

(f) Occupational safety and health

As indicated in section 6(a), employers generally are responsible for the safety and health of workers at the workplace and during work hours. However, during WFH, supervisors are unable to ensure the health and safety of workers because they are not present at the employer's workspace. Participants in the Global Dialogue Forum on the Challenges and Opportunities of Teleworking for Workers and Employers in the Information and Communications Technology and Financial Services Sectors, held in Geneva in October 2016, included this among their consensus points: "Occupational safety and health conditions are more difficult to monitor and control in teleworking arrangements, especially where the home is also the workplace."²⁵

Furthermore, for a majority of individuals who are working from home for the first time, getting the correct home office set-up presents a challenge. Sometimes, space within the home is limited and office space may double as a dining space, kitchen counter or general use area. Other times, a desk and chair may be present but without the adjustability needed to provide a suitable long-term work environment. Ergonomic risks can be exacerbated as workers may not have access to the same ergonomically-friendly equipment as inside the company's premises. For both employers and workers,

²⁴ ILO, *Ensuring decent working time for the future*, p. 743.

²⁵ IBEC.

²⁶ ILO, *Final report: Global Dialogue*, p. 28.

the use of proper ergonomics can be overlooked while implementing WFH arrangements during COVID-19, possibly increasing the risk of injury or health problems to workers. Employers should consider how they could mitigate the potential for injuries to address potential ergonomic concerns for workers.

Promote awareness and ensure compliance

Employers should do the following:

- ▶ provide information and training on health and safety issues particularly relevant for workers in WFH arrangements (e.g. ergonomics, working in isolation, general fire and electrical safety issues);
- ▶ ensure that workers are aware of or provided with relevant information about their general obligations with regards to safety and health including taking care of their own health and safety and the safety of others;
- ▶ ensure that workers are aware of and comply with the company's safety and health policy, if any, including the procedures for reporting work-related accidents and ill health or any health and safety concern;
- ▶ review the company's safety and health policy, if any, and ensure it has provisions covering the worker's home when WFH arrangements are in place;
- ▶ ensure workers are aware of the company's liability under the applicable national laws and regulations and their liability insurance for injuries that occur in the worker's home during the WFH hours;
- ▶ provide on-going evaluation of offsite workers' workstation and offer guidance and monitoring of ergonomic conditions (however, managers will need to respect workers' home privacy);
- ▶ offer ergonomics and safety training or resources to change work habits and improve the physical home-based work environment.