

Allianz Research

Remote work: Is the honeymoon over?

20 July 2022



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- *In 2020, the pandemic made working from home the norm for millions of employees in the EU. Two years later, how do they feel about remote working? In our 2022 Allianz Pulse survey, we asked 1,000 respondents each in Germany, France and Italy about their perceptions of the benefits and challenges.*
- *Compared to the previous round of the survey, the share of employees that reported not being able to work from home decreased in all three countries. Nonetheless, the share of those going back to the office also increased in both the hybrid and mostly full-time formats: 32% in Germany and Italy, and 29% in France (compared to 25% in all three countries the year before).*
- *The benefits of remote working are clear: Respondents mostly cited the elimination of commuting (men: 51%, women: 58%), time flexibility (49%) and lower costs (men: 26%, women: 28%), amongst others.*
- *However, the share of respondents citing challenges increased twofold in almost all categories: two years of working from home has clearly sharpened the awareness of the downsides. Social contact and lack of networking opportunities was the top challenge (men: 29%, women: 27%), followed by blurred private life boundaries (men: 17%, women: 20%), inadequate workspace (men: 20%, women: 18%), juggling domestic activities with work responsibilities (men: 18%, women: 20%) and reduced productivity (men: 14%, women: 12%).*
- *Working remotely is not a “one size fits all” solution. The double shift for women overshadows the flexibility of working from home, and the digital divide (internet access, digital skills, and internet usage) could widen inequality. Policymakers and employers need to keep these considerations in mind when designing the future of work.*

Employees are taking off the rose-tinted glasses when it comes to remote working.

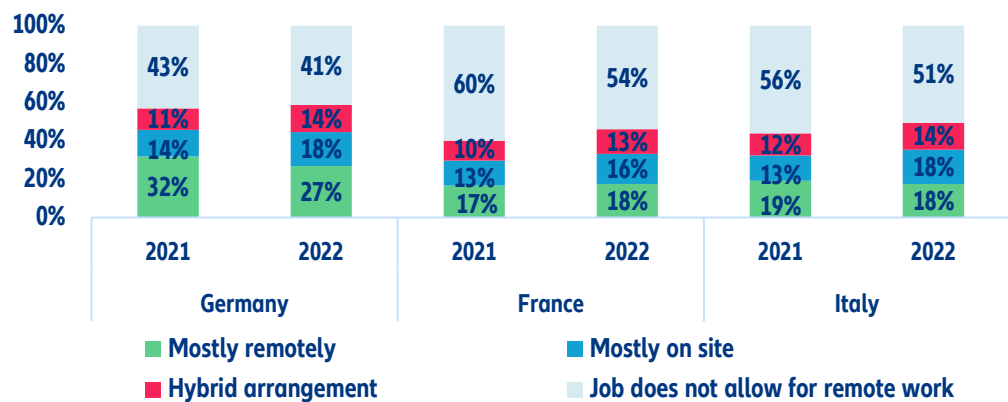
In 2020, the pandemic made working from home the norm for millions of employees. Since then, the future of work has moved into the spotlight of public and policy interest, from tech moguls issuing ultimatums to teleworkers via e-mail to countries making remote work a legal right. But how do employees feel about working from home, and have their perceptions changed since the onset of the pandemic? In our 2022 Allianz Pulse¹ survey, **we asked 1,000**

¹ See our report [Allianz Pulse 2022: United in pessimism](#).

respondents in Germany, France and Italy about their perceived benefits and challenges of teleworking.

Compared to the previous round of the survey², the share of employees that reported not being able to work from home decreased in all three countries. Nonetheless, the share of respondents going back to the office also increased both in the hybrid and mostly full-time formats: 32% in Germany and Italy and 29% in France (compared to 25% in all three countries the year before, see Figure 1).

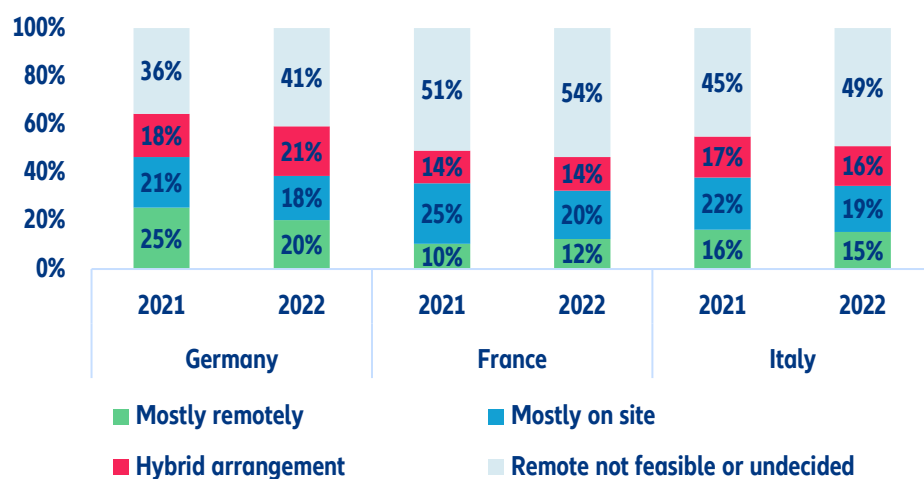
Figure 1: Respondents that reported working remotely as a result from the pandemic (%)



Sources: Allianz Pulse surveys (2021, 2022)

We asked respondents how they would like to work once pandemic worries are off the table and their responses stayed more or less stable year on year: Working mostly remotely lost 5pp of support in Germany and lost 1pp in Italy but the share of its supporters in France increased by 2pp (see Figure 2).

Figure 2: Stated preferences of respondents regarding working arrangements (%)

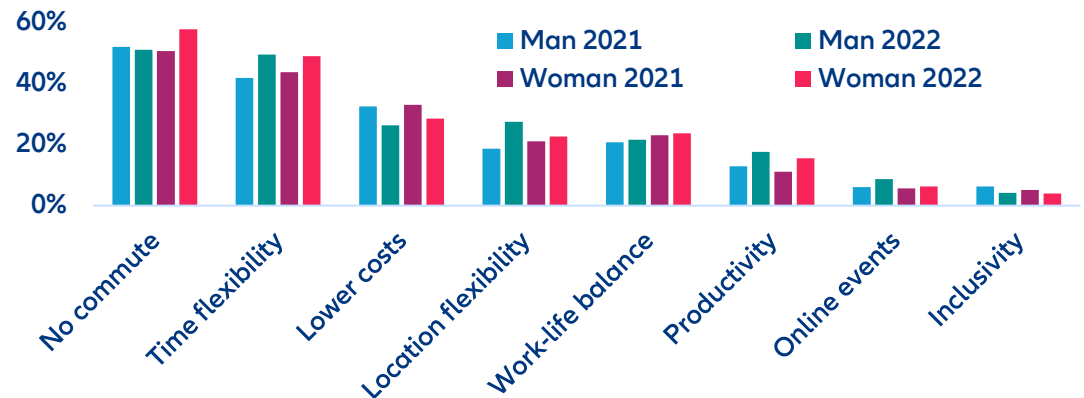


Sources: Allianz Pulse surveys (2021, 2022)

² See our report [Allianz Pulse 2021: Old beliefs die hard](#).

The benefits are clear: **Respondents mostly cited the elimination of commuting (men: 51%, women: 58%), time flexibility (49%) and lower costs (men: 26%, women: 28%), amongst others** (see Figure 3) as the top advantages.

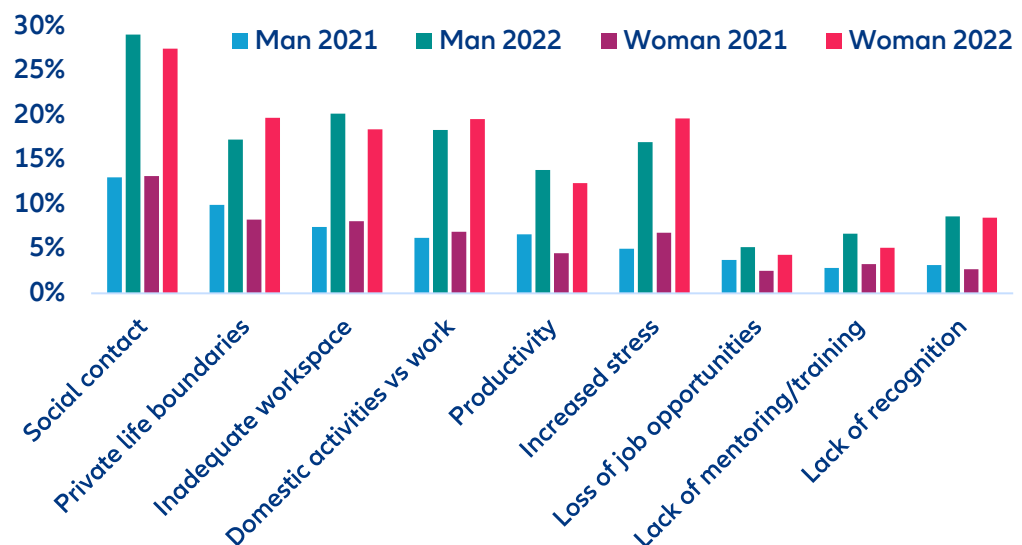
Figure 3: Perceived benefits of working from home, by gender (%)



Sources: Allianz Pulse surveys (2021, 2022)

But respondents also recognized that **remote work does not come without challenges. In sharp contrast to the benefits – where perceptions hardly changed – the share of respondents citing challenges increased twofold in almost all categories:** two years of WFH experience has sharpened the awareness of the downsides. Social contact and lack of networking opportunities was the top challenge (men: 29%, women: 27%), followed by blurred private life boundaries (men: 17%, women: 20%), inadequate workspace (men: 20%, women: 18%), juggling domestic activities with work responsibilities (men: 18%, women: 20%) and reduced productivity (men: 14%, women: 12%) as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Perceived challenges regarding remote work, by gender (%)



Sources: Allianz Pulse surveys (2021, 2022)

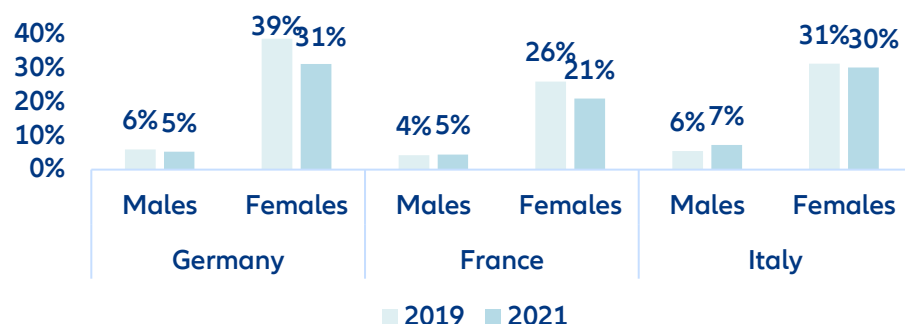
Working remotely is not a “one size fits all” solution.

The seismic shift we experienced during the pandemic and the newfound “teleworkability” will undoubtedly keep working from home a common occurrence for years to come. However, there are some important considerations for policy- and decisions-makers drafting the new rulebook of ways of working. For instance, while the end of commuting is a burden lifted from workers’ shoulders, the reduced social contact in the office may result in a loss of promotion and learning opportunities, creating a wider inequality divide. To add to this, increasing remote work puts the digital skills gap in the spotlight: Those that lag in formal education as well as in digital skills are bound to be left behind. In this context, employers, workers and governments need to adapt to this new reality, addressing the distributional effects that the shift to remote work will bring.

In addition, while some studies³ have found that that working from home has no detrimental impact on productivity, our survey yields some different insights, suggesting that workers need to be equipped with tools that will help them achieve their full potential: proper IT infrastructure, constant communication to understand the context in which manager and employees are working to avoid misunderstandings, psychological safety – with clear functional roles to avoid the feeling of free-riding and resentment –, and building a common identity to provide employees with a common purpose, which can help improve productivity and employee engagement⁴.

Finally, remote work is not an easy fix for existing gender inequality in the workplace. In fact, for women and especially mothers, the switch to remote working during the pandemic sparked a “double-double shift” in which they were always “on”: burdened by juggling both domestic activities and work responsibilities. As Figure 5 shows, a larger share of women than men are also inactive due to caring responsibilities. This suggests that the flexibility offered by work-from-home arrangements is not enough: Increasing female labor force participation in Europe will require a multidimensional approach that includes workplace flexibility, caregiving facilities and shared domestic responsibilities.

Figure 5: Inactive population due to caring responsibilities by sex, % of population outside labor force wanting to work



Source: Eurostat

³ Barrero, J., N. Bloom and S. Davis (2020), *Why Working From Home Will Stick*, <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3741644>.

⁴ Grant, A. (2022), *How Science Can Fix Remote Work*, <https://tinyurl.com/7apxbxac>.

ANNEX

- **Overall responsibility for methods:**

Allianz Research, Allianz SE

- **Planning and drawing the sample:**

Qualtrics

- **Target groups surveyed:**

French resident population, age 18 and over in France

German resident population, age 18 and over in Germany

Italian resident population, age 18 and over in Italy

- **Number of respondents:**

First wave: 3,200 persons (1,049 from France, 1,075 from Germany, 1,076 from Italy)

Second wave: 3,137 persons (1,050 from France, 1,050 from Germany, 1,037 from Italy)

- **Sampling method:**

Representative quota sampling

Qualtrics was given quotas for how many people to survey and which criteria to use in selecting respondents. The quotas were distributed in accordance with official statistics among sex, age groups and education.

- **Representativeness:**

A comparison with official statistics shows that the survey data on the whole corresponds to the total population age 18 and over in the three countries.

- **Type of survey:**

Web-based survey

- **Date of survey execution:**

First wave: 21.05.2021 – 02.06.2021

Second wave: 20.05.2022 – 10.06.2022

1 Statistics

- **Sex (in % of respondents)**

	First wave			Second wave		
	France	Germany	Italy	France	Germany	Italy
Male	47%	51%	50%	47.90%	49.40%	52.60%
Female	52%	49%	50%	51.70%	49.90%	47.30%
Diverse	0%	0%	0%	0.40%	0.70%	0.20%

- **Age (in % of respondents)**

	First wave			Second wave		
	France	Germany	Italy	France	Germany	Italy
Gen Z	10%	11%	10%	13%	12%	11%
Millennials	26%	27%	26%	29%	30%	26%
Gen X	32%	29%	36%	31%	30%	38%
Boomers	31%	32%	28%	27%	29%	24%
Silent	1%	1%	2%	0%	0%	1%

- Education (in % of respondents)

	First wave			Second wave		
	France	Germany	Italy	France	Germany	Italy
Primary	7%	22%	17%	14%	20%	14%
Secondary	50%	49%	60%	49%	56%	61%
Tertiary	43%	29%	24%	37%	24%	25%

- Income⁵ (in % of respondents)

	First wave			Second wave		
	France	Germany	Italy	France	Germany	Italy
Less than 1000 EUR	16%	19%	29%	17%	13%	29%
1000 – 2000 EUR	38%	32%	43%	39%	30%	44%
2000 – 3000 EUR	25%	25%	18%	27%	30%	18%
3000 – 4000 EUR	11%	13%	5%	10%	15%	5%
4000 – 5000 EUR	5%	6%	3%	4%	7%	2%
Above 5000 EUR	4%	5%	2%	3%	5%	2%

⁵ Monthly income after tax.

These assessments are, as always, subject to the disclaimer provided below.

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