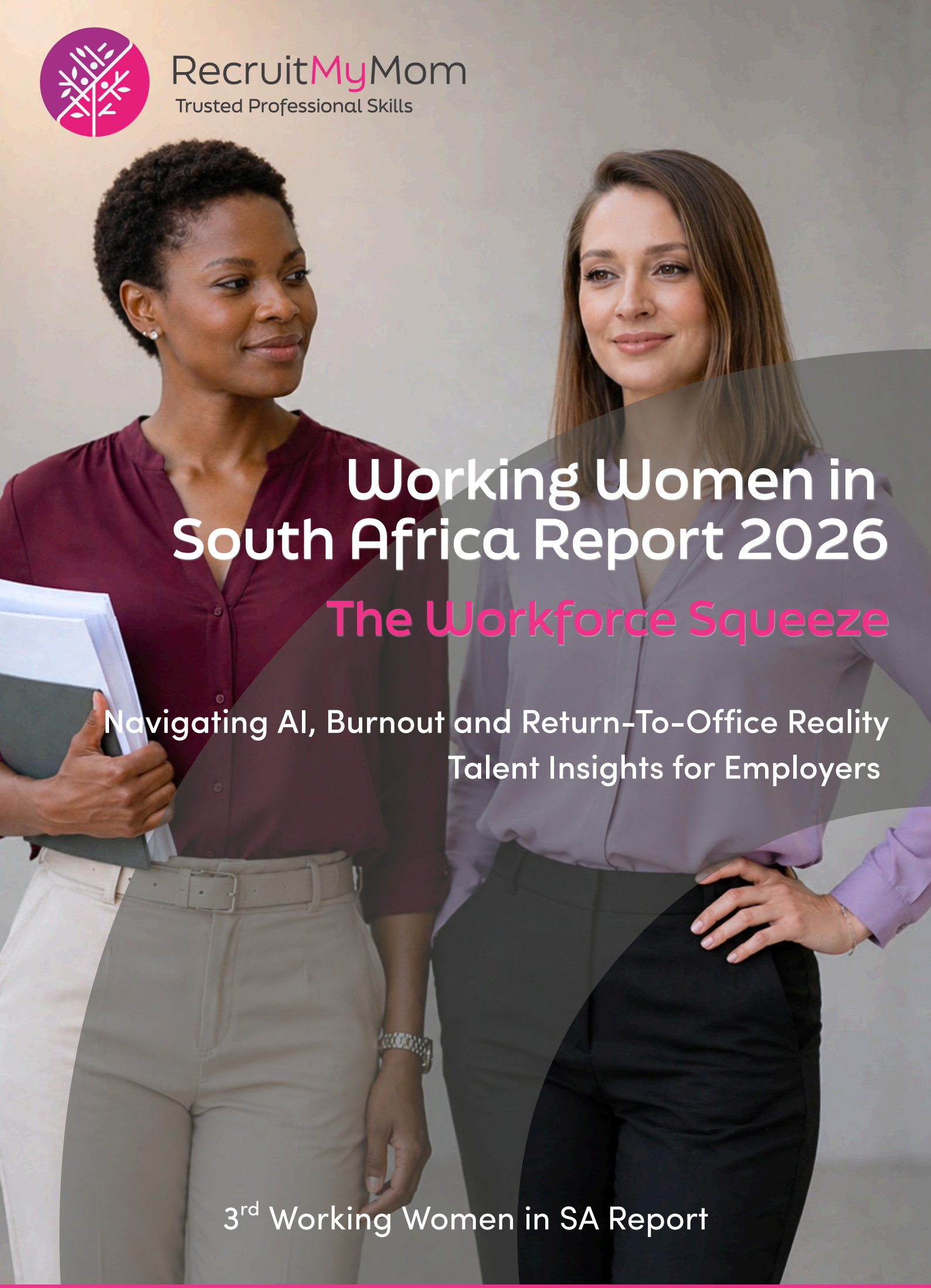
RecruitMyMom
Trusted Professional Skills



Working Women in South Africa Report 2026

The Workforce Squeeze

Navigating AI, Burnout and Return-To-Office Reality
Talent Insights for Employers

3rd Working Women in SA Report

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A note from Phillipa Geard
CEO and Founder

South African employers are competing for skilled talent in a tight market, while responding to a clear trend in the workforce: Women are graduating from tertiary institutions in higher numbers than men, yet this talent is still not consistently attracted, integrated or retained within organisations.

From where we sit, working closely with both employers and candidates, this gap is significant. Those who are adjusting how they hire and support women are already seeing the benefit - not only in access to skills, but in retention and long-term value gained.

The 2026 Working Women in South Africa Report builds on last year's talent blueprint and brings together data drawn directly from the market. In a country where reliable data remains limited, our aim is simple; to help employers make better, more confident decisions about how they attract and retain experienced female talent.

This year, we focused on three vital areas affecting how women experience work in 2026.

- **The first is the return to office** - what increased on-site expectations mean in practice, what employees are gaining from it, and where it is falling short.
- **The second is AI readiness**, and how women are engaging with these changes, whether they see opportunity in them, and whether they feel adequately supported to adapt.
- **The third is wellbeing**, including the drivers of burnout and what would make the greatest difference to women's ability to work and thrive over time.

Attracting women into the workforce is only the beginning. The organisations that will stand out are those that are deliberate in how work is structured, how people are supported, and what enables women to build long, sustainable careers.

This report is intended to provide the insight and evidence needed to support more informed conversations and better decisions - ones that strengthen your organisation for long-term gain.

Best regards,
Phillipa



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Section 1

Executive Summary

The Workforce Squeeze: Navigating AI, burnout and return-to-office reality.
Key research findings.
Strategies for success: Attracting and retaining skilled women in 2026.
Conclusion: A strategic opportunity for business growth.



The Workforce Squeeze: Navigating AI, burnout and return-to-office reality

South Africa's skilled working women remain valuable and underutilised assets in the country's workforce. The 2026 Working Women in South Africa Report, compiled by RecruitMyMom, a specialist women-focused talent agency, builds directly on the blueprint established in 2025, revisiting the core trends and exploring three vital areas affecting how women experience work in 2026.

This year's report draws on 3 509 eligible survey responses from skilled women aged 18 to 64. While a focused edition, the findings are consistent, compelling and directly actionable for employers navigating return-to-office decisions, AI adoption and the growing importance of employee wellbeing in their workforce.

Key research findings

The gap between how women work and how they want to work remains wide.
91% of women prefer hybrid or fully remote working, yet 43.7% are currently fully office-based. Among those whose on-site attendance has been increased, 40.7% are actively looking for new opportunities. The data also reveals what would make the office worth employees' while and the answers are practical and achievable.

Women are embracing AI in the workplace.
Nearly two thirds experience AI positively in their jobs and feel optimistic about AI in their profession. 81.7% believe it gives or could give them a professional advantage. Yet only 47.2% feel supported by their employer to adapt to it. The gap between women's AI readiness and employer support is a defining workforce development opportunity in 2026.

Burnout is widespread, and wellbeing support is not reaching those who need it.
86.1% of women experience burnout to some degree. 55.5% have struggled with their mental wellbeing in the past 12 months. Only 9.2% accessed employer mental health support and 18.3% are not aware of wellbeing support via employers. The report uncovers the four things that would most improve employee wellbeing.

Career progression barriers persist and are becoming more visible.
Lack of visible opportunity remains the top career barrier, consistent with previous years' reports. 64.2% can not see a clear next career step within their organisation. New for 2026: Return-to-office policies appear for the first time as a named career barrier.

Skilled women are qualified, financially committed and loyal when working conditions are right.
74.2% of respondents hold a tertiary qualification, 45% are sole income earners and 80.4% support dependants. When employers meet their needs, women stay well beyond South Africa's national average tenure, with 53.9% remaining with their current employer for three years or more.

Strategies for success: Attracting and retaining skilled women in 2026

The 2025 report identified five key strategies for employers seeking to attract and retain skilled female talent. The 2026 data builds on and extends these, adding new strategic priorities defined by the three vital areas affecting how women experience work in 2026.

1. Invest in AI capability for your workforce. Women are optimistic and ready. The 44.2% who say AI possibly gives them a professional advantage are waiting for employers to help them convert that openness into confidence. Practical, role-specific AI literacy is the investment with the most immediate return.

2. Build workplaces where wellbeing is structural, not supplementary. Better pay, supportive leadership, manageable workloads and genuine psychological safety are what women say would improve their working lives. Ensuring that wellbeing support is visible, accessible and actively communicated is a meaningful starting point.

3. Design flexibility into how work is structured. With 91% of women preferring hybrid or fully remote working, flexibility is not a perk, but the architecture of a workforce that stays. The findings are consistent: fewer required days, flexible hours and office time centred around meaningful collaboration strengthen both retention and talent access.

4. Make career pathways visible and attainable. Structured mentorship, transparent promotion criteria and regular career conversations signal that advancement is possible and intentional. Women who can see a future in your organisation are far more likely to build one there.

5. Recognise career breaks for the asset they are. 94% of women who took a career break returned to work. The skills built during that time are precisely what a fast-moving, AI-shaped economy demands. Employers who look past a CV gap will find talent their competitors are overlooking.

6. Expand your talent sourcing deliberately. Flexible roles, structured return-to-work pathways and part-time opportunities expand talent pools and open the door to experienced talent that is available, motivated and ready.

Conclusion: A strategic opportunity for business growth

Data-led decisions give organisations the clarity to build teams that perform and thrive. They help leadership teams challenge assumptions, test policies and act with greater confidence, whether that means rethinking how office time is structured, supporting teams through an AI transition, or checking in with a high-performing employee who may be carrying more than is visible.

South Africa's women are educated, ambitious and ready to contribute. The opportunity for employers is to create the conditions that make that contribution sustainable. The small, consistent shifts that come from understanding this data are what build workplaces where skilled women choose to stay and businesses grow stronger as a result.

Section 2

About this Research

The motivation behind the research.
Research methodology.
Demographics of the respondents:

- Race
- Age
- Education
- Marital status and household income profile
- Family support needs and dependants
- Employment status
- Seniority at work



The motivation behind the research

RecruitMyMom is a multi-award-winning recruitment company and committed to enabling and retaining skilled women in the South African workforce. Our annual Working Women in South Africa survey is the most comprehensive study of its kind - tracking the evolving realities, ambitions and experiences of skilled women across industries, career levels and life stages.

The 2026 report is our third annual research report. It tracks core trends over the previous two years, and introduces three new lenses shaped by the forces most actively defining the current workplace: return to office mandates, the rise of AI, and the sustainability of how women work day to day.

This data gives employers timely, data-backed insight into attracting and retaining the skilled women - a growing workforce whose needs cannot be ignored for the future of work.

Join us as we explore the results of our 2026 survey.



3,509
Responses to this survey

Research methodology

3 509 Survey responses were collected online in March 2026 via a self-administered questionnaire.

A convenience sampling method was used. Eligible respondents were skilled women in South Africa, where skilled is defined as those who had attained at least a matric (NQF 4) qualification. The sample included women aged 18 to 64 (as 65 and above is the conventional retirement age in South Africa), consistent with the methodology applied in 2024 and 2025.

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.

The survey was distributed across RecruitMyMom's social media platforms - including LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram as well as through our email newsletter database.

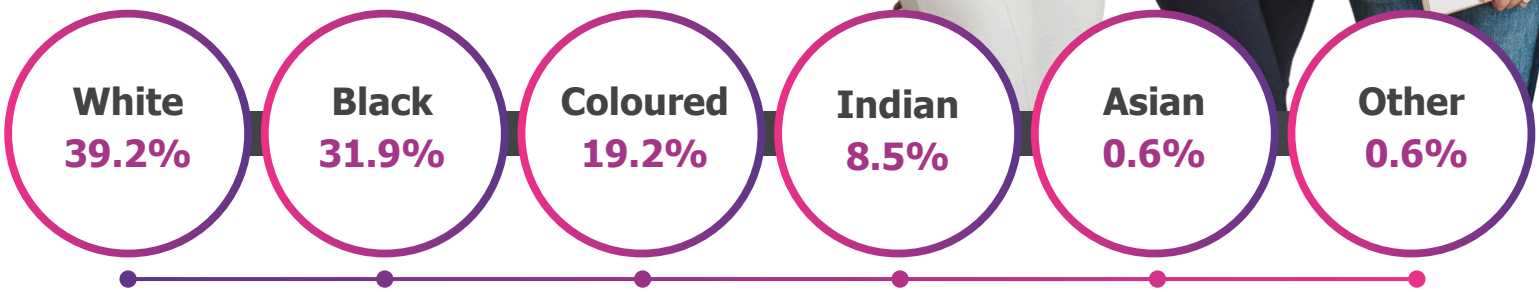
Demographics of the respondents

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 Africa; 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:

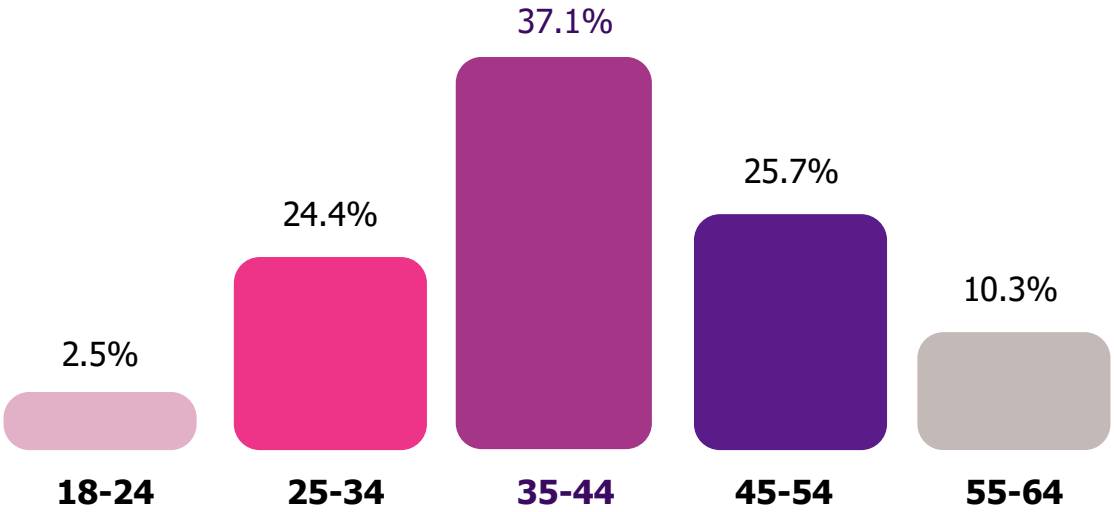


AGE

This report focuses on women of working age between 18 and 64 years, in line with South Africa's conventional retirement age.

The 35 to 44 age group is the dominant cohort, representing 37.1% of respondents, which is consistent with both the 2024 and 2025 reports. The prime working-age bracket of 25 to 54 accounts for 87.2% of the dataset, giving the findings strong representation across the career years when women are most actively building, navigating and advancing their professional lives.

Percentage of respondents by age bracket:



Demographics of the respondents

EDUCATION

74.2% of respondents hold a tertiary qualification

Three in four women in this survey hold a tertiary qualification. This is in line with data indicating that more women are entering and graduating from tertiary institutions than men, and, reinforces the depth of skilled female talent available to employers.

What is the highest level of education:

NQF 4 (Grade 12)	25.8%
NQF 5 - Higher Certificate / N4-N6	15.2%
NQF 6 (National Diploma)	20.1%
NQF 7 (Degree)	22.0%
NQF 8 (Honours Degree)	12.8%
NQF 9 (Masters)	3.7%
NQF 10 (Doctorate)	0.4%



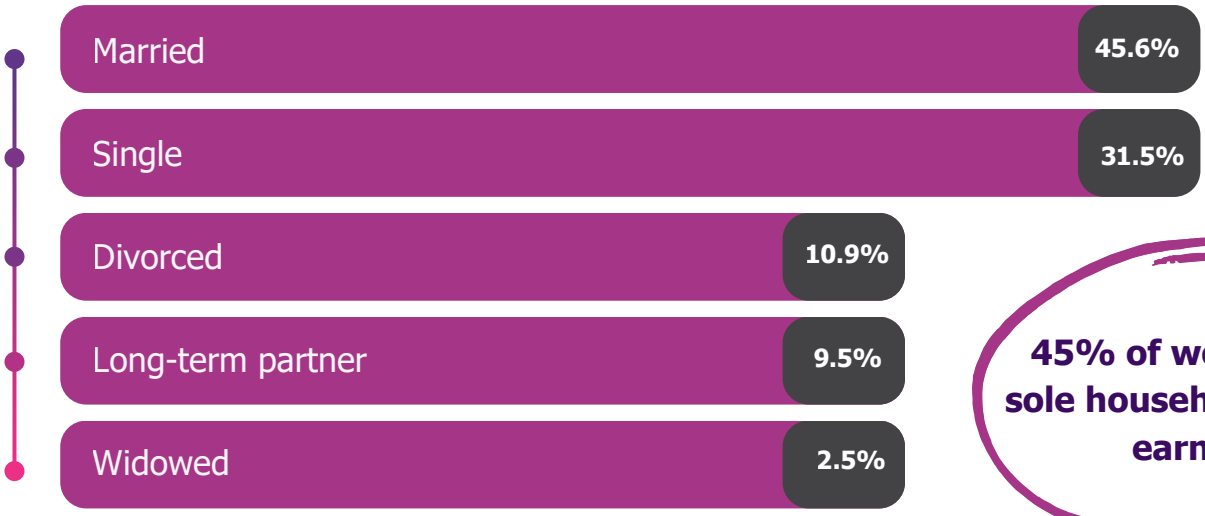
Demographics of the respondents

MARITAL STATUS AND HOUSEHOLD INCOME PROFILE

Nearly half of all respondents are single, divorced or widowed - women managing their financial lives without a second household income. When grouped with those in long-term partnerships or married, the split is almost equal: 55.1% in joint-income households and 45% carrying sole financial responsibility.

This financial reality is not incidental to the findings that follow. It shapes everything - from why salary consistently ranks as the most important factor in women's working lives, to why flexibility is not a lifestyle preference but a practical necessity for managing work alongside the responsibilities that come with sole income status.

Percentage of respondents by marital status:



45% of women are sole household income earners

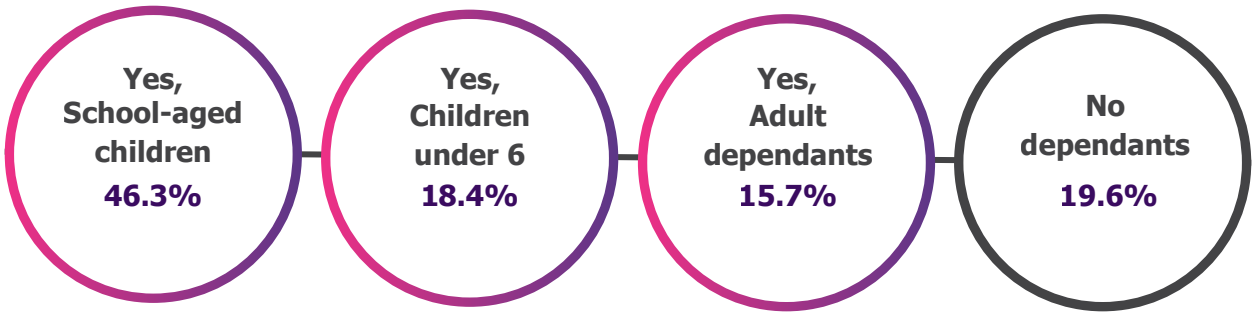
FAMILY SUPPORT NEEDS AND DEPENDANTS

Four in five women in the dataset support dependants - a figure that has remained broadly consistent across all three years of this report. The largest group by far are mothers of school-aged children at 46.3%, followed by mothers of children under 6 at 18.4%. Together, mothers account for 64.7% of all respondents.

A further 15.7% support adult dependants, a caregiving responsibility that is often invisible in workplace conversations.

80.4% of women support dependants

Only 19.6% have no dependants.



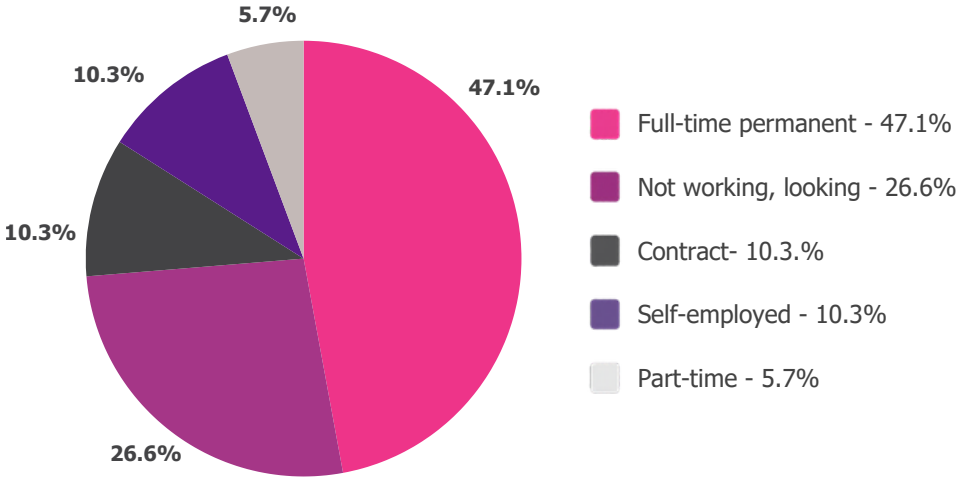
Demographics of the respondents

EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Nearly half of respondents (47.1%) are in full-time permanent employment, while 10.3% are on contract and 10.3% are self-employed. A further 5.7% work part-time. Together, 73.4% of respondents are in some form of current employment.

The 26.6% who are not working but actively seeking employment is a finding that deserves particular attention. Of these job-seeking women, 67.4% hold a tertiary qualification and are available and motivated to work.

Current work status:

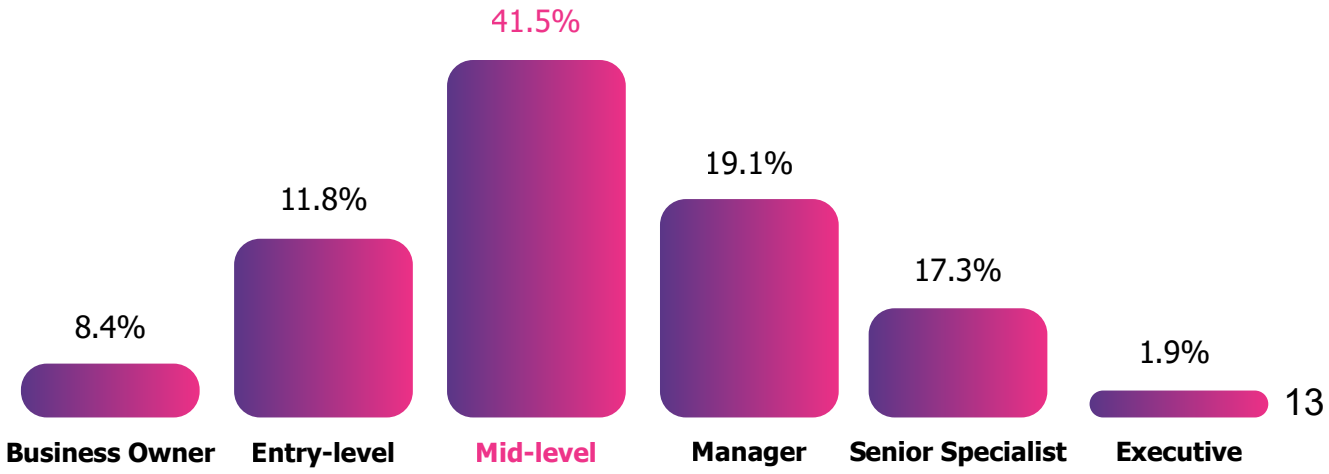


SENIORITY AT WORK

The 2026 dataset is anchored in professional and leadership-level women. Nearly 88% of respondents are at mid-level or above, making this a richly experienced respondent base whose insights carry particular weight for employers building and developing skilled teams.

The 8.4% who identify as business owners or founders are a notable sub-audience within the report. These are women who have built their own working structures and whose responses offer a consistent and instructive counterpoint throughout, illustrating what autonomy, flexibility and self-determination produce in terms of wellbeing, AI confidence and job satisfaction.

Current seniority level in the workplace:



Section 3

The Flexibility Dilemma: Balancing Remote, Hybrid, and Office-Based Work

Where women currently work and where they want to work.
The work arrangement gap by age and seniority.
The return-to-office experience:
- What is working and what is not
- What would make the office worth it

Insights for employers: Designing flexibility that works.



Where women currently work and where they want to work

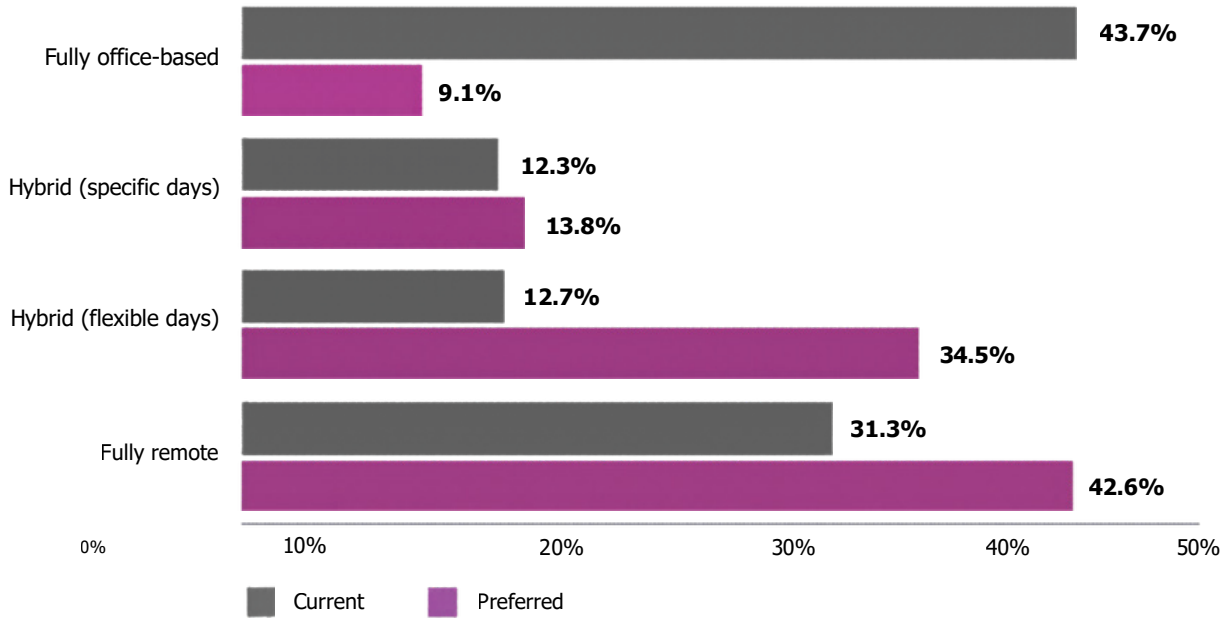
The data indicates the gap between how women are working and how they want to work. 43.7% of women are currently fully office-based - yet only 9% want to be. 25% work in a hybrid way, but 48.3% prefer hybrid work.

Compared to 2025, where 49% were working fully in-office, the 2026 figure reflects a modest but meaningful shift towards more women working in a flexible way in South Africa. The preference picture is equally consistent year-on-year: hybrid (48.3%) and fully remote (42.6%) together account for 91% of women's working preferences. The preference towards flexible working has not changed, it has strengthened versus a year ago.

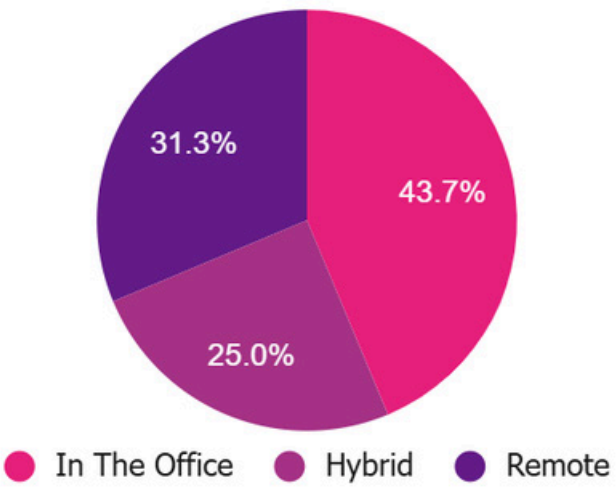
The preference for fully remote working has increased from 37% in 2025 to 42.6% in 2026.

91% of women prefer hybrid & fully remote working

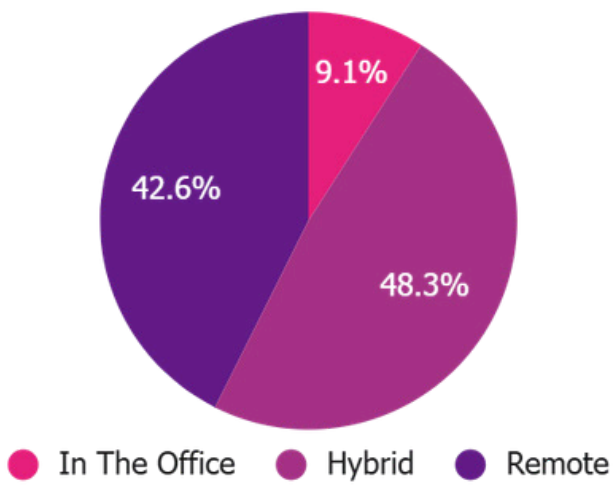
Current workplace vs where woman want to work:



Where women currently work:



Where women want to work:

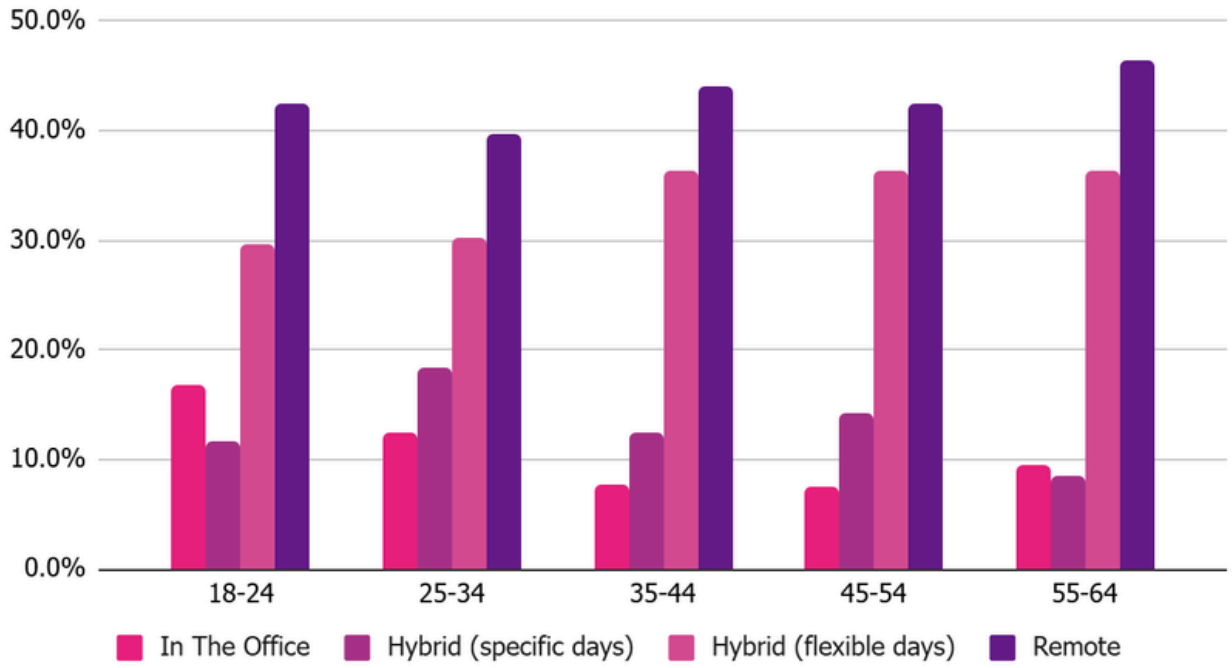


The work arrangement gap by age and seniority

The assumption that younger women prefer the office is firmly contradicted by the data. Even among 18 to 24 year olds, only 16.7% prefer to be fully office-based.

The most significant mismatch of preference for workplace is with 25 to 34 year olds: 53.1% are currently fully office-based, yet only 12.2% want to be. This is the group bearing the child caregiving load, navigating school runs and childcare costs, and navigating full-time in office jobs.

PREFERRED WORK ARRANGEMENT BY AGE

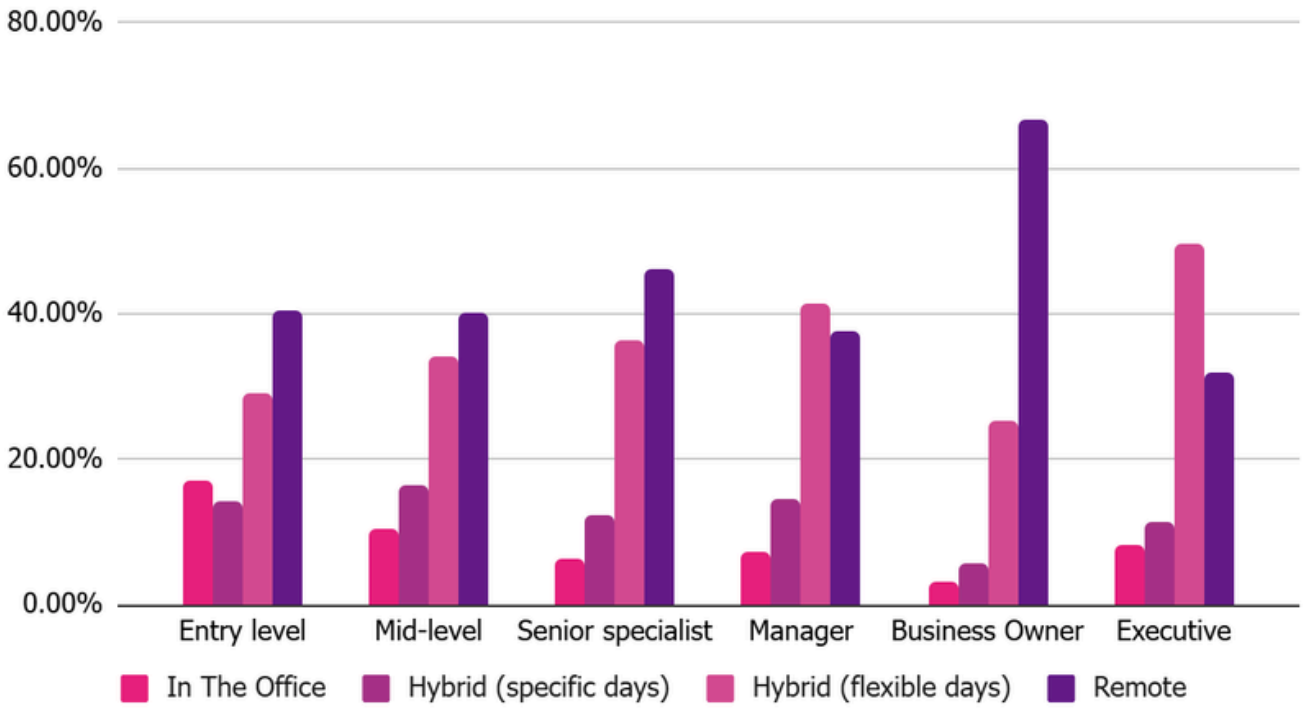




PREFERRED WORK ARRANGEMENT BY SENIORITY

Mid-level professionals demonstrate the largest gap of any seniority group: 51.9% are currently fully office-based versus just 10.2% preferring this work arrangement. This is the largest seniority representation in the dataset at 41.5% of all respondents.

Business owners are the instructive outlier: with only a 3.3 percentage point gap between current and preferred way of working. This group is most likely to have designed their working lives around what works for them.





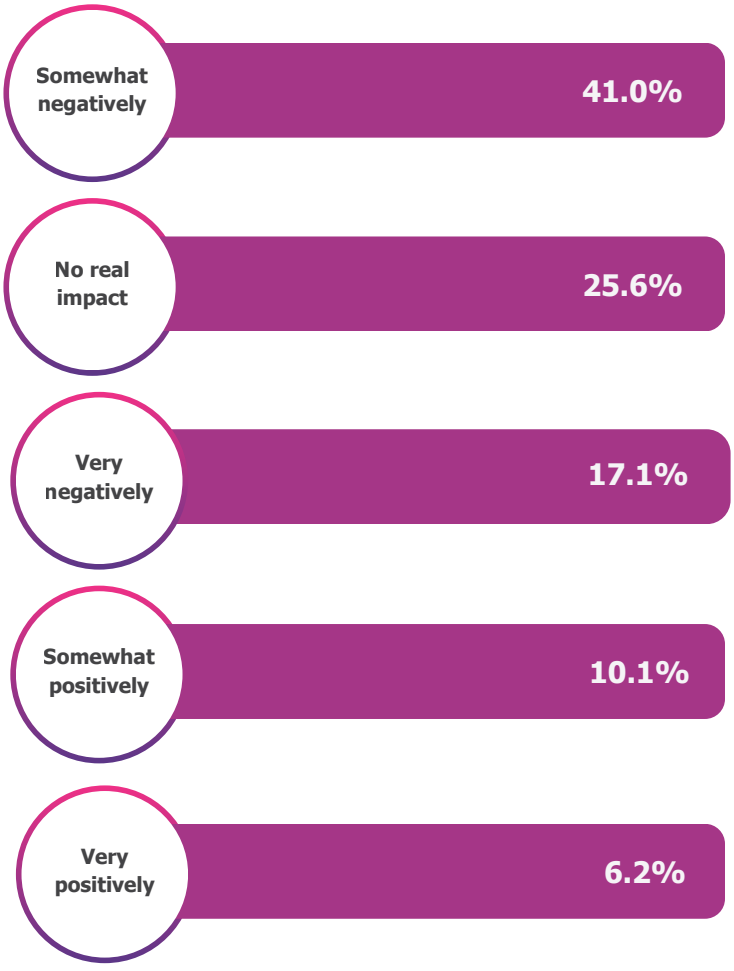
The return-to-office experience

38.7% of working women had their on-site attendance increased in the past 12 months. The data captures what that experience has been for these respondents.

For every 10 women whose on-site attendance has been increased, roughly 7 are in some stage of reconsidering their future with that employer. 40.7% are actively looking for new opportunities.

58.1%
of women whose office attendance increased say it has negatively affected their job satisfaction.

How has increased on-site attendance affected your overall job satisfaction?







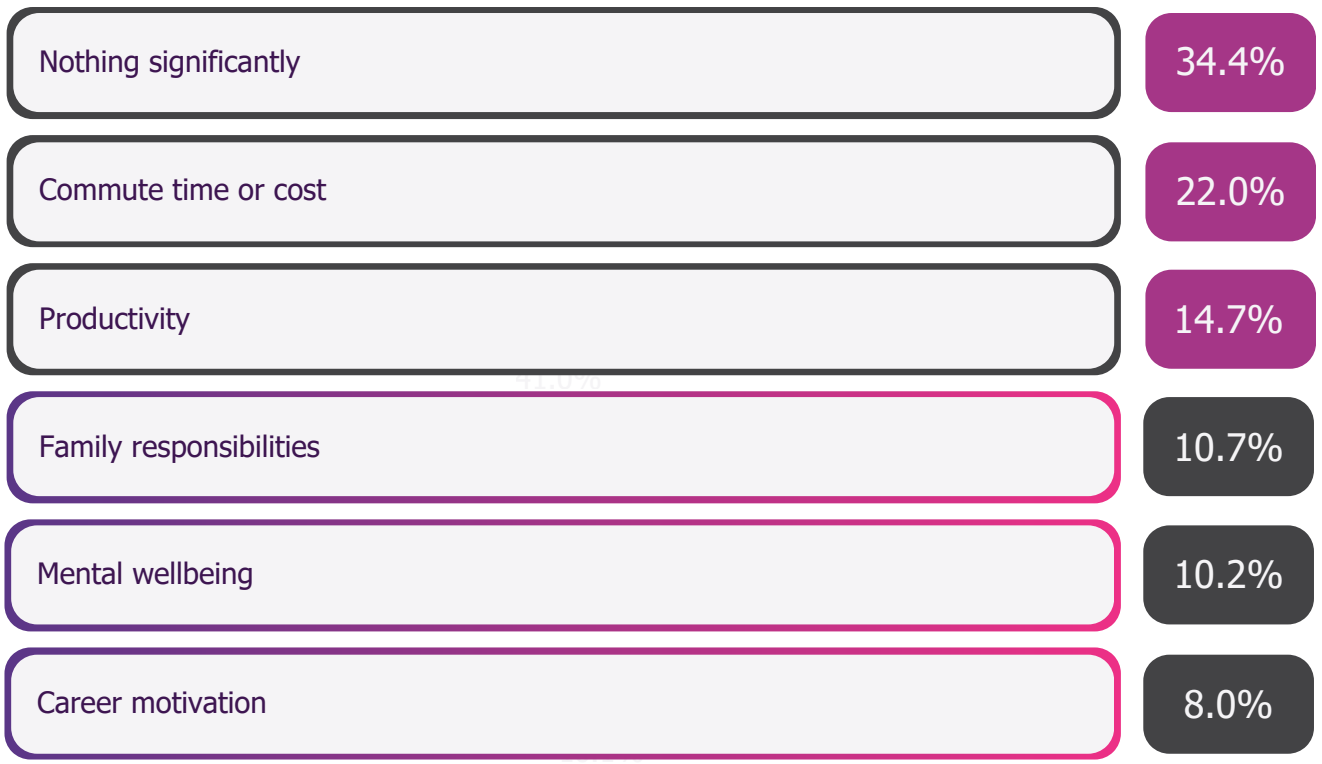
The return-to-office experience

RETURN-TO-OFFICE: WHAT IS WORKING AND WHAT IS NOT

The most common response to what the return to office has improved is that nothing has, selected by 34.4% of women. This is the most important number for employers to reckon with when assessing the value of attendance mandates.

That said, the data also offers a constructive counterpoint. 14.7% cite improved productivity and 10.2% report better mental wellbeing as positives. The office is not without value. The question is whether it is being intentionally designed to deliver value or whether attendance is being mandated in the hope that value will materialise.

What has most positively been affected by increased office attendance?





The return-to-office experience

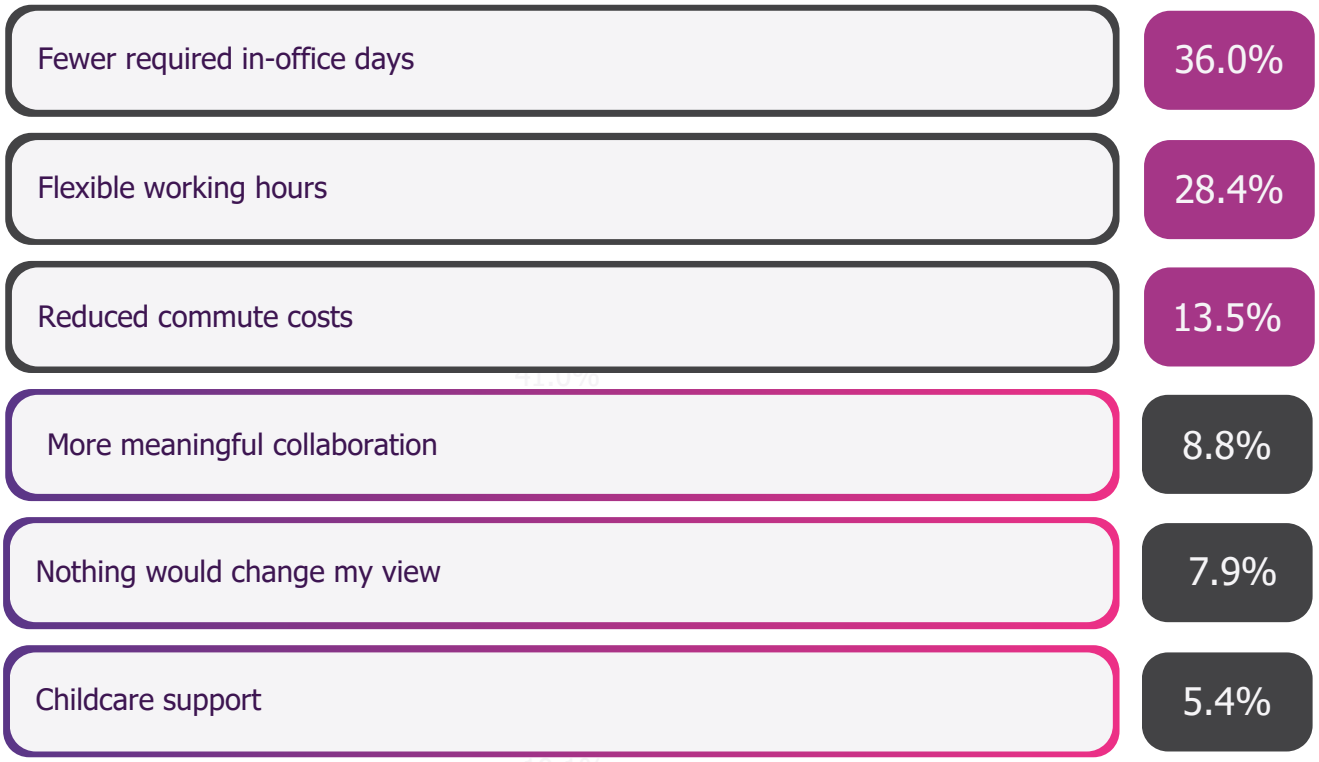
WHAT WOULD MAKE THE RETURN-TO-OFFICE MANDATE WORTHWHILE

Fewer required in-office days, 36%, and flexible working hours, 28.4%, together account for 64.4% of all responses. The data indicates that women are not seeking remote only work, they seek flexibility in the number of days or hours required in office.

8.8% cite that more meaningful collaboration would improve their experience. This finding points toward the fact that being in office does not automatically translate into meaningful collaboration.

7.9% say nothing would change their view. This is a small group for whom the return-to-office question is effectively settled.

What would improve office satisfaction:



Insights for employers: Design flexibility that works to attract and retain talent

Closing the gap between current and preferred working patterns.

The 34.7 percentage point gap between women working fully in-office and those who would choose to do so is one of the clearest retention signals in the data. While some roles will always require in-person presence, many organisations are finding value in reviewing which truly need full-time office attendance and where greater flexibility can be introduced without compromising outcomes.

Designing office time with purpose.

The data points to a consistent pattern: Fewer required days, flexible hours, and time in the office that is centred around meaningful collaboration. When office attendance is aligned to clear business outcomes rather than set as a default, it is more likely to be experienced as productive and worthwhile.

Focusing on mid-level professionals and early career builders.

Mid-level professionals and those aged 25 to 34 show the largest gaps between current and preferred working arrangements. These groups are often building the skills and experience that shape future leadership pipelines. Where flexibility expectations are not met, the risk of attrition - and the long-term impact on capability - increases.

Positioning flexibility as a recruitment advantage.

With 91% of skilled women indicating a preference for hybrid or remote work, well-designed flexibility is increasingly shaping employer choice. Organisations that approach this deliberately are not only improving retention, but also strengthening their ability to attract experienced talent in a competitive market.



Section 4

AI in the Workplace: Closing the Confidence and Capability Gap

How AI is impacting work.

- How women feel about AI in their profession.
- Does AI give women a professional advantage?

The AI adaptation support gap.

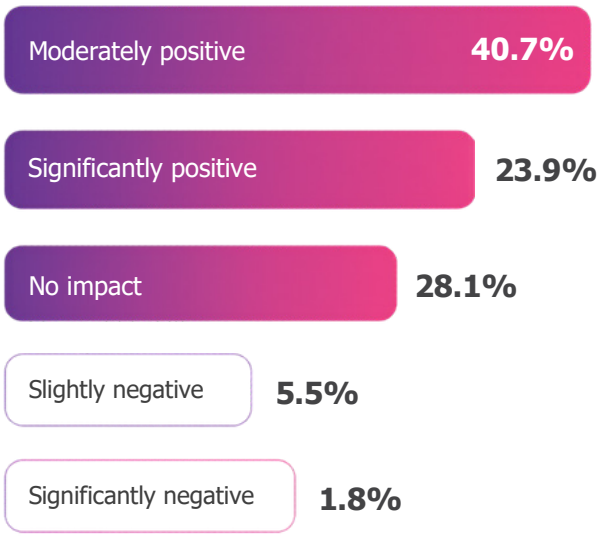
- Are women confident about their future employability in an AI-shaped workplace?

Insights for employers: Closing the AI support gap.



How AI is impacting work

Describe the impact that AI has on your job:

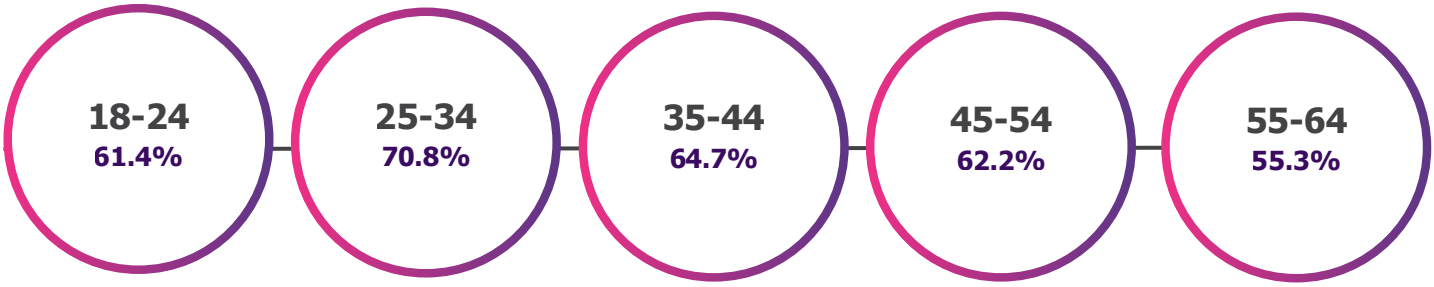


64.6% of women have a positive experience of AI in their working lives. 28.1% indicate no impact, with only 7.3% describing a slightly negative or significantly negative impact on their job.



Women are positive towards AI across all age groups:

Positive sentiment towards AI is highest among 25 to 34 year olds at 70.8%. Despite the age group 55-64 being the least positive, it remains the majority of respondents across the entire data set.



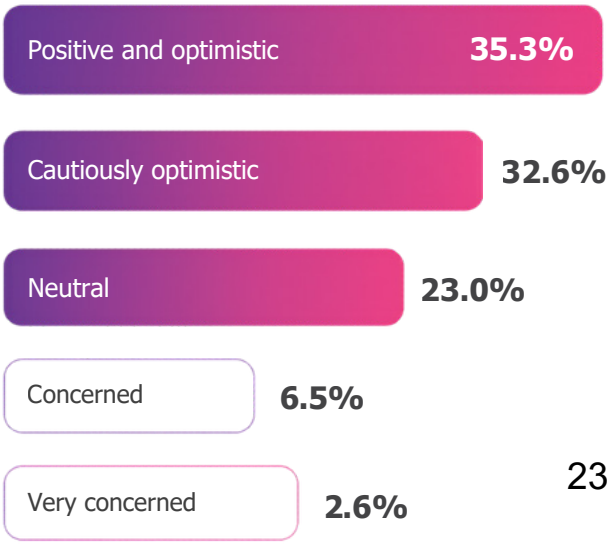
Sentiment towards AI in their profession

67.9 % of women view AI with positivity and optimism. The 23.0% who are neutral have not yet formed a strong view and are the group most likely to be shaped by how their employers engage with AI in the near future.

9.1% of skilled women are concerned or very concerned about the impact of AI on their profession.

67.9% of women are optimistic about AI in their profession

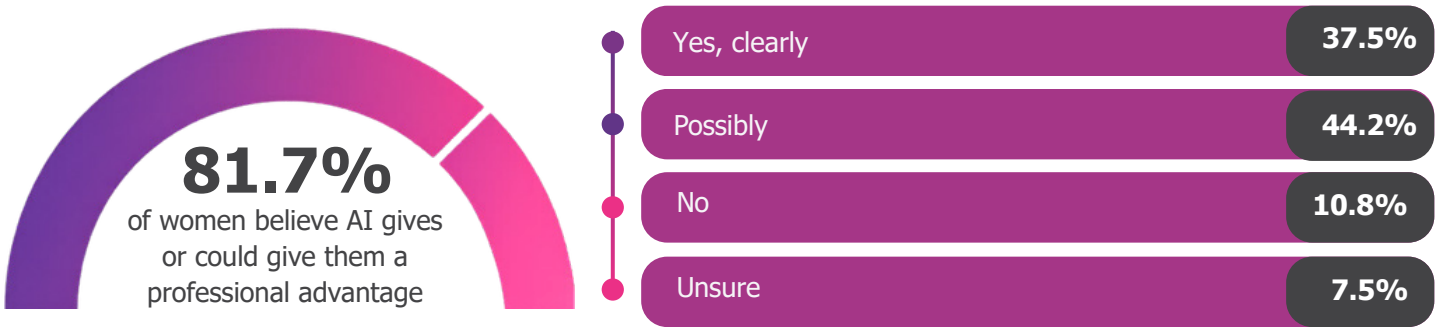
How do you feel about AI in your profession:



Does AI deliver a professional advantage?

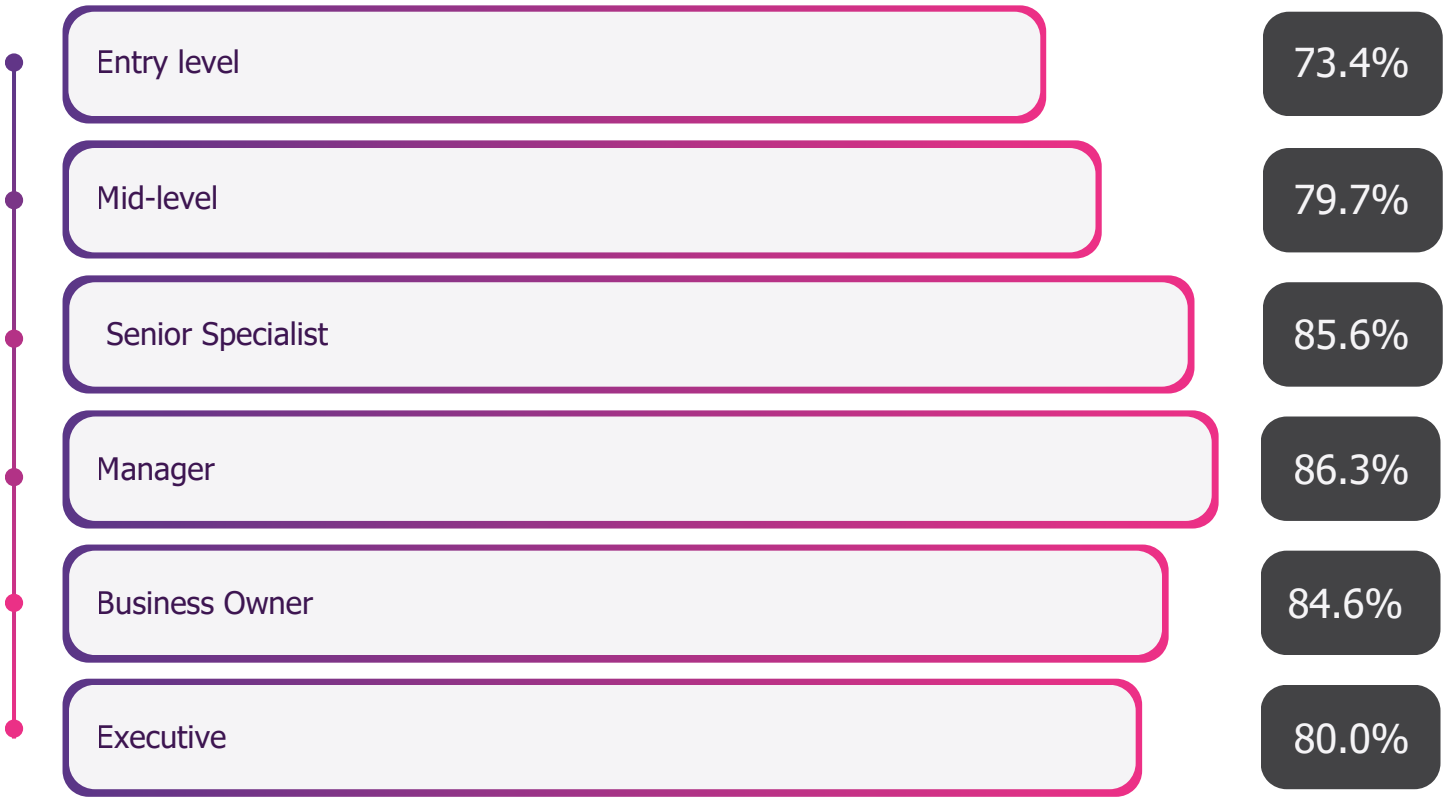
81.7% of respondents believe that AI does, or possibly gives them a professional advantage . The largest single response is 'possibly' at 44.2%. This group is still exploratory, open to AI's potential but waiting for the right conditions, tools or guidance to convert that openness into confidence. This openness presents an opportunity for employers to assist employees to move from cautious optimism to optimism in embracing AI.

Does AI give you a professional advantage?



Does AI give you a professional advantage by seniority

Entry level and mid-level respondents show the lowest levels of confidence in AI delivering a professional advantage, and, increases with seniority, to 86.3% among managers and 80.0% of executives experiencing an advantage.

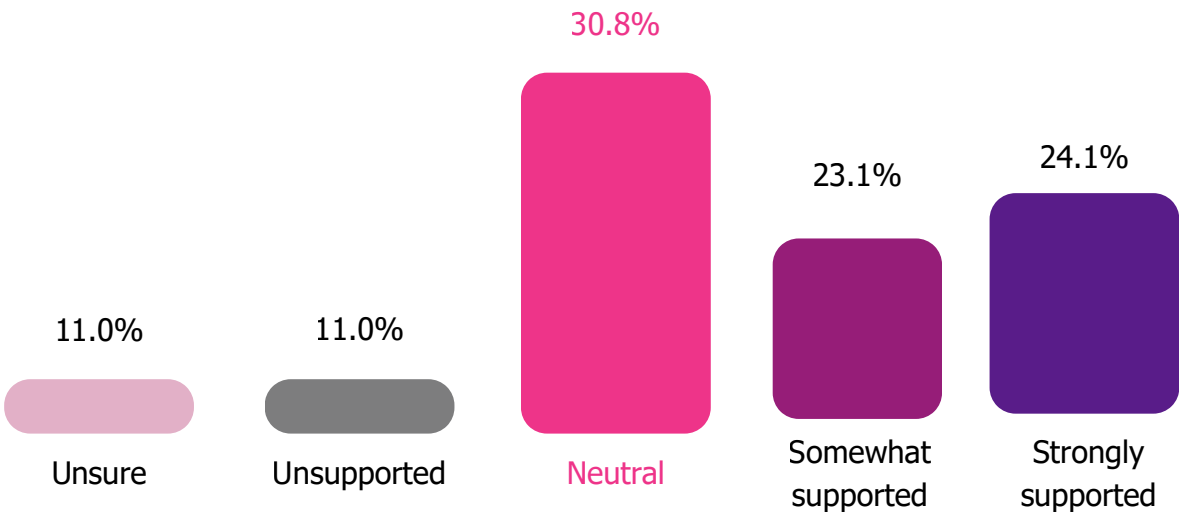


The AI adaptation support gap

While 81.7% see the advantage of AI in their working lives, less than half, 47.2%, feel supported by their employer to realise AI's full potential. A further 30.8% are neutral, operating in environments that have not yet addressed AI development deliberately.

22% of all respondents feel either unsupported or unsure if their employer is supporting them to adapt to AI.

Do you feel supported by your employer to adapt to AI:



22% of women feel either unsupported or unsure about employer AI support

Confidence in future employability in an AI-shaped workplace

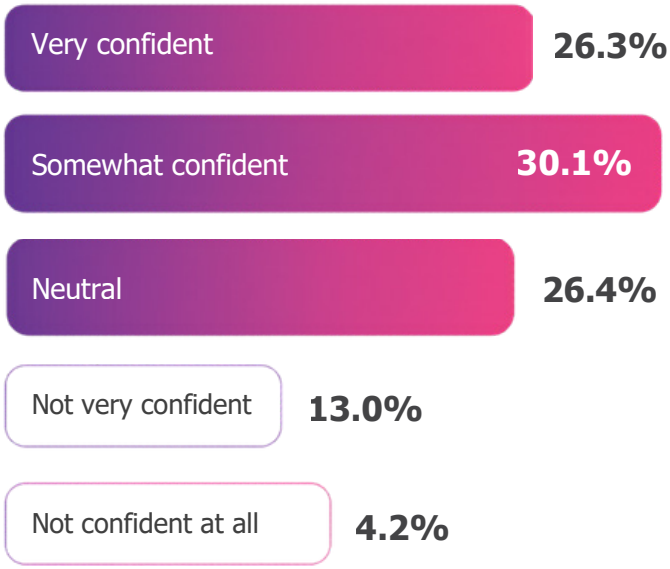
How confident do you feel about your future employability as a result of AI:

56.4% of women feel future-ready in an AI-shaped world.

More than half of skilled women feel confident about their future employability in an AI-shaped world.

That confidence is supported by the data when you look at how they are experiencing AI day to day:

- 64.6% describe AI's impact on their work as positive.
- 67.9% feel optimistic about it in their profession.
- 81.7% believe it gives or could give them a professional advantage.



Insights for employers: Closing the AI support gap

Start with literacy, not expertise.

The goal is not to create AI specialists, but to ensure every woman in your business understands how AI affects her role and how to use it productively. Foundational literacy - what AI can and cannot do in this specific role, in this specific business - is the bridge between curiosity and confidence.

Make learning practical and immediately applicable.

Abstract AI training rarely changes behaviour. The most effective upskilling is tied to real work challenges, including guided use of specific tools, peer learning, and on-the-job coaching. Given that 44.2% of women are not convinced of the professional advantage, a practical experience that demonstrates value in their own work is worth more than any workshop.

Let senior women lead the way.

Executives have the highest perceived advantage rate of any group at 80.0%. When senior women visibly use and champion AI tools, they make AI adoption feel strategic rather than remedial.

Reach the neutral group before they form a negative view.

30.8% of women feel neutral about employer support, and 26.4% are neutral about future employability. A deliberate employer intervention now, however modest, will shift this group toward security and confidence before uncertainty becomes anxiety.

Position AI investment as a retention differentiator.

In a skills-scarce market where women are choosing employers partly on the basis of career growth opportunities, being the business that actively equips its people for an AI-shaped economy is a meaningful talent competitive edge. The 44.2% who see AI as a possible advantage are waiting to be convinced, and the employer who convinces them is the one who will attract and keep them.



Section 5

Wellbeing at Work: Burnout as a Growing Retention Risk

Burnout: Frequency and severity.
- How often women feel burnout at work
- Burnout by age and seniority

Key drivers of work-related stress.
- Mental wellbeing in the past 12 months
- The wellbeing support gap: Safety, access and awareness

What will improve wellbeing at work.
- Insights for employers: Building a sustainable workforce



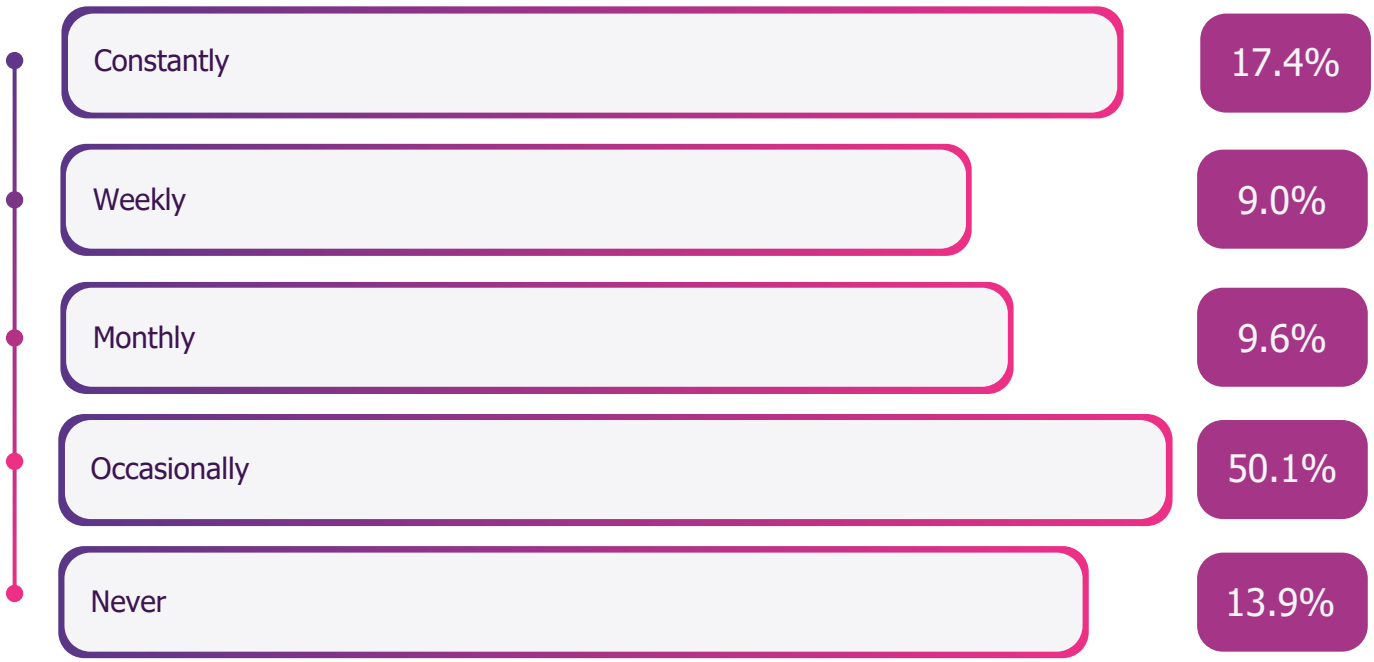
Burnout: Frequency and severity

This report introduces a dedicated wellbeing section for the first time, establishing a baseline that will be tracked in future editions.

36% of women experience constant, weekly or monthly burnout and 86% of all women experience burnout to some degree, with 50.1% reporting that they feel close to burnout occasionally and a further 17.4% saying they experience it constantly. Only 13.9% say they never experience burnout.

86% of women experience burnout to some degree

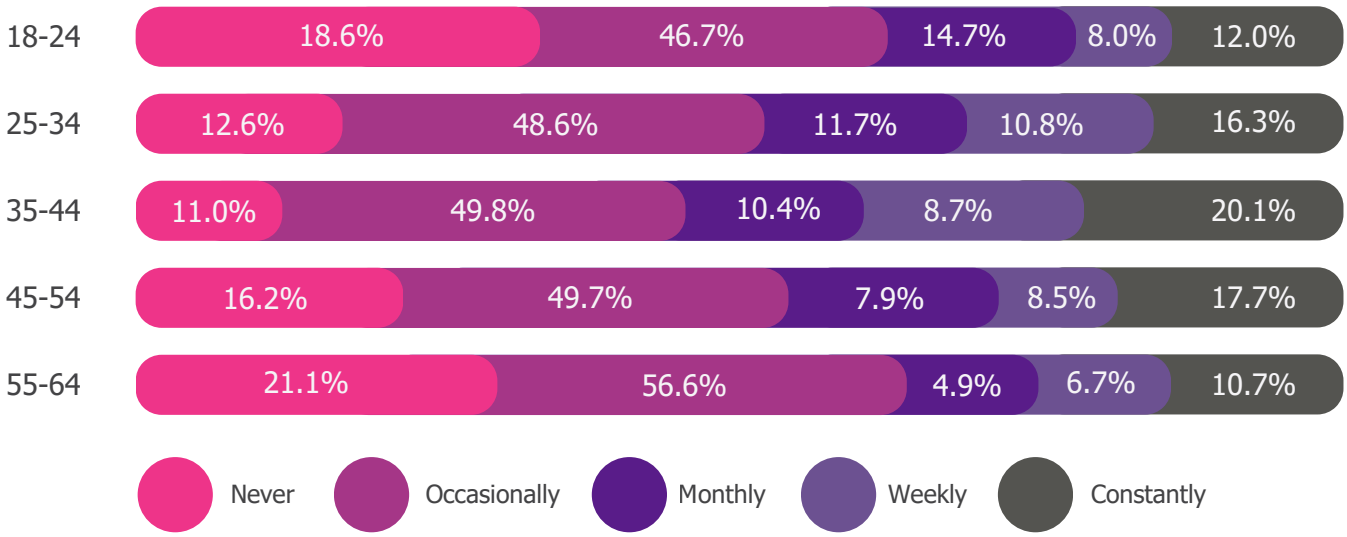
How often do you feel close to burnout due to work:





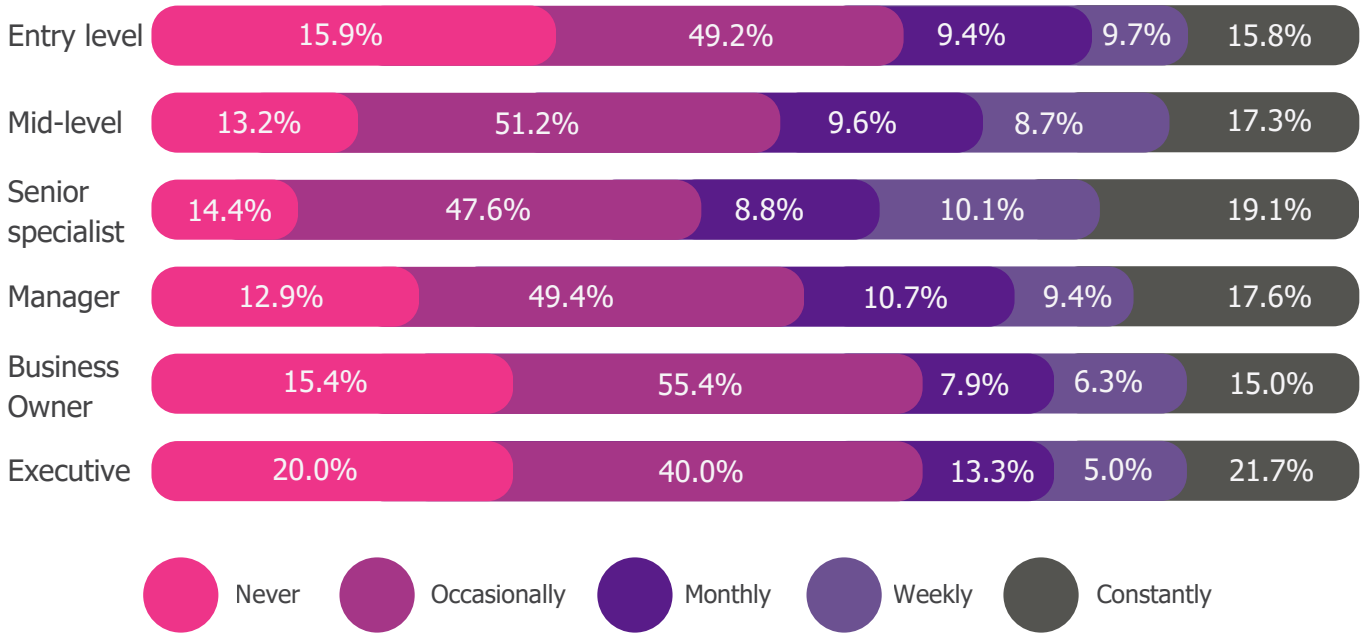
Burnout: Frequency and severity

Burnout frequency by age:



Burnout peaks among women aged 35 to 44, where 39.2% experience it regularly and 20.1% feel it constantly. This is consistent with the data across this report. Women aged 35 to 44 are more likely than any other age group to be managing caregiving responsibilities alongside their careers - 17.2% cite caregiving as a career barrier, the highest of any age group. They also face a 37.5 percentage point gap between where they currently work and where they want to work.

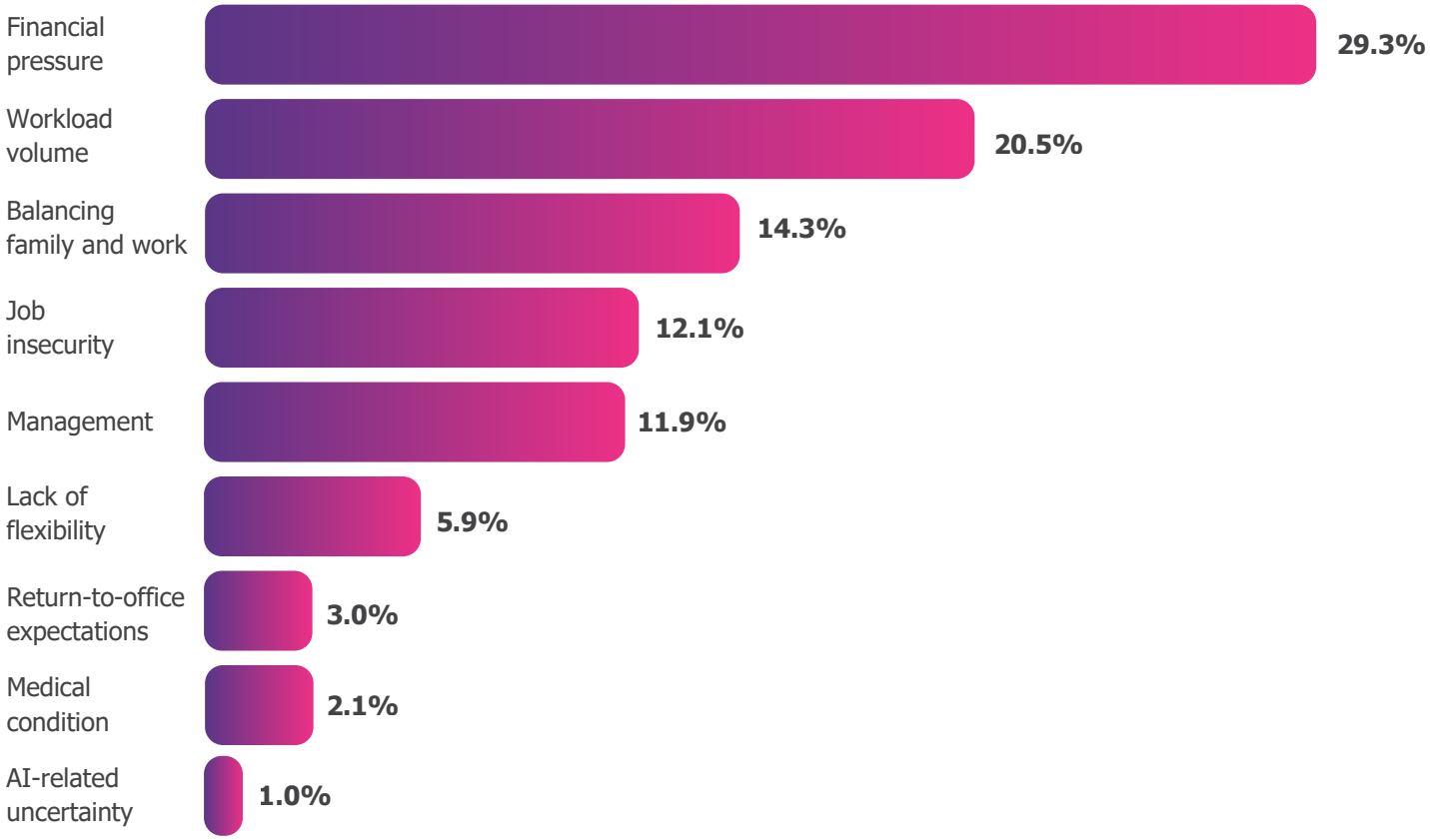
Burnout frequency by seniority:



The seniority picture challenges the assumption that burnout is primarily a junior-level problem. Executives show the highest regular burnout rate of any seniority level at 40.0%, with 21.7% experiencing it constantly. Business owners report the lowest regular burnout rate of any seniority group at 29.2%.

Key drivers of work-related stress

What contributes most to work-related stress:



Financial pressure is the single biggest driver of work-related stress, cited by nearly 1 in 3 women at 29.3%. Given 45% of women are sole income earners and 80.4% support dependants, the financial and caregiving burden on women is immediate and material.

Workload volume at 20.5% and balancing family and work at 14.3% reinforces the burnout data. Women are not burning out because of fragility, but because the load of what is expected of them is weighty.

One finding deserves particular emphasis: AI-related uncertainty ranks last at just 1.0% of work-related stress contributors. AI-related work anxiety has demanded global media and employer attention. In uncertain economic times, and the potential threat of AI on jobs, job insecurity at 12.1% will be a statistic to monitor in future.

Among South Africa's skilled women financial pressure, workload volume and job insecurity are the real drivers of workplace stress. For employers who have held back on AI investment on the assumption that employee anxiety needs addressing first, this data offers a clear and useful redirect.

Psychological safety to discuss mental health at work

Do you feel safe and supported when discussing mental health at work:

Psychological safety around mental health conversations is a clear area of concern, with 44.1% of respondents saying they do not feel safe and supported when discussing mental health at work. This exceeds the 38% who feel safe and supported, while 18% prefer not to say.

The findings point to an ongoing challenge for many organisations in building trust, reducing stigma, and creating environments where employees feel able to speak openly about mental wellbeing. For employers, this is an opportunity to strengthen engagement and ensure that support structures are visible and trusted.

Have you struggled with your mental wellbeing in the past 12 months?

Yes, significantly	Yes, occasionally	No	Prefer not to say
16.3%	39.2%	40.9%	3.6%

55.5% of women have struggled with mental wellbeing in the past 12 months

55.5% of respondents have experienced a mental health challenge in the past year. 16.3% describe their struggle as significant. The 3.6% who preferred not to say adds a further layer of caution given the stigma that still surrounds mental health disclosure in the workplace.

The wellbeing support gap: Safety, access and awareness

Have you accessed employer mental health support in past 12 months:



44.1%
of women do not feel safe discussing mental health at work

What will improve wellbeing at work

Better pay leads by a wide margin at 34.6%, a consistent number one across every age group. This is consistent with the 2025 Report finding that women are under significant financial security pressure.

For women carrying sole income responsibilities and supporting dependants, salary is not a negotiation lever, but a wellbeing foundation.

The top four wellbeing improvements - better pay (34.6%), supportive leadership (18.6%), greater flexibility (14.7%) and clearer workload boundaries (13.7%) - together account for 81.6% of all responses.

Better pay is the top wellbeing improvement for every age group and every seniority level

What would most improve wellbeing at work:

Better pay	34.6%
Supportive leadership	18.6%
Greater flexibility	14.7%
Clearer workload boundaries	13.7%
Clearer career pathways	8.0%
No change needed	6.5%
Better support at home	3.9%



Insights for employers: Building a sustainable workforce

Financial security is the foundation.

Better pay is the top wellbeing improvement across every age group and every seniority level. Where budgets are constrained, transparent pay structures, clear progression-linked pay reviews, and part-time or flexible roles that offer more control alongside fair compensation are practical alternatives that signal real commitment.

Make mental health support visible.

18.3% of women did not know any employer support existed. Regular, multi-channel communication about Employee Assistance Programmes, counselling resources and wellness benefits ensures that the women who most need support can access it without stigma.

Manage workload volume.

Workload volume is the second biggest stress driver and a direct contributor to the burnout rates in this survey. Realistic workload planning, clear prioritisation, and the cultural permission to discuss it are management practices that will make a positive difference.

Be aware of burnout signals.

These findings suggest that feelings of overload are not isolated incidents, but a common feature of modern working life. Create sustainable workloads or bring in AI assistance, ensure there is supportive management, and workplace practices and boundaries that protect long-term performance.



Section 6

Talent Retention and Attraction: Key Insights

The loyalty factor: Length of tenure with current employer.

- Tenure at a company by race
- Tenure at a company by age
- Insights for employers: The loyalty advantage

Career Breaks: A talent pipeline, not a red flag.

- The available talent pool
- Insights for employers: Career breaks and the untapped talent pool

Top career barriers to advancement.

- Career barriers by race and age
- Insights for employers: Making career progression visible and attainable

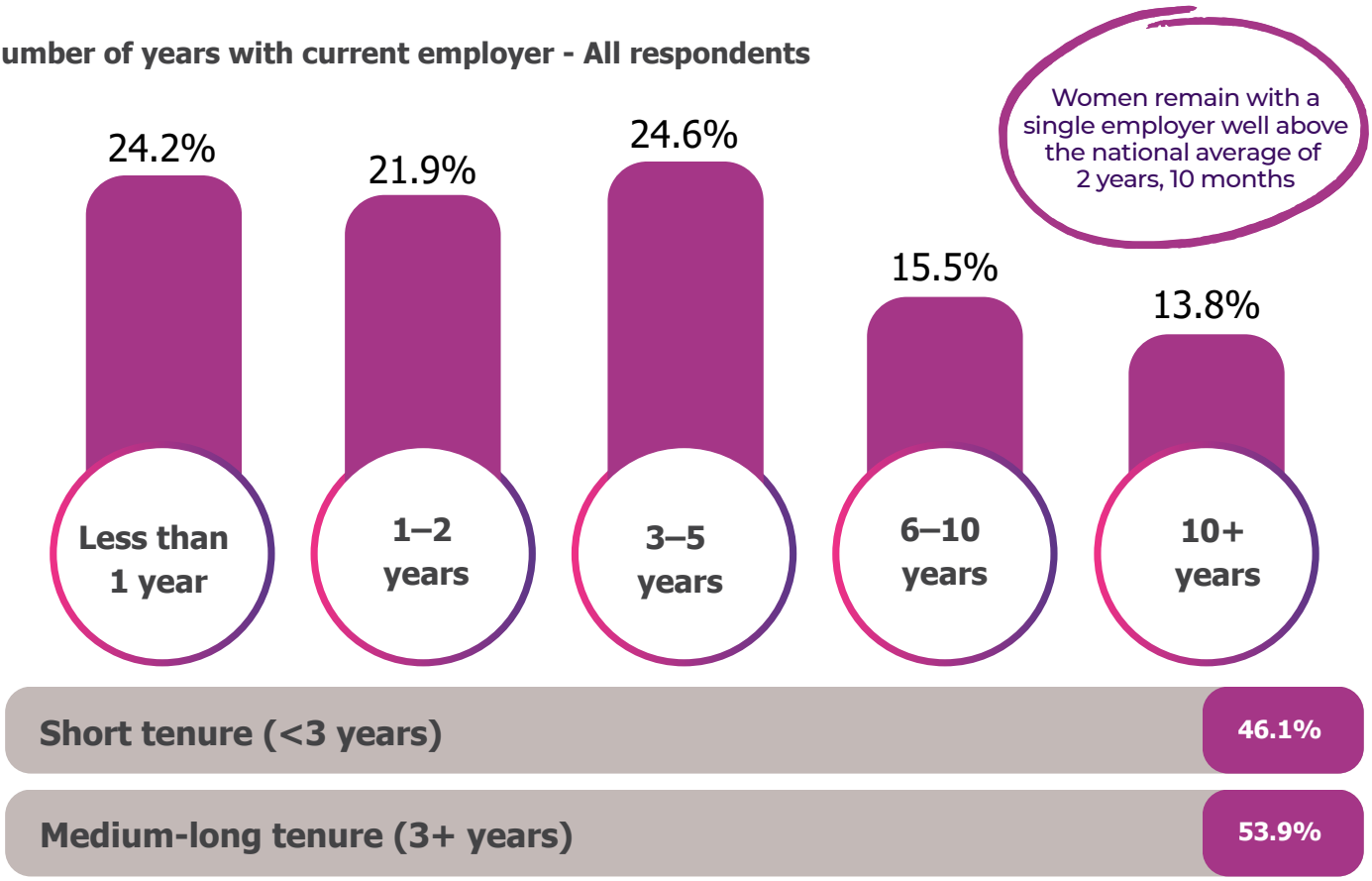


The loyalty factor: Length of tenure with current employer

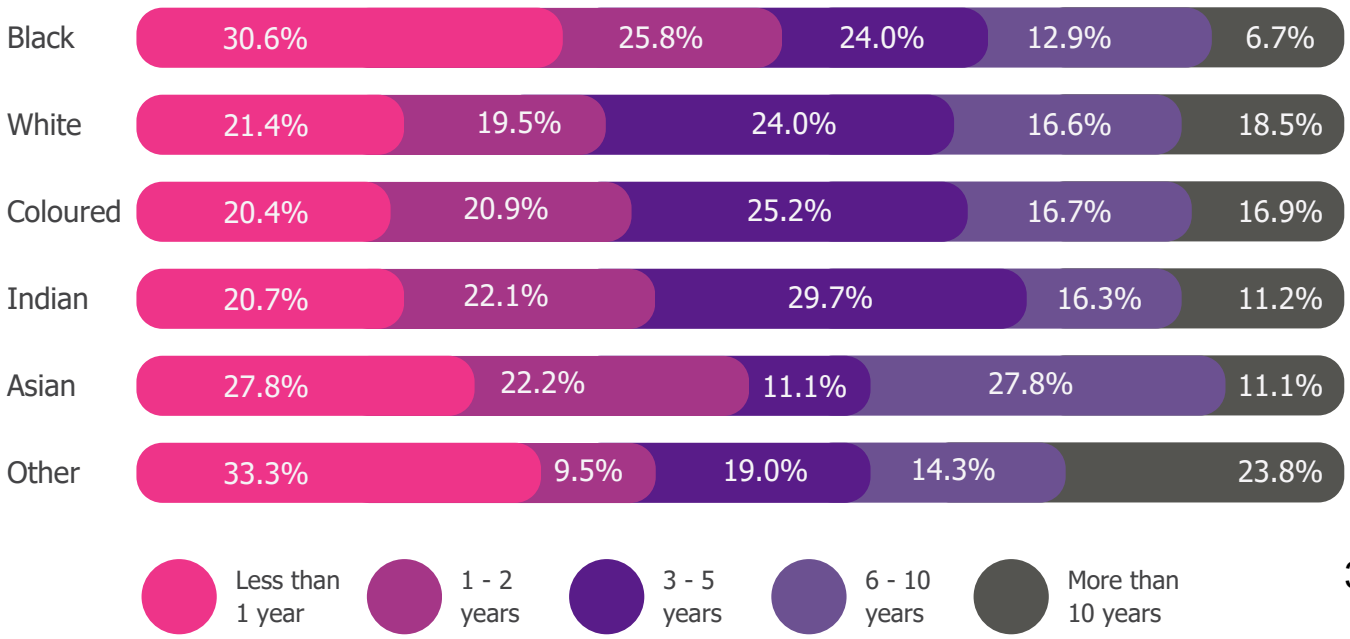
With an overall average employee tenure of 2 years and 10 months in South Africa, 53.9% of skilled women who stay 3 years or longer are well above the national norm.

Amongst skilled women, high loyalty and length of tenure is a consistent finding across all three research studies. Women who find workplaces that meet their needs stay and deliver institutional knowledge, mentorship and cultural consistency that give businesses stability and sustainability.

Number of years with current employer - All respondents

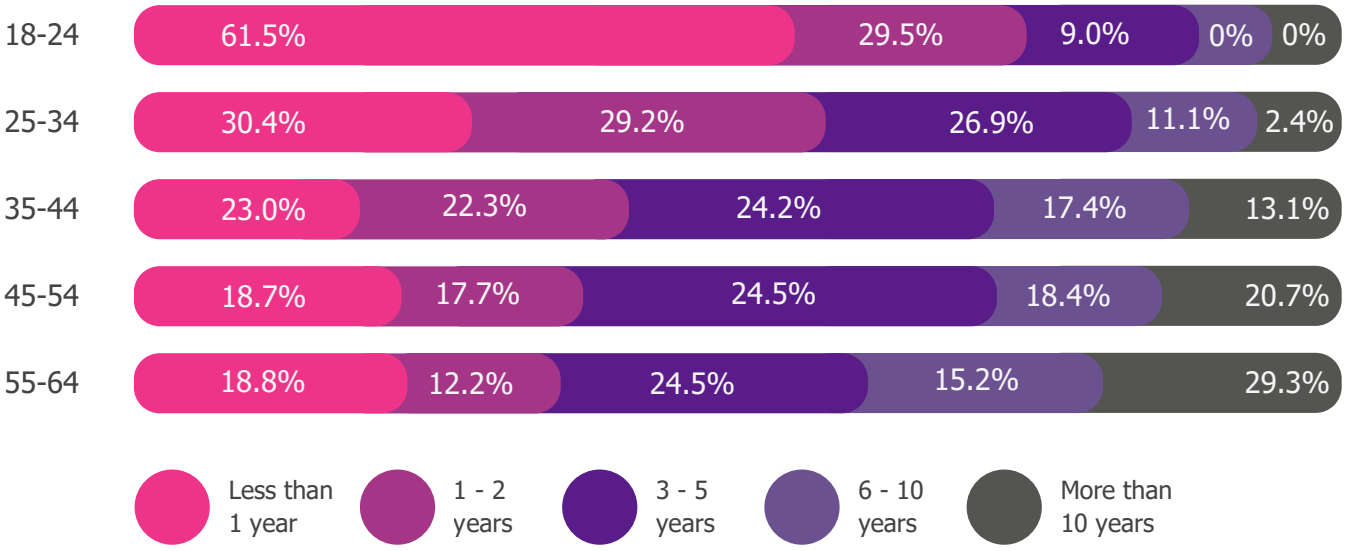


Number of years with current employer - By race



The loyalty factor: Length of tenure with current employer

Number of years with current employer - By age



Insights for employers: The loyalty advantage

Loyal employees are strategic and financial assets.

Women demonstrate a strong commitment to their employers. This is a strategic and financial benefit to any company through the retention of institutional knowledge and reduced recruitment and training costs due to high staff turnover. Understanding the environment in which women thrive is a key unlocking the loyalty advantage.

Racial disparity is a concern in long-term tenure.

Black women are leaving organisations earlier in their tenure than any other groups. Early career support, targeted mentorship and visible career pathways for Black women are retention investments with measurable returns.

Protect your most experienced talent.

Senior women aged 45 and above represent the highest-tenure, most experienced group in the dataset. Their departure is also among the most costly to absorb.

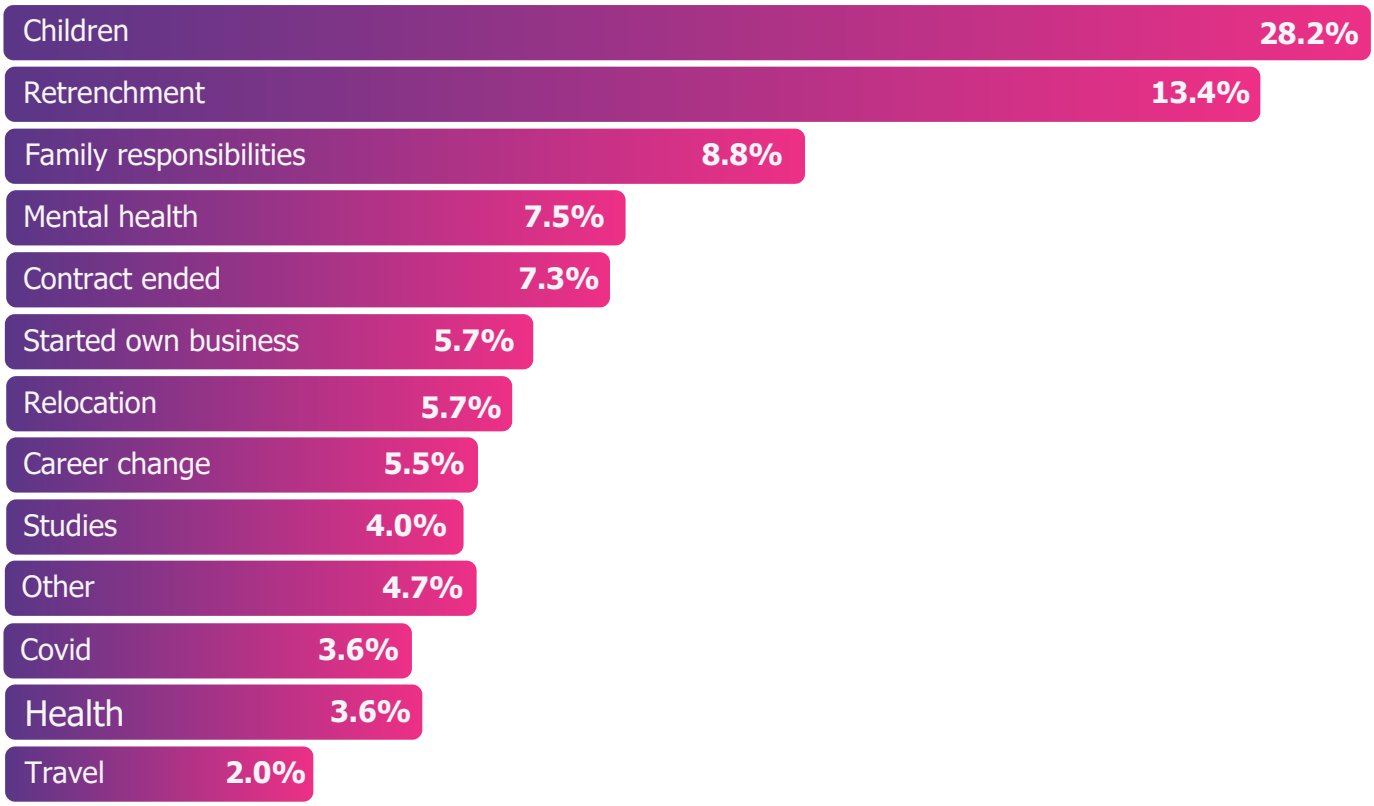
Invest early to reap long-term loyalty.

The tenure data shows that women who make it past the three-year mark are significantly more likely to stay. Onboarding, early career support, flexible working arrangements from the outset, and meaningful recognition in the first two years are the investments that convert short tenure into long-term commitment.

Career Breaks: A talent pipeline, not a red flag

44.9% of women in the 2026 dataset have taken a career break at some point in their working lives, which is in line with 2025 data. This is a characteristic of how skilled women navigate the intersection of professional ambition, caregiving responsibility and life circumstances. 94% of women return to work after a career break.

What was the reason for taking a career break:



Children, retrenchment and family responsibilities account for 50.4% of all career breaks. These are responses to the realities of caregiving and economic vulnerability that continue to shape women's working lives in South Africa.

Mental health has risen to become the fourth most common reason for a career break at 7.5%, consistent with the 2025 findings and connecting directly to the employee wellbeing data explored in this study.

WOMEN ARE AN AVAILABLE SKILLED TALENT POOL

Of the women in the dataset who are not working and actively looking for employment, 67.4% hold a tertiary qualification. For employers struggling to find qualified candidates in a talent-scarce market, this is a directly accessible pool. Many of these women would welcome a structured return-to-work opportunity, a flexible or part-time role, or a contract position that allows them to re-enter the workforce on manageable terms.



Insights for employers: Career breaks and the untapped talent pool

Rethinking how career breaks show up in hiring conversations.

94% of women who take a career break return to work. While a CV gap can raise questions, it is not always a negative signal. Many employers are finding value in exploring what sits behind that gap: what the candidate learned, how they stayed connected to their field, and what they are now bringing back into the workplace.

Creating pathways for return-to-work candidates.

A growing number of businesses are introducing targeted return-to-work pathways, whether through flexible roles, structured re-entry, contract positions, or phased working arrangements. These approaches are opening access to experienced, motivated talent that is often overlooked. In many cases, the investment required to onboard a returning professional is lower than training an inexperienced hire from the ground up.

Using part-time and project-based roles as a growth strategy.

For many professionals returning from a career break, a gradual return is both practical and appealing. Part-time and project-based roles offer businesses a cost-effective way to access skilled talent, while building flexibility into their workforce. Employers who adopt this approach often find it supports both immediate delivery and longer-term retention.

Recognising the drivers behind career breaks.

7.5% of career breaks are linked to mental health. For employers, this highlights a broader workforce dynamic rather than an isolated issue. Organisations that pay attention to workload, flexibility, and employee wellbeing are often better positioned to retain experienced talent and reduce avoidable attrition over time.



Top career barriers to advancement

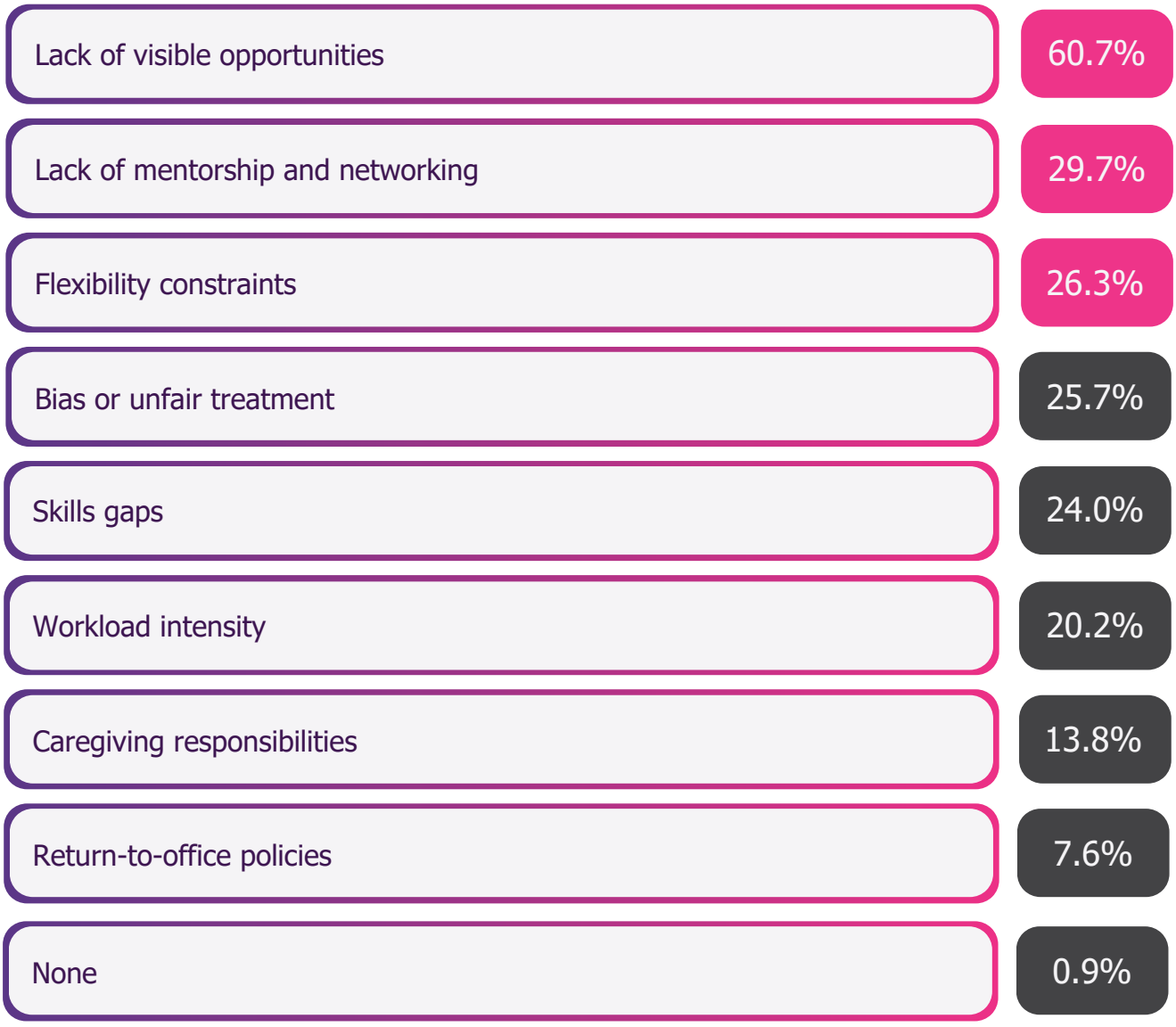
The barriers that limit career progression for skilled women in South Africa are not new. Lack of visible opportunity has led this list across all three years of this report.

60.7% of respondents cite lack of growth opportunities as the key barrier to career growth. Lack of mentorship and networking (29.7%) and flexibility constraints (26.3%) round out the top three.

What is new in 2026 is the granularity of the picture and the addition of return-to-office policies as a named career barrier for the first time.

60.7% of women cite lack of visible opportunity as their top career barrier.

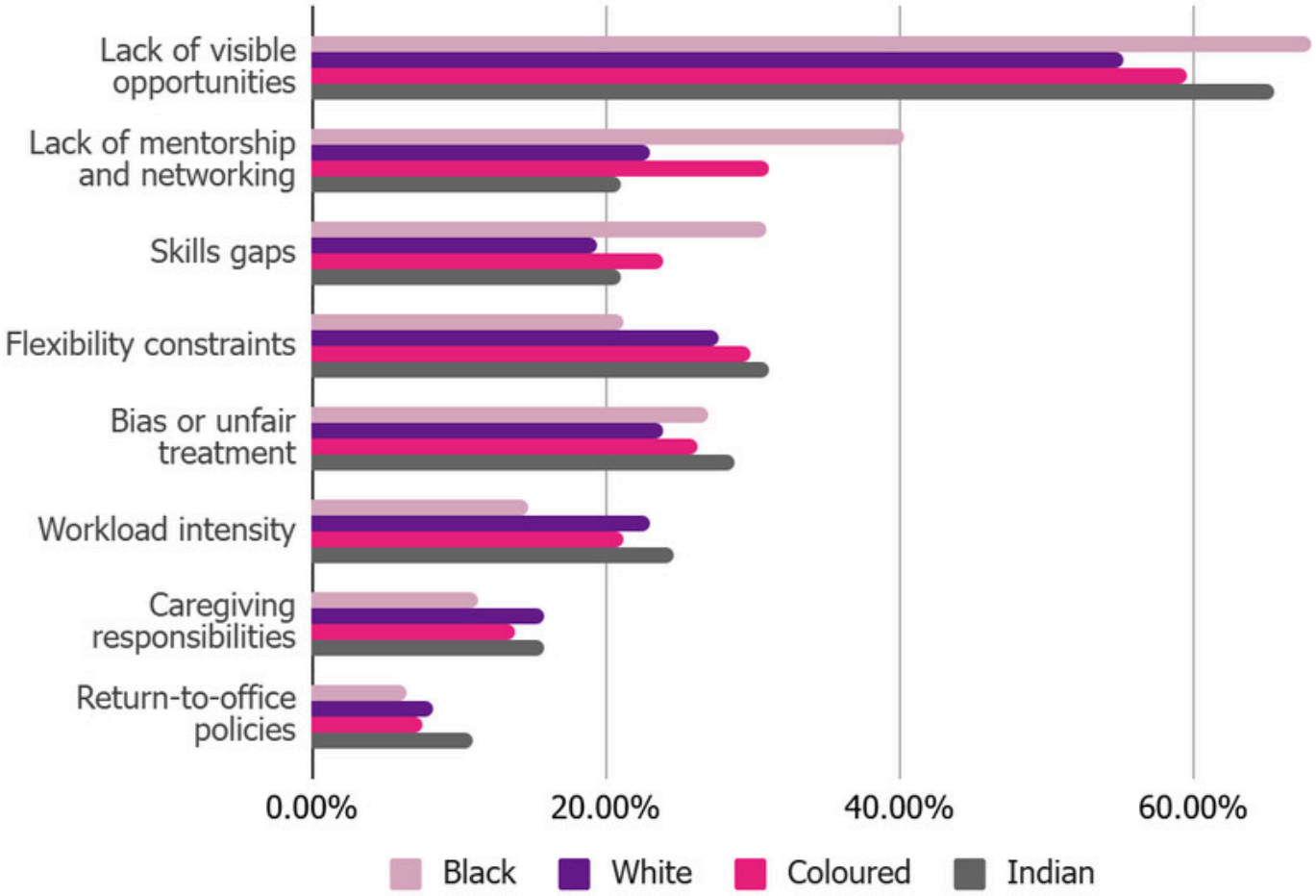
What are the top three barriers currently limiting career progression:



Top career barriers to advancement

TOP BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION BY RACE

Lack of visible opportunity tops the list across all racial groups, which is consistent with previous years of this research. Black women face the most career barriers: lack of visible opportunity is cited by 67.8%, mentorship and networking access at 40.2% and skills gaps at 30.8%. Flexibility constraints weigh most heavily on Indian and Coloured women at 30.9% and 29.7% respectively.



Top career barriers to advancement

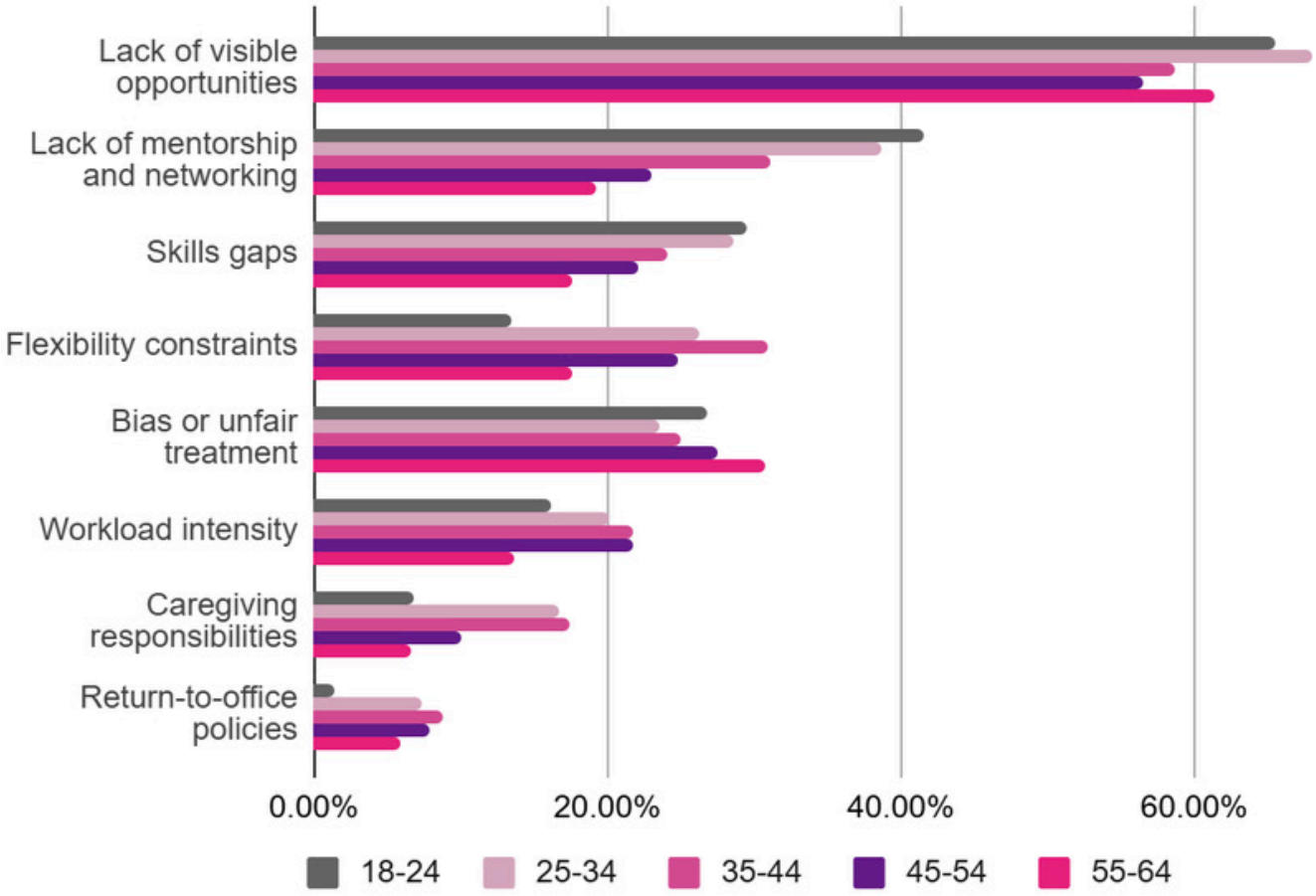
TOP BARRIERS TO CAREER PROGRESSION BY AGE

Lack of visible opportunity is the dominant career barrier at every life stage. It peaks among 25 to 34 year olds at 67.8% and remains the top barrier even among 55 to 64 year olds at 61.2%.

Mentorship and networking concerns are most acute early in careers at 41.3% among 18 to 24 year olds, declining steadily with age to 19.0% among 55 to 64 year olds as professional networks develop over time.

Flexibility constraints peak at 30.8% among 35 to 44 year olds, consistent with previous years, reflecting the career stage where professional demands and caregiving responsibilities most frequently intersect.

Two findings are new in 2026. Return-to-office policies appear as a named career barrier for the first time, peaking among 35 to 44 year olds at 8.6% and the rise in bias among older women is more pronounced than in previous years.



Insights for employers: Making career progression visible and attainable

Map career pathways and communicate them explicitly.

Clear progression frameworks, transparent promotion criteria and regular career conversations are the most effective responses to the finding that 60.7% of women cannot see the next opportunity in their careers. Growth can be materialised in training and upskilling, not just in linear promotion.

Invest in structured mentorship and networking.

Lack of mentorship and networking is the second biggest career barrier across all age groups. Structured mentorship programmes, peer coaching and access to senior sponsors can be a standard part of how talent is developed.

Treat flexibility as a career progression and future leadership retention tool.

Employers who design flexible work into how roles are structured remove one of the most consistent barriers to women's career progression. This can include hybrid work arrangements or flexible hours that prioritise output over physical presence.

Address unconscious bias with structure.

Bias or unfair treatment is cited by 25.7% of women and increases with age. Structured, criteria-based hiring and promotion processes reduce the influence of unconscious bias and protects the experienced talent that is most costly to lose.



Section 7

Final Words

Data-led conversations give organisations a more grounded, less subjective way to make decisions. They help leadership teams challenge assumptions, test policies, and act with greater clarity, with the goal of attracting and retaining high-performing talent to sustain growth.

In practice, this might mean rethinking whether an office policy is improving productivity or affecting retention. It might shape how teams are supported through an AI transition, or prompt a timely check-in with a high-performing employee who is carrying more than is visible.

These small, consistent shifts are what build workplaces where skilled women choose to stay. It's where businesses grow stronger as a result of wise decisions.

South Africa's skilled women are educated, ambitious, and ready to contribute. The opportunity for employers is to create the conditions that make that contribution sustainable.

RecruitMyMom partners with organisations to access and retain this talent, we support businesses as they build teams for their next phase of growth.



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