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Flexibility and Precarity in the Post-Pandemic Era: Unveiling New Workplace Inequalities Among Young European Workers

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Master in Sociology

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Resumo

Apesar dos efeitos da pandemia de coronavírus continuarem a influenciar os procedimentos e as condições de trabalho no local de trabalho, tem havido, até ao momento, uma atenção académica limitada relativamente às ramificações desses impactos nos trabalhadores mais jovens. Abordando essa lacuna, este estudo investiga especificamente as preferências e experiências dos trabalhadores mais jovens em relação às modalidades de teletrabalho e às condições precárias de emprego em um contexto europeu pós-pandêmico. O estudo emprega uma abordagem metodológica mista, integrando a análises estatísticas em relação a 27 países europeus, com dados qualitativos resultantes da aplicação de 12 entrevistas em profundidade de uma amostra de jovens a residir em Itália.

Ao analisar os valores, as preferências e as experiências socioestruturais referentes ao teletrabalho e às condições de emprego dos trabalhadores desde o surto de coronavírus, o estudo revela várias desigualdades no local de trabalho encontradas pelos trabalhadores mais jovens. Especificamente, os resultados indicam que os trabalhadores mais jovens enfrentaram condições de emprego mais precárias desde a pandemia em comparação com seus colegas mais velhos. Além disso, os trabalhadores mais jovens, que preservam diversos valores e preferências no local de trabalho em comparação com os trabalhadores mais velhos, tiveram menos oportunidades de acesso a acordos de teletrabalho e emprego seguro.

Ao examinar os valores e as experiências que fundamentam as preferências individuais no sentido de arranjos e acordos flexíveis no local de trabalho e de valorização do emprego seguro, este estudo oferece informações valiosas para futuras decisões políticas.

Palavras-chave: Teletrabalho; Precariedade do Emprego; Desigualdades no Trabalho; Jovens Trabalhadores; Flexibilidade; Pandemia do Coronavírus

Abstract

As the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic continue to influence workplace procedures and employment conditions, there has hitherto been limited scholarly attention given to the ramifications of these impacts on younger workers. Addressing this gap, this study investigates the preferences and experiences of younger workers regarding teleworking arrangements and precarious employment conditions in a post-pandemic European context. The study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating extensive quantitative survey data encompassing 27 European countries with qualitative data derived from 12 in-depth interviews of an exclusively Italian sample.

By analysing workers' values, preferences and socio-structural experiences of teleworking and employment conditions since the coronavirus outbreak, the study uncovers several workplace inequalities encountered by younger workers. Specifically, the findings indicate that younger workers have faced more precarious employment conditions since the pandemic compared to their older counterparts. Moreover, younger workers, who preserve diverse workplace values and preferences compared to older workers, have experienced fewer opportunities to access teleworking arrangements and secure employment.

Based on these findings, the study formulates several predictions regarding the future implementation of teleworking and employment conditions in a post-pandemic context, considering the shifting values and inclinations of the individuals who inhabit the contemporary and future workforces. By examining the values and experiences surrounding individual preferences for flexible workplace arrangements and secure employment, this study offers valuable insights for future policy-making that align with the needs and desires of workers of all ages.

Keywords: Teleworking; Employment Precarity; Workplace Inequalities; Young Workers; Flexibility; Coronavirus Pandemic

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Glossary of Acronyms

GRT	Generational Replacement Theory
PMVs	Post-Materialist Values
MVs	Materialist Values
WLB	Work-Life Balance
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies

Introduction

The onset of the coronavirus pandemic has had substantial impacts on workers, especially younger workers. To mitigate the spread of the virus, governments around the world implemented various measures that had profound effects on the operational and physical aspects of workplaces. This frequently entailed minimising physical presence at work and imposing involuntary changes to working schedules and employment conditions. These measures had a significant effect on younger workers. Indeed, younger workers emerged as one of the most vulnerable and least supported segments of the workforce throughout the pandemic, grappling with the challenges of increased unemployment rates and poor mental health (OECD, 2021a).

This present study aims to identify and explore several workplace inequalities faced by younger workers in Europe that have emerged from the impacts of the pandemic. Specifically, it seeks to identify the preferences and experiences of younger European workers regarding teleworking and their employment contracts since the coronavirus outbreak. By analysing these findings, the study aims to determine whether younger European workers have encountered workplace inequalities related to accessing teleworking opportunities and securing stable employment.[1]

Additionally, this study contributes to the existing comprehensive sociological theories that emphasise the substantial impacts of increasing workplace flexibility on individuals' lives (e.g., Castells, 2010; Sennett, 1998; Hochschild, 2001). By delving into the lived experiences of younger workers since the pandemic, this research uncovers valuable insights into the broader social implications and ramifications of these phenomena.

Furthermore, this study specifically examines the potential benefits and implications of temporal flexibility, as opposed to numerical flexibility, which predominantly serves the interests of organisations (Armstrong & Taylor, 2023). Hence, the research seeks to understand the perspectives and preferences of employees, rather than those of employers and managers. This distinction is crucial as the implications of workplace flexibility can significantly vary depending on its implementation. Top-down, organisation-driven flexibility, for instance, often contributes to increased job precarity, whereas bottom-up, employee-initiated flexibility is commonly valued and embraced by employees.

Teleworking, as defined by Eurofound (2020b), refers to "any type of work arrangement where workers work remotely, away from an employer's premises or fixed location, using digital

[1] This study acknowledges that not all jobs are suitable for teleworking arrangements, which leads to a form of workplace inequality in itself. However, instead of addressing this issue – which undoubtedly warrants attention – this study concentrates on examining the specific inequalities experienced by workers who have the potential or currently engage in teleworking arrangements for some or all of their workplace tasks.

technologies such as networks, laptops, mobile phones and the internet". The pandemic lockdowns resulted in a significant surge in teleworking rates, reaching unprecedented levels (OECD, 2021b). Moreover, many organisations that had previously not adopted or seldom utilised teleworking practices chose to extend its implementation beyond the imposed lockdown restrictions (Llave et al., 2022). This shift occurred to such an extent that the term "the new normal" was coined, capturing the fundamental operational and work dynamic changes that arose in response to the new health, social and economic realities brought about by the pandemic (Raghavan et al., 2021).

In Europe, even prior to the pandemic, a considerable number of jobs were deemed "teleworkable". A report conducted by the European Commission (2020b) on the member states of the European Union revealed that around 37% of workers were employed in occupations that were teleworkable, though the prevalence of regular or occasional telework in 2019 was only at 15%. Since the outbreak, teleworking rates have undergone a dramatic increase globally, with some regions experiencing rates up to four times higher than the pre-outbreak period (OECD, 2021b). These extensive workplace transformations occurring in contemporary Europe thus warrant further attention.

Employment precarity generally relates to a higher risk of socioeconomic instability, characteristically involving atypical forms of work, such as temporary, part-time and fixed-term work and internships, as opposed to a more "standard" employment agreement, such as permanent and full-time work (Kesisoglou et al., 2016; Carmo et al., 2014). Economic crises, such as the coronavirus pandemic, tend to have a substantial impact on workers with precarious contracts compared to those in more secure employment (Weber et al., 2020). Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the implications of employment precarity in a post-coronavirus outbreak context.

The study is organised into five chapters: Chapter 1 provides a comprehensive literature review that examines previous studies and reports on the implications of teleworking and employment precarity both before and since the coronavirus outbreak. Chapter 2 introduces the study's theoretical framework and model, which incorporates Ronald Inglehart's Generational Replacement Theory (GRT) and the theory of critical realism. Additionally, this chapter presents the research questions and hypothesis that guide the study.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodology employed in the study, which utilises a mixed-methods approach involving quantitative surveys and qualitative, in-depth interviews. Chapter 4 involves the analyses of the research questions and hypothesis on both qualitative and quantitative levels, presenting the overall findings and revealing the workplace inequalities observed. Lastly, Chapter 5 further analyses the findings, applying them to the theoretical framework and discussing any nuanced aspects of the data. This final chapter also addresses the study's limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

1.1 Teleworking

Initially, to offer insights into the potential benefits and limitations of teleworking and how the practice can be effectively implemented to maximise the former and minimise the latter, academic literature is presented that examine both the structural and agency-related aspects of teleworking.

1.1.1 Agency

Literature widely supports that teleworkers often have a greater degree of agency to that of an onsite worker. On a micro level, numerous studies support that teleworking can benefit individuals' work-life balance (WLB), considerably influencing family and social life. Green et al. (2020) found that teleworking is associated with lower work-family conflict. Wu et al. (2022) posit that teleworking can improve family relationship quality. Castells (2010) emphasises that the social costs of flexibility can be significant: the transformative value of new work arrangements on a worker's social life can substantially improve family relationships. Loi (2021) found that teleworking can foster family balance, particularly for women.

From an individual level, studies largely support that flexible workplace arrangements offer greater WLB, and consequently higher levels of job satisfaction. This was observed in pre-coronavirus settings (e.g., Wheatley, 2012; Noda, 2019), and since the outbreak (e.g., Iacovoiu, 2020; OECD, 2021b; Green et al., 2020). Interestingly, several of these studies found that flexible workplace arrangements that are constructed based on employees' preferences subsequently benefit both employers and employees due to an enhancement of work performance.

The positive impacts that teleworking arrangements have found to have on job satisfaction and WLB (particularly on work-family balance) consequently enhance workers' agency. However, some studies have highlighted how teleworking can also limit workers' agency to certain degrees. For example, for the telework and family dynamic, Eddleston and Mulki (2017) found that teleworking can encourage overwork, as the work is always "right there", and therefore can trigger a work-family conflict. Palumbo (2020) emphasises that the overlapping of work commitments and private affairs in a teleworking arrangement, particularly for parents, can imperil WLB, rather than improve it. Ghislieri

et al. (2021) found that teleworking (specifically, the technological aspect of the practice) can increase work-family conflict.

Another factor commonly found to negatively impact teleworkers' agency across studies is an oft-reported increased level of social isolation (Predotova & Llave, 2021; Bentley et al., 2016; Eddleston & Mulki, 2017). However, isolation can extend beyond the psychological level: it can also impact internal workplace mobility. Communication and collaboration can be limited by telework (Green et al., 2017). For instance, the quality of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can profoundly impact social relationships in the workplace. If the quality of the operative ICTs is poor, productivity, motivation and managerial recognition of the teleworker are negatively impacted (Castells, 2010).

Moreover, some studies caution the potential hidden exploitation of human labour of teleworking within a capitalist model, suggesting that organisations, under the guise of publicly extolling the benefits of teleworking, in fact exploit the workers by intensifying working hours and appropriate workers' homes and private spaces to their own needs (Durães et al., 2021). Others warn of the recently developed monitoring tools and software that are designed to provide managerial staff with reports on employees' movements. For example, Vaujany et al. (2021) posit that while technology facilitates greater autonomy, paradoxically, with that autonomy comes surveillance and control.

While these findings may be cause for concern given the widespread increase of teleworking, the abovementioned literature mostly agrees that each of the identified limitations to teleworkers' agency can be avoided if the practice is appropriately applied. For example, regarding ICTs, Predotova and Llave (2021) and Bentley et al. (2016) maintain that adequate equipment must be provided to teleworkers to reduce the risk of isolation. Castells (2010) identifies that for ICTs to be used to produce greater agency and freedom for the worker, they must overcome the formidable obstacles of authoritarian management and exploitative capitalism. In other words, rather than prioritising commercial motivations and the micromanagement of employees, technology should be utilised for the wellbeing of the worker.

Ghislieri et al. (2021) emphasise the need for transparent policies that are based on trust, that support the autonomy of the worker and the right to disconnect. This responds to the perceived overlapping of work and private life within teleworking arrangements. Green et al. (2017) hold that hybrid teleworking models can mitigate various of the potential negative impacts of remote work. To reduce the effect of reduced mobility in a remote setting, Dahlstrom (2013) suggests managers of teleworkers to develop relationship-oriented behaviours with clear and frequent communication. While generally outlining the negative aspects of teleworking on WLB, Palumbo (2020) acknowledges that when work engagement is high, the potential negative impacts are alleviated. Noda

(2019) stresses that the WLB that can be attained through flexible workplace arrangements is highly dependent on the institutional design and adequacy of implementing the procedures.

Based on the literature reviewed, it is evident that teleworking has the potential to both enhance and constrain worker agency. Against this backdrop, this study seeks to explore the experiences of workers since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, an area that remains relatively unexplored in academic literature. Adopting a multi-level approach to examine individual and collective experiences of teleworking, this study investigates the reasons for the practice's adoption or rejection, seeking to identify the factors that contribute to the enhancement of worker agency as well as those that constrain it. Moreover, the study intends to uncover potential limitations or exploitations related to teleworking experienced by specific age groups in the workforce; this is discussed in further detail below.

By addressing these issues, the study contributes to the existing literature by deepening understanding of teleworking in the context of the pandemic and highlighting ways in which teleworking can be implemented to promote worker agency.

1.1.2 Structure

Based on the above, the potential for teleworking to increase workers' agency is contingent on two factors: the existence of appropriate institutional policies and effective implementation of the practice. Of course, the perceived benefits of teleworking are ultimately influenced by how the practice is structured, and if it is structured at all. This section considers how, and by whom, the structure of teleworking is typically determined.

Undeniably, technology plays a large role in the structurisation of teleworking. Had the coronavirus pandemic ensued twenty years earlier, the widespread shift from the workplace to the home that was witnessed during the coronavirus outbreak would have no doubt occurred on a much smaller scale. The constant improvements of ICTs have allowed for these workplace procedures to be carried out. Literature widely agrees that technology plays a crucial role in teleworking; that, fundamentally, technology facilitates teleworking (Lodovici et al. 2021; Baker et al., 2006; Pearce, 2009).

The advancements of ICTs are understood to provide employees the possibility to work remotely, enabling workers with a viable alternative to traditional office spaces. These innovations impact teleworking on both employer and employee levels. For example, the development of videoconferencing software such as Zoom facilitates many workplace procedures that would typically require workers to be presential in the office, such as conference meetings, to instead be carried out remotely.

Indeed, technology appears to facilitate the possibility for teleworking to operate efficiently. Based on these recent developments, some research points towards the possibility that, with the dramatic development of ICTs that have led to these shifting working conditions over the past twenty years, it is possible that these changes might be directly attributed to technological advancement (Athanasiadou & Theriou, 2021). This perception, in its essence, would support the central notion of technological determinism (Misa, 1988; Rapp, 1981; Ellul, 1980).

By applying technological determinist notions to the development of teleworking, one might suggest that the advancement of ICTs is the fundamental cause of the practice. However, this is ultimately not how teleworking has structuralised today. Technology has facilitated teleworking in many workplace roles well before the outbreak of the coronavirus. As mentioned earlier, 37% of workers in the European Union are employed in teleworkable occupations, while the prevalence of teleworking before the outbreak was only 15% (European Commission, 2020b). Since the outbreak, teleworking rates have rapidly increased across all European countries (OECD, 2021b).

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, organisations were persistently hesitant to adopt teleworking practices, mostly due to uncertainty regarding its benefits, technological limitations or perceived risk of adjusting the employment contract between organisations and employees (Raghavan et al., 2021). In Europe, teleworking increased at a significantly slow rate in the ten years before the COVID-19 outbreak, despite operative technological capacity (European Commission, 2020a). It would appear, then, that the major force of the workplace structure is not technologically driven, but instead, determined by social processes. Hence, as technological determinist positions fail to locate the apparent causal mechanisms of teleworking's structurisation, they are to be exempted from this study.

Concurring with this notion, Castells (2010) posits that workplace transformations, such as teleworking, are socially determined and managerially designed; technological change indeed supports the processes of the change, but ultimately, institutions and social organisations of work play the greater role. For teleworking, it took governmental authorities to facilitate the workplace conditions—albeit for diverse purposes (to slow the spread of the virus, instead of seeking to alter workplace conditions or policies). Present day ICTs just happen to be sufficiently advanced for businesses and organisations to effectively operate under home-based conditions.

Thus, top-down, societal causes – namely, governmental and organisational forces – have determined the structurisation of telework since the pandemic; advanced technologies merely enable the change. This is an important consideration, as the previously defined agency that teleworking can offer employees is generally dependent on the effectiveness of institutional policy and application, and, arguably even more importantly, if the institutions permit the practice at all.

Currently, a limited amount of literature exists on how teleworking continues to be structured since the pandemic. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how the aforementioned forces have influenced the structurisation of teleworking. Furthermore, by identifying the factors that determine access to teleworking, the study aims to uncover potential workplace inequalities, with a specific focus on workers' age.

1.1.3 Age-Related Literature

This section addresses previous studies[2] that have examined the role of age as a variable in workers' experiences and preferences for teleworking. Several studies have investigated perceived WLB in teleworking arrangements across generations. Gorjifard and Crawford (2021) provide a comprehensive research review on the impact of teleworking on wellbeing and WLB, concentrating part of their study on generational aspects; the study asserts that WLB for younger generations is strongly associated with job satisfaction. Neville and Brochu (2019) examine the differences between generational perspectives of WLB based on the results of a survey, emphasising the differing perceptions and desires towards the workplace of the millennial cohort. While finding no clear distinctions between millennials and other generations, the authors advocate that workplace policies should not remain static, and that ongoing evaluation of policies is crucial to meet the desires of the employees.

Additional studies have likewise emphasised the need for appropriate policies to reduce generational conflicts: Taylor (2018) stresses that generational conflicts in the workplace present significant challenges to businesses—even more so than racial or gender tensions. The study supports the notion that organisations benefit from establishing flexible workplaces that accommodate the desires across the involved generations. Gursoy et al. (2008) second this notion, suggesting that in order for workplaces to operate productively, organisations must address existing generational pressures.

In a post-pandemic context, a relatively limited amount of literature on age and teleworking values and preferences yet exists. Some recently published studies have been conducted within a post-outbreak setting that aim to capture generational sentiments towards teleworking: namely, Raišienė et al. (2020) and Ivasciuc et al. (2022); however, their results on which generations perceive the benefits of the practice significantly differ. Indeed, the indicators and methodologies are significantly different between each of the studies, and also the samples are of diverse cultural backgrounds. Nevertheless,

[2] The majority of these studies have employed generational categories to investigate age-related preferences and experiences. However, as explained in the Methodology and Theoretical Framework chapters, this study adopts age cohorts based on older and younger workers, rather than generational categories.

the general conclusions indicate that there appear to be no distinct variations identified between each generational cohort.

Hence, no obvious distinctions between generational cohorts have mutually been determined across the abovementioned studies; however, most of the conclusions tend to concur that values and preferences can vary across age groups and that appropriate workplace policies should be applied that seek to reduce potential generational conflicts and respond to the desires of the employees. In other words, the literature supports flexible workplaces arrangements that respond to individual employee values of all ages.

Evidently, most of these studies have been carried out pre-pandemic, and therefore, do not address the unique challenges that have arisen since the outbreak. The widespread adoption of teleworking has generated a diverse environment to investigate how workers of different ages have experienced the practice to a pre-pandemic setting. For many workers, the pandemic was their first experience of teleworking. Surveys conducted during the pandemic across various countries indicate that the more employees teleworked, the stronger their desire to continue the practice (e.g., OECD, 2021b; Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2020).

With the sudden surge in teleworking and the likely shift of preferences since the pandemic, it is vital to conduct further research on how workers of different ages perceive and experience the practice. This study aims to contribute to the presently limited research in this area.

1.2 Employment Precarity

This section of the literature review focuses on employment precarity, specifically, among younger workers within a European context, before and since the coronavirus pandemic.

Examining employment precarity among younger workers today is critical not only because the phenomenon is widespread and omnipresent, which is further elaborated below, but also because unstable employment conditions have significant influence over an individual's life. Workers with atypical employment contracts, on the one hand, often must negotiate by themselves and typically find it harder to get support from trade unions and social protection programs to protect their rights, and on the other, experience difficulty making autonomous life plans and setting long-term projects (Carmo & Vasconcelos, 2020). Hence, not only are work conditions severely impacted by precarious employment, but also personal lives. An individual's potential prospects, such as starting a family or taking out a mortgage, are unquestionably impacted, thus affecting one's agency both on individual and structural levels.

Much research has been carried out on precarious employment in Europe. Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, precarious employment was already high among young workers across Europe: workers under thirty years old accounted for one-third of temporary contracts (Weber et al., 2020). Since the 1980s, the European Union have implemented policies of liberalisation and deregulation of markets with the aim of reducing labour market rigidity and opening them up to competition. Following the 2008 financial crisis, a renewed focus on liberalising markets took place. The OECD (2016) stressed how the financial crisis particularly impacted younger workers, increasing their likelihood to take on atypical employment contracts. Thus, well before the pandemic, younger workers have experienced employment precarity.

Among policymakers, more precarious forms of employment are often perceived to offer greater flexibility and assist certain disadvantaged labour market groups to access work and provide a steppingstone to more secure workplace arrangements. However, when the unemployment rate is higher, precarious employment arrangements tend to lower the chances of workers to transition into more stable employment (Filomena & Picchio, 2022). Indeed, for younger workers, these conditions commonly increase precarity and fail to achieve a reduction of youth unemployment, as per the policies' primary objectives (Liotti, 2021). Some studies have attributed the increase of precarious work among younger workers to both structural trends and organisational practices (Farina et al., 2019; Blackham, 2019).

Furthermore, precarious work typically relates to a lack of control over one's working conditions (Rodgers & Rodgers, 1989; Vosko, 2014). This often takes the form of involuntary temporary work. A Eurofound study found that around 60% of temporary workers between 2008 and 2018, particularly younger workers, identified the main reason for working on temporary contracts as not being able to find permanent work (Weber et al., 2020). Canzio et al. (2022) demonstrate how involuntary temporary workers tend to be less satisfied than permanent workers, and that shorter contracts wield negative effects on job satisfaction, but only among involuntary employees.

However, within a post-coronavirus outbreak context, significantly less studies on precarious employment across Europe have yet surfaced. Still, statistics demonstrate how the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic have exacerbated younger workers' unemployment: among countries within the European Union, the youth unemployment rate fell 2.3 percent points between 2019 and 2020 (European Union, 2022). The OECD (2021a) reported that the pandemic crisis pushed the unemployment rate of young people upwards across nearly all OECD countries, observing an impact twice as strong as for the total population.

As previously stated, when unemployment is high, workers in precarious job situations are more negatively impacted. This may develop in forms of increased job insecurity such as hour reductions or higher risks of losing a job, lower wages, limited access to benefits such as sick leave, increased stress

and reduced bargaining power (Matilla-Santander et al., 2021). A European Union (2022) report demonstrates how almost ten percent of young workers in 2021 worked involuntary in temporary contracts, nearly double the average of all workers aged between 15-64 years. Furthermore, a Eurofound report highlights how the pandemic poses significant risks to many precarious workers, stressing the requirement for policies that support workers with limited access to social protection and representation (Sándor et al., 2021). Thus, the repercussions of the pandemic appear to be aggravating the adverse effects of precarious employment on an already vulnerable group.

In sum, younger workers have been particularly vulnerable to employment precarity long before the pandemic, however the pandemic has exacerbated the trend. Precarious employment conditions significantly impact an individual's work and personal life, limiting opportunities for growth and stability. These findings validate the necessity for further investigations on employment precarity of younger workers in a post-pandemic context; this present study seeks to contribute to the hitherto limited research in this field.

The subsequent hypothesis based on this review is presented in the following Theoretical Framework chapter.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Framework and Model

2.1 Generational Replacement Theory

The study's central theoretical framework integrates Ronald Inglehart's (1977; 1990; 1992; 1998) GRT.[3] The theory suggests that formative experiences shape the values of each generational cohort, when individuals are considered to be "most impressionable", and that social change occurs progressively due to the influences of generational replacement. The formative years are considered as an individual's teenage and young adult years. Societal value changes over time are seen as a consequence of generational replacement; change is seen to be mostly caused by the discontinuation of older generations' values being progressively substituted by younger generations with new orientations. Values are divided into two categories: materialist (MVs) and post-materialist values (PMVs).

MVs are those which prioritise security, economic and political stability; PMVs, on the other hand, prioritise goals such as individual freedom and self-expression, tending to be more concerned about the environment compared to economic growth (Abramson & Inglehart, 1992). Furthermore, PMVs favour a greater concern for the quality of life and a preference for less formal interpersonal relations, which, in the context of the workplace, can be interpreted as prioritising WLB over economic gains and less hierarchical structures, respectively.[4]

For clarity, the following table outlines the key priorities of each of the defined values:

Materialist Values (MVs)	Post-Materialist Values (PMVs)
Security	Self-expression
Economic stability	Individual freedom
Political stability	Environmentally concerned
	Greater concern for quality of life
	Preference for less formal relations

[3] While some of these central works include contributions from Paul R. Abramson, the theory is primarily attributed to Ronald Inglehart as he is considered its main developer and is therefore solely credited for it.

[4] The values presented here have been selected from the twelve MV and PMVs identified by Inglehart in his seminal work, "The Silent Revolution" (1977). These values were chosen specifically for their relevance to the research questions at hand.

Inglehart's theory is based on his findings that older Europeans, growing up in times of scarcity, tend to hold more MVs, while younger Europeans, spending their formative years in relative prosperity, typically demonstrate more PMVs. For example, older generations, spending their formative years often impacted by wars and poverty, typically were found to hold more conservative, materialist goals such as maintaining order and fighting inflation; younger generations that had been raised under conditions of exceptional economic security had not experienced the same pressures as older generations, and were found to uphold more social and self-actualisation values (Inglehart, 1992). That is not to say that economic and physical security were not valued positively among younger generations, but only that their relative priority was lower than in the past.

Today's societies are exceptionally different to those in the period when Inglehart was developing the theory during the 1970s. Dividing societies into those who were impacted by large-scale wars and those who weren't is no longer viable. It also proves difficult in attempting to measure a generation's values based on specific large-scale events. Indeed, significant events have occurred that would likely influence the values of certain generations currently in the workforce, such as The Cold War and the ongoing threat of nuclear war or the several economic recessions that took place over the last fifty years, but these events prove difficult to define clear distinctions between generational values.

This also applies to events in recent history that would likely increase MVs, such as a growing preference towards security following such events as 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror, or the spreading of the coronavirus. More ubiquitous and longstanding influences, such as globalisation and the consequential rapid global expansion of technology, likely have even greater influence and thus further distort divisions between generations. Unlike the events experienced by generations of which Inglehart analyses, the wide-spreading consequences of these more recent major events are more unclear and prove more difficult to define and measure their impacts over a generation's values.

Therefore, this study does not apply generational categories, but rather separates workers into younger and older cohorts.[5] This approach avoids potential ambiguities that may arise from corresponding generational categories while still enabling the examination of a potential replacement effect of values. Incorporating generational categorisations into a study without due care not only risks ambiguity but may also lead to overgeneralisations of populations (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine, 2020). Given that this study includes populations from 27 different countries, it is possible that different generations have faced the abovementioned circumstances inconsistently in their respective countries. The simplified categorisation adopted in this study addresses these concerns, allowing for a more straightforward and accurate analysis of the data.

[5] For certain investigations, there is a further distinction: youngest (18-24), second youngest (25-29) and older (30+) cohorts. This is explained in the Methodology chapter.

GRT has been selected as the framework for this study, as opposed to some of its major contending theories, such as, for example, life-course theory or age-period-cohort theory, for various reasons. Life-course theory postulates that values are shaped by cumulative effects of life experiences, such as family background, education and work experiences, and major life events, such as marriage, parenthood and retirement (Elder et al., 2003). The theory suggests that value changes occur as individuals move through these life experiences. GRT contrarily emphasises the role of societal changes and historical trends as central influences in shaping values across generations. The longitudinal studies carried out by Abramson and Inglehart (1998) provide considerable evidence that the trend towards post-materialism had largely been the result of generational replacement, thus demonstrating the magnitude of societal changes on collective values.

Age-period-cohort theory proposes that generational values are defined by a complex interplay between age, period and cohort effects, stressing that individuals of the same age cohort might experience different events at varying stages of their life, resulting in different values (Mason, 1985). This approach, however, fails to address some of the more ubiquitous influences that occur within today's globalised societies, such as technological development or the impacts of the coronavirus pandemic, which are the central to this present study.

GRT, on the other hand, recognises the significant role of technology in determining values. Inglehart (1977) asserted that technology is creating the post-industrial society, just as it created the industrial society. The desire for more flexible workplace arrangements today accurately confirms this anticipation. Moreover, Inglehart (1977) recognised early-on that technological developments have led to the evolution of new lifestyles. Technology has played a role in the increase of PMVs, which is also central to this study.

This study employs GRT to categorise and analyse the values and preferences related to teleworking and employment conditions that emerge from the data. Specifically, the theory is used to examine how values and preferences differ between younger and older workers. In doing so, the study explores whether a consequential replacement effect can be anticipated in the future, whereby the values and preferences of younger workers gradually replace those of older workers. By applying this theoretical framework to the data, the study seeks to shed light on the implications of age differences for teleworking and employment conditions, both now and in years to come.

Thus, based on the literature reviews and theoretical framework, the study's research questions and hypothesis are presented. The research questions that specifically pertain to teleworking are as follows:

RQ1: *Since the pandemic, do younger workers have a stronger preference to continue teleworking compared to older workers? How have these preferences across age cohorts varied over time?*

RQ2: *What are the main reasons individuals of varying age cohorts desire or do not desire to telework?*

RQ3: *How has teleworking typically been structured since the pandemic?*

The focus now shifts specifically to the employment precarity section of the study. Acknowledging that, across Europe, the rate of unemployment among younger workers has risen since the pandemic, this study seeks to identify some of the variations of employment precarity experienced between younger and older workers. It is hypothesised that younger workers have experienced more precarious employment conditions over the course of the pandemic compared to older workers (H1).

Lastly, the two final research questions, which are based on the findings of the previous research questions and hypothesis, covering both teleworking and employment precarity, are presented:

RQ4: *Do younger workers tend to maintain more PMVs towards teleworking (1) and precarious employment conditions (2), compared to older workers?*

RQ5: *Do younger workers experience workplace inequalities towards accessing teleworking opportunities (1) and secure employment (2)?*

2.2 Critical Realism

To gain a deeper understanding of the social structures and mechanisms that contribute to the phenomenon of employment precarity among younger workers and their experiences with teleworking, the philosophic framework of critical realism is applied as this project's theoretical model. Particularly for the sections of this project that examine the workers' teleworking experiences and employment conditions on an individual level, critical realism offers a valuable basis for understanding how underlying social structures have shaped those experiences, facilitating a more comprehensive and nuanced analysis. For instance, RQ3, RQ5 and H1 each require analysis on the social structures that shape workers' respective experiences; critical realism effectively enables this exploration, serving to identify the causal mechanisms that generate the observed patterns of inequality and precarity.

Specifically, the writings of critical realist Dave Elder-Vass (2017; 2011) are integrated into the study. Elder-Vass' approach has been selected instead of, for example, his fellow critical realist, Margaret Archer, because Elder-Vass' ideas tend to capture the causal mechanisms of workplace arrangements more precisely. For example, while both emphasise the significance of human agency, Archer (2004) places more importance on internal conversations that individuals have with themselves

that shape their actions and decision-making, whereas Elder-Vass (2011) stresses the external factors that influence agency, such as institutions.

Moreover, Archer (2009) stresses the need to approach social phenomena as open and dynamic processes, rejecting that social ontology can be comprehended within fixed structures. Elder-Vass (2011) instead emphasises social stratification as a part of understanding the ontology of a social process, recognising different levels of social phenomena and their relationships between one another. Fixed institutional structures typically have a great deal of influence over workplace structures, thus aligning more closely with Elder-Vass' approach.

Critical realism has been chosen over other philosophies, such as, for instance, anthropocentric ontological approaches, as it distinguishes both human agents and non-human material objects as essential contributors to their causal impacts (Elder-Vass, 2017). As previously mentioned, this is particularly relevant to teleworking, which is widely possible today due to advanced technologies. The impacts of non-human material objects, such as ICTs, that facilitate the practice of teleworking are explicitly recognised in critical realism. More anthropocentric ontological approaches tend to overlook the impacts of non-human material objects that operate within social structures.

The theoretical model of critical realism is applied to analyse the findings of the project and is thus presented in the final Discussion chapter for this purpose.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

3.1 A Mixed-Methods Approach

This study primarily applies an explanatory sequential mixed-methods approach, which initially involves a quantitative phase followed by a sequential qualitative phase that builds on the findings of the quantitative results to explain them in more detail (Creswell & Clark, 2018). This approach was adopted because it provides the opportunity to explore the quantitative findings in more detail (Ivankova et al., 2006). For instance, while the quantitative data revealed which age cohorts demonstrated a greater preference to telework, it did not provide the reasons for their preference; this was explored in the qualitative analysis. Similarly, the quantitative data exposed certain extents of employment precarity faced by younger workers amid the pandemic, whereas the qualitative analysis provided an in-depth comprehension of how they experienced job precarity on a personal level, capturing individual values and sentiments.

Furthermore, a mixed-methods approach effectively responds to the generally explorative nature of this study. The various research questions and several levels in which the single hypothesis is investigated require different types of analyses. For instance, some research queries are better addressed using mostly quantitative methods with supplementary qualitative analysis (for instance, RQ1 and H1), while others benefit from a predominantly qualitative approach (RQ2 and RQ3). A mixed-methods design provides the necessary flexibility to tackle this study's objectives.

3.1.1 Quantitative Methods

The quantitative data used in this study was collected by Eurofound (2023a) as a part of the "Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey". The full dataset is yet to be released to the public; early access to the preliminary data was granted under a confidentiality agreement, of which the terms and conditions have been strictly adhered to. IBM SPSS Statistics (v29) was employed to carry out all quantitative analyses. Additionally, graphs and figures were generated using both IBM SPSS Statistics and Microsoft Excel. Frequencies were calculated to summarise the distribution of responses of the relevant survey questions, while descriptive statistics, such as means and standard deviations, were used to depict the data. The use of frequencies and descriptive statistics allowed for a comprehensive understanding of the survey data. The results of the analyses were then used to address the research questions and test the hypothesis.

The provided Eurofound dataset included a merged datafile of four rounds of survey data[6] comprising of respondents from 27 European countries of age ranges from 18-98. The surveys took place online, between April 2020 to May 2022. Depending on the availability of the data and the nature of the research question, the analyses use and combine different variations of the survey rounds; the data that is used in each investigation is clarified in the Analysis chapter. The sample size, therefore, also varies depending on the question, and is thus defined within each analysis.

As the study seeks to specifically define employment inequalities of younger workers, the age cohorts were split into two categories: ages 18-29 (young workers) and 30+ (older workers). This also enhances clarity and comprehensibility, particularly for the visual representations of the data. Additionally, other analyses within the job precarity section further divide the younger cohort: younger workers are contained between ages 18-24 and 25-29; older workers remain as 30+. The rationale behind the further subdivision of the young age groups in such cases is to provide a more comprehensive examination of the employment situations of younger workers who may be facing increased job precarity as a result of their university or other educational commitments.

3.1.2 Qualitative Methods

The qualitative section of this study comprised of 12 interviews, conducted with an Italian population. A solely Italian sample was maintained in the interview selection for two reasons: firstly, on a collective level, national laws and regulations heavily impact teleworking and employment conditions, which differ greatly across countries. By maintaining a population within a single country, potential outlier variables that might arise are avoided. For example, many of the observed workplace conditions, such as contract renewal laws or health and safety protocols towards remote working, were strongly influenced by Italian labour regulations. Secondly, the language capacity of the researcher allowed for the interviews to be conducted in the participants' native tongue, improving the validity and accuracy of the obtained data.

A snowball approach was employed to recruit additional participants, but to ensure a diversity of workplace conditions, new contacts were only accepted from existing participants who worked in different workplaces. This approach avoided recruiting participants who might have similar experiences due to working in the same workplace. Thus, the convenience of snowball sampling was

[6] The analyses conducted in this study use data from different survey rounds depending on their availability. For information of the fieldwork dates of each round, refer to the beginning of Annex A. For details on the availability of each survey question, refer to Annex C.

acquired while simultaneously mitigating the approach's often associated limitation of sampling bias (Parker, et al., 2019).

In order to achieve a diverse sample, participants were selected based on a range of potential circumstances that could impact their values and preferences towards the research questions. For example, both male and female participants were selected, and circumstantial factors such as being a parent, or a student, were considered during the sampling process. Furthermore, to avoid selection bias, workers of small, medium and large sized businesses, living and working in both semi-remote and metropolitan areas, were specifically chosen.

Since the study focuses mainly on workplace inequalities faced by younger workers, the majority of participants were younger individuals, with interviewees ranging from 21 to 53-years-old. The decision was made to stop the data collection at 12 interviews as a sufficiently thick data saturation was reached (Fusch & Ness, 2015); each of the abovementioned conditions were met with variations of preferences. For instance, data was obtained on males and females, parents and students who preferred teleworking as well as those who did not.

The interviews applied a semi-structured approach, which asked the participants a set of mostly open-ended questions, with additional probe questions to explore the responses further. The questions comprised in the interview are detailed in the Analysis chapter. A semi-structured approach was chosen for the ability to provide a degree of control over the questioning, allowing for follow-up questions and a deeper exploration of participant responses (Creswell, 2017). This was particularly important given the variability of situations experienced by the participants, as follow-up questions often resulted in the most insightful and relevant findings.

Interviews typically lasted between 20-30 minutes and were conducted either in-person, over the phone or via Zoom. As the majority of the interviews were carried out in Italian, any quotes presented in the text have been translated into English. To ensure that the interviews were conducted in an ethical manner, appropriate measures were implemented. Participants provided informed consent prior to interview participation, and were clearly informed about the recording process, anonymity measures and their right to withdraw at any time (refer to the beginning of Annex D for the precise ethical statement). To maintain confidentiality, only participants' age and gender were collected. Recordings of the interviews were stored in a secure location.

A content analysis approach was taken for examining the interview data. This involved categorising the data into specific themes so that the findings could be compared and contrasted. By collating the participants' individual experiences and preferences towards teleworking and their employment conditions, emerging patterns were able to be detected. The interview findings have been assembled in Tables 1 and 2. Notable quotes applied in the analysis were selected based on their

relevance to the research questions. In the analysis, for the research questions that consider the age variable, participants are identified by their age and gender; these demographics are omitted in questions without the age variable.

To avoid potential biases during the interviews, the subject matter was discussed with each participant as objectively as possible. The researcher, maintaining reflexivity, regularly reflected on any potential personal biases or assumptions towards the research topics. This approach sought to decrease the possibility of the researcher's presence causing bias towards interviewee responses (Creswell, 2017). Moreover, maintaining a degree of impartiality was important as, from the onset, participants had varying opinions and experiences towards teleworking and employment precarity.

CHAPTER 4

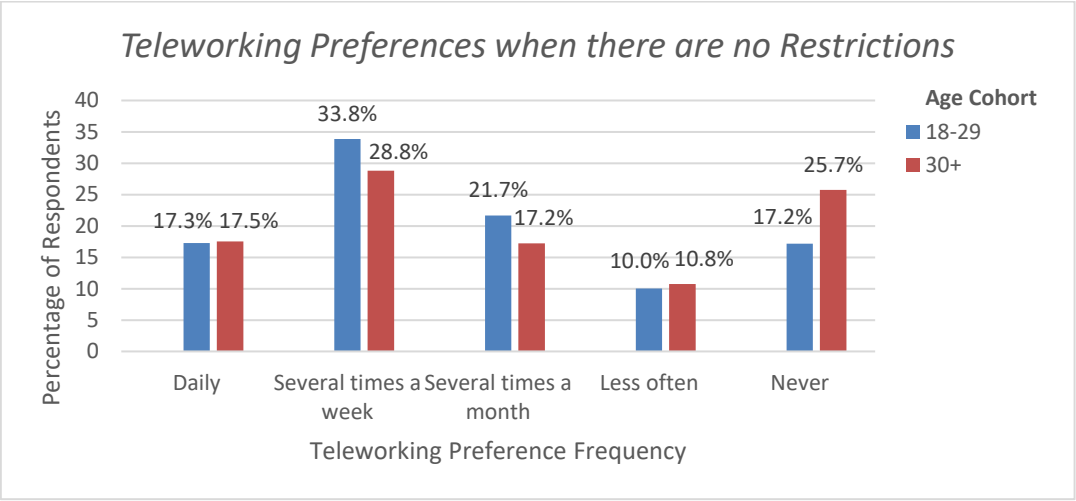
Analysis

4.1 RQ1 - Teleworking Preferences Since the Pandemic

4.1.1 Quantitative Analysis

To analyse RQ1, three rounds of responses to the survey question: "*If you had the choice, how often would you like to work from home if there were no restrictions due to COVID-19?*" have been examined (N = 35,300).[7] Firstly, to envisage an overall perspective, preferences across all three rounds have been amalgamated, and presented in Figure 1.[8] The analysis shows that, on average, younger workers (ages 18-29) report a higher preference for working from home (M = 2.76, SD = 1.33) to older workers (ages 30+) (M = 2.98, SD = 1.46).[9] The findings reveal that younger workers demonstrate an overall higher preference to work from home several times a week or a month, where older workers show a higher rate of preferring to work from home less, or not at all. Overall, it is found that both cohorts would generally prefer some degree of working from home, but the stronger preference is experienced by younger workers.

Figure 1



Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 2, 3 and 5 (June 2020 – May 2022).

[7] For a detailed overview of the descriptive statistics of each analysis, refer to Annex B.

[8] All the graphs and figures referred to in the analyses are found in Annex A.

[9] For the value labels of each survey question, refer to the corresponding question in Annex C.

Figure 2 has also been produced to reveal further divisions between age cohorts; this graph exposes a distinctive gradual decline of preference to work from home as the cohorts increase in age. For example, for the oldest cohort (60+), there is a significantly higher preference to never work from home compared to other cohorts; the preference to never work from home progressively decreases the lower the age range. The opposite goes for the "several times a week" response, which shows clear favourability among younger cohorts, and becomes gradually less favourable for older cohorts. The means of each cohort demonstrate this pattern: ages 18-29 M = 2.76; 30-39 M = 2.71; 40-49 M = 2.97; 50-59 M = 3.14; 60+ M = 3.27. The only disruption in the pattern is a slightly higher mean for the youngest cohort. These findings have direct consequences towards GRT, which is further elaborated below in the Discussion chapter.

Moreover, the same data is presented in Figure 3, but is divided between the three survey rounds (Summer 2020; Spring 2021; Spring 2022) so that the changes of preferences between age cohorts over the years can be examined. From this graph, it is shown how, over the years, each cohorts' teleworking preferences remained relatively stable. For the younger cohort, the share of the "daily" response increased by 3.6%.[10] The most substantial changes occurred for the share of the responses "several times a week", decreasing 7.4%; "several times a month", decreasing 11.5%; and "never", which increased 12.3%. The older cohort demonstrate less variation of preferences, with responses remaining relatively stable. A notable change is a 9.1% increase for the share of the "daily" response.

Overall, the data shows relative stability over the survey rounds, but nonetheless with a slight decrease of preference to work from home over time for the younger cohort, and a slighter increase for a daily preference to work from home among the older cohort.

Therefore, responding to RQ1, the findings indicate that younger workers do indeed have a stronger preference to continue teleworking since the pandemic, and that, over the period of the survey rounds, teleworking preferences have remained relatively stable. While this analysis supports the research question, there are certain nuances and patterns that require further elaboration and are discussed below in the Discussion chapter.

4.1.2 Qualitative Analysis

While the interview data are not sufficient to explore RQ1 quantitatively, the responses nevertheless reveal that, regardless of age, employment conditions, or being a parent or not, responses to teleworking desirability among the participants varied considerably from person to person. The rate of

[10] All percentages presented in this chapter represent the proportion of responses to the corresponding survey question.

teleworking preferences among the interviewees ranged from not at all to several days a week, with the exception of one participant, who, due to the fact that her colleagues were very rarely in the office, preferred to telework almost always.

4.2 RQ2 - Main Reasons Behind Teleworking Preferences

4.2.1 Quantitative Analysis

Initially, in order to address the age variable in RQ2, a quantitative analysis is presented. Two possible responses to the survey question: "*What concerns you most about returning to work?*" have been included in the analysis (N = 19,160).[11] For the concern: "loss of control over my time", among younger workers (ages 18-29), 23.8% nominated this as a main concern, while this response was selected by just 16% of the older cohort (ages 30+). Figure 4 illustrates this result. This finding demonstrates how younger workers tend to show a significantly greater concern for losing control over their time by being required to return to their workplaces. Furthermore, this is an important finding regarding GRT, which is discussed further in the examination of RQ4.

For the second concern: "I won't be as productive", among the younger workers, 12.6% selected this as a main concern upon returning to the workplace, while this response was selected by 10.4% of the older cohort. This is presented in Figure 5. While the variances between each cohort are less sizable to the prior response's findings, they nevertheless demonstrate that younger cohorts show more concern for a loss of productivity by returning to the workplace. This finding suggests that younger workers may feel more productive when teleworking, which is further explored in the following qualitative section.

4.2.2 Qualitative Analysis

4.2.2.1 Reasons for Teleworking

Presently, to attain a more comprehensive understanding of teleworking preferences, an analysis of the interview data is to be carried out. Firstly, attention is given to the participants that demonstrated a desire to telework. Overall, the majority of the participants reported a preference to telework. A

[11] Certain concerns contained in the survey that were less generalisable and more individualistic, and therefore not deemed as beneficial to a quantitative analysis, have been omitted in this analysis, such as "being exposed to COVID while commuting" or "I don't like my job any longer".

variety of reasons were provided; the most frequently reported reasons have accordingly been categorised into the following sections:

4.2.2.1.1 More Flexibility

This reason was by far the most frequently reported. Participants typically described it as having a greater degree of control over one's time and having more opportunity to structure daily tasks. For example, one male participant (aged 33) stated that he was a "flexibility-focused" person who would take a two-hour lunch break to go to the gym but would start an hour earlier in the morning to make up for it. Similarly, a female participant (37) emphasised the benefits of teleworking for family responsibilities. She stated, "in the afternoon I have family commitments… if I have to pick up my daughter from school, when I'm working from home, I can manage this easily. When I take my daughter home, I can continue to work, and at least for her, someone is with her." She added that it was easier for her to work outside of business hours to finish a task.

4.2.2.1.2 Environmental Concerns

A preference for teleworking for environmental concerns was also frequently reported, particularly among younger participants. For example, two participants (a 21-year-old male and a 26-year-old female) reported environmental concerns as one of their main reasons for preferring teleworking. This was mostly interpreted as not needing to drive to the office, which could have a positive impact on the environment. The female participant, referring to her management's lack of environmental concern, said: "On an environmental level, it's much better to not have to drive to work every day, but there is still this mindset that is very old." Another male participant (25) who lived nearby his workplace and therefore preferred to not telework, said that if he lived far from his workplace, he would be more inclined to telework for environmental reasons.

4.2.2.1.3 Increased Productivity

Several participants cited being more productive as a central reason for preferring to telework. This was often attributed to the ability to work in a more relaxed environment and maintain higher levels of focus. Three female participants (26, 26, 37) and three male participants (21, 26, 33) reported this as a motive. For instance, one female participant (26) said: "At home you are more active; more mentally fresh. Working in the office can be slower because maybe you are tired, or people keep interrupting you—at home, you can probably do what would be eight hour's work in the office in just five hours."

Similarly, a male participant (21) said: “A person working from home is more at ease; freer, and the consequence of this is being more productive.”

4.2.2.1.4 Other Reasons

Other notable but less common reasons for favouring teleworking reported by the participants include the ability to work from home when feeling unwell, acquiring more free time, having access to better equipment and having more family time. One 26-year-old male participant explained the latter motivation: “the beauty is that you can stay at home with your family, so that, on your work break, you can see your family and you can eat lunch together. While at work, you might have to eat lunch alone or you might have to pass a lot of the time at work alone. It’s a completely different environment.”

It must also be noted that almost all participants expressed a preference for a hybrid work arrangement, rather than solely teleworking.[12] Thus, the teleworking preferences provided by the interviewees were reflected within a hybrid structure. This is an important consideration which is further discussed below in the Discussion chapter.

4.2.2.2 Reasons against Teleworking

Presently, this section investigates the reasons which participants cited for *not* desiring to telework. The most frequent responses are classified below:

4.2.2.2.1 Isolation

Participants often cited isolation as a reason for not wanting to telework, with some stating it as a main reason for never teleworking (a 32-year-old female and a 25-year-old male) and others as a reason for only teleworking occasionally (a 53-year-old female and a 33-year-old male). For instance, the 25-year-old male participant expressed a strong need for human contact and collaboration: “I need to see you, to work with you, so that we can share our ideas. I really need that.”

[12] There was only one exception to this (a 37-year-old female); however, her case was unique in that her colleagues almost always teleworked, and working from the office would mean that she would either be alone or only working with her supervisors.

4.2.2.2.2 Less Connected with Colleagues

Two male participants, both aged 33, cited feeling less connected with their colleagues as a reason for not wanting to exclusively telework. One participant explained that remote work often makes it difficult to connect with colleagues on a personal level, and during prolonged office-wide teleworking arrangements, he found it challenging to separate his colleagues' professional roles from their personal lives. A 32-year-old female participant cited a lack of connection with colleagues as a central reason for never desiring to telework.

Moreover, the other 33-year-old male made a notable observation about online meetings, remarking that they often focus solely on work-related topics and do not allow for personal conversation: "In face-to-face meetings there is the possibility to discuss other topics that is not only about work; to ask how someone is, to ask about their weekend… in online meetings this is often not the case: when conversation on the meeting's topic finishes, you close the meeting without further discussion." The participant preferred face-to-face meetings, which he felt allowed for a more informal and personal connection with colleagues.

4.2.2.2.3 Reduced Productivity

Contrary to the aforementioned reasons that report home as a less-distracting workspace, some participants reported the opposite: that they are more distracted at home and therefore less productive. This was reported by two females (32 and 53) and two males (33 and 25). Participants mentioned how they are "less stimulated" and "lazier" working from home. The 53-year-old female participant explained that household chores and pets were common sources of distraction: "Maybe I have to wash the clothes, make the bed… I am distracted by my pets… there are things that distract me. When I am in the office these things obviously don't bother me."

4.2.2.2.4 Challenges Separating Work and Private Lives

Some participants expressed difficulty in separating their work and private lives within teleworking arrangements. For instance, a 25-year-old male participant expressed this preference, stating: "I wouldn't want to work from home because that would interfere with my private life… I need a rigid schedule." Similarly, a 34-year-old female participant shared her challenges with teleworking during the pandemic: "When I worked from home, it was all mixed together, and the day was never ending… At least when I work in the office, I can separate my work life from my private life." She added: "When I'm out of the office, it's another life. It's my life. When I'm in the office, that's the life of work."

4.2.2.2.5 Other Reasons

Other notable reasons cited for not desiring or only occasionally wanting to telework include insufficient space at home to work efficiently, feeling depressed due to always being in the same environment and experiencing communication challenges with colleagues and clients when relying solely on devices instead of face-to-face interactions.

In sum, addressing RQ2 on a quantitative level, younger workers tend to show a greater desire to telework based on having more control over their time and being more productive at home compared to older workers. From the qualitative analysis, the main reasons that emerged for preferring to teleworking or otherwise increase the practice included more flexibility, environmental concerns and increased productivity. Whereas, for those that desired to limit the practice or not telework at all, the main reasons that arose were experiencing isolation, being less connected with colleagues, reduced productivity and experiencing challenges with separating work and private lives.

4.3 RQ3 - Structurisation of Teleworking Since the Pandemic

Given the diversity of circumstances and experiences among individuals and their workplaces, this research question is investigated using solely a qualitative approach, based on the interview data. Certain teleworking conditions were consistent among all participants. Specifically, all interviewees reported having teleworked since the onset of the pandemic.[13] Moreover, only one of the participants was currently obligated to telework; for the rest, if teleworking arrangements were offered by their respective workplaces, it was never mandatory. However, apart from these general similarities, the structure and implementation of teleworking arrangements across the participants' respective workplaces showed significant variations.

The participants were asked if they are currently permitted to telework, and how frequently. The responses ranged from "as often as they want", to "several days a week", to "one day a week and no more" to "never". Some reported that certain colleagues were permitted to telework based on their age and superiority, while others are not; this finding is further discussed in RQ5. Some participants reported facing hesitancy from their superiors when they requested to increase their teleworking

[13] The only exception to this was a 21-year-old male participant, as he had only joined the workforce soon after the lockdown restrictions were lifted, and therefore was never asked to telework. Prior to the participant's start date, however, his workplace did indeed employ teleworking arrangements.

frequency. For instance, one participant reported: “If you ask to work from home for any more than one day, they (the bosses) are not happy.”

A top-down, hierarchical structure towards implementing teleworking was observed among each of the participants’ respective workplaces. The decision to allow teleworking was always determined by managerial staff. In some cases, teleworking was prohibited regardless of the feasibility of carrying out work tasks remotely. The findings also revealed that some workplaces had already implemented teleworking arrangements before the pandemic, while others only began after its outbreak. In some cases, teleworking continued to be facilitated beyond the pandemic restrictions, while in others, it ceased. One participant described a gradual, involuntary return to the office as lockdown restrictions eased.

The most commonly cited reasons for managers prohibiting or reducing teleworking included a lack of trust and control over their employees to work productively outside the workplace. This sentiment was often not shared by the employees. For example, one participant stated: “They (the bosses) think that if you are at home, then you are not working, but this is not true. You can work very well from home.” Another participant described their boss’ general desire to constantly monitor employees in the workplace: “when the employees are in the office, he probably finds everything more under-control, and he feels he can make sure that you work all the eight hours.”

Some participants reported that teleworking was not permitted due to a lack of the required operational equipment and server connections outside of the office or the inability to effectively monitor employees from home. However, the participants tended to agree that it was possible to implement the necessary devices and connections. For instance, one participant commented: “It might be difficult to monitor our productivity (from home), but with some effort, it would be possible.” Another reason cited was a lack of trust towards specifically younger employees to telework, which is further explored in RQ5.

Some participants reported that their managerial staff fully permitted teleworking without any boundaries, allowing employees to decide the frequency of their teleworking. For others, teleworking was facilitated to some extent, often with certain conditions, such as requiring employees to come into the workplace to perform certain tasks or if their performance rate was low. One participant described that onsite working was encouraged but not enforced, while another explained how their boss occasionally threatened to revoke the possibility of teleworking, treating it as a privilege that can be taken away at any time.

Thus, responding to RQ3, the study found that since the pandemic, telework has typically been structured in a hierarchical and centralised manner. Moreover, the practice has been implemented or prohibited with varying degrees of enthusiasm and hesitancy. The extent to which the participants

were able to telework was highly dependent on their managers' attitudes towards the practice and the level of trust they had in their employees to work remotely.

4.4 H1 - Employment Precarity During the Pandemic

4.4.1 Quantitative Analysis

To test H1, three survey questions were analysed. The first question comprised of four rounds of data (N = 86,069), asking: "*How likely or unlikely do you think it is that you might lose your job in the next 3 months?*". The amalgamated results of all four rounds are represented in Figure 6, which exposes the youngest cohort (ages 18-24) reporting the highest likelihood of losing their job (M = 3.84, SD = 1.31); the second youngest cohort (25-29) reported less likelihood of losing their job (M = 4.03, SD = 1.14), but still slightly more likely than the older cohort (30+) (M = 4.04, SD = 1.16).

The data demonstrate how the youngest cohort felt much more likely to lose their job. The results reveal a notable gap not only between the youngest cohort and the older cohort, but also when associated with the second youngest cohort. The youngest cohort were approximately twice as likely to report "very likely" to losing their job (9.6%) compared to the second youngest (4.9%) and older (4.7%) cohorts. Furthermore, the youngest cohort were less likely to report "very unlikely" (42.9%) compared to the second youngest (45.9%) and older (48.7%) cohorts. This data shows how younger workers have perceived a greater degree of employment precarity over the course of the pandemic in relation to potential job loss.

To divulge any significant directions or patterns over the course of the survey, Figure 7 encapsulates the same data, but separates the responses of each cohort over the rounds. However, no notable variation appeared; each response remains relatively stable across the cohorts, especially when comparing the first and last rounds. These findings indicate how the youngest cohort remained the most at-risk group throughout the entire period of the survey rounds.

The second survey question testing H1 comprises of three rounds of data (N = 45,617) asking "*What kind of employment contract do you have in your main job?*". Figure 8 displays all the responses of each cohort across the survey rounds. The graph demonstrates how the youngest cohort are significantly less represented as holding a contract of unlimited duration (47%) compared to the second youngest (65.8%) and older (84.4%) cohorts. Consequently, the youngest cohort are much more likely to report holding a contract of limited duration (32.9%) to the second youngest (25.8%) and older (12.6%) cohorts.[14] While the data do not reveal if the specified employment contracts are

[14] Means and standard deviations were not generated for this analysis as the value labels are not represented on an ordinal scale.

voluntary or involuntary, they do demonstrate that younger workers throughout the pandemic have nonetheless experienced more precarious employment arrangements.

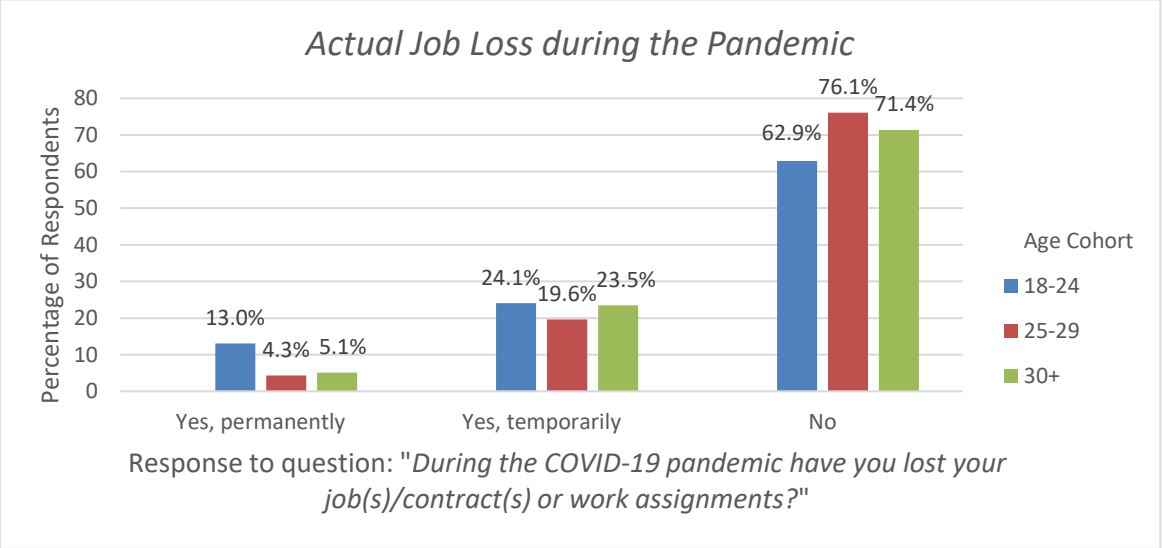
Akin to the prior survey question's investigative model, Figure 9 has been generated to capture how the responses of the present question have transformed over time. The graph demonstrates that most of the variation across the responses occurred among the youngest cohort: between the first and second time this cohort were asked the question, the share of the response rate for option "contract of unlimited duration" dropped from 53.56% to 39.42%. The third round, the percentage rate increased to 49%. This demonstrates an overall decrease in secure employment among the youngest cohort from the first to the last rounds.

In addition, the response rate to the question "contract of limited duration" among the youngest cohort significantly increased from the first to the final rounds of questioning: from 28.26% to 26.33% to 39.55% across the three rounds, respectively. These findings demonstrate how younger workers have endured increasing degrees of precarious employment amidst the pandemic; that is, more often reporting to maintain limited contracts, rather than sustaining secure, unlimited contracts.

Notably, the second youngest cohort experienced a prominent decrease in the rate of reporting "contract of limited duration" (33.21% to 21.23% from first to final round of questioning) and increase of reporting "contract of unlimited duration" (62.79% to 70.01%). In other words, it appears that workers aged 25-29 actually experienced a gradual increase of employment security over the course of survey. Furthermore, comparatively insignificant change of the type of contract obtained over the years occurred among the older cohort. Thus, the data demonstrate that, specifically, the youngest employees in the workforce (18-24) appear to have experienced increasing levels of employment precarity; the slightly older cohort (25-29) appear to have attained more secure employment over time, while the older cohort remained relatively stable.

Finally, the third survey question testing H1 comprises of one round of data (N = 40,496), asking: "*During the COVID-19 pandemic have you lost your job(s)/contract(s) or work assignments?*". Figure 10 illustrates the response rate of each cohort for the three possible responses. The results indicate that the youngest cohort had a significantly higher rate of permanent job loss during the pandemic (13%) compared to the second youngest (4.3%) and older (5.1%) cohorts. Consequently, the youngest cohort had a significantly lower rate of keeping their job during the pandemic (62.9%) compared to the second youngest (76.1%) and older (71.4%) cohorts. These results suggest that the youngest cohort not only perceived a higher likelihood of job loss during the pandemic, as previously observed, but also experienced it to a greater extent.

Figure 10



Note. Data is collected from survey round 1 (April 2020 – June 2020).

4.4.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative interviews also examined the participants' employment conditions. The interviewees were asked about their current employment contract and conditions, whether they were content with this arrangement and the reasons why. They were asked about their employment preferences and if this preference had ever been offered. In the context of the pandemic, the participants were asked to discuss if their employment conditions had changed since the outbreak, for instance, involuntary modifications, a reduction of days or hours or completely losing their job, or if these risks were ever perceived to possibly occur.

While the interviews are not sufficiently expansive for a quantitative examination of H1, the findings nevertheless offer interesting insights. The results revealed in which ways the participants experienced job precarity due to the impacts of the pandemic. This often took the form of temporary reductions in working hours or days. While some participants did not receive any compensation for these reductions, others received partial compensation from the government.

More precarious circumstances were particularly observed among the younger participants. For example, one of the younger participants (25-year-old male) experienced a complete pay cut while still being required to work the same number of hours. In the participant's words: "I kept on working the same hours which was really frustrating because I was actually working for free… the frustrating part is that during the pandemic there weren't many companies that needed people to work for them… you felt compelled to work at a place because you had to feel like thank god you still have work!"

The contracts that the interviewees had maintained since the onset of the pandemic were also discussed. Indeed, the younger participants also typically had less secure employment contracts; however, their attitudes towards these contracts varied. For instance, a 26-year-old female participant on a temporary apprenticeship expressed dissatisfaction with her arrangement due to low wages and a higher risk of job loss. In contrast, several other participants reported being satisfied with maintaining non-permanent employment, citing a greater degree of flexibility; this is further discussed in RQ4.

Thus, confronting H1, the findings indicate that younger workers have experienced more precarious employment conditions throughout the pandemic to older workers. Less stable employment conditions have both been perceived and experienced by younger workers: they reported significantly higher levels of probability of losing one's job compared to older workers, which remained stable over time.

Younger workers also sustained more precarious employment contracts, which became more precarious over time. This second finding was observed specifically among the youngest cohort; the preceding cohort (25-29), while still reflected as a "young" cohort, in fact appeared to experience the contrary. Most significantly, the youngest cohort also reported much higher rates of losing their job during the pandemic. These findings are further examined in the Discussion chapter.

4.5 RQ4 - Post-Materialist Values

This analysis incorporates the interview data and builds upon the previous research questions and hypothesis. Initially, the research question is explored within the specific context of teleworking.

4.5.1 Teleworking

On the one hand, it is difficult to make a blanket assertion that a desire to telework is a purely PMV. For instance, one interview participant that favoured occasionally teleworking mentioned how they nevertheless preferred face-to-face meetings as online meetings can impede personal communication and facilitate solely formal communication. Here, the participant demonstrated the PMV of preferring less formal interpersonal relations. In other words, despite a preference to telework, a PMV was evident in the desire for certain procedures to be carried out in person.

However, on the other hand, most of the reasons provided by participants who preferred teleworking reflected PMVs. For example, the most frequently reported reasons comprised of the following: that teleworking offers more flexibility and autonomy to structure one's day and promotes WLB, which relates to the PMVs of individual freedom and a greater concern for the quality of life;

that teleworking has less of an environmental impact, reflecting the PMV of prioritising environmental concerns, and that one can be more relaxed and acquire more family and free time, which also reflects the PMV of a greater concern for the quality of life. Hence, this analysis maintains a desire to telework as a PMV.

Returning to the analysis carried out in RQ1 and shown in Figure 1, younger workers were found to have a stronger preference for teleworking. Moreover, the survey question showing the concern for losing control over one's time when being asked to return to the workplace reflects the PMVs of individual freedom and a greater concern for the quality of life. As shown in RQ2 and Figure 4, the significantly higher response rate for this concern among the young cohort highlights the substantial value gap between each cohort. These findings suggest that, in the context of teleworking preferences (1), younger workers tend to maintain more PMVs to older workers. Whether or not this might anticipate a replacement effect of values is considered in the Discussions chapter.

4.5.2 Employment Precarity

Addressing RQ4 on precarious employment conditions (2), the study examines the attitudes and preferences of participants towards their employment conditions, drawing on the interview data. While employment stability was widely valued, numerous participants reported preferring to have more say in structuring the conditions of their contract. For instance, a desire for more flexibility around start and finish times and the required weekly hours were commonly reported.

In fact, four participants stated wanting to reduce their weekly hours to achieve greater WLB. A 26-year-old female participant stated that she would be willing to take a pay cut if it meant that she could reduce her hours and consequently have more free time. Another participant (34-year-old female) cited the challenges of balancing work and motherhood as the primary reason for desiring a decrease of her working hours. Furthermore, a 32-year-old female participant expressed a preference for non-contract work, citing the greater degree of flexibility that it provides as a top priority. These preferences align with PMVs that prioritise individual freedom and a greater concern for the quality of life over traditional materialistic values like economic security.

According to several younger participants, job security was not a top priority for them. For instance, a 21-year-old male participant expressed his lack of concern for job precarity despite his unstable conditions, saying: "I am a young guy; I don't think I need to have security." Echoing this sentiment, a 25-year-old male participant noted the diverse conditions of the current work climate compared to the past, stating: "I think that, nowadays, for people my age, a contract that lasts for a lifetime isn't really necessary, because, for example, for my parents, you used to work in a place for all your life… for this generation it's not that necessary because we want to do different things; we

want to develop new skills… I don't want to spend too many years in this place because I want to grow constantly in my job."

Due to the limited nature of the qualitative data, responding to RQ4 in a general manner is challenging. However, based on the prevailing sentiments expressed by the interviewees, including the desire for improved WLB, greater autonomy in determining working hours and a lower prioritisation of job security among younger workers, it could be posited that younger employees espouse PMVs with regards to precarious employment conditions.

4.6 RQ5 – Workplace Inequalities

Although this research question cannot be fully addressed by the current study's findings, it is still possible to conduct a preliminary investigation to shed some light on the topic.

4.6.1 Access to Teleworking

Initially, considering access to teleworking opportunities (1), the findings have thus far shown that younger workers demonstrate a stronger preference to telework compared to older workers. The top-down, hierarchical socio-structures commonly found in workplaces can create obstacles for younger workers to have their teleworking preferences met in accordance with their individual values. Moreover, several of the younger interviewees reported that teleworking was not an option available specifically to the younger or less-experienced employees. A 21-year-old male participant commented on this, stating: "I think they have a trust problem… I think the boss doesn't trust the new, younger workers to work productively from home." These findings highlight the existence of an age-based inequality in accessing teleworking arrangements.

4.6.2 Access to Secure Employment

Similarly, it is challenging to comprehensively answer RQ5 regarding younger workers accessing secure employment since the pandemic (2); however, based on the study's findings, given that younger employees have experienced greater job loss and maintained increasingly more precarious employment conditions compared to older workers throughout the pandemic, it is suggested that younger workers have indeed experienced less opportunity to access secure employment, thus exposing another age-based workplace inequality.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion

This chapter delves into the implications of the research findings for each of the study's research questions and hypothesis. By confronting the findings with the study's theoretical model and framework, this chapter seeks to draw conclusions and provide insights into the future ramifications of teleworking and employment precarity among younger workers. This chapter also confronts the study's limitations and suggests avenues for future research.

5.1 Teleworking Findings

5.1.1 Application of Generational Replacement Theory

This section explores how the study's findings align with GRT's concept of a "replacement effect" of generational values. However, prior to delving into the specific reasons for teleworking preferences outlined in this study, it is worth considering the evident preference gap towards the practice between younger and older workers. Younger workers showing a stronger preference to maintain teleworking practices beyond the pandemic compared to older workers may come down to the considerably diverse conditions between younger and older workers' formative years. The rapid rate of technological advancement, for instance, has profoundly affected day-to-day work and private lives.[15]

Technology has progressed at such a swift pace in recent decades that each generation have experienced them in unique ways. For example, the technology that younger cohorts have been exposed to in their formative years, such as the internet, smartphones and social media, were absent during the formative years of many older workers. Moreover, many younger workers have lived and worked in societies where the internet has always existed; older workers have undergone the transformation of integrating the internet into the workplace. Such diverse associations with technological advancement undoubtedly impact one's values.

Inglehart (1977) posits that technological developments have led to the evolution of new lifestyles, involving changes in how people work and communicate. Younger workers, growing up with the same ICTs that facilitate teleworking, are likely more prepared and habituated to apply them

[15] As per the populations analysed in this study, the projections in this chapter are likewise considered specifically among a European population. Other non-Western populations may have experienced these changes in different ways, and thus may not necessarily exhibit the same trends and values as Europeans.

in their working lives, and therefore more content to do so. Additionally, as more experienced users of ICTs, younger workers are likely more efficient in using them. The drastic shifts in personal environments uproot individuals from previous patterns (Inglehart, 1977). Thus, the lifestyles of the formative years of younger workers may contribute to their stronger preference for teleworking arrangements, which in turn may drive an increase in telework in the future, reflecting the values of a more technology-integrated and tech-savvy workforce.

Indeed, the specific reasons identified in this study for teleworking preferences tend to align with PMVs. Results from the quantitative analysis show that younger workers prioritise the PMVs of individual freedom and a greater concern for the quality of life significantly more than older workers, with a stronger preference for controlling their own time. The qualitative analysis findings also indicate that the most cited reasons for favouring telework, indicated by mostly younger participants, predominantly reflected PMVs; namely, environmental concerns, individual freedom and a greater concern for the quality of life. However, older participants also reported similar reasons and preferences towards teleworking that aligned with PMVs, albeit to a lesser extent.

These findings align with Inglehart's (1992) projection: in the 1990s, he observed a gradual decline of MVs in Europe, as older generations that upheld such values were dying off and younger generations continuously replaced them with PMVs. Inglehart predicted that the replacement of PMVs over MVs will continue to occur in the coming decades, although at a slower rate than the populations he studied in the past. While the findings of this study show that younger workers do maintain a stronger desire to telework with reasons that reflect more PMVs, older workers, nevertheless, exhibit substantial inclinations towards teleworking. In the context of teleworking preference, the findings of the study align with Inglehart's prediction: that European populations will largely uphold PMVs, but that younger generations will continue to introduce increasingly PMVs to the population's values.

In a post-pandemic context, the decision to maintain or revoke teleworking arrangements has been largely managerial. Perhaps the dominant concerns of managers that have been exposed in this study, such as a general lack of control and trust over staff to work from home, may ultimately wane as more effective teleworking strategies are developed and as employees continue to demand greater flexibility. Furthermore, as younger workers ascend to more senior positions in the workforce, managerial staff may become increasingly receptive to teleworking arrangements, potentially resulting in further implementation of flexible workplace policies.

Naturally, there are other variables at play in determining the future structurisation of teleworking, such as potential legal constraints, evolving workplace policies and the introduction of new forms of ICTs or surveillance that could shape teleworking practices. However, this study's findings suggest that, since the pandemic, teleworking arrangements continue to be primarily established by managerial-determined, top-down processes, and that values towards workplace

practices increasingly align with PMVs. Thus, within a GRT framework, it can be hypothesised that a shift in workplace values may contribute to a greater frequency of teleworking in the years to come.

5.1.2 Application of Critical Realism

This section provides an analysis of the findings pertaining to RQ3 and RQ5 by adopting a critical realist perspective to examine some implications of future teleworking implementation and the subsequent accessibility of younger workers to the practice.

Elder-Vass' (2011) concept of an "emergence hierarchy" refers to the notion that higher-level social structures, such as organisations, emerge from the interactions of lower-level structures, such as the interactions of individuals; higher-level structures can have causal effect on lower-level structures because they emerge from the interactions of those structures. Nonetheless, organisations are recognised as maintaining a substantial degree of causal power over individuals due to their fixed internal authoritative structures. Consistent with the findings of this study, namely, the dominating top-down, hierarchical approach to the implementation of teleworking, through the lens of critical realism, it can be argued that the decision to allow teleworking, which was always determined by managerial staff with the fixed authoritative structure of the organisation, reflects the causal power of the higher-level social structure over lower-level structures, such as individual employees.

However, as per Elder-Vass' (2011) theory, social structures are far from static: their causal powers always depend on the interactions of their parts. The increasing desire to telework among employees can be seen as having emergent causal powers that may substantially impact the future implementation of the practice. As the preference to telework becomes more widespread, the dominant top-down approach of teleworking structurisation observed in this study may become challenged, requiring organisations to reconsider how teleworking is structured and permitted. In other words, the lower-level structures influence the dominant higher-level structures, thus shaping the normative conditions surrounding the practice and potentially reshaping organisational decision-making processes.

This prospect will have implications for younger workers' teleworking possibilities. Organisations ultimately depend on the beliefs and dispositions of the human agents who are their parts to produce the mechanisms that give them their causal powers (Elder-Vass, 2017). As teleworking practices become more widespread, and thus, more normative, organisational strategies, albeit in top-down processes, will reflect more tolerant and non-discriminatory policies of teleworking arrangements. As a result, this addresses the age inequality uncovered in this study, facilitating younger workers to attain equal access to teleworking to their older counterparts.

5.1.3 Nuances in the Data

The analysis of teleworking preferences revealed noteworthy distinctions that merit further consideration. Specifically, when measuring the preference to telework beyond the pandemic, the youngest cohort (ages 18-29) exhibited a slightly lower preference to telework compared to the subsequent cohort (30-39), thereby contradicting the pattern of a gradual decrease in preference with age (see Figure 2).

This finding raises the question of why the youngest cohort may be less inclined to telework than older ones. One possibility is that, being relatively new to the workforce, this cohort may value the social and professional benefits of in-person work interactions more than the flexibility of remote work. This sentiment was shared by one of the younger interview participants (25), who emphasised the need for human contact and to share ideas with colleagues in person. Furthermore, this cohort, lacking the experience to that of older workers, may also feel less confident in their ability to perform their job duties remotely and may prefer the structure and guidance of in-person arrangements, or they may see in-person work as an opportunity to build relations and networks that can facilitate their career growth.

Additionally, the analysis of teleworking preferences over three survey rounds revealed that, despite being relatively stable throughout, there was a marked decline in the younger cohort's (18-29) inclination to telework "several times a week" and "several times a month" over time, coupled with an increase in the preference to "never" telework (see Figure 3).

The surveys were conducted from June 2020 to May 2022, representing a crucial phase of the pandemic. Several pandemic-related factors may have contributed to the observed decline in teleworking preferences during this period. One plausible explanation is that as pandemic restrictions were gradually lifted, younger workers may have opted to return to their workplaces to socialise and network with colleagues after prolonged durations of isolation. The pronounced emphasis on achieving positive WLB among younger workers may have been disrupted by the pandemic's exigencies, and to redress this imbalance, they may have expressed a preference to return to the physical workplace to accomplish a more desirable WLB.

There is also the possibility that younger workers faced greater challenges working in less suitable home environments compared to their older counterparts. In Europe, younger individuals are much more likely to live in households that are shared with family members or flatmates compared to older workers (Eurostat, 2022). Such household dynamics may be distracting and constrained, which may not be satisfactory for effective remote working. The prolonged periods of mandatory remote work during the pandemic may have exacerbated this issue. However, it is probable that under more

stable conditions, beyond the pandemic, where teleworking arrangements are more voluntary and regulated, younger workers will likely return to their initial teleworking preferences as a means to achieve the desired WLB which is highly valued among this cohort.

Finally, a noteworthy discovery from the qualitative interviews was that all participants who expressed a preference for teleworking desired it within a hybrid structure, rather than a full-time arrangement. In light of this finding, it is crucial for organisations to provide employees with some level of autonomy in deciding how frequently they telework. This approach enables employees to achieve a better WLB by combining onsite and offsite options, thus facilitating the advantages of teleworking.

5.2 Employment Precarity Findings

5.2.1 Application of Critical Realism

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the specific structural mechanisms at play in the phenomenon of younger workers experiencing less access to secure employment throughout the pandemic, the philosophy of critical realism is applied to this study's findings.

Organisations have real emergent causal powers that materially affect social events; they not only shape internal normative environments, but they have the capacity to influence their external normative environment (Elder-Vass, 2011). As previously stated, workers with atypical contracts experience not only greater degrees of work-related challenges compared to more secure employees, but they also face more difficulties with making long-term decisions in their personal lives. Hence, the causal powers of organisations on individuals' lives should not be underestimated.

Considering that younger workers were already experiencing greater degrees of job precarity before the onset of the pandemic, it is worth considering the structural mechanisms that aided in establishing this workplace inequality in the first place. To understand the wider societal factors that shape organisational norms, critical realism presents two concepts relating to temporal emergence: morphogenetic causal factors, which relate to the generative mechanisms that bring about social change, and morphostatic factors are those that contribute to sustaining their existence over time (Elder-Vass, 2011). In Europe, the former concept can be applied to the European Union's policies and regulations of liberalisation and deregulation that have failed to adequately protect workers' rights and ensure secure employment, while the latter can be applied to the organisations themselves, that have sustained these policies despite increasing employment precarity (OECD, 2016).

Thus, the underlying structures and mechanisms that have produced the exacerbation of employment precarity throughout the pandemic among young workers have been longstanding, top-down institutional forces; namely, governmental and organisational causes. To rectify this matter, it is hereby suggested that, in order to target the issue at its source, policies must also be directed at institutional levels. Specifically, to address the workplace inequality of younger workers involuntarily maintaining precarious employment, workplace policies that equally support the rights of workers of all ages must be directed at governmental and organisational levels. Top-down policies necessitate change from the institutions themselves, preventing the probable sidestepping of certain workplace policies and protections in the interest of capitalist motives. Such policies safeguard younger workers to access the same work and private life opportunities as their older counterparts, thereby addressing the workplace inequality identified in this study.

5.2.2 Nuances in the Data

One noteworthy distinction that emerged from the results was that the second youngest cohort (25-29) appeared to have obtained slightly more secure employment throughout the duration of the pandemic (see Figure 9). This outcome contradicts the rest of the findings. While it is difficult to precisely determine the reasons for this trend, one possible explanation is that the second youngest cohort, having more experience in the workforce to their younger counterparts, having completed their apprenticeships (as demonstrated in Figure 9) subsequently secured more stable conditions.

Moreover, this increase in job security was observed in May 2022, when the worst impacts of the pandemic on employment conditions had already passed. Hence, the higher demand for workers may have led to an increase in the number of secure job positions available, benefitting the second youngest cohort.[16] Contrarily, the youngest cohort, lacking the experience of their older colleagues and being more likely to still be engaged in apprenticeships and training schemes, faced greater challenges in securing stable employment contracts.

5.3 Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While this study contributed to filling certain gaps in the research, it also has some limitations that should be addressed. For instance, while the qualitative interviews were specifically designed to locate and measure PMVs among participants, relevant survey questions that captured values relevant to

[16] Notably, this analysis did not account for the temporary impacts of the pandemic, such as temporary hourly or daily reductions, which were commonly reported by the interview participants.

GRT had to be cherrypicked for the quantitative surveys. Similarly, while the quantitative survey data established that younger employees maintained more precarious employment contracts throughout the pandemic, it was not clear if these employment conditions were voluntary or involuntary; the interviews, on the other hand, were designed to detect these details. Future research would benefit by implementing quantitative surveys that specifically capture and monitor PMVs among participants, as well as determine whether precarious employment conditions are voluntary or involuntary. Combined with in-depth qualitative interviews that seek similar information, a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding can be accomplished.

Building on this study, future research could investigate voluntary and involuntary precarious employment, but with the added dynamic of a cross-country analysis. Consistent with recent research that has identified the impact of the welfare state on voluntary verses involuntary precarious employment (e.g., Karabchuk & Soboleva, 2020; Green & Livanos, 2017), it would be interesting to further investigate this area of inquiry in a post-pandemic context. Given the extensive impacts of the pandemic on workers' employment conditions, it would be valuable to monitor their preferences and experiences across multiple European countries. This would provide insights into how different states are handling the implementation of teleworking and addressing employment security concerns. Additionally, such research could shed light on how well policy measures align with employees' preferences and identify areas that require further attention.

5.4 Final Remarks

While this study managed to identify several workplace inequalities experienced among younger workers as it set out to do, an equally significant finding is that the preference for more flexible workplace arrangements was widely valued by most workers, regardless of age. Indeed, while younger cohorts tended to indicate a stronger preference for more flexibility, the desire to telework and have more control over the structure of their jobs remained at relatively high levels for workers of all ages. Furthermore, preferences for the ways in which flexible workplace arrangements are implemented, such as the rate of teleworking and the opportunity to attain more secure employment, significantly varied from one person to the next.

Therefore, the results demonstrate that workplace values and preferences vary from person to person. As a result, organisations must seek to ensure equal opportunities for employees of all ages while implementing teleworking and employment contract policies and procedures tailored to the individual, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach. By supporting equal opportunity and responding to individual preferences and needs, organisations can create more inclusive and positive workplaces that promote the satisfaction and wellbeing of all workers, regardless of their age or employment status.

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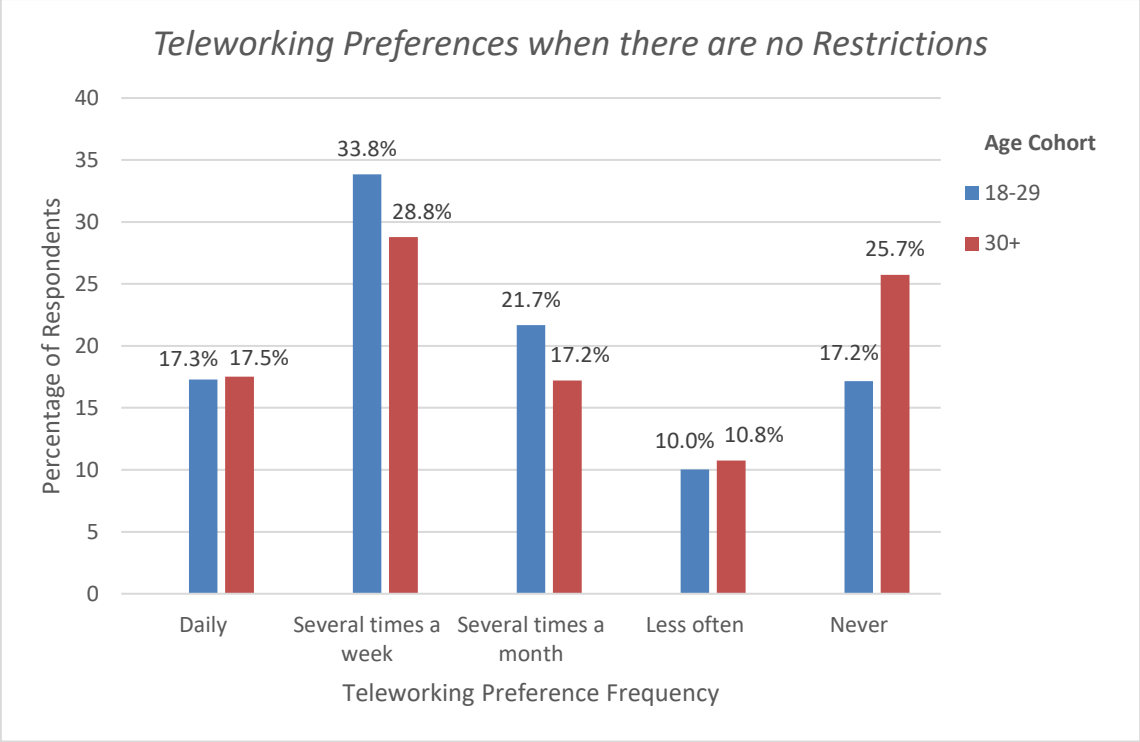
Annex A: Graphs and Figures

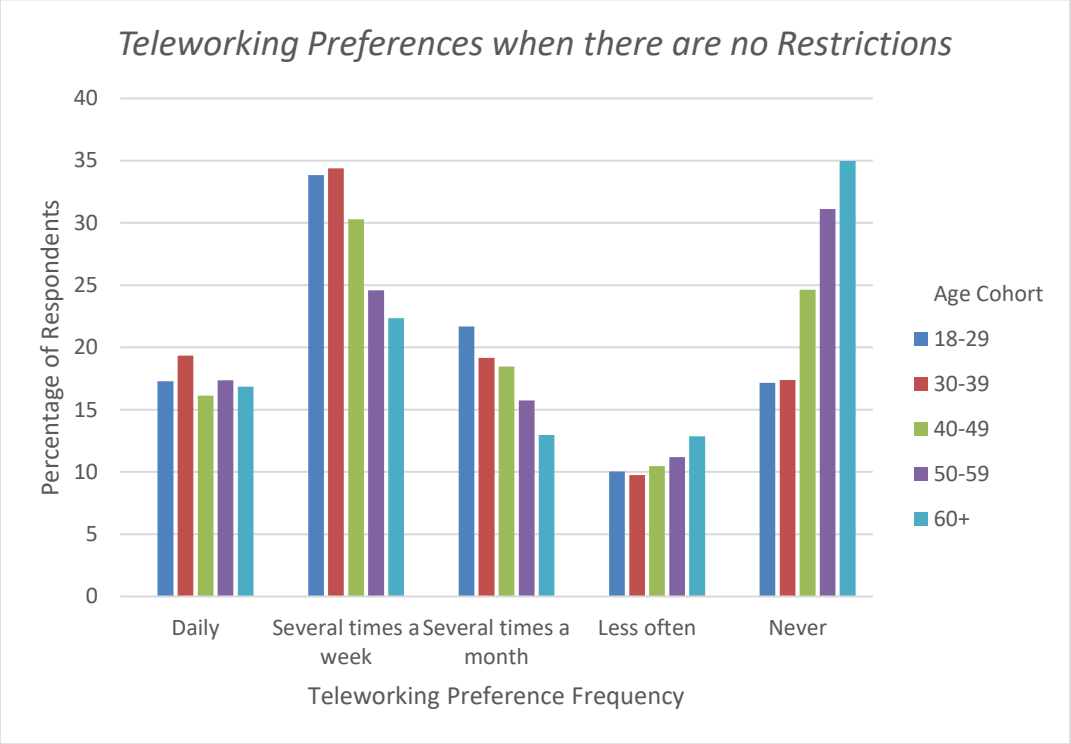
This annex contains the graphs and figures referred to in the Analysis chapter of this study. They are arranged in the order that they appear in the text. The data contained in each figure has been collected from Eurofound's (2023a) "Living, working and COVID-19 e-survey". Fieldwork for Round 1 took place between 9 April and 11 June 2020; for Round 2 between 22 June and 27 July 2020; for Round 3 between 15 February and 30 March 2021 and for Round 5 between 24 March and 2 May 2022.

Figure 1



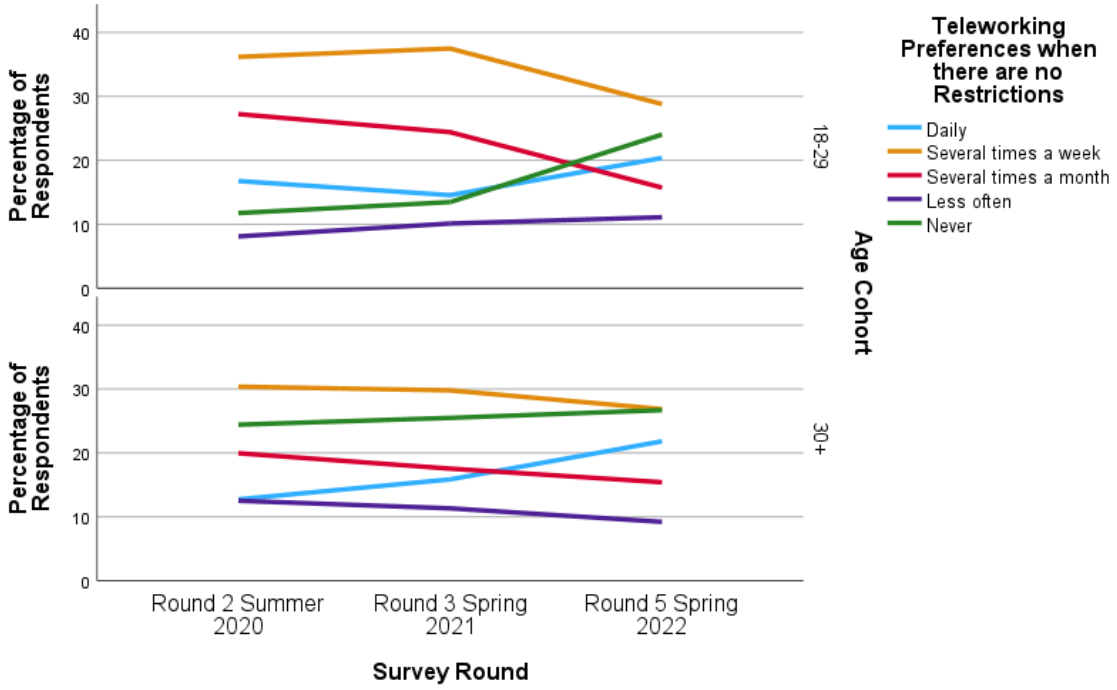
Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 2, 3 and 5 (June 2020 – May 2022).

Figure 2



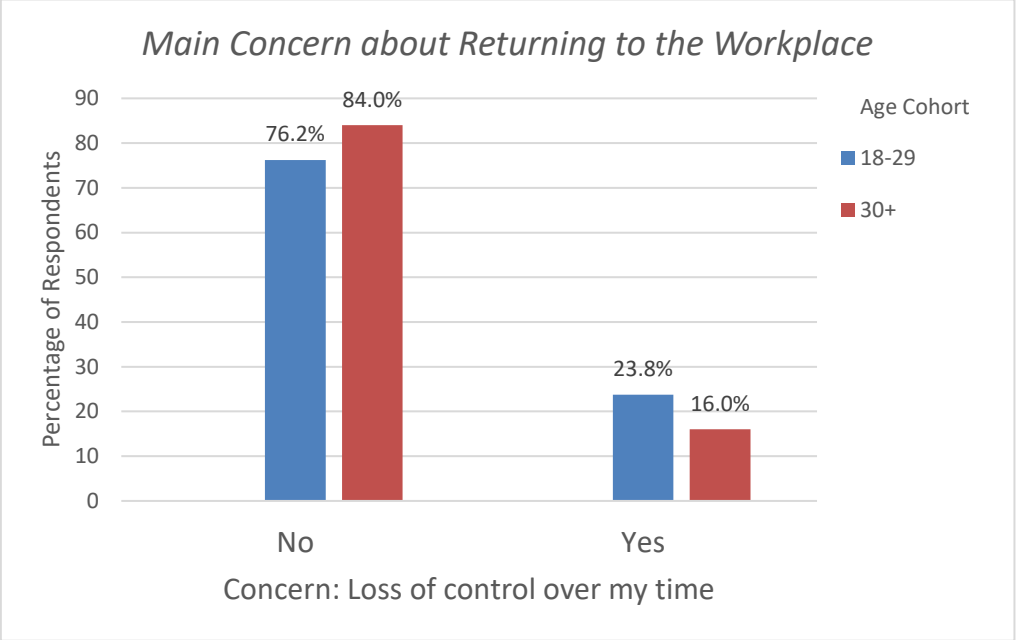
Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 2, 3 and 5 (June 2020 – May 2022).

Figure 3



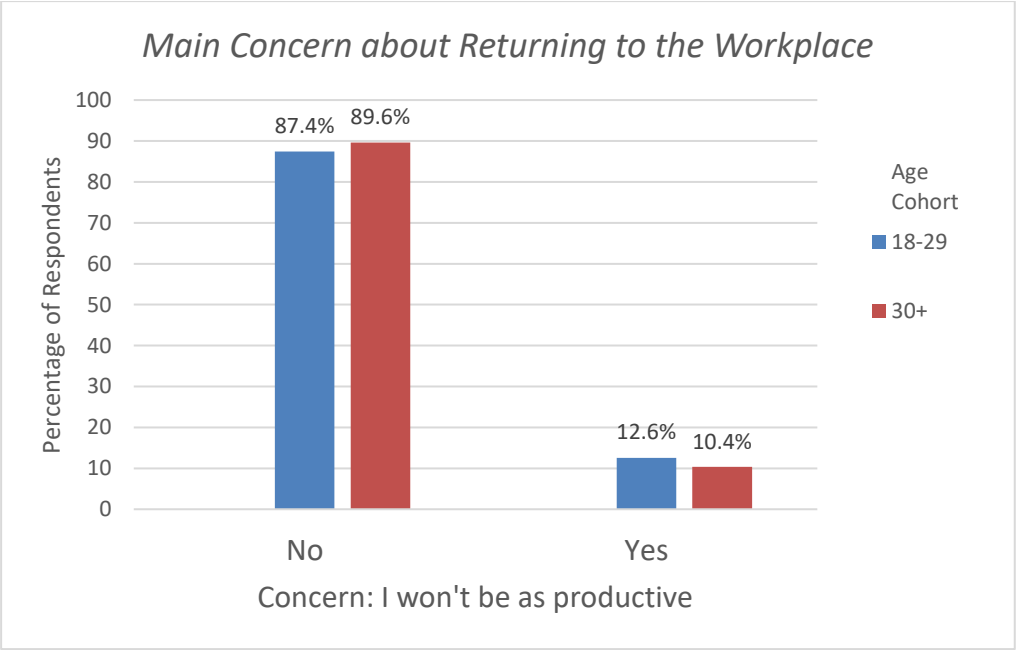
Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 2, 3 and 5 (June 2020 – May 2022).

Figure 4



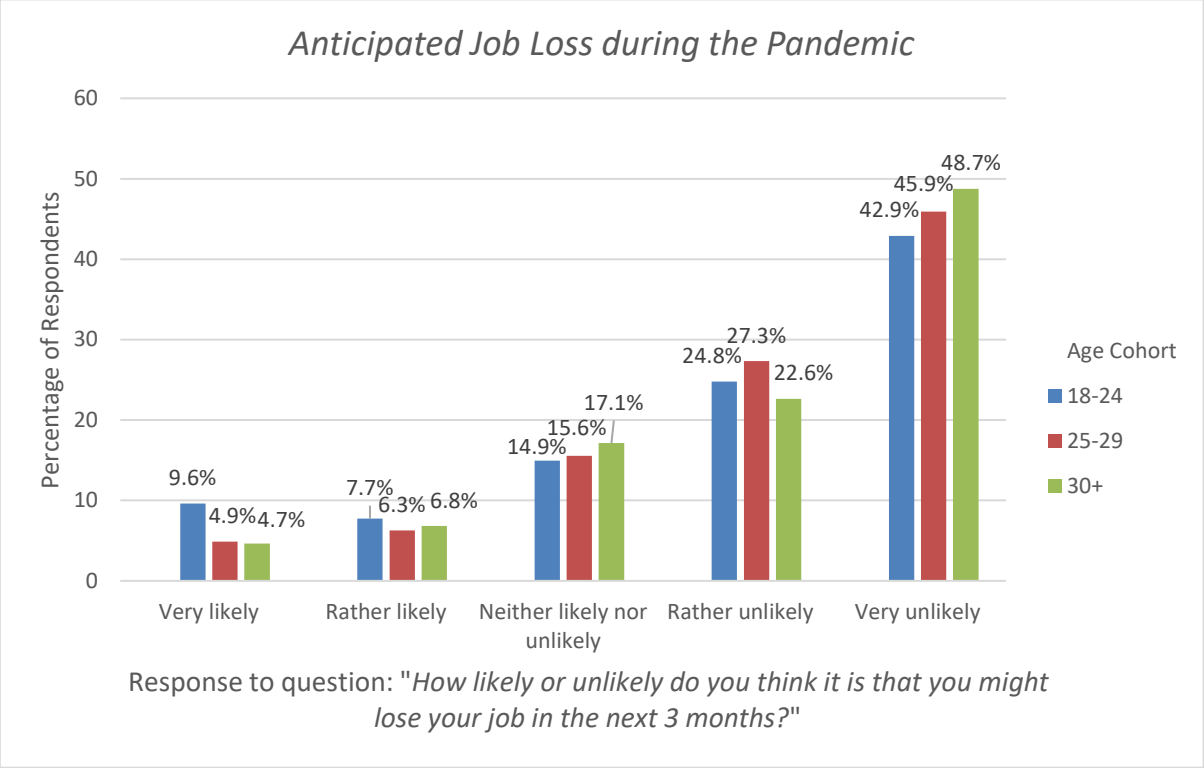
Note. Data is collected from survey round 5 (March 2022 – May 2022).

Figure 5



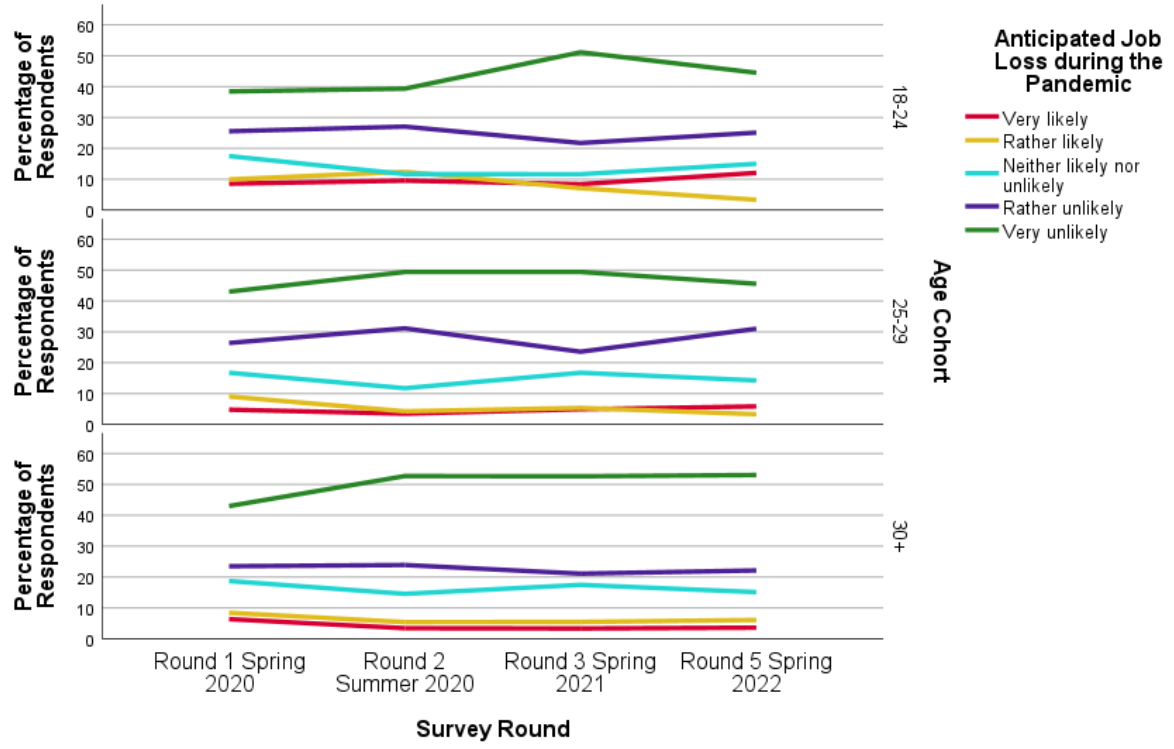
Note. Data is collected from survey round 5 (March 2022 – May 2022).

Figure 6



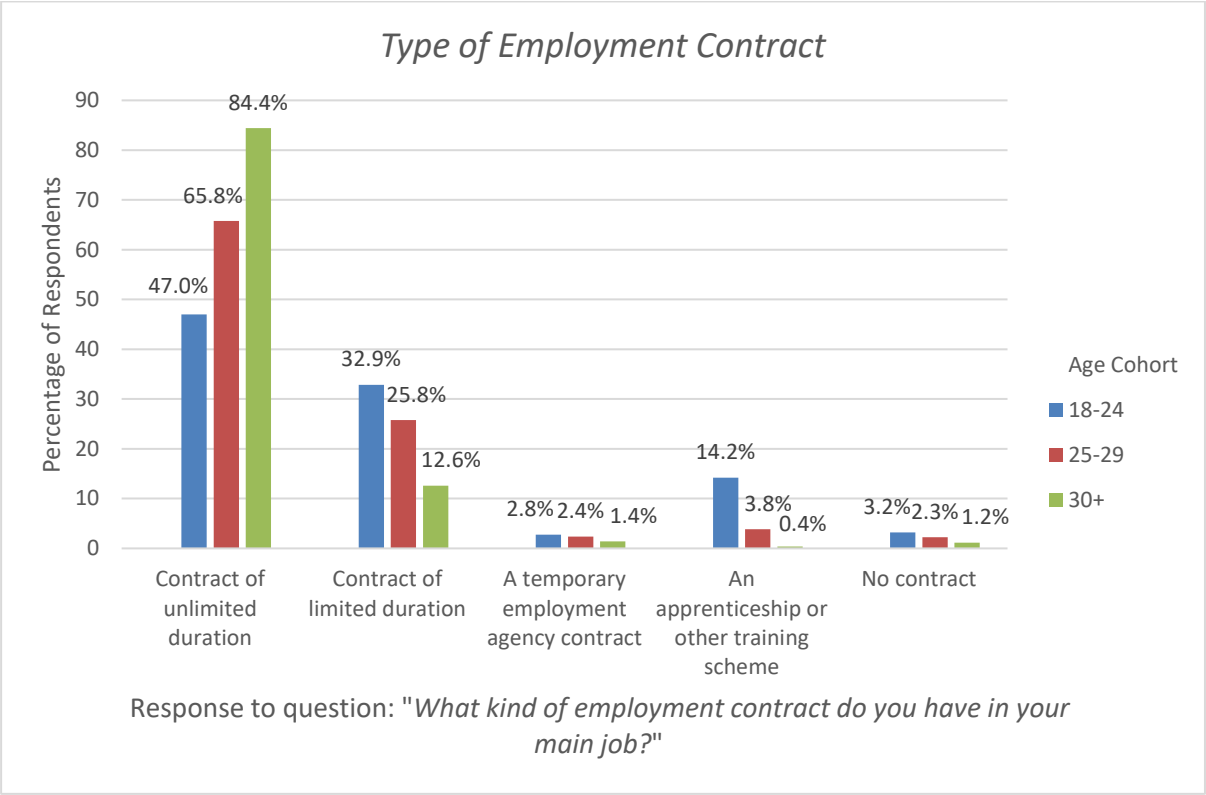
Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 1, 2, 3 and 5 (April 2020 – May 2022).

Figure 7



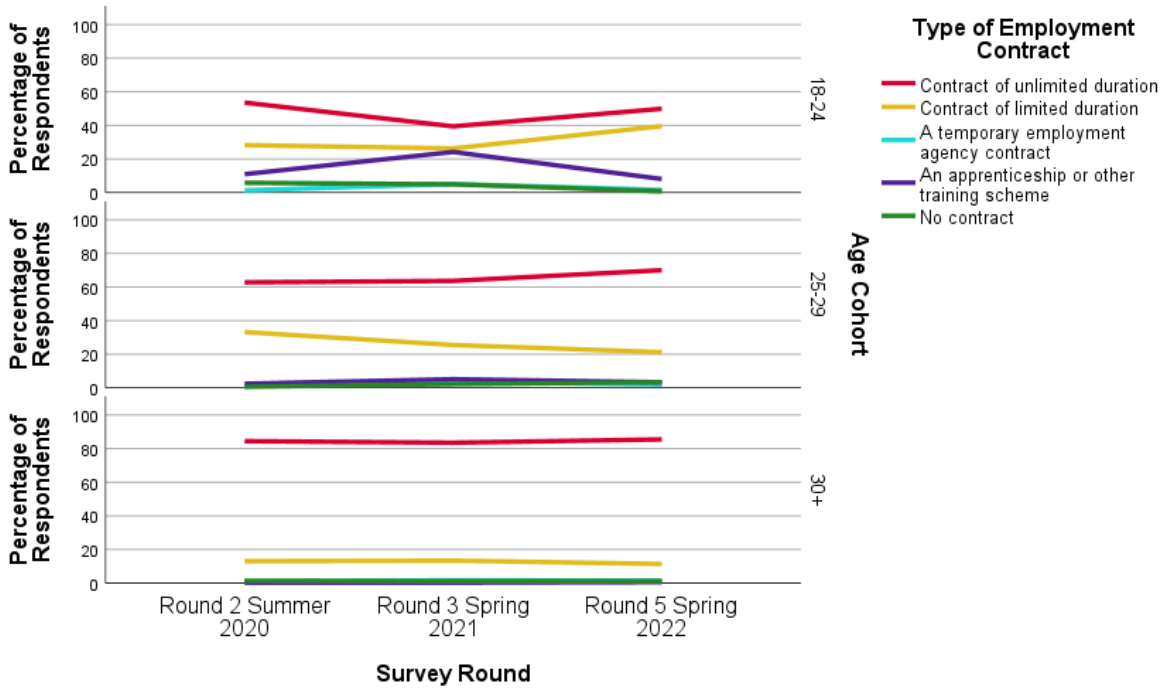
Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 1, 2, 3 and 5 (April 2020 – May 2022).

Figure 8



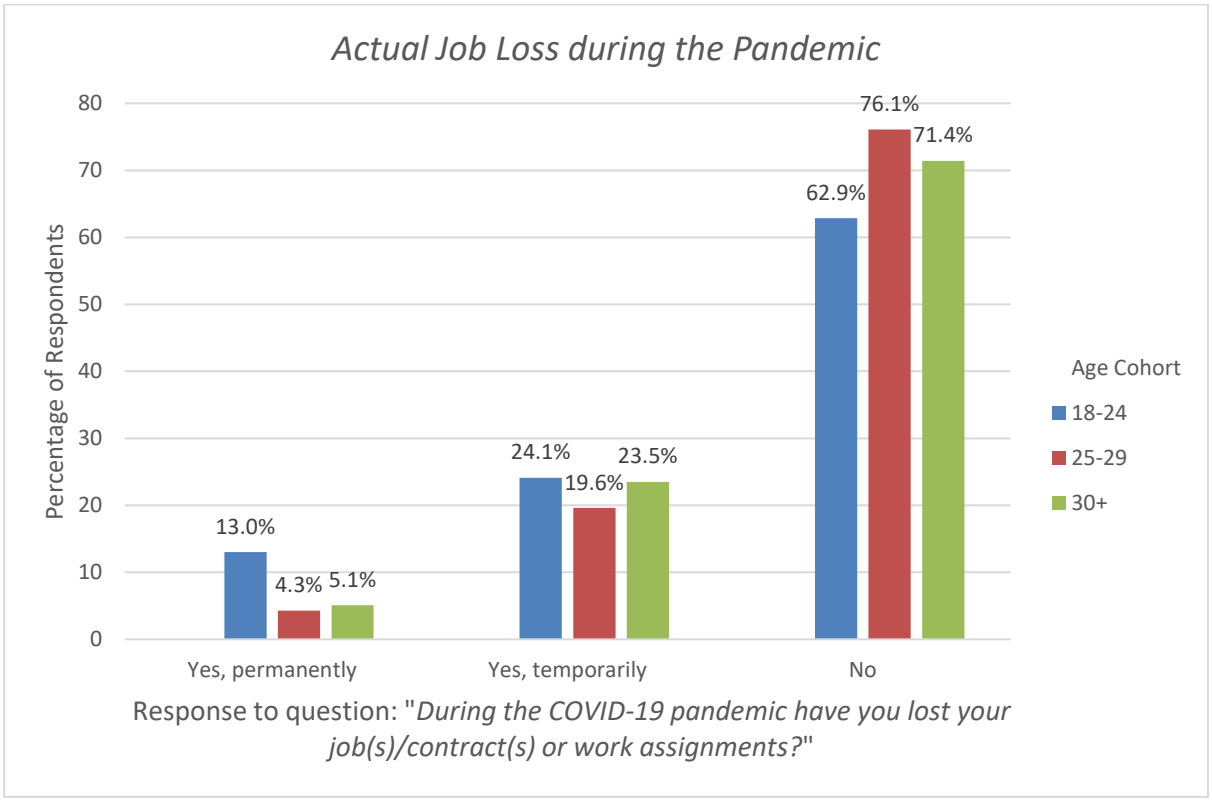
Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 2, 3 and 5 (June 2020 – May 2022).

Figure 9



Note. Data is collected from survey rounds 2, 3 and 5 (June 2020 – May 2022).

Figure 10



Note. Data is collected from survey round 1 (April 2020 – June 2020).

Annex B: Descriptive Statistics

This annex presents the descriptive statistics for each quantitative investigation conducted in the Analysis chapter. The statistics are organised by the research question in the order they appear in the text.

RQ1

Case Processing Summary

	Cases Included	
	N	Percent
Work from home preferences when there are no restrictions	35300	20.2%

(1)

Report

Work from home preferences when there are no restrictions

Age	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
18-29	2.7594	4145	1.32624
30+	2.9840	31155	1.45795
Total	2.9576	35300	1.44490

(2)

Report

Work from home preferences when there are no restrictions

Age	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
18-29	2.7594	4145	1.32624
30-39	2.7146	8968	1.35233
40-49	2.9718	8855	1.42741
50-59	3.1413	9945	1.50896
60+	3.2677	3386	1.53421
Total	2.9576	35300	1.44490

RQ2

(1)

Case Processing Summary

	Cases Included	
	N	Percent
Concern: Loss of control over my time	19160	11.0%

(2)

Case Processing Summary

	Cases Included	
	N	Percent
Concern: I won't be as productive	19160	11.0%

H1

(1)

Case Processing Summary

	Cases Included	
	N	Percent
Anticipated job loss during the pandemic	86069	49.2%

Report

Anticipated job loss during the pandemic

Age	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
18-24	3.8358	3334	1.31474
25-29	4.0314	7389	1.14263
30+	4.0400	75346	1.16156
Total	4.0313	86069	1.16691

(2)

Case Processing Summary

	Cases Included	
	N	Percent
Type of employment contract	45617	26.1%

(3)

Case Processing Summary

	Cases Included	
	N	Percent
Actual job loss during the pandemic	40496	23.2%

Annex C: Survey Questionnaire and Details

This annex presents the survey questions incorporated in this study. The questions are organised by the research question in the order they appear in the text.

RQ1

Work from home preferences when there are no restrictions

Question text: If you had the choice, how often would you like to work from home if there were no restrictions due to COVID-19?

Value labels:

1 Daily
2 Several times a week
3 Several times a month
4 Less often
5 Never

Availability: Rounds 2, 3 and 5

RQ2

(1)

Concern: Loss of control over my time

Question text: What concerns you most about returning to work?

Value labels:

0 - No

1 - Yes

Availability: Round 5

(2)

Concern: I won't be as productive

Question text: What concerns you most about returning to work?

Value labels:

0 - No

1 - Yes

Availability: Round 5

H1

(1)

Job security

Question text: Using this scale, how likely or unlikely do you think it is that you might lose your job in the next 3 months?

Value labels:

1 Very likely
2 Rather likely
3 Neither likely nor unlikely
4 Rather unlikely
5 Very unlikely

Availability: Rounds 1, 2, 3 and 5

(2)

Employment contract in main job

Question text: What kind of employment contract do you have in your main job?

Value labels:

1 Contract of unlimited duration
2 Contract of limited duration
3 A temporary employment agency contract
4 An apprenticeship or other training scheme
5 No contract

Availability: Rounds 2, 3 and 5

(3)

Lost job during COVID-19 pandemic

Question text: During the COVID-19 pandemic...

Have you lost your job(s)/contract(s) or work assignments?

1 Yes, permanently
2 Yes, temporarily
3 No

Availability: Round 1

Annex D: Interview Data

This annex provides data and information on the qualitative interviews. Firstly, it presents the ethical statement read to the participants at the beginning of the interview, in both English and Italian versions. Secondly, it includes the tables containing the interview data and notable quotes.

English version of ethical statement:

"*This interview is to be recorded. Is that okay with you?* (wait for participant's consent)

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and if you wish to stop the interview at any time, this is not a problem.

I also inform you that your personal details will remain anonymous. No identifiable information, such as your name or the company that you work for, are to be included in the publishing of this study. The only personal information that will be included in the study is your age and gender. Is that ok with you? (wait for participant's consent)"

Italian version of ethical statement:

"*Questa intervista deve essere registrata. Va bene per te?* (wait for participant's consent)

La tua partecipazione è del tutto volontaria e se desideri interrompere il colloquio in qualsiasi momento, questo non è un problema.

Ti informo che i tuoi dati personali rimarranno anonimi. Nessun dato sensibile, come il tuo nome o l'azienda per cui lavori, verrà incluso nella pubblicazione di questo studio. Le uniche informazioni personali che saranno incluse nello studio sono la tua età e il tuo sesso. Va bene per te? (wait for participant's consent)"

Table 1

Telework Section of Interview

	Age	Gender	Currently permitted to telework? How often?	How is teleworking structured? Reasons?	Desire to telework more/less/at all? Reasons?	Key quotes
Participant 1	32	Female	Yes. Several days a week.	Employer permits hybrid arrangement. Employee decides if to carry out the practice or not.	No desire at all. Too distracted at home. Not enough space to work. Feels isolated.	(Regarding working from home) "I cannot talk to people directly; I'd be by myself alone. I don't want it."
Participant 2	53	Female	Yes. As often as she wants.	Employer permits teleworking without boundaries, on the condition that certain tasks that cannot be carried out remotely are completed onsite.	Currently working about 2 days a week at home. Teleworks when feeling unwell. Does not enjoy teleworking, feels isolated and gets less work done. At home, is distracted by pets, household chores. Feels depressed when staying in pyjamas/home clothes all day; prefers to dress for the office and prepare makeup.	"Maybe I have to wash the clothes, make the bed… I am distracted by my pets… there are things that distract me. When I am in the office these things obviously don't bother me."
Participant 3	33	Male	No, no possibility.	Completely decided by the employers; employees have no say. As lockdown restrictions eased, employers were gradually required to return to the office. This was likely because employers did	Would like to telework one or two days a week in order to get through the tasks that can be carried out individually. Would prefer to have more say in structuring the week's tasks.	"(the bosses) likely do not trust us to work from home productively… it might be difficult to monitor our productivity, but with some effort, it would be possible." "In face-to-face meetings there is the possibility to discuss other topics that is not only about work; to ask how someone is, to ask about their weekend… in online meetings this is often not the case: when conversation on

	Age	Gender	Currently permitted to telework? How often?	How is teleworking structured? Reasons?	Desire to telework more/less/at all? Reasons?	Key quotes
				not trust the employees to work productively from home.	Would not always want to telework because he feels isolated and less stimulated to work when always at home. Particularly feels isolated with online meetings. Feels that online meetings create environments where only work can be discussed; prefers face-to-face meetings where there is the possibility to connect with colleagues on a less formal and more personal level.	the meeting's topic finishes you close the meeting without further discussion."
Participant 4	26	Female	Yes, but only one day a week and no more.	Completely decided by the directors of the company (likely also influenced by the guidance of HR). Mostly due to concerns of lower productivity. Employees have very little say, for example, one employee works from home two days a week but only because her father is very unwell.	Would like to telework two or three days a week (more than permitted). Main reasons for this: - Better for the environment - More relaxed at home - More free time	"(the bosses) think that if you are at home, then you are not working, but this is not true. You can work very well from home." "If you ask to work from home for any more than one day, they (bosses) are not happy." "On an environmental level, it's much better to not have to drive to work every day, but there is still this mindset that is very old."

	Age	Gender	Currently permitted to telework? How often?	How is teleworking structured? Reasons?	Desire to telework more/less/at all? Reasons?	Key quotes
Participant 5	33	Male	Yes, as often as he wants.	The company's boss allows most employees to choose how much they wish to telework. At least one day a week in the office is preferred, but this is not strictly enforced. Certain colleagues have been requested to come into the office if their performance rate is low. In moments of frustration, the boss has threatened to take away the possibility of teleworking.	Content with current arrangement: teleworking roughly 3-4 days a week. Main reasons for teleworking: - Easier to focus at home - Better equipment at home - More flexibility (more control over his time) Feels less connected to people on a personal level when work is carried out remotely too often, for example, finds it difficult to separate colleagues on a personal level from their professional roles. Advised that he mitigates this issue with in-person, non-professional interactions with colleagues, such as playing foosball in the common office space.	"For job searching, teleworking is a nonnegotiable requirement for me." (Would not accept a job offer if teleworking was not possible) "I am a flexibility-focused person… for instance, when I take a two-hour lunch break to go to the gym, I usually start an hour earlier in the morning." "In our company, you can ask to be paid for the extra hours you do. I never did this because I always valued more the flexibility of being in the flow, like, I want to get this done verses not caring about the work and counting down the hours."

	Age	Gender	Currently permitted to telework? How often?	How is teleworking structured? Reasons?	Desire to telework more/less/at all? Reasons?	Key quotes
Participant 6	34	Female	Yes, permitted to telework. Frequency has not been discussed as she does not wish to telework.	Employer permits teleworking. The decision to engage in teleworking is left to the discretion of the employee.	No desire to telework at all. Reasons: - No separation of work and private life - Always staying in the same environment - Less efficiency with communicating with colleagues and clients, there are often delays trying to communicate through devices rather than in person.	"At least when I work in the office, I can separate my work life from my private life. When I worked from home, it was all mixed together, and the day was never ending." "When I'm out of the office, it's another life. It's my life. When I'm in the office, that's the life of work."
Participant 7	37	Female	Yes, as often as she wants.	The boss permits teleworking without boundaries. All employees consequently work from home. There is a shared office space available which is commonly used by the	Prefers to telework; currently working in the office only one or two days a month. Reasons for preference: - Flexibility to structure her daily tasks, such as family	"In the afternoon I have family commitments… if I have to pick up my daughter from school, when I'm working from home, I can manage this easily. When I take my daughter home, I can continue to work, and at least for her (the daughter), someone is with her." "At home, I am able to be much more concentrated… probably, my productivity has increased (working from home)".

	Age	Gender	Currently permitted to telework? How often?	How is teleworking structured? Reasons?	Desire to telework more/less/at all? Reasons?	Key quotes
				bosses, but rarely by employees.	commitments, gym, shopping, with work tasks - More productive - Doesn't want to go to the office to only work with her bosses (all her colleagues work mainly telework)	"It's easier for me to work outside of business hours in order to finish a work task."
Participant 8	26	Female	No, no possibility.	Completely decided by boss, who wants everyone to be in the office at all times. This is likely due to a perceived increase degree of control over the employees.	Would like to telework three or four days a week. The main reason is so that she can manage her time in a more effective way. Also, productivity is higher when teleworking.	"(why the boss wants all employees in the office) because when the employees are in the office, he probably finds everything more under-control, and he feels he can make sure that you work all the eight hours." "(regarding productivity) at home you are more active; more mentally fresh. Working in the office can be slower because maybe you are tired, or people keep interrupting you—at home, you can probably do what would be eight hour's work in the office in just five hours."
Participant 9	21	Male	No, participant is not permitted to telework. Some employees are permitted to telework, others are not. He has been working at	Which employees are permitted to telework is completely dictated by the boss. Possibility for his colleagues to telework has only been offered since the pandemic. Younger workers (including the	Would like to telework half of the time. Main reasons: - To manage his time in an effective way - No need to drive and therefore	"(Why he is not permitted to telework, while most of his colleagues are) I think they have a trust problem… I think the boss doesn't trust the new, younger workers to work productively from home." "A person working from home is more at ease; freer, and the consequence of this is being more productive"

	Age	Gender	Currently permitted to telework? How often?	How is teleworking structured? Reasons?	Desire to telework more/less/at all? Reasons?	Key quotes
			the company for two years but still has not been provided the option to telework, while his team leader teleworks.	participant) are likely not trusted to work productively from home.	less impact on the environment - More at ease when working at home, and therefore, more productive	
Participant 10	25	Male	No, participant is not permitted to telework. Only some colleagues, who have higher positions, are permitted to telework several days a week.	Teleworking is currently not feasible for most employees because the main operational equipment, reliable network and server connections have not been provided by the employers for remote working. If these were implemented, however, teleworking would be feasible.	Does not desire to telework at all. Main reasons are that he prefers to keep work and private life separate, he is more productive in the office, he would feel isolated at home and, because he lives nearby the workplace, he is comfortable to go to the office rather than stay home. If he lived far from the office, he would be more inclined to the telework due to environmental reasons and high costs of driving and using public transport.	"I wouldn't want to work from home because that would interfere with my private life… I would be lazier. I need a rigid schedule." "I really need human contact… I need to see you, to work with you, so that we can share our ideas. I really need that."
Participant 11	26	Male	Yes, but not every day.	Working in the office is encouraged by the boss, but not enforced. If an	Would like to work some days from home and some in the office.	"(Regarding teleworking) The beauty is that you can stay at home with your family, so that, on your work break, you can see your family and you can eat lunch

	Age	Gender	Currently permitted to telework? How often?	How is teleworking structured? Reasons?	Desire to telework more/less/at all? Reasons?	Key quotes
				employee desires to telework, they must request for this beforehand. Participant was partially teleworking in the month of December for a specific project; he would still like to work within this hybrid arrangement but has not requested this from his boss; he advised it would most likely be possible if he were to ask.	Main reasons to telework are that he feels generally more comfortable and relaxed working from home and that he can spend more time with his family.	together. While at work, you might have to eat lunch alone or you might have to pass a lot of the time at work alone. It's a completely different environment."
Participant 12	26	Male	Yes, he is required to only telework.	Works for a startup company that exclusively operates with a teleworking arrangement, i.e., there is no common onsite workspace.	Is satisfied with an exclusive teleworking arrangement as it gives him the flexibility to travel and live in different locations while working. Additionally mentioned the value of teleworking in honing digital skills essential for the contemporary digital landscape.	"(By having the possibility to telework) I've been able to work in 10-12 different cities over the last year… in four or five different countries… (in this arrangement) I have not needed to ask for any holiday leave because in the day I work and, in the evenings, I am able to enjoy the city."

Table 2

Precarious Employment Section of Interview

	Current employment contract and conditions? Content with this arrangement? Reasons? Preferences?	**(If different) Has preferred option ever been offered?**	**Have employment conditions changed since the pandemic? How? Involuntary changes?**	**Since the pandemic, perceived risk of losing job or reduction of hours?**	**Key quotes**
Participant 1	Full-time. No contract (self-employed). No sick or paid leave. Content with this arrangement as it is more flexible. Can decide if she wants to leave without notice. Can work for different employers.	-	No changes. Contract option was never offered. *Note*. Job has been acquired since the pandemic.	No to both. Several workers left the company so working hours actually increased.	-
Participant 2	Full-time, permanent contract. While her contract is secure, she is not content with her salary.	-	No changes.	No to both. Working hours increased due to higher workload.	-
Participant 3	Full-time, permanent contract. Mostly content but would prefer more flexibility around start and finish times and the number of hours worked each week. Instead of being obliged to start at 9 and finish at 5, would prefer to have more freedom to choose hours. Also, in the future, would prefer to work 1 or 2 hours less each day.	No, there are discussions for more flexible arrangements instead of fixed start and finish times but has not yet been made possible. It is likely it will not be made possible.	For 8 weeks during the crisis, there was a reduction of four hours each week; two of the reduced hours were compensated by the state, the other two were not. Online meetings have continued as opposed to face-to-face meetings, however, even in cases when all participants are in the same office/building.	No perceived risk of losing job. Reduced hours were reinstated after the 8 weeks. No perceived risk of further hourly reductions.	"I would like to have more say over when I work… I would like to reduce my hours, maybe 6-7 hours a day instead of 8." "They (bosses) have discussed more flexible start and finish times, because they do this in other departments of the business, but it's likely they will not make it possible for us."
Participant 4	Full-time permanent contract. Content with the security of the contract but would prefer to reduce overall weekly hours (also willing to take a pay cut for the reduced hours). Would also prefer to have more	No.	No changes.	No to both.	"Instead of working 40 hours a week, I would prefer to work 35 or 36 hours a week." "I would like to be able to work one hour more on, for example,

	Current employment contract and conditions? Content with this arrangement? Reasons? Preferences?	(If different) Has preferred option ever been offered?	Have employment conditions changed since the pandemic? How? Involuntary changes?	Since the pandemic, perceived risk of losing job or reduction of hours?	Key quotes
	say over the structure of the hours, for example, working more on one day in order to work less on another day.				Monday and Tuesday, and then have Friday afternoon free."
Participant 5	Full-time contract, about to pass from probationary period to a permanent ongoing contract. He has felt secure under these conditions due to the unique skills he obtains (i.e., no perceived precarity in employment contract). Content with current arrangement.	-	No changes.	No to both. Workload has increased since the pandemic.	"(Regarding working on a probationary contract) I feel like I have job security because my employer has more to lose than me… I've always tried to make my way up (with skills) because it tells a lot more than laws (of contracts)".
Participant 6	Full-time permanent contract. Content with permanent contract but would prefer to reduce hours; feels eight hours is too much for a mother and woman. She has a child and feels she needs more time to be a mother.	A reduction of hours has been briefly discussed with employer, but not seriously or officially.	No changes.	No to losing job, but the productivity of the business dropped significantly. Soon after the lockdowns, the business' productivity went back to normal, so the reduced workload was temporary, and the risk of reduced hours was not particularly felt.	"I would prefer to work less hours because, for a mother and a woman, in my opinion eight hours a day is too much."
Participant 7	Full-time permanent contract. Content with permanent contract but would prefer to reduce hours. She is about to ask her boss to reduce her weekly hours from 40 hours to 35 hours (seven hours a day instead of eight).	Not yet: she has still not officially requested for the reduction of hours.	No changes.	No to both.	-
Participant 8	A three-year apprenticeship. Not at all happy with this arrangement because this	No.	No changes.	Yes, perceived risk; however, this was	"(Regarding current employment contract) It is

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	arrangement pays less and is precarious—she could lose her job at any moment.			perceived even before the pandemic.	comfortable for both the business and the employee because both parties pay less tax… but (the employee) doesn't have security like workers on full-time contracts. In Italy (full-time contracts) are the only contracts that give you security and possibility."
Participant 9	Full-time permanent contract, after a one-year temporary contract. He is not content with his wage and is less concerned regarding job precarity; he was not concerned regarding the precarity of his contract during the first year of work.	-	No, as he started working after the worst impacts of the pandemic had already occurred.	Yes, perceived risk; however, he noted that he felt that it wasn't just him who experienced a heightened risk of job loss or hour reduction, as it was felt across the entire workplace.	"I am a young guy; I don't think I need to have security (in his job). I think it's more important that I am paid more."
Participant 10	Full-time temporary contract. Content with current contract because it will soon be obligatorily renewed next year into a permanent contract, as per Italian law.	-	A reduction of hours from five days a week to three days occurred for one month due to impacts of the pandemic. Prior to his current job, the participant was working for a different company (from the pre-outbreak period to 2021) and experienced significant changes: he experienced a complete pay cut (from 100	At the current job, no to both (except for the month of working three days instead of five).	"I think that, nowadays, for people my age, a contract that lasts for a lifetime isn't really necessary, because, for example, for my parents, you used to work in a place for all your life… for this generation (younger generation) it's not that necessary because we want to do different things; we want to develop new skills. So, for me personally, I don't want to spend

	Current employment contract and conditions? Content with this arrangement? Reasons? Preferences?	(If different) Has preferred option ever been offered?	Have employment conditions changed since the pandemic? How? Involuntary changes?	Since the pandemic, perceived risk of losing job or reduction of hours?	Key quotes
			euros to zero), while still working the same hours.		too many years in this place because I want to grow constantly in my job." "(Regarding occupational situation for younger workers of today) Now there is no more stability… you have to think about your personal development." "(Regarding pay cut in first job) I kept on working the same hours which was really frustrating because I was actually working for free… the frustrating part is that during the pandemic there weren't many companies that needed people to work for them. That was frustrating. You felt compelled to work at a place because you had to feel like thank god you still have work!" "(Regarding the employers that stopped paying him) I was 22 at the time… they think we (younger workers) are pretty stupid; that we'll settle for anything because we are young and inexperienced, that we'll believe everything… they take advantage of you."

	Current employment contract and conditions? Content with this arrangement? Reasons? Preferences?	(If different) Has preferred option ever been offered?	Have employment conditions changed since the pandemic? How? Involuntary changes?	Since the pandemic, perceived risk of losing job or reduction of hours?	Key quotes
					"You indirectly think that you are stuck in that situation, and you don't know how to get out of it. Personally, I thought this; I thought I had no choice."
Participant 11	Parttime permanent contract. Participant is a student, and when he finishes his studies, he will be able to directly switch to a full-time position in the same business. He is, therefore, very content with this arrangement.	-	No changes.	No to both.	-
Participant 12	Indeterminate apprenticeship, following a six-month internship. Content with this arrangement, as he considers it as the necessary steps towards eventually securing a permanent contract.	-	No changes.	No to both.	-

Notes:

1. See Table 1 for participants' age and gender.
2. Key words used in the interviews were translated from English to Italian as follows: "teleworking" = "lavoro a distanza"; employment precarity" = "precarietà occupazionale".