

Working from home: the possibility or necessity?²

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Summary

- The study describes the use of work from home across socio-demographic groups in the Czech Republic during the coronavirus year 2020. It shows how work-from-home arrangements relate to workers' characteristics, such as their education, industry, gender, and type of household. The analysis reveals the perceived barriers to and benefits of working from home.
- The share of workers from home strongly correlated with the development of the epidemiological situation. The share of employees working from home reached 40% during the first spring wave of the pandemic and only 30 % during the diametrically larger wave in the autumn. The probability that workers switched to working from home was strongly related to their level of education and industry. Working from home was 20 percentage points (pp) more likely for university graduates than for workers with the high-school leaving exam (maturita) and as much as 40 percentage points more likely than for workers without the high-school leaving exam. Employment in finance and IT and in education was associated with 20 pp. more work from home compared to workers in unspecified sectors or, for example, in trade and services. The lowest incidence of transitions to work from home was quite naturally reported by the industry and agriculture sectors (by about 8 pp) and also overall during the autumn epidemic wave (by 5 pp).

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- The main reason respondents gave for not working from home was the nature of their work. Onetenth of respondents also stated that they preferred to work at their workplace because it suited them better. Furthermore, the same share declared that their employer did not allow them to work from home.
- Workers who did work from home embraced the time flexibility it provided and the time they saved by not commuting to work. On average, their reported productivity was at a similar level as if they had been working in the workplace; women even reported slightly higher productivity at home. A notable share of men with small children reported that they were less focused on work at home. In the future, most workers, including those who did not work from home during 2020, would like to work from home for 50 % of their working hours.
- Greater use of work from home arrangements did not result in safer behaviour within corporate information systems. Almost half of those who worked from home did not have to make any IT security-related changes. The greatest insistence on IT security was felt in the IT and finance sectors, the least in education and culture.
- The group that switched most extensively to working from home consisted of workers with higher education who work in positions that allowed this transition. It is therefore very unlikely that we will see any significant expansion in work-from-home arrangements in the post-pandemic period compared to the situation before 2020. Working from home is primarily hindered by the structure of the Czech economy and the nature of the work performed. Significant changes can be expected only with the possible onset of the phenomena of Industry 4.0. However, that will depend on the further development of information technologies and a sufficient level of digital literacy, with most workers able to use digital technology.