



Remote working during COVID-19: Ireland's national survey initial report

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Remote working during COVID-19

Ireland's National Survey:
Initial Report | May 2020

**NUI Galway in conjunction with the
Western Development Commission**



NUI GALWAY
responding to COVID-19

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Acknowledgments

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Further Information

Further information about the survey and remote working project can be found on the Whitaker Institute [website](#) and the Western Development Commission [website](#).

How to Cite this Report

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Executive Summary

This report presents the headline findings from a national online survey of remote working in Ireland during COVID-19. The data were collected from employees across a wide range of industries and sectors over a one-week period from 27 April to 5 May 2020. A total of 7,241 responses were received. The key findings are as follows:

- Just over half of respondents (51%) never worked remotely before the COVID-19 crisis. Of these workers, more than three-quarters (78%) would like to continue to work remotely after the crisis is over.
- Nearly half of respondents (48%) report that it is easy or somewhat easy to work effectively these days. 37% indicate that it is somewhat difficult or difficult to work effectively these days.
- The top three challenges of working remotely at present are:
 1. not being able to switch off from work
 2. collaboration and communication with colleagues and co-workers is harder
 3. poor physical workspace.
- The top three advantages of working remotely at present are:
 1. no traffic and no commute
 2. reduced costs of going to work and commuting
 3. greater flexibility as to how to manage the working day.
- The majority (87%) of respondents report they have the equipment they need to work from home. However, the provision of better ergonomic equipment is one of the key changes suggested by employees to help with their well-being and productivity. Many also report the need for more suitable workspace within their home.
- The key changes and improvements employees suggest that their manager and employers should make regarding remote working are:
 - **Assist with provision of better and more ergonomic physical workspace:** Provide good equipment including provision of a good (ergonomic) chair, provision of printer, and better screens. The kitchen table seems to be a common workstation for many respondents.
 - **Better management of video-conferencing:** Some respondents felt that more video-conferencing and virtual meetings would assist them to feel more connected. However, if overdone, video-conferencing can cause stress and pressure.
 - **Reduce expectations and workload to more realistic levels:** A common theme was the need for managers to acknowledge the challenges of managing childcare, home-schooling and work expectations.
 - **Regular communication and check-ins:** Respondents indicated that regular communications and check-ins are important both in team and one-to-one settings. Employers are encouraged to keep social contact and break the feeling of isolation and loneliness. This can be achieved through regular communication and initiatives like virtual coffee breaks. However, managers need to strike a balance to ensure communications and check-ins are not excessive or perceived as micro-management.
 - **Well-being:** Many respondents indicated that their employers are providing well-being supports through the employee assistance programme (EAP). A

- number of additional well-being suggestions were provided: online yoga; well-being training; mindfulness & meditation; exercise & fitness; and counselling. Respondents would appreciate if their employers and managers acknowledge, through their actions, the toll the crisis can have on employees' mental health.
- **Managing annual leave and time off:** Many respondents indicated that they are taking annual leave to care for children. There is a call for more time off to care for children and more flexibility in terms of hours of work to cater for caring responsibilities at this time.
- The majority of respondents somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed that their organisation is providing them with ergonomic and health & safety advice for working remotely.
 - The majority of respondents strongly agree or agree that:
 - their organisation is regularly communicating with them at present (85%)
 - they feel informed by their organisation at present (81%)
 - their organisation is doing its best in the circumstances (85%)
 - In relation to productivity: 37% of respondents indicated that their productivity working remotely during COVID-19 is about the same as normal; 30% report that their productivity is higher than normal; 25% report that their productivity is lower than normal; and 9% of respondents indicate that it is impossible to compare productivity as the demand for products/services/business has changed.
 - The majority of respondents (83%) indicated that they would like to work remotely after the crisis is over. Some 12% indicated they would like to work remotely on a daily basis; 42% indicated they would like to work remotely several times a week; 29% indicated they would like to work remotely several times a month; and 16% indicated they do not want to continue working remotely.
 - 21% of public sector respondents indicated they do not want to work remotely after the crisis is over. The corresponding figure for private sector respondents is 11%.
 - Respondents aged 60 or over represent the highest proportion (25%) of those who do not wish to work remotely after the crisis. Respondents aged 31-40 represent the highest proportion (86%) of those who want to work remotely for some or all the time after the crisis is over.
 - The highest proportion of respondents who would like to work remotely on a daily basis are those who work in the ICT sector (22%). The highest proportion of respondents who do not want to work remotely after the crisis is over are those in the education sector (31%).
 - In terms of location, for those who would like to work remotely after the crisis is over, 51% would like to work from home; 36% would like to work a mix of home/hub or work-sharing space and onsite; 11% would like to work in a mix of home and hub/work-sharing space; and 2% would like to work solely in a hub/work-sharing space.
 - Nearly 31% of respondents indicated there are no challenges for them to continue working remotely after the crisis is over. For those who want to work remotely post-COVID-19, the following are the key challenges reported in order of most cited: their organisation will not support it; inadequate equipment and/or resources; and their manager will not support it.

Introduction & Background

The COVID-19 crisis catapulted hundreds of thousands of employees and their employers into a work pattern and routine vastly different to their normal daily work experience. This radical change happened suddenly and for the vast majority the change effectively occurred overnight.

While some employees have experience of remote working, many find themselves working remotely having had little time to plan, negotiate, organise and set-up remote working in conjunction with their employer and manager.

NUI Galway and the Western Development Commission (WDC) undertook a national survey in Ireland to gather data on employees' experiences of remote working in these unprecedented times.

The survey gathered empirical evidence and data to address the following questions:

1. How are employees adjusting to remote working, what is going well and what changes would employees suggest?
2. How is remote working impacting employee productivity?
3. What are employees remote working preferences post-COVID-19?
4. What lessons can be learned about remote working that could be retained/sustained post-COVID-19?

This report presents the initial findings from the national survey.

Survey Methodology and Response

The national survey was conducted between 27th April and 5th May 2020 using the online Qualtrics survey platform. The survey was designed by the research team at NUI Galway and the Western Development Commission. The survey included a mix of quantitative questions, Likert-scale questions, and open-ended free-text qualitative questions.

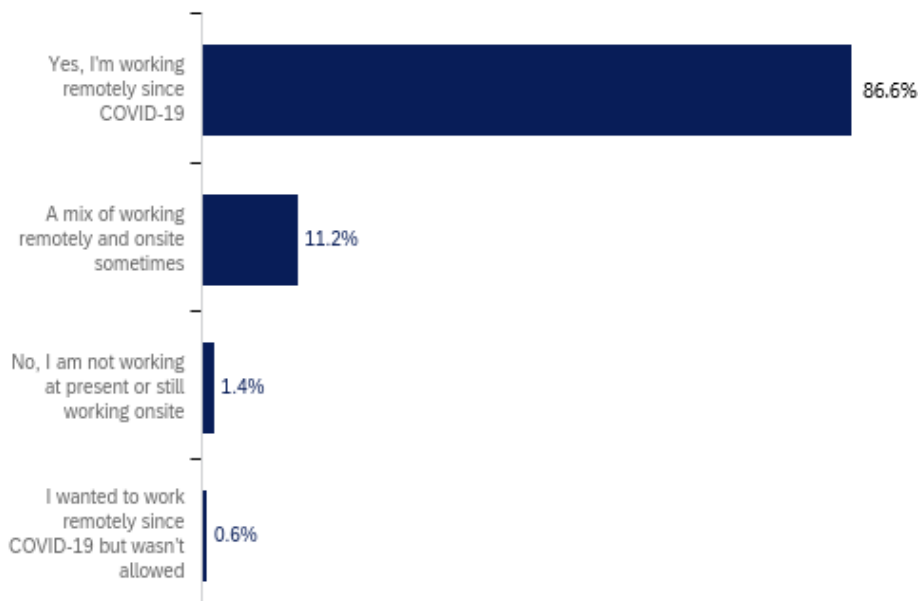
A total of **7,241** usable responses were received. A number of responses were removed from the database as they were completed by respondents outside of the island of Ireland or were incomplete.

Remote Working Status

Nearly 87% of respondents indicated they were working remotely because of the outbreak of COVID-19.

11% were working remotely sometimes and working onsite sometimes.

A small percentage (1.4%) were either not working or still working onsite and 0.6% indicated they wanted to work remotely since COVID-19



but were not allowed to do so. Respondents who were not working at present or only working onsite did not complete the remainder of the survey questions about remote working and were guided to the end of the survey.

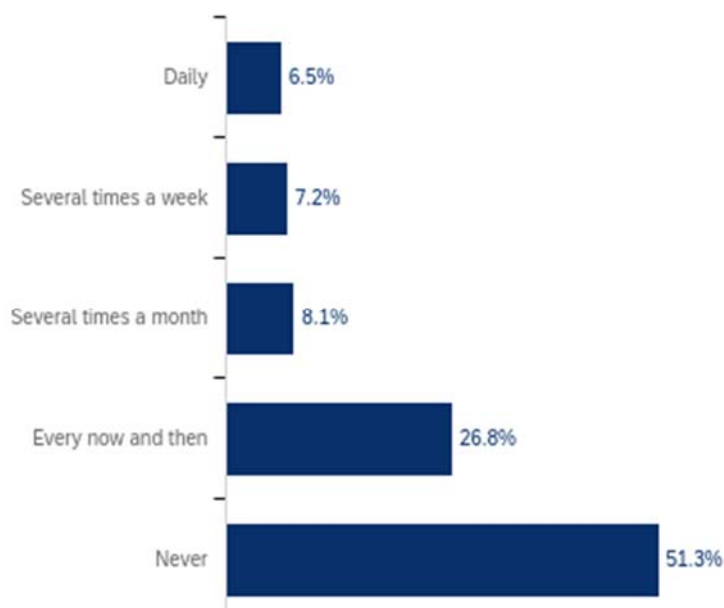
For those who wanted to work remotely since the outbreak of COVID-19 but were not allowed, the key reasons cited were:

- Not possible to do the job remotely due to nature of work
- Inadequate resources such as lack of broadband access, ICT equipment and access to work systems
- Lack of trust from employer to work remotely

Frequency of Remote Working Before COVID-19

Just over half of respondents (51%) never worked remotely before COVID-19.

27% worked remotely every now and then; 8% worked remotely several times a month; 7% worked remotely several times a week; and 6.5% worked remotely on a daily basis.

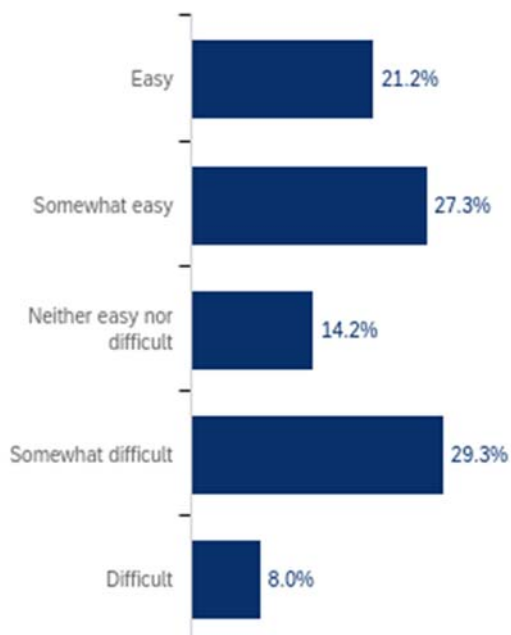


Ease or Difficulty of Working Effectively at Present

21% of respondents indicated that it is easy to work effectively these days and 27% indicated it is somewhat easy to work effectively these days.

29% indicate that it is somewhat difficult to work effectively these days and 8% report that it is difficult to work effectively these days.

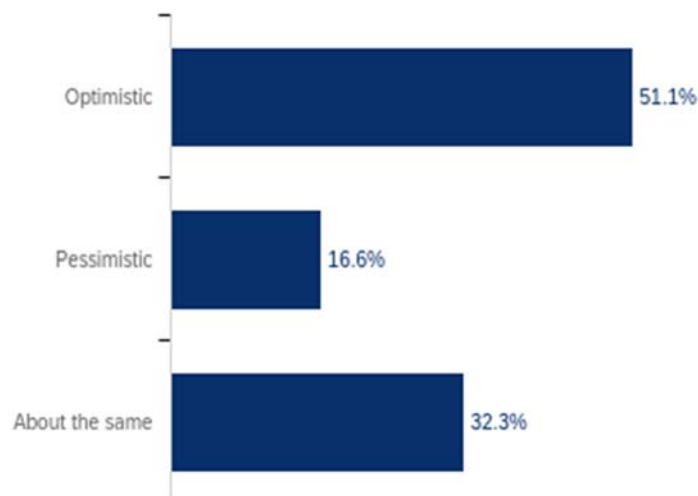
The remaining 14% report that it is neither easy nor difficult to work effectively at present.



Optimism about Remote Working

Respondents were asked if they were more or less optimistic about working from home since doing so because of COVID-19.

Just over half of respondents (51%) indicated they are more optimistic, 32% indicated they are about the same, and 17% indicated they are more pessimistic about working from home since the COVID-19 outbreak.



Top 3 Challenges of Working Remotely

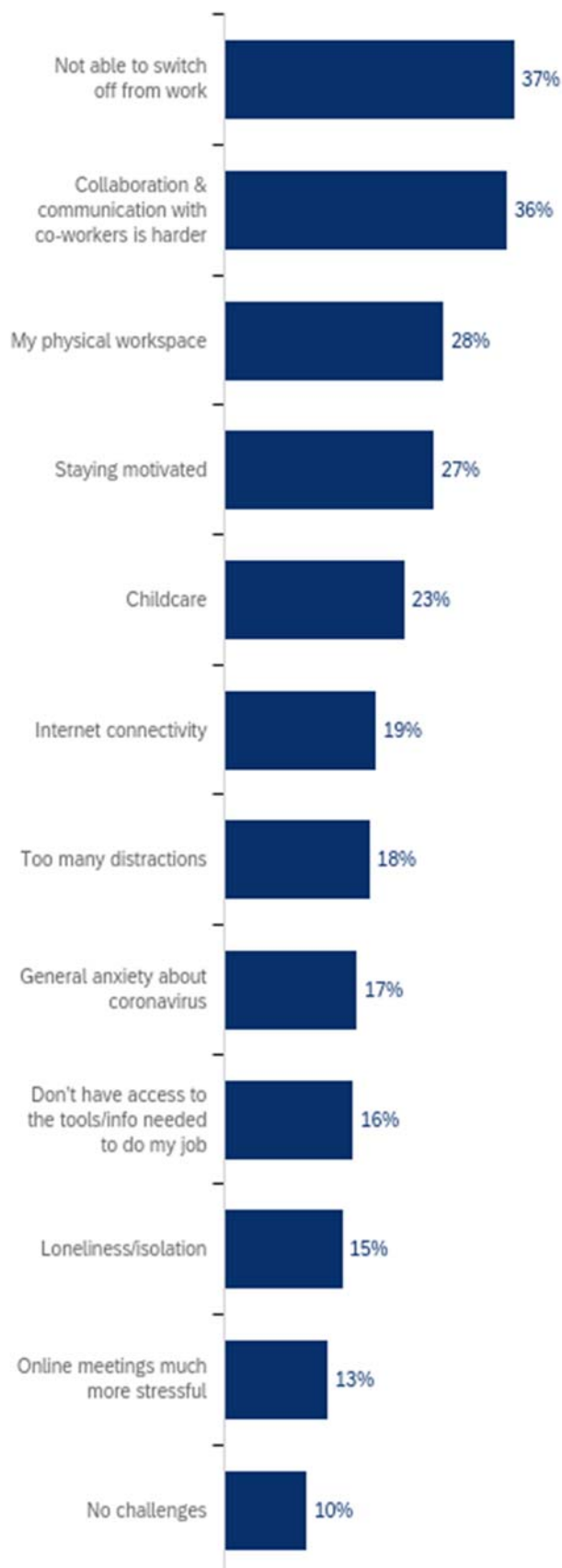
Respondents were asked what are the top three challenges they face working remotely at present. The top three challenges reported are:

1. Not being able to switch off from work
2. Collaboration and communication with colleagues and co-workers is harder
3. Poor physical workspace

Some additional open-ended qualitative comments were provided by respondents who selected the 'other' challenges category. The main recurrent themes to emerge are:

- Juggling home-schooling and work
- Manager expectations too high
- Increased workload
- Missing social interaction with colleagues and clients/customers/service users

10% of respondents indicated they are facing no challenges working remotely at present.



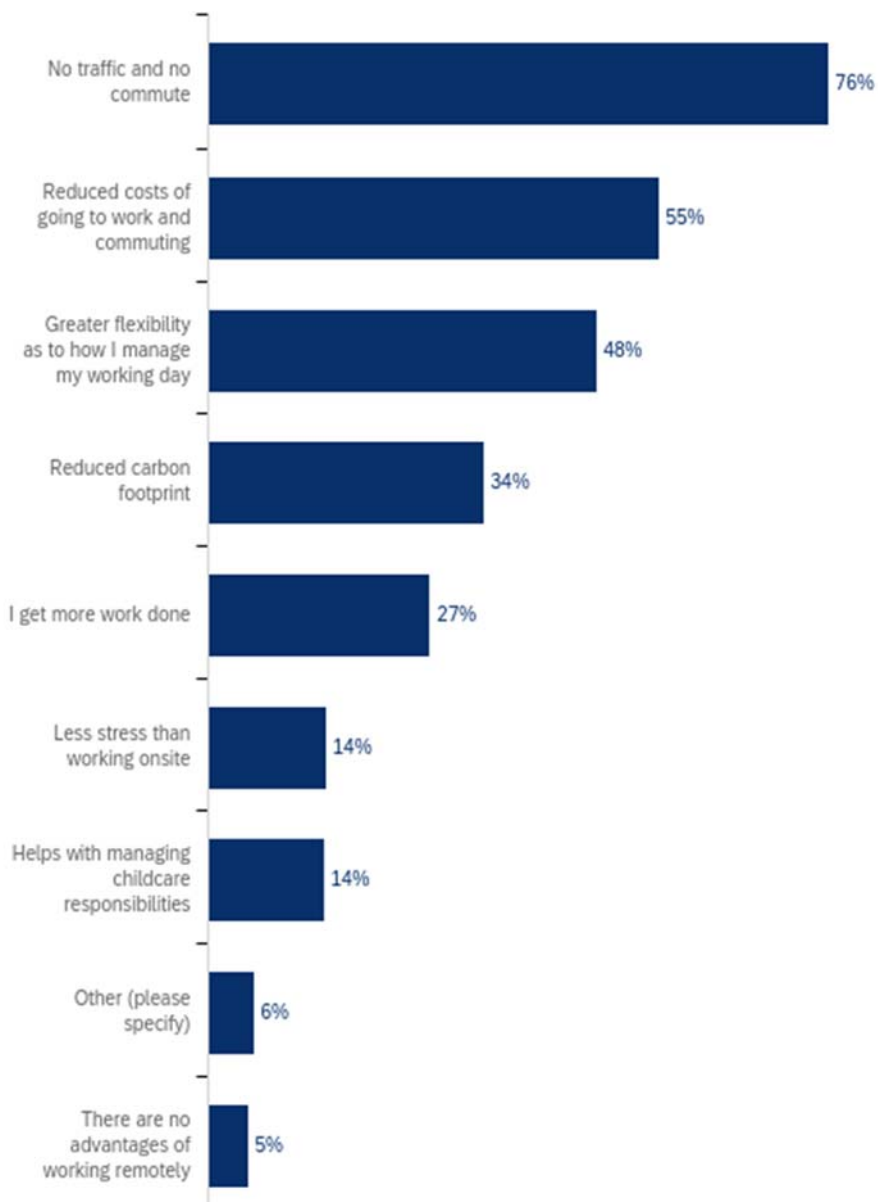
Top 3 Advantages of Working Remotely

Respondents were asked what are the top three advantages of working remotely. The top three advantages reported are:

1. No traffic and no commute
2. Reduced costs of going to work and commuting
3. Greater flexibility as to how to manage the working day

Some additional open-ended qualitative comments were provided by respondents who selected the 'other' advantages category. The main recurrent themes to emerge are:

- Less risk of contracting COVID-19
- Financial savings from not eating out
- More time for self, family and exercise
- Eating healthier (no "canteen food")
- Less distractions from colleagues



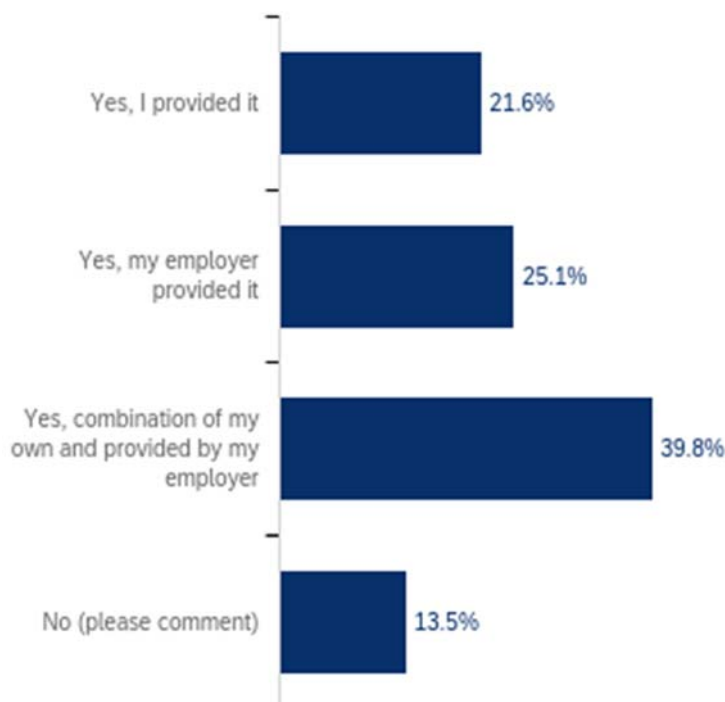
5% of respondents report that there were no advantages to working remotely.

Workspace & Equipment to Work Remotely

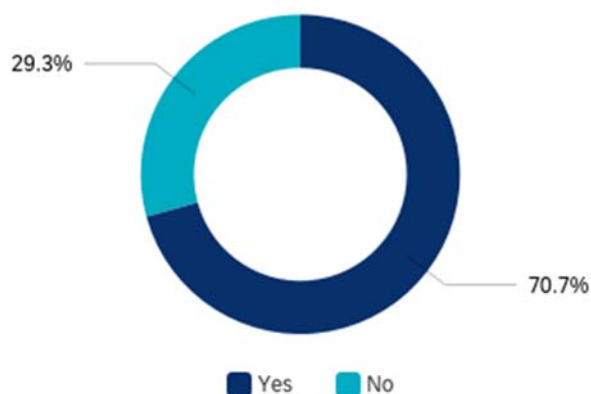
Respondents were asked if they have the equipment they need to work from home and who provided it.

The majority (86.5%) of respondents report they have the equipment they need to work from home. Of these, 22% provided their equipment themselves, 25% report the equipment was provided by their employer, and nearly 40% indicate that it is a combination of themselves and their employer who provided the equipment.

13.5% indicate that they do not have the equipment they need to do their job at home.



71% report that they have a dedicated workspace at home where they can work without too many interruptions.



A number of open-ended qualitative responses were provided by those who indicated that they do not have the equipment they need at present to work from home:

- No proper desk
- No printer/scanner
- No proper chair
- Using a personal laptop rather than a work laptop
- No proper office/workspace
- Lack of remote/virtual access to work systems/files/servers



Changes to Support Remote Working

Respondents were asked what is the top thing their manager and employer could do to help them adjust to remote working at present, assist with their well-being, and help their productivity. The following are the key themes to emerge from the open-ended qualitative responses provided:

- **Assist with provision of better and more ergonomic physical workspace:** provide good equipment including provision of a good (ergonomic) chair, provision of printer, and better screens. The kitchen table seems to be a common workstation for many respondents.
- **Better management of video-conferencing:** responses were mixed. Some respondents felt that more video-conferencing and virtual meetings would assist them to feel connected. However, if overdone, it can cause stress and pressure.
- **Reduce expectations and workload to more realistic levels:** a common theme was the need for managers to realise the challenges of managing childcare, home-schooling and expectations to deliver work. Many indicated that productivity at home cannot be the same as productivity at work when the lockdown means many are simultaneously managing caring with work but without the usual supports.
- **Regular communication and check-ins:** respondents indicated that regular communications and check-ins are important both in team and one-to-one settings. Employers are encouraged to keep social contact and break the feeling of isolation and loneliness through regular communication and initiatives like virtual coffee breaks. However, managers need to strike a balance to ensure communications and check-ins are not excessive or perceived as micro-management.
- **Well-being:** many respondents indicated that their employers are providing some good well-being supports through the employee assistance programme (EAP). A number of well-being suggestions were provided including:
 - online yoga
 - well-being training
 - mindfulness & meditation
 - exercise & fitness
 - counselling

A common theme was that respondents would appreciate that their employers and managers acknowledge, through their actions, the toll the crisis can have on employees' mental health.

- **Managing annual leave and time off:** many respondents referred to the need to examine HR policies and adapt to the current challenges. Many respondents indicated that they are taking annual leave to care for children but it is not 'annual leave' in the spirit of annual leave policies. There is a call for more time off to care for children and more flexibility in terms of hours of work to cater for caring responsibilities at this time.

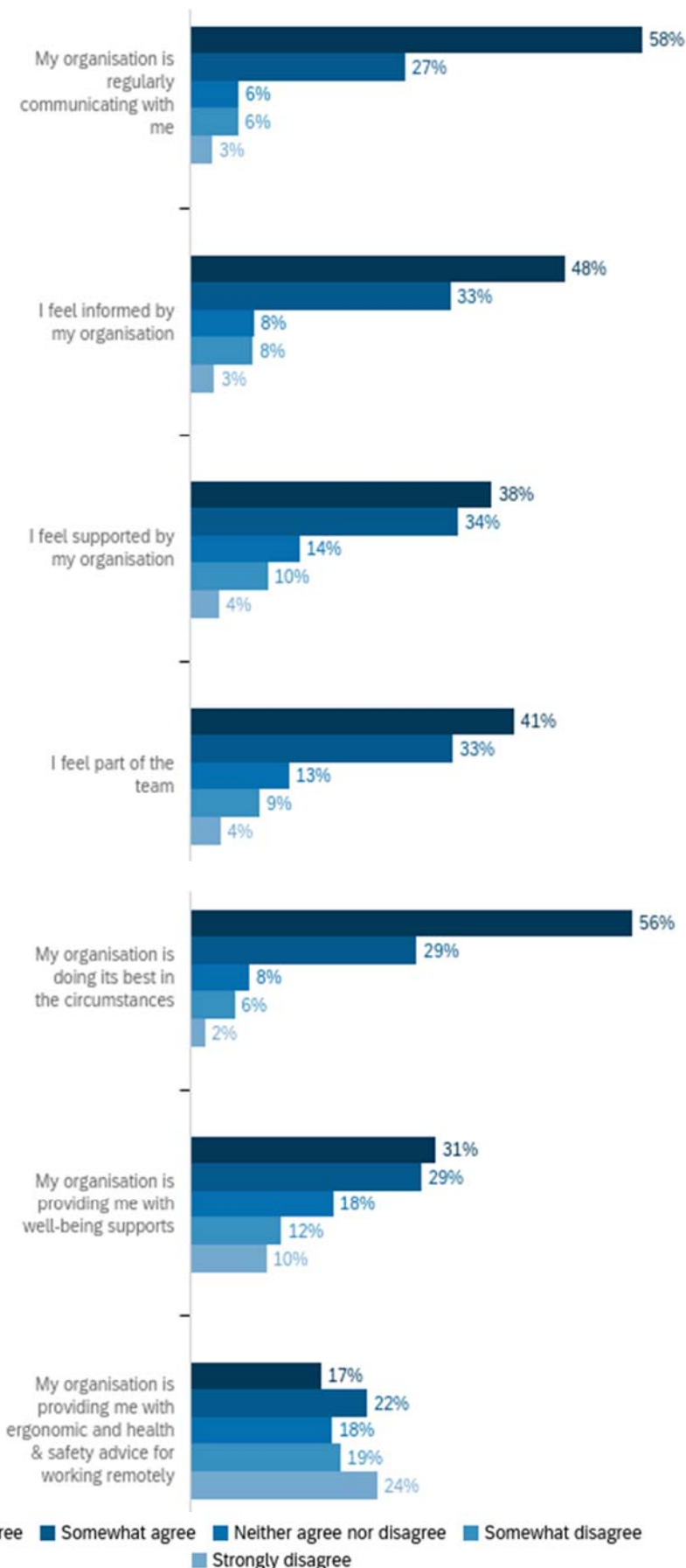
Organisational Support

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with a range of statements regarding support from their organisation at present and how it is managing remote working.

The majority of respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed that:

- their organisation is regularly communicating with them at present (85%)
- they feel informed by their organisation at present (81%)
- they feel supported by their organisation (72%)
- they feel part of the team (74%)
- their organisation is doing its best in the circumstances (85%)
- their organisation is providing them with well-being supports (60%)

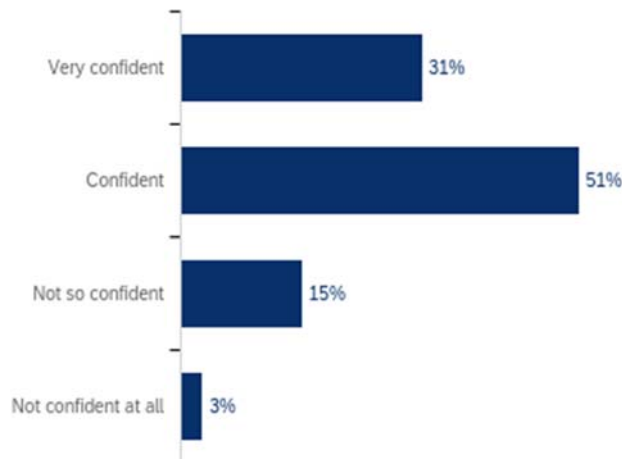
The majority of respondents somewhat disagreed or strongly disagreed (43%) that their organisation is providing them with ergonomic and health & safety advice for working remotely.



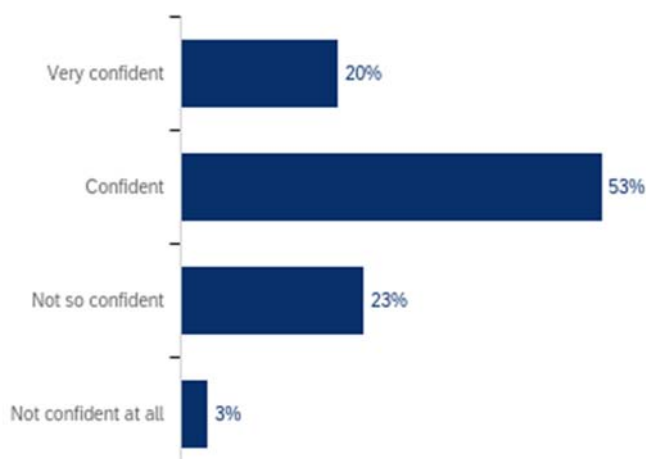
Confidence in Leadership & Resources to Cope with the Crisis

The majority of respondents reported that they are confident or very confident that:

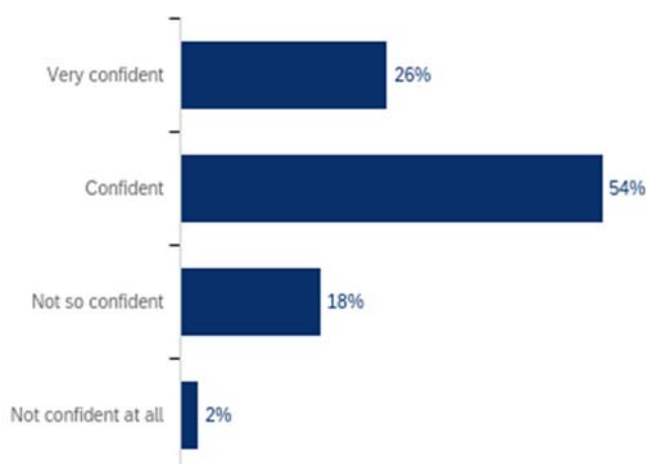
- their organisation’s leadership team will make the right decisions to manage through the crisis (82%)



- they have the right resources and benefits from their organisation to help support them through this period (73%)



- they have the right support network outside of work to help through this period (80%)



Productivity

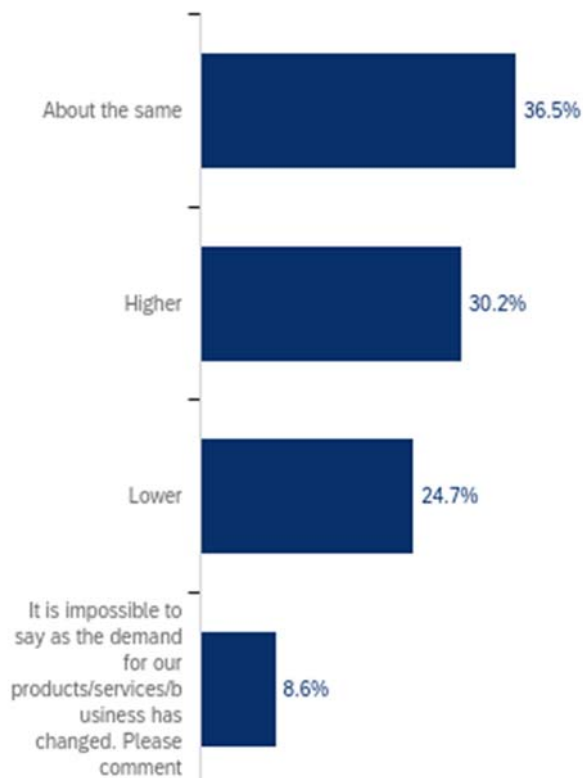
Respondents were asked to indicate how their current productivity while working remotely compares to normal.

Nearly 37% of respondents indicated that their productivity working remotely during COVID-19 is about the same as normal.

30% report that their productivity working remotely during COVID-19 is higher than normal.

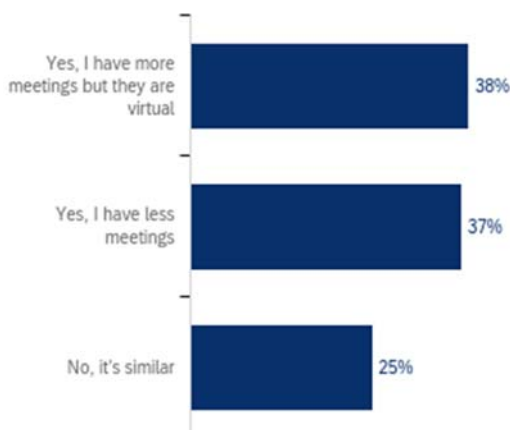
Nearly 25% report that their productivity while working remotely during COVID-19 is lower than normal.

Nearly 9% of respondents indicate that it is impossible to compare productivity as the demand for products/services/business has changed.

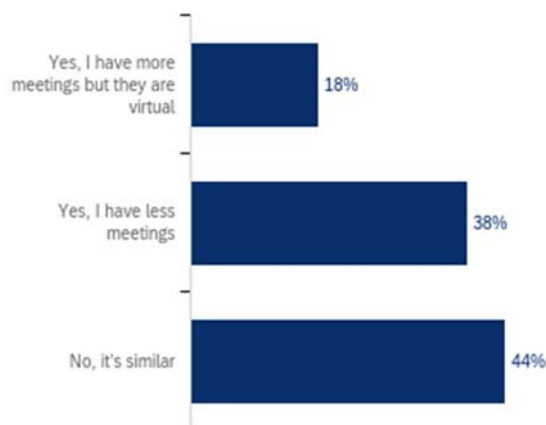


Impact of Remote Working on Meetings

Respondents were asked how remote working has changed the way they work with colleagues within their organisation and they responded as follows:



Respondents were asked how remote working has changed the way they work with others outside their organisation and they responded as follows:



Impact of Remote Working on Meeting New Clients/Customers/Colleagues

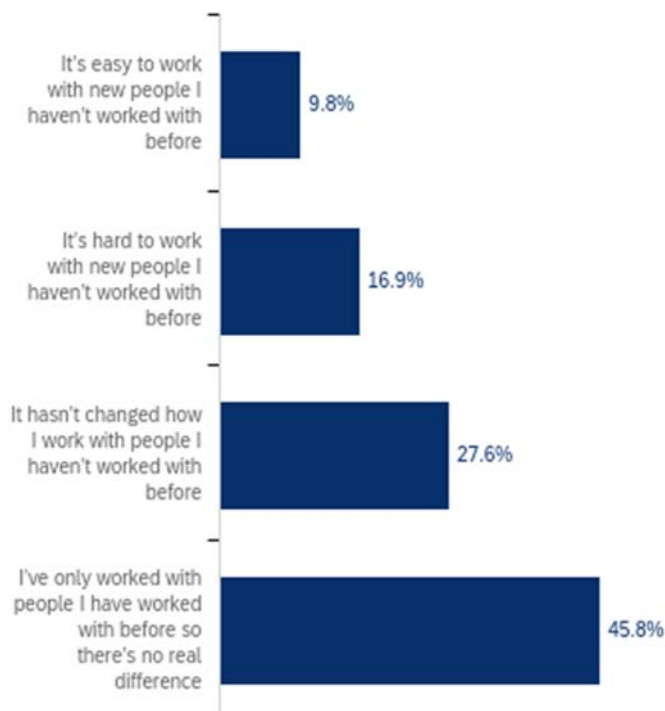
Respondents were asked how remote working has changed how they meet new clients, customers or colleagues.

The majority (nearly 46%) report no real difference as they are only working with people whom they had worked with before COVID-19.

Nearly 28% report that remote working has not changed how they work with new people whom they had not worked with before.

Nearly 17% report that it is hard to work with new people now whom they have not worked with before.

Nearly 10% report that it is easy to work with new people whom they have not worked with before.



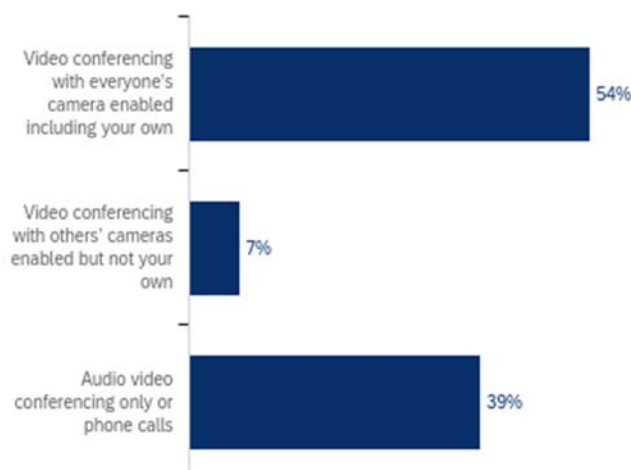
Virtual Communication Preferences

Respondents were asked what their preferences were when communicating virtually for work.

54% indicated that they prefer video conferencing with everyone's camera enabled including their own.

39% indicated that they prefer audio only during video conference calls or prefer phone calls.

7% indicated that they prefer to leave their own camera off when video conferencing with others.

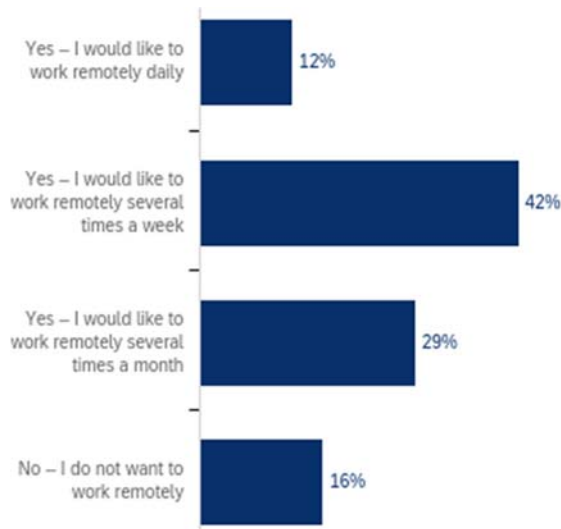


Remote Working Preferences Post-COVID-19

Respondents were asked if, given the choice, they would like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over.

The majority (83%) indicated that they would like to **work remotely after the crisis**:

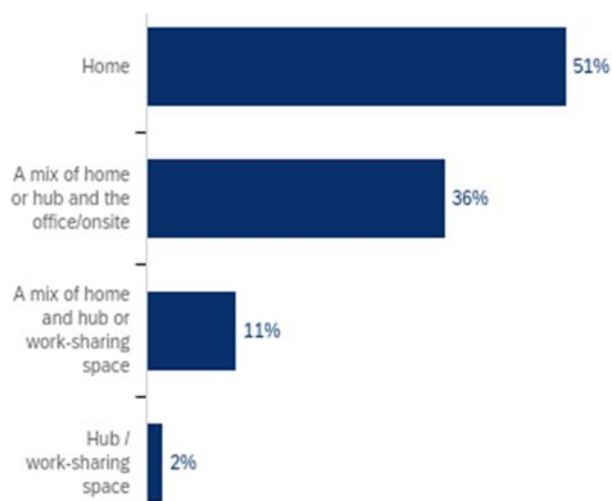
- 12% indicated they would like to work remotely on a daily basis
- 42% indicated they would like to work remotely several times a week
- 29% indicated they would like to work remotely several times a month



16% indicated they do not want to continue working remotely after the crisis is over.

In terms of **location**, for those who would like to work remotely after the crisis is over:

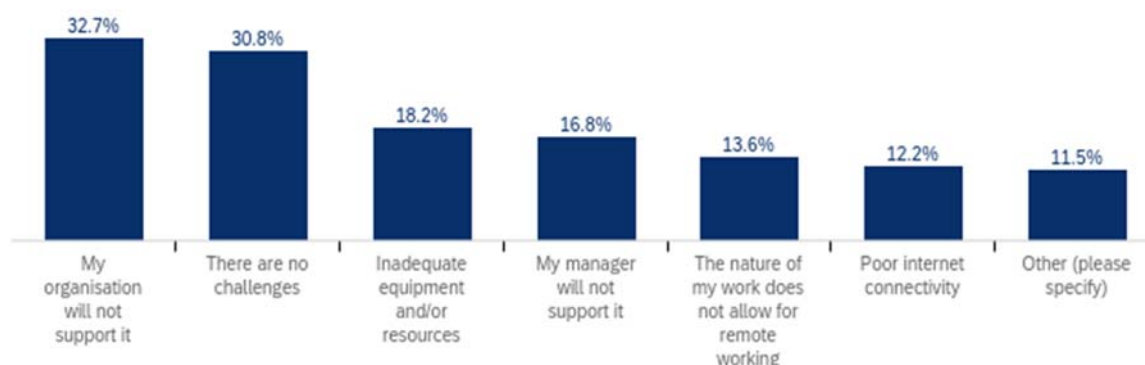
- 51% would like to work from home
- 36% would like to work a mix of from home/hub or work-sharing space and onsite
- 11% would like to work in a mix of home and hub/work-sharing space
- 2% would like to work solely in a hub/work-sharing space



For those who want to work remotely post-COVID-19, the following are the key **challenges** reported in order of most cited:

- Their organisation will not support it (33%)
- Inadequate equipment and/or resources (18%)
- Their manager will not support it (17%)

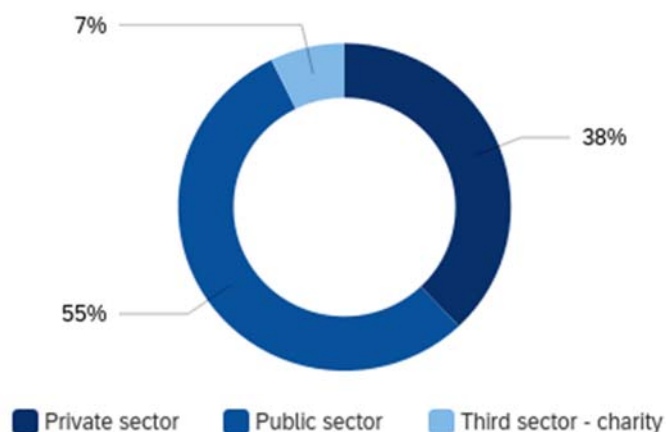
Nearly 31% of respondents indicated there are no challenges for them to continue working remotely after the crisis is over.



Demographics and Respondent Profile

Sector

- 55% of respondents work in the public sector
- 38% of respondents work in the private sector
- 7% of respondents work in the third sector



Industry

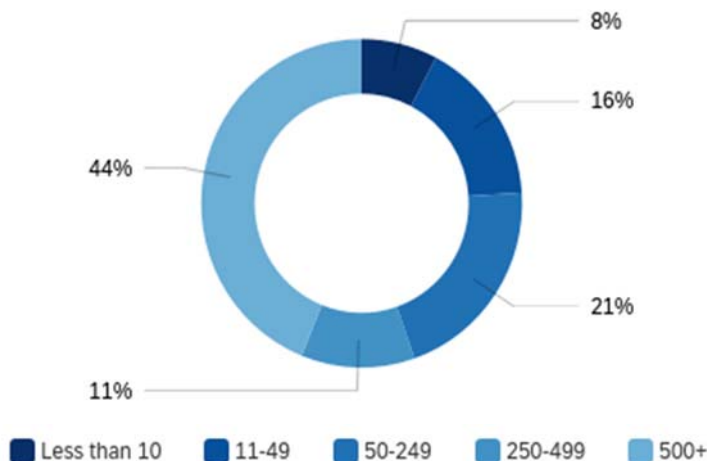
The following table sets out the percentage of respondents working across different industry categories.

1	Administrative and support services including travel agents	4.1%
2	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1.0%
3	Arts, entertainment and recreation including sport	1.3%
4	Construction	1.9%
5	Education	23.2%
6	Financial, banking and insurance activities	9.9%
7	Health and social work activities	7.9%
8	Hospitality (accommodation, hotels, restaurants and food service)	0.7%
9	Information, communication and telecommunications	7.6%
10	Manufacturing	3.7%
11	Mining and quarrying	0.1%
12	Professional, scientific and technical activities including consulting	8.6%
13	Public and civil service administration and defence	17.0%
14	Real estate activities	0.4%
15	Retail and wholesale (clothes, goods, motor etc.)	1.5%
16	Transportation, postage, courier and storage	0.8%
17	Utilities (electricity, gas, water supply; sewerage, waste management)	1.4%
18	Other	8.9%

Organisation Size

Respondents were asked to indicate the number of employees in their organisation:

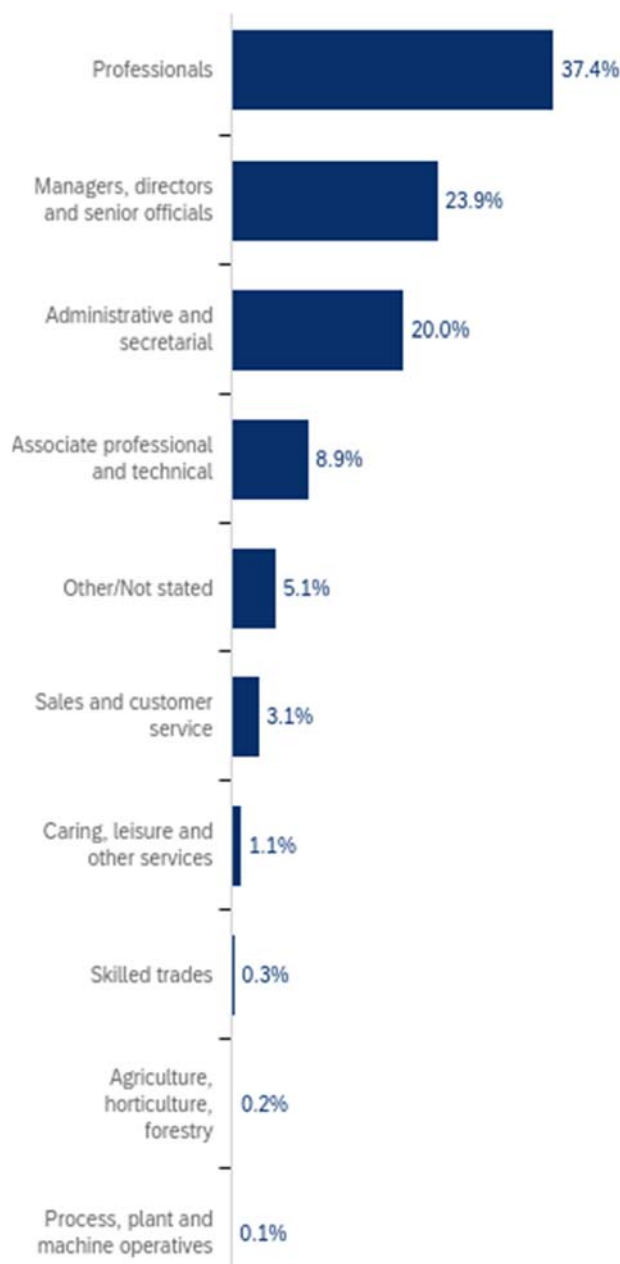
- 44% worked in organisations with 500 or more employees
- 11% worked in organisations with 250-499 employees
- 21% worked in organisations with 50-249 employees
- 16% worked in organisations with 11-49 employees
- 8% worked in organisations with 10 employees or less.



Occupation

The majority of respondents described themselves as professionals (37%).

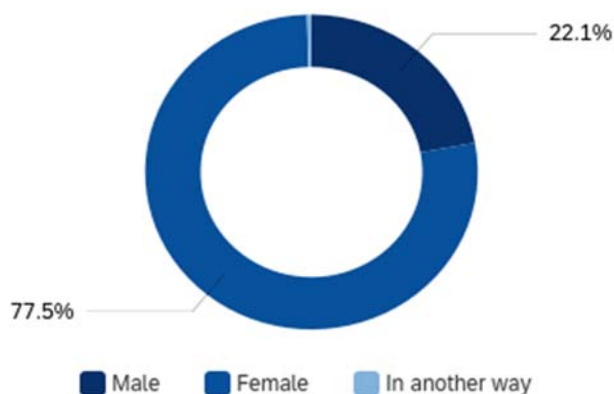
Managers, directors and senior officials were the second highest occupational category (24%) followed by administrative and secretariat (20%)



Gender

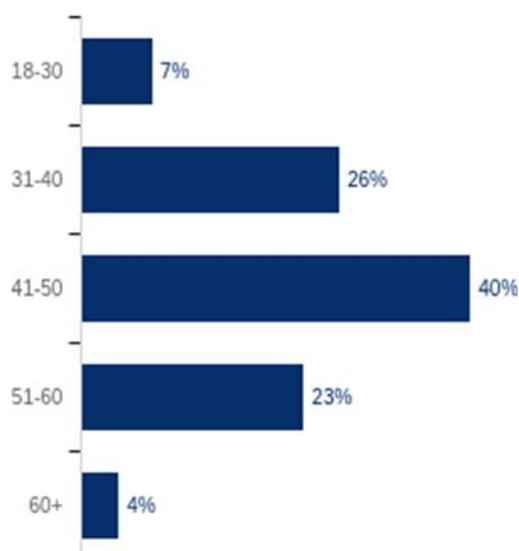
Respondents were asked how they would describe their gender.

- 77.5% were female
- 22.1% were male
- 0.4% describe themselves in another way.



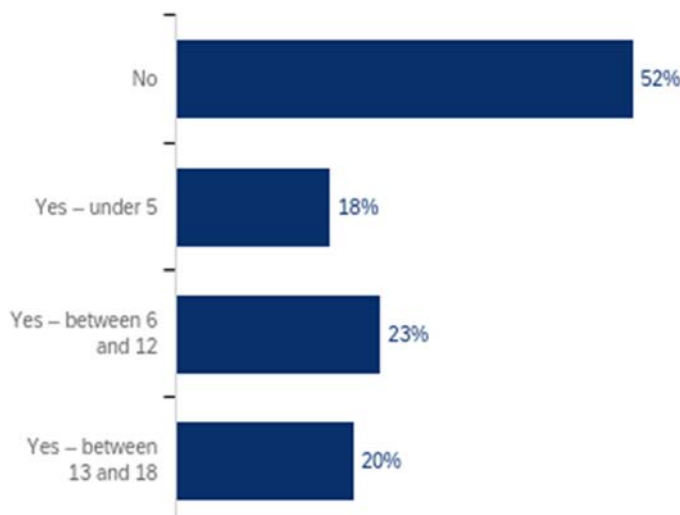
Age

40% were aged between 41-50; 26% were aged between 31-40; 23% were aged between 51-60; 7% were aged between 18-30; and 4% were aged 60 or over.

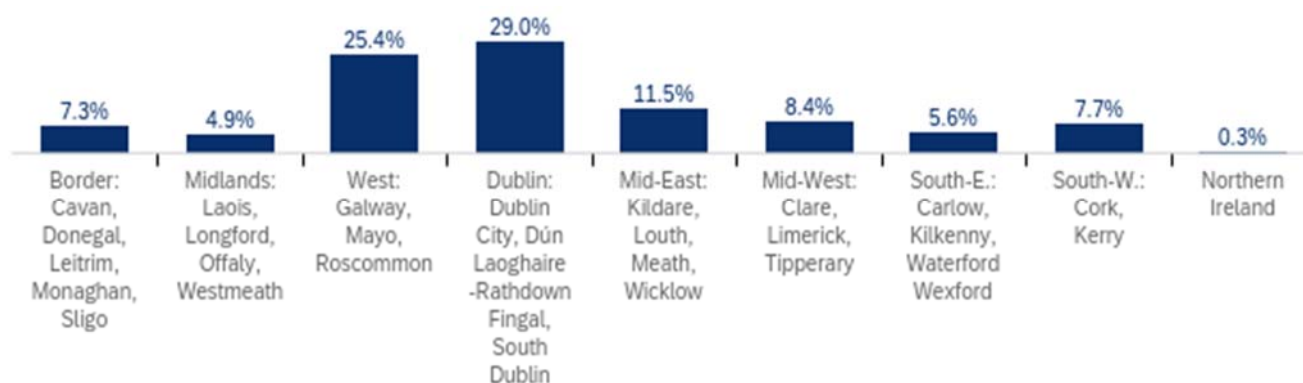


Dependent Children

52% of respondents had no dependent children; 8% had dependent children under the age of 5 years; 23% had dependent children aged between 6-12 years; 20% had dependent children between 13-18 years of age.



Region



Appendix: Additional Analysis & Statistics for Future Remote Working Preferences

Cross-tab of Future Remote Working Preference and Previous Remote Working Experience

		How frequently did you work remotely before the outbreak of COVID-19?					
		Total	Daily	Several times a week	Several times a month	Every now & then	Never
If you had the choice, would you like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over?	Yes – I would like to work remotely daily	12%	38.7%	23.3%	17.5%	8.8%	8.9%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week	42%	28.7%	65.3%	55.8%	43.6%	38.5%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month	29%	16.4%	7.3%	24.1%	36.0%	30.8%
	No – I do not want to work remotely	16%	16.2%	4.0%	2.5%	11.6%	21.9%

Cross-tab of Future Remote Working Preference and Sector

		Are you working in the:			
		Total	Private sector	Public sector	Third sector - charity
If you had the choice, would you like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over?	Yes – I would like to work remotely daily	12%	16.6%	9.8%	10.3%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week	42%	45.2%	41.2%	37.1%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month	29%	27.4%	28.0%	35.0%
	No – I do not want to work remotely	16%	10.8%	21.0%	17.6%

Cross-tab of Future Remote Working Preference and Gender

		Gender			
		Total	Male	Female	In another way
If you had the choice, would you like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over?	Yes – I would like to work remotely daily	12.3%	15.0%	11.6%	12.5%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week	42.8%	43.6%	42.5%	45.8%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month	28.5%	28.6%	28.5%	33.3%
	No – I do not want to work remotely	16.4%	12.8%	17.4%	8.3%

Cross-tab of Future Remote Working Preference and Age

		Age					
		Total	18-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	60+
If you had the choice, would you like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over?	Yes – I would like to work remotely daily	12.4%	11.5%	13.3%	13.1%	10.5%	11.7%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week	42.6%	32.0%	42.4%	45.6%	41.7%	37.1%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month	28.6%	35.2%	30.0%	27.5%	27.3%	25.8%
	No – I do not want to work remotely	16.4%	21.3%	14.2%	13.8%	20.5%	25.4%

Cross-tab of Future Remote Working Preference and Childcare Dependents

		Do you have a dependent child/children?				
		Total	No	Yes – under 5	Yes – between 6 and 12	Yes – between 13 and 18
If you had the choice, would you like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over?	Yes – I would like to work remotely daily	12%	11.6%	12.9%	13.4%	12.5%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week	42%	39.6%	46.3%	49.3%	45.1%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month	28%	29.8%	26.5%	25.3%	28.0%
	No – I do not want to work remotely	16%	19.0%	14.2%	12.0%	14.4%

Cross-tab of Future Remote Working Preference and Industry

		Industry																		
		Total	Administrative and support services including travel agents	Agriculture, forestry and fishing	Arts, entertainment and recreation including sport	Construction	Education	Financial, banking and insurance activities	Health and social work activities	Hospitality (accommodation, hotels, restaurants and food service)	Information, communication and telecommunications	Manufacturing	Mining and quarrying	Professional, scientific and technical activities including consulting	Public and civil service administration and defence	Real estate activities	Retail and wholesale (clothes, goods, motor etc.)	Transportation, postage, courier and storage	Utilities (electricity, gas, water supply, sewerage, waste management)	Other (please specify)
If you had the choice, would you like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over?	Yes – I would like to work remotely daily	12%	19%	16%	14%	10%	7%	16%	11%	9%	22%	7%	0%	16%	11%	0%	16%	6%	10%	15%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week	42%	45%	47%	35%	44%	34%	47%	38%	50%	45%	50%	57%	46%	49%	38%	42%	48%	41%	42%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month	29%	23%	21%	36%	35%	27%	28%	37%	29%	24%	35%	29%	27%	28%	50%	33%	28%	38%	26%
	No – I do not want to work remotely	16%	13%	16%	16%	10%	31%	10%	14%	12%	9%	8%	14%	11%	11%	12%	9%	18%	12%	17%

Cross-tab of Future Remote Working Preference and Region

		Region									
		Total	Border – Cavan, Donegal, Leitrim, Monaghan, Sligo	Midlands – Laois, Longford, Offaly, Westmeath	West – Galway, Mayo, Roscommon	Dublin – Dublin City, Dún Laoghaire-Rathdown, Fingal, South Dublin	Mid-East – Kildare, Louth, Meath, Wicklow	Mid-West – Clare, Limerick, Tipperary	South-East – Carlow, Kilkenny, Waterford, Wexford	South-West – Cork, Kerry	Northern Ireland
If you had the choice, would you like to continue working remotely after the crisis is over?	Yes – I would like to work remotely daily	12%	15.8%	13.8%	13.1%	10.5%	12.7%	10.8%	13.8%	13.1%	10.0%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a week	42%	41.1%	47.0%	44.5%	40.7%	46.9%	40.3%	39.5%	39.3%	40.0%
	Yes – I would like to work remotely several times a month	29%	24.6%	26.0%	28.1%	32.9%	24.8%	28.8%	25.9%	28.6%	25.0%
	No – I do not want to work remotely	16%	18.5%	13.2%	14.3%	15.9%	15.6%	20.1%	20.8%	19.0%	25.0%