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Ireland's hybrid advantage: How flexible working is empowering Irish society and economy

Report
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Foreword

The world of work has changed. 'Work' has evolved into a thing that we do, rather than a place we go, with communication and collaboration moving online aided by technology.

Working patterns were changing before the pandemic, but these changes were turbocharged by events that forced millions to work remotely with both employers and employees experiencing the benefits of a more flexible approach to how and when they work.

Today, huge majorities of people want to maintain what's become 'the new normal', with 90% of business leaders surveyed by Zoom saying they prefer having a hybrid or remote working environment over one that's solely in-person, and 86% agreeing with the sentiment that "the future of work is hybrid".¹

Ireland continues to lead the way in demonstrating how the adoption of hybrid and remote can increase productivity and give workers the flexibility they desire. Recent CSO data found that life and job satisfaction was highest for those working remotely for 17 days or more in the previous 4 weeks, with 94.2% of workers who worked at home with a mix of office, hub, or travel in 2021 reporting they were satisfied or very satisfied.²

Under new work-life balance legislation, employees in Ireland will soon have a right to request hybrid and flexible working schedules, allowing people to work when and where suits them best. More flexible working, underpinned by greater digital adoption, has already led to workers reporting they are more productive and feeling empowered and supported to work and collaborate wherever they are.³

This report explores how these trends have developed so far, and where we can go from here to embed the benefits for the long term. It was developed following a collaboration between Zoom and FRS Recruitment – one of Ireland's leading recruitment consultants. The collaboration explored how Ireland's jobs market is adapting to give greater flexibility to workers in Ireland and the implications for policy as the Irish Government's Future of Work and Work Life Balance agendas begin to take shape. Data supplied by FRS Recruitment to support the report was collated in October 2022, with annual comparative analysis covering the 12-month period back to October 2021.

¹ Zoom Morning Consult Survey, 2022. [Link](#)

² CIPD (2022) An update on flexible and hybrid working practices: Report. [Link](#)

³ Central Statistics Office (CSO): Personal and Work-Life Balance 2021 - Remote Working. [Link](#)



How work in Ireland is changing

Remote working allows employees to work from anywhere with an internet connection and usually denotes individuals that rarely if ever go to a set physical location to do their job. Hybrid working meanwhile sees workers split their time between a physical office and other locations, whether that's from their home, a second office or a public co-working space.

New flexible working styles such as these are allowing workplaces to move beyond the traditional 9am - 5pm working day in the office, usually followed by a commute. This is just the start, with flexible concepts like job shares and condensed hours also growing in popularity.

"Zoom's position at the centre of the hybrid working transformation has given us a unique perspective. We have seen first-hand how organisations of all sizes have changed their working patterns in recent years, the positive impact remote working can have on productivity, how it can help small businesses to grow and how it gives workers the additional flexibility they want."

Charlotte Holloway

Zoom Government Relations Director, UK and Ireland

The Irish Government is, by international standards, highly progressive when it comes to flexible work and wants to promote greater remote working to support rural and economic development. Its approach has been data-led: an evaluation of the impacts of remote working, conducted for the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment in May 2022, found that overall, remote working would likely have a positive impact on the Irish economy and society.⁴

A survey included as part of the same evaluation revealed that:

- **68%** of those surveyed agreed that remote working increased their productivity, with
- **59%** of those surveyed saying it reduced their stress levels.

In the Irish jobs market, the number of hybrid or remote jobs has grown substantially as employers have sought to attract and retain workers from across the country beyond Ireland's urban hubs.

43% **The increase FRS has seen in the number of job postings which included a remote or hybrid option compared to the previous 12-month period**

The growth in roles that can be done remotely or on a hybrid basis is also expanding the number of opportunities available to people who cannot afford or choose not to live within commuting distance of Ireland's traditional economic centres. As a result, individuals are increasingly able to move further away from urban areas such as Dublin and build their lives in rural communities without impacting their career.

This shows no sign of reversing, even as the labour market shows some sign of weakening, with many employers recognising that it is in their interest to offer flexible working to attract and retain the talent they need to be successful. FRS Recruitment have reported that roles advertised by them that offer potential candidates flexibility attract a wider range of responses - especially among job seekers looking to move from their current employment.

⁴ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment - An Evaluation of the Impacts of Remote Working, May 2022. [Link](#)



Attitudes to flexible working across sectors varies

There is a strong level of demand for remote working among Irish employees, but what that looks like varies from sector to sector. Recruitment consultants at FRS have even noted that many of their candidates have been willing to countenance roles with lower salaries for the hybrid or remote flexibility they were looking for, with savings on transport frequently cited.

"For the first time we have candidates telling us that salary is less important to them than the ability to do their job remotely. For many people, the pandemic showed they can do their work from anywhere, which is enabling them to move to areas outside of cities where the cost of living and housing pressures aren't so acute and without the burden of long commutes and high transport costs"

Lynne McCormack
General Manager at FRS Recruitment

There is noticeable variance in the percentage of roles advertised with a remote working option offered across different sectors. These have been, to date, concentrated in three sectors of the Irish economy.

87% Of jobs offering remote or hybrid working options were in either the IT, accounting and finance, or commercial sectors

By contrast, the construction, manufacturing & engineering sectors each have less than a 6% share of the total number of jobs offering a remote or hybrid option. Recruiters have also noted differences in the level of remote or hybrid working in demand by workers in each sector. FRS reports that in the IT sector, candidates predominantly look for a fully remote role and want to go into the office a few times a month at most for team building or work planning.

In the commercial sector however, 80% of candidates say they prefer hybrid work with a mix of remote and office work each week. Very few candidates from either sector are willing to work fully on-site unless it is a senior or director level position.

The share of job adverts with a remote / hybrid option in the past 12 months have been concentrated in a few sectors⁵

Sector	%
Accounting and Finance	34.97%
IT	34.27%
Commercial	18.04%
Construction	5.87%
Manufacturing and Engineering	3.92%
Temp	2.94%

⁵ Comparative analysis of FRS Recruitment job database – September 2020 to September 2022



Where some sectors are struggling to adopt the hybrid work model

Not all sectors have been able transition to remote or hybrid working equally. In healthcare, for example, there tends to be variance depending on the type of role, with triage nurses able to work remotely but few other roles are offering this option.

Many candidates looking for community-based or middle management roles in healthcare enquire if a hybrid option is available, and fully on-site roles are proving difficult to fill.

“Healthcare roles with flexible or remote working options have proven to receive a higher volume of applications. This is an indication that some sectors need to focus on ensuring that they are equipped with the appropriate technology to provide flexible working options to attract and retain talent. A greater focus on shifting to a hybrid model of work could potentially help fill key gaps in Ireland’s healthcare system”

Lynne McCormack
General Manager at FRS Recruitment

Examples of similar roles advertised by FRS demonstrating a difference in application rate based on whether the role was for fully on-site vs where a remote / hybrid option was offered⁶

Sector	Role	On-site / Remote / Hybrid	Applications
IT	Support Engineer	Advertised specifically with remote	36
		Advertised specifically on-site	7
	ETL Developer	Advertised specifically with remote	22
		Advertised specifically on-site	7
Commercial	Payroll Specialist	Hybrid	12
		On-site	0
	Finance Manager	Hybrid	12
		On-site	6
	Head of Finance	Hybrid	23
		On-site	10
Accounting & Finance	Finance Director	Remote	24
	Finance Manager	On-site	0
	Investment Specialist	On-site (Limerick)	3
	Junior Financial Analyst	Hybrid (Limerick)	17
	Accounts Admin	On-site (Galway)	6
		Hybrid (Galway)	40

⁶ Comparative analysis of FRS Recruitment job database – September 2020 to September 2022

Remote working can help close the salary gap between urban and rural Ireland

A greater level of remote working among the Irish workforce stands to benefit communities across Ireland. As more workers feel empowered to move out of crowded city centres and back to the communities where perhaps they grew up or can afford to buy a family home, they will take their salaries with them which can be spent locally and reverse the brain drain that has blighted Ireland’s rural areas.

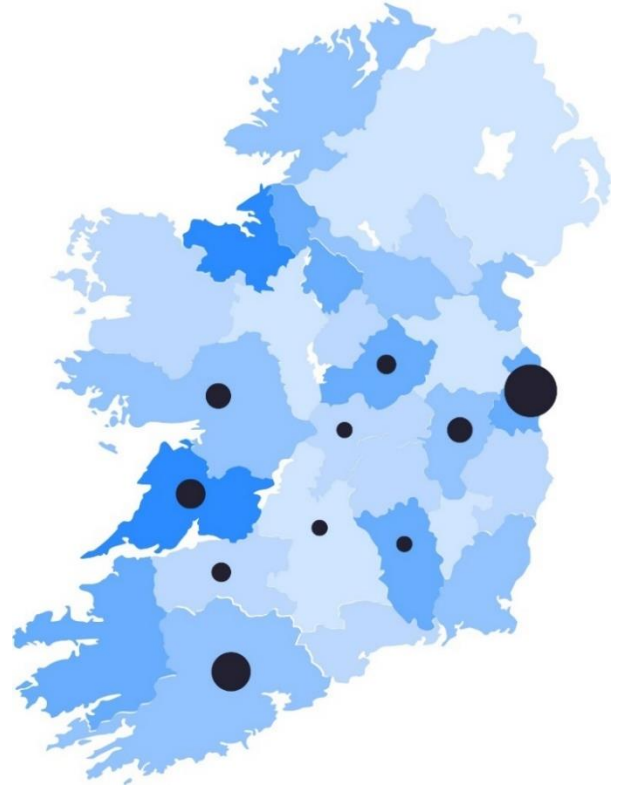
This has potential to provide a significant pathway to close traditional income disparities between rural and urban Ireland. The most recent Central Statistics Office (CSO) data from 2019 on average disposable income after the deduction of taxes and social security charges, shows a significant difference between Dublin and the rest of the country, with the average disposable income per person in Dublin 16.6% higher than the state average.⁷

Of the roles posted by FRS Recruitment in the past 12 months offering a remote working option, 41% of these originated in Dublin, with another 22% from employers based in Cork, Limerick, and Galway. The growing number of remote working roles originating in Ireland’s cities suggests that workers who do not live in those areas are increasingly able to access employment opportunities there, making higher salaries open to a wider pool of candidates.

The changes we are seeing mean that individuals located in the worst performing regions for disposable income now have access to better quality employment opportunities through remote and hybrid work. This is subsequently increasing the earning capacity in communities beyond the major urban centres.

It also aligns with the Government’s approach to boosting economic development across rural Ireland, underpinned by new public communications and transport infrastructure that can transform rural towns, villages, and communities.⁸

More than 50% of employers offering remote working opportunities are based in either Dublin or Cork



Location	%
Dublin	41.54%
Cork	12.03%
Clare	8.39%
Galway	5.59%
Kildare	5.17%
Limerick	4.48%
Westmeath	3.92%
Kilkenny	3.36%
Offaly	2.10%
Tipperary	2.10%

Difference in salaries offered by city-based companies vs rural companies⁹

Location	Average Salary	Median Salary
Rural based companies	€51,648	€49,000
City based companies	€60,814	€54,000

€58k The median salary for remote / hybrid roles based in Dublin

⁷ Central Statistics Office (CSO), Country Incomes and Regional GDP, 2019. [Link](#)

⁸ Our Rural Future, Rural Development Policy 2021-2025. [Link](#)

⁹ Comparative analysis of FRS Recruitment job database – September 2020 to September 2022



More needs to be done to empower employers to embrace hybrid & remote work

Adopting the economic and social benefits

Embracing hybrid working has clear economic benefits both for workers and Ireland as a whole, as it can open more jobs to people who don't live near cities, closing the urban-rural salary gap. It can also enable people to reduce commuting time, reduce stress, improve work-life balance, and be more present in their local communities. Offering flexible work also benefits business, as studies show hybrid and remote work improves productivity, and helps organisations attract and retain talent at a time of high competition for workers across Europe.

Risks of failing to meet demand for flexibility

According to FRS Recruitment, employers are often hindered in attracting talent where a remote or hybrid option in the role they are recruiting for is not made possible. What's more, companies requiring full-time on-site work are seeing higher turnover than those that accommodate hybrid work as workers opt to move to more flexible roles for example in the commercial sector where demand for flexible roles is high. With up to 80,000 EU-based remote jobs available to Irish workers¹⁰, it is vital to the Irish economy that homegrown businesses meet workers' growing need for flexibility if they are to attract the talent they need.

The new demands for hybrid and remote working options are also increasing expectations both for workers and employers. For workers looking to move into a flexible role, FRS Recruitment have indicated that a strong grasp of video conferencing technology, as well as interpersonal and communication skills are becoming a prerequisite for these roles.

Encouraging a move to hybrid and remote work

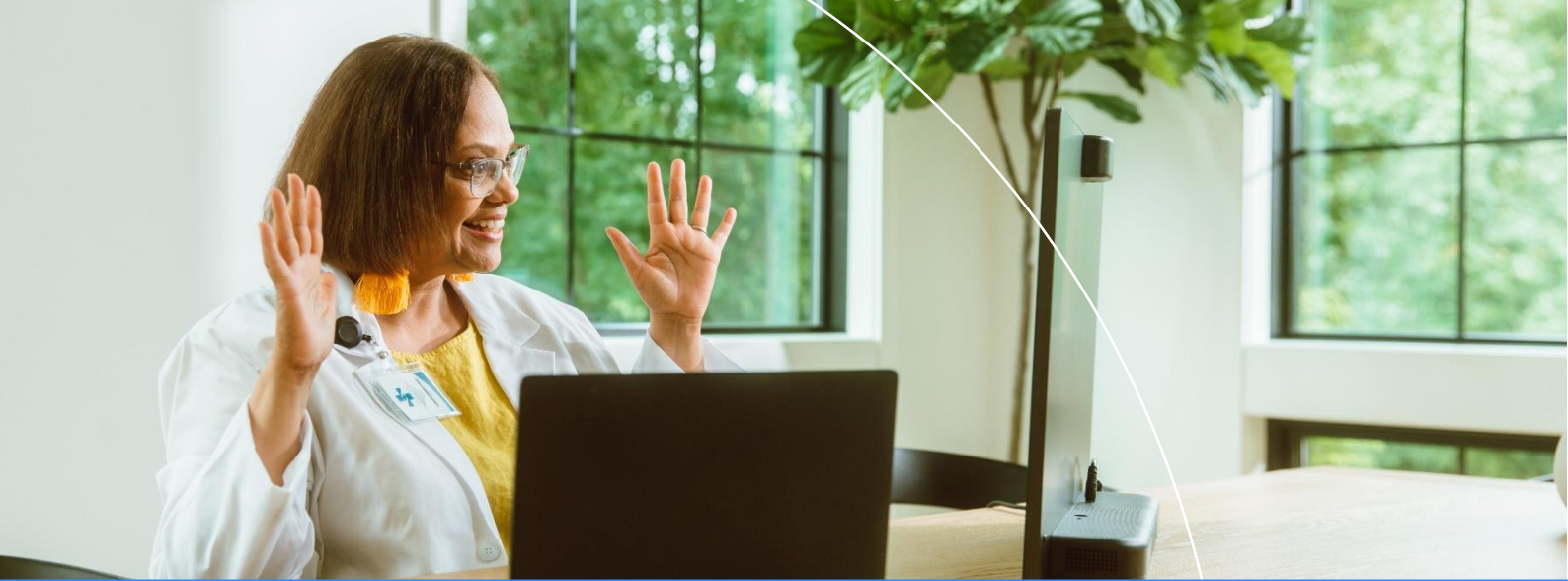
The move to hybrid or remote work has been slower in some sectors than others, with only a small percentage of healthcare, engineering or temporary jobs offering flexible working options. While there will always be work that can only be done in person, there is room for flexibility on cross-functional teams for some work to be done remotely.

Many businesses have the capacity to adopt a flexible model of work but continue to require employees to be on-site on a full-time basis. Further awareness raising is needed to inform and educate these companies of the disadvantaged position they are leaving themselves in when it comes sourcing suitable candidates for roles. For others who offer remote and hybrid working options but lack experience in online onboarding and setting people up technically, greater supports would be hugely beneficial.

Utilising regional remote working hubs

It's important that employers, particularly those located in urban settings, gain greater awareness of the many benefits the National Network of Remote Working Hubs offers for both their existing and future workforce. Under the ConnectedHubs.ie platform employees can simply source and book working and networking spaces in their locality – giving them access to professional workspaces near their home and a 'third space' from which to work in addition to their home or office.

¹⁰ Grow Remote – Learn the skill of remote work. [Link](#)



Maximising the benefits of remote working across Ireland

We are already seeing how an increase in quality jobs that can be done from anywhere in Ireland, or which require the candidate to attend a physical workplace only some of the time, is helping to deliver the objectives set out in the Irish Government's remote working strategy, *Making Remote Work*.¹¹

These include ensuring that remote working is a permanent feature in the Irish workplace in a way that maximises economic, social, and environmental benefits, and to capture the benefits of remote working in terms of enabling balanced regional development.

"The benefits of remote working are obvious – less commuting, fewer transport emissions, better quality of life with more time with family and friends. New job opportunities will be created for people who want to live in rural Ireland, for people with disabilities and for people with caring responsibilities. Smaller towns and villages across Ireland will benefit from new investment, increased footfall and local spend."

Leo Varadkar TD

Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment

The right to request remote work will also soon be enshrined in Irish law under the Work Life Balance Bill, which will lay down a code of practice for employers for remote, hybrid or flexible working arrangement. Welcoming the Bill, then Tánaiste and Minister for Enterprise, Trade and Employment Leo Varadkar hailed the benefits of flexible working for workers and the rural economy.¹²

However, more needs to be done if the benefits of greater remote working in Ireland are to be fully achieved. Tackling regional inequality will require roles across every sector – not just those that are traditionally white collar – to be available on a flexible basis, from entry level right through to senior positions. Major employers, including those in the public sector, could do more to encourage their employees to work remotely, for example.

Case Study: PracticeEvolve

Before the pandemic, remote working hadn't really been on our radar. Even though we operate three different offices in Ireland, UK and Australia, this simply hadn't been our way of working.

All that changed once Covid-19 hit and we found we had to evolve our practices quickly. Initially this was a challenge but the necessity of working this way allowed us to adapt quickly and we swiftly realised the benefits of this approach. In fact, since the pandemic ended, we have operated with a hybrid model, and we will never return to a full office.

We continue to see the rewards offered through remote/hybrid working which include increased staff retention, engagement, and enhanced recruitment. We certainly wouldn't have been able to recruit staff if we didn't offer hybrid/remote working. This approach really works for our business and for our staff. We would highly recommend any business who can operate this way to consider it.

¹¹ Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment – Making Remote Work: National Remote Working Strategy 2021. [Link](#)

¹² Right to request remote work for all workers to be introduced through the DCEDIY Work Life Balance Bill. [Link](#)

Five recommendations for advancing Ireland's remote working ambitions

1. Equip employees with the right tools

In companies that do offer flexible work options, onboarding new employees remotely and setting them up with the right equipment can be challenging. Making hybrid and remote working a success is about having the right tools. For example, Zoom has moved beyond the video meetings that it is synonymous with and now offers a full suite of communication solutions, including a cloud-based phone system, the ability to book meeting rooms and desks, a dedicated virtual events platform and much more, all on the Zoom platform and designed with facilitating hybrid working in mind.

2. Expand the potential of remote working hubs

The National Network of Remote Working Hubs, ConnectedHubs.ie, has enormous potential to enable more people to work from their community in a professional environment, however these collaborative co-working spaces will only work at scale if people are encouraged to use the hubs regularly. Ireland's businesses must be empowered to engage fully in the remote working resources available to their workers and provide an environment, both remotely and on-site, that works for today's candidates.

3. Public sector should lead from the forefront

To drive digital adoption in all enterprises, not just the use of technology but through changes in culture, leadership, skills and processes, Ireland's public sector must be an exemplar. Zoom believes there is an opportunity for the public sector in Ireland to lead by example and demonstrate best practice to employers nationally by embracing remote and hybrid working and promoting use of ConnectedHubs.ie to public sector workers.

4. Right to request remote work must be monitored

The Government must also continue to review the provisions for flexible working under the Work Life Balance Bill, which will for the first time give employees the right to request remote working, to ensure that workers' rights evolve alongside the digital landscape.

5. Accelerate implementation of Ireland's Remote Working Strategy

To improve access to remote working across all sectors, Ireland needs to accelerate progress on the Remote Working Strategy and grow remote working opportunities across the country as a way of spreading prosperity and boosting rural communities. Key areas of the strategy are to ensure everyone in Ireland has access to fast and reliable internet under the National Broadband Plan, and the expansion and promotion of remote working hubs in locations that suit commuters, and which are close to childcare facilities.



About Zoom

Zoom is a space where you can connect to others, share ideas, make plans, and build toward a future limited only by your imagination. We formed our company in 2011 because we felt there was a better way for people to communicate and work together. We have been transforming business communications ever since, building out a reliable, easy-to-use cloud platform with video at its core that not only supports different workplaces, but reimagines what meetings, phone, chat, webinar, virtual events, and app integration solutions can be in a hybrid world.

Since our creation, we have expanded the delivery of Zoom services to governments, families and businesses across the world, transforming the way we live, work and socialise. This has led to Zoom becoming one of the most widely used platforms for both individuals and businesses globally. Our intuitive, scalable, and secure platform is relied on by more than half a million businesses, and powers telehealth services that are modernising and democratising healthcare around the globe.

About FRS Recruitment

FRS Recruitment is Ireland's only co-operative recruitment consultancy, placing talented people into jobs since 1980. With 10 offices nationwide, FRS has grown into a multifaceted, industrial, technological, and highly sophisticated recruitment agency, with recruitment expertise spanning a huge breadth of industries.

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