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Ireland joins global row-back on working-from-home arrangements

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4–5 minutes

In January 2021, in the middle of the [Covid-19](#) pandemic, the Department of Enterprise and Employment published a national remote working strategy aimed at facilitating those who could not get to the office or workplace.

Last September the Minister for Enterprise [Peter Burke](#) told the Dáil that this strategy aimed to ensure “that remote work becomes a permanent feature in the Irish workplace in a way that maximises its economic, social and environmental benefits”.

Legislation to allow workers to [request the right to work from home](#) or some other location was introduced in 2023.

Separately, the then government invested about €150 million, largely through the Department of Rural and Community Development, in the improvement of remote work facilities through a variety of programmes to provide accessible, well-equipped working spaces throughout the State.

Mr Burke told the Dáil in September that with more than 360 hubs across the country at that time, the “Connected Hubs” initiative was helping to build vibrant local economies, revitalising communities and offering diverse services to remote workers, SMEs, and start-ups.

He said such hubs were essential in enhancing labour market participation and promoting sustainable, flexible work options in line with government policy.

However, internationally the attitude towards working from home would appear to be shifting.

And the concept that the world of work had changed forever following the pandemic is being increasingly challenged.

[[Remote working in Ireland: People ‘are being pushed back to the office against their will’](#)]

Initially a number of tech companies sought their employees to return to the traditional workplace.

Last week US president [Donald Trump](#) ordered that US government agencies “as soon as practicable, take all necessary steps to terminate remote work

arrangements and require employees to return to work in-person at their respective duty stations on a full-time basis”.

In Ireland the Government directly employs about 40,000 staff in the Civil Service, with over 300,000 across the broader public service. A policy on blended working was published in 2022.

In this policy document [Michael McGrath](#), then minister for public expenditure and reform, said the Government had [mandated public sector employers to move towards 20 per cent blended working](#).



The new Programme for Government commits to reassess blended working in the Civil Service. Stock photograph

The new Programme for Government, published earlier this month, contained a commitment to review the Civil Service blended-working policy framework “to consider how the public sector can adopt a coherent approach to blended working and remote work”.

But in parts of the Civil Service changes are being envisaged and the Government seems set to face a potential dispute with trade unions if it seeks to force staff to return to the office more frequently.

The largest public service union, [Fórsa](#), has directed members to continue working their existing arrangements.

It has warned there could be possible strikes if staff face disciplinary action for complying with the union’s instruction.

The row stems from reforms announced for staff in the [Department of Social Protection](#).

It has said that from February, the minimum level of attendance in the workplace would be changing to two days per week. Those at the grade of principal officer and above will be expected to attend the office a minimum of three days per week. Staff will essentially have to spend a day more per week in the office.

The union has accused the Government of seeking to roll back its previous commitment to more flexible and remote working for its own employees.

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