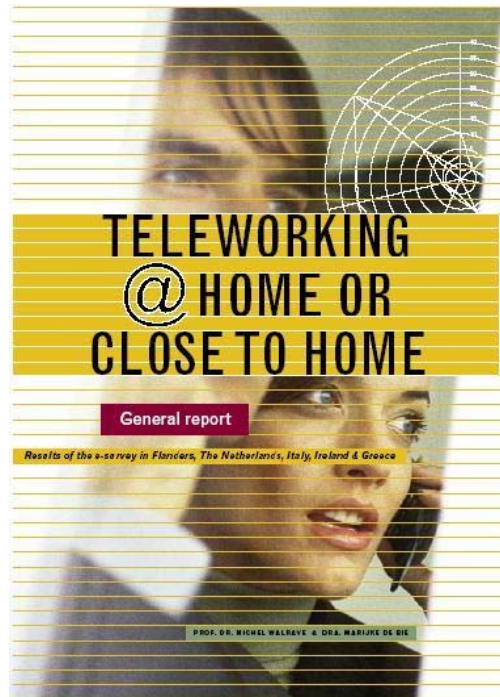


## Teleworkers and managers enthusiastic about their telework experience.

Thresholds still prevent non-teleworking managers and employees from starting to telework.

*A majority of the surveyed teleworking employees and managers evaluate their experience in a positive way. Employees stress the benefits of teleworking on productivity, stress, work motivation, autonomy and work/life balance.*



This is one of the conclusions of a survey conducted by prof. dr. Michel Walrave and dra. Marijke De Bie of the University of Antwerp for Unizo as a part of the EU project Allinclusive @ work coordinated by the ESF-Agency Flanders. For non-teleworkers and managers without teleworking experience in their company, opinions concerning possible risks and pitfalls of teleworking prevent them from starting. This survey was conducted in the five countries participating in the project, namely Flanders, Greece, Ireland, Italy and The Netherlands. Hereafter you will find an overview of results in three countries. Due to a too small number of respondents of the Greek and Irish surveys, the results of the data-analysis and the possible tendencies are limited.

The main purpose of this e-survey is to feel the pulse of actual teleworkers. What is their attitude towards different facets of their teleworking experience? Who took the initiative? Who pays the costs? Does it have a (positive or negative) influence on one's productivity, career, work/life balance? Some issues concerning teleworking are also submitted to non-teleworkers to get a grip on their reasons not to telework. Furthermore, the possible significant differences between teleworkers and non-teleworkers concerning several issues can point to thresholds that prevent employees from starting to telework. What are the possible negative aspects of teleworking feared by non-teleworkers? Do actual teleworkers confirm or deny this, based on their experience? Which positive effects of teleworking, supposed by non-teleworkers, are asserted or contradicted by teleworkers? In brief, pros and cons experienced by actual teleworkers and supposed by non-teleworkers are compared.

Next to employees, managers and employers (of SMEs and big companies) are surveyed to find out more about their attitude towards and possible experience with teleworking. Also, a comparison has been made between companies that have implemented one of several teleworking-types and managers of businesses without teleworking experience. What keeps the latter from implementing working at a distance? Is it a question of lack

of 'teleworkable' positions, tasks or concerns about specific phases of the implementation of teleworking in their company?

**Telework initiative and costs**

First of all most of the teleworkers who participated in the survey are occasionally working at a distance from the companies' premises (less than one day per week) or telework regularly (some one to three days a week).

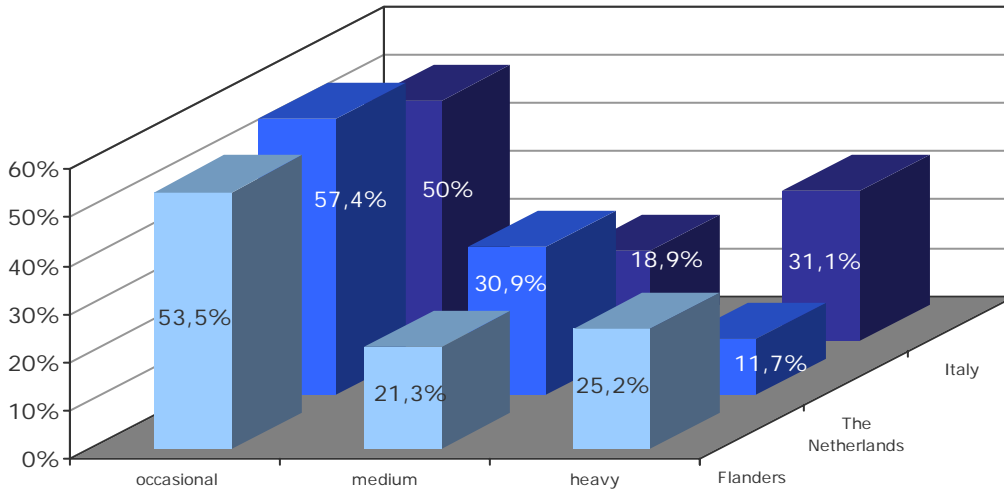


Figure 1: Telework frequency

Teleworking is mostly organised on an informal basis, without contractual agreements (e.g. concerning insurances, working hours, costs etc.).

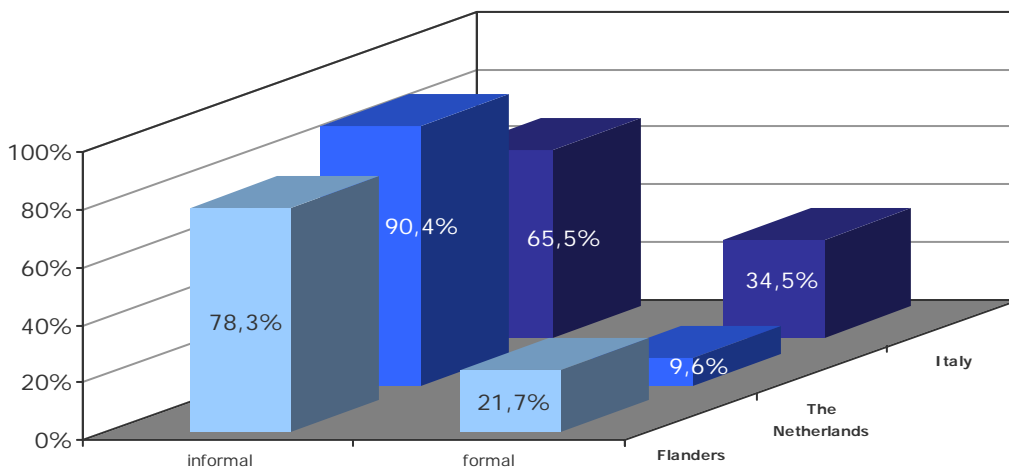


Figure 2: Formal or informal agreement

More men than women telework and having children increases the teleworking frequency significantly. The most implemented telework-type is homeworking.

More men than women take the initiative. In most cases the employee has proposed teleworking, except in Italy where the employer is the initiator more often (employee takes the initiative: Flanders: 60.5%; The Netherlands: 80.2%; Italy: 33.9%).

More teleworkers are employed in big companies than in SMEs. The latter organise teleworking more in an informal way. The Flemish and Italian results show that SME-teleworkers are less involved in training programmes. The necessary tools (computer and internet connection) are also less refunded, according the Flemish results.

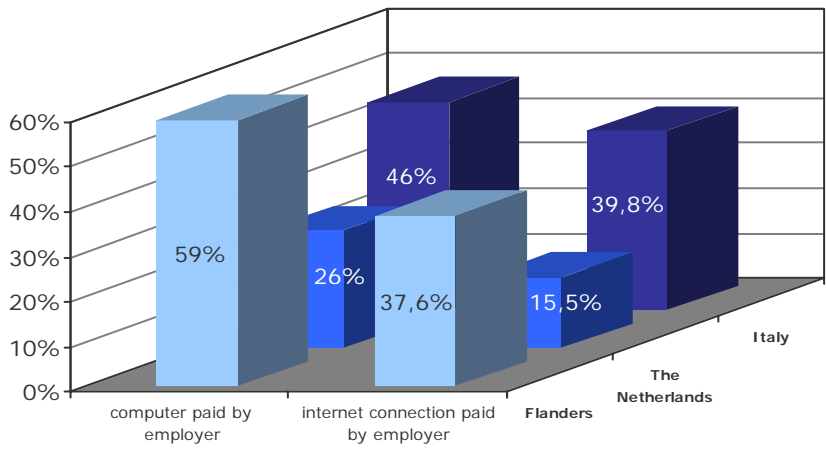


Figure 3: Payment of telework costs by employer

The payment of those costs is also linked with whom takes the initiative to telework and whether or not there is a formal agreement (significant results in Flanders for both variables and in The Netherlands only for the teleworking agreement). In other words, if the employer is the initiator and if there is a formal agreement, he/she is more likely to pay for the telework costs. A possible consequence of this is that an employee might have to be ready and have the financial means to invest in ICT to be able to telework. Teleworkers are also stressing the need for training and the concrete initiatives to involve teleworkers in company activities and to enhance the information flow.

**Experienced advantages**

Teleworking employees testify that there are several advantages linked to teleworking: next to the obvious decrease of commuting, they can organise their working hours more autonomously, finish some tasks after office hours and they are able to work without being disturbed. The possibility to work undisturbed is (in Flanders and The Netherlands) linked with the presence of a home-office. Yet, less than half of the teleworkers have a separate office at home.

Teleworkers also experience a reduction in work pressure and stress level and an increase in work motivation. The creation of more autonomy makes it possible for some to combine professional tasks with caring and domestic chores, although teleworkers are not all on the same wavelength about this topic. This autonomy gained by teleworkers runs analogously with an important responsibility for employees and their supervisors. It was observed that an important proportion of teleworkers' work is monitored by the output they deliver within certain deadlines.

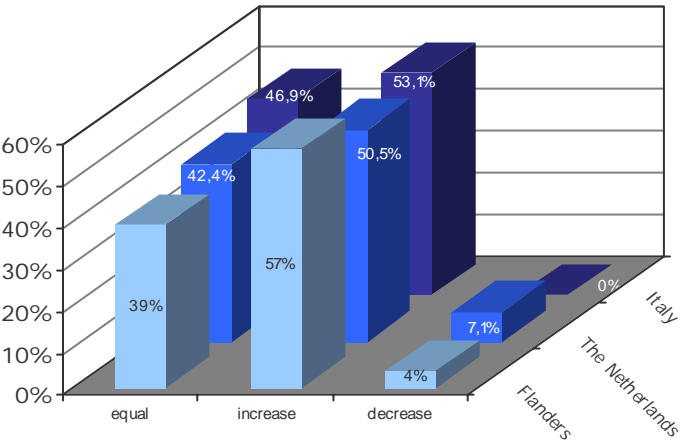


Figure 4: Effect on productivity

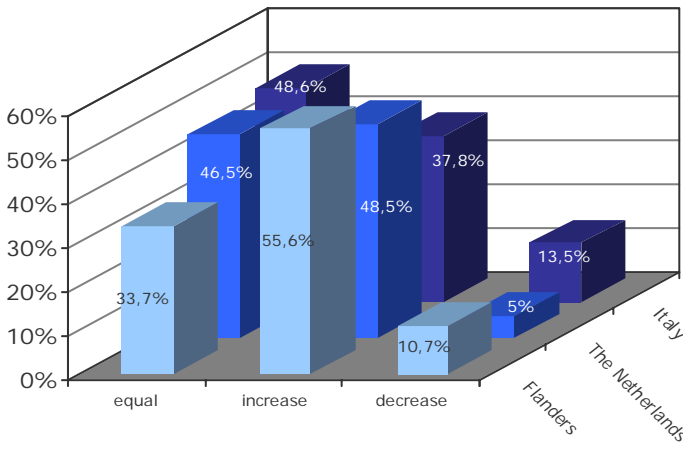


Figure 5: Effect on work/life balance

Next to this individual level, (non-)teleworkers are convinced that teleworking can create more opportunities on a social level for disabled, for women with children and for inhabitants of rural areas.

### ***Downsides of teleworking***

The downsides of teleworking are also experienced by teleworkers, but they often are present less than non-teleworkers presume. One of the issues presented to the respondents concerned the possible negative effects of working (part-time) at a distance on the career opportunities. In Flanders and The Netherlands the concern about this possible downside was stressed more by non-teleworkers than it was experienced by the teleworkers themselves. We must keep in mind that a majority of the teleworkers pinpoint this as being an important disadvantage of their teleworking experience. Conversely, they evaluate their productivity as teleworkers higher.

Other arguments against teleworking are the diminished social contact with colleagues and supervisors, the possible reduction of access to company information and the risk of a minor involvement in corporate activities. Those pitfalls can generally be countered by different organisational initiatives, going from alternating tele(home)working with working at the (main) office and implementing specific communication tools for (non-)teleworkers to be able to interact, to collaborate and share the data needed for their work.

### ***Non-teleworkers' thresholds***

The non-teleworkers declare that the main reasons for them not to start working at home, or at another location that differs from the (main) office, are the specific characteristics of their job. Intensive face-to-face interaction with colleagues, superiors and/or clients are the most common cited grounds.

The management not allowing teleworking in the company is another important reason (most frequently cited in Italy, second reason in The Netherlands and Flanders).

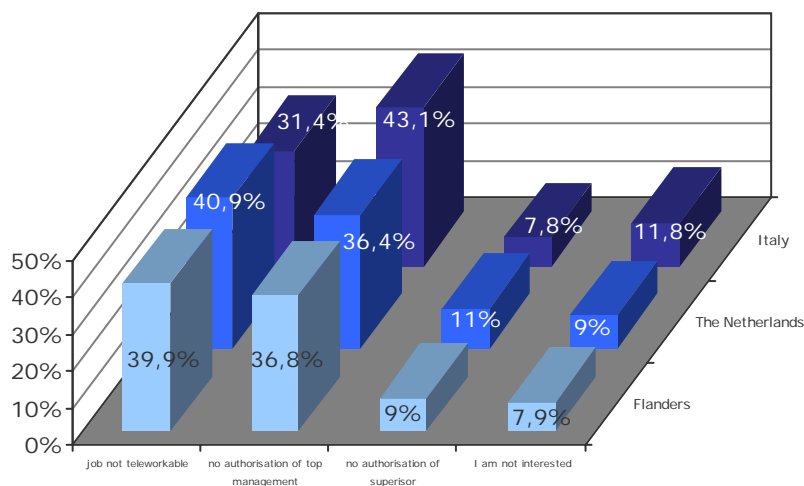


Figure 6: Reasons for not teleworking

Nevertheless, a large majority of non-teleworking employees are interested in this work-type (Flanders: 87.7%; The Netherlands: 77%; Italy: 83.6%). Moreover, they think it is possible to implement (part-time) teleworking in their current function (Flanders: 60.3%; The Netherlands: 63.8%; Italy: 69.8%). Homeworking is the favourite location, mostly in combination with the companies' premises. The other teleworking-types are less popular. In Flanders women are more in favour of telecentres, while men are less enthusiastic about this location and prefer mobile working.

Despite their enthusiasm for teleworking, a majority of the non-teleworkers declare that the management of their company would not allow teleworking (Flanders: 74.8%; The Netherlands: 55.6%; Italy: 72.2%).

### *Managers' view on telework*

This negative attitude of the management can be explained by the concerns of employers without teleworking experience about some possible pitfalls of teleworking. They are, more than managers with teleworking experience, convinced that teleworking leads to high ICT-costs, a decrease in supervision possibilities and the possible resistance from the management. The possible productivity increase, the decrease in absenteeism, the higher attractiveness of a teleworking company for potential employees and the long-term benefits of teleworking for the company are advocated less by employers without teleworking experience.

Managers with and managers without teleworking in their company agree on the issue of teleworking making high demands on the management. But, also some positive aspects, such as the increase in flexibility and loyalty of employees and the decrease of mobility problems are underlined (according to the Flemish results in which a subdivision between employers with and without teleworking projects was possible).

The implementation of teleworking in companies mainly consists of homeworking for specific functions, namely managers, technical and commercial functions, in some cases for specialised functions and to a lesser extent for administrative functions. Less employers have introduced working at clients' premises, mobile working and working in satellite offices. Managers confirm the experiences of the employees and state that in most cases teleworking is arranged in an informal way. The flexibility this offers employers to start and stop teleworking, the consequences for the costs and planning, but also the implications for employees when it comes to their costs to telework and their insurance protection while working at home, could be researched more in depth.

A majority of the employers attach conditions to the opportunity to telework (for instance a particular position and specific personality traits and, for some, a certain level in the company hierarchy; the seniority of the employee seems less important). The managers also confirm that they will extend their teleworking experience. The use of homeworking, working at clients' sites, satellite offices and telecentres are possible options. Employers attach, however, certain conditions to the telecentre-option, such as the guarantee of a professional working environment, and of secure business data. Some want this teleworking-type to cost less or at least not more than homeworking.

Managers without teleworking experience explain their refusal to implement teleworking by the shortage of positions that are teleworkable. A rather large proportion of the employers also underline that they fear a lack of employee supervision and need more information on the advantages and disadvantages of teleworking.

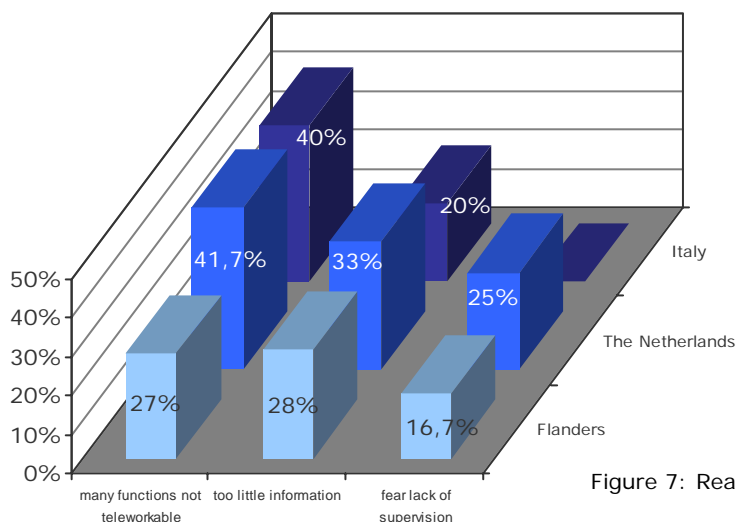


Figure 7: Reasons for not implementing telework

This is why more information on myths and reality of pros and cons of teleworking-types, based on testimonials and research among experienced teleworking organisations could stimulate other employers to change their mind and consider the testing and/or implementation of teleworking. Because, for a majority of employees and employers to try telework is to adopt it. We observed namely that the teleworking employers in this survey and in most cases also the employees are rather positive about their experience.

#### Synthesis of 10 trends/issues:

1. More men than women telework, although women and men are equally interested. Men take initiative more often
2. Telework is based on an informal agreement
3. Telework entails costs for the employer and the employee
4. The majority does not receive training before teleworking, while there is a need for training
5. Teleworkers experience certain advantages, while non-teleworkers underestimate pros for their work and private life
6. Teleworkers (and non-teleworkers) fear a decrease in promotion opportunities. Teleworkers experience a reduction of social contact and lesser involvement in corporate activities
7. Employees' favourite telework location is home, but they consider also satellite offices, mobile working & telecentres
8. Managers without telework experience stress more the risks of teleworking and less the advantages
9. Managers have a restricted view on teleworkability
10. Important reasons for not implementing telework is a lack of teleworkable functions, a lack of information and fear for less supervision

*Research report: Teleworking @ home or close to home.* Walrave & De Bie,

*More information (download the reports):*

<http://www.tijdvoortelewerk.be> & <http://www.europeteleworks.org>

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