

Remote-IT

Remote and Hybrid work for Thriving Cities

QUARTERLY REPORT #3

JULY - SEPTEMBER 2024



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network, with the support of the
partner cities



This **third Quarterly Network Report** captures the Remote-IT network's activities between July and September 2024, marking a key moment of **transition from planning to refinement in the Integrated Action Plan (IAP) process**.

The quarter's anchor was the **transnational meeting in Câmara de Lobos, Portugal**, a vibrant coastal town blending tradition and innovation, where partners deepened their focus on **infrastructure, testing actions, and peer learning**.

Key highlights include our **first Online Forum on Remote work and the Green Transition, led by Dr. Eleni Feleki**, a hands-on Living Library session on **soft and hard infrastructure**, the network's first **Mini Peer Review facilitated by Alison Partridge**, and the discussion on diverse **testing actions** across cities. The meeting also featured a **live podcast recording capturing local perspectives**, and explored new tools to support adaptive action planning.

Through collaborative exchange and critical reflection, cities sharpened their strategies to support remote workers, while reaffirming their shared commitment to **inclusive, practical, and forward-looking urban transformation**.

LEARNINGS FROM THE NETWORK

Câmara de Lobos Hosts 5th Remote-IT Transnational Meeting on Remote Work

From 25 to 26 September 2024, the Remote-IT network gathered in the coastal city of Câmara de Lobos, Portugal, for its 5th Transnational Meeting.

This in-person exchange brought together city representatives, local stakeholders, and URBACT experts to reflect on progress, test methodologies, and advance Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) to make cities more attractive and prepared for remote workers and digital nomads.

The meeting was officially opened by Mayor Leonel Silva, who welcomed partners and emphasized how participating in networks like URBACT has opened the door for international collaboration, knowledge exchange, and access to new funding opportunities. The Câmara de Lobos team also presented its recent pilot – **the Innovator in Residence Programme** – showcasing their ambition to become a reference point for creative and remote talent in island contexts.





Key moments and activities

Throughout the two-day gathering, partners shared updates on local ULG activities and presented the progress of their IAPs. A Living Library session challenged cities to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of their **soft and hard infrastructure** to attract remote workers. Another highlight was the **Mini peer Review** session, as well as the **Testing Actions – State of Play** session, both encouraging critical peer-to-peer dialogue on the readiness and feasibility of each city's Integrated action plan and pilot initiatives.

Câmara de Lobos offered partners a unique experience of local culture, including site visits to a **creative residency and a local TV studio**, helping to demonstrate the city's potential to support remote work through community, infrastructure, and cultural identity.

A faded background image showing four people (three women and one man) sitting around a white table in a meeting room. There are water bottles and papers on the table, and a potted plant in the background.

REMOTE-IT Podcast:

Who is a remote worker/digital nomad these days?

As part of the Remote-IT transnational meeting held in Câmara de Lobos, a special podcast episode was recorded to capture insights from participating cities on the evolving phenomenon of remote work and digital nomadism.

Hosted by Mark Thomas, the second episode of the URBACT Remote-IT podcast features Jelka Tepšić (Deputy Mayor of Dubrovnik), Bárbara Letícia Rodrigues Sabino (ARDITI, Câmara de Lobos), and Jaime Ruiz Huescar (CITIES FORUM, Murcia), and explores how different European territories are **navigating the opportunities and challenges that come with attracting digital nomads.**

The episode draws from the touristic destinations like Dubrovnik and Madeira, where the COVID-19 pandemic sparked innovative initiatives aimed at making their cities attractive to location-independent professionals, resulting in notable shifts in both local economies and urban dynamics.

Throughout the conversation, the guests reflect on the varying stages of engagement with the digital nomad trend in their respective cities. Dubrovnik and Madeira have already seen significant inflows of nomads, bringing both **benefits—such as economic diversification and global visibility, and pressures, particularly in the housing sector.** Murcia, on the other hand, is at an earlier stage, with potential yet to be fully tapped.

The podcast highlights how cities can position themselves more strategically to attract remote workers, address seasonal tourism gaps, and design co-working spaces that reflect the diverse needs of this workforce. Ultimately, the episode offers a nuanced understanding of digital nomadism—not as a uniform trend, but as a complex and evolving aspect of the future of work that cities must approach with flexibility, inclusivity, and foresight.

Designing Remote-Ready Cities: Building the Soft and Hard Infrastructure for the Future of Work

The rise of remote work has transformed not only how people work, but also where they choose to live. Cities across Europe and the globe are competing to become hubs for remote workers and digital nomads, recognizing their potential to contribute to local economies, revitalize communities, and strengthen innovation ecosystems. But to truly capitalize on this opportunity, cities must look beyond marketing campaigns and coworking spaces. What's required is a long-term, strategic investment in both **hard and soft infrastructure** – the tangible and intangible assets that shape the urban experience for mobile professionals.

Understanding the Infrastructure Spectrum

The concept of infrastructure in the context of remote work extends beyond roads and cables. It includes **the physical environment, digital services, legal frameworks, and social systems** that collectively create a place where remote workers can live, work, and integrate.

- **Hard Infrastructure encompasses physical and digital assets - high-speed internet, coworking hubs, transport systems, housing, healthcare, and utilities.**
- **Soft Infrastructure includes regulatory frameworks (e.g., visa schemes, taxation), community-building mechanisms, quality of life factors, support networks, and cultural amenities.**

Together, these elements determine whether a city can attract, host, and retain remote professionals — and how well it integrates them into its economic and social fabric.

Building Strong Hard Infrastructure

Remote workers depend on uninterrupted digital connectivity, affordable and inspiring workspaces, accessible mobility, and safe, healthy living environments. Cities like Tallinn, Lisbon, and Barcelona are regularly cited for their robust hard infrastructure:

- Tallinn, Estonia has invested in 5G networks, nationwide e-services, and integrated transport systems, creating a seamless experience for both locals and digital nomads.
- Lisbon offers one of Europe's densest coworking networks and strong public transport infrastructure, alongside an international airport within 20 minutes of the city center.
- Barcelona balances urban density with beach access, fast Wi-Fi zones, and smart city planning, which makes it attractive for professionals seeking both productivity and leisure.

However, **cities must also think about non-digital hard infrastructure - such as schools, medical services, and housing affordability, especially as more remote workers arrive with families or long-term intentions.** The Nomad List 2024 Report highlights that nomads increasingly search for child-friendly infrastructure and safety ratings when choosing destinations.

Investing in Soft Infrastructure for Belonging and Stability

Hard infrastructure brings remote workers to a city, but soft infrastructure makes them stay. This includes the sense of belonging, integration into local communities, and a regulatory environment that supports their lifestyle.

Key components of soft infrastructure include:

- **Legal Frameworks:** Remote work visas (e.g., Croatia's digital nomad visa), tax incentives, and labor policies that clarify rights and obligations for non-resident workers.
- **Community Ecosystems:** Events, meetups, local nomad groups, and public-private networks that connect newcomers with residents and institutions.

- **Support Systems:** Language learning, mentorship programs, local guides, and digital platforms that ease the transition.
- **Cultural Infrastructure:** Access to arts, heritage, cuisine, and local traditions that create a sense of place and identity.

The European Commission’s Digital Decade Policy Programme 2030 emphasizes the need for **holistic approaches that include human capital, community participation, and digitally empowered public services**. It recognizes that connectivity without inclusion leads to transient populations, not rooted communities.

Lessons from the Remote-IT Network

During the transnational meeting held in Câmara de Lobos, the topic of soft and hard infrastructure was explored in depth through a hands-on exercise. Each city team was asked to **evaluate their own local conditions using a structured template that covered key aspects such as legal frameworks, community engagement, professional development, digital connectivity, coworking availability, and quality of life indicators**.

The exercise allowed cities to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in supporting remote workers and digital nomads.

The activity sparked meaningful peer-to-peer discussions and highlighted the **importance of balancing physical infrastructure with social, legal, and institutional conditions**.

This collective exercise provided a foundation for cities to better understand which infrastructure elements need prioritization in their local contexts as they continue to develop and refine their Integrated Action Plans.

Remote-IT Remote and Hybrid work for Thriving Cities
CÂMARA DE LOBOS
URBACT
 Co-funded by the European Union

City Infrastructure Evaluation

City: (Insert Your City Name) _____

Part 1: Soft Infrastructure Evaluation

1. Legal Frameworks
 (e.g., Digital nomad visas, taxation policies, freelancing regulations)

- Strengths: (List aspects of the city's legal framework that benefit remote workers/digital nomads. Example: Easy visa process, favourable tax policies)
- Weaknesses: (List any legal barriers that might deter remote workers/digital nomads. Example: Complicated tax system, no remote worker visa)

Strengths	Weaknesses

2. Community Engagement and Networking Opportunities
 (e.g., Nomad communities, professional and social events, platforms for networking)

- Strengths: (What events, platforms, or communities make the city attractive to nomads? Example: Regular meetups, strong expat communities)
- Weaknesses: (What's missing in terms of community engagement? Example: Lack of local/national integration with nomads, no organized events)

Strengths	Weaknesses

3. Access to Professional Development
 (e.g., Skill-building workshops, mentoring programs, learning platforms)

- Strengths: (What training or upskilling opportunities exist for remote workers/digital nomads? Example: Affordable coding bootcamps, coworking hubs offering training)
- Weaknesses: (Any gaps in professional development support? Example: Lack of mentoring, no support for career advancement)

FIVE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CITIES

1. **Conduct a Local Infrastructure Audit:** Map out existing digital assets, legal conditions, social programs, and mobility systems.
2. **Bridge the Urban-Rural Divide:** Strengthen rural areas with broadband and social infrastructure to spread the benefits of remote work more equitably.
3. **Create Hybrid Spaces:** Mix coworking with community use (e.g., in libraries, cultural centers) to embed remote workers in local life.
4. **Design for Inclusion:** Integrate remote worker strategies into broader urban planning, ensuring housing, healthcare, and sustainability goals align.
5. **Build Feedback Loops:** Establish mechanisms for remote workers to co-shape policy and service design, reinforcing a sense of belonging.

Remote Work and the Green Transition

Insights from the first Remote-IT Online Forum

On July 5, 2024, the Remote-IT network launched its first online forum titled “Green Transition and Remote Work”, gathering researchers, policymakers, and city representatives to explore one of the most complex and timely questions in the remote work discourse: **Is remote work truly a driver for the green transition, or are its impacts more ambiguous than we assume?**

The forum was expertly moderated by URBACT expert Dr. Eleni Feleki, who challenged participants to look beyond assumptions and embrace the nuanced realities of remote work's environmental and territorial implications.

Remote work: a revolution still unfolding

Opening the discussion, Mattia Corbetta (OECD) emphasized that remote work is not a temporary phenomenon but a profound transformation reshaping labor markets, spatial planning, and public policy. His message was clear: governments have two choices – **adopt a neutral, reactive stance, or shape the future proactively**. Corbetta argued for the latter, especially in light of public goods at stake, from worker wellbeing to sustainable mobility.

PROGRAM

Event Details:
Date: Friday, July 5th, 2024
Time: 10:30 AM - 12:00 PM
Location: Online (Zoom)

10:30 – 10:40 Welcome and Introduction
Natasia Miric, DURA, Remote-IT Lead Partner
Alisa Aliti Vlasic, Remote-IT Lead Expert

10:40 – 10:50 Introduction to the Theme and Speakers
Dr. Eleni Feleki, Remote-IT Ad Hoc Expert

10:50 – 11:10 Remote Work's Impact on Territorial Development
Insights from Trentino, Italy, and the Ems-Achse, Germany by Mattia Corbetta, Policy Analyst, OECD

11:10 – 11:15 Q&A Session

11:15 – 11:20 Adverse Effects of Remote Work on Environmental Sustainability
Dr. Eleni Feleki

11:20 – 11:35 Introduction to R-Map Horizon Project
Emphasis on the Rural-Urban Divide by Efstratios Stylianidis, Professor, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH)

11:35 – 11:50 First Results from R-Map Project on Remote Working Arrangements
Kelly Pasmatzis, Assistant Professor, South Eastern European Research Centre (SEERC)

11:50 – 11:55 Q&A Session

11:55 – 12:00 Final Words and Closing
Alisa Aliti Vlasic and Natasia Miric

Remote-IT
Research and regional work for a better future

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Eleni Feleki
Remote-IT Ad Hoc Expert and LET'S GO CIRCULAR! Lead Expert

Mattia Corbetta
Policy Analyst, OECD







Efstratios Stylianidis
Professor on Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH)

Kelly Pasmatzis
Assistant Professor on South Eastern European Research Centre (SEERC)

Alisa Aliti Vlasic
Remote-IT Lead Expert

Natasia Miric
Remote-IT Lead Partner

HOSTS SPEAKERS



He presented examples from Trentino (Italy) and Ems-Achse (Germany), illustrating how remote work is being integrated into regional development strategies to tackle labor shortages and promote **balanced territorial development**.



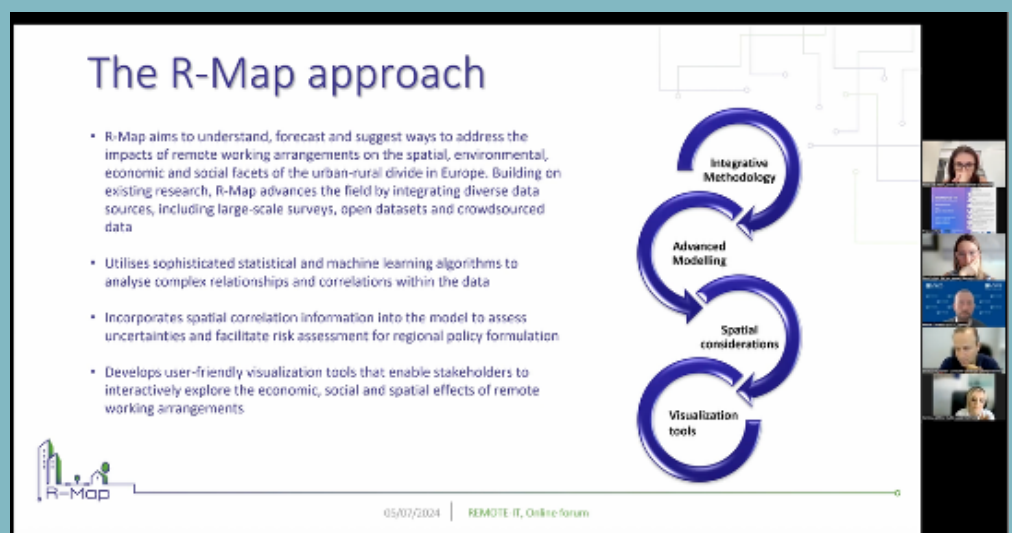
However, he also pointed out that a lack of awareness and political vision risks leaving remote work underutilized as a lever for sustainable change.

Scientific insights: measuring the invisible

Professor Efstratios Stylianidis introduced the **R-Map Horizon Project**, a groundbreaking EU-funded initiative designed to **analyze and visualize the spatial, environmental, and social effects of remote work across Europe**.

Using six diverse regional case studies, R-Map aims to bridge existing knowledge gaps and provide policymakers with the tools to understand and manage the urban-rural divide more effectively.

His presentation demonstrated how remote work influences **land use, commuting patterns, and housing markets**, and underscored the potential of remote work to contribute to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. R-Map's interactive platform, when fully developed, will offer evidence-based recommendations and help identify policy blind spots that could hinder equitable and sustainable development.



Digital gaps and future-readiness

Kelly Pasmatzki (SEERC) addressed a critical dimension often overlooked in remote work discussions: **the digital divide**.

Drawing on data from across Europe, she showed how rural areas continue to lag in both digital infrastructure and digital skills, the two prerequisites for attracting and sustaining remote workers.

Her presentation emphasized that telework, while central to EU digital and environmental agendas, still faces barriers at the legislative and infrastructural levels. Stakeholders agree remote work is here to stay, but many countries **lack clear frameworks or the necessary implementation capacity**. Moreover, remote work is transforming company structures, management roles, and organizational culture — making multi-level dialogue between business and policy crucial.



The paradox of sustainability

Closing the forum, Eleni Feleki invited participants to reflect on an important paradox: while remote work appears to reduce commuting and emissions, its net environmental impact is far more complex. **Increased home energy consumption, digital pollution, and potential urban sprawl can offset many of the presumed gains.**

Feleki called for deeper, evidence-based investigation into these interrelations. She questioned whether current policy frameworks are truly designed in an integrated manner or merely respond to single-issue pressures. Her intervention reminded us that **“green” is not an automatic byproduct of “remote”**, and without systemic, cross-sectoral approaches, the potential of remote work to drive a green transition may remain unfulfilled.

Prototyping Policy in Practice

Remote-IT Testing Actions

Integrated Action Plans aim to support cities in shaping place-based responses to complex urban challenges. A vital, yet sometimes underutilized, component of IAP development is **the testing of proposed interventions in real-world settings**. As the URBACT Programme's own guidance notes, **“testing small-scale actions enables cities to learn by doing, adjust assumptions, and build political and stakeholder support for broader change”**.

In the Remote-IT network testing actions will take a central role. Not only will they help validate the strategic direction of the IAPs, but they will also generate practical feedback, political momentum, and cross-sectoral collaboration. Here we want to present how each partner city will use testing actions to inform their IAPs—acknowledging that these initiatives, while in different stages of execution, are collectively setting the stage for more robust urban policy on remote work.

Why Testing Matters in Action Planning?

Urban policies are often based on assumptions that require real-world validation. As outlined in the URBACT IAP Guidelines, testing actions allow cities to:

- **Identify unintended consequences or implementation barriers;**
- **Refine proposed solutions based on feedback;**
- **Build confidence among political decision-makers and local stakeholders;**
- **Demonstrate feasibility and public benefit through “quick wins”;**
- **Foster a culture of experimentation and learning in public institutions.**

Moreover, testing contributes to an iterative design approach, aligned with global public innovation trends that advocate for prototyping and co-creation before large-scale investments are made (Mulgan & Albury, 2003; OECD, 2017).

Testing Actions in Remote-IT Cities

Dubrovnik: Dual Testing of Visibility and Infrastructure

Dubrovnik plans to test two complementary approaches:

- A digital marketing campaign designed to explore interest in the city among international digital nomads;
- To launch an Offline Space, a free informal coworking environment in the historic TUP building.

Bucharest District 6: Community Feedback through Immersive Engagement

Bucharest plans to organize a testing event at Impact Hub in March 2025, gathering remote workers and digital nomads. The insights should shape strategic objectives of their IAP, emphasizing the importance of community-building and inclusive coworking spaces.

Brindisi: Testing the Allure of the “Digital Nomad Package”

Brindisi's is planning to co-design and promote a curated one-month digital nomad experience.

Murcia: Internal Transformation and Public Engagement

Murcia will pilot two testing actions:

- A one-month hybrid work program within the city's municipal departments,
- A Digital Nomad Info Stand at the city's Science and Innovation Week

Tirana: Validating through a Festival

Tirana is planning to use the opportunity of their flagship event Tirana Digital Nomad Festival (TDNF2024) to test IAP interventions in real-time.



Tartu: Digital Learning Infrastructure for Public Sector Staff

Tartu's testing action will involve launching an online training on hybrid meetings, hosted on the SharePoint platform. The aim will be twofold: assess SharePoint's usability as a training environment and gather feedback on training content.

Câmara de Lobos: Hosting Innovation Through Residency

The Innovator in Residence Programme will host an international expert for a four-week pro-bono collaboration with local actors. The pilot will test if short-term high-skilled residencies could generate lasting benefits for the community.

Heraklion: Digital Presence and Remote-Ready Spaces

Heraklion will focus on two pilot actions:

- A dedicated website for digital nomads, designed with input from the ULG to centralize relevant information and facilitate user registration.
- A soundproof working booth installed in the Heraklion Youth Centre, a centrally located municipal café.



**STRENGTHENING
INTEGRATED ACTION
PLANS THROUGH PEER
EXCHANGE**

Mini Peer Review session

During the fifth Transnational Meeting in Câmara de Lobos, the network piloted its first Mini Peer Review session — an exercise designed to help cities refine their Integrated Action Plans (IAPs) through mutual **feedback**. The session was facilitated by Alison Partridge, Remote-IT Ad Hoc Expert, who led the structured review process and set the tone for an open, collaborative exchange among city teams.

The objective of the session was to **offer constructive peer feedback at a key stage of IAP development**. Each participating city had the opportunity to present its draft IAP using a shared **canvas format** and receive insights and questions from three peer cities.

The session followed a strict time structure: five minutes of presentation by the review city, followed by twenty minutes of structured feedback, and a five-minute summary by a designated note taker. This format ensured focus and equal participation across all groups.





The peer review focused on key dimensions of the IAP, including **the clarity of the city's core problem, ambition and realism of the vision, SMART-ness of the objectives, coherence of the intervention areas, and the quality of indicators and action descriptions.** A peer review template was provided in advance to guide participants in providing meaningful, structured input.

The cities welcomed the opportunity to hear critical, constructive feedback from others dealing with similar challenges. The process not only highlighted areas for improvement but also allowed participants to reflect on how their local strategies were perceived by peers — a vital step for building more grounded and actionable plans.

WHATS NEXT?

**Online forum #2 – “Beyond
Lifestyle – Digital Transformation,
nomads and remote workers”
*October 2024***

**Transitional meeting in
Brindisi, Italy
*January, 2024***

**Transitional meeting in
Tirana, Albania
*March, 2024***

Remote-IT

Remote and Hybrid work for Thriving Cities



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).



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