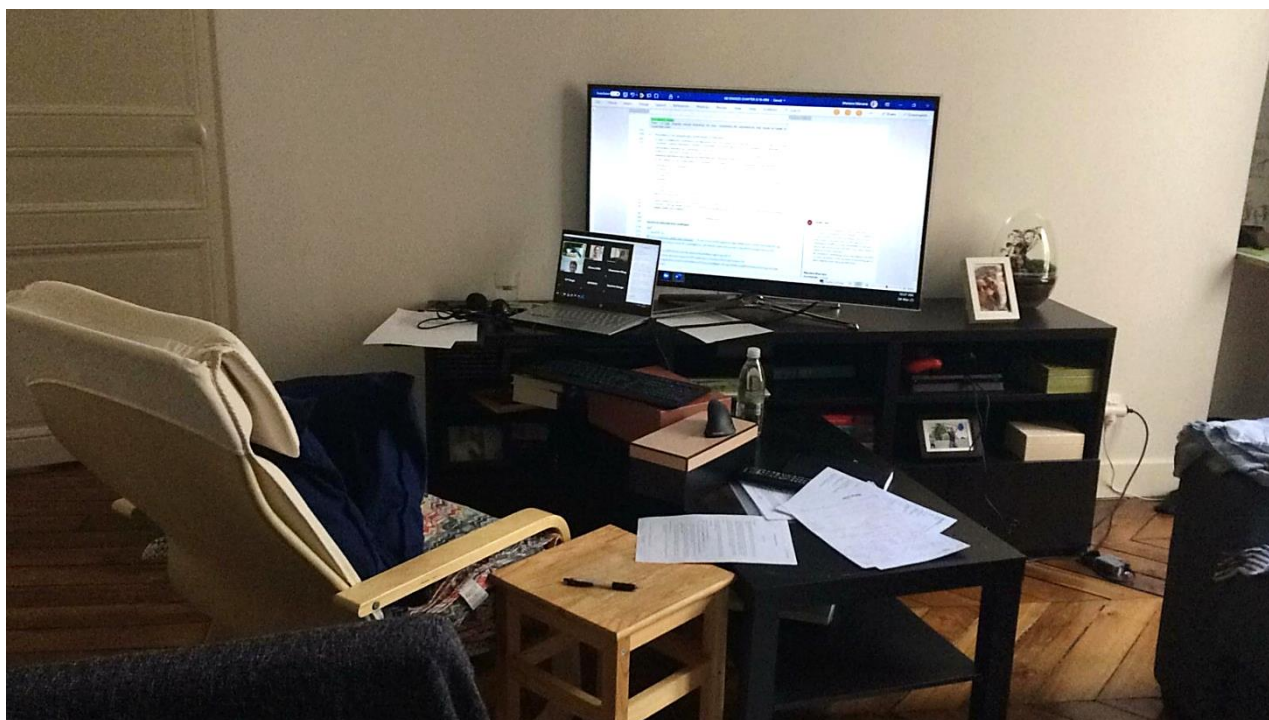


## ***(Re)Starting off on the right foot***



My home setup to host the Ad hoc group on Rinderpest.

***News of the transition to returning to work at OIE HQ has been received with varying degrees of joy by colleagues. Having been back at the office on and off since 16 June, I would like to offer a reflection on this period.***

It was 16 June - I won't say how long after 9a.m. - and I arrived back to the OIE on my bike. What a surprise to see Alex behind a Plexiglas screen! His cheerful 'Good morning to you' a little muffled by a black mask. Although the path upstairs was now marked by bright orange stickers, apart from the ominous spiral staircase, my office felt just the same – three-month-old coffee in the mug to attest to it. My first thought was 'I have a chair! And a desk!!'. That first day was an ergonomic relief for my much worn-out back and wrists, that were tired of sofas, Pilates balls and tall chairs by the kitchen counter. Don't get me wrong – I was not eagerly waiting to come back to the office. However, I think I was craving variety and I didn't want to feel like I was reliving the same day over and over again – maybe it was the millennial in me. As a good millennial, I have always been a staunch supporter of teleworking for increased well-being<sup>1</sup> and productivity.<sup>2</sup> 'Be careful what you wish for', as the saying goes. In this case, we got quite a bit more than we had expected – all it took was a pandemic!

<sup>1</sup> Telework delivers increases in productivity and wellbeing: <https://phys.org/news/2012-11-telework-productivity-wellbeing.html>

<sup>2</sup> New Survey Shows 47% Increase In Productivity: 3 Things You Must Do When Working From Home: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/chriswestfall/2020/05/20/new-survey-shows-47-increase-in-productivity-3-things-you-must-do-when-working-from-home/#105c4c8f80dc>

As I settled into work (and I realised I had left my vertical mouse at home), a couple of colleagues came in to say hi, which felt great – human connection off-screen! Being at the OIE meant that I could go on a real coffee break instead of another Zoom catch-up. I am certain that during lockdown I spent more time looking at the screen than at my partner. I was connected to my colleagues through e-mail, Zoom, Teams, WhatsApp, LinkedIn, you name it! And the lack of separation between my professional and personal lives took a toll on my mental health. However, being back at the office, despite providing the much needed ‘right to disconnect’ when leaving the premises, does impede the over-connectedness of our working days. Therefore, I found myself being even more over-connected with my desk phone ringing, Teams messages buzzing, Zoom webinar ongoing, and Keith at the door, sneaking in for a chat between his own Zoom calls. Since most of the multi-region calls happen at CEST lunch time, I worked away at my desk. A quick trip to the microwave downstairs showed me that the cafeteria now looks like a cross between a classroom and a driving school, with the separated tables and markings on the floor.

By the end of the day, I wondered where the time had gone. During the day, I did not have time to think while frantically hopping from one Zoom call to another and ticking-off my to-do list. I even got to go to Salon Blajan and have an in-person (albeit properly distanced) meeting, which was a mix between face-to-face and interaction onscreen. Being in the same room as my colleagues was a much-appreciated return to normality, without video lag and awkward silences. Bouncing ideas across the table without raising the blue hand was effortless and informal.

Right before leaving, to protect my mindfulness and concentration, I decided to opt out of e-mail, Teams and Zoom notifications – I ended up thanking myself a few days later, when I realised that I could actually finish a task without being distracted by pop-up windows and blinking icons (I check all these apps regularly, don't worry!). I left my laptop at the OIE that evening, which felt really strange – as if I was a teenager again and I was removing my braces – and I hopped back on my bike, leaving the challenges of the working day behind me. Other challenges awaited me on the Parisian streets, but that's a whole other story.

With the end of the work-from-home-times looming, I hope we can all leave behind the blurred lines between personal and professional lives – although I have enjoyed getting to know your living rooms – and that we bring with us the good habits that such an extraordinary situation has fostered.

***‘In these last few months, we have become more creative, bold and resourceful.***

We have hosted *Ad hoc* groups from our living rooms, organised global webinars and taken big decisions in our pyjamas. I hope we have become more reasonable in planning our missions and meetings, and in being aware of other people's time. I also hope (really, really badly) that the productivity and resilience of our staff in times of crisis results in a modern, flexible and accountable teleworking policy being promptly implemented.

*We wish to thank Mariana Marrana for submitting this article to the OIE News Team.*

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