

Protection of Older People Working from Home During the Pandemic: A Central-European Case Study

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Abstract: The COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on labour markets worldwide, necessitating the rapid implementation of work-from-home policies to mitigate the spread of the virus. This study examines the legislative frameworks and their effectiveness in protecting older employees working from home in four Central European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. Through a legal comparison and an empirical survey of respondents aged 50 to 64, six key areas were investigated: the definition of work from home, the grounds for its institution during the pandemic, the provision of necessary equipment, the coverage of equipment costs, the coverage of energy costs, and workplace safety. The results revealed some disparities in legislative support and practical implementation across these countries. Many older employees reported insufficient provision of necessary equipment and a lack of compensation for related costs, including energy expenses. Furthermore, more than 50% of respondents in the Czech Republic and Slovakia indicated inadequate safety training for remote work. Despite these challenges, a majority of the respondents expressed a preference for continuing work-from-home arrangements post-pandemic. The study concludes with recommendations for legislative enhancements to better

protect older employees, including clearer regulations, improved equipment provision, comprehensive cost coverage, and thorough safety training.

Keywords: *legal aspects, remote working, survey, Visegrad countries*

1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic was an unexpected event that affected the lives of many people. The pandemic also brought changes in the labour market as a number of governments and employers had mandated working from home to prevent the virus from spreading, or at least mitigate its effects (von Gaudecker *et al.*, 2020). In view of this, governments were facing a number of challenges. First, maximum protection had to be provided to populations by taking various measures including the closing down of shops and other establishments; the governments approached this solution with varying results (Finch *et al.*, 2022; Koca, 2022). Next, such measures had to be taken, while preventing or limiting the spread of the virus, that would not impair the national economy. As a result, a solution had to be found that would protect public health without having devastating effects on the country's economy. Both the governments and the employers promoted work from home as a compromise between protecting public health ("stay home, save lives") and upholding economic productivity (Brooks *et al.*, 2020; Shimazu *et al.*, 2020).

The article aims to assess whether the legislative regulations concerning work from home in four Central European countries—the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia—provides adequate protection for older employees and to formulate subsequent recommendations for legislation.¹ In order to achieve this goal, we defined six partial research questions:

RQ1: How do the legislations of the four Visegrad countries (V4) define work from home?

RQ2: What was the basis for instituting work from home during the pandemic?

¹ We believe that *de lege ferenda* considerations are necessary as the return of pandemic waves cannot be excluded. For this reason, work from home must be seen as necessary even in the future and an optimal combination must be sought for the traditional employment and work from home and its implementation.

RQ3: Did the employer provide the employees with the necessary equipment?

RQ4: Did the employer cover the cost of the equipment used,

RQ5: including energy costs?

RQ6: How was workplace safety guaranteed?

The Visegrad countries were chosen in view of their institutional and economic similarities and because of their similar historical experience, including similar courses of the waves of the pandemic. Also, we focused on older employees, who are regarded an important part of the active labour force (Eurostat, 2020a; 2020b), also because, despite the COVID-19 pandemic afflicting all age brackets, senior people were considered the most vulnerable group, with the mortality rate being strongly correlated with advanced age (Lin *et al.*, 2020; Onder, Rezza & Brusaferro, 2020). Moreover, older people were less likely to easily adapt to working from home while facing increased risks of unemployment, discrimination at work, or economic problems due to loss of income (Ehni & Wahl, 2020). Senior people who do not use technologies may be marginalised, facing occupational and social deprivation. Aging and the necessity to use technology at work make senior people more vulnerable at work, negatively impacting their employability and permanent presence in the labour market (Seifert, 2020; or Jasik *et al.*, 2022).

Although partial studies exist on this subject (such as Danielak, 2021), there is currently no unified comparison available based on the data from all the Visegrad countries related to the pandemic period. Thus, work from home and the legal regulations governing it in the Visegrad countries have not been described and relevant resources on this subject are rather limited. The data we have analysed are thus among the first in this area, and our conclusions contribute to an improvement of legislation and better protection for older employees.

2. Data and methods

The study primarily used the method of legal comparison, followed by a comparison to ascertain the *de lege lata* legal status, that is, to ascertain the current and effective legislation in the countries compared. The analysis of legal regulations—that is, to what extent is the labour law prepared to regulate

work from home, and what are the main potential problems and obstacles (*de iure* analysis)—is compared with the real experiences of employees at pre-retirement and retirement age (*de facto* analysis) to ascertain from a representative empirical survey the contentment and secured work from home. By legal comparison, the strengths and weaknesses of a legislation in question can be detected, subsequently suggesting a solution to be applied in a different legislation. Moreover, by using real data from a representative survey, we could ascertain how work from home was actually implemented and how legal regulations were implemented in practice.

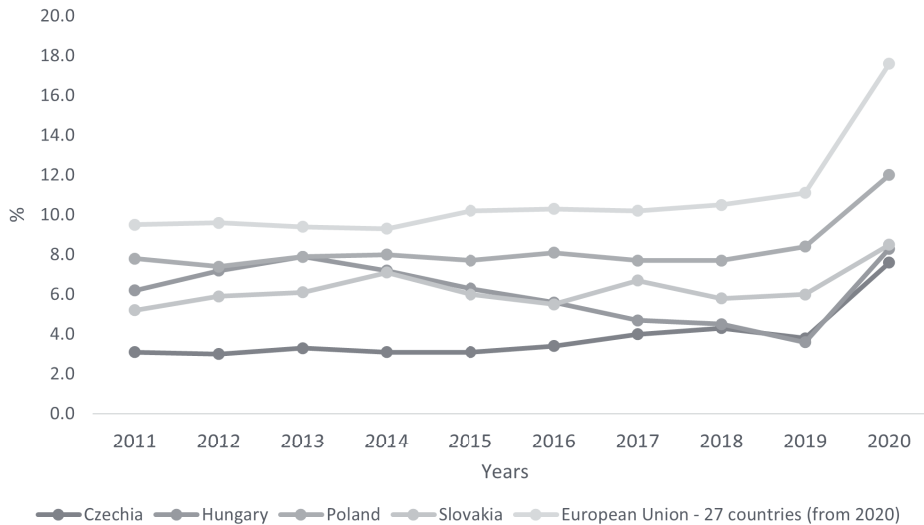
From the survey, we obtained a sample of 1,306 respondents, representative in terms of gender, age, education level, and regions (NUTS 2) (see Appendix I). Of this sample, 38% of respondents had direct experience of working from home. These were mostly economically active senior persons (at pre-retirement and retirement age of 50 to 64), who, at the time of the survey, could be confronted with extended work from home due to COVID-19. Thus, they saw themselves in quite a new employment type, brought about unexpectedly and abruptly. Given the segment of the population in question, the survey questions were designed to be clear and limited in number. The overall response rate (i.e., completed questionnaires divided by a number of contacted eligible respondents) was 30.5% (1,306) in total. The response rate for specific countries was 40.2% (363 respondents) for the Czech Republic, 42.6% (305 respondents) for Hungary, 55.3% (303 respondents) for Poland, and 53.3% (335 respondents) for Slovakia (see Appendices II and III).

3. How important is working from home for older employees?

Before the pandemic, over the past ten years, the use of working from home had varied substantially for each of the EU countries (European Commission, 2020; OECD, 2020). The average proportion of people working from home in the EU in the long run remained low and relatively stable, averaging around 5% of all employees (Eurostat, 2021). The share of older employees (aged 50 to 74) working from home was lower, 10% on average, but also very rigid in time. Due to the 2020 pandemic, the percentage of individuals working from home rose from 5 to 12.3% among all economically active employees, and to 17.6% in the 50–74 age bracket.

In the V4 countries, however, the percentage of employees working from home (both before and after the pandemic) remained substantially lower in all brackets, below the EU average over a long period, despite the society being digitalised and new technologies introduced (Esses, Csete & Németh, 2021). The lowest value of 3% among the V4 countries was recorded by the Czech Republic for the 50 to 74 age bracket in 2011–2020 (Fig. 1). This was caused by such organisational factors as decreased trust in this form of employment among managers or employees, who felt the need to meet their colleagues in person (Eurofound, 2017; Vilhelmson & Thulin, 2016). Such differences among EU countries offer a wide space for politicians to promote working from home more effectively (OECD, 2020).

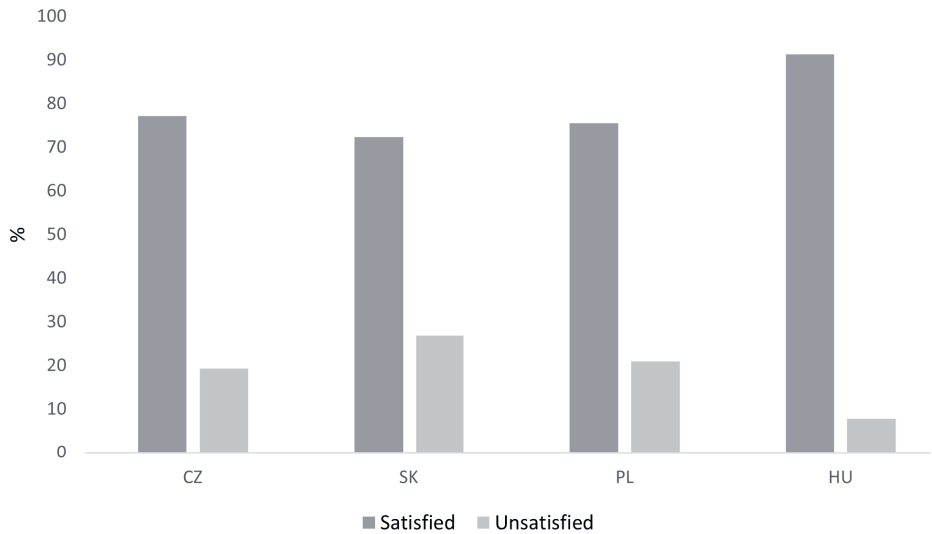
Figure 1. Employees aged 50–74 working from home as a percentage of total employment.



Source: Eurostat, 2021.

Our results suggest that a majority of employees in the V4 countries would welcome the opportunity to work from home were this option still offered, which indicates a preference for a hybrid model of work even if different views exist as to the frequency of this option (Figs. 2 & 3). The largest proportion of respondents expressed a preference to work from home several times a week, with fully transitioning to working from home being less preferred than the option to work from home several times a month (with the exception of respondents in Hungary).

Figure 2. To what extent are you satisfied with working from home?



Source: Authors' data.

Figure 3. If this was an option, how often would you like to work from home even if this was not due to the COVID-19 pandemic?

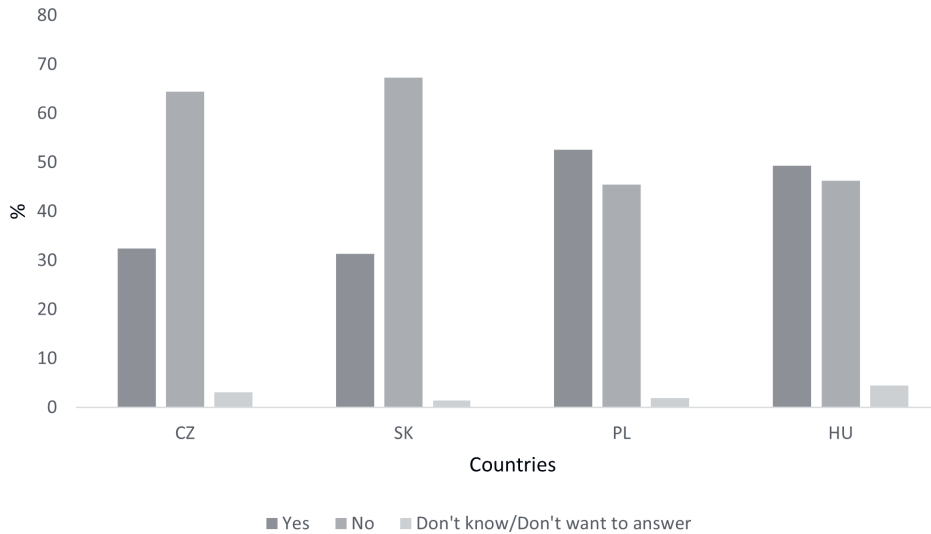


Source: Authors' data.

The results of our research (Fig. 4) suggest that employees have different options to work from home (outside the pandemic context), whereas in Poland and Hungary this is available for 52.6% and 49.3% of employees,

respectively,² in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, most of the employees do not have this option (in the Czech Republic, this is not available for 64.5% and in Slovakia for 67.3% of employees).

Figure 4. Do you have an option of permanent work from home if desired?



Source: Authors' data.

In utilising work from home, the V4 countries are below the EU average, and have remained so over a sustained period. One of the reasons for that might be the loss of full control over an employee's work performance (Collins, 2009). Particularly in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, there is still a prevailing conviction that working from home is less efficient than work performed by an employee physically present in the employer's workplace (MPSV, 2021). Older employees of the V4 countries are, of course, satisfied with work from home and would like to use this option several times a week. This is in line with the latest studies on work from home, which indicate that employees prefer working at home to working in an office (Beňo, 2018).

² In this case, 49.3% actually means a majority of respondents since 4.5% had given no statement or would not answer.

4. The legal and quantitative aspects of home office

4.1 How is work from home defined in the legislation of each V4 country? (RQ1)

To fully understand the principle of working from home, it is necessary to look at the ways how each V4 country defines work from home in its legislation. **Hungarian legislation** views work from home as a rather broad concept. It is basically defined as work outside the employer's premises that may take the form of teleworking or outworking. Even if the concept of home office overlaps the above ones in a number of aspects, it is not identical with them. Teleworking in the broader sense, that is, including teleworking and outworking, is governed by two regulations: the Labour Code, Act no. 1/2012, and Act no. CXII/1993 on Labour Safety (Bankó, 2020). According to these regulations, the conditions for both teleworking and outworking must be stipulated in the employment contract (Kun, 2021). The basic difference between teleworking and outworking lies in the technologies employed. In both cases, this is an atypical form of work (Vallasek & Mélypataki, 2020). The traditional home office, that is, regular or occasional work from home is, however, not covered by the legislation.

In **Czech legislation**, there is no clear unambiguous definition describing the situation of an employee carrying out his or her work partially or fully outside the employer's premises. A number of different concepts can be found in the literature—in addition to work from home, one can also find descriptions such as distant work, remote work, mobile work, etc. Often, terms like home office or mobile working can be heard (Weinhold Legal, 2019). While the meaning of those concepts is subject to change in terms of both place and time, authors may apply these concepts in different ways—some using them as synonyms, others making a point of clearly distinguishing them (Eurofound, 2015). Regardless of a particular nomenclature, the basic distinguishing signs of this form of employment include the possibility of an employee to perform work from anywhere, that is, from any place that may be fixed, but not necessarily, and pass the results of the work on to the employer through information and communication channels. Home office is thought of as occasional work from home (Dandová, 2021). Whichever form such remote work may take, it is based on employment contract or agreement to work outside the scope of employment pursuant to Act 262/2006, Coll., particularly its Section 317. Such an agreement between the employee and the employer on work outside the employer's premises relates to the employment of an employee who, while not working on the employer's

premises, performs for the employer agreed work based on conditions agreed upon during office hours determined by the employee alone. Therefore, such an employee does not have to comply with rules concerning the timetable, dead time, or suspension of work due to unfavourable weather conditions.

Slovak legislation distinguishes between work from home, telework, and home office. The basic distinguishing feature is the regularity with which work is performed from home. When working from home and when teleworking, an employee performs work from home on a regular basis, while home office lets an employee perform work on occasion or in an emergency (National Labour Inspectorate of Slovakia, 2022). What is termed home office is then defined as follows: work in the form of home office is performed on occasion or in an emergency at home or in a place other than the usual one as approved or agreed to by the employer, given that the kind of work, performed by the employee in conformance with the employment contract and the description of the place of work, allows this (Slovak Labour Code, Sec. 52, para. 5).

No comprehensive legislation exists as of yet in **Poland** concerning flexible forms of employment and clearly defining the conditions. Regulations only exist on what is called teleworking in Article 67(5) of the Polish Labour Code, which is conditioned by the use of information technology. To a considerable degree, this condition as part of Polish legislation does not adequately reflect the current challenges of the labour market. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Polish legislation started to use a new concept of “remote working.” Remote working is thought of as work performed by an employee remotely, provided that, for the employer, the kind of work is suitable for being performed remotely, and that the employer has come to the conclusion that the employee possesses the required technical skills and rooms adequate for performing work outside the usual workplace (Sládek & Sigmund, 2021).

It may come as a surprise that, in the countries compared, there is no clear legal definition of work from home yet. The reason may be the low number of employees working from home even before the pandemic, as can be seen in Figure 1. The definition is still ambiguous with its parameters undergoing a development. This is why a comprehensive legislation is missing for stipulating clear and predictable conditions for work from home. As a matter of fact, work from home is only defined on a factual level; thus, this type of work has come to be dubbed “home office” as a quite general concept.

4.2 What was the basis for instituting work from home during the pandemic? (RQ2)

According to **Hungarian legislation**, the basis for instituting work from home is mainly an agreement between the employee and the employer, which has to be specifically included by both in the employment contract. This means that the relevant legislation in the Hungarian Labour Code is rather flexible. Thus, during the first wave of the pandemic, work from home was instituted through agreements between the employees and the employer (Bankó, 2020). In the **Czech Republic** and **Slovakia**, employers conclude agreements with the employees which stipulate, in detail, rules for work outside the employer's premises, limitations for work on each day, limitations for work at night and on Saturdays and Sundays, the employee's duty to take a break for eating and resting, safety at work rules, etc. (National Labour Inspectorate of Slovakia, 2021; Opinion of the Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs from 23/09/2020). In **Poland**, too, remote work is instituted based on an agreement between the employer and the employee (Naumowicz, 2021).

Figure 5. Is your option to work from home regulated by a special agreement / an internal company regulation?



Source: Authors' data.

The pandemic introduced the need to regulate work from home. However, in cases where clear and predictable legislation was missing, employees and employers had to find their own solutions resting, though not always, on the

employment contract. Work from home was instituted based on agreements between the employee and the employer (Fig. 5).

A majority of employees in Hungary (52.9%) worked from home under such an agreement (particular agreement, internal regulation); in other countries, this was mostly not the case. In general, employment contracts or annexes to employment contracts cannot replace legislation concerning employee health protection. As our findings suggest, a major deficiency, no doubt, is the fact that no legislation exists regulating work from home, not even as an annex to employment contracts.

4.3 Did the employer provide the employees with the necessary equipment? (RQ3)

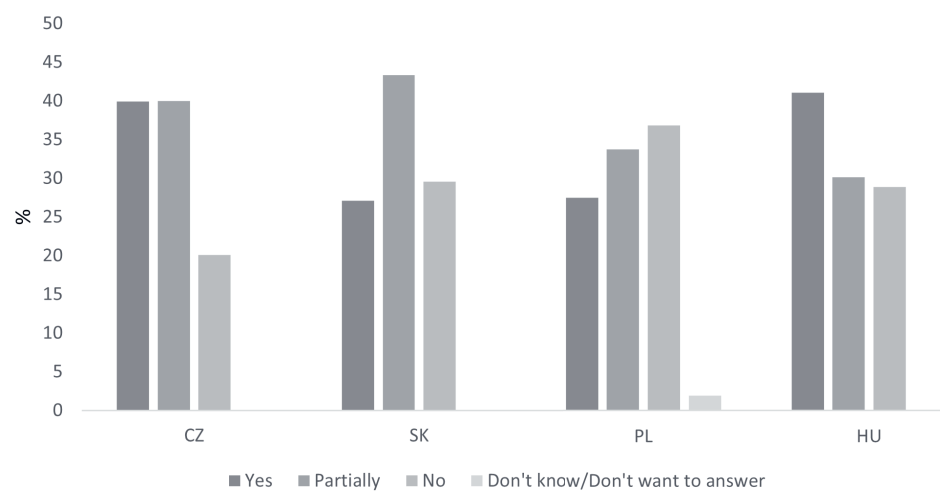
It is the basic responsibility of employers to provide employees with the necessary equipment or at least compensate the employees for using their own equipment (Nowacki, 2021a). Such an obligation of the employers' rests on the basic principles of European labour law, which, of course, extends to working from home as well. **Hungarian legislation** stipulates the employer's obligation to provide an employee with equipment (Bankó, 2020). In **Czech legislation**, the employer is obliged not to let any cost incurred by an employee to rest on the employee's shoulders. The employer must make the necessary equipment available to the employee or compensate the employee for any costs incurred in connection with work from home. However, also in view of the provisions of Section 265, paragraph 3 of the Labour Code, the employee's personal property should only be used if approved by the employer. The conditions, manner, and amount of compensation for the wear of the employee's personal property should be agreed upon by the employer, set out by a company internal regulation, or laid down in writing on an individual basis. A compensation for the use of an employee's property may take the form of a lump-sum payment, which complies with the provisions of Section 190, paragraph 1 of the Labour Code.

According to **Slovak legislation**, the employer must provide an employee with the equipment necessary for carrying out work even if this is not performed in an office. The employer may agree with an employee that the employee's own equipment will be used. If such an agreement has been concluded, the employment contract may stipulate that the employer will pay the employee a compensation (see Slovak Labour Code, Sec. 52, para. 2).

According to Article 67(11) of the **Polish Labour Code**, in the event of remote work from home, the employer must ensure an employee in their employment equipment adequate for the subject of work. The employer must also cover the insurance and the costs of installation, servicing, operation, and maintenance of the equipment provided. Also, the employer must provide adequate technical support for a teleworker as well as the training required for using the equipment.

Our findings suggest that a problem that the employees often face is the missing equipment for work in instances where the employers should equip the employees with the necessary means for the work. The results show (Fig. 6) that employers did not provide any equipment needed for 20% of employees working from home in the Czech Republic, for almost 30% in Slovakia, 28.9% in Hungary, and even almost 40% of employees in Poland. The problem of equipment is not yet fully resolved in practice as, from this point of view, there should be no difference between work from home and work in the place determined by the employer. Those employers who encourage their employees to work remotely should provide them with at least a computer equipped with the required software and connectivity or compensate the employees for the costs incurred by the use of such equipment (payments for equipment, connectivity, calls, etc.).

Figure 6. Has your employer provided you with the equipment needed to work from home?



Source: Authors' data.

4.4 Did the employer cover the cost of the equipment used (RQ4), including the energy costs (RQ5)?

In addition to the use of equipment, the question of compensation for the costs of equipment is another point of contention. According to **Hungarian legislation**, costs incurred in connection with work performed from home must be compensated. Section 199, paragraph 2 of the Labour Code stipulates that an employee performs work using his or her own means in case of outworking. However, the costs incurred by such an employee must be compensated for, pursuant to Section 200. An employee is entitled to a compensation for costs incurred by working at home. If such costs cannot be ascertained, they will be covered by a lump sum. Different rules apply to remote working in the form of teleworking. In the event of home office, no part of legislation relates to it.

In the **Czech Republic**, there is uncertainty as to what costs can be reimbursed and to what extent. This is also connected with the difficulty to prove whether the costs to be compensated for are those directly related to working from home or costs of private consumption. According to the Czech Employment Lawyers Association (Dandová, 2021), (i) costs incurred by an employee because of using home as an office should be separated from those incurred at home in times of leisure, (ii) costs incurred not because of an employee's work but because an employee shares home space with other members of the household should not be included. Thus, an employee must provide information on and prove the type and amount of the costs (Dandová, 2021).

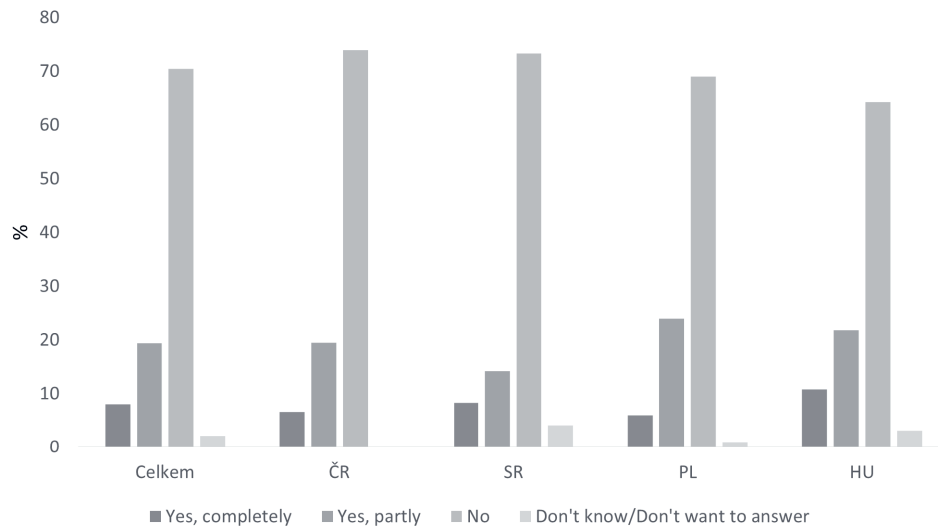
In **Slovak legislation**, the employer is obliged to compensate a teleworking employee for provably increased costs incurred by the employee using home instruments, equipment, and objects needed for performing the work (Slovak Labour Code, Sec. 5).

Since the **Polish Labour Code** includes no regulation of compensation for costs incurred by work from home (costs of electricity, connectivity, and others); only the general legislation can be applied concerning costs incurred by an employee (Polish Labour Code, Art. 67(11)).

Due to working from home, some costs are unlawfully transferred from an employee to the employer—costs related to connectivity, telephone calls, etc. Although, according to each country's legislation, employers are obliged to compensate employees for costs incurred in connection with work, in each country at least 65% of employees working from home had not received

compensation (the maximum was reached in the Czech Republic, where almost 74% of employees had not received compensation). If there was a compensation available for the employees, then for 45% of the employees it was in the form of a lump sum, that is, the employee did not have to prove that real costs incurred. This also complies with the results of a survey (Nowacki *et al.*, 2021b), according to which only 17% of employees were compensated by the employer for costs of connectivity.

Figure 7. Do you receive compensation from the employer for costs related to work from home, that is, energy, calls, software, etc.?



Source: Authors' data.

4.5 How is safety at work guaranteed? (RQ6)

The advancing digitalisation with an option to perform work from home has also changed the concept of a workplace and, thus, also the one of safety at work. According to the basic principle of labour law, the employer must instruct employees on safety at work. In the case of work outside the employer's premises, this question is of considerable importance as the workplace is, to a certain degree, given by the employee with the employer having only a limited possibility to ensure safety at work for the employee. Thus, more emphasis is given to the employer's duty of prevention and own responsibility. This, however, does not mean that the employer is released from the obligation to instruct an employee on safety at work.

Hungarian legislation allows employees to use their home equipment, such as computer; however, it does not comprehensively address issues of safety at work and possible instruction (Vallasek & Mélypataki, 2020).

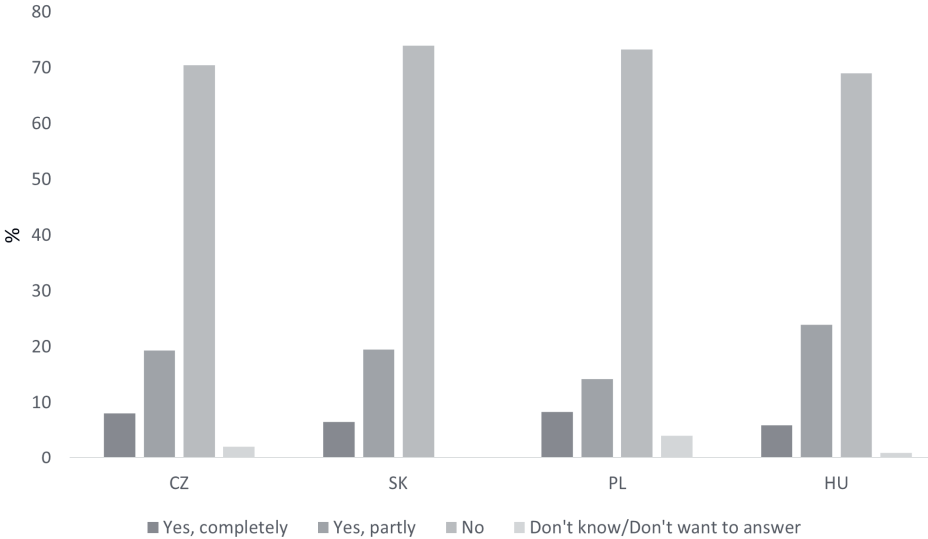
In the **Czech Republic**, a major point of contention in connection with remote working is the question of safety at work and health protection, which the current legislation cannot sufficiently regulate with the existing rules of such forms of work being too concise to provide employers with instruction on how to go about guaranteeing safety at work for their employees (Dandová, 2021). Concerning safety at work, the Labour Code does not exempt employers from any obligation to employees working outside the employer's premises, that is, the employer should honour all obligations even to employees working from home concerning safety at work. Accidents at work are particularly problematic as it is rather difficult to prove whether an accident was work-related or not (Czech Labour Code, Sec. 101–108).

According to **Slovak legislation**, a place of work must be suitable or adapted also in view of observing safety at work regulations. The employer must not neglect the obligation to instruct and inform employees pursuant to Section 7 of Act no. 124/2006 Coll. Given the present legislation, the employer, when ordering or enabling work in the form of home office, is not responsible for the condition of the workplace in which an employee will perform the tasks. Thus, although the employer has no responsibility for the condition of the workplace, this does not apply to the suitability of the working instruments and their compliance with the safety at work regulations (National Labour Inspectorate of Slovakia, 2021). The obligations to ensure safety at work are also stipulated in **Polish legislation** (Polish Labour Code, Art. 207 et subs.).

Despite the varied definitions of the responsibility for safety at work and health protection in the legislations of different countries, the empirical data indicate a divide between the countries into two groups: Hungary and Poland, on the one hand, with the majority of employees having been instructed on health protection when working from home, and Slovakia and Czech Republic, on the other hand, where more than 50% of employees have not been instructed (trained), which points to major shortcomings in actual remote work practices. This is corroborated by the studies (Davis *et al.*, 2020; Wütschert *et al.*, 2022), which report considerable shortcomings such as lack of equipment in home office workplaces and related health problems (back pains, vertigo, numbness of limbs). Many employees working from home have only received minimal instruction, if any, on ergonomics in

the workplace. This has resulted in many work-from-home employees not working in optimal working conditions.

Figure 8. Has your employer instructed you on work-from-home safety at work and health protection?



Source: Authors' data.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The findings of this study contribute to our understanding of how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected older workers' attitudes towards telework and how different legal frameworks support or hinder the inclusion and protection of older workers in remote work environments. This is important, given the complex understanding, challenges, and opportunities associated with remote work for older workers and building resilience in society when other disruptive events (natural disasters, activism, or war) are likely to occur that may require ongoing adaptation of employees and organisations to remote work. It seems that the COVID-19 pandemic acted as a catalyst in this area, pushing telework to the fore, even in the Visegrad states.

In terms of theoretical implications, the study challenges the existing stereotypes about older employees' reluctance to embrace telework and

new technologies. Older employees are open to working from home and our research did not indicate their fear towards working from home. It appears that there are more legislative barriers and risks rather than a lack of willingness among older employees to work from home, despite the general belief that older employees are unwilling to work from home and that technology is an obstacle. Similar prejudices can be observed with AI (e.g., Stypinska, 2023). At the same time, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interrelationship between teleworking and legislative protection in an international comparison, as well as offers insights into the impact of teleworking on a specific age group. Older employees are not threatened by working from home as such, but by the associated prejudices and insufficient protection in labour laws, to which they are entitled as employees. The combination of insufficient legislative protection and prejudices leads to their vulnerability.

According to the results, older employees in the V4 countries are mostly interested in working from home several times a week. They have a positive approach to working from home regardless of the fact that the protection of an employee working remotely is weaker than in the case of work performed physically in the workplace on the employer's premises. As work from home is likely to become more commonplace (European Commission, 2020; ILO, 2020; OECD, 2020), an urgent need arises to regulate remote work so that it only differs by the workplace and not by a lower degree of legal protection for the employee. Work from home would make it possible for older employees to stay longer in the labour market. According to Skučiene and Moskvina (2016), institutional protection, suitable working conditions, and other factors can substantially influence the labour market decisions of the population. The lawmakers of Visegrad countries should adapt the legislation to the requirements of both the employers and the employees. Insufficient legislation can raise concerns about working from home on the part of both employers and employees, thus leading to the jobs of older employees being jeopardised.

Our findings suggest that governments and employers have not taken into consideration that, in addition to protecting public health and safeguarding the effectiveness of the labour market, it is necessary to protect the employees as the weaker party of employment. The reason is that, when starting to work from home, employees have not lost their position of still being protected by labour law. This means that, to ensure proper functioning, all interests should be balanced, that is, not just the protection of public health and interest in the proper functioning of the market (productivity, economy

efficiency), but the protection of employees, particularly older ones, as well. With regard to the results of our research, we believe that this was not done in the case of the pandemic with the interest in the protection of employment rights of elderly employees having been neglected. Regulated more or less on a factual basis, work from home does not respect the most fundamental principles of labour law. Considerable autonomy of both the employer and the employee in this field is hardly desirable as the employee must be seen as the weaker party in this relationship. In the countries under comparison, legislation does not sufficiently protect the employee, thus violating the essential qualities and functions of labour law, which is to protect the employee (*RQ1* and *RQ2*).

The results show that while employees were quite satisfied with remote work, they were lacking equipment (being provided with the required software) for the functioning of this form of work in the long term (*RQ3*), and neither were the employees compensated for the costs incurred in connection with performing the work (*RQ4*), such as those of energy (*RQ5*). In addition, the employers do not instruct employees on safety at work (*RQ6*).

As far as the differences between the Visegrad countries are concerned, the practice is more or less the same in all the countries. The results show that there are no statistically significant differences between the countries, which confirms that they have very similar institutional backgrounds. The attitude of Hungarian employees regarding the regularity of working from home slightly differs, and so do their views on the regulation of working from home; as shown in Figure 5, Hungarian practices are slightly different. There are also minor differences in the possibility of working from home in the Czech Republic and Slovakia compared to Poland and Hungary (Fig. 4). However, these differences between the countries are quite negligible and do not significantly affect the overall proximity of the countries or the responses of the employees.

Based on the above results of an actual implementation of work from home, the following recommendations can be formulated to contribute to a better protection of older employees working from home:

1. A clear definition of what constitutes work from home, or home office, should be given to prevent factual contingent regulations, which are not based on legislation, constitute unpredictability, and create space without proper protection of employees. Moreover, regulations properly based on legislation will satisfy the interests of employees working from home.

- From the point of view of employee protection, no distinction should be made between work outside and inside the employer's premises.
2. Employers should also establish internal procedures summarising specific ways of work from home for their employees, especially with respect to employee protection.
 3. Employees should be instructed on safety at work, they should know how to work from home and be cognisant of the basic conditions of such work (attending training, being sent an e-mail message with the required information or, if necessary, with a contact person to answer any questions).
 4. Employees working from home should be guaranteed a safe and adequate environment and given the equipment required for work. The risk of health problems associated with working from home for long periods of time can be reduced through training on ergonomics and work environment settings.
 5. At the same time, legislators and employers should consider promoting a hybrid work model that combines home and workplace work but in a way that does not put employees at a financial disadvantage when working from home. Employers should provide employees with equipment and cover the costs provably incurred by its use. A possible solution could be payment in the form of lump sums.

6. Limitations of the study and suggestions for future research

The research focuses on older workers, which is a relatively homogeneous group and covers countries with a similar socioeconomic status, which limits the generalisability of our findings. The bias may also be due to the COVID-19 pandemic itself, during which remote work was a highly debated, officially supported/recommended and prioritised way of working.

As with almost all web-based surveys, an existing limitation is the representativeness of our sample—specifically, selfselection³ (i.e., respondents self-selected to register for an online panel and be prompted to complete surveys). Thus, the questionnaire was completed by respondents who had the resources available to participate in the study—for example, a stable internet connection and time.

³ Self-selection poses a danger to the representativeness of the sample if respondents are systematically different from non-respondents in terms of the questionnaire or the variables being studied.

In addition, the relatively higher technological literacy, access, and active internet use by respondents in our study (participation in the research was possible by completing a questionnaire sent electronically via a link) may indicate an easier adaptation to remote working, which may not be true in other types of occupations, other socioeconomic systems, or countries that were less affected by the pandemic.

This study was conducted in the early stages after the pandemic ended, so conclusions about long-term consequences cannot be adequately drawn. Future research may explore in more depth various aspects that are, or are not, critical to the use and adaptation to remote work among older workers, such as the importance of social contacts. For example, it is worthwhile to study whether loneliness among older employees correlates with lower openness to remote work and how these attitudes may interfere with work and non-work demands.

Although our findings suggest that employees adapt well to telecommuting, which is consistent with other studies that suggest generally favourable attitudes toward remote working (Beauregard, 2011), further research is needed to demonstrate the generalisability of our findings across a broader range of occupations, countries, and socioeconomic systems. At the same time, research should focus on how the preferences and attitudes of older workers evolve over time, specifically on whether employees still wish to work from home or whether the situation has returned to its pre-COVID-19 pandemic status. Indeed, the respondents' answers were collected shortly after the end of the epidemic, and while this timeframe is considered appropriate for exploring adjustment processes, there is no doubt that both organisational processes and personal attitudes can change in the post-pandemic era. We do not have comparable data from the post-pandemic period, which limits our ability to draw conclusions about relative changes or their stability, as employees may not currently face such urgent challenges and demands associated with teleworking. The relative impact of the pandemic on organisational and work processes may have been reduced.

Similarly, further research should focus on changes in legislation in the Visegrad countries, the nature of these changes, and their subsequent impact on older workers. This line of inquiry is crucial as it can provide insights into how different legal frameworks support or hinder the inclusion and protection of older workers in telework environments. Understanding the effectiveness of these legislative changes will not only help in improving policies, but also in creating a more inclusive and supportive work environment for older workers.

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Appendix I: Methodology of the survey

The survey was carried out in July and August 2021 by the STEM/MARK interviewing agency in the Visegrad countries (V4) on a sample of employees aged 50 years and above. The CAWI method was used.⁴ The advantage of the survey was that the sample consisted of active employees, who at the time of the survey were likely experiencing widespread telework due to the COVID-19 crisis.

Given the type of the population surveyed, the questions were designed so that respondents were presented with a limited number of items and clear wording was used. The questionnaire was pilot-tested among respondents; the respondents were structured and asked about (i) clarity, (ii) clarity of wording (iii), and were also given the opportunity to provide open-ended feedback that could potentially be omitted. Any issues identified during this pilot were resolved prior to the survey.

Once data collection was complete, data cleaning and sensitivity analyses were conducted to further enhance the quality of responses. The results remained robust after these analyses were conducted. Participants who were unable to correctly answer “validation” questions were also eliminated, as were participants with very short completion times (within the 5% of the shortest survey duration).

The selection of respondents for the survey was quota-based on the following sociodemographic characteristics: gender, age, level of education, NUTS 2 region. Information on the composition of the V4 population from the respective statistical offices was used to set the quotas. Due to the narrower target group limited to workers aged 50–64, it was not possible to fill all the quotas exactly, so the data were subsequently reweighted. The post-stratification weights were subject to a range of 0.5–2. There was low quota fulfilment for the variable on education in the category primary education, graduated without matriculation in Hungary and Slovakia. At the same time, weighting was done according to the actual share of persons in the population of each country.

⁴ An online data collection method. The questionnaires were distributed using web links that made the questionnaires accessible. Responses were recorded electronically.

Appendix II: Quotas for data collection, collection results, population structure for weighting, and weighted sample structure in each country, %

Czech Republic (N=363)		Quota	Collection of data	Population	Weighted	Fulfilled collection/ quota	Fulfilled weighted/ population
Gender	Man	53	51	53	53	96	100
	Woman	47	49	47	47	105	100
Age	50–54 years	42	42	42	42	101	100
	55–59 years	38	39	38	38	102	100
	60–64 years	20	19	20	20	93	100
Status	Male/Female employee	80	80	81	82	100	101
	Self-employed	20	20	18	18	101	101
Education	Basic	4	3	4	4	72	100
	Secondary	75	76	75	75	102	100
	Tertiary	21	21	21	21	99	100
NUTS 2	Prague	12	12	12	12	97	100
	Central Bohemia	13	14	13	13	111	100
	Southwest	12	11	12	12	91	100
	Northwest	10	10	10	10	97	100
	Northeast	14	14	14	14	101	100
	Southeast	16	16	16	16	98	100
	Central Moravia	12	12	12	12	105	100
	Moravia-Silesia	11	11	11	11	100	100

Slovakia (N=335)		Quota	Collection of data	Population	Weighted	Fulfilled collection/ quota	Fulfilled weighted / population
Gender	Man	51	51	51	51	101	100
	Woman	49	49	49	49	99	100
Age	50–54 years	41	41	41	41	100	100
	55–59 years	40	39	40	40	98	100
	60–64 years	20	21	20	20	106	100
Status	Male/Female employee	80	80	84	84	100	100
	Self-employed	20	20	16	16	101	100
Education	Basic	4	1	4	3	37	74
	Secondary	74	76	74	74	103	101
	Tertiary	22	23	22	23	103	101
NUTS 2	Bratislava region	14	14	14	14	102	100
	Western Slovakia	35	33	35	35	96	100
	Central Slovakia	25	26	25	25	105	100
	East Slovakia	27	27	27	27	100	100

Hungary (N=305)		Quota	Collection of data	Population	Weighted	Fulfilled collection/ quota	Fulfilled weighted/population
Gender	Man	54	52	54	54	98	100
	Woman	46	48	46	46	102	100
Age	50–54 years	45	47	45	45	104	100
	55–59 years	33	30	33	33	92	100
	60–64 years	22	23	22	22	103	100
Status	Male/Female employee	80	82	85	85	102	100
	Self-employed	20	18	15	15	90	100
Education	Basic	12	2	12	5	19	39
	Secondary	63	71	63	68	113	108
	Tertiary	25	27	25	27	106	108
NUTS 2	Budapest	19	19	19	19	100	99
	Pest	14	15	14	14	106	100
	Közép-Dunántúl	11	10	11	11	93	100
	Nyugat-Dunántúl	11	11	11	11	106	100
	Dél-Dunántúl	8	7	8	8	89	100
	Észak-Magyarország	11	9	11	11	81	100
	Észak-Alföld	14	14	14	14	103	100
	Dél-Alföld	12	14	12	12	115	100

Poland (N=303)		Quota	Collection of data	Population	Weighted	Fulfilled collection/ quota	Fulfilled weighted / population
Gender	Man	56	49	56	55	89	100
	Woman	44	51	44	45	114	100
Age	50–54 years	40	41	40	40	101	100
	55–59 years	37	38	37	37	103	100
	60–64 years	23	22	23	23	94	100
Status	Male/Female employee	80	86	74	74	108	100
	Self-employed	20	14	26	26	68	99
Education	Basic	6	4	6	6	63	99
	Secondary	69	70	69	69	101	100
	Tertiary	25	26	25	25	105	100
NUTS 2	Malopolskie	9	5	9	9	56	100
	Slaskie	11	14	11	11	121	100
	Wielkopolskie	10	10	10	10	106	100
	Zachodniopomorskie	4	5	4	4	117	100
	Lubuskie	3	2	3	3	90	100
	Dolnoslaskie	8	9	8	8	117	100
	Opolskie	2	2	2	2	70	100
	Kujawsko-Pomorskie	5	6	5	5	118	100
	Warminsko-Mazurskie	3	4	3	3	115	100
	Pomorskie	6	5	6	6	74	100
	Lódzkie	7	7	7	7	108	100
	Swietokrzyskie	3	3	3	3	93	100
	Lubelskie	5	6	5	5	120	100
	Podkarpackie	5	4	5	5	78	100
	Podlaskie	3	3	3	3	113	100
	Warszawski stoleczny/ Mazowiecki regionalny	15	15	15	15	97	100

Appendix III: The number of panelists contacted, the number of completed questionnaires, and the average length of the questionnaire

Country	CZ		SK		HU		PL	
	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%	COUNT	%
Total contacted	1,307	100	953	100	1,206	100	820	100
Opened by	904	69.2	629	66.0	716	59.4	548	66.8
OPENED	904	100	629	100	716	100	548	100
Ended by quota	478	52.9	252	40.1	351	49	69	12.6
Ended otherwise	63	6.9	42	6.7	60	8.4	176	32.1
Completely filled	363	40.2	335	53.3	305	42.6	303	55.3
Average length of fill	10.5 min		10.5 min		11 min		10 min	