

# LIFE AFTER COVID-19 FOREWORD

مؤسسة دبي للمستقبل  
DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION



## THE DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION POST-COVID SERIES

The Dubai Future Foundation is producing a series of short reports about life after COVID-19. These papers focus on the most important areas of our lives, including education, work and commerce. They examine how the changes being made to social and working patterns could affect our future, bringing new possibilities as well as challenges. Each paper assesses the current situation, identifies the opportunities ahead and sets out some short and longer-term implications. The series of papers will continue at regular intervals until the COVID-19 pandemic subsides. Accompanying these insights, the Dubai Future Foundation will create platforms and online discussions to provide more insights and opportunities to interact with experts.

COVID-19 has cast a clear spotlight on our collective vulnerability to an unknown virus, the inadequacy of some of our health systems, the global interconnectedness of our economies, our dependence on scarce resources, our professional and educational habits and our reliance on 'just-in-time' systems to keep our society supplied with the goods it needs.

During a crisis we accept that life needs to be led differently, for the greater good. We heed the advice of experts and follow government guidelines. We hear views from all directions, gathering information from sources we trust - and discarding those we do not. Although at this moment it is difficult to imagine precisely how life after COVID-19 will be different, we can already see that both the virus itself and our responses to it have huge consequences for the future.

The structures of our societies and economies are being tested in a completely new way. A new variable has inserted itself into our system and challenged our complex structures to their core. In many ways, COVID-19 has proved the unexpected trigger for a series of long-anticipated impacts. For example, we knew that if tourists stopped travelling, the tourism industry would suffer; but we did not know why tourists would suddenly stop coming. We knew that if ships cut deliveries, markets would be damaged; but we could not see why that might happen. More positively, we also knew that if an unknown disease struck some of the most vulnerable, we would do whatever it took to address that. We were unprepared for this virus and how it tied everyone and everything together. But the response has also been unprecedented in its scale and substance.

When the world emerges from this pandemic, the countries and cities that will have succeeded most will be those that have proved to be most inclusive in understanding their citizens' needs. In particular, they will have leveraged technology, using the crisis as an opportunity to emerge stronger by accelerating positive trends for change.

Life after COVID-19 will be different. That difference will reflect the proactive decisions and directions taken right now - and that makes it important to look beyond the present, for Dubai, and the world as a whole. Dubai is a multicultural and multi-talented city. So what needs to be done in this current situation to leverage and sustain its unique character and prepare it for the future? The Dubai Future Foundation is here to act as a source of information and insights about the future during this time of global crisis.

**DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION**

# LIFE AFTER COVID-19

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FUTURE TRENDS  
**WORK  
SPACES**



# INSIGHTS IN BRIEF



**Working remotely is set to be the norm for the foreseeable future**, with employers developing more flexible workforces and organizations drawing up business continuity plans to ensure their sustainability.



**Remote working has also opened up wider questions around the nature of work**, including that of whether a work space is actually necessary.



In the short term, **HR policies will need to adapt to the current situation**, focusing on employee happiness and productivity. In the longer term, **employers will need to consider whether working remotely may be beneficial** for employees, and whether jobs can be automated or digitized to allow for more multi-disciplinary work.





# CURRENT SITUATION

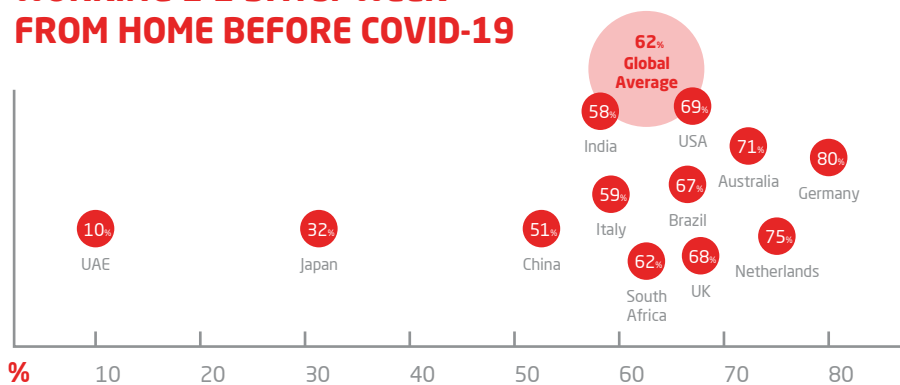
As a clear directive from the government, public entities, private sector companies and all universities and schools in the UAE have begun working remotely.

Although the assumption is that this is a temporary change, it has raised a number of questions. Will this change the nature of work and the occupations that people have? How do employees interact with each other? Will this alter the relationship employees have with their employer?

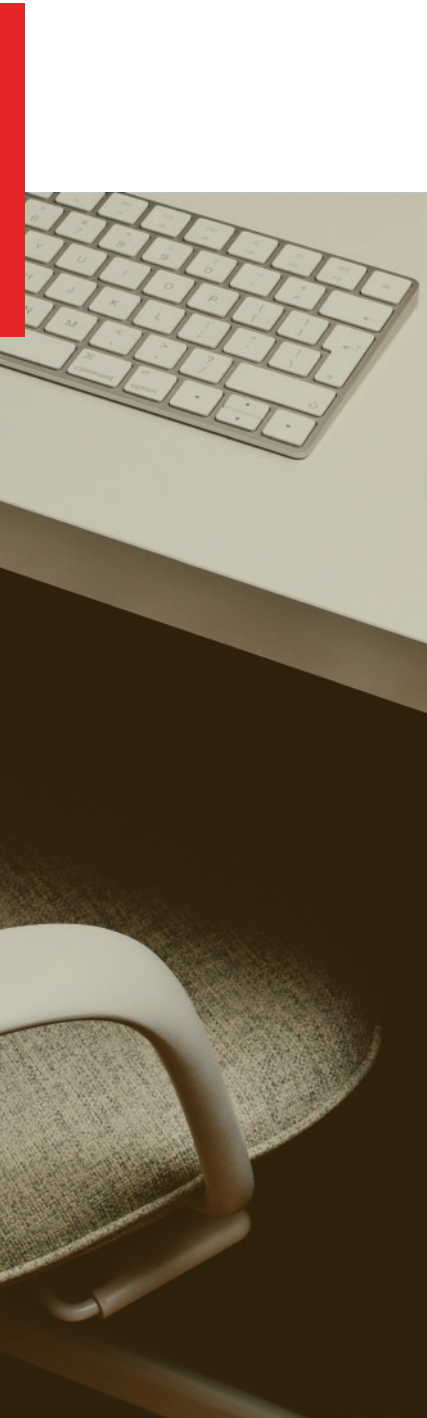
Will this change visa processes that are now in place, especially if people now work from their own homes? How is productivity measured? Can people continue to find value in work if so much of it becomes digital?



## PERCENTAGE OF EMPLOYEES WORKING 1-2 DAYS/ WEEK FROM HOME BEFORE COVID-19



IWG Global Workplace Survey  
Date: March 2019



# OPPORTUNITY

Working remotely has typically been common in certain sectors, such as IT, marketing, app development and some forms of retail. It has meant increased productivity, virtual collaboration, and for some companies, lower costs, including office rental, travel and events. Companies that have adopted remote working policies have also been able to reduce their carbon footprint, with employees commuting less and using less energy.<sup>1</sup> Operating remotely is also well-suited to certain forms of activity such as 'deep work', where intensive research and thinking is required.

In today's pandemic, however, the workforce is set to become more flexible and dispersed by necessity as more people are asked to stay home. This will lead to a more agile, human-centered, inclusive system that depends on individuals as much as the management of their companies.<sup>2</sup>

To meet this rapid change, key policies and processes will need to be put in place. Organizations need to have a 'business continuity plan' to ensure that essential tasks are carried out.<sup>3</sup> Other jobs that are rarely undertaken remotely will need to be rethought, with a view to employees using their skills and knowledge for other forms of work.

Companies that have adopted remote working policies have also been able to reduce their carbon footprint, with employees commuting less and using less energy.

<sup>1</sup> Although there are reports that claim this is incorrect as office buildings tend to be more sustainable than houses (BBC).

<sup>2</sup> Lau, Y., "The Future of Work is the Liquid Workforce", Forbes, 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Mohammadi, E., "The future of work brought closer to reality by Coronavirus", VIA News, 2020.

# WHAT NEXT >

## • Short term (During Coronavirus)



**Well-being models, such as happiness indices, and activities to promote social interaction, such as digital community events,** will become prevalent in HR policies to ensure employees remain healthy mentally while working remotely.



**Productivity will be measured through outputs rather than inputs,** with employees managing their own time, instead of being subject to mechanisms that monitor hours or visibility.

## • Long term (Post Coronavirus)



**Working remotely may become an integral part to work post-COVID-19** with entities maintaining a remote working structure, except for meetings that have to be held face-to-face.



**Large events, seminars and workshops will go digital,** with virtual and augmented reality used to create 'real-life' inclusive experiences.



**Automation will increase rapidly. Employees will need to diversify their skills** or use their existing skills for other jobs. Creativity will increase as traditional jobs are replaced.

As well-being workplace models are implemented, they will need to be designed to achieve and maintain **happiness at work and avoid mental health issues.**

<sup>4</sup> Buffer, "State of Remote Work", Buffer, 2019



# LIFE AFTER COVID-19 WORK SPACES

**AS COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE GO INTO LOCKDOWN, WORKING REMOTELY HAS BECOME THE NORM FOR MANY PEOPLE.**

Companies that have previously established policies for working remotely have found that this practice:



Increases productivity



Reduces rental and travel costs



Lowers employees' carbon footprint.

But this potential shift to remote work for all employees has also raised questions about the nature and meaning of work.

**Q/1** How will productivity be measured if employees can no longer be assessed according to the number of hours worked?

**Q/2** How will people find meaning in work if much of their daily life shifts from the real to the virtual?

