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Research on Individual Characteristics of Remote Workers

Preliminary Research Report

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1. Introduction

1.1. About the 'Danube4Rural.com' project

Depopulation is one of the main challenges of rural areas in the Danube Region. Citizens are leaving rural areas in search of job opportunities in national urban centres or abroad. Consequently, beside losing people, rural areas struggle to maintain quality public services and economic competitiveness, and retain intellectual potential for future development. In addition, local and regional authorities in rural areas have limited capacities to engage into transnational cooperation and develop innovative policy solutions in the field of depopulation.

The Danube4Rural.com project addresses these challenges by aiming to develop a governance model for attracting remote workers to rural areas. It is its ambition to build on existing potentials of rural areas in form of better quality of life, more living space, lower living costs and clean environment. Furthermore, the project pursues the goal of creating framework conditions that will enable local and regional authorities to design a modern policy framework that can be adjusted to the global remote work landscape.

To this end, the project will develop policy solutions in the frame of three key policy packages:

- **Policy package 1: Quality of life**
- **Policy package 2: Financial incentives**
- **Policy package 3: Regulatory framework**

Specifically, consortium members are joining capacities with members of the newly established Remote Workers Policy Hub to transnationally design and test solutions in the frame of the mentioned policy packages. These are joint efforts of public authorities on local and regional levels, employer organisations covering private and public employers, and experts of different profiles such as employment, law, finance, well-being, policy, academia etc. Finally, these activities will result in the developing the governance model as a key output of the project.

In a first step, the project devotes attention to identifying the key factors that are decisive for people to consider working remotely or moving to a rural area. The research at hand focuses on this goal and subsequently will support the evidence-based development of the three policy packages and their contents with the produced results.

1.2. Definition of remote work and rurality

1.2.1. New work and emerging work trends: embedding of remote work in a broader context

The world of work and everyday working life are currently undergoing numerous transformation processes. Globalisation and migration have had a wide range of effects and led to a high degree of mobilisation and mobility of people, capital, goods and services around the world. In addition, demographic change in the (working) population in many European countries has led to a massive

shortage of labour and skilled workers (Bergmann et al. 2022). Climate change and the resulting need to transform the economy in a sustainable manner, combined with the further acceleration of digitalisation and the use of new technologies in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, are also key drivers of change in the labour market.

Based on these global and regional trends as well as changes in the labour market, companies and organisations are also required to respond to these diverse transformations. Emerging new forms of work, either referring to changes in work hours, leadership, special concepts or digital forms of work, can provide solutions in this sense, and are further explored below.

New Work is a term that refers to the changing trends in the world of work, particularly new forms of work organisation such as home office, hybrid work, four-day week, self-organisation, new leadership and agile working. These forms of work are characterised in particular by greater flexibility in terms of time and location, as well as new forms of collaboration. The term New Work was originally coined by Frithjof Bergmann (2004), who in 'New Work, New Culture' developed a concept for a working society in which the exclusive focus on wage labour is dissolved. In this sense, New Work encompasses not only organisational design approaches, but also the idea of a different working world in which gainful employment coexists with other forms of activity.

However, the concept of New Work has a longer tradition than the term suggests (Heidling 2022). In the sociology of work, the expansion of temporal and spatial scope for organisation has been discussed since the 1980s under the heading of 'flexibilisation of work'. This included exploring new possibilities for work organisation such as flexitime, teleworking and the development of atypical or precarious forms of employment (Hardering 2023).

Overall, it is a complex term that encompasses various approaches to work organisation and a new understanding of work beyond gainful employment. Similar to the topic of work-life balance, it is used in different ways and with different motivations. It is therefore important to be aware of the ambivalence of the term, because opportunities for New Work to gain significance arise above all when measures are considered in a differentiated manner and when New Work is thought of in connection with established approaches to the organisation of work.

The following topics are discussed in the literature as central characteristics of New Work:

- A **work culture** characterised by independent work and operational and democratic participation is a central feature of New Work. Employees should have more control over their working conditions and content. A supportive work culture creates the framework conditions that are adapted to personal needs and skills, and participation ensures the active involvement and co-determination of employees (Wellmann 2022; Gerst 2023; Sorger et al. 2024).
- Closely related to a different work culture is **New Leadership**, which focuses more on the needs and development of employees. This is achieved through increased participation, more flexible forms of organisation and communication on an equal footing, among other things (Harwardt 2020; Helmold 2022; Geyer 2023; Sorger et al. 2024).

- **Working time arrangements:** With regard to working time, New Work shifts the focus towards a flexible, results-oriented approach that meets the needs of employees and the requirements of the modern working world. The demands of care work, voluntary work and political and cultural engagement are also taken into account, which necessitates a move away from rigid full-time models (Bergmann 2004; Sorger 2014; Sorger et al. 2020; Sorger 2020).
- **Digitalisation** is having a profound impact on the world of work, changing it in several ways, for example through automation and the use of artificial intelligence. It creates new opportunities and can increase flexibility and efficiency, but at the same time it also requires new skills and adjustments (Conrads 2020; Bergmann et al. 2022; Pretterhofer 2024; Felstead 2022). Technologies such as video conferencing, cloud computing and project management tools make it possible to work in a networked manner, regardless of physical location.
- **Space concept / remote work:** In addition to creative space concepts designed to facilitate communication (Endrejat 2020), remote work is often seen as the epitome of New Work. With improved technical possibilities, the frequency of use has changed and, especially in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, working from home in particular has gained in importance. On the one hand, the advantages of this arrangement are emphasised, as it can improve work-life balance by allowing for flexible time management and eliminating commuting time. On the other hand, it also harbours dangers such as the blurring of boundaries between work and private life (Carstensen 2022; Felstead 2022; Hardering and Biesel 2023).

Based on these perspectives, we are selecting the most relevant aspects to consider in the framework of the study at hand and are specifying the definition of remote work accordingly – as described in more detail further below. Also, the research goals and topics are aligned with this definition.

1.2.2. Understanding of remote work and rurality in the framework of the current project

A common understanding of remote work is essential for the implementation of the research. Remote work refers to a form of work in which employees perform their professional tasks, usually using digital means, not at a fixed workplace in their employer's office, but rather from any location independent of the company (e.g. their own home/home office, co-working spaces, cafés).

In the frame of the current project, the partners agreed on the following definition for remote workers, which constitute the main target group for the study:

Remote workers may include:

- **Employees (working for domestic or international organisations with the option to work remotely),**
- **Freelancers or self-employed professionals,**
- **Digital nomads – who are open to integrate and contribute to local community and living in rural areas medium or long term, and**

- **Entrepreneurs with location-independent businesses.**

They typically work in knowledge-based or information-driven sectors such as information technology, education, digital media, creative industries, consulting, education and training, sales, marketing, and other digital services.

Key characteristics of remote workers in this context include:

- **Strong digital literacy, autonomy, and self-management skills,**
- **Professional experience or education in fields requiring analytical, technical, creative, or leadership competencies,**
- **The ability to contribute to innovation, entrepreneurship, knowledge-sharing, and community engagement,**
- **A willingness to live and work in rural regions on a medium- to long-term basis,**
- **A desire for higher quality of life, access to nature, affordability, safety, and a sense of community.**

Based on this definition, the following characteristics of remote workers have been picked out and considering in particular when developing the data collection instruments and subsequently when implementing the research.

With view to the nature of their work/job, prerequisites for remote workers in the context of the Danube4Rural project are:

- **High digital literacy,**
- **job suitability/ability to work remotely – both from technical standpoint (carrying out the work in a digital environment), and a managerial perspective (with a high share of activities that can be performed independently).**

It is expected that under these conditions remote work may favour jobs in highly digitalised industries (however not limited to these).

At the same time, with view to preferred lifestyle choices of remote workers, it is vital that they show:

- **Commitment or at least openness towards relocating medium-to long term to rural areas at risk of depopulation,**
- **readiness to connect to and partake in the local community life,**
- **appreciation for the various benefits of rural communities and an endorsement of associated lifestyle (valuing of high quality of life, healthy lifestyle and tranquillity).**

While this may in part apply to digital nomads too, they are not the focus of this study, as per definition they are characterised by a short-term planning horizon and a travel-focused lifestyle.

To sum up, the study at hand mainly addressed as a target group highly qualified remote workers that are either already living in a rural region or are open to the possibility to move to a rural area.

However, in order to provide a point of comparison and, in particular, to identify hindering reasons for working remotely the study also included people who have not yet had any experience of remote working,

But when does a region qualify as rural? Standardised indicators define clear typologies based on several criteria. In line with the most established understanding for the degree of urbanisation and in order to ensure comparability with official statistics, in the frame of this study we adopt the definition coined by Eurostat (2021). According to this, settlements are divided into three categories based on population size and population density:

- **Cities, urban centres/areas (densely populated areas)**
- **Smaller towns and suburbs (areas with medium population density)**
- **Rural areas (sparsely populated areas)**

Due to the Danube Region being particularly diverse and this diversity also reflecting in the different territorial compositions of different countries in the region, we aim to allow for this diversity to be expressed and for each country to apply its own understanding of urbanisation. For this reason, in the framework of this study the three categories are not defined more strictly, e.g. by means of thresholds for population density defined based on certain numbers of inhabitants per square kilometre.

1.3. Research goal and topics

The main research goal is to identify key factors that are important for workers when deciding to work remotely and potentially moving (or staying) in rural areas. Specifically, the study focuses on determining the needs and wishes of (potential) remote workers in areas such as housing, public transport, leisure activities and work-life balance, with the aim of ascertaining which factors would favour a move to rural areas and generally making such areas more attractive as long-term places to live, thus also counteracting depopulation in these regions.

Clustered into two main topic bundles, the following research questions and topics were pursued in the framework of the conducted study:

Research questions and topics revolving about remote work

- **Which characteristics of remote workers can be identified? How and to what extent do different working conditions, personal preferences and qualifications as well as other additional aspects factor into the decision to work remotely?**
- **How is remote work structured and carried out? Which factors are supporting remote work and which ones are impeding it?**
- **With focus on the project pilot areas, what similarities and differences in relation to personal experiences with remote work can be observed on a transnational level?**

Research questions and topics revolving around life in rural areas

- **What aspects related to the personal, family and employment situation as well as personal preferences and other additional aspects factor into the decision to live in a rural area?**

- **How is life in rural areas perceived by rural and urban inhabitants? Which factors make living in rural areas attractive and which ones discourage a possible move?**
- **What incentives can motivate people to stay in or move to rural areas? How can targeted policy actions contribute in this regard?**
- **With focus on the project pilot areas, what similarities and differences in relation to personal experiences with life in rural areas can be observed on a transnational level?**

Specifically, the study focuses on exploring the following main topics:

- **Work-life balance:** pursuing a better balance/flexibility between professional and personal lives, family friendly environment, but also possible work-family conflicts resulting from blurring boundaries between life domains
- **Health and well-being:** positive aspects of psychosocial adaptation to remote work with emphasis on reducing stress, nature access, but also negative aspects such as social isolation
- **Autonomy and independence:** individuals that value independence/autonomy in their work without constant supervision, but also the possibility of decreasing productivity and motivation
- **Cost saving options:** reduced spending higher cost of life in urban areas, reduced spending on commuting
- **Global job opportunities:** remote work opens an opportunity to work for companies around the globe
- **Other personal preferences:** cultural aspects, slower pace of life

This list of topics is non-exhaustive and was extended further in the framework of the explorative research activities, mainly the literature review and in-depth personal interviews. Examples of additional topics are:

- **Individual situation:** personal, family, household, living, employment situation
- **Differing experiences with and expectation from working remotely and living in rural areas** based on socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, social mobility, skill/qualification levels, digital literacy.
- **Employer position towards remote work:** work/company culture and practice, industry/sector specifics
- **Framework conditions for working remotely in rural areas:** forms and intensity of remote work, locations for remote work, digital/technical infrastructure, transport infrastructure, housing situation, local job market, availability of childcare services, administrative support and bureaucracy, measures supporting the EU Digital Single Market.

To this end, the research design combines the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data through an online-survey and in-depth personal interviews in all project pilot areas. The information collected in the frame of the study forms the basis for developing specific solutions for the three policy packages of the governance model. However, particular emphasis lies on the first policy package consisting of measures for improving the quality of life of people living in rural areas.

2. Research design and implementation

The research has been implemented transnationally in all project pilot areas. As a whole, the topics listed in subsection 1.3 give indication of which aspects can contribute towards a better quality of life overall, thus setting the groundwork for developing specific measures to be included in the first policy package focusing on improving the quality of life in rural communities.

This approach allowed to gain insights into broader trends and dynamics influencing individuals to work remotely in rural areas. In turn, the results are intended to guide policymakers, employers, and rural communities to position themselves as attractive destinations for remote workers.

Following a literature and document review aimed to identify main topics for the primary research as well as good practice examples from the region, the study has been designed and its implementation coordinated within the project consortium. It was designed as a mixed-methods study and therefore included both a quantitative online-survey as well as in-depth qualitative interviews. Using an explanatory, sequential mixed-methods approach (Creswell J. and Creswell D., 2017), the quantitative data was first analysed and then further explored using the data from the qualitative interviews. These research steps are described in more detail in the subsections below.

2.1. Literature and document review and analysis

In a first step, a review of relevant literature and documents was conducted with the aim to prepare the primary research part of the study. The review focused on the disambiguation of key terms and concepts related to the main research topics of the study such as remote work and rural life. Moreover, the review sought to identifying additional topics and aspects that proved to be relevant and should be considered for the primary research. These findings served as a basis for the development and enhancement of the data collection instruments for the primary research.

Another goal of the review was to identify examples of good practices in the area of remote work and revitalisation of rural areas to be showcased in the study report. These examples should highlight already proven and successful approaches that could serve as inspiration for partners developing specific policies, activities and measures within the framework of the projects. The good practices collection mainly focused on but was not limited to initiatives from Austria. Given that Austria is the only country in the project framework without a pilot region, the regional focus set for the good practices collection provided the possibility to also feature this country in the study at hand, even though by means of a different approach.

To this end, a search strategy defining the main topics of interest and establishing the main search parameters and was devised for the review. The search was based on select tags, terms, key words

and phrases that were used for developing search strings. Specifically, the following dimensions and topics were considered during the search:

- **General concepts related to new work and digitalization:** new forms of work, future of work, work 4.0, digitalisation of work, digital transformation, labour migration, labour mobility, workforce retention
- **Specific subtopics related to remote work:** digital nomads, co-working spaces, co-workation
- **Synonyms for or specific forms of remote work:** telework, mobile work, working from home/WFH, home-office, virtual work, digital work, location-independent work, decentralised work, cross-border remote work
- **Regional focus:** regional development, rural development, rural areas, rural regions, rural life, rurality, countryside, peripheral areas, Danube Region, cross-border labour market, smart villages, rural depopulation, rural revitalisation
- **Additional terms related to digitalisation and rural life:** digital infrastructure, broadband internet expansion, labour migration, labour mobility, quality of life, financial incentives, work attractiveness, commuting, digital divide urban-rural.

The search was conducted in both German and English by using variations of the search tags listed above. For this, various academic and general search engines as well as literature databases were used. The identified materials were subsequently checked for relevance and quality. The publications that met the relevance and quality criteria were subjected to text-based analyses. The main findings were either considered for the development of the data collection tools or included in the study report in order to contextualise the own findings produced in the framework of the primary research.

2.2. Quantitative online-survey

The quantitative survey serves as an important source of information in order to gain a better understanding of the target group. To this end, the survey looked into the demographics of the target group, and collected socio-demographic data such as information on gender, education, current life and familial situation, country of origin and current living situation. But also, professional characteristics were of interest, namely information on the current employment situation of respondents, the industry of the current job, the current occupation and level of qualification. Furthermore, the survey also provided insights into the interests, needs and expectations of the target group and how these relate to considering the possibility to move to rural areas and work remotely from there. In this context, the survey also focused on gathering information on core values of the target group as well as on their attitudes and preferred lifestyle choices.

In order to ensure the access to this information, an appropriate communication style and suitable means of communication were chosen. The quantitative survey was implemented as an online-survey, as this approach offers the advantage of designing a multilingual survey and conducting it transnationally. Furthermore, as the survey addressed a mostly digitally savvy target group, this approach was deemed most suitable for data collection.

The online-survey was translated into the national languages of the countries represented in the project consortium with the help of the project partners. In addition to the English survey, translations into ten additional languages (Bulgarian, Croatian, German, Hungarian, Montenegrin, Romanian, Serbian – both in Latin and Cyrillic writing -, Slovak and Slovenian) were implemented and distributed in the pilot countries.

Before the start, the online-survey was thoroughly checked with the support of all consortium members as part of pre-testing. The pre-test is a vital quality assurance tool for quantitative surveys, as it verifies whether the survey questions serve the intended survey purpose and collect all relevant information required for the analysis, but also ensures that the survey is clearly structured and easy to follow as well as that wordings are comprehensible and precise.

The collected quantitative data was prepared for analysis and the resulting dataset imported into SPSS, a specialised statistical software. Subsequently, aggregated as well as detailed descriptive statistical analyses were carried out and illustrated by means tables and figures.

2.3. In-depth qualitative interviews

The qualitative interviews followed up on the online-survey in order to gain more in-depth insights into certain life situations of the target group. The interviews were conducted by the project partners in their national languages in coordination with the research team. In support of this, semi-structured interview guides were developed and put at the partners' disposal.

The interview partners were mainly acquired by means of the online-survey. As part of the survey, respondents could also express their interest to be interviewed and register by submitting their contact details. In addition, interview partners were also acquired independently of the online-survey by the project partners, for instance from their personal or professional networks. The interviewees were selected by the project partners in coordination with the research team, according to the research goals and topics, and with attention to covering a wide range of different life and professional situations of the target group. To aid the selection process, the research team also provided input on current blind spots that required closer examination, based on regular updates and preliminary analysis of the quantitative data.

The conducted interviews were made available by the project partners in English as transcripts. For this, the interviews were recorded upon requesting permission from the interviewees, then transcribed and translated into English. In cases where recording the interviews was not possible, the interviewers afterwards prepared detailed documentation of the discussions (minutes, protocols etc.).

The collected materials (transcripts, minutes, further documentation etc.) were, if required, anonymised, prepared for analysis and imported into MAXQDA, a specialised software for qualitative and quantitative text analyses. Subsequently, a code structure was developed based on the main research topics and the materials were organised according to this structure. This approach allowed for a systemic analysis and interpretation of the material.

2.4. Research implementation and response rate

The online-survey was distributed and promoted by the project partners in their respective out-reach areas. Between September and December 2025, **a total of 526 persons participated in the online-survey**. In addition, **39 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted** between September 2025 and January 2026 by the project partners **with individuals from the pilot areas** (see Table 1). The interviewees were recruited by the partners, and there was also the option of agreeing to take part in a personal interview as part of the online-survey.

Table 1: Country distribution of study participation

	Online-survey		Interviews	
	Number	%	Number	%
Bosnia and Herzegovina	61	11.6%	4	10.3%
Bulgaria	56	10.6%	5	12.8%
Croatia	41	7.8%	4	10.3%
Montenegro	25	4.8%	-	0.0%
Austria	16	3.0%	2	5.1%
Romania	36	6.8%	2	5.1%
Serbia	72	13.7%	7	17.9%
Slovakia	81	15.4%	8	20.5%
Slovenia	92	17.5%	4	10.3%
Hungary	37	7.0%	3	7.7%
Other	6	1.1%		
No fixed country of residence / nomad	1	0.2%		
No answer	2	0.4%		
Total	526	100.0%	39	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey' & 'Danube4rural.com_Interviews', 2025; n survey=526; n interviews=39

Since due to the participation of different countries and region as well as the focus on highly qualified remote workers no basic population could be determined in this sense, the survey cannot be considered representative, as it is not based on quota regulations. The only checks possible concerned a balanced country distribution and whether from a statistical standpoint there were enough respondents with specific characteristics (e.g. women/men, younger/older persons etc.) for further analysis. An overview of the distribution of key characteristics within the survey sample can be found in the appendix (see Table 3). In order to better contextualised the research results, the survey sample is depicted in more detail based on the key characteristics of the respondents in chapter 3 below. Also, the ways in which the interviewees differ from the survey sample are closer described in this section as well.

It is therefore vital to stress once again that the research results cannot be considered as statistically representative of the target group of remote workers or people living in rural areas as a whole nor in the surveyed countries, and therefore should under no circumstances be communicated as such. The results merely serve as a basis or guide, indicating in which areas there is room for improvement and concrete solutions should be based.

3. Sample description, living situation and behaviour of respondents

For an accurate interpretation of the research results, it is important to know the sample. Therefore, this section provides a brief description of the main characteristics of the persons that participated in the primary research. Both the sample of the online-survey and the interviewees are described by key socio-demographic and professional characteristics.

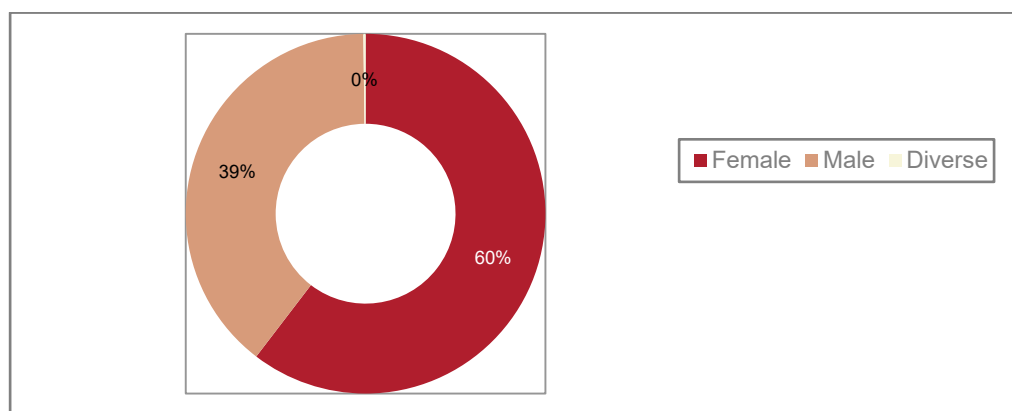
While the sample is not representative of the target groups of remote workers and people living in rural areas in the pilot countries, it still achieves a satisfactory distribution based on select attributes. Thus, the research results provide valuable insights into the attitudes, behaviour, experiences as well as needs and wishes of the respondents in relation to remote work and life in rural regions.

3.1. Socio-demographic profiles of research participants

3.1.1. Survey participants: personal and professional information

With a share of 60%, women are overrepresented in the survey sample. Men amount to 39% of all respondents and persons identifying as diverse to less than 1% (see Figure 1).

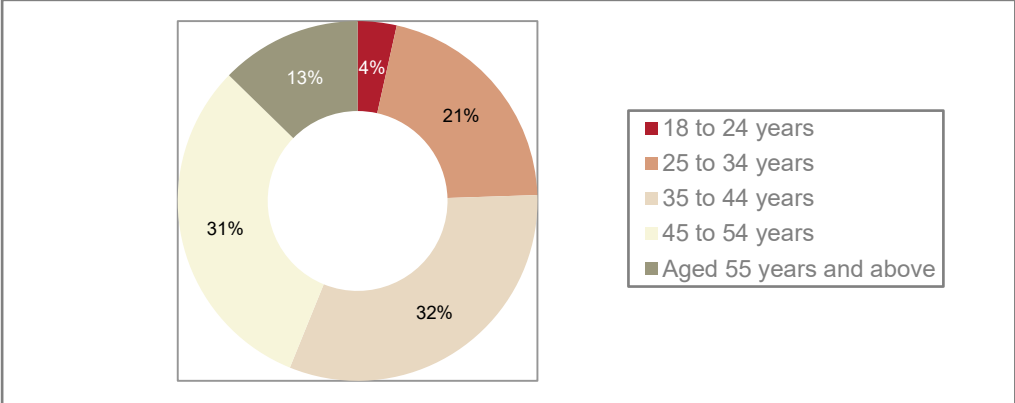
Figure 1: Survey respondents by gender



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=518

Almost one third of respondents fall into the age groups 35 to 44 years and 45 to 54 years, respectively. Another 21% are aged between 25 and 34 years, followed by 13% aged 55 years and above. Merely 4% are younger than 25 years (see Figure 2).

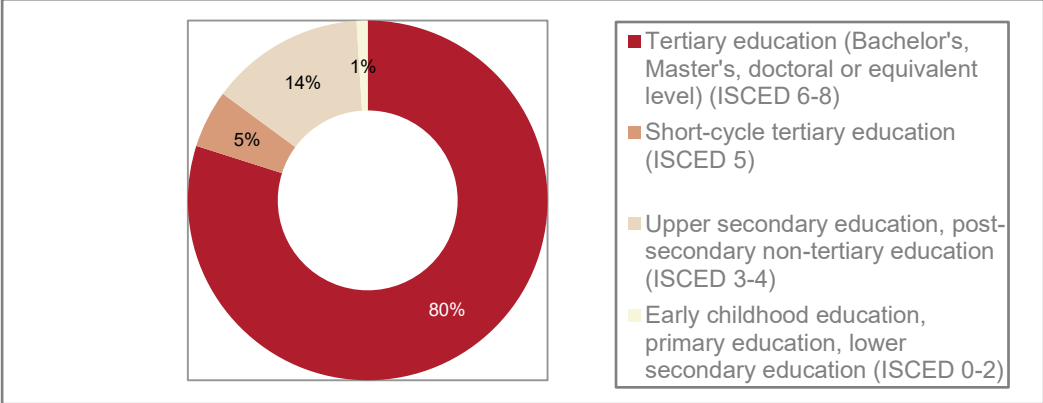
Figure 2: Survey respondents by age



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=520

A high proportion of respondents have tertiary qualifications (80%), followed by 14% with at most upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary education. In turn, merely 1% indicate completing at most a lower secondary education (see Figure 3). The generally high level of education can also be attributed to the fact that the study at hand focuses on highly qualified remote workers.

Figure 3: Survey respondents by highest education



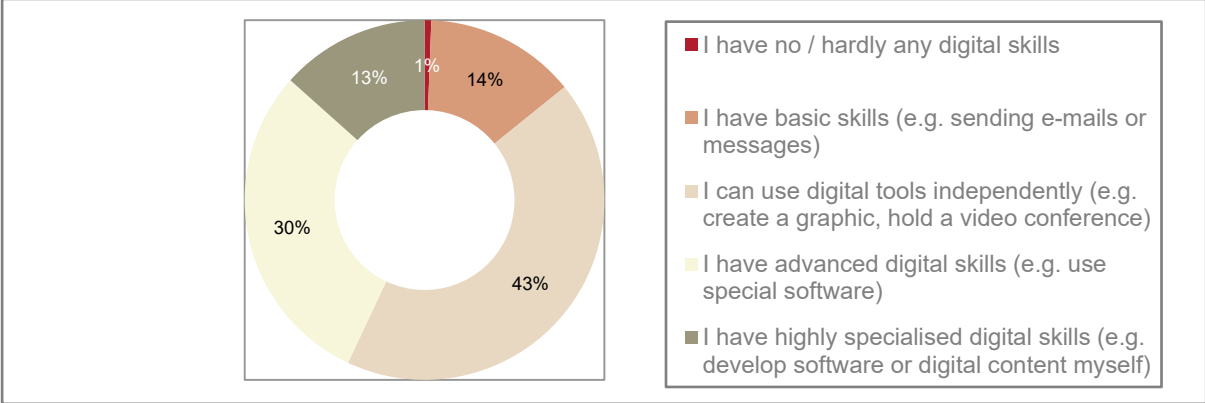
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=517

In line with the high educational attainment, a tendency towards higher professional qualification levels could be observed. More than half of the respondents fulfil either a leadership (16%) or an expert/highly qualified role (43%). Further 30% describe their qualification level as corresponding

to a professional or specialist role, with mere 6% in an auxiliary or semi-skilled role and 2% in training (see Table 3).

With regards to digital skills, the survey sample consists mostly of persons that can use digital tools independently (43%) and persons with advanced digital skills (30%), with merely 0,6% indicating having no/hardly any digital skills (see Figure 4). The high digital affinity of the respondents is an important prerequisite for remote work.

Figure 4: How competent do you feel in the use of digital tools?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=523

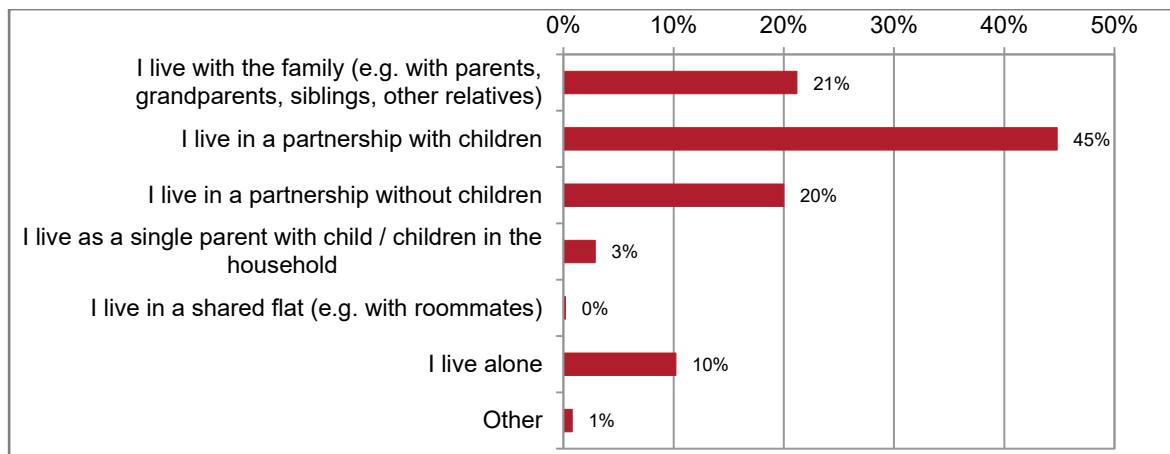
The majority of survey participants primarily work as employees (81%), followed by self-employed persons or entrepreneurs (9%). To a smaller extent retired and unemployed persons (3% each) as well as persons still in training and persons principally involved in housework or nursing care/child-care (2% each) also completed the survey (see Table 3).

Of all respondents currently in employment, a large proportion work full-time (95%). Additional 4% are employed part-time with a minimum of 20 work hours per week, and merely less than 1% work less than 20 hours per week (see Table 3).

3.1.2. Survey participants: living situation

The low share of part-time employed persons comes as a surprise in connection with the comparably high share of respondents living in a partnership with children (45%) or identifying as single parents with children in their household (3%, see Figure 5), as studies generally show a high prevalence of part-time work among parents – especially mothers (Danzer et al. 2024; Bergmann et al. 2020; Mäkinen et al. 2023; Andrew et al. 2023).

Figure 5: Survey respondents by current household situation

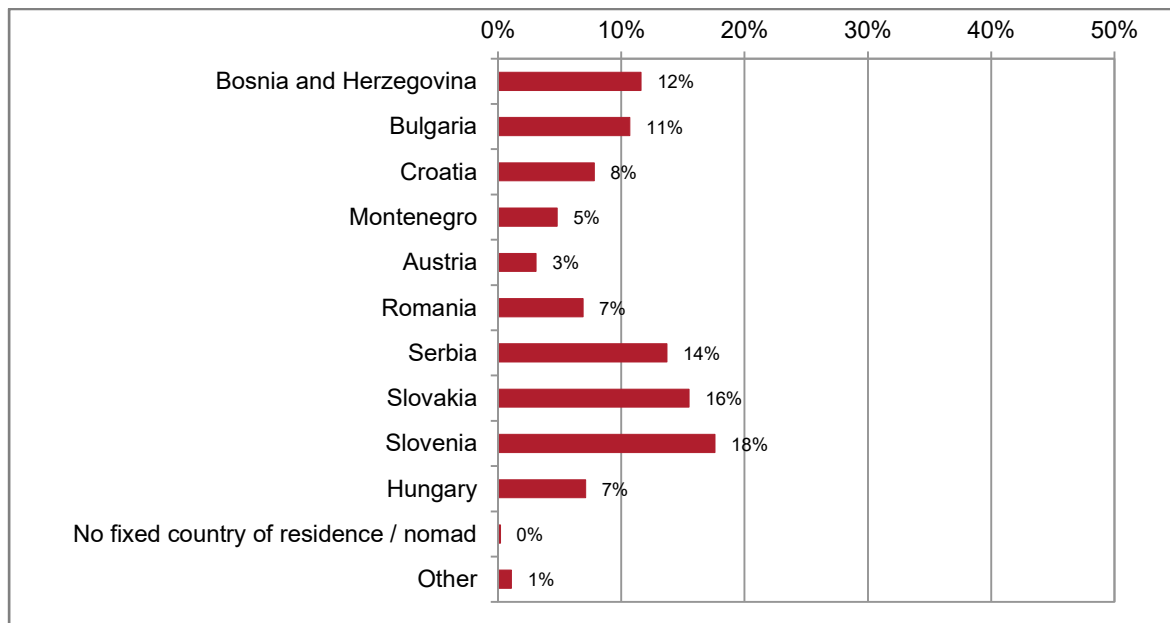


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=520

The distribution of survey participants by current country of residence shows most respondents living in Slovenia (18%), followed by Slovakia (16%) and Serbia (14%). Additional larger samples correspond to residents of Bosnia and Herzegovina (12%) and Bulgaria (11%). In turn, detailed results for respondents from Austria (3%) and Montenegro (5%) must be interpreted with caution due to the comparably small country samples. Merely 0,2% of survey participants indicate having adopted a nomad lifestyle (see Figure 6).

The vast majority of respondents were also born in their current country of residence (94%, see Table 3).

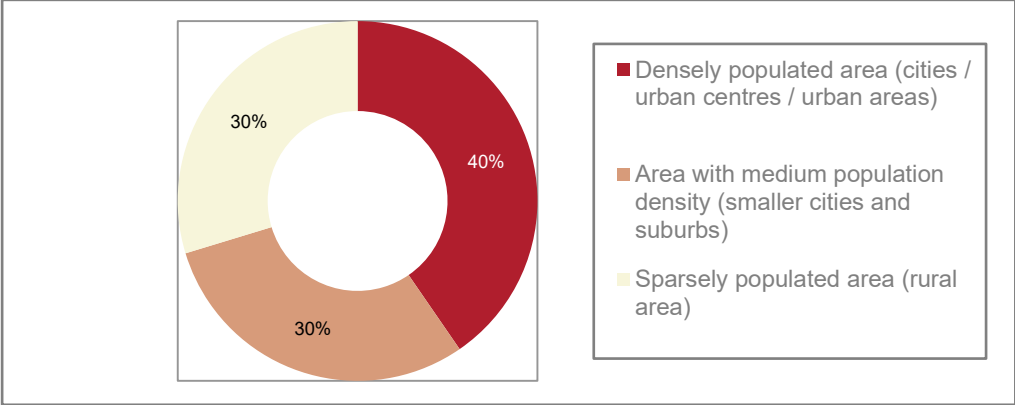
Figure 6: In which country do you live most of the year?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=524

The sample distribution by population density is quite balanced: 40% of survey participants live in densely populated areas for the most part of the year and 30% each in areas with medium population density and sparsely populated areas (see [Figure 7](#)).

Figure 7: Survey respondents by population density of living area



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=525

3.1.3. Interviewees: personal and professional information

As the interviews did not focus on collecting socio-demographic characteristics, the sample cannot be described in the same level of detail as those of the survey participants. Nevertheless, data on living situations was collected during the interviews and is briefly outlined below (see [Table 2](#)).

Table 2: Personal and Professional information: Interviewees

		Number
Area of Living	Rural area	16
	Suburban area	7
	Urban area	14
	Different residences	2
	Total	39
Employment situation	Employee	25
	Self-employed	12
	Both	2
	Total	39
Care responsibilities	Yes	15
	No	24
	Total	39

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Interviews', 2025; n=39

Similar proportions of the interviewees live in urban (n = 14) and rural (n = 16) regions. Seven people stated that they live in suburbs, while two commute regularly between homes in the countryside and the city. As in the survey, assessments of whether the current place of residence is urban,

rural or suburban are based on information provided by the interviewees, rather than quantitative indicators.

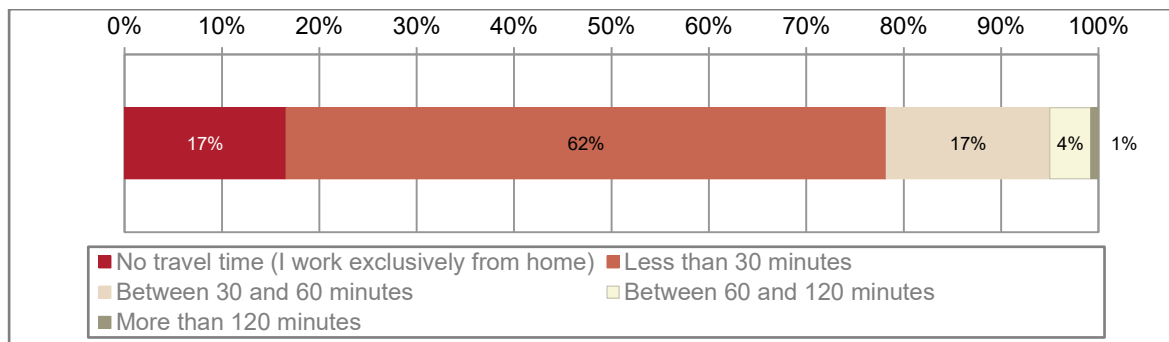
Concerning the employment situation at the time of the interview, the vast majority of the interviewees was employed (n=25). A further 12 people stated that they were self-employed, and two people were both self-employed and employed at the time of the interview. All of them have jobs that largely involve traditional office or computer work, with varying degrees of personal contact with customers or colleagues. None of the interviewees has a job that, from a technical standpoint, could only be performed on site. 15 Interviewees have care responsibilities for children.

Almost all interviewees already had some form of experience with remote work. However, the range of these experiences is very broad, ranging from interviewees who have been working exclusively or predominantly remotely for years to people whose experiences with remote work are limited to individual experiences in connection with exceptional circumstances such as the Covid-19 pandemic. Only one interviewee stated never having worked remotely, not even in exceptional circumstances.

3.2. Commute time and means of transportation used by respondents

Almost two-thirds of respondents take less than 30 minutes to commute to work, while 5% take an hour or longer (see Figure 8). A significant 17% work exclusively from home and therefore do not spend any time commuting to work.

Figure 8: How long does it take you to commute to your workplace?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=520

What modes of transport do people use to get to work? More than two-thirds use their own car, especially older people aged 55 and over (82%), people living in rural areas (83%) and people who need an hour or more to get to work (46%, see Figure 9). However, there is considerable overlap between the first two groups: on average, older people (55%) are also more likely to live in rural areas (30%) (see Figure 16). Around one third walk to work, especially people who live in urban

centres (39%). More than a fifth also use public transport, especially people who need an hour or more to get to work (68%) and people who live in urban regions (32%).

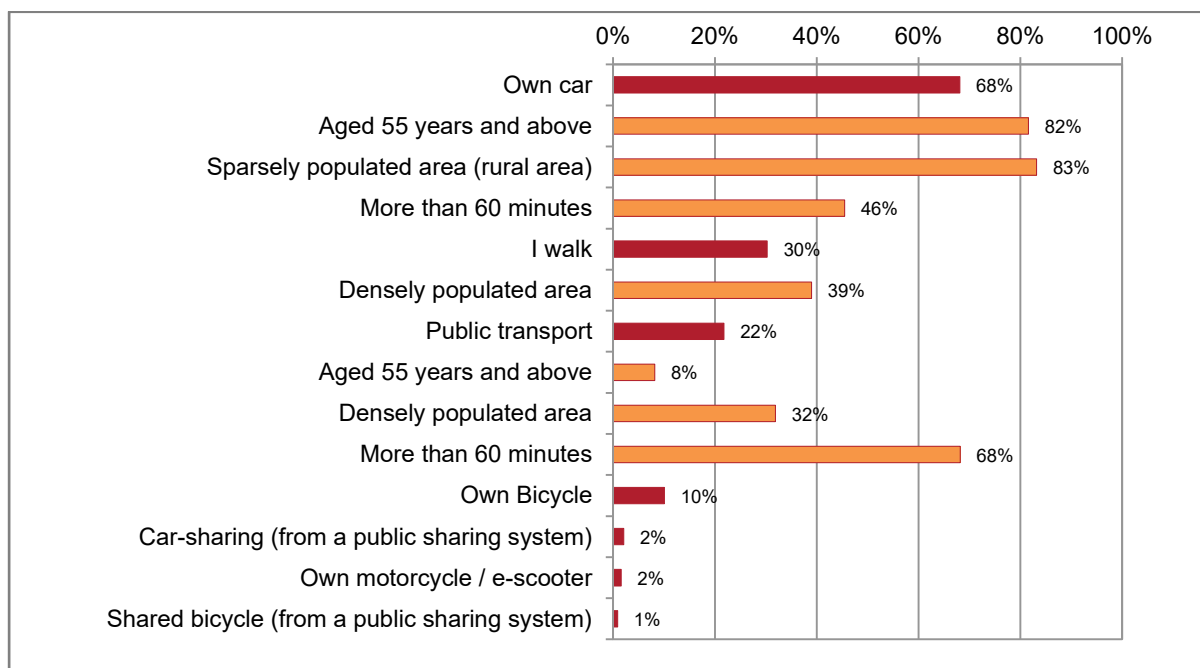
It is unclear here whether people use public transport because they have long journey times or whether using public transport leads to longer journey times. However, the qualitative interviews suggest that the latter point could especially apply to people who live in rural areas and still want to do without a car or do not have a car. As public transport in rural areas often take longer, commute times can be very long, as it is the case for IP3.

I am the only employee that is travelling with the public transport, specifically with the bus. It takes me a lot of time every day just to get from home to work and get back in the other direction...approximately between three and 3.5 hours per day. (Interview 3_Danube4rural)

People aged 55 and above use public transport considerably less (8%). For this group, the public transport services currently available seem to be less attractive. However, the physical aspect should be considered as a possible explanatory factor here. Age-related barriers to use can arise, especially when using public transport involves many changes and walking times.

Another 10% also use their own bicycle to commute to work. Other modes of transport and sharing services, on the other hand, are only used by a minority. However, sharing services in particular could be very useful in rural areas, if they were better adapted to the needs of residents.

Figure 9: If NOT 'no travel time': What means of transportation do you regularly use to get to work? (multiple answers possible)



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=418

The qualitative interviews indicate that the heavy use of private cars as a means of transport for people in rural areas is often due to a lack of (attractive) alternatives: people living in rural areas often reported that there are either no public transport connections or only very irregular ones, and that even when available, these are not an attractive alternative. In addition to unreliability due to delays and roadworks, people refrain from using public transport because their commute time would be disproportionately longer than by car.

It really bothers me, to be honest, with all this constant driving, because I'm generally very environmentally conscious. And I feel bad that I use the car so much. But there's just no other way. We have a train station in our village, but the schedules make it absolutely impossible to take your kids to the kindergarten with the train. (Interview 28_Danube4rural)

4. Experience with remote work

Remote work can help make rural areas more attractive places to live, as it potentially enables people to take up jobs in more distant regions or urban areas while still living in the countryside. Remote work refers to a form of work in which employees perform their professional tasks, usually using digital means, not at a fixed workplace in their employer's office, but rather from any location independent of the company (e.g. their own home/home office, co-working spaces, cafés).

This chapter focuses on the respondents' experiences and perceptions of remote work. By combining quantitative and qualitative results, it describes how remote work is used, the factors influencing usage, the motives for (not) using this form of work as well as the positive experiences and challenges encountered. Finally, approaches that promote remote work are identified, drawing on the ideas, wishes and perspectives of the respondents.

4.1. Framework for remote work

4.1.1. Possibility to work remotely

What is the situation of the respondents with regard to remote work? As can be seen in [Figure 10](#), more than half of the respondents have the option of working remotely, but only 39% actually use it. Almost a third would also like to have this option, while 17% see no need for it. There are several differences depending on socio-demographic characteristics.

Men use remote work slightly more often than women (43% compared to 37%), while women would like to have this option more often than men (34% compared to 24%).

The use of remote work also declines with age: while 47% of those under 35 make use of this option, the proportion drops to 32% among those aged 55 and above. Among older people aged 55 and above, a third see no need for remote work, compared with 17% on average. Related to this is the fact that people from rural areas, where older people predominate, are also more likely than average to see no need for remote work (28%).

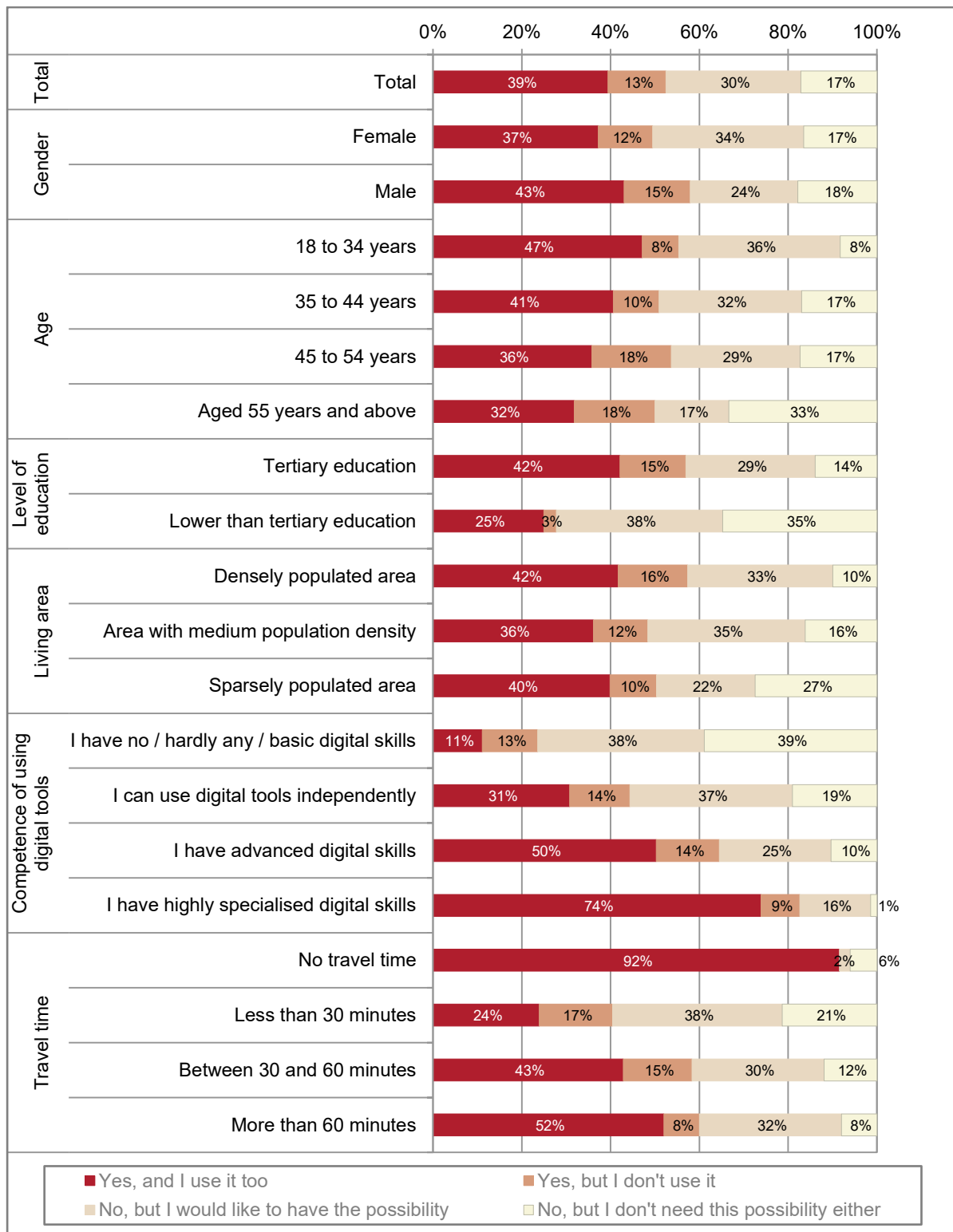
In terms of educational attainment, people without tertiary education are less likely to use remote work (25%) and are also more likely than average to see no need for it (35%).

As digital skills increase, so does the use of remote work: While the usage rate among people with low digital skills is only 11%, it rises to 74% among those with highly specialised digital skills. It is striking, however, that 37% of people with low or basic skills would still like to have this option.

A comprehensive analysis of the digital skills intensity of jobs demonstrates significant segregation in task performance dependent on socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age and educational attainment (Leitner and Zilian 2025). These findings are interesting in the context of the study at hand, as for one digital skills can be viewed as a necessary requirement for working remotely, and for another they can help contextualise the results in so far as they put the results of a non-representative sample into perspective. Women are less likely than men to fulfil tasks of a higher digital skill intensity within their jobs – a result that aligns with the fact that women in our sample use remote work to a lesser extent than men despite being slightly overrepresented. Also, a higher digital skills intensity when performing their jobs is associated with employees that have a higher level of education, namely either tertiary or upper secondary education. Furthermore, the digital skills intensity of jobs decreases with increasing age (see [Figure 1](#), [Figure 10](#)).

In addition, people with a long commute of an hour or more are also more likely to work remotely (52%), while this is only true for around a quarter of people with a short commute of up to 30 minutes. Unsurprisingly, the majority of people who do not lose a significant amount of time commuting to work (92%) use remote work. The remaining 8% are, for example, self-employed people who have their office at home or people who work just “around the corner”.

Figure 10: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=520

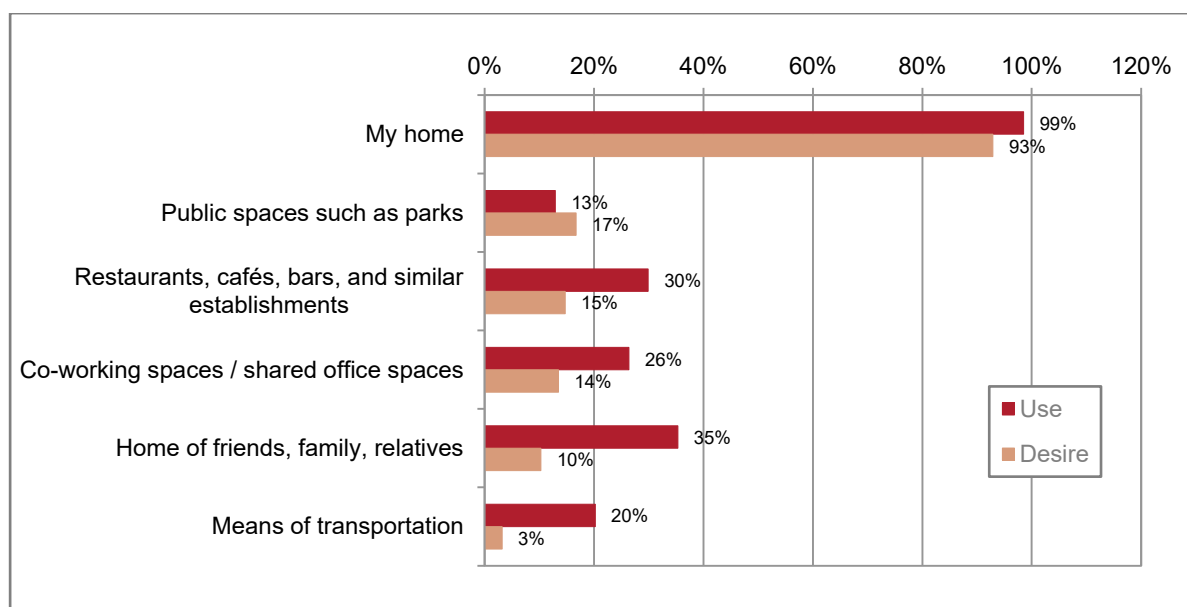
4.1.2. Places for working remotely

When working remotely, most people work from home (99%), or would like to do so, if they had the option (93%). However, working in the homes of friends or relatives (35%), restaurants or cafés (30%) and/or co-working spaces or shared offices (26%) are also very common strategies (see Figure 11).

When asking respondents that are already working remotely about what other places they would like to use for remote work, the results point to a huge potential for expansion in the area of co-working spaces or shared offices: 28% of remote workers stated that they would like to have this option, which could mean that not enough workspaces of this kind are available in their vicinity. This particularly applies to rural areas or areas with medium population density, where 33% and 38% respectively expressed a preference for co-working and shared office spaces. By comparison, this applies to only 17% of people living in urban areas. This could indicate a lack or shortage of supply in these areas.

When comparing the locations that remote workers really use with those preferred by people if they had the opportunity to work remotely, there are some significant differences: The actual use of remote work in restaurants, cafés and coffee houses (30% to 15%), co-working spaces or shared offices (26% to 14%), friends' or relatives' homes (35% to 10%) and public transport (20% to 3%) is significantly higher than the desire to use these locations. This can be interpreted as an indication that the possibility of remote work opens up a much wider range of flexible work locations than most non-users have assumed to date.

Figure 11: *If remote work used or possibility desired: Where do you / would you like to work remotely? (multiple answers possible)*



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; use: n=205; desire: n=158

The qualitative results support these findings of the survey to a high degree. Most of the interviewees stated that they primarily work remotely from home. In many cases, remote working is even regarded as synonymous with working from home.

The interviews reveal differences in the locations for remote working, particularly in dependence on the question of why and to what extent remote working is used. Those who work with hybrid models, i.e. alternating office days with remote work days, mostly use remote work specifically for working from home. Remote work is used here as a way to balance private and professional commitments and/or save travel time. Especially from the perspective of those who use remote work to better balance job and childcare (e.g. I17, I26, I14, I15, I7, I31) or for those who reported to have very long commutes (e.g. I5, I4, I6, I34) the advantages of remote work are very closely linked to the fact that work can be done from home.

Whether or not it is possible to work from home depends on the availability of necessary work infrastructure at home. This includes a stable internet connection, which is an absolute prerequisite, as well as other aspects, such as a quiet room and an ergonomic workplace, depending on work requirements and needs. In some cases, possibilities to work from home were reported to be limited due to insufficient space. This especially applies to cases, where other household member also regularly work from home. IP2 serves as an example for this:

I would like to work more from home. At the moment I don't do that because my husband, he works entirely remotely, because he's working for a company abroad. And we don't have two desks at home. So he uses the desk, and I would have to sit at the kitchen table. And that's not very ergonomic, it's not very comfortable. So that's why I don't do it. (Interview 2_Danube4rural)

Working infrastructure at home was unsurprisingly even more relevant to those who worked remotely frequently or exclusively. For this group, access to office infrastructure, such as a printer, is also important, which is why they placed greater emphasis on the need for opportunities to share traditional office equipment, for example in co-working spaces. Co-working spaces were discussed as a desirable alternative primarily by those who work exclusively or very frequently remotely. The aim was either to counteract social isolation or to be able to share infrastructure with other remote workers. Some of those who work exclusively or almost exclusively remotely reported to alternate working from home with other work locations (e.g. I33, I29). Other work locations that are used occasionally were also mentioned, such as cafés or, in cases where available, co-working spaces. One interviewee, who is self-employed, rented an own office space (I24).

According to the Co-working Trends Survey that is being conducted since 2020, capacities of co-working spaces have been steadily increasing worldwide, with the Covid-19 pandemic being a key catalyst for the increased demand and the popularisation of this work setting. However, co-working spaces are also facing several challenges such as rising costs and difficult members acquisition, partly due to increased competition. The results show that co-working spaces usually follow a concept and have goals reaching beyond those of merely generating profits. Two thirds of participating co-working spaces indicated building supportive communities for their members and users and more than half generating social impact beyond their spaces as important long-term goals and

missions (Deskmag 2025). This is an indicator that co-working spaces have a strong community orientation.

4.1.3. Frequency of working remotely

A comparison of people who already use remote work with those who would like to do so also reveals a diverse picture in terms of the frequency of use (see [Figure 12](#)): While 50% of users work exclusively or mainly from home, only a quarter of non-users would like to do so. The desired frequency of working remotely ranges from 40% to 60% of working time (36%) to only in exceptional cases or when needed (34%). This may also indicate that once the option to work remotely is available, it is used more frequently than expected.

When having a closer look at the frequency of working remotely by various socio-demographic characteristics, several differences become apparent, although some results should be viewed with caution due to the comparably small sample size for some subgroups (see [Table 11](#)).

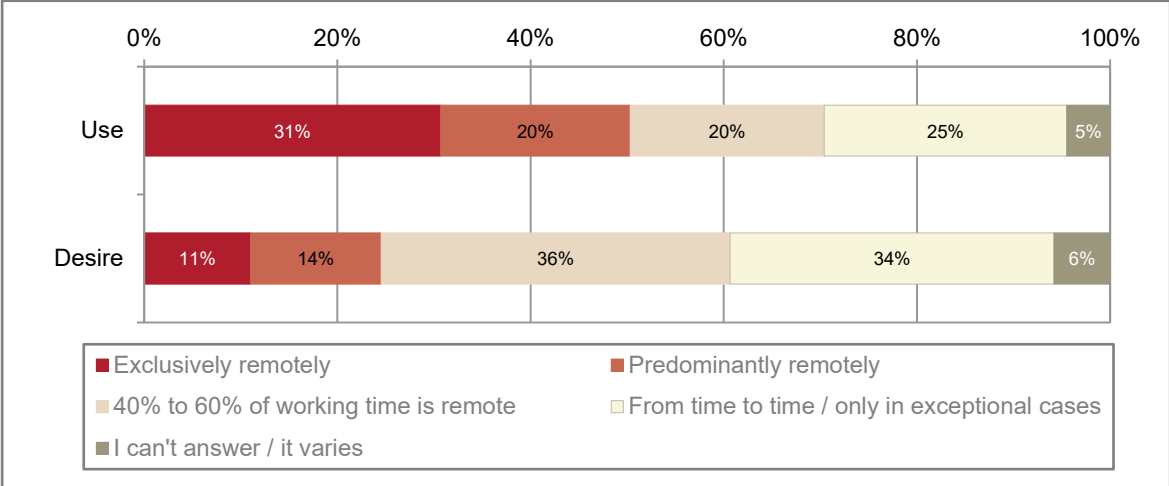
Almost two-thirds of young respondents aged between 18 and 34 years and more than half of respondents aged between 35 and 44 years work exclusively or predominantly remotely. This share drops to merely 36% in the age group 45 to 54 years, these respondents rather preferring to use remote work for roughly half of the working time or only in exceptional cases (round 30% each).

Respondents that live alone choose to work exclusively remotely more frequently (44%), while for respondents living with their families this is more seldomly the case (24%).

Also, more than half of respondents with highly specialised digital skills work exclusively remotely, while this only applies to round one quarter of independents users of digital skills and one-fifth of respondents with advanced digital skills. In turn, independent users rather choose to work remotely from time to time (34%).

Almost three quarter of respondents with no commute time to the workplace work exclusively remotely, with another one-fifth working predominantly remotely. Conversely, half of the respondents with a commute time of less than 30 minutes only work remotely in exceptional cases. Respondents with a travel time between 30 and 60 minutes mainly choose to work remotely for about half of their working time (39%).

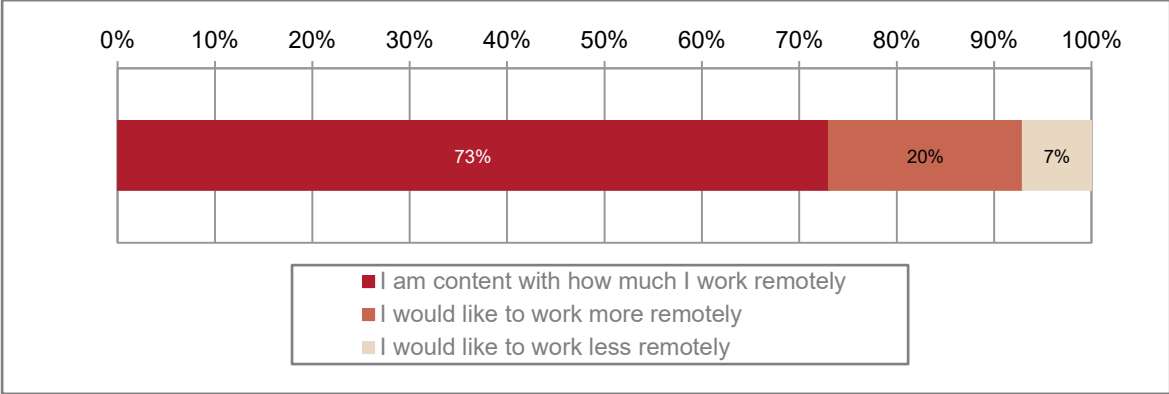
Figure 12: If remote work used or possibility desired: How often do you / would you like to work remotely?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; use: n=205; desire: n=158

This frequent use of remote work also seems to be voluntary in most cases, with 73% of users stating that they are satisfied with the frequency of use (see Figure 13). 20% would even like to use it more often and only 7% would like to work remotely less, indicating considerable leeway to decide the extent of remote work in line with own needs and preferences.

Figure 13: If remote work used: How do you assess this frequency?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=205

The qualitative interviews reveal a wide variety of situations regarding the use of remote working, the extent to which it is used, and how satisfied people are with these arrangements. However, none of the 39 interviewees primarily used remote working to work independently of location in the classic sense of digital nomadism. Overall, the interviewees can be grouped into different

categories, primarily based on their degree of autonomy in deciding whether and how much they work remotely.

The people who work exclusively or almost exclusively remotely are mainly the self-employed people in the sample or, to a lesser extent, those working for international companies.

Among employees who partially work remotely, some say that the amount of allowed remote work is stipulated in their employment contract. In some cases, the contract also specifies the maximum amount of time that may be spent working remotely.

Where the frequency of remote work is not specified in the employment contract, informal agreements are often in place.

Especially those working in knowledge-intensive industries, where employee performance is primarily measured by output, the employees in question report to have a lot of autonomy in how they practise remote work and are not limited to a fixed number of remote days. Typical for the interview employees in highly output-oriented companies are also constellations where work is predominantly done remotely, but appointments are kept on site when necessary. IP29 and IP32 can be cited as examples of these cases:

I have the possibility to work remotely and I use it frequently. I usually work from my home, and occasionally from other quiet locations, when needed. I go to the main office only when required, for meetings or specific tasks. (Interview 32_Danube4rural)

I am free to choose when and to what extent I shall work remotely. As I mentioned above, the important thing is to achieve the expected results and the job to be done correctly and on time. (Interview 29_Danube4rural)

Literature indicates that hybrid work solutions are associated with increased subjective well-being of employees. With the exception of the physical health dimension, employees that only partially work remotely tend to assess their well-being better in the dimensions of psychological well-being and relationships compared to those who work fully remotely (Mierzejewska et al. 2024).

4.2. Main factors influencing remote work

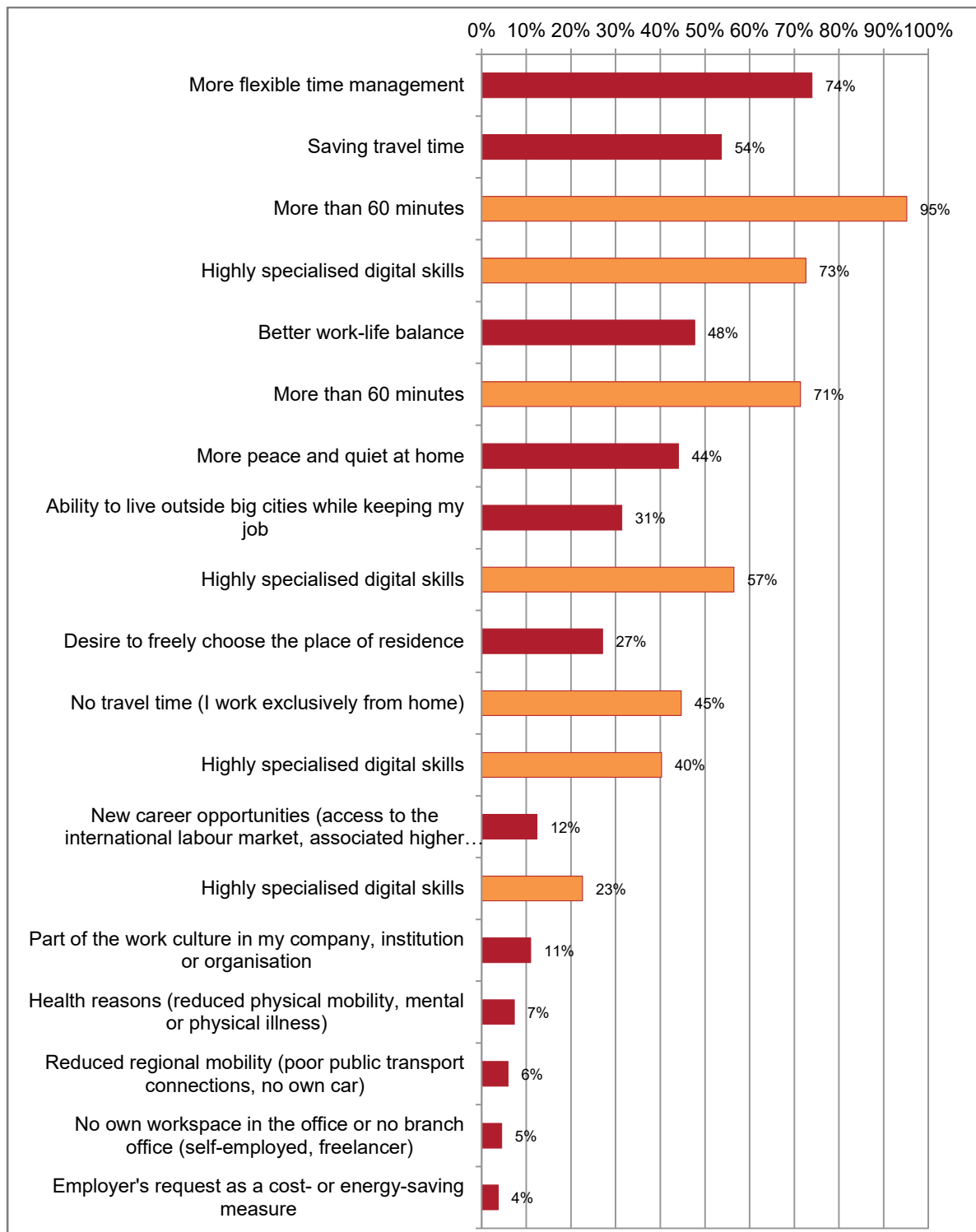
Remote work is a complex domain, with a double-edged impact showing both positive and negative implications for remote workers. How remote work is perceived depends greatly on the individual situation and the current life stage of the affected people. What some people see as an advantage of remote work can be a burden or challenge for others. As the qualitative interviews in particular show, it is not only life circumstances that have an influence, but also subjective preferences and work habits. Despite this ambivalence, studies still largely show that the advantages tend to outweigh the disadvantages of remote work (Ferreira et al. 2021; Blumberga and Pylinskaya 2019; Mierzejewska et al. 2024).

4.2.1. Conducive factors for remote work

Concerning the decisive reasons for the (desired) use of remote work, almost three-quarters of respondents cite more flexible time management as their top priority. Those living with children, cited this to an even slightly higher percentage (80%). Also important are time savings on commuting (54%), a better work-life balance (48%) and a quieter working environment (44%, see [Figure 14](#)). However, the opportunity to live outside of large cities while still working there, or to be able to choose where to live through remote work in general, is also seen as an advantage by almost a third (27%) of respondents.

The remaining reasons, on the other hand, are of comparatively lesser importance and are only relevant to certain individuals depending on their individual situation. For example, people with highly specialised digital skills are more likely to name new career opportunities (access to the international labour market, associated higher pay) as an advantage, at 23% compared to 12% on average. Also, these respondents value more leeway in freely choosing their place of residence, at 40% compared to 27% on average, and specifically in being able to live outside the side and still do their job, at 57% compared to 31% on average. The commute time to the workplace also significantly affecting the individual reasons for working remotely: Respondents with long commute time of more than one hour mainly see advantages in saving travel time, at 95% compared to 54% on average, as well as in a better work-life balance, at 71% compared to 48% on average. In turn, respondents with no travel time that are working exclusively remotely mainly draw benefit from being able to freely choose their place of residence, at 45% compared to 27% on average.

Figure 14: *If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)*



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=363

The qualitative interviews shed a light on the interdependence between the most popular reasons for (desired) use of remote work. Especially, more flexible time management, time savings on commuting and a better work life balance are closely interrelated and thus must be understood as shaped by each other. The following quotes of three interviewees serve as exemplary illustrations of this reciprocal relationship:

The joy came from the freedom: although I live in a large city, commuting to the other district took me 1.5 hours each way. My entire day was consumed by work and travel. Now I can manage my time freely; I can organise my family obligations, household tasks, and my work-life balance has improved enormously. (Interview 7_Danube4rural)

The greatest advantage is the ability to maintain a work-life balance, especially as a mother of a school-aged child. Since I am self-employed, I do not have fixed working hours or time-tracking systems. I simply complete the tasks that need to be done. This type of work allows me to manage my professional and personal life very flexibly. (Interview 23_Danube4rural)

The flexibility of remote work suits me, also because I can combine it more easily with personal and family life. Less commuting, the fact that I used to spend 5 hours in the car every day...Now I can dedicate those 5 hours to something else (Interview 5_Danube4rural)

While IP5 and IP7 enjoy considerable flexibility in terms of working hours, largely thanks to remote working eliminating long commutes, IP23 emphasises the ability to spread work tasks throughout the day above all else. What these three interview partners have in common is that for them, a better work-life balance primarily means better compatibility between their job, childcare and household responsibilities. This was mentioned in almost all interviews with people with caregiving responsibilities. The fact that enabling remote work could significantly reduce subjective stress levels for people with children, is also evident from the following descriptions of IP15:

I would like to be able to work remotely since I can better manage my time... And I can get to peace to my private life and my job. You know, because with kids you never know... In total it is one hour [commute time to work]. And then I have problem with kindergarten. Our kindergarten starts at six and then until four. The kindergarten will wait for parents for half an hour, but you have to pay, extra cost for that. And, few times I had a problem coming for my child at 4 or 5. And then the, you know, the teachers in kindergarten were making problems because we were late. It's, yeah, a pretty stressful for us... Flexible, working time would be also a good practice to get this private and working time, at peace. (Interview 15_Danube4rural)

The improved work-life balance achieved through remote work also addresses an important aspect from a gender equality perspective. Both across OECD countries and in the European Union, women continue to be responsible for the majority of unpaid care and reproductive work (OECD 2025a; Eurofound 2025). The promotion of work-life balance-friendly working conditions, such as enabling remote work or hybrid working models, should also be viewed in this context as a possibility for enhancing gender equality.

For some people, such as interviewee 2, whose family lives in another country, remote work additionally offers the opportunity to combine family visits with work, meaning she does not have to use up all her holiday allowance for these visits. Although she can work during the stays with her family, she sees this more as a compromise solution, as she finds it less undisturbed than at home.

It was important to me that I could work from my home country. So that I don't have to use up my holiday, visiting my family. So that was the criteria. (Interview 2_Danube4rural)

Apart from positive experiences related to better reconciliation of work and family life, an improved work-life balance through remote work can also refer to other aspects. Interviewees pointed to the fact that the time saved by not having to commute can be used for activities that would otherwise be impossible to fit in. These may include activities that improve overall well-being (such as exercising), as well as social activities (including time with family) or voluntary activities that would otherwise not be possible to arrange in a working day. This especially applied for those with long commute times.

Remote work would mean that I could then start earlier in the morning and finish earlier, and then I could maybe use the have a longer evening. Which would be nice. Yeah, that's probably the main advantage. (Interview 2_Danube4rural)

Remote work gives me more flexibility, I have more time to spend with my family, I do not waste time on travelling. (Interview 29_Danube4rural)

I no longer need to wake up extremely early. I can even go to a workout during the day and continue my work afterwards. I have grown to love this freedom so much that I cannot imagine returning to a desk in an office. (Interview 7_Danube4rural)

With regard to the influence of commute time on individual reasons for working remotely, the result from the interviews fit to those from the online survey.

Concerning the advantages related to the saving of travel time, the connection with the availability of public transport should be noted. Those interviewees who particularly emphasised the advantages of eliminating travel time were dependent on the car as a means of transport. As a result, travel time was often seen as empty, wasted time, as nothing else can be done while driving. This may differ from people who can commute to work by public transport, especially by train. In the latter case, the time could at least be used for other activities to some extent. However, the interviewees did not go into detail about the role of the type of transport medium, which is why this must be seen as an open question that requires further study to clarify.

The interviewees also describe the reduction in subjective stress directly associated with (long) commutes as a relevant advantage of remote work. This includes, for example, the possibility of avoiding traffic jams and crowded, noisy public transport, a more relaxed start to the day, and an overall reduction in planning effort.

Remote work saves the everyday stress — morning routines, commuting, planning everything around other activities. That alone was around two unnecessary hours per day. The time isn't paid, yet it's lost. You save time, energy, and avoid stress. (Interview 6_Danube4rural)

So, I mean, it saves obviously it saves time. I don't have to commute to work. I don't really like my commute because, it's not very green. And it's, there's quite a lot of traffic. I find it quite stressful. So, that would be the main reason to save on the commute or the main advantage, I guess. (Interview 2_Danube4rural)

Remote work can also contribute to a better fit between individual needs and work requirements. This not only contributes significantly to greater well-being, but can also lead to higher job satisfaction and greater productivity. The promotion of work productivity and quality, for example through a quieter, less distracting work environment and the ability to adjust the time structure to best suit one's own work type, was frequently mentioned in the interviews. This is a particularly important factor for mentally demanding jobs.

I choose to work remotely primarily for flexibility and better concentration. It allows me to organize my workday more efficiently, avoid commuting, and focus on tasks that require creativity and strategic thinking. In my opinion, the main advantages are increased productivity, improved work-life balance, and the ability to work in a calm environment. (Interview 32_Danube4rural)

I can organise my tasks well throughout the day, which is a huge added bonus for me. It's great that I can work like this. I can work undisturbed as nobody comes into the office and talks to me. I'm completely on my own, which is great for getting things done. (Interview 1_Danube4rural)

As IP30 emphasises, people have different needs and preferences and the subjective perception of how a good work environment looks like can thus differ greatly. Remote working can be an effective way of carrying out job-related tasks, depending on the individual situation.

Also, different types of different types of people, prefer different types of situations, ways of doing work. So, if someone prefers to or maybe if someone is more introverted person, this type of person would prefer to do it maybe in some private situation, you know, at home or on some other place. Just because the concentration could be better, which can lead to the better and higher productivity in terms of business. (Interview 3_Danube4rural)

In summary, it can be stated that remote work can contribute significantly to improving work-life balance by enabling a more flexible time management and creating time for other activities. For those with care obligations, it can contribute to a better reconciliation of work and care obligations.

In the quantitative survey, people with highly specialised digital skills were more likely to name new career opportunities (access to the international labour market, associated higher pay) as an advantage. The qualitative interviews point to the fact that this may also be related to companies

searching for highly qualified workers without being able to provide sufficient offices due to a lack of space. As companies can significantly save costs by employing remote workers, being open to work remotely can in certain jobs improve or broaden opportunities.

More and more institutions are hiring experts to work remotely. Because on the one hand, they need more experts to be integrated into the work process. On the other hand, these state institutions do not have an infinite number of spaces where experts can be located. They have the same space. If they had to find premises in which to work all these experts, this would extremely slow down the process of structuring this ceremony. (Interview 26_ Danube4rural)

Saving time on commuting to work and enjoying a better work-life balance due to flexible working hours and the ability to self-manage them are reoccurring theme in connection with remote work in the scientific literature as well. By contrast, this also goes hand in hand with greater organisational requirements due to self-management and difficulties in separating home affairs from professional ones (Klopotek 2017).

Ferreira et al. (2021) looked into factors influencing the decision to promote remote work from an organisational perspective. They too recognise the additional flexibility and mobility that remote workers enjoy, enabling them to organise their schedule in ways that lead to a better work-life balance and increased job satisfaction. For employers, the option to recruit in cheaper geographies was identified as a noteworthy side-effect of remote work and a strategy for companies aiming to reduce costs. Negatively perceived were technological issues, which can also lead to communicational issues.

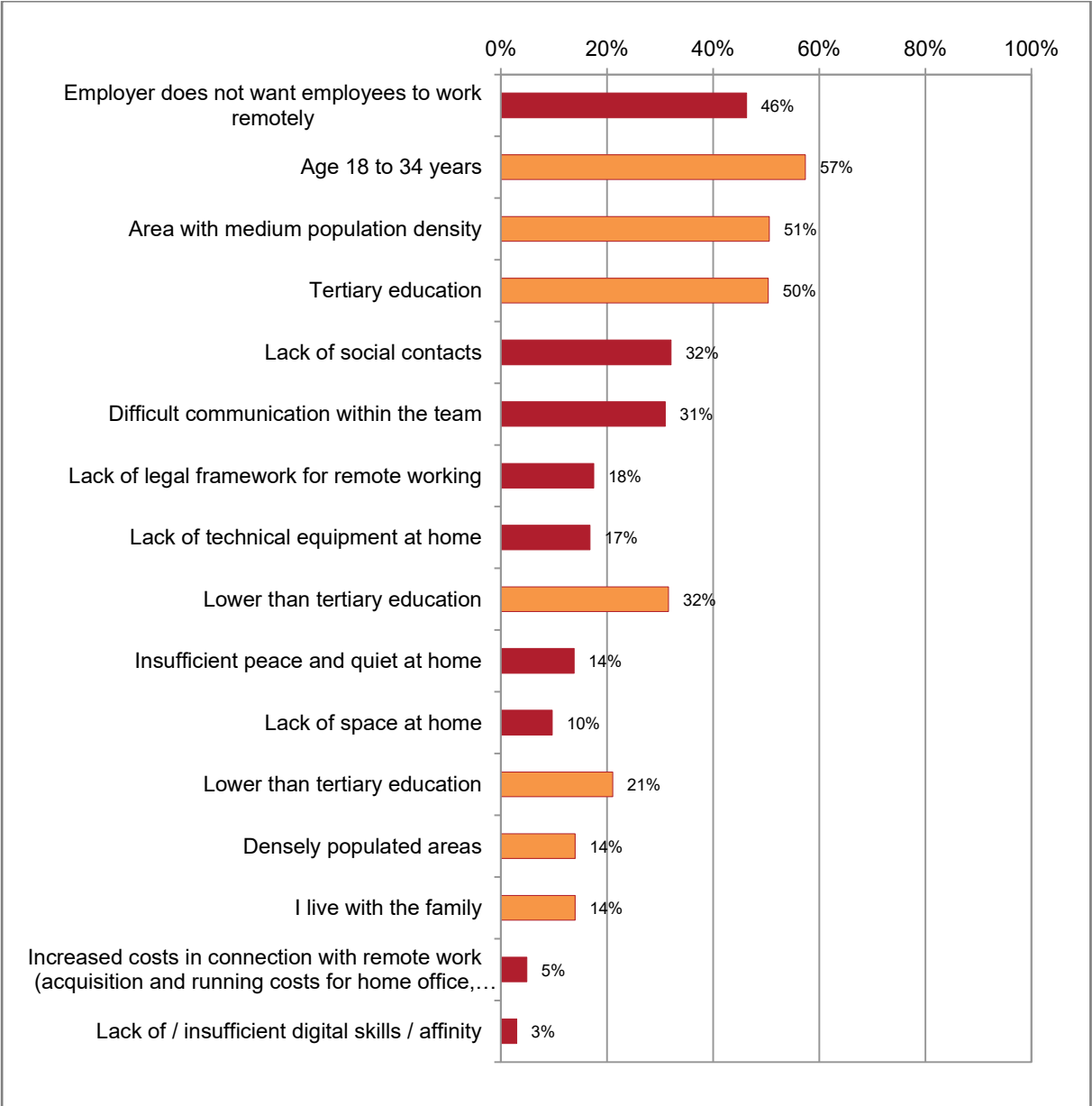
Blumberga and Pylinskaya (2019) were also able to observe cost-saving effects for remote workers, due to avoiding expenses on the road. The results furthermore indicated that remote work offers a time-saving advantage, which in turn enables employees to better manage their schedule, leading to decreased stress and better work-life balance. Interestingly, study participants acknowledged in principle the freedom to determine the place of residence as another advantage of remote work, however, they did not consider this possibility for themselves, suggesting quite a high threshold for this decision. The main issues connected to remote work stemmed from poor communication within the team.

4.2.2. Hindering factors for remote work and experienced challenges

On the other hand, what are the reasons for not using remote work? In most cases, this is because employers do not want it (46%, see [Figure 15](#)). This issue is more frequently reported by young respondents aged between 18 and 34 (57%) as well as respondents living in smaller cities and suburbs (51%) – although these findings are not statistically significant – and respondents with tertiary education (50%) – a significant result. A possible explanation for this could be, that those without tertiary education work in jobs that technically cannot be performed remotely. However, as this information was not included in the survey, it is not possible to statistically test this explanation.

Around one third also fear a lack of social contact and/or difficulties in team communication. Around 18% also criticise the lack of a legal framework for remote work. Between 17% and 10% also criticise a lack of or inadequate technical equipment, a lack of a quiet working environment and/or insufficient space at home – circumstances that are more prevalent among people with a lower than tertiary educational attainment. In particular a lack of space at home affects more frequently respondents living in densely populated areas and/or with their families (14% each), however, it should again be borne in mind that this result is not statistically significant.

Figure 15: *If remote work not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)*



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=315

The fact that remote work is not permitted in their organisation was also cited in some interviews as a central barrier to remote work. However, the interviews revealed a difference between cases where supervisors do not approve remote work on their own initiative and those where direct supervisors simply cannot decide on this at all because they have to operate within a given framework. The latter mainly applied for employees working in state/public institutions. In these cases, it is not so much supervisors who have reservations about remote work, but rather rigid bureaucratic regulations that have not been adapted to changing job requirements, especially those related to digitalisation. For those whose job profile does not require physical presence and who would like to work remotely, this is described as frustrating. Furthermore, the interviews showed that this can promote informal strategies that benefit neither employees nor employers. The situations of IP14 and IP16 are described below to illustrate this.

IP14's job mainly involves managing international projects, which she believes she could do remotely. However, her company does not permit remote work, which means she has to be in the office at fixed times every day. This conflicts with the requirements of her job, which are characterised above all by fluctuating workloads and flexible availability. As a result, she works remotely on an informal basis. For instance, if her children are ill and she has to stay home, she is officially on care leave. Nevertheless, she coordinates her projects from home on these days. This causes problems on several levels. As she is working remotely informally, she is not paid for this time and is not entitled to tax relief. Furthermore, she uses her own equipment for work as she is not officially working from home.

When I'm on a sick leave with my kid, I always have a computer. So, I have this in my mind that because of the nature of my projects, they never stop. (Interview 14_Danube4rural)

Another example of informal remote working practices is IP16. She is also not officially allowed to work remotely. However, she cannot concentrate in her open office, so she completes complex tasks in the evenings, i.e. in her free time, from home. Overall, she ends up working considerably more than necessary.

The interviewees also express the perception, that these problems are also related to continuing prejudice about remote work, both at the company level and at the political and administrative levels. The interviewees also perceive these different attitudes towards remote work partly as a generational issue. While young people increasingly ask for working conditions that meet their job requirements, those in decision-making positions often try to hold on to the status quo – partly because they themselves have never known anything else.

We need to just transforming people's minds about remote working. They just need to ship their mind around this topic. And it's always like something that is bugging them. It's the same questions, but how are you going to do your job when you're at home. You will do your job. It's not that. You just have this support that you can do it, support from your manager, from your government side of it not complementing that with something negative, but with positive thoughts. Not just for an employment for an employer but for employment, for employer for himself, for himself for sure. (Interview 14_Danube4rural)

While the Covid-19 pandemic led to a rethink in some areas or companies and partially even become a remote work booster, in others it was only a state of emergency that did not bring about any lasting change – to the displeasure of those employees who came to appreciate the benefits of remote work during the pandemic.

While the pandemic forced a temporary shift to working from home, it was treated as an extraordinary measure rather than a strategic change in management. Once the emergency situation ended, we returned to the mandatory on-site model. Currently, the legal and organizational framework of my employer does not provide the flexibility for remote or hybrid work, even for tasks that are strictly administrative and could technically be performed from any location. (Interview31_Danube4rural)

Challenges regarding the lack of social contacts as well as problems concerning communication with colleagues or business partners were also highly discussed in the qualitative Interviews. The challenge of perceived isolation due to the lack of social contacts at work affected mainly those who exclusively work remote and especially those always working from home and not from shared offices or co-working spaces. Consequently, the interviewees also mentioned strategies for dealing with this challenge – such as looking for co-working spaces or occasionally working in cafés or other public communal areas. Others, such as interviewee 6, combine remote work with a second activity – in this case a part-time job – that involves a lot of social interaction.

Because I combine two very different activities — long-term project work and coaching children in sport, which demands full focus — the two balance each other out well. The coaching keeps me socially active, so isolation isn't a big issue for me. But I think that someone without this kind of social engagement could struggle with it. (Interview 6_Danube4rural)

This example shows that feeling isolated because of remote work depends very much on overall life circumstances as well as individual characteristics. While reduced social interaction can be a relief for introverted people, it can be a huge struggle for extroverts. This was also an influencing factor mentioned by the interviewees (e.g. IP3, IP17 and IP23).

Challenges related to communication within the team were experienced by those working exclusively or predominantly remote as well as by those working with hybrid models and alternate between working in the office and remotely.

For those in hybrid settings, challenges were related to what interviewee 17 described as not 'being in the loop' and feeling 'disconnected from what's going on'. This especially seems to apply for those, whose colleagues do not or work less remotely. Related to that is the lack of spontaneous communication – especially those types of talks that were not intended or scheduled but can sometimes spark new ideas or bring up quick solutions. This issue is expressed, for example, in the following quotes:

Loss of Interaction: I missed the spontaneous communication and quick decision-making that happens during face-to-face office interactions. (Interview30_Danube4rural)

Sometimes issues could probably be resolved faster if we were all in the same office. (Interview 22_Danube4rural)

A special case of communication challenges with regard to remote work are international companies in which employees work in different time zones. This was true for one of the interviewees, who found cross-time zone communication challenging, although this did not contradict the fact that this person greatly appreciated the opportunity to work remotely.

The biggest challenge isn't social isolation but the fact that coworkers are often in different time zones. If you run into a problem, you might have to wait until the next day for a reply because someone is asleep or just coming online. That forces you to think further ahead or ask questions in advance – although that can be a double-edged sword, because you might end up asking about something that later turns out not to be a problem. (Interview 22_Danube4rural)

The lack of a legal framework, as it turned out to be a hindering issue for 18% of the survey participants is closely linked to the above-described problem, namely that employers often do not permit remote working, even though there are no technical barriers to its implementation. The interviews reveal considerable variation in this regard. While some respondents reported that their ability to work remotely is formally regulated through written agreements, others indicated that remote working is not formally regulated within their organisations.

Consequently, many employees do not have a formal entitlement to remote working. Additionally, the legal framework varies significantly from country to country. In some countries, there are specific legal regulations that define the rights and obligations of employers and employees with regard to issues such as working hours, health and safety in the workplace, insurance coverage in the event of accidents at work, and the tax deductibility of work-related expenses. In other countries, however, no such overarching framework is in place.

Although EU-level framework agreements between the European social partners address teleworking, there is no binding supranational legal framework that applies across all member states. This situation poses a challenge for the interviewees, as it leaves the question of whether and to what extent remote working is permitted largely at the discretion of employers and can pose a hindering factor for remote work. Interviewee 37 has never tried remote work. Although he attributes this to the requirements of his work, he also suggests that even if it were technically possible, he probably would not use remote work due to the lack of a legal framework.

I haven't tried working remotely yet because my job involves constant communication with customers and suppliers, as well as team coordination, which is easier to manage from the office. Also, the company doesn't have a formal remote work policy, so working from home would require special arrangements. (Interview 37_Danube4rural)

This, in turn, may give rise to practices in which employees within the same company are granted remote work to varying degrees at the employer's discretion. The following quotation, even though it is in favour of the person concerned in this case, exemplifies the aforementioned challenge:

As I mentioned, in the institution where I currently work, there is no official policy defining the scope of remote work, which also affects the drafting of employment contracts between employees and the employer. However, there is a practice of allowing certain employees to work remotely – up to one day per week – as a reward for their high-quality work and effort (Interview 10_Danube4rural)

The interviews also shed light on the challenges of insufficient space for remote work or a lack of quiet environments, again highlighting the importance of individual living situations. Challenges related to lack of space were primarily described by interviewees whose household members also work remotely or who, for other reasons (such as children), did not have a separate room at home for remote work.

Only from time to time, so that I could combine it with obligations I have outside the place where I live. I am not interested in permanent remote work because I do not have the conditions for it at home, primarily peace and a proper working atmosphere. (Interview 13_Danube4rural)

The issues of lack of space and lack of peace and quiet are closely interrelated – if there is no space at home for a separate office, this can make it difficult to work without distractions. More broadly, a lack of suitable and affordable coworking spaces could present a challenge in the context of remote working. For individuals lacking adequate working conditions at home due to limited space, noise or insufficient privacy, co-working spaces located close to their place of residence could provide an important alternative (see also chapter 4.1.2).

Also, stable internet availability is a central prerequisite for remote work and must therefore be considered when identifying hindering factors, especially in rural areas. For some interviewees, such as IP17, this was a significant obstacle.

I get frustrated with the lower-quality digital infrastructure — weak and unstable internet has complicated my home office more than once. (Interview 17_Danube4rural)

One key issue that emerged as a major challenge in both the interviews and the literature (see Radulovic et al., 2023, below), but was not addressed in the questionnaire, was the blurring of boundaries between private life and work in terms of space, and especially time. More precisely, the interviewees reported that it can be difficult to switch off from work and maintain a 'healthy balance between private life and job-related tasks'. As boundaries are no longer set, but must be established individually, there is a risk of working very long hours due to difficulties in setting boundaries. This potential risk was also discussed in the interviews. Whereas this is something every self-employment person has to deal with to some extent, it particularly applies to those who can work from virtually anywhere.

It was difficult to separate professional tasks from personal life when working from home, often leading to longer hours. (Interview30_Danube4rural)

Performing services remotely means you work much more. Before, when I had fixed 8-hour workdays, I tried to get the most out of myself. There were advantages to that too, after working hours you could disconnect. With remote work, that right to disconnect basically doesn't exist, or can't be practically enforced (Interview 5_Danube4rural)

The example of blurred boundaries illustrates why remote work is an ambivalent topic, with advantages and disadvantages lying close together. Depending on life circumstances and individual strategies and resources, flexibility in terms of time can either lead to blurred boundaries and a poorer work-life balance, or it can contribute to a reduction in working hours and a better work-life balance.

This also applies to the last point, which was described as challenging by the interviewees – the need for a high degree of self-discipline and self-organisation of the day in the absence of fixed structures and boundaries. This is likely to affect those who have not been working remotely for long or who do not do so often. When the structure that is usually provided by office days is no longer there, it is necessary to find and establish own work routines.

In the beginning, the main difficulty was establishing a disciplined, stable daily routine. Remote work requires strong self-management: waking up on time, getting dressed, attending meetings – just like going to the office. (Interview 9_Danube4rural)

Sometimes it's difficult for me to "switch" into work mode. But I manage to minimize this quite well by having my own workspace, changing my clothes, and getting ready as if I were actually going to the office. I also take a morning walk. (Interview 17_Danube4rural)

These two quotes already mention strategies for dealing with the challenges of self-organisation and time management in response to these challenges. Another proposed solution was to gradually increase the number of remote working days to establish a routine more slowly. Additionally, the importance of occasional in-person meetings was emphasised.

A representative survey that was conducted in four Western Balkan countries looked into different aspects of psychosocial adaptation to working from home. The research determined that due to working from home feelings of anxiety, social isolation and blurring boundaries in the sense that work and personal life become increasingly difficult to separate, were most prevalent among subjects (Radulovic et al. 2023). Also, poor sleep quality and decreased attention towards close family and less personal time – surprisingly indicating worsening work-life balance, despite contrary evidence in literature (Ferreira et al. 2021; Blumberga and Pylinskaya 2019) – were further issues negatively affecting people that work from home. In turn, positive effects such as good job stability and satisfactory income as well as personal fulfilment were also pointed out (Radulovic et al. 2023). However, it stands out that these positive effects are rather related to job quality in general and not directly connected to remote work. That these jobs can be carried out remotely could however be regarded as a common quality criterion.

Based on data collected at four different points in time during the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically between April 2020 and May 2022, Leitner (2024) explored in her analysis different factors

impacting the mental well-being of people that worked from home. She observed that especially in the initial phases of the pandemic, mental well-being was significantly lower among women compared to men, possibly hinting toward difficulties in reconciling work and family life. However, this outcome should rather be attributed to the overall increased mental load connected to the pandemic, as the results show no significant direct relationship between mental well-being and working from home. Resilience, adequate housing conditions and a strong support network consisting of family and friends were significant positive mediators for improved well-being when working from home, while social isolation showed a significant negative impact, especially with increasing frequency of working from home.

4.2.3. Approaches to supporting remote workers and making remote work more attractive

From the results presented, several key approaches can be derived that would be important for supporting remote workers and for enabling remote work more broadly.

The first aspect concerns the necessary work infrastructure. For remote workers in particular, comprehensive and stable internet connectivity — especially in rural regions — is absolutely essential. In addition, access to appropriate technical equipment and ergonomic office furniture is required. From the perspective of the interviewees, it would be helpful if funding schemes were made available for these resources or if sharing models were introduced. In particular, for printers and other resources that can be used collectively, the idea was raised to provide them in community centres or co-working spaces so that they can be accessed by many people and remain affordable.

Furthermore, it was suggested that business incubators should not be limited to supporting start-ups, but should also be conceived as community hubs — places where a wide variety of people within a locality can come together, interact, and build networks.

I never see incubator as a just one place to stop and to be there. I see it, like doing the full circle, like make making it available, I don't know, for my kid to make a copy of some photograph, or to some other entrepreneurs, to like, build, rebuild their idea there or their product there or something. Not just on a company to working only there. You know, that is also remote work for me. And just to think about that some also other industries doesn't have to use this space, this equipment 100%, you know. (Interview 14_Danube4rural)

In this context, community-building initiatives for remote workers are particularly important. As well as providing workspaces for people who lack sufficient space at home, co-working spaces foster a sense of community. Such initiatives could extend further to include networking opportunities and shared leisure activities. Such forms of engagement can help to counteract the social isolation that may arise from remote work and were also highlighted by the interviewees. Also, it was pointed to the importance of having access to business networks, which can be especially difficult in rural areas.

I mean, the community is super important. And that's what I like about the office is having, is being able to talk to my colleagues and kind of having that social context. And I

think that's super important, especially for people who are maybe working totally remotely... So I think co-working spaces are really good. I mean I know a lot of co-working spaces, you have to pay to use them, but I'm working for an NGO, they wouldn't cover that. Yeah, but to make it still accessible to those people. Either co-working spaces or like, sports. The kind of sports opportunities, maybe also cultural opportunities, either to watch, but also maybe to get involved (Interview 2_Danube4rural)

There are fewer clients here. In a city, I would have easier access to networks and business effects. Networks are crucial; in cities there are more of them and you integrate faster, which brings business benefits. That's why rural areas should promote networking more. (Interview 5_ Danube4rural)

Last but not least, it is important to note the need of establishing a binding legal framework, which does not yet exist in all countries.

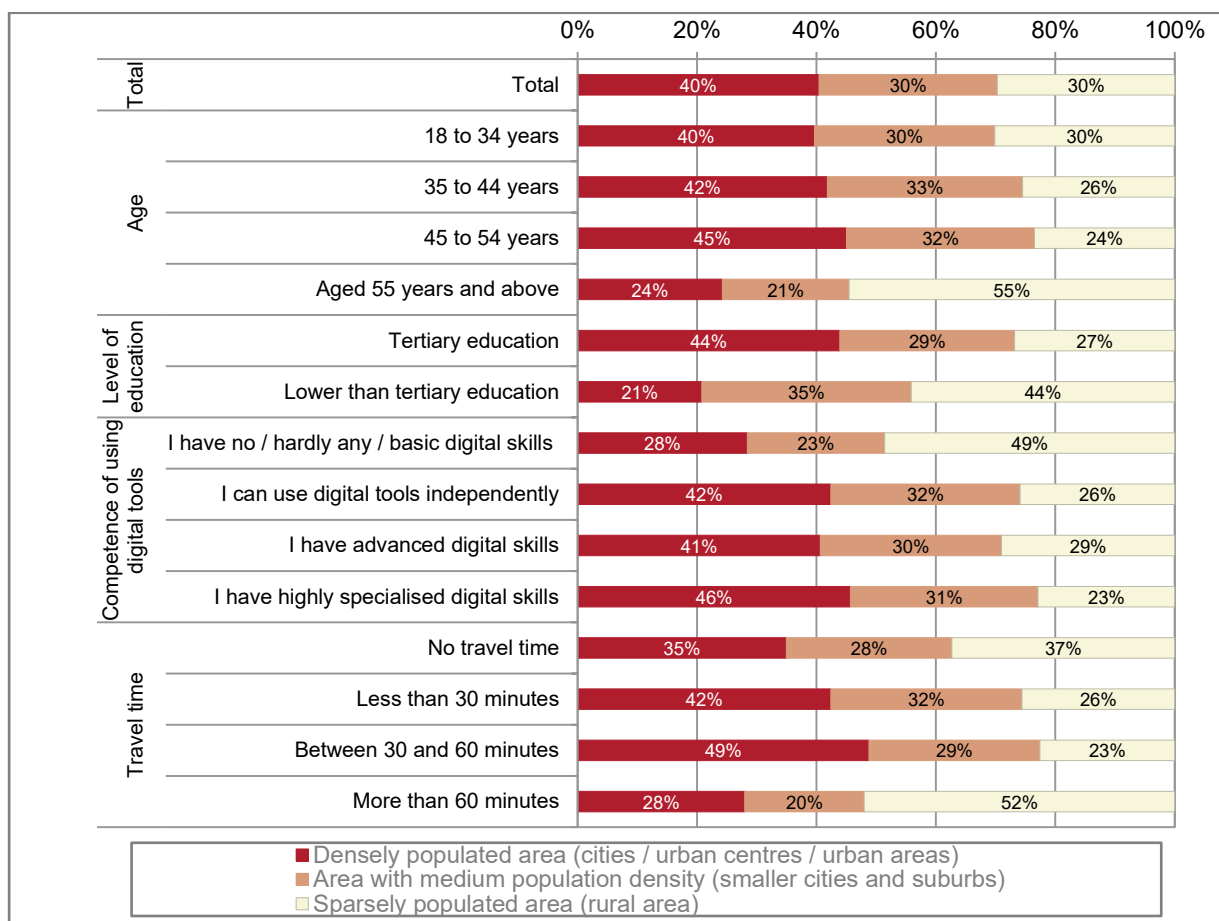
5. Life in rural areas

Life in rural areas can be perceived very differently compared to life in urban regions. Experiences with different living scenarios are strongly dependent on the personal situation and individual preferences of each person, but to no small extent also the framework conditions and the overall environment in their region of choice. How these aspects factor into the decision about the where to settle will be explored more closely in the current section.

5.1. Experience with living in rural areas

What is the regional distribution of respondents? As can be seen in Figure 16, around 30% live in rural areas or regions with medium population density, while 40% live in urban centres. Older respondents aged 55 and above are more likely than average to live in rural areas (55%), as are people without a tertiary degree (44%). In addition, rural areas also have a higher concentration of people with low digital skills (49%) and people who need more than an hour to get to work (52%).

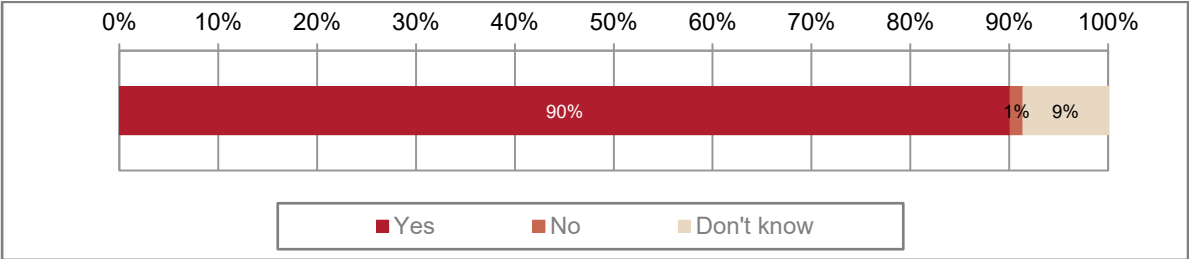
Figure 16: In what kind of area do you live most of the year?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=525

The majority of respondents from rural areas would like to continue living in such a region in the longer term (the next three to five years) (see Figure 17). Only 1.3% say they would not, and 9% do not yet have any long-term plans and do not know.

Figure 17: Do you intend to continue living in a rural community long-term (in the next 3 to 5 years)?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=156

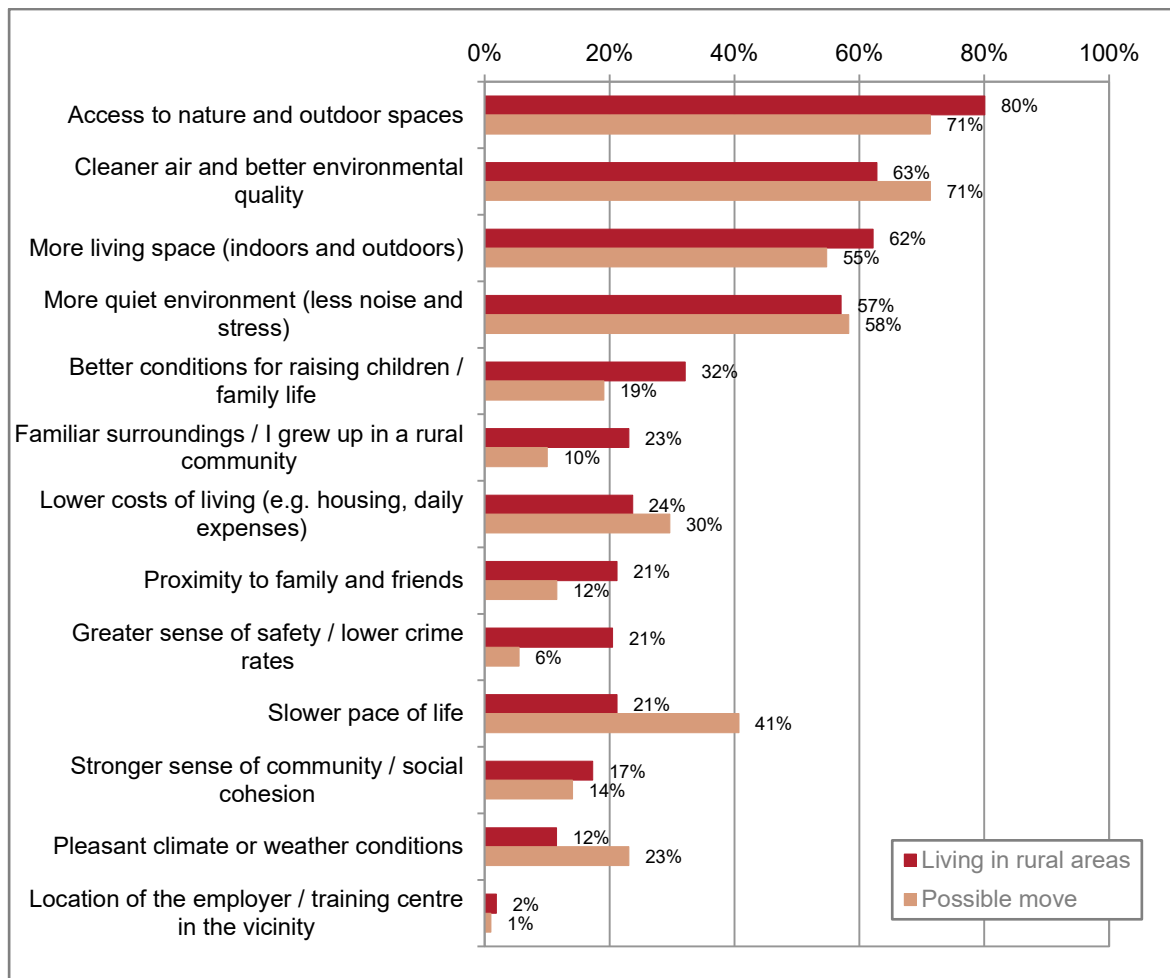
5.2. Assessment of life in rural areas

5.2.1. Main advantages of living rurally

What are the advantages of living in the countryside from the perspective of the rural population? First and foremost, 80% of respondents cite access to nature and outdoor areas, followed by cleaner air and better environmental quality (63%), more living space (indoors and outdoors) (62%) and a quieter environment (less noise and stress) (57%, see Figure 18). Around a third see better conditions for raising children and family life in general, and almost a quarter appreciate the familiar surroundings and proximity to family and friends. Around a fifth also feel safer due to lower crime rates and perceive a slower pace of life in rural areas. In addition, 17% feel a stronger sense of community and 12% appreciate the pleasant climate and weather conditions in these regions.

In comparison, when looking at people who could imagine moving to a rural area, the focus shifts somewhat when it comes to the advantages of living in the countryside. For these respondents, clean air and better environmental quality (71% to 63%), a slower pace of life (41% to 21%) and a pleasant climate or weather conditions (23% to 12%) are more important than is the case for people who already live in rural areas. On the other hand, they are less likely to see better conditions for raising children and family life in general (19% to 32%). In addition, unsurprisingly, they are less familiar with the rural environment (10% to 23%) and are less likely to have close ties to family and friends (12% to 21%).

Figure 18: What are in your view the main advantages of living in the countryside? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; living in rural area: n=156; possible move: n=202

In their study, Despotovic et al. (2020) identify the depopulation of rural areas as the main obstacle for revitalising rural communities, and specifically proposes the application of the “smart village” concept as a proactive approach towards rural development and consequently demographic recovery. Based on the example of a rural area in Montenegro, this concept proved particularly effective when complemented by a sound digital infrastructure and innovative use of digital technologies. The smart village branding alone evokes certain associations and for instance leads to these communities being perceived as modern and proactive towards complex challenges in order to best explore opportunities for positive change.

According to the qualitative interviews, living in the countryside allows for closer social interactions and building a sense of community, which may prove to be particularly rewarding and meaningful for people looking to know their neighbourhoods, meet new people and expand their social circle.

The strong sense of community is also a big advantage. Everyone knows each other, people are helpful. Even the doctor picks up the phone immediately — in the city you can hardly even reach them. Life here is much more peaceful and supportive. (Interview 8_Danube4rural)

I also like the other thing - how people organize themselves within the community. For example, we can order milk or some other products together. One of us will go to town today, pick up some things for the others. In general, there's a feeling of mutuality, which I like. (Interview 28_Danube4rural)

For some, the personal connection to other people in their area thus evokes a sense of support and understanding, which in turn contributes to less stress and a more peaceful environment. Further factors that have a positive impact of decreasing stress as well as improving mental well-being and the overall quality of life are a greater sense of safety due to less crime, more peace and quiet, access to a calmer, greener and healthier environment, and generally a slower pace of life. By contrast, urban areas tend to be perceived as hectic and overcrowded, where daily life is fast-paced and social interactions are scarce and rushed.

And something that is very important is that there is a very low crime rate. It is actually extremely important for a person to have a normal and peaceful life. (Interview 27_Danube4rural)

Having lived exclusively in a rural area in previous years, I have a positive experience. The main advantages of life in rural areas lie in the slower pace of life, away from the crowds and hustle of the city, which I greatly enjoyed. (Interview 11_Danube4rural)

I spent almost the entire summer working from a rural village. I enjoyed the proximity of nature, the calm environment, and the slower pace—no traffic jams, no rushing. (Interview 7_Danube4rural)

So I came back because living in a bigger city, [...], in the capital, it was pretty stressful. It was pretty rushing. You always have some pressure on you there. I used to walk all my distances [...] because I didn't like taking the tram. Because it was always full of people. You didn't have place to breathe in those trams, you know, though. Okay, the big cities have this rush hours, but it is always rush hour. You have to go somewhere. So it is, pretty, pretty stressful, you know. (Interview 15_Danube4rural)

In addition to finding like-minded people, some may also enjoy the opportunity to challenge and expand their own perspective by meeting with people that think and view the world differently. Due to generally lower inhibition thresholds to start conversations with people living in rural areas, getting to know them and reaching a relationship depth that allows to exchanging opinions about one's world view and life can be easier than in larger cities.

And the other thing is that you have to communicate with everyone. We get to know people, with much different views than ours, even politically, if you wish. (Interview 28_Danube4rural)

Rural areas are particularly attractive to people who enjoy sports and other outdoor activities in their spare time and appreciate the proximity and connection to nature. Even mundane activities such as gardening or mowing the lawn can be enjoyable, especially paired with the additional benefit of being able to grow their own food in a health and environmentally conscious manner. Spending quality time outside allows them to pursue their hobbies and to unwind, which subsequently increases their mental well-being and overall health.

I enjoy living in the countryside very much and I think I make use of all it offers. Life here brings me mental calm, psycho-hygiene, and better overall well-being. Mowing the lawn is a great way for me to relax, as are daily walks with my dog, which keep me active. Nature is easily accessible and has a very positive impact on me. (Interview 24_Danube4rural)

As a sportsman, I'm outdoors a lot. The area offers ideal conditions — low traffic, clean air, nature. Compared to bigger cities, for example the capital, it's incomparably more pleasant. (Interview 6_Danube4rural)

So that would be, I think, and also then to be able to do maybe sports outside more easily, like going for a run, going for a bike ride, not having to, or like going swimming outside. Because that's the stuff that I like to do in my free time. That would be easier living rurally. Yeah, that's the main things I think for me at the moment. (Interview 2_Danube4rural)

You live in the sun, you live in a peaceful, green environment. Contrary, in the urban area in the best case you will have a balcony. So, working remotely and in the rural area has many advantages, at least for me. (Interview 26_Danube4rural)

In this context, interviewees also emphasise the health benefits of living rurally, as this lifestyle allows them to live a calmer and more peaceful life at a slower pace. From an environmental standpoint, having less pollution and cleaner air are too decisive. Also, having the opportunity to grow their food in own gardens or at least to buy fresh produce locally from other people in the region is another upside that they highly value about life in rural areas.

I am convinced that living in a rural area gives you more opportunities to live a healthier and not stressful life. [...] In my opinion living in a rural area is not so stressful, you live in a small community where you know almost everyone, you do not need to travel to work for a long time and last but not least you have easier access to healthier, homemade food (most people here have their own gardens). (Interview 29_Danube4rural)

First of all, there is less pollution and more options for spending time. For me, the main advantages are being closer to nature and the possibility of having a healthier diet, which impacts quality of life. This means fewer doctor visits, less medication, more freedom, and more resources to live life better. (Interview 36_Danube4rural)

I enjoy all the benefits of rural life, which include a calmer and healthier environment. I go to the city less and less, except for business and administrative obligations. (Interview 12_Danube4rural)

Interviewees also emphasise the cost saving opportunities that arise from settling in rural areas. These regions are appreciated for their lower costs of living, especially with regards to housing.

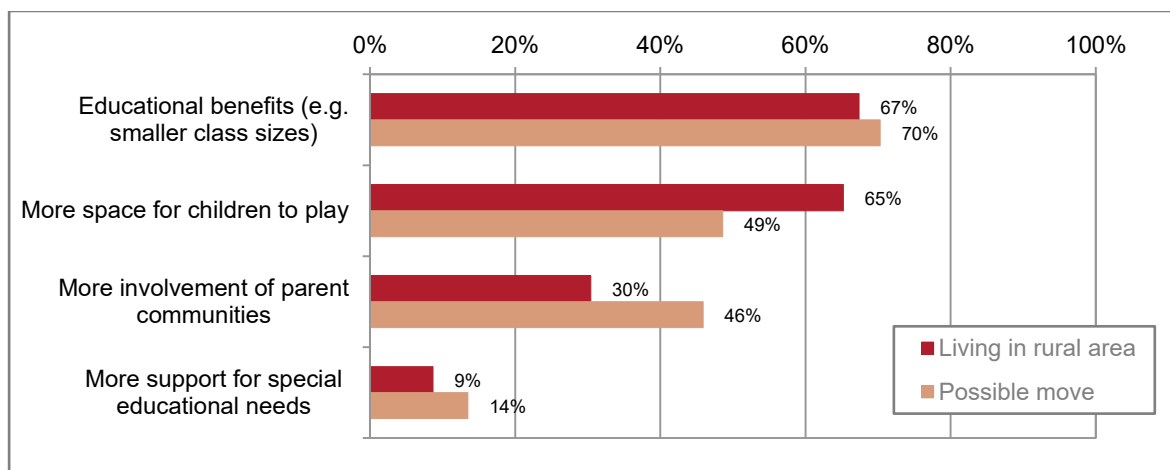
Yes, given the current housing market. Property here is three times cheaper than in [the capital city], while salaries aren't proportionally higher there. So I see myself staying in a semi-rural or small-urban environment. (Interview 22_Danube4rural)

Life is cheaper — significantly cheaper than in major cities. (Interview 6_Danube4rural)

The survey shows that better conditions for raising children and family life in general are particularly relevant issues for people with children in their households. People who already live in rural areas primarily see educational advantages (e.g. smaller classes, better quality teacher-student relationships) (67%), followed by more space for children to play (65%) and greater involvement of parents (30%, see Figure 19).

Respondents who can imagine moving to a rural area, on the other hand, value greater parental involvement even more (46% to 30%), but less often value more space for children to play (49% to 65%).

Figure 19: *If agreement with better conditions for raising children / family life: What advantages do you see in the countryside in connection to child education / childcare? (multiple answers possible)*



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; living in rural area: n=50; possible move: n=38

The interviewees too recognise the benefits of raising children in rural areas. They point out the additional sense of safety compared to larger cities, and see in a positive light the opportunity for their children to grow up in a peaceful, stress-free environment, with plenty of opportunities to spend quality time outdoors, and where they can develop an appreciation for nature. Particular emphasis is put on the smaller and more closely connected community where children can enjoy more personal connections, for instance in school and clubs for leisure activities.

For me, as a person who has two small children, it seems very important to me that my children, at least in their first years, grow up in a place where they will be able to see firsthand how the food they consume is grown, and they will spend more time outdoors. (Interview 28_Danube4rural)

From the point of view of looking after children. Here my children won't be in a hurry, having to cross 20 streets to get to school or interchanging three transports, etc. (Interview 27_Danube4rural)

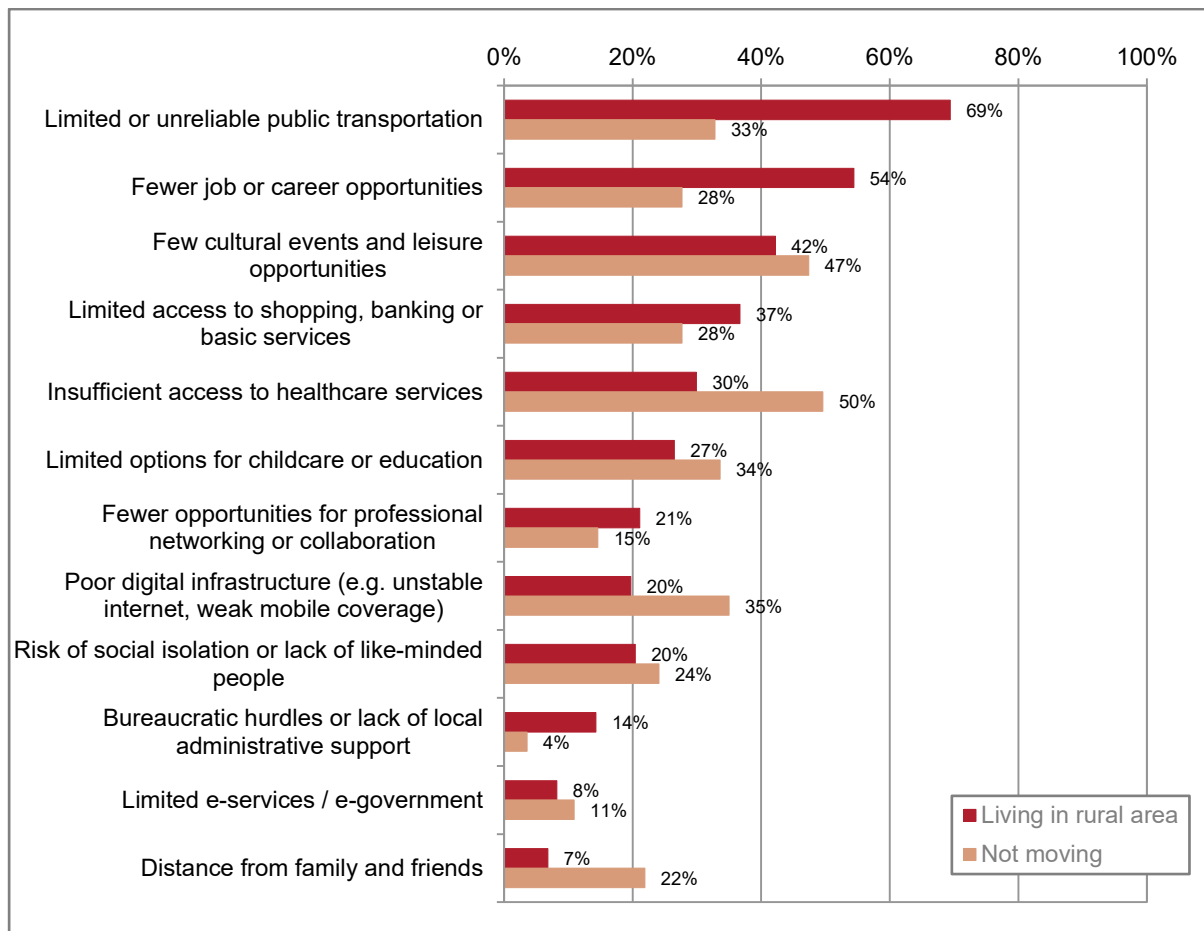
From a family perspective, it's important for me that my child goes to a school with only 200 pupils total, can walk outside freely without constant worry. Safety is extremely important. Not just crime, but traffic, environment, peer violence—it's different here. (Interview 5_Danube4rural)

5.2.2. Main disadvantages of living rurally

On the other hand, what are the disadvantages of living in the countryside from the perspective of the rural population, and are these viewed differently by people who cannot imagine moving to a rural area? For the rural population, limited or unreliable public transport is the main obstacle (69%), followed by fewer job and career opportunities (54%), few cultural events and leisure activities (42%) and limited access to shopping, banks or basic services (37%, see [Figure 20](#)). As many as 30% also complain about inadequate access to healthcare services. However, limited childcare or education opportunities, professional networking or collaboration, poor digital infrastructure (e.g. unstable internet, poor mobile phone coverage) and the risk of social isolation or a lack of like-minded people are also seen as disadvantages by around one-fifth to one-quarter of respondents. 14% also criticise bureaucratic hurdles or a lack of support from local authorities.

People who do not want to move to a rural area cite insufficient access to healthcare services (50% to 30%) as the main reason, followed by poor digital infrastructure (35% to 20%) and the resulting distance from family and friends (22% to 7%). Less frequently, these individuals mention limited or unreliable public transport (33% to 69%), fewer job or career opportunities (28% to 54%) and/or bureaucratic hurdles or a lack of support from local authorities (4% to 14%) as reasons for not moving to the countryside.

Figure 20: What are in your view the main disadvantages of living in the countryside? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)



Quelle: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com', 2025; living in rural area: n=150; not moving: n=141

The existence and quality of the digital infrastructure – more concretely of high-speed broadband internet connection – and its socio-economic benefits are the topics at the centre of the analysis of Birglauer et al. (2023). Results point out the need to close the digital divide between urban and rural areas and that, while the mere availability and use of the infrastructure on the demand side produces a strong positive impact in terms of economic growth and productivity, the effects diminish for infrastructure upgrades. This finding emphasises the importance of a sound and reliable digital infrastructure in rural areas, while at the same time keeping too high expectations about infrastructure capability at bay.

In her study on the access of young women living in rural areas in Bulgaria to the digital space, Lendzhova (2025) singles out the main barriers that this group that she considers particularly vulnerable and marginalised is facing. First and foremost, a lacking digital infrastructure in the form of an unreliable internet connection proves particularly hindering. But also, individual factors such as insufficient digital literacy as well as societal norms and structural inequalities profusely affecting rural societies and, within these, young women, are counterproductive for fostering digital

inclusion. She calls for gender-sensitive rural policies addressing these issues, with a strong outreach and active engagement of young women living in rural areas.

On a similar note, the qualitative interviews mainly confirm the findings of the survey and other studies and also identify similar challenges of living in rural areas, with a limited range of services being a crucial one. In terms of leisure and cultural activities, rural areas lag behind, making it difficult for residents to satisfy their cultural interests there – especially for young people, life in rural areas can seem restrictive and lonely.

However, one yearns for cultural life. The disadvantage in the rural area is that cultural life is extremely poor. It is poor, there is no cultural program either for children or for adults. For everything you have to go to a bigger city. But this cultural program is usually structured either after working hours to accommodate sporty people, or weekend cultural programs. (Interview 24_Danube4rural)

I also dislike the feeling of isolation and loneliness. There's no option to quickly grab a coffee in a pleasant environment or work from a café. (Interview 20_Danube4rural)

But also limited services that are important for everyday life like shops are confirmed to pose a challenge in rural areas. Moreover, a lack of or mostly unreliable public transport services either make having access to a car an absolute necessity or otherwise further hinder one's access to services located further away, contributing even more to a sense of isolation and unmet needs. In some extreme cases, even basic needs such as running water and sanitation services remain unmet, making life in such areas particularly difficult.

The main disadvantage is the distance from the city, the lack of reliable public transport, the lack of shops, and the lack of water and sewage services. It's also more complicated to go to a play or a show. (Interview 37_Danube4rural)

Access to services is limited, and life here is very difficult without a car. Transportation is one of the reasons why rural areas often lag behind. (Interview 24_Danube4rural)

Personally, what bothers me most are the limited services and poorer accessibility—fewer shops, doctors, schools or extracurricular activities for children, longer trips to offices, specialist appointments, or cultural events. The transport infrastructure is weaker—for example, road crews are often caught off guard by winter, making it difficult to get anywhere. (Interview 17_Danube4rural)

Public utilities in rural areas are not sufficiently developed, nor is public transportation. Road, electricity, and water supply infrastructure are either of poor quality or non-existent. Services such as schools, clinics, pharmacies, veterinary stations, home visits for the elderly, and similar are of poor quality or located far away. Public transport lines and the quality of vehicles are mostly questionable in terms of reliability and scheduling. (Interview 11_Danube4rural)

An OECD (2024) study examines differences in the availability of various local services in both urban and rural areas and concludes that especially smaller suburban settlements are poorly

supplied, mainly due to their proximity to larger cities where a wide spectrum of services is provided. In turn, small towns and villages located farther away from larger cities tend to have more services available. Another aspect to consider is the accessibility of such services, which especially in rural areas can prove to be challenging. Therefore, a good transport connectivity is of paramount importance for services to be used and maintained. Against the backdrop of increasingly complex challenges that rural areas are facing such as population decline and ageing, it is becoming increasingly important that service provision be complemented by targeted, cohesive strategies for rural development in order for these locations to remain attractive and relevant.

While having a tight-knit rural community is generally viewed in a positive light, it can also lead to more conflicts within the neighbourhood, sometimes spanning over generations. Interviewees perceive changing well-established community rules and habits as particularly difficult, also due to rural communities being rather averse to the idea of change. A possible reason for this is the slow-paced way of life and generally little input from outside the community.

New people would bring fresh ideas and energy, and most importantly, they wouldn't be burdened by disputes that have lasted for generations. People here often don't even remember why their great-grandparents had conflicts, but they know they're supposed to dislike each other and not communicate. Out of principle and longstanding anger, they would never support anything proposed by x or y, even if it could solve all the world's problems. But that's a peculiarity of our village. (Interview 17_Danube4rural)

Also connected to the observation that rural communities are rather set in their ways in terms of values and norms, interviewees see less personal development opportunities due to this fact. There are fewer options to choose from when it comes to leisure activities, but also educational and career opportunities, which can also limit one's sense of identity.

But I'd also say there are fewer set paths. For example, you can choose to be an athlete or cultural worker, but then you fall into exactly one club—the only club that develops that activity. So, your future in rural life is more predetermined. Especially if you don't go study outside the region. (Interview 4_Danube4rural)

The main reasons for not living in rural areas so far are related to work opportunities, access to professional networks, and urban amenities that are important for my career in digital marketing. (Interview 32_Danube4rural)

This drawback keeps some parents from considering a move to a rural area and for the sake of their children rather choose to live in larger cities instead – specifically because of a wider range of available services and opportunities for personal and professional development.

I could not make the decision to move to the village earlier primarily because of my children, who were attending school and would not have had the same opportunities there as in the city. (Interview 12_Danube4rural)

Interviewees also criticise a lack of privacy in rural areas where neighbours expect to be more involved in the personal affairs of others and have trouble respecting boundaries – even more so when neighbours are quick to judge about one’s lifestyle choices. However, some choose to see the humour in this type of behaviour and are not particularly bothered by it.

I think cities offer the chance to hide, more freedom and less burden. For me, people there don't bother with your private life. That anonymity is attractive. (Interview 4_Danube4rural)

Unfortunately, my experience has repeatedly confirmed the stereotype and prejudice that “people in villages mind everyone’s business and interfere in everything.” I notice this mostly among the older generation in my area, and those small talks (in dialect) like, “You’re not really working, just sitting at home,” when I work on my laptop on the terrace, or “Oh, you’re so lucky, you’re just strolling around,” when I take a quick walk during lunch, are priceless—they somehow manage to lift my mood, even the millionth time! (Interview 17_Danube4rural)

5.3. Interest in moving to rural areas

In their analysis of mobility trends in Bulgaria emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic, Pileva and Markov (2021) explored to what extent the pandemic triggered a counter-urbanisation movement and implicitly a return to rurality. Following quite balanced movements from rural to urban areas and the other way around since 2012, the year 2020 brought a strong surge of movements to rural areas – by a factor of more than 2.5 times compared to the previous year. In addition to changes that can be traced back to the pandemic, generally positive attitudes towards life in the countryside – especially for people in their mid-thirties and mid-forties – possibly also contribute to this development. Furthermore, the results show that the possibility for remote work is decisive for people considering moving to rural areas, people expressing their interest in living in the countryside if they had this option and to a lesser extent even considering a change of profession to accommodate remote work in order to be able to leave the city. Furthermore, villages situated in close vicinity of the city where people currently live or also generally situated near a larger city with good infrastructure, commercial and childcare services as well as sufficient job opportunities are preferred.

Knuepling et al. (2025) reach similar conclusions and point out the increased significance of rural destinations during the Covid-19 pandemic due to their inherent low population density and compliance with pandemic containment measures, with the widespread availability of remote work being a strong contributing factor to urban-rural migration movements in that time. However, the sustainability and longevity of these developments are still up for debate and the long-term effects of these movements still remain to be determined.

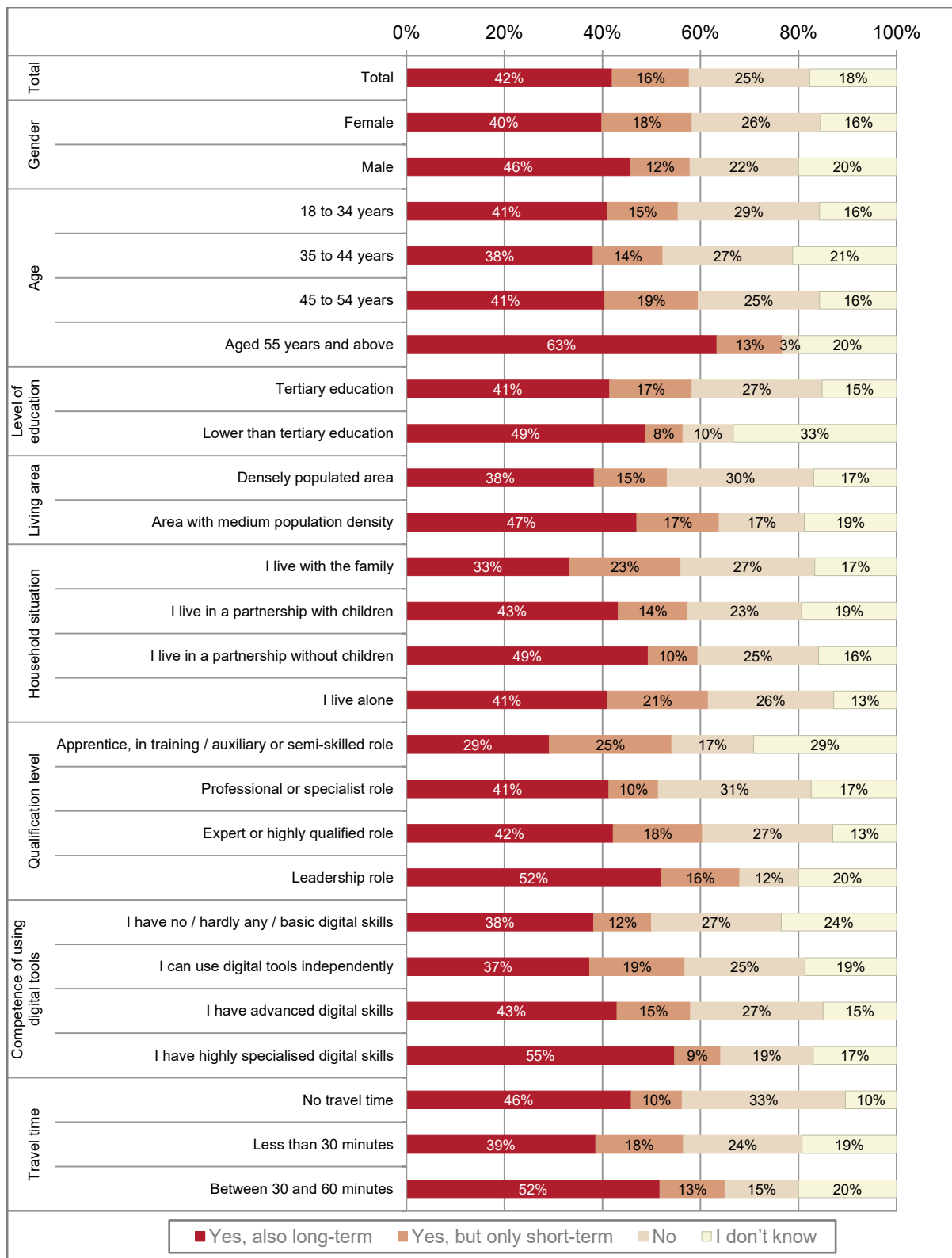
Knezevic et al. (2021) identify the greatest challenges for small and medium-sized towns to remain attractive for young people in the areas of creating innovative solutions to help maintain a functional business environment and create new job opportunities. These should be in line with the needs and expectations of young people, with innovation, diversity and inclusion holding a strong appeal. Specifically, these wishes are being reflected in quality personal and career development opportunities as well as affordable and more diverse housing options in the region.

As many as 58% of survey respondents who do not live in a rural area could imagine moving there in the next three to five years, although 16% of them would only do so for a short period of time (see [Figure 21](#)).

Men (46%) would be slightly more willing to move permanently than women (40%), as would older people aged 55 and over (63%), people who live in areas of medium population density (47%), those in a relationship without children (49%), those in a management position (52%), those with highly specialised digital skills (55%) and/or those with longer commutes of between 30 and 60 minutes (52%).

In contrast, people without a tertiary degree tend to be more ambivalent about the question of relocation: on the one hand, 49% say they could imagine doing so permanently, while on the other hand, a third of this group has no opinion on the matter.

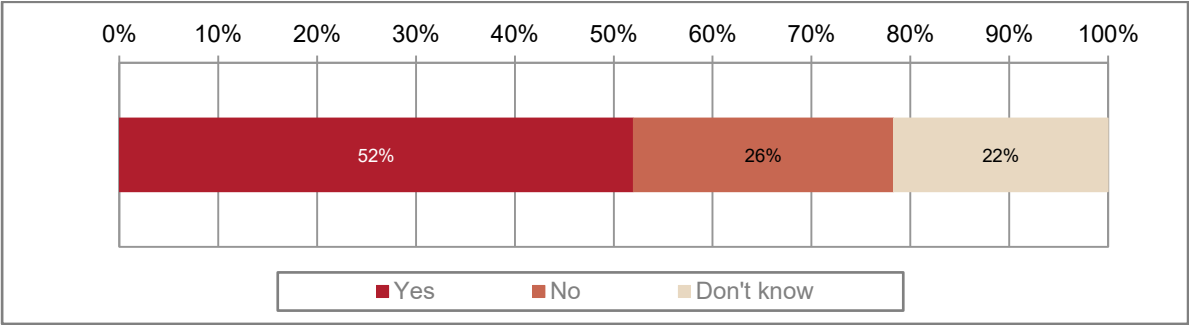
Figure 21: Could you imagine moving to a rural region in the next 3 to 5 years?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=369

If people could imagine moving to a rural area, more than half would also consider moving abroad. Roughly one quarter rule out this option, while about one-fifth are ambivalent in this regard (see Figure 22).

Figure 22: If yes, short- or long term: Could you also imagine moving to a rural region in another country?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=156

The qualitative interviews indicate that considering relocation to a rural region is a decision highly shaped by individual factors. The willingness to move to a rural region is in large part subject to personal preferences and determined by one's individual situation as well as their current life stage. While some acknowledge the benefits that living rurally has to offer and may consider a move at a later point in life, they are currently choosing the more practical and convenient city life for various reasons such as a wider range of services and opportunities available for themselves and their families.

Yes, I can absolutely imagine myself living in a rural area in the future. However, my decision is closely tied to my family's life stage. Currently, my focus is on providing my children with everything an urban environment offers, such as proximity to schools and various activities. (Interview 31_Danube4rural)

However, I can imagine living in a rural area in the future, especially when our children are older and no longer dependent on school and after-school activities in the city. I would also like to slow down the pace of life and reduce stress, which a rural environment could provide. (Interview 37_Danube4rural)

But maybe when I'm older, when I don't have this kind of responsibilities and this kind of this needed facilities that I don't do need now, I for sure am thinking, to work remotely, for example, to this near town of my parents which is really agricultural. I could think of living there. And it's even smaller than my town. It's like it's where I was raised, so it's like closer to me in this way. But in some time for sure. So now I need a pool I need now, you know, a theatre for a kid. I need now gymnastics and stuff like that. I need it now. Yeah. For sure. (Interview 14_Danube4rural)

However, some career choices require settling in the capital city due to these jobs only being available there, even though in principle living rurally could be attractive. This is the case for instance when working in politics or public administration on the national level. Introducing new elements to make such jobs more flexible, such as by deregulating the possibility for remote work, could open up new opportunities for people looking to leave the city.

So, for me the incentive would be the job. And that's why I'm working in a city is because I mean that's where the job is basically. I mean, especially in, in my sector, I think because it's kind of quite close to politics. So that's I mean, politicians especially its capital city, it's not even just any city. Politics happens in the capital. (Interview 2_Danube4rural)

For interviewees enjoying the benefits of urban life such as better services and more convenience, a smaller town or suburban settlement could provide exactly the life balance they seek.

No, never. Life in the countryside is not something I can imagine. I enjoy living in the city, especially in my town. The city is big enough to offer everything I need, yet small enough not to feel overwhelming. I have never felt the desire to move to a village. (Interview 23_Danube4rural)

Choosing a rural region that is located close to an urban centre and moreover is well supplied in terms of various available services is often cited as a prerequisite for being willing to settle there. This emphasises once more the importance of good service coverage for making rural areas more attractive.

Yes, I can imagine living in a rural area in the future, [...] but what would be absolutely essential for me is reliable high-speed internet, good mobile network coverage, and strong connectivity to an urban centre for professional and personal needs. (Interview 33_Danube4rural)

Another obstacle that interviewees with no experience of living in the countryside face is the fear of the unknown. As they cannot imagine how life in the countryside would really feel like without having experienced it themselves, they are thus unsure whether it would suit their lifestyle and remain reluctant to make such a change – especially when in addition to the familiarity that the urban lifestyle offers, they also enjoy it for the most part and see little reason to risk such a radical change.

So basically, my whole life I'm living in this urban area. I'm like in the city centre of everything. So, I'm just, you know, normally used to having everything that I need, whether it comes to education processes or maybe, some, you know, social things, cinema, theatre, you know, sport facilities, everything that some person can do and would like to do and, you know, maybe in some leisure time or whatever. When it comes to rural area, I'm never lived, not even for a bit. I suppose it would be a bit challenging for me, just because I'm used during my whole life living in this fully urban area. (Interview 3_Danube4rural)

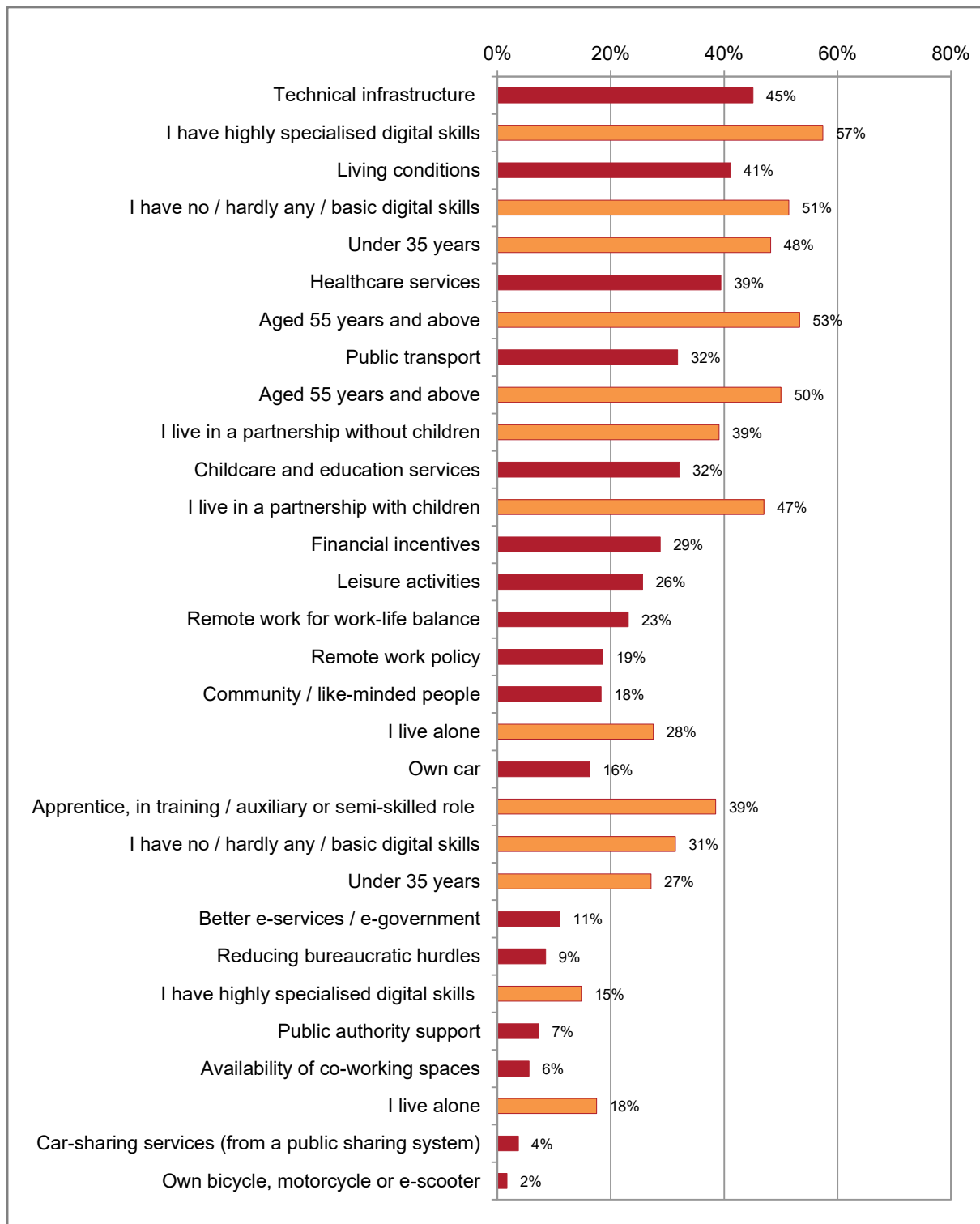
5.4. Potential incentives for relocation to rural areas

What would be suitable starting points for making rural life more attractive and thus counteracting the depopulation of these areas? First and foremost, this concerns technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet and mobile phone coverage), which 45% of respondents see as needing improvement, followed by housing and living conditions (41%, see [Figure 23](#)). The former is particularly important for people with highly specialised digital skills (57%), while the latter is particularly important for people with low digital skills (51%) and younger people under the age of 35 (48%).

A further 39% criticise health services, with older people aged 55 and above (53%) being particularly vocal in this regard. Considering that inadequate access to healthcare services is the primary reason why people cannot imagine moving to a rural area, this seems to be a particularly important issue that has great potential for improvement and could therefore be a strong incentive for people to move to rural regions.

Almost a third would also like to see better and more reliable public transport, especially older people aged 55 and above (50%) and people living in a partnership without children (39%). Around a third also see room for improvement in childcare and educational opportunities, especially people with children in their household (47%). More than 20% of respondents would also like to see financial incentives (e.g. relocation allowances or tax breaks), more leisure activities and the option of remote work for a better work-life balance.

Figure 23: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area? (Multiple answers possible – maximum 5 options)



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=369

Pileva and Markov (2021) identified in their study about urban-rural movements in Bulgaria several obstacles as well as requirements that rural settlements should meet in order for people to consider moving there. Among the main obstacles are an active social life in the city and the desire to provide a good social environment for their children. The requirements include good digital/technical infrastructure – specifically the availability of cable TV and internet providers in the area – followed by at least a minimal network of grocery shops and services and a medical centre or pharmacy in the vicinity.

An OECD (2025b) study identified three key enabling factors to support rural competitiveness and resilience: In response to persistent skills gaps and labour shortages further exacerbated by ageing populations and youth outmigration that are disproportionately affecting rural areas, fostering skills developments can help alleviate these disparities. Another factor addresses the business environment and pertains to strengthening rural entrepreneurship – especially among young people – and rural innovation in the broader sense. A prerequisite for achieving these objectives and the third enabling factor is expanding the digital connectivity in rural areas and ensuring a high-quality and reliant digital infrastructure in the form of widely available high-speed broadband coverage.

The qualitative interviews reveal key aspects that can greatly determine the attractiveness of rural areas, and give indications on where actions may be helpful to make it more appealing. While municipalities play a key role and can produce significant change through innovative and forward-thinking policy-making, involving the local community and developing bottom-up approaches in a participatory manner is an approach that is viewed in a positive light. This is due to the fact that the locals and civil society organisations active in the region know the needs, but also the potential of their region best and have a personal interest in making it a better place to live.

Also a horizontal approach—not only municipalities, but NGOs, societies offering cultural and sports activities, companies, experts. Newcomers must be able to integrate socially. Municipalities can do a lot; the state should enable, not obstruct. And that's how it works. (Interview 5_Danube4rural)

Local cooperation is everything. Civil organisations, businesses, and municipalities must work together. This is the foundation of any rural development, and without this alignment, people will not stay. Community is what makes rural life attractive. (Interview 7_Danube4rural)

Approaching businesses with incentives aimed to support them to create new job opportunities in rural regions could be a sustainable measure for making these regions more attractive. By creating the basic requirements for leading a fulfilled life in these regions, namely granting access to good jobs, many other positive developments in these regions may follow.

Complementary, remote work can have an important contribution to this end, showing once more the close interconnectedness of remote work opportunities and making rural areas more attractive. In many cases the first step would be to implement measure to increase the willingness of employers to allow for more remote work, as this is still a main barrier for many jobs that could be

performed remotely. This would necessitate a change in workplace culture and more awareness for the needs and desires of employees.

I think that if some incentives are given, especially to business, it would create jobs for remote work. And only if there is such a good business, people would move to rural areas. (Interview 26_Danube4rural)

Someone might want to move to the countryside but can't because their employer doesn't allow remote work. So employers play a big role, not just the government or municipalities. (Interview 22_Danube4rural)

Interviewees point out that many of the benefits that rural areas have to offer are not always visible and known to non-residents. Against this backdrop, making relevant information appealing and easily accessible could help address potential movers. This would also be a good opportunity to advertise the various incentives already in place, as it is often the case that they do not get used because of being unknown. Providing this information through digital platforms makes it accessible to a broad audience and moreover makes it easier to keep up-to-date, compared for instance to brochures or other printed materials.

I would like to emphasize the importance of publicly available and transparent information. Potential remote workers need easy access to clear data regarding the incentives, infrastructure quality, and legal possibilities offered in specific rural areas. Having a centralized digital platform that showcases available subsidies, the status of the local network (internet/utilities), and success stories would significantly lower the barrier for those of us considering a move. For a highly qualified professional, the decision to relocate is much easier when all the necessary information is clear and accessible in one place. (Interview 30_Danube4rural)

Also, actively involving remote workers in rural development was another suggestion from the interviewees. This approach would give them a sense of purpose, make them feel heard and welcomed in the community.

Success lies in treating remote workers as partners in the development of rural areas, ensuring that the environment supports their productivity rather than hindering it. (Interview 30_Danube4rural)

6. Detailed results on country level

The following section presents country-specific results from the online-survey that are intended to serve as guidance for partner organisations with pilot regions. As already mentioned in the methodology section of the report (see chapter 2.4), however, these do not provide an accurate picture of the situation in the individual countries or pilot regions, as the country-specific survey samples cannot be considered representative due to their composition and small number of cases. Rather, the aim is to gain initial impressions of the different regions and countries in order to derive possible approaches for further actions and activities.

To sum up, the main questions to be clarified is whether there are strong differences in the results in individual countries or regions compared to the overall survey sample, and whether this can be interpreted as an indication of actual differences in the pilot regions.

Due to the widely varying number of cases in each country, the selected results are always adjusted accordingly. This means that if the number of cases is too small, some of the partial results selected will differ from those for larger survey samples. Overall, three main topics are covered to differing degrees for each country:

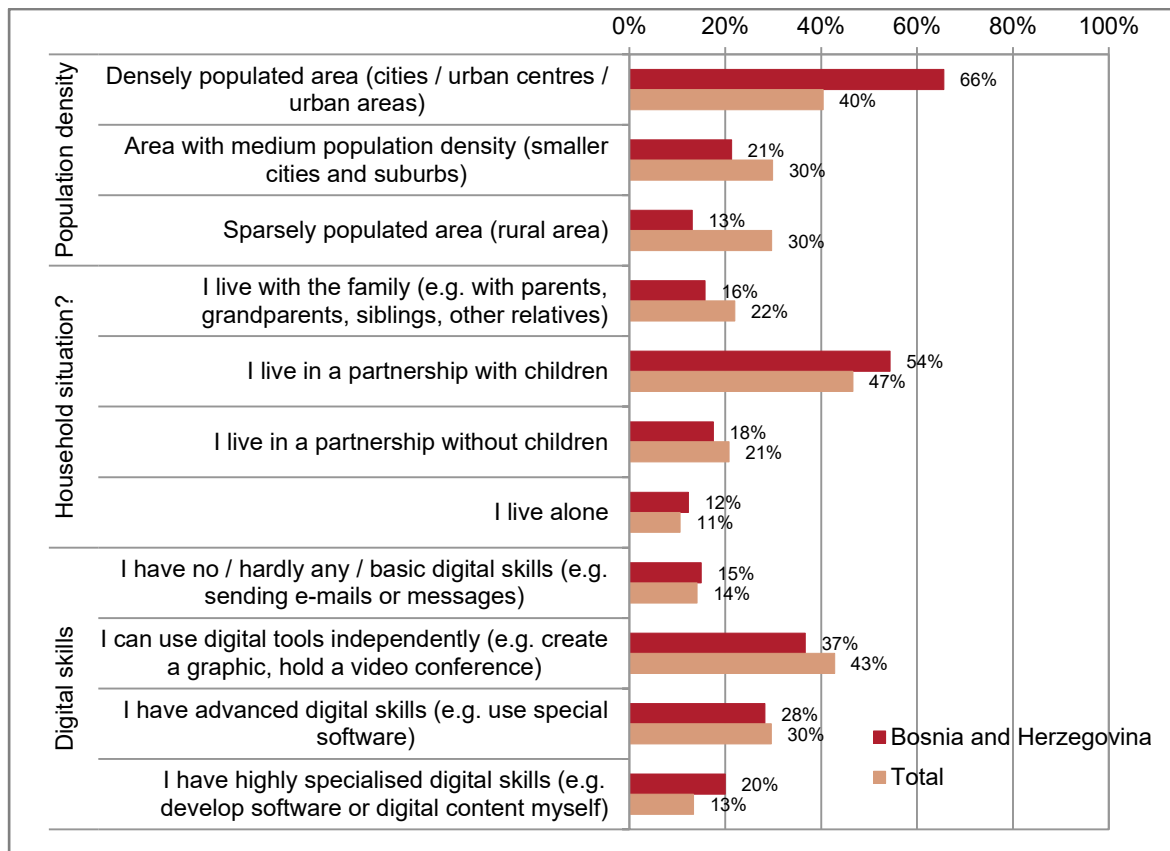
- **socio-demographic differences from the overall sample** for better contextualisation and interpretation of the country-specific results,
- **experiences with remote work in each county and**
- **experiences with life in rural regions.**

6.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina

6.1.1. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 61 respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in [Figure 24](#) below, the biggest difference lies in the regional distribution: In Bosnia and Herzegovina, almost two-thirds of the survey respondents live in urban centres, while this applies to only 40% of the overall sample. Conversely, only around 21% of respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina live in rural areas – compared to around 30% of the overall sample. In addition, respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina are more likely to live in partnerships with children (54% compared to 47% overall) and are more likely to have highly specialised digital skills (20% compared to 13%).

Figure 24: Bosnia and Herzegovina: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Bosnia and Herzegovina=61

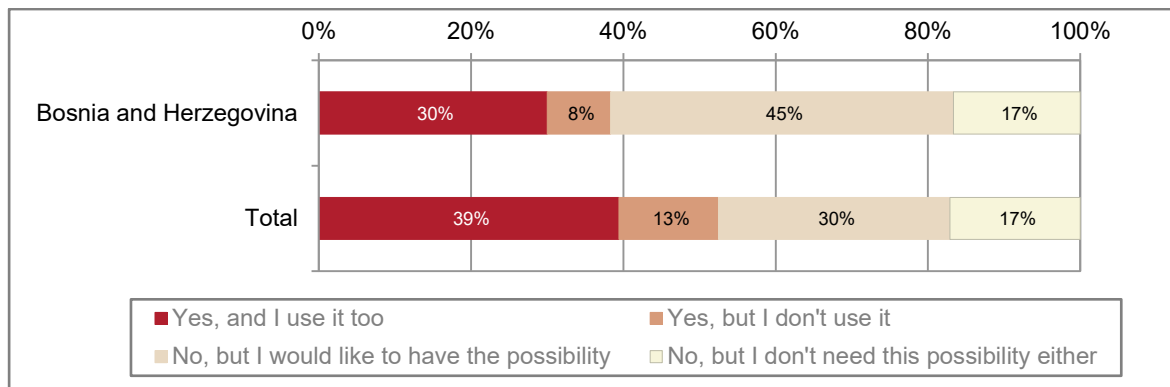
6.1.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the overall sample, respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina use remote work less often (30% or 18 out of 60 people) compared to 39% overall, but 45% (27 people) would like to have the opportunity to do so more often – a higher share than in the total sample at 30% (see Figure 25).

In terms of intensity of use, more than half (10 out of 18 people) from Bosnia and Herzegovina stated that they only use remote work when necessary or occasionally, which is significantly more than in the overall sample at 25%.

When asked about the locations from which they most frequently work remotely, there are also differences compared to the overall sample: respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina more frequently use restaurants, bars and similar establishments, as well as co-working spaces. However, it should be noted that the number of respondents from this country is very low at 18, which calls for particular caution when interpreting these results.

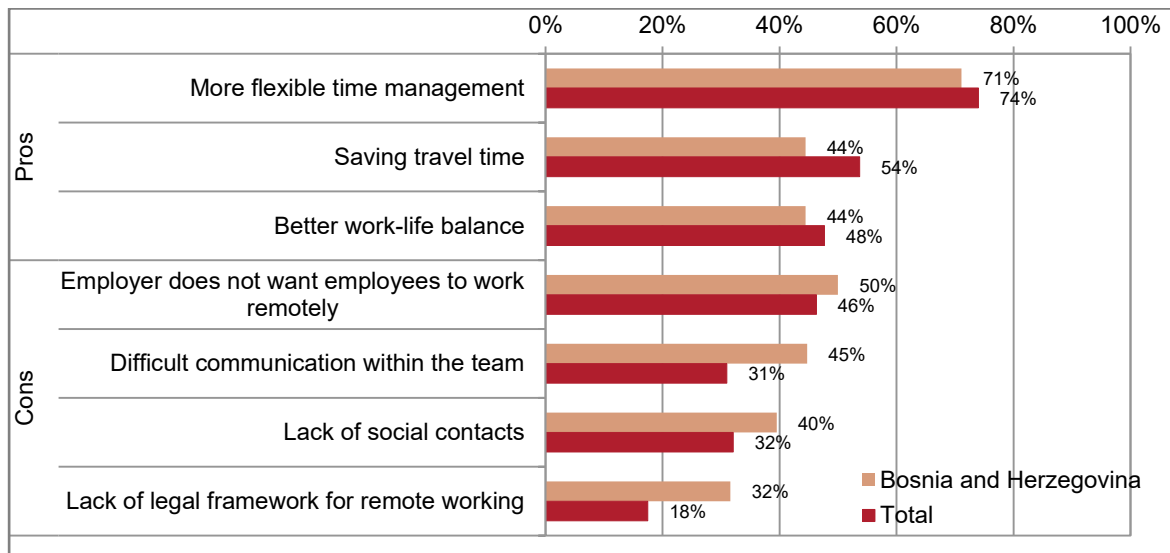
Figure 25: Bosnia and Herzegovina: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Bosnia and Herzegovina=60

What are the reasons for and against remote work? When it comes to the positive aspects, there are hardly any differences between the overall sample and respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina: for both groups, flexible time management is the top priority, followed by time savings due to the elimination of commuting time and a better work-life balance. However, there are some notable country-specific differences when it comes to the negative aspects: respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina are particularly likely to see problems with communication within their teams (48% to 31%) and a lack of legal framework (32% to 18%, see Figure 26).

Figure 26: Bosnia and Herzegovina: If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely? / If not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely?



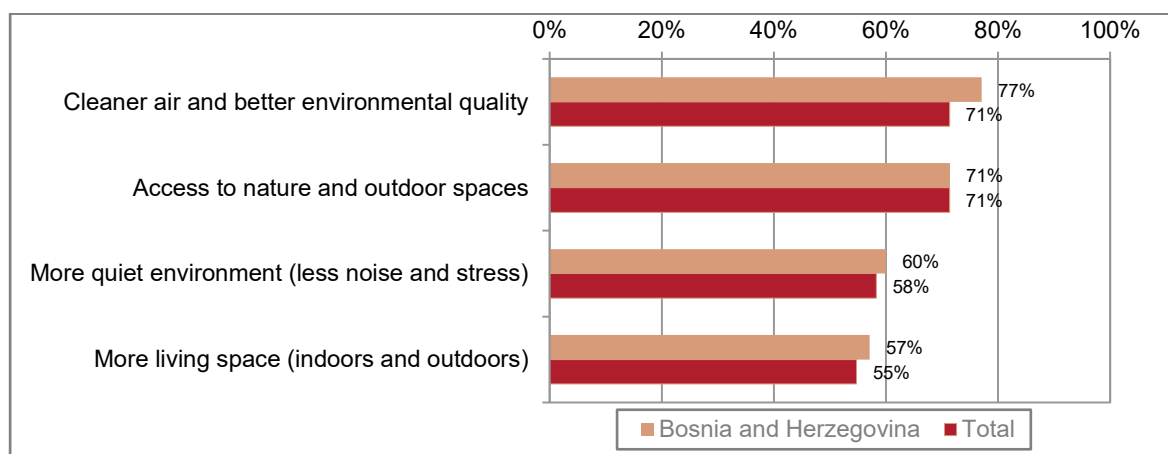
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Pros: Total: n=363; Bosnia and Herzegovina: n=45; Cons: Total: n=315; Bosnia and Herzegovina: n=42

6.1.3. Bosnia and Herzegovina: Life in rural areas

Of the eight respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina who live in rural areas, seven can imagine continuing to live in such an area for the next three to five years. Of those who do not live in a rural area, 55% (29 out of 53 people) could imagine moving to such an area in the next three to five years on a long-term basis, and a further 11% (6 people) could imagine doing so at least in the short term. This essentially corresponds to the responses from the overall sample.

The reasons most frequently cited by both groups for why they would consider moving to a rural area were better access to nature and outdoor areas, cleaner air and better environmental quality, more living space (both indoors and outdoors) and a quieter environment with less noise and stress (see Figure 27).

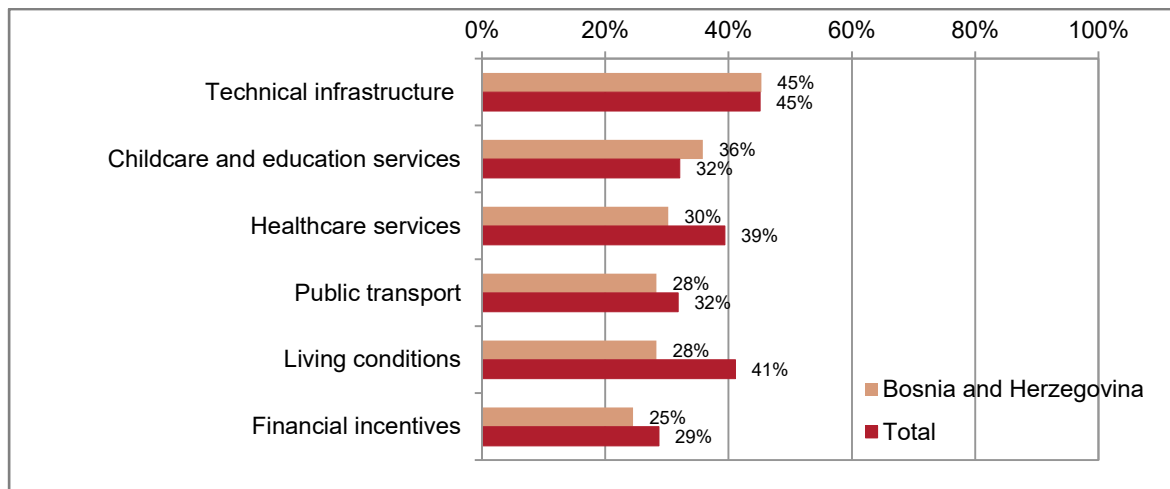
Figure 27: Bosnia and Herzegovina: Possible move to rural areas: What are in your view the main advantages of living in the countryside?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=202; Bosnia and Herzegovina: n=35

What would people who are currently not living in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? First and foremost, this mainly concerns a working technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet connection and mobile phone coverage) both in the overall sample as well as for respondents from Bosnia and Herzegovina. For the latter, the second most important factor is the need for improvements in childcare and educational opportunities, which could be related to the fact that they are more likely to live in partnerships with children than the overall sample. In addition, better health services, more reliable public transport and financial incentives (e.g. relocation allowances or tax breaks) would be strong motivating factors for both groups to move to rural areas. However, the improvement of living conditions seems to carry more importance in the overall sample compared to Bosnia and Herzegovina (see Figure 28).

Figure 28: *Bosnia and Herzegovina: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?*



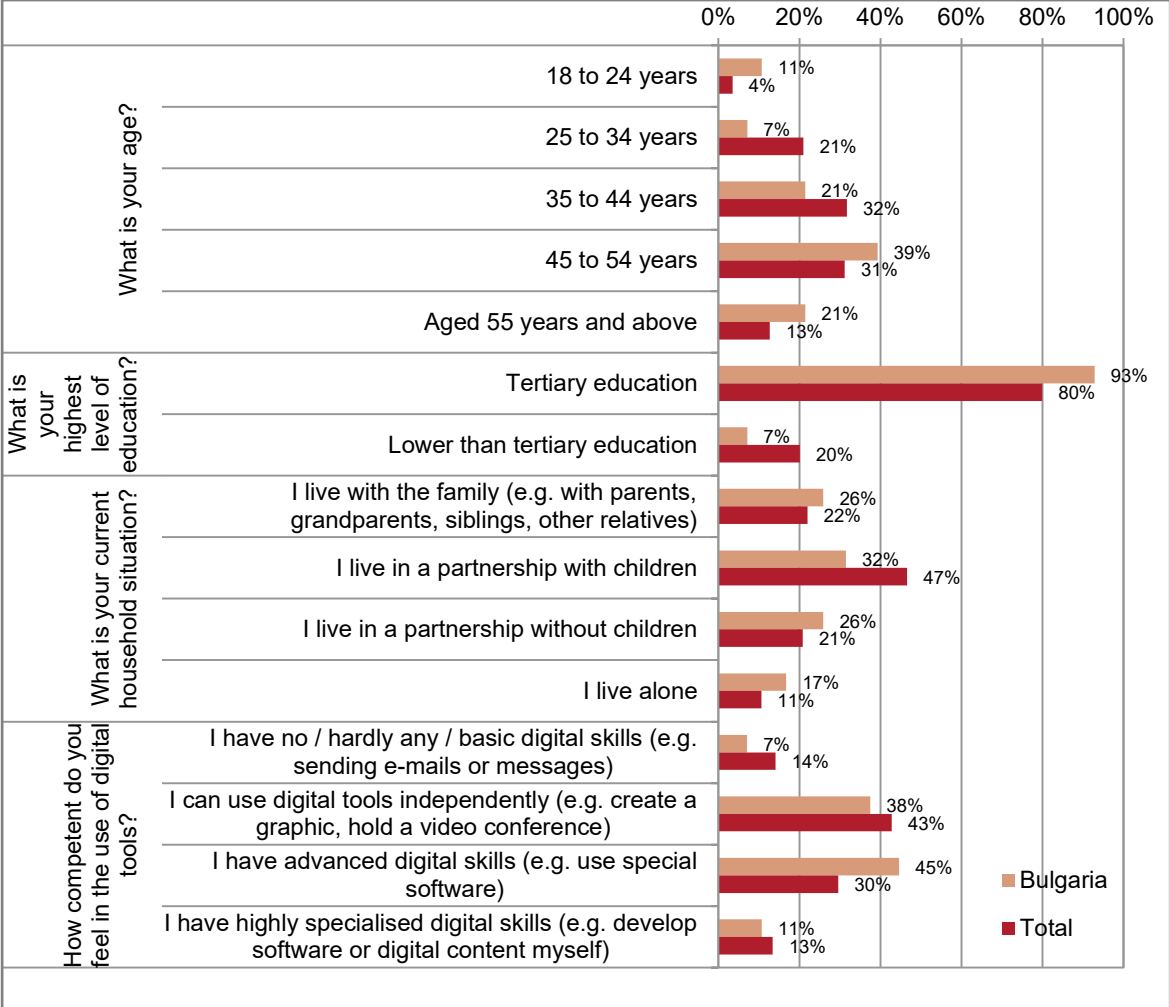
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Bosnia and Herzegovina: n=53

6.2. Bulgaria

6.2.1. Bulgaria: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 56 respondents from Bulgaria differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in [Figure 29](#) below, there are differences in regards to age and education: in Bulgaria, more than a fifth of respondents are aged 55 and over, compared to only 13% in the overall sample, and 93% have tertiary education, compared to 80% overall. On the other hand, respondents from Bulgaria are less likely to live in partnerships with children (32% compared to 47% overall) and are more likely to have advanced digital skills (47% compared to 30% overall).

Figure 29: Bulgaria: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Bulgaria=56

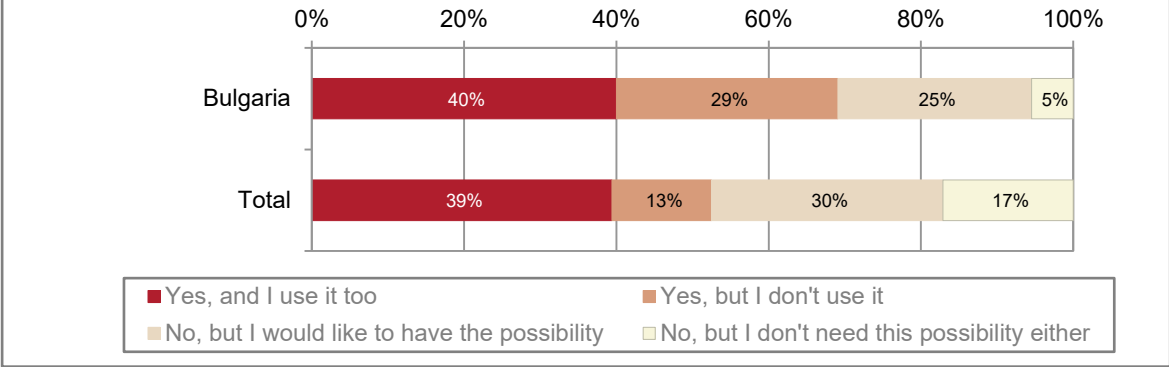
6.2.2. Bulgaria: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the overall sample, respondents from Bulgaria are more likely to have the opportunity to work remotely, at 69% to 53%. At 40%, the usage rate in Bulgaria is similar to the overall rate. However, a significantly higher proportion of respondents from Bulgaria (29% to 13% overall) have the opportunity to work remotely, but choose not to do so (see Figure 30).

In terms of intensity of use, around half (10 out of 22 people) from Bulgaria stated that they only use remote work when necessary or occasionally, which is significantly more than in the overall sample at 25%.

When asked about the locations from which respondents would like to work remotely, there are also differences compared to the overall sample: Respondents from Bulgaria would more often like to have the option of using co-working spaces and/or working remotely from public places such as parks – however, it should be noted due to the low number of respondents from this country at 22, these results are merely of limited significance.

Figure 30: Bulgaria: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?

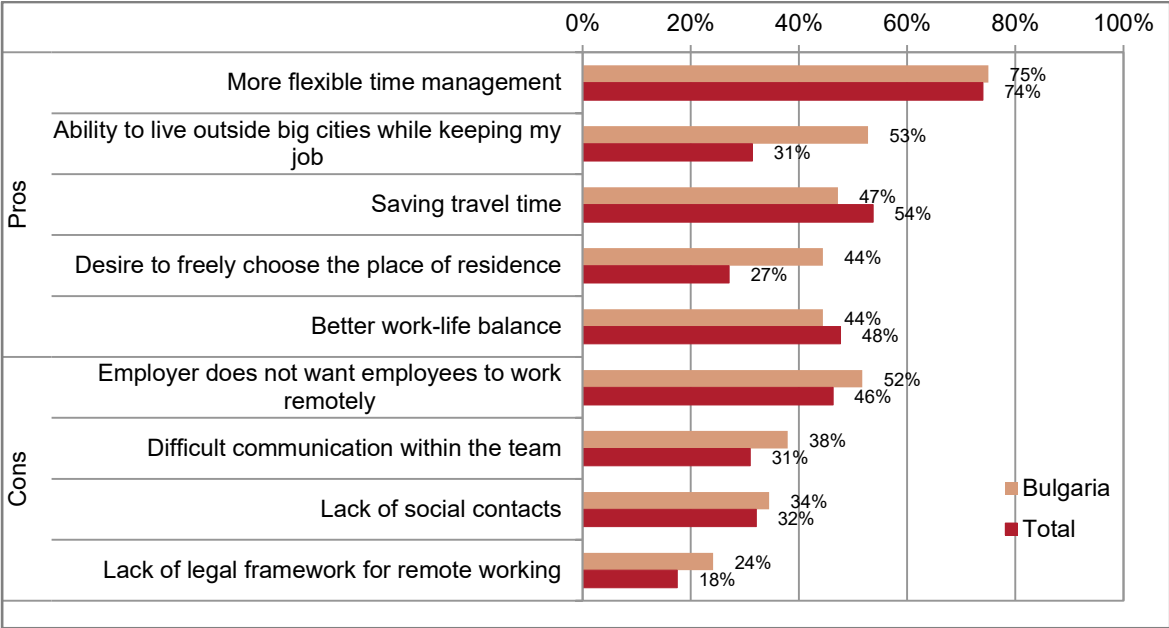


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Bulgaria=55

What are the reasons for and against remote work? When it comes to the positive aspects, there are only minor differences between the top three reasons in the overall sample compared to the assessment of Bulgarian respondents, namely more flexible time management, time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, and a better work-life balance. However, for respondents from Bulgaria, the opportunity to live outside the city and still keep a job there (53% to 31% overall) and the desire to be able to choose where to live (44% to 27% overall) play an above-average role compared to all respondents.

In contrast, there are only minor differences in the negative aspects: respondents from Bulgaria are slightly more likely to see problems in communicating with the team (38% to 31% overall) and in the lack of a legal framework for remote work (24% to 18% overall) (see [Figure 31](#)).

Figure 31: Bulgaria: If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely? / If not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Pros: Total: n=363; Bulgaria: n=36; Cons: Total: n=315; Bulgaria=33

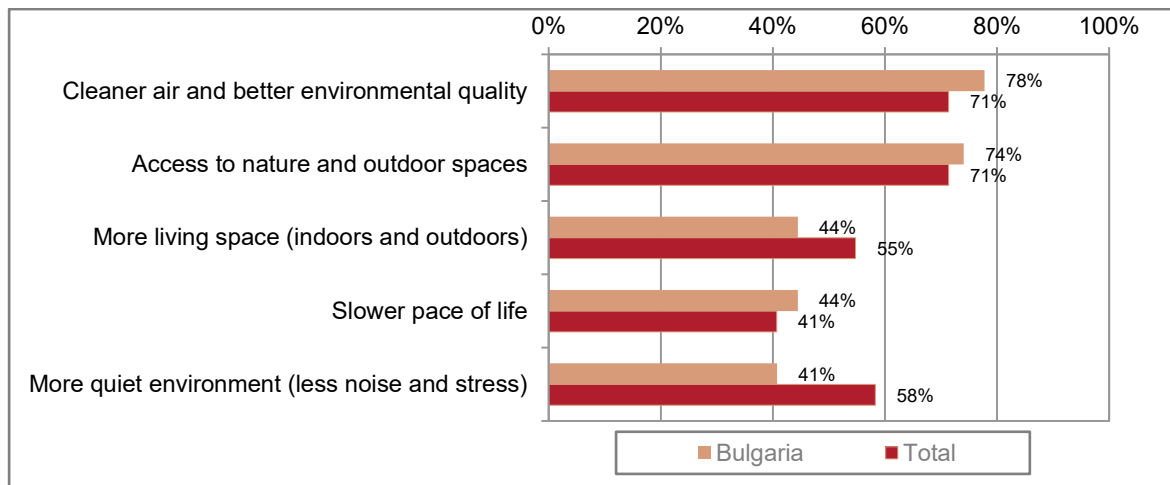
6.2.3. Bulgaria: Life in rural areas

Of the 14 respondents from Bulgaria who currently live in rural areas, all can imagine continuing to live in such an area for the next three to five years. Of those who do not live in a rural area, 39% (16 out of 41 people) could imagine moving to such an area in the long term in the next three to five years, and another 27% (11 people) could imagine doing so at least in the short term. This essentially corresponds to the responses from the overall sample.

The reasons most frequently cited by both groups for why they could imagine moving to a rural area were cleaner air and better environmental quality, access to nature and outdoor areas and a slower pace of life. For Bulgarian respondents, having more living space (both indoors and outdoors) and a quieter environment with less noise and stress also rank among the top advantages of living in the countryside, but apply to a slightly smaller respondent group (see Figure 32).

In terms of negative aspects, inadequate access to healthcare services stands out in particular: Nine of the 14 respondents from Bulgaria who live in rural areas and want to stay there see this as a problem, and of the 18 respondents who cannot imagine moving to a rural region or would only do so for a short period of time, 11 cite this aspect as the reason for their preference.

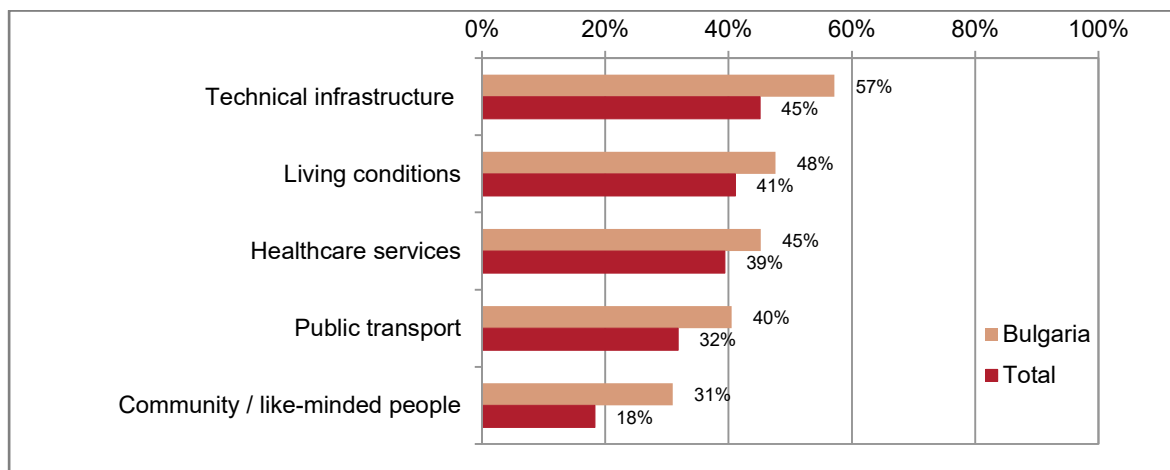
Figure 32: Bulgaria: Possible move to rural areas: What are in your view the main advantages of living in the countryside?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=202; Bulgaria: n=27

What would people who are currently not living in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? First and foremost, this involves a working technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet connection and mobile phone coverage), better living conditions and healthcare services, and more reliable public transport – all aspects where Bulgarian respondents show slightly above-average levels of agreement. Furthermore, for respondents from Bulgaria, it is also important that they find like-minded people or a community in the countryside, with 31% to 18% saying so overall (see Figure 33).

Figure 33: Bulgaria: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?



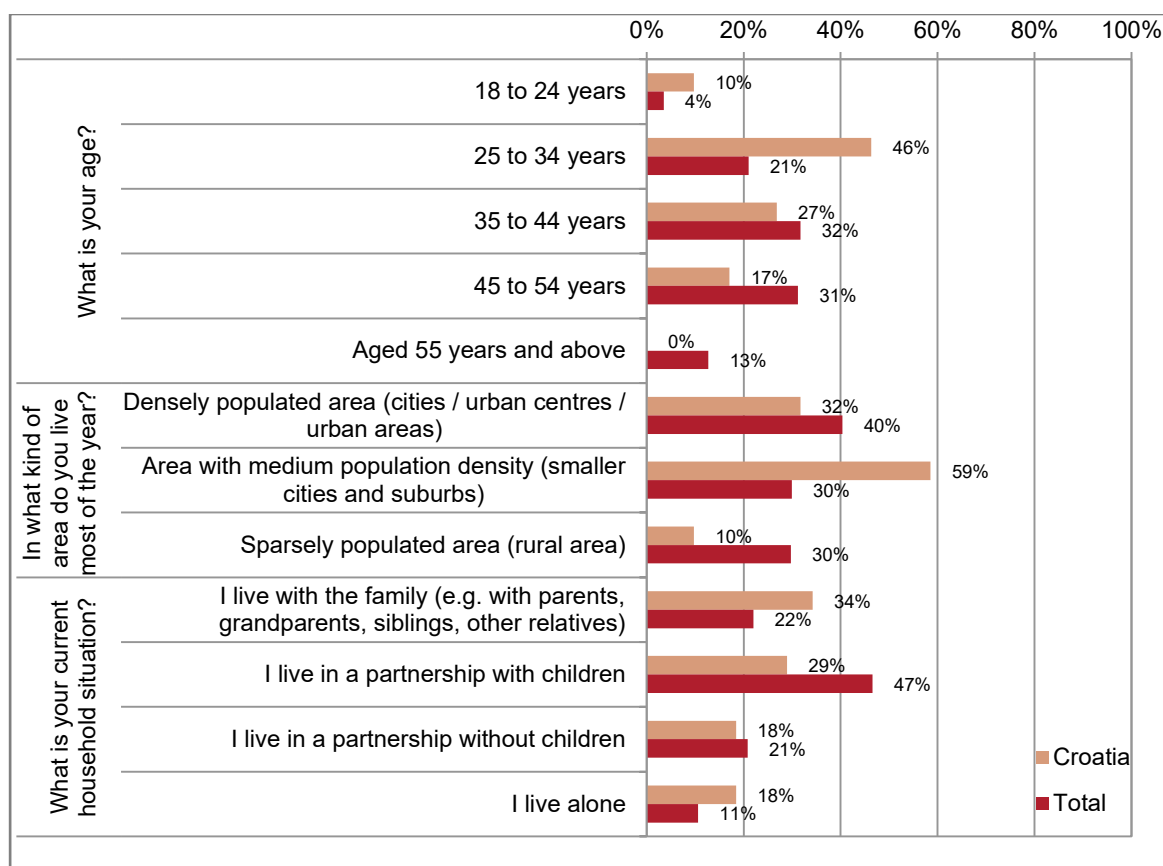
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Bulgaria: n=42

6.3. Croatia

6.3.1. Croatia: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 41 respondents from Croatia differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in Figure 34 below, significant differences occur in regard to age, the regional distribution and the household situation. In Croatia, 56% of respondents are under 35, compared to only a quarter of the overall sample. This is also likely to result in a different household structure: respondents from Croatia live more often with other family members (34% compared to 22% overall) or alone (18% compared to 11% overall), and more seldomly in partnerships with children (29% compared to 47% overall). In addition, only 10% of Croatian respondents currently live in rural areas, compared to 30% overall.

Figure 34: Croatia: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample



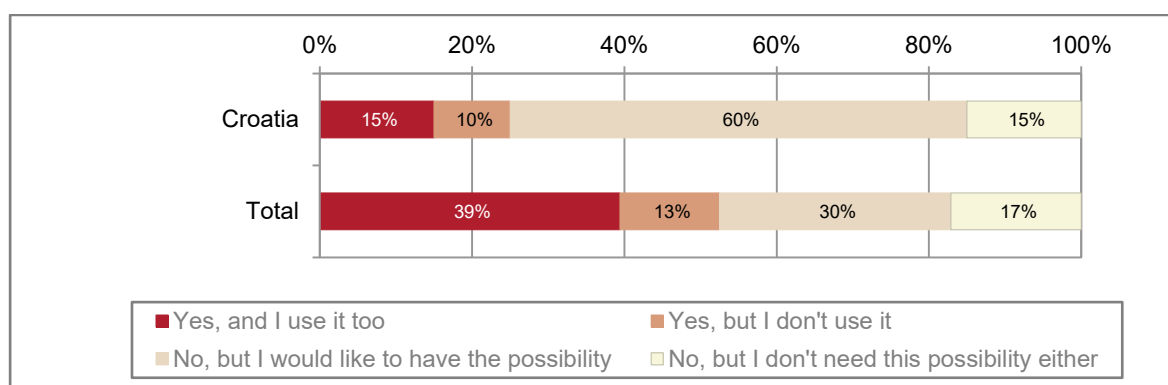
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Croatia=41

6.3.2. Croatia: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the 39% of the total sample, only 15% (6 out of 40 people) from Croatia use remote work. However, a striking 60% (24 people) would like to have the option to do so, a proportion that is almost twice as high as in the overall sample (see Figure 35).

In terms of frequency of use, 4 of the 6 people from Croatia only use remote work when necessary or occasionally. Due to the small number of cases, no further detailed analyses could be conducted on this matter.

Figure 35: Croatia: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?

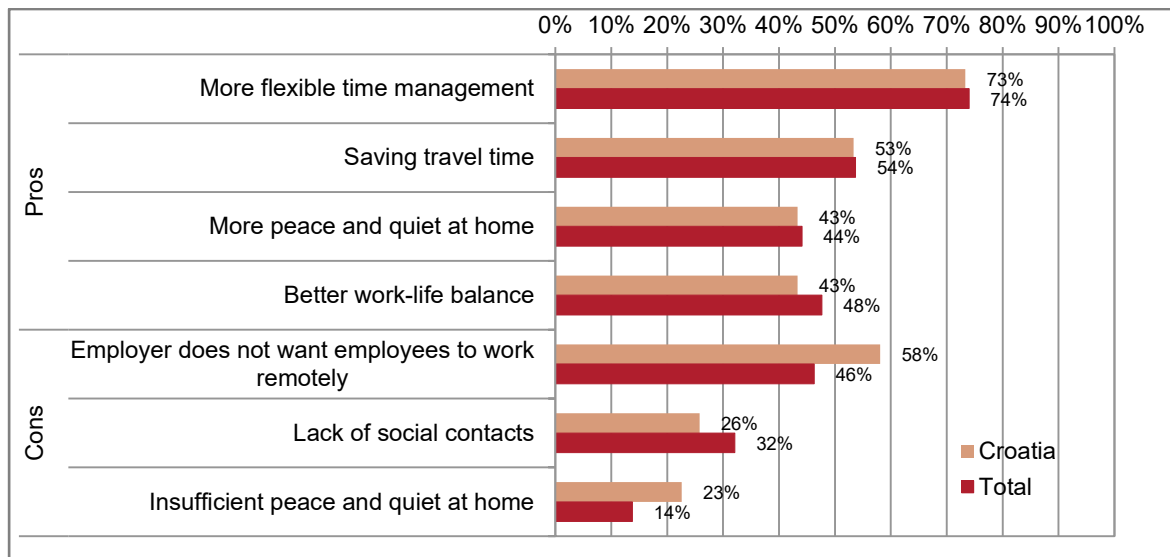


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Croatia=40

What are the reasons for and against working remotely? When it comes to the positive aspects, there are only minor differences in the top reasons between the Croatian and the overall sample, i.e. more flexible time management, time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, a better work-life balance and a quieter environment at home.

On the other hand, there are greater differences when it comes to the negative aspects associated with remote work: 58% of respondents from Croatia report that remote work is not desired by their employer, compared to 46% overall. In addition, 23% of respondents from Croatia report that they do not have enough space or peace and quiet to work from home, compared to 14% overall (see Figure 36).

Figure 36: Croatia: If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely? / If not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Pros: Total: n=363; Croatia: n=33; Cons: Total: n=315; Croatia=34

6.3.3. Croatia: Life in rural areas

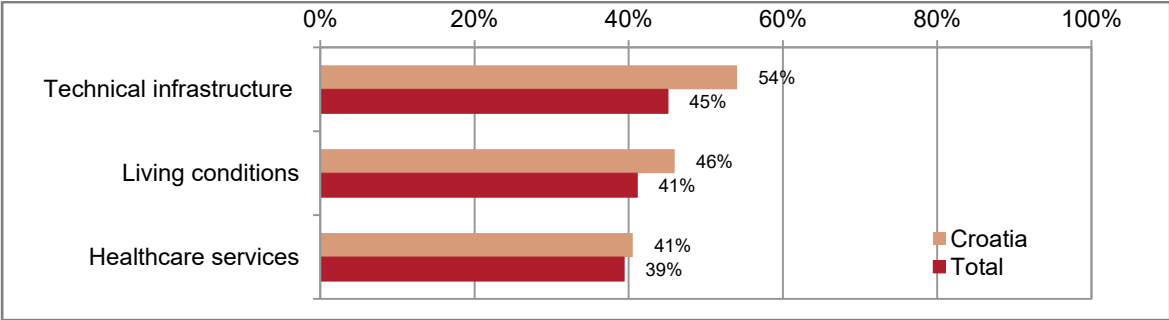
Of the four Croatian respondents are currently living in rural areas, all plan to continue living in such an area for the next three to five years. Of those who are currently not living in a rural area, 41% (14 out of 34 people) could imagine moving to such an area in the next three to five years on a long-term basis, and further 12% (4 people) would consider such a move at least in the short term. This essentially corresponds to the responses from the overall sample.

The reasons most frequently cited by both groups as to why they would consider moving to a rural area were access to nature and outdoor areas, cleaner air and better environmental quality, more living space (both indoors and outdoors), a quieter environment with less noise and stress and a slower pace of life.

In terms of negative aspects, inadequate access to healthcare services stands out in particular: 8 of the 14 respondents from Croatia who cannot imagine moving to a rural region, or can only imagine doing so in the short term, cite this as a reason.

What would people who are currently not living in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? First and foremost, both the overall survey sample and the Croatian sample cited technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet connection and mobile phone coverage), followed by better living conditions and healthcare services as the main points for improvement (see Figure 37).

Figure 37: Croatia: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?



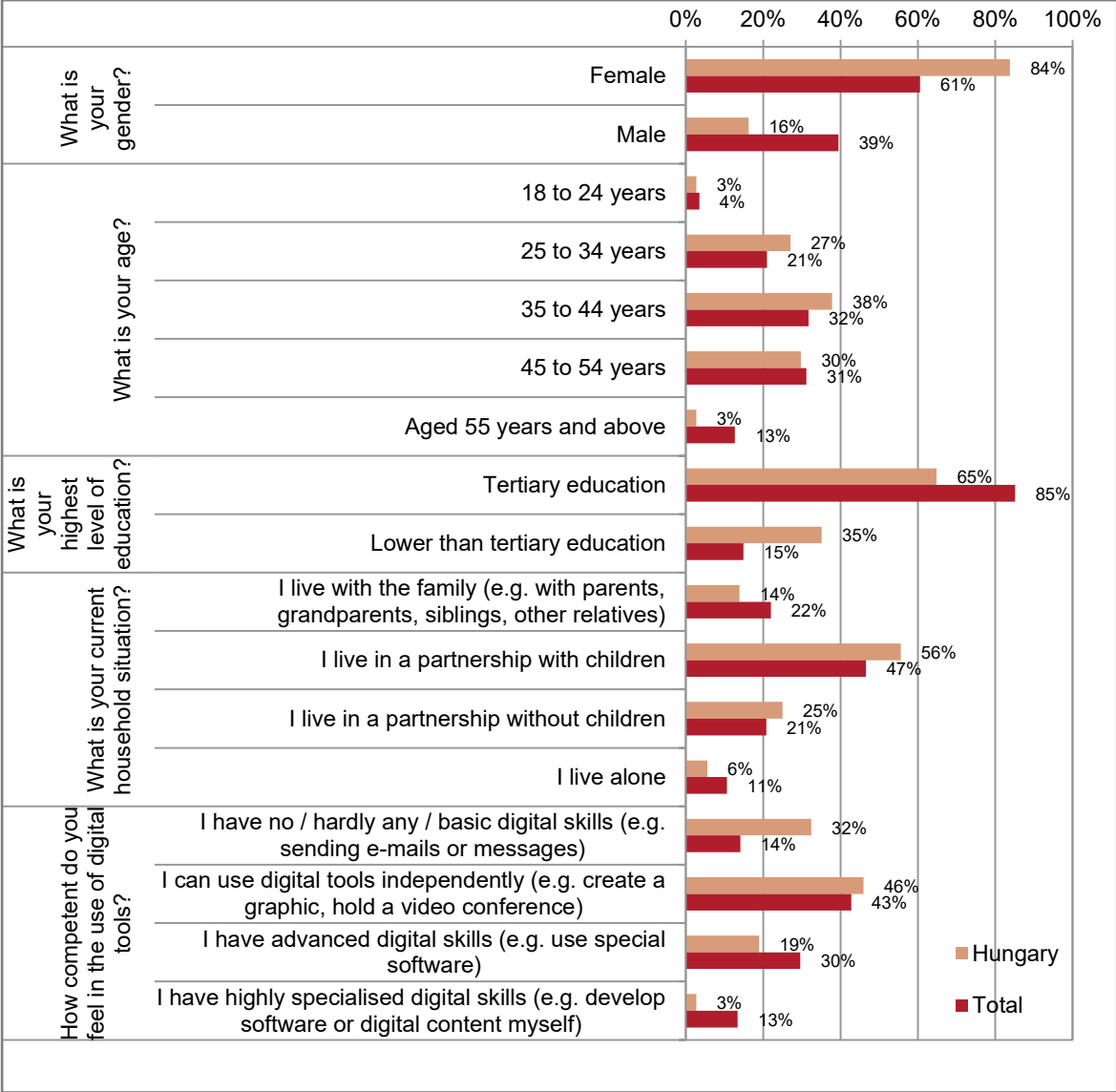
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Croatia: n=37

6.4. Hungary

6.4.1. Hungary: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 37 respondents from Hungary differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in Figure 38 below, some socio-demographic characteristics diverge quite strongly from the overall distribution. In Hungary, more women have participated in the survey compared to the overall sample (84% to 61%). Furthermore, respondents from Hungary are more likely than in total to not have tertiary education (35% to 15%), to live with a partner and children in a shared household (56% to 47%), and to have low to medium digital skills (78% to 57%). In contrast, older people aged 55 and over are less common in the Hungarian sample (3% to 13% overall).

Figure 38: Hungary: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample

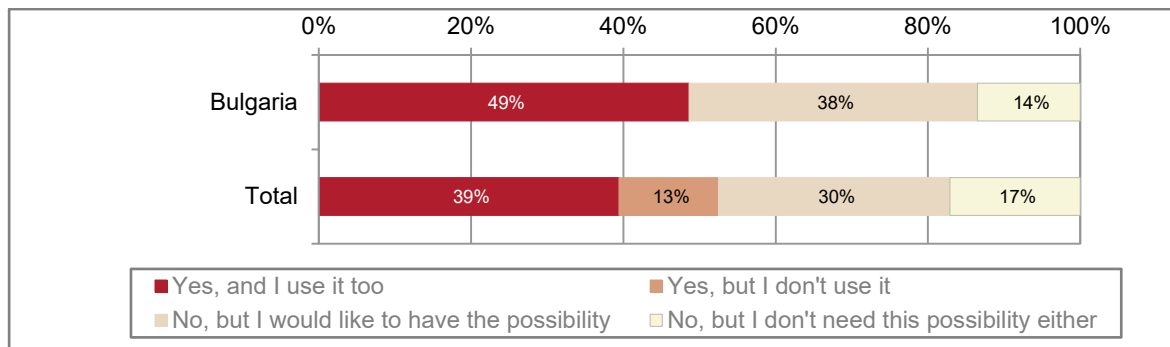


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Hungary=37

6.4.2. Hungary: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the overall sample, respondents from Hungary are more likely to take advantage of remote work opportunities, at 49% to 39% (see Figure 39). In terms of frequency of use, one-third (6 out of 18 people) from Hungary stated that they work remotely most of the time.

Figure 39: *Hungary: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?*

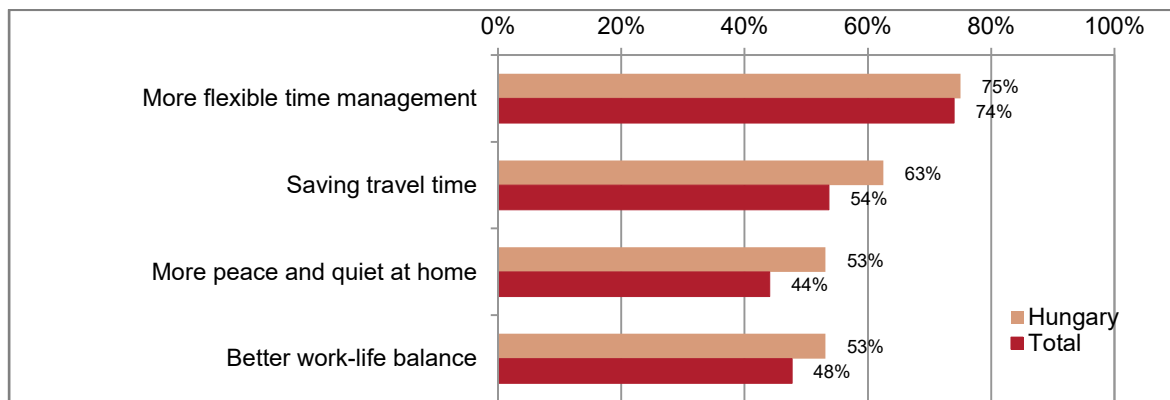


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Hungary=37

What are the reasons for and against remote work? When it comes to the positive aspects, there are only minor differences between the main reason in the overall and Hungarian samples, namely more flexible time management, while Hungarian respondents are slightly more likely to cite time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, a better work-life balance and a quieter environment at home as important benefits for working remotely (see Figure 40).

However, when it comes to the negative aspects, it is striking that according to 10 of the 19 respondents from Hungary who do not use remote work can trace this fact back to their employer's disapproval.

Figure 40: *Hungary: If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely?*



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Pros: Total: n=363; Hungary: n=32

6.4.3. Hungary: Life in rural areas

Of the 13 respondents from Hungary who are currently living in rural areas, 11 can imagine continuing to live in such an area for the next three to five years. Of those who are currently not living in a rural area, merely a quarter (6 out of 24 people) would consider moving to such an area on a long-term basis in the next three to five years; in the overall sample, this applies to 42%.

In terms of negative aspects of living in the countryside, inadequate public transport stands out in particular: 9 out of 11 respondents from Hungary who are currently living in rural areas and want to continue to do so see this as a problem.

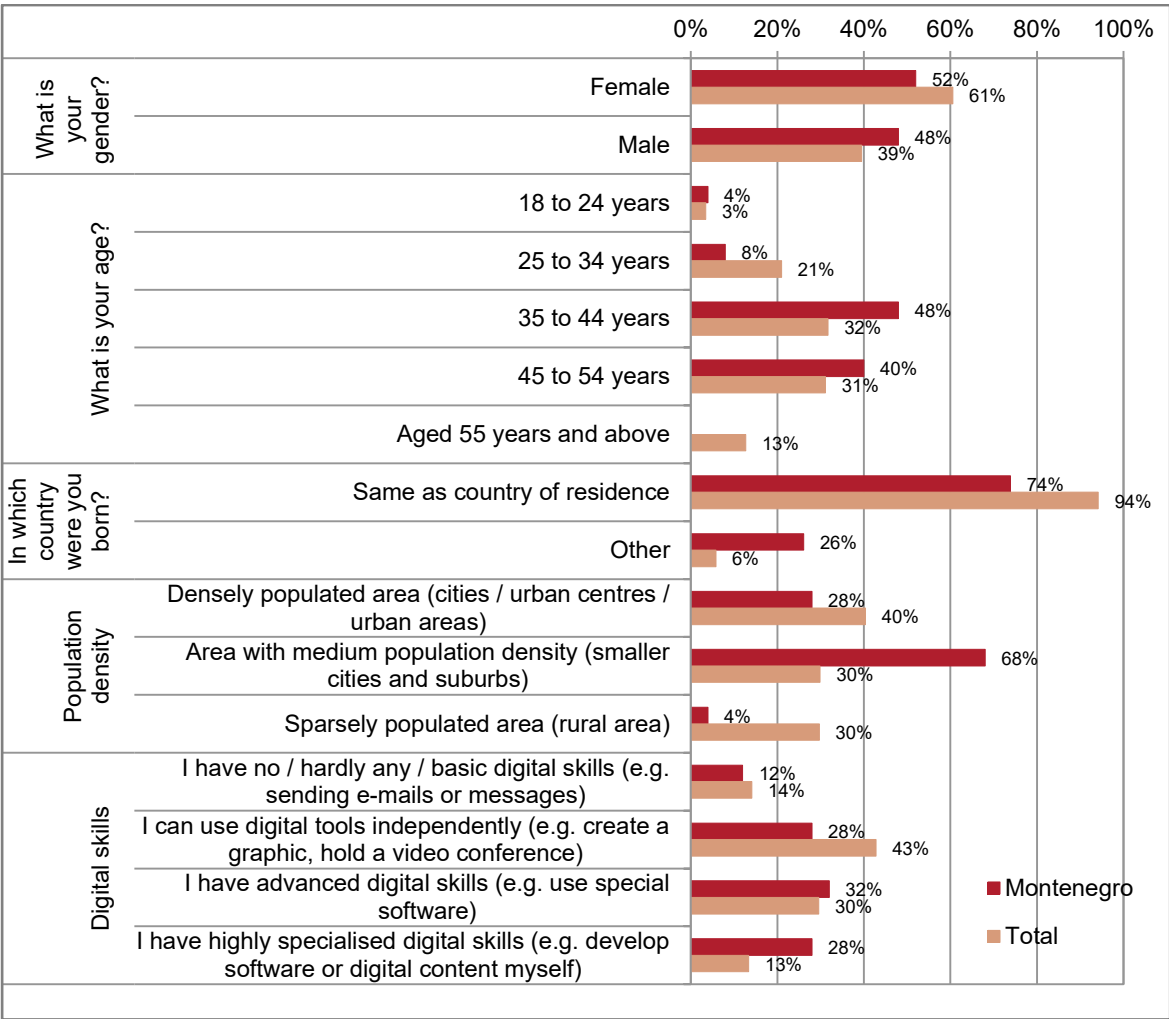
What would people who are currently not living in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? For respondents from Hungary, the most important factor is the possibility to work remotely for an improved work-life balance (10 out of 24 people), followed by improved health services (9 people).

6.5. Montenegro

6.5.1. Montenegro: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 25 respondents from Montenegro differs from that of the overall sample. As can be seen in [Figure 41](#) below, in Montenegro, less women have participated in the survey compared to the overall sample (52% to 61%). In addition, none of the Montenegrin respondents are over 55 years of age, whereas this applies to 13% of the total sample. At least a quarter (6 out of 25 people) of respondents from Montenegro were born in other countries; by comparison, this applies to only 6% of the overall sample. In terms of urbanity, respondents from Montenegro are concentrated in areas of high and medium population density, with only one person living in a rural region (compared to 30% of all respondents who live rurally). In addition, 60% of Montenegrin respondents have high and highly specialised digital skills, compared to only 43% in the overall sample.

Figure 41: Montenegro: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample



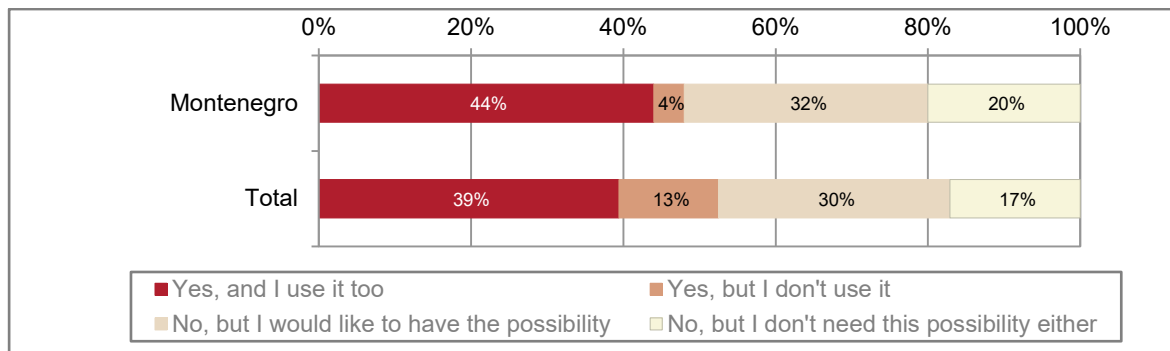
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Montenegro=25

6.5.2. Montenegro: Experiences with remote work

The opportunity to work remotely and the use of remote work hardly differs between the Montenegrin and overall samples: 44% (11 out of 25 people) of respondents from Montenegro work remotely (see Figure 42), with slightly more than half of them (6 out of 11 people) working exclusively remotely.

When asked about the locations from which they would like to work remotely, 6 of the 11 respondents from Montenegro that take advantage of the possibility to work remotely stated that they would like to use co-working spaces.

Figure 42: Montenegro: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Montenegro=25

What are the reasons for and against remote work? In terms of benefits of remote work, there are only minor differences between the overall sample and respondents from Montenegro, even though the detailed results for Montenegro are not fully reliable due to the low number of cases. Both groups cite flexible time management, time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, and a better work-life balance as the main advantages. For respondents from Montenegro, the desire to be able to freely choose where they live (11 out of 19 people) also plays an above-average role.

When it comes to drawbacks of or hindering factors for remote work, respondents from Montenegro mainly mention the lack of a legal framework for remote work, the fact that this form of work is not desired by employers, and that working remotely makes communication within the team more difficult (5 and 4 out of 12 people, respectively).

6.5.3. Montenegro: Life in rural areas

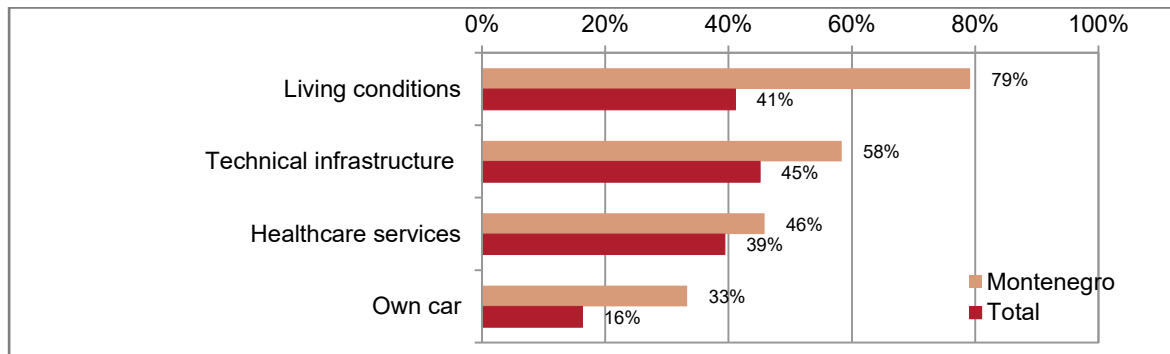
Only one of the respondents from Montenegro currently lives in a rural area. Of the remaining 24, nine can imagine moving to such an area for the long term in the next three to five years, and another five would consider doing so at least for the short term.

Similar to the overall sample, the most frequently cited reasons for considering a move to a rural area were access to nature and outdoor areas, cleaner air and better environmental quality, more living space (both indoors and outdoors) and a quieter environment with less noise and stress. In contrast, the main reason respondents from Montenegro cited against moving to the countryside was the poor digital infrastructure (6 out of 11 people).

What would people who are currently not living in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? For respondents from Montenegro, the main wish refers to improving living conditions (19 out of 24 people), followed by improving the technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet connection and mobile phone coverage) (14 people). In addition, 11 of the Montenegrin respondents would like to see improved healthcare services, and 8 people would need their own car in order to

consider a move to a rural region (see Figure 43). Again, due to the small number of cases these results can merely indicate rough trends and should be interpreted with particular caution.

Figure 43: Montenegro: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?



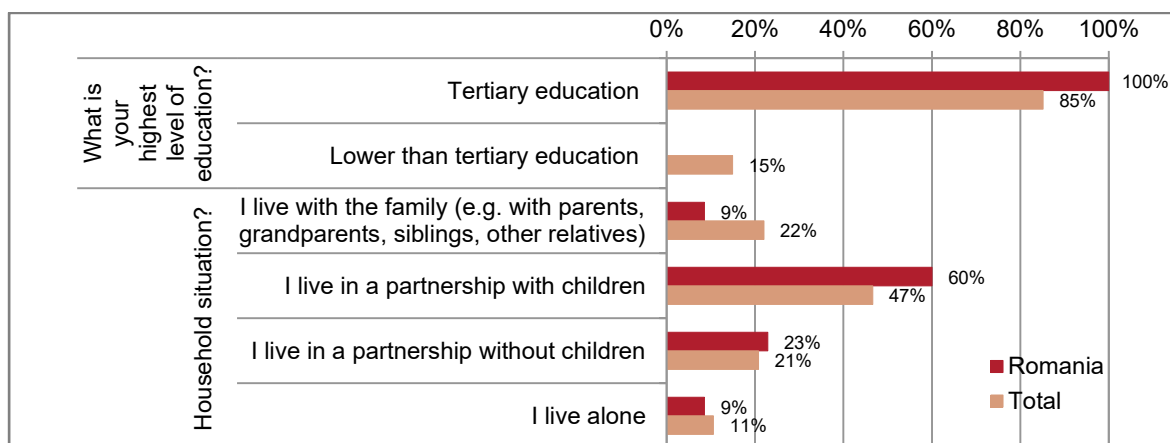
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Montenegro: n=24

6.6. Romania

6.6.1. Romania: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 36 respondents from Romania differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in Figure 44 below, there are some differences between the two groups: all respondents from Romania have a tertiary degree compared to 85% in the overall sample, and 60% of them live in partnerships with children, compared to 47% in the overall sample.

Figure 44: Romania: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample

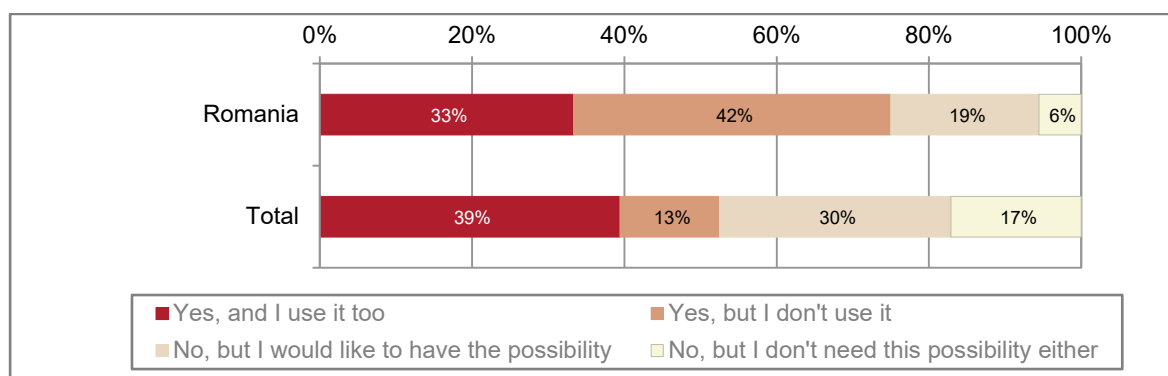


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Romania=36

6.6.2. Romania: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the prevalence of remote work in the overall sample at 53%, respondents from Romania are significantly more likely to have the opportunity to work remotely, at 75% (27 out of 36 people). At 33%, the usage rate among Romanian respondents is similar to the overall rate (see Figure 45), but 10 of these 12 respondents from Romania only use remote work from time to time or when necessary.

Figure 45: *Romania: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?*

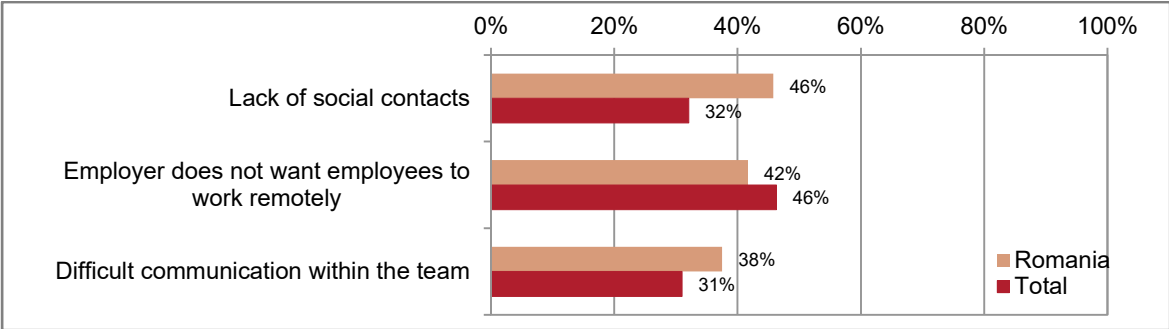


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Romania=36

What are the reasons for and against remote work? Concerning the positive aspects associated with working remotely, there are hardly any differences between the overall sample and respondents from Romania: both groups emphasise flexible time management, time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, a better work-life balance and more peace and quiet at home as the main benefits of remote work.

The situation is similar with regard to the negative aspects: in both groups respondents see particular problems in limited social contacts – with a slight above-average mention among Romanian respondents – and communication with the team and/or stated that remote work is not desired by their employer (see Figure 46).

Figure 46: Romania: If remote work not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=315; Romania: n=24

6.6.3. Romania: Life in rural areas

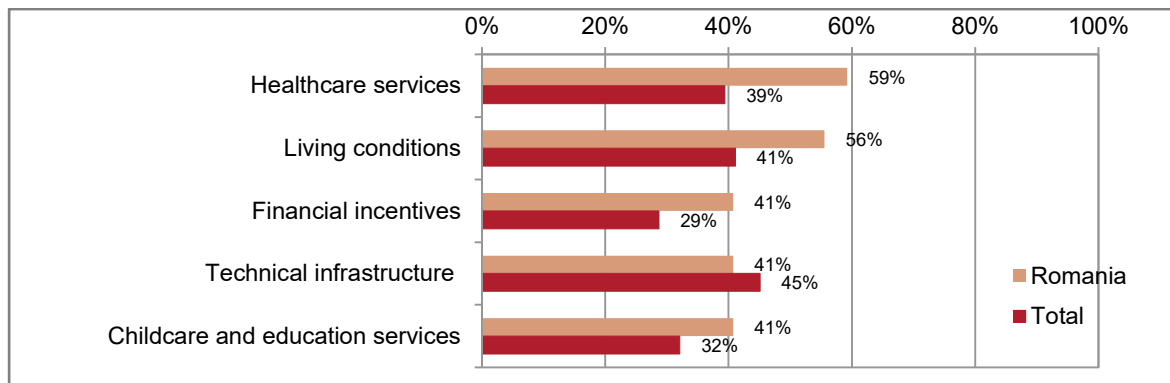
The small size of the Romanian sample only allows for limited and cautious comparisons on the topic of living in rural areas. Of the eight Romanian respondents who are currently living in rural areas, seven can imagine continuing to live in such an area for the next three to five years. What is striking, however, is that all of these people consider childcare and education options to be lacking and therefore view this as a negative aspect of rural life – even more so considering that respondents that live in a partnership with children are overrepresented in the Romanian sample.

Of those who are currently not living in a rural area, 39% (10 out of 26 people) would consider moving to such an area for the long term in the next three to five years, and another 23% (6 people) could imagine doing so at least in the short term. This essentially corresponds to the responses from the overall sample.

The reasons most frequently cited by both groups for considering a move to a rural area were access to nature and outdoor areas, cleaner air and better environmental quality, more living space (both indoors and outdoors) and a quieter environment with less noise and stress. In contrast, the main obstacle to relocation for respondents from Romania is limited access to healthcare services (6 out of 10 people).

What would people who are currently not living in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? First and foremost, respondents from Romania cited improved health services – also in line with them identifying this as the main obstacle for living rurally. In addition, they also see a need for improvement in living conditions, technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet connection and mobile phone coverage) as well as childcare and education. Furthermore, financial incentives would be a greater motivation for Romanian respondents to move to a rural area than for the overall sample (see Figure 47).

Figure 47: Romania: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?



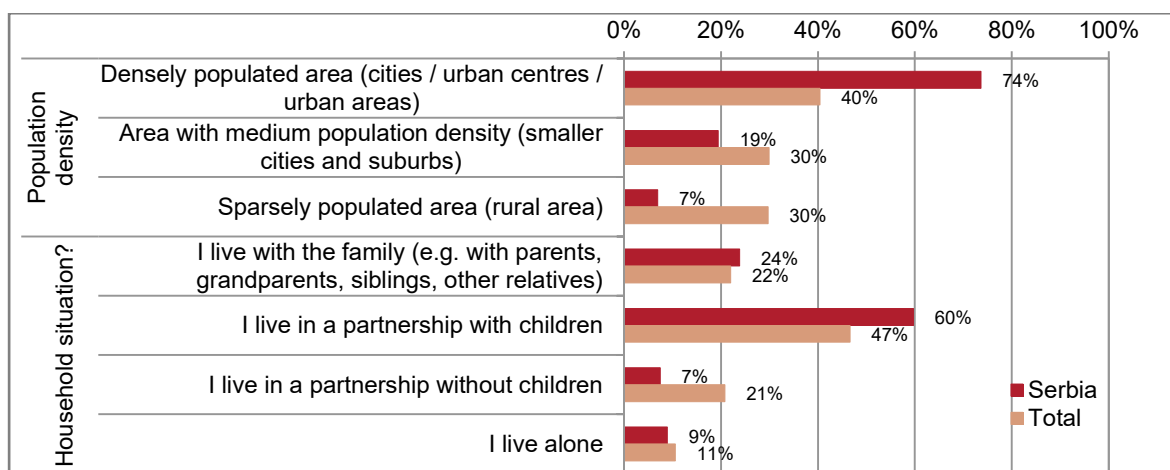
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Romania: n=28

6.7. Serbia

6.7.1. Serbia: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 72 respondents from Serbia differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in Figure 48 below, the biggest difference lies in the regional distribution: in Serbia, almost three quarters of respondents live in urban centres, while this applies to merely 40% of the total sample. Conversely, only around 7% of respondents from Serbia live in rural areas, compared to around 30% overall. In addition, Serbian respondents are more likely to live in partnerships with children (60% compared to 47% overall).

Figure 48: Serbia: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample



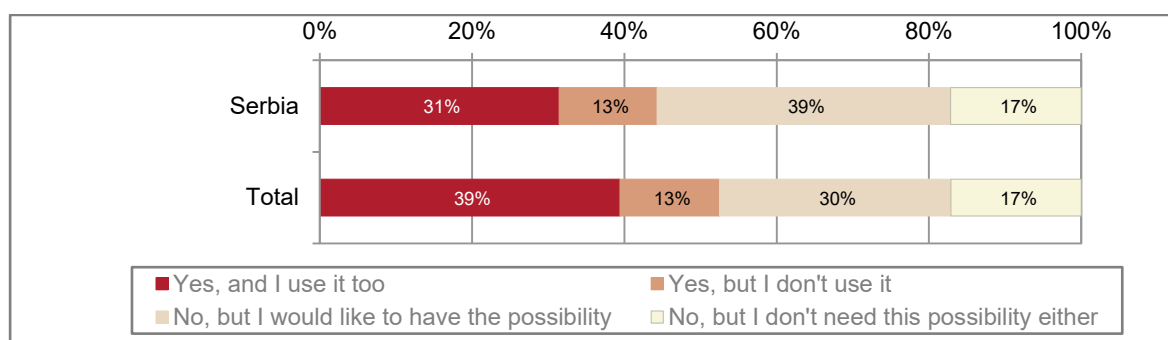
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Serbia=72

6.7.2.Serbia: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the overall sample, there are only minor differences in terms of the possibility to work remotely and the actual use of remote work for Serbian respondents: at 39% to 30% overall, they would like to have this option slightly more often (see [Figure 49](#)).

The intensity of use among respondents from Serbia varies greatly, from very intensive use to only occasional use, when necessary.

Figure 49: *Serbia: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?*

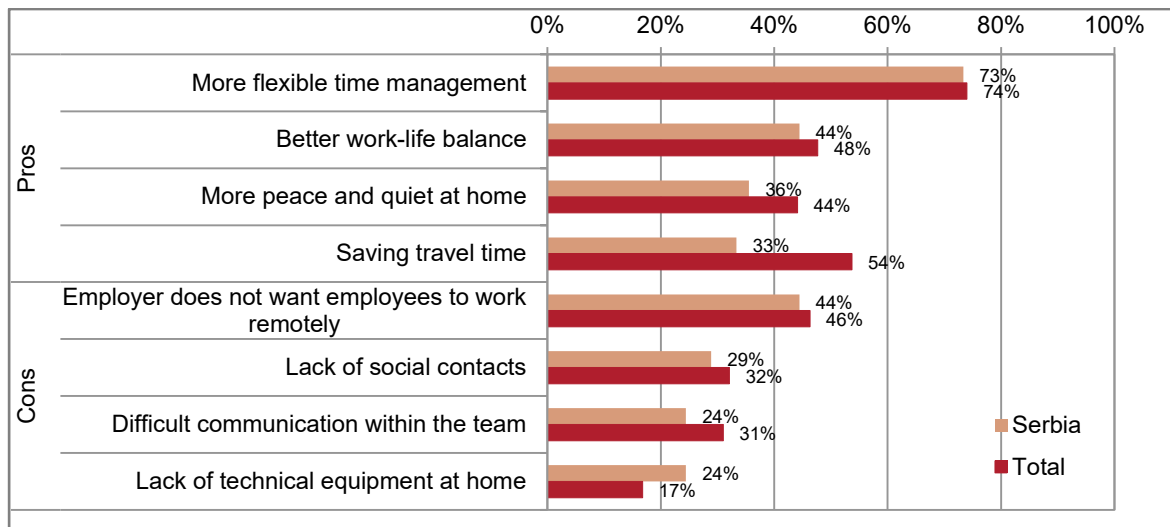


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Serbia=70

What are the reasons for and against remote work? In terms of positive aspects, there are hardly any differences between the overall sample and Serbian sample: both groups emphasise flexible time management, a better work-life balance, more peace and quiet at home and time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, with the latter two aspects being slightly less popular among Serbian respondents compared to the overall sample.

The perception of negative aspects in connection to remote work is similar among the two samples too: respondents from both groups often see problems with social contacts and communication with the team and frequently state that remote work is not desired by their employer. However, respondents from Serbia are more likely than the overall sample to lack the technical equipment necessary to work from home (see [Figure 50](#)).

Figure 50: Serbia: If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely? / If not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Pros: Total: n=363; Serbia n=49; Cons: Total: n=315; Serbia: n=48

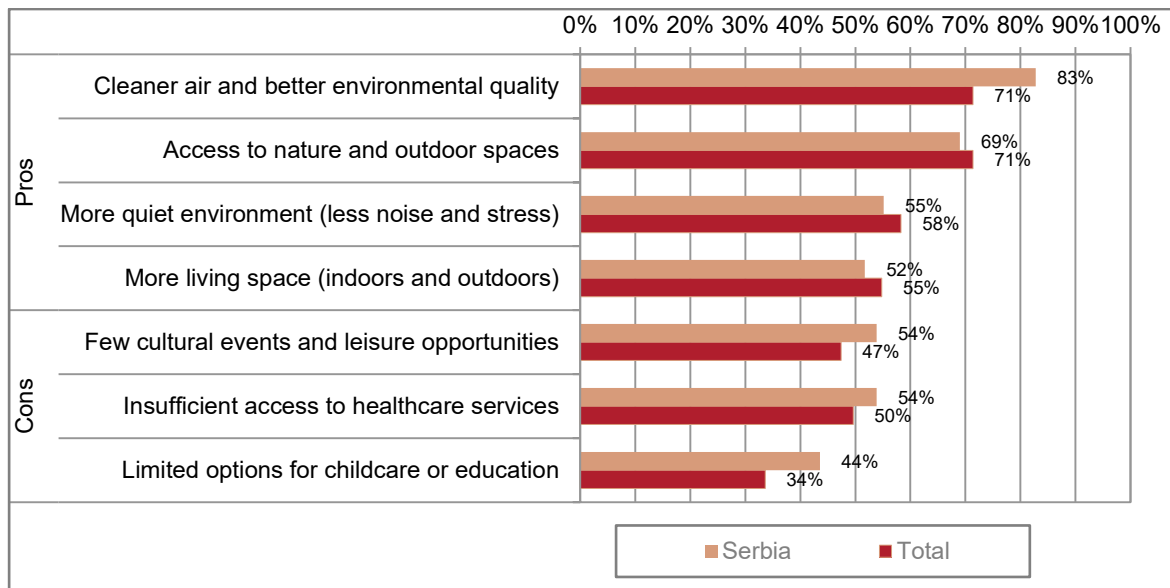
6.7.3. Serbia: Life in rural areas

The limited experience of Serbian respondents with living in rural areas accounts for a very small number of cases, which only allows for limited and cautious comparisons on this topic. Of the five respondents from Serbia who are currently living in rural areas, four can imagine continuing to live in such an area for the next three to five years. Of those who are currently not living in a rural area, 23% (15 out of 67 people) could envision moving to such an area for the long term in the next three to five years, and further 24% (16 people) would only consider doing so at least in the short term. At 47%, the willingness to move to the countryside among Serbian respondents is thus significantly lower than in the overall sample (58%) – especially when it comes to longer-term moves.

The reasons most frequently cited by both groups for considering moving to a rural area were access to nature and outdoor areas, cleaner air and better environmental quality, more living space (both indoors and outdoors) and a quieter environment with less noise and stress. Especially the environmental quality seems to stand out among Serbian respondents, with 83% recognising this benefit compared to 71% overall.

The main reasons cited by both groups for not considering a move to a rural area were a lack of cultural events and activities, limited access to healthcare services, and lacking childcare and education options. Also here, the agreement was slightly above-average among Serbian respondents (see Figure 51).

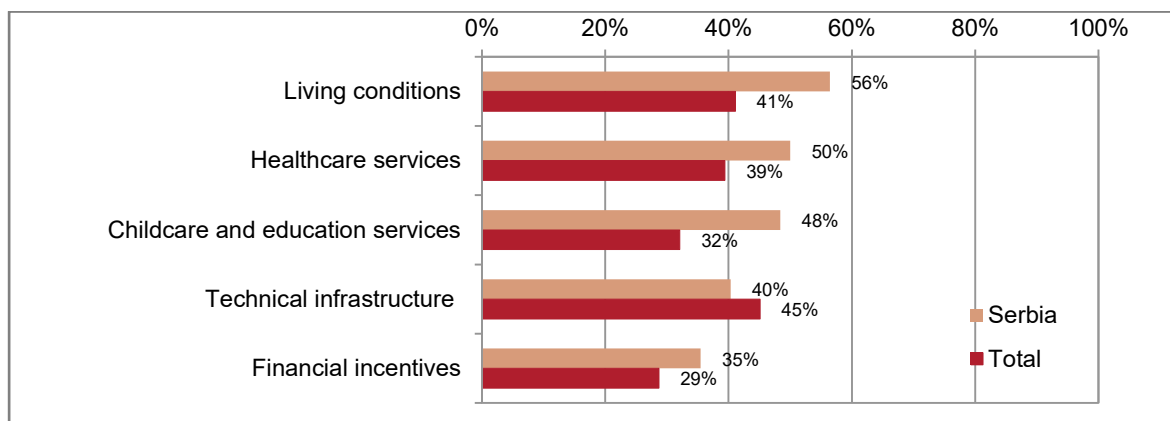
Figure 51: Serbia: Possible move to rural areas: What are in your view the main advantages of living in the countryside? / Not moving: What are in your view the main disadvantages of living in the countryside?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Pros: Total: n=202; Serbia: n=31; Cons: Total: n=141; Serbia: n=40

What would people who are currently not living in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? For respondents from Serbia, the most important factors are improved living conditions and better access to healthcare services as well as more comprehensive childcare and education options, followed to a lesser degree by a working technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet connection and mobile phone coverage). However, financial incentives (e.g. relocation allowances or tax breaks) are also a strong motivating factor among Serbian respondents for moving to rural areas (see Figure 52).

Figure 52: Serbia: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?



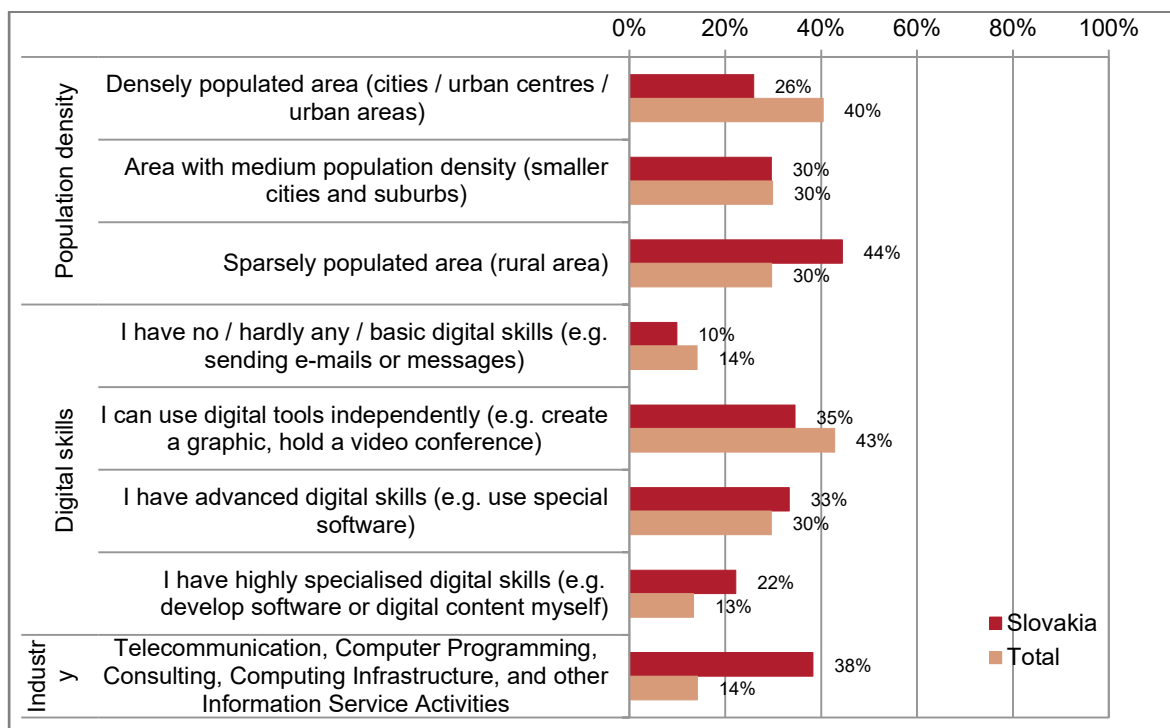
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Serbia: n=67

6.8. Slovakia

6.8.1. Slovakia: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 81 respondents from Slovakia differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in Figure 53 below, one of the biggest differences lies in the regional distribution: 44% of Slovak respondents live in rural areas, compared to only 30% of the overall sample. Conversely, only around 26% of respondents from Slovakia live in urban centres, compared to around 40% of the overall sample. In addition, Slovak respondents are more likely to have highly specialised digital skills (22% compared to 13%) and are more likely to be employed in the field of 'telecommunications, computer programming, consulting, computer infrastructure and other information services' (38% to 14% overall).

Figure 53: Slovakia: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample



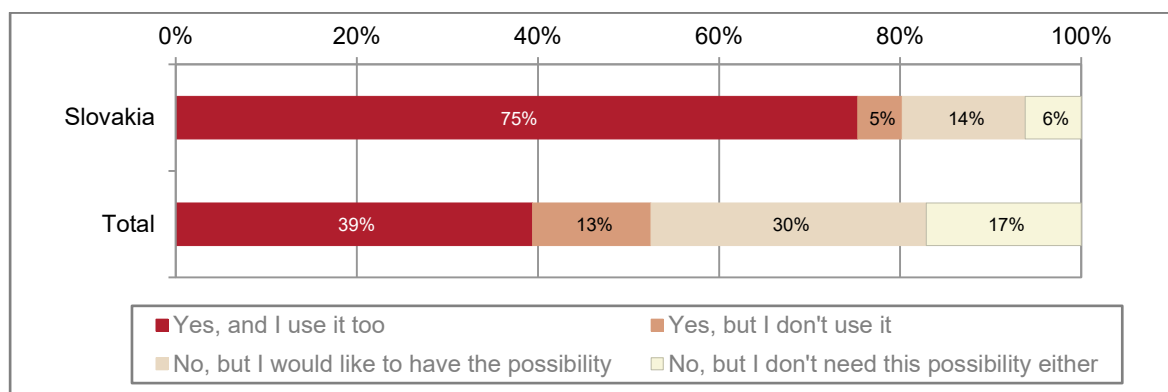
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Slovakia=81

6.8.2.Slovakia: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the overall sample, Slovak respondents use remote work at an above-average rate of 75% (61 out of 81 people) as opposed to 39% in total (see [Figure 54](#)). In terms of intensity of use, around one third stated that they work exclusively remotely, while over a quarter use remote work predominantly. The intensity of use is therefore also slightly higher than in the overall sample.

When asked about the locations from which they most frequently work remotely or would like to work remotely, however, there are hardly any differences compared to the overall sample.

Figure 54: *Slovakia: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?*

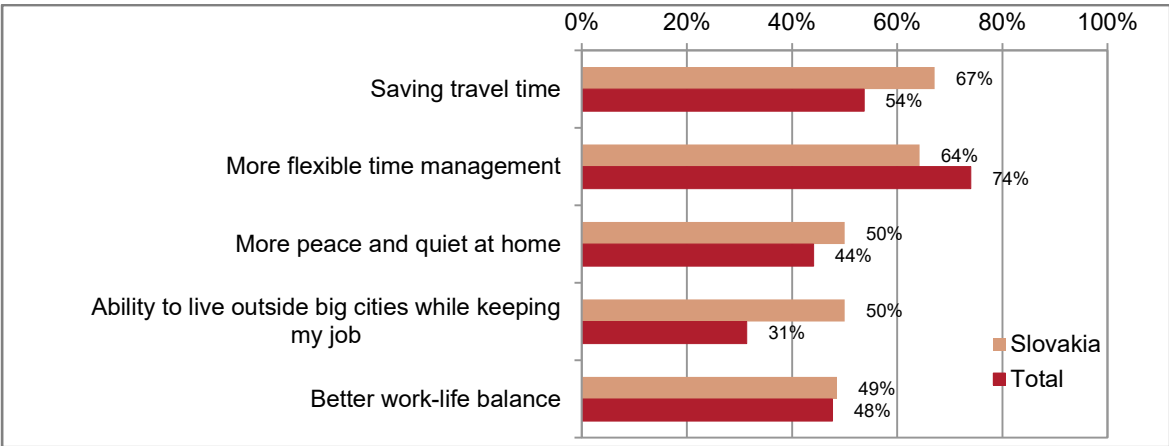


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Slovakia=81

What are the reasons for and against remote work? When it comes to the positive aspects, there are only slight differences between the overall sample and respondents from Slovakia: for both groups, the main advantages are flexible time management, time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, a quieter environment at home, a better work-life balance, and the opportunity to live outside the city while still being able to work there – with especially the latter point being applying to a considerably higher degree to Slovak respondents (see [Figure 55](#)).

Similar to the overall sample, the negative aspects mostly relate to the fact that remote work is not welcomed by employers (7 out of 19 people).

Figure 55: Slovakia: If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=363; Slovakia: n=72

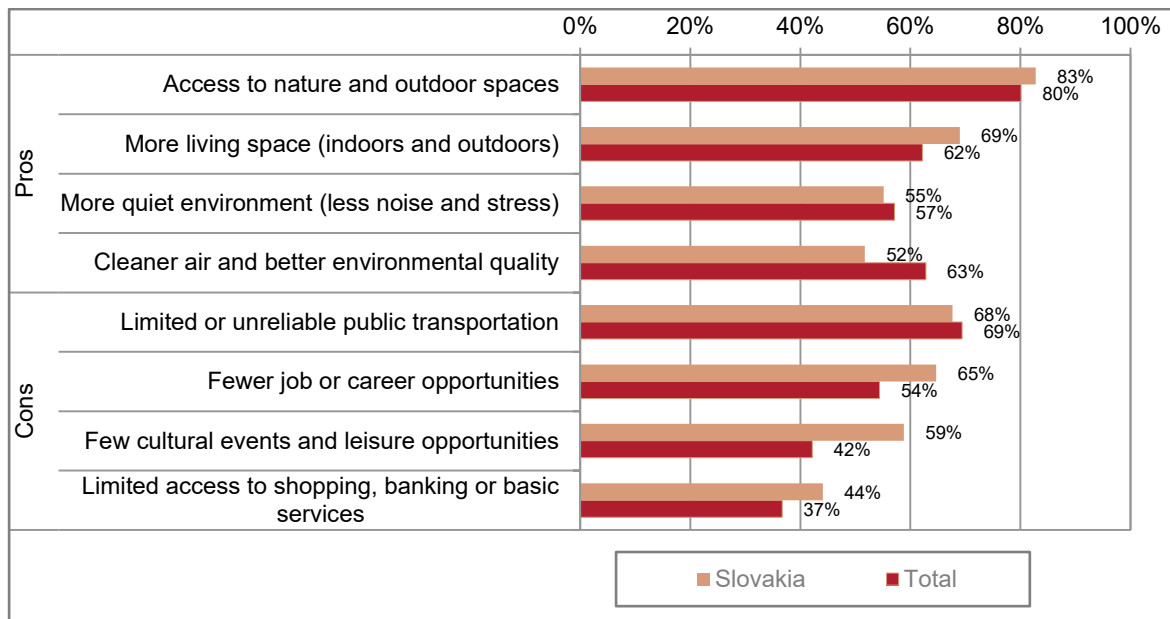
6.8.3.Slovakia: Life in rural areas

Of the 36 respondents from Slovakia who live in rural areas, 80% (28 people) can imagine continuing to live in such an area for the next three to five years. Of those who do not live in a rural area, 61% (27 out of 45 people) would consider moving to such an area for the long term in the next three to five years, and another 7% (3 people) could imagine doing so at least in the short term.

The advantages of living in the countryside are seen by Slovak respondents (both those who would like to continue living in rural areas and those who could imagine moving there) and in the overall sample as being, in particular, having access to nature and outdoor areas, cleaner air and better environmental quality, more living space (both indoors and outdoors) and a quieter environment with less noise and stress.

In contrast, respondents from both groups who would like to continue living in rural areas describe the main disadvantages as inadequate public transport, fewer job opportunities, fewer cultural events and activities, and limited access to services, with the latter three aspects being particularly emphasised in the Slovak sample (see [Figure 56](#)).

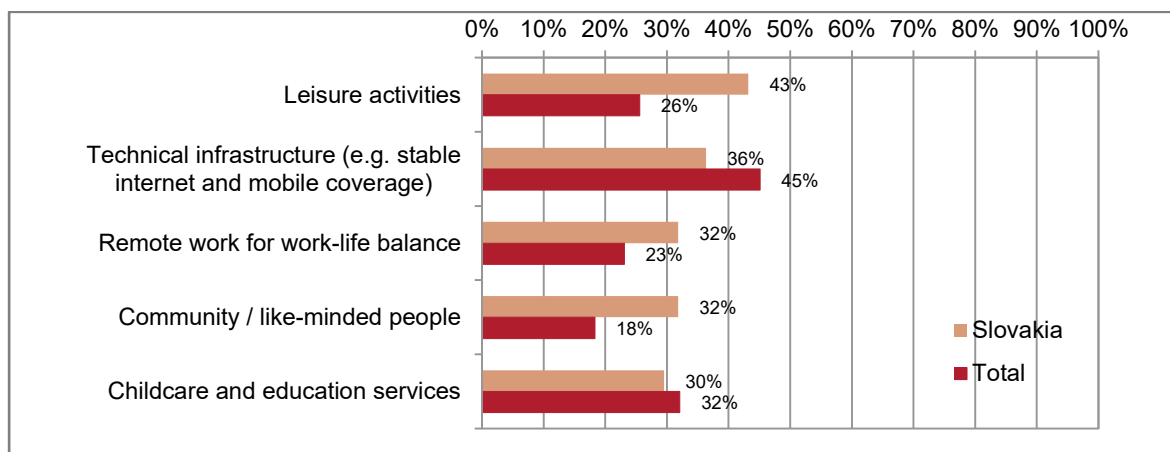
Figure 56: Slovakia: What are in your view the main advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: Pros: n=202; Slovakia: n=36; Cons: Total: n=150, Slovakia: n=34

What would people who do not live in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? Respondents from Slovakia gave quite different assessments in some cases compared to the overall sample. In addition to technical equipment, Slovak respondents attached particular importance to leisure activities, remote work for a better work-life balance, and finding like-minded people or communities (see Figure 57).

Figure 57: Slovakia: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?



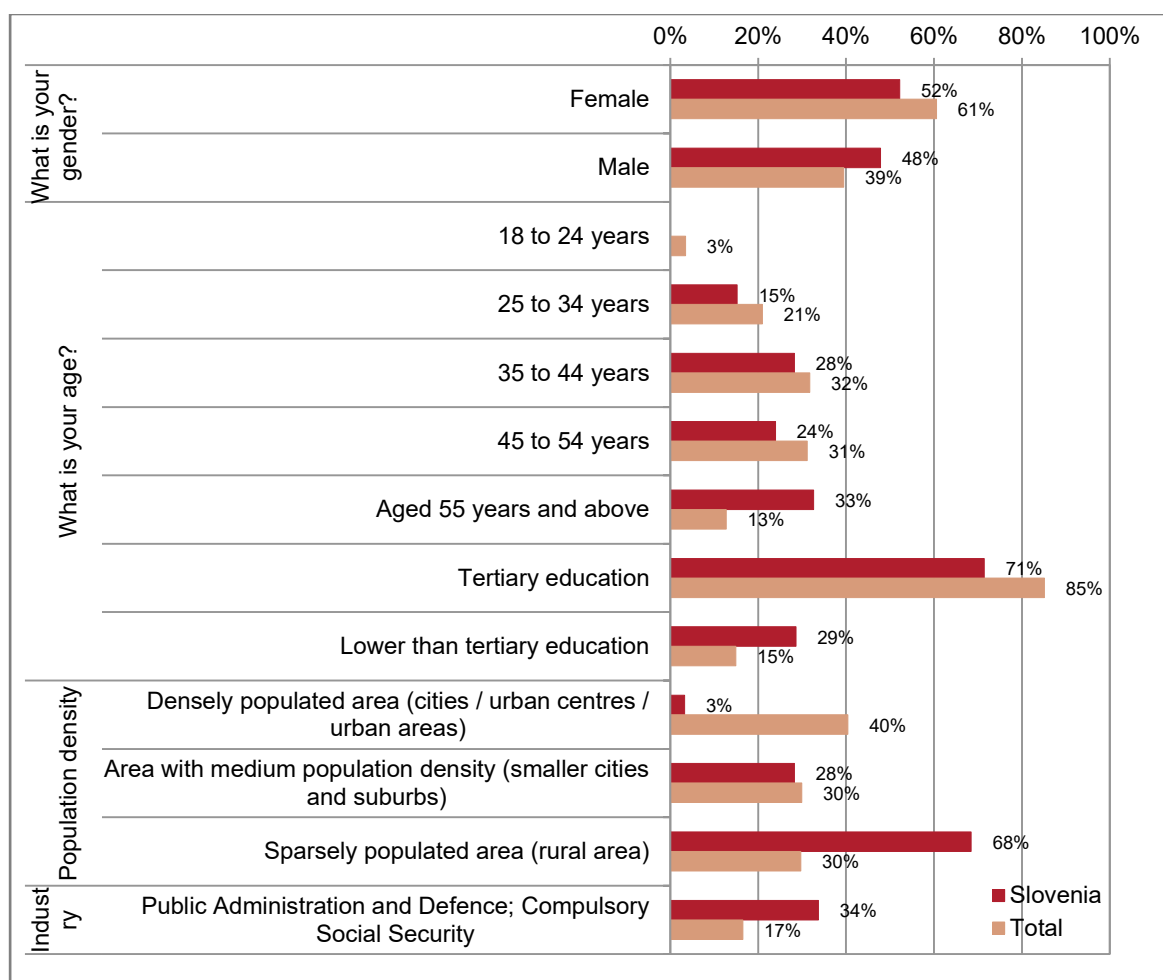
Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Slovakia: n=45

6.9. Slovenia

6.9.1. Slovenia: Sample description by main socio-demographic characteristics

In order to place the following country-specific results in the right context, the first question that arises is how the sample distribution of the 92 respondents from Slovenia differs from that of the entire sample. As can be seen in the [Figure 58](#) below, there are a number of differences. Men are overrepresented among Slovene respondents compared to the overall (48% vs. 40%), as well as older people aged 55 and above (33% vs. 13%), people without tertiary education (29% vs. 15%) and people working in public administration and defence (34% vs. 17%). There are also differences in regional distribution: more than two-thirds of respondents from Slovenia live in rural areas, compared to only 30% in the overall sample. Conversely, only 3% of Slovene respondents live in urban centres, compared to around 40% of the overall sample.

Figure 58: *Slovenia: Sample description based on the main differences in socio-demographic characteristics to the overall sample*

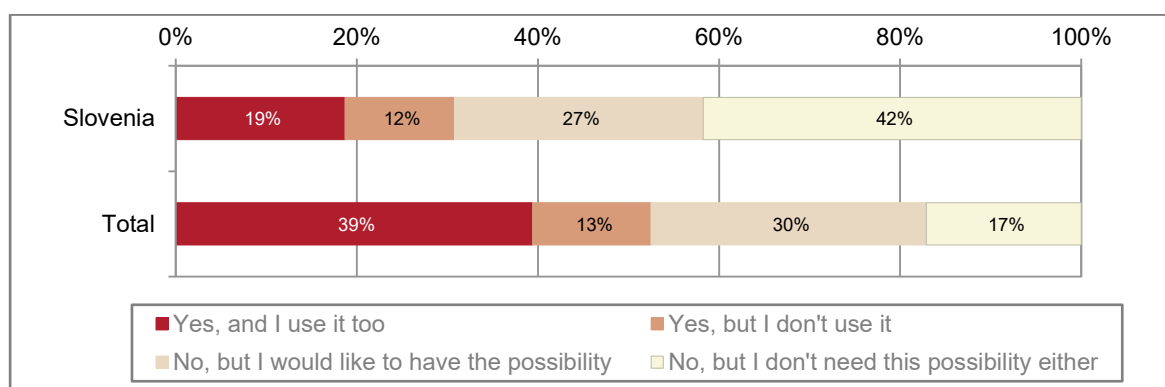


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=526; Slovenia=92

6.9.2.Slovenia: Experiences with remote work

Compared to the overall sample, respondents from Slovenia are significantly less likely to have the opportunity to work remotely, at 31% to 53%. The remote work usage rate is also below average, at 19% (17 out of 91 people) to 39% overall. It is also striking that respondents from Slovenia, at 42% to 17%, state that they do not need the option of working remotely at all (see [Figure 59](#)).

Figure 59: *Slovenia: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?*

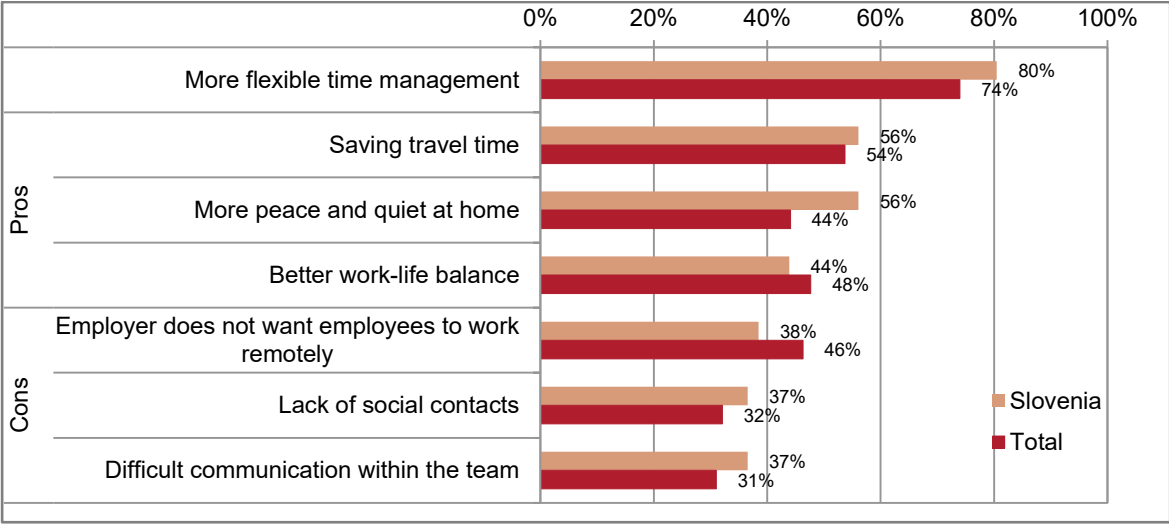


Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total n=520; Slovenia=91

What are the reasons for and against remote work? In terms of positive aspects, there are hardly any differences between the overall sample and Slovene respondents: both groups cite flexible time management, time savings due to the elimination of commuting time, a better work-life balance and more peace and quiet at home as the main advantages.

The negative aspects are similarly distributed: respondents from both groups often see problems with social contacts and communication with the team and frequently state that remote work is not desired by their employer (see [Figure 60](#)). Still, employers blocking the possibility of remote work affects Slovene respondents slightly less, being a possible indication of a more open regulatory framework or organisational culture.

Figure 60: Slovenia: If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely? / If not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Pros: Total: n=363; Slovenia: n=42; Cons: Total: n=315; Slovenia: n=74

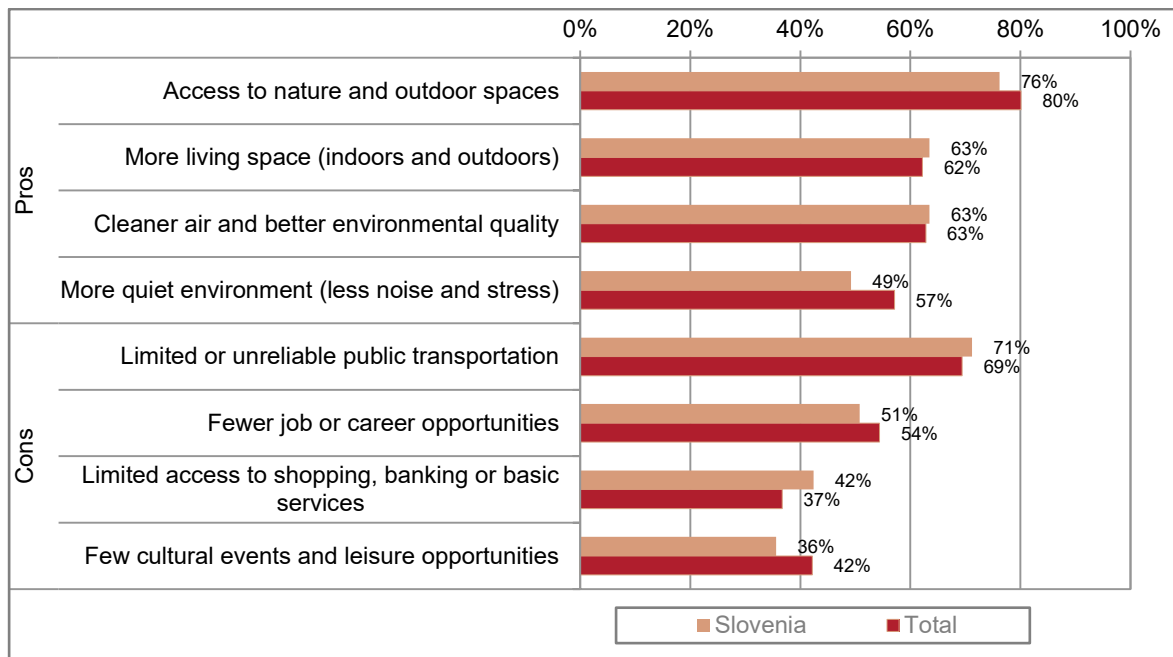
6.9.3.Slovenia: Life in rural areas

Of the 63 respondents from Slovenia who live in rural areas, more than 90% (58 people) can imagine continuing to live in such an area for the next three to five years. Of those who do not live in a rural area, for 54% (14 out of 26 people) moving to such an area for the long term in the next three to five years would be a feasible option, and further 12% (3 people) could imagine doing so at least in the short term.

The advantages of living in the countryside are seen by respondents from Slovenia (both those who would like to remain living in rural areas and those who could imagine moving there) and in the overall sample as being, in particular, having access to nature and outdoor areas, cleaner air and better environmental quality, more living space (both indoors and outdoors) and a quieter environment with less noise and stress.

In contrast, respondents from both groups who would like to continue living in rural areas describe the main disadvantages as inadequate public transport, fewer job opportunities, fewer cultural events and activities, and limited access to services (see [Figure 61](#)).

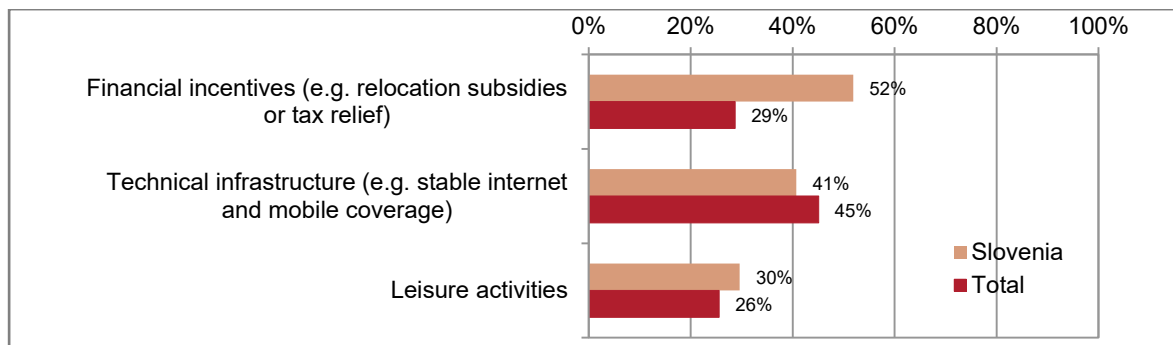
Figure 61: Slovenia: What are in your view the main advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: Pros: n=202; Slovenia: n=58; Cons: Total: n=150, Slovenia: n=61

What would people who do not live in rural areas need in order to consider moving there? In addition to appropriate technical equipment and leisure activities, Slovenian respondents would like to benefit from financial incentives more often than average (see Figure 62).

Figure 62: Slovenia: What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area?



Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; Total: n=369; Slovenia: n=29

7. Overview of main findings and first ideas for possible pilot actions

Based on the results of the online survey and the qualitative interviews, supplemented by findings from the literature, possible areas for action, focusing on the three policy packages, are identified. This chapter also serves as research-guided orientation to support possible regional starting points according to the country-specific results. As the research at hand mainly focused on analysing individual characteristics of remote workers and determining their role in making remote work and life in rural areas more attractive, the results mainly contribute to the “Quality of Life” policy package. Nonetheless, the policy packages “Financial Incentives” and “Regulatory Framework” are also considered, where possible. The following preliminary compilation serves as a guide for the pilot regions and is intended to provide first impulses for pilot actions.

To this end, the researched good practice examples illustrate what is possible in practice with regards to the respective identified thematic area, or what is already being implemented in some regions. It should be noted at this point that the mapping of good practices and their allocation to thematic areas is not always clear-cut, as some of the practical examples relate to several thematic areas.

This chapter shall not be deemed as a final outcome but should rather serve as a basis for discussion for further action. The identified action fields proposals are to be reflected upon and further refined within the consortium.

7.1. Policy package “Quality of Life”

7.1.1. Upgrade and expansion of digital infrastructure

A good digital infrastructure, such as a stable internet connection and good mobile phone coverage, is essential for remote work. However, as many as 20% of respondents from rural areas cite this as insufficient and therefore as a drawback of living in the countryside. Furthermore, 35% of those who do not wish to move to a rural area cited this as their reason. Also, 45% of respondents who are currently not living in a rural area would require an improvement in this regard before they would consider moving to such an area. Whilst acknowledging the limited validity of the country-specific results due to the small number of cases and the non-representative composition of the survey sample, they suggest that this is a matter of significant concern, particularly in Montenegro.

A possible approach to tackling the issue of poor internet connectivity on a larger scale could be the development of country-wide digital strategies to set minimum standards to be fulfilled in this regard. But regional or communal development plans for the extensive development of fiber-optic-based internet services are too significant upgrades. As high costs are usually involved for extensive upgrades, linking such initiatives to local development actions already underway as well as making use of available EU financial support schemes could make them more attractive and could increase the motivation and willingness of municipalities to participate.

Good Practice: The Austrian Broadband Strategy 2030

The strategy aims to provide countrywide comprehensive coverage of symmetrical gigabit-capable access networks by 2030, and is supported by appropriate subsidies. The basis for this development is the expansion of fibre-optic and 5G networks so that all citizens, businesses and public institutions throughout the country can equally benefit from the opportunities and possibilities that digitalisation offers.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: The nÖGIG Initiative: Fiber optics development for municipalities in Lower Austria

The initiative aims to develop a comprehensive and extensive fiber-optic network in the federal state of Lower Austria by rolling out fiber-optic connections in the region. The model has been successfully trialled in four pilot regions and further areas are being connected step by step due to the growing involvement of municipalities in the region. The most important prerequisite for rapid and cost-saving roll-out is the co-installation of empty conduits during ongoing civil engineering works or other municipal construction projects, as this creates synergies to current projects and the prepared infrastructure can be used at a later point too. During the roll-out, the sections already laid alongside existing infrastructure are to be integrated into the overall concept, complementing the fibre-optic infrastructure to form a functional network. As part of the co-installation service, the nÖGIG initiative offers support and consultancy services to both municipalities and residents.

More information is available [here](#).

7.1.2. Improvement of public transport in rural areas and provision of alternative transport solutions

For many survey respondents, a well-functioning public transport network is a must for a good living environment. However, as many as 69% of respondents from rural areas cite this as inadequate and therefore as a drawback of living in the countryside. Furthermore, 33% of those who do not wish to move to a rural area cited this as their reason. Furthermore, 32% of respondents who do not currently live in a rural area would require improvements in this area before they would consider moving to such a region. Country-specific results suggest that this issue is of particular importance in Hungary, though these results should be treated with caution due to the small number of cases and non-representative sample composition.

Furthermore, it is important to take target group-specific needs into account: for instance, older respondents aged 55 and over use existing public transport services significantly less frequently, which may indicate unmet needs.

Where public transport is already available in individual regions, subsidised tickets or passes could encourage residents to make greater use of these services. Even though the proportion of survey respondents who use communal sharing schemes is relatively low, such services could be suitable as alternate and complementary mobility options in certain regions. A focus on electric vehicles for such sharing services also contributes to the sustainability of these initiatives.

Good Practice: Electric car-sharing service in the municipality of Zeiselmauer-Wolfpassing, Austria

Since 2021, an electric car has been available for sharing for residents of the Austrian municipality of Zeiselmauer-Wolfpassing, with the goal to increase mobility in a flexible, affordable and sustainable manner. The vehicle is located at a central and accessible location near the train station. Booking is simple and unbureaucratic and can be completed at different rates for individuals, families and companies via an online platform.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: Subsidised public transport tickets, “trial tickets” (“Schnupperticket”) and transferable tickets in Austrian municipalities

“Trial tickets” are transferable monthly or annual public transport passes that municipalities make available for their residents. The tickets can be borrowed in more than 370 participating Austrian municipalities for a symbolic monthly cost to enable people to experience the benefits of public transport and leave the car at home for a change. The passes can be secured via an online booking system, conveniently allowing residents to check from the comfort of their home or while out and about whether tickets are still available for their preferred dates, and then to also book them online. This digital support reduces administrative workload and increases the ticket take-up.

More information is available [here](#).

7.1.3. Development and expansion of childcare facilities

For parents in particular, adequate education and childcare facilities are a key factor in their decision about where to live. However, as many as 27% of respondents from rural areas describe these facilities as inadequate and therefore see them as a drawback of living in the countryside. Furthermore, 34% of those who do not wish to move to a rural area cited this as their reason. Furthermore, 32% of respondents who do not currently live in a rural area would require improvements in this area before they would consider moving to such a region. A closer look at the country-specific results indicates that this seems to be a particularly significant issue in Romania. Again, caution is advised when interpreting these results due to the small number of cases and non-representative sample composition.

Possible approaches include, for example, locally funded childcare facilities, but businesses can also contribute to this, for instance by setting up company kindergartens or providing additional facilities within the workplace such as children's play areas or parent-child rooms.

7.1.4. Pilot schemes for co-working spaces and shared offices

When asking respondents that are already working remotely about what other places they would like to use for remote work, the results point to a huge potential for expansion in the area of co-working spaces or shared offices: 28% of remote workers stated that they would like to have this option, which could mean that not enough workspaces of this kind are available in their vicinity. This particularly applies to rural areas or areas with medium population density, where 33% and 38% respectively expressed a preference for co-working and shared office spaces. By comparison, this applies to only 17% of people living in urban areas. This could indicate a lack or shortage of supply in these areas. Although not representative and thus to be interpreted cautiously, country-specific results suggest that this is a particularly significant issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia and Montenegro.

No two shared workspaces are alike, as they are usually tailored to local needs and circumstances. Existing experiences with co-working spaces and other forms of shared workspaces can offer ideas about creative and innovative possibilities to develop such spaces, while also integrating associated services into these offers.

Good Practice: Austrian municipalities that invested in the development of co-working spaces

Co-working spaces are a convenient alternative to home offices, especially for those that do not have access to regular offices spaces, as for instance the self-employed. They offer advantages such as flexible and cost-effective booking options and furthermore provide the opportunity to join or build a community based on mutual interests. In addition to basic office facilities, the co-working spaces in the 16 Austrian municipalities examined offer specific features such as:

- seminar/meeting rooms
- including all necessary office equipment (e.g. screens, beamers, good internet connection, printer, kitchen, lockable storage compartments)
- own server infrastructure for increased data security
- silent zones and phone boxes
- fitness rooms and wellness services
- PO box for registered office/headquarters
- accounting/bookkeeping services,
- business consulting services
- combined with in-house accommodation services
- attention to accessibility (location in town centre, availability of parking spaces, public transport connections)

More information is available [here](#).

Good practice: Creation of innovative workspaces in rural areas in Austria by means of the “village offices” initiative

In 2024, the funding initiative “Raum.Hub-Space.It_Up!” supported the countrywide creation of digital facilities in innovative workspaces and meeting areas – so-called “village offices” – with the aim to ensure equal opportunities in rural areas throughout Austria and to showcase good practice models for the digital transition. Co-working and innovation rooms as well as collaboration spaces and hubs fall under the umbrella of “villages offices” and were thus eligible for funding.

More information is available [here](#).

Good practice: Housing project “KoDorf” addressing remote workers in the municipality of Wiesenburg, Germany

In the frame of the “KoDorf” project, a resort/new living area was developed by a construction cooperative/housing association with 40 small houses and apartment buildings consisting of 26 flats for remote workers. The resort offers facilities such as public outdoor areas (e.g. golf course), co-working spaces, shared kitchen, workshops, event rooms etc., and the decision on their usages is agreed upon within the community.

Aspects such as accessibility (barrier-free constructions) are being considered, as well as affordability (space-saving and standardised constructions), but also ecological aspects (use of natural materials such as wood as well as room greening, tree planting, renewable energy supply etc.).

KoDorf promotes communal, intergenerational, self-managed and self-determined living.

More information is available [here](#).

7.1.5. Education and training services in digital skills and in response to the digital transition

Missing or insufficient digital competences are usually grounds for exclusion when considering remote work. However, the survey results show that 37% of people with low or basic digital skills would appreciate the option to work remotely. The reasons why these individuals cannot work remotely vary. However, in some cases, this is due to the lack of digital skills necessary to utilise this form of work.

Training and further learning offers in this area could help to break down any competence-related hurdles and barriers. This applies not only to the individual level of potential users, but also to digital transformation processes within companies.

Good Practice: “Digital Überall” initiative: free of charge workshops to improve digital skills in Austrian municipalities

Following the goal to make basic digital competencies widely available among the adult population by 2030, the initiative coordinates national measures to this end, most notably in the form of cost-free workshops addressing key topics such as digital literacy for elderly people, digital public services, online safety, and artificial intelligence.

The workshops are run in two formats: Individual bookings for interested citizens and group bookings for municipalities. The latter invites municipalities to request workshops to be held on their premises by qualified adult education providers, exclusively addressing their residents.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: Inspirational projects in the framework of the initiative “Best-of Digital Transformation 2017-2021” in the federal state of Upper Austria

The flagship initiative “Best-of Digital Transformation 2017-2021” was launched in 2017 in the federal state of Upper Austria with the aim of preparing the region and its companies for the digital transformation and all the challenges as well as opportunities that this development entails.

At the end of the project in 2021, a best-of brochure featuring 13 successfully implemented projects was published. These showcase a wide range of activities covering topics revolving around qualification, automated driving, digital medtech, information security and digital sales.

More information is available [here](#).

7.1.6. Information and awareness raising campaigns on the benefits of remote work

Interviewees express the perception that some problems with remote work are also related to continuing prejudice surrounding this form of work, at both the company level and the political and administrative levels. Furthermore, 46% of the survey respondents who do not work remotely cited the fact that their employer does not want them to do so. Country-specific survey results suggest that this is a particularly significant issue in Bulgaria and Slovenia. Again, caution is advised when interpreting these results due to the small number of cases and non-representative sample composition.

A means to address these prejudices is through wide-ranging information and awareness raising campaigns aimed at the general public or through lobby work at the political level. Moreover, informational and educational work within companies that could be conducted by HR/personnel departments, works councils or other employee representative bodies can trigger lasting changes in mentality and workplace culture.

7.1.7. Creation of community spaces and activities to foster networking and exchange

Cultural and leisure activities as well as interaction with like-minded people are essential for preventing social isolation – particularly for those who work (almost) exclusively remotely. However, as many as 42% of respondents from rural areas cite a lack of cultural events and leisure opportunities as a drawback of living in the countryside. Furthermore, 47% of those who do not wish to move to a rural area cited this as the reason. In addition, 26% of respondents who are currently not living in a rural area stressed that improvements in this area would be needed for them to consider moving to such a place. With regard to social isolation and access to like-minded people, 20% of respondents from rural regions cited this as insufficient and therefore a shortcoming of rural areas. Moreover, for 24% of respondents who do not wish to move to a rural area, this is a crucial factor for their decision. Also, 18% of respondents who do not live in a rural area would need to see improvements in this area before they would consider moving to such a region. Country-specific results suggest that this is a particularly significant issue in Bulgaria, Romania and Slovakia, while again taking into account the limitations in terms of small case numbers and non-representative samples composition.

Community spaces promoting networking and exchange can take various forms. For instance, within the qualitative interviews it was suggested that business incubators should not be limited to supporting start-ups, but should also be conceived as community hubs — places where a wide variety of people within a locality can come together, interact, and build networks. Moreover, innovative community-based approaches that integrate remote work into leisure activities and combine it with vacation-like experiences can also contribute to making remote work more attractive, while at the same time promoting touristic regions. An extensive collection of good practice examples showcases further novel and innovative formats aimed to facilitate and encourage exchange within rural communities.

Good Practice: Project “Außilahn & Hoamkema” for the creation of inclusive meeting places and workspaces in three Austrian pilot regions

Implemented in 2022 and 2023 in three pilot regions in Austria, the project aimed at creating inclusive meeting places and workspaces in rural areas and bringing together locals and newcomers alike. Through on-site and digital interventions particularly addressing women, newcomers and people outside traditional role models, these target groups were encouraged to break new ground and actively shape the community. The project aimed to establish regional networks, strengthen the sense of community and pass on the experience gained in the pilot areas by means of handbooks and video formats.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: “Digital Villages” project in four federal states in Germany to empower rural communities

The project is being implemented in the German federal states Bayern/Bavaria, Niedersachsen, Schleswig-Holstein and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and was developed together with the research institute Fraunhofer IESE as part of its Smart City and Smart Regions business field.

The project offers various community services such as DorfFunk and DorfNews as well as platform services and apps for volunteers. These services support connecting, facilitating information exchange and communication within the village community, while at the same time promoting digitalisation and the development of digital skills within the community.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: “Hatrium – Life in the Village” community rooms in the municipality of Hartkirchen, Austria

The non-profit cultural and social association “Hatrium – Life in the Village” was founded in 2022 in the Upper Austrian municipality of Hartkirchen with the aim to develop social and cultural services to reduce social isolation and exclusion and to connect people of all ages within the community. To this end, vacant premises in the community centre were converted to community rooms that are made available to residents as well as other clubs and associations located in the municipality. The name “Hatrium” connects the municipality name “Hartkirchen” with the Roman word “atrium” as a central meeting place, the association thus offering an open space for encounters, community and engagement in the municipality.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: “Co-workation Alps” network for fostering the development of Alpine regions

“Co-workation Alps” is a club-based network aiming on the one hand to further develop the Alpine regions and on the other to promote exceptional co-workation services and locations. Co-workations are organised trips that combine extraordinary locations, a work-friendly infrastructure and a space for exchange and community, effectively placing these initiatives at the cross-roads between community, work and vacation. Specifically, the network supports regions, location operators and service providers in the development of attractive co-working offers with the aim to sustainably strengthen rural Alpine regions through new work approaches.

More information is available [here](#).

7.1.8. Improved access to healthcare services

For many survey respondents, good access to healthcare services is a necessary prerequisite for a good quality of life and living environment. However, as many as 30% of respondents from rural areas cite this as inadequate and therefore as a drawback of living in the countryside. Furthermore, this was the top reason cited by 50% of those who do not wish to move to a rural area. Furthermore, 39% of respondents who are currently not living in a rural area would require an improvement in this area before they would consider moving to such a region. Whilst acknowledging the limited validity of the country-specific results due to the small number of cases and the non-representative composition of the survey sample, they suggest that this is a matter of significant concern, particularly in Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania.

In this context, multi-disciplinary clinics where several different healthcare services cooperate in one location could be considered. Similarly, digital solutions such as hotlines, online advisory services as well as outreach home visits on a voluntary basis could complement the range of services. This would also be particularly beneficial for older people, who may have limited mobility. Furthermore, adequate access to healthcare services is particularly important for this target group.

7.1.9. Promotion of rural areas and all they have to offer

Interviewees emphasise the health benefits of living rurally, as this lifestyle allows them to live a calmer and more peaceful life at a slower pace. From an environmental standpoint, having less pollution and cleaner air are too decisive. Also, having the opportunity to grow their food in own gardens or at least to buy fresh produce locally from other people in the region is another upside that they highly value about life in rural areas.

But they also point out that many of the benefits that rural areas have to offer are not always visible and known to non-residents. Country-specific survey results may provide further context for this issue: The fact that significantly fewer respondents from Serbia are open to the possibility of moving to a rural area could be a symptom of insufficient knowledge about the benefits of living in the countryside. Again, caution is advised when interpreting these results due to the small number of cases and non-representative sample composition.

Against this backdrop, making relevant information appealing and easily accessible could help address potential movers. This would also be a good opportunity to advertise the various incentives already in place, as it is often the case that they do not get used because of being unknown. With the brochure that is planned to be developed in the framework of the Danube4rural.com project, we aim to contribute to making our project's pilot areas better known and more visible.

Good Practice: (Residential) location marketing in the Austrian region of Southern Burgenland

The project promotes the Austrian region of Southern Burgenland as an attractive, affordable place to live and work through joint location marketing and vacancy management initiatives, involving all 72 municipalities in this area. Municipalities work together with business and civil society to revitalise town centres, use infrastructure efficiently and protect against additional land sealing. Digital platforms, marketing measures and networking formats support relocation, the integration of new residents and all around sustainable regional development.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: Project "Lifework region: attractive region – attractive for employees" against the shortage of skilled workers in three pilot areas in the federal state of Carinthia, Austria

The project "Lifework region: attractive region – attractive for employees" targets three pilot areas in the Austrian federal state of Carinthia and positions this region as an attractive place to live and work based on three pillars: Bundled regional information for (new) residents, targeted communication of all offers in the region, and an employee card with exclusive benefits. These include specific measures for making employers more attractive and regional services to strengthen the retention of skilled workers in the region, such as through mentoring buddies or additional support processes. The aim is to attract people to the region, comprehensively inform them about opportunities that the region has to offer and retain them in the long term.

More information is available [here](#).

7.1.10. Identification of specific target group needs and joint community planning in the region

One suggestion that emerged from the qualitative interviews was to actively involve remote workers in rural development. This approach would give them a sense of purpose and make them feel heard and welcome within the community. However, it is not just remote workers who should be involved in planning processes, but people from the region in general. It would be beneficial to have as wide a variety of people as possible co-designing these development plans in order to recognise the specific needs of different target groups and translate them into action.

Good Practice: "Soravium" Social space analysis for the Austrian region Villach and the surrounding area to retain young people

In the framework of the project "Soravium", a social space analysis of the Austrian region Villach and the surrounding areas was conducted with the aim to identify the potential and needs of young people in the region. Based on these findings, measures and recommendations for action

were developed and subsequently translated into specific youth work and tailored youth projects being implemented in the region in the timeframe between 2023 and 2027. In the long term, these actions also aimed to improve the quality of life for young people and secure the region as an attractive place to live for future generations.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: “Rurasmus” initiative attracting students to rural areas throughout Europe

The “Rurasmus” initiative is inspired by the Erasmus exchange programme and is available in several member states of the European Union. For at least one semester, students live in a rural community and work closely with community residents on a specific local issue, such as regional vacancy management. The results are fed directly into community planning, enabling future plans to better appeal to young people. At the same time, for many exchange students this experience allows for a first acquaintance with life in rural areas.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: Smart Village project in the municipality of Unzmarkt-Frauenburg, Austria

This Smart Village project in the Austrian municipality of Unzmarkt-Frauenburg is financially supported by the Austrian federal state of Styria and the European Union. Between January 2022 and June 2023, a citizen participation process took place, focusing on the topics of climate and environment and revitalisation of the local centre. Project groups, future offices, idea workshops and consultations via survey were held. Ideas were gathered from the population, and the citizens had in turn the opportunity to obtain various information. The results of the participation process and the project developed in this framework were presented to the local council for further use.

More information is available [here](#).

7.2. Policy Package “Financial Incentives”

Financial incentives offer another way of encouraging people to move to rural areas. These range widely from start-up grants and housing subsidies to support for the purchase of personal office equipment (e.g. printers, laptops, office supplies) in order to facilitate working from home. As many as 29% of respondents who are currently not living in a rural area would like to see such incentives to consider moving to such an area. While considering the limitations in terms of small case numbers and non-representative samples composition, country-specific survey results suggest that finance-based incentive schemes would be particularly effective in Romania, Serbia and Slovenia.

Good Practice: Start-up initiative in the Austrian LEADER region Kamptal+

Under the title “Kamptal+ – I can do it here”, the Austrian LEADER region of Kamptal launched a start-up competition in 2022 and 2023 with the aim to improve knowledge about vacancy rates in the 25 involved municipalities in the region and to support entrepreneurs and the long-term establishment of innovative business premises.

To this end, young entrepreneurs were supported in implementing creative business ideas, particularly those aimed at revitalising vacant commercial premises in the community centres of the involved municipalities. Selected entrepreneurs received contributions in kind from network partners in the fields of business and law, tax consulting, IT and marketing. Furthermore, the region bore the costs for project management, marketing activities and rent.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: Action programme for revitalising vacant and brownfield sites, town and city centres in the federal state of Upper Austria

The project “Coordination office for the revitalisation of vacant and brownfield sites” is a funding measure aimed at revaluing vacant properties in town and city centres in the federal state of Upper Austria, and is financially supported by the European Union.

Funding is available for the development of (inter-municipal) concepts for the activation of vacant properties, the reuse of derelict buildings and the development of town and city centres.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: Initiative of the municipality of Rappottenstein, Austria to attract primary residents by giving away building plot.

The Austrian municipality of Rappottenstein has given away ten building plots that have been vacant for years, with no prospects of being sold, on the conditions that the new owners will have to build a house on the plot in the next ten years and agree to set their primary residence in the municipality. Moreover, a minimum of three primary residents is required per newly built home, effectively targeting young families.

More information is available [here](#).

Good Practice: Building rights action of the federal state of Lower Austria to incentivise construction

The Lower Austrian building rights scheme makes it possible to build a house on a plot of land without having to purchase it immediately. Instead, building rights are granted which also serve as collateral for a bank loan. An annual building interest rate of 1% of the acquisition costs has to be paid by the user. The plot of land can be purchased at a later date (after at least 100 years). The scheme applies to all Lower Austrian municipalities and is aimed at young families, young couples and families with several children in order to keep construction costs low and make owning a house more affordable. Furthermore, it is also possible to take advantage of housing subsidies in combination with the building rights action.

More information is available [here](#).

7.3. Policy Package “Regulatory Framework”

A significant proportion of survey respondents expressed a desire for reduced bureaucracy and the establishment of a legally or corporately regulated framework for remote work. However, as many as 14% of respondents from rural areas cite bureaucratic hurdles or a lack of support from local authorities as a major drawback of living in rural areas. Moreover, 4% of those who expressed an unwillingness to relocate to a rural area cited this as their reason.

What could be done in this regard to better support and encourage people to consider a move to rural areas? 19% of survey respondents that are currently not residing in a rural area highlighted remote work policies as a motivating factor for considering a relocation to such an area. For another 9%, the removal of bureaucratic barriers in general would serve as an important incentive

for considering a move. The country-specific results suggest that this is a particularly significant issue in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. Again, caution is advised when interpreting these results due to the small number of cases and non-representative sample composition.

7.3.1. Establishment of legal framework for remote work

Consideration could be given to information campaigns on what aspects of remote work are already regulated at national or regional level, supplemented by research into what could be improved when taking framework conditions in other countries as reference. The results of the pilot actions implemented as part of the Danube4rural.com project as well as the policy measures derived from them that are to be incorporated into the governance model, can provide important impulses for the development of a sound legal framework for remote work. Through the involvement of the members of the Remote Workers Policy Hub, the scope and outreach of these measures can be further expanded.

7.3.2. Development and distribution of concepts and guidelines for remote work

How can remote work be implemented in companies? 46% of respondents who do not work remotely cited the fact that their employer does not want them to do so as the reason. This could be a symptom of remote work not being (sufficiently) formally regulated in many companies, which in turn can lead to arbitrariness and inconsistency concerning use within the organisation – an explanation, that is highly supported by the qualitative findings. Furthermore, a cautious approach to remote work could also be traced back to the fact that neither party – employee nor employer – is legally protected due to a weak legal framework. Here, for example, model templates for collective bargaining agreements on remote work or similar guidelines could help companies to at least offer this option within a clearly defined framework that is acceptable to them.

Although not representative and thus to be interpreted cautiously, country-specific survey results suggest that this is a particularly significant issue in Croatia and Hungary. Conversely, Slovakia could serve as an example of good practice in this sense, as Slovak respondents reported using remote work at an above-average rate. The frequency of use is also slightly higher in Slovakia than in the overall sample.

7.3.3. Streamlining of administrative hurdles to increase interest in rural properties

Dealing with inherited properties in rural areas can be time-consuming and even overwhelming, especially when the new owners do not reside in the same areas and are thus unfamiliar with the local administrative structures and procedures. Targeted support services provided by the municipalities, for instance in the form of streamlined bureaucratic processes or expert consulting services, can assist the residents in their endeavours and point out new opportunities to appreciate and make better use of their properties, while at the same time increasing the value and attractiveness of the communities as a whole.

Good Practice: Pilot project in the municipality of Moosburg, Austria, consisting of consulting services for owners of vacant houses

The Austrian municipality of Moosburg supports owners of vacant houses to better utilise their properties by providing a wide range of free of charge consulting services.

These include consultations from experienced architects regarding, for in-stance, options for re-designing the room partitioning and layout, adaptation of space in line with accessibility requirements (barrier free), resulting in concrete renovation plans and recommendations. Furthermore, consultations also address legal matters related to restructuring the living space and redefining the living arrangements regarding, for instance, renting possibilities, legal accountability for different living situations (shared living space, inheritances) or tax-related questions.

More information is available [here](#).

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9. Appendix

9.1. Tables from the online-survey

9.1.1. Sample distribution

Table 3: Socio-demographic and professional characteristics

		Number	%
What is your gender?	Female	313	60.4%
	Male	204	39.4%
	Diverse	1	0.2%
	Total	518	100.0%
What is your age?	18 to 24 years	18	3.5%
	25 to 34 years	109	21.0%
	35 to 44 years	165	31.7%
	45 to 54 years	162	31.2%
	Aged 55 years and above	66	12.7%
	Total	520	100.0%
What is your highest level of education?	Tertiary education (Bachelor's, Master's, doctoral or equivalent level) (ISCED 6-8)	413	79.9%
	Short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 5)	27	5.2%
	Upper secondary education, post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 3-4)	72	13.9%
	Early childhood education, primary education, lower secondary education (ISCED 0-2)	5	1.0%
	Total	517	100.0%
What is your primary living / employment situation currently?	In training (student etc.)	10	1.9%
	Employee	426	81.3%
	Self-employed / Entrepreneur	48	9.2%
	Unemployed / job seeker	14	2.7%
	Retired	16	3.1%
	Housework and / or nursing care, childcare	8	1.5%
	Other	2	0.4%
	Total	524	100.0%
What is the extent of your employment in weekly hours?	Employed full-time	437	95.4%
	Part-time employment of 20 or more hours per week	17	3.7%
	Part-time employment of less than 20 hours per week	4	0.9%
	Total	458	100.0%
In which country were you born?	Same as country of residence	485	94.2%
	Other	30	5.8%
	Total	515	100.0%
In what kind of area do you live most of the year?	Densely populated area (cities / urban centres / urban areas)	212	40.4%
	Area with medium population density (smaller cities and suburbs)	157	29.9%
	Sparsely populated area (rural area)	156	29.7%
	Total	525	100.0%
What is your current household situation?	I live with the family (e.g. with parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives)	110	21.2%
	I live in a partnership with children	233	44.8%
	I live in a partnership without children	104	20.0%
	I live as a single parent with child / children in the household	15	2.9%
	I live in a shared flat (e.g. with roommates)	1	0.2%
	I live alone	53	10.2%
	Other	4	0.8%
	Total	520	100.0%
	Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	15	2.9%

		Number	%
In which industry are you currently or were you last employed?	Manufacturing	12	2.3%
	Electricity, Gas, Steam and Air Conditioning Supply	5	1.0%
	Water Supply; Sewerage, Waste Management and Remediation Activities	6	1.2%
	Construction	17	3.3%
	Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles	7	1.4%
	Transportation and Storage	6	1.2%
	Accommodation and Food Service Activities	6	1.2%
	Publishing, Broadcasting, and Content Production and Distribution Activities	5	1.0%
	Telecommunication, Computer Programming, Consulting, Computing Infrastructure, and other Information Service Activities	73	14.2%
	Financial and Insurance Activities	23	4.5%
	Real Estate Activities	1	0.2%
	Professional, Scientific and Technical Activities	44	8.5%
	Administrative and Support Service Activities	48	9.3%
	Public Administration and Defence; Compulsory Social Security	85	16.5%
	Education	47	9.1%
	Human Health and Social Work Activities	17	3.3%
	Arts, Sports and Recreation	8	1.6%
	Other Service Activities	31	6.0%
	Activities of Households as Employers; Undifferentiated Goods and Services Producing Activities of Households for Own Use	1	0.2%
	Activities of Extraterritorial Organisations and Bodies	18	3.5%
I have never been employed.	6	1.2%	
Other	34	6.6%	
Total	515	100.0%	
Which of the following professional qualification levels best corresponds to your current or last job?	Apprentice, in training (trainee or entry-level employee with limited independent tasks)	11	2.2%
	Auxiliary or semi-skilled role (basic tasks with little specialisation)	31	6.1%
	Professional or specialist role (tasks requiring a degree, formal training or certification)	154	30.4%
	Expert or highly qualified role (deep expertise in specialised field of activity, great autonomy)	218	43.1%
	Leadership role (entrepreneur or employee responsible for managing people, budget or strategic planning)	83	16.4%
	Other	9	1.8%
Total	506	100.0%	
How competent do you feel in the use of digital tools?	I have no / hardly any digital skills	3	0.6%
	I have basic skills (e.g. sending e-mails or messages)	71	13.6%
	I can use digital tools independently (e.g. create a graphic, hold a video conference)	224	42.8%
	I have advanced digital skills (e.g. use special software)	155	29.6%
	I have highly specialised digital skills (e.g. develop software or digital content myself)	70	13.4%
Total	523	100.0%	

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=526; *working hours: n=474, living area: n=525, qualification level: n=520

9.1.2. Commuting time and remote work

Table 4: How long does it take you to commute to your workplace?

	Number	%
No travel time (I work exclusively from home)	83	16.6%
Less than 30 minutes	309	61.7%
Between 30 and 60 minutes	84	16.8%
Between 60 and 120 minutes	21	4.2%
More than 120 minutes	4	0.8%
Total	501	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=520

Table 5: If NOT 'no travel time': What means of transportation do you regularly use to get to work? (multiple answers possible)

	Number	%
Own car	290	68.1%
I walk	129	30.3%
Public transport	93	21.8%
Own Bicycle	43	10.1%
Car-sharing (from a public sharing system)	9	2.1%
Own motorcycle / e-scooter	7	1.6%
Shared bicycle (from a public sharing system)	4	0.9%
Total	426	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=418

Table 6: Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?

		Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?									
		Yes, and I use it too		Yes, but I don't use it		No, but I would like to have the possibility		No, but I don't need this possibility either		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	Total	205	39.4%	68	13.1%	158	30.4%	89	17.1%	520	100.0%
What is your gender?	Female	115	37.2%	38	12.3%	105	34.0%	51	16.5%	309	100.0%
	Male	87	43.1%	30	14.9%	49	24.3%	36	17.8%	202	100.0%
What is your age?	18 to 34 years	57	47.1%	10	8.3%	44	36.4%	10	8.3%	121	100.0%
	35 to 44 years	67	40.6%	17	10.3%	53	32.1%	28	17.0%	165	100.0%
	45 to 54 years	58	35.8%	29	17.9%	47	29.0%	28	17.3%	162	100.0%
	Aged 55 years and above	21	31.8%	12	18.2%	11	16.7%	22	33.3%	66	100.0%
What is your highest level of education?	Tertiary education (Bachelor, Master, doctoral or equivalent level) / Short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 5-8)	185	42.1%	65	14.8%	128	29.2%	61	13.9%	439	100.0%
	Upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary education / Childhood, primary, lower secondary education (ISCED 0-4)	18	25.0%	2	2.8%	27	37.5%	25	34.7%	72	100.0%

		Do you currently have the possibility to work remotely or did you have this possibility in your last job?									
		Yes, and I use it too		Yes, but I don't use it		No, but I would like to have the possibility		No, but I don't need this possibility either		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
In what kind of area do you live most of the year?	Densely populated area (cities / urban centres / urban areas)	88	41.7%	33	15.6%	69	32.7%	21	10.0%	211	100.0%
	Area with medium population density (smaller cities and suburbs)	56	36.1%	19	12.3%	55	35.5%	25	16.1%	155	100.0%
	Sparsely populated area (rural area)	61	39.9%	16	10.5%	34	22.2%	42	27.5%	153	100.0%
What is your current household situation?	I live with the family (e.g. with parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives)	35	33.3%	17	16.2%	37	35.2%	16	15.2%	105	100.0%
	I live in a partnership with children	82	35.2%	31	13.3%	73	31.3%	47	20.2%	233	100.0%
	I live in a partnership without children	51	49.0%	9	8.7%	28	26.9%	16	15.4%	104	100.0%
	I live alone	25	48.1%	9	17.3%	11	21.2%	7	13.5%	52	100.0%
Which of the following professional qualification levels best corresponds to your current or last job?	Apprentice, in training / auxiliary or semi-skilled role (basic tasks with little specialisation)	10	23.8%	3	7.1%	22	52.4%	7	16.7%	42	100.0%
	Professional or specialist role (tasks requiring a degree, formal training or certification)	41	26.6%	12	7.8%	66	42.9%	35	22.7%	154	100.0%
	Expert or highly qualified role (deep expertise in specialised field of activity, great autonomy)	116	53.2%	37	17.0%	46	21.1%	19	8.7%	218	100.0%
	Leadership role (entrepreneur or employee responsible for managing people, budget or strategic planning)	36	43.4%	13	15.7%	16	19.3%	18	21.7%	83	100.0%
How competent do you feel in the use of digital tools?	I have no / hardly any / basic digital skills (e.g. sending e-mails or messages)	8	11.1%	9	12.5%	27	37.5%	28	38.9%	72	100.0%
	I can use digital tools independently (e.g. create a graphic, hold a video conference)	68	30.8%	30	13.6%	81	36.7%	42	19.0%	221	100.0%
	I have advanced digital skills (e.g. use special software)	78	50.3%	22	14.2%	39	25.2%	16	10.3%	155	100.0%
	I have highly specialised digital skills (e.g. develop software or digital content myself)	51	73.9%	6	8.7%	11	15.9%	1	1.4%	69	100.0%
How long does it take you to commute to your workplace?	No travel time (I work exclusively from home)	76	91.6%			2	2.4%	5	6.0%	83	100.0%
	Less than 30 minutes	74	23.9%	51	16.5%	118	38.2%	66	21.4%	309	100.0%
	Between 30 and 60 minutes	36	42.9%	13	15.5%	25	29.8%	10	11.9%	84	100.0%
	More than 60 minutes	13	52.0%	2	8.0%	8	32.0%	2	8.0%	25	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=520

Table 7: If remote work used: Where do you work remotely or would like to do so? (multiple answers possible)

		Number	%
My home	I use this option	191	98.5%
	I don't use but would like the option	2	1.0%
	I don't use and don't need the option	1	0.5%

		Number	%
	Total	194	100.0%
Home of friends, family, relatives	I use this option	49	35.3%
	I don't use but would like the option	17	12.2%
	I don't use and don't need the option	73	52.5%
	Total	139	100.0%
Co-working spaces / shared office spaces	I use this option	37	26.4%
	I don't use but would like the option	39	27.9%
	I don't use and don't need the option	64	45.7%
	Total	140	100.0%
Restaurants, cafés, bars, and similar establishments	I use this option	41	29.9%
	I don't use but would like the option	22	16.1%
	I don't use and don't need the option	74	54.0%
	Total	137	100.0%
Public spaces such as parks	I use this option	17	12.9%
	I don't use but would like the option	29	22.0%
	I don't use and don't need the option	86	65.2%
	Total	132	100.0%
Means of transportation	I use this option	26	20.2%
	I don't use but would like the option	12	9.3%
	I don't use and don't need the option	91	70.5%
	Total	129	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=205

Table 8: *If remote work possibility desired: Where would you like to work remotely? (multiple answers possible)*

	Number	%
My home	145	92.9%
Public spaces such as parks	26	16.7%
Restaurants, cafés, bars, and similar establishments	23	14.7%
Co-working spaces / shared office spaces	21	13.5%
Home of friends, family, relatives	16	10.3%
Means of transportation	5	3.2%
Gesamt	156	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=158

Table 9: *If remote work possibility desired: How often would you like to work remotely?*

	Numer	%
Exclusively remotely	17	11.0%
Predominantly remotely	21	13.5%
40% to 60% of working time is remote	56	36.1%
From time to time / only in exceptional cases	52	33.5%
I can't answer / it varies	9	5.8%
Gesamt	155	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=158

Table 10: If remote work used: How often do you work remotely?

	Number	%
Exclusively remotely	61	30.7%
Predominantly remotely	39	19.6%
40% to 60% of working time is remote	40	20.1%
From time to time / only in exceptional cases	50	25.1%
I can't answer / it varies	9	4.5%
Gesamt	199	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=205

Table 11: If remote work used: How often do you work remotely? (detailed)

		How often do you work remotely?										Total	
		Exclusively remotely		Predominantly remotely		40% to 60% of working time is remote		From time to time / only in exceptional cases		I can't answer / it varies			
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%		
Total	Total	61	30.7%	39	19.6%	40	20.1%	50	25.1%	9	4.5%	199	100%
What is your gender?	Female	34	30.4%	18	16.1%	25	22.3%	29	25.9%	6	5.4%	112	100%
	Male	26	30.6%	20	23.5%	15	17.6%	21	24.7%	3	3.5%	85	100%
What is your age?	18 to 34 years	18	32.7%	18	32.7%	5	9.1%	11	20.0%	3	5.5%	55	100%
	35 to 44 years	24	35.8%	11	16.4%	15	22.4%	16	23.9%	1	1.5%	67	100%
	45 to 54 years	13	22.4%	8	13.8%	18	31.0%	17	29.3%	2	3.4%	58	100%
	Aged 55 years and above	6	33.3%	2	11.1%	2	11.1%	6	33.3%	2	11.1%	18	100%
What is your highest level of education?	Tertiary education (Bachelor, Master, doctoral or equivalent level) / Short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 5-8)	53	29.0%	37	20.2%	37	20.2%	49	26.8%	7	3.8%	183	100%
	Upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary education / Childhood, primary, lower secondary education (ISCED 0-4)	8	50.0%	2	12.5%	3	18.8%	1	6.3%	2	12.5%	16	100%
In which country do you live most of the year?	Bosnia and Herzegovina	3	16.7%	3	16.7%	2	11.1%	10	55.6%			18	100%
	Bulgaria	12	54.5%	7	31.8%	1	4.5%	1	4.5%	1	4.5%	22	100%
	Croatia	1	16.7%	1	16.7%			4	66.7%			6	100%
	Montenegro	6	54.5%	1	9.1%	1	9.1%	3	27.3%			11	100%
	Romania	1	8.3%	1	8.3%			10	83.3%			12	100%
	Serbia	7	33.3%	2	9.5%	7	33.3%	4	19.0%	1	4.8%	21	100%
	Slovakia	20	33.3%	16	26.7%	12	20.0%	8	13.3%	4	6.7%	60	100%
	Slovenia	6	40.0%	1	6.7%	6	40.0%	2	13.3%			15	100%
In what kind of area do you live most of the year?	Densely populated area (cities / urban centres / urban areas)	24	27.9%	19	22.1%	12	14.0%	28	32.6%	3	3.5%	86	100%
	Area with medium population density (smaller cities and suburbs)	19	33.9%	7	12.5%	15	26.8%	14	25.0%	1	1.8%	56	100%
	Sparsely populated area (rural area)	18	31.6%	13	22.8%	13	22.8%	8	14.0%	5	8.8%	57	100%
	What is your current household situation?	I live with the family (e.g. with parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives)	8	23.5%	11	32.4%	7	20.6%	7	20.6%	1	2.9%	34
	I live in a partnership with children	26	31.7%	13	15.9%	19	23.2%	22	26.8%	2	2.4%	82	100%

		How often do you work remotely?											
		Exclusively remotely		Predominantly remotely		40% to 60% of working time is remote		From time to time / only in exceptional cases		I can't answer / it varies		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
	I live in a partnership without children	15	30.6%	8	16.3%	8	16.3%	14	28.6%	4	8.2%	49	100%
	I live alone	10	43.5%	6	26.1%	2	8.7%	3	13.0%	2	8.7%	23	100%
Which of the following professional qualification levels best corresponds to your current or last job?	Apprentice, in training / auxiliary or semi-skilled role (basic tasks with little specialisation)	5	62.5%	1	12.5%			1	12.5%	1	12.5%	8	100%
	Professional or specialist role (tasks requiring a degree, formal training or certification)	17	42.5%	7	17.5%	5	12.5%	11	27.5%			40	100%
	Expert or highly qualified role (deep expertise in specialised field of activity, great autonomy)	31	27.2%	25	21.9%	26	22.8%	27	23.7%	5	4.4%	114	100%
	Leadership role (entrepreneur or employee responsible for managing people, budget or strategic planning)	8	22.9%	6	17.1%	8	22.9%	11	31.4%	2	5.7%	35	100%
How competent do you feel in the use of digital tools?	I have no / hardly any / basic digital skills (e.g. sending e-mails or messages)	1	20.0%					3	60.0%	1	20.0%	5	100%
	I can use digital tools independently (e.g. create a graphic, hold a video conference)	18	26.9%	9	13.4%	15	22.4%	23	34.3%	2	3.0%	67	100%
	I have advanced digital skills (e.g. use special software)	16	21.1%	23	30.3%	16	21.1%	17	22.4%	4	5.3%	76	100%
	I have highly specialised digital skills (e.g. develop software or digital content myself)	26	51.0%	7	13.7%	9	17.6%	7	13.7%	2	3.9%	51	100%
How long does it take you to commute to your workplace?	No travel time (I work exclusively from home)	55	74.3%	15	20.3%	1	1.4%	1	1.4%	2	2.7%	74	100%
	Less than 30 minutes	4	5.6%	12	16.7%	18	25.0%	36	50.0%	2	2.8%	72	100%
	Between 30 and 60 minutes	1	2.8%	7	19.4%	14	38.9%	11	30.6%	3	8.3%	36	100%
	More than 60 minutes	1	7.7%	5	38.5%	6	46.2%	1	7.7%			13	100%

Quelle: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=205

Table 12: If remote work used: How do you assess this frequency?

	Number	%
I am content with how much I work remotely	143	73.0%
I would like to work more remotely	39	19.9%
I would like to work less remotely	14	7.1%
Total	196	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=205

Table 13: *If remote work used or possibility desired: What were / would be the main reasons for you to work remotely? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)*

	Number	%
More flexible time management	262	74.0%
Saving travel time	190	53.7%
Better work-life balance	169	47.7%
More peace and quiet at home	156	44.1%
Ability to live outside big cities while keeping my job	111	31.4%
Desire to freely choose the place of residence	96	27.1%
New career opportunities (access to the international labour market, associated higher pay)	44	12.4%
Part of the work culture in my company, institution or organisation	39	11.0%
Health reasons (reduced physical mobility, mental or physical illness)	26	7.3%
Reduced regional mobility (poor public transport connections, no own car)	21	5.9%
No own workspace in the office (shared desk or similar) or no branch office (self-employed, freelancer)	16	4.5%
Employer's request as a cost- or energy-saving measure	13	3.7%
Total	354	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=363

Table 14: *If remote work not available or not used: What are the main reasons against you working remotely? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)*

	Number	%
Employer does not want employees to work remotely	124	46.3%
Lack of social contacts	86	32.1%
Difficult communication within the team	83	31.0%
Lack of legal framework for remote working	47	17.5%
Lack of technical equipment at home	45	16.8%
Insufficient peace and quiet at home	37	13.8%
Lack of space at home	26	9.7%
Increased costs in connection with remote work (acquisition and running costs for home office, costs for co-working spaces)	13	4.9%
Lack of / insufficient digital skills / affinity	8	3.0%
Total	268	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=315

9.1.3. Life in rural areas

Table 15: In what kind of areas do you live most of the year?

		In what kind of area do you live most of the year?							
		Densely populated area (cities / urban centres / urban areas)		Area with medium population density (smaller cities and suburbs)		Sparsely populated area (rural area)		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	Total	212	40.4%	157	29.9%	156	29.7%	525	100.0%
What is your gender?	Female	123	39.3%	94	30.0%	96	30.7%	313	100.0%
	Male	85	41.9%	62	30.5%	56	27.6%	203	100.0%
What is your age?	18 to 34 years	50	39.7%	38	30.2%	38	30.2%	126	100.0%
	35 to 44 years	69	41.8%	54	32.7%	42	25.5%	165	100.0%
	45 to 54 years	73	45.1%	51	31.5%	38	23.5%	162	100.0%
	Aged 55 years and above	16	24.2%	14	21.2%	36	54.5%	66	100.0%
What is your highest level of education?	Tertiary education (Bachelor, Master, doctoral or equivalent level) / Short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 5-8)	193	43.9%	129	29.3%	118	26.8%	440	100.0%
	Upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary education / Childhood, primary, lower secondary education (ISCED 0-4)	16	20.8%	27	35.1%	34	44.2%	77	100.0%
What is your current household situation?	I live with the family (e.g. with parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives)	36	32.7%	36	32.7%	38	34.5%	110	100.0%
	I live in a partnership with children	84	36.1%	78	33.5%	71	30.5%	233	100.0%
	I live in a partnership without children	51	49.0%	20	19.2%	33	31.7%	104	100.0%
	I live alone	24	45.3%	16	30.2%	13	24.5%	53	100.0%
Which of the following professional qualification levels best corresponds to your current or last job?	Apprentice, in training / auxiliary or semi-skilled role (basic tasks with little specialisation)	17	40.5%	10	23.8%	15	35.7%	42	100.0%
	Professional or specialist role (tasks requiring a degree, formal training or certification)	71	46.1%	46	29.9%	37	24.0%	154	100.0%
	Expert or highly qualified role (deep expertise in specialised field of activity, great autonomy)	93	42.7%	68	31.2%	57	26.1%	218	100.0%
	Leadership role (entrepreneur or employee responsible for managing people, budget or strategic planning)	26	31.7%	25	30.5%	31	37.8%	82	100.0%
How competent do you feel in the use of digital tools?	I have no / hardly any / basic digital skills (e.g. sending e-mails or messages)	21	28.4%	17	23.0%	36	48.6%	74	100.0%
	I can use digital tools independently (e.g. create a graphic, hold a video conference)	95	42.4%	71	31.7%	58	25.9%	224	100.0%
	I have advanced digital skills (e.g. use special software)	63	40.6%	47	30.3%	45	29.0%	155	100.0%
	I have highly specialised digital skills (e.g. develop software or digital content myself)	32	45.7%	22	31.4%	16	22.9%	70	100.0%
How long does it take you to commute to your workplace?	No travel time (I work exclusively from home)	29	34.9%	23	27.7%	31	37.3%	83	100.0%
	Less than 30 minutes	131	42.4%	99	32.0%	79	25.6%	309	100.0%
	Between 30 and 60 minutes	41	48.8%	24	28.6%	19	22.6%	84	100.0%
	More than 60 minutes	7	28.0%	5	20.0%	13	52.0%	25	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=525

Table 16: Do you intend to continue living in a rural community long-term (in the next 3 to 5 years)?

	Number	%
Yes	137	90.1%
No	2	1.3%
Don't know	13	8.6%
Total	152	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=156

Table 17: What are in your view the main advantages of living in the countryside? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)

	Number	%
Access to nature and outdoor spaces	125	80.1%
Cleaner air and better environmental quality	98	62.8%
More living space (indoors and outdoors)	97	62.2%
More quiet environment (less noise and stress)	89	57.1%
Better conditions for raising children / family life	50	32.1%
Lower costs of living (e.g. housing, daily expenses)	37	23.7%
Familiar surroundings / I grew up in a rural community	36	23.1%
Proximity to family and friends	33	21.2%
Slower pace of life	33	21.2%
Greater sense of safety / lower crime rates	32	20.5%
Stronger sense of community / social cohesion	27	17.3%
Pleasant climate or weather conditions	18	11.5%
Location of the employer / training centre in the vicinity	3	1.9%
Total	156	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=156

Table 18: If already living in a rural area and agreement with better conditions for raising children / family life: What advantages do you see in the countryside in connection to child education / childcare? (multiple answers possible)

	Number	%
Educational benefits (e.g. smaller class sizes, better quality of teacher-pupil relationships)	31	67.4%
More space for children to play	30	65.2%
More involvement of parent communities	14	30.4%
More support for special educational needs	4	8.7%
Total	46	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=50

Table 19: *If not living in a rural area and agreement with better conditions for raising children / family life: What advantages do you see in the countryside in connection to child education / childcare? (multiple answers possible)*

	Number	%
More space for children to play	26	70.3%
More involvement of parent communities	18	48.6%
Educational benefits (e.g. smaller class sizes, better quality of teacher-pupil relationships)	17	45.9%
More support for special educational needs	5	13.5%
Total	37	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=38

Table 20: *If already living in a rural area and wanting to stay: What are in your view the main disadvantages of living in the countryside? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)*

	Number	%
Limited or unreliable public transportation	102	69.4%
Fewer job or career opportunities	80	54.4%
Few cultural events and leisure opportunities	62	42.2%
Limited access to shopping, banking or basic services	54	36.7%
Insufficient access to healthcare services	44	29.9%
Limited options for childcare or education	39	26.5%
Fewer opportunities for professional networking or collaboration	31	21.1%
Risk of social isolation or lack of like-minded people	30	20.4%
Poor digital infrastructure (e.g. unstable internet, weak mobile coverage)	29	19.7%
Bureaucratic hurdles or lack of local administrative support	21	14.3%
Limited e-services / e-government?	12	8.2%
Distance from family and friends	10	6.8%
Total	147	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=150

9.1.4. Possible move to a rural area

Table 21: Could you imagine moving to a rural region in the next 3 to 5 years?

		Could you imagine moving to a rural region in the next 3 to 5 years?									
		Yes, also long-term		Yes, but only short-term		No		I don't know		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Total	Total	147	42.0%	55	15.7%	86	24.6%	62	17.7%	350	100.0%
What is your gender?	Female	82	39.8%	38	18.4%	54	26.2%	32	15.5%	206	100.0%
	Male	64	45.7%	17	12.1%	31	22.1%	28	20.0%	140	100.0%
What is your age?	18 to 34 years	34	41.0%	12	14.5%	24	28.9%	13	15.7%	83	100.0%
	35 to 44 years	43	38.1%	16	14.2%	30	26.5%	24	21.2%	113	100.0%
	45 to 54 years	49	40.5%	23	19.0%	30	24.8%	19	15.7%	121	100.0%
	Aged 55 years and above	19	63.3%	4	13.3%	1	3.3%	6	20.0%	30	100.0%
What is your highest level of education?	Tertiary education (Bachelor, Master, doctoral or equivalent level) / Short-cycle tertiary education (ISCED 5-8)	128	41.4%	52	16.8%	82	26.5%	47	15.2%	309	100.0%
	Upper secondary, post-secondary non-tertiary education / Childhood, primary, lower secondary education (ISCED 0-4)	19	48.7%	3	7.7%	4	10.3%	13	33.3%	39	100.0%
In what kind of area do you live most of the year?	Densely populated area (cities / urban centres / urban areas)	77	38.3%	30	14.9%	60	29.9%	34	16.9%	201	100.0%
	Area with medium population density (smaller cities and suburbs)	70	47.0%	25	16.8%	26	17.4%	28	18.8%	149	100.0%
What is your current household situation?	I live with the family (e.g. with parents, grandparents, siblings, other relatives)	22	33.3%	15	22.7%	18	27.3%	11	16.7%	66	100.0%
	I live in a partnership with children	67	43.2%	22	14.2%	36	23.2%	30	19.4%	155	100.0%
	I live in a partnership without children	34	49.3%	7	10.1%	17	24.6%	11	15.9%	69	100.0%
	I live alone	16	41.0%	8	20.5%	10	25.6%	5	12.8%	39	100.0%
Which of the following professional qualification levels best corresponds to your current or last job?	Apprentice, in training / auxiliary or semi-skilled role (basic tasks with little specialisation)*									24	100.0%
	Professional or specialist role (tasks requiring a degree, formal training or certification)	45	41.3%	11	10.1%	34	31.2%	19	17.4%	109	100.0%
	Expert or highly qualified role (deep expertise in specialised field of activity, great autonomy)	65	42.2%	28	18.2%	41	26.6%	20	13.0%	154	100.0%
	Leadership role (entrepreneur or employee responsible for managing people, budget or strategic planning)	26	52.0%	8	16.0%	6	12.0%	10	20.0%	50	100.0%
How competent do you feel in the use of digital tools?	I have no / hardly any / basic digital skills (e.g. sending e-mails or messages)	13	38.2%	4	11.8%	9	26.5%	8	23.5%	34	100.0%
	I can use digital tools independently (e.g. create a graphic, hold a video conference)	58	37.4%	30	19.4%	38	24.5%	29	18.7%	155	100.0%
	I have advanced digital skills (e.g. use special software)	46	43.0%	16	15.0%	29	27.1%	16	15.0%	107	100.0%
	I have highly specialised digital skills (e.g. develop software or digital content myself)	29	54.7%	5	9.4%	10	18.9%	9	17.0%	53	100.0%

		Could you imagine moving to a rural region in the next 3 to 5 years?									
		Yes, also long-term		Yes, but only short-term		No		I don't know		Total	
		Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
How long does it take you to commute to your workplace?	No travel time (I work exclusively from home)	22	45.8%	5	10.4%	16	33.3%	5	10.4%	48	100.0%
	Less than 30 minutes	86	38.6%	40	17.9%	54	24.2%	43	19.3%	223	100.0%
	Between 30 and 60 minutes	31	51.7%	8	13.3%	9	15.0%	12	20.0%	60	100.0%
	More than 60 minutes*									11	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=369; * Distribution not shown due to insufficient number of cases

Table 22: *If yes, short- or long-term: Could you also imagine moving to a rural region in another country?*

	Number	%
Yes	103	52.0%
No	52	26.3%
I don't know	43	21.7%
Total	198	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=202

Table 23: *If yes, short or long-term: Why do you want to move to a rural region? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)*

	Number	%
Access to nature and outdoor spaces	142	71.4%
Cleaner air and better environmental quality	142	71.4%
More quiet environment (less noise and stress)	116	58.3%
More living space (indoors and outdoors)	109	54.8%
Slower pace of life	81	40.7%
Lower costs of living (e.g. housing, daily expenses)	59	29.6%
Pleasant climate or weather conditions	46	23.1%
Better conditions for raising children / family life	38	19.1%
Stronger sense of community / social cohesion	28	14.1%
Proximity to family and friends	23	11.6%
Familiar surroundings / I grew up in a rural community	20	10.1%
Good experiences with life in rural regions	12	6.0%
Greater sense of safety / lower crime rates	11	5.5%
Location of the employer / training centre in the vicinity	2	1.0%
Total	199	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=202

Table 24: *If no or only short-term: Why would you not want to move to a rural region, or would only consider a short-term move? (multiple choice possible – maximum 5 options)*

	Number	%
Insufficient access to healthcare services	68	49.6%
Few cultural events and leisure opportunities	65	47.4%
Poor digital infrastructure (e.g. unstable internet, weak mobile coverage)	48	35.0%
Limited options for childcare or education	46	33.6%
Limited or unreliable public transportation	45	32.8%
Fewer job or career opportunities	38	27.7%
Limited access to shopping, banking or basic services	38	27.7%
Risk of social isolation or lack of like-minded people	33	24.1%
Distance from family and friends	30	21.9%
Not compatible with my current job (large distance, no remote work option)	29	21.2%
Fewer opportunities for professional networking or collaboration	20	14.6%
Limited e-services / e-government	15	10.9%
Family situation does not fit (e.g. childcare, nursing care responsibilities)	13	9.5%
Individual situation does not fit (e.g. property)	9	6.6%
Bureaucratic hurdles or lack of local administrative support	5	3.6%
Bad experiences with life in rural areas	1	0.7%
Total	137	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=141

9.1.5. Potential Incentives for Relocation to Rural Areas

Table 25: *What would need to be improved or what would you need in order to consider moving to a rural area? (Multiple answers possible – maximum 5 options)*

	Number	%
Technical infrastructure (e.g. stable internet and mobile coverage)	160	45.1%
Living conditions	146	41.1%
Healthcare services	140	39.4%
Childcare and education services	114	32.1%
Public transport	113	31.8%
Financial incentives (e.g. relocation subsidies or tax relief)	102	28.7%
Leisure activities	91	25.6%
Remote work for work-life balance	82	23.1%

	Number	%
Remote work policy (e.g. encouragement, incentives, local support)	66	18.6%
Community / like-minded people	65	18.3%
Own car	58	16.3%
Better e-services / e-government	39	11.0%
Reducing bureaucratic hurdles within the administrative authorities	30	8.5%
Public authority support	26	7.3%
Availability of co-working spaces	20	5.6%
Car-sharing services (from a public sharing system)	13	3.7%
Own bicycle, motorcycle or e-scooter	6	1.7%
Total	355	100.0%

Source: L&R Datafile 'Danube4rural.com_Survey', 2025; n=369