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National Survey
A Majority of US Employees Want Remote Work Arrangement to Stay

The coronavirus threat pushed employers and employees into the remote workspace in record time, accelerating a digital transformation that has been underway since the advent of the personal computer. Historically, however, many organizations remained wary of letting their staff work from home – this despite substantial evidence that letting people work remotely boosts productivity and worker satisfaction. According to Flexjobs, 3.4% of the total US workforce telecommuted in 2019, up from 2.9% in 2015.[1] By early April 2020, the percentage of Americans working from home had climbed to about 50%.[2] The pandemic left organizations with little choice but to participate in the world's largest work-from-home experiment – and now the world of work may never be the same again.
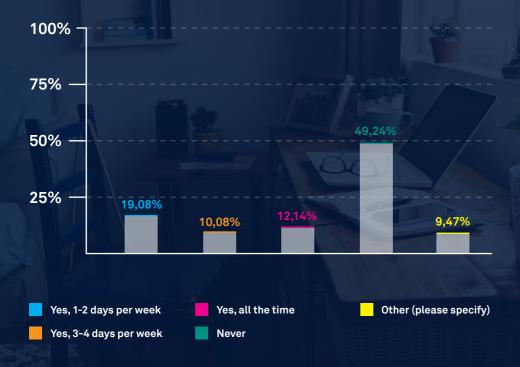
[1] Weiler Reynolds, Brie. "159% Increase in Remote Work Since 2005: FlexJobs & Global Workplace Analytics Report." Flexjobs (blog), July 29, 2019, https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/flexjobs-gwa-report-remote-growth.

[2] Guyot, Katherine and Isabel V. Sawhill. "Telecommuting Will Likely Continue After the Pandemic." Brookings Institution, April 6, 2020, https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2020/04/06/telecommuting-will-likely-continue-long-after-the-pandemic/.

How have workers fared with working from home? Do they want to keep working remotely or are they eager to return to the office once it's safe to do so? getAbstract has conducted a survey to find out.

The online survey, which was conducted between April 16 and 17, 2020, included more than 1,200 full-time people who are working from home in the United States during the pandemic. Survey participants included a nearly equal number of women and men respondents from a range of ages, income levels and careers.

Many survey participants already had at least some experience with home office prior to the pandemic. Forty percent of respondents said they had been working from home regularly at least one day per week.

BEFORE the COVID-19 pandemic, in a typical week, did you ever work remotely? (i.e. not in a traditional office, and in a different place from most of your colleagues. this could be from home, from a public place like a coffee shop or from a co-working space)

100%	
75%	
50%	49,24%
25%	19,08% 10,08% 12,14% 9,47%

- 🟦 Yes, 1-2 days per week
- 🟧 Yes, 3-4 days per week
- 🟥 Yes, all the time
- 🟩 Never
- 🟨 Other (please specify)

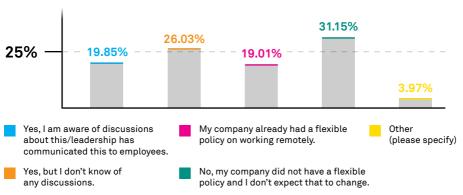Asked about whether they would like to go back to their pre-COVID-19 work arrangement, 43% of respondents said they would like to work remotely more of the time going forward, while 35% indicated that they would like to go back to their former schedule. Only 12% said the experience of being sequestered at home is making them want to spend more time in an office environment.

Compared to your schedule before COVID-19, do you want to change your schedule after COVID-19 (after the threat of disease has passed, and schools, offices and other institutions have reopened)?

- 42.67% — Yes, I want to work remotely more of the time.
- 12.37% — Yes, I want to work in an office more of the time.
- 34.96% — No, I want to maintain my former schedule.
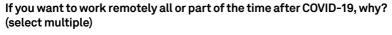- 7.56% — I already worked remotely full-time.
- 2.44% — Other

The decisive factor, however, will be how employers will respond to shifting employee attitudes toward telecommuting. Nineteen percent of respondents said that their company already had a flexible policy on remote work in place prior to the pandemic, while another 20% said implementing such a policy is currently under active discussion at their company. Another 26% expressed optimism that their employer will offer them more flexibility in the future.

Do you think your company will allow more flexibility in working remotely after COVID-19?

- 19.85% — Yes, I am aware of discussions about this/leadership has communicated this to employees.
- 26.03% — Yes, but I don't know of any discussions.
- 19.01% — My company already had a flexible policy on working remotely.
- 31.15% — No, my company did not have a flexible policy and I don't expect that to change.
- 3.97% — Other (please specify)

The top three reasons among survey participants for wanting to work remotely were: Not having to commute; enjoying a more flexible schedule; and being more productive at work. Respondents also stressed the advantage of having more time to pursue hobbies or spend with loved ones.

If you want to work remotely all or part of the time after COVID-19, why? (select multiple)

- ■ (light blue) I am more productive
- ■ (orange) My performance is better.
- ■ (magenta) I don't have to commute.
- ■ (teal) My schedule is more flexible.
- ■ (red) I have more time with my family/friends.
- ■ (blue) I have more time for hobbies or exercising.
- ■ (yellow) I don't want to work remotely.
- ■ (dark blue) Other (please specify)

Bar values: 36.79%, 27.79%, 55.27%, 48.32%, 34.27%, 30.46%, 20.00%, 3.59%
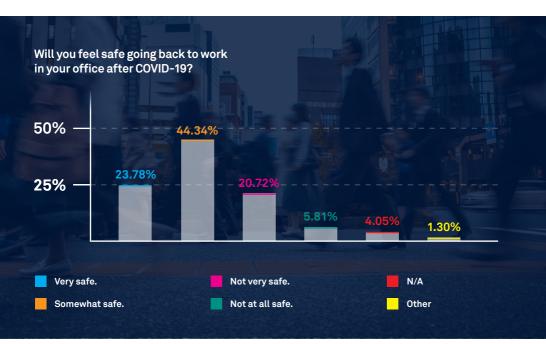
Asked about what they perceived as the biggest drawback of working from home, over a quarter of respondents mentioned feelings of isolation. Others were concerned about imperfect telecommuting technologies or feared becoming detached from their company and co-workers. Seventeen percent felt that distractions at home would pose a significant challenge.

What, if any, are the biggest downsides to continuing to work from home AFTER COVID-19?

- ■ (light blue) I will feel isolated
- ■ (orange) Telecommuting technology doesn't always work well
- ■ (magenta) Telecommuting technology is hard to use
- ■ (teal) It will be hard to feel connected to my company
- ■ (red) I will be distracted
- ■ (yellow) Other

Bar values: 27.33%, 20.08%, 4.35%, 19.39%, 17.25%, 11.06%

Virus-related health and safety concerns, however, were not top-of-mind for a majority of respondents. Only 25% said they did not feel safe returning to the office after the pandemic.

Will you feel safe going back to work in your office after COVID-19?

- 50%
- 44.34%
- 25%
- 23.78%
- 20.72%
- 5.81%
- 4.05%
- 1.30%

- ■ Very safe.
- ■ Somewhat safe.
- ■ Not very safe.
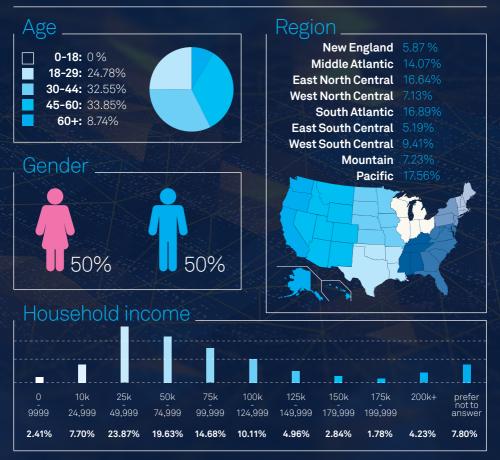- ■ Not at all safe.
- ■ N/A
- ■ Other

The survey underlines the strong popularity of remote work options, making it almost impossible to imagine that organizations will go back to how things were before the pandemic.

"Our survey is the tip of the iceberg on the seismic, long term changes the coronavirus pandemic is bringing to how people work, cities develop and employers invest in offices and technology," says Andrew Savikas, chief strategy officer at getAbstract. While exact implications of these unprecedented shifts in work arrangements remain uncertain, Savikas believes they could bring societal changes that rival the entry of large numbers of women into the workforce decades ago.

As employees and employers discover new ways of working together, they are not just creating opportunity. They are creating history.

Survey Respondent Demographics

Age

- ☐ **0-18:** 0 %
- ☐ **18-29:** 24.78%
- ☐ **30-44:** 32.55%
- ☐ **45-60:** 33.85%
- ☐ **60+:** 8.74%

Region

New England	5.87 %
Middle Atlantic	14.07%
East North Central	16.64%
West North Central	7.13%
South Atlantic	16.89%
East South Central	5.19%
West South Central	9.41%
Mountain	7.23%
Pacific	17.56%

Gender

50% (female)   50% (male)

Household income

0 – 9999	10k – 24,999	25k – 49,999	50k – 74,999	75k – 99,999	100k – 124,999	125k – 149,999	150k – 179,999	175k – 199,999	200k+	prefer not to answer
2.41%	7.70%	23.87%	19.63%	14.68%	10.11%	4.96%	2.84%	1.78%	4.23%	7.80%

To learn more about how employees, companies and society benefit from remote work, getAbstract recommends the following two summaries:

The Future of Work Looks Like Staying Out of the Office
Kate Cox
Ars Technica, 2020

Is Working Remotely Effective? Gallup Research Says Yes
Adam Hickman and Jennifer Robison
Gallup, Inc., 2020

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