

Working conditions and sustainable work

The hybrid workplace: Ensuring benefits for workers and organisations



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Introduction

Hybrid work, whereby employees alternate between working in an office and working remotely, became much more widespread in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many organisations and employees had to make substantial investments in technology and equipment and adapt swiftly to the new situation, learning as they went, particularly those with no prior experience of remote work. Despite the discussion around ‘return to the office’ policies led by some prominent multinational corporations, there is a strong consensus that hybrid work will persist, as it potentially offers enduring benefits for organisations and workers alike.

The research supporting this policy brief aimed to explore how organisations are adapting their work processes and practices to hybrid models and to better understand the consequences for job quality.

This policy brief builds on previous Eurofound research on hybrid work and is based on the main findings of 10 case studies conducted in organisations in 4 EU Member States, complemented by a statistical analysis of the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) 2024 data. It discusses the main drivers behind the implementation and take-up of hybrid work from employers’ and workers’ perspective and identifies different typologies of hybrid work. It proceeds to examine the main implications of hybrid work for working conditions, job quality and organisational performance. Finally, it offers policy pointers focused on the implementation of hybrid work models that benefit both organisations and workers.



Policy context

Hybrid work is covered by a number of EU-level policy frameworks and initiatives. In principle, Council Directive 89/391/EEC on occupational safety and health (OSH) also applies to remote work settings, but Council Directive 89/654/EEC, covering minimum safety and health requirements for the workplace, does not. In November 2024, the EU's Advisory Committee on Safety and Health at Work adopted an opinion recommending the expansion of the scope of the directive to include off-premises work and homeworking. Directive 2019/1158/EU on work-life balance promotes flexible working arrangements, especially for parents and carers, including hybrid working arrangements.

More specifically, the cross-industry autonomous framework agreement on telework, signed by the EU social partners in 2002, sets minimum standards for telework, including health and safety, data protection, and equal treatment. In January 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the European Commission to introduce legislation on a right to disconnect. In April 2024, the Commission launched a first-stage consultation of the European social partners to gather their views on the possible direction of EU action on ensuring fair telework

and the right to disconnect. Workers' groups argue that many employees face an 'always-on' culture with constant out-of-hours digital contact, which leads to overwork, stress, a poorer work-life balance, health issues, unfair hours and unpaid work. While they advocate for a legally enforceable right to disconnect and stronger teleworking rights (including non-discrimination, privacy and health and safety), employers warn that overly prescriptive EU rules could reduce flexibility, increase liability and administrative burdens for employers, and discourage companies from offering telework. They argue that telework should remain voluntary, and solutions should be negotiated between the social partners at national or company level. Second-stage consultations started in July 2025.

At Member State level, there has been a surge in legal changes and policy initiatives on remote work in recent years, particularly following the outbreak of the pandemic (Eurofound, 2020, 2022; EU-OSHA, 2021, 2023a; European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion et al, 2024). New regulations focus on aspects such as:

- the adoption of statutory definitions of remote work or changes to pre-pandemic definitions

- clearer definitions of rights and responsibilities concerning digital surveillance and data privacy
- strengthened OSH risk assessment and enforcement procedures, and prevention of psychosocial risks and physical health issues
- employers' obligations concerning the provision of equipment and compensation for remote work expenses (e.g. energy, internet, equipment or furniture)
- a right to request remote work
- a right to disconnect

By better understanding the implications of hybrid work for job quality, this research contributes to the body of knowledge on sustainable work and inclusive workplaces. It assists in the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in 'making work standards fit for the future of work' and ensuring 'occupational safety and health standards for a new world of work'. The evidence provided can contribute to the discussion and implementation of policies and measures dealing with the consequences of hybrid work. These include the right to disconnect, working time and work-life balance regulations, psychosocial risks, gender equality and workplace inclusion.

Key findings

- Hybrid work is implemented in different ways. Existing models mostly vary in terms of the frequency and autonomy employers can offer to workers to decide on-site and remote work schedules. Regardless of the model implemented, a key feature of successful hybrid work is its voluntary nature. This goes both ways: employers are free to offer telework whenever possible, and employees are free to opt in. It must also be regulated by a set of rules establishing the eligibility criteria, the maximum frequency of remote work allowed, the procedure for accessing hybrid work, and the means of support, if relevant. In the vast majority of cases, the concrete terms of implementation must be agreed between employees and their managers.
- In terms of working time quality, hybrid work can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can provide greater flexibility regarding working time arrangements and scheduling, which is often coupled with time savings as employees do not have to commute when working remotely. This can help to improve work-life balance. On the other hand, both the EWCS 2024 data and the case studies show that hybrid workers might extend their working days and work longer hours, due to the blurring of boundaries between work and private life.
- When working remotely, most people work from home. This can be positive for workers' health and well-being, resulting in potentially less stress (e.g. in commuting), more time for rest and recovery, and healthier habits (e.g. time for exercise or food preparation). However, workers may be more exposed to ergonomic and other physical health risks. They may lack adequate space or resources to set up their home workstation according to OSH standards, while legal regulations may prevent the inspection of home workspaces. Since offices are supposed to provide adequate ergonomic working conditions, employers are reluctant to consider bearing additional costs for home workstations.
- Hybrid workers prefer to perform three main aspects of their work in the office: collaborating and making decisions with colleagues; sharing information and clarifying tasks; and dealing with intricate or delicate issues.
- The potential overlap of various information and communication tools and channels and the multiplication of virtual meetings can lead to a sense of work intensification and fatigue. Achieving good and effective communication and collaboration in hybrid settings requires more effort than in typical on-site settings, particularly to ensure adequate social support from colleagues and supervisors.
- The implications of hybrid work for workers' decision latitude – the influence that they have on the processes and results of their work – depend on both managerial practices and the type of tasks performed. When tasks are predominantly asynchronous and there is some discretion in managing deadlines, hybrid work can substantially increase workers' level of autonomy in deciding their work schedules and pace of work. In contrast, the impact is limited when tasks are highly routine based, the pace of work is largely pre-established, or tasks consist of providing services at given times, either on site or remotely.
- Two main issues can lead workers to associate hybrid work with greater work intensity: inefficient virtual communication which requires additional time and effort, and the compression and/or extension of the working day by skipping/prolonging breaks when working from home.
- Line managers have increased responsibility and discretion in allowing access to hybrid work, monitoring its implementation and managing communication. However, only some of the organisations studied provide specific training to support line managers managing hybrid work.



Exploring the evidence

Methodology

This policy brief is based on an analysis of 10 exploratory case studies and data from the EWCS 2024. The case studies were carried out to shed light on how public and private organisations implement hybrid work and how this type of work impacts job quality and organisational performance. They were conducted in Austria, Finland, Lithuania and Spain, involving a total of 75 interviews carried out between October 2023 and April 2024. The interviews were conducted with management representatives of the organisations examined, line managers responsible for teams engaged in hybrid work, employee representatives (e.g. members of works councils) and employees engaged in hybrid work (see Table 1 and Eurofound (2025) for more details). Due to the limited number of cases, the findings cannot be generalised.

The statistical analysis of the EWCS 2024 compared hybrid workers with other groups of workers in relation to specific features of job quality and sustainable work, including

working time, physical environment, social environment, autonomy, work intensity, job prospects and organisational participation (see Eurofound (2017) for more details on how each of these aspects is measured). The comparison included those employees in teleworkable jobs – in which there is the technical possibility of providing labour input remotely (Sostero et al, 2020) – who, nevertheless, work at their employers' premises all or most of the time.

Eurofound's definition of telework (Eurofound, 2022) was used for the statistical analyses; in the EWCS 2024 data, employees were grouped according to the following categories.

- **Full-time teleworkers:** Employees who use ICT at least half of the time, always work from home, and sometimes, rarely or never from their employer's premises; or who often work from home and rarely or never from their employer's premises. They represent 3% of all employees in the EU.

Table 1: Overview of case studies

Country	Type of organisation	Total number of employees (approximate)	Employee representative body	Unit of analysis (approximate number of employees in the unit of analysis)	Number of interviews
Austria	Bank	> 40,000	Works council	Headquarters (3,000)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 2 employee representatives and 3 employees; total = 7
	Federal ministry	1,700	Staff council	Central administration (1,000)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 1 employee representative and 3 employees; total = 6
Finland	State agency	> 5,000	Trade union and OSH representative	Whole organisation (> 5,000)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 1 employee representative and 4 employees; total = 7
	Temporary employment company	12,000	OSH representative and committee	Internal staff (210)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 1 employee representative and 5 employees; total = 8
Lithuania	Bank	1,000	Works council	Credit department (13)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 1 employee representative and 5 employees; total = 8
	Software publishing company	80	No employee representation	Software development team (13)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, no employee representative and 4 employees; total = 6
	State agency	180	Works council	Policy group (12)	2 organisation representatives, 1 line manager, 1 employee representative and 4 employees; total = 8
Spain	Insurance company	320	Works council	Central services (70)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 1 employee representative and 4 employees; total = 7
	Multinational pharmaceutical company	> 1,800	Works council	Head office and R&D centre (580)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 3 employee representatives and 4 employees; total = 9
	Regional public entity	170	Works council	Whole organisation (170)	1 organisation representative, 1 line manager, 1 employee representative and 6 employees; total = 9

- **Regular teleworkers/hybrid workers:** Employees who use ICT at least half of the time, always work from home and always or often from the employer's premises; or who often work from home and always, often or sometimes from the employer's premises. This type of work, which corresponds to what has been widely understood as hybrid work, is carried out by around 9% of employees in the EU.
- **Occasional teleworkers:** Employees who use ICT at least half of the time and work sometimes or rarely from home. This group makes up approximately 16% of employees.
- **Employees working from employer's premises in teleworkable jobs:** Employees who always work from their employer's premises in jobs with some degree of teleworkability. This accounts for 15% of employees.
- **Employees working from employer's premises in non-teleworkable jobs:** Employees who always work from their employer's premises in jobs with no teleworkability. This group makes up 36% of employees.
- **Other:** Employees who mostly work from other places (apart from their employer's premises or their own home). This accounts for 21% of employees.

Main drivers of hybrid work

Why employers embrace hybrid work

In 7 of the 10 case studies, hybrid models of work organisation predated 2020, whereas in the remaining 3, the pandemic acted as an accelerant, transforming a crisis response into what is currently seen as a strategic advantage.

Five primary drivers are behind the continued use of hybrid models in the organisations studied.

- **Labour market competitiveness:** With skilled workers increasingly difficult to attract and retain, offering hybrid work has become a key differentiator. Several organisations report using it as part of a deliberate strategy to appeal to younger professionals and skilled workers.
- **Digital transformation:** In three public organisations studied, hybrid work was both a consequence and an enabler of broader digitalisation efforts. Investments in collaborative platforms and cloud-based tools have made remote collaboration more feasible and efficient.
- **Cost efficiency:** Downsizing and reorganising office space and reducing overheads were tangible benefits identified in four cases, including in public and private organisations.
- **Improved employee engagement and job satisfaction:** Both were reported as outcomes of well-managed hybrid models.
- **Sustainability goals:** In one case, hybrid work was introduced as a means of reducing commuting time and contributing to the company's commitment to reducing carbon emissions.

Why workers opt for hybrid work

While remote work was initially the only way to continue working for many during lockdowns, its continued uptake in the form of hybrid work arrangements is voluntary. In every case study, the option to work in a hybrid mode was discretionary, contingent on certain job roles and managerial agreements. The freedom to opt in is central to its success.

The dominant reason cited by employees for choosing hybrid work is that it **saves commuting time**. Time previously spent in transit is now repurposed for rest, personal responsibilities or leisure, improving employees' **work-life balance**. This was

particularly appreciated by those with long commutes and/or caregiving duties.

Employees also reported improved productivity, often tied to greater autonomy and the ability to schedule tasks requiring greater concentration for times when they were removed from office distractions and work requiring more interaction for office-based days.

Crucially, hybrid work was linked to enhanced **overall well-being**. Several case studies revealed that hybrid work is also linked to enhanced motivation and job satisfaction, contributing to building trust when it is appropriately managed.

Many interviewees underlined that hybrid work comes with a certain learning curve, in which the work-related benefits of this arrangement (the ability to work when and where one is most productive; and the opportunity to focus more effectively when working from home, leading to more efficient time management and improved performance) are increasingly appreciated over time.

Various (emerging) models of hybrid work

Hybrid work models vary greatly in their design and management, depending on the sector of activity, the type of organisational structure and job tasks.

In five cases, the models implemented are governed by central policies but allow team-level discretion. Typically, workers are permitted to work remotely for 2 to 3 days a week (40–60% of working time). Line managers play a key role in scheduling and coordination, balancing organisational needs with individual preferences.

In four additional cases, the hybrid work models prioritise individual autonomy, with few formal restrictions. Remote work is often the default, and office presence is largely optional. Line managers are tasked with managing diverse team arrangements, often with most staff working remotely most of the time.

In one single case, remote work was tightly controlled and limited to one fixed day per week, agreed upon in advance with the line manager. This model was implemented with a top-down policy, setting terms for all staff.

The divergence in models reflects different organisational cultures, sectors of activity, managerial styles and practices, and existing legal frameworks. It also suggests that hybrid work, far from a one-size-fits-all solution, is adapted to fit specific operational contexts, which can change over time.

Despite the variability in the models implemented, there are three common pillars.

- Hybrid work is defined as a voluntary option for employees in jobs where remote work is technically feasible.
- Hybrid work is implemented in accordance with a coherent set of rules (or policy) that are adopted at company level by agreement with employee representatives or at the unilateral initiative of the employer. Such policies define the general rules of hybrid work in the organisation, including eligibility criteria, the maximum frequency of remote work, the procedure for accessing hybrid work and the means of support for individuals performing remote work.
- An individual's hybrid work arrangement relies and depends on an agreement with their line manager.

Implications for selected aspects of job quality

Changes to working time can improve work-life balance – but not always

Working time is a crucial dimension of job quality in hybrid work settings. The main point of debate is whether the increased working time flexibility associated with hybrid work enhances workers' ability to accommodate job demands and personal life, with positive impacts on work-life balance and well-being. Pre-pandemic research on remote and hybrid work provided mixed evidence (Beauregard et

al, 2019), stressing that these work arrangements might turn out to be a ‘double-edged sword’ for work–life balance.

The EWCS 2024 data reveal that hybrid workers tend to be at a disadvantage compared with other groups in terms of working more hours per week, working longer days (10 hours or more), working during free time to meet work demands, and working at weekends. In all these aspects, hybrid workers score significantly worse than others, even after controlling for other factors, such as sector, occupation or employment status. At the same time, however, hybrid workers have more control over their working time arrangements than occasional teleworkers or on-site workers and other types of workers. Moreover, it is significantly easier for them to take an hour or two off during working hours to attend to personal or family matters. Only full-time teleworkers enjoy more flexibility.

The case studies found that workers in hybrid work arrangements benefit from the time saved commuting, which enhances work–life balance. Even in the most restrictive model (a single fixed day per week and weak working time flexibility), the associated time savings are considered to improve work–life balance. The time saved may be used for additional rest or for dealing with personal issues, such as picking up children from school, attending medical appointments or running errands, without the need to ask for time off.

These things may seem trivial, but it makes it much easier for me to have at least one day for these things that otherwise would be unattainable. (Employee, Spain)

However, the time saved commuting combined with the blurring of the boundaries between work and private life can contribute to longer working hours. In the case studies, examples of this were found when additional efforts were needed to address higher workloads. Even in the absence of exceptionally higher workloads, some workers reported having extended their working hours; in some cases, this was reflective of self-imposed reciprocating

behaviour, where employees feel compelled to work longer hours in exchange for the possibility of working remotely. The lack of social routines, which exist in the office environment but may not at home (e.g. coffee and lunch breaks), may also explain why some workers find it more difficult to adhere to regular work schedules and breaks when working remotely (Kelliher and Anderson, 2010; Menezes and Kelliher, 2017). A member of the works council of one of the companies studied reported that many employees lose track of time when they work from home and end up working longer hours because they are ‘passionate’ about work, echoing Cech’s (2021) analysis of the passion principle reinforcing a culture of overwork.

None of the organisations studied showed evidence of having an always-on culture where employees are expected to be responsive to work requests beyond regular working hours. In Spain, organisations must adhere to legal provisions concerning the right to disconnect. In the Austrian bank, the employee representative reported that flexitime rules state that workers are not expected to work outside regular hours. These rules were generally complied with and requests or messages were not sent outside core hours. Similarly, the employee representative at the Finnish private company emphasised that employment contracts stipulate that no employee is expected to send or respond to work-related requests outside regular working hours, and this is widely accepted in Finland’s work culture.

Nonetheless, enforcement of these ‘soft’ rules is not always ensured. While an always-on culture is not openly promoted, workers may adopt one on their own initiative or be encouraged or pressured to do so by their line managers or co-workers. Several employees said they engage in work-related communication outside regular hours, but none mentioned negative impacts. Typically, engaging in work-related exchanges is framed as a matter of personal preference or communication practice among team

members. Many workers have installed corporate applications on their personal mobile devices, and participate in informal messaging groups with colleagues, which, despite the benefits, can blur the line between personal and professional matters. Workers also stressed the importance of having a supportive organisational environment that values work–life balance to benefit from the working time flexibility associated with hybrid work without fear of stigmatisation.

Overall, hybrid work models that provide employees with substantial time flexibility are highly valued. This flexibility results in diverse working time patterns among employees. Some hybrid workers opt to spread their daily working hours over a longer working day, starting earlier and finishing later and having longer breaks. Other employees opt to ‘compress’ their working hours and finish earlier.

Physical environment – ergonomics matter

Most hybrid workers in the case studies work from home when working remotely, although working from second residences and ‘workations’¹ is relatively common in Finland and Lithuania, where most of the organisations studied allow full-time remote work. Working from ‘third spaces’, such as coworking spaces or hubs, was not mentioned in any of the case studies.

Working from home can have many benefits for workers’ health and well-being, which is confirmed by the case studies. Employees report a wide range of positive effects on their physical and mental well-being, as a result of saving commuting time and having greater autonomy over work schedules. These include reduced stress, more time for rest and recovery after busy days or after travelling for work, longer breaks, increased physical activity, and generally healthier habits.

However, workers are also more exposed to specific ergonomic and other physical health risks when working from home. This is mostly because they may lack adequate space or resources to set up their home workstation according to OSH standards. Working from home or alternative locations makes the risk assessment and enforcement of OSH standards more complex, something that is widely reflected in the case studies and other research (e.g. EU-OSHA, 2023b; European Commission: Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion et al, 2024). Employees and their representatives in all organisations studied referred to instances of inadequate space at home, lack of proper (ergonomic) equipment, poor working postures or insufficient breaks. In five of the case studies, workers referred to poor ergonomics at home as the main reason for working more frequently at the office:

I don't have a dedicated workspace [at home], so that's one of the reasons why I work from the office. I don't want to work on a regular table, a regular chair where I have to clear the table every time for lunch.
(Employee, Lithuania)

The case studies indicate a lack of awareness of the importance of ergonomics among both managers and workers. The organisations examined lacked effective tools to gather data and to monitor and assess basic aspects of working conditions and well-being in the context of remote work. For instance, two organisations regularly collect data on OSH without including aspects related to remote work and home workstations. In one of them, the latest annual OSH survey pointed to an increase in musculoskeletal disorders, insufficient breaks, poor working posture and even weight issues, which were linked by the respondents to the expansion of remote work. In general, the employees interviewed seemed unaware of potential long-term health issues

¹ Combination of work and leave, where individuals work remotely while travelling to different locations.

caused by poor ergonomics and instead underlined the advantage of working in different spaces in their homes, such as the kitchen, living room or terrace.

The EWCS 2024 data show that physical conditions are generally better for full-time teleworkers and hybrid workers than for those with other arrangements. They are less exposed to noise, or to high/low temperatures, for instance. Simultaneously, hybrid and full-time teleworkers are more exposed to repetitive movements and prolonged sitting than other groups. Compared with full-time teleworkers, hybrid workers and occasional teleworkers are less likely to report tiring positions.

Most of the organisations studied do not provide specific support for setting up an ergonomic workstation at home. Only one company provides ergonomic equipment (e.g. special keyboard/mouse, footrest or raised computer screen) if requested by the employee, and approved by the occupational physician. The lack of organisational support to ensure adequate ergonomic conditions at home was mostly justified on the basis that hybrid work is a voluntary arrangement: as the office provides good ergonomic conditions, employers do not see a justification for incurring additional costs.

Eight out of the 10 organisations studied have transformed their offices following the adoption of hybrid work, closing some offices, reducing office space or accommodating a larger number of employees in the same space. These office transformations typically entailed a reduction in the relative number of workstations and other changes in office design, such as an open office layout alongside individual booths. In some organisations, employees who work mainly on site have a designated workstation, while in others, hot-desking applies to all. Specific spaces for meetings and socialisation are created to encourage interaction in the workplace.

Although these concerns were not a priority in the interviews and focus groups with employees, some remarks did point to the negative implications of office restructuring, in particular hot-desking. Those included poorer workplace ergonomics, a deterioration in teamwork and social relations at work as well as perceptions of decreased support from co-workers and supervisors.

Social environment – efforts needed to maintain communication and support

According to the EWCS 2024 data, hybrid workers and others receive roughly the same level of support from colleagues or managers. However, the case studies draw attention to the way virtual communication and collaboration tools are effectively used to provide such support.

The organisations studied have effectively adopted such tools for both asynchronous and synchronous work, even when the extent of remote work is limited. Online meetings have become standard practice, regardless of where employees are working, and they tend to be shorter and more focused than in-person meetings (some say ‘more efficient’).

Nonetheless, the case studies suggest that achieving effective team communication and collaboration in hybrid settings requires more effort and intention than it does in on-site settings, particularly to ensure adequate social and emotional support from colleagues and supervisors. The lack of informal and face-to-face communication is found to be challenging, specifically in situations requiring more intense cooperation among team members.

The case studies signal difficulties faced by some individuals that may lead to uncertainties and misunderstandings when using digital communication channels. In particular, some hybrid workers may refrain from seeking assistance or support from managers and colleagues due to uncertainty about the appropriate time and manner for approaching them.

In organisations with geographically dispersed offices, multi-located teams and a large share of employees working remotely, it is increasingly difficult to sustain in-person exchanges and meetings. In such settings, line managers highlighted that workers tend to prefer full remote work despite the potential negative impacts on social relations and collaboration. But this preference for remote work is not shared by all: some employees also prefer more face-to-face and social interaction with co-workers in the office. Older employees and new hires are more likely to experience feelings of isolation and lack of social support from colleagues and supervisors in hybrid settings.

Two areas of inefficient use of virtual communication practices that have an impact on job quality have been identified: the overlapping of different information and communication channels, and the multiplication of virtual meetings. Information and communication overload arises from increased difficulties in the handling and processing of information from multiple sources, resulting in feelings of being overwhelmed:

Previously, when we had a meeting, you used to leave your seat and go to another room. Now, you just remove and put on your headphones. After one meeting, I press the button and get into another meeting. This has also resulted in us moving around less. Now it's all about more meetings.
(Employee representative, Spain)

The multiplication of virtual meetings was raised by several interviewees. This development has implications for work intensification and fatigue due to lack of breaks, physical movement and informal interactions typically associated with face-to-face meetings. Some organisations have established guidelines to tackle these issues by imposing restrictions on the scheduling and maximum duration of meetings and allowing brief breaks between successive meetings. The implementation of these measures may,

however, prove challenging during intense working days with consecutive meetings, or when recommendations are not enforced and meetings are scheduled outside the agreed time slots.

Autonomy – hybrid work empowers employees

Hybrid work has implications for **work autonomy** through two main mechanisms:

- workers' discretion on how to organise tasks with colleagues, clients or suppliers, for example
- workers' decision latitude on whether to meet in person or virtually

When tasks are predominantly asynchronous and there is some discretion in how the work is organised, hybrid work can substantially increase the level of autonomy. In contrast, when tasks are highly routine or consist of providing services at given times (either on site or remotely), hybrid work has a limited impact on work autonomy.

The EWCS 2024 data show that hybrid workers (together with full-time teleworkers) enjoy greater autonomy as regards selecting their methods of working (and the order of their tasks). In all case studies, managers and workers agreed that adopting hybrid work has not entailed substantial changes in the allocation of tasks and task performance.

According to the employees interviewed, working from home is typically associated with tasks requiring more focus and individual work, whereas working at the office is related more to collaborative tasks, including regular team meetings. In organising their work between on-site and home environments, hybrid workers opt to conduct certain tasks at the office for three main reasons:

- (a) collaborating with colleagues, discussing progress and making decisions at meetings;
- (b) exchanging information about work matters and clarifying tasks; and
- (c) dealing with intricate or delicate issues where the potential for misinterpretation is greater.

Higher work intensity is a risk

Hybrid work can be linked to greater **work intensity**, which is detrimental to workers' health and well-being. The EWCS 2024 data show that hybrid workers are significantly more likely to report higher work intensity in their jobs than all other groups. Compared with other types of workers, hybrid workers are more likely to report working to tight deadlines and not having enough time to get the job done. They are also likely to report being more frequently in situations that are emotionally disturbing while working.

Hybrid workers sometimes perceive work as more intense due to the compression of more work into their working day or skipping coffee

breaks or lunch breaks when working from home. This phenomenon was referred to as an extension of 'grey overtime' by an employee representative in Finland. The lack of social routines that are typical in the office may explain why some workers find it more difficult to adhere to regular work schedules and breaks.

Perhaps we should set an alarm that force[s] you to take regular breaks. [...] I always have the same feeling that I have spent the entire morning here without moving from my seat. In contrast, in the office, it is different. You engage in conversations with others, and you also force yourself to take breaks. (Employee, Spain)

Does hybrid work lead to greater presenteeism?

In seven case studies, hybrid work was often associated with individuals working while sick – corresponding to the phenomenon of presenteeism. Steidelmüller et al (2020) detected this phenomenon in pre-pandemic times in connection with home-based work. More recent research suggests that presenteeism among hybrid workers is related to high workload and time pressure. However, this relationship is moderated by a supportive organisational climate, in particular the extent to which employees perceive that line managers are committed to preventing stress and promoting psychosocial well-being (Biron et al, 2021). The EWCS 2024 data reiterate the link between hybrid work and working while sick: more than half of hybrid workers in the EU reported working while sick at least one day during the previous year, a share that is significantly larger than for other types of remote work and much larger than for non-teleworking groups.

In some of the cases studies, interviewees highlighted that employees tend to work from home instead of taking a day off when facing mild symptoms or minor illnesses.

In fact, I've been with bronchitis from Tuesday, and I have teleworked until today. And I was not well able to work from home, but it is up to each one's responsibility. You have the option. So, my thought is, well, even if you don't give 100%, you give 50%. But it is true that what I really wanted was to get into bed. (Employee, Spain)

In some instances, employees and their representatives emphasised that many workers continue working from home even when seriously ill. Some opt to take only brief periods of sick leave or no sick leave at all, continuing to perform at least the simplest tasks from home, and avoiding placing additional workload on their co-workers.

Remote work does not harm job prospects

Job prospects and opportunities for career advancement are essential for employee engagement and motivation. Good career opportunities are associated with greater motivation and, consequently, better performance. The EWCS 2024 data show that employees in all forms of remote work report higher scores in terms of good prospects for career advancement than other workers. Such statistically significant differences indicate that hybrid workers are not missing out on career opportunities because of their mode of work.

The case study interviews confirm these findings. The normalisation of hybrid work was positively perceived in all case studies once it was based on transparent criteria and well-defined procedures. While line managers in particular might have some discretion when it comes to workers accessing remote work, hybrid workers do not perceive it as a privilege for 'those who show dedication' and find it can be easily accessed without being judged.

Visibility and career progression can be addressed

The literature raises some concerns in connection with the **visibility** of employees in the workplace when it comes to career progression and promotions. Examining the effect of hybrid work on career progression, the interviewees mentioned the following mediating factors.

- **Quality of relationship between manager and employee.** Many interviewees, employees and managers alike, mentioned that establishing adequate communication links with their manager – what can be described as a good rapport – was more important than their presence on site when accessing career opportunities.
- **Type of post.** Some interviewees mentioned that hybrid work does not make a difference for vertical progression – when moving up from a junior to a more senior post, for instance. However, candidates who work on site and are competing for a higher management post may have a

better chance of promotion. They argue that successful candidates need to prove their leadership and communication skills and these are better demonstrated and more visible while they are in the office.

- **Type of organisation (public or private).** Some of the interviewees maintained that line managers have less discretion when it comes to promotion decisions in the public sector. This is due to well-established rules and decisions taken in accordance with a transparent, closely monitored procedure, often agreed with employee representatives, which can reduce potential bias.

More training and learning opportunities available to hybrid and remote workers

Access to training to enhance skills and competencies is crucial for career advancement. This applies to formal training courses and on-the-job learning alike.

The EWCS 2024 data show that employees in occasional, regular/hybrid and full-time teleworking arrangements comprise the largest shares of employees reporting access to training. These differences remain statistically significant after controlling for other factors, with hybrid workers being the most likely to report they have received training paid for by their employer. The same pattern is observed when examining on-the-job training.

This was largely confirmed by the case studies, insofar as all interviewees, including line managers, reported that they had access to formal training opportunities in their organisations. Both in-person and virtual training modes were used to access training but some interviewees raised issues about the quality of online training. They emphasised the need to make the training more inclusive and engaging and for more in-person training.

While the statistical analysis and case studies concur regarding the accessibility of training for remote workers, an issue concerning the specific needs of young workers and new recruits was raised by interviewees in six case studies. In remote situations it becomes hard

for both co-workers and managers to assess and provide the necessary technical and psychological support. It was reported, for instance, that in some cases new recruits working online refrained from sharing their difficulties in solving problems with colleagues or supervisors:

When a new team member comes, what often happens remotely is that they don't say when they're stuck and try to solve the problem themselves. (Employee, Lithuania)

This may have some benefits – it shows initiative, for instance – but mistakes or misunderstandings due to insufficient knowledge or lack of communication can lead to operational problems and cause stress. The absence of regular physical meetings can exacerbate the situation: the body language perceptible in face-to-face meetings can reveal important clues, not easily detectable in virtual meetings.

In a couple of cases, managers and employees agreed on more regular face-to-face meetings to build interpersonal relationships and networks, enhance alignment with team (and organisational) culture and establish trust for new recruits. Building social networks within an organisation at the early stages of a career and developing close contacts with senior employees are important for career prospects.

Hybrid work benefits organisational participation and workplace voice

Several studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic found that remote and hybrid work reinforced ties within individual teams while weakening cross-team connections, leading to siloed collaboration (Yang et al, 2022; Zuzul et al, 2024). This may hinder cross-functional collaboration and damage organisational culture (Davis et al, 2022; Tsipursky, 2023).

The EWCS 2024 data show that hybrid workers are more likely to influence decisions that are important for their work and to be involved in improving their work organisation and/or work processes than all other types of workers, even after controlling for other factors. Both hybrid and full-time teleworkers are more likely to be consulted before objectives are set for their work and to place more trust in their management than their on-site counterparts in non-teleworkable or other jobs.

The case studies provide limited evidence of hybrid work affecting workers' participation in decision-making regarding their work, but some concerns were raised about detachment and reduced cohesion, which were more pronounced in organisations with extensive remote work. In the Austrian and Spanish case studies, structured hybrid models with regular on-site work are seen as essential for social

Potential for more equitable employment and career opportunities for women

Two of the case studies showed that hybrid work, in combination with flexible working time arrangements, can provide more opportunities for employment participation and career development. This may play some role in counteracting gender inequalities in the labour market by benefiting women in particular. In these cases, in Austria and Spain, women who previously worked part time due to caring responsibilities benefited greatly from the introduction of hybrid work. The possibility to work partially from home allowed them to extend their working hours, therefore increasing their wages and enhancing their career prospects. This suggests that a well-structured and balanced hybrid model has the potential to address possible elements of gender segregation in career prospects. However, it does not necessarily contribute to a better division of care responsibilities from a gender perspective.

relations and performance, though some employees prefer a fully remote work environment. A Lithuanian information technology firm successfully maintains engagement from employees working remotely through structured practices such as regular meetings and group activities. Importantly, hybrid work has not hindered employee representation or social dialogue, which are often based on long-lasting, solid relationships.

Implications for performance

Hybrid work has important implications for performance, at both the individual and collective levels. Performance is not always objectively and accurately measured in organisations, and data on the links between hybrid working and performance are still scarce (Williams et al, 2025). Most employees interviewed in the case studies reported that their self-perceived individual performance improved as they now have the flexibility to select their working time and place. Among the factors determining this improved performance were:

- employees' autonomy over tasks to be performed remotely
- flexibility in workload management
- employees' appreciation of the trust placed in them to work in a hybrid mode and responding with increased effort as a result
- reduced absenteeism
- (appropriate) digital tools, allowing good communication and coordination

The employees interviewed appreciated being given the chance to better manage their **workload** (by being able to balance job demands and personal life more effectively), and to manage **tasks that can be better performed remotely**, leading to a better performance overall. Tasks that require deeper concentration or more intellectual effort, for instance, are best performed when employees

work in their home environment. Many mentioned that they can perform better when away from **work interruptions**. These include being interrupted during a task in order to perform a new one, being interrupted by colleagues, and having to deal with a noisy work environment in a shared workspace.

Nevertheless, the EWCS 2024 data show that those working in a hybrid arrangement are not only more likely to report being frequently interrupted but they are also more likely to consider these interruptions as disruptive.

An indication of employee engagement and performance was expressed by employees in five case studies: they expressed a willingness to **go beyond requirements and expectations** in their work as a token of appreciation to their employer for the opportunity to work in a hybrid arrangement. It was also seen as a demonstration of **increased trust** between managers and employees. Among other things, this meant occasionally working additional hours or adapting working hours to accommodate individual and team targets and needs, raising obvious concerns about irregular, and potentially long, working hours. However, a rigid application of hybrid work by managers (e.g. the possibility of working from home only one day per week) could, according to the employees interviewed, be associated with a lack of trust in workers.

It is noteworthy that employees said that hybrid work arrangements allow them to improve their individual performance as they are able to work around medical appointments, unexpected family or caring needs and moderate illness, thus reducing **absenteeism** rates.

Inefficient use of **digital tools** for communication and collaboration, excessive use of online meetings and overlapping modes of communication can all hamper performance. Good **coordination of tasks** to meet team or department targets and deadlines are key to individual performance.

While the above aspects are critical for individual performance, they also affect **organisational performance**. In this context, it is important to underline the **enhanced role of line managers** in the implementation of hybrid work arrangements.

Depending on the hybrid work model, line managers' increased responsibility and discretion in allowing access to hybrid work, monitoring its implementation and managing communication within the team or department can have varied impacts on the workplace and its organisational performance.

On the one hand, in structured, balanced hybrid work models, where there is a limit to the frequency of remote work and operational constraints for working remotely may differ within the organisation, line managers play a prominent role in matching individual hybrid work arrangements to the requirements of work processes and methods. On the other hand, in flexible, unconstrained models, where there is no limit to the frequency of remote work and there are no operational constraints for fully remote work in most jobs, line managers tend to be more accommodating of the individual preferences of employees.

In any case, and regardless of the hybrid work model implemented, only some organisations studied provide specific training to support line managers in identifying and addressing issues in the implementation of hybrid work.

The introduction of hybrid work has also benefited organisations in terms of **retaining and recruiting employees** from a larger talent pool. Several respondents reported wider recruitment possibilities (e.g. of people living in remote or isolated areas) thanks to hybrid work arrangements.

Another benefit of hybrid work included cost reductions as **workspaces are reorganised or reduced in size**. Several organisations reported adjustments in the number of workstations based on the projected number of employees working on site each day.

Overall, the case studies clearly demonstrate that organisations have not developed performance indicators to monitor and compare how hybrid workers perform. The managers interviewed said that their reference points are broad organisational metrics (e.g. revenue or profits) and other quantitative performance indicators such as ensuring customer satisfaction, meeting deadlines or reaching targets. Some employees are monitored at team level by team leaders, who conduct individual performance assessments with members of their team. As long as the targets and goals are met at team level, organisations do not feel the need to add an additional level of monitoring.



Policy pointers

- Despite some high-profile examples of employers reverting to more in-person working, the EWCS 2024 data and the case studies show that hybrid working has become an established work organisation model that can have important benefits for organisations and workers.
- Different organisational requirements and workers' needs or expectations mean that there is no one-size-fits-all hybrid work model. The models implemented can allow for varying frequencies of telework and levels of worker autonomy over when and where to work. However, key principles for successful hybrid work are that it must be voluntary and implemented on the basis of clear and transparent rules that determine eligibility, the procedure to access hybrid work and the support provided to remote workers and their managers.
- Hybrid working can improve work–life balance and productivity, but it also carries the risk of longer hours, blurred boundaries between work and personal life, and fewer structured breaks and social interactions than on-site work. None of the organisations studied showed evidence of having an always-on culture where employees are expected to respond to work requests beyond regular working hours. However, when implementing hybrid work, managers and employees must find a balance between flexibility and protecting employees' health and well-being – by setting clear boundaries, scheduling regular breaks and fostering intentional opportunities for social interaction.
- Hybrid work offers great potential to improve workers' physical and mental well-being, but employers and employees must be aware of and guard against the risks posed by unergonomic home workstations. While regulations to this effect are not currently in place, it is important that employers introduce mechanisms, such as surveys, to collect data that would facilitate the assessment of home workstations. At the same time, they could consider informing their employees on how to set up ergonomic workstations at home.

- Hybrid working requires a careful approach to communication practices to avoid an upsurge in virtual meetings. Good team and managerial communication, which offers sound professional and social support and makes the most of on-site presence for collaborative working and socialisation, must be ensured. Guidelines governing the scheduling and maximum duration of meetings and mandatory breaks can help but must be enforceable.
- Specific attention needs to be paid to the support and integration of new recruits in hybrid work arrangements to ensure effective knowledge transfer and team integration.
- Although both the EWCS 2024 data and the case studies showed good access to training and did not indicate a likelihood of stunted career progression, efforts are needed in situations of extensive hybrid work (or full-time telework) to ensure that remote workers remain visible and cultivate effective working relationships with line managers and colleagues.



Resources

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This policy brief examines how organisations are adapting their work organisation and practices to hybrid work. Based on case studies and on data from the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) 2024, it examines how hybrid work is being managed in organisations and profiles important consequences for workers who have a hybrid working arrangement. The policy brief explores the main drivers of this type of work organisation and the implications for working conditions, job quality, work sustainability, and performance when compared with other forms of work organisation (e.g. fully remote and office-based arrangements).

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