

Working conditions and sustainable work

Working anytime, anywhere: The quality of working time in the EU



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When citing this report, please use the following wording:

Eurofound (2026), *Working anytime, anywhere: The quality of working time in the EU*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

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Research project: Working time in the context of increasing flexible working in the aftermath of the pandemic

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Acknowledgements: The authors would like to thank Elena Biaggio and Valeria Virgili, for quality-checking national reports from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents; Ignace Glorieux, Jorge Velilla, José María Barrero, Karen Wood Engel, Dragoș Adăscăliței, Pablo Sanz de Miguel, Juan Arasan, Agnieszka Piasna, Heejung Chung and Antonio Aloisi, for presenting their research findings at the Eurofound workshops ‘Working time and digitalisation’ and ‘Commuting and use of time’; and Jessy Muller and Pietro Malacalza, for chairing the workshops.

Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2026

Print: ISBN 978-92-897-2572-9 doi:10.2806/5364724 TJ-01-26-015-EN-C

PDF: ISBN 978-92-897-2571-2 doi:10.2806/4804524 TJ-01-26-015-EN-N

This report and any associated materials are available online at <https://eurofound.link/ef24032>

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Country codes

AT	Austria	ES	Spain	LV	Latvia
BE	Belgium	FI	Finland	MT	Malta
BG	Bulgaria	FR	France	NL	Netherlands
CY	Cyprus	HR	Croatia	PL	Poland
CZ	Czechia	HU	Hungary	PT	Portugal
DE	Germany	IE	Ireland	RO	Romania
DK	Denmark	IT	Italy	SE	Sweden
EE	Estonia	LU	Luxembourg	SI	Slovenia
EL	Greece	LT	Lithuania	SK	Slovakia

Executive summary

Introduction

Working time is an important aspect of job quality. The duration of working time has been slowly reducing in the EU (by around half an hour for full-time employees and almost one hour for the whole workforce over the last 14 years). An average working week of 40 hours had already been adopted in regulations in most advanced European economies at the end of the last century. A more recent development, during the 21st century, has been an increase in flexibility about the time and place of work, triggered by (among other societal developments) the digitalisation of the world of work.

Today, at least one in five employees in the EU make use of teleworking arrangements. Eurofound research has elucidated three main types of teleworking arrangement, depending on how frequently workers work remotely: full-time telework, regular telework in a hybrid or partial mode and occasional telework. This illustrates the role of digitalisation as a facilitator of flexible working arrangements. Flexible working arrangements have improved some aspects of working time quality, notably enabling workers to have greater autonomy to decide when and where they work. However, flexibility can also be associated with patterns that hinder job quality, such as extended hours of availability, irregular or unpredictable schedules, or work spilling into personal time. This report investigates flexible working arrangements in terms of time and place of work, and their effects on the quality of working time.

Policy context

The Working Time Directive (Directive 2003/88/EC) sets out minimum requirements as regards the duration of weekly working time, daily and weekly rest periods, and paid annual leave. This legislation, together with social partner agreements, has contributed to the reduction in working time across the EU. Increasing possibilities for flexible arrangements are echoed in Directive (EU) 2019/1158 on work–life balance for parents and carers. In relation to teleworking, the European Parliament passed a resolution on 21 January 2021 on the right to disconnect. Following this initiative and others at the sectoral level, the European Commission finalised a two-stage consultation of social partners on possible action in the area of telework and workers' right to disconnect. Improving quality of working time is also a goal of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Key findings

- The increase in flexible working has been driven by workers' preferences, technological change, changing values with regard to work, gender balance in the labour market and a highly competitive environment. Digital technologies and ICT use are important facilitators.
- While teleworking has increased and become consolidated in the European labour market, working time autonomy has increased mainly among workers with access to teleworking. This is a manifestation of the close links between flexible working and workers' autonomy in the organisation of working time.
- Flexible working entails certain risks to the quality of working time for both ends of the occupational structure, although the characteristics differ for high- and low-skilled workers. High-skilled workers tend to have greater autonomy but are more likely to work long hours, whereas low-skilled workers have less autonomy and are more at risk of experiencing more fragmented working time. Both patterns present risks to the quality of working time and to work–life balance.
- In 2024, the quality of working time had considerably improved for workers in teleworking arrangements compared with the situation in 2015. However, workers working remotely at different frequencies continued to be more exposed to certain working time patterns – such as longer hours, overtime, working in one's free time, irregular schedules, lack of rest and a need to be constantly available – than those working only at their employer's premises.
- Research on flexible working arrangements continues to reveal some paradoxes. For instance, workers report having a better work–life balance while simultaneously being more likely to work during their free time. Research shows that flexible schedules generally reduce the quality of working time, but, when workers have autonomy over their schedules, the effects are more neutral or even positive. Ultimately, the impact of flexible working on health and work–life balance depends on contextual factors, including organisational practices and workplace culture and roles. However, telework and autonomy are, for example, positively associated with reduced risk of burnout and of mental and physical exhaustion.

- Digitalisation may be useful for recording working time. However, high levels of intrusive digital monitoring may reduce workers' autonomy and increase their stress levels.
- Being frequently contacted outside working hours by one's employer or colleagues is one of the aspects of the organisation of working time with the strongest negative effect on employees' stress, mental strain and work-life balance. According to a literature review, legislation such as policies on the right to disconnect seem to have a positive effect. After eight years of implementing regulatory initiatives, France has become one of the countries where employees are least likely to be contacted outside working hours. Since the pandemic, an increasing number of countries have included this right in their national regulatory frameworks. In 2025, 13 countries had provisions on the right to disconnect in their national regulatory frameworks.
- From a gender perspective, while the take-up of flexible working is broadly similar for men and women, there are differences in the quality of working time. Women are more likely to report working in their free time, whereas men more frequently report working longer hours, having more irregular schedules and having insufficient rest between working days. Finally, teleworking improves work-life balance for both men and women. However, it seems to have little effect on improving work-family interference for women, and working fully from home may have a more negative effect on women's health.
- There is wide diversity between the EU Member States as regards policy priorities and regulatory approaches in relation to the organisation of working time in flexible working arrangements. Overall, there has been an increase in regulatory provisions related to flexible working time and telework since the pandemic. This is partly related to the incorporation of the Work-Life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158) in national legislation.
- Policies and agreements between social partners on the organisation of working time in teleworking arrangements are mostly adopted at the company level. Companies implementing teleworking arrangements offer, in most cases, opportunities for hybrid working, typically involving two or three days a week of remote working.
- The expansion of teleworking has contributed to savings in commuting time. In general, time saved as a consequence of working from home is used by employees primarily for leisure activities. The second most common use of this time is for work and the third is to meet caring demands.

Policy pointers

- Across the EU, various aspects of working time quality are regulated differently in Member States, and some present significant challenges to workers' work-life balance and health. EU-level, national or sectoral initiatives may therefore be needed to address aspects with strong negative effects on workers' well-being. These could include measures to limit extremely flexible and irregular schedules that offer no working time autonomy, to prevent frequent contact outside working hours and to improve the enforcement of existing working time regulations. Even though those who telework and have flexible schedules are more likely to be contacted outside working hours, a substantial number of employees who do not telework experience this situation. Therefore, any initiative or measure related to preventing contact outside working hours must consider all workers, regardless of working arrangement.
- High workloads are one of the most significant reasons for reduced quality of working time. There is a need to address underlying working conditions with the objective of improving the quality of working time. For example, the implementation of measures to re-evaluate workloads could be considered.
- Since teleworking and working time autonomy have the potential to improve work-life balance, access to these arrangements should be facilitated for workers facing difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance, and initiatives to combat the risks associated with flexible arrangements should be reinforced. For example, workers could be granted autonomy while a clear framework is implemented to prevent them from working long hours and having highly flexible schedules. This is supported by data analysis and by the fact that the quality of working time has improved for workers in teleworking arrangements.
- Flexible arrangements alone may not overcome all work-life balance challenges, and therefore policies must be accompanied by overarching measures targeting, for example, workers with domestic responsibilities more specifically.
- New regulations in some countries reflect the trends towards flexible working, but do not consider the fragmentation of working time and the blurring of boundaries between working time and rest. Considering these characteristics of working time specifically could contribute to improving work-life balance and the health of European workers. Social dialogue at the company level could play a relevant role in addressing the challenges related to working time in the context of increasingly flexible working. This approach is able to adapt the arrangements to the specific situation of workers and companies.

Introduction

The nature of work in Europe has undergone profound changes over the past few decades. One key dimension of job quality, working time, has evolved slowly but steadily. Over the last 14 years, the average working week for full-time employees has reduced by roughly half an hour, with the workforce as a whole working nearly one hour less. By the end of the 20th century, most EU Member States had already adopted a 40-hour workweek in their regulations. In the 21st century, however, a new transformation has emerged: increasing flexibility in both the scheduling and the location of work, driven in large part by the digitalisation of workplaces. Today, at least one in five employees in the EU take advantage of teleworking arrangements, demonstrating the role of digital technologies in facilitating more variation in the place and time of work.

Flexible working arrangements are shaped not only by technological innovation but also by policy frameworks at both the EU and national levels. The Working Time Directive (Directive 2003/88/EC) established minimum requirements as regards the duration of weekly working time, daily and weekly rest periods, and paid annual leave. Social partner agreements and other legislation, including the Work-Life Balance Directive (Directive (EU) 2019/1158), have reinforced these requirements, supporting more flexible working patterns. In the context of teleworking, the European Parliament adopted a resolution in January 2021 on the right to disconnect, prompting the European Commission to consult with social partners on measures to safeguard workers' well-being in increasingly flexible work environments.

The past decade has seen the organisation of work in Europe shift towards more flexible models. Digitalisation, changing employee expectations and the unprecedented expansion of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the adoption of flexible working. These arrangements have become central both to policy initiatives and to the evolving structure of work itself, offering employees greater autonomy while presenting new challenges to employers and regulators alike.

The quality of working time, or how working hours affect employees' health, well-being and work-life balance, is a critical lens through which these developments can be assessed. Flexible arrangements can bring clear benefits, enabling workers to better reconcile professional and personal responsibilities. However, constant connectivity and blurred boundaries between work and personal life pose risks, particularly to health and overall work-life balance. The Eurofound and International Labour Office report *Working anytime,*

anywhere: The effects on the world of work highlighted these opportunities and challenges, showing how ICT has revolutionised working practices (Eurofound et al., 2017). The present report builds on that publication, providing an updated assessment based on data from 2024, covering not only telework but also flexible scheduling and working time autonomy, and their implications for employees' well-being and regulatory frameworks.

Importantly, flexible work contributes to work-life balance, a central concern in European societies where women's participation in the labour market has grown and work intensification has made personal and caring responsibilities increasingly challenging. Even before the pandemic, about one in five workers reported having difficulties balancing work and private life, a challenge that flexible working helps mitigate.

This report studies flexible working arrangements in the EU, examining how evolving patterns of working time and location influence employees' health, well-being and work-life balance. It considers changes in regulations after the pandemic and discusses current debates and possible future avenues. The report does not, however, focus on productivity or company outputs when discussing flexible working. Other Eurofound projects, such as those on managing hybrid workplaces and reducing working time, consider these aspects.

The report draws on data from the 2024 European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS), the European Union Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), a literature review (Eurofound, 2026a), contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents and two expert workshops dedicated to analysing changing working time patterns in a digitalised world of work (Eurofound, 2026b, 2026c).

The objectives of this report are (1) to investigate the typical working time patterns related to changes in the organisation of work characterised by increasing flexible working and digitalisation, with a focus on the expansion of teleworking; (2) to investigate how those changes in working time patterns and place of work are affecting the health and work-life balance of European workers; (3) to map recent regulatory changes addressing the increase in flexible working time and teleworking; and (4) to assess how well regulations are addressing the challenges workers experience in the context of increasing flexible working and the overall evolution of working time. These objectives will contribute to updating previous findings and providing a better understanding of our world of work in the five years after the COVID-19 outbreak.

1 Towards a new paradigm of working place and working time

The overall change in working hours, autonomy in determining working schedules and the take-up of telework in the EU is presented in this chapter. In relation to working time, two main patterns have been observed in the past decade: a rather slow but continuous decline in weekly working hours, combined with an increase in the share of employees reporting autonomy in deciding their working time. The latter is a key characteristic of flexible working.

As Eurofound (2013, 2017a, 2020a, 2020b, 2023) has demonstrated in some reports, working time is key to the quality of work. Changes in working time patterns may have consequences for other aspects of working conditions, including work–life balance and health and safety.

The Working Time Directive aims to protect health and safety and regulates the maximum weekly duration of working time, and minimum rest periods and breaks, among other aspects of working time. Acknowledging the general trends in the EU, the actual duration and organisation of working time vary across Member States, along with the dissemination of flexible ways of organising work. This should be taken into account when interpreting the findings of this report, and considered in policymaking. Flexible working is related not only to working time but also to the place of work. The expansion of teleworking has contributed to changes in organisation of working time. The Eurofound and International Labour Office report *Working anytime, anywhere: The effects on the world of work* showed how different some aspects of working time were when comparing workers in telework or ICT-based mobile work ⁽¹⁾ with those working only at their employer's premises (Eurofound et al., 2017).

The two aspects of flexible working (place and time) have interacted to produce an overall more flexible organisation of work, with effects on the quality of working time.

This introductory chapter defines the concepts used in this report and discusses trends in the duration of working time, autonomy in the organisation of working time and teleworking. It goes on to consider the main drivers of these changes, along with some possible consequences.

The next chapter, based on analysis of the European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS) and reports from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents (from the Member States), will show post-pandemic trends in working time patterns and quality of working time in the context of an increase in flexible working.

Concepts and definitions

This section defines the key concepts used in the report.

Flexible working arrangements offer the possibility of working at any time and from any location, reflecting different levels or forms of flexibility. The Work–Life Balance Directive defines flexible working arrangements as providing the opportunity for workers to adjust their working patterns, including through the use of remote working arrangements, flexible working schedules or reduced working hours. Arrangements involving reduced working hours are not studied in this report.

The report differentiates between flexible working, flexible schedules and working time autonomy. Flexible working refers broadly to variability in the temporal organisation of work, regardless of who controls that variability. By contrast, flexible schedules are arrangements in which working hours may vary, without necessarily implying employee control over those variations. Working time autonomy, in turn, concerns the degree of discretion workers can exercise over the timing and distribution of their working hours, which may occur in contexts characterised by either high or low levels of temporal flexibility.

This distinction is analytically significant, as each configuration may have distinct consequences for working time quality, work–life balance and health.

Telework is an overarching term covering remote work, regardless of the frequency with which workers perform tasks remotely (working only from home, occasionally from home or in a hybrid mode (partial telework), etc.). It is defined as a working arrangement in which work is performed outside a default place of work, normally the employer's premises, by means of ICT. The main features of telework are the use of computers and telecommunications to enable work to be carried out from a location other than the employer's premises.

⁽¹⁾ ICT-based mobile work refers to working arrangements carried out in more than one location and enabled by ICT, including work conducted from home or from multiple locations.

Quality of working time covers aspects of work with an impact on workers' health and general work-life balance. It includes, for example, working time duration, scheduling, autonomy over working time arrangements and predictability and flexibility of working hours. The more positive the impact, the higher the quality of working time.

Other terms used in this report, like 'work-life balance', 'health and safety' and 'working time patterns', are considered in the same way as in previous Eurofound reports (Eurofound, 2017b, 2018) and scientific literature, and there is therefore no need to clarify their definitions for this study.

Trends in the duration of working time

The EU's Working Time Directive establishes maximum weekly working time (48 hours, including overtime). While the directive sets minimum standards, statutory limits and actual hours vary across the EU. In most Member States, 40 hours a week is the maximum statutory limit, not including overtime. However, collective agreements at the company and the sectoral level also play a relevant role in determining working hours. While regulation is important in shaping working time, this chapter focuses on actual working time patterns rather than the associated regulatory framework.

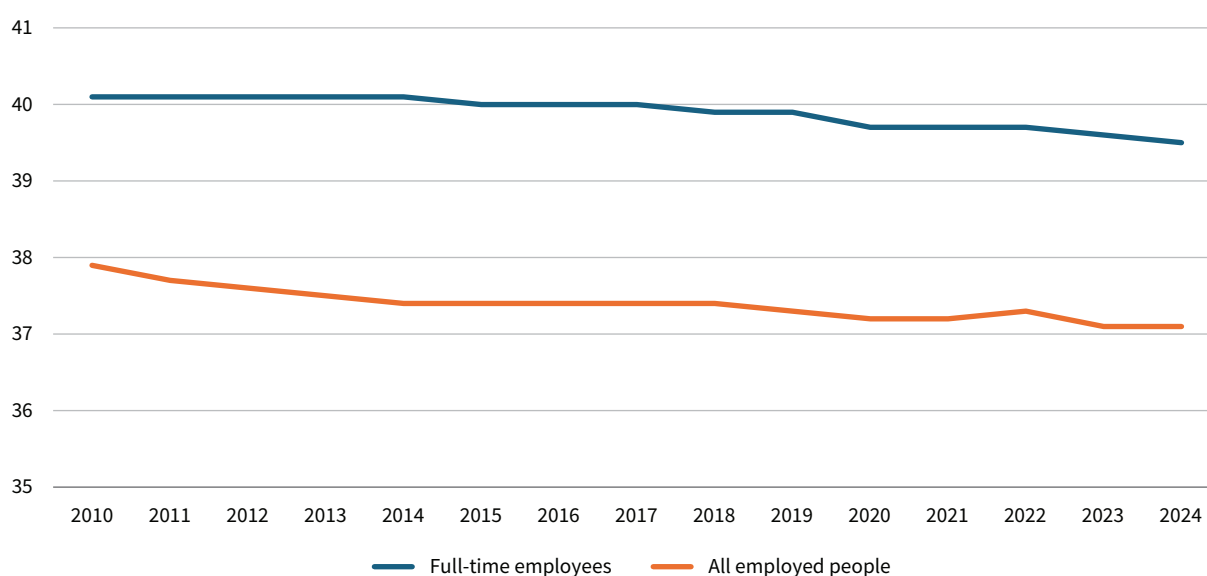
According to the EU-LFS, the average number of hours worked per worker steadily declined between 2010 and 2024 in the EU and in most Member States. The EU experienced a reduction of almost 1 hour in weekly

working time over those 14 years (0.8 hours a week). However, when focusing solely on full-time employees, the reduction was smaller (0.6 hours a week), with working time reaching 39.5 hours a week in 2024 (Figure 1). The general decline is, to some extent, related to the overall increase in part-time work; productivity increases; and the abovementioned regulations limiting maximum working hours for full-time employees.

The decrease is visible across most Member States, although the number of full-time working hours remains highly heterogeneous. Northern and western European countries, such as Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands, consistently record shorter full-time working weeks, typically at or below 40 hours in recent years. In contrast, southern and eastern Member States, including Czechia, Greece and Poland, continue to exhibit longer working weeks, often exceeding 41 hours even in the years before 2024. The institutional, cultural and sectoral composition of the economy play an important role in determining differences in the duration of the working week. Extra hours follow quite a stable pattern over time, with full-time employees recording almost an hour of extra work per week.

When considering professions, larger differences can be seen, with managers working, on average, almost 2.5 hours more than other professions in 2023, compared with 4 hours in 2011. Regarding the sector of employment, small changes can be noticed for full-time employees, ranging from 37 hours in education to almost 42 hours for activities of households as employers (domestic personnel), mostly driven by workers with a medium skills level (who work 44 hours a week).

Figure 1: Average usual weekly hours worked in the main job, 2010–2024, EU-27



Source: EU-LFS.

From a gender perspective, men consistently worked longer weekly hours than women in full-time employment, although the gender gap has narrowed over time. At the EU level, the gap declined from around 2.5 hours per week in 2008 to approximately 1.6–1.7 hours in 2024. This convergence mainly reflects a sustained decline in men's working hours, while women's usual weekly hours remained broadly stable (Eurostat, 2026).

Against this background of a continuous but slow decline in working hours, workers' preference is to reduce working hours further. On average, since 2015, EU workers have preferred to work fewer hours. This preference has become more prevalent since the COVID-19 pandemic, especially among more educated workers and people who are financially better off (European Commission, 2023). According to the EWCS, between 2015 and 2024, the share of workers who felt that they worked more hours than they would like to increased from 26.5 % to 33.1 %, indicating an increasing desire to work fewer hours. During the same period, the proportion of those working fewer hours than they would prefer to declined slightly (from 13.1 % to 10.5 %), while around 56 % of workers in both years reported working about the same hours as they would like to. Overall, the 2024 results show that more workers now feel that they work longer than they would like to, and fewer would prefer to work additional hours than in 2015 ⁽²⁾.

Trends in flexible working: time and place of work (telework)

This section presents results from the EWCS and the EU-LFS in relation to autonomy over working time and telework. It should be noted that, although the working arrangements covered are the same, the exact wording of the questions and the reference period are different. Therefore, the EWCS shows higher percentages than the EU-LFS.

The EWCS allows the observation of a long-term trend in autonomy over working time. Between 2015 and 2024, employees in the Member States experienced greater autonomy over their working time, with 4 percentage points (pp) fewer workers saying that their working schedules were entirely set by their company (65 % in 2015 compared with 61 % in 2024) and 6 pp more workers partaking in flexitime arrangements ⁽³⁾ (38 % compared with 44 %). Data show a slightly higher share of men reporting working time autonomy. However, schedule flexibility (characterised by changing start and finish times or irregular schedules, not necessarily

implying autonomy) appears to have remained stable over time. In both 2015 and 2024, around 68 % of workers reported having fixed start and finish times, while approximately 32 % reported having flexible schedules.

The EU-LFS, with annual results, allows more precise monitoring of the change in the number of full-time employees with autonomy over working time during and in the aftermath of the pandemic. Interestingly, the pandemic did not substantially change the prevalence of working time autonomy. Before the pandemic (in 2019), 18.2 % of full-time employees could decide their working hours, with some restrictions (benefiting from flexitime). By 2023, this share had increased by 2.2 pp (20.4 %). These figures show a continuous increase in working time autonomy but no abrupt change due to the pandemic, unlike the change observed for teleworking.

Comparing Member States, in 2023 Sweden (70.4 %), Finland (68.6 %) and the Netherlands (62.7 %) recorded the largest shares of full-time employees having some degree of autonomy in deciding the start and end of their workday. In contrast, five Member States reported shares below 10 % (Bulgaria, Greece, Romania, Lithuania and Hungary).

In relation to telework, the EU-LFS shows that the share of workers teleworking, whether occasionally, regularly (in a hybrid mode) or fully from home, rose slowly before 2020 and then increased sharply, owing to the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 2). Among all employed

Figure 2: Share of employed people working from home usually or sometimes, 2015–2024, EU-27 (%)



Source: EU-LFS.

⁽²⁾ Eurofound will publish the findings of a pilot project on the reduction of working time as part of research conducted under the related service-level agreement between Eurofound and the European Commission (2026, 2027).

⁽³⁾ Arrangements offering workers some degree of flexibility in deciding their working schedules.

people, the EU average in 2024 stood at 22.6 %, with the Netherlands reporting 52 % of employed people working usually or often from home, followed by Sweden, Luxembourg and Denmark (45.6 %, 42.8 % and 41.0 %, respectively). At the other end of the spectrum, only Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Romania reported fewer than 1 worker in 10 working from home, with the lowest values recorded in Romania (3.5 %) and Bulgaria (3.0 %). When considering only employees, the trend is similar: in 2024, 20.4 % were working from home at different frequencies.

Based on the 2024 EWCS, workers can be differentiated based on the frequency with which they telework: 16 % telework occasionally, 9 % report engaging in regular partial telework (hybrid work) and 3 % work full time from home. Higher levels of occasional and regular telework are observed particularly in Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Sweden, while the prevalence of full-time telework exceeds the EU average in Finland (6 %), Germany (6 %) and Ireland (7 %). This Member State pattern is consistent with the EU-LFS findings discussed above, which also show higher levels of telework in northern and western Europe and lower levels in several southern and eastern Member States.

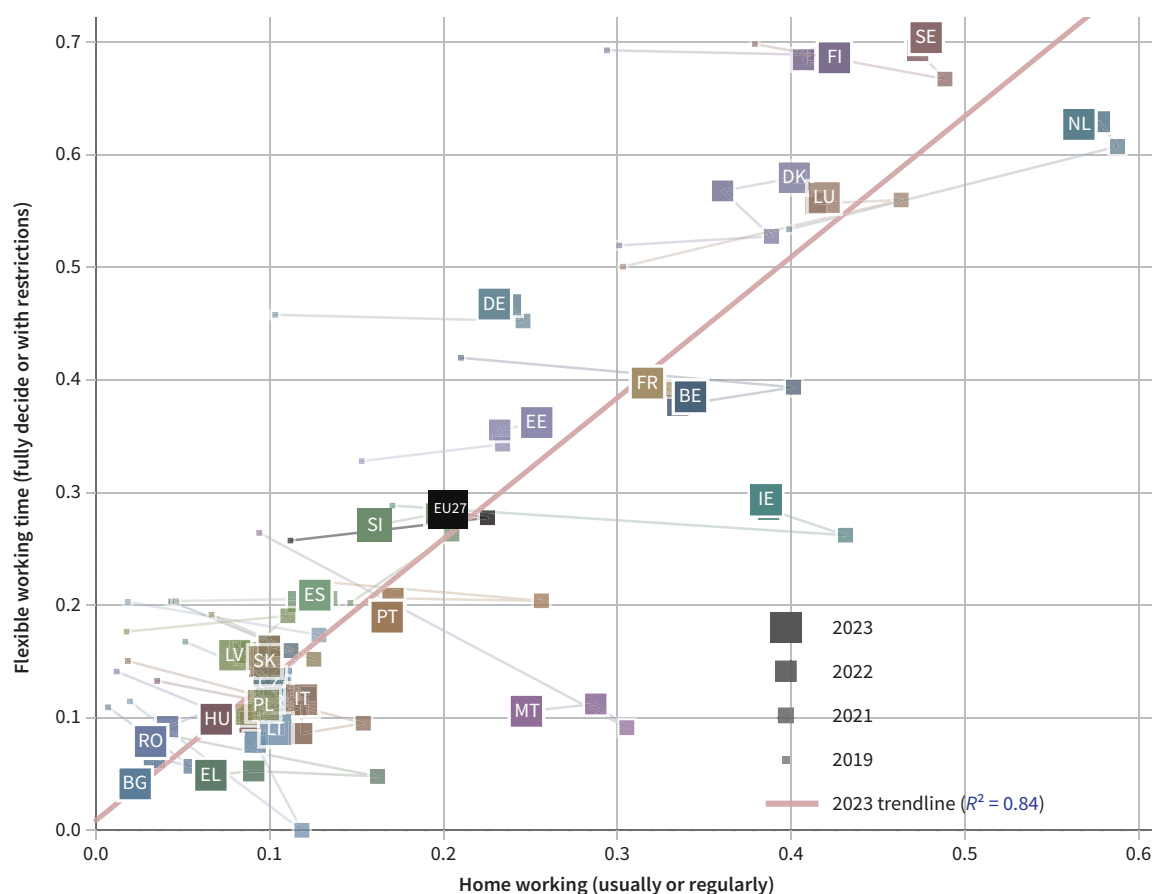
Comparing the various indicators, overall, during the last decade in the EU the duration of working time has

slowly but continuously declined, while autonomy over working time has increased (but not necessarily because of the pandemic). The prevalence of teleworking accelerated during the pandemic and has stabilised since then. Consequently, using the EU-LFS as a reference, at least one in five workers in the EU have access to flexible working, and a similar number can telework, making flexible working an important element of the European labour market and the organisation of work in the EU.

When considering both autonomy in working time and telework, a consistent relationship emerges (Figure 3). These two dimensions of flexibility are strongly correlated across all Member States, showing that somehow the increases in flexibility around place of work and working time are part of the same phenomenon and perhaps have the same drivers, and that they reinforce each other.

However, some variations appear when comparing countries. The Netherlands and Sweden have always been at the forefront in terms of flexible working time and place. Conversely, the prevalence of homeworking has increased dramatically in Malta, probably due to the pandemic, but the share of workers benefiting from flexible working time has stayed rather constant or even decreased in recent years. A similar trend can be

Figure 3: Correlation between working time arrangements, 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023, EU-27 (%)



Notes: The horizontal axis represents the proportion of workers working from home, and the vertical axis represents the proportion of workers able to decide their own working schedule. In 2020, the EU-LFS did not include a question on working time autonomy.

Source: Authors' creation, based on the 2019, 2021, 2022 and 2023 EU-LFS.

noticed in Ireland. At the other end of the spectrum, Bulgaria, Greece and Romania display the lowest prevalence of flexible working arrangements, with the pandemic minimally affecting both working time and place.

This strong association suggests that the slow but steady trend towards flexible working arrangements has been largely driven by an increasing number of workers being able to telework and perhaps the increasing digitalisation of European workplaces. Precisely, flexibility in scheduling is a key element of what workers desire from teleworking (Isusi, 2024).

In Chapter 2, the effects of these developments on aspects of the quality of working time are explained. The next section will discuss the main drivers of these trends.

Drivers and challenges

This section is mainly based on a literature review carried out by Eurofound (2023) and workshops conducted as part of the research project associated with this report, on digitalisation and working time and the effects of teleworking and flexible working on commuting. These sources are complemented by findings collected from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents (Eurofound, 2026d).

The data presented in the previous section showed trends in flexible working. This section explores the main drivers of those trends and points to some of the consequences for working time, as identified in the literature (Eurofound, 2023). It then considers the impacts of these trends on workers' skills levels and the challenges they may pose to regulation.

Digitalisation: main enabler of flexible working arrangements and source of consequences for working time

The widespread adoption of flexible working arrangements has been enabled by technological change, most notably digitalisation. Digitalisation consists of the adoption of digital tools and technologies in productive processes. It is an ongoing phenomenon that affects productivity and the organisation of work. It provides workers with the opportunity to perform many of their work tasks from virtually any location covered by an internet connection at any time. This facilitates flexibility in the organisation of work, with implications for both companies and workers (Wajcman, 2018). Consequently, the European labour market is experiencing an increase in the de-spatialisation of jobs through remote working practices. Another consequence of digitalisation at work is an increase in task-oriented work rather than strict time schedules; this shift provides more flexibility but also raises concerns about overworking and workers feeling the need to be constantly available to colleagues (reflecting an 'always on' culture) (TNO, 2024).

Two main processes have taken place in the aftermath of the pandemic in relation to the digitalisation of work: the expansion of the boundaries of place of work and time of work (e.g. due to teleworking); and the emergence of algorithmic management and AI, leading to a type of work organisation characterised by managerial tasks being delegated to digital tools (e.g. in platform work). Both have an impact on the organisation of working time, and, therefore, on workers' health and work-life balance.

The literature shows that digitalisation is making working time more fragmented and flexible, with consequences for the quality of working time. Generally, the consequences of digitalisation for working time are twofold. On the one hand, the flexibility it facilitates can be used to enhance work-life balance and the organisation of work, especially where workers retain control over their schedules (Adăscăliței et al., 2024) and the place they work. On the other hand, it can create situations in which the quality of working time can be negatively affected, for example through strict monitoring of working time and schedules uncondusive to work-life balance. Several real examples of the influence of digital tools on working time have been described (Isusi, 2024). In Austria, a study found that digital tools such as Microsoft Teams create pressure for workers to be constantly accessible and available through chat functions (Eurofound, 2026d). Similarly, a Finnish report shows that digitalisation has intensified daily routines by enabling the formal booking of back-to-back virtual meetings (Sutela et al., 2021).

It is important to underline the growth of 'platform work' in recent years and the parallel rise in the use of digital platforms as a means of organising work, enabling greater mobility and flexibility in the workplace (López Ahumada, 2023). This form of work can lead to the fragmentation of working time, an increase in work pressure and an acceleration in the pace of work. As work is atomised and fragmented, the idle time between work packages is reduced or even eliminated. Where idle time persists, due to the unavailability of a work package, it is not recognised as working time and therefore not reimbursed (Pulignano et al., 2021). In the context of telework and ICT-based mobile work, the use of digital tools can lead to more irregular schedules and blurred boundaries between work and personal life (Eurofound, 2020b; Chung, 2022). Moreover, there is evidence of risks related to working longer hours and being available all the time or contacted outside working hours (Eurofound et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2020b, 2023).

In the context of both telework and platform work, working time has become less linear and more fragmented, involving the blurring of work with other activities, but also offering potential to improve work-life balance.

While algorithmic management and AI play a role in the configuration of working time, the focus of this report is on the expansion of the boundaries of working time and working place. These boundaries are characterised by flexible working time and flexibility in the place of work (teleworking), and are mainly discussed from the perspective of workers in relation to their autonomy to decide the place and time at which they work.

Workers' demands for more flexibility and autonomy

One of the key forces behind the transformation of working time is the growing demand for flexibility, particularly from workers seeking to better balance their professional and personal responsibilities. This demand has been strongly influenced by the increasing participation of women in the labour market over the past two decades. The number of women participating in the labour market rose from 62 % to 70 % between 2003 and 2023. There has also been an increase in the share of dual-earner households in the EU. This reflects an increasing economic necessity for two incomes. For families with caring responsibilities, work–life balance has become an increasingly important issue (Eurofound, 2022a). Changes in the use and organisation of time are needed to manage work and private demands, including ‘reproductive’ responsibilities (educating and caring for children, doing housework, etc.).

Adding to this phenomenon, the COVID-19 pandemic triggered a reassessment by workers of their values and expectations. In fact, since the pandemic, workers have seemed to give higher priority to work–life balance, quality of working conditions, and well-being and health. Therefore, questions relating to how time is meaningfully used are becoming central (Alfano et al., 2024). This has prompted an increase in the adoption of flexible working arrangements, including from the employers' side. O'Sullivan (2024) states that employers recognise the various benefits of experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic, for instance related to productivity and talent attraction/retention. As an example, in Spain up to 68 % of workers rate flexible working hours as one of the most important factors in choosing a job (second only to salary and the general work environment (Edenred, 2022)). This demand for a better work–life balance has also driven the development of some pilot experiments relating to a four-day working week and reduced working hours (including the Eurofound and European Commission pilot project on working time reduction). Therefore, there is an increasing demand not only for more flexible working arrangements and autonomy but also for a reduction in weekly working hours and days, with the aim of pursuing better work and a better life. This is in line with the results of the EWCS, shown in the section ‘Trends in flexible working: time and place of work (telework)’.

An external shock: the COVID-19 pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic began in late 2019 in China and was declared a public health emergency of international concern by the World Health Organization in early 2020. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, governments introduced measures such as social distancing and mandatory face masking. To further control the spread of the coronavirus, in most jurisdictions, acts were passed that forbade all non-essential travel and participation in non-essential activities outside the home. Measures related to working time were applied, including a general reduction in working time to protect employment (through job retention programmes and short-time work schemes) and some flexibility in time spent in the workplace.

The impact of the pandemic has already been measured in terms of changing values and accelerating digitalisation. The best proof of these effects is the widespread adoption of telework. The health crisis accelerated the large-scale adoption of telework, sparking a shift in corporate culture and demonstrating the feasibility and, in some cases, the productivity benefits of remote work for a wide range of tasks. These changes have been underpinned by policy and legislative shifts in several Member States. One example is Croatia's 2023 Labour Act amendments, which give workers a wider legal range to adapt their working hours and location (Isusi, 2024).

Overall, the combined effects of digitalisation and the COVID-19 pandemic have expanded flexibility in both telework and, to a lesser extent, autonomy in the organisation of working or flexible working.

Work culture

Increasing opportunities for flexible working requires a certain degree of change in work organisation and work culture. Flexible working has been partly associated with organisational cultures that value outcomes rather than actual time spent at work. It is also seen as associated with cultures emphasising the importance of well-being, work–life balance and trust between managers and employees. From an enterprise perspective, many European companies have now integrated hybrid work into their operational models (Isusi, 2024). In Bulgaria, half of employers surveyed who are involved in teleworking practices (50 %) provide employees with the option to work in a hybrid mode (BIA, 2021), and in Greece more than 70 % of companies offering teleworking arrangements implement a hybrid model for their workforce (Eurofound, 2026d).

Moreover, the abovementioned always-on culture is a feature of work with an effect on working time patterns. Research has shown that the development of this culture cannot be attributed to a single cause; it is, rather, a complex sum of interdependent working patterns and social norms, gradually consolidating the

trend of extensive availability, both online and while working at an employer's premises (presenteeism). In this regard, there are variations between countries, for example in relation to respect for work–life balance and the right to disconnect. The result is that, in the EU, in some work environments there is an expectation that workers will be available at any time, including outside their usual office hours (European Commission, 2025).

The (perceived) need to work during free time may, in some contexts, be aggravated by an organisational culture that accepts long working hours and high workloads as normal, with the situation exacerbated by the fact that digital technologies extend possibilities for working any time and anywhere. These circumstances are more prevalent among professionals and managers, because of their higher level of autonomy, than among medium- or low-skilled workers. In a work culture where high achievement and working beyond contracted working hours are valued and normalised, the net result is work beyond the limits established in the legislation (Eurofound, 2020a).

The recognition of this situation and its impact on employees' health and work–life balance led to the adoption of regulations relating to the right to disconnect in several Member States between 2017 and 2022, and has prompted debate on the issue in most of the other Member States (Eurofound, 2020c).

Dualisation of working organisation (place and time)

The drivers discussed contribute to increasing dualisation or polarisation in relation to emerging 'non-standard' and flexible working, in terms of time and place of work (Eurofound, 2023).

Working hours are becoming more 'boundaryless' among high-qualified professionals and managers, with the line between work and personal time increasingly blurred (Vieten, 2022). However, even if flexibility may come with occasional overtime and extended availability beyond regular hours, these groups of workers also enjoy higher levels of flexibility and autonomy to decide when and where they work (Seitz et al., 2018; Vieten, 2022). In contrast, the benefits of autonomy with regard to place and time of work, like potential improvements in work–life balance, may be out of reach for some groups of workers with lower levels of qualifications. Access to flexible working opportunities is uneven and often favours those in higher positions or with stronger bargaining power over those who need them most (Chung, 2019).

Low-qualified workers, particularly women in low-end service jobs (retail, hospitality, healthcare and social care), characterised by a high prevalence of part-time work, are more likely to work unsocial hours (e.g. long hours or at short notice) and non-standard working hours (e.g. in the evening, at night or on weekends).

These workers are exposed to unstable and unpredictable working schedules and higher levels of employer-led flexibility (Riekhoff et al., 2021; Eurofound, 2023). This situation may be further intensified in the platform work economy with the use of algorithmic management. This kind of management splits paid work into short, irregular time slots and requires workers to be available during hours for which they are not paid, pushing workers in these sectors to maximise their availability to ensure they receive enough assignments (Pulignano et al., 2021).

As can be seen from Table 1, the digitalisation of work is bringing common elements – remote work, fragmented working hours and algorithmic management – to all workers, posing risks to work–life balance but also having the potential to improve it.

Table 1: Yet more polarisation?

'Standard' workers, higher qualified	'Non-standard' workers, lower qualified
Always-on culture, digital presenteeism, overtime, working time reduction	Punctuated and atomised time, short working hours, unpaid working time, lack of control over and predictability of working time
Telework, fragmented working hours, algorithmic management of working time	

Source: Contribution from Antonio Aloisi during a workshop on 'Working time and digitalisation' (Eurofound, 2024a).

Regulation as a driver and a challenge

According to the literature (Eurofound, 2023), and as confirmed by the findings presented in this report, working time is evolving towards less standardised and more flexible arrangements, with increasingly blurred temporal boundaries. This raises the question of whether working time should continue to be regulated in the same way as decades ago, or whether regulation should adopt a different approach, including by implementing changes in how working time is measured.

Against this background, regulatory efforts have emerged to address some of the challenges associated with flexible working and to enable flexible working arrangements. While some regulatory initiatives aim to facilitate flexibility, others focus on protecting workers from its potential negative effects. However, these regulatory developments have not progressed with the same intensity across all Member States (Eurofound, 2020a, 2022a).

Overall, the current situation suggests that working time and labour legislation have not completely adapted to these new trends. Moreover, there is no clear consensus on the most appropriate approaches or solutions. As discussed in Chapter 4, several debates

and differing perspectives exist regarding the adequacy of current legislation for regulating recent changes in working time and place of work. These debates concern, among other issues, the incorporation of autonomy and flexibility into legislation, the need for a right to disconnect, the measurement and recording of working time in fragmented schedules, the blurring of boundaries between work and rest time, and the relative importance of outputs compared with time spent at work. Additionally, relevant aspects like managing workload are hardly addressed at the regulatory level, as explained in Chapter 4.

A key issue in this debate is whether regulation adequately reflects changes in the organisation of work, or whether it remains largely unchanged despite the expansion of flexible working arrangements. The risk of not fully accounting for these changes is twofold: on the one hand, the full potential of flexible working to improve productivity and work–life balance may not be realised; on the other hand, regulation may be less effective in protecting workers' rights, particularly those related to work–life balance, health and safety, and, more broadly, the quality of working time.

Summary

There are notable differences between Member States regarding the duration and organisation of working time. Overall, weekly working hours have gradually declined, accompanied by an increase in autonomy over working time, primarily driven by the rise in teleworking. These trends have developed in conjunction with an increase in part-time employment. In short, flexible arrangements have surged over the past decade. However, the expansion of teleworking has been much stronger than the increase in autonomy over where and when work is done. Moreover, the rise in autonomy has not led to more flexible schedules or increased irregular working hours.

These trends can be explained by Europe undergoing a transformation, particularly in terms of when and where work is performed. Traditional models of working time, based on fixed hours and fixed workplaces, are becoming less common as workplaces introduce more flexible arrangements, including flexibility regarding both the place of work and the time at which work is performed. This transformation in work organisation began before the COVID-19 pandemic and has been driven by digital technologies, economic demands, project-based work organisation and the increasing participation of women in the labour market (Eurofound, 2020c). All these factors are leading to a transition from linear and standardised working time, typical of the industrial economy, to a more flexible way of organising work, which is more common in the knowledge-based economy and digitalised working environments.

In addition to these objective factors, these trends would not have developed without a work culture characterised by values and norms facilitating flexible ways of working. One extreme example is the emergence of an always-on work culture.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the transition to more flexible working arrangements, pushing both workers and employers to adapt rapidly to remote work and alternative scheduling models. Moreover, in the aftermath of the pandemic, the labour market witnessed a shift in values, implying a desire for a better balance between work and private life, alongside the wider use of digital tools for work. These changes have not disappeared, and they remain key traits of the current labour market in the EU. Therefore, two opposing sets of values coexist in the European world of work: one, embedded for a long time in certain work environments, advocates working any time and anywhere (without limits), leading to the extension of workers' schedules and their perception of a need to be constantly available; the other encourages workers to be more mindful of their use of time, striving for a more balanced approach.

Some of the trends discussed in this section present challenges to the existing policies and regulations related to working time and place of work.

2 Flexible working and quality of working time

The organisation of work across Europe has undergone a substantial transformation over the past decade. Digitalisation, evolving worker expectations and the unprecedented expansion of teleworking during the COVID-19 pandemic have accelerated the shift towards flexible working arrangements, in terms of both working time and place of work (Eurofound et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2020b, 2023, 2026d). Autonomy in the organisation of working time, teleworking and compressed schedules have started to become part of policy initiatives and elements of modern work organisation. This chapter of the report considers flexible working time and teleworking but not the reduction of working time.

Chapter 1 showed that the push for flexible working arrangements accelerated during the pandemic owing to associated health-related measures, the increasing role of technological change and workers' demands for better work-life balance. These factors contribute to more flexibility as regards place of work (telework) and working time (in particular, working time autonomy and options for adapting working time to employees' needs). In Chapter 1, statistical analyses showed that both types of flexibility seem to be part of the same shift towards a new paradigm in the organisation of work (in terms of both time and space). Moreover, Eurofound research before and during the pandemic (Eurofound et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2020b, 2023) showed that flexible arrangements, in particular teleworking, have consequences not only for the duration and organisation of working time but also, more importantly, for the quality of working time. This chapter investigates the effect of flexible working on key indicators related to the quality of working time since the pandemic.

While flexible working arrangements offer substantial opportunities to improve well-being and work-life balance, they may also create new pressures for workers. Extended availability, irregular schedules and increased workload, linked to ICT-enabled connectivity, have contributed to concerns about an emerging always-on culture, blurring boundaries between paid work and personal life (Eurofound et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2020b, 2023; Samek Lodovici et al., 2021).

This chapter therefore draws on the 2015 and 2024 EWCS (data available as of July 2025; see Box 1) to assess how the expansion of flexible working affects several core indicators of working time quality, a key component of Eurofound's job quality framework. Findings are complemented by some literature in particular the Eurofound working paper *Flexible working and teleworking: The effects on the quality of working time in the EU* (Eurofound, 2026d).

The analysis explicitly distinguishes between flexible schedules and working time autonomy. Teleworkers and workers working from their employer's premises are compared to identify trends and risks associated with flexible working.

The findings are analysed by country, sector and occupation, recognising inequalities in access to flexibility and exposure to negative outcomes (Eurofound, 2022b, 2026d). The evaluation of these differences supports ongoing policy debates concerning the sustainability of flexible work models, changes in the organisation of working time, the enforcement of working time limitations and workers' rights, and the role of labour regulations in safeguarding health and well-being in an increasingly digitalised labour market.

Box 1: Comparing the 2015 EWCS with the 2024 EWCS

The analysis draws on two rounds of data collection for the EWCS: the sixth round, conducted in 2015, and the eighth round, conducted in 2024.

For the purposes of this analysis, two different classification systems for teleworking employees are applied. The first system divides workers into four categories based on frequency of teleworking: (1) full-time teleworking employees, (2) regular teleworking employees (hybrid workers), (3) occasional teleworking employees and (4) employees working exclusively at their employer's premises. These categories are used to present findings from the 2024 EWCS.

However, due to differences in the framing of certain survey questions between the two rounds of data collection, a second, simplified classification was introduced to enable valid comparisons between findings from 2015 and those from 2024. This revised categorisation splits respondents into two groups: employees conducting at least

some telework and employees working only at their employer's premises. This dual categorisation approach enables consistent and meaningful comparison of trends over time. To clarify what is meant by 'at least some telework', this category includes all employees working from home always, often or sometimes. Table 2 presents the various categories more concisely, based on Eurofound's definition of telework.

Additionally, the EWCS-based analyses presented here include both full-time and part-time employees (but not self-employed people). If any of the results exclude part-time workers, this is explicitly stated in the relevant section.

Table 2: Eurofound's definition and categorisation of telework, based on the EWCS

Telework category based on 2015 and 2024 EWCS	Telework category based on 2024 EWCS	Conceptual definition
At least some telework: working from home at different frequencies	Full time	Employee works only from home
	Regular (hybrid mode)	Employee works regularly from home, typically two or three days a week
	Occasional	Employee works only occasionally from home (less than in the hybrid mode)
Work only at employer's premises	Work only at employer's premises	Employee works only from their employer's premises

Sources: Eurofound et al. (2017), Eurofound (2023) and an unpublished concept paper from the foundation, finalised in 2020; and the 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

Characteristics of working time in the context of flexible working

In this section, aspects of working time closely related to or influenced by (or influencing) flexible working arrangements are presented. Moreover, possible effects on work-life balance and health are suggested based on a literature review. The next chapter will provide further information on the effects of characteristics of flexible working arrangements on work-life balance and health.

Links between autonomy, telework and flexible schedules

Autonomy and flexible schedules: different aspects of flexible working

In this section, we explain how flexible schedules and autonomy are operationalised differently using the 2024

EWCS and the continuous strong association with teleworking since the pandemic. Flexibility and autonomy are different but related concepts. This section of the chapter will examine the association using 2024 EWCS data and explore trends in flexible working schedules and autonomy over time. In this regard, flexible schedules should be understood as a very specific indicator of flexible working, not as referring to the concept of flexible working as a whole or the variety of aspects related to it (Box 2).

The first relevant question of the EWCS asks about the employee's autonomy to adjust their working time, and the second question asks about fixed start and finish times, but not whether these times are set by the employer or the employee (see Box 2). Both aspects are part of flexible working, but in some publications they are not clearly distinguishable.

Box 2: The EWCS questions used to distinguish between autonomy and flexibility of working time

The EWCS includes several important questions regarding employees' working time. The two questions (and responses) that this section of the chapter considers are the following.

- How are your working time arrangements set?
 - They are set by the company/organisation, with no scope for change.
 - You can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organisation.
 - You can adapt your working hours within certain limits (e.g. flexitime).
 - Your working hours are entirely determined by yourself.
- Do you have fixed start and finish times? (Yes/no.)

Table 3: Flexibility of working time versus autonomy over working time, 2024 (%)

	Working hours are set by the company/organisation, with no scope for change	You can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organisation	You can adapt your working hours within certain limits (e.g. flexitime)	Your working hours are entirely determined by yourself	Total
Fixed start and finish time	74	9	15	2	100
Flexible start and finish time	34	9	44	14	100
EU	61	9	24	6	100

Source: 2024 EWCS.

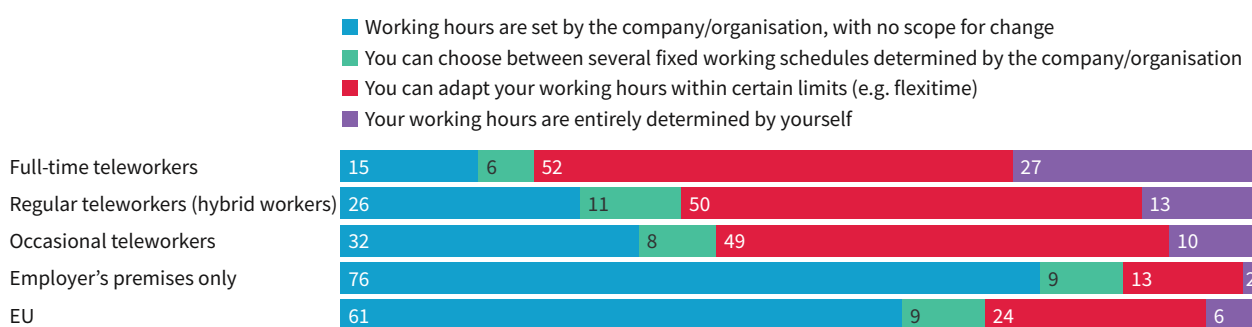
However, for analytical purposes, it is crucial to distinguish between the strict flexibility of schedules and when workers have autonomy, as flexibility does not inherently imply autonomy (as Table 3 shows). This relates to the concepts of employee-led flexibility versus employer-led flexibility. For instance, a significant 34 % of employees in the EU with flexible start and finish times still have their working time entirely set by their company, with no scope for change. This highlights that, even with a certain degree of flexibility (in terms of the start and end of the workday), true autonomy may be absent, and this flexibility is controlled by the employer.

Association of telework with both flexible schedules and autonomy

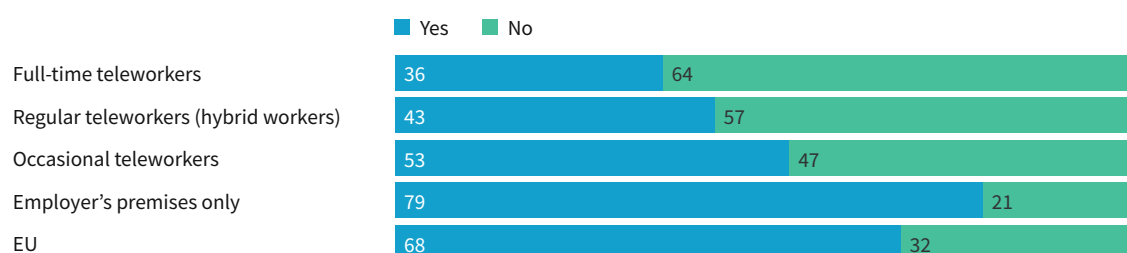
Findings from Eurofound (2020b) and the EU-LFS indicate a strong correlation between the take-up of teleworking and autonomy over working time at the country level (see Figure 3, in Chapter 1). This is further

supported by research from several Member States, showing that individuals with the ability to work remotely also tend to have greater autonomy over their working time (Eurofound, 2026d). Moreover, according to the 2024 EWCS analysis, the higher the frequency with which workers telework, the higher the proportion of workers with control over their working hours. A larger group, hybrid workers (who work some days from their employer's premises and some remotely), demonstrate considerable autonomy, with approximately three in four workers having some degree of control over their working time arrangements (see Figure 4).

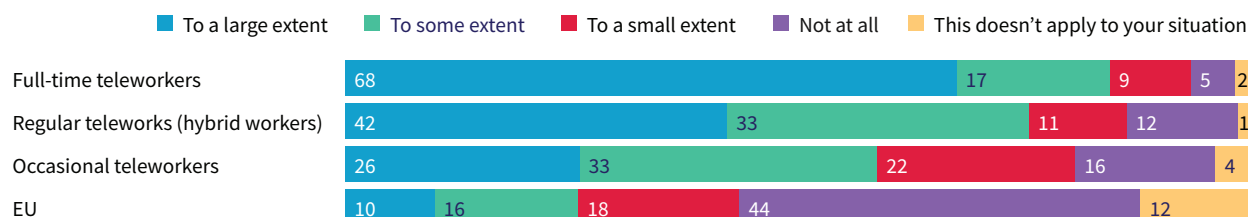
2024 EWCS data also indicate that, although flexible schedules are more typical of workers teleworking (57 % of hybrid workers), some workers working only at their employer's premises (21 %) are granted them. However, they seem also to be, to some extent, associated with the possibility of working remotely (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Working time arrangements, by telework category, 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Figure 5: Fixed start and finish times, by telework category, 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Figure 6: Autonomy to decide location of work, by telework category (including workers working in at least two locations), 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Autonomy can take various forms, not only in deciding when one works but also in choosing where the work is carried out. The 2024 EWCS introduced a new question for those who reported working from more than one location, asking whether they can **choose the location from which they work**. This implicitly excludes anyone with only one location of work. The findings clearly show that workers with the autonomy to choose their place of work are more likely to work outside their employer's premises at a higher frequency (Figure 6).

Therefore, working remotely is associated not only with autonomy over working time and flexible schedules but also with autonomy over place of work.

Trends in flexible working (autonomy and schedules)

According to the EWCS, between 2015 and 2024, employees in the Member States experienced greater autonomy over their working time, with 4 pp fewer working schedules set entirely by their company (from 65 % to 61 % in 2024) and 6 pp more being in flexitime arrangements (from 38 % to 44 %). However, overall, in the EU-27 up to 61 % of workers still lack any type of working time autonomy. Around one in four (26 %) teleworkers are in this situation.

When comparing teleworkers with on-site workers, the increase in autonomy over working time was concentrated among workers performing at least some telework. Among them, the share working in schedules set by the employer with no scope for change fell by 9 pp (from 35 % in 2015 to 26 % in 2024), while the proportion able to adapt their hours within certain limits rose by 9 pp (from 42 % in 2015 to 51 % in 2024). In contrast, on-site employees saw no notable change in their working time autonomy over the same period. These findings suggest a strong link between teleworking and employees' control over their working hours.

These results seem to be related to the trend of workers seeking more control over their time and place of work, which is clear from national sources (Eurofound, 2026d). Belgian research indicates that between 78 % and 86 % of employees want to choose their work setting or timing (IDEWE, 2021). In Denmark, 32 % of employees

aged 50 and older have flexible working options, and 30 % can decrease their working time (Andersen et al., 2023). Debates in Italy include broader scheduling autonomy (Deidda et al., 2023; Ponzellini, 2024). Slovak research shows that over 90 % of employees would welcome flexible working hours, valuing the ability to organise their time more freely (Grafton, 2024). In Spain, flexible working hours are a top priority for 68.2 % of workers, second only to salary and the general working environment (Edenred, 2022). Therefore, this aspiration of having greater time sovereignty is easier to achieve in teleworking arrangements.

An aspect of autonomy over working time is workers being able to take a break when they wish for the purpose of carrying out personal activities. The share of workers who report that they can never take a break when they wish to declined from 18 % in 2015 to 16.2 % in 2024, indicating a modest overall improvement in access to breaks. However, improvements are more pronounced among workers in flexible and teleworking arrangements. Considering teleworking arrangements, in 2024 8.7 % of workers who engage in at least some telework reported never being able to take a break, compared with 13 % in 2015. For those with flexible schedules, the share of employees reporting not being able to take a break reduced from 19 % in 2015 to 13 % in 2024.

Looking into flexible schedules of teleworking employees and all EU-27 workers offers a different perspective. Between 2015 and 2024, there was a decrease in employees with flexible start and finish times (of 4pp). Full-time teleworking employees saw a reduction of 9pp, while there was no overall change in the EU-27.

The following sections investigate the links between flexible working (flexible schedules and teleworking) and key elements of working time quality that the literature has shown to be part of the flexible working work environment (Eurofound, 2022a, 2023): connectivity and always-on culture, including working in free time and being contacted outside working hours, weekly and daily working hours, irregular working time and commuting time. Moreover, the links between flexible working and factors affecting working time – such as autonomy, workload, recording and monitoring

of working time, and the use of ICT – are explored. The analysis of the EWCS will generate findings from the post-pandemic world of work and identify how the quality of working time is evolving.

Connectivity and an always-on culture

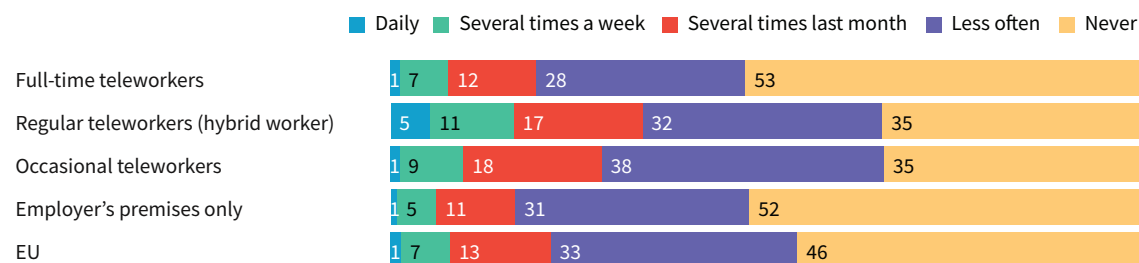
National studies widely support the prevalence of constant or extended availability or an always-on culture, where employees feel expected to be continuously reachable outside their formal working hours. National sources show that in the Netherlands 42 % of employees are frequently or always available for work-related contact beyond their regular working hours, and about 52 % engage in evening or weekend work (TNO, 2024). In Slovenia, about one third of employees report that their organisation expects them to be available during their off-hours, and more than half also admit to routinely completing tasks in their free time that they have not finished during the workday (Robnik, 2022). Some studies suggest that employees themselves contribute to working longer hours and work in their free time due to factors like the desire for digital visibility and a sense of responsibility towards tasks (Dummert et al., 2024; Rebelo et al., 2024). However, the picture is more complex (European Commission, 2025), with different elements intersecting in relation to work suggesting that there is a cultural element in some workplaces that contributes to these experiences.

These findings are confirmed by the 2024 EWCS. The survey shows that around half (51 %) of workers with standard schedules report that they are never contacted outside working hours for work-related reasons⁽⁴⁾, compared with only 36 % of those with flexible schedules. Considering those in teleworking arrangements, 37 % of workers are never contacted outside working hours, compared with a larger group of

52 % of on-site workers who are never contacted (see Figure 7). This highlights the potential of flexible working to enable constant availability. Interestingly, a similar proportion of those working fully remotely to those working only at their employer's premises are never contacted. It is also interesting to note that a proportion of workers who do not telework report being contacted outside working hours. The variable 'being contacted outside working hours' was not included in the 2015 EWCS, and, therefore, it is not possible to track trends. In summary, those working regularly in a hybrid mode (34 %) and those teleworking on an occasional basis (28 %) are more at risk of being contacted outside working hours, but those working only at their employer's premises (17 %) are not exempt from this situation.

Another significant downside of flexible schedules and teleworking is the increased frequency of working in free time (see Box 3). While the share of workers in the EU working in their free time at least several times a month is 16 %, workers with flexible start and finish schedules more often work in their free time at least several times a month (26 %) than workers with fixed working time (12 %). The situation did not significantly change for any groups of workers between 2015 and 2024. Teleworkers work in their free time far more often than those based only at their employer's premises: 32 % do so at least several times a month, compared with 9 % for on-site workers. For on-site workers, the situation has remained stable, while the share of teleworkers working in their free time at least several times a month fell from 58 % in 2015 to 32 % in 2024, a decrease of 26 pp. Therefore, while teleworkers are more likely to work in their free time, the situation improved between 2015 and 2024: there was a significant reduction in the share of teleworkers reporting working in their free time.

Figure 7: Frequency of being contacted outside working hours, by telework category, 2024 (%)



Source: 2024 EWCS.

⁽⁴⁾ Based on responses to Q49: 'In the last month, how often have you been contacted for work-related reasons outside your working hours?'

Box 3: Multivariate analysis findings – contact outside working hours and working in free time

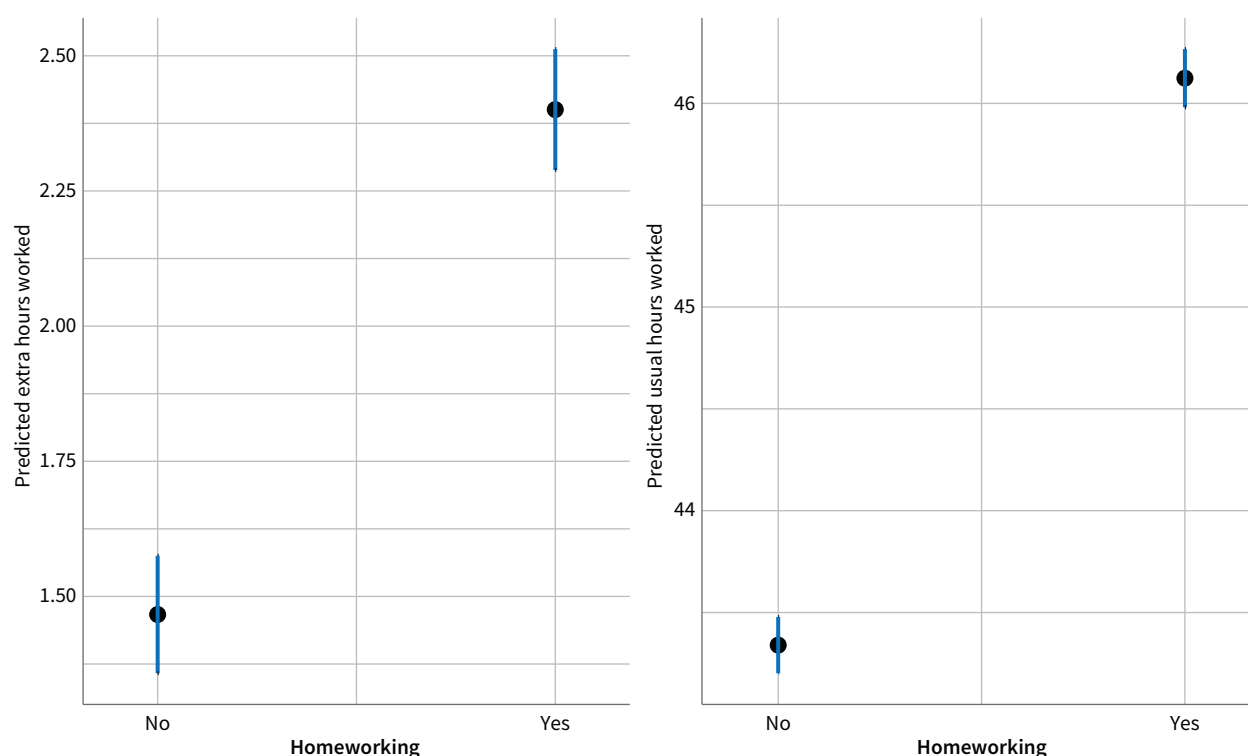
Interestingly, when controlling for contextual variables, both being contacted outside working hours and working in free time are associated with the intensification of work (measured as not having enough time to do a job) and with having a flexible working schedule and teleworking. Being contacted outside working hours is also associated with a high level of digital monitoring of performance and the use of ICT (see the section ‘Exploring ICT use (digitalisation)’). For both indicators, working time autonomy does not play a clear role in preventing or fostering an always-on culture. Perhaps some workers with autonomy over their working time are positively affected while others experience a negative impact, cancelling each other out when they are considered at the aggregate level (see Table A1).

Duration of working hours

One of the consequences of the always-on culture and extended availability is increasing daily and weekly working hours. While flexible arrangements offer more autonomy over schedules, in some work contexts this may lead to an ‘autonomy paradox’ (Eurofound, 2020b), where workers with a high degree of autonomy work longer hours than those with fixed schedules (i.e. without autonomy). This is partly driven by high-involvement work cultures and an expectation that workers will take on a higher level of work commitment in exchange for flexibility (Seitz et al., 2018; Eurofound, 2020b; Korunka, 2020; Chung, 2022).

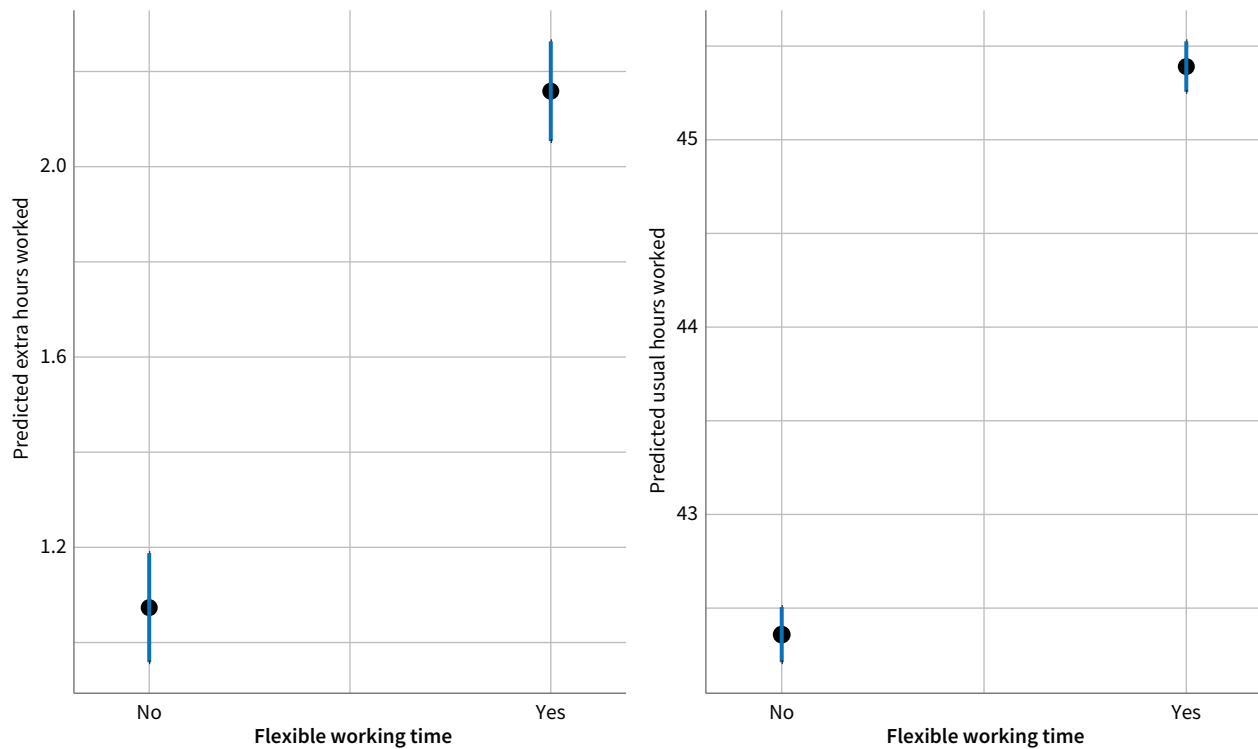
Eurofound’s multivariate analysis of the EU-LFS shows a clear effect of working from home and autonomy in working time (flexitime) on overtime (extra hours worked) and weekly working hours (usual hours worked) (see Figures 8 and 9). Employees working from home (homeworking) are predicted to work around 1 extra hour more a week than those working only from their employer’s premises, and over 46 weekly working hours in total. Similar differences are found between those with and without autonomy over working time (flexible working arrangements).

Figure 8: Predicted usual and extra hours worked, by presence of homeworking, 2023, EU-27



Notes: The figure shows the effect of homeworking and flexible working (autonomy over working time) on actual hours worked and overtime worked. In order to enable comparison with results from previous survey rounds, professions were allowed to interact with homeworking and flexible working, while the results were controlled for European country of residence, sector of employment and gender. To capture the most recent trends and to avoid missing values, the regression model was fitted only for 2023.

Source: Authors’ creation, based on the 2023 EU-LFS.

Figure 9: Predicted usual and extra hours worked, by working time autonomy, 2023, EU-27

Source: Authors' creation, based on the 2023 EU-LFS.

Based on the EWCS⁽⁵⁾, when considering weekly working hours in 2015 and 2024, employees with flexible start and finish times increasingly had standard working weeks of 35–40 hours, regardless of their level of autonomy (Table 4). However, in 2024, 17 % of employees with flexible start and finish times worked 48+ hours a week, compared with 6 % of those with

fixed schedules. This is down from 21 % in 2015, although workers with flexible schedules still worked 48+ hours a week more often than those with fixed schedules. However, the share of workers with flexible schedules working more than 40 hours a week has not changed significantly since 2015, and is more than double that of workers with fixed schedules.

Table 4: Employees' reporting of fixed start and finish times, EU-27 (%)

	≤ 20	21–34	35–40	41–48	> 48	Total
Fixed start and finish time						
2015	4	5	74	11	6	100
2024	2	3	82	7	6	100
Flexible start and finish time						
2015	5	4	54	16	21	100
2024	2	2	61	17	17	100
EU-27						
2015	15	12	54	10	9	100
2024	11	11	62	8	8	100

Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

⁽⁵⁾ The EWCS analysis in this section considers only full-time employees.

The same trend applies to long working days, of more than 10 hours. About 48 % of employees with flexible schedules report never having to work long days, compared with 81 % of those with fixed schedules. There was only a small change between 2015 and 2024, with around a 5 pp increase in the proportion of employees with flexible schedules reporting that they never work long days. The trend remains the same when shift workers are excluded.

Working long hours both weekly and daily and the intrusion of work into employees' free time have a negative impact on the quality of workers' rest time. Despite improvements since 2015 ⁽⁶⁾, workers with flexible schedules are more likely to report not having sufficient rest between two working days (30 %) than those with fixed hours (13 %).

Among teleworking and on-site employees, the long-term trend is a decline in average weekly working hours and a strong demand for shorter hours (Eurofound, 2024a; Isusi, 2024). Empirical research conducted before and during the pandemic consistently concluded that employees working from home (at different frequencies) were more likely to work longer hours and under more irregular schedules than those working from their employer's premises (Eurofound, 2023).

However, findings from the EWCS reveal a notable shift for teleworkers towards more standard full-time hours (shorter working weeks) between 2015 and 2024. The proportion of teleworking employees working between 35 and 40 hours per week significantly increased, by 21 pp (from 48 % to 69 %; excluding part-time workers)

(Table 5). In the same period, there was a decrease in the proportion of teleworkers working excessive hours. Crucially, the proportion working long hours (over 48 hours per week ⁽⁷⁾) fell from 22 % in 2015 to 11 % in 2024, representing a substantial 11 pp reduction, while the percentage for on-site workers remained the same (at 7 %).

Improvements among teleworking employees are also evident in relation to rest time (see Box 4). In 2015, 34 % of teleworkers reported having insufficient rest time, compared with 22 % in 2024. However, the situation did not change significantly for on-site workers: 18 % in 2015 and 16 % in 2024 stated that they did not have sufficient rest time (at least 11 hours) between the end of one working day and the start of the next.

Therefore, even though longer hours are more common among those teleworking, the gap between teleworkers and on-site workers regarding long hours is getting smaller over time.

National-level studies confirm that, despite the decline in the prevalence of teleworkers working long hours, they are still working longer hours than employees working from their employer's premises (Eurofound, 2026d). For example, in Germany teleworkers' average working week is 41 hours, compared with 39 hours for on-site staff (Goebel et al., 2024). In a few countries (Finland, Ireland and Romania), overtime is reported to have increased, especially for remote workers; these extra hours are sometimes uncompensated (Sutela et al., 2021; Dimitru, 2023; McCarthy et al., 2023).

Table 5: Teleworking profile of full-time workers, by working time, 2015 and 2024 (%)

	≤ 20	21–34	35–40	41–48	> 48	Total
At least some telework						
2015	4	7	48	18	22	100
2024	2	3	69	14	11	100
No telework (always working from employer's premises)						
2015	2	4	75	12	7	100
2024	2	3	81	7	7	100
EU-27						
2015	3	5	69	13	11	100
2024	2	3	77	9	9	100

Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

⁽⁶⁾ The Working Time Directive stipulates that a minimum of 11 hours of rest should be taken between two working days. In 2015, 36 % of workers with flexible start and finish times had experienced having less than 11 hours of consecutive rest between finishing one working day and starting another, with the proportion decreasing to 30 % in 2024. For workers with fixed start and finish times, the share decreased from 16 % in 2015 to 13 % in 2024.

⁽⁷⁾ The maximum number of weekly working hours specified in the Working Time Directive, with no derogations.

Box 4: Multivariate analysis findings – rest time and excessively long hours

After controlling for contextual variables, results show that employees with flexible schedules are more likely to have insufficient rest; high workloads contribute to this. They are also more likely to report working very long hours (over 48 hours), with total autonomy over working time playing a role. However, teleworking does not have a significant link to either insufficient rest or very long working weeks. This finding suggests that it is the combination of flexible schedules with work intensification and managerial roles that renders workers in teleworking arrangements more likely to work over 48 hours a week than those working only from their employer's premises (see Table A1).

Irregularity, predictability and porosity of working time

In Chapter 1, a trend towards higher flexibility, and fragmented, porous – referring to the blurring boundaries between work and private life – and even punctuated (characterised by short periods of work interspersed with brief periods of standby or inactivity) working time, was explained, driven by digitalisation and other factors related to competitiveness, consumption patterns and regulatory approaches facilitating flexibility. These drivers have consequences for the irregularity and predictability of working time.

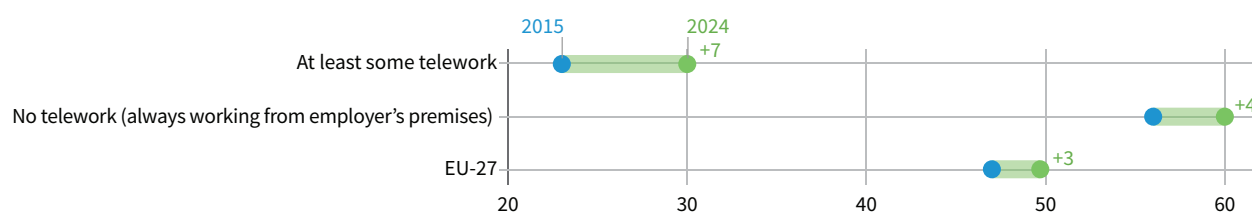
One of the key differences between workers with flexible schedules and those with fixed schedules lies precisely in the regularity and predictability of working time. Employees with fixed schedules are far more likely to report high working time regularity, for example working the same hours each day or week, than those with flexible schedules; for instance, 87 % of fixed-schedule workers work the same hours each week (up from 83 % in 2015), compared with only 45 % of flexible-schedule workers (up from 37 % in 2015). Moreover, there is a significant difference in predictability, with approximately 77 % of employees on fixed schedules able to accurately predict their working hours for the next month, compared with just

42 % of those with flexible start and finish times⁽⁸⁾. This does not necessarily mean that irregularity is imposed by the employer. In many jobs for which flexible schedules are available, irregularity stems from employees adjusting their hours daily to suit their needs, making them less regular than fixed-schedule jobs.

Teleworking adds another dimension to this discussion. Teleworkers tend to enjoy greater flexibility and autonomy over their schedules; this contributes to the greater irregularity and lower predictability of their working hours. Although highly regular working time is less prevalent in teleworking jobs (31 %) than in on-site jobs (60 %), the share of teleworking employees with highly regular working time increased by 7 pp between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 10).

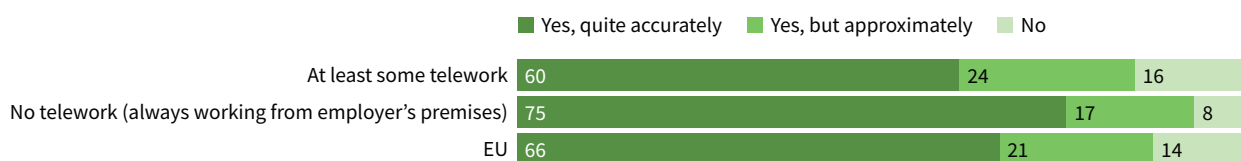
The 2024 EWCS also introduced a new indicator on working time predictability, asking workers about if they could tell in advance how many hours they would work next month. Figure 11 shows a clear pattern: while most workers can anticipate their hours for the upcoming month, teleworkers are less able to predict their working hours for the upcoming month than on-site workers. However, a multivariate analysis shows that this may be due to job-related characteristics rather than teleworking.

Figure 10: Regularity of working time, 2015 and 2024 (%)



Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

⁽⁸⁾ Working time predictability was introduced as a variable in the 2024 EWCS; therefore, the results cannot be compared with those from the 2015 EWCS.

Figure 11: Employees' advance knowledge of how many hours they will work in the next month, 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

These indicators of irregularity and unpredictability are related to the fragmentation and porosity of working time. On the one hand, working time is increasingly populated with private activities and, on the other hand, rest time is increasingly filled with work activities (Eurofound et al., 2017). With the spread of telework and ICT-based flexibility, working hours are no longer tied to fixed schedules or places. For higher-skilled workers, with some degree of autonomy, porosity can support work–life balance, while in sectors like retail, care or hospitality and in platform work it often reflects employer-driven unpredictability in a context of fragmented and punctuated working time, which may lead to great conflict between work and life (see Box 5).

The role of workload in flexible arrangements

Previous Eurofound findings have shown that high workloads can reduce the quality of working time. For example, high workloads result in workers being contacted outside working hours, working longer weeks and performing tasks during their free time. Before the pandemic, telework was frequently used to finish tasks that could not be completed in the workplace during normal hours (supplemental work) (Eurofound et al., 2017). Based on the 2024 EWCS, a multivariate analysis (Box 6) confirms that high workloads lead to lower quality of working time and are, in particular, associated with flexible schedules more than teleworking.

Only a quarter of employees working flexible hours always had enough time to complete their tasks, compared with a third of those with fixed hours. Among teleworkers, 70 % reported always or mostly having enough time, slightly lower than the 75 % of on-site staff. Since 2015, the share of teleworkers with sufficient time has risen slightly (from 66 %), while the proportion has remained stable for on-site workers.

Box 5: Multivariate analysis findings – unpredictable working time

The regression results show that, after controlling for contextual variables, the unpredictability of working time is associated with flexible schedules, total autonomy over working time and very high work intensities. In contrast, teleworking itself does not appear to influence the predictability of working time (see Table A1).

Box 6: Multivariate analysis findings – the role of high workload

Employees who report not having enough time to do their job are more likely to be contacted outside working hours, not have sufficient rest, work in their free time, work more than 48 hours a week, not be able to take a break and experience less predictable working schedules. Together, these findings indicate that a high workload plays a key role in reducing the quality of working time, contributing to an always-on culture, particularly among workers with flexible schedules and, to a lesser extent, among teleworkers. Therefore, a high workload could be, in many cases, a reason for (and sometimes a consequence of) flexible working (see Table A1).

The effect of autonomy on the quality of working time

As shown in the section ‘Links between autonomy, telework and flexible schedules’, teleworkers and those in flexible working schedules are more likely to enjoy working time autonomy. Traditionally (in the industrial era), autonomy has been seen as a factor leading to better quality of working time, with positive effects on workers’ health and work–life balance. However, recent research by Eurofound et al. (2017) and Eurofound (2018, 2020c, 2022a, 2023) itself has shown that working time autonomy in the context of flexible working and digitalised workplaces can lead to undesirable effects on the quality of working time, with potential negative consequences for workers’ health and work–life balance.

The 2024 EWCS data show that autonomy can ease some of the negative effects of flexible and remote work. For example, those with a degree of autonomy (flexitime) work in their free time less often (29 %) than teleworkers without autonomy (36 %). However, with regard to being contacted outside working hours, a cancellation effect may occur (with some workers being contacted outside working hours because of this autonomy and others not). This calls into question the autonomy paradox, as mentioned above.

When it comes to long working hours and insufficient rest, autonomy plays a dual role (see Box 7). Full autonomy, where employees set their own hours entirely, is linked to a much higher likelihood of working over 48 hours per week (16 pp more prevalent among teleworkers and 10 pp more among on-site workers). This suggests that, while moderate autonomy can protect personal time and support work–life balance, full autonomy may lead to excessively long working hours and reduced recovery time.

The complexity of the interactions between different individual and organisational factors necessitates further research on the role of autonomy and its effects on the quality of working time in the current world of work.

Monitoring and recording of working time

One of the challenges posed by non-standard schedules and flexible working arrangements is to the monitoring and recording of working time. On the one hand, it is precisely the porosity and irregularity explained above that makes recording working time more difficult, therefore, in some instances, contributing to extended schedules. On the other hand, digital devices enable employers to monitor and control remote work, potentially undermining intended flexibility and autonomy.

Traditional methods of recording working time have become less effective due to remote and flexible working practices. As noted above, teleworkers are more likely to work in their free time outside official working hours, making it harder to track actual hours worked. This often leads to unrecorded and unpaid overtime (Eurofound, 2022b; Lukács et al., 2023). For example, a Greek Labour Inspectorate audit conducted in October 2023 found that over half of the inspected companies (50.3 %) and 14 % of audited workers had breached labour laws on declaring actual working time, mainly by exceeding working time limits or failing to record overtime accurately (Kathimerini, 2024).

To deal with this new reality, in several countries, digital tools and AI-based systems are reshaping how working time is monitored. In Denmark and the Netherlands, new technologies enable the close tracking of employees’ hours, raising concerns about privacy, surveillance and stress (Skjædt, 2021; TNO, 2023). Similar issues emerge elsewhere: in Portugal, some teleworkers must switch their cameras on during online meetings, while in Bulgaria automated time recording has been introduced, and in Croatia and Estonia algorithmic management pressures extend or fragment hours (McKinsey & Company Adriatic, 2021; Kusk et al., 2022; Pedroso, 2023; Badoi et al., 2024; BCCI, 2024). By contrast, studies from Latvia and Sweden note that less monitoring can be seen as a benefit, with some organisations even shifting to results-only models (GigWork LKA, 2022; Futurion, 2023).

Box 7: Multivariate analysis findings – the role of autonomy

A regression analysis (see Table A1) showed that autonomy over working time (flexitime) does not have a strong positive or negative effect on the quality of working time. It is very likely that this is because some workers experience an improvement in quality of working time due to flexible working, while for others flexitime is detrimental (producing a cancellation effect), depending on the context and job. Nevertheless, having autonomy over working time means that workers are more likely to be able to take a break to attend to private matters when necessary (see Chapter 3, in which the effect of working time autonomy on work–life balance is analysed) and are, to some extent, less likely to have to work in their free time.

Box 8: Multivariate analysis findings – performance monitoring

The regression analysis does not show a strong effect of performance monitoring on the main indicators of quality of working time.

Digital monitoring of working time is the most common form of surveillance, reported by 47 % of employees in Germany and 36 % in Spain. Although seemingly routine, automated tracking of tasks and computer use can be intrusive, reducing workers' control over how they allocate their hours. The study shows that even low-intensity monitoring, which includes the recording of working hours, is linked to lower autonomy, and the positive effect of homeworking on time control decreases when such monitoring is combined with high-intensity digital monitoring, for example of computer or internet use, voice calls or emails (Adăscăliței et al., 2024). Moreover, high-intensity digital monitoring increases employees' stress levels.

Further evidence of potential negative associations between monitoring and the quality of working time is offered by 2024 EWCS data (see Box 8). The data show that teleworkers whose performance is heavily monitored more often report having insufficient rest (25 %) than those not monitored (20 %). For on-site workers, the figures are 20 % and 15 %, respectively. Although monitoring can have potential negative effects, recording working time helps to identify overtime and ensure fair compensation, which can contribute to higher job satisfaction. For example, German research found higher job satisfaction among employees whose working hours were recorded (Backhaus et al., 2024). This suggests that recording working time can support fairer compensation for overtime, even if it does not necessarily prevent overtime from occurring.

It is important to note that the legal framework for working time recording varies across Member States. While the EU's Working Time Directive does not explicitly mandate recording, the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), in its case-law interpreting the directive, has ruled that Member States must provide for an 'objective, reliable and accessible system' for recording working time (DLA Piper, 2020; Helmerich, 2021; Leccese, 2023). However, the actual implementation and strictness of these requirements differ significantly among Member States (Eurofound, 2023) (see Chapter 4).

Exploring ICT use (digitalisation)

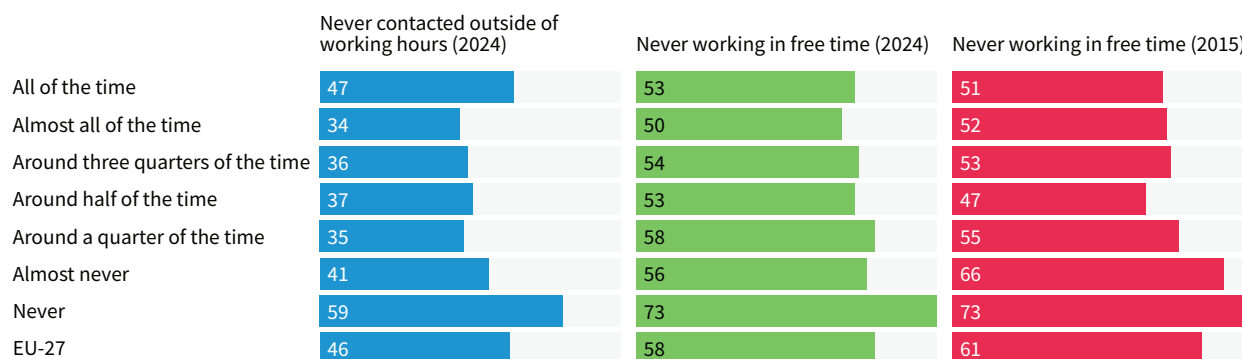
As mentioned in Chapter 1, a key contributor to developing flexible working arrangements has been the increasing digitalisation of the world of work. A key technology in this regard has been, since the 1980s, the use of ICT. In general, flexible arrangements would have been more difficult to implement without incorporating digital tools into work. In this section, we explore the effect of ICT use on working time.

Use of ICT is a key indicator of workers' flexibility and autonomy, yet the two are not interchangeable. Employees who use ICT are more likely to have flexible start and finish times than those who do not (37 % compared with 26 %). The difference is even greater for autonomy: almost half of ICT users (49 %) report having at least some degree of autonomy, compared with only a quarter of non-users (25 %). The most common form of autonomy is flexitime – the ability to adapt working hours within certain limits. Around 31 % of ICT users report having this arrangement, compared with 13 % of non-users.

But what are the specific effects of ICT on the quality of working time, beyond facilitating flexible working? To explore this, four indicators were examined: working during one's free time, being contacted outside working hours, working more than 48 hours per week and having sufficient rest, of at least 11 consecutive hours, between the end of one working day and the start of the next.

The 2024 EWCS and 2015 EWCS data show no association between ICT use and either working more than 48 hours per week or having sufficient rest. However, ICT use is clearly linked to working during free time and being contacted outside working hours, although the frequency of ICT use does not appear to matter. The key difference lies between those who never use ICT at work and everyone else. For example, in 2024, 73 % of employees who never use ICT reported never working in their free time, compared with an average of 54 % among ICT users (across all frequencies). The trend is the same for the 2015 findings, as shown in Figure 12, and there are changes in only a few categories over the decade. Similarly, 59 % of employees who never use ICT have never been

Figure 12: Share of workers never contacted outside working hours and never working in their free time, by frequency of ICT use, 2015 and 2024 (%)



Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

contacted outside working hours, compared with only 38 % of ICT users on average (see Figure 12)⁽⁹⁾. Employees who do not use ICT are less likely to work during their free time and less likely to be contacted outside working hours, but also less likely to have working time autonomy.

It is not possible to test the effect of ICT use on quality of working time among teleworkers, as they always use ICT and no differences were found across frequencies of use. For on-site workers, however, the pattern holds: those who never use ICT are less likely to be contacted outside working hours and less likely to work during their free time than those who use it, even at the lowest frequency. This means that, although teleworkers are generally contacted outside working hours more often and work more frequently during their free time than on-site workers, on-site employees are also influenced by ICT use to some extent, and those who use it may face a greater blurring of boundaries between professional and personal life than those who never use ICT.

No regression analysis was conducted for ICT use because it has a degree of collinearity with telework.

Changes in use of time and commuting

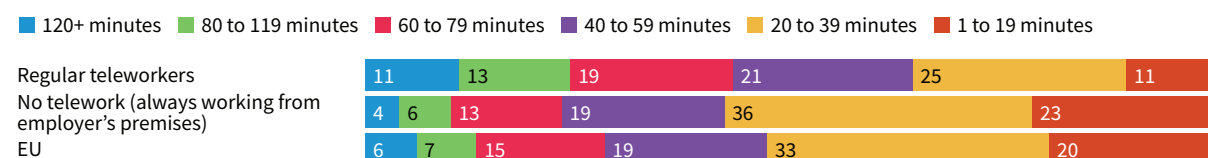
One of the advantages of flexible working, and in particular of teleworking, is the reduction or elimination of commuting time (the distance between the home and the workplace), as confirmed by several surveys and research studies from various Member States (Staniulienė et al., 2022; Fiorini, 2023a, 2023b; Pluxee, 2024a). In addition to its well-documented positive impact on workers' work-life balance, reduced

commuting time contributes positively to the environment by lowering carbon dioxide emissions. For instance, in Belgium, teleworking helps reduce kilometres driven by approximately 34 million per day (Eurofound, 2026d).

Among teleworkers, the most preferred arrangement is regular hybrid working, with some days at the employer's premises and others at home, offering greater flexibility in working time and location (News 24/7, 2022; Devote, 2024; PwC, 2024). In the EU, the most common models are two days working at the employer's premises and three days working from home, or three days working at the employer's premises and two days working from home (Łobocki et al., 2022; Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 2023; McCarthy et al., 2023; HR Portál, 2024; Pluxee, 2024b). There are some exceptions and differences among countries. For example, teleworkers in Denmark often work one to two days a week from home (36.5 %), and 45.8 % of them work less than a day a week from home (Mathiesen, 2023, 2024). However, over one third of Irish companies report they offer total flexibility to staff concerning their working location (Dublin Chamber, 2024).

As shown in Figure 13, there is a key difference between teleworkers and on-site employees as regards commuting time: teleworkers are more likely to have long commutes, with 11 % reporting more than two hours per day, compared with 4 % of on-site workers (see Box 9). This suggests that commuting time is linked to the decision to work remotely, as remote workers tend to commute longer distances to their workplace. Separately, Eurofound (2024a, 2024b) reports that teleworking is more common in large metropolitan areas across the EU, where people usually have longer commutes to work. Between 2015 and 2024, commuting times for on-site workers remained largely unchanged.

⁽⁹⁾ This variable was introduced in the 2024 EWCS; therefore, the results cannot be compared with those from the 2015 EWCS.

Figure 13: Commuting time, by telework category, 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Among teleworkers, however, the share with the shortest commutes (1–19 minutes) fell from 19 % to 11 %, and the share commuting 40–59 minutes rose slightly (from 16 % to 21 %). These data indicate a slight shift towards living further from the workplace, and/or greater use of teleworking as a means of avoiding long commutes among those who have access to this working arrangement.

The time saved by not commuting daily is typically reallocated to a mixture of productive and personal activities (Eurofound, 2023). In general, it can be said that the largest share of time saved is used for leisure activities, followed by work-related activities, with the remainder used for caregiving or other activities (Isusi, 2024). These results largely resemble those from the United States (Aksoy et al., 2023; Eurofound, 2026b).

Examples from some countries show that time used for additional work represents around 35 % of time saved in Austria, approximately one third of time saved in Greece, and higher percentages in France and the Netherlands. However, larger shares of time are frequently invested in leisure pursuits (about 45 % of time saved in Austria, and 40 % or more in Spain, Germany and Sweden) (NBER, 2022; Aksoy et al., 2023). Furthermore, a notable amount of time is directed towards caregiving (e.g. 7 % in Austria, or 14–16 % in France, Greece, Italy and Poland), along with household chores, personal development and socialising (CSO, 2021; Sánchez-Toledo Ledesma, 2021; NBER, 2022; Staniulienė et al., 2022; Aksoy et al., 2023; Fiorini, 2023a, 2023b).

It is important to note that the allocation of this saved time is often gendered, with evidence from Bulgaria and France indicating that women tend to spend the extra time on unpaid labour (primarily housework and childcare), while men typically use it for leisure or personal activities (Dares, 2024; NSI, 2024).

Prevalence of flexible working by Member State, sector, occupation and gender

Member State comparisons

Previous Eurofound research has shown differences in the prevalence of flexible working between Member States (Eurofound, 2017c, 2020b, 2023). This is related to various factors: industrial relations system, work culture, increasing digitalisation and economic and occupational structure. Generally, flexible working is more prevalent in Nordic, western and central European Member States than in the eastern and southern countries.

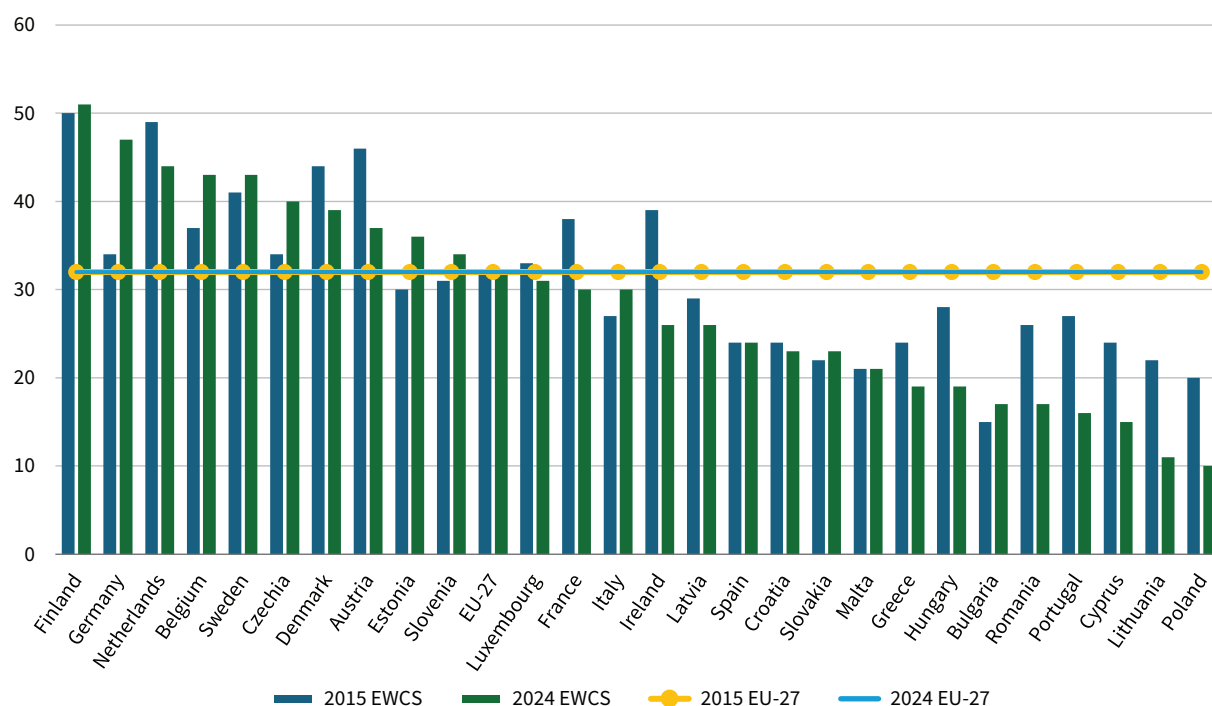
Flexible schedules and working time autonomy

The change in the prevalence of flexible working schedules (irrespective of autonomy) across the Member States is considered in Figure 14. At the EU-27 level, there is no overall difference in the prevalence of flexible start and finish times between 2015 and 2024. However, the EU-27 averages mask significant national variation. For example, Germany experienced a 13 % increase in workers with flexible start and finish schedules, while Ireland saw a 13 % decline.

While the prevalence of employees with flexible schedules has not changed over the years at the EU-27 level, working time autonomy has increased. Based on findings from the EWCS, in the EU-27 the share of workers with flexitime increased from 19 % (2015) to 24 % (2024), confirming the shift towards more working time autonomy. It is worth noting that at the EU level a substantial share of workers with flexible schedules do not have autonomy (at least 34 %).

Box 9: Multivariate analysis findings – commuting time

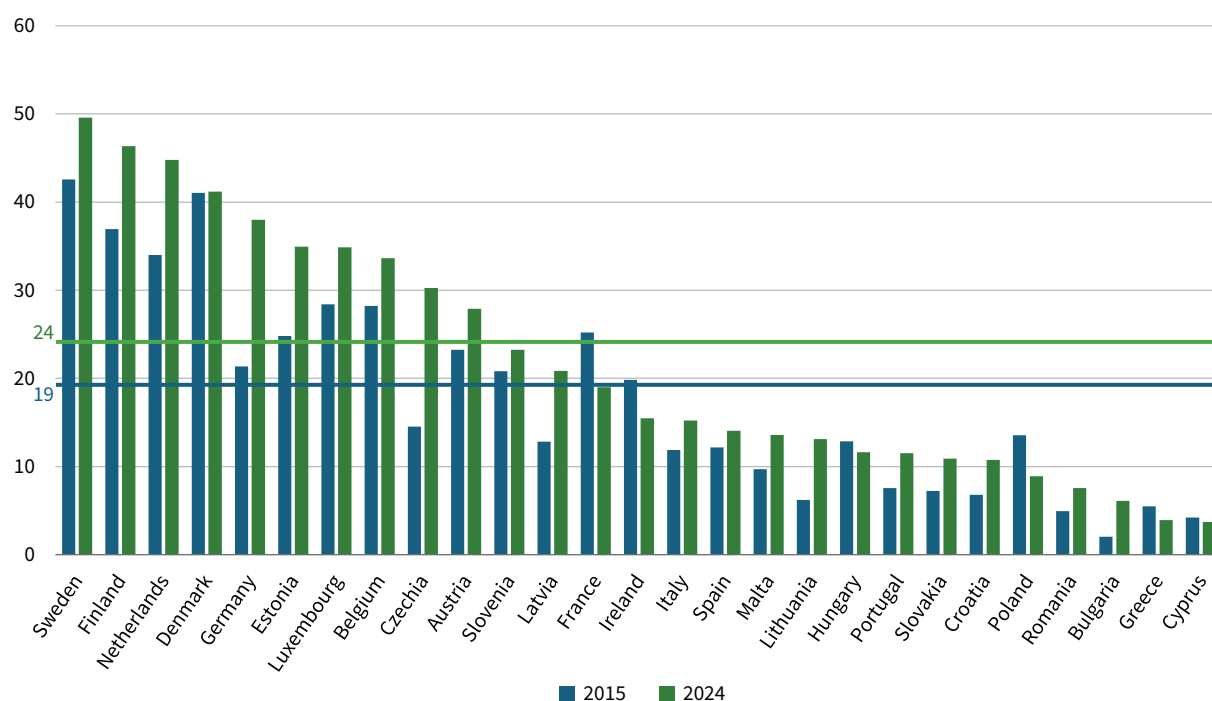
The regression results show that, after controlling for contextual variables, teleworkers are more likely to report commuting more than two hours per day on the days they travel to their workplace than employees who always work at their employer's premises. Flexible schedules do not influence commuting time.

Figure 14: Change in the prevalence of flexible start and finish times, by Member State, 2015 and 2024 (%)

Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

At the national level, in most Member States the share of workers with flexible start and finish times has increased. The largest increases in flexitime were observed in Czechia (16 pp) and Germany (17 pp).

Decreases between 2015 and 2024 were recorded in France (6 pp), Ireland (5 pp), Poland (5 pp) and Greece (2 pp) (Figure 15).

Figure 15: Change in ability to adapt working hours within certain limits (e.g. using flexitime), by Member State, 2015 and 2024 (%)

Note: Horizontal lines represent the EU-27 percentages.

Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

In general, and as expected, in 2024 countries with a higher share of workers with flexible schedules also had a higher share of workers with working time autonomy (Nordic countries, and the Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Czechia, Austria and Estonia).

Telework

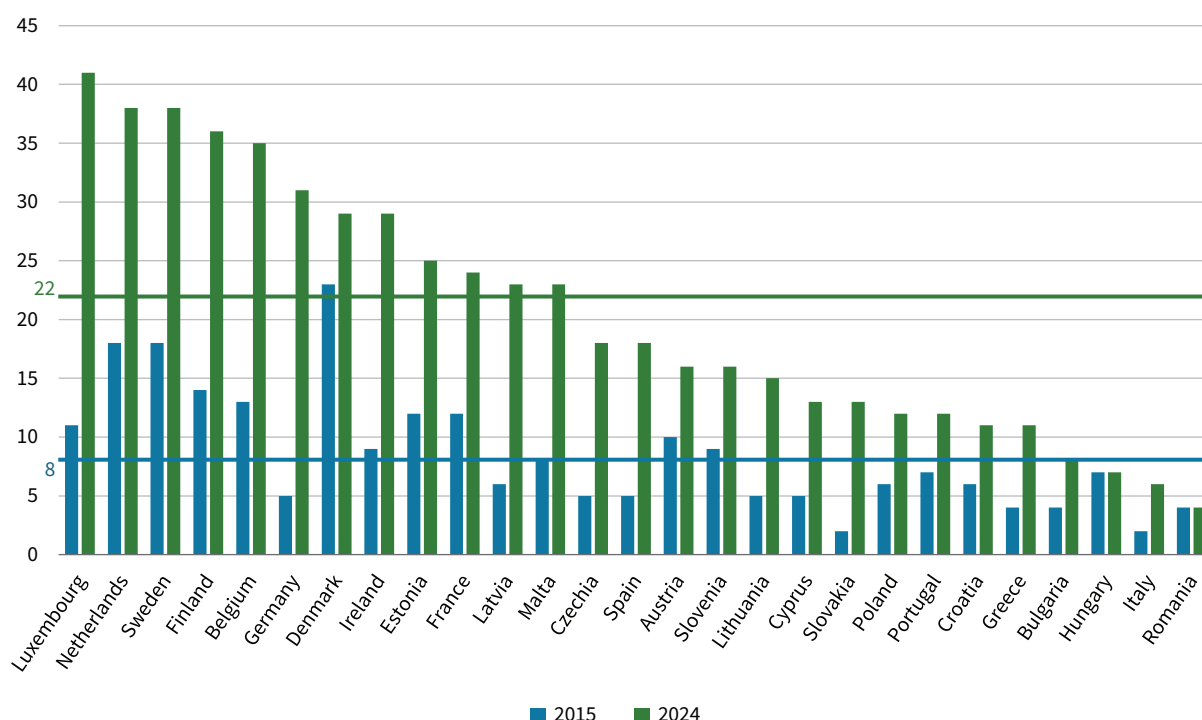
The EWCS shows that, compared with 2015, the share of employees working at least sometimes from home increased markedly in the EU-27 in 2024, rising from 8 % to 22 % (by 14 pp) (Figure 16). The greatest increases were recorded in Luxembourg (30 pp), Germany (26 pp), Belgium (22 pp), Finland (22 pp), Ireland (20 pp) and Sweden (20 pp). Substantial increases were also observed in countries with initially low levels, such as Czechia (13 pp), Latvia (17 pp) and Slovakia (11 pp). In contrast, Hungary and Romania showed virtually no change over the same period, with the shares remaining at 7 % and 4 %, respectively. As in 2015, southern countries, like Italy (which saw a 4 pp increase) and Greece (where the share increased by 7 pp), continue to report a relatively low prevalence of telework.

These results confirm the existence of important differences in the organisation of work across Member States, with overall divisions between groups of countries: Nordic, Benelux and German-speaking countries have the highest prevalence of flexible arrangements, followed by France. Italy and Spain are just below the EU average, and countries in the south-east of the EU have the smallest share of employees in these arrangements.

Working time quality

This section examines selected indicators of working time quality that were found to be associated directly or indirectly with some or all flexible arrangements. Table 6 shows countries with a relatively high or low percentage of workers reporting on the abovementioned aspects of working time, focusing on countries with a relatively great difference from the EU average.

Figure 16: Workers working from home at least sometimes, 2015 and 2024 (%)



Note: Horizontal lines represent the EU-27 percentages.

Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

Table 6: Quality of working time – Member States with a relatively low or high percentage of employees reporting a specific indicator of working time quality and the EU average for each indicator, 2024

Indicator of working time	Relatively high prevalence	Relatively low prevalence	EU (%)
Excessively long hours (full time and more than 48 hours a week)	Greece (19 %)	Denmark, France, Spain (4–6 %)	8
Working in free time (at least several times a month)	Cyprus, Malta, Sweden (26–27 %)	Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Poland (11–13 %)	16
Unpredictable working hours	Denmark, Sweden (both 21 %)	Malta, Poland (6 % and 7 %, respectively)	14
Insufficient rest time (less than 11 hours between two working days at least once in the last month)	Spain (38 %)	Bulgaria, Cyprus, Hungary, Italy, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania (8–12 %)	18
Workload (rarely or never enough time to do the job)	Greece, Romania (14 % and 15 %, respectively)	Bulgaria, Italy, Lithuania, Malta (3–5 %)	10
Never being able to take a break	Malta (34 %)	Estonia, Finland, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Sweden (8–12 %)	16
Being contacted outside working hours (at least several times a month)	Sweden, Netherlands (30 % and 31 %, respectively)	France, Poland (14 % and 17 %, respectively)	21

Notes: All indicators were standardised using min.–max. normalisation, assigning a value of 0 to the lowest observed percentage and 100 to the highest. This transformation places all variables on a common 0–100 scale, allowing for the consistent interpretation of relative positions within each distribution. In this analysis, Member States scoring below 15 on the normalised scale are classified as low extremes, while those scoring above 85 are classified as high extremes.

Source: Authors' creation, based on the 2024 EWCS.

Considering Table 6, the results of a regression analysis (see Table A1) and the maps comparing countries (see Figure A1), the influence of variables related to flexible working is measured, for example, when describing the influence of country-related characteristics.

As shown above, different factors are related to being contacted outside working hours, including workload, flexible schedules and telework, use of digital tools, managerial work and work culture. Sweden and the Netherlands have high shares of workers in flexible working arrangements, whereas Poland has a relatively low share. As a country, France seems to have some institutional or other country-related characteristics that reduce, to a certain extent, the likelihood of reporting being contacted outside working hours. The opposite seems to be true for Croatia, Italy and Portugal.

Working in free time is associated with a high workload and teleworking. Sweden and Malta are included in the group of countries with high shares of workers reporting working in free time. Lithuania, Bulgaria and Hungary have low shares of employees in this situation. France and Poland seem to have certain characteristics that prevent working in free time. However, in the case of Poland, its high share of workers working long hours can be considered a reason for not reporting working in free time, as these hours may be understood as 'normal' working hours.

Excessive weekly working hours (more than 48 hours a week) are explained by several factors. Among them are legal statutory working hours, high workload, total autonomy in the organisation of working time, managerial work and flexible schedules. Poland and Greece have a high share of workers in this situation, whereas low shares are found in Denmark, France and Spain. From a country perspective, Greece seems to have certain characteristics that facilitate this result.

Experiencing insufficient rest is related to several factors, namely flexible schedules, high workload and excessive working hours. A very high percentage of workers in Spain report having insufficient rest, and a very low percentage in Poland do so. Based on the regression analysis, from the country perspective, Spain has certain institutional or other characteristics leading to a higher share of workers reporting insufficient rest.

The lack of predictability of working hours is related to flexible schedules, total autonomy over working hours, workload, temporary agency work and non-contractual work. From a country perspective, Malta, the Netherlands and Poland seem to have characteristics that improve predictability.

Being able to take a break is positively associated with teleworking and autonomy over working time and negatively associated with high workload, certain medium- and low-skilled occupations and work in the education sector. Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Poland and Portugal seem to have certain characteristics as countries that limit workers' ability to take breaks.

Workload was considered an independent variable in the regression analysis and, therefore, cannot be interpreted in the same way. This variable has a strong effect on several conditions: being contacted outside working hours, working in free time, not being able to take a break and having unpredictable working hours. Sweden, Poland, Greece and Romania are the countries with the highest shares of workers reporting that they rarely or never have enough time to do their job.

Some more general evidence from a geographical perspective is as follows.

- In Sweden, although workers largely feel able to take breaks, quality of working time based on other variables is low, with working life characterised by high workloads, unpredictable working time and work in free time.
- Spain has an extraordinarily high percentage of employees reporting insufficient rest between two working days.
- Working life in several eastern European countries is characterised by long working hours and high workloads.
- Italy stands out as a country with a good quality of working time, in terms of most aspects considered.

In this section, differences by country have been introduced, and explanations related to flexible working and other working-time-related variables have been discussed using a regression analysis and maps, which include comparative data from the EWCS (see the Annex). The results confirm relevant differences in relation to flexible working and some aspects of the quality of working time.

Comparisons by sector and occupation

Previous research highlights that flexible working arrangements are not evenly distributed among sectors and occupations (Eurofound et al., 2017; Eurofound,

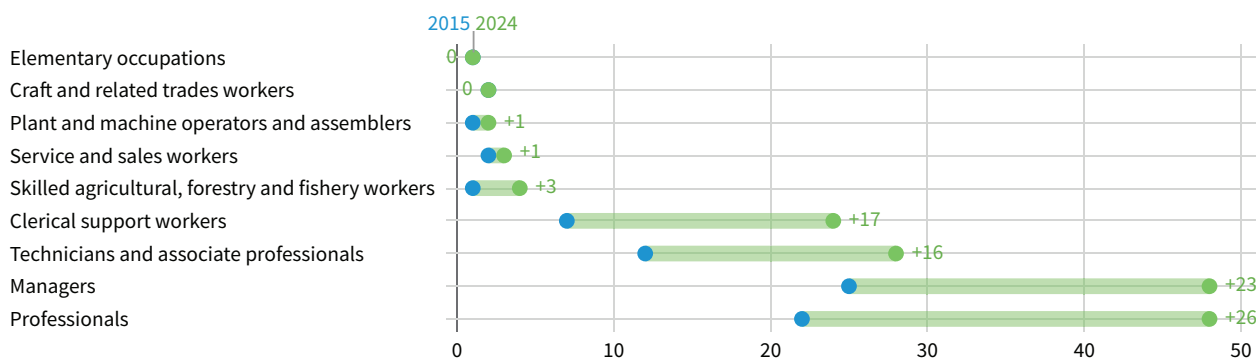
2020b, 2022a, 2023, 2026d). For example, teleworking arrangements are predominantly found in knowledge-intensive and office-based sectors, such as ICT; finance; professional, scientific and technical activities; banking; insurance; and corporate management/consulting services (BIA, 2021; Destatis, 2023; Fondation Jean-Jaurès, 2023; Schülz et al., 2023; Dares, 2024; Jenerte, 2024; CZSO, 2025; Insee, 2025). These sectors have seen an acceleration of teleworking practices in recent years, widening the gaps with other sectors (SP ČR, 2022; Mathiesen, 2024). Conversely, these teleworking arrangements remain rare in sectors inherently requiring a physical presence in the workplace or involving client-facing duties, including accommodation and food services, transport and storage, manufacturing, construction, retail, and health and social work (Destatis, 2023). In general, higher-skilled, white-collar employees with a higher level of education are more likely to telework and enjoy more flexibility than those in lower-skilled jobs with a lower level of education (NBS, 2021; Draganov, 2022; SURS, 2022; Koumarianos, 2023; Sá et al., 2024).

This section of the chapter examines in which sectors and occupations flexible working is most prevalent, updating data using findings from the 2024 EWCS, and how the characteristics associated with poor quality of working time are distributed.

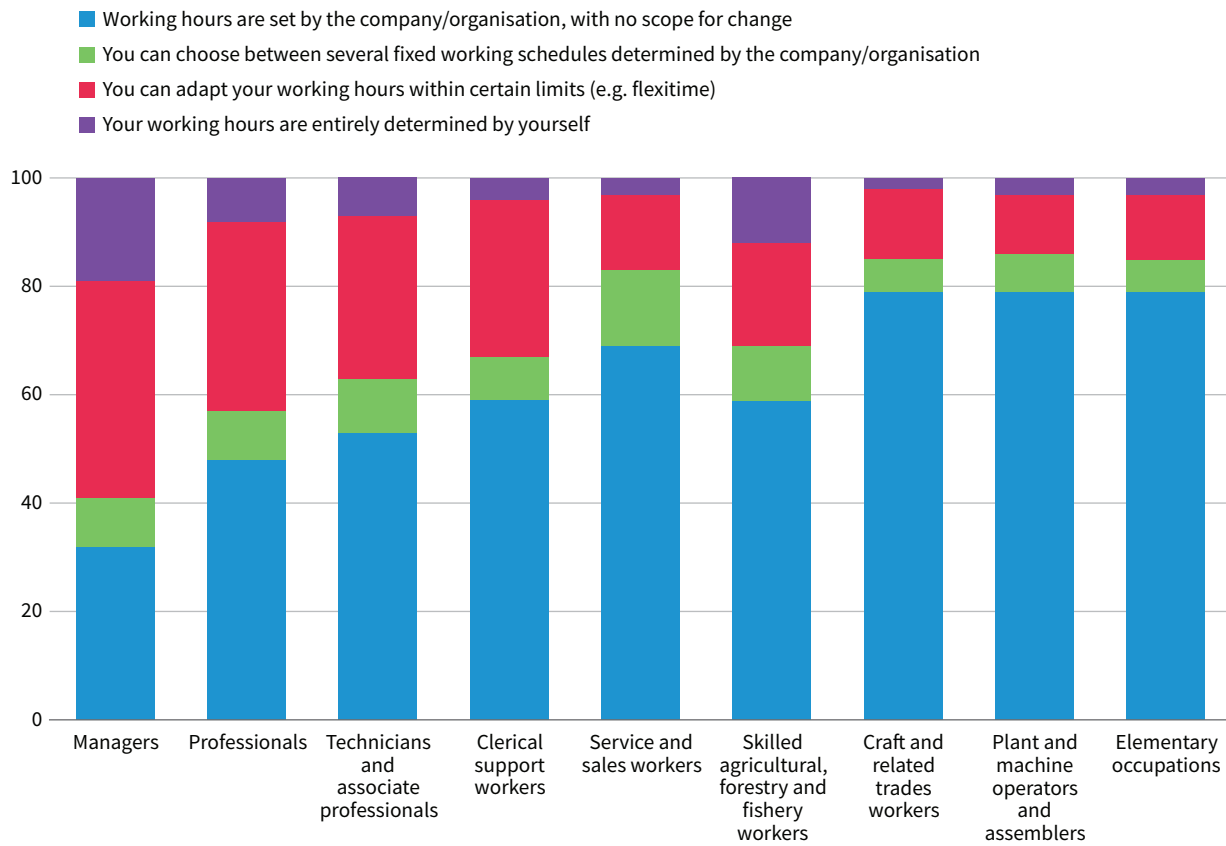
Occupations

Considering the prevalence of telework by International Standard Classification of Occupations (ISCO) group (see Figure 17) confirms findings from previous Eurofound research showing that more white-collar, high-skilled workers enjoy teleworking and working time autonomy than blue-collar, lower-skilled workers and workers with client-facing duties (Eurofound, 2022a; Isusi, 2024). Regarding teleworking, the gap (in pp) between those two groups of workers widened

Figure 17: Change in the prevalence of telework, by ISCO occupation, 2015 and 2024 (%)



Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

Figure 18: Working time arrangements with and without autonomy, by ISCO occupation, 2024 (%)

Sources: 2024 EWCS.

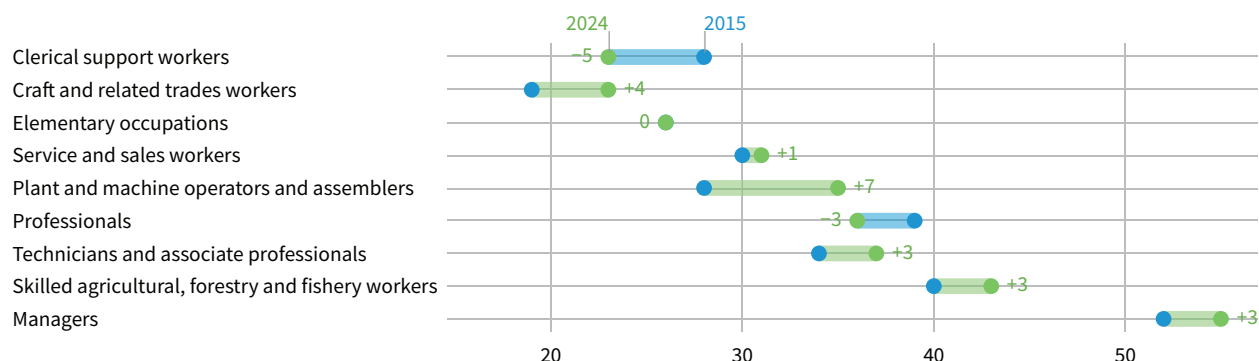
between 2015 and 2024: the increase in teleworking was over 20 pp for managerial (23 pp) and professional (26 pp) positions, 17 pp for clerical support workers and 16 pp for technicians and associate professionals. However, there was hardly any or no increase in telework for elementary occupations, craft and related trades workers, plant and machine operators and assemblers, service and sales workers, and skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers. Employees in these occupations are more often required to be present in their workplace because their jobs are more often not suitable for teleworking.

The distribution of working time autonomy varies substantially across occupational groups (Figure 18). As expected, managers report the highest levels of autonomy, with 40 % able to adapt their working hours within certain limits and 19 % having full control over their schedules. By contrast, employees in elementary occupations, craft and related trades workers, and plant and machine operators remain the most constrained, with nearly 80 % of workers in these categories having schedules set entirely by their company. Professionals and technicians and associate professionals occupy an intermediate position, reflecting some opportunities for

flexible arrangements but with a significant share still bound by company-determined schedules. When compared with 2015, changes across occupations are generally modest. The most notable shifts include a decrease of 8 pp in company-set schedules for professionals, accompanied by an 8 pp rise in flexitime, and a similar pattern among skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers, for whom flexitime increased by 10 pp while full autonomy declined by 6 pp. For most other occupational groups, changes remain within a margin of 5 pp.

A similar picture emerges when looking at flexibility in start and finish times (which does not imply autonomy). The highest share of fixed schedules is observed among craft and related trades workers (81 %). A great deal of flexibility is reported by skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers and by professionals, with around 40 % in each group able to adjust their start and finish times. The change in the prevalence of these types of schedules between 2015 and 2024 is also very moderate (Figure 19). The largest decrease in the prevalence of fixed start and finish schedules is experienced by clerical support workers (5 pp) and the largest increase by plant and machine operators and assemblers (7 pp).

Figure 19: Change in the prevalence of workers with flexible start and finish times, by ISCO occupation, 2015 and 2024 (%)



Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

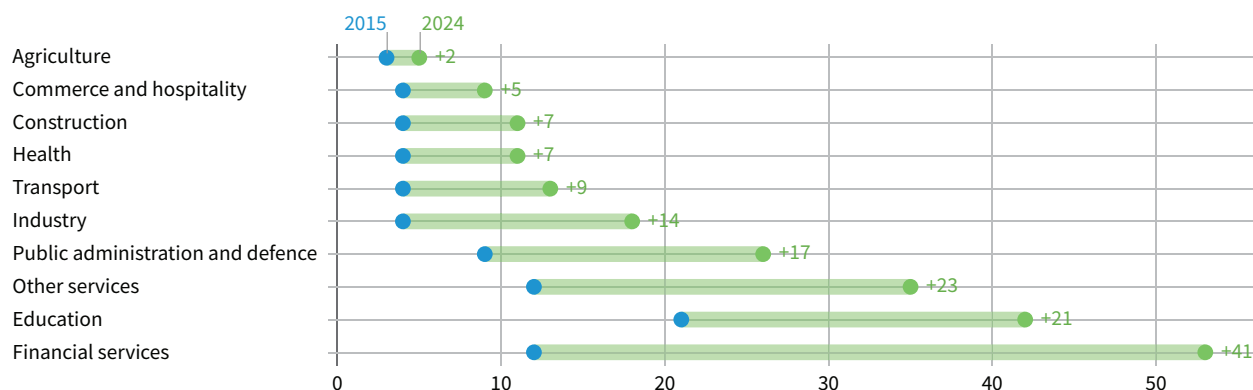
Sectors

When considering sectors (the 10 categories covered by the EWCS), we can see that the largest shares of employees teleworking are in financial services (53 %), education (42 %) and other services (35 %), and that the lowest shares are in agriculture (5 %) and commerce and hospitality (9 %). The biggest increases in teleworking between 2015 and 2024 were observed in the financial services (41 pp), other services (23 pp) and education (21 pp) sectors. This reflects the fact that, as in the case of occupations, the gap is widening between sectors (Figure 20).

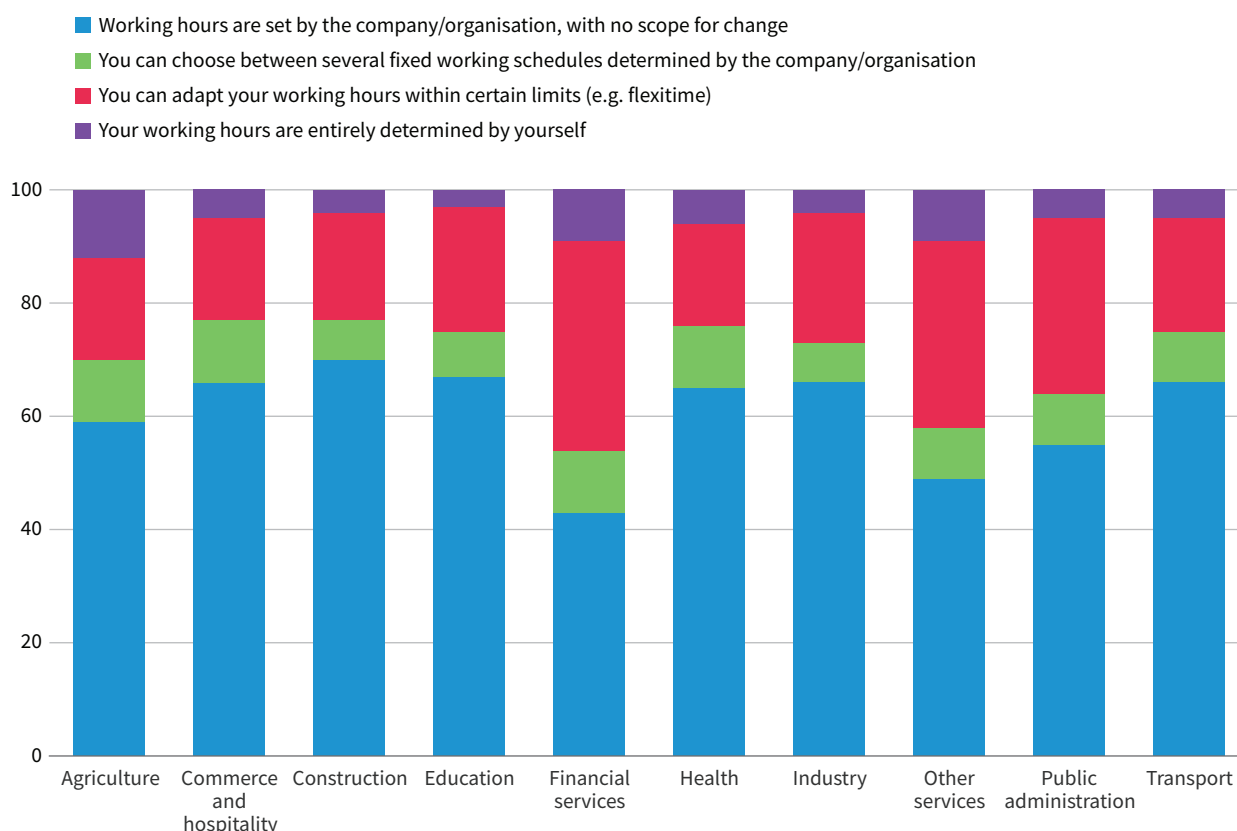
Working time autonomy differs markedly across sectors (Figure 21). In construction, commerce and hospitality, education, health, industry and transport, schedules determined fully by employers predominate, with roughly two thirds of employees having no opportunity to adjust their hours. In contrast, financial services, other services and public administration – a sector that

has seen notable growth in working time autonomy since 2015 – display greater scope for working time autonomy: around one third of workers in these sectors report having access to flexitime, and a small but notable share have full autonomy over their schedules. This is consistent with the finding that teleworkers possess more working time autonomy, since these industries offer more telework, as shown in previous sections. Agriculture presents a mixed picture, with a majority of workers in the sector bound by predetermined schedules but the highest proportion of workers (12 %) determining their own hours. Slightly exceptional is the case of education, in which we can observe a high share of telework, although the sector falls closer to the more rigid end of the working time autonomy spectrum: just over two thirds of workers are on company-set schedules and very few (3 %) enjoy full autonomy. Across all sectors, the option to choose from several fixed schedules remains rare, never exceeding 11 %.

Figure 20: Change in the prevalence of workers who telework, by NACE sector, 2015 and 2024 (%)



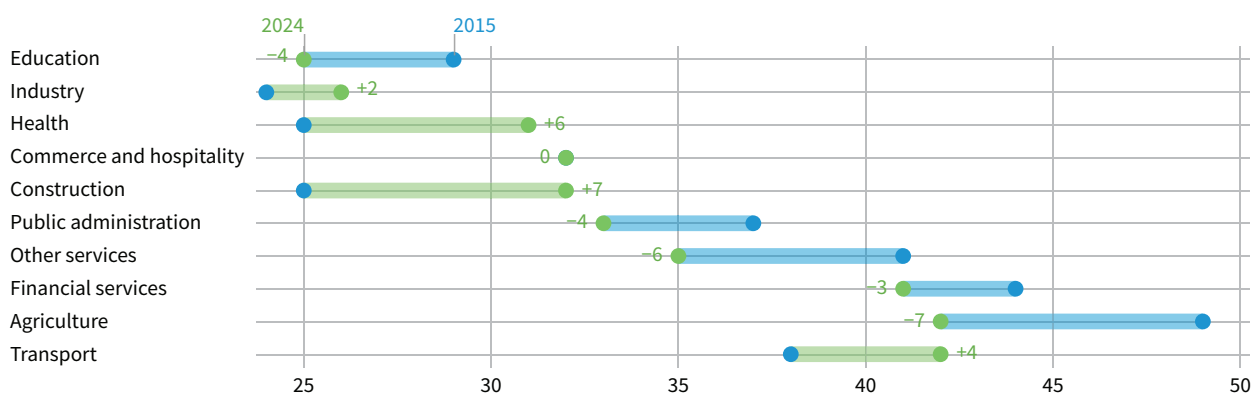
Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

Figure 21: Working time arrangements with and without autonomy, by NACE sector, 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

When comparing sectors, there were some changes in the prevalence of flexible start and finish times between 2015 and 2024 (Figure 22). Some sectors experienced more notable increases, such as construction (25 % to 32 %), health (25 % to 31 %) and transport (38 % to 42 %). In contrast, declines were observed in education (29 % to 25 %), other services (41 % to 35 %) and public administration (37 % to 33 %). Sectors such as

commerce and hospitality (32 %) and industry (24 % to 26 %) remained largely stable, while financial services experienced a small decrease (44 % to 41 %). Overall, the data suggest that flexibility in start and finish times is not evenly distributed across sectors, with agriculture and financial services consistently having higher levels of flexibility, while levels in industry and education remain low.

Figure 22: Change in the prevalence of workers with flexible start and finish times, by NACE sector, 2015 and 2024 (%)

Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

Quality of working time across sectors and occupations

In this section, the distribution of (selected) indicators of poor working time quality in flexible working arrangements is shown: working in free time, being contacted outside working hours, working more than 48 hours a week and experiencing less than 11 hours of rest between two working days. The results can be interpreted alongside findings from the regression analysis (see Table A1).

In this part of the analysis, a matrix of NACE (general industrial classification of economic activities within the European Union) sectors and ISCO occupations is presented. Table 7 examines the prevalence of working during free time across different sector–occupation combinations (jobs). Employees who report working in their free time (daily, several times a week or several times a month) are more frequently found in managerial positions, followed by professional positions, but also among technicians and associated professionals and service and sales workers. Within the occupational group of managers, those in the financial services, health and other services sectors are most affected. Others in this situation are professionals in the education sector. According to the regression analysis, clerical and support workers and workers in elementary occupations are least likely to work in their free time.

From a sectoral perspective, those working in the education or agriculture sector are most likely to work in their free time.

Table 8 presents the share of employees contacted outside working hours at least several times a month (computed as the number of respondents who reported being contacted outside working hours daily, several times a week or several times in the last month). As observed for working in free time, managers are most likely to report being contacted outside their working hours, with the highest prevalence of out-of-hours contact in the financial services sector, followed by health and other services, commerce and hospitality and education. This confirms that the two conditions are related. Other groups with a high share of employees affected are technicians and associate professionals in the education sector and workers in jobs related to agriculture, and professionals and service and sales workers in health and public administration. The regression analysis shows that, after managers, service and sales workers are next most likely to be contacted outside their working hours. From a sectoral perspective, those in the education sector are most likely to be in this situation, followed by those in the health sector.

Table 7: Working during free time (at least several times a month), by ISCO occupation and NACE sector, 2024 (%)

Occupation	Agriculture	Commerce and hospitality	Construction	Education	Financial services	Health	Industry	Other services	Public administration	Transport
Managers		32	13 (*)	42 (*)	55 (*)	52 (*)	18	44	28 (*)	20 (*)
Professionals		13	23 (*)	46	21	20	16	25	21	12 (*)
Technicians and associate professionals		14	16	21 (*)	20	12	19	22	12	18 (*)
Clerical support workers		4	3 (*)	2 (*)	10	3	6	16	6	12
Service and sales workers		14		22		16	18	12	19	16 (*)
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers								2 (*)		
Craft and related trades workers		7	10				8	18 (*)		2 (*)
Plant and machine operators and assemblers		4	7				6	4 (*)		14
Elementary occupations		7	15	2		1	4	10	6	6

(*) Based on fewer than 100 observations.

Note: Each cell is based on at least 30 observations.

Sources: 2024 EWCS.

Table 8: Being contacted outside working hours (at least several times a month), by ISCO occupation and NACE sector, 2024 (%)

Occupation	Agriculture	Commerce and hospitality	Construction	Education	Financial services	Health	Industry	Other services	Public administration	Transport
Managers		45	15 (*)	38 (*)	67 (*)	60 (*)	23	48	27 (*)	29 (*)
Professionals		15	15 (*)	32	16	27	21	20	22	13 (*)
Technicians and associate professionals		22	28 (*)	34 (*)	23	29	20	26	15	24 (*)
Clerical support workers		12	5 (*)	19 (*)	17	10 (*)	13	20	9	12
Service and sales workers		24		26		30	18	25	33	17 (*)
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	30 (*)							32 (*)		
Craft and related trades workers		18	18				11	16 (*)		13
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	13 (*)	26	11 (*)				10	13 (*)		28
Elementary occupations	30	14	20	1		20	13	12	11	10

(*) Based on fewer than 100 observations.

Note: Each cell is based on at least 30 observations.

Sources: 2024 EWCS.

Table 9 further examines the prevalence of working more than 48 hours a week across sector–occupation combinations based on the 2024 EWCS. The prevalence is highest for managers, particularly in the health sector. Interestingly, plant and machine operators in construction and transport also have a relatively high percentage of workers in this situation, along with elementary occupations in agriculture and construction. According to the regression analysis, managers are more likely to report working long hours during the week. From a sectoral perspective, results do not show that specific sectors are associated with working long hours. Multivariate analysis of data from the 2023 EU-LFS confirms that, even though managers are more likely to experience an increase in extra hours and usual weekly working hours when they work remotely or have the autonomy to decide their working time, this increase is experienced by all occupational groups. Excluding managers, in the case of remote working, the most considerable increases in usual

working hours are experienced by service and sales workers. With regard to increases in extra hours worked, managers stand out considerably against other occupational groups.

Finally, Table 10 presents the share of employees who report experiencing a violation of the minimum rest period of 11 consecutive hours between the end of one workday and the start of the next (at least once during the month before the survey). Managers, again, are most likely to report poor working time quality, in particular in the other services, health and financial services sectors. Other jobs in which high shares of workers experience this situation are service and sales workers in public administration and health, and plant and machine operators in commerce and hospitality and transport. Regression analysis shows that, after managers, service and sales workers are next most likely to experience insufficient daily rest time. Those in clerical and support jobs are least likely to encounter this phenomenon.

Table 9: Working 48 hours or less per week, by ISCO occupation and NACE sector, 2024 (%)

Occupation	Agriculture	Commerce and hospitality	Construction	Education	Financial services	Health	Industry	Other services	Public administration	Transport
Managers		14	14 (*)	18 (*)	23 (*)	34 (*)	16	21	17	11 (*)
Professionals		2	4 (*)	3	7	6	8	5	0	8 (*)
Technicians and associate professionals		6	9	1	7	2	6	9	2	12
Clerical support workers		1	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	6
Service and sales workers		6		0		4	3	3	8	1 (*)
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	10 (*)						0 (*)			
Craft and related trades workers		2	9			5	6			5 (*)
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	9 (*)	4	17 (*)			2	3 (*)			16
Elementary occupations	18	1	23	0	0 (*)	1	1	0	0	1

(*) Based on fewer than 100 observations.

Note: Each cell is based on at least 30 observations.

Sources: 2024 EWCS.

Table 10: Lack of sufficient rest (11 consecutive hours between the end of one working day and the start of the next), by ISCO occupation and NACE sector, 2024 (%)

Occupation	Agriculture	Commerce and hospitality	Construction	Education	Financial services	Health	Industry	Other services	Public administration	Transport
Managers		28	15 (*)	24 (*)	33 (*)	36 (*)	15	36	22 (*)	19 (*)
Professionals		19	13 (*)	17	18	23	13	20	22	15 (*)
Technicians and associate professionals		19	20	5	14	21	17	22	13	17 (*)
Clerical support workers		11	8 (*)	27 (*)	5	6	7	12	5	16
Service and sales workers		23		17		27	15	23	35	15 (*)
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	16 (*)						4 (*)			
Craft and related trades workers		7	17				12	14 (*)		18 (*)
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	18 (*)	25	17 (*)				11	14 (*)		29
Elementary occupations	17	16	16	2	20 (*)	9	6	17	6	13

(*) Based on fewer than 100 observations.

Note: Each cell is based on at least 30 observations.

Sources: 2024 EWCS.

Differences between women and men

Working time and teleworking have strong gender dimensions, because they are directly connected with the distribution of tasks and roles and work–life balance. The effects of flexible working on work–life balance are analysed in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the prevalence of flexible working by gender will be analysed, along with the effect of this arrangement on aspects of the quality of working time.

Prevalence of flexible working

Despite findings from some national-level research showing greater access to flexible working for men than for women (Lott et al., 2020; Magnusson, 2021; Schülz et al., 2023), the EWCS data show that, at the EU level, similar proportions of women and men work remotely, or enjoy working time autonomy (Table 11). The main difference exists in relation to flexible schedules, with more men than women enjoying flexibility (35 % compared with 29 %). The only exceptions are in Finland and Sweden, where more women have flexible schedules (by 8 pp). The overall shares of men and women working flexible hours have remained stable since 2015.

Gender differences in teleworking are smaller (Figure 23). In Estonia, 9 pp more women telework than men, while in Belgium, Cyprus and Malta the gap is 8 pp. Spain is the only country where significantly fewer women telework (15 % compared with 21 % of men). With regard to autonomy over working time, the largest gaps are found in Luxembourg, where 16 pp fewer women than men (26 % versus 42 %) have flexitime (Figure 24), and Sweden, where 13 pp fewer women than men (25 % versus 38 %) have schedules set by their employer with no scope for change.

Gender differences in the quality of working time

Evidence from countries in Europe shows some gender differences in relation to working time.

Women consistently work fewer hours on average than men, largely due to their higher concentration in part-time employment. Drawing from national-level reports, in Austria, for example, women's average weekly hours stood at around 31.5 between 2021 and 2023, compared with 39.2–39.7 for men (Statistik Austria, 2024). Beyond shorter hours, women are more exposed to irregular and fragmented schedules, particularly in lower-skilled roles in sectors such as care, retail and hospitality. French data show that between 2013 and 2019 exposure to non-standard schedules fell by 23 % among highly qualified women but rose by 11 % among women in low-skilled jobs – especially those in cleaning and care work, where unpredictable hours and split shifts are common (Lambert et al., 2022, cited in Eurofound, 2023). This finding is in line with the digital divide in working time explained in Chapter 1. However, over time, gender differences in the working of extra hours have decreased, with male employees working one extra hour more than female employees, down 0.6 hours from 2010 to 2023.

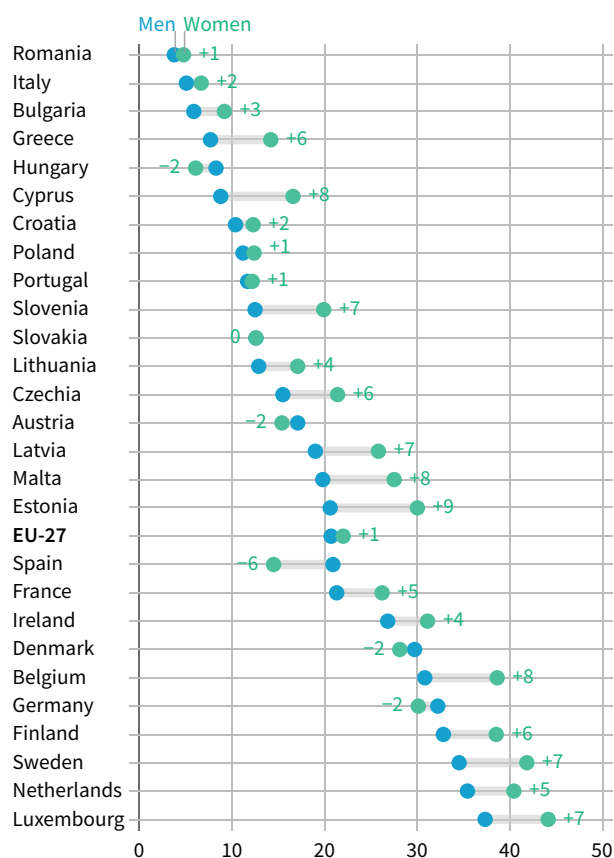
But how do flexible arrangements influence gender differences in working time quality?

Country evidence from Finland and Portugal shows women teleworkers reporting overtime far more often than men (21 % compared with 13 % in Finland; 53.3 % compared with 18.6 % in Portugal). By contrast, men in higher-skilled roles are more often required to work occasional overtime during regular shifts, suggesting that, while men typically log longer contracted hours, women may bear a greater hidden burden of overtime under flexible arrangements (Lambert et al., 2022).

Table 11: Working time autonomy, by sex/gender, 2015 and 2024 (%)

	Working hours are set by the company/organisation, with no scope for change	You can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organisation	You can adapt your working hours within certain limits (e.g. flexitime)	Your working hours are entirely determined by yourself	Total
2024					
Men	60	10	24	6	100
Women	63	9	23	5	100
EU-27	61	9	24	6	100
2015					
Men	66	9	19	6	100
Women	65	11	19	5	100
EU-27	65	10	19	6	100

Sources: 2015 and 2024 EWCS.

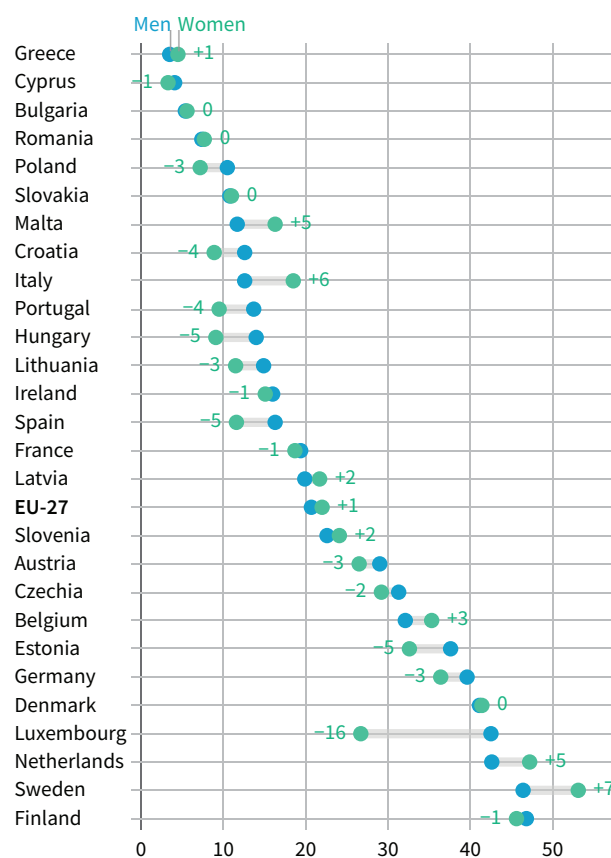
Figure 23: Conduct of at least some telework, by gender, 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

This is in line with EWCS results showing more women working in free time while teleworking. Over a third of women report doing so at least several times a month, compared with just over a quarter of teleworking men. This may reflect differences in the organisation of time due to household work (Eurofound, 2023). Women tend to fragment their teleworking days more than men, ending up working in their free time. This practice has declined sharply since 2015. By contrast, there is no gender difference in being contacted outside working hours, with 29 % of both teleworking men and women experiencing this at least several times a month.

However, when considering total number of hours, the EWCS data highlight clear gender differences in teleworking arrangements. Teleworking men put in longer hours than teleworking women, averaging almost 40 hours per week compared with 35. They are also more likely to work very long hours: 11 % of teleworking men exceed 48 hours a week, compared with 4 % of teleworking women. While these shares are much lower than in 2015 (23 % and 14 %, respectively), the gap remains.

Rest and irregular schedules show further contrasts. Nearly one in four teleworking men report not getting 11 consecutive hours of rest between working days,

Figure 24: Working time autonomy (adapting working hours within certain limits), by gender, 2024 (%)

Source: 2024 EWCS.

compared with one in five teleworking women. Teleworking men are also more likely to face irregular schedules (36 % compared with 28 %).

When comparing men and women with and without autonomy over their working time, gender gaps emerge, though not always in the same way as for telework. EWCS data show differences in working in free time by level of autonomy. Most employees with employer-set hours never work in their free time, though women are slightly more likely than men to do so occasionally (9 % compared with 4 %). Under flexitime arrangements, men more often work in their free time at least several times a month (19 % compared with 13 %) and are also more likely to be contacted outside working hours (28 % compared with 20 %).

With regard to sufficient rest, no gender difference exists among employees working only at their employer's premises, with about 15.5 % of both men and women lacking adequate rest. However, when some autonomy over working time is considered, men report insufficient rest more often than women, with gaps of 8–10 pp (e.g. under flexitime arrangements, 23 % compared with 14 %).

In line with the findings regarding telework, EWCS data show that, across all categories of working time autonomy, men work, on average, longer weekly hours and are more likely than women to work over 48 hours a week (around 7 % compared with 2.5 %). While the gaps are generally small, they widen considerably when schedules are fully self-determined: 27 % of men report long working weeks, of more than 48 hours, compared with only 8 % of women (a difference of 19 pp).

Finally, according to the logistic regression results, women are slightly less likely than men to be contacted outside working hours, report having insufficient daily rest and work excessive weekly working hours. Taken together, this indicates that women show, on average, slightly lower signs of extended availability and overwork than men, even within the same roles and working arrangements. However, although significant, the differences between men and women are small (see the Annex).

Summary

A flexibility–autonomy trend

It is evident from the analysis of the EWCS that flexible arrangements and autonomy over place and time of work are part of the same trend. Autonomy over working time, and therefore some degree of flexible working hours, is one of the most sought-after characteristics of a job in the Member States, and those teleworking are in a very good position to achieve this goal. However, generalisations should be avoided, as a portion of workers with flexible schedules do not enjoy autonomy over working time. A rather positive development is that, in teleworking arrangements, the percentage of those reporting only a flexible schedule (without autonomy) has slightly reduced.

Extended availability and connection: features of flexible working but not exclusively

Overall, telework and flexible scheduling independently increase the likelihood of work spilling into rest time or workers being contacted outside working hours by employers or colleagues, reinforcing the evidence of a work culture characterised by extended availability and working hours, mainly (but not exclusively) in flexible working.

Flexible schedules, more than telework, lead to long working hours

Flexible scheduling, more than teleworking per se, carries risks for rest and recovery, as it often leads to longer working hours and insufficient rest time. However, due to some typical characteristics of the work environments of workers who can telework, flexible scheduling could be used to do additional work, and, therefore, work beyond the statutory standard working hours.

Flexible arrangements are associated with porosity of working time, less regular schedules and unpredictable working hours

Flexibility in start and finish times has a stronger negative association with working time predictability than teleworking. However, both teleworking and flexible working hours increase the likelihood of experiencing irregular schedules and porous time schedules. Therefore, in general, flexible working arrangements are associated with less regular schedules and more unpredictable working hours.

The effect of autonomy seems to be less paradoxical than initially thought

Having a very high workload reduces the quality of working time, whereas autonomy improves only certain aspects of working time quality. The combination of high workloads, flexible working schedules and teleworking leads to a deterioration in the quality of working time. Even though autonomy in working time is more prevalent in flexible working arrangements, the effect of autonomy on the quality of working time is limited to enabling workers to take breaks and, to some extent, preventing workers from working in their free time. However, very high levels of autonomy can lead to long hours and unpredictable schedules. Nevertheless, as will be shown in the next chapter, even though working time autonomy has no strong association with some key aspects of the quality of working time, it is still able to improve outcomes related to health and work–life balance.

Digitalisation and flexibility can reduce the quality of working time

The recording of working time may have positive effects on the quality of working time, whereas intrusive digital monitoring can reduce autonomy and increase levels of stress. It is recognised that digital technologies are facilitators of both working time autonomy and teleworking; however, they also contribute to workers' need to be constantly available and to them working in their free time. This is a clear example of how technology contributes to the new paradigm of working time, as a key element of flexible working trends and their impact on the quality of working time.

Telework provides more time for leisure, work and care

As regards commuting time and use of time, teleworking arrangements play an important role in changing how time is used, particularly with regard to activities and the schedules on which they are carried out. It can be concluded that flexible working arrangements (teleworking) improve the overall quality of time for workers, by giving them more time to carry out caring or leisure activities and additional work, and by reducing total weekly commuting time.

Improvement of quality of working time: good news or a compositional effect?

A promising result is that the share of workers reporting positive effects of telework on working time has increased, and the share reporting negative effects has decreased. This situation seems to be a consequence of policy changes like the implementation of the right to disconnect, changes in working practices and the addition of groups of workers who did not telework before the pandemic.

Member States: some differences are linked to the prevalence of flexible working

Flexible working (or the lack of it) varies across European countries and contributes either positively or negatively to the quality of working time. In general, autonomy over working time and teleworking are correlated at the country level. The geographical distribution shows significant variation in indicators related to the quality of working time, with some countries, such as Sweden, having a relatively low overall quality of working time, and others, such as Italy, having an overall good quality of working time.

Sectors and occupations

The evidence shows that, despite a general pattern in certain occupations (e.g. managerial positions) of lower quality of working time, due to high flexibility in schedules and a high level of autonomy or total autonomy, there are specific occupations in certain sectors that should not be neglected when addressing challenges to the quality of working time (e.g. service and sales work in the public administration sector, elementary occupations in the construction sector and plant and machine operators in the transport sector). Moreover, certain occupations in sectors like transport or agriculture offer a high level of flexibility in schedules without autonomy, a situation likely to lead to a lower quality of working time.

Gender: no differences in the take-up of flexible arrangements

While at the EU level there are no relevant differences between men and women in terms of the share of employees who telework or have autonomy over their working time, there are some differences in a few countries. Access to flexible working does not contribute significantly to the difference in the work–life balances of women and men at the aggregate level in the EU. With some exceptions, such as working in free time, men report a lower quality of working time than women when they have flexible working arrangements. This is most likely related to their occupation and the sector in which they work, although gender also plays a small role.

3 Effects on work–life balance and health

Previous chapters have explained changes in working time in the context of increasing flexible working. Aspects of quality of working time have been associated, to different extents, with flexible working arrangements, and changes have been tracked mainly between 2015 and 2024. The quality of working time is the extent to which working time conditions are positively or negatively associated with workers' well-being, including their health and their work–life balance.

This chapter explores the relationship between flexible working arrangements, typical aspects of working time patterns, and employees' work–life balance and health, using data from the 2024 EWCS. The analysis focuses exclusively on employees in the EU.

The chapter begins by presenting descriptive findings on work–life balance and then findings on health-related outcomes. It goes on to explain some differences related to gender. The final section compiles the results, highlighting how various forms of flexible working arrangements (and aspects of working time patterns) intersect with employees' well-being outcomes.

Results are presented across key dimensions of flexible work: the frequency of teleworking and the level of autonomy over working time. Working time autonomy is included in the context of work–life balance and health, because a degree of autonomy is considered to have a positive effect on these outcomes. For simplicity, we include the variable regularity/irregularity (and not both regularity/irregularity and flexible schedules), which can be considered a proxy for flexible schedules. In this way, the analysis is simplified and results are presented with more clarity. The chapter, rather than presenting all results for all variables, highlights where there are relevant differences by flexible working frequency.

Work–life balance

Research indicates that flexible working practices have the potential to enhance work–life balance (Eurofound et al., 2017). As demonstrated previously in this report, telework increases workers' control over their daily schedules and eliminates commuting time, enabling them to better reconcile work demands with caregiving responsibilities, personal interests and leisure activities (Williamson, 2022; Dörfler-Bolt et al., 2025). Greater autonomy over working hours is associated with improved work–life balance outcomes (Gleerup et al., 2023). At the same time, flexible arrangements may increase overlap between work and private life, making it harder to fully disengage during non-working hours. Research shows that the benefits of autonomy depend on the form of telework and the context of work (Eurofound et al., 2017).

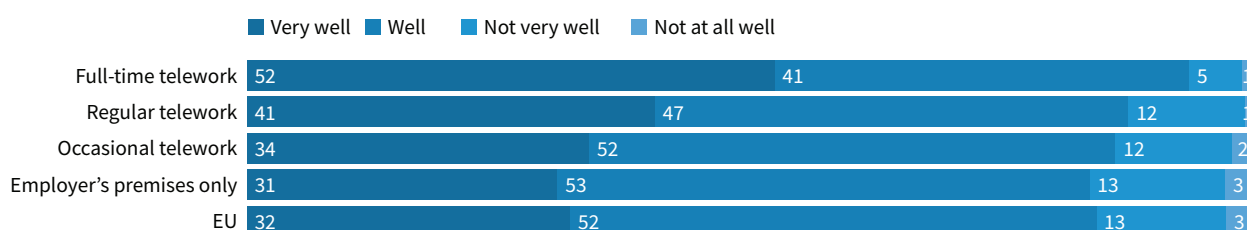
This section investigates the association between flexible arrangements and indicators of quality of working time and work–life balance.

Work–life balance: fit between work and private life

The 2024 EWCS asked workers how well their working hours fit with their family or social commitments outside work. In the EU, 16 % of employees mentioned that their working hours fit not very well or not at all well with their personal responsibilities (Figure 25).

When comparing different teleworking arrangements, full-time teleworkers were most likely to report a good fit between work hours and personal commitments (with only 6 % reporting difficulties in maintaining their work–life balance), followed by regular teleworkers (12 %) and occasional teleworkers (14 %). Employees working exclusively at their employer's

Figure 25: Fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work, by teleworking category (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)



Notes: Weighted data. Answer categories 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are excluded from the analysis. The telework category 'Other' is not shown in the figure.
Source: 2024 EWCS.

premises were least likely to report such alignment (16 %). This suggests that greater flexibility in working arrangements, particularly full-time telework, facilitates better work–life integration.

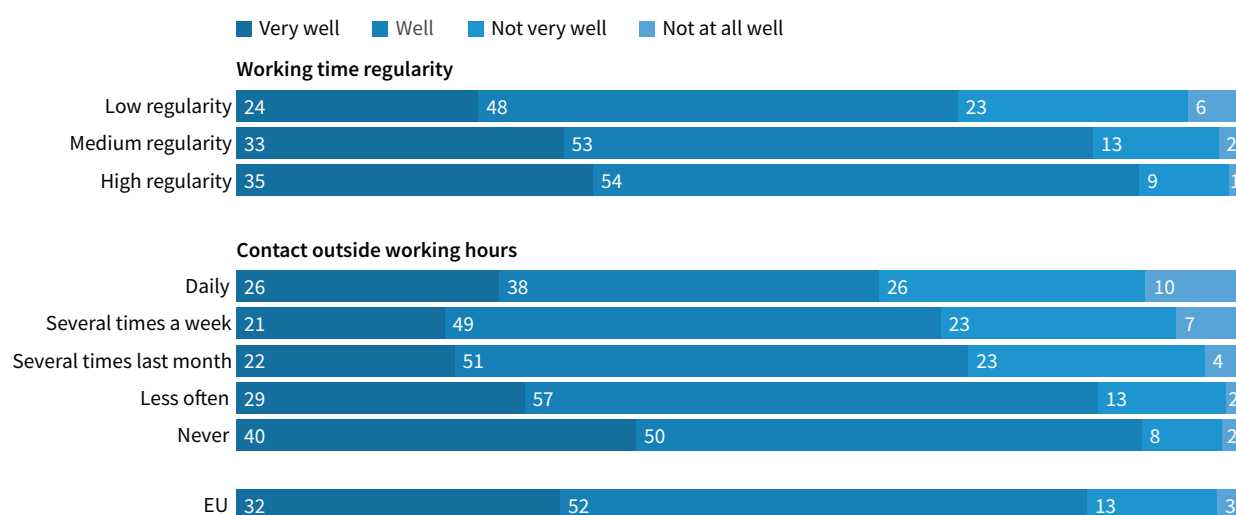
Differences in employee work–life balance are less pronounced when examined in the context of working time autonomy. Among employees whose working time is set by their company, 17 % say their working hours do not fit (very) well with their family or social commitments outside work. This share drops to 12 % among those who can adapt their working hours within certain limits. In line with findings above on quality of working time, working autonomy with certain limits (flexitime) at the aggregate level has a more positive effect on work–life balance than other arrangements. The opposite is found for those with total autonomy.

The regularity of working hours is the extent to which people work the same hours every day or every week and the same number of days every week. The previous chapter showed that those in flexible working arrangements are less likely to report working regular schedules. As expected, working time regularity is positively associated with work–life balance. While 29 % of employees with low working time regularity state that their working hours fit not very well or not at all well with their family or social commitments outside work, this share decreases to 15 % among those with medium regularity and to 10 % among those with high regularity (see Figure 26).

Like low levels of working time regularity, frequent work-related contact outside working hours is negatively associated with work–life balance. Among employees who never receive such contact, 10 % have a bad work–life balance. However, among those who are contacted daily outside working hours, the share increases to 36 %. In the previous chapter, it was shown that those with flexible working arrangements (at least those who telework and have flexible schedules) are more likely to be contacted outside working hours. This was not the case for working time autonomy.

This result suggests that, despite the flexibility paradox (Chung, 2022) or the autonomy paradox⁽¹⁰⁾ (Eurofound, 2020b), a high share of workers with a certain level of autonomy over the organisation of their working time report having a good work–life balance, meaning that the negative side of this paradox does not affect a large proportion of workers with such autonomy. Therefore, previous discourses should be reconsidered, and the paradox only attached to certain groups of workers in certain work contexts. Based on the 2024 EWCS, in general, the autonomy paradox is more common among those with a self-determined schedule than those in arrangements in which they have autonomy with certain limits or no autonomy at all. For example, the autonomy paradox affects a large proportion of craft and related trades workers and plant and machine operators with totally self-determined schedules, and a considerable share (but a smaller proportion) of skilled agricultural workers, professionals, services and sale

Figure 26: Fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work, by working time regularity and frequency of contact for work-related reasons outside working hours (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)



Notes: Weighted data. Answer categories 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are excluded from the analysis.

Source: 2024 EWCS.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Workers having working time autonomy but reporting high workload (work intensity), poor quality of working time and a poor work–life balance.

workers and managers with access to flexitime (autonomy with certain limits).

Work–life balance: spillover between work and family responsibilities

The EWCS captured the extent of work–family spillover and family–work interference over the 12 months preceding the survey. Work–family spillover was assessed by asking respondents how often they worried about work (reflecting stress and mental workload), how often they felt tired after work (indicating physical or mental exhaustion as a result of work) and how often they found their job affected their family time (signalling an imbalance between work and personal life). Family–work interference was measured by asking respondents whether they found it difficult to concentrate on their job due to family responsibilities.

Teleworking seems to be linked to the extent of spillovers between work and family. One in eight employees (13 %) in the EU always or most of the time keep worrying about work when they are not working. Teleworkers are more likely to experience this form of spillover than employees who work exclusively on-site (Figure 27). The highest proportions are observed among regular (26 %) and occasional teleworkers (16 %). Full-time teleworkers (11 %) also show a slightly elevated level of worry compared with on-site employees (10 %), who mention the lowest levels of work-related worry during non-working time.

For the rest of the work–life balance indicators, the differences between teleworking arrangements and working only at the employer’s premises are smaller, with the highest share of those reporting being tired after work being among those working only at their employer’s premises, the lowest share reporting that their job affects family time being among those in full-time telework and very small differences in relation to difficulties in concentrating on the job (Figure 27).

In conclusion, from a comparative perspective, teleworking seems to have a negative effect only in terms of increasing workers’ likelihood of worrying about work while not working, and in particular for those in who telework regularly (in a hybrid mode).

Employees who can fully or within certain limits determine their own working hours are less likely to mention always or often feeling tired after work (13 % and 16 %, respectively) than those whose working time is set by their company (24 %) and those who can choose between several fixed schedules (24 %) (more typical of shift work) (Figure 28). For the rest of the indicators, differences are small.

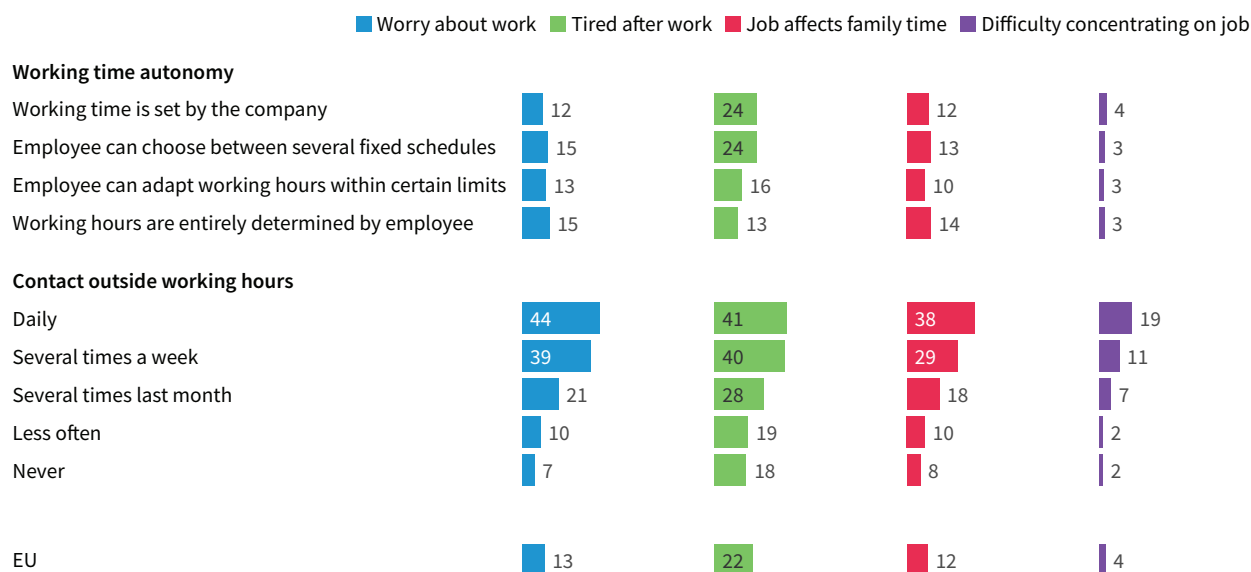
Frequent work-related contact outside regular working hours is strongly associated with increased work–family spillovers and heightened family–work interference. As the frequency of out-of-hours contact rises, employees are more likely to worry about work when not working, feel tired after work, state that their job affects their family time and experience difficulty concentrating on their job due to family responsibilities.

Figure 27: Work–life conflict, by telework category (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)

	Worry about work	Tired after work	Job affects family time	Difficulty concentrating on job
Full-time telework	11	14	6	3
Regular telework	26	18	14	3
Occasional telework	16	18	13	3
Employer’s premises only	10	23	12	4
EU	13	22	12	4

Notes: Percentages correspond to those who responded ‘always’ or ‘most of the time’. Answer categories ‘Don’t know’ and ‘Refused’ are excluded from the analysis. For item ‘difficulty concentrating on job’, the answer category ‘I have no family responsibilities’ is not included. The telework category ‘Other’ is not shown in the figure.

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Figure 28: Work–life conflict, by working time autonomy and frequency of contact for work-related reasons outside working hours (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)

Notes: Weighted data. Percentages correspond to those who responded 'always' or 'most of the time'. Answer categories 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are excluded from the analysis. For item 'difficulty concentrating on job', the answer category 'I have no family responsibilities' is not included.

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Health

Telework has been associated with lower levels of burnout and reduced sick leave (Ingelsrud et al., 2020). According to Robnik (2022), working remotely enables individuals to better align their working schedules with personal routines and supports healthier lifestyles, involving improved nutrition, increased physical activity, more time for recreation, reduced stress levels and fewer sleep problems. However, telework is not without health risks: highly mobile telework and regular telework are associated with a number of negative health outcomes, for example sleep disorders and stress, mainly due to high work intensity (Eurofound et al., 2017; Eurofound, 2020b).

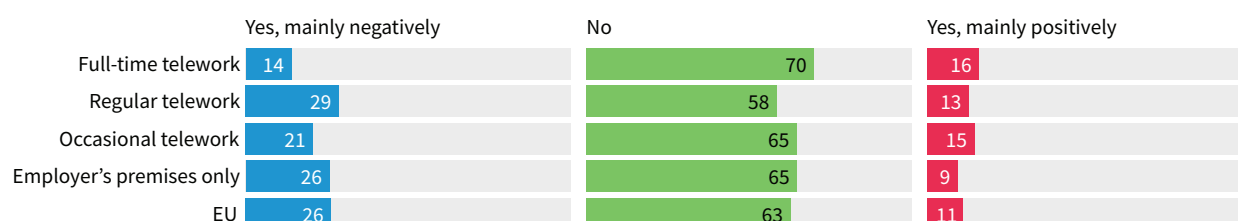
Flexible working arrangements also have positive and negative effects on health. On the one hand, they have been shown to have health and safety benefits, for instance improving mental health (Ahrens, 2024).

On the other hand, flexible working has been linked to psychosocial challenges that can undermine mental health. These include psychological strain due to blurred boundaries between work and rest (Erb, 2025).

Effect of work on health

For work to be sustainable, it must not have a detrimental effect on workers' health. The EWCS examined employees' subjective assessments of how their work influences their health. Around one third of employees (37 %) indicated that their work had either a positive or negative impact on their health (see Figure 29). 26 % reported a negative impact.

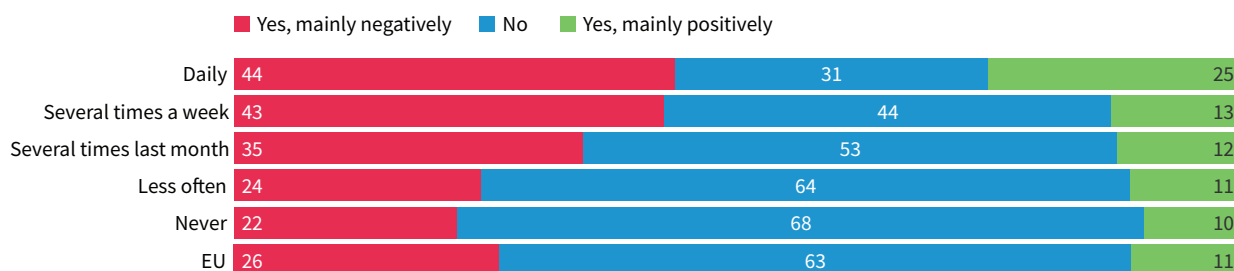
A higher share of regular teleworkers reported negative health effects (29 %) than those with other working arrangements, particularly those who work exclusively on-site (26 %). However, in all teleworking arrangements, a higher share of employees reported a positive impact of work on health.

Figure 29: Work affecting health, by telework category (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)

Notes: Weighted data. Answer categories 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are excluded from the analysis; 5 % of employees did not provide a valid answer to the question. The telework category 'Other' is not shown in the figure.

Source: 2024 EWCS (Q93).

Figure 30: Work affecting health, by frequency of contact for work-related reasons outside working hours (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)



Notes: Weighted data. Answer categories 'Don't know', 'Refused' and 'Does not apply' are excluded from the analysis; 5 % of employees did not provide a valid answer to the question.

Source: 2024 EWCS (Q93).

In line with the findings above (indicating a negative impact of out-of-hours contact on quality of working time and work–life balance), the EWCS data show that employees are increasingly likely to report that work affects their health mainly negatively as the frequency of work-related contact outside regular working hours increases (Figure 30). However, employees who are contacted more frequently outside working hours are also more likely to state that work affects their health mainly positively. These differences may be partly driven by compositional effects. The negative impact of work on health has to do with various elements of both the physical and the social working environment, and some groups of workers (like those in managerial positions) may have better working conditions in general, even though they are more likely to be contacted outside working hours. As shown in the multivariate analysis in the section 'A factor analysis', being contacted outside working hours has a strong effect on reporting stress and mental strain.

Negative health effects of work are also associated with working time regularity and autonomy over working time. In terms of regularity, a higher proportion of employees with low working time regularity (34 %) than with medium (28 %) or high (22 %) regularity state that

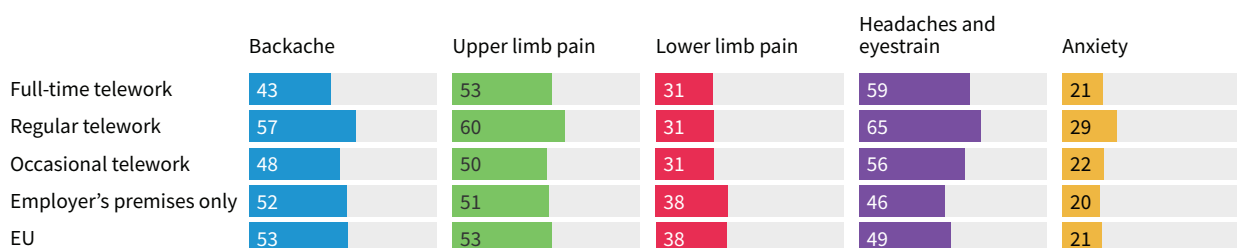
work affects their health mainly negatively. Regarding autonomy, negative health impacts are most commonly mentioned by employees whose working time is entirely set by their company (29 %). This share decreases among those who can choose between several fixed working schedules (26 %) and those who can adapt their working hours within certain limits (21 %), and is lowest among employees who can entirely determine their own working hours (20 %).

Health problems

Survey respondents were asked whether they had experienced any of the following health problems in the 12 months prior to the survey: backache; muscular pain in the shoulders, neck or upper limbs; muscular pain in the lower limbs; headaches or eyestrain; and anxiety.

Among the teleworking groups analysed, regular teleworkers have the highest risk of experiencing backache, upper limb pain, headaches and eyestrain, and anxiety (Figure 31). This result points to a work environment characterised by long-term sitting, use of ICT and exposure to certain risks related to the quality of working time (see Chapter 2). Moreover, although not studied in this report, it is possible that certain social environments can play a role.

Figure 31: Experience of health issues in the 12 months before the survey, by telework category (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)



Notes: Weighted data. Answer categories 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are excluded from the analysis. The telework category 'Other' is not shown in the figure.

Source: 2024 EWCS (Q85).

With regard to physical exhaustion at the end of the working day, teleworkers have more favourable outcomes than employees who only work from their employer's premises. While 30 % of employees working only on-site stated that they feel physically exhausted always or most of the time, this share decreases to 23 % among regular teleworkers, 21 % among occasional teleworkers and 15 % among full-time teleworkers.

Physical exhaustion is also associated with both autonomy over working time and working time regularity. Employees with greater autonomy over their working time are less likely to feel physically exhausted at the end of the working day (Figure 32). Similarly, highly regular working time is linked to a lower likelihood of physical exhaustion.

A comparable pattern is observed for emotional exhaustion, although the differences in emotional exhaustion across teleworking groups and levels of working time autonomy and regularity are less pronounced than in the case of physical exhaustion. 14 % of employees working only on-site mention feeling emotionally drained by their work, compared with 10 % among occasional teleworkers, 14 % among regular teleworkers and 9 % among full-time teleworkers.

Work-related stress

Work-related stress refers to the response individuals may experience when work demands and pressures exceed their knowledge, abilities or capacity to cope (Cox et al., 2004). Among the teleworking groups analysed, regular teleworkers experience the highest levels of stress (33 %), followed by occasional teleworkers (24 %), employees working only from their employer's premises (23 %) and full-time teleworkers (19 %).

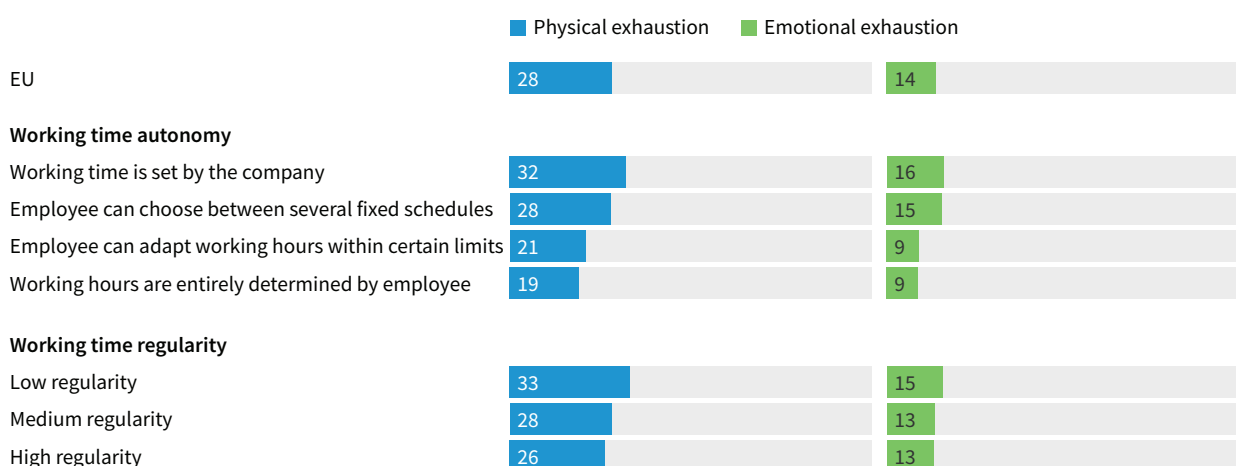
Experiencing work-related stress is also closely linked to the frequency of work-related contact outside working hours. Around 6 in 10 employees (59 %) who are contacted daily experience stress at work always or most of the time. This share decreases as the frequency of contact does, with 17 % among those who are never contacted outside working hours reporting stress. A similar pattern is observed in relation to working during free time to meet job demands. Furthermore, low working time regularity (associated with highly flexible schedules) is associated with higher stress levels. One third of employees with low regularity (34 %) report experiencing stress always or most of the time, compared with 25 % of employees with medium regularity and 18 % of those with high regularity.

Difficulty sleeping

Sleep is essential for overall health, and disturbances in sleep have emerged as a significant occupational health concern. The EWCS asked respondents how often they had had difficulty sleeping in the month before the survey.

Sleep issues are associated with the regularity of working time. Employees with low working time regularity are more likely to have difficulty sleeping daily or several times a week (28 %) than those with medium (22 %) or high regularity (18 %). The frequency of work-related contact outside working hours also plays a role. Among employees contacted daily, 34 % mention having difficulty sleeping at least several times a week. This share increases to 37 % among those contacted several times a week but declines to 27 % for those contacted several times in the month before the survey, 18 % for those contacted less often and 18 % for those never contacted outside working hours. Only marginal differences were observed in the prevalence of

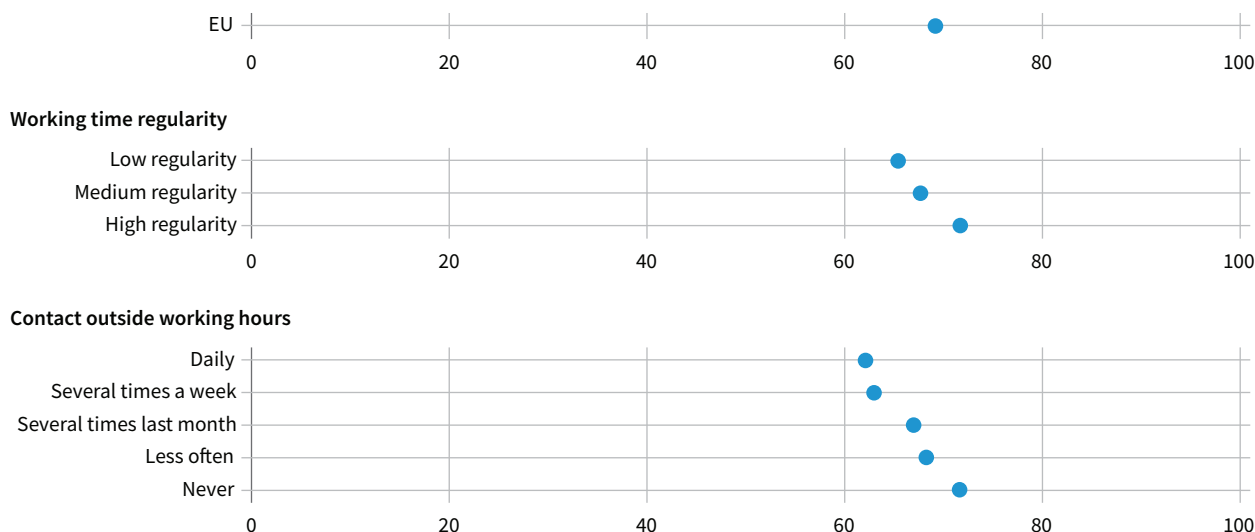
Figure 32: Physical and emotional exhaustion, by working time autonomy and working time regularity (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)



Notes: Weighted data. Percentages correspond to those who responded 'always' or 'most of the time' when asked how often they felt exhausted by their job(s). Answer categories 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are excluded from the analysis.

Source: 2024 EWCS (Q98).

Figure 33: Mean subjective well-being in the two weeks before the survey, by working time regularity and frequency of contact for work-related reasons outside working hours (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)



Notes: Weighted data. Answer categories 'Don't know' and 'Refused' are excluded from the analysis.

Source: 2024 EWCS (Q96).

sleep issues across teleworking groups and among workers with varying levels of working time autonomy.

Subjective psychological well-being

Emotional and psychological well-being can be assessed using the World Health Organization-Five Well-Being Index. Survey respondents were asked how often, in the two weeks before the survey, they felt cheerful and in good spirits, calm and relaxed, and active and vigorous; how often they woke up feeling fresh and rested; and whether their daily life was filled with interesting things. The results show that lower working time regularity is associated with lower average well-being scores (Figure 33). Similarly, employees who are contacted more frequently for work-related reasons outside working hours tend to have lower average well-being.

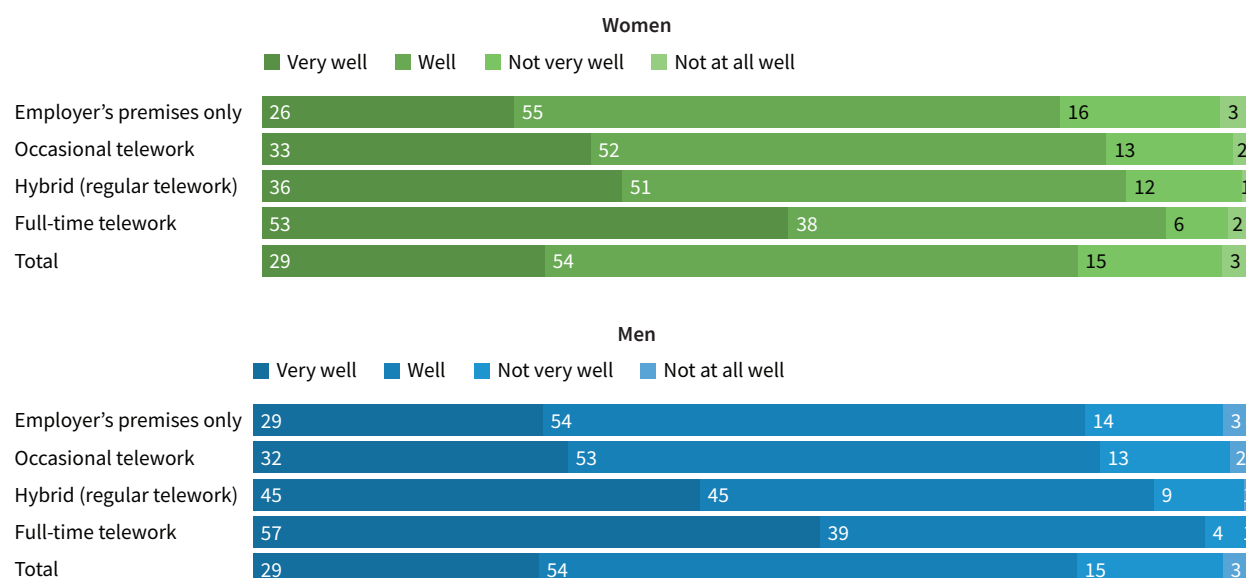
An insight into gender differences

The purpose of this chapter is to explore the relationship between flexible working arrangements and employees' work–life balance and health. For many of the variables examined, the differences between women and men appear to be driven primarily by gender rather than by teleworking or flexible working status. Women tend to work in different occupations from men, which may influence well-being and health outcomes in distinct ways. Therefore, gender remains an important factor influencing both work–life balance and health, and gender-specific differences in health and well-being outcomes have been described in the 2024 EWCS overview report (Eurofound, 2026).

However, variables related to flexible working appear to have some gender-specific effects on work–life balance. Firstly, teleworking contributes to a good work–life balance for all, in particular when performed at higher frequencies (see Figure 34). More specifically, when teleworking under a regular (hybrid) model or full time, a higher share of men than women report that their working hours fit very well with their family and social commitments outside work, and fewer report that they do not fit very well. However, multivariate analysis (controlling for contextual and sociodemographic variables (sector, occupation, age, country, support from managers and duration of working time)) shows that regular hybrid working is, to some extent, more effective in protecting women against poor work–life balance.

However, when considering subjective indicators of work–life balance, telework seems to combat work–family spillovers and family–work interference among men, while little improvement in this regard is observed among women. This could be explained by more women than men still spending more time working on household-related duties, caring, etc. Working time autonomy contributes to a good work–life balance for both women and men, with total self-determination benefiting more women than men. Flexible schedules are equally detrimental to women's and men's work–life balance.

In general, women are more likely than men to report negative effects of work on health when they telework full time, which may be related to feelings of isolation and the blurring of boundaries between work and private life. Men, when they telework regularly (in a hybrid model), are to some extent more likely than women to report negative effects of work on health.

Figure 34: Fit between working hours and family and social commitments outside work, by telework category and gender (EU-27, full-time employees only), 2024 (%)

Notes: Only full-time employees are included, so that the figure more accurately represents gender differences. Women are over-represented in part-time work.

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Those with working time autonomy are more likely to report a general positive impact of work on health: flexitime benefits women and men equally, although total flexibility benefits men more. Flexible schedules have a rather general negative effect on health for both men and women.

More specifically, teleworking women are more likely to experience upper limb pain and backache than non-teleworking women. Among men, teleworking has only a limited effect on upper limb pain and even appears to reduce the prevalence of backache. Thirdly, teleworking men report lower subjective well-being than non-teleworking men, whereas no such effect is observed among women.

With some differences by gender for specific flexible arrangements and outcomes, the same teleworking arrangements that improve work-life balance may simultaneously undermine health, particularly through sedentary behaviour, social isolation and the erosion of work-rest boundaries. Therefore, flexible working arrangements do not necessarily have the same positive or negative effects on work-life balance and health, and, for some variables, mainly teleworking arrangements, one group (men or women) benefit more than the other or face different consequences for work-life balance and health.

Some of these findings have been explained in this report but others deserve further research focusing on gender, family composition and policies and resources relating to work-life balance.

A factor analysis

This chapter has discussed outcomes related to health and work-life balance. These are complex and interconnected concepts, captured in the EWCS through approximately 20 separate indicators. To identify the relevant underlying dimensions of these indicators, a factor analysis was conducted. This revealed five latent dimensions of health and well-being:

- emotional and psychological well-being covers the items of the World Health Organization-Five Well-Being Index, assessing whether respondents felt cheerful, calm, active, rested and that life was filled with interesting things;
- stress and mental strain reflects whether respondents mentioned worrying about work, experiencing work-related stress, feeling emotionally drained by their work, or experiencing headaches or eyestrain, anxiety or sleep issues;
- physical health complaints include backache, muscular pain in the lower limbs, headaches or eyestrain and muscular pain in the shoulders, neck and/or upper limbs;
- work-life conflict includes how well working hours fit with family or social commitments outside work, whether the job prevents respondents from devoting time to family as desired, and whether family responsibilities make it difficult to concentrate at work;

- exhaustion and fatigue indicate whether respondents feel physically exhausted at the end of the working day, too tired after work to do household tasks or emotionally drained by their work.

Seven indicators, three corresponding to flexible working arrangements (teleworking, autonomy over working time and working time regularity) and four related to the quality of working time in these arrangements (contact outside working hours, duration of working time, a long commute and insufficient rest), are considered in relation to the above factors.

These health and well-being factors may be shaped not only by remote work or flexible working but also by other characteristics, such as employees' age or occupation. To account for these characteristics, a multilevel regression analysis was conducted for each of the five health and well-being factors, controlling for flexible working arrangements, length of commuting time, weekly working hours, time between working days and contextual characteristics, including gender, age group, occupational category and country. This approach isolates the effect of flexible working arrangements and quality of working time while adjusting for the composition and context of the employee population. Figure 35 presents the statistically significant effects of the different flexible working arrangements and selected indicators of quality of working time.

Telework

After controlling for relevant variables, employees with teleworking arrangements show lower levels of exhaustion and fatigue than employees who work only from their employer's premises. However, teleworking is associated with higher levels of stress and mental strain, possibly due to increased workload and difficulties in mentally disconnecting from work or social isolation in some cases. In terms of physical health complaints and work–life conflict, full-time teleworkers have statistically significantly better outcomes than on-site workers and/or those teleworking at a lower frequency.

Working time autonomy

In relation to working time autonomy, employees who can adapt their working hours within certain limits have a lower likelihood of experiencing physical health complaints than those whose working time is entirely determined by their employer. Compared with the reference group, employees who entirely determine their working hours report having better emotional and psychological well-being, and reduced work–life conflict and exhaustion and fatigue.

Working time regularity

Generally, working time regularity facilitates the planning and combination of work with private or family life, and working time irregularity (as a proxy of flexible schedules) does the opposite. As expected, lower regularity is associated with reduced emotional and psychological well-being, higher levels of work–life conflict (particularly among those with low working time regularity), and, to a lesser extent, the prevalence of physical health complaints.

Contact outside working hours

Work-related contact outside regular working hours is detrimental to employees' mental well-being and work–life balance. Namely, frequency of contact outside working hours has the strongest association, among all variables related to flexible working, with stress and mental strain and greater work–life conflict. Employees who are contacted several times a week or month report higher emotional and psychological well-being than those who are never contacted. The results suggest that it is important for employees to be able to disengage from their professional roles during non-working hours.

Other indicators related to quality of working time when working flexibly

Long commuting times, long weekly working hours and insufficient recovery periods between working days are associated with increased work–life conflict, and exhaustion and fatigue. Long commuting times are also linked to a higher prevalence of physical health complaints. There are, however, some somewhat unexpected findings: long commuting times and insufficient recovery periods are associated with greater emotional and psychological well-being.

Figure 35: Effect of remote work and flexible working on indicators of health and work-life balance (employees only), 2024, EU-27 (%)

■ Emotional and psychological well-being
 ■ Stress and mental strain
 ■ Physical health complaints
■ Work-life conflict
 ■ Exhaustion and fatigue

Teleworking groups, reference group = employer's premises only

Full-time telework	-0.52	0.30	-0.27	-0.23	-0.19
Regular telework	0	0.30	0	0	-0.25
Occasional telework	0	0.18	0	0.11	-0.16

Working time regularity, reference group = high regularity

Low regularity	-0.16	-0.04	0.10	0.24	0
Medium regularity	-0.13	0	0.05	0.08	0

Working time autonomy, reference group = working time is set by the company

Employee can adapt working hours within certain limits	-0.12	0	-0.07	-0.08	-0.23
Employee can choose between several fixed schedules	0	0	0	0	-0.10
Working hours are entirely determined by employee	0.11	0	0	-0.26	-0.18

Contact outside working hours, reference group = never

Daily	0	0.96	0	0.34	0
Several times a week	0.11	0.67	0	0.40	0
Several times last month	0.15	0.45	0	0.37	0
Less often	-0.04	0.21	-0.07	0.20	-0.05

Long commuting time, reference group = less than 2 hours

2 hours or more	0.19	0	0.11	0.18	0.14
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Long weekly working hours, reference group = less than 48 hours

48 hours or more	0	-0.08	0	0.41	0.06
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Time between working days, reference group = sufficient recovery period

Less than 11 hours between working days in the past month	0.10	0.06	0	0.23	0.08
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Notes: In the figure, positive values indicate that the given category of flexible work is associated with an increase in the relevant factor, relative to the reference category; negative values indicate a decrease. The size of each bar reflects the strength of the association, and each factor is displayed on its own scale. For example, low and medium working time regularity are linked to higher levels of work-life conflict, with the effect being more pronounced for employees with low regularity. The figure presents the results from five separate multilevel regression models, each using a different indicator of health or work-life balance as the dependent variable. Each model controls for the independent variables listed in the relevant rows, in addition to respondents' gender, age group, occupational category (ISCO-08, one-digit level) and country (as the higher-level unit). Only parameters showing statistical significance at the 5 % level are displayed.

Source: 2024 EWCS.

Summary

Teleworking and the most prevalent form of autonomy in working time (flexitime) have positive effects on the organisation of work and life and contribute to preventing work–life conflict. This is particularly the case in the context of full-time telework. Among the aspects of working time related to flexible working, irregular and unpredictable schedules present a risk to work–life balance. However, being contacted outside working hours has the most detrimental effect on work–life balance. Long commuting times, long weekly working hours and insufficient recovery periods between working days are also particularly associated with increased work–life conflict. From a gender perspective, even though teleworking is more beneficial for women than men in terms of improving work–life balance (as women more often perform household tasks in addition to their role at work), this working arrangement is better at preventing work–life spillovers for men than for women. This dynamic is related to the fact that more women than men experience a blurring of boundaries between work and family-related tasks.

In relation to health outcomes, a high share of workers with working time autonomy report a positive impact on health (even within the groups of teleworkers and workers with flexible schedules). Autonomy also plays a role in preventing physical and mental exhaustion and fatigue. A different effect is observed in the irregularity of working time (an indicator related to flexible schedules), which has a rather negative impact on health. Overall, teleworkers are more likely to experience stress and mental strain (including sleep disorders) than those working only at their employer's premises (although not by much). In addition, telework reduces workers' likelihood of experiencing mental and physical exhaustion. In relation to other key indicators of quality of working time, being contacted outside working hours increases stress and mental strain. Long commuting times, long weekly working hours and insufficient recovery periods between working days are related, to some extent, to higher levels of exhaustion and fatigue. From a gender perspective, full-time telework may have more negative consequences for women than for men, while the opposite is true for hybrid working. Musculoskeletal disorders are more prevalent among women than men, and men who telework have poorer subjective well-being than women with the same working arrangement.

Further research is needed to investigate, through the 2024 EWCS, work–life balance and health effects in relation to gender, considering not only flexible working but also the general organisation of work, other aspects of working time, family composition and policies relating to work–life balance.

4 Changes in regulations on (flexible) working time and telework

As we have seen in previous chapters, certain drivers (mainly digitalisation) have led to an increase in flexible working in European workplaces. These developments have also had consequences for the quality of working time. However, some elements of the trends in increasing flexibility with regard to place of work and working time pose risks to the health and well-being of European workers, for example extended availability and being contacted outside working hours.

At the EU level, some initiatives have been implemented to regulate these trends and prevent some of these risks, for example the European Parliament resolution on the right to disconnect in 2021 and, before that, the Work-Life Balance Directive. Similarly, Member States have tried to develop new sets of regulations aimed at, firstly, incorporating new realities in the regulatory framework and, secondly, addressing some of the challenges discussed in this report.

This chapter analyses the regulation of working time and work organisation, telework and digitalisation in the 27 Member States and Norway. It identifies changes in regulations (legislation and collective agreements) that took place between 2021 and 2024. Among others, the following aspects are considered in relation to flexible working trends: duration of working time, organisation of working time, access to compressed working weeks, recording and monitoring of working time, the right to disconnect, the telework regime, employment conditions for telework and working time in platform work, algorithmic management and AI in the workplace. All these aspects are relevant to the protection of employees in a context characterised by greater flexibility with regard to working time and location of work and the expansion of flexible ways of organising work.

The chapter is mainly based on the analysis of contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, who gathered information on working time and telework legislation and collective agreements in the Member States and Norway.

The chapter covers:

- new developments in legislation on working time and the organisation of work;
- new developments in legislation related to the digitalisation of work, with a focus on teleworking;

- recent developments in sectoral collective bargaining;
- examples of company-level collective bargaining;
- key findings and national debates.

This chapter is based on the Eurofound report *Working time in the context of flexible working and teleworking: Regulatory updates in the 27 Member States (2021–2024)* (Eurofound, 2026e). For more information on the regulatory initiatives introduced in this chapter, this report should be consulted.

New developments in legislation on working time and the organisation of work

This section will focus on developments since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, exploring different dimensions of working time regulation related to facilitating flexible working or to protecting workers against the negative impacts of working time flexibility. It also includes other aspects of working time that are relevant to facilitating flexible working, for example the duration of working time and the recording of working hours.

New legislative initiatives

Since 2021, 20 countries have introduced legislative reforms concerning working time and the organisation of work, either by enacting new legal provisions or by updating existing ones. These changes were partly motivated by the need to adapt legal frameworks to post-pandemic realities marked by the growing digitalisation of work processes and increased flexibility in working hours; address persistent issues around work-life balance; and promote greater flexibility in how working time is structured. The pace and nature of these reforms vary, with some countries introducing dedicated provisions, others amending existing ones and a few upholding negotiated agreements. In many cases, social partners were actively involved, especially in countries with a tradition of social dialogue. As can be seen from Table 12, overall, there have been changes in the regulatory framework regarding working time in most Member States.

Table 12: New or updated regulations on working time and organisation of work

Member State	National regulation(s) (legislation and agreements)	Date of entry into force	Legislative approach	Scope	Social partners' involvement
Belgium	Labour Deal (Act of 3 October 2022 containing various labour provisions)	3 October 2022	Separate piece of legislation including amendments to the 1971 Labour Law	Public and private sector employees	Partial
Croatia	Amendment to Labour Act	1 January 2023	Amendment to previous legislation	All workers in the public and private sectors	Not specified
Cyprus	Law No 25(I)/2023, Article 10 (regarding transparent and predictable working conditions)	13 April 2023	Separate piece of legislation	All employees, with some exceptions	Not specified
Czechia	Act No 230/2024 Coll. amending the Labour Code	1 January 2025	Amendment to the Labour Code	All employees	Not specified
Denmark	Amendment to the Working Environment Act	1 July 2024	Update to existing legislation	All employees	Not specified
Estonia	Amendment to the Employment Contracts Act, Article 43(2) (regarding employees with independent decision-making capacity)	24 December 2022	Amendment to the Employment Contracts Act	Agreement between employer and employee on a case-by-case basis	Not specified
France	Law No 2022-1157 and amendment by Law No 2025-127	17 August 2022	Amendment to the Financial Law for 2022, extended to December 2026 by Law No 2025-127	Private sector employees	Not specified
Greece	Law 4808/2021, Article 55, paragraph 2 (regarding the establishment of working time limits), and Article 59, paragraph 2 (regarding agreement on teleworking time arrangements)	19 June 2021	Amendment to Article 41 of Law 1892/1990	Private sector employees	Not specified
Ireland	Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023	6 March 2024	Separate piece of legislation	All employees, especially women	Not specified
Italy	National Protocol on Agile Work, in accordance with Law 81/2017	7 December 2021	Framework agreement (not legislation)	Private sector employees, especially those from vulnerable groups (including employees with disabilities)	Yes
Latvia	Amendments to the Labour Law (27 May 2021, 16 June 2022 and 19 September 2024)	1 August 2021, 1 August 2022 and 22 October 2024	Amendments to the Labour Law	All workers, including remote workers	Not specified
Lithuania	Laws amending the Labour Code: Law No XIV-1189, Law No XIV-2704 and Law No XIV-3034	28 June 2022, 13 June 2024 and 24 October 2024	Amendments to the existing Labour Code	Public and private sector employees, parents and carers	Not specified
Luxembourg	Law of 15 August 2023 and Law of 28 June 2023	15 August 2023 and 28 June 2023	Separate legislation inserted into the Labour Code and amendment to existing laws	Employees with caregiving responsibilities and digital tool users	Not specified
Malta	Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers Regulations (Subsidiary Legislation 452.125)	2 August 2022	Separate legislation	All workers with employment contracts	Not specified
Poland	2023 Labour Code amendment	26 April 2023	Amendment to previous legislation	Employees with standard contracts	Not specified
Portugal	Law 13/2023, amending the Labour Code (in the framework of the decent work agenda)	1 May 2023	Amendment to Labour Code (Law No 7/2009)	Public and private sector companies	Not specified

Member State	National regulation(s) (legislation and agreements)	Date of entry into force	Legislative approach	Scope	Social partners' involvement
Romania	Law No 283/2022	19 October 2022	Amendment to Labour Code (Law No 53/2003)	All employees	Not specified
Slovakia	Act No 76/2021 Coll. Amendment to the Labour Code	1 March 2021	Amendment to existing Labour Code (Act No 311/2001)	All employees	Not specified
Slovenia	Employment Relationships Act and Employment Records Act	November 2023 and April 2023	Amendments to previous legislation	All employees	Not specified
Spain	V Agreement for Employment and Collective Bargaining	10 May 2023	Separate legislation (collective agreement)	Public and private sector employees across specific sectors	Yes

Source: Questionnaire for the comparative analytical report *Working time in the context of flexible working and teleworking: Regulatory updates in the 27 Member States (2021–2024)* (Network of Eurofound Correspondents) (Eurofound, 2026e).

Main topics introduced in legislation on working time

In this section, eight key regulatory dimensions are considered, namely the duration of working time, the organisation of working time (flexibility) (including in relation to climate change and the clean economy), access to compressed working weeks, the recording and monitoring of working time, the right to disconnect, the adjustment of workload and different ways of

considering work / working time. Although not all these dimensions relate to flexible working, they are directly or indirectly linked to increasing flexible working. Most of them relate to improving the quality of working time in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, and, therefore, work–life balance and workers' health.

The comparative analysis summarised in Table 13 shows that some themes have gained importance in recent regulatory reforms across Member States.

Table 13: Main topics introduced in legislation on working time since the COVID-19 pandemic, in relation to aspects of working time quality addressed and Member States addressing them, 2021–2024

Topic	Quality of working time		Member States
	Mainly detrimental effects	Mainly positive effects	
Duration of working time	Excessively long hours, insufficient rest	—	Greece (extension), Ireland (defence sector)
Organisation of working time (e.g. flexible working hours or start/finish times, or ad hoc reduced hours)	Irregular schedules, flexible schedules	Autonomy over and predictability of working time	Bulgaria, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Romania
Access to compressed working weeks (ad hoc reduction in working days during the week)	—		Belgium, Greece (in several countries only pilot initiatives have been implemented)
Recording and monitoring of working time	Risk of excessive monitoring of performance	Prevention of long hours and improved quality of working time	Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Slovenia
Organisation of working time related to climate change or the clean economy	—	—	—
Right to disconnect	Contact outside working hours, working in free time	—	Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus (only for teleworkers), Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia
Adjustment of workload	High workloads, working in free time	—	Estonia, Finland, France
Meaning of working time	—	—	—

Notes: The table links national legislation to the indicators of working time quality presented in Chapter 2. The indicators shown in the second and third columns correspond to the dimensions of working time quality and are therefore not exhaustive. As a result, related aspects that fall outside this framework (e.g. broader measures of well-being or health) are not included.

Source: Questionnaire for the comparative analytical report *Working time in the context of flexible working and teleworking: Regulatory updates in the 27 Member States (2021–2024)* (Network of Eurofound Correspondents).

These include the organisation of working time (flexibility), the right to disconnect and the recording and monitoring of working time. Therefore, national-level regulation in some countries seems to have developed considering recent developments in working time and, in particular, flexible working. The right to disconnect was introduced in response to an increasing number of workers working outside normal working hours, facilitated by digital tools and flexible working, while recording and monitoring is covered because it becomes challenging when work schedules are non-standard or irregular.

Other topics, such as the duration of working time and the adjustment of workload, have only been addressed in legislation in a few countries despite growing public debates. However, the former may be subject to a slower but continuous and longer-term regulatory trend towards the reduction of working time. In fact (see Chapter 1), over the last 10 years, working hours have reduced by an average of one hour per week at the EU level. Considering the findings in Chapters 2 and 3, workload adjustment is a challenge in the current world of work.

There were two dimensions for which no legislation was identified: the organisation of working time in relation to climate change and the clean economy, and the meaning of working time. The latter, although not addressed in legislation, is part of debates in a small number of countries (e.g. in Denmark).

Duration of working time and compressed working weeks: mainly pilot initiatives

As mentioned previously in this report, maximum weekly working time is regulated by the Working Time Directive, which states that the average working time over a seven-day period, including overtime, cannot exceed 48 hours. However, the limit may be exceeded if a worker gives their explicit consent.

In 2021, three groups of European countries could be distinguished in terms of the maximum duration of the working week, regulated through statutory legislation, namely:

- countries that set their maximum weekly hours at the 48 hours specified by the Working Time Directive (Denmark, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy and the Netherlands), although in some of these countries sectoral and company-level collective agreements set the maximum weekly working time well below 48 hours;
- countries that impose a limit of 40 hours (Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain);

- countries that set a maximum weekly working time lower than 40 hours (38 hours in Belgium and 35 hours in France) (according to Eurofound's database of wages, working time and collective disputes, last updated in 2023).

Since the pandemic, the regulation of maximum weekly working time has been discussed in a few countries. However, the reduction of working days with or without the reduction of working hours has been more frequent than the mere reduction of weekly working hours.

Before the pandemic, only the Nordic Member States and France had any experience of or initiatives on the compression (reduction of working days) or reduction of working time. According to data gathered from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents between 2021 and 2024, the pandemic gave rise to new debates regarding the reduction of weekly working days (compressed working weeks, including the idea of a four-day working week) or the reduction of working time.

Most initiatives have so far been limited to pilot programmes establishing a four-day week, with or without a reduction in working hours, or programmes reducing weekly working hours (e.g. in Denmark, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and Sweden), and to collective bargaining (Austria). Pilot initiatives are generally characterised by supporting and/or allowing companies to voluntarily shorten working schedules, including by reducing the number of working days in a week (to create a four-day working week). However, in Belgium and Greece access to a four-day working week was adopted through legislation. In these countries, the measure can be seen as a flexible arrangement because it is implemented on an ad hoc basis at the request of workers.

Some initiatives aimed at reducing weekly working time through legislation have been developed in Lithuania, Luxembourg, Spain and Sweden. However, none of these Member States had approved the legislative framework before 2026. For example, the Spanish government initiative to reduce weekly working hours from 40 to 37.5 had not been approved by parliament at the end of 2025. In the opposite direction, Greece has adopted legislation facilitating a working week of up to 48 hours. Also in Greece, new rules have been implemented to increase employers' capacity to extend working time by implementing a six-day working week.

The reduction of working hours and days has been studied by Eurofound in the context of the service-level agreement between Eurofound and the European Commission on the reduction of working time in the EU, implemented from January 2025 to December 2027. In general, these measures tend to have positive effects on workers' health and work-life balance.

Existing legislation already limits maximum working hours; however, there is still a share of employees (around 8 %) working 48 hours or more per week, and a similar proportion work from 41 to 48 hours. These workers are more at risk of reporting having a poor work–life balance. From this perspective, the abovementioned pilot initiatives may have positive effects, but so far they seem to be limited geographically (to a few countries) and in scope (to pilot actions implemented in companies). However, no actual national-level statutory requirements for the reduction of working time have been implemented since the COVID-19 outbreak. In any case, since most countries have limited the maximum weekly working hours to around 40 hours in their legislation, work–life balance would only improve if other measures were taken. For example, more effective implementation of regulations would involve recording working time. Finally, as we have seen in the previous chapters, other factors related to the quality of working time include workload, and some conditions typical of flexible arrangements that contribute to working long hours (e.g. use of digital tools, flexible schedules or working in free time).

Organisation of working time: providing flexibility to improve workers' work–life balance

Flexible working time enables the employer and/or employee to modify their regular work pattern (Eurofound, 2013). As previously mentioned, although both perspectives are interlinked, this report focuses on employee-friendly flexible working and its challenges. As discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 above, autonomy over working time can be a powerful tool for improving workers' work–life balance, although flexible schedules may pose risks to the quality of working time.

At the EU level, the main regulation addressing flexible working arrangements is the Work–Life Balance Directive. This directive gives all working parents of children up to eight years old and all carers the right to request flexible working arrangements (in Article 9). These can include remote working arrangements, but also flexible working schedules and a reduction in working hours.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, various forms of flexitime were in place across the Member States. In several countries, flexitime arrangements had already been adopted and implemented prior to the pandemic (e.g. in Austria, Denmark, Finland, the Netherlands and Sweden) (Eurofound, 2024a).

The pandemic led to a surge in flexible working practices, with many workers wanting to focus on their work–life balance – that is, having more time for their personal life. The data gathered through the Network of

Eurofound Correspondents show that 15 countries addressed various aspects of working time flexibility through reforming statutory legislation between 2021 and 2024.

Several countries have approved legal amendments on the right to request flexible working arrangements, in most cases following the incorporation of the Work–Life Balance Directive in national legislation. This aspect is mentioned in the country reports of Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Romania. In these countries, flexible working arrangements generally include part-time hours (reduction of working hours), flexitime or adjusted working schedules (as in Croatia, Ireland, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Romania) and telework (e.g. in Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Luxembourg and Poland). This right to request flexible working arrangements is mainly applicable to workers with caring responsibilities or work–life balance needs and, in some cases, pregnant workers (e.g. in Latvia). In Belgium, Hungary, Ireland, Portugal and Romania, the right to request flexible working arrangements (telework) is applicable to all employees (although in Belgium only occasional telework can be requested).

At least three countries have set up new provisions providing workers with more autonomy in the organisation of working time (Czechia, Estonia and Romania). These are related to flexitime, shift choice and more independent decision-making in certain occupations.

In Finland, a notable legal amendment, in force since January 2025, has expanded the scope for local-level bargaining to introduce derogations or agree on more flexible arrangements with regard to working hours. The reform allows companies to implement derogations, regardless of their membership of employer associations.

Finally, in Czechia, Lithuania and Portugal, legal reforms have been aimed at improving workers' rights in the context of overtime or at better protecting workers with caring responsibilities in this context.

Recording of working time

Workers in flexible arrangements are more at risk of working long hours or working in their free time than those only working at their employer's premises. In this context, on the one hand, regulating the recording of working time can contribute to reducing overtime and preventing the submission of requests to work outside working time by improving the enforcement of working time legislation (Eurofound et al., 2024). On the other hand, it is more difficult to effectively record working time when schedules are irregular and workplace conditions vary (e.g. in the context of hybrid working).

At the EU level, the Working Time Directive does not explicitly contain provisions on the recording of working time. However, in the CJEU's case-law interpreting the directive, the court ruled that companies should record the daily working time of employees. While the Working Time Directive does not establish the specific nature of the arrangements to be adopted by each Member State, it requires Member States to take the necessary measures to ensure that every worker is entitled to the limitations on time guaranteed by the directive (Eurofound et al., 2024).

Before the pandemic, several countries had already included an obligation to record all working time in their regulations, even before the CJEU judgment was passed: Austria, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia (Ius Laboris, 2023). The information gathered by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents shows that, since 2021, 11 countries have approved or updated regulations on working time recording: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Portugal and Slovenia. In 9 out of these 11 countries, new legislation has set up procedures for recording working time for all types of employees and arrangements. In contrast, in Cyprus legislation is only applicable to teleworkers, while in Hungary there are some exceptions for flexible working arrangements.

Moreover, in Germany a national report reveals that the federal government is examining whether the ruling of the CJEU is to be applied in Germany and if any changes need to be made to German laws. In contrast, in countries like Estonia, Lithuania, Romania and Sweden, national contributions suggest that the government and social partners do not agree on the need to establish additional rules to enforce existing regulations.

The right to disconnect

As discussed in Chapter 2, although not exclusively, those with flexible working arrangements, and in particular workers teleworking and using ICT, are more at risk of being contacted outside working hours. Before the pandemic, some countries, starting with France in 2017, became aware of the risks that extended availability facilitated by the use of ICT poses to the work-life balance and health of workers.

At the national level, the right to disconnect exists in 13 Member States: Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain.

Belgium, France, Italy and Spain were the first countries to have national legislation on the right to disconnect, introducing this right before the COVID-19 pandemic. The other nine countries, namely Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Luxembourg, Portugal, Slovakia and Slovenia, introduced new legislation, amendments

to existing national laws or national guidance (Ireland) to establish this right after the COVID-19 outbreak. In addition, new legislation regarding the right to disconnect was introduced in Belgium in 2022.

The scope of the right to disconnect varies significantly from country to country. In eight Member States, the right to disconnect applies to all employees (at least in the private sector), while in Luxembourg it applies specifically to workers using digital tools for work purposes, and in four it applies only to teleworkers (Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Slovakia). In France, the right to disconnect applies to all employees in the private sector and only to teleworkers in the public sector. Legislation is usually applicable to employees in both the private and public sectors, except in Cyprus and Luxembourg, where the right to disconnect currently applies only to the private sector.

In terms of the legal definition, in most Member States the right to disconnect is expressly framed as a right of employees. However, in seven of them, legislation does not clearly define the right to disconnect (Belgium, Cyprus, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Spain). Furthermore, in four Member States, the right to disconnect is expressed either as the absence of an obligation on employees to respond to professional communication (in Bulgaria and Croatia) or as a duty on employers to refrain from contacting employees during rest periods or to ensure that employees are not at their employer's disposal during such periods (in Portugal and Slovenia, respectively). Moreover, in Greece and Ireland, the right to disconnect is expressed as a right to both disengage from work and to not engage in work-related electronic communication.

The approach to implementing the right to disconnect, as set up in legislation, differs between Member States. In four Member States (Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Spain), legislation confers on social partners and social dialogue, at both the sectoral and the company level, a significant role in defining and implementing the right to disconnect. In the remaining nine Member States where the right exists, the law does not establish specific procedures for implementing the right to disconnect (e.g. Croatia, Greece, Portugal and Slovakia) or leaves its implementation to company policies (Ireland) or individual agreements (Italy).

Adjustment of workload

Work intensity refers to the level of demand placed on workers, including workload in terms of quantitative demands and time pressure. High workloads are associated with an increased likelihood of work being carried out outside normal working hours, reduced rest periods and difficulties in detaching from work. These dynamics may, in turn, have implications for work-life balance and workers' health (Eurofound, 2017b). However, despite the relevance of workload, only a limited number of countries have introduced specific

provisions addressing it or related aspects in national-level regulation.

Legal reforms in Estonia and Finland set out solutions for adjusting workloads. As in the case of the right to disconnect, France seems to be the pioneering country, in terms of starting debates and adopting regulations. However, even in that Member State, the provisions seem to be limited to certain occupations or ways of working.

In France, the *forfait jours* system, whereby employees are paid based on days worked in a year, provides more flexibility for managers and for other groups of employees who are trusted by their employer to self-organise their working time or whose jobs do not require them to follow collectively agreed schedules. The Labour Code includes provisions aimed at ensuring that employees' workload is reasonable and properly distributed through collective agreement. Although some voices consider the system to conflict with EU law and the case-law of the CJEU, the provisions have been received favourably by employees, in particular managers, who thereby avoid having to clock in and out. Although some trade unions have challenged the system before the European Committee of Social Rights and the International Labour Organization, it is nevertheless well established in the French labour market and well accepted by employees, even though the Court of Cassation regularly settles related disputes.

Different ways of considering work / working time

As shown in Chapters 1 and 2, working time has become less standard, and more punctuated, fragmented and porous, which makes it difficult to clearly differentiate between working time and rest time, for example. Even though in some countries these trends have been identified by academics, governments and/or social partners (at least in Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Sweden), the regulation of working time still reflects the typical standard working time of the industrialised world and does not take into account these aspects that characterise working time trends in a digitalised and service-oriented world of work.

In this context, it is worth pointing out that no regulatory reform modifying the definition of working time has been identified. Moreover, most national contributions highlight that there are no major discussions around the meaning of working time as a core element in the regulation of the employment relationship and as a main indicator of employees' performance, and that the main innovations are limited to specific contexts (sectors, job profiles and company-level initiatives).

Debates about the consideration of outputs as performance indicators have been identified in only a few countries (e.g. Denmark).

However, the initiatives and legislation introduced in this chapter on flexible working arrangements and the right to disconnect are examples that indirectly recognise that the nature of working time is changing, with working time becoming more and more fragmented. It can be questioned whether these initiatives are sufficient or if the regulation of working time needs major reformation, considering its increasingly fragmented and porous nature.

New developments in legislation related to the digitalisation of work, with a focus on telework

As shown by previous Eurofound research, there were many developments in telework regulation across the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic (Eurofound, 2022b). This section will focus on new developments, exploring legal changes from 2021 to 2024. In addition, it analyses recent legal changes regarding digitalisation that are related to working time.

New legislative initiatives

Since 2021, 16 countries have revised or introduced national regulations to address the challenges and opportunities associated with telework and digitalisation (Table 14). These changes aim to clarify employers' and employees' obligations, modernise outdated legal provisions and ensure decent working conditions in the context of widespread telework. The legislative approaches adopted vary across countries: some have enacted stand-alone laws on telework (e.g. Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Lithuania and Spain), while most countries introduced amendments to their labour codes or existing regulatory frameworks (e.g. Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Greece, Portugal and Romania) and two opted to implement non-legislative agreements (Luxembourg and Norway).

Main topics introduced in legislation on telework and digitalisation

In this section, four key regulatory dimensions are considered, namely platform work, algorithmic management and AI in relation to aspects of working time; telework regime (in particular, the right to request telework); employment conditions of telework (cost compensation and geographical mobility); and the organisation of work and working time.

Table 14: Changes in national regulations on telework and digitalisation

Country	Legislative provision	Date of entry into force	Legislative approach	Scope	Social partners' involvement
Austria	Telework Act	1 January 2025	Separate piece of legislation, replacing former 'home office' rules	Private sector employees	Not specified
Bulgaria	Amendment to the Labour Code	29 March 2024	Amendment to the Labour Code	All employees	No
Croatia	Amendment to the Labour Act	1 January 2023	Amendment to previous legislation	Public servants in the state (government) sector	No
Cyprus	Law No 120(1) 2023 providing for a framework for the organization of telework	1 December 2023	Separate piece of legislation	Employees in the private and semi-governmental sectors	No
Czechia	Act No 281/2023 Coll. amending the Labour Code and other laws	1 October 2023	Amendment to the Labour Code, Law No 281/2022 and Law No 262/2006	All employees	No
Denmark	Working Environment Act	1 April 2022	Update to existing legislation	All employees	No
Estonia	Update to the Occupational Health and Safety Act, Article 12	19 November 2022	Update to existing legislation	All employers and employees	No
Greece	Law 4808/2021, Article 67 (regarding telework), amending Law 3846/2010, Article 5	19 June 2021	Amendment to previous legislation	Private sector employees	Yes
Ireland	Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023	6 March 2026	Separate piece of legislation	All employees, especially women	No
Lithuania	Law No XIV-1189 of 28 June 2024, amending the Labour Code	1 August 2022	Separate piece of legislation	All employees, in particular those with family responsibilities	No
Luxembourg	Convention of 20 October 2020 on teleworking	2 February 2021	Social partner agreement (non-legislative)	Employees covered by the Labour Code, with some exceptions	Yes
Norway	Amendment to the Regulation on Work Performed in the Employee's Home	1 July 2022	Amendment to an existing regulation	All home-based workers	No
Poland	Amendment to the Labour Code	26 April 2023	Amendment to the Labour Code	Employees with standard contracts	No
Portugal	Law 83/2021 amending the telework regime	1 January 2022	Amendment to the Labour Code	Private and public sector employees	Yes
Romania	Law No 241/2023, Article 1181	24 July 2023	New article in the Labour Code	Employees with children under 11	No
Spain	Law 10/2021 on remote work	9 July 2021	Separate piece of legislation based on Royal Decree-Law 28/2020	Private sector employees	No

Source: Questionnaire for the comparative analytical report *Working time in the context of flexible working and teleworking: Regulatory updates in the 27 Member States (2021–2024)* (Network of Eurofound Correspondents).

As shown in Table 15, in relation to telework, the telework regime (right to request telework) has been the dimension most addressed in recent legal reforms (11 countries), followed by changes in certain employment conditions, such as cost compensation and, to a lesser extent, geographical mobility (7 countries) and the organisation of work and working time (1 country).

Regarding the digitalisation of work, the report identifies four countries that have developed new regulations related to platform work, algorithmic management and AI in the workplace.

In the following sections, we provide further details of the policy reforms developed with regard to each dimension.

Table 15: Main topics introduced in recent legislation on digitalisation and telework, 2001–2024

Topic	Member State(s)
Platform work, algorithmic management and AI in relation to aspects of working time	Croatia, Greece, Malta, Portugal, Spain
(Right to request) telework	Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain
Employment conditions for telework	Austria, Croatia, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Portugal
Organisation of work and working time	Spain

Source: Questionnaire for the comparative analytical report *Working time in the context of flexible working and teleworking: Regulatory updates in the 27 Member States (2021–2024)* (Network of Eurofound Correspondents).

Platform work, algorithmic management and AI in relation to aspects of working time

Algorithmic management refers to the use of algorithmic systems to track data and other information to organise, assign, monitor, supervise and evaluate work (Rani et al., 2024). These systems may rely on digital technologies or on AI-based technologies or models that make automated or semi-automated decisions or provide information for decision-makers on issues related to worker management (EU-OSHA, 2024). Algorithmic management or AI-based worker management is a key feature of digital labour platforms. However, it is increasingly used in different activities, such as traditional manufacturing (EU-OSHA, 2024).

Previous research has identified several risks associated with algorithmic management systems, such as the intensification of surveillance, which in turn leads to high stress levels or an increase in work intensity and the speed of work, resulting in unpredictable working schedules (EU-OSHA, 2024). In addition, several risks are specifically related to working time. For instance, some studies have acknowledged the extension of unpaid working time on digital platforms, where workers work on demand and are paid on a piece-rate basis (Pulignano et al., 2021). Others have pointed to the radical individualisation of working time practices, which makes it difficult to enforce regulations on working time (Piasna, 2023).

Based on this evidence, it is crucial to analyse how European countries regulate the organisation of the working time of platform workers. At the EU level, the key regulation governing the use of personal data, which is also relevant to addressing challenges raised by algorithmic management systems, is the General Data Protection Regulation (Regulation (EU) 2016/679). This regulation prohibits the basing of decisions solely on automated processing and establishes a series of other rights that have implications in the context of algorithmic management systems. Moreover, in March 2024, EU employment and social affairs ministers approved a provisional agreement made between the European Council and the European Parliament on the proposal for a directive on improving working conditions for platform workers. The approved text

includes a chapter on algorithmic management that introduces a set of rights applicable to all people providing work through platforms.

According to a recent Eurofound report (Eurofound, 2024b), the vast majority of European countries still do not have a national regulation in place regarding algorithmic management and platform work. The information gathered from contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents confirms this. According to the contributions, legal reforms have set up a right to algorithmic transparency for platform workers in only two countries (Malta and Spain). In the case of Spain, Article 64.4d of the Workers' Statute establishes the right of workers' legal representatives (e.g. works councils, staff delegates) to be informed by the company of the parameters, rules and instructions on which the algorithms or AI systems that affect decision-making regarding working conditions, access to employment and maintenance of employment (including profiling) are based. This article applies to all workers in all sectors.

Moreover, three countries have begun to address the implications of algorithmic scheduling and control over working hours or related themes: Croatia, Greece and Portugal. Greece and Portugal have introduced initial legal references to the use of AI tools in relation to time management and employer oversight, signalling the early stage of legislative engagement with algorithmic working environments. In Croatia, national contributions refer to a 2022 amendment to the Labour Act concerning platform workers working irregular schedules at their employers' request. A new article (Article 221) provides that employment contracts are required to specify details of flexible working hours, the time frame for employer requests, a guaranteed minimum amount of paid work and the employee's right to decline tasks without facing penalties if requests are received outside a specified time frame.

As was explained in Chapter 2 (in the section 'Drivers and challenges'), the digitalisation of work, and not the mere use of ICT, is associated with changes in working time patterns that make work more fragmented, with flexible working in terms of place and time, and sometimes more unpredictable. However, beyond

teleworking, the digitalisation of work enables greater mobility and flexibility (López Ahumada, 2023). Even though platform work, for example, still represents a small fraction of work, its prevalence is rapidly growing. As seen in Table 15, a small number of countries address implications of platform work, algorithm management and AI in their national regulations.

Right to access telework and objective eligibility criteria

As discussed in Chapter 2, teleworking and autonomy in relation to place of work offer opportunities to improve the work–life balance of employees. However, access to teleworking varies between workers.

Recent survey data from Eurofound (2026e) highlight a widening gap between the number of employees who are able to telework and the number who wish to do so.

Prior to the pandemic, most EU legal systems followed the ‘voluntary principle’ set out in the EU’s framework agreement on telework. Thus, an employee’s access to telework was based on an agreement between the employee and the employer, usually following a request from the employee. Moreover, most EU legal frameworks required that the telework regime be set out in the employee’s contract of employment or in an individual written agreement (Eurofound, 2022b).

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, the rights of workers to request and gain access to teleworking arrangements have been the subject of debates at the policy level, and among social partners and scholars (Cooper et al., 2015; Chung, 2022; Sanz de Miguel et al., 2025). Moreover, as mentioned previously, at the EU level, Article 9 of the Work–Life Balance Directive states: ‘Member States shall take the necessary measures to ensure that workers with children up to a specified age, which shall be at least eight years, and carers, have the right to request flexible working arrangements for caring purposes.’

Previous Eurofound research found that, in the pandemic context, legislation in only three countries (France, Lithuania and Portugal, with the last modifying regulations in 2021) provided that an employer’s decision following a telework request had to be justified or motivated, particularly when it affected workers with care needs (Eurofound, 2022b). The information gathered from the contributions of the Network of Eurofound Correspondents shows a dramatic increase in the number of countries that currently regulate the right to request telework. Since 2021, the following 11 Member States have enforced new regulations on the right to request telework: Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal, Romania and Spain. In some countries, this was done in the process of incorporating the Work–Life Balance Directive in national legislation.

In Ireland, Portugal and Romania, legal reforms provide all workers with the right to request telework and to receive justification from their employer if their request is not granted.

In Cyprus, Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Lithuania and Spain, legal reforms have set out or reinforced (e.g. Spain) a right to request telework for certain categories of workers (pregnant employees, workers with caring responsibilities or work–life balance needs and/or workers with disabilities). In the case of Italy, legal reform has strengthened the right to flexible working arrangements for certain categories of workers. Moreover, in two countries new legislation has provided a right to telework for certain categories of workers (Romania, for those caring for children under 11, and Portugal, for victims of domestic violence with caring responsibilities).

Employment conditions for telework

Several countries have introduced specific provisions regulating at least three aspects of employment conditions of teleworkers: the provision of equipment and compensation for the cost of it; the geographical location of teleworking; and cross-border telework. Even though these elements are not directly linked to working time or autonomy in teleworking, they can facilitate access to telework, and therefore flexibility in terms of place of work.

One aspect that has been increasingly addressed in legislation is the provision of equipment and of compensation for costs incurred by teleworkers. When Eurofound mapped this dimension in 2021, it identified that six countries had approved relevant legal reforms during the pandemic: Austria, Latvia, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. The information gathered from the contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents shows that, between 2021 and 2024, Croatia, France, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Portugal also included new legal clauses or updated legislation (Portugal) on cost compensation. Currently, in 19 countries employers are legally obligated to cover teleworking expenses, such as those for equipment and telecommunications (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain). The approach to establishing compensation levels differs widely across countries. In some countries (Austria, Czechia, Greece, Hungary, Luxembourg, Poland and Portugal), legal provisions typically involve lump sum contributions, or the reimbursement of proven costs or fixed hourly rates. In other countries, compensation details must be agreed upon between employers and employees and included in telework agreements (Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Greece, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain). In five

countries (Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania and Malta), there are no clear rules on compensation methods.

One country (Austria) reports, with regard to employment conditions, adopting new legal provisions that acknowledge a broad range of teleworking locations, from secondary residences to co-working spaces, thus reflecting new spatial dynamics of remote work. Another aspect of legislation is the regulation of remote work from countries other than the one in which the employer's premises is located (i.e. cross-border telework). At the EU level, in July 2023, a new regulatory framework was provided by the framework agreement on cross-border telework. The agreement has been signed by 22 countries ⁽¹¹⁾.

These developments reflect the increasing regulation of telework, facilitating access to this working arrangement. Regulation seems to vary across the EU.

Organisation of work and working time in teleworking arrangements

As covered in Chapter 2, working time patterns are different among workers who telework at different frequencies. The relationship between telework and working time has been extensively explored in this report. Telework has the potential to improve work-life balance by facilitating family life, helping workers cope with the demands of their personal lives, increasing the time workers have available for leisure activities and increasing workers' autonomy over the organisation of working time to suit their preferences and needs (Eurofound et al., 2017). However, telework has often been associated with informal overtime (employees working from home in addition to their normal schedule at their employer's premises) due to difficulties in coping with work overload in the context of flexibility as regards time and place of work.

At the EU level, there is no specific regulation on working time organisation and telework beyond the EU's framework agreement on telework, which sets out in Article 9 that the teleworker must manage the organisation of their working time.

At the national level, previous research has found that general legislation on working time also applies to teleworkers (Eurofound et al., 2024). Moreover, a previous study by Eurofound on telework regulation found that in eight countries legislation establishes that teleworkers can organise their working time themselves to some extent (Czechia, Hungary, Italy (only for agile/smart work), Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia (modified in 2021) and Spain (modified in 2020)), within the limits set by legal provisions and

remote working agreements, including mandatory periods of availability and rules on working time and rest. Moreover, legislation in two countries assigns autonomy to teleworkers to organise their breaks and rest periods during working time (Bulgaria and France).

According to the contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, only one country reports changes in relation to telework and working time patterns since 2021. In Spain, Law 10/2021 establishes clear guidelines regarding working time patterns, breaks and rest periods for remote workers. The provisions included in Articles 13 (on flexible working hours) and 14 (on working time recording) ensure that teleworkers maintain a good work-life balance and are protected from overwork, while adhering to the same standards as on-site employees. Article 13 stresses that teleworkers have the right to organise their working time flexibly, as agreed in their remote working contract, provided that they respect regulations on total working hours and rest periods (to combat overworking). The article also stresses that flexible working must align with labour laws, including daily and weekly rest requirements, while fostering work-life balance.

Therefore, it seems that, since the rather intensive modification of national-level regulatory frameworks including specific elements of working time in teleworking arrangements during the pandemic, there has been almost no modification. This suggests that, as with the right to disconnect, there is a division between countries that rely solely on general legislation on working time regardless of place of work or flexibility, and countries that find it necessary to introduce some provisions on the organisation of working time for teleworking arrangements.

Recent developments in sectoral collective bargaining

This section presents a collection of examples of recent regulatory initiatives implemented at the sectoral level through collective agreements on flexible working time and teleworking, with the aim of illustrating the content of relevant provisions and providing a general overview of sectors regulating flexible working and the content of sectoral agreements in the EU. The information included in this section is based on contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents. This information only includes examples of agreements published from 2021 until the first quarter of 2025.

⁽¹¹⁾ Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland (Federal Public Service – Social Security, n.d.).

Overview of collective agreements regulating flexible working in Member States and sectors

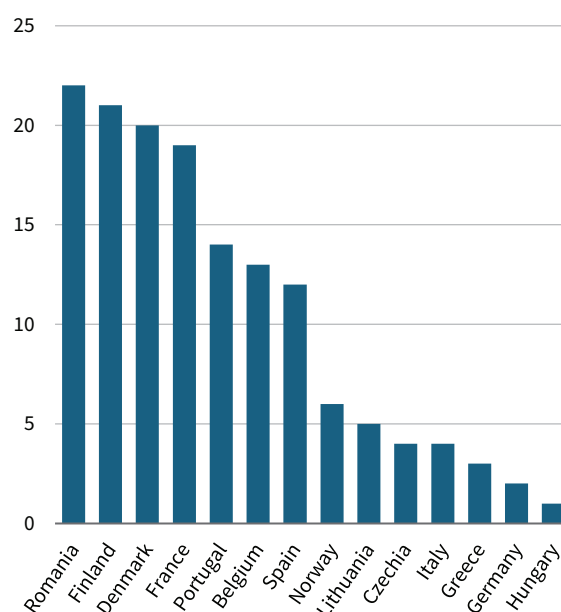
A sample of 161 sectoral collective agreements with provisions on flexible working hours, from 26 Member States, was selected based on information provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents. The agreements selected are found mainly in countries where collective bargaining is traditionally strong or where sectoral bargaining predominates.

Figure 36 shows the number of sectoral collective agreements with flexible work provisions in each country. It mainly includes information on countries where sectoral collective bargaining plays a prominent role. However, some countries where sectoral bargaining is scarce – Czechia (public sector), Ireland (public sector), Lithuania (arts, sports, recreation and education sector), Romania (financial and insurance activities sector) and Slovenia (real estate sector) – are represented in the sample, with at least a few sectoral agreements covering telework.

Sectors in which provisions related to flexible working are prevalent

Based on the sample presented in Figure 37, collective agreements with provisions related to flexible working are mainly found in five sectors: energy (D), health and social work (R), finance (L), transport (H) and manufacturing (C). However, most of the agreements in these sectors regulate only a small number of aspects of

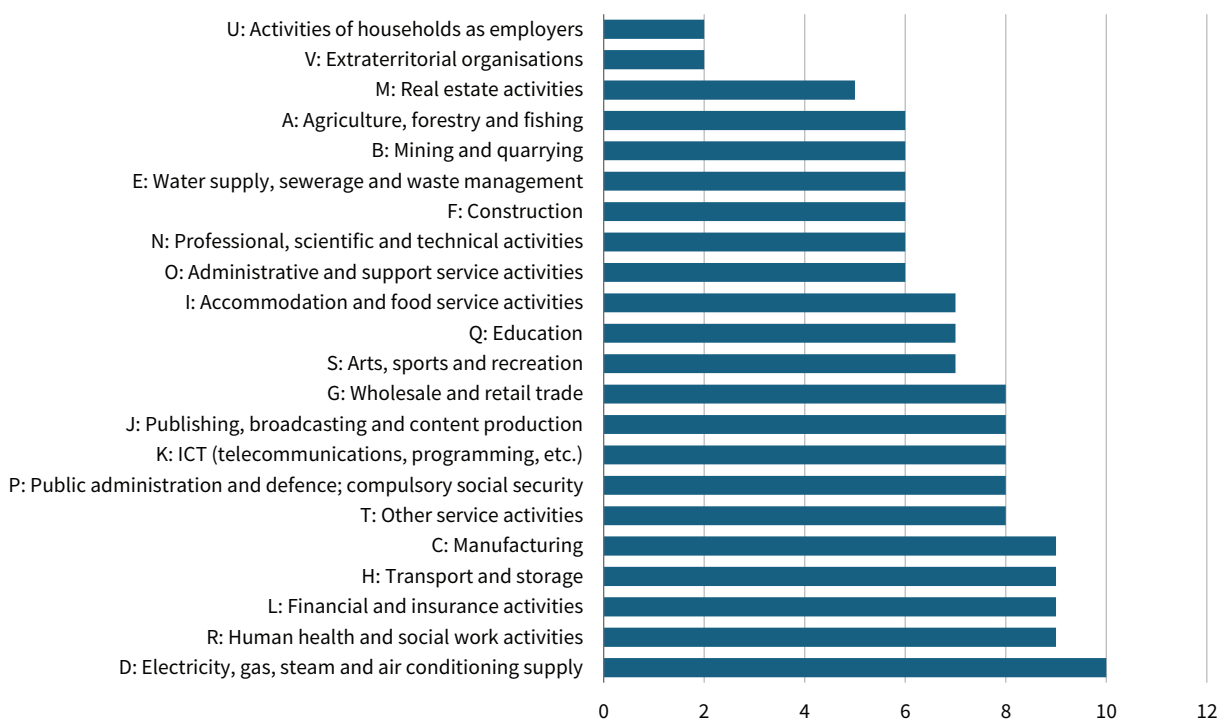
Figure 36: Number of sectors covered by sectoral agreements with provisions regarding working time in selected countries



Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

flexible working. Out of 36 agreements, 16 contain only one provision – usually on access to telework or working time flexibility. Another 12 include two provisions, often including provisions on breaks or rests.

Figure 37: Number of selected Member States with collective agreements on flexible working, by sector



Note: Some data are not available for Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden.
Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Only a few agreements regulate more than two aspects, with the manufacturing sector showing the broadest scope. In France and Portugal, some sectors (e.g. finance and transport) also cover work–life balance and the right to disconnect.

Content of provisions related to flexible working

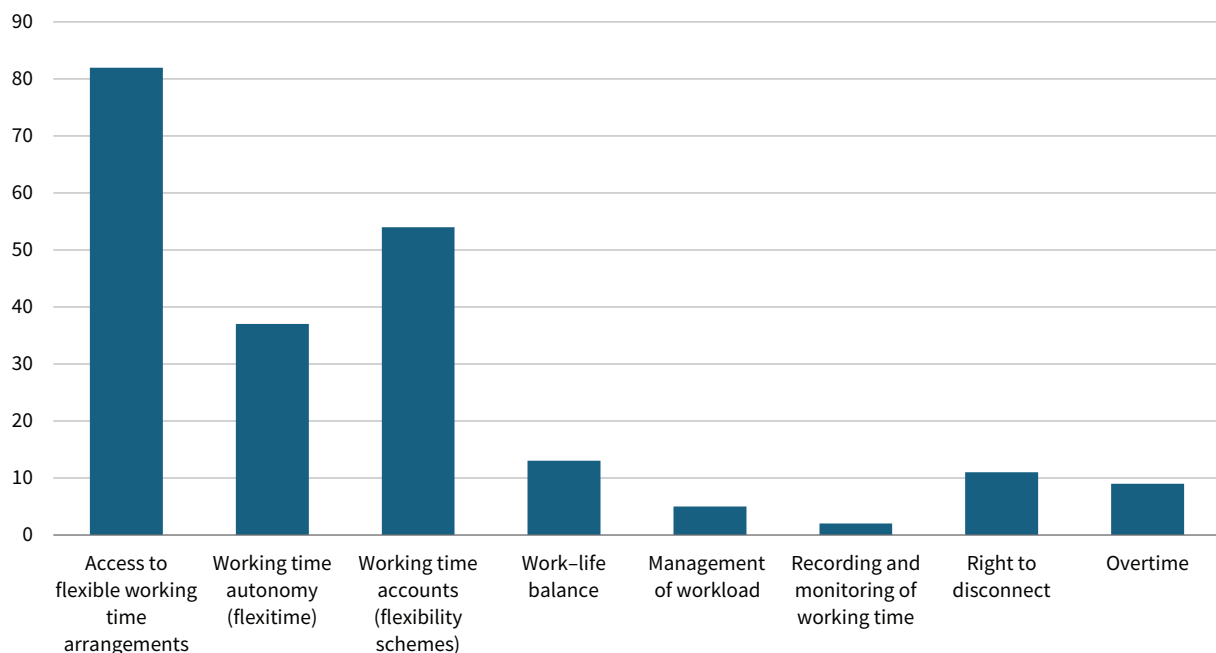
This section provides an overview of the content of the sectoral agreements dealing with flexible working. Selected examples illustrate how sectors in specific countries are addressing various aspects of employment and working conditions in flexible working arrangements, focusing on:

- access to flexible working arrangements;
- the organisation of working time and the right to disconnect (breaks and rest, flexibility, work–life balance, management of workload, recording of working time);
- other aspects (compensatory mechanisms).

Access to flexible working arrangements

Access to flexible work is the most regulated aspect of flexible arrangements across agreements (Figure 38), but in most cases the provisions only set out general principles or procedures. Most delegate the issue to company-level or individual agreements through local negotiation (e.g. in Germany (public administration sector), Denmark (industry sector) and Spain (catering sector)) or individual requests (e.g. in Romania (healthcare sector), Portugal (journalism sector) and the Netherlands (social work sector)). Only sectoral agreements for the metal industry in France and the journalism sector in Portugal (Box 10) have specific clauses applicable to all employees.

Figure 38: Number of collective agreements regulating flexible working, by type of provision



Note: Some data are not available for Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden.
Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Box 10: Portugal – collective agreement for the journalism sector

Employers must not refuse teleworking requests submitted in writing by the following groups: student workers, pregnant workers, workers with certified poor health, workers with children under six years old or children with disabilities or chronic illnesses (if the other parent does not have the same right to request telework), workers caring for dependent older family members and workers with disabilities or chronic illnesses. Any refusal must be justified in writing.

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Working time organisation and the right to disconnect

With regard to working time patterns, most agreements focus more on flexibility in working hours and scheduling than on the regulation of breaks and rest periods. Some examples are presented in this section to illustrate different perspectives on the regulation of working time organisation.

The Norwegian sectoral agreement for state employees is the only sectoral agreement with a full ‘flexitime band’ system, by which employees can choose their daily schedules. It defines core working hours during which presence is mandatory (09:00–14:30) and flexible working hours (06:00–09:00 and 14:30–21:00). By individual agreement, flexitime may also be used on Saturdays, with up to five hours worked between 07:00 and 18:00.

Other ways of regulating working time have been identified. The Finnish sectoral agreement for government employees relies on a goal-oriented model based on individual responsibility, and the Portuguese sectoral agreement for journalists allows employees to use flexible daily schedules to adapt their workday to their ‘personal or professional needs’. Some agreements introduce systems for averaging working time. France’s national agreement for the metallurgy sector introduces both a multi-week working time arrangement and annual hour/day packages (*forfait annuel*), which allow companies to average hours over up to 12 months. The implementation of these schemes sometimes requires company-level negotiation.

Some agreements require a further company-level agreement before the flexible arrangements they provide for can be implemented in practice. This is the case for Denmark’s industrial collective agreement, which allows for variable weekly working hours and compressed workweeks (e.g. four-day weeks with extended daily hours), and Spain’s collective agreement for the catering sector.

Provisions on breaks and rest periods are rarely included in sectoral agreements on flexible working and usually refer to national legislation or require prior consultation with worker representatives (e.g. in Spain (catering sector), Romania (healthcare sector) and the Netherlands (social employment sector)). Similarly, the right to disconnect is almost never explicitly recognised, and no agreements include specific provisions for its enforcement. References to work–life balance are also virtually absent, with only one isolated mention identified in Romania’s agreement for the healthcare sector.

Others

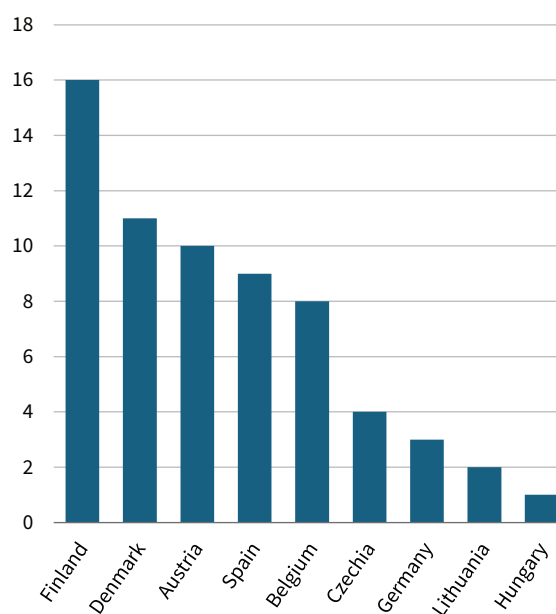
Although rare, some compensatory mechanisms for exceeding standard working time have been identified. For instance, the Portuguese agreement for journalists permits the implementation of local agreements on paid exemptions from working time limits, and the Swedish public sector agreement establishes reductions in standard weekly working hours based on employees’ exposure to night shifts.

Overview of collective agreements regulating telework in Member States and sectors

A sample of 98 sectoral collective agreements with provisions on telework from 26 Member States was selected based on information provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents. The agreements are found mainly in countries where collective bargaining is traditionally strong or where sectoral bargaining is predominant.

Figure 39 shows the number of sectors covered by agreements with telework-related provisions in each country. It does not include countries that generally exhibit a weak role for sectoral collective bargaining, although some – Czechia (public sector), Ireland (public sector), Lithuania (arts, sports, recreation and education sector), Romania (financial and insurance activities sector) and Slovenia (real estate sector) – are represented in the sample, with at least a few sectors covering telework.

Figure 39: Number of sectors covered by sectoral agreements with telework-related provisions in selected Member States



Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Sectors in which telework-related provisions are prevalent

Based on the sample in Figure 39, collective agreements containing provisions on telework are mainly found in the financial and insurance activities and manufacturing sectors (Figure 40). Agreements referring to telework in these sectors exist in 8 and 10 Member States, respectively.

In the manufacturing sector, telework appears to be most extensively regulated in Finland, Germany and Portugal, with provisions covering working time patterns, recording and monitoring of working time, the right to disconnect and access to telework (except in Germany).

A similar pattern is observed in the financial and insurance activities sector. Finland, Germany and Portugal tend to regulate telework more comprehensively than other countries, more frequently addressing work-life balance and economic compensation. Notably, countries like Romania – through non-binding recommendations – and Czechia also include some telework-related provisions in this sector, particularly related to working time and access to telework.

Content of telework-related provisions

This section provides an overview of the content of sectoral agreements addressing telework. Selected examples illustrate how different sectors in specific

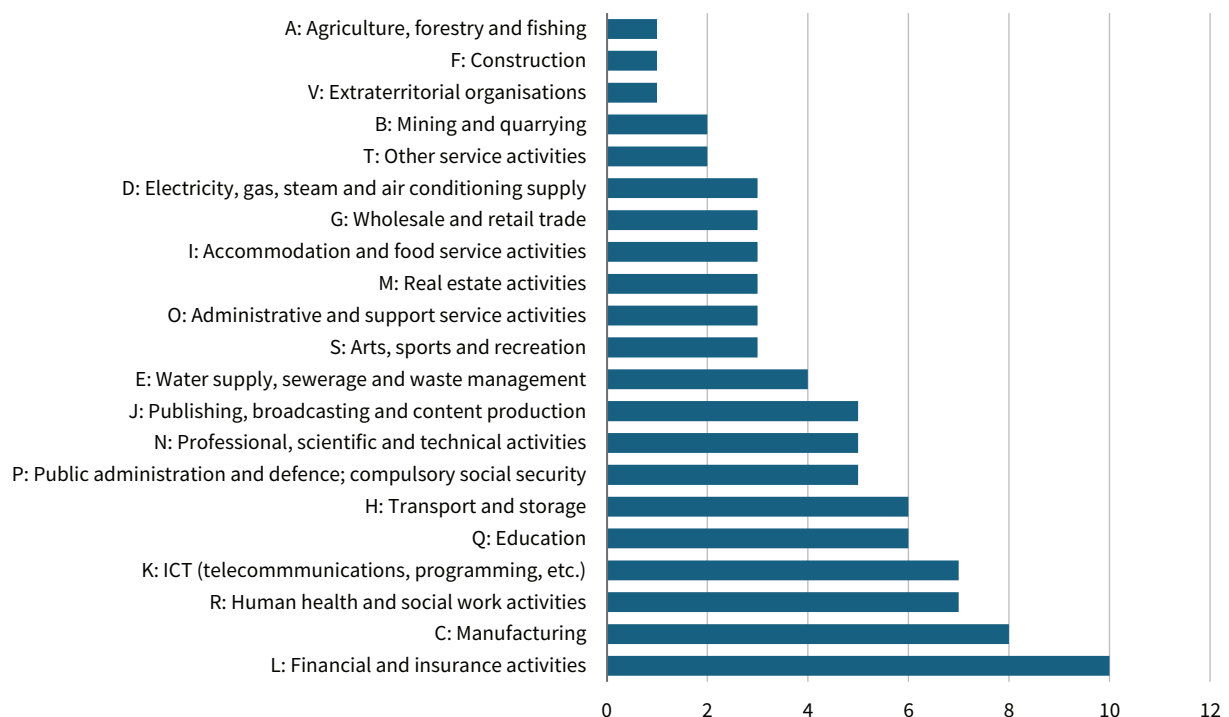
countries regulate various aspects of employment and working conditions in teleworking arrangements, focusing on:

- telework regime (access to telework);
- employment conditions (geographic location);
- the organisation of working time and the right to disconnect (breaks and rest, flexibility, work-life balance, management of workload, recording and monitoring of working time);
- other aspects (occupational health and economic compensation).

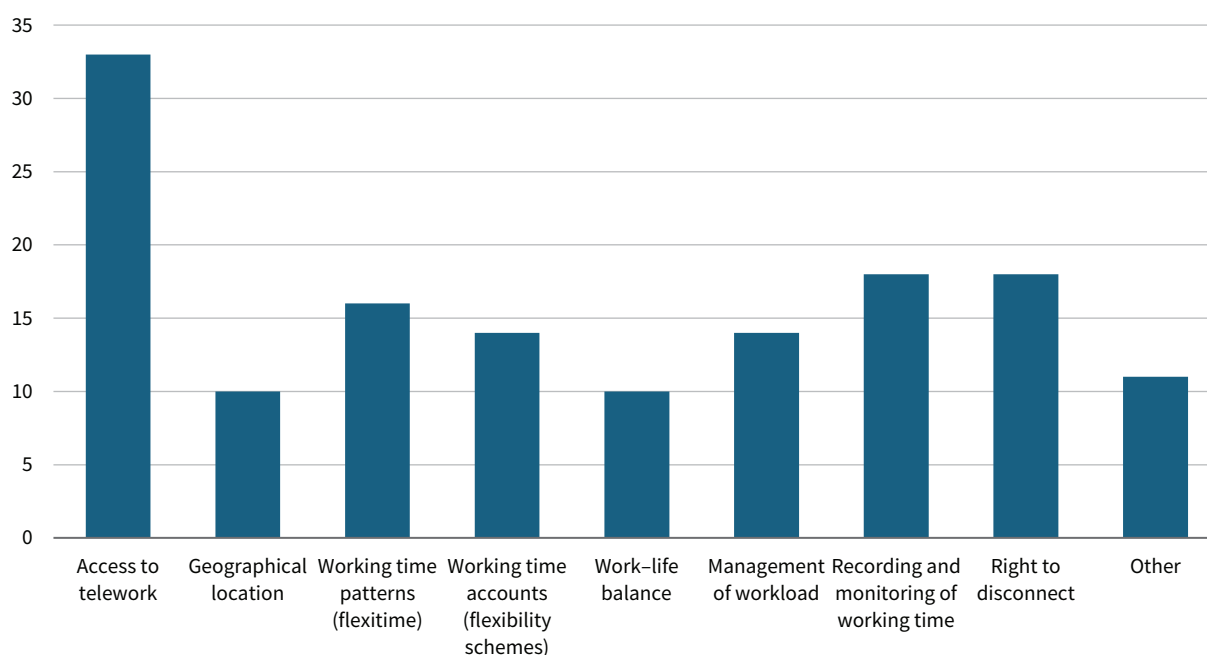
Telework regime

Most of the sectoral agreements on telework analysed include provisions concerning access to teleworking arrangements (Figure 41). However, only two explicitly grant the right to telework – at least for a minimum number of days. The German public banking agreement allows employees to perform up to 40 % of their weekly working hours as ‘mobile work’. Similarly, the Belgian agreement in the commercial aviation sector (see Box 12) establishes a right to telework at least two days per week for employees in non-operational roles, with eligible functions defined at the company level. Notably, the collective agreement for the metal sector in Portugal grants access to telework, or preferential access to telework, for specific groups of workers (e.g. workers with disabilities or caregiving duties).

Figure 40: Number of selected Member States with collective agreements on telework, by sector



Note: Some data are not available or missing for Bulgaria, Croatia, Estonia, Latvia, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia and Sweden.
Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Figure 41: Number of collective agreements regulating telework, by type of provision

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

By contrast, the sectoral agreement in Bulgaria restricts telework to periods of national emergency.

A right to request telework is also mentioned in France and Romania, but only in France must the employer justify its refusal of requests when the company has an active teleworking policy. In the Romanian agreement, employers retain wider discretion to grant access.

Employment conditions

The geographical location of telework remains largely unregulated in collective agreements (Figure 41), with exceptions in Germany (manufacturing and public administration sectors), Finland (water supply, construction and publishing sectors), France (professional, scientific and technical activities sector) and Portugal (water supply, publishing and financial activities sectors). These agreements typically require that telework location(s) be specified in writing. Notable exceptions are the French agreement, which includes a recommendation related to social security and tax liability for cross-border telework, and the Romanian agreement, which grants employers discretion over approving telework location.

Working time organisation and the right to disconnect

The organisation of working time is not among the most frequently addressed aspects of the sectoral agreements analysed. A notable exception is the agreement in the French technical and consultancy sector, which regulates daily rest and breaks for hybrid

workers. Other agreements, such as the Danish framework agreement on telework and homeworking for the municipal sector, establish formal equivalence between the working time arrangements of remote and on-site employees, leaving flexibility for local bargaining. Similarly, issues such as breaks, rest and flexible working arrangements are often delegated to company-level bargaining (e.g. in Finland (health and social work sector), Portugal (metal and machinery manufacturing sector) and Romania (financial sector)).

The right to disconnect is explicitly recognised in agreements for France's technical and consultancy sector, Spain's travel agencies and Romania's financial sector. The French agreement requires the definition of specific availability slots (Box 11). In the Romanian financial sector, a set of recommendations recognises the right to disconnect 'at the end of the working schedule ... except in cases where overtime is performed, based on an agreement between employees and employers'.

Work-life balance was seldom addressed in the sample of collective agreements analysed, with some agreements merely mentioning it without providing details of measures. Only in the Spanish collective agreement was work-life balance directly linked to the right to disconnect.

Finally, the recording and monitoring of working time is typically regulated through the explicit extension of existing rules applicable to on-site workers. The responsibility is often delegated to companies or assigned to employees (e.g. Portugal's metal sector).

Box 11: France – collective agreement for technical design offices, engineering consultancies and consultancy firms (example covering most aspects of the organisation of working time)

Hybrid working is voluntary for both the employee and the employer. Therefore, when the former informs the latter of their wish to benefit from it, the employer may, after examination, accept or refuse their request. A refusal must be justified when access to hybrid working is open to all employees in the company, by collective agreement or charter, and the requesting employee fulfils the eligibility conditions. An employee may refuse to switch from on-site to hybrid working, which should not result in the termination of their employment contract, as long as willingness to work in a hybrid format is not a condition of their employment.

Employees participating in a hybrid working scheme are entitled to a break of at least 45 minutes, which cannot be taken contiguously with their daily rest period of 11 consecutive hours.

Companies determine, by company-level agreement or charter or written agreement between the employer and the employee, a time slot during which the employee can be contacted by their employer. Outside this time, the employee cannot be criticised for not having answered a work call or email.

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Others

Some sectoral agreements include provisions on occupational safety and health for teleworkers, mainly addressing risk assessments and the employer's duty to provide ergonomic equipment. A few also cover psychosocial risks; for example, the French sectoral agreement establishes an annual workload review, promotes social contact, and advises limiting telework to 20 % of working time. Similarly, Norway's agreement for the retail sector stresses the importance of social interaction, but does not introduce any specific measures.

Economic compensation for telework is likewise infrequently addressed, with exceptions in Belgium (for airlines) (Box 12), the Netherlands (for government), Romania (for the financial sector) and Spain (for travel agencies), where agreements either set fixed amounts or require employers to cover related expenses.

Examples of company-level collective bargaining

A sample of 15 company-level collective agreements included in national contributions provides insights into the current status of regulation of flexible working time

and teleworking in the corresponding countries. The agreements selected were mostly negotiated in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The selection also includes companies' internal policies, for those cases in which collective agreements could not be identified (e.g. Latvia (public administration sector)).

The most prominent sectors among those with company-level agreements are telecommunications, and financial and insurance activities, followed by public administration. In this section, these agreements are classified. It is important to understand that the examples provided serve only to summarise the types of provisions that are included at the company level.

Telework-related provisions

The most common provisions in the sample refer to the frequency of telework and eligibility for telework. In most cases, provisions exist for the minimum number of days of on-site work and their allocation and limitations for certain groups of workers.

Access to telework is generally granted to all employees whose tasks are compatible with telework, subject to agreement with line managers and/or individual teleworking arrangements (in Cyprus, Denmark,

Box 12: Belgium – collective agreement for commercial aviation

Employees in non-operational positions are entitled to telework at least two working days per week.

An employee who, in a month, spends on average at least one full working day per week teleworking on a voluntary basis is entitled that month to a telework allowance of EUR 20.

An employee who is required by their employer to telework should be entitled to a monthly telework allowance that is at least equal to the fixed maximum amount exempt from taxes and social security contributions (EUR 148.73 as of 1 January 2023).

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Spain). Notably, only one company-level agreement, from Italy, grants employees full flexibility to choose their workplace without restrictions. Similarly, Malta's public administration guidelines allow employees to telework for up to 20 % of their weekly hours, while additional remote working hours may be permitted for a valid reason (e.g. childcare, care for a dependent or medical/humanitarian needs). In Cyprus, employees follow a hybrid model, working two days from their employer's premises and the remaining days remotely or in the field (Box 13). In Latvia, guidelines on the organisation of flexible working in the public sector specify that institutions should determine not only which roles can be teleworked, but also which physical workplaces are suitable.

In some cases, access to telework is subject to a minimum tenure and is not available to new hires (Cyprus and Estonia). In a company-level agreement from France, apprentices are eligible to telework, while trainees are not – though they may be granted a one-off remote working day with managerial approval. At this company, telework is also restricted to employees working more than 60 % of a full-time schedule. An agreement in Estonia requires prior online training on telework regulation and occupational health.

With regard to access to telework, only an agreement in Lithuania (covering the financial sector) explicitly requires employers to justify refusals of employees' requests in writing.

Reversibility provisions appear in agreements in France and Ireland. A French financial company allows managers to require on-site work in cases of inadequate

autonomy, behavioural issues or operational needs. In Ireland, a company policy mandating a return to the office led to one of the first legal cases under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023 (Box 14), though the claim was unsuccessful.

Regarding cross-border telework, two company-level agreements include specific provisions. An Estonian ICT company allows employees to work from Schengen countries for up to 30 days per year, subject to managerial approval. In contrast, the agreement at the French Allianz subsidiary permits telework only from the employee's primary residence or another private location, explicitly prohibiting telework from abroad or third-party locations.

Provisions on equipment and cost compensation for teleworkers are reported in the agreements included from Denmark, Lithuania and Spain. The equipment provided is limited to the tools and equipment needed to carry out telework. The company-level agreement for a Lithuanian financial institution specifies that costs or additional expenses incurred by teleworkers can only be reimbursed if telework is carried out at the employer's request, except in emergency situations.

Provisions related to flexible working and work-life balance

Flexible working provisions are included in the collective agreements of seven countries. Flexitime schemes, allowing employees to decide on their start and finish times within a set time frame, are the most common arrangements (found in Denmark, France, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain). Agreements for Denmark, France and Spain stipulate core working

Box 13: Cyprus – financial and insurance activities

Most employees in the financial and insurance activities sector work two times per week at the premises of their employers and the rest from home or another remote location, for example in the field if conducting external audits. Hybrid working arrangements are coordinated by heads of departments. Work at the employer's premises is performed in rotation on a weekly basis and is facilitated by company-specific desk reservation systems. Depending on the needs and development of projects undertaken, employees have the flexibility to change their weekly working schedules.

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Box 14: Ireland – telecommunications and ICT

On 25 July 2023, TikTok announced a planned return to the office for all employees, effective from 9 October 2023. The announcement declared that 'employees will be required to work in the office a minimum of three days per week, unless otherwise dictated by local laws or regulations'. In terms of providing a basis for the return-to-office policy, the announcement stated: 'The Company believes that in-person collaboration inspires creativity and creates irreplaceable value.' At that time, exceptions to the requirement for employees to work at least three days in the office were only made on the basis of providing reasonable accommodations for employees with disabilities and were not granted based on individual requests (as they had been previously).

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Box 15: France – financial and insurance activities

To promote a good work-life balance, a company-level agreement imposes periods of availability, to be agreed between the employee or their team and their manager. For employees with flexible working hours, whose working day takes place within the hours of 07:30 to 19:00, the periods when they must be available to be contacted include, as a minimum, from 09:45 to 11:45 and 14:00 to 16:15. Employees on a fixed-day contract set their availability periods in consultation with their manager, within the 07:30 to 19:00 time frame. They also set periods of unavailability, during which they cannot be contacted, except in an emergency. The company also insists on lunch breaks being taken.

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

hours or time slots during which teleworkers are required to be available, while allowing flexibility in the allocation of the rest of their working hours to accommodate their personal needs and preferences (see Box 15).

In one agreement (Malta's public service guidelines on telework), flexibility in working time and place is granted only to employees who work from home on a regular basis, defined as more than 20 % of their total working hours. These guidelines specify that these workers can 'work their remote working hours or part thereof outside their normal office hours, in agreement with the respective Director/head and with the approval of the Permanent Secretary'. The document also states that, while working remotely, employees have full flexibility regarding where they carry out their work.

Additionally, national contributions from Germany point to recent developments in collective bargaining at the company level. New rules on working time flexibility agreed in the Lufthansa framework agreement allow cabin crew to voluntarily join a seasonal summer working team. The summer working team work more hours during the busy summer months and receive higher remuneration for their efforts. In their 2024 collective bargaining round, social partners additionally agreed on rules to improve the predictability of employees' working schedules and free time (including 10 days off each month). The latest agreement is valid

until the end of 2026 (Lesch et al., 2024a). Similarly, the recent 2023 bargaining rounds of the railway operator Deutsche Bahn resulted in the introduction of new flexible working models. In April 2024, the company also agreed to reduce the working hours of shift workers from 38 to 35 hours gradually without wage loss (reducing hours to 37 hours in January 2026, 36 hours in January 2027, 35.5 hours in January 2028 and 35 hours in January 2029). However, the agreement states that workers can choose their preferred number of weekly hours within a range of 35 to 40 hours, with each hour in excess of 35 adding 2.7 % to their basic weekly wages (Lesch et al., 2024b).

The company-level agreements investigated in Lithuania, the Netherlands and Spain explicitly acknowledge employees' right to request flexible working arrangements to improve their work-life balance. The agreement for a financial institution in Lithuania provides that flexible working arrangements should be determined by agreement between the employee and the employer, considering the needs of the employee. Employees are entitled to request reduced working hours (Box 16).

Finally, provisions on the right to disconnect are reported in company-level collective agreements in Malta, Portugal and Spain, with a specific emphasis on teleworkers.

Box 16: Lithuania – financial and insurance activities

Upon returning from childcare or parental leave, a staff member may request to work part time temporarily for up to three months, with pay adjusted proportionally to the hours worked. The employee can opt to work up to half of their previous hours. The specifics of the part-time arrangement are agreed on by the employee and the employer, who must consider the employee's preferences. If the employer disagrees with the employee's proposed working hours, they must provide a reasonable explanation.

Source: Contributions from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

Summary and outlook

There are persistent differences between countries in terms of governance approaches (how rules are set) and in the substantive content of such rules (Eurofound, 2020a, 2022b; Eurofound et al., 2024; Sanz de Miguel et al., 2025) in relation to working time and teleworking. This chapter has shown a growing effort to modernise national frameworks governing working time and the organisation of work across European countries. In line with previous research, the findings show a diversity of regulatory approaches reflecting different industrial relations traditions and policy priorities, but also different levels of maturity in the regulation of working time and telework prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the chapter also shows that some common themes emerge across European countries, which partly reflect the expansion of flexible working debates and the impact of EU legislation such as the Work-Life Balance Directive.

General increase in the regulation of flexible working, affecting both telework and flexible working at all levels

When considering relevant regulations addressing the increase in flexible working in the EU labour market, regulatory trends since the pandemic indicate an increase in provisions aimed at improving work-life balance (and well-being) based on the technical and organisational possibilities for working any time and anywhere.

Regarding national-level regulation, whereas flexible working arrangements have been available for a long time in some western European countries and in Scandinavian countries, since the pandemic new developments in the regulation of flexible working have been observed in central-eastern Member States. They have begun allowing some types of access to flexible arrangements, including by providing more autonomy in the organisation of working time. This is exemplified by the number of provisions related to access to flexible working time and teleworking (flexible working arrangements), which is associated with more opportunities for employees to decide work schedules and whether they want to work from home. Interestingly, the increase in the number of provisions on access to flexible working and the regulation of flexible working arrangements is seen in both national-level regulation and sectoral agreements.

However, owing to regulatory efforts implemented at the national level during the pandemic, the specific organisation of working time in teleworking arrangements is now mostly regulated through agreements and mainly at the company level. By contrast, the regulation of working time in the context of platform work and algorithm management is still scarce at all levels.

Examples of company-level agreements show that they typically stipulate core working hours or time slots during which teleworkers are required to be available, while allowing workers the flexibility to allocate the rest of their working hours to accommodate their personal needs and preferences. Company policies on access to telework normally address eligibility, the number of days employees are permitted to work from home (two or three days) and employees' level of autonomy over where they work.

In a few countries, reforms are mainly determined by the operational requirements of the business (employer-oriented flexibility) and are aimed at enhancing the employer's capacity to extend working time or derogate from working time provisions. However, as mentioned above, this has not been the focus of this report.

Right to disconnect

Efforts to facilitate employee-friendly flexible working and combat the negative effects of being contacted outside working hours are exemplified by the development, since the pandemic, of new provisions on the right to disconnect in several Member States. Despite the different ways of implementing the right to disconnect, there has been a clear trend towards increasing its regulation before, during and since the pandemic. Even though the practical implementation differs from country to country, this finding indicates greater awareness among lawmakers of the challenges posed by increasing flexible working and digitalisation. However, the right to disconnect still exists in fewer than half of Member States. A few examples of agreements at the sectoral and the company level have been reported, and some are derived from the implementation of national-level regulations.

Duration of working time, compressed working weeks, breaks and rest

No national-level statutory reduction in working time has been implemented since the COVID-19 outbreak. However, there has been an increase in initiatives to reduce working time (mostly pilot actions). These have mainly been implemented at the company level and in a few sectors. These initiatives have been accompanied by initiatives on compressed working weeks (e.g. four-day week initiatives) in some countries at the national level but also at the company level. Although there are hardly any new regulations related to breaks and rest at the national level in the context of flexible working, examples have been reported at the sectoral and company levels.

Recording and monitoring working time

The recording and monitoring of working time is regulated in many countries. With some exceptions in a few Nordic and central-eastern Member States, since the pandemic, there has been a trend towards updating legislation, for example to include the obligation to record working time. Therefore, efforts continue, in some Member States, to regulate the monitoring and recording of working time, which helps to protect workers in flexible working arrangements. Since 2021, this aspect has been further regulated in the context of teleworking at the sectoral level; however, provisions related to recording and monitoring working time that specifically address flexible working are scarce in sectoral agreements.

Employment conditions and the right to request telework

Focusing on flexibility as regards place of work (teleworking), apart from the aspects mentioned above, legislative reforms and collective agreements in several countries have granted workers the right to request access to telework. Moreover, legislation is increasingly oriented towards ensuring fair and good-quality telework through provisions that prevent biases and discrimination in gaining access to telework or recognise the employer's duty to cover costs and expenses.

Aspects such as cross-border telework, the frequency of teleworking days and eligibility for telework seem to mainly be part of agreements or policies at the company level.

Issues with scarce or no national-level regulation: redefinition of working time, workload adjustments and the clean economy

Changes in working time due to increasing flexible working and the digitalisation of work are being addressed to some extent. However, some aspects have not captured the attention of lawmakers. At the national level, there is a lack of a holistic approach to regulating recent trends in the organisation of working time and no redefinition or conceptualisation of working time considering, for example, the further fragmentation of working time patterns and the blurring of boundaries between work and rest time. Instead, these changes in working time are being addressed through specific provisions (e.g. on the right to disconnect). Some debates have emerged in a few countries, but almost no examples of actual regulation have been reported.

The few existing examples of regulations addressing adjustments to workload are implemented at the sectoral and company levels in a small number of countries and mostly in the context of teleworking and addressing specific groups of workers. Legislative initiatives are scarce.

No examples of regulations are reported on the organisation of working time in relation to climate change or the clean economy.

Outlook and debates

In general, the existing regulatory framework on working time increasingly includes flexible working time and telework in most Member States, considering the role of collective bargaining at the sector and company levels in adapting legal provisions to companies' needs. However, as mentioned above, there are country differences in the aspects addressed (e.g. on the right to disconnect) and in the depth of the regulation.

In relation to the consideration of possible new definitions or conceptualisations of working time, there have been no major discussions around the meaning of working time as a core element of the regulation of the employment relationship and as one of the main measures of employees' performance, and the main innovations are limited to specific contexts (sectors, job profiles and company-level initiatives).

Indeed, national contributions from seven Member States (Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Sweden) highlight a general trend towards more flexible working arrangements and shifts towards addressing output-based performance management systems, but mostly based on company-level examples in specific sectors, such as ICT and finance, and usually in the form of informal arrangements not provided for in legislation or collective agreements. Therefore, employees work in a flexible way with some degree of autonomy over their schedule, but this is often not formally established in regulations.

Even though regulatory efforts regarding the monitoring of working hours have strengthened, changes in working time patterns due to increased flexibility have introduced significant challenges to the effective monitoring and recording of working hours, with consequences for the enforcement of legal provisions related to overtime and rest periods. In only a small number of countries, there have been debates due to difficulties in measuring, monitoring and recording working time in the context of flexible working (e.g. in Denmark and Finland).

On the opposite side, despite the increase in the fragmentation of working time and the blurring of boundaries between working time and rest time, several Member States (e.g. Estonia, Lithuania, Romania and Sweden) reaffirm the validity of existing working time regulations in general, and state that there is no need for innovations (e.g. the right to disconnect) or redefinition. For many countries, the existing regulatory framework is assessed as sufficient, and adaptations need to be carried out only at the level of sectoral or company agreements.

In relation to the duration of working time, there have been debates and initiatives on the reduction of working time (e.g. in Spain), but, so far, statutory legislation has not yet been enacted, except with regard to compressed (four-day) working weeks in a few countries (e.g. Belgium). One country (Greece) has gone in the opposite direction, facilitating the extension of weekly working hours. Therefore, the future is uncertain as regards how the duration of working time will evolve.

In some countries, social partners have mixed views on whether current regulations are well suited to changing working patterns. In Portugal and Spain, employer associations tend to consider that statutory regulations may limit companies' ability to organise working time with the flexibility required by different sectors. However, trade unions emphasise the role of legislation, with the primary issue being the enforcement of existing laws rather than their amendment. Likewise, in Germany, the main employer association, Bundesvereinigung der Deutschen Arbeitgeberverbände, calls for enhanced working time flexibility facilitated by the weekly calculation of maximum working hours and more flexible distribution according to both employers' and employees' needs. However, the obligatory 11-hour rest period makes such working time arrangements difficult to implement. In contrast, the German Trade Union Confederation advocates upholding current regulations on working time and the introduction of new legal provisions for mobile work, with additional obligations for employers concerning the provision of equipment and the prevention of unpaid overtime, especially in the context of home-based telework.

5 Conclusions

The Eurofound and International Labour Office report *Working anytime, anywhere: The effects on the world of work* (Eurofound et al., 2017) concluded that new ICT has revolutionised work and life in the 21st century. The constant connectivity enabled by digital devices allows work to be performed at any time and from almost anywhere. The report highlighted that telework and ICT-based mobile work had positive consequences for both employees and employers but also posed some risks to workers' health and work-life balance.

The current report updates the findings to reflect the situation a decade later in relation to telework, incorporating the broader phenomenon of flexible working (including flexible working time, in addition to teleworking), with a focus on the effects of these arrangements on the quality of working time, work-life balance and health, and associated regulations. Moreover, the report shows some challenges to addressing the changing work environment and different ways of handling this change.

Some of the characteristics of flexible arrangements from 2015 are still present, but there have been some improvements in the quality of working time and new developments in the regulation of teleworking and flexible working, along with an increase in the take-up of these arrangements. More employees are working (fully or partially) from home and places other than their employers' premises, and more employees have a certain degree of autonomy in deciding their working time (at least one in five workers were in these arrangements in 2024). Between 2015 and 2024, weekly working hours continued to slowly decline (reducing by almost one hour on average).

The rise of flexible working started before the pandemic but accelerated because of the health crisis and associated measures implemented from 2020 until 2022, in particular in relation to place of work (telework). Among the drivers of these trends, apart from the pandemic, the digitalisation of work must be highlighted. Moreover, the prevalence of flexible working has increased because it has been useful for both employers and workers. The former can adjust hours worked to economic conditions, enabling them to boost productivity and preserve their competitiveness. Flexible working hours allow companies to make better use of their resources. Workers have adopted flexible working arrangements because they improve work-life balance, a very important feature in European societies that have witnessed the integration of women into the labour market and the increasing intensification of work, making the use of time for leisure or care needs

more difficult for a significant percentage of workers (one in five reported facing difficulties in maintaining a work-life balance in 2015).

Unlike working time autonomy, the prevalence of flexible schedules that do not offer employees autonomy over the organisation of their working time remained stable between 2015 and 2024. Flexible schedules affect more low- and medium-skilled workers than high-skilled workers. This finding confirms the fragmentation of working schedules without time sovereignty in some occupations, which has been fostered by recent developments in the digitalisation of work, such as in platform work. Although high-skilled workers enjoy more autonomy in working time, they are more likely to experience extended working hours, in addition to fragmented working time derived from flexible working patterns.

Currently, the quality of working time in flexible working environments can be assessed more positively than in the pre-pandemic or pandemic period. Statistical analysis of the EWCS shows an improvement in the quality of working time since 2015 for workers in flexible working arrangements and, in particular, among those teleworking. Relevant indicators show a decrease in aspects that pose risks to work-life balance or workers' health (for teleworkers), for example a decrease in the share of employees working in their free time or extended days and an increase in autonomy over working time, allowing workers to take breaks, and have sufficient rest between working days. These results are not related to an overall improvement in the economy, because (for most indicators related to working time) little or no improvement has been observed among workers working only at their employer's premises.

Several explanations seem plausible.

- There was an overall improvement due to regulations and policies implemented between 2015 and 2024, including the incorporation of the EU's Work-Life Balance Directive or the regulation of the right to disconnect in the national legislation of some Member States.
- The groups of workers that took up telework during and after the pandemic did not experience (or did not adopt to the same extent as in 2015) working time practices that are more detrimental to the quality of working time. For example, proportionally, a decade ago teleworking arrangements were used more often than nowadays to perform supplemental work outside the employer's premises.

- A change in cultural values after the pandemic led employees to place greater importance on having a good work–life balance.

Notwithstanding improvements in the quality of working time in flexible arrangements over the last decade, it must be said that workers in flexible arrangements are still more likely than those with fixed place and time schedules to be contacted outside working hours, work in their free time, have unpredictable schedules, work overtime or have insufficient rest between working days, among other detrimental characteristics of working time. In this context, high workloads also play a role in reducing the quality of working time.

When considering the effects of flexible arrangements, it is important to differentiate between flexible schedules without autonomy, autonomy over working time and teleworking. While flexible schedules have a rather detrimental effect, autonomy over working time has a more balanced effect, indicating that, depending on how autonomy is used and the work environment, it can foster positive working time practices rather than lead to more detrimental characteristics. Teleworking appears to have a more positive effect on indicators of quality of working time than flexible schedules without autonomy. For example, whereas employees with flexible schedules are more likely to work more than 48 hours a week, teleworking alone does not necessarily lead to excessive working hours.

The autonomy or flexibility paradox – that is, more flexibility leading to more work – is not universal. Teleworkers are increasingly managing to limit excessive working hours, while more workers with flexible schedules continue to report having insufficient rest and unpredictable schedules than fixed-schedule workers. Teleworkers benefit more from working time autonomy than those with flexible schedules who do not telework. In this regard, working time autonomy (flexitime) can have positive effects in teleworking arrangements. However, when this autonomy is complete (in the context of flexible schedules), working time is more unpredictable and irregular, most likely because workers have characteristics closer to the self-employed or are managers rather than average employees. In general, considering different frequencies of teleworking, in 2024 those in full-time telework tended to have a better quality of working time based on some indicators.

In the context of increasing flexible working, recording working time through digital monitoring, which is increasingly used in countries for which information is available, may have negative effects on workers' autonomy and at the same time prevent excessively long working hours. Therefore, digital monitoring can be considered a double-edged sword for workers in flexible arrangements.

An important effect of teleworking is the reduction of the number of days on which workers commute. It is evident that many workers use teleworking as a means of avoiding long commutes. Time saved from commuting and related errands is mainly used for leisure and secondarily for additional working time, followed by other activities, such as caring responsibilities.

Among the aspects of working time related to flexible working, irregular and unpredictable schedules pose a risk to good work–life balance. However, the most detrimental effect on work–life balance is produced by being contacted outside working hours. Long commuting times, long weekly working hours and insufficient recovery periods between working days are also particularly associated with increased work–life conflict. Therefore, in general, the risk of a deterioration in work–life balance is not necessarily related to employees working remotely or having autonomy to organise their working time.

Teleworking and the most prevalent form of working time autonomy (flexitime) have positive effects on the organisation of work and life, particularly in the context of full-time telework. This positive effect is observed among both women and men, for example, in regular hybrid work. However, teleworking works better in preventing work–life balance spillovers for men than for women, a dynamic related to the fact that more women than men still use the time freed up by teleworking – for example, by avoiding commuting – to carry out unpaid work, and are therefore more likely to experience the blurring of boundaries between work and private life.

Overall, autonomy in working time not only improves work–life balance but also contributes to the perception that work has a positive impact on health. It also plays a role in preventing physical and mental exhaustion and fatigue. In contrast, irregularity in working time (an indicator related to flexible schedules) has a less positive, or rather negative, impact on health.

Teleworking is not without health risks. It has a negative, though not very strong, effect on stress and mental strain (including sleeping disorders). Moreover, workers teleworking on a regular basis (e.g. in a hybrid mode) experience a more negative impact of work on health than those with other working arrangements. They report higher levels of anxiety, musculoskeletal disorders, eye strain, mental strain and stress at work. Workers working full time from home assess the impact of work on health more positively, except for subjective psychological well-being, which may be related to feelings of isolation.

In parallel with the increase in the number of workers in flexible arrangements, there have been general development in the provisions and adoption of regulations on flexible working arrangements (related to flexible schedules, working time autonomy and teleworking).

The need for further regulation or redefinition of working time in the context of more fragmented and porous time (e.g. characterised by workers having difficulty differentiating between rest and working time) is not clear. In general, there have been no regulatory efforts in this direction in the Member States. However, workers in flexible arrangements, especially those with fragmented schedules, are still more at risk of experiencing poor-quality working time, with negative consequences for work–life balance and health.

Additionally, there is a fairness issue. The appropriate definition of working time is linked to issues beyond work–life balance and health, for example pay. A conceptualisation of working time that reflects the real world of work may therefore be necessary in some working arrangements, such as certain types of platform work.

Since the pandemic, regulations have continued to develop alongside the adoption of flexible arrangements, providing for greater working time autonomy and teleworking. Initiatives to reduce working hours or introduce a four-day working week have also been launched, contributing in a smaller scale to the gradual reconfiguration of working time. However, initiatives and regulations have not been developed with the same intensity and on the same topics, and differences between Member States remain. Moreover, the findings of this report highlight the emergence of a working time divide, largely associated with skills level and occupational differences. In this context, and taking into account existing differences between countries, national working time regulations could further address the evolving characteristics of work to mitigate risks and enhance benefits for both workers and companies. Nonetheless, the role of social partners at the company level remains essential, as it is at this level that the actual organisation of work and the needs of employees can be most effectively addressed.

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Annex

Table A1: Multivariate regression results for indicators of working time quality (*Beta* (standard error))

Characteristic	Contacted OOH	No rest	Commute > 2 hours	Working in free time	Able to take a break	Working week 41–48 hours	Working week > 48 hours	Working time predictable
Intercept	0.08** (0.025)	0.14*** (0.024)	0.11*** (0.016)	0.08*** (0.023)	0.69*** (0.030)	0.07*** (0.019)	0.04** (0.014)	0.98*** (0.021)
Telework status								
No telework (always working from employer's premises)	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
At least some telework	0.07*** (0.017)	0.02 (0.017)	0.05*** (0.010)	0.14*** (0.017)	0.11*** (0.019)	0.00 (0.012)	0.02 (0.010)	0.00 (0.014)
Other	0.07*** (0.014)	0.00 (0.012)	0.01 (0.007)	0.07*** (0.011)	0.01 (0.016)	0.01 (0.008)	0.02** (0.007)	– 0.05*** (0.012)
Fixed start and finish times								
Yes	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
No	0.08*** (0.015)	0.12*** (0.013)	0.00 (0.007)	0.07*** (0.013)	0.02 (0.016)	0.04*** (0.009)	0.07*** (0.008)	– 0.17*** (0.013)
Working time arrangement								
Working hours are set by the company/organisation, with no scope for change	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
You can choose between several fixed working schedules determined by the company/organisation	0.04* (0.019)	0.02 (0.018)	– 0.02 (0.010)	0.05** (0.018)	0.04* (0.022)	0.00 (0.011)	0.00 (0.011)	– 0.01 (0.015)
You can adapt your working hours within certain limits (e.g. flexitime)	– 0.01 (0.017)	– 0.02 (0.014)	– 0.01 (0.010)	– 0.02 (0.013)	0.20*** (0.020)	0.03** (0.012)	– 0.01 (0.008)	– 0.02 (0.014)
Your working hours are entirely determined by yourself	0.06 (0.033)	0.04 (0.028)	0.00 (0.018)	0.05 (0.028)	0.28*** (0.027)	0.00 (0.018)	0.11*** (0.024)	– 0.14*** (0.030)
Sufficient time to complete work tasks								
Always	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Most of the time	0.06*** (0.012)	0.01 (0.011)	0.00 (0.008)	0.04*** (0.009)	– 0.12*** (0.015)	0.02** (0.008)	0.00 (0.007)	0.00 (0.010)
Sometimes	0.16*** (0.017)	0.07*** (0.016)	0.00 (0.010)	0.16*** (0.015)	– 0.25*** (0.019)	0.02* (0.009)	0.03** (0.010)	– 0.04** (0.014)
Rarely	0.18*** (0.025)	0.09*** (0.022)	0.00 (0.012)	0.24*** (0.023)	– 0.30*** (0.025)	0.07*** (0.018)	0.06*** (0.014)	– 0.04* (0.019)
Never	0.20*** (0.036)	0.11*** (0.031)	– 0.01 (0.015)	0.22*** (0.032)	– 0.31*** (0.032)	0.04 (0.024)	0.04* (0.019)	– 0.12*** (0.034)
Performance monitored using digital technologies								
Not at all	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
To a small extent	0.00 (0.019)	0.00 (0.016)	0.01 (0.011)	0.00 (0.015)	– 0.08** (0.024)	– 0.01 (0.011)	– 0.02* (0.010)	0.02 (0.014)
To some extent	0.06** (0.019)	0.03 (0.016)	0.00 (0.010)	0.03 (0.015)	– 0.04 (0.020)	0.00 (0.011)	– 0.02 (0.010)	– 0.01 (0.016)
To a large extent	0.06** (0.021)	0.03 (0.021)	0.02 (0.012)	0.03 (0.017)	0.01 (0.024)	0.02 (0.016)	0.01 (0.011)	– 0.05** (0.017)

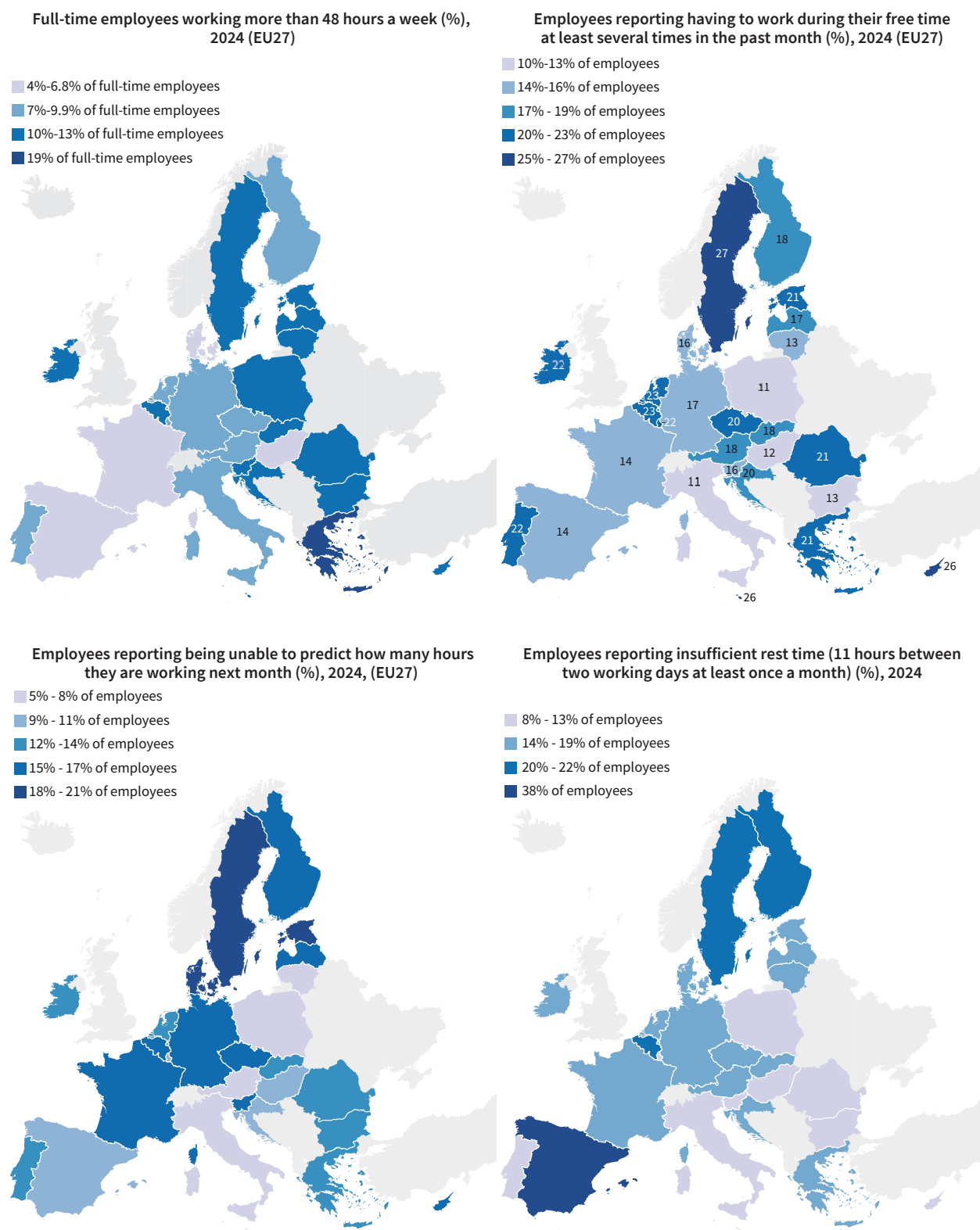
Characteristic	Contacted OOH	No rest	Commute > 2 hours	Working in free time	Able to take a break	Working week 41–48 hours	Working week > 48 hours	Working time predictable
Occupation (ISCO group)								
Professionals	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Managers	0.17*** (0.031)	0.06 (0.030)	0.02 (0.019)	0.09** (0.029)	0.04 (0.030)	0.03 (0.023)	0.11*** (0.025)	– 0.07** (0.027)
Technicians and associate professionals	0.04* (0.018)	0.00 (0.017)	0.00 (0.012)	– 0.04* (0.017)	– 0.01 (0.020)	– 0.01 (0.013)	0.01 (0.010)	– 0.01 (0.016)
Clerical support workers	– 0.02 (0.020)	– 0.05** (0.019)	0.00 (0.013)	– 0.09*** (0.018)	0.02 (0.026)	– 0.03** (0.012)	– 0.01 (0.010)	0.02 (0.016)
Service and sales workers	0.07*** (0.020)	0.05** (0.020)	– 0.01 (0.011)	– 0.02 (0.017)	– 0.13*** (0.024)	0.02 (0.013)	0.03** (0.010)	– 0.03 (0.016)
Skilled agricultural, forestry and fishery workers	0.04 (0.090)	– 0.07* (0.035)	– 0.02 (0.026)	– 0.15** (0.058)	0.00 (0.075)	– 0.02 (0.054)	– 0.06* (0.029)	– 0.03 (0.074)
Craft and related trades workers	0.02 (0.022)	– 0.02 (0.020)	0.00 (0.013)	– 0.03 (0.019)	– 0.18*** (0.029)	– 0.01 (0.015)	0.00 (0.014)	– 0.02 (0.019)
Plant and machine operators and assemblers	0.01 (0.024)	0.02 (0.024)	– 0.01 (0.013)	– 0.05* (0.021)	– 0.15*** (0.031)	– 0.01 (0.015)	0.02 (0.014)	– 0.07** (0.022)
Elementary occupations	– 0.03 (0.022)	– 0.04* (0.019)	– 0.01 (0.013)	– 0.08*** (0.020)	– 0.16*** (0.029)	– 0.02 (0.012)	– 0.01 (0.010)	– 0.01 (0.020)
Sector of economic activity (NACE)								
Other services	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Transport	– 0.02 (0.022)	0.03 (0.023)	0.00 (0.016)	– 0.03 (0.020)	– 0.07* (0.029)	– 0.01 (0.015)	0.04* (0.016)	– 0.04 (0.023)
Education	0.12*** (0.024)	– 0.01 (0.020)	– 0.04** (0.012)	0.19*** (0.024)	– 0.28*** (0.025)	0.00 (0.018)	– 0.01 (0.011)	0.01 (0.017)
Financial services	– 0.01 (0.030)	– 0.04 (0.025)	0.02 (0.023)	– 0.02 (0.027)	0.01 (0.032)	– 0.03* (0.015)	0.01 (0.020)	0.01 (0.023)
Commerce and hospitality	0.00 (0.019)	– 0.01 (0.018)	– 0.02 (0.010)	– 0.03 (0.016)	– 0.05* (0.023)	– 0.01 (0.012)	0.01 (0.010)	– 0.02 (0.017)
Industry	– 0.04* (0.019)	– 0.04* (0.018)	– 0.04*** (0.010)	– 0.04* (0.018)	– 0.04 (0.023)	– 0.02 (0.013)	0.00 (0.012)	0.01 (0.017)
Health	0.08*** (0.021)	0.05* (0.021)	– 0.01 (0.014)	– 0.02 (0.018)	– 0.14*** (0.024)	– 0.02 (0.011)	0.02 (0.012)	0.00 (0.018)
Construction	– 0.05* (0.023)	– 0.01 (0.022)	0.02 (0.018)	– 0.05** (0.020)	0.02 (0.034)	0.00 (0.018)	0.03* (0.016)	– 0.03 (0.022)
Public administration and defence	– 0.02 (0.022)	– 0.01 (0.022)	0.00 (0.016)	– 0.04 (0.019)	– 0.04 (0.028)	0.02 (0.019)	– 0.03** (0.011)	0.01 (0.019)
Agriculture	0.10 (0.058)	– 0.02 (0.033)	0.00 (0.018)	0.14** (0.051)	0.02 (0.052)	0.07 (0.038)	0.08 (0.040)	– 0.10* (0.052)
Type of employment contract								
Contract of unlimited duration	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Contract of limited duration	– 0.03 (0.019)	0.02 (0.018)	0.00 (0.013)	0.01 (0.015)	– 0.01 (0.023)	– 0.03*** (0.008)	0.02* (0.011)	– 0.04* (0.018)
Temporary employment agency contract	– 0.07* (0.033)	0.02 (0.039)	0.05 (0.040)	– 0.02 (0.030)	– 0.13** (0.040)	– 0.02 (0.013)	0.00 (0.022)	– 0.12** (0.045)
Apprenticeship or other training scheme	– 0.10 (0.053)	– 0.09** (0.032)	0.02 (0.052)	0.01 (0.039)	– 0.08 (0.068)	– 0.06*** (0.015)	– 0.01 (0.011)	– 0.05 (0.065)
No contract	0.00 (0.036)	0.07 (0.035)	– 0.01 (0.014)	0.04 (0.030)	– 0.07 (0.035)	0.00 (0.020)	0.05** (0.020)	– 0.10*** (0.028)

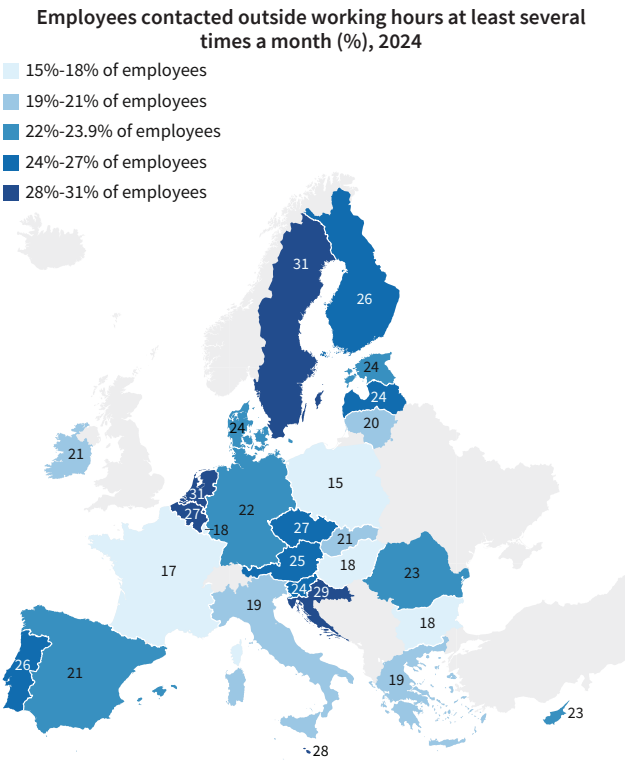
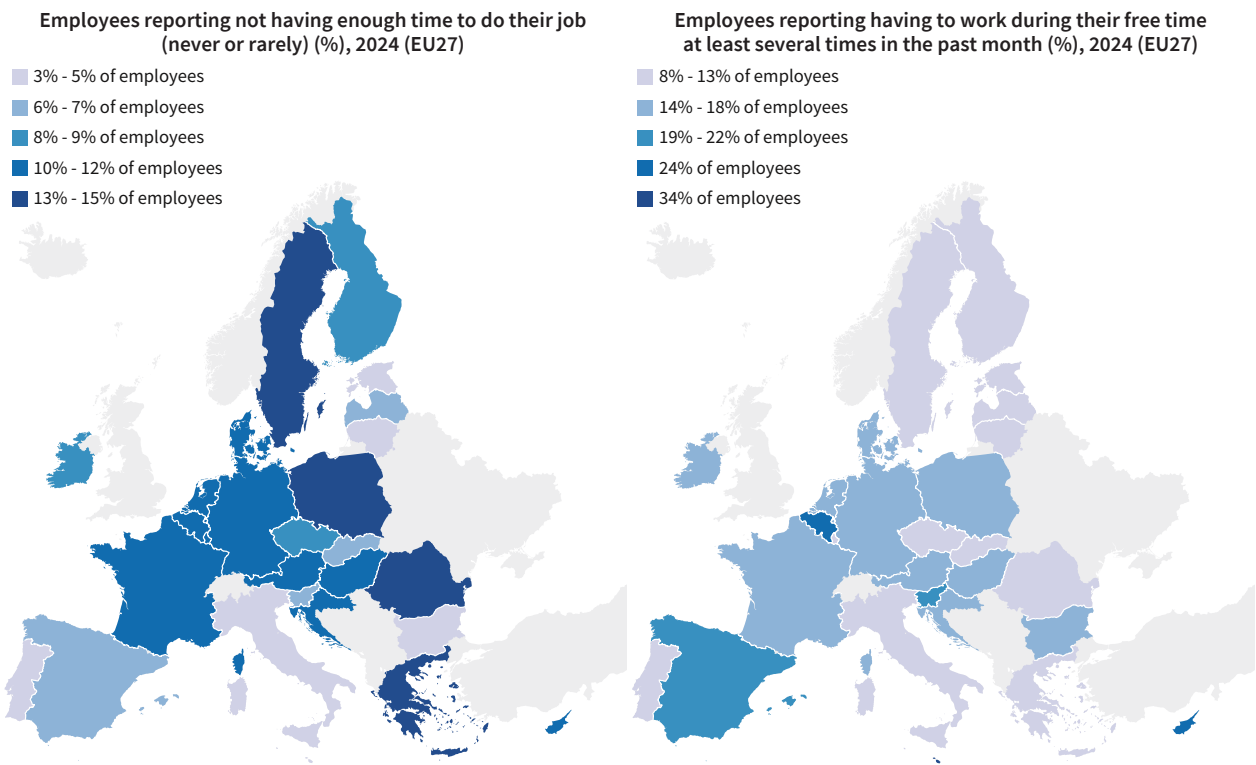
Characteristic	Contacted OOH	No rest	Commute > 2 hours	Working in free time	Able to take a break	Working week 41–48 hours	Working week > 48 hours	Working time predictable
Working time (full time/part time)								
Full time	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Part time	0.03* (0.017)	– 0.02 (0.014)	0.01 (0.009)	0.00 (0.013)	– 0.05** (0.018)	– 0.08*** (0.007)	– 0.05*** (0.006)	– 0.01 (0.013)
Male	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Female	– 0.03** (0.012)	– 0.04*** (0.011)	– 0.01 (0.007)	0.02 (0.010)	– 0.05*** (0.014)	– 0.01 (0.008)	– 0.03*** (0.006)	0.03* (0.010)
Age group								
25–54	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
15–24	0.05 (0.028)	0.02 (0.020)	0.00 (0.014)	– 0.01 (0.017)	– 0.04 (0.028)	0.01 (0.015)	– 0.02* (0.009)	– 0.05* (0.020)
55+	– 0.02 (0.012)	– 0.02 (0.012)	0.00 (0.008)	– 0.01 (0.011)	0.06*** (0.016)	0.00 (0.009)	0.00 (0.007)	0.00 (0.011)
Country								
Belgium	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Austria	0.00 (0.020)	– 0.01 (0.018)	– 0.06*** (0.012)	– 0.02 (0.018)	0.08*** (0.020)	0.03* (0.013)	– 0.01 (0.012)	0.06*** (0.015)
Bulgaria	– 0.02 (0.021)	– 0.06*** (0.018)	– 0.07*** (0.013)	– 0.03 (0.018)	– 0.14*** (0.025)	– 0.02 (0.012)	0.05*** (0.015)	– 0.01 (0.018)
Croatia	0.06** (0.024)	– 0.04* (0.019)	– 0.07*** (0.012)	0.01 (0.020)	– 0.12*** (0.025)	0.01 (0.014)	0.05*** (0.015)	0.03 (0.017)
Cyprus	0.01 (0.025)	– 0.06** (0.021)	– 0.08*** (0.012)	0.07** (0.023)	0.04 (0.028)	0.03 (0.017)	0.04* (0.016)	– 0.01 (0.021)
Czechia	0.02 (0.022)	– 0.02 (0.019)	– 0.05*** (0.014)	– 0.01 (0.020)	– 0.02 (0.023)	0.03 (0.015)	0.00 (0.014)	– 0.01 (0.019)
Denmark	– 0.03 (0.021)	– 0.01 (0.019)	– 0.05*** (0.013)	– 0.06** (0.017)	0.03 (0.021)	– 0.01 (0.012)	– 0.04*** (0.009)	– 0.04* (0.018)
Estonia	0.02 (0.020)	– 0.02 (0.018)	– 0.06*** (0.013)	0.02 (0.019)	0.09*** (0.022)	– 0.04*** (0.011)	0.01 (0.013)	– 0.03 (0.018)
Finland	– 0.03 (0.020)	0.00 (0.019)	– 0.03* (0.014)	– 0.06*** (0.017)	0.08*** (0.021)	– 0.03* (0.012)	– 0.03* (0.011)	0.03 (0.017)
France	– 0.07*** (0.019)	0.01 (0.019)	– 0.03 (0.014)	– 0.06*** (0.017)	0.07*** (0.022)	– 0.01 (0.014)	– 0.04*** (0.010)	– 0.03 (0.018)
Germany	– 0.04* (0.020)	– 0.05** (0.017)	– 0.06*** (0.013)	– 0.05** (0.017)	0.00 (0.022)	0.01 (0.013)	– 0.04*** (0.009)	0.02 (0.017)
Greece	– 0.05 (0.024)	– 0.05* (0.022)	– 0.05*** (0.015)	0.00 (0.023)	– 0.13*** (0.027)	– 0.03 (0.014)	0.09*** (0.019)	0.00 (0.019)
Hungary	– 0.02 (0.020)	– 0.07*** (0.017)	– 0.06*** (0.013)	– 0.03 (0.018)	– 0.08*** (0.025)	– 0.03* (0.012)	0.00 (0.012)	0.00 (0.017)
Ireland	– 0.04* (0.019)	– 0.04* (0.017)	0.02 (0.016)	0.01 (0.018)	0.07** (0.022)	0.00 (0.012)	0.00 (0.012)	0.01 (0.015)
Italy	– 0.02 (0.023)	– 0.07*** (0.018)	– 0.08*** (0.011)	– 0.04* (0.019)	– 0.09*** (0.028)	0.00 (0.014)	0.02 (0.016)	0.05** (0.018)
Latvia	0.02 (0.021)	0.01 (0.019)	0.01 (0.015)	– 0.01 (0.018)	0.05* (0.023)	– 0.02 (0.012)	0.03* (0.014)	– 0.02 (0.017)
Lithuania	0.01 (0.021)	0.00 (0.020)	– 0.04* (0.015)	– 0.03 (0.017)	0.02 (0.024)	– 0.02 (0.012)	0.04** (0.016)	0.01 (0.016)
Luxembourg	– 0.07* (0.030)	– 0.06* (0.026)	– 0.04 (0.022)	– 0.02 (0.030)	0.02 (0.036)	– 0.02 (0.018)	0.02 (0.020)	0.01 (0.026)
Malta	0.05 (0.026)	– 0.08*** (0.019)	– 0.07*** (0.013)	0.07** (0.024)	– 0.03 (0.026)	– 0.04** (0.012)	0.00 (0.017)	0.06*** (0.016)
Netherlands	0.02 (0.024)	– 0.04* (0.020)	– 0.03 (0.015)	0.00 (0.020)	– 0.03 (0.024)	– 0.02* (0.011)	– 0.03* (0.011)	0.06*** (0.018)

Characteristic	Contacted OOH	No rest	Commute > 2 hours	Working in free time	Able to take a break	Working week 41– 48 hours	Working week > 48 hours	Working time predictable
Country								
Poland	– 0.06** (0.021)	– 0.09*** (0.018)	– 0.07*** (0.012)	– 0.08*** (0.019)	– 0.11*** (0.026)	– 0.05*** (0.010)	0.03 (0.016)	0.05*** (0.015)
Portugal	0.07** (0.024)	– 0.06*** (0.018)	– 0.10*** (0.010)	0.06** (0.022)	– 0.15*** (0.026)	– 0.01 (0.013)	0.02 (0.014)	– 0.02 (0.018)
Romania	0.01 (0.023)	– 0.08*** (0.019)	– 0.03 (0.016)	0.03 (0.021)	– 0.04 (0.027)	– 0.04** (0.013)	0.04* (0.018)	– 0.03 (0.020)
Slovakia	– 0.01 (0.022)	– 0.02 (0.020)	– 0.07*** (0.012)	0.01 (0.021)	– 0.03 (0.025)	0.10*** (0.020)	0.03 (0.015)	– 0.01 (0.020)
Slovenia	0.03 (0.019)	– 0.05** (0.016)	– 0.05*** (0.012)	– 0.01 (0.016)	– 0.02 (0.021)	0.02 (0.013)	0.02 (0.013)	– 0.01 (0.016)
Spain	– 0.01 (0.020)	0.20*** (0.023)	– 0.05*** (0.013)	– 0.03* (0.017)	– 0.08*** (0.022)	– 0.02 (0.012)	– 0.01 (0.011)	0.02 (0.015)
Sweden	0.01 (0.022)	0.01 (0.021)	– 0.03 (0.014)	0.01 (0.020)	– 0.04 (0.023)	0.01 (0.014)	0.00 (0.013)	– 0.03 (0.020)

Notes: * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001. OOH, out of hours.

Figure A1: Employees' quality of working time, by country and indicator, 2024, EU-27 (%)





Source: 2024 EWCS.

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This report examines flexible working arrangements and their effects on working time quality, work–life balance and health, and related regulations. Since 2015, the take-up of flexible working arrangements, accelerated by the pandemic and digitalisation, has increased significantly, with one in five EU workers engaged in telework or having working time autonomy in 2024. Overall, flexible working is associated with improved working time quality and a better work–life balance. However, risks persist, notably irregular schedules, high workloads and work-related contact outside working hours, which strongly undermine health and work–life balance. Regulatory responses, including the recording of working time and the implementation of a right to disconnect, have increased, although unevenly across EU Member States. Despite improvements in the quality of working time, flexible arrangements continue to reveal an evolving organisation of working time, highlighting the need to reassess working time and rest time in an increasingly digitalised world of work.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

