Benefits and risks of flexible working arrangements: Findings from international research

Flexible working arrangements and parental responsibilities sharing: New perspectives in Italy and Europe – Rome, 4-5 December 2017

Gianni Rosas, ILO Senior Employment Specialist and Director for Italy and San Marino
• Definition of telework/ICT-mobile work (T/ICTM), scope and methodology of the study

• Incidence and intensity of T/ICTM work

• The effects of T/ICTM on working time, work-life balance, health and well-being and performance

• Conclusions and policy implications
**DEFINITION:** Telework/ICT-mobile work (T/ICTM) includes all work performed by workers using Information and Communications Technologies outside the employer’s premises.

**WORKER CATEGORIES:** (i) regular home-based teleworkers; (ii) T/ICTM high-mobile workers; (iii) occasional T/ICTM workers; and (iv) workers always at employer’s premises.

**15 COUNTRIES:** (i) Europe: Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom; and other Regions: Argentina, Brazil, India, Japan and the United States.

**METHODOLOGY:** (i) joint ILO-EUROFOUND national questionnaires on incidence and effects of T/ICTM plus policy responses; and analysis of micro-data of European Working Conditions Survey (EWCS 2015).
In incidence of T/ICTM work (1)

Share of T/ICTM employees in 2015 (EU28)

Source: Elaboration data EWCS 2015
• **Increase in T/ICTM in recent years**, particularly in places other than home

• **T/ICTM more common among professionals and managers**, but is also significant among clerical support and sales workers

• In general **men are more likely to perform T/ICTM than women**, although the latter carry out more regular home-based telework than the former.

• The **typical T/ICTM worker is employed full time, high-skilled and works more from home** than from other places
The main findings of the national studies are that T/ICTM workers:

- **Work longer hours** than average employees in the country

- **Experience more atypical work schedules** (e.g. evenings, weekends) but also perform personal tasks during normal working hours

- **Have greater working-time autonomy**/“time sovereignty”
Effects of T/ICTM: Working Time (2)

Percentage of employees by type of T/ICTM, gender and working hours, EU28

Working hours in the main job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Working hours in the main job</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always at employer premise</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Regular home-based telework</td>
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<tr>
<td>High mobile T/ICTM</td>
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<tr>
<td>Occasional T/ICTM</td>
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Source: Elaboration data EWCS 2015
Most of the national studies report:

- An **overall positive effect** of T/ICTM work on work-life balance.
- A “**blurring of the boundaries**” with more work-home and home-work interference.
- A **better work–life balance for home-based teleworkers**, while the ‘**high-mobile’ workers** face more negative outcomes.
- A **more positive balance for partial and occasional forms** of T/ICTM than the higher frequency ones.
- Shorter hours of work and a slightly **better work-life balance for women that men**.
Effects of T/ICTM: Work-life balance (2)

Employees reporting working in their free time to meet work demands by type of T/ICTM and gender, EU28 (%)

Over the last 12 months, how often have you worked in your free time to meet work demands?
(at least several times a month)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of T/ICTM</th>
<th>Men (%)</th>
<th>Women (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Always at employer premises</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular home-based telework</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High mobile T/ICTM</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasional T/ICTM</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>27</td>
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Source: Elaboration data EWCS 2015
Employees reporting that it is very or fairly easy to take time off during working hours to take care of personal or family matters, by type of T/ICTM and gender, EU28 (%)

Source: Elaboration data EWCS 2015
Effects of T/ICTM: Health and well-being (1)

The national studies report:

- Increased **flexibility and autonomy**, as well as **work intensification and stress**
- **Blurring boundaries** and stress (in most EU national studies)
- **Commuting and related stress reduction** (Brazil, France, Germany, Hungary, Japan, UK, USA)
- **Isolation** (Argentina, Brazil, Italy, Finland, Hungary, Japan, Netherlands, UK)
- Challenges relating to **ergonomics** (Finland, Spain, the Netherlands) – more research needed
Effects of T/ICTM: Health and well-being (2)

Percentage of employees reporting that work affects their health (positively or negatively) by T/ICTM group, EU28

Source: Elaboration data EWCS 2015
Effects of T/ICTM: Health and well-being (3)

Indices of autonomy and intensity in relation to working outside the employer’s premises and frequency of use of ICTs

Source: Elaboration data EWCS 2015
The national studies identified the following effects of T/ICTM on performance:

- A general positive effect also related to **productivity increases due to technological innovation**

- Positive impact due to **autonomy, work-life balance, motivation**

- **Some performance drawbacks** due to lack of ICT skills, managerial behaviour (especially “command and control”), lack of rest periods
Conclusions

- Growing incidence of T/ICTM work but substantial differences across countries, occupations, sectors and in terms of frequency for workers
- Men are more likely to perform T/ICTM than women, but women perform more regular home-based telework
- Longer, more “porous” working hours, including supplemental working hours, BUT reduced commuting time and more working time autonomy
- Overall, better work-life balance but more work-home and home-work interference due to blurring of work-life boundaries
- Women doing T/ICTM tend to work shorter hours than men and seem to achieve slightly better work–life balance
- Greater work intensity but more working time autonomy appears to offset the greater intensity, except for “high mobile” T/ICTM workers
- More stress for some T/ICTM workers, especially ICT-mobile workers
- Lack of attention to ergonomics and the potential for isolation
- Overall positive effects on individual performance/productivity
- Partial (part-time) telework and occasional ICT-mobile work seem to produce the most positive balance in relation to the effects of T/ICTM work
Some policy implications

• Strengthen positive effects of T/ICTM and reduce negative ones (e.g. promoting partial or part-time work, while restricting informal/supplemental work and long hours for high-mobile) through legislation and collective agreements.

• Include T/ICTM work in policies for inclusive labour markets (e.g. older workers, workers with family and other responsibilities, persons with disabilities).

• Introduce policy measures to tackle the negative effects on working conditions for those engaged in different types of T/ICTM work.

• Adjust working time regulations (e.g. address supplemental work and ensure respect of minimum rest periods).

• Address major challenge of OSH prevention and application of legislation to T/ICTM (e.g. training for both employees and managers on risks and effective use of ICTs for remote work).
Questions/comments
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