

Telework and workers' right to disconnect

Reply to the second stage consultation of social partners under Article 154 TFEU on possible action

3 October 2025

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On 25 July 2025, the European Commission launched the first stage of an EU Social Partner Consultation on possible EU action around telework and the right to disconnect. The World Employment Confederation-Europe, as the voice of the HR services industry, welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation.

Any action related to telework and the right to disconnect must consider the labour market dynamics and that work is becoming less of a place to go and more of a task to perform.

A rising number of workers value and request the opportunity to work remotely, while policies on telework need to reflect that not all professions and jobs are suitable for telework. With regard to the four questions in the consultation document, WEC-Europe provides the following input:

1. **WEC-Europe calls for any EU action to properly reflect the changing world of work and new and emerging forms of work.** EU actions should consider that work is less and less a place to go, but a task to perform, which can and is being done remotely in many sectors. At the same time, not all tasks are suitable for telework. Working conditions in Europe and the agency work sector are already quite strictly regulated, and telework is not a new form of work, but a way to organise work that matches companies' and workers' needs. WEC-Europe broadly welcomes the political objectives linked to possible EU action on telework and the right to disconnect, but advocates for reflecting specific national or sectoral needs.
2. **WEC-Europe does not see a need to establish a right to disconnect in European legislation on telework.** On the contrary, it should be valued that workers value autonomy in terms of when and where they work. WEC-Europe considers this to be impractical and non-enforceable. A right to disconnect cannot be absolute, but should be linked to company policies promoting the well-being of workers
3. **The agency work employers do not believe in the need for an EU legislative intervention on telework and the right to disconnect.** The regulatory approach to telework and the right to disconnect needs to reflect specific national circumstances, and social partners at the national level should have room to agree on tailored solutions. Some non-binding guidance on telework and the right to disconnect through recommendations could be valuable.
4. **If Social Partners' actions on telework and the right to disconnect are initiated at the EU level, these should be held at the cross-industry level social partners.** WEC-Europe and UNI-Europa do not intend to engage in negotiations on telework and the right to disconnect.

1. General assessment

- 1.1. In Europe, as well as globally, there are many megatrends that shape the changing world of work and impact labour markets and the lives of workers. Prominent megatrends are digitalisation and the impact of AI, the ageing workforce, particularly in Europe, skills mismatches, the missing workforce, and the importance of diverse forms of work. In 2024, the World Employment Confederation published [research findings](#) based on a global survey among 715 senior business executives and world of work experts, including social partners, policymakers and stakeholders. 83% of respondents acknowledge that workers now place as much value on having flexibility around where and when they work as they do on other factors such as compensation. The survey also shows that employers are increasingly requiring flexibility. 92% of surveyed executives say they will need a more flexible workforce in the next two years, and the digital transformation has been identified by 31% of the survey respondents as a significant driver for change.
- 1.2. Work is thus transforming from a place to go to a task to perform. This trend characterises the economies and labour markets at large. The prevalence and characteristics of telework and the right to disconnect vary across the different sectors and industries to which WEC-Europe members assign workers. Telework is a topic that should be decided at the company level, not as an individual right of a worker. Some European guidance through a (non-binding) Recommendation can help ensure convergence among European countries in industries, while leaving sufficient freedom to reflect workers' economic needs and personal preferences.
- 1.3. While telework is increasing, its degree varies enormously across sectors and depends on whether a task is location-based or can be performed remotely. It must be acknowledged that a significant share of the EU workforce cannot do telework because of the nature of the job and the tasks they perform. When considering rules around the right to disconnect and telework, we must not create a new divide within the working population. It also needs to be recognised that working conditions and labour markets are comprehensively regulated, ensuring quality employment.
- 1.4. A too prescriptive and static approach or overregulation of telework would risk endangering the development of remote and telework, thus hampering an essential trend in the changing world of work that benefits companies and workers. Should an EU initiative on telework be considered, it should respect the voluntary nature of telework for employers and workers. If an EU initiative on telework and/or the right to disconnect is considered, it should stay at a more general level and avoid too detailed European rules, giving both Member States and social partners the freedom to set up and implement corresponding policies and measures.

2. Views on the objectives of possible EU action

- 2.1. While WEC-Europe broadly welcomes the objectives linked to telework and the right to disconnect, the agency work industry is concerned that an EU legislative action on telework and the right to disconnect could lead to overly prescriptive regulation, which would not adequately reflect the changing preferences of workers and the needs of companies. An EU legislative intervention on telework and the right to disconnect also bears the risk of negatively impacting the competitiveness of European companies. The European Union and its 27 Member States are already leading in terms of regulating working time and working conditions today, while the main competing economies in the US, China, and Japan are opting for more flexible employment and labour market solutions. That being said, it is essential that the approach of EU Member States and economic sectors to telework and the right to disconnect reflects the European social model and reaches a balance between the legitimate interests of companies and workers.

- 2.2. It needs to be recognised that there is no universal or European definition of telework, and telework covers a number of different work arrangements. Matters and questions related to telework and the right to disconnect are becoming more complex and challenging in cross-border situations due to social security, health and safety, and labour law matters.
- 2.3. Ensuring appropriate protection while unlocking the opportunities of digitalisation and telework is also increasingly important for people working in diverse forms of work, including temporary agency work. Agency workers tend to work on shorter assignments compared to the directly employed workers at the user companies; they change their places of work more frequently. However, for a rising number of professions and tasks they perform, working on location is not necessarily a precondition, as the essential element is that the workers are employed based on the skills they bring to the organisation. Against this background, it is necessary to unlock the opportunities linked to remote work and digitalisation for people in diverse forms of work and not discriminate against certain forms of employment. At the same time, it should be recognised that many agency workers are working in sectors or professions unsuitable for telework. Thus, a debate on the right to disconnect is less relevant in these sectors and occupations.

3. What are your views on possible avenues for EU action addressing the emerging “always-on work” culture?

- 3.1. For decades, especially in the 20th century, work was focused on a classical 8-hour day and a working time from 9 to 5 o'clock. This reflected workers' demand for rest time and was based on a social compromise embedded in collective labour agreements in the EU Member States.
- 3.2. In the 21st century, work patterns and working time arrangements started to shift drastically. This reflected a company and business need for more labour market flexibility, but it also matches the quest for more autonomy about when and where to work. In a global company survey conducted by FT Longitude and the World Employment Confederation, business leaders underlined that 83% of employees value autonomy and flexibility about when and where they work, and the request for flexibility is equally important as remuneration. More flexibility in working time and an “always-on” culture are linked to the increased use of ICT tools. Rules on a right to disconnect should be flexible enough to meet business needs and worker preferences.
- 3.3. Increased autonomy and flexibility of work patterns, especially in the case of remote work, can bear the risk of an “always-on work” culture. Therefore, companies, employers, and social partners should be encouraged to establish policies at the sectoral or company level that ensure an appropriate balance of work, rest time, and professional and private life. WEC-Europe does not believe there is a need or added value for an EU regulatory approach to address the always-on work culture, as this is best addressed at the sectoral or company level.

4. What are your views on the possible avenues for EU action to improve working conditions for fair and quality telework?

- 4.1. WEC-Europe does not believe that binding, European rules on telework and the right to disconnect are the relevant and appropriate answer to the changes that characterise modern and dynamic labour markets.
- 4.2. Rather than opting for binding European regulation on telework and the right to disconnect, it is more appropriate to give social partners at the national and/or European level freedom to address issues linked to telework and the right to disconnect through collective labour agreements and European guidance. Establishing a right to disconnect at the EU level is not only unnecessary, but WEC-Europe sees it as impractical and

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unenforceable in practice, which will not contribute to a better work-life balance for workers. Such a right can never be absolute, but needs to be embedded in a healthy company and business culture. Social dialogue and collective bargaining at the sectoral or company level are essential tools.

- 4.3. While WEC-Europe replies to this consultation as the social partner for temporary agency work, our confederation represents a much broader scope of HR services, including career management, direct recruitment and Employer of Record services. The Employer of Record services especially have a strong cross-border dimension, within the European Union and at the international level. For EOR companies, it is thus particularly important that policy approaches to telework and the right disconnect take into account the cross-border character of some forms of work and the impact different time zones may have on telework and the right to disconnect.
- 4.4. In the consultation document, the European Commission identified a number of potential challenges linked to telework and the right to disconnect, linked to work-related communication and requests, fair and quality telework, access to telework, occupational safety and health, monitoring, surveillance and data protection, equipment and other teleworking costs, work organisation and access to training. When assessing these areas and linking them to existing EU Directives and regulatory instruments, WEC-Europe does not believe that there is an actual regulatory gap that requires legislative intervention. The issues identified are best dealt with at the national level and through collective bargaining. As addressed above, a particular area is the topic of cross-border telework and the right to disconnect, but here, policy guidance is more appropriate than binding European rules. In the case of Employer of Record services, the cross-border provision of services often goes beyond the EU context, which means that it would be better addressed by global guidance to be developed by international stakeholders.
- 4.5. The annual European Semester exercise and the country-specific recommendations provide a more suitable framework for addressing potential challenges related to telework and the right to disconnect than engaging in European legislation on the subject. Alternatively, EU institutions could consider adopting a principle-based Council Recommendation on telework and the right to disconnect, which would give sufficient freedom to national and sectoral approaches.

5. Are the European social partners willing to enter negotiations with a view to concluding an agreement under Article 155 TFEU

- 5.1. As illustrated in this reply to the consultation, WEC-Europe does not believe that too prescriptive and detailed EU regulation on telework and the right to disconnect is the right answer to the challenges resulting from changes in the world of work. Too prescriptive and detailed EU regulation risks not keeping up with the speed of change in European labour markets and the world of work.
- 5.2. Rather than opting for statutory regulation, WEC-Europe believes that social partners are well placed to address challenges linked to telework and the right to disconnect. This is already happening through collective bargaining and collective labour agreements at the Member State level.
- 5.3. If further guidance and a general framework on telework and the right to disconnect at the European level are necessary, WEC-Europe believes this should be discussed at the cross-industry level and by the cross-industry social partners. The agency work industry provides work opportunities to agency workers in many different sectors and professions. Based on this experience and knowledge, it is evident that telework needs to be adapted to sectoral needs and reflect whether work in a given sector, either performed by agency workers or directly employed workers, is suitable for telework. In the agency work industry, the principle of equal treatment is an established and respected norm. It covers basic employment and working conditions and thus includes aspects related to telework and the right to disconnect. Against this background, WEC-Europe does not intend to enter

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into negotiations with its European social partner UNI-Europa on aspects related to telework and the right to disconnect.

About the World Employment Confederation-Europe

The World Employment Confederation-Europe serves as the voice of the HR services industry at the European level, representing both national federations and workforce solutions companies worldwide. Our diverse membership encompasses a broad spectrum of HR services, including agency work, direct recruitment, career management, Recruitment Process Outsourcing (RPO), and Managed Service Provider (MSP) solutions.

Our mission revolves around securing recognition for the pivotal role played by the HR services industry in fostering well-functioning labour markets and advocating on behalf of our members to enable appropriate regulation. By fostering an environment conducive to sustainable growth of the HR services sector, our ultimate goal is to deliver better labour market outcomes for all.

By bridging the supply and demand gaps in labour markets, creating pathways to employment, enabling agile organisations, balancing flexibility with protection and deploying digital solutions responsibly, the HR services industry plays a central role in addressing labour market challenges and delivering people-centric solutions.