



How the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted Irish society: **A focus on Healthcare, Social Care, and the Labour Market**

Laura Foley, UCD Geary Institute for Public Policy



Introduction

- Impact of COVID-19 on healthcare, social care, and the labour market in Ireland has been substantial
- Unequal impact across Irish society
- Gendered impact – women workers greatly affected and women took on unequal share of unpaid care and housework

Presentation Outline

- Impact on Health, Healthcare, and Social Care Settings
 - Pregnancy, mental health, and the gendered care divide
- Impact on the Labour Market
 - Job losses and Business Closures
 - Shift to Remote Working
 - Gendered Impact

What does this mean moving forward ?

Impact on Healthcare

- As of 8th June 2022 **1,570,519** confirmed PCR tests
- True number of infections likely to be higher
- Up to Wednesday 8th June 2022, **7,416** deaths
- Impact on hospital settings: concern in relation to bed space
- Delays in illnesses being detected and treated
- Health screenings and elective procedures delayed
- 20% reduction in cancer surgeries

COVID-19 can be serious for you and your baby

Getting the vaccine helps protect you and your baby from serious illness and hospitalisation from COVID-19.



NATIONAL IMMUNISATION OFFICE
WWW.IMMUNISATION.IE
#FORUSALL



 HSE campaign to promote COVID-19 vaccines among pregnant women. Source: <https://www.hse.ie/eng/health/immunisation/hcpinfo/covid19vaccineinfo4hps/health-professional-information-covid-19-vaccine-and-pregnancy/6-reasons-fact-1-ig.png>

Impact on Pregnancy

- Widespread restrictions on maternity-related services
- Increased **anxiety**
- **Fears** around vaccine
- Increased number of pregnant women in ICU with COVID

A person with long brown hair, wearing a green hooded sweatshirt and blue jeans, is sitting on a wooden pier or dock. They are facing away from the camera, looking out at a calm body of water under a grey, overcast sky. The pier is made of dark wooden planks.

30% of people reported that
their mental health had
worsened since March 2020

- Source: Healthy Ireland Survey 2021

Impact on Mental Health

- 81% felt lower level of social connectedness
- Increase in mental health referrals (College of Psychiatrists, 2020)
- Women, especially young women, greatly affected.



Gendered Care Divide

Date	Overall cases	Healthcare worker cases	% of Healthcare worker vs overall
12 th April 2020	430	335	78%
23 rd April 2020	936	328	35%
8 th Jan 2021	8248	708	8.5%

Healthcare Workers COVID-19 cases compared to overall cases.

Source: <https://covid19ireland-geohive.hub.arcgis.com/>

- Women make up over 70% of global frontline health- and social care workers
- 4 out of 5 workers in Ireland’s health service are women
- Exposed to acute risks during COVID

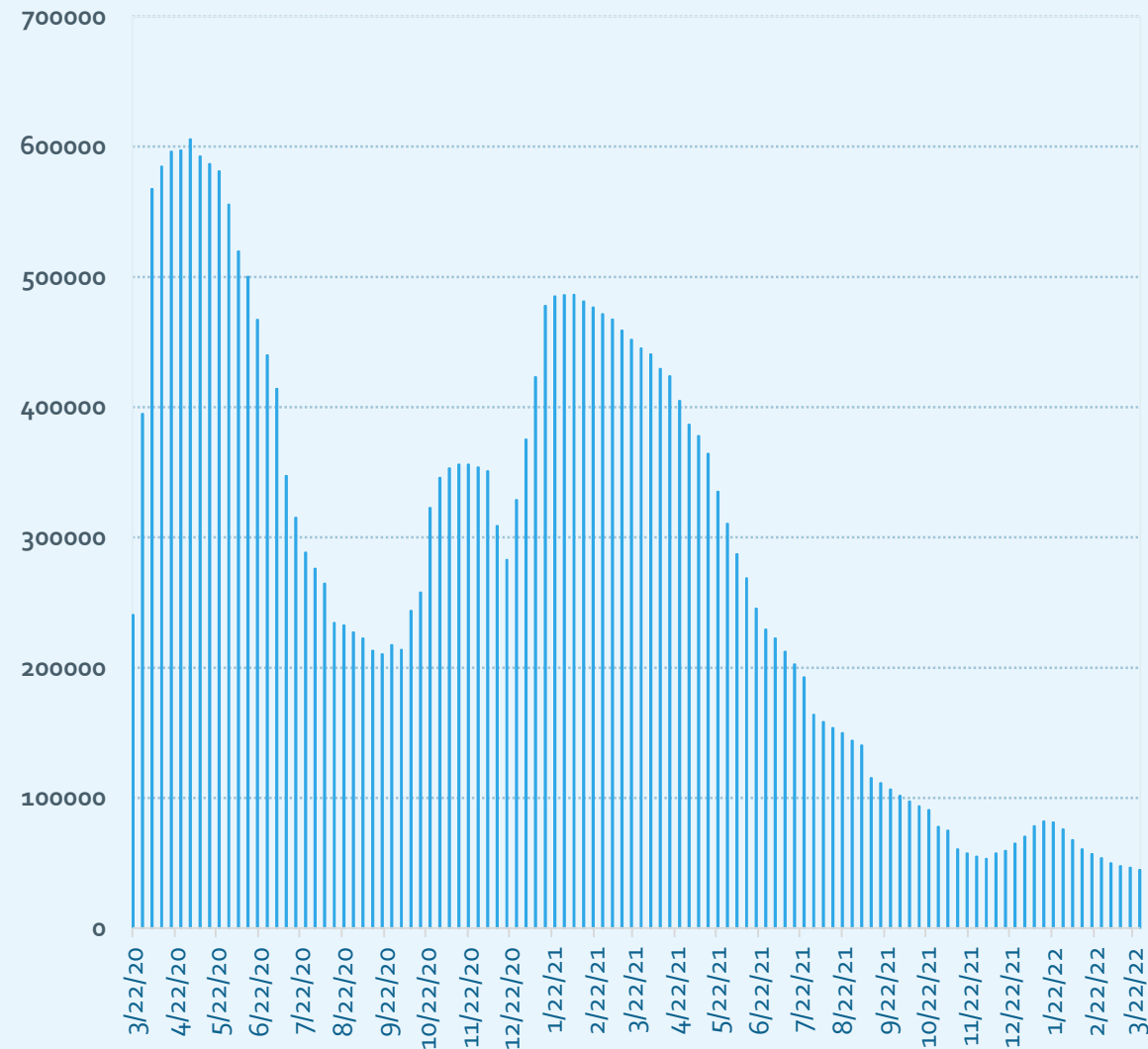
Formal and Informal Care Settings

- Long-term care settings were “disproportionately affected in terms of incidence, morbidity and mortality” (HIQA and HPSC, 2021).
- High rates of COVID-19: Insufficient PPE, lack of testing, staffing pressures, and the transfer of patients from hospitals (Nursing Homes Ireland, 2020)
- By November 2021, formal care settings accounted for 62% of COVID-19-linked deaths (Carswell, 2021)
- Women also provide majority of unpaid care and this was exacerbated during lockdowns.

Job Losses and Business Closures

- Impact of job losses and business closures were felt unequally across sectors, skills-levels, genders and age groups
- Largest job losses at the start were in hospitality, food services, wholesale and retail, and tourism
- Young people, those who were in part-time and 'low-skilled' work greatly affected (Coates et al., 2020)
- Women may have been more negatively impacted due to restrictions in hospitality, retail, and personal care services (Brioscú et al., 2021)
- Eastern European women most detrimentally impacted (Enright et al., 2020)

Number of PUP Recipients between March 2020 and March 2022



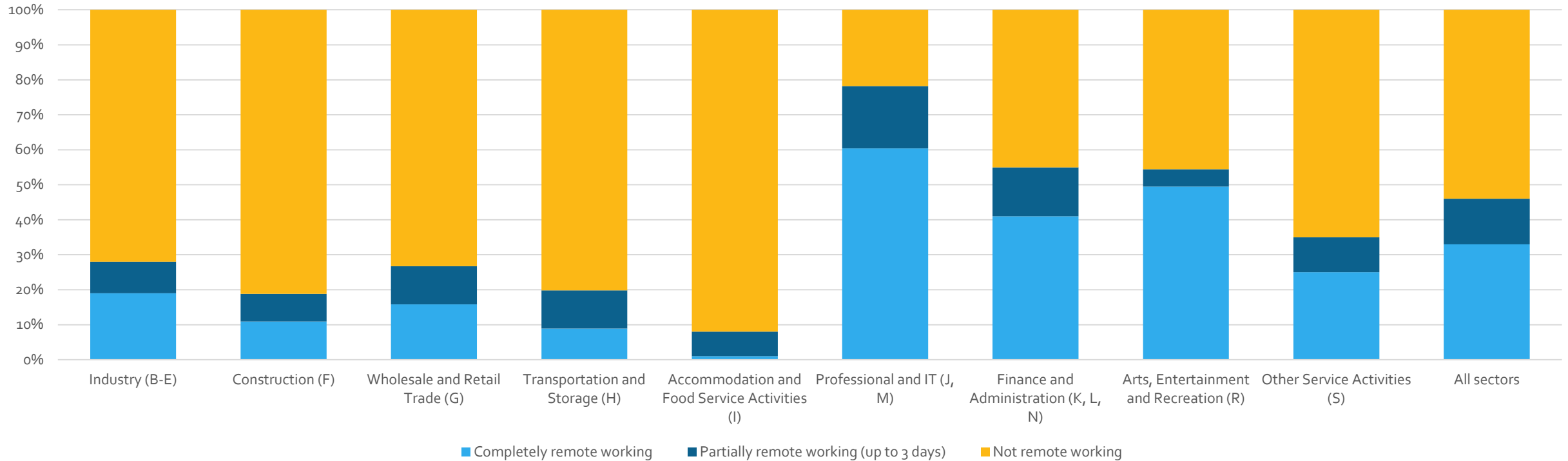
Source: CSO (<https://data.cso.ie>)

Interventions to support businesses and individuals

- Pandemic Unemployment Payment
- Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme
- Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme
- COVID-19 Restrictions Support Scheme
- At peak, 605,674 people received PUP in May 2020 (CSO, 2022)
- 879,766 people have received PUP for at least one week (CSO, 2022)

Shift to Remote Working

Working location by staff and sector at the end of 2020.



88% of people who can work remotely would like to do when all restrictions end (CSO, 2020)

Source: CSO

Gendered Impact

Impact on the world of work was not gender neutral

- Women tended to have high levels of contact-density in healthcare, social care, personal services, food preparation, hospitality, leisure and travel services (Fitzgerald, 2020)
- Irish women workers had to juggle many roles (NWCI, 2020)
- Internationally, over 2 million mothers left the labour force in 2020 (ILO and UN Women, 2022)
- For working mothers, their living and working conditions deteriorated
 - Ibec (2021) survey of employers found that 'more women' has requested changes to their working schedule to accommodate caring duties

What does this mean moving forward?

- Impact on Ireland's labour market and health and social care systems likely to remain for some time
- Pressures on the healthcare system: "overstaffed and overstretched"
- HIQA recommend that Ireland "explore alternative more suitable models of care, such as homecare and assisted living" (2020)
- Paid and unpaid care given little attention in COVID-19 policy responses (Fernandez Lopez and Schonard, 2022)
- Ongoing staff shortages especially in sectors such as tourism and hospitality

Remote Working – A change that may continue

- Searches for the term “working from home” on Indeed.com was six times higher in December 2021 than pre-pandemic (Slattery, 2022)
- 12.5% of job advertisements in December 2021 contained term “remote working” compared to 2.9% in 2019
- BUT there are **risks associated with remote working**, especially for women as the European Economic and Social Committee (2021) note workers could be made “invisible” and could miss out on support structure, and opportunities for promotion and training
- **Gender inequalities could be exacerbated** if women are expected to take on additional unpaid care work alongside their paid work.

Thank You!

Laura Foley laura.foley@ucd.ie -  @LauraCFoley

The full paper is available to download:

<https://publicpolicy.ie/papers/the-pandemic-two-years-that-have-changed-ireland-part-1-health-healthcare-and-the-labour-market/>

Please visit: <https://publicpolicy.ie/> for more policy papers
and to submit your research for publication