

# Minister McGrath launches the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020 COVID-19 Remote Working Report.

From [Department of Public Expenditure and Reform](#)

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- This report is based on the findings of a module of the 2020 Survey, devised specifically to capture the experiences of staff who transitioned to remote working as a result of the COVID-19 crisis
- Overall, the results reflect the impact of interventions implemented by Civil Service Departments and Offices in response to the crisis
- 88% feel they are as effective when working remotely as they are during normal working arrangements
- This survey has gained the highest response rate of surveys conducted to date, with 26,822 civil servants (65% of the workforce) responding
- It is the largest workplace survey conducted in Ireland this year
- It provides a rich body of data which will inform the development of future policies and initiatives with respect to remote working, employee wellbeing and workplace supports;
- The results compare favourably with the results of similarly-focused consultations held both nationally and internationally
- The Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020 COVID-19 Remote Working Report arises from the third in the series of Civil Service Employee Engagement Surveys. Surveys were previously held in 2015 and 2017

The Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Michael McGrath TD, today (23rd December) published the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020 COVID 19 Remote Working Report. This Report arises from the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey and is the third in a series of surveys carried out across the entire Civil Service.

The 2020 survey has achieved a record response rate, with 26,822 civil servants, or 65% of the workforce completing it, making it the largest work based survey this year in Ireland. The results of this module are the first to be published from the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey. A further report will issue in early 2021.

The Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey launched on Monday 14th September and ran until Friday 2nd October 2020. Given the unprecedented situation that the country found itself in, due to COVID 19, a new module was introduced to the survey this year to capture the experiences of staff who transitioned to remote working as a result of the COVID-19 crisis. Overall, the results reflect the impact of interventions implemented by Civil Service

Departments and Offices in response to the crisis. The results also compare sympathetically with the results of similarly-focused consultations held both nationally and internationally, indicating that the experiences, resilience and drive of staff are part of a more global human phenomenon.

Speaking today Minister McGrath said:

“I am pleased to announce the launch of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey COVID 19 Remote Working report. This is the largest workplace survey on COVID 19 and remote working held in Ireland to date this year and as such provides us with a rich body of data to inform future policy development”

The Minister further added:

“As we are all aware, COVID 19 has severely disrupted and changed the working environments of workers throughout the country. As we collectively face the challenging road ahead, we must also be open to the opportunities that the pandemic has presented. We will continue to proactively explore both the challenges and the opportunities so that we can develop solutions that will allow us to serve the people of Ireland to the best of our abilities, while protecting the health and well-being of all. This report also highlights the importance of staying connected with colleagues and supporting each other. I would like to thank everyone who took the time to have their say.

"I am heartened by the finding that 88% of staff believe they are as effective working remotely as they are in their normal place of work and I see first hand in my own Department how well staff have adapted to the challenges of Covid-19. I note that some staff feel they have not been adequately supported in terms of wellbeing and I acknowledge that this must be addressed".

**ENDS**

**Notes for Editors:**

### **What is the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey?**

Under Action 25 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan, the Civil Service is committed to carrying out a series of three biennial surveys, beginning in September 2015, and followed by another survey in 2017. The survey is developed and run by the Central Statistics Office. It asks civil servants for their views on working in the civil service, focusing on areas such as employee engagement, well-being, coping with change, and commitment to the organisation. Departments and Offices put in place a variety of initiatives in response to the results. This most recent survey was run from Monday 14th September and ran until Friday 2nd October 2020, and included a module regarding Civil Service Departments and Offices responses to, and staff experiences of, working remotely during COVID-19.

### **What are the Key Findings of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020 COVID 19 Remote Working Report?**

**POSITIVE FINDINGS**

### **1. There has been an extraordinary shift to remote working in the Civil Service.**

Civil Servants have embraced the move to remote working since the COVID-19 pandemic crisis began. 75% of respondents reported that they were working remotely at the time of the survey. However, 25% of staff were not working remotely at that time, most notably the grades of PO (26%), Director, ASG and above (32%) and CO (36%). 81% of respondents had never worked remotely before. This successful large-scale shift in the working model suggests that the Civil Service is well positioned to develop and implement formalised flexible remote working arrangements in the future.

### **2. Overall, Civil Servants feel that they are as effective when working remotely.**

The majority of staff (88%) indicated that they feel as effective when working remotely as they are during normal working arrangements.

### **3. Civil Servants strongly favour a blended approach to remote working in the future.**

Three-quarters of staff indicated that they would like to continue to access remote working in the future if given the choice. Of these, 62% indicated a preference for a blended approach to working remotely (a mix of home and office). A significant number of staff (30%) expressed a preference to work from home exclusively in the future. This was strongest in the grades of EO (30%) and CO (33%).

### **4. The Civil Service is maintaining an active connection with staff who are working remotely.**

Nearly three-quarters of staff (72%) reported receiving regular contact from their organisation while working remotely. The result mirrors the strong 'Social Support' score of 72% in the 2017 Civil Service Engagement Survey, which may suggest that the proactive management culture of the Civil Service has remained strong in the face of the challenges presented by COVID 19.

### **5. Females in the Civil Service are more positive about remote working than their European counterparts.**

The Euro found report found that females in Europe experienced greater difficulties maintaining a healthy work-life balance compared to men, while working remotely. While not directly comparable, our survey has found that the majority of female civil servants in Ireland (73%) reported feeling as effective while working remotely during normal working arrangements, compared to their male counterparts (65%). In addition, 78% of female civil servants in Ireland would like to continue to access working remotely in the future, compared to 72% of males.

## **CHALLENGING FINDINGS**

### **1. The level of wellbeing supports civil servants received from their organisations while working remotely varied:**

54% of respondents reported receiving regular well-being supports from their organisation while 15% either disagreed or strongly disagreed. The remaining respondents (31%) neither agreed nor disagreed with this question.

**2. There are regional differences in the number of civil servants working remotely:**

Staff in Ulster, Connacht and those outside of Ireland reported the least number of staff working remotely. This may reflect the nature of services provided in these regions.

**3. Some grades within the Civil Service were less positive about remote working.**

25% of total respondents reported that they did not want to work remotely after normal working arrangements had resumed. This was most evident in responses from Principal Officers and above and the lower grades. The same cohort also reported the most difficulty with feeling effective while working remotely.

**4. Civil servants at lower grades felt less connected with their organisation while working remotely:**

Staff at CO and equivalent grades reported the lowest levels of regular communication from their organisations. The current hierarchical structure of the Civil Service may pose challenges for effective communication across all grades.

The full report on COVID-19 and Remote Working is available on gov.ie at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/9f6a3-civil-service-employee-engagement-survey-covid-19-remote-working-report-august-2020/>