

Remote work: an organizational and reconciliation tool

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Abstract

National regulations, once the pandemic and its acute phase ended, adopted remote work and hybrid forms of work as stable organizational tools. This is a more structured discipline, detached from the pandemic urgency.

The use of hybrid work in 2023 has allowed employees to balance work and life needs, with a very high participation rate within the Institute. In December alone, the days of remote work performed by Institute staff totaled 13,863, with 5,385 days by male colleagues and 8,478 days by female colleagues. Overall, throughout 2023, there were 172,804 days of remote work. For analyzing the use of this reconciliation tool, it is useful to verify the participation rate by gender, i.e., the remote workdays used by gender in relation to the male and female presence in the Institute. This analysis shows that, although the average number of days used per month by both men and women is always quite high (except for some months), there is consistently a significantly higher usage by women. This phenomenon is likely linked to the unequal distribution of workloads outside the office.

Similarly, remote work is a valuable tool for those within the institute who have health conditions that benefit from greater protection by working from home. Even after the pandemic, the intention to support this category of workers through an exception to the principle of predominance (where the number of days worked in-person must exceed the number of remote workdays) remained stable within the Institute and national regulations. In 2023, remote workdays for so-called "vulnerable" colleagues totaled 21,526, with an average of around 11 days per employee per month, slightly exceeding the general limit for all staff using remote work.

Finally, the contribution aims to correlate the extensive use of remote work and other forms of distance work with staff absenteeism rates: has the possibility of working from home reduced absenteeism rates?

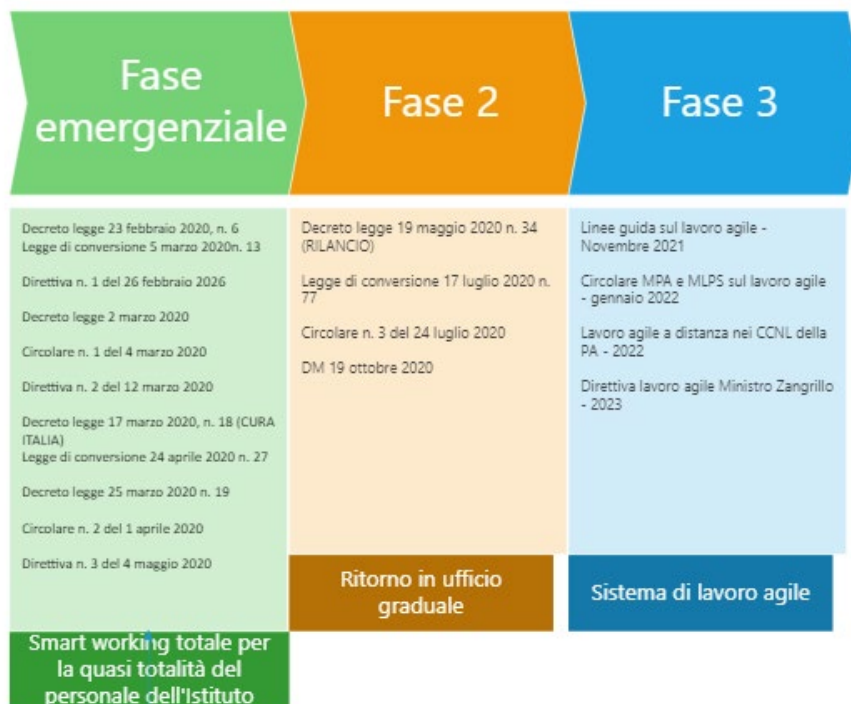
Legislative framework on agile working

The legislative framework on agile work has a tradition, within our system, which starts from far (from the so-called third Law Bassanini), the subsequent interventions and in particular the law n.81 of 2017 has started the experimentation of agile work within the Public Administrations. The health emergency, as is known, has intervened massively on this discipline, determining the need for an organizational model based on flexible hours. This was followed by the adoption of a series of Decrees Law that put an end to the so-called "experimentation" of agile work to transform it into the ordinary mode of work.

The latest regulations and contract renewals, following the end of the pandemic's acute phase, have established remote work as a stable part of organizational practices. This new framework distinguishes between *agile work* and *remote work*.

Agile work, as defined by Law No. 81/2017, is a way of performing work processes identified by the administration, with the necessary organizational and technological requirements in place. Its aim is to improve public services and foster organizational innovation, while ensuring a balance between work and personal life.

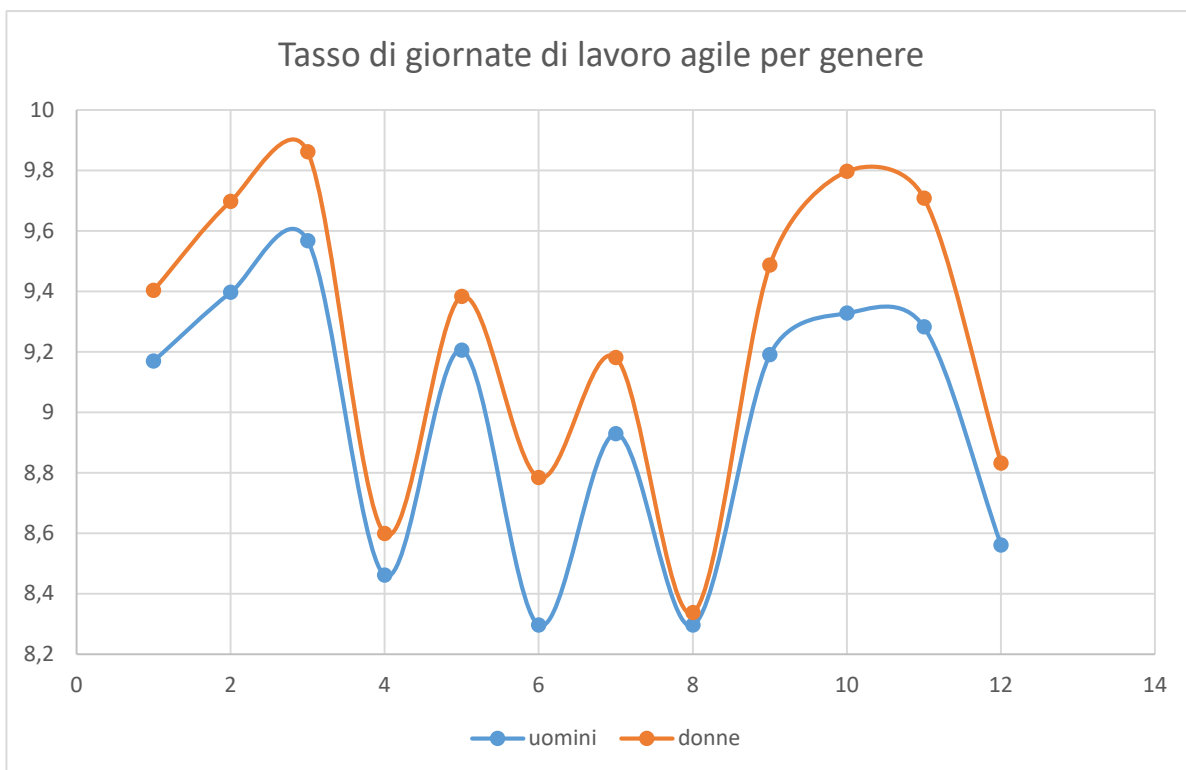
Remote work, on the other hand, differs as it can involve fixed working hours and adherence to attendance obligations under work-hour regulations. It modifies the workplace, allowing the employee to work from a suitable location other than the assigned office. This type of work is enabled by technological tools provided by the administration and can take two forms: a) home-based telework, where the employee works from home; b) other forms of distance work, such as co-working or work from satellite centers.



Analysis of the post pandemic agile work in Institute

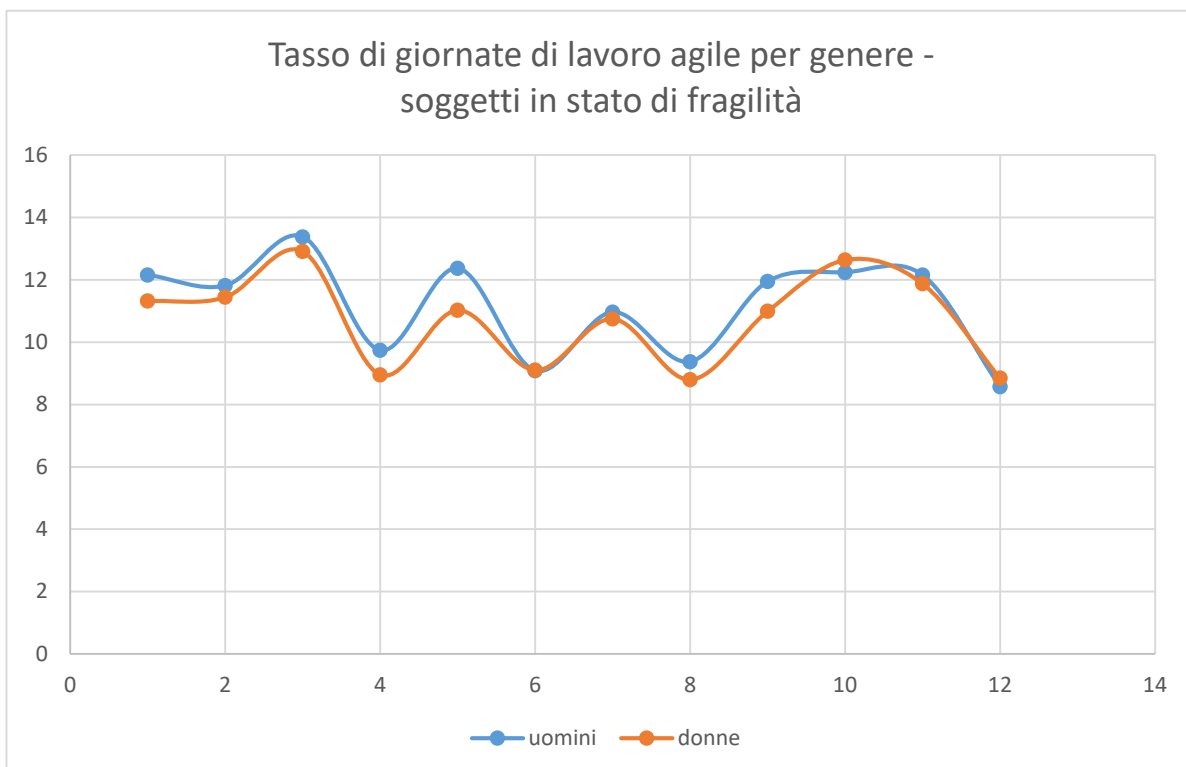
On May 5, 2023, the World Health Organization declared the end of the COVID-19 health emergency. As a result, agile work underwent a significant shift. Following its "normalization" after the emergency approach, agile work is increasingly becoming a stable organizational model for the Institute. It brings benefits to the organization while also serving as a welfare tool to improve employees' quality of life. In 2023, while awaiting the signing of the National Collective Labor Agreement for the Education and Research sector, the National Institute of Statistics continued to use agile work based on specific guidelines. Starting from March 2023, a maximum number of days that could be worked outside the office was set on a monthly basis (previously bimonthly).

Agile work in 2023 helped balance work-life needs, with a high level of participation across the Institute. In the last month of the year, out of 1,916 employees, 1,589 used agile work, with additional employees utilizing other remote work tools, such as special telework or regular telework. In December alone, 13,863 agile workdays were recorded, with 5,385 by men and 8,478 by women. Overall, in 2023, 172,804 agile workdays were logged. A gender-based analysis shows that, while both men and women had high monthly usage, women consistently had a significantly higher number of agile workdays.



The data confirms findings from a previous study conducted by the National Research Council, in collaboration with the Committee for Equal Opportunities and the Social Changes, Evaluation, and Methods team of the Institute for Population and Social Policy Research. This study analyzed agile work in relation to stereotypes and the work-life balance among employees and highlighted a gender gap linked to the unequal division of unpaid domestic work, which remains largely the responsibility of female employees (39% compared to 24% of male employees). The data shows that household and family tasks still reflect traditional gender roles, leading to a greater need for work-life balance tools among women.

Similarly, agile work has become a valuable tool for employees at the National Institute of Statistics with health conditions that benefit from working from home. Initially, these employees were identified to mitigate risks related to COVID-19. However, as the pandemic risks diminished, the Institute maintained the intention to support this category of workers by allowing an exception to the principle that in-office days should exceed remote days. In 2023, this exception allowed vulnerable employees to be exempt from returning to the office. In total, there were 21,526 agile workdays for "vulnerable" employees, averaging around 11 days per month per employee, slightly above the general limit allowed for all staff using agile work. These data also allow for a gender-based analysis of how this special provision impacted vulnerable employees.



It is noteworthy that, in the case of vulnerable employees, gender seems to have an inverse effect compared to the rest of the staff. While, in general, women tend to use more agile workdays, likely due to caregiving responsibilities that still fall predominantly on them, among employees with health conditions requiring special protection, men (except in October and December) used more agile workdays than women. However, this situation is not consistent over time, with occasional trend reversals in certain months and differences that do not always warrant deeper analysis.

The forms of teleworking in Istat in 2024 and the choices regarding the work-life balance

In line with the Directive issued by the Minister for Public Administration on December 29, 2023, the National Institute of Statistics has planned to introduce new forms of agile work for 2024. These will allow employees, under certain conditions, to benefit from an enhanced agile work model compared to the one currently used at Istat.

In response to the directives of December 29, the Institute has decided to implement **Differentiated Agile Work**, aimed at providing greater protection for employees with specific needs. The goal of this

differentiated model is to further support work-life balance in specific situations, fostering continuous improvement in work processes, while ensuring that no one is discriminated against in accessing agile work. It also enhances organizational measures, technological requirements, and staff training.

To implement this model, two different operational approaches, with specific procedures, have been developed, along with two distinct profiles for agile workers:

The differentiated agile work, in both modes of implementation, will be addressed to all the staff of the Institute, including managerial qualifications or those coming, in command, from other administrations. The incompatibility of both modes of implementation with remote working, special teleworking and shift work remains.

In addition, the agile work implementation will be accompanied by additional flexibility measures.

- **Enhanced Agile Work:** For employees who can document serious, urgent, and otherwise irreconcilable personal health issues, or those who can document serious, urgent, and otherwise irreconcilable personal or family situations, including issues related to significant distance from their workplace.
- **Ordinary Agile Work:** For employees who do not fall under the conditions described above.

Differentiated agile work, in both its forms, will be available to all Institute staff, including managerial positions and those seconded from other administrations. However, both forms are incompatible with remote work, special telework, and shift work.

Additionally, the implementation of agile work will be supported by further flexibility measures, specifically:

- In cases of inaccessibility or unavailability of the workplace, as verified by the Central Directorate of Administration and Property (DCAP), the affected staff will be granted additional agile workdays for the time required to resolve the issue, exceeding the usual limits.
- If the Istat medical officer determines, based on medical documentation, that an employee is temporarily unable to commute due to mobility issues but can still perform their duties remotely, they will be allowed additional agile workdays, again exceeding the identified limits.

Despite the introduction of these new agile work regulations, there has not been a substantial increase in the number of agile workdays used.

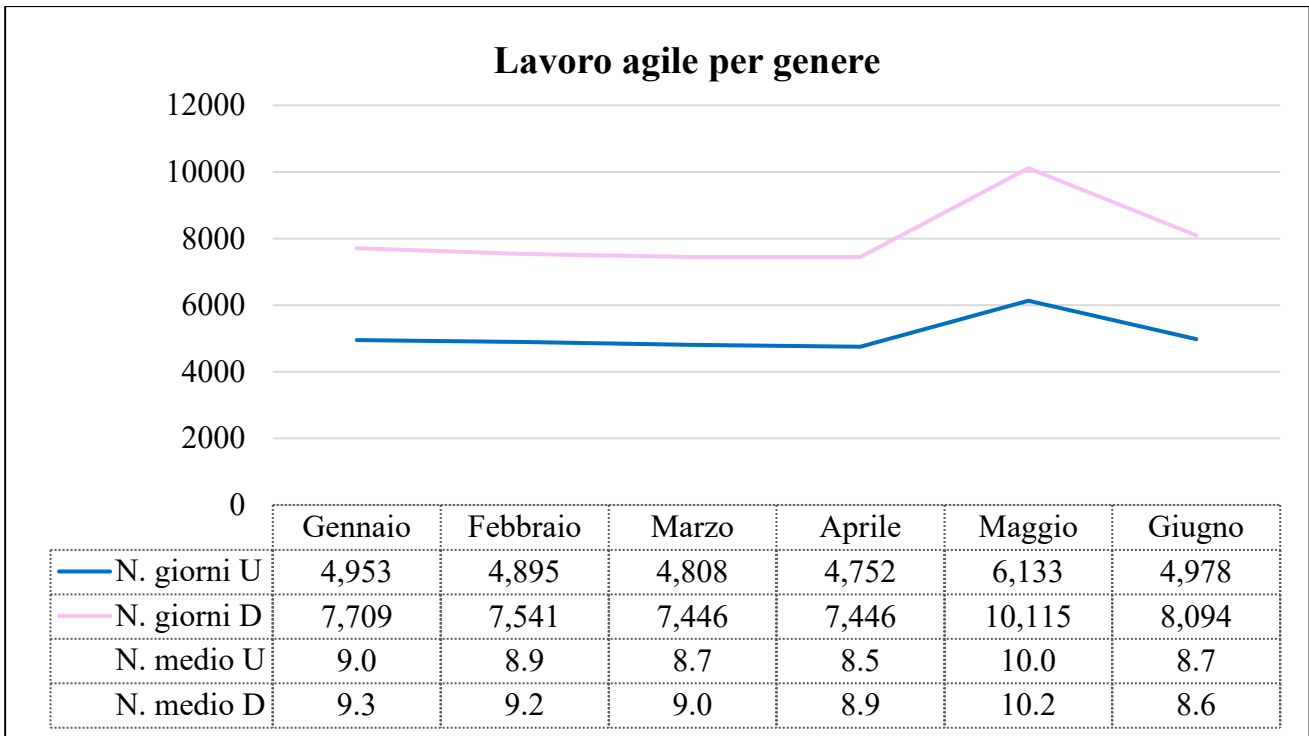
Number of days in agile work per code

| Reference period | Numero di giornate in lavoro agile per codice | | | | | | | |
|------------------|---|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| | Total days | <i>di cui gg 610/601</i> | <i>di cui gg 610H/601H</i> | <i>di cui gg 601P</i> | <i>di cui gg 604</i> | <i>di cui gg 604H</i> | <i>di cui gg 605</i> | <i>di cui gg 605H</i> |
| January | 15.361 | 10.149 | 2.513 | 0 | 1.877 | 28 | 786 | 8 |
| February | 15.235 | 10.014 | 2.422 | 0 | 1.896 | 25 | 865 | 13 |
| March | 15.571 | 9.878 | 2.376 | 0 | 1.818 | 27 | 1.423 | 49 |
| April | 15.052 | 9.970 | 2.228 | 0 | 1.649 | 21 | 1.109 | 75 |
| May | 16.742 | 7.359 | 930 | 7.959 | 137 | 0 | 357 | 0 |
| June | 13.697 | 4.661 | 3.260 | 5.151 | 348 | 0 | 276 | 1 |

A slight increase in agile workdays granted, for example to employees with enhanced agile work, has coincided with a decrease in the days used by “vulnerable” employees—those with pre-existing conditions that placed them at higher risk for COVID-19 complications. It’s worth noting that the right to smart working for vulnerable employees, established during the COVID-19 emergency and repeatedly extended over the last three years, expired on March 31, 2024, for private-sector employees (as per the extension in Decree-Law 145 of October 18, 2023, converted into Law 191 on December 15, 2023) and on December 31, 2023, for public-sector employees.

However, as previously mentioned, the National Institute of Statistics continues to offer additional protections. Employees whose medical conditions, as verified by Istat’s medical officer based on submitted documentation, temporarily prevent them from commuting to the office are still exempt from bimonthly agile workday limits.

The trends observed in the previous year regarding the use of agile work by men and women have remained consistent in the first few months of 2024.



At the Institute, agile work continues to be predominantly utilized by women, likely due to the unequal distribution of family responsibilities. To examine this, the usage rate of agile workdays by gender was analyzed, showing the proportion of agile workdays used by men and women relative to their presence at the Institute. The analysis reveals that, although the average number of agile workdays per month remains relatively high for both genders (except in certain months), women consistently use a higher number of agile workdays, except in June, where the impact of vacation likely plays a role.

The agile work model at the Institute allowed for up to 10 agile workdays per month in 2023 and early 2024 (through April). For employees identified as “vulnerable” by the Institute's medical officer, exclusive agile work without in-office attendance was permitted.

Starting in May 2024, following the Public Administration Minister’s Directive from December 29, 2023, the Institute introduced new forms of agile work to offer employees with specific needs a reinforced agile work model. In response to this Directive, the Institute adopted Differentiated Agile Work to provide increased protection for employees with particular circumstances. This new model, currently in a trial phase, will undergo monitoring to assess its impact on the Institute’s organizational and relational structures.

Comparing 2023 data with 2024, agile work usage trends remain similar between the two years. While there was a slight increase in total agile workdays in May 2024 (compared to May 2023), usage returned to average levels in June 2024 relative to the previous June.

Notably, there has been a shift in the usage of specific codes for agile workdays. While there is an overall increase in “ordinary” agile workdays, there has been a significant decrease in agile workdays for health-related vulnerabilities, marked by the specific code 604.

| Periodo di riferimento | Numero di dipendenti agili per codice | | | |
|------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------|----------|
| | Totale codici* | 610/610H 601/601H/601P | 604/604H | 605/605H |
| Maggio 2023 | 1.601 | 1.418 | 167 | 33 |
| Giugno 2023 | 1.582 | 1.408 | 155 | 35 |
| Maggio 2024 | 1.633 | 1.605 | 23 | 21 |
| Giugno 2024 | 1.563 | 1.517 | 37 | 25 |

| Periodo di riferimento | Numero di giornate in lavoro agile per codice | | | | | | | |
|------------------------|---|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------------|
| | Totale giornate | <i>di cui gg 610/601</i> | <i>di cui gg 610H/601H</i> | <i>di cui gg 601P</i> | <i>di cui gg 604</i> | <i>di cui gg 604H</i> | <i>di cui gg 605</i> | <i>di cui gg 605H</i> |
| Maggio 2023 | 14.911 | 10.277 | 2.394 | 0 | 1.900 | 18 | 321 | 1 |
| Giugno 2023 | 13.591 | 9.785 | 2.141 | 0 | 1.399 | 11 | 250 | 5 |
| Maggio 2024 | 16.742 | 7.359 | 930 | 7.959 | 137 | 0 | 357 | 0 |
| Giugno 2024 | 13.697 | 4.661 | 3.260 | 5.151 | 348 | 0 | 276 | 1 |