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The Distribution of Work-Life Integration against COVID-19 and its Implications: Focusing on Remote Work in Switzerland

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the distribution of work-life integration against COVID-19 and its Implications by analyzing remote work in Switzerland. **Research design, data and methodology:** The study performed literature review and descriptive analyses using various data such as perception surveys, statistics, and related documents. **Results:** The infectious disease was a turning point for many people in Switzerland by changing where and how people want to live. Since the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that disease could be spread by proximity, negative perception about urban areas expanded, and rural areas are increasingly preferred due to fresh and clean air and a more ecological lifestyle. In addition, increased remote work, a change brought about by COVID-19, has subsequently led to changes in household habits and needs. Distance from work is no longer an important factor when someone chooses where to live. A trend is now emerging where households wanting to improve the quality of life leave the city center and move to the suburbs. **Conclusions:** Paradoxically, such trend accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis has an unintendedly positive impact on the distribution of work-life integration across society while providing more flexibility in terms of place and time management and lowering the burden on roads and infrastructure.

Keywords : Remote Work, COVID-19, Work-Life Integration, Lifestyle, Switzerland

JEL Classification Code: K32, N54, O13, P48

1. Introduction

This study aims to explore the distribution of work-life integration against COVID-19 and its Implications by analyzing remote work in Switzerland. To this end, the study performed literature review and descriptive analyses using various data such as perception surveys, statistics, and related documents. The results of this study show that the

infectious disease was a turning point for many people in Switzerland by changing where and how people want to live. Since the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that disease could be spread by proximity, negative perception about urban areas expanded, and rural areas are increasingly preferred due to fresh and clean air and a more ecological lifestyle. In addition, increased remote work, a change brought about by COVID-19, has subsequently led to changes in household

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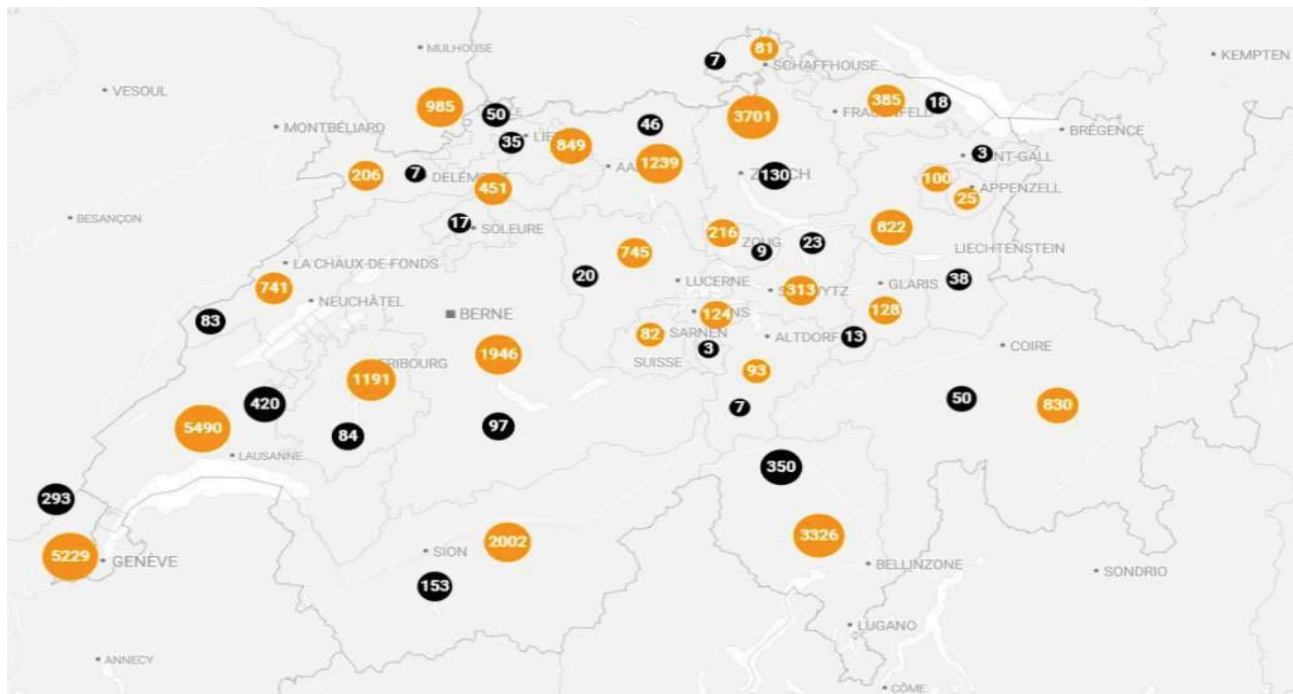
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habits and needs. Distance from work is no longer an important factor when someone chooses where to live. A trend is now emerging where households wanting to improve the quality of life leave the city center and move to the suburbs. The study concludes that such trend accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis, paradoxically, has a positive impact on the distribution of work-life integration across society while providing more flexibility in terms of place and time management and lowering the burden on roads and infrastructure. The next section of this paper describes COVID-19 response in Switzerland. It then explains changing residential environments and trends of remote work with the spread of COVID-19 in Switzerland. The final section describes role of information technology against COVID-19 as well as implications and recommendations for future research.

2. COVID-19 Response in Switzerland

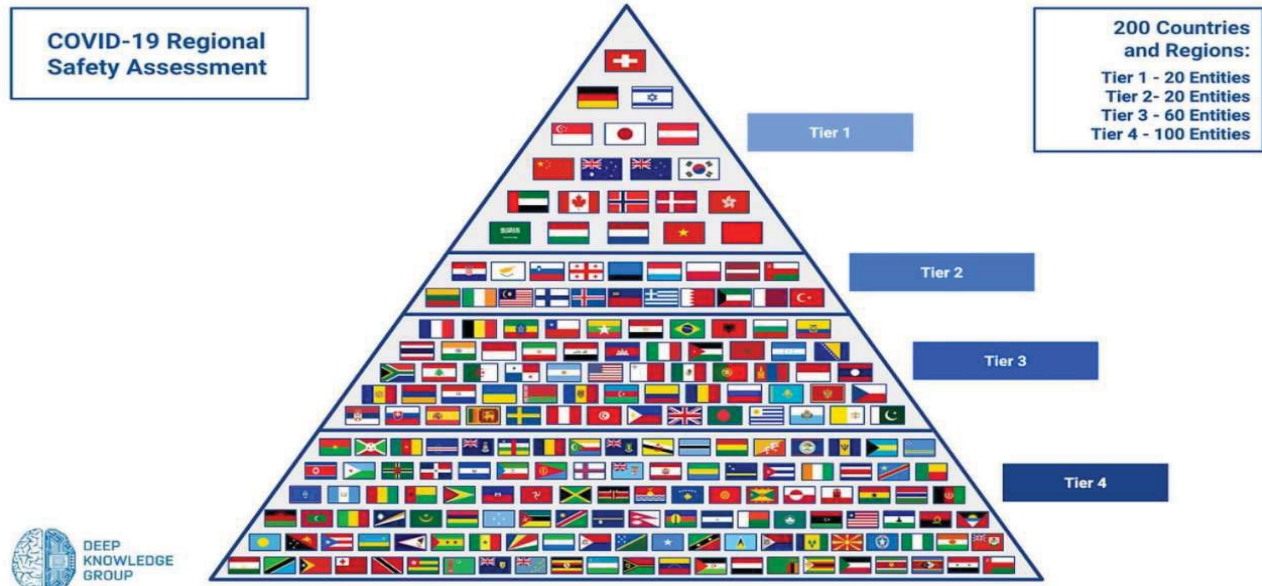
The population of Switzerland is approximately 8.5 million, and the country borders France, Italy, Germany, Austria, and Liechtenstein and is surrounded by land. Switzerland consists of 26 cantons and is home to the Federation International de Football Association (FIFA), United Nations, International Committee of the Red Cross,

Bank for International Settlements, World Trade Organization, and International Olympic Committee. Switzerland has been a neutral state, adopting neutrality policies recognized internationally since the 16th century and thus not belonging to the European Union. The country has four official languages: German (62.8%), French (23%), Italian (8.2%), and Romansh (0.5%). Its acceptance of different cultures and languages contributes to internal solidarity. According to Mercer, the quality of life in Geneva and Basel is the highest in the world in terms of political stability, housing, employment, sustainability, mobility, healthcare, education, safety, and governance (Dormeuil, 2020). Switzerland is a federal state, and the Federal Council is the head of the federal and canton governments overseeing the federal administration. The President is elected by the Federal Assembly for a term of one year and serves as the country’s representative domestically and internationally with no special powers. Each canton has its own constitution and laws approved by the Federal Assembly, and the canton government’s decision-making authority is wide over local issues including education, health, traffic, and public security. The canton government sets its own tax level and operates its own education system, social services, and police. Local governments are run by representatives elected by local residents, and people in Switzerland exercise strong voting rights on current issues submitted periodically (Figure 1).



Note: Orange = no. of people infected with COVID-19. Black = no. of deaths due to COVID-19. Source: Dormeuil (2020)

Figure 1: Reported COVID-19 deaths and infected people (as of June 23, 2020)



Source: Deep Knowledge Group (2020)

Figure 2: Results of COVID-19 regional safety assessment

On February 25, 2020, the first patient confirmed with coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Switzerland was reported in Ticino near Italy. A few days later, seven new cases were reported in Geneva, Graubünden, Zurich, Aargau, Basel, and Vaud. On March 5, 2020, 114 cases of COVID-19 were reported across 15 cantons with the first death confirmed. The scope of actions by the Federal Council to tackle this infectious disease is defined in the Federal Act on Controlling Communicable Human Diseases (Epidemics Act). Under the amendment to this Act, which was adopted in September 2013 in the wake of the infectious diseases of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and H1N1 in 2009, the Federal Council Federal Council and Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH) delegate most decision making to canton authorities. Under a “normal situation,” cantons would have autonomy over the scope of actions to protect their people. On March 16, 2020, however, the Federal Council declared a “special situation” in Switzerland, shifting to a rare action where the Federal Council stepped up and took responsibility for the COVID-19 response action plan (Choi et al., 2016).

Accordingly, hospitals and physicians were mobilized to ensure enough space for COVID-19 patients, gatherings of five or more people were banned, border checks were clearly monitored with limited access, and educational institutions shut down until May 5 when the re-opening was to be determined. The Federal Council also agreed to provide the Swiss Army to each canton to support hospital services, and a Swiss Military Hospital battalion of 5,000 soldiers was dispatched to support the country in terms of

hygiene and security resilience. The Federal Council announced that all shops, markets, restaurants, bars, nightlife and leisure facilities, including museums, libraries, cinemas, theaters, sports centers, swimming pools, and ski domains were to shut down. By contrast, grocery stores, corporate canteens, takeout and meal delivery services, as well as pharmacies, gas stations, banks, post offices, hotels, and public administration and social services, were allowed to remain operational. The Federal Assembly confirmed that the sales of food supplies, pharmaceuticals, and essential everyday products were guaranteed. Although the use of public transport was not recommended, it was maintained while ensuring social distancing and hygiene. Work from home was strongly recommended.

The Federal Council’s drastic activities and rapid safety action plan implemented from mid-March resulted in Switzerland ranked first among 200 countries in COVID-19 regional safety assessment. Regional safety assessment is conducted by the Deep Knowledge Group to optimize the current health and well-being outcomes of the population during the COVID-19 pandemic, stabilize geopolitics, and determine the optimal outlook and potential of economic recovery in a post-COVID-19 world (Figure 2).

Despite “special situation” measures implemented by the Federal Council to protect the population and labor market from the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic, business survival remained under threat as self-employed individuals and firms could not conduct full activities due to COVID-19. Even though the Swiss government launched a financial insurance action plan to overcome economic

difficulties due to COVID-19, many self-employed individuals, who were a population most vulnerable to the pandemic in the Swiss economy, were initially excluded from these unprecedented actions. The self-employed providing many jobs represent 594,000 people in Switzerland (11% of the working age population). On March 30, 2020, a new initiative began by the Geneva Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Services (CCIG) and APTER-GE amid the COVID-19 crisis, and its purpose was to obtain more supportive measures from the Federal Council to support not just corporate executives but also all self-employed individuals in the country.

On April 16, 2020, the Federal Council decided to expand the rights to the Lost Income Allowances to self-employed individuals not directly related to an office shutdown or ban under certain provisions. It allowed Swiss employers to be compensated for six months' worth of loss (short-term work compensation, to be updated from September 2020) from unemployment insurance. Furthermore, similar compensation was made available for part-time workers who could not work due to a shutdown or public event ban, temporary workers, apprentices, or self-employed individuals who were not permanent workers with a huge change in monthly occupancy rate. Meanwhile, people in Switzerland accepted the COVID-19 Act in June 2021, which granted further authority to the Federal Assembly to mitigate the negative impact of COVID-19 on society and the economy, including giving benefits for short-term work (vacation), compensation for lost income, support for difficulties, and support for cultural and sports organizations (Hauri, 2022).

2. Changing Residential Environments in Switzerland due to the Spread of COVID-19

2.1. Changes in Lifestyle Preferences against COVID-19

It usually takes a generation to acquire a new habit about how to live, work, and travel. COVID-19, however, turned everything upside down. The infectious disease was a sort of turning point for many people in Switzerland. COVID-19 changed where and how people want to live. Accordingly, there was a series of demand changes impacting real estate and its value (Bae & Choi, 2021).

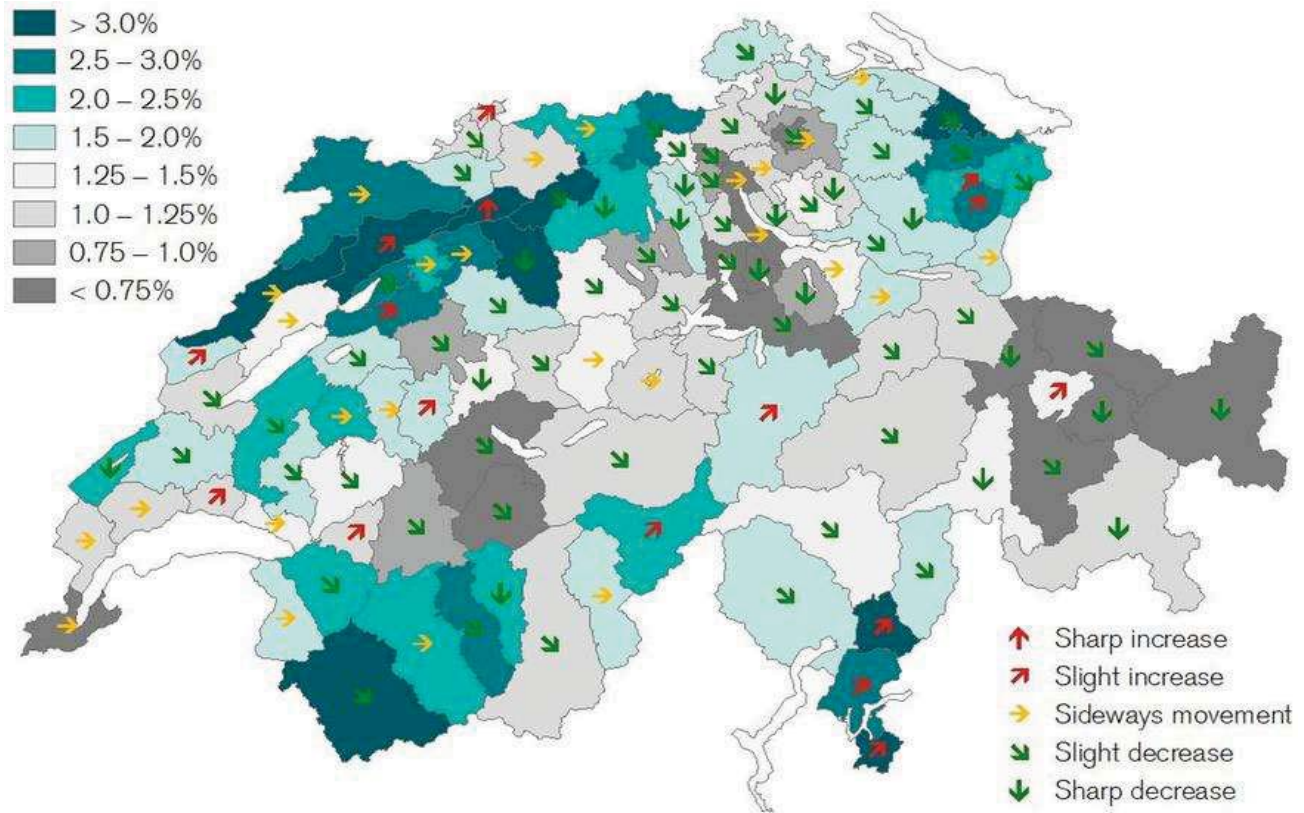
The price of holiday homes in the Alps rose in 2020, supported by travel restrictions and remote work guidelines introduced to prevent the COVID-19 pandemic. A total of 99% of the investors surveyed by EY Switzerland real estate experts in the trend barometer on the real estate investment market 2021 said Switzerland would remain a very attractive real estate market to investors in 2021. In October

2020, EY Real Estate Switzerland conducted a questionnaire survey on 74 investors, who were more active in the Swiss real estate market compared to a year earlier, as part of the trend barometer on the real estate investment market 2021. This survey has been conducted every year since 2011. The barometer is intended to allow professional real estate investors to evaluate the Swiss real estate market every year and forecast the strategies that investors will follow for the next 12 months (Ernst & Young AG, 2021).

The investors in the survey responded that it would be difficult to see full recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic across the real estate sector in 2021. The pandemic has increased risk aversion among investors. Almost 90% of the respondents predicted that there would be more demand, as well as quality improvement, concentrated on less risky real estate such as residential and office real estate with tenants with good credit scores. Nonetheless, the pandemic has led to a distinctive differentiation in the real estate market. Respondents indicated there were different levels of attractiveness depending on the type of real estate, and key office real estate and holiday hotels were chosen as the segments with great recovery potential. A total of 73% strongly preferred investment in residential real estate, followed by logistics (32%), healthcare (31%), office (13%), and hotels (6%). A positive sign was expected over the medium-term for trendy concepts such as coworking space, micro-living, and serviced apartments. By contrast, 47% of the respondents forecast that business hotels, office real estate in surrounding areas, and shopping centers will not be able to fully recover from the crisis over the long term.

Meanwhile, in the *dream home* questionnaire survey, which are Swiss real estate and insurance companies, more than half of the respondents said they wanted to move from urban areas to rural areas. Most (more than 60%) prioritized quiet environments and access to nature, and more than half (53%) wanted to enough space for a home office. Interestingly, physical proximity between office and home lost its importance due to the spread of remote work.

Although many experts worried that the Swiss real estate market would collapse due to the health crisis, the purchase price for houses and apartments rose. In particular, trends toward rural areas from urban areas gained momentum in the early days of the pandemic. At the end of November 2020 amid the second wave of COVID-19 in Switzerland, RTS, a Swiss public television channel, reported that demand increased sharply for single-person households in rural areas or small towns. It suggests that since the COVID-19 crisis demonstrated that disease could be spread by proximity, negative perception about urban areas expanded, and rural areas are increasingly preferred due to fresh and clean air and a more ecological lifestyle.



Note: The unit is the vacancy rate, and the arrow represents the change from a year earlier.
 Source: Swiss Federal Statistical Office; adapted from Credit Suisse (2021, p. 7).

Figure 3: Decreased vacancies in 68 out of 110 areas in Switzerland (as of June 1, 2021)

2.2. Move to Suburban Areas and Remote Work

Swiss people displayed more demand for rural life, plains and mountain resorts, detached houses, larger space, extra space for office, and working space quality (Cauchie, 2021). In particular, demand for holiday apartments and detached houses including second homes and chalets in Switzerland has increased after COVID-19 protocols were relaxed, which suggests that fear about COVID-19 had some effect on some Swiss people avoiding being stuck in apartments in the city center and there are needs for more space for remote work and leisure activities. Many Swiss residents used their second homes in the mountains as a place for rest and shelter during the lockdown imposed by the government to stop the spread of the pandemic.

Demand for holiday homes indicates that preference among households in Switzerland is changing as more residents spend their vacation at home. According to UBS, the price of holiday homes in the Alps rose last year, supported by travel restrictions and remote work guidelines

introduced to stop the COVID-19 pandemic. On average, the price of holiday homes increased by 4% in 2020, which was the largest annual rise since 2012 and partly due to limited housing supply (Pagani et al., 2021).

Increased remote work, a change brought about by COVID-19, has subsequently led to changes in household habits and needs. Distance from work is no longer an important factor when someone chooses where to live. A trend is now emerging where households wanting to improve the quality of life leave the city center and move to the suburbs. As they go to work only a few days a week, they are willing to spend more time commuting in cars or public transport. The COVID-19 lockdown has been difficult for many households living in closed spaces, and they ideally want to move to detached houses (Cauchie, 2021). The attractiveness of the city center in major cities was hit disproportionately by COVID-19-related restrictions (Credit Suisse, 2021).

A number of households predicted continuous changes due to COVID-19, such as increased remote work, and

turned their back on cities. In other words, while lease apartments located in the expensive city center became less attractive due to the pandemic, demand increased for larger apartments around the city. As such, while demand for residential real estate increased in Switzerland amid the COVID-19 crisis, the construction price rose due to a lack of some construction materials caused by protective measures against COVID-19 and bottlenecks in the global supply chain. Subsequently, residential development was delayed, stagnating supply. The price of detached houses is expected to rise before stabilizing in 2022. Overall, housing supply is still short of demand.

3. Trends of Remote Work with the Spread of COVID-19

3.1. Dramatic Increase in Remote Work

The spread of COVID-19 confirmed that firms in Switzerland need to accept virtual collaboration tools and practices, increase resilience, and ensure community well-being. Firms that accepted future trends in work practices and ensured resiliency are more likely to be better positioned to maintain their operations and swiftly respond to COVID-19 needs. These firms recognize work as the ecosystem of virtual resources, technologies, and behavior norms, which defines work as not “a place” but “a thing they do.” It allows these organizations to comprehensively respond to a new dynamic environment due to a spreading infectious disease.

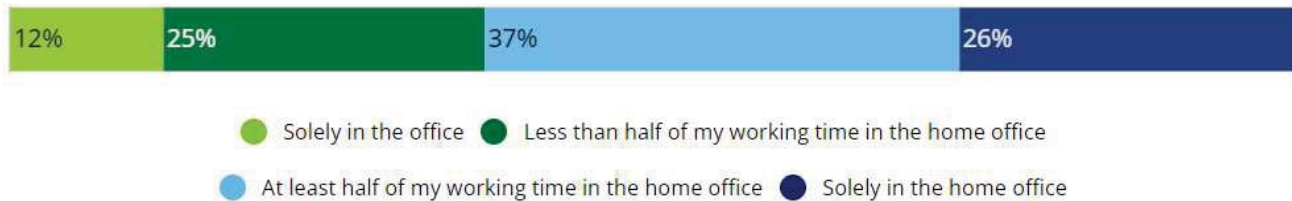
Due to the COVID-19 crisis and social distancing measures introduced by the Swiss government in March 2020, thousands of workers in Switzerland currently work remotely (Deloitte, 2021). The number of people working remotely had been increasing even before COVID-19, and many firms were shifting to a more flexible work model. In the past few years, the percentage of employees working remotely at least half a day per week has increased by about 1 percent annually, from 18% in 2013 to 24% in 2018. According to the data from the Federal Statistical Office, the percentage of employees working remotely at least half a day per week increased from 18% to 24% between 2013 and 2018 before the crisis (Deloitte, 2020a). Before the COVID-

19 lockdown, 28% of the workers in Switzerland already worked remotely at least half a day per week, and one third of the remaining 72% wanted to do so. Recruiters reported that remote work opportunities served as an important factor among millennials and Gen Z and has become essential for employers in the past few years, and without remote work opportunities, 4 out of 10, a larger percentage than any other generation, would not have taken jobs (Deloitte, 2020).

The number of people working remotely in Switzerland doubled during the COVID-19 pandemic, and remote work seems to remain increased permanently even thereafter. Since the start of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, this number has doubled to about half of the respondents, which demonstrates that the pandemic has fueled a trend toward remote work. Although most firms hurriedly shifted to unplanned remote work due to the pandemic, they were mostly successful. The business world is now on a learning curve, exploring remote work and home office.

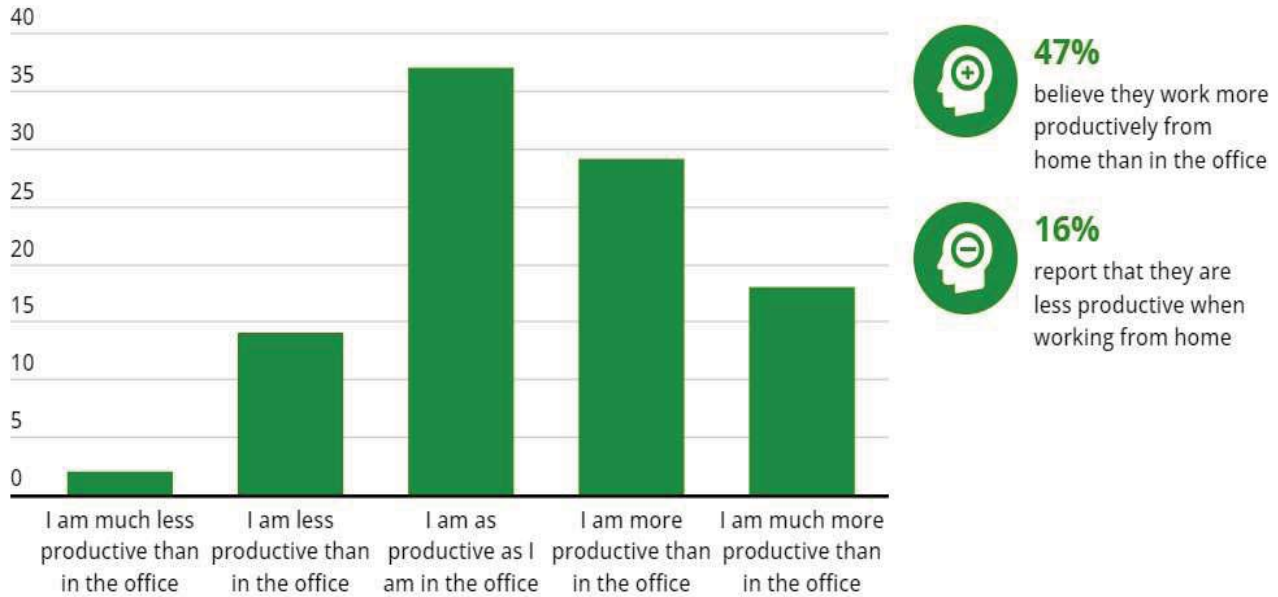
Many employees, who had not worked from home or through digital meetings before COVID-19, were forced to learn a new way of work overnight in March 2020. When we are now reaching the end of the tunnel of COVID-19, many employees want to stay in their home office for some of their working hours. Then, where do Swiss people work after the COVID-19 pandemic? The following survey was conducted to answer this question. An online survey conducted by Deloitte Switzerland on 2,000 people aged 16 to 64 in Switzerland reveals what will change if individuals can choose their preferred way of work. Nonetheless, it must be noted that this survey may have some bias due to employees' own evaluation and therefore may not provide a completely accurate picture. First, the largest percentage (37%) of people who could work remotely preferred remote work for at least half of their working hours. Surprisingly, 1 out of 4 (26%) preferred to work only from home, and only 1 out of 8 (12%) preferred to return to the pre-pandemic model and work in the office (Figure 4).

There were many reasons why remote work was popular. For instance, employees do not spend time commuting, have more flexibility in organizing their time, and can work in the comfort of their home. Furthermore, it was found that almost



Source: Deloitte (2020a)

Figure 4: Questionnaire: How do you want to work in the future if you can choose?



Source: Deloitte (2020a)

Figure 5: Questionnaire: How productive do you think you are when you work remotely?

half of the employees (47%) considered remote work more productive than in-person work. Only 1 out of 6 (16%) responded productivity decreased when they worked from home. In addition, there is a direct correlation between the respondents' self-evaluation about productivity and preference toward remote work. In other words, the more they believe productivity is high during remote work, the more time they want to spend working remotely (Figure 5).

3.2. Limitations and Challenges of Remote Work in Switzerland

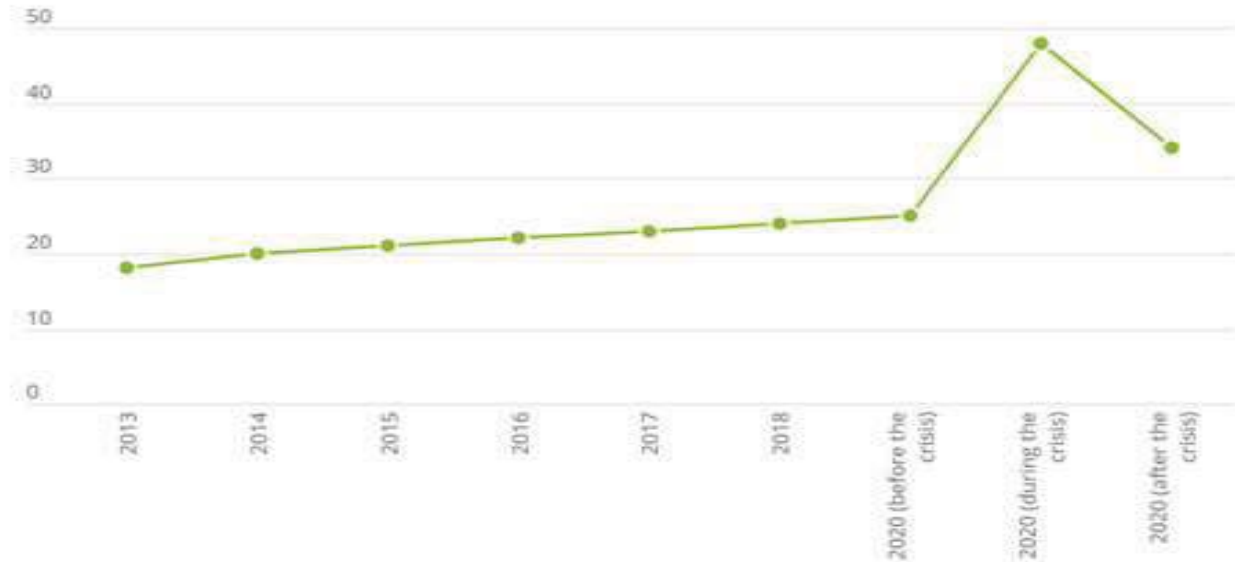
However, remote work has some downsides, and almost half of the respondents (44%) said one of the challenges was a lack of interaction with colleagues. They reported that they were missing out on exchanges with colleagues, and remote work was interrupted by their partner, children, and other people living together (28%). Other challenges included a lack of equipment (22%) and a lack of space (20%).

These results indicate many implications for business management after COVID-19. First, firms need to determine an appropriate balance between remote work and physical presence in the office. Before the current legal obligations in Switzerland that require remote work during COVID-19 if possible, 1 out of 4 employers (26%) were reluctant about or rejected remote work. It may change after COVID-19. Even if employees return to the office, firms need to recognize a transitional period of a few months to test a long-term balance between remote work and physical

presence in the office. They need to consider employees' needs for personal contact and interaction with colleagues along with concerns about safety and infection.

Second, a combination of remote work and physical presence in the office would help to develop a new work model and provide easier access to employment by some populations. For instance, a flexible model allowing for both remote work and in-person work would help employees with children to harmonize responsibilities for family and work more easily. Socially vulnerable people such as those with limited physical abilities can benefit from spending more time working from home. Making a way of work more flexible can increase the potential number of employees in a firm. Employers may mobilize more employees to overcome a lack of skills and obtain more benefits.

Third, firms need to shift from a human resources management model based on physical presence in the workplace to an effective coordination-bases model. This shift needs a premise that employees know their organization's important goals, directions, and their roles no matter where they work, such as having a meeting in the headquarters of a firm, having a teleconference from the kitchen table, or using their holiday home for focused thinking. In fact, the same survey found that almost half of the remote worker respondents (46%) were working remotely from not just their home but other places, such as a holiday home, a friend or family's home, or a shared workspace. In particular, young employees worked remotely from such places. Hence, it is clear that terms like



Source: Deloitte (2021)

Figure 6: Percentage of people working remotely (at least half a day per week) in Switzerland

“home office” or “remote work” do not accurately reflect the phenomenon we are observing, and firms must not see their employees simply as “remote” workers. In the future, the desired new work model is “distributed work,” where employees can work anywhere with shared goals, open cultures, and clear directions.

Meanwhile, in a COVID-19 survey in 2021, Deloitte Switzerland asked 1,500 people across Switzerland how this sudden change impacted them. This online questionnaire survey was conducted from February 12 to 23, 2021 on 2,000 people aged 16 to 64 and representative of age, gender, and region in Switzerland (Deloitte, 2021).

The following are the detailed results: First, 50% of the employees or self-employed were working remotely when COVID-19 hit the country, and an absolute majority of people currently working remotely believed that it did not undermine their productivity. Before the crisis, approximately 25% of the respondents worked remotely at least once per week. After the crisis, 34% believed that they would work remotely at least once per week. Most of these people will return to the office when things return to normal, but the number of remote workers is unlikely to return to the pre-COVID-19 level (Figure 6).

The current crisis serves as a large-scale experiment about what works or does not work well from remote work, and increased remote work will have a huge impact on many people and businesses moving toward a more flexible workspace model. Such trend accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis has a positive impact across society while providing

more flexibility in terms of place and time management and lowering the burden on roads and infrastructure.

As in Figure 7, remote work does not undermine most people’s productivity, and it could be more productive for some people than in-person work. Depending on the task, some work can be done more efficiently when employees are not physically present in a noisy office. More than 70% of the respondents said they were more efficient when working remotely, and only 1 out of 4 stated productivities could be decreased during remote work. These results revealed that most employees considered a flexible workspace model more productive and bringing a higher level of job satisfaction.

Of course, serious restrictions imposed on the economy as part of the response to COVID-19 are likely to cause a further decline in Switzerland’s GDP. Nevertheless, to mitigate the impact of the restrictions on society, Switzerland is actively utilizing not just unemployment insurance, short-term work compensation policy, and business loans, but also digitalization and remote work. Digitation in the Swiss economy, combined with many employees’ ability to work remotely, helps to reduce economic repercussions from the pandemic. According to a survey conducted by Deloitte, the number of employees working at least half a day per week in Switzerland since the outbreak of COVID-19 in mid-March 2020 has almost doubled from 25% to just below 50%, and almost half are working remotely. A detailed breakdown by sector provides more diversity. A comparison of the percentage of those who cannot continue to work remotely (assigned to short-

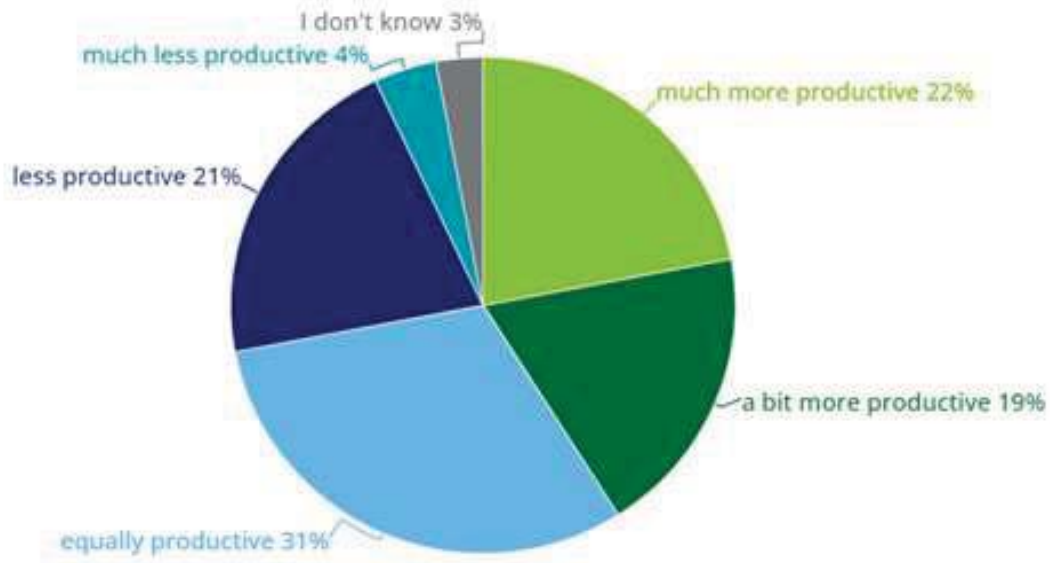
term work compensation or redundant) and those who can by segment reveals a clear negative correlation. In other words, the more employees can work remotely in a given sector, the less likely it is to be shut down. In general, COVID-19 had the most negative impact on employees in hotels and catering, and only 14% of the workers in hotels and catering could work remotely, and more than 30% had to stop working. COVID-19 has caused a big change in Switzerland's working system. Overall, working hours were reduced, while remote working resulted in a significant increase. At the other end of the spectrum, there are ICT, banking, and insurance sectors, and most employees in these sectors worked remotely, and only a few could not continue to work. The health sector was the outlier. It was no surprise, given its special status on the front line of the COVID-19 outbreak. Of course, the percentage of workers who can work remotely is not the only factor affecting how many people stop working. Another important factor is whether employees can work without direct contact with other people. The Swiss government's lockdown decision has had almost no impact on these sectors.

There are many challenges for remote work. A 2020 survey by Deloitte Switzerland on the impact of COVID-19 revealed that employees faced a higher risk of cybercrime in a long-term lockdown. Insufficient technological infrastructure and cyber and data security were identified as some of the main reasons. Since the beginning of the pandemic, employees have noticed increased fraudulent emails, phishing attempts, and spam in their corporate email accounts. In response, many firms have enhanced security, fixed shortcomings in their IT infrastructure, and adapted

their IT security measures and rules to new threats. However, it was found that establishing IT security standards for remote workers based on those for the physical workspace decreased employee productivity.

In a survey by Deloitte Switzerland in February 2021 of 2,000 working age individuals about cyber security during work from home or remote work, an absolute majority (81%) said they could still work efficiently from home, while the other 19% believed (new) IT security measures and rules could undermine productivity. This number has doubled with the comparison of 2020 survey results. In addition, it should be noted that health and well-being issues were considered to be residential environments, which suddenly had to accommodate various functions of an urban system (Pagani et al., 2021).

The respondents selected "I cannot access important data" (32%) and "I cannot use my printer to print business documents" (24%) as two reasons for not working efficiently from home. Compared to last year, fewer respondents reported a poor VPN connection (22%) and limitations on videoconferencing tools (18%) as the main reasons. In an effort to promote digital working since the beginning of the pandemic, firms have prioritized investment in these two areas. Nonetheless, they need to further focus on safe, secure, and non-intrusive IT security measures for employees remotely accessing corporate data and to address the issue of restrictions on the use of home printers. Along with issues of IT security and rules, another reason for less efficiency in remote work is many employees lacking skills to professionally use new technologies and tools in the work environment. A total of 2 out of 5 of the



Source: Deloitte (2021)

Figure 7: Questionnaire: How productive is remote work compared to in-person work?

respondents (42%) stated their employer did not provide training and/awareness raising about working securely from home. While shifting to remote work during the COVID-19 lockdown was intended to allow employees to continue to work and collaborate, firms may have prioritized the introduction of new technologies over comprehensive security training (Deloitte, 2021).

4. Conclusions: Role of Information Technology against COVID-19 and Implications

While remote work can be introduced quickly for employees in the IT, service, financial and insurance sectors, it is difficult to be introduced for those in the transport, logistics, nursing, or catering sectors, which involve direct interpersonal interaction. The COVID-19 crisis, however, will accelerate digitization and a trend toward remote work. Hence, firms capable of implementing remote work and having reasonable options need to put robust and stable data infrastructure in place. Firms should take action to appropriately support their employees. Firms can respond to this trend by regularly reviewing, testing, and strengthening their IT infrastructure and security measures. It can be helpful to simplify and standardize rules and guidelines. In the meantime, more targeted training may help to increase productivity. Many firms have some things to catch up and should invest in know-how, resources, capacity, and tools for employee training and awareness raising. Regular training should cover all the cyber security-related issues such as malware, phishing, username and password management, data protection, encryption, home network security, network connectivity (VPN), and endpoint security. At the same time, employees should keep their knowledge about these updated. Furthermore, employees should regularly make themselves familiar with rules and guidelines about handling confidential data, including the potential penalties they may face if they use data improperly. A total of 1 out of 4 of the respondents (24%) indicated they were tempted to keep copies of important corporate data in case of “the worst-case scenario” where they potentially lose their job or their firm goes insolvent. Continuous prevention, informing, and training are required to minimize these types of internal cyber risks and prevent the loss of valuable corporate data and intellectual property (IP).

Unsurprisingly, when asked the current difficulties they faced during remote work, almost half of the respondents viewed a lack of interpersonal interaction with colleagues and clients as the greatest challenge. In addition, approximately 20% were worried about their mental well-being as they felt isolated from time to time while working from home. A total of 1 out of 3 considered being distracted by their children or family as one of the greatest challenges,

and 16% did not have a designated workspace at home, which worsened such distraction.

Such results need to be interpreted in the context of the current COVID-19 pandemic. Many people face an extreme situation where they have to improvise at work while taking care of their children at the same time. Those distracted by their children are much more likely to report that they are less productive when working from home. Hence, there may be an increase in the perceived productivity of employees once their children return to school.

The following concrete implications are provided. First, situations in the COVID-19 pandemic crisis are not likely to become the norm for those who choose to work remotely. Some of today’s challenges, however, can be practical lessons to implement a flexible workspace model in the future. For firms to improve productivity among their employees when working remotely after COVID-19, they need to note a few important considerations. Firms that previously accepted future work practices with virtual resources and technology support for remote workplaces are better positioned to maintain their operations and quickly respond to needs in overcoming the current crisis. Accordingly, it is very important for firms to address a lack of adequate technology and tools, such as digital devices, virtual collaboration tools, and the platforms that support dynamic workplaces. Firms should invest in better know-how, resources, capacity, and tools for employee training and awareness raising.

Second, technology is not the only important factor regarding working remotely. Firms and their employees must find a way of organizing themselves and consider how to conduct team meetings productively and ensure efficient teamwork. Managers and leaders must make sure that their team members understand their shared goals on individual and team levels during remote work. During disruptive times in particular, managers should communicate regularly with their teams and establish a new rhythm to ensure the best possible performance. They need to be aware that each of their team members is different, listen to their needs, and understand that performance may differ based on how individuals adapt to a new situation. To keep team spirit elevated even in the virtual environment, managers should find an appropriate way to reward and recognize teamwork. It is necessary to have regular check-ins with each team member to ensure the well-being of team members and their team, and leaders should be a role model and prepare the foundation for a healthier and more sustainable work environment when working remotely. Only then can they fully enjoy the benefits of remote work.

Third, government support is also necessary to disseminate remote work. Of course, employers must basically arrange remote work depending on the characteristics of work, ensure such arrangements can be

implemented with reasonable efforts, and take appropriate organizational and technological measures to do so. Under Article 327 of the Swiss Code of Obligations (CO), employers must provide their employees with necessary tools and equipment for work, and employees are entitled to appropriate remuneration if they use their private material for work with their employer's consent (Vidakovic, 2021). Under this Article, employees are entitled to reimbursement for the expenses that are necessarily incurred over the course of their work, including those for telephone and internet services, electricity, and heating. Accordingly, in an effort to alleviate a burden for firms, the Federal Council expressly asserts that any expenses for work performed by employees in a home office due to the pandemic are not owed (Article 10 (3) of the COVID-19 Ordinance Special Situation). As a result, employers do not owe employees working in a home office during the pandemic any compensation for expenses, such as electricity or rent. As such, identifying expenses required for remote work as the issue of government-level support to respond to a social crisis beyond a firm's burden contributed to expanding remote work in Switzerland. Too many changes have occurred due to COVID-19. Much effort has also been made to return to daily life in Switzerland. In particular, legislative efforts at the parliamentary level are noteworthy. It can be evaluated as significant progress in that society's efforts have been made to see who suffers more from the pandemic and who should receive more protection (Uhlmann & Scheifele, 2020).

Finally, this study has limitations that provide recommendations for further research. First, because this study was conducted in the Swiss context, cross-national research can be conducted to compare these results with those for other countries. Second, because the time span of this study covers only initial stage of the COVID-19 pandemic, future research can conduct a longitudinal study tracking impacts of the COVID-19 crisis over time. In the future, it is necessary to discuss remote work methods against COVID-19 pandemic along with case studies in other European countries.

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