



PART 3

Read the text below and answer questions 27–40.

THE BROADER SOCIETAL REPERCUSSIONS OF A REMOTE WORKFORCE

Remote work is often framed as a private bargain between employer and employee, yet when it becomes a mass practice it starts to function like a change in infrastructure. The office has long concentrated people, information, and spending into predictable corridors; shifting work away from those corridors alters how cities, regions, and institutions coordinate. Because many of these arrangements depend on agglomeration economies—dense clusters that make matching, learning, and service provision cheaper—the consequences are not simply “less commuting”. The effects can become path-dependent: once firms renegotiate leases, households relocate, and public budgets are rewritten, returning to the old geography may be politically and financially difficult.

The first and most visible adjustment is the redistribution of day-time economic activity. Central business districts typically rely on commuter footfall to sustain lunchtime retail, small services, and fare-paying public transport. If a sizeable share of workers stays local, the loss is not only a fall in sales but a thinning of the ecosystem that made these areas productive: fewer informal meetings, reduced client visits, and weaker spillovers between complementary firms. Municipal budgets can be hit through lower commercial rates and declining transport receipts, creating a feedback loop in which reduced service quality further discourages travel. At the same time, spending migrates to suburban high streets and smaller-town centres, which can revive some places while leaving others with vacant storefronts. In cities marked by spatial mismatch, where low-income workers are separated from job-rich cores, the shift can also re-sort opportunity, sometimes easing congestion but sometimes removing accessible entry-level work from established transit routes.

Housing markets tend to react faster than labour law. When proximity becomes less valuable for certain occupations, some households trade a short commute for extra space, moving to outer suburbs or smaller cities that once sat beyond daily travel tolerance. This can reduce pressure on central rentals, but it can also bid up prices in places with limited supply, reproducing unaffordability at the periphery. Land-use rules then determine whether growth is absorbed through new building or through price escalation. Crucially, the outcome depends on whether workers believe remote policies are stable. If organisations later tighten attendance rules, the costs of a longer journey are borne by households, not firms; those who moved or signed new loans face policy reversals that turn a lifestyle choice into mortgage risk.



Labour markets also change in ways that are subtle but significant. Remote-first recruitment widens the pool for employers and can reduce barriers for candidates excluded by geography, disability, or caregiving. Yet expanded reach increases competition, especially in roles that are easily standardised and monitored, and it can erode local labour-market power that once came from scarce supply in a high-cost city. Employers may exploit a location discount—offering lower pay in cheaper regions while retaining higher expectations—or use the possibility of offshore hiring as leverage in wage negotiations. Without updated labour standards, remote arrangements can shift risk onto workers through variable hours, weaker mentoring, and fewer informal promotion signals. The gains from flexibility may therefore accrue to highly specialised workers while routine roles experience more insecurity.

These pressures feed directly into public finance. Under fiscal federalism, different levels of government fund services and collect revenues based on assumptions about where people live, work, and consume. Remote work blurs those assumptions: an employee may live in one jurisdiction, use schools, roads, and healthcare there, but generate profits and payroll administration in another. Disputes then arise over which authority should levy income-related taxes, how to apportion employer obligations, and who should fund amenities that make residential areas attractive to remote workers. Some regions may attempt reciprocity agreements, while others may pursue enforcement that feels like double taxation to mobile households. Where rules were built around stable commuter flows, contestation can intensify, and the administrative costs of monitoring and coordination can rise.

Community life is often presented as the “human” upside of staying local, but the sociology is mixed. Fewer commutes can free time for neighbourhood ties, informal care, and volunteering, potentially strengthening place-based identity. However, weak-tie theory, associated with Granovetter, emphasises the value of casual contact with acquaintances rather than close friends. Offices, transit systems, and city-centre routines create repeated low-stakes encounters that expand information, opportunity, and trust across social lines. When these weak ties shrink, civic fragmentation can grow: people may become more embedded in homogeneous local networks, while fewer shared spaces remain for cross-class mixing and social learning. Whether new “third places” such as co-working hubs, libraries, or community venues can replace those encounters becomes a central question for social policy.

Health and environmental outcomes likewise cut both ways. Reduced commuting can lower stress, improve sleep, and decrease emissions, but the same shift can blur boundaries, extend working hours, and increase isolation. These effects are mediated by



job design—autonomy, workload, managerial expectations—so they can differ sharply across occupations and households, and they can accumulate over time. A well-supported professional may gain focus and wellbeing, while a precarious worker may face constant availability demands and diminished support. Remote work also turns digital systems into a core public-interest concern. Reliable broadband, secure devices, and strong cybersecurity become prerequisites for labour-market access, training, and civic participation. Where connectivity is uneven, digital equity becomes a distributional issue: communities with weak infrastructure are locked out of the flexibility that remote work promises. Governments therefore face a planning dilemma: many benefits are decentralised and privately captured, while costs—shifting tax bases, transport revenue declines, and infrastructure upgrades—are collective. Decisions on zoning, taxation, labour standards, and digital investment will shape whether remote work deepens fragmentation or supports a more resilient society.

Questions 27–31

Choose **YES** if the statement agrees with the claims of the writer, choose **NO** if the statement contradicts the claims of the writer, or choose **NOT GIVEN** if it is impossible to say what the writer thinks about this.

27 The writer argues that once remote work reshapes economic geography and public budgets, it may be hard to return to previous patterns.

28 The writer suggests that fiscal disputes created by remote work can be fully solved by merging tax jurisdictions into a single authority.

29 The writer claims that spending less time commuting will automatically strengthen neighbourhood relationships for most people.

30 The writer indicates that remote work can improve wellbeing for some people but harm others, depending on job design and occupation.

31 The writer maintains that policy choices will determine whether remote work leads to fragmentation or resilience.

Questions 32–36

Complete the summary below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

How remote work redistributes risks and opportunities

Some households relocate farther from job hubs in exchange for **32** rather than proximity. If employers later change expectations, **33** can turn relocation into



financial exposure. Firms may reduce pay by applying a **34** in cheaper regions. Under fiscal federalism, conflict can emerge over where **35** taxes should be collected. Weak-tie theory suggests casual encounters can expand information, **36**, and trust across social lines.

Questions 37–40

Complete the table notes below. Choose **NO MORE THAN TWO WORDS** from the text for each answer.

System-wide effects of remote work

System affected	Change associated with remote work	Effect / Requirement
Spatial economy	Fewer commuters travel to city centres	Falling commuter numbers reduce the fare income available to support 37
	Households prioritise extra 38 over a short commute	Housing demand may shift to outer suburbs and smaller cities
Labour market	Employers recruit across a wider geographical area	Greater competition and possible location-based pay reductions
Public finance	Residence, employment and consumption may occur in different jurisdictions	Disputes arise over which authority should collect 39 taxes
Community life	Casual encounters and weak ties may decline	Information, opportunity and trust across social groups may be reduced
Digital access	Employment and civic participation increasingly depend on connectivity	Reliable broadband, secure devices and strong 40 become essential

Answer Key

27. YES

28. NOT GIVEN



29. NO

30. YES

31. YES

32. extra space

33. policy reversals

34. location discount

35. income-related

36. opportunity

37. public transport

38. space

39. income-related

40. cybersecurity