



**TWING PROJECT**

# Estonia – Finland

## Transferability workshop

### report

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**praxis**  
think tank



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## 1. An assessment of the status quo in ICT and public administration sectors

*How common are telework practices, who pushes for which practices, what are general positions?*

### **Public administration group<sup>1</sup>:**

Both in Estonia and Finland, telework in form of hybrid work practices has become common since the COVID-19-19. Hybrid work arrangements refer to an opportunity to work e.g. three days remotely and two from the office. In practice, the division of telework and office time is often done between the team leader and members. For example, in the national insurance company – Kela, it is possible to work almost entirely remotely as long as it supports the realisation of working tasks and division of tasks between colleagues. In Finland, no particular telework regulation has been done because social partner representatives (for both employers and employees) find the current legislation as comprehensive and sufficient. Therefore, telework is not part of the collective agreement in the public administration sector.

**The ICT sector** has implemented telework quite extensively already before COVID-19 while the practice has become even more widespread since then. Due to high competition for talent in the sector, companies often invest a lot in the welfare packages for employees, where telework is one part. Hence, it is easier to implement telework in those companies. Trade unions have not perceived the necessity to negotiate for collective agreements on telework as the welfare packages are usually quite extensive and considerate for employee needs. Still, ICT is also characterised by quick changes and large flexibility – different practices are

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<sup>1</sup> The workshop hosted in Helsinki invited representatives from the Finnish and Estonian public sector, i.e. the Employee Union of the University of Jyväskylä (JYHY) and the Trade Union of State and Selfgovernment Institutions Workers of Estonia (ROTAL), the Estonian Trade union Confederation (EAKL) and the network for HR representatives and employees from Estonia (PARE) and of two researchers from the University of Jyväskylä (JYU). A shop steward from the University of Jyväskylä representing JYHY had to cancel her meeting few days before the workshop. Instead, she took part in a Teams interview where she came up with few suggestions of good practices.

implemented across teams within the same company. Overall, telework is considered as an integral part of work organisation in the ICT sector.

## 2. A representation of the discussion between the social partners

It is difficult to frame any particular good practice because of the broad field of public administration. Instead, the focus was on general improvement practices in the regulations and arrangement of telework. The following topics were discussed in the public administration group:

For companies and public administration authorities:

- **Sharing of workload and tasks** (both in meetings as well as in teams)
- **Improved collaboration between team members** (and in meetings) are important: Currently the collaboration and exchange of information is not always very fluent between team members or participants in meetings.
- **Access to training:** in particularly the training of team leaders
- Focus on **training of human skills:** improved human skills can be helpful in challenging discussions between the employer and employee, or colleagues.
- **Need to limit the amount of internal e-mail exchanged between colleagues?** Not so, instead the employer/employee should turn off the e-mail after the working day.
- **Face to face meetings** are needed to some extent because these can maintain and, or improve the well-being of the employees, e.g. inclusion to the work community and improve the exchange of knowledge and ideas.

For companies and their social partners:

- **Leisure time insurance**, i.e. how it could be included as part of the collective agreement. In several cases, the funding of accident costs will not go to the company as long as it has not taken an insurance for its teleworking employees.
- **Awareness raising** of hybrid work, i.e. to stress that telework is part of the new normal working time arrangement: Already the awareness about the right to telework can increase employees' working motivation and commitment for their company.

For unions:

- Hybrid working time arrangements have challenged unions to look for **new methods to mobilise and recruit potential union members**. The challenge is to find new and efficient channels for recruiting new members.

In **ICT discussion group**, the main features of good practices were identified as following:

- Flexibility creates flexibility: companies that implement flexibility practices are more open to different flexible work organisation arrangements; sectors with more flexibility experience tend to introduce more flexible work organisation practices in other companies in the same sector.
- Enabling the use of **office equipment** at home:
  - It is important to be considerate that open office does not fit everyone so some employees might prefer working in a more private environment at their home offices. There needs to be a working space for different needs
  - Some companies have opted for rebuilding the office to meet employee needs as the needs and expectations for office space has changed with COVID-19 and the awareness of different needs related to office environment has increased
  - Some companies cut down on office space, while keeping the same amount of employees. There seems to be no information about issues with lack of access to office space (i.e. people who would like to work at the office but are not able to do so)
  - Before COVID-19 employers were not excited to keep people working from home, but with COVID-19 and home work experience, equipment and skills for telework became available and now the good practices are continued.
- Attention on **psychosocial aspects** (evaluation of home conditions and psychosocial aspects of working from home), access to mental health consultations
  - Some companies have introduced the ability to contact psychologist, it was particularly important during COVID-19.
  - After launch of mental health programmes, people immediately picked it up; now as people are more used to home work, there is less use
  - Managers do more 1:1 discussions and there is higher awareness of mental health issues; mental health issues at work should not be a stigma
- **Training** employees and line managers on telework (i.e. hybrid team management, effective work arrangements etc)
- Some level of **common office time** is still necessary – it is difficult to blend into a work environment when you have never met anyone. Nevertheless, some teams work abroad and in different countries with no common office time and it works out.
  - It is a good practice to keep social environment for new and current employees

- It is important to explain why common office time is necessary
- Important for mental health to meet employees from time to time.
- Innovation does not happen remotely
- **Equal treatment:** not everyone can implement telework, but it is important to recognise the room for flexibility for different types of work

It was concluded in the group discussion that good practices in telework is not only about telework anymore, but a combination of different welfare programmes that are implemented in the ICT companies. Employee welfare is about more than just the ability to work from home but a combination of different working conditions including welfare and health programmes, flexibility of time and place of work, access to training etc.

### 3. Factors and features for establishing (successfully) regulating telework in the two countries

In the public administration group, the representatives stressed as the core reason for successful hybrid working time arrangement in both countries has to do with smooth and good cooperation between companies/organisations and social partners. Key factors are amongst others: mutual trust, time given for decision-making and careful preparation by the partners before they attend the meetings. For example, the steering group members of local associations representing the Finnish universities meet and discuss possible changes and recommendations relating mainly with the collective agreements, but if needed also about teleworking arrangements before they present their recommendations to the trade unions who in turn are in charge of sector level collective agreements.

In ICT discussion group, the **main assumptions and obstacles** for implementing good practices for telework were discussed.

Main assumptions for implementing good practices in telework is that telework is **based on trust** between people. An important starting point: company trusts every employee in the company. For example:

- Implementing telework is easy when there is trust
- Awareness that being in office does not make an employee more reliable – you are not expected to be more devoted to work while working in the office. Employee devotion and dedication is not a matter of physical location

- Trust is more common in teams/ companies with high level salaried employees
- Individual plans and case-to-case approaches are necessary in case trust is lost
- Presence of checklist/guidance for telework supports mutual agreements, e.g. employer / manager has the right to terminate remote work arrangement in case employee performance does not meet expectations

How to build trust is a continuing question that requires long-term approach, there are no easy and quick-fix solutions. The main approach is: flexibility creates flexibility. It is important not to just dictate what to do, but important to explain the reasons of different decisions. Additional important features for building trust in teams are:

- Careful selection of line managers
- Recognising the goals for working
- Building common goals
- Facilitating the awareness how everyone's work is meaningful

Implementing good practices is **demanding for line managers** as it is important to keep self-discipline. Line managers need to have constant 1:1 discussions with their team members and they have to be aware about the topics that need to be brought up and discussed in case of distant work. For this purpose, it is necessary to remind line managers about the topics of 1:1 discussions or what to bring up in daily conversations. Awareness of line managers is the key and being aware of different needs of employees.

The ICT group also discussed whether the size of a company plays a role while implementing telework good practices. It turned out that both large and small companies have their strengths and weaknesses. It is easier to implement and test different work practices on a small scale (smaller companies are more quickly adaptable). However, large multi-national companies may have global work principles that are implemented in all branches (global experience supports local practices). However, these decisions can also be more costly in large companies as the resources needed are much larger. There are also different options that companies may opt for in case of managing costs, e.g. introducing a discount to buy necessary equipment for home offices instead of full coverage etc.

**Assessment of results** is important while implementing good practices. It is necessary to evaluate how telework works in the company. Implementing regular evaluations was discussed as an option to keep track of the situation. For instance, the connection between working from home and employee satisfaction can be measured in regular evaluations. Based

on their current experience ICT group participants emphasised the importance of a hybrid working model (i.e. dividing time between home and office), which supports best the employee devotion to work connection with the company culture.

A strong support for **work-life balance** at the workplace is crucial for supporting effective telework practices in a company. The implementation of telework practices in a company depends on whether the company values an 80-hour workweek or prioritizes the ability to manage within regular working hours. Attention was also given to employees' use of their annual vacation, i.e. by encouraging employees to fully utilize their annual vacation is a key indicator of a work-life balance culture. This approach extends to home office environments as well.

It was concluded that after COVID-19 employers recognise more the necessity to implement flexible work arrangements, including telework. This mindset supports implementation of telework practices in ICT companies.

The **main obstacles** for implementing good practices were also discussed in the group. Main obstacles are not country-specific but rather industry-dependent. In sectors with a higher concentration of highly skilled employees, it is easier to establish the level of trust needed to implement flexible work arrangements. In contrast, companies with a large proportion of low-skilled workers, such as those requiring a significant amount of manual labor, find it more challenging since these roles are often not suited to remote management.

It was also discussed whether there are differences across generations in implementing telework. Are younger employees more ready to do telework? One important factor is the differences in digital skills across generations. While in ICT sector everyone is comfortable with using digital tools for telework, this may not be the same case in other sectors where digital tools are not part of daily working lives and job tasks.

In addition, some companies may not be well equipped for telework (for instance due to sensitive data). Access to digital tools can also be different across companies – some employers may not be ready or able to provide the necessary tools for telework. In some countries, expensive internet connection may become an issue in implementing telework (it would be costly to cover the costs of an internet connection with the necessary quality).

Employers may also fear of losing control over their employees. The group participants referred to it as an 'old-fashioned feeling of being present' which can still be very true in many companies.

#### 4. What needs to be done to transfer good practice ideas, regulations, agreements about teleworking regulation to other countries, sectors or environments.

**Public administration:** In general, companies and organisations should increase the awareness raising of hybrid (or telework) options for potential candidates interested in public administration roles. In particular young workers are likely to prefer an employer providing hybrid working opportunities instead of job done entirely in office premises. Of course, the nature of tasks should guide these opportunities. In those cases where physical presence of the employee is required, an opportunity to rotate face-to-face with teleworking tasks could be an alternative. It is important to ensure equal opportunities for hybrid work (or telework) for all employees.

Both in Estonia and Finland, the representatives of the public sector stressed the need to listen to the needs of the employees. In the future, companies and organisations should ensure access to soft and digital skills training. The former is becoming even more important because, employees interact even more than before via social media and online tools (e.g. Zooms and Teams). Simultaneously, digital and technological skills need to be kept updated. Therefore, the training should comprise both employees and management (e.g. team leaders and employers).

Attention should also be given to the so-called leisure time insurance covering possible accidents taking place while teleworking, i.e. this insurance would cover those cases that are not immediately connected to the physical working place, (e.g. falling in the stairs while going to the kitchen or similar cases). In Finland, so-called leisure time (accident) insurance is fairly common in the ICT sector. According to unions and HR representatives for ICT, several companies have taken a leisure time accident insurance<sup>2</sup> for their employees. During the time of data collection there were no specific remote work insurances. However, the latter type of insurance has become more common during post-pandemic era.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ytkpalvelut.fi/en/services/leisure-time-accident-insurance/>

The Estonian and Finnish representatives for the public sector do not find a special need to focus on the right to be disconnected because the current legislation (in Finland the Working Time Act and in Estonia Employment Contracts Act) sufficiently frames the legal working time for workers.

The **ICT discussion group** also explored potential company-level approaches to support the implementation of good practices.

First, regular negotiations between employers and employees (either collectively or individually) could support the implementation of flexible work arrangements. The following points were outlined as important elements of those negotiations:

- It is necessary to provide accurate information for employees on work arrangements (e.g. presence and number of mandatory office days)
- Discussions need to be held in case different companies have different work organisations: this becomes important when people change jobs and expect the work culture and practices of one company to be implemented in the other. It is necessary to explain to (new) employees company traditions and work practices.
- It is good to have common guidelines about flexible work arrangements while remaining some space for flexibility in different teams because the needs of different teams in one company can be very different. This would give space for teams and team leaders to find their own solutions to work together as a team and setting their own ground rules and agreements on how they work best within the overall framework agreed on company level.

Usually in the ICT sector, the main guidelines are done at company level, particularly common in international organisations. It is important to be able to choose what works best at company level as companies and the needs of individual teams within companies (and their needs) can be very different.

In order to implement good practices at company level, it is **crucial to share good practices** across companies, countries, sectors etc. It is also necessary for employers, unions and employee representatives to be aware of good practices and what works in different ICT company settings. Additionally, it is important to support managers in implementing these practices into the daily operations of their teams and solving issues that may arise from remote teamwork.

The role of collective agreements in regulating telework in ICT were also discussed. It was outlined that the Estonian and Finnish ICT employers do not perceive the need to regulate telework in collective agreements while employers want to have positive impacts of telework,

i.e. they want to implement telework at their companies. Both employers and employees are reluctant to include remote work as part of the collective agreements in the sector because things are changing quickly, especially in the ICT sector, but collective agreements are not perceived to be flexible in time. It was outlined that there is a lot of flexibility in implementing telework and there is a need to be able to adjust to the needs of different positions in the company (i.e. different occupations might have different level of flexibility, different teams might have different needs and level of flexibility might also be dependent on individual needs and personal characteristics). The discussion group members stressed that collective agreements do not enable this kind of adjustments. During the discussion, it was also highlighted that in negotiations, employers and trade union representatives have not become aware of any particular remote work needs of individual teams or work positions to account for all these differences.

It was also outlined that a good practice would be to introduce **overall recommendations or guidelines on what to discuss regarding telework conditions**. This serves as a tool for employers (to be aware on what needs to be agreed on) and for the employees to know the room for manoeuvre in those agreements.

Finally, the ICT discussion group concluded that it is fairly easy to conclude agreements on telework in companies that contribute to the welfare of the employee. Nevertheless, more support and information is necessary for companies (and managers) that do not recognise the necessity of telework.

## Attachment 1. Transferability workshop programme

### Transferability workshop

Helsinki

10.06.2024

**Venue:** Insinöörit & Ekonomit -building, Ratakartijankatu 2, Helsinki, 3rd floor (entrance floor),  
meetin room: “Tohtori”.

### 10<sup>th</sup> June 2024

**10:15-10:30 Coffee/ tea**

**10:30-10:45 Welcome: Introduction to the workshop**

- Nathan Lillie, University of Jyväskylä

**10:45-11:35, Brief presentation of the first results of the project**

- Sanna Saksela-Bergholm, University of Jyväskylä
- Q/A + Joint discussion

**11:35-12:30, Input on recently scrutinized aspects of teleworking**

- Estonia: Kirsti Melesk, PRAXIS
- Finland: Sanna Saksela-Bergholm, University of Jyväskylä
- Q/A + Joint discussion

**12:30-13:30 Lunch**

**13:30-15:30 Focus group discussions in small groups: good practice**

13:30-15:00 Small group discussion

15:00-15:15 Coffee break

**15:15-15:45 Transferability of good practices**

**15:45-16:00 Wrap-up and closing the session**

#### **Local contacts:**

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## Attachment 2. Guidelines for the workshop

### Background

[TWING](#) will organise three one-day transnational workshops (Finland and Estonia; Poland and Spain; Austria and Portugal). Each transnational workshop will bring together social partners from two different countries of the project representing different industrial relations regimes.

The aim of the transferability workshop is to support social partners to improve regulation of telework by facilitating reflection on mutual learning on practices implemented by social partners in Estonia and Finland, as well as to explore consensus-building around transferability of good practices to different companies, sectors and countries.

The focus will be on the following questions:

- What good practices of social dialogue at company level addressing the topic of telework since the outbreak of the pandemic can be identified?
- How can social partners improve the regulation of telework at national, sectoral and company level?

The preliminary outcomes of the TWING study showed how the transfer to telework has been smooth particularly in ICT and public administration sector in Estonia and Finland. In the transferability workshop we would like to know more about good practices of teleworking arrangements and how these could improve the regulation of telework.

### A good practice

What is a **good practice** example?

- A measure or initiative that improves the regulation of teleworking or pre-existing arrangements of telework to the benefit of the two sides of industry (at least specific target groups).
- Level of good practice arrangement: preferably at individual company/organization level, but also at sector/industry level.

What does **transferability** of good practices mean?

- Extent to which a practice can be easily adopted and adapted/used in other contexts (to which practical obstacles and challenges can be overcome).

## Guidelines

We would be grateful if you could identify and analyse good practices of social dialogue at company level and, or sector level addressing the topic of telework by paying attention to the following topics:

### Legislation and directives

- How does the current legislation particularly in your sector improve the regulation of telework? (e.g. How has the legislation facilitated the transfer from office work to telework? Or, are there parts in the legislation to be improved?)

### Social partners and the negotiation process

- How has social dialogue or collective bargaining conducted at company level regulated or addressed telework (collective agreement, framework agreement)? Any suggestions for future improvements?
- What made it possible for you at company level to make the decision about teleworking arrangements and its regulation without inviting representatives from unions, (*except the shop steward who is working in the company*)?
- What has been the secret of a smooth negotiation process? (*I.e. what kinds of topics has influenced on the negotiation process, e.g. legislative, human resources, trust, etc.*)

### The role of unions in the regulation of telework

- How could the role of unions be strengthened in the regulation of telework in your sector?
- How has social dialogue or collective bargaining conducted at sectoral level (or EU level) regulated or addressed telework (collective agreement, framework agreement)? Any suggestions for future improvements?

### Transferability of telework

- Would it be possible to adopt and adapt/use the good practices in your company in other contexts (e.g. companies/sectors/other countries)? What should be taken into consideration?

### Well-being and work efficiency of teleworkers

- Do you have suggestions for how to improve teleworkers' well-being and work efficiency? (These can be influenced by supervision and management of tasks and by employees' age, gender and work experience, time in the company, etc).



**Attachment 3. List of participants**

