

## **Brave new world of work: Are Irish remote workers happy?**

### **Despite citing reduced income and social interaction, Irish employees appear to be happily embracing the brave new world of working from home. Employers take note.**

Almost half of workers now working remotely have already accepted a salary reduction or expect one in the near future as a result of the Covid-19 crisis.

A new survey carried out on behalf of the National Recruitment Federation (NRF) has found that similarly 50pc of workers are already experiencing lower household income, or expect to, as a result of lower personal pay or a working partner being unpaid or on reduced pay.

Those experiencing reduced earnings were more likely to work in sales (77pc) or professional services (51pc), to be Dublin-based (53pc), and to be on a salary scale under €50,000.

However, 73pc, over 7 in 10 now working from home have seen their overall outgoings reduced, or are saving money as a result.

Cohorts that appear to be benefitting most in terms of savings include those in suburban or rural areas, those who are always office based, and those who normally use either public transport or their car to get to work.

The survey was carried out nationally last week, by research company Opinions. It questioned individuals working from home on their experience of remote working and the practical and emotional impacts. Income change and future finances and employment prospects were also examined.

### **Job security in a brave new world**

On future job security perceptions, just 1 in 4 of workers, 25pc, are very confident of the security of their role after the crisis; although almost half, 46pc, appear quite confident.

Of the 24pc not confident at all of their job prospects, this cohort includes those living in urban

areas, people who have already taken a pay cut, or expect to, and those whose pay is currently supplemented by a Government subsidy.

Over 4 in 10 working from home report that the nature of their role has changed considerably due to Covid-19, beyond just working from a different location. Dramatically changed work practices and the nature of work now done remotely was most likely to affect people under 35 years old, those in the C2DE social grade and those reporting a salary cut.

4 in 10 working remotely claim that Covid-19 disruption is causing them to evaluate their job and consider a new or different role elsewhere, or a new career or training opportunity. Similarly, those most likely to be reviewing their career potential now include the under 35s, those in urban areas, people who have taken a salary cut or whose role has changed as a result of working from home.

## **Remotely happy**

Despite financial worries and changed career prospects, the National Recruitment Federation survey reveals polarised experiences of working through Covid-19, NRF President, Donal O'Donoghue says.

59pc, or almost 6 in 10 people now working remotely, say they are happier as a result, he explains.

“On balance, it seems, we are happier working from home; and, almost 7 in 10 say they would be happy to work remotely in future. So, leaving aside economic concerns, the notion of a remote working revolution in the future must be seriously examined by employers”.

While 68pc said they would be happy to work remotely in future, with occasional office meetings, only 3 in 10, 30pc of workers that never work from home in ordinary circumstances, say they are likely to ask their employer for such an arrangement.

Those reported to be most happy with remote working are living in rural areas, or working in professional services and advisory or consultancy roles. Suburban residents in executive or operational roles and those over 55 years old were most likely to be less happy working from home.

## **Pros and cons of working from home**

Questioned on the positive aspects of working from home, 81pc agreed they were safer, in terms of the spread of Covid-19.

In terms of the work experience, not having a daily commute was the top benefit, referenced by eight out of ten working from home.

Not needing to dress or appear in a certain way, such as clean shaven, was selected as a positive aspect by 57pc, while 47pc felt they were not spending as much on lunch and incidental shopping.

The flexibility to work when it suits appeals to 45pc of respondents, but only 34pc felt that increased productivity at home and getting through more work was a benefit.

On the question of productivity levels, almost twice as many working remotely feel they are less productive than more productive. While 40pc say they are similarly productive now that they are working from home, a similar proportion (39pc) feel they are less productive as a result.

However, one fifth, 21pc of workers, feel they are actually a lot more productive at home.

## **Missing social interaction?**

Missing social interaction with work colleagues is identified as the number one negative or challenge experienced to date by 54pc of those working from home. Interaction with colleagues for professional reasons or practical work supports emerges as a main challenge for slightly fewer, at 47pc.

42pc say it is harder to get motivated and in the frame of mind to work, while distraction from other family members is a problem for 36pc and distraction from children bothers 32pc.

Unsurprisingly, distraction from children is the number 1 negative experienced to date by parents working from home.

More than one in 5, 21pc, is hampered in working from home by poor or no broadband connectivity, an issue flagged by the National Recruitment Federation as significant in terms of encouraging the remote working model in Ireland.

Many factors in play at the moment, such as job security and distraction from home-schooled children would not normally exist for remote workers, Donal O'Donoghue explains.

“Post Covid-19, we expect cost-savings and logistics issues like reduced commuting to tip the balance in favour of working from home for many. Interaction with colleagues, socially and professionally, can still happen with various technologies, although outside of the main urban areas reliable broadband infrastructure will be crucial”.

## **New ways of working**

With the pandemic likely to prompt new ways of working in the future, employers will also look at the fact that 4 in 10 workers claim they are less productive working from home currently.

Again, this is more a product of the lockdown and the unique circumstances we find ourselves in, than of remote working, the NRF President says.

“Increasingly, global data in the recruitment sector confirms that remote workers are more productive than their office-based counterparts. Out of the office, they report less distractions and less stress, largely due to greater autonomy”.

The fact that working remotely is making 4 in 10 evaluate their job and consider a different role or career elsewhere will also be food for thought for many employers, Donal O’Donoghue says.

“Enabling some sort of home working arrangement would appear sensible, both from an employee satisfaction and productivity perspective. Time and money savings for employees make economic sense and employers will also reckon in the need for less office space and infrastructure for remote workers too!”

## **Working at home impacts survey**

Carried out by Opinions.ie, fieldwork for this study ran from 13 April to 16 April 2020. The representative sample of 512 individuals included those living alone, couples, and families with children, in urban and rural settings countrywide.

- 63pc lived with a spouse or partner, while 54pc were also living with children in the household
- 42pc, over 4 in 10, of those working remotely never work from home in ordinary circumstances
- Over half of workers (52pc) claim to be office based all the time in normal circumstances, and 77pc in total are almost always office based
- Respondents included self-employed individuals and a range of employment levels, from company owners and senior managers, through operational, admin and trainee roles
- Almost 1 in 10 workers, 9pc, had moved to a location that is not their main home, due to the Covid-19 outbreak

Written by [John Kennedy](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com) ([john.kennedy3@boi.com](mailto:john.kennedy3@boi.com))

*Published: 21 April, 2020*