

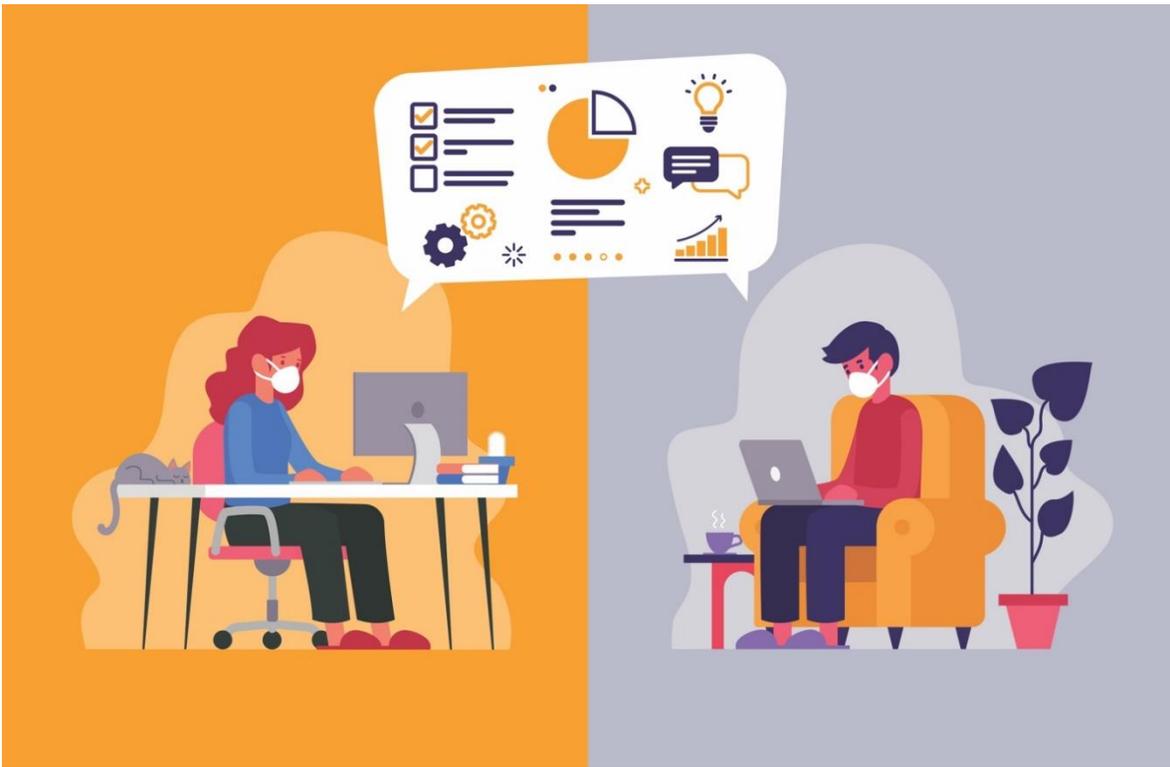
IOE Guidance on teleworking in the times of Covid-19

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IOE GUIDANCE ON TELEWORKING IN THE TIMES OF COVID-19



Working from home during emergency situations entails diverse and unexpected challenges that are not common to traditional teleworking strategies.

During COVID-19 emergency, many companies are confronted with the dilemma of safeguarding a healthy and safe environment for their employees, while also facing the need of securing business sustainability to preserve jobs and maintain the well-being of their workforce.

In emergency situations, there are no one-size-fits-all solutions to respond to the changing realities. Employers must be ready to adapt and vary their expectations.

Some companies may already have a teleworking policy in place, other companies are now forced into uncharted territory. The key to implementing a successful teleworking strategy is where employers and workers share responsibilities and join efforts to keep the ship afloat.

This document aims at providing practical guidance to our members on understanding the main challenges of teleworking during emergency situations, as well as to provide key measures for its effective implementation.



MAIN CHALLENGES

1. **Health and mental wellbeing:** Occupational health and safety measures are out of direct control of the employers when employees are teleworking. Moreover, emergency situations alter our ordinary routine and can result in additional stress, tension and discomfort, lack of exercise and sleep. The impact of these stressors is even stronger during forced and prolonged teleworking.
2. **Work life balance:** Working from home blurs the boundaries between work and private life and can impose challenges to well-being. The situation is aggravated when lockdowns prevent people from going out and when social life is limited. Family responsibilities and shared working spaces might alter the working schedules.
3. **Technology, data protection and security:** The use of technology for teleworking can present higher risks of cyber-attacks and confidentiality breaches.
4. **Skills:** The use of communication tools requires technological skills that not all the workforce might have at the time a teleworking policy is put in place. Companies will probably have to anticipate a new way of working. Depending on the specific sector and context, different skills will be required once the emergency is over and work resumes.
5. **Productivity:** Full lockdowns have resulted in children and babies remaining at home and often more than one family member sharing the same space to telework. This may result in a decrease in productivity. Workers must adapt to their new working environment at home where there may be other members in the household and other distractions.

KEY MEASURES

- 1. Promote health and safety:** Employers can promote appropriate health and safety measures and provide guidance to meet the needs of the changing situation. It is important to raise awareness of the employees' responsibility to take care of their own physical and mental well-being at home.
- 2. Build mutual trust and share responsibilities:** It is key to build mutual trust and establish shared responsibilities with workers through open and transparent discussions about expectations, decisions and deliverables.
- 3. Provide extra support and understanding:** Both employers and employees need more than ever to keep a positive and reassuring attitude, remain calm, supportive and be empathetic in the context of an emergency.
- 4. Change productivity mindset:** Productivity should be mission driven and measured based on deliverable outcomes rather than on working time. Using collaborative online tools, such as shared calendars and public status (online/offline), can facilitate teamwork and boost productivity. Productivity goes hand in hand with well-being, hence regular breaks and healthy lifestyle should be promoted.
- 5. Be flexible and reactive:** Circumstances can change very quickly and require teleworking policy to be flexible and regularly reviewed in order to be fit for the changing needs of the emergency situation. For instance, at a given moment some workers could be asked to return to the company's premise. Furthermore, companies should anticipate transitional strategies for implementation once the emergency is over.
- 6. Communicate regularly:** Keep workforce informed of the emergency situation and its impact on the business operation. Exchange views and ideas on business continuity strategies.
- 7. Promote a learning culture:** Training on software and the use of tools for teleworking by means of peer to peer learning can be useful for the workforce to develop the necessary skills.
- 8. Protect cyber security and privacy:** Safe remote work processes are important, especially if employees are using personal laptops or devices for teleworking. IT tools should have up-to-date virus protections, secured VPNS and firewalls against cyber threats. Furthermore, the workforce should be aware of the continuity of their confidentiality obligations while teleworking.
- 9. Secure compliance:** An assessment of applicable laws and regulations at national level, as well as any exceptions announced by the government in the context of the emergency may lead to a revision of internal teleworking guidelines and individual and collective agreements. Make sure that insurance policies remain valid and fit for teleworking.
- 10. Engage in policymaking:** Contact national employers' organisations for recommendations and coordinated actions. Follow authoritative recommendations and engage with policy makers to find agreed solutions for teleworking as a form of business continuity measure.



LESSONS LEARNT FROM COVID-19

- Teleworking policy is a key element of an effective contingency plan to ensure productivity, business continuity and job preservation.
- Teleworking implies a shared responsibility and commitment of both employers and employees.
- Teleworking policies and arrangements must be regularly reviewed to remain relevant and fit for purpose to respond to the changing needs in the context of emergency situations.
- Communication and understanding of workers' family situation can help build a more effective and tailored-made teleworking policy.
- Companies can leverage workforce's skills through peer to peer learning and shorten the learning curve of teleworking.



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