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ABBREVIATIONS

SFEDI GROUP	Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative Limited_UK
UOP	University of the Peloponnese_GR
WSBINOZ	WYZSZA SZKOLA BIZNESU I NAUK O ZDROWIU_PL
FIP	FUTURE IN PERSPECTIVE LIMITED_IE
UPIT	UNIVERSITATEA DIN PITESTI_RO
INNOVENTUM	INNOVENTUM OY_FI
RIGHT CHALLENGE	Rightchallenge – Associação_PR
IHK	IHK- PROJEKTGESELLSCHAFT MBH_DE
SME'S	Small and medium-sized enterprises
VET	Vocational Education and Training
REMOTE CTRL	Building Skills and Attributes for Remote Working

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Scope

This policy paper presents the results of the empirical work that has been carried out in the context of the European Project "**REMOTE CTRL**_Building Skills and Attributes for Remote Working" to highlight the importance of supporting remote work's management and strengthening the links

between SMEs employers and employees towards the best implementation of remote work environments to achieve lasting benefits for society and economy.

The paper provides the background of the project and the main rationale behind it. It, also, summarises the methodological approach that was adopted to achieve the objectives, the empirical evidence that was gathered and the analysis that has been conducted throughout the different tasks implemented by the project team so far. In terms of geographical scope, it includes an analysis of the empirical evidence that has been collected from the partners and other key stakeholders from the following European Countries: United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Finland, Portugal, Greece, Romania and Poland.

1.2 Goals

This policy paper presents the results of the implementation of the curriculum to selected SMEs and VET trainers in order to highlight the importance of supporting remote work management and strengthening the links between VET and SMEs' employers and employees. More specifically, it aims to highlight

i. the role of VET professionals in supporting remote work management within SMEs,

ii. the importance of remote work management within the SMEs in the improvement of their operation and

iii. the policy changes needed to take place in order to make the partnership between SMEs employers and employees and VET professionals more effective in remote work.

1.3 Structure

The policy paper is consisted of the following chapters:

- **Project Framework:** In this chapter the main characteristics of the project are analysed, including the goals, the partners, the work that has been carried out as well as the key outputs.
- **Approach and Methodology**: In this chapter the methodology followed for the optimization of the Building Skills and Attributes for Remote Working curriculum is presented
- **Analysis:** This chapter provides information about the main outputs of the methodology that has been carried out, regarding the Building of Skills and Attributes for Remote Working curriculum and its relation with the SME's needs.
- **Conclusions & Course of Action:** In this chapter, the key conclusions derived from the analysis are presented and a course of action for the implementation of the policy is proposed.
- **ANNEXES** including supporting material and evidence as referenced throughout the document.

2. PROJECT FRAMEWORK

2.1 Project Overview

Remote working is the labour market model of the future with the potential not only to improve employee wellbeing and productivity but also to reduce our carbon footprint, which will be a significant motivation for employees of the future. It provides many benefits to employers, employees, governments and society in general. However, in order to be adopted in large scale so that it can support global economic and environmental recovery, it needs to be supported by tailored education and training materials that will build key skills and competences in employers and employees so that they can adapt to remote working. The REMOTE CTRL project aims to develop bespoke training resources that will address the needs of employers, employees and VET tutors in a remote working environment.

2.2 Project Objectives

Conducted desk research reveals that in most European countries SMEs are invited to remote working environments without any preparation or planning. As a result, many are struggling to cope and adapt as infrastructure and skills are deficient. Furthermore, there is identified a distinct lack of a comprehensive training and support materials which cater to both employers and employees and provide guidance on how remote working practices can be implemented across economic sectors. REMOTE CTRL specifically addresses this gap in the vocational educational landscape; and aims to support employees and employers across Europe to build the skills, aptitudes and disciplines they need to embrace a remote-working future.

REMOTE CTRL aims to create materials for both employers and employees to allow them to support both themselves and each other and to foster a relationship of trust and mutual respect which is key to ensure the success of any remote working policy. Also, the project REMOTE CTRL provides an innovative In-Service Training Programme for VET tutors to build their competence in the realm of remote working. REMOTE CTRL will support them to facilitate remote learning and to advise employers and employees on remote working practices, who are the main multipliers of the approach proposed in this application.

2.3 Project Partners

SFEDI

Established in 1996, Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative in the UK makes a difference through enterprise learning and skills development. As the government-recognised sector skills body for business enterprise, it works to support the learning and skills development of prospective and current owner-managers of small businesses, employees in organisations and vocational and educational professionals working to support enterprising learning and skills development.

UOP

The University of the Peloponnese in Greece was established in 2000 and accepted its first students in 2002. It comprises of 9 Schools and 22 academic Departments with a student population of approximately 25000 people. It offers studies in all cycles of learning: undergraduate, postgraduate and Doctoral as well as Life Long Learning and VET activities.

WSBINOZ

It is the first non-public higher education institution in central Poland that offers health-allied and medical-allied studies as well as business and pedagogy faculties. At the current stage has more than 60-70 full-time employees and more than 200 academic teachers on contract.

FIPL

Future In Perspective Limited (FIP) is a private company working in the field of vocational training, youth & adult education, e-learning, digital media. The company generally works with rural SMEs, micro-enterprises and social organisations. FIP places a particular emphasis on developing self-directed learning pathways to encourage the educational development of "Free Agent Learners".

UPIT

University of Piteşti (UPIT) is a state university that aims being a dynamic and efficient HE provider in the region. Currently it is a recipient for approx. 10.000 students from Muntenia region. It has approximately 700 paid teaching and administrative staff. It consists of 6 different faculties offering Bachelor, Master and Doctor Diplomas (www.upit.ro). The areas in which UPIT is active and delivers services are: education & training; scientific & applicative research; educational software design and testing; guidance & counselling; professional orientation; international cooperation in different fields; publishing activities.

INNOVENTUM OY

Innoventum Oy is a creative business founded in 2001. It has considerable experience in developing easy-to-use web-based applications for purposes ranging from e-learning to online shopping and live video streaming and has built a reputation for excellence in intuitive design both in Finland and throughout Europe. The core staff of Innoventum consists of four highly skilled professionals. For more than a decade, they have been involved in developing video streaming and e-learning tools and platforms and organise delivery of training contents in collaboration with local network of partner organisations working in the fields of youth and adult education, youth work, sports, migrants and entrepreneurship support.

RIGHTCHALLENGE

The Rightchallenge Association is a non-governmental organization which aims at the promotion of education and training as a means of social inclusion and equal opportunities. As an organization actively engaged with the community, one of their pillars is lifelong learning, in a variety of services such as: Human Resources development and capacity building in the fields of education, youth work, VET, community intervention, labour and employment, Curriculum design and development in a variety of sectors both for Face-to-Face and Online Environments' Support for people with no qualifications or exclusion.

IHK

It is a service provider for Vocational Education and Training (VET) at regional, national and international level, acting as a service provider and partner for the Chamber of Commerce and their member companies as well as Chamber of Crafts, Ministries and other institutions who are promoting economic development. IHK is initiator, leader and active partner of different strategic VET partnerships at regional and national level with key competences in Work Based Learning, Validation and recognition of informal/non-formal competences, Established network of local and regional companies.

2.4 Project Results

REMOTE CTRL specifically addresses the SME's needs for remote work policies and aims to support employees and employers across Europe to build the skills, aptitudes and disciplines they need to embrace a remote-working future.

The REMOTE CTRL project focuses on the following outputs to reach these objectives:

(1) REMOTE CTRL Masterclasses and Manual for Employers – this comprises a comprehensive training programme delivered through a series of master-class sessions to support business owners and managers to adapt their business and their management style for a remote working environment. These masterclass sessions are supplemented by a toolkit of short, bite-sized digital learning resources, that businessowners and managers can use to adapt their business model to a remote working environment.

(2) REMOTE CONTROL Toolkit for Employees – this toolkit aims to develop the remote working literacies of employees so that they can manage successful remote careers, by providing a complete suite of 18 digital resources which addresses the issue from a holistic perspective.

(3) In Service Training Programme for VET Tutors – this programme supports VET tutors for remote teaching and facilitation, so that they can integrate digital learning resources developing into their work with employers and VET learners.

(4) MOOC - The MOOC houses all of materials created during the lifetime of the project, it is free accessed remotely.

(5) Policy Recommendations Report - The consortium is aware that the model proposed in this project has the potential to yield significant policy-learning across the participant countries. As such, a policy paper will be key publication to allow partners to reflect on the lessons learned, to make pertinent

policy recommendations, to influence labour market and VET policy on a national and European level, to lobby for change and finally to support the exploitation of the REMOTE CTRL model.

3. APPROACH AND METHODOLOGY

In order to construct the policy paper, a multilevel methodological approach has been followed, taking into account the necessity to diversify data collection means, to leverage results from one task to develop subsequent tasks, and to involve the key stakeholders identified. To ensure the thoroughness of research and guarantee high-quality results, the project team has employed a mixture of data collection techniques that complement each other. The data collection techniques include desk research as well as the reports out of the distribution of a questionnaire to each partner's focus group that are described in detail in the following paragraphs.

3.1 Desk research

The data collection phase was initiated with extensive desk research to identify and define factors of innovation transfer and management in SMEs. In order to gather all the relevant information systematically conventional search engines were used, such as Google and Google Scholar. Furthermore, in order to guarantee an accurate and complete view of the main skills and attributes of remote work in SMEs, the project team used academic reports and publications, relevant to the field.

Based on the desk research, the project team developed the profile of the required focus group members-respondents of the questionnaire. More specifically, four categories of respondents were defined: a) Members of Partners' groups involved in the project, b) VET trainers and c) SMEs employers and d) SMEs employees.

3.2 Questionnaire

The project team developed a policy questionnaire that included the main factors and obstacles of remote work implementation in SMEs. The questionnaire was then distributed to the respondents - focus groups chosen from the desk research phase. Each partner synthesizes an extended report with the main trends and differentiations in the focus group.
Eventually, 83 stakeholders from all the countries participating in the project, including members of the partners, SMEs employers and employees and VET professionals took part in the survey.

The questionnaire entailed four main sections, the first one concerning general information about the participants and the rest concerning questions modified in three axes: REMOTE Work in partner country, Remote Working experience, REMOTECTRL Project's impact. The questionnaire is presented in the Annex.

4. ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the key outputs and results from the desk research and questionnaire are presented. REMOTE CTRL project aims to develop bespoke training resources that address the needs of employers, employees and VET tutors, willing to accommodate remote working or flexible working patterns, in a remote working environment.
The main focus of the analysis is the identification of drivers and barriers of remote work management, as described by members of the partners, employers, employees and VET professionals in Europe. The analysis includes quantitative as well as qualitative results that provide crucial information for the development of a course of action based on the experiences and lessons learned during the REMOTECTRL project.
The Policy Paper questionnaire circulated by UoP contained a set of semi-structured interview questions for all partners to complete in conjunction with their local VET tutors, employers and

employees during local consultations in the form of focus groups (about 10 participants per each partner: partner group members, employers, employees, VET trainers). Each partner collated all responses and forwarded a summary report to UoP, to compose the present Policy Paper.

4.1 Descriptive statistics

To begin with, a main aspect of the analysis was to ensure a balanced geographical spread of the participants. The project team monitored the process thoroughly and achieved the participation of members from all partner countries. Each country report indicates the number and the status of participants belonging to each one of the specific focus groups. The allocation of the participants based on the country of residence is shown in the following figure.

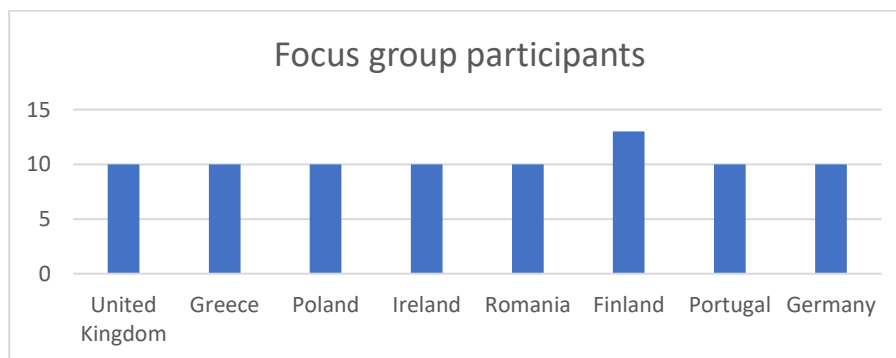| Country	Focus group participants
United Kingdom	10
Greece	10
Poland	10
Ireland	10
Romania	10
Finland	13
Portugal	10
Germany	10
TOTAL	80

Figure 1: Allocation of focus groups participants based on the country of residence

As seen on the above diagram, all partner countries conducted a semi structured interview with focus groups. An average number of 10 participants in each focus group was pursued.

Moreover, another important parameter that should be examined is the characteristics of each participant. The following table analysis focuses in the distribution of the participants among the four main categories of the respondents: members of the partners' teams, SME's employers, SME's employees and VET professionals. The results are shown in the following diagram.

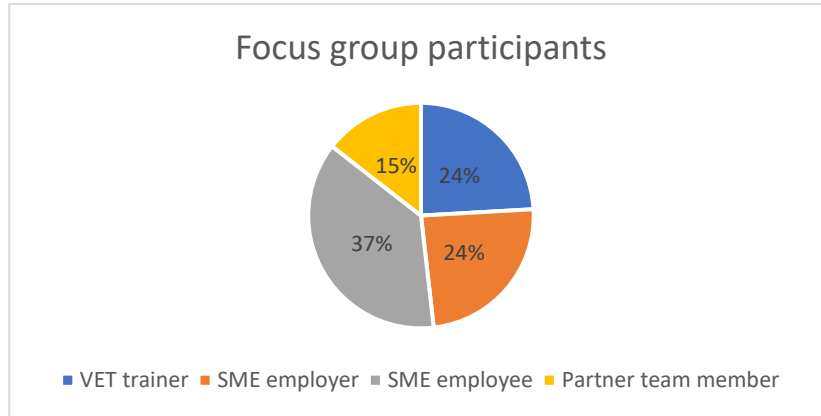| Identity	Focus group participants
VET trainer	20
SME employer	20
SME employee	31
Partner team member	12

Figure 2: Allocation of focus group participants based on their status/identity

Most of the participants were SMEs representatives, employers (24%) and employees (37%), 61% in total, which is a very important percentage because it can lead to an accurate depiction of the SMEs needs in the field of remote work management. Furthermore, another positive aspect is that the percentage of VET trainers is also high (24%) and therefore important insight about the efficiency of the curriculum can be provided. Apart from the above, it is essential to examine the division of each category of respondents among the participating countries.

Table 1: Distribution of Participants' identity among partner countries

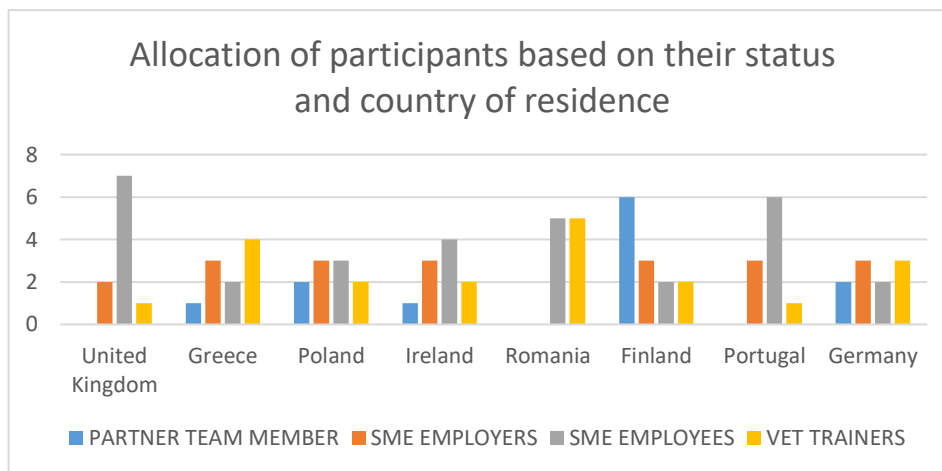| COUNTRY	PARTNER TEAM MEMBER	SME EMPLOYERS	SME EMPLOYEES	VET TRAINERS	TOTAL
United Kingdom	0	2	7	1	10
Greece	1	3	2	4	10
Poland	2	3	3	2	10
Ireland	1	3	4	2	10
Romania	0	0	5	5	10
Finland	6	3	2	2	13
Portugal	0	3	6	1	10
Germany	2	3	2	3	10
TOTAL	12	20	31	20	83

**

Figure 3: Allocation of participants based on their status and country of residence

In particular, focus groups with the largest number of SME employees are conducted in UK (7 employees) and Portugal (6 employees), followed by Romania (5 employees). As for focus groups with

8

SME employers, they are conducted in an average of 3 employers in most of the countries Finally, VET professionals are present in every focus group in proportional numbers, between 4 and 1 participants. Partner members are also present in focus groups of five countries.

Based on the above table, most SME representatives derive from United Kingdom, Romania and Portugal, whereas Romania and Greece have the largest number of VET trainers (5 and 4 respectively). Therefore, the impact of these countries in the development of the policy paper will be higher.

4.2 Qualitative results

Section B: REMOTE Work in partner country

B1 *Describe the legislation framework for REMOTE work in your country*

Scope of question
The main goal of this question is to identify if stakeholders are aware of the current situation in the EU regarding remote work and to define the necessary actions in order to support and motivate SMEs to incorporate remote work environments. Therefore, main task was to provide a synopsis of the legislation frame in every partner country. Important points to record in the focus groups were possible regional differences, how dated the legislative framework is, any changes made during the pandemic, etc. in order to define the factors that can pose a challenge in the development of the action proposed for.

Key Results
In most European partner countries, there is **no separate legislative framework** for remote working, apart from Germany, where different legal regulations for mobile work, telework and work from home are in power, and Romania with recent Romanian Labour Code, "work at home" that regulates the status of employees who work from home. In most countries legislation follows working protections and regulations to cover all working aspects with equality, like salary and benefits, hours of work, safe working environment, workers with a disability, etc. In some partner countries, like the UK, there is special care for expenses in remote work; employers should reimburse their employees for expenses that necessarily incur, such as telephone charges, IT equipment, etc.

Generally, in all the countries, remote work is considered as *a right* -in various interpretations though, and can take place,
                    "as long as the employer and the employee accept it".
In fact, employees in most countries are entitled to ask for remote work. The vice versa, if employers, as the employees, have the right to request or enforce remote working, is a grey area in several partner countries. In Finland on the contrary, employers in all sectors may decide internally whether remote work is permitted and what are the specific guidelines for remote work. In Portugal, on the other hand, employees have no subjective right to remote work, except for victims of domestic violence, parents with children up to 8 years old and informal careers cannot be denied the right to do remote work.

There are also several differences and variances between countries about the right to claim tax relief whether the employment contract lets work from home (Finland), or not (UK). Certain particularities in legislation worth to be mentioned: in Greece for example, a new policy has been established in the public education sector relaxing the requirement for the head of the body to be physically present. However, in the private sector, there seems to be a much different situation.

As all partners acknowledged, the Covid 19 -pandemic initialized the so-called mandatory home office. Consequently, remote working increased in specialist fields, mostly work at offices and government sectors, and continues to be a quite popular way of working in 2022. **Remote work** was issued as a result of the **changes in work patterns** produced by the COVID-19 pandemic worldwide and affected legislation. It is since, redefined and socially embedded:

""remote work" as "the form of work organization through which the employee, on a regular and voluntary basis, fulfils the duties specific to the position, occupation or job he/she holds in a place other than the workplace organized by the employer, using information and communication technology"

To conclude, following changes during the pandemic, remote work is widely considered to be a right legislatively recognized -but not similarly treated in all partner countries- either for employee or for the employer or just for a minority group.

Policy implication
There are some gray areas in remote working issues such as the borders of obligatoriness and consent in private or public sector, the financial implications in employers and employees' expenses or benefits etc. Legislation between partner countries provides more or less clarity on issues such as equality of career opportunities, employees', and employers' commitments within remote work context.

Although there are significant legislation variances among partner countries and even if experts have distinct opinions whether there is sufficient legislation about remote work or no need to introduce specific labor laws than the existing ones, it seems necessary to admit that remote work as a right for both sides, employers and employees, should be further envisioned.
Therefore, successful implementation of remote work in public or private sector should be a concern for employers as well as employees. This requires the development of a methodology that will help remote work to the best development and overcome potential barriers in any legislative background.

This methodology is efficiently presented through the remote ctrl curriculum, which draws upon the knowledge and skills from a variety of remote work aspects as well for employers (to adapt their business and their management style for a remote working environment) and employees (to develop remote working literacies so that they can manage successful remote careers) that are relevant to all countries participating in the project.

B2 *Are there certain policies or initiatives for REMOTE Work in your country?*

Scope of questions
The main goal of these questions is to identify if there are mutual policies and initiatives for remote work among stakeholders in partners countries. It is significant to relate initiatives by location or identity of focus groups in order to better understand how remote work is now perceived.

Key Results

There has been overall acknowledged no significant dispersed policies in partners' countries. Otherwise, there are partially some initiatives towards better conditions in remote work's establishment.

Initiatives in the interest of both employees and employers working remotely have various goals. For example, in Germany labour union ver.di which has started a campaign to promote the "right" home office and to inform employers and employees about how remote work can function in the long run. In Finland which is a trust-based society, emphasizing trust in individuals and their acknowledgment of their own responsibilities regarding work and working ethic, an agreement between employer and employee is encouraged. Finally, the most recent related initiative is the UK 4-day week pilot is underway working with 70 diverse companies and 3300 workers. This trial is based on the principal of the 100:80:100 model where 100% of the pay for 80% of the time is offered to employees in exchange for at least 100% of the productivity.

There are also, initiatives in the perspective of employers. In the UK has been actively developing several policies and initiative relating to flexible hybrid working. A task Force has been formed with objectives in time to include understanding and supporting the change to hybrid work, responsible for providing advice and guidance to support employers who are considering adopting more remote or hybrid working practices. Also, several public debates about what the employer needs to provide in terms of equipment and material or about the productivity and the acceptance of remote workers by employers take place (Germany). Finnish local insurance companies had to create new remote working policies that they have offered to employers, so that the insurance may cover remote work. Employers who offer remote working insurance are also seen as more desirable and safer by prospective employees.

Whereas employees, encounter concerns in Portugal and Greece, without a specific policy to ensure the best equilibrium between costs and benefits of remote work. Overall, there seems to be a lot of interest in remote working expressed mostly via training seminars, the development of relevant platforms as well as interest among employees in the private sector for the working conditions of a company. Furthermore, with the recently established initiative of digital nomad visa program, Romania, Germany and Greece, by joining other European countries like Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Iceland, Italy, and Norway, support international employees wishing to work remotely abroad. It is a legal instrument to attract resources, promote the remote work country internationally, and develop the economy. In UK, an open consultation was launched entitled 'Making Flexible working the Default', is to allow employees to balance their work and home life.

"So, policies range from fully remote via hybrid to fully on site".

Focus groups pointed out numerous aspects that both sides, employers and employees should take under a mutual agreement in the frame of remote work: What tasks are within the remit of remote work, duration of the remote working arrangement, feedback paths to the employer of remote work, the allowed locations for remote work, how much work the employee is allowed to do remotely (hours, tasks, possible additional tasks), how are workhours logged and checked, in what ways should the employee be reachable during remote work, what is the time in which the employee must be reachable to answer messages, how are the results of the work followed and reported, work equipment and their replaceability, how are matters of information security addressed in remote work (document archiving, digital security), occupational safety and health (physical and emotional), ergonomic circumstances, sick-leave arrangements, the employer's right to change these guidelines and regulations etc.

Policy implication

Societies have just understood the importance of initiatives to explore remote work potentials. Although there is no homogeneity in initiatives among partners countries, new ideas about policies start to be implemented everywhere, addressing employers and/or employees. Therefore, it is crucial to increase the participation of key stakeholders and achieve the incorporation of remote working ethic on several matters in every country despite the observed differences. The REMOTE CTRL curriculum addresses all stakeholders with several topics to be secured in each population for a better remote working implementation everywhere.

B3 *Describe actual trends of REMOTE work in your country*

Scope of question
The scope of this question is to identify potential conditions and perceptions of remote work that might prevent participants from using the curriculum, in order to find ways to decrease them. On the other hand, it is important to understand the main aspects of remote working mentality in each partner's country and to consequently manage with the processes of its gradual expansion.

Key Results
Remote working is **gaining ground**, especially during the tail end of the pandemic. In some countries like Romania, there has been a big increase of employment contracts, both in the private and in the public sector.

> *"This is particularly evident in SMEs and/or start-ups where remote working*
> *is the norm mainly for flexibility and cost-saving reasons"*

Also, lately remote work's impact **is broadly studied**. Research literature almost in every partner country, focuses on relevance between flexible working, wellbeing and productivity as well as other benefits or contradictions. In the UK, for example, there is a growing body of evidence that shows remote and hybrid working has contributed to improved productivity and increased staff well-being in many organisations. Piloting of hybrid work (4 day week campaign) in the UK is currently under further study by researchers.

Other **large-scale trends** as the digital nomads or the hybrid workers, become more and more an adopting work style, in numerous European countries, needing further support in matters of organizing it under the best terms.
A common thread almost everywhere is use of remote working software and the employers' high control of remote work's management; the employer is always considered to be responsible for the safety of the employee during the working hours, even when working remotely. Another trend of implementation is that usually Companies are developing their own remote/hybrid working policies.

There also, appeared a **wide-reaching shift of perception**: For many -especially employers- remote work has lost some of its negative touch after it was established in many companies during the first lockdown. Employers have come to the realisation that they need to offer hybrid work modes toc attract qualified talent. Furthermore, levels of Employer/employee trust have increased, since presenteeism isn't any more so considerably related to productivity.
Nevertheless, the first enthusiasm subsided for employees and the lack of personal contact urge per preference a sort of hybrid form of working in the office for some days and remotely on others.

For the "terra incognita" of remote work, employees and employers express the need for further training to make the most of it.

> *"flexible working could increase wellbeing and productivity, but benefits are not equally distributed throughout the population and there is potential for increased inequality."*

There is in fact, a mismatch between what employers want and what employees about their working type preferences which varies among the partner countries, depending to sectors' differences as well. Regarding other remote work affronted **concerns**, there is a greater concern linked to the mental health of employees, to social inequality for non-remote workers and to certain legislation gaps, to the probability of negative affects career progression and the increase in blurring of lines between work and home or others.

Policy implication

The wide spread of multiple remote work types is an actuality that labor sectors have to cope with. Despite differences between countries and the extend of remote work implementation, the role of employers in decision making remains dominant. Also, several concerns of both employees and employers about remote work issues are apparent once research studies offer recent findings about it.

The need to manage the uncertainty of impacts and new settings of Remote work must be answered by the arise of awareness and empathy with the proper and knowledge by accurate information as soon as it is provided by recent research. Topics about remote work's impact in employees lives and managing new work conditions in SME's should be thoroughly elaborated from all sides' perspectives, employers, managers and employees. The program of REMOTE CTRL has wisely included employers and employees and offered distinct sections of content, by a curriculum that respects the above-mentioned goals.

Section C: Remote Working experience

C1. Please provide examples of successful practices and benefits regarding remote work implementation in the SMEs

Scope of question

The scope of this question is to identify the common threads that lead to successful practices regarding remote work. It is useful to find if successful practices are based on other relevant criteria and if there are ways to expand best implementation practices equally in all countries.

Key Results

Remote work best practices are detectible in features of productivity, performance, well-being and connectedness.

Productivity has been increased by working remotely, as generally acknowledged nowadays, despite the initial reservations of employers, mostly.

Performance in remote work is a benefit that was stressed out in focus groups. For example, employers witness employees who used to be considered introverts beforehand come out more and more with their personality. They believe that the comfort of their own home or chosen surroundings make them bring in their ideas and personalities more than ever before.

Well-being is extensively a seeking task for remote workers: remote work can contribute to an improved work-private life balance, which can improve a person's physical, emotional, and mental

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REMOTE
CTRL

health. Employees' preference to remote work is usually conducted by the expectation of work balance:

"…with remote working, we tend to disagree less, especially for trivial reasons such as office space, days of leave, etc."

Connectedness is also accomplished. Focus groups have stated about collaboration with field specialists from other locations filling in vacant positions and smoothly joining in the SME's remote working groups.

To conclude, almost all focus groups have stated the importance of good management in remote work settings. Otherwise, major disadvantages occur generated by poor management such as social isolation, decrease of individual's concentration and tendency to concentrate more on domestic affairs, lack of supervision, reduced dynamics of collaboration with colleagues etc.

In quest of Good Management, derives to be the most important factor of remote work's best practices. In Romania, this is a paid service offered by professionals to SME's: specialists that will analyse the current way of working and will develop the immediate migration plan to the new teleworking policy, proposing variants of solutions, and if it is considered necessary, ensuring the remote training of a key team within the companies. In other countries, like in Finland, with previous experience of partially working remotely in the public and private sectors, transferring into remote work has been quite seamless.

In most countries, thanks to the undesired lockdown, the pandemic worked as a form of training in practice. Employers have finally managed to systemize remote work control of their employees.

Some examples of successful practices stated in the United Kingdom are the following:

-Allowing employers a balance of working from home and office time
-Listening to employers and flexing practices accordingly
-Encouraging employees to take scheduled breaks between meetings.

To conclude, working successfully in a remote context has a lot to do with trust and managing expectations, according to the interviews. So, both sides, employers and employees, need to know what is expected and how they can bring in the best of themselves.

Policy implication

Accordingly to findings the remote working best practices should focus on four key areas, productivity, well-being, performance and connectedness. As managing all conditions and being prepared for remote work's implementation are necessary, it derives that SMEs high executives and managers need to get properly informed on all remote work's settings and resources, then make the best choices and prepare a well framed working environment in mutual understanding with employees and before the start of remote work application.

As needed, a training program like REMOTECTRL, that addresses employers and employees with special information for each one about the remote work's settings and ways to manage each particular ongoing conditions, may contribute to successful practices.

C2. What do you consider to be the most important needs of SMEs with regards to remote work in different contexts (i.e., type of business, field of business applications etc.)?

Scope of question

The scope of this question is to identify potential challenges in remote work implementation in particular SME's business sectors in order to understand their needs and adapt the curriculum accordingly.

Key Results

SMEs, from all kinds of activity fields in general, have needs addressing to Technology Investment, Skills development, Wellbeing, Policies and Practices.

There have been special comments among focus groups mostly about the following remote work needs:
- Adapting business realities to remote work conditions and constant support of employees, establishing routines and norms to be reliable and legally binding in remote work
- Better financial support
- Ensuring the proper devices and connectivity: for example, a communications tool to ensure they do not work in the wrong direction for long
- to digitalize all processes – as personalised as possible-
- Trainings for both employers and employees on how to manage remote work (information and communication technology, time management, netiquette etc.)
- Improved employee care (for instance, mental health or ensuring that work is ergonomic and helps to prevent the development or aggravation of an illness)
- Clear regulation of duration and frequency of remote work
- Regulation of the right to disconnect during periods of rest and the ability to ensure a healthy work-life balance while remote working
- Investing time into making manual processes more digital,

"We had an office which closed from Lockdown. As time went on we decided to let that office go. I worked independently during covid. Sharing a home office with other members of the family was difficult, trying to host meetings and calls when others were doing the same. The noise was an issue. I personally struggled with motivation. I like to bounce ideas and celebrate successes with colleagues"
https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/1Oo57u3d4MB5W5LVgdqn7Y9LBi7UOVtSl

Also, it seems important to consult an external trainer to have an outside perspective and a neutral advice on formats, tools and norms. This needs to include all employees and shall not remain solely a management decision. This is especially true in manufacturing and traditional service SMEs for whom remote work is something entirely new.

Policy implication
During the implementation of the curriculum, it is natural that some activities pose a higher difficulty to the participants than others. Also, participants from different sectors or countries could encounter challenges in different kind of activities, based on their characteristics. Therefore, the adaptation of each activity to the participants' needs is required for the successful completion of the curriculum.

C3.   What should be the EU's priorities regarding remote work implementation in the SMEs? If necessary, provide required policies.

Scope of question

The scope of this question is to define the necessary EU actions regarding remote work in order to support and motivate SMEs to incorporate policies in their remote operations.

Key Results

The majority of participants highlighted the importance of providing EU priorities focused around ensuring legislation that supports rather than hinders workers' rights. Legislation should consider inclusivity and accessibility to flexible working for everyone. They also emphasized that it was important to regulate a balanced model between the opportunities and risks of remote work.

Moreover, another essential factor that should be a priority for the EU law, as well as the law of the individual countries, is to enshrine the important right to disconnect from work.

Furthermore, EU should focus on implementing a policy that provides to support the acquisition of digital skills among adults as a means of empowering them to resort to remote work.

It is widely believed that the EU should strive to make it more of a mainstream point by providing motivation for SMEs to adopt it more widely usually through SEG policy initiatives for SMEs and start-ups.

> *"Remote working should be a criterion for the allocation of public funds to the SMEs."*

Specific remote work policies as regulation (eg. of the daily schedule agreed between the employer and the employee, of time intervals for online and in office presence, of Social Security and taxes for remote work carried out outside the country) seems to be needed.

Also, as a policy action, EU might provide a network, to enhance the exchange of good practices between EU entrepreneurs and suggest guidelines for accessibility in remote work.

Policy implication

To conclude, EU policies should reassure legislation in every aspect of inclusivity and accessibility to remote work, based on a place-sensitive policy that takes into consideration the variety of European regional contexts. Further trainings (e.g., Digital tools, wellbeing practices etc.) and several motivator policies for SME's should be widely adapted. EU networks of good practices between EU entrepreneurs and guidelines to remote work will enhance the best implementation.

Section D: REMOTECTRL Project's impact

D1. Does each of the following project's deliverables address the   curriculum tasks on Remote working needs? Please elaborate.
    -REMOTE CTRL Masterclasses and Manual for Employers
    -REMOTE CTRL Toolkit for Employees
    -In Service Training Programme for VET Tutors
    -MOOC (the online learning environment, a reserved access area on the platform
      to allow educators consult and exchange with the other members of this network)
D2. Can you identify any areas or issues that were not efficiently addressed in the Curriculum?
D3. Why do you feel this way?

Scope of questions

The scope of these questions is to recognize other needs of SMEs regarding remote work implementation in the interest of evaluating and improving the proposed curriculum of the project and the process of applying it.

Key Results

(1) REMOTE CTRL Masterclasses and Manual for Employers
The masterclasses and the manual provide a diverse range of well-organized resources offering employers valuable insights, advice and guidance in easy bite size chunks on how to manage and develop their teams. A great deal of consideration has been given to each of the resources in order to think about the needs of Employers for these resources, but also the needs of their staff.

(2) REMOTE CTRL Toolkit for Employees
The toolkit for employees has been divided into three broad areas to support preparing for work, searching for work and securing your position once at work. The resources provide valuable tools and insights to help individuals identify the best roles for them and also help them to secure work through on-line interviews. All resources have been created to improve and heighten awareness for the employee or the person searching for work about their talents and what their challenges might be. The resources have been tested and the responses have been very positive.

(3) In Service Training Programme for VET Tutors
These resources within the Training Programme aimed at VET tutors help them to understand how best to make use of all resources within the project. They provide additional and surrounding information about the topic that expands VET tutors' knowledge, making tutors feel more comfortable in delivering their training.

(4) MOOC (the online learning environment, a reserved access area on the platform to allow educators consult and exchange with the other members of this network). The MOOC was described as a modern and useful tool for remote learning in everyone's style.

The platform is an easy to access place for staff, mangers, VET tutors and others to access all the information provided by the Remote CTRL project in one place. There is an abundance of resources available in the shame of videos, and activities to help develop skills and knowledge in remote working.

The curriculum addresses the majority of SMEs' needs and provides important insight and knowledge to the learners about these needs. All learners felt that the activities were up to their capacity and interests.

> *"Employers were positively surprised by the number*
> *of digital resources that exist to facilitate remote work."*

Policy implication
During the development of a curriculum, the specific objectives that need to be addressed should be considered. In the case of Remote CTRL project, the key aspects that the curriculum should address are the SMEs' needs of Employers for these resources, but also the needs of their staff.
The main parameters that can be considered as crucial needs for the SMEs employers include financial aid, access to networks and expertise in valuable insights, advice and guidance in easy bite size chunks on how to manage and develop their teams. Crucial needs of employees as well, should be taken care to support preparing for work, searching for work and securing work position.
Therefore, the curriculum should provide insight to the SMEs regarding these topics and prepare them in order to be more remote work ready.

D4. Were there any areas of differentiation during the development of the material or the training process?

Scope of question
The scope of this question is to recognize the practices and examples that SMEs and VET trainers consider as successful in order to understand their expectations from the implementation of the innovation management curriculum.

Key Results
The efficient use of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and other types of automation, XR, blockchain and digital platforms are listed as successful practices among the participants. Moreover, the incorporation of innovations in the digital marketing area to reach new target audience or expand the existing one was also mentioned as a significant example of successful innovation. Lastly, some participants highlighted the efficiency and economic development that many startup companies in the technology sector displayed during the pandemic, by answering emerging needs of the citizens.

"The incorporation of emerging technologies such as AI and blockchain and the innovative digital marketing solutions were rendered as successful practices"

Policy implication
Successful practices and good examples can play an important role to the innovation transfer process as they can be exploited by SMEs and VET trainers to overcome difficulties during their transformation towards a more innovative operation. Therefore, it is essential to increase the exchange of knowledge between participants, through co-organized events and incorporation of good practices and examples from innovation ready SMEs.

5. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

This policy paper presents the results of the implementation of the curriculum to selected SMEs and VET trainers in order to highlight the importance of supporting remote work management and strengthening the links between VET and SMEs. More specifically, it aims to highlight
a) the role of VET professionals in supporting remote work management within SMEs,
b) the importance of remote work management within the SMEs in the improvement of their operation and
c) the policy changes need to take place in order to make the partnership between SMEs employers and employees and VET professionals more effective in remote work.

Regarding the latter, it is worth noting the existence of a rather wide range of legislative measures in many countries regarding the institutional treatment of remote work in many countries. There lies the primary policy challenge, which is the harmonization of the legislative frameworks across EU to ensure that remote work is viewed as an employee's right to exercise rather than being an alternative option for employment. This will pave the way of establishing remote work as the primary avenue of employment in many professional fields.
Complementing the aforementioned proposal, it is essential to treat training programs as a necessity and not as a luxury. Therefore, appropriate policy steps should be taken to ensure that SMEs are mandated to train their executives through a constant stream of qualified training programs. Possible means of achieving this, could be through additional funding for SMEs that have undergone executive training, etc.
Furthermore, specialized research on the ever-changing landscape of remote work should be developed through the appropriate national and international funding. This would be very useful in

order to complement SME training with new areas of interest and methodology. National agencies should be mandated to allocate a portion of their research funds to relevant high quality applied research.

The penultimate proposed policy measure would be to establish the development of a list of the most urging needs of each business sector regarding remote working in order to create tailor-made training programs. Ideally, the list could be prepared by each sector's chamber through the appropriate funding hence paving the way for training programs centered around those areas.

Finally, central and/or regional authorities must identify and promote best practices in remote work spanning various criteria (geographical, business sector, etc.) in order to boost interest and participation in SME remote work place.

In summary, the proposed policy measures are the following:

- ➢ Harmonization of the legislative frameworks across EU regarding remote work
- ➢ Executive SME training must be promoted through appropriate measures
- ➢ Develop specialized research in remote work
- ➢ Establish a list of the most urging needs of each business sector regarding remote work
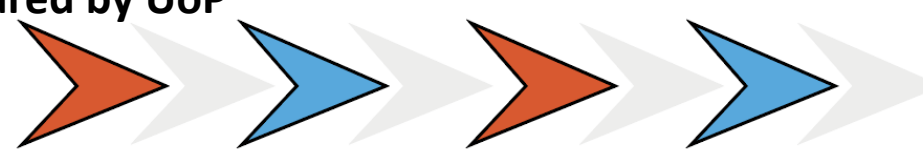- ➢ Identify and promote best practices in remote work

Remote work could be a driver for success and innovation at local, regional and central level. Lawmakers ought to pay special attention to this in order to gain full advantage of its potential.
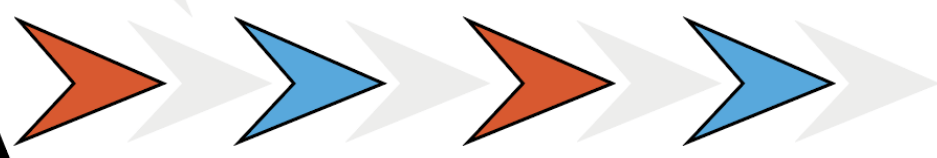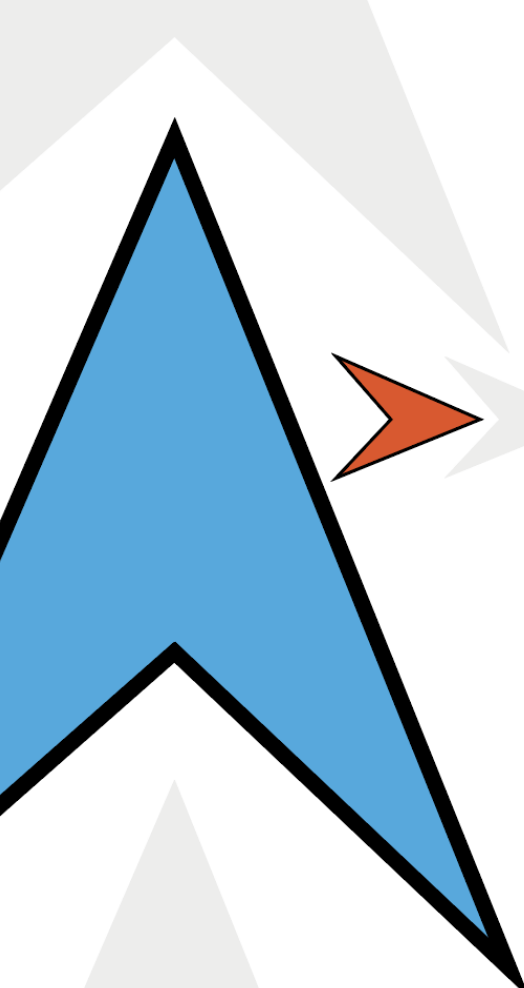
IO5: POLICY PAPER

Semi-structured interview questions

Prepared by UoP

Building Skills and
Attributes for
Remote Working

6. ANNEX: Semi-structured interview questions for POLICY PAPER

Dear Participant,
Thank you for your participation in REMOTECTRL Project aiming to accommodate remote working or flexible working patterns. As we continuously strive to improve our projects, we would like to assess the experience of the project partners, trainers, employers and employees in 8 different countries and make recommendations for policy change on the basis of that experience. Therefore, we would appreciate your taking the time to provide us with constructive feedback.

The REMOTE CTRL-Project Team

YOU CAN FIND US ON FACEBOOK
https://www.facebook.com/remotectrlproject

PROJECT WEBSITE AVAILABLE AT

 https://remotectrl.eu/

Section A. Information
Email Address

1. Please indicate your country:

> United Kingdom
>
> Greece
>
> Poland
>
> Ireland
>
> Romania
>
> Finland
>
> Portugal
>
> Germany

2. Please indicate your status:

A. VET trainer
B. SME employer
C. SME employee
D. Partner team member

3. Gender:
   A. Female
   B. Male
   C. Other / no response

Section B: REMOTE Work in partner country

1. Describe the legislation framework for REMOTE work in your country.

2. Are there certain policies, initiatives for REMOTE Work in your country?

3. Describe actual trends of REMOTE work in your country:

Section C: Remote Working experience

1. Please provide examples of successful practices and benefits regarding remote work implementation in the SMEs

2. What do you consider to be the most important needs of SMEs with regards to remote work in different contexts (i.e., type of business, field of business applications etc.)?

3. What should be the EU's priorities regarding remote work implementation in the SMEs? If necessary, provide required policies.

Section D: REMOTECTRL Project's impact

1. Does each of the following project's deliverables address the curriculum tasks on Remote working needs? Please elaborate.

(1) REMOTE CTRL Masterclasses and Manual for Employers

[ ]

(2) REMOTE CTRL Toolkit for Employees

[ ]

(3) In Service Training Programme for VET Tutors

[ ]

(4) MOOC (the online learning environment, a reserved access area on the platform to allow educators consult and exchange with the other members of this network)

[ ]

2. Can you identify any areas or issues that were not efficiently addressed in the Curriculum? Why do you feel this way?

[ ]

3. Were there certain activities that posed challenges for the learners?

[ ]

4. Were there any areas of differentiation during the development of the material or the training process? Please elaborate.

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5. Any other comments

REMOTE CTRL

Building Skills and Attributes for Remote Working

SFEDI®GROUP

f!p Future In Perspective

IHK IHK-Projektgesellschaft mbH OSTBRANDENBURG

RightChallenge

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innoventum