

White Paper on Work From Home

to help organizing employees towards protecting livelihoods of the 40+ million IT & ITES employees

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Introduction

Work From Home(WFH)/Telework is not a new concept. WFH/Telework with the rise of computer age in the early 70's became a crisis management approach to work. Since its initial days WFH/Telework has had more of white collar professional's option of work. In the early 90's the emergence of the Internet made WFH/Telework a new option of work location in the western world. The development of technology made Telework an option for employees. From working at home for a few days to working at home for a few weeks, WFH in some countries, even has a permanent nature. European Union had a framework for telework as early as 2002; it shows that work from home or telework is a long existing concept in the west. Around 7% of the US workforce(pre Covid) and 5.2% in European Union were on telework on a regular basis.

The concept of work from home in India similarly emerged with the rise of technology in the Indian market. Indian IT sector due to its global presence was the first to structurally incorporate Telework/WFH. Again WFH was seen more as a crisis management/BCP approach rather than an alternative approach to work location. Though the same MNC companies in different countries give employees a more flexible option to WFH. In India, they were skeptical about giving complete flexibility to employees on WFH. The two major reasons for this approach are SEZ benefits and myth that Indian employees won't be productive at work from Indian homes.

The present permanent work from home started after the covid 19 Pandemic, with the announcement of TCS in a quarterly press meet. TCS concept of SBWS with just 25% of associate time in office by 2025 were strategic plans for a longer run but not on the scale or numbers realised now. TCS had a slogan of agile by 2020 previously, on which they achieved around 60% project conversion to agile. As the next step to that process, open agile workspace was a long term plan of TCS and conversion also started towards that. So only TCS was very precise on SBWS plan to the press. TCS decision or plan would have a cascading effect on other major IT companies due to the new business model.

No company was planned or prepared for 95% of the company workforce in WFH. Covid gave a testing ground for Indian IT companies to experiment WFH on a large scale. Most of the IT companies confirmed that productivity was not impacted, infact most of them saw an increase in productivity. MNCs are using utilities to monitor employees' activities and to understand work behaviour. The results of WFH made Infosys the second major company after TCS to announce that even after covid 33% of the employees will remain in regular WFH.

Amitabh Kant, CEO, Niti Ayog said that the Pandemic situation has ushered in the fourth industrial revolution where people can work from anywhere they want to. As we get into Industrial Revolution 4.0, WFH or Telework has become easily feasible due to development of technology. WFH won't wipe away the entire office environment but going forward employees will spend less time in the office. Employers will reap benefits by reducing large operation costs and high productivity resulting in profit maximization.

According to the World Economic Forum report on the future of jobs which was released in 2016, there will be more disruption in the nature of jobs. The report also says the development of new technologies can benefit workers with a preference or need for flexibility. Technology is making it increasingly feasible to decentralize tasks from companies and directly allocate it to individuals, which they can perform as freelancers. Unbundling of jobs into sets of smaller tasks creates opportunities for workers to enjoy the flexibility of freelancing and to top up their incomes. This trend is also leading to the flourishing of the “gig,” “sharing,” or more generally, the “platform” economy. This shows us that irrespective of pandemic, the industry is already moving towards gig employment and decentralization of work.

On the Employees side it's always a mixed bag to be assessed. A few merits and demerits of WFH.

WFH Strengths

- **Women Participation:** Major gain from WFH would be for working women in India. As we know that in India at entry level there are 50% of women associates but further up the ladder, many women drop off from job due to care work burden on women. So WFH will help women to remain in the workforce or return to the workforce.
- **Flexible work:** It's too early to comment on flexible work in India but generally teleworkers in western have flexibility in the login and logout time.
- **Work-Life:** As employees spend more time with family the work-life balance is expected to be better.
- **Commutation Time:** Commutation is always a major challenge in big cities. Employees need to spend on average 2-3 hrs on commutation to and fro for work. WFH will save the commutation time and money. It can be effectively spent with family members or personal work.
- **Environment:** As WFH becomes the new normal it will have an impact on the carbon footprint with reduced pollution during transportation. Large IT parks' need for natural resources like water, electricity, land etc will reduce.
- **De-Centralization of work:** In capitalist mode of production development of industry & wealth are concentrated in major urban centers. So employees are forced to live in cities with a high cost of living. WFH will enable employees to even connect from remote villages to the globe.
- **Personal Time:** Employees may have increased personal time in WFH. As within work time they would get time to do their personal activities within the house. Also plenty of time to take care of personal needs.
- **Persons with disabilities:** WFH is a boon for persons with disabilities. It's always constraining for them to travel long distances, to persons with disabilities, friendly office facilities and work environments etc. So WFH will give the companies a scope to increase the workforce of persons with disabilities.

- **Job Satisfaction:** Various factors like flexibility, work/life giving associates higher levels of job satisfaction.
- **Multiple Employment:** WFH will give rise to the gig economy where employees would get the option to work more than one company or project at a time. So additional earnings would be possible for the employees.
- **Emergence of large MSME companies:** WFH will give companies with zero rent and operation cost to quickly establish and start operating. It would increase employment opportunities.

WFH Threats

- **Work Time:** Lack of clear demarcation of time between work and life would indirectly increase work time and would lead to the exploitation of employees.
- **Ergonomics:** Lack of work ambience at home would be a major challenge. It would end up in ergonomics problems for the employees.
- **Work Essentials:** Lack of infrastructure at home to enable work from home would be a major challenge. Still this threat can be mitigated if a one time cost is given from the company to the employees for infrastructure establishment.
- **Allowance:** Current allowance like LTA(leave travel allowance), Vehicle allowance, food allowance, city allowance, weekend etc would be questionable in work from home. Though other new types of allowances may come up for work from home like the internet, electricity, mobile etc. It still poses a major threat.
- **Salary:** Current salary of the employees were determined based on the cost of living of the work location. So WFH may create a dent in salary and salary structure.
- **Shift:** WFH for rotational shifts, weekend shifts & night shifts would be a major threat. As they lack of infra for shifts, loss of family privacy, can be stressful for employees.
- **Gig-Economy:** IT Sector would see rapid fall of permanent employees and rise of casual employees.
- **Lack of Social Networking:** Work from home would break the chain of workplace social relationships and isolate employees.
- **Collective Bargaining:** Employees Unions and ILO emphasized that collective bargaining is a right that employees should have. It still poses larger problems of organizing people as unions etc at the workplace.
- **Impact on Economy:** WFH may be a boon for employers and employees in certain aspects but indirect employment would have a huge impact. Urban decay may become a problem in IT industry hubs.
- **Health Issues:** WFH will pose physical problems due to ergonomics but it may be temporary. The challenge of mental issues would be significant due to isolated work and work-life stress. It may lead to greater degradation of personal health.
- **Office tool in personal device:** Infiltration of office collaborative tools into personal devices like mobiles posts a threat to privacy.

- **Labour Law:** So far labour laws we have are from struggles of the working class but recently a proposal to draft WFH labour changes were taken from the employers' side. It poses a great risk to the current labour rights and future labour laws for WFH.
- **Social Security:** Gig economy will favour employers to skip social security benefits like PF and gratuity.

Employers Perspectives

1. Over 3-5 years, upto 60% of IT industry's work and upto 40% of the ITES work could shift to a WFH model - NASSCOM [1]
2. CFO Survey Reveals 74% Intend to Shift Some Employees to Remote Work - Gartner [2]
3. The new labour codes should be specifically reviewed to ensure they provide greater flexibility to enable WFH while ensuring adequate protection for both full time employees and contractual/gig workers, in a manner that is conducive to a transition to WFH across industrial/commercial contexts where it is desirable. The Centre should create a Working Group to work closely with the States to ensure that the State laws are aligned, do not duplicate obligations and as much as possible are harmonised across States. - NASSCOM [3]
4. Relaxation on open and closing hours, working hours (including weekly off), exemption from health & safety obligations, maintenance of attendance registers, and accident compensations. [3]
5. Exemption from Industrial Employment (Standing Orders) Act, 1946, permanently. [3]
6. Relaxation on ID Act, for enabling employers to implement dynamic policies. [3]
7. Relaxation from the requirement to provide nursing breaks and creches. [3]
8. Social Security interoperable across formal and gig economy. EPFO over NPS as the latter is tied to employee not employer. [3]
9. Continuation of S.10AA tax holiday for companies working from Special Economic Zones (SEZs) even after extending WFH [3]
10. Government should increase last mile fiber connectivity. [3]

Employees Approach

1. **We can't be abrupt in rejecting telework/WFH.** - The development of technology, Industrial Revolution 4.0 vision of Capitalist think tanks and Capital's interest of profit maximization marching towards creating more precaritive form of employments in the name of "Human Clouds", "Independent Workers", etc. It also goes against the development of Industry together. A considerable section of employees favour WFH due to various advantages it poses.
2. **We need to win our rights and our version of labour law for WFH:** The Indian IT and ITES corporates lobbying through NASSCOM with the Government for laws specific to WFH. Those laws lobbied by IT and ITES corporates are regressive and paving a way for "Modern Slavery". The way forward for us should be to organize our strength and oppose the regressive laws proposed by the IT and ITES corporates. It is not going to be an easy task, only by consistently

campaigning the true regressive nature of the laws proposed by NASSCOM and demanding our version of laws, we can make a meaningful change and protect our livelihood and of the 40 million employees.

Employees Demand for WFH / Tele Work / Remote Work

- **30 hours Work Week** and 6 hours Workday.
- **EQUALITY:** people doing remote worker (RW) have the same rights as people working from office.
- **VOLUNTARILY:** switching to RW must be voluntary, bilateral, and put down in writing.
- **REVERSIBILITY:** the RWer can, at any point, choose unilaterally to return to in-person work.
- **REMUNERATION:** RW salary must be equal or higher than the salary for the same work done in person.
- **DISCONNECTION:** the employer should not request tasks to be completed or contact the RWer outside of the worker's contractually obliged working hours. Disconnection as a Right is needed to enforce it.
- **WORK:** RWers responsible for children, disabled people or elderly people have the right to working hours compatible with their domestic labor, including the right to interrupt their shift for this reason. **CARE**
- **WORK SUPPLIES:** the employer must provide the necessary equipment and support for doing the work, either by providing a computer and software licenses OR paying the worker for the purchase of one.
- **COMPENSATION FOR EXPENSES:** the employer must compensate the worker for additional expenses incurred (Internet bill, power bill, any services that must be employed, etc) due to remote work.
- **HEALTH:** the employer must contribute financially to the physical and mental health wellbeing of employees
- **SOCIAL SECURITY:** Gratuity, pension, health insurance, reskilling fund and other social security benefits should be provided regularly by the employer without any disruption.
- **PRIVACY:** The privacy of employees is under threat in Remote Work in the name of Information Security. Privacy of the employees should be upheld.
- **OTHER RIGHTS:** RWers have the same right as in-person workers to classes, workshops, seminars and union rights.

Survey Report

This report is a part of the effort to understand continuous work from home a survey taken among the employees by the UNITE executive committee from 12/07/2020 to 19/07/2020. The survey was responded to by 171 employees.

Sampling data variants

- **Sample:** 171 Employees
- **Gender:** 128 - Males / 35 - Females / 8 - Prefer not to say
- **Location:** 126 - Chennai/ 14 - Bangalore / 10 - Hyderabad / 11 - Others
- **Sector:** 139 - IT / 27 - ITES / 5 - Others
- **Experience:** 64 (0 to 4yrs) / 64 (4 to 8 yrs) / 27 (8 to 12yrs) / 13 (12 to 16yrs) / 3 (16+ yrs)

Reports Highlights

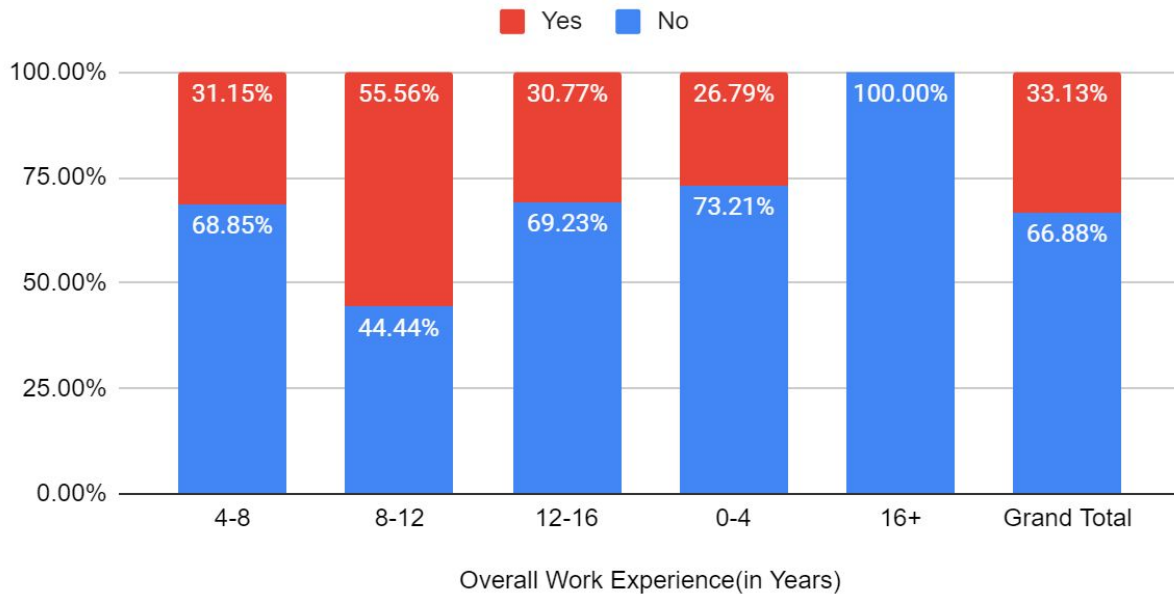
- More women prefer work from home than men. (Female - 62.86% Men - 50 %)
- As employees experience increases more people prefer work from home (40.63% (0-4yrs) / 42.19% (4-8 yrs) / 59.26% (8-12yrs) / 53.85% (12-16yrs) / 66.67% (16+yrs))
- In Big 10 companies higher preferences for Work from home (Big 10 52%,MSME 39.76%,MNC 22.22%)
- In Chennai, little more than half don't prefer to work from home. (Chennai 57.94%)
- Both IT & ITes employees majority don't prefer work from home (IT 53.24%, ITes 59.26%)
- Overall little more than half of the IT employees don't prefer work from home (54.39%)

Other Key Highlights

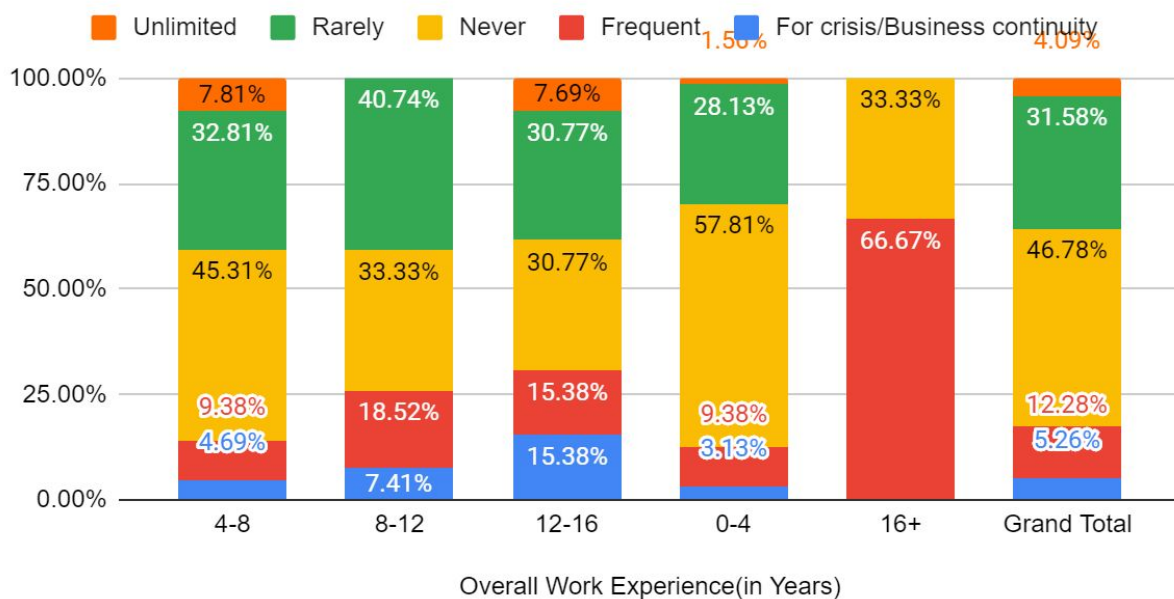
- **67.9% employees not paid any allowance for internet and power.**
- **24.7% employees had allowance cut due to covid**
- **75.1% employees feel work hours increased after COVID.**
- **92.3% employees work more than 8 hours per day (65.5% more than 9 hours per day)**

Charts

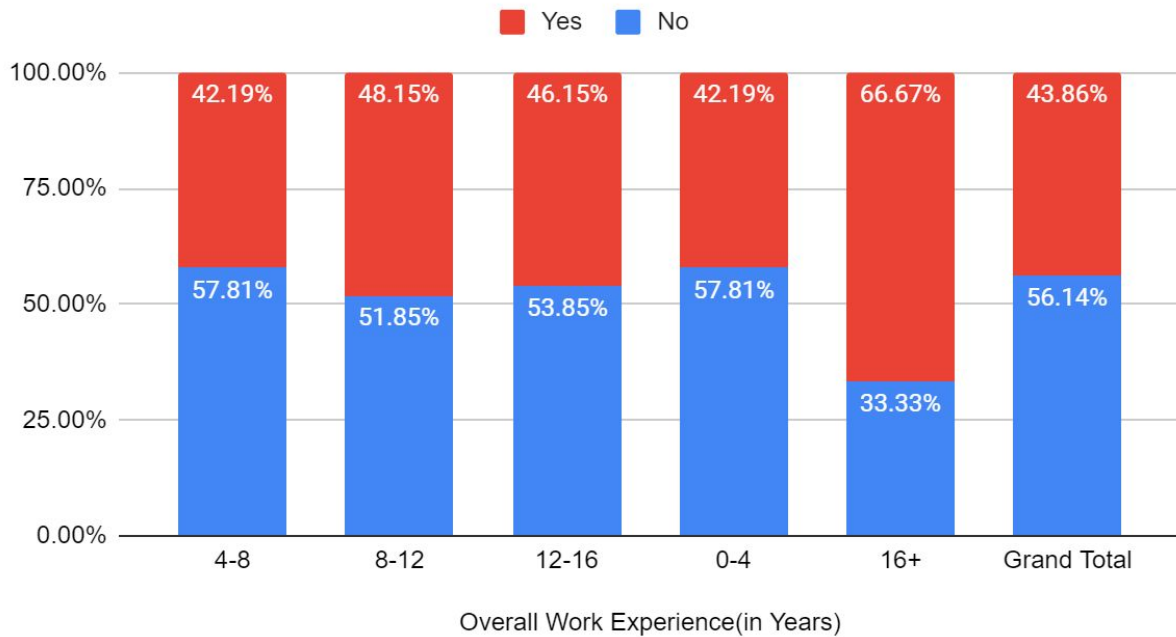
Is company providing allowance for Power and Internet bills during Covid 19 pandemic period?



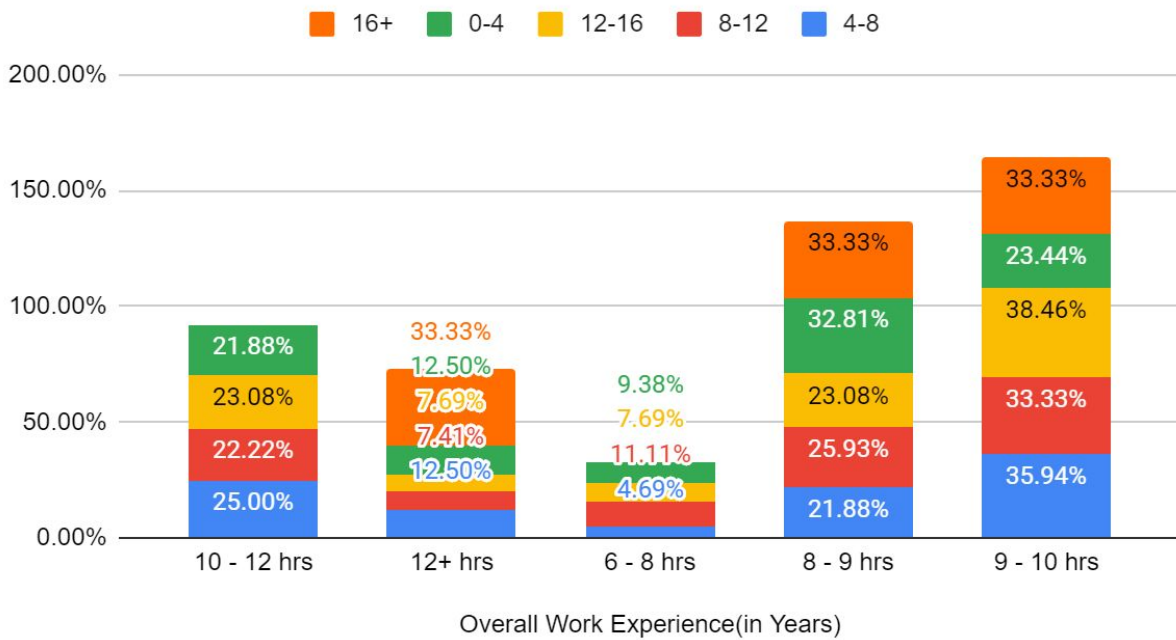
For crisis/Business continuity, Frequent, Never, Rarely and Unlimited



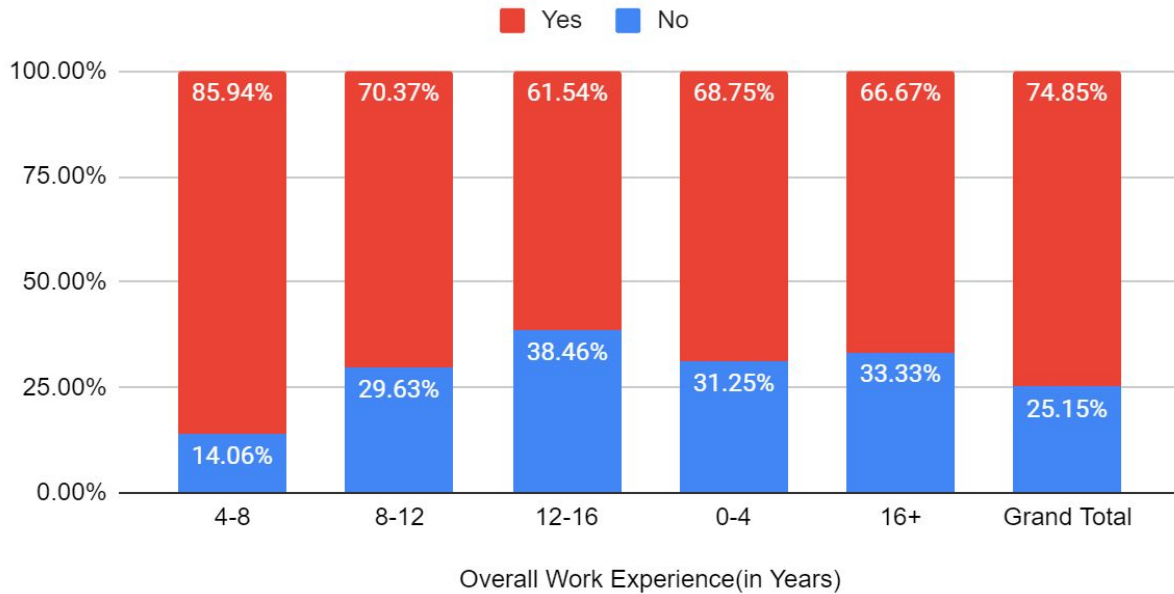
Do you prefer 'work from home' over working from office?



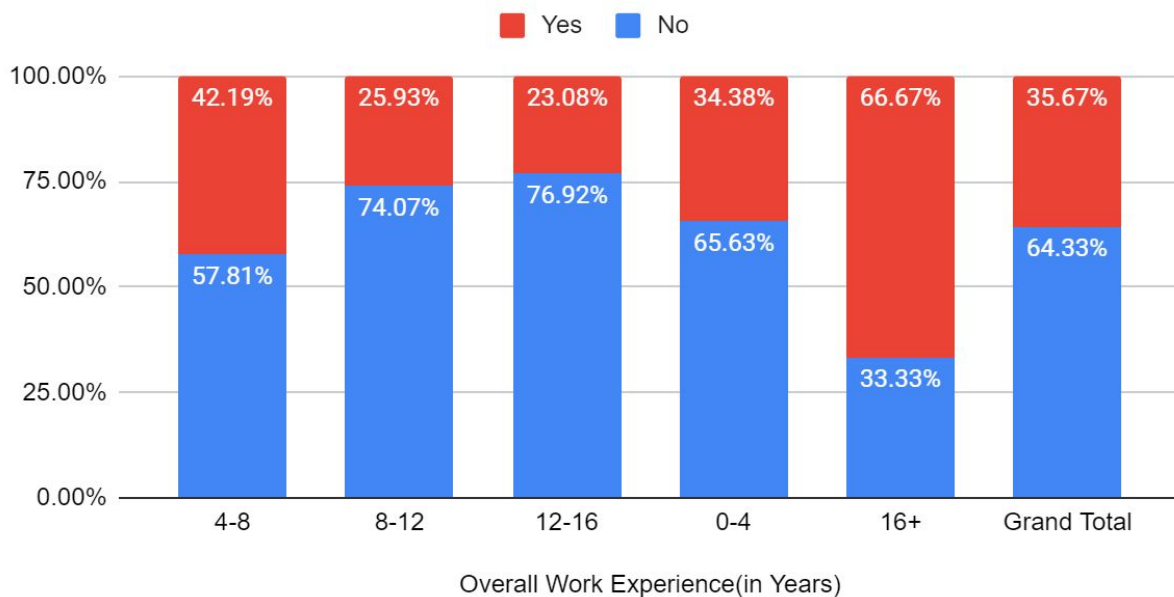
Per day how many hours are you working for the company



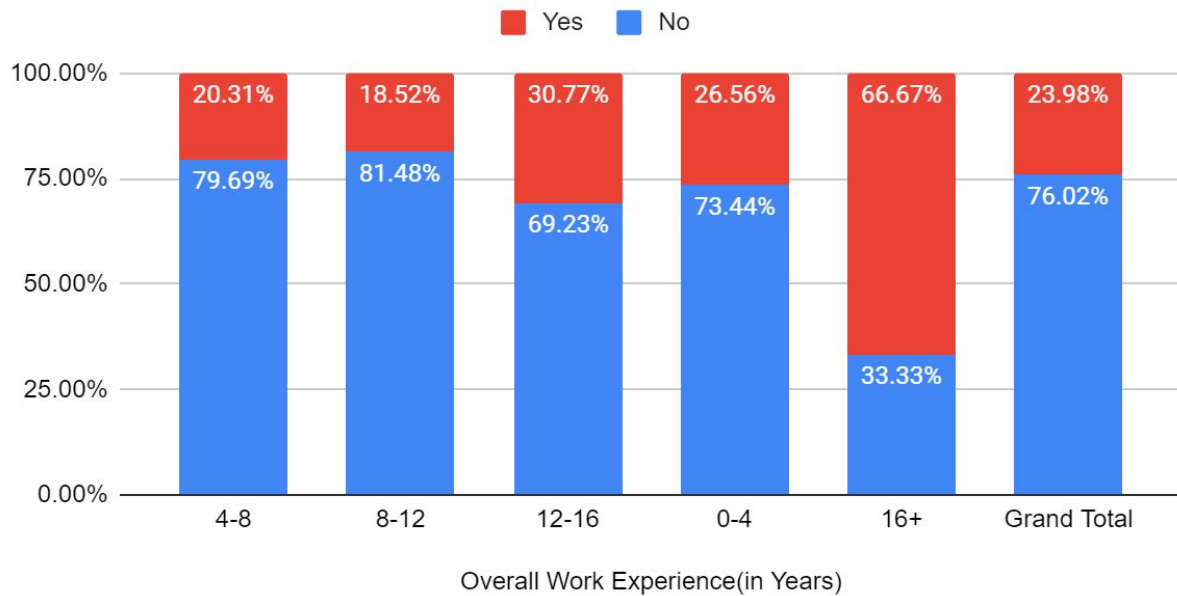
Do you think that working hours have increased after the Covid 19 pandemic ?



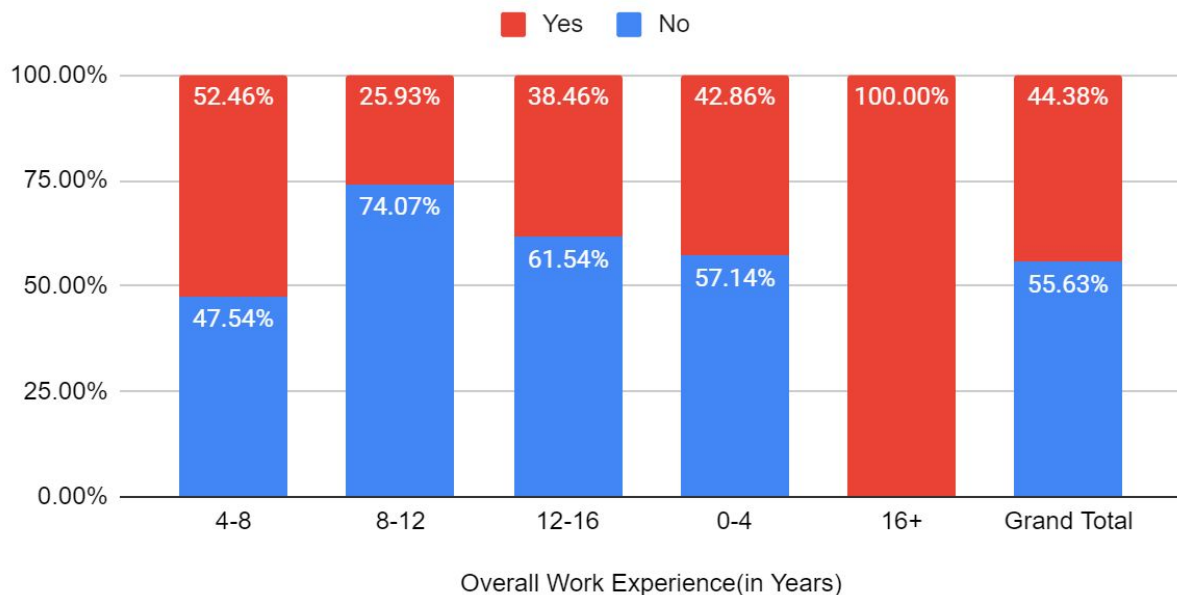
Are you are asked to work on Holidays / Weekends after the Covid 19 Pandemic ?



Have you had any allowance cuts due to 'work from home' after the Covid 19 Pandemic ?



Are you forced to work anytime other than stipulated work hours?



Case Study - Argentina's Remote Work Law

- 1 - **EQUALITY**: people doing remote work (RW) have the same rights as people working presentially.
 - 2 - **VOLUNTARILY**: switching to RW must be voluntary, bilateral, and put down in writing.
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 - 6 - **WORK**: RWers responsible for children, disabled people or elderly people have the right to working hours compatible with their domestic labor, including the right to interrupt their shift for this reason.
- CARE**
- 7 - **WORK SUPPLIES**: the employer must provide the necessary equipment and support for doing the work, either by providing a computer and software licenses OR paying the worker for the purchase of one.
 - 8 - **COMPENSATION FOR EXPENSES**: the employer must compensate the worker for additional expenses incurred (Internet bill, power bill, any services that must be employed, etc) due to remote work.
 - 9 - **OTHER RIGHTS**: RWers have the same right as in-person workers to classes, workshops, seminars and union rights. Also, the privacy of workers is protected by forbidding employers from using surveillance or tracking software.

References

- [1] - [NASSCOM's Policy Recommendations: Harnessing the potential of Work from Home](#)
- [2] - [Gartner CFO Survey Reveals 74% Intend to Shift Some Employees to Remote Work Permanently](#)
- [3] - [Recommendations to the Government of India - Enabling Work from Home \(WFH\) and harnessing its potential - NASSCOM - May 19 2020](#)
- [4] - [Future of jobs report from World economic forum](#)
- [5] - [Future work regional perspective by African Development Bank, Asian Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Inter-American Development Bank](#)

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