

**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 Session 1:
National approaches to telework and the right to disconnect**

Background

In 2019, only 5% of Europeans were regularly doing telework.¹ In July 2020, as a result of the Covid-19 crisis and its related restrictions, 34% were.² Even before the pandemic-induced surge in telework, some North-Western Member States had high percentages of people working from home. These ranged from 25% in Belgium to 37% in Sweden.³ The same figures were much lower in Southern and Eastern Member States, like Spain (8%), Italy (5%), Bulgaria (1%) or Poland (14%).⁴ Lockdowns across the EU led many of the latter group of countries' businesses to swiftly switch their workforce online. As of July 2020, more than half of Spaniards and Italians, more than a quarter of Bulgarians and nearly four out of ten Poles were working from home "usually or occasionally"⁵, more or less in line with their North-Western European counterparts (e.g. around half of the workforce in Finland and Ireland).

Such systemic changes have prompted widespread debates on the need for ad hoc policy measures on telework and, most notably, on the right to disconnect. Prior to the pandemic, only four Member States (France, Belgium, Italy and Spain) had adopted legislation aimed at allowing employees to disconnect outside working hours, whereas 21 Member States had put laws in place to protect teleworkers. The issue was and is dealt with through collective agreements in Finland, Denmark, Sweden (at sectoral level), Cyprus and Latvia (at company level).⁶

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 (2021). Telework, ICT-based mobile work in Europe: Trends, challenges and the right to disconnect. Available [online](#).

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ Eurofound (2020). Regulations to address work-life balance in digital flexible working arrangements. Available [online](#).

Furthermore, the COVID-19 crisis has shed light on widespread mental health issues among the population, and pushed work-life balance at the top of policy-makers' agendas. Although there are many factors that influence psychosocial well-being, as a result of the above four further countries in the EU have recently introduced relevant laws on the right to disconnect, namely Greece, Luxembourg, Portugal and Slovakia.⁷ Ireland has adopted a national code of practice, while Austria, Spain and Hungary have strengthened their existing regulatory frameworks, and Belgium has put forward a new law which ensures a right to disconnect to all its federal civil servants. Croatia, Germany and Poland are also mulling legislative action.⁸

Member States' approaches differ, with some countries favouring statutory obligations for employers and others mandating social partners and/or corporate-wide practices. There is nonetheless a clear, overall trend of renewed policy thinking and action on how work-life balance is dealt with in the digital age.

In light of the above, participants to this panel discussion may want to reflect on the following questions.

⁷ Eurofound (forthcoming). Legislative provisions on the right disconnect before and after the pandemic outbreak.

⁸ *Ibidem*.