

Remote-IT

Remote and Hybrid work for Thriving Cities

QUARTERLY REPORT #1

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Prepared by

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network, with the support of the
partner cities





Private photo taken in Royal Casino of Murcia, Spain

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[Tirana]- Sara Cela, Genci Kojdheli.

NETWORK OVERVIEW

Remote-IT is an URBACT Action Planning Network, financed through the URBACT IV (2021-2027) programme of the European Commission. Remote-IT network tackles the new challenges cities are experiencing connected to the future of work. The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the transformation around how work is organised, with hybrid and remote work models significantly impacting the lives of citizens, as well as the organisational culture of major employers (public/private). Remote-IT partnerships of cities are collaboratively exploring this emerging topic in order to implement proactive policy making.

Website <https://urbact.eu/networks/remote-it>;

URBACT is the European Territorial Cooperation programme aiming to foster sustainable integrated urban development in cities across Europe. It is an instrument of the Cohesion Policy, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund, the 27 Member States, Norway & Switzerland. It enables cities to work together to develop solutions to major urban challenges, reaffirming the key role they play in facing increasingly complex societal changes.

More info: <https://urbact.eu/>

The Remote-IT Network is led by the Dubrovnik's Development Agency (DURA), Croatia. Partner cities include: Brindisi (Italy), Bucharest District 6 (Romania), Camarade Lobos (Portugal), Heraklion (Greece), Murcia (Spain), Tartu (Estonia), Tirana Albania).

This **first Quarterly Network report** summarizes the activities carried out at the transnational and local level within the Remote-IT network in a period between January and March 2024. This period started with a change of the network Lead Expert, followed by a short period of defining how eight partner cities will collaborate at both local and transnational levels within 2024. Partners of the Remote-IT network defined their URBACT Local Group coordinators and started with active hands-on ULG meetings towards their journey of creating an Integrated Action Plan, and finally met in Murcia, Spain for their third transnational meeting.

WHO ARE WE?

DUBROVNIK

LOCAL CONTEXT

The City of Dubrovnik, renowned as a Mediterranean hotspot, faces the challenges of over-tourism due to its ever-increasing visitor numbers. To address these issues and promote sustainable tourism, Dubrovnik initiated the "Respect the City" project in 2017 and joined the URBACT Tourism-friendly cities network (TFC) between 2020-2022. The COVID-19 pandemic's disruption to the local economy, heavily reliant on short-term tourism, prompted the city to explore diversification strategies, highlighting the potential of digital nomads. Recognizing this emerging market, Dubrovnik launched initiatives like the "Dubrovnik for Digital Nomads" conference and the "Dubrovnik Digital Nomad-in-Residence" program in 2021.

The city now aims to leverage the remote work trend to attract digital nomads for extended stays, reshaping its tourism model to be more sustainable. This involves balancing the needs of residents, many of whom work in tourism, with the city's digital transformation. This transformation focuses on democratizing sectors like housing, short-term rentals, urban mobility, air quality, and sea biodiversity. By addressing these areas, Dubrovnik seeks to create collaborative solutions that meet the needs of both residents and visitors, fostering a more sustainable and diversified local economy.



41,562 residents | UNESCO Heritage Site



Croatia issues a digital nomad visa since 2021

Dubrovnik launched the Digital Nomad Pass in 2023

**KEY
FIGURES**

BRINDISI

LOCAL CONTEXT

Brindisi, situated as the entry point to Italy's Puglia region, is striving to overcome its industrial past and address modern demographic challenges such as population decline, an aging population, increased financial burdens, and the underuse of public buildings. Despite its strategic coastal position and importance as a maritime port and United Nations logistical hub, Brindisi has not traditionally been a major tourist destination. Over the past two decades, the city has considered tourism for economic diversification. Still, the pandemic's impact on mass tourism has led Brindisi to reimagine itself as a haven for remote workers.

In 2020, Brindisi launched a marketing campaign to attract remote workers, featuring the 'Sea Working Brindisi' contest that offered a unique experience of living and working on a sailing boat. This initiative drew 800 international applications and significant media attention, elevating Brindisi's profile as a desirable location for digital nomads. Despite gaining recognition in rankings by The Guardian and Airbnb, Brindisi lacks a comprehensive strategic plan to enhance its remote work infrastructure and attract international talent without causing gentrification or environmental harm. The city sees the pandemic-driven shift in work geography as an opportunity to develop a strategy that meets new demands while fostering local economic growth.



87,141 residents

KEY FIGURES



Italy offers a digital nomad visa since 2022

+ 'Impatriated workers' law, which offers a temporary tax relief regime, applying to workers who transfer their residence to Italy. A special extra tax incentive is given if the residence is taken in the region Brindisi is part of (Puglia) or in Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Basilicata, Calabria, Sardinia, Sicily.



BUCHAREST

LOCAL CONTEXT

Bucharest District 6 (PS6), a key administrative unit within Romania's capital, is home to 397,754 residents out of the city's 2 million. The city's governance is complex, requiring coordination across seven administrative units for strategic decisions, including sustainable urban mobility and local economic development. District 6, with the largest building stock in Bucharest, predominantly features high-rise residential units with limited green spaces. During the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns, the inadequacy of these living spaces for home working led to a rise in mental health issues and domestic disturbances.

Despite these challenges, Bucharest is becoming increasingly attractive to international remote workers due to its affordability, vibrant cultural scene, and high-speed internet. In response, District 6 City Hall is developing a strategy to improve conditions for remote work and digital adaptation. This includes systemic changes to public spaces and services to better support residents working from home or public areas. With major Romanian employers based in Bucharest adopting hybrid work models, there's a risk of losing talent to locations with a better quality of life. Therefore, it's crucial for District 6 City Hall to address these challenges and enhance the district's appeal as a prime environment for remote work.



397,754



Digital nomads legal framework

KEY FIGURES

CÂMARA DE LOBOS

LOCAL CONTEXT

Câmara de Lobos, situated in the Autonomous Region of Madeira, is a medium-sized municipality with a population of 32,162, located approximately 10 km from Funchal, a key city on the island. Although Câmara de Lobos and Funchal often function as a unified urban area, the former is aiming to diversify its local economy. Currently reliant on agriculture (notably the production of grapes for Madeira Wine, cherries, sour cherries, chestnuts, and bananas), fishing (unique for black scabbardfish), trade, and tourism, the city faces challenges in economic development. The adoption of remote work practices presents an opportunity to attract economic activity from various sectors while promoting sustainable tourism practices.

Furthermore, Câmara de Lobos maintains its status as one of the country's municipalities with the youngest population, necessitating proactive youth policies. The regional government's commitment to new technologies and the widespread, high-speed internet coverage across the island, including Câmara de Lobos, has opened up new opportunities for local youth and digital nomads in this peripheral European space. While Madeira is generally recognized as a potential destination for digital nomads, Câmara de Lobos stands out for offering a high quality of life and greater affordability compared to other locations on the island. Remote work could also be a means to attract tourists year-round, countering the current trend of short and highly seasonal stays.



32,162 residents

KEY FIGURES



New telework rules, approved on 5 th November of 2021 in the Portuguese National Parliament, made telework more flexible;

Portugal has a digital nomad visa system.

HERAKLION

LOCAL CONTEXT

In the case of Heraklion, the city grapples with multi-level governance challenges related to tourism. Despite national and regional promotion of Crete as a tourism destination due to the island's economic dependence on this sector, the reality in Heraklion is that the city serves as the main entry point with the local airport and port experiencing significant traffic. However, the influx of tourists disrupts residents' quality of life and contributes minimally to the city's economy. Housing affordability concerns have risen, exacerbated by a considerable number of units dedicated to short-term rentals. Tourists tend to spend limited time in Heraklion, favouring other parts of the island, perpetuating an unsustainable tourism model with a substantial environmental footprint.

Recognizing the need for change, digital nomad visas were identified as an opportunity to shift Heraklion's tourism model. However, regional authorities initiated a marketing campaign in 2020 promoting Crete as a destination for digital nomads, leading to an unexpectedly busy 2022 season. Despite this success, Heraklion remains committed to environmental goals, signing the Covenant of Mayors Planning for Energy and Planning to reduce CO2 emissions by 40% by 2030. Consequently, strategic actions are now crucial to support Heraklion in becoming a digital nomad destination while addressing challenges in the housing market.



211,370 residents

KEY FIGURES



The Ministry of Tourism of Greece has a pilot programme for telework practices in multinational financial services company, in cooperation with the Greek Digital Nomads initiative, and the VISA multinational company

Greece issues a digital nomad visa since 2021

MURCIA

LOCAL CONTEXT

Although Murcia is not yet recognized as a destination for digital nomads, it has significant potential to attract this demographic within Spain and Europe. As the 7th largest city in Spain with about 450,000 inhabitants, Murcia is the capital of the Murcia Region and features modern amenities, including two universities, university hospitals, a public transport system, and a service-based economy. Its exceptional weather and lower cost of living compared to major cities like Madrid or Barcelona enhance its attractiveness. With a vibrant tourism sector that has not yet reached overtourism, Murcia has already taken steps to direct tourism towards peri-urban and rural areas to prevent urban overflow. In preparation for an increase in remote work and digital nomads, Murcia aims to maintain the quality of life for its residents while capitalizing on its potential to become a favored destination for remote workers.

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460,349 residents



Spain issues a digital nomad visa since 2023

KEY FIGURES

TARTU

LOCAL CONTEXT

Estonia has been a pioneer in e-government solutions, facilitating the rise of remote work through its advanced digital state systems. Although official data is currently lacking, many Estonian workers are considering remote work opportunities abroad, especially during winter. Tartu, the nation's second-largest city, has been at the forefront of this digital transformation, which has been accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic. This rapid shift poses significant challenges to Tartu's capacity in terms of cyber and data security. The city has identified two primary challenges in this regard:

Firstly, how can the city ensure that remote working spaces and internal systems are secure enough to withstand diverse cyber threats?

While some risks rooted in human behaviour can be mitigated through training and awareness initiatives, individual capabilities to address certain problems vary significantly.

Secondly, Tartu, renowned as a university town, benefits from a substantial student population, yet most students leave after completing their studies due to limited job opportunities. Remote work emerges as a potential solution to retain educated professionals, capitalizing on the city's favourable living environment, particularly for young people and families.



97,435 residents

KEY FIGURES

Tartu is the European capital of culture in 2024

Estonia was one of the first countries in Europe to offer the e-residency and now also offers a digital nomad visa



TIRANA

LOCAL CONTEXT

As Albania's capital and economic hub, Tirana faces challenges from its growing population, including pressures on housing, urban mobility, and labor markets. The city also needs to diversify its economic base amidst limited funding. Tirana has become a favored destination for digital nomads and remote workers, attracting over 400 professionals according to the Nomad List. To engage this group, the municipality organized the Tirana Digital Nomad Festival in 2022 and promoted its coworking spaces, local IT ecosystem, and cultural attractions.

However, the influx of digital nomads presents challenges, such as ensuring adequate governance and infrastructure, including high-speed internet and cybersecurity. Tirana must also develop a collaborative local ecosystem and address the significant digital skills gap among its population. Developing remote work preparedness is essential not only for economic development but also for improving urban mobility and connecting urban and rural areas.

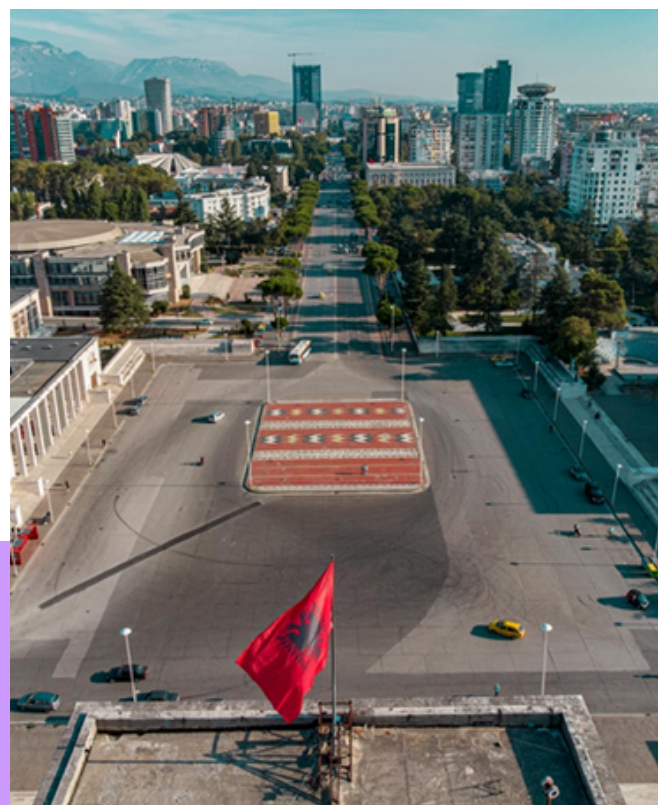
KEY FIGURES



494 000 residents



Albania issues a digital nomad visa since 2022



LEARNINGS FROM THE NETWORK

PUBLIC AUTHORITY AS A HYBRID WORK SPACE

THE FINDINGS FROM THE TARTU INTERNAL EVALUATION

The transition to remote work in the Tartu City Government was significantly influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Before the pandemic, remote work was uncommon, with more than half of the workstations being stationary and limited remote access to information systems. Sandra Õnne, Project Manager at the Tartu City Government, outlines the steps taken, challenges faced, and the ongoing efforts to optimize remote work practices in Tartu.

Initial Steps Towards Remote Work

At the onset of COVID-19, employees were instructed to work from home. Within 1-2 weeks, laptops were procured and distributed, and the IT department assisted in setting up home offices. This included configuring computers, ensuring internet connectivity, and even transporting office chairs. New software like Zoom was introduced, and both employees and managers received guidance on its usage and remote work management.

The transition highlighted several challenges:

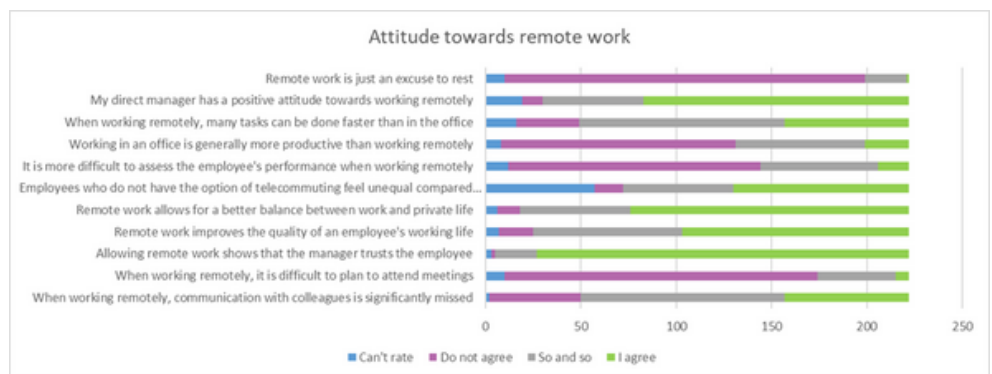
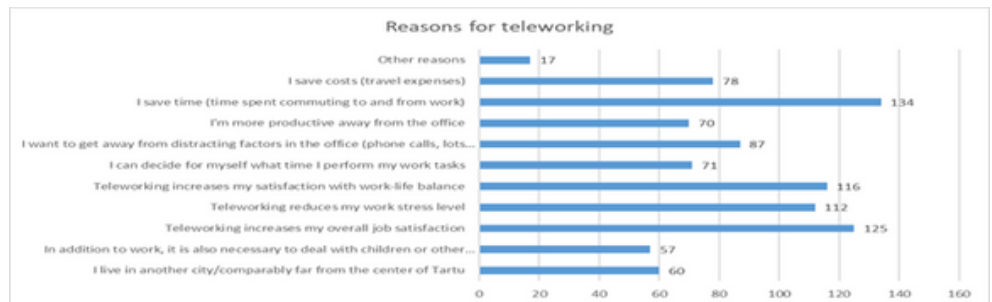
- The remote work process was poorly managed, with inconsistent practices among managers.
- Ensuring secure remote access to information systems was a significant concern.
- Lack of effective information exchange among hybrid teams, leading to reduced work quality.
- Ensuring a safe and productive work environment remotely posed challenges.

Internal Evaluation

An internal evaluation was conducted via a survey, consisting of 25 questions. The survey aimed to understand employee and manager attitudes towards remote work, the practices and challenges of organizing remote work, conditions, management skills, benefits, and threats associated with remote work. Out of 360 employees, 222 responded, including 37 managers, with a gender split of 53 males and 169 females.

Findings

The evaluation revealed varied perspectives on the effectiveness and preference for remote work. There were differences in how widespread remote work had become, various motivations behind choosing to work remotely, identified barriers preventing remote work, existing policies and their adequacy for remote work, the need for enhanced management and remote work skills, and both positive outcomes and potential risks associated with remote work.



Next steps

Moving forward, the Tartu City Government aims to:

- Clearly outline the specific issues faced in remote work.
- Compare findings with results from the Urban Local Group's (ULG) problem tree.
- Employ methods like "How Might We" to generate solutions, e.g., "How might we support managers to lead hybrid teams more efficiently?"
- Collaborate with local businesses, universities, and public sector organizations that excel in telework to develop best practices and solutions.

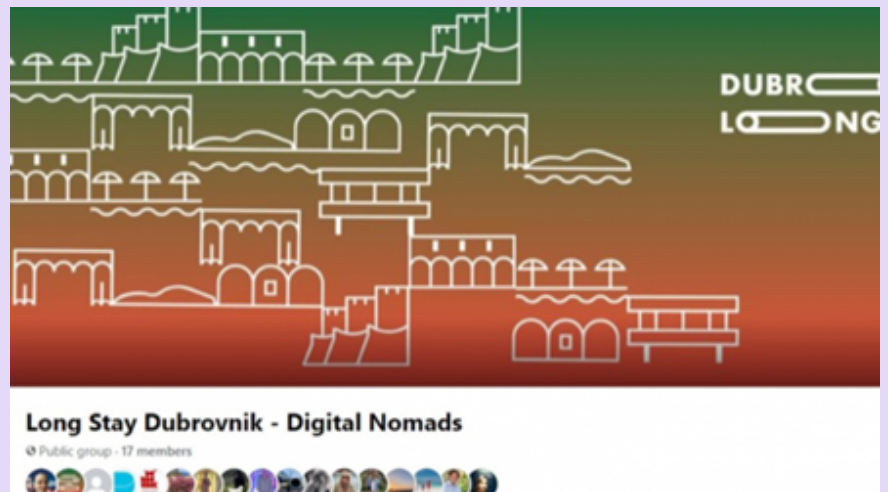
The Tartu City Government's experience highlights the complexity of transitioning to a hybrid work model. Through continuous evaluation and collaborative efforts, they aim to refine their remote work practices to ensure efficiency, security, and a positive work environment for all employees.

DESTINATION BRANDING

In the changing work landscape, remote working has become more than a temporary trend; it is a fundamental shift in how businesses operate. This shift has provided a unique opportunity for cities to reimagine their branding strategies, positioning themselves as attractive destinations for remote workers.

Seven Remote-IT cities – Dubrovnik, Tartu, Brindisi, Camara de Lobos, Murcia, Heraklion, and Bucharest District 6 – provide examples of how they have approached rebranding to attract this dynamic workforce:

Dubrovnik, renowned as the "pearl of the Adriatic," has long been a popular tourist destination. However, the city faced a significant decline in visitor numbers during the Covid-19 pandemic. To adapt, Dubrovnik launched "The City for Digital Nomads" project in

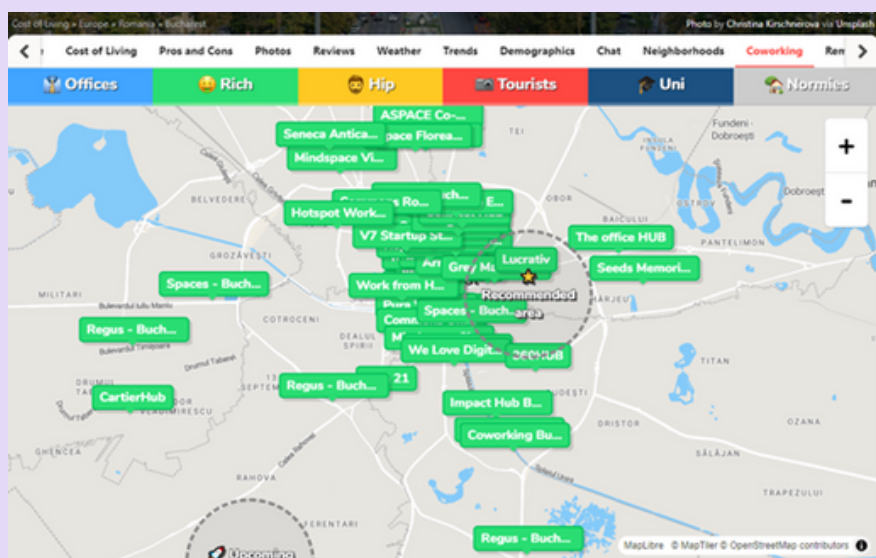


collaboration with the Dubrovnik Tourism Board. This initiative included conferences and residency programs like "Dubrovnik for Digital Nomads" and "Dubrovnik Digital Nomads in Residence," aimed at understanding and catering to the needs of remote workers. These efforts have successfully enhanced Dubrovnik's appeal in the digital nomad market.

Brindisi, a post-industrial city in the touristically popular region of Puglia, recognized the potential for growth through the tourism sector during the Covid-19 pandemic. The city initiated the "Sea Work & Live" project, creating new spaces for remote work and promoting socialization and discovery. This project aims to develop sustainable infrastructure for remote workers, balancing the needs of locals and newcomers.

Camara de Lobos, a picturesque municipality in Madeira, has traditionally been overshadowed by the capital, Funchal. Despite this, the city has seen significant growth in tourism while maintaining its agricultural and fishing roots. The urban-rural dynamics and thriving cultural scene, particularly during annual festivals, position Camara de Lobos uniquely as a top destination for digital nomads, blending traditional and modern lifestyles.

Bucharest District 6, one of the seven administrative districts of the Romanian capital, is focusing on digitalization and enhancing its infrastructure for remote work. Through the Remote-IT project, the district aims to improve quality of life for



remote and hybrid workers by fostering dialogue between local administration, employers, academia, and community groups. This structured approach supports the district's goal of becoming a desirable location for digital nomads.

Heraklion, a city rich in ancient heritage, has been diversifying its tourism offerings to include cultural, urban, conference, ecotourism, and gastronomic tourism. By creating specific logos and slogans that highlight these various forms of tourism, Heraklion has successfully branded itself as a versatile destination. This multifaceted approach makes it an attractive option for remote workers seeking a vibrant and culturally rich environment.

Murcia, Spain's seventh-largest city, is focusing on strategic tourism development to avoid the pitfalls of mass tourism. The "Murcia Smart Tourism Strategy 2021" outlines plans to enhance the city's international outreach and branding. By addressing the needs of digital nomads and promoting controlled tourism growth, Murcia aims to improve its reputation and appeal as a remote work destination.

Tartu, Estonia's second-largest city, has revamped its branding strategy by developing a Corporate Visual Identity (CVI). This new identity ensures consistent and recognizable branding across all platforms, enhancing Tartu's local and international presence. The clear and unified visual identity helps position Tartu as a memorable and attractive destination for remote workers.



Since remote workers often seek more than just a change in scenery; looking for a combination of factors that enhance both their lifestyle and productivity. Key elements include technological infrastructure, affordable cost of living, a vibrant community, quality healthcare, and leisure activities. Within the next transnational meetings, Remote-IT network cities will further explore strategies for attracting digital nomads and skilled professionals, as well as soft and hard infrastructure that are essential for strengthening the attraction and retention of remote workers.



WHO IS OUR REMOTE WORKER / DIGITAL NOMAD?

Today traditional office settings are no longer the only option for professionals. The rise of digital technologies and changing attitudes towards work-life balance have initiated diverse remote working arrangements.

Let's explore the definitions and characteristics of digital nomads, remote workers and hybrid workers:

Remote worker	
Definition	Remote workers perform their job duties from a location outside their employer's physical office. This can include working from home, a co-working space, or any other remote location.
Characteristics	Work can be done from anywhere with a reliable internet connection. Requires strong time management skills to stay productive without direct supervision. Relies heavily on digital communication tools like email, video conferencing, and collaboration platforms. Needs a high level of self-motivation and discipline to avoid distractions. Often seeks a better balance between personal and professional life.
Resources needed	Home office setup (desk, chair, computer), high-speed internet, communication tools, and productivity software.

Digital nomad	
Definition	Digital nomads are individuals who leverage telecommunications technologies to earn a living and conduct their life in a nomadic manner. They work remotely from foreign countries, coffee shops, public libraries, co-working spaces, or recreational vehicles.
Characteristics	Digital nomads are constantly on the move, often traveling internationally. They have the freedom to choose their work hours and locations. Proficient with digital tools and platforms essential for remote work. Able to quickly adjust to new environments, cultures, and time zones. Typically self-employed, freelancers, or remote employees with a high degree of autonomy.
Resources needed	Portable technology (laptops, smartphones), reliable internet access, VPN services, travel insurance, and adaptable workspaces.



Hybrid worker	
Definition	Hybrid workers split their time between working remotely and working from their employer's office. This model combines the benefits of both in-office and remote work.
Characteristics	Typically has a predetermined schedule for in-office and remote days. Balances face-to-face collaboration with colleagues and independent remote work. Comfortable with transitioning between different work environments. Uses both physical office resources and remote work tools effectively. Enjoys a flexible work arrangement that supports personal needs and professional responsibilities
Resources needed	Dual setup (office and home), portable devices, access to company networks remotely, and collaboration tools.

WHATS NEXT?

Capacity building workshop on
Integrated Approach to building
Remote-IT Action Plans

April, 2024

Capacity building workshop on
building a Persona

May, 2024

Transitional meeting in Tartu,

Estonia

June, 2024

Podcast recording: "Our Changing
Work Places: What Do We Need for
Remote Working?"

June, 2024