

Article

# Coronavirus and homeworking in the UK labour market: 2019

The extent to which different people in the labour market work from home, either on a regular or occasional basis.

Contact:  
Bob Watson  
labour.supply@ons.gov.uk  
+44 (0)1633 455070

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# 1 . Main points

- Of the 32.6 million in employment, around 1.7 million people reported working mainly from home, with around 4.0 million working from home in the week prior to being interviewed for the survey.
- Around 8.7 million people said that they have worked from home; this is less than 30% of the workforce.
- Some industrial sectors, such as transportation and storage, accommodation and food services, and wholesale, retail and repair provide relatively few opportunities for people to work from home.
- Other industrial sectors, such as information and communication, professional, scientific and technical activities, financial and insurance activities, and real estate activities, provide far more homeworking opportunities.
- Occupations requiring higher qualifications and experience are more likely to provide homeworking opportunities than elementary and manual occupations.
- Younger workers are the least likely to be working from home, whereas those who continue to work beyond State Pension age are increasingly likely to be working from home.

## 2 . Overview of homeworking

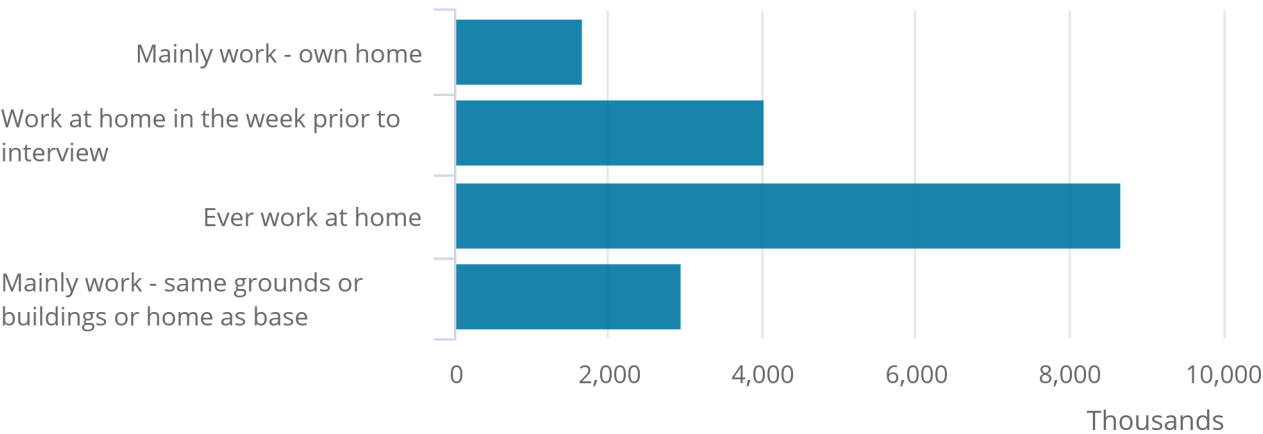
With the current outbreak of the coronavirus (COVID-19), most people are expected to work from home where possible. This article investigates to what extent different people within the labour market work from home, either on a regular or occasional basis. It makes use of information from the Annual Population Survey (APS) and covers the 12 month-period from January to December 2019. For further information on the survey and the questions used, see the [Methodology](#) section.

**Figure 1: Around 1.7 million people reported working mainly from home**

Number of people working at or near home in the UK, January to December 2019

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Number of people working at or near home in the UK, January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

For the 12-month period from January to December 2019, of the 32.6 million people in employment, around 1.7 million people reported working mainly from home, with around 4.0 million working from home at some point in the week prior to the interview. Meanwhile, 8.7 million people say they have worked from home and 2.9 million people work either in the same grounds or buildings as their home or use home as a base (Figure 1).

## Figure 2: The number and proportion of people who work mainly at home has generally increased over time

Percentage of people in employment who mainly work in their own home, UK, between January to December 2015 and January to December 2019

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Percentage of people in employment who mainly work in their own home, UK, between January to December 2015 and January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Over the last five years, the proportion of people who say that they mainly work from home has increased (Figure 2). In the 12-month period from January to December 2019, there were an estimated 1.7 million people who said that they work mainly from home; this represents just over 5% of the total workforce. In addition, around 1% of the total workforce said that they worked in the same grounds or buildings as their home, such as farmers or people with a shop attached to their home, and just over 8% of the total workforce said that they worked from home as a base, for instance, those who are self-employed and work on site at varying locations.

## 3 . Industries of homeworkers

The extent to which people can and do work from home varies by industrial sector.

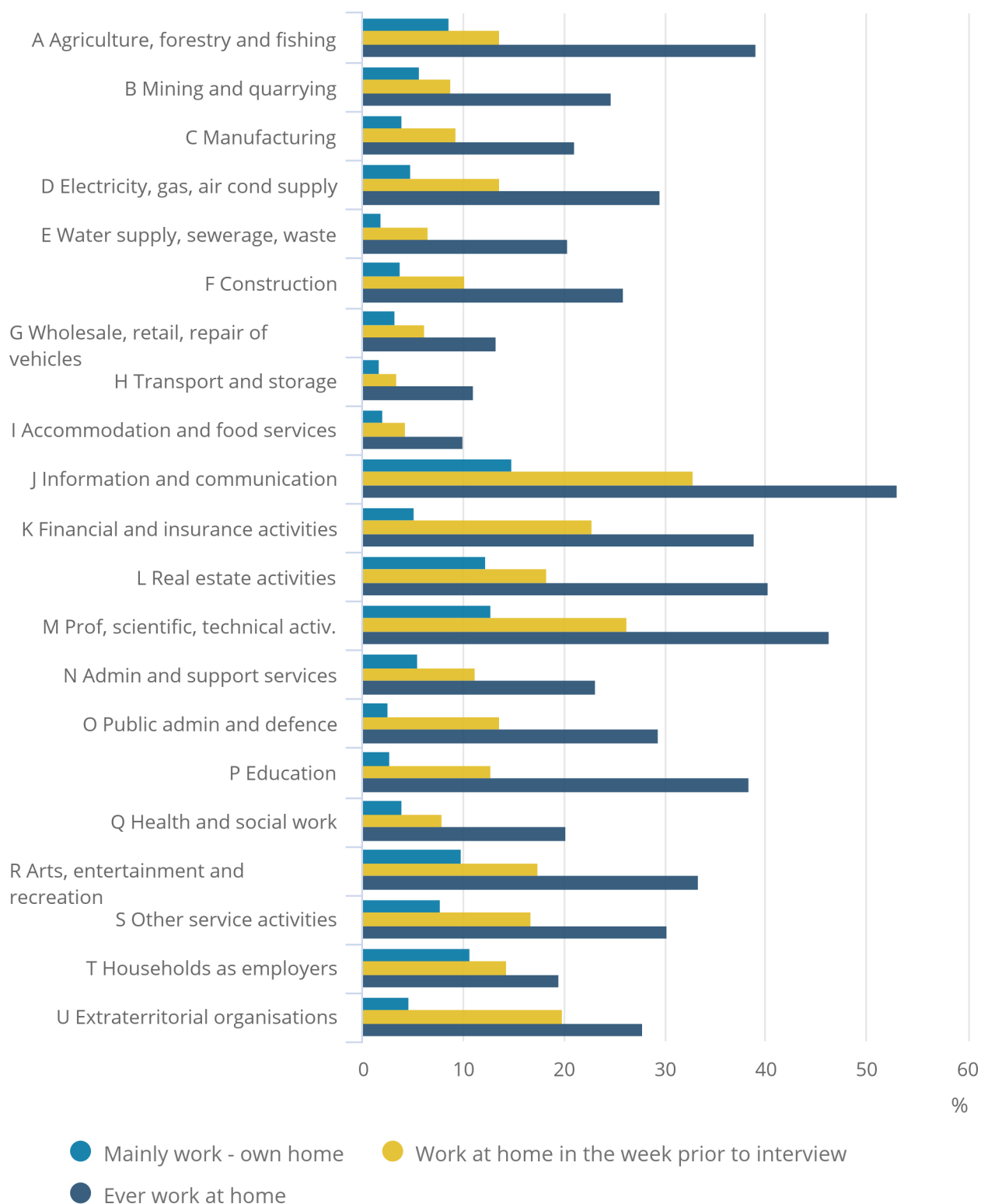


**Figure 3: The extent to which people can and do work from home varied by industrial sector**

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking in each industrial sector, January to December 2019

# Figure 3: The extent to which people can and do work from home varied by industrial sector

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking in each industrial sector, January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

For some industrial sectors, it would be very difficult for people to work from home. For example, in both the transportation and storage sector and accommodation and food services sector, only around 10% of people report ever being able to work from home. These two sectors include rail, road, air transport, shipping, warehousing, postal activities, hotels, bars and restaurants (Figure 3).

In contrast, the information and communication sector and professional and scientific sector both had around 50% of people who reported that they have worked from home as well as high percentages of people who had done so in the week prior to the interview.

The two largest industrial sectors, accommodation and food services and health and social work, account for over 25% of all employment but only around 16% of the people who have ever worked from home.

It should be noted that in some cases, just because people can and do work from home on some occasions, this does not necessarily mean that this is done on an ongoing basis. For example, this is likely to be the case in the education sector, which had a relatively high percentage reporting that they have worked from home. This may reflect certain activities such as planning and marking, which can take place at home, whereas very few people in this sector reported that they mainly worked from home.

## **4 . Occupations of homeworkers**

Those with higher-skilled occupations are more likely to work from home than lower-skilled workers.

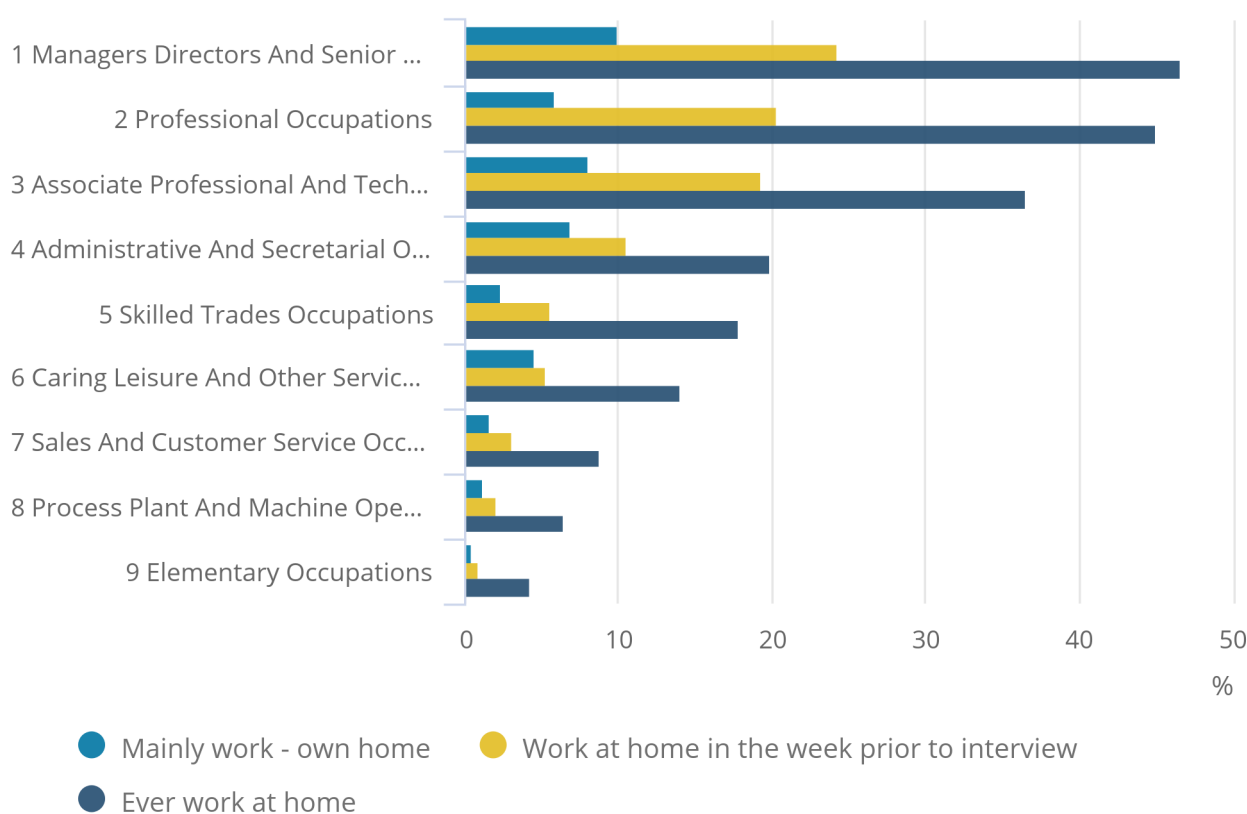


## Figure 4: Those with higher-skilled occupations were more likely to work from home than lower-skilled workers

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by occupation, January to December 2019

### Figure 4: Those with higher-skilled occupations were more likely to work from home than lower-skilled workers

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by occupation, January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

The likelihood to work from home in a particular week or to ever work from home broadly follows the structure of the occupational classification, with those major occupation groups towards the higher end of the classification more likely to work from home than those at the lower end (Figure 4).

Nearly 80% of those who worked from home in the week prior to the interview, or who ever work from home, came from the first three major occupation groups, while these groups constitute less than 50% of total employment. These three major occupation groups are also the highest-earning major occupation groups, suggesting that higher-paid workers are more likely to have the ability to work from home than lower-paid workers.

Table 1: Homeworking by minor occupation group, UK

	Level (000's)	Percentage				
	Employed	Own Home	Same grounds or buildings, or home as base	Separate from home	Work at home in the week prior to interview	Ever work at home
111 Chief Executives and Senior Officials	114	8.9	16.8	74.3	39.5	69.2
247 Media Professionals	187	20.5	11.4	68.2	30.7	58.1
341 Artistic, Literary and Media Occupations	454	23.7	29.0	47.2	37.2	57.8
231 Teaching and Educational Professionals	1,607	3.8	5.9	90.3	19.0	57.8
118 Health and Social Services Managers and Directors	107	2.5	8.0	89.1	23.1	57.0
113 Functional Managers and Directors	1,196	13.2	13.5	73.2	33.1	56.1
241 Legal Professionals	213	5.4	7.1	87.4	25.2	55.7
213 IT and Telecommunications Professionals	1,065	11.4	9.0	79.3	33.8	55.0
242 Business, Research and Administrative Professionals	841	8.0	10.7	81.3	31.8	54.8
215 Research and Development Managers	55	2.7	6.0	91.0	19.2	54.8

Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Looking in more detail at the minor occupation groups, the 10 minor groups with the greatest proportion of people who ever work from home all come from those three major groups.

## 5 . Regions of homeworkers

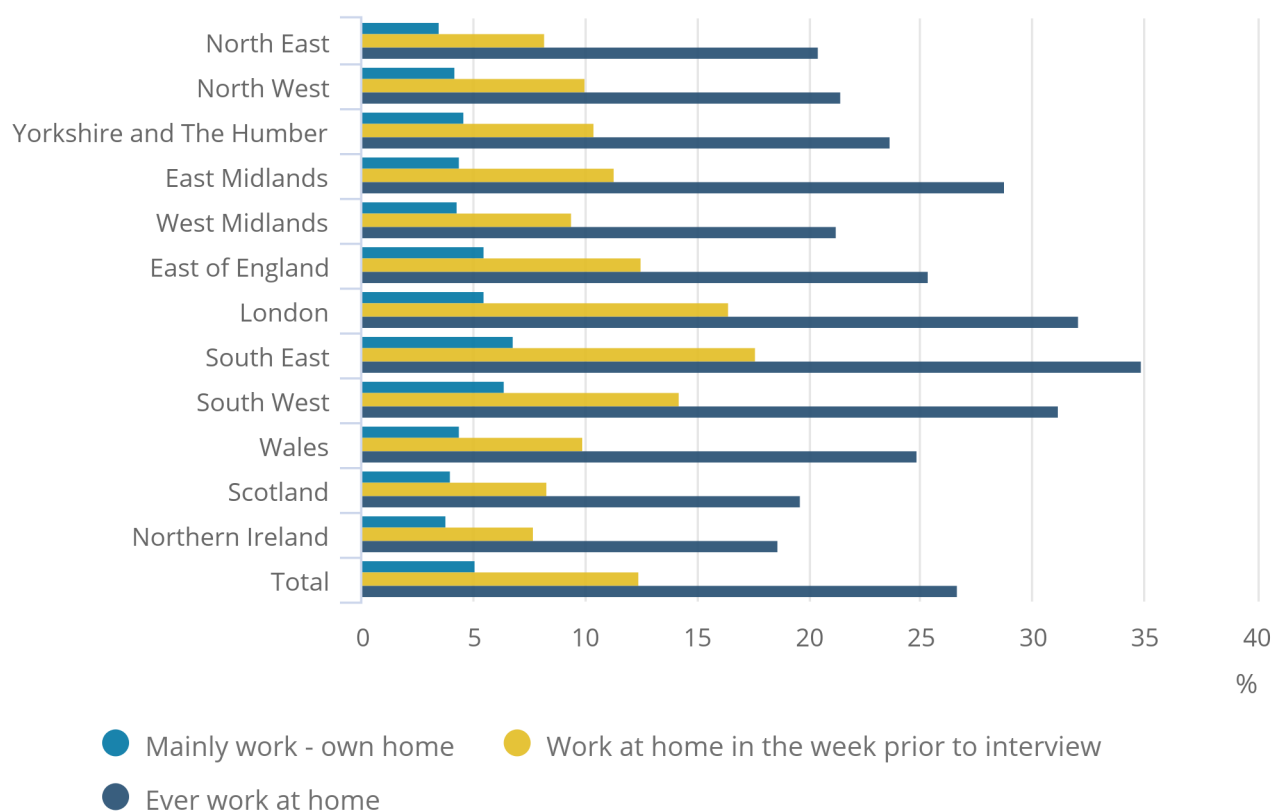
Homeworking is more prevalent in London, the South East and the South West than the rest of the UK.

**Figure 5: Homeworking was more prevalent in London, the South East and the South West than the rest of the UK**

Percentage of workforce homeworking resident in each UK region, January to December 2019

## Figure 5: Homeworking was more prevalent in London, the South East and the South West than the rest of the UK

Percentage of workforce homeworking resident in each UK region, January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

People who live in the South East are the most likely to work from home, ahead of those who live in London or the South West. In 2019, those working in the South East were over twice as likely to work from home at some point during the week as those who lived in Northern Ireland, Scotland or the North East (Figure 5).

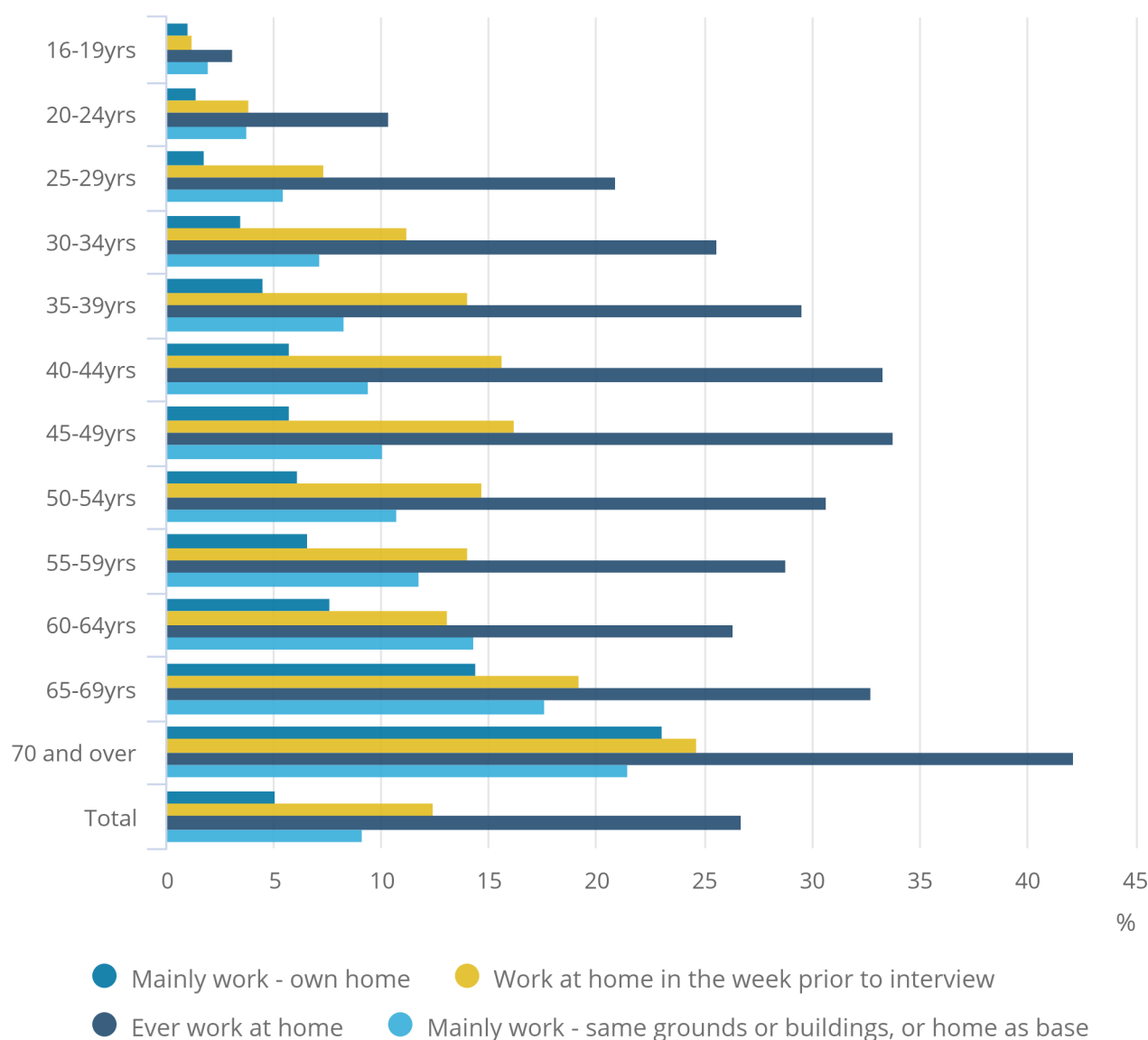
## 6 . Ages of homeworkers

**Figure 6: Workers aged 30 years and under were much less likely to work from home than older workers**

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by age group, January to December 2019

Figure 6: Workers aged 30 years and under were much less likely to work from home than older workers

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by age group, January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

Workers aged 30 years and under are much less likely to work from home than older workers. They are also less likely to work in the same grounds or buildings as their home or use home as a base. Meanwhile, those that keep working beyond State Pension age are far more likely to work from home than those below that age (Figure 6).

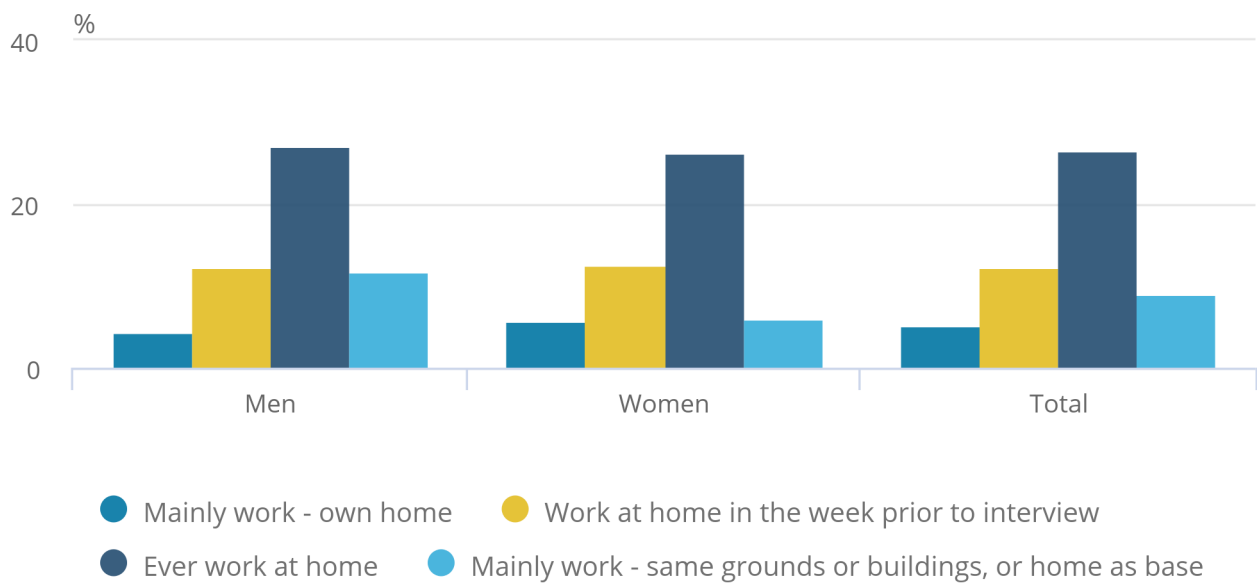
# 7 . Sexes of homeworkers

Figure 7: Men were over twice as likely to work either in the same grounds or buildings as their home or with home as a base

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by sex, January to December 2019

Figure 7: Men were over twice as likely to work either in the same grounds or buildings as their home or with home as a base

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by sex, January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

There are not very large differences between the percentage of men and women working from home, with women a little more likely to work mainly from home while men are a little more likely to have worked from home at some point. However, men are over twice as likely to work either in the same grounds or buildings as their home or with home as a base (Figure 7). This is partially because these are working arrangements prevalent in the agriculture and construction industries, which are both dominated by male employment.

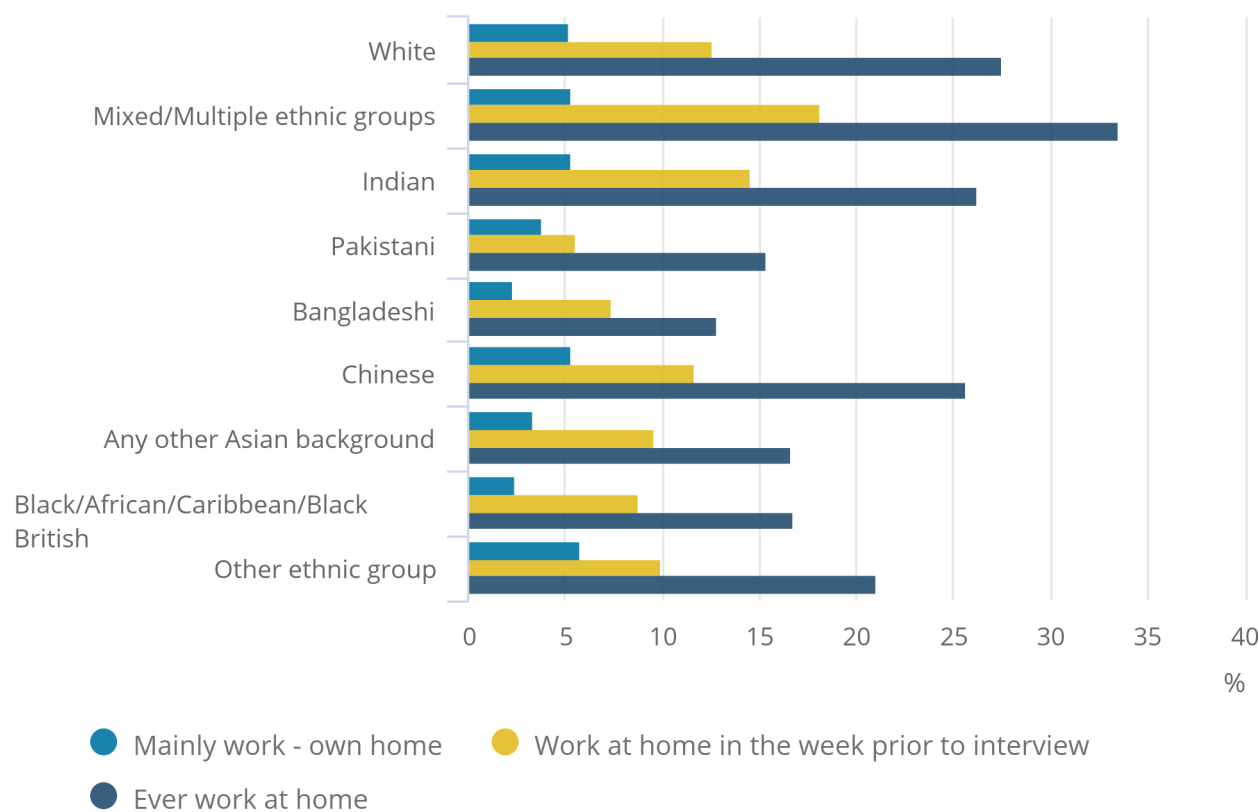
## 8 . Ethnicities of homeworkers

Figure 8: People of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicities were the least likely to work from home

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by ethnicity, January to December 2019

Figure 8: People of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicities were the least likely to work from home

Percentage of UK workforce homeworking by ethnicity, January to December 2019



Source: Office for National Statistics – Annual Population Survey

People of Pakistani and Bangladeshi ethnicities are the least likely to work from home (Figure 8). This is partially because a higher proportion of people from these ethnic background work in the wholesale, retail and repair; transport and storage; and hotel and catering sectors. These three sectors have a low prevalence of homeworking.

## 9 . Methodology

This article makes use of the Annual Population Survey (APS), a survey of people resident in households in the UK. The people selected are asked a number of questions about their relationship with the labour market, including questions on the extent to which they work from home. These questions examine whether people work mainly from home, for those that do not work mainly from home whether they ever work from home, and for all workers whether they did any work from home in the week prior to interview.

### APS questions

The analysis in this article is based on three separate APS questions asking:

In your main job, do you work mainly:

- in your own home?
- in the same grounds or buildings as your home?
- in different places using home as a base?
- somewhere quite separate from home?

Do you ever do any paid or unpaid work at home for your main job?  
(This is asked of those who do not mainly work from home in their main job.)

In your main job, have you spent at least one full day in the seven days ending Sunday the [date] working:

- in your own home?

### Weighting

Because the questions about ever doing work from home and working from home in the last week are only asked in certain APS interviews, they use a secondary set of weights in the dataset. Consequently, the estimate of the total number of people falling within a category would be different to the estimate derived from the main dataset weights.