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# **HYBRID WORK: New opportunities and challenges for occupational safety and health (OSH)**

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**Webinar “Challenges of hybrid work”**

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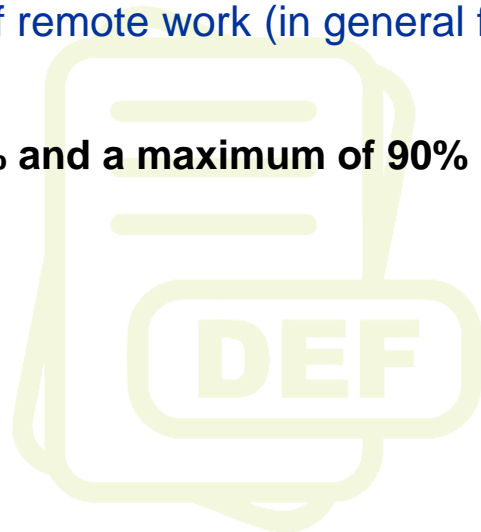
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# Defining hybrid work

- **Hybrid work:** a combination of remote work (in general from home) with work at the employer's premises
  - Includes a **minimum of 10% and a maximum of 90%** of home-based work

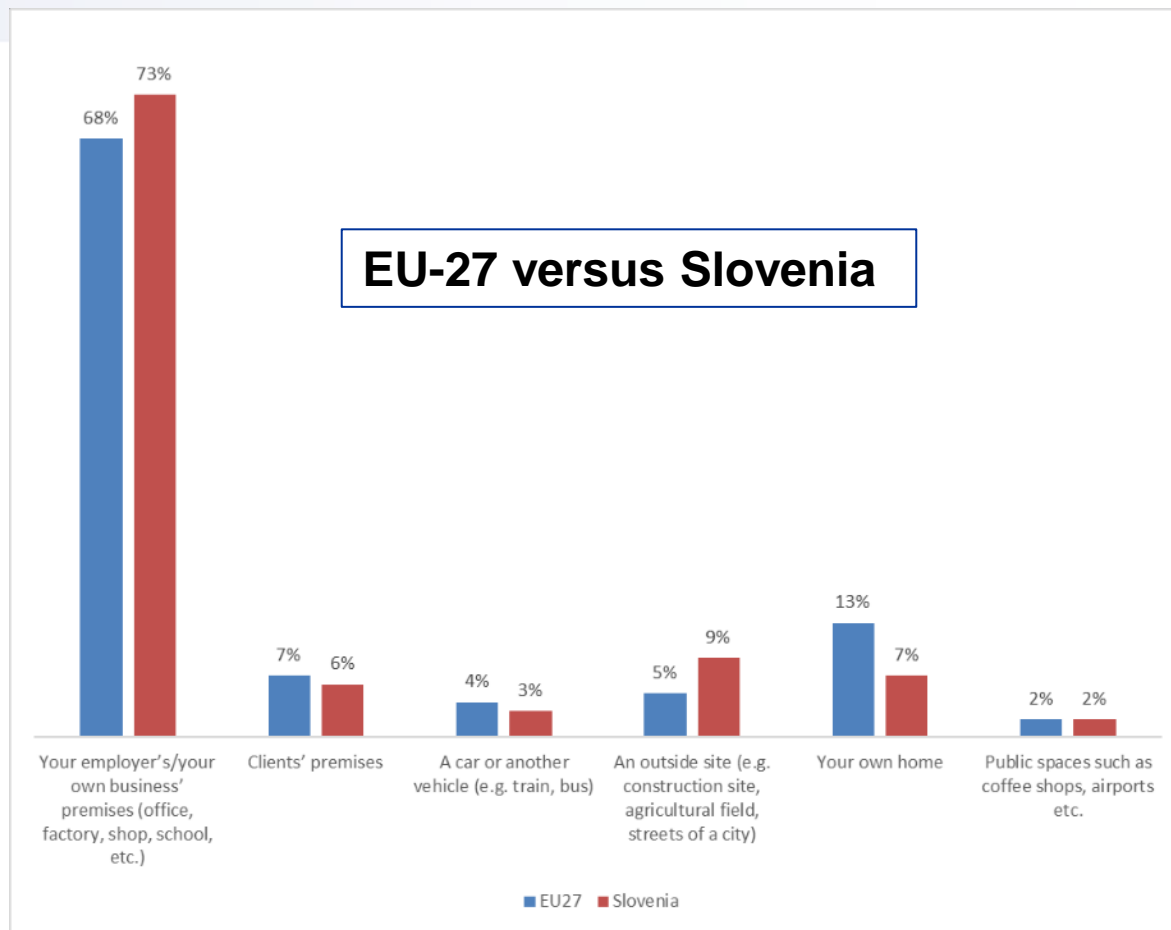


# Locations people worked most of the time in 2024-25

## In the EU-27:

- 68% of interviewees worked at their employer's premises vs. 65% in 2022
- 13% worked from home vs. almost 17% in 2022
- The rest worked from other various places

Source: OSH Pulse – Occupational Safety and Health in the era of climate and digital change



# OSH opportunities of hybrid work

- Increased flexibility and a better work-life balance
- Positive impact on workers' motivation and productivity
- Reduced commuting times and less home-to-work accidents
- Decreased office-related costs (for employers)
- Workers are removed from high-risk environments or from performing high-risk tasks



# OSH risks and challenges of hybrid work

Main risks arise from working from places not conceived as a workplace, where employers cannot be (fully) in control of the risks.

## General physical and safety risks in remote workplaces:

- Temperature, lighting, noise, disturbances
- Slips and falls due to electrical wiring and cables
- Fire



# Ergonomic risks in hybrid / remote workplaces

- **Poor lighting and inadequate contrast** between the screen and the surrounding area can lead to eyestrain, vision disorders
  - Poor ergonomics of **improvised or inappropriate workstations**, combined with **prolonged sitting** can lead to musculoskeletal disorders (MSDs)
    - Discomfort and muscle loading
    - Neck pain, back pain
    - Tendon pain in the wrists and fingers, repetitive strain injury
  - Risks of **MSDs increase with home-based work**
    - MSDs ↑ when telework days/week  $\geq 2$  (Tezuka, 2022; Matsugaki, 2023)
    - Neck pain ↑ when weekly telework  $\geq 50\%$  working time s (Bodin et al., 2023)
- **Sedentarism increases with the proportion of home-based work with potential health consequences (MSDs, overweight, cardiovascular diseases)**



# Psychosocial risks in hybrid / remote workplaces

- Isolation due to lack of contact with colleagues and supervisors
- **Blurred boundaries** between work and private life
- **Constant availability** - renouncing the right to disconnect
- Increased **work intensity**
- **Information overload** - multiple synchronous communications and information processing
- **Presenteism** - working while feeling unwell
- **Cyber-bullying and harassment** - some customers, colleagues or supervisors tend to be ruder when communicating digitally than when face-to-face

**Health outcomes:** stress, anxiety, burnout, sleep disturbances, eating disorders (unhealthy eating patterns), cardiovascular disorders, etc.



# Challenges related to hybrid work organisation

- **Increase of digital work both at home and at the employer's premises**
  - Intensive use of digital technologies
  - Intensive virtual interactions (e.g. videoconferencing) and less in-person face-to-face communication
- **Transformed teamwork both during telework and on-site work**
  - Ever-changing hybrid work configurations and work teams - changing mix of remote and on-site colleagues and managers
  - Reduced social interactions at work, especially informal interactions, with colleagues or managers both at home and at the employer's premises
  - Teamwork more focused on operational aspects to the detriment of informal ones
- **Knowledge sharing decreases when telework increases**
  - Reduced commitment and organisational trust between colleagues and managers
  - Physical contiguity necessary for collaboration, creative processes, and innovation

# Impact on management practices and stress

## Managing a dispersed and remote hybrid workforce

- Increased worker surveillance, monitoring and algorithmic management
    - Linked with psychosocial risks: reduced job control, work intensification, mistrust
    - Reduced interaction with and support from line managers
  - Challenge for managers to manage dispersed teams remotely
    - More effort- and time-consuming than managing a fully on-site or fully remote workforce
    - Need to rethink the workteam in dynamic way and adapt management methods
    - Ensure a fair distribution of teleworkable / non-teleworkable tasks between workers
- **Direct line manager should be trained to acquire new managerial skills and provide effective organisational support to hybrid workers**

# Gender issues

- Telework work during COVID-19 resulted in **increasing role demands for women**
- Women teleworking are more exposed to **work-life conflicts**
- **Women with children under 12** are more likely to work in hybrid mode
- Mothers show **stronger job dissatisfaction** than fathers when in remote work
- Reduction in **commuting time is reinvested differently** by gender:
  - Women spend more time on domestic, parental, and household tasks
  - Men use it to spend more time for themselves (e.g. sport)
- **Hybrid work can exacerbate existing gender inequalities: unequal sharing of household tasks and unpaid care**
- **Women working hybrid have a higher mental burden and poorer work-life balance**

# European regulatory framework

**Employers have the same health and safety responsibilities for teleworkers as for any other workers.**

- **European framework agreement on telework**
- **EU Directives most relevant to hybrid work:**
  - The OSH Framework Directive
  - Directive 2009/104/EC – use of work equipment
  - Directive 89/654/EEC - workplace requirements
  - Directive 90/270/EEC - display screen equipment
  - Directive 2003/88/EC - working time



# What can employers do?

A **risk assessment (RA)** of the remote workplace is the **first step**

- Remote/hybrid work must be included in the employer's RA
- Workers' and management's participation in the RA is fundamental

## To be clarified:

- Who assesses the risks
- Individual RA for each remote/hybrid worker
- RA can be carried out with the information collected from the worker or a visit of the worker's home with permission



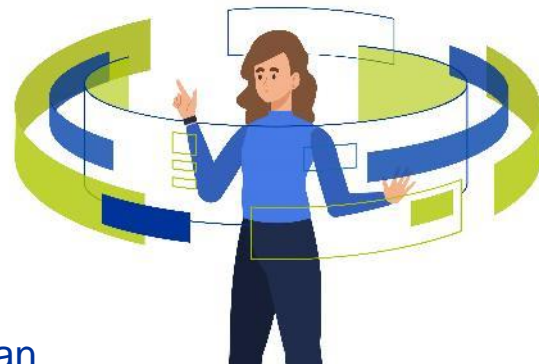
**Check EU-OSHA Online Risk Assessment Tool (OiRA) on telework**

<https://oira.osha.europa.eu/en>

# What can employers do?

## Adopt a hybrid work policy that covers ALL risks

- Provide ergonomic equipment - mouse, keyboard, screen, etc.
- Provide technical support, guidance and training on how to set up an ergonomic and effective remote workstation
- Advise on healthy (dis)connecting and on regularly moving and changing posture
- Promote regular physical exercise by encouraging workers to take active breaks and short workouts
- Stay connected with the team to ensure information flows to all
- Make agreements about the results workers are expected to achieve, hours of availability and progress reporting
- Raise-awareness for a respectful use of digital technologies and interactions
- Talk with workers about their needs, expectations and healthy disconnection



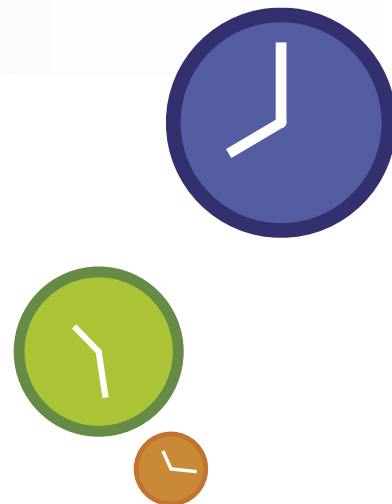
# What can workers do?

## Organise work

- Provide a separate home-office to avoid disturbances
- Schedule the workday including breaks
- Respect 'normal' office working hours
- Maintain a routine
- Make plans after work to log off
- Ensure that work tasks are varied

## Stay in touch with colleagues

- Stay connected with colleagues through phone calls or virtual meetings
- Alternate team meetings with one-on-one talks
- Make time for informal talks and hearing friendly voices



# Key pointers for safe and healthy hybrid work

- Employers have the same OSH responsibilities whether workers work at home or at their premises
- OSH prevention and management must be adapted to hybrid work
- Hybrid work presents new challenges but also opportunities to improve OSH
- Depending on organisational factors and management practices  
Participative and supportive management, worker autonomy, voluntary choice of hybrid work, etc.
- Employers and workers must be trained for safe and healthy hybrid work within hybrid teams
- Hybrid work arrangements must be tailored to individual worker needs  
Some workers rely on face-to-face support from colleagues on-site to alleviate stress, others benefit from a “protective effect” of being away from a corporate setting
- Hybrid work must be an individually, voluntary, and reversible option  
Independently of age, gender, qualification



# Thank you!

- Use our Online Interactive Risk Assessment tools (OiRA) on telework:

<https://oira.osha.europa.eu/en>

- Check out all related content under priority area “Remote and hybrid work”:

<https://healthy-workplaces.osha.europa.eu/en/about-topic/priority-area/remote-and-hybrid-work>

- Consult all publications on the topic:

<https://osha.europa.eu/en/publications-priority-area/remote-and-virtual-work>

The screenshot shows the OiRA Tools website. At the top, there is a header with the OiRA logo, the text 'European Agency for Safety and Health at Work', and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation menu with links: Home, OiRA Tools, Partners, Profiles, Risk assessment, Practical resources, What's new, and About OiRA. The main content area is titled 'OiRA Tools' and contains a description: 'The OiRA sectoral tools provided here are to enable micro and small enterprises to carry out risk assessments. The tools are free to download and can be easily accessed by clicking on the relevant link. Tools can be searched by country, language and/or sector.' Below this is a search interface with filters for Country, OiRA Tool language, and Sector. A search bar contains the word 'telework'. The results show three tools: 1. 'Telework' by ACT (Working Conditions Authority) for Portugal, dated 04/04/2023. 2. 'Teleworking' by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, dated 04/10/2023. 3. 'Telework' by the State Labour Inspectorate of the Republic of Latvia, dated 13/09/2023. Each tool entry includes a 'Start the risk assessment' button.

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