

UK workers increasingly rejecting return-to-office mandates, study finds

2 months ago



[New research](#) reveals that less than half of UK workers would comply with a full-time return-to-office mandate, with women and some parents showing the strongest resistance to employer demands for in-person attendance.

Despite high-profile CEO announcements and media reports suggesting a “great return” to workplaces, researchers found no evidence of a mass move back to offices, with working-from-home rates remaining stable since 2022.

[The study](#), by researchers at the Global Institute for Women’s Leadership at [King’s College London](#) and King’s Business School, analysed over 1 million observations from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and 50,000 responses from the Survey of Working Arrangements and Attitudes UK (SWAA), providing a comprehensive picture of remote working patterns across the UK workforce from early 2022 through to the end of 2024.

Workers increasingly willing to quit over flexibility

The research shows growing worker resistance to rigid office mandates:

- 42% of workers say they would comply with a five-day return-to-office requirement – down from 54% in early 2022.
- From early 2022 to the second quarter of 2024, the proportion of workers saying they would look for a new job with homeworking opportunities if their current employer tried to make them return to the office full-time rose from 40% to 50%.

- Similarly, over the same period, the share of workers saying they would quit straight away if forced to go in five days a week doubled from 5% to 10%.
- Overall, 58% of workers now say they would either quit immediately (9%) or start looking for a new job (49%) if required to return full-time.
- Women are more likely to resist, with 64% saying they would quit straight away or seek alternative employment, compared to 51% of men.

Some parents are increasingly resistant to office mandates

Parents have particularly shown growing opposition to full-time office requirements:

- In early 2022, 38% of fathers with school-age children (aged six to 17) said they would quit or look for a new job in response to such a mandate – but by the end of 2024 this had risen to 53%.
- Just one in three (33%) mothers with young children say they would comply with full-time office mandates.
- Meanwhile, Black and minority ethnic workers show higher rates of compliance with full-time return-to-office mandates, possibly reflecting job insecurity and workplace discrimination

Hybrid working becoming the norm

Despite a widespread “return to office” narrative, the data shows hybrid working has become established in the UK labour market:

- Employer policies have not shifted significantly towards eliminating remote work: based on the LFS dataset analysed, a stable 26-27% of women said their home was their main place of work between the first quarter of 2022 and the fourth quarter of 2024. Similarly, for men, the rate has remained at around 27-30%, although a slight decrease of around 1-2 percentage points is observable in the most recent data.
- If anything, there has been a slow increase in average permitted work-from-home days – from less than one day per week in 2022 to about 1.3 days in 2024.
- However, there is also evidence to show that employers are less likely to allow *fully* remote working, with a slight increase in the number of homeworking policies that permit staff to only work from home one to two days per week.
- According to the SWAA dataset, one in four (25%) workers report working remotely at least three or more days a week, while two in five (40%) work remotely at least once weekly.

Implications for businesses and diversity

The researchers warn that rigid return-to-office policies risk creating a two-tier workforce and undermining diversity:

- Women and parents who cannot comply with full-time office requirements due to caregiving and other household responsibilities may be forced out.
- Remote workers are likely to face a greater flexibility stigma and potential career penalties, especially when it is generally parents or mothers who work from home.
- Organisations implementing inflexible mandates risk significant recruitment, skills and retention challenges.

The study recommends that organisations frame flexibility as a long-term business strategy rather than a temporary perk, emphasising that hybrid and remote working have become baseline expectations in the modern labour market.

Heejung Chung, Professor of Work and Employment and Director of the Global Institute for Women's Leadership at King's College London, and lead author of the report, said:

"An increasing amount of research shows that well-designed hybrid working models offer significant benefits for both employers and employees. Alongside this, there has been a marked shift in attitudes, with workers now seeing flexibility as the norm. Managers need to understand and adapt to this new reality. Rather than forcing a return to pre-pandemic working patterns, organisations should be looking to formalise hybrid models, invest in remote collaboration tools, and set up coordinated in-office days to maximise engagement.

"Where possible, workers should feel emboldened to hold their ground in the face of return-to-office mandates, as the weight of the evidence demonstrating remote working does not harm productivity is growing. In fact, many studies are finding flexible workers tend to work longer and harder compared to those who do not work flexibly – and importantly, those who are able to work remotely tend to be more loyal and committed to their jobs."