

**CONFERENCE ON
THE RIGHT TO DISCONNECT AND TELEWORK**

A perspective from the EU institutions, Member States and social partners

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**Steering paper for the Discussion on main challenges and opportunities:
the EU perspective**

Background

Digitalisation is re-shaping everyday life. The world of work is no exception. New and emerging technologies allow for the creation of new jobs while re-shaping existing ones. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the take-up of information and communication technologies (ICT), as many businesses switched almost overnight their operations to remote work in order to comply with social distancing rules. This sudden switch has helped preserve jobs and kept businesses afloat, shedding light on their digital preparedness as well as on the flexibility of workers and managers.

In 2019, fewer than 5% of Europeans were regularly performing telework¹, while the share jumped to 34% in July 2020, at the height of the pandemic.² The surge in remote work arrangements has been more pronounced in countries where telework was already in vogue, while the take-up of telework has since become widespread across the EU. Many workers have been able to reap the benefits of telework in their daily lives, allowing for an improved work-life balance as well as reduced time and resources spent on commuting. Similarly, employers have positively assessed the increased productivity and reduced costs linked to the surge in telework.³

However, the flipside of telework poses challenges ranging from the well-evidenced worsening of gender, socio-economic and territorial inequalities, to the blurring of boundaries between professional and private lives, the impact on mental health and the heightened risks of musculoskeletal diseases. The sudden shift to telework that took place in many workplaces in 2020 was a reaction to a crisis, and was thus not necessarily accompanied by appropriate support measures in other areas, such as education, care, digital infrastructure, and others. In light of these developments, policy-makers have not stood still. Some Member States had already put in place relevant laws and policies even before the pandemic broke out, while others have done so in response to the pandemic, or are considering introducing them.

¹ Eurofound (2020), Right to disconnect in the 27 EU Member States, Working Paper. Available [online](#).

² Eurofound (2020), Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available [online](#).

³ Eurofound (2020), Telework and ICT-based mobile work: Flexible working in the digital age. Available [online](#).

In January 2021, the European Parliament adopted a legislative own-initiative report on the right to disconnect⁴, touching upon many of these challenges and calling on the Commission, among other things, to put forward a legislative proposal on the right to disconnect and fair telework. In June 2021, the Council also adopted its Conclusions on telework⁵, calling on, among others, the Commission to explore the context and evolution of telework and the right to disconnect and facilitate the exchange of good practices. In January 2022, the Commission adopted a Declaration on Digital Rights and Principles for the Digital Decade⁶, reiterating the importance of the right to disconnect and of work-life balance in a digital environment.

The Commission has also followed-up to the Parliament's resolution by reaching out to social partners, who are in the process of implementing a 2020 Framework Agreement on Digitalisation⁷ (including modalities of connecting and disconnecting), and by launching a study to analysing the trends and regulatory landscape of telework and the right to disconnect in Europe, in the context of digitalisation and the future of work.

This conference on the right to disconnect and telework, co-organised by the European Commission and the European Parliament, is part of the EU's response to the aforementioned challenges and the need to gather different stakeholders' views and ideas on how to tackle them. In this context, participants to this discussion are invited to reflect on the below questions.

⁴ Available [online](#).

⁵ Available [online](#).

⁶ Available [online](#).

⁷ Available [online](#).