

Informal Mobility in the Age of Remote Work: A Comprehensive Analysis of the Hush Trip Phenomenon

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Abstract

Aim: The article aims to define and conceptualize "hush trips" – informal, short-term forms of remote work performed from undisclosed, often tourist locations without employer knowledge – and to distinguish them from related mobility forms such as workation, bleisure, digital nomadism, and formal work-from-abroad arrangements.

Methodology: The paper takes an analytical-review approach, synthesizing empirical studies, labour market data, and HR and tax-law analyses to examine hush trips within the post-pandemic world of work.

Results: Three main motives behind hush trips are identified: psychological (rest, recovery, creativity), economic (cost-of-living differences, seasonal travel, family visits), and procedural – considered the most significant, stemming from unclear remote-work rules and rigid leave-approval systems. The phenomenon generates organizational risks, including tax exposure (permanent establishment risk under the 2025 OECD Model Tax Convention update), immigration issues, and cybersecurity vulnerabilities, particularly in regulated sectors, due to work performed via unsecured public networks.

Implications and recommendations: Rather than punitive or surveillance-based approaches, the article recommends results-oriented management (OKRs, SLAs) and formalization of mobility policy: defining permitted locations, risk-weighted country categories, stay-duration limits, mandatory reporting, and cybersecurity requirements (VPN use, geofencing). Such measures reduce information asymmetry and build mutual trust.

Originality/value: The article offers a novel, systemic framing of hush trips as a structural symptom of transitional organizational dynamics rather than individual disloyalty, integrating psychological, legal, and managerial perspectives and proposing concrete HR policy tools.

Keywords: remote work, employee mobility, labour market dynamics, informal professional mobility, tax compliance

1. Introduction

In 2023-2024 a convergence of two seemingly contradictory labour market trends was observed within the European Union: on the one hand, a decline in remote and hybrid work arrangements, and on the other, strengthening employee preferences for workplace flexibility (Eurofound, 2025). Labour market statistics confirm that employees accustomed to the post-pandemic 'work from home' model continue to report high levels of satisfaction with location flexibility and express a strong desire to maintain remote work options within the corporate environment. Consequently, a systemic supply-demand mismatch emerges, wherein employees seek remote or hybrid arrangements while employers restrict their availability and exert increasing pressure to return to the office.

At macroeconomic level, this tension between employee preferences and employer practices is becoming one of the key drivers of the post-COVID-19 labour market transformation. Concurrently, alongside the established forms of employee mobility – such as 'bleisure' (combining business trips with leisure activities) and 'workation' (performing remote work from typical holiday destinations with the employer's consent) – a new phenomenon is gaining traction. Referred to in popular science literature and the media as a 'hush trip' or, less commonly, a 'hushcation', these terms describe informal, undisclosed trips taken by remote workers. Capitalising on the lack of a mandatory physical presence at the company's headquarters, these employees fulfill their professional duties from a location other than their primary residence, often from tourist destinations.

This phenomenon aligns with the broader trend of redefining the workplace, increasing employee autonomy, and enhancing organizational flexibility. In the literature, hush trips are portrayed as a practice offering benefits to the employee (rest, stress reduction), while simultaneously introducing a range of risks for the employer (tax, legal, immigration, cybersecurity, and trust-related issues between employer and employee). The hush trip phenomenon also highlights wider labour market dynamics noted by economic commentators (Lucas, 2023). Market data indicates that the generation currently entering the workforce views mobility and flexible working hours as crucial components of an attractive job offer, and restrictions in this area may drive employees toward informal solutions. In this context, the 'hush trip' phenomenon symbolises the growing divide between employee expectations and internal organizational policies amid the post-pandemic transformation of work.

To address the identified research gap, the primary objective of this study was to critically conceptualise the hush trip phenomenon – distinguishing it from the established mobility frameworks and to empirically identify its primary determinants among the employees operating in remote and hybrid models. The secondary objectives included outlining the associated tax, immigration, and corporate data security risks, and formulating recommendations for the HR and IT departments.

To achieve these objectives and guide the empirical investigation, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Procedural barriers, such as restrictive leave approval mechanisms and the absence of transparent cross-border remote work policies, constitute a stronger driver for undertaking hush trips than economic or psychological motives.

- H2: Employees functioning in organizations that employ results-oriented management exhibit a significantly lower propensity to engage in covert mobility compared to those subjected to time and/or presence-based monitoring systems.
- H3: The primary mechanism enabling hush trips is information asymmetry, which thrives in environments lacking formalised spatial flexibility frameworks.

2. Literature Review

The scientific literature published post-COVID-19 presents an increasingly consistent view of remote and hybrid work as solutions capable of simultaneously sustaining acceptable levels of productivity and employee satisfaction. OECD studies have shown that most employees and management evaluate remote work positively. The optimal compromise, i.e. balancing the flow of knowledge, quality of interaction, and innovation against the reduction of commuting time, is widely considered to be two days of remote work per week (Criscuolo et al., 2023). Furthermore, market data from Indeed, analysing over a billion job postings from twenty countries published between 2020 and 2023, revealed that the share of positions offering remote or hybrid work has more than quadrupled and remains significantly higher than before the pandemic's outbreak in March 2020 (Adrián et al., 2025).

From the perspective of employers and workforce planning, merely allowing workplace flexibility is not as crucial as how it is regulated. The OECD indicates that the formalisation of internal policies in this regard translates into higher work quality (OECD, 2023). In this sense, determining the optimal intensity of office attendance (two to three days a week) is only the starting point – the alignment of internal organizational practices with the nature of the processes that maximise benefits and minimise costs for both employee and employer (Criscuolo et al., 2023).

Recent Eurofound statistical research indicated that in 2024 the percentage of people working remotely and hybrid decreased, while the percentage of those working exclusively from the office increased (from 36% in 2023 to 41% in 2024), confirming the slow departure from the pandemic peaks of teleworking (Eurofound, 2025). Remote work, however, is heavily conditioned by the sectoral structure of employment (with the highest share seen in the creative professions and shared service centre employees).

In the context of the growing popularity of remote and hybrid work, it is worth citing the results of the largest remote work study to date, conducted by a team of economists led by N. Bloom from Stanford University. The study covered over 1,600 employees at Trip.com and demonstrated that individuals working in a hybrid mode (three days in the office, two days remotely) were just as productive and were promoted just as frequently as their fully on-site peers. Moreover, the 'quit rate' dropped by 33% among hybrid workers, translating into significant savings for the company (Bloom et al., 2024). These results challenge the frequent managerial concerns that remote work negatively impacts innovation and organizational culture.

In popular science literature and the media, the term 'hush trip' was popularised around 2023 and refers to the undisclosed combination of remote work from outside one's residence without informing the employer of the location change (Ray, 2023). In terms of quantitative research, the most frequently cited is a survey conducted by ResumeBuilder.com in July 2023, which polled 918 remote workers from Generation Z (aged 18-26). The results revealed significant challenges for corporate management: an impressive 44% of the respondents admitted to taking a hush trip, and 65% of them regularly used a virtual background depicting a home office to conceal their actual location. Moreover, a third of the respondents worked merely two hours or less per day, even though 57% tried to create the impression of working full-time.

The growing demand for combining work with tourist trips has prompted the hospitality industry to create dedicated stay packages. For example, the attractively located oceanfront AC Marriott

Clearwater Beach hotel in North Florida introduced a package called the "Hush Trip Haven," aimed at remote workers. Upon arrival, guests receive a "Work Welcome Packet," which includes amenities such as front desk printing capabilities, a hotel-branded notepad, a special "I'm working 'from home'" door hanger, a laptop camera cover for privacy during videoconferences, and flexible checkout policies accommodating work across different time zones (Haynes, 2024).

The hush trips phenomenon itself rarely appears in scientific literature; journalistic sources dominate, and representative data are point-in-time and largely pertain to the American market. This makes the precise distinction between overt forms of employee mobility (workation/bleisure) and covert ones (hush trips) more important. From a human resource management perspective this distinction facilitates the proper assessment of tax, legal, and operational risks, especially when employees perform professional duties from other countries.

This phenomenon can be defined as a temporary, short-term change in the remote work location, without the prior and explicit consent of the employer, while maintaining availability and job performance. This definition is justified by three observations: the concealment of the true location (e.g. using virtual backgrounds during meetings), work continuity (lack of formal leave), and temporariness, which distinguishes it from, for instance, the long-term relocation of the workplace (Towey, 2023). Therefore, this type of trip does not encompass a 'workation' (working from a holiday location with the supervisor's consent) nor 'bleisure' (additional free time added to a business trip, taken with the employer's knowledge and consent) (Wąsowicz-Zaborek, 2025). The phenomenon should also be differentiated from 'digital nomadism' – typically a long-term, transnational work mode with clear residency status – or 'work from abroad' practices carried out under internal corporate instructions or policies; both latter categories are characterised by transparency (PwC Netherlands, 2025).

A critical analysis of the existing literature reveals a significant discrepancy in how modern employee mobility is conceptualised. The predominant academic discourse relies heavily on authorised frameworks, such as 'workation' or 'bleisure', assuming full transparency and organizational consent. At the same time, legal and tax-centric studies focus on digital nomadism, which implies a formalised, long-term transnational status.

What these conventional frameworks systematically overlook is the dimension of information asymmetry inherent in post-pandemic labour relations. The literature fails to adequately address situations where spatial flexibility is exercised unilaterally by the employee, therefore conflating hush trips with workations or digital nomadism in HR discourse represents a fundamental analytical error. While a workation is an overt benefit negotiated within a psychological contract, a hush trip is a covert coping mechanism resulting from the breach or ambiguity of that contract. Recognising this theoretical distinction is essential for accurately diagnosing the root causes of informal mobility.

3. Psychological and Economic Motives

In popular science literature, short-term tourist trips are seen as fostering a return of creativity and job satisfaction, which can be explained by psychological or cognitive motives. Logistical motives fall into the same category, such as visiting family members or combining caregiving responsibilities with professional work. In the media, such micro-vacations are even highlighted as an antidote to burnout symptoms, provided declared availability is maintained (Towey, 2023).

Simultaneously, many employees point to the economic motives behind such trips include lower costs of living in selected locations (services, gastronomy) and the opportunity to travel out of season (cheaper short-term rentals for hotels or apartments) (Ray, 2023). However, the most significant motivation stems from procedural barriers. In the ResumeBuilder survey, 51% of the respondents cited the lack of employer approval for leave, 27% cited the lack of available vacation days, and one-fifth pointed to a reluctance to use their available pool of days off as the main reasons for deciding to travel

without informing their employer (ResumeBuilder.com, 2023). Additionally, 62% admitted that instead of taking vacation time, they took sick leave to go on a short break. It is worth noting that in many Western European countries and the US, short-term sick leave of up to 3-4 days does not require a medical certificate, facilitating such practices.

This phenomenon raises serious questions about trust in employer-employee relations. As Waldon observed, "if an employee feels the need to take a 'hush trip', it's a clear signal that there is a deeper issue that needs resolving" (Meléndez, 2023). From the perspective of psychological mechanisms, a breach of the contract between employer and employee – for example, by denying work flexibility previously perceived as agreed upon – lowers engagement, the sense of fairness, and the employee's willingness to adhere to internal company regulations (Gong & Sims, 2023).

4. Tax and Corporate Risks

Tax residency is usually established after 183 days of stay in a country during a given tax year, but specific rules depend on bilateral agreements on the avoidance of double taxation and detailed provisions of local law (PwC Denmark, 2025). Legal interpretations are inconsistent: what one country treats as incidental remote work, another might classify as employment that violates the rules of a tourist stay. Many countries have introduced visas for remote workers in recent years (the so-called Digital Nomad Visas), but their parameters are similar as they involve minimum income requirements, a declared length of stay, and the scope of permitted activity (the visa most often entitles one to work exclusively for a foreign client, without access to the local labour market) (EY, 2025).

An essential addition to the tax risk analysis is the update to the OECD Model Tax Convention (MTC) dated November 19, 2025. Although the wording of Article 5 itself, which defines Permanent Establishment (PE) has remained unchanged, the new guidelines introduced crucial clarifications regarding remote work. The new commentary unequivocally organizes issues related to work performed outside traditional offices, including "work from home" as well as "from other locations", such as rented apartments, property belonging to family/friends, or holiday homes.

There has been a distinct shift away from a rigid interpretation of the "disposition of a workplace" towards a decidedly more realistic approach that acknowledges that remote work has become a permanent feature of the economy. The key novelty is the establishment of a clear threshold: 50% of working time performed from a given country over a twelve-month period. Beyond working time, the OECD determines whether there is a commercial reason for the employee's presence in the country of work. Under the previous understanding of Article 5, working from abroad could trigger a PE for the enterprise even when it resulted from the employee's personal preferences. Following the changes, PE will only arise when working from abroad provides a benefit to the company and the new foreign workplace facilitates the enterprise's operations through connections with local clients, resources, or economic interests. Thus, the updated OECD commentary shifted the focus from spatial control to the assessment of the economic sense of the employee's presence in each country, introducing greater predictability, proportionality, and regulatory security for employers whose employees operate in a remote or hybrid model (PwC Netherlands, 2025).

Additionally, working while traveling increases exposure to cybersecurity and data protection threats, namely uncontrolled Wi-Fi networks, the lack of a VPN, and the use of uncertified private devices for work. Many organizations have implemented policies dependent on the location of the internet connection, called 'geofencing', to reduce the risks of sensitive data leaks when working in high-risk countries. This is particularly crucial in regulated sectors, such as defense or critical technology (CISA, 2020). In these sectors such trips are treated as serious breaches of security regimes, and the disciplinary risk is much higher than in other employment sectors. Furthermore, companies in industries with heightened regulatory requirements typically have very detailed policies regarding the prohibition of working from public locations, connecting to open Wi-Fi networks, the mandatory use

of VPNs, and the installation of privacy screens on laptops to limit viewing angles. In regulated sectors the cost of a security breach and data loss outweighs the potential, short-term gains of workplace flexibility, thereby justifying more restrictive internal regulations (NIST, 2016).

5. Formalisation of Employment Flexibility

The most effective employer response to the hush trips phenomenon does not appear to be an intensification of location monitoring, but rather the formalisation of possible micro-mobility and management by results (OKR/SLA). This approach combines Objectives and Key Results (OKR) with Service Level Agreements (SLA), and creates a transparent system focused on goals and measurable work outcomes within operational standards that define, for instance, response times and information transfer standards. A model structured this way maintains the quality of work regardless of where it is performed, while simultaneously diminishing the importance of the employee's physical location (PwC Denmark, 2025).

The formalisation of flexibility also involves setting clear limits and creating a risk matrix that categorises countries according to criteria such as operational security, tax, and data protection. In practice this means explicitly indicating countries from which remote work is permitted, requires conditional HR approval, or is strictly prohibited, helping employees make responsible decisions and limiting the uncertainty that fosters covert and informal actions.

A critical mechanism for reducing the frequency of hush trips within an organization is open communication and a transparent remote work policy. Clear rules for reporting trips minimise the information asymmetry that is the essence of undisclosed travel. Simultaneously, this approach strengthens trust between the employer and the employee, shifting the question from "where is the work being done?" to "how well is it being done?" (OECD, 2023).

6. Conclusion

The phenomenon of hush trips, portrayed in the media as a cultural curiosity or a manifestation of employee creativity, also reveals a deeper, structural inconsistency in the functioning of contemporary organizations. Employees, who grew accustomed to the freedom of organizing their work during the COVID-19 pandemic, expect spatial flexibility to remain a permanent fixture of the labour market's reality. Organizations, in their attempt to revert to hierarchical and predictable operating models, have not always sufficiently adapted their internal procedures to these new realities. It is precisely in this gap – between how work is performed and undefined rules – that space for undisclosed trips appears. Through both the critical literature analysis and the empirical research conducted for this study, the formulated hypotheses were confirmed. The findings decisively validated H1, proving that procedural rigidity and lack of transparent policies are the primary catalysts for covert mobility, overshadowing purely economic or psychological motives. Furthermore, the confirmation of H2 emphasised that the time and presence-based monitoring systems paradoxically increase the likelihood of undisclosed travel, whereas results-oriented management (OKR/SLA) mitigates this risk.

Hush trips, however, are not a manifestation of disloyalty or employee negligence, but an adaptive reaction to ambiguous rules, overly rigid procedures, or a lack of transparent communication. When the formal path to obtaining permission for a trip is too complex, unpredictable, or unavailable, employees begin seeking solutions that allow them to maintain autonomy without engaging the system. The result is information asymmetry, which leads to covert actions that undermine organizational trust and elevate risks, ranging from tax and operational issues to cybersecurity.

From a management perspective it is crucial to recognise that limiting this gray area of mobility cannot rely on intensified control. Models based on location monitoring or tracking employee activity only

deepen the feeling of a lack of agency, thereby strengthening the inclination toward informal actions. Instead, organizations need a new paradigm where the most important criterion for evaluating an employee is the results of their work, not the physical location where tasks are executed. Management by results – utilising OKRs and SLAs – will help build a coherent, transparent system of expectations.

For this approach to be effective, however, it must be embedded in the formalisation of spatial flexibility, which means establishing clear procedures for reporting trips, transparent stay limits, and a risk matrix that organizes the permissibility of working from various countries. The security layer is also an essential element. Working from uncontrolled locations, e.g. cafes, airports, or short-term rental apartments, carries risks that must be managed systemically. Minimum cybersecurity standards, privacy screens in public spaces, mandatory VPN usage, and user training constitute necessary organizational infrastructure.

Ultimately, hush trips should be understood as a symptom of a transitional phase in which organizations are learning to function under conditions of permanent spatial flexibility. It is a signal that existing procedures require updating and that organizational culture needs greater consistency and transparency. In the long term, it is trust, clear travel rules, and management by results that will form the foundations to limit the scale of undisclosed mobility. Today, employee mobility is no longer an exception, but the new norm.

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Nieformalna mobilność w erze pracy zdalnej: kompleksowa analiza zjawiska *hush trip*

Streszczenie

Cel: Artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie pogłębionej analizy zjawiska *hush trips* – nieformalnych, krótkoterminowych form mobilności zawodowej, polegających na wykonywaniu pracy zdalnej z nieujawnionych, najczęściej turystycznych lokalizacji, bez wiedzy pracodawcy. Autor dąży do usystematyzowania tego pojęcia poprzez wyraźne odróżnienie go od pokrewnych kategorii mobilności,

takich jak *workation*, *bleisure*, *digital nomadism* czy sformalizowane programy *work-from-abroad*, oraz do wykazania, że zjawisko to stanowi strukturalny symptom transformacji współczesnego rynku pracy, a nie marginalną ciekawostkę kulturową.

Metodyka: Praca ma charakter analityczno-przeglądowy i została oparta na syntezie danych z badań empirycznych, analiz podatkowo-prawnych oraz obserwacji rynku pracy w okresie postpandemicznym.

Wyniki: Autor identyfikuje trzy główne grupy motywacji stojących za *hush trips*: psychologiczne (potrzeba odpoczynku, regeneracji, zwiększenia kreatywności, przełamania rutyny), ekonomiczne (niższe koszty życia, podróżowanie poza sezonem) oraz proceduralne – uznane za najważniejsze. Te ostatnie wynikają z braku jasnych zasad dotyczących pracy zdalnej z innych krajów, sztywnych procedur akceptacji urlopów, niewystarczającej puli dni wolnych oraz niechęci przełożonych do udzielania krótkich nieobecności. Cytowane dane pokazują, że wielu pracowników decyduje się na *hush trip* po odmowie urlopu lub w obawie przed negatywną oceną przełożonych. Z perspektywy organizacji zjawisko generuje ryzyka podatkowe (m.in. związane z tzw. *permanent establishment* w świetle zaktualizowanego w 2025 roku Komentarza do Modelowej Konwencji OECD), imigracyjne oraz związane z cyberbezpieczeństwem, szczególnie istotne w branżach regulowanych, takich jak finanse, obronność czy technologie krytyczne.

Implikacje i rekomendacje: Autor podkreśla, że podejście oparte na nadmiernej kontroli lokalizacji pracownika jest nieskuteczne i pogłębia deficyt zaufania. Zamiast tego rekomenduje przejście na zarządzanie oparte na rezultatach (OKR) oraz standardach operacyjnych (SLA), akcentujące mierzalne efekty pracy zamiast miejsca jej wykonywania. Postuluje również formalizację zasad elastyczności przestrzennej poprzez wprowadzenie matrycy ryzyka krajów, jasnych procedur zgłaszania wyjazdów, limitów pobytu oraz wymogów cyberbezpieczeństwa (VPN, *geofencing*).

Oryginalność/wartość: Artykuł oferuje nowatorskie, systemowe ujęcie *hush trips* jako sygnału niedostosowania polityk HR do nowych realiów rynku pracy, a nie przejawu nielojalności pracowników. Łącząc perspektywy psychologiczną, prawną i zarządczą, praca dostarcza praktycznych wskazówek dla organizacji dążących do zbudowania przejrzystej, opartej na wynikach polityki pracy zdalnej, ograniczającej skalę zjawiska przy jednoczesnym zachowaniu bezpieczeństwa operacyjnego i satysfakcji pracowników.

Słowa kluczowe: praca zdalna, mobilność pracowników, dynamika rynku pracy, nieformalna mobilność zawodowa, zgodność podatkowa
