

# The Social Impacts of Remote and Hybrid Working Arrangements in Ireland, 2026

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Report on remote and hybrid working arrangements  
and the future of work in Ireland

Survey findings and qualitative research

Research by Ireland Thinks,  
commissioned by Fórsa

# Key Findings

**Remote Working Landscape:** Remote and hybrid working is now a mainstream labour-market experience: 38% currently work remotely at least one day per week, and a further 19% did so previously. The inequality story is important: 64% agree that remote-work opportunities are unfairly concentrated among higher-paid or higher-skilled jobs. Indeed, remote workers tend to be on much higher incomes.

**Preferences:** The preference for remote and hybrid is clear. Almost every worker who currently works in a hybrid/remote arrangement prefers it. 61% would prefer hybrid or fully remote work over the next two years, compared with 26% who prefer fully on-site.

**Return to Office:** There is considerable opposition to returns to the office. If access to remote work were curtailed, 40% say they would be very or somewhat likely to look for a new job, and 38% say they would ask to change hours or role. Just 28% said they would be very or somewhat likely to accept the change without seeking an alternative. Many employees did not agree with common arguments for RTO mandates, such as culture, teamwork and productivity. Many believed remote working to be more productive.

**Caring Responsibilities:** Benefits are small, everyday gains from time saved by commuting, including household chores, wellbeing, sleep, leisure, childcare, school runs, and care for older relatives. Remote and hybrid working significantly reduces the burden of childcare costs: 45% report lower costs, 8% higher costs. Those benefits are most significant among those on lower incomes. Remote work also supports a more equal sharing of care, with 48% saying responsibilities are now more equally shared.

**Work-Life, Commuting:** This has a knock-on effect on well-being. The case for remote work is strongest in relation to stress, time use and productivity: 74% say it reduced stress, and 68% say it improved productivity. It is clear from the qualitative research that the specific circumstances of individuals (caring, childcare, commuting, personality and mental health issues), facilitate people who might not otherwise be able to work.

**Relocation and Local Economies:** Among those who moved in the past year, one-third said remote or hybrid work played some role in that decision. Remote working is redistributing wealth across the country. High-income remote workers appear to have moved the furthest from their role base. Workers are spending more in their local area: money that would otherwise have been spent near workplaces.

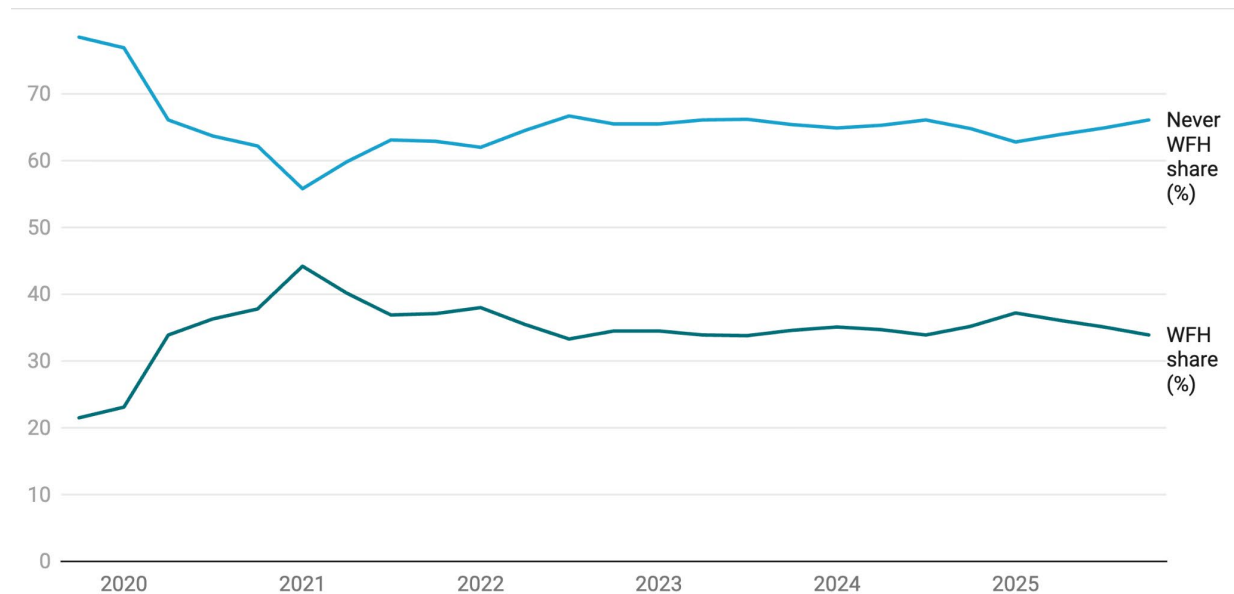
**Overall:** The vast majority believe that remote/hybrid working is very good or somewhat good for Ireland. Clear support for the right to disconnect and considerable support for help to protect workers who are able to work remotely. This includes union activity.

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# Background

Remote and hybrid working arrangements, that is, ‘working away from the employer’s usual workplace (e.g., at home), have become a central feature of working life in Ireland, especially since the pandemic. The latest CSO Labour Force Survey data shows that working from home, whether full-time or as part of a hybrid set-up, remains far more common than prior to 2020. Although the proportion of those working from home has decreased slightly, it appears to have stabilised.



In a 2025 membership survey, Fórsa members identified protecting remote and hybrid working as a major priority. Beyond pay, it is the issue members value most. For many workers, access to remote or hybrid work is now closely connected to work-life balance, commuting patterns, caring responsibilities, accommodation choices, and participation in local communities.

Many employers have sought to reduce access to remote working or introduce return-to-office mandates. These decisions are justified for a variety of reasons: teamwork, communication, productivity, and the use of the office itself. Fórsa’s research suggested that such claims were often unsubstantiated or based on assumptions rather than clear evidence.

The issue has become relevant to current public policy. Since 6 March 2024, all employees in the state have had a statutory right to request remote working under the Work Life Balance and Miscellaneous Provisions Act 2023. It allows employees to make a formal request, and employers must consider it in line with the statutory framework though unions have argued that the legislation is weak and unbalanced in favour of the employers.

The January 2025 Programme for Government included a commitment to promote flexible working arrangements. It recognised the rollout of high-speed broadband, which enabled further remote work. It noted that the growth of remote working has created opportunities for people to live and work in their own communities, with benefits for the regional development of rural Ireland. The government committed to reviewing the Civil Service Blended Working Policy Framework, to develop a coherent public sector approach to blended and remote work.

In 2025, the Government asked the National Economic and Social Council to review the impact of remote work in Ireland. This research aims to contribute to this wider evidence base by capturing up-to-date public polling and qualitative data.

Previous research suggests that remote working has a positive effect on the economy and society. An evaluation by the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service in 2022 found that, on balance, remote working was likely to have a positive impact.

Building on this, this report examines the social impacts of remote and hybrid work in Ireland in 2026. It looks beyond whether people simply 'like' remote work and asks how access to flexibility is shaping everyday life: household arrangements, commuting, local communities, workplace culture and future expectations of work.

The report first explores the gap between what workers want, their preference in terms of remote working, versus the reality, and how access to remote and hybrid work remains unevenly distributed across income and social class. The report then explores this gap through a series of linked themes. It begins by examining differences between those who have access to remote work and those who do not, including people who previously worked remotely but can no longer. It then considers Return to Office pressures, considering how workers interpret employer claims around productivity, before turning to the effects of remote and hybrid work on work-life balance and well-being, commuting & time use, and the impact on the household and caring arrangements. The report also assesses wider social effects through the impact of housing and local communities. Finally, we look at who misses out and the future of remote working, including the role of rights, support and collective representation in shaping fair and sustainable access to remote and hybrid work.

# Methodology

This research used a mixed-methods design, combining a nationally representative quantitative survey with qualitative research to explore the social impact of remote and hybrid work in Ireland. The approach followed the structure set out in the original proposal: a large-scale public opinion survey, followed by qualitative work designed to examine in greater depth the themes emerging from the quantitative findings.

## Quantitative survey

The quantitative phase consisted of a nationally representative survey of 1,191 workers in Ireland in late February and early March of 2026. The survey was designed to measure current working arrangements, experiences of remote and hybrid work, attitudes to return-to-office requirements, and perceived wider social impacts.

Respondents were recruited through Ireland Thinks' established polling panel, recruited through a combination of probability and non-probability methods (face-to-face polling, random-digit dialling, online advertisements). Respondents are invited to participate via SMS using unique survey links, with duplicate links removed. Quality-control procedures include checks for inconsistent answering, very fast completion times, straight-lining and other forms of low-quality response behaviour.

The final dataset was weighted to align with relevant demographic targets. The weighting approach accounted for non-response bias and reflected key population characteristics including age, gender, region and educational attainment. The proposal also specified that urban/rural classification and employment status are relevant variables for the weighting and analysis strategy.

Analysis of the survey data included cross-tabulations by key demographic groups and working arrangements, region, age, gender, and other relevant characteristics, with the aim of identifying both headline patterns and inequalities in access to and the impacts of remote and hybrid work.

## Qualitative research

The qualitative phase was designed to explore the survey findings in greater depth. It examined how arrangements shaped everyday life. We wanted to capture nuanced experiences, trade-offs, and unintended consequences, and to understand relations with management and employers regarding remote work.

Participants were recruited to reflect a range of relevant working arrangements and circumstances, including remote workers, hybrid workers, on-site workers, workers without access to remote work, parents and caregivers, rural residents, recent relocators, and people

otherwise affected by changes in commuting and workplace patterns. This segmentation was developed in part in response to the findings in the quantitative research. Overall, we spoke to twenty-four people.

The qualitative fieldwork was structured around a discussion guide developed from the research objectives and the emerging quantitative findings. The discussion guide was structured around the following sections:

- Personal circumstances: their role and current pattern of working from home and/or in the office.
- Preference versus reality: their ideal working pattern and how that differed from their current arrangement.
- Return-to-office policies: views on return-to-office mandates, whether participants had experienced pressure to return, perceived effectiveness of mandates, and concerns about increased office attendance.
- Trade union involvement: whether trade unions should represent workers on remote and hybrid work, willingness to become involved in collective action, and what opposition to return-to-office policies might look like.
- Employer rationale: participants' views on employer arguments for office attendance, including productivity, morale and team cohesion.
- Commuting: commuting times, the impact of commuting and the time saved through remote working.
- Work-life balance: use of additional time, ability to disconnect from work, and effects on the division of housework and caring responsibilities.
- Rural and local development: whether they had relocated, the impact on local shops and services, contribution to local community life, and whether a return to work would force a relocation back to an urban centre.

The qualitative material was analysed thematically and integrated with the quantitative survey findings. This allowed the research to use the survey to identify the scale and distribution of attitudes and experiences, while the qualitative work explained the reasons behind those patterns and provided richer examples of how remote and hybrid work affect people's working lives, households, and communities.

### Integration of findings

The final analysis integrated the quantitative and qualitative strands. Survey results provided robust estimates of the prevalence of attitudes, experiences and social impacts, while the qualitative research provided context, explanation and illustrative examples.

This integrated approach allowed the research to assess not only whether remote and hybrid work were associated with particular social outcomes, but also how and why these impacts were experienced differently across groups. The analysis was also designed to contribute to policy discussion on remote work in Ireland.

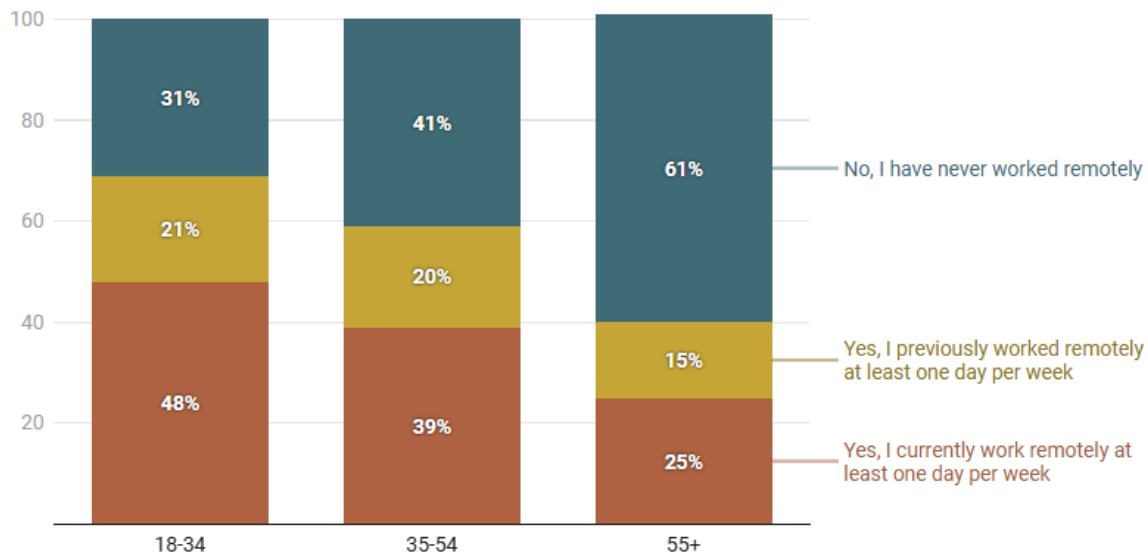
# Preferences vs Reality

## Remote Working Today

Our poll shows 38% of respondents currently work remotely at least one day per week, 19% previously worked remotely at least one day per week but no longer do so, while 42% state that they have never worked remotely. These figures are similar to CSO estimates.

Collectively, they show that remote working is now a much more common feature of working life in Ireland. Remote work is particularly common among younger workers, while older workers are significantly less likely to work remotely, perhaps reflecting a modern trend.

Figure. Experiences of remote/hybrid work broken down by age

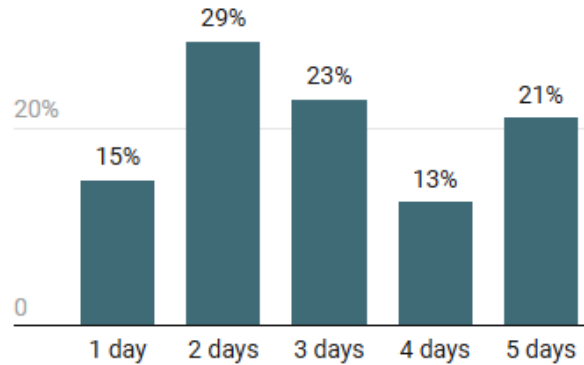


The number of days an employee is working remotely depends on the total number of days they are working. Among remote workers who work five days per week, almost one-fifth work remotely on all five days; however, for the vast majority, their experience of remote work is hybrid: part remote, part in the office. On average, your typical five-day-per-week remote/hybrid worker is working remotely on 3 of those days (2.9, to be precise), meaning that your typical remote/hybrid worker is spending two days per week in the office.

The qualitative interviews also suggest that remote and hybrid arrangements should not be understood as a simple binary choice between full office attendance and working completely from home, as respondents describe a wide variety of arrangements. One participant indicated that they *could* work from home five days a week, but still chooses to meet their team in person once a week so that they are not reduced to “posted stamps on Zoom”. Many workers with extensive remote access still noted the value of in-person contact, particularly for

wellbeing, informal communication, and easier access to colleagues. This reflects a wider theme in the interviews: respondents were much more open to office attendance when it served a clear purpose, but more resistant when attendance was perceived as being required for its own sake. Another interviewee described a formal HSE pattern of three days in the office and two days at home, while Mary described a semi-state role where the policy is two days in the office and the rest flexible. Flexibility is clearly important.

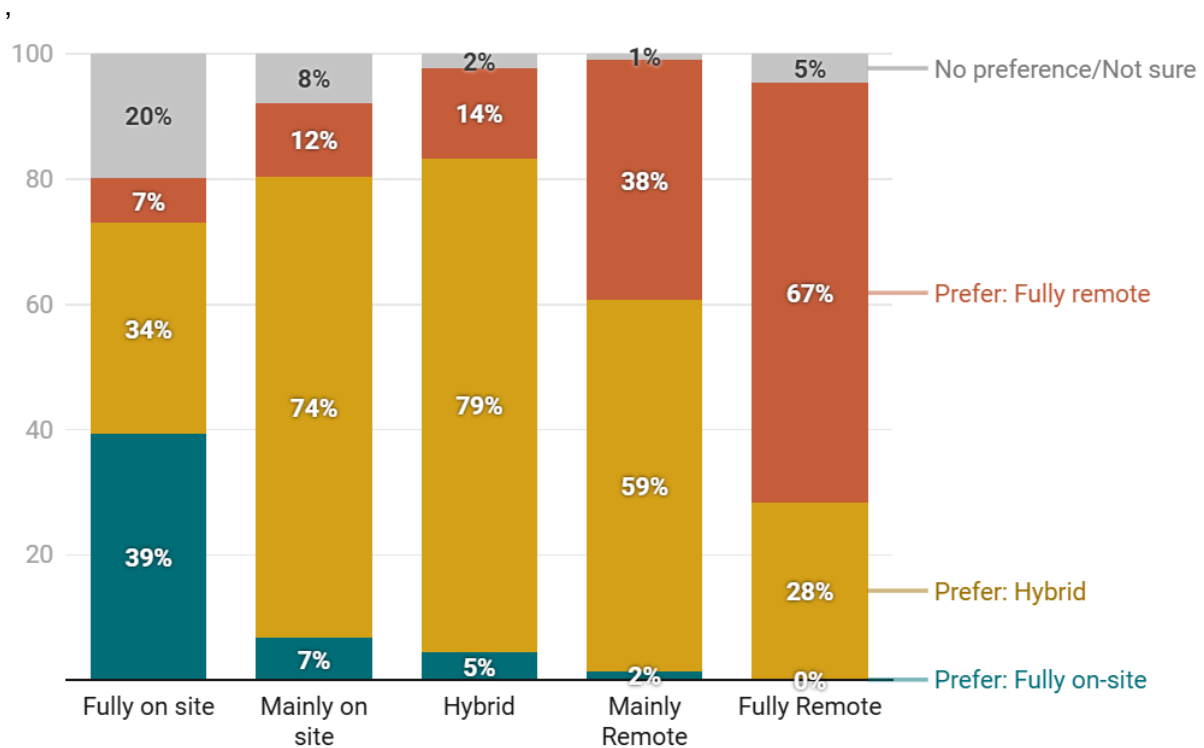
Figure. Number of days working remotely, for those who engage in hybrid/remote



## Preferences

While remote and hybrid work is now a mainstream feature of working life in Ireland, the findings show a clear gap between what workers currently experience and what they would prefer over the coming years. While 38% of respondents currently work remotely at least one day per week, preference for flexible working is substantially higher than current access. When asked about their preferred working arrangement over the next two years, 61% said they would prefer either hybrid (45%) or fully remote work (16%), compared with 25% who preferred fully on-site work (the remaining 11% indicated that they had no preference, and 3% were 'Not sure'). While preferences for remote work significantly outstrip its implementation, the strong preference within that category is for hybrid work.

Figure. Preferences for working arrangements broken down in terms of current working arrangements



This suggests that a central issue is not simply whether remote work is popular, but whether existing workplace arrangements align with employees' circumstances. The findings still point to a mismatch, where 38% of workers are currently working remotely, yet 61% would prefer to do so. This is not simply a case of thinking the grass is always greener on the other side; almost every worker who currently works in a hybrid/remote arrangement prefers it. Just 7% of those who are mainly on-site would prefer to be fully on-site, 5% hybrid, 2% mostly remote, and less than 1% fully remote. There is a greater division among those currently working full-time, yet still, 41% prefer fully remote/hybrid arrangements over fully on-site.

There is also a notable age difference. Older workers are more likely to prefer on-site work compared with younger workers. 39% of those aged 55+ would prefer to be fully on site compared with just 20% of those aged 18-34.

This preference for hybrid work was strongly reflected in the interviews. Participants often valued remote work for focus and commuting relief, but also recognised the nuance in their situation and that some tasks are easier in person. One participant, Alex, said that home working has helped him to emotionally recover from “emotionally draining case work”, while office days have enabled him to gain quick access to colleagues under time pressure. Another made a similar distinction: ideally, she would like to work from home a bit more often, but

valued time in her office because “you learn more sometimes when you’re in”. Overall, hybrid working arrangements appear to be most beneficial.

What emerges from the interviews is a broad preference for control over their work flows and working patterns. Focused writing, administration, emotionally draining work and “bunker days” were often seen as better suited to home. Quick conversations, mentoring, training, informal learning and relationship building were often seen as better suited to the office.

“  
Three days in, two days off, is a nice balance with the type of work that I’m doing to sort of get the best of both worlds.”

— Interview Participant

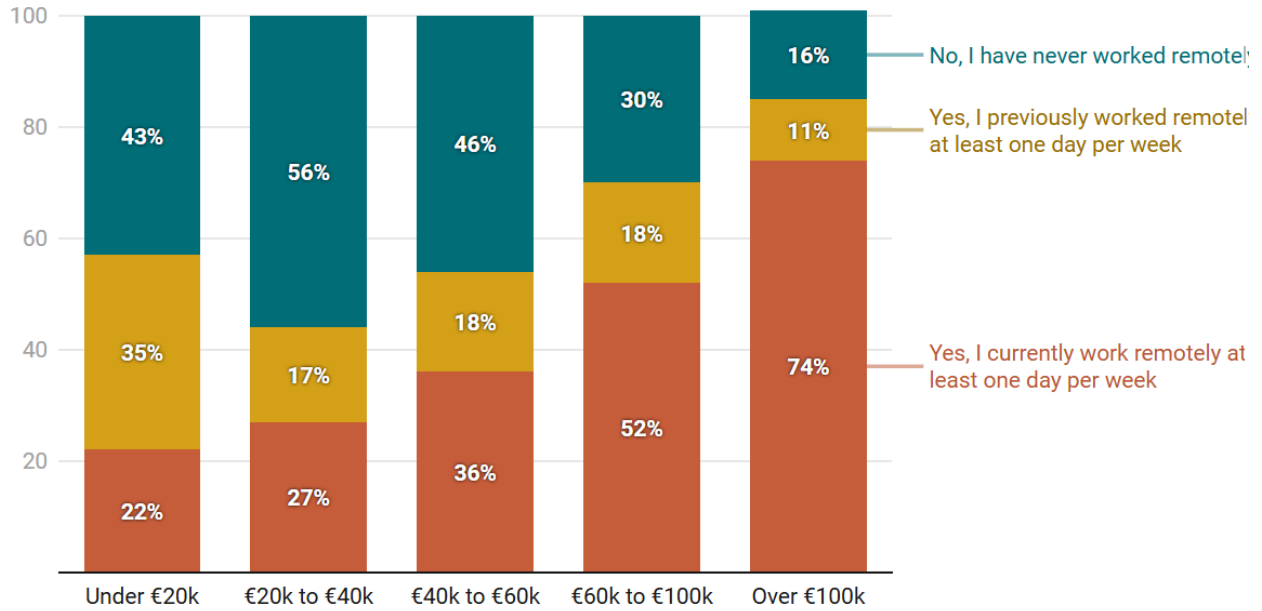
## Inequality

Access to remote and hybrid work is unevenly distributed. The results show that the current remote-working experience is much higher among higher-income respondents than among those on lower incomes. Among respondents with household incomes over €100,000, 74% currently work remotely or in a hybrid model, compared with 27% among those earning €20,000 to €40,000.

There is also a class gradient. 46% of those who identify as middle-class currently work remotely at least one day per week, compared with 29% of those who identify as working-class. These are subjective evaluations of social class rather than social grade. This suggests that remote and hybrid work isn’t merely a lifestyle preference, but differences in opportunity reflect underlying labour-market inequality.

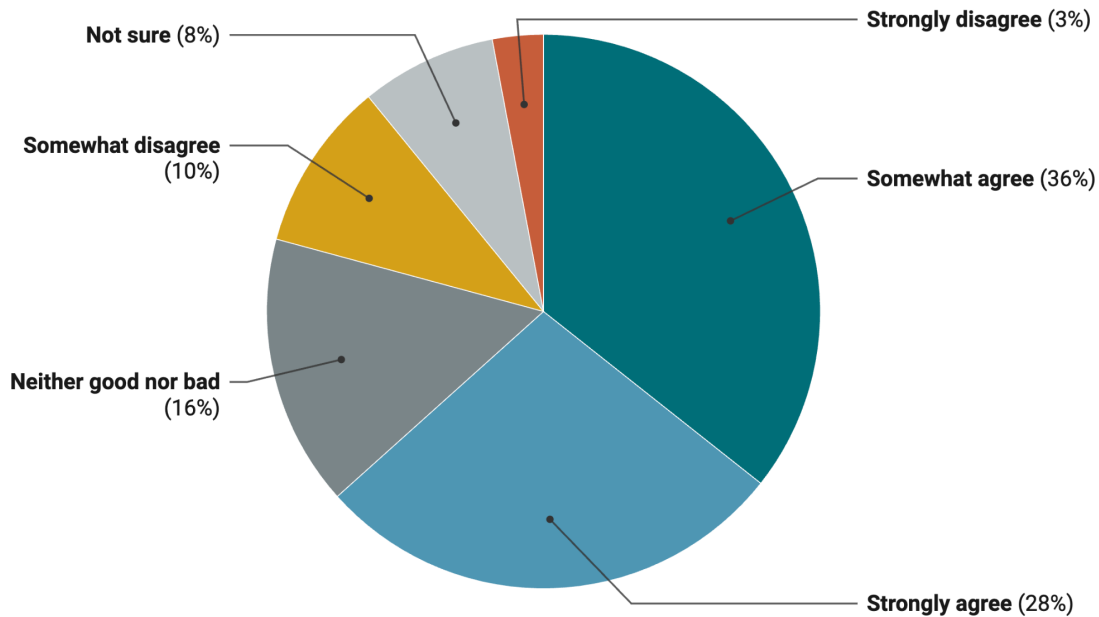
*Figure: Remote working experience broken down by income level*

### Remote Work in Ireland 2026



This inequality is recognised by respondents themselves, as discussed in the policy section. 64% agree that remote-work opportunities are unfairly concentrated among higher-paid or higher-skilled jobs.

*Figure: Opinions on remote-work inequality: 'Do you agree or disagree: Remote work opportunities are unfairly concentrated among higher paid or higher skilled jobs?'*



“It’s a real privilege, because not everybody in the organisation would have that opportunity or that option.”

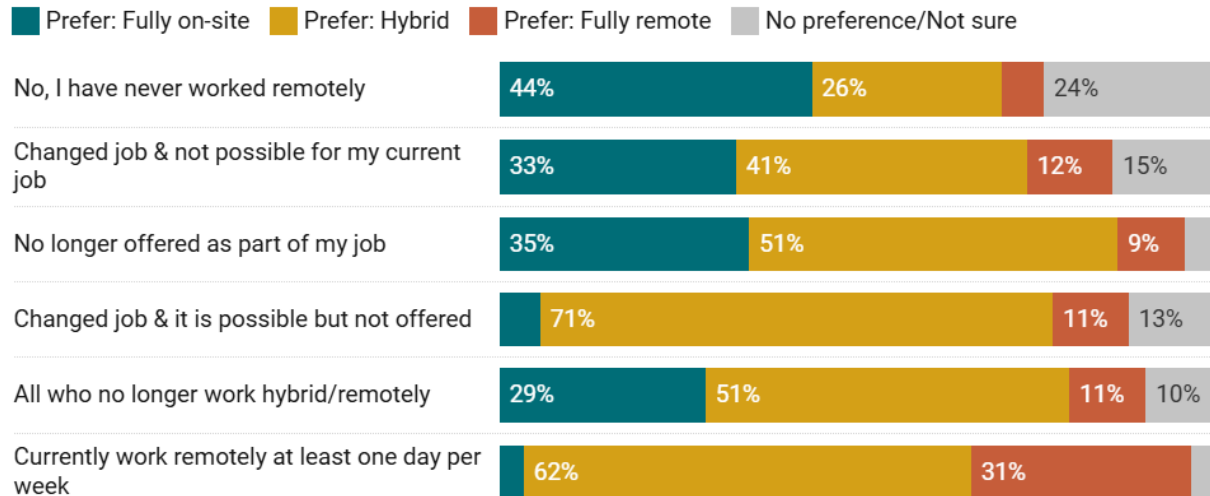
— Interview Participant

The interviews reinforce the survey's findings regarding the uneven access to remote work. Participants repeatedly linked access to the practical requirements of their or their colleagues' roles. Ciara noted that hospital-based clerical staff have far fewer opportunities to work remotely due to the physical nature of medical record storage and patient-facing work. Kayleigh made a similar point in the private sector, explaining that sales and customer success workers in her firm are asked to attend the office more often than her team. There was a broad suggestion that remote and hybrid working options are shaped by occupation and role design, not simply by whether a worker requests flexibility.

## Losing Access

One in five respondents previously worked remotely and no longer do so. We can categorise these people into three groups: those for whom remote work is no longer offered as part of their job (41%), those who have changed jobs and remote work is not possible in their current role (40%), and those who have changed jobs, and while it is possible, remote work is not offered for their current job (19%). Across all groups, there is a clear preference for remote/hybrid working, particularly those who perceive it to be possible in their new role. The only substantial group who are less enthusiastic are those who have no experience of remote work.

Figure: Remote working preferences according to those who no longer have access to remote working and categories of people currently remote working and have never had that experience.



The qualitative evidence suggests that, beyond the lifting of temporary working-from-home arrangements prompted by public health restrictions during the pandemic, losing access to remote work can happen in several ways. One participant described moving from a fully remote role into her current position, which is initially fully on-site, with hybrid access only becoming available after probation. For others, the loss or change in access has reflected a step change in employer expectations after remote working arrangements had already become part of the employment relationship. Some participants described colleagues being mandated to attend the office so that any perceived fall in productivity could be monitored.

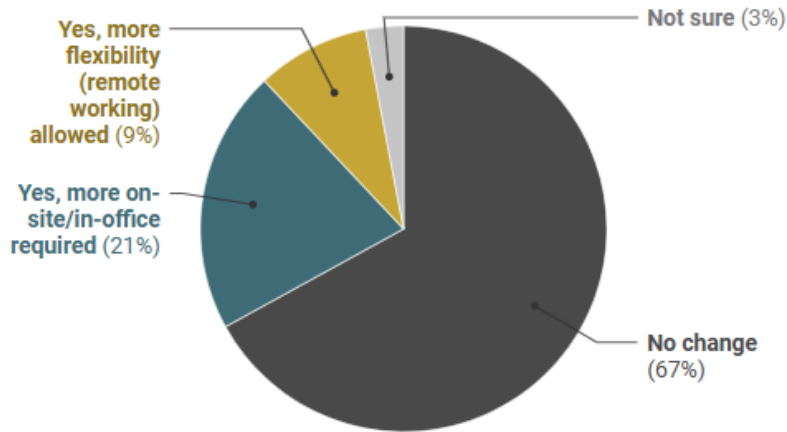
# Return to Office

## Reductions in Remote working

Return-to-office policies should be understood as a contested workplace issue, given both the desire for more remote work and the pressure from employers or managers.

In the last 12 months, 21% of respondents said their employer had required more on-site or in-office work, 9% were allowed more flexibility. While most respondents reported no change, for those affected, views on increased office attendance were divided.

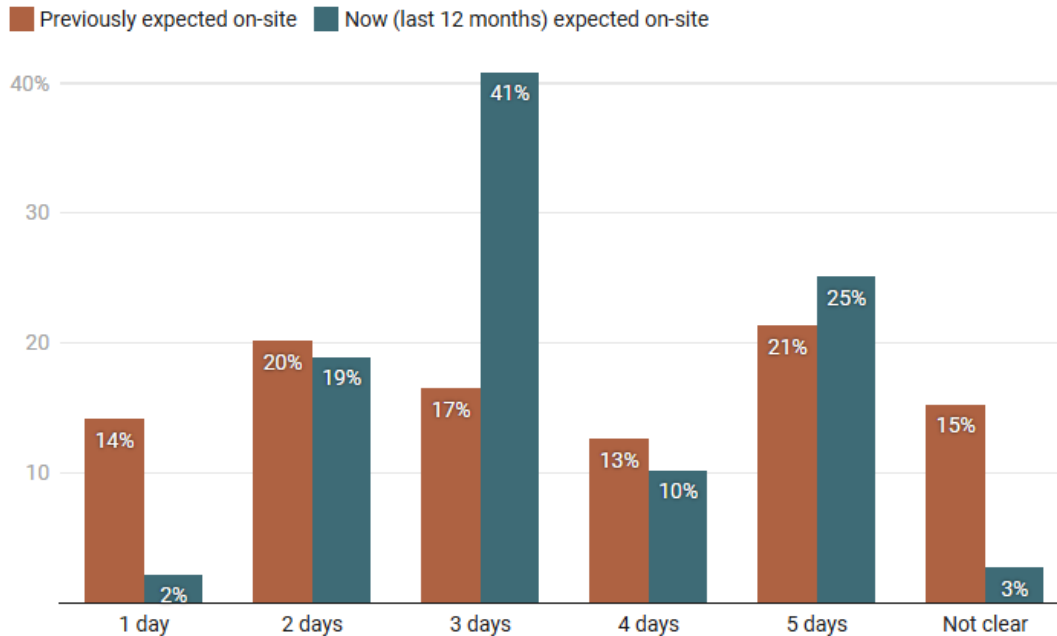
*Figure: In the last 12 months, has your employer changed expectations about working on-site (as opposed to from home/remote)?*



There has been a clear increase in the number of days employers and management expect employees to be on-site. Looking just at those working a 5-day week, one-third who had to change (in the past 12 months) their remote/on-site mix had previously been working 1 or 2 days per week, with much of that shift towards working 3, 4 or 5 days on site.

*Figure: Changes to the number of days expected and previously working on-site among those who have experienced a change in the last 12 months (5-day workers only)*

## Remote Work in Ireland 2026



The qualitative interviews suggest that reductions in remote working are most contentious when workers do not understand the reason for the change.

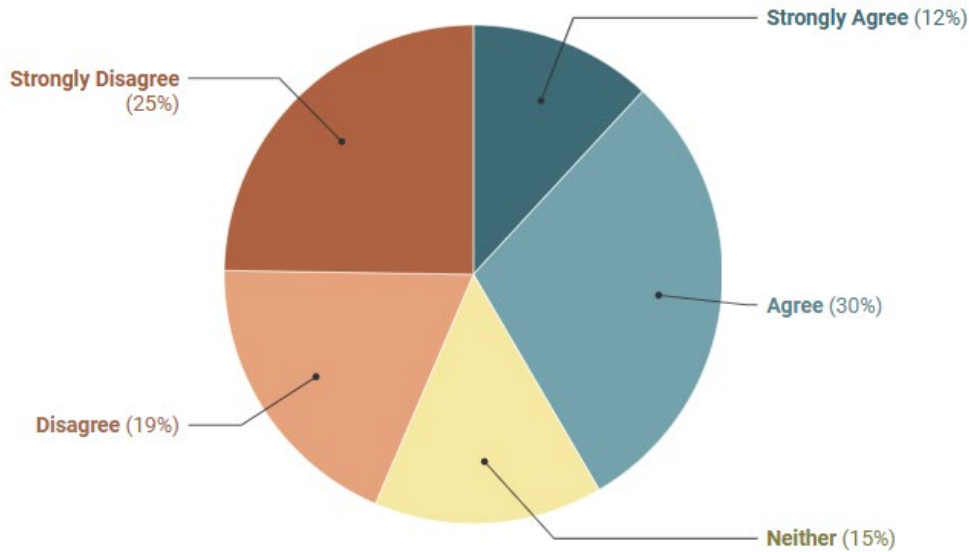
One participant recalled being asked to take part in the in-person training of a new colleague during their onboarding. He felt this may have been the beginning of a gradual move towards more office-based days, but, without a formal remote working agreement in place at the time, he felt he had little real choice but to comply. His frustration was not simply about attending the office, but about the absence of a clear rationale. Another took a more resigned view of policy change, saying that if the policy changed “you have to go in”, but she immediately connected this to petrol costs, commuting time and the wider burden of travel.

### Attitude towards change

Among those asked whether they agreed or disagreed with the decision to increase the number of on-site days, 42% agreed, and 44% disagreed. This near-even split shows that return-to-office decisions do not command a settled consensus among affected workers. Some accept or support increased office attendance, but a similar proportion oppose it. It is worth acknowledging, however, that among those opposed, the strength of feeling is sharper.

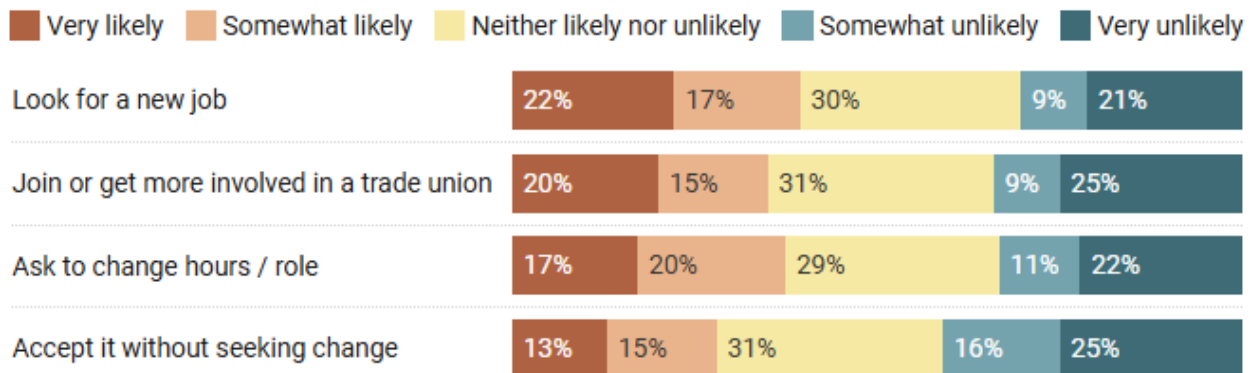
*Figure: Do you agree or disagree with the decision to increase the number of days on site?*

## Remote Work in Ireland 2026



The findings also show that workers may respond actively if access to remote or hybrid work is reduced. If their access were reduced, 40% said they would be very or somewhat likely to look for a new job, while 38% said they would ask to change hours or role. Only 28% said they would be very or somewhat likely to accept the change without seeking an alternative.

*Figure: Attitudes in response to potential changes in working arrangements - 'If your access to remote/hybrid working was reduced, how likely would you be to...'*



This suggests that return-to-office mandates may have consequences for retention and engagement. For many workers, remote and hybrid work is no longer seen as a temporary benefit, but as a valued part of the employment relationship.

This group is particularly important because they can compare remote and non-remote working from direct experience. Their responses suggest that the loss of remote work is not always a matter of genuine role feasibility. In some cases, it reflects employer policy choices about whether flexibility is offered. Return-to-office is best framed as a contested change rather than a simple restoration of normality. 21% report that their employer has required more

on-site/in-office work in the last 12 months. Among those asked about the decision to increase on-site days, 41% agree, while 43% disagree.

Participants' likely responses to increased office attendance varied, but the interviews suggest that stronger mandates could lead to resentment, job search behaviour, or reluctant compliance. Stephen said that if he and his colleagues were mandated back despite already being productive at home, it would create "a sense of resentment towards management". Enda said that if a previous employer had required four or five days in the office, he would probably have made it work only until he found something different.

“  
If I was continuing in Wexford, I couldn't be in office every day. That's just something that wouldn't be possible for me”

— Interview Participant

## Reasons for the Return

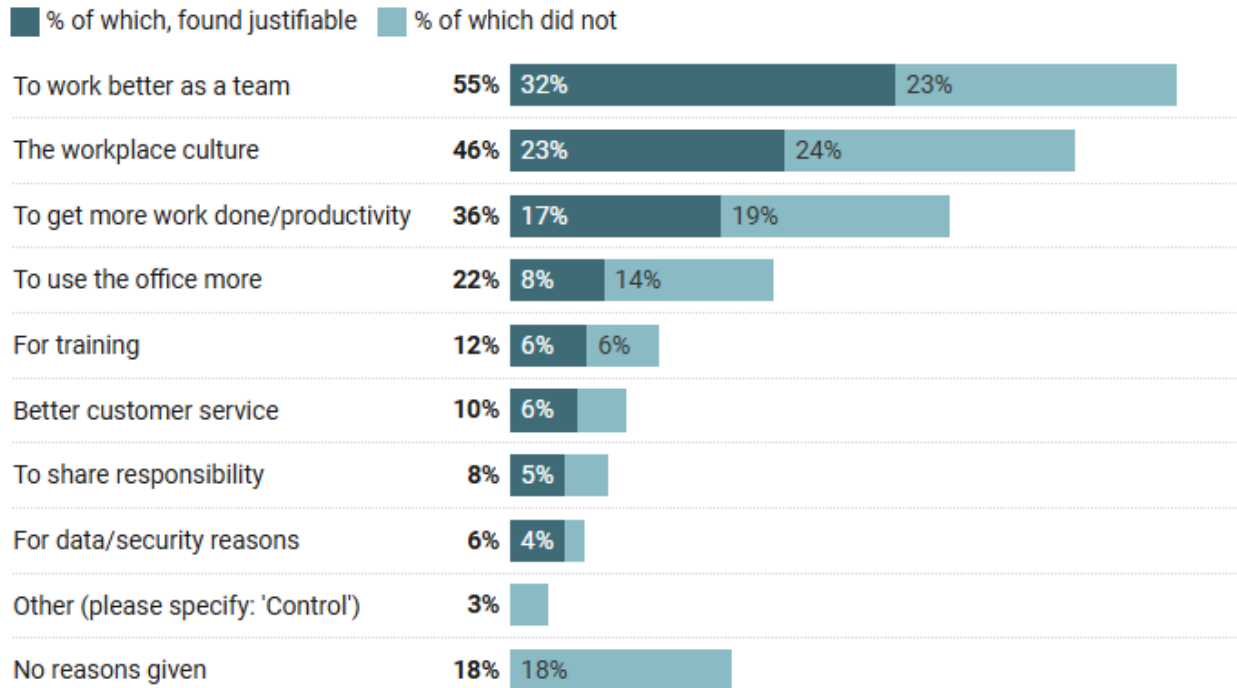
Among those whose employers asked for more office work, the most commonly cited reasons were to work better as a team, cited by 55%, and workplace culture, cited by 46%. Productivity was cited by 36%, while 22% cited using the office more. Notably, 18% said no reasons were given.

When respondents were asked which reasons they found justifiable, the strongest rationale was again teamwork: 57% found "working better as a team" justifiable. Workplace culture was less strongly endorsed, at 40%, while productivity was seen as justifiable by 34%. The weakest rationale was using the office more, which only 16% found justifiable.

We can look at these figures specifically in context where they were applied by exploring those who were given a specified reason and the extent to which they found that reason justifiable in that context. From the chart below, 55% were given the reason that it would be preferable to work better as a team, and most of these, 32%, found this to be justifiable.

*Figure: Why has your employer asked for more office work? Which of these reasons do you find justifiable? (select all that apply)*

## Remote Work in Ireland 2026



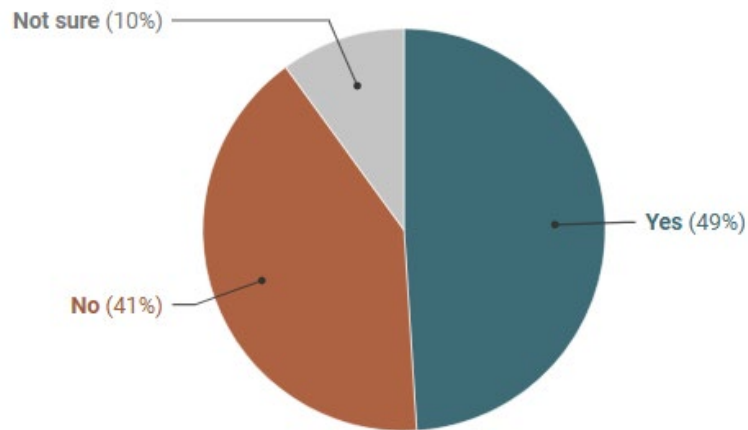
There is a clear tension still between employer claims and workers' experience. 68% of respondents with remote or hybrid experience agreed that remote/hybrid working improved their productivity, yet productivity is also used by some employers as a reason for requiring more office attendance. This suggests that productivity claims need to be examined carefully rather than accepted at face value.

When asked whether the reasons offered by employers would lead to improvements, respondents were divided: 49% said yes, while 41% said no. This again suggests that return-to-office decisions are not automatically rejected; rather, their credibility depends on the rationale, communication, and evidence behind them.

## Overall Assessment

Employers' reasons for increased office attendance are not always seen as equally likely to deliver improvements. Overall, among those who were given a reason by their employer, 49% believed the reasons offered would lead to improvements, while 41% did not, and 10% were unsure. Confidence was highest where the rationale was concrete and service- or function-related: 92% of those citing better customer service believed it would lead to improvements, followed by 71% for data or security reasons and 60% for training. By contrast, broader organisational rationales attracted more mixed views: 46% said "working better as a team" would lead to improvements, 44% said this of workplace culture, and 40% said this of using the office more. This suggests that return-to-office policies are more persuasive when tied to specific operational needs, and less persuasive when the justification is framed in broader or less clearly evidenced terms.

Figure: Do you think the reasons offered by your employer will lead to improvements? (Only asked of those given a reason)



Overall, participants in the interviews did not generally argue that offices have no value. Many recognised the value of socialisation on business outcomes, but also on their mental health. A majority agreed that there is value in office work for entry-level staff, who need more supervision and informal learning. At the same time, participants objected strongly to attendance where it appeared poorly justified.

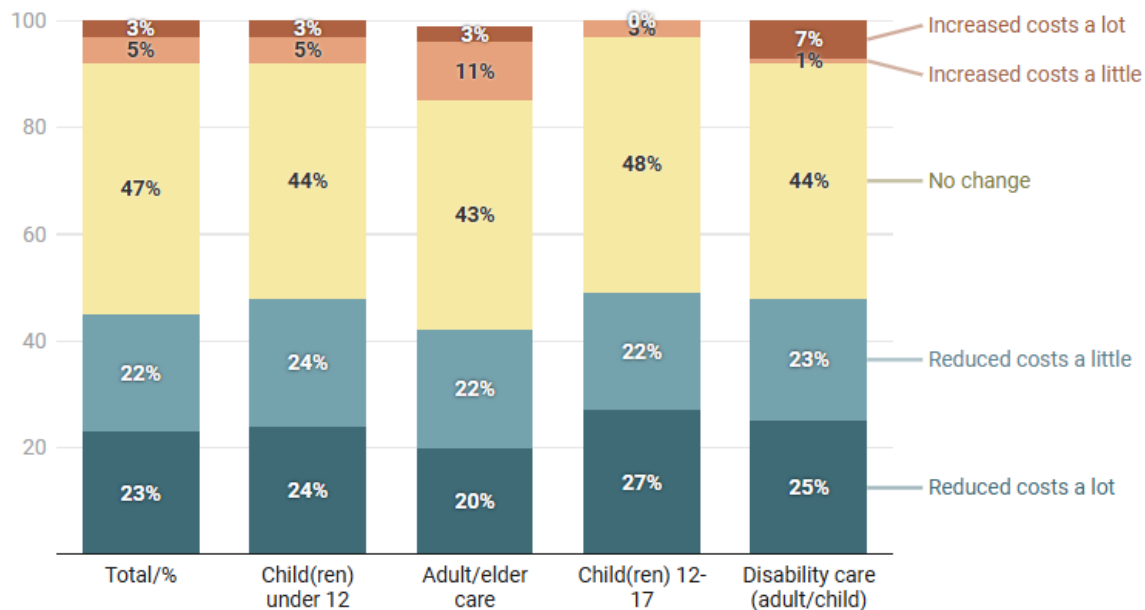
“People showed that they could be equally, if not more, productive at home... I don't think it's necessarily the best approach... for people to be forced to go in just to fill [offices].”

# Caring Responsibilities

## Financial implications

The clearest overall finding is that remote and hybrid working are more likely to reduce care costs than increase them. Looking just at those with caring responsibilities, 45% of respondents said remote or hybrid working had reduced their care costs either a lot or a little, compared with just 8% who said costs had increased. Almost half (47%) reported no change. This suggests that while remote working is not a substitute for formal care, it reduces pressure on household budgets for a sizeable minority of workers.

Figure: Has remote/hybrid working affected your care costs (e.g., childcare, paid care)?



The effect is especially pronounced among some groups. Women were more likely than men to say care costs had reduced a lot (33% compared with 17%), while men were more likely to report that costs had reduced a little (27% compared with 14%). The class pattern is also striking: 65% of working-class respondents said remote or hybrid working had reduced care costs, compared with 38% of middle-class respondents. This indicates that the financial value of flexibility may be particularly important for households with tighter budgets.

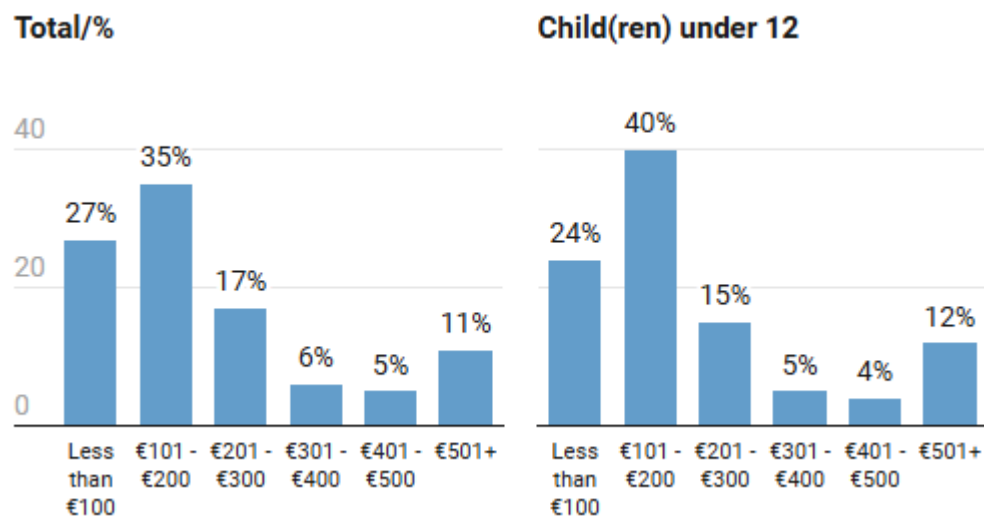
There are also important income differences. Respondents with household incomes under €20,000 were especially likely to report reduced costs, with 64% saying care costs had reduced either a lot or a little. By contrast, among those earning over €100,000, 40% reported reduced costs and 53% reported no change. This suggests that the care-cost benefits of

remote work may be felt most sharply among lower-income households, where even modest savings can make a meaningful difference.

The results also vary depending on the caring situation. Those with children, adult or eldercare responsibilities, children aged 12 to 17, and disability-related care needs all reported some reduction in costs. The findings, therefore, point to a wider household effect: remote and hybrid work can help workers manage care arrangements, reduce paid-care costs, and ease the financial and logistical strain of balancing work with family responsibilities.

The specific costs depend on circumstances. For those with children under 12, there are more significant changes in costs, with 12% reporting over €500 savings per month. In terms of savings. For carers of people with disabilities, elderly relatives etc., the cost savings are slightly smaller. The overall figure remains high.

Figure: Savings among carers and those with children under 12



The interviews show that remote and hybrid work arrangements do not replace formal care structures, but rather, they can make existing care arrangements more workable and flexible. One participant with young children explained that if both adults in the household were commuting on the same day, they would need a different childcare setup stretching from very early morning into the evening. Another appreciated the buffer that remote work offered when their children were sick. Sinead linked the issue to household finances more broadly, explaining that if she and her partner both had to commute to Dublin even three days per week, it would cost them at least €180 in childcare fees per week, which she described as “not feasible”. Sean remarked that he appreciates the flexibility that remote working offers him as a father of children with additional needs.



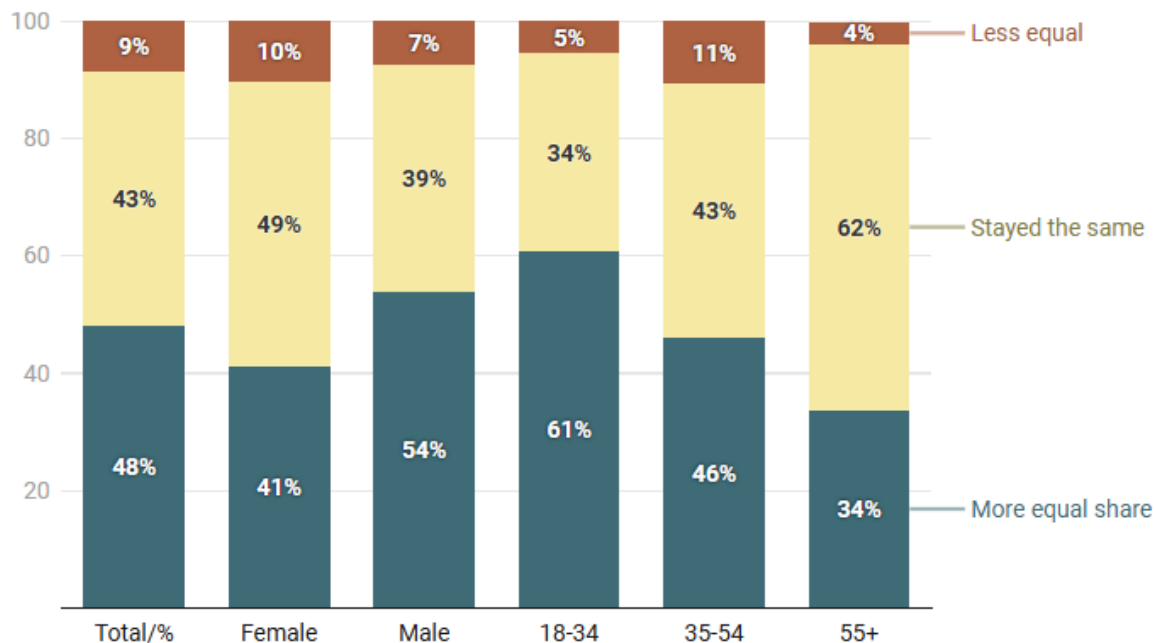
If one of my kids has to stay home from childcare or school... if I was working five days in office, that's just the day I'd have to completely take off. "If they get sick at school or something happens, I'd have the

## Sharing of responsibilities

Remote work appears to have helped create a more equal sharing of caring responsibilities for many respondents. Overall, almost half (48%) say that remote work has led to a more equal share of caring responsibilities in their home, compared with just 9% who say it has made the division less equal. A further 43% say it has stayed the same.

The perceived impact is strongest among younger respondents. Among those aged 18-34, six in ten (61%) say remote work has made caring responsibilities more equal, compared with 46% of those aged 35-54 and 34% of those aged 55+. There is also a gender difference. Men are more likely than women to say remote work has made caring responsibilities more equal (54% compared with 41%), while women are more likely to say things have stayed the same (49% compared with 39%). Broadly speaking, significant numbers identify improvements in this area.

Figure: 'Has (or had) remote work impacted the overall share of caring responsibilities in your home?'



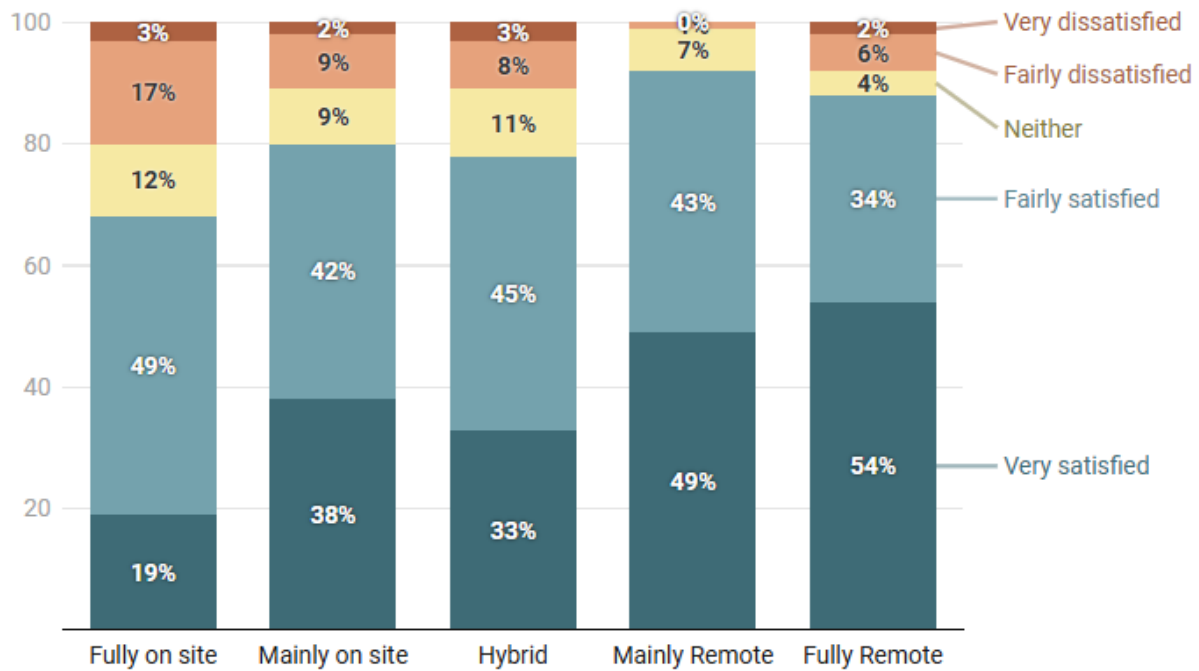
# Work - Life Balance

## Work-Life Satisfaction

Perhaps the strongest case for remote and hybrid work is its everyday effect on work-life balance, stress and wellbeing.

Overall, 73% of respondents said they were very or fairly satisfied with their current work-life balance. Among those with experience of remote or hybrid working, the perceived benefits are particularly clear, with remote workers much more likely to indicate that they were either satisfied or very satisfied.

Figure: 'Overall, how satisfied are you with your current work-life balance?'

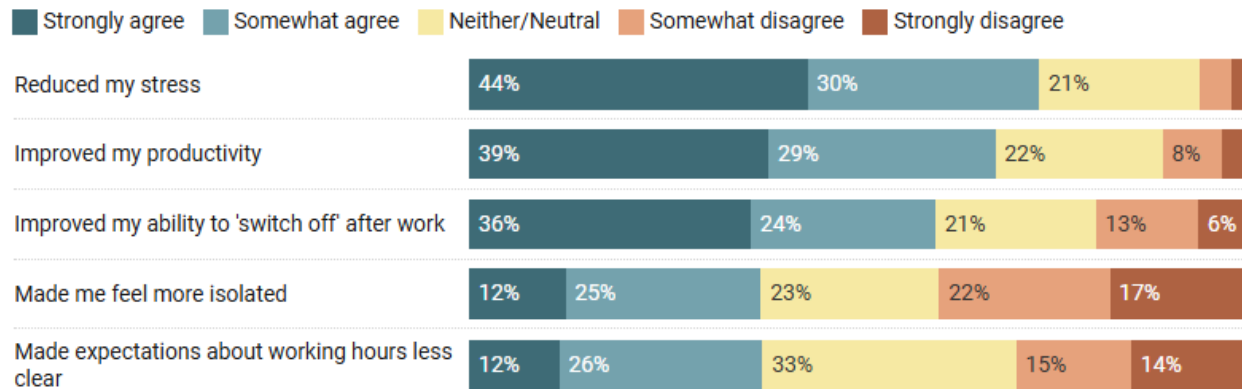


The interviews repeatedly show that remote work gives workers back control over the rest of their day. For one participant, who explicitly noted that he likes his job, the issue was that the commute transformed the job into something that dominated the entire day, making it difficult to exercise and see friends. For Ciara, the value was in headspace. Being able to start earlier, take a walk, put on a wash, or avoid the frustration of traffic add up to a different experience of working life. For others, the benefit was being able to pick up children, get to the gym, eat a healthier dinner or simply close the laptop at five.

## Stress & Productivity

When compared with working mostly on-site, 74% agreed that remote or hybrid work reduced their stress, while 68% agreed that it improved their productivity. A further 60% agreed that it improved their ability to switch off after work.

Figure: ‘Compared with working mostly on-site, remote/hybrid working...?’



These findings challenge the idea that remote work necessarily blurs boundaries or damages productivity. While there are risks, including isolation and unclear expectations, the overall picture is that remote and hybrid work is experienced by many workers as a practical support for wellbeing.

The findings also show that the benefits are often small, everyday gains rather than dramatic lifestyle changes. Respondents use time saved from commuting for household chores, wellbeing, sleep, leisure, childcare, school runs and care for older relatives. The most common uses of saved time were household chores, time for oneself or wellbeing, and more sleep or avoiding early mornings.

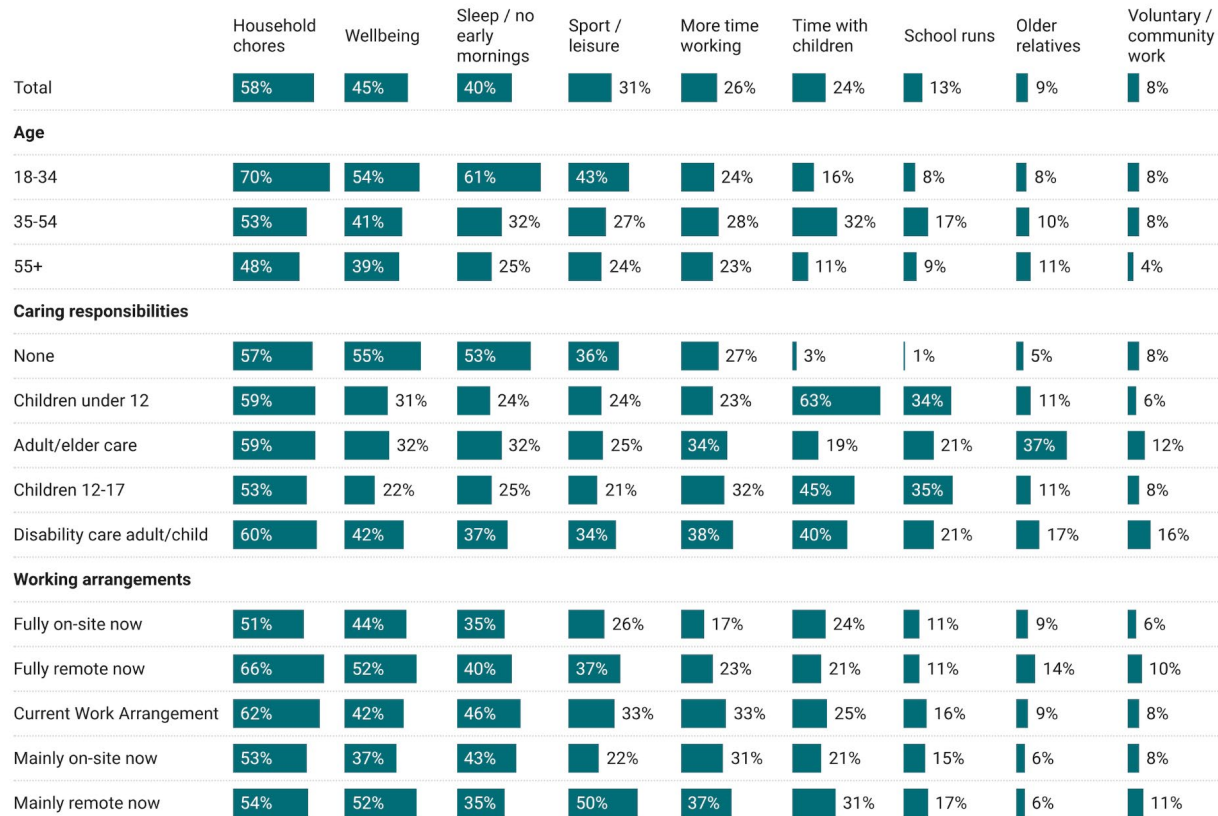
The interviews suggest that productivity effects are task-specific. Participants often described home as better for focused work, writing, administration and tasks requiring undisturbed concentration. Ciara said remote days allow her to “get [her] head down” without interruptions, while Kevin linked home working to being “laser focused”. Conor added an important neurodiversity perspective, describing office interruptions and constant “mode shifting” between development work and problem-solving as particularly disruptive for him.

## The value of small everyday gains

The key benefits include the ordinary, practical value. The ability to do a school run, time to exercise, the chance to start dinner earlier, or the ability to recover from work without a long commute. Everyday gains are especially evident in qualitative research.

The wellbeing story is strong and practical. Overall work-life balance is positive, with 73% very or fairly satisfied. When respondents compare remote/hybrid work with mostly on-site work, the most persuasive benefits are reduced stress (74%), improved productivity (68%) and improved ability to switch off (60%).

Figure: Which of the following do you do with the time you save on the days you work remotely? (select all that apply)



The interviewees stressed that these “small” gains should not be treated as trivial. They showed that remote working changes the logistics of ordinary life. Picking up a prescription, facilitating a boiler service, making sensitive calls, or visiting the post office can become difficult when a worker leaves before opening hours and returns after closing time. Remote days allow these tasks to be fitted into breaks, rather than pushed into weekends or annual leave. The value of remote work, in this sense, is not only time saved. It is stress avoided, weekends protected, and daily life made less compressed.

“You can kind of do little bits throughout the day. So it just gives me so much mental headspace.”

—**Michelle Doherty**

# Commuting

Commuting is one of the most tangible ways in which remote and hybrid work affects daily life. One participant observed that commuting across Dublin had seemed “perfectly fine” until the pandemic showed that many roles could, in fact, be done from home, changing how workers understood the lifestyle costs of commuting.

The survey shows that commuting remains a significant burden for many workers. Overall, 12% of respondents reported a one-way commute of at least one hour on days they travel to their usual workplace. For these workers, a standard office day can involve two hours or more spent travelling, before accounting for delays, congestion, childcare logistics or other responsibilities.

## Length of Commute

The burden of long commuting is not evenly distributed. It is highest among respondents in Leinster, where 21% report a one-way commute of at least an hour, compared with 7% in Dublin, 10% in Munster and 9% in Connacht-Ulster. This suggests that long commuting is particularly associated with workers living outside Dublin but travelling longer distances, including into larger employment centres.

There is also a clear income gradient. Only 2% of those earning under €20,000 report a commute of an hour or more, rising to 32% among those earning over €100,000. This may reflect the concentration of higher-paid roles in major employment centres, and that it is these higher-paid employees who appear to be able to do this the most. This highlights two features: the first is that remote working is clearly leading to a geographical redistribution of wealth, and the second is that it reinforces the inequality of remote work.

The current working arrangement is also strongly linked to commute length. Long commutes are relatively uncommon among fully on-site workers (6%) and mainly on-site workers (5%), but much more common among those working remotely or hybrid: 28% of fully remote workers, 27% of hybrid workers and 35% of mainly remote workers report a one-way commute of at least an hour. This suggests that remote and hybrid work may be particularly important for workers whose workplace is further away. For these respondents, remote work may not simply be a preference, but a practical way of making a distant job sustainable.

The qualitative evidence also helps explain why long commutes are more common among remote and hybrid workers in the survey. For some workers, remote access is what makes it possible to hold a job based further from the office. Without hybrid arrangements, it is often noted that they would need to move or change jobs. In this context, remote work is part of the infrastructure that allows people to access employment without relocating closer to major employment centres.

“ I commute anywhere between 90 minutes and two hours every day...It’s draining... getting home at seven o’clock... by the time you’ve had

Figure: On days you commute to your usual workplace, about how long is your one-way journey (door to door)? [Proportion of those with a commute of an hour or more]

**Region**



**Income**



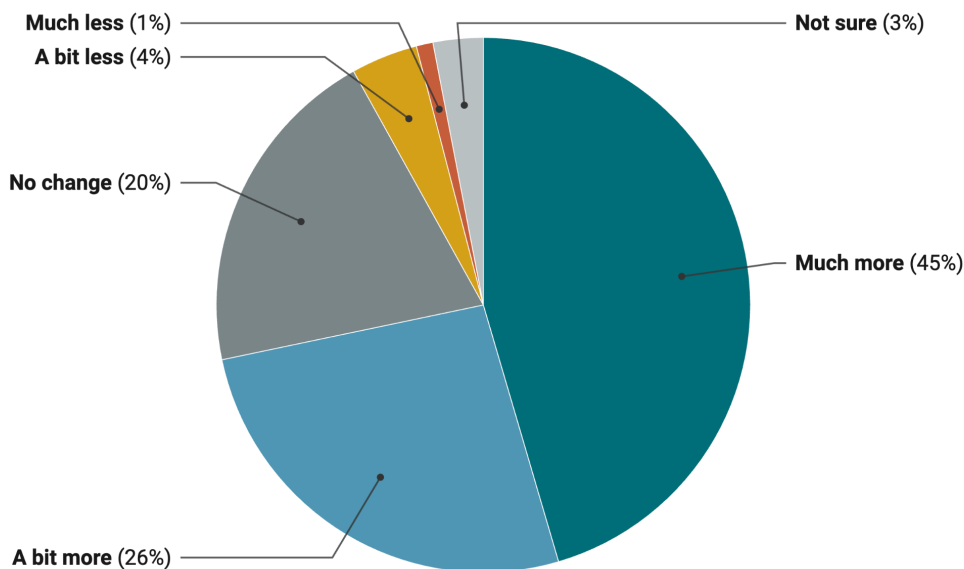
**Current Work Arrangement**



The wider public-interest dimension is also clear. More than seven in ten respondents say congestion or crowding at peak times in their area has become worse over the past 12 months: 45% say it has become much worse, while a further 26% say it has become a bit worse. Only 5% say it has become less severe, while 20% report no change.

## Changes in Congestion

*Figure: In your area, have you noticed any change in congestion/crowding at peak times in the past twelve months?*



These findings suggest that commuting is not only an individual inconvenience, but a broader social and infrastructural issue. Peak-time congestion affects journey times, reliability, stress, emissions and quality of life, including for people who are not themselves commuting long distances. In this context, remote and hybrid work can be understood as one way of easing pressure on transport networks, particularly at peak times.

Remote and hybrid work also reduce the time, cost and stress associated with commuting. Just as importantly, they change how time is used. Among those who save time on remote-working days, respondents reported using that time for household chores, wellbeing, sleep, sport or leisure, childcare, school runs, older relatives and community activity.

This means that time saved from commuting is not simply “free time”. It is redistributed into family life, household management, rest, wellbeing and local participation. In this sense, remote work has social value beyond the workplace in that it can reduce the burden of long

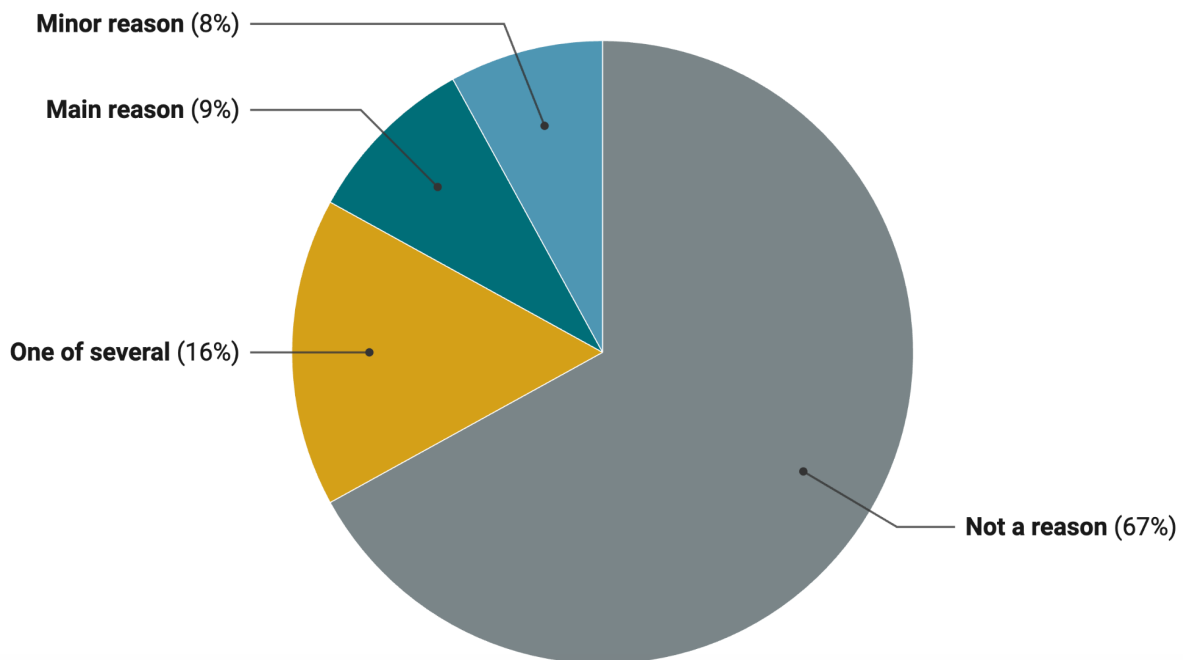
commutes, ease pressure on congested areas, and give workers more capacity to participate in everyday life closer to home.

# Housing, Location & Community

## Relocation

Remote work has implications beyond the workplace, shaping where people live, where they spend money, and how local economies benefit from changing work patterns. Since 2020, 31% of respondents say they have changed where they live. Among those who moved, around one-third say remote or hybrid work played some role in that decision, either as a main reason, a minor reason, or one of several reasons for the move.

*Figure: Was remote/hybrid work an important reason for your move? (Asked only of respondents who changed where they live since 2020.)*



This suggests that remote work is not the sole driver of residential change for most movers, but it is a meaningful factor for a sizeable minority. The ability to work remotely or on a hybrid basis may be giving some workers greater flexibility over where they live, potentially weakening the link between employment location and residential location.

“Being able to be fully remote... I’m actually in the process of moving now closer to my parents... that would not be possible.”

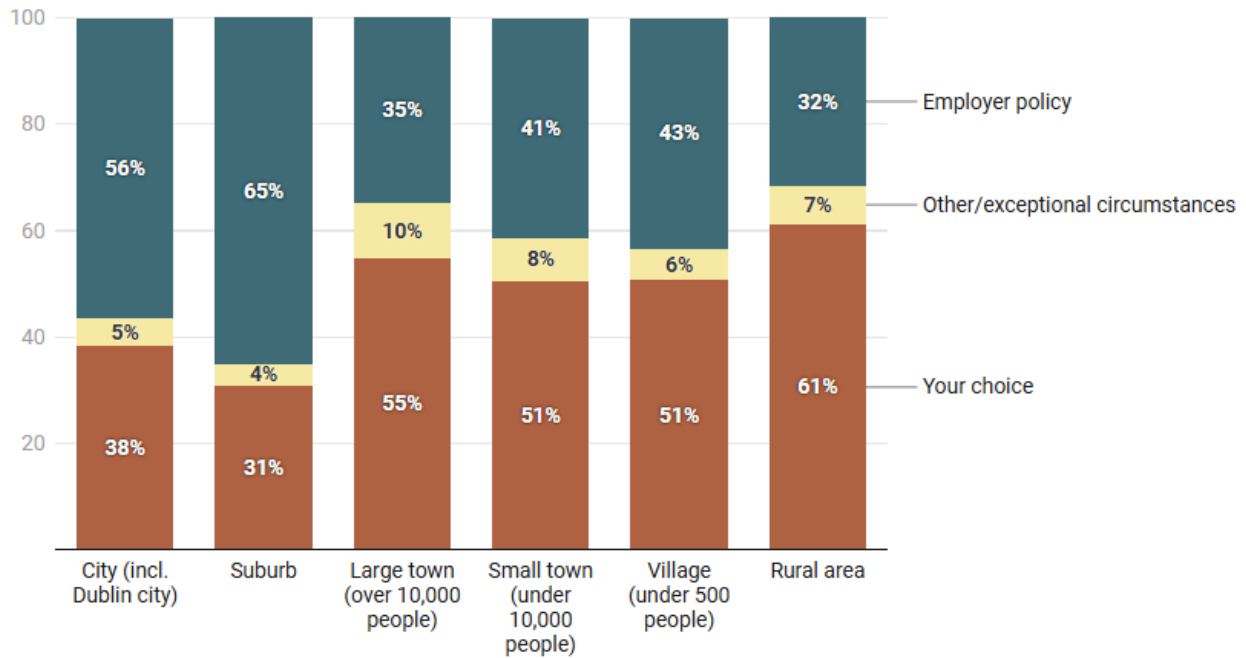
**Interview Participant**

The data also suggests that remote working is more of a choice for those living outside of Dublin & its suburbs . Where remote or hybrid work is described as mainly a function of where someone lives, this points to an important spatial dimension: remote work may help people remain in, move to, or spend more time in rural and local communities while staying connected to jobs that might otherwise require regular commuting.

The sentiment regarding relocation in the qualitative interviews is nuanced. Some participants noted that remote work increased their residential choice, which allowed them to live closer to family and in commuter towns. Others were moving back towards urban areas for career, family and in-person networking reasons. Although remote working often loosened the link between job location and home location, there was no direct link between the increased choice and relocation.

“The fact that we were both fully remote meant that we could prioritise [living beside the sea], and how close to Dublin we were didn't

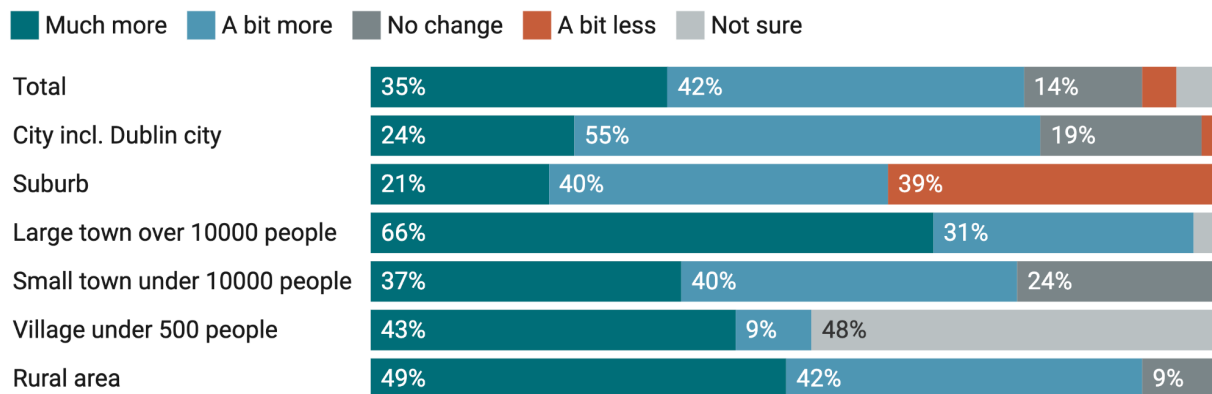
Figure: Relationship between working from home initiative and location



## Spending Locally

The local economic impact of remote work is particularly clear. More than three-quarters of remote or hybrid workers (77%) say they now spend more of their day-to-day money in their local area as a result of remote working. This points to a shift in everyday spending patterns, with money that might previously have been spent near workplaces now being redirected towards local shops, cafés, services and amenities.

Figure: Compared with a few years ago, say pre-2020, do you now spend more of your day-to-day money, food, coffee, services, in your local area due to remote working? *remote/hybrid working in your work mainly....*



Among those who report increased local spending, nearly half (49%) say this is mainly money they used to spend near their workplace. This makes local spending a redistribution story as much as a new-spending story. Remote work does not simply create additional spending; it changes where routine spending takes place. For local communities, especially outside major employment centres, this may represent an important economic benefit of remote and hybrid working.

“You can get your lunch in the local shop. That’s helping the local economy and helping all those small coffee shops.”

— Interview Participant

Remote working is more than a workplace issue, it also has implications for housing choices, commuting patterns, local spending, and the economic vitality of communities. The strongest evidence in the data is around local spending: remote and hybrid workers are not only working differently, but also redirecting everyday economic activity closer to home.

Several participants described remote work as increasing their presence in the places where they live. Interviewees noted that remote work has redirected routine spending and overall social presence into local areas. Participants described buying lunch locally, using local services, talking to neighbours, attending volunteer group meetings as key activities that have been unlocked by remote working. One spoke about their involvement in the local GAA club. Their accounts suggest that remote work can support local community life by giving workers more time, energy and presence in their own areas.

“It’s people who are living there because they want to live there... making sure there’s an art centre and lovely cafés and restaurants.”

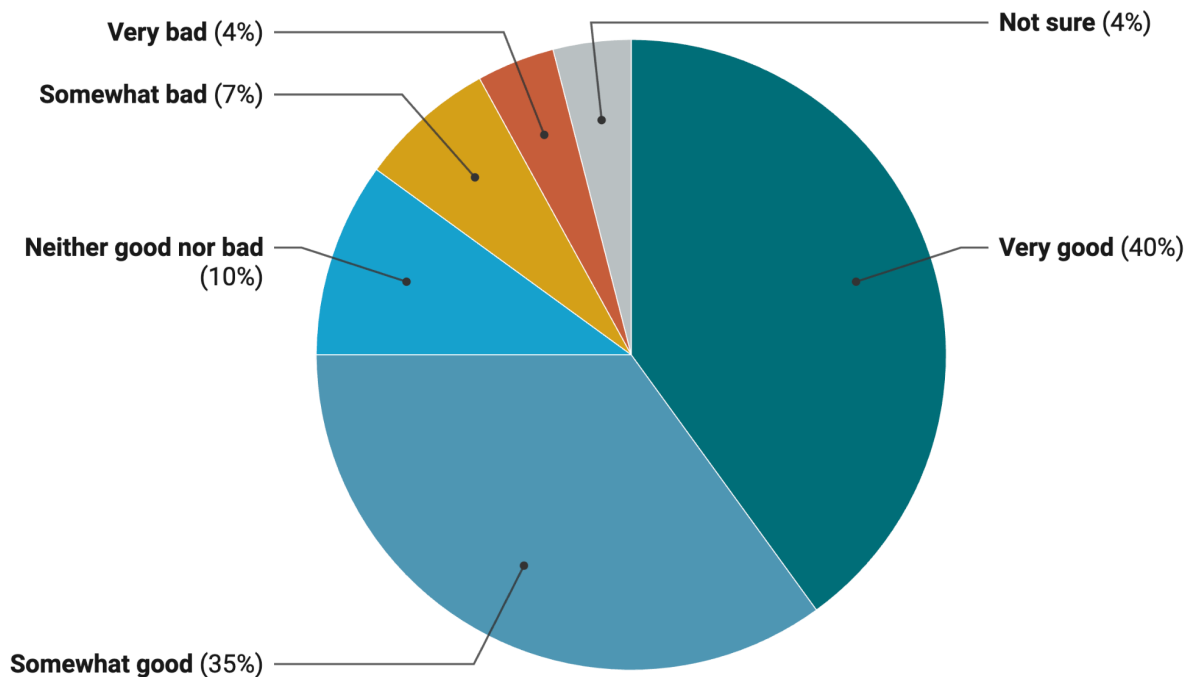
— Interview Participant

# Future of Work & Policy

## Overall Assessment

The survey shows that remote and hybrid work are viewed positively not only as individual working arrangements, but also in terms of their wider impact on Ireland. Three-quarters of respondents think remote/hybrid work has been good for Ireland overall, with 40% saying it has been very good and a further 35% saying it has been somewhat good. By contrast, only 11% say it has been bad for Ireland, while 10% say it has been neither good nor bad and 4% are not sure.

Figure: Overall, do you think remote/hybrid work has been good or bad for Ireland?



## Support for Measures

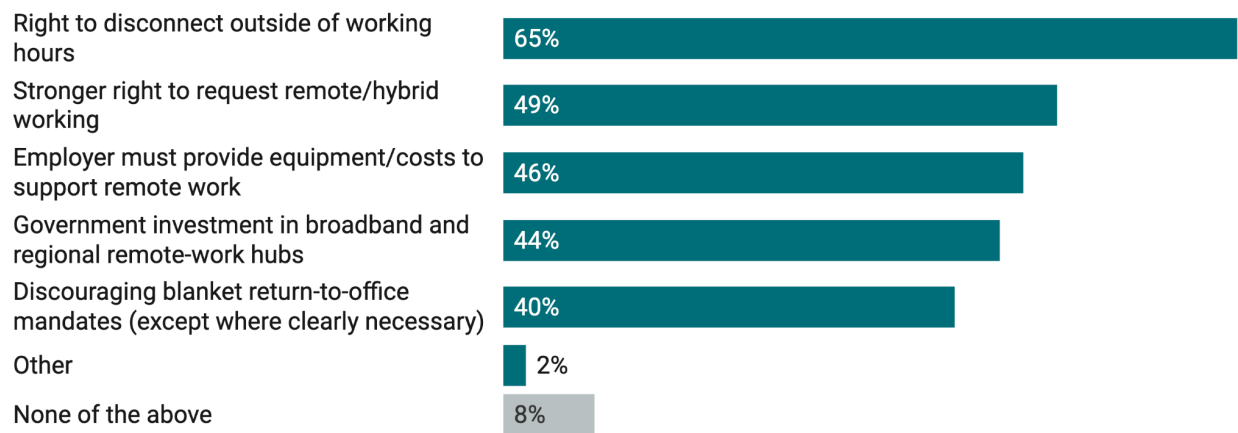
This broad positive assessment is important. It suggests that remote and hybrid work are not seen simply as private benefits for individual workers, but as arrangements with wider social, economic and community value. This is consistent with other findings in the report showing impacts on commuting, local spending, caring responsibilities, stress and work-life balance. Policy support is broadest where it speaks to rights, boundaries and practical supports. The right to disconnect is the strongest tested measure, supported by 65% of respondents. This

indicates that, alongside support for flexibility, there is also strong demand for clearer limits around working time and availability outside normal working hours.

The next most supported measures are a stronger right to request remote/hybrid working (49%) and employer provision of equipment or costs to support remote work (46%). These findings point to a practical policy agenda: respondents are not only supportive of remote and hybrid work in principle, but also want clearer rights, fairer access and better resourcing for those working remotely.

Support is also substantial for government investment in broadband and regional remote-work hubs (44%), suggesting that remote work is seen partly as an infrastructure issue. Meanwhile, 40% support discouraging blanket return-to-office mandates, except where clearly necessary. This does not imply opposition to office work itself, but it does indicate concern about one-size-fits-all approaches that reduce flexibility without clear justification.

Figure: Which of the following policies would you support? Select any that apply.



The interviews suggest that policy support is driven less by a demand for remote work in all circumstances and more by a desire for clearer standards. Alex argued that the current right to request is too vague because workers do not know how likely a request is to succeed or how to challenge an unreasonable refusal. Ciara made the related point that any legislation or union campaign must be careful and role specific, because some jobs simply cannot be done remotely.

“Paying for commuter tickets... those kind of incentives would get me on site, because it costs a fortune.”

Interview Participant

Participants also raised practical supports. Carolan said that if employers wanted more office attendance, financial supports such as commuter tickets would matter because travel “costs a fortune”. Shane supplemented this point, by noting that commuter tax saver tickets only allow for the best savings when he needs to commute five days a week. Kevin suggested that remote work, where possible, should be connected to paternity leave, reflecting the value it had for him as a new father.

“They would really have to give me better benefits... a promotion, or more money... to make me want to go in.”

Interview Participant

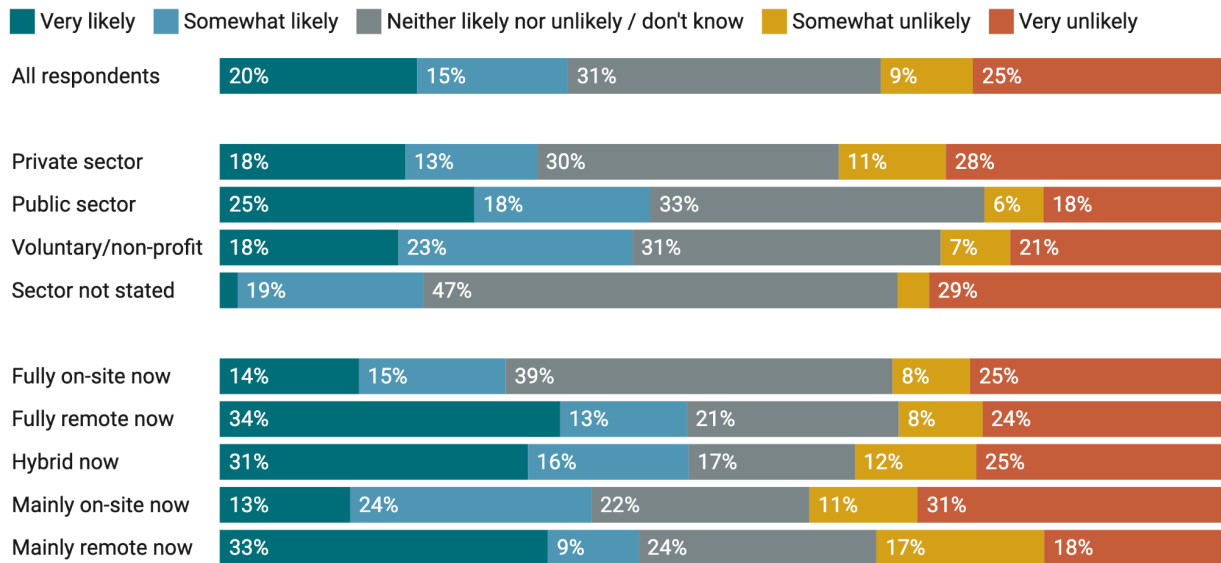
## Union Activity

The survey also suggests that remote and hybrid work could become a more prominent issue in workplace representation. If their employer reduced access to remote or hybrid work, over one-third of respondents say they would be likely to join, or get more involved in, a trade union to protect and enhance remote-working policies: 20% say they would be very likely and 15% say they would be somewhat likely.

This potential response is strongest among workers who currently have remote or hybrid arrangements. Among those who are fully remote, 47% say they would be likely to join or become more involved in a union if access was reduced. The equivalent figure is also 47% among hybrid workers, and 42% among those who are mainly remote. This compares with 29% among those fully on-site now.

There are also sector differences. Public-sector respondents appear more likely than private-sector respondents to say they would take this kind of collective action, with 43% of public-sector workers saying they would be likely to join or get more involved in a union, compared with 31% of private-sector workers. Voluntary and non-profit workers are also relatively high at 41%.

Figure: If your employer reduced your access to remote/hybrid work, how likely would you be to join or get more involved in a trade union to protect and enhance remote-working policies?



The findings show that remote and hybrid work have moved beyond being temporary pandemic-era arrangements. They are now linked to wider views about quality of life, regional development, workplace rights and collective representation. Overall, support is strongest for measures that preserve flexibility while also setting boundaries and ensuring that remote work is properly supported.

The qualitative evidence shows that remote and hybrid work could become a more prominent issue for workplace representation, but willingness to engage personally varies. Participants were particularly concerned about cases where workers accepted jobs on the understanding that remote work would be available, only for that arrangement to later change. In these cases, collective representation was framed as protection against unilateral changes in expectations. Some participants were sceptical of blanket union positions, especially where different roles have different operational needs. The strongest perceived union role emerging from the interviews is to push for fairness and enforceable standards, while recognising that the appropriate level of remote access will differ across roles and sectors.

“I think the trade union should be behind that. It’s a work-life balance issue”

## Conclusion: Policy Implications

Remote and hybrid working have become established features of the Irish workplace since the pandemic.

This report shows that remote work has dramatic implications for commuting, caring responsibilities, and work-life balance more generally.

It also shows the impact on local economies and local society more generally, with higher-income employees in particular relocating to less urban parts of the country and spending more in those local economies.

The practical everyday benefits are very clear: reduced stress, time saved from commuting, lower care costs for some households, and greater ability to manage family responsibilities. Overall, it is hard to argue that remote work is not having a substantial positive impact on the individual lives of those fortunate enough to avail of these opportunities.

These benefits appear to be especially important given demands for government funding to support infrastructure, childcare and healthcare.

Workers clearly value the flexibility of hybrid work in particular, and for some, access to remote or hybrid work is a factor in determining whether to remain in a job. One can conclude that remote working may be supporting increased labour-market participation, particularly where it helps workers manage commuting, caring responsibilities or other constraints. The findings therefore suggest that there are wider economic costs of return-to-office decisions.

And yet, there is a tension. Many workers are being asked to return to the office in greater numbers. Many employees also disagree with much of the rationale for this shift, but have little power

The evidence supports a practical and balanced approach: to protect and improve access to remote and hybrid work where it is feasible. Remote work is not a complete solution to workplace inequality, caring pressures or commuting burdens, but it is now an important part of how many workers manage their working lives.