

ORGANIZATION OF REMOTE WORK: UKRAINIAN LEGISLATION AND STANDARDS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.61345/1339-7915.2024.3.23>

Annotation. The article explores remote work in Ukraine and its alignment with European Union (EU) standards. It analyses the Ukrainian Labour Code and the 2002 EU Framework Agreement on Telework.

It is emphasized reveals both similarities and differences between the two documents. Both emphasize the voluntary nature of telework, ensuring equal rights and protections for remote workers as those on-site. They prioritize health, safety, privacy, and confidentiality, mandating employers to provide necessary equipment and maintain safe working conditions.

The author emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between the concepts of “remote work” and “home-based work”. It is established that the term “remote work” differs from “telework” in its international understanding and encompasses a broader scope than home-based work. However, a comparison between the definitions of telework provided in the European Framework Agreement on Telework of 2002 and remote work as outlined in the Ukrainian Labour Code concludes their synonymy.

Other differences have also been scrutinized in the article: Ukraine allows employees combine remote work with office work (hybrid work), while the EU doesn't address this yet. Ukraine also guarantees the right to disconnect, allowing remote workers to switch off after work. The EU is working on updates to cover these areas and create a more consistent approach across member States: This might include the right to disconnect, equal treatment for remote workers, and clearer rules for hybrid work.

It was concluded that both regions need further development: Ukraine needs to address remote work abroad and data security, while the EU needs to modernize its framework.

Key words: remote work, home-based work, telework, labour law, Ukraine, European Union (EU).

1. Introduction.

The advent of new information and communications technologies (ICT) has brought about a significant transformation in both work and daily life during the 21st century. These technologies allow individuals to remain constantly connected, not only with friends and family but also with colleagues and supervisors, blurring the boundaries between work and personal life. The decoupling of paid employment from traditional office settings has played a pivotal role in this evolution. Present-day office tasks, as well as broader knowledge-based work, heavily rely on internet connectivity, enabling them to be conducted from virtually any location and at any time. This newfound spatial flexibility has reshaped the role of technology in the workplace, presenting both novel opportunities and fresh challenges [3, p. 1].

Remote work revolutionizes work structures, aiming to enhance productivity and boost the competitive edge of businesses. It strives to strike a delicate equilibrium between the need for organizational flexibility and ensuring the safety and well-being of employees. Additionally, remote

work fosters the creation of high-quality jobs while facilitating access to the formal job market for the disadvantaged groups, such as individuals with caregiving responsibilities or disabilities. This paradigm shift not only redefines traditional work dynamics but also fosters inclusivity and diversity, ultimately contributing to a more resilient and dynamic workforce.

Both sides of the production process recognize it as a means of modernizing work organization by introducing flexible working conditions, providing a greater degree of autonomy, and achieving a balance between work, personal, and family life. Furthermore, working in a permanent remote mode also reduces carbon emissions caused by the necessity of commuting to work, thus positively impacting the environment. It is also considered a key element in achieving the goals of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and employment, particularly in modernizing labour markets and developing a knowledge-based economy.

The European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions published statistics on telecommuting in the post-COVID European Union. Their research is based on reports from the Network of Eurofound correspondents and the EU Labour Force Survey 2019–2022 (EU-LFS) [5].

The statement specifies that in 2020, with the beginning of the pandemic, there was a significant increase in telecommuting across most EU Member States. Remote working policies were adopted across the EU due to travel restrictions and the requirement for workers to stay at home. After this initial surge in teleworking, the number of EU workers working from home continued to increase in 2021, followed by a small decline in 2022, and a general trend of stabilisation by the end of 2022 and 2023. The number of workers teleworking “usually or sometimes” increased from 14% in 2019 to 24% in 2021, followed by a small decline to 22% in 2022. More than 44 million workers teleworked in the EU [5].

In several countries including Austria, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, Ireland, and the Netherlands, teleworking remains prevalent, with a similar number of workers telecommuting in 2022 compared to 2020. However, the teleworking landscape varies in other nations. Bulgaria and Romania saw the most significant decline in telecommuting post-2021. Additionally, several countries witnessed a notable reduction in teleworking, such as Portugal, Poland, Greece, and Slovakia. Poland is the sole country reverting to pre-pandemic levels. The remaining 14 Member States align with the EU average, experiencing a slight decrease in 2022 that stabilized in 2023, as per national-level LFS quarterly data [5].

Interestingly, the EU-LFS 2022 shows strong variations in the percentage of people working from home between 2019 and 2022 depending on the skill level of workers. Workers in high-skilled occupations experienced the most significant increase in remote working (Figure No. 1) [5].

Ukraine, currently not a member of the European Union, remains absent from EU statistical data. However, unlike the rest of the world, Ukraine has undergone two significant waves of remote work surge:

– The COVID-19 pandemic: According to Work.ua statistics, the share of remote job vacancies increased from 4% in the second quarter of 2019 to 6.4% in the second quarter of 2020. The trend continued to strengthen and reached its peak in the fourth quarter of 2021, with 9,313 companies posting 19,186 remote job vacancies, accounting for 6.8% of the total vacancies [11].

– The large-scale invasion by the Russian Federation in February 2022, which persists to this day: Work.ua data indicates that in the initial weeks of the war, the labour market significantly declined. Businesses with experience in remote work showed the greatest resilience. The share of remote job vacancies increased from 6.8% in the fourth quarter of 2021 to 13.9% in the second quarter of 2022 [11].

Research from Work.ua demonstrates that Ukrainians desire remote work. Following the onset of the full-scale invasion, the number of vacancies here decreased by a factor of four, while in the labour market overall, it decreased by as much as ten times. However, in January 2024, there were 3% more remote job offers than in January 2022 (Figure No. 2) [11].



In the context of ongoing conflicts and digitalization, research on remote work legislation holds paramount importance. Exploring the legal framework surrounding remote work and highlighting its advantages are essential endeavours.

Remote work offers numerous benefits, including increased flexibility, reduced commuting time and expenses, and improved work-life balance. Additionally, it enables individuals displaced by conflict, such as those evacuated from occupied territories in Ukraine, to continue working. Moreover, remote work provides a safer working environment amid constant shelling and military actions.

For Ukrainians residing outside the country's borders, remote work ensures the preservation of employment continuity and allows them to contribute to Ukraine's economy during these challenging times. Thus, amidst the tumultuous circumstances, remote work emerges as a crucial tool for maintaining employment, productivity, and economic stability.

Nevertheless, in addition to the opportunities remote work offers, it can pose substantial challenges for both employees and employers. Addressing these challenges effectively requires the careful structuring, formulation, and implementation of legislation and policies. It's essential to navigate issues such as ensuring fair treatment, maintaining productivity, fostering effective communication, and protecting data security in remote work environments. Thus, crafting comprehensive strategies becomes imperative to harness the full potential of remote work while mitigating its associated risks.

2. Research status.

The legal regulation of remote work in Ukraine and the EU has become the subject of numerous research studies by Ukrainian scholars such as Pavlinska, O., Lotosh, K., Kolot, A., Stasiv O., Herasymenko O., Doschenko A., Simutina Ya., Volkova, O., Oleg M. Yaroshenko, Vyshnovetska S., as well as international researchers – MARIN R., Liu Y., Marica M.E., Vasic M., Parker S.K., Epuran, G., Urbane M., Wang B., Parker, S.K. However, the comparison of the legal regulation of remote work in Ukraine and the EU remains underexplored.

3. The purpose of the article.

The aim of the study is to analyse, compare, and evaluate Ukrainian legislation on remote work in comparison with European Union standards, considering the significant increase in remote work in Ukraine due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war, as well as Ukraine's attainment of candidate status for EU accession on June 23, 2023.

4. Presentation of the research material.

In the context of the European employment strategy, the European Council invited the social partners to negotiate agreements modernising the organisation of work, including flexible working arrangements, with the aim of making undertakings productive and competitive and achieving the necessary balance between flexibility and security.

The European Commission, in its second stage consultation of social partners on modernising and improving employment relations, invited the social partners to start negotiations on telework. On 20 September 2001, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) (and the liaison committee EUROCADRES/CEC), UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP announced their intention to start negotiations aimed at an agreement to be implemented by the members of the signatory parties in the Member States and in the countries of the European Economic Area. Through them, they wished to contribute to preparing the transition to a knowledge-based economy and society as agreed by the European Council in Lisbon [2].

16th of July 2002, the European social partners concluded the first autonomous Framework Agreement. The Framework Agreement on Telework is the main regulatory framework on telework

in the EU. It came into being within the ambit of Article 155 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), which states that social dialogue at the level of the Union can lead to contractual agreements. Subsequently, the Agreement should be implemented according to the “procedures and practices” specific to each Member State (article 155 (2) of the TFEU) [9]. This is in contrast with the previous framework agreements concluded on the European level, which were implemented through Council directives. The Member States could therefore choose their preferred practice to implement framework agreements – within three years after the date of signature – leading to a variety of instruments.

The discussions and ideas about the importance of regulating remote work as a type of employment in the European Union began more than 20 years ago and were largely driven by the pace of digitalisation and the development of the Internet.

However, as of 2002, the concept of remote or even home-based work was not regulated in Ukrainian labour law. Only in 2020 after the introduction of the quarantine caused by the COVID-19 Ukrainian legislation first defined the concept of remote work. On 30.03.2020 the Law of Ukraine No. 540-IX “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine Aimed at Providing Additional Social and Economic Guarantees in Connection with the Spread of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19)” added Article 60 “Flexible Working Hours” to the Labour Code of Ukraine, which in its tenth paragraph states that remote (home) work is a form of labour organisation when work is performed by an employee at his/her place of residence or in another place of his/her choice, including through information and communication technologies [13].

There was a lot of criticism of this wording, as it combined two different institutions: remote work and home-based work. However, such a combination of remote and home-based work in one definition did not last long, since as part of bringing Ukrainian legislation in line with the standards of the EU’s labour legislation, on 04.02.2021, the Law of Ukraine No. 1213-IX ‘On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts of Ukraine on Improving the Legal Regulation of Remote, Home-based Work and Work with Flexible Working Hours’ added Articles 60-1 ‘Home-based Work’ and 60-2 ‘Remote Work’ to the Labour Code of Ukraine [12]. Thus, it can be concluded from the above that Ukrainian labour legislation is developing rather slowly and often does not meet the needs of the modern world – 18 years of difference between the definition of remote work in the EU and Ukraine is a direct example.

Having analysed the European Framework Agreement on Telework and the Labour Code of Ukraine, we can conclude that they have a lot in common. Initially, both the European Framework Agreement on Telework and Ukrainian legislation on remote work aim to regulate and protect the rights of workers engaged in remote work arrangements. One significant similarity between the two is their emphasis on the voluntary nature of remote work. Both frameworks stress that remote work should be voluntary for both the employer and the worker involved.

The European Framework Agreement and Ukrainian legislation ensure that remote workers enjoy the same rights and protections as their counterparts working on-site. They guarantee that remote workers have access to training, career development opportunities, and collective rights, promoting fair treatment and equal opportunities regardless of the work location.

Both frameworks also prioritize the health and safety of remote workers. They require employers to take appropriate measures to ensure the protection of remote workers’ occupational health and safety, including providing necessary equipment and maintaining safe working conditions.

As can be seen from both documents, the Ukrainian Labour Code and the European Framework Agreement on Telework guarantee privacy and confidentiality. For example, the ninth section of the Model Telework Agreement, which is mandatory for signing due to the article 60-2 of Ukrainian Labour Code, contains provisions on the protection of employee personal data and its confidentiality [14].

When both documents are examined, there are notable differences between the European Framework Agreement and Ukrainian legislation regarding remote work. One key distinction lies in the terminology used. While the European Framework Agreement focuses on ‘telework’, Ukrainian legislation refers to ‘remote work’.

Among scholars, various interpretations of the terms telework and remote work, as well as their legal regulation, have been proposed. Most scholars equate the concepts of telework and remote work. Considered 'telework' to involve an employee performing work outside the employer's premises (office, etc.) using telecommunication tools means. In essence, two characteristics of such telework can be identified: work performed away from the employer's workplace and the use of telecommunication tools means [17]. These same characteristics are applied by scholars, including A. Kolot, in formulating the definition of remote work. For instance, remote work can be defined as work carried out through the use of information and communication technologies, remotely from the employer's premises [10].

Despite scholarly positions, there is an opinion that national legislation should distinguish remote work from home-based work, as well as telework, due to certain peculiarities in their legal regulation and semantic doubts regarding the application of these terms.

The term "remote" implies operating at a certain distance, while the adverb remotely means at a distance using communication means. Thus, telework, essentially, like home-based work, is remote since it is performed at a distance from the employer's location [1]. However, in other identifying characteristics, these concepts are not identical.

Telework, as a translation of the English term telework, literally means working from home with the transmission of results through telecommunications technologies [18]. It's worth noting that in the European context, telework is divided into specific types, including home-based telework, additional telework, telework in a specialized telecenter, and mobile telework [17].

Home-based telework involves an employee working in the office but spending at least one day per week working from home, while being constantly in contact with the employer and using communication tools (computer, fax, telephone, etc.) while commuting or working from home. Additional telework does not differ significantly from home-based telework, except that the employee works the entire workweek in the office with the possibility of completing certain tasks remotely from home.

However, the key distinction from these types of telework is telework in a specialized telecenter, where an organization acts as an intermediary, providing and equipping workplaces with communication tools and specialized equipment not for its own employees but for employees of other organizations. This essentially serves as a specialized service center for teleworkers.

Finally, mobile telework involves employees performing their work function for at least 10 hours per week outside of their home and office, whether commuting, working from another location during a business trip, or engaging in work with a mobile nature, always utilizing online communication tools.

Article 2 of the European Framework Agreement on Telework states that telework is a form of organizing and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where work that could also be performed at the employer's premises is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis.

Given the definition of telework in the Framework Agreement and its defining features, it is quite reasonable, as noted by Simutina, that the term 'telework' in the Ukrainian language, due to its "tele" component, may be perceived inadequately for the phenomenon it denotes [16]. Therefore, in national legislation, it is more appropriate, in our opinion, to use the identical term "remote work" to denote work performed by an employee outside the employer's premises.

Home-based work, although performed remotely from the employer's location, is not entirely consistent with the concept of remote work as defined by the national legislator.

Until recently, Article 60 of the Ukrainian Labour Code contained the concept of "remote (home-based) work", which was defined as a form of organizing work where work is performed by an employee at their place of residence or another location of their choice, including through information and communication technologies, but outside the employer's premises. Thus, the legislator equated the concepts of remote and home-based work at that time, which drew criticism from scholars and

practitioners who emphasized the inappropriateness of such identification, as these are entirely different forms of organizing work that emerged in different historical epochs with different purposes of work organization.

To some extent, heeding this opinion, the national legislator made changes to the Ukrainian Labour Code by adding Article 60-1 (Home-based work) and Article 60-2 (Remote work), thus distinguishing these concepts.

According to the Labour Code:

– Home-based work is a form of organizing work where work is performed by an employee at their place of residence or other designated premises characterized by the presence of a defined area, technical equipment (basic production and non-production assets, tools, instruments, inventory), necessary for the production of goods, provision of services, performance of work or functions provided for in constituent documents, but outside the employer's production or work premises [12].

– Remote work is a form of organizing work where work is performed by an employee outside the employer's premises or territory, in any location chosen by the employee, using information and communication technologies [12].

Therefore, judging from the definitions, the scope of the terms "remote work" according to Ukrainian legislation and "telework" as per the European Framework Agreement on Telework appears to be identical. Hence, these concepts are used interchangeably in the article.

The second difference is that the Labour Code of Ukraine provides for the possibility of combining remote work and work at the employer's workplace (premises) – the so-called blended working, which is becoming increasingly popular in the world (hybrid work). The article states: "By agreement between the employee and the employer, remote work may be combined with the employee's work at the workplace in the employer's premises or on the employer's territory. The specifics of combining remote work with work at the employer's premises or territory shall be set out in the employment agreement on remote work" [12].

Another difference is that Ukrainian law guarantees the right to disconnect. Thus, Article 60-2 of the Labour Code of Ukraine states the following: "An employee who performs remote work is guaranteed a period of free time for rest (disconnection period), during which the employee may interrupt any information and telecommunication communication with the employer, and this is not considered a violation of the terms of the employment contract or labour discipline. The period of free time for rest (disconnection period) is determined in the employment agreement on remote work" [12].

The European Social Partners' Framework Agreement on Telework of 2002 does not contain such a provision. There is no single EU legal act specifically dedicated to telework or the right to disconnect. The EU Framework Agreement on Telework provides a conceptual common ground regarding the definition of telework, but it could be considered outdated [4].

The EU Framework Agreement on Telework is criticized not only for the absence of guarantees for the right to disconnect but also for the fact that the definition of telework outlined in the document is outdated, as it declares that telework is a form of organizing and/or performing work, using information technology. Technological advancements have rendered the requirement of using ICT for telework largely irrelevant, as nearly all forms of remote work now rely on ICT.

Telework encompasses various modalities beyond regular telework, including occasional or mobile arrangements. While some EU countries explicitly address occasional telework in their regulations, there is variation in how telework is defined and regulated across Member States. In this context, in around half of the Member States, employees working remotely on an occasional basis can be excluded from the telework regime and therefore, for example, from mutual written agreements or the right to disconnect when these apply only to regular teleworking [4, p. 62]. The document lacks terms like hybrid work and mobile work further complicate regulatory frameworks, necessitating a clearer definition at the EU level. Sectoral and company-level agreements often stipulate the frequency and duration of telework, with a preference for hybrid arrangements to address isolation concerns

and improve communication. Therefore, there is a need for updated regulations to accommodate evolving remote work practices and ensure consistent protection for teleworkers across the EU.

The first steps towards updating the legislation on remote work at the EU level have been taken. In January 2021, the European Parliament adopted a resolution with recommendations to the Commission on the right to disconnect [8]. The resolution called on the Commission to present a legislative proposal on the right to disconnect, as well as an EU legislative framework for telework. Specifically, the resolution highlighted the fundamental role of social partners in identifying and implementing measures addressing the challenges of digitalisation, telework and the right to disconnect [7].

Future directive should:

- guarantee the existing right to disconnect;
- ensure equal pay and equal treatment for teleworkers;
- protect privacy and prevent invasive monitoring;
- ensure that the decision to telework is in the hands of the worker and is not intended to replace the job;
- guarantee the involvement of trade unions through collective bargaining in the design and implementation of telework [6].

On April 30, 2024 the Commission launched the first-stage consultation of European social partners to gather their views on the possible direction of EU action on ensuring fair telework and the right to disconnect [7].

It cannot be asserted that Ukrainian legislation comprehensively addresses all the trends in remote work. In future legislative changes, it is crucial to consider issues such as the specifics of remote work from abroad (applicable law); increased responsibility for preserving the employer's data confidentiality; application of general norms regarding occupational safety at enterprises where virtually all employees work remotely on a permanent basis (including the appropriateness of eliminating the need to establish a labour protection service) [15].

5. Conclusion.

Remote work offers numerous advantages, including increased flexibility, reduced commuting time and expenses, and improved work-life balance. It also empowers displaced individuals, such as those forced to evacuate occupied territories in Ukraine, to continue working. Furthermore, in situations of constant shelling and military actions, remote work provides a safer work environment. For Ukrainians residing abroad, remote work safeguards employment continuity and allows them to contribute to Ukraine's economic stability during challenging times.

However, alongside the benefits, remote work also presents substantial challenges for both employers and employees. To effectively address these challenges, careful planning, formulation, and implementation of legislation and policies are necessary. Issues such as ensuring fair treatment, maintaining productivity, fostering effective communication, and protecting data security require strategic navigation in remote work environments. Crafting comprehensive strategies is crucial to harness the full potential of remote work while mitigating its associated risks.

This study compared and analysed Ukrainian legislation on remote work with European Union standards. The significant increase in remote work in Ukraine due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing war, along with Ukraine's recent attainment of EU candidate status, necessitates this analysis.

While there are many similarities between Ukrainian legislation and the European Framework Agreement on Telework, there are also key distinctions. The terminology used differs, with Ukraine

focusing on remote work and the EU on telework. There are also variations in how the concept of home-based work is integrated into the legislation. The Ukrainian Labour Code acknowledges the possibility of combining remote work with work at the employer's workplace, a growing trend known as 'blended working' or 'hybrid work'. Additionally, Ukrainian law guarantees the right to disconnect, a provision absent from the European Framework Agreement.

The European Framework Agreement on Telework, adopted in 2002, is considered outdated by some. The definition of telework is no longer entirely relevant as advancements have rendered the use of ICT nearly ubiquitous in remote work. The document also lacks terms like hybrid work and mobile work, further complicating regulatory frameworks. The EU is currently taking steps to update remote work legislation, with the first-stage consultation of European social partners launched in April 2024.

Ukrainian legislation, while demonstrating progress, cannot be said to comprehensively address all aspects of remote work. Future legislative changes should consider issues such as the specifics of remote work from abroad, the increased responsibility for preserving employer data confidentiality, and the application of occupational safety norms when entire workforces operate remotely.

In conclusion, remote work offers a promising approach to work organization in the modern world. However, to fully leverage its potential and mitigate its challenges, robust legal frameworks and effective communication between employers and employees are essential. As Ukraine integrates further with the EU, aligning its remote work legislation with EU standards will be important. The ongoing war in Ukraine has presented unique challenges and necessitated adaptations to remote work regulations. Moving forward, continuous improvement and adaptation of remote work legislation will be necessary to ensure it meets the evolving needs of the workforce.

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