

Working conditions and sustainable work
**Hybrid work in Europe:
Concept and practice**



Hybrid work in Europe: Concept and practice



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List of abbreviations

HCBO	hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities
HR	human resources
ICT	information and communications technology
ILO	International Labour Organization
JD-R	job demands–resources
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SWOT	strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic and the related public health measures provided a boost to telework. With hardly any notice, in March 2020 many workers were asked to work from home to limit the spread of the virus. Subsequently, during periods when the public health restrictions were lifted and when the pandemic started to recede, many of those working exclusively from home started to return to their places of work intermittently. When discussing ways of organising work after the pandemic, the term ‘hybrid work’ has been used to refer to situations in which (teleworkable) work is carried out both from the usual place of work (normally the employer’s premises) and from home, as experienced during the pandemic, or from other locations. The term quickly came into common parlance, with the *Economist* (2022) nominating it the word of the year 2022, in recognition of its potential to ‘reshape cities, careers, family life and free time’.

However, the concept of ‘hybrid work’ is still fuzzy, and various meanings are in use in the media and in the academic and research world. It is, for instance, unclear how it relates to familiar concepts such as telework and remote work. Are these latter concepts, which have been around since the 1970s, enough to capture the contours and implications of ‘hybrid work’?

This report aims to clarify such questions and explore the available information derived from two main sources – recent literature and contributions provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents – with the objective of contributing to a better understanding of what hybrid work really is and what its main features are. This report is based on a working paper that provides a more detailed overview of the materials explored and attempts to conceptualise hybrid work for future research (see Eurofound, 2023).

Discussing hybrid forms of work organisation

The ongoing discussion, definition and development of ‘hybrid work’ started soon after the first phase of the COVID-19 pandemic, in autumn 2020. This discussion was about what working life and workplaces would be like after the pandemic. Hybrid work was initially understood as work that is flexible in terms of the situation, place and time, with work carried out partly from the employer’s premises and partly from home or elsewhere with the help of digital tools and platforms facilitating work, communication and cooperation. While this resembles the traditional notion of telework, the question of what constitute the elements, content and implications of hybrid work in practice remains

open. To determine if this form of work reflects an evolution of earlier remote work and telework or a transition to a qualitatively new form of work, this question needs to be answered at the individual, organisational and societal levels. This report attempts to provide some answers.

The various new ways of working, such as telework, information and communications technology (ICT)-based mobile work and platform work, have been on Eurofound’s research agenda for decades. A recent report from Eurofound on the impact of telework on working conditions charts the swift rise of telework during the COVID-19 crisis (Eurofound, 2022). That report shows that the pandemic demonstrated the enormous potential of telework in improving workers’ living and working conditions, allowing them to balance their working time with their private and family life. However, COVID-19 and the experiences of societies, organisations and people in general obliged to telework from home have changed the situation and especially the expectations around organising and conducting remote work in the future. In addition, technological developments (such as deepening digitalisation, wider bandwidths and the application of artificial intelligence) combined with improved collaboration platforms potentially impact how we work from afar in practice. The term ‘hybrid work’ has become widely used and has entered the common lexicon. Overall, the question of exactly what hybrid work is, and what its elements and features are, still needs to be answered. It remains to be determined whether a new concept is needed to understand and underpin the reality of working life now and in the future.

Prevalence of telework

Before the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, large differences in levels of remote work and telework between countries were influenced by factors such as occupation, gender, organisation of work, deep-rooted common practices and regulations, and the management cultures of various organisations and countries. International Labour Organization (ILO) data (ILO, 2021a) indicate that 7.9% of the global workforce – approximately 260 million workers (including artisans and self-employed business owners) – worked from home on a permanent basis prior to the pandemic. Employees accounted for 18.8% of the total number of fully home-based workers worldwide. However, in high-income countries, this share was as high as 55.1% (ILO, 2020a). A global survey ($N = 208,807$, from 190 countries) by the Boston Consulting Group and The Network, carried out between October and early

December 2020, showed a global shift from 31% of respondents stating that they worked from home, full or part time, before the COVID-19 pandemic to 51% during the pandemic (Strack et al, 2021). During the pandemic, there was considerable variation between countries (for example, 90% in the Netherlands and 37% in China) and job types (for example, ICT and technology, 77%; manual work and manufacturing, 19%) worldwide. However, today, employees in many countries are unable or not allowed to work remotely. According to Hatayama et al (2020), the willingness of employers to let employees work from home increases with the level of economic development in the country. The authors found job characteristics and internet access at home to be key determinants of telework prevalence. There are also differences among so-called developed countries.

Sostero et al (2020) estimated that 37% of dependent employment in the EU is teleworkable. This proportion is very close to the proportion of teleworkers indicated in real-time surveys during the COVID-19 crisis. Because of differences in employment structures, the proportion of teleworkable employment ranges between 33% and 44% across EU Member States. Even starker differences in 'teleworkability' emerged between high- and low-income workers, between white- and blue-collar workers, and between men and women (Sostero et al, 2020). However, the enforced closure of workplaces during the pandemic also resulted in many new teleworkers among low- and mid-level clerical and administrative workers, who previously had limited access to such working arrangements. Dingel and Neiman (2020) found that 37% of jobs in the United States can be performed entirely from home, with significant variation across occupations. Managers, those working with computers, and people employed in finance and law are largely able to work from home, whereas front-line employees such as healthcare practitioners and cleaning, construction and production workers are not. Those who can work from home typically earn more. This divide is not new and was mentioned in an early 2000s review by Bailey and Kurland (2002).

Overall, the numbers of people working from home and working from anywhere are expected to increase, as is the use of digital tools and collaboration platforms. Barrero et al (2021) suggest five reasons for the popularity of working from home:

- better-than-expected experiences of this mode of work during the pandemic
- new investments in physical and human capital
- diminished social stigma

- lingering concerns about crowds and contagion risks
- technological innovations that support remote work

The increasing use of digital technologies and software based on artificial intelligence is likely to permeate new fields of work and increase opportunities for flexible arrangements in fields that are not yet teleworkable.

About the study

This report aims to present observations and findings that contribute to clarifying the concept of hybrid work on which further research can be based. The following questions are explored.

- What is hybrid work and what are its main constitutive elements and features according to the literature and country reports?
- How has hybrid work been addressed in national policy debates among governments and social partners and at the company level?
- What were the experiences in implementing hybrid work during the pandemic in the Member States?
- What are the expected hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities of hybrid work for the future?

The methodological approach of this study was hermeneutic¹ and based on the combination of two main sources of information (Boell and Cecez-Kecmanovic, 2014):

- the available literature, which was examined to build an understanding of contemporary hybrid work
- national-level information covering the EU27 Member States, provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents

The literature review process comprised a literature search followed by classification, mapping and critical assessment of the findings and development of an argument based on those findings.

The study was also abductive by nature, as the antecedents of the concept of hybrid work were also taken into consideration. The body of hybrid work knowledge continuously and gradually developed even as the study progressed.

1 The process of analysing and interpreting written text and imagery to understand the text.

Literature

There is little research specifically about hybrid work. However, the extensive literature on flexible forms of working such as telework or remote work can give important insights. This consists of conceptual and empirical studies and academic literature. The conceptual studies enable the identification of the potential characteristics of hybrid work. Empirical studies, mainly carried out on companies' behalf, provide knowledge that can be used to predict the impacts of hybrid work on employees, organisations and society. Professional literature typically puts forward challenges and proposes guidelines for implementing and working in flexible work arrangements.

The available literature was divided into three categories and subsequently analysed by first focusing on how hybrid work and related concepts are defined and then identifying expectations concerning hybrid work.

1. The first category is meta-analyses and literature reviews on remote work, telework, mobile multilocational work, online telework and other related topics. This material included only literature reviewing, integrating and summarising earlier empirical studies and theoretical papers that aimed to define these forms of work. It is expected that future hybrid work will incorporate at least some of the same features as these forms of work. Information concerning national debates about hybrid work concepts was obtained through observations from the literature. Meta-analyses and literature reviews were also analysed to build a tailored strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOT) analysis, following the hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities (HCBO) framework.
2. The second is empirical research reports and journal articles summarising COVID-19-related telework findings. For example, after the pandemic started in 2020, several global, European and national studies were launched, such as the Eurofound *Living, working and COVID-19* e-survey (Eurofound, 2020a). In addition, many professional associations have gathered material and resources on new ways of working before and during the pandemic and published these in their journals. These professional associations include those aimed at management and organisation scholars, such as the Academy of Management; at general psychologists, such as the International Association of Applied Psychology; and at work and organisational psychologists, such as the European Association of Work and Organizational Psychology. The analysis of this material has focused particularly on the impacts of 'forced' remote work and telework in society, and showed the hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities of forced telework from home during the pandemic.
3. The third consists of professional publications, reports and articles, particularly those focusing on challenges and expectations for future hybrid work. These included, for example, McKinsey & Company and Gallup reports, the *Harvard Business Review* and the *MIT Sloan Management Review*. This material focuses on management's beliefs and expectations regarding hybrid work and how it should be organised, and provides guidelines for implementing and organising hybrid work in organisations. The material was thematically reviewed in terms of the hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities of hybrid work. In addition, recommendations and guidelines for hybrid work were compared, as they reveal expectations regarding hybrid work from an organisational standpoint.

Country reports

The data for EU27 Member States were collected through a standardised questionnaire circulated to the Network of Eurofound Correspondents between 15 December 2021 and 7 January 2022. The questionnaire, which was accompanied by a short note informing recipients of the context of the questionnaire, asked correspondents to collect data from their countries about hybrid work and its definitions, related debates and relevant policies and practices (Annex 1). The respondents were asked to:

- provide existing definitions of hybrid work or similar concept(s) referring to the situation in which work is performed partly from the employer's premises and partly from other locations
- list existing national sources of data that (may) capture the phenomenon of hybrid work and (may) contribute to a better understanding of its consequences for firms/organisations, employees (including managers) and society in general
- describe the extent to which hybrid work is being debated in their country and the main subjects of such a debate
- describe the main actors driving the debates and these actors' positions regarding hybrid work and, additionally, specifically describe the views of trade unions, business or employers' associations, and other organisations or communities such as human resources (HR) managers
- provide examples of hybrid work in practice or experimented with in companies or other organisations in their country
- note any other relevant information regarding the implementation of hybrid work in their country (such as success stories, challenges and other observations)

Data

The research collected data for all EU27 Member States and included the correspondents' summaries based on available statistics, regulations, legislation documents, court decisions, collective agreements, media discussions, literature and, in the case of some countries, interviews. In addition, the country reports included links to various documents that were downloaded and analysed. This material consisted of 246 documents, including research reports by various research institutes and other public and private organisations, guidelines and statements by social partners and government organisations, descriptions of telework practices by governments and other public and private organisations, information on updates to telework legislation and online articles discussing related experiences, and plans and views of organisations and HR professionals. To give a few examples, the documents included an employment prospects survey carried out by ManpowerGroup in Greece, a proposal for changes in teleworking legislation by a Finnish trade union (the Confederation of Unions for Professional and Managerial Staff in Finland (Akava)) and an online article published by Ireland's national television and radio broadcaster, RTÉ, on HR professionals' views on hybrid work.

Analysis

The analysis of the country reports was carried out using ATLAS.ti software, which is a workbench for the qualitative analysis of large bodies of text, graphics and audio and video data. The country reports were analysed from four different perspectives, described below. The analysis in each perspective phase began with an inductive approach, followed by reflection using theoretical knowledge obtained from the literature analysis.

Existing definitions of hybrid work

The first phase focused on the hybrid work definitions presented by different actors. The core content of each definition was coded into the basic elements, sub-elements and features of hybrid work. The potential key components of hybrid work identified through the literature analysis were used as the basis for the analysis of the definitions.

National policy debates

The analysis of the content of hybrid work was followed by an analysis of national policy debates concerning hybrid work among governments and social partners and at the company level. This phase focused on identifying the topics and the actors and their views on hybrid work issues relevant to the debates.

Implementation of hybrid work

Part of the country report analysis focused on examples of how hybrid work was implemented in specific organisations during the pandemic and what factors were deemed critical for the successful implementation of hybrid work. The examples were analysed inductively, focusing on the aspects of hybrid work that were brought up in the case descriptions without predetermined frameworks or categorisations. This analysis yielded information about the support structures, policies and spatial arrangements deemed important for the success of hybrid work and about managerial challenges related to its implementation in organisations.

Hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities

The reports were also analysed to identify the implications of hybrid work at different levels, including the individual, team, organisational and societal levels. This phase aimed to develop an understanding of the expected hindrances and challenges that should be addressed and the benefits and opportunities of hybrid work that should be taken into account when designing hybrid work systems.

Structure of the report

Chapter 1 identifies the main elements and features of hybrid work, drawing on existing literature and presenting various definitions of hybrid work found in the country reports.

Based mainly on the country reports, Chapter 2 focuses on how hybrid work has been addressed in national policy debates among the main stakeholders (companies, social partners, governments).

Chapter 3 examines how European organisations are currently implementing or planning to implement hybrid work and this, in turn, facilitates the identification of some success factors behind the introduction of hybrid work models.

Chapter 4 explores emerging hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities related to hybrid work.

Finally, the main conclusions are presented in Chapter 5.

1 Main elements and features of hybrid work

This chapter explores the constituent elements of hybrid work and its emergence as a form of work organisation during the COVID-19 pandemic. It first reviews the available literature to identify the main elements and sub-elements of hybrid work as a form of work organisation. This includes research carried out before the pandemic on concepts such as telework and remote work, which are intrinsically related to hybrid work. It then examines definitions of hybrid work that were used during the pandemic and compares them with the constituent elements identified earlier. In addition to information provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, the following sources will be taken into account in the review: consultancy company reports, articles in business journals and reports by international organisations such as the ILO and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Building blocks according to the literature

The analysis of the available academic literature suggests that hybrid work refers to a form of work organisation comprising four main elements: physical, temporal, virtual and social. These are the broad, generic elements, each of which can contain various specific features and aspects. The following sections will explore each of these basic elements in light of the available literature, and flesh out the sub-elements of relevance for hybrid work.

Physical

The physical element refers to the place where work is carried out. It is important to differentiate between *workplace* and *location* as sub-elements of the physical element. They are related to each other conceptually and in practice as workplaces are physical spaces, or sites, for work. Both a workplace and its location are designable spatial elements; for example, they may take the form of a desk in an open office space or a private room and may involve working mainly in an office or somewhere else. However, a location turns into a workplace when it is used for work. The availability of workplaces in different locations and the opportunity to choose which workplaces to use can be important enablers of hybrid work.

Mobility is a sub-element of the physical element. It relates to the possibility of moving both within and between locations and workplaces, and benefiting from

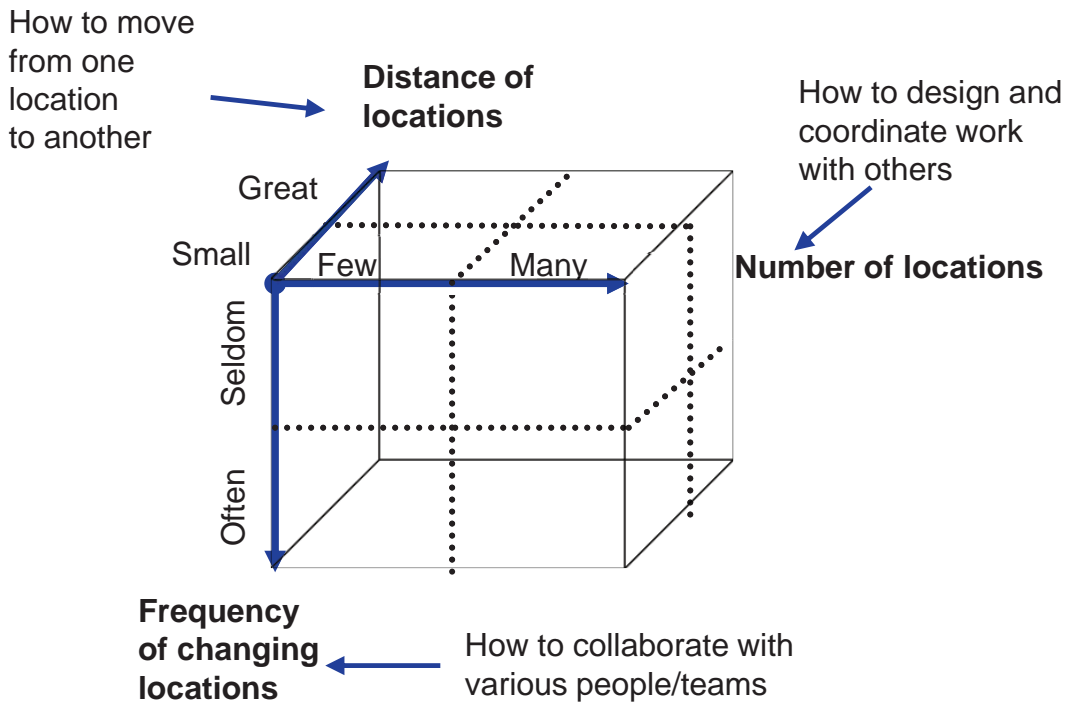
a variety of locations and workplaces available. Mobility means that there are multiple locations at which work takes place, different people to meet and a greater need to coordinate joint actions.

To identify physically mobile employees, Lilischkis (2003) used a still-valid typology based on the dimensions of physical and temporal spaces. Physical space criteria include (1) the number of locations, (2) the similarity among locations, (3) whether there is a default workplace to return to, (4) whether work takes place while moving or at a destination, (5) whether work can take place at fixed locations without changing between them, (6) whether there are limitations in the work area and (7) the distance between locations. Time criteria include (1) the frequency of location changes, (2) the time spent moving between work locations and (3) the time spent at a certain work location if not moving. Each type of mobile work has its own basic physical space and time criteria. ‘On-site movers’ work in a limited work area, ‘yo-yos’ return to a main workplace, ‘pendulums’ have two recurrent work locations, ‘nomads’ work in more than two places and ‘carriers’ cannot do their work at a fixed location and must work while moving.

The more locations and workplaces there are, and the more distant they are from each other, the greater the need to manage work processes. The features of both locations and workplaces as spatial elements are multilinearly interdependent. As shown in Figure 1, greater distance between workplaces increases the need for physical mobility if a worker needs to meet a colleague or customer in person, for instance. The need for a face-to-face meeting can potentially be eliminated by using ICT if the task permits. An actor’s contextual complexity also increases when there are several locations to visit and when the location changes often. This is because the physical working conditions, digital infrastructure and people in each location are different.

Challenges also arise in the design and development of how work is organised. How should work be coordinated when people are working in different locations? Are new or different competencies needed? What are the ergonomic and working conditions and requirements in each place? The relationships between such aspects are quite sensitive and fluid, and their balance is thus precarious. If a group and its members are physically mobile, other features of their work will also be affected. The combination of spatial elements involved in mobility may determine, for example, whether a team is only temporary or fluid.

Figure 1: Effects of location on work-related challenges



Source: Eurofound, 2023

Potential workplace locations in hybrid work include (1) the employee's home, (2) the main workplace (the employer's premises), (3) vehicles, such as cars, buses, trams, trains, planes and ships, (4) a customer's or partner's premises or alternative company premises and (5) hotels, cafes and parks ('third workplaces' according to Oldenburg (1989)) (Vartiainen, 2007, p. 29). Critical questions about hybrid work in such locations are how these places differ as working contexts or workplaces, what places are actually used in practice and how such places should be physically and virtually equipped.

Physical arrangements have dominated the discussion of post-pandemic workplaces, including how employees can be attracted back to the office and what kinds of offices are needed. For example, Kane et al (2021) suggest that physical workplaces should enable flexibility by providing spaces appropriate for a group to, for example, brainstorm, host a workshop or conduct daily meetings. Holtham (2008, p. 455) lists seven core affordances² an office should offer: it should function as (1) a formal meeting place for colleagues and business associates, (2) a base for mobile and remote workers, (3) a base for static workers, (4) a base for information-intensive work processes, (5) a base for

knowledge-intensive work processes, (6) a space that provides opportunities for serendipitous face-to-face contact, hence stimulating creativity and innovation, and (7) a symbol of the organisation to both external and internal audiences. At the same time, individual employees' preferences, such as having dedicated desks in the workplace, should be taken into consideration.

Other types of location can be evaluated similarly based on the physical affordances they offer. In this context, it would be important to consider the kinds of features necessary for each workplace in the organisation to enable smooth working. Blomberg and Kallio (2022), in their recent review on the physical context of creativity, suggest using McCoy's (2005) five spatial elements, which are related to social dynamics and behaviour in each workplace. *Spatial organisation* defines the spatial aspects of the work environment, such as the size, shape, arrangement and division of space. These features can affect privacy, control, flexibility and so on. *Architectonic details* include fixed or stationary aesthetics, materials or ornaments, including decorative styles, signs, colours and artwork. These features may be important in terms of a group's identity. *Office or workstation views* include adjacent workspaces and what can be seen from windows.

² Affordance refers to what the environment offers the individual, for good or ill.

These views might contain relaxing or stressful elements. The final two important aspects of the work environment are *workplace resources* for employees, such as access to equipment, physical fitness areas, parking and food services, and *ambient conditions*, which refer to aspects such as heating, lighting, ventilation and acoustics.

In addition to increased autonomy in decision-making, the content of tasks and jobs impacts workplace functionality: work requiring deep focus is easier in a silent place at home or in a private room in an office, whereas face-to-face interaction with others during lunchtime is easier in an office. However, the quality of working conditions in the workplace seems to be even more important than the location itself, whether it be the main workplace, the home or any other place, as good working conditions facilitate getting work done satisfactorily. During the pandemic, homes were converted into workplaces – which varied greatly in terms of the amount of space available, the technologies in use and household composition – while workspaces in offices were largely empty.

Temporal

The temporal element comprises three sub-elements: duration, timing and frequency. ‘Duration’ concerns the units of time necessary for things to happen (such as minutes, hours, days, weeks, months or years). For example, a hybrid-working employee may be allowed to work two weeks per month remotely or a total of four weeks per year abroad. ‘Timing’ refers to when something should take place or happen – that is, whether something happens during certain hours of the day or on certain days of the week. For example, hybrid working may entail working at the employer’s premises only on Mondays and Fridays (and at home on other weekdays) or working at home in the morning (and at the employer’s premises in the afternoon). In many hybrid models (see examples in Chapter 3), workers are required to work from the office on a minimum number of days (or from home on a maximum number of days) per week. ‘Frequency’ is how often something happens during a period – that is, whether something happens hourly, daily or constantly and whether it happens regularly or occasionally. Some employees may work from home only once a month (occasionally) while others may do so more frequently (for example, every week or even every morning).

In knowledge work, the use of technological tools allows collaborating employees to operate around the clock, enabling them to complete their portion of the work at any time. Sometimes collaboration is needed across countries and time zones. The temporal element has other features that impact the configuration of a hybrid model. It can dictate the formation of new work units or teams for one-time projects, the time during which individuals can disconnect and what work schedules will be followed; for example, time

allocations for individuals can vary as a result of participating in multiple projects. One critical issue in hybrid work is who – the employer or the employee – is authorised to decide how much time is spent teleworking and how much is spent in the office (hours/days/weeks).

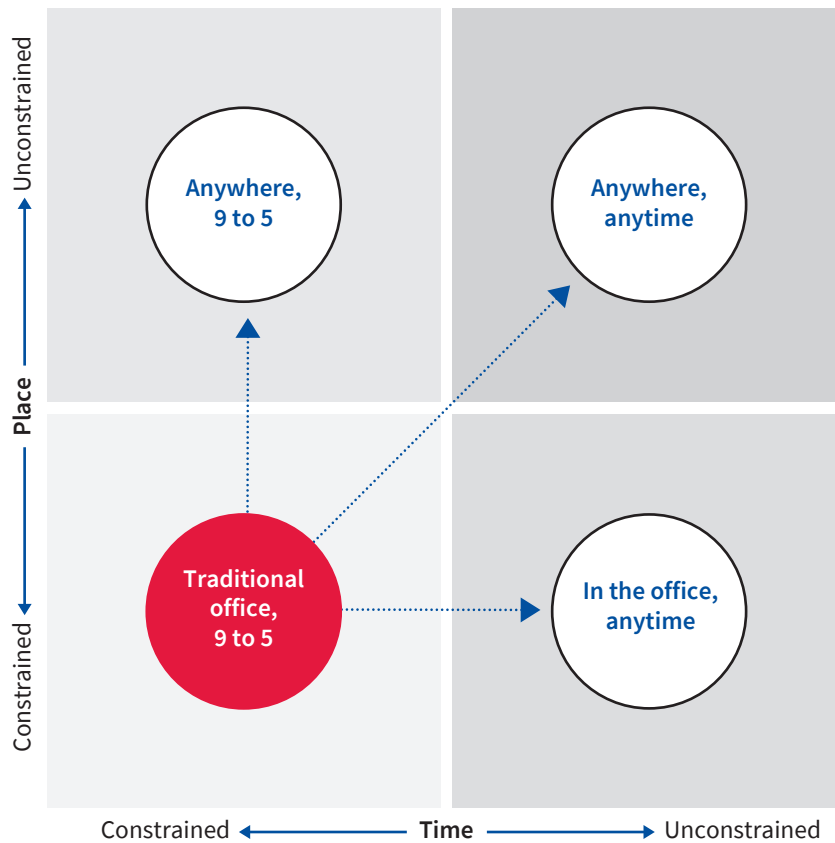
Interplay between the physical and temporal elements

Gratton (2021) describes the interplay of workplace and time in terms of their flexible use (Figure 2). Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of physical space and time was more limited because most employees were expected to work in the office for a specific period. At the beginning of the pandemic, there was a sudden shift from being place constrained (working at the employer’s premises) to being place unconstrained (working anywhere, although mainly at home). Simultaneously, there was a shift in time use, from being time constrained (working synchronously with others) to being time unconstrained (working asynchronously, whenever the worker chooses). Gratton defines this situation as an ‘anywhere, anytime’ (hybrid) model of working, shown in the upper-right quadrant of Figure 2. The employment and working conditions associated with this kind of work arrangement have been explored by Eurofound (see Eurofound and ILO, 2017; Eurofound, 2020b).

Both the duration and the timing of workplace use vary, in turn impacting how these elements are managed. The demands of the business (or organisation) and the needs of the individual change over time. This increases the fluidity and transience of the mixture of hybrid work elements needed.

The interplay of physical, social and virtual elements in hybrid work is shown, for example, when creativity and innovativeness are necessary to a given job. Some companies have been concerned about the repercussions of forced working from home on innovation and innovativeness. Arena et al (2022) warn that there is now a long-term risk to the ability of organisations to innovate. According to the authors, research shows that face-to-face interactions in teams are critical to innovation because such interactions often develop and persist through casual micro-interactions in the workplace during lunchtime, for instance. Drawing on social network theory, the authors show how each of the three stages of innovation (idea generation, idea incubation and scaling) can be undermined by virtual work. They propose an alternative organisational design that leaders can adopt to overcome these limitations – the adaptive hybrid model. This model involves a blend of intentionally virtual and face-to-face work to avoid the loss of social connections and suggests diverse types of connection for each of the three stages of innovation. The model is adaptive and flexible, with employees being required to be in the office for the ‘moments that matter’.

Figure 2: Work arrangements in terms of place and time



Source: ‘How to do Hybrid Right’ by Lynda Gratton [product# R2103C], published in the May/June 2021 edition of Harvard Business Review. © 2021 Harvard Business School Publishing. <https://store.hbr.org/product/how-to-do-hybrid-right/r2103c?sku=R2103C-PDF-ENG>
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Virtual

Computer-mediated communication and digital tools enable individuals to work alone or together both offline and online, even if employees are physically dispersed. The pandemic forced many not only to telework from home but also to learn how to use some digital technologies (for example, remote communication tools such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams and Slack). New tools and applications were put to use in a variety of ways; for example, online meetings became routine, and many restaurants adopted online services for ordering and delivery. In the future, the development and growth of telework and remote and digital online work will be tightly integrated with expanding 5G bandwidths and emerging 6G bandwidths, artificial intelligence applications, ever-smarter mobile devices, and other technological developments. Through broadband mobile internet and digital labour platforms, workers have access to multiple communication functions, including email, the

internet, instant messaging, text messaging and company networks. Digitalisation has been changing the working environment: impacting working processes, tasks and job content and affecting structures and organisations, products and services in many ways, resulting in the need for new competencies, organisation and ways of working (Schaffers et al, 2020).

Halford (2005) related her concept of the ‘hybrid workspace’ to the development of ICT that enables remote working outside organisational settings, usually from home.

There is a hollowing out of the fixed organisational workspace and a polarisation towards the relocation of work into domestic space on the one hand and the dislocation of work into cyberspace on the other ... These individuals work at home and engage in embodied organisational spaces; they conduct relationships virtually and in close proximity.

(Halford, 2005, pp. 19–20)

Halford shows that ‘spatial hybridity’ changes the nature of work, organisation and management in domestic space, cyberspace and organisational space. It can be said that spatial hybridity is the result of combining physical, virtual or digital spaces with social spaces (or ‘life spaces’)³ in use.

In this early definition, the differentia specifica of spatial hybridity and its elements are place or location (for example, the home) as a physical space, and cyberspace as a virtual or digital space for both solo working and interacting with others in a social space (i.e. enabling collaboration). This definition is closely related to the concept of a ‘blended workplace’ as described by Tredinnick and Laybats (2021, p. 108): ‘Blended work combines the advantages of physical and virtual work environments, allowing hybrid modes of work where individuals dip in and out of virtual and physical spaces.’

Social

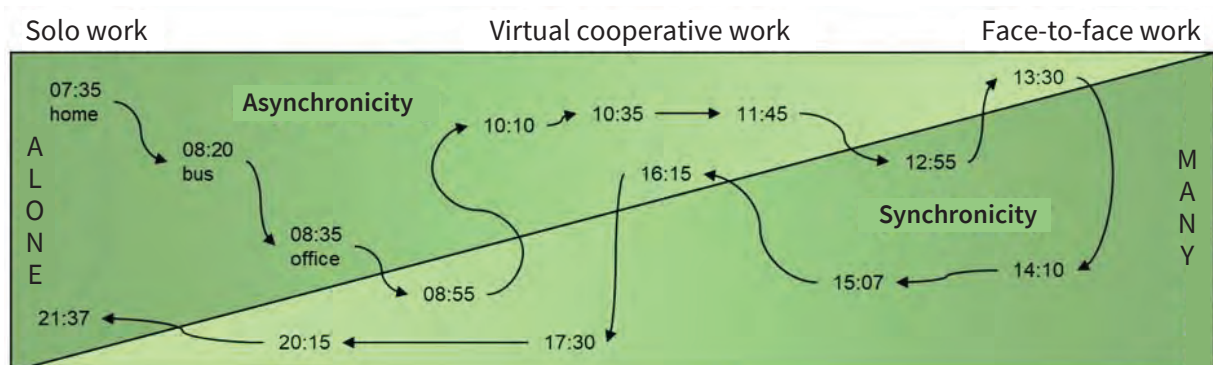
Social space covers communication and social interaction with other people in both physical and virtual settings. For example, social support such as advice and help can come from a variety of sources, including co-workers, supervisors, customers, family and friends (Taylor, 2011). People may have the option to work in solitude, doing remote work alone, or in face-to-face collaboration with others, online or offline, asynchronously or synchronously, at the main workplace or any other location. Figure 3 illustrates a hypothetical working day for a hybrid worker. The working day starts alone at home, reading and responding to emails asynchronously. After a bus ride to the main workplace, preparations for an online meeting

start. Discussions with colleagues in the office are face to face during lunchtime and in two previously arranged meetings. Thereafter, the person exchanges emails with distant team members. Finally, the working day ends with two short face-to-face meetings before the worker returns home. Hybridity in this context consists of working remotely at home, virtually and asynchronously with others, and synchronously with others at the main workplace, including online. A working day for a hybrid worker can comprise a blend of working in different spaces.

In the hybrid work context, the flexible use of places generates variance in face-to-face social contact, for example, contact with one’s family at home and with one’s colleagues at the main workplace. In practice, it is often difficult to separate solo working from collaborative work, even when physically isolated at home. In this type of ‘pseudoprivacy’, working is often interrupted by emails, text messages, calls and virtual meetings (Becker and Sims, 2000, p. 15). Thus, the nature of hybrid work requires presence at several levels, creating a need to be ‘multipresent’.

‘Multipresence’ describes the mobile worker’s urge to be simultaneously present in physical, virtual and social spaces while working across boundaries from multiple locations and on the move (Koroma and Vartiainen, 2017). The increasing findability and awareness of other people’s locations and their availability on the internet can reduce the feeling of autonomy and increase the sense of external control. Leonardi et al (2010) called this the ‘connectivity paradox’, with teleworkers sometimes using advanced ICT strategically to decrease, rather than increase, the distance they feel from colleagues.

Figure 3: A mobile multilocational worker’s working day



Source: Based on Vartiainen, 2007, p. 50

3 Lewin (1972) introduced the idea that everyone exists in a psychological force field – the ‘life space’ – that determines and limits their behaviour. The ‘life space’ is a highly subjective environment that characterises the world as the individual sees it, while remaining embedded in the objective elements of physical and social fields. Nonaka et al (2000) further developed the ‘life space’ concept, introducing the concept ‘Ba’. ‘Ba’ refers to a shared context in which knowledge is shared, created and utilised by those who interact and communicate there. ‘Ba’ unifies the physical space (such as an office space), the virtual space (such as email), the social space (such as colleagues) and the mental space (such as common experiences, ideas and ideals shared by people with common goals in a working context).

Emergence of hybrid work during the pandemic

During the early phases of the pandemic in 2020–2022, references to hybrid work started to emerge in consultancy company publications, business journals and reports of international organisations such as the ILO and the OECD (see Table 1). The content of the definitions identified was analysed in terms of the basic elements (the overarching, more general ones, as identified in the previous section) and sub-elements and features of hybrid work (concrete aspects that are part of the basic elements and how they might be applied in practice).

The results show that the physical element was used in all definitions of hybrid work. This is because the use of a flexible mix of locations – working both at the employer’s premises and elsewhere remotely – was central in all of them. In addition, the temporal element was used to indicate when, how often and for how long work should be performed in the various locations. Less common are references to the social and virtual elements of hybrid work. Additional aspects, such as flexibility, agility and autonomy of both employers and employees in the implementation of hybrid forms of work organisation, were also mentioned. These features refer to concrete situations in which the sub-elements assume specific characteristics.

Table 1: Examples of hybrid work definitions from company and business journals and other reports

Source	Definitions	Basic elements	Sub-elements and features
Consultancy company publications			
Capgemini (Crummenerl et al, 2020)	‘A hybrid workforce essentially refers to a workforce that is distributed across different locations, from traditional office and factory spaces to remote locations, including within employees’ living space, be it a family home or shared apartment. A hybrid working model is characterized by the flexibility and choices it offers employees, and it can be an innovative way of driving new approaches to agility, collaboration, and ways of working.’	Physical, social	Main workplace, multiple locations, home, social relations, flexibility, autonomy
Boston Consulting Group (Strack et al, 2021)	‘It is indeed flexibility that most people are interested in, not a 180-degree turn in the traditional model that would have everyone working from home all the time and never going to a physical work location.’	Physical	Home, main workplace, flexibility
McKinsey & Company (Alexander et al, 2021)	‘As the pandemic eases, executives say that the hybrid model – in which employees work both remotely and in the office – will become far more common.’	Physical	Main workplace, multiple locations
Microsoft (Teevan et al, 2022)	‘For individuals, hybrid work refers to working part of the time in the office and part time from somewhere else. For organizations, hybrid can also refer to having a mix of fully on-site and fully off-site employees.’	Physical, temporal, social	Multiple locations, duration, face to face
Gallup (Wigert, 2022)	‘Employees with the ability to work remotely are largely anticipating a hybrid office environment going forward – one that allows them to spend part of their week working remotely and part in the office.’	Physical, temporal	Multiple locations, duration
Business journals			
<i>Harvard Business Review</i> (e.g. Gratton, 2021)	‘To design hybrid work properly, you have to think about it along two axes: place and time ... an anywhere, anytime model of working – the hybrid model.’	Physical, temporal	Multiple locations, frequency (any time)
<i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i> (e.g. Kane et al, 2021)	‘The anticipated gradual return to collocated work in the coming months provides opportunities to experiment with hybrid ways of working ... gives managers the ability to critically consider the ways in which a hybrid workplace might be more effective.’	Physical	Main workplace, effectiveness
International organisations’ reports			
ILO, 2021b	‘Pre-pandemic research (Eurofound and ILO, 2017) suggests that the “sweet spot” for teleworking is some combination of work at the employer’s premises and teleworking. During the pandemic, this approach has come to be known as the “hybrid model”—working part-time in the office combined with part-time telework.’	Physical, temporal	Main workplace, multiple locations, duration
OECD, 2021	‘In particular, proximity to employers’ premises still plays a role for workers in hybrid models, which combine teleworking and office presence, whereas this factor becomes negligible in work-from-anywhere models, which primarily rely on online communication, with personnel distributed across locations and, often, time zones.’	Physical, virtual, temporal	Main workplace, multiple locations, online, timing

An aspect common to all these definitions is that hybrid work refers to the combination of telework and work carried out in the usual workplace. The *Microsoft new future of work report 2022* puts forward the idea that hybrid work may have different meanings for workers and for organisations: for individuals, hybrid work refers to working part of the time in the office and part of the time from somewhere else, while, for organisations, a hybrid model can also refer to having a mix of fully on-site and fully off-site employees (Teevan et al, 2022). This suggests that hybrid work models can have different meanings (and therefore different impacts) according to the perspective from which they are viewed: from the point of view of an individual, team, organisation, sector or society.

Hybrid work definitions in use across the EU

Experts from the Network of Eurofound Correspondents were asked to find ‘existing definitions of hybrid work or similar concept(s) referring to the situation in which work is performed partly from the employer’s premises and partly from other locations’. Altogether, 93 definitions of hybrid work and 16 definitions of similar concepts were identified in the 27 country reports. How the content of these definitions was analysed is described below.

The core content of each hybrid work definition and definitions related to similar concepts were coded based on the basic elements, and sub-elements and features of hybrid work, as outlined above. Each basic element – physical, temporal, virtual and social – and their sub-elements can include specific features such as working at home, using online technologies, communicating face to face and working fixed days in the office each week. For example, some definitions used the physical element (location and/or workplace) as the defining characteristic of hybrid work (‘working in

[the] office and [at] home’, ‘not [a] dedicated workplace in [the] office’ and ‘working elsewhere’) whereas others referred to time (‘two home days’, ‘three office days’ and ‘occasional telework’).

The features that define hybrid work were also grouped into categories based on flexibility in time, work organisation and location, in addition to the emphasis on technology.

Hybrid work

Table 2 presents examples of definitions of hybrid work from the country reports and the number of times each element, sub-element and feature are mentioned in the reports.

As in the definitions analysed above, the physical and temporal elements were the most common basic elements used to define hybrid work. The virtual and social elements and their sub-elements were also sometimes used. The definitions included many additional aspects. The physical element, for instance, was described in terms of working in multiple locations, especially at the main workplace and at home. The quality of workplaces in different locations was barely mentioned or discussed. The temporal element was typically used in references to working at fixed times during the week, month or year in the office and remotely, for example, three office days and two telework days each week.

The social element was mostly discussed in terms of how communication and collaborative interaction were arranged. Usually, the meaning and significance of face-to-face contact were underlined and were sometimes related to building trust and leadership and avoiding social isolation and alienation. The virtual or digital element was also sometimes – although not in all cases – referred to as the basic element of hybrid work. Autonomy, flexibility, agreements on work arrangements and contracts were viewed as additional aspects of hybrid work.

Table 2: Examples of typical hybrid work definitions drawn from the country reports and number of basic elements, sub-elements and features mentioned

Sample quotations	Sub-elements	Features
Physical element (N = 78)		
'Employers' organisation AWWN uses the following definition in a news publication on their website: Hybrid work: "partly at home and partly in the office or elsewhere.'	Location (N = 72) Workplace (N = 3) Mobility (N = 3)	Multiple locations (N = 48) Main workplace (N = 28) Home (N = 23) Shared office (N = 1)
Temporal element (N = 43)		
'It has already introduced its "60/40" hybrid working model in Ireland. This allows employees to work 60% of their time remotely and 40% in the office which will allow employees to maintain the flexibility they had during the pandemic.'	Timing (N = 22) Duration (N = 13) Frequency (N = 9)	Fixed time (N = 18) Part time (N = 5) Days per week (N = 4) Mixed time, occasionally (N = 3) Regularly, weekly (N = 2) Always, hours per day, any time (N = 1)
Social element (N = 11)		
'The Fraunhofer Institute also calls for the hybrid model as an attractive and socially acceptable work arrangement, on the one hand to better ensure the exchange of information and social cohesion in teams/departments, and on the other hand to ensure leadership tasks.'	Communication (N = 11) Group maintenance (N = 2) Task orientation (N = 2) Social relations (N = 1)	Face to face (N = 10) Mediated communication (N = 2) Alienation, social isolation, trust, leadership (N = 1)
Virtual element (N = 10)		
'Hybrid work is result-oriented work and leadership based on trust and dialogue. You collaborate with others from different work locations and stay connected through technology and physical meetings.'	Virtual space (N = 10) Online (N = 1)	ICT, online tools (N = 1)
Additional aspects (N = 38)		
'The office space and how it can be organised in a way that it supports both face-to-face interaction and privacy for online meetings and video calls; the technical equipment necessary to make a hybrid work organisation possible; the organisational culture or working culture are also topics covered in the debate on hybrid work; an ecological perspective, as less work at the office might mean less commuting; debated is also an "alienation" and a loss of creativity.'		Autonomy (N = 11) Flexibility (N = 6) Agreement on work arrangement (N = 5) Job content, performance (N = 3) Contracts based on individual needs and company decisions (N = 2) Creativity, ecology, organisation culture, well-being (N = 1)

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Similar concepts

Apart from references to hybrid work or models of hybrid work arrangements, there are other concepts being used to refer to the same phenomenon. Smart working, agile work, flexible work, blended working and other similar concepts were defined according to the same basic elements as hybrid work and mostly in terms of the physical, temporal and virtual elements, as shown in Table 3. The physical space of work in the future was characterised as multiple locations, at home and at the main workplace. Time was characterised by decisions about when work would take place ('timing') and for how long ('duration'). Virtual space was referred to only in terms of data safety. In addition, future work

was defined as having different forms and being autonomous, flexible and non-hierarchical. In some definitions, it was also described as being based on the organisation's goals, values and written agreements and as overcoming the organisation's constraints and crossing its boundaries.

For example, one respondent defined 'workation', referring to working in distant locations, as follows:

A work model in which the employer arranges for employees to work abroad or in a resort city in the same country, where part of the time is devoted to doing work, part of the time is devoted to professional self-development and part of the time is for rest.

Table 3: Examples of similar concepts drawn from the country reports and the number of basic elements, sub-elements and features mentioned

Similar concepts (N = 16)	Sample quotations	Sub-elements	Features
Full-time telework organisation, agile work, 'crossbreed' work, smart working, forms of telework, a mixed work model, partial teleworking, workation, flexible organisation, boundless work, working from home, blended working, flexible ways of working, regular telework	<p>'Hence, what in the international debate and legislation is expressed more generically with the term Remote Work or Hybrid Work, implying a work carried out outside the office, whether stably, at regular or occasional intervals, in Italy is referred to as Smart Working or Agile Work.'</p> <p>'The Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Leo Varadkar, said that blended working will involve working sometimes from the office and other times from home, a hub or on the go.'</p> <p>'There are no other official definitions of hybrid work nor other similar definitions. In parallel to hybrid work, a term "flexible work" (a flexible way of working) (in Swedish "flexibelt arbetssätt") is sometimes used to describe not only to [sic] non-place-based work but also the wider flexibilization of work (e.g. in terms of working hours).'</p>	Physical element (N = 15)	
		Location (N = 12) Workplace (N = 5)	Multiple locations (N = 12) Home (N = 2) Work as environment (N = 2) Main workplace (N = 1)
		Temporal element (N = 11)	
		Timing (N = 4) Duration (N = 2) Frequency (N = 2)	-
		Social element (N = 1)	
		-	Organisational constraints and contexts (N = 1)
		Virtual element (N = 1)	
		-	Data safety (N = 1)
		Additional aspects (N = 15)	
		-	Flexibility (N = 5) Autonomy (N = 3) Written agreement, organisational objectives, variety of forms, non-hierarchical, work-life balance, organisational constraints and boundaries, value-based drivers (N = 1)

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Flexibility-related definitions

The hybrid work definitions were also categorised in terms of flexibility in time, flexibility in work organisation, flexibility in using different locations to work and issues related to technology options (Table 4). The use of ICT was seldom mentioned as a specific feature of hybrid work. The most interesting definitions were those that added new features to the temporal and physical elements and their organisation. The main sources of these definitions were representatives of private sector companies, of governments and of research institutes. Representatives of trade unions and news in public media were also the sources of some definitions.

Time-related flexibility was referred to most often. Temporal flexibility indicators varied from generic 'occasional and part-time' telework and a fixed number of days per week in the office to adjustable time spread across the office, the home and elsewhere. Some examples in the information collected are:

- two days at home and three days in the office
- 50% in-office work and 50% at-home work scheduled between 07:00 and 20:00
- varying amounts of working in the office: between 30% and 70%

- a maximum of 35 days of working from home per year
- alternating between one week in the office and one week elsewhere

Flexibility in organising refers to ways of flexibly organising features of hybrid work. The definitions include several elements and features, such as who has the decision-making power (the employee, the manager or the company), the location where the work takes place and the work schedule. Other options such as flexible choices and agreements based on job responsibilities, the need for communication and interaction, and company and job needs were also mentioned.

In many cases, the flexible choice of location by the employees was the main element of hybrid work, referring often to only the employer's premises and some other places (such as the home). Location flexibility indicators varied from generic, such as 'working elsewhere' or working at on-site and off-site locations, to more specific, such as offices and homes or mobile, multilocal and hub work inside one country. Teleworking abroad for a certain period was also mentioned.

Table 4: Examples of definitions of concepts related to hybrid work drawn from the country reports

Type of definitions (N = 79)	Sample quotations
Flexibility in time (N = 32)	‘Under the new model, 50% of working time must be spent in the office, but employees can schedule their working time between 7am and 8pm as they please when working from home.’
Flexibility in work organisation (N = 22)	‘Hybrid work relies on the possibility of choosing flexibly the location from which the work is done. It is not the building or office that is decisive, but the type of work to be done, the necessary communication possibilities and the degree of interaction. In a hybrid work environment, work at the office is combined with work from home, or from any other location.’
Flexibility in location (N = 20)	‘Hybrid work is mostly defined as a combination of working on the employers’ premises and in other locations.’
Technological options (N = 5)	‘The hybrid organization combines physical presence with work from other locations, such as homework. This means that some parts of the company’s tasks are performed virtually, while others are performed by meeting physically.’

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

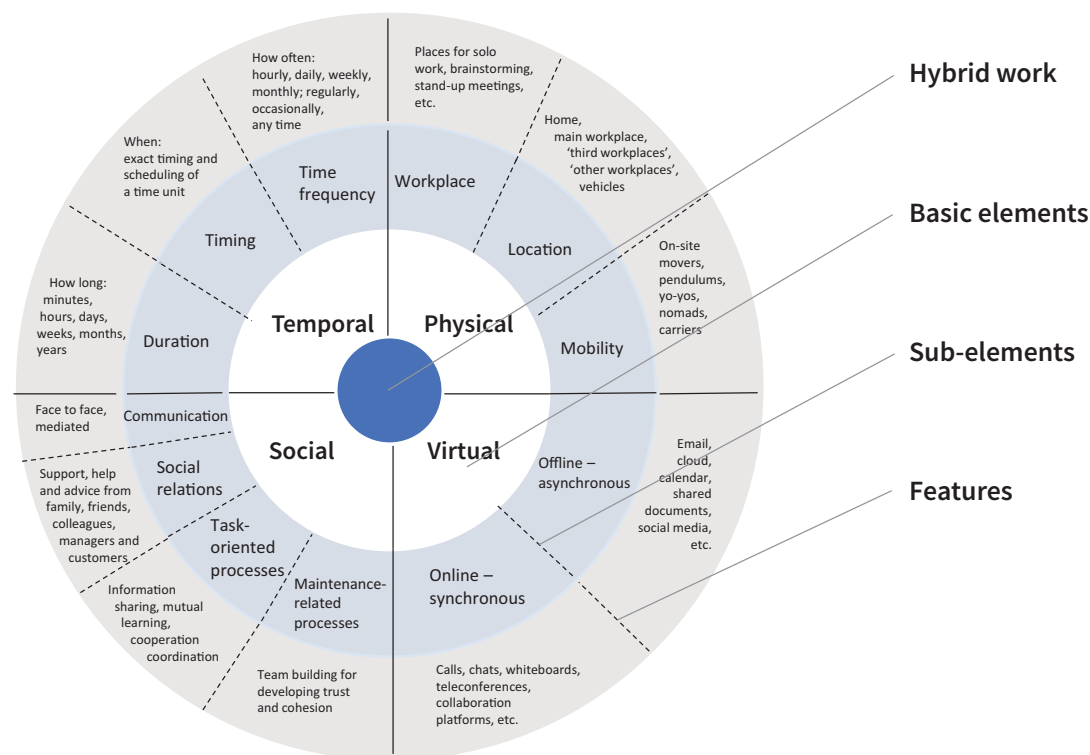
Technology played only a minor role in these definitions. However, the need to enable presence, awareness of others and virtual connectivity from anywhere, and the need for the employee and the employer to agree about who bears responsibility for providing ICT were sometimes emphasised.

In conclusion, the definitions of hybrid work, and similar concepts, at the Member State level typically mentioned physical and temporal elements and features. Even when different terminology was used, the content was similar. For example, ‘blended working’ was defined as involving working sometimes from the office and sometimes from home, at a hub or on the go. This definition clearly recalls the concept of multilocal work.

The analysis of the definitions in the excerpts in terms of flexibility confirms this conclusion.

The analysis of the definitions given by different types of actors, in different types of media, across the EU (provided by Eurofound’s national correspondents), confirms the conclusions from the literature review that hybrid work is composed of four main elements: physical, temporal, virtual and social. These basic elements of hybrid work are interconnected and are susceptible to be acted upon, or in other words, are ‘actionable’. This means that those elements should be taken into account when designing, implementing or analysing hybrid work in terms of its impacts. Figure 4 summarises the main elements, sub-elements and features of hybrid work.

Figure 4: The basic elements, sub-elements and features of hybrid work



Source: Eurofound, 2023

Evolving concept of hybrid work

The analysis of hybrid work definitions presented in the literature and country reports during the pandemic shows that the physical element (remote work in multiple locations and working at the main workplace) and the temporal element (when, for how long and how often work is carried out in each location and workplace) were the two elements most frequently used to characterise hybrid work. Social and virtual elements were less often referred to. The same pattern of elements was found in definitions of similar concepts. It is also evident that earlier definitions of remote work and telework use the same basic elements.

For instance, the European Framework Agreement on Telework (2002) defines telework as:

A form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.

This definition of telework refers specifically to work carried out away from the employer's premises on a regular basis, leaving aside the work performed from the employer's premises. It includes physical (location), virtual (ICT) and temporal (frequency: 'on a regular basis') elements and refers to it as a feature of an employment contract/relationship.

More recently, telework and ICT-based mobile work were defined (Eurofound, 2020b, p. 1) thus:

Telework and ICT-based mobile work (TICTM) is any type of work arrangement where workers work remotely, away from an employer's premises or fixed location, using digital technologies such as networks, laptops, mobile phones and the internet.

The ILO (2020b) describes remote work as 'situations where the work is fully or partly carried out on an alternative worksite other than the default place of work' and telework as:

A subcategory of the broader concept of remote work. It includes workers who use information and communications technology (ICT) or landline telephones to carry out the work remotely. Similar to remote work, telework can be carried out in different locations outside the default place of work. What makes telework a unique category is that the work carried out remotely includes the use of personal electronic devices.

(ILO, 2020b, p. 6)

These definitions refer only to the physical element (excluding the main workplace) and the virtual element (ICT), leaving aside the temporal and social elements that seem to be important in defining hybrid work.

The definitions of hybrid work produced during the pandemic are somewhat evocative of the 'classical' definitions of remote work, telework and ICT-based mobile work, mostly focusing on the physical and temporal elements of the organisation of work. This means that existing definitions of telework or remote work are important in order to define hybrid work.

With the popularisation of the term 'hybrid work', the scope of the organisation of work became broader by involving telework or remote work. The newer definitions underline the need for flexibility and autonomy in the arrangements of the physical and temporal dimensions. Sometimes they also allude to the importance of the virtual and social elements of this form of work organisation. They also characterise hybrid work with more detailed, but individualised, features, as its features can be different for each worker. These individualised features highlight the need:

- to develop agreements on work arrangements
- to prevent isolation and alienation
- to provide support for well-being, work–life balance, and creativity and innovation
- to invest in developing leadership

Hybrid work is therefore a concept that encapsulates elements over and above telework. These elements resonate at the individual, team, organisational and societal levels.

2 Exploring the debates around hybrid work

The quick transition to teleworking from home at the beginning of 2020 was mostly perceived positively, even by those who had no previous remote work experience. Some challenges, however, included inadequate working conditions such as poor ergonomics in home spaces. The scarcity of proper ICT tools and their limitations were evident, for example, in the form of increasing 'Zoom fatigue' (see, for example, Nadler, 2020) due to prolonged use of digital tools. There were difficulties in reconciling work and family life when children and spouses or partners were also at home; many people felt isolated from colleagues and managers; and those living alone experienced loneliness.

Discussions started in late 2020 and early 2021 about how organisations, social partners and sometimes governments and society in general could support and improve the experience of teleworking from home. The information provided by the national correspondents shows that hybrid work was first addressed in the media and in national policy discussions by governments and social partners. The latter consulted about the 'right to disconnect' and – at the company level – about necessary agreements and guidelines. In late 2021 and early 2022, the debate focused on the post-pandemic period, emphasising the necessary hybrid elements and features, and how they should be combined and implemented.

The debates among different actors in the EU Member States were analysed by focusing on the following questions, which were put to the Network of Eurofound Correspondents.

- To what extent is hybrid work being debated in your country, and what are the main subjects of such debates?
- Who are the main actors driving the debates, and what are their positions regarding hybrid work? What are the views of trade unions, business or employer associations, and other organisations or communities such as HR managers?

The information on the debates on hybrid work provided in the national reports was classified according to the country, the topics and the types of actors involved. The following topics were identified: hybrid work, organising hybrid work, hybrid work's consequences, regulation, legislation, hybrid work agreements, costs, office premises, control,

employment relationships, working conditions, ICT, health and well-being, leadership, work culture, competencies, equality, risks, time and work-life balance.

The actors participating in these debates were trade unions and worker representatives, employer organisations and employer representatives, the public/media (newspapers, websites), governments, researchers, companies, consultants, political parties and HR managers.

The following extract from the report submitted by the Irish correspondent provides an example of the type of input that was taken into account in the analysis. It forms part of the results of a public consultation, 'Guidance for remote working', held by the Irish government between July and August 2020, in which the public expressed concerns about health and safety legislation.

Health and safety – related to the workstation set-up – was raised in around 120 submissions. Many pointed out that the current health and safety legislation was inadequate for the modern office and/or working from home. Many said that there was a need for clarity on what is a safe and ergonomic workplace. Submissions called for a clear protocol to be developed for work-related accidents in the home, outlining liability and insurance coverage.

Main debate topics

The quotations identified in the national reports ($N = 140$) describe debates on various topics related to working from home and hybrid work (Table 5). The main topics of debate regarding telework from home and hybrid work, and their arrangements, concerned the type of regulation needed. The questions arising included what kind of changes in legislation are needed, whether a contract between social partners is sufficient and whether contracts should be made at the organisational level. In addition, questions were asked about what hybrid work is, how it should be organised and what are its consequences. The matter of 'who pays the bill' was also discussed, as were the costs related to telework, the types of office premises and technologies that are needed, and to what extent the offices and technology used may need to be changed. Questions about the employment relationship in hybrid work and how to control and manage it were discussed as well.

Health, well-being and leadership issues, competencies, equality, risks, work–life balance and the organisation’s work culture were also addressed, but to a minor extent. Illustrative quotations from the analysed reports are presented in the associated working paper (Eurofound, 2023, Annex 4). The debate topics include:

- regulation, including type and level (for example, agreements at the company or team level), and adequacy of existing telework legislation or collective agreements ($N = 43$)
- the organisation of hybrid work and its consequences ($N = 34$)
- the actual definition of hybrid work ($N = 21$)
- responsibility for costs, premises, proper working conditions and ICT in a hybrid model ($N = 19$)
- employment relationships and management systems ($N = 13$)
- risks of hybrid work and its consequences for health and well-being ($N = 4$)
- needs in terms of leadership and new skills and competencies ($N = 4$)
- equality, work–life balance and ‘good’ work culture ($N = 2$)

Actors and their positions

The main actors in debates about hybrid work were the public/media ($N = 35$), trade unions and worker representatives ($N = 32$), and employer organisations and employer representatives ($N = 31$), followed by researchers ($N = 12$), government bodies ($N = 11$) and companies ($N = 10$). HR professionals, political parties and consultants seldom participated in the debates (Table 5), although both international and global consulting companies and local consultants at the country level quickly started to offer their solutions and services for those who needed them.

Social partners mainly discussed the level of regulation required. Trade unions and employer organisations both seemed to be generally in favour of the hybrid work model and did not envisage many problems in its implementation, although they also saw the need for further discussion. Government bodies or their representatives rarely participated in the debates about legislation. Coverage in the media about the measures regulating remote work was positive and generally considered necessary. It highlighted the need to address the content of the legal provisions for these arrangements.

Table 5: Debate actors and topics in the correspondents’ reports

Topic	Actors ($N = 140$)						
	Public/media ($N = 35$)	Trade unions and worker representatives ($N = 32$)	Employer organisations and employer representatives ($N = 31$)	Government bodies ($N = 11$)	Researchers ($N = 12$)	Companies ($N = 10$)	HR professionals, political parties, consultants ($N = 9$)
Regulation, legislation, agreements ($N = 43$)	6	14	12	6	3		2
Organisation and consequences of hybrid work ($N = 34$)	9	6	8	2	3	4	2
Hybrid work definition ($N = 21$)	10	5	2	1	1	2	
Costs, premises, working conditions, ICT ($N = 19$)	4	2	3	2	2	4	2
Employment relationship, control ($N = 13$)	1	4	6		1		1
Risks, health and well-being ($N = 4$)	2				1		1
Leadership, competencies ($N = 4$)	2				1		1
Equality, work–life balance, work culture ($N = 2$)	1	1					

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Trade unions and worker representatives underlined the need to regulate the telework part of hybrid work through legal measures and collective agreements for sector-specific provisions. They encouraged governments to initiate the dialogue and asked for the updating of existing telework legislation. For example, the Finnish trade union confederation Akava proposed that the definition of teleworking be enshrined in legislation, specifically that the rights and obligations relating to teleworking should be laid down as necessary in the Finnish Working Hours Act, Occupational Safety and Health Act and the Act on Accidents at Work and Occupational Diseases (Akava, 2021). Trade union representatives also raised some concerns. For example, an employee should have the right to end a telework contract depending on their life situation. In addition, many specific issues were flagged for discussion, such as the right to disconnect, the allocation of bonuses, forms of managerial control and surveillance, and the overall remuneration of workers.

Employer organisations generally suggested that telework should be regulated among social partners within the process of the definition or the renewal of collective agreements, and not by legal means. Some were of the opinion that the European Framework Agreement on Telework (2002) was working well, and no additional legislation was needed. Others stated that many companies have already made good progress by introducing internal company regulations on hybrid work. Employers' concerns focused on unilateral decisions by public authorities regarding the compulsory character of telework during the pandemic crisis. Other concerns were also reported: for example, the rights to reversibility, benefits and privacy were regarded as already sufficiently tackled in existing legislation.

Companies mostly focused on the concrete issues of telework from home and hybrid work. Many companies expected the new forms of work to continue after the pandemic. Benefits and possible positive impacts were expected in terms of work efficiency, better adjustment of work obligations and private life, a reduction in stress felt by employees and lower business costs. One of the issues discussed by companies was the reduced need for office space due to options such as desk sharing. It was expected that a reduction in the office space needed by companies implementing hybrid work models would generate a substantial reduction in costs. Some companies also had a clear tendency to occupy office buildings in more central areas than before to be close to employee housing, as this arrangement would save them time commuting. Companies often used such changes as opportunities to inform the public about their flexible working arrangements, to attract young employees. Some of the concerns raised related to the availability and quality of equipment for workers to use at home (laptops, mobile phones) and the work-life balance of employees.

In public discussions, mostly taking place in the media, many challenges and hindrances, as well as benefits and opportunities, of these new work arrangements were presented. Telework and hybrid work were discussed in a way that viewed the hybrid work concept as an evolved version of telework. Overall, the debates revolved around positive and negative characteristics of telework from home and hybrid work, and the continuation of telework on a regular basis in the post-pandemic era. There is general agreement that the crisis revealed the advantages of remote work for both employers and employees. The concept of hybrid work seems to be mostly used by academics/practitioners who investigate or are otherwise engaged with the subject. The lack of specific mentions of 'hybrid work' in public authorities' documents and pieces of legislation or proposals was also noticed.

Shifting debates and expectations

The main debate topic around hybrid work was the level of regulation. In general, social partners agree that hybrid work will increase in the future, but their opinions about the level and content of regulation vary. On the one hand, trade unions expected legislation to be developed and contracted between social partners regarding the associated risks, health, safety, rights and obligations. On the other hand, employer organisations, in general, do not see the need to develop legislation but favour 'contracting' flexibly at the company level.

The main challenge in sketching the content of such agreements is to determine how to arrange work in such a way that both companies and employees are satisfied, combining increased efficiency with satisfaction of employees' needs (in terms of work-life balance, working hours, etc.). Once that is determined, the technological and psychosocial challenges of hybrid work can be addressed.

Other challenges include arranging the physical work environment and determining who should cover the costs of this when working from home. The responsibility for ensuring the health and safety of employees when they are working from home is also unclear. Further challenges include the organisation of teamwork and communication among remote workers in organisations, and taking care of employees' mental health and well-being. In the discussion, some suggested that mental health support should be provided to counteract workers' feelings of isolation, loneliness and difficulty 'switching off'. Importantly, the balancing of professional and personal lives requires attention, as telework is frequently characterised by constant availability and longer working hours. Another challenge is related to the digital perspective and includes access to the employer's digital infrastructure, information security and data safety.

Access to training that can develop employees' and supervisors' skills involved in remote and hybrid work was also noted in the discussions and this was perceived as an opportunity. Mentoring and coaching for remote workers were also mentioned. It was claimed that, in the future, work will depend on how HR departments manage hybrid work. One other issue raised was tax and financial incentives. This concerned the cost of utilities such as broadband and heating, and equipment such as headsets for those working from home. It was pointed out that the existing tax relief systems for those working at home are not suitable for modern work practices and that such tax relief is difficult to apply for.

In a recent ILO report, it was suggested that work organisation, decent teleworking conditions (working time, occupational health and safety, and inclusion) and skills development should be included in collective bargaining concerning telework and hybrid work (ILO, 2022). The report emphasises that the pandemic prompted extensive changes to legislation related to remote work in many countries. During 2020 and 2021, there were collectively negotiated responses concerning facilitating transitions in work organisation, ensuring decent teleworking conditions and promoting skills development (ILO, 2022, pp. 177–180). Agreements related to organisational transitions have concerned the

voluntary nature of remote work arrangements, equipment and the associated costs, cybersecurity and data protection. To guarantee decent teleworking conditions, agreements have been reached concerning working time regulation, workers' control over their own work schedules, the times they are reachable, time monitoring and the right to disconnect. Agreements addressing occupational safety and health standards and the equal treatment of on-site and off-site workers in respect of earnings and opportunities for career development were also reached. Skills development agreements have included access to training to ensure the use of technologies and the acquisition of digital skills.

In sum, it is fair to say that there is a lively debate around hybrid work, which is first and foremost concerned with its regulation/legislation and how it should be organised. This suggests the need for all stakeholders – including employees, employers and their representatives – to agree on the conditions under which hybrid work should ideally be performed. In principle, this kind of agreement can take place at various levels, from the EU level to the team or even individual level, and should take into account issues such as health and safety, work–life balance, working time, associated costs, commuting, and the need for leadership and management skills.

3 Experiences of implementing hybrid work during the pandemic

This chapter looks at experiences of implementing hybrid work in organisations based in Europe. The focus is how companies have implemented hybrid work or are planning to do so. The data were collected at the end of the second year of the pandemic (2021), when many companies and other organisations were starting to discuss, design, implement and test hybrid work arrangements. Most companies did not yet have much experience with hybrid work systems at the time of data collection but were planning hybrid work arrangements based on their experiences with company-wide remote work during the pandemic.

The 27 country reports and other online documents linked to the country reports contained a total of 80 examples of the implementation of hybrid work from different organisations. These organisations represented 21 different sectors of activity: finance

(*N* = 23), ICT and telecommunications (*N* = 19), insurance (*N* = 6), public administration (*N* = 6), utilities (*N* = 6), online retail (*N* = 3) and others (*N* = 17). The examples of how hybrid work has been implemented have been classified according to five main themes in the information provided to describe them:

- agreements and policies related to hybrid work
- support structures and practices that facilitate hybrid work
- managerial challenges related to hybrid work
- motivation for implementing hybrid work
- how office space has been adapted to hybrid work

The elements associated with each of the factors are summarised in Table 6 and are discussed in detail in this chapter.

Table 6: Critical factors in implementing hybrid work: summary of themes and elements

Theme	Elements
Agreements and policies (<i>N</i> = 107)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Specific number of days/weeks in the office required (<i>N</i> = 40) ○ General policies related to space and location (<i>N</i> = 22) ○ Employees’ freedom to choose location (<i>N</i> = 15) ○ Policy regarding working hours (<i>N</i> = 7) ○ Defined percentage of monthly working time spent in the office or remotely (<i>N</i> = 7) ○ Specific number of days per year allowed for working abroad (<i>N</i> = 6) ○ Local, team-level agreement (<i>N</i> = 5) ○ Conditions for hybrid work (<i>N</i> = 5) ○ Costs (<i>N</i> = 3)
Support structures and practices (<i>N</i> = 53)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Technology and applications (<i>N</i> = 13) ○ Training and guidelines (<i>N</i> = 13) ○ Communication and virtual events (<i>N</i> = 12) ○ Grant for furnishing home office (<i>N</i> = 9) ○ Support for mental and physical well-being (<i>N</i> = 6)
Managerial challenges (<i>N</i> = 30)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Communication and information sharing (<i>N</i> = 6) ○ Interpersonal relationships and sense of community (<i>N</i> = 5) ○ Ensuring well-being (<i>N</i> = 4) ○ Adaptive management approach (<i>N</i> = 4) ○ Addressing employee needs (<i>N</i> = 4) ○ Creating a culture of trust (<i>N</i> = 4) ○ Other (<i>N</i> = 3)

Theme	Elements
Motivation for implementing hybrid work (N = 27)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase employee productivity, motivation and well-being (N = 8) To maintain organisational culture and cohesion (N = 4) To attract new employees (N = 3) To provide structure and stability for employees (N = 2) To maintain flexibility and autonomy (N = 2) To reduce office space costs (N = 2) To eliminate the commute (N = 2)
Office space adaptation (N = 22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No assigned desks (N = 5) Multifunctional office (N = 5) More meeting rooms (N = 3) Less office space (N = 3) Community space (N = 3) Other (N = 5)

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Agreements and policies

The agreements and policies presented in the national reports were mainly related to organisation-specific solutions in terms of the required number of days in the office when adopting hybrid work. Most organisations required employees to spend one to three days in the office per week, but this was defined in various ways. In some organisations, a minimum number of telework days was specified, whereas, in others, the policies defined a minimum number of days that should be spent in the office. As not all jobs are compatible with remote working, these specifications applied to specific groups of workers only. In many organisations, employees were grouped into those who permanently work in the office, those who are permanent remote workers and those who could adopt a so-called hybrid model.

In several examples, employees who could work remotely had complete freedom to choose where they worked; in others, work needed to be conducted within the country but it was otherwise flexible. In some organisations, a specific number of working days when an employee could work abroad was defined. In some cases, teams were given autonomy and responsibility to agree on the number and organisation of office working days based on team-specific needs. Additionally, there were general policies regarding the use of office space. For example, one German company did not offer fixed workstations, reducing the number of workstations

available. If no working spaces were available, the employee was free to leave after one hour and end their working day.

Support structures and practices

In some of the cases, organisations implementing hybrid work identified supporting practices and structures that were believed to facilitate its success. Technological tools and applications were the most central category of support structures. Technologies such as virtual platforms that facilitate online collaboration were viewed as valuable types of communication tools when meeting face to face was not possible. In addition, companies have developed new systems, for example, for managing and booking workstations in the office. Management and employee training and guidelines were mentioned in several cases as important support structures; examples include training for managing remote teams, health and safety guides for working from home, and employee training in digital skills and data security. Regular formal and informal communication practices and virtual events to ensure a sense of community and organisational culture have been put in place. In several organisations, a monetary allowance was provided to employees for furnishing an ergonomic home office. Finally, new support structures for maintaining physical and mental well-being in hybrid workforces were put in place. For example, in a Cypriot consultancy, a psychologist was made available around the clock for employees.

Portugal: Team agreement on coordinating working time

The model of hybrid work implemented in the Municipality permits workers, whose functions allow them, to telework a maximum of four days per week, requiring, in all situations, that at least one of the weekly working days must be in-person and that on one of the days of the week the team must work together in-person.

(Public administration)

Estonia: Using collaboration technologies

When previously most of the communication and activities were face-to-face, now [employees] have started using different virtual platforms like Slack, Confluence and Google products to facilitate communication.

(Finance sector)

Challenges for managers

Some specific managerial challenges identified by companies in relation to hybrid work were mentioned in the country reports. Particular issues for managers to address when managing and leading hybrid-working employees were also highlighted. These are challenges that may require new competencies and training for managers. Based on their experiences, the companies found that they should pay specific attention to communication and information sharing and facilitate the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. In some cases, a culture of trust was underlined as a prerequisite for the hybrid model to work properly.

Additionally, in most cases, the companies believed that the managerial approach should be flexible and that employee experiences should be constantly monitored. The organisation of hybrid work and its practices and policies should be adjusted according to employee- and team-level needs. In this context, leaders are seen as people who can share power, put the needs of the employees first and help people develop and perform as well as possible. Another challenge for managers is ensuring employee well-being when it is difficult for them to directly and continuously ascertain their subordinates' circumstances.

Motivation to implement hybrid work

The motivation to implement hybrid work was mostly based, on the one hand, on the positive experiences gained from remote work during the pandemic (which was found to increase employee motivation,

productivity and well-being) and, on the other hand, on the negative implications of not meeting face to face (Eurofound, 2023, Annex 10, Table 4).

Additionally, hybrid work was regarded as a crucial factor in attracting new employees. The opportunities to reduce office space costs and reduce commuting were also mentioned as motivating factors. Other organisations justified their implementation of hybrid work as a way of maintaining organisational culture and group cohesion and of providing structure and stability for employees by encouraging them to spend time in the office. Face-to-face meetings were also considered important from the perspective of knowledge sharing and organisational innovativeness. Hybrid work was justified in some cases as an opportunity not only to maintain autonomy and flexibility but also to maintain social relationships and provide structure and stability for employees.

Environmental sustainability was also mentioned in some contributions as a benefit or opportunity of implementing hybrid work. Emphasis was put on the reduction in commuting, and therefore also in CO₂ emissions. For example, Greenpeace Germany (2020) commissioned a study in the early days of COVID-19 that concluded that 5.4 million tons of carbon emissions could be saved if 40% of employees worked from home two days per week. This would amount to reducing the emissions caused by commuter traffic by 18%. A study on the impact of telework on CO₂ emissions carried out in the wider context of Eurofound's research on telework in the EU showed that calculating the magnitude of such impact is complex (Bisello and Profous, 2022). This complexity makes it very difficult to calculate the environmental benefits of telework.

Sweden: Developing management and leadership practices

For the workplace of the future to contribute to a strong employee experience, managers and leadership need to create the conditions for and encourage strong collegial interaction in both the physical and digital environment. Maintaining and strengthening collegial interaction when we are not always physically on site becomes even more important. This requires a strategic focus on maintaining and strengthening interaction, both by staff and managers.

(Research institute)

Adapting office space

In some companies, changes to office space were made, or considered necessary, to facilitate hybrid work (Eurofound, 2023, Annex 10, Table 5). Many examples highlighted the need for more meeting rooms as opposed to single workstations, as the office would be used primarily for meetings and spending time with colleagues. Some organisations have been transforming their spaces into multifunctional offices to better cater to individual and team-specific work needs and to make the space more efficient and attractive.

Additionally, some organisations reported moving to smaller spaces, as most of the workforce would be working remotely for a significant portion of the week and thus individually assigned desks were not needed. The office space was, in many cases, described as a community space and a place for meeting colleagues, rather than for concentrating on work as in the traditional office setting. Accordingly, the office designs associated with the hybrid model featured more group work elements and more meeting rooms than in a traditional office. Some organisations reported establishing working hubs in more remote areas for those employees who lived further away from the main office but who wished to work outside their homes. As an interesting example of municipality-level support for remote work, and therefore hybrid work, the City of Vilnius has set up city-centre mobile workstations equipped with Wi-Fi for anyone to use free of charge.

Core issues involved

The examples collected for this research show that the motivation to implement hybrid work is mostly driven by the positive implications of telework, such as the employer's opportunity to apply flexible working structures and the employee's increased autonomy over the place and time of their work and decreased need to commute. These aspects have been associated with increased employee productivity, motivation and well-being. In addition, the possibilities of attracting new employees and reducing costs related to office space have been discussed as important motivators for implementing hybrid work. The implementation of hybrid work seems to also be motivated by the opportunity to provide structure and stability to employees while maintaining the organisational culture and cohesion by ensuring face-to-face interaction at the organisation's premises.

Much of the hybrid work discussion revolves around the questions of what constitutes an optimal number of telework days per week and what types of company-wide policies are needed to ensure that the benefits of both telework and office work are achieved. In addition, the need for support structures and practices that ensure productivity and well-being, and the maintenance of organisational culture and a sense of community, are central issues to be taken into consideration when planning how hybrid work will be organised. For many organisations, the shift to hybrid

Hungary: Implementation of hybrid work in a financial institution

A Hungarian financial institution with 3,300 employees made the decision to switch permanently to a hybrid working model once the pandemic situation allowed a return to the office. This means that in jobs where remote work is possible, employees must spend at least half of their monthly working hours in the office. Working hours are flexible. Employees are free to allocate their working time between 7 a.m. and 8 p.m. Meetings can only be organised between 8 a.m. and 5 p.m.

The decision to implement hybrid work was driven by the employees' general need for flexibility and the increasing shortage of labour in the banking sector. Moreover, based on an internal survey, 90% of the employees considered working from home to be as effective as working at the office. With this arrangement the company seeks to maintain trust and loyalty among existing employees and to attract talented young employees.

In the hybrid work arrangement, the primary function of the office building is to serve as a community space and a place for maintaining personal relationships and team cohesion. The office has been prepared for hybrid work by updating the meeting rooms with video and audio technologies to support the involvement of remote workers in meetings.

(Finance sector)

work seems to be an opportunity to change the organisational culture towards agility and flexibility by providing employees with more influence over the time and place of their work based on their tasks and personal preferences. This requires initial trust, but also contributes to building a culture of trust if implemented in a way that provides employees with supportive structures: for example, training for managing remote teams, health and safety guidelines for working from home, training in digital skills and data security, regular formal and informal communication practices, and support structures for maintaining physical and mental well-being. This also entails the flexibility of management in monitoring the employee- and team-level experience, and adjusting the organisation and its hybrid work practices and policies according to changing individual and organisational needs.

In the telework literature, the focus has primarily been on the individual who works away from the employer's premises (for example, task independence has been highlighted as one of the success factors of telework).

However, the discussion on hybrid work regarded team-level agreement as a viable approach to ensure well-functioning hybrid working. Moreover, team-level needs are central in developing the physical environment. In many companies, the office space is being adapted to facilitate teamwork and maintain a sense of community by providing more spaces for serendipitous interaction. Overall, the meaning of 'the office' seems to be shifting from 'the primary place of work' to a community space in which the main purpose is to meet and work with colleagues.

The examples of the implementation of hybrid work models show that there are multiple options for implementing the temporal, physical, social and virtual elements of hybrid work. The feasibility and success of different arrangements depend on legislation, organisational and team-level objectives, task descriptions, and individual needs and preferences. The next chapter will discuss the main hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities that, according to the information collected through the national reports, can be expected in the implementation of hybrid work models.

4 Expected hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities

During the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020–2022, many local, national and global surveys were conducted concerning the expectations of both employees and management about the post-pandemic hybrid work outlook. In a global survey conducted in late 2020, 9 out of 10 respondents said they wanted to work remotely at least some of the time, and only a small proportion of workers – 1 in 4 – would switch to a completely remote model if they could (Strack et al, 2021). This wish to continue availing themselves of remote work and telework options is not limited to those with ‘digital’, ‘knowledge’ or ‘office’ jobs but also includes those working in social care, services and manufacturing. With regard to temporal flexibility, 36% of respondents wanted a traditional nine-to-five job with fully fixed hours, 44% would prefer a combination of fixed and flexible time, and 20% would like to have complete time flexibility.

In a survey carried out for Microsoft’s Work Trend index in early 2022,⁴ the number of people engaging in hybrid work was up by 7% year on year (to 38%); over half of respondents (52%), especially those in the Gen Z (born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s) and millennial (born between the early 1980s and mid-1990s) cohorts, said they were likely to consider shifting to hybrid or remote work in the year ahead (Microsoft, 2022). From an organisational viewpoint, this may result in huge challenges if these preferences are not properly taken into account. The results of a survey conducted by McKinsey & Company suggest that the majority of organisations see value in hybrid work and are planning to combine remote and on-site working post-pandemic (Alexander et al, 2021). Most executives expected that employees would be on site between 21% and 80% of the time or between one and four days per week.

While the shift to remote work during the pandemic has had positive effects in some organisations, for example, on productivity, managers have observed differences in managing remotely versus in person and have admitted to difficulties in leading their organisations (Alexander et al, 2021). For example, in their interview study of 50 executives about their experiences of leading their organisations during the pandemic, Kane et al (2021) uncovered several challenges. When managing remote workers, innovation capability is weakened because collaboration with others drops off sharply. In addition, there have been challenges in starting new projects relying on virtual collaboration, and establishing and maintaining organisational culture has been difficult, if not impossible, in a virtual setting. Employees, particularly younger employees, received less mentoring and coaching during the shift to remote work than they did before the pandemic.

While these benefits and challenges are related to the extreme case of forced telework during the pandemic, they provide important insights into the hybrid work model, its management and what needs to be considered when planning and implementing it. This chapter looks at the expectations of different actors regarding the hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities of hybrid work at the individual, team, organisational and societal levels. They are described and discussed within a framework for categorising the expected impacts of hybrid work based on a tailored strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats analysis of the country reports and respective linked documents.

Analysis using HCBO framework

The information provided in the national reports was also analysed through an HCBO model, which identified hindrances and challenges as job demands, and benefits and opportunities as resources.

⁴ Across 31 countries, 31,102 full-time employed or self-employed workers were surveyed between 7 January 2022 and 16 February 2022.

HCBO model and hybrid work

The HCBO model is built on the job demands–resources (JD–R) model (Demerouti et al, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017). In the JD–R model, job demands are defined as the physical, psychological, social, organisational and other aspects of work that require sustained efforts from an actor and are, therefore, associated with certain costs. Hybrid work will change the physical, virtual, social and time-related organisational conditions of a job and require the adjustment of employees, managers and organisations to a new context and a new psychological orientation, and collective ways of coping. Two types of job demands have been identified: hindrance and challenge job demands (Cavanaugh et al, 2000; LePine et al, 2005; Van den Broeck et al, 2010). Hindrance job demands involve excessive or undesirable constraints that interfere with or inhibit an actor’s ability to achieve important goals. For example, changing work contexts often involve encountering interruptions in shared workspaces, disturbances in communication with other people and other hurdles that hinder work actions. Challenge demands are those work characteristics that prompt individuals to put effort into the task at hand and that help achieve goals. They create possibilities for personal growth, learning and achievement. Challenge job demands require efforts from an actor that potentially promote the development and achievement of the set goals. They are not an inherently negative aspect of hybrid work, but they may result in hindrances if the resources an employee has at their disposal are not sufficient to support them in meeting the challenges (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

The JD–R model indicates that the resources needed to meet the hindrances and challenges of working from home can also be found in physical, virtual, social and organisational aspects of the home context that are functional in achieving work goals. The model suggests the need to reduce job demands, and the associated reduction in physiological and psychological costs is expected to stimulate personal growth, learning and development. Job resources are the physical, social, organisational or other aspects of a job that reduce hindrance and challenge job demands and the associated costs (see Schaufeli and Bakker, 2004). In hybrid work, it can be expected that the usefulness and functionality of digital tools and proper working conditions at any location act as technological and physical resources, and that colleagues and leaders at the workplace, and family and friends at home, act as social resources. In addition to these contextual resources, hybrid-working employees can rely on their own personal resources. These refer to a remote worker’s or teleworker’s positive self-evaluations and competencies that manifest as proactivity, and their sense of their ability to successfully control and impact their environment (Hobfoll et al, 2018). For example, prior experiences and learned practices involving telework before and during the pandemic can increase personal resources in hybrid work. In this context, two types of resources can be considered: benefits and opportunities. These are explained below.

The type and content of the impacts of hybrid work were identified in the national reports. The actors presenting the hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities and the level of such impact – individual (employees, managers), team, organisation (management, owners) or society – were coded using the following definitions:

- **actors:** the stakeholders presenting the hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities – companies, consultants, the public/media, trade unions and worker representatives, researchers, employer organisations and employer representatives, governments, municipalities, HR professionals, international associations or political parties
- **hindrances:** the kinds of hindrances that might be faced by individuals, teams, organisations, etc. as a result of the implementation of hybrid work arrangements
- **challenges:** the kinds of challenges that might be faced by individuals, teams, organisations, etc. as a result of the implementation of hybrid work arrangements
- **benefits:** the kinds of benefits that could be offered as resources to individuals, teams, organisations, etc. as a result of the implementation of hybrid work arrangements
- **opportunities (enablers):** the kinds of opportunities some features of successful hybrid work can offer to avoid or remove hindrances and overcome challenges
- **level of impact:** who is impacted by the implementation of hybrid work – individuals (employees, managers), teams, organisations (management) or society

Table 7 summarises the categories and frequencies of the expected hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities of hybrid work for individuals, teams, organisations and society, based on the information provided by the national correspondents.

Table 7: Expected hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities of hybrid work at the individual, team, organisational and societal levels

Hindrances (N = 38)	Challenges (N = 99)	Benefits (N = 97)	Opportunities (N = 126)
Individual level (employees, managers)			
Social relations (N = 4), health and well-being (N = 4), work-life balance (N = 3), inequality (N = 3), workload (N = 2), costs (N = 2), ICT (N = 2), other (all N = 1): loss of creativity, motivation, data security, precarity, availability of knowledge, surveillance, alienation, taxes	Hybrid work agreements (N = 11), social relations (N = 8), employment relations (N = 5), leadership (N = 5), work-life balance (N = 4), workload (N = 4), working conditions (N = 3), career (N = 2), ICT (N = 2), inequality (N = 2), other (all N = 1): mindset, communication, competence, health and well-being, legislation, location, office, productivity, recruitment, trade union membership, work culture	Work-life balance (N = 13), autonomy (N = 8), reduced commuting (N = 7), efficiency (N = 5), reduced costs (N = 4), health and well-being (N = 3), motivation (N = 3), productivity (N = 3), working conditions (N = 3), creativity (N = 2), knowledge (N = 2), leadership (N = 2), other (all N = 1): career, equality, flexibility, job satisfaction, leisure, recruitment, safety, social relations, trust, working location, workload	Leadership (N = 5), working conditions (N = 4), ICT (N = 4), hybrid work agreements (N = 3), training (N = 3), autonomy (N = 2), costs (N = 2), flexibility (N = 2), guidelines (N = 2), other (all N = 1): work-life balance, physical activity, monitoring, employment relationship, data security
Team level			
Alienation	Hybrid work agreements (N = 2), communication (N = 2), workload (N = 2)	Self-leadership	Hybrid work agreements
Organisational level (management viewpoint)			
Social relations, motivation, work-life balance, health and well-being, surveillance	Leadership (N = 4), hybrid work agreements (N = 4), social relations (N = 4), working conditions (N = 2), employment relationship (N = 2), other: communication, costs, health and well-being, ICT, inequality, office, privacy	Leadership (N = 4), hybrid work agreements (N = 4), social relations (N = 4), working conditions (N = 2), employment relationship (N = 2), other: communication, costs, health and well-being, ICT, inequality, office, privacy	Hybrid work agreements (N = 13), ICT (N = 10), office (N = 9), leadership (N = 7), training (N = 6), communication (N = 5), costs (N = 3), health and well-being (N = 3), recruitment (N = 3), guidelines (N = 2), HR (N = 2), other: concentration, competence, control, employment relationship, participation, working conditions, work culture, working location
Societal level			
Inequality, costs, taxes, knowledge	Employment relationship (N = 3), health and well-being (N = 2), costs (N = 2), other: social relations, working conditions, mindset, communication, implementation, knowledge, office, productivity	Reduced commuting (N = 4), other: working location	Legislation (N = 5), hybrid work agreements (N = 4), tax (N = 3), other: training, working conditions, working location, recruitment, ICT, data security

Source: Network of Eurofound Correspondents

Hindrances

Hindrances (N = 38) form the smallest of the four categories. Most of the expected hindrances are at the individual level, and most of them are related to a lack of social interaction (for example, feelings of isolation), negative effects on health and well-being (for example, mental health problems), work-life balance issues (for example, difficulties in managing the boundaries of work and other domains of life) and inequality (for example, women's dual role in unpaid and paid work). Increased workload, increased costs and inability to purchase equipment to work from home (desks and ICT) were also identified as hindrances associated with hybrid work. At the team and organisational levels, some remarks about the lack of social relations, reduced motivation, problems maintaining work-life

balance and negative effects on health and well-being, and surveillance exercised by the employer through technologies, were made. At the societal level, inequality (between those with children and those without children, for example), knowledge of employees' rights and responsibilities, and the costs and taxes associated with telework from home were highlighted. In a survey from Romania in February 2021, for example, 4 out of 10 women said that their work-life balance had deteriorated; in some cases, they had had to work harder, including working overtime, to meet the job requirements (Stirile PRO TV, 2021). They also had to work more because housework took up more time than usual. In a Dutch financial daily newspaper, a professor of leadership and organisational change stated that hybrid working increases women's housework load and

that women engaged in academic work published fewer articles than usual during forced telework periods (FD, 2021).

Challenges

Challenges ($N = 99$) in hybrid work also appeared mostly at the individual level and included issues related to agreeing on the conditions of hybrid work ('hybrid work agreements'), for example, the necessary expenses to create proper working conditions, including ICT; employment relationships, including the rights and responsibilities of teleworking employees; and career prospects (see Table 7). The expected challenges in social relations concentrated on maintaining relations with co-workers. In addition, the quality of leadership, increased workload and work–life balance were also expected to be challenges in hybrid work.

At the team level, maintaining a sense of community, ensuring appropriate workloads and achieving agreement between employees and employers concerning, for example, working time, appeared to be the main challenges. At the organisational level, challenges were mostly related to the quality of the management and leadership of remote workers, work contracts defining the employment relationship, and proper working conditions, including social ties with co-workers. Similar challenges were found at the societal level: how employment relations, working conditions and their expenses should be arranged and how to guarantee the well-being of remote workers and teleworkers.

Benefits

Benefits ($N = 97$) of hybrid work appear when working remotely, especially at the individual level (see Table 7 and Eurofound, 2023, Annex 8). The ability to balance work and family life and reduced management control seem to be particularly important. Although maintaining work–life balance was seen as both a hindrance (a negative impact of hybrid work) and a challenge (requiring additional efforts from workers), it was also viewed as a benefit due to the increase in autonomy and its potential contribution to improving the health and well-being of individual employees. Time and cost savings from reduced commuting and observations of increased efficiency and productivity when working from home were other expected individual-level benefits of hybrid work. In addition, motivational and creativity-related benefits were mentioned. At the organisational level, the following were commonly expected benefits: cost savings, especially due to reduced office space needs; new opportunities in recruiting new workers; the introduction of new practices; and productivity increases. At the societal level, the identified benefits were related to sustainability issues such as reduced

commuting, which, in addition to reducing CO₂ emissions, prevents traffic jams and saves time for employees.

Opportunities

Opportunities ($N = 126$) were the most prolific of the four categories. They include practices, guidelines and principles identified as important resources when implementing hybrid work (Table 7). Most of the aspects identified reflect an orientation towards the preparation for the post-pandemic period. From the individual perspective, it was deemed important to concentrate development efforts on developing leadership practices, working guidelines, working conditions and ICT as enablers of hybrid work; developing agreements on work arrangements (for example, on costs and training); and increasing autonomy and flexibility.

Most of the expected opportunities were, however, related to the organisational level. From the perspective of organisations, hybrid work was expected to provide an opportunity (but also a requirement) to, among other elements, reconsider and redesign types of work contracts, digitalise work processes and procedures by diversifying ICT use, develop office spaces to better meet the needs of hybrid employees, and develop HR and managerial practices and guidelines. The need for new competencies requires training, and collaboration requires communication. The perceived societal-level opportunities were mostly related to the need to develop and change labour legislation, collective agreements and taxation to incentivise remote work. It is worth noting that, in practice, no team-level opportunities were identified.

Hybrid work as an organisational model

While most of the hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities identified concern the individual or employee level (including managers), the fact that there are other aspects identified at the team, organisational and societal levels confirms that hybrid work is a work organisation model. It permeates those different levels and therefore needs to be observed from various perspectives to be fully understood. For individuals, most hindrances are related to social relations, well-being and work–life balance, areas in which benefits have also been identified. Individual-level challenges were mostly related to the agreed conditions under which hybrid work should take place ('hybrid work agreements') and social relations at work, while opportunities were related to leadership development, improvement of working conditions and ICT. Only a few hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities could be observed at the team level.

At the organisational level, a few hindrances were mentioned, but it is also important to account for tensions related to challenges and opportunities regarding developing hybrid work agreements, ICT, physical premises and leadership. Cost reductions (especially related to working premises), recruitment

and productivity were seen as areas of organisational benefit resulting from hybrid work. At the societal level, employment relationships, health and well-being, and cost issues were identified as challenges, and developing legislation and hybrid work agreements were viewed as opportunities for hybrid work.

5 | Conclusions

The term ‘hybrid work’ became widely used during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was popularised mainly by consulting companies and business journals and was gradually incorporated in everyday discourse. However, clear definitions and consensus about its meaning were lacking, and the concept has been used in various ways. Hybrid work can be thought of as a way of organising work, and it is implemented in practice by referring to the intersection between telework or remote work and on-site work. From the synthesis of findings from recent literature and definitions used during the pandemic, as reported by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents, hybrid work can be interpreted as a form of work organisation that results from the interplay of four main elements: physical, temporal, virtual and social. Each element is composed of different sub-elements that interact with each other and can be combined in many different forms.

There has been a lively debate around hybrid work. This debate has been first and foremost concerned with regulation/legislation regarding hybrid work and how it should be organised. On the one hand, this indicates that existing regulations and legislation – including on telework – may not be sufficient, while, on the other hand, it highlights the need for stakeholders to agree on the conditions under which hybrid work should ideally be performed. In principle, such agreement can be achieved at the individual or team level but also at the organisational, sectoral, national or

even supranational level and should account for issues such as health and safety, work–life balance, working time, associated costs, commuting, and the leadership and management skills required to put it into practice.

The numerous examples of the practical implementation of hybrid work models confirm that there are multiple options for addressing the interaction of the physical, temporal, social and virtual elements of hybrid work. The feasibility and success of different arrangements depend on legislation, organisational and team-level objectives, task descriptions, and individual needs and preferences. Another conclusion from the experiences of implementing hybrid work is that telework and on-site work are seen as performing different, but complementary, functions. In this context, the employer’s premises (usually offices) are increasingly seen as the work location for social interaction, which, for example, promotes the exchange of ideas and innovation, whereas telework is a work situation in which the social feature is not as important, for example, so that more focused, individual, work can be carried out.

In conclusion, concepts such as remote work, telework and ICT-based mobile work put the emphasis on the work carried out away from the organisation’s or employer’s premises, while ‘hybrid work’ accounts for a broader picture by representing the intersection of various work situations, including telework or remote work and work performed at the employer’s premises.

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The term ‘hybrid work’ was popularised with the upsurge of telework during the COVID-19 pandemic, when companies and employees started to discuss ways of organising work after the crisis. The term has been increasingly used to refer to situations in which (teleworkable) work is carried out from two sites: at the usual place of work (normally the employer’s premises) and from home (as experienced during the pandemic) or other locations. However, the concept of hybrid work is still fuzzy and various meanings are attributed to it. This report aims to bring clarity to this concept by exploring the available information from two main sources: recent literature and contributions provided by the Network of Eurofound Correspondents from across the European Union. It summarises the main debates around hybrid work in the Member States and shows how hybrid work has been implemented in practice across Europe. The main hindrances, challenges, benefits and opportunities of hybrid work are also discussed.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) is a tripartite European Union Agency established in 1975. Its role is to provide knowledge in the area of social, employment and work-related policies according to Regulation (EU) 2019/127.

