

Part IV: Benefits, Limits and Future Directions of Online Supervision

CHAPTER 8

The Benefits of Online Supervision in Social Work

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Introduction

Supervision represents one of the key tools for the professional support and development of social workers. Its primary aim is to ensure the quality, effectiveness, and ethical standards of social work practice through reflection, competence development, and the prevention of professional burnout (Kadushin & Harkness, 2014; Vaska, Budoš Vrt'ová & Šavrn'ochová, 2023). In contemporary understanding, supervision is viewed as an interactive process that fosters professional growth, self-reflection, and the ability to cope with stress in demanding work situations through a collaborative relationship between the supervisor and the supervisee (Vrt'ová & Vaska, 2022). In social work, supervision fulfills several functions – educational, supportive, managerial, and mediating – which complement one another. The educational function focuses on the development of professional competencies, the supportive function helps to manage emotional and ethical dilemmas, the managerial function ensures the quality and accountability of work performance, and the mediating function represents the interests of employees toward senior/higher management (Tsui, 2005; Vaska & Vrt'ová, 2021). These aspects make supervision a tool not only for the professional growth of individuals but also for the development of organizations and the entire social work system. The potential benefits of supervision for practice therefore stem from its very definition. In the professional literature, the most frequently mentioned benefits of supervision include the enhancement of professional skills, the development of reflective practice, the improvement of service quality, the management of work-related stress, the strengthening of professional identity, and the prevention of burnout (Beddoe et al., 2016; McCafferty, 2005). Supervision also provides space for sharing experiences and receiving ethical support in demanding cases (Hawkins & Shohet, 2004). From the supervisors' perspective, it provides an opportunity to support workers' professional growth and create a safe

space for developing practice, while for supervisees, it offers feedback, a sense of security, and professional support (Vaska & Vrtová, 2021).

Online forms of supervision, which expanded significantly during the COVID-19 pandemic, have brought additional benefits: time flexibility, accessibility for professionals in remote regions, and new opportunities for connection within interdisciplinary teams (Engelhardt, 2018; Watters & Northey, 2020). Meta-analyses also indicate that the quality of the relationship and the level of satisfaction among supervisees are not influenced by the form of supervision – whether conducted in person or online (Woo et al., 2020). Online forms of supervision further expand the space for new communicative and reflective processes (Engelhardt, 2020). Research suggests that online supervision is perceived as a fully valid alternative to traditional forms, provided that the principles of trust, ethics, and interpersonal support are maintained (Lohrke & Metz, 2021).

The pandemic served as a significant impulse for the digitalization of supervision in the Slovak context as well. Restrictive measures limiting interpersonal contact had a direct impact on social work practice, including the immense pressure experienced by frontline workers. At the same time, there emerged a need for supervision that would remain accessible despite limited opportunities for in-person meetings and changing administrative constraints. Online supervision thus became, *de facto*, a response to practical necessity. The digitalization driven by the broader societal crisis led to an expansion of available supervision options, some of which have persisted even after the crisis ended. Current research in the Slovak Republic shows that both supervisors and supervisees perceive the benefits of online supervision mainly in terms of accessibility, effective communication, and new opportunities for professional development (Vaska & Vrtová, 2021; Vrtová & Vaska, 2022). However, international studies in this area also emphasize the need to preserve the authenticity of the relationship and the reflective depth of the process within the digital environment (Engelhardt & Engels, 2021).

The aim of this chapter is to present and compare the perceived benefits of supervision from the perspectives of supervisors and supervisees in the context of the pandemic, with an extension into the post-pandemic period. Particular attention is paid to online forms of supervision as a modern tool of support and professional development in social work.

The Benefits of Supervision from the Supervisors' Perspective

Supervision is currently perceived as a key tool for the professional development of social work practitioners. From the supervisors' perspective, it represents a complex process of support, reflection, and competence enhancement that brings multifaceted benefits – individual, team, and institutional. Research conducted in the Slovak Republic (Gabura, 2022; Levická, Vaska, & Vrtová, 2021; Vaska & Vrtová, 2021; Vaska, Budoš Vrtová & Šavrnichová, 2024; Vrtová & Vaska, 2022; 2023) repeatedly confirms that supervision contributes to the development of professional identity, the prevention of burnout, the improvement of service quality, and the cultivation of organizational culture. More recent studies, particularly those responding to developments associated with the COVID-19 pandemic, add the dimensions of digitalization and technological adaptability, which have emerged as new sources of professional growth for supervisors.

In the research presented in this study, supervisors offered a broader and more differentiated perspective compared to existing findings. They identified benefits not only for supervisees but also for themselves (that is, for their own continued professional growth) as well as for the overall system of supervision. From the supervisors' point of view, supervision does not represent merely a technical alternative to traditional in-person practice; rather, it becomes a legitimate space for development, reflection, and the enhancement of the quality of the supervisory process (Engelhardt, 2018; Vrtová & Vaska, 2022).

In the interviews, participants reflected on their experiences with conducting supervision in an online environment primarily during the pandemic (given the research focus) but also extending into the post-pandemic period. Although the use of online environments did not become the new standard after the crisis subsided, for many, the use of such tools in supervision has become a regular part of their professional practice.

Table 1 presents an overview of thematic categories as identified from the authentic statements of the participating supervisors. The most prominent category in terms of frequency is the efficiency and accessibility of online supervision, followed by the subjective and relational benefits of online supervision, the adaptation of supervisory techniques in the online environment, and the functions and uses of online supervision. The list of topics concludes with the cognitive and reflective benefits of online supervision. The table also presents the prevalence of these thematic categories as recorded across the interviews. In terms of frequency, the dominant

categories appear to be efficiency and accessibility, and subjective and relational benefits.

Table 1: Overview of Thematic Categories in the Context of the Benefits of Online Supervision from the Perspective of Supervisors

	Prevalence (n)
Efficiency and accessibility	40
Subjective and relational benefits	19
Adaptation of supervisory techniques	11
Functions and uses of online supervision	10
Cognitive and reflective benefits	9

Source: Author's own elaboration.

A closer look at the individual categories reveals the nuances within these themes, which are explored in greater depth in the following section.

As mentioned above, the dominant thematic area in terms of the perceived benefits of online supervision is its *efficiency and accessibility*. This theme was strongly present in all interviews, with emphasis primarily on the temporal and spatial flexibility of online supervision. This dimension also enhances the accessibility of supervision – not only by broadening the pool of available supervisors, but also by enabling supervisees who, under limited conditions for in-person meetings, might otherwise lack access to supervision due to time, distance, or resource constraints. To a lesser extent, the theme of organizational efficiency (“*it can be organized or canceled very quickly*”) also emerged, and, more marginally, participants mentioned economic efficiency (“*no expenses*”), emphasizing its cost-effectiveness. Typical statements within the respective themes include:

- Efficiency and accessibility (in terms of time and space)

“If there’s an option not to spend an hour stuck in traffic and instead sit comfortably at home. Great! ... Kind of convent. It saves time. One can put on sweatpants, at home with coffee, without the stress of how long it will take to drive back through traffic.” (S3)

“Time constraints related to commuting – whether for the supervisor or the supervisee – are eliminated.” (S4)

“The fact that I can get in touch with my supervisee even from the other side of the world is a huge advantage, because we can connect when it’s needed, not only when we can physically meet.” (S7)

“A big benefit is that supervision can take place at a time when all team members are available – even those who might otherwise be off work.” (S11)

- Accessibility

“In the online space, it can work really well, mainly because there’s a much wider choice of supervisors – you’re not limited to someone who happens to be nearby.” (S6)

“It’s becoming standard that if someone wants you because they’ve heard of you, they’ll find you – even from ... – and tell you they don’t want to travel an hour for supervision with someone else who happens to be available there.” (S11)

“For some people, online supervision may be the only way they can actually take part in it – it makes it accessible to them.” (S14)

- Organizational efficiency

“That’s a huge benefit that you can just log in within five minutes and get connected.” (S4)

“The staff on that helpline are spread all over Slovakia, and thanks to online supervision, we can hold sessions with all of them together.” (S5)

- Cost-effectiveness

“From time to time, I do online supervision mainly for financial reasons – it just doesn’t make sense to travel all over the place.” (S10)

“No expenses for the car, hotel, accommodation, food – nothing. I just turned it on, and it worked.” (S12)

Table 2 presents the list of thematic codes mentioned above, along with their frequency in the participants’ statements. It illustrates the strong emphasis on time and spatial flexibility as a key aspect of the benefits of online supervision.

Table 2: Efficiency and Accessibility of Supervision from the Supervisors' Perspective

Efficiency and accessibility (total frequency)	40
Flexibility	23
Accessibility	8
Organizational efficiency	7
Cost-efficiency	2

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The second most frequently discussed area concerns the *subjective and relational benefits of online supervision*. In this context, supervisors most often emphasized the compatibility of supervisees with the online environment. Given the diverse practical experience of supervisors, it is important to reflect on two distinct levels. The first relates to generational compatibility, particularly in terms of the younger – “online” generation, for whom work and communication in the digital space are natural. However, this is not solely a matter of age – participants also highlighted the general ability to adapt quickly to digital tools and environments, regardless of generation. The second level concerns distance counseling, which takes place in an online setting – in this case, supervision of professionals whose own work environment is already virtual. This practice is well illustrated by one participant's statement: “*These are also the working conditions – for example, the helpline operates through online distance counseling, and their work setup allows them to carry out supervision only in an online environment.*”

Among participants, experiences with online supervision varied. Some were clearly positive, while others expressed reservations. From the perspective of benefits, a number of relational advantages emerged as key factors for successful online supervision. Supervisors explicitly mentioned a *sense of safety* that the online setting creates. This feeling is often associated with being in one's own familiar environment (a sense of “*territoriality*”), and is further supported by the physical separation between participants:

“*I was in my own territory. No one interfered with it, no one was checking it. No one was looking over my shoulder – I was completely on my own.*”
(S1)

“Sometimes the screen actually provides a greater sense of safety, and even more space for the supervisee.” (S3)

Positive experiences with online supervision were also linked to positive emotional responses. Although this theme was explicitly mentioned by only two participants, it highlights the potential of online supervision for a broader range of users. In these cases, positive emotions were tied to the feeling of having managed a new or unfamiliar situation in an environment that was not yet fully mastered: *“I was really anxious about it at first, but in the end, I had a very good feeling.” (S1)*

This thematic area also encompassed statements in which participants expressed a preference for individual supervision in the online format. Compared to group supervision, individual sessions were perceived as providing more space for building a relationship between supervisor and supervisee. One possible argument raised in this context refers to overcoming the limitations of online environments in interpersonal communication: *“Maybe the lack of face-to-face interaction could be partly compensated by having a more personal, one-on-one conversation.” (S13)*

Table 3 presents the list of thematic codes discussed above, along with their frequency in participants’ responses. Given the distribution of frequencies in this case, the verbalized content appears to cover both the emotional and procedural aspects of online supervision relatively evenly.

Table 3: Subjective and Relational Benefits of Online Supervision

Subjective and relational benefits of online supervision (total frequency)	19
Compatibility with the online environment	7
Sense of safety	5
Affective experience	4
Preferable in individual supervision	3

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

The topic of the content of supervision is undoubtedly closely related to the relational dimension of supervision. Within the overall structure of themes identified in the supervisors’ statements, it appears only marginally (mentioned in nine responses), yet it provides an interesting complement to the

overall picture of what, according to the participants, takes place in online supervision. This category of statements was labeled as *cognitive and reflective benefits*. It primarily encompasses responses highlighting the strong potential of online supervision to foster focus on the content itself. Participants described experiences of concentration, greater structure, “focusing”, thematic orientation, and attention directed toward the supervisee:

“(Online supervision) is much more focused on supervision topics. ... The online space seems to automatically trigger that focusing – like now, when I’m talking to you, I’m focused on you and everything else is cut off.” (S5)

“In the online environment, I usually use a model where I supervise one person within a group, followed by a process review, where people reflect on it ... There’s much more structure in that format.” (S10)

“During online supervision, one tends to be more concentrated in the sense that there’s only the screen – the attention, especially the visual one, is focused on the person, the time is more limited ... greater concentration ... visual focusing on the person.” (S13)

In individual cases, participants also mentioned an interesting aspect related to self-perception during online supervision – the possibility of observing one’s own image on the screen. This experience reveals a potential for enhanced self-reflection on the part of the supervisor, at least from a visual standpoint. A related point, mentioned only marginally, was the opportunity for further education and training, given the ease of recording such sessions:

“It might be interesting for research – we, as supervisors, can also see ourselves; we have a mirror set up for us too. And the supervisee sees themselves on the camera as well.”

Table 4 presents the frequency of thematic codes, showing a clear quantitative emphasis on the dimension of content focus as the primary benefit of online supervision.

Table 4: Cognitive and Reflective Benefits of Online Supervision

Cognitive and reflective benefits (total frequency)	9
Focus on content	7
Self-reflection and self-observation	2

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Another thematic area identified in the supervisors' statements concerned the use of *techniques in online supervision*. This topic proved to be highly relevant, as most of the interviewed supervisors confirmed that they also use various techniques in the online setting. Participants reflected on their experiences with the transferability of techniques to the online environment, with several referring to the digital transformation of originally offline tools (such as cards, images, etc.) used as visual aids in online sessions:

"I have different colored cards cut out... That method can be used online as well." (S2)

"I used to apply many techniques online too, though they were different types of techniques – not necessarily better or worse. ... Just those that could be adapted to the online environment." (S3)

"What I usually work with in the online setting during supervision is imagination and visualization. We also quickly started using Dixit cards... You can work creatively that way." (S10)

Several participants agreed on the meaningfulness of techniques that encourage imaginative work. Alongside the perspective of adapting learned methods to a new environment, some participants also reflected on using new techniques that often draw on features integrated into digital communication platforms, such as Zoom. However, in this context, participants also noted insufficient preparedness ("orientation"), limited knowledge of available tools, and a lack of validation of these newly developed techniques through relevant research and practice: *"We can use techniques – I even invented some new ones for the online setting, ones that just came to mind – so the techniques are maybe a bit different. But we haven't researched or tested them yet." (S8)*

This theme appeared in a total of 11 statements (see Table 5), with participants discussing both the adaptation of in-person supervision techniques and the use of techniques specific to online settings in roughly equal measure.

Table 5: Adaptation of Supervision Techniques in Online Supervision

Adaptation of supervision techniques (total frequency)	11
Transferability of techniques from the offline environment	6
Specific online techniques	5

Source: Author's own elaboration.

Another theme identified by participants concerned the *function and use* of online supervision. Supervisors' experiences indicate a certain degree of adaptation of online approaches into supervisory practice even after the end of pandemic restrictions. However, such practice remains rather marginal. Most participants have returned to in-person supervision, viewing the period of online supervision retrospectively as a temporary deviation from the norm. Their perspective is largely shaped by the perceived limitations of online supervision. On the other hand, among supervisors, a marginal acceptance of online supervision can also be observed, mostly conditioned by situational factors. They particularly recognized its value in the context of crisis intervention (*"better online than nothing during a crisis"* S12). Nevertheless, most of these reflections referred to the pandemic period, with only a few cases indicating the continuation of such practices afterward:

"Over the phone – that was desperate supervision, when you don't see anyone. It wasn't even supervision, more like a lifeline for that woman. ... It was crisis intervention." (S1)

"I also provided SOS supervision – or rather intervision – when a colleague called me during the pandemic after a particularly difficult therapy session and immediately needed a supervisory intervention for herself." (S7)

"These are the quick crisis supervisions – that's what I currently use online supervision for the most." (S11)

This perspective is closely related to the understanding of online supervision as a complementary tool to traditional face-to-face supervision. For thematic completeness, one participant expressed this view explicitly: *"I see online supervision as an excellent supplement – when someone needs to deal with something urgently."* (S11)

The theme of functions and uses appeared in a total of 10 statements (see Table 6). Within this category, crisis intervention emerged as the dominant subtheme, while the complementary role of online supervision was mentioned only marginally.

Table 6: Functions and Uses of Online Supervision

Functions and uses of online supervision (total frequency)	10
Crisis intervention	8
Complement to in-person supervision	2

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The pandemic period, as well as the subsequent post-pandemic phase, demonstrated that despite the identified benefits of online supervision and its considerable potential – particularly in relation to the digitalization of social work, the provision of crisis intervention, and the facilitation of individual supervision – it has not yet become a firmly established practice. Barriers to its wider implementation were identified on several levels. The most prominent theme emerging from supervisors' accounts was the need for innovation in the training of supervisors. Closely related to this is the need to develop methodologies, guidelines, and standards that would not only confirm the effectiveness of online supervision but also strengthen supervisors' competencies for working in online environments. Overall, the participating supervisors presented a multi-layered, reflective, and systemic perspective on supervision. Their statements repeatedly revealed connections between individual benefits and the development of professional practice.

The Benefits of Supervision from the Supervisees' Perspective

The digitalization of supervision in social work has brought a fundamental shift in how supervisees approach reflection, learning, and professional support. From their perspective, online supervision appears as an accessible, efficient, and adaptable form of professional development, one that enables the maintenance of supervision quality even outside the traditional in-person setting (Engelhardt, 2018; Vrťová & Vaska, 2022;).

For the analysis of supervisees' statements, the same coding system was applied as in the case of supervisors, in order to allow for a meaningful comparison of their perspectives. However, the analysis of supervisees' responses regarding the benefits of online supervision proved to be considerably less extensive in both thematic breadth and frequency of occurrences than that of supervisors. Table 7 presents the frequency of thematic categories identified in this group of participants. The most frequent themes were those related to efficiency and accessibility enabled by online supervision. With a noticeable drop in frequency, these were followed by the categories of cognitive and reflective benefits and subjective and relational benefits. Finally, the functions and uses of online supervision appeared as the least represented thematic area.

Table 7: Overview of Thematic Categories Related to the Benefits of Online Supervision from the Perspective of Supervisees

Efficiency and accessibility	23
Cognitive and reflective benefits of online supervision	9
Subjective and relational benefits of online supervision	6
Functions and uses of online supervision	2

Source: Author's own elaboration.

A closer examination of the thematic category “*efficiency and accessibility*” reveals the dominance of temporal and spatial flexibility as the key benefit of online supervision. The possibility to arrange sessions flexibly, regardless of physical location, significantly broadens the opportunities for providing supervision and substantially enhances its accessibility. This view was shared by most participants who had experience with online supervision. Closely related to this is the theme of accessibility, which was the second most frequently mentioned aspect. In contrast, economic and organizational efficiency were reflected only marginally.

“You can join from anywhere, wherever you find a space, and you can arrange a time that suits you.” (P5)

“For me, the real benefit is that it saves time. You don't have to travel; you can even meet with a colleague who's on the other side of Slovakia.” (P15)

“It’s more time-accessible, I realize that – it’s much easier to arrange an online session than a face-to-face one.” (P17)

The issue of accessibility (or availability) was strongly reflected by participants, particularly in the context of pandemic restrictions that limited opportunities for in-person meetings. However, some participants also reported experiences with foreign supervisors, emphasizing that such supervision would not have been possible without online tools:

“In such unavoidable situations, the benefit is simply that supervision can take place at all – that there is some form that allows us to meet. That’s the real benefit. Furthermore, another benefit was that the supervisor was willing to find a way to make it work despite the circumstances in society.” (P10)

“That’s actually another benefit – I’ve worked with many supervisors from abroad, even from the U.S. That’s amazing. We’ve had supervisors from England, America, and the Czech Republic. The advantage is that you can have supervision with different experts.” (P15)

Table 8 presents the frequency of individual thematic codes within the category of efficiency and accessibility. The frequency distribution illustrates the dominance of flexibility and accessibility as the primary benefits of online supervision from the supervisees’ perspective.

Table 8: Efficiency and Accessibility from the Perspective of Supervisees

Efficiency and accessibility (total frequency)	23
Flexibility	13
Accessibility	7
Cost-efficiency	1
Organizational efficiency	2

Source: Author’s own elaboration.

Within the category of *cognitive and reflective benefits* of online supervision, supervisees identified only one thematic dimension – focus on content. This aspect was mainly emphasized in connection with better control over the time dimension of supervision. In total, nine instances of this category were recorded in participants’ statements.

“Since I knew how much time was allocated, we went straight to the topic, and I think we always resolved things more constructively. ...I didn’t answer the phone, and no one interrupted me.” (P2)

“During the online meeting – since it was time-limited – it went faster and more smoothly. ... The advantage of online supervision is that I managed my time better. Since I had the screen in front of me, I could see the time. I knew when to get started, or, conversely, if there were only five or ten minutes left, I wouldn’t open a deep topic because we wouldn’t have time to process it, and I’d leave it for next time.” (P5)

“I also feel it’s easier to end it within a specific time frame than an in-person meeting. ... It’s more structured. And also stricter in terms of timing.” (P17)

The category of *subjective and relational benefits* of online supervision appeared slightly less frequently – six instances in total (see Table 9). Among supervisees, this topic was primarily shaped by the sense of safety, either in relation to health concerns (e.g., respiratory illnesses) or the security and comfort provided by one’s home environment.

“For example, the supervisor might have had a cold – they had tea with them and told us how they were feeling – but we could still meet comfortably. If we had met in person, it wouldn’t have been appropriate, as we might have infected each other.” (P13)

“We run online supervision from home, not in the office, mainly because there’s a lot of noise and movement there. So I prefer having it at home when I know no one is around, and personally, I visit my supervisor in her own space.” (P17)

Only isolated instances within this category reflected a spontaneously emphasized positive affective experience with online supervision, an emphasis on compatibility with the online environment, or a favorable setting for individual supervision. Table 9 presents an overview of the thematic contents comprising this category.

Table 9: Subjective and Relational Benefits of Online Supervision

Subjective and relational benefits of online supervision	6
Affective experience (good feeling)	1

Subjective and relational benefits of online supervision	6
Sense of safety	3
Compatibility with the online environment	1
Preferable in individual supervision	1

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The final theme identified by supervisees, albeit only marginally, concerns the function and use of online supervision as a tool for crisis intervention. This theme was reflected in the accounts of two participants. In one case, it referred to experience during the pandemic; in the other, the participant highlighted the potential future applicability of online supervision in situations of acute need.

In summary, from the supervisees' perspective, online supervision is perceived as a flexible and accessible form of professional support that reduces barriers, promotes focus on content, and allows for more effective reflection. With a limited degree of generalization, it can also be stated that its benefits extend beyond practical efficiency to include emotional safety and an expanded capacity for self-reflection and learning.

Comparative Analysis of The Benefits of Online Supervision from the Perspectives of Supervisors and Supervisees

The digitalization of social work and supervision has introduced both new perspectives and challenges to the professional development of helping professions. Research from the past decade (Engelhardt, 2014, 2018; Vrťová & Vaska, 2022) confirms that online supervision has evolved from an alternative solution during the pandemic into a stable and respected format of professional support. As Engelhardt (2018) notes, the digital transformation of supervision represents not only a technical shift in communication methods but, above all, a cultural change in professional contact and a redefinition of spatial, temporal, and relational boundaries.

In the global context (Kumar, Kumar & Taylor, 2020; Watters & Northey, 2020; Woo et al., 2020), research on online supervision has primarily focused on comparing its efficiency, the quality of the working alliance, and the impact of technology on learning processes. The meta-analysis by

Woo et al. (2020) showed no significant differences between traditional and online supervision in perceived satisfaction, relationship quality, or professional outcomes, suggesting that comparable qualitative effects can be achieved in digital environments.

In the Slovak context, the digitalization of supervision began to be systematically analyzed in connection with the COVID-19 pandemic. Vrťová and Vaska (2022) identified two main lines of change: the transformation of supervision delivery and the shift in participants' subjective experience. Supervision became more flexible, time-efficient, and more accessible for many professionals.

The empirical analysis conducted in this study and presented above allows for a comparison of these dimensions based on the real experiences of both sides of the supervisory process. The findings align with those of Engelhardt & Engels (2021) and Lohrke & Metz (2021), who argue that while the digital environment alters the structure of interaction, it simultaneously opens space for new forms of reflection, intimacy, and safety.

From a comparative perspective, the findings reveal a high level of convergence in three key areas of benefit (see Table 10). Almost complete alignment can be observed in the category of efficiency and accessibility, which was the most strongly represented theme among both groups and can therefore be identified as the “core benefit.” A significant degree of overlap was also observed in subjective and relational benefits, although the intensity of representation differed between supervisors and supervisees. In both groups, this category prominently featured the theme of safety. A relatively high level of agreement was likewise found in the cognitive and reflective dimension, where both groups emphasized the enhanced concentration that online supervision facilitates.

In other thematic areas, differences emerged that primarily reflect the distinct roles of the two groups. While supervisors emphasized technical and methodological aspects (techniques and standards) and, to a lesser extent, organizational aspects (crisis intervention), supervisees experienced online supervision primarily as a space for support and personal growth.

Table 10: Comparison of the Benefits of Online Supervision from the Perspectives of Supervisors and Supervisees

Thematic area	Supervisors	Supervisees	Convergence / Difference
Efficiency and accessibility	very strong (40)	strong (23)	full convergence = core benefit
Subjective and relational benefits	19	6	convergence – safety, differing intensity
Cognitive and reflective benefits	9	9	convergence – concentration
Functions and uses	10	2	Convergence in crisis intervention; specific to supervisors – emphasis on standards
Adaptation of techniques	11	–	specific to supervisors

Source: Author's own elaboration.

A closer examination of the content dimension of the identified *convergence between the two participant groups* shows that the most frequently coded theme in both was *efficiency and accessibility* of supervision. Both groups perceive the strong potential of the digital environment to overcome spatial and temporal limitations, reduce organizational costs, and broaden access to supervision for professionals from smaller towns or remote regions. This finding aligns with the conclusions of Kumar et al. (2020), who point out that online supervision increases inclusivity and enables participation of individuals who would otherwise not engage in face-to-face formats. Similarly, Vrtová and Vaska (2022) reported in the Slovak context that the online format became an “effective tool for maintaining the continuity of professional support” during the pandemic, with participants particularly appreciating the opportunity to choose a supervisor regardless of location. It can therefore be concluded that the improved accessibility and efficiency

of supervision provided in online environments – extending beyond the crisis period – represent an important practical benefit in terms of broader access to quality supervision.

The second shared category concerned *subjective and relational benefits*. Both groups emphasized the *sense of safety* and comfort that the online environment provides. For supervisees, the online space became a setting associated with reduced threat and greater openness, whereas supervisors described it as a “compatible environment” that enables authentic contact when properly structured and prepared. These findings correspond with insights obtained from various sociocultural contexts. For instance, Lohrke and Metz (2021) explain that video technology creates a “triadic space” between the participants and the technical medium – a new kind of space of trust in which surprisingly deep closeness can be achieved. Similarly, Reinders, Cho, and Lewis (2013) note that the affective dimension of online communication can be consciously managed through politeness strategies and reflective commenting on emotions.

Both participant groups also revealed the category of *cognitive and reflective benefits*. In this case, participants from both groups consistently described greater *concentration on content* and less distraction by nonverbal influences. Supervisors additionally highlighted the possibility of observing oneself on the screen, thereby creating a space for a continuous parallel process of meta-reflection. Watters and Northey (2020) and Woo et al. (2020) confirm that online environments may even intensify self-observation, as the visual feedback from the camera increases awareness of one’s own behavior. Vrťová and Vaska (2022) similarly note the emergence of greater analytical focus and reduced emotional overload compared to in-person formats.

The areas identified as *specific to supervisors* reflected the need to *adapt techniques* to the online environment – whether through the transfer of traditional methods (e.g., reflective circles, case modeling) or the development of *online-specific techniques*. According to Engelhardt and Engels (2021), “video-based counseling” (videoberatung) requires technological, contextual, and relational competence on the part of the supervisor. Watters and Northey (2020) further recommend perceiving technology not merely as a transmission channel, but as a medium that transforms the dynamics of learning. Successful use of online tools requires thorough preparation – not only in terms of technical mastery of the digital environment, but also in the application of techniques that enable the full potential of supervision to be realized in online settings. Supervisors participating in the study

emphasized the need for systematic training in digital competencies as well as for methodological guidelines that would enhance their professional readiness for working in digital environments. This finding aligns with Engelhardt (2018), who notes that the supervision profession faces the task of defining quality standards for digital formats, similar to those established for face-to-face practice. A similar call has already emerged in the Slovak context, through proposals to integrate online supervision into social work education standards (Vrťová & Vaska, 2022).

Areas *specific to supervisees* indicate that online supervision holds primarily an *affective and supportive dimension* for this group. Participants described greater willingness to share complex topics, reduced inhibition, and an increased sense of control over self-exposure. These observations correspond with studies emphasizing the importance of emotional regulation and psychological safety in online supervision (Reinders et al., 2013). A smaller portion of supervisees perceived online supervision as a form of *crisis intervention* or a *complement* to in-person formats. This pragmatic perspective supports the findings of Lohrke and Metz (2021), who observed that digitalization expanded the continuity of professional support during emergency situations and opened the way toward hybrid models of supervision.

The comparison of both perspectives suggests that online supervision can be regarded as at least an equivalent format to in-person supervision, provided that certain conditions are met -specifically, technological competence, clear structure, and relational sensitivity on the part of the supervisor (Engelhardt & Engels, 2021; Watters & Northey, 2020). Both groups perceive the online environment as a safe and flexible space for reflection. Supervisors, however, highlight the continuing need to strengthen education, as well as to further professionalize and standardize supervisory methodologies. Research conducted in Slovakia (Levická, Vaska & Vrťová, 2021; Vrťová & Vaska, 2022) indicates that the digitalization of supervision has become part of a broader trend toward the modernization of social work, raising new questions related to quality, ethics, and data protection. At the European level (Engelhardt, 2018; Malík Holasová, 2024), growing emphasis is being placed on the integration of digital competencies into supervision training curricula and on strengthening the reflection of the media dimension in professional communication. A similar demand is now emerging within the Slovak context as well.

Online supervision represents an intersection of practical and psychological benefits: it enhances efficiency, expands accessibility, strengthens

reflective potential, and, when properly structured, maintains the quality of the relational alliance. Differences in perception primarily reflect the diversity of roles: supervisors highlight the need for methodological innovation and standardization, while supervisees value above all the supportive and safe character of the environment. Hybrid and fully online formats are gradually – albeit somewhat cautiously – becoming an integral part of professional support in social work. However, their further development requires deeper research and the establishment of quality standards that respect the specificities of the digital environment while preserving the core values of supervision – its reflective nature, trust, and ethics.

Discussion

The results of the analysis indicate that, based on the identified benefits, online supervision is beginning to establish itself in the Slovak context as a fully-fledged form of professional support. It effectively fulfills the educational, supportive, managerial, and, in some cases, mediating functions of supervision. From the supervisors' perspective, online supervision offers new opportunities for professional growth, expands their technological competencies, and enables the development of methodological innovations in response to the evolving needs of practice (Engelhardt, 2018; Malík Holasová, 2024; Vrtová & Vaska, 2022). Supervisees, on the other hand, perceive online supervision as a space for greater accessibility, flexibility, and safety, which also supports focused engagement with content and reflection on professional practice (Vaska & Vrtová, 2021).

These findings correspond with international research (Watters & Northey, 2020; Woo et al., 2020), which confirms that the quality of the supervisory relationship is determined not by the format but by the quality of interaction, trust, and reflection. The COVID-19 pandemic proved to be a crucial catalyst for the digitalization of supervision (Lohrke & Metz, 2021; Vrtová & Vaska, 2022), contributing to its strengthening as a modern tool of professional support that transcends geographical and temporal barriers.

At the same time, maintaining the quality and depth of the reflective process in online environments requires purposeful preparation of supervisors, as well as the establishment of clear methodological frameworks and ethical standards (Engelhardt & Engels, 2021; Kumar, Kumar & Taylor, 2020). The digital environment transforms not only the technical aspects of supervision but also its culture – introducing new modes of communica-

tion, new perceptions of closeness, and new forms of self-reflection. This can be understood as a natural evolution of the profession within the broader digitalization of social work (Vaska, Budoš Vrt'ová & Šavrn'ochová, 2023).

It can thus be concluded that online supervision represents a promising model of professional support that complements traditional formats and expands the scope of supervision with new dimensions such as accessibility, flexibility, efficiency, and reflective depth. A key challenge for the future lies in the systematic integration of online supervision into social work education and practice, so that the digital format becomes not merely an alternative, but a natural and inherent part of the professional culture of supervision.

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