Impact of the COVID-19 confinement measures on telework in Spain
A qualitative survey

Antonio Corral, Iñigo Isusi

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Antonio Corral, Iñigo Isusi

IKEI Research & Consultancy

Abstract

The spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated home confinement measures in March 2020 urged many Spanish companies and their workers to "improvise" a teleworking practice for which not much previous experience was available. The qualitative survey results show that a large proportion of Spanish workers have accepted telework in relatively good terms, where a majority of them would be ready to telework more in the future if a balanced combination with physical presence at the workplace could be managed. Notwithstanding this, the research also identified some particularly conflictive issues related to conciliation (difficult to manage when all day at home), worktime (sometimes extended and problematic to stop) and occupational health, both physical (MSD related) and psychosocial (feelings of isolation).

Related publications and reports:

Fana, M., Milasi, S., Napierala, J., Fernandez Macias, E. and Gonzalez Vazquez, I., *Telework, work organisation and job quality during the COVID-19 crisis: a qualitative study*, European Commission, 2020, JRC122591.

Fana, M., Torrejón Pérez, S. and Fernández-Macías, E. (2020), *Employment impact of Covid-19 crisis: from short term effects to long terms prospects,* J. Ind. Bus. Econ. 47, 391–410.

Milasi, S., González Vázquez, I., Fernández Macías, E. (2020), *Telework in the EU before and after the COVID-19: where we were, where we head to,* JRC Science for Policy Brief.

Sostero, M., Milasi, S., Hurley, J., Fernandez-Macias, E., Bisello, M. (2020), *Teleworkability and the COVID-19 crisis: a new digital divide?* (No. 2020-05), Joint Research Centre (Seville site).

Contents

Introduction

Telework has been until now a minority option within the Spanish Labour market. Thus, and according to the latest 2019 data for the Spanish Labour Force Survey, approximately 8.3% of the Spanish working population teleworked, either occasionally or more than half of their working days.

However, following the declaration on 14 March of a 'state of alarm' in Spain by the Royal Decree 463/2020 for the management of the health crisis caused by COVID-19, the Spanish Government approved a package of employment-related measures through the publication of the Royal Decree-Law 8/2020, 17 March, on urgent measures to cope with the economic and social impact of COVID-19. Specifically, together with home confinement measures, the Spanish Government strongly recommended that companies should allow teleworking for those employees whose functions can be carried out from home and in those situations when this was technically and reasonably possible and if the effort required was proportionate.

This preference for teleworking arrangements has been extended in time, and in fact is still part of the Royal Decree-Law 21/2020, from 9 June, regulating measures for the implementation of the back to normal process. In that sense, companies have to adopt measures for the progressive reinstatement of face-to-face work and "the promotion of the use of telework" when possible.

Finally, Royal-decree 28/2020, of September 22nd on telework[1], states that the generalization of teleworking as a consequence of the pandemic has resulted in a kind of imbalance of rights and obligations between companies and workers. Thus, this legislation is intended to help business and worker parties to transfer the protective nature of labour law to the new reality. This rule is, moreover, the result of social agreement, of a process of shared reflection and debate with social partners and takes also into account the European Framework Agreement on Telework.

The new law applies to those employees who telework at least 30% of their weekly workday during a quarter, which is equivalent to a minimum of two days a week. The legislation specifies that remote work must be voluntary and reversible for the worker and the company, and that must be applied guaranteeing equal rights and obligations for the entire workforce. In that sense, the employee who works remotely must sign an agreement with the company and the company will be obliged to cover the expenses caused by this operational dynamic.

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[1] https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2020/09/22/28.

Methodological issues

During the month of March 2020, a total of 25 interviews were carried out with workers who were teleworking from home because of the confinement. Interviewees were identified mainly through personal contacts of the research team and other work colleagues.

The personal and occupational profile of the interviewees was as follows:

Table 1: Distribution of respondents by socio-demographic characteristics and job profile.

VARIABLE	CATEGORIES	No interviewees
Gender	Male	13
	Female	12
Age	<=45	13
	>45	12
Type of household	Couple with children	15
	Couple without children	3
	Single person	5
	Other	2
Sector of Activity	Services	17
	Manufacturing	8
Private/public employee	Private	21
	Public	4
Occupational level	High	21
	Medium-Low	4
Type of contract	Permanent	22
	Temporary	3
Working time	Full time	23
	Part time	2
Contact with clients/other people	Yes	16
	No	9
Intensity of ICT use	High	16
	Medium	8
	Low	1

As it can be observed, the sample is well balanced in terms of gender and age, while in terms of household composition there is a majority of couples with children vs other types, somewhat above the real proportion of this group in Spain.

As for the sector of activity there is a predominance of workers in the service sector than in manufacturing, which is consistent with their respective weights in the Spanish employment (though not necessarily in the teleworkers collective). The same happens regarding private sector employees, much more present in the sample than public sector personnel.

Regarding occupational level, the majority of the interviewed teleworkers are placed in the high level segment (professionals, engineers, consultants, lawyers, publishers, teachers, etc.), with only few cases of medium or low level occupations (one OSH technician and several office clerks).

On the other hand, about two thirds of the interviewees have a high level of ICT use in their job, and a similar proportion has direct contact with clients or other people.

Finally, the great majority of the teleworkers in the sample work with a permanent contract and full time.

Resources available at home and previous experience with telework

Resources available at home

According to the answers from the interviewed teleworkers, it can be stated that he level of ICT resources available to them was quite good. Of course, they had an Internet connection in all cases, though in general this was not provided or paid by the company but by themselves (except some case where the access is via a company mobile phone, with complaints about speed), and the same applies to the WI-FI system at home.

On the contrary, in most cases the computers and, to a lesser extent, the mobile telephones they use were made available by the company. However, regarding the computers, there are complaints about the size of the screen (or not having two screens), often due to the fact that it is a laptop they are using at home, and not a table PC as the one they use in their offices (though in some cases the office PC was carried home). Also, there are issues with the versions of the programs to be used, which sometimes are different to those used in the office.

As for other ICT equipment, printers are provided in a majority of cases by the workers themselves (though some don't have one, and others had to buy it), and the same applies to other office materials (paper, etc.) also facilitated by the teleworkers.

Regarding the adequacy of other infrastructures and work equipment at home (e.g. number of rooms in the house, chairs, desks, etc.), again in a great majority of cases, the interviewees value the adequacy as good and appropriate (especially when they already had a study room or where the number of family members is reduced, and without small children). However, in several cases the room they work in is not a proper "office room" or bureau, but the living room or the kitchen, in spite of which there are not major complaints.

> *"I work in the living room or the kitchen: very comfortable regarding light, chair, table... When I have a phone call I move to another room without problems".*
>
> *"I have a specific working room, but I had to buy an office chair, as the one I had was not good to work".*

Also, in households with several members (workers or students), a certain "competition for working space" is mentioned, as during confinement all these persons have to work or study from home, requiring the distribution and organisation of workplaces amongst them, which was not the case when teleworking in the previous circumstances.

> *"We have a room to work in. Now we have had to move around and share spaces among my wife, my sons and me. I'm the one who has been moving most".*
>
> *"I work where I can, even sitting in the living room with my small children around".*

Previous experience with telework

As it has already been reflected above, about two thirds of the interviewed cases work in positions with a high intensity of ICT use. However, the proportion of those who had previous teleworking experience is smaller (about a 50%). Moreover, the frequency of this past teleworking is low and only in few cases it is mentioned as an everyday practice and or as several times per week. For the rest of cases, teleworking has been until now just an occasional activity due to particular situations or momentary work needs.

Though, some interviewees mention that other people in their companies have a more regular teleworking experience than their own, so the situation varies greatly within companies. The reasons for teleworking are diverse, in some cases related to the type of job (commercial work that requires

travelling and thus the need for tele-interaction with the company's headquarters), and in others to personal circumstances:

"The company gave me this option to telework some days per week and I accepted, as it facilitates taking care of my small child. I could telework more often but I prefer the personal contact with my colleagues".

Nevertheless, telework as a conciliation enabler can have a double reading:

"After 7 ½ hours at the office, I still have work to do, so I telework from home when the children are asleep".

In the same sense, telework on weekends in order to cope with a high workload is mentioned several times as an occasional practice, prior to the pandemic.

On the other hand, the reasons which are mentioned for not teleworking before Covid-19 are also various: in some cases, the workers or the companies didn't have or see the need to do it; in others, their job is better performed in person (e.g. personal contacts with customers) and/or because teleworking is relatively new in their sector (e.g. school education) or not considered by their companies in the past.

Telework during the Covid-19 situation – General assessment

Work routines during the period of confinement

To a large extent, interviewees declare that teleworking has not changed very much the activities they have to perform in time of confinement, except for the fact that they carry them out from home and not in their usual workplaces. This is particularly true for jobs (and tasks) related to office work, mostly based on computer programs, which can be performed online without major difficulties (though more things have to be written down, more reports to managers are to be prepared...). This applies to all kinds of occupations at different levels, including managers (of finance, procurement, exports...), engineers, ICT professionals, lawyers, etc.

Of course, there are other tasks carried out previously related to "field work", as visits to companies, clients, inspections, etc. which are not possible. This applies especially to sales personnel, management consultants or OSH practitioners. Also, all kinds of face to face meetings (external or internal) are suspended and substituted by tele-calls, which affect all types of occupations. Many teleworkers mention that this entails some difficulties and a loss in the quality of communication and interaction with colleagues and stakeholders:

> *"It is not the same. Meetings do not flow easily, I feel it's less natural, nuances are lost, messages are not so clear, the possibility to clarify positions when negotiating is more limited, lack of body language..."*

This is especially true for teachers, a particular group whose work procedures have changed radically. For many of them, classes (and exams) online are something completely new, even if they had some previous experience interchanging papers with pupils. They state that they spend less time teaching, but more in correction work and other chores. Also difficulties in using new classroom programs are mentioned (this question of new programs, for connecting or interchanging documents, is also mentioned by other professions). In any case, online classes are not very well valued by the interviewed teachers, who prefer face to face education.

Timing of the transition to telework

With respect to the date they started teleworking, 10 of the interviewees did it from the same moment the health alarm and home confinement were declared, while 7 a few days before and 8 a few days after. Those who started in advance work mainly in financial services, large companies or multinationals (some of them with business relations in China) which were more conscious of what was coming, were more prepared for telework and took decisions earlier. Also people with conciliation problems, as schools started to close before the full outbreak of the pandemic.

On the contrary, in many cases starting later was due to difficulties to implement telework, lack of equipment, etc. as companies' and public administration ICT infrastructures were not prepared to allow a massive remote access to their servers and arrangements had to be made (in some cases also scheduling access, with an impact on actual working hours, though official working schedules were not changed).

Finally, regarding the number of days per week the interviewees have been teleworking since the confinement began, the great majority of them do it every day and only a few of them telework only some days per week. But all of them have increased their teleworking practice.

Management of the transition

It must be underlined that in the great majority of the cases the transition to teleworking was not the result of a negotiation between the employer and the workers and trade unions. Usually a

meeting was held where the management informed workers of the situation, presenting the need to telework as an accomplished fact due to the health alarm.

> *"Teleworking was the only way to keep on working. There wasn't a negotiation but a communication from the company".*

Previously, some companies had procedures for workers to request teleworking but these rules have been left behind because of the COVID situation. However, no complaints have been mentioned to this lack of negotiation, given the circumstances (in some cases, workers had the possibility of going to the office and did so during some days at the beginning, but not later on). It is interesting to mention that very often workers thought they were going to telework for a short period of time (a couple of weeks or so) and not for the 2-3 months or longer that the situation has extended.

Except for the organisations that had a more or less extensive teleworking practice, there were no previous plans for formal teleworking.

> *"Teleworking is just the results of the pandemic, not of a previous intention or plan from the company. The idea is going back to our workplace as soon as possible".*

In few cases, pilot experiments and preparations to introduce telework were already being made (laptop provision, training on on-line and cloud work, and document sharing) and teleworking tools were used even within the office. This has been very useful. But in general there was not a real policy or guidelines for teleworking and the work procedures applied in the office have been hurriedly transposed to work from home, improving on the go with successive updates.

The process has been a challenge for everybody. Rules and procedures were established for technical problems and consultation with PC technicians, cybersecurity instructions, etc., but not always. Also some training was provided on ICT use, tools, programmes, platforms, etc.

> *"We had to learn a lot of new things in a short time, it was very stressing".*

In many cases, recommendations or guidelines for OSH at home or conciliation issues (not to be in pyjamas the whole day) have been provided, though this has not always been practical or useful. Also specific counselling on Covid protection or information from official instances (newsletters from the Social Security, business associations, employment service…) has been provided.

> *"The company elaborated a protocol for workers to telework properly. There were some meetings and a document with telework OSH guidelines".*

Now protocols for organising a gradual back to work process are being devised and implemented.

Work organisation issues

Communication issues

According to approximately seven out of ten interviewed persons, telework has not had a relevant negative effect on the quality of the relationship and communication with their supervisors or their co-workers.

> *"Personal contact and physical proximity is always better, but communication has not been negatively affected during these months of confinement and telework".*

Curiously, all the teleworkers who mention an impact in the quality of their relations with other colleagues are people that had previous experience with telework. Maybe they are more aware of the communication drawbacks that teleworking implies, while the others were more enthralled by the novelty of the situation.

Different systems and procedures for communication have been implemented which are considered to be adequate and effective. Apart from telephone calls and email messaging, diverse programs have been used for virtual meetings (Skype, Webex, Zoom, MS Teams,…). In general, these systems are well valued, as they seem more human than the usual telephone, but not everybody likes them equally (though this appears to be the result of personal perceptions, more than related to the type of occupation).

These types of platforms are used not only for meetings but also for sharing common documents, coordination and interwork. In fact, an interviewee considers that confinement has pushed forward an update of working methods in the company:

> *"Teleworking has helped a little bit the generational change in the company. Many colleagues only knew how to turn on their computers and sub-use the standard programs. Now they have had to learn to handle other applications and profit all their utilities. In that sense, this situation has been positive".*

Different working groups have been created, depending on units, projects in common, areas of work, markets, etc. with and without managers, allowing for a fluent communication and coordination. Also, where teleworking was in place to some degree before Covid, the need for communication-coordination was known and diverse procedures and tools were already implemented.

Nevertheless, several interviewees mention the fact that virtual meetings don't facilitate reaching agreements and taking decisions, so that the same questions have to be dealt with in several meetings, when the issues seemed to have been already closed before. Also, the feeling of isolation derived from confinement is not eliminated by these virtual meetings:

> *"When meetings finish you are on your own. You are disconnected and cannot freely share worries and ask your colleagues, something that happens spontaneously at the office and that is very enriching".*

However, it is not possible to relate this feeling of segregation that affects some teleworkers to any particular type of occupation (it has been mentioned by office clerks, teachers, consultants, managers,…) or even to family composition (for people living alone, for instance). Again, this seems to be basically a subjective perception related to personality or to the type of work relations already established before the confinement.

In any case, apart from strictly related work communication, informal communication with colleagues is also considered to be very important and often missed due to the confinement. However, imaginative ways are put in place to tackle this:

> *"Every day we have a virtual coffee break meeting at 11:00 and also at 16:00, so that we can chat with other colleagues. This enables continuity in the personal contact with them".*

In the specific case of teachers, the relationship with pupils has changed a lot and paradoxically has turned more personal (one-to-one) than when at school.

Regarding communication with managers, some teleworkers state that they talk with them even more than before. It is mentioned that managers and supervisors are making an effort to keep contact and remain close to the teleworkers, trying to give support in a difficult situation. But also,

teleworkers feel they are being controlled and have had to report to their managers about the work they were performing more often and in more detail than before. Additionally, this has had an impact in terms of working time, often with messages, meetings and requests from managers at any time of the day. Other interviewees mention that the relationship with their managers has somehow gone cold, that there is less space for informal communication.

Autonomy, monitoring, supervision and standardisation

In terms of autonomy at work, most interviewees declare to be able to set their own objectives, deadlines and procedures during the confinement, of course within the framework defined by their managers, clients, etc. In general, this doesn't seem to be the result of telework as such but of the type of work organisation they already had before. Most of them state to have been doing the same work as before, with the same level of autonomy and control as before, but through remote means: daily or frequent tele-meetings, phone calls, emails, etc.

In this sense, it is not possible to establish a relation between the type of occupations and the level of autonomy declared by the interviewed teleworkers, who seem to have been already quite autonomous already before the confinement. Also, no distinct pattern emerges if previous experience with teleworking is considered.

In some cases, there is a feeling of greater autonomy and less control, at least in a physical sense:

> *"In the office I have a coordinating person who is sitting nearby and can see what I am doing all the time, which now is not the case obviously".*

Teleworkers also mention that they have to register their worktime and that they have daily meetings with project managers, so that their activity is continuously controlled. In terms of dedications, several interviewees mention that also when in the office they have to report the time they devote to each project they are involved in or to the different tasks they perform. This has not changed with telework, though several interviewees have the feeling that they have to report more often and have more meetings than when in the office:

> *"I think that sometimes pressure has been excessive, considering the exceptionality of the situation. We had to be available for unexpected and urgent meetings all the time, very long calls, connected all the time...But it worked well".*

Also, the communication programs allow being controlled at work (e.g. Skype, with green or yellow signs) by the managers. Some teleworkers expresses doubts about other possible hidden control systems:

> *"On the other hand, I don't know if they use some other control system, as checking the number of hours that we are connected to the company's servers, or my lapse of response to emails, etc."*

In some cases this type of computerised control is known by the workers but not exempt from drawbacks:

> *"When I access the intranet in the morning, this is registered and my workday starts for a standard of 8:15 hours. If I work longer, this is not registered as extra hours, which would be the case in the office".*

From the point of view of teleworkers with directive or supervisory responsibilities, management and control of their personnel has been a challenge, though they make a positive balance to this respect, and mention that their teams have been quite responsible. They all had to meet their objectives, deadlines and results, and these are controlled. Nonetheless, a fall in productivity levels is mentioned, due to the lack of immediate contact and communication, but not to bad practices

from the employees. Moreover, this seems to have happened mainly at the beginning of the confinement, when telework systems were still being deployed. In any case:

"Production targets have been made more flexible due to the coronavirus crisis, as workload has reduced. The same happens with deadlines, which have been extended, not because of teleworking but of the general situation".

This has been especially clear regarding commercial tasks and contacts with clients, which have been reduced practically to nothing.

This increased flexibility is recognised by many teleworkers, though at the same time most of them declare that work procedures remained the same as before. Only in the case of teachers these procedures have changed significantly, as classes have been given in remote or by podcasts, exams have also been on line, etc. Apart from that group, in few cases there is a specific mention of the change from paper to digital when having to record activities, tenders, forms, etc. and to telephonic attention to clients instead of face-to-face contacts.

Job quality issues

Pay and compensation issues

Concerning payment and compensation issues, approximately only 1 out of 5 respondents have experienced a loss of income since the start of the confinement period, fully explained by the cease of activity created by the COVID-19 situation that has affected many activities and that has forced some companies to introduce ad-hoc measures to reduce their pay bills (for instance, via temporary labour force adjustment plans or "Expedientes de Regulación de Empleo (ERTE)" in Spanish). In other cases, this reduction in wages has come via the removal of travel expenses due to the confinement situation. There is no clear pattern of individuals affected by this loss of income, in the sense that it affects individuals irrespectively of their level of skills, sector or occupation.

> *"Due to the confinement and the fall in activity, we have had to take many measures in the company, including the drop in wages".*

By way of contrast, 4 out five respondents suggest that they have not experienced any loss of income since the start of the confinement period. Notwithstanding this, a relatively large number of them (approximately 4 out of ten) suggest that in case the future economic evolution of the economy in general and the company in particular is not good enough, there is a certain risk of losing income in the near future.

> *"In the short term I have not experienced changes in remuneration, but if the stagnation situation continues, there may be. For example, the company is thinking of applying an ERTE, at a date and scope still undecided".*

On the other hand, approximately one out of three interviewees suggest that their company has supported them during this transition to telework, through different ways. Typical responses include the provision of hardware tools (laptops and mobile phones) and technical advice/ad-hoc training to effectively use the telework tools. There are also some examples of companies underpinning an ERTE process where the company is supporting their employees, either advancing in time the payments received from the Public Employment Service or compensating the reduction in wages derived from the introduction of these ERTEs to different degrees, depending on their position in the company.

Unfortunately enough, there is one example where the interviewee had to buy herself her laptop. Interestingly also, this situation corresponds to a medium skilled person with a temporary contract at that moment.

Intrinsic quality of work issues

The largest part of interviewees (approximately two-thirds of respondents) suggest that the new telework situation has had a neutral effect, either in terms of the quality of work, motivation, satisfaction with the job, skills use or productivity (in this last case, the percentage reduces a bit).

On the contrary, only a minority of interviewees (one out of five) reckon that telework has negatively affected the quality of their work or their productivity levels, whereas for the remaining items the number of individuals negatively affected is even lower. There is not a clear pattern of interviewees in this group (for instance in terms of gender, age or family status).

> *"My productivity levels during the workday have been reduced due to having to take care of the children. Then I make up for it in hours when the children are asleep or I take turns with my husband".*

By way of contrast, a relatively higher proportion of individuals suggest that telework has had a positive impact on their motivation and satisfaction at work (approximately one out of four interviewees). Equally to the former case, there is not a clear pattern of interviewees in this group, which includes different occupations and household compositions.

> *"I think teleworking itself has had a very positive effect. I have been able to make the most of the time, rest better and organize myself very well. Further-more, teleworking has given me technical knowledge of different platforms, I have continued my tasks without problems and I have learned in this process".*
>
> *"Teleworking has increased my ICT skills, since before for example I did not use programs like Skype and now I use it on a daily basis".*

Employment quality issues

Concerning employment quality issues, all the interviewees suggest that the current telework situation is not going to affect their job, even if they may have a temporary contract. In this regard, one of the interviewees stress that companies are introducing short-term adjustments via salaries and not via job-cuts.

Approximately, 1 out of five interviewees suggest that this positive expectation may change in the medium term in case the economic situation may further deteriorate in the coming months, where this perspective is shared by individuals, irrespectively of their contract status.

> *"I hope there will be a quick recovery. If the general economic stagnation situation continues over time, we could have problems"*

Linked to the previous point, the largest majority of interviewees suggest that working from home is not having any negative repercussions on their recognition and career opportunities. On the contrary, some individuals suggest that telework has facilitated the assumption of new skills and capabilities that are very valued by companies (for instance in terms of tele-managing teams).

Notwithstanding this, there are only a couple of interviewees that reckon that teleworking practices will have a negative impact on their careers. For instance, one interviewee alerts that, in normal circumstance, teleworkers may become "invisible" for the company in comparison to those present workers. Other interviewee stresses the limits of telework, particularly for those individuals with commercial duties and in direct contact with clients:

> *"Telework is fine as long as it is combined with business travel. Virtually every-thing can be done remotely but (physical) customer visits are essential. Tele-conferences work but up to a certain point. You have more influence on customers being physically with them".*

Health and safety issues

As far as health and safety issues are concerned, approximately one out of three interviewees suggest that their physical health has been negatively affected by the current situation of "forced" telework. It is interesting to stress that all these affected interviewees are over their forties, and nearly all live in couples with children. Typical examples of physical health problems mentioned include sight problems (derived from small laptops screens) as well as postural/musculoskeletal-associated pain in the back/neck (usually associated to poor ergonomic chairs and lack of

movement). Some individuals also suggest acoustic problems (linked to the lack of a proper/noise isolated space as the working space may be shared with other elements such as the TV set).

> *"It is true that I am noticing some posture problems due to the lack of an ergonomic chair. Also, I notice the theme of the screens, since in the office I have 2 large screens. I have begun to notice sight problems"*
>
> *"I miss my "super table" at work and, although I have been fine, I would like to have more space, to be more comfortable"*
>
> *"I have missed having the right place, material and facilities similar to those in the office (second screen, printer/scanner, correct chair and correct Internet connection). If I had them, it would have been perfect".*

Meanwhile, and as far as psychological/mental health issues are concerned, up to three out of four interviewees report suffering from these type of problems, where this group of persons comprise a wide array of characteristics in terms of age, gender or family status situations. Also, approximately 1 out of four interviewees suggest suffering from both physical and mental health problems.

Typical psychological problems mentioned include higher levels of stress and anxiety (often linked to the perceived workload or the insecurity with the hardware and software and), sleep problems and, in some cases, certain levels of social isolation from colleagues at work. Problems related to "workaholism" are also mentioned, but only by a limited number of interviewees.

> *"I am a bit of a disaster with the schedules, you get up later, you eat something, you work throughout the day, more distributed, but less productive".*

By way of contrast, most of the interviewees reckon to have freedom to decide when and how often to take their own break times. This situation is sometimes "generated" by external elements, such as the obligations generated by the family needs

> *"More than work alcoholism, I would say that I need more time to do the same job due to the interruption of having 2 children around me asking questions about school. I don't want my productivity and performance to be affected by teleworking, therefore I spend more time finishing things pending. I may feel more stressed in that regard",*

For some interviewees, the confinement situation, together with the current social and economic uncertain situation in Spain, have aggravated these problems. As one of the interviewees suggests,

> *"The greater sedentary lifestyle that teleworking entails, together with the current confinement situation, is sure to be affecting my physical health. Before, I walked to and from work for almost an hour, and I also walked a lot in the office itself. This reduced mobility, in addition to the general uncertainty, are also affecting my mental health".*

Also, some interviewees (a very small percentage in any case) denounce that their companies have not provided them with proper guidance in order to prevent these physical and psychological health problems.

Notwithstanding these problems, we have identified several interviewees that reckon that the current "forced telework" situation has affected them positively, in the sense that they work more concentrated, avoid "toxic colleagues" and feel they have more time for themselves

> *"Thanks to teleworking I have much less stress. I work the same time as if I were in the office, but I avoid distractions and I'm much more focused on the job"*
>
> *"Teleworking is helping me to reduce the stress generated by other colleagues at work, it is helping me to take a distance to a very absorbing type of work and to recover a tranquillity that is not possible in the office (there are no walls in my office , it is an open floor with a lot of noise, conversations, etc). I really like my job, and teleworking I concentrate very well and I spend my eight hours, even if I'm tired, but the stress of the office has been reduced. In addition, my health has improved because I am working in a much friendlier environment, I do not have to commute to the other edge of the city, I eat much better, I rest better, I am calmer and I lose much less time".*

Working time issues

More than 3 out of four interviewees suggest that they have experienced changes in their working time, although not in all cases these changes are due to the new telework regime per se. In this regard, the nature and content of the concrete work influences changes in the duration, flexibility and intensity of the work.

Generally speaking, and as far as the duration of the working time is concerned, a bit more than half of those experiencing changes suggest that their working time has increased. This situation is explained in the large part of cases due to the new circumstances opened by the confinement and the telework possibilities (a good example of this is given by the case of teachers, whose working time has increased in order to accommodate to the new tele-learning needs).

> *"I work many more hours than before when the face-to-face teaching sessions. All the teachers are devoting in a lot of hours. This has forced us to reorganize and reinvent everything, and for this we have devoted many more hours than before. I myself have dedicated twice hours as much to it, without exaggeration".*

In other cases, interviewees suggest that they have extended their working time beyond desirable, often explained by the inexistence of external time limits imposed (for instance, the closure of the office). Also the need to conciliate work with domestic chores may have had an influence on the perception of working time extension.

> *"The duration of work time has been extended many times beyond normal since there is no obligation to leave the workplace, since you are at home."*
>
> *"During the confinement situation, and with the whole family at home and having no activities outside, working hours have been longer in my case. Being at home and with the computer always connected, my working hours have been extended".*

In terms of intensity, most of the interviewees suggest that they do not feel that their work intensity has increased. Some exceptions have been found, particularly amongst those persons in management positions, who were responsible of managing the work of others and felt an increase in their work intensity, particularly at the beginning of the confinement, when many arrangements for telework had to be made.

"Especially during the initial confinement days, I hardly had moments of tranquillity, there were a lot of things to organize at work. Currently, the situation has calmed down and I am doing better".

By way of contrast, less than half of those experiencing changes suggest that their working time has decreased. In many of these cases, this situation is explained either by a reduction of the workload (due to the slowdown in activities) or, in other cases, by ad-hoc time reductions imposed by the company as part of the ERTE procedures.

"I used to work 40 hours a week before COVID-19 and now my working time has obligatorily changed to 35 hours. The difference will be adjusted in the future in terms of vacation days".

On the other hand, and as far as working time flexibility are concerned, it could be suggested that, unless the case of those workers under external demands (clients, other colleagues, etc), most of the interviewees have had the opportunity to adjust their work schedules to their own circumstances and needs.

"With the confinement situation, the working time has been much more flexible. I usually work with previous appointments, with a very demanding schedule, every half hour I have to attend a person and give an answer to his/her request. Now, teleworking, I manage myself the calls, the work is more fluid. I don't have an obligation to be with a person every half hour and close things".

"I have total flexibility to organize my work day (which was more rigid before), but I have seen that the length of the working day has been extended in time".

Work-life balance

General assessment

Concerning work-life balance issues, approximately one out of three interviewees suggest that they have experienced differences and difficulties in work-life balance since the confinement and start of teleworking. It is interesting that the largest part of these affected individuals live in couples with young children, irrespectively of their gender.

> "Confinement and teleworking have led us to a more "intense" family life: There have been somewhat difficult moments with our little baby"
>
> "Generalizing is complicated, it depends on the circumstances and the days. But in general I would say that it has been complicated. I have not been able to work as much as I would have liked. It is all the housework, the children and we are without outside help".

By way of contrast, and for the remaining two thirds of interviewees, they reckon not having experienced particular difficulties. In this regard, and in the case of individuals living in couples with children, they often suggest that the fact that children are relatively older has helped a lot to avoid possible problems.

> "There have been no special problems. With older children, reconciliation does not entail difficulty, it is not like when you have small children".
>
> "The changes introduced by teleworking have been positive: I have saved time for my personal life from previous commuting, I have been able to cook healthier and eat at home, I have been able to better take care of my dog, etc. In general, the organization of my life is much easier with teleworking. Easier and more restful".

Meanwhile, and in terms of satisfaction in balancing your work with your personal/family life, the largest part of interviewees (approximately two thirds of respondents suggest a high level of satisfaction, even amongst many who reckon difficulties in work-life balance.

> "The situation generated by COVID-19 and telework has allowed me more family life time, eating with my children, supporting them with more tranquillity in their school tasks, more leisure shared with them (movies, …), also more time for me by not having to bring them and take them to all the extracurricular activities they had… The truth is that apart from all the stress of being all at home all day I am enjoying these little moments"
>
> "Yes, I am satisfied with the experience, but largely because my wife is the one who cares for my young daughter, which requires a lot of dedication. If she didn't, I couldn't telework. "
>
> "In my case, and since I live alone reconciliation is not a problem".

By way of contrast, only one out of ten interviewees stress that their level of satisfaction is low, where in all cases, this situation corresponds to individuals (either men or women) living couples with young children.

> "We find it quite difficult to combine work with children at home. I work in the afternoons and my husband in the morning, in order to take care of the children".
>
> "I have the feeling that you are not fully with the children, helping them … And at work, bad feelings too, because you don't do everything you have to do¡¡¡.

Division at work at home

Nearly six out of ten interviewees have introduced changes in the daily organisation of caring/housekeeping tasks since the confinement period. In this regard, typical answers include devoting more time to some duties that were previously purchased outside (typically cooking or housekeeping), as well as other activities such as taking care of children education, doing the shopping, getting out the dog, etc.

> *"Before the confinement we had an external assistant person who came to do the cleaning. Now, we have to take on everything (cleaning, meals, shopping, etc), but we share these duties between both couple members"*
>
> *"Now I prepare meals daily, when before I only did it on weekends"*
>
> *"With the new situation, I can take care of my pet and do not need to resort to an external assistant".*

A large share of these cases correspond to couples with children, although it is also possible to identify examples of couples with no children and even individuals living in unipersonal households. There are no specific bias in the data based on gender or age.

By way contrast, and in the remaining cases, no specific changes have been introduced. In this sense, the former distribution of caring/housekeeping activities remain the same.

> *"The distribution of tasks remains the same: shopping and cooking for my husband and cleaning the home for me".*

It is interesting to notice that, in a relatively large number of cases (approximately six out of ten cases), both members of the family have been obliged to telework at the same time, where this situation has fostered the introduction of these changes in the daily organisation of caring/housekeeping tasks.

Finally, none of the interviewees received any regular help with childcare or elderly care from a day care centre, a nursery, a babysitter, or relatives. In this regard, the confinement situation has obliged individuals and families to arrange their own individual solutions to cope with this type of problems, where in some cases, this situation has redounded in big difficulties to reconcile with work duties.

> *"Before the confinement situation, my mother used to go to a day care centre and I went to work. Therefore, while I was working I did not have to worry about the care of my mother. But as a result of the new situation, the day care centres closed and literally left me with my mother situation without any solution. This has been a problem and I have had to cope with my dependent mother, sometimes in a bad way. Of course, this situation has not facilitated my telework experience".*

Time management

Concerning time management issues, it is interesting to underline the important time devoted to commuting to work, which has been "saved" during the confinement period for other purposes. In this sense, and on average terms, interviewees suggest devoting approximately 1 hour of their time to go and return from work, with some people even devoting up to 2 hours and more to commute. It should be stressed that a large part of the interviewees use different public or private transport means (buses, motorcycles, cars, etc.), which represents an additional expense that has been saved during the confinement.

> *"I live 20 kilometres from the office. When there is a lot of traffic, it can take me up to an hour to reach the company. So I like to telework, I save all that time for myself".*

Concerning the use made to this "saved" time, the array of answers is very wide, depending on the specificities and personal "needs" of each individual. In this regard, main typical answers include "sleep more", "taking things more calm", "eat better", "spend more time with kids and family", "cook more" or "devote more time for hobbies (sport/yoga, reading, etc.)". Of course, all these elements are very positively valued by the interviewees.

> *"I get up a little later than before and sleep more. Then, in the afternoon, I take the opportunity to do some exercises that I should do because of back problems that I have. I live at a calmer pace and I can rest much more".*
>
> *"I use it to eat quietly with the family, since before I used to eat quickly in the company".*

Notwithstanding, approximately one out of ten interviewees suggest that they are not saving time but, on the contrary, devote more time to work than before, an element that is not positively valued at all. Nearly all these cases correspond to women with children at home.

> *"I have not saved time; on the contrary, I devote now much more time to work than before".*

Interestingly also, the majority of interviewees have changed their life routines since the confinement period. In this regard, and in addition to the changes introduced in the daily organisation of caring/housekeeping tasks (see previous section 7.2.), some interviewees have introduced new routines in their daily life, for instance, in terms of doing some sport or cooking "more sophisticated" dishes.

> *"With the confinement, I have started doing some yoga and mindfulness exercises".*

Notwithstanding this, one out of four interviewees stress that they have not changed or introduced new routines in their life. Typically, these individuals correspond to either men living in unipersonal households or couples (either men or women) with aged children.

Finally, and in relation to the need to combine work-related responsibilities with other responsibilities related to helping child(ren) with online education or taking care of elderly family people, this situation is only relevant for a limited share of the interviewees (for instance, for those who have very young children aged less than 14 years). In this regard, and for the large majority who have had to cope with these situations, this seems to have been a certain "challenge"

> *"I have had to devote a lot of attention to my little son, to follow him up and guide him a little in his school work. Instead, my 13 and 15 year old daughters are relatively independent and have not required much help from me".*
>
> *"We, brothers and sisters, have taken turns to be with our mother during the first six weeks of confinement and to help her in any way possible."*

Prospects and general outlook

Well-being feelings during the period of confinement

Generally speaking, and despite existing difficulties, the large majority of interviewees (approximately more than eight out of ten) assess their experience of telework as very positive. In some cases, this positive perception is quite "extreme".

> *"I would be delighted to be able to telework every day. If it was up to me I wouldn't go back to the office".*

Positive elements linked to telework include the possibility to self-organisation and distribution of working time, more capacity to concentrate on the work, saved commuting times (and associated expenses), more time for other things (for instance for leisure) or, in the case of individuals with family duties, a better reconciliation of work and family.

By way of contrast, negative elements linked to telework include, amongst other, difficulties in developing personal relationships and the exchange of ideas with clients and colleagues, as well as certain problems of social isolation and difficulties to disconnect from work for some individuals.

Of course, the extreme confinement situation has added certain elements that are beyond teleworking in itself (for instance, more people at home, a high level of anguish linked to the COVID situation, etc.)

> *"I think the telework experience would have been very pleasant if it had occurred in a normal situation, that is, teleworking when everyone else is in their daily routines (the children at school, my partner at work). But we all have had to be at home at the same time and that has made things difficult. At the beginning it was quite difficult but I already do better".*
>
> *"At the beginning, I was more nervous, misplaced, maybe it was more complicated for me, but I think I'm actually confusing teleworking with the confinement situation and they are two different things".*

By way of contrast, less than two out of ten interviewees suggest a bad or average assessment of their experience of telework. Most of these individuals (either men or women) include couples with small children and interviewees whose job include close interactions with clients/external persons. Also, these interviewees suggest in all cases a bad self-assessment of their own welfare feeling during the confinement situation.

Prospects of telework

According to the information collected, approximately half of the interviewees believe that their employer will encourage telework in the future, often associated to certain persons and moments in time, and compatible with physical presence. This positive attitude is also prevalent amongst those companies with previous telework experience, and it is often associated with possibilities to further reduce fixed costs as well as a solution for individuals with specific needs (for instance, those who need to reconcile work with some special family needs).

> *"The company believes that teleworking for some people, positions and specific moments will be regarded as a viable alternative. For the future, the company already has plans to do so, and I think it will be a way to both satisfy some employees with special needs as well as a means for the company to save on certain expenses (office rents, for instance).*
>
> *"The experience of teleworking has been positively valued by the company since it has been better than expected. The pace of work has been maintained and things have turned out very well.*

> *Therefore, I do not believe that the company has no problem with teleworking and, as a result, it may propose to telework".*

By way of contrast, telework is denied as a feasible option by one third of the interviewees while the remaining 20% do not have an opinion on this. In some cases, the own nature of the activities of the company impede the development of these telework practices. In other cases, it is argued that telework cannot substitute the importance of "social elements", particularly within teams that have to work together as well as the "gossiping/small talk" with colleagues. The largest share of these interviewees belong to the private sector.

> *"The company is not going to promote teleworking due to the own nature of the work we do. We do social intervention with individual persons, and this cannot be done via telework".*
>
> *"Certain parts of my work cannot be done via telework, since part of my time I need to go to the companies on site. I think that, in my case, the ideal thing would be to combine telework with physical presence with clients".*
>
> *"In my work, and despite the advantages and good experience with telework, we will return to the previous situation as soon as possible, due to the advantages linked to physical contact in team work".*

On the other hand, approximately three out of four interviewees believe that they will continue teleworking in the short run, where this percentage is lower (four out ten interviewees) when the medium-long term perspective is taken into account. All these latest respondents work in the private sector (preferably in the tertiary sector), and comprise different situations in terms of gender, family status or age considerations).

Availability to telework in the future

Concerning the question whether the interviewees would like to telework if their employer gave them this possibility, nearly three out of four of them suggest a positive answer. In most cases, these individuals opt for a combination of telework and physical presence at work. By way of contrast, very few interviewees opt for a pure telework option.

> *"I would like to combine telework with face-to-face work (2 + 3 or 3 + 2 formula). This mixed model would be the optimal for me since this situation guarantees a better reconciliation of family and work life, the maintenance of relationships with work colleagues, ensures an adequate exchange of ideas that enriches work and encourages the maintenance of personal care. Definitively, It would be nice to telework a few days a week"*
>
> *"Fridays, when we only work from 8 to 15 hours, could be a good day to tele-work".*

One of the conditions more often stressed by those interviewees who would like to continue teleworking in the future refers to support by the company to cover certain expenses either currently incurred by individuals (light, Internet access, etc), or other expenses regarded as necessary to develop the work in good conditions (optimal lighting, purchase of an ergonomic chair, changes at home to accommodate a working space, etc.). An additional element refers to the provision of technical support by the company (for instance when computer problems take place).

> *"It would be desirable if the existing conditions at home were ideal for tele-working (for instance, the connection to the server sometimes crashes). I believe that the company should provide at its own costs all the required means, including computers, printers, Internet Access, etc."*

By way of contrast, and for the remaining interviewees, this possibility of teleworking has no interest. Typically, this group is comprised by individuals (either men or women), usually living in couples with young children and with a negative view on the impact generated by telework on their

work in terms of quality of work or on productivity and the reconciliation of their work and family duties.

"I would not like to telework all the time. I prefer to have clearer schedules and delimit better my personal life from work. Also, I am really more efficient in the office. In the office I have everything I need for work".

Some conclusions from the research

Resources available for teleworking and past experience

- According to the answers from the interviewed teleworkers, the level of ICT resources available to them was quite good, with computers and, to a lesser extent, mobile telephones made available by the company. On the contrary, the Internet connection was provided by themselves.

- Interviewees value positively in a great majority of cases the adequacy of other infrastructures and work equipment at home. Even when the room they work in is not a proper "office room", there are not major complaints. However, in households with several members, a certain "competition for working space" is mentioned, since all persons at home have to work or study from home during the confinement situation.

- About two thirds of the interviewed cases work in positions with a high intensity of ICT use. However, the proportion of those who had previous teleworking experience is smaller and only in few cases it is mentioned as a frequent practice.

Telework during the COVID-19 situation – General assessment

- To a large extent, interviewees declare that teleworking has not changed very much the activities they had to perform previously, except for the fact that they carry them out from home and not in their usual workplaces. This is particularly true for jobs (and tasks) related to office work, but not for "field work", as visits to companies, providers, inspections, etc., which have not been possible.

- Also, all kinds of face-to-face meetings (external or internal) have been suspended and substituted by tele-calls. Many teleworkers mention that this entails some difficulties and a loss in the quality of communication and interaction with colleagues, stakeholders and clients.

- Though most of the interviewees started teleworking from the same moment the confinement was declared, or even a few days before (mainly financial services, large companies or multinationals), in many other cases teleworking started later due to a lack of equipment and sufficient connection capacity as companies' ICT infrastructures were not prepared to allow a massive remote access to their servers.

- In the great majority of the cases the transition to teleworking was not the result of a negotiation between the employer and the workers and trade unions. Usually a meeting was held where the management informed workers of the situation, presenting the need to telework as an accomplished fact. Except for those with a previous teleworking practice, there were no previous plans for teleworking.

- The process has been a challenge for everybody. Several rules and procedures were established for different elements (solving of technical problems, consultation procedures with PC technicians, cybersecurity instructions, etc.), but not in all cases. Also some training was provided. In many cases, recommendations or guidelines for OSH at home, COVID protection or conciliation issues have been provided, though this has not always been practical or useful.

Work organization issues

- According to approximately seven out of ten interviewed persons, telework has not had a relevant negative effect on the quality of the relationship and communication with their supervisors or their co-workers.

- Different systems and procedures have been implemented, allowing for a fluent communication and coordination. Diverse programs have been used for virtual meetings, sharing common documents, coordination and interwork. Nevertheless, several interviewees mention the fact that virtual meetings do not facilitate reaching agreements and taking decisions. Also, the feeling of isolation derived from confinement is not eliminated for some teleworkers (though no occupational or even household pattern can be identified). In that sense, apart from strictly related work communication, informal communication with colleagues is also considered to be very important and often missed.

- A significant share of interviewees suggest that they have felt controlled by their managers and supervisors, having to report to their managers about the work they were performing more often and more in detail than before, resulting in longer working time to respond to messages, meetings and requests at any time. In this regard, several interviewees had the feeling that they had to report more often and had more meetings than when in the office. Also, that the communication programs allowed being controlled at work. Some interviewees mention that the relationship with their managers has somehow gone cold, that there is less space for informal communication.

- In terms of autonomy at work, most interviewees declare to have been doing the same work as before, with the same level of autonomy and control as before, but through remote means (daily or frequent tele-meetings, phone calls, emails, etc.). Also, work standardisation seems to have remained unchanged to a great extent, though more flexible activity targets are mentioned (particularly when contacts with clients are involved), together with digitalisation of some procedures, previously implemented on paper. However, for specific groups as teachers, tele-education has implied important changes in their work procedures.

- For those teleworkers with directive or supervisory responsibilities, management and control of their personnel has been a challenge, though they make a positive balance to this respect, particularly in terms of the responsibility shown by employees. Nonetheless, a fall in productivity levels is mentioned, particularly at the beginning of the confinement period, due to the lack of immediate contact and communication, but not to bad practices from the employees.

Job quality issues

- Most of interviewees stress that the new telework situation has had a neutral effect in terms of the quality of work, motivation, satisfaction with the job, skills use or productivity, as well as in their recognition and career opportunities. The largest part of them have not experienced any loss of income since the start of the confinement period.

- However, approximately one out of three interviewees suggest that their physical health has been negatively affected by the current situation of "forced" telework, particularly sight problems as well as postural/musculoskeletal-associated back pain. Meanwhile, psychological/mental health issues are more spread (typically stress and anxiety, sleep problems or feelings of social isolation), affecting up to three out of four interviewees. Approximately 1 out of four interviewees suggest suffering from both physical and mental health problems.

- A majority of interviewees suggest that they have experienced changes in their working time, where a significant part suggest that their workday has prolonged (in some cases, even beyond desirable). Meanwhile, work intensity has not increased for most of the interviewees. Most of

them have had the opportunity to adjust their work schedules to their own circumstances and needs.

Work-life balance

- Approximately one out of three interviewees have experienced difficulties in work-life balance during the research period, mostly amongst those living in couples with young children, irrespectively of their gender. Nevertheless, only one out of ten interviewees stress that their satisfaction in balancing work and personal/family life is low, where this situation corresponds again to individuals (either men or women) living in couples with young children.

- More than half the interviewees have introduced changes in the daily organisation of caring/housekeeping tasks since the start of the confinement period and new routines in their daily life. Also, a large part of respondents have "saved" an important time in commuting to work (up to 1 hour on average), that has been successfully profited for other more satisfactory uses (with exceptions, particularly amongst women with children at home).

Prospects and general outlook

- The large majority of interviewees assess their experience of telework as very positive. Particularly valued elements include the possibility to self-organisation and distribution of working time, more capacity to concentrate on the work, saved commuting times, more time for leisure activities or a better reconciliation of work and family. By way of contrast, negative elements include difficulties in exchanging ideas with clients and colleagues, problems of social isolation or difficulties to disconnect from work.

- Regarding the future, approximately half of the interviewees believe that their employer will encourage telework, often associated to certain persons and moments in time, and combined with physical presence at the workplace. Meanwhile, nearly three out of four interviewees suggest that they would like to telework if their employer gave them this possibility where, in most cases, these individuals also opt for a combination of telework and physical presence at work. According to interviewees, the successful implementation of these telework practices would require an additional support by companies, particularly in terms of monetary support to cover some expenses currently incurred in or in terms of additional technical support.

Final conclusions

- In general terms, and according to the testimonies gathered, a positive assessment can be made of the widespread experience of teleworking in Spain triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. In a moment of great alarm, social concern and uncertainty, many companies (depending on their activity sector and resources) and their workers (depending on their type of job) have been able to "improvise" a teleworking practice that had not been planned in advance and for which their previous experience was quite limited.

- In that context, telework has been implemented not without difficulties but, at the same time, without a great impact on job quality and the activities teleworkers carry out for their companies. Though the transition to teleworking was not the result of a negotiation process, workers have accepted it in good terms and don't express major complaints or negative impacts. Of course for some of them there are issues related to conciliation (difficult to manage when all day at home) and worktime (sometimes extended and problematic to stop), or to occupational health, both physical (MSD related) and psychosocial (isolation).

- But a majority of them would be ready to telework more in the future if a balanced combination with physical presence at the workplace can be managed.