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# Disconnected workers cost the Irish economy €472m

## Interview

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WITH all the road closures in Dublin and in certain parts of the country due to Queen Elizabeth's visit this week, it is worth considering if Irish firms' workers are set up to work from home and how much it will cost the economy if they can't?

Think of the disruption the snow and ice caused in December and how it's a fact of life that people need to work from home sometimes.

According to new research by Empathy Research on behalf of Damovo, €472m was lost in the economy last year because workers who were stuck at home for various reasons were less productive or just not productive at all.

The survey revealed that 35-44 year olds (55pc) were most likely to have missed time from work, with those aged over 45 years (40pc) least likely to have missed work for reasons beyond their control. It is likely that those in the 35-44 year age bracket have young children and may have needed to stay at home due to a child illness or school closures during bad weather.

Looking at the regions, office workers in the rest of Leinster (excluding Dublin) were much more likely to have taken time off (66pc) than other regions, with Dublin at 45pc, Munster at 39pc and Connaught/Ulster at 38pc.

This is probably due to the snow and ice disruption in the east of Ireland, including the commuter counties near Dublin. The wider range of public transport options in Dublin is likely to have helped more people make it into the

office.

There was very little difference between males missing work (46pc) and females (49pc). In total, almost half (48pc) of those surveyed couldn't make it to work at some stage in the last year, excluding holidays and personal illness, with 3.4 days being the average number of days missed.

Almost two thirds (65pc) of office workers have limited or no access to their office computing and communications tools from



Mary Bradshaw, country manager, Damovo Ireland

outside the office, ie restricted access to company network, work email or work voicemail.

More than twice as many males (49pc) than females (24pc) surveyed have full remote access to the office.

While this could point to a gender divide for technology usage, it's interesting to note that there is an even split between males (79pc) and females (78pc) who use unified communications (UC) tools such as Skype and

Facebook instant messaging in their personal lives to stay in contact with friends and family.

In the office, 42pc of workers have UC tools available to communicate with colleagues and customers. These include instant messaging (online chat), presence information (online availability status), videoconferencing and real-time data sharing.

This compares with just 24pc of office workers in a similar Damovo survey conducted in 2008.

Damovo Ireland country manager Mary Bradshaw says the fact so many workers were unable to be productive is ironic when you consider a lot of them actually have broadband.

According to Bradshaw, very few companies in Ireland have plans for unexpected situations like snow and ice, so there's no workflow or backup plan in place to keep the show on the road.

"It's also a question of how firms equip or provide access to the office network to workers who may need to work from home. For

example, how many workers have access to the company email system from their home computers or who have access to a virtual private network (VPN)?"

Describing the €472m loss to the economy as 'frightening', she urges firms to have contingencies in place to enable workers to keep working if they can't make to the office.

"Last year was a signature year because it was so bad with the weather. But year in and year out there are going to be days of productivity lost for any number of reasons.

"New technologies like unified communications (UC) enable everything that's in the office to be accessed remotely and they're not expensive. All workers need is to be connected to the internet," Bradshaw adds.

