

Massimo, Francesco S.

Working Paper

Impact of the Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France - A qualitative survey

JRC Working Papers Series on Labour, Education and Technology, No. 2020/09

Provided in Cooperation with:

Joint Research Centre (JRC), European Commission

Suggested Citation: Massimo, Francesco S. (2020) : Impact of the Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France - A qualitative survey, JRC Working Papers Series on Labour, Education and Technology, No. 2020/09, European Commission, Joint Research Centre (JRC), Seville

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/231341>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>



JRC Technical Report

Impact of the Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France

A qualitative survey

JRC Working Papers Series on
Labour, Education and Technology
2020/09

Francesco S. Massimo

LABOUR

EDUCATION

TECHNOLOGY

Joint
Research
Centre

This Working Paper is part of a Working paper series on Labour, Education and Technology by the Joint Research Centre (JRC) The JRC is the European Commission's science and knowledge service. It aims to provide evidence-based scientific support to the European policymaking process. The scientific output expressed does not imply a policy position of the European Commission. Neither the European Commission nor any person acting on behalf of the Commission is responsible for the use that might be made of this publication.

Contact information

Name: Francesco S. Massimo

Address: Joint Research Centre, European Commission (Seville, Spain)

Email: francescosabato.massimo@sciencespo.fr

Tel.: +34 9544-87114

EU Science Hub

<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc>

JRC122669

Seville: European Commission, 2020

© European Union, 2020



The reuse policy of the European Commission is implemented by the Commission Decision 2011/833/EU of 12 December 2011 on the reuse of Commission documents (OJ L 330, 14.12.2011, p. 39). Except otherwise noted, the reuse of this document is authorised under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) licence (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>). This means that reuse is allowed provided appropriate credit is given and any changes are indicated. For any use or reproduction of photos or other material that is not owned by the EU, permission must be sought directly from the copyright holders.

All content © European Union 2020

How to cite this report: Massimo, F.S., Impact of the Covid-19 confinement measures on telework – qualitative survey for France, European Commission, 2020, JRC122669.

Impact of the Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France

A qualitative survey

Francesco S. Massimo (Sciences Po Paris, Centre de sociologie des organisations, CNRS)

Abstract

During the Covid crisis the population in regime of telework jumped from 3% to 25% of the workforce. This study aims at better understanding how the massive shift to telework following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic affected workers' jobs and lives in France during the first lockdown (March 17th-May 11th 2020). In particular, we shed light on how this exogenous change had an impact on tasks content and work organisation dimensions like teamwork, routine, workers' autonomy and types and extent of supervisory controls method. Moreover, we dig into both subjective and objective dimensions of job quality such as job satisfaction, motivation, changes in working time and pay, together with issues related to physical and mental health and more generally to work-life balance. The picture that emerges is quite fragmented, largely depending on workers' occupation and family composition, although some general patterns could be observed. First, the transition to telework did not affected the structural inequality of the occupational structure: respondents accomplishing low skilled and standardised tasks enjoyed, to a certain extent, more freedom from direct control, whereas interviewees on less standardised and more autonomous tasks were more able to carve out some niches of independence in the new situation and were more able to resist management pressures for more control and standardization. Second, most organisations had no specific policies dedicated to teleworking and workers had to adapt to the new situation without any special guideline: horizontal cooperation emerges as driver of adaptation as important as vertical control, if not more. Third, the positive aspect that was noticed by the large majority of respondents was the opportunity that telework gave them to experiment a more flexible management of time, at least for those who could tinker with their working time schedule. Fourth, and especially for that reason, the overwhelming majority of respondents wishes to consolidate the practice of telework also after the end of the lockdown and with more continuity.

Keywords: Covid-19, Telework, Quality of Work, Management and Workers Power, Labour Process, Employment Relations, Work-Life Balance.

Authors: Francesco S. Massimo (Sciences Po Paris)

Joint Research Centre reference number: JRC122669

Related publications and reports:

Corral, A. and Isusi, I., *Impact of the COVID-19 confinement measures on telework in Spain*, European Commission, 2020, JRC122651.

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.

Massimo, F.S., *Impact of the Covid-19 confinement measures on telework – qualitative survey for France*, European Commission, 2020, JRC122669

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 in France before and during the Covid-19 Crisis.....	3
Methodology, research design and sample composition.....	4
Sample composition	5
Data collection and analysis	6
Main Findings.....	8
Telework during the COVID-19 situation.....	8
<i>Timing and management of the transition</i>	8
<i>The responses of the organisations in the accounts of respondents: management of the transition</i>	8
Negotiation between the employer and the workers/trade union	11
Work organisation	12
Communication	12
Autonomy, Control and Standardisation.....	17
The job quality	21
Pay and compensation and employment quality.....	21
Employment quality.....	36
Health and safety.....	38
Working time (intensity, schedules and breaks)	39
Work-life balance	39
Time management.....	39
Changes in work-life balance since lockdown	40
Prospects and general outlook.....	43
Respondents' overall well-being during the period of confinement.....	43
Availability to telework in the future.....	44
Conclusions	46
Appendix	48
Survey Sample Guidelines	48
Respondents Descriptive Table	49
Interview Grid.....	54

Introduction: Telework in France before and during the Covid-19 Crisis

According to a study of the French Minister of Labour carried out in 2019, regular teleworking is still a rare practice in France . In 2017, only 3% of employees practiced it at least one day a week. Teleworkers were mainly managers (61%) and were relatively more numerous in the IT and telecommunications professions.

If women telecommuted almost as much as men, the family situation affected the use of this method of work organization. Employees with a child under the age of 3 were more often teleworkers. Regular teleworking was also more frequent in Île-de-France and, more generally, in dense urban areas, where journey times from home to work are the longest.

In establishments with more than 10 employees in the non-agricultural private sector, a quarter of teleworkers were covered by a collective agreement (company, branch agreement), more than a fifth by an individual agreement between the employee and his hierarchy, while more than half practice teleworking outside of any contractual formalization.

For many executives in particular, telework corresponded to an occasional and little formalized practice: one in seven teleworks a few days or a few half-days per month. If we consider the more flexible recent definition of telework integrated into the labour code in September 2017, there would therefore have been 1.8 million teleworkers in France, that is to say 7% of employees.

The Covid pandemic and the decision taken by French government to establish a lockdown forcefully induced a scaling up of telework, which was extended for the first time to a large part of the workforce in the country, even in those sectors and activities that were not likely to experiment telework in ordinary circumstances.

Telework became the norm for a much larger share of workers . This not only imposed technical challenges for employers to support the great number of workers connecting to company's network and software from home at the same time but also required changes for the workers as they saw their daily work routines as well as work-life balance change in a very short time and often without preparation.

Due to the drastic change in workers daily lives that the COVID-19 confinement and remote working measures imply, and since many workers may not have the necessary tools, knowledge nor the optimal home situation to telework, the study described under these terms of reference aims to gain a better understanding of how different types of workers are coping with the imposed teleworking measures, and what can be learnt about prospects in the short and medium term for the continuation of telework practices. This qualitative study would aim at providing evidence on how the confinement measures affect employees in terms of work organisation, job quality and work-life balance and what changes they have brought about compared to the previous, non-confinement situation.

Methodology, research design and sample composition

The fieldwork research was carried on between April 27th (day of the first interview) and May 26th (day of the 25th and last interview).

25 video-chat or phone interviews were carried out with workers employed in France who were teleworking as a result of the COVID-19 outbreak. Interviews were conducted with employees who are working online from home (teleworking) because of the virus outbreak, and who may or may not have done telework before but excluding employees who were in a permanent telework arrangement before the COVID crisis.

Interviews are semi-structured and have been conducted on the basis of a grid jointly developed by the JRC team and the external experts.

The set of questions will cover three broad themes:

- work organisation and labour relations (e.g. transition to telework, negotiations of the transition with unions, relation with colleagues and teamwork, autonomy, control mechanisms, task distribution and coordination);
- job quality (e.g. intrinsic quality of work, wage and contractual issues, working time, social, economic and psychological risks, and health and safety);
- work-life balance (e.g. clash of telework and family life, mechanisms of adjustment). [cf. Appendix: Interview grid]

The large majority of the interviews were conducted via Video-Chat (16) while 9 were carried out via mobile phone, with no appreciable difference.

The expected duration of the interviews was 60 minutes. The actual interviews' duration was 88 minutes on average, spanning from a minimum of 32 minutes, to a maximum of 125.

The extra time of the interviews was necessary to comply with the guidelines and to cover the whole set of questions expected.

Respondents were contacted and selected according to the grid provided by the JRC team. The elaboration of the grid was inspired by the aim of covering a spectre of sectors, professions, skills, genders, types of contract and household's composition which could reflect the French occupational structure [cf. Appendix: Survey Sample Guidelines]. It is important to take into account possible availability biases: it is possible that the duration of the interview induced some possible respondents, especially those living in more difficult situations, to decline our demand. Therefore, the composition of the sample could be biased in favour of respondents with more time availability and that respondents in difficult situations could not show their conditions.

Interviewees were found in through multiple channels: almost half of them were experts' personal/acquaintance contacts (either in direct or in indirect relations with the experts); the remaining half of interviewees were reached through ad hoc links (several trade unions put the experts in touch with their members), professional links (people known through previous researches) or snowball effect (interviewees introduced to the experts by other interviewees) [cf. Appendix: Respondents Table].

Sample composition

The overall composition of the sample respects the guidelines provided by the team, with some flexibility in the case of gender. Regarding gender, 14 respondents were female and 11 male - whereas the original expected repartition was supposed to be equally balanced (50% Female and 50% Male).

Over half of the respondents live with children in school age (13/25) but none with elderlies in need of assistance ; 12 respondents out of 25 live either with partners (6/25), alone (4/25) or with flatmates (2/25).

The sample maintains the minimum percentage of interviewees living in households with children and/or non completely elder relatives in need of assistance (11 out of 25 living with school age sons and daughters, 3 with sons and daughters aged 18 or more, 2 with elderly parents needing assistance).

The sample respects also the prescribed proportions between private and public sector workers (18 out of 25 respondents are employed in the private sector, that is 72%), workers in direct contact with clients/users or not (15 out of 25 respondents being usually involved in direct contact with clients and users, that is 60%), permanent and temporary contracts (7 out of 25 respondents been hired with some kind of temporary and precarious contracts, that is 28%).

Furthermore, the interviewees selection process followed also the recommended distribution among different levels of skills: 12 out of 25 respondents were high skilled workers (48%), 6 medium skilled workers (24%) and 7 low skilled workers (28%).

Finally, at least 9 out of 25 respondents could be said to have experienced some sort of telework either in the course of their current job or in previous jobs (the requirement was minimum 20% of people having already teleworking to some extent). Interviews were to be conducted with employees who were working online from home because of the virus outbreak. Among our sample, 24 interviewees were teleworking 100% of their working time during the lockdown period, while solely 1 other was only partially teleworking (40% of their working time).

Respondents have a fair wide range of occupations and operates in a reasonably large spectrum of sectors: 2 managers (1 Manager and ICT professional in an ICT/corporate service company; 1 IT Manager in a telemarketing company), 4 specialised professionals (1 subtitler in an outsourced branch of national French broadcasting; 1 agronomist in a consulting firm; 1 psychiatrist in a psychiatric hospital; 1 iconographer in a children's literature publisher), 4 knowledge workers (1 tourist Guide and communication officer in an Abbey/Museum; 1 primary school teacher; 1 PhD researcher and lecturer; 1 dance teacher in three different private dance schools or vocational centre), 1 full-time union officer and 14 clerical workers (3 senior middle manager in a temporary work multinational company; 1 middle manager in the music industry; 1 informatic engineer in an ICT service company; 1 junior juridical advisor in a public university; 1 account secretary for a trade union; 1 junior rail expert in the national independent transport authority; 1 city council employee, 1 call centre operator in a telemarketing company, 2 insurance clerks and call centre operator in the insurance industry; 1 editorial secretary in a research institute; 1 clerk/janitor in a High School).

Three respondents (INT. 01, 04, 08) were employed in the same company but in three different services and geographical locations. Two respondents were employed in the same company and in

the same service (INT. 14, 24). The fact that these cases belong, to a certain extent, to the same organisation could appear as a shortcoming of our sample, but it is quite the opposite, as these members of the same firm (or service) have very different socio-demographic characteristics, thus providing an interesting case variation within the same organisational environment.

Finally, 5 respondents out of 25 were also workers representative at the company level.

The intensity of ICTs use in the labour process varies among this range of occupations, including either complementary resort to ICTs (9/25), i.e. in the cases of janitors, tourist guides and teachers - essential (11/25) - i.e. in the case of clerks from temporary work agencies or research professionals - or total (4/25) - i.e. in the cases of managers and clerical workers (especially the low skilled clerk of the insurance and call centre industries). The great majority of the interviewees commonly uses a wide range of professional tools, platforms and software, which raised the problem of their remote accessibility from home.

Age and Area of residence were not among the selection criteria detailed in Terms of Reference. In the case of age, respondents are distributed in a reasonably balanced way through the different age ranges of the working life. The sample of the interviewees is thus composed by 2 people in the 20-29 age range, 8 people in the 30-39 age range, 13 people in the 40-49 age range, 2 people in the 50-59 age range and 1 person older than 60. Concerning the area of residence, on the contrary, the distribution of interviewed workers across Regions appears remarkably unbalanced (even if we consider the demographic concentration of the population that characterises Metropolitan France): 14 in Ile-de-France (whose 8 in the city of Paris, 6 in its suburban belt); 3 in Brittany (whose 1 in the city of Rennes, 1 in its suburban belt, 1 in the countryside); 2 in Burgundy (both in Dijon); 2 in Region Centre (whose 1 in the city of Orléans and 1 in the countryside); 2 in Provence (whose 1 in the city of Marseille and 1 in its suburban belt); 1 in Auvergne-Rhône-Alpes (in the city of Lyon); 1 in Pays-de-la-Loire (in the city of Nantes). Regarding the distribution across urban and countryside areas, 3/25 interviewees lived in the countryside whereas 22/25 reside in urban or peri-urban areas.

Data collection and analysis

The grid proved to be a useful tool for interviewing, not as a rigid scheme of questions but mainly as a check list of the main topics and elements the research aimed to focus on. In this respect, the interviewers gave themselves the freedom to adapt the grid according to the specific situation of the interviewees and to allow the interviewees to set their own priorities in their narration.

In that regard it is noteworthy the fact that many respondents actively participated to the research, whether conceding more than an hour of their time, providing useful complementary data (such as organisation chart, brochures etc.) or putting the researcher in touch with other interviewees.

An important role was also played by some of the trade unions we solicited, whose officers cooperated with the researcher in the finding of potential respondents.

Detailed notes of what the interviewees said were systematically taken during the interviews and incorporated into the grid according to the pertaining topic. This method allowed for a horizontal systematic comparison of each topic across the 25 interviews.

Socio-Demographic Information (Section 1 of the interview grid) on the interviewees were extrapolated from the fieldnotes and incorporated in a table [cf. Respondents Descriptive Table].

The following report contains the findings related to sections 2-6 of the interview grid, in which the synthesis of data is associated with relevant anonymised quotes of the interviews.

Given the considerable heterogeneity of the sample and respondents' answers, our analysis proceeded in a double-step method. At the beginning of every part and sub-part readers will find an analytic overview of respondents account according to the relevant topics and questions. This introductory part is followed by an intermediate synthesis: for every topic we regrouped as much respondents in groups, according to a homogeneity criterion and the compared to the others , accompanied of excerpt from. This allowed us not only to mechanically resume the results but to synthetise time in order to suggest provisional explanation and hypothesis for further research.

Main Findings

Telework during the COVID-19 situation

Timing and management of the transition

Most respondents (21/25) started teleworking the same day of the lockdown. The only one who started in the previous week (INT. 04) was a middle manager working in the HQ of a temporary work company who was already in telework for health reasons. Three respondents started teleworking after the lockdown, in a lapse of time that spans from one to two weeks later. In one case (INT. 09), a call centre operator, the company asked workers to come to the workplace during the entire first week of lockdown. In a second case (INT. 20), a psychiatrist working in a psychiatric hospital, doctors and hospital administration took a considerable amount of time (2 weeks) to organise telework and establish *ex novo* a follow-up standard for their patients; finally in the third case (INT. 25), a janitor and school clerk workers in a high school, because the administration priority was to organize online classes and only later to reorganise the work of janitors and clerks. Another respondent (INT. 23), a tourist guide and communication officer in an abbey, was not employed at the beginning of the lock down and signed his contract only in the middle of April.

The responses of the organisations in the accounts of respondents: management of the transition

All the respondents had access to the internet at home. The quality of the internet connection varies through the sample: 14 out of 25 interviewees had an optical fibre connection, 9 an ADSL connection and 2 were not able to point out what kind of connection they have.

Everyone in the sample declared to use at least one digital device (computer, laptop, tablet, smartphone) in their ordinary work activity in the pre-COVID19 situation. Everyone also declared to have at least one digital device available at home (in most of the cases 2 or more).

Regarding the provision of tools and resources, in 7 cases the employer did not provide any tool or resource for teleworking . In the majority of the cases (15/25), the employer provided one of these devices (mostly a laptop). Actually, in some cases (7 out of those 15 cases), the workers did not receive a new device, but just took at home the laptop they were using in ordinary work. In the 8 remaining cases the workers received a device especially provided for the telework situation. A respondent remarked that she had to solicit several times before receiving a laptop. In another case an interviewee not only took at home his professional laptop but an entire server in order to be sure to have the necessary working condition.

In some cases, the employer contributed to the internet subscription during the lockdown (4/25) in some others (4/25) respondents stigmatised the refuse of the employer to contribute to the internet subscription. In 2/25 cases the employer offered participate to the purchase of non-digital tools (such as chairs or ink for printers) whereas in 2/25 cases offered to deliver at the workers' home their tools of work. No employer contributed to the electricity domestic expenses of their teleworkers.

If the majority of respondents started teleworking the same day of the lockdown, this does not mean that they were immediately ready to such a change.

Organisations who had already been experimenting some forms of telework were not necessarily capable to apply it on a large scale, as reported by workers from a large company of temporary work or by interviewees from an insurance company (INT. 01, 04, 08, 09, 14, 24):

[INT. 01] [Commercial middle manager in a temporary work agency]

For example, there are people who have found themselves working alone, but were not used to it and were not accompanied properly, so they end up alone at home managing their work. They have to work as if they were in an agency, but without having the help they could have had before from colleagues and the manager, without the necessary documents, without anything. At home you need to have a computer, there are a lot of things, have a work phone or a photocopier with a scanner... we work a lot with that, that was very difficult, or take for instance a temporary worker who has to go and work: how do we give them the security shoes For some people it's being a very hard time, especially at the beginning...

In these two cases employers had already a formalized policy for teleworking that was limited to employees based in the HQ in Paris and not for their workers in peripheral agencies and offices, in spite of workers' demands to extend telework to everyone.

The objective difficulties in extending telework to the large scale and in a short lapse of time were confirmed in the account given by this ICT manager:

[INT. 21] [ICT manager in a multinational telemarketing company]

It was really a race against time to get everyone to telework. ...] The lockdown obviously had a significant impact, of course. Already by the availability of people. Another important factor is that in our call centres, the ratio is 1 pc for 1.3-1.4 people. There are rotations. Now, of course, we had to give one PC per person, and sometimes even two PCs per person. [...] I have the advantage of having teams that know what computer teleworking is about. They haven't discovered teleworking with confinement. So, they have known about these guidelines for a long time. The only thing that has changed is that before they used to ask me for one-time authorization to telework, whereas now it's simple, I've imposed telework on a good number of them. For others who have to be on-centre, they were on-centre to allow them to configure their computers so that they can go to the agents' homes, and there they are also on-centre to prepare their return with social distancing and so on to be respected. So, 75% of my staff are teleworking for me and 25% are on centre to do the preparation or the layout, the configuration on site.

This was less true for other cases of respondent that had already experimented telework with their current employer but in smaller organisations [cf. Appendix: Respondents Table]: in these cases, telework was less dependent on strict and real time coordination among operators and this allowed them a softer transition:

[INT. 19] [Subtitler for an outsourced branch of National French Broadcasting]

For the previous six months most of my colleagues had been eligible for one teleworking day per week and this was a novelty, and there were some who had not taken this opportunity, but most of them had. So, everybody was pretty much familiar with teleworking. Thereafter, we didn't have any special instructions since everyone was more or less familiar with it [...]. We receive health e-mails, for example we got an e-mail on the prevention of musculoskeletal disorders, with little gymnastic exercises to do. Little e-mails like that, so that we can take care of ourselves. But on the work in itself we didn't get any instructions.

The first kind of organisation, large private companies operating in the ICT, insurance or temporary work sector (INT. 24, 22, 21, 14, 9, 8, 7, 4, 3, 1; but also INT. 22, iconographer in a firm with 150 employees) organised telework through specific tools such as VPN in order to guarantee workers' access to their office computer and software and to keep control on their work: the kind of labour process seems to be an important variable: standardised work represented an imperative to switch to telework in the most rapid way but also in a way that could secure the continuity of the organisation of work with no special change. Others, such as medium and small sized private employers or medium sized public administration did not need or were not able to do so:

[INT. 22] [Illustrator for a children's literature publisher]

We are too small a company, there is no human resources department, no internal communications department, so there was no message of instructions or advice on how to telework.

Finally, other medium and large organisations such as public administrations, schools and hospitals found themselves completely unprepared for the lockdown. Operations in these are organisations are usually based on direct physical contact between workers and users and on a low degree of standardisation and quantification of work (even if some interviews such as INT. 20, reported a long-term trend toward the quantification of performance evaluation). Respondents working in this type of organisations reported a slow response from the highest hierarchical levels which infused a sense of abandonment but, in some cases, also enhanced the workers' autonomy (especially for those with medium and high skills tasks).

Regarding the reactivity to the organisational change some workers stressed disorientation (especially in hospitals and schools, the labour process and the teamwork were very vulnerable to the lockdown):

[INT.20] [Psychiatrist and responsible of a psychiatric service in a hospital]

So, I had to basically set up the switch to this teleworking regime, with contradictory injunctions that I've been used to since I worked in the hospital, which were to protect the caregivers from possible contamination. We have a lot of caregivers who do an hour of RER [Suburban rail transport] every day to come in. So, there was the idea, on the day of the containment, that public transit was very potentially dangerous. We had to protect the agents, but teleworking didn't exist in my hospital, it didn't exist. [...] And then, under pressure, in working order, the hospital began to think, to produce documents to validate telework. [...] We did this quite autonomously, we imagined it among ourselves. And then we had meetings of all the doctors in my department with my department head. So, my department head is in contact with the other department heads. So, we did a bottom-up and top-down process.

[INT. 25] [Clerk/Janitor in a public high school]

I've had no communication from anyone, no one told me anything. After a couple of weeks, my CPE ["Conseiller principal d'éducation", a pedagogical referent and head of the janitor/clerks] sent a collective message to us, the janitors/supervisors, to ask us who was available to do some tele-work. At the beginning I had not accepted, because I was in a single room and he had not told us what kind of job he wanted from us, we had to answer with a closed envelope. I called her to understand what they had in

mind and once she explained to me, I talked to my partner to see if it was OK for him. He said OK and I accepted because I needed to do something. But I had no instructions about anything, I had quite virulent discussions with the management because they sent me to do things I didn't have any kind of information about and basically I got insulted on the phone by my parents and in addition there was a big communication problem with regard to the return because in my school is an extremely hierarchical system that tends to infantilize and humiliate the base of its pyramid.

Other organisations were less vulnerable: some large companies because were already practicing telework, even if at an incomparable scale, some because they were small enough not to need large scale planification and the transition were made through progressive arrangements (INT. 17). The other side of the coin was that the impact of these progressive and informal arrangements on the well-being of workers and on job quality could be mild but also negative, especially in the case of precarious workers of the private sector (INT. 05, 23): in both cases respondents, a dance teacher and a tourist guide, were forced, respectively, to switch to telework and to change his task, both under threat of losing their jobs.

In general, organisations, whether larger or smaller, had to learn on the field how to manage the transition, with different timing and modalities. We refer to the section on autonomy and control [Part 3.2.2.] to describe how workers dealt with the different contexts that the reactivity of their organisation produced.

Negotiation between the employer and the workers/trade union

Approximately half of our sample (12/25) reported some forms of negotiation and consultation between employers and workers representatives (respondents come from a variety of firms: public and private sectors, large and small sized organisations) but none of them reported any special collective agreement at the company level, even if many workers expressed revendications in the new context. Workers representatives' request regarded the management of partial unemployment and forced vacations, economic contributions for employees working from home. According to most answers the employers did not make any special concession to workers representative except for one case (INT. 06), a university administration clerical worker who reported that unions managed to reduce the amount of forced vacations from 10 to 5 days [cf. part. 3.3.1.1. for more information in this respect]. Employers provided workers with instruments to work at home such as laptops and, in some cases, ergonomic chairs, unilaterally and never through a collective agreement. Workers from a large temporary work company (INT. 01, 04, 08) and from an insurance company (INT. 14, 24) declared that the company refused unions' demand to extend a collective agreement on telework, reserved to HQ employees, to the whole workforce.

In 8 cases out of 25 respondents reported that unions were not even solicited by employers (INT. 02, 05, 07, 09, 12, 14, 16, 17, 24): also, this group includes respondents coming from a variety of sectors, firms, and professions. In 2 cases out of 25 (INT. 10, 13) respondents were employees of two different unions, and arrangements were settled in a "collegial way", as reported by one of them (INT. 10).

In conclusion social dialogue and union voice seem to have been largely dismissed and unable to effectively influence the transition to telework, mostly because of the emergency situation that allowed employers to act unilaterally. However, on the mid run, as long as the pandemic and telework will be renewed, we can presume that unions will be able to exert some pressures on both employers and the state in order to regulate telework through respectively collective agreements and/or legislation.

Work organisation

Communication

The conditions of communication were very so heterogeneous that, given the limited length of this interim report, we proceeded tracing some main relevant dimensions along which most of the cases can be presented.

The impact of telework in interaction with users and customers: between essentiality and redundancy

The first analytical dimension is obtained regrouping workers according to the “relational” nature of their job, i.e. whether they work in direct contact with customers and users or rather they do not.

Workers with direct (physical) contact with customers and users (15/25) are in general the most affected by the transition to telework in terms of communication. The first reason is structural, inherent to the nature of the job: they talk about the importance of the “emotional” or “interactional” aspect in their job¹. Among this group we can mention teachers, psychiatrists and trade union officer:

[INT. 05] [Dance Teacher]

The quality of learning fell as well as the results. I am not even able to see them in a proper way, as my movements often lead me out of the frame of the computer camera. I can't even check if they understand the moves that I try to teach them. Sometimes I even think that they understand the opposite of what I mean. Sound and images are often offset and give the importance of rhythms, time and movements in this discipline it is a real problem... I cannot see their body: I can see only their head or their shoulders... It's a real catastrophe, it's very frustrating... Moreover, I am not able to talk to them as I used to do before, when I could have a conversation with them at the end of the class. Now I cannot stay in touch with time. First, because I do not have their personal contacts - the administration does; second, because pupils already spend so much time before a screen.

[INT. 13] [Full time Trade Union Officer]

In my job which implies many physical meetings with employers in order to negotiate working condition and labour relations, distant meetings are a real problem. For instance, it is impossible to immediately react to someone else's proposition or to have a one-to-one exchange during the meeting because it is crucial to respect the order of the interventions. But still, this makes impossible those spontaneous and immediate communication that are only possible in face-to-face meetings. You can note what you

¹ This could be true also for service workers operating in indirect, but still on real time, interaction with users and costumers, i.e. call centre operators. However, for the purpose of this research, a strict definition of “direct contact” has been chosen, thus excluding call centre operators and similar workers, from the class in question.

want to say and then wait for your time, but what is the point in replying to someone statement 15 minutes later when it is the timing of your speech that really matters?

[INT. 20] [Psychiatrist]

We couldn't actually do our job, because our job is to welcome people, children and their parents, to play with children and discuss with parents. So, our job is a lot of "doing together". On the phone we don't "do together".

The risk reported by these workers was also to pretend to have the same kind and quality of relation through digital communication tools. Workers soon realized that such an option was not affordable unless they accept to dedicate an unreasonable amount of time to keep such occasional communication with users or customers. The only solution was a suspension, or at least a significant reduction, of the time spent in communication with users or customers, as in the case of a teacher and an Abbey communication officer.

[INT. 15] [Primary School Teacher]

Had I to transpose all our communication with parents on tools such as WhatsApp, I would have to make a phone call for every family, and this is clearly not possible.

Slightly different but still relevant for our argument is the case of the Abbey communication officer, whose problem was not so much to reduce media interactions with users (believers demanding "spiritual contents") but to reorient them to the more pertinent figures (monks):

[INT. 23] [Tourist Guide in an Abbey]

I try to reduce at most my exchanges, because I am not in a position to deal with "intimate" issues, I cannot talk on behalf of the monks. Many believers wrote on the social media page of the Abbey and asked for "spiritual contents" ("give us some prayers, readings etc"). For very specific messages I put them in touch with the monks, otherwise I asked the monks for more spiritual contents. I can take care of the historical or the cultural issues, not of the spiritual.

Perhaps we can consider as outliers the two clerical workers in temporary work agencies, in charge of the commercial relations with customers enterprises (in the same company but in two different regions), according to which the shift from a more direct to a less direct contact with customers ameliorates the quality of their work. In the first case, the respondent focused on the shift of customer relation from telephone to email:

[INT. 01] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

Customers call us on the phone line but the most loyal customers prefer reaching us via email, which is easier to manage: they do not have to wait on line before we can take the call and it is also better for us because the email summarises clearly the issue, we can read it when we want and we keep a trace and finally it is easier to transfer the request, if necessary.

In the second case the discourse about efficiency of the exchanges leaves the place to the redundancy of most of the physical meetings and visits to customer enterprises:

[INT. 08] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

The halt to meetings and visits to customer enterprises was not a special loss for me. In my opinion phone calls serve the purpose of customer survey. It does not bother me [The fact of not going to customers anymore], it is something that I did not particularly appreciate. Physical meetings and visits are important because they allow you to grasp the real situation on the field, to understand something that you could not foresee by email or telephone. However, we also have many loyal customers which we have a trustful relationship with, and they do not hide things to use. Overall, I would say that we can do most of our survey on the phone: a visit every year is necessary but not 3 or 4 as it is normally the case.

In conclusion we could say that in most of jobs that includes direct physical contact with customers telework cannot replace the visual and physical contacts, but still it contributes to critically reflect on the way in which these interactions are carried out but they also suggest, especially in the case of INT. 08 that these visits and physical interactions have more priorities for management (who evaluate and are evaluated on the basis of statistics, i.e. about the number of visits) than for the single workers that have to personally engage in the interactions and do not attribute the same importance to such a task.

The impact of telework on internal communication: parallel and informal channels of communications

A similar reflection about the effects of distant communication is done by many respondents, both in direct or indirect contact with customers, when they talk about change in the relation with co-workers and supervisors.

On the one hand, many interviewees miss the office and the possibility of sharing their workspace with colleagues involved in the same labour process. On the other hand, they recognize that the shift to distant communication improved in a certain way the efficiency of the communication or, at least, had to change form in order to be efficient. This led some respondents to appreciate the quality of these new kinds of exchange in which one who solicits a colleague's intervention is expected to go straight to the point:

[INT. 18] [Editorial Secretary - Research Institute]

Interactions with colleagues are more limited, but I find it pretty good, because sometimes it's easy to go see someone four times to ask them something, while now you are think about it: because it is when not the same thing calling someone four times when you know that you are going to disturb him.

Another important aspect is the recognition that physical presence could not be entirely reproduced through software and digital devices: managers and workers quickly realised that increasing the number of meetings in order to compensate the physical absence was not realistic and indeed counterproductive:

[INT. 11] [Rail Expert - Transport Public Authority]

We try to avoid very long meeting; it is not very useful. Two hours it is ok, but we rarely exceed except for when we really need it.

The second relevant aspect concerns the modalities of adoption and use of communicational tools in the new context of telework. First of all, in most of the cases organisations in which respondents are employed already had introduced platforms for communication and collaboration such as Skype, Zoom, Ortif, Microsoft Teams and Slack, and workers were, to a limited extent, acquainted with these instruments. The general transition to telework, however, accelerated the process of integration of these platforms in the labour process, in so far resorting to these types of software was not a matter of choice anymore. In some cases, tools such as Teams, thanks to their multiple functions (chat, screen and file sharing, separate threads, video-chat etc.) funnelled the fluxes of communication that previously depended on phone calls or in-presence interaction.

[INT. 18] [Editorial Secretary - Research Institute]

Teams has become a very important flow to animate collective watch. We are currently preparing a special issue of the journal. It is also used to send messages. Maybe its flaw is that it multiplies the channels sometimes, because when it is not used well it is better that it goes by email. When we start to mix everything, to overlap the files in the main thread, in the requests of appointment, I tend to get more lost ... Teams, we had it for some time, because we had been under the Microsoft 365 environment for a year, but we were not using video tools and associative tools at all (file sharing, chat, etc.). You have to know how to differentiate the channels to avoid the multiplication of messages that do not concern everyone. There are several channels that have been created which do not regard everybody, so we end up receiving notifications when we are not involved in it.

The use of these instruments is however not homogeneous across respondents: for instance, some workers used Teams almost as an exclusive platform, other did not find it a useful tool because of colleagues' lack of training (like INT. 18) or because it was not fitting with the special needs of the workers. In two cases respondents declared that, instead of using the platform officially adopted by their employer, decided together with their colleagues to use alternative supports:

[INT. 07] [Informatic Engineer - ICT Service Company, posted in a Hotel Multinational Company]

Some people at work opened a free Slack account, while the firm promotes Teams because they have a contract with Microsoft but many of us find it too heavy and complicated, so we prefer working on Slack, we have a parallel channel.

[INT. 22] [Illustrator for a children's literature publisher]

We talked about Slack the first Sunday of the lockdown, between us co-workers. I didn't know Slack. I have freelance colleagues who work in other copywriting and who are younger and who told us that. They are just colleagues, not chefs at all, but they who offered to switch to Slack. So, we started on Slack on Monday but a little helter-skelter. We hadn't had an official email with instructions or recommendations, so we all did sort it out, they sent us a link, but the link was made by a colleague, not by a service. And we all connected very quickly on Slack and that's great.

A remarkable point is that alongside official tools and spaces of communications, workers organised horizontally to keep in touch to reproduce recreational moments: among these WhatsApp group chat and Zoom or Skype meeting were the most preferred.

[INT. 06] [Juridical Officer in a University Administration]

We created a WhatsApp group for the occasion. It was strictly for work communication, but sometimes someone diffuse pie recipes because we all eat pies. The boss is also in the chat. The chat's purpose is to share information to the whole team: for instance, sharing a pie recipe [she laughs, ironically]. So, we do not have always something to tell everyone: if I need to talk to one specific person, I will contact him or her personally. Otherwise we use the chat also to share our grumbles about work, for instance about people from outside that upset us...

[INT. 10] [Account Secretary in a white-collar trade union]

We call each other with certain colleagues... we keep in direct contact, to communicate, to greet each other, to fight over work... we take news that's very, I would say "paternalistic"... we're like a family... we keep in touch... we face each other... we see each other on video... it's a convivial reunion... it lasts an hour and we can talk about other things... at the beginning there are these emotional outbursts... sometimes it was fine, sometimes it wasn't... some have children, others are in a couple, others are alone... it takes a little effort to organise these meetings...

You have these convivial gatherings every day?

No... a few times a week...

[INT. 17] [Agronomist in an agriculture consulting firm]

What I did with colleagues is that physically we used to have tea at around 4pm, what we did was have meetings on Skype and have virtual tea. We have an informal WhatsApp too, where we put little crap. The chiefs are also in this WhatsApp.

[INT. 22] [Illustrator for a children's literature publisher]

My colleagues and I continued to communicate by e-mail, of course. On Slack with the whole company. And afterwards, just informally, for example, I have a WhatsApp that's a bit "black" with my co-workers, because we are colleagues-friends, so we have a WhatsApp that is a bit of a joke, a bit of a buddy too, but that didn't exist before. It's the principle of the coffee machine! Since we no longer have the coffee machine to discuss our weekends and stuff, it's on this random thread that it's done. As we've been doing it for two months now, people have signed up with an emoticon and now we all know... we weren't asked to do it but tacitly it's done - people have found emoticons that match them.

This second focus shows a plurality of situation in which an important scope of action was left to workers in deciding the way of remaining in touch with each other perhaps with a sharper division between communication oriented to production and communication turned to recreational interactions.

In general, the passage to distant relation seems to have been more complicated for the relationship with customers and users than for internal communication.

We couldn't present the entire spectrum of variation but only the most relevant for our exploratory analysis. We wanted to stress the continuity that lies behind the rupture represented by the Covid crisis. It seems to us that the organisation and their members reacted in a way which is consistent with the previous situation, without particularly pathbreaking patterns.

Autonomy, Control and Standardisation

Continuity or change?

A first interesting fact is that more than half of the interviews did not experience any significant difference concerning the degree of autonomy and control: 16 out of 25 did not remark any special change.

Almost all the jobs went through a process of task adaptation to a certain extent, especially for workers operating in direct contact with users/customers – for instance abbey/museum workers and school employees – but the equilibrium and dialectic of autonomy and control did not undergo significant alterations.

Continuity in standardisation was stressed especially by mid and high skilled worker.

[INT. 02] [Middle Manager in the music industry]

It depends on what the artist decides, already when he wants to release his project. I didn't notice any big differences from the ordinary work, it just slowed down.

[INT. 9] [Call centre operator in a telemarketing company]

There is no more freedom in our work, the system has remained the same transported at home... with the same work schedule and the same time for breaks.

[INT. 16] [PhD researcher and university lecturer]

No one has posed a question of control over online educational activity. Anyway, there is normally no control over lecturers' pedagogical planning: everyone can carry out the program they want. I also think there are those who, perhaps rightly so, have chosen not to do anything anymore if they already had the students' grades, given the conditions.

[INT. 21] [ICT Manager in a telemarketing multinational company]

I monitor the work of my team as I did before. I have my team spread over 5 countries all over the world. It makes absolutely no difference to me. Out of 100 people, I only had one person who was on the headquarters, so they are supervised with monitoring tools, they are missions, and I will realize very quickly if the work is not done, so there is no risk.

However, we should take into account two aspects. First, a strong presence of respondents who reported no substantial change in the labour process does not mean that the lockdown and the transition to telework did not trigger conflicts between supervisors and supervisees. However, the outcomes of these pressures were different, depending on the the degree of autonomy of the tasks. Some workers reported an increase in control, and these are, quite obviously, workers whose jobs are at the same time low-skilled and standardised. In these cases, the increase in control was of a very specific type: an attempt of compensating the lack of personal control and direct supervision through the increase in technical control through application, and more control protocols:

[INT. 09] [Call centre operator in a telemarketing company]

Then, sometimes via the chat we receive a personal message that tells us that we've been listened to... and if the listening went well, we get a written message by chat: "good care, good KPIs [Key Performance Indicator]"... We are monitored to very often, at least twice a day... normally we are listened to twice a month, it was different, and we had two mail checks per month...

[INT. 14] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

New criteria no, we didn't get any. But we have a regular check on our file... remotely... since the confinement there is a service that takes care of controlling the dossier. We've already had feedback, individual meetings... they have access to all the cases I process through the software...

[INT. 24] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

There is a phenomenon of the hierarchy listening to you all the time. It's a form of permanent control. So, it induces pressure. In any case, that's how I used to live. Whereas here, at home, certainly, my conversations are listened to. I don't know the percentage. I often get briefings on recordings that have been made on my calls. But when I talk, even though I know that I can potentially be listened to, I don't have anyone around me and I find it more comfortable because by being present on the site, not only can I potentially be listened to and recorded, which happens very often, but also all my colleagues and all my bosses listen to me all day long. It can even happen that a boss, after hearing a phone conversation, comes up to you and asks you if I want to follow up in an office, he gives you advice - so it doesn't happen very often, but it happens - on how I handled the client. For example, when there is a conversation that becomes a little bit complicated, it happens, there are difficult, even very difficult clients, and right away, the technical referent or supervisor gets up and comes next to you. So, it starts from a good intention. It's to help. But I liked it, I like to be autonomous and unless I ask for help myself, I don't like it. [...] As of today, I have not yet had a briefing of any of the calls recorded during the period of lockdown. I haven't had the opportunity today to get feedback on conversations recorded during the containment period. It used to be every month. In my opinion it has not been done so far because there are technical reasons. I think that technically, it is complicated to listen to our conversations and to record them when we are at home remotely. They're working on a solution to that problem.

Low-skilled and not standardised respondents such as the dance teacher experienced an increase in control which is anything other but the virtualisation of personal control:

[INT. 05] [Dance teacher]

I have no autonomy except for what regards my pedagogy. The rest is at the discretion of my school administration. Since the beginning of distant classes, the administrator started monitoring my virtual classes. [...] They check it out, the woman from the school administration comes in and participates in the session, she watches! I don't pay too much attention to it, because I'm focused on something else... she's watching, and besides she doesn't warn... I don't know when she's there. She doesn't intervene... it doesn't influence me in my pedagogy, but it bothers me... a sense of malevolence... and it makes the students uncomfortable as well...

Workers who, on the contrary, are on less standardised but more highly skilled and autonomous tasks (teachers, scholars, doctors etc.), faced pressures to control too, but were more able to exert and secure their autonomy.

[INT. 15] [Primary School Teacher]

We saw that what was proposed to us by the hierarchy did not bring much in the way of realizable results for the parents. From there I said to myself: "This is what I want my students to continue to do at home, this is what which parents can spend their time printing, opening a mailbox, setting up these activities. That's what parents have at home and that's how my students are going to get it. So, I had a lot of parameters to take into account in order to develop a tool that would be the least bad, I would say, possible.

[INT. 16] [PhD researcher and university lecturer]

There is a university platform on which you do everything a bit, but it's opaque and doesn't work effectively. I used a variety of multimedia tools, but not the institutional ones because they were unsuitable. That's why I used Dropbox, Google drive and email. I didn't use any video conferencing applications, I used video editing programs for some parts of the lecture and recording applications. It was not mandatory to use institutional tools: they were recommended to take advantage of the tools that the university already has available; the main goal was not to lose contact with students.

[INT. 20] [Psychiatrist and responsible of a psychiatric service in a hospital]

Somehow, we got a little pressure from our medical informatics director who says, "Attention, attention, we must act". But there's a resistance movement. For example, there are colleagues of mine, doctors in my department, well committed, who say: "There's no way I'm going to do anything". So, I think there will be extremely varied and disparate positions depending on each other's personalities. In practice, I didn't do anything during this period, but also because every day I was in a kind of uncertainty, having to deal with colleagues on the phone".

No homogeneous or unilateral tendency towards much control and less autonomy or vice versa was found across the sample. Perhaps if one tendency could be traced - but still in need of verification - it would be that of an increased polarisation between those who face no special pressure or can resist to pressures on the one hand, and those who receive pressure and find difficult to resist (call centre operators are the archetypical cases) on the other hand. We can find also, polarisation among users, between those who are more at ease in participating to virtual meeting and those who are not:

[INT. 15] [Primary School Teacher]

I didn't videoconference with parents, but colleagues did, and they were confronted with the fact that it's always the same parents who participate and speak.

[INT. 17] [Agronomist in an agriculture consulting firm]

Usually the meeting is held in person and this allows for discussion with the [agricultural] co-operative leaders. If we do this type of meeting by skype, some people will interact a lot and others will be very quiet.

Second, the double face of management domination expressed not necessary in the form of control but also, sometimes, in the form of management absenteeism or neglect, especially in the case of jobs and tasks that are difficult to be standardised and quantified. Some workers were able to react increasing their autonomy:

[INT. 22] [Illustrator for a children's literature publisher]

We already had a high degree of autonomy, we're already very autonomous, but with the lockdown, physically not seeing it was even more so.

Other respondents, on the contrary, experienced isolation and uncertainty more than autonomy:

[INT. 01] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

I would say that there is more autonomy because we don't have the chef who watches us every two seconds but there are people who need to be guided... I don't mind this loss, but other colleagues do because people feel safe when they work with the team in the office... if I have a question I can ask it now, now I have to call the chef who has to send an email to the security or legal affairs management for an answer... lack of time that makes that sometimes the situation is more complicated and there are people who do not like to work like that... so more than a problem of autonomy is also a problem of lack of clear guidelines.

[INT. 09] [Call centre operator in a telemarketing company]

We haven't received any training in psychosocial risks... in fact they don't care about us...

In this sense autonomy shows its other side: neglect and abandonment into isolation of vulnerable workers who, stuck in simple and low-skilled tasks during ordinary times did not receive any special instruction and were not able to enjoy any form of autonomy because of management neglect [cf. Part 3.1 on the transition to telework].

Autonomy is not necessary individual but can also mean horizontal cooperation, and in some cases, those were workers were already acquainted with some form of cooperation, respondents reported forms of self-organisations and collective reaction, in absence of clear instruction from management:

[INT. 15] [Primary School Teacher]

We were finally expecting to be taken care of by our hierarchy and we weren't, so we were a little bit confused about what we were going to do. By the way, there is a very, very important solidarity and reactivity on the part of the teaching staff, at least at the primary school level. There is both the desire to move forward and the slightly sense of being lost that I am trying to smother in order to keep going for good.

The job quality

Pay and compensation and employment quality

The majority of respondents (18/25) did not report any wage reduction or special income loss. On the contrary some of those interviewees who used to go to work by car stressed the fact that they saved money for private transports (INT. 01, 03, 22).

Of those who reported some forms of income loss, the reduction was of three types:

Three respondents declared that during the lockdown they spend more or less periods in regime of partial unemployment (“chômage technique”). These respondents are two high skilled agency employees of a large temporary work multinational company (INT. 01, 08) and one high skilled employee of a medium multinational company of the music industry (INT. 02). The reason of this measure is the sudden slump of the economic activity,

In the first two cases employees spent three days in regime of partial unemployment, while the third case was a less episodal and a more considerable period:

[INT. 02] [Middle Manager in the music industry]

At first, we worked full-time, the first two weeks. In any case, even during the first two weeks we didn't really work 8 hours, but the salary hadn't changed... and after that it changed: at the beginning of April we started partial unemployment.

Moreover, in the first two cases respondents did not experience a remarkable loss², their employer compensated the wage gap (between the total ordinary wage and the unemployment subsidy) so as workers' base wage was kept equal. In the third case, on the contrary, the partial unemployment regime significantly affected the global income of the respondent:

[INT. 02] [Middle Manager in the music industry]

We've had a drop in our income. Starting from April I had a 200 € net loss, that is 9-10% less than the salary. 1900 € per month is my net salary. That's because of partial unemployment.

Another respondent, a call centre operator in an outsourced branch of a multinational insurance company declared that the company proposed to the employees the possibility

² After the fieldwork and during the writing of the report we have been informed that the company massively increase its reliance on partial unemployment, starting from the month of June. The company reported an initial decrease of 75% of its economic activity and in the beginning of June it had only partially recovered (a loss of 45% compared to the same period of the previous year). Workers are currently alternating telework and day offs and the ratio of the first has been decreasing in favour of the latter.

of voluntary partial unemployment, but the respondent refused, even if the company proposed to fill the income gap between the base salary and the subsidy:

[INT. 14] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

Partial unemployment was proposed but a priori took care of everything ... but they offered us this to take care of children under 15 ... but I wanted to continue working ... it's more related to the fact that I'd rather work than do nothing ... and then I hope that my effort will be remembered and rewarded ...

The second kind of income reduction was related to the suppression of production bonuses that the two agency workers reported³:

[INT. 01] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

In the agency we have a variable salary system that are bonuses... and so for example, depending on the professional level, I am commercial, we have a percentage... I used to reach 2500 € of salary and today I don't know because I don't think I will have 2200-2300 €. My net fixed salary is 1800 €.

[INT. 08] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

Yes, we are going to have an impact, especially on the bonuses... the activity has collapsed and so the variable part of the salary... even if the fixed part hasn't moved...

At the time during which interviewees were being carried on, the impact of the economic recession on many economic sectors, and (consequently) on wages, was still not clear, and some respondents could only foresee, with a certain extent of probability, possible reductions of their incomes. A subtitler in an outsourced branch of the French national broadcaster, declared a very likely reduction or suspension of bonuses:

[INT.19] [Subtitler for an outsourced branch of National French Broadcasting]

Every year we get a profit-sharing on the company revenue. It is a sum of money that we receive, and we were made to understand that next year there would be none. Because this profit-sharing is proportional to the financial turnover, and that's a disaster...

A third kind of income reduction was the suspension of wages increases: an IT middle manager and informatic consultant of an ITC service company - and also union

³ INT. 04 s employed in the same company but is not an agency worker, she works at the HQ and is in charge of health and safety issues. Her performance is not linked to the sales revenue of an agency. Therefore, she did not lose any productivity bonus.

representative - declared that the employer had suspended all the wage increase that had been planned for the month of March:

[INT. 03] [Middle Manager and Informatic Consultant in an ICT Services Company]

I had no wage loss because I kept on working at 100%... on the contrary, they postponed the increases that were to take place at the end of March... it was an individual increase... everyone asks for an amount and the management decides. This was postponed to the end of July, provided that economic circumstances allowed it. For the time being we can estimate a loss of 7% of the company's gross income.

A fourth kind of wage loss is the suspension of ticket restaurants reported by another employee of the temporary work company [INT. 04]. Differently from the other kinds of wage reduction (partial unemployment, bonus suspension etc.) that were linked to the economic recession - temporary work industry is very sensitive to the economic conjuncture - the suspension of ticket restaurants was directly linked to the transition to telework: the company's argument was that, as HQ workers were at home and could prepare their lunch themselves they did not need anymore. Such an argument was clearly refused by our respondent:

[INT. 04] [Middle Manager, Health and prevention project officer in a Temporary Work Multinational Company]

After the transition to telework, most employees - those working in the agencies - received their ticket restaurants in liquid money in their pay-check. We the HQ workers usually have lunch at the canteen in the HQ. When the lockdown happened, the company did not had converted our ticket restaurant converted.

Interestingly all these workers who reported wage loss during the Covid crisis not only were employed in the private sector but had open-ended contract. The large majority of short-term contract interviewees were in the public sector (5/7) and did not experience any of these forms of income loss. On the contrary the two private sector precarious workers of our sample both reported income losses:

The interviewee who witnessed the most violent impact of the lockdown was the dance teacher who lost two of her three jobs during the lockdown, i.e. 80% of her wage income. These two short-term contracts expired during the pandemic and were not renewed:

[INT. 05] [Dance teacher]

Two schools of mine closed and did not renew my contracts. the last one decided to move to telework. I was not eager of doing distant dance teaching, but I had no choice: take or leave. I had to regroup my classes, because many students dropped their courses, and all the yearly shows were cancelled, which was another source of revenue for me. I lost 80% of my income.

In the second case of precarious and private sector worker - a tourist guide and communication officer in an Abbey and Museum - the impact was less direct and violent but still remarkable:

[INT. 23] [Tourist Guide in an Abbey]

The work contract that was intended for me, it was understood that it was the year I signed a permanent contract. I could not sign my permanent contract because of the uncertainty about the coronavirus, not knowing if the tourist season would be able to take place. Let's say that my contract was used as an adjustment variable in the face of the situation. And it was not possible to discuss the increase in my salary (which is mandatory when you reach a fourth year in the same position). I asked because I said that legally it was something that had to be done, but I couldn't discuss it, on the phone it was very complicated, I was told that it wasn't a matter of discussion. I asked, but I was told that there was no need to negotiate and that, in any case, it was the only thing they were offering me.

In conclusion we want to stress three main aspects about this dimension of analysis.

First, only 7/15 reported an income loss and the all worked to the private sector. The impact was more violent for precarious workers employed in small organisations.

Second, excepted for the marginal case of the ticket restaurants, all the income losses were linked more to the economic conjuncture than to the specific transition to telework.

Third, the other 18/25 workers reported no direct income loss, even if some private employees reported cases of “chômage partiel” in other branches of their organisations, those who directly suffered the lock down and the economic halt (INT. 03, 04, 07, 09).

A deferred form of wage loss: RTT and CP

Besides these direct forms of wage or income increase we could also take into account indirect forms. In 10 cases respondent reported that their employer, whether public or private suggested, demanded or forced employees to take some days off in order to cushion the fall of economic activity.

These days of vacations were of two types. The first one is the classic paid leave (“Congés payés”, commonly known as “CP”), an institution common to many countries: paid time off work granted by employers to employees to be used, under some conditions, for whatever the employee wishes. The second one is a special institution established by the French labour law in order to regulates working time: “Réduction du temps de travail”, commonly known as “RTT”. The reduction of working time (RTT) is an instrument which allows to allocate days or half-days of rest to an employee whose working time is more than 35 hours per week. The benefit of RTT days is fixed by a collective agreement (in most cases at company level).

These two institutions can be considered a form of deferred wage as the can both be monetized, *de iure* or *de facto*. RTT days can be monetized for some categories of workers, such as middle managers (“Cadres”), whereas CP cannot be legally monetized unless the employer refuses to concede a CP to the employees because of operational reasons.

During the lockdown many employers, whether public or private resorted to these institutions as an adjustment variable to deal with the slowing down of their activity, thus reducing operational costs, and in the long term, to avoid that, once the lockdown lifted, workers scheduled their holidays all together in the same period.

The amount of these vacancies and the modes of adoption varies across organisations. In a temporary work company three workers of our sample reported a massive recourse to CP and RTT (INT. 01, 04, 08):

[INT. 01] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

We have CPs and what we call RTTs; days of catch-up time. At the beginning the company forced us to take 10 days of RTT and now they are talking about 14 days until the end of May. I have to take 14 days of RTT until the end of May. And the others are normal working days. The government said it could help pay the "chômage partiel" on the condition that the workers also take days off, RTT and CET, i.e. "Compte épargne de temps" (i.e. accumulated holidays). Now President Macron has said that in order to get the aid, the workers must also help to pay this CET. But the CET has not been possible here because we need a collective agreement at sector and company level. The sectoral agreement has not been signed by the trade unions, so we would need a company agreement negotiated between management and representative trade unions; but for the moment we have nothing, so let us just take the 14 days of RTT. But we do not know how they will organise it, if they force us to take the days this summer in July, August, later, I do not know.

Even in some branches of the public sector, such as university administration, workers have been asked to take some leaves during the lock down instead of teleworking:

[INT. 06] [Juridical Officer in a University Administration]

The university has imposed 5 days of CP... To use whenever we want... by May 15th. In some cases, CP already scheduled before the pandemic and the lockdown were blocked.

[INT. 09] [Call centre operator in a telemarketing company]

We fight a little bit with management... there are also paid holidays that cannot be cancelled, we are under pressure to take our days off knowing that we don't know what will happen in 3 weeks... the employer was entitled to impose 6 days off....

In this last case, as well as, in other ones such as the temporary work firm (INT. 01,04,08) and other large companies (INT. 14, 24), the use of RTT or CP was imposed by the employer. In other ones, often smaller organisations (such as INT. 14's agriculture consulting firm), there were not compulsory but suggested or at least negotiated with the trade unions:

[INT. 17] [Agronomist in an agriculture consulting firm]

We have been asked to put in leaves during containment, so that everyone does not take their leaves at the end of containment. Within the union of co-ops there was a negotiation with the unions.... The only thing that has changed is that they have asked us to take leave now for the next two months.

[INT.19] [Subtitler in an outsourced branch of the national French broadcasting]

I didn't have that problem because I already had no more days off, but I think that people were forced to use up their days off stock, because normally we're supposed to have schedule all our days off by the end of April. And indeed, there are people who had not taken all their leave, who were told they had to take it and they did. ...] Some people would have liked to carry them over to the next year and were told they couldn't do it.

[INT. 24] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

I've never worked weekends before. I'm off duty now. I've been forced to do RTT in May. In May, I will work 12 days. So, my portfolio situation necessarily gets worse.

In general workers seem to have positively replied to this demand, even if with many employers faced some forms of resistance or annoyance from their employees who perceived these measures as a loss of their earned time.

[INT. 20] [Psychiatrist and responsible of a psychiatric service in a hospital]

In the beginning, we weren't allowed to take a vacation because we were on a white plan. But then he was advised to. The advice from above: "Teleworking is tiring. It's a particular way of working and it's very demanding. So tell colleagues who can take days off if they wish". And then, we had a scuffle from colleagues who said, "What do you mean? Now we have to take leave, but we do not want to take leave". We'd rather save the leave for times when we can go on holiday". So, there is also a whole contradiction here, especially this one, which says, "I am, I am overwhelmed, I am overwhelmed". That is all day long. I am working a lot". And then when I say, "But do you want to take days off?", she says, "But not at all, not at all".

A minority of respondents (2/25) reported the opposite phenomenon: employers explicitly decided not to intervene on vacancies or even to ask workers not to take days off. The first employer is a research institute, in which the respondent's job is editorial secretary. The second respondent is an iconographer in a children's literature publisher:

[INT. 18] [Editorial Secretary - Research Institute]

We haven't been asked to take any time off. On the contrary, we received a message telling us that if we had taken leave during the confinement, we could cancel it.

[INT. 22] [Illustrator for a children's literature publisher]

As it happened, we were just told to continue to take our days off as we did before and not to take too much during the confinement period.

The two cases include two knowledge workers in research or cultural industry organisations whose activity was quite resilient both to the lockdown and to telework and flexible enough to slightly reorganise their activity in order to minimize the effect of the economic slowdown [cf. part 3.1]. The hypothetical reason of this policy could be associated to an overall continuity of the economic activity of these sectors and organisations.

The remaining respondents (INT. 03, 05, 07, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, 16, 18, 21, 23, 25) did not mention any resort to partial unemployment scheme, CP and RTT either and the same hypothesis could be extended to these cases. These are mostly workers of the public sector (INT. 11, 12, 15, 16) teleworking on essential services (INT. 12,15, 16) or whose activity was not especially affected by the lockdown (INT. 11); employees of trade unions or trade union officers whose activity remained constant or even increased its intensity during the lockdown (INT. 10, 13); managers or middle managers in crucial sectors such as the ICT (INT. 03, 07, 21); precarious workers who lost their contracts (INT. 05) or who had to change their tasks (INT. 23).

The topic of task change during telework is a topic that let us skip to the following part on intrinsic quality of work.

Intrinsic quality of work (Motivation, Satisfaction, Productivity)

The quality of work is a crucial issue when telework is analysed: does telework have a direct effect on the sense of motivation and satisfaction of workers or on their productivity. The results of our research cover a large and heterogeneous spectrum of situations.

First of all, when asked the question workers referred to a variety of aspects, from the labour process, to the situation at home, evoking a wide variety of factors that affected their telework experience during the lockdown.

Respondents felt more or less motivated, satisfied and productive for different reasons which we regrouped in three macro-factors:

- Work/home environment
- Overall working pace of their organisation
- Aleatory reasons (see for instance INT. 12)

The only category for which a negative relation between telework in itself and satisfaction can be established beyond reasonable doubt is teaching. For the remaining categories telework experience was mediated by the three variables presented above.

Judgements were ambivalent in most of the cases, even if leaning toward either a positive or negative hypothetical pole according to a variety of mediating factors such as skills, tasks, household composition, increase or decrease of work intensity.

A relevant aspect that is worth to be mentioned is task displacement, which was experienced by very few respondents but had a serious impact on their work (INT. 12, 23, 25). In the first case it was a positive displacement for the respondent, while in the second and third cases interviewees felt so frustrated by this change that the whole experience of telework was subsumed by that. Quite tellingly (cf. also part 3.3.3.) they both declared that this experience induced them to look for another job.

Being at home, between time flexibility and social isolation

According to our survey, working at home *per se* does not necessarily improve or make worse working conditions.

Some workers enjoyed not simply the fact of being at home but that of being at home with their family. That is because telework allowed some respondents, especially parents with school age children and especially women, to take care of their family who were also living the unprecedented situation of a lockdown. At the beginning of the pandemic schools were the first spaces to be closed and staying at home became suddenly for parents the only way to follow their prole. A (female) commercial middle manager of a temporary work company gave us this clear account:

[INT. 01] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

I feel more confident in this period of teleworking because, on the one hand, I feel that I'm working more but, on the other hand, I can manage my time differently and be in contact with my family without being stressed, running in the car to pick up my daughters... When we are in the agency there is a lot of work, we want to finish it and sometimes we leave much later and then thus I have to drive fast on the road, but now I do not have this kind of stress. For me it's much more beneficial to be at home but I wouldn't like to be there every day either. If I wanted to choose tomorrow, I would like to make two out of five. I don't feel more or less valued or motivated, absolutely. I feel... how to explain it? ... it doesn't change much for me, but it couldn't last more than many months. Tomorrow they tell me you have to stay another three months at home ... it would become more difficult ... but my motivation is the same. I like to do what I do, my job... it hasn't changed but I feel more relaxed for my family organization...

A (male) call centre operator in the insurance industry with children

[INT. 14] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

With regard to the feeling I appreciated teleworking... I don't need to be present in the company... First of all, I avoid transport every day, then I am out of the control of my superiors. On the other hand, I missed my colleagues a little bit... then I say that the advantage of teleworking is that I have more time for my

family... I am less stressed... and in terms of concentration it is equivalent to being at work... I like to be close to my children... apart from the tiredness of school at home, homework etc...

A (female) iconographer with children:

[INT. 22] [Illustrator for a children's literature publisher]

Frankly, I have the impression that I work as well as I do at work, but it's true that my rhythms are never too much high... I take the time to take care of my son, do the laundry, take advantage of the break to go to the laundromat, make the evening meal, do three errands... It's true that it's completely profitable. Because, on a normal day, I have time off in my job, which in the past I used to spend looking at news agencies, pulling up the photo threads, that's still work, because it's part of the work culture, it's true that today I do much less and I do a lot more personal stuff. [...] But I think it's better because afterwards, when I go back to work, I'm happy because it's less in my head as a mental load, so I work better too.

The other side of the coin was isolation. Other respondents attributed a negative experience of telework to the same situation of staying at home. Interviewees who stressed this point had no children in need of assistance or in any case were less worried about that than about other aspects such as space or isolation:

[INT. 18] [Editorial Secretary - Research Institute]

Obviously the conditions of telework are not the same as those in the office, because in the office there is generally no noise from the neighbours, we still have working conditions with individual desks, adapted ergonomic workstations, as soon as we have a need we don't have problems to obtain good working conditions. In addition, my partner does a lot of meetings in vision, so we adapt to the use of the rooms, we share between the office and the living room according to the visions we have, so productivity is necessarily more limited when I have papers to read and my partner is in vision or the neighbours listen to loud music (isolation is not exactly great in my house!). On the other hand, we don't have collective meetings, chatting over coffee... in the end it balances out. In terms of objectives I don't feel at all in difficulty [...] When spaces are more intertwined there are difficulties that appear. At the office I have access to the printer whenever I want. Here the printer is in the office and makes a crazy noise. So, if my girlfriend is making a video I can't print, and I have to wait. Maybe I'll print what I need before she starts working on it. Then I'm going to start my tasks according to my concentration, my desires, is there noise... I don't necessarily have the same organization as at the office. If I know that I'm going to have an hour of calm in front of me, I'm going to start reading an article on trial. If for example I need a little less quiet, I'll do reminders by email or I'll check a library on Zotero [a bibliographic archive software].

Isolation is another possible aspect that makes telework from home uncomfortable or painful. Either because of quasi-total isolation, as in this case of a respondent living on her own:

[INT. 03] [Middle Manager and Informatic Consultant in an ICT Services Company]

I feel isolated, yes, but not in relation to work, but in relation to the closure of the bars... otherwise I exchange with my colleagues for questions that don't have to do with work, yeah.

[INT. 11] [Rail Expert - Transport Public Authority]

In fact, in a period of lockdown, I found it more difficult ... because we have a rupture of social bond, we only have a virtual social bond and over a long period of time it weighs on us ... and as a result these hard to bear ... you still want to go out, I missed not seeing colleagues and friends. Now with the end of the lockdown it's true that we still work at home but it's true that there's a feeling of being able to go out more freely... it's a general state of mind that's different, not in the context of work but of life in general [...] These just in terms of space it could be better... I live in a 2-room apartment, so the separation between the personal and workspace I feel it.

[INT. 24] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

Then we'll see, because it's true that I live alone. There is already another problematic aspect that arises, and that is the problem of social relations. It is true that today it is not the same as having colleagues around. In some cases, it can be comfortable to be at a distance.

Or, because of a more specific kind of isolation: that from colleagues whose presence and cooperation is as crucial and natural in the labour process as unnoticed, as in the case of this employee of the music industry:

[INT. 02] [Middle Manager in the music industry]

Being at home makes things a bit more difficult: for example, I can't put the music on loud as I usually do at the office to listen with colleagues and evaluate the songs together. And we like to exchange opinions. But it doesn't change the way you evaluate the songs. Usually we listen with three or four people.

The professional category which is affected in the most negative way by the isolation aspect telework are, unsurprisingly, those of teachers and other educational workers:

[INT. 05] [Dance Teacher]

Moving to telework was a complete catastrophe!

[INT. 15] [Primary School Teacher]

After the holidays I had a lot of trouble getting back to work because I thought "what's the point?". But in the end, I thought that even if it's not much use, it's a little bit of help to someone. And then anyway if I don't do it, what do I do? What am I good for? There's the question of utility behind the job. So, I went through a bit of a dry spell and then I said to myself: "We have to keep going, we have to motivate our little students as well". [...] I've been overloaded with work because we're looking for a document that will be better adapted to the implementation within the family, to be passed on by the parents. In fact, what increases our workload is that we have to give parents instructions so that they can give instructions to their children. So, we have a double workload, so it's obviously an overload compared to the normal condition.

[INT. 25] [Clerk/Janitor in a public high school]

This kind of work from home is very boring, it's really a pain in the ass, a never-ending pain in the ass. Because I liked this job because, besides leaving me a lot of time to prepare for the competition, it gave me contact with the kids and the bureaucratic part allows me to acquire skills on the local communities that are useful for my competition. So... so I'm a receptionist! It's a kind of job that the only thing you're satisfied with is the relationship with the pupils and how you can help them. You miss that, you miss the job satisfaction part, at least for me, you miss the sense of your work and skills.

But also, that of other workers who need a direct visual contact with users or co-workers such as the trade unionist that we quote:

[INT. 13] [Full time Trade Union Officer]

I'm not satisfied at all. It was a great situation and there was a lot more work and responsibility and people were counting on me and it was more complicated... Now with the end of the lockdown it's going a little bit better, the team is starting to take over... but I'm not going to send the kids to school... What frustrated me was the efficiency of the meetings ... It's complicated: there are all the trade unions, sometimes there are more than 50 people without counting the management ... The problem is delicate: when you are in front of your screen you want to speak, you want to take the floor... there are no rules on the speaking time , you can't censor people but by the way discipline was lacking, for example people didn't even turn off the microphone when they were not supposed to speak... And then what's really important is that a lot of things are discussed and played out behind the scenes of the negotiations, during the coffee break etc... but even the physical vision allows us to get along better... and sometimes the jokes between colleagues we can't understand it any more in videoconferencing and all that creates misunderstandings... Compared to the employees who are union members, it changes... a lot: on the one hand the employees call us a lot, also those who never call us... and so they need a lot more support.

[INT. 17] [Agronomist in an agriculture consulting firm]

On the level of motivation, it's not the same. I'm less motivated. When I go to the office I'm going to ask questions, I'm going to talk with my colleagues about my projects, I'm going to have a little more interaction than with skype, I'm going to see how they rule about me, whereas here it's just words. Everything that is exchanged with the coops we have less than when we were in the office and I feel more motivated when I interact with the coops. And after going out, going to the field or even going to the office by bike, in the end you change your mind a little bit, whereas here everything is a little more complicated.

Nevertheless the impact of isolation from the ordinary work space could also been stressed by professions considered more “suitable for telework”, i.e. those with no direct contact with users or customers with or those who demand ubiquity (which in the case of normal telework is possible but not during a lockdown). Respondents underline the fact that at home they have a more peaceful work environment than their usual workplace (INT. 2, 7, 14, 18, 23, 24), they do not have horizontal or vertical control (INT. 14, 23, 24 – INT. 17 stressed that this was somehow a problem for him because he got more distracted), or even because the lockdown creates less stress because of the suspension of social life (INT. 19, at the opposite of INT. 11's account who lives on her own and suffered from social isolation).

[INT. 18] [Editorial Secretary - Research Institute]

When I'm not bothered by noise, I think that some things I can do faster, because I have fewer interruptions from colleagues. For example, if I'm proofreading papers and I get an email I'm not going to interrupt what I'm doing to answer the email, whereas if there's a colleague coming into your office... When I'm working at home, I'll put my laptop on mute: I'd rather see after someone has tried to reach me than be interrupted. I find that at home we are more in control of the eventualities... we have a routine in which we can cut out what we are going to do during the day, and I organize myself so as not to be disturbed... I have the impression that I have almost gained in productivity, but then it's just an impression, it's something difficult to measure.

[INT. 19] [Subtitler for an outsourced branch of National French Broadcasting]

I'm less into the "I've got to work, I've got to work" thing. I'm tell myself: "Anyway, I'm spreading it out if necessary ". And then, the fact that I no longer have any friendly, social obligations, well, it's weird to say, but it's almost a relief. I can concentrate better on what I have to do. And I know that I have time to do it, that I have nothing else to do and that, as a result, I am less stressed.

[INT. 21] [ICT manager in a multinational telemarketing company]

Teleworking allows me not only to avoid wasting time but also to isolate myself, because when I am at the office, I am constantly disturbed by about thirty

people who want to talk to me and so on. So, it's been pretty good. It's true that it saves time and it's always nice to be close to your family, so I like that [...] The downside, the negative side. It's true that, as I was saying, I don't have an environment favourable to telework, that is to say, I work from my room. Usually, I don't have my wife or my child at home, so I can work in the living room where I have a large table and I have working conditions that are quite pleasant. It's a bit more annoying there.

[INT. 23] [Tourist Guide in an Abbey]

Being at home I am always so alone in my task and there is no more collaboration. Except that it has allowed me to be much more efficient, because I was not permanently obliged to justify doing what I was doing and not being permanently cut off, because at work I was doing it in idle time and I was always cut off. There I had the possibility to create a bubble where my thinking was not interrupted, so I could move forward for several hours, really moving forward, whereas being on the spot it would not have been possible, because I didn't have any work time really dedicated to it on the spot. [...] I feel that, being at home, I was able to be more productive. Especially in relation to one thing: if at some point my mind was no longer there and I felt that my attention was elsewhere, I could stop, I could take a break with a real disconnection, going to see my partner, going to the garden, doing manual work, which then allows me to refocus on my work, whereas at work there can be moments when I'm not there and I still have to be there. I was able to manage my breaks with more freedom.

[INT. 24] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

So, I was alone for two months, and it's true that during the first weeks of teleworking, I was almost euphoric to be freer, to be more comfortable and calm too, because one thing I didn't mention earlier was the noise in a call centre and the difficulty of concentrating. And this also explains why, at a distance, in the case of teleworking, I can concentrate better because I am in a calm environment and I do not constantly hear the conversations of other colleagues who are polluting me. What happens at a certain point is that I get so tired that the week before the lockdown, when I was on sick leave, it was because of that. I was exhausted. When I was at the workstation, hearing the conversations, the fuss, the presence of the people in charge, etc., I couldn't stand it anymore. So, for me, teleworking at the beginning was euphoria... [...] For me it went relatively well. Afterwards it's a question of autonomy. But I had been aspiring to this autonomy for a long time and I saw something very positive in teleworking for the moment, the fact of not being under pressure from the hierarchy physically. Afterwards, we'll see, because it's true that I live alone.

In some cases (INT. 07) workers stressed the opportunity, given by telework from home, to spread their working time accordingly with their personal and family necessities.

[INT. 07] [Informatic Engineer - ICT Service Company, posted in a Hotel Multinational Company]

Sometimes I have a whole day when, apart from when my son is asleep, I can't move forward... I find myself with more concentrated times... so maybe it happens that I haven't worked much but I catch up the day after or in the evening because the organization adapts...

Working rhythms, adaptation and task change

Half of our respondents (13/25) reported a change, either an increase (INT. 09) or a decrease (INT. 01, 02, 05, 06, 08, 12, 13, 17, 20, 23, 25) in the intensity of work. It is hard to determine sharply the causes of these increase or decrease but none appears to be directly linked to telework more than to other correlated variables, such as the continuity of the operations activity of the organisations to whom workers belong. [cf. part 3.1. on transition to telework].

The effects of this change in work intensity are also very different but we can identify some groups of respondents who operates on different jobs but have in common structural working conditions and thus experienced the same effect of telework on their work.

The decrease of work intensity seems to have had a negative effect on motivation, especially among respondents who did not have to take care of children or elderly people - either because they live alone or with their partner and no one else (INT. 06) or because their partner, usually a women, take the charge of reproductive work (INT. 08). In both cases respondents do not feel the pressure of reproductive labour and son they are not particularly relieved by the reduction of productive labour.

[INT. 06] [Juridical Officer in a University Administration]

There are some days when I don't feel like doing anything and so the motivation is a bit less... we are working less, so... but still a "less" that fills my day... But it doesn't change the way I do things: I do it the same, I always do it well... before there was more work but it was more spread out... now there is less work because the contracts don't start, only the bigger ones start, so you have less small things to do so I can take more time to recover some things that I missed before: a juridical research in normal period I would have done it much faster...

[INT. 08] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

I would say that I'm less motivated anyway... because the business has collapsed and also in relation to the fact that it's a special situation for me, because I want to move on to something else: I've been with [company name] for 3 and a half years... I'm less motivated, I don't want to contact customers... Now in confinement we have mainly administrative tasks: processing numbers and contracts, sending out payments, asking for invoices, etc... What I miss is the more interesting part, the prospecting part: finding new customers... new contract negotiation etc...

[INT. 16] [PhD researcher and university lecturer]

This period has significantly influenced the work on the thesis: due to the absence of working tools and a favourable context from an emotional and

relational point of view in which to study. the causes of this "waning productivity" are both material and related to the state of mind in which one faces isolation. This second aspect is much more disabling: loneliness and absence of relationships influence concentration, research activity. [...] I have experienced loss of motivation and satisfaction. [...] I have experienced a tendency to do less. Maybe I revised some writings, but I didn't suffer an overload of work, rather I experienced a sense of emptiness because I think that research activity feeds mainly on comparison, discussion, exchange. Loneliness, which is an essential element of research, cannot be enough in itself. This has reduced my volume of work.

The decreasing intensity on the contrary was hailed by other respondents who, in a quite talkative way, have children and are women:

[INT. 20] [Psychiatrist]

We're all in a bit of a slow mode at work I think right now in. Except for those who want to, because I also have adult colleagues on duty, for example, where the work hasn't changed at all. That is to say, the adult hospitalization services were worse than usual, that is to say a lot of people who are not doing well, no room, reviewing the entire organization. And so, in adult services, people had reasons to be on their kneecaps. We have this relationship at work, I don't know if it's French or not, a complaint. And so, I admit that I worked much less than usual for the first four weeks, and I was so happy about that. Because I was overwhelmed with my previous work. I was thinking about taking a part-time job so I could see more of my kids. All this pressure at work was really weighing on me, and so, it's a bit like a vacation that was given to me by a providence, by an infectious providence. Now I work about half of it.

In other cases, especially in those organisation who had to readapt their operations to the new constraints of the lockdown (schools, trade unions, hospitals), the intensity of work changed but it was only partially or temporarily affected: it decreased at the beginning as long as their organisation was undergoing a process of adaptation but then recovered. In this regard the case of a clerical worker in a white-collar trade union federation is quite indicative:

[INT. 10] [Account Secretary in a white-collar trade union]

It's been a pretty busy period... at the beginning... I didn't have the bookkeeping to do any more... but now, as the activity has stabilised, I have the bookkeeping again... but the calls have been reduced a bit... I've reorganised my way of working a bit... now I have fewer calls, I can concentrate on other things... The employees are a bit panicky with the crisis... but in the end it didn't bother me too much. It's my job and it was complicated to manage it before.

What is particularly interesting about the impact of telework during the lockdown - which implied the necessity of suspend some activities - was the fact that some workers took this opportunity to catch up the amounts of work that they had left behind during the daily routine of ordinary times (INT. 06, 12):

[INT. 12] [City Council Officer, Real Estate Registry Officer]

I missed the field a little bit, come on, it's not great fun when it's cold but it's nice to come back if the weather is better... The positive side is that we work at home, it's cooler, I no longer had the stress of getting up and running... as we couldn't do any more field work, I could focus on administrative tasks. That helped me a lot, otherwise I would have fallen behind by working in pairs, because my co-worker didn't easily use computer tools, it's complicated for her... everything that's computer, it was me who had to do that... the colleague didn't telework and so that was a great relief for me because I could work alone without having to assist her...

In some cases, this task reorganisation was soft and chosen by the respondent (Like in INT. 06 and INT. 12). In other cases, it was a more intrusive change dictated by the employer, as in the case of the tourist guide in an abbey who was unilaterally appointed to tasks of communication officer of the Abbey's social media:

[INT. 23] [Tourist Guide in an Abbey]

It's not at all my goal to work on these digital tools. I felt like I was being given things to fill up my working hours. At the end of the day my role is not very clear. On the one hand I'm happy because I'm developing new skills, but on the other hand that's not why I committed myself at all and I have no possibility to see what's expected of me. [...] I feel completely hindered in my abilities. What I can do I can't do. And the things that I can have expertise on, I'm asked not to give my expertise. I've even been explicitly asked to keep quiet and not to think about it. For example, a week ago I was sent a publication to put on fb to talk about the reopening of visits, to be posted on a Monday. So, according to the statistics I was able to make on the page, Monday is the day when you really shouldn't publish, so I simply suggested to do it another day, to one of my colleagues, and then I received an email saying that I didn't have to contest an order, that things were like that and that I was a troublemaker at the moment I was giving an opinion. And this was confirmed by the monks, who told me that my role was to apply what I was told, that I was a tool.

Among workers who reported a constant increase in working activity we find only a call centre operator (INT. 09) whose company was in charge of the emergency Covid hotline, through which citizens could ask for and receive information about anything related to the Covid crisis, especially about their health conditions. As a result, the call centre company increased the amount of work, without any special compensation, and tried to extend the working time of operators.

Employment quality

The question on employment quality was specifically addressed to short-term contract workers in order to understand the impact of telework on the employment condition and consequences on future career development (namely contract renewal). However, many

workers with open-ended contract expressed concerns about the continuity of their employment.

It is difficult to determine at that stage of the lockdown and telework implementation the effective impact of telework on employment of the interviewees, so we will confine ourselves to show how workers at the time of the interviews perceived the possible consequences of that extraordinary situation.

Only one worker - a short-term contract - lost her job (she lost 2 of her three work contracts) because of the lockdown. It was a dance teacher and the loss of employment was due more to the lockdown and students' withdrawal than to the effects of the transition to telework.

Most workers expressed preoccupation not so much for the security of their job, rather for the economic future of the economy or their employer because of the economic recession (INT. 01, 02, 03, 04, 05, 08, 09, 13, 16) or for previous structural technological change in their job:

[INT. 14] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

I don't have any immediate fears due to telecommuting... it's more the evolution of our profession that is bound to have an impact... automation... artificial intelligence...

Others are not especially afraid, especially those working in the public sector (INT. 06, 11, 12).

Two workers only stress a link between their conduct during the lockdown and telework and received or expect a reward for their positive attitude they had (INT. 12, 14):

[INT. 12] [City Council Officer, Real Estate Registry Officer]

On the contrary, no! This experience reinforced my director, he saw that despite my situation [as a single mother with three children] ... as we have a precarious contract, I don't have the right of permanent civil servants, who could stay at home without teleworking and continue to be paid ... that wasn't my case. My boss didn't think it was normal, but that's the public service, and he found that I provided a good quality of work... I have expectations for the future... my boss is satisfied, also for my patience that I've always had with my co-worker... he asked me to become head of this department... it's becoming official...

[INT. 14] [Call centre operator in an insurance company]

Partial unemployment was proposed but a priori took care of everything ... but they offered us this to take care of children under 15 ... but I wanted to continue working ... it's more related to the fact that I'd rather work than do nothing ... and then I hope that my effort will be remembered and rewarded ...

On the contrary two respondents, both precarious and knowledge workers, considered the idea of leaving their job. The reason could be linked to telework as lockdown and telework operated as a catalyst of discontent towards their employers for the way how they managed the transition to telework:

[INT. 23] [Tourist Guide in an Abbey]

I'm in a total lack of clarity today about my work. Today I'm seriously thinking about finding another job, where things are more settled, because right now I'm in the dark, I don't know what to expect. And because of teleworking there are a lot of decisions that have been taken and on which I have no visibility. [...] For three years I was in a race ahead, without counting my hours and in a total commitment. Today my vision has completely turned around in the sense that I am thinking about my interests, and I tell myself that I will have to defend my interests because they will not be defended by my employers. Whereas I used to have a very very strong entrepreneurial soul, today I no longer have the soul of a worker, where I respond to the tasks that are given to me but without a vision of the future. I think this is a lot in relation to telework, in the sense that telework when the working conditions are good it can certainly help, but when the roles are not defined and when the working situation is already complex, anxiety-producing or... we'll say ill-defined, telework has a catalytic effect.

[INT. 25] [Clerk/Janitor in a public high school]

I'm looking for another job, or else I'll go into unemployment. Let's just say that this quarantine has led me to this personal reflection.

In most cases however telework seems not the relevant factor. It is rather the economic recession the key aspect that seems to create concerns for respondents.

Health and safety

The first provisional finding regarding health and safety is that the majority of respondent reported a negative impact of telework on health and safety. Physical pain, at their back and neck, especially (INT. 01, 02, 06, 12, 17, 18, 19, 23, 25); sleeping problems (INT. 02, 13 and 25). Psychological problems linked to the fact of being in telework at home: difficulties to concentrate or, on the contrary, to stop working at the end of the day (INT. 01, 06) isolation (INT. 02, 03, 11, 24, 25)⁴ - and to the way in which their employer reacted to lockdown and transition to telework: task displacement (INT. 23, 25), and lack of supervision and assistance from management and employers (INT. 01, 09, 15, 25) .

The second is that remaining workers, on the contrary, stressed no special impact or even an amelioration on their physical and mental conditions especially for the instruments provided by the employers (INT. 19, 22) flexibility allowed by the fact of working from home in terms of work-life balance or because (cf. part 3.3.2.)

⁴ When asked about isolation workers tended to take into account at the same time both the isolation from colleagues and the general isolation and social distancing due to the lockdown.

Working time (intensity, schedules and breaks)

Some workers maintained the same working time of ordinary work. Some because of the kind of their job which implies a certain degree of interaction with the external environment: low skilled workers in call centres (INT. 09, 14, 24), medium and high skilled workers in contact with other organisations (INT. 02, 06) or public sector workers (INT. 12, 15, 20, 25). Remaining respondents were not forced to maintain a fixed schedule even they tried to organise and plan their work with a certain degree of planification.

Five interviewees explicitly reported frequent extra time work (“débordement”) (INT. 01, 13, 15, 16 19, 21, 23).

Regarding pauses, all respondents experienced a larger autonomy in setting their breaks - but this requires an effort in self-disciplining and control - except for the three call centre operators whose break time were strictly defined and could not be circumvented (because of technical control through digital devices).

Time management is probably the field in which we found the strongest polarisation between a category of highly controlled low skilled teleworkers and other categories whose labour process is not so strict to require a firm control on working time.

Regarding the intensity of work, the overwhelming majority of workers reported no increase in work intensity. In some cases, respondents declared a decrease of work intensity because of the lockdown and the freezing of many economic sectors (cf. Part 3.3.1). This is probably due to contingent factors, i.e. the overall slowing down of the economy, more than to the remote working *per se*. However, it is not excluded that on the long run that the recovery of economic activity, and employers’ quest for increases in productivity, could combine with telework and jointly increase work intensity. A prefiguration of such a scenario in our sample, is the case of workers employed in sectors or tasks on the frontline of the pandemic (for example INT. 09, a call centre operator working for the government outsourced emergency hotline on Covid-19) who reported a significant increase on work intensity, made easier by some features of telework, especially the extension of working day.

Work-life balance

Work life balance for the combined effect of telework and lockdown that confined at home not only teleworkers but also their families and acquaintances.

Time management

As we already stressed in part 3.3 workers who did not had to follow a strict time schedule enjoyed the possibility to redistribute work especially those with children in need of care. Respondents who had to deal with a more rigid work schedule and who had children (INT. 14) enjoyed the help and cooperation of their partner or at least enjoyed more time gained thanks to the suspension of transfer to the ordinary workplace.

The presence of children at home was an handicap for many workers- even if some respondents enjoyed the possibility to remain at home with their families and the time

flexibility which was accorded to them (at different degrees, as we showed) made them able to take care of them in function of the family daily routine (schools, homework, meals etc.) - at the same time in some circumstances a lack of rigid work time schedule allowed respondents to spread their work and family tasks thus conciliate work and life duties. In a certain way the combination of telework and lockdown create a redundancy both in the negative and the positive aspects.

Changes in work-life balance since lockdown

We have already stressed the pros and cons of telework on work-life balance in the previous part on quality of work section (cf. part 3.3.2.). In this paragraph we will present some possible explanation of this variety of effects. In our hypothesis the impact of lockdown and telework on work-life balance depended on two macro categories: household composition and gender, had an effect on work-life balance, especially on domestic and reproductive labour.

Division of work at home

Respondents with school age children had to face the toughest challenge. Schools were the first spaces to be closed by government decrees and this upset the entire time organisation of parents: children needed not only to be controlled but also to be followed, often on real time while, while they were taking classes and this task was falling directly on parents. Women in particular had to take the largest part of this burden, whether they were unemployed, on leave or in telework.

[INT. 15]

Usually we are anyway like Shiva with N arms, we are multitasking, we do more things at the same time. I'm talking about me but generally speaking teachers are several things at once. At home we have work at home. This dimension does not appear in all jobs. So, I articulated the thing as I usually do: I did several things at the same time! But spread over time.

In some cases, the stressed cooperation with their husband (INT. 01) sometimes the care of children was entirely on their shoulders (INT. 05):

[INT. 01] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

I am very lucky because I have a husband who cooks, who does things at home... we rather had to combine it with the children who are used to going to school with the canteen, they are served and so we had to set up the division of tasks: "you set the table, you wash the dishes". It was more the fact of getting the children used to our rhythm, which is already quite balanced, so there were very strong moments and calmer moments...

[INT. 02] [Middle Manager in the music industry]

My partner does more at home. I try to do a little, but it's not enough. My girlfriend also does teleworking... She deals with goods and transport in Europe...

Permanent contract... she works all day, but she has a lot more work, she does 9h-18h and her activity hasn't been impacted at all by the confinement, on the contrary...

[INT. 05] [Dance Teacher]

The workload at home has increased... because you have to follow the kids to school, and it didn't go back with my boyfriend...

An exception is the informatic engineer (INT. 07) who is in charge of the care of his child most of the time but only because his wife is a nurse and spend most of the day at work in her hospital.

Another kind of impact, isolation and a consequent difficulty in separating work and free time (INT. 03, 11; cf. part 3.3.2.1). The opposite case (INT. 17) seems to confirm the relevance of this hypothesis:

[INT. 17] [Agronomist in an agriculture consulting firm]

I manage to compartmentalise my work time very well. When I shut down my computer, I don't touch it up until the next day and then my girlfriend helps me to partition it, we go out for a little walk when I finish work. I think you tend to work more when you're alone.

Among the 18 cases in which respondents lived with their partners, 11 interviewees confirmed that the, in spite of the impact of lockdown and telework, the balance of division of work at home remained constant. Among these 11 cases, 4 respondents declared a balanced division of domestic work within the couple. The other 7 are reported a previously unbalanced distribution of reproductive tasks that did not change during the lockdown period or even got worse. The remaining 7 out of 25 respondents are either single mothers (INT. 12, 15) or workers living alone (INT. 03, 09, 11, 16, 24).

In all the couples the lockdown and the transition to telework imposed a reorganization but this reorganisation replicated, in most of the cases, the gender inequality within the couple:

[INT. 19] [Subtitler for an outsourced branch of National French Broadcasting]

During this period, I am still much more disturbed than usual when I work. For example, when my husband is taking care of my daughter and I'm working and he, for example, is making her do homework and then at one point I feel that it starts to yell because she doesn't want to do her exercise and he tells her that she hasn't understood anything, etc. I don't know what to do, but I don't know what to do. So, I hear them, so I go in to calm the situation down. Or if they're playing, laughing like crazy, I'll go there to tell them to keep it down. Sometimes I am also tempted to go because I hear that they are going to taste, so I want to taste with them. Stuff like that... So, I'm still more interrupted during this period. [...] My husband, on the contrary, can't stand being interrupted. I also think that he does a job that perhaps requires more concentration than I do. Therefore, he allows himself to be interrupted much less and he will be much less inclined to leave his office to intervene. It's not at all equal from that point of view.

In some cases, the fact that the partner or housemate was not in telework produced a very unbalanced distribution (INT. 08, 13, 21, 23). In the first three cases, respondents were men with children and the largest part of reproductive work was borne by their wives or female partners. In the third one respondent was a man living with her partner who, being in partial unemployment, took the entire burden of reproductive labour.

On the opposite spectrum of this divide, interviewees reported a change in the balance of the division of work at home in 4 cases out of 18, all in favour of the female member of the couple. In three cases (INT. 01, 07, 20) such a rebalancing regarded heterosexual couples with children, while one regarded a couple without children (INT. 25). In the first case the respondent (a woman) reported a rebalancing of work given to the fact that her husband was in partial unemployment. In the second case the respondent (a man) reported that his wife was working in a hospital as a nurse, so the care of their child was taken in charge by him. In the third case we have the symmetrical situation: respondent, a woman psychiatrist teleworking 2 days per week, accounted a significant change in the distribution of domestic work:

[INT. 20] [Psychiatrist]

I think it rephrased the balance of power in couples in a different way. Because I have a psychiatrist colleague like me, we were forced to go to work when our husbands could no longer go to work. And so, by necessity, our husbands took care of the children much more than we did, at least at the very beginning. Anyway, I made arrangements to still be at home so that it was half and half with my husband. But in the balance, my colleague and I realised at that time that despite the woman's liberation, we were working on domestic tasks, but especially on managing the children, it was much more our responsibility. That was very interesting in terms of rebalancing and distribution of tasks.

The only respondent with no children who reported a rebalancing, was a woman janitor/school clerk teleworking at 100%. Her partner was in partial unemployment (working only 9 hours per week) and most of the reproductive work was taken in charge by him:

[INT. 25] [Clerk/Janitor in a public high school]

I do no housework when I'm in telework, except to prepare my lunch, so if there's something to do (shopping, dishes, bed) my partner does it. I'm not a great housewife, I let everything fall on him, especially during the lockdown, since he was not in telework, I really delegated many things to him. But we are very well-balanced on this and already in normal times he was the one who took care of the house more than me. So, I think he was more affected than I was.

A final interesting aspect, and less considered in the common sense, that we found in our survey is the inclusion of children in the distribution of housework, in four cases (INT. 01, 12, 15, 20).

[INT. 01] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

I am very lucky because I have a husband who cooks, who does things at home... we rather had to combine it with the children who are used to going to school with the canteen, they are served and so we had to set up the division of tasks: "you set the table, you wash the dishes". It was more the fact of getting the children used to our rhythm, which is already quite balanced, so there were very strong moments and calmer moments...

[INT. 20] [Psychiatrist]

Domestic chores with my husband are fairly well distributed, but with the children I have rearranged them and so there they participate much more. For example, we all clean together on Sundays. They help me a lot in the kitchen. We used to have such a sequenced rhythm that asking the children to participate meant that everything would take much longer, because they would make mistakes etc. We have to be careful not to let the children get involved. So now, all of a sudden, we have time to waste.

This was particularly evident in the two cases of single mothers that we found in our sample (INT. 12, INT. 15):

[INT. 12] [City Council Officer, Real Estate Registry Officer]

I've tried to avoid isolation and enjoy my children... At the beginning of the lockdown I was worried about the weekend. I was thinking "They're going to break me" and in fact no, not so much! They've grown up! Without the confinement I wouldn't have noticed it... it also changes them... made them responsible, they want to help at home... I hadn't noticed that they had grown up...

Prospects and general outlook

Respondents' overall well-being during the period of confinement

All respondents said that they underwent an extraordinary and stressful situation which somehow had some negative consequences on their overall well-being. Based on what facts reported by our interviewees, we registered a first group of workers (10/25) who underlined negative consequences: from sleep deprivation to anxiety for their employment stability, from an increase in working rhythms to the absence of an adequate space where they could work without external interferences or, on the contrary to excessive isolation. Others (15/25) preferred to stress their capacity to deal with the situation or the privileged conditions that allowed them to live up with the lockdown and the transition to telework: for instance, cooperation with their partners (INT. 01), a well-planned work schedule (INT. 18), hobbies such as gardening (INT. 24) or a decrease of the workload (INT. 20).

Availability to telework in the future

More than two thirds of the respondents declared their availability to telework in the future (17/25), for a variable duration, spanning from 1 to 3 days per week. 2 respondents (12 and 14) at the time of the interview (may) had received the proposition of going back to work or telework and they both decided to stay at home (but again difficult to distinguish the pandemic from the specific case of telework). Among these 17 respondents who positively answered to the question 7 are men (5 of them with children) and 10 women (5 of them with children).

Among them, we find all the respondents who had already teleworked (9/25) except for one (INT. 13), a trade union officer that by virtue of his negative experience of telework during the lockdown excluded, like teachers, the possibility to with his job to a regime of telework. Among those who had not teleworked before (16/25), 9 respondents confirmed their availability to telework.

Among those who are not available to telework (7/25) we found 4 women (3 of them with children) and 3 men (one of them with children).

It is not possible of course to establish any correlation between gender and household composition and availability. On the contrary the reason for which those respondents are not willing to replicate the experience of telework is more professional than domestic: among the three teachers (respectively in the primary school, in a dance school and at the university) and 1 psychiatrist who are willing to repristinate an ordinary in-presence pedagogy, 3 are women with children and only one is a (single) man.

Finally, only one respondent (INT. 03) was undecided whether repeating or stop teleworking: a middle manager and informatic consultant living alone in his apartment. Even if his profession seems particularly suitable to telework, he is not sure about remote working, mostly because of isolation (but also for his role of supervisor).

It is also important to stress that many respondents (INT. 01, 07, 14, 24) who had never been in telework had nevertheless asked to their employers to introduce some forms of distant work or work from home, unsuccessfully, because of their employers or managers' reluctance to renounce to direct supervision:

[INT. 08] [Commercial Middle Manager in a Temp Work Company]

It's not in the company's habits, not in their habits, normally you can't telework, because it's very complicated, and the management doesn't make any effort in this direction... you need to connect to the company's network and you have to go to a nearby office and you need a special box to telework, it's expensive and it's complicated, they say... it's a dumb logic... And then all of a sudden it changed! Now they've installed automatic software and it became simple... whereas before they said it wasn't possible...

Some of these workers think that this experience of forced telework could induce their employers to reconsider their choice in the medium long run, but they do not delude themselves (INT. 04).

The conditions to be in telework, shared by most of the interviewees are a contribution to expenses, and the existence of an adequate space to work, which is considered more likely

once the lock down will be lifted, alleviating the problems of isolation and permanent childcaring.

To resume many workers appreciated telework because of more flexibility or a relaxing of direct hierarchical control. However, the results of this survey suggest that telework does not change structural conditions: polarisation and inequalities in terms of tasks, wage, health and safety. Telework was experienced as a moment of evasion from routine and direct control or at least of flexibility necessary to conciliate work and “life”. But respondents also stressed a matter of resources and distributive antagonism on who will take charge of the negative externalities (expenses, reproductive labour) of telework, which are not of a different kind of traditional work.

Conclusions

During the Covid crisis the population in regime of telework jumped from 7% to 25% of the workforce. Mass telework during the lockdown could be considered as a large-scale experiment on the viability of telework. However, the temptation of considering this data as universally valid should be avoided. The specific and exceptional context in which telework was applied at the intersection of a global pandemic, a lockdown and an economic recession make our result intrinsically dependent on these three convergent structural factors. Given the exceptional nature of this societal experience, in which telework overlap the lockdown and the economic recession, if the questions on telework are the same the way we answer them should be readapted so as to take into account the combined effect of these factors. We recommend further inquiry either in a longitudinal sense, following up the evolution of telework in the experience of the same respondents, but it would be also useful to sharp the questions and the sample through a cross-country or a cross-sector comparison in order to better control some variables and test more precise hypothesis, starting from some provisional findings:

a. Not all telework is smart work.

Our definition of telework is large and covers a wide range of sectors, professions, and skills. Among them we surveyed many low skilled teleworkers who do not enjoy the same working conditions of more autonomous and skilled professions, especially in terms of flexibility and autonomy. In this respect the transition to telework did not affected the structural inequality of the occupational structure: respondents accomplishing low skilled and standardised tasks enjoyed, to a certain extent, more freedom from direct control (even if management tried to compensate this through an increase of indirect control, like in the case of call centre operators), whereas interviewees on less standardised and more autonomous tasks were more able to carve out some niches of independence in the new situation and were more able to resist management pressures for more control and standardisation. (cf. Part. 3.2.).

b. The resilience of organisations: the inertia of many organisations.

As showed in part 3.1. most organisations reported no specific policy dedicated to teleworking. Even organisations that were already practicing, to a certain extent, telework had to improvise and let things go, instead of trying to plan such a sudden transition. The consequence was an opportunity for more autonomy regarding certain kinds of respondents (for instance we found examples of horizontal cooperation instead of a top-down decision-making) but also a feeling of abandonment and isolation and vulnerability, especially for the most subaltern or precarious jobs. Another point regarding the transition is the limits of social dialogue in effectively lead the transition: in such exceptional circumstances trade unions were caught off-guard by the unilateral initiative's management. It is possible however that trade unions could reclaim the initiative as far as the situation normalise and the return to work in a post-pandemic situation should be organised and negotiated.

c. Working time flexibility and the return of reproductive labour:

The positive aspect that was noticed by the large majority of respondents was the opportunity that telework gave them to experiment a more flexible management of time, at least for those who could tinker with their working time schedule. This flexibility was particularly appreciated by respondents with children, that thus could organise work according with the necessity of reproductive labour (housework, helping children with online schooling etc.).

d. Back to work?

The previous aspect was decisive in orienting workers feelings about telework and their availability to telecommute in the future. The overwhelming majority wishes to consolidate the practice of telework also after the end of the lockdown and with more continuity. This is true also for professions whose core task is accomplished through direct physical contact with users and customers: in these cases, respondents that they would like to do some of the bureaucratic and administrative tasks at home.

Telework was an experience that changed some perspectives and pre-notions about working in remote, but we are not able to preconize whether, once the pandemic and the lockdown will be overcome, workers who wish to keep on teleworking will be allowed by their organisations to do that. Employers seems worried about productivity and control and so will probably ask in exchange an increase in distant contr. Workers on the other hand do not want to take in charge the whole financial burden of working from home (they fear wage reduction, or they want that the company contribute to the domestic expenses of telework). In any case it is important to keep in mind that every form of telework reposes on the structural conditions and relations of power that were already set in ordinary work.

Appendix

Survey Sample Guidelines

Table 1 . Survey Sample Guidelines

Selection variables	Main relevant categories	Approximate number of interviews
Gender	male/female	50/50%
Family situation	families with children (at school age/not at school age)/couples without children/single people	Minimum 50% living in a household with children
Sector	private/public	70/30% or 80/20%
Skills level	high/medium/low skilled	50/25/25%
Work type	involving direct (remote now) contact with clients or not (salesman vs. secretary)	50/50%
Telework experience	some previous experience of telework vs. not	Min 20% was already teleworking to some extent
Contractual arrangement	Permanent vs. temporary contract. Self-employed not included	70-30%

Respondents Descriptive Table

(see also attached Excel files)⁵

Interview code	Age	Gender	Household composition	Area of residence	Sector	Occupation	Direct contact with clients/users	Skill	Contractual arrangement	Firm size	Intensity of ICT use	Total or Partial Telework
INT. 01	49	F	4: EGO + HUSBAND + 2 CHILDREN (14 and 9 years old)	Countryside (Orléans)	Private	Commercial Middle Manager - Temporary Work Multinational Company/Workers representative	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended	GE	ESSENTIAL	1

⁵ Firms have been classified according to INSEE (<https://www.insee.fr/fr/statistiques/2569436?sommaire=2587886>), based on “LOI n° 2008-776 du 4 août 2008 de modernisation de l'économie (1)”, art. 51 (https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000019285059/2016-06-26/):

Grandes entreprises (GE): more than 5000 employees

Entreprises de taille intermédiaire (ETI): less than 5000 employees

Petites et moyennes entreprises (PMI): less than 250 employees

Microentreprises (MI): less than 10 employees.

Impact of Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France – A qualitative survey

INT. 02	30	M	2: EGO + PARTNER	Paris	Private	Middle Manager - Music Industry	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended	ETI	ESSENTIAL	100%
INT. 03	52	M	1	Orléans	Private	Middle Manager and Informatic Consultant - ICT Services Company/Workers representative	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended	GE	TOTAL	1
INT. 04	48	F	2: EGO + PARTNER	Countryside (Chaville)	Private	Middle Manager - Health and prevention project officer - Temporary Work Multinational Company	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended	GE	ESSENTIAL	100%
INT. 05	39	F	6: EGO + PARTNER + 4 CHILDREN (3,11,13,17 y.o.)	Aix-Marseille	Private	Dance Teacher for three different schools	YES	LOW	Part-Time Fixed-Term contract + Freelance	MI/PMI	COMPLEMENTARY	1
INT. 06	30	F	2: EGO + PARTNER	Paris	Public	Juridical Officer - University Administration	NO	MID	Fixed-Term Contract	GE	ESSENTIAL	100%
INT. 07	49	M	3: EGO + PARTNER + 1 CHILD (1,5 y.o.)	Paris	Private	Informatic Engineer - ICT Service Company, posted in a Hotel Multinational	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended Contract	ETI	ESSENTIAL	100%

Impact of Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France – A qualitative survey

						Company						
INT. 08	41	M	4: EGO + PARTNER + 2 CHILDREN (7 and 5 y.o.)	Grand Paris	Private	Commercial Middle Manager - Temporary Work Multinational Company	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended Contract	GE	ESSENTIAL	100%
INT. 09	35	F	1	Grand Paris	Private	Call Center Operator - Multinational Company specialized in services to business/Workers representative	NO	LOW	Open-Ended Contract	GE	TOTAL	100%
INT. 10	44	F	3: EGO + PARTNER + CHILD (11 y.o.)	Grand Paris	Private	Account Secretary in a White Collar Trade Union	YES	LOW	Open-Ended Contract	MI	COMPLEMENTARY	100%
INT. 11	37	F	1	Grand Paris	Public	Rail Expert - Transport Public Authority	NO	HIGH	Fixed-Term Contract	PME	ESSENTIAL	100%
INT. 12	46	F	4: EGO + 3 CHILDREN (18, 16 and 11 y.o.)	Grand Paris	Public	Officer - City Council, Real Estate Registry Officer	YES	MID	Fixed-Term Contract	ETI	COMPLEMENTARY	50% (since 11/06/2020)
INT. 13	43	M	4: EGO + PARTNER + 2 CHILDREN (8 and 3	Asnières 92600	Private	Bank Clerk for a Temporary Work Multinational Company -	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended Contract	GE	COMPLEMENTARY	1

Impact of Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France – A qualitative survey

			y.o.)			Full Time Trade Union Officer						
INT. 14	42	M	4: EGO + PARTNER + 2 CHILDREN (12 and 8 y.o.)	Countryside (Rennes)	Private	Call centre operator - Outsourced Branch of a Multinational Insurance Company	NO	LOW	Open-Ended Contract	ETI	TOTAL	100%
INT. 15	49	F	3: EGO + 2 CHILDREN (school age)	Rennes	Public	School Teacher	YES	LOW	Open-Ended Contract	//	COMPLEMENTARY	1
INT. 16	26	M	3: EGO + PARTNER + FLATMATE	Nantes	Public	PhD researcher and university lecturer	YES	HIGH	Fixed-Term Contract	//	ESSENTIAL	100%
INT. 17	25	M	3: EGO + PARTNER + FLATMATE	Dijon	Private	Agronomist - Agriculture Consulting Firm	NO	HIGH	Open-Ended Contract	PME	ESSENTIAL	1
INT. 18	40	F	2: EGO + PARTNER	Grand Paris	Private	Editorial Secretary - Research Institute	NO	MID	Open-Ended Contract	PME	COMPLEMENTARY	100%
INT. 19	43	F	3: EGO + PARTNER + CHILD (6 y.o.)	Grand Paris	Private	Subtitler - Outsourced branch of National French Broadcasting	NO	MID	Open-Ended Contract	PME	ESSENTIAL	100% (previously 50%, 2 weeks per month)

Impact of Covid-19 confinement measures on telework in France – A qualitative survey

INT. 20	40	F	5: EGO + PARTNER + 3 CHILDREN	Grand Paris	Public	Psychiatrist - Psychiatric Hospital/Workers Representative	YES	HIGH	Open-Ended Contract	PME	COMPLEMENTARY	40%, 2 days per week
INT. 21	42	M	4: EGO + PARTNER + 2 CHILDREN (5-10 y.o.)	Grand Paris	Private	IT Manager - Call Center and Telemarketing Company	NO	HIGH	Open-Ended Contract	GE	ESSENTIAL	100%
INT. 22	39	F	4: EGO + PARTNER + 2 CHILDREN (11-15 ans)	Grand Paris	Private	Illustrator - Children's Literature Publisher	NO	MID	Open-Ended Contract	PME	TOTAL	100%
INT. 23	34	M	5: EGO + 4 FLATMATES; during the lockdown: 2: EGO + PARTNER in his partner's flat	Dijon	Private	Tourist Guide and Communication Officer - Abbey/Museum	YES	MID	Fixed-Term Contract	MI	COMPLEMENTARY	100%
INT. 24	53	M	1	Coutryside (Rennes)	Private	Call centre operator - Outsourced Branch of a Multinational Insurance Company	NO	LOW	Open-Ended Contract	ETI	TOTAL	100%
INT. 25	32	F	2: EGO + PARTNER	Aix-Marseille	Public	Clerk/Janitor - High School	YES	LOW	Fixed-Term Contract	//	COMPLEMENTARY	100%

Interview Grid

Interview guidelines

1. Socio-demographics and descriptive questions

- Personal: Age, gender, household composition, area of residence.
- Current job: Sector, occupation, type of contract arrangement, firm size, years with the same employer, intensity of ICT use.
- Resources available at home: enquire about access to the internet, ICT equipment at the households level, infrastructures adequacy (e.g. number of rooms in the house, chairs, desks) enquire about who provides the tools and resources (e.g. own PC or employer's one).
- Previous experience with telework (i.e. experience of working from home): e.g. Have you ever teleworked before? If yes, why and how often did you use to telework (i.e. at least once a week but not every day/once a week/less than once a week)? If no: reasons for not teleworking.

2. Telework during the COVID-19 situation – General assessment

- General question on the work routine during the period of confinement
- More specific questions on the timing of the transition to telework: e.g. Since when are you locked at your home? Have you started to telework on the same day, few days before that or later? How many days per week have you been teleworking since the lockdown began?
- More specific questions on the management of the transition: Within this context, one would also ask:
 - i) if teleworking was a result of negotiation between the employer and the worker/trade union,
 - ii) if there was a proper teleworking policy/guidelines in place and eligibility criteria to apply for telework. If not, one would ask if a policy/guidelines have been introduced at the beginning/during the Covid crisis;
 - iii) If respondents received any information/guidelines/training about how to telework regarding: data protection, confidentiality, health and safety, what to do in case of technical/other type of issues, signature of documents, tips for work/life balance, etc.

3. Work organization

- Communication: Effect of telework on the quality of relationship with supervisor and co-workers). Within this context, teleworkers should be asked about tools and ways to coordinate and carry out work with colleagues, superiors, external contractors/clients/ other stakeholders. Are these effective? Are these adequate? Here one should also gather questions on the prevalence of teleworking among respondents' co-workers, and more generally the organisation where they work.
- Autonomy: Investigate the extent to which the worker is able to set his own objectives, deadlines, and procedures during telework, and what changed vis-à-vis the pre-COVID situation.
- Monitoring & supervision: Mechanisms of control and coordination of work by the employer. For those in supervisory position, how do they manage other people work, schedule, objectives?
- Standardisation: Investigate the extent to which the worker has to follow procedural standards, deadlines, production targets. Who decide them: direct supervisor, clients, technical constraints.

4. The Job quality

- Pay and compensation: e.g. Have you already experienced any loss of income since the start of the lockdown? In which ways (e.g. subsidy, tools) your company has supported you during this transition to telework?

- Intrinsic quality of work: Effect of teleworking on motivation, sense of purpose, satisfaction, skills use, productivity.
- Employment quality: Contractual conditions and development opportunities (e.g. What kind of employment contract do you have? (If in temporary work) Approximately, when your work contract is expected to end? Do you think working from home could have negative repercussions on your recognition and career opportunities?
- Health and safety Within this context one should gather information about emerging physical risks due to lack of proper workplace environment and equipment at home - e.g. problems of posture due to lack of ergonomic chair or sight problems due to lack of adequate PC screen, or lack of acoustic isolated workspace. Regarding psychological risks, one would ask if the respondents
 - i) have noticed signs of “workaholism” (i.e. they’re working too much),
 - ii) feel isolated;
 - iii) How often they can take breaks, and if they can self-regulating breaks.
- Working time: changes in the duration, scheduling, flexibility, intensity due to the new telework regime.

5. Work-life balance

- General assessment: Changes in work-life balance since lockdown (e.g. How your work-life balance has changed since the lockdown and start of teleworking? How successful do you feel in balancing your work and personal and family life?)
- Division of work at home (by gender, age): e.g. Has anything changed in the daily organisation of caring/housekeeping tasks in your family since the lockdown? Is your partner also teleworking? Are you getting regular help with childcare from a day care centre, a nursery, a babysitter, or relatives?
- Time management: e.g. How many minutes you spend daily to commute to work one-way? What have you done with this time spared since teleworking? Have you introduced or forced to introduce some new routines to your life since lockdown (this can relate to duties such as housekeeping and cooking)? How are you combining your responsibilities of helping your child(ren) with online education and telework?

6. Prospects and general outlook

- Ask a general question on respondents’ overall well-being during the period of confinement.
- Assessment of short-, medium- and long-term prospects. Will this situation continue? Do you think your employers will encourage telework in the future?
- Sustainability of current arrangements. What would be necessary to improve while teleworking and perception of main barriers. (e.g. What changes would have the greatest impact on your effectiveness of working from home? What do you think is the greatest barriers for you to continue teleworking in the future? How much of your usual work can be performed remotely?
- Availability to telework in the future. In the future, if your employer gave you the choice: would you like to telework? If yes, how often and under which conditions?

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre nearest you at: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

On the phone or by email

Europe Direct is a service that answers your questions about the European Union. You can contact this service:

- by freephone: 00 800 6 7 8 9 10 11 (certain operators may charge for these calls),
- at the following standard number: +32 22999696, or
- by electronic mail via: https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en

FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at: https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en

EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications from EU Bookshop at: <https://publications.europa.eu/en/publications>. Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

GETTING IN TOUCH WITH THE EU

In person

All over the European Union there are hundreds of Europe Direct information centres. You can find the address of the centre



The European Commission's
science and knowledge service
Joint Research Centre

JRC Mission

As the science and knowledge service of the European Commission, the Joint Research Centre's mission is to support EU policies with independent evidence throughout the whole policy cycle.



EU Science Hub
ec.europa.eu/jrc



@EU_ScienceHub



EU Science Hub - Joint Research Centre



EU Science, Research and Innovation



EU Science Hub