Project Result 1

Detailed analysis of the labour market, identification of telework and field opportunities

Data Collection Analysis
Transnational Report

Prepared by GIE

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Executive Summary

Since a few years ago, remote work has been a common employment practice. However, with the COVID-19's introduction in early 2020, remote work has become more common as a means of maintaining operations for many firms, organizations, and institutions. In order to ensure that remote working (or teleworking) can be used as productive and sustainable work practices moving ahead and as part of the Reliable GREEN initiative, we are attempting to leverage the expertise of both employers and individuals.

Remote employment requires the creation of specialized education and training resources to assist CEOs and back-office staff of SMEs in learning essential skills and competencies. The information provided by the current study is essential for developing highly targeted solutions and adaptable training programs.

ReliableGREEN Project Partners from 5 EU Countries (Romania, Cyprus, Portugal, Ireland, Germany) performed a data gathering research at the national level utilizing freely available technology to cover a wide variety of stakeholders at the target group level.

For each partner country, the data collection and analysis involved a minimum of 50 persons. Application of questionnaires (40 participants, employees of small and medium-sized firms) and conducting interviews were the methods utilized for data gathering and analysis (10 participants, members of the management team and human resources).

The results will be presented in the Transnational Report on Data Collection and Analysis, which seeks to offer a comprehensive practical evaluation of the demands for remote work at the European level. The result is a labour market analysis that offers a solid knowledge platform for the strategies and tools that the partners will develop to make it easier for managers and employees of small and medium-sized businesses to adapt. It is the main tool for customizing learning resources and modifying educational and training programs. In order to make sure that the project results truly have an influence on the organizational culture of SMEs, it is necessary to evaluate and analyse the unique requirements of SMEs structures on many different levels.

For the Local Data Collection Analysis of the ReliableGREEN Project in Romania, the Group for European Integration (GIE) oversaw gathering 40 responses to the questionnaire intended for SME employees and 10 interviews with SME managers. For the Local Data Collection Analysis of the Reliable Green project in Portugal, Rightchallenge oversaw gathering 42 responses to the quantitative questionnaire intended for employees of Small and Medium Sized Businesses (SMEs) and 11 interviews intended for SMEs' management. A minimum of 50 participants in Cyprus were the target audience for the data collection and analysis. In completing the data collection process in Ireland, we interviewed 10 individuals working at management level within SMEs representing the views of employers. We also issued the survey questionnaire to 65 employees that work for SMEs within Co. Cavan to illicit their feedback and contribution. From the 65 invitations issues,

we received 44 responses from employees and their views and opinions are summarized below. 10 SME leaders participated in the interviews as well. University Paderborn was responsible for the Local Data Collection Analysis of the Reliable Green Project in Germany. This paper illustrates the results of a qualitative survey with 10 interview partners and a quantitative survey with 44 participants in Germany regarding the use and management of remote work or telework. Preliminary, remote working is the new trend and will continue after the Covid-19 limits are released, according to the conclusions of the requirements assessment that was done. The main considerations that decision-making positions like HR Managers and Team Leaders consider as they adapt their work to best support their employees are the improvement of teamwork, collaboration, and connectedness, the physical and digital wellbeing of the team members, and the motivation of their team members.

It is interesting from the results of the Irish research, that both businesses and employees engaged in the research process identified a similar skillset that is needed to be successful as a remote worker. These skills included:

- Self-motivation and focus (eliminate procrastination)

- Look at how you promote employee wellbeing to minimize isolation and loneliness

- Excellent communication skills in terms of delivering and receiving information

- Excellent time and task management

- Organizational skills

- Teamworking and teambuilding skills

- Problem Solving and the ability to network and engage with others

- Strategies to maintain a good work life balance and avoid burnout

- Expectation management on both side – employer and employee. The right to disconnect.

- Ability to work independently

Most respondents, both from the questionnaires (workers) and the interviews (managers), appeared to be telework pros and were generally happy with their prior or present experiences. People reported having trouble communicating, dealing with technological problems, and separating their personal lives from their work lives. The main advantages appear to be related to cost and time savings, job organization, and balancing personal and professional obligations. This illustrates how complicated the situation may be because, depending on how people oversee it, the advantages and challenges of remote work may be same. Participants generally agreed that both employees and employers still need to develop and improve transversal skills (related to work and time management, communication, etc.), particular attitudes concerning the relationship with work and the organization, and the capacity to balance personal and professional life. Finally, only a minority of managers seemed to feel workers need to be tightly controlled while in telework, while most considered that they must be trusted so that they can excel.

The study also showed that the "sense of social alienation and emotional disengagement," "miscommunication challenges," and "lack of work-life balance" are currently the most significant factors affecting teleworkers, with the "financial burden" being another significant factor. The results showed that all variables lead to the development of core transverse skills for effective management of telework, providing a useful tool to incorporate into their busy schedules while attending to the needs of the team. As far as course-related areas of improvement identified to influence teleworking in both cases (decision making positions and employees) were concerned, the findings indicated that they did.

The Reliable Green project coordinator, GIE, will analyse these findings in order to combine the knowledge from all five partner nations and create a needs assessment report that will guide the creation of the educational package that is being presented as a part of the Reliable GREEN project.

The context for SMEs, digital transformation, and adaptation to remote work will be presented in the document that follows, along with an analysis of the questionnaire and interview data with the goal of reflecting on experiences with telework, its benefits and challenges, and the skills that must be developed by employees, managers, and employers.

Introduction to the Transnational Report

Remote working has been a feature of employment practice for some years, however with the emergence of COVID-19 in early 2020, remote working as a policy response to the pandemic, led to it becoming a widespread practice in Ireland and across Europe. Through our research as part of the Reliable GREEN project, we have used this backdrop to identify issues, challenges and opportunities associated with remote working which may be applied in a post pandemic environment. This report draws on the employee and employer experiences of remote working and identifies recommendations for the development of the Reliable GREEN educational outputs.

This project's output will be established to serve as a solid knowledge base for the partners' approach and resources, which will be used to make it easier for management and staff at small and medium-sized businesses to adopt telework. It serves as the primary means of personalizing the educational and training plans as well as the teaching and learning materials. It is essential to assess and analyse the specific demands of SMEs structures on several levels in order to ensure an authentic impact of the project results being included in the organizational culture of the SMEs.

The use of remote work requires specialized educational and training materials that will help SMEs' executives and back-office staff members develop their critical competencies. The analysis, with a focus on the aforementioned areas, will contribute significantly to highly targeted solutions and realistic responsiveness of the training program.

The main objectives of the data collection analysis are:

- Identifying the needs of employees in terms of skills / competencies necessary to carry out professional activity in telework.

- Identifying the level of digital skills of employees working in telework.
- Identifying the departments / sectors within the small and medium enterprises that can transfer their activity in permanent telework regime.
- Identifying telework opportunities for companies.
- Identifying the needs of employers in order to carry out professional activity in telework.

The two components of the local data collection activity are field research and data collection. To conduct the field study, the questionnaire was selected as the most appropriate tool to address a wide statistical sample, overcoming time and space constraints, ensuring anonymity of respondents, enhancing objectivity and validity of data, and providing an overview of the research topic, which would be difficult to achieve with other research techniques. The first step was to use the qualitative questionnaire survey that is provided in Annex 1 of the PR1 Guidelines. An online version of the questionnaire was used, and interviews were primarily performed online as well, to answer the current needs of teleworking and target SMEs team leaders, HR specialists, managers, and employees in general who work remotely. The consortium got responses from 223 of the approximately 250 people who work in small and medium businesses across a range of disciplines who completed the questionnaire.

The questionnaire consisted of multiple questions covering the following topics:

- Needs of employees in terms of skills / competencies necessary to conduct professional activity in telework.
- Level of digital skills of employees working in telework.
- Sectors within the small and medium enterprises that can transfer their activity in permanent telework regime.
- Telework opportunities for companies.
- Needs of employers to conduct professional activity in telework.

The second phase was conducting an interview with ten people/ partner country who worked in management or human resources departments of small and medium businesses. The interviews were carried out in accordance with Annex 2 of the Draft Guidelines. Either face to face or online, the interviews were implemented with team leaders, decision-making professionals, HR professionals and managers, reaching a total of 51 participants in our target groups. The main focus was to use a qualitative method to gain a holistic view of the specific needs of our target group at the moment. For the purposes of our research, we used remote-working in the broadest of terms to include all of the following: telework (the practice of using technology), e-Work (using electronic methods to work at a location separate to or remote from the office) remote-working (working from home or a hub) and flexible working (employment practices that are flexible in terms of the hours worked and where the work is done).

Chapter 1 – Questionnaire findings

Profile of Participants

Romania

Gender: 29 female & 11 male

Age:

- Between 25 and 29 – 21 respondents
- Between 30 and 39 - 12 respondents
- Between 18 and 24 – 3 respondents
- Between 40 and 49 – 3 respondents
- Between 50 and 59 – 1 respondent

Position: Assistant director, Technician, Lawyer, Office administrator, Transport manager, Writer, Insurance Manager, Business controller, Legal advisor, Psychologist, Engineer, Audit analyst, Accountant, Customer responsible, HR Manager, Manager, Researcher, EU Funds expert, IT Business Analyst, Recruiter, Buyer, Sales assistant, Software engineer, Project manager.

Portugal

Gender		Age Range					
Male	Female	18-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	> 60
12 (28,6%)	30 (71,4%)	5 (11,9%)	9 (21,4%)	11 (26,2%)	13 (31%)	3 (7,1%)	1 (2,4%)

Note. Cases (percentage)

In what concerns participants' working positions, these are quite varied: 10 project managers/advisors; 7 participants in the area of education; 4 in administrative/secretarial areas; 3 department/institution directors; 2 engineers; 2 Operations Management; 2 in the commercial area; 2 accountants; 2 trainees; 1 CFO; 1 volunteer worker; 1 in logistics and planning; 1 in the legal area; 1 psychologist; 1 translator; 1 web designer; and 1 unemployed worker.

Cyprus

Respondents were 53 adults who met the criteria of having experience in partially or fully working remotely. Most of the respondents fell into the age group of 30 - 39 and 25 - 29, with almost as triple the representation of female (71.7%) than male (26.4 %) respondents in the pool sample. Most of the respondents fell in decision making positions / HR Managers (67.9%) with telework employees following at (28.3%) and finally unemployed / university students at (3.8%). Moreover, in the light of the research findings, 62.3% of respondents worked fully from home during the pandemic, while 32.1% partially. By the time of completing the questionnaire (time zero), respondents working fully from home decreased by 7.6%, in contrast to working partially from home, which increased by 3.7 %

Germany

44 participants took part in the survey. All are employees in an SME. 25 are male, 18 are female and one person did not give any information. The following diagram shows the age distribution

Figure 1. Age distribution

Age

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	Between 25-29	5	11,4	11,4	11,4
	Between 30-39	26	59,1	59,1	70,5
	Between 40-49	9	20,5	20,5	90,9
	Between 50-59	4	9,1	9,1	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

The current position in their small and medium – sized enterprises was presented in a very varied way: 3 concept manager, 12 employee, 4 employee marketing, 2 employee supply, 3 marketing manager, 6 office staff member, 2 operations manager, 2 professional staff, 2 purchasing manager, 2 quality control, 5 supervisors. All of them confirmed that they work from home. During the pandemic, of the respondents (N=44), 39 worked permanently from home and only 5 did not work regularly. However, by the current survey period of May 2021, only 4 were still working from home and the remaining 40 were working from the company site again. Nevertheless, all of them said they were adept of teleworking.

Ireland

In total, Ireland partner received 44 responses and the profile of the participants, is as follows:

Figure 2. Gender Breakdown: Figure 3. Age Profile:
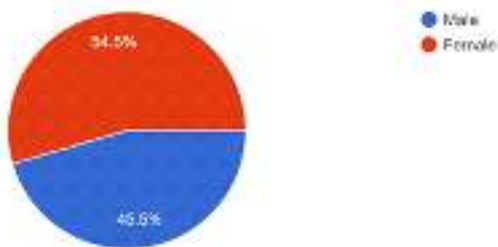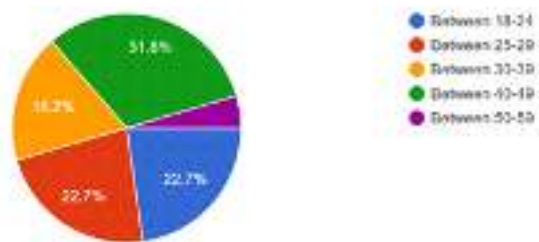
The range of employment positions held by the respondents included sales representative, retail manager, trainer, web developer, office manager, office worker, school teacher, bank officials, tech support, accountant, legal secretary, production worker, customer relations (customer service).

Findings

Romania

Figure 4.

If the answer in the previous question is yes, do you still? work from home totally of partially?

21 de răspunsuri
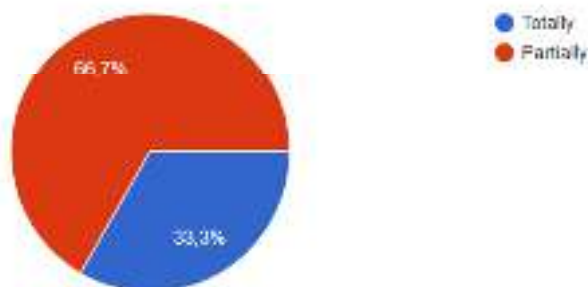
Figure 5.

2.3. Are you an adept of telework? Telework is defined as a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of such employee's position, and other authorized activities, from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work. In practice, telework is a work arrangement that allows an employee to perform work, during any part of regular paid hours, at an approved alternative worksite (e.g. home or telework centre).

40 de răspunsuri

● Yes
● No
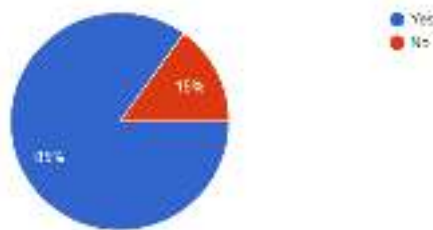
Figure 6.

2.4. Please select 3 advantages of telework   Copiați

40 de răspunsuri

- Time saving — 30 (75 %)
- Better time management — 18 (45 %)
- Increased productivity — 10 (25 %)
- Increased motivation — 5 (12,5 %)
- It helps saving money — 13 (32,5 %)
- More efficient meetings and dis... — 4 (10 %)
- Less stressful — 16 (40 %)
- Better work atmosphere — 8 (20 %)
- More time for family and perso... — 24 (60 %)
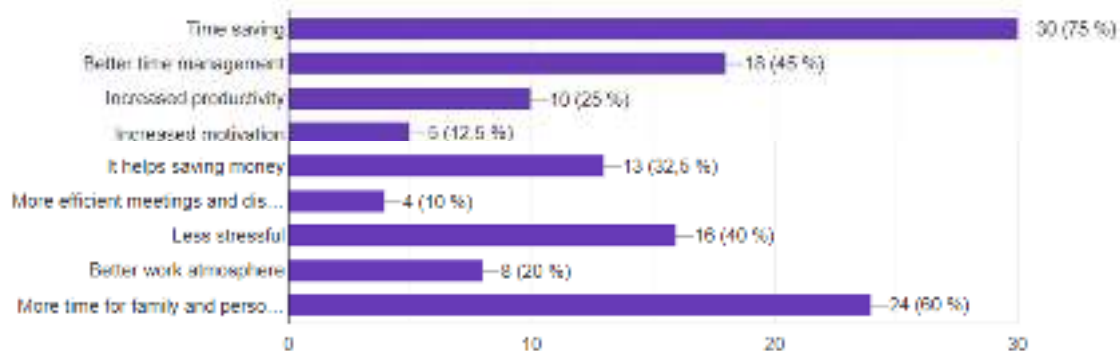
Figure 6.

2.5. Please select 3 disadvantages of telework   Copiați

40 de răspunsuri

- Lack of communication — 24 (60 %)
- Inefficiency — 4 (10 %)
- Lack of productivity — 5 (12,5 %)
- Lack of motivation — 3 (7,5 %)
- Increased costs for electricity a... — 17 (42,5 %)
- Lack of proper equipment (lapt... — 12 (30 %)
- More attention for family than f... — 8 (20 %)
- The difficulty to establish a line — 18 (45 %)
- Difficulties in team work — 16 (40 %)
- It causes anxiety — 9 (22,5 %)
- Lack of direct feedback for cert... — 14 (35 %)

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Figure 7.

2.6. How was your previous experience with telework in terms of:

Figure 8.

2.6. Please rate, from 1 to 5, where 1 is the lowest rate and 5 is the highest rate, your readiness for telework in terms of:

Figure 9.

How important are the following skills for you, as an employee who works from home?

Portugal

From these 42 participants, 35 (83,3%) experienced remote work in the past, demonstrating the regularity of this experience in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. From the 35 individuals who had undergone remote work in the past, 27 experienced remote work full-time (64,3% of the complete sample) and 8 experienced it part-time (19% of the complete sample).

At the moment of the data collection, from the complete sample only 18 participants (42,9%) were working remotely. From these, most were working remotely part-time (14 and one of them stated it was very rare), and 4 stated they were working remotely full-time. These results seem to show a trend towards hybrid working conditions, instead of a full transition to remote work (which was mentioned as a preference by mangers in the interviews conducted, which will be addressed further on).

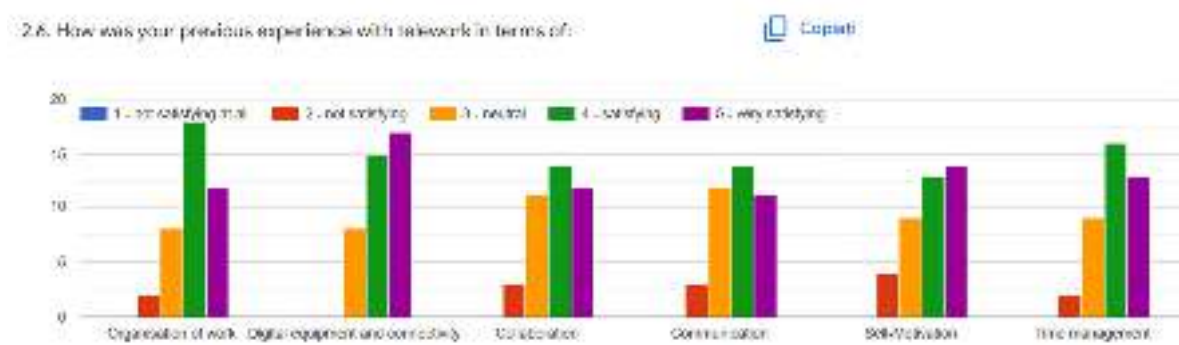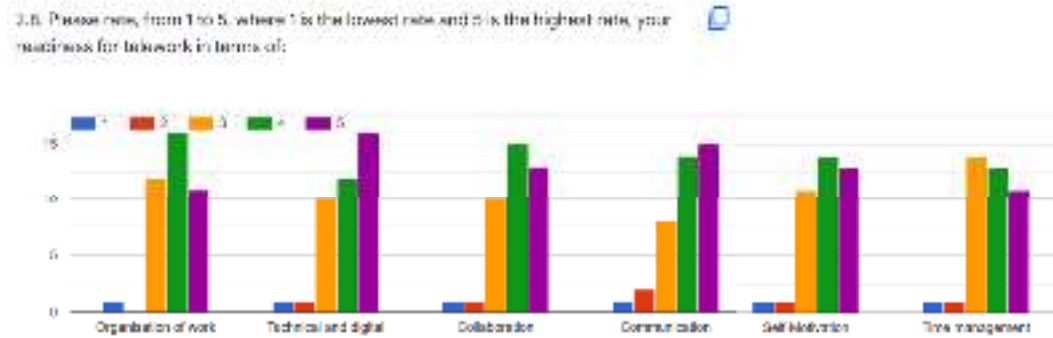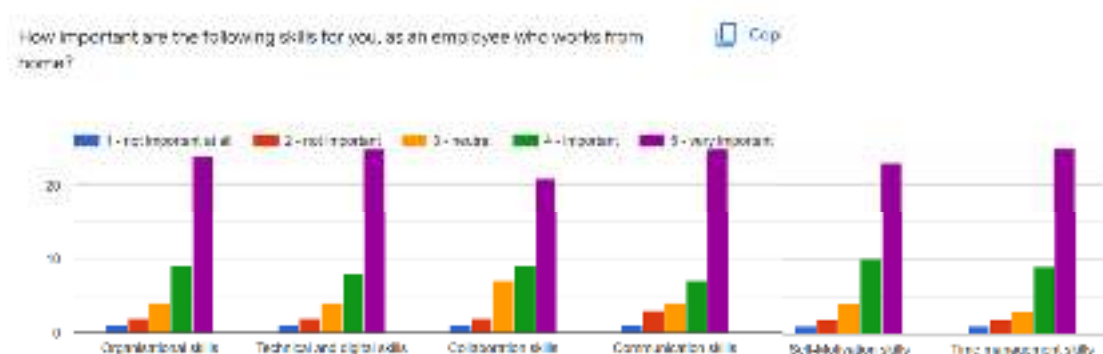Nonetheless, most participants stated they were adepts of telework – 35 participants (83,3%).

All participants were asked to select the three greatest advantages of teleworking and voted as follows (2 participants chose more than 3 advantages but we accepted all answers):

Figure 10.

Advantages	No. Votes
Time saving	**25**
Better time management	**22**
Increased productivity	16
Increased motivation	5
It helps saving money	**25**
More efficient meetings and discussions	7
Less stressful	10
Better work atmosphere	2
More time for family and personal pleasures	20

Therefore, the ones that were identified as the greatest three advantages were: save money, save time, and better time management, followed by more time for family and personal pleasures, with a high number of votes.

In what concerns the three identified disadvantages of telework, respondents voted as follows:

Figure 11.

Disadvantages	No. Votes
Lack of communication	**15**
Inefficiency	0
Lack of productivity	4
Lack of motivation	8
Increased costs for electricity and internet	**17**

Lack of proper equipment (laptop, printer, internet connection)	12
More attention for family than for work	1
The difficulty to establish a line between personal and professional life	**31**
Difficulties in teamwork	14
It causes anxiety	4
Lack of direct feedback for certain tasks	14

So, the three disadvantages that were most common for participants were the difficulty to establish a line between personal and professional life; increased costs for electricity and internet; and lack of communication, followed by difficulties in teamwork and lack of direct feedback for certain tasks, which are also related to communication issues.

Participants were then asked to assess their **experiences of telework** regarding their satisfaction with a set of skills on a Likert scale between 1(not satisfying at all) and 5 (very satisfying).

The means for each skill assessed in terms of satisfaction with past experiences were: Organisation of work (3,86); Digital equipment and connectivity (3,95); Collaboration (3,64); Communication (3,52); Self-Motivation (3,64); Time management (4,07).

The following graph presents the distribution of answers for each skill in percentages. Therefore, most participants were satisfied with their past experienced of telework regarding these skills. Considering both means and the distributions in terms of satisfaction in the Likert scale, the skills with lower levels of satisfaction seem to be collaboration, communication, and self-motivation.

Figure 12. Percentages of satisfaction with previous experiences in telework for each skill identified
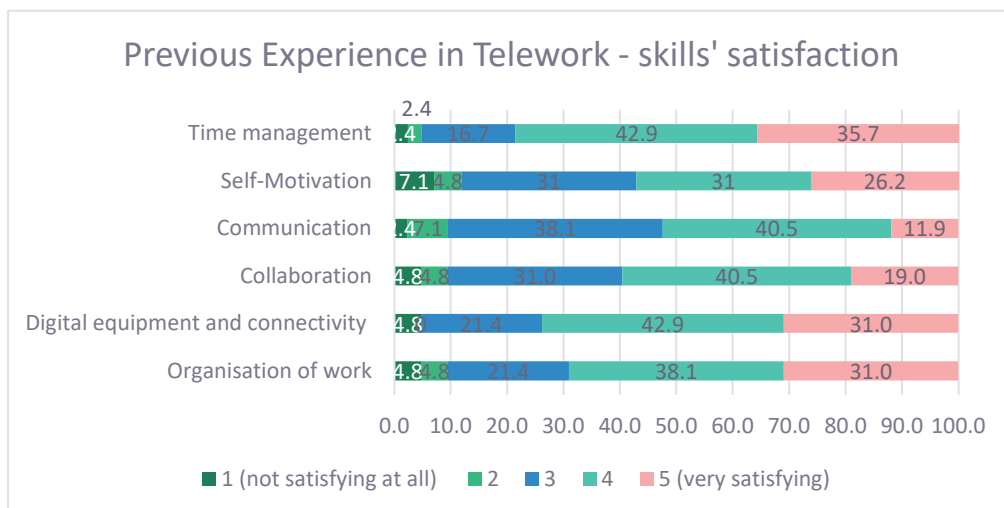
Next, respondents were asked about which of the aforementioned **skills they found most important for telework**, in a Likert scale between 1 (not important at all) and 5 (very important).

The means for each skill in terms of level of importance were: Organisational skills (4,52); Technical and digital skills (4,21); Collaboration skills (4,31); Communication skills (4,24); Self-Motivation skills (4,45); Time management skills (4,55). Thus, considering both the means and the percentages below, participants seem to agree on the importance of all these skills, rating higher time management skills, organisational skills, and self-motivation skills. So, it is important to note that most answers fall above the point 4 in the Likert scale for all skills.

Figure 13. the percentage distribution of the Likert scale for each skill assessed.
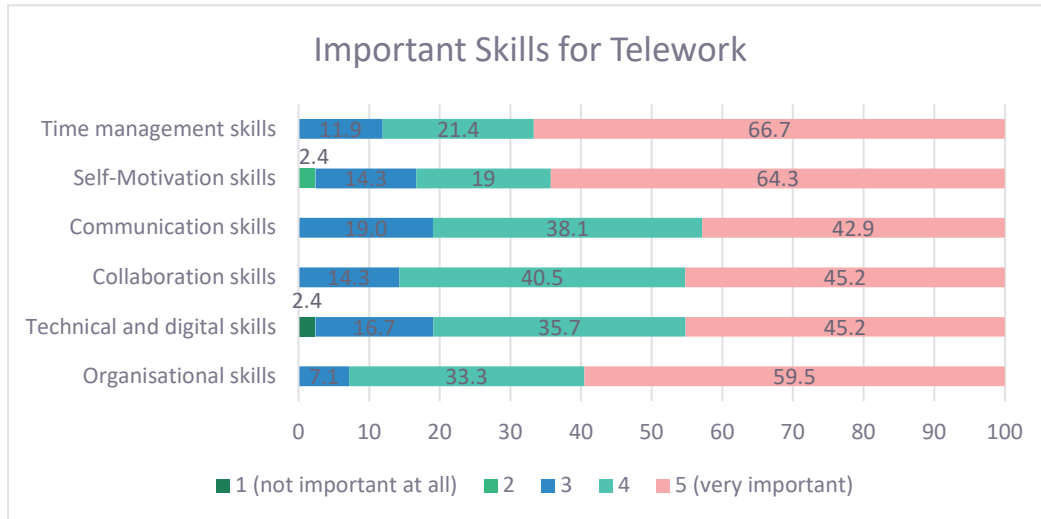
Finally, participants were asked to **self-assess their level of preparedness for telework regarding these skills**. Participants' responses reached the following means for each skill assessed: Organisation of work (3,98); Technical and digital (4); Collaboration (3,9); Communication (3,93); Self-Motivation (3,88); Time management (3,98). So, regarding their readiness to work remotely and their self-assessment on these skills, the one that entails more training is self-motivation.

Nonetheless, in all skills a considerable percentage of respondents self-assess in all skills <= 3 in the Likert scale: Organisation of work (23,8%); Technical and digital (28,6%); Collaboration (33,3%); Communication (33,3%); Self-Motivation (35,7%); Time management (33,3%).

Figure 14. the percentage distribution in the Likert scale for the level of readiness of participants regarding these skills.

Level of readiness for telework regarding these skills

	1 (not ready at all)	2	3	4	5 (very well prepared)
Time management	2.4		31.0	31.0	35.7
Self-Motivation	4.8	4.8	26.2	26.2	38.1
Communication	4.8	2.4	26.2	28.6	38.1
Collaboration	2.4		31.0	38.1	28.6
Technical and digital	4.8	2.4	21.4	31.0	40.5
Organisation of work	2.4	4.8	16.7	45.2	31.0
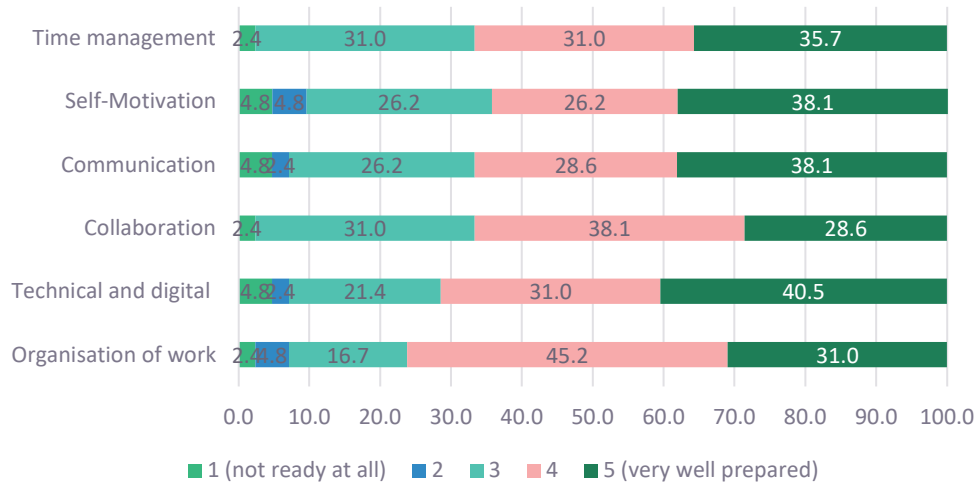
Lastly, participants identified important dimensions for a worker to develop to become more efficient, productive, and confident in their telework. We have sought to summarise these qualitative suggestions, identifying the number of participants for the ones which were mentioned the most. Nonetheless, we kept all the answers, even some that could be integrated into other categories, since they may have divergent meanings. So, participants mentioned:

- Time and work management (define aims and deadlines) – 16 participants
- Organisation – 12 participants
- Communication skills, teamwork, and cooperation (e.g., Communication channels between colleagues and managers; Skills for digital communication to compensate for the distance and guarantee teamwork) – 9 participants
- To be able to separate family and work issues – 5 participants
- Responsibility / Professionalism – 6 participants
- Self-discipline – 3 participants
- Digital skills / Digital Literacy (collaboration tools; documents and work processes dematerialization; cyber hygiene – safe use of digital equipment and resources to ensure security in information transmission) – 4 participants
- The employer must respect schedules and trust in the work/task management of the employee – 2 participants
- Physical and digital means: A house and family organisation that allow conditions to work at home, including adequate equipment (computer, chair, monitor, fixed space to work in which one can concentrate without distractions) – 2 participants
- To keep daily routines and respect breaks, especially lunch (keep routines as in the office and have self-discipline in terms of schedules - e.g., dress as if you were going to the office) – 3 participants
- Ethics and Loyalty to the organisation – 2 participants

- Develop skills and knowledge in effective strategies for project management (use of collaborative tools for project management, de-bureaucratisation of processes, feedback cycles agility).
- Efficiency
- Self-motivation and agency
- Resilience, adaptation skills and openness to new technologies
- Self-confidence
- Technical skills
- Concentration

Cyprus

Advantages of teleworking Table 1 presents the advantages of telework provided by all the respondents from all age groups and genders. Almost 1/3 of the respondents (32.50%) reported that they find working remotely beneficial because they save time and budget invested during transportation, followed by a preference in flexible working conditions (26.25%) and have increased focus at home, resulting in work productivity (18.75%).

As can be seen from the data provided in table 1, there were a total of 80 frequent responses, of which productivity related (15) were as triple the family time increase (5). Interestingly, only 2.5% reported on environmental benefits of interlinking telework, while stress reduction and safety improvement possess 13.75 % of the pooled sample.

Figure 15. Advantages of teleworking

Advantages of teleworking	Frequency	Percent %
Save time and budget avoiding commuting to work	26	32.5
Flexible working conditions	21	26.25
Increase productivity and focus	15	18.75
Reduces stress from travelling and improves individual safety	11	13.75
More time with family	5	6.25
Environmentally friendly working method	2	2.5
Total	80	100%

Challenges of telework presents the disadvantages of telework provided by all the respondents from all age groups and genders. Exactly, 1/3 of the respondents (33.33%), reported that they find working remotely ineffective because they feel socially excluded and emotionally disengaged.

Miscommunication issues between colleagues follow second while several distractions close the top 3 challenges working in the distance with 21.67 % and 15 %, respectively.

Figure 16. Drawbacks of telework

Disadvantages of teleworking	Frequency	Percent %
Social exclusion and emotional disengagement	40	33.33
Miscommunication issues	26	21.67
Distractions	18	15.00
Lack of work-life balance	16	13.33
Financial burden	12	10.00
Technical issues	8	6.67
Total	120	100%

Previous experience with telework in point of the areas of interest

Previous experience with telework in relation to areas of interest are presented in *figure 17*. The highest experience of participants is shown in the areas of organization and technical/digital aspects in line to working remotely, while time management and self-motivation follows closely at 3rd and 4th place, respectively. All of the areas, are considered above average (above 104points), with least areas of experience the communication and collaboration sections.

Figure 17.
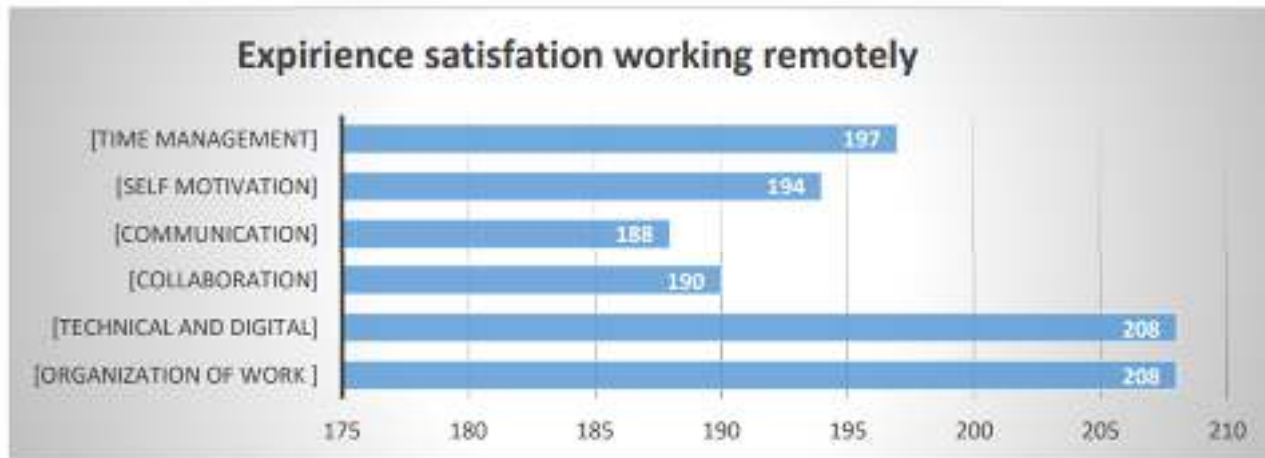
Figure 1 Areas of past experience working remotely

Skills importance, for an employee who works from home Important competences in relation to employee's needs are indicated in figure 18. According to participant's responses, e-workers consider time management skill and self-motivation, followed by organization of work, to be among the top three competences a teleworker should possess.

Figure 18.
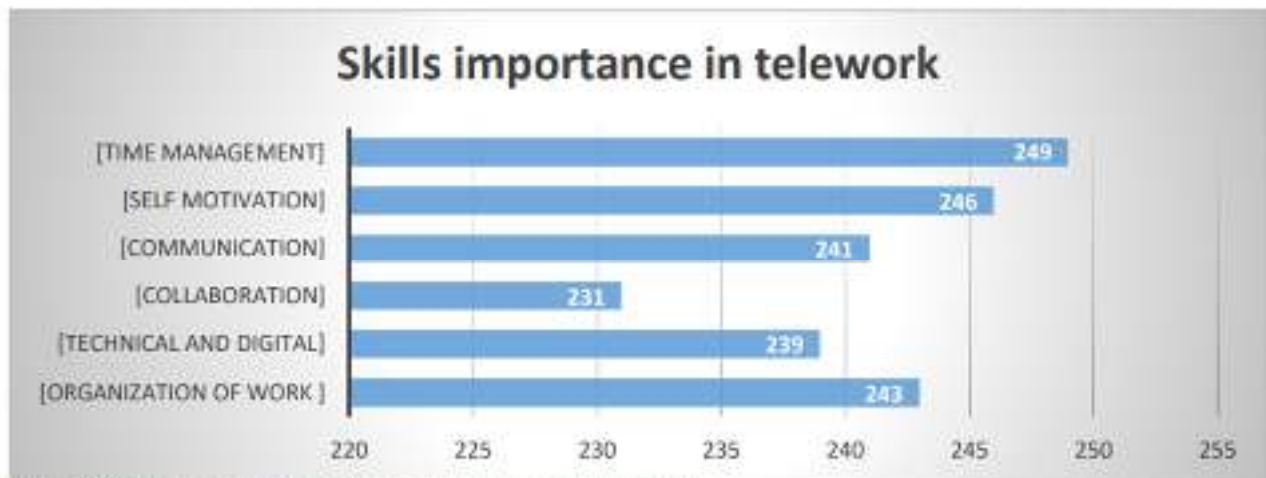
Figure 2. Skills importance in relation to competences areas of interest

Teleworkers readiness

Readiness indicators for teleworking are presented in figure 19, in relation to several areas of interest. According to responses, e-workers feel comfortable with all areas of interest, emphasizing their work organization and communication and collaboration. The lowest level of readiness refers to areas related to technical/digital skills and self-motivation.

Figure 19.
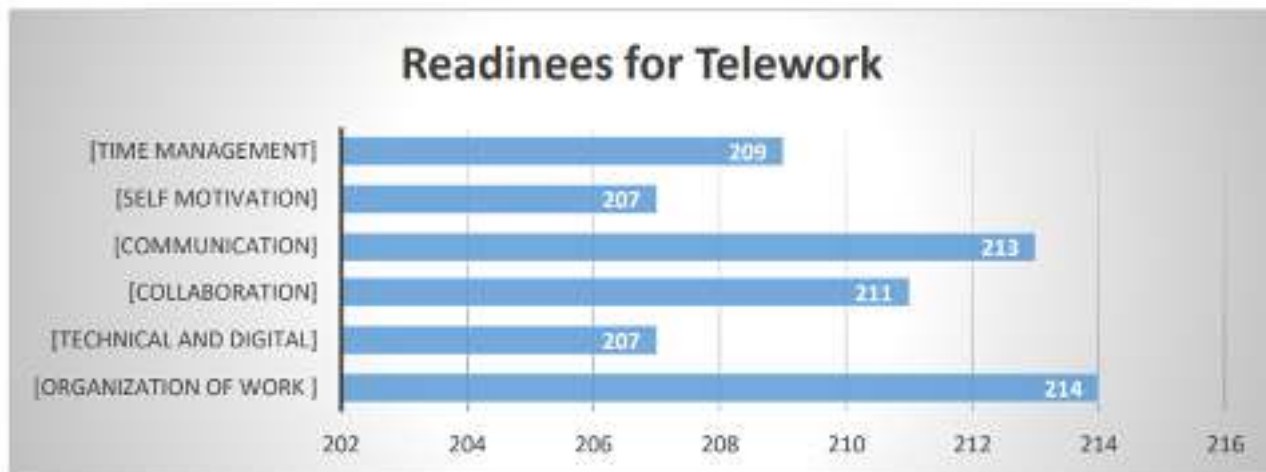
Figure 3. Readiness for telework in regards to several areas of interest

Key aspects to be developed for a Teleworker, in order to be efficient, productive and pleased in this framework.

Important aspects for an e-worker to excel in this context are presented in the Figure 20. It is recorded that the top five aspects of importance for participants are the following: -

Communication and collaboration - Individual focus and engagement - Organizational aspects - Digital literacy, equipment and technical support – Flexibility.

Figure 20.
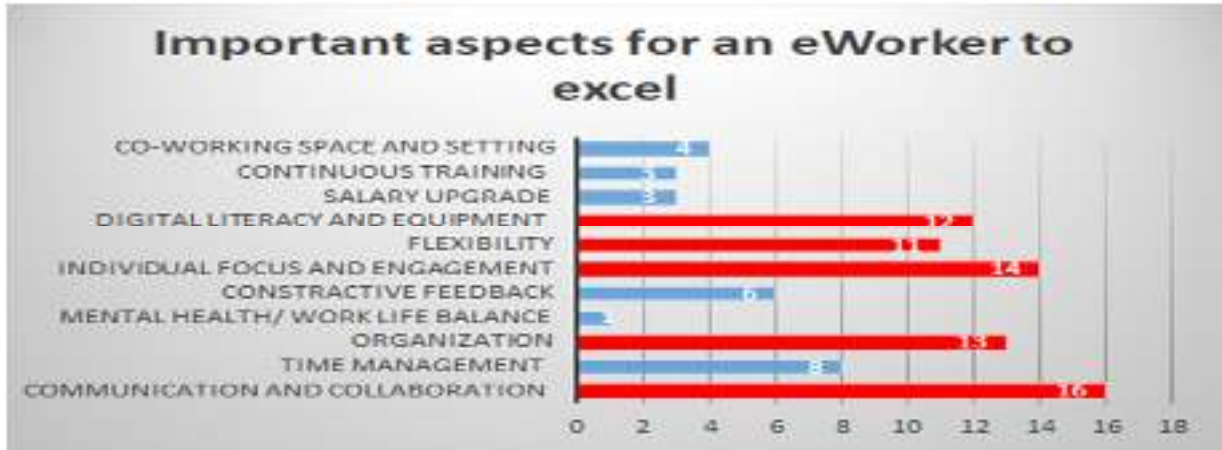
Germany

All participants were asked to select the three greatest advantages of teleworking and voted as follows

Figure 21. Advantages of remote work

Advantages	Votes
Time saving	13
Better time management	**29**
Increased productivity	**43**
Increased motivation	10
It helps saving money	1
More time for family and personal pleasure	**19**
Better work atmosphere	17

Therefore, the ones that were identified as the greatest three advantages were: Increased productivity, better time management, and more time for family and personal pleasure

In what concerns the three identified disadvantages of telework, respondents voted as follows:

Figure 22. Disadvantages of Remote work

Disadvantages	Votes
Lack of communication	**30**
Inefficiency	21
Lack of productivity	23
Lack of motivation	4
Increased costs for electricity and internet	1

Lack of proper equipment (laptop, printer, internet connection)	10
More attention for family than for work	**21**
The difficulty to establish a line between personal and professional life	**21**
Difficulties in teamwork	9
It causes anxiety	1
Lack of direct feedback for certain tasks	6

So, the three disadvantages that were most common for participants were the difficulty of lacking in communication, followed by more attention for family than for work and the difficulty to establish a line between personal and professional life.

Participants were then asked to assess their **experiences of telework** regarding their satisfaction with a set of skills on a Likert scale between 1(not satisfying at all) and 5 (very satisfying).

Figure 23.

How was your previous experience with telework in point of: Organisation of work

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	not satisfying at all	1	2,3	2,3	2,3
	2	2	4,5	4,5	6,8
	3	28	63,6	63,6	70,5
	4	11	25,0	25,0	95,5
	very satisfying	2	4,5	4,5	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

Figure 24.

How was your previous experience with telework in point of: Technical and digital

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	2	3	6,8	6,8	6,8
	3	24	54,5	54,5	61,4
	4	17	38,6	38,6	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

Figure 25.

How was your previous experience with telework in point of: Collaboration

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	2	8	18,2	18,2	18,2
	3	31	70,5	70,5	88,6
	4	5	11,4	11,4	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

Figure 26.

How was your previous experience with telework in point of: Communication

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	2	5	11,4	11,4	11,4
	3	29	65,9	65,9	77,3
	4	10	22,7	22,7	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

So far, all results are still very much in the middle of the Likert scale. 3 is mentioned most often.

Figure 27, 28, 29, 30.

How was your previous experience with telework in point of: Self-Motivation

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	2	1	2,3	2,3	2,3
	3	26	59,1	59,1	61,4
	4	16	36,4	36,4	97,7
	very satisfying	1	2,3	2,3	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

How was your previous experience with telework in point of: Time management

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	2	3	6,8	6,8	6,8
	3	17	38,6	38,6	45,5
	4	24	54,5	54,5	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

How important are the following skills for an employee who works from home? Organisational skills

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	3	5	11,4	11,4	11,4
	4	27	61,4	61,4	72,7
	very important	12	27,3	27,3	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

How important are the following skills for an employee who works from home? Technical and digital skills

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	3	13	29,5	29,5	29,5
	4	28	63,6	63,6	93,2
	very important	3	6,8	6,8	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

Figure 31., 32, 33, 34.

How important are the following skills for an employee who works from home? Collaboration skills

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	3	4	9,1	9,1	9,1
	4	26	59,1	59,1	68,2
	very important	14	31,8	31,8	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

How important are the following skills for an employee who works from home? Communication skills

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	3	3	6,8	6,8	6,8
	4	20	45,5	45,5	52,3
	very important	21	47,7	47,7	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

How important are the following skills for an employee who works from home? Self-Motivation skills

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	3	3	6,8	6,8	6,8
	4	33	75,0	75,0	81,8
	very important	8	18,2	18,2	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

How important are the following skills for an employee who works from home? Time management skills

		Häufigkeit	Prozent	Gültige Prozente	Kumulierte Prozente
Gültig	3	7	15,9	15,9	15,9
	4	34	77,3	77,3	93,2
	very important	3	6,8	6,8	100,0
	Gesamt	44	100,0	100,0	

Finally, the participants were asked which aspects were most important to develop further. Here, the handling of digital technologies and communication skills crystallized out. But aspects such as flexibility, structure and time management also need to be intensified.

Ireland

When asked how many had worked from home (remote working) during the pandemic, it was remarkably interesting that only 2 respondents did not at all, 8 partially engaged in remote working and the rest all worked from home as seen.

And interestingly, since the end of the pandemic, or at least since the lifting of restrictions, 86.4% of respondents no longer engage in remote working (work from home). When asked how adept they were at remote working, 63.6% of respondents stated that they were adept at it.

The most common advantages listed in terms of remote working included:

•   Greater flexibility in working hours

•   No commuting time (4)

•   No work-related travel for meetings and training

•   Flexible agenda

•   Better working hours

•   Better work ethic as you have time to plan and get organised

•   Increased productivity levels (2)

•   Cost savings (no travel costs) (4)

•   Increased productivity (5)

•   Better work life balance (more time with family) (2)

•   Less distractions to complete work

•   More comfortable

•   Less distraction than in an office (5)

•   Managing your work more freely - less interruptions and distractions

•   Opportunity to do things around the house on breaks

•   Ability to live a rural lifestyle

•   No childcare costs

•   Reduces carbon footprint

•   More independence - you can plan your workflow

The most common disadvantages mentioned in relation to remote working were:

•   Hard to separate home and work life

•   Feeling of always being available and having access to work (emails) – (6)

•   Less contact with colleagues and brainstorming and helping each other

- Difficult to stay focused and motivated

- Expense and disadvantages of setting up a home office /

- No peer support can lead to feelings of loneliness

- Bills are higher

- Lack of access to information

- Lack of interaction and feeling of isolation (5)

- Longer response times

- More online meetings and demands on time

- Poor internet access

- Burnout and lack of physical exercise/movement

- Hard to switch off which can lead to working longer hours

- No distinction between work and family life

- Harder to communicate with colleagues or get answers to queries

- Deduced team spirit

- Distractions at home – children, other adults working at home, housework, television

- Personal appearance can go downhill – dressing from the waist up

- Managers might not be able to trust employees as much

- Childcare issues - work can be a disaster due to home schooling while also trying to work full time

- Misunderstandings from poor or elongated communication

- Missing office politics and gossip

- Harder to collaborate during online meetings and build rapport

- Awfully hard to conduct training online due to different levels of IT skills - almost impossible to engage trainees fully

- Lack of support at times.
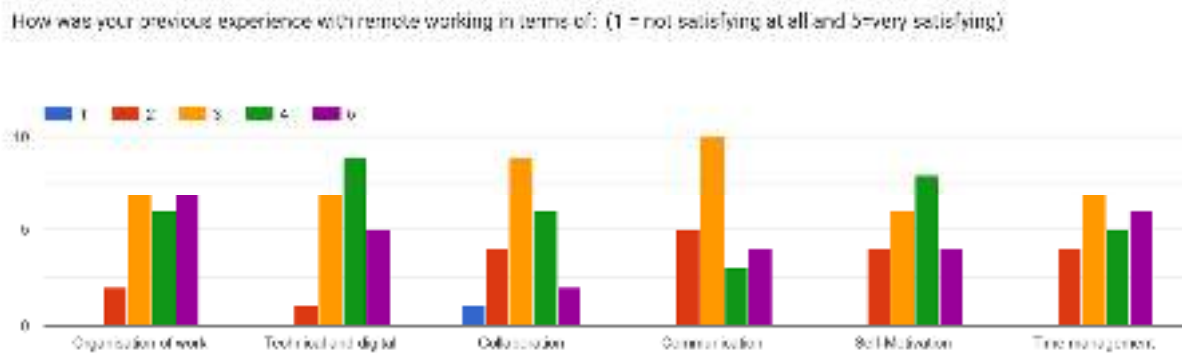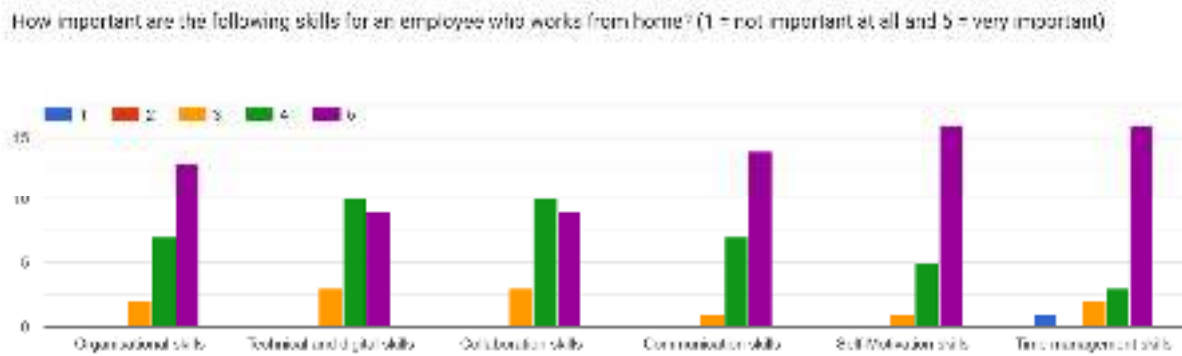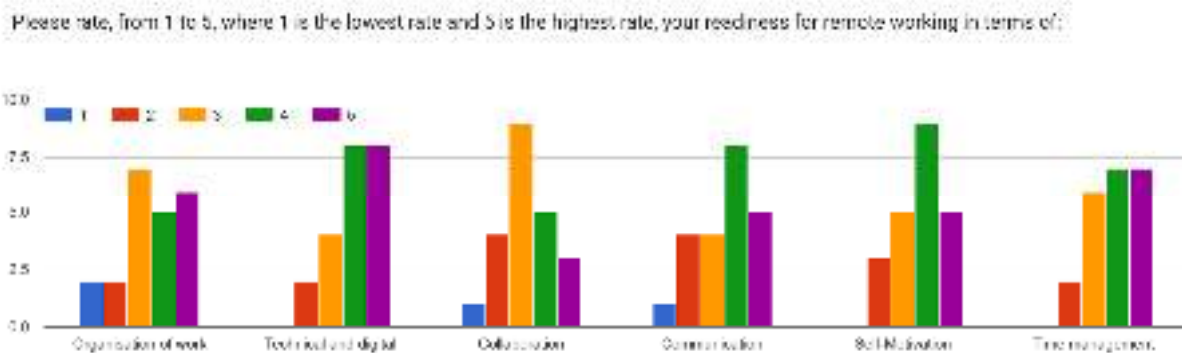
Figure 35.

Figure 36.

Figure 37.

When asked to consider what are the most important aspects to be developed for an employee in order to be efficient, productive, and satisfied with remote working the following responses were given:

• Self-motivation and focus

- Excellent time management and organisational skills

- Equip employees with the technical and productivity tools needed to be productive

- Establish daily check-ins to minimise isolation and loneliness

- Good Communication

- Problem Solving

- Good task management – how to organise your work

- Maintaining an excellent work life balance

- Ability to work independently

- Acknowledge work done well

- Clear understanding of priorities and deadlines

- Clear communication channels with colleagues/customers, regular phone/video contact with team members for morale/motivation

- It is important that an employee is made to feel part of the team and that they can still buy into what a company is trying to achieve. It is important that they are made feel connected to both management and other colleagues.

- It might depend on the job, but it would be most important to make sure there is trust between employer and employee.

- Support from colleagues

Chapter 2 – Interview findings

Profile of Participants

Romania

Gender: 8 females & 2 males

Age:

- Between 18 and 24 – 1 respondent
- Between 25 and 29 – 2 respondents
- Between 40 and 49 – 5 respondents
- Between 50 and 59 – 1 respondent
- Over 60 – 1 respondent

Company profile: Transport, Human resources, Consulting, Tourism, Accountancy, Assurances, Research, IT.

All respondents have a leading position in the profiled companies – managers or company administrators. All companies organised their activity online for at least a limited period in the past.

Portugal

Interviews in Portugal were implemented with 11 participants, characterised by the following features:

Figure 28. Sample characterisation

Gender		Age Range					
Male	**Female**	**18-24**	**25-29**	**30-39**	**40-49**	**50-59**	**> 60**
4	**7**	**1**	**0**	**3**	**4**	**3**	**0**

These participants were collected from 8 companies:

- an accounting services firm (8 employees). The interviewee held the position of managing partner
- a Tourism Agency (2 employees), and the interviewee held the position of managing partner, as well as customer service and participating in day-to-day activities of the company
- a multinational company in market studies that is starting to implement their shared services in Portugal and so, in the country they are still considered an SME – the interviewee holds the position of Learning Solutions Manager in the Human Resources Department. She also mentioned her previous experiences in the position that she left 2 months ago, at a small multinational company in veterinary training that fits SME standards in Portugal (working as a Senior Digital Learning Coordinator, managing the European team in digital learning projects)
- an SME in electrical installations construction work, which has been in the market for over 30 years, working in the Portuguese territory as a whole, with around 40 employees (it used to have more employees but there was a decrease during the years that followed the financial crisis of 2007/2008). Four participants were interviewed: one is the Human Resources Director/Manager; another is the founder and CEO of the company; another is an Electrical Engineer and Construction work's management; and another is an administrative manager.

- an SME in Rural Tourism – the interviewee was the partner-manager
- an SME in Product Development in various areas
- a multinational company in Real Estate Management (university residences) that in Portugal fits SME standards. The interviewee was the Operations Manager, managing all operations in Portugal
- an SME in wine production and commercialisation. The interviewee is the commercial area.

Cyprus

Focus Group (FG) discussions, one-to-one interviews (via telephone and Skype) and online survey/ questionnaires, all qualitative research-based, were used to gather data from the target group. In total, 10 Cypriot leaders were interviewed. All questions, especially probing ones, were addressed in a non-directing neutral way. Due to the Coronavirus situation, and the forced restrictions on in-person gatherings, online and telephone adaptations for the research to run smoothly were employed.

As shown in table 3, participants form a truly diverse group of experts, as they come from organisations of different types, and qualities. Their unique common ground is their decision-making position and influence in their organisation. Two organisations are research centres – NGOs while the rest are private entities. 3/5th of the participants were males falling in the age group of 30-39, while the other 40% of participants had an average age of 38 years.

Figure 39. Participants Profile

A/A	Name	Current Position	Gender	Age	Company profile
1	KK	HR manager	F	40-49	Research Centre
2	VC	Managing Director	F	40-49	Research Centre
3	HD	CEO	M	30-39	Technology company - startup
4	ES	HR manager	F	30-39	Audit company
5	XK	HR officer	F	25-29	Forex company
6	NG	Director	M	30-39	Investment Company
7	DA	CEO	M	30-39	Environmental Technology Company
8	MP	Team leader	M	30-39	IT company - startup
9	AZ	Team leader	M	30-39	IT company
10	TK	Team leader	M	25-29	Inspection and Certification Center

Germany

As part of the Reliable Green project, 10 interviews were conducted in Germany. 4 interview partners were male, and 6 interview partners were female. Most of the project partners were aged between 30-39. Other interview partners from other age groups were rare.

Figure 40.

1.2.Age

Between 18-24

| 1 |

Between 25-29

| 1 |

Between 30-39

| 6 |

Between 40-49

| 1 |

Between 50-59

| 1 |

60+

| |

The participants are all from different companies. Many of them has a specific function in the field of sustainability: Sustainable food production, Circular economy, Sustainable tourism, Creation and production of outdoor clothing, Ink refill business, Organic catering, Eco-Consulting company, Retail company – a small supermarket, Beauty salon, Sustainable event planning company.

The current position in their small and medium – sized enterprises was presented in a very varied way:

Figure 41.

I am sales manager.
I am waste management concept designer.
I am founder of the enterprise and head manager (CEO).
I am product manager for outdoor clothing.
I am founder of our ink cartridge refilling company, a small enterprise with local focus.
I am staff member and food consultant.
My position is eco-consultant.
My position is retail shop assistant.
In our salon my position is ecommerce designer.
Event manager

Ireland

We conducted 10 interviews with 4 SMEs talking to their HR managers, team leaders, and business owners. All interviewees were contacted directly (by telephone) and interviews arrange at a time that suited them. Interviewed were conducted face-to-face, online and via telephone depending on the availability and preference of the interviewees. All companies engaged in the interview process had introduced with remote/teleworking during the pandemic therefore had experience upon which to draw from.

Profile of Interviewees:

• 40% were male; 60% female

• Age range was:

• 25- 29: 1 person

• 30-39: 3 people

• 40-49: 5 people

• 60+: 1 person

Interviewees had a lot of experience in terms of SME management and all participants had direct human resource management responsibilities in their current or past roles. The roles of the interviewees were as follows: business owner (2), HR manager (3), administrator (1), team leader/ supervisor (1), counsellor (1), welfare officer (coach) (1) and production manager (1). The SMEs

were working in the following sectors: ICT, Architecture, Recruitment, and Manufacturing (plastics).

Findings

Romania

Benefits of remote work

- Economy for the company

- The activity takes place from the comfort of your own home

- Autonomy for employees

- Reducing transportation costs for employees

- Time saving

- Digitization of company processes

- Flexibility of the company's activities

- Identifying potential employees anywhere in the country, which makes their profile fit the company perfectly by removing distance barriers

Challenges of remote work

- The ability of the individual to stay connected and focused on the activity throughout the program

- Maintaining a balance between professional activity and personal life

- Lack of the social component of professional activity

- Lack of inter-human interaction

- The tendency to work outside the working hours

- The ability of the company to assure cyber-security

Which are the most important skills for an employee to work from home?

- Communication skills

- Transversal skills

- Focus and self-motivation

- Digital skills

- Time management skills

- Efficient planning skills

Which are the most important skills for an employer to manage the activity of a company remotely?

- Remote management skills

- Communication skills

- Team management skills

- Flexibility

- Adaptability

- Focus on results and productivity

Which are the skills that need to be improved or developed?

All respondents in the interview highlighted that both employees and employers developed their skills by practice, facing the suddenly change in the way they organised their activity, mostly due to the pandemic. Thus, the two professional categories need professional development of all necessary skills, competences and attitudes which can be done throughout continuous professional training, developed, and directed by specialists in the field of education and training.

Only in this way, companies can be sure that they are productive, successful, and the employees are well-trained for their activity, keep connected, motivated, and pleased with their professional pathway.

Portugal

Choosing remote work or not

From the abovementioned 8 companies, three of them never really implemented any form of telework: – the one in electrical installations and construction work (in which only one worker was temporarily working from home during a period in which his child was sick, and he had to stay home); the company that works in Rural Tourism; and the accounting services, in which only one of the Partner Managers was working remotely during some days of the week during the lock-downs enforced during the COVID-19 pandemic (and workers when they were forced to do so because they had had contacts with someone who was infected).

The construction company's main work is physical and so this kind of work could not be done remotely. However, they also decided to keep all office workers working in presence, stating that the infrastructures of the company are quite large, there is a lot of space and so they could keep all the safety rules.

The company that works in rural tourism also stated they could only carry out their work in presence. Nevertheless, the accounting company would be a type of work that could have transitioned to telework and decided not to do it, stating that they were not prepared for that technically, digitally, mostly in terms of a secure system since they have confidential data from

companies. Indeed, she mentioned the costs of having digital support to transfer their system to one that could be accessed from home.

Moreover, she also showed some concerns regarding the workers' level of responsibility and organisation, considering that some of them still need close supervision.

Nonetheless, not all participants who implemented telework were adepts. The partner manager of the Tourism Agency mentions that it was difficult for customers to adapt (liking the face-to-face contact) but also for her, since she considers herself to be very social, enjoying the routine of leaving home, being at the office, interacting with people. However, she accepts that her kind of work can be done remotely.

Indeed, from the 11 interviewees, 7 of them can be considered adepts of telework. The person who works at the multinational company in market studies only worked for 3 months in her previous job in person and then moved to telework completely and developed her team, recruiting and selecting people in telework and to do telework. The person who works in Real Estate Management also transitioned to telework 25 days after starting this job and had to recruit workers in telework. The person who works in wine production and commercialisation has been working remotely since 2014. The person who works product development has also been working remotely for a long time.

Challenges of remote work

Participants identified a set of challenges of telework that seem to fall under specific categories. For example, some mentioned the problems of concentrating at home during the lockdowns since their children were also at home and so they had to assume two different roles at the same time. When reflecting on the possibility of working from home with no children to attend to, generally the experience was reported as a positive one.

Another important issue that was addressed was having the adequate conditions to work from home, which includes equipment but also having available physical spaces at home to work, to be alone and concentrated. So, people who do not have an adequate space and conditions to work from home, will generally report the experience as negative.

Another area of challenges is related to communication. In this area, participants report difficulties as: being more difficult for workers to clarify doubts / solve problems; not being able to connect with clients face-to-face; reduced social interaction (feeling lonely) – this one only mentioned by individuals who state they are very social and need social contact.

One person who developed her team while working remotely stated that the only issue at first was developing relationships with staff but that they managed to overcome that by always doing online meetings with their cameras on, doing these meetings frequently and making workers comfortable to contact whenever needed.

Moreover, one of the interviewees mentioned that sometimes people who are working remotely while others are working at the office or in a hybrid mode, may feel distanced from the office decisions and developments if there are no measures to properly involve them in the process. On

the other hand, a human resources manager mentioned that it is easier to understand how people are feeling at work when you have direct contact with them, even if not to talk about it directly.

Another area of challenges was related to digital issues: workers having the necessary digital skills, as well as managers and employers; adequate equipment; and data security issues.

One of the challenges that is commonly mentioned is related to difficulties separating the personal life from the professional life.

Participants often report working longer hours, having difficulty resisting the "temptation" of checking their emails, answering them and solving problems from work outside work hours. The flexibility that is presented as an advantage is also identified as a potential burden since individuals feel the need to show that they are working, that they are responsible and professional.

Therefore, participants stated the importance of respecting working hours or trying not to do too much overtime, defining limits to work, keeping to routines, separating workspaces from the family and leisure, and keep doing breaks, as they did in the office. So, a few participants mentioned that working from home may promote becoming dependent on work and working too much (one states working 14 hours a day and feeling no difference between personal life and work; others state that the flexibility of hours is a benefit and challenge; another states being "always connected").

So, when "time management" or "organisation" challenges appear in this scope they mean people tend to work longer hours. When they appear in the scope of responsibility, commitment, self-discipline, they are usually connected to a fear from the part of managers that workers possess enough time management skills not to lose track of work.

So, one participant mentioned problems in managing telework not with workers but with managers. According to her, everything was going well with work, the newly selected team was working well in developing a new business in the country, everyone was new to the company and had been selected to work remotely because of the pandemic.

However, the board of administration was extremely concerned and asked her "how did she knew people were working?". Therefore, they pushed her into controlling workers throughout the day since they distrusted their employee's responsibility and commitment to work.

Consequently, for some time they all worked throughout the day while being online, with the cameras on. The interviewee reports the discomfort of feeling forced to control people like this but considers they coped well with it, and it ended up fostering positive relationships in the team. Nonetheless, this kind of distrust was mentioned by many interviewees, stating that what employers must develop is trust and confidence in workers (which will be further addressed).

On the other hand, some participants that were somewhat prejudiced or distrustful of remote work, mentioned challenges of time management for workers (considering some may become lost at home), concentration on work and focus on the company. So, some participants mention abuses from workers who do not perceive remote work as work, showing a lack of responsibility and commitment.

Benefits of remote work

The benefits of remote work can be organised in some areas. One of these areas is related to costs and so, participants mention two forms of savings: reduced costs for companies (reduce rent, electricity, water, internet); reduced costs for workers (transportation and food).

On the other hand, participants mention issues related to work organisation and balancing personal and work life, mentioning the flexibility of hours; facilitated time management, allowing workers to manage time with less pressure and less stress, gaining time for the personal life by not having to commute and enjoying family life more.

Moreover, some participants consider they can be more productive while working from home, being able to concentrate more (although, as previously mentioned, the ones that are fearful of workers commitment with work pointed out that working from home could compromise concentration and productivity).

Finally, a couple of participants mention benefits to the environment since telework reduces commuting and so, less transportation pollution.

Do employers and employees have the necessary skills for remote work

Most participants considered that nowadays both employers and employees have the necessary skills for remote work. However, some identified persistent needs in this area in both workers and employers believing companies are still not ready for this. The most traditional companies reported having older, less technologically and digitally prepared workers that need training and monitoring to be able to develop telework safely.

On the other hand, small companies feel that it does not fit their needs and only bigger companies (for example in tourism) may benefit from remote work, reducing costs and improving productivity.

Moreover, some participants mentioned that not all workers want to do remote work, especially the ones that need more social interaction who feel lonely at home and may struggle to develop working relationships in these conditions.

One participant has been working remotely for 14 years and states that, before the pandemic workers and employers were not prepared but that she considers that everyone adapted very well to the situation and have developed the necessary skills throughout the past years.

Another participant with experience in teleworks considers that there were great improvements and adaptations in workers and companies, helping to change the mentality of some employers that "if people are at home, they're not working". He considers that employers should not be concerned with the amount of time employees are working, or with keeping their fixed schedules but value that the work is being done, considering that as the most important thing.

Another participant states that she believes 90% of the companies and workers are prepared but there are still some digital, technological needs. Furthermore, she states that companies must adapt their internal communication considering the situation of workers (if working remotely or not), analyse each worker and situation to explore risks and benefits and then decide. Indeed, she states that companies seem to have irrational fears regarding telework that may lead to bad decisions and lose valuable staff members that become dissatisfied with the situation and, if there is no redundancy for that position in the company, it may generate new challenges: recruiting, training new workers…

In summary, some participants that seemed to be somewhat more fearful and distrustful of remote work mentioned needs for employers and managers to develop skills on how to monitor and control work being done remotely, mentioning the need for software in this area. In contrast, the ones who were adept of telework mentioned that, if the mentality of employers regarding telework (abovementioned) changes and if they trust their workers, there is no need for control.

Important skills for workers to do remote work

All participants agree on the need for technological and digital skills. Besides those, there are a set of transversal skills that are always mentioned, such as: work planning; time management; organisation (defining clear aims); communication skills; teamwork and good communication with colleagues and managers through online means; autonomy and self-confidence to be able to manage their work.

On the other hand, there a set of characteristics and attitudes that are valued, which are more related to the relationship to work and to the organisation, such as: responsibility; professionalism; honesty; dedication; commitment; self-discipline; motivation towards work; concentration and focus on the work and being a methodical person. These seem to be the characteristics that employers value to trust the worker who is doing remote work.

Finally, participants mentioned that openness may be an important skill to work from home and many addressed the importance of having good conditions at home even though these are not a worker's skill but a circumstance.

Important skills for employers to manage remote work

Many participants mentioned all the skills that they had mentioned for workers as important for employers too. So, they all refer to digital/technological skills and transversal skills. Regarding these, participants mentioned: adequate work planning; organisation of online communication - having regular contact with workers, setting up meetings and motivating workers for telework (e.g., having meetings at the end of the workday to understand how the day went, clarify doubts, solve problems, etc. – and being available for the team and to help them); coordinating, management and delegating skills.

Regarding supervision and supervision skills, two main approaches arose: one that highlighted the need to develop some control mechanisms; and another that focused on trust towards

workers. This second approach was defended by participants, valuing: flexible management skills – being flexible and understanding; trust workers and developing trustful relationships (considering one cannot be "manipulative, controlling, otherwise people will feel pressured"); provide autonomy; know enough about the work so that my expectations are realistic – to be fair and make good decisions; and be empathic and tolerant – not being too demanding, being sensible and having sensitivity to individuals' experiences (e.g. employers who were very intolerant of worker's difficulties in balancing work while taking care of their children who were also at home, creating more pressure for workers).

Finally, a key issue that was mentioned was also the importance of providing necessary training to staff ("I can't demand if I haven't trained the worker").

What needs to be developed/improved

Technological skills were considered as still needing development and improvement (e.g., networks, digital security; digital literacy; cloud platforms). Regarding this, some participants mentioned that companies must provide training to prepare their workers for these transitions.

Transversal skills that were mentioned as needing improvement were work planning, time organisation and management, along with attitudes as workers' responsibility and commitment.

Regarding employers, many participants, mentioned that companies need to trust workers to improve relationships between workers and managers; provide autonomy to workers to manage their work (not focusing too much on the number of hours people have worked but also not giving too much work for someone who keeps following tight deadlines), and developing codes of conduct that do not focus on time clocks but on giving employees tranquillity to work.

One of the issues that was considered necessary by participants was capacitating workers to define work objectives but also time to rest, supporting them and helping them to develop strategies in terms of the balance between work and personal life – "working too much time isn't healthy".

Participants also mentioned that it is important to help provide the adequate conditions to work comfortably from home. Some participants were more assertive on the fact that these conditions must be all guaranteed by the organisation, while others would state that these could depend on the situation (for example, if it was the worker who asked to work from home in a situation in which that was not happening, costs could be shared).

Some participants were more adept of hybrid work instead of remote work. This was offered as a possibility, for example for workers with children, so that they can save time and costs, and spend more quality time with their families since their lives are quite stressful. Hybrid working conditions could be useful for those who live extremely far from their offices, allowing them to save time and money.

Finally, one participant mentioned that the legislation on remote work needs to be developed and become more assertive, coherent, and equitable so that it does not create injustices – securing workers and companies to avoid abuses for either side.

Cyprus

All the participants have experience working from work and are familiar with telework in teams in different settings.

What were the main challenges of telework?

The interviewees in Cyprus have identified the following main challenges of teleworkers:

- Productivity and performance challenges: Teleworkers' productivity is rather difficult to be monitored and stays at high levels all the time. It is stated that **diverse areas affect an employee's productivity and performance, which strongly depends on the individuals' attributes such us working ethics, working regime, mental health, task familiarity, communication and social connectedness between employee and supervisor, etc**. Also, organisations that were implemented on a low scale before the pandemic telework, was easier for the employees to adapt to the new conditions.

- Mental health challenge: Telework employees could experience psychologically tiresome due to the **continued social exclusion, emotional disengagement, and isolation at their working space (home).** Some of the participants mentioned that they have cases of teleworkers that showed mental health issues such as depression and stress due to work-life imbalance. As stated by all the professionals, it is difficult to 'disconnect' from their work **to keep a balance between their personal life and work**. All professionals mentioned that at some point they or colleagues had the 'urge' to work more hours than the normal schedule to receive complaints as diligent workers.

- Technical challenge: Participants mentioned that technical issues are often on a daily basis, therefore, it's a challenge for team leaders and their colleagues is to ensure that their teams have all the **technical support, appropriate equipment and facilities that are needed in order to complete their work in a timely manner.**

In your opinion, which are the main benefits of telework?

According to the participant's statements, the main advantages of teleworking are showed below:

- Teleworkers are more focused to tackle more tasks
- Save budget from transportations
- Home comfortability
- Work flexibility
- work for all around the world
- Working hours' flexibility
- Reduce carbon emissions from travelling

Do you consider employers and employees possess the necessary skills for telework?

Four of the participants that have been teleworking partially, before the Covid–19, stated that is easier to transit in a full teleworking. In contrast to the rest of the participants, which agreed that

there is a rather considerable gap and need for continues improvement and training in shifting working environments.

Which are the most important skills and competences for an employee to work from home? The most critical competences for an employee to work from home that the participants mentioned are the following:

- Digital tools/literacy in relation to: Team collaboration (communication), IT knowledge, Time management tools, Organisational tools (planning and executing)
- Soft competences in regard to: Self – motivation and discipline, Communication skills, Critical thinking to identify priorities, etc, Risk assessment methodology

Which are the most important skills for an employer to manage the activity of the company remotely?

The most important skills for an employer to manage the activity of the company remotely that were mentioned by the participants are the following:

- Leadership skills that promote trust between employee and employer
- Communication skills to guide, motivate and engage, but also to provide clear work-related massages
- Time management skills
- Digital and collaborative competences
- Performance management skills
- Critical thinking to accept different working styles and solve complex problems remotely

Which are the skills/competences that need to be improved or developed? The most important skills/competences that need to be improved or developed are the following:

- Digital skills
- Organisation skills and collaborative competences
- Performance management skills
- Critical thinking to solve complex problems remotely
- Leadership skills that promote trust between employee and employer
- Communication skills to guide, motivate and engage, but also to provide clear work-related massages
- Time management skills
- Risk assessment skills

Germany

Main challenges of telework

The participants present their challenges in a varied way: Several partners state that focus on work and to communicate with partners and colleagues were exceedingly difficult. To stay in contact via mail, phone or video chat is urgently necessary. A further interesting challenge is the security aspect, which has also considered. This can be quite challenging to ensure a secure access to the data and to create a basis for the data exchange.

Main benefits of telework

The benefits of teleworking are clearly less commuting time and more flexibility, besides more flexibility many participants mention to spend more time with family, higher productivity and general a better work-life balance.

Main challenges of telework

When looking at the advantages of teleworking, one must always consider the disadvantages as well. For example, the interviewees described poor communication among colleagues, especially when one needs information and agreements, loneliness, finding common appointments because everyone is tied up much more closely, technical problems, the great challenge of organising oneself. But also, the problem that the technology is not available, internet connection varies in strength or general digital skills are lacking.

Do employers and employees have the necessary skills for remote work

The digital competences are moving particularly into the foreground.

In addition to digital competences, the participants complement the ability to adapt. Self-organisation / self-management skills also need to be pushed further. At the same time, discipline was often mentioned as a necessary skill. A certain ability to innovate and to be open to the future and new perspectives must also be added.

At the same time, working from home requires new communication skills.

Figure 42.

2.9. Which are the skills that need to be improved or developed?

I think communication and time-management skills have to be improved.
Digital skills have to be improved to get more in touch with conferencing tools as well as application sharing.
I think that it is important to focus on self-motivation and time-management and improve these skills continuously.
- analytical skills - communication and collaboration skills - time-management skills -self-organising skills
I don´t really know, because we will not implement telework.
The most important skills at the beginning of remote work are technical skills but after a while communicative skill become much more important. This requires empathy and a keen level of understanding.
From my point of view communicative skills have to be trained. This is an ongoing process for all employees.
The IT skills should be improved.
I think that the communication is always be possible to be improved.
With regard to my company, I think that the organisational skills should always be improved.

Ireland

For all companies, teleworking was not widespread or a regular feature within their typical working practices before the pandemic. On occasion, SMEs offered teleworking at the discretion of the line manager/business owner and in the context of supporting work-life balance particularly in relation to care responsibilities, reducing long work commutes and increasing staff retention. It was typically only offered to key personnel in the SME that were deemed crucial for operational reasons. It was offered very much a case-by-case basis and in consultation with the employee.

All interviewees were typically office-based companies from within the services sector and all interviewees stated that before the pandemic, they did not have a remote working policy in place.

When asked to consider the Key Benefits experienced in terms of remote working, the following were the key answers given by nearly all interviewees:

•	Cost reduction especially in relation to overheads, travel costs, and office disposables

- Increases in productivity (at the start) of the pandemic when employees were happy to be working from home and still in employment. This productivity waned as the pandemic continued.

- For most of the interviewees, they had the ability to support teleworking as they had equipment and technology available from their existing offices that they permitted employees to bring home and set up home offices.

- In most cases, the interviewees stated that they focussed on supporting team communication and tried to mirror office practices online by hosting team meetings, online notice boards, virtual coffee breaks, etc.)

- The companies interviewed all mentioned that they had to adapt to remote working quite quickly and that there was no template for it previously, so it was very much "learning by doing" however a number of interviewees stated that the Government's COVID protocols at national level helped to guide their work and remote working practices.

- For two of the interviewees, they mentioned that the shift to remote working during the pandemic opened up the possibilities for them in terms of staff recruitment in that they were able to attract talent from outside their immediate geographic location and commute times were no longer a barrier.

When asked to consider the main challenges experienced in terms of remote working, the following were the key answers given by nearly all interviewees:

- Pressure on revenue streams and cash-flow and redundant costs within the businesses – paying rent on empty offices for example.

- Broadband and technical issues, this was particularly problematic for more rurally based businesses. It also had an additional cost for SMEs to provide individual support for employees in terms of purchasing home office equipment and hardware.

- Some services provided by the SMEs interviewed could not be supported online or by teleworking, therefore the services had to be curtailed which resulted in a loss of profits and reducing in staff hours for some sections of their employees.

- Most of the interviewees stated that employee productivity waned over a sustained period and that they noticed a decrease in morale and well-being

- Family dynamics were a major challenge, as some employees were working from home, home-schooling, and looking after young children. This required a case-by-case assessment of working situation for each employee, and it was difficult to manage as sometime additional work was placed on employees with no care commitments which over a longer period of time was unfair and difficult to negotiate.

- In Ireland as a result of the pandemic, there were new Health &Safety requirements placed on employers extending their duty of care into the home of the employees especially where official home offices were established. This contributed extra administration work and costs on SMEs.

- Like the results of the employees' survey, the interviewees mentioned a loss of team spirit and collaboration, with employees reporting that they felt isolated and disconnected

- Mental health and wellbeing issues were on the rise because of the isolation employees felt

- Finally, maybe unique to Ireland, many employers found it challenging to retention staff as there were now new employment opportunities that offered remote or hybrid working which suited some people on a more long-term basis. Secondly, employers were competing with a generous social welfare payment to potential employees that were receiving €350 per week to stay at home and not work as part of the Government's COVID-19 pandemic payment.

When asked to consider the Skills needed to facilitate remote working, the following were shared comparing the skills needed by the employer and those needed by employees:

From the side of the employee:

- Dedicated working space – organisational skills

- Effective communication skills

- ICT skills and access to excellent quality broadband

- Self-care (maintain work-life balance) and self-motivation

From the side of the employer:

- Work-processes to support teleworking – change the culture

- ICT skills and investment in collaborative platforms

- Dedicated remote working officer (coordinator) to manage employee wellbeing and commitment

- Communication – clear and unambiguous

- Flexibility – map out how the company can work using teleworking

When asked which skills needed to improve on both sides the following were identified. Organisational skills were seen as the key skills that needed to be improved in terms of organising work, maintaining contact with employees, ensuring the systems and processes were maintained and to ensure that the regular business services and products were delivered albeit in a modified format – online rather than face-to-face. Building on their current experience, interviewees stated that there was a need for both sides (employers and employees) to stay focussed on communication, collaboration, and team-building skills as this was identified as having a rippled effect on productivity, comradery, and peer support.

Finally, the recent changes in Government policy were mentioned by a number of interviewees. Now, employees are permitted under law to request remote working across any sector or industry in Ireland. This was seen as a challenge for SMEs in terms of costs, additional investment in workplace H&S, i.e., the need to mirror the office environment at home and the impact it can have one communication and collaboration across the team of employees. Some interviewees mentioned that since the pandemic, they are finding it increasingly difficult to recruit

inexperienced staff and retain them as there is now an expectation that all companies should provide remote working.

Conclusions and recommendations

Questionnaire conclusions and recommendations

The majority of participants appeared to be skilled at working remotely and were generally happy with their previous or current telework experiences. While there is a tendency to continue working remotely both before and after the constraints of Covid-19, signalling that this form of work will continue, the majority prefer working from home compared to frequently travelling to the office.

More than half of the participants have already worked remotely, are knowledgeable about its benefits and drawbacks, and are generally content with it. Most of them choose either a fully online or mixed setting (on-site and remote).

The professional work of SMEs needs to be organized in a way that includes telework. Employees already have the fundamental knowledge and abilities necessary to ensure the success of their work, but they require ongoing training to develop new abilities that will make it easier for them to work remotely in a competent and effective manner. As a result, they must spend more money on training and support.

In particular, remote work training should concentrate on these skills (Organisation of work; Technical and digital; Collaboration; Communication; Self-Motivation; Time management), as well as some that were mentioned by participants in the open question, like the importance of routines, reflection and awareness on the difficulties of defining boundaries between family and work issues, and exploration of remote work. All questioned skills are considered to be important and very important.

Although some participants also highlight benefits like higher productivity and lower stress, it seems like the greatest benefits of telework are time and money savings, better time management, and more time for family and personal pursuits.

In terms of the drawbacks, the main one appears to be the difficulty in drawing a line between personal and professional life, increased electricity and internet expenditures, and communication challenges with co-workers and bosses, which may lead to issues with teamwork.

It was clear from the participant's awareness of the significance of digital skills that she made two significant comments: "digital literacy (collaboration tools; documents and work processes dematerialization; cyber hygiene) and develop skills and knowledge in effective strategies for project management."

This is the very situation where the Reliable Green project's existence is beneficial. to increase the potential for teleworking while fostering sustainability and a greener society.

Interview conclusions and recommendations

Working remotely presents issues for both employers and employees. Although the transition from a physical location to an online one was abrupt, both employers and employees made every effort to ensure that operations proceeded as normally as possible. It is therefore clear at this time that centralized and structured skill development is needed. The possibility of remote labour appears to be more feared and mistrusted by traditional businesses. She does, however, believe that employees who became accustomed to it, delighted in it, and excelled at it have lost interest in it and may leave organizations, losing key abilities. In fact, due to these conditions, this participant had already lost two employees. The performance management and productivity of co-workers is another major issue for decision-making experts. Although there are many interrelated and complex factors involved in this challenge, including issues of trust between co-workers and mental health, there are fundamental gaps that must be filled and new competencies must be developed on both ends, with a focus on upskilling in digital and soft skills.

There is a need for knowledge and upskilling gaps regarding both the hard skills of a Teleworker employee and employer related to digital literacy skills (and how well they are used), among others, as well as soft competences gaps regarding concepts and topics as critical thinking and problem thinking are common. These complex skills include the ability to interact and create relationships with co-workers, superiors, and employees online. They also include digital job competency. Employees and employers need educational resources that are brief, clear, and focused on the need to develop skills like communication skills, transversal skills, focus, and self-motivation, as well as digital skills, time management skills, efficient planning skills, flexibility, and adaptability and teamwork. They are all associated with the online working environment.

Even while most businesses have resumed operations, this is generally only partially true and reflects the desire of both employers and employees for the activity to be carried out in a hybrid manner. Therefore, it is important to carefully consider both remote and hybrid solutions while also considering the needs and incentives of the workforce. However, hybrid arrangements do not always function, indicating that some individuals view the days they are required to attend work as a "punishment". In other instances, businesses have reorganized their offices, making them shared spaces in which employees no longer have their own offices or desks. This depersonalizes spaces and causes people to feel cut off from the location and their co-workers (because they may come into the office on different days), making it difficult for them to recognize their old workplace. Therefore, it is advised to implement a hybrid model rather than full-scale telework for improved teamwork and communication, which will lead to balanced mental health. As a conclusion, it can be claimed that this study was successful in highlighting the critical function of telework framework. Long after the Covid-19, working remotely will still be used in many situations.

Furthermore, some companies have remote employees who work from various locations or even from other countries, and for them, online activity is essential. Moreover, some companies decide to forgo providing their own office space to the employees, keeping only a few modest rooms for irregular face-to-face encounters. Additionally, it is advised to use non-traditional performance

evaluation techniques that may be adjusted to the new environment of partial or full teleworking, such as task-based project methodologies. For e-workers, understanding and accepting social isolation and emotional disengagement while working from home as opposed to frequently coming to the office is a similar major difficulty. In addition, the importance of mutual understanding between employees and employers is being highlighted by devoting valuable time to lifelong learning training that will increase interest parties' awareness of and familiarity with best practices in the context of teleworking. tools for project management work, file sharing, support for teleworking and training, tools for remote working and time management, and tools for communication between team leaders, supervisors, and their subordinates.

However, the majority of participants appeared to be skilled at working remotely, and only a small percentage appeared to believe that employees need to be tightly monitored. Most believed, instead, that employees should be trusted to perform at their best.

For SMEs, telework has a significant potential and a wealth of benefits. Flexibility and productivity are a couple of these. Finally, everyone acknowledged that there is still room for progress in terms of transversal skills, digital/technological abilities, and mindsets for both employees and employers. The quantitative and qualitative surveys both support the same general trend. Both businesses and employees are happy to participate in the ReliableGREEN program due to the anticipated results, which seek to encourage adaptability and considerably improve necessary skills. These skills will guarantee corporate productivity, performance, motivation, engagement, and contentment as well as individual management and employee satisfaction.