

## A Czech Employee's Perspective on the Benefits and Drawbacks of Working from Home During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### Abstract

The COVID-19 virus pandemic has made working from home a common occurrence, which has brought about several changes for businesses and their employees, while also presenting new challenges for people. The major purpose of this essay is to provide a critical evaluation of the benefits and drawbacks of remote work during the 2020 and 2021 pandemic from the viewpoint of the Czech Republic's workforce. Part of this study is to investigate the gender gap in Generation Z's perspectives and experiences with working from home. To accomplish the main objective, the technique included selecting and analysing the content of 475 print and online sources that offered quantitative and qualitative data on the issue. Secondly, the survey, comparison, and synthesis have improved our comprehension of these issues.

**Keywords:** home working, positives, negatives, Czech Republic.

### Introduction

Economic and social upheaval on a worldwide scale has resulted from the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, which initially emerged in December 2019 in Wuhan, China, and has since spread throughout the globe. In both personal and professional spheres, it has had a profound impact on Czech citizens' life (ManpowerGroup, 2021). Both 2020 and 2021 have presented several obstacles for numerous businesses. Everybody has learned to be more adaptable because of the epidemic. Workplaces have altered, and for many companies, the culture has shifted entirely (HR Forum, 2021a). Findings from the "ManpowerGroup Index of the job market" conducted by ManpowerGroup Czech Republic indicate that 57% of Czech businesses have been adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 10% having to entirely close their doors. Only 3% of businesses have seen an uptick in activity, while 35% have seen no change at all. When looking at the global picture, the impact of the pandemic on Czech firms is comparable to that of countries like Slovakia or Germany (EIPA, 2020; Deloitte, 2021; TfN, 2021). At 63%, businesses in the

Czech Republic have reported that the pandemic has had a negative impact on their operations, which is in line with the worldwide average (ManpowerGroup, 2021).

The effects of the coronavirus epidemic on the workplace and its workers have been dramatic, speeding up digitalization in several sectors. Workers' habits have changed, managers no longer have daily face-to-face interactions with their subordinates, and workers' priorities when it comes to perks have been rethought. The epidemic, however, has brought us a new phenomenon: working from home.

During this time, remote work has been the most talked-about HR issue. On the one hand, if individuals want it but are unable to get it; on the other hand, if they do not desire it yet still encounter it (202.212). The abundance of articles on working from home provides more evidence of this. According to Hájková (2021), the figure multiplied by eight from 2019 to 2020.

According to the authors and the available information, there is no data wherever cumulatively given, and no conclusions are drawn from the many studies that cover various sorts of repercussions of the coronavirus epidemic on Czech companies and workers. Future arrangements for working remotely may benefit from this. Consequently, this essay sets out to address this knowledge vacuum by providing a comprehensive analysis, from the perspective of Czech Republic workers, of the pros and cons of working remotely during the 2020 and 2021 COVID-19 epidemic. Finding out how members of Generation Z, who will be the workforce of the future, feel about working from home is one objective.

Individuals will come to see working remotely as the norm rather than an advantage in the years to come.

### **Theoretical background**

There was a gradual increase in sporadic remote work in the decade leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic. Just 5.4% of EU-27 employees sometimes worked remotely prior to the pandemic; this percentage has been relatively stable since 2009 (Eurostat, 2021). Roughly 4% of workers in the Czech Republic were affected by this (Kyzlinková et al., 2020). According to Dandová (2021), workers were given the option to work from the comfort of their own home. As the COVID-19 pandemic approaches, the idea of remote work from home starts to gain traction and is adopted as a strategy by several enterprises throughout the globe, including those in the Czech Republic (Mustajab et al., 2020). One important aspect of the future of work is the ability to work from home (Bai et al., 2020).

The majority of employees and employers benefit from home working. This includes workers

who put in more effort, who take more initiative, who are more engaged, and who are healthier overall due to the increased autonomy they have (Bathini and Kandathil, 2019; Galanti et al., 2021; Nakrošienė et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2018; Rupieta Beckmann, 2018). In addition, numerous surveys have shown that remote workers enjoy a number of benefits. These include: greater agility and adaptability, easier recruitment and retention of top talent, more convenience, higher productivity, higher employee motivation, greater freedom in setting their own work schedule, enhanced efficiency, better health and wellness, reduced

sick days, better work-life balance, cost and time savings on commuting, and technological advancements that make work easier (Hylland and Prottas, 2017; Okuyan and Begen, 2021).

The flip side is that working from home is bad for business and workers alike. The study conducted by Galanti et al. (2021) and Eng et al. (2010) highlights that working from home might have negative effects, such as increased stress, social isolation, and work-family conflicts. In addition, numerous surveys have shown that remote workers have a number of drawbacks. These include, but are not limited to, the following: not everyone is comfortable working from home, it can be difficult to monitor performance, employees are more likely to be distracted while working, there is a higher risk of burnout and work-related fatigue, remote workers incur higher costs, there are issues with staff development, and there is a lack

challenges such as not all jobs being suitable for remote work, physical and emotional exhaustion, low staff morale, information security risks, insecure home access to important documents and technology, and difficulties in managing work and life balance (Galanti et al., 2021; Palumbo, 2020; Okuyan and Begen, 2021; Vione and Kotera, 2021).

Maintaining productivity and well-being of individuals is of utmost importance, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, so it is crucial to minimize the negative effects of working from home and find solutions to decrease the negative factors associated with these disadvantages (Okuyan and Begen, 2021). Employees are not obligated to work exclusively from home just because there has been a trend towards remote work. Meetings are a great way to keep employees engaged and up-to-date, and a combination of working from home and in the office may be a very effective arrangement (Businessinfo, 2021).

Many experts were compelled to work remotely due to the epidemic. According to Szumilo and Wiegelmann (2021), businesses started using hybrid work arrangements and rethought office layout, size, and location. According to the Fortune/Deloitte CEO Survey conducted

in October 2020, 76% of CEOs expressed the expectation that their firms would need less space in the future. Operating expenses and capital expenditures might be significantly reduced as a result of this. In most companies, real estate and facilities account between 2% to 5% of sales, making them one of the top three expenditures (Griffin and Asker, 2021). Coworking spaces are expected to see a dramatic increase in popularity, according to research.

There have been several shifts in approach and expectations among workers as a result of the COVID-19 epidemic; 79% of businesses surveyed by Aon in their 2021 UK Benefits and Trends Survey expressed concern that they would have to modify employee benefits to accommodate the new reality (Aon, 2021). According to research conducted in the UK by the worldwide insurance brokerage and advice company Willis Towers Watson, 42% of the employers altered their benefit packages as a result of the epidemic. One may argue that COVID-19 did not do away with the need for benefits; on the contrary, it generated new ones for a lot of individuals (Rappaport, 2020).

#### **Research objective, methodology and data**

This article primarily aims to outline, from the perspective of the Czech Republic's workers, the experience of working from home during the pandemic in 2020 and 2021, including both the good and bad elements.

The first stage of the project began in July 2021 with the selection of 87 appropriate printed publications (frequently accessible online) and 365 virtual retrospective quantitative and qualitative pieces regarding the effects of the pandemic on the Czech Republic's workforce and the global economy. Nearly three quarters of the Czech-language articles were written by individuals with extensive knowledge and experience in the subject matter. These individuals included local experts such as personalists, economists, management analysts, directors, owners, and managers of businesses and recruitment consulting agencies. Some examples of these authors are Hájková, A., Očenášková, A., Černohlávková, L., Housková, S., Kazdová, A., Kvapil, K., Hovorková, L., Jarošová, B., Reiner, T., Stegura, T., and others. Such writers contribute to prominent Czech specialized periodicals as Profi HR, HR Forum, Personál, Ekonom, Praktická personalistka, etc., that address specific issues. Additionally, in order to display the entire examined region and allow for the prospect of comparing the situation in the Czech Republic to that of other nations, approximately 25% of the English-language articles were located in the databases of Web of Science and Scopus. These articles were retrieved using keywords related to the topic, such as remote, work, home, COVID-19, impacts, positives, negatives, and combinations thereof. These were articles published in renowned magazines

such as Journal of Applied Psychology (Dutch authors Stollberger, J. et al.), International Journal of Manpower (Israeli author Nadiv, R.), Journal of Corporate Real Estate (American authors Eunhwa, Y. et al.), Frontiers of Psychology (Swiss authors Zurcher, A. et al.), Stress and Health (Dutch authors Darouei, M. and Pluut, H.), Journal of Labour Market Research (Norwegian authors Holgersen, H. et al.), Technology in Society (Macedonian authors Prodanova, J. and Kocarev, L.), Gender, Work and Organization (British authors Antonacopoulou E. P. and Georgiadou A.) and others.

Twenty percent of the articles were published in Czech and eighty percent were written in English; both languages were used to filter digital content that addressed the issues of remote work using the same set of keywords. The articles were penned by Czech authors such as Drahošová, B., Vacková, H., Verner, I., Klímová, Z., and others, as well as by foreign experts in the field who publish on specialized websites and news servers. For instance, British author Cook, J., French author Laljee, J., American author Zeidner, R., Australian author Dalzell, S., British author Partridge, J., and others.

Additionally, during the same time period, 23 research papers were discovered that dealt with the subject of working from home. These papers came from a variety of sources, including the Czech Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, Czech and foreign consulting and recruitment agencies, and other organizations and individuals. Hence, 475 print and digital sources were used. The pieces were published in both print and digital formats throughout the latter half of 2020 and the early half of 2021. Only sources that adequately reflect the content of all sources used to process the research are included in the reference list.

To compile the state-of-the-art report, we ran content analyses on all of these publications and research papers; in July of 2021, we gathered secondary data for the next stages of the project using descriptive research. A search, comparison, and synthesis conducted in August 2021 shed light on the pros and cons of remote work as seen through the eyes of Czech Republic workers, as a result of the country's shift to this work type. The primary goal mentioned earlier served as the basis for the formulation of the first research question: Question 1: In the Czech Republic, what are the pros and downsides of remote work, according to the employees? Next, suggestions for the future of remote work were presented, building on the primary objective and drawing on inductive reasoning, deduction, and the authors' own experiences. These suggestions were extended to the Czech economy and others like it.

In June 2021, we asked respondents to share their thoughts on home-based employment among members of Generation Z in an effort to finish the half-goal. The inquiry aimed to get workers' perspectives on the pros and cons of working from home. The following two inquiries were made in light of the previously stated partial objective: Question 2: Does the millennial generation see the good and bad in

looking at remote work from the perspective of workers, similar to those who worked remotely for a year during the epidemic, and does this impression hold true when taking

gender into account as well? Q3: Are there any distinctions in how Generation Z and workers who worked from home for a year during the pandemic see home working? If so, what are those differences? Do gender factors also play a role? A total of 172 students, 110 of whom were female and 62 of whom were male, enrolled in the second year of bachelor's degree programs in economics, management, marketing, and trade at the Faculty of Economics at one of the Czech Republic's state universities. The sample size was large enough to ensure a 100% return rate. Since the respondents were providing their responses in the form of free-form writing, they were able to elaborate on the pros and cons of remote work from the perspective of the employee. Content analysis and descriptive statistics with a second-level gender categorization were used to evaluate the responses. This study only employed the aforementioned statistical methodologies and analyses because of its limited scope.

## Results

Based on previous studies, individuals who have worked from home see several benefits, including the ability to set their own schedules (68%), spending less time on mundane tasks (e.g., makeup application, commuting, etc., 64%), saving money on lunches and commuting (30%), feeling more independent (59%), being able to take care of household chores while working (63%), and having more time for family (33%). (Hájková, 2021; Očenášková, 2021a). According to data released last year by the ABSL organization, which links business service centers, it is also feasible to see that several workers have used the epidemic as an opportunity for personal development. A total of 66% of centers saw an increase in online education, 33% of workers enrolled in language classes, 41% sought to acquire new capabilities, and 64% improved their soft skills (Profi HR, 2020b). Based on studies conducted by the Institute of Technology and Business in České Budějovice, 51% of workers report increased productivity while working remotely, 36% report no change in output, and 13% report a decrease in output. Worker efficiency is enhanced since they are not burdened with

on the way to work, avoid interruptions from coworkers, and schedule tasks more effectively (Novinky.cz, 2021). Černohlávková and Housková (2021) cite research from the company LMC that reveals 60% of managers were surprised by the high results of home working during the spring and autumn wave of coronavirus. Even managers who were skeptical about the idea of working remotely discovered that employees did the same or even better work when they were allowed to do it.

According to studies conducted by Hájková (2021) and Langvik et al. (2021), employees who work from home often face challenges such as missing colleagues (37%), having poor communication with colleagues (31%), not having the tools needed for work (28%), having trouble managing their time (23%), and being interrupted and distracted by children (14%). Also, many feel socially isolated and see a blurry boundary between their personal and

professional lives. People in this position often feel isolated because micromanagers don't trust them, information flows poorly, and they lack visibility into corporate operations. A decline in cooperation is also seen, along with a lack of opportunities for socialization, a clearly defined job structure, and consistent rituals connected to workdays (Novinky.cz, 2021; Očenášková, 2021b; Kvapil, 2021). According to Očenášková (2021b) and IDnes.cz (2021), employees have been evaluating the effects of total or long-term home working negatively on their relationships with colleagues and superiors, as well as on their feeling of connection to the company. Additionally, ApuTime and DAP Service found a decrease in motivation during this time. Working from home for an extended period of time reduces intrinsic motivation by 6.5% compared to 2019 (some organizations see a little decline, others see a loss in the tens of percent), according to this study (IDnes.cz, 2021). According to studies conducted by the SC&C agency on behalf of System4u, not everyone is a good fit for working remotely. In fact, over 50% of workers report that working remotely is extremely or very tough for them. For 42% of them, the most frustrating aspect of working with coworkers is the difficulty of communicating with them over the phone or email; they long for the days of casual, one-on-one interaction that they formerly enjoyed; they

According to Buřinská (2021), a significant number of employees are affected by issues such as not having full access to company applications, unstable connections, limited user rights, complicated and non-functional connections to the company internal network, and inadequate equipment. Research from the communication agency AMI Communications backs this up: 48% of respondents say the current situation has affected relationships amongst colleagues; 34% say their relationship with their employer has changed for the better or worse; and 1 in 8 employees see the group situation as worsening, for reasons like cooled relationships and jealousy of working conditions (Profi HR, 2020a). Survio found that in the spring of 2021, workers who were less experienced and who needed more frequent face-to-face contact with their mentors were more likely to suffer negative effects from working remotely for an extended period of time (Kvapil, 2021). Those who were able to work from home were hit hard by the epidemic, both mentally and physically (Okuyan and Begen, 2021). A third of the population did not engage in any kind of physical activity at all, not even once weekly, but just once every two weeks or once a month, according to studies conducted by the firm MultiSport; and only 20% of the population exercised with the same intensity as before the pandemic (HR Forum, 2021b). Being in daily contact with young people, future employees, and representatives of Generation Z, the authors of this article set out to partially discover what their opinion was on home working. None of the cited surveys dealt with processing results based on identification signs (age and gender), and one of the goals of the article was to address this lack of knowledge. Employers would do well to get to know the views of Generation Z, a cohort that will soon be entering the workforce, on a variety of work-related topics, including remote work, so that they can better balance their own ideas with those of their employees and tap into the generation's strengths to achieve their goals and stay competitive. As members of Generation Z, the 172 students who filled out the survey (110 female and 62 male) provided free-form responses to the aforementioned question, allowing them to elaborate on the pros and cons from the perspective of the employee. After doing their research, the writers achieved

**Tab. 1: Positive and negative aspects of home working from the employees' point of view**

<b>Positive aspects</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Time saving	79 (45.9 %)	31 (50 %)	48 (43,6 %)
Cost saving	56 (32.6 %)	24 (38.7 %)	32 (29,1 %)
Growth of self-reliance, responsibility, and efficiency	41 (23.8 %)	28 (45.2 %)	13 (11,8 %)
Flexibility	41 (23.8 %)	5 (8.1 %)	36 (32.7 %)
No need to care about appearance	23 (13.4 %)	8 (12.9 %)	15 (13.6 %)
Less stress	21 (12.2 %)	11 (17.7 %)	10 (9.1 %)
Higher productivity	15 (8.7 %)	9 (14.5 %)	6 (5.5 %)
Skills development	10 (5.8 %)	2 (3.2 %)	8 (7.3 %)
Prevention of workplace-related conflicts	8 (4,7 %)	6 (9.7 %)	2 (1.8 %)
<b>Negative aspects</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>
Missing personal contact	97 (56.4 %)	38 (61.3 %)	59 (53.6 %)
Worse work ethic, motivation, lower efficiency	75 (43.6 %)	29 (46.8 %)	46 (41.8 %)
Disturbance by other members of the household	35 (20.3 %)	12 (19.4 %)	23 (20.9 %)
More time spent working	27 (15.7 %)	6 (9.7 %)	21 (19.1 %)
Health issues	12 (7 %)	4 (6.5 %)	8 (7.3 %)
Connectivity issues	9 (5.2 %)	5 (8.1 %)	4 (3.6 %)
Impossibility to use employee's benefits	9 (5.2 %)	3 (4.8 %)	6 (5.5 %)
Increased household costs	8 (4.7 %)	4 (6.5 %)	4 (3.6 %)
Feeling to be constantly online	8 (4.7 %)	2 (3.2 %)	6 (5.5 %)

Source: Authors' own research



### **Discussion and conclusion**

The first question, Q1, may be answered by doing research, comparing, and synthesising the survey data given above: For Czech Republic workers, what are the most salient benefits and drawbacks of working remotely? in this way: workers perceive working from home as primarily beneficial because it allows them to set their own schedules, which in turn saves money and time. They also like that it gives them more freedom to do things around the house while they're at work, which means they can spend more quality time with their families. Workers also like that it promotes personal growth and productivity, eliminates distractions from coworkers, and allows for better planning of tasks. The employees see the primary unfavorable features as the following: difficulties with time management, ineffective contact with coworkers, inadequate work equipment, and absent coworkers. management, children's interruptions and distractions, a blurred boundary between work and personal life, isolation, a lack of trust from micromanagers, an inadequate flow of information, a lack of insight into company activities, a lack of motivation, strained relationships with coworkers and supervisors, a lack of full access to company applications, connection instability, limited user rights, and negative effects on physical and mental health. When we compare the pros and cons of remote work with those found in comparable economies, such Slovakia, Germany, or Poland, we find that the pros and cons of remote work in these countries are very similar such as those in the Czech Republic (Deloitte, 2020; EIPA 2020). This article discussed the effects on Czech Republic workers of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. After reviewing the responses, we can also affirmatively answer Q2: Does Generation Z see the pros and cons of remote work from an employee perspective in the same way as those who worked remotely for a year during the pandemic, and does this perception hold true when we take gender into account as well? What this means is that, according to the findings of all the polls described above, Generation Z shares the same perspective as the workers who worked remotely for a whole year during the pandemic in terms of the pros and cons of remote work. When it comes to the pros and cons of working from home, there are some gender variances.

Based upon the evaluation of respondents' answers, it is also possible to answer the third question **Q3**: If there are any differences in perception of home working from the employees' point of view of Generation Z and those employees who worked from home for a year during the pandemic, what differences are there and do these differ if we also consider gender? There are some differences, these perceptions also differ according to gender. In comparison with the results of all the above-mentioned surveys, respondents mentioned the prevention of workplace related conflicts as another positive from the employee's point of view; in the case of negatives, they also mentioned the impossibility to use employee benefits and increased household costs. In addition, respondents mentioned the possibility of attracting qualified professionals from abroad as another positive from the employer's point of view and refusing contact with their supervisor as another negative. All these positive and negative aspects were not mentioned by a larger number of respondents, these were minor further opinions referring to the above- mentioned surveys.

The paper dealt with how the pandemic of virus disease covid-19 caused by the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2 has affected employees in the Czech Republic.

The methodology of this paper is based on positive-objective approach, where the examination of 475 quantitative and qualitative printed and virtual articles published on the topic of effects of the pandemic on the world of work and employees in the Czech Republic is used as the main method. Evaluation of answers was done by using the method of content analysis and descriptive statistics with second-level classification based on gender.

Home working was studied in detail as a phenomenon of the pandemic situation. The identification of the positive and negative aspects of this situation from the point of view of employees in the Czech Republic was based on many surveys. The authors also found out the opinions of Generation Z representatives regarding the positive and negative aspects of home working.

A limitation of the overview study may be the fact that even with the maximum effort of the authors to catch all available information on this given topic, with regards to the number of published articles this did not have to be fully successful. Partially limiting is also the fact that the article is focused only on the Czech Republic. However, based on studied and processed publications, it is possible to claim that, besides partial differences, e. g. in the approach to productivity control, the Czech Republic and other comparable states do not differ much. Another partial limitation can be the fact that the analysis of the secondary data was used. This means that the authors did not have control over conceptualisation of research and data collecting. On the other hand, the use of secondary data brought simplification of the realisation of the study and saving of time and financial resources.

The future direction of this researched area is viewed by the authors in the possibility to focus on the survey of positive and negative aspects of home working from the employers' point of view, which may bring further beneficial opinions about the future form of home working.

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