

The background image is a black and white photograph of a woman with curly hair holding a sleeping baby. In the foreground, a laptop is visible, with a hand typing on the keyboard. The image is overlaid with several colored rectangles: a large pink one in the top left, a smaller pink one below it, a green one on the left side, and a large green one in the bottom right.

# Work at home or live at work

The complexities of new working arrangements



Environics Institute for Survey Research conducts relevant and original public opinion and social research related to issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it has been changing, and where it may be heading.

The Future Skills Centre (FSC) is a forward-thinking centre for research and collaboration dedicated to preparing Canadians for employment success. We believe Canadians should feel confident about the skills they have to succeed in a changing workforce. As a pan-Canadian community, we are collaborating to rigorously identify, test, measure, and share innovative approaches to assessing and developing the skills Canadians need to thrive in the days and years ahead. The Future Skills Centre was founded by a consortium whose members are Ryerson University, Blueprint ADE, and The Conference Board of Canada, and is funded by the Government of Canada's Future Skills Program.

The Diversity Institute conducts and coordinates multi-disciplinary, multi-stakeholder research to address the needs of diverse Canadians, the changing nature of skills and competencies, and the policies, processes and tools that advance economic inclusion and success. Our action-oriented, evidence-based approach is advancing knowledge of the complex barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading practices to effect change, and producing concrete results. The Diversity Institute is a research lead for the Future Skills Centre.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

# Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 1

INTRODUCTION ..... 3

THE PREVALENCE OF WORKING FROM HOME ..... 5

THE EXPERIENCE OF WORKING FROM HOME ..... 12



# Executive summary

The second wave of the Survey on Employment and Skills was conducted in late 2020, as the pandemic's second wave gathered momentum in Canada and the number of new COVID-19 cases steadily increased. The survey investigates how Canadians have been affected by, and are coping with, the disruptions caused by the pandemic. This report focuses on the experience of working from home. It examines who has been working from home during the pandemic and who has had to continue to work at their regular workplace; the challenges and benefits of working from home; and how these experiences vary among different types of employee.

The survey shows that the Canadian workforce is evenly split between those who have switched to working from home at least some days during the pandemic, and those who continue to work at their usual workplace. But these proportions vary significantly across the country: workers in Ontario are most likely to have switched to working from home at least some days, followed by those in B.C. and Quebec; workers are least likely to have moved to a work-from-home arrangement in Saskatchewan and Atlantic Canada. Switching to working from home is also more common in some of the country's largest metropolitan areas, especially Toronto and Vancouver.

Working from home during the pandemic is much more common for clerical and office workers, and for professionals and executives, than for those working in sales and services, or in trades, transportation or labour. Full-time employees are also more likely to have switched to working from home than part-time employees. Workers earning lower incomes, and with less formal education or training, are much more likely to have continued to work at their workplace outside the home during the pandemic, rather than switching to working from home.

While, overall, younger workers are somewhat more likely than their older counterparts to have been working from home during the pandemic, the situation is different for men and women: younger men are much *more likely* to be working from home than are older men; but younger women are somewhat *less likely* to be working from home

than are older women. Workers with young children at home are also more likely to have switched to working from home at least some days during the pandemic.

While it's reassuring to confirm that many workers in Canada have altered their work arrangement in order to minimize the risk of contracting and spreading COVID-19, these survey results serve as an important reminder that the ability to do so is closely tied to one's socio-economic situation. Those working in white-collar jobs or earning higher incomes are much more likely to have been able to protect themselves by working from home. Conversely, Canadians who are more economically vulnerable are also more likely to be vulnerable to the virus due to their need to continue to work outside the home. While Canadians have all been urged to stay at home as much as possible during the pandemic, the ability to do so is not simply a function of a person's willingness to follow public health guidelines, but also of the types of jobs that they hold.

Experiences of working from home have been more challenging for some workers than others, especially for those with young children at home. Nonetheless, a majority of workers who are working from home agree that they like doing so a lot better than working in their regular workplace; and most hope that they can continue to work from home at least some days once the pandemic is over. Only one in three agree that it's impossible to do their job well when they're working from home. Those in occupations where the switch to working from home during the pandemic has been more common – namely clerical and office workers, and professionals and executives – also report more positive experiences with the arrangement. This is particularly true of clerical and office workers.

Importantly, however, many of those working from home during the pandemic have a mixed range of experiences, with more negative ones not precluding more positive ones. It's possible to experience challenges with working from home while nonetheless feeling positive about the arrangement as a whole, and hoping that it might continue even after the pandemic is over.

The survey confirms that, as might be expected, those with children at home – especially those with younger children – find the situation more challenging. For instance, among those working at home at least some days, those with children under the age of five at home are much more likely to feel like they're working all the time, and never have time for themselves or their family, or that it's impossible for them to do their job well. Those with preschool-age children at home are also more likely to worry that they can't be good parents and be good at their job while they're working from home.

As is the case with workers in general, however, working parents tend to report a mix of positive and negative experiences with working from home. Specifically, despite the challenges, majorities of those with children at home (including younger children) agree that they like working from home a lot better than working in their regular workplace; and that working from home has been a lot easier than they thought it would be. And roughly seven in ten of both parents and non-parents who are working from home agree that, once the pandemic is over, their employer should continue to allow them to work from home at least a couple of days a week. These findings suggest that the eventual reopening of the economy after the spread of the virus has been contained is unlikely to mean that working life will revert completely to the way it once was. Employees, particularly those with children at home, may continue to express a desire for working arrangements that are more flexible and family-friendly than those that they experienced before the pandemic took hold.

Other groups of workers, in addition to parents, are more likely to express concerns about the challenges of working from home. Younger workers (those between the ages of 18 and 24) are *less likely* than those in their core working years to agree that they like working from home better than working in their regular workplace; and are *more likely* to worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their careers. Immigrants are more likely than non-immigrants to agree that it's hard to be both a good parent and good at their job while they're working from home; and that they feel like they're working all the time, and never have time for themselves or their families. The same is true of racialized workers compared to those who identify as white; and of Indigenous workers compared to those who do not identify as Indigenous. And immigrant workers, and workers who are either racialized or Indigenous, are all more likely to worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their careers. As is the case with younger workers, it's possible that immigrant, racialized and Indigenous workers are less securely employed, and are therefore more concerned about the longer-term consequences of being physically distanced from their workplaces.

Finally, it's notable that those with a physical or mental condition or difference that limits their daily activity are much more likely than others to report that that they don't have the right computer equipment or software to allow them to do their job properly when they work from home.



# Introduction

The Survey on Employment and Skills was designed to explore Canadians' experiences with the changing nature of work, including technology-driven disruptions, increasing insecurity and shifting skills requirements. Following the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the survey was expanded to investigate the impact of the crisis on the lives of Canadians, particularly in terms of employment. The expanded survey explores how different types of workers have been affected by the pandemic, in terms of such things as their hours of work, earnings, location of work, and ability to combine work and family responsibilities.

The initial wave of the survey was conducted between late February and early April 2020; a preliminary report was published in May, and a final report in September. This report is based on the second wave of the survey, which was conducted between November 24 and December 22, 2020, with a large sample of 5,351 Canadians age 18 and over, in all provinces and territories.

This wave of the Survey on Employment and Skills was conducted as the pandemic's second wave gathered momentum and the number of new COVID-19 cases steadily increased. The continued spread of the virus brought with it the realization that the adjustments to work and school arrangements that were suddenly implemented in March 2020 would need to remain in place for many more months to come. Many employees affected by the lockdowns remained unemployed; while others marked more than half a year working from home, or working in reorganized workplaces while observing new public health and physical distancing protocols. Students undertook a new school

year, either learning online or attending school in-person, while navigating shifting rules about testing and self-isolating for potential COVID-19 exposure. In some parts of the country, initial steps to reopen workplaces or schools were soon reversed as governments moved to implement new restrictions to inhibit the spread of the virus. Toward the end of this period, however, hopes were raised by the announcement that vaccines were in production and would start to become available in Canada early in the new year.

In this context, the Survey on Employment and Skills sought to gain better insight into how Canadians of all backgrounds have been affected by, and are coping with, the disruptions caused by the pandemic. The results of this wave of the survey will be presented in a series of reports, beginning with this one focusing on the experience of working from home. This report will examine who has been able to work from home during the pandemic, and who has had to continue to work at their regular workplace. It will also explore both the positive and negative experiences with working from home, and how these vary among different types of employee. The report's findings provide an important reminder that the ability to stay home during the pandemic is closely tied to one's socio-economic situation. They also suggest that the eventual reopening of the economy after the spread of the virus has been contained is unlikely to mean that everything will go back to the way it once was. Employees, particularly those with children at home, may continue to express a desire for working arrangements that are more flexible and family-friendly than those that they experienced before the pandemic took hold.

## About the Survey on Employment and Skills

The Survey on Employment and Skills is conducted by the **Environics Institute for Survey Research**, in partnership with the **Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University**. The second wave of the study consists of a survey of 5,351 Canadians age 18 and over, conducted between November 24 and December 22, 2020, in all provinces and territories. It was conducted both online (in the provinces) and by telephone (in the territories). The survey includes oversamples of Canadians living in smaller provinces and territories, and Canadians who identify as Indigenous, in order to provide a better portrait of the range of experiences across the country. Unless otherwise indicated, the survey results in this report are weighted by age, gender, region, education and Indigenous identity, to ensure that they're representative of the Canadian population as whole.

The second wave of the survey was accompanied by a companion survey of an additional 260 adults living in northwest Toronto (north of Eglinton Avenue and west of Bathurst Street), where the per capita number of COVID-19 cases has been particularly high. This companion survey was conducted at the same time as the main survey, both online (following initial cellphone contact) and by landline telephone, bringing the total second wave survey sample to 5,611. However, the results for the companion survey are reported separately, when relevant, and are not combined with the results for the main survey.

Detailed data tables are available under separate cover; these present the results for the survey questions covered in this report by population demographics and other relevant characteristics (see the study project page at [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org)). All results are presented as percentages unless otherwise noted.

## Acknowledgements

This research was made possible through the hard work and contributions of a number of individuals, including Noel Baldwin, Pedro Barata and Tricia Williams from the Future Skills Centre; and Wendy Cukier, Alexandra Macdonald, Karen McCallum and Michael Urban from Ryerson University's Diversity Institute. The study partners would also like to acknowledge the contributions of Keith Neuman from the Environics Institute for Survey Research for assistance with questionnaire development and analysis; John Otoo of Environics Research Group for leading the data collection; and Steve Otto and Cathy McKim for their work in designing and producing this report. Finally, we express our sincere thanks to the thousands of Canadians from all backgrounds who took the time to participate in the study.



# The prevalence of working from home

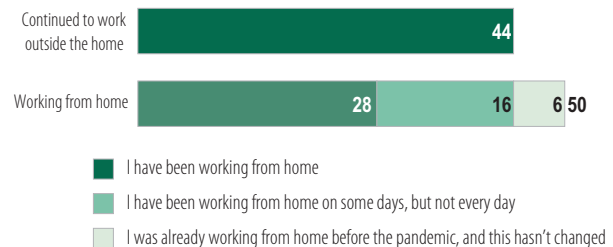
The Canadian workforce is evenly split between those who have switched to working from home at least some days during the pandemic, and those who continue to work at their usual workplace. But these proportions vary significantly across the country and among different types of worker. Working from home during the pandemic is much more common for clerical and office workers, and for professionals and executives, than for those working in sales and services, or in trades, transportation or labour. And workers earning lower incomes, and with less formal education or training, are much more likely to have continued to work at their workplace outside the home during the pandemic, rather than switching to working from home.

The restrictions brought in to contain the spread of COVID-19 have had many consequences for Canadians in the labour market. Many have lost their jobs, either temporarily or permanently, while others have seen a reduction in their weekly work hours. But many of those who remain employed have also seen dramatic shifts in where and how they perform their jobs, as those who are able to do so are asked to work from home. Not all types of jobs are equally adaptable to a work-from-home arrangement, however. This section examines how the ability to work from home varies among different types of worker.

## The national and regional picture

Twenty-eight percent of employed Canadians say they've been working from home during the pandemic. An additional 16 percent say they've been working from home on some days, but not every day; while six percent were already working from home before the pandemic began and have continued to do so. This means that, in total, one in two employed Canadians (50%) have been working at home, at least on some days, during the pandemic.<sup>1</sup>

## Work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic



Q.24d

Which of the following best describes your work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

Forty-four percent have continued to work from their usual workplace outside their home, and six percent do not provide an answer (perhaps because their work situation was not fully captured by the options presented in the survey). Leaving aside those who did not answer and those who were already working from home, Canadians are evenly split between those who switched to working from home at least some days during the pandemic (44%), and those who continued to work at their usual workplace (44%).

Among the provinces, those in Ontario (53%) are most likely to have switched to working from home at least some days, followed by those in B.C. (46%) and Quebec (38%). Workers are least likely to have moved to a work-from-home arrangement in Saskatchewan (25%) and Atlantic Canada (30%). One in two workers in the North have also shifted to working from home at least some days during the pandemic.

Switching to working from home is also more common in some of the country's largest metropolitan areas, especially Toronto (66%) and Vancouver (52%).<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Results for the three Territories, when shown separately, are unweighted.

<sup>2</sup> Note, however, that the switch to working from home during the pandemic is less common in northwest Toronto (46%), where the incidence of COVID-19 has been higher, than the average for the Greater Toronto Area or for the City of Toronto as a whole.

Table 1: Work situation during the pandemic, by occupation\*

Note: all numbers are percentages; the columns add to 100%

|  | All<br>occupations | Office/<br>clerical | Sales/<br>services | Trades/<br>transportation/<br>labour | Professional/<br>executive |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------------|
| I have been working from home (A)  | 28                 | 43                  | 14                 | 9                                    | 39                         |
| I have been working from home on some days, but not every day (B)                | 16                 | 17                  | 16                 | 9                                    | 19                         |
| I was already working from home before the pandemic, and this hasn't changed (C) | 6                  | 6                   | 4                  | 3                                    | 6                          |
| I have continued to work at my usual workplace outside my home (D)               | 44                 | 31                  | 60                 | 71                                   | 35                         |
| Cannot say (E)   | 6                  | 4                   | 6                  | 8                                    | 2                          |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>100</b>         | <b>100</b>          | <b>100</b>         | <b>100</b>                           | <b>100</b>                 |
| <i>Switched to working from home at least some days (A + B)</i>                  | <i>44</i>          | <i>60</i>           | <i>29</i>          | <i>18</i>                            | <i>58</i>                  |
| <i>Working from home at least some days (switched or continued) (A + B + C)</i>  | <i>50</i>          | <i>66</i>           | <i>34</i>          | <i>21</i>                            | <i>63</i>                  |

\* Office/clerical includes clerical, administrative or office support; sales/services includes salesperson, retail, cashier, food services and other services; trades/transportation/labour includes skilled trades, transportation and manual labour; professional/executive includes professional, executive, manager and business owner.

Q.24d

Which of the following best describes your work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Occupation and employment status

Working from home is clearly more feasible for those in some occupations compared to others.

- Those most likely to have switched to working from home on at least some days include: executives, managers or business owners (60%); clerical, administrative or office workers (60%); and professionals (56%).
- Those less likely to have made this transition during the pandemic include: sales and retail workers (38%); those working in food services (22%); those working in transportation (20%); skilled tradespeople (18%); and manual labourers (18%).

Looking at broader occupational categories, clerical and office workers, and professionals and executives, are both more likely to have switched to working from home, every day or at least some days, than those working in sales and services, or in trades, transportation or labour (see Table 1).

In terms of **EMPLOYMENT STATUS**:

- Full-time employees (32%) are twice as likely than are part-time employees (16%) to have shifted during the

pandemic to working from home every day. Forty-six percent of full-time employees, compared to 35 percent of those working part-time, have switched to working from home at least some days, if not every day.<sup>3</sup>

- The proportion of full-time employees that have switched to working from home every day is highest in Ontario: 41 percent in that province describe their situation as working from home, significantly more than in B.C. (31%) and Quebec (28%), and more than twice as high as in the Prairies (19%) and Atlantic Canada (15%).
- The group that stands out most, however, is the self-employed, mainly because self-employed Canadians were much more likely to have been working from home even before the pandemic. Forty-three percent of self-employed Canadians switched to working from home once the pandemic struck, and an additional 25 percent were already working from home. About seven in ten (68%) of those who are self-employed, therefore, are able to work from home during the pandemic, at least some days if not every day.

**Table 2: Work situation during the pandemic, by employment status**

Note: all numbers are percentages; the columns add to 100%

|  | Employed<br>full-time | Employed<br>part-time | Self-<br>employed |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|
| I have been working from home (A)  | 32                    | 16                    | 27                |
| I have been working from home on some days, but not every day (B)                | 15                    | 19                    | 17                |
| I was already working from home before the pandemic, and this hasn't changed (C) | 3                     | 6                     | 25                |
| I have continued to work at my usual workplace outside my home (D)               | 46                    | 49                    | 23                |
| Cannot say (E)   | 4                     | 10                    | 9                 |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>100</b>            | <b>100</b>            | <b>100</b>        |
| <i>Working from home at least some days (A + B)</i>                              | <i>46</i>             | <i>35</i>             | <i>43</i>         |
| <i>Working from home (switched or continued) (A + B + C)</i>                     | <i>50</i>             | <i>41</i>             | <i>68</i>         |

Q.24d

Which of the following best describes your work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

<sup>3</sup> These results, and others in this section, refer to those who continue to be employed at the time of the survey. The experiences of those who became unemployed as a result of the pandemic are addressed in a separate report.

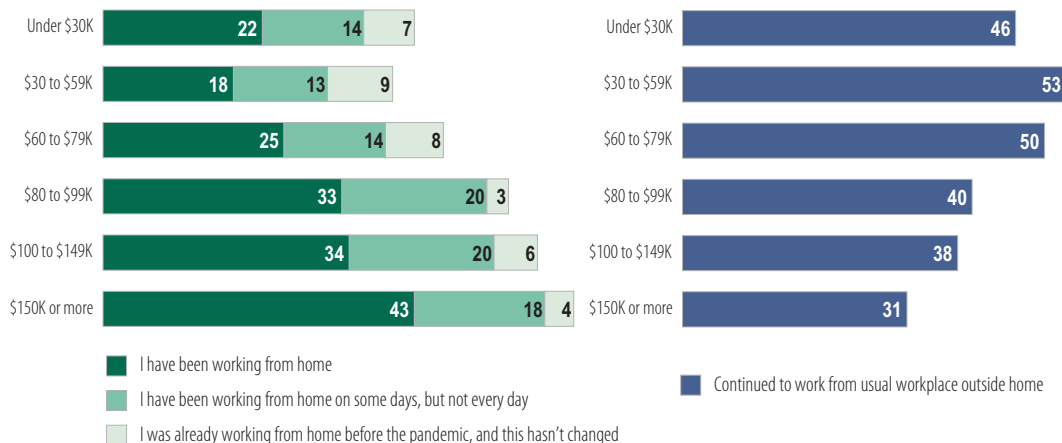
## Income and education

Workers earning lower incomes, and with less formal education or training, are much more likely to have continued to work at their workplace outside the home during the pandemic, rather than switching to working from home.

- About one in two workers with annual household incomes under \$80,000 have continued to work from their usual workplace outside their homes during the pandemic. This compares to about two in five of those with incomes between \$80,000 and \$149,999; and fewer than one in three of those with incomes of \$150,000 or higher.
- Conversely, workers with the highest incomes (\$150,000 or more) are twice as likely to have switched to an everyday work-from-home arrangement during the pandemic as those with the lowest incomes (less than \$60,000).

- One in two workers with no post-secondary education or with a college diploma, and two in three of those with trades training, have continued to work from their usual workplace outside their homes during the pandemic. This compares to only three in ten (28%) of those with a university degree.
- Conversely, workers with a university degree are much more likely to have switched to working from home every day during the pandemic, compared to those with other types of education (for instance, 63% of those with a university degree switched to working from home at least some days, compared to 25 percent of those with a trades training or apprenticeship certificate).

### Work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic By annual household income

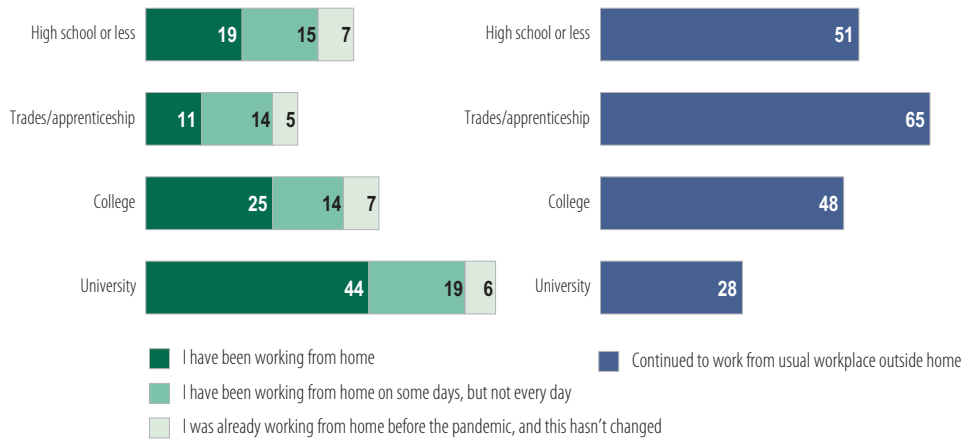


Q.24d

Which of the following best describes your work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic

By educational attainment



Q.24d

Which of the following best describes your work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

## Age and gender<sup>4</sup>

Younger workers are somewhat more likely than their older counterparts to have been working from home during the pandemic. At the same time, there is only a modest difference overall between the situations of men and women. These two general patterns are somewhat misleading, however, as the circumstances of younger and older men, compared to younger and older women, are very different. Age and gender therefore should be looked at in combination, and not separately.

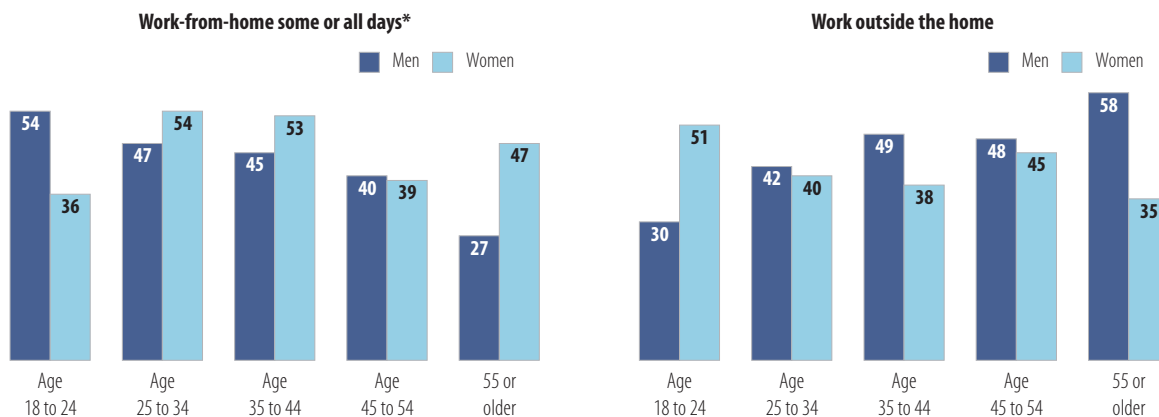
- Younger men are *twice as likely* to be working from home as older men: 54 percent of employed men between the ages of 18 and 24 have been able to switch to working from home at least some days during the pandemic, compared to only 27 percent of employed men age 55 and older. Conversely, 30 percent of employed men between the ages of 18 and 24 have continued to work outside the home, compared to 58 percent of employed men age 55 and older.

- Younger women are *less likely* to be working from home than older women: the differences among age groups are less pronounced for women than for men, but more importantly, they trend in the opposite direction. Younger employed women (those between the ages of 18 and 24) are more likely to have continued to work outside the home (51%) than to have switched to working from home (36%). Working from home is most common for women between the ages of 25 and 44; just over one in two (53%) employed women in this age group have been able to switch to working from home at least some days.

The net result of these different patterns is that, while younger men are much *more* likely than younger women to have been able to work from home during the pandemic, the reverse is true for older men compared to older women.

## Work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic

By age and gender



\* Does not include those who were working from home before the pandemic.

Q.24d

Which of the following best describes your work situation during the COVID-19 pandemic?

<sup>4</sup> In the survey, 5,312 of the 5,351 respondents identified as "man" or "woman," while 16 indicated another gender identity and 23 did not say. The discussion of gender that follows focuses on men and women; the sample size for those with other gender identities is not large enough to support a separate analysis.



## Children at home<sup>5</sup>

Workers with young children at home are also more like to have switched to working from home at least some days during the pandemic: 53 percent of those with children under the age of five at home have made this adjustment, compared to 39 percent of those with no children age 18 or younger at home. The difference between those with and without younger children at home is greater in the case of men (52% of men with children under the age of five at home have switched to working at home at least some days, compared to 35% of men with no children age 18 or younger at home), compared to women (53% and 44%, respectively).

## Immigration background and racial identity

Across Canada as a whole, those who were born in Canada to Canadian-born parents (50%) are more likely to have continued to work at their regular place of work during than pandemic, compared to immigrants (38%) or those with at least one immigrant parent (37%). The situation of recent immigrants, however, is very different from that of other immigrants: 46 percent of immigrants who have been in Canada for 10 years or less have continued to work at their regular place of work, compared to only 31 percent of those who have been in Canada for 25 years or more. Within the Greater Toronto Area, however, where the switch to working from home has been more common, there is relatively little difference in the work location of those with and without an immigrant background.<sup>6</sup>

It's also very difficult to generalize about the situation of those who are racialized, compared to those who identify as white. In part, this is because those who identify as racialized are more likely to live in major urban centres where the switch to working from home has been more common.<sup>7</sup> In this case, it's also because of the variation in experiences among those who

are racialized. For instance, across Canada as a whole, those who identify as Black are almost twice as likely as those who identify as Chinese to report that they've continued to work in their regular place of work. Given this variation, combining different racial groups together as a single racialized group is potentially misleading (this issue could be addressed in the design of future studies).<sup>8</sup>

## Indigenous identity

Workers who identify as Indigenous are twice as likely as average to have been working from home on some days, but not everyday, during the pandemic; this applies to 34 percent of Indigenous workers, compared to the average for all workers of 16 percent. This may be related to the fact that Indigenous Peoples are more likely than average to be employed on a seasonal or temporary basis, and less likely to be permanently employed (working from home every day is more common for those with a permanent work arrangement, while working from home on some days (but not every day) is more common for temporary and seasonal workers).

## Living with disabilities

Those who report having a physical or mental condition or difference that limits the amount or the kind of activity that they can do on a typical day are slightly more likely to report having switched to working from home at least some days, compared to those who do not report such a condition or difference.<sup>9</sup> About one in two of those who say that such a condition or difference *often or always* limits the amount or the kind of activity that they can do on a typical day (48%), or that *occasionally* limits their activity (49%), switched to working from home, compared to 42 percent of those who do not report such a condition or difference.

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<sup>5</sup> Most workers with children at home can be assumed to be the children's parent, guardian or caregiver; but in some cases they may be related to them in some other way (such as brother or sister, or grandparent). The results reported here are generally the same, regardless of whether possible siblings (the youngest of those living with other children in their household) or grandparents (the oldest of those living with other children in their household) are excluded from the sample.

<sup>6</sup> This pattern is also confirmed when the Greater Toronto Area pattern is expanded to include the companion survey of 260 residents of northwest Toronto.

<sup>7</sup> In general, workers who identify as white are more likely to be working outside the home than those who are racialized, but this difference is likely affected in part by the greater concentration of racialized workers in metropolitan areas more affected by the pandemic.

<sup>8</sup> Unfortunately, as this survey question is asked only to those who are employed (limiting the sample size), results for each individual racial group must be treated with caution, especially if they're further broken down by region or urban area.

<sup>9</sup> The survey asked: "Do you currently have a physical condition; a cognitive difference; an emotional, psychological or mental health condition; or a health problem that limits the amount or the kind of activity that you can do on a typical day? For this question, please consider only conditions or difficulties that have lasted or are expected to last for six months or more."

# The experience of working from home

The experience of working from home has been more challenging for some workers than others, especially for those with young children at home. Nonetheless, a majority of workers agree that they like working from home a lot better than working in their regular workplace; and most hope that they can continue to work from home at least some days once the pandemic is over. Even those who are more likely to experience challenges with working from home generally feel positive about the arrangement as a whole.

Working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic inevitably brings many challenges, such as managing the overlap of work and family responsibilities, staying connected with work colleagues, and accessing the necessary work equipment. The arrangement, however, also offers greater flexibility and other advantages, such as avoiding daily commutes. This section of the report examines these different types of experiences with working from home.

## The experience of working from home: an overview

Those who are working from home at least some days during the pandemic (including those who switched to working from home, and those who were already doing so) were asked to agree or disagree with a number of statements about their work situation. Overall, these workers were more likely to agree with positive statements about working from home than with negative statements.

- About seven in ten of those working from home agree that “my employer has given me the support I need to enable me to work from home” (73%); and that “once the pandemic is over, my employer should continue to allow me to work from home at least a couple of days a week” (70%).

- More than three in five agree that “once I started working from home, it was a lot easier to do my job than I thought it would be” (65%); that “working from home is much less stressful than working in my regular workplace” (64%); and that “I like working from home a lot better than working in my regular workplace” (63%).
- Fewer workers – but still sizeable minorities – express concerns about juggling work and family responsibilities when working from home, including 45 percent who agree that “I can’t be a good parent and be good at my job at the same time when I work from home;”<sup>10</sup> and 44 percent who agree that “when I work from home, I feel like I am working all the time and never have time for myself or my family.”
- Two in five (38%) worry that “working from home will have a negative impact on my career.”
- One in three (33%) agree that “it is impossible to do my job well when I am working from home;” and the same proportion (32%) agrees that “I don’t have the right computer equipment or software to allow me to do my job properly when I work from home.”
- As mentioned, almost two in three agree that working from home is much *less* stressful than working in their regular workplace. This was asked to half of those who work from home, while the other half were asked whether they agree that working from home is much *more* stressful than working in their regular workplace. The results are consistent: one in three (31%) *agree* with the second statement (that working from home is *more* stressful), which is the same proportion (29%) as that which *disagrees* that working from home is *less* stressful.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This question was only asked of those with children at home.

<sup>11</sup> This experiment suggests that the results reflect workers’ genuine sentiments rather than having the effect of unduly shaping responses with the positive or negative wording of the statements.

Not surprisingly, those who were already working from home prior to the pandemic, and who continued to do so, are less likely to report difficulties with their situation. For instance, only 12 percent in this group agree that “it is impossible to do my job well when I am working from home,” compared to 32 percent who switched to working from home every day, and 43 percent who switched to working from home on some days but not every day. Similarly, 24 percent of those already working from home agree that “when I work from home, I feel like I am working all the time,” compared to 48 percent who switched to working from home every day, and 46 percent who switched to working from home on some days but not every day. That said, a majority of those who have switched to working from home during the pandemic also report positive experiences, such as liking the arrangement better than working in their regular workplace.

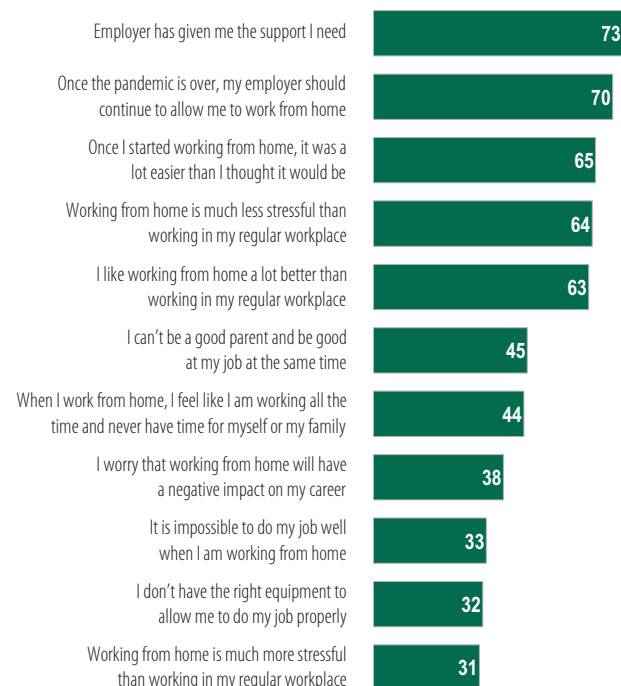
While the survey finds that Canadians working from home during the pandemic are more likely to feel positively than negatively about the experience, a second finding is that many have mixed experiences, with more negative ones not precluding more positive ones. More specifically, many who experience challenges with working from home nonetheless feel positive about the arrangement as a whole.

For instance, a majority (62%) of those who agree that “when I work from home, I feel like I am working all the time and never have time for myself or my family” also agree that they like working from home a lot better than working in their regular workplace. Moreover, this group – that is, those who feel they never have time for themselves or their family – are actually more likely than average (74%) to agree that, once the pandemic is over, their employer should continue to allow them to work from home a least a couple of days a week.

The same is true of those who agree that “it is impossible to do my job well when I am working from home.” A majority of those who feel this way (59%) nonetheless agree that they like working from home a lot better than working in their regular workplace; and even more (74%) agree that they would like to continue to work from home some days after the pandemic is over.

## Experiences of working from home

Strongly/somewhat agree



Subsample: Those working from home all or some days

Q.24E

*Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about working from home ...?*

## Working from home and raising children<sup>12</sup>

The survey confirms that workers with children at home, especially those with younger children, find the situation more challenging. For instance, among those working at home at least some days:

- 63 percent of those with children under the age of five at home agree that “when I work from home, I feel like I am working all the time and never have time for myself or my family,” compared to 36 percent of those without children.
- 51 percent of those with children under the age of five at home agree that “it is impossible to do my job well when I am working from home,” compared to 25 percent of those without children.
- 43 percent of those with children under the age of five at home agree that “working from home is much more stressful than working in my regular workplace,” compared to 22 percent of those without children.

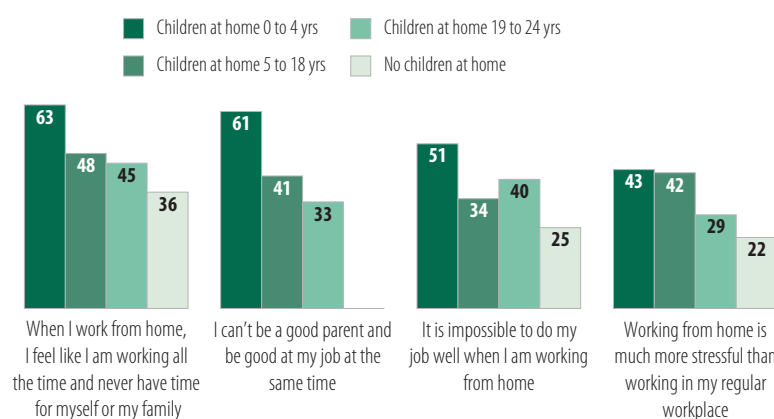
In addition, 61 percent of workers with children under the age of five at home agree that “I can’t be a good parent and be good at my job at the same time when I work from home,”

compared to 41 percent of those with children at home between the ages of five and 18, and 33 percent of those with children at home age 19 to 24 (this question was not asked to those with no children at home).

While the greater share of the burden of managing the overlap of work and childcare responsibilities while working from home generally falls to women rather than men, the survey suggested that the challenges of the altered work situation are felt somewhat more acutely by men – possibly because they’re less used to juggling both professional and domestic responsibilities at the same time than are women. Compared to women, men are more likely to agree that they can’t be both a good parent and be good at their job while working from home; that it’s impossible to do their job well when they are working from home; and that when they work from home, they feel like they’re working all the time. For example, among those working at home with children under the age of five, 62 percent of men, compared to 37 percent of women, agree that “it is impossible to do my job well when I am working from home.”

### Negative experiences of working from home

By age of children at home, strongly or somewhat agree



Subsample: Those working at home at least some days per week

Q.24E

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about working from home ...?

<sup>12</sup> Most workers with children at home can be assumed to be the children’s parent, guardian or caregiver; but in some cases they may be related to them in some other way (such as brother or sister, or grandparent). The results reported here are generally the same, regardless of whether possible siblings (the youngest of those living with other children in their household) or grandparents (the oldest of those living with other children in their household) are excluded from the sample.

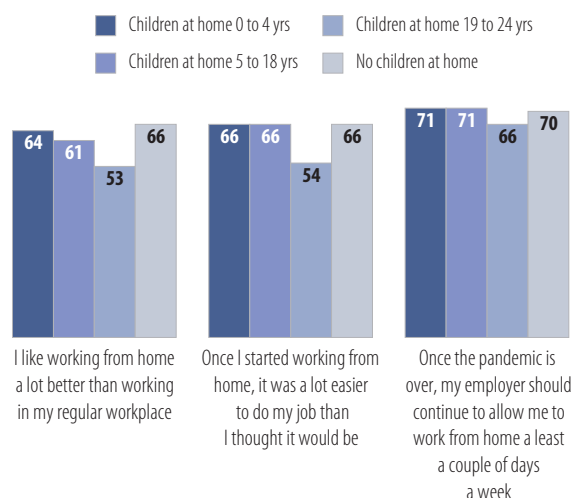
Notably, however, while workers with children at home are more likely than workers without children to report challenges related to their work-from-home situations, they are no less likely to agree that there's an upside. In other words, as is the case with workers in general, working parents tend to report a mix of positive and negative experiences with working from home. Specifically, majorities of those with children at home (including younger children) agree that they like working from home a lot better than working in their regular workplace; and that working from home has been a lot easier than they thought it would be. And roughly seven in ten of those who are working from home – both with and without children at home – agree

that, once the pandemic is over, their employer should continue to allow them to work from home a least a couple of days a week.

This combination of positive and negative sentiments among parents working from home applies to both mothers and fathers. However, just as men are somewhat more likely to agree that there are some challenges with working from home, they're also somewhat less likely to agree that there are advantages. For instance, among those working at home with children under the age of five, a majority of men (67%) agree that their employer should continue to allow them to work from home once the pandemic is over; the proportion of women who agree (76%) is somewhat larger.

### Positive experiences of working from home

By age of children at home, strongly or somewhat agree



Subsample: Those working at home at least some days per week

Q.24E

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about working from home ...?

## Variations in the experience of working from home

**Income and education.** Generally speaking, experiences of working from home (whether positive or negative) do not vary significantly according to employees' levels of income or education. However, both high-income workers and workers with a university education – who are more likely to have switched to working from home during the pandemic – are more likely than others to agree that their employer should continue to allow them to work from home at least a couple of days a week, once the pandemic is over.

- 75 percent of those with incomes of \$60,000 or more agree that their employer should continue to allow them to work from home once the pandemic is over, compared to 63 percent of those with household incomes under \$60,000 per year.
- 75 percent of those with a university education agree that their employer should continue to allow them to work from home once the pandemic is over, compared to 66 percent of workers without a university degree.

**Age.** Different perspectives on the advantages and disadvantages of working from home likely mirror differences in family circumstances, with workers in their 30s and 40s more likely to be combining working from home with raising young children than are workers in their 50s and 60s. Beyond this, however, it's notable that the youngest age group (those between the ages of 18 and 24), who have had less time to establish themselves in their careers, have had less positive experiences with working from home during the pandemic. For instance:

- Younger workers (51%) are *less* likely than those in their core working years (age 25 to 54) (66%) to agree that they like working from home better than working in their regular place of work. They're also *less* likely to say that working from home has been easier than they thought it would be (58% and 66%, respectively).

- Younger workers (48%) are *more* likely than those in their core working years (32%) to agree that it's impossible to do their job well when they're working from home. They're also *more* likely to worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their career (56% and 37%, respectively).

**Gender.** The differences between fathers and mothers outlined earlier are mirrored more generally in differences between men and women. Men are more likely than women to agree with negative statements about working from home (such as it being impossible to do their job well when they're working from home); and less likely to agree with positive statements (such as liking working from home better than their regular workplace). Just over two in five (43%) men, compared to one in three women (32%), worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their career. Men (69%) and women (70%), however, are equally likely to agree that, once the pandemic is over, their employer should continue to allow them to work from home at least a couple of days a week.

**Occupation.** Those in occupations where the switch to working from home during the pandemic has been more common – namely clerical and office workers, and professionals and executives – also report more positive experiences with the arrangement. This is particularly true of clerical and office workers. These workers are the most likely to agree that:

- Their employer should continue to allow them to work from home at least a couple of days a week, once the pandemic is over (81%).
- They like working from home better than working in their regular place of work (77%).
- Once they started working from home, it was a lot easier to do their job than they thought it would be (71%).



## Negative impact on careers

Immigrants, racialized Canadians and Indigenous Peoples are distinct groups with their own particular experiences in the workplace. At the same time, they are all more likely than average to face certain challenges due to the switch to working from home.

First or second generation immigrants or racialized Canadians are generally no less likely to have experienced the upsides of working from home, such as finding it easier than they first expected or liking it better than working in their regular workplace. There are some differences, however, when it comes to experiencing the challenges. Immigrants are more likely than non-immigrants to agree that it's hard to be both a good parent and good at their job when they work from home; and that they feel like they're working all the time and never have time for themselves or their families.

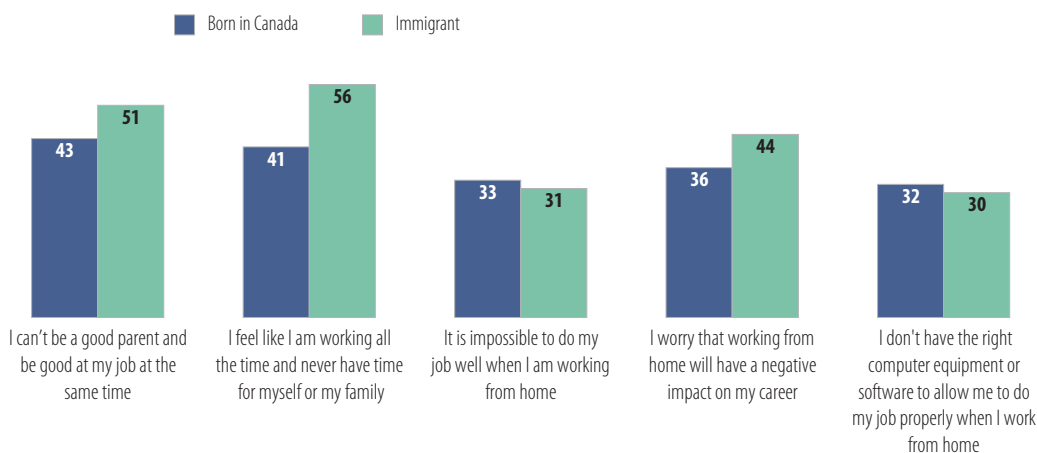
The same is true of racialized workers compared to those who identify as white; and it is also true of workers who identify as Indigenous compared to non-Indigenous workers. Both Racialized and Indigenous workers are also more likely than average to agree that they don't have the right computer equipment or software to allow them to do their job properly when they work from home.<sup>13</sup>

One of the most notable differences, however, comes in terms of the possible negative impact on their careers:

- 44 percent of immigrants (including 60% of recent immigrants) worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their careers; this compares to 36 percent of those born in Canada.
- 46 percent of racialized workers worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their careers; this compares to 30 percent of those who identify as white.
- 60 percent of Indigenous workers worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their careers; this compares to 35 percent of those who do not identify as Indigenous.

As is the case with younger workers, then, it's possible that immigrant, racialized and Indigenous workers are less securely employed and are therefore more concerned about the longer-term consequences of being physically distanced from their workplaces.

**Experiences of working from home**  
By immigrant background, strongly or somewhat agree



Subsample: Those working at home at least some days per week

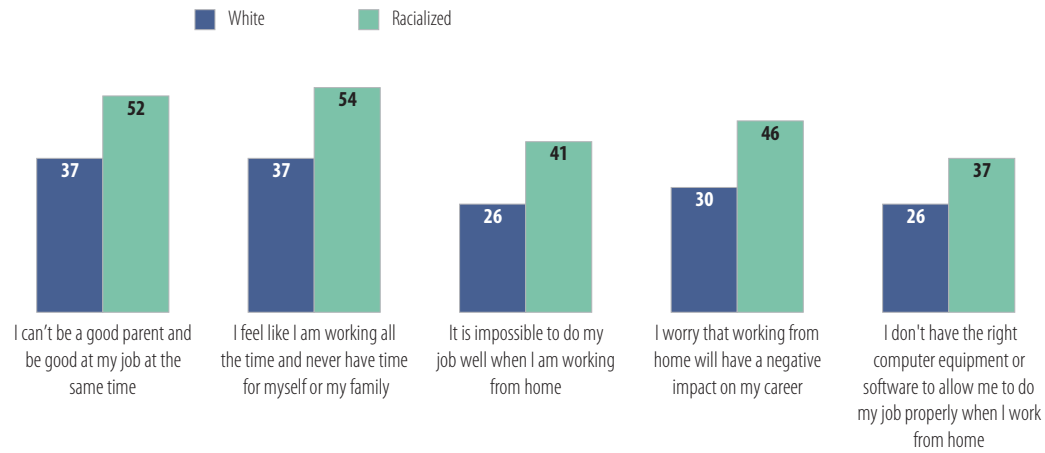
Q.24E

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about working from home ...?

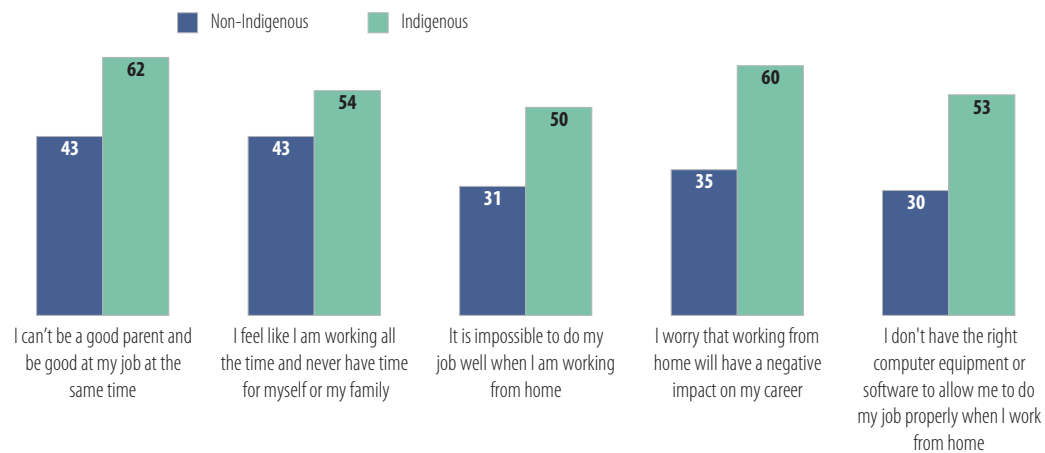
<sup>13</sup> These workers may also face barriers related to Internet access and affordability. This issue will be addressed in a later report in this series.

## Experiences of working from home

By racial identity, strongly or somewhat agree



## Indigenous and Non-Indigenous identity, strongly or somewhat agree



Subsample: Those working at home at least some days per week

Q.24E

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about working from home ...?

## Living with disabilities

Among those working from home, those who report having a physical or mental condition or difference that limits the amount or the kind of activity that they can do on a typical day are slightly more likely to agree with statements relating to the challenges of this work situation, compared to those who do not report such a condition or difference. For instance:<sup>14</sup>

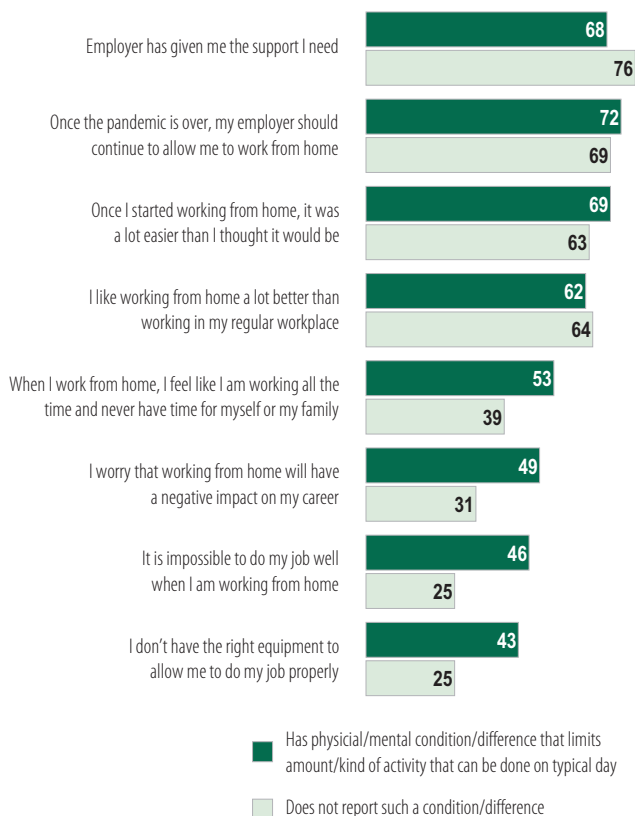
- 53% of those with a physical or mental condition or difference that limits their daily activity agree that “when I work from home, I feel like I am working all the time and never have time for myself or my family,” compared to 39% of others.
- 46% of those with a physical or mental condition or difference that limits their daily activity agree that “it is impossible to do my job well when I am working from home,” compared to 25% of others.

It’s especially notable that those with a physical or mental condition or difference that limits their daily activity (43%) are much more likely than others (25%) to agree that that “I don’t have the right computer equipment or software to allow me to do my job properly when I work from home.” Those with these limitations on their daily activities (49%) are also more likely than others (31%) to worry that working from home will have a negative impact on their careers.

At the same time, a majority (68%) of those with a physical or mental condition or difference that limits their daily activity agree that their employer has given them the support they need to enable them to work from home – though this is slightly lower than the proportion of those with no such limitations on their activity (76%). More generally, the more significant challenges that those with limitations on their activities face when working from home do not prevent them from also experiencing the upside. They’re just as likely as those with no such limitations to say they like working from home better; that they found it easier than expected; and that they hope it can continue on some days once the pandemic is over.

## Experiences of working from home, by restrictions on activity

Those working from home all or some days



Subsample: Those working at home at least some days per week

Q.24e

Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with each of the following statements about working from home:

<sup>14</sup> Among those who report having a condition or difference that limits their activity, the views of those who say their daily activity is *always or often* limited, and those who say it's *occasionally* limited, are very similar; in this section, therefore, the two groups have been combined.

