Flexible Work within the UN Common System: Implications for the International Civil Service

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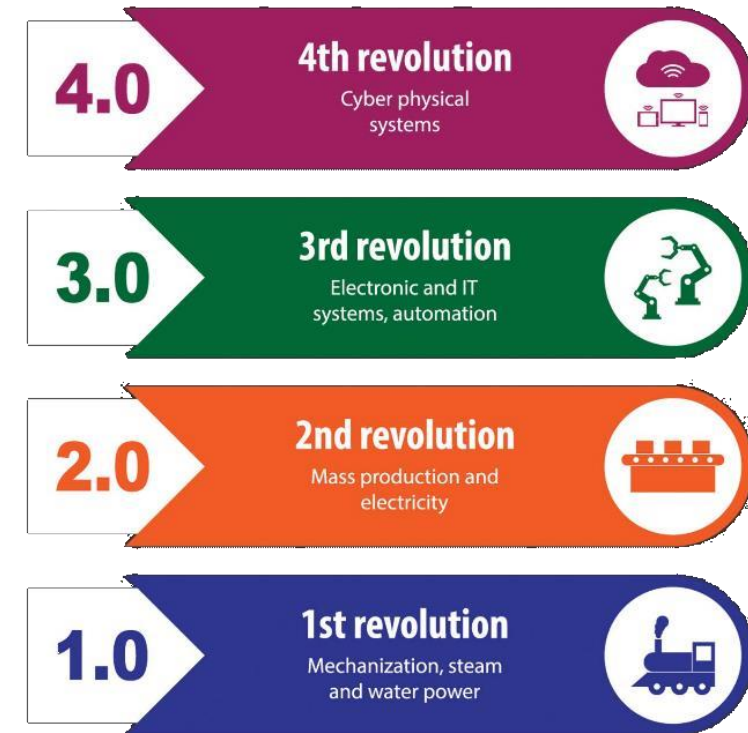
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- Context – concepts and definitions

- Key trends

- Model policy – key considerations

- Implementation challenges

  - Policy analysis

  - Staff perspectives

  - Manager perspectives

- Addressing the challenges and maximising the opportunities in the international civil service

- Recommendations

- The development of digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence (AI), advanced robotics, widespread connectivity, the internet of things and big data, wearables, mobile devices and online platforms, **is changing the nature and location of work, who works and when, and how work is organized and managed**.

- Includes: **Telecommuting or Teleworking or Remote Work**; Online jobs, Platform work; Hot desking; 'At-home' jobs; Virtual team/Distributed team/Dispersed virtual team; Virtual reality (VR); Augmented reality (AR); AI and Robotics etc.

- New ways of work including flexible work arrangements and alternative forms of work offer the potential for innovative and exciting developments in the workplace, but also present new challenges.

- Flexible and alternative work arrangements are not new, but their use has rapidly increase in the past decade and *further accelerated by the pandemic*
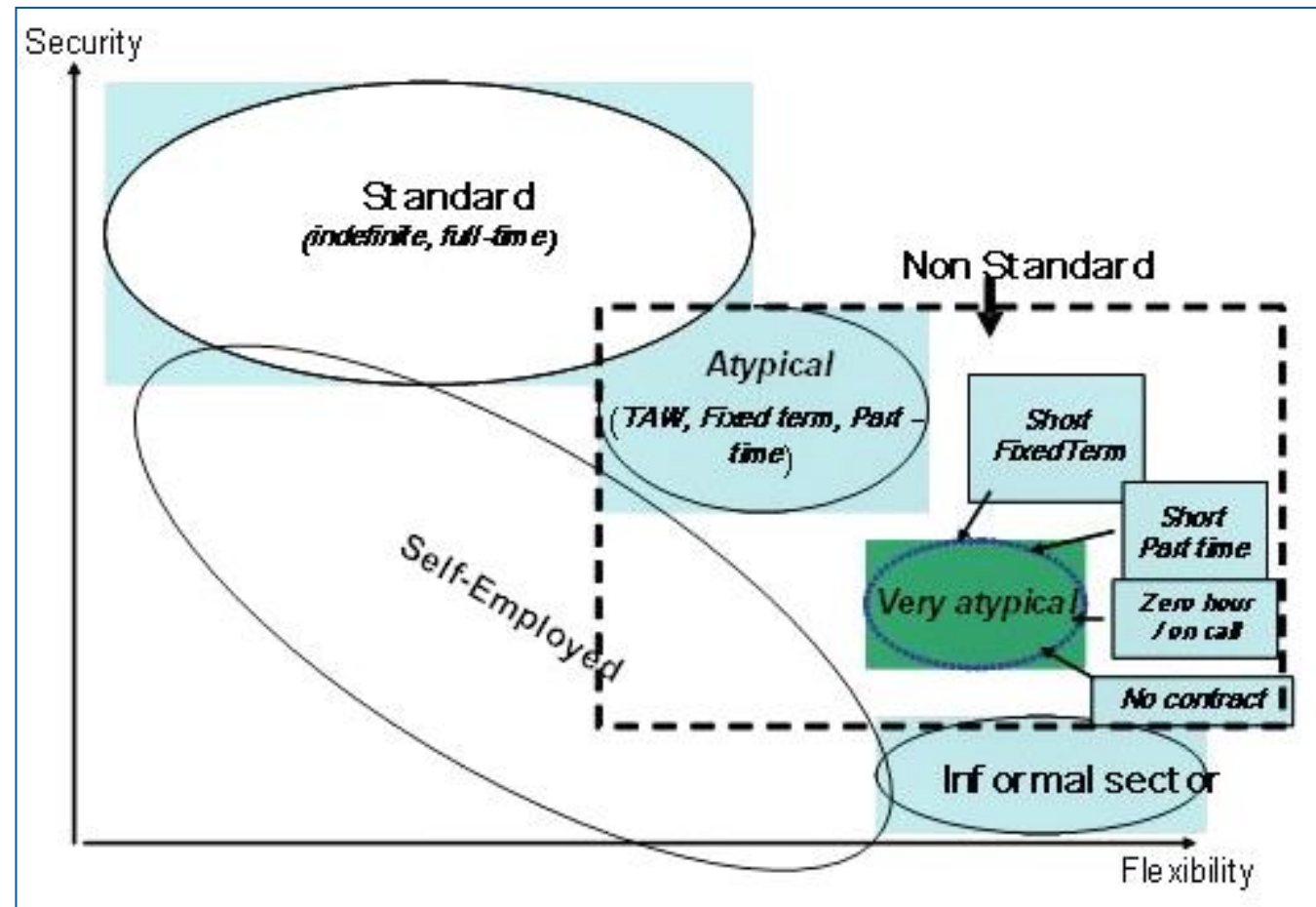
- FWA can be broken down by **where** (flexplace) and **when** (flextime) one's work is performed (Kossek & Michel, 2011; Rau & Hyland, 2002).

- Key characteristics include Flexibility in Scheduling, Reduced Hours/Part-Time Work, Compressed Workhours, Remote Work/Telecommuting and Job Sharing

- According to the UN System Model Policy on Flexible Work policy, flexible work options include:
  - *Flexible working hours*
  - *Compressed work schedule*
  - *Teleworking from the duty station*
  - *Teleworking away from the duty station*
  - *Part-time work*
  - *Part-time work in specific situations* (job-sharing, return to work, phased retirement)

- The policy recognizes that flexible work provides a foundation for work-life harmony and offers UN personnel the flexibility to effectively manage both their work and personal responsibilities. These arrangements support overall well-being, including the mental and physical health of UN personnel, as well as motivation, productivity and contribute to attraction and retention of talent (UN, 2021)

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- Alternative work arrangements are more about the nature of the employment contract and the relationship between the worker and the organization rather than the flexibility in scheduling or location (Mas & Pallais, 2020; Spreitzer et al., 2017). They include work patterns, such as:

  - Short-term contract work
  - Freelancing
  - Temporary Work
  - Consulting

- Part-time work vs part time employment: *Part-time work* applies to existing personnel who may require adjustments to their contractual status on a temporary or semi-permanent basis during the course of the career lifecycle, while, *part-time employment* implies that the employee is recruited on that basis (UN, 2021).
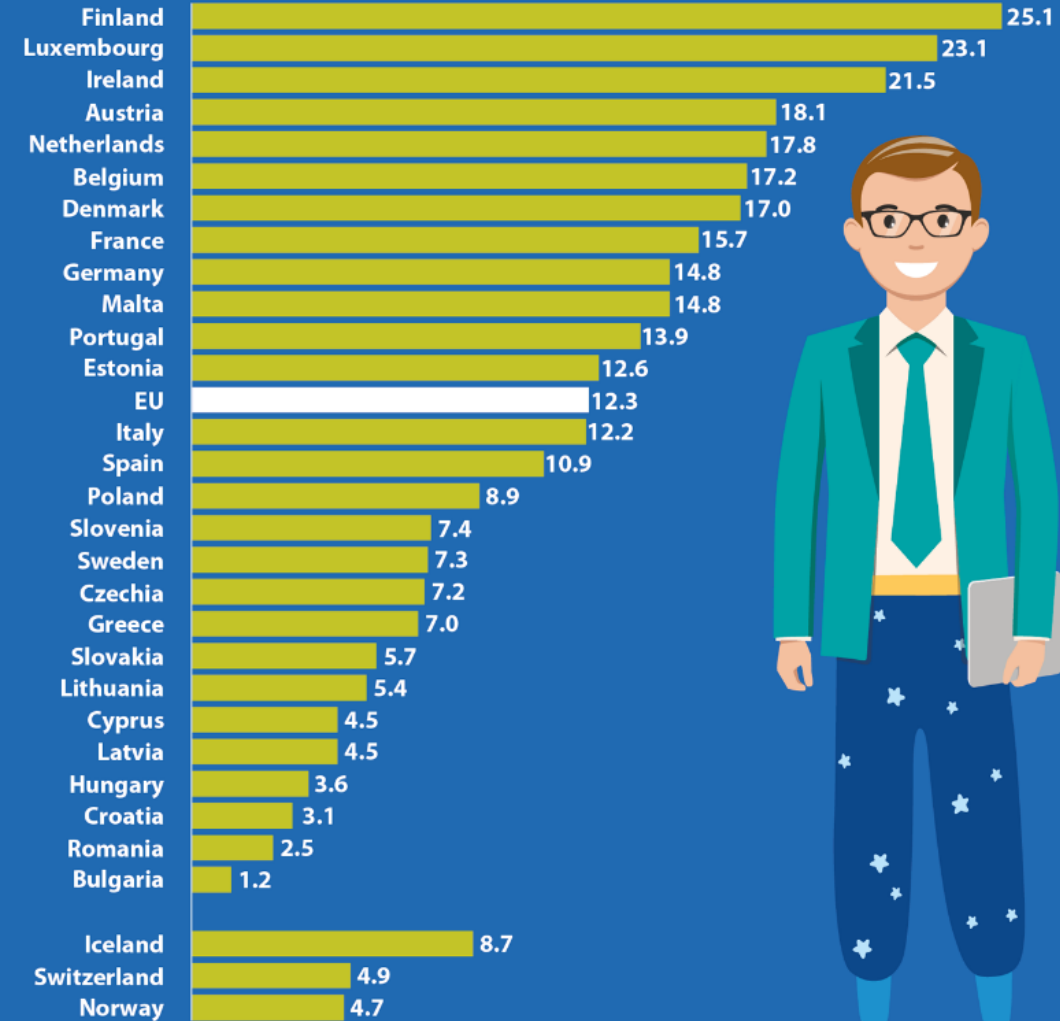

Source: Eurofound (2005) - Flexible forms of work: 'very atypical' contractual arrangements'

- In 2020, 12.3% of employed persons in the EU, aged 15-64, usually or sometimes worked remotely from home (Eurostat, 2021). Post-Covid-19 the proportion of Europeans working remotely virtually shot up to 40% (Eurostat, 2020).

- Marked differences across countries (Nordic, Benelux vs Eastern, Southern), sectors (knowledge intensive vs manufacturing and others) and types of jobs (white collar, highly skilled, managerial vs others)

- Several public administrations are currently exploring how to integrate new and recently-introduced tools to the broader workforce management agenda, including remote working and flexible time options (OECD, 2023)

People usually working from home, 2020
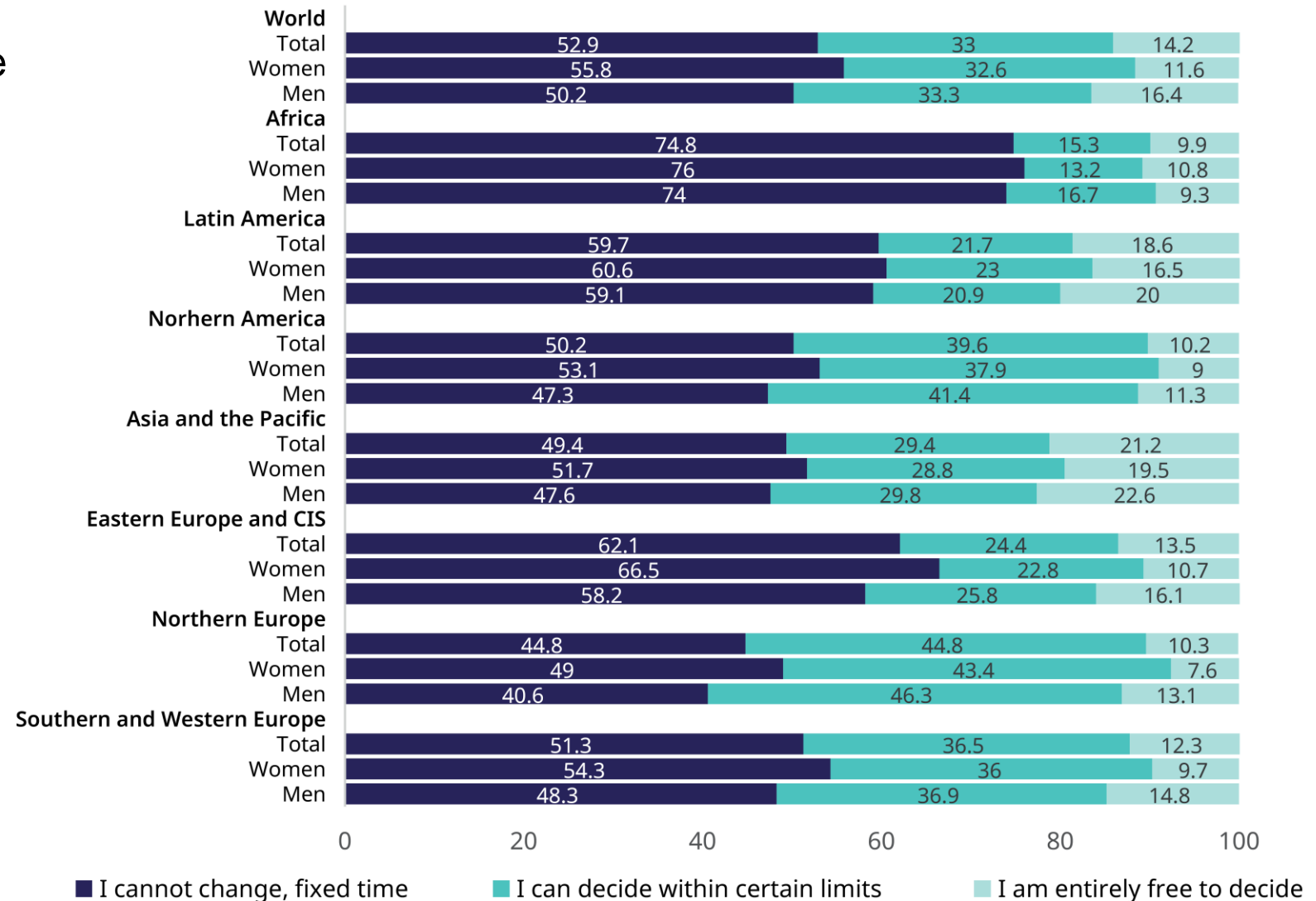(% of employed people aged 15-64)

Country	%
Finland	25.1
Luxembourg	23.1
Ireland	21.5
Austria	18.1
Netherlands	17.8
Belgium	17.2
Denmark	17.0
France	15.7
Germany	14.8
Malta	14.8
Portugal	13.9
Estonia	12.6
EU	12.3
Italy	12.2
Spain	10.9
Poland	8.9
Slovenia	7.4
Sweden	7.3
Czechia	7.2
Greece	7.0
Slovakia	5.7
Lithuania	5.4
Cyprus	4.5
Latvia	4.5
Hungary	3.6
Croatia	3.1
Romania	2.5
Bulgaria	1.2
Iceland	8.7
Switzerland	4.9
Norway	4.7

Germany: provisional data with low reliability.

ec.europa.eu/**eurostat**

- Flextime is perhaps the most common form of flexible working-time arrangement (ILO 2011).

- Globally nearly half of all employees (47.1 per cent) have access to some form of flexibility concerning their work schedules – typically within certain limits

- Schedule flexibility is more widely available to men than to women.

- Access to such flexible schedules is most widespread in Northern Europe (55.1%) and least common in Africa, where nearly three quarters of employees work on traditional fixed schedules (ILO, 2022).
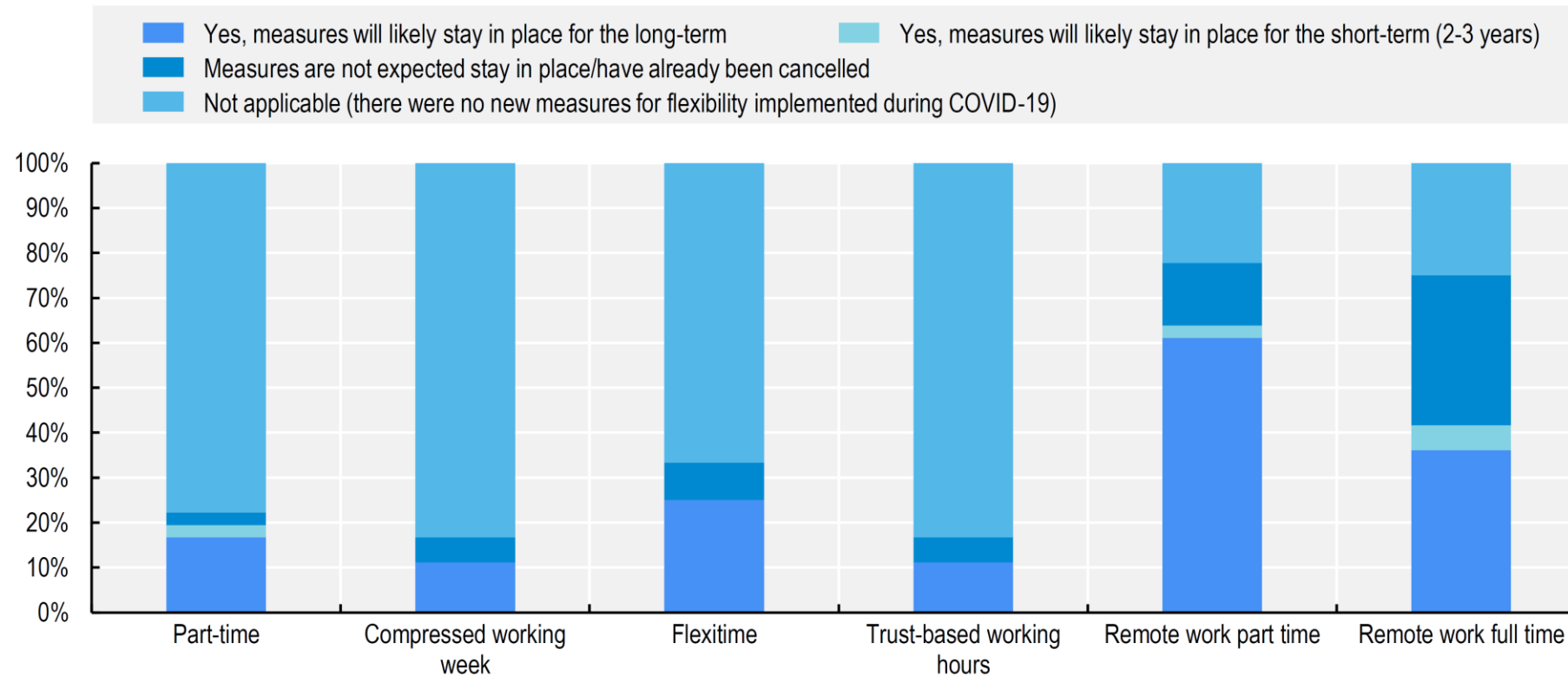
	I cannot change, fixed time	I can decide within certain limits	I am entirely free to decide
World			
Total	52.9	33	14.2
Women	55.8	32.6	11.6
Men	50.2	33.3	16.4
Africa			
Total	74.8	15.3	9.9
Women	76	13.2	10.8
Men	74	16.7	9.3
Latin America			
Total	59.7	21.7	18.6
Women	60.6	23	16.5
Men	59.1	20.9	20
Norhern America			
Total	50.2	39.6	10.2
Women	53.1	37.9	9
Men	47.3	41.4	11.3
Asia and the Pacific			
Total	49.4	29.4	21.2
Women	51.7	28.8	19.5
Men	47.6	29.8	22.6
Eastern Europe and CIS			
Total	62.1	24.4	13.5
Women	66.5	22.8	10.7
Men	58.2	25.8	16.1
Northern Europe			
Total	44.8	44.8	10.3
Women	49	43.4	7.6
Men	40.6	46.3	13.1
Southern and Western Europe			
Total	51.3	36.5	12.3
Women	54.3	36	9.7
Men	48.3	36.9	14.8

Trends in public administrations regarding flexible ways of work

Legend:
- Higher demand and use from employees
- Lower demand and use from employees
- Stable demand and use from employees
- Not available

Categories: Part-time, Compressed working week, Flexitime, Trust-based working hours, Remote work part time, Remote work full time

Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability.

- Eurofound (2020): nearly all financial-services employment is potentially virtually teleworkable (93%), 79% in information/communication, <u>around two-thirds in education and public administration</u>, real estate, professional, scientific and technical activities, 30% in health, 27% in retail, 10-20% in manufacturing and construction

Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability.

- *Post pandemic, the civil service is reflecting on what the new normal looks like, and despite having identified clear benefits, public administrations are unsure about the future and the depth of modalities offered during the pandemic (OECD, 2023), this is also seen in the international civil service*

- Inconsistent terminology and definitions

- Significant differences in provisions of flexible work options included in the UN System Model Policy on Flexible Work policy (Flexible working hours, Compressed work schedule, Teleworking from/away from duty station, Part-time work)

- Variance in, and lack of clarity on key procedural steps and requirements relating to submission of flexible work arrangement requests, consultation between staff member and line manager, time frame for approval, criteria for approval or disapproval, avenues available to staff to appeal, and the conditions for early discontinuation of flexible work arrangement agreements.

- Most of the organizations reviewed their flexible working arrangement policies in the past three years. Most revisions focused on different teleworking scenarios, including clearer parameters relating to requirements and conditions, duration, approval process and details on the impact of flexible working arrangements including compensation package, entitlements and insurance.

- Some organizations have issued additional implementation guidelines that provide further details and guidance to both line managers and staff on how to apply the policies.

- Lack of comprehensive coverage of flexible work arrangements management by oversight/accountability functions

- Further alignment with other policies (mental health, disability etc.) and support to develop organizational culture that supports flexible work arrangements needed.
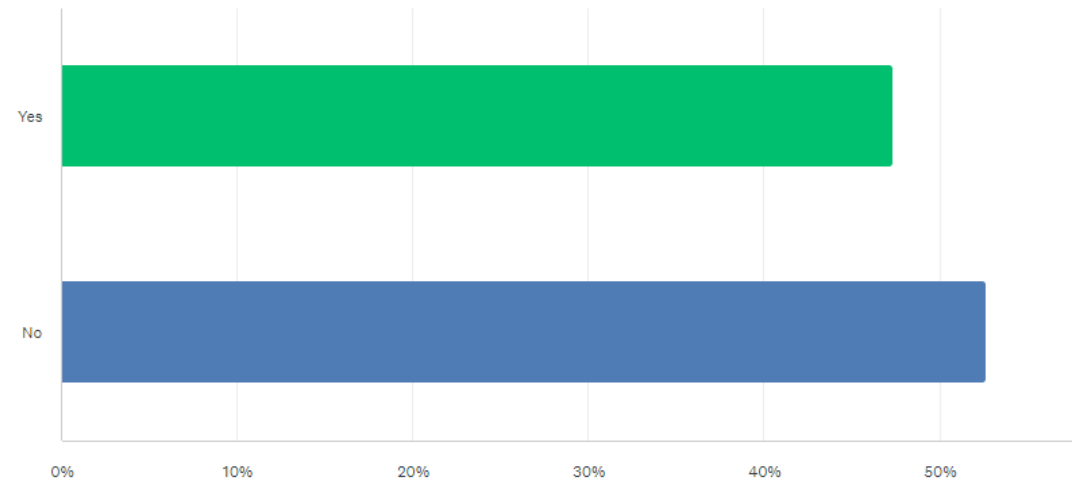
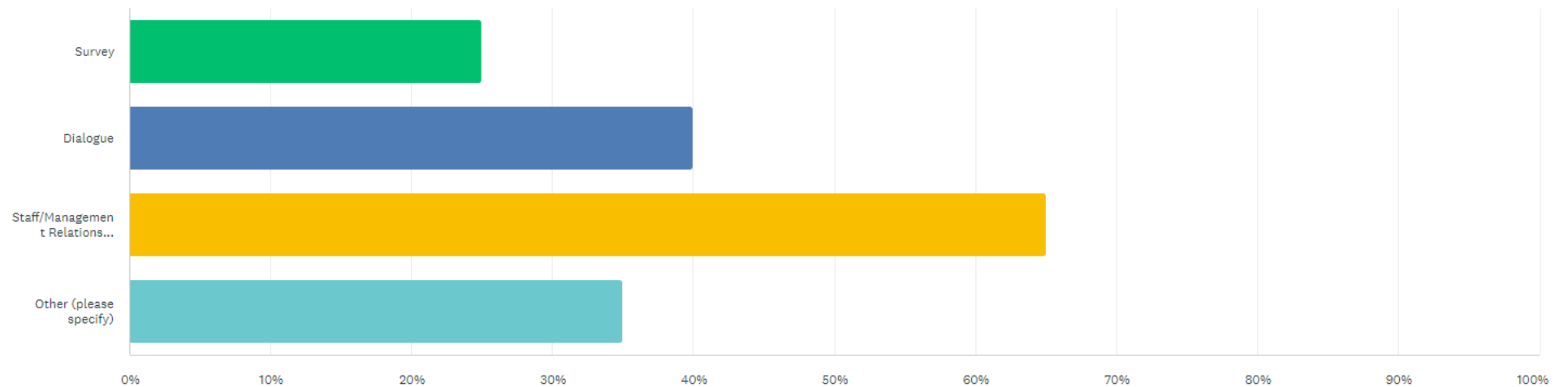Did your organization apply the CEB Model Policy?
Answered: 19 Skipped: 1

Is your organization implementing it differently from the model policy? If yes, in what way?
Answered: 19 Skipped: 1

Is your Staff Association / Union or staff at large consulted in promulgation of the Flexible Work policy? In what way?
Answered: 20 Skipped: 0

Staff Perspectives – Does the organization's policy include (and for how long once approved) flexible work options outlined in the UN model policy

	Yes	No	In progress	Total	Up to a year	Six Months	Require approval each time	Total
Compressed work schedule	9 respondents (47.37 %)	9 respondents (47.37 %)	1 respondent (5.26 %)	19	5 respondents (50 %)	1 respondent (10 %)	4 respondents (40 %)	10
Teleworking from duty station	16 respondents (84.21 %)	3 respondents (15.79 %)	0 respondents (0.00 %)	19	6 respondents (46.15 %)	3 respondents (23.08 %)	4 respondents (30.77 %)	13
Teleworking outside duty station	14 respondents (73.68 %)	5 respondents (26.32 %)	0 respondents (0.00 %)	19	2 respondents (15.38 %)	3 respondents (23.08 %)	8 respondents (61.54 %)	13
Part-time work	12 respondents (63.16 %)	7 respondents (36.84 %)	0 respondents (0.00 %)	19	3 respondents (30 %)	0 respondents (0.00 %)	7 respondents (70 %)	10
Alternate Work Arrangements	11 respondents (57.89 %)	7 respondents (36.84 %)	1 respondent (5.26 %)	19	1 respondents (10 %)	0 respondents (0.00 %)	9 respondents (90 %)	10

Key aspects of model policy present in organizational policies
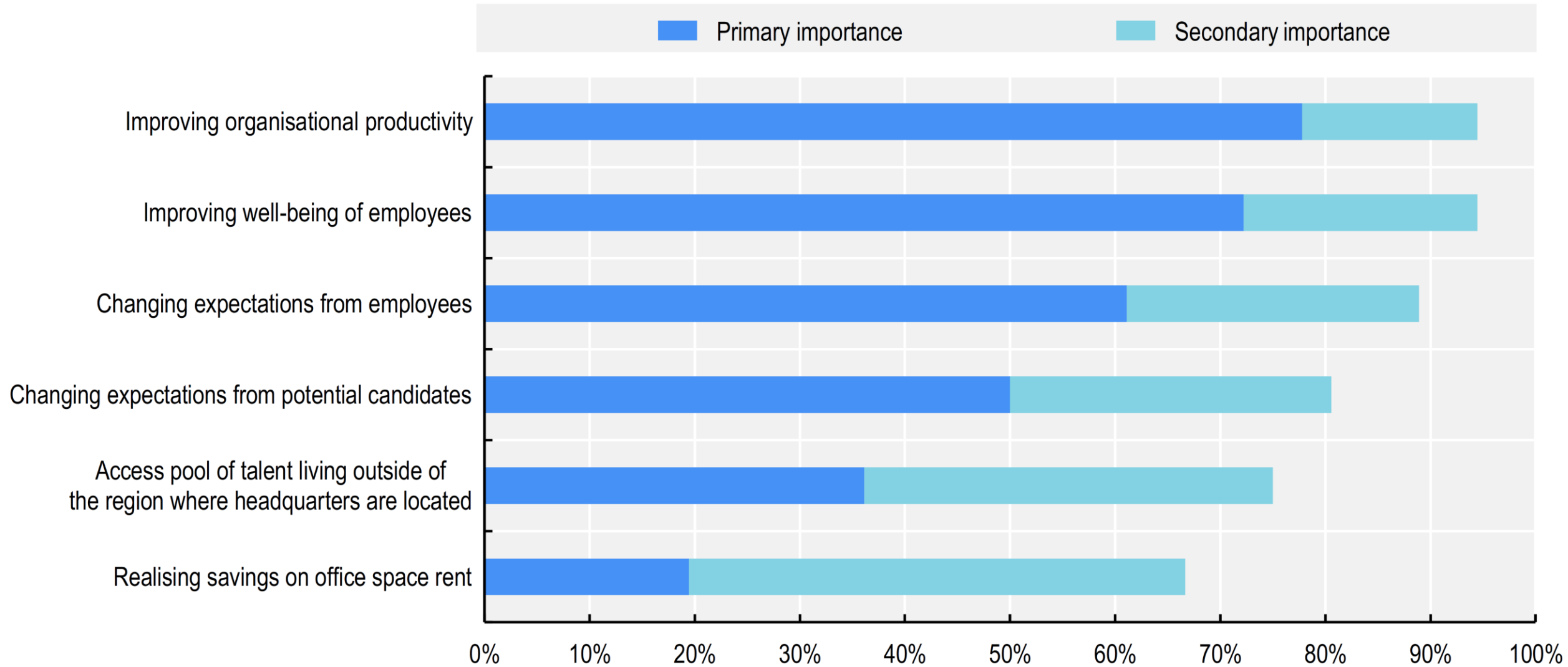
Flexible Work may be applicable to all personnel, regardless of grade or level. Organizations should promote equal applicability across the workforce so that all personnel have fair and equitable access to a range of flexible work. Managers are expected to model and promote these arrangements, subject to exigencies of service.	**75%**
Managers should be encouraged to consider Flexible Work requests favourably, while duly considering the compatibility with the completion of functions and exigencies of service. Personnel do not need to provide reasons for their requests. Any decision (approval or denial) should be transparently communicated and, if denied, the reason should be clearly justified.	**50%**
Flexible work arrangements are aimed at supporting work-life harmony, allowing UN personnel to effectively manage both work and personal responsibilities. It is beneficial to overall well-being, including mental and physical health, as well as improving motivation, productivity, and aiding in the attraction and retention of talent.	**56.25%**
Flexible Work is voluntary and initiated by UN personnel, different from alternate working arrangements decided by the organization.	**75%**
There are environmental benefits of flexible work arrangements, such as reduced travel and carbon emissions.	**43.75%**
Flexible work arrangements should be implemented in a manner that supports and balances both the operational effectiveness of the organization (operational needs and exigencies of service) and the well-being of its workforce.	**81.25%**

Manager Perspectives – Results from JIU Line Manager Survey

Flexible working arrangement policy areas and practices requiring improvement	% of respondents
Further refinements are necessary in the organization's policy on flexible working arrangements as well as in the inter-related policies	69
Managers and supervisors should be made aware of their rights and responsibilities	57
Standard procedures are needed for uniform implementation across the organization(s)	53
Adequate managerial training and guidance relating to flexible working arrangements	53
Written guidance is needed to indicate which job types do not lend themselves to certain types of flexible working arrangements and/or are not authorized in certain working environments	49
Different layers of approval should be avoided; the line manager should take the final decision	48

Recurring challenges related to flexible working arrangements and their implementation
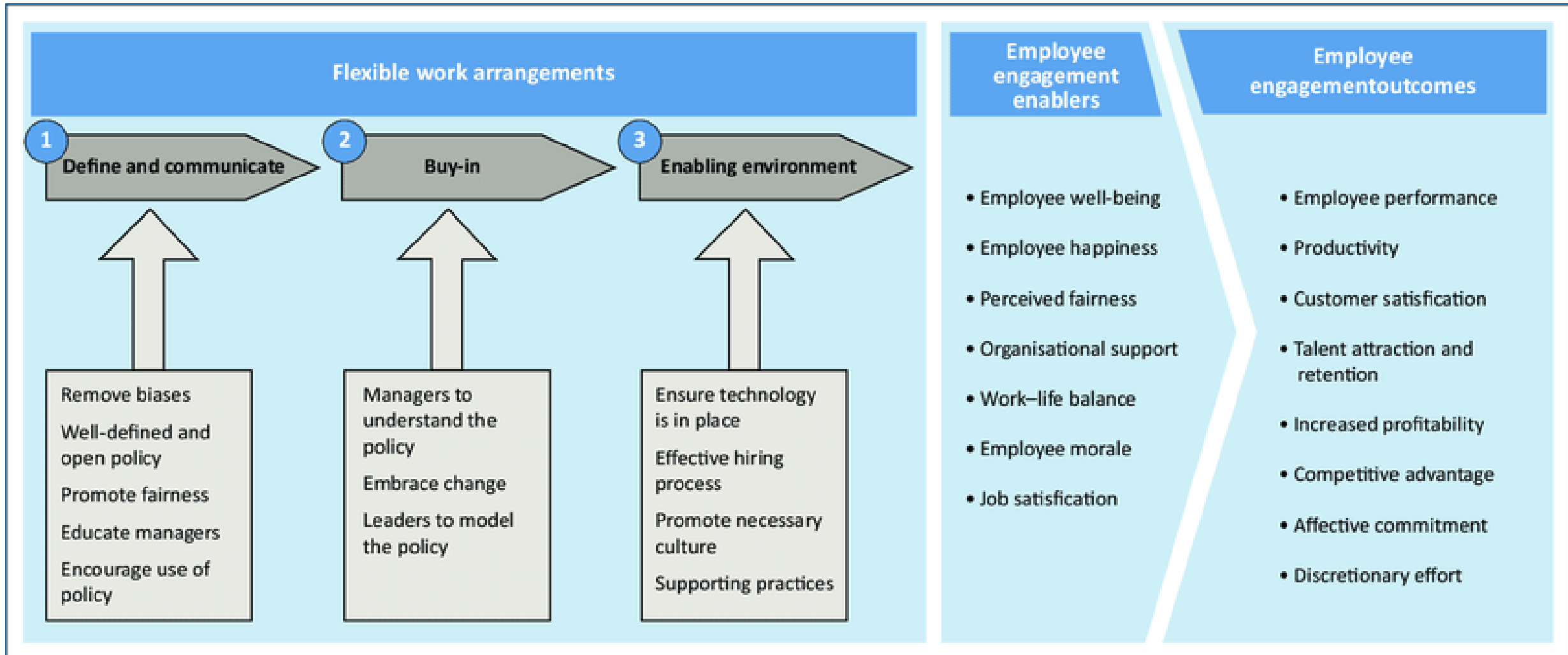
- Weak compliance with rules
- Risks of abuse and lack of accountability
- Inadequate monitoring systems
- Lack of analytical information on flexible working arrangements, including their impact (gender, work-life balance, individual and organizational productivity)
- Day-to-day supervision of staff and managing hybrid teams
- Flexible working arrangements considered an entitlement by some staff members
- Cumbersome approval processes
- Inadequate support from senior and executive management

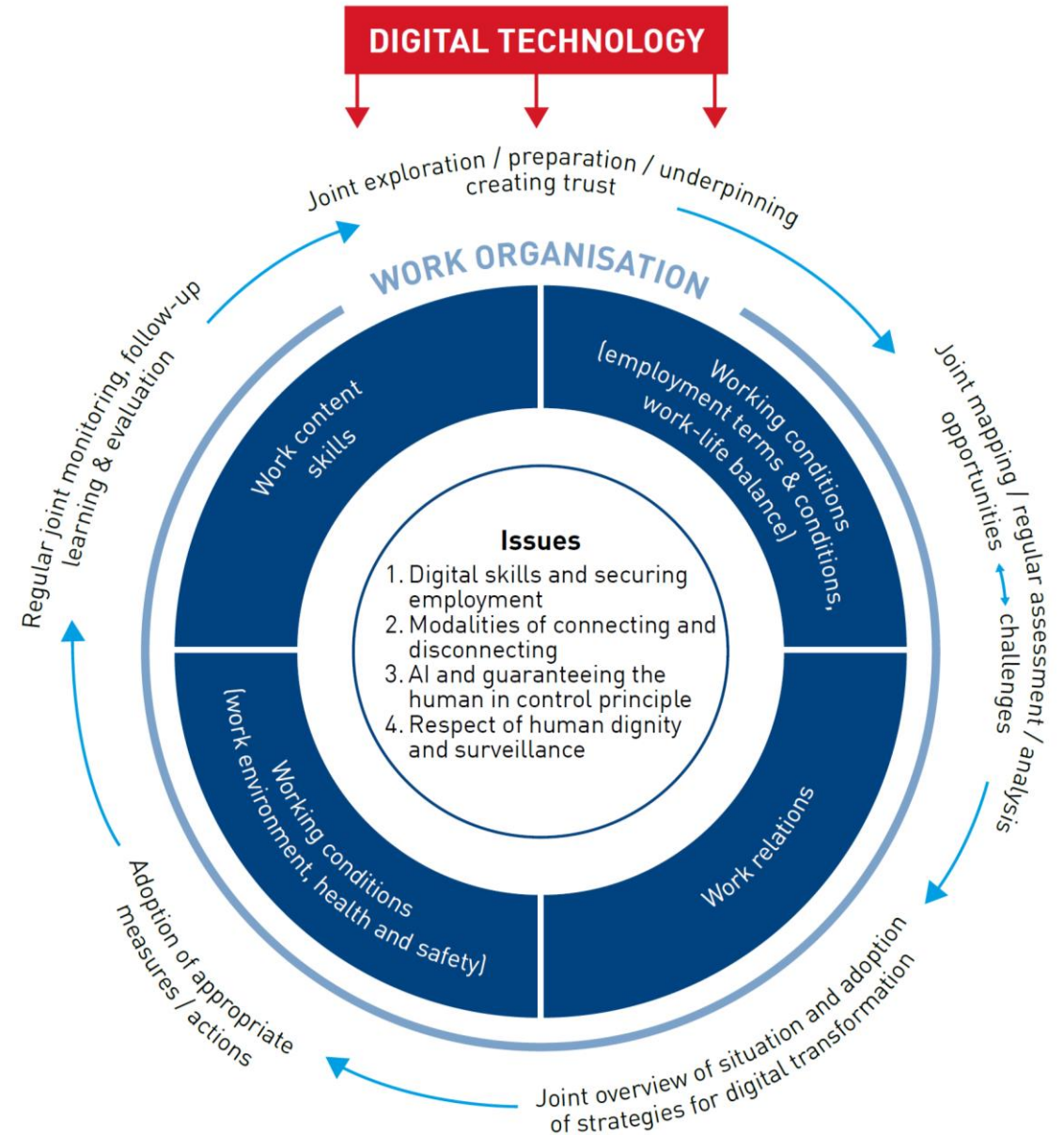# Factors driving flexible work policies in public administrations

Source: OECD (2022), Survey on Public Service Leadership and Capability.

Weideman & Hofmeyr (2020)

This framework can be used to raise awareness and improve understanding of managers, staff and their representatives of the opportunities and challenges resulting from the changes in ways of work (including contract modalities) and encourage a partnership approach between them while enabling them to identify concrete approaches, actions and measures, they can take to implement effective flexible work arrangements, according to their specific needs and circumstances, to address issues across four key areas:

a) Work content and skills, working conditions (work environment, health and safety)

b) Employment/working conditions (employment terms and conditions, work-life balance),

c) Work relations

d) Work organization

Source: EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS (2020) AUTONOMOUS FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT ON DIGITALISATION

- A focus on quality and effective training: This means to provide access to relevant training responding to the identified training needs of the employer and the worker. A key aspect of this in the context of the FWA is to train managers and workers, to help them make the best possible use of the flexible work arrangements that are introduced.

- Modalities of connecting and disconnecting
    - Respect of FWA policies (working time rules and teleworking and mobile work rules etc);
    - Providing guidance and information for employers and workers on how to respect FWA rules including on how to use digital tools, e.g. emails, including the risks of being overly connected particularly for health, safety and well-being (inclusion of FWA related risks in risk registers);
    - Commitment from management to create a culture that respects FWA policies which include provision to avoid out of hours contact;
    - Work organization and workload, including the number of staff, are key aspects which need to be identified and evaluated jointly between managers and workers and/or their representatives;
    - Appropriate measures to ensure compliance;
    - Prevention of isolation at work.

- Information and communications technology-based solutions to enable flexible work arrangements and new ways of working

- Senior management and staff representatives should include the topic of flexible working arrangements in the agendas of staff management discussions, including in the appropriate formal forums, such as staff management committees, so as to address the issues raised by staff representatives and managers.

- Focus on flexible work arrangements rather than alternate work arrangements (which can foster precarity)

- Improved approval processes
  - Mandatory submission of the formal request in the management system and/or ERP system
  - Time frame for approval of requests and automatic approval if there is no reaction on the part of the line manager within the specified time frame
  - Consultations between employee and manager(s), if necessary
  - "Default" approval of requests if organizational conditions are satisfied
  - Mandatory written reasons provided by line manager if a request is rejected
  - Use of detailed forms/templates for flexible work arrangement agreements
  - Annual review of flexible work arrangement agreements

Source: JIU, 2023

- Include generic definition of flexible working arrangements in organization's policy guidance, in order to clearly establish the scope of the policy and differentiate the arrangements from other forms of flexible work

- Develop, by the end of 2026, methods to measure the impact of the assumed benefits and the unintended consequences of flexible working arrangements, including the effects of prolonged teleworking modalities, to ensure that the arrangements in place are in the best interests of the personnel and the organization.

- Integrate flexible working arrangement considerations into the next iteration of their organization's human resources management strategy, in order to ensure a strategic approach to flexible working arrangements.

- Provide periodic updates on the implementation of flexible working arrangements and teleworking policies, including statistical data, disaggregated by gender and other relevant dimensions, with a view to ensuring data-driven and evidence-based decision-making on flexible working arrangements management.

- Include a quantifiable definition of "commuting distance" in organization's policy guidance on flexible working arrangements, for headquarters and field duty stations, in order to improve compliance with the exigencies of service provision.

- Review, by 2025, the management systems and tools related to data collection and analysis of flexible working arrangements and ensure that they are upgraded as necessary and fit for purpose, in order to support data-driven and effective management of flexible working arrangements

- Establish a working group to develop, by the end of 2026, harmonized criteria for determining the maximum duration of teleworking outside the duty station and for adjusting the entitlements and benefits should such teleworking be used beyond the established maximum duration, with a view to achieving system-wide coherence.

- Consider, the Secretary-General's proposals regarding harmonized criteria, within the current United Nations common system framework, for determining the maximum duration of teleworking outside the duty station and for adjusting the entitlements and benefits should such teleworking be used beyond the established maximum duration.

- Present, starting in 2026, voluntary periodic reports, ideally on a triennial basis, on the implementation of the United Nations System Model Policy on Flexible Work, in order to maximize its benefits and promote system-wide coherence, including through sharing related experiences, challenges, achievements and innovative good practices.

JIU, 2023

Thank You!!!

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