



Report on the third national usergroup meeting: BELGIUM

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Agenda

1. Presentation of the testing stage and the major conclusions
2. Discussion on results and recommendations

Main conclusions

The conclusions of the discussion can be subdivided into two main parts. First of all, the discussion has resulted in some remarks on the list of core indicators. Secondly, the participants to the usergroup meeting have formulated some suggestions on the implementation strategies of the module.¹

1. List of core indicators

1.1 Telework or eWork: a conceptual discussion

One of the usergroup members mentioned that it is impossible to identify call center workers based on the list of core indicators (place, intensity and ICT usage). If eWork is broadly defined as new work forms that have become possible thanks to ICT, then this group of workers should not be neglected. The STILE module, however only wants to gain insights into the group of respondents who work with a certain intensity (2) at a distance of their employer (1), and who make use of ICT to work at a distance (3).

This discussion illustrates that the 'conceptual' still exists. It is important to come to a decision on the question whether to use the term 'eWork' or whether the term 'telework' is more preferable. EWork is much more broader than 'working at a distance from the employer'. In this choice it is important to

¹ It should be clear that only one member of the usergroup was attended at the meeting. The conclusions are therefore resulting from a discussion between HIVA employees and an one external representative of the academic field. One representative of a statistics producing organisation has given feed back by e-mail conversation.

remind that the term 'telework' is often associated with tele-homework. Despite this argument against the term 'telework', the usergroup prefers it in this research context. *EWork* is more than telework and telework is more than tele-homework.

1.2 Flexibility requires disciplinary definition exercises

The choice for deductive definitions of teleworkers and non-teleworkers on the basis of the three core indicators (place, intensity and ICT usage at a distance), offers a flexibility. Researchers can put forward different selection criteria (filtering criteria) and they can compose different groups, depending on the specific research question. This requires from the researchers to define clearly which criteria are put forward and which groups are composed.

Example

The example of the nomadic eWorkers can illustrate this. Based on the module it is possible to discern nomadic workers that only use a phone when working at a distance from those using an internet connection when they are at a distance. It is possible to consider both groups as teleworkers/eWorkers (work at a distance is the only filter in this case). Research that emphasizes the role of ICT in telework will take advantage of the opportunity to distinguish both groups. Research putting attention to the distance aspect may be less interested in the ICT aspect.

The deductive and flexible process of defining telework/eWork requires a certain discipline of the researchers. The interpretations of figures that are processed need to be introduced by a clear definition of the groups that are compared to each other.

REMARK: The flexibility in defining telework/eWork is no threat to the comparability of figures. Thanks to the idea of a derived definition and thanks to the extended answer categories, the lack of consensus on a definition is no longer a problem. Based on the module data are collected with an optimal level of detail. Moreover an optimal range of indicators is investigated. The data are available, researchers and statistics producers can be creative with them. There is however one important requisite. The importance of the requirement to clearly define the various groups that are compared to each other, is emphasised here.

1.3 Composition of the module

The STILE consortium has translated the emerging difficulties into a new proposal of the module. This alternative module is presented to the usergroup (see table 1). The participants of the assembly have assessed the proposal and they have concluded that the original module is the most preferable one.

Original module	Alternative module
<p>1. During the last 4 weeks, have you ever worked at the following premises?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - At one fixed location of your employer - At multiple locations of your employer - While travelling - At multiple customers' or clients' premises - In an office that is administered by a third party - At home - At other premises <p>2. Thinking about the last 4 weeks, how many hours a week on average have you worked at a distance? Thinking about the last 4 weeks, how many days a week on average have you worked at a distance?</p> <p>3. When you work at a distance, do you use the following tools?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PC - Laptop - Fixed telephone - Mobile telephone - e-mail - Access to the organisation's network - Internet access (dial up) - Broadband Internet access - Software for distant co-operation - Other <p>4. When you work at a distance, which percentage of your time do you, on average, make use of a computer? <i>*(this question was used as an alternative for question 3)</i></p>	<p>1. Do you use a computer for your work? Do you use internet or e-mail for your work?</p> <p>2. During the last 4 weeks, have you ever worked at the following premises?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - In your own home - At locations belonging to a third party - On the move - At more than one location belonging to customers or clients - Other places different from traditional workplaces (<i>hotels, conference rooms</i>) - In More than one location belonging to your employer - At just one location belonging to your employer - At other traditional workplaces <p>3. Would it be possible to work at a distance without a computer or internet?</p> <p>4. Thinking about the last 4 weeks, how many hours a week on average have you worked at a distance? Thinking about the last 4 weeks, how many days a week on average have you worked at a distance?</p> <p>5. When you work at distance from employers' location, do you transfer work result by means of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personally - Post - Fax - Telephone - e-mail - internet - software for distant co-operation - Other, namely

The advantage of the alternative module is that it collects information on the computer and internet usage of all working respondents. The module does however not give insights into the ICT usage when the respondent works at a distance. As the computer usage for work in general is relatively high, there is real risk that an important group of traditionally distant working people distorts the number of teleworkers/eWorkers. This could be prevented by including the questions on the intensity of computer and internet usage² when working at a distance in the core module. The question on the transfer of work is not applicable to all teleworkers as certain people are not used to transfer work to the workplace.

Taking account of the disadvantages of the alternative module, the participants of the assembly prefer the original module. As the answering categories of the ICT usage question are too complicated and too detailed, they need further simplification.

² When you work at a distance, what percentage of your time do you use a computer?
When you work at a distance, how often are you on-line?

2. Implementation strategy

2.1 Place of the module

Within the LFS context ad hoc modules are systematically put at the end of the questionnaire. The usergroup members think it would be worthwhile to take into consideration the place of the module within the basic questionnaire.

2.2 Other questionnaires

Not only the LFS offers opportunities to attach the module in order to collect information in an efficient way. Other existing questionnaires can serve as a basic questionnaire to which the module can be attached. At the national level a survey on ICT usage for private and professional purposes lends itself for a combination with the STILE module. At the European level the European Survey on Working Conditions, the Population and Household Censuses and Eurobarometer are mentioned as interesting alternatives to the LFS.