

Article

Homeworking in the UK – regional patterns: 2019 to 2022

Homeworking during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, focusing on changes and how they have altered the distribution of labour across the UK.

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1 . Main points

- Between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, homeworking in the UK more than doubled from 4.7 million to 9.9 million people.
- Increases in homeworking varied across UK regions, the largest percentage increase in homeworking was in Scotland (203.5%, up 544,000), and the smallest percentage increase was in Northern Ireland (56.4%, up 49,000).
- Between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, the number of non-homeworkers (those who live and non-homework in the same region) and regional commuters (those who work in a region but live in a different region) in the UK decreased by 19.7% (down 5.5 million).
- The decrease in the number of non-homeworkers (those who live and non-homework in the same region) and regional commuters (those who work in a region but live in a different region) varied across UK regions, the largest decreases were in London (30.1%, down 1.4 million), followed by the South East (21.8%, down 775,000), Scotland (21.2%, down 505,000) and the North West (20.2%, down 627,000).

2 . Overview

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic there was an unprecedented increase in the number of individuals working from home. Recent analysis shows that this increased homeworking is likely here to stay, as detailed in our [Is hybrid working here to stay? article](#). Despite the end of UK government guidance to work from home, in February 2022 more than 8 in 10 workers who had to work from home during the coronavirus pandemic said they planned to work both from home and in the workplace (hybrid work). Of those workers surveyed, 42% were planning to work "most working hours from home, and sometimes from their usual place of work". The increase in homeworking practices has led many to consider the implications on local labour markets and consumption.

To understand this better, we examine how increased levels of homeworking have affected where workers spend most of their working hours across the UK. We compare the Labour Force Survey (LFS) for the periods October to December 2019, and January to March 2022. This allows us to make a comparison between the most recent period of data available, and the period prior to the introduction of guidance and legal requirements to work from home.

From the LFS we can obtain a respondent's International Territorial Level (ITL) 1 region of work. This allows us to compare the ITL 1 region a worker lives in relative to where they spend most of their working hours. Workers can either spend most of their working hours in the same region as they live or commute to another region.

In addition, LFS respondents are asked the extent to which they work from home. From the responses given, we classify homeworkers as anyone who reported their main place of work as:

- their own home
- the same grounds or building as home
- different places using home as a base

Those who reported mainly working "somewhere quite separate from home" were classified as non-homeworkers. Homeworkers automatically had their region of work set to their region of residence.

Based on individuals' responses about their region of work, their region of residence, and whether they mainly worked from home, we categorised workers in each UK region into three mutually exclusive groups, those who:

- live and homework in the same region (homeworkers)
- live and non-homework in the same region (non-homeworkers)
- work in a region but live in a different region (regional commuters)

Throughout this analysis, the number of regional workers is based on where workers spend most of their working hours rather than the region in which they live. We use levels of regional workers to understand the geography of where those in employment are spending most of their working hours. For these reasons, our estimates differ from the official employment statistics and should not be interpreted as the official source of information on employment levels in the UK regions. For more information, see our [Labour market in the regions of the UK bulletin](#), which is based on residential employment and published each month.

3 . Changes in regional workers

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has changed working habits with more people now working from home, as detailed in our [Public opinions and social trends, Great Britain: 22 June to 3 July 2022 bulletin](#). The increased prevalence of homeworking, as well as wider economic conditions, have contributed to changes in the distribution of where regional workers are spending their working hours.

We calculated the number of regional workers by summing those who live and homework in the same region, live and non-homework in the same region, and live outside of the region but commute in to the region to work. Between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, the number of regional workers increased in four regions and decreased in eight regions. There are seasonal patterns relating to regional workers which may affect the results when comparing the periods October to December 2019 and January to March 2022.

The largest percentage increases in regional workers were:

- in the East of England by 3.1% (up 89,000)
- in the West Midlands by 1.7% (up 48,000)
- in Scotland by 1.5% (up 39,000)

The largest percentage decreases in regional workers were:

- in London by 4.8% (down 258,000)
- in the North West by 4.3% (down 151,000)
- in the East Midlands by 2.4% (down 56,000)

Figure 1 shows the contributions of homeworking, non-homeworking, and regional commuting to the change in regional workers in each region between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022. An increase in the prevalence of homeworking has resulted in a positive contribution to the change in regional workers in all regions. The positive contribution is greatest in London and Scotland at 22.8 percentage points and 20.1 percentage points, respectively. This is offset by the negative contribution of those non-homeworking in all regions. Similarly, the contribution of regional commuting to the change in regional workers was negative in all regions. The largest negative contributions were in the regions which see the greatest proportion of commuters, London (down 6.2 percentage points) and the South East (down 2.6 percentage points).

Figure 1: London has seen the largest decrease in the number of regional workers

Contribution to change in the number of regional workers between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, UK regions, not seasonally adjusted

Notes:

1. Regional worker figures for the UK and England are not reported to avoid confusion with official employment statistics. Only ITL1 regions have been included in the chart.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

The following sections of this article provide more detail on the underlying patterns in homeworking, non-homeworking, and regional commuting in each region and how these patterns differ by regional and personal characteristics.

4 . Homeworking

The UK government first asked people to work from home if they could on March 16 2020. Guidance and legal requirements on homeworking throughout the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic varied between administrations but England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland all ended the legal requirement to work from home at the end of January 2022. However, England and Scotland ended their work from home guidance at the same time, [in Northern Ireland, guidance to "work from home where possible" was removed in June 2022](#) and [Wales introduced a strategy to encourage remote working in March 2022](#).

Between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, homeworking in the UK more than doubled, increasing by 108.8% (up 5.2 million), from 14.5% (4.7 million) to 30.6% (9.9 million).

The number of homeworkers increased by more than 50% in all UK regions. Scotland saw the largest percentage increase in homeworking (203.5%, up 544,000 people) and Northern Ireland the smallest percentage increase (56.4%, up 49,000).

The regions with the highest percentage of homeworkers in January to March 2022 were London (37.0%, 1.9 million), the South East (36.9%, 1.6 million) and the East of England (31.1%, 903,000). The regions with the lowest percentage of homeworkers were Northern Ireland (16.4%, 137,000), the North East (22.4%, 262,000) and Yorkshire and The Humber (26.2%, 668,000).

Between the same two periods, the percentage of non-homeworkers (people who live in a region and leave their homes to work in the same region) decreased in all UK regions. London saw the largest decrease (28.3%, down 1 million), and Northern Ireland the smallest decrease (8.7%, down 67,000).

Figure 2: Homeworking increased by more than 50% in all UK regions

Change in homeworking and non-homeworking, October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, UK regions, not seasonally adjusted

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

5 . Commuting between regions

Between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, the number of people who commuted into a region different to their region of residence for work fell across the UK by 26.1% (down 629,000). The decrease happened in all UK regions but was largest in:

- London 36.8% (down 367,000)
- the South East 29.1% (down 117,000)
- the East Midlands 21.2% (down 32,000)

Figure 3: The number of workers commuting into a region different to their region of residence has fallen across all UK regions

Change in regional commuting, October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, UK regions, not seasonally adjusted

Notes:

1. There were no commuters in or out of Northern Ireland from other UK regions in either the October to December 2019 sample or the January to March 2022 sample. Northern Ireland is therefore absent from the figure.

Download the data

[.xlsx](#)

To avoid double counting workers who live in one region and work in a different region, we only include those who are commuting into a region for the count of regional commuters and regional workers. However, for completeness we also report trends in commuters travelling out of a region between the two periods.

Between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, the number of people commuting out of a region for work fell in every UK region except the North East, where it increased by 4.2% (up 2,000). The largest percentage decreases in the number of people commuting out of a region for work happened in:

- the South East 35.6% (down 233,000)
- Scotland 29.8% (down 10,000)
- the East of England 28.8% (down 144,000)

6 . Flexible working

In addition to the variables already detailed, Labour Force Survey (LFS) respondents are asked whether they worked at least one full day from home during the reference week. This allows us to examine whether individuals who reported they do not mainly work from home (non-homeworkers) did work from home in some capacity.

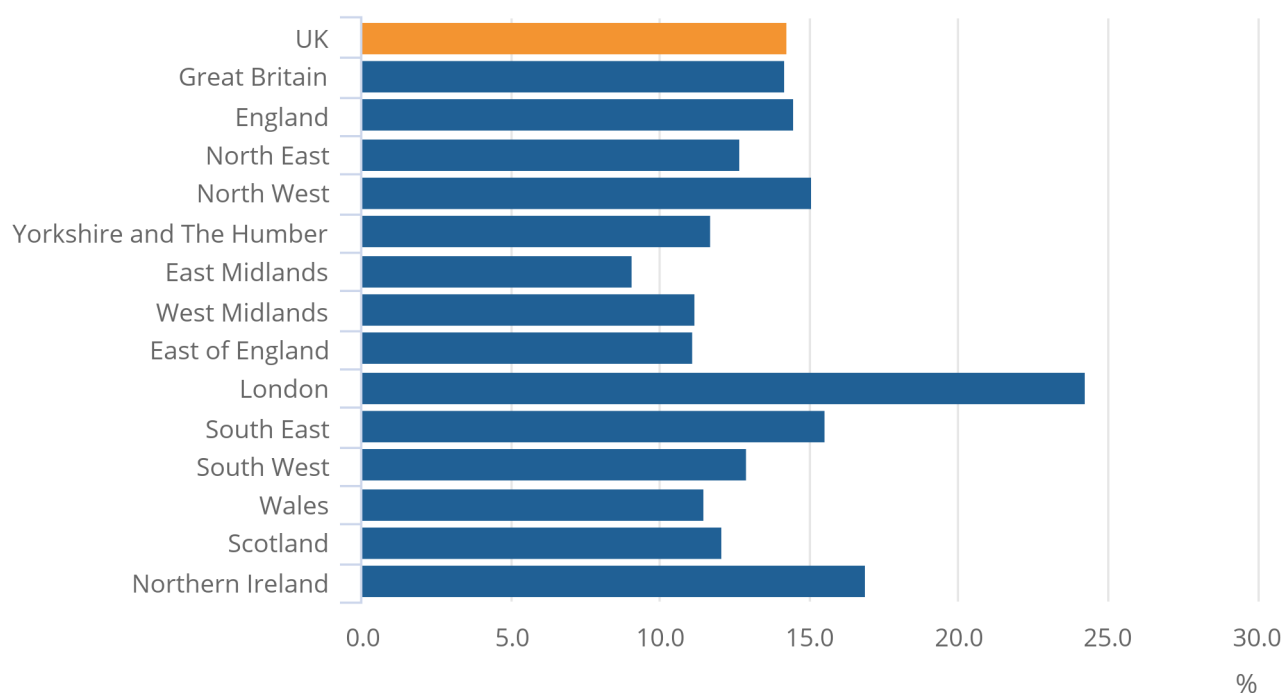
Across the UK, in January to March 2022, 14.3% of people (2.8 million) who did not mainly work from home (non-homeworkers) said they worked from home at least one day in the reference week. This figure was highest in London (24.3%, 627,000) and lowest in the East Midlands (9.1%, 126,000).

Figure 4: Over 14% of those who did not mainly work from home reported working from home at least one day a week

Percentage of workers who do not mainly work from home (non-homeworkers) but reported working from home at least one day in the reference week, January to March 2022, UK regions

Figure 4: Over 14% of those who did not mainly work from home reported working from home at least one day a week

Percentage of workers who do not mainly work from home (non-homeworkers) but reported working from home at least one day in the reference week, January to March 2022, UK regions



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

7 . Effects on spending

Our analysis on [Homeworking and spending by characteristic](#) found that around half of those who worked from home as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic reported spending less as a result. Alongside reduced spending on transport, one reason for this could be reduced spending on locally consumed goods and services while commuting and in the workplace.

Combining the number of non-homeworkers with the number of regional commuters gives the total number of people who might purchase goods and services as they work and commute. For example, buying a sandwich or a coffee at a train station or near their workplace.

Between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, the number of non-homeworkers and regional commuters in the UK has decreased by 19.7% (down 5.5 million). The decrease occurred in all UK regions, with the largest percentage decreases in London (30.1%, down 1.4 million), the South East (21.8%, down 775,000) and Scotland (21.2%, down 505,000).

While these data are not directly linked to changes in spending, this shift in the distribution of labour from areas of high job density, such as high streets and city centres, to residential areas may also change where and how workers spend their money.

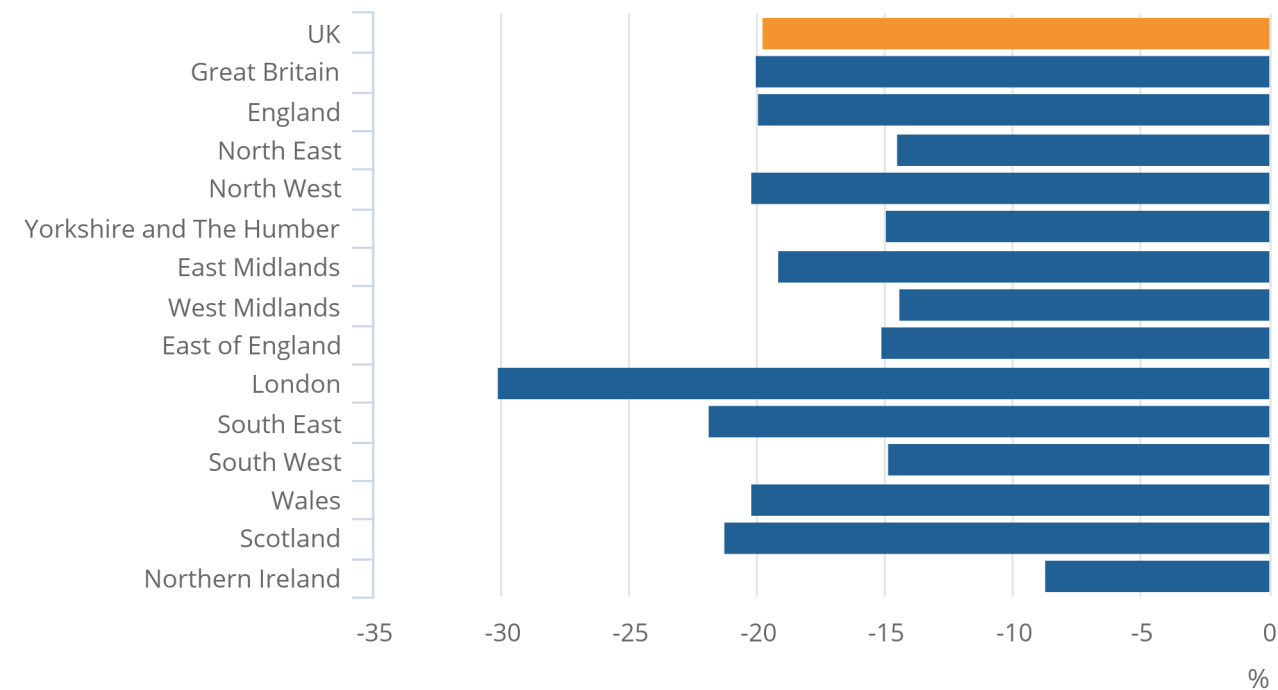
It is possible to observe this using the Pret Index, as detailed in our [Economic activity and social change in the UK, real-time indicators methodology](#). This shows total weekly till transactions at Pret a Manger shops as a proportion of the average weekly level in the first four weeks of 2020 (between Friday 3 January and Thursday 30 January 2020). In the week ending 30 June 2022, the [Pret Index](#) showed transactions in the "West End" and "City Worker" groupings of London were lower than pre-coronavirus pandemic levels (at 94% and 86%, respectively), but transactions in the "Suburban" group were higher at 123%.

Figure 5: London had 1.4 million fewer regional workers non-homeworking and commuting in to work between the two periods

Percentage change in non-homeworkers and regional commuters, October to December 2019 to January to March 2022, UK regions, not seasonally adjusted

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Percentage change in non-homeworkers and regional commuters, October to December 2019 to January to March 2022, UK regions, not seasonally adjusted



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

8 . Industry composition and occupation

The industry composition of each region is one explanation for regional variation in the rate of homeworking. Some industries are [more likely than others to adopt homeworking](#) and have a [higher percentage of their employees](#) working from home. Our previous analyses found large variation in homeworking by industry. Regions where these industries are common are therefore more likely to have a larger proportion of their employees working from home.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, industries requiring face-to-face contact (for example, [accommodation and food services](#)) were hit harder than those with workers who were able to work from home. This shift in industry composition could increase the proportion of businesses able to work from home and the percentage of employees working from home.

However, when we standardised industry composition, so all regions have the same industry composition as the UK in October to December 2019, there is still considerable variation in the percentage of homeworkers between regions. This variation might be explained by a number of factors, such as access to technology or specialist tools, which have been explored in [previous analysis](#).

Considering the [popularity of homeworking](#) (as detailed in our Business insights and impact on the UK economy: 16 June 2022 bulletin) amongst workers, the ability of industries to work from home may affect the desirability of some jobs. In August and September 2021, businesses in industries which have low rates of homeworking (hospitality, water, health, construction, and retail) reported it was [more difficult than normal to fill vacancies](#).

Figure 6: Standardising for industry composition had little effect on the percentage of homeworkers

The percentage of homeworkers, standardised and non-standardised, January to March 2022, UK regions

Figure 6: Standardising for industry composition had little effect on the percentage of homeworkers

The percentage of homeworkers, standardised and non-standardised, January to March 2022, UK regions



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Occupation

In October to December 2019, those employed in skilled trade occupations were most likely to be working from home (24.8%), while those within the sales and customer service occupation were least likely (4.2%). Similar patterns in the ability of different occupations to work from home were detailed in our [Which jobs can be done from home? article](#).

Those employed in professional occupations saw the largest increase in homeworking (30.5 percentage points), rising from 12.9% in October to December 2019 to 43.4% in January to March 2022. Those employed as process, plant and machine operatives and in elementary occupations were the only groups that saw a decrease in the percentage of homeworking between the two periods (1.3 and 1.1 percentage points respectively). This could be because of seasonality.

Figure 7: The largest percentage increase in homeworking was in professional occupations

Change in percentage of homeworking, by occupation, October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, UK, not seasonally adjusted

[Download the data](#)

[.xlsx](#)

Breaking this down by region, we find Scotland saw the largest percentage point increase in homeworking for two occupations. This was in professional occupations (36.7 percentage points), and process, plant and machine operatives (7.4 percentage points).

In January to March 2022, Northern Ireland had the lowest percentage homeworking in all occupations other than sales and customer services. In the same period, the South East had the highest percentage of homeworking in five occupations.

9 . Demographic breakdowns

Sex

In the UK, 16.5% of men worked from home compared with 12.3% of women in October to December 2019. Although men still worked from home more in January to March 2022, the gap had narrowed with 31.2% of men homeworking compared with 29.9% of women. Whilst men work from home more than women overall, our previous analysis found that men were overrepresented in roles which were unable to work from home. For more information, see our [Which jobs can be done from home? article](#).

Both men and women saw an increase in homeworking in all UK regions between October to December 2019 and January to March 2022. The largest increase overall was seen by women in London (24.9 percentage points), and the smallest increase overall was seen by men in Northern Ireland (4.2 percentage points).

In October to December 2019, men worked from home more than women in every UK region, but in January to March 2022 more women worked from home than men in London, Wales, and the East of England.

Figure 8: The percentage increase in homeworking was greater for women than men in every UK region except the North East

Change in homeworking percentage, by sex, October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, UK, not seasonally adjusted

[Download the data](#)

[.xlsx](#)

Age

Younger age groups were, in general, less likely to work from home in the UK in the period October to December 2019. Those aged 16 to 29 years had the lowest percentage of homeworkers (6.3%), followed by those aged 30 to 39 years (12%). The highest percentage of homeworkers was for those aged 60 years and over (27.3%), followed by those aged 50 to 59 years (17.9%).

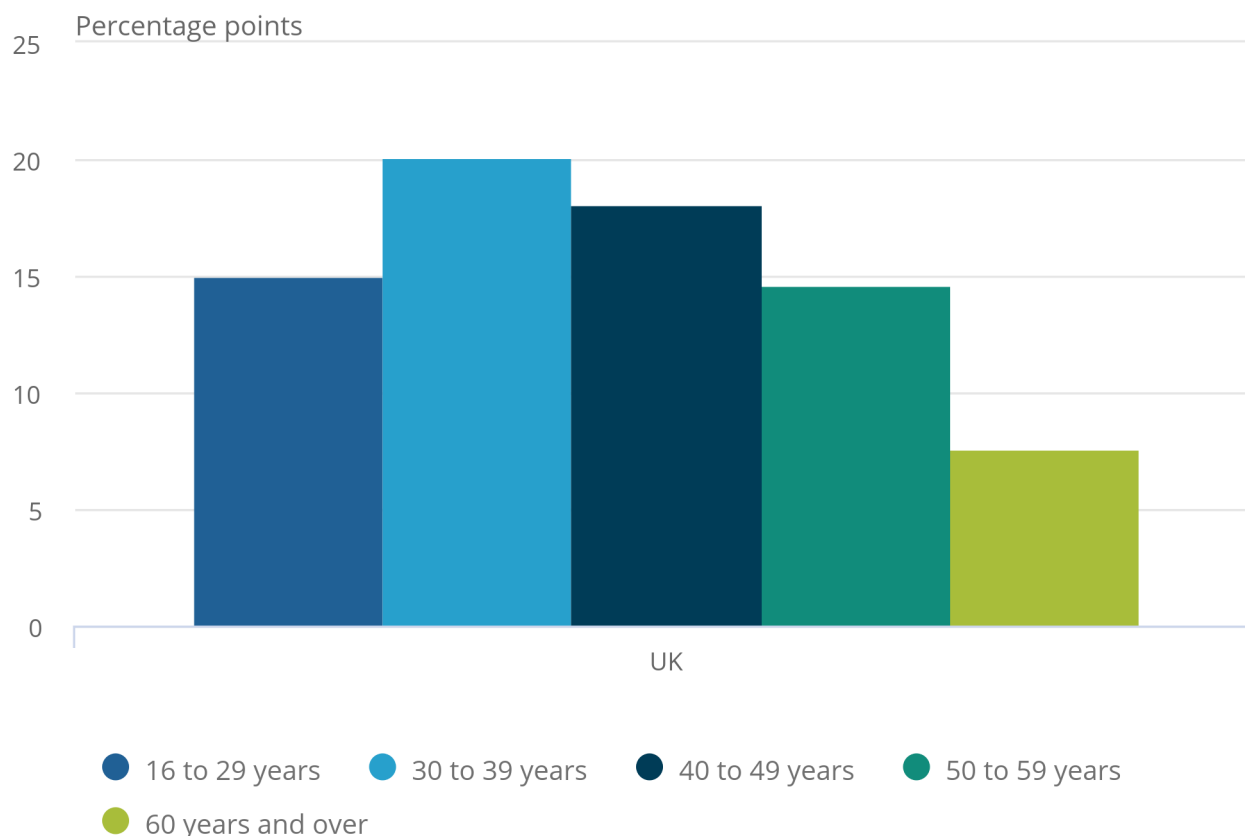
In January to March 2022, the percentage of homeworkers was higher in all age groups than in October to December 2019. For the UK, the highest increase in homeworking was in the aged 30 to 39 years group (20.1 percentage points). Those in the aged 60 years and over group remained the most likely to be working from home, even though the group saw a relatively small increase (7.6 percentage points).

Figure 9: Those aged 30 to 39 years saw the largest percentage point increase in homeworking

Percentage point change in homeworking, by age group, October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, UK, not seasonally adjusted

Figure 9: Those aged 30 to 39 years saw the largest percentage point increase in homeworking

Percentage point change in homeworking, by age group, October to December 2019 and January to March 2022, UK, not seasonally adjusted



Source: Office for National Statistics – Labour Force Survey

Changes between the two periods varied by both region and age group. Among those aged 16 to 29 years, the largest increase in homeworking was in London (28.4 percentage points), nearly double the next highest increase (Scotland, 15.4 percentage points).

In January to March 2022, those aged 60 years and over in Wales were the most likely age group in the UK to be working from home (43.8%). Only those aged 60 years and over saw a fall in the percentage of home workers between the two periods. There was also only a percentage points decrease in Northern Ireland (0.3 percentage points) and Yorkshire and The Humber (0.2 percentage points).

10 . Homeworking in the UK – regional patterns: 2019 to 2022 data

[Homeworking in the UK – regional patterns](#)

Dataset | Released 11 July 2022

Homeworking data for the UK from the Labour Force Survey in October to December 2019 and January to March 2022.

11 . Glossary

Regional workers

This is the number of individuals working in a region, this is made up of homeworkers, non-homeworkers and regional commuters into the region. This figure is therefore associated with the region an individual works in rather than the region in which they live. It should not be interpreted as official employment statistics.

Homeworking and homeworkers

This is defined as those who report their main place of work being their own home, same grounds or building, or different locations with home as a base.

Non-homeworking and non-homeworkers

This is defined as those who report their main place of work being separate from home. However, they remain within the same region when travelling to their main place of work.

Regional commuting and regional commuters

This is defined as those who report their main place of work being separate from home. However, they travel to a different region from their region of residence to get to their main place of work.

12 . Data sources and quality

This article uses data collected from the Labour Force Survey (LFS), the largest household survey in the UK. The sample is made up of approximately 40,000 responding UK households and 100,000 individuals per quarter. Respondents are interviewed for five successive waves at three-monthly intervals, and 20% of the sample is replaced every quarter.

Quality and methodology information on strengths, limitations and appropriate uses is available in our [Labour Force Survey \(LFS\) Quality and Methodology Information \(QMI\)](#). Our [LFS performance and quality monitoring reports](#) provide data on response rates and quality-related issues.

Data for Northern Ireland are available in full in the [Northern Ireland Labour Market Report on the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency \(NISRA\) website](#). You can [view local area statistics on the Nomis website](#).

LFS and APS reweighting

LFS estimates published from 14 June 2022 have been reweighted for periods from January to March 2020, using updated [Pay As You Earn \(PAYE\) Real Time Information \(RTI\) data](#). The non-response bias adjustment, previously implemented for England, Wales and Scotland data, has now also been applied to Northern Ireland data.

Our [Impact of reweighting on Labour Force Survey key indicators: 2022 article](#) explains the impact and gives a more detailed reweighting timeline. Our [Dataset X08: Impact of LFS reweighting on key Labour Force Survey indicators](#) includes estimates of key LFS indicators using both old and new weighting methodology, and the revisions between the two series.

13 . Related links

[Is hybrid work here to stay?](#)

Digital content article | Released 23 May 2022

Almost half of working adults were working from home at times during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, but what will business as usual look like with restrictions lifted?

[Homeworking and spending during the coronavirus \(COVID-19\) pandemic. Great Britain: April 2020 to January 2022](#)

Digital content article | Released 14 February 2022

Analysis of how working from home has affected individuals' spending, how this differs by characteristics, and how consumer spending has been affected.

[Which jobs can be done from home?](#)

Article | Released 21 July 2020

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, government advice has said that people in the UK should work from home if possible. This is easier for some workers than others, and jobs that pay more are more likely to be done remotely.

[Technology intensity and homeworking in the UK](#)

Article | Released 1 May 2020

Recent trends and insights into technology as an enabler for homeworking. Analysis considers differences in technology usage across industries.