

Chapter 4

Home-based telework, gender and the public-private divide

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1. Introduction

While the blurring of the boundaries between public and private spaces in the context of work had already commenced before the pandemic, the Covid-19 crisis prompted an increase in the use of telework, bringing to the fore the numerous challenges of working from one's private home. It has become evident that the place where individuals telework can have different consequences for working conditions, on top of different levels of teleworking intensity and frequency; and that some workers, in particular those with unpaid care responsibilities at home, are more likely to be negatively affected (Eurofound 2020a; 2022a).

In this chapter, we provide an analysis of a specific type of teleworking arrangement defined by reference to the place where it is performed, namely home-based telework (HbTW),¹ and adopt a robust gender perspective. In particular, we point to the challenges posed by home-based telework for working conditions having different relevance on the basis of gender, with women likely to be disproportionately negatively affected because they are more likely to perform home-based telework alongside a larger share of unpaid care work. We argue, however, that HbTW also has the potential to make a positive contribution to addressing women's labour market disadvantages and to gender equality, if accompanied by culture change and policy and legal frameworks that give appropriate recognition to paid and unpaid work performed in the home.

We analyse the impact of home-based telework on working conditions and on gender equality from the perspective of a feminist theorisation of the public-private divide. That is, we focus on how the historical division between the public space of the workplace and the private space of the home in western societies, and the constructed economic relations of production and reproduction, has translated into gendered social relations and on the repercussions that this has in the context of the shift to new remote working practices. This theoretical framework enables us to analyse critically how the rapid spatio-temporal changes in the world of work risk repeating the ideology regarding socially constructed places in which the home as a place of work is rendered subordinate to the public space, thus recreating gender inequalities. We examine evidence of the

1. We adopt the definition of the ILO (2020a) of 'home-based telework' as comprising 'home-based workers who carry out work defined as telework'. At EU level, telework is defined as 'a form of organising and/or performing work' by means of 'information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship' regularly carried out away from the employer's premises (ETUC et al. 2002).

working conditions of home-based teleworkers obtained mainly in the EU and make recommendations regarding the regulation of home-based telework in the EU context.

The chapter proceeds as follows. We first outline how the historical division of the public-private space in western countries has translated into gendered social relations and how this has affected the conditions of those working in the private space of the home, such as domestic and home-based workers (Section 2). Second, we provide an analysis of recent EU data on the prevalence of home-based telework before and during the Covid-19 pandemic, showing that this mode of performing paid work in the private space of the home has a significant gender dimension (Section 3). We then discuss some of the potential negative implications that HbTW could have for women and link those to the gendered division of public and private space and the structural disadvantages facing women (Section 4). Finally, we argue that the way to address such negative implications – as well as the disadvantages faced by those performing work in the home more generally – requires us to challenge the dominant narrative regarding the public-private divide and to implement a range of complementary policy and regulatory solutions at EU, national and workplace levels to ensure that HbTW has a transformative, positive effect on work organisation and gender equality (Section 5).

2. The gendered division of social space into public and private

Western thinking has historically used binaries to construct an understanding of the social world (Habermas 1991; Squires 2018). The positing of men/women, masculine/feminine and public/private as opposite entities has constructed an ideological structure in which meanings and qualities are attributed so that one part is subordinate to the other (Kang et al. 2017; Lefebvre 1991). The gendered division of social space into the private ‘feminine’ sphere of the home and the public ‘masculine’ space in western societies can be seen as a legacy of the industrial revolution (Gal 2002) and the associated shift in modes of production and economy (Beebe and Davis 2017).² Alice Clark’s (2013 [1919]) book ‘Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century’ showed how the growth of the factory industry in Europe from the eighteenth century onwards meant that women began to stay in their homes whilst more men went out to work. Consequently, it was women who became almost entirely engaged in domestic labour, while the separation of the home and the workplace meant that ‘it became harder for women to juggle work and childcare [and] by the 19th century, the idea that a woman’s place was in the home – or among the lower social classes, in other people’s homes – had become entrenched in European capitalist societies’ (Basham 2021: 1).

Within this conceptualisation, the public space became associated with masculinity, production and professionalism, juxtaposed with the private space that became attributed to femininity and the family. Thus, the public space – including the place of work, such as factories – came to be seen as the domain of men and of paid,

2. When space takes on meaning it becomes a place; for example, ‘a home’ is a spatial structure where a person lives while simultaneously being a place with meanings attributed to it such as safety and a sense of belonging and of privacy.

‘productive’ work, and the private space of the home as the domain of women and unpaid, ‘reproductive’ work. As with any social phenomenon, the history of the division was not clear-cut as there were class differences between women for whom the concept of a private, feminised ‘domestic sphere’ was realised (that is, the bourgeoisie) while working class women who were recruited to factory work (e.g. in the textile industry) became subjected to the double burden of paid and unpaid (care) work (Williamson 2012).

Marxist-feminist theorisation of the value of production/reproduction highlights that, while in industrial capitalism both men and women participated in the economy and generated surplus value, in the family it was mainly women who carried out the work of producing use value – and this situation continues to date. The domestic economy produces value through invisible work which contrasts with the visible work taking place in the public sphere, but complements it: ‘on one hand, the domestic work of women allows further time for social work and creation of surplus value by men, on the other women themselves also participate in social work, but even more discriminated against, with lower wages’ (Larguia and Dumoulin 1975, in Campos 2020: 33). Further, Lafargue (1973 [1904]) notes that industrialisation integrated women both in factories and liberal professions to guarantee capitalism low wage labour, but also that capitalism and the bourgeoisie kept women at home when it benefited them.

For example, in the late 19th century, a ‘cult of domesticity’ dictated that a woman who considered working outside the home was unnatural (Welter 1966); while, during World War II, American women who, at the time, were mostly occupying the private space of the home were asked to go to work in factories in the short-term before being brought back to the private space and to domesticity (Santana 2016). In the UK, during World War I and II, large numbers of women were recruited to work in jobs that were formerly reserved for men (e.g. railway guards and ticket collectors, bus and tram conductors, postal workers, police, firefighters, bank ‘tellers’ and engineers), as well as into new jobs created as part of the war effort, for example in munitions factories. Women’s employment increased by around 10 percentage points during the world wars, and the actual level of employment is likely to have been higher as many domestic servants would have been redeployed to national service but were excluded from the figures. However, stereotypes about women’s capacity and ability to engage in ‘men’s work’ were rife; and, alas, they received lower wages for doing the same work. While some limited agreement was reached that allowed equal pay for women, most employers managed to circumvent the issue and women’s pay remained on average 53 per cent of the pay of the men they replaced. It was also expected that women’s wartime work would only be temporary (‘Striking Women’ website). Such situations illustrate how this division between public and private is a historically bound ideological structure enacted through unequal gender relations and embodied in the physical spaces of homes and workplaces.

Capitalism articulates itself differently depending on particular social settings and therefore is not universal (Basham 2021). In the western context, the origins and consequences of the division of social space during the industrial era continue to have an impact on gender relations through ideology, discourse and culture, disadvantaging women. While women’s labour market participation has steadily risen over the last

century, the employment rates of women are still lower than those for men in all EU Member States (European Commission 2020). Women spend considerably more time than men in unpaid care and housework – and this is true before, during and after the Covid-19 pandemic (EIGE 2021a; EIGE 2021b) – which often means that they participate in the labour market on a part-time basis or on precarious contracts. Their participation in public life, such as politics, remains unequal to that of men (Schreeves 2021; European Commission 2021). The division between public space and the private space of the home is connected to the state and it exerts normative power through social practices (Bourdieu 2002) and legislation. Indeed, the divide between the public space and the private space of the home, and between productive and reproductive work, has delineated the boundaries of state intervention in the private space, with significant negative implications for women.

Importantly, in the world of work, the public-private divide has defined the reach of labour law. Work performed in the home has traditionally either been excluded from labour protection altogether or else accorded a lower degree of it (Fudge 2014; Mantouvalou 2012; Sedacca 2022). Further, labour law is not concerned with regulating ‘labour’ in general, only labour performed within the remit of certain kinds of contractual relationships. Unpaid domestic labour occurs outside conventional market relationships and has thus traditionally been deemed not to be an appropriate object of labour law regulation (Zatz 2011: 245). Regulatory issues relating to social reproduction have instead been treated as a matter of family and social welfare law (Freedland and Kountouris 2011; Fudge 2014: 11) – areas of law that have often reinforced patriarchal structures and the ‘male breadwinner/female housewife’ model. Feminist labour law scholars have, however, pointed out that the drawing of jurisdictional boundaries – such as between labour and family law – along this divide is not inevitable (Fudge 2014: 11). Rather, it is the outcome of social and political contestation (Fudge 2014: 18), reflecting societal perceptions about the different nature of activities and relationships that take place within the public sphere and the home, and that only work performed in the public sphere is ‘real’, economically significant work.

The public-private divide has ramifications for workers performing paid work in the household, too. The location of domestic workers³ in the private space of the home and close to the family has troubled ‘conventional maps of jurisdiction’ (Fudge 2014: 11), resulting in their exclusion in many jurisdictions from all or some minimum labour standards (ILO 2013; Mantouvalou 2012). Enforcement of standards relating to working conditions on the employer’s premises – that is, the private home – is generally poor, not least because private homes are sometimes excluded from labour inspections (ILO 2013; Mantouvalou 2012). This is despite domestic workers being generally more exposed to abuse and a lack of work-life balance because they are isolated from other workers, rarely unionised and sometimes live in their employer’s home (Mantouvalou 2012). Assumptions about the public-private divide thus lead to a lack of accountability and scrutiny of labour and human rights violations and – because domestic work is

3. ‘Domestic worker’ is defined in Article 1 of the ILO Domestic Workers Convention as ‘any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship’, although ‘a person who performs domestic work only occasionally or sporadically and not on an occupational basis is not a domestic worker.’

traditionally performed by women as unpaid work – to a gendered devaluation of the work performed, resulting in lower wages and worse working conditions (Sedacca 2022). For these and other reasons,⁴ domestic workers are among the most vulnerable and precarious workers. The International Labour Organization (ILO) Domestic Workers Convention No. 189 of 2011 – which requires the protection of certain basic rights for domestic workers – has been ratified by only eight EU Member States and 35 member states of the ILO.⁵

Another group of workers that has been subject to no or reduced labour protection are home-based workers.⁶ The ILO estimates that, in 2019, there were around 260 million home-based workers worldwide, amounting to 7.9 per cent of global employment (ILO 2020b). Women form the majority of home-based workers globally (ILO 2021) and more women than men work from home in most EU Member States (Eurostat 2021). Home-based work includes a wide range of activities such as sewing clothes or stitching shoes, assembling goods or, more recently, also computer-based tasks such as translation, text production or other click-work, sometimes through digital platforms (Nilsson et al. 2022; Berg 2022; Piasna et al. 2022). Home-based work has often been a way for women to combine paid work with unpaid domestic labour (ILO 2020b). It has always existed but has remained largely invisible and often excluded from official employment statistics because it is performed in the private sphere, often in an informal way, or because these workers are classified as self-employed (Chen et al. 1999; Nilsson et al. 2022). Home-based workers have often been omitted from the coverage of labour law and social protection while being exposed to particular risks resulting from the lack of either or all of an adequate workspace, equipment and health and safety precautions (ILO 2020b; Nilsson et al. 2022).

Neethi (2014: 89) argues that home-based work has allowed employers inexpensively to ‘expand production and capital to manipulate patriarchal social relations’ as many home-based workers have poorer contractual terms and conditions, less autonomy and poor working conditions. Home-based work has enabled changes in work organisation, such as switching to piece rate pay, along with setting lower wages and abdicating social security responsibilities. In the context of developing economies, home-based manufacturers have been considered as a flexible labour force that can be quickly hired and fired in response to changing market demands, while traditional unionising methods subside under home-based production (Neethi 2014). As in the case of paid and unpaid domestic work, the private space of the home not being considered as a site of production and labour has contributed to the undervaluation of this type of work and the struggle for the recognition of home-based workers as ‘real workers’ (Nilsson et al.

4. Other important factors creating vulnerabilities for domestic workers are restrictive visa regimes and the fact that such work is often undeclared (Mantouvalou 2012; Sedacca 2022).

5. A list of countries that have ratified the Convention can be found here: https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=1000:11300:0::NO:11300:P11300_INSTRUMENT_ID:2551460

6. Home-based work does not have a legal definition but it is generally understood to be work that is carried out in one's own home (ILO 2020b: 19). A homeworker is a sub-set of home-based workers, defined in Article 1 of the ILO Home Work Convention No. 177 of 1996 as ‘work carried out by a person ... in his or her home or in other premises of his or her choice, other than the workplace of the employer, for remuneration, which results in a product or service as specified by the employer, irrespective of who provides the equipment, materials or other inputs used.’

2022; Neunsinger 2022). As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, more employers are moving to fully remote working and this can potentially open more jobs to the possibility of offshoring from Europe (Alexandri et al. 2023: 24), making it imperative to analyse this shift globally and from a gender perspective.

Feminist scholars, in particular, have contributed to critical thinking around and the deconstruction of social dichotomies, as well as in the questioning of related power relations, while the historical division of social space has received considerable scholarly attention (Seeliger and Villa Braslavsky 2022; De Backer et al. 2019; Madanipour 2003; Özbey and Bardakçı 2019; Basham 2021). However, a reconceptualisation of the home as a place of HbTW remains scarce. Now that ‘the office’ is increasingly located in the private space of the home, the influence of the binary logic of public versus private is becoming evident as the remit of employment and occupational safety and health legislation is balancing on an ideological line. In the context of rapid changes in the world of work, most notably the exponential increase in the prevalence of home-based teleworking during and beyond the Covid-19 pandemic, it is important to consider the ways in which gendered ideology regarding space is produced and reproduced if we are to transform these practices.

3. Home-based telework and gender

The findings on home-based work in general resonate with recent developments in the EU and elsewhere on home-based telework – a mode of working that has been possible for some time but the use of which increased to unprecedented levels during the Covid-19 pandemic and is predicted to expand significantly compared to pre-pandemic levels. Home-based telework offers opportunities to achieve better balance between work and private life due to spatial and temporal flexibility, including opportunities to arrange work alongside domestic and care tasks and to take advantage of the time freed from commuting (Eurofound 2022c). This can be particularly attractive, as in the case of home-based work generally, to those with a greater share of caring responsibilities who are more likely to be women. For example, couples with children telework⁷ more often than other household types, though they also tend to work more in their free time (Ojala et al. 2014). Indeed, before the pandemic, according to some studies, women constituted 57 per cent of home-based teleworkers but only 46 per cent of those using telework/ICT mobile work arrangements generally (Eurofound and ILO 2017). This suggests that gender roles are important in selecting the type of remote working arrangement (EIGE 2021 b: 26). Motives for opting for home-based telework are often gendered, too. Men tend to use home-based telework to work more hours while women invest their time gained in childcare and unpaid domestic labour (van der Lippe and Lippényi 2020).

Before the pandemic, in 2019, 5.7 per cent of employed women aged 15–64 and 5.2 per cent of employed men worked from home. In 2020, during the pandemic, the

7. While there are differences in defining ‘telework’ across studies, in general ‘home-based telework’ is more common than ICT-mobile work and, when using ICT outside the employer’s premises, employees generally prefer to work at home rather than more flexibly in various places or on the road (Eurofound and ILO 2017).

shares were 13.0 per cent and 11.2 per cent; and, in 2021, 14.4 per cent and 12.5 per cent respectively (Eurostat 2022). The Internet and Platform Work Survey (IPWS) conducted by the ETUI in 2021 across 14 EU countries (for details about the survey, see Piasna et al. 2022) gives an indication of the overall increasing gender differences in the use of telework across sectors.⁸ It found that, prior to the pandemic, female self-employed workers were more likely than male workers to work from home, but there was little difference among employees (Table 1). The proportion of workers working from home during/after the pandemic by gender and employment status shows a dramatic increase for employees and there is now a large difference between men and women in teleworking from home (Table 2).

Table 1 The proportion (%) of workers working from home before the pandemic by gender and employment status

Employment status	Women	Men	Total
Employee on open-ended contract	18	19	18
Employee not on open-ended contract	16	16	16
Self-employed with employees	35	26	29
Self-employed without employees	37	29	32
Total	20	20	20

Source: ETUI IPWS 2021.

Table 2 The proportion (%) of workers working from home during/after the pandemic (i.e. at the time of the survey in 2021) by gender and employment status

Employment status	Women	Men	Total
Employee on open-ended contract	45	39	42
Employee not on open-ended contract	44	38	41
Self-employed with employees	59	49	52
Self-employed without employees	55	46	49
Total	46	40	43

Source: ETUI IPWS 2021.

This finding resonates with the hypothesis regarding gender differences in terms of the degree of the ‘teleworkability’ of certain jobs, a predictor for the probability of telework (EIGE 2021 b: 27; Eurofound 2022c). It has been estimated that the share of women in teleworkable occupations is much higher than the share of men, at 45 per cent compared with 30 per cent (Sostero et al. 2020).

8. We are grateful to our ETUI colleague, Wouter Zwysen, for kindly providing us with IPWS data on gender differences in the use of HbTW and his analysis of the data. The results shown in this chapter are based on data pooled from the Spring and Autumn 2021 waves of the IPWS.

Table 3 Teleworking (work from home) prior to and during/after the Covid-19 pandemic (i.e. at the time of the survey in 2021) by sectors and gender (%)

Sector	Women	Men	Gender gap
Agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing			
Before	20	12	8
During/after	36	26	10
Industry			
Before	20	17	3
During/after	41	34	7
Construction			
Before	31	13	18
During/after	57	24	33
Trade, repair, transportation, accommodation			
Before	15	16	-1
During/after	35	32	3
Information and communications			
Before	29	44	-15
During/after	61	73	-12
Financial and insurance activities and real estate			
Before	29	39	-10
During/after	70	73	-3
Professional, scientific and technical			
Before	30	33	-3
During/after	61	61	0
Admin and support			
Before	27	29	-2
During/after	63	56	7
Public administration, education and health			
Before	16	20	-4
During/after	45	44	1
Other sectors			
Before	20	20	0
During/after	44	43	1
Total			
Before	20	20	0
During/after	46	40	6

Source: ETUI IPWS 2021.

The ETUI IPWS Survey data also show that the gendered trend of an increase in HbTW for women is apparent across sectors (Table 3). The sectors in which there had already been a higher proportion of women conducting HbTW saw a further increase: most notably, in the construction sector from a gender difference in HbTW of 18 percentage points to one of 33; and in the agriculture, hunting, forestry and fishing sector from an eight point gender difference to one of 10 points. The gender difference increased also in industry (seven points) and in the trade, repair, transportation and accommodation sector (three).

Sectors that, prior to the pandemic, had a higher proportion of men conducting HbTW witnessed the same trend: in the administration and support sector the increase for women was 36 points and men 27, changing the gender difference from a two points greater use of HbTW arrangements for men prior to the pandemic into one of seven points greater for women during/after the pandemic. The change was similar in the public administration, education and health sector (from four points higher for men to one point higher for women). The three point gender gap in the professional, scientific and technical sector changed to no gender difference; and the gender difference in financial and insurance activities and the real estate sector, as well as in the information and communications sector, decreased by seven and three points respectively as more women changed to HbTW.

It is notable also that the increase in gender differences in the use of HbTW is repeated across different educational levels. Prior to the pandemic, education was strongly related to telework with a greater presence of workers working from home among higher educational levels, with almost two in three having completed higher education studies (62.6 per cent). The probability that workers with tertiary education would work from home was greater, but the distribution by level of education was more homogeneous than for occasional teleworkers or highly mobile teleworkers (López-Igual and Rodríguez-Modroño 2020). The ETUI IPWS data show that, among workers with low or intermediate qualifications, the increase in HbTW during the pandemic was much larger for women than for men: 20 points for low-qualified women vs. 14 points for men; and 23 points for intermediate-qualified women vs. 18 points for men. Among those with a university degree, there was a greater increase for women than men (32 points and 27 points respectively) (Table 4).

The results of the IPWS, alongside data from other sources on the pre-pandemic use of HbTW, clearly show that HbTW is a gendered phenomenon and so both its positive and negative implications are likely to affect women in particular. While women may benefit from some of the positive opportunities that home-based telework offers for combining paid work with care responsibilities – which may increase women’s labour market participation and their income – they are also disproportionately affected by the considerable challenges and potential negative effects that it brings. As women are the majority of home-based teleworkers, more women than men are exposed to the general risks that home-based telework poses. Women are also particularly vulnerable to some of the negative effects of telework because of the existing structural disadvantages such as the double burden of paid and unpaid work (Eurofound 2022c). Below, we explain in

more detail some of these challenges and discuss how they relate to the issues stemming from socially constructed, gendered spaces.

Table 4 The proportion (%) of workers who teleworked (worked from home) prior to and during/after the pandemic by education and gender

Education	Women	Men	Total
Low: lower secondary			
Before	15	13	14
During/after	35	27	30
Intermediate: higher secondary and post-secondary non tertiary			
Before	14	15	14
During/after	37	33	35
High: tertiary			
Before	29	33	31
During/after	61	60	60
Total			
Before	20	20	20
During/after	46	40	43

Source: ETUI IPWS 2021.

4. Risks arising from women's structural disadvantages and gender stereotypes

Home-based telework poses a range of challenges to the wellbeing and career development of workers that may have particular repercussions for women. We have divided these into three broad categories: lack of visibility in the workplace and reduced career prospects; gender stereotyping and the increased double burden; and psychosocial risk-mediated health impacts. These effects are at least in part interrelated and underpinned in different ways by the assumptions and gender roles associated with the public-private divide discussed in Section 2. These are areas in which there is already evidence of negative impacts, as well as hypotheses of potential negative impacts.

4.1 Lack of visibility and reduced career prospects for home-based teleworkers

As mentioned in Section 2, societal assumptions regarding the public-private divide associate the public space of the employer's premises with productive work and professionalism; by contrast, the private space of the home is associated with non-productive, 'subordinate' type of work. This has led to the devaluation of both unpaid and paid work performed in the home and the struggle to recognise even that those performing paid work in the home are 'real' workers. This perception is reflected also

in the situation of home-based teleworkers, whose visibility as workers is reduced. The physical absence of home-based teleworkers from the office may be seen as a lack of commitment, resulting in career penalties such as being overlooked for promotion (Leslie et al. 2012; Eurofound 2020a: 41). Home-based teleworkers can also face a lack of trust from their organisation mediated by the lack of face-to-face contact, both by management and by co-workers, as well as tensions with colleagues who are non-teleworkers (Athanasiadou and Theriou 2021; Sewell and Taskin 2015; Taskin and Bridoux 2010).

Furthermore, the lack of contact in the physical space has been found also to affect the transfer of knowledge between teleworkers and non-teleworkers (Taskin and Bridoux 2010) as well as opportunities for learning, particularly informal learning, that enhances work-related skills (Eurofound 2020a). This, again, can reduce professional development and affect career prospects. It has been found that female teleworkers, especially those with children who spend more than half of their working hours in HbTW, are more likely to report experiencing reduced visibility and fewer career development opportunities (Maruyama and Tietze 2012). This could be a particular issue for some women who already have less visibility at work, such as those working part-time. This is on top of women already often being left out of key leadership networks, frequently having less access to mentors than equivalent men (Ernst Kossek and Kelliher 2022) and being disadvantaged in workplaces that reward the working of longer hours on the employer's premises. Thus, the increasing use of HbTW by women and the increasing gender differences in the use of such arrangements hide the risk that women may be further sidelined at the workplace, with economic and other repercussions. The lack of presence at a physical workspace may also mean that women have less information about their rights and are less involved in collective organisation and representation (see also Dedden et al., and Vandaele and Piasna, this volume).

4.2 Gender stereotypes and increased double burden

Another concern is that the increasing use of HbTW by women workers could entrench existing gender stereotypes that associate women with the home space and gender roles relating to care responsibilities (EIGE 2021b). It may also lead to women taking on a greater amount of unpaid care work, given their availability to undertake such tasks in the home alongside their work, leading to (even) greater work-life conflicts or interruptions at work. These can, in turn, lead to poorer performance and affect career prospects while also contributing to risks to mental and physical health, as discussed below (EIGE 2021b; Blasko et al. 2020; Eurofound 2020b). As an example, the analysis by Adams-Prassl (2020) of gender differences in working patterns and wages on Amazon Mechanical Turk⁹ showed that women earn 20 per cent less per hour on average. The wage gap is concentrated amongst women with young children reporting that domestic responsibilities affected their ability to plan and complete work online. Already existing structural gender inequalities in respect of unpaid care work – often the reason for

9. Amazon Mechanical Turk is a crowdsourcing website for businesses to hire remotely located workers to perform on-demand tasks.

women to work from home in the first place – may be exacerbated by the increasing availability and use of HbTW.

A similar phenomenon was observed during the Covid-19 pandemic more broadly: the combination of telework and school closures affected women disproportionately because of existing structural disadvantages linked to women in general tending to be the primary caregiver in the family. Women were more likely to take paid or unpaid leave, reduce their working hours or leave the market altogether in order to fulfil increased care responsibilities; as they are more likely to work on part-time or precarious contracts, in part because of the double burden they face, they were also more likely to lose their job, in turn making it more likely that they would bear the brunt of care responsibilities, rather than their male partner (Wenham 2020; EIGE 2021b; Kohlrausch and Zucco 2020; Eurofound 2020b; Buckingham et al. 2020).

Structural disadvantage can be self-reinforcing in this way and it is crucial to bear this in mind in the context of HbTW. The negative effects of HbTW must be considered in the context of the disadvantages facing women more generally, including the lack of recognition of the economic and social value of unpaid care work. Accordingly, as we argue in more detail in Section 5, efforts to address such disadvantages must be part of more comprehensive efforts to ensure gender equality in unpaid care work, pay, career opportunities and so on.

4.3 Psychosocial risk-mediated health impacts

While offering opportunities for better work-life balance, home-based telework is often also associated with increased availability, longer working hours, the intensification of work and a blurring of the boundaries between work and private life which exacerbates work-life conflicts (EU-OSHA 2021; Eurofound 2020b; Eurofound and ILO 2017). Significantly more teleworkers, including home-based teleworkers, than those working from an employer's premises report health issues such as fatigue, headaches, eyestrain and anxiety (Eurofound 2020a: 33). In addition, such working conditions give rise to psychosocial risk factors (PSR), exposure to which can be detrimental to workers' mental and physical health (EU-OSHA 2021). When exploring the intersection of HbTW and gender, two PSR factors come across as specifically prominent: work-life conflict and job insecurity. The focus on 'space' is relevant to both aspects because it is the domestic space, under home-based teleworking, that combines paid and unpaid work and because it risks transforming it into a place for precarious employment with a lack of recognition.

During the pandemic, women had higher levels of exhaustion and stress in the EU, particularly due to work-family conflict (Eurofound 2020d), while women who work from home are more likely to have blurred work-life boundaries as many combine paid work with caregiving (Ernst Kossek and Kelliher 2022; Chung and van der Lippe 2020; Glavin and Schieman 2012). The study of Franklin et al. (2022) of temporal job quality based on cross-sectional European data, found that time-based work-life conflict is particularly detrimental to women's health; and there is also a range of

other evidence of negative health impacts for women mediated by work-life conflict (Eurofound 2020b; Mascherini and Nivakoski 2021; Del Rio-Lozano et al. 2022). Data show that men initially took part in unpaid work during the Covid-19 pandemic more than before, prompting an expectation that the future of home-based telework would narrow the gender gap in unpaid labour. However, subsequent research has shown that the unbalanced sharing of tasks continues (Eurofound 2020d; results from 2nd wave of Covid-19 survey), including in countries considered highly gender equal such as Iceland (Hjálmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir 2021) and Finland (Yerkes et al. 2022).

Another relevant aspect of PSR in home-based teleworking is job insecurity, which is linked to stress-mediated negative health outcomes in general (Hassard and Winski 2017), while precarious employment has been found to contribute to the work-related mental health problems of women in particular (Campos-Serna et al. 2013; Méndez Rivero et al. 2021). Prior to the pandemic, close to a quarter of teleworkers were in precarious employment, being more likely to have a fixed-term contract, earn a low income, experience job insecurity and lack training opportunities (Eurofound 2020b). The analysis of the 2015 European Working Conditions Survey data by López-Igual and Rodríguez-Modroño (2020) found weak correlations between telework, permanent contracts and full-time jobs, especially among home-based teleworkers who are, mostly, women. Similarly, analysis of EU Labour Force Survey data showed that the spike in 2020 in working from home rates coincided with an increase in temporary work. At EU27 level, the share of fixed-term remote workers increased by around one percentage point in 2020, to a level not seen in previous years, indicating that the number of fixed-term workers who were also working from home increased faster than the total number of those working from home. This may be indicative of a linkage between working from home and the use of fixed-term contracts (Alexandri et al. 2023).

While it is still too early to predict who the workers that will remain as home-based teleworkers are, and how contractual practices might change, the ETUI IPWS data indicate a clear gender pattern that requires monitoring of the situation. Based on the analysed data and reviewed evidence, the pandemic has changed the profile of home-based teleworkers both in terms of sectors and level of education, with clear gender differences. Considering the specific unfavourable psychosocial working conditions involved in HbTW, attention should be paid to work-life conflict and possible job insecurity. Further, musculoskeletal disorders (MSD) particularly affect women in all European countries, research having established an interrelationship between PSR factors and MSDs. MSDs can be regarded as the pathological effects of dysfunctional work organisation and the resulting intensification of work (Roquelaure 2018). Aside from this, there is research that shows teleworkers in general being more likely to report health concerns, including virtual presenteeism – that is, working from home despite feeling unwell – with regular HbTW being associated with the highest number of negative health outcomes (Eurofound 2020b). Further research into the interplay between gender, working conditions and health in the context of HbTW is essential (Casse and De Troyer 2020).

5. A way forward

Despite the considerable issues discussed above, many want to telework, and it is clear that HbTW does have the potential to improve work-life balance and to benefit women workers in various ways. For this potential to materialise, it is essential to organise HbTW in a way that addresses the challenges outlined in Section 4, paying particular attention to gender differences and how these relate to gender inequalities more generally at the workplace and in society at large. In the EU context, this requires a comprehensive set of complementary policy measures that deal with the various problematic dimensions of HbTW: lack of visibility and career penalties for home-based teleworkers; stereotypes that associate women with the home space and unpaid care work; psychosocial risks that arise from the intensification of work and a blurring of the boundaries between work and private life; and so on. Many of these issues are at least in part related to societal perceptions about the public space of the workplace and the private space of the home and their respective association with productive and non-productive labour. The relevance of spatial divisions to the scope of labour law is significant here too, since its application to and enforcement in the private home remains circumscribed.

Efforts to address the challenges that HbTW presents to workers should, therefore, take as a starting point a reconsideration of assumptions about the public-private divide. In this respect, HbTW could have a transformative effect on how we think about the gendered division of space, with normative implications. In the words of Doreen Massey, some three decades ago:

Particular ways of thinking about space and place are tied up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations... challenging the ways in which space and place are currently conceptualized implies also, indeed necessitates, challenging the currently dominant form of gender definitions and gender relations. (Massey 1994: 2)

As the use of HbTW increases and workplace and employer control increasingly spill into the home, the dominant societal narrative that work performed in the physical space of the home is in some way inferior – or not ‘real work’ – has quite clearly become untenable. HbTW blurs the boundaries between ‘office’ and ‘home’, casts a light on the home space as a workspace and juxtaposes paid and unpaid work performed in spatial and temporal proximity. In this it challenges sharp distinctions between ‘paid’ and ‘unpaid’ labour and makes more visible the unpaid domestic labour that workers perform alongside their job – labour that easily goes unrecognised when the performance of ‘paid’ work is physically separated. HbTW also has the potential to challenge the assumption that the home is ‘the domain of women’ given that take-up by men is also considerable. Furthermore, the attention that HbTW has received in the context of the pandemic has created a fresh impetus to consider policy and regulatory solutions to inadequate working conditions and the impacts on health of those working from home. The implementation of these solutions could benefit not only home-based teleworkers but also other home-based and domestic workers.

A range of policy and regulatory measures at different levels are needed to support this change in societal assumptions and to ensure that work organisation can make the most of the positive aspects of HbTW while addressing the potential negative repercussions. Gender-sensitive changes to work organisation and working patterns at company level are key to ensuring that workers can reap the benefits of telework. This includes measures to ensure that teleworkers stay connected to their colleagues and supervisors, have a sufficient degree of autonomy and benefit from a culture of trust and compassion (Bérastégui 2021). It also includes the particular design of telework arrangements which, for example, has implications for the extent to which workers are able to achieve better work-life balance, particularly those with care responsibilities (Eurofound 2020a: 23-25). In this respect, further research is necessary to understand better the gender differences in the use and impacts of HbTW, in particular between different types of arrangement (e.g. full-time vs. occasional HbTW or its combination with flexible working hours, as well as other specificities of HbTW).

In terms of regulatory measures, the ‘right to disconnect’ – that is ‘the right for workers to switch off their technological devices after work without facing consequences for not replying to e-mails, phone calls or text messages’ (Eurofound 2020c) – has gained attention as a measure to prevent the expansion of working hours and the intrusion of professional life into the private sphere, and has been introduced by a number of Member States (Eurofound 2022b). The European Parliament has called for legislation on the right to disconnect at EU level, too (Shreeves 2021). While important, however, such a right does not address the crucial challenges arising from the intensification of work and the spatial (rather than temporal) expansion of the office into the home. There is a need also to challenge traditionally accepted boundaries of ‘workplace’ regulation and ensure that the obligations of employers under occupational health and safety legislation extend to the private home where relevant, alongside a corresponding enforcement of the competences of labour inspectorates and appropriate safeguards for workers’ privacy, and that these obligations include the prevention of psychosocial risks. A few Member States have taken steps in this direction; for example, Spain has introduced requirements for risk assessment and the prevention of ergonomic and psychosocial risks in the context of telework (Eurofound 2022b: 13).

More generally, a recent Eurofound report finds that many Member States have introduced or amended existing measures regulating telework in the wake of the pandemic, both in legislation or national/sectoral collective agreements covering access to telework, rules on data protection, privacy and surveillance, compensation for telework, access to training, etc. (see Eurofound 2022b: 12). Relevant measures, however, vary significantly between Member States and some have little regulation or only soft initiatives; while, despite changes to regulatory frameworks, working conditions have generally not been adequately adapted to the reality of teleworking in many countries (Eurofound 2022b). There is, therefore, much room for improvement when it comes to the regulation of telework across the EU. The EU Social Dialogue and an updated Framework Agreement on Telework are essential to developing solutions to the challenges posed by teleworking, although there is no one-size-fits-all approach to regulation in this context (Eurofound 2022b). Social dialogue and collective agreements are necessary to put in place arrangements that are adapted to the particular sector,

workplace and activities. Gender mainstreaming should be applied across all of these regulatory measures to ensure that the gendered impacts of telework arrangements are identified and addressed.

Finally, measures to address the gendered impacts of HbTW can only be effective if accompanied by robust policy and legal frameworks which specifically address the unequal distribution of unpaid care work between men and women. Such frameworks should provide, among other things, for adequate and accessible child and adult care services, widely accessible and well-paid parental and paternity leave of sufficient duration, and revised limits to working time for all workers regardless of gender (Arabadjieva 2022; Zbyszewska 2016). They should also be underpinned by the recognition that paid and unpaid care work are essential to the functioning of our societies and have significant social and economic value (Arabadjieva 2022; Elson 2017) – another fact that the Covid-19 pandemic has brought to the fore. Relevant EU frameworks, such as the Work-Life Balance Directive, are lagging behind in this respect (Arabadjieva 2022). Much more ambitious efforts are needed to challenge the dominant narratives and gender stereotypes about care and work performed in the home; and the disruption brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic may well, finally, prompt such a transformation.

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