

## Extended Availability of Public Servants for Work from Home During Non-Work Time in the COVID-19 Pandemic

Špela MAR  
Jernej BUZETI

### Špela MAR

Teaching Assistant, Faculty of Public Administration,  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia  
E-mail: spela.mar@fu.uni-lj.si  
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-1698-4273

### Jernej BUZETI

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Public Administration,  
University of Ljubljana, Slovenia  
E-mail: jernej.buzeti@fu.uni-lj.si  
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-8985-8190

### Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic, with its public measures, has led to changes in public administration and in the way public servants organize their work and working time. The purpose of our article is to determine whether there is a correlation between work during non-work time and extended availability for work among public servants in the Slovenian public administration who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research was conducted in February 2021 in the Slovenian public administration and involved 1,676 public servants. Based on the data of our study, which we analyzed using various statistical methods (Chi-square, Kruskal-Wallis test, Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc test, Spearman's rho), we assert that during the COVID-19 pandemic, public servants in the Slovenian public administration who worked from home performed their work during non-work time and were excessively available for work. As a result, their ability to psychologically detach from work decreased.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic, extended availability for work, non-work time, public servants, work from home.

## 1. Introduction

Global changes, including the proclaimed COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020 by the World Health Organization (WHO), affect organizations. Countries and organizations have taken various measures to protect human health, which in turn affect the dynamics and changes in the organization of work and the working time of employees. In practice and literature (CIDP, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; McDermott and Hansen, 2021; DeFilippis *et al.*, 2020; ILO, 2020; McCulley, 2020; Reisenwitz, 2020; WEF, 2020) it has been found that working time for employees who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic was extended and because of that, they were overworked and constantly available for work because of use of information-communication technology (ICT), which affected their well-being.

In the European Union (EU27), in July 2020, the largest number of employees who worked from home were from the service sector, mainly in education and public administration, and slightly fewer from the healthcare (Eurofound, 2021). However, employees who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic performed work during the rest period time (CIPD, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; Ahrendt *et al.*, 2020; DeFilippis *et al.*, 2020; ILO, 2020; McCulley, 2020; Reisenwitz, 2020; WEF, 2020). Not even public servants in the Slovenian public administration were exempted from this.

Some of the most important parts of the employment relationship are the working time and the rest period of employees. Minimum standards in the EU regarding the organization and duration of working time and rest periods are laid down in legal regulations, but the most important is the Directive 2003/88/EC (Senčur Peček, 2018). In Slovenia, the legal regulation of working time and rest period time of employees is defined in the Employment Relationships Act (ZDR-1), which is based on the directive and applies to public servants in Slovenian public administration. Working time means ‘any period during which the employee is working, at the employer’s disposal and carrying out his activities or duties, in accordance with national laws and practice’ (Article 2 of Directive 2003/88/EC). Rest period time, however, means any other time that is not working time (Senčur Peček, 2019 *apud* Benčan *et al.*, 2019) and is intended for rest and entertainment of employees to take them away from work (European Commission, 2017). In Slovenia, full-time work may not exceed 40 hours per week (Articles 142 to 143 of ZDR-1). A minimum daily rest period includes 11 consecutive hours and a minimum weekly rest period of 35 uninterrupted hours (Articles 3 to 5 of Directive 2003/88/EC; Article 155 to 156 of ZDR-1). Employees are entitled to annual leave for a minimum period of four weeks (Article 7 of Directive 2003/88/EC; Articles 159 to 162 of ZDR-1). For public servants, there are some special features in relation to working time, which are regulated by other legal principles<sup>1</sup>. We will use the term ‘non-work time’ instead of the rest period time in our article.

---

1 Defence Act (Obr); Medical Services Act (ZZdS), Organization and Work of the Police Act; Decree on working time in state administration bodies; Collective Agreement for the Education Sector in the Republic of Slovenia, etc.

The purpose of our article is to determine whether there is a correlation between work during non-work time and extended availability for work in the Slovenian public administration among public servants who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. The aims are (1) to analyze the obtained data of our survey of the Slovenian public administration in February 2021 and based on this (2) to describe the phenomenon of work during non-work time and extended availability for work and (3) to explain how work during non-work time affects extended availability for work of public servants who worked at home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Based on this, the research question in our article is how public servants in the Slovenian public administration, who were ordered to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic, are constantly available for work during non-work times and consequently are excessively available for work.

In the introduction, we present the literature review and the hypothesis, a description of the methodology, the procedures, participants, the research instrument, and the results in the field of extended availability for work of public servants to work from home during non-work time in the COVID-19 pandemic. In the discussion part, we provide key findings of our research. The final part of the article is a conclusion with implications and limitations.

## **2. Work during non-work time and extended availability for work**

### ***2.1. Work during non-work time***

With the announcement of COVID-19 and the measures that were taken, it is reasonable to assume that workers began to work from home and during non-work time. Non-work time is the time before or after the end of official working time during which employees are entitled to a daily rest period. However, it also includes weekly rest, annual leave, and sick leave (Mar and Buzeti, 2021) and is intended to allow employees to relax and enjoy themselves and thus be free from work obligations (European Commission, 2017).

During the COVID-19 pandemic (April–May 2020), 21.6% of the respondents in Slovenia started working from home, which is significantly lower than the EU27 average, where 36.3% of the respondents worked from home (Eurofound, 2021). In Slovenia, from November 2020 to mid-May 2021, 11.5% of employees worked from home, 8.5% in combination, and 67.2% at the employer's premises (SURS, 2021). According to Eurofound (2021) data, 57.2% of the respondents in Slovenia worked outside working hours in the period from April 2020 to March 2021. This is 3% more than the EU27 average, where 54.2% of the respondents worked outside working hours in the same period.

Employees around the world are facing many problems. In addition to increasing their working hours by 48.5 minutes, the duration of their meetings has increased by 12.9%, or 18.6 minutes, even though their number has decreased. Among employees working from home, almost 5% more emails were sent (DeFilippis *et al.*, 2020). In EU27, employees worked longer or additional hours (McCulley, 2020) and in the period June–July 2020, they worked on average 41.6 hours per week. However, in Slovenia employees worked almost 10 hours more (51.3 hours) than in EU27 (McCulley, 2020). Due to the physical separation of work teams, employees worked via ICT and were constantly available to

their managers, colleagues, and customers. They spent more time on virtual meetings and caring for dependent family members. Hence, they worked during the non-work time (in the morning or in the evening) (Reisenwitz, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, a trend toward greater flexibility in work performance was observed among workers in various organizations. At the same time, the greater benefit of working from home was perceived by men, who found it easier to manage the number of hours worked than women (because of childcare, and housework). However, both experienced an increase in work activity of almost 20% or 8 additional hours of work per week. At the time the pandemic was first declared, about 24% of workers were working two additional hours on weekends, and the proportion of these workers declined by 4% toward the end of the pandemic. However, it is still typical for some workers to work early mornings and late evenings (McDermott and Hansen, 2021).

In addition, employers discovered the phenomenon of ‘leaveism’ among employees, i.e., they work outside of working hours while on leave or sick leave during the pandemic COVID-19. At least 60% of employers confirmed that their employees worked outside of working hours, and 70% noted that employees took assigned days off or annual leave to work. As a result, foreign organizations are already taking steps to eliminate ‘leaveism’ among employees. However, there are still 47% of companies that do not eliminate ‘leaveism’ because it is not perceived by employees (CIPD, 2021). According to research results (CIPD, 2021; Eurofound, 2021; McDermott and Hansen, 2021; DeFilippis *et al.*, 2020; ILO, 2020; McCulley, 2020; Reisenwitz; WEF, 2020), we hypothesize that:

***Hypothesis 1:*** There is a correlation between public servants in the public administration in Slovenia who worked from home during the COVID-19 pandemic and work during non-work time.

## ***2.2. Extended availability for work***

By entering an employment relationship, the employee becomes available to the employer. This means that the employer and the employee control the employee’s work behavior within a certain working time (Bergman and Gardiner, 2007). However, due to the possibility of using ICT, employees work and respond to work demands even during non-work time. In the literature (Thörel, Pauls and Göritz, 2021; Cooper and Lu, 2019; Dettmers, Bamberg and Seffzek, 2016) the concept of extended availability for work<sup>2</sup> is used to perform work and reach employees during non-work time. The latter means the state of availability of employees for work-related matters formally during non-work time, but during this time (e.g., due to the possibility of using ICT) the employees respond to work requirements for various reasons and perform work obligations. ‘Extended availability for work is a multifaceted concept, which includes long hours and overtime of employees, the concept of presenteeism, when employees are present at work despite ill health and ‘leaveism’ when employees use flexible forms of work, rest days, and the right to annual

---

2 Or work-related extended availability – WREA, or excessive availability for work – EAW.

leave instead of sick leave due to their own ill health, illness or injury or to care for a family member, or when employees perform tasks they did not perform during working time' (Cooper and Lu, 2019). The concept is associated with certain forms of employee behavior, such as psychological detachment from work, and can affect the health and well-being of employees (Thörel, Pauls and Göritz, 2021; Dettmers, Bamberg and Seffzek, 2016).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, employees highlighted the benefits of working from home, such as a flexible schedule and saving time for commuting to work. Therefore, their biggest challenges were how to take their mind off work, self-motivation for work, loneliness, use of annual leave, and disturbances in the home environment. They faced problems communicating with colleagues, a sense of lack of contact, and that their professional efforts were not sufficiently appreciated by their managers and colleagues. Managers confirmed that employees were constantly available for work, and were concerned about reduced employee focus and productivity, team cohesion, poorer maintenance of organizational culture, and how the situation affects employee careers (DeFilippis *et al.*, 2020).

During the COVID-19 pandemic employees who worked from home used a variety of ICTs in their work. Among 173 full-time U.S. administrative assistants who worked from home, a relationship between working outside of work hours (in the form of using e-mail) and psychological detachment emerged, which affected their emotional exhaustion and the occurrence of work-life conflicts. Specifically, they experienced the inability to psychologically detach from work more intensely, were more inclined to work or more preoccupied with work, and had a desire to respond quickly to emails they received. As a result, they were more likely to experience a conflict between work and personal life (Manapragada Tedone, 2022).

Among employees of various Czech companies, a correlation was found between expectations of their accessibility via smartphones and the inability to psychologically detach. Participants, who perceived expectations of their accessibility were more likely to use a smartphone and to work longer hours or during non-work time. As a result, they found it harder to mentally detach themselves from work. However, expectations led them to use the rest of ICT. Research has found that workers who are better able to separate work and personal life are more able to withstand expectations about their accessibility during non-work time and find it easier to psychologically detach from work (Kondrysova, Leugnerova and Kratochvil, 2022).

In the EU27, on average 78.9% of employees were worried about work between April 2020–March 2021. In the same period, 80.2% of the respondents in Slovenia were worried about work, which is above the European average (Eurofound, 2021). Similar has been found in a Eurofound report (Ahrendt *et al.*, 2020) from the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents confirmed that they were burdened with work during non-work time, which led to increased anxiety and deterioration in their well-being and emotional exhaustion during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahrendt *et al.*, 2020). Employees perceived expectations of constant availability, which made it difficult for them to disengage from work. As a result, psychosocial risks for workers increased. These included problematic work schedules such as long work hours and weeks, social and emotional demands, and

high work intensity. In particular, working hours, work intensity, and emotional demands had a positive effect on workers' exhaustion, which was positively correlated with the number of health symptoms and presenteeism (Eurofound, 2021). Similar research has found (Thörel, Pauls and Göritz, 2021; Dettmers, 2017; Dettmers, Bamberg and Seffzek, 2016) that extended availability for work is connected with their reduced ability to psychologically detach from work and increases their malaise.

In a study involving private and public sector employees, it was found that there was a negative connection between WREA and psychological detachment. Although no direct relationship was found between WREA and change in employees, it was found that those characterized by WREA were unable to mentally detach from work, had sleep problems, and were therefore emotionally exhausted. Therefore, the organizations suggested that they should take measures to discourage employees from WREA, as it affects employees' well-being and health in the long run (Thörel, Pauls and Göritz, 2021).

Employees in the service sector confirmed that being accessible and responsive to work demands during non-work time is connected to their ability to psychologically detach from work and emotional exhaustion. When expectations of work during non-work time increase in an organization, employees experience emotional exhaustion and the frequency of conflict between family and professional life, and their ability to psychologically detach from work decreases. The results indicate a correlation between the extended availability for work and time delays. Due to constant expectations of work during non-work time, employees are forced to 'learn' to psychologically detach from work, but their abilities change over a long period of time (Dettmers, 2017). Another research identified that the frequency of work contacts, adequacy of equipment, control over work contacts, and predictability of work-related contacts are characteristics of extended availability for work. Based on the study which included employees from companies, public administration, and healthcare, they confirmed that the extended availability for work is associated with the deterioration of employees' well-being (Dettmers, Bamberg and Seffzek, 2016). Based on the before mentioned literature, we hypothesize that:

***Hypothesis 2:*** Public servants in the public administration in Slovenia working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic worked during non-work time and were therefore excessively available for work.

***Hypothesis 3:*** Extended availability for work of public servants in the public administration in Slovenia working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic is associated with their reduced ability to psychologically detach from work.

### **3. Methodology**

#### ***3.1. Procedure and research instrument***

We conducted a survey of the Slovenian public administration in February 2021. This encompasses state administration (government offices, government departments, ministries with their bodies and administrative units), local self-government, and bearers

of public authorities (Tičar and Rakar, 2011). The research data were collected from 1,676 public servants, which amounts to 4.13% of the total population (40,553<sup>3</sup>) of public servants in Slovenian public administration.

To obtain the data in our research, we used a quantitative research method and designed an online questionnaire<sup>4</sup>, which included four sets of questions. For the first part of the questions (socio-demographic data), we used a questionnaire designed by Buzeti (2020). In the second part of questions about work during the non-work time, we used open and closed questions included in the two questionnaires from Eurofound reports<sup>5</sup>. For the third part, with questions about extended availability for work and the ability of employees to psychologically detach from work, we included questions and a Likert scale (1 – ‘Strongly disagree’ to 5 – ‘Strongly agree’)<sup>6</sup>. The research data sets allowed us to prepare various statistical analyses and different scientific articles because the same sets of data can be used for various research. With this, we want to present the statistical analysis of our research in as much depth and breadth as possible. In connection with the hypotheses of this article, we present below some results of the statistical analysis of the research.

In our research participated 79.4% of women and 20.6% of men. 33.2% of respondents were between 35 and 44 years old and 35.6% were between 45 and 54 years old. The average age of participants was 46 years. Most of the participants (34.6%) have university education (pre-Bologna), and least some of them (1.7%) have specialization and doctorate (2.6%). 47.6% of public servants work in ministries and in their bodies, 15.3% in local self-governments, 15% in administrative units, 11.8% in bearers of public authorities, and 5.3% in government services. By the answer ‘Other’, 5.1% of respondents gave answers that had already been given in the other questions. The largest share of the sample, 55.4%, is made up of officials. Other participants were officials in senior positions (14%), officials in top positions (2.7%), professional and technical staff (23.7%), and professional and technical staff in senior positions (4.1%). As we expected, most of the participants are full-time employees (97.8%). The rest (2.1%) are part-time employees.

#### 4. Results

In order to statistically analyze the research data, we first merged some of the respondents’ answers (Table 1), who answered the question ‘How often do you work during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic to meet work requirements?’ with ‘Every day, every other day, once or twice a week and less often’ and recorded everything under the answer ‘Yes’. Respondents who answered ‘Never’ were recorded under the an-

---

3 From the OPSI portal 31 October 2020.

4 It is referred to as the ‘Questionnaire on Extended Availability for Work of Public Servants During Non-work Time with Causes During the COVID-19 Epidemic’.

5 Living, working and COVID-19 (Ahrendt *et al.*, 2020) and 6<sup>th</sup> European Working Conditions Survey (Parent-Thirion *et al.*, 2017).

6 Sonnentag and Fritz (2007) and Trogolo *et al.* (2020).

swer 'No'. Only those respondents who worked during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic were included in the analysis of the extended availability for work.

**Table 1:** Location of work during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic

			Pandemic work during non-work time to meet work requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic		Total
			YES	NO	
Location of work during the COVID-19 pandemic	At home	Count	362	49	411
		%	31%	14.6%	27.3%
	Employer's premises	Count	252	193	445
		%	21.6%	57.4%	29.6%
	At home and at the employer's premises	Count	533	87	620
		%	45.6%	25.9%	41.2%
	At different locations	Count	6	1	7
		%	0.5%	0.3%	0.5%
	Other	Count	15	6	21
		%	1.3%	1.8%	1.4%
Total	Count	1168	336	1504	
	%	100%	100%	100%	

**Source:** Authors' own work

Table 1 shows that in the Slovenian public administration there are statistical differences between public servants who worked and those who did not work during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic but worked from home or at the employer's premises. During the COVID-19 pandemic the majority of respondents (45.6%) worked during non-work time, regardless of how often they worked in combination from home and at the employer's premises. 31% of respondents who worked during non-work time in the pandemic worked from home. Among those respondents who never worked during the non-work time during the pandemic, the majority (57.4%) worked at the employer's premises.

**Table 2:** Chi-square test result

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	164.552 <sup>a</sup>	4	0.000
Likelihood Ratio	154.659	4	0.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	0.168	1	0.682
N of Valid Cases	1504		

a. 2 cells (20.0%) have an expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 1.56.

**Source:** Authors' own work

Table 2 shows, based on the result of the Chi-square of the independence test (Chi-square = 164.552; df = 4; p = 0.000), that there are statistically significant differences



of public servants in the public administration in Slovenia who perform work during non-work time depending on where they work. Therefore, hypothesis 1 is confirmed.

For respondents who confirmed that they worked during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic, we wanted to find out if they were excessively available for work (Table 3). The extended availability for work was measured by the frequency of employees' thoughts and responses on a 5-Point Likert scale (1 – 'Never' to 5 – 'Always'). Knowing that most of the respondents worked from home or a combination (at home and employer's premises) during the COVID-19 pandemic and slightly fewer worked at the employer's premises or at the locations where they were posted, we checked the statistical characteristics for each variable using the Kruskal-Wallis test. The analysis shows (Table 3) that the differences are statistically significant for 'Responding to work contacts through ICT' ( $\chi^2 = 24.36$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), 'Contacting supervisors and colleagues about technical problems using ICT' ( $\chi^2 = 38.37$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), 'Continuing to work instead of waiting for a new work day' ( $\chi^2 = 28.94$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), 'Checking received messages via ICT' ( $\chi^2 = 22.75$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), 'Checking remote access via ICT immediately in the morning' ( $\chi^2 = 91.41$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), 'The presence of ICT at all times, including during sleep' ( $\chi^2 = 12.89$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ), 'Use of ICT even during the weekend' ( $\chi^2 = 13.03$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and 'Extended availability for work as a key factor in getting the job done' ( $\chi^2 = 11.31$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). We found statistically significant differences everywhere except for 'Reporting to superiors about work during free time' ( $\chi^2 = 9.43$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ).

Using Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc test, we statistically analyzed pairs of respondents (Table 4, second column) who worked during non-work time at specific locations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Pairs show how often respondents who work in different location were excessively available for work. We included only those pairs for which there were static differences (Table 4).

Respondents who worked from home (86,915) and in combination (-118,959) were more likely to answer to the question about responding to work contacts via ICT during non-work time. For technical problems with ICT, respondents who worked at the employer's premises (86,341) were more likely to respond than those who checked at home and those who checked other (-121,283 <  $p = 0.05$ ; -34,942 <  $p = 0.05$ ) instead of at home or at the employer's premises. When continuing to work instead of waiting for a new working day, those who worked at home (115,714) and in combination (-121,475) preferred to work at the employer's premises, and those who worked at other places (-298,794) than at the employer's premises. Those who check messages received via ICT are more likely to work in a combination (-110,563; -62,551) than at the employer's premises or from home. Those who worked in a combination (-218,440) or from home (232,696) were more likely to check remote access via ICT immediately in the morning than those who worked at the employer's premises. The presence of ICT at all times, including during sleep, is more common among those who work in combination (-43.129) than among those who work from home, or who prefer places other than home (-363.370) or who prefer other places and different locations (356.667) and are more likely to work in other places (-335.240; -320.241) than in the employer's premises or in combination. Involvement in ICT even at

**Table 3:** Kruskal-Wallis test of extended availability for work of public servants who worked in different locations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Frequency of:	Location	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal-Wallis test		
				x2	df	p
Responding to work contacts via ICT	A	362	587,8	24,36	4	,000
	B	252	500,9			
	C	533	619,9			
	D	6	770,8			
	E	15	575,4			
Contacting supervisors and colleagues about technical problems with ICT	A	362	571,8	38,37	4	,000
	B	252	485,5			
	C	533	637,9			
	D	6	703,6			
	E	15	606,7			
Continuing to work instead of waiting for a new workday	A	362	606,3	28,94	4	,000
	B	252	490,6			
	C	533	612,1			
	D	6	789,4			
	E	15	572			
Reporting to a supervisor about work during non-work time	A	362	588,2	9,43	4	,051
	B	252	530,8			
	C	533	607,4			
	D	6	544,5			
	E	15	598,8			
Checking received messages via ICT	A	362	565,9	22,75	4	,000
	B	252	517,8			
	C	533	628,4			
	D	6	736,1			
	E	15	533,2			
Checking remote access via ICT immediately in the morning	A	362	641,9	91,41	4	,000
	B	252	409,2			
	C	533	627,7			
	D	6	663,6			
	E	15	576,7			
The presence of ICT at all times, including during sleep	A	362	556,8	12,89	4	,012
	B	252	584,9			
	C	533	599,9			
	D	6	920,2			
	E	15	563,5			
Use of ICT even during the weekend	A	362	563	13,03	4	,011
	B	252	560,5873			
	C	533	606,7598			
	D	6	953,9167			
	E	15	565,3			
Extended availability for work as a key factor in getting the job done	A	362	586,8	11,31	4	,023
	B	252	543,9			
	C	533	606,2			
	D	6	678,2			
	E	15	401,6			

\* A – At home, B – Employer premises, C – At home and in an employer's premises (combination), D – At different locations, E – Other.

Source: Authors' own work

**Table 4:** Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc test of extended availability for work between pairs of respondents who worked in non-work time at different locations during the COVID-19 pandemic

Frequency of:	Location (pair)	BD	p < 0,05
Responding to work contacts via ICT	B – A	86,915	,001
	B – C	-118,959	,000
Contacting supervisors and colleagues about technical problems with ICT	B – A	86,341	,001
	B – E	-121,283	,165
Continuing to work instead of waiting for a new workday	A – E	-34,942	,687
	B – A	115,714	,000
Checking received messages via ICT	B – C	-121,475	,000
	B – D	-298,794	,026
Checking remote access via ICT immediately in the morning	B – C	-110,563	,000
	A – C	-62,551	,005
The presence of ICT at all times, including during sleep	B – C	-218,440	0,000
	B – A	232,696	0,000
	A – C	-43,129	,029
	A – D	-363,370	,002
	E – D	356,667	,011
Inclusion of ICT even during the weekend	B – D	-335,240	,005
	C – D	-320,241	,007
Extended availability for work as a key factor in getting the job done	B – D	-393,329	,004
	A – C	-43,716	,050
	A – D	-390,872	,004
	E – D	388,617	,014
	C – D	-347,157	,010
	E – A	185,209	,032
	E – C	204,534	,017
	B – C	-62,205	,013

\* A – At home, B – Employer premises, C – At home and in an employer's premises (combination), D – At different locations, E – Other.

**Source:** Authors' own work

weekends is more common among those who worked at other places (-393,329; -390,872; 388,617; -347,157) than at the employer's premises or from home or elsewhere or in combination, and among those who preferred to work in combination (-43,716) than from home. Those for whom over-availability is the determining factor for the work done were more likely to work in the area (185,209) than at home and more likely to work in combination (204,534; -62,205) than elsewhere or at the employer's premises.

Based on the Kruskal-Wallis and Dunn-Bonferroni post hoc test statistical analyses (Table 4), we confirm hypothesis 2. In the following, we wanted to find out whether there was a connection between excessive availability for work and the ability to detach mentally among the study participants.

**Table 5:** Extended availability for work of public servants and their ability to psychologically detach from work

			Work during non-work time to meet work requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic.	I am able to psychologically detach from work
Spearman's rho	Work during non-work time to meet work requirements during the COVID-19 pandemic	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	-.380**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
		N	1504	1168
	I am able to psychologically detach from work	Correlation Coefficient	-.380**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
		N	1168	1168

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Source:** Authors' own work

Hypothesis 3 was verified using Spearman's correlation coefficient, as we had previously found that the variables were not normally distributed. Table 5 shows that the extended availability for work of public servants in public administration is correlated with their ability to psychologically detach from work (Spearman's correlation coefficient = -0.380;  $p = 0.000$ ). The respondents who worked during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic were not able to psychologically detach from work and are thus constantly available for work. Hypothesis 3 is therefore confirmed.

## 5. Discussion

In the context of the research question, we found out that public servants in the public administration in Slovenia worked during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic and were constantly available for work. The result of our analysis shows that 77.65% of public servants in the public administration worked during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The situation was similarly confirmed in the Eurofound survey (2021), where 57.2% of respondents from Slovenia confirmed that they worked in non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, we note that 45.6% of the respondents confirmed that they worked during the non-work time when they worked in combination (from home and at the employer's premises), and one-third of them worked during the non-work time when they worked at home. Accordingly, hypothesis 1 is confirmed. Consistent with research (McDermott and Hansen, 2021; DeFilippis *et al.*, 2020; ILO, 2020; McCulley,

2020; Reisenwitz; WEF, 2020), we predict that the biggest challenge for public servants in the public administration in Slovenia was that many of them had never worked from home before the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the workload of public servants in public administration has increased slightly. Therefore, they had to adapt to the new situation very quickly. Accordingly, they spent more time fulfilling their work duties via ICT and being available to their managers, colleagues, and customers during their non-work time. Although public servants had a more flexible schedule and could arrange their working hours, most of them had to take care of family members during working time. In addition, it can be said that in our study, the phenomenon of 'leaveism' was observed among respondents during the COVID-19.

From the results, it is clear that public servants in the Slovenian public administration were constantly available for work during the COVID-19 pandemic, as they responded to work demands and performed work obligations during this time, which is in line with the findings of previous research (Thörel, Pauls and Göritz, 2021; Cooper and Lu, 2019; Dettmers, Bamberg and Seffzek, 2016). This suggests that public servants who worked from home during the COVID-19 were often excessively available because of work during non-work time, in particular, during the working time during the COVID-19 pandemic, they responded to work contacts via ICT, had contact with supervisors and colleagues in case of technical problems, and continued working instead of waiting for a new workday. They also checked messages received via ICT during non-work time and checked immediately in the morning to see if they had access via ICT. At the same time, they always had ICT with them, even while sleeping, and they kept ICT even on weekends. Public servants often felt that excessive availability for work was key to the work being done. During the COVID-19 pandemic, only during non-work time, respondents did not report work performed to supervisors. Depending on the location of work during non-work time and the occurrence of excessive availability for work, we compared the pairs in more detail. On this basis, we can confirm hypothesis 2.

Our findings show that among public servants in the public administration in Slovenia there is a reduced ability of psychological detachment from work during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic. As we predicted in hypothesis 3, we confirmed that the extended availability for work of public servants working from home during the COVID-19 pandemic is associated with their reduced ability to psychologically detach from work. At the same time, we believe that during the COVID-19 pandemic the extended availability for work is influenced by the ability to be constantly available through ICT during non-work time, and the possibility of flexible working hours considering private and family obligations. Based on our research and in line with other research (Ahrendt *et al.*, 2020; Thörel, Pauls and Göritz, 2021; WEF, 2020), we concluded that respondents were burdened with work during non-work time, felt emotionally exhausted, worried about work, and their focus and productivity were in decline. Consequently, the ability of public servants to psychologically detach from work decreased, and this had the effect of deteriorating their well-being and blurring the boundaries between personal and professional balance.

## 6. Conclusions

We conclude that public servants in the public administration in Slovenia performed work during the non-work time during the COVID-19 pandemic and because of that were excessively available for work. We also found out that public servants who were excessively available found it harder to psychologically detach from work. According to Buzeti (2021), leaders have an important role and should work towards increasing the ability of public servants to psychologically detach from work and limit their extended availability for work by introducing changes.

The research results have several theoretical and practical implications. From the theoretical point of view, we explained the term 'non-work time' and the concept of 'extended availability for work'. Based on data analysis, we demonstrated the existence of a connection between work during non-work time and the extended availability of public servants in the public administration in Slovenia. Numerous changes due to measures taken during the COVID-19 pandemic have affected the way public servants did their work. Especially those who worked from home because of it. Therefore, our research is also important in terms of practical implications. Especially from the perspective of acquainting human resource management, which plays an important role in the organization of work, the distribution of working hours and non-work time of public servants, and influencing their extended availability for work. We also found out that changes such as work during non-work time and extended availability for work affect the well-being and health of public servants. The results of the research are also important for bodies and organizations in public administration and policymakers with the aim of limiting or reducing the problems of work during non-work time and extended availability for work of public servants. Consequently, human resource management in organizations and public administration authorities must be directed towards the adoption of measures that limit the performance of work by public servants during non-work time as much as possible.

The limitation of the research is that we included only public servants from public administration not from the entire public sector in Slovenia. In general, there is a lack of research on the correlation between the work during the non-work time of public servants and their extended availability for work during the COVID-19 pandemic. To analyze the data obtained from our questionnaire, we had to look for links between the extended availability for work of public servants and their psychological detachment from work. In addition, we are aware that work during non-working time and extended availability for work of public servants is influenced by a number of organizational and individual reasons that will need to be examined in more detail. Our further studies of the topic of work during non-work time and the extended availability for work of public servants across the public sector in Slovenia will focus on different reasons why they are constantly available for work during non-work time and whether there is a correlation between them.

## References:

1. Ahrendt, D., Cabrita, J., Clerici, E., Hurley, J., Leončikas, T., Mascherini, M., Riso, S. and Sandor, E., 'Living, Working and COVID-19', Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020.
2. Benčan, I., Belopavlovič, N., Korpič Horvat, E., Kresal, B., Kresal Šoltes, K., Mežnar, Š., Robnik, I., Senčur Peček, D. and Šetinc Tekavc M., 'Zakon o delovnih razmerjih (ZDR-1) s komentarjem, 2., posodobljena in dopolnjena izdaja' [Employment Relationships Act (ZDR-1) with Commentary, 2<sup>nd</sup>, updated and supplemented edition], Ljubljana: Narodna in univerzitetna knjižnica, 2019.
3. Bergman, A. and Gardiner, J., 'Employee Availability for Work and Family: Three Swedish Case Studies', 2007, *Employee Relations*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 400–414, doi: 10.1108/01425450710759226.
4. Buzeti, J., 'The Connection between Leader Behaviour and Employee Sickness Absence in Public Administration', 2021, *International Journal of Organizational Analysis*, vol. 30, no. 7, pp. 1–19, doi: 10.1108/IJOA-09-2020-2425.
5. Buzeti, J., 'Association between Field of Work, Years of Service, and Sickness Absenteeism in Public Administration', 2020, *Organizacija*, vol. 53, no. 1, pp. 53–67.
6. CIPD (The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development), *Health and Wellbeing at Work*, 2021, [Online] available at <https://www.cipd.co.uk/news-views/viewpoint/employee-health-well-being>, accessed on July 3, 2022.
7. Cooper, C.L. and Lu, L., 'Excessive Availability for Work: Good or Bad? Charting Underlying Motivations and Searching for Game-Changers', 2019, *Human Resource Management Review*, vol. 29, no. 4, pp. 1–13.
8. DeFilippis, E., Impink, S.M., Singell, M., Polzer, J.T. and Sadun, R., 'Collaborating During Coronavirus: The Impact of COVID-19 on the Nature of Work', NBER Working Paper no. 27612, [Online] available at <https://ideas.repec.org/p/nbr/nberwo/27612.html>, accessed on July 5, 2020.
9. Dettmers, J., 'How Extended Work Availability Affects Well-Being: The Mediating Roles of Psychological Detachment and Work-Family-Conflict', 2017, *Work and Stress*, vol. 31, no. 1, pp. 24–41.
10. Dettmers, J., Bamberg, E. and Seffzek, K., 'Characteristics of Extended Availability for Work: The Role of Demands and Resources', 2016, *International Journal of Stress Management*, vol. 23, no. 3, pp. 1–35.
11. Employment Relationships Act (ZDR-1), Official Gazette of the Republic of Slovenia, no. 21/13, 78/13 – popr., 47/15 – ZZSDT, 33/16 – PZ-F, 52/16, 15/17 – odl. US, 22/19 – ZPosS, 81/19, 203/20 – ZIUPOPĐVE, 119/21 – ZČmIS-A in 202/21 – odl. US.
12. Eurofound, 'Working during COVID-19', 2021, [Online] available at <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sl/data/covid-19/working-teleworking>, accessed on July 5, 2021.
13. European Commission, 'Interpretative Communication on Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council Concerning Certain Aspects of the Organization of Working Time', published in the Official Journal of the European Union no. 2017/C 165/01.
14. ILO (International Labour Organization), 'Teleworking during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond', Geneva: International Labour Organization, 2020.
15. Kondrysova, K., Leugnerova, M. and Kratochvil, T., 'Availability Expectations and Psychological Detachment: The Role of Work-related Smartphone Use during Non-work Hours and

- Segmentation Preference', 2022, *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, vol. 38, no. 2, pp. 1–10, doi: 10.5093/jwop2022a6.
16. Manapragada Tedone, A., 'Keeping Up with Work Email After Hours and Employee Wellbeing: Examining Relationships During and Prior to the COVID19 Pandemic', 2022, *Occupational Health Science*, vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 51–72, doi: 10.1007/s41542-021-00107-3.
  17. Mar, Š. and Buzeti, J., 'Working in Public Administration During Nonwork Time During the COVID-19 Pandemic', 2021, *Central European Public Administration Review*, vol. 19, no. 1, pp. 223–242.
  18. McCulley, L., 'Lockdown: Homeworkers Putting in Extra Hours – Instant Messaging up 1900%', [Online] available at <https://www.thehrdirector.com/business-news/the-workplace/new-data-over-a-third-38-admit-to-working-longer-hours-when-working-from-home/>, accessed on April 27, 2020.
  19. McDermott, G.R. and Hansen, B., 'Labor Reallocation and Remote Work during COVID-19: Real-Time Evidence from GitHub, 2021, NBER Working Paper no. 29598, [Online] available at <https://www.nber.org/papers/w29598>, accessed on June 20, 2021.
  20. Parent-Thirion, A., Biletta, I., Cabrita, J., Vargas, L., O., Vermeylen, G., Wilczyńska, A. and Wilkens, M., '6<sup>th</sup> European Working Conditions Survey – Overview Report (2017 update)', Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017.
  21. Reisenwitz, C., 'How COVID-19 Is Impacting Workers' Calendars. Clockwise Blog', [Online] available at <https://www.getclockwise.com/blog/how-covid-19-is-impacting-workers-calendars>, accessed on April 21, 2020.
  22. Senčur Peček, D., 'Ureditev delovnega časa med prožnostjo in varnostjo v kolektivnih pogodbah dejavnosti' [Regulation of Working Time between Flexibility and Security in Collective Agreements for Activities], 2018, *Delavci in Delodajalci*, vol. 4, pp. 583–608.
  23. Sonnentag, S. and Fritz, C., 'The Recovery Experience Questionnaire: Development and Validation of a Measure for Assessing Recuperation and Unwinding from Work', 2007, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, vol. 12, no. 3, pp. 204–221.
  24. SURS, 'Sredi maja 2021 je delalo delno na lokaciji delovnega mesta, delno od doma 10 % zaposlenih' [As of Mid-May 2021, 10% of Employees Worked Partly at Work and Partly from Home], [Online] available at <https://www.stat.si/StatWeb/News/Index/9631>, accessed on June 18, 2021.
  25. Tičar, B. and Rakar, I. 'Pravo javne uprave' [Public Administration Law], Maribor: Inštitut za lokalno samoupravo in javna naročila, 2011.
  26. Thörel, E., Pauls, N. and Göritz, A.S., 'Work-related Extended Availability, Psychological Detachment, and Interindividual Differences: A Cross-Lagged Panel Study', 2021, *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, vol. 35, no. 2, pp. 1–23.
  27. Trogolo, M., Morera, L., Castellano, E., Sponton, C. and Medrano, L.A., 'Psychometric Properties of the Recovery Experience Questionnaire at Argentine Workers', 2020, *Anales de psicología/Annals of Psychology*, vol. 36, no. 1, pp. 181–188.
  28. WEF (World Economic Forum), '6 Chart That Show What Employers and Employees Really Think about Remote Working', [Online] available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/coronavirus-covid19-remote-working-office-employees-employers>, accessed on June 5, 2020.
  29. WEF (World Economic Forum), 'Longer Hours, More Emails and Shorter Meetings – Working from Home in the Time of COVID', [Online] available at <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/08/coronavirus-working-home-hours-research/>, accessed on August 14, 2020.