

September 29th, 2020

THE ORGANIZATION OF WORK IN ITALY: TIMES, PLACES, DEGREE OF AUTONOMY Year 2019

The Labour Force survey, according to the EU Regulation, includes in the standard questionnaire an *ad hoc* module, which every year focuses on a specific aspect of work or some characteristics of the interviewees.¹

In 2019 the *ad hoc* module collected information on the organization and working hours of employees to assess to which extent workers can manage a certain autonomy according to their preferences and needs.²

The subject includes not only the possibility of combining work time with other spheres of life or suspending work for a few hours/days, but should include the degree of organizational autonomy, the forms of measuring work and the places in which it is carried out, as well as the penetration of work in leisure time. Each one of these aspects has to do, at least potentially, with professional recognition and the balancing of work and personal/family life.³

European data are simultaneously disseminated with this work and are available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/2995521/11384710/3-29092020-AP-EN.pdf/281a8d79-ad6a-a12d-40bd-bfa2dd781157>.

Flexible working hours

More than seven out of 10 employed people (16.6 million) do not have the opportunity to decide when to start and/or end their working day. For employees, working time is defined by the employer, while the constraints faced by self-employed workers are related to customer needs or law regulations.

On the other hand, 16.4% of the employed have full autonomy in working time, and 12.0% declared to be autonomous but with some restriction (Table 1, attached). Male workers aged 50 and over, and those with high educational qualifications - traditionally the strongest groups in the labour market - have hour flexibility to a greater extent: more often than other can decide daily working time, and they can more easily access to leave and holidays, even at short notice. More constraining are the working conditions of foreigners, young people, women and people with low educational backgrounds.

It is not surprising that for employees the working time is set by the employer in almost all cases (85.0%) and that the conditions are even more restrictive for temporary employees (90.9% to 83.8% of permanent employees; Table 2, attached). On the other hand most employers and pure self-employed without employees have complete autonomy in defining their working time (57.2% for the self-employed as a whole, 63.8% and 58.4% for employers and pure self-employed respectively). In an intermediate position, confirming their hybrid nature, the dependent contractors, among whom just over a third - 36.1% - decide autonomously (43.5% have a timetable set by third parties, clients or regulations).

¹ COMMISSION DELEGATED REGULATION (EU) 2016/1851 of 14 June 2016 adopting the programme of ad hoc modules, covering the years 2019, 2020 and 2021, for the labour force sample survey, and COMMISSION IMPLEMENTING REGULATION (EU) 2017/2384 of 19 December 2017 specifying the technical characteristics of the 2019 ad hoc module on work organisation and working time arrangements.

² The implementation of the *ad hoc* module was funded by the European Union. For technical and methodological aspects, see the Italian version.

³ In 2018 the ad hoc module was dedicated to reconciliation between work and family, while this is focused on the organization of work. For the 2018 ad hoc module see <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/235619>.

The possibility of taking one or two hours off at short notice is a central aspect of flexible working hours and the reconciliation of work and lifetime; as a whole, 73.1% of those in employment reported that they could with some ease do that: 39.2% reported that they could take hours quite easily and 33.9% very easily.

FLEXIBILITY: KEY NUMBERS. Year 2019

Decider on working time		Freedom in taking hours off		Freedom in taking leave		Expected flexibility in working time	
Worker can fully decide	16.4	Very easy	33.9	Very easy	15.9	At least once a week	25.7
Worker can decide with certain restrictions	12.0	Quite easy	39.2	Quite easy	40.2	At least once a month	21.6
Employer or organisation mainly decides	71.1	Quite difficult	18.6	Quite difficult	30.5	Less than every month or never	50.1
Don't know	0.5	Very difficult	7.0	Very difficult	12.0	Don't know	2.5
		Don't know	1.2	Don't know	1.4		

Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

Self-employed have the most flexible conditions: 65.0% of them said they could be absent from work very easily for a few hours at short notice while among employees, the proportion dropped to 24.8%; on the other hand, 45.8% of employees think they can do so quite easily.

The greatest difficulties are described by temporary workers and dependent contractors who, in one case out of ten (11.6% and 10.1% respectively), find it very difficult to be free from work for a few hours.

Men, who are more often self-employed, indicated greater possibilities than women: 37% stated that it would be very easy to take leave compared to 29.1% of women.

The possibility to take off a whole day at short notice (vacations for employees) is generally quite limited; the difficulty is particularly high, even if for different reasons, between temporary workers and employers: the majority - respectively 50.1% and 54.1% - stated that the possibility is either rather or very difficult.

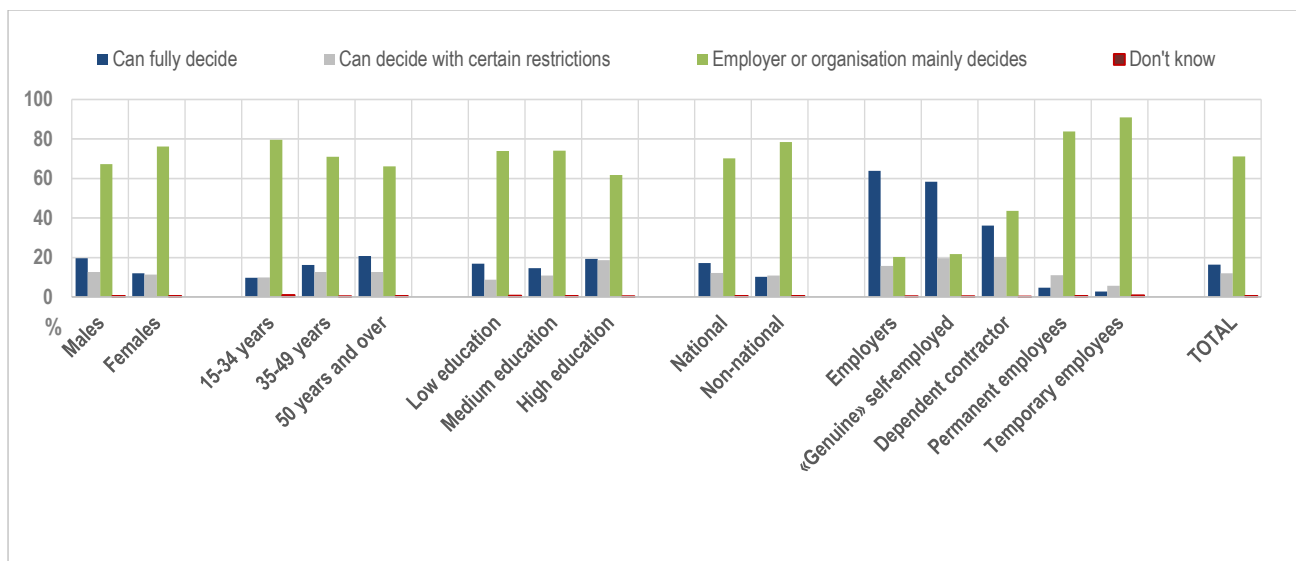
The most inflexible working hours are observed for the employed in industry, in particular for those in the industry excluding construction who have a fixed timetable in the percentage of 79.5%, and even more for the employed in education (85.7%), public administration (82.3%), transport and storage (82.2%), health and social care (80.2%). Greater flexibility characterizes the workers in agriculture (due to the incidence of self-employed workers) and in business activities (48.1% and 56.5% respectively declared to have a strict timetable).

Looking at the occupations, the organization of working hours of the armed forces is very strict (91.7%), as for plant and machine operators and assemblers (89.6%) and clerical support workers (85.5%). On the other hand, managers have complete autonomy (61.7% decide in full autonomy). Craftsmen, skilled workers, farmers and non-manual occupations also have access to an adequate level of flexible working hours (25.1% and 21.5% decide in full autonomy).

It is easy to access hourly leaves in the agricultural sector (very easy for 51.6%), in the information and communication sectors (46.3%), in business (45.3%) and financial and insurance activities (43.8%). In comparison, it is more difficult in the transport and storage sectors (for 38.1% it is rather or very difficult), health and social care (36.7%), hotels and restaurants (35.2%), but also education (33.3%).

The possibility of taking days off at short notice is higher in the information and communication (73.5% gets it very or quite easily) and financial and insurance activities (73.3%) and is more narrow for the employed in education (42.7%), hotels and restaurants (44.8%) and health and social care (48.7%). Both leaves and vacations are more accessible for qualified and clerical occupations.

FIGURE 1. EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 16 AND OVER BY HOW THE TIME OF THE WORKING DAY IS DECIDED AND MAIN SOCIO-ECONOMIC VARIABLES. Year 2019. 2W. (Percentage values)



Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

Required flexibility and time balance

Next to the flexibility asked by the workers for personal needs, there is the flexibility required by the employer due to unpredictable requests related to task, clients or superiors. One fifth of employees are required to change working time at least once a week, while 22.6% at least once a month. These requests are more frequently addressed to graduated, male or with Italian citizenship workers (foreigners, women and people with low education are much more rarely asked to change their working hours).

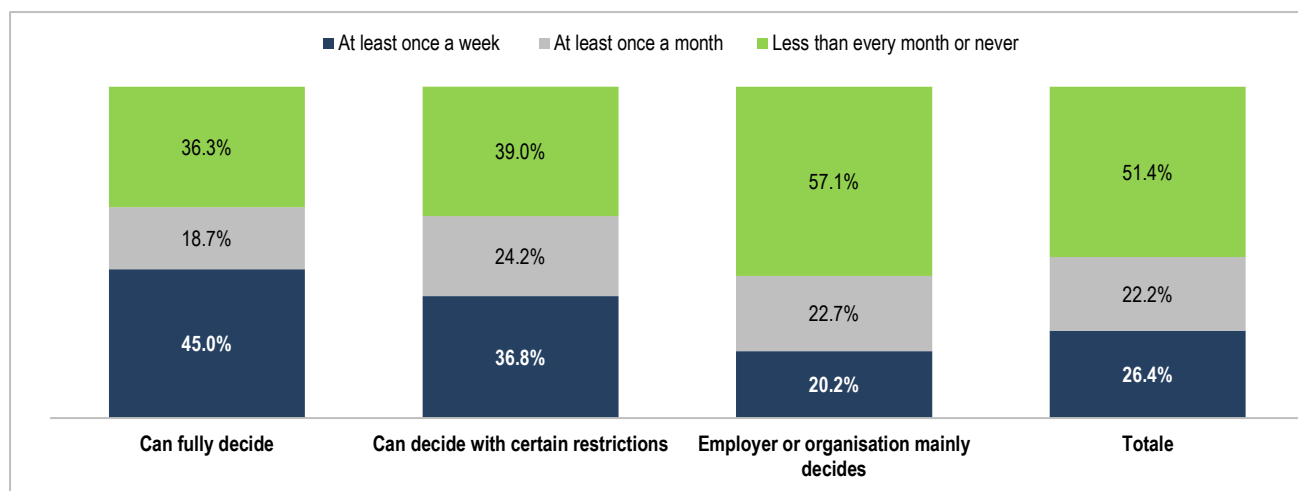
Among the self-employed, including dependent contractors, 45.0% need to reconsider their work schedule at least once a week for customer requests or changes in the quantity of work, and an additional 18.5% need to do so at least once a month.

In some sectors the higher time flexibility (flexibility enjoyed) is associated with the more frequent request to change working time (flexibility required): this is the case of business or financial and insurance activities (34.2% and 34.0% of employed must review their schedule more than once a week). The same applies to the occupations of managers, professionals and technicians (33.5%), especially for managers (52.3%). More regular working hours are for activities of households as employers and education (68.1% and 58.4 have to change the work schedule less than once a month or never, respectively) and for elementary (63.8%), clerical (53.1%) or worker occupations (52.7%).

The trade-off between flexibility enjoyed and flexibility required is not always favourable or fair. Almost half of the employed people who cannot decide their working hours (about 7 million out of more than 16 million) are asked by the employer, clients or work commitments to change their working time (Figure 2); the balance between flexibility enjoyed and flexibility required is more equal for the remaining 9 million.

On the other hand, 45.0% of those who have full autonomy of hours have to change their working time due to unpredictable requests at least once a week, 18.7% at least once a month while 36.3% never or very rarely.

FIGURE 2. EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 16 AND OVER BY THE WAY IN WHICH THE WORKING TIME AND FREQUENCY OF REQUESTS TO CHANGE WORK ORGANIZATION IS DECIDED. Year 2019 (2W) (Percentage structure)



Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

The right to log off

There is a boundary between work and private life, both in time and in space, and it can be more or less porous. In the module, respondents were asked how often during their free time they were contacted due to work issues and whether they were requested to provide an immediate reaction or not. Although the majority of the employed (54.0%) in the two months preceding the interview were never contacted during their free time, 29.4% were contacted once or twice and 16.6% even more often. In half of the cases, those who have been approached frequently were requested to react before the next working day; in these cases, too, the professional variable was crucial: 7 out of 10 employers were contacted in their free time, and less than one-third of the employees in their term of employment.

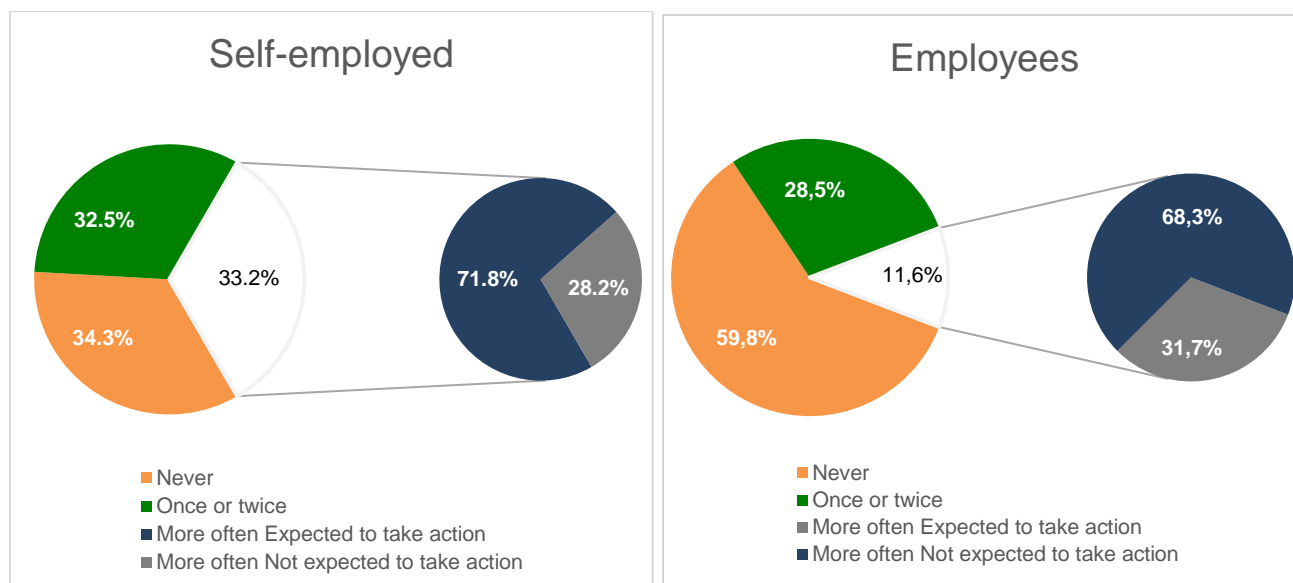
The least contacted during leisure time were foreigners, less educated people, young people, women (the latter in 57.7% of cases), possibly because of their often marginal positions in the work organization. Those with the most frequent interference were those with high educational qualifications, workers in the 35-49 age group, and men (Table 3, attached).

Although contacts in leisure time are not common, people with low education more frequently than others need to provide an immediate reaction (57.0% of those contacted more than twice compared to 50.1% calculated on the total), along with workers in the South and Island (56.0%), men and people aged 50 and over (54.0 and 52.4% respectively).

Graduates, on the other hand, are characterized by being the most contacted (25.5% have been contacted more than twice in the last two months) but also by being those who most rarely have to immediately react (47.2% of the total contacted more than twice). Finally, young people, and even more women, are the ones who are less likely to be contacted and have to ensure a prompt reaction (46.5 and 42.7% respectively).

Self-employed workers have more ephemeral boundaries between work and private life: 65.7% had at least one interference from work in their free time and a third were contacted at least three times. Among those contacted more than twice in the two months preceding the interview, 71.8% had to immediately react; the percentages were higher for dependent contractors and employers (74.8 and 73.8%) (Figure 3). The situation was more relaxed for employees who, in about 60% of cases, did not suffer intrusion, especially when temporary employees (70.3%; Table 4, attached).

FIGURE 3. EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 16 AND OVER BY FREQUENCY WITH WHICH THEY WERE CONTACTED IN THEIR FREE TIME IN THE TWO MONTHS PRECEDING THE INTERVIEW AND EXPECTED REACTION BY PROFESSIONAL STATUS*. Year 2019 (2W) (Percentage structure)



* Excluding 'doesn't know'.
Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

The sectors in which the interference of work in private life was more frequent were services, in particular business activities (56.9%, of which 25.7% frequent) and the information and communication sector (57.7%, of which 23.1% frequent). The workers of activities of households as employers, industry excluding construction and agriculture, were more protected, and the percentages of those who were never contacted in their free time ranged between 67% and 63%. More exposed, because of the greater productive and organizational responsibilities, the qualified occupations and in particular managers (77.0% were contacted in their free time, among them 42.8% often), also the armed forces (respectively 66.0% and 27.9%) while 73.0% of those employed with elementary occupations were never contacted.

However the most often contacted were not the most often required to immediately react exception made for the construction workers (62.4% of those who were contacted more than twice, had to immediately react) and, in addition to the armed forces and managers, craftsmen and skilled workers (respectively 64.2%, 63.6% and 62.0%). The employed in education and the clerical support workers were rarely disturbed and could also postpone their reaction when back at work. The analysis also suggests in this case specific profiles that obtain positive balance in the exchange between flexibility enjoyed and flexibility 'suffered' and others for which requests exceed benefits.

Methods of work measurement

Employees are usually subject to some forms of recording of the performed work. There are different forms and methods of measurement, mainly related to presence and hours worked, using automatic systems, direct control of supervisors and colleagues, or self-registration.

The recording of presence or working hours naturally depend on the production context: for example, the size of the company or the sector of activity, but also the type of contract. Temporary employees more often than others are subject to automatic forms of presence control, which is, however, the most common method (46.0% of the total, Tables 5 and 6, attached), especially in the North and among male employees, the over 50 and the Italian nationals.

For about one fifth of employees (20.3%) there was no record of either presence or time, especially among foreigners (44.4%) and the same happened though with different intensity, among people with low educational qualifications, residents in the Centre or women.

More unusual, compared to other methods, is the recording of presence and working hours under one's own responsibility (15.4% of employees), more frequent among the highly educated and women (22.5% and 19.2% respectively).

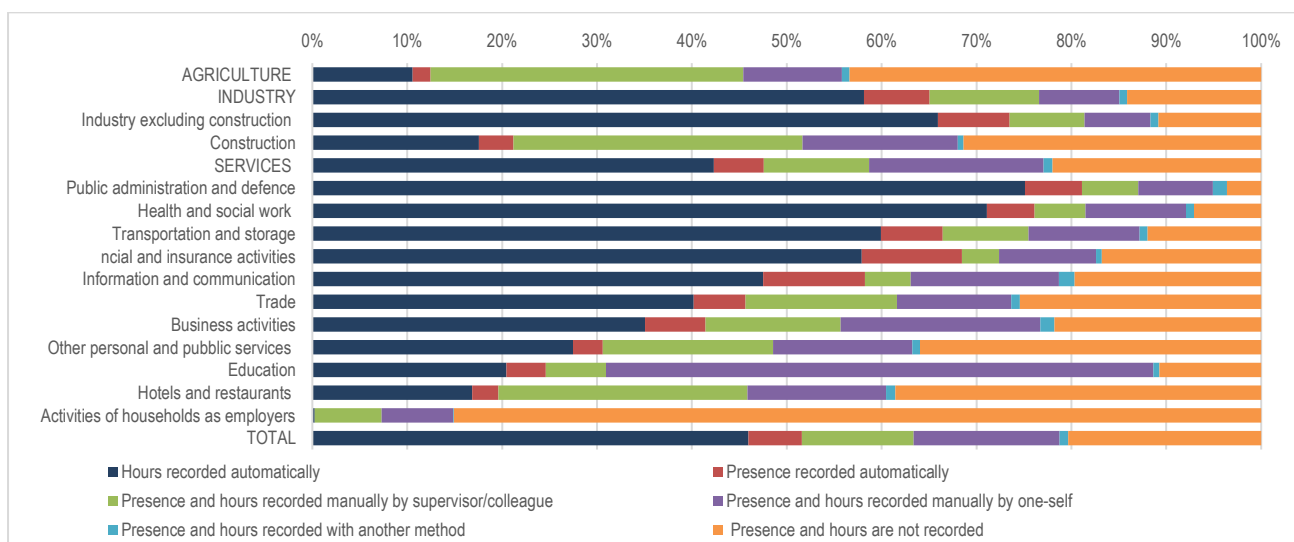
Finally, those whose presence or hours are controlled by colleagues or employers are 11.8% of employees and are more often foreign (20.7%), low educated (17.2%) and young (16.3%).

The recording of hours and presence through automatic systems is more popular among permanent than fixed-term employees (54.9% to 34.8%); for the latter, on the other hand, a method of control by supervisors is more often used (21.5% to 9.9% of permanent employees).

The method of recording work differs by sector of activity (Figure 4 and Table 6, attached). Automatic systems are more used in the public sector, health and social care and industry excluding construction (81.1%, 76.1% and 73.5%, respectively). The self-registration system is the most used in the education sector, while in activities of households as employers 85.1% of the employed people do not register hours or presence. Mixed systems characterize the construction sector, agriculture, hotels and restaurants, as well as business activities.

Considering the occupations, the automatic recording of hours or presence is very frequent for plant and machine operators, the armed forces, technical and clerical workers (72.2%, 65.9%, 66.6% and 65.1% respectively). A significant proportion of the non-manual occupations self-certify their presence or hours (36.6%).

FIGURE 4. EMPLOYEES AGED 16 AND OVER BY TYPE OF WORKING TIME RECORDING AND BY SECTOR OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY. Year 2019 (2w) (Percentage values and absolute values in thousands)*



* Excluding 'doesn't know'.

Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

Freedom to decide work sequence and content

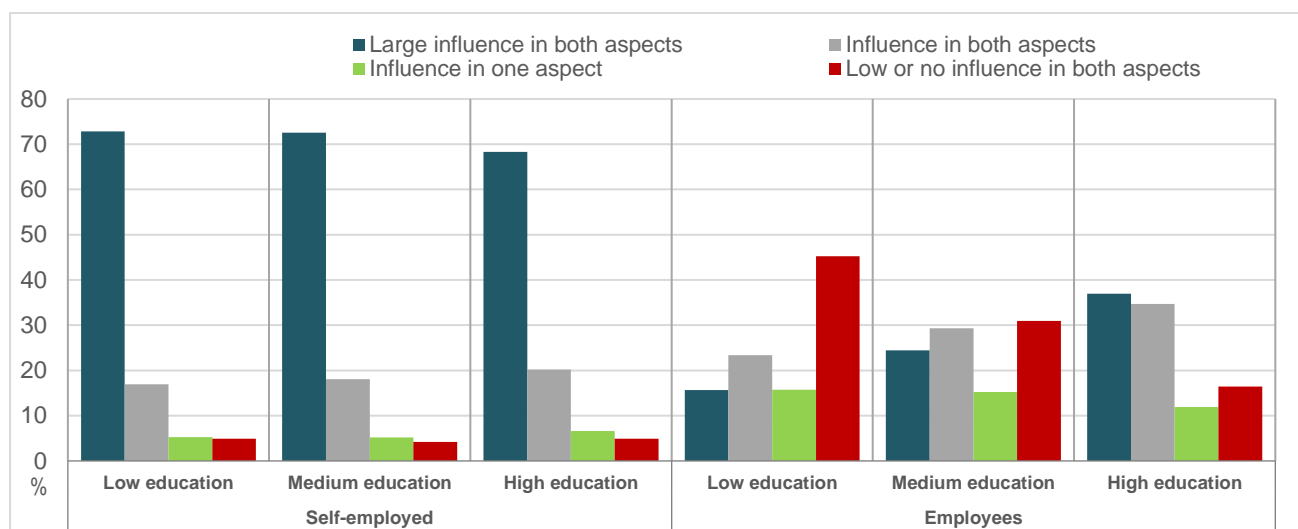
The autonomy in performing work has been analyzed concerning the possibility of deciding the contents and the order in performing work activities. 61.8% of the employed can influence both aspects (35.5% even widely), 25.6% have little or no influence, while the remaining 12.6% can affect only one of the two aspects.

The percentage of those who say they can influence both aspects is very similar for women and men (62.7% women, 61.2% men). However, a complete level of influence is more frequent among men (Table 7, attached). The greater autonomy also marks graduates and older workers (45% and 41.4% of the employed, respectively). Narrower autonomy margins are left to foreigners (43.9%), young people aged 15-34 (35.8%) and less educated people (35.3%).

Observing the levels of autonomy by occupation condition and considering autonomy in both aspects, it ranges from 93.8% of employers to 38.6% of fixed-term employees (Table 8, attached). To be noted, also in this case, the intermediate position of dependent contractors 49.8% of them have complete autonomy and 21.7% the possibility to influence both aspects. For the pure self-employed the values are respectively 72.7 and 18.5%.

Among the self-employed, levels of autonomy are unrelated to educational attainment (Figure 5 and Table 9, attached), while for employees there is a direct relationship between autonomy and educational level, especially for term employees. Among the latter, those who have high autonomy are 14.5%: 25.2% if they have a university degree and 9.7% if they have a low degree (for permanent employees the percentages are 39.1% and 17.0% and for the self-employed 68.3% and 72.9% respectively); more than half of fixed-term employees with a low level of education (58.1%) have little or no influence in defining the order and content of their work (for permanent employees the share drops to 42.3%).

FIGURE 5. 16 EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 16 AND OVER BY DEGREE OF AUTONOMY, EDUCATIONAL LEVEL, AND PROFESSIONAL STATUS*. Year 2019 (2W) (Percentage values)



* Excluding 'doesn't know'.

Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

About half of the qualified occupations have wide autonomy in the order and content of the work; only 10.7% declared little or no influence. In particular, the wide autonomy characterizes 78.3% of legislators, entrepreneurs and senior management, 51.5% of intellectual occupations, 42.3% of technical occupations. Even among artisans, specialized workers and farmers there is a significant share with wide margins of autonomy in both aspects (37.0%).

On the contrary, percentages are decidedly low for plant operators, fixed machinery workers and drivers (10.5%) and elementary occupations (19.6%), and are combined with very high shares of workers with little or no influence in both aspects (55.8% and 43.3% respectively). Finally, part-time employees have, on average, closer areas of autonomy than full-time employees.

Workplaces

81.7% of employed people mainly work in employers' premises or, in the case of the self-employed, in their own premises (Table 10, attached). This condition most often characterizes female workers (90.4%), graduates (88.8%) and younger workers (83.4%).

0.8% of employed people work mainly from home (1.5% among highly educated), 9.7% work at clients' premises (15.9% among foreigners and 13.5% among those with a maximum average license). Foreign workers and less educated are also those who most often do not have a fixed place of work (10.2 and 11.4% respectively, compared to 7.1% of the total number of the employed). These characteristics are closely linked to occupation and the work activity carried out. About a quarter of the employed (25.7%) have at least two places where they work, especially among men and graduates (33.3 and 33.6%), while working always in the same place more often characterizes women (84.7%), foreigners 83.8% and young people (79.2% to an average of 74.3%).

Employees and employers generally carry out their activities in the spaces provided by the employer (85.6% and 83.3% compared to 81.7% of the total; Table 11, attached). Employees most frequently have a single workplace (78.9% overall), especially temporary workers (82.8%). The self-employed without employees more often than others work at home (3.6% compared to 0.8% of the average number of total employed), at clients' premises or home (22.7%, with an average value of 9.7%) or do not have a fixed workplace (11.5 and 7.1%). Consequently, it is also more frequent for self-employed without employees to have more than one workplace (45.9% compared to an average of 25.7%).

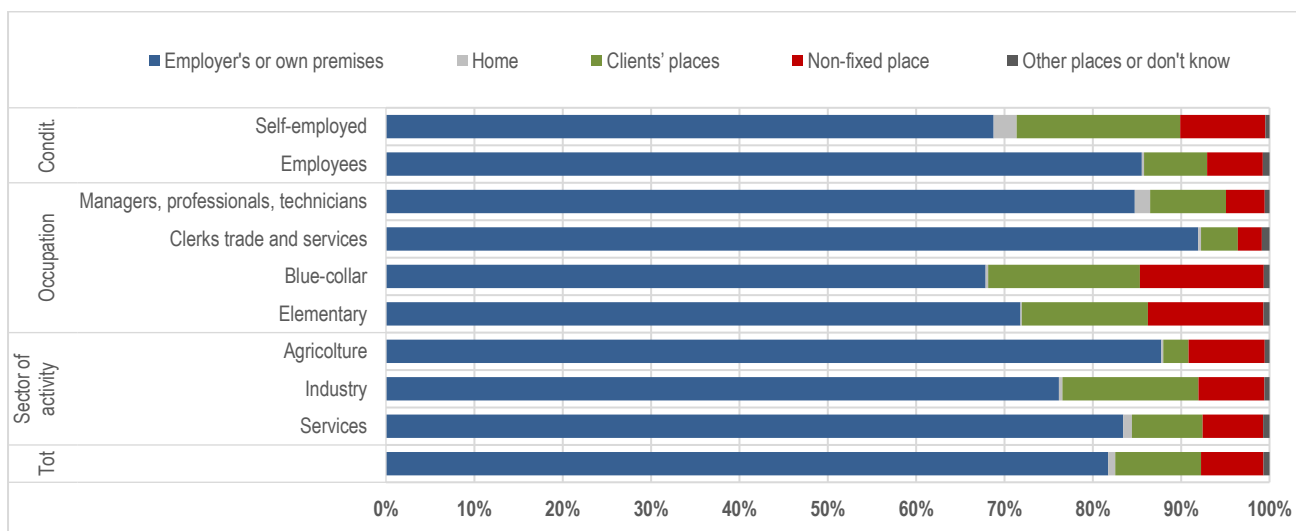
White collars usually work mainly at employers' premises (91.9%); a similar situation characterizes managers, professionals and technicians (84.8%). In contrast, among blue collars it is less frequent, though still about two out of three. Managers, professionals and technicians work at home more than others (1.7% compared to an average of 0.8%). Blue collars, especially the most skilled, as well as people with elementary or technical occupations present higher percentages among those who work at clients' premises.

Managers, professionals and technicians are also the most dynamic - 37.3% change workplaces - together with the armed forces (50.4%); white collars are more stable: 88.4% have a single workplace.

Almost all the employed in the education sector (95.5%) and hotels and restaurants (93.5%) work mainly in the employer's offices or in their own premises. The information and communication sector is characterized by the highest share of employed who work mostly at home (3.6%); construction shows the highest percentage of those who work at clients' premises (55.1%), transport and storage of those who do not have a fixed workplace (34.7%).

Activities of households as employers are the sectors in which a single workplace is more frequent (97.1%) as well as hotels and restaurants (93.9%); on the contrary, in transport and storage (48.2%), information and communication (47.6%) and construction (44.6%) moving among several workplaces is more frequent. (Figure 6).

FIGURE 6. EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 16 AND OVER BY WORKPLACE AND MAIN ECONOMIC VARIABLES. Year 2019 (2W)
(Percentage values)



Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

Home and smart working

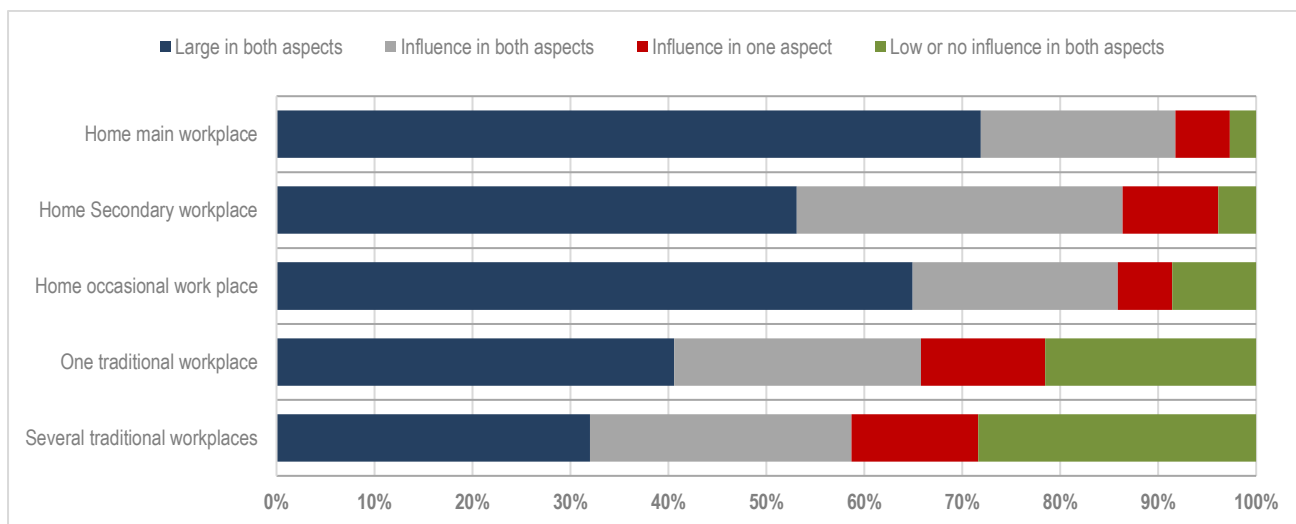
Working from home - which in 2019 involved about 1.3 million employed people (5.7%) - is more used in the tertiary sector, however with significant differences between branches. It is more frequently implemented in the information and communication as well as in the business activities sector; moreover, in the education sector, home is very often the secondary workplace (Table 12, attached). Working from home is nearly absent for the employed in hotels and restaurants, transport and storage, health and social care, activities of households as employers.

In detail, in public administration services, only 1.7% of the employed use home as a place of work: 0.2% as the main workplace, 0.9% as a secondary workplace, 0.6% occasionally.

The option of working from home is more frequent among those who perform a qualified or non-manual occupation (12.9%) while those who perform clerical occupations, both in office work and trade (88.1 and 86.8% respectively), have a single and traditional workplace.

Workers with at least a bachelor's degree work from home (also as a secondary location) much more often than the less educated (12.7% versus 2.0%; Table 13, attached). Working from home is also associated with higher levels of autonomy, with the ability to influence both the content and the sequence in which it takes place, especially when home is the primary or occasional place of work (Figure 7).

FIGURE 7. EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 16 AND OVER BY WORKPLACE AND DEGREE OF AUTONOMY. Year 2019 (2W)
(Percentage values)



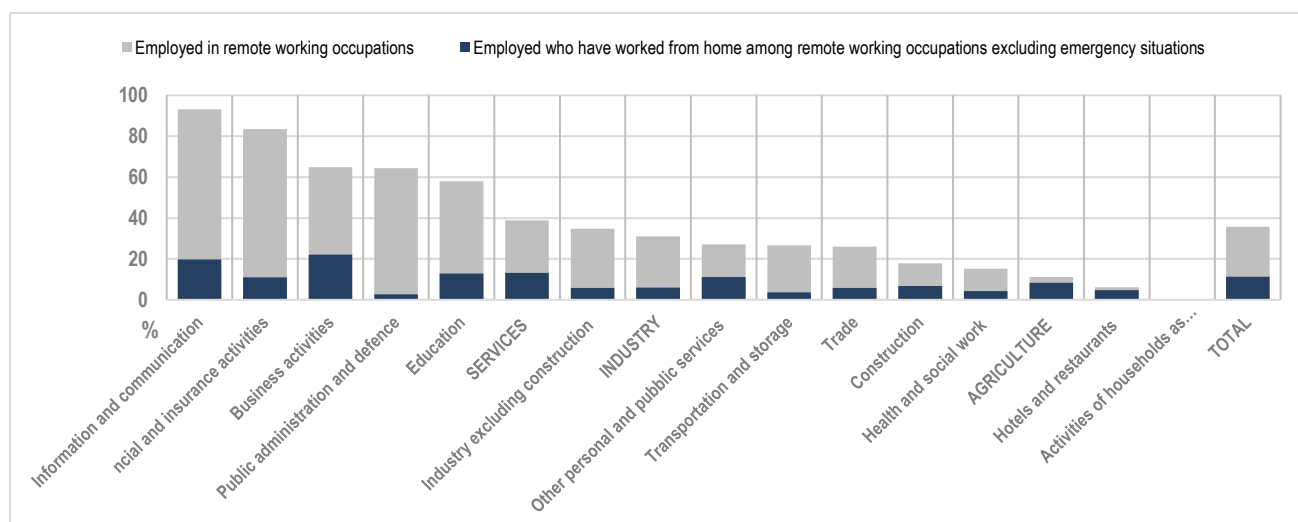
Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

Women use home more often as their main and secondary place of work, but at the same time they are also more numerous among those who work only in one traditional workplace (Table 13, attached). Men have greater and more frequent work mobility. When men use home as a workplace, they do it occasionally. The use of the house is less frequent among less educated workers (2.0%), foreigners (2.8%) and younger workers (4.0%) who, like women, perform their jobs in a single traditional workplace more often (76.4%, 82.6% and 78.3% respectively, against an average value of 73.4%). Working at home is also less common among workers resident in South and Island region.

Of the 408 thousand employees who, in 2019, used their homes as their main or secondary place of work (1.7% of the employed, 2.3% of the employees), 8.2% had a teleworking contract (0.2% of the total employees), and 20.2% had a smart working agreement (0.5% of the total). On the whole, they were about 116 thousand people. In both cases these forms of work were mostly exclusively reserved to permanent workers, especially in the tertiary sector (about 73%).

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, remote work involved a limited number of activities and workers, despite the potentially larger audience (Figure 8). According to an Istat estimate, there are 8.2 million people employed in a occupation that can somehow be performed remotely (Table 14, attached), a share that goes down to about 7 million if we exclude occupations for which remote work is only possible in emergency situations (for example, teachers in primary and secondary education). During 2019, only 12.1% (about one million of the employed) have actually experienced this possibility.

FIGURE 8. EMPLOYED PERSONS AGED 16 AND OVER WITH AN OCCUPATION EASILY TELEWORKED BY THE EFFECTIVE WORKING FROM HOME. Year 2019 (2W) (Percentage values)



Source: Istat, Labour Force Survey, Ad hoc Module 2019

However, the adoption of smart work has been crucial to maintain employment levels during the pandemic and to limit daily mobility, especially in urban areas. In addition to reducing the possibility of contagion, lower occupational mobility is an environmental protection measure, reducing the time spent travelling and the associated pollution. In 2019, 2.8% of the employed (630,000) said it took them more than one hour to get to work, 13.3% from half an hour to one hour and 83.1% no more than half an hour. If all the workers who could work remotely and travel more than an hour to get to their working place worked from home, it would reduce by about 800,000 hours the time spent on commuting and the associated pollution for each day of smart working..

For technical and methodological information

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