

BAuA-Working Time Survey: Telework in Germany



baua: Report brief

Advancements in information and communication technology enable many employees to carry out their work without a fixed place of work. However, the BAuA-Working Time Survey shows that only a small proportion of employees in Germany actually have an agreement on telework or home office (12 %). These employees experience both job resources (e.g. self-determined working hours or social support from colleagues) and job demands (e.g. overtime work or extended availability). A much larger proportion of employees work from home at least occasionally without a company agreement (31 %). In this group, the stressful demands of work predominate. This is often accompanied by lower levels of work-life balance satisfaction.

The findings below are based on data from the second wave of the BAuA-Working Time Survey, a representative panel survey of employed persons in Germany. Data of 8,767 employees aged 15–65 years were analysed (see Häring et al., 2018). The analyses focus on the existence of telework agreements between employees and employers. For this purpose, respondents were asked whether they had an agreement on telework or home office with their employer. Such an agreement will be referred to as „telework“ hereafter, even if it might not be an agreement according to the German Workplace Ordinance (Arbeitsstättenverordnung § 2 (7)). In addition, respondents were asked whether they worked from home without an agreement or beyond the scope defined in an existing agreement.

Distribution and frequency

In 2017, 12 per cent of employees had agreed on telework with their employer (compared to 9 % in 2015). 8 per cent of employees performed telework at least one day per week. But people also work from home without an agreement, at least occasionally: This applies to about one third (31 %) of all employees (see Fig. 1). However, more than half of the employees with a telework agreement also indicated that they carried out work tasks from home in addition to what is stated in their agreement. There are indications that working from home may be more widespread than the figures on telework initially suggest.

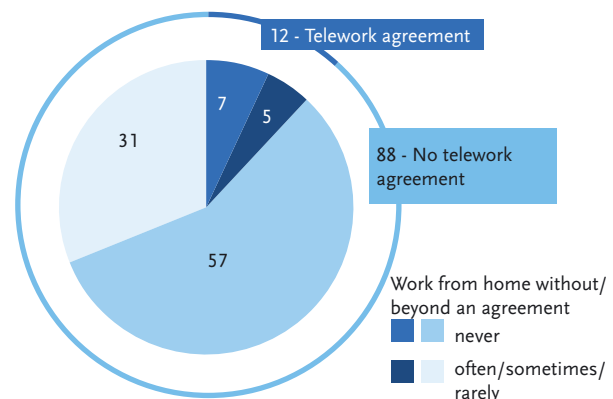


Fig. 1 Distribution of telework and work from home, data in per cent, n = 8,739

Who works from home?

The possibility for telework strongly depends on professions or activities. Telework is more widespread among workers primarily engaged in intellectual activities, working in offices and performing activities requiring a high level of qualification. It is most common in the information and communication sector (52 %) and among executives across all economic sectors. There are significantly more men than women employed in the information and communications sector, and the proportion of men is also higher among executives. It is not surprising, therefore, that men are more likely to have a telework agreement compared to women (14 vs. 10 %).

Telework is significantly less common among part-time workers, who are predominantly women, than among full-time workers. This suggests that a large number of women use part-time employment – rather than telework – to reconcile family and career. For example, 57 per cent of women with children living in the household work part time, compared to only 32 per cent of women without children.

How prevalent is the preference for telework?

More than half (60 %) of employees in Germany do not have a telework agreement and do not want one (see Fig. 2). Approximately one in five would like to work from home, but this is not possible due to their job tasks (19 %). 8 per cent of employees would like to work from home but state that their employer does not allow it.

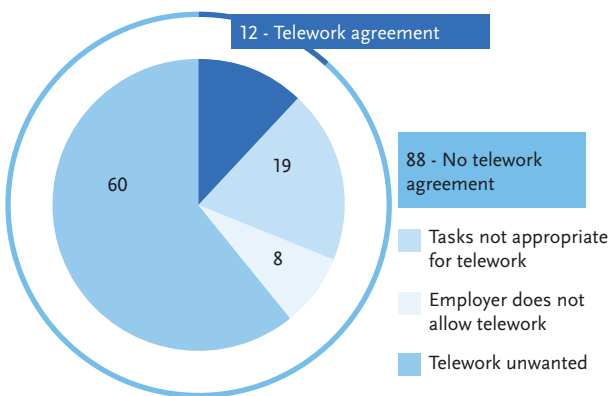


Fig. 2 Employees with telework agreements vs. without telework agreements, including reasons for not teleworking (n = 8,548), figures in per cent, rounding errors possible

Working conditions: Job demands and resources of teleworkers

Employees with telework agreements are more likely to experience a dissolution of boundaries between work and private life. On average, they work longer hours, do more overtime and violate the statutory minimum rest period of eleven consecutive hours between the end of work and the next shift more often (see Fig. 3). This applies in a similar way to employees who work from home without a telework agreement. The possibility of working from home can therefore lead to a blurring of the boundaries between work and private life. For example, employees with more than one teleworking day per week as well as employees who work from home without an agreement are more frequently contacted in their private lives for work-related reasons (see Fig. 3). In addition, some studies also point to an increased workload and higher time and performance pressure (see AOK study, Badura et al., 2019). However, mean value comparisons based on the BAuA-Working Time Survey only confirm this to a limited extent: There is no evidence of higher average work intensity for employees with telework arrangements, but there are indications of

higher work intensity for employees who work from home without a telework agreement. Some employees therefore seem to bring their work home when tasks cannot be completed during regular working hours.

The greater the extent of telework, the less often employees are present at the workplace. As a result, personal contacts with colleagues and superiors are often reduced. However, the feeling of being part of the community at work is even slightly more pronounced for employees with up to one teleworking day per week. The sense of community at the workplace only seems to be reduced among employees with telework agreements covering two or more days a week (see Fig. 4).

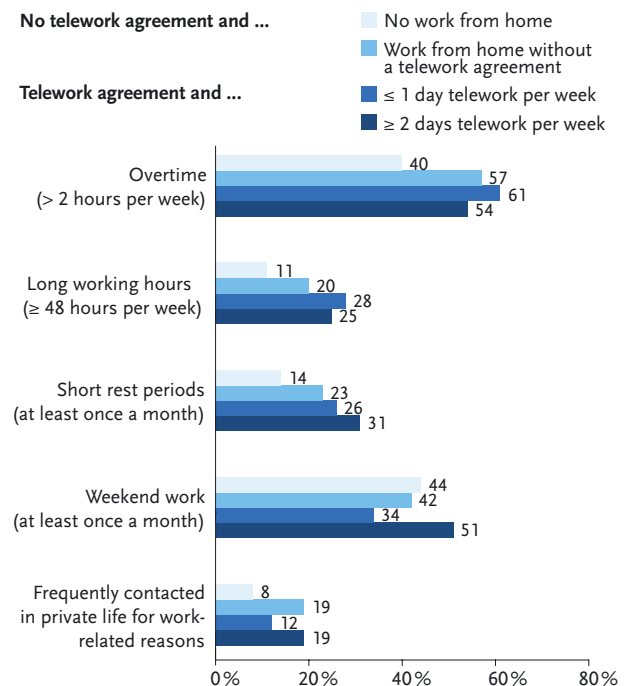


Fig. 3 Temporal boundarylessness according to the frequency of agreed telework or working from home without an agreement (8,201 ≤ n ≤ 8,736)

However, being away from the workplace can also be a resource. The more days employees perform telework, the less they feel disturbed or interrupted in their work. It is possible that telework is also used by some employees to work without interruptions.

In addition, telework is often chosen to improve the compatibility of family and working life. Indeed, the proportion of teleworkers is higher among employees with younger children than among employees without children. In contrast, telework seems to play hardly any role with regard to other caregiving responsibilities. Telework is also used to avoid long commutes. 21 per cent of employees with long commutes to their work place (two hours or more per day)

have telework agreements and also work from home more frequently, usually one day per week (14 %).

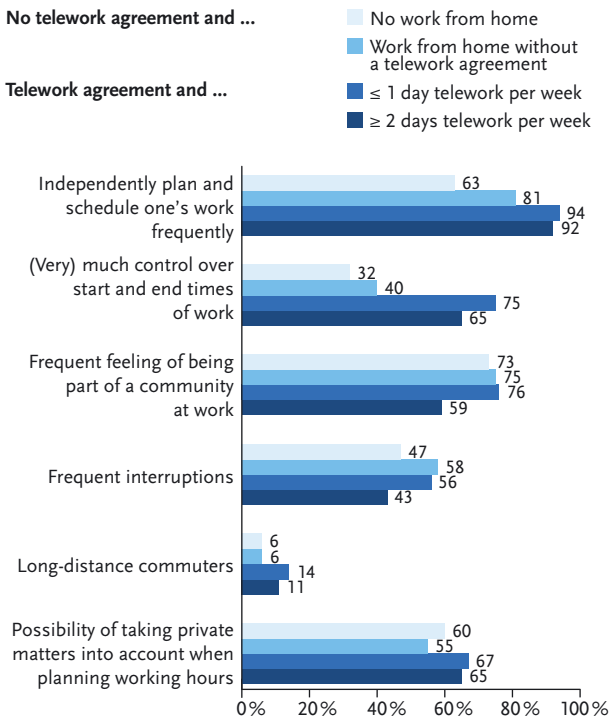


Fig. 4 Job resources by frequency of agreed telework (8,493 ≤ n ≤ 8,734)

Overall, teleworkers also have a much greater decision latitude, not least because of their qualifications and knowledge-based tasks. Employees with telework agreements, for example, have control over the organisation of their daily working time more often as well as on the planning and scheduling of their work (see Fig. 4). As high decision latitude tends to be associated with better well-being and health, teleworkers should be more satisfied and healthier on average. Employees working without a telework arrangement tend to have fewer resources than employees with a telework agreement.

Well-being and health

In fact, a comparison of employees with and without telework initially shows no differences in work-life balance satisfaction (see Fig. 5). Although telework seems to be a tool to facilitate that balance, it is not directly related to work-life balance. Moreover, employees with a telework agreement are less likely to be able to detach from work than employees who do not work from home. On the other hand, workers who often work from home without or beyond a telework agreement are less likely to be satisfied with their work-life balance and are less likely to detach from work.

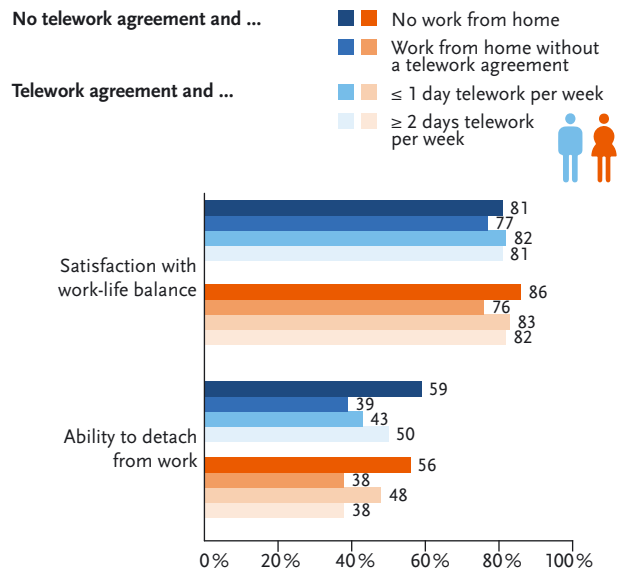


Fig. 5 Satisfaction with work-life balance and being able to detach from work for employees with telework agreement or work from home without an agreement (8,736 ≤ n ≤ 8,742)

Conclusion

In comparison to other European countries, only few employees in Germany do parts of their work from home (see Eurofound, 2020). Contractual telework arrangements in particular are limited to a small group of employees. In this context, telework is associated with occupations and tasks that often involve large decision latitude and therefore above-average job resources. Telework can also be helpful for employees with long commutes or those who wish to achieve a better balance between family and career. At the same time, the extent of telework also increases the risk of temporal boundarylessness and social isolation. Employees with telework agreements also have a high risk of working long hours. The results presented here indicate that telework agreements do not have negative effects as long as job demands and resources are present simultaneously. However, work intensity increases when employees work from home without a telework agreement or beyond an existing agreement, a detrimental association with well-being and health can also be observed. Specific agreements on telework can be used to give employees more temporal and spatial flexibility. However, these agreements should not call for excessive work from home and should also include measures to limit temporal boundarylessness (e.g. permanent availability) and social isolation. In principle, work from home should only be carried out within working hours regulations. Accordingly, maximum daily working hours, rest and recovery periods must be paid attention to. From an occupational health perspective, a moderate amount of telework (e.g. one day per week) appears to be advisable. In addition, it should be

ensured that no additional work is done from home beyond the agreement. Finally, the preferences of many employees to separate work and private life have to be taken into account, and no one should be forced to work from home involuntarily.

This article presents some results of a forthcoming BAuA report on work-related mobility based on analyses of the 2017 BAuA-Working Time Survey.

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Additional Information

- 1 Badura, B., Ducki, A., Schröder, H., Klose, J., & Meyer, M. (Hrsg.) Fehlzeiten-Report 2019: Digitalisierung - gesundes Arbeiten ermöglichen. Berlin, Heidelberg: Springer.
- 2 Eurofound (2020). Telework and ICT-based mobile work: Flexible working in the digital age. Luxemburg und Genf: Publications Office of the European Union und International Labour Office.
- 3 Häring, A., Schütz, H., Middendorf, L., Hausen, J., Brauner, C. & Wöhrmann, A. M. (2018). Methodology report and questionnaire for the BAuA-Working Time Survey 2017 (baua: report). Dortmund/Berlin/Dresden: Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Last retrieval on 23.09.2018 at www.baua.de/DE/Angebote/Publikationen/Berichte/F2398-3.html