



Digitalization and remote work in peripheral labour markets in the Nordic region

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the impact of technological transformation as one of the global megatrends in modern times. We focus on how new technologies, especially digitalization, have made it possible for people in peripheral places to work remotely. The focus is on the case municipalities in Iceland, especially Húsavík in in Norðurþing in northern Iceland, but also in a comparative context with remote municipalities in Norway, Sweden, and Åland. The empirical data used is from the Nordic project SUNREM (Sustainable Nordic Remote Labour Markets), which has been studying the impacts of megatrends on the sustainability of remote labour markets in four Nordic countries. Data is collected from in-depth interviews with stakeholders, policymakers, and ordinary citizens in seven selected cases in the four countries. The key research questions dealt with here are: What is the situation of remote work in selected cases in Nordic sparsely populated areas? What preconditions are needed for remote digital working? Has remote work made the labour market more sustainable? The main conclusions are that remote working exists in all of the Nordic cases investigated. The town of Húsavík in the municipality of Norðurþing in North Iceland, stands out with its well-developed remote work centres. There are clear signs that facilities where people can work and meet other remote workers are important. This enables broader recruitment into the labour market, since for example spouses can use this option, enabling them to move to more remote places. Remote work from people's homes has some disadvantages, as pointed out by various researchers, and therefore infrastructure for remote working contributes to making labour markets in the periphery more sustainable.

Introduction, background and research question

Global megatrends such as *demographic change*, *technological change*, *climate change*, and *globalisation* are posing challenges to working life in the future (ILO, 2017), and crises such as the COVID–19 pandemic have accelerated the effects and are thereby ‘threatening the prospects for sustainable and inclusive economic growth’ (ILO, 2022). Even though the long-term global effects of the COVID–19 pandemic are uncertain, it is believed that in the longer run, it is rather the global megatrends we mentioned above that are likely to have an impact on the labour market (s) in the Nordic countries (Alsos and Dølvik, 2021).

The impacts of the megatrends on sustainable labour market participation will likely manifest differently across labour markets. In the SUNREM project, sustainable labour market participation is defined as a labour market characterized by quality of jobs, decent work,

adaptable skills, low unemployment, and a balanced job market. It requires the alignment between job demands and employees’, skills, supported by fair compensation and favourable workplace conditions to foster effective and willing performance now and in the future.

We define local labour markets as the functional areas where the labour supply and the labour demand meet (Borges, 2020). There are about 365 local labour markets in the Nordic Region, ranging from 1.5 million employed in the Stockholm, Sweden labour market area to 104 people employed in Utsira in western Norway (Borges, 2020). While urban local labour markets face challenges and opportunities related to urban growth, housing shortages, and social polarisation, rural labour markets relate to remoteness, population shrinkage and ageing, difficulties in recruiting key competencies, and labour shortage. However, they also relate to providing new opportunities, such as new technology in, for example, the energy sector, digitalisation, and to multilocality³

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³ We define multilocality as the practice of living and working across multiple locations with regular, sustained, or, in some cases, irregular routines.

(André et al., 2021; Norlén et al., 2022). These are the main factors that influence labour force participation.

In remote local labour markets, the industrial mix is often less diverse, and they are often dependent on a singular or a couple of industries and employers (Norlén et al., 2022). Thus, labour force participation in geographically remote labour markets and in economic peripheries may be particularly impacted by the megatrends. There is, however, a lack of knowledge on how remote local labour markets in the Nordic Region are affected by, and respond to, the megatrends and how megatrends influence a sustainable local labour market participation. The aim of this paper is therefore to contribute to increased knowledge on how global megatrends influence remote or peripheral local labour markets in the Nordic Region and how sustainable and inclusive labour market participation can be achieved.

In this article, we will primarily be focusing on the global megatrend *technological change* and more specifically the digital transformation and remote work.

Technological change has historically been of high importance for structural changes in the labour market and is expected to have large impacts on the Nordic labour markets in the future. One of the technological changes is automation, which will impact some industries to a larger extent than other, and hence the challenge of this trend is unevenly distributed across the Nordic territory. High-speed, reliable internet, cloud computing, collaboration and communication tools, cybersecurity, and more are among the technological changes that are very important to the development for remote work.

Not only is the labour force expected to grow in the years to come, but technological change in the labour market is also related to an increasing demand for more people with higher education. This could make it more difficult to recruit people with the right qualifications into remote labour markets.

The focus of this article is the impact of digitalization and remote working on labour markets in rural areas and remote areas outside the most urbanized areas – looking primarily at the case of Iceland but with a comparative reference to the cases in the three other countries in the SUNREM project: Norway, Sweden, and Åland. Therefore, our research questions are:

- What is the situation of remote work in Nordic sparsely populated areas?
- What preconditions are needed for remote digital working?
- Has remote work made the labour market more sustainable?

To answer these questions, we use qualitative interview data from the ongoing Nordic research project, SUNREM (Sustainable Nordic Remote Labour Markets). We will introduce the project in the following section.

The SUNREM project

The Nordic research project SUNREM (Sustainable Nordic Remote Labour Markets) is funded by NORDFORSK which is an organisation under the Nordic Council of Ministers. The project explores how local labour markets in remote areas of the Nordic region are impacted by four global megatrends: demographic changes, technological transformation, climate change, and globalisation. The point of departure for this project is that there is a shortage of workforce and a mismatch between supply and demand in many remotely located job sectors. Aging population, fewer young people entering the local/regional workforce, migration of skilled workers to larger urban areas all pose challenges to more remote regions. One of the key challenges has been a lack of infrastructure, e.g. high speed and secure internet, to support technological changes. However, this has been improving fast, the coverage of internet and broadband access in Sweden was 95% of households, 97% in Finland and 98% in Norway (Nordregio, n.d.). In Iceland the government plans to connect all homes with high-speed internet by the end

of 2026 (Government of Iceland, 2025).

The study in the project was conducted in four Nordic countries: Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Åland. In three of the countries, two cases were selected for the study, while in the fourth country (Åland) only one case was included. In Iceland the chosen cases were two municipalities: *Dalvíkurbyggð* and *Norðurlþing*. In Norway, the two municipalities were *Stord* and *Hammerfest*. In Sweden the municipalities were *Skelefteå* and *Gotland*. In Åland the whole of the islands were their case in this study (see map 1). As the map shows, the remoteness of the cases as well as distance from main centres of economic activity and administration is different. Some are islands and others of insular nature due to distances (Fig. 1).

Data and methodology

A considerable part of the data collection in the case studies in the project were qualitative interviews, but additionally backcasting⁴ meetings were held, and quantitative data was collected. In this article, we focus on the findings from the interviews. The general setup for the semi-structured interviews in the project followed a flexible research design approach. Up to fifteen in-depth, semi-structured interviews, were to be conducted in each case. The researcher prepared an interview guide and at the same time he/she considered the degree of openness, flexibly adapting the question where needed (see in Grønmo, 2020).

The general setup in the project was that the interviews lasted 30–60 min in every case. However, in some cases, the interviews were longer. Three groups of people were interviewed, up to five in each of the following groups: First, key stakeholders such as people from the educational sector, the labour market sector, from key businesses, and institutions connected to the labour markets. Second, ordinary citizens living and working in the communities, and third, people with useful knowledge on local and/or regional circumstances without necessarily living or working in the communities. In the Icelandic case, 27 interviews were conducted, a total of 13 in Dalvíkurbyggð municipality and 14 in Norðurlþing municipality. The interviews were conducted from spring 2024 until fall 2024.⁵ Table 1 below gives an overview of the interviews and breakdown by gender, age and more.

The interviews were recorded with the permission of the interviewees and transcribed. Analysis of the interviews was thematically based on the main pillars of the megatrends presented above: sustainable labour market participation. The thematic analysis was conducted with the assistance of the software QDA Miner.

Theoretical background and literature review

Remote work has fundamentally changed how employees engage with their tasks, allowing for greater flexibility in choosing their work environments. This flexibility can lead to a redistribution of the workforce from urban centres to suburban and rural areas. Zhu and Akella (2023) assert that changes in work arrangements, including

⁴ Backcasting is a research approach – and a strategic planning tool – based on active stakeholder engagement through *co-creation*. It has been used a lot for sustainability studies as well as regional studies/city planning (Bibri 2018). It is a form of scenario-building that is *normative*, rather than explorative or predictive, and it is goal-oriented, has a problem-solving character and particularly useful in complex cases (Bibri 2018, 2020; Börjeson et al., 2006; Dreborg 1996). It is used/useful especially in cases where there is need for transformations or breaks in trends – or avoid “business as usual”/assumed future – to get to a desirable future (i.e. sustainable development).

⁵ The interviews in Iceland were conducted by the authors who are employees at the University of Akureyri. In Norway by researchers from FAFO (an independent social science research foundation), in Sweden by researchers from Nordregio (Nordic research institute dedicated to regional development and planning) and in Åland by researchers from ÅSUB (Statistics and Research Åland).

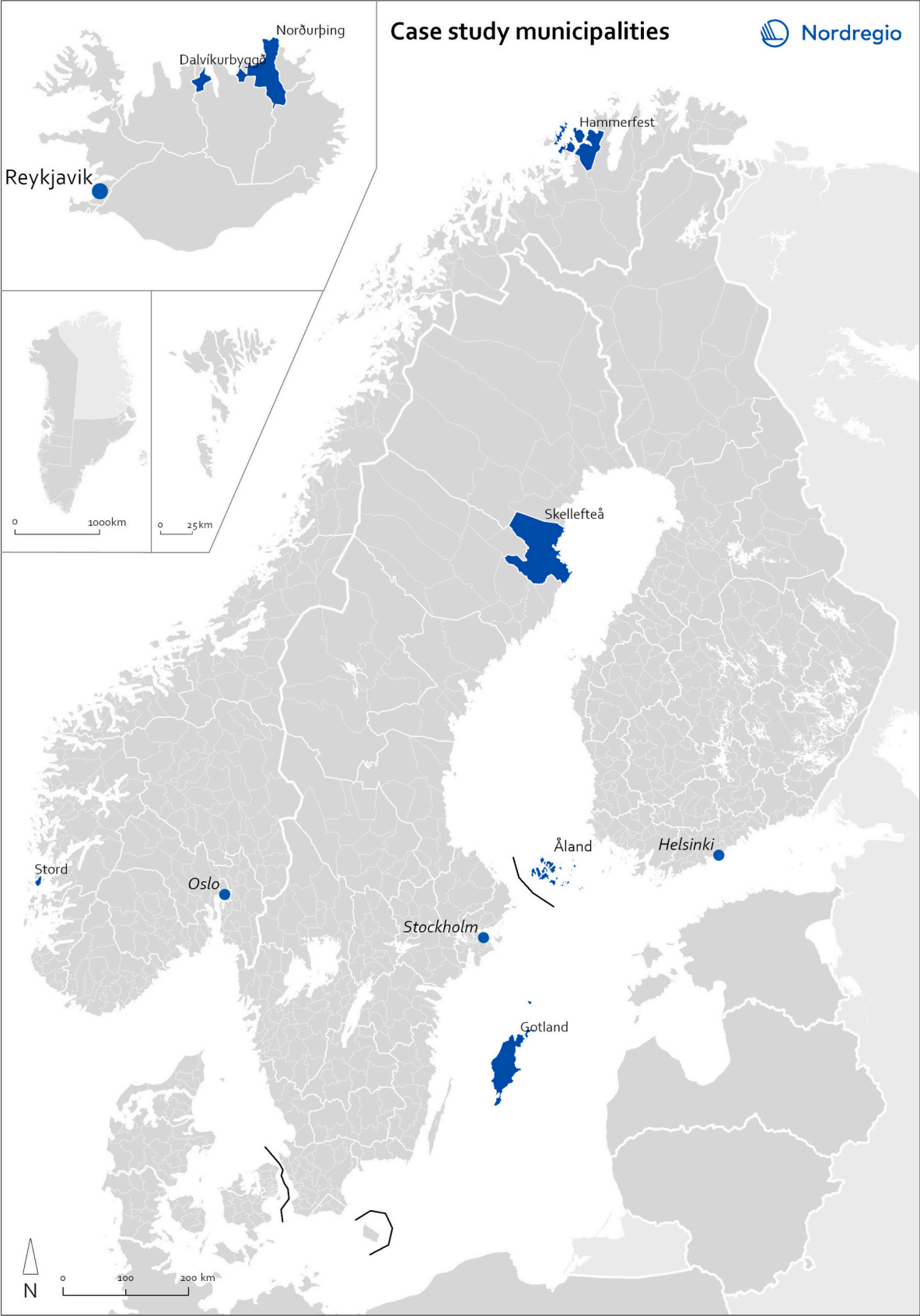


Fig. 1. The case study areas in the SUNREM-project.

Table 1
An overview of interviews in the case studies in Iceland.

Number of interviews	27
In Davíkurbyggð municipality	14
In Norðurþing municipality	13
Stakeholders	16
Individuals	11
Public sector	16
Private sector	11
Males	12
Females	15
Average age	51 years
Age span	32–66 years
Average length	45 min
Length span	22–62 min
In person	22
Teams	5

telecommuting, have significant consequences for local governments, affecting their fiscal bases due to shifts in commercial real estate demand and population movements. This phenomenon aligns with findings from Dolbilina et al. (2023), who noted that the adoption of digital remote working influenced commuters' travel behaviours, directly impacting urban development patterns and business location choices. Such developments can work against urban sprawl and create opportunities for sustainable development in less densely populated areas.

Gajendran and Harrison (2007) pointed out that telecommuting arrangements often lead to benefits for employees, such as increased autonomy and reduced commuting time, encouraging individuals to seek remote work opportunities in different regions. These shifts are particularly relevant for rural areas seeking to attract investment and retain a young, and more educated workforce, as well as increase the diversity of the labour market.

Remote working not only reshapes individual work experiences but can also have profound impacts on regional development. Conversely, rural areas present unique opportunities and challenges stemming from the adoption of remote work. Bogason et al. (2024) noted that remote work can attract residents and skilled workers, promoting rural development. These findings indicate that while rural regions can benefit significantly from attracting remote workers, concerted efforts are required to overcome infrastructural deficiencies. Furthermore, the infrastructure required to sustain remote work is critical. In their article, based on case studies in northern Scotland and Sweden, Dubois and Sielker (2022) highlighted that digital tools can improve services, enhance collaboration, and compensate shortages in local expertise in rural areas. Remote areas, on the other hand, often face barriers in adapting the technology. Examples can be weak infrastructure, lower technical skills, financial constraints and data-privacy concerns.

Novikova et al. (2021) suggest that many scientists focus on digital transformation as a key component of the overall business restructuring strategy. But at the same time, they argue that “today's technology – combined with people, processes and operations – enables businesses to adapt quickly to disruptions and opportunities; meet new and growing customer needs and drive future growth and innovation, often in unexpected ways” (Novikova et al., 2021, p. 70–85). Zub (2023) emphasizes similar arguments.

Economically, the rise of remote work presents both opportunities and challenges for local and regional development. Telecommuting can facilitate a diverse and geographically dispersed workforce capable of contributing to local economies, as noted by Makori and Mauti (2023). By embracing flexible work arrangements, regions can attract professionals looking for better work-life balance and lower living costs, stimulating economic growth outside urban centres. An article by Behrens, Kichko and Thisse (2024) argues that while working from home offers benefits, too much of it can reduce worker productivity and negatively affect economic outcomes, mainly because workers lose opportunities for face-to-face interactions, learning, and collaboration.

Braesemann et al. (2022) assert that remote work tends to polarize the labour market along the skill axis, leading to a concentration of higher-quality jobs in urban regions while leaving rural areas behind. They emphasize that workers with desirable skills secure profitable remote positions in metropolitan hubs, creating an urban-centric job landscape that further deepens the divide between urban and rural communities. As a result, urban regions attract remote jobs, while rural areas experience stagnation, enhancing economic disparities.

But working remotely from home and not from a location that is similar to a workplace can have its disadvantages. Researchers have pointed out diverse aspects in that context. Afonso et al. (2021) argue that one of the most pronounced issues in that context is the increase in work-family conflict. And when the boundaries between professional and personal life become blurred, it can lead to heightened stress and dissatisfaction, both at work and at home. This disruption can have adverse effects on mental health, leading to increased anxiety and depression among employees (Afonso et al. 2021; Ipsen et al., 2021; Nemteanu and Dabija 2023). Social isolation is also a pervasive challenge for remote workers (Galanti et al., 2021; Mun et al., 2022). Coworking spaces⁶ is a phenomenon that can offer the benefits of working at the workplace while working remotely. This has been growing in rural areas, and a recent study from Sweden found links to increased domestic migration towards rural areas, a post-pandemic rise in remote work, and a desire for lifestyle changes. Among the economic impacts that coworking spaces can have are that they can act as platforms for entrepreneurship and catalysts for new business clusters. Furthermore, they can improve connections between local governments, businesses, and civil society (Rex and Westlund, 2024). Finally, Nowrouzi-Kia et al. (2024) and Scheibe et al. (2022) mention that the immersive nature of remote work can lead to longer working hours, a lack of structured work schedules, disrupting work-life balance. They also argue that employees often report an inability to “switch off” from work, resulting in burnout and fatigue.

All the above points towards our research questions; on the situation of remote work in the Nordic sparsely populated areas, the pre-conditions feasible for remote working

- and whether that contributed to a more sustainable labour market.

Remote working in four Nordic countries

IT technology has changed the situation for both individuals and businesses – for example, social media and COVID-19 have greatly changed marketing in tourism and reduced the need for physical meetings that were common just a few years ago. In the seven Nordic cases in the SUNREM study, nearly all report remote work as a component of the labour market. In the following subchapters, we present findings from interviews conducted in these cases. The content is almost entirely the narratives from the interviewees in the seven cases.

The topic of remote work turned out to emerge most clearly in the interviews conducted in Húsavík, Norðurþing, Iceland.

Iceland

“In Húsavík it was like that there are some narrow corners of some kind of knowledge activity and people were each one in their own corners. One and two and three employees sitting in each place. There is no dynamism in such workplaces. Although the projects are sometimes good and sometimes not, there is no dynamism. This has driven my ambition for this, and I believe that it is absolutely necessary for the labour markets of smaller communities to create a soil where you can host more of these

⁶ A shared and serviced workspace where professionals from different companies, remote workers and freelancers work together.

jobs” (Interview with an expert and director in the knowledge sector in Norðurþing municipality).

In the town Húsavík (around 2500 inhabitants) in Norðurþing municipality in North-Iceland, there are localities and operations located in the R&D knowledge centre facilities in Stéttin, a community of institutions, companies, and individuals that offers 25–30 remote working stations for rent.⁷ Remote working facilities are also offered by the regional trade union Framsýn at its Húsavík localities. The interviewees in Húsavík argued that Stéttin was important: helping to attract and retain educated people in the community. This is believed to have caused more brain gain than brain drain in Norðurþing.

“It was a very small number of people, but we are now having just here at Stéttin in Húsavík much more people. There are many employees here, working in this building on all kinds of jobs and research. Educational sector, this and that, and then the other ones who are just in these non-local jobs who have moved here and found a place to work. That is one of the changes in the labour market” (Interview with an expert and director in the knowledge sector in Norðurþing municipality).

In the other Icelandic case, the municipality Dalvíkurbyggð, also in North-Iceland (around 1900 inhabitants), remote work increased after the COVID–19 pandemic. The interviewees explained that people could use the technology for remote work more effectively after that experience. Among the conditions that made use of this technology were so called office hotels e.g. in nearby town Siglufjörður in Fjallabyggð municipality (34 km) with all the necessary equipment for remote work. One interviewee characterised Dalvíkurbyggð as a place where some things arrive slowly, including remote work. However, another interviewee began working remotely and using a remote office in the nearby Siglufjörður as early as 2015 and told us that she felt *“like the only gay in the village”*. That was meant to describe the situation of being the only one in the village working from home. Up until present, there are no specific localities or infrastructure intended for remote working in Dalvíkurbyggð, and no dedicated office spaces for remote work available. There is a remote-working facility for only a few persons in the village of Dalvík, which can hardly be called a remote-working centre. People there talk about the need to make remote work a possibility to increase and enable the possibilities for young, educated people migrating there from other parts of Iceland or from abroad. While remote working was for a long time a mental wall for people in the area, the interviews show that this is not the case anymore. One example is distance work for the state-run Meteorological Institute by its employees located in Dalvíkurbyggð. One interviewee is commuting almost daily to Akureyri (44 km) but has the possibility to work from home at times but finds it more stimulating to work in a larger workplace among colleagues.

Remote work must be considered quite developed in Norðurþing, especially in the town of Húsavík. That initiative clearly attracts educated people to the community and thereby creates opportunities. People working for domestic and foreign private companies, state institutions, and in other contexts are in remote working centres in town. As in many other countries, the Icelandic local and state administration needed the COVID–19 pandemic to realize that remote working was possible and realistic (Eythórsson, 2024). However, some argue that the state administration still doesn't have a full understanding of this and that there are signs that this is reversing – more emphasis is put on having staff on site than on working remotely. This takes place even though people needed to learn the technical solutions for remote working in the pandemic and gained the skills and knowledge. Furthermore, employer's and businesses attitudes towards remote work

also changed.

Remote work even exists in the smaller villages in the northeastern part of Norðurþing municipality, outside Húsavík. For example, one respondent living in the village of Raufarhöfn (located 130 km from Húsavík) works remotely in private service and consulting in a location which is among the most remote from the capital Reykjavík. An interviewee working at Stéttin, the R&D centre in Húsavík argued that *“remote working is the only way to have a very specialized job in Norðurþing”*.

Interviewees feel that the robust infrastructure for remote work opened up possibilities for highly specialized jobs in small and remote municipalities (Norðurþing), and that new industries have created different types of jobs compared with the past.

“Remote working. It was of course a revolution for being able to do that when we got a proper net-connection infrastructure” (Interviewee in the remote part of Norðurþing municipality).

Åland, Norway and Sweden

In the interviews in Åland, it appeared that the shift toward remote work following the COVID–19 pandemic has contributed to a broader geographic distribution of tech companies within Åland, and that tech companies in Åland have expanded their operational and marketing opportunities. Moreover, globalization and the rise of remote work have intensified global competition for specific skills.

Most interviewees in Åland emphasized the growing importance of remote work as a factor contributing to job attractiveness, particularly after the COVID–19 pandemic. The shift in attitudes towards remote work, combined with advancements in digital infrastructure, has significantly expanded opportunities for flexible working arrangements. It was noted that today, there is greater acceptance of employees having varying opportunities to work remotely. This flexibility has fostered trust between management and staff and has, in some cases, led to increased efficiency. Some interviewees also highlighted that remote work enables immigrants to “bring their job” with them when relocating to the region, for example, if their partner finds employment in Åland. Similarly, some regional companies maintain offices outside the area, allowing employees to work remotely across locations. Remote and rotational work arrangements have also improved the feasibility of living in municipalities outside the main island in Åland, including the surrounding archipelago.

When it comes to the Norwegian cases, we have two, Stord in western Norway and Hammerfest in the high north. Being on the periphery, digital platforms made it easier, especially for industrial, locally based leadership, to maintain remote touch with headquarters. While working from home, it could open opportunities for people to move to remote areas. Digitalization has opened opportunities for online education; thus, it is easier to skill or re-skill staff.

In Stord, digitalization is changing the way work is done and influencing how employees interact with each other. Today's commonly known software, Teams and Zoom have changed the way people communicate and have opened up easier communication with partners both nationally and internationally. They have just begun to realize how artificial intelligence (AI) can change jobs. Some companies in Stord are reported to be at the forefront of this development.

In Hammerfest one interviewee described things like this: “As a company, digitalization came with remarkable opportunities for “coordination between locations” – something that was particularly appreciated given the peripheral position of Hammerfest.” One employer mentioned that job applicants had asked whether they could work remotely – and not move to Hammerfest. This was not yet possible, while they considered it a possibility to secure future employees, though stressing the need not only to ensure a functioning work environment but also to have the employee on site to understand and do the job.

The case studies in Sweden didn't give much of findings in this

⁷ Stéttin is located in localities down by the harbour of Húsavík. They are owned by a private company, Langanes ehf. The operation is partly financed by the municipality of Norðurþing and partly by rent. (www.stettin.is)

context and they were mainly about the situation in the case of Gotland. What appeared was that working remotely in Gotland increased significantly after the COVID–19 pandemic. There was an inflow of people to this island in the Baltic Sea and retired people and people who had so called creative jobs, moved in to live and work remotely. Since internet broadband is well developed on the island it permitted working remotely, not only in the main town Visby, but even in all parts of Gotland. In Skellefteå in the north, many jobs are in industries and therefore less suited for remote working. Some people with partners who got a job in Skellefteå, brought their work with them and worked remotely with an employer in the south of Sweden or internationally. But these were not many.

The findings from the cases in Åland, Norway and Sweden are in many ways similar to the Icelandic cases. In all cases it can clearly be seen how the megatrend, technological changes, has affected the labour market by effectively creating the conditions for remote work. However, there are only slight differences in how the effects of these changes are manifested by the interviewees. It is common that the variety of jobs increases and possibilities for increased specialization, the employment opportunities of spouses increase, and that it is possible to move jobs with you when moving. It is also common to mention that the COVID–19 pandemic has encouraged remote work. However, the emphasis on the significance of remote work centres is probably what characterizes the results of the interviews in the Icelandic cases.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, our main research questions have been three: On the first one, on what the situation of remote work in selected cases in Nordic sparsely populated areas is, we have come to the following conclusion: Remote working is reported as something existing in most, if not all, cases in the SUNREM project. Remote working seems to have entered the remote labour markets with full force under and after the COVID–19 pandemic in 2020–2022. The town of Húsavík in Norðurland, Iceland, stands out with its well-developed remote work centres. On the second question, about the preconditions needed for remote digital working, we have come to the conclusion that these are of two kinds: First, access to high-speed internet is a basic precondition; without it, little would happen and related to this computer programs that facilitate communication between employees. Second, we have seen clear signs of the fact that facilities where people can work and meet other remote workers, as if it were a workplace, even though no one has the same task or employer, are vital. But someone would have to take the initiative to establish and finance such a facility for remote working. Remote work from people's homes is also part of the picture, but it has its disadvantages, as various researchers have pointed out such as (Afonso et al. 2021; Ipsen et al. 2021 and Nemteanu and Dabilja 2023), especially on the effect on mental health. Some interviewees reported preferring working in a more stimulating work environment rather than at home to avoid social isolation, as we have seen Galanti et al. (2021) and Mun et al. (2022) point out. The third research question was if remote work made the labour markets more sustainable. It is our conclusion that specifically the existence of remote work facilities, especially in Húsavík in Norðurland, shall be considered to have an important impact on the labour market and contributed to making it more sustainable. More generally, it was observed that remote work has diversified the small labour market, opened possibilities to hold more specialized jobs and highly educated people have been more likely to return to and live in more remote places. Also, it has been easier to recruit educated people into these labour markets, since their spouses have had the possibility of working remotely and therefore move with them. This is in accordance with how Dolbilina et al. (2023) suggested, that remote working and remote working infrastructure contributed to more sustainable local and regional development. Similar findings were also presented by Bogason et al. (2024). The importance of remote working facilities or centres has been highlighted and has become more obvious when we learnt about

the case of Húsavík, Iceland. It appears that the remote working facilities in Húsavík act as an important micro-hub for local development which enables collaboration, social embeddedness and business activities similar to what was observed in Rex's and Westlund's research (2024) in non-metropolitan areas in Sweden and that they in fact bring urban like advantages to smaller places. Various researchers have pointed out some significant disadvantages of working remotely from one's home. Increase in work-family conflicts were pointed out by Afonso et al. (2021), and boundaries between professional and personal life becoming blurred, leading to more stress and dissatisfaction both at work and home with consequences for mental health were pointed out by Ipsen et al. 2021 and Nemteanu and Dabilja (2023). Nevertheless, this aspect was not brought forward in our interviews. Remote work has become a reality in modern societies. Both public and private remote working infrastructure have helped remote labour markets become more sustainable. Therefore, it seems to be relevant to recommend such initiatives to policy makers. Another recommendation is that technical infrastructure, such as a high-speed internet connection, is an absolute prerequisite for remote working and therefore such investment would contribute to sustainable future remote labour markets. This increases the possibilities for younger people with higher education to move in or return to more remote places. This also enables spouses to move and be able to continue their work. The remote working facilities play a key role in that context. The conclusions in this paper are based solely on studies conducted in seven cases from an ongoing research project in four Nordic countries. Therefore, one should be cautious in generalizing. However, what we have seen here is that remote work seems to have become a fact in rural or remote areas, and that centres where remote workers can share facilities are essential as meeting points, creating a desired work environment for people working remotely, for different employers in various geographical locations, domestic as well as abroad. At the same time, this seems to contribute to more sustainable labour market participation and to make a considerable positive contribution to regional development in remote areas.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

Grétar Þór Eythórsson: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Supervision, Methodology, Formal analysis, Conceptualization. **Hjalti Jóhannesson:** Writing – original draft, Methodology, Formal analysis.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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