

**FINDINGS**

# THE EMPTY OFFICE

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR  
**MATTIA VACCHIANO**





# ➤ Intro

This SNIS project brought together an interdisciplinary team from Switzerland, Germany, Spain, and the Netherlands to examine one of the most significant issues in contemporary working life: the relationship between remote work, social networks, and well-being. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods, we collected data from more than 4000 workers, analysed over 27000 personal ties, and conducted 35 in-depth interviews.

Our findings show that remote work is not problematic per se. On the contrary, it is a work arrangement valued by many employees and, when implemented under the right conditions, can reduce personal conflict and enhance well-being. At the same time, its adoption requires appropriate training and careful consideration to mitigate potential risks, including overwork and the challenges associated with managing teams remotely.

The debate on remote work must move beyond simplistic claims that it is either “good” or “bad.” Instead, research and policy should continue to investigate for whom, under what conditions, and through which mechanisms telework shapes social relationships, well-being, and quality of life.



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# ↘ The consequences of involuntary on-site work: evidence from worker satisfaction, engagement, and health outcomes

Restricting employees' preferred telework comes with significant and often hidden reductions in well-being, particularly for older workers, underscoring the importance of flexible workplace policies.

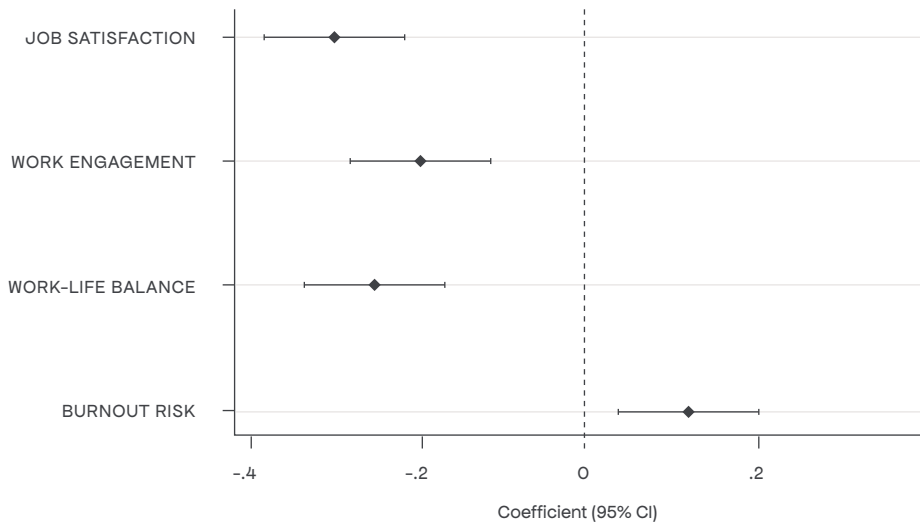


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↘  
Arntz, M., Müller, G., & Steinmetz, S. (2026). The consequences of involuntary on-site work: Evidence from worker satisfaction, engagement, and health outcomes. Social Indicators Research. Manuscript under review.



**Notes** This figure shows the OLS coefficient of interest for different models that relates employees' restriction status with different outcomes, see Tables 3 and 4 from the paper for details. For job satisfaction the dependent variable is measured at a 10-point Likert scale (standardized). Work engagement, work-life-balance and burnout risk reflect standardized indices that combine information from different item batteries. Control variables include the number of preferred telework days, demographic, socioeconomic, and job- and employer-related characteristics, country and occupation fixed effects and indicators of the quality of work relations.

This paper examines the consequences of involuntary on-site work in hybrid workplaces, focusing on employees whose preferred level of telework is restricted by employer policies. Using novel survey data, we identify “restricted” workers who would like to work remotely more often but cannot. On average, the gap between their preferred and actual telework amounts to 1.5 days per week, even after accounting for individual and job characteristics. These restrictions are only weakly explained by observables, though parents are more often constrained, while older and part-time

workers are less affected. Importantly, involuntary on-site work is consistently associated with lower job satisfaction, reduced engagement, poorer work-life balance, and higher burnout risk. These findings are robust across model specifications. Heterogeneity analyses show stronger negative effects for older workers, while gender differences are negligible. For parents of young children, negative effects are somewhat attenuated. Overall, restrictive telework policies impose substantial - but often hidden costs - on worker well-being.

# ➤ A personal network analysis of remote workers

Remote workers have geographically more extended networks, but similar emotional closeness. It emerges a new way of experiencing conflict at home and at work.



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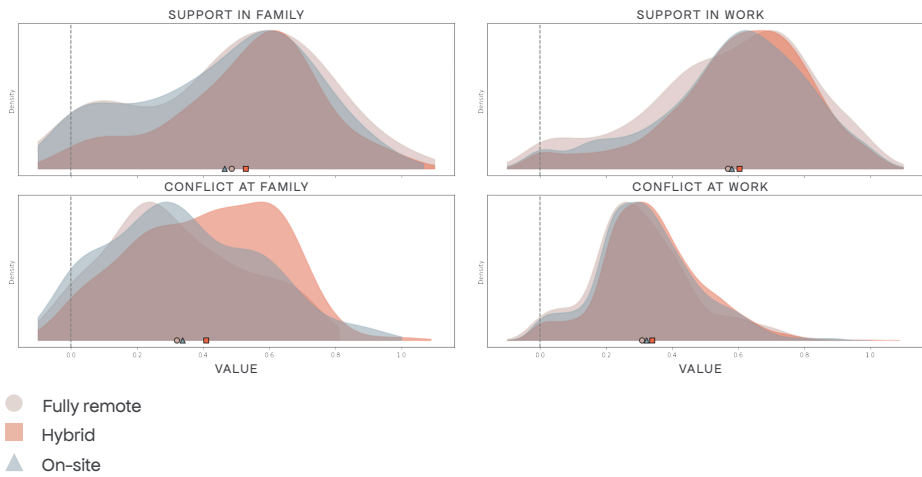


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➤  
Vacchiano, M., Fernandez, G., & Widmer, E. D. (2026). A personal network analysis of remote workers. *Social Networks*, 86, 412-422.



The rise of remote work has introduced new dynamics into the labor market, reshaping both where and how people work. While research on social networks has long emphasized the importance of personal contacts in job searches and status attainment, the rapid diffusion of remote work opens new and largely unexplored avenues of inquiry. Drawing on egocentric network data from 4,097 workers and 22,402 professional and household ties, we examine how three distinct work arrangements—fully remote, hybrid, and on-site—are associated with the composition of personal networks, the exchange of social support, and the emergence of workplace and household conflict. Using multivariate and multilevel techniques to test a set of hypotheses, we find that although

remote workers maintain professional networks that are geographically more extended, they do not report lower emotional proximity to colleagues compared to on-site workers. Overall, we observe no substantial differences in the transmission of social support across work modalities. In contrast, marked differences emerge with regard to conflictual relationships. Hybrid workers report higher levels of household conflict. Higher conflict within personal networks is also reported by fully remote managers and by workers who perceive a mismatch between their preferred and actual level of telework. This article provides novel empirical evidence on a growing and powerful driver of personal network dynamics in today's labor market.

# ↘ Five mechanisms linking remote work, social support, and workers' well-being: a systematic review

We identified both positive and negative mechanisms connecting remote work, social support, and well-being.



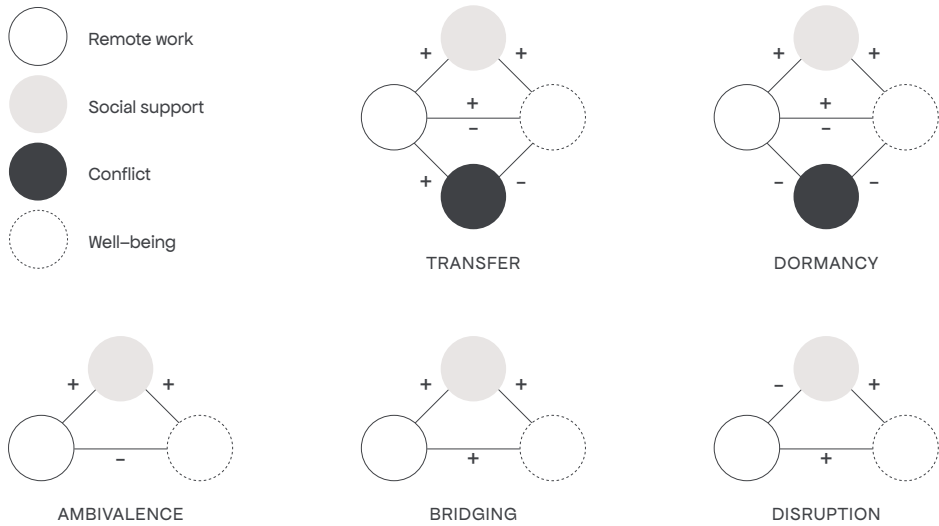
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Five mechanisms were identified: **(1) Disruption** captures the difficulties associated with the abrupt transition to telework during the pandemic and the stress related to the reconfiguration of daily routines and workplace interactions; **(2) Bridging** refers to the capacity of remote work to generate new ties with geographically distant colleagues, expanding access to new forms of support; **(3) Ambivalence** reflects the dual nature of social support, whereby excessive presence or assistance from supervisors may

be experienced as surveillance or control. **(4) Dormancy** highlights how reduced face-to-face interaction may weaken the transmission of social support, while simultaneously reducing workplace conflict; **(5) Transfer** shows how many interactions formerly located in the office are displaced into the domestic sphere, creating opportunities for new forms of family support but also generating new tensions and negotiations over roles, responsibilities, and time.

# ➤ Working from home and well-being: the mediating role of social interactions

Better home workspaces are associated with greater worker well-being by reducing conflicts, interruptions, and perceived monitoring at work.

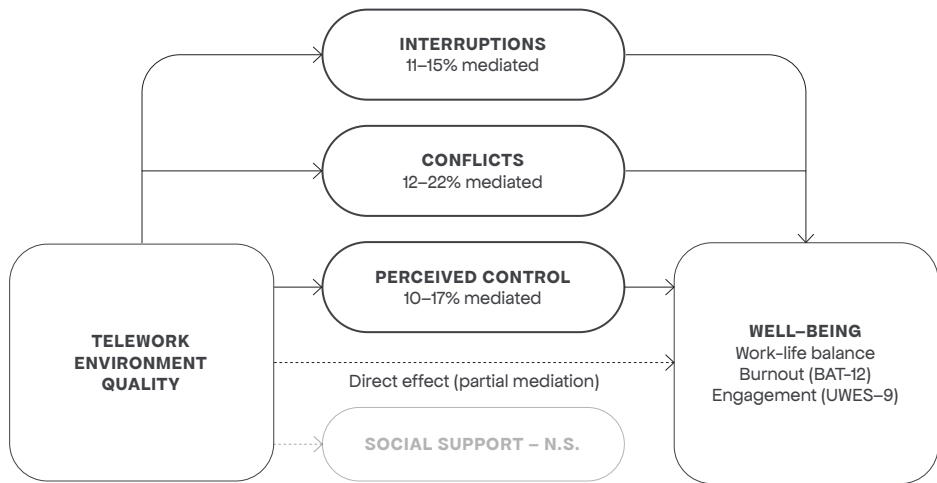


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➤  
Bulti, A., & Vacchiano, M.  
(2026). Working from home  
and well-being: the mediating  
role of social interactions.  
Community, Work & Family,  
1-24.



The physical space in which people work from home is rarely neutral. It shapes daily routines, concentration, and the interactions that unfold with colleagues and, in remote work contexts, household members. This paper examines how home workspace quality relates to worker well-being, and whether social interactions help explain this association. Using personal network data, we apply a mediation framework to analyse negative and positive relational mechanisms. Results show that higher-quality environments are associated with better well-being across three dimensions: work-life balance, burnout, and work

engagement. Part of this association appears to operate through negative interactions. Better environments are linked to fewer conflicts, interruptions, and experiences of perceived control, which in turn relate to higher well-being. Positive interactions such as social support show no comparable pattern. These findings hold across weighted models and separate analyses of colleague and household ties, suggesting that home workspaces function as relational infrastructures shaping the social conditions of remote work.

# ➤ Six typologies of the work week

Working in multiple locations gives us a granular view of its cost: extended and fragmented workweek location patterns are associated with higher burnout and poorer social support, while balanced hybrid (normative) and fully remote arrangements are not.



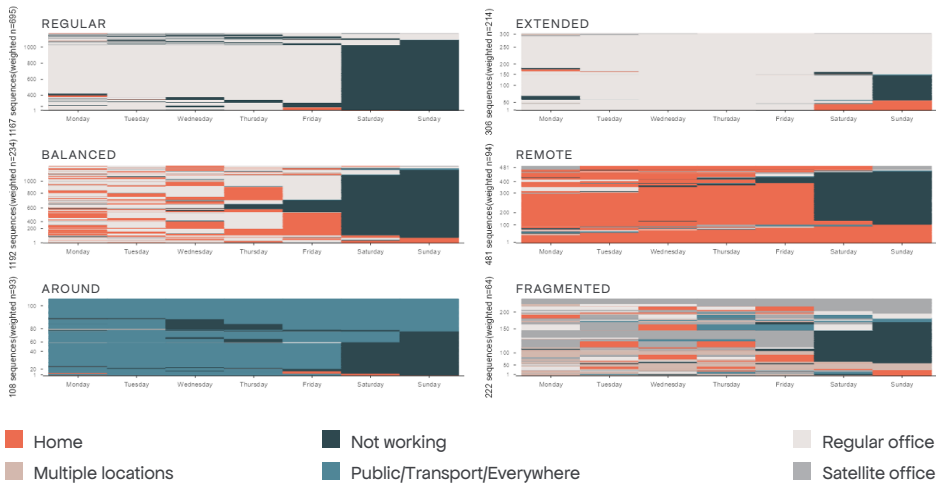
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Working anywhere and everywhere is possible, but at what cost? Most research reduces this complexity to a simple count of days away from the office. This study reconstructs the typical workweek from Monday to Sunday, across a wide range of work locations (e.g. home, office) of 3,338 employees in Germany, Spain, Switzerland, and the Netherlands. Using sequence analysis, six distinct workweek typologies are identified: regular (normative office), extended (overworking), balanced (normative hybrid), remote, around (working in multiple places), and

fragmented (fragmented work locations). Associations with burnout, work engagement, social support, and conflict are estimated using generalized estimating equations. Workers in the extended and fragmented typologies report significantly higher burnout and adverse social health outcomes. Balanced and remote workers show no significant differences from regular office workers. These findings suggest that work location is a potential dimension of social inequalities; the risk is in overextension and spatial fragmentation.

# ➤ Health beyond the workplace: exploring the relationship between teleworking intensity and precarious employment

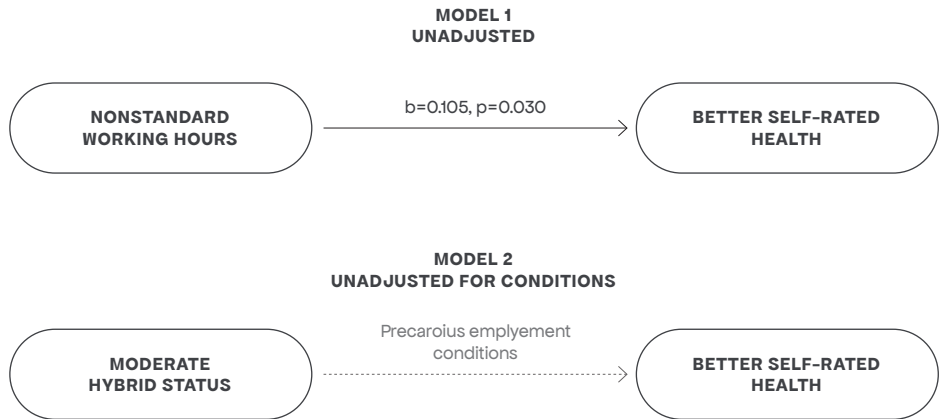
Telework does not affect health equally: the employment conditions under which remote work is performed, such as income, overwork, and managerial control, are key drivers of health inequalities among teleworkers.



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Using data from nearly 3,000 European workers, this study examines how employment conditions differ across teleworking intensities and shape health outcomes. Findings show that fully remote workers are more

frequently exposed to precarious conditions, while hybrid workers have the most favorable conditions. These difference in their precarious conditions largley explain health inequalities among remote workers.

# ➤ **Commuting, meetings, and conflict: an analysis using network canvas**

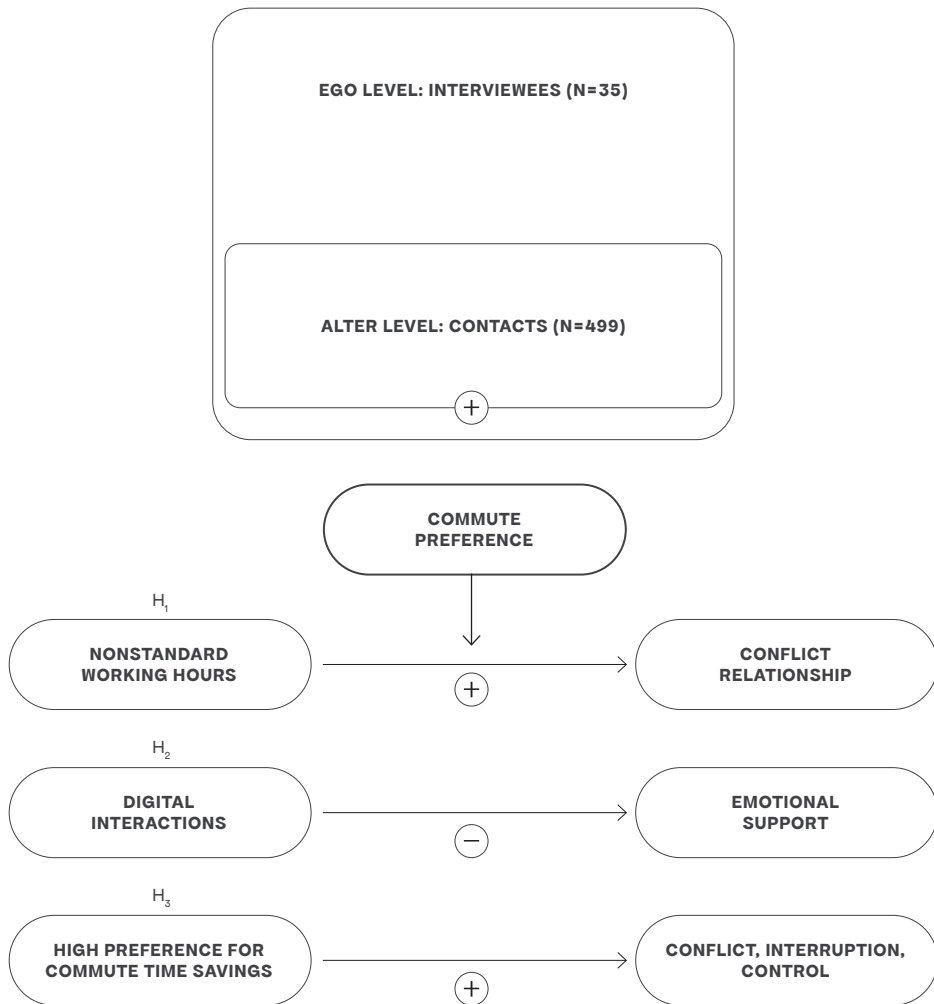
Using data from 35 in-depth interviews, we found that working odd hours is associated with more conflictual relations, as work and home roles compete for time.



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Using data on 499 social ties collected through 35 in-depth interviews of remote workers, we examine the effects of work schedules, online interactions, and mobility on levels of support and conflict. We show that face-to-face interactions are associated with higher levels of

support. Moreover, workers who report engaging in work activities during non-standard working hours, such as at night or during weekends, also report an increase in conflictual relations, especially among those who value avoiding commuting.

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