Working Women In South Africa **Report 2025**



Winning With Women:
A Talent Blueprint For Employers

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Trusted Professional Skills

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A note from Phillipa Geard
CEO and founder of RecruitMyMom and RecruitAGraduate

Dear Employer,

It is with great pride that I introduce the 2025 Working Women in South Africa Report, the most comprehensive study of its kind on the realities, challenges and ambitions of skilled women in the workplace. This year, our research base has grown significantly, with the number of women surveyed increasing by 52% - from 2,468 respondents in 2024 to 3,742 in 2025.

While many of the core trends we identified last year remain consistent, this larger and more representative sample - particularly the increased participation of Black women—makes the findings even more robust and actionable for employers. The data is clear: more women are entering and graduating from tertiary institutions than ever before, creating an expanding talent pipeline of skilled professionals. Yet, employers who fail to adapt their attraction, development and retention strategies risk missing out on this critical workforce.

To deepen our understanding of the workplace landscape, this year's report introduces new insights into:

- Diversity and inclusion - how gender representation is evolving across industries.
- Working conditions for women - whether workplaces are improving for female employees.
- The impact of back-to-office policies - how rigid office mandates are driving women to seek new opportunities.

For employers, this report serves as a data-backed resource to help you build high-performing teams by understanding what women value in their careers. The findings offer valuable insight into what attracts and retains skilled women, the barriers they encounter, and the opportunities employers have to adapt in order to stay competitive in a changing talent landscape.

Not all the data we collected could be included in this report. If there is a specific insight you need, please feel free to reach out to me directly. Our goal at RecruitMyMom has always been to help businesses harness the full potential of South Africa's skilled workforce through smarter hiring and retention strategies.



I hope this report sparks conversations within your organisation and informs decisions that will drive long-term business success while creating more inclusive and productive workplaces that enable women to thrive.

Best regards,
Phillipa



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Section 1

Executive summary

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Winning with women:
The data-driven blueprint for SA employers

Women are a vital part of South Africa's workforce, yet they continue to encounter significant barriers to career progression, financial stability and workplace flexibility. The 2025 Working Women in South Africa Report, compiled by RecruitMyMom, a specialist women-focused talent agency, presents the largest survey of its kind, incorporating insights from 3,742 skilled working women across various industries, career levels, and life stages. The trends uncovered offer valuable guidance for employers looking to attract, retain and develop women in the workplace.

Key research findings

The 2025 Working Women's Report by RecruitMyMom reveals a workforce of women driven by financial necessity, professional ambition, and a strong desire for flexibility. Financial security is the primary motivator for the majority of working women, with 74% citing it as the main reason for their employment. Notably, 41% are the sole income earners in their households, and 85% have dependants - many of them mothers navigating the dual demands of work and caregiving.

Despite widespread ambition - 84% of women want to progress in their careers - systemic challenges continue to hinder advancement. Nearly half are actively seeking new roles due to limited internal growth opportunities, a lack of mentorship, and inflexible workplace policies. Interestingly, the more senior the women at work the more likely they are to prioritise flexibility.

Encouragingly, the report highlights perceived progress in gender diversity, particularly in Finance, Healthcare, HR, and Retail, with 60% acknowledging improvements. However, advancement disparities remain, especially for Black women, who are the least likely to be promoted to senior roles.

Flexibility has emerged as a non-negotiable for retaining female talent. With 57% preferring hybrid work and 37% favouring fully remote roles, only a marginal 6% desire a full-time office presence. Employers enforcing a full return-to-office mandate risk losing key talent, with 84% of impacted women actively exploring other opportunities.

Despite these challenges, women continue to demonstrate strong workplace loyalty when employers meet their needs. Nearly 65% remain with one employer for three to ten years - well above the national average. Medical aid, pension contributions, and access to training and development consistently rank as the most valued employee benefits, highlighting the importance of long-term investment in women's growth and wellbeing.

Strategies for success: Attracting and retaining skilled women

The 2025 Working Women's Report identifies five key strategies for employers seeking to attract, retain, and advance skilled female talent. First, provide clear pathways for career growth. Structured mentorship, leadership development initiatives, and transparent internal promotion processes are essential to retaining mid- and senior-level women who are eager to progress but often face stalled trajectories.

Secondly, embrace flexible work models. Hybrid and remote work arrangements are not just perks - they are critical retention tools for women balancing professional ambitions with caregiving responsibilities. Offering the right flexibility will be the difference between keeping or losing top performers.

Third, benefits that genuinely resonate with women should be prioritised. Medical aid, pension or provident fund contributions, bonuses and, training and development, rank as the most valued benefits across all levels of seniority. These offerings reflect a company's commitment to both financial security and employee well-being.

Fourth, career breaks should not be viewed as career enders. With 43% of women reporting breaks - most commonly due to childcare, family responsibilities or retrenchment—employers who recognise the transferable skills and resilience gained during these periods will tap into a rich, often underutilised, talent pool.

Closing the gender gap at senior levels presents an opportunity for employers to strengthen their leadership pipelines. By fostering mentorship, sponsorship, and clear pathways to progression, organisations can create environments where more women advance to senior leadership and thrive. Collectively, these strategies represent not only smart talent practices but also critical levers for building more equitable and future-ready workplaces.

Conclusion: A strategic imperative for business growth

Supporting women in the workplace is not just a matter of equity - it is a strategic future-proofing necessity. South African women are educated, ambitious, skilled, and dedicated employees when given the right work environment. Businesses that offer flexibility, professional growth, and inclusive policies will gain a competitive advantage in attracting and retaining exceptional female talent.

RecruitMyMom's 2025 report offers data-driven insights to help South African businesses shape workplaces where women can thrive. In doing so, employers position themselves to benefit from greater retention, innovation, and long-term business performance—while also contributing to a stronger, more inclusive workforce for the future.

Section 2

About this research

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The motivation behind the research

RecruitMyMom, multi award-winning recruitment company, is committed to enabling and retaining women in the workplace. We strive for meaningful transformation in South African women's professional lives with our annual Working Women in South Africa survey results.

With an increase of 52% eligible surveys on last year, our 2025 report illustrates the outcome of South Africa's largest survey on the topic of working women.

This report focuses on the business imperatives of drawing in and retaining women talent in South Africa, plus delivering insights and perspectives on achieving this. Join us as we explore the results of our 2025 survey.



3,742
women participated in this survey

Research methodology

3,742 eligible surveys were collected online from November 2024 - February 2025 via a self-administered questionnaire.

A convenience sampling method was used. The collected surveys deemed eligible were from the target audience of skilled women in South Africa, where skilled is defined as someone who had attained at least a matric (Grade 12) part of their education. The sample included women aged 18-64 (as 65 and above is the conventional retirement age in South Africa).

The survey included open-ended and closed-ended questions to determine preferences and gather deeper insights on selected topics relevant to working women in South Africa.

We invited several women-centric businesses to collaborate and share the research link with their networks. Additionally, the survey was shared across RecruitMyMom's social media platforms, including LinkedIn, Facebook, and Instagram. RecruitMyMom's database connections were invited to participate via email newsletter.

All research data was collected anonymously, apart from those who opted to share their details.

Demographics of the respondents



RACE

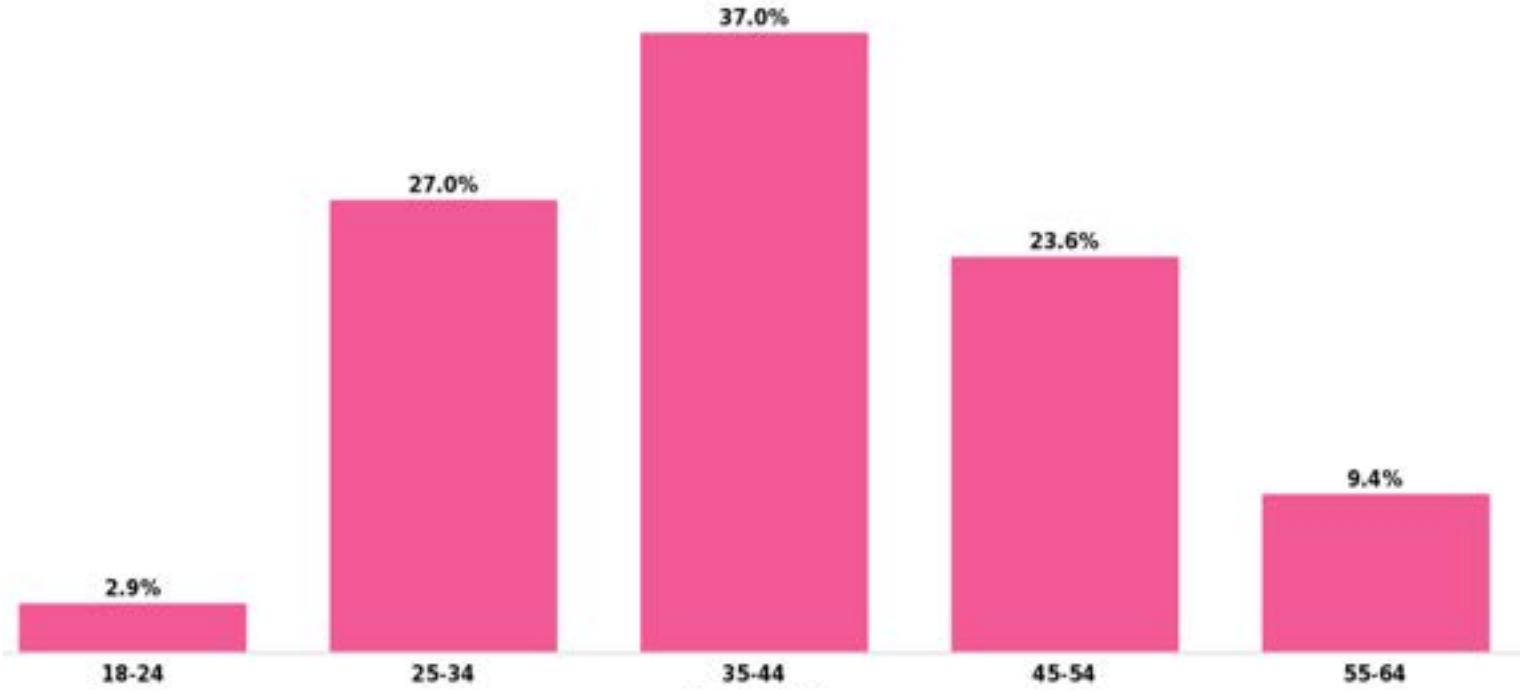
This report includes representation from all major racial groups in South Africa and aligns closely with the demographic profile of tertiary-educated women In South African; the intended focus of this research study. While it may not mirror the full national racial breakdown, where the black population makes up over 80%, comparing our survey sample to the tertiary-educated population helps ensure a more accurate and relevant reflection of the workforce segment we aim to understand.

The racial breakdown of the respondents is:

- **Black** 35.3%
- **White** 34.5%
- **Coloured** 21.6%
- **Indian** 7.6%
- **Asian** 0.4%
- **Other** 0.6%

AGE

This report focuses on women of working age between 18 and 64 years, in line with South Africa's conventional retirement age. While we acknowledge that many women remain economically active beyond 65, this age range reflects the most common period of formal workforce participation. The majority of respondents were between 25 and 54 years old, with the largest proportion in the 35 to 44 age group - offering valuable insight into the core of the working women population.



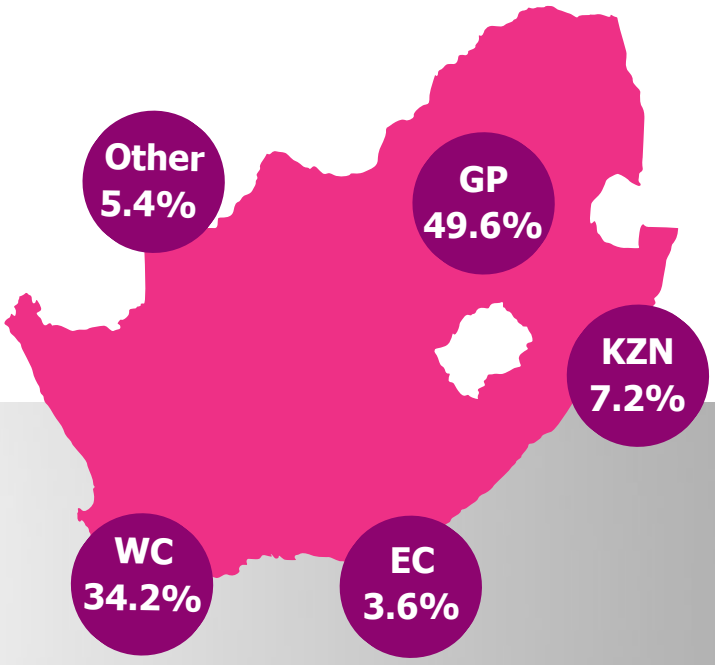
Percentage of respondents by age bracket

Demographics of the respondents

LOCATION

Province

This report covers all the provinces in South Africa, with 91% of women surveyed residing in Gauteng, Western Cape and KwaZulu-Natal. The provincial data aligns with national employment data, where 58% of employed individuals reside in these three provinces.



Percentage of respondents by province

The highest proportion of respondents were based in Gauteng (49.6%), followed by 34.2% in the Western Cape.

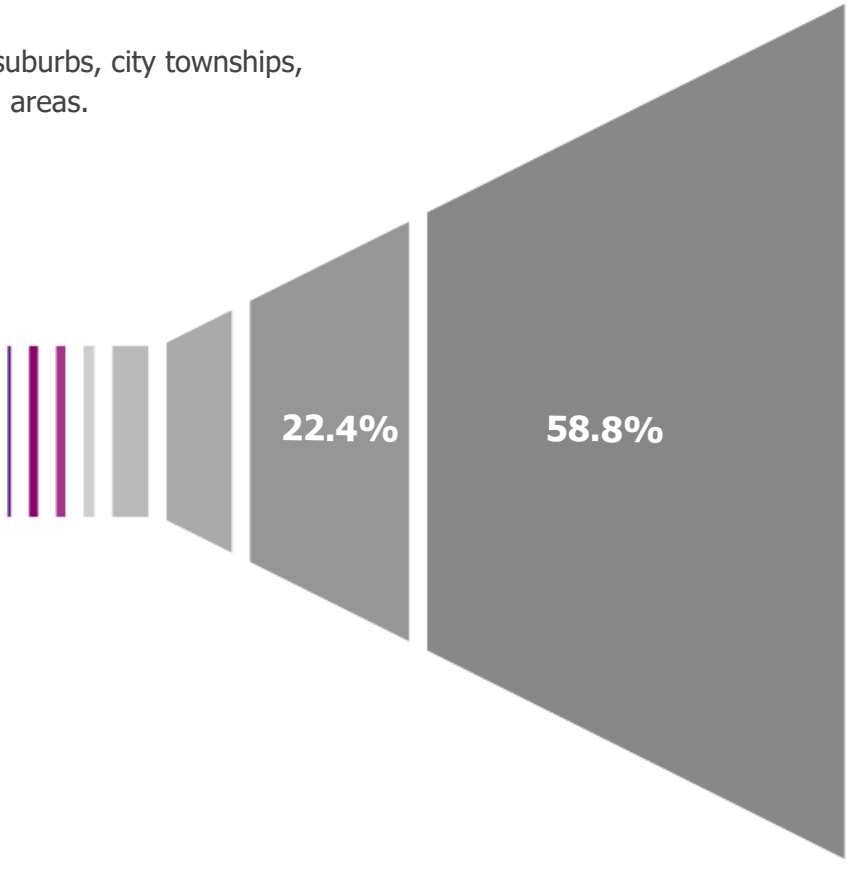
The remainder of the country accounted for the rest of the results.

Settlement type

95.5% of the sample live in city and town suburbs, city townships, or town townships. Very few are from rural areas.

Where respondents currently live

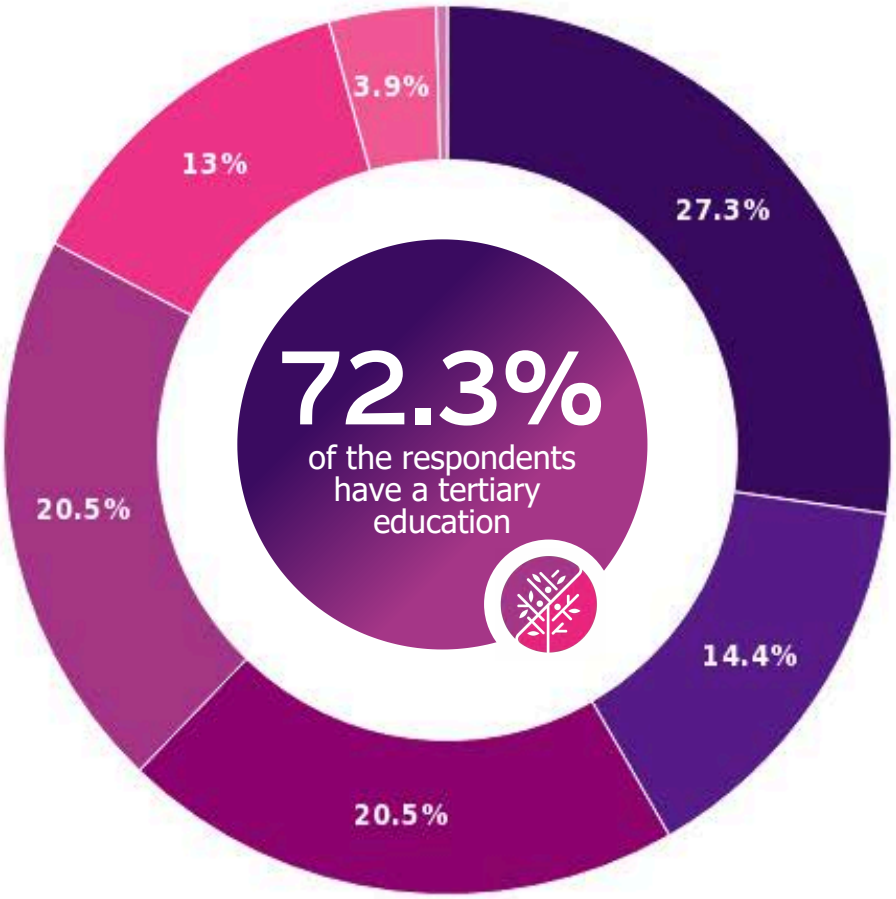
City suburb	58.8%
Town suburb	22.4%
City township	9.2%
Town township	5.1%
Urban farm	1.5%
Rural settlement	1.3%
Rural farm	1.2%
City informal settlement	0.5%
Town informal settlement	0.2%



Demographics of the respondents

EDUCATION

More than 70% of this sample have a tertiary qualification.



Percentage of respondents by education

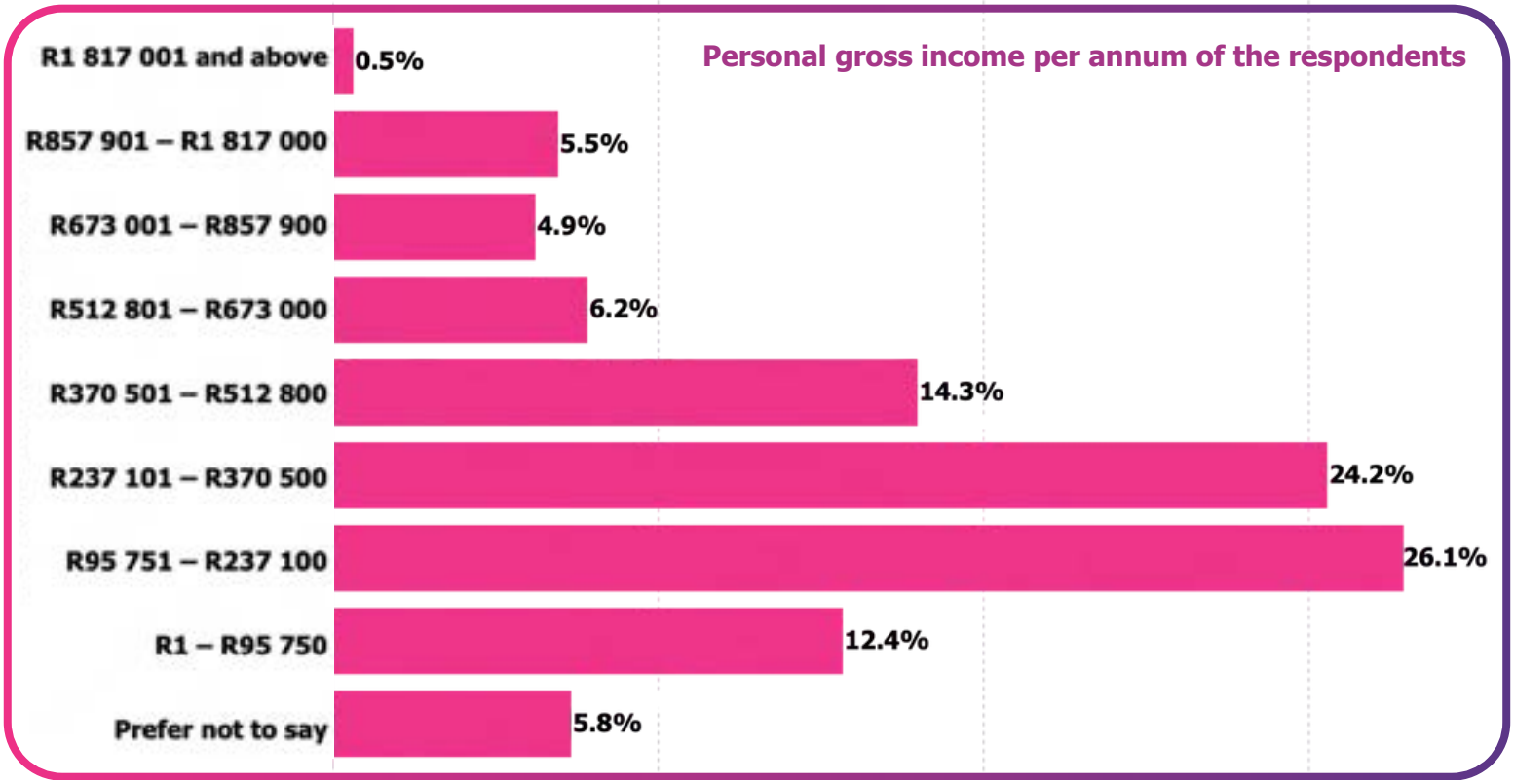
- NQF 4 (Grade 12 / NCV Qualifications 4)
- NQF 5 (Higher Certificate / Advanced (NVC) / N4-N6 National Qualification)
- NQF 6 (National Diploma / Advanced Certificate)
- NQF 7 (University Degree / Degree, Advanced Diploma, Post Graduate Certificate, or a Bachelor of Technology)
- NQF 8 (University Honours Degree / Postgraduate Professional Certification / Post Graduate Diploma)
- NQF 9 (University Masters Degree)
- NQF 10 (University Doctorate Degree / Professorship)



Demographics of the respondents

PERSONAL GROSS INCOME

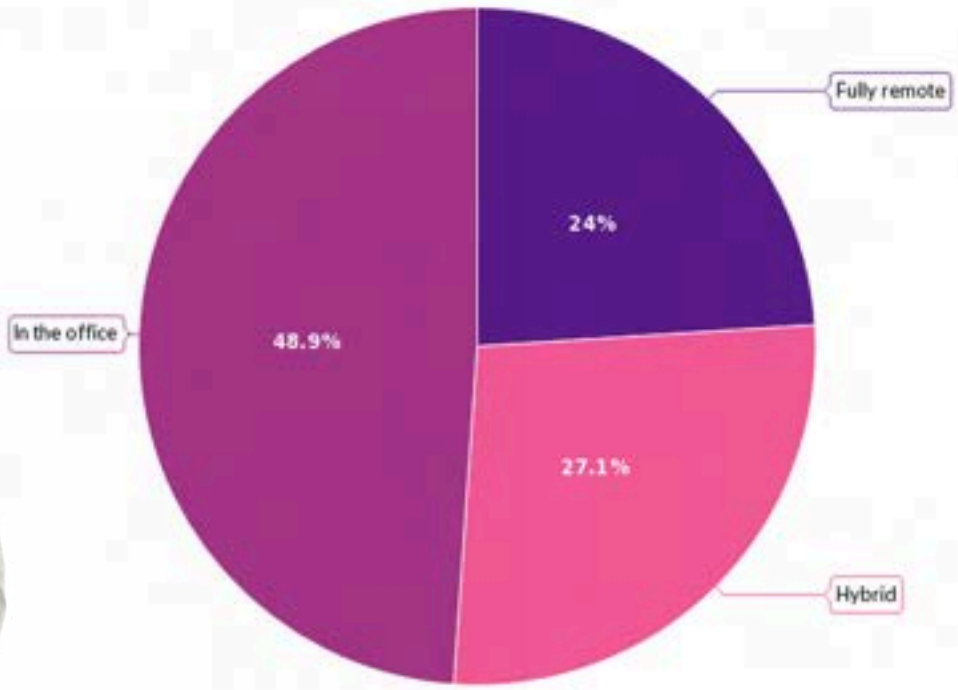
A third of the respondents earn above R370 500 gross personal income per annum.



WORKPLACE - WHERE WOMEN WORK

Almost half 49% of the sample currently work in the office, whereas 27% have a hybrid work arrangement, and 24% work fully remotely.





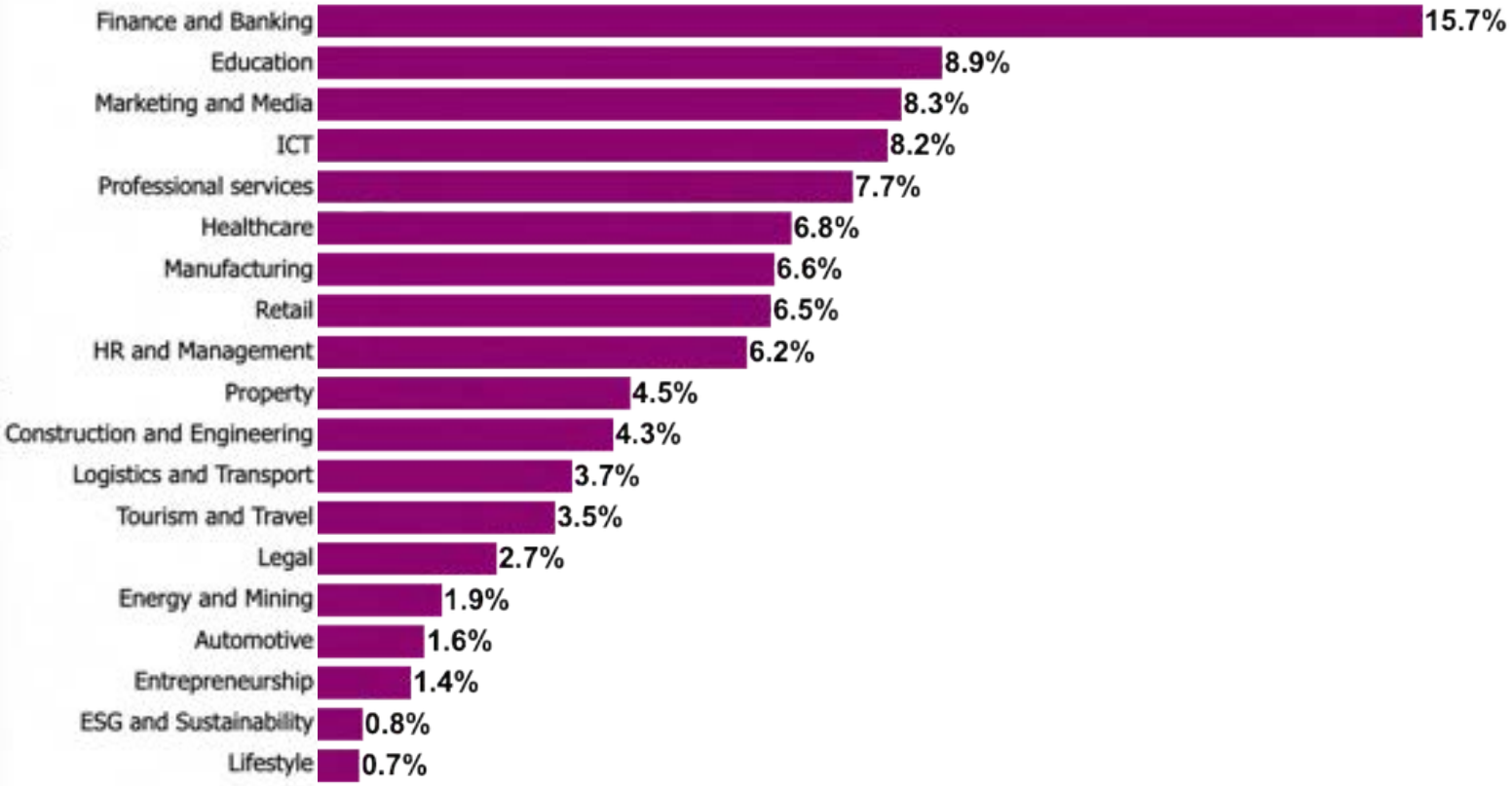
Percentage of Respondents by Workplace

Demographics of the respondents

INDUSTRIES REPRESENTED

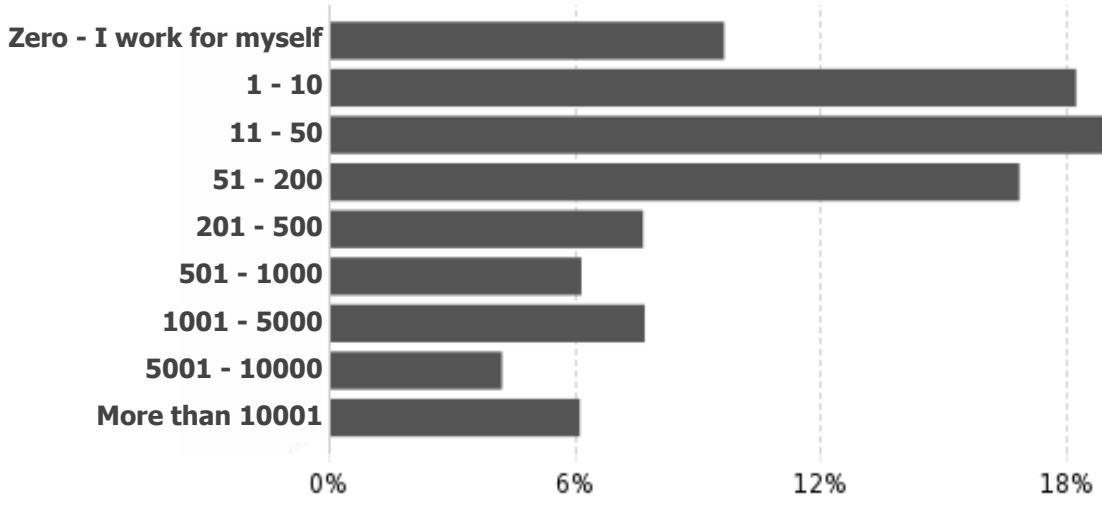
Participants come from diverse industries, with the Finance and Banking Industry being the largest sector, rendering the findings of this research relevant to the general workforce.

Percentage of respondents by industry



COMPANY SIZE

Two-thirds (65%) of the respondents are employed in companies with 200 or less employees. There is a notable representation of women in large organisations ensuring that this research applies to companies of all sizes.

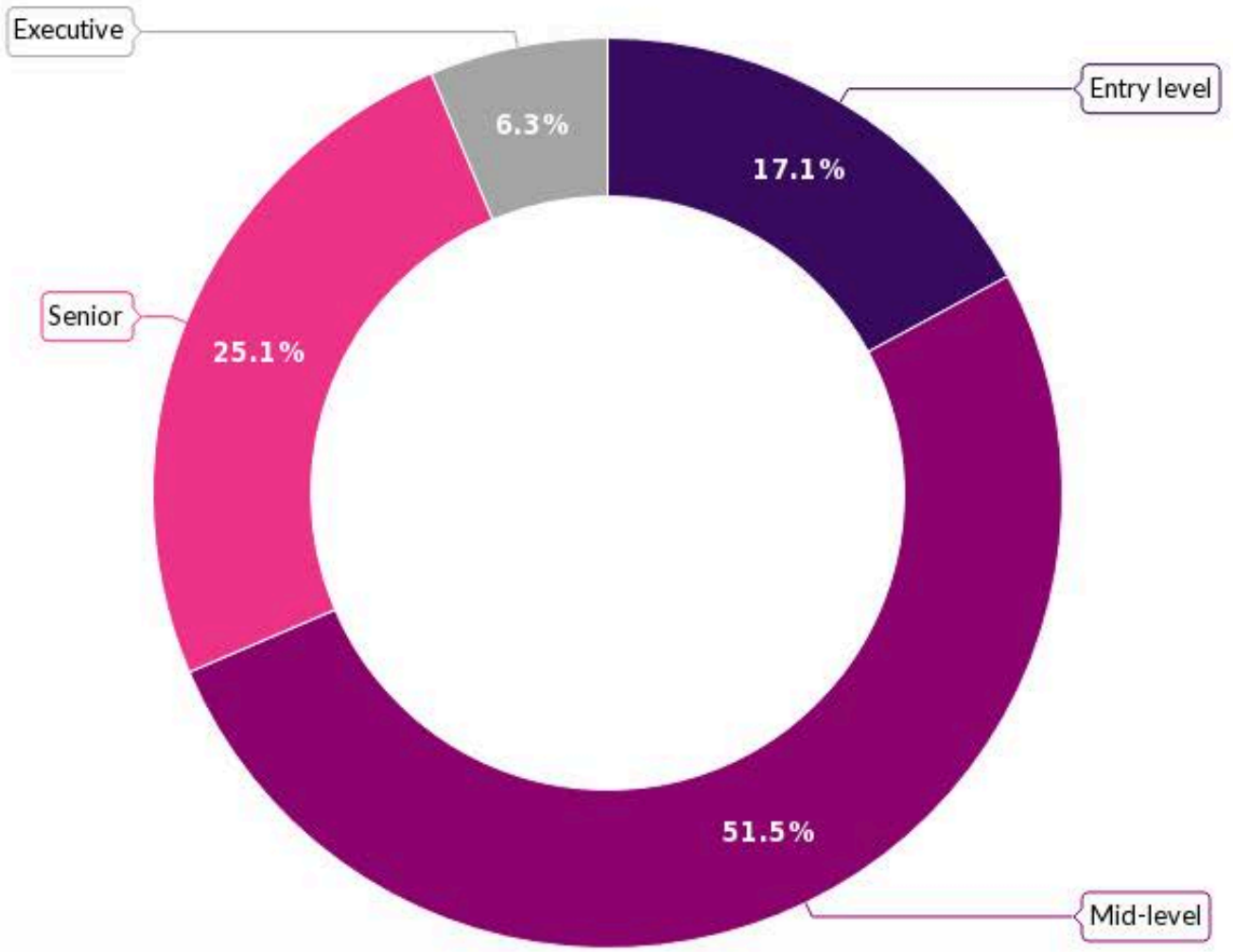


Current company size of respondents who are working

Demographics of the respondents

SENIORITY AT WORK

The majority of the sample, 52%, hold mid to senior-level positions. A notable portion occupy senior roles 25%, while 6% are executives and 17% are in entry-level positions.





Section 3

Gender diversity improves: Workplaces are getting better for women

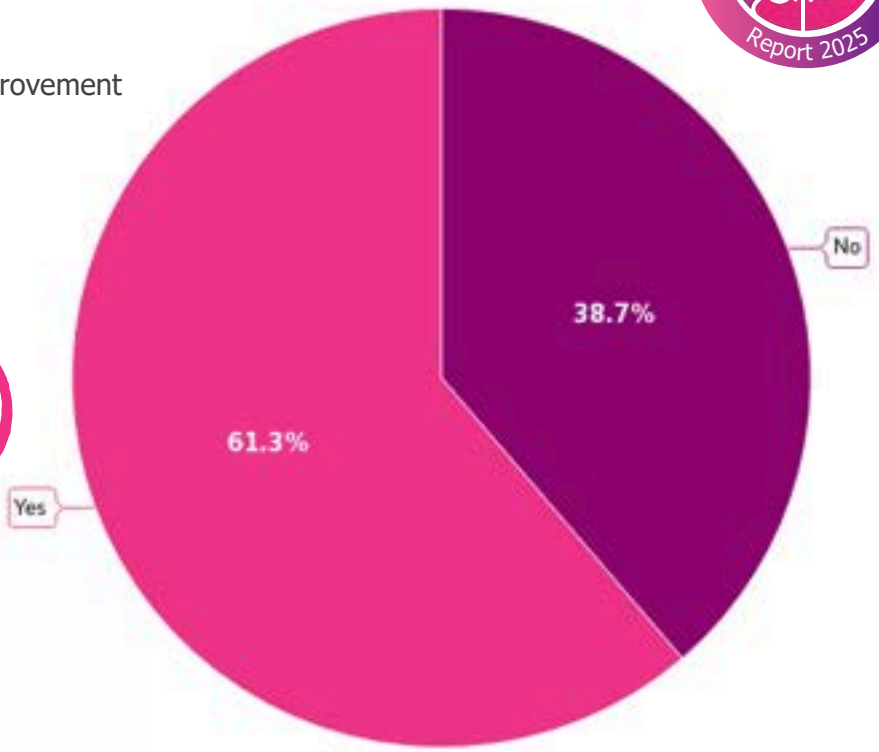
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Gender diversity

Over 60% of working women report an improvement in gender diversity in the past 5 years.

This is good news for companies that recognise that diversity is a strategic goal.



Has gender diversity improved over the past 5 years?



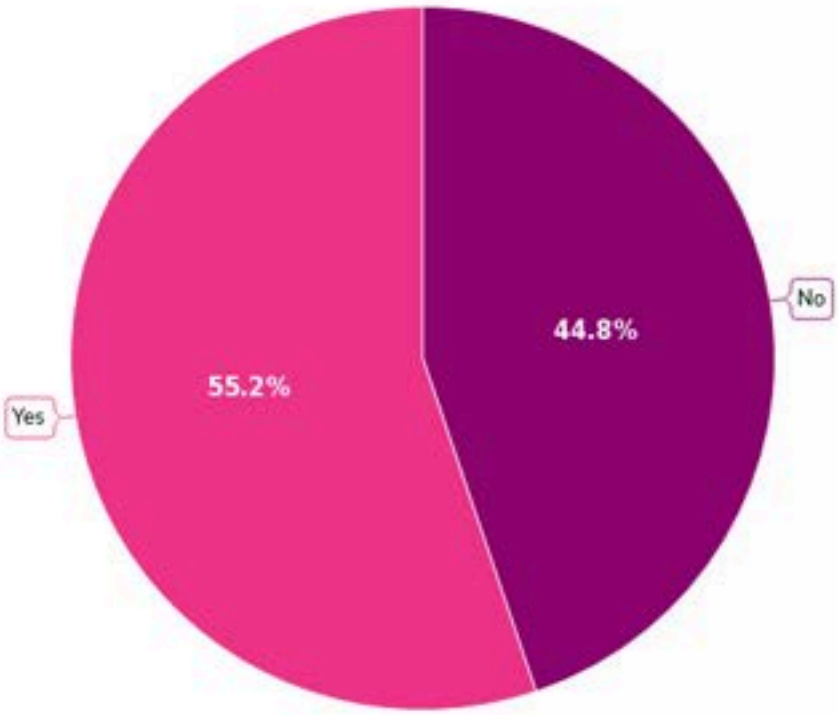
The industries where more than 60% of working women have seen an improvement in gender diversity, are HR, Education, Healthcare, Finance & Banking, Property, ICT and Retail. Manufacturing is well below 60%.



Industries - has gender diversity improved in the workplace in the past 5 Years? Yes.

Working conditions for women at work

More than 55% of women surveyed reported an improvement in working conditions at work. It is encouraging to see the progress in working conditions for women. There is still more work to be done.





WORKING CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS

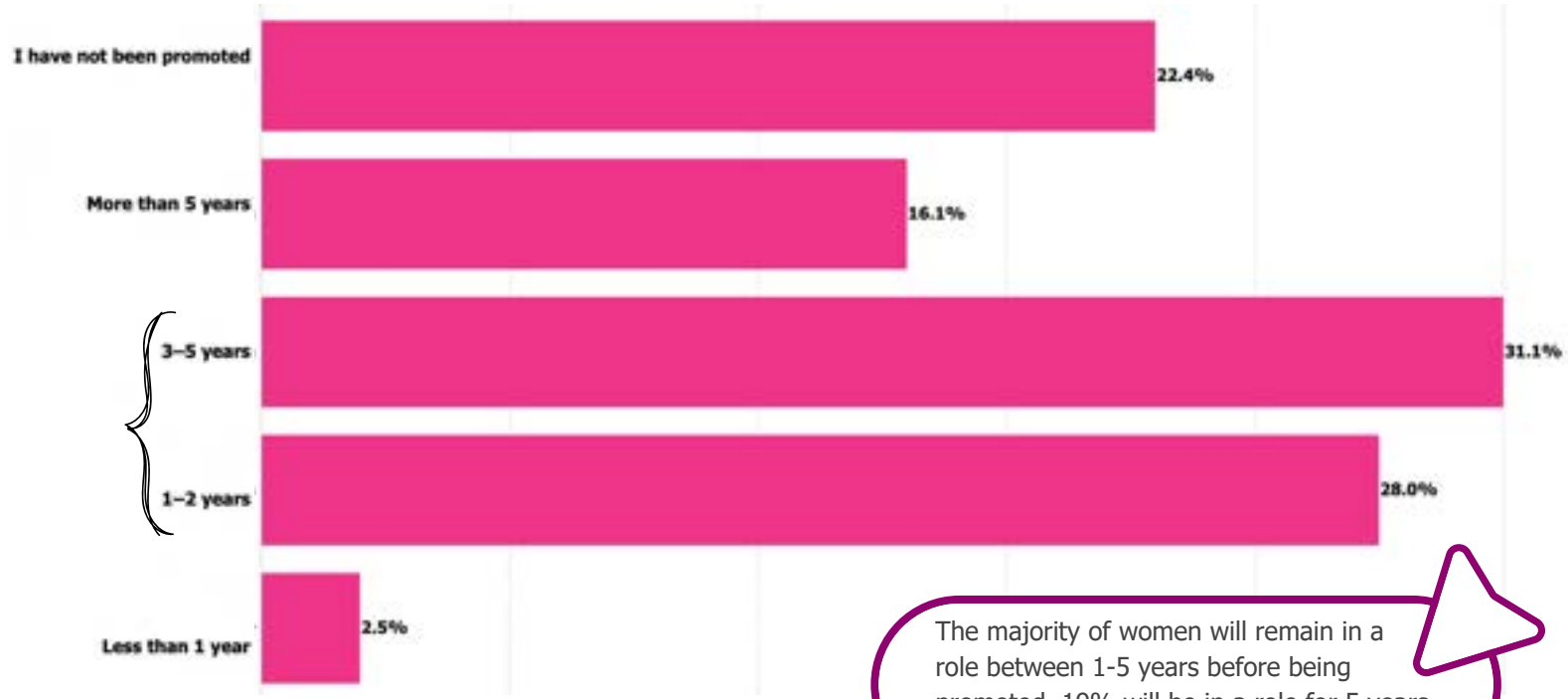
Over 55% of respondents report improved working conditions in HR Management, Finance and Banking, Professional Services, ICT, Logistics & Transport, and Marketing and Media. Manufacturing and Construction show the least improvement.



Industries - have working conditions improved for women over the past 5 years? Yes.

The promotion gap: How long it takes women to advance in the workplace

LENGTH OF TIME IN A ROLE BEFORE BEING PROMOTED



The majority of women will remain in a role between 1-5 years before being promoted. 19% will be in a role for 5 years or longer.

LENGTH OF TIME IN A ROLE BEFORE BEING PROMOTED BY RACE

# Years in a Role Before Promotion	Black	White	Coloured	Indian
Less than 1 year	9.0%	6.0%	6.0%	4.9%
1-2 years	27.6%	24.8%	26.1%	25.0%
3-5 years	23.7%	26.0%	22.7%	28.2%
More than 5 years	12.9%	22.6%	23.3%	22.5%

The promotion gap is a measure of how much faster one group gets promoted compared to another.

Black employees (9.0%) are the most likely to be promoted within a year, followed by White and Coloured employees, both at 6.0%.

The **highest proportion of promotions occurs within the one-to-two-year range,** with Black employees (27.6%) leading, followed closely by Coloured (26.1%), Indian (25.0%), and White (24.8%) employees. Promotion rates are relatively even across all groups, possibly a key window for career progression.

In the three-to-five-year range, Indian employees (28.2%) have the highest chance of promotion, while Black (23.7%) and Coloured (22.7%) employees have the lowest rates. White employees, at 26.0%, fall in between.

Beyond five years, White (22.6%), Coloured (23.3%), and Indian (22.5%) women have similar promotion rates, while 12.9% of Black women are promoted after this period. This suggests that Black women employees are the less likely to advance into senior leadership roles, highlighting potential barriers to long-term career growth.

The promotion gap: How long it takes women to advance in the workplace

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS: THE PROMOTION GAP

Key observations and recommendations for employers to consider in order to better support and retain working women - particularly across different racial groups:

1. Pay close attention to promotion timelines—1 to 2 years is a critical window.
Paying attention to promotion timelines—particularly in the one-to-two-year range—can make a meaningful difference. Most women are promoted within one to five years, with many advancing early in their careers. Creating clear career pathways and recognising high-performing women during this window is a powerful way for businesses to support retention and long-term growth.

2. Proactively address long-term promotion gaps, especially for Black women.
While short-term promotion rates are relatively even across all racial groups, Black women are significantly less likely to be promoted beyond five years in a role. With only 12.9% advancing after this point, compared to over 22% in other groups, this indicates a potential barrier to senior leadership.

3. Tailor leadership development and mentorship by career stage and background.
Differences in promotion rates by race and length of service point to a need for more nuanced talent strategies. Mentorship, sponsorship, and leadership development programs should be accessible from early career stages and designed to address specific barriers faced by different demographic groups.

4. Measure and report on promotion equity across the business.
To close persistent advancement gaps, companies can track and analyse promotion data by race, gender, and tenure and make this data visible to leadership teams.

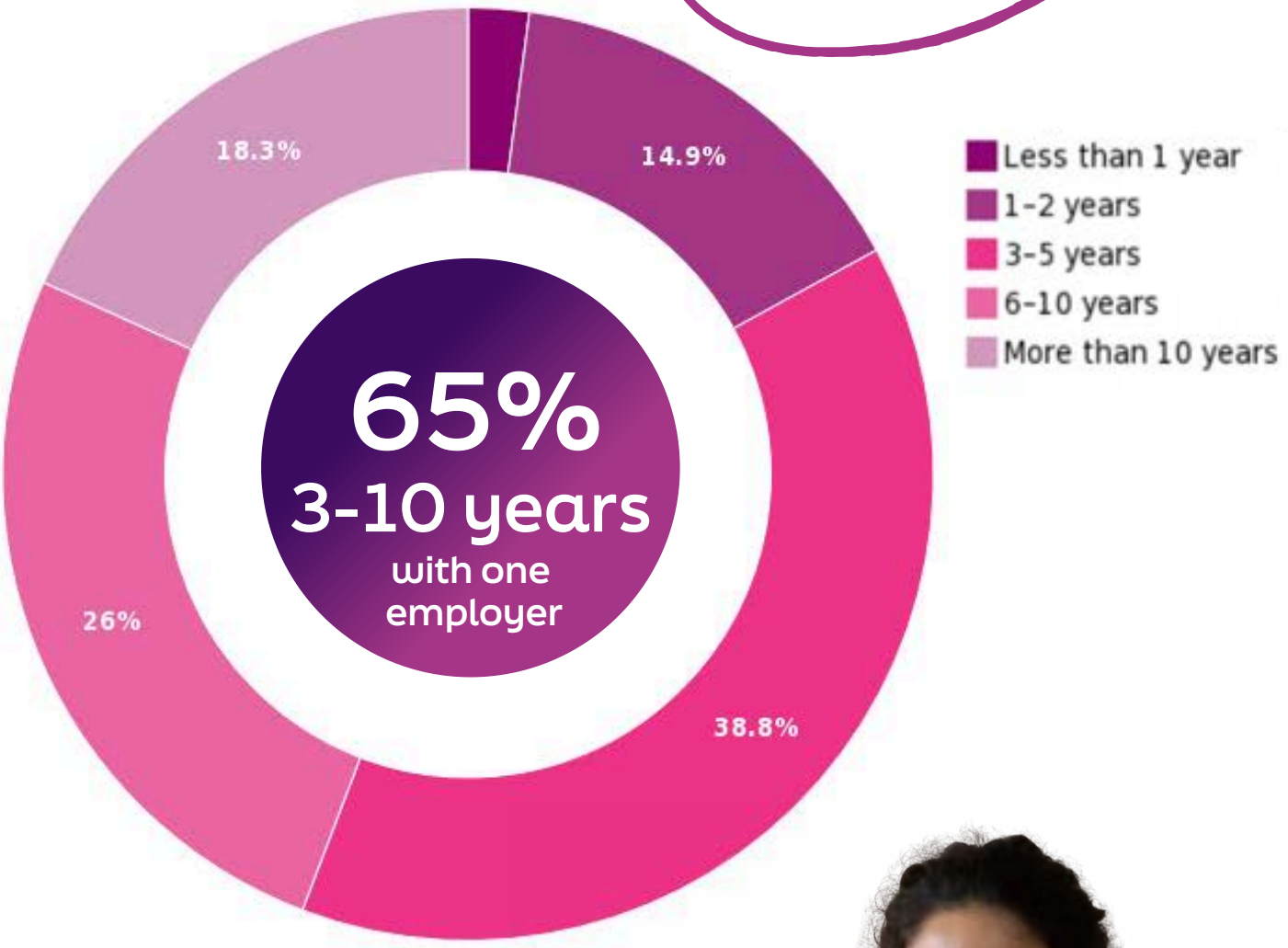
5.Track progress towards Employment Equity goals (EEA)
Under South Africa's Employment Equity Act, designated employers are legally required to monitor and report on representivity and fair treatment in recruitment and promotion. Tracking promotion timelines by gender and race group supports EE goal targets:



The loyalty factor: Length of tenure at a company

The high levels of loyalty among skilled working women present a powerful business case for investment in female talent. With nearly 65% of women remaining with a single employer for between 3 and 10 years—well above the national average job tenure of 2 years and 10 months - this trend signals strong workplace commitment, reduced turnover costs, and long-term organisational stability.

Women remain with a single employer well above the national average of two years ten months.



Average length of tenure with a company



The loyalty factor: Length of tenure at a company

KEY OBSERVATIONS AND WHY LENGTH OF TENURE MATTERS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. Loyal employees reduce recruitment and training costs.
Frequent turnover is expensive and disruptive. The long tenure of skilled women means businesses will benefit from sustained institutional knowledge, reduced hiring frequency, and lower onboarding costs.

2. Women's loyalty offers a strong return on investment - if nurtured.
Employers who support career development, offer flexibility, and provide meaningful benefits will unlock years of high performance and engagement. Investing in training, mentorship, and wellbeing initiatives for women is likely to yield long-term dividends.

3. Retention strengthens culture and leadership pipelines.
Long-serving employees contribute to a more stable and consistent workplace culture. When women stay and grow within a company, they are also more likely to advance into leadership roles, shaping inclusive cultures and mentoring future talent.

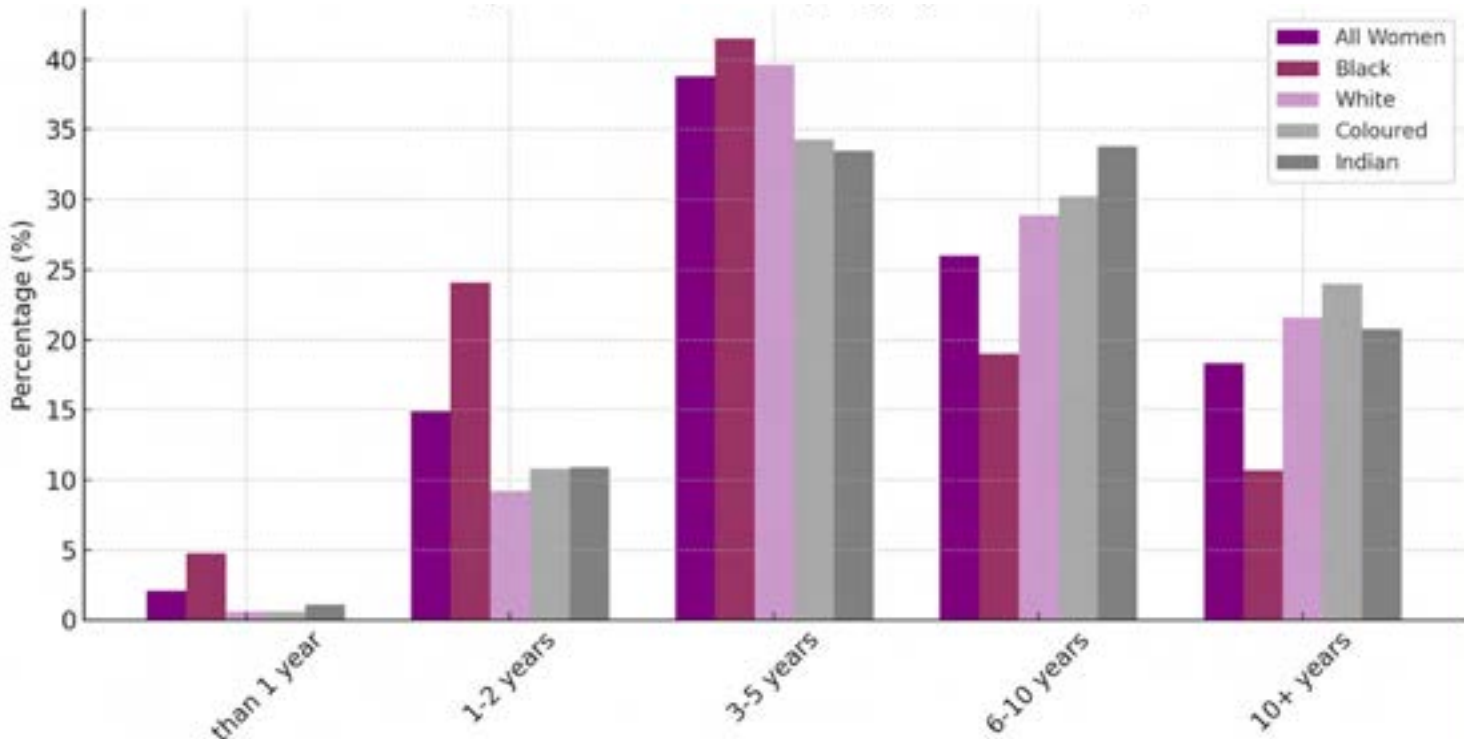
4. Failing to meet expectations can break this loyalty.
While women demonstrate strong loyalty, this is not unconditional. When employers enforce rigid work models, overlook promotions, or fail to offer competitive benefits, that loyalty erodes. The report shows that women are willing to leave if their needs aren't met—particularly regarding remuneration, flexibility and recognition.

5. Retention can be a competitive advantage.
In a competitive talent market, companies that retain skilled female employees stand out. Business leaders have a valuable opportunity to view women's loyalty as a strategic advantage—one that can strengthen teams, deepen institutional knowledge, and drive sustainable growth.



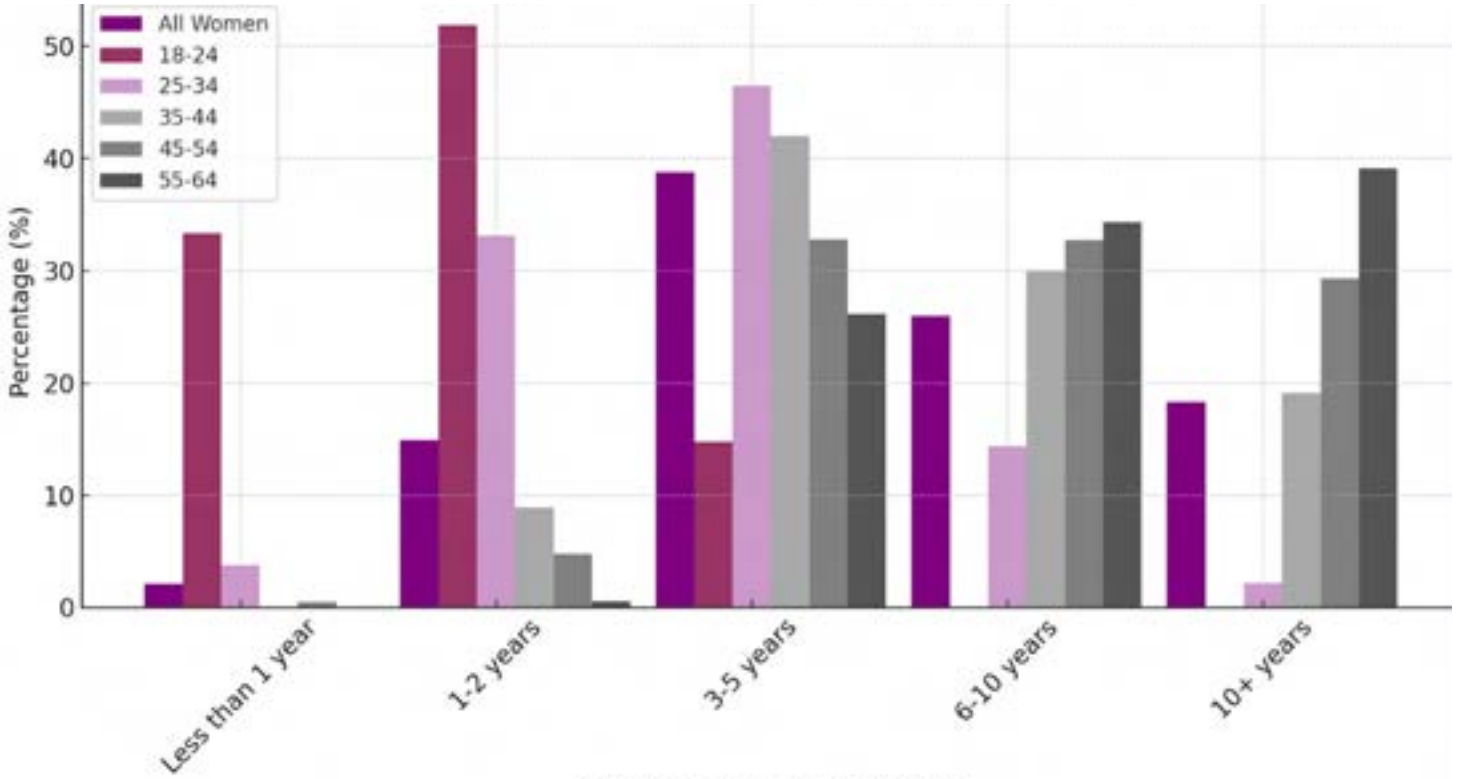
The loyalty factor: Length of tenure

TENURE AT A COMPANY BY RACE



Average tenure by race

TENURE AT A COMPANY BY AGE



Average tenure by age

The loyalty factor: Length of tenure at a company

TENURE OBSERVATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS BY AGE AND RACE

1. Black women have higher short-term turnover but strong mid-term retention.
They are more likely to leave within the first two years (29%), pointing to possible challenges with inclusion or early support. However, 41.5% stay for 3–5 years—more than any other group—suggesting that once engaged, they are likely to stay.

Recommendation: Strengthen onboarding, mentorship, and early career support to reduce early attrition.

2. White, Indian, and Coloured women are more likely to stay long term.
These groups are better represented in the 6–10+ year categories, while Black women are underrepresented, indicating potential barriers to long-term progression.

Recommendation: Invest in equitable career development and leadership pathways to retain diverse talent over time.

3. Tenure increases with age—young women are mobile, older women are stable.
Women under 35 have higher short-term turnover, while those 45+ are far more likely to stay for 6–10 years or more.

Recommendation: Tailor retention strategies by age—focus on flexibility and growth for younger women, and leadership and legacy roles for older employees.

4. Mid-career is a critical window for advancement.

Women aged 25–44 dominate the 3–5 year tenure range. Without promotion during this phase, particularly for Black women, disengagement or exit becomes more likely.

Recommendation: Prioritise internal mobility, upskilling, and succession planning during this career stage.



Section 4

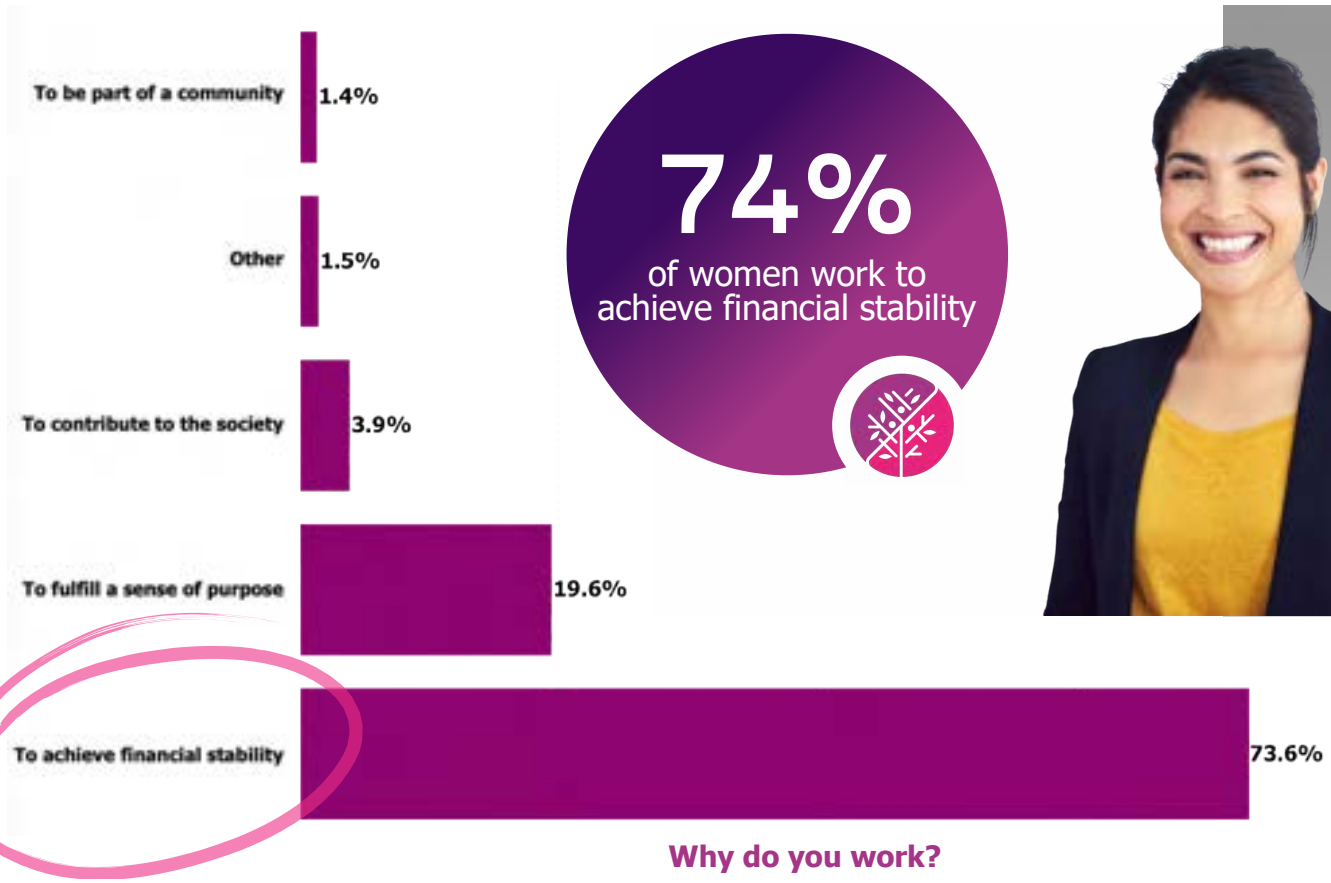
Women are ambitious in their pursuit of financial stability

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Why women work

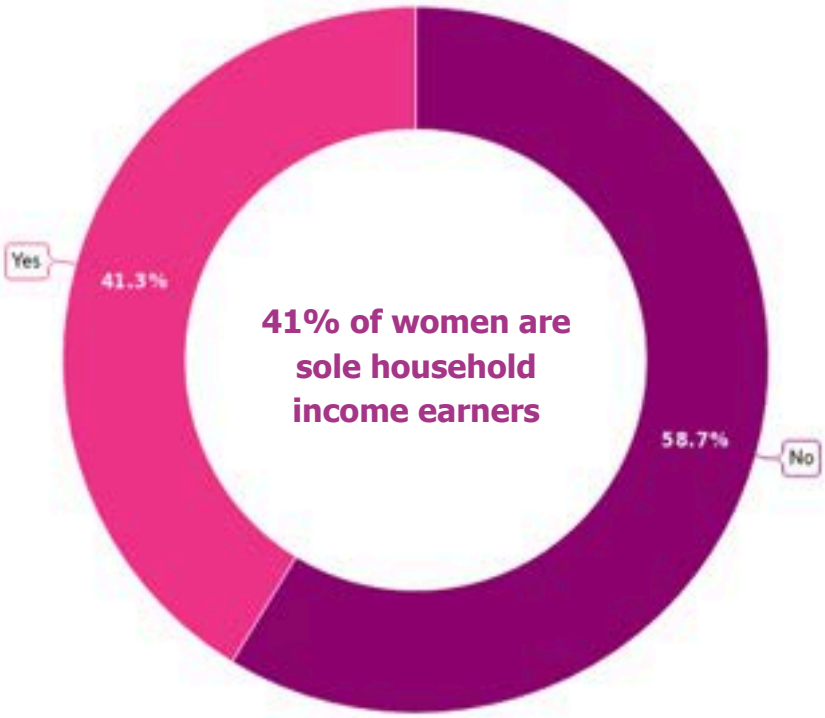
74% of women cite financial stability as their primary motivation for working. Being financially stable translates into making decisions about money confidently, and having control over their financial future, particularly when many are sole household income earners.



74%
of women work to achieve financial stability

Why do you work?

Financial stability for women as sole household income earners



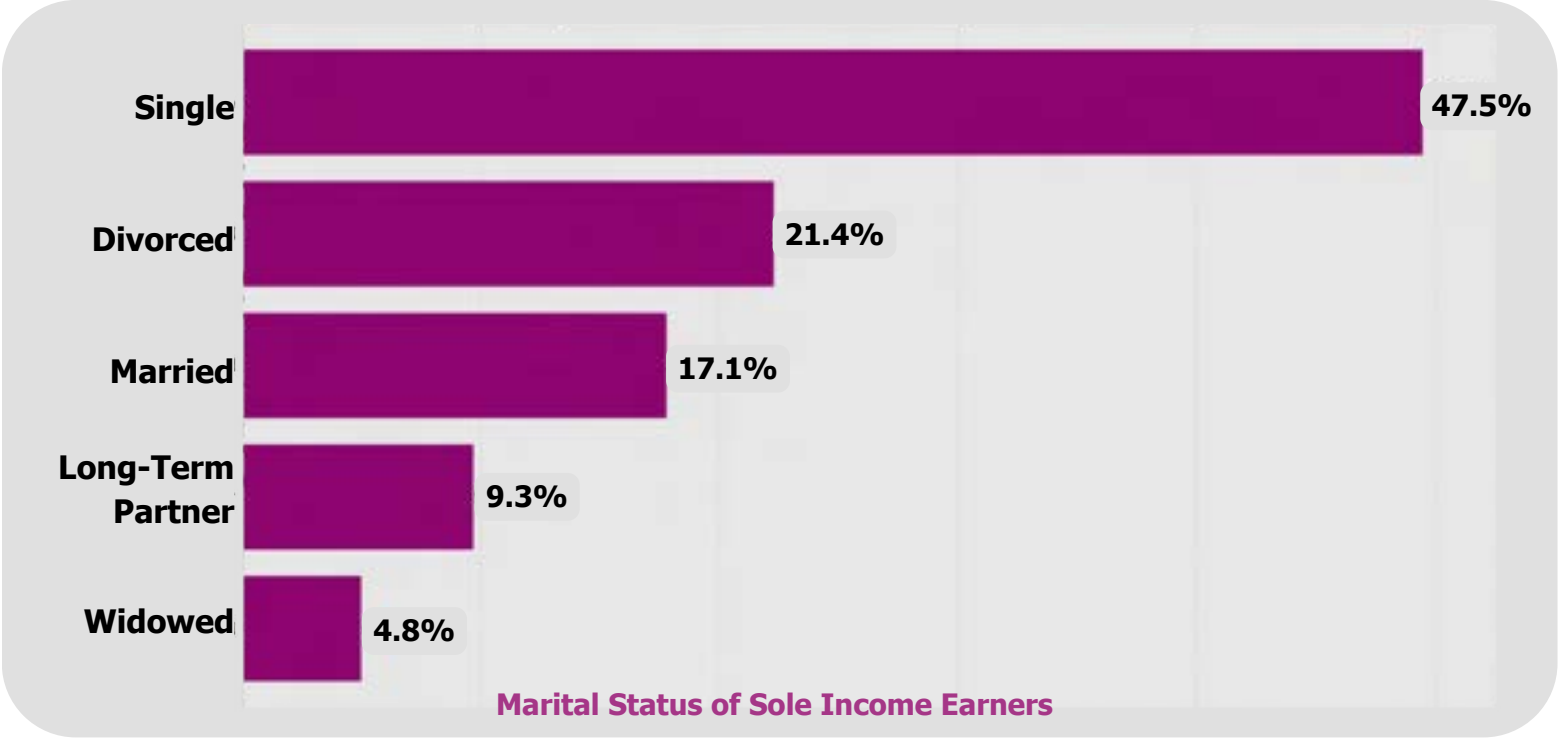
Women as sole household income earners

The sole financial burden combined with the care responsibilities of dependants cannot be overlooked for women at work.

Financial stability for women as sole household income earners

THE MARITAL STATUS OF SOLE INCOME EARNERS

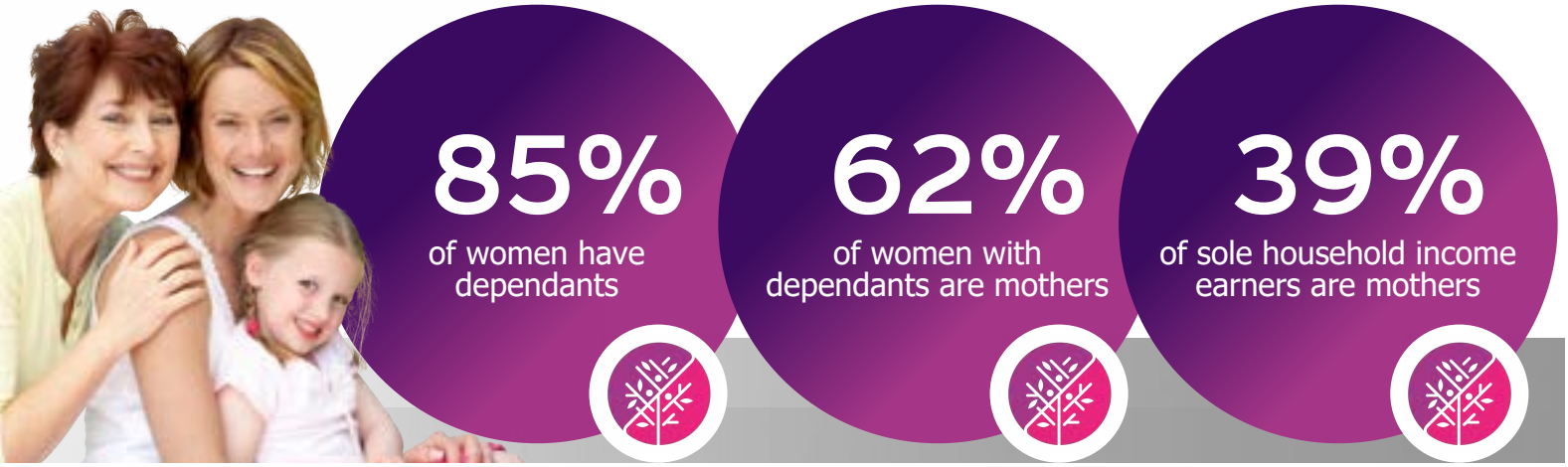
74% of sole-income earners are single, divorced or widowed. 26% are married or have long-term partners in the home. This responsibility of being the primary bread-winner in the home makes financial stability vital.



Marital Status of Sole Income Earners

Family support needs and dependants

The need for financial stability is better understood in light of the dependants that women support. 85% of women across all age groups have dependants, making financial security an imperative.



Additionally, 28% of women are responsible for caring for their children and other relatives, adding further strain on the household finances.

50% of women with dependants solely have children as dependants. A quarter, 25%, of women with dependants have care responsibility for children and parents or other relatives.

7% of women have only their parents as dependants.

Section 5

Talent attraction & retention insights

- What women want from their career p. 25
- Most appealing factors when looking for a job by age pp. 26-27
- Insights for employers p. 28
- Most appealing factors when looking for a job by race p. 29
- Company benefits that are most appealing to women pp. 30-31
- Insights for employers p. 31
- The current state of dissatisfaction at work p. 32
- Retain talent by addressing career advancement barriers pp. 32-34
- Insights for employers to address the key barriers to career advancement p. 34
- Grow senior female talent by supporting mothers p. 35



What women want from their career

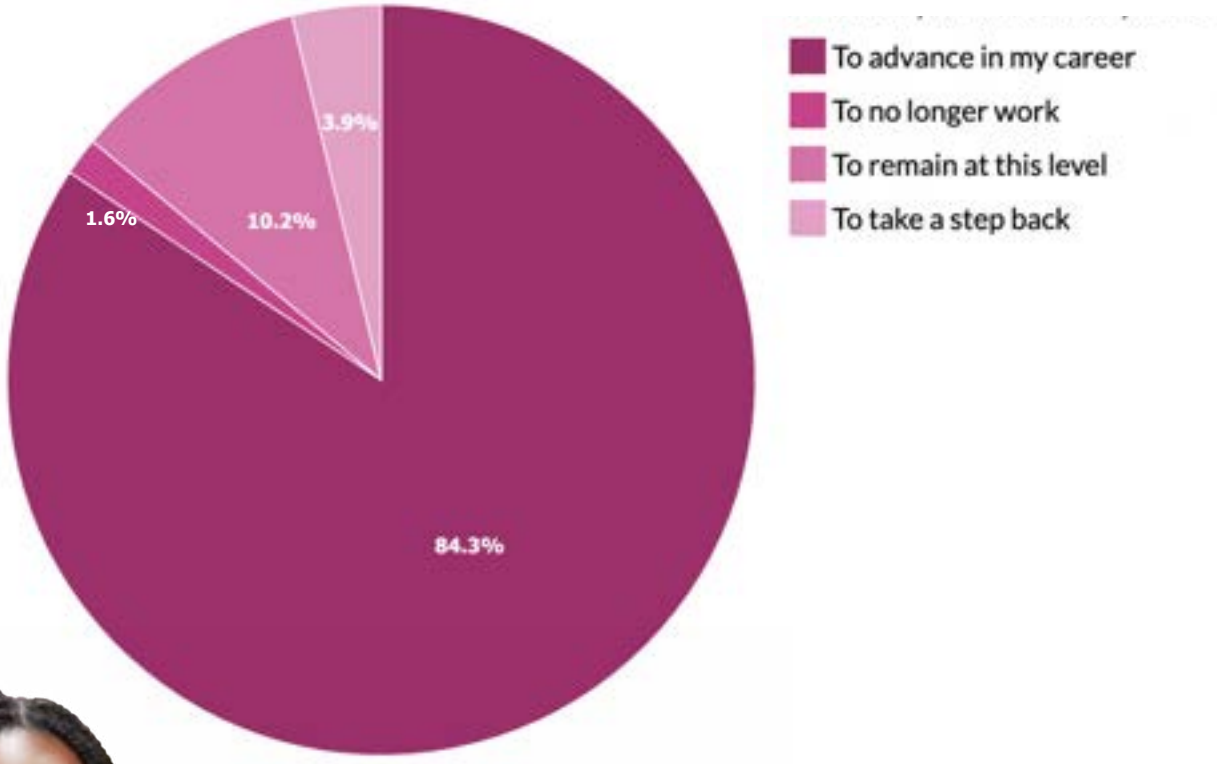
Women are ambitious in their careers. 84 % want to grow in their careers.

This is in line with their need for financial stability and care responsibilities. Only 10% of women want to remain at the same level at work and a tiny 2% no longer want to work.

84%
of women want to grow in their careers

Fair pay, mentoring relationships and professional development initiatives are essential for women to feel that they are growing in their careers. Engage in open conversations with talented team members about their career goals. When their aspirations extend beyond your organisation, supporting their next step can strengthen your reputation as a forward-thinking and people-focused employer.

What women want from their career



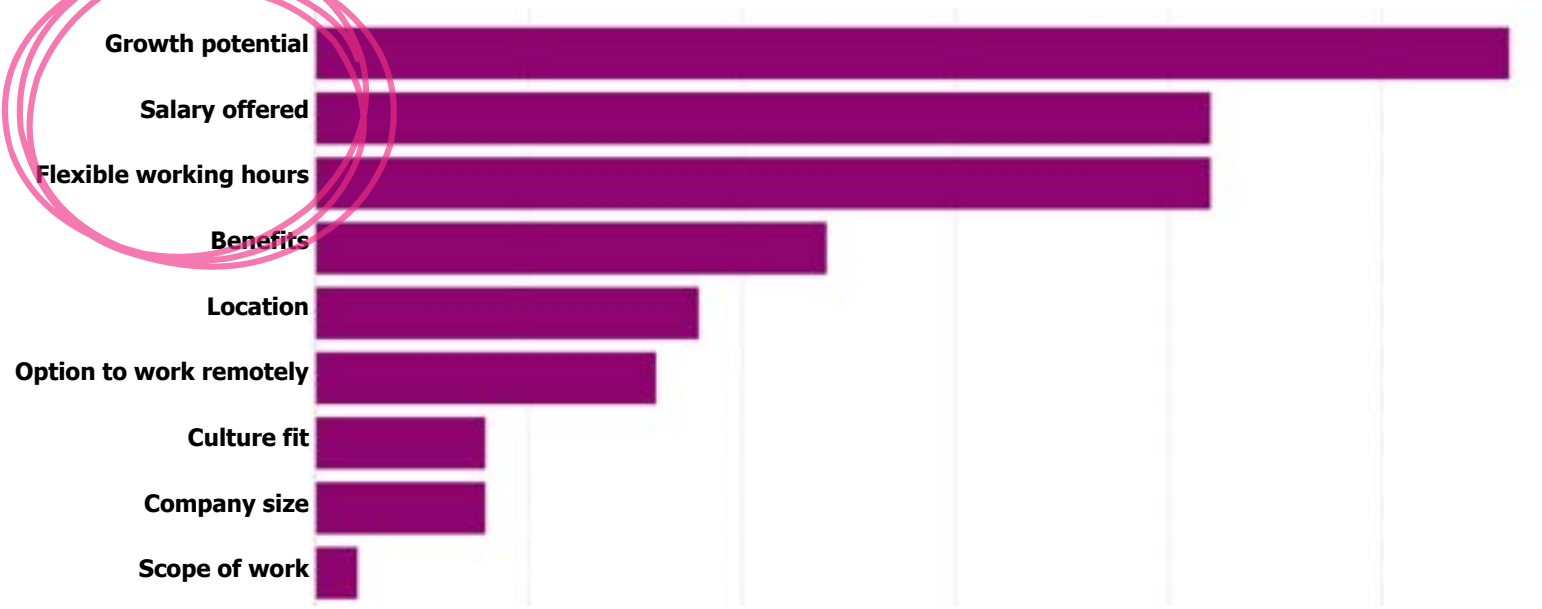


I love being a mom—but there's a part of me that still dreams. I want to grow in my career, not just for myself, but to show my children that it's okay to pursue purpose, ambition, and be a good mom

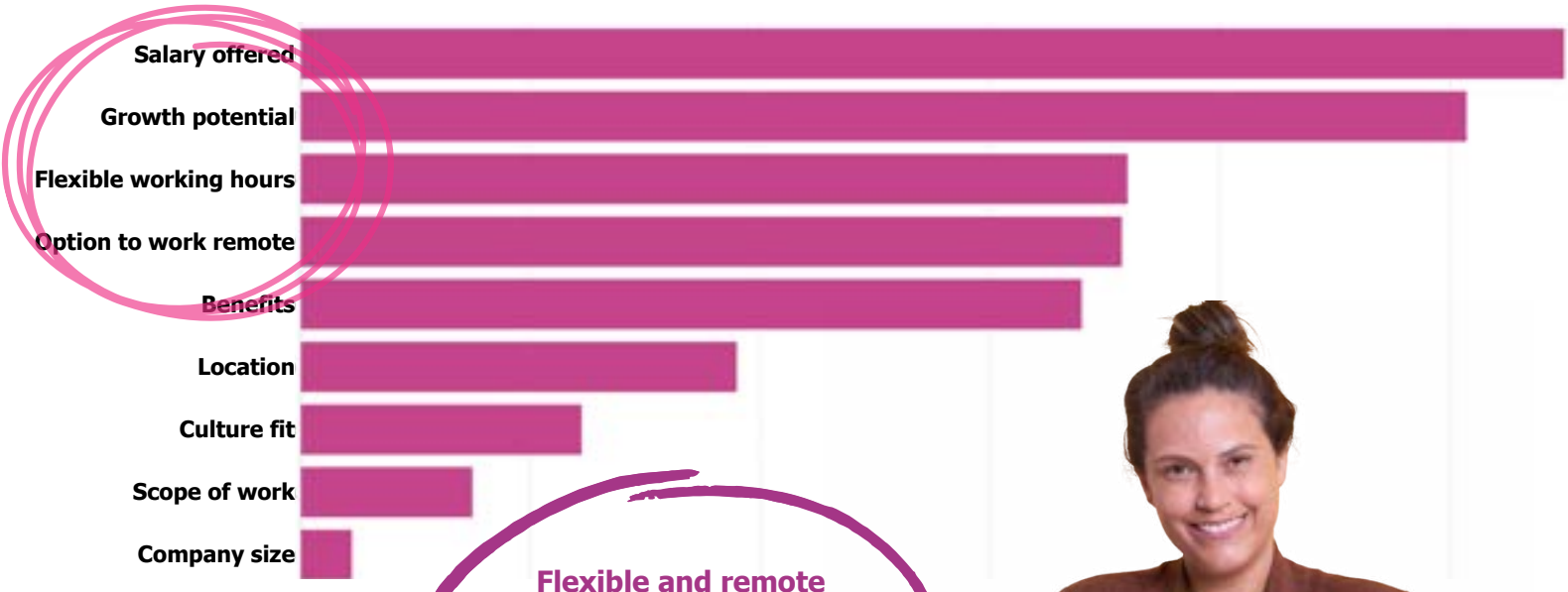
Most appealing factors when looking for a job by age

Most appealing factors when looking for a job - 18-24 years

This section looks at the most appealing factors for women when looking for a job by age category. If an age category has the same appealing factors it is combined. Salary, growth and flexibility are noteworthy factors by lifestage.



Most appealing factors when looking for a job - 25-34 years



Flexible and remote working are appealing for women age 25-34 years (The child-rearing years).

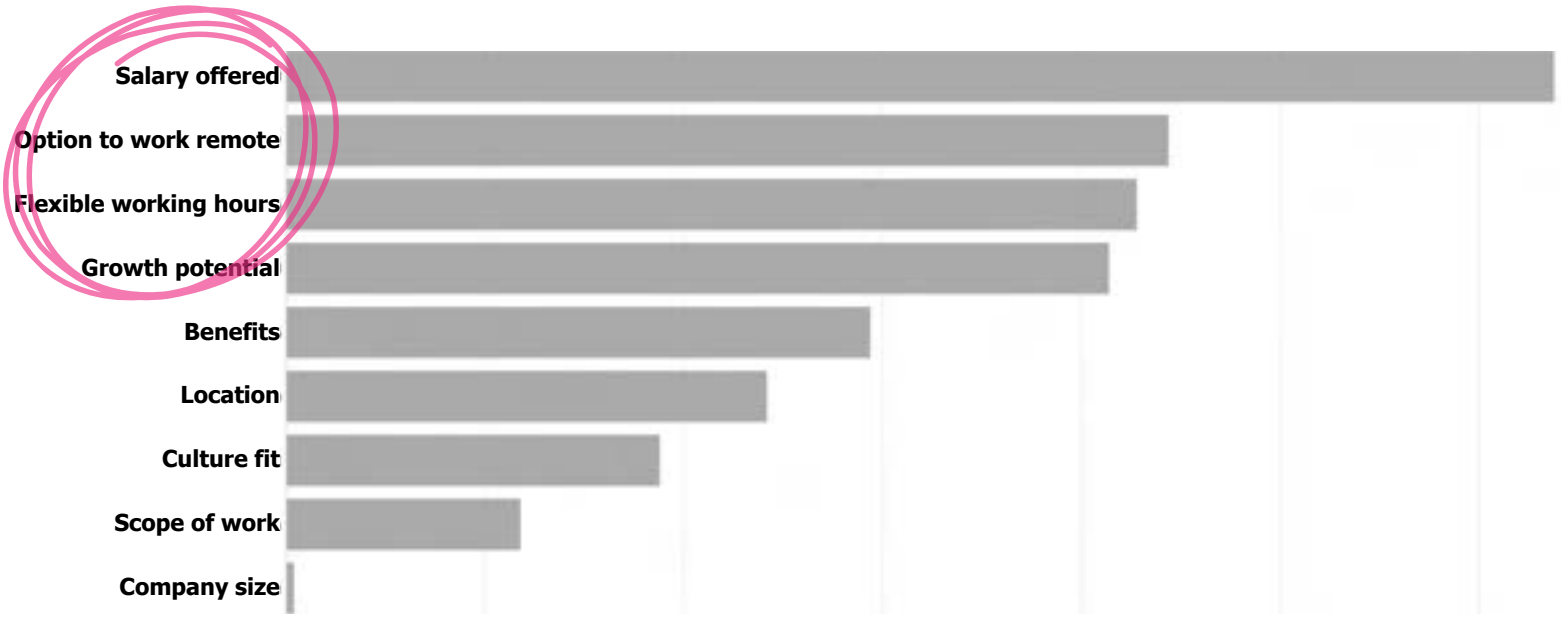


Most appealing factors when looking for a job by age

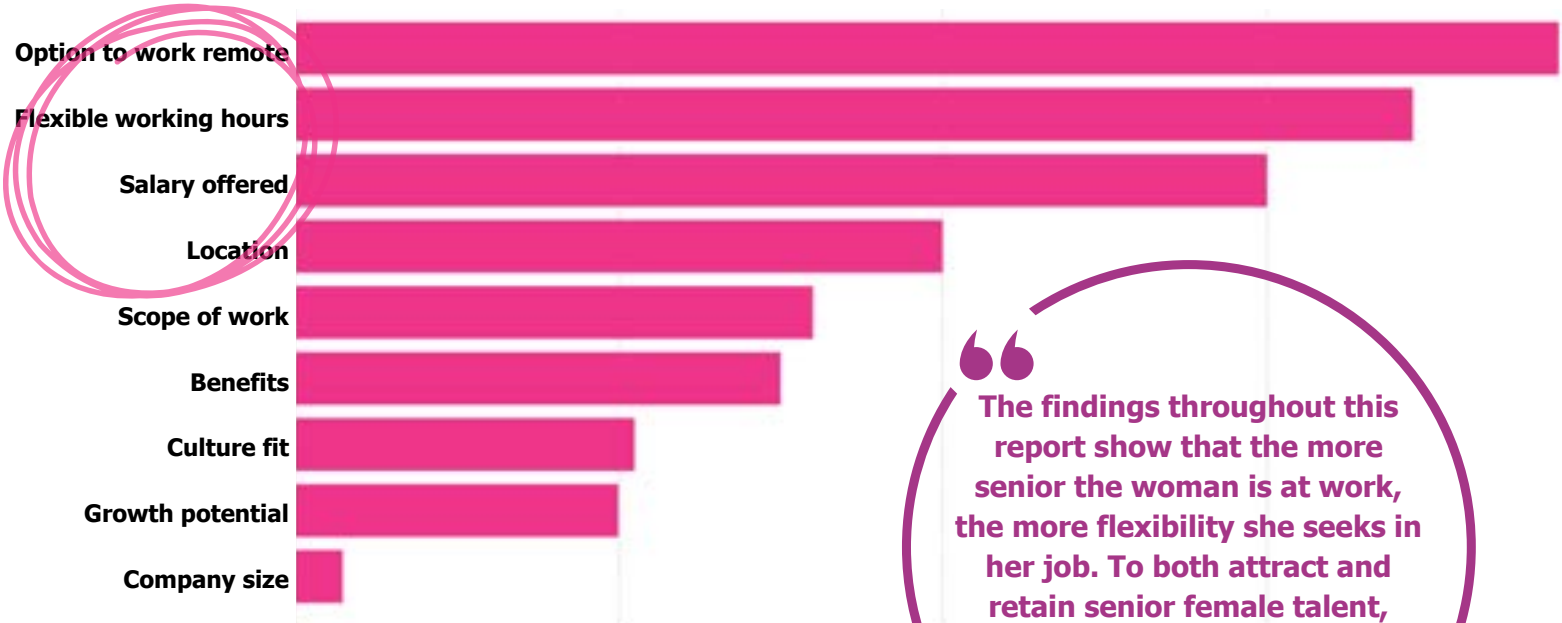
For women age 35-44 and 45-54 after salary, flexibility and remote working are key appealing factors when looking for a job, preferred over growth potential and benefits. This supports our findings that the more senior a women is at work, the more flexibility they seek.

For women age 55-64, now at the top of their careers, remote and flexible working beat salary followed by location and scope of work. Growth potential now drops in appeal.

Most appealing factors when looking for a job - age 35-44 & 45-54



Most appealing factors when looking for a job - age 55-64



The findings throughout this report show that the more senior the woman is at work, the more flexibility she seeks in her job. To both attract and retain senior female talent, flexible work policies must be considered.

Insights for employers

1. Younger women (18–24) are motivated by opportunity and earning potential.
Growth, salary, and flexibility (not necessarily remote) are top priorities, reflecting a desire to learn, earn, and build a foundation.

Recommendation: To attract early-career women, highlight career development, clear growth pathways, and work-life balance without necessarily pushing remote options.

2. Women in childrearing years (25–34) value balance and income.
Salary, growth, and remote/flexible work are key. This group is balancing career ambitions with family responsibilities.

Recommendation: Offer flexibility and progression—think hybrid work, family-friendly policies, and development plans that don't penalise for time out.

3. Mid-career women (35–54) want flexibility and autonomy.
After salary, remote and flexible work arrangements become more appealing than traditional markers like benefits or promotions.

Recommendation: This group seeks control over how and where they work. Flexibility is not just a perk—it's a must-have for retaining experienced, skilled women.

4. Senior women (55–64) prioritise lifestyle over ladder-climbing.
Remote and flexible work now outrank salary. Location and scope of work matter more than growth potential.

Recommendation: At this stage, women are highly skilled but selective. Highlight purposeful work, autonomy, and lifestyle-friendly roles to retain or re-engage senior talent.

Flexibility becomes more important with age and career stage. To attract and retain women - especially senior talent - it should be built into job design, culture, and leadership strategy.

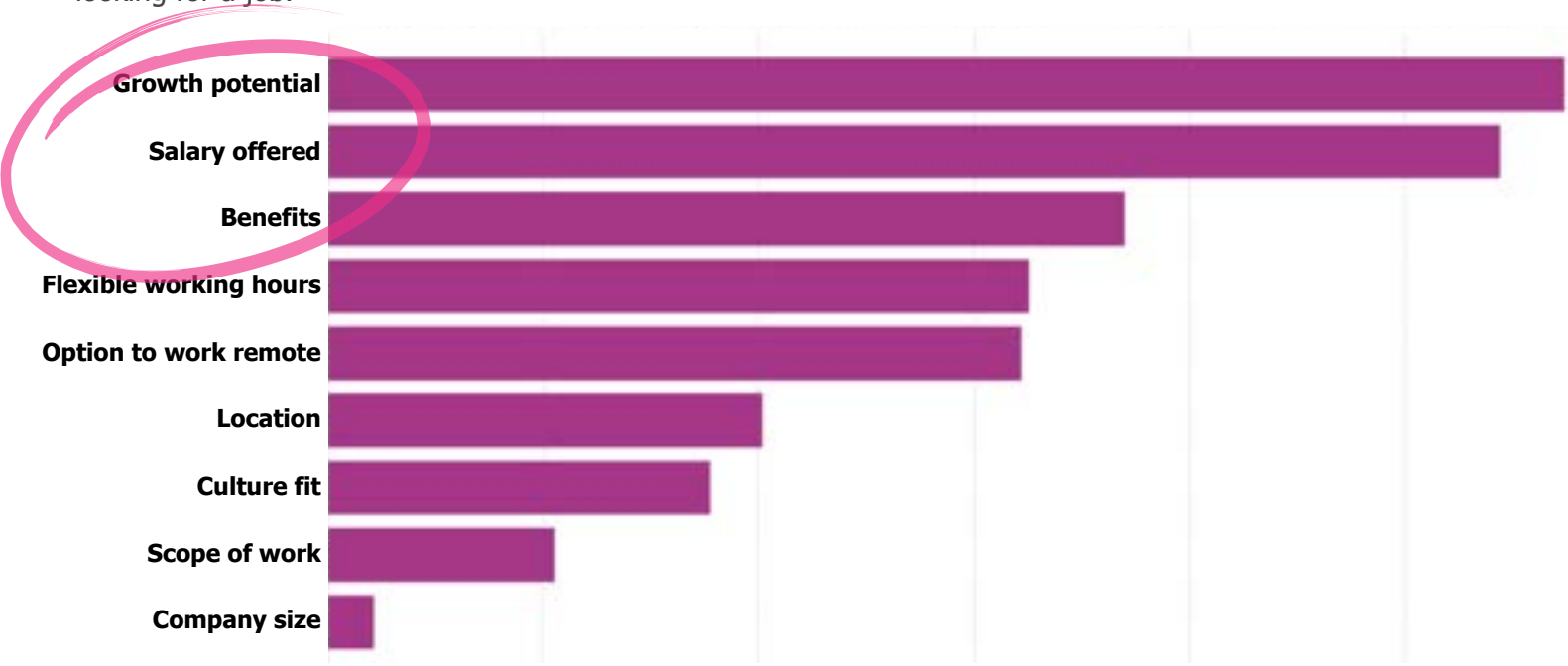


Most appealing factors when looking for a job by race

This section looks at the most appealing factors for women when looking for a job by race. If a race category has the same appealing factors it is combined.

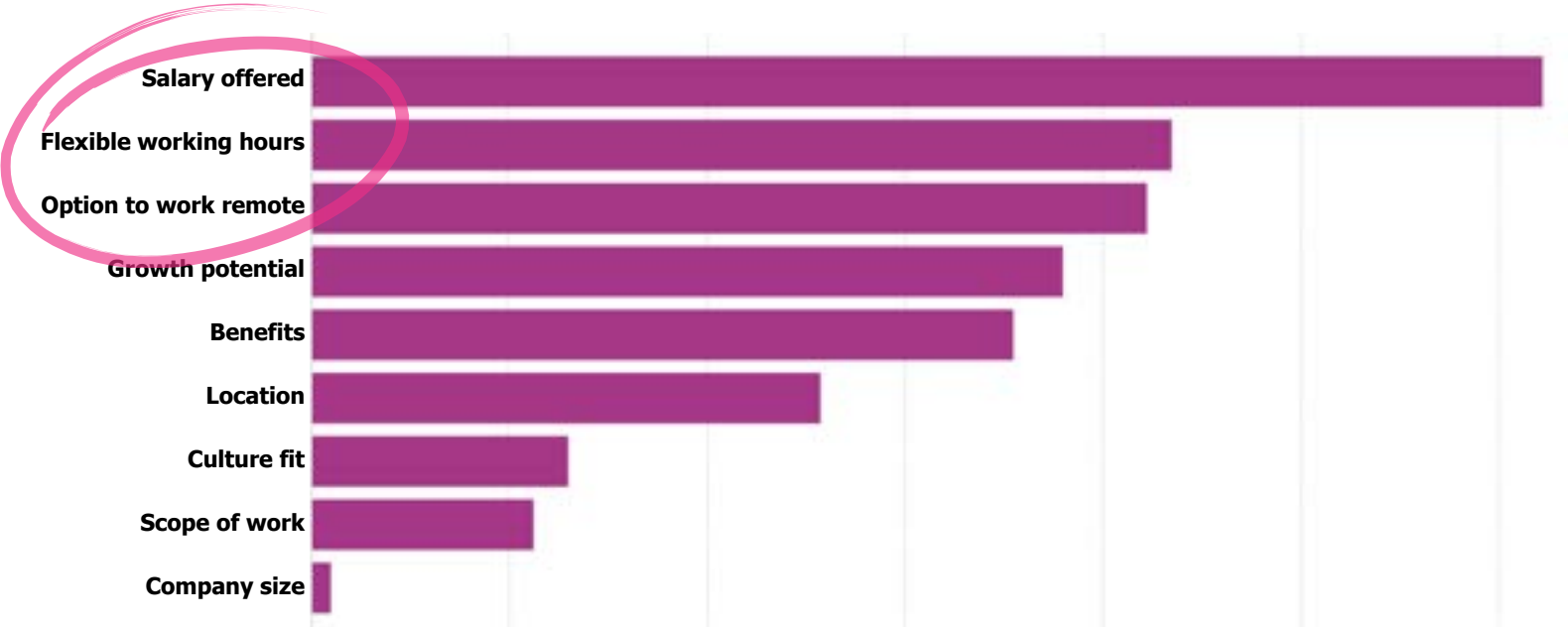
Most appealing factors when looking for a job by race - black women

Black women seek growth potential, salary and benefits before flexible and remote working when looking for a job.



Most appealing factors when looking for a job by race - coloured, white & Indian women

Coloured, White and Indian women prioritise salary and flexible and remote working over growth potential and benefits.



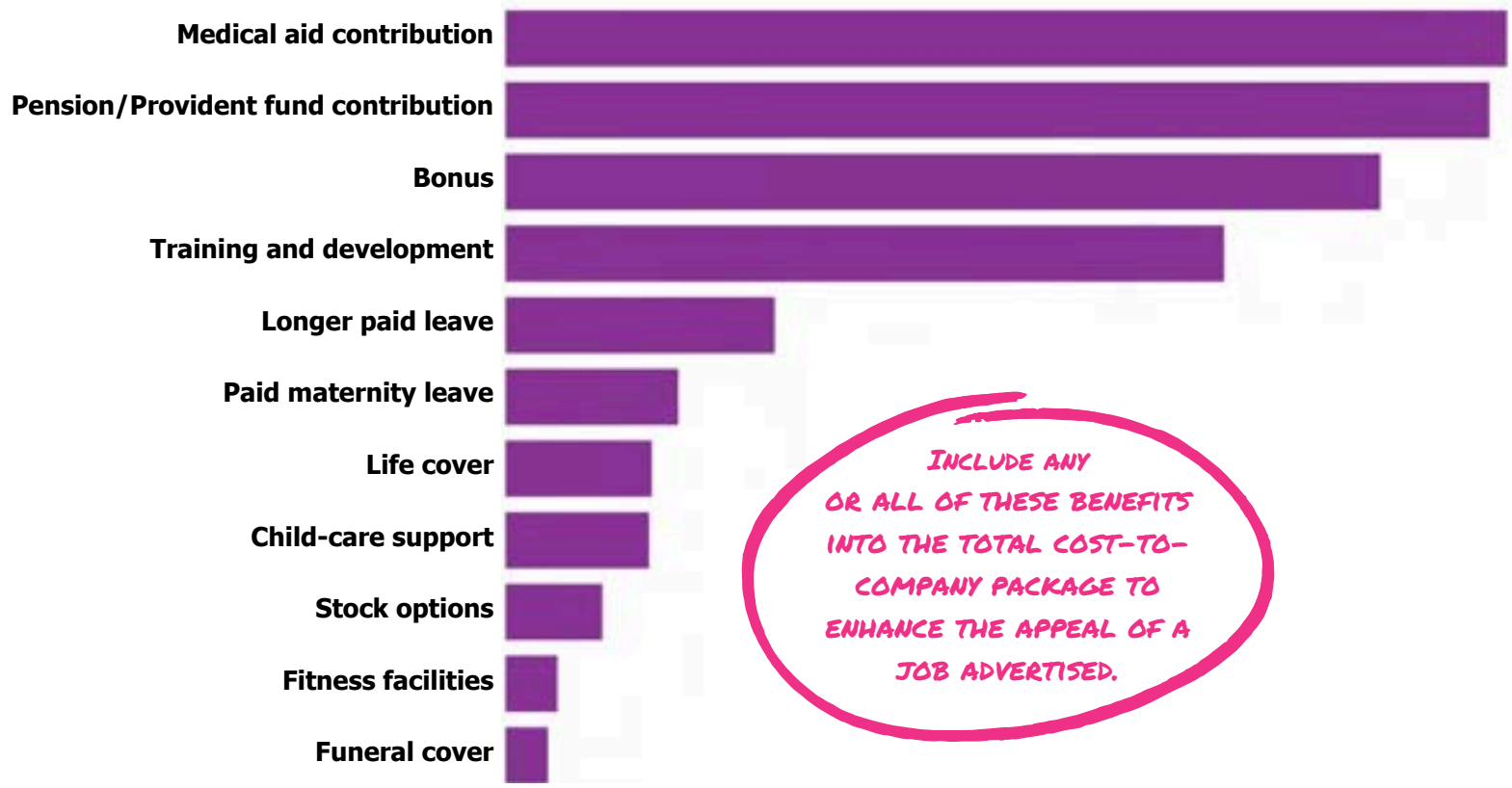
Insight for Employers: Culture fit, scope of work and company size have not featured as any of the top appealing factors for women when looking for a job. These factors may have more impact on talent retention than talent attraction strategies.

Company benefits that are most appealing to women

Salary is the most appealing factor for women when looking for a job. Knowing what other company benefits are important to women, assists with talent attraction and retention strategies for employers.

Amongst all women surveyed the top three benefits are Medical Aid contribution, Pension/Provident fund contribution and a bonus. This is followed by training and development and longer paid leave.

Company benefits that are most appealing to women



Include any or all of these benefits into the total cost-to-company package to enhance the appeal of a job advertised.

Company benefits that are most appealing to women by age 18-24

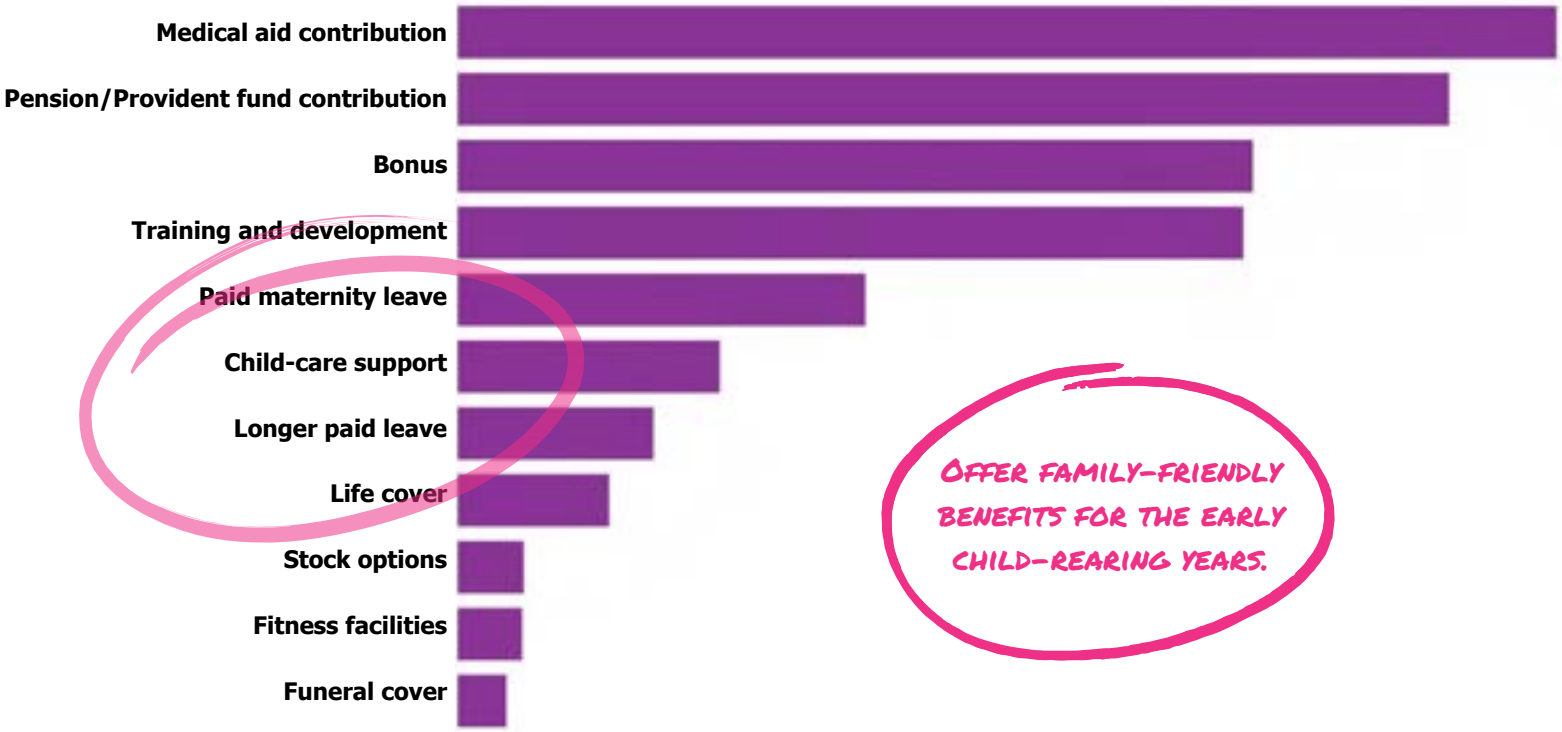
Younger working women aged 18–24 place the highest value on medical aid contributions and opportunities for training and development. They also consider bonuses and pension or provident fund contributions equally important when evaluating the benefits a company offers.

1. Medical Aid Contribution
2. Training & Development
3. Bonus
4. Pension / Provident
5. Paid Maternity Leave

Company benefits that are most appealing to women

During the "typical" child-rearing years company benefits such as paid maternity leave, child-care support and longer paid leave move up in importance versus younger and older age groups. The top three benefits remain consistent with the majority of skilled women.

Company benefits that are most appealing to women by age 25-34



Company benefits that are most appealing to women by age 35-64

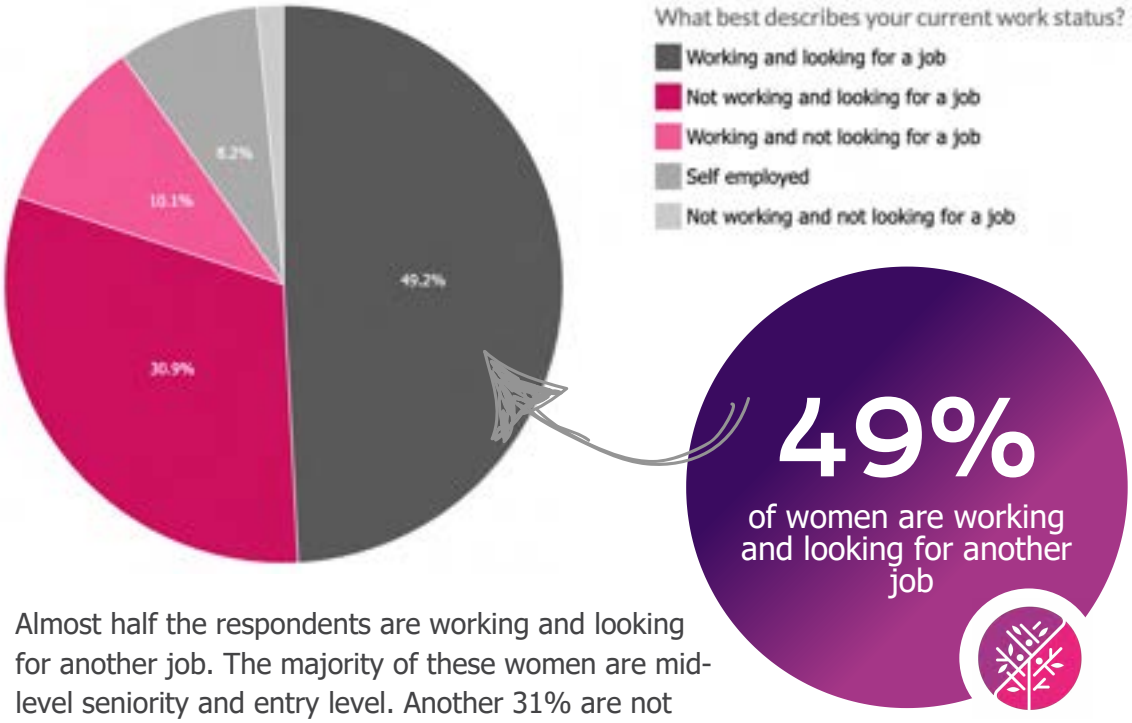
As women get older pension and provident fund contributions become most important together with medical aid and bonus contributions. Training and development and longer paid leave remain in the top 5 benefits that are important to women.



Insights for employers

The value women place on workplace benefits shifts depending on their stage of life. By offering a range of benefits that align with these evolving needs, companies can stay competitive, boost employee retention, and support the growth of gender diversity in their workforce.

The current state of dissatisfaction at work

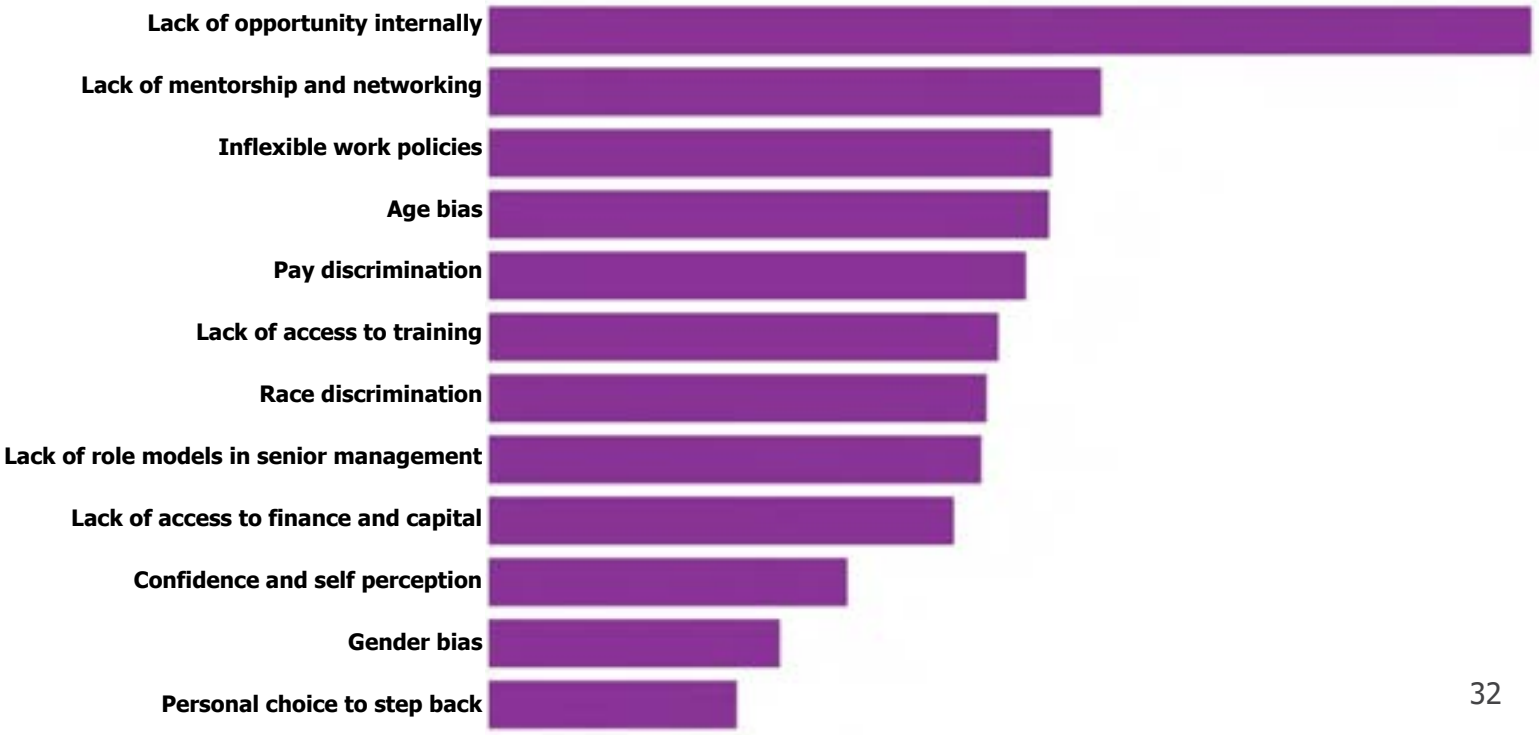


Almost half the respondents are working and looking for another job. The majority of these women are mid-level seniority and entry level. Another 31% are not employed and looking for employment. Only 10% are working and not looking for another job.

Retain talent by addressing career advancement barriers

The barriers to women's career advancement are largely due to a lack of opportunity internally, followed by lack of mentorship and networking, and inflexible work policies. These obstacles correspond with worldwide challenges confronting working women, highlighting the common difficulties faced by skilled women in South Africa. It is encouraging that many women do not view gender bias as a major impediment to their professional development.

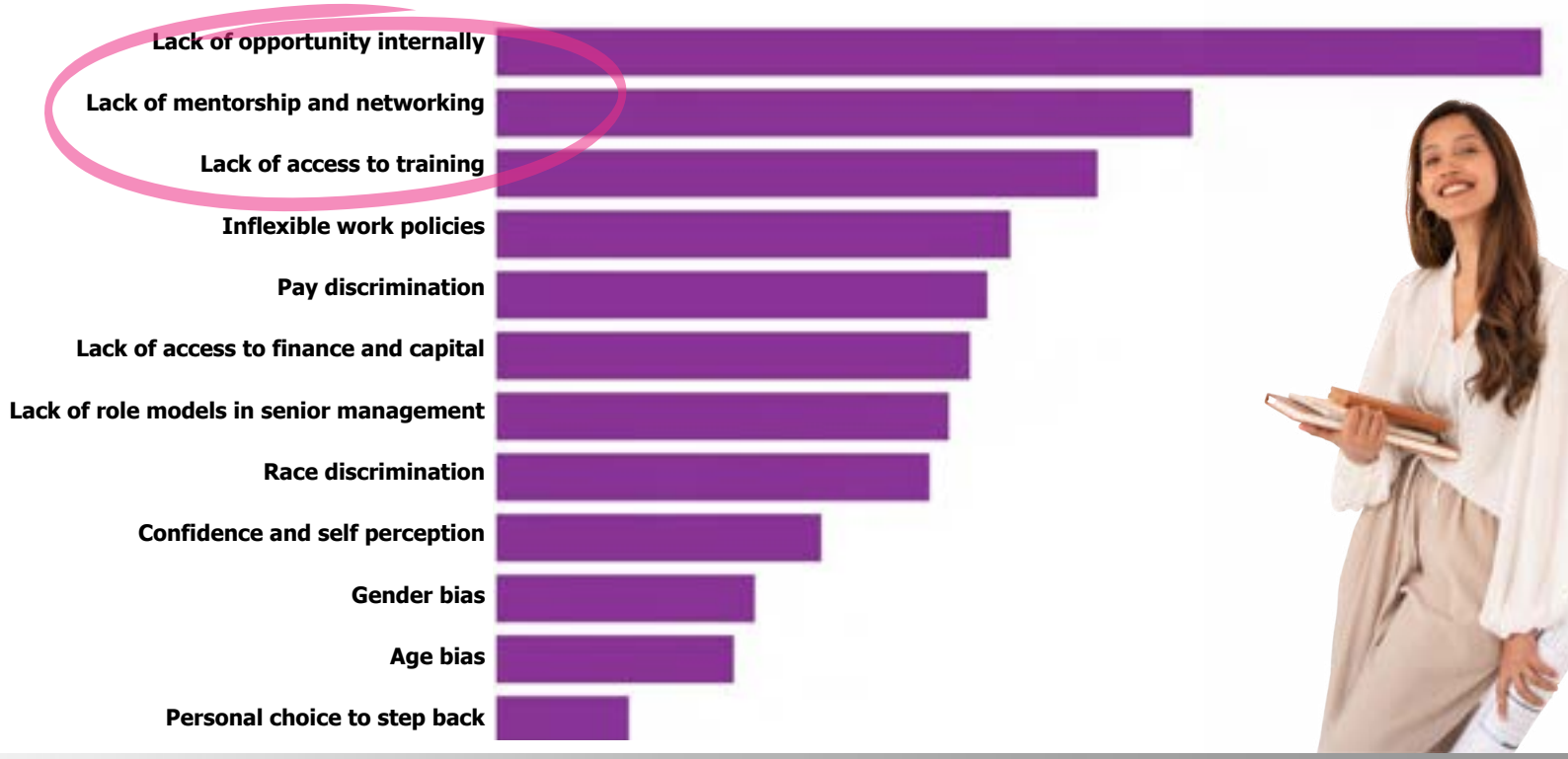
Top barriers to career advancement - all women



Retain talent by addressing career advancement barriers

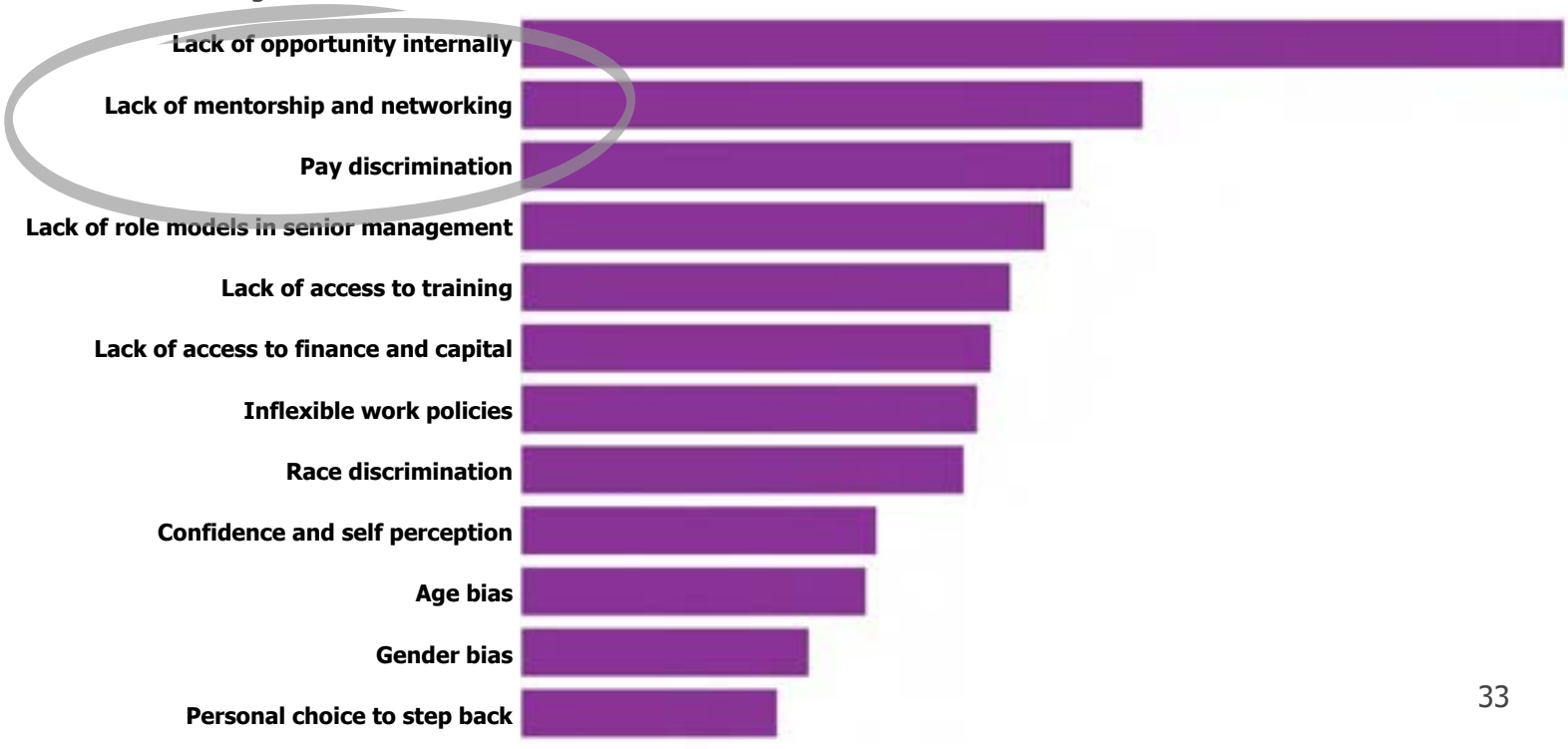
Top barriers to career advancement age 18-34

While lack of internal opportunity and lack of mentoring and networking are the number one and two barrier for this age group, lack of access to training comes ahead of inflexible work policies as a barrier for younger talent. Age bias drops significantly from the total sample.



Top barriers to career advancement age 35-44

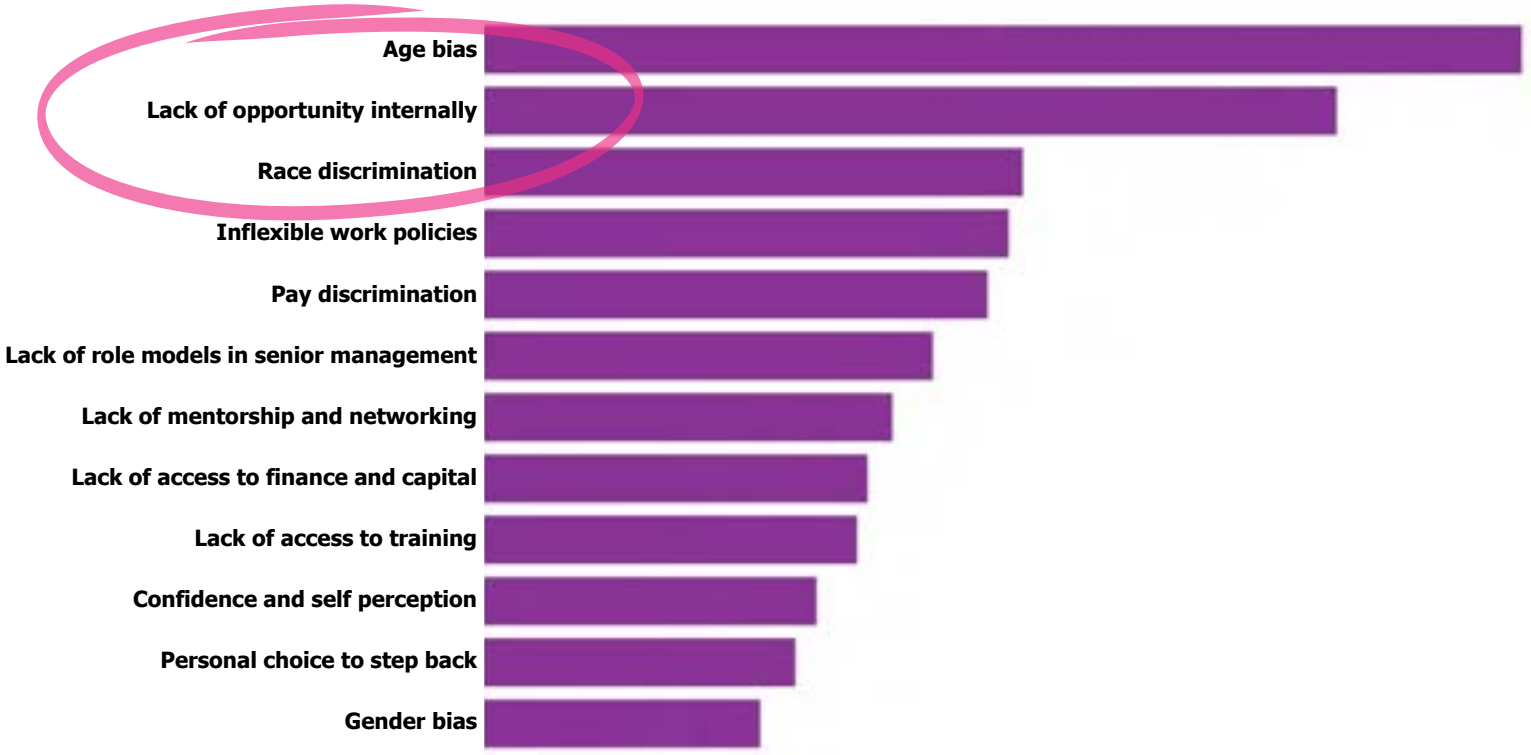
Lack of opportunity, mentorship and networks, pay discrimination and lack of role models in senior management come to the fore. Age bias drops significantly from the total sample. Gender bias is not a significant barrier.



Retain talent by addressing career advancement barriers

Top barriers to career advancement by age 45-64

Age bias and race discrimination are now number one and three top barriers to career advancement for this older age group. Lack of opportunity internally is number two. Inflexible work policies remains high, and lack of training reduces in importance.



Insights for employers to address the key barriers to career advancement

Working women seek career growth and a meaningful future. Even without traditional promotions, offer clear growth pathways—through skills development, stretch roles, or purpose-driven work—to retain valued talent..

Creating Growth Opportunities Without Promotions

For companies with flat structures or SMEs where vertical promotions are limited, growth can come in other forms:

- **Lateral moves & job rotation** – Encourage employees to expand their skill sets by moving across departments or taking on stretch assignments.
- **Project-based leadership** – Allow employees to lead initiatives, even if they don't have formal managerial roles, building leadership skills and visibility.
- **Upskilling & specialisation** – Support industry-specific certifications, technical training, and short courses that help employees deepen their expertise.

Building a Culture of Mentorship & Visible Role Models

Many employees, particularly women and underrepresented groups, struggle with a lack of role models. Organisations can establish mentorship or peer coaching programmes, matching employees with senior leaders or external mentors; showcase success stories and career journeys internally, ensuring employees see examples of people who have grown within the business.

Implementing Flexible Work Policies for Retention

Rigid work structures are one of the biggest contributors to turnover. Companies that offer flexibility have higher retention and engagement. This can include hybrid work arrangements or flexible hours that prioritise output over physical presence. Reduced hour and reduced week options are alternatives.

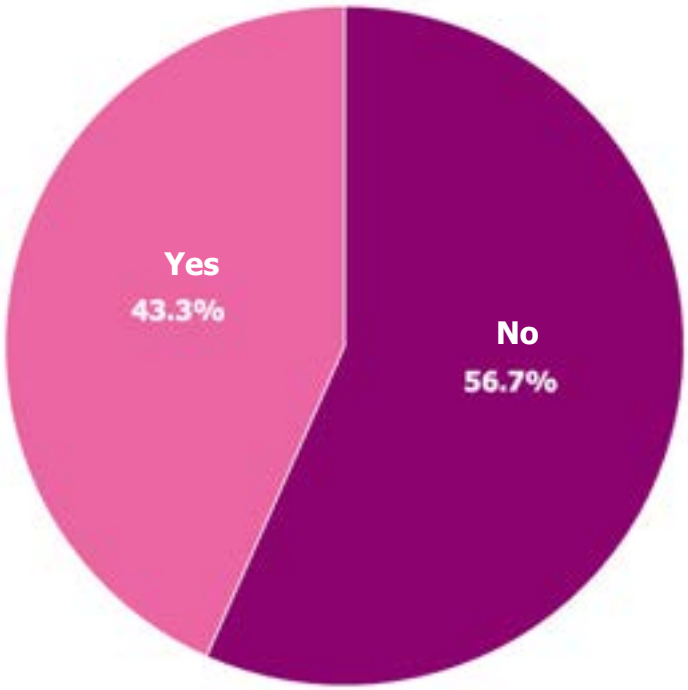
Grow senior female talent by supporting mothers

WORKING WOMEN AND CAREER PAUSES

Career pauses on a CV have traditionally been seen as a cause for concern, often misinterpreted as a loss of skills or career momentum. However, this perspective needs to shift - especially in the context of women, 43% of whom take a career pause, mostly to raise children or retrenchment mostly as a result of COVID.

Rather than being a setback, this time often strengthens leadership, prioritisation, and emotional intelligence - key skills needed in a volatile and digitised workplace.

Employers who recognise the value of these skills will tap into a talent pool of adaptable, resourceful professionals ready to contribute meaningfully.



Women who have taken a career break

94% returned to work after a career break

94%

RETURNING TO WORK AFTER A CAREER PAUSE

Women take career breaks for a variety of reasons, with the top three being childcare, retrenchment, and family responsibilities. In the wake of widespread retrenchments following the pandemic, many women turned to contract work - its conclusion now representing the fourth most common reason for a career break. Additionally, mental health career pauses account for 8% of career pauses.

Reasons why women take a career pause



Section 6

The flexibility dilemma: Balancing remote, hybrid, and office-based work

- Where women currently work vs how they want to work - location p. 37
- Preferred work location for young and entry level women p. 38
- Preferred work location for senior and executive women p. 38
- The impact of back-to-office p. 39
- How women currently work vs how they want to work - working hours p. 40
- How employers can support wellbeing at work p. 41
- How employers can support wellbeing at work by race p. 42
- Insights for employers p. 43

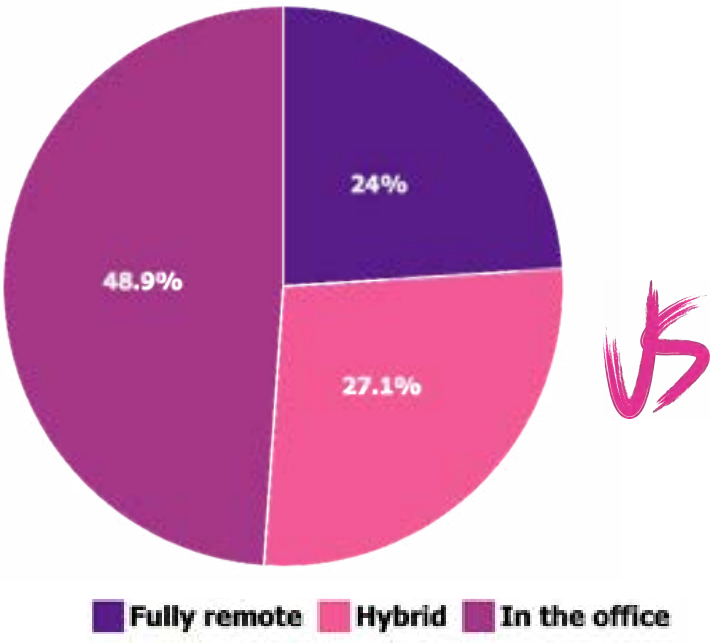


Where women currently work vs where they want to work - location

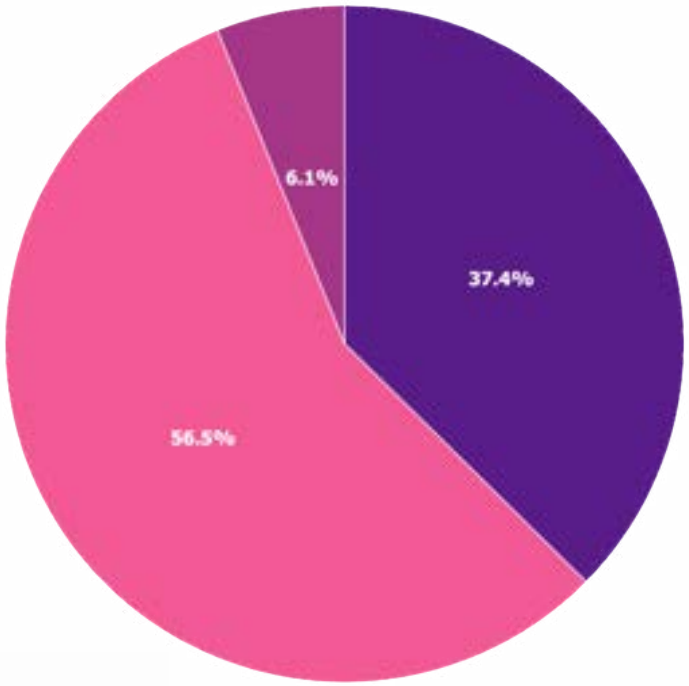
This section examines the data on how South African working women are currently working, their preferences, and the impact of flexible work on wellbeing and productivity. We also explore the implications of back-to-office policies on women, assessing the impact on workplace inclusion and economic participation.

Employers face a weighty decision: should they sustain flexible working models or push for a full return to the office? Before COVID-19, most organisations operated in a predominantly office-based environment. The pandemic forced a sudden and near-total shift to remote work, proving that many roles could be performed effectively online. In the post-pandemic period, hybrid work became the norm, striking a balance between flexibility and in-person collaboration. However, some companies are now reversing course, enforcing a return to office policies. How do women feel about this shift?

Where women currently work



Where women want to work





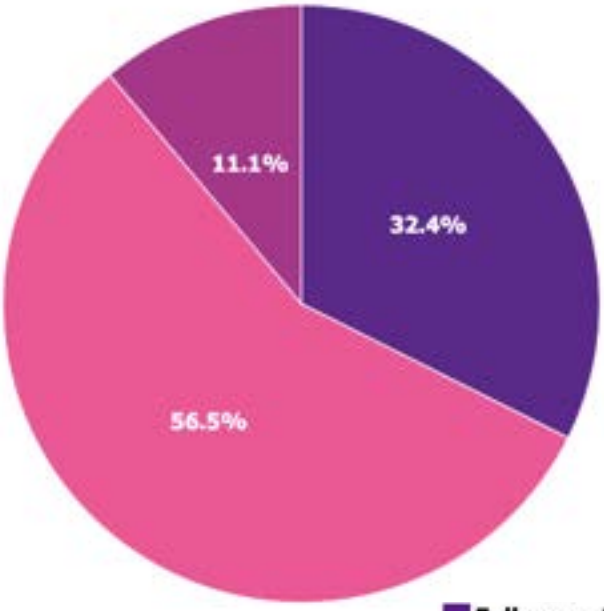
56.5% of women want hybrid working yet 48.9% are currently working in office.

Preferred work location for young and entry level women

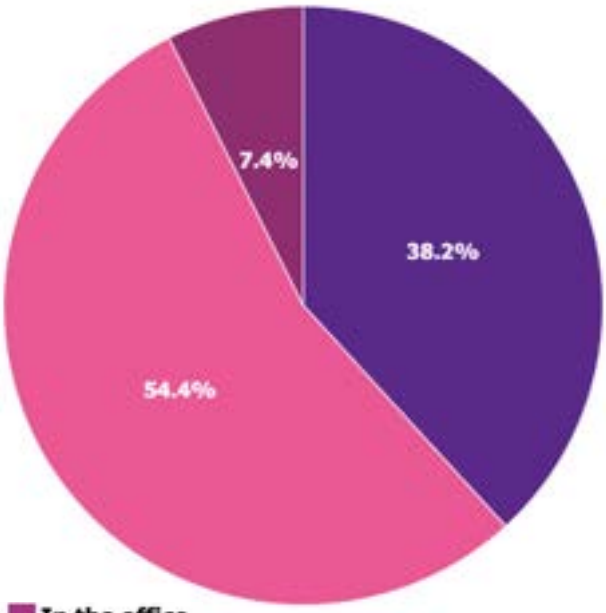
There is an assumption that younger employees prefer to work in the office and not work remotely or in a hybrid manner. The data of women aged 18-24 preferring fully in office work is slightly higher 11% vs 6% for the total sample. Hybrid working is the highest preference 56.5%, and remote working 32% amongst age 18-24 indicating a strong preference for flexible working.

When looking at entry-level respondents, they too prefer hybrid and remote working and show a slightly higher inclination for in-office work, 7%, compared to senior and executive women with 4%.

Women age - 18-24



Entry level women



Fully remote Hybrid In the office

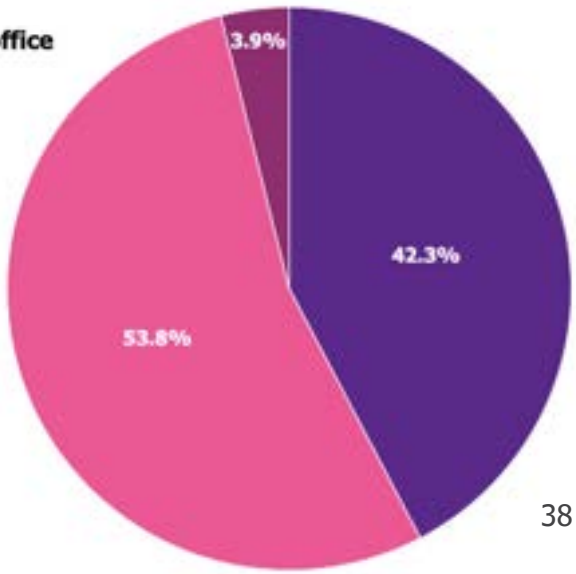
Preferred work location for senior and executive women

As women progress in their careers, the demand for flexibility increases, with senior and executive women showing the highest preference for hybrid, 54% and remote work, 42%. This shift is likely due to greater professional responsibilities, combined with the need to integrate work and home life more effectively.



Seniority - senior & exec level

Fully remote Hybrid In the office



The impact of back-to-office

Almost one quarter of the sample said yes employers had increased the time they needed to be back in office. 76% said no or not applicable.

Have employers increased the amount of on-site time in the past 12 months?



Among women whose employers have increased their required in-office hours, 84% are actively seeking alternative employment. This is significantly higher than the 49% of all respondents who are both employed and looking for a new job.

84%
of women with increased on-site hours are working and looking for a job

VS

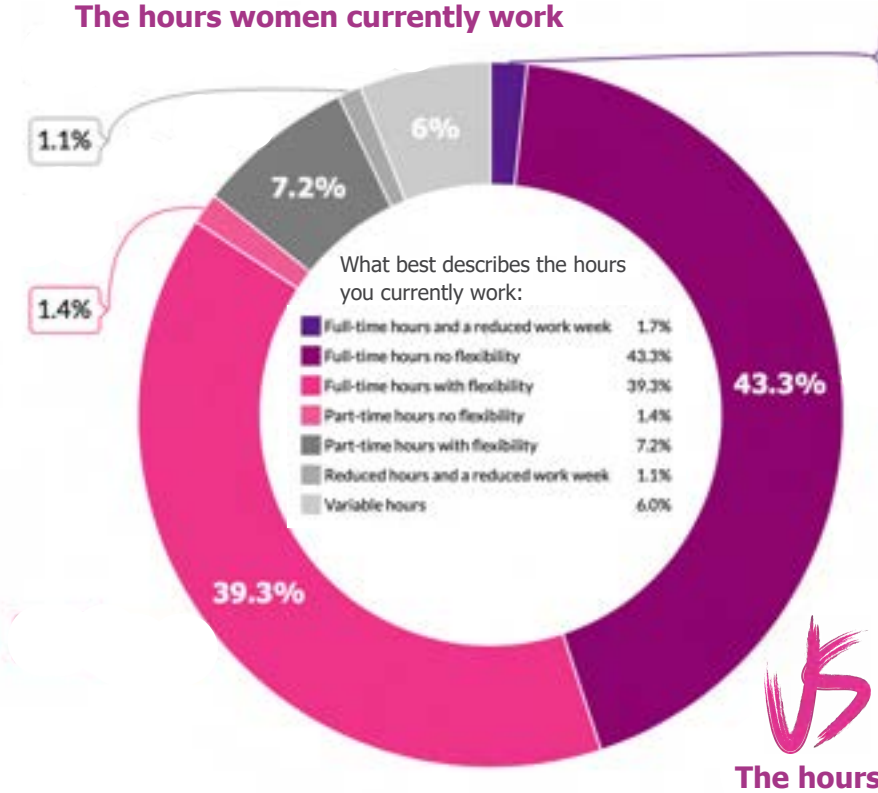
49%
of women are working and looking for a job (all respondents)

Insights for employers: The data suggests that rigid back-to-office policies are a key driver of job dissatisfaction and employee turnover among skilled women. Employers who enforce stricter office attendance requirements risk losing high-calibre female talent to competitors offering greater flexibility.



How women currently work vs how they want to work - working hours

The hours women currently work



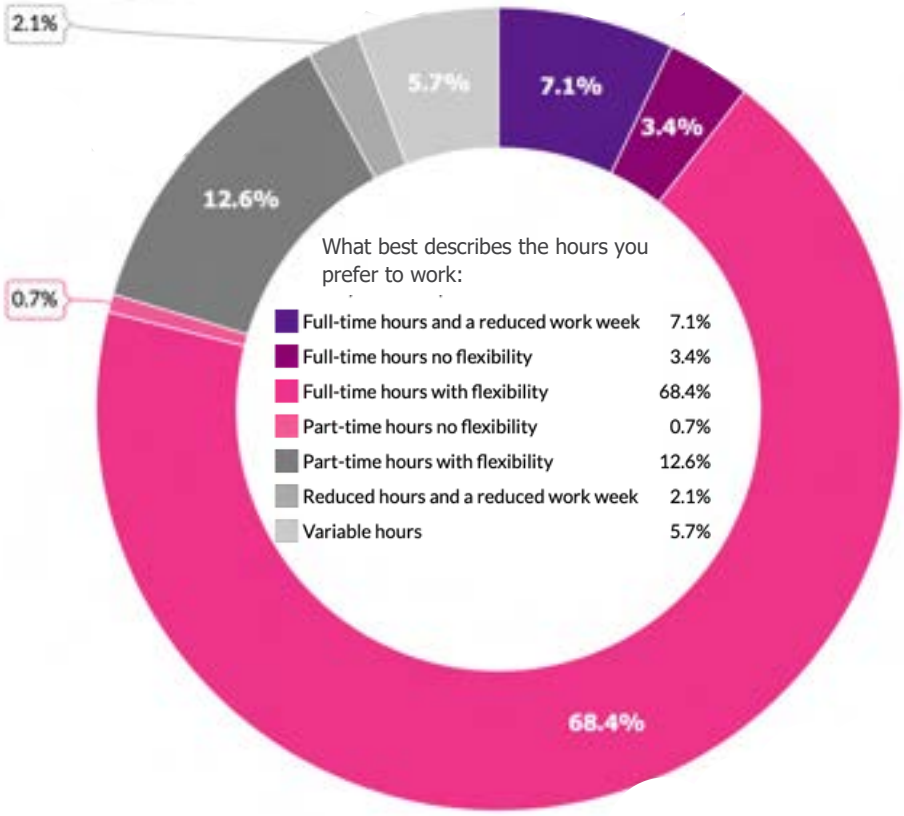
There are notable differences in the hours women are working and how they prefer to work.

Currently 43% of women work full-time with no flexibility compared to 3.4% of women who prefer this option.

39% currently work full-time with flexibility with a majority preferring this option - 68.4%.

Part-time hours with flexibility is 7% compared to a preference of 13%.

The hours women prefer to work



Currently 1.7% of women work full-time and shorter week, and 7.1% would prefer this option. Reduced hours and a reduced week is not widely preferred. This speaks to the need for financial stability

68%
of women want to work full-time with flexibility.

Insights for Employers: Offer flexibility to enhance diversity at all levels.
To attract and retain diverse talent, rethink traditional job structures. Consider re-scoping full-time, office-based roles into hybrid or fully flexible positions to broaden your talent pool and retain top talent. Part-time roles are also highly appealing to women, offering a practical solution for balancing work and personal commitments, and cost-effective talent solutions for employers.

How employers can support wellbeing at work

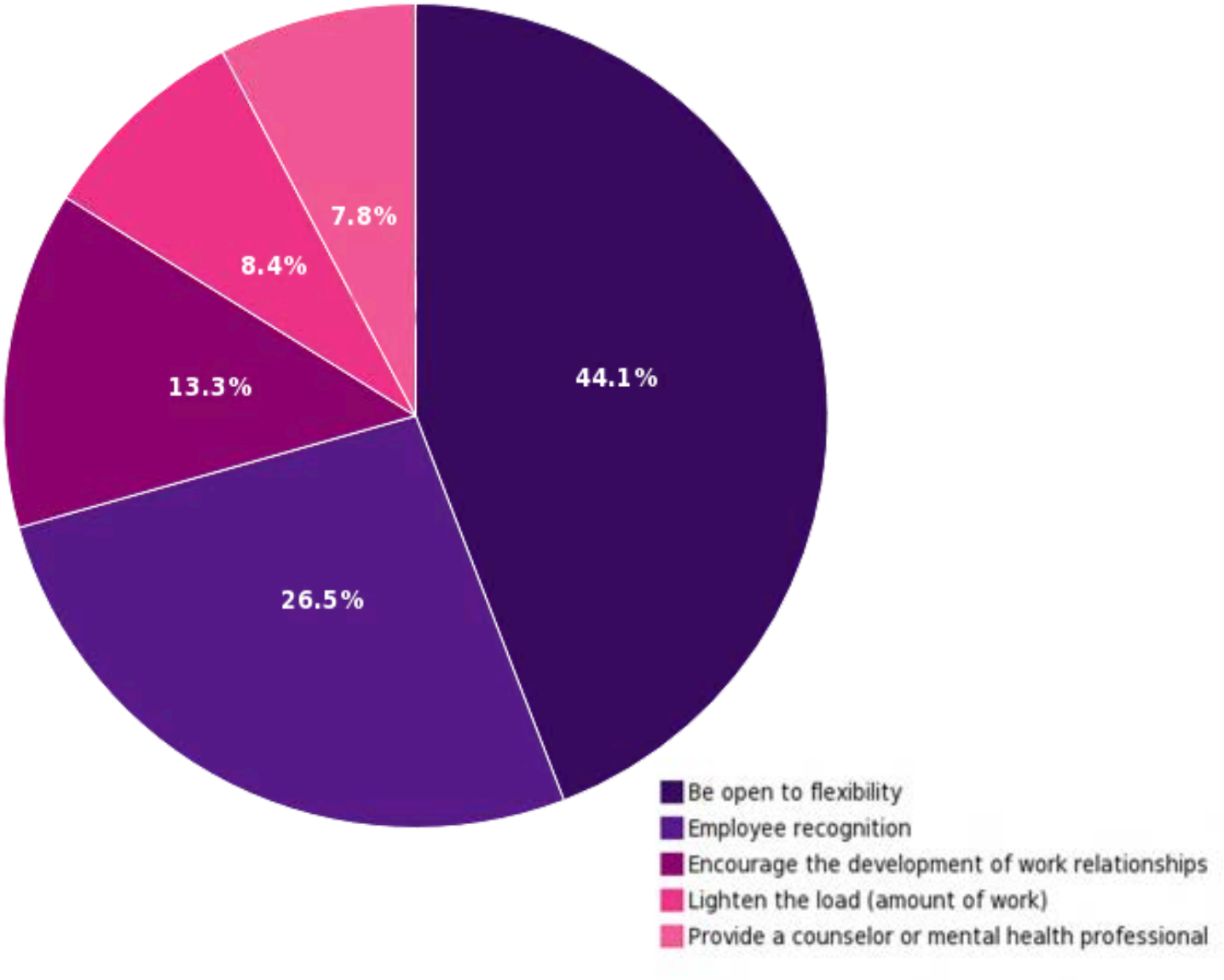
THE ROLE OF FLEXIBILITY, RECOGNITION, AND CONNECTION IN WOMEN'S WORKPLACE WELLBEING

When asked how employers can support wellbeing at work, offering flexibility plays a significantly positive role, 44%, enabling women to balance career and personal responsibilities without sacrificing productivity. Beyond flexibility, employee recognition, 27%—acknowledging contributions and career growth—reinforces a sense of value and accomplishment.

Also important, is workplace relationships,13% as strong connections with colleagues strengthen engagement, collaboration, and job satisfaction. The desire for meaningful workplace relationships is likely a key driver behind many women's preference for hybrid work over fully remote roles, striking a balance between autonomy and in-person connection.

Lightening the amount of work required, 8.4% and providing a mental health professional or counselor, 7.8% are additional valuable support strategies for wellness at work.

How employers can support wellbeing at work



How employers can support wellbeing at work by race

The survey reveals differences in workplace wellbeing support desired by race, with Black women showing distinct results, while Coloured, Indian, and White (CIW) women having similar responses and were grouped together.

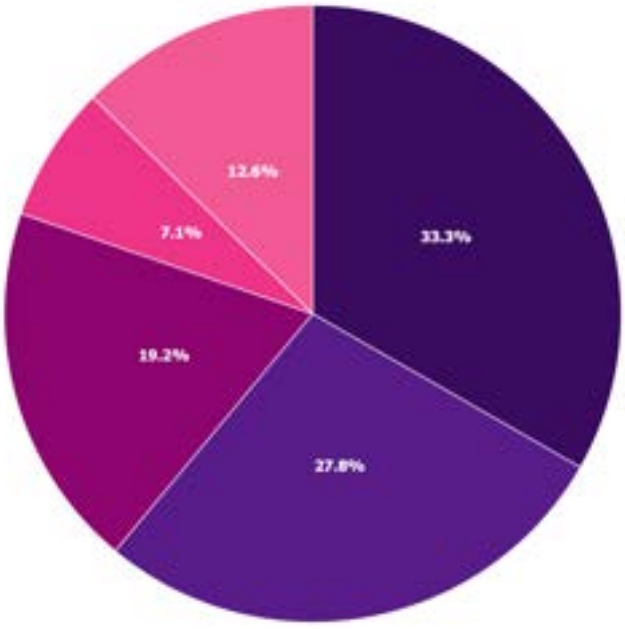
Offering flexibility plays a significantly positive role in supporting women's wellbeing at work across all race groups, however less for Black women, 33% than the Coloured, White, Indian group with 49%.

Employee recognition to support wellbeing at work across all race groups is similar, Black 28% and the Coloured, White, Indian group 26%.

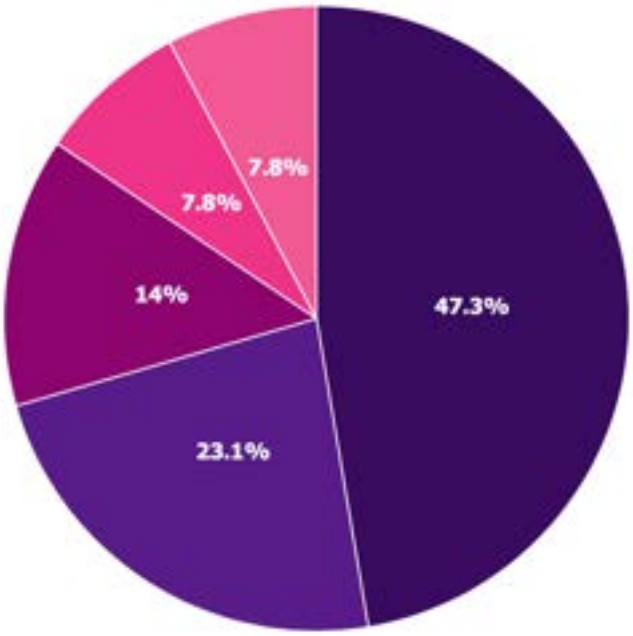
Encouraging the development of work relationships is considerably higher for Black women, 19%, compared to the Coloured, White, Indian group, 11%.

The need to lighten the amount of work required for wellbeing is higher for the Coloured, White, Indian group, 11%, than for Black women 7%.

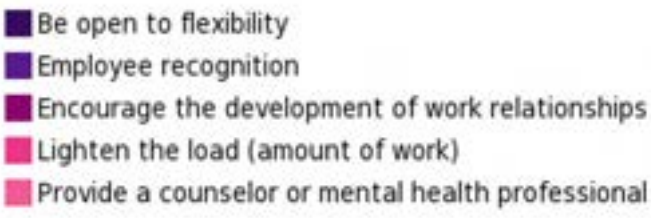
Providing a mental health professional or counselor for Black women is considerably higher at 13% vs the Coloured, White, Indian group 6%.



Race - Black



Race - Coloured, Indian, White



Insights for employers

To truly harness the benefits of gender diversity in senior leadership, forward-thinking companies are developing intentional strategies to support the advancement of women into senior roles. Focusing on the following key areas can help unlock this potential and strengthen leadership pipelines:

Offer beneficial financial reward
Due to the increased financial burden on women, particularly sole-income earning mothers, paying market related salaries and having transparent financial reward policies is essential. This is a basic requirement to both attract and retain high calibre women talent. Where budgets are constrained offer part-time working roles.

Demonstrate growth opportunities
For women to see a future within an organisation, growth opportunities must be visible and attainable—even beyond traditional promotions. Providing opportunities for skills development, lateral moves, project leadership, mentorship, and specialised training signals a commitment to their long-term success. When women feel their careers are progressing, they are more likely to stay, increasing retention and fostering a pipeline of future leaders and stemming leaky talent pipelines.

Offer work location flexibility and in particular hybrid working
Women across all ages, races, and seniority levels overwhelmingly prefer hybrid and remote work over full-time office-based roles, with hybrid full-time and part-time work being the most valued options.

Flexibility is a key factor in attracting and retaining female talent across all ages and seniority levels. More importantly, it is a strategic enabler—helping companies retain women through the child-rearing years and ultimately developing senior female role models and business leaders.

Back to office with caution
This research indicates that women have seen both gender diversity and working conditions improve in the past 5 years. It also indicates that women highly prize flexible working as a preferred work arrangement. Hybrid working is preferred to both remote working and in-office working, with full-time in-office working being the least preferred.

Companies that call all their staff back to the office, risk the loss of high-calibre women talent to competitors offering flexibility. Offer hybrid working as a smart talent attraction strategy.

Implement mentoring and assist with networking
Supporting women with mentoring and access to professional networks plays a vital role in building career confidence, visibility, and leadership readiness. By investing in these opportunities, employers strengthen succession pipelines, develop women leaders and foster an inclusive culture .

Medical aid contribution
Medical aid emerged as the most sought-after employee benefit among women. With a significant number of single mothers and sole-income earners supporting dependants, offering medical aid can play a crucial role in both attracting and retaining top female talent.



Section 7

Closing remarks

FUTURE-PROOFING SOUTH AFRICA'S WORKFORCE

The findings from this report makes one thing clear: women are indispensable to South Africa's economic future. They are entering the workforce in increasing numbers, gaining higher qualifications, are ambitious and taking on greater financial responsibilities in their households. The business case for attracting and retaining skilled women has never been stronger.

Harvard Professional Development (2024) indicates that companies with the greatest proportion of women on executive committees earn a 47% higher return on equity compared to companies with no women executives. Additionally, companies in the top 25% for gender diversity are 27% more likely to outperform their industry peers in profitability. Locally, Statistics South Africa confirms that women are increasingly the primary breadwinners, with 41% of working women in our survey being sole income earners. This shift means that women are actively seeking long-term, stable employment where they can grow and contribute meaningfully—a significant advantage for employers who are willing to adapt.

Yet, as this report highlights, many employers are still operating within outdated talent strategies that do not fully capitalise on the potential of developing skilled women. Rigid work policies, lack of career growth opportunities, and inflexible promotion structures are creating unnecessary barriers, pushing talented women to seek employment elsewhere.

For companies looking to future-proof their talent pipeline, this report offers a blueprint. By understanding what skilled women need to thrive - whether it's clear career progression, flexible work arrangements, or supportive leadership - companies can position themselves as employers of choice in an increasingly competitive skilled labour market.



The reality is that South Africa's workforce is changing and global employers are hiring SA talent - remotely. The companies that embrace data-driven, inclusive hiring and retention strategies today will be the ones with stronger, more resilient teams tomorrow. This is not about meeting diversity targets; it is about securing the best talent and ensuring long-term business success.

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