

Remote working arrangements in selected public-sector entities following the declaration of the state of epidemic emergency

Performance audit

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[FULL REPORT \(PL\)](#)[SUMMARY \(EN\)](#)

What we assessed and why

The Act of 2 March 2020 on specific arrangements for preventing, countering and combating COVID-19 and other infectious diseases and resulting crises allowed employers to instruct their staff to work remotely. Most public administration bodies were not adequately prepared for the epidemic. This was particularly true of public authorities, which had access to documents containing secrets protected by law but lacked appropriate facilities (laptops or electronic systems for filing and processing documents). The objective of the audit was to examine how public authorities solved the organisational and technical problems of remote working, and assess whether the quality of their services to the public was affected and whether they ensured the safety of secrets protected by law. The audit conclusions are intended to aid the development of effective procedures for remote working in the future.

What we found

A year into the COVID-19 pandemic, it was apparent that the public authorities audited had been passive about introducing flexible working arrangements and had not adapted their way of working remotely to their tasks. As a result, such remote working arrangements decreased, despite the growing threat as the pandemic progressed.

Our assessment of how 34 of the 40 public-sector entities audited had prepared for working remotely was negative. The entities that introduced remote working had developed and implemented appropriate in-house procedures and generally recorded remote working time correctly. However, infrastructural, financial and technical barriers constrained or prevented the organisation of effective remote working. Most of the entities audited (29 out of 40) had only few laptops, almost half had no digitised data, and 17 could not use their domain-specific IT systems off site, which prevented remote access to documents.

Inadequate preparation did not allow the audited entities to reliably work remotely and in accordance with the rules. This required two thirds of their staff perform support tasks that did not require access to IT systems, train themselves or be entirely at their employers' disposal, and often use private resources for work purposes. This, in turn, resulted in limited uptake of remote working, especially during the second and third waves of COVID-19, despite a remote working order being in force at the time in Poland.



What we concluded

It was apparent more than a year after the COVID-19 outbreak that the entities we audited had not sought to improve their remote working arrangements, particularly in relation to the direct provision of services to the public.

No comprehensive changes were made to the rules on remote working during this time, nor were there any programmes or strategies setting objectives, targets or indicators for digital transformation in the institutions concerned. There were generally no audits or checks in those entities to identify either obstacles or good practice in relation to remote working, though the heads of these institutions did identify benefits and problems.

Our audit showed that the public institutions in question were inadequately prepared for remote working, and systemic measures were required. The institutions – being financially dependent on the bodies to which they reported – do not have sufficient means to undertake the necessary digital transformation alone. We therefore consider that major changes are needed, including financial and organisational measures to equip public authorities with laptops, as well as technical and legal solutions allowing remote access to documents. We thus made proposals to the Prime Minister concerning, among other things, the necessary legislative changes, as well as to the heads of the institutions audited.