

DOI: [10.22620/agrisci.2024.43.013](https://doi.org/10.22620/agrisci.2024.43.013)

DIGITAL NOMADISM: KEY CONCEPTS AND CHALLENGES

Ralitz F. Pandurska*, **Irina I. Danailova**, **Desislava N. Koleva-Stefanova**,
Ventsislava Ts. Stoyanova, **Ralitz I. Tenekedjieva**, **Dimitrina At. Karamfilova**

University of National and World Economy, Bulgaria;

*Corresponding author: rpandurska@unwe.bg

Abstract

Digital nomadism is a novelty in scientific theory, although it has been well-known in practice for many years. Clarifying the nature and specific characteristics of digital nomadism could serve as a foundation for a deeper understanding of this increasingly preferred form of employment. The study examines various concepts regarding the nature and characteristics of digital nomadism and outlines the profile of typical digital nomads. It presents some indicators for investigating digital progress and digital nomadism, explores the opportunities that digitalization offers for the development of this form of flexible employment among young people, and examines the UN's Sustainable Development Goals in the context of digital nomadism. Based on the research, some conclusions are drawn about digital nomadism as a perspective for youth employment.

Keywords: digital nomadism, flexible employment, digitalization, labor market, sustainable development goals

INTRODUCTION

Nomadism originated from the early human communities' realization that migration was essential for their survival. In the absence of permanent settlements, these communities were compelled to follow herds of wild animals, using temporary shelters like caves. As an ancient way of life, deeply rooted in human evolution, nomadism has inspired the modern world. Today, in the era of the technological revolution, nomadism has found a new expression – digital nomadism. Instead of being constrained by physical boundaries, digital nomads move freely in virtual space, transforming traditional aspects of the nomadic lifestyle into online communities. This new form of nomadism not only continues the tradition of cultural enrichment but also opens opportunities for the exchange of ideas, knowledge, and skills on a global scale. While classical nomadism provided humanity with the necessary tools for survival in the physical world, digital nomadism expands this concept,

opening new possibilities for communication and innovation in the world of virtual travel and global connectivity.

Defining the meaning of digital nomadism is ambiguous due to various understandings of its scope. However, all studies agree that it is inherent to people who have a free spirit and seek an independent lifestyle, far from big cities and crowded spaces. Digital nomads have consciously chosen to move to smaller settlements that have retained their authenticity while performing their work remotely. Modern digital nomads do not forgo the comforts of the modern world. In most cases, they are dynamic young people with professions that allow remote work, desiring to work from different parts of the world. They often use the comfort of shared spaces with meeting areas and, most importantly, secure and fast internet connections, essential for remote work. After spending some time in one place, digital nomads leave and move to another, which brings new challenges and meets other preferences.

There are many definitions of "digital nomad," but they all gravitate around the freedom to choose a profession that allows remote work from an interesting location. This term was first used in 1997 by Makimoto and Manners in their book "Digital Nomad" (Makimoto&Manners, 1997), where they described how current and future technological possibilities, combined with the natural human desire for travel, would allow humanity to live, work, and exist on the move.

According to Beverly Thompson (Thompson, 2018), digital nomads are workers whose primary occupation is conducted online. They are not required to be physically present at work, making them "territorially independent." Miles Everson, Steve King, and Carolyn Ockels believe that these are people who adopt a high-tech, location-independent lifestyle that allows them to travel and work anywhere in the world as long as they are connected to the internet (Everson et al., 2021).

In the study "In Search of the Digital Nomad: Defining the Phenomenon," Olga Hannonen notes that "digital nomads are simultaneously highly mobile professionals and lifestyle travelers" (Hannonen, 2020:351). The author further points out that digital nomadism is driven by significant societal changes, such as the widespread availability of mobile internet and everyday technologies and the increasing flexibility of employment. The term "digital nomad" describes a category of mobile specialists who perform their work remotely from anywhere in the world using digital technologies. Digital nomadism refers to the lifestyle of these independent professionals, which evolves thanks to mobile technologies (Hannonen, 2020:336).

Another definition states that "digital nomads are professionals who can fulfill their work commitments regardless of their location on the globe" (Duneska&Petrov, 2019). They further believe that the digital nomad community includes people with diverse social statuses – young people, wealthy individuals,

entrepreneurs, refugees.

These and many other definitions of digital nomadism give us grounds to summarize that this way of life, born from the desire for freedom of spirit and adventure, allows work from anywhere with good internet coverage, provided the profession permits remote work without requiring physical presence at the workplace. The phenomenon of digital nomadism is neither solely remote work, nor solely tourism, nor an adventure for young people without serious commitments. It is a unique culture, lifestyle, and value system that combines high-tech skills with a desire for independence, flexibility, and freedom.

Typically, digital nomads are young, highly educated, and intelligent individuals engaged in professions that allow for greater flexibility in working hours and the possibility of remote work (Pandurska, 2021). They have a pronounced affinity for travel and do not like to stay in one place for long; as soon as they feel bored with their current location, they quickly move on. Well-educated and proficient in information technology and foreign languages, these individuals are in constant search of new challenges. By changing their location, they reset their social life, meeting new people and getting to know new cultures and customs.

Most often, digital nomads live in communities and maintain close communication with each other, exchanging information about living conditions, accommodation costs, utility expenses, internet coverage quality, local natural attractions, climate, cultural activities, children's education, transport links, and nearby sightseeing opportunities. Many factors determine their next destination. Digital nomads are very active in forums and festivals, where they exchange information and impressions about the "nomadic" culture in different regions. An example of such a global forum is the Bansko Nomad Fest held annually in Bulgaria, where digital nomads from around the world gather to exchange contacts, information, impressions,

and experiences with other colleagues.

Simultaneously, there are instances where some digital nomads voluntarily isolate themselves and avoid contact with the outside world as much as possible, enjoying nature, introspection, and meditation while continuing their usual work.

Digital nomads do not necessarily live in isolated or hard-to-reach areas – they simply change their location periodically, often after staying for 3, 6, or 12 months. Small towns with

good internet coverage and favorable infrastructure, allowing quick access to larger urban areas and locations with rich cultural and natural attractions, often attract digital nomads. Through their communication networks, they share information and exchange ideas about new suitable destinations.

The main characteristics of digital nomadism that distinguish it from other forms of remote work are presented in Figure 1:



Figure 1. Main characteristics of digital nomadism

Source: Author

The aim of the study is to provide an independent definition of digital nomadism. Based on the survey, the main prospects, opportunities, and risks of the new phenomenon are highlighted.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study considers digital nomadism as one of the most modern forms of flexible employment, which is gaining popularity and becoming increasingly preferred by people striving for an independent lifestyle. The research supports the thesis that by combining opportunities for remote work and travel to different parts of the world, digital nomads are changing the paradigm of static office work and giving new meaning to flexible employment, satisfying their striving for digital and personal freedom.

The research has the following objectives:

1. To summarize various concepts of digital nomadism and, based on this, to establish an independent definition of digital nomadism.

2. To present selected indicators for measuring digital progress and digital nomadism.

3. To show flexible employment as a suitable form of work for digital nomads.

4. To examine digital nomadism in the context of the UN's sustainable development goals.

The following tasks are set:

1. Make a literature review of the essence of digital nomadism and outline its specific features.

2. Present indicators for measuring digital progress and digital nomadism.

3. Define the age boundaries of young people and present the specifics of flexible employment and its study through the prism of the UN's sustainable development goals.

Traditional research methods are used: analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction.

The research was conducted under the following restrictions:

1. The study only examines the theoretical concepts of digital nomadism as a potential opportunity for flexible employment, while its practical application in the labor market will be the subject of another study.

2. Due to the restrictions in the scope of the research, only some indicators of digitalization and digital nomadism for a specific period are presented.

3. Due to the specifics of the research problem, the data are not tracked dynamically.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the study "FlexJobs Digital Nomad Survey: Insights into the Remote Lifestyle," conducted in 2018 among 500 nomads, Brie Weiler Reynolds outlines the profile of the typical modern digital nomad (Reynolds, 2018). The demographic characteristics of digital nomads surveyed in this study are: 41% from Generation X, 32% baby boomers, and 27% from Generation Z. Women predominate more than twice as much – out of every 10 nomads, 7 are women and only 3 are men. They are often well-educated, with 72% holding a bachelor's degree and 33% a master's degree. The majority are employees (35%), 28% are freelancers and 18% are business owners. Most of the nomads have been so for a short time – 42% for less than a year, 33% between 1 and 5 years, and 24% for more than 5 years.

Digital nomads are primarily engaged in the following professional fields: writing, education and training, administrative services, customer service, arts and creativity, computers and IT, consulting, data processing, marketing, project management, and more. 51% of them usually live in rented hotels, 41% with family and friends, 36% in Airbnb apartments, 21% in a caravan, van, or car, and 16% in hostels. The most preferred places for settling are America,

Western Europe, Asia, and others. Typically, they change 1-2 countries per year (73%), with only 19% changing 3-4 countries and 8% changing more than 5 countries, staying in one place from a few days to more than a year.

Sixty-one percentage of digital nomads are married, while the remaining 39% are not. Interestingly, 38% of nomads always travel with their spouses, 31% sometimes travel with them, and 32% never travel with them. The question of children is also interesting – only 26% of digital nomads have children under 18 years of age, and 59% of them do not travel together with their children. The children of nomads traveling with their parents usually attend public school, but it is not uncommon for them to attend online schools or be homeschooled.

The reasons why digital nomads decided to lead this lifestyle are most often: work-life balance; enjoy the freedom; love to travel; avoid office politics and distractions of a traditional work environment; want to explore other cultures; high cost of living in home country; poor local job market in hometown..

According to the cited study by Brie Weiler Reynolds, the typical digital nomad has the following characteristics: it is a married woman, representative of Generation X (aged 40-54, born between 1965-1979). She is an experienced full-time employee and is involved in education, writing, creative sciences or administration. She is highly educated and pays her insurance regularly and has good savings in the bank. To a large extent, this study disproves society's stereotypical notions of digital nomads as adventurous young people who frequently change not only their workplace but also their profession and tend to do lighter and less demanding work.

Digital Nomadism Index

The choice of a new destination for digital nomads depends on various factors, such as the quality of internet services, their cost, the coverage of 4G and 5G networks, climate conditions and natural features, transportation,

local customs and mentality, the population's readiness to accept foreigners, and many others. To achieve an objective comparison between different countries regarding their suitability for digital nomadism, a digital nomadism index has been developed, which includes eight indicators (Circleloop, 2021):

1. Broadband Speed – The average speed of broadband internet access.
2. Mobile Speed – The average speed of mobile internet.
3. Broadband Cost – The average monthly cost for fixed cable broadband access.
4. Monthly Rent – The average monthly

rent for a one-bedroom apartment.

5. Working Holidays Visa – A residence permit that allows individuals to work and study in the country issuing this visa to earn funds for travel.

6. Happiness Index – Determined based on the global happiness index, ranging from 0 to 10.

7. Migrant Population – The percentage of people with migrant status within the population.

8. People Seeking Remote Work – The number of annual searches for remote work in a given country X.

Table 1. Digital Nomadism Index

№	Country	Broad-band speed	Mobile speed	Broad-band cost (€)	Monthly rent (€)	Working holiday visa	Happiness visa	Migrant population %	Remote job searches	Digital nomad score
58	South Africa	37,24	38,73	41,64	524	Yes	4,81	7,2	10120	47,29
59	Ecuador	27,44	21,97	40,8	363	Yes	5,93	2,2	220	47,15
60	Indonesia	23,04	16,16	27,92	274	Yes	5,29	0,1	6260	46,57
61	Serbia	68,9	48,44	15,83	287	No	5,78	9,4	3020	43,97
62	Bulgaria	67,44	77,3	14,81	292	No	5,1	2,4	2000	43,62
63	Trinidad and Tobago	68,53	41,81	52,76	483	No	6,19	4,2	120	39,21
64	Albania	41,52	56,44	19,11	283	No	4,88	1,7	70	38,97
65	Panama	99,9	17,22	44,16	684	No	6,31	4,4	680	38,46
66	Pakistan	10,93	18,8	16,32	127	No	5,69	1,5	3550	37,9

Source: <https://www.circleloop.com/nomadindex>

According to the Digital Nomadism Index, the most favorable country for digital nomadism is Canada, due to the presence of some of the world's largest technology hubs, which creates good living opportunities for digital nomads. The United Kingdom ranks second in this classification because of its favorable conditions for digital nomadism, and Romania comes in third due to its low internet service costs and rapidly developing digital technology market.

Out of a total of 85 countries, Bulgaria ranks 62nd, positioned between Serbia and Trinidad and Tobago, which indicates a significant lag in digital nomadism compared to neighboring countries. Representatives of

digital nomads are primarily concentrated around Bansko, Plovdiv, and Varna, which offer good conditions for remote work, cheap and fast internet with good coverage, convenient transportation connections, a favorable climate, and relatively lower living costs.

Flexible employment as a prerequisite for youth digital nomadism

Flexible employment is particularly suitable for digital nomads as it provides the freedom they seek – namely, the ability to choose both the duration of their work hours and their place of work. As noted in the previous research, digital nomadism is a preferred form of employment mainly among young people.

Providing a universal and internationally accepted definition that clearly and unambiguously defines the concept of "youth" (young person/adult) is a challenging and currently unachieved task. Most countries derive their national definitions based on age, as this criterion most easily identifies individuals who will be perceived and treated as youths. The decision on the age range for youths is influenced by a variety of country-specific factors – demographic, cultural, socio-economic, political, and others. Thus, there are many variations depending on interpretations and circumstances, but there are also some supranational age definitions imposed to standardize the demographic cohort of young people on a larger scale.

The United Nations sets, enforces, and uses the age range of 15 to 24 years for all its statistical research targeting "youth/young adults" (The United Nations, 2013). UNICEF, the World Health Organization, and the United Nations Population Fund have also adopted this age range. However, it remains a guideline, as most countries have adopted shorter or longer age intervals, varying across different national laws, policies, and strategies.

Evidence of this diversity in the age definition of the youth cohort (young people), specifically for the European Union, can be found in the "Youth Wiki" platform, maintained by the Policy Analysis Unit for Education and Youth at the European Executive Agency for Education and Culture of the European Commission. This platform provides synthesized, reliable, and up-to-date information on youth policies of EU member states – subjects, scope, goals, priorities, legal frameworks, and more.

The concept of flexicurity originated in Denmark, with Hans Andriessen considered its founding figure. Denmark's labor market policy focuses on several directions to achieve efficiency concerning flexible employment and social security:

- "*Numerical Flexibility*" – The number of enterprises should align with contemporary innovations and the integration of new technologies into work processes and the economy.

- "*Flexibility of Working Hours*" – Working hours are a variable factor, adjusted according to production processes and workload.

- "*Flexibility of Wages*" – Labor costs are not fixed but determined by the economic conditions at both the micro and macro levels.

- "*Functional Flexibility*" – The ability for rapid adaptation of people's knowledge and skills in line with the use of new technologies in business organizations.

- "*Providing Social Security for the Workforce*" – Tailored to the changing modern labor market and flexible work processes.

For the implementation of flexible forms of employment, three types of legislative regulations on the labor market are necessary: 1. the right of a free choice of work by the workforce; 2. the right to social security; 3. the development of an active labor policy, reducing unemployment and stimulating professional training of individuals. (Sotirova, 2007).

In general, the idea of a high percentage of flexible employment combined with social security, based on the fifth principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights, is at the heart of the concept. This principle protects fair, adaptive working conditions based on security. (European Union, 2021), One of the main forms of flexible employment applied in the work process in most European countries is conditionally divided into three directions - flexible working hours, flexible workplace and flexible career.

➤ Flexible working hours:

- *Part-time* - in this flexible employment, employees do not work according to the established traditional eight-hour workday. Depending on the specifics of the job, different approaches to part-time work are applied, such

as part-time, or a combined approach of all possibilities.

- *Job-sharing* – in this form of flexible employment, two or more employees are assigned to one position and share common duties, and the price of their labor is determined by the distributed duties and responsibilities. There are different forms of employment, such as part-time, alternate weeks or month, etc.

- *Floating working time* - with it, the working day has a variable beginning and end, depending on the work process. In this flexible employment, workers work standard working hours, but the limits of working hours themselves are not fixed.

- *The compressed working week (fortnights)* - with it, employees allocate their weekly working hours, and one day can be more or less.

- *Annual hours* - the required hours of work are determined for a period of time (usually a year), allowing for flexibility in the distribution of working time by the worker and the manager.

➤ Flexible workplace:

- *Remote work/remote employment* - in this case, employees perform their work duties outside the business organization itself, through a virtual connection including digital devices and Internet connectivity. This form of flexible employment can be entirely remote (home office) or it can be hybrid employment, i.e. certain time to work in the office as well.

- *Working from home on a regular basis* - a form of flexible workplace, with the worker performing their work duties full time, but from their home.

➤ Flexible Career:

- *Career break* - enables the use of long-term leave of one to five years, usually unpaid.

- *Term-time working* - with it, the employee has the opportunity to use paid/unpaid vacations several times a year (Institute of Public Administration, 2020).

Of the above forms of flexible employment, working from a distance (home

office) is one of the most preferred and rapidly developing in the modern digital society.

Advantages of working remotely:

- Providing an opportunity to combine the personal and professional life of the workforce;

- Provision of an opportunity for independent management of the work process related to time, place and distribution of the volume of work;

- Providing trust, responsibility and the opportunity to prove themselves;

- Providing an opportunity to improve employees' digital and soft skills;

- Telecommuting saves the employee daily travel and operating costs;

- Telecommuting allows the employer to save part of the company's funds for operating expenses, such as rent, utilities, business trips, etc. These available finances could be invested in other profitable activities.

- Communication in a virtual environment enables rapid exchange of information and processing of a large-scale database;

- Remote work saves time for the employee and at the same time reduces traffic, which is also related to limiting harmful emissions from cars.

Potential risks of remote work:

- When working remotely, it is more difficult to control and evaluate the performance of the work tasks set;

- It is more difficult to regulate and control the implementation of standards for health and safety at work;

- When working remotely, the present form of communication, verbal communication, lack of direct contact with colleagues is lost. Often the remote form is associated with isolation of the individual, which leads to deterioration of his mental and physical health;

- There is a danger of mixing personal with professional duties, which leads to additional stress and dissatisfaction

- In the age of digital technologies, working remotely carries a higher risk of cyber attacks;

- Technical problems often arise when working remotely, which have to be fixed by the employee, which is related to tension and taking their time;

- Remote work requires longer communication in a virtual environment, including emails, online messages, work meetings, etc. These ideas lead to mental strain and excessive working hours.

Digital nomads could also be viewed as a potential opportunity for the development of rural areas in the countries where they settle, particularly in Bulgaria, where these areas are characterized by an aging population, depopulation, and a lack of young people. Modern nomads are not tourists, as they typically stay in a given area for about two to three months, investing their money into the local economy by purchasing goods and services. Many of these individuals engage in volunteer work in schools, shelters, cultural centers, and similar establishments. They are highly skilled and knowledgeable individuals, making them a valuable human resource for any country. (Karshovski, 2023)

An example of the rapidly growing digital nomadism in Bulgaria is the town of Bansko. According to data from the information portal "Nomad List," in the past five years, the town has become one of the most dynamically expanding remote work locations, with a concentration of numerous digital nomads (Nomad List, 2024). Not only the areas around Bansko but also those around Varna, Plovdiv, and Sofia hold immense potential for the development of digital nomadism. They attract with their beautiful, diverse nature, where renting or purchasing properties for coworking spaces and coliving facilities is financially accessible for digital nomads. Rural areas hold a key role in the sustainable development of the country, and thus, it is necessary to develop comprehensive policies encouraging young people to settle in depopulated villages and to realize their potential. Promoting digital nomadism to "revitalize" Bulgarian villages

should be an integral part of the programs and approaches of government institutions, social partners, non-governmental organizations, and all interested parties.

After 2011, there are no significant changes to the labor legislation regarding remote work. The Bulgarian institutions and all interested parties, in sync with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), strive to build a competitive, modern labor market, subject to the European concept of flexibility and security in labor processes.

Digital Nomadism and the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Given that more and more young people are striving for digital nomadism as a way of life and work, and based on the essence of sustainable development - namely, that it meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (The United Nations, 1987) - it is important to trace the relationship between digital nomadism and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The SDGs are outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by world leaders at the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. This program is a commitment to eradicate poverty and achieve sustainable development globally, ensuring that no one is left behind (European Commission, 2016).

The SDGs can be categorized into three groups based on their interaction with digital nomadism. The first group includes goals, achievement of which is beneficial for digital nomadism as it leads to better prospects and living and working conditions for nomads. These goals can be seen as factors promoting digital nomadism and can be defined as facilitators of digital nomadism. The second group consists of goals for which digital nomadism is beneficial. Regarding these, digital nomadism serves as a means to achieve them.

The third group includes goals with which digital nomadism does not directly interact.

In the first group, those that create a favorable environment for the development of digital nomadism include the fourth SDG, "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all." This goal is directly aimed at the main asset of any country, namely its population. Achieving it requires improving the quality of education and training, providing young people, who constitute the majority of digital nomads, with opportunities for better future employment and a better life. The implementation of the sixth SDG, "Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all," and the seventh SDG, "Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all," guarantees access to clean drinking water and clean energy for everyone, which is essential for creating good living and working conditions for digital nomads in more and more populated areas. The same applies to achieving the eighth goal, "Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all," specifically its sub-goals related to ensuring full and productive employment and decent work for all, protecting labor rights, and promoting a safe and secure working environment for all workers, including migrant workers and those in precarious employment, as well as promoting sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products. The ninth SDG, "Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization, and foster innovation," includes the idea of developing quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure, including regional and transborder infrastructure, to support economic development and human well-being, with a focus on affordable and equitable access for all. It aims to significantly increase access to information and communication technologies

and provide universal and affordable access to the internet in the least developed countries. All of this, along with facilitating migration and the mobility of people through well-planned and managed migration policies, as outlined in the tenth SDG, "Reduce inequality within and among countries," are also prerequisites for promoting digital nomadism. The implementation of the eleventh SDG, "Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable," will lead to better living conditions in urban areas. The twelfth goal, "Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns," particularly its sub-goal to ensure that people everywhere have the relevant information and awareness for sustainable development and lifestyles in harmony with nature, is a good premise for encouraging people to lead environmentally friendly lifestyles. The seventeenth SDG, "Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development," primarily stimulates the progress of least developed and developing countries.

In the second group of goals, those positively influenced by digital nomadism include the second SDG, "End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture," as the expenditures of digital nomads in the economies of small settlements lead to increased incomes for small-scale food producers, local populations, family farmers, livestock farmers, and fishermen. This, in turn, develops small farms and the local economy. The third goal, "Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages," includes a criterion to reduce premature mortality from non-communicable diseases by one-third by 2030 through prevention and treatment, as well as promoting mental health and well-being. It also aims to significantly reduce the number of deaths and illnesses from hazardous chemicals and air, water, and soil pollution and contamination. Given that digital nomadism is a lifestyle where people often choose to live in environmentally

clean areas that provide a peaceful way of life, it can be concluded that it is a precondition for a healthier lifestyle and reduced premature mortality.

The third group includes the remaining six SDGs, which do not have a direct relationship with digital nomadism and are not the subject of analysis in this study.

Digitalization processes in Bulgaria as a prerequisite for digital nomadism

Digitalization and digital transformation are important prerequisites for the development of digital nomadism. At the European level, the state and progress of member states regarding digital technologies are actively monitored, with one of the important unified indicators being the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) (European Commission, 2024).

For the purposes of this study, this index is particularly significant because it covers key indicators relevant to digital nomadism:

- **Connectivity:** Reflects access to fast and reliable broadband connections (including fixed and mobile connections);
- **Human Capital/Digital Skills;**
- **Use of the Internet:** Activities such as digital news, shopping, and online banking;
- **Integration of Digital Technology:** Use of advanced digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, the Internet of Things, cloud computing, and big data analytics. In the latest European Commission report, data on the integration of digital technologies and internet use are combined into the category "Integration of Digital Technology";
- **Digital Public Services:** E-health (such as telemedicine, e-prescriptions, and medical data exchange), use of advanced technologies to improve public services;

Since digitalization is developing at an extremely rapid pace, periodic changes and recalculations of the index are necessary (especially in the period from 2014 to 2019). The biggest change was made in 2019, when DESI was recalculated for all countries for all

previous years, to reflect the aforementioned changes in the choice of indicators and adjustments in the primary data (European Commission, 2019). This clarification is important as it explains the differences in reports and especially in the recorded values for different years.

From 2023, DESI is also included in the report on the state of the Digital Decade for 2030 (European Commission, 2022), and the progress of the countries will be closely monitored, indicating its importance for the strategic development of Europe in terms of digitalization.

Increasing digitalization and expanding opportunities for remote work can have an impact on the interest in digital nomadism. Establishing it as a flexible form of employment in Bulgaria can lead to positive effects on the local economy and consumption; improving the quality of employment; supporting the economy in small settlements; developing tourism, and more.

Table 2 presents data on the index for Bulgaria from 2015 to 2023 and a summary indicator for the EU for the same period, with the aim of tracking the changes for Bulgaria and making a comparison with the entire European Union.

According to data from the survey "Bulgaria in the Digital Economy and Society Index" the country is progressing at a relatively good pace in terms of digitalization (from 32.4 in 2017 to 37.7 in 2022), but since the initial level is low, this progress is not sufficient for our country to "catch up" with its European partners. The EU shows much more noticeable progress (from an initial value of 46.9 in 2017, DESI-EU reaches 52.3 in 2022). Bulgaria (along with Romania) consistently ranks at the bottom in terms of the adoption and use of digital technologies.

Table 2. Digital Economy and Society Index

	Bulgaria		European Union
	Ranking (27 countries)	BG	EU
DESI, 2015 г.	27	0.36	0.45
DESI, 2016 г.	27	0.35	0.49
DESI, 2017 г.	27	32.4	46.9
DESI, 2018 г.	27	33.5	46.5
DESI, 2019 г.	28	33.8	49.4
DESI, 2020 г.	28	36.4	52.6
DESI, 2021 г.	26	36.8	50.7
DESI, 2022 г.	26	37.7	52.3

Source: DESI from 2014г. to 2022г. (official information from EC report);

Report on Bulgaria 2022 - Index of penetration of digital technologies in the economy and society, 2022.

The latest report on Bulgaria (European commission, 2022) contains detailed information that can be summarized as follows:

- *Human Capital*: Bulgaria ranks 26th with a score of 32.6, EU average is 45.7.

The data shows that more efforts need to be made to build digital skills, with measures encouraging both individuals and employers in their roles as investors in human capital.

- *Connectivity*: Bulgaria ranks 19th with a score of 50.7, EU average is 59.9.

This indicator provides detailed information on the overall spread of fixed broadband internet access; the spread of fixed broadband internet access with speeds of at least 100 Mbps; the spread of internet speeds of at least 1 Gbps; next-generation high-speed broadband coverage; coverage of fixed very high-capacity networks; coverage with fiber optic lines to buildings; the 5G spectrum; 5G network coverage; the spread of mobile broadband internet access; and the broadband internet access price index.

This indicator is particularly important for digital nomadism, and it is one of the indicators where Bulgaria performs relatively well compared to other member states. Bulgaria

has the potential to attract digital nomads, offering quality high-speed internet coverage. What needs to be done is to develop a large-scale advertising campaign and promote the opportunities the country can offer to digital nomads.

- *Integration of Digital Technologies*: Bulgaria ranks 26th with a score of 15.5, EU average is 36.1.

The lag is significant but will not affect the opportunities for digital nomadism, as it has no direct connection to the conditions for digital work or the regulation of remote work.

- *Digital Public Services*: Bulgaria ranks 25th with a score of 51.9, EU average is 69.3.

The use of public services is also at a very low level and requires targeted measures and actions.

The level of digitalization in Bulgaria is also monitored by the National Statistical Institute (NSI), and the DESI data can be supplemented by the following national information (NSI, 2022):

- 12.8% of Bulgarians have never used the internet, with significant regional disparities – 16% in the Northwestern region and 7.6% in the Southwestern region.

- The fact that 79% of people report using the internet at least once a week or daily, while only 39.1% of the population has digital skills related to copying and moving files, and only 18.6% can edit photos, videos, or audio files, is puzzling.

- The internet is mainly used for phone calls (67.3%), participation in social networks (63.4%), messaging (61.5%), finding information about goods and services (60.2%), and reading news (50.9%). The use of digital networks for health services via websites is the least common – 3.3%.

- 87.3% of households have internet access, with the most widely used means being mobile phones or smartphones (71.8% of individuals).

- The use of online administrative services is very low – 26.4% use the internet for

interaction with administrative authorities and public institutions.

- E-commerce is almost twice as developed in cities compared to rural areas (45.4% vs. 26.9%).

The limitations of this study do not allow for an in-depth examination of the statistical data, but this brief overview shows that, on one hand, digital transformation in our country is already a fact (especially in light of the changes following the pandemic), but on the other hand, Bulgaria's readiness to quickly and effectively cope with the changes is very low. The data outlines deficits that can (and should) be viewed as unrealized potential. Digitalization is developing at a very rapid pace, creating many problems (regarding digital skills and internet services) but at the same time creating many opportunities and prerequisites for expanding the possibilities for flexible employment and the rise of digital nomadism.

CONCLUSION

Digital nomadism is a lifestyle, work style, and perception of the world that is becoming increasingly popular and preferred among people seeking tranquility and independence, far from the noise of the big city and daily stress. The COVID-19 pandemic turned life stereotypes upside down in all their previously known forms, with interactions occurring primarily in the virtual environment. People are striving to balance work and leisure time more effectively and to reduce the stress they are subjected to. Digital nomadism allows for all this, provided that the profession practiced by individuals can be performed remotely.

The main prospects, opportunities, and risks of digital nomadism can be found in the following key aspects:

➤ Digital nomadism will occupy an increasingly significant place in the working life, with one of its biggest advantages being the

possibility of a better balance between work and personal time.

➤ Digital nomadism allows people to be mobile and largely autonomous, to plan their work processes independently, to develop personal responsibility, and to enhance their creativity and organizational skills.

➤ One of the most important prerequisites for the stimulation and development of digital nomadism in the coming years is that it is becoming a preferred form of employment among young people, who can simultaneously work and travel to different destinations. It is especially important because they are the future workforce that will shape the trends and development of the modern labor market. Young people have the opportunity to travel, enrich their culture and worldview, be in various geographical locations around the world, and simultaneously be full participants in the labor market.

➤ Alongside the positive opportunities that digital nomadism provides, it is necessary to consider the risks associated with the health and social security status of individuals. Nomads do not stay long in one country, thus not contributing enough to social security funds to acquire necessary entitlements. Insufficient participation in the social security system deprives them of the right to benefit from pensions, disability, unemployment, sickness, and other insurance risks, making them vulnerable when these events occur.

➤ Another challenge is the taxation of digital nomads' income, as often the country of residence does not coincide with the country of tax payment. This means they pay taxes in one country but consume benefits in another, which could be seen as a contradiction.

➤ A negative aspect of digital nomadism is the psychological pressure on workers and employees due to isolation and the lack of in-person and verbal communication with other colleagues in the respective organization.

Despite their differing preferences, characteristics, education, economic and social

- [and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/shaping-europes-digital-future_bg1](#), [in Bulgarian].
- European Commission. (2022). Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) - Bulgaria <https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/redirection/document/88692>
- European Commission. (2023). Youthwiki. Bulgaria – Overview. <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/bulgaria/overview>
- European Commission. (2023). Youthwiki. Germany – Overview. <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/germany/overview>
- European Commission. (2024). State of the Digital Decade package. <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/2024-state-digital-decade-package>
- European Commission. (2024). Youthwiki. Norway – Overview. <https://national-policies.eacea.ec.europa.eu/youthwiki/chapters/norway/overview>
- European Parliament and of the Council. (2021). The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1606&langId=en>
- European Union. (2006). Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council, EUR-Lex Access to European Union law. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32006H0962>
- Hannonen, O. (2020). In search of a digital nomad: defining the phenomenon. *Information Technology & Tourism*, 22(3), 335–353. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00177-z>
- Institut po publicna administratsia. (2020). Analiz na dobri praktiki i izgotvyane na predlozelnia za vavezhdane na gavkavi usloviya na trud. [Analysis of good practices and preparation of proposals for the introduction of flexible working conditions.]. https://www.ipa.government.bg/sites/default/files/analiz_na_dobri_praktiki_i_i_zgotvyane_na_predlozheniya_za_vvezhdane_na_gvkavi_usloviya_na_trud.pdf [in Bulgarian].
- Karshovski, M. (2023). Za zhivota na digitalnia nomad [On the Life of a Digital Nomad], <https://varnafix.com/zhivota-na-digitalniya-nomad> [in Bulgarian]
- Makimoto, T., & Manners, D. (1997). *Digital nomad*. Wiley.
- Miles, E., King, S., & Ockels, C. (2021). *Your Company Needs a Digital Nomad Policy*. Harvard Business Review.
- National statistics institute (2022). Ispolzovane na informatsionni i komunikatsionni tehnologii (IKT) v domakinstvata i ot litsata prez 2022 godina. [Use of information and communication technologies(ict) in households and by persons in 2022]. https://www.nsi.bg/sites/default/files/files/pressreleases/ICT_hh2022_JMM978_9.pdf . [in Bulgarian].
- Nomad List. (2024). <https://nomads.com/>
- Pandurska, R. (2021). Digitalното nomadstvo – noviyat fenomen po patya kam tsifrovata i lichnata svoboda. [Digital nomadism – the new phenomenon on the way to digital and personal freedom]. mezhdunarodna nauchno-prakticheska konferentsiya „Upravlenie na choveshkite resursi“, provedena na 24.09.2021g., str.36-43, (pp. 36-43). Varna University of Economics. http://conference.ue-varna.bg/hrm/wp-content/uploads/Proceedings/HRMConf_Proceeding2019.pdf . [in Bulgarian].
- Reynolds, B. W. (2018). *FlexJobs Digital Nomad Survey: Insights into the Remote Lifestyle*. <https://www.flexjobs.com/blog/post/fle>

[xjobs-digital-nomad-survey-insights-remote-lifestyle/](#)

- Sotirova, M. (2007). Theoretical views and concepts of flexible employment. [Theoretical views and concepts of flexible employment]. In: Economic Thought, 5, IKI BAS, (pp. 33-37). <https://www.iki.bas.bg/Journals/EconomicThought/2007/2007-5/3.pdf> . [in Bulgarian].
- The European Pillar of Social Rights in 20 principles. (2021). Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion - European Commission. <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1606&langId=en>
- The United Nations. (1987). Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. Our common future. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>
- The United Nations. (2013). Youth. Definition of Youth. <https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/documents/youth/fact-sheets/youth-definition.pdf>
- Thompson, B. Y. (2018). Digital Nomads Employment in the online gig economy. Glocalism Journal of Culture Politics and Innovation, 1. <https://doi.org/10.12893/gjcpi.2018.1.11>
- Tsentar za ikonomicheskoto razvitiye, (2022), Gavkavite formi na zаетost i konkurentosposobnostta na balgarskite predpriyatia. [Flexible forms of employment and the competitiveness of Bulgarian companies]. [in Bulgarian].