

# HR Insights



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## Work From Anywhere: Pros and Cons

The COVID-19 pandemic changed the world within just a few months. As the crisis worsened, established processes were relaxed or abandoned in favor of maintaining operations. Among the most significant of these changes has been the increase in telework arrangements and the domino effect that it has caused.

Telework, or working from home, has risen steadily over the past several years, but it exploded amid the COVID-19 pandemic. Take, for instance, a 2017 Gallup poll that found that 43% of Americans worked remotely at least some of the time. Now, nearly that same percentage (42%) is working remotely *full-time*, according to a recent Stanford study.

These figures—and signals from employment giants like Facebook, Google and Twitter—indicate that telework is here to stay. Unfortunately, work-from-home policies aren't always straightforward. For example, what happens if employees want to work from a vacation destination? What if an employee is never able to come into the office? These are the types of questions employers must consider as some work-from-home arrangements lean closer to work-from-anywhere (WFA) arrangements.

### What Is Work From Anywhere?

Telework is traditionally conducted at an employee's house. Many businesses that shifted to remote work amid the COVID-19 pandemic had workers who were not used to these kinds of arrangements. As such, those workers were naturally clustered near their homes and places of business.

Now, as telework cements itself as a new workplace standard, employees are asking themselves, "Why work from home when I can work from anywhere?"

This emerging trend is exactly what it sounds like: Employees travel to a desired location with a reliable internet connection and work from there (either for an extended visit or permanently). This might seem like an inconsequential situation—especially if the workers telework permanently—but there are some important questions for employers to consider before allowing WFA arrangements.

### WFA Pros

Having employees work from any place they like can actually benefit the entire organization. One study found that workers' output increased by 4.4% after transitioning from working at home to WFA, according to the Harvard Business Review.

Another advantage to WFA is its allure from a recruiting perspective. Employers could extend openings to anyone who has access to the internet. In terms of retention, WFA allows employees the flexibility to move without worrying about their job.

For instance, a senior employee may be debating whether to retire someplace warm or to keep working a bit longer. In a WFA environment, they could do both, which would retain a valuable worker while providing them much-needed flexibility.

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Similarly, WFA arrangements allow employees to move to more affordable locations. This adds more value to their salaries without any impact on the employer, which can be a very attractive perk.

Finally, a robust WFA policy creates a failsafe for pandemic situations. If another global pandemic breaks out, employers would have a policy in place when workers are sent home. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, this could prove invaluable.

## WFA Cons

Not every organization has the ability, or desire, to allow employees to work from their homes, let alone anywhere they like. Some employers are concerned about productivity; others worry about reliable communication and legal consequences. These are all valid concerns.

In terms of productivity, it's difficult to gauge the impact of telework across the board. Employers have different ways of measuring this, such as using time-monitoring software, conducting frequent check-ins and examining work output. If employers are struggling to keep employees on task when working from home, then a WFA arrangement isn't likely to improve the matter.

As far as communication goes, a WFA policy would need to directly address it. For instance, a policy might limit geographical areas or time zones where an employee may work. Having an employee working several time zones away could limit their availability, especially if the employee is unwilling to work odd hours as an accommodation (e.g., working 6 a.m. to 2 p.m. PST to accommodate a 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. shift on the East Coast).

Obviously, coordinating availability would be further complicated if an employee wanted to work from a different country as part of their WFA arrangement. However, that's one of the smaller issues regarding international WFA situations.

More significant concerns come in the way of taxes, data security, workers' rights, immigration rules, public health and insurance. Different countries will have different policies regarding these types of employment matters. If an employer

wishes to adopt an international WFA policy, they—and their legal counsel—should first consider these aspects.

## Conclusion

While WFA arrangements won't work for every employer, they do present an interesting opportunity for others. Not only can these arrangements look attractive during recruiting, but they also provide real value to employees without costing the employer.

However, there are some significant pitfalls to consider prior to adopting a WFA policy. Employers should consider examining individual employee cases before rolling out a sweeping policy. And, as with any policy, it's highly recommended that legal counsel reviews everything prior to implementation.

Speak with JP Griffin Group for more workplace guidance, including attraction and retention tips.