GOVERNMENT OF DUBAI

مؤسسة دبي للمرأة
DUBAI WOMEN
ESTABLISHMENT

Guide for

WOMEN'S
REMOTE WORK

ACROSS THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

GUIDE FOR WOMEN'S REMOTE WORK
ACROSS THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

The '**Guide for Women's Remote Work**' is launched in line with the aspirations of the Government of Dubai to provide a conducive work environment for its employees in general, and women in particular, and with the aim of adapting to changing circumstances. The guide was developed to make use of the Government's various resources, including its human cadre, in order to enhance its pioneering status and embody the vision of **His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum**, Vice President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai. Ultimately, this guide contributes to fostering flexible work environments that meet the needs of future jobs, as well as working conditions that enhance employees' happiness and satisfaction. Therefore, this guide is a translation of His Highness' statement:

> **"We do not aim to empower women in society - rather, we aim to empower our society through women."**

Families are the cornerstones on which society is built; they are the basis for social stability, as they are the primary source from which customs, traditions, and rules of behavior stem from, inevitably influencing social development.

With the aim of striking a healthy balance between familial and professional commitments and capacities, and in line with the directives of His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, the Government of Dubai issued Executive Council Resolution No. (36) of 2020 Concerning Telework System for the Employees of the Government of Dubai. On the issuance of the resolution, His Highness Sheikh Hamdan bin Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Crown Prince of Dubai and Chairman of the Executive Council, highlighted the protocols and parameters of remote work for the Government of Dubai employees, which allow government agencies and entities to set their own regulations in order to implement remote work systems.

Under the directives of **Her Highness Sheikha Manal bint Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum** - President of UAE Gender Balance Council, and Dubai Women Establishment, in cooperation with relevant governmental and non-governmental agencies in Dubai, has developed this guide to serve as a reference tool for the implementation of remote work systems across both the public and private sectors in an effort to further establish Dubai as a woman-friendly This Guide has been developed in collaboration with The Executive Council of Dubai, The Supreme Legislation Committee of Dubai, Dubai Government Human Resources Department, Dubai Courts, Dubai Community Development Authority, Dubai Foundation for Women & Children, and Dubai Chamber of Commerce & Industry.

Due to the implications of the COVID-19 pandemic, flexibility in the workplace has become increasingly necessary for both employers and employees. Remote work systems were thus adapted quickly and effectively, thanks to the high-tech capacities of the public and private sectors in Dubai and the commitment of employees to this novel system's success amid these challenging circumstances. There is a significant and measurable positive impact on when both parents have the option to work remotely, either partially or completely. The rationale for offering mothers flexibility in their work schedule is well known - it stems from collective recognition of their responsibility to care for children. However, it is also important to note the importance of a father's active contribution in looking after his children as well. Therefore, the promotion of gender balance through the equal division of domestic and familial responsibilities must be considered in all government policies. This guide will broaden the definition of the "remote work system" with the aim of reducing the existing economic and social gender gaps.

The purpose of the '**Guide for Women's Remote Work**' is to provide governmental and non-governmental entities with recommendations and measures concerning the application of remote work systems, particularly in the case of female employees. What distinguishes this guide is that it is in line with the strategy of Dubai in general, and Dubai Women Establishment's in particular. It aims to foster work environments that are more suitable for the employment and retention of Emirati women, and reduce the number of women who are reluctant to join the workforce – or leave it entirely – as a result of their inability to strike a balance between their professional and family obligations. Providing more flexibility to achieve such a balance, and to enhance job loyalty and productivity, were necessary and instrumental aspects in the development of this guide.
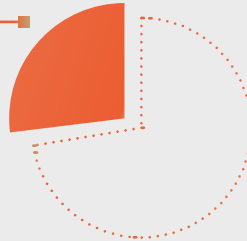
This guide is important as it aims to:

Narrow the gender gap, as women represent

27.1%

of Dubai Government employees (nationals and non-nationals).

Source: (Dubai Statistics Center 2020)

Provide the public and private sectors with knowledge and instruction on how to apply the remote work system for female employees.

Enhance **flexibility** to manage and provide the best services in the workplace in a way that contributes to increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of the public and private sectors in carrying out their duties, preserving their human resources, creating synergy between working hours, work needs, and an employee's private life, and ensuring business continuity even in emergencies.
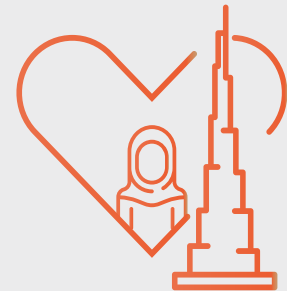
Establish Dubai among the best women and family friendly cities in the world.

TERMS

The following terms and expressions, wherever mentioned in this guide, will entail the meanings indicated below, unless the context of the text indicates otherwise:

Country	The United Arab Emirates.
Emirate	The Emirate of Dubai.
Government	The Government of Dubai.
Resolution	Council Resolution No. (36) of 2020 Concerning Telework System for the Employees of the Government of Dubai.
Governmental entity	Government departments, public bodies and institutions, government authorities and councils, and any other public entity affiliated with the Government of Dubai.
Non-governmental entity	Companies, sole proprietorships, and any other private entity licensed to operate in the Emirate.
Workplace or Employer	Government departments and non-governmental organizations.
Guide	The Guide for Women's Remote Work.
System	The remote work system implemented by the employer, according to which the female employee performs her job duties outside the workplace in line with the requirements and guidelines approved by this guide.
Employee	Every woman employed by an employer that implements the remote work system.
Line manager	The manager who is directly responsible and oversees performance of employee.
Emergency	Any unexpected situation that is difficult to predict and would make the performance of work tasks at the workplace a danger to the employee.
General Manager	The highest level of authority in the workplace, including the CEO, Director General, etc.

OBJECTIVES

This guide aims to:

1 Ensure the proper application of the remote work system approved by employers, in line with the Resolution.

2 Achieve harmony between the remote work system approved by the employer and the strategies and policies adopted by the government. This includes providing a more suitable work environment that encourages the retention of women employees by facilitating a balance between their professional and personal obligations.

3 Provide flexible work systems in line with government directives and relevant international best practices.

4 Enhance employees' happiness and positivity, and achieve greater job satisfaction.

5 Enhance productivity by focusing on results and achievements.

6 Achieve better synergy between the employee's working hours, work needs, and personal responsibilities.

7 Ensure business continuity in emergencies.

8 Enhance job loyalty.

FRAMEWORK FOR APPLICATION

1. This guide, including the rules and clauses it lists, is voluntarily applied by governmental and non-governmental entities in the Emirate, and is not considered binding.

2. Remote work is not considered an acquired right for the employee or a binding entitlement, and it may be canceled or modified if its application conflicts with public interest and the functioning of the workplace.

3. The rules and clauses of this guide shall be applied in accordance with internal decisions issued by the General Manager.

TARGET AUDIENCE

This guide applies to both national and non-national female employees working for governmental and non-governmental entities in the Emirate.

TYPES OF REMOTE WORK

Below are the two types of remote work that female employees may be assigned to:

1. COMPLETE REMOTE WORK

Applies to female employees experiencing any situation that requires them to work remotely, and whose job duties allow them to fully perform the tasks and responsibilities away from the workplace.

2. PARTIAL REMOTE WORK (OR ON DEMAND)

Applies to female employees on a temporary basis by dividing their work hours at the workplace between them and their colleagues, in equal or different proportions, either in days, weeks, or months.

CONDITIONS FOR REMOTE WORK

A. To apply the remote work system, the following conditions are required:

1. The job should be among those that can be performed outside the workplace and does not require the actual presence of the female employee at the workplace.

2. The remote work arrangement will not affect the productivity of the employer and the employee, the proper functioning of the work therein, and the provision of the services and tasks requested.

3. The job should be among those where employees can be evaluated remotely.

4. The work is performed remotely inside the country, except in cases approved by the employer, and where the employee does not benefit from the option of flexible working hours, set by the employer, at the same time.

B. Notwithstanding the condition stipulated in Clause (4) of Section (A), the General Manager may allow a female employee to work remotely abroad in emergencies, or when it is difficult for the female employee to return to the UAE due to her presence in a country where an emergency is occurring.

C. The employee's performance of her tasks remotely, whether inside or outside the country, shall abide by the security and confidentiality of information. The employee's performance and productivity during the period of remote work will be monitored.

D. The employee is not given priority to use the childcare centers in the workplace if she is working remotely.

CIRCUMSTANCES THAT REQUIRE REMOTE WORK

There are specific situations and circumstances that allow employees to be assigned remote work. Employees are responsible for providing their employers with proof of these circumstances, verified by documents approved by relevant authorities.

FIRST CATEGORY | PREGNANCY AND MOTHERHOOD

- **A pregnant employee** whose pregnancy requires rest throughout the duration of the pregnancy (until the day of delivery) according to a medical report approved by government health authorities in the UAE, whether such rest is needed due to a high-risk pregnancy or other factors which require staying home.
- **New mothers**, up to five months after an employee's maternity leave, if her newborn requires medical aid and care.
- **An employee who gives birth to twins** or more during the first year after delivery, if there are no other caregivers to look after the children.
- **A mother of a Child of Determination**, during the first year after delivery.
- **An employee who gives birth to a premature newborn.**
- **An employee undergoing fertility treatment**, from the process of insemination until the stabilization of pregnancy.

SECOND CATEGORY | HEALTH AND WELLBEING

- **An employee who suffers from a chronic illness** that is negatively impacted by being seated for extended periods of time.
- **An employee receiving treatment,** if she is not granted a sick leave.
- **An employee who is injured due to her job,** and whose health requires extended rest, if she is not granted a sick leave.

THIRD CATEGORY | TRAVEL AND FAMILY COMMITMENTS

- **An employee who lives far from the workplace,** whose physical presence at the premises requires much time and stress.
- **An employee who is accompanying a sick child,** husband, or second-degree relative, if she is not granted relatives escort leave.
- **An employee married to someone who works in the diplomatic corps,** if he is travelling for educational or training purposes and if she is not granted relatives escort leave.
- **An employee during bad weather or road closure conditions.**
- **An employee caring for a first-degree senior relative.**

FOURTH CATEGORY | EDUCATION AND TRAINING

- **An employee who teaches in any higher-education institute,** in addition to her permanent job.
- **An employee who is learning or training in any educational establishment or certified institution,** if she is not granted a study leave.

FIFTH CATEGORY | SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

The employer may allow an employee to work remotely, in cases other than those mentioned, at the discretion of the employer and in accordance with approved remote work system guidelines.

DURATION, DAYS, AND WORKING HOURS

1. The duration, days, and working hours of an employee working remotely should be in line with the number of official working hours stipulated in the remote work arrangement or the contract signed between employee and employer.

2. The employee must abide by official working days and hours during remote work, according to verification systems approved by the employer.

METHODS AND MEDIUMS OF COMMUNICATION BETWEEN EMPLOYEE, LINE MANAGER, AND EMPLOYER

A. Communication between the employee, line manager, and the employer during remote work is to take place through the tools approved by the employer, such as:

1
Email applications.

2
Online conferencing applications.

3
Online event applications.

4
Proof of remote attendance and departure applications.

B. The employee must have a functioning internet connection in her place of residence, in order to use the aforementioned means of communication.

TECHNICAL METHODS, TOOLS, PROGRAMS, AND DEVICES NEEDED TO WORK REMOTELY

The department responsible for information technology (IT) at the workplace shall provide the employee with the devices, systems, and software needed. In particular, the IT department should provide the following:

Portable computers (laptops).	An official email.	Security software ensuring the confidentiality of information in line with the cybersecurity standards approved by the employer.	Software, mechanisms, applications, and secure technical means to hold meetings remotely by video and audio conferencing.
Approval for a virtual private network (VPN) to connect the devices of the employee working remotely to the network of the employer. The employee must ensure that the VPN of the employer is activated at all times during her working hours.		The conditions and standards to connect the employee's laptop to the employer's network in a reliable and secure manner.	Support and technical assistance before and during the period of remote work to ensure smooth workflow and the integrity of systems and information.

PROCESS AND MECHANISMS OF MONITORING AND MEASURING EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

Below is the process and mechanisms of monitoring and measuring the productivity of an employee working remotely:

1. The employer is to ensure there is a process to monitor the employee's daily performance and provide the employee with all forms of support, awareness, guidance, and direction.
2. The employee is to perform required tasks and responsibilities, deliver the work by stipulated deadlines, and respond to all calls and emails whether from the line manager or colleagues.
3. The employee is to use her working hours optimally by accomplishing all required tasks, abiding by standards of professional conduct and work ethics, and maintaining the confidentiality of information and documents.
4. The employee is to submit a periodic report detailing work productivity and accomplishments, and submit it to her line manager.
5. The employee should meet bi-annual performance goals and objectives.
6. The employee should not allow any person in her household to access the computer, programs, systems, or applications provided by the employer.

PROCESS AND METHOD OF ASSIGNING TASKS TO EMPLOYEE

1. Obtaining prior approval for remote work from the relevant department at an employee's workplace, as well as her line manager.

2. The employee must sign a pledge committing to maintaining the confidentiality of data, information, and other systems and programs designed for remote work.

3. Tasks that must be accomplished during the period of remote work must be determined and agreed upon between the line manager and the employee.

4. The communication tools between the employee, her line manager, and colleagues must be pre-determined, such as e-mails and virtual event and conferencing applications.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYER

To implement the remote work system efficiently, the employer is responsible for:

1. Providing technical means, tools, and needed support to allow the employee accomplish her job duties and tasks, and measure her performance.
2. Enhancing communication between the employer and the employee working remotely.
3. Developing an effective communication plan with the employee working remotely.
4. Preparing periodic reports and providing data on the results of implementing the remote work system, and submitting them to the relevant department at the workplace.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF EMPLOYEE

An employee who is authorized to work remotely must:

1. Perform duties and tasks by herself, and not outsource to any other person.
2. Submit periodic reports to the line manager.
3. Commit to the days and working hours approved by her employer.
4. Utilize mechanisms approved by the employer to communicate effectively with managers and colleagues.
5. Maintain all the devices and tools that are in her custody, and request technical maintenance whenever required.
6. Commit to the tasks stipulated by the employer when attending virtual meetings.
7. Return the tools and devices that were provided by the employer when requested to do so.
8. Refrain from using devices provided by the employer for any purposes other than official professional tasks.
9. The employee is prohibited from attending meetings or performing her job duties in public places.

EMPLOYEE RIGHTS AND PRIVILEGES

The employee's remote work **will not affect** monthly or annual dues stipulated in her contract, nor will it affect her chances at receiving a promotion or job privileges. The duration of remote work is a continuation of her period of service.

CONCURRENCE WITH EMPLOYER REGULATIONS

The rules, procedures, and clauses stated in this guide do not violate nor contradict – but are rather concurrent with – what is stipulated in the legislation, regulations, and policies enforced by the employer.

TERMINATION OF REMOTE WORK

A. An employee's remote work shall be canceled in any of the following were to occur:

1. Violation of any of the obligations stipulated in the regulations and policies adopted by the employer or stipulated in this guide.
2. Failure to accomplish tasks assigned by the line manager.
3. Non-compliance with official working days and hours.
4. Absence from the workplace when attendance is mandatory for purposes related to job performance, without a legitimate excuse accepted by the relevant internal department.
5. Any other context for the sake of job performance, or if deemed necessary by the general manager

B. In the event that the employee's remote work is terminated, she must return to the workplace within one working day. Otherwise, she will be considered absent and the provisions of absenteeism, and interruption of work stipulated in the regulations and policies of the workplace, shall be applied.

Working
REMOTELY
survey
REPORT

PREFACE

In light of the implications entailed to the COVID-19 global pandemic, work routines have substantially changed – working from home has become the new normal for most. In an effort to adapt to these unprecedented circumstances, many employers and employees faced various advantages and disadvantages as they adopted new approaches to manage and navigate their untraditional work routines. This holds especially true within organisations that had never implemented flexible working options before.

Striking a healthy balance between both the demands of personal life and work, while simultaneously embracing an enforced work-from-home culture, may have been an empowering challenge for many working women. Seeing as they are often the primary caretakers within their households, women had to shuffle between multiple domestic and familial responsibilities, while ensuring they did not compromise on their performance within their professional capacities as employees.

This paper looks into women employees' diverse experiences working from home during the lockdown period imposed across Dubai, summarising the benefits reaped and challenges faced by working women, and highlighting the ways by which they are able to adapt to the new reality of work.
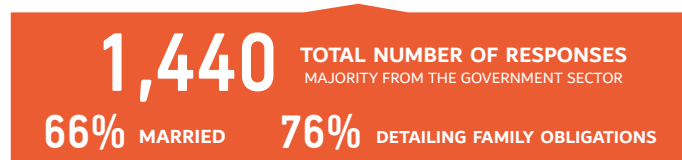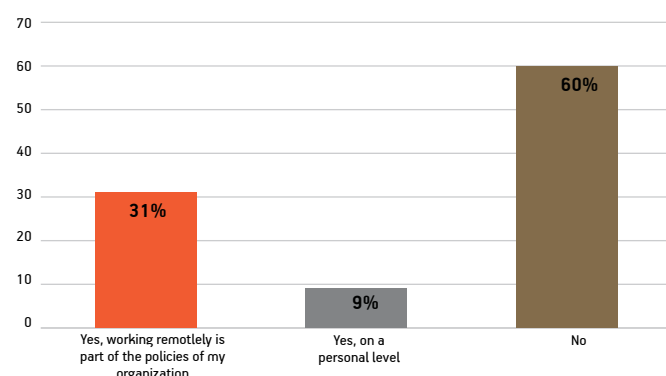
METHODOLOGY

The survey consisted of 27 questions and was distributed virtually by way of emails and text messages. The total number of responses was 1,440, with the majority of respondents employed in the government sector; 66% of whom are married, and 76% detailing family obligations. Almost 50% have been working for 10 years and above, and more than half had no prior experience working from home.

The survey was divided into three sets of questions. The first set was focused on the respondent's personal background, detailing age, marital status, work sector, educational background, and other general information. The second set focused on the respondent's remote working experience, looking into their overall performance, familial and work responsibilities, the challenges they faced, and how the experience may have made them reconsider their career paths. The third and final set of questions delved into the lockdown's impact on social and mental well-being, addressing the feasibility of

striking an effective balance, as well as addressing the different challenges faced, when carrying out home and work duties, as well as general perceptions on the future of work in the UAE during the COVID 19 pandemic.

1,440 TOTAL NUMBER OF RESPONSES
MAJORITY FROM THE GOVERNMENT SECTOR

66% MARRIED **76%** DETAILING FAMILY OBLIGATIONS

DID YOU HAVE EXPERIENCE WORKING REMOTELY BEFORE THE COVID-19
FIGURE #1 - KEY FINDINGS OF POINT NUMBER 1

Bar chart:
- Yes, working remotely is part of the policies of my organization: 31%
- Yes, on a personal level: 9%
- No: 60%

KEY FINDINGS

1. 60% of the survey respondents never worked from home previously, or never experienced a flexible working option. The remaining 40% utilised flexible working arrangements as part of their corporate policy, or on a personal level, prior to the pandemic

60% WITHOUT PRIOR EXPERIENCE WORKING FROM HOME/FLEXIBLE WORKING OPTIONS

71% RATED THEIR WORKING FROM HOME EXPERIENCE AS 'VERY GOOD'

2. 71% rated their working from home experience as 'very good', while less than 5% rated their experience as 'poor' and 'very poor'.

3. 50% of the respondents reported that their working hours increased during lockdown; 35% stated that their working hours remained the same; while the rest said their working hours decreased.

4. Based on multiple responses, amongst the challenges that women faced while working from home were mostly related to:

51%
Technical and connection issues

46%
Taking care of children & elderly family members

36%
Lack of a convenient workspace

34%
Lack of social and physical interaction with colleagues

5. Other issues reported were:

a. working beyond official working hours. This being the most cited, respondents highlighted how they were expected to deliver job-related tasks all day long

b. handling home-schooling while working

c. not having an ergonomic home office or suitable physical space

d. inability to conduct field visits to meet customer and stakeholder needs

e. maintaining a healthy work-life balance

6. Only 4% of respondents said they did not face any issues

7. On measuring productivity, 79% answered that they worked more efficiently from home; 12% were uncertain; and the remaining found themselves to be less productive
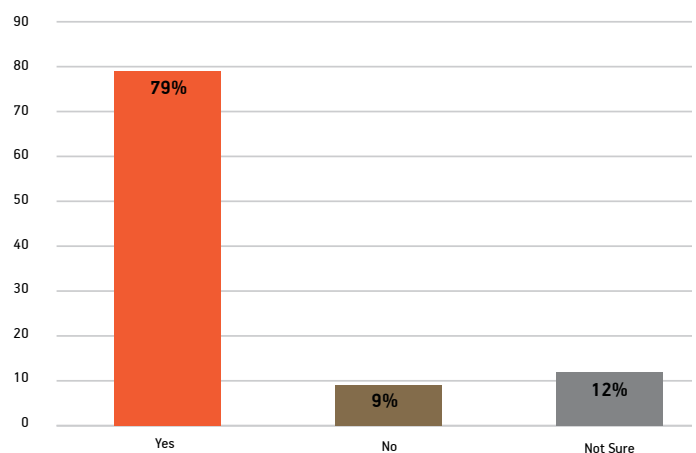
DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS, MY WORK HOURS
FIGURE #2 - KEY FINDINGS OF POINT NUMBER 3

- Increased: 50%
- Remained the same: 35%
- Decreased: 15%
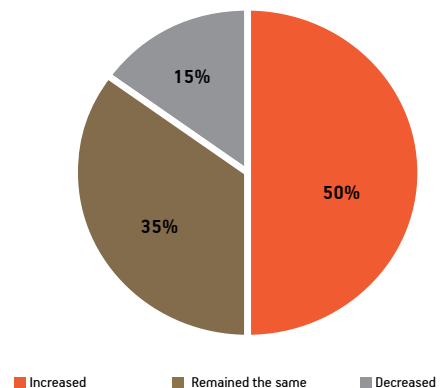
DID YOU FIND YOURSELF MORE PRODUCTIVE IN TERMS OF WORKING FROM HOME?
FIGURE #3 - KEY FINDINGS OF POINT NUMBER 7

- Yes: 79%
- No: 9%
- Not Sure: 12%

8. When asked on what resources would have enhanced their working from home experience, almost one-third indicated technical support; 30% cited being provided with guidelines on working from home; 24% wanted more clarity on performing their job roles; and 13% wanted more interaction with their work colleagues.
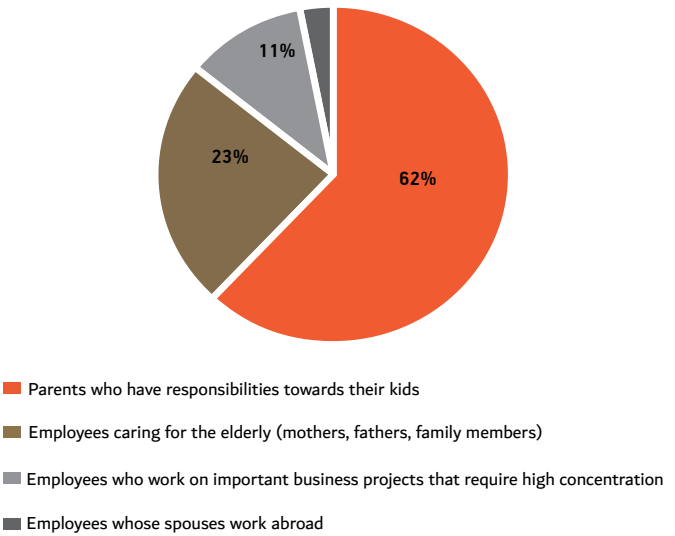
9. Trying to understand how the pandemic has made women reconsider their jobs; 43% pointed out they would change how they perform their roles; 27% expressed their interest in pursuing further education and training; 15% reported they would ask their managers for more job responsibilities; and the remaining feel they would like to pursue a different career or leave the workforce, even if temporarily (6% and 5%, respectively).

10. Other factors cited were:

a. considering employers that allow work from home as a permanent option

b. restructuring the nature of jobs, as the experience has allowed employers to realise that certain job roles can be performed remotely

c. realigning priorities and focusing on self-development and care

APART FROM THE COVID-19, FROM YOUR POINT OF VIEW, WHAT ARE THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH THE EMPLOYEE DESERVES TO WORK FROM HOME?

FIGURE #4 - KEY FINDINGS OF POINT NUMBER 11

- Parents who have responsibilities towards their kids
- Employees caring for the elderly (mothers, fathers, family members)
- Employees who work on important business projects that require high concentration
- Employees whose spouses work abroad

d. putting greater focus on work-life balance

11. As for the circumstances that should allow employees to work remotely on a permanent basis, based on multiple responses, most chose parents who have major childcare responsibilities (62%), employees who care for their elderly (23%), employees working on critical projects (11%), and employees with spouses working abroad (3%).

WHAT CHALLENGES DID YOU FACE DURING WORKING REMOTELY?

FIGURE #5 - KEY FINDINGS OF POINT NUMBER 11 TO 16
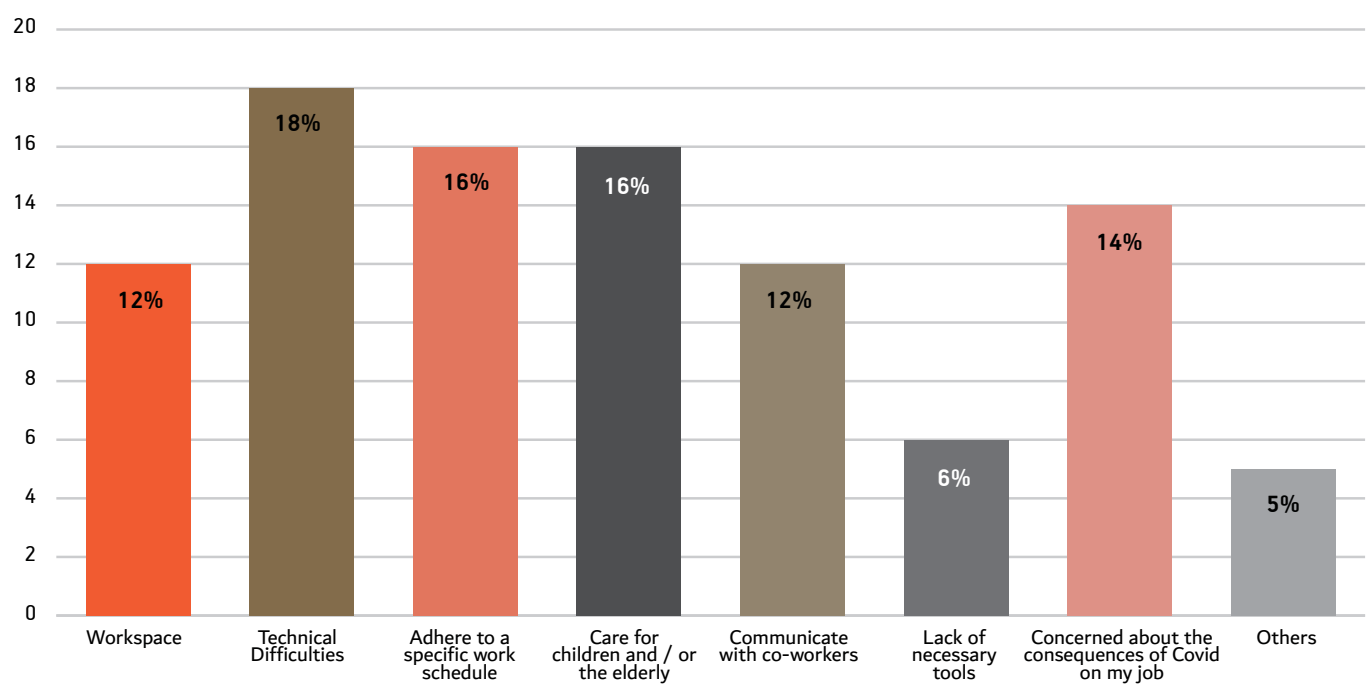
12. 41% of the survey respondents have children below the age of 12, while 16% and 19% care for other family members, or both (respectively). More than one-third reported that occasionally their job prevented them from giving their children, or other family members, the required time and care. However, 26% said they did not experience any conflict between both responsibilities.

13. On the contrary, when asked how their family responsibilities affected their work performance, 43% stated that they did not face any issues, and only 8% recorded that they could not establish a balanced approach.

14. More than one-third stated they lacked support when it came to household chores and home-schooling. 22% cited that their husbands helped them, while 20% were supported by domestic workers. Others received help from their family members and their children (17% and 6%, respectively).

15. Exploring mental health and wellbeing, 62% said that they experienced anxiety and fear as a result of the pandemic.

62% EXPERIENCED ANXIETY AND FEAR AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC.
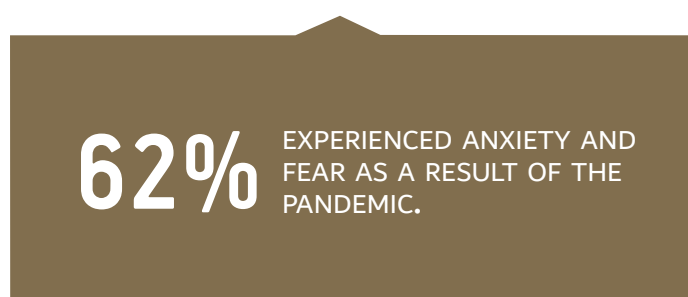
16. 14% mentioned that they were worried about the impact the pandemic would have on their job security.

17. When asked about how they attempted to overcome their anxiety, 22% answered that they would ask their employers for flexibility in work management; 22% indicated they would ask their family and social circle for support with childcare; 7% considered therapy; whereas 43% chose to act indifferently and learn to adapt.

18. Respondents dealt with anxiety by:

a. developing effective strategies to work from home while home-schooling
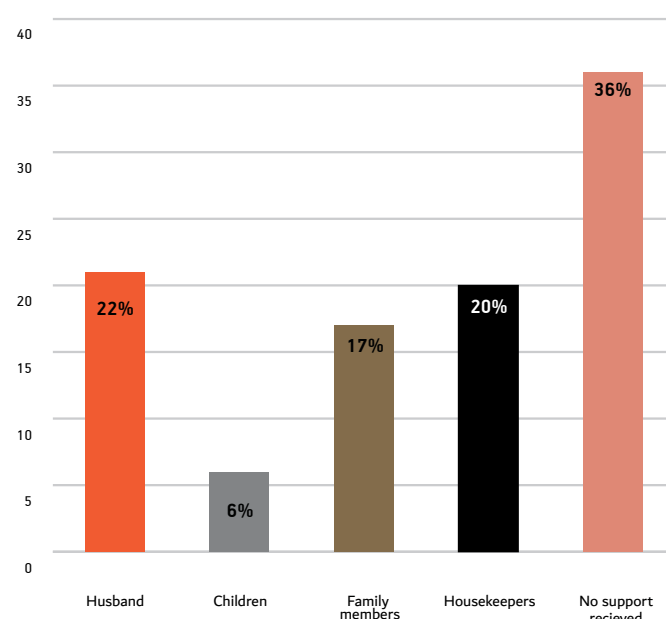
b. practising exercise and meditation

c. prioritising responsibilities

d. engaging in self-development by reading and listening to podcasts

19. 92% prefer to continue working from home several days a week, even after the pandemic is over.
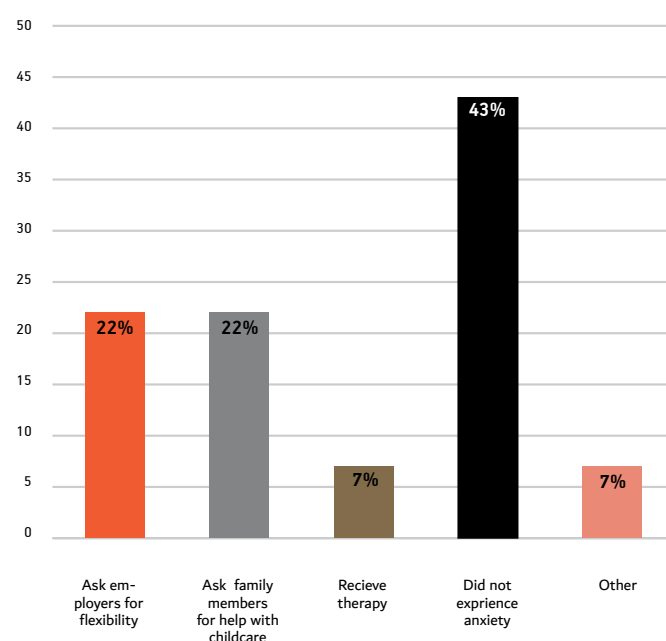

WHO OFFERED MOST SUPPORT WITH HOME-SCHOOLING AND HOUSEHOLD CHORES?

FIGURE #6 - KEY FINDINGS OF POINT NUMBER 14

HOW DID YOU OVERCOME YOUR ANXIETY?

FIGURE #7 - KEY FINDINGS OF POINT NUMBER 17

20. Additional reported implications :

- Managing work and home-schooling

- Maintaining a healthy work-life balance

- Fostering and nurturing family connections with mothers being more available at home

- Fear of contracting COVID-19, and fear of transmitting the virus to family members

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the survey and its respondents' answers, there evidently seems to be a wide acceptance and keen willingness to embrace remote working as a viable alternative to traditional approaches to the nature of work. Working from home has always been a controversial topic; some employers prefer the typical 'work-from-office' approach, believing that employees' job performance and quality would be compromised if not physically present within office premises. However, this outlook has greatly receded, as the pandemic is broadly reshaping attitudes and mindsets of both employers and employees, and transforming the labour market as a whole. Decision-makers have been forced to adopt and adapt to flexible working, while ensuring that organisational goals are met and productivity levels are maintained.

While remote work presents a very specific set of challenges ranging from technological problems, physical space, overworking, home-schooling, and other issues identified in this paper, developing strategies and introducing solutions to overcome them will help institutionalise 'work-from-home' for employers and efficiently facilitate it for employees. Considering various aspects related to women's experience working from home, women employees may be the most affected in terms of striking a balance between their work and familial responsibilities. However, there still seems to be positive aspects that indicate women are eager to overcome these challenges in order to accommodate remote working.

The path forward is still unclear. COVID-19 has caused societies and economies to rethink and recalibrate traditional methods and everyday functions. Safety and social distancing in light of the pandemic are the primary reasons that actualised remote working on a global scale. Much remains to be learned if remote working is to be implemented effectively and seamlessly across institutions, as the impacts of this novel approach to the professional fields on both women and society as a whole are yet to be completely and thoroughly understood and analysed.