

PRESS RELEASE



COVID-19: Double-edged sword of greater work flexibility and increased isolation requires urgent action by employers – new report from Economist Intelligence Unit, supported by Allianz Partners

– Updated, transparent supports and policies reflective of the ‘new normal’ can improve wellbeing and productivity –

OCTOBER 8 2020: The COVID-19 pandemic has provided many employees with new and more flexible options on where, when and how they work, with working from home being enforced by government guidance in many cases. But it has also challenged their physical and mental health, productivity, and ability to communicate effectively at work. This is according to new research published today by the Economist Intelligence Unit, supported by Allianz Partners.

The research, contained in *‘The Future of Work and Digital Wellbeing – protecting employees in a COVID-19-shaped world’*, surveyed 1,000 full-time employees working from home in the UK, Canada, France, Singapore and United Arab Emirates due to government restrictions imposed during COVID-19.

A total of **75% of respondents said they want to work from home more post-pandemic**, with **69%** wanting to **work from home for most of the working week** (i.e. at least three days). However, the research also found that:

- **61%** of all respondents have **not had a good conversation** with their manager about **mental health** during lockdown
- **36%** were **concerned about the long-term effects** on their **mental health**
- **46%** **felt isolated** working from home during COVID-19
- **Over 50%** reported **new aches and pains** since lockdown
- **77% of respondents said employers should provide guidance and rules around working from home.**
- **Only 58%** of respondents in **France** working from home during COVID-19 **felt sufficiently supported by their employer with regards to their mental health**, compared to over three quarters (**77%**) in the **UAE**.
- Over two-thirds (**67%**) of respondents feel they are **just as productive working from home**
- **58%** felt they have **struggled** to do at least **part of their job remotely**

These findings represent a clear call to action for employers to better understand, support and accommodate their employees’ needs from a physical and mental wellbeing perspective. The report **recommends** that

employers should consider **changes at every level of their organisation** in order to maximise the benefits and minimize risks of digital transformations:

- First and foremost, **leadership** is central. Executives need to set the example around the behaviours they are trying to instil; whether on returning to the office, working from home, being open about accessing mental health support or setting boundaries between work and home life.
- Secondly, technology gives companies the flexibility to create **new systems** of work and company policies should reflect, rather than constrain, this opportunity. For example, rather than imposing top-down rules on issues such as working hours, policies should mandate that, at a team-level, there should be a guidance in place defined by that group. This approach ensures people know what is expected of them, but also allows employees to decide for themselves what works.
- Lastly, **all existing support processes around mental and physical wellbeing** need to be made **available remotely** to ensure people can get the help they need from home. And there should be a review about whether there are any gaps in the type of support needed.

Commenting on the report's findings, Ida Luka-Lognoné, CEO International Health & Travel at Allianz Partners stated: *"Our goal was to highlight how COVID-19 has changed how we work, what the impact has been on employee wellbeing and give companies some practical insights into what they can do to support their workforce. Not just during this very challenging time, but longer term, because this pandemic will result in longer term changes to how, and where, people work. Through polling and expert insights from academia, businesses and wellbeing specialists, the report provides rich data, perspectives and recommendations of benefit to everyone with an interest in the new workplace landscape that has emerged in 2020."*

She added: *"The contrasting findings among countries, age groups and family circumstances demonstrate just how varied the impacts of COVID-19 have been on employees and workplaces. Addressing this effectively requires tailored solutions rather than a blanket policy, one-size-fits-all approach. And that means continuous, meaningful engagement with diverse stakeholders in all workplaces around work culture, as well as the design, implementation and management of new practices."*

Jonathan Birdwell, EMEA Head of Public Policy and Thought Leadership at the Economist Intelligence Unit, said: *"Since the pandemic began, employees globally have had to start working remotely, where possible, increasing their use of digital communications and virtual collaboration. This shift has the potential to change employee experiences for the better – if the associated risks are also mitigated. Companies need to actively manage this transition to a more online way of working or risk a drop in performance. By putting employees' mental and physical wellbeing at the heart of any digital transformation, business leaders can access a range of commercial benefits while improving staff satisfaction. In a post-COVID-19 world, or one where the virus remains part of our lives, this employee-centric approach will be essential for helping businesses attract, retain and get the most out of their workforce."*

ENDS

Note: The report 'The Future of Work and Digital Wellbeing – protecting employees in a world with COVID-19' was launched at a two-day conference, [Partners in Health](#), hosted virtually 7th-8th October 2020.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

Other key findings of the research include:

- **59%** of respondents in **France** working from home during COVID-19 **felt sufficiently supported by their employer with regards to their physical**, compared to over three quarters (**76%**) in the **UAE**.
- **83%** feel they are **more comfortable** doing at least one part of their job online
- **70%** of respondents feel **more comfortable doing tasks involving others online** than prior to the lockdown
- **68%** would be **more open to hiring a remote worker** into their team
- **48%** said it was **difficult to coordinate multiple people's input online**
- **13% of non-parents** feel that **home responsibilities** is their biggest challenge, compared with **24% of fathers** and **29% of mothers**.

About Allianz Partners

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