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From Necessity to a New Reality: working from home after the covid-19 pandemic²

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Summary

- Prior to the covid-19 pandemic, the Czech Republic was among countries with a low proportion of employees working from home. During the pandemic, working from home increased significantly due to anti-pandemic measures.
- This study maps the extent of working from home in the Czech Republic before, during, and after the covid-19 pandemic. We are interested in whether the significantly higher prevalence of working from home was sustained after the pandemic, similarly as in other countries around the world. We also focus on whether different demographic and socio-economic groups engage in working from home at different rates, and the degree to which current rates of working from home match the desires and preferences of different groups of workers.
- Based on data from 2018–2023, we show that there has been a significant and sustained increase in working from home in the Czech Republic as a result of the pandemic. After the pandemic finally ended in 2023, one in ten employees continued to work from home, compared to only one in twenty before the pandemic. Employees working from home most often do so for fewer than half of their working hours.

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- The post-pandemic differences in the extent of home-based work between women and men are surprisingly small. Education, on the other hand, plays a crucial role. People without a high school diploma rarely work from home, and remote work is conducted almost exclusively by employees with at least a high school diploma. Of those with a university degree, about a quarter work from home.
- People aged 25–44 are the most likely to work from home, the share of them working from home increased from 6% to more than 12%. The highest relative increase in working from home has been among the youngest group, aged 20–24, where the share has increased five times, from just under 2% to 10%.
- Although parents are now working from home slightly more often than those without children, the increase in home-based work was surprisingly similar for both groups. While the presence and number of children has little effect on parents' engagement in home-based work, the age of the youngest child is quite crucial. Rates of working from home increased most among parents with younger children. The increase was modest for mothers with a youngest child aged 13–17, and there was no increase at all for fathers. Women with a child aged 0–2 were the most likely to work from home, and also experienced the largest increase after the pandemic. Today, almost a third of these mothers work from home.
- While the size of a company or workplace does not play a major role in working from home, the sector of employment is quite important. Working from home is naturally used mainly in occupations that are easier to perform from home. It is mainly found in information and telecommunications, real estate, finance, and insurance sectors. In information and telecommunications, fully half of employees now work at least partly from home.
- There is a positive correlation between household partners in the extent and frequency of working from home. If one partner does not work from home at all, it is very likely that their partner also does not. People who work more from home than from work have partners who are also more likely to work predominantly from home. Conversely, people who work less from home and are more often at work have partners who also work mostly at their workplace and only spend a small part of their working hours from home. While these similarities in working from home between partners may be due to people choosing partners with similar educational backgrounds or those who work in similar sectors, they are also likely to reflect similar preferences of partners for working from home.
- Based on preferences expressed in the January 2023 survey, 66% of men and 70% of women would prefer to work from home several days a week, most often two or three. Workers' preferences about the extent to which they engage in working from home largely correspond to whether and to what extent they already work from home. However, preferences and reality do not always coincide, and some work from home more often than they would like. At the same time, however, more than half of those working solely in their workplace would prefer to work at least partly from home. Overall, therefore, we can expect that working from home will continue to increase, if employees' preferences coincide with employers' capabilities and willingness of employers to allow working from home.
- Increased home-based work in the Czech Republic could also lead to higher rates of labour market participation of mothers of young children. Earlier returns of women from parental leave, facilitated by the possibility of working from home or by partners working from home who can take over some part of childcare responsibilities could help to reduce persistent gender inequalities in employment rates and incomes.

- In the long term, the documented increase in working from home is likely to allow for increases in commuting distance and commuting time. This may enhance labour mobility, strengthen the matching of labour supply and demand, and increase overall competition in the labour market. Given that working from home is primarily among workers with higher education and in better paid occupations, further growth in working from home may also contribute to growing economic and social disparities in society.