

**Diamond Working Paper:**  
**Impacts of COVID-19 on employment fairness in  
the transport industry – challenges, employer  
support and flexible working**

Anne Marie Cullen, Yvonne Hail, Ronald McQuaid, University of Stirling UK

FINAL 27 October 2021





Project ref. no. H2020-MG-2018-SingleStage-INEA N° 824326	
<b>Project title</b>	Revealing fair and actionable knowledge from data to support women's inclusion in transport systems.
<b>Project duration</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> November 2018 – 31 <sup>st</sup> October 2021 (36 months)
<b>Website</b>	<a href="http://www.diamond-project.eu">www.diamond-project.eu</a>
<b>Related WP/Task</b>	WP4 and WP9
<b>Dissemination level</b>	PUBLIC
<b>Document due date</b>	-
<b>Actual delivery date</b>	27/10/2021
<b>Deliverable leader</b>	STIR
<b>Document status</b>	Draft / Released / Validated / Submitted

## Revision History

Version	Date	Author	Document history/approvals
0.1			Draft version circulated to partners
1.0		Deliverable leader	Writing: Anne Marie Cullen, Yvonne Hail, Ronald McQuaid (STIR) plus support for data gathering from TU Dublin (Ireland), STIR (UK), EURECAT (Spain), FGC (Spain) and ZTM (Poland).
1.0		Work Package Leader	Validation
1.0		Project Coordinator	Submission





## Executive Summary

### *Background*

This Working Paper considers the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employee experiences of work in the transport sector including: changes to place of work, challenges faced while working through the pandemic, employer support offered to employees, and areas where employees believed support was lacking.

Some 46 individuals were interviewed (or in one country took part in focus groups) in the summer of 2020 during the covid pandemic, in order to collect views from a wide range of professionals. These represented multi-level samples in terms of city level (Warsaw), regional level (Catalonia region of Spain), and national levels (Ireland and UK (Scotland and England)).

### *Findings and Conclusions*

The main findings relate to both: ‘front line’ transport workers such as drivers and others working in the field in customer-facing roles, who required particular health and safety support due to the covid pandemic; and office workers where there was a major move towards homeworking. While the value of the data discussed is mainly in its richness in terms of employee views, the broad summaries and conclusions for the specific research questions are now set out.

1. **During COVID did you work at home or at your usual location?** Overall, the responses suggest that the areas and countries were similar in terms of changes to work location. They do however point out how a worker’s role influenced their work location and wider concerns about covid at this time. As may be expected, ‘front line’ roles that were usually carried out in the field and were deemed essential during the pandemic, such as drivers and inspectors, continued to work in their usual location. Other roles, generally officed based, shifted rapidly from the workplace to working from home or a mix of both.
2. **Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced by working in your usual location?** Individuals working in their usual location, and who are not customer-facing workers that is those who usually work in the office, shifted to a mix of working from home and office, and generally did not report any specific challenges. However, the data does highlight that customer-facing, ‘front line’ workers, who worked in their usual location during the pandemic faced considerable challenges. Hence the ‘roles’ of the workers had the biggest impact on level of challenge faced. It is important to note that ‘front line worker responses mainly involved participants from the Spanish and Polish data were predominantly ‘front line’ workers, while few such workers were involved in the Irish and UK samples. Some further specific issues included: the lack of protective equipment for employees which seemed to be an issue in the initial stages of the pandemic when resources were limited; some customers not adhering to the covid safety measures that had been put in place; and those working in their usual workplace being challenged by conflicts and variations between safety measures and changes to regulations.
3. **Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced working at home?** Themes emerging from the data indicated that participants working from home faced some key technical challenges such as limited access to their work computers, laptops and printers particularly at the beginning of the lock downs, although there were some cases when this persisted throughout lock down. Technical challenges were also discussed in relation to multiple users attempting to access the





internet at the same time and band width problems with many home workers stating that having partners and children at home, who also required access to the internet for home schooling etc., made it difficult at times to log on during normal working hours. This resulted in many participants claiming they had to alter their usual working hours to work more early mornings and late nights to accommodate their partners and children. A lack of childcare generally during lock down meant that most children were at home with working parents during the day. These same parents then had responsibility not only for continuing their own work but also the additional responsibility of home schooling their children, this was reported across areas/countries and participants. A further challenge of working from home for many of the participants related to missing their co-workers and social interactions or “water cooler conversations”, with participants who worked both at home and in their usual location agreeing that the best part of working in their usual location on certain days was the social interactions with their co-workers.

4. **How did your organisation support you?** Participants reported that employers supported them well during the outbreak of covid in several ways, when working from home or in their usual workplace and upon returning to work. With regard to support received for those who moved to working from home, the majority of participants were satisfied with the measures their organisation undertook to support their shift to working from home, by providing everything from risk assessments and office equipment to IT support. With regard to participants who continued to work in their usual location the support provided by employers included the introduction of covid safety measures, such as Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) although sometimes this was delayed, and other safety measures and employer preparation for future outbreaks. Employees also benefited from a separation of workspaces, staggered worktimes, increased contact with managers, communication on non-work-related topics and general interaction, and support for the mental health and wellbeing of individuals. In addition, participants noted that the support they received included things like no reduction in wages for those whose hours were cut, no job losses and some appreciated opportunities to be redeployed to non-customer facing work or to work part time for a period. For parents work flexibility was particularly important.
5. **What could your organisation have done to support you more/better?** Some employees thought their organisation could have provided better support, although they recognised that as they were working through a crisis it was understandable that there were few opportunities for socialising virtually and some employers did not explicitly support these. Most appear to have felt well supported by the employers in the circumstances.





## Contents

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY.....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>3. METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>4. FINDINGS .....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>5. CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>6 REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>1. APPENDIX 1 - DATA COLLECTION .....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>2. APPENDIX 2 INTERVIEW AND FOCUS GROUP EXTRACTS.....</b>	<b>26</b>





## I. INTRODUCTION

A major aim of the DIAMOND project was to analyse and convert data into knowledge with notions of impartiality to support gender inclusion in current and future transport systems from the perspective of women as transport users and as professionals in the sector. This includes research examining *women's needs and barriers as employees* in Europe's transport sector with the aim of developing a toolkit to support the recruitment, retention and promotion of women in the transport sector.

The findings discussed here are based on the interview and focus group discussions carried out across 4 countries as part of Use Case IV in Work Package 4 of the DIAMOND project. It was during the initial stages of data collection in March 2020, that Covid-19 restrictions and social distancing rules were put in place across Europe. The project partners decided to add covid specific questions to capture data on individual experiences as the restrictions were being rolled out across Spain, Ireland, Poland and the UK.

**This Working Paper considers the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employees' experience of work in the transport sector including: changes to place of work, challenges faced while working through the pandemic, employer support offered to employees, and areas where employees believed support was lacking.**

The paper sets out some of the key issues related to working during the initial stages of the covid pandemic (during the summer of 2020), that were raised by participants working in the transport sector in the partner countries of Ireland, Poland, Spain and the UK (Southern, Eastern and North-western EU). These represented multi-level samples in terms of city level (Warsaw), regional level (Catalonia region of Spain), and national levels (Ireland and UK (Scotland and England)). In particular, issues related to the key challenges faced by working during the pandemic and how their organisation supported them are considered. As the sample size of this qualitative study is relatively limited, the range of issues considered cannot be comprehensive. However, the data highlights some of the issues experienced by workers in the transport sector during this unusual time and so provide evidence on issues such as the retention of women employees, particularly parents.

Semi-structured interviews and focus group protocols were developed by partners at the Technical University Dublin (TUDublin) and the University of Stirling (STIR) in order to explore the experiences of women who had worked in or were currently working in the transport sector (see Appendix I for further details). This Paper complements the relevant literature discussed elsewhere in the DIAMOND project (e.g. Deliverable D2.2), the data collection framework (see D3.1), and other quantitative and qualitative results set out in other deliverables (D4.2 and D4.4).

The DIAMOND research questions related to the covid pandemic were:

- I. During covid did you work at home or at your usual location?





2. Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced by working in your usual location?
3. Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced working at home?
4. How did your organisation support you?
5. What could your organisation have done to support you more/better?

The responses to these research questions were supplemented by information given by participants through the course of interviews, in the case of Ireland the UK and Spain and focus groups, in the case of Poland, where the issue of working through the pandemic and the impact of Covid restrictions at work were raised/discussed by participants while discussing other issues/questions.

Some of the relevant literature is now considered, followed by a description of the methodology used and then some findings and conclusions are presented.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The transport sector was initially affected strongly by COVID with major falls in employment and output reported between 2019 and 2020 (e.g. Transport Scotland, 2021; ILO, 2020). In recent times some sections (such as home shopping related, international goods transport and partly public transport) have partly recovered, while others (such as international air travel and associated industries) have yet to see a full recovery. The research in this paper, relates mainly to public transport sectors (bus, tram, train etc.) which was badly affected in 2020, although (after the research in this paper) has to-date shown partial recovery in terms of passengers and employment.

The covid pandemic, started to have significant impacts on employment in transport in early 2020 particularly for those in low paid jobs, including many in transport, that employ large proportions of women, as well as young people and those from ethnic and minority groups (Papoutsaki and Wilson, 2020; WIEGO, 2020) and young people (Konle-Seidl, R., Picarella, 2021 for the European Parliament). Those in the informal parts of the economy, and parts of the gig-economy, were particularly badly affected in employment and income terms (Webb et al., 2020; Williams and Kayaoglu, 2020; ITUC, 2020). However, there were also many transport workers were able to receive furlough (payment in lieu of wages when they could not work due to covid) (ONS, 2020).

As Alon et al. (2020) suggest, the covid pandemic offered both threats and opportunities for women in employment, as school and childcare closures often put increased pressure on mothers. In relation to threats many parents, including fathers had additional childcare responsibilities. The most beneficial opportunity provided for many women has been the move towards more flexible working in terms of location and working hours. However, the effects of covid on women's employment varies by country, with Yerkes et al. (2020) finding that Finnish mothers who are highly educated found it more





difficult to combine work and care than Dutch mothers during the initial lockdown. So differences across countries may be significant and require further investigation.

Employment across the transport sector globally has traditionally been viewed as male dominated and as a result, transport policy has been male-oriented, often devised by men and centred around male lifestyles (Buchmann 2013; Wright 2014; European Commission, 2018). One result is that the values embedded in the industry often show little support for females in the sector, and particular groups of women such as those caring for young children, and lack gender-sensitivity, which is absent from most EU transport policy. It is unclear if the response to the covid pandemic has followed a similar male-orientation.

In terms of job recruitment, retention and promotion of female staff, organisational responses to covid are likely to be important. The concept of job segregation by gender is widely recognised in the literature and policy (including a pilot study conducted by the European Commission in 2017) in relation to the development of HR policies that support fair and equal employment for women. They discuss the requirement that in terms of positive actions to make jobs more attractive to women transport organisations should set up specific promotional schemes for women, present successful examples of women taking up previously male-dominated positions, improve the working environment and make any necessary changes in education and training to encourage more girls to follow STEM and engineering routes into employment (French and Strachan 2008; Astor et al. 2017; Giannelos et al. 2018).

A major theme emerging from the literature on women's employment in the transport sector is based on the historical concept of occupational and job segregation (French and Strachan 2008; Wright 2014; Giannelos et al. 2018) based on a gendered notion of employment which dictates which jobs are acceptable and suitable for men or women and Corral and Isusi (2007) adding that the transport sector is one of the most "gender segregated sectors of the economy" (p. 4). French and Strachan (2008) report that very few transport organisations use "proactive strategies" (p. 86) to recruit, promote and retain women employees, particularly amongst the management roles. The idea that many transport organisations still have this view of outdated gender stereotypes becomes visible in the ways that certain vacant roles are advertised all have an impact on the likelihood of women applying for roles, particularly at a management level. In the response to covid, different jobs were affected in different ways (e.g. customer facing jobs compared to office-based ones) and these jobs often suffered different levels of gender segregation.

There are still many (men and women) who believe that there are certain roles and careers that are more suited to men than women. This gendered view of roles has a direct daily impact on women in the workplace in relation to their working conditions which can also result in a lack of specific policies to support women in the workplace (Astor et al. 2017, Giannelos et al. 2018). Yerkes et al. (2017) highlight this by discussing the impact on women returning to work from maternity leave and the ways in which career breaks disadvantage women in their





long terms career goals. The study reports that in some cases within the transport sector women are returning to work on a part time “lower occupational status” (p. 477) which they claim is unfair and creates issues around both procedural and interactional justice for working mothers. Similar impacts are observed in other sectors, including female dominated professions such as nursing (e.g., McIntosh et al. 2012). French and Strachan (2008) report that their research shows a positive correlation with providing robust maternity, pregnancy and breastfeeding policies with the retention of female employees. Adams et al. (2000) also claim that many organisations were still unsure of employing married women as they are generally regarded as having less commitment to their careers, although such attitudes are likely to have change since then. Women returning to work during the covid pandemic may therefore be affected in different ways.

Job segregation is also highlighted by the current link between the higher rates of male employment in the transport sector and the working practices operationalised in organisations, for example long working hours that are not always family friendly, particularly in the case of certain mobile professions that may require prolonged absences from home and an inflexible approach to work routines which does not provide opportunities to work from home or remotely for example (Wright 2014; Giannelos et al. 2018). Taking measures to create flexibility for all employees, providing the opportunity to reduce working hours when required and permanent contracts to improve job satisfaction, will not only attract more women to the sector, but it will also improve their ability to attract and retain talent overall (French and Strachan 2008; Astor et al. 2017).

Before and during the covid pandemic (and afterwards), all people should have fair and equal opportunities to access all types (levels, occupations etc.) of employment and the relevant training and educational opportunities which would support their role and promotion in the transport industry (Corral and Isusi 2007; Giannelos et.al. 2018). However, we can see from the actual employment patterns (outcomes) that this is usually not the case for many groups of women (e.g., those with dependent children etc.). There are barriers, lack of support etc. which mean women tend to be under-represented in many types and levels of jobs in the transport sector. French and Strachan (2008) state that providing equal opportunity training within transport organisations “was positively associated with the increased numbers of women across the various job areas” (p 87)

One factor which emerged from the literature as a barrier to women working in the transport sector was to a large extent based on a lack of family friendly working practices, such as providing flexible working, shift patterns and opportunities for home, remote or part time working (Giannelos et al. 2018; Astor et al. 2017). Although this could be said to be a barrier for men as well as women, working women are still in the main, responsible for all family caring responsibilities (Wright 2014). Covid offered an opportunity for increased flexibility,





for instance to change the location and timing of work, which may be particularly important for women's employment.

A further theme to emerge from the literature was related to a lack of separate facilities for women in the workplace. The working environment in transport organisations tends to reflect the dominant male work force and as a result, women often have to adjust to a male-centred organisation of work, workplace culture and working conditions (Sicard 2012; Giannelos et al. 2018). A similar situation exists in relation to health and safety issues in the workplace, which are usually male centred and is reflected in a lack of female toilets and showers, provision of suitable female Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) and segregated changing rooms (Corral and Isusi 2007; Rowan and Laffey 2020). During the covid pandemic certain types of covid related PPE in particular became an important health and safety (and associated health worries).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

Qualitative semi-structured interviews took place with a specifically targeted “purposive sample” of participants who fitted the criteria framework given for the Use Case, i.e. knowledge and experience of women as employees in public transport services. Bryman (2008:458) defines purposive samples as being “...essentially strategic...” allowing a connection between the research questions being asked, and the participants taking part.

The interviews and focus groups collected views from a wide range of professionals. These were multi-level in terms of including Warsaw city, and the Catalonia region of Spain, UK (Scotland and England) and national (Ireland).

The interview and focus group schedules were firstly written in English and then translated into several other languages in order to collect comparative data from Spain and Poland together with Ireland and the UK (Scotland and England), which would provide robust cross-cultural findings. Supporting partners for this data collection activity were TU Dublin (Ireland), STIR (UK), EURECAT (Spain), FGC (Spain) and ZTM (Poland). All questions have been designed to be open ended as suits the semi-structured process and allow both the participant and interviewer to provide additional and/or follow up information.

Prior to interviews and focus groups taking place and following national and international ethical research guidelines set by the DIAMOND project, participants were asked to provide full informed consent before participating in the interview. For the purpose of this project, each partner country was provided with a participant's information sheet, and an informed consent form to be completed by each participant and returned to the relevant partner.





Formal ethics applications and approvals were given by the relevant ethics boards (approvals, and amendments due to Covid-19, are set out in D8.5, D8.6 and D8.7).

To be able to generate as accurate an account as possible of each participant's interview, all data collection was conducted by native speaking researchers in each country. All interviews and focus groups were also recorded, after consent was given by each participant, transcribed, and then translated into English (when necessary) for upload to the NVivo software programme for analysis.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent roll out of social restrictions across Europe greatly affected on the project's data collection process, particularly in terms of conducting focus groups and face-to-face interviews. In the majority of cases all data collection was moved to online platforms.

Data were collected from Ireland, Poland, Spain and UK (from both Scotland and England). Partners from Spain and Poland provided STIR with summary reports of their interviews/focus groups which were then analysed using the same coding framework as the UK and Irish data where possible. It should therefore be noted that the Spanish quotes are based on a report of the interviews rather than direct verbatim quotes, while all other quotes are verbatim.

In total there were 46 participants who took part in the interview/focus group data collection. The gender, nationality, occupational and transport mode splits mean that specific gender differences cannot be fully explored.

4 participants were HR personnel.

15 participants from Poland

5 participants from Spain

22 participants from UK/Ireland/Scotland.

For further details (job roles and transport sector) on participants please see Appendix 1.

Appendix 2 provides an extract of responses gained from individuals working in a wide range of modes of transport and a variety of roles. The Irish interview data are from the rail sector only and involved those in senior positions, such as director, manager, and HR manager. The UK interview data, however, covers rail, bus and truck transport and incorporates diverse roles such as drivers and directors. Polish data, gained through focus group discussions, includes the tram and bus sectors, and a range of roles from drivers to passenger information officers. Finally, the Spanish interview data covers the rail sector and includes a range of roles from drivers to engineers. *The names of all interviewees have been replaced with pseudonyms.*

As noted above the sample size of this study is relatively limited and as such findings should not be considered comprehensive, however, the insights from employees in the sector during this atypical period is valuable data that warrants exploration and possible follow up.





## 4. FINDINGS

The findings are set out according to the Research Questions above. Further illustrative quotations are provided in Appendix 2.

### 4.1 During the first wave of the COVID pandemic did you work at home or at your usual location?

In order to understand the roles and sectors within transport that were impacted upon by changes to work location due to the pandemic participants were asked whether they worked from home or from their usual location during the first wave of the pandemic.

When participants were asked whether they worked in their usual location or at home during the first wave of the pandemic responses ranged widely. Several participants faced no change to their usual working arrangements with regard location. For example, one individual, a director, worked remotely as usual and another director continued to work both at home and in the office as usual. Moreover, a large number of ‘front line’ participants (14) who usually worked ‘in the field’ (e.g. depot or workshop, usually customer facing), continued to work in their usual location despite the restrictions and impacts of the pandemic. These individuals were tram and train drivers and ticket inspectors.

As these participants noted, *the nature of their work meant working from home was not possible: “... the job is specific. And, unfortunately, we cannot do it remotely, you have to leave the house, sit behind the wheel, do your job with caution, hoping that nothing bad will happen to us.”* **Luke, Male, Multi-modal, Front line, Poland**

*“The tram and bus drivers were and are in the worst situation. They have to ride the streets and, in their case, remote work is not an option. You have to get out there and do your job.”* **Mia, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

In some instances, this mix was driven by employers but as these participants pointed out it could also be beneficial to individuals:

*“I had a mixed arrangement but the rule for me would have been, I fell into that bracket of work from home where you can, and I should have been working from home but I got to the stage where I was like, when they say, ‘work from home when you can’, does that mean losing your mind and also jeopardizing your entire career? So I had to draw a line... there was an understanding that I felt I’d get more done if I could get into the office an odd day here and there.”* **Siobhan, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

One individual, a bus driver, reported being furloughed during this period (i.e. their received government income support while not working), while one tram driver was offered a temporary move to office-based work. Six workers, involved in office-based customer service,





engineering and a manager, shifted to partly working from home. In some instances, this mix was driven by employers but was also reported as being to individuals.

*The largest number however shifted to working from home, 16 people in total from a variety of roles that were all office based, such as director, manager, customer service trainer and engineering maintenance:*

*“...our office staff over [number] people would have worked remotely... we moved to teams. We moved to Zoom. Skype. And we interviewed virtually. We delivered training virtually.”* **Lorna, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

Overall, this suggests that the countries were similar in terms of changes to work location. It does however point out that work role impacted on work location at this time. As may be expected, roles that were usually carried out in the field and were deemed essential during the pandemic, such as drivers and inspectors, continued to work in their usual location. Yet other roles, generally office, shifted from the workplace to home working or a mix of both.

#### **4.2 Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced by working in your usual location?**

Those employees who reported working in their usual location (e.g. in the office or at a train station), either wholly or in part, were operational workers such as transport drivers, customer service employees, engineers, and some with management positions.

The main issues reported by those who worked in their usual location, carrying out their duties within the safety parameters necessitated by the pandemic included: lack of protective equipment for employees; customers not adhering to Covid safety measures; and a lack of consistency regarding implementation of safety measures in place.

The *lack of protective equipment* for employees seemed to be an issue in the initial stages of the pandemic when resources were limited. In one organisation employees reported that the organisation was not prepared for the level of protective equipment required, and therefore gave priority to the most vulnerable employees. While another employee stated that there was no protective equipment for employees initially, underlining the difficult and even dangerous situation they had to work in at the start of the pandemic (from the Spanish data).

Moreover, participants pointed out a further challenge they faced as some *customers did not adhere to the covid safety measures in place*. Examples cited included, instances of customers not wearing masks, and the supply of public transport not meeting the demand due to the limited numbers allowed on transport, so as to facilitate social distancing.

Data suggests this was also a problem encountered by front line employees in Spain also, as this participant suggests, some passengers did not want to wear masks and some did not





understand that they could no longer eat on the train (Sofia, Female, Rail, Front line, Spain). Similar issues with passengers were experienced elsewhere:

*“We also collided with a ‘wall’. In peak hours we would take who knows how many passengers... suddenly seventy people enter the [bus number] bus, where there is a sign saying only 8 people may get on board, and there is consternation. The first week was difficult.”* **Andrew, Male, Tram, Front line, Poland**

Moreover, the data highlights that there were also challenges regarding avoiding close contact with other employees and customers, with one respondent noting the lack of adjustments to lesson contact with fellow colleagues over break times (Lucia, Female, Rail, Front line, Spain) and another noting the lack of facilities to allow cashless transactions for customers (Sofia, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, Spain).

Moreover, those working in their usual workplace were *challenged by conflicts and variations between safety measures and changes to regulations* as the pandemic progressed. As this respondent notes, the frequent changes to protocols would often be inconsistent with each other and different regulations regarding confinement as the pandemic progressed further complicated the already challenging situation for workers (Lucia, Female, Rail, Front line, Spain).

It is clear from the data that overall that ‘front line’ (customer facing) employees who had *no option but to work in their usual location* faced many challenges.

The data suggest several issues were challenging for those employees who shifted to working from home. Some individuals reported a *lack of resources required to do their job properly at home*. One respondent noted that his organisation moved to home working without providing appropriate chairs and desks while another stated:

*“...probably sitting on a sofa is not the best place to do your work.”* **Grace, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

And yet another had issues with lack of resources as she states:

*“I have to work on my private computer. In my opinion it is a poor solution, among others for security reasons. ...I have to access work emails on my private cell.”* **Mia, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

Individuals working in their usual location who are not customer-facing workers, that is those who usually work solely in the office but shifted to a mix of working from home and office, did not report any specific challenges. The data therefore highlights that customer-facing, ‘front line’ workers who worked in their usual location during the pandemic faced the most challenges. Hence the ‘roles’ of the workers had the biggest impact on level of challenge faced.





It is important to note that although the participants noting the challenges are drawn from the Spanish and Polish data this is most likely because the participants from these countries were predominantly ‘front line’ workers (with no ‘front line’ workers involved in the Irish data and only a few in the UK sample).

### 4.3 Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced working at home?

As expected, the shift to working from home in the early stages of the pandemic applied to those already in office-based roles. A few participants also reported being furloughed (where the government paid up to 80% of the salary of workers unable to work for their employer due to loss of business because of covid – which could last up to 18 months) for a few months, or temporarily being transferred from a customer facing role to an office based one.

The data suggest several issues were challenging for those employees who shifted to working from home. Some individuals reported a *lack of resources required to do their job properly at home*. One respondent noted that his organisation moved to home working without providing appropriate chairs and desks while another stated that some of his colleagues had problems because they did not have an internet connection or did not have enough space for the whole family to work from home. (Patrik, Male, Rail, Office based, Spain ) And yet another had issues with lack of resources claiming using their own lap top was not secure. The problem of lack of resources was also apparent in households where there was more than one adult working from home necessitating the sharing of physical space and IT resources.

*Parents or carers of school age children were also challenged by working from home, especially for over the time period when schools were closed, due to issues such as a lack of sufficient physical space, quiet work areas, equipment, and IT resources for everyone in the household alongside balancing caring responsibilities for children while having to carry out their work. This seemed to particularly affect female employees, although we did not have reliable quantitative evidence. Even the individual who worked entirely from home prior to the pandemic pointed to the added complication of children and other adults working from home at that time: there were many problems linked to having school age children at home, and specifically home schooling, at this time:*

*“Yes, it is difficult. I had a Zoom conference two days ago... at 12 am [noon]... and there was a problem because I had to exclude my daughter from one lesson in order to manage the conference. I have two daughters and I am divorced; they are in alternate care. So when they are at my place I am their sole guardian and I have to work. We manage to have remote lessons and my work at the same time, but not two Zoom conferences. As a result my daughter missed out on an English lesson. This type of situation happens rarely, but it is a loss for the child.”* **Maria, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

*“I suppose it took me a while to settle at home... I had kids here in the house and there were some stressful days now, because... I have triplet boys, so they were at home and my husband was at*





*home... There will be parts of the day where they will be flash points [arguments] and things will settle.”* **Agnes, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

Related to this point some participants noted *challenges associated with the merging of home and work life*, with issues such as ‘thinking about work all the time’ and a negative impact on mental health and wellbeing due to the lack of separation between work and home life when individuals have set up home offices in spaces such as their bedroom. This respondent highlights this lack of separation between work and non-work time:

*“There is that weird combination of work and home life are melting together and I am recognizing more and more that the longer I am working from home I am spending hours working much more than I did when I was going to work. There is no time to decompress after work and getting ready for home. I find I am thinking about work all the time.”* **Grace, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

Overwhelmingly, however, the main challenge reported by individuals regarding working from home was the *lack of ‘in person’ and often informal interaction with colleagues*. The informal ‘5-minute chats’ or ‘water cooler conversations’ as one respondent described them, were reported as being a loss and their absence a contributor to a negative impact on peoples mental health and wellbeing. In order to help alleviate this lack of interaction a few participants noted that they purposefully shifted to a mixed practice of working from home while also attending their workplace in person a few times per week. Others suggested that video conference calls replaced in-person interactions and were vital, in fact one responded suggested they ‘saved the day’.

*“It’s actually been fine [working from home], I can do most of what I do from home. The most important thing has been the interaction with people, that has been the hardest thing. Video calls have saved the day to be honest. I feel like I am just sitting here in this room. I know a couple of my younger team have found it difficult, one lives with his gran [grandmother] and the other with her mum. They only have their bedroom to work in and they haven’t got a desk or the proper room to work. Ultimately both of them ended up going back into the office (so no furlough then!) which was fine as there was nobody else in the office, they were both really struggling to do their work and struggling mentally too.”* **Caroline, Female, Bus, Office based, UK**

Despite the challenges reported above some individuals pointed to a *preference for working from home* now they have experienced it.

#### **4.4 How did your organisation support you during the pandemic?**

Participants reported that employers supported them during the outbreak of covid in several ways, when working from home or in their usual workplace and upon returning to work. With regard to support received for those who moved to working from home the data demonstrate that the majority of participants were satisfied with the measures their organisation undertook





to support their shift to working from home, by providing everything from risk assessments and office equipment to IT support. The responses to the question ‘how did your organisation support you during the pandemic?’ illustrated the *positive views of the general support received*:

*“I mean they are brilliant... I have the scope to, you know, get what I need, get my staff what they need in terms of all the equipment that they need for working at home. ... So what we did was we developed an assessment, a home assessment document and tips for remote working from your home. So we sent that out to people, you know a guidance document on how to set it up and then an assessment on kind of your work station and you know if stuff needed to be improved... I mean that was one of the first things we did.”* **Shaun, Male, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*“We’ve been offered desks, chairs, any IT kit that we need, I mean they are very, very generous.”* **Lisa, Female, Rail, Office based, UK**

Those employees whose role determined that they continued working in their usual place of work ‘in the field’, that is, drivers and ticket inspectors, also reported a high level of support offered to them at work. This *support included the introduction of covid safety measures*, such as supplying Personal Protection Equipment (PPE), temperature checking, enhanced cleaning protocols, additional spaces for breaks, partitions separating workspaces and reducing the number of employees in work at any one time.

For customer service on the [train] line masks were provided every week or every 15 days. At first, they were missing, but now they have more than enough masks and gloves. On the train there are sprays to disinfect. Sofia, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, Spain. Also employees worked more in their offices, with additional ventilation measures and extra spaces provided for breaks to avoid crowding and *worked in groups to limit infection spread*.

*“There was a lot of work done to ensure the safety of employees in the office, i.e. dispensers with disinfectant, soap in bathrooms, adequate preparation of rooms, both by the director and the people from health and safety and the people from the Security Department. We were reminded to wear masks on the premises of the company, to wash hands and to disinfect them all the time. Later, even a thermometer was installed and we were obliged to measure our temperature.”* **Mia, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

This respondent points out that *apart from PPE employees also benefited from a separation of workspaces*. With the progressive return to work, they were provided with a pair of masks, a small bottle of hydrogel and alcoholic wipes. Screens were also installed to separate the workplaces. There were also some perceived *more general benefits of the covid safety measures*:

*“When it comes to trams, we also got all the equipment... Personally, I really like the buffer zone [between driver and passengers] and it should stay that way. Because it is both comfort and general safety. I mean general for the driver, when it comes to passengers - there is a bit of separation.”* **Penny, Female, Tram Front line, Poland**





Spanish data further highlights that protective equipment was provided. Temperatures were taken before entering the building and disinfectants implemented in all infrastructures for both employees and customers, and importantly hygiene personnel numbers were reinforced to allow for more cleaning. Also employees worked more in their offices, with additional ventilation measures and extra spaces provided for breaks to avoid crowding and worked in groups to limit infection spread. As some employees returned to their workplace, either full time or in part while also working from home, employers supported their employees further.

There were also some perceived *more general benefits of the covid safety measures* such as essential paperwork being provided and *staggered worktimes* put in place. In addition to these more practical supports discussed above, many organisations also offered *increased contact with managers*, using weekly meetings to check in with employees and using zoom and skype to keep in touch and provide ongoing training.

*“The odd time... when I was going back to the office, you got a letter to say you were an essential worker if you were stopped by the police or anything like that. Yeah, you know when I went into my office certainly everything was in place Covid-19 related, you know hand sanitizers in office. I work in an office on my own but offices upstairs, they had the screens and they had people coming in kind of staggered times, it was all good.”* **Agnes, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

Interestingly, some participants also highlighted that contact and communication did not always revolve around work issues, but rather also included *non-work-related topics and general interaction* with some reporting online quizzes and social events being organised by managers.

*“...it is the thing that you don't see (particularly) people working remotely and it is important to stay in touch. So one thing I do personally is I have a weekly team meeting through teams with all the lads from around the country, and lads and girls around the country and we just have a chat and now there's lot of [work] actions we have on it but it will just be a general chat as well to see how everyone is.”* **Shaun, Male, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*“I was fully supported, I had daily calls to check in, a weekly team call, silly quizzes at night-time which were hilarious. We had loads of things to make you feel connected. We had virtual management meetings, you never felt that you were on your own. I was very well supported.”* **Sharon, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, UK**

Moreover, there was evidence of employer and manager support regarding the *mental health and wellbeing* of individuals, both male and female:

*“We tried to run webinars, mental health and Wellness webinars ...it's basically we've professionals from the health and kind of industry particularly mental health and they'll come on and they'll talk about you know, tips for trying to deal with the likes of working from home, helpful tips for trying to manage your lifestyle during lockdown, what to eat, get out for walks, exercise, exercising at home*





*and all that type stuff. And look, I mean it's great benefit and a lot of people have commented that they gain something from it.”* **Shaun, Male, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*“[Management] checked in with everybody as well to ensure that they are, you know if they need help with mental health issues or stuff like that and that's been provided during the lockdown.”* **Samantha, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

More generally participants reported that the support they received were things like no reduction in wages for those whose hours were cut, no job losses and some appreciated opportunities to be redeployed to non-customer facing work or to work part time for a period, which was considered particularly valuable to those with young children at home or those who were home schooling.

Furthermore, employees with school age children at home during the initial stages of the pandemic particularly valued the support of their organisation with regard work flexibility at that time. The data also show that several organisations made efforts to accommodate the demands on these parents.

#### **4.5 What could your organisation have done to support you more/better?**

Although, as stated above, some organisations did make efforts to communicate virtually regarding issues other than work, as having a well-being strategy, some employees thought their organisation could have been better at this, although they recognised that as they were working through a crisis it was understandable that there were few opportunities for socialising virtually and some employers did not explicitly support these.

Again, as discussed above, while many organisations provided appropriate IT resources and internet provision others did not, with a few participants pointing out that they had to provide and finance these work essentials personally.

*“I honestly think they did everything they can. I think it was a very challenging time for the rail sector. You know, because there was just so much change and we still had to keep our depots open and we still had to provide a train service for the critical workers, for the key workers, but I think the railway industry, I think really came together and I'm quite happy with how we managed it all.”* **Samantha, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

*“I believe that my employer has done a lot. What could be introduced, was introduced - whether it was on a more national level, in the separation of these zones, which is particularly important in buses, where there is no cabin. It gives you a feeling of greater security... It gives a certain sense of security that no one is sitting close to the driver, not talking, breathing or coughing. Each driver receives a disinfectant whenever needed and receives masks to cover his/her face... But what could have been done, I believe has been done... You have to accept that such a period has come and you don't know when it will end. But the job is specific. And, unfortunately, we cannot do it remotely, you have to leave*





*the house, sit behind the wheel, do your job with caution, hoping that nothing bad will happen to us.”*

**Luke, Male, Multi-modal, Front line, Poland**

Moreover, it was reported that some organisations could have offered better support to employees by organising work shifts to better reduce the number of contacts they encountered daily and instigate better cleaning protocols. However, despite these few suggestions regarding how their organisation could have supported them better the majority of participants reported satisfaction with the level of support they received.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion while transport workers such as drivers and others working ‘in the field’ required particular health and safety support due to the covid pandemic, among office workers there was a major move towards homeworking. While the value of the data discussed is mainly in its richness in terms of employee views, the broad summaries and conclusions for the specific questions are now set out.

**During COVID did you work at home or at your usual location?** Overall, the responses suggest that the areas and countries were similar in terms of changes to work location. They do however point out how a worker’s role influenced their work location and wider concerns about covid at this time. As may be expected, ‘front line’ roles that were usually carried out in the field and were deemed essential during the pandemic, such as drivers and inspectors, continued to work in their usual location. Other roles, generally officed based, shifted rapidly from the workplace to working from home or a mix of both.

**Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced by working in your usual location?** Individuals working in their usual location, and who are not customer-facing workers that is those who usually work in the office, shifted to a mix of working from home and office, and generally did not report any specific challenges. However, the data does highlight that customer-facing, ‘front line’ workers, who worked in their usual location during the pandemic faced considerable challenges. Hence the ‘roles’ of the workers had the biggest impact on level of challenge faced. It is important to note that ‘front line worker responses mainly involved participants from the Spanish and Polish data were predominantly ‘front line’ workers, while few such workers were involved in the Irish and UK samples. Some further specific issues included: the lack of protective equipment for employees which seemed to be an issue in the initial stages of the pandemic when resources were limited; some customers not adhering to the covid safety measures that had been put in place; and those working in their usual workplace being challenged by conflicts and variations between safety measures and changes to regulations.

**Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced working at home?** Themes emerging from the data indicated that participants working from home faced some key





technical challenges such as limited access to their work computers, laptops and printers particularly at the beginning of the lock downs, although there were some cases when this persisted throughout lock down. Technical challenges were also discussed in relation to multiple users attempting to access the internet at the same time and band width problems with many home workers stating that having partners and children at home, who also required access to the internet for home schooling etc., made it difficult at times to log on during normal working hours. This resulted in many participants claiming they had to alter their usual working hours to work more early mornings and late nights to accommodate their partners and children. A lack of childcare generally during lock down meant that most children were at home with working parents during the day. These same parents then had responsibility not only for continuing their own work but also the additional responsibility of home schooling their children, this was reported across areas/countries and participants. This seemed to particularly affect female employees, although we did not have reliable quantitative evidence. A further challenge of working from home for many of the participants related to missing their co-workers and social interactions or “water cooler conversations”, with participants who worked both at home and in their usual location agreeing that the best part of working in their usual location on certain days was the social interactions with their co-workers.

**How did your organisation support you?** Participants reported that employers supported them well during the outbreak of covid in several ways, when working from home or in their usual workplace and upon returning to work. With regard to support received for those who moved to working from home, the majority of participants were satisfied with the measures their organisation undertook to support their shift to working from home, by providing everything from risk assessments and office equipment to IT support. With regard to participants who continued to work in their usual location the support provided by employers included the introduction of covid safety measures, such as Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) although sometimes this was delayed, and other safety measures and employer preparation for future outbreaks. Employees also benefited from a separation of workspaces, staggered worktimes, increased contact with managers, communication on non-work-related topics and general interaction, and support for the mental health and wellbeing of individuals. In addition, participants noted that the support they received included things like no reduction in wages for those whose hours were cut, no job losses and some appreciated opportunities to be redeployed to non-customer facing work or to work part time for a period. For parents work flexibility was particularly important.

**What could your organisation have done to support you more/better?** Some employees thought their organisation could have provided better support, although they recognised that as they were working through a crisis it was understandable that there were few opportunities for socialising virtually and some employers did not explicitly support these. Most appear to have felt well supported by the employers in the circumstances.





## 6 REFERENCES

Adams, J., Greig, M., McQuaid, R. (2000) 'Mismatch unemployment and local labour-market efficiency: the role of employer and vacancy characteristics', *Environment and Planning A* (32) pp 1841 -1856 accessed. [here](#)

Alon, T., M. Doepke, J. Olmstead-Rumsey and M. Tertilt (2020). "The impact of COVID-19 on gender equality." NBER Working Paper 26947, NBER, Cambridge Mass. [https://www.nber.org/system/files/working\\_papers/w26947/w26947.pdf](https://www.nber.org/system/files/working_papers/w26947/w26947.pdf)

Astor, E., Onsalo, M., Perea, M. (2017) 'Women's career development in the construction industry across 15 years: main barriers', *Journal of Engineering, Design and Technology* 15 (2) pp. 199-221

Buchmann, C. (2013) CARS 2020: Action Plan for a competitive and sustainable automotive industry in Europe Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions accessed [here](#)

Corral, A. and Isusi, I. (2007) Innovative gender equality measures in the transport industry *European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions* accessed [here](#)

European Union Commission (2017) *Mobility and Transport, Women in transport* accessed [here](#)

European Commission (2018) *How to attract women to the transport sector?*, Brussels. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/2018-11-27-conference-how-attract-women-transport-sector-minutes.pdf>.

French, E. and Strachan, G. (2008) 'Evaluating equal employment opportunity and its impact on the increased participation of men and women in the transport industry', *Transportation Research Part A*, 43, pp. 78-89 accessed [here](#)

Giannelos, I., Smit, G., Lakamp, R., Gonzalez Martinez, A., Dorantes, L., Doll, C., Tanis, J., Vroonhof, P. and Perciaccante, F. (2008) *Business case to increase female employment in Transport* accessed [here](#)

Hail, Y. and McQuaid, R. (2021) 'The concept of fairness in relation to women transport users', *Sustainability*, Vol. 13, No. 5, 2919. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13052919>

International Labour Organization (ILO) (2020), *COVID-19 and the world of work: Impact and policy responses*, ILO, Geneva, available at: <https://www.ilo.org/globval/topics/coronavirus> (May, 2020).





International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) (2020), *Putting people first: 12 governments show the world how to protect lives, jobs and incomes*, available at: <https://www.ituc-csi.org/putting-people-first> (accessed 20 April 2020).

Konle-Seidl, R., Picarella, F., 2021, Youth in Europe: Effects of COVID-19 on their economic and social situation, Publication for the committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, Luxembourg.

McIntosh, B., McQuaid, R., Munro, A., and Dabir-Alai, P. (2012) 'Motherhood and its impact on career progression – the case of Scottish nurses 2000-2008', *Gender in Management*, 27, 5, 346-364.

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2020), *Furloughing of workers across UK businesses: 23 March 2020 to 5 April 2020*, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/articles/furloughingofworkersacrossukbusinesses/23march2020to5april2020> (July 2020).

Papoutsaki, D. and Wilson, T. (2020), *Covid-19 and the low paid: Early analysis of Labour Force Survey, Briefing*, IES, Brighton, available at: [https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20-%20Covid-19%20and%20the%20low%20paid%20FINAL2\\_0.pdf](https://www.employment-studies.co.uk/system/files/resources/files/IES%20briefing%20-%20Covid-19%20and%20the%20low%20paid%20FINAL2_0.pdf) (accessed 31 July, 2020).

Rowan, N.J. & Laffey, J.G., 2020. Challenges and solutions for addressing critical shortage of supply chain for personal and protective equipment (PPE) arising from Coronavirus disease (COVID19) pandemic–Case study from the Republic of Ireland. *Science of the Total Environment*, 725, p.138532.) Available at: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969720320453>

Sicard, S., 2012. Female Truck Drivers: Negotiating Identity in a Male Dominated Environment. *GVSU McNair Scholars Journal*, 16(1), pp.49–57. Available at: <http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/mcnair/vol16/iss1/9>.

Transport Scotland (2021) COVID-19 - Scotland's transport and travel trends during the first six months of the pandemic. Available at: <https://www.transport.gov.scot/publication/covid-19-scotland-s-transport-and-travel-trends-during-the-first-six-months-of-the-pandemic/>

Webb, A., McQuaid, R. and Rand, S. (2020) 'Employment in the Informal Economy: Implications of the Covid-19 Pandemic', *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, Vol. 40 No. 9/10, pp. 1005-1019. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSSP-08-2020-0371>





Williams, C.C. and Kayaoglu. A. (2020) COVID-19 and undeclared work: impacts and policy responses in Europe, *The Service Industries Journal*, 40:13-14, 914-931, DOI: [10.1080/02642069.2020.1757073](https://doi.org/10.1080/02642069.2020.1757073)

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) (2020), “Informal worker demands during COVID-19 crisis”, available at: <https://www.wiego.org/informal-worker-demands-during-covid-19-crisis> (accessed 31 August 2020).

Wright, T. (2014) ‘Gender, sexuality and male-dominated work: the intersection of long-hours working and domestic life’, *Work, Employment and Society*, 28(6) pp. 985–1002  
accessed here

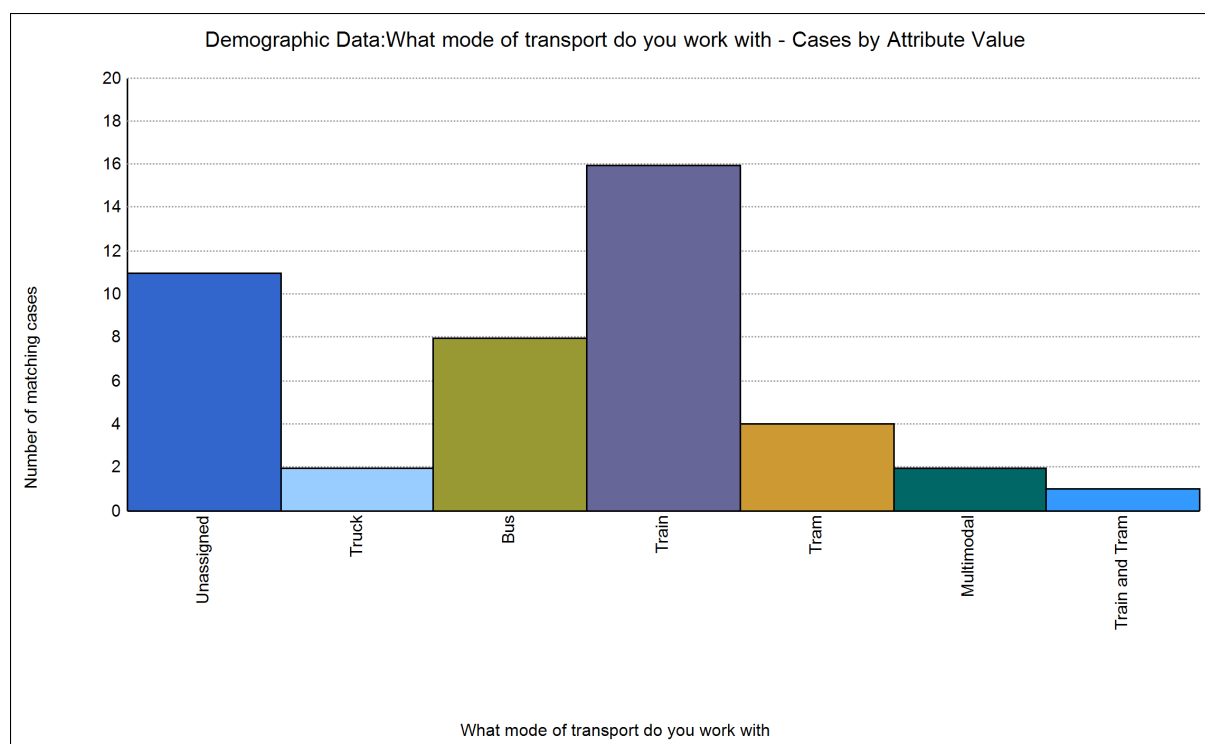
Yerkes, M.A., Dotti S., Giulia M. and Solera, Cristina (2017) Attitudes Toward Parenthood, Partnership, and Social Rights for Diverse Families - Evidence From a Pilot Study in Five Countries. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 65 (1), (pp. 80-99)

Yerkes, M. A., Andre, S., Remery, C., Salin, M., Hakovirta, M., & van Gerven, M. (2020, December 26). Unequal but Balanced: Highly educated mothers’ perceptions of work-life balance during the COVID-19 lockdown in Finland and the Netherlands. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/652mh>





## Appendix I - Data Collection



### Job roles of participants in the research

Role	Number
Manager/Director	13
Office Based Role (E.G. It, Communications, Marketing)	9
Operator/Driver	9
Front Line Customer Contact/Service (E.G. Passenger Information)	5
Unassigned/Not Applicable	7





## Appendix 2 Interview and Focus Group Extracts

**During the first wave of the COVID pandemic did you work at home or at your usual location?**

As these participants noted, the nature of their work meant working from home was not possible: *“Remote work is not an option.”* **Andrew, Male, Tram, Front line, Poland**

*“... the job is specific. And, unfortunately, we cannot do it remotely, you have to leave the house, sit behind the wheel, do your job with caution, hoping that nothing bad will happen to us.”* **Luke, Male, Multi-modal, Front line, Poland**

*“The tram and bus drivers were and are in the worst situation. They have to ride the streets and, in their case, remote work is not an option. You have to get out there and do your job.”* **Mia, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

In some instances, this mix was driven by employers but as these participants pointed out it could also be beneficial to individuals:

*“I had a mixed arrangement but the rule for me would have been, I fell into that bracket of work from home where you can, and I should have been working from home but I got to the stage where I was like, when they say, ‘work from home when you can’, does that mean losing your mind and also jeopardizing your entire career? So I had to draw a line... there was an understanding that I felt I’d get more done if I could get into the office an odd day here and there.”* **Siobhan, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*“Being restricted to the house I found challenging to be honest because ... I like getting out and about... I don't like working from home because I think you need a separation between your home life and your work life. I don't think, you know that it helped I think mental health wise you know, having that separation is a benefit in terms of mental health and wellbeing and I suppose that was a challenge. Being able to split and being able to go back and forth between the office and the house has been a godsend to be quite honest with you.”* **Shaun, Male, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

The largest number however shifted to working from home, 16 people in total from a variety of roles that were all office based, such as director, manager, customer service trainer and engineering maintenance:

*“...our office staff over 700 people would have worked remotely... we moved to teams. We moved to Zoom. Skype. And we interviewed virtually. We delivered training virtually.”* **Lorna, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**





*“Me and my section, moved from work in the office to work at home overnight. All the work connected to preparing timetables was moved from our office, where there is a landline telephone, where operators can call us and so on, to our homes.”* **Margaret, Female, Multi-modal, Front line and office based, Poland**

### **Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced by working in your usual location?**

Examples cited included, instances of customers not wearing masks, and the supply of public transport not meeting the demand due to the limited numbers allowed on transport, so as to facilitate social distancing, as these quotes highlight:

*“Since the requirements are very clear in public transport - face covering, complying with these restrictions. Not all passengers adjust. There are people who do not cover their faces.”* **Oliver, Male, Bus, Front line and office based, Poland**

Data suggests this was also a problem encountered by front line employees in Spain also, as this participants suggests, some passengers did not want to wear masks and some did not understand that they could no longer eat on the train (Sofia, Female, Rail, Front line, Spain).

*“We also collided with a "wall". In peak hours we would take who knows how many passengers... suddenly seventy people enter the [bus number] bus, where there is a sign saying only 8 people may get on board, and there is consternation. The first week was difficult.”* **Andrew, Male, Tram, Front line, Poland**

It is clear from the data that overall that ‘front line’ (customer facing) employees who had no option but to work in their usual location faced many challenges. As this respondent sums up:

*“You can't feel completely safe, this job is always a risk. Well now there is an additional one.”* **Luke, Male, Multi-modal, Front line, Poland**

### **Can you tell us about the key challenges you faced working at home?**

The data suggest several issues were challenging for those employees who shifted to working from home. Some individuals reported a *lack of resources required to do their job properly at home*. One respondent noted that his organisation moved to home working without providing appropriate chairs and desks while another stated:

*“...probably sitting on a sofa is not the best place to do your work.”* **Grace, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

And yet another had issues with lack of resources as she states:





*“I have to work on my private computer. In my opinion it is a poor solution, among others for security reasons. ...I have to access work emails on my private cell.”* **Mia, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

*“...we’ve [company employees] always worked remotely so Covid doesn’t bother us much because not much has changed for us, except some people have small children at home, which is a challenge... And on the other hand, having a husband home 24/7 as well... [laughs].”* **Sarah, Female, Multi-modal, Home based, UK**

Parents or carers of school age children were also challenged by working from home, As the following quotes underline there were many problems linked to having school age children at home, and specifically home schooling, at this time:

*“Yes, it is difficult. I had a Zoom conference two days ago... at 12 am [noon]... and there was a problem because I had to exclude my daughter from one lesson in order to manage the conference. I have two daughters and I am divorced; they are in alternate care. So when they are at my place I am their sole guardian and I have to work. We manage to have remote lessons and my work at the same time, but not two Zoom conferences. As a result my daughter missed out on an English lesson. This type of situation happens rarely, but it is a loss for the child.”* **Maria, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

*“I suppose it took me a while to settle at home... I had kids here in the house and there were some stressful days now, because... I have triplet boys, so they were at home and my husband was at home... There will be parts of the day where they will be flash points [arguments] and things will settle.”* **Agnes, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

This respondent highlights this lack of separation between work and non-work time:

*“There is that weird combination of work and home life are melting together and I am recognizing more and more that the longer I am working from home I am spending hours working much more than I did when I was going to work. There is no time to decompress after work and getting ready for home. I find I am thinking about work all the time.”* **Grace, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

One respondent summed up her experience of many of the issues discussed above, family, equipment and no separation between work life and family life:

*“For me personally, the problem is the technical performance of the company, i.e. the ability to work remotely, on a remote desktop, on a document on our computer, because I have the impression that this performance is not adequate to the number of employees who work remotely. Another problem is that I am a mother of a three-year-old and for me working at home is a horror, i.e. I have a child*





*who stands by my leg, who wants me to play with me. I have nothing against the baby, because it's natural that he wants me to play with me. My husband who is in the other room works remotely, his e-mail is on all the time, I have to go for a walk with my child, because he will set the house on fire... And then there is no border between work and home, I work at night. I get up at 6 am to work before the baby gets up. This is problematic for parents, especially of small children, or young children, studying remotely.”* **Mia, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

Overwhelmingly, however, the main challenge reported by individuals regarding working from home was the lack of ‘in person’ and often informal interaction with colleagues.

*“It’s actually been fine [working from home], I can do most of what I do from home. The most important thing has been the interaction with people, that has been the hardest thing. Video calls have saved the day to be honest. I feel like I am just sitting here in this room. I know a couple of my younger team have found it difficult, one lives with his gran [grandmother] and the other with her mum. They only have their bedroom to work in and they haven’t got a desk or the proper room to work. Ultimately both of them ended up going back into the office (so no furlough then!) which was fine as there was nobody else in the office, they were both really struggling to do their work and struggling mentally too.”* **Caroline, Female, Bus, Office based, UK**

Others suggested that video conference calls replaced in-person interactions and were vital, in fact one respondent suggested they ‘saved the day’:

*“I think it's just the interaction. You know you don't get to see your team. You don't get to see any of the people and it's just, I think, it's not the same you know, speaking to somebody over the phone or over video conference. So I think that's a thing that I've, I think everybody in my team, have really missed because we are, we used to work really closely and you know there is a lot of interaction, so just having that taken away has I think really affected people”* **Samantha, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

*“In general, I’ve got similar issues sometimes [to those who switched to working from home due to the pandemic] which is you know just missing that social environment. That’s a tricky one you have to balance... It’s missing those water cooler conversations”* **Sarah, Female, Multi-modal, Home based, UK**

*“Most of my calls we have videos of, so on the whole I’m not seeing a whole lot of people and that’s hard because I am a social person and I do like interacting with people. I find you get a lot done just by bumping into people and knocking on doors. I do miss that interaction and I’m looking forward to getting that back, I don’t think I’ll ever go back to the office full time... I would like to say that I will always retain an element of working from home and it will get easier, and it will change as my daughter gets a bit more independent, but I do miss interacting with people and even if I was to do that once or twice a week there’s a lot to be said for it.”* **Siobhan, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**





Despite the challenges reported above some individuals pointed to a preference for working from home now they have experienced it. For example:

*“I loved it (working from home) and was more productive. Saved time on commuting, I spent time with the family. No, I loved it. I had a slight problem once with broadband connection but that’s it.”*  
**Sharon, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, UK**

### **How did your organisation support you during the pandemic?**

These responses to the question ‘how did your organisation support you during the pandemic?’ illustrate the positive views of the general support received:

*“I mean they are brilliant... I have the scope to, you know, get what I need, get my staff what they need in terms of all the equipment that they need for working at home. ... So what we did was we developed an assessment, a home assessment document and tips for remote working from your home. So we sent that out to people, you know a guidance document on how to set it up and then an assessment on kind of your work station and you know if stuff needed to be improved... I mean that was one of the first things we did.”* **Shaun, Male, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*“We’ve been offered desks, chairs, any IT kit that we need, I mean they are very, very generous.”*  
**Lisa, Female, Rail, Office based, UK**

*“Very well, very well. They did in fairness, they made sure that, you know we had to do a risk assessment to show them exactly where our working from home location was in the house, just give them an outline. They set us up that we were able to work remotely.”* **Agnes, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*“Really good. Clearly, I have all the facilities, you know I have the laptop and the room and I was set up at home. As an organisation there were a lot of people who were not as well set up for home working. So we got people sorted with lap tops, VPN, the organisation did a huge amount of stuff around providing laptops and additional VPN’s and this kind of stuff to help us all work from home. IT did a really good job supporting people. There was a risk assessment thing about where you are sitting.”* **Caroline, Female, Bus, Office based, UK**

*“100% supported, no doubt. We had a self-assessment for what we needed, desks, chairs whatever we could just order it and get it delivered. There was 24 hr IT coverage, for 42,000 employees they did well.”* **Crystal, Female, Rail, Office based, UK**

*“...they did provide the laptops to people who didn't have them who were going to work from home. I know that some people didn't have particularly good Internet connection, so I think they wound up getting dongles.”* **Irene, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**





*“I think you know they were great. All the IT support was provided, they were very flexible. And had all the home risk assessments done and... we got really everything we wanted in terms of from starting from office chairs to like IT equipment and video conference services and all that sort of stuff.”*

**Samantha, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

For customer service on the [train] line masks were provided every week or every 15 days. At first, they were missing, but now they have more than enough masks and gloves. On the train there are sprays to disinfect. Sofia, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, Spain  
Also employees worked more in their offices, with additional ventilation measures and extra spaces provided for breaks to avoid crowding and worked in groups to limit infection spread.

*“There was a lot of work done to ensure the safety of employees in the office, i.e. dispensers with disinfectant, soap in bathrooms, adequate preparation of rooms, both by the director and the people from health and safety and the people from the Security Department. We were reminded to wear masks on the premises of the company, to wash hands and to disinfect them all the time. Later, even a thermometer was installed and we were obliged to measure our temperature.”* **Mia, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**

This respondent points out that apart from PPE employees also benefited from a separation of workspaces. With the progressive return to work, they were provided with a pair of masks, a small bottle of hydrogel and alcoholic wipes. Screens were also installed to separate the workplaces. There were also some perceived more general benefits of the covid safety measures:

*“When it comes to trams, we also got all the equipment... Personally, I really like the buffer zone [between driver and passengers] and it should stay that way. Because it is both comfort and general safety. I mean general for the driver, when it comes to passengers - there is a bit of separation.”* **Penny, Female, Tram Front line, Poland**

Further, as this interviewee notes, essential paperwork was provided and staggered worktimes put in place:

*“The odd time... when I was going back to the office, you got a letter to say you were an essential worker if you were stopped by the police or anything like that. Yeah, you know when I went into my office certainly everything was in place Covid-19 related, you know hand sanitizers in office. I work in an office on my own but offices upstairs, they had the screens and they had people coming in kind of staggered times, it was all good.”* **Agnes, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

And importantly this employer was prepared for future outbreaks:

*“... the measures that they put in place in terms of how to deal with an outbreak within the office environment when we did go back, worked extremely well because no sooner had we gone back than*





*we did have a few reported cases and the office went into full shutdown and there was a full deep clean. So, all of the procedures that they put in place worked. Absolutely worked successfully. ... We're closed now again until the 2nd of December but that's actually for our benefit because they are redesigning the office for us, ready to go back, to be covid friendly, to have less shared working spaces. So, they've really given some thought to the redesigning of the offices to make it safer for us."* **Lisa, Female, Rail, Office based, UK**

In addition to these more practical supports discussed above, many organisations also offered increased contact with managers, using weekly meetings to check in with employees and using zoom and skype to keep in touch and provide ongoing training:

*"We had calls from HR... The calls were about welfare checks and there was a number for us to call if we had any other issues. They were very helpful, sent us regular emails of what was going on. I think they did pretty well. As I said there are 200 staff and we all got regular calls. Every couple of weeks they called."* **Theresa, Female, Bus, Front line, UK**

*"I would have communicated with my boss very regularly. The CEO of the company has team meetings every week, once a week, so everybody knew in the company where we were with the virus..."* **Agnes, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

Interestingly, as the following participants highlighted, contact and communication did not always revolve around work issues, but rather also included non-work-related topics and general interaction:

*"...it is the thing that you don't see (particularly) people working remotely and it is important to stay in touch. So one thing I do personally is I have a weekly team meeting through teams with all the lads from around the country, and lads and girls around the country and we just have a chat and now there's lot of [work] actions we have on it but it will just be a general chat as well to see how everyone is."* **Shaun, Male, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*"I was fully supported, I had daily calls to check in, a weekly team call, silly quizzes at night-time which were hilarious. We had loads of things to make you feel connected. We had virtual management meetings, you never felt that you were on your own. I was very well supported."* **Sharon, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, UK**

*"We do a monthly team call and half an hour in that call is dedicated to sharing something personal. So, today we spoke about how we keep fit or if we like watching sport and that sort of thing and I think the last time we spoke about covid, but we also had one really fun one where we spoke about our favourite movies. And we had one where we spoke about if we could have a completely different career in a parallel universe what would that you know what's our biggest passion, what would we be."*





*That was really fun, so we do that a little bit (laughs)."* **Sarah, Female, Multi-modal, Home based, UK**

Moreover, there was evidence of employer and manager support regarding the *mental health and wellbeing* of individuals. As these managers and employees reported:

*"I have been ringing my employees who have been furloughed or who are shielding. I am ringing saying, how are you, what is happening? In the past I wouldn't necessarily have done that... I said to my husband one day: 'just ring all the drivers and check in, make sure everything is ok'... And one of the guys said to my husband your phone call to me during this pandemic is worth more than a £1000. It was just a phone call."* **Louise, Female, Truck, Office based, UK**

*"We tried to run webinars, mental health and Wellness webinars ...it's basically we've professionals from the health and kind of industry particularly mental health and they'll come on and they'll talk about you know, tips for trying to deal with the likes of working from home, helpful tips for trying to manage your lifestyle during lockdown, what to eat, get out for walks, exercise, exercising at home and all that type stuff. And look, I mean it's great benefit and a lot of people have commented that they gain something from it."* **Shaun, Male, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*"We had updates around if we need support, you know one to one support, team support and lots of welfare, mental wellbeing. Honestly, every week. We've got an end of the week email encouraging us to reach out if we need anything. There was a lot of effort actually put in."* **Lisa, Female, Rail, Office based, UK**

*"[Management] checked in with everybody as well to ensure that they are, you know if they need help with mental health issues or stuff like that and that's been provided during the lockdown."* **Samantha, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

More generally participants reported that the support they received were things like no reduction in wages for those whose hours were cut, no job losses and some appreciated opportunities to be redeployed to non-customer facing work or to work part time for a period:

*"...so they cut a lot of the services but the staff were all kept on and kept fully paid and they might be redeployed to cleaning things or do their shifts with it being cut in half but they were still employed and they were still paid that gave them more time at home. and because well they would obviously have children so no I think the company did well by the staff."* **Irene, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

The data show that several organisations made efforts to accommodate the demands on these parents, as these managers highlight:





*“So what we are doing is working with them to enable them to work and follow social distancing rules, enable them to go on to a shift pattern that is cost effective for us and also works for their child care.”* **Naomi, Female, Rail, Office based, UK**

*“So while our office staff, over [number] people, would have worked remotely and the company was very open to people where they had children at home. So for example, I had a girl working with me, she was home schooling and so what she would do if she would kind of take 9 to 11 in the morning as that time [to home school] and then she would work on so she would come back on [to work] when the kids went to bed for two hours. ... So there was there was a flexible piece there, you weren't expected to be chained to the desk.”* **Lorna, Female, Rail, Office based, Ireland**

*“[Company name] has been really good. People are having to cut their hours because they've got small kids at home now and can't send them to day care anymore, can't send them to school, so it's a very supportive work environment. It's all been done really well, I think.”* **Sarah, Female, Multi-modal, Home based, UK**

### **What could your organisation have done to support you more/better?**

Although, as stated above, some organisations did make efforts to communicate virtually regarding issues other than work, as having a well-being strategy, some employees thought their organisation could have been better at this, although they recognised that as they were working through a crisis it was understandable that there were few opportunities for socialising virtually and some employers did not explicitly support these.

*“We could have done better in terms of maybe setting aside time to just have a chat with each other, have a laugh, so just to set an hour a week or every second week to just have a cup of tea and a blether, you know see what's going on, and I think that is something we should do, it's so important but it's been such a crisis it's been endless. You know when you are in the office, we do spend 5 minutes just chatting and having a conversation”.* **Caroline, Female, Bus, Office based, UK**

Again, as discussed above, while many organisations provided appropriate IT resources and internet provision others did not, with a few participants pointing out that they had to provide and finance these work essentials personally:

*“Yes, I wanted to mention this. I (also) work on my personal equipment. Fortunately, I have two private computers so I am able to work and my child can study at the same time. My internet connection won't allow two simultaneous conferences on Zoom. For it to work well, there should be, although it's hard for me to imagine it, some funding, for example to finance better Internet connection or for a suitable equipment, because now we have to finance it ourselves.”* **Maria, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, Poland**





However, despite these few suggestions regarding how their organisation could have supported them better the majority of participants reported satisfaction with the level of support they received, as these participants replied when asked the question: stated:

*“I believe that my employer has done a lot. What could be introduced, was introduced - whether it was on a more national level, in the separation of these zones, which is particularly important in buses, where there is no cabin. It gives you a feeling of greater security... It gives a certain sense of security that no one is sitting close to the driver, not talking, breathing or coughing. Each driver receives a disinfectant whenever needed and receives masks to cover his/her face... But what could have been done, I believe has been done... You have to accept that such a period has come and you don't know when it will end. But the job is specific. And, unfortunately, we cannot do it remotely, you have to leave the house, sit behind the wheel, do your job with caution, hoping that nothing bad will happen to us.”*

**Luke, Male, Multi-modal, Front line, Poland**

*“Nothing.”* **Hannah, Female, Rail, Front line, UK**

*“Nothing.”* **Justine, Female, Bus, Office based, UK**

*“No, they were great, and they still are, they really are.”* **Lisa, Female, Rail, Office based, UK**

*“I was fully supported...”* **Sharon, Female, Multi-modal, Office based, UK**

*“I honestly think they did everything they can. I think it was a very challenging time for the rail sector. You know, because there was just so much change and we still had to keep our depots open and we still had to provide a train service for the critical workers, for the key workers, but I think the railway industry, I think really came together and I'm quite happy with how we managed it all.”* **Samantha, Female, Rail, Front line and office based, UK**

*“No [the company name] has been really good...It's all been done really well, I think.* **Sarah, Female, Multi-modal, Home based, UK**

