

Telework in Africa: a new way of working

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For almost a month now, ILO staff in the Africa Region have been working from home following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led most States to take measures to protect their populations. Among these measures, there is the "compulsory confinement" requiring everyone to stay at home. Telework is a new experience to which each office, each worker, tries to contribute with the means at hand in order to achieve the assigned results.

The majority of the offices in the Region have equipped their staff with a means of communication in order to remain reachable, such as a telephone and/or prepaid SIM. So-called "essential" staff who had to telework were provided with laptops and pre-charged modems for the Internet. Other colleagues work with their own equipment (laptop, desktop, internet connection, printer, scanner, communication units, etc.). To some extent, this device helps to keep the activities afloat. The leadership of the regional administration, the support of the directors of the offices and the United Nations system coordination, as well as the agility and commitment of the staff, all make it possible to find alternatives for the continuation of field activities.

Teleworking is being achieved not without difficulties for all indiscriminately. It affects the well-known meaning of work which, until recently, consisted of leaving one's home. Now, unexpectedly, everything happens at home, with the emergence of difficulties of another kind, among others:

- Inadequate working environment (unsuitable furniture, noise pollution, climatic hazards (heat, etc.);
- Appearance of unusual and demanding colleagues (spouses and other dependants) with their share of concerns;
- Water and electricity cuts that affect the timely completion of actions;
- The pressure of demands that have almost all become "urgent";
- Ubiquitous and lengthy daily meetings that lead to fatigue and nervousness;
- Dependence and unreliability of technological means of communication;
- Difficulty to synchronize work schedules with colleagues who do not have access to Internet and communication facilities;
- Insufficient logistical means to respond to certain requests;
- Difficulty in delivering results on time and ensuring effective supervision of subordinates;
- Lack of understanding by some managers for actions taken late;
- Teleworking has led to a significant imbalance in the distribution of tasks.

As in every situation, telework with a bonus confinement offers some positive points. I note two of them: on the one hand it forges the spirit of working independently and, on the other, it brings the family closer together in terms of transparency and personal organization.

In addition to the difficulties mentioned, it is possible to improve the performance conditions of telework in the regional context if the following suggestions could be taken into account:

- Reduce the number and length of meetings on Skype and other means of communication through self-discipline and a clear and relevant agenda;
- Make an effort to comply with working hours by respecting breaks and weekend time;
- Ensure work/life balance;
- Explore the possibility of creating, where possible, a small workspace adapted to be productive.

I am convinced that teleworking in confinement, despite its difficulties, is an opportunity for every staff member to discover themselves in the face of adversity. It is during these moments that artists reveal themselves!