



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
DIRECTORATE-GENERAL
HUMAN RESOURCES AND SECURITY

GUIDELINES ON TELEWORKING IN COMMISSION DEPARTMENTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

1. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous spread of the coronavirus COVID-19 and in line with the new risk assessment by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC), the Commission has decided to activate, on the request of the President, both business continuity plans and special teleworking arrangements.

These additional measures are designed to protect staff by decreasing physical contacts between colleagues, while ensuring that essential tasks of the Commission continue to be carried out. These measures are applicable for an initial period running from Monday 16 March 2020 to Sunday 29 March (the “period concerned”). They are subject to review depending on the evolution of the situation.

The present Guidelines have been drawn up by the Directorate-General for Human Resources and Security to guide Commission departments in the use of telework in this particular instance of force majeure. They will also detail, where relevant, the impact of the current situation on the application of the provisions on working time.

These guidelines are adopted pursuant to Article 4(5) of Decision C (2015)9151 on the implementation of telework in Commission Departments (hereinafter 'the Decision on telework') and Article 9 of Decision C (2014)2502 on Working Time (hereinafter 'the Decision on Working Time').

2. SCOPE

These guidelines set out the principles common to all Commission departments with regard to telework during the period concerned.

These guidelines do not apply to staff working in EU Delegations. Specific guidelines setting the possibilities of using telework and the application of the working time shall be determined by the European External Action Service, in close cooperation with the Commission.

3. BACKGROUND

Teleworking is a method of organising and carrying out work using information and communication technology that allows staff to perform their duties outside the workplace.

Given the force majeure situation, DG HR is empowered, on the basis of Article 4(5) of the Decision on telework, to request staff members to telework.

Likewise, under the Decision on Working Time, DG HR is competent to adopt detailed provisions and practical procedures to adjust or complement working time provisions. .

4. APPLICABLE ARRANGEMENTS

All structural teleworking agreements concluded on the basis of Commission Decision C(2015) 9151 on the implementation of telework in Commission Departments are suspended during the period concerned. Line managers will inform the beneficiaries of

those arrangements of this suspension (Article 5(3) of the Decision on telework shall apply *mutatis mutandis*).

For that period, the arrangements defined under the present Guidelines shall apply.

No request for teleworking under these guidelines is needed in Sysper.

Specific provisions will be communicated to contractors (*intra muros* service providers, cleaning staff, security guards, staff working in the canteens/cafeterias, etc.) by the service responsible.

4.1. Teleworking for staff with some specific profiles

Staff members **are requested to telework** (irrespective of whether they have critical or non-critical tasks) in the following instances:

- Staff who have travelled in a quarantine area (as defined by the national authorities concerned) within the last 14 days. Telework applies for 14 days from their return.
- Staff who have been in close contact with a confirmed COVID-19 patient¹. Telework applies, as a rule, for 14 days (the incubation period) or for a longer period if medically necessary.
- Staff (even if asymptomatic) with a sick child or sick family member at home with all COVID-19 related symptoms. Telework applies for the period required for the situation, on the basis of medical advice.
- Staff with a condition that increases the risk of adverse outcomes of COVID-19² (so-called vulnerable groups). Telework applies until further notice.

Staff **will be offered to telework** if their children attend a school or crèches/kindergartens facilities closed due to COVID-19 and who have no alternative option to look after their children.

¹ A 'close contact' is defined by the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control as:

- A person living in the same household as a COVID-19 case;
- A person who had direct physical contact with a COVID-19 case (e.g. shaking hands);
- A person who had unprotected, direct contact with the infectious secretions of a COVID-19 case (e.g. being coughed on, touching used paper tissues with their bare hand);
- A person who had face-to-face contact with a COVID-19 case, within 2 metres for 15 minutes or more;
- A person who was in a closed environment (e.g. a classroom, meeting room, hospital waiting room, etc.) with a COVID-19 case for 15 minutes or more and at a distance of less than 2 metres;
- A person providing direct care for a COVID-19 case, or laboratory workers handling specimens from a COVID-19 case without the recommended personal protective equipment (PPE) or with a possible breach in the PPE;
- Sitting in an aircraft within two seats (in any direction) of the COVID-19 case.

² The non-exhaustive list of conditions established by the Medical Service is as follows: pregnancy (regardless of gestational week); adults over the age of 63; chronic cardiovascular disease (coronary heart disease, congestive heart failure, cardiomyopathy, stroke); chronic obstructive or restrictive lung disease, severe asthma, obstructive sleep apnoea; individuals with immunosuppressive conditions (with active malignancy, or receiving chemotherapy or long-term steroids or other immune-modifying treatment; hypertension or diabetes, when accompanied by complications (i.e. simple diabetes or hypertensions, well controlled under medication, are not included); chronic kidney or liver or hematologic or neuromuscular or autoimmune disease; infectious diseases: chronic hepatitis B, chronic hepatitis C that has not responded to treatment; people who are very obese, with a body mass index (BMI) of 40 or higher, or significantly underweight (BMI < 18.5).

4.2. Teleworking for all other staff and staff performing critical tasks

For staff not falling under 4.1., the arrangements will depend on whether the staff within a unit or a service performs critical tasks, as defined in the Business Continuity Plan of each DG/Service/Office/Executive Agency or by the management.

- a) Staff not performing critical tasks have to telework for the entire period concerned.
- b) Critical/essential staff have to be split to avoid that all team members come to the office at the same time. In practice, this would mean that one part of the colleagues work in the office for one week (if necessary), while the other colleagues telework. The following week, the colleagues switch. If, and only if, the critical/essential tasks can be carried out at home, both teams can telework.

By derogation, DG HR can authorise a rotation other than on a weekly basis, if this is justified by the interest of the service.

In very exceptional and well-defined circumstances, for tasks linked to the management of the coronavirus crisis, the above shift arrangements (rotation between telework and physical presence) may not apply to certain critical/essential staff. Those members of staff may be required to come to the office at all times. The decision on derogations from the shift arrangements will be taken by DG HR.

- c) Certain critical/essential colleagues may have tasks that cannot be carried out remotely; they may organise their presence in the office in shifts.

4.3. Special leave

Special leave will be granted in situations covered under 4.1 and 4.2, where the nature of the tasks of the staff members is not compatible with teleworking.

5. IMPLEMENTATION OF TELEWORK

Telework shall in principle be carried at the place of employment and staff should, in principle, telework from home. Although it is not strictly forbidden to telework from elsewhere, staff should be able to **physically come back to their workplace in a reasonable time** if their presence is required at the office due to an emergency or an unforeseen specific need of the service.

Teleworking from outside of the place of employment, notably from the place of origin, is in principle forbidden, unless this is a neighbouring country in a location that is close to the place of employment.

However, in situations where the Commission or the national authority itself would acknowledge that there is strong evidence that the national health system of the host country is not able to ensure proper health care and treatment of staff members and their families, due to the COVID-19 outbreak, case-by-case derogations or generic derogations

to authorise staff to telework from outside the place of employment may be granted by DG HR.

By way of exception, staff who are unable to return to their place of employment due to travel restrictions imposed by the national authorities of the country where they are currently staying should telework from this location to the extent possible.

Staff on telework should be given clear and specific tasks; they should be in regular contact with their hierarchy through email or Skype. In principle, staff who are teleworking must always be reachable during the Commission's core hours, unless a derogation is granted by the line manager. To this end, staff must transfer their office telephone line (unless they use skype for business) and regularly check their emails. Derogations from core time will be allowed in order to take account of specific service needs and to ensure the continuity and delivery of required services

Staff whose children's school is closed and who thus need time during the day to home school their children at the request of the school need to inform their line manager thereof and to agree on the core tasks they need to perform during this period and on the extent to which they need to be available.

Staff who own a corporate laptop need to use it to telework, unless they have been unable to return to their place of employment or to the office.

In case of sustained connection issues, DIGIT may prioritise network access to staff carrying out critical functions and issue specific user instructions for all other staff.

6. ADDITIONAL USEFUL INFORMATION

For best experience working from home, take your corporate laptop with you. Instructions can be found [here](#).

[Internal meetings](#) can easily be taken online via the **Skype for Business** application which allows for up to 250 simultaneous connections.

[Meetings with non-Commission staff](#) can be organised using **WebEx**.

Last but not least, if you still use a traditional phone, [redirect your fixed phone line](#) to your mobile phone or landline at home. If you use Skype for Business as your phone, you can find [here](#) the steps on how to transfer/forward your calls.