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The impact of remote work on mobilities in the UK

Kirsten Clarke [a,b]

ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has substantially increased remote and hybrid working rates, creating a large group of workers whose experiences differ from those in traditional workplace settings. While previous studies have compared remote and non-remote workers in relation to productivity, performance and well-being, less attention has been given to how their mobility patterns differ. Although researchers have suggested that the ability to work remotely affects workers' mobilities, there remains limited empirical evidence comparing remote and non-remote workers' mobilities. This paper presents the first study to compare the mobilities of these groups in the UK. It focuses on four types of mobility studied in relation to remote work: counterurbanisation, commuting, multi-local work and immobility. It is the first to integrate analysis of all four mobilities, offering a novel, integrated perspective on remote work and mobility. The paper examines regional differences in these mobilities across the UK, highlighting how workers' mobility patterns vary between regions.

This study draws on data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study and employs bivariate statistical tests and regression analyses. The results show that remote workers are more likely than non-remote workers to move to rural areas, own second homes and commute longer distances. These trends are pronounced in southern English regions. Remote work risks reinforcing existing inequalities between knowledge workers and manual workers and perpetuating traditional associations between mobility and urban areas in the UK. Furthermore, while remote work may generate new economic opportunities, it may also increase demand for accessible rural housing, particularly in regions surrounding London.

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KEYWORDS

Mobility; remote work; counterurbanisation; commuting; immobility; multi-local work; geography of work

1. INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic triggered an unprecedented transformation in how people work. Prior to the pandemic, 12% of UK workers worked remotely at least sometimes (Mutebi & Hobbs, 2022). Now, 41% still work from home at least sometimes, with 28% hybrid working and 13% working fully remotely (ONS, 2024). Notably, remote and hybrid workers are typically higher-paid knowledge workers, whereas those in manual or routine occupations often remain tied to fixed workplace locations.

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Researchers have suggested that the ability to work remotely has led some workers to re-evaluate their mobility decisions. Four types of mobility have been identified as potentially influenced by remote work: counterurbanisation (urban-to-rural migration), multi-local work (working from multiple locations), commuting (travel to and from a workplace) and immobility (remaining in place). Despite the suggested links between remote work and these mobilities, few studies have directly compared the mobility patterns of remote and non-remote workers – and none have done so in the UK. As a result, it remains unclear whether and how the four mobilities outlined above differ between these two groups.

Therefore, the first objective of this paper is to address this gap by examining how mobilities vary between remote and non-remote workers in the UK. Importantly, existing research tends to examine each of the four remote work-related mobilities in isolation. In contrast, this paper analyses all four mobilities together and considers how they may be interconnected, offering a novel perspective that treats remote work-related mobilities as integrated. In addition, little research has explored how these mobility patterns may vary across regions, despite clear regional differences in working practices and lifestyles, including in the UK. The second objective of this paper is therefore to investigate regional variation in remote work-related mobilities in the UK.

The paper's objectives are addressed by analysing data from the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS) (University of Essex, 2023), a longitudinal panel survey that captures various work and mobility-related topics. The findings show that remote workers are more likely than non-remote workers to counterurbanise, commute for longer and own a second home. These mobility patterns also vary across the UK, with higher levels of mobility observed in southern English regions. Understanding these dynamics – and the opportunities and challenges they create – can support policymakers and planners in anticipating and managing the effects of changing work practices on regional societies and economies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on remote work and mobility has grown substantially since the pandemic, as the shift to remote work disrupted many workers' daily and residential mobilities. While recent studies suggest that post-pandemic remote and hybrid work trends continue to influence how workers make mobility decisions, few have directly compared the mobility patterns of remote and non-remote workers. As a result, uncertainty remains about whether – and in what ways – these groups differ in their daily and residential movements. Moreover, no studies to date have examined these differences within the UK context or explored how remote work-related mobilities may vary across UK regions.

A significant portion of the literature focuses on remote work and counterurbanisation. During the pandemic, media reports and academic studies documented the urban-to-rural migration of workers, including in the UK (Rowe et al., 2023). However, recent research suggests that many workers have relocated to suburbs or accessible rural villages, rather than more remote rural areas, creating what has been termed a 'donut effect' (Ramani & Bloom, 2022), a trend observed in several countries (e.g., Argent & Plummer, 2022; Kotsubo & Nakaya, 2024), including the UK (Ahrend et al., 2023). Indeed, Wang et al. (2022) found that UK workers were most likely to counterurbanise to rural areas close to the city they were leaving. Debates also persist about whether these trends reflect a lasting, fundamental change or if workers are returning to cities as some organisations implement return-to-office mandates (Sharifi & Lee, 2024). Despite widespread claims that counterurbanisation has been driven by remote work, relatively few studies have empirically examined the association between the two. Connections between remote work and residential relocation have been established in Italy (Jansen et al., 2024), Sweden (Correa, 2025) and the EU (Wong et al., 2025). However, all three studies relied on pandemic-era data, limiting their relevance to post-pandemic trends.

No studies have assessed whether remote and non-remote workers differ in their likelihood to counterurbanise in the UK, or how these patterns may vary across regions with diverse mobility behaviours.

A further focus in the literature is commuting. While both fully remote and hybrid work typically reduce commuting frequency, some pre-pandemic studies found that remote workers endured longer commutes due to the reduced need for daily travel (e.g., de Abreu e Silva & Melo, 2018). In the UK context, Caldarola and Sorrell (2024) analysed 15 years of pre-pandemic data and found that remote workers had longer weekly commute distances than their non-remote counterparts. Few comparisons of remote and non-remote workers' commute times have been conducted since the pandemic. Wöhner (2022) found hybrid workers in Switzerland commute shorter overall distances than non-remote workers, though with added travel time for other journeys. Hostettler Macias et al. (2025) found remote workers in Switzerland commute longer distances but travel shorter overall weekly distances. Indeed, whether remote or non-remote workers accumulate longer total weekly or monthly commute times remains a key debate. The causal relationship between remote work and commuting is also debated, with some arguing that remote work enables longer commutes (e.g., de Vos et al., 2018), while others suggest that workers with longer commutes are more likely to seek remote work (de Abreu e Silva & Melo, 2018). No studies have investigated post-pandemic commute times by remote work status in the UK, where commute times in large urban agglomerations like London are among the longest in Europe (Yanatma, 2024).

Multi-local work involves using multiple workplaces in different locations, encompassing both residential and daily mobility. Residential multi-local work refers to working from multiple residences, often a main home and a second home. While much of the research on residential multi-local work has focused on Nordic countries, this trend has also been observed in other European countries, including Germany (Schier et al., 2015) and Switzerland (Bürgin et al., 2021). Remote work has been linked to the rise of 'bi-residence' and increased demand for second homes, with Colomb and Gallent (2022) noting the role of remote work in increasing rates of second homeownership in rural Europe. Di Marino et al. (2024) further argue that the distinction between a worker's primary and second home is becoming increasingly blurred. However, no studies have yet explored whether remote workers are actually more likely than non-remote workers to own or work from second homes. Residential multi-local work and its regional variation have not been examined in the UK, despite relatively high rates of second homeownership.

Daily multi-local work involves working from and commuting to multiple locations, such as an office, home or 'third places' like trains, customers' premises or cafes. The trend has traditionally been associated with workers in traditional industries, such as construction or delivery, due to the inherently transitory nature of these jobs (e.g., Ojala & Pyöriä, 2018). However, post-pandemic, daily multi-local work is also rising among remote workers (Di Marino et al., 2024), who may choose to work from co-working spaces, cafes or public transport. Despite this trend, it remains unclear whether remote workers are now more likely to engage in multi-local work than their non-remote counterparts.

While the relationship between remote work and immobility has not been extensively explored, some studies have identified connections. It remains unclear whether remote or non-remote workers experience more immobility daily – given the extensive debates surrounding commute times and the propensity to work from multiple locations. Furthermore, it is uncertain how residential immobility differs between remote and non-remote workers. While remote workers may have greater flexibility in their residential location choices, they may also be able to avoid moving house when starting a new job, potentially leading to declining internal migration (McCollum, 2025). Another question is whether residential mobility facilitated by remote work is a privilege, primarily accessible to higher-paid knowledge workers, that creates

enforced immobility for those unable to work remotely. Immobility also varies across regions, with rural regions traditionally associated with stability (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014).

The four mobilities examined in this paper have largely been studied separately rather than as part of an integrated system of mobility practices. While some research has considered the link between commuting and residential location choices (e.g., Ory and Mokhtarian, 2006) and emphasised connections between daily and residential mobility (Hostettler Macias et al., 2025), limited attention has been given to how different forms of mobility may interact or evolve together in response to remote and hybrid work. This fragmented approach limits our understanding of the broader changes in mobility patterns emerging in the post-pandemic period.

This paper addresses three key gaps in the literature. First, while remote work is widely assumed to influence mobility, there are very few studies that directly compare the mobility behaviours of remote and non-remote workers – and none that do so in the UK context. Second, no studies to date have examined these four forms of mobility together, despite growing recognition that daily and residential movements are interconnected. Third, no research has explored how changing mobility trends among workers may vary across different UK regions, where diverse local contexts may lead to distinct mobility patterns. Overall, this paper provides a holistic understanding of how remote work is reshaping mobility in the UK.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Data and sample

This study uses data from the UKHLS, a longitudinal panel study tracking approximately 40,000 UK households. The UKHLS provides data on work, behaviour and migration that are representative of the UK population. The UKHLS has previously been used to investigate how the pandemic's impacts vary across UK regions (Cross et al., 2022). Data from Waves 10 (Jan 2018 to May 2020) and 13 (Jan 2021 to May 2023) were analysed. Wave 10 was used solely to assess residence changes between Waves 10 and 13 for counterurbanisation. The other three mobilities were analysed using cross-sectional data from Wave 13 – the most recent data available at the time of analysis – as these outcomes are based on current behaviours. The few responses collected for Wave 10 in 2020 were excluded to ensure it represented pre-pandemic trends. The sample consisted of employed and self-employed UKHLS main survey respondents who provided valid responses regarding remote work. The sample size was therefore 14,174 respondents. All data subsetting and analysis were performed using the 'survey' package in RStudio to account for clustering and stratification (Lumley, 2021; RStudio Team, 2024).

Remote workers were classified as those working from home sometimes, often or always. Counterurbanisation was assessed by creating a variable indicating whether a resident moved from an urban to a rural area between Waves 10 and 13. Residential multi-local work was evaluated using a variable indicating second home ownership. Daily multi-local work was analysed using a variable on primary work location, with one response option being 'work from one or more places'. Commute times were available as a continuous variable. Immobility was implicitly analysed through the absence of other mobilities.

Regional variation was assessed using a variable that identified the respondents' region of residence. Special license data containing rural-urban identifiers, derived from the 2011 UK census (ONS, 2016) and the Scottish Government's urban/rural classification (Scottish Government, 2022), were used to explore further geographical trends. Supplementary UK census data on the location of second homes used for work were used for spatial analysis, as discussed in the following section.

3.2. Statistical and spatial analysis

Bivariate statistical tests were conducted to assess how remote and non-remote workers' mobilities differ. Rao-Scott adjusted Chi-squared tests were conducted for counterurbanisation, residential multi-locality and daily multi-locality, which were categorical variables. A Mann–Whitney U test was performed for commuting, a continuous variable. These tests provided an initial assessment of the association between remote work status and each mobility outcome.

To further examine the relationship between remote work status and mobility outcomes, a survey-weighted regression analysis was conducted for each mobility. Binary logistic regression was used for counterurbanisation, residential multi-locality and daily multi-locality, while linear regression was used for commuting. The full sample of 14,174 respondents was included in each model, though the sample size varied slightly depending on the mobility being analysed due to missing data. Each mobility type was analysed independently: Model 1 focused exclusively on counterurbanisation, while Models 2–4 examined the other mobilities (residential multi-locality, daily multi-locality and commuting). Although the models were separate, connections between mobilities were considered in interpretation.

The primary goal of the regression analyses was to determine the significance of the effect of remote working on mobilities after controlling for other factors that may influence mobility. Therefore, in each model, the mobility in question was the dependent variable, and remote work status was the primary independent variable. Each model also included additional control variables such as socio-economic classification (UK NS-SEC 5-fold classification), demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender and income) and urban/rural classification to account for confounding factors. The variables included were chosen based on those that have been included in other similar studies (e.g., Champion et al., 2009; Stockdale & Catney, 2014). Urban/rural classification was excluded from the counterurbanisation model to avoid circular reasoning, as this model specifically predicts rural migration.

Model diagnostics included checking multicollinearity and logit linearity for logistic models, and homoscedasticity and normality of residuals for the linear model. Model fit was evaluated using Nagelkerke's pseudo-R-squared for logistic models and R-squared for the linear model. Sensitivity analyses were also performed to ensure the results' robustness, including alternative model specifications and adjustments for potential outliers.

Finally, to illustrate regional differences in mobility patterns, maps were created to visually represent the spatial distribution of each mobility across different regions using respondents' regional locations. However, although the UKHLS asks about second home ownership, it does not provide second home locations. Therefore, the most recent UK census data was visualised instead, depicting second homes used for work in regions and Lower Layer Super Output Areas (LSOAs). While this approach provides an overview of second home distribution, it is important to note that this data could not be analysed in relation to remote work status. Furthermore, the census data was only available for England and Wales, limiting the generalisability of these findings across the UK.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Descriptive statistics

The number of remote workers varies across UK regions, with London and other southern English regions experiencing the highest rates, as shown in Figure 1. This is likely due to the prevalence of jobs suited to remote work in these regions, particularly managerial, administrative and professional occupations (ONS, 2024).

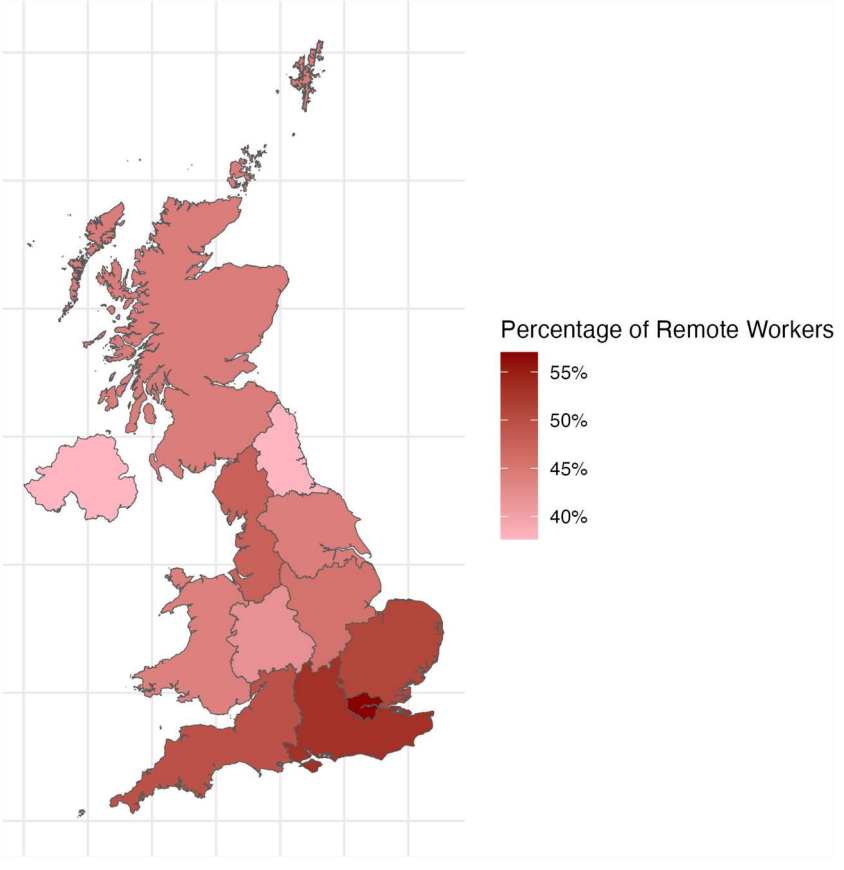

Figure 1. Map showing the percentage of remote workers in UK regions. Source: University of Essex (2023).

4.2. Counterurbanisation

2.8% of all remote workers counterurbanised between Waves 10 and 13 of the UKHLS, compared to 1.7% of non-remote workers. The Rao-Scott adjusted Chi-square test revealed a significant association between remote working and counterurbanisation, X^2 (1,1792) = 11.32, p = <0.01. The logistic regression analysis (Table 1; Model 1) also showed a significant association between remote work and counterurbanisation, even after controlling for other relevant variables. These findings suggest that remote workers are significantly more likely than non-remote workers to have counterurbanised between Waves 10 and 13 of the UKHLS.

In Figure 2, maps A and B depict counterurbanising remote workers as a percentage of all remote workers in each region. Map A highlights regions where remote workers have left urban areas, while map B shows regions that have received remote workers moving to rural areas. Maps C and D present the same data for non-remote workers. Notably, the similarity between the regions both non-remote and remote workers have moved from and to suggests that workers may be counterurbanising within regions where they already lived, supporting the findings of Wang et al. (2022). Additionally, the maps show that remote workers are more likely to have counterurbanised in regions bordering London, reflecting the established trend of 'counter-Londonising' (Smith & Higley, 2012), whereas Scotland and the South West of England exhibit the strongest counterurbanisation trends for non-remote workers.

Table 1. Regression analysis results.

Predictor Variable	Model 1: Counterurbanisation (logistic regression)	Model 2: Commuting (linear regression)	Model 3: Residential multi-locality (logistic regression)	Model 4: Daily multi-locality (logistic regression)
Remote workers	**0.53 (0.23)***	**2.33 (0.73)****	−0.14 (0.18)	0.13 (0.16)
Age	**−0.04 (0.00)*****	**−0.07 (0.02)****	**−0.02 (0.00)*****	0.01 (0.00)
Income	**0.00 (0.00)****	**0.00 (0.00)*****	**0.00 (0.00)*****	0.00 (0.00)*
Have children	−0.18(0.13)	**−1.99 (0.62)****	**−0.74 (0.20)*****	−0.08 (0.12)
Women	0.10(0.16)	**−3.00 (0.57)*****	0.17 (0.13)	**−0.39 (0.13)****
Socio-economic classification				
Intermediate occupations				
Managerial, administrative and professional	0.38 (0.29)	**2.10 (0.90)***	−0.14 (0.20)	**0.63 (0.20)****
Small employers and own account	0.32 (0.41)	−1.22 (1.44)	0.07 (0.30)	**−2.82 (0.77)*****
Lower supervisory and technical	0.29 (0.44)	**4.36 (1.12)*****	0.23 (0.34)	**−0.13 (0.27)*****
Semi-routine and routine	0.49 (0.34)	**−3.34 (0.88)*****	**−0.51 (0.26)***	**0.52 (0.22)***
Urban-rural classification				
Urban areas				
Accessible rural areas		−0.47 (0.71)	**0.51 (0.20)***	0.19 (0.15)
Remote rural areas		−0.51 (1.96)	−0.35 (0.50)	**0.84 (0.35)***
Model fit	Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.07$	$R^2 = 0.07$	Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.07$	Nagelkerke's $R^2 = 0.04$

Notes: Coefficients displayed with standard errors in parentheses. * Significant at 5%, **Significant at 1%, *** Significant at 0.1%.

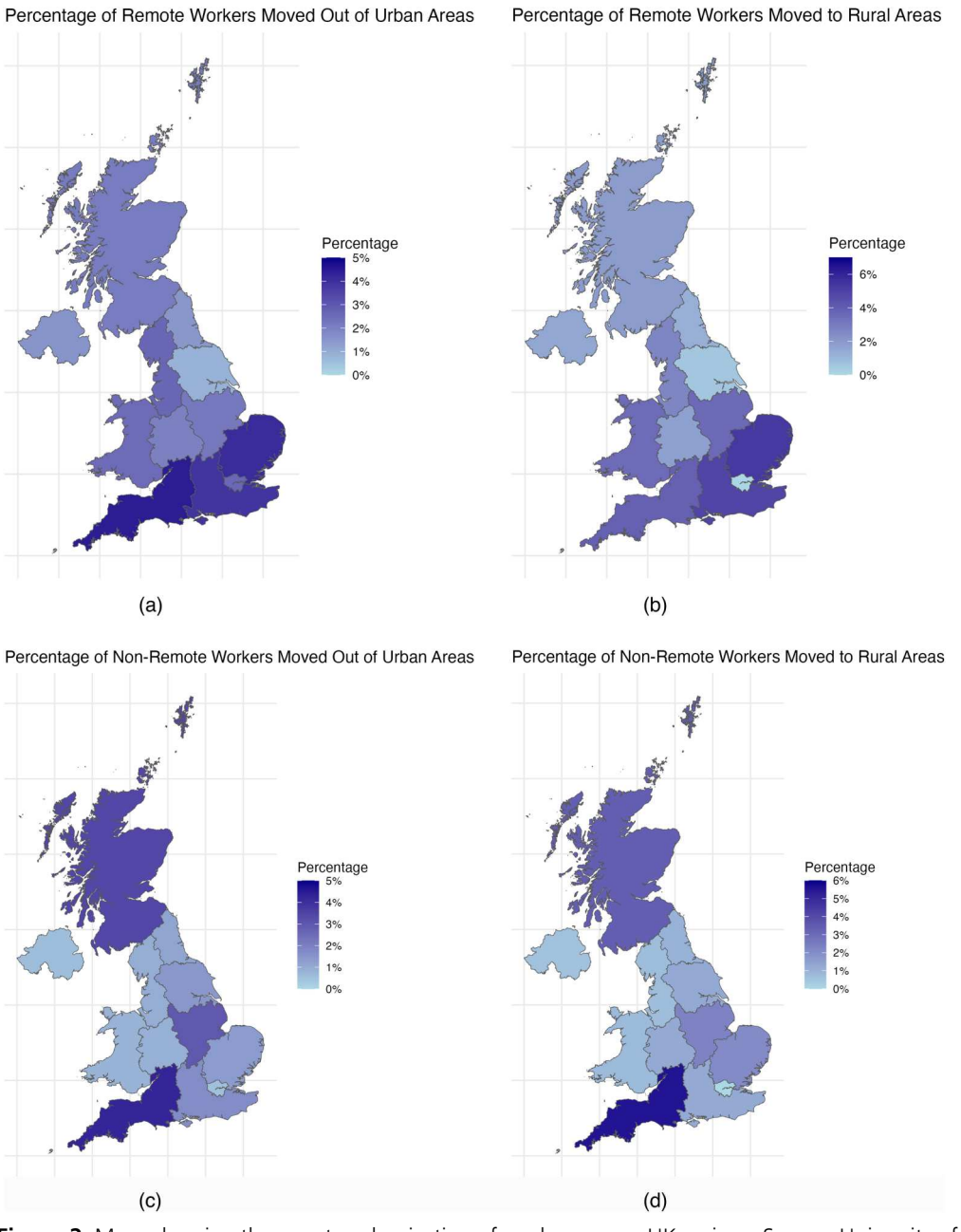

Figure 2. Maps showing the counterurbanisation of workers across UK regions. Source: University of Essex (2023).

A simple comparison of counterurbanisers' destinations revealed that the majority of counterurbanisers have moved from urban to accessible rural areas (95%) rather than remote rural areas (5%), indicating a potential 'donut effect' in the UK, as suggested by Ahrend et al. (2023). This trend may be linked to the post-pandemic popularity of hybrid work, meaning many workers must still live relatively close to their workplace. Furthermore, workers may consider the availability of factors such as access to amenities and proximity to family and friends in

their counterurbanisation decision-making, potentially limiting some moves to remote areas where these 'pull factors' may be lacking.

4.3. Commuting

Remote workers commute 27 min on average compared to 21 min for non-remote workers. The Mann–Whitney U test revealed a statistically significant difference in commute times between remote workers and non-remote workers, $z = 10.52$, $p = <0.01$. The linear regression analysis (Table 1, Model 2) also shows that there was a significant association between remote work and longer commuting times when holding other variables constant. These findings evidence that remote and non-remote workers have significantly different commute patterns in the UK, with remote workers being likely to commute for longer times, as has been suggested elsewhere in post-pandemic literature (Hostettler Macias et al., 2025). This finding aligns with counterurbanisation trends, as relocating to rural areas often entails accepting longer commute times. The UKHLS does not provide data on the frequency of commutes, meaning it was not possible to assess whether remote or non-remote workers have longer weekly or monthly commute times.

The map in Figure 3 demonstrates that commute times vary across UK regions, with London and its neighbouring regions having the longest commute times, reflecting the high concentration of jobs and the housing pressures that push workers out of the city. These are

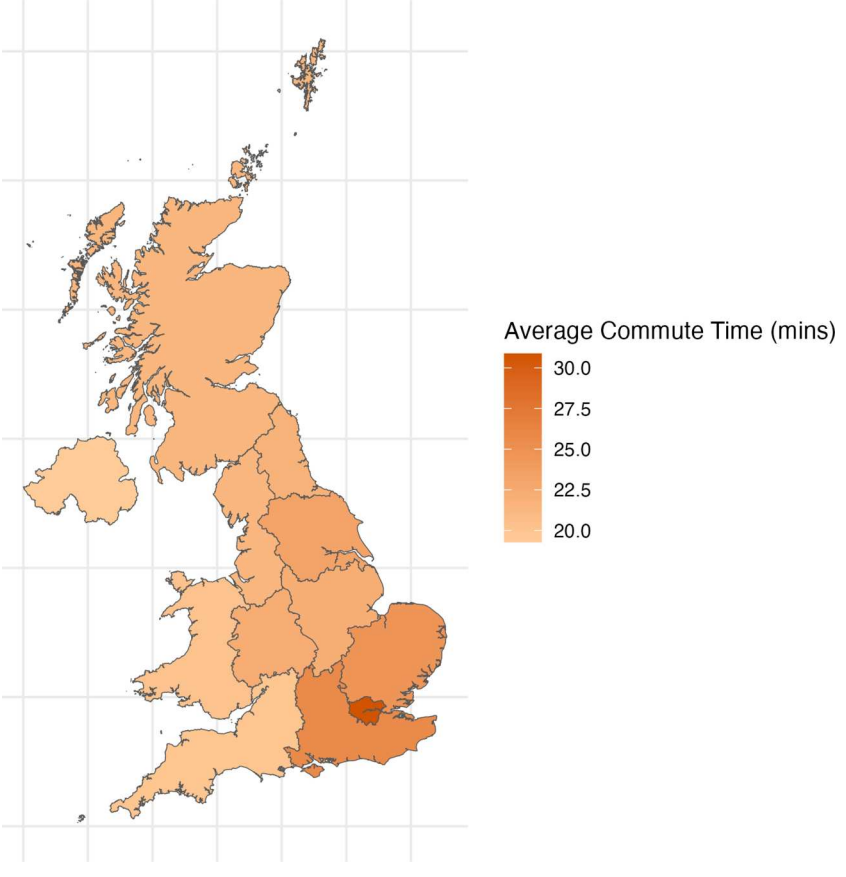

Figure 3. Map showing workers' average commute times across UK regions. Source: University of Essex (2023).

also the regions with the highest concentration of remote workers. Unfortunately, it is not possible to determine the causal relationship between commute time length and remote work using this data, which remains a key debate in the literature. Further qualitative investigations in these regions could illuminate whether workers with long commutes choose to remote work or if remote workers are willing to commute longer times.

4.3.1. Multi-local work (Residential)

3.5% of remote workers own a second home compared to 2.1% of non-remote workers. Importantly, this does not mean they are using their second home for work, although it is notable that second home ownership increases as remote work frequency increases. The Rao-Scott adjusted Chi-square test revealed a significant association between remote work and second home ownership, X^2 (1,2163) = 14.13, p = <0.01. However, this association was no longer significant when other factors were held constant in the logistic regression analysis (Table 1; Model 3). These findings suggest that while remote workers are more likely than non-remote workers to own a second home, other factors – including age, income and having a primary residence in an accessible rural area – are stronger predictors.

The maps in Figure 4 present data from the 2021 census and show that the use of second homes for work varies across and within UK regions. In map A, this geography appears to be dominated by London. However, the more granular data in map B shows that some rural areas also have relatively high percentages of second homes used for work, including Copeland in the Lake District (5.8%) and Somerset West and Taunton (6.3%). Indeed, when calculated together, remote rural areas across England and Wales have higher proportions of second homes used for work than accessible rural or urban areas. These findings corroborate suggestions in the literature that remote work has increased second homeownership in rural areas (Colomb & Gallent, 2022) and suggest evidence of this trend in the UK. This trend may grow as remote workers seek the well-being advantages of working periodically from these areas.

4.3.2. Multi-local work (Daily)

4.4% of remote workers state their primary work location as working from one or more places compared to 5% of non-remote workers. The Rao-Scott adjusted Chi-squared test did not find

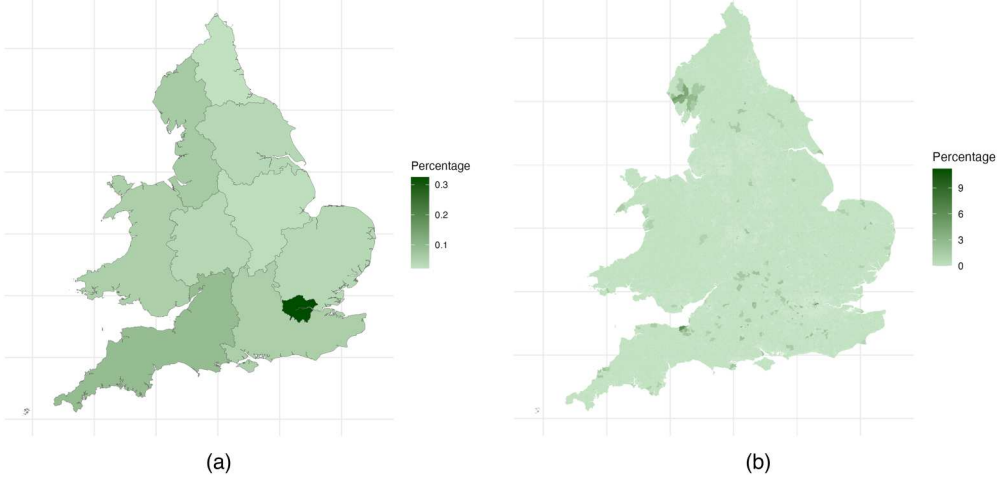

Figure 4. Maps showing the percentage of dwellings that are second homes used for work in (A) English and Welsh regions and (B) LSOAs. Source: University of Essex (2023).

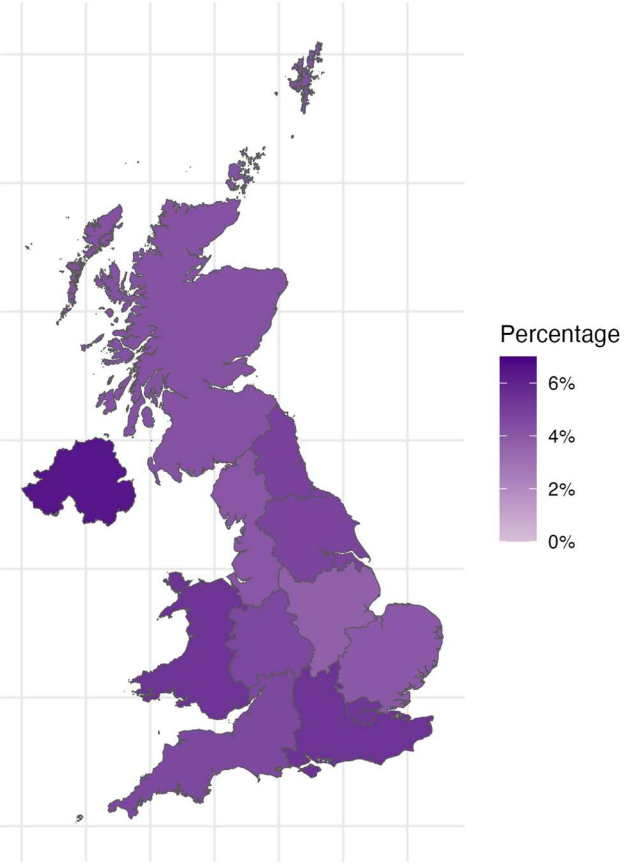

Figure 5. Map showing how working from one or more places varies across UK regions. Source: University of Essex (2023).

a significant association between daily multi-local work and remote work, X^2 (1,130) = 2.8457, $p = 0.09$. Furthermore, the logistic regression model revealed no significant association between remote work and working from multiple places (Table 1; Model 4). These findings suggest that there is no significant difference in daily multi-local working patterns between the groups.

However, working in semi-routine and routine or managerial, administrative and professional occupations were positive significant predictors of daily multi-local work. These two groups correlate with (a) those traditionally thought to work from multiple places in the pre-pandemic literature (semi-routine and routine occupations such as construction workers and delivery drivers) and (b) remote workers, who are largely employed in managerial, administrative and professional occupations. This finding highlights a potential shift away from this practice's primary association with traditional industries (Ojala & Pyöriä, 2018). Post-pandemic, remote workers may be taking advantage of their new flexibility to work from multiple places, thus creating two ends of a spectrum of multi-local workers. Daily multi-local working also varies across regions, as shown in Figure 5. The highest rates of working from multiple places are in London, the South East, Wales and Northern Ireland.

4.4. Immobility

The results presented above suggest that non-remote workers may be more immobile than remote workers. Non-remote workers are less likely to commute for longer times, counterurbanise or own second homes. However, as the UKHLS data does not capture weekly or monthly commute times, it is not possible to fully determine whether remote or non-remote workers are more immobile on a daily basis. Nonetheless, these findings raise important questions about the distinction between chosen and enforced immobility. Remote workers may be able to choose when to be immobile (e.g., opting to commute further but less frequently), whereas non-remote workers remain bound by the necessity of daily travel. As such, they are constrained by their existing commute patterns, making it more difficult to, for instance, counterurbanise or use a second home for work. Their relative immobility – particularly in terms of residential relocation – can thus be considered more enforced than chosen. This distinction is closely connected to earlier findings. The greater likelihood of counterurbanisation and second home ownership among remote workers suggests that the flexibility afforded by remote work may enhance their *motility* – that is, their capacity and opportunity to be mobile. In contrast, non-remote workers may face practical and structural constraints that limit their ability to move.

There are also interesting differences in immobility between regions, with southern English regions – particularly London – tending to exhibit greater mobility trends. This supports the dominant cultural narrative where urban regions like London are more mobile and the best places to 'succeed' (Glaeser, 2012).

5. CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

This paper presents the first study to directly compare remote and non-remote workers' mobilities in the UK, contributing to the limited international literature directly comparing the two groups' mobilities. The findings show that remote and non-remote workers do display distinct mobility patterns: compared to non-remote workers, remote workers are more likely to counterurbanise, own second homes and commute further. Indeed, remote workers appear to be generally more mobile than non-remote workers, meaning that non-remote workers may experience enforced immobility, particularly in terms of their residential movements. Although these findings are UK-specific, they provide valuable insights for stakeholders in other nations and regions facing increasing rates of remote work and associated new mobility trends.

5.1. Social and spatial inequalities

These findings have important implications for understanding inequality in the post-pandemic labour market. Remote workers are already more likely to be higher-paid knowledge workers and the rise of remote work appears to extend these advantages by offering greater spatial and temporal flexibility. In contrast, non-remote workers – often in lower-paid roles that require daily physical presence – remain tied to fixed routines and locations and may experience enforced immobility. Their ability to move, particularly in terms of residential relocation, is more constrained, limiting access to the benefits of flexible work. As such, the enhanced motility associated with remote work not only reflects existing occupational and income divides but also risks deepening them.

The regional analysis shows that mobility patterns are unevenly distributed across the UK. Southern English regions, especially those surrounding London, exhibit the strongest trends in remote work-related mobility. These patterns both reflect and reinforce existing spatial inequalities, positioning London and its hinterlands as centres of mobility. This supports longstanding narratives in which mobility is concentrated in urban growth regions and associated with success

(Glaeser, 2012), while immobility is seen as disadvantageous or involuntary – and often linked to more remote areas and regions (Milbourne & Kitchen, 2014).

5.2. Integrated approach to remote work and mobility

This study advances the understanding of remote work-related mobility by viewing the four mobilities as an interconnected system, where different forms of mobility influence each other. For example, remote workers who counterurbanise may also accept longer commutes, illustrating how spatial mobility can be balanced with temporal mobility. Higher rates of second home ownership among remote workers, particularly in rural areas, may also suggest that second homes can as a stepping stone for some workers towards full counterurbanisation. Non-remote workers, constrained by fixed work locations, may find it harder to utilise such opportunities, reinforcing their immobility in terms of both residential moves and flexible work options. Additionally, daily multi-local workers may commute between multiple work sites or between home and co-working spaces – creating a non-linear commuting pattern that differs from traditional single-destination commuting, highlighting the complexity of work mobility post-pandemic. These patterns, which have not been investigated here, could be an interesting avenue for future research.

5.3. Policy implications

The trends identified here will likely create important opportunities and challenges in communities and regions around the UK that should be considered in planning and policymaking. Remote workers' counterurbanisation and use of second homes for work risk pressurising housing markets and driving up property prices, particularly in accessible rural communities. These issues are especially relevant in southern English regions, which are seeing the highest levels of counterurbanisation and second home use for work. This may contribute to rising house prices and gentrification, which are already pressing issues in many accessible rural areas, particularly those near London (Crane, 2023). To address these challenges, regions may need to invest in infrastructure and services to support growing populations. This includes adapting public transport and other commuting infrastructure to manage increases in commuter traffic. Additionally, boosting housebuilding, particularly affordable homes, in remote work-driven counterurbanisation hotspots could help ensure these communities remain affordable for long-term residents.

As workers spend more time at home, demand for local services, retail and hospitality could also increase, particularly in accessible rural communities, where remote workers may also be moving. This influx of remote workers could further boost local economies, as counterurbanisers bring new skills and diversify the regional workforce. Entrepreneurs could also develop new services tailored to remote workers, such as co-working spaces or hospitality venues designed to accommodate daily multi-local workers.

5.4. Limitations and future research directions

Notably, the findings reflect workers' mobilities in a wave of the UKHLS primarily collected in 2022. It would be interesting to update these findings with the next wave of UKHLS data to see if the trends observed here continue further into the post-pandemic era. Additionally, this analysis does not explore within-group variation between remote workers, treating them as a homogeneous group. Future research could address this by examining how mobility patterns differ depending on the frequency of remote work. The quantitative approach used here also limits the ability to establish causality. While associations between remote work and mobility-related behaviours are evident, it remains unclear whether remote work directly enables mobility choices or whether individuals with specific mobility preferences seek remote work opportunities. Qualitative research could help explore how workers make mobility decisions and how these are shaped by other forms of mobility.

Future research could explore the complex commuting patterns of multi-local workers, which are not captured in the UKHLS data. There is also an interesting rural geography that remains unexplored. Rural communities are the recipients of counterurbanisers and host the highest proportions of second homes used for work; however, the majority of studies on the impact of remote work have focused on urban areas. Future research could therefore examine the implications of the mobility trends identified here for the resilience of rural communities.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available from the UK Data Service at https://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-Series-2000053, SN: 2000053.

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