International Labour Organization

Teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond

A Practical Guide

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1. Introduction

What is the purpose of the Guide?

The year 2020 has brought unprecedented changes to the global economy and the world of work. On the 11th of March, the World Health Organization (WHO) characterized the novel coronavirus outbreak as a pandemic, and urged governments around the world to take matters seriously and prepare for the first wave of the public health emergency with several drastic measures, one of which was the nationwide lockdowns in many countries (WHO, 2020a). As the lockdowns or stay-at-home measures entered into force, a large proportion of the workforce was instructed to stay home and continue to work remotely - if their functions make it possible. Organizations that were previously familiar with teleworking, as well as organizations that haven't experimented with teleworking before, were sending their employees home, creating the conditions for the most extensive mass teleworking experiment in history.

Though the number of people teleworking part-time or on a full-time basis has been gradually increasing over the years (Eurostat, 2018), the pandemic has certainly fast-tracked the adoption of teleworking modalities by employers. In a scenario such as the COVID-19 pandemic, teleworking has proven itself an important aspect of ensuring business continuity, whereas under normal circumstances its benefits include reduced commuting time, increased opportunity for workers to focus on their work tasks away from the distractions of the office, as well as an opportunity for better work-life balance. Teleworking offers the opportunity for a more flexible schedule for workers and the freedom to work from an alternative location, away from the premise of the employer. There may also be risks, such as isolation (particularly for individuals living alone), and the loss of contact with fellow employees, which it is essential to anticipate and prevent.

The purpose of the Guide is to provide practical and actionable recommendations for effective teleworking that are applicable to a broad range of actors; to support policymakers in updating existing policies; and to provide a flexible framework through which both private enterprises and public sector organizations can develop or update their own teleworking policies and practices. The Guide also includes a number of case examples regarding how employers and policymakers have been handling teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic and addresses the lessons learned from the recent months that are relevant for the future of teleworking arrangements beyond the pandemic; and a list of available tools and resources.

Key information on teleworking

What is teleworking?

Telework is defined as the use of information and communications technologies ICTs), such as smartphones, tablets, laptops, and desktop computers, for work that is performed outside the employer's premises (Eurofound and ILO, 2017). In other words, telework implies work achieved with the help of ICTs and conducted outside the employer's locations.

Teleworking should happen in a voluntary agreement between the employer and the employee. Besides, agreeing on the location of the work (at the home of the employee or elsewhere) there are several other aspects that need to be clarified, namely the working hours or schedule, the communication tools to be used, the work to be accomplished, the supervisory mechanisms and the arrangements for reporting on the work undertaken.

Teleworking is not normally defined so as to include those working in the platform or gig economy; for example a freelancer who works primarily from home may not be classified as a teleworker but might be classified as a home-based worker, under the terms of ILO Convention 177 on Homework (1996).

Teleworking and continuity?

Teleworking policies could be an essential part of any business continuity plan. In the case of an unforeseen event (extreme weather, terrorism, pandemic) that prevents employees from taking up work at their regular offices or workplace, the possibility of teleworking allows them to perform work offsite and to keep the organization operational.

While telework is typically used for limited periods (e.g., one or two days per week), many workers are being required to telework full-time to prevent the spread of the coronavirus. In any case, given the health risks, all of those workers who perform work tasks and activities that are compatible with teleworking arrangements should be eligible to telework during this crisis, including those in temporary employment and interns (ILO, 2020a). This Guide does not focus on a particular category of workers, but rather aims to be as inclusive as possible. However, it applies primarily to workers in an employment relationship, rather than to self-employed (with a few exceptions).

How to use this Guide?

This Guide may be used during a pandemic or a natural disaster, which requires an emergency response and in order to ensure business continuity, for employees to stay at home. However, the Guide can just as well be applied to teleworking in general, outside the specific scope of such emergency situations.

Whenever the Guide refers to "teleworking" and "telework", it refers to both teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic, and under normal circumstances, as many of the issues explored in this Guide and its recommendations are also applicable to teleworking in general.

The Guide takes the readers through 8 focus areas, offers relevant definitions, the main issues for considerations, and presents real-life examples of how organizations have been putting these recommendations into practice successfully. The design of teleworking policies and its different aspects, their implementation and monitoring should involve both employers and workers.

The Guide also contains references to national government policies, which were designed to respond to the public health crisis, alongside international labour standards laid down in relevant conventions and recommendations.

A number of ILO Conventions and Recommendations are relevant to the aspects contained in this Guide. These international labour standards include, among others, those on occupational health and safety, gender equality and maternity protection, collective bargaining, the prevention of violence and harassment (ILO, 2020g), as well as working time and social dialogue mechanisms.

2. Entering a new era of teleworking

Undoubtedly, we have entered the most unusual working arrangement of this generation. The world, as we knew it came to an abrupt halt in early 2020, and governments, informed by science, had to enforce drastic measures to save lives. The challenge for policymakers is how to continue protecting the lives and health of people without doing irreversible damage to the economy in the process. The measures that ensure physical distancing—the closing of schools, grounding flights, putting a stop to large gatherings and closing workplaces—are just the beginning of the fight against the virus and serve only as a tool to slow down its spread. Easing the restrictions should not put lives at risk, or risk a new wave of infections, which some predict might be even worse than the first wave that already stretched healthcare capacity beyond its limits and put frontline workers under considerable risk and pressure.

Before the pandemic, only a fraction of the workforce was working from home occasionally. Within the European Union (EU), the incidence of regular or occasional teleworking (home-based telework and mobile telework combined) varied from 30 per cent or more in Denmark, the Netherlands and Sweden to 10 per cent or less in the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, and Poland. Depending on the studies, up to 20 per cent of the United States workforce were regularly or occasionally working from home or another alternative location, 16 per cent in Japan, and just 1.6 per cent in Argentina (Eurofound and ILO, 2017).

Between January and March 2020, as the COVID-19 infections swept the globe, one by one countries instructed employers to close operations, and if possible, to introduce full-time teleworking for their workers, with very little time to prepare on both the employer's and the worker's side. Something that was planned as a temporary, short-term solution has been now going on for months.

A number of factors determine whether a job can potentially be performed remotely. The portion of jobs that are amenable to teleworking determine the size of the workforce that can work from home during a pandemic and thus reduce community transmission of the virus. Two recent papers (Hatayama et al., 2020; ILO 2020h) examined the potential for working from home in countries at different levels of economic development, and found that factors such as the economic and occupational structure, and access to broadband internet and likelihood of owning a personal computer, are important determinants of working from home. The findings indicate that the amenability of jobs to working from home increases with the level of economic development of the country. Therefore, the countries where a large proportion of jobs are in sectors such as ICT, professional services, finance and insurance and public administration sectors can mobilise a greater proportion of the workforce to work from home, whereas countries with a heavy reliance on sectors such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction, and tourism are less able to do so.

As a result of the government-issued stay-home orders, almost 4 in 10 employees in Europe started teleworking (Eurofound, 2020b). The most significant increase in teleworking took place in countries that were most affected by the virus, and where teleworking was well developed before the pandemic. In Finland, close to 60 per cent of employees switched to working from home. In Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark, over 50 per cent, in Ireland, Austria, Italy, and Sweden, around 40 per cent of employees were teleworking. In these countries, fewer workers had their working time reduced. On average, in Europe, 24 per cent of employees that have never worked from home before, started teleworking, compared to 56 per cent of employees, who have worked from home occasionally before. Nevertheless, this jump in numbers shows that with the right technology, tools, (e.g., communication tools), and work reorganization, a lot more jobs can be performed from distance than previously assumed.

Similar measures were taken in other parts of the world, where governments urged employers to embrace teleworking to reduce commuter density in large cities and thus contribute to physical distancing. In Japan, according to a survey of the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Tourism, fewer than 13 per cent of workers nationwide were able to work from home in March 2020 (Dooley, 2020) due to a number of factors, including the extensive use of the Hanko stamp[1], which is a personal seal used on office paperwork, contracts, applications and even memos, in lieu of signatures for any item requiring acknowledgement of authorship instead of a signature.

It has to be stressed, that for working parents and carers, the school closures, and the closing of other care facilities have made working from home challenging. According to the latest Eurofound survey, of those working from home as a physical distancing measure, 26 per cent live in households with children under 12, and another 10 per cent are living with children aged 12–17 (Eurofound, 2020b). These workers find balancing their work and care responsibilities challenging and are experiencing new dynamics in managing their work-life balance.

1 Usually a small cylinder carved with the characters for a person or company's name, "hanko" or "inkan" are pressed on red ink pads and then stamped on documents as needed (Kaneko, 2020).

> Moving to a full flex workforce has been a necessity given COVID-19 but it only accelerates what we have believed for a long time – full-flex is the natural extension of embracing diversity in all its facets. Balancing the apparent freedom of flex for a workforce with the necessity for productivity improvement, not just its maintenance, is the true challenge for leaders in any contemporary business in 2020 and beyond.
>
> ▶ **Blair Vernon**, Chief Executive, Financial Services enterprise, New Zealand

The next phase of the pandemic response can begin once there is a sustained decrease in new cases, or either a vaccine or a viable treatment against the COVID-19 virus is found and deployed. During this phase, first essential sectors, then other industries, will be cautiously reopened. There is however a very high degree of uncertainty associated with this phase. Organizations will have to comply with a number of strict hygiene and safety regulations, and the continued restrictions, physical distancing in elevators, offices and meeting rooms may not make it possible for the entire workforce to return safely to the employer's premises. Teleworking will remain necessary for at least some part of the workforce during this period. Lastly, high-risk and vulnerable groups must be protected, which is why home-based telework will be a very attractive alternative at least for the duration of the pandemic. As with any crisis, a high degree of inventiveness and willingness is required from all stakeholders, governments, employers, employees, and social partners in exploring which roles and jobs can be performed at least partially from home. However, the expanded use of telework may not end with the pandemic, but could become part of the "new and better normal" for years to come, supported by digitalization, advanced communication, and cloud technologies.

Employers need to take into account the perspectives of workers in relation to the challenges and opportunities of teleworking for them (family and living situation, type of role, skills...). Workers and their representatives need to play an active part in the decision making process through a constructive social dialogue that may take different forms, including consultations, exchange of information or negotiation.

This new era of teleworking will require much wider use of a new kind of management—one which is more trusting and more results-based—and also a new way of working—one which is more autonomous, more flexible, and better adapted to the individual circumstances and preferences of employees than before.

This Guide explores how organizations can build resilience, improve management practices, create an organizational culture based on trust, and reduce the barriers to an effective teleworking ecosystem that safeguards the health and wellbeing of employees while fulfilling organizational commitments and objectives effectively.

3. Ensuring the well-being of workers and continued productivity while teleworking

By having an overall framework of the key areas that are affecting employee wellbeing and performance of individuals and teams, organizations may be better prepared to adapt work arrangements in order to protect workers and contribute to the government efforts of flattening the curve of new cases and thus slowing the spreading of the virus.

This chapter is therefore intended to assist organizations to take an inventory of their actions in the areas that need to be considered and adapted in light of the COVID-19 challenges, in order to implement teleworking across the organisation while ensuring employee wellbeing and continued productivity.

3.1 Focus on: Working time and work organization

While the COVID-19 pandemic continue to spread across the world, its impact on labour markets is wide-ranging, affecting most people to varying degrees. For many workers, the introduction of physical distancing measures, lockdowns, and related restrictions to flatten the curve of infections have had dire consequences, including (mandatory) leaves of uncertain duration, furloughs, reduced working hours and wages, layoffs and job loss, as well as business closures. Nonetheless, for a significant segment of the working population, the pandemic has led to a sudden increase in workload, as well as major changes in working arrangements and working conditions, such as teleworking or short-time work.

Even if employees can continue performing their work during the pandemic by teleworking, a certain number of aspects of the work organization need to be taken into account and respected to ensure employee health and safety. The European Framework Agreement on Teleworking of 2002 offers guidance on the organization of the work of people working remotely, whereby the teleworker manages the organization of his/her working time (called time sovereignty). The workload and performance standards of the teleworker are equivalent to those of comparable workers at the employer's premises (ETUC, BusinessEurope, CEEP and UEAPME, 2002). It recalls that teleworkers benefit from the same legal protection as employees working at the employer's premises, and also identifies the key areas requiring adaptation or particular attention when people work away from the employer's premises. These may include data protection, privacy, health and safety, organization of work, access to training, etc. Especially given the current situation, there is a need to reconcile the evolving family and caring responsibilities of workers with employers' priorities in terms of business continuity and productivity.

Research into teleworking has repeatedly shown that employees working from home tend to work longer hours than when they are working at the premises of the employer, in part because the time to commute to the workplace is replaced by work activities, and also due to changes in work routines and the blurring of the boundaries between paid work and personal life. Teleworking, in general, can lead to longer working hours and also to working more during the evenings and the weekends (see e.g., Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Messenger, 2019).

Specific research looking into the working hours of employees working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic has also shown that home workers are putting in extra hours, as 38 per cent of respondents said they are more likely to work longer hours (McCulley, 2020). One in four workers (27 per cent) who work from home as a result of the pandemic state that they work in their free time to meet the demands of work (Eurofound, 2020b). Also, employees are spending more time in

one-on-one meetings or team check-ins, according to one recent study (Reisenwitz, 2020) due to the physical separation of teams.

Those employees that have children or other dependants at home need to find additional time in their day to get work done, either by starting their work very early in the morning, or by working until much later in the evening, as well as breaking up the workday into smaller segments, interspersed with breaks for childcare, household chores, home-schooling, etc.

Case example: Financial services enterprise (Poland)

The Polish branch of a financial service provider demonstrated a lot of flexibility towards the time-sovereignty of employees, by supporting them in their care responsibilities. Line managers and HR accommodated individual requests for working time changes, based on the needs of the employees, mainly in relation to their caring responsibilities. For example, they permitted that one of their female employees, a new mother, work from 6 am till 2 pm for a week, during which her husband took care of their young child, and the following week worked from 2 pm till 8 pm when they swapped shifts. This arrangement allowed both parents to continue working and sharing childcare tasks.[2]

Managers are not only confronted with their entire teams working from different locations but also with having to agree on individual working patterns and work schedules with employees to accommodate their care responsibilities. Managers are playing a pivotal role in supporting employees and mitigating the harmful impact of overwork on their health and wellbeing. These objectives can be achieved by effectively communicating realistic expectations, setting achievable deadlines considering the highly unusual context in which teleworking currently takes place, while ensuring business continuity and the required level of performance. On the contrary, unrealistic expectations and additional pressure on already overstretched employees can lead to disengagement and also increase the risk of burnout. Besides, enterprises need to be aware of the increase in the work demands on managers themselves, which can result from managing remote teams. Microsoft in China determined that leading teleworking teams added an extra 90 minutes per week to the working time of managers, resulting from one-on-one calls and meetings (Spataro, 2020).

Without any previous teleworking experience or only very limited experience, teams, and whole business units working from home can experience a lack of clarity around the priorities and the tasks they need to accomplish. Many organizations in which teleworking was practically non-existent went overnight to an unfamiliar work system (Eurasia Review, 2020). Being isolated leads to uncertainty about whom to talk to on specific issues, where to get specific support, and how and when to approach colleagues, leading to hold-ups and delays (Bick et al., 2020). The situation of mandatory mass teleworking is challenging, even for the most experienced organizations and workers. It often means that workers have to familiarise themselves with new or different technological tools, as well as switching to a different way of organizing of work, which explains partially why many people work longer hours, interspersed with personal activities, to adapt to this new reality (see Messenger, 2019, for a discussion of the porosity in the organization of a typical teleworking day).

Therefore, management practices have to be adjusted to the situation, including prioritization, workload, tasks, and deadlines. Typical steps that enterprises can take as a response may include:

- Ask workers to prepare an individual teleworking Workplan, which should be discussed and agreed upon with their direct supervisor. These Workplans should complement and not replace current Workplans and related procedures, or existing Workplans need to be adjusted to fit the new reality.

2 The information in this box is taken from confidential interviews with company representatives.

- Clarify priorities and deprioritize work that is not essential or realistic under the current circumstances.
- Agree on a common system to signal availability for work and ensure that managers and colleagues respect it.
- Break up larger teams into smaller cross-functional ones, each with a clear mission and reporting line, where directions and tasks are easy to implement.
- Encourage workers to share when they are feeling overloaded to serve as an early warning system to detect the risk of burnout, and know when tasks or team members have to be re-assigned.
- Conduct a skills-mapping among the workers, to potentially re-deploy under-stretched workers to overstretched teams.
- Talk about how work gets done. Ask employees how they work when they feel most productive, energized, and focused. Encourage workers to work that way as much as possible.
- Ask workers to share examples of how they have changed their everyday routines in ways that work for them.
- Recognize that offline time is needed for getting substantive work done well.

3.2 Focus on: Performance management

One of the most important sources of stress for any manager of a teleworking team is to maintain team performance and fulfill commitments to stakeholders, customers, and beneficiaries. To be effective, teleworking needs to be based on dialogue and cooperation between management and workers (ILO, 2020b). This becomes even more important when teleworking is mandatory and occurs on a full-time basis.

Studies indicate that the best method for managing telecommuting personnel is through a process called Management by Results, whereby both manager and employee agree on a common productivity measurement mechanism (Sorensen, 2016). This may include identifying objectives, tasks, milestones, and monitoring and discussing progress without overly burdensome reporting, allowing personnel the flexibility and autonomy to organize their work without the manager having to constantly check on progress.

Actions to consider may include the following:

- Be very clear about the expected results. Being as specific as possible about the expectations towards workers significantly reduces potential ambiguity and the possibility of misunderstanding, which, on the other hand, also leads to more empowerment and autonomy for the teleworker in completing their tasks.
- Consider the following questions, which may help to define the results expected from employees: “How would I recognize a fully satisfactory end product if I saw it? What are the completion criteria?”
- Ensure timely, regular, and descriptive feedback to workers, by describing what the workers did, and focusing on those changes that will result in the most significant improvement to the task and will have the expected impact.
- Do not forget to provide positive feedback for a job that is done well.
- Favor video-enabled calls for sensitive performance conversations, in order to allow for the more subtle non-verbal communication to transpire.

Case example: Financial Services enterprise (New Zealand)

Less than 1% of the staff at this financial services firm worked from home permanently before the COVID-19 pandemic, 100% of the workforce (400 people) switched to remote working during the pandemic, a shift that took about 5-6 days for the organization. In the implementation of full scale teleworking, the leadership team had to find the right balance between productivity and outputs. For this, they implemented a coaching-based approach called 'leaders conversations', as, in such crisis situations, leaders and team leaders have a critical role to play and show examples. They also encouraged leaders to collect feedback from staff. The enterprise reports that according to their forecast, one-third of the workforce will return after the pandemic to the flex model they had in place before (occasional teleworking); one-third of the workforce will use flexibility once in a while, such as on a fortnightly basis; and the remaining one-third of the workforce will use teleworking 2 or 3 days per week.[3]

3.3 Focus on: Digitalization

Digitalization is defined as a socio-technical, evolving process that takes place at the individual, organizational, societal, and global levels (Legner et al, 2017) and across all sectors. It refers to the use of tools converting analog information into digital information. Digitalization includes a complex array of technologies, some of which are still at their early stages of development and use. In the context of work and the workplace, digitalization in its current form refers to the increased presence and use of cloud computing and scheduling tools, as well as web-based applications across different platforms to facilitate remote access and collaborative work.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the pace of digitalization has quickened, the adoption of digital technologies by enterprises has led to an increased opportunity for workers to carry on working from home. Digitalization was already leading to significant changes in the way employment and workplaces are organized, with potentially substantial implications for skill requirements, labour standards, and workers' wellbeing (ILO, 2019). Digitalisation however is not evenly spread across the globe, with certain regions struggling with the lack of broadband, internet connection and available ICT tools to enable teleworking. For example, only a quarter of the population in Sub-Saharan Africa has access to the internet and only half in the Maghreb, compared to four-fifths in Europe (Gómez-Jordana Moya, 2020). In the countries where regular power cuts and weak internet service makes even sending an e-mail a challenge, teleworking is practically impossible without the specific support of the employer, in terms of purchasing hardware and providing broadband.

Case example: Public sector digitalisation (Cameroon)

Cameroon was the most impacted country by the COVID-19 virus in Central Africa by mid-May. The government did not install a nationwide lockdown, however both private employers and the public sector were recommended to work from home to avoid physical contact. To support this recommendation, the Cameroon Ministry of Forestry and Fauna invested in new modems, softwares and USB keys and the Ministry of Postal Services and Telecommunications put in place a new video-conferencing platform with an integrated messaging service (Nsangou, 2020).

3 The information in this box is taken from confidential interviews with company representatives.

Mass teleworking, coupled with digitalization, offers many opportunities but carries several risks as well. Enterprises, therefore, need to weigh the risks against the possibilities before they invest and roll-out a new piece of technology to the workforce.

There is an ever-growing number of tools and software available to track and monitor the activity of workers, especially when working from remote locations (i.e. home), and away from the traditional workplace context. Tools that track keyboard strokes, mouse movements or the physical location of workers have an intrusive nature, and therefore they are not recommended. Moreover, they should not be used to replace management by results and a clear articulation of what specific work tasks and products are expected of workers and by when these must be completed.

Workers also should not incur additional costs when performing their work from their homes. They are also entitled to obtain equipment and tools from their employer that allow them to work as if they were at their regular workplace, without negative consequences on their performance, effectiveness, and wellbeing. Continued working on sub-par equipment and tools leads to a loss of productivity, frustration, and ultimately disengagement of the workers. Therefore, in order to achieve a similar level of productivity as in the office, the employer needs to ensure that teleworkers have access to the technology and tools that they would otherwise be using if they were at the workplace. A continuous dialogue between the employer and the employees is vital to detect any difficulties with the tools and for the workers to come forward with their specific needs, in terms of ICT equipment and software as well as related training.

What are the different aspects that need to be considered when transitioning from office-based to teleworking, and what steps may employers take?

- Review the technology needs and resources of employees working from home, as well as their level of skills in accessing and working with the technology.
- Revise the policy on whether workers will be permitted to use their own devices to connect to work servers and access data, or will instead receive ICT equipment provided by their employers.
- Include in the teleworking policy the reimbursement modalities for supporting workers financially to ensure they have the right kind of equipment, internet, bandwidth, and communications tools within the framework of the organization's objectives.
- Consider either a reimbursement of the actual cost for the tools and equipment used for teleworking due to the pandemic, allowing workers to take office equipment home, or offering a lump-sum payment for workers to purchase the necessary equipment for their home-based working.
- Provide training opportunities to workers on the different tools they will be required to use, as well as self-assessment and external testing on the ability and skills-levels.
- Ensure that workers know how to access the team's technical support personnel should they need assistance; especially in the case of SMEs with limited internal ICT capacity, they could ask more tech-savvy employees to help out their colleagues who may have more challenges with the technology.
- Enterprises may also consider how the necessary equipment will be delivered to the home of the worker (by courier service or workers may pick them up themselves).

Case example: Telecommunications enterprise (Japan)

As the coronavirus started spreading locally in Japan, the government has declared a state of emergency in major cities and has been urging people to reduce human-to-human contact by at least 70 per cent. Employers were therefore required to move their operations online. One of the major telecommunications groups has already been an advocate of telecommuting for a number of years, and has since February 2020 been telling employees to avoid commuting during rush hour or simply work from home, to protect its 200,000 employees across Japan from the growing coronavirus outbreak in the country. The company also began using avatar robots in April 2016 as part of its efforts to promote teleworking, a policy aimed at allowing employees to continue working while raising children or caring for aging parents.

Using the avatar robots, remote workers can view their office and communicate with their colleagues. The roughly 20-cm-tall robots, with built-in camera, microphone and speakers, coupled with the "teleworking" application on a phone or iPad, is operated remotely by the teleworker and can be carried around by staff in the office, and can even attend meetings on behalf of remote employees. It is also possible to operate its hands and head, even using non-verbal communication with various gestures from applause to greetings. "*I can feel the atmosphere in the office and it's like I'm there*", said one teleworker in his 40's.

3.4 Focus on: Communication

Teams in which the majority or all of the members are teleworking rely heavily on regular electronic communication to foster collaboration, trust, and transparency. However, there is research evidence that teams that work remotely face more significant communications challenges than face-to-face teams (Hertel et al., 2005). These challenges multiply with time, because when team members spend more and more time working apart, the degree of separation and professional isolation increases. The collaboration of teams slowly erodes because by communicating via electronic means, workers tend to share less information with their colleagues and in some cases have difficulty interpreting and understanding the information they receive. The process for giving feedback tends to be less to that which occurs when teams are working together in the same location. Workers and managers need to invest additional efforts to ensure that their communication is effective and messages are clear, as well as providing a continuous flow of information. The COVID-19 pandemic has led employers to increase interaction with workers significantly. Recent research shows that nearly nine in 10 (88 per cent) have increased communication on health and safety tips, while 84 per cent have provided advice on working from home. Three-quarters of respondents (76 per cent) have also provided tips on managing a remote workforce (WorldatWork, 2020).

Given the real risk of social isolation that is associated with full-time teleworking, every effort should be made to help teleworkers stay connected with supervisors, colleagues, and the organization as a whole (ILO, 2020c). Many organizations are, therefore, introducing and increasing informal opportunities for workers to connect. These occasions typically mirror and expand on their previous practices, from online social interactions, entertaining children of colleagues via online tools, or simply checking in to see how colleagues are doing. These touch-points can make a big difference for workers suffering from the isolation or the anxiety of the situation, but it is important to strike a balance and predominantly contain social interactions within regular working hours, in order not to further blur the line between working time and private time.

Case example: Global consumer electronics for streaming enterprises (United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands, Denmark, China)

At this consumer electronics company providing streaming products, following the introduction of lockdowns, all of the meetings were moved online – both team stand-ups and office meetings. Slack continued to be used as a primary form of communication, even with a morning "hello" from various team members. It became very apparent that the social aspect of office life was more valued then they all thought. Across the company, multiple ideas were launched, for example, the "Kitchen Table" a one-hour open video conferencing meeting for people to come and go during lunchtime, "Beer o'clock" on Friday afternoon, "Elevenses with the Cool Kids" – English morning tea once a week with colleagues. These were introduced to foster connections between colleagues and the social aspects of work, but not to talk specifically about work. People were encouraged to share on the internal company website photos of their workspace and pets. The Slack menu channel that existed before the pandemic for the canteen menu of the HQ building became a channel where people posted their lockdown recipes – this was very popular.

To ensure that communication is effective and is supporting teleworking teams in their collaboration, the following may be considered by organizations:

- Consider setting up a centralized repository of all the major changes and updates to internal policies and processes. Especially for those enterprises that do not have a culture of documentation, this can be a major culture shift. One of the challenges when workers are teleworking is keeping everyone informed about the latest organization-wide changes effectively. This can save a great deal of time for workers trying to find the latest and most accurate information about organizational policies.
- Establish communication norms: Remote teams need to create new standards that establish clarity in communications that bring predictability and certainty to virtual conversations. Norms can exist on an individual level as well, such as people's preferred response time, writing style, and tone. Such norms may also include length and level of detail of messages, turnaround time, use, and tolerance for humor.
- Communication shouldn't be limited to content but should also include the social aspects of work, by creating opportunities for connecting outside of work obligations, or continue established office traditions.
- Make use of the entire spectrum of available communication options. Allow workers to gravitate towards the tools they find the easiest and most effective ones to use. Research also shows that video conferencing enhances the effectiveness of remote workers (Forbes Insights, 2017).
- Ensure that workers know when and how they can reach their direct supervisors. Clear communication around the best times and the best ways to get in touch is essential to teleworkers. Depending on the urgency or the priority of the call, there may be several options workers can choose from to find the most appropriate way to communicate.
- Communication among teleworkers carries its own risk of being biased. Managers and direct supervisors should learn how to spot and effectively address cognitive bias regarding the frequency and quality of communication. This includes, for example, workers who are always communicating with each other; which employees are silent; which are the most frequent connections among team members; and how smaller teams are exchanging information.
- Offer encouragement and support: Especially in the context of an abrupt shift from working in the office to working remotely, managers need to acknowledge stress, listen to workers' anxieties and concerns, and empathize with their difficulties.

Case example: Digital marketplaces enterprise in Africa (Senegal, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia, South Africa)

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in order to protect the health of their 400 workers across 8 African countries, this digital marketplaces company implemented remote work across all their country offices. The majority of their offices were new to teleworking, therefore a number of elements had to be put in place to make it operational. In terms of digital communication, the approach of the enterprise was to empower and train their employees in the use of a number of video conferencing tools (Skype, Zoom, Google Hangouts, WhatsApp) and offered the possibility to the employees to switch between these platforms according to the internet availability and the quality of the call. In order to break the isolation of the team members and to reinforce the social aspect of work, they initiated daily morning and afternoon video group calls, called Stand-up and Stand-down meetings, led by their CEO addressing the entire team, with business unit leaders taking turns with their updates. For employees struggling with internet speed and technology, the company distributed a contact list to employees, so they can get in touch with the right colleague directly, in order to receive a mobile top-up or get tech support or have their expenses reimbursed (Nzekwe, 2020).

3.5 Focus on: Occupational Safety and Health (OSH)

The abrupt shift involving a large number of organizations from office-based working to telework happened without much consideration to health and safety requirements, which would otherwise apply at the premise of the employer with clear roles and responsibilities to ensure the physical and mental wellbeing of employees. However, the physical and environmental characteristics of the home office and related work habits are critical to the workers' capability to perform remotely and effectively (ILO, 2020e).

According to most national laws and collective agreements regarding OSH, the employer is responsible for the protection of the occupational health and safety of workers, and this typically applies to teleworking as well. Employers have the same health and safety responsibilities for home-based teleworkers as for any other workers in the organization. These include identifying and managing the occupational risks of home-based teleworkers.[4]

In terms of occupational health and safety issues for teleworkers, besides the known benefits to workers' wellbeing, the two most commonly recognized challenges are psychosocial risks and ergonomics. Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic is unlike teleworking under normal conditions, as workers are working from home for a prolonged period, under difficult external circumstances. This situation itself is provoking higher levels of anxiety than usual in workers, which is linked with anxiety due to the health, social and economic implications of the crisis. According to the Eurofound survey launched on 9 April 2020, 18 per cent of EU respondents said they felt particularly tense most of the time over the past two weeks – this contrasts with just 11 per cent in the 2016 survey (Eurofound, 2020b).

The ensuing stress and worry from the COVID-19 pandemic have negatively affected mental health for close to half of United States adults, a Kaiser Family Foundation survey revealed. More than two-thirds of American workers say this pandemic has resulted in the most stressful time of their careers, according to a poll by mental health provider Ginger, and 88 per cent said they were moderately to extremely stressed during the previous four to six weeks (Mullen, 2020).

According to the literature review of *The Lancet* medical journal (Brooks et al., 2020), studies that surveyed those who had been quarantined during the pandemic reported depression, stress, low mood, irritability, insomnia, post-traumatic stress disorder symptoms, anger, and emotional exhaustion as a result of being isolated or quarantined. Low mood and irritability stand out as having a particularly high prevalence.

4 As a general rule, the employer is responsible for providing, installing and maintaining the equipment necessary for regular telework unless the teleworker uses his/her own equipment EU-OSHA OSH Wiki, 2020).

Another survey (Kolakowski, 2020) that anonymously polls technologists about their experiences found that 73 per cent of respondents were reporting burnout at the end of April, far above the 61 per cent who felt exhaustion in mid-February. Some 19 per cent of respondents said that fears over their job security were at the root of their burnout, while slightly more (20.5 per cent) said that they had an unmanageable workload. Another 10 per cent said that they felt they had no control over their work.

Employers, workers, and OSH professionals need to be aware of the associated risks of full-time telecommuting, which are accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting requirement for physical distancing:

- Technostress and technology addiction and overload, which increases fatigue, irritability and the inability to switch off from work and rest properly.
- Increased consumption of alcohol and other recreational or performance-enhancing drugs, which may increase negative emotions, lower performance and contribute to an increase in aggression and violence.
- Prolonged sedentary behaviour, working in one position over long periods without moving increases the risk of health problems, including musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs), visual fatigue, obesity, heart disease, etc.
- The ergonomics of home furniture may not be optimal for prolonged teleworking. Employers should therefore inform workers about key ergonomics issues, including via training. These preventive measures support workers to be able to adjust their working arrangements and change them if necessary. The responsibility for the right ergonomics in order to prevent MSD should be shared by employers and workers.
- Due to the prolonged isolation, there is a risk of burnout and feeling left out, which requires an additional effort from employers, HR professionals, direct supervisors, and colleagues to extend mutual support.
- Slow or patchy internet and technology tools can also cause frustration and irritability; therefore, proper, well-functioning tools for teleworkers should be ensured.
- Work-life conflict and the challenges related to managing the boundaries between working time and personal obligations are exacerbated, including an inability to switch off from work and recharge. This is especially the case for those with care responsibilities, such as parents with school-aged children at home.

While part-time and occasional teleworking may reduce forms of violence and harassment requiring face-to-face contact, full-time – and generalized – teleworking arrangements may lead to a higher risk of technology-enabled violence, cyberbullying and harassment, including domestic violence. Occupational safety and health measures should be further strengthened to prevent and reduce psychosocial risks from this situation, including violence and harassment, and actively promote workers' mental health and well-being (ILO, 2020d).

Case example: Internet technology enterprise (China)

This Chinese Internet technology company, set up a 24-hour hotline for all teleworking employees (including interns) and even family members, staffed by psychologists and consultants, plus online courses on how to manage emotions during the quarantine and the COVID-19 pandemic (Batchelor, 2020).[5]

To effectively address the OSH challenges being faced by teleworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic, many organizations have opted to set-up specific global pandemic task forces,

5 The information in this box is taken from confidential interviews with company representatives.

steering groups, or well-being task forces, which include representatives from the different departments and sectors of the organization. These task forces are entrusted to update existing policy documents and identify information and skills gaps, and put in place training, information provision and communication actions to ensure that everyone has access to information about their rights and responsibilities in terms of organizational health and safety of the workforce in the given situation. Closer cooperation between organizational health and safety professionals and management is necessary across enterprises and organizations, as managers need to be especially attentive to the physical and mental health of their team members during a period of prolonged, full-time teleworking. A number of provisions in the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 164) offer relevant guidance and preventive and protection measures designed to mitigate the negative health and safety effects of pandemics as well as those associated with teleworking.

This OSH policy update and related actions may include the following aspects:

- Clarify and update the responsibilities of employers for the protection of the occupational health and safety of the teleworker by taking stock of the health and safety risks and hazards, the home office environment, equipment, ergonomics, and stress as well as other mental health issues.
- Clarify the rights and responsibilities of teleworkers regarding their health and safety while working from home.
- Update and empower health and safety professionals with tools and processes in terms of workers' health support systems, the working environment, training, information, and compliance mechanism regarding OSH and ergonomic protocols specifically designed for teleworkers.
- Train managers and teleworkers on the importance of taking sufficient rest breaks during the workday, as well as clarifying that such breaks won't have negative career consequences.
- Use every opportunity to promote physical health, including exercise, and encourage workers to maintain healthy eating habits, i.e., by sharing links to physical and mental wellbeing videos, and promoting the use of fitness apps and services.
- Establish new options or augment existing options for psychological support for workers to share their fears and worries confidentially, i.e., through access to helplines, counseling, employee assistance programmes.
- Encourage managers to be a role model for staff under their supervision and conduct themselves in ways that show how to mitigate stress.
- Consider allowing workers to borrow equipment from the office for the duration of the pandemic-related teleworking, such as office chairs, monitors, and other relevant tools that are fully compatible with ergonomic standards.

Case example: UN WOMEN (Global)

UN Women has set up four task teams that look into the impacts of COVID-19 for UN Women's work from different perspectives, with the participation of UN Women personnel across divisions, offices, and geographical locations. One of them is the Employee Well-Being Task Team, which is coordinated by UN Women HR and brings together almost twenty colleagues from different parts of the organization. The objective of this Task Team is to assess and identify the evolving wellbeing needs of UN Women personnel and respond to them in light of COVID-19. The Task Team ensures that adequate services can be provided to all, allowing adaptation to the new situation while continuing to fulfill the organization's mandate, thus ensuring business continuity and personnel as the primary priority. Based on the feedback received, the Task Team reports back to the senior management and Executive Leadership Team with concrete recommendations. Their activities have included a wellbeing needs-assessment survey of the global UN Women workforce and an up-to-date repository of wellbeing resources on a dedicated intranet site. These activities will continue to expand, shift, and be guided by identified needs, including webinars, group talks, and communication regarding support resources.

3.6 Focus on: Legal and contractual implications

In addition to working hours, technical support and tools, and health and safety measures, it is also critical to clarify the conditions of teleworking arrangements regarding location, the reimbursement of teleworking related costs, contractual changes, and notification procedures in case of impediments to perform work, illness, or a work-related accident. Organizations need to verify several legal aspects related to telework, as well as possess adequate insurance policies in case a work-related accident occurs during teleworking.

Employers also need to clarify the terms and conditions of employment while teleworking, including salary questions, which worker benefits and allowances will be reviewed and might need to be adjusted, insurance, and legal implications regarding equipment and software used while teleworking. In principle, the terms and conditions of employment should be the same as when workers are working at the employer's premises.

Likewise, teleworkers need to be made aware of the liability for the different assets workers are using while working from home, which may belong either to themselves or their enterprises, in case they are lost, damaged or stolen. Workers should be exempt from any financial liability for such losses unless they are found to be negligent. Employers should inform and, if necessary, train workers about the organization's policy regarding the work tools they are using, and how to ensure they are safe and well maintained. These may be especially important when it comes to highly specialized equipment, such as 3D printers, VR headsets, or other tools workers need to use when performing their functions remotely.

Another area that needs to be examined is the inspection of the work environment of teleworkers to ensure safety by identifying and correcting risk factors that could contribute to illness or injury. Health and Safety Institutes in a number of countries have developed Guidelines regarding the assessment of the home working environment of teleworkers (e.g., indoor air quality, ergonomics, tripping hazards, lighting, chemical exposure, and other concerns) (OSH Wiki, 2020). With the pandemic situation, there is a compelling need to establish a clear policy about the continuation of the regular in-situ reviews, while respecting physical distancing rules and, at the same time fulfilling the legal obligation of the employer. Employers and OSH professionals may wish to consider conducting a virtual site-check to ensure that the potential health and safety hazards are assessed, and that steps are taken to mitigate them.

Employers need to continue ensuring compliance with national legislation and their own organizational policies, as well as introducing new measures in the following areas:

- Monitoring whether the government provides tax-free cost compensation for teleworkers for the costs related to working from home, and informing and supporting workers to apply to receive this financial support.
- Revising employee benefits appropriately, if for example the continued teleworking means that workers cannot avail themselves of some of their benefits (e.g., a gym membership, commuting compensation, free food and drinks, etc.) and ensuring that the overall salary and benefits package remains at the same level as before the pandemic, by potentially replacing some benefits with other options of equal value (e.g., gym apps, online coaching and learning options, etc.).
- Clarifying the implications regarding income taxes if workers are teleworking from a different country than the country in which the premise of the employer is located. The same is true for social security payments.
- Requesting work visas and residency permits for those workers who are teleworking outside their country of origin and cannot return to that country due to pandemic-related restrictions on free movement across borders.

3.7 Focus on: Training

Just as full-time teleworking for a prolonged period is different from working in the traditional enterprise context, managing a teleworking team also has its particular challenges as well as opportunities. Organizations need to acknowledge that, for workers and managers alike, this new situation requires reassessing old working habits and learning new skills to manage the situation better, to safeguard employee wellbeing and maintain the agreed performance metrics. Keeping workers motivated, helping them to navigate different working modalities while at home, maintaining good team collaboration, and supporting employees to disconnect from work and have reasonable working time arrangements are just some of the critical issues that training and development for teleworkers and their managers can address.

Organizations have taken various approaches to ensure that their employees are well-equipped to perform effectively when teleworking; line-managers are capable of effectively managing a remote team using a results-based approach; and all teleworkers have the skills and knowledge required to successfully navigate regular teleworking, including during the pandemic, or are offered relevant training to bridge any skills gaps.

These actions include the following:

- Conducting surveys regularly (every 2-3 weeks) on the challenges and needs of teleworkers and specifically targeting those needs with online training, webinars, workshops, and coaching sessions.
- Prioritizing the types of training from their existing training catalogues that are most relevant now, such as leadership skills, time-management skills, communication skills.
- Managers may benefit from attending or re-visiting specific training aimed at developing leadership skills in managing remote teams, leading teams through a crisis, effective communication with a remote team, coaching, and mentoring.
- Offering training sessions that focus on soft-skills and behavioural aspects of teleworking, such as mindfulness or time-management skills for teleworkers. These sessions would help them learn about and acquire skills to minimize health risks, set boundaries between work and personal life, and improve effectiveness. Getting enough exercise, eating and sleeping well, and disconnecting from digital devices are just as important if not more so in the context of teleworking during the pandemic.
- Managers could also greatly benefit from training that focuses on learning about role-modelling and proactive engagement and collaborative approaches that should become central features in strengthening the dynamics of remote teams.
- Sharing ideas and tips for effective teleworking openly, and also challenges around work rhythms, time management, and healthy habits can also empower teams to practice better self-care.

Case example: Directorate General for Administration and Public Employment (Portugal)

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the body responsible for training at the Portuguese Administration, in collaboration with universities, has made available a free online training module. This tool allowed participants to follow the training autonomously and to quickly and meaningfully build new skills in an interactive way. Each participant manages his or her time independently and flexibly, as it is accessible 24/7. Ten webinars were also organized for public sector employees. This training module has also been used to enhance the skills of blue-collar employees, whose jobs are not compatible with teleworking. Building on the success of the online training available for both employers and employees, the PA is planning a more widespread implementation in the future.

3.8 Focus on: Work-Life Balance

Compared to occasional teleworking under normal circumstances, teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic is far more challenging because it is mandatory, rather than voluntary, and full-time, rather than part-time or occasional. Surveys conducted with people working from home during the pandemic reveal that there are also positive experiences with working from home (Cartmill, 2020). The most useful tool to support workers with maintaining their work-life balance is to manage teleworkers by results and not by focusing on the number of hours or the particular schedules that they work. By keeping the workload manageable and setting clear, realistic expectations regarding the specific results to be achieved, workers are better equipped to organize their own time and tasks, in order to effectively balance their work obligations with their personal lives, including their family responsibilities.

One of the most significant challenges teleworking employees are facing during the pandemic is the work-life conflict they are experiencing due to blurred boundaries between work and personal life. Blurring of the boundary between paid work-personal life is always an issue with teleworking, even in the best of times, but it seems to be particularly problematic due to the unique circumstances of the pandemic. Indeed, the COVID-19 crisis has shattered the notion that paid work and personal life are two entirely separate domains, as well as the ideal worker myth that workers can and should always be available to perform their work-related functions. Studies have shown that teleworking increases work intensity and work-home interference, leading to adverse effects on the well-being and stress-levels of teleworkers (Eurofound and ILO, 2017).

People with children find the combination of school and child care facility closures with prolonged, full-time teleworking particularly challenging. In a recent survey, over one in five persons (22 per cent) living with young children (under 12) reported difficulties in concentrating on their job all or most of the time, compared to just 5 per cent of households with no children and 7 per cent with children aged 12–17 (Eurofound, 2020b). Specifically, single parents or parents of children with a disability or learning difficulty report that the situation is very stressful.

On the other hand, survey respondents reported that they appreciated the absence of time and stress of commuting to the office; spending more time with their children and spouses; and also the flexibility of the working hours.

But how can workers effectively disconnect from work when their personal and working lives have become so blurred together? The following actions among others may be considered by organizations to help improve the work-life balance of their teleworking employees, including by enabling them to effectively disconnect from work during specified periods:

- Supporting work-life boundary management by setting clear expectations about work outputs, and at the same time offering workers the flexibility to manage their own work schedules based on their individual needs.
- Ensuring that workers feel empowered to disconnect from work at specified times reserved for rest and personal life without negative repercussions for their careers.
- Encouraging open communication and cooperation between workers and managers around scheduling, availability, and boundary-setting within teams.
- Supporting workers with small children or other care responsibilities who may be facing difficulties getting their work done and living up to the expectations of their employers. Such individuals should be supported with targeted measures, such as the special parental leave schemes that have been put in place in several countries, organized on the basis of social dialogue and consultations between workers and employers, on either a full-time or part-time basis.

> The current pandemic context showed us that teleworking is a privileged way amidst a set of measures that promote flexibility of work and a maximization of the use of technology; for instance, for the conciliation between work and family life or for a better time management on the part of the worker. This was a complex but successful operation. There were clear guidelines not only to prevent and safeguard the health of workers and users, but also to ensure the continuity of public services, the ultimate role of Public Administration. As for the future, after this period has passed, the Portuguese Government aims to keep at least 25% of the workers in teleworking, in the range of the workers that can perform their functions remotely. The time we are living is one of great ordeals in which each and every one of us has a crucial role in order to achieve common goals and to build bridges.
>
> ▶ **José Couto** - Secretary of State for Public Administration, Portugal

4. The gender dimension of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic

The world of work, including teleworking, is gendered. Under normal circumstances teleworking may potentially disadvantage women, as they typically have to shoulder both childcare and household chores as well as paid employment. Alternatively, it may help them to facilitate their desired work-life balance. For example, one prominent study found that female home-based teleworkers reported slightly better work-life balance outcomes than their male counterparts (Eurofound and ILO, 2017). The ultimate effect of telework on the reported work-life balance of both women and men depends on many factors, including the established legal and regulatory framework, the prevailing gender division of labour, the organizational culture, policies and practices of their employer, among other factors.

Existing social and economic gender inequalities and challenges for women are aggravated by the current crisis, which demands that enterprises and other organizations become more gender-responsive in their actions related to tackling the COVID-19 crisis (UN Women, 2020). Women working on the frontlines in healthcare or essential items retail, or working from home with eldercare and childcare responsibilities need to be heard, and their voices and their challenges should inform future policymaking and HR policies regarding flexible working. Moreover, according to one early analysis, women's employment is likely to be hit more severely by the pandemic induced economic crisis than men's (ILO, 2020f).

Some of the critical areas enterprises may need to pay specific attention to are as follows:

- Whenever organizations collect data, including regarding the pandemic, it should be gender-disaggregated, in order to understand how different factors affect men and women differently. Such data should be used to raise awareness among senior leadership and managers, in order to ensure that they are aware of and understand the different impacts on women and men and implement response plans accordingly.
- Enterprises may be confronted with the profound challenges that women are facing regarding balancing their paid work and caring responsibilities during the pandemic. Performance

appraisals shouldn't prioritize only those workers for promotions who were able to continue working at full capacity during the pandemic or penalise those workers who could not do so because of personal challenges, such as for example homeschooling their children when public schools were closed.

- Employers need to demonstrate empathy and creativity in supporting female workers and workers with care responsibilities, to avoid leaving them with no other option than to cut back their working hours or quit their jobs entirely, thus increasing the risks of women falling behind in their careers.
- Reports from many countries that currently have or have had government-ordered lockdowns to curb the spread of the coronavirus find that the incidence of domestic violence has escalated substantially (ILO, 2020g). For many survivors of domestic violence, work provides a respite from the unpredictability of abuse, and there can be more immediate danger inside the home than outside it. Employers have a role to play in raising awareness, offering support and assistance to potential victims, as well as empowering all workers to look out for each other and detect early warning signs that something may point to incidences of abuse or violence at the home of one of their coworkers. Organizations should share information with workers on where to report and seek help to combat domestic violence, including national and local hotlines and services with trained responders, by using special code-words that victims can use to signal abuse and thus trigger responses by the competent authorities, in line with the ILO Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190) and its accompanying Recommendation (No. 206).
- Employers should continue promoting family-friendly policies and measures, with a particular focus on encouraging men to equally share the responsibilities of unpaid care and domestic chores by means of targeted employee engagement and creative initiatives, such as role-modelling of good practices by male managers, social-media campaigns, internal blogs or photos, videos, etc. It is important that the new working arrangements offer both women and men equal opportunities to telework and viable options to overcome work-life conflict (ILO, 2020f).
- One of the important aspects to consider is that the full-time, continuing teleworking that has been imposed by physical distancing rules and lockdowns should not become a significant setback for previous gender equality achievements, and not hamper the diversity and inclusion efforts of enterprises.
- Finally, it is essential to include women and the gender dimension in COVID-19 responses and task forces.

5. Trust and organizational culture

How well an organization has reacted to the pandemic and is navigating through it largely depends on its organizational culture and values. How it has managed the complex shift to teleworking, and what this experience has been like for workers, is mediated through several factors, such as the culture, leadership skills, transparency, and level of trust within the organization.

Many organizations were quick to react to the crisis early on, with some of them introducing a teleworking testing period for their workers—and many haven't returned to their workplace since then. Those employers that have been quick to communicate clearly and openly with their workers about the processes and the potential risks of the pandemic, as well as supporting their employees with every aspect of teleworking, have benefited from a highly motivated workforce, an increased level of trust, and a positive effect on the organizational culture in the long-term.

Trust is the "glue" that holds all the aspects of teleworking together. Managers, teleworkers, and their colleagues need to trust each other. Telework cannot be effective without it (ILO, 2020a). Trust can be pro-actively built by organizations, even if teams are working remotely.

These are some of the steps that workers and organizations can take to build confidence and maintain trustful relationships among the employees and with management:

- Workers need to feel empowered to make decisions without fearing negative repercussions. They also need to be reassured that making mistakes is part of the learning and development process. If workers feel trusted, they won't unnecessarily involve lots of other colleagues in solving problems or making decisions, which will translate into time efficiencies for the entire team.
- One of the fastest ways to build trust is to be very specific about what is expected of workers and by when. Once direct supervisors can articulate these expectations very clearly, ideally involving workers in the discussion of goals and objectives, there is much less need to micromanage, as performance issues become very apparent.
- Workers, who are carriers of the DNA of the culture of the organization and act as their culture-ambassadors, should be activated and called-upon. They may organize and devise activities that nurture the organizational culture even while workers are teleworking, for example, via peer-support groups, informal events, fun competitions, and their own other initiatives.
- Workers need to know when and how they can reach their colleagues and direct supervisors for support and how they are expected to communicate their progress.
- Ensuring that the social relationships among teams are kept alive even when they are teleworking will also have benefits to trust-building. Informal video calls combined with virtual coffee breaks, lunches, or experience-sharing team activities during the COVID-19 crisis have demonstrated a positive effect on the wellbeing of workers, their sense of belonging to the organization, and mutual trust.
- There is now an even more significant role for managers to play in ensuring the psychological well-being of employees, by regularly communicating about the current situation in the organization, pay projections, incentives, and employment conditions. For example, organizing weekly online town hall meetings, during which senior leaders address the entire workforce with up-dates and answers to questions, have proven to be vital in building and maintaining trust.
- Listening actively to the concerns and challenges, as well as the ideas, of workers and offering flexibility and support, are also critical to building and maintaining trust-based employment relationships.
- Role modeling of organizational values by senior managers, such as trust and empathy, are also highly effective ways to support workers with developing behaviours that are aligned with the desired culture of the organization.
- Informal groups within the organization, such as Employee Resource Groups or Affinity Groups[6], have a significant role to play in upholding the culture of the organization during the pandemic and fostering trust. It is important to encourage them to continue their regular meetings, activities, and recruitment efforts, even while most workers are teleworking. Groups that support fathers, single-mothers or parents with a child with disability or a learning difficulty are particularly helpful for sharing information and mutual support.
- Finally, it is suggested here that organizations need to restrain from using employee monitoring and surveillance tools and software, which on the surface may appear to promise an easy fix for managing the performance of teleworkers but raises a number of ethical

6 Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) are groups of employees who join together in their workplace based on shared characteristics or life experience. ERGs are also known as Affinity Groups (Sample, 2011).

questions. If unaddressed, these concerns have the potential to significantly impact the relationship between the employee and the employer, reducing trust in management and resulting in negative attitudes and counterproductive behaviours (McParland, Connolly, 2020).

6. Policy responses for supporting employers and workers in introducing and sustaining effective teleworking

The devastating nature of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated swift and drastic government responses to limit social interactions, in order to slow the spread of the virus and ensure that healthcare systems do not become overloaded. Among these governmental actions were the temporary closing of non-essential businesses and other organizations and also policies encouraging them to allow those workers whose functions are compatible with teleworking to work from home.

However, switching from office-based working to teleworking wasn't a simple or a smooth transition for all enterprises and public organizations, especially for those with limited prior experience with teleworking. Among the reasons for the difficulty in making this transition were the following ones:

- organizational culture,
- management resistance,
- the lack of appropriate IT tools and devices,
- cumbersome paper-based processes,
- lack of skills and training resources to support teams switching to teleworking,
- lack of internal health and safety guidelines for the home office,
- labour legislation in which teleworking employees don't have the same rights and protections as workers working in the office, and
- data security concerns and privacy issues.

Scaling up teleworking for their workers is a shared role between relevant government departments and agencies, employers' representatives, trade unions, and professional bodies supporting employers. By offering advice, information resources, webinars, and financial support during the pandemic and beyond, these diverse actors can all contribute to a smoother transition from office-based work to teleworking.

What are the key policy options to support employers and workers regarding teleworking?

1. **Providing up-to-date, reliable, and accessible information to all stakeholders concerning teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic by:**
    - Providing clarification about the applicability of existing rights and obligations and the changes that have been adopted due to the pandemic.
    - Issuing advice or guidance on the minimum required equipment necessary for teleworking (including computers and software applications).
    - Providing concise information and awareness-raising on health and safety, including correct ergonomics.

- Issuing recommendations on how to prevent cybersecurity threats while workers are working from home, as well as offering guidance on how employers can comply with data protection and privacy regulations, such as the EU General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR[7]).

Case example: Smart Working (Italy)

Smart Working, otherwise known as agile work, has been governed in Italy by Law no. n. 81/2017, with the main goal of promoting the reconciliation of work and family life, in order to increase the company's competitiveness and the relationship of trust between worker and employer. This new form of working is based on the use of work flexibility and management by objectives. Formally, the Smart Working arrangement requires an individual agreement between worker and employer, in written form.

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a Decree of the Prime Minister was adopted on the 1st of March 2020, based on which employers could allow their workers to telework, even without the individual agreements in writing, mandated by Law no. 81/2017. For the limited, 6 months period of the Decree, Smart Working will be considered as a measure of health and safety at work. In terms of the formal requirements of the simplified Smart Working arrangement, employers should provide the necessary IT tools for employees to carry out their work remotely. Employers must also send information to their employees about the potnetial health and safety risks arising from these working arrangements.

2. **Providing diverse forms of financial, fiscal and administrative support and other relief for enterprises by:**
   - Offering a one-time lump-sum payment or cash support for SMEs for the purchase of equipment to enable workers to work from home.
   - Offering subsidies to purchase training services to support switching to teleworking.
   - Introducing tax and financial support measures, such as deferral of payments, rate reductions, or paying in installments to ease the financial burden on employers, with the condition that their workers are permitted and encouraged to work from home.
   - Lightening some bureaucratic procedures regarding the workplace, for instance, with regards to health and safety reviews of the home office environment, in order to allow the immediate implementation of teleworking, provided that each worker carries out a self-evaluation of their own workplace.
   - Offering flexibility and relaxing existing regulations as appropriate (e.g., the obligation of the employer to provide ergonomic seating or to sign a teleworking agreement before the start of the teleworking period).

Case example: Malta Enterprise - Teleworking cash grant scheme (Malta)

On the 16th March 2020, Malta Enterprise issued a guideline document and an application form under the Business Development and Continuity Scheme to facilitate employers providing teleworking arrangements to their employees who can carry out their work from their residence. The call supported employers to invest in technology that enables teleworking and to partially cover the costs of teleworking solutions. The call for application under this scheme was open to all undertakings irrespective of size and sector, as well as limited up to €500 per teleworking agreement and €4,000 per undertaking. There were 1001 applications submitted for this grant, of which 845 were determined to be eligible.

7 The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) 2016/679 is a regulation in EU law on data protection and privacy in the European Union and the European Economic Area. It also addresses the transfer of personal data outside the EU and EEA areas. This regulation protects fundamental rights and freedoms of natural persons and in particular their right to the protection of personal data.

3. **Supporting teleworking employees by:**

- Introducing new teleworking regulations, as appropriate, which may include improved protection standards for all workers working remotely; references to flexibility in work schedules; the ability to disconnect from work at times specified for rest and personal life; the proper use of ICT tools; hygiene and safety measures; and collective rights.
- Reimbursing (fully or partially) the costs of electricity, communication, heating and/or air conditioning, and other telework-specific costs for workers working from home.
- Offering teleworkers additional flexibility around working hours and control of their work schedules (e.g., the teleworker's working day may start earlier or finish later based on individual needs, such as care responsibilities and home-schooling obligations).
- Introducing tax measures for workers who are teleworking from countries other than the country in which their employer's premises are located, in order to prevent them from having to pay double income tax.

Case example: Telecommuting Regulation Law (El Salvador)

On 20 March 2020, the Legislative Assembly of the Republic of El Salvador endorsed the Telecommuting Regulation Law, which had been under discussion for a year prior to its approval. This law was enacted as a consequence of increased telecommuting due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The new law is applicable only to those employees who have an existing employment contract. It is applicable in both the private and public sectors; it is strictly voluntary; and there must be a written agreement between both parties, the employee and the employer, in which they agree on the terms and conditions of the arrangement. Importantly, the law establishes modalities regarding the working hours of the teleworker and the place where the tasks are carried out. Employers have the same obligations as those already established in the labour law and also the responsibility to provide the tools necessary for telecommuting. Telecommuters have the same rights as those employees working at the employer's premises, such as social security, OSH, freedom of association. (La Asamblea Legislativa de la Republica de El Salvador, 2020).

The Investment Promotion Agency of El Salvador (Proesa) estimates that this type of flexible working arrangement could save approximately 20,000 jobs that might have been lost as a consequence of the pandemic, especially in the call center sector (Rivas, 2020).

4. **Involve social partners in the design and implementation of teleworking, in accordance with the principles of the ILO Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154) by:**

- Consulting them on the rules and regulations governing telework.
- Informing their members of the benefits of teleworking and offering assistance in transitioning to working remotely.
- Using their extensive networks to share experiences, empower each other, and spread important government information regarding working from home.
- Trade union representatives have a role to play in holding employers accountable regarding the safety of the workplace. Where union representatives feel workplaces are unsafe due to COVID-19 contamination, they should contact their union's legal team for urgent advice on taking action, in accordance with the ILO Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155).
- Ensuring that employers fully perform their responsibilities in terms of keeping workers informed and trained about OSH measures when returning to the workplace. Unions may also support workers by maintaining active communication with their membership.

Case example: Teleworking recommendations with a view to resuming professional activities and future prospects (France)

As the deconfinement has been advancing in France, in mid-May 2020, three major trade unions—the French Democratic Confederation of Labour, the French Confederation of Christian Workers, and the National Union of Autonomous Trade Union—issued a joint statement that aims at providing a road-map for the future of teleworking in France. The different points in this joint statement include the following:

- that teleworking should be subject to quality social dialogue between employers and workers, and teleworking should be based on an agreed Charter or an Agreement.
- that when organizations put in place more frequent, occasional teleworking, they also need to rethink how work is organized.
- that every role needs to be considered for its compatibility with teleworking, and when designing new roles, teleworking needs to be embedded in the design process.
- that the voluntary nature of teleworking must be safeguarded.
- that digitalisation and health and safety issues must be considered.
- that the above measures need to also take into account the specific situation of workers with disabilities.
- that organisations need to invest in the materials and the processes required for effective teleworking, to ensure that the highest possible quality of teleworking is available to workers.

7. The future of teleworking post-COVID-19

As some of the countries begin entering the next phase of managing the COVID-19 pandemic response, employers are preparing for the return of their workers to the offices, factories, and shops. Reopening workplaces and the economy, however, won't be static; may be subject to setbacks from a second wave of the virus; and in any case, this certainly won't happen in a single day.

In April 2020, the WHO issued an unambiguous message highlighting the risks of a precipitate return to the workplace, as the premature lifting of physical distancing measures is likely to lead to an uncontrolled resurgence in COVID-19 transmission and an amplified second wave of cases (WHO, 2020b).

The uncertainty surrounding the development and deployment of a safe and effective vaccine as well as the lack of therapeutic options will hamper the economic recovery and the return to "normal" for practically all organizations. Countries will attempt to transition in a controlled way from a scenario of rapid transmission to a sustainable, steady situation of low-level or no transmission, and every actor in the world of work needs to contribute to an orderly and well-organized return-to-work process by adopting prudent new behaviours in the short- and medium-term.

The full impact of COVID-19 on labour markets remains to be determined. However, it is likely that rates of telework will remain significantly higher than they were prior to the onset of the pandemic (see e.g., Eurofound, 2020a).

Governments and social partners will have to plan for several different scenarios, in which restrictions will be increased or eased according to how the epidemic is advancing or receding on their territory and prepare for teleworking arrangements to once again become generalised on short notice.

During the next, highly uncertain period, workers, employers, and governments will have to adapt to a new way of living and working, which will require new behaviours and new norms. It most likely will involve a hybrid or blended form of isolation (i.e., teleworking) and deconfinement (i.e., the possibility to use the workplace but with controlled conditions based on physical distancing).

Government-mandated lockdowns and mass teleworking were initiated in an emergency situation in many countries, and social partners were often not involved in the negotiation or design of teleworking arrangements, with the exception of a few countries where these processes are deeply embedded in existing organizations at all levels, such as Germany and the Nordic countries. Going forward, it will be imperative to ensure that social partners play a central role in drawing out the lessons learned from the first two phases of the initial pandemic response and workers transitioning from office-based work to teleworking, and to apply these lessons to revise existing or initiate new teleworking policies.

Early-stage research and surveys have found that a very high percentage of workers would like to telework more frequently—even after physical distancing restrictions have been lifted. Additionally, some workers have now realized that their jobs can be performed outside of traditional office spaces, and are now also more comfortable using technology. Many leaders who previously were resistant to their teams working from home have experienced that it can be done and are supportive of workers teleworking more frequently. For example, one study of 1,000 SME owners and decision-makers in 19 cities across the United Kingdom reports that nearly one in three (29 per cent) SMEs plan to increase flexible working post-pandemic (Smith, 2020).

Case example: Multinational financial services bank (Canada)

The bank employed about 45,000 people as of the 31st of January 2020, of which only 5% of the workforce was working remotely before the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the bank to make a sweeping reappraisal of its workplace policies. It anticipated that as much as 80% of its staff—about 36,000 employees—may adopt new flexible working arrangements that blend working from home with going into the office, even after the pandemic subsides.[8]

In addition to employers and workers considering an expansion of teleworking modalities, customers and clients have also been more willing to accept that the services they require are being delivered by remote teams or employees working from remote locations.

Going forward, both private enterprises and public sector employers may consider having a more significant portion of their workforce teleworking beyond the pandemic, and these are some points that they may want to consider while preparing for this potentially "new and better normal":

- Update or prepare a teleworking and a return-to-work policy based on the experience with the initial COVID-19 plan that takes into account the feedback received from workers and management regarding what worked well and what can be improved, and the potential need for investment in the new digital technologies necessary to conduct business remotely on a long-term basis by working remotely more efficiently.
- It is essential to involve workers and their representatives in reviewing the lessons learned from the current phase of pandemic regarding how management and workers transitioned to teleworking, and then use these experiences to modify existing teleworking policies or initiate new policies.
- Include guidelines for decision-making regarding the protection of vulnerable groups within the workforce, such as workers with underlying health conditions, older workers, who may face a higher risk of developing serious health issues, workers who share the household with a person who has underlying health conditions, and women, who will likely bear a disproportionate burden in the care responsibilities in the case of closure of schools or care systems (ILO, 2020a). Pregnant workers and new mothers are particularly vulnerable during any health crisis; therefore employers need to comply with the ILO Maternity Protection

8 The information in this box is taken from confidential interviews with company representatives.

Convention, 2000 (No. 183) and the ILO Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156) and their accompanying recommendations.

- Assess the various roles within the organization, in order to determine whether they can be performed via teleworking, at least partially, combined with a certain number of days working at the employer's worksite. Update the organization's teleworking policy based on these results, as well as the individual Teleworking Plans of workers.
- Consider amending existing teleworking policies to make sure that they adhere to the terms and conditions of their collective bargaining agreements.
- Evaluate on an on-going basis the experience of workers with teleworking and monitor their changing needs by regularly running employee surveys, interviews, focus groups, and Q&A sessions, in order to ensure that their voices are included in the design and implementation of future teleworking policies.
- Regularly assess the learning needs of workers and managers, and then develop and offer specific training to build skills and confidence for new ways of working, including teleworking, other forms of flexible working (e.g., flexi-time arrangements), staggered hours, alternating teams, rotating schedules, etc.

Case example: Furniture enterprise (Global)

This US-based furniture company has typically been more informal about flexible working approaches, but they are currently formalizing guidelines for flexible working. This has been brought about by the need to reduce density in offices, and the guidelines are designed to ensure equity across all their locations globally. The purpose of these guidelines is to assist employees and leaders, ensuring objectivity in decision making as they determine who is best suited for working remotely. It is based on assessments of factors such as the nature of the work, preferred work styles, the availability of office space (given new physical distancing guidelines and regional government requirements), and the availability of employee home office options. The enterprise is also augmenting the guidelines with toolkits to support flexible working and development for leaders who must increasingly lead from a distance.[9]

Policymakers may also wish to consider the following actions to help foster an enabling environment for teleworking in both private enterprises and public organizations:

- Monitor and evaluate the take-up of their proposed financial incentives as well as the impact of their legislative efforts during the initial stages of the pandemic; learn from this feedback; and build on the successes to better support employers to implement teleworking effectively.
- If they have not done so already, national authorities should review their operational plans to address COVID-19 with regards to the prevention and mitigation of the social impacts of the crisis, including teleworking, as well as those areas that may disproportionately affect vulnerable groups, such as women, the elderly, individuals with disabilities, migrants, single parents, etc.
- Social dialogue: Last but not least, it is imperative for policymakers to involve social partners in reviewing the lessons learned from the current phase of pandemic regarding how management and workers transitioned to teleworking, and then use these experiences to adjust, as needed, existing teleworking policies or initiate new policies.

9 The information in this box is taken from confidential interviews with company representatives.

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- Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156)
- Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155)
- Occupational Safety and Health Recommendation, 1981 (No. 164)
- Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (No. 206)
- Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190)
- Collective Bargaining Convention, 1981 (No. 154)
- Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183)

Annexes

Annex I. - Tools and resources developed to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic

Title:	Short description:
Keys for effective teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic	This resource describes ways to effectively implement teleworking during the pandemic.
Ergonomic tips when teleworking	This website by the ILO offers tips on teleworking, including how to improve the ergonomics in home offices.
An employer's guide on managing your workplace during COVID-19	This guide was developed by the ILO bureau for employers'activities (ILO-ACT/EMP) and provides guidance on how tomanage the workplace and protect workers, includingoccupational safety and health.
In the face of a pandemic:Ensuring Safety and Health at Work	This report, by ILO, explores the occupational safety and health (OSH) risks arising from the spread of coronavirus disease. It discusses psychosocial risks, ergonomics and other important work-related safety and health risks associated with the COVID-19 pandemic.
Family-Friendly Policies and other Good Workplace Practices in the Context of COVID-19: Key Steps Employers can take	This document, developed by UN Women, ILO and Unicef, provides employers with key, specific steps they can take regarding flexible work arrangements, childcare support options, occupational safety and health (OSH) measures and OSH training.
Telework in the 21st century: An evolutionary perspective	This insightful book offers a new conceptual framework explaining the evolution of telework over four decades.
An employers' guide on working from home in response to the outbreak of COVID-19	This guide has been developed by the International Labour Organization Bureau for Employers' Activities (ILO-ACT/EMP) to assist EBMOs to provide practical guidance to member companies that have implemented "working from home" protocols for their staff in 2020 as an alternative temporary arrangement during the COVID-19 crisis.
Getting your workplace ready for COVID-19	The document developed by WHO gives advice on simple ways to get workplaces ready for COVID-19. simple **ways to get workplaces ready for COVID-19.**
Guidance for Action: Gender-sensitive private sector response to COVID-19 for accelerated and inclusive economic recovery	This Guidance Note for Action, developed by UN Women, puts a specific emphasis on the gender dimension of COVID-19 response and recovery plans.

Title:	Short description:
Supporting people and companies to deal with the COVID-19 virus: Options for an immediate employment and social-policy response	This resource by the OECD contributes to the evidence sharing on the role and effectiveness of various policy tools.
Responding to the coronavirus	This web page from CIPD provides updated advice, resources and guidance to support employers and people professionals in their COVID-19 response.
Navigating COVID-19	This page, by SHRM, offers a toolbox to build a New World of Work.
Guide to Prolonged, Mass Teleworking During a Pandemic	This resource, by the WorkLife HUB, summarise the most important roles and responsibilities organisations, their workers and team leaders need to follow when getting ready for an emergency teleworking situation.
Les conseils de la CNIL pour mettre en place du télétravail	This page (in French), by CNIL, provides useful tools and documents for organizations on how to secure data during teleworking.
Seven Practical Human Factors and Ergonomics (HF/E) Tips for Teleworking/ Home-learning using Tablet/Smartphone Devices	This booklet, by the Japan Human Factors and Ergonomics Society (JES) includes action-oriented tips for individuals who are teleworking/home-learning using tablet/ smartphone devices, based on the format of the Ergonomic Checkpoints prepared by the ILO/IEA.
IOE Guidance on teleworking in the times of Covid-19	This guiding document, by the International Organization of Employers (IOE), provides practical guidance to employers in understanding the main challenges of teleworking during emergency situations, as well as to provide key measures for its effective implementation.

Annex II. - The most frequently used forms of communication during the COVID-19 pandemic

Category	What/Why	Frequency	Tool
Work organisation			
"All-hands" or "Huddle" meetings	To disseminate key company information and updates throughout your organization, thus ensuring everyone is in sync	Weekly or Monthly	Video conferencing tool
Group launch or relaunch meetings	To set expectations, create guiding norms, discuss practicalities and generate enthusiasm	At the start of group telecommuting, repeated monthly	Video conferencing tool
Regular check-ins	To prevent miscommunication, engage and motivate your team, and get feedback on your tele-management skills; forms: Individual conversations or team meetings	Daily or weekly, planned, depending on the project	Video conferencing tool, phone, messaging apps
Performance management			
Coaching conversations	To talk about worker growth and change opportunities, setting action points	Monthly	Video conferencing tool
Progress review with individuals and teams	To track Work Plan, identify concerns, discuss progress, align on objectives	Every 2 weeks	Video conferencing tool
Trust building			
Informal, social gatherings	To make workers bond, to help remote workers stay connected and engaged	Weekly	Video conferencing tool
Wellbeing			
Quick connect	To check-in on mental and physical health of workers	Daily, Every second day	Phone, Messaging app
Problem-solving			
Q&A session with management	To avoid rumours and answer to concerns and anxiety; To set the narrative straight for your team and to get a feel of the team's sentiments	Weekly or Monthly	Video conferencing tool
Activating culture champions	To reach out to staff and reinvigorate about values and mission	Weekly or Monthly	Video conferencing tool

Annex III. - Checklist

Working time and work organization

	YES	NO
Individual Teleworking Plans for all teleworking workers have been written and approved, which includes working hours and hours of contactability.	☐	☐
A common system to signal availability among team members and towards customers has been agreed on and established.	☐	☐
Cross-functional teams have been established.	☐	☐
The skills of workers have been analyzed and mapped and staff redeployed among teams, as needed.	☐	☐

Performance management

	YES	NO
Expected results have been clarified and articulated clearly to workers.	☐	☐
Realistic deadlines and timeframe have been agreed upon.	☐	☐
Direct supervisors and team-leaders have been trained and are well vested in management by results.	☐	☐
The feedback culture of the organization has been evaluated and adapted to teleworking.	☐	☐

Digitalization

	YES	NO
Technology needs and required resources of workers teleworking have been reviewed.	☐	☐
The level of technology skills of teleworkers has been assessed and training for those tools deployed.	☐	☐
The internal policy on the use of technology and digital tools has been revised to include the use of own devices by workers and the modalities for financial or material support for workers working from home.	☐	☐
Information about technical support has been widely disseminated among teleworking workers.	☐	☐
Data and privacy protection training is available and highly visible across the organization.	☐	☐
All personal data collection and processing are compliant with applicable privacy laws and regulations.	☐	☐

Communication

	YES	NO
A specific dedicated site on the organization's website/intranet has been created for teleworking information and resources and updates to the internal policies.	☐	☐
Communication norms have been clarified and communicated to teleworkers.	☐	☐
Information around when and how direct supervisors are reachable has been widely disseminated (on multiple channels) to teleworkers.	☐	☐
Workers have been encouraged to engage in informal, social communication within the teams and organizations.	☐	☐

Occupational Safety and Health

	YES	NO
The potential health and safety risks and hazards affecting teleworkers have been identified.	☐	☐
Teleworkers have been informed about their rights and duties related to their own health and safety.	☐	☐
Opportunities to provide workers with physical and mental health support have been reviewed and action taken.	☐	☐
The option for workers to borrow ergonomic equipment (chairs, monitors) from the office for the duration of the teleworking has been reviewed and granted.	☐	☐

Legal and contractual implications

	YES	NO
Government policies and available support for employers whose workers are teleworking have been reviewed.	☐	☐
Worker salary and benefits packages have been reviewed and adjusted if necessary in the light of prolonged teleworking.	☐	☐
Legal and taxation issues have been assessed and clarified.	☐	☐
Visa, work permits, and other formalities for international workers have been reviewed and processed.	☐	☐

Training

	YES	NO
Regular online surveys are in place.	☐	☐
Training and support for workers who are teleworking and their maangers have been evaluated and rolled out.	☐	☐
Training and coaching on soft-skills and behavioural aspects and norms have been considered and rolled-out for both workers and managers.	☐	☐

Work-Life Balance

	YES	NO
Flexibility and support have been offered to teleworking workers.	☐	☐
Open communication and cooperation between direct supervisors and workers around scheduling, availability, and boundary setting have been encouraged.	☐	☐
The challenges of working from home with children out of daycare and schools closed have been listened to and avenues for support have been discussed and deployed.	☐	☐

Trust and Organizational Culture

	YES	NO
Social relationships among team members have been fostered.	☐	☐
Employee Resource Groups and Affinity Groups have been encouraged to continue working and meeting.	☐	☐
Regular, honest, and positive communication by senior leaders has been put in place, by also incorporating Q&A sessions.	☐	☐

Gender

	YES	NO
Gender-related normative barriers and beliefs are addressed to overcome stereotypes and biases.	☐	☐
Women and the gender-aspect have been included in the COVID-19 responses and task-force.	☐	☐
Data collection has been adjusted to collect gender-disaggregated data.	☐	☐
Awareness raising and support measures around gender-based violence and domestic violence have been disseminated among the teleworkers with information around where to seek assistance.	☐	☐
Female leadership pipelines and development programs have been maintained during the COVID-19 crisis and teleworking.	☐	☐

Annex IV. - Comparative table of 3 national teleworking laws Italy, El Salvador and Chile)

The following table provides a comparative overview of 3 national legislation on teleworking, that were issued as a response to the pandemic

Key areas of teleworking legislation / Country	El Salvador Decree nr. 600 containing la Ley de regulacion del teletrabajo on 20/03/2020	Italy Law No. 27/2020, and law decree No. 34/2020 "Decreto Rilancio"	Chile Ley 21.220 sobre trabajo a Distancia y Teletrabajo on 01/04/2020
Provides a statutory definition(s) (teleworking, teleworker)	X	X	
Provides reference to employment conditions and rules (rights, applicability, duration or maximum term, return to the workplace, termination, access to the workplace, refusal etc.)	X	X	X
Outlines the conditions of data protection and privacy issues			
Provides reference to organizational safety and health (display screen equipment, stress and mental health etc.)		X	X
Includes specific provisions regarding the responsibilities of the parties such as the transportation of office equipment to the premises of the teleworker, or maintenance of such equipment			
Includes information on equipment and cost compensation in case the worker has to provide equipment (tools, lap-top etc.)	X	X	X
Requires a written agreement between manager and worker, or reference to the applicable collective bargaining agreement, as a condition for participation in teleworking	X	X	X
Requires both managers and workers to complete training on teleworking		X	
Provides information on the organisation of work (working time and overtime, frequency of telework, working place, workload, performance measurement and evaluation, expectations, reporting, monitoring etc.)	X	X	X
Its application requires a form of consultation with social partners; it includes a particular reference concerning the collective representation of teleworkers		X	
Requires organisations to designate a dedicated person (Teleworking Manager) in charge of teleworking			
Includes reference to flexibility or the right to disconnect		X	X
Includes reference to the nature of teleworking (voluntary)	X	X	
Provides information on how teleworking should be implemented (procedures for execution) including formalities such as communication procedures for accidents, or questions regarding insurance policies			
Provides reference to the role of inspectors (labour inspectors, or workers' representatives) at the workplace of the teleworker			

Annex V. - Case Examples

Case Example 1 - Multinational Financial Services Bank (Canada)

The Bank employed about 45.000 people as of the 31st of January 2020, of which only 5 per cent of the workforce was working remotely before the COVID-19 crisis. The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the bank to make a sweeping reappraisal of its workplace policies. It anticipated that as much as 80 per cent of its staff - about 36.000 employees - may adopt new flexible working arrangements that blend working from home with going into the office even after the pandemic subsides (Alexander, 2020).

What were some of the measures the organization put in place as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic?

In terms of ergonomics, the bank focused on creating a sustained working from home model that enables employees with the tools and technology to be productive remotely. Those employees who are working from home are enabled with laptops; for some roles, it has supplied additional technology like monitors, headsets, and other items required for productivity in a remote environment.

The VPN remote capabilities of the company allowed its employees whose functions could be performed remotely to work from home during regular work hours. Due to other COVID-19 impacts such as school closures, eldercare closures, managers are working with their employees to provide flexibility given outside demands.

The fiscal year of the bank runs from the 1st of November – the 31st of October. Managers have completed mid-year check-ins with employees to recalibrate on goals in the context of new and delayed work.

Employee communications throughout the COVID-19 crisis have been robust. The approach they took included some of the following examples:

- Built resilience in employee population through up-to-date, fact-based information regarding the pandemic, leveraging digital channels including Response Hub (internal employee landing page), on-the-GO (mobile information page) and LinkedIn.
- Created a detailed COVID-19 People Leader Guide to guide managers through the pandemic response with supportive tools. The Guide has been regularly updated and communicated to 6000 people managers throughout the crisis. Key content includes core elements of the bank's response, evolved enterprise HR programs, and detailed support on addressing employee scenarios.
- Tailored their line of business messaging to deliver relevant and business-specific information from trusted leaders.
- Provided enterprise education sessions with medical and mental health advisors to equip employees with the facts; sessions are made available to all employees and have had over 10,000 employees participate.
- Developed employee listening mechanisms and pulse checks to understand how employees are doing and feeling.

The health and safety of their employees and customers has been the primary focus of their COVID-19 response. A well-established health and safety practices in place in all open worksites including physical distancing measures and enhanced cleaning rigour. Additional examples include:

- Provided face coverings (masks) to those locations where employees are working.
- Installed Plexiglass in bank branch locations where employees are interacting with the public.
- Disseminated information and education on hygiene practices.

To address the health for all employees, the organization has also taken the following measures:

- Disseminated information from medical experts through virtual Q&A sessions, with over 10,000 attending sessions.
- Launched a virtual health care service to all benefits-eligible employees in Canada, United States and United Kingdom, offering employees 24/7 connection to physicians and nurse practitioners.
- Provided tools and resources to support employee's mental health through the crisis including "Wellness Bursts", work from home guides and evolving Employee Assistance Program offering.

Measures the bank took in view of the deconfinement and employees returning to work, resuming "business as usual"

This financial services enterprise is applying a measured, staged approach that includes bringing employees back in small waves over the course of the coming months. No vulnerable employees will be a part of these waves, and they have initiated a survey to understand personal situations and preferences relating to returning to the workforce. Their Readiness Framework includes 5 factors to inform re-opening decisions: external readiness, employee readiness, new normal (Home / Hybrid / Hub Operating Models), business readiness, enterprise readiness.

Case Example 2 - Directorate General for Administration and Public Employment (DGAEP) (Portugal)

Following a state of emergency declaration, the Portuguese Government has put in place several measures of a temporary and exceptional nature aiming at containing the spread of the COVID-19 virus while maintaining, as far as possible, the operability of the public entities to ensure the continuity of public services' provision. It is important to clarify that the measures adopted by DGAEP, as a public body, reflect the political guidelines embodied in various pieces of legislation published in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specific measures were adopted by all public sector entities ranging from health and family care to working conditions. As regards working conditions, teleworking was established as the mandatory working modality for public employees whenever this was compatible with the performance of their duties, and regardless of the form of employment relationship. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, in May 2020, 88 per cent of the employees at DGAEP worked from home full time.

Importantly, all teleworkers kept their full salaries and meal allowances. Only those employees who perform essential functions, and whose work cannot be carried out remotely, worked from their usual offices. When public employees did not telework they could be required to perform duties based on the following terms:

- Where it is not possible to guarantee the recommended minimum safety distance, an off-peak schedule should be adopted;
- Specific work schedules may be adopted throughout the week or month;
- Exceptionally, and whenever another modality does not seem possible, they can opt for the compressed work schedules modality;
- The public health emergency is considered a justifiable reason for the authorisation of the continuous day mode, which should, as a consequence, decrease the normal working period by one hour;
- Use of adaptability schemes and time banks.

In addition to these measures, in particular with regard to the organisation of working time, workplaces should also be reorganised, allowing maximum distance between employees, and, whenever possible, reducing the number of employees in each room.

DGAEP carried out a needs assessment in terms of technological infrastructure (e.g. VPN connections) for arge-scale teleworking implementation, after identifying the employees, by department, who would be teleworking and those who would work at the office on a rotating basis.

Trade union involvement

As a result of the first state of emergency declaration, which was in force from the 19th of March to the 2nd of April 2020, some rights, freedoms and guarantees were suspended, given the nature of this particular state of emergency as provided for in the Constitution.

The scope of this suspension of rights included the right to consultation and participation of trade unions in the drafting of exceptional legislative measures of adjustment to combat of the pandemic. This suspension resulted from the need to ensure that there were no delays in the entry into force of this legislation.

All legislative and administrative measures adopted in the context of the crisis, which depend on the declaration of a state of emergency, have been ratified.

However, with the renewal of the declaration of the state of emergency, from the 3rd of April to the 17th, social dialogue has been resumed, albeit with limitations. The right of workers' committees and trade union associations' participation is recognized, provided that the exercise of this right does not represent a delay in the entry into force of urgent legislative measures and that the deadlines and conditions for consultation may be limited.

Key challenges and lessons learned

The most significant challenge for any public services, including DGAEP, was to create the technological conditions, in a short period of time, to get most public employees teleworking. Although telework was already in use at the Portuguese Public Administration, its level of take-up was not widespread.

The role of the leadership was another major challenge for DGAEP, as leaders needed to quickly adapt to managing a remote workforce. Their concern was, on the one hand, how to ensure the sustainability of employees' motivation and well-being, avoiding their social isolation and promoting the relationship with colleagues and, on the other hand, how to guarantee the usual levels of productivity and consequently the functioning of the service. In this regard, the fact that the Portuguese Administration has been applying, since 2004, a redefined management model that is based on managing by objectives has proven to be a great advantage in the evaluation of the performance of teleworkers during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Another challenge had to do with the skills of leaders. Are the existing skills sufificent or does mass teleworking require new skills? What skills? Have leaders been up to the challenge posed by the pandemic crisis? What should be done with less qualified workers (e.g. auxiliary staff, telephonists), whose jobs are not suitable for teleworking and those that belong to at-risk groups (e.g., those who have chronic illnesses or are over 65 years old) and cannot work on-site? These are some of the questions that have arisen, but cannot yet be answered.

Based on teleworkers' feedback, those with young children at home due to the closure of nurseries and schools and/or other relatives to care for in dependency situations, are finding it difficult to reconcile work and family life. Some say that they can only work without interruptions at night when the children are asleep. When the father or the mother is also teleworking, they have had to create a system of rotation in the care of their dependents. This situation is considered very stressful. However, teleworkers without children or with grown children did not report these problems.

The forced extension of teleworking in the Portuguese Public Administration and DGAEP almost 2 months after the introduction of full time teleworking has led some teleworkers to show signs of saturation. Some of them have signaled interest in returning to the workplace on a rotational basis with other colleagues or on a basis of 2 to 3 days per week. Most likely the new normal of working time organisation will involve alternating remote work with face-to-face work.

The creation of social networking groups, especially on WhatsApp, has proven to be very positive in maintaining contact among colleagues from the same department, not only to discuss work-related issues but also to hold informal social conversations. This helps to promote group cohesion and avoid social isolation, with important benefits for the mental health of teleworkers, as it helps to maintain a level of psychological and emotional balance.

Periodic virtual meetings with the teams to maintain a certain management normality, as well as regular contact of teleworkers with the management team, have proven to be a good practice that contributed to breaking the sense of isolation and the potential for disinterest of the manager.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the body responsible for training at the Portuguese Administration, in collaboration with universities, has made available a free online training offer. This tool allowed participants to follow the training autonomously and to quickly and meaningfully build new skills in an interactive way. Each participant manages his or her time independently and flexibly, as this tool is accessible 24/7. Ten webinars were also organized for public sector employees. The training module has also been used to enhance the skills of blue-collar employees, whose jobs are not compatible with teleworking. Building on the success of the online training made available for both employers and employees, the PA is planning a more widespread implementation of this tool in the future.

The coronavirus pandemic highlighted the importance of teleworking in public administration by preventing the collapse of public services, which have continued to operate, albeit in some cases with some understandable limitations.

"I am convinced, on the one hand, that after the Covid-19 crisis the implementation of this work modality will be faster and will have greater coverage in public service and, on the other hand, that the new working time organization will alternate between teleworking and face-to-face work, according to the nature of the work and employers and employees' needs at a given moment, safeguarding the work-life balance as well as the physical, psychological and emotional well-being of these latter ones. Government support, through more flexible human resource management policies, is key to promoting teleworking, making it the new normal of work." - Teresa Ganhão - Head of Department, Department for Cooperation Management and Communication

Case Example 3 - Malta Enterprise (Malta)

The Economic Development Agency for the Government of Malta (Malta Enterprise) is in charge of attracting foreign direct investment into Malta and ensuring that businesses that operate from Malta are provided with the right business climate to innovate, consolidate and expand their economic activity. This is done in various dimensions, including, but not limited to an active policy advocacy role, an advisor to the Government on economic strategy, and the development of specialized support measures.

One of the key policy areas that the Maltese Government has addressed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic was remote working, which, together with other flexible working arrangements, was already gaining traction prior to the crises. Encouraging people to work from home, limiting interactions between different households, and stopping meetings at the workplace were important mitigation measures to contain the spread of COVID-19 virus. The Maltese Government envisaged that the promotion and adoption of teleworking during this period could actually start a positive change in how some companies viewed teleworking. It is also worth noting

that the increased acceptance of teleworking could lead to higher female labour force participation rates in the future.

Data collecting by the Maltese National Statistics Office through its labour force survey shows that, while on average during 2019 12 per cent of those in employment had teleworking arrangements, this had figure increased to 33 per cent by the end of March 2020. It is expected that this figure will rise even higher by April 2020.

Facilitating teleworking activities

On the 16th of March 2020, the Malta Enterprise (ME) issued a guideline document and an application form under the Business Development and Continuity Scheme to facilitate employers in providing teleworking arrangements to their employees who can carry out their work from their home. The call for proposals under this scheme supported employers and self-employed individuals to invest in technology that enables teleworking and partially covers the costs of teleworking solutions.

The supporting scheme was limited up to €500 per teleworking agreement and €4,000 per undertaking. The grant was awarded against 45 per cent of the eligible cost incurred between the 15th of February and the 8th of May 2020. To be eligible, the employee should not have had an active teleworking agreement before the 15th of February 2020.

The call for proposals was initially open for 3 weeks with a relatively low level of take-up, as the suppliers of IT equipment were not expecting such a surge in demand for portable IT equipment and teleworking solutions. The call was then extended for a further five weeks and take-up during the extension period was exponential. Over the duration of the scheme, the Malta Enterprise received a total of 1,001 applications of which around 845 were eligible to be supported under the scheme. Each application would cover typically between 4 to 10 teleworking agreements. The scheme also covered single person businesses that could provide services to their clients through online media solutions. Taken together, thsse grants covered approximately 3,740 teleworking agreements. Under this scheme, Malta Enterprise envisages that it has disbursed a total of around €1.2m to applicants.

Key challenges and lessons learned

The Malta Enterprise employs around 100 employees, and it serves as the central point of contact for businesses on all the incentives that the Government has launched concerning COVID-19. For ME this was not always an easy task, as the volume of applications being dealt with was significant and the response time for reponding to any queries and providing assistance was critical. The main challenge was allocatating the resources effectively for all the schemes being administered.

ME required that each item supported was accompanied by copies of the necessary financial documentation and proof of payment (to the supplier), thus providing a verifiable audit trail. This created a challenge when dealing with smaller businesses that might not be used for such administrative procedures, resulting in a number of interactions between ME and the applicant to ensure that all required documentation is provided.

Continuation

For the time being, when possible employees are still being encouraged to continue working from their homes. This is crucial to ensure that the risk of potential contagion remains at a minimum level. The Government is leading by example by announcing that the directive related to enabling public sector employees to continue to work from home has been extended further. Private companies that operate in sectors that enable teleworking are also taking the same approach. Overall, there is general agreement among everyone in Malta that, where possible, employees should telework.

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