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**Remote Work During the COVID-19  
Pandemic in the Visegrad Countries**

**Keywords:** remote work, telework, COVID-19, social research, Visegrad Group

**Słowa kluczowe:** praca zdalna, COVID-19, badania społeczne, Grupa Wyszehradzka

**Abstract**

The aim of this article is to explore the issue of remote work during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Visegrad countries. The paper consists of a theoretical part, an empirical part and a discussion of the results of the research conducted by the author. The first section of the article defines remote work. Later, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market is described. In the next section, legal changes related to remote work in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary are presented. The legal regulations in the V4 countries are examined using a legal-dogmatic method, while the changes in the legislation – with a historical method. Subsequently, the article focuses on empirical research methodology and analyses the research results. The comparative analysis is based on data collected in the four Visegrad countries (Poland, Slovakia, Czech Republic and Hungary).

**Streszczenie****Praca zdalna podczas pandemii COVID-19  
w państwach Grupy Wyszehradzkiej**

Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie problemu pracy zdalnej podczas pandemii COVID-19 w państwach Grupy Wyszehradzkiej. Artykuł składa się z części teoretycznej, empirycznej oraz prezentuje wyniki badań przeprowadzonych przez autorkę. W pierwszej części artykułu została zdefiniowana praca zdalna. Później opisano wpływ pandemii COVID-19 na rynek pracy. W dalszej części zostały natomiast przedstawione zmiany prawne związane z pracą zdalną w Polsce, na Słowacji, w Czechach i na Węgrzech. Do przeprowadzenia analizy przepisów prawnych zastosowano metodę prawną-dogmatyczną oraz metodę historyczną ukazującą zmiany w legislacji badanych państw. Następnie w artykule zaprezentowana została metodologia badań empirycznych oraz omówiono rezultaty badań. Analiza komparatystyczna została oparta na danych zebranych w czterech państwach Grupy Wyszehradzkiej (Polsce, Słowacji, Czech i na Węgrzech).

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**I. Introduction**

The 1990s saw the start of the IT revolution, which researchers called “Third Wave civilisation”<sup>1</sup>. The globalisation that reached Poland and the Visegrad countries led to the emergence of information societies, which played a significant role in the economy, business, politics, technology and education, thus enhancing the quality of citizens’ lives. The concept of globalisation involves the flow of capital, commodities, information, forms of culture, entertainment and people through the entangled networks of the new economy, society and culture<sup>2</sup>. A new era has dawned – the information era, subordinated to ICT’s and dependent on the Internet, which has created a new socio-economic reality. The Internet has become an interactive resource of consolidated knowledge from far and wide, enabling contacts and creating remote work oppor-

<sup>1</sup> A. Toffler, H. Toffler, *Budowa nowej cywilizacji. Polityka trzeciej fali*, Poznań 1999.

<sup>2</sup> S. Best, D. Kellner, *The postmodern adventure. science, technology, and cultural at the third millennium*, London 2001.

tunities for people all over the world. A manifestation of the development of the information society and organizational progress is, among others, bigger interest in job opportunities in the form of telework – also known as e-work or remote work (telework, teleworking, telecommuting)<sup>3</sup>.

The characteristic sectors associated with the information society are mainly sectors of new services, such as telecommunications, banking, IT, robotics, finance, research and development, thus the knowledge-based economy. The emergence of the information society, often also referred to as the digital society, has therefore influenced the transformation of the labour market in various sectors of the economy. The very definition of remote work is very broad, but it is generally assumed that this concept means a flexible form of work performed off-site, which can take various forms, but must last for a given period and can be done at home. Consequently, remote work entails the performance of the duties assigned by the employer to the employee under the employment contract.

The COVID-19 pandemic began in 2019 and significantly affected all societies worldwide. The dynamic and unpredictable changes brought about by the epidemic transformed people's lives and daily functioning. The epidemics significantly affected the economies of all countries. The legal restrictions imposed resulted in numerous prohibitions and regulations for citizens. One of the solutions introduced to combat the COVID-19 pandemic was to regulate remote or hybrid work and encourage employees and employers to take it up.

The aim of the present article is to provide an overview of remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Visegrad countries. This is because that period brought about changes in every area of life and in the labour market. The paper discusses legal provisions related to remote working in Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Hungary introduced during the pandemic and afterwards. It provides a comparative analysis of the author's own empirical research carried out in the V4 countries regarding forms of employment during the pandemic. The text consists of a theoretical section, an empirical section and research results. The empirical research was quantitative and conducted by means of a survey. An online questionnaire was used

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<sup>3</sup> A. Birski, *Telepraca – formy organizacyjne i możliwości rozwoju*, "Przegląd Organizacji" 2005, no. 2 (781), p. 26, DOI: 10.33141/po.2005.02.06.

as a research tool. The survey involved 1,752 respondents from the Visegrad countries. A legal-dogmatic method was used to analyse legal regulations, whereas a historical method allowed the author to show changes in the legislation of the states under examination. In addition, the comparative legal method was applied. The article highlights the mutual impact of labor market policy and health policy of the Visegrad Group countries in the conditions of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## II. Remote work

The literature on the subject of remote work<sup>4</sup>, its advantages and disadvantages<sup>5</sup>, encompasses many academic papers. Many definitions of remote work have been offered, which have evolved over the years. All in all, it should be assumed that such work is based on 4 assumptions<sup>6</sup>:

1. Performance of work away from the employer's premises (the employee works at home),
2. Communication with the employer (permanent contact with the employer, e.g. using software),
3. Flexible working time (the employee chooses the time he/she works),
4. Flexible execution of tasks at the workplace (the employee organises the work process by himself/herself).

In 2002, telework was defined by the European Framework Agreement on Telework as: "a form of organising and/or performing work, using information technology, in the context of an employment contract/relationship, where

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<sup>4</sup> W. Furmanek, *Zalety i wady telepracy*, "Edukacja – Technika – Informatyka" 2015, no. 6 (1), pp. 127–135, I. Grzanka, *Transformacja procesu pracy w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, "Management Systems in Production Engineering" 2012, no. 1 (5), pp. 14–18, A. Misztal, P. Misztal, *Telepraca – elastyczna forma zatrudnienia jako odpowiedź na wyzwania współczesnego rynku pracy [in:] Rola informatyki w naukach ekonomicznych i społecznych. Innowacje i implikacje interdyscyplinarne*, ed. Z.E. Zieliński, Kielce 2014, pp. 103–111.

<sup>5</sup> J. Sikora, *Telepraca – o walorach i pułapkach elastycznego zatrudnienia [in:] Rola informatyki w naukach ekonomicznych i społecznych. Innowacje i implikacje interdyscyplinarne*, ed. Z.E. Zieliński, Kielce 2012, pp. 81–88.

<sup>6</sup> A. Jaren, *Praca zdalna jako źródło problemów realizacji funkcji pracy*, "Opuscula Sociologica" 2016, no. 2, DOI:10.18276/os.2016.2–04, pp. 54–55.

work, which could also be performed at the employer's premises, is carried out away from those premises on a regular basis"<sup>7</sup>.

Over the last three decades, changes have been observed in the Polish, Czech, Slovak and Hungarian labour markets. Immediately after the transition in the 1990's, these changes were related to the switch to free-market economies, which significantly affected the labour market, increasing the number of unemployed. However, with the development of new media and the digital revolution, work often started to move into the Internet, assuming the form of teleworking. While the transition to teleworking or remote working in the United States and Western Europe took place in the 1980's and 1990's, it happened much later in the post-communist countries, which did not even have Internet access at that time. The majority of citizens in Central and Eastern Europe were only connected to the Internet between 2005 and 2010. Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, the V4 countries claimed that 80–90% of their citizens were connected to the web.

Remote work raises numerous doubts among many employers and employees. Employers worry about whether employees do their jobs properly, efficiently and do not shorten their expected working hours, while the latter, on the other hand, often work with their own equipment, pay the bills themselves and, to make matters worse, have to combine work and family life, which posed a real challenge for many employees in the coronavirus pandemic due to family members, especially children, staying at home. According to Anna Dolot (2020, p. 37), telework had both positive and negative aspects for the employee during the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>8</sup>.

### **III. COVID-19 pandemic and legal regulations on remote work**

The coronavirus pandemic began in November 2019 in the city of Wuhan in Hubei Province, China. Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) was defined as a respiratory infectious disease caused by SARS-CoV-2. At first, it seemed

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<sup>7</sup> European Trade Union Confederation, Framework agreement on telework, 2002, <https://www.etuc.org/en/framework-agreement-telework> (10.03.2024).

<sup>8</sup> A. Dolot, *Wpływ pandemii COVID-19 na pracę zdalną – perspektywa pracownika*, "E-mentor" 2020, no. 1 (83), <https://doi.org/10.15219/em83.1456>, p. 37.

that the problem would only affect China and possibly other Asian countries but would not reach Europe. However, the skyrocketing number of cases and the rapid spread of the virus to other continents led the World Health

Since COVID-19 appeared in Central European countries, governments began to introduce various types of restrictions to protect the health and life of citizens, and in order to prevent the rapid spread of the epidemic, legislators preferred remote work. The COVID-19 pandemic forced fundamental amendments to labour codes, as existing regulations were no longer sufficient, while restrictions introduced by governments changed the behaviour of employers and employees. In each of the V4 countries, the binding laws were not adequate to deal with the pandemic which put workers' health and lives at risk. "The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a changed mode of performing work – from on-site work (on the employer's premises) to off-site, with a number of consequences for both employers and employees in terms of work organisation"<sup>9</sup>. Remote work undoubtedly gained in popularity during the coronavirus pandemic, when employers had to adjust operations to meet sanitary and social requirements. Businesses and institutions had to switch to telework to continue functioning and remain competitive on the market and further operate in such difficult conditions.

In spite of previous telework development in Poland, this form of employment was not legally regulated until the amendment to the Polish Labour Code in 2007, in which Art. 67 in Chapter II b entitled "Employment in the form of telework" stipulates<sup>10</sup>:

§ 1. "Work may be performed away from the premises of an employer, on a regular basis, by means of information and communications technologies (ICTs) within the meaning of the provisions on rendering services by electronic means (telework)".

This legal situation in Poland lasted until the COVID-19 pandemic, when the legislator introduced the Act on Special Solutions Related to the Pre-

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<sup>9</sup> A. Sobczak, *Praca zdalna w warunkach pandemii COVID-19. Problemy efektywności i nierówności społecznych*, "Wychowanie w Rodzinie" 2021, t. XXIV, no. 1, p. 147, DOI: 10.34616/wwr.2021.1.147.159.

<sup>10</sup> Act of August 24, 2007 amending the Labor Code and certain other acts (Dz.U. 2007 No. 181 item 1288).

venting, Counteracting and Combating COVID-19, Other Infectious Diseases and Crisis Situations Caused by Them of 2 March 2020. Article 3 in Chapter 2 reads: “To counteract COVID-19, an employer may instruct an employee to do, for a specified time, the work stated in the employment contract, outside the place of its regular performance (remote work)<sup>11</sup>”. The purpose of adopting the Act of March 2, 2020 on special solutions related to prevention and counteracting and combating COVID-19 and other infectious and induced diseases crisis situations, the aim was to minimize the threat to public health, and among the instruments was remote work has emerged, and the laconic legal regulation has, however, begun to generate many interpretation difficulties<sup>12</sup>.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the legislator, recognising changes in the economy and the labour market, amended the Labour Code, considering the possibility of remote work. From the effective date of the regulations on remote working, the chapter of the Labour Code on teleworking was repealed. The Act of 1 December 2022 amending the Labour Code and certain other acts (Dz.U. 2023 item 240) of introduced remote work to the Labour Code – Chapter II c. The new regulations governing telework came into force, with a longer *vacatio legis*, on 7 April 2023. The deferment of the effective date was intended to allow employers to adapt to the new requirements under the Act. The legislator, in Art. 67 (18), introduced a definition of remote work, stating that such work may be carried out wholly or partly at the place indicated by the employee and agreed with the employer in each case, including at the employee’s home address, in particular by means of direct communication at a distance<sup>13</sup>.

In Slovakia, the legal germ for telework and remote work was the regulation concerning home-based work – Act No. 311/2001 § 52<sup>14</sup>. It was only in

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<sup>11</sup> Act of March 2, 2020 on special solutions related to the prevention, counteracting and combating of COVID-19, other infectious diseases and crisis situations caused by them (Dz.U. 2020 item. 374).

<sup>12</sup> M. Świstak, *Zdalne świadczenie pracy w czasie epidemii koronawirusa SARS-Cov-2 w Polsce. Wybrane zagadnienia* [in:] *Prawo i administracja we współczesnym świecie. Kierunki zmian*, ed. M. Stanisławska, Łódź–Kielce 2020, p. 171.

<sup>13</sup> Act of December 1, 2022 amending the Labor Code and certain other acts (Dz.U. 2023 item 240).

<sup>14</sup> *Zákonník práce (zákon nr SR č. 311/2001 Z.z.)*.

2007 that the legislator introduced teleworking in an amendment to the Labour Code. It was then stipulated that the employment relationship of the employee who performs work for the employer under the terms and conditions agreed in the employment contract at home or at another agreed location (“home-based work”), or performs work for the employer under the terms and conditions agreed in the employment contract at home or at another agreed location with the use of information technology (“telework”) during self-regulated working hours is subject to this Act with the following exceptions § 52 (1).

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Labour Code was amended<sup>15</sup>, imposing a state of emergency in Slovakia. The employer could take measures to prevent the outbreak and spread of infectious diseases and necessary measures in the event of a public health emergency. The legislator stipulated that the employer has the right to order the performance of work at the employee’s home if the type of work allows it<sup>16</sup>.

The last amendment to the Slovak Labour Code, accounting for the changes in the provisions on remote work, was adopted in February 2021<sup>17</sup> – Act No. 311/2001 § 52<sup>18</sup>. The amendment did not enter into force until 1 June 2023. The act (*Zákon č. 311/2001 § 52 (1) Z.z. Zákonník prace*) states that home-based work or telework means work that could be performed at the employer’s workplace but is carried out on a regular basis at the employee’s household within the agreed weekly working hours or part thereof.

The Czech Labour Code of 2006 neither contains regulations on remote work nor introduces a definition of telework<sup>19</sup>. Although teleworking has become possible with the development of ICT, it is still treated as a new form of non-standard employment in the Czech Republic. Interestingly, teleworking was not legally regulated in the Czech Republic even during the COVID-19 pandemic. The media report that work is in progress to amend the Labour Code so that it includes legal regulations on home-based work and remote

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<sup>15</sup> Zákon nr SR č. 66/2020 Z.z. z 2. apríla 2020.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, § 250b (2a–b).

<sup>17</sup> Zákon nr SR č. 76/2021 z 4. februára 2021.

<sup>18</sup> Zákon nr SR č. 311/2001 § 52 Z.z.

<sup>19</sup> Zákon nr SR č. 262/2006 § 317 Sb.



work<sup>20</sup>. It is expected that the regulations may come into effect in the second half of 2023 or from 1 January 2024.

In Hungary, § 196 (1) in Chapter 87 (“Telework”) of the 2012 Labour Code<sup>21</sup> defines telework as an activity performed on a regular basis at a place separate from the employer’s workplace by means of information or computer technology (using computer equipment), the results of which are submitted electronically. The current amendment to the Labour Code came into force during the COVID-19 pandemic, i.e., on 1 June 2022. Under § 61 (1), the employer informs the employee if a given job position allows remote working. An employee with a child under 8 years of age may request a switch to remote work (§ 61 (4c)).

#### **IV. Methodology of empirical research**

Between 29 November and 23 December 2020, i.e., during the COVID-19 pandemic, the author conducted survey research entitled “Citizens’ lives during the COVID-19 epidemic” in the Visegrad countries<sup>22</sup>. Identical, anonymous questionnaires were conducted via the Internet, in four languages (Polish, Czech, Slovakian, Hungarian). Survey participants were selected with the snowball method (links to survey questionnaires were made available in social media, websites of government offices, non-governmental foundations and universities). In total, there were 1,752 respondents: 1,189 respondents from Poland, 203 from the Czech Republic, 205 from Slovakia and 155 from Hungary. The research coincided with a period when each country was introducing various legal acts, including epidemic restrictions, states of emergency and various orders and prohibitions.

Among Hungarian respondents, those aged 45–54 were the largest group – 26%. In contrast, respondents aged 18–24 prevailed in other V4 countries:

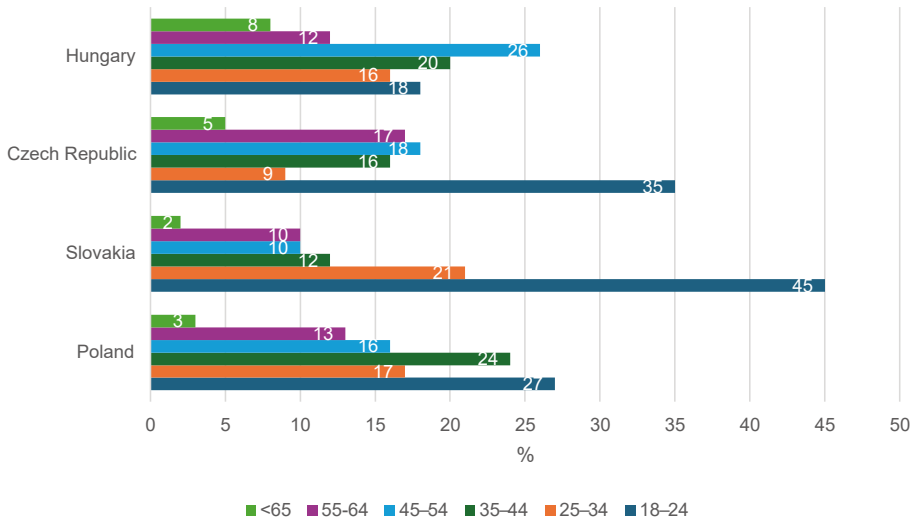
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<sup>20</sup> V. Hejná, *Nová pravidla práce na dohodu a home office schválila vláda*, <https://www.penze.cz/pracovni-pomer/441416-zmeny-v-zakoniku-prace-nova-pravidla-prace-na-dohodu-a-home-office-schvalila-vlada> (10.03.2024).

<sup>21</sup> 2012. évi I. törvény a munka törvénykönyvéről a munka törvénykönyvéről.

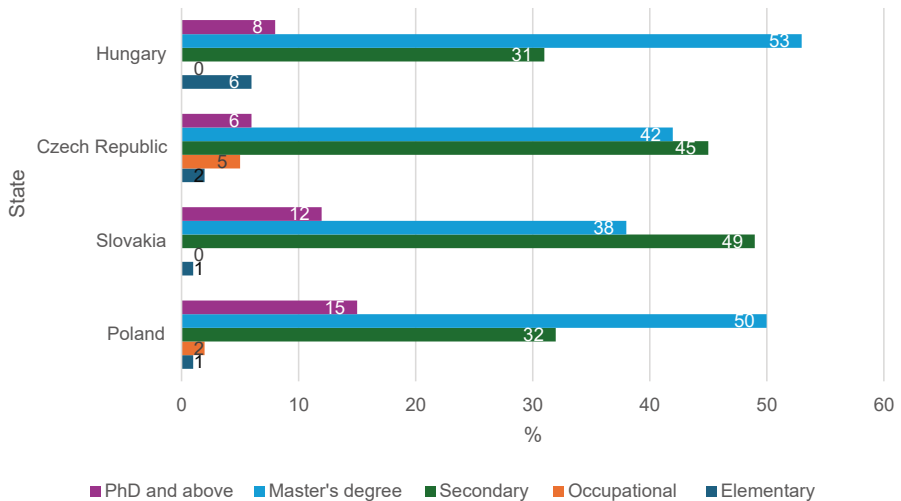
<sup>22</sup> The research was conducted on the following Internet research platforms: webankieta.pl, netquest.cz, netquest.sk.

**Chart 1. Age of respondents**



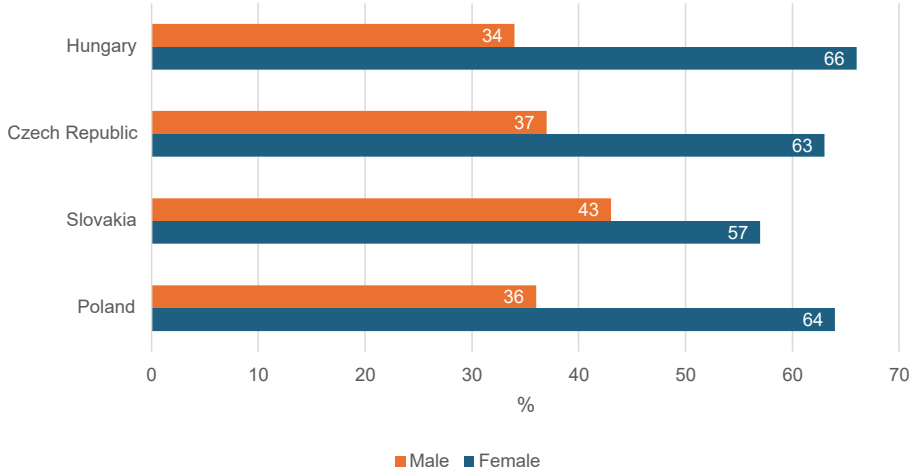
Source: Own research.

**Chart 2. Education of respondents**



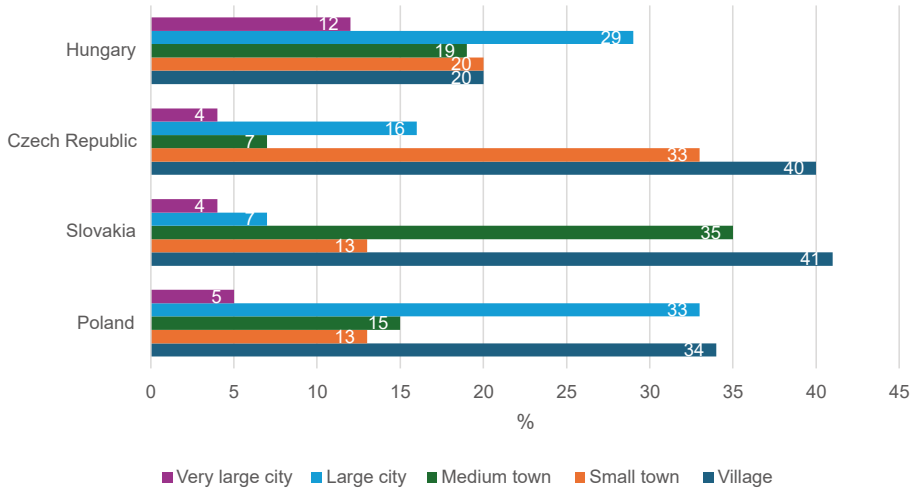
Source: Own research.

**Chart 3. Age of respondents**



Source: Own research.

**Chart 4. Respondents' place of residence**



Source: Own research.

35% in the Czech Republic, 45% in Slovakia and 27% in Poland. The age of respondents is shown in detail in Chart 1.

Regarding the educational background of respondents (chart 2), most Hungarians and Poles participating in the research held a master's degree: 53% and 50% respectively. On the other hand, in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, people who completed secondary education predominated: 45% in the former and 49% in the latter.

As illustrated in Chart 3, which indicates the gender of survey participants, women outnumbered men among respondents in each of the V4 countries: in Hungary, 66% of participants were female, 63% in the Czech Republic, 57% in Slovakia and 64% in Poland.

According to the survey (Chart 4), a plurality of respondents live in rural areas: 40% of Czechs, 41% of Slovaks and 34% of Poles.

## **V. Research results**

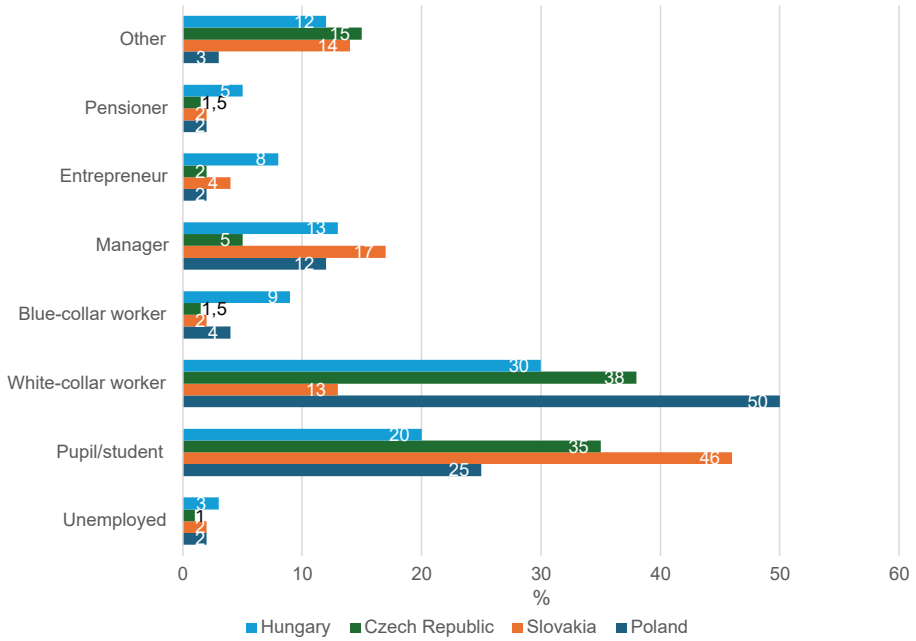
As regards the occupational status of respondents (chart 5), a plurality declared that they work as white-collar workers: 30% of the Hungarians surveyed, 38% of Czechs and 50% of Poles.

The labour market experienced great turmoil at that time (during the COVID-19 pandemic) as some services closed completely, many employees were made redundant and, where possible, work went online. In view of this situation, respondents were asked whether they had a job.

Poland came first with the highest percentage of those employed (76.94%), followed by respondents from Hungary (73.19%), while the Czech Republic was third (71,28%). Last place went to Slovakia, where 64.25% of those surveyed were employed. In the case of Slovakia, this may be because as many as 48% of respondents declared that they were students or pupils. The details are shown in Chart 6.

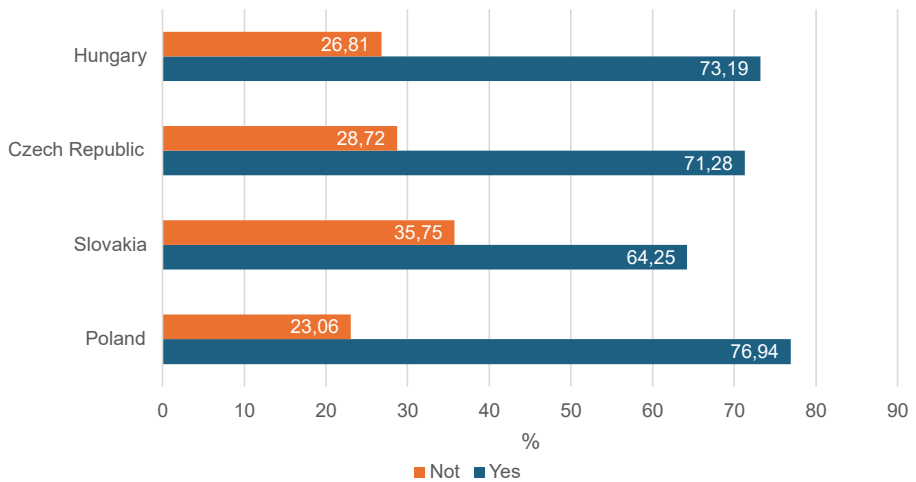
Another nagging question was the type of contract that respondents had during the pandemic, as this was of great importance during the state of emergency in the countries studied due to the stability of work and the financial stability of workers.

**Chart 5. Professional status of respondents**



Source: Own research.

**Chart 6. Job (do you have any job?)**



Source: Own research

**Table 1. Type of contract**

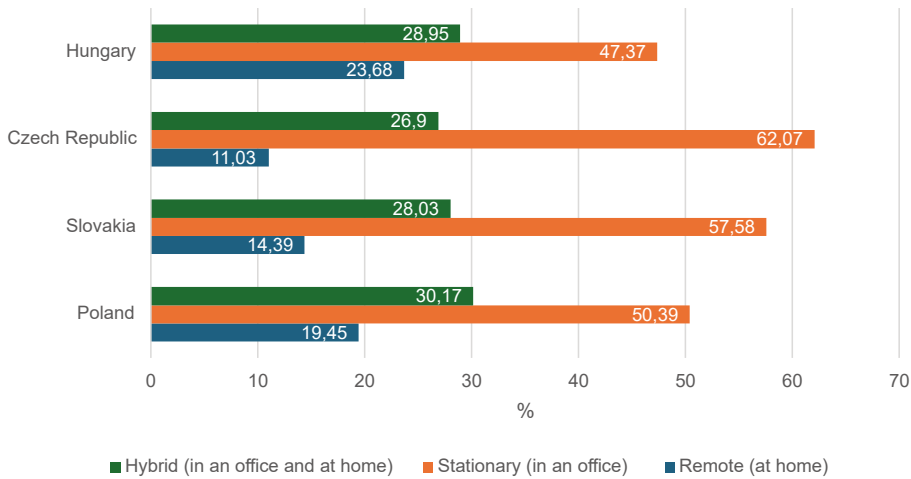
	Hungary	Slovakia	Czech Republic	Poland
Employment contracts	70.18%	66.67%	71.72%	87.07%
Contracts of mandate	5.26%	3.03%	1%	6.06%
Contracts for specified work	6.14%	13.64%	10.03%	0.44%
Business activity/self-employment	7.89%	5.30%	8.82%	3.31%
I have more than one job	7.89%	9.09%	6.21%	2.32%
Internship/practical training	2.63%	2.27%	2.76%	0.77%

Source: Own research.

Among Polish respondents, the percentage of those with an employment contract was the highest at 87.07%. In the case of Czech respondents, this number amounted to 71.72%, followed by Hungarians with 70.18% and Slovaks with 66.67%. 6.06% of Polish respondents had contracts of mandate, which puts them first among respondents in this category. As far as contracts for specific work are concerned, as many as 13.64% of Slovak respondents chose this option, the most in the Visegrad nations. The highest percentage of sole traders was recorded among Czech respondents – 8.82%, while the lowest was among Poles – 3.31%. The highest number of people with at least one job was found among Slovak respondents (9.09%). Interestingly, survey participants from Poland were in the last position again with 2.32%. The highest proportion of interns and trainees was found among Czech respondents. The types of contracts are shown in detail in Table 1.

Respondents were then asked where they worked at that time. The largest number of respondents, irrespective of which V4 country they represented, had an on-site job: 62.07% of Czechs, 57.58% of Slovaks, 50.39% of Poles and 47.37% of Hungarians. Another form of work that respondents declared was a hybrid form, called mixed, which consists of a combination of off-site and on-site work. The majority of respondents performing hybrid work came from Poland (30.17%), followed by 28.95% of Hungarians, 28.03% of Slovaks, and finally 26.90% of Czechs. The greatest number of respondents working exclusively remotely was among respondents from Hungary (23.68%), followed

**Chart 7. Form of work (in what form are you currently working?)**



Source: Own research.

by survey participants from Poland (19.45%), then Slovaks (14.39%), and finally Czechs (only 11.03%).

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, various studies were conducted on remote work in the V4 countries, but it is difficult to compare them due to the different samples, differing research periods and the specific character of each country. However, it is important to note that the number of people working in this form soared during the pandemic (before the pandemic, it ranged from 3 to 8% in European countries).

## VI. Conclusion

After the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries from the Visegrad Group have introduced new regulations on remote work or amended existing ones. It should be noted that remote work is equated with telework in new legislation. Legislation on telework/remote work in the countries under study originates from the European Framework Agreement on Telework and has been adopted mainly through domestic legislation, bilateral agreements or collec-

tive agreements in the member states. Poland and Slovakia have introduced the most developed laws on remote work, followed to a lesser extent by Hungary. Undoubtedly, the fact that remote work is disregarded in the legislation of the Czech Republic puts this country in last place in terms of regulatory alignment.

Working from home has many benefits which include flexibility of working hours, autonomy, contact with the family and no need to commute. However, it is also vital to point out the disadvantages of such work, i.e. social and professional isolation, lack of real communication, unpaid overtime and the risk of becoming a workaholic.

The COVID-19 pandemic undoubtedly exerted a profound impact on the development and a greater role of remote work in the countries investigated. Initially, remote work was difficult to introduce in many areas of the economy on account of the lack of suitable equipment, software or staff qualifications. Nevertheless, over the course of the pandemic, many businesses and companies turned to telework, achieving very good results.

Now that the COVID-19 pandemic is over, it seems that most workers have returned to the traditional form of work – at the employer’s workplace. Undoubtedly however, the legal norms introduced so far will enable employees to work remotely.

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