



## Home-Based Working in the Western Region

This WDC Insights is the third in a series examining the current nature of work, focussing on work which occurs away from the traditional 'workplace' and is often home based.

Working at or from home can take different forms. The WDC Policy Briefing No.7 *e-Working: A Review of the Evidence*, examined the extent of e-Working in the Western Region among those in traditional employer-employee relationships. The WDC Insights *'New Work' – the Gig economy in the Western Region*, examined the extent and nature of the gig economy in the Western Region. The gig economy is different to typical work as it is often characterised by payment per task or sales and is typically based on a short-term relationship between worker and client.

Capturing and measuring those engaged in the 'gig' economy and e-Working in Ireland is very difficult due to the paucity of data. There is however comprehensive Census data on the numbers who work mainly at or from home. The Census question asked is 'how do you usually travel to work?' with one of the answers being 'work mainly at or from home'. This WDC Insights examines the data on those people who work 'mainly at or from home'. The Census definition is self-assigned but can include those who are self-employed and work from home (such as childminders, home-based general practitioners and sole traders across all sectors) as well as those working in the gig economy and e-Workers. Work mainly at or from home can include those who work full-time from home or working from home on at least three days of a five day working week.

### Working Mainly at or from Home

According to the Census, nationally, in 2011<sup>1</sup>, 4.7% (83,326) of all those at work, stated they worked mainly at or from home. By far the most significant occupational group is farmers, fishing & forestry workers, comprising over two fifths (43.5%) of the total. Excluding those working in Agriculture, forestry & fishing industries<sup>2</sup>, the share of the state's working population working mainly at or from home was 2.8% (47,127). In the Western Region<sup>3</sup> the share was higher with 3.2% (8,994) of workers stating they worked mainly at or from home.

### Profile of home-based workers in the Western Region

Compared with the working population generally, those working mainly at or from home, excluding those working in the Agriculture, forestry & fishing sector, in the Western Region are:

- More likely to be male – 56.5% of home-based workers are male in the Western Region, compared to 49.4% of all workers in the Region (excluding Agriculture, forestry & fishing). This is similar to the national profile where 55.9% of home-based workers are male, compared to 50.8% of the working population generally.
- Generally older, with nearly two-thirds (58.8%) aged 45 years and over compared to 36.9% of the total working population in the Western Region<sup>4</sup>.
- More likely to have third level education or higher – 38.8% had a third level degree or higher compared to 34.1% of all workers in the Region.
- More likely to work in professional, technical and healthcare occupations which account for 27% of those working mainly at or from

1. Census of Population 2011, the most recent Census data available. Census 2016 data will be available in September 2017.

2. The rest of the data presented in this WDC Insights exclude those working in the Agriculture, forestry & fishing industries, in order to understand the prevalence of home-working in the wider economy. The WDC wish to thank the CSO for a special run of data excluding those working in the Agriculture, forestry & fishing industries.

3. Counties Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway and Clare.

4. Research has found that men are more likely than women to use the internet at home for work, and those aged 35-50 are the most likely age group to do so. Amárach Research. 2016 <https://www.vodafone.ie/connected-futures/>



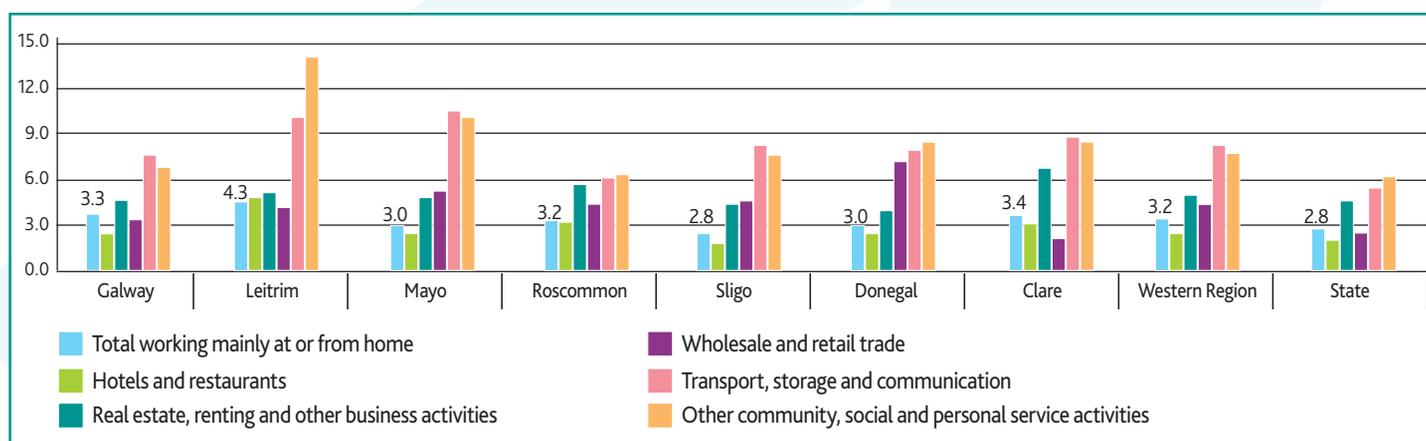
home in the Western Region. Service workers, (17.8%) and clerical, managing and government workers, (15.8%) are next highest.

- When measured as a proportion of the resident workforce, Leitrim has the highest rate of those working mainly at or from home (4.3%), followed by Clare (3.4%), Galway (3.3%), Roscommon (3.2%), Mayo and Donegal (3.0%) and the lowest rate is reported in Sligo at 2.8% – the same as the national rate.

## Industrial distribution in the Western Region

- Across the Western Region, there is a similar pattern across industries with the 'Real estate, renting and other business activities' sector the highest for four of the seven counties and accounting for 7.5% across the Western Region, as illustrated in Figure 1.
- The next highest sector is 'Other community, social and personal service activities' with 7.4% in this sector in the Western Region working at or mainly from home.
- At a county level there are some interesting observations. For example while 3.2% of workers work mainly at or from home in the Western Region (2.8% nationally), in Leitrim particularly high rates are evident among some industrial groups, such as 'Other community, social and personal service activities' and 'Real estate, renting and other business activities'.
- The incidence of working at or mainly from home in the Western Region in the largely public sectors of education (1.7%), health (1.3%) and public administration and defence (0.9%) – (not included in Figure 1), is unsurprisingly low given the nature of the sectors.

**Fig 1: Distribution of those working Mainly at or from Home as a % of all workers by County and Region, 2011 – Selected Industries<sup>5</sup>**



## Conclusion

Those working mainly at or from home represent a broad range of workers; the self-employed, employees, 'gig' workers and e-Workers across a broad range of sectors. They may have very little in common except their place of work, which is less visible than traditional work places. As noted in the WDC Policy Briefing on e-Working, there is a need for better data to understand these workers, be they self-employed, e-Workers or engaged in the 'gig' economy. Data should measure those working from home on a one day, two day week and more frequent basis.

It is clear that there is a higher rate of those working mainly at or from home in the Western Region than nationally – both including and excluding agriculture. There is a higher rate of self-employment in the Western Region and this is likely to be a contributory factor. This higher rate of self-employment is partly related to an absence of other opportunities and the need to generate income. Those working mainly at or from home also include skilled employees choosing to live in more regional locations. Supporting those 'who work mainly at or from home' is also supporting the retention of higher skilled, often entrepreneurial workers in regional economies as well as likely reducing the incidence of commuting and migration.

Work takes many forms and the concept of work is changing. We need to ensure that we can capture and measure the incidence of all types of work so as to ensure that our policy focus is not limited to the traditional workplace-based employer-employee relationship. Policies will need to be developed to support all employment types and evidence of the nature and extent of work that occurs in the home is required to inform this.

<sup>5</sup> Excludes those working in Agriculture, Forestry & Fishing Industries.