

global

talent trends.

2025



About ACCA.

We are ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), a globally recognised professional accountancy body providing qualifications and advancing standards in accountancy worldwide.

Founded in 1904 to widen access to the accountancy profession, we've long championed inclusion and today proudly support a diverse community of over **252,500** members and **526,000** future members in **180** countries.

Our forward-looking qualifications, continuous learning and insights are respected and valued by employers in every sector. They equip individuals with the business and finance expertise and ethical judgment to create, protect, and report the sustainable value delivered by organisations and economies.

Guided by our purpose and values, our vision is to develop the accountancy profession the world needs. Partnering with policymakers, standard setters, the donor community, educators and other accountancy bodies, we're strengthening and building a profession that drives a sustainable future for all.

Find out more at accaglobal.com



Global talent trends 2025.

The largest annual talent survey of accountancy and finance professionals across the world.

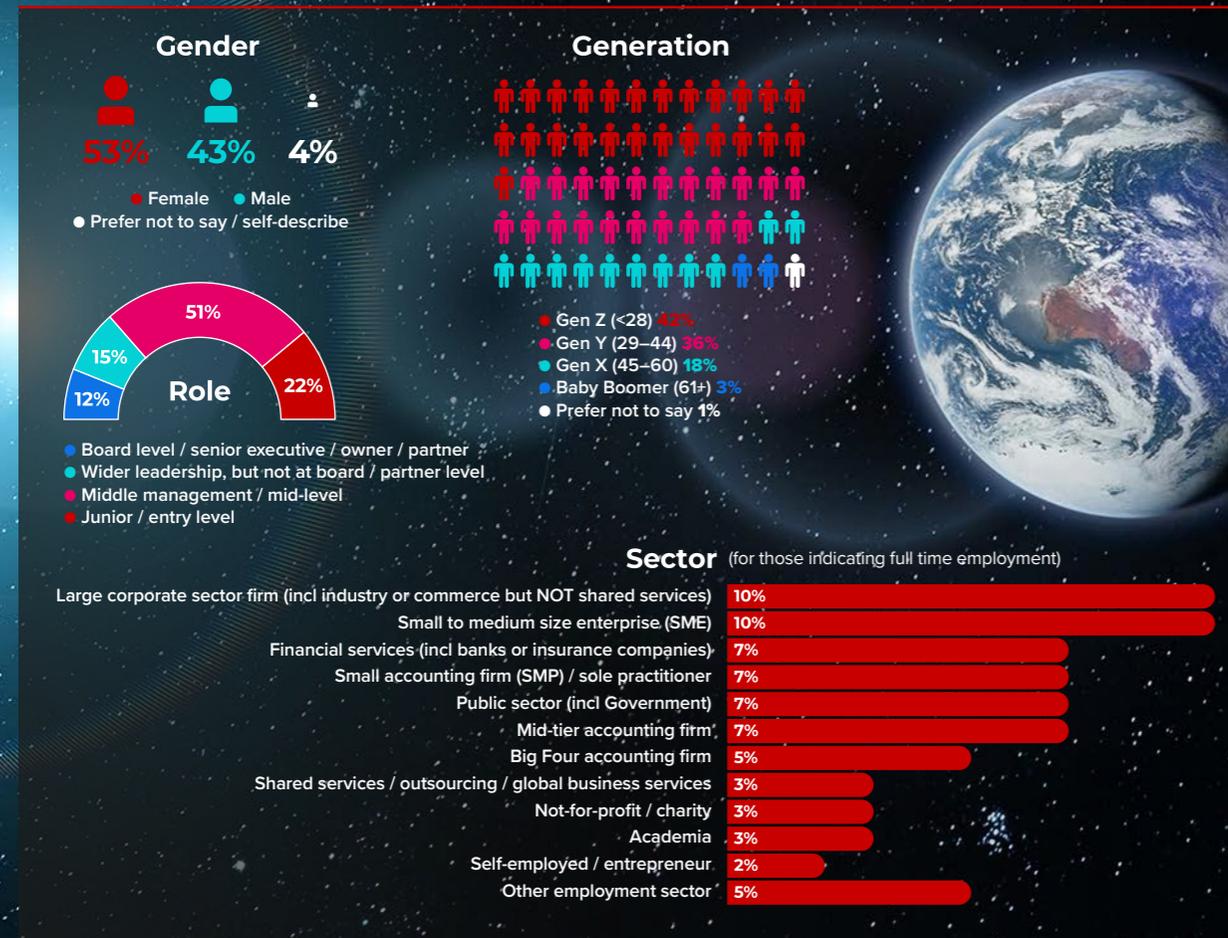
Our third annual study collects compelling data, insights and perspectives – shared by over **10,000** respondents from **175** countries – on **the transforming world of work** and **emerging career aspirations**.

‘This year, a key theme emerging is how accountancy can be a fantastic early career pathway for building entrepreneurial skills.’

Jamie Lyon, FCCA Global Head of Skills, Sectors and Technology, ACCA

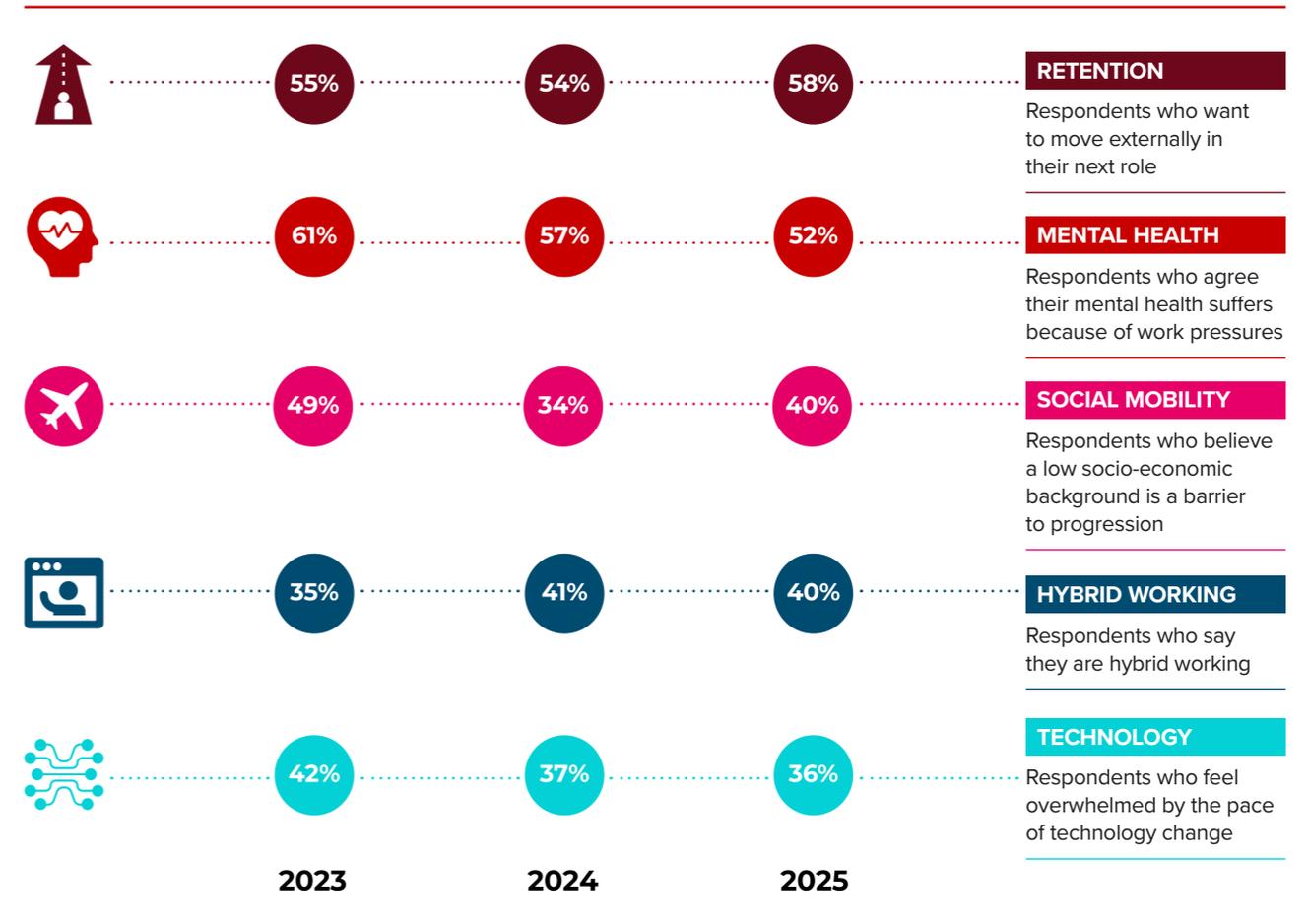
Demographics.

Global Talent Trends 2025 is the largest annual talent survey of accountancy and finance professionals across the world, shared by over 10,000 respondents from 175 countries.



Key work metrics tracked.

Every year we track key metrics to better understand trends across different aspects of work in accountancy and finance.



2025 headlines at a glance.



Click  to learn more

1. Accountancy as a gateway for building entrepreneurial skills

With over half of respondents (52%) indicating they have career ambitions to be entrepreneurs, it's clear that many see accountancy as a natural springboard to eventually running their own businesses in the future. But as career paths expand, there's a growing need for accountants to adapt their entrepreneurial mindsets to more traditional career paths in finance and business too – where skills such as commerciality and innovation are prized attributes.

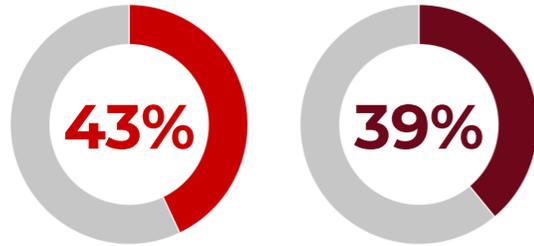
 52%

Respondents who have career ambitions to be an entrepreneur

‘With 52% of respondents indicating they have career ambitions to be entrepreneurs, it’s clear that many see accountancy as a natural springboard to eventually running their own businesses.’

2. The rise of the 'side hustle' for Gen Z?

Our survey shows that **43%** of Gen Z respondents in work and **39%** across all age groups suggest they're now engaged in additional employment to their main jobs. The key reasons cited by younger respondents pursuing concurrent roles are earning supplementary income and diversification of income streams. These ambitions have significant implications for employers in terms of engagement and retention – but some see the positive side in opportunities to acquire new skills.



43% of Gen Z respondents in work and **39%** across all age groups suggest they're now engaged in additional employment to their main jobs

'The key reasons cited by younger respondents pursuing concurrent roles are earning supplementary income and diversification of income streams.'

3. Hybrid work preferences remain elusive for many

Three years of tracked data from our annual Global Talent Trends survey suggests that worker demands on hybrid working are still not being met. Over three quarters of respondents (**76%**) want hybrid working arrangements, yet over half (**51%**) are still working in the office full time. This ongoing discrepancy risks poor engagement and employee dissatisfaction, but it also has potential implications for skills development and mental health. The issue is compounded by 'in-office days' policies that appear to be applied inconsistently.

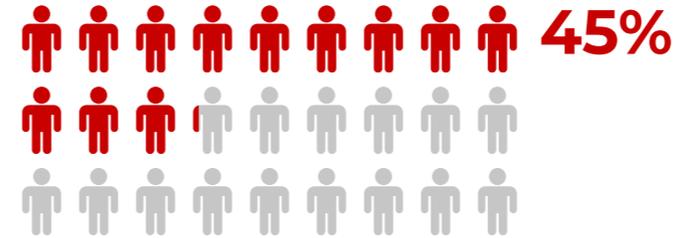


Over three quarters of respondents want hybrid working arrangements, yet over half are still working in the office full time

'This ongoing discrepancy fuels poor engagement and employee dissatisfaction, but it also has potential implications for skills development and mental health.'

4. Ageism in accountancy?

Leadership inclusivity indicators score well across our survey – with most respondents seeing their leaders as having integrity and being accessible. Yet there are elements of the inclusivity agenda that continue to cause concern – with **40%** of respondents agreeing that a low socio-economic background is still a barrier to progression. Almost half of respondents this year (**45%** – up from **41%** in 2024), suggest their organisation continues to focus more on certain aspects of diversity than others. Interestingly, it's inadequate recognition of older employees that tops the list of concerns.



Almost half of respondents suggest their organisation continues to focus more on certain aspects of diversity than others (up from **41%** in 2024)

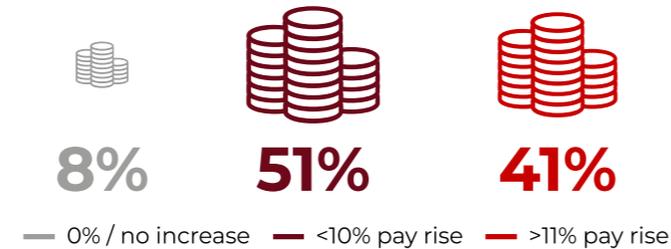
'Interestingly, it's inadequate recognition of older employees that tops the list of concerns.'





5. Cost of living continues to top our 'workplace fears' index

Concerns over the cost of living continue to top our Global Talent Trends 'workplace fears' index in 2025, a trend we've seen for three years in a row. It's an issue that's evident across the respondent divide, almost entirely agnostic of sector or country demographic. This is creating pressure for organisations in managing salary costs – with **41%** of respondents expecting an annual pay rise of at least **11%**. No surprise, it's also the younger generation and more junior employees who feel hardest hit.

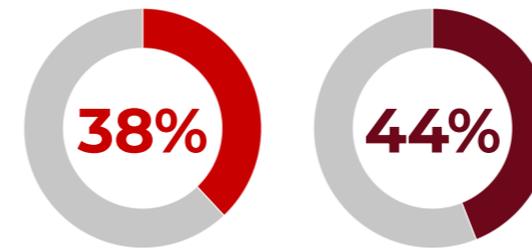


Annual pay rise expectations of respondents overall, with **41%** of respondents expecting a pay rise of at least **11%**

'Concerns over the cost of living continue to top our 'workplace fear' index in 2025, a trend we've seen for three years in a row.'

6. Is AI upskilling falling short?

Exactly half of respondents (**50%**) are concerned they're not developing the skills required for the future workplace. Artificial intelligence (AI) is unsurprisingly identified as the most valuable workplace skill in demand – but **38%** suggest they are not confident in their current knowledge of AI. While there's broad confidence in being able to apply and learn new AI skills, many (**44%**) cite insufficient opportunities to learn about AI as a key barrier to skills development. Less than one third (**32%**) say their organisation is providing opportunities to learn AI-related skills, and where upskilling is happening, it appears to be heavily weighted towards Gen Z workers only.



38% of respondents suggest they are not confident in their current knowledge of AI, and **44%** cite insufficient opportunities to learn about AI as a key barrier to skills development

'Half of respondents are concerned they're not developing the skills required for the future workplace.'

7. Employability confidence is high

The retention challenge for employers evident in this year's data mirrors the employability confidence that professional accountants have – with almost **60%** of respondents in work expecting their next career role to be outside of their current organisation. The speed with which career paths and job roles are evolving demands a re-evaluation of individual career planning. Crowdsourcing thousands of comments on successful individual career strategies, there's consistent advice emerging from this survey on the need for 'resilience', 'authenticity', 'adaptability' and 'lifelong growth'.

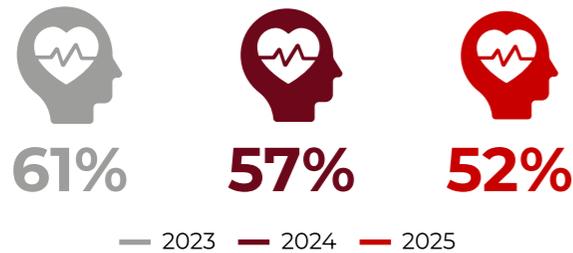


Respondents expecting their next career role to be outside of their current organisation

'Crowdsourcing thousands of comments on successful individual career strategies, there's consistent advice emerging from this survey on the need for 'resilience', 'authenticity', 'adaptability' and 'lifelong growth'.'

8. Mental health indicators improve but remain challenging

It's clear that mental health continues to be a challenge. More positively, our mental health indicators have improved slightly in comparison to both our 2023 and 2024 findings – but over half of respondents (52%) in 2025 still agree that their mental health suffers due to work pressures. There's little room for complacency as the data suggests a relationship between poor mental health status, concerns on the adequacy of organisational support, and overall workplace satisfaction levels. Organisation flight risk continues to be a key issue linked to mental health.



Mental health indicators have improved slightly in comparison to our 2023 and 2024 findings – but over half of respondents in 2025 still agree that their mental health suffers due to work pressures

‘Organisation flight risk continues to be a key issue linked to mental health.’

9. Demand for sustainability related careers flies high

Two-thirds of respondents (67%) suggest they are interested in pursuing accountancy and finance roles focused on environmental issues. It's a particular ambition for Gen Z respondents, as well as those in emerging markets. While many of these roles currently reside at more senior levels, there's a real opportunity for organisations to ensure sustainability roles and skills cascade through to junior levels moving forward.



Over two thirds suggest they are interested in pursuing accountancy and finance roles focused on environmental issues

‘While many of these roles currently reside at more senior levels, there's a real opportunity for organisations to ensure sustainability roles and skills cascade through to junior levels moving forward.’

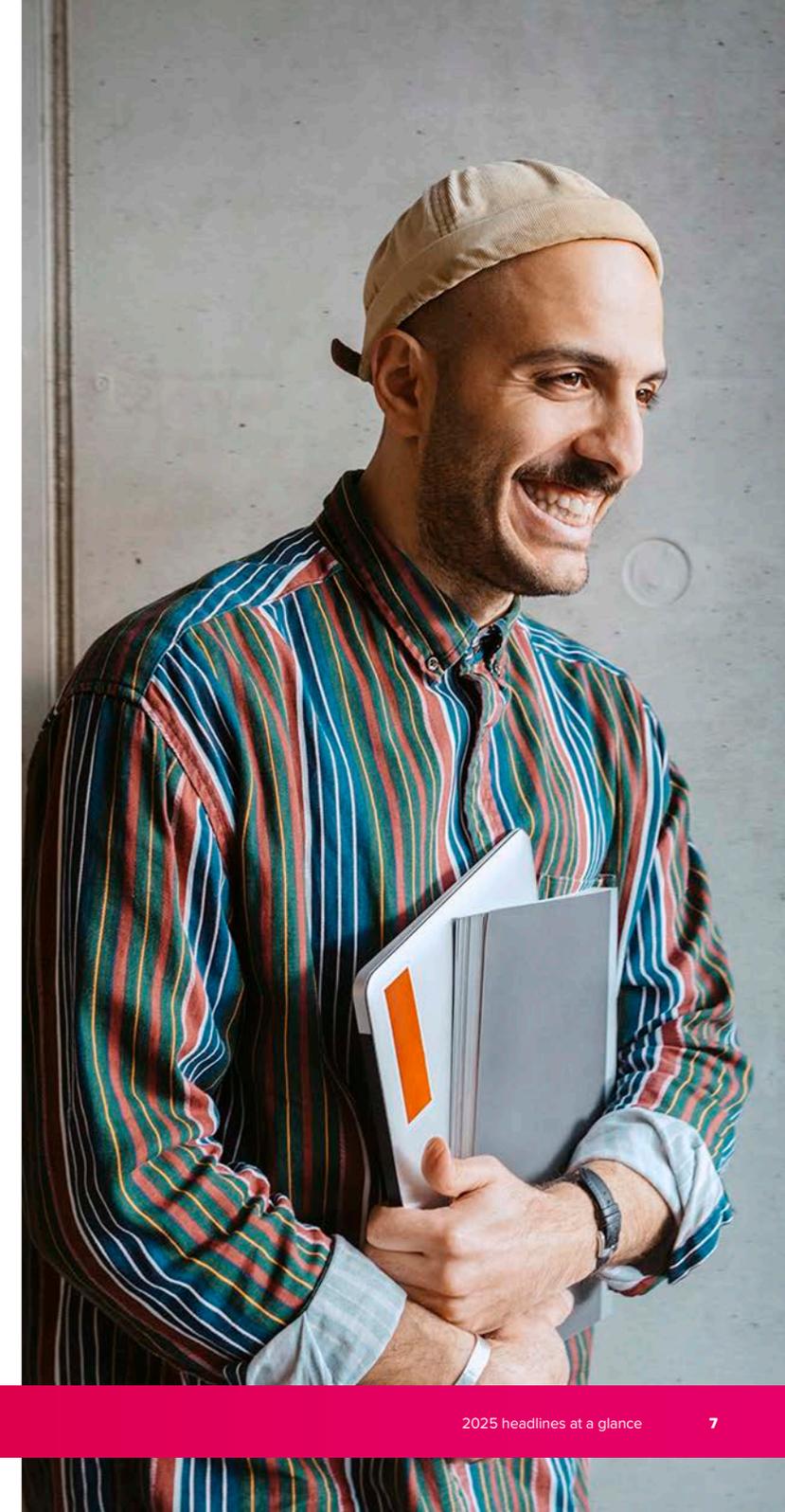
10. Accountancy training remains a gateway for global careers

Our survey finds that 72% of Gen Z respondents and 52% from Gen Y cite a desire to pursue career opportunities abroad – with migration typically from developing economies to key developed economies to pursue career goals and job moves. But does this exodus of finance professionals have implications for retaining home-grown accountancy talent in emerging markets?



72% of Gen Z respondents and 52% from Gen Y cite a desire to pursue career opportunities abroad

‘But does this exodus of finance professionals have implications for retaining home-grown talent in emerging markets?’





2025 findings in detail.



1. Accountancy as a gateway for building entrepreneurial skills

■ **Accountancy is a gateway profession for entrepreneurs.** From our survey, **52%** of respondents have career ambitions to be entrepreneurs, suggesting many see accountancy as an ideal pathway to build the necessary skills to run their own business. And, it's no surprise that the younger generation are fuelling this 'go-solo' ambition – with **57%** of Gen Z respondents and **53%** from Gen Y, suggesting that's where they want their future career to head. There's also another interesting dimension to these ambitions – with those either in the most junior positions, or the most senior positions who are driving entrepreneurship. But, as career paths expand, there's a growing need for accountants to adapt their entrepreneurial mindsets to more traditional career paths in finance and business too – where skills such as commerciality and innovation are prized attributes.

■ **Technology confidence appears to be a key enabler for 'would-be' entrepreneurs.** There's a clear correlation in our data between digital confidence and ambitions to become an entrepreneur. This intuitively makes sense in the digital economy – technology is key to helping start-ups access new customers through digital platforms, driving better decisions through data analysis, or helping accelerate product or service development. Technology affords entrepreneurs better opportunities to scale enterprises quickly, drive collaboration initiatives, and deliver more targeted communication. But accountants in more traditional finance and accounting career paths can also be thinking innovatively about how their organisations and finance teams are deploying technology to drive innovation.

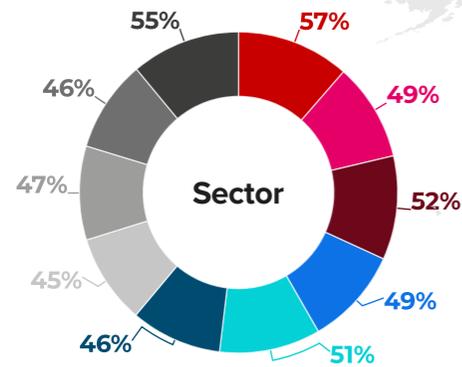
'Accountancy is an excellent platform for entrepreneurship because it equips individuals with the necessary financial literacy, budgeting skills... when these elements are necessary for the success of a business.'

Africa roundtable participant

Entrepreneurial ambitions by numbers

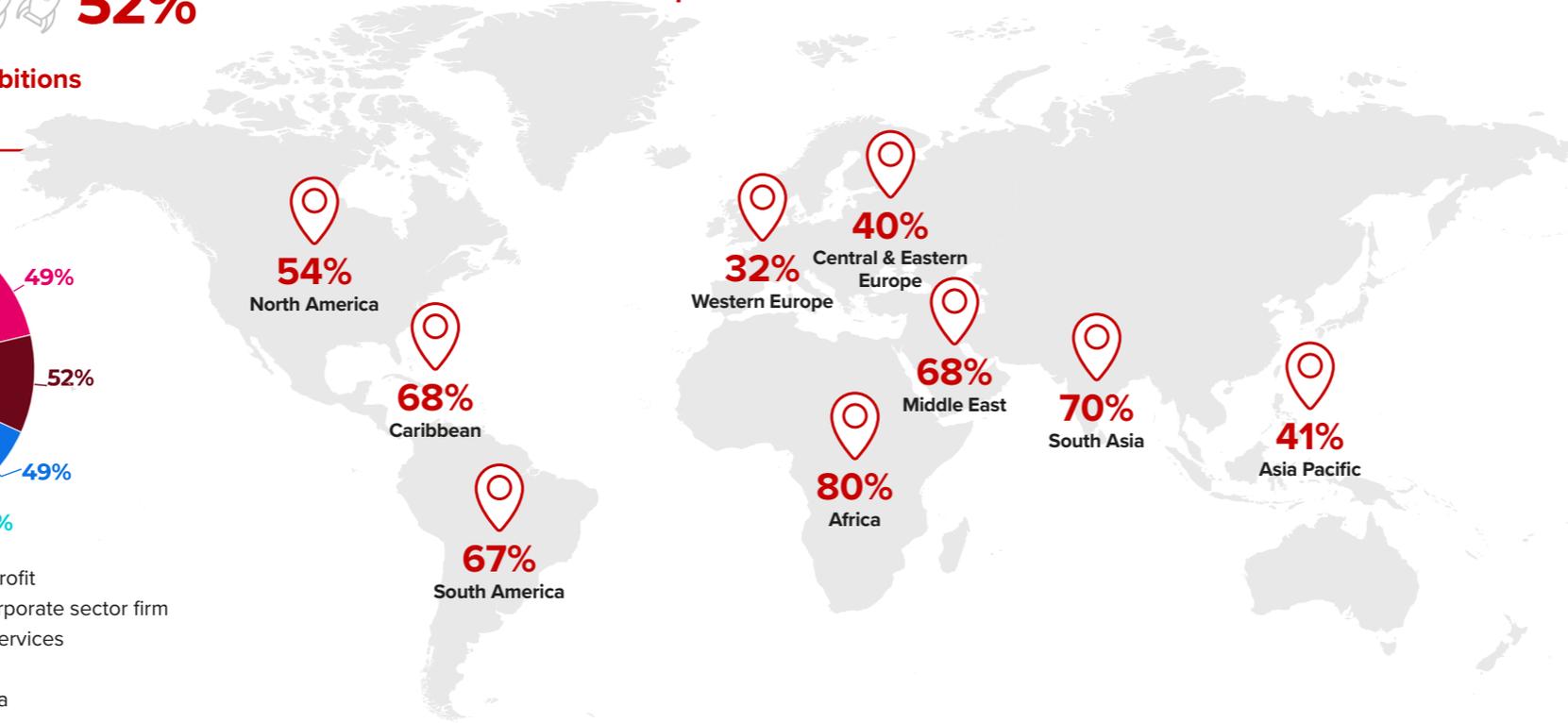


Respondents who have career ambitions to be an entrepreneur



- Big Four accounting firm
- Mid-tier accounting firm
- SMP
- Public sector
- Financial services
- Not-for-profit
- Large corporate sector firm
- Shared services
- SME
- Academia

Entrepreneurial ambitions across the world



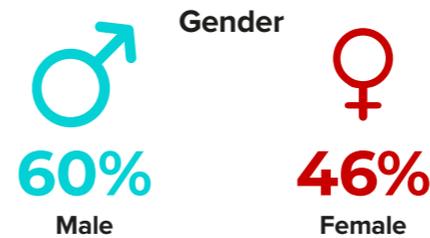
■ **Entrepreneurial ambitions are highest in developing markets.** Entrepreneurial ambitions differ vastly across regions and countries of the world. There's a clear pattern emerging – with respondents from emerging economies more likely to indicate they have aspirations to run their own businesses. This possibly reflects the fast-paced, growing opportunities in those markets and more informal work opportunities. Here, Africa, a continent with a young demographic and fast-growing sectors such as fintech, is the standout region – with **80%** of respondents suggesting they want to run their own businesses. By contrast, less than a third of respondents (**32%**) from Western Europe harboured similar ambitions. Those individuals intent on moving internationally with their careers are more likely to cite entrepreneurial career goals.

■ **Entrepreneurs are the happiest workers.** Those respondents who have already taken the leap to becoming entrepreneurs, are the happiest workers in any sector – with two-thirds of them (**66%**) from Gen Z or Gen Y cohorts. Entrepreneurs also score relatively high in believing they're building vital skills needed for the future compared to other respondent bases. Yet challenges are evident too – with entrepreneurs citing poor networking opportunities as their most challenging career barrier.

Role



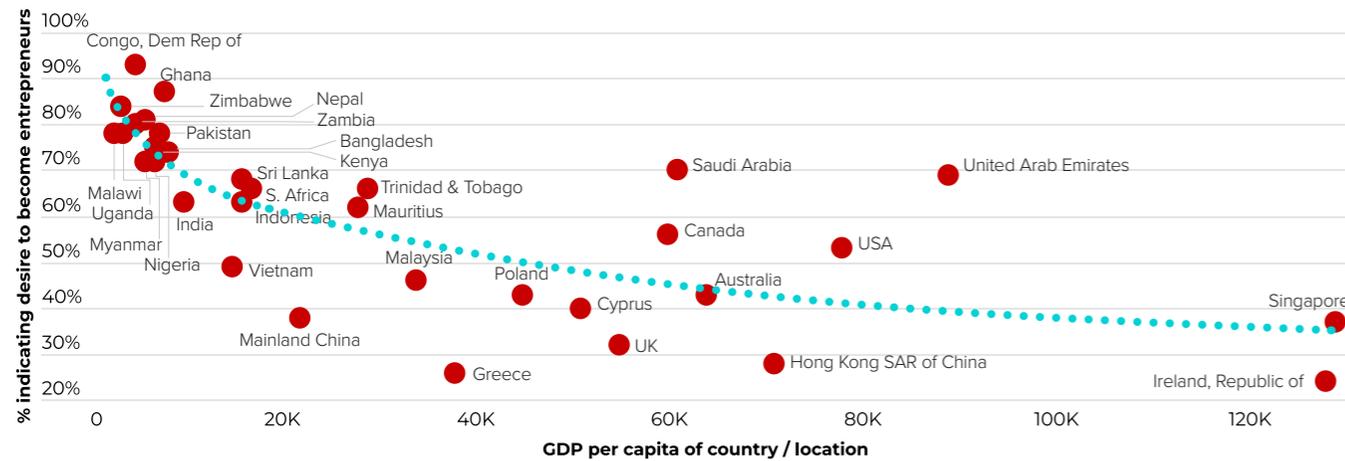
Generation



'Running a business or being an entrepreneur is all about the ability to convert a brilliant idea into numbers.'

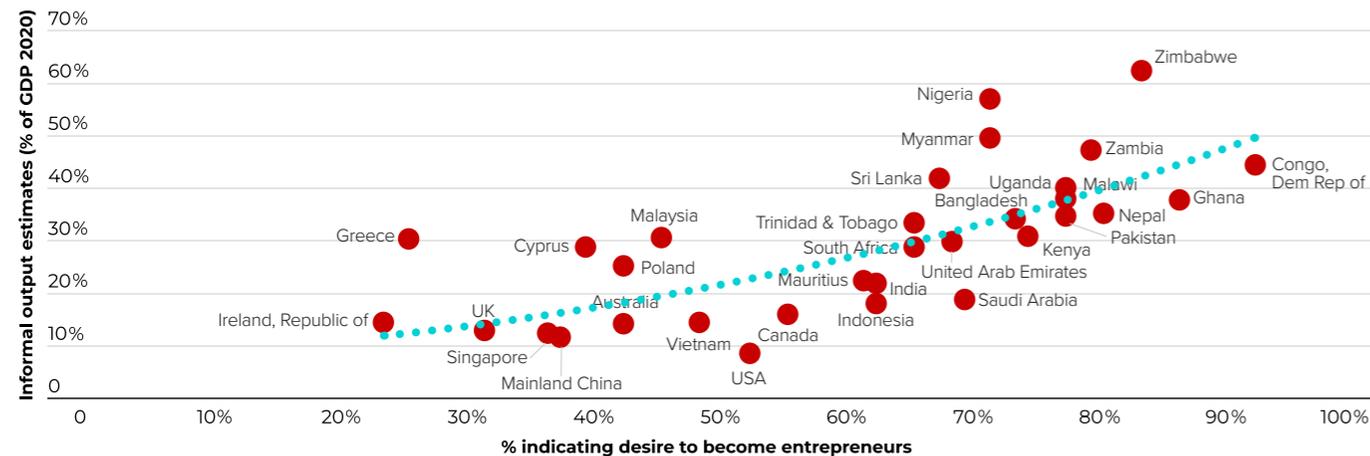
Asia Pacific roundtable participant

Entrepreneurial ambitions appear correlated to wealth of country / location



Source: GDP information sourced from IMF estimates of GDP per capita at constant prices (purchasing power parity, 2021 international dollar).

Entrepreneurialism levels influenced by size of informal economy?



Source: Informal economic activity by country estimations World Bank, <<https://www.worldbank.org/en/research/brief/informal-economy-database>>.

Box 1:

Accountancy and entrepreneurialism – why it's such a good match

It's not difficult to see why accountancy is an emerging career gateway for those with ambitions of running their own businesses. Most small businesses fail early not because the basic idea isn't plausible, or there isn't enough market demand for the product or service as imagined – they simply run out of cash.

Basic financial literacy, that cornerstone of accountancy training, is an invaluable starting point for would-be entrepreneurs. But it's also important to consider the broader demands placed on business owners at inception – from cost control to budgetary management, as well as the ever-growing regulatory, tax and compliance requirements that come with business start-ups.

Most entrepreneurs want to build a sustainable business that lasts, either to generate long-term profits, or to sell on. And it's here that those skills honed as accountant can be really valuable through:

- superior data analysis skills to aid better business decision-making
- expertise in financial forecasting to support more effective strategic planning
- the ability to build credible relationships with future investors based on sound financial and business plans
- understanding core risk management principles to better manage downside risks and exploit upside risk
- opportunities understanding broader issues such as business model change and sustainability.

It's this combination of deep financial expertise coupled with broader business acumen gained from accountancy training that provides a uniquely powerful grounding for future entrepreneurs.

Yet as career paths expand, there's an acute need for accountants to adapt their entrepreneurial mindsets to more traditional career paths in finance and business – where commerciality and innovation skills are prized attributes. At the top levels of the organisation – as CFOs transition more to Chief Value Officers – the focus on broader and long-term value necessitates merging entrepreneurial and commercial flair with sound governance and stewardship skills.

With an increased focus on innovation across the global economy, one option that aspiring accountants can also consider is pursuing 'intrapreneurship' opportunities – initially within more established organisations where they are given more responsibility to pursue their creative business ideas within the relative safety of the organisational ecosystem.

Box 2:

How do entrepreneurial ambitions and other work preferences differ between men and women?

Our global data across most indicators suggests the work preferences of men and women are very similar. But there are some differences...



‘The traditional role of finance professionals – as gatekeepers and compliance officers – often places them in high-pressure positions with limited incentive to explore entrepreneurship. To change this, it’s important to rethink how we prepare finance professionals, provide better opportunities, and especially encourage women in finance to take the entrepreneurial leap, as their representation grows.’

India roundtable participant

6 **As an entrepreneur you need to back yourself. You need to take risks. You need to think big.**

Asia Pacific roundtable participant

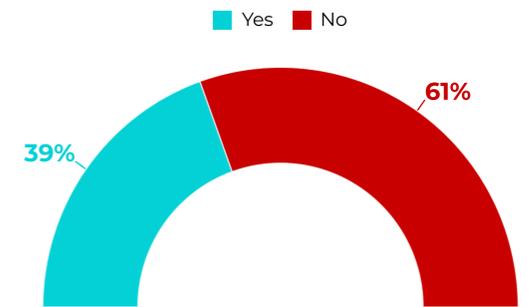
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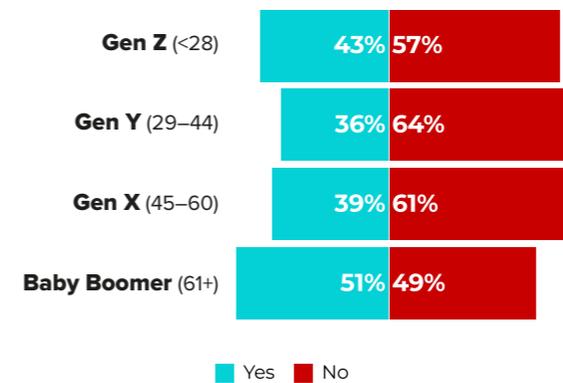
2. The rise of the ‘side hustle’ for Gen Z?

■ **‘Side hustles’ and additional jobs are popular in accountancy.** Almost **40%** of respondents in work currently indicate they are engaged in additional employment outside their main day-to-day role. From Gen Z, **43%** suggest they are currently engaged in external activities to supplement their employment. Over half of Baby Boomer respondents (**51%**) indicate they have additional jobs concurrently too. Work patterns clearly impact – with those working fully remotely more likely to indicate they are pursuing these opportunities.

Respondents who are currently undertaking another role – overall



Respondents who are currently undertaking another role – by generation



The types of additional employment pursued



‘For older and more senior respondents, it’s primarily about the opportunity to give back and contribute with purpose.’



■ **Younger respondents want money from additional jobs, older respondents seek purpose.** For younger and more junior respondents, the main driver is earning more money (a true ‘side hustle’), but diversifying income streams is also a key reason. It’s no surprise given this is the demographic most vocal about the cost of living crisis in our data – with just over a third of the Gen Z cohort (35%) being currently satisfied with the level of pay they receive. While for older and more senior respondents, it’s primarily about the opportunity to give back and contribute with purpose.

‘While younger Gen Z professionals and senior leaders (in the ACCA data) show a stronger inclination toward startups and entrepreneurial ventures, the type of ventures they are keen on starting could be different. Senior leaders and board-level professionals may lean toward ventures in the social sector or pursue roles that reflect a sense of fulfilment and purpose after achieving career milestones.’

India roundtable participant

Box 3:

Definition of ‘side hustle’

side hustle

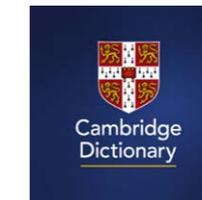
noun [c] mainly US informal

UK / 'saɪd ˌhʌs.əl/ US / 'saɪd ˌhʌs.əl/

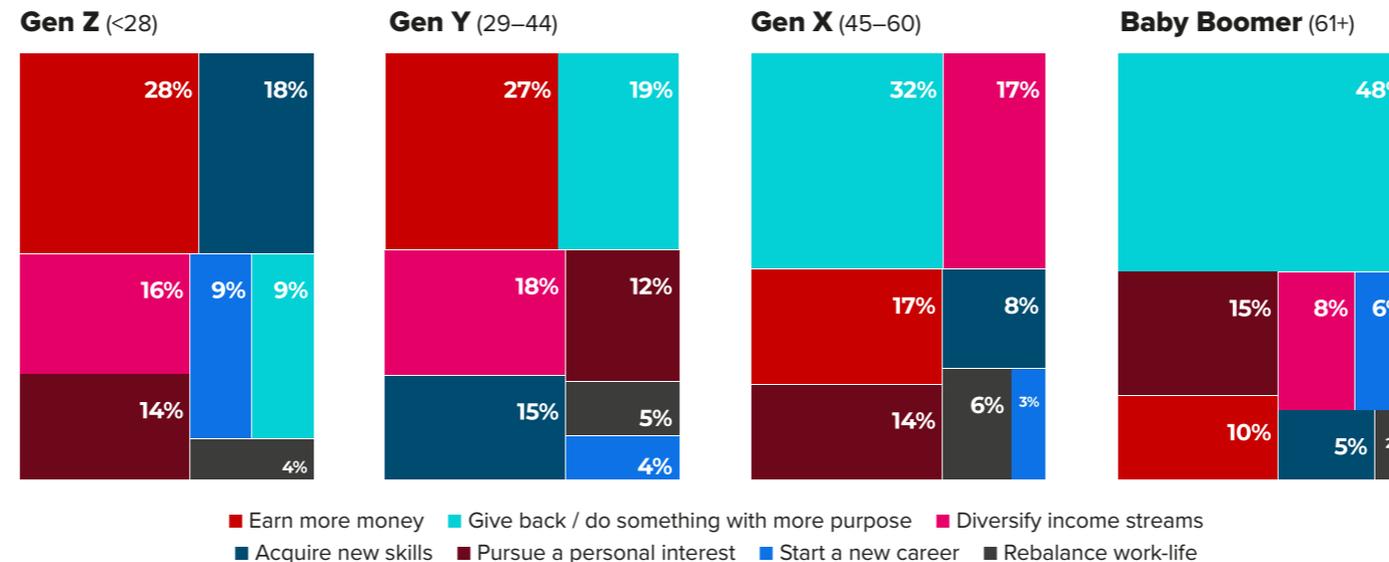
(also side gig)

a piece of work or a job that you get paid for doing in addition to doing your main job.

Source: dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/side-hustle



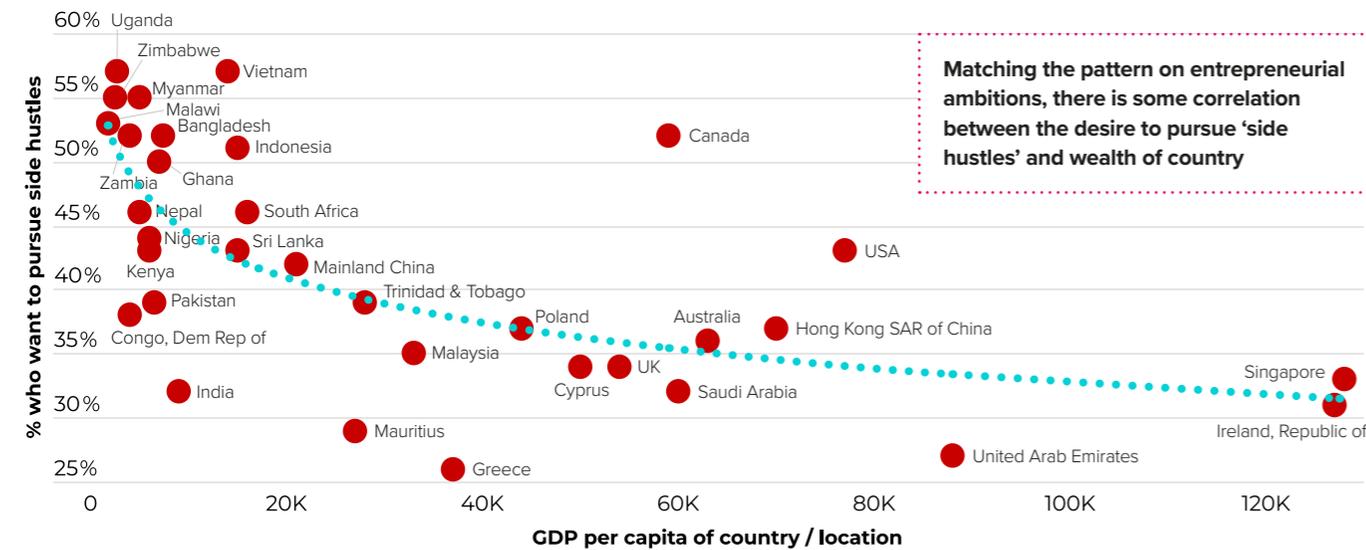
Different generations undertake the ‘side hustle’ or additional jobs for different reasons



■ **'Side hustles' are more prevalent in emerging economies.** There are significant differences in respondents' ambitions to pursue additional roles or 'side hustles' by geography. Respondents from emerging markets are more likely to be currently exploring concurrent job opportunities than those from developed economies. It's the African region that records the highest response rate of 'side hustle' ambitions – with almost half of Africa respondents (**49%**) pursuing these opportunities compared to only **28%** from the Middle East. But it's also interesting to note the reasons why individuals are pursuing these opportunities are broadly demarcated between earning more money in developing countries and give back / purpose in mature economies.

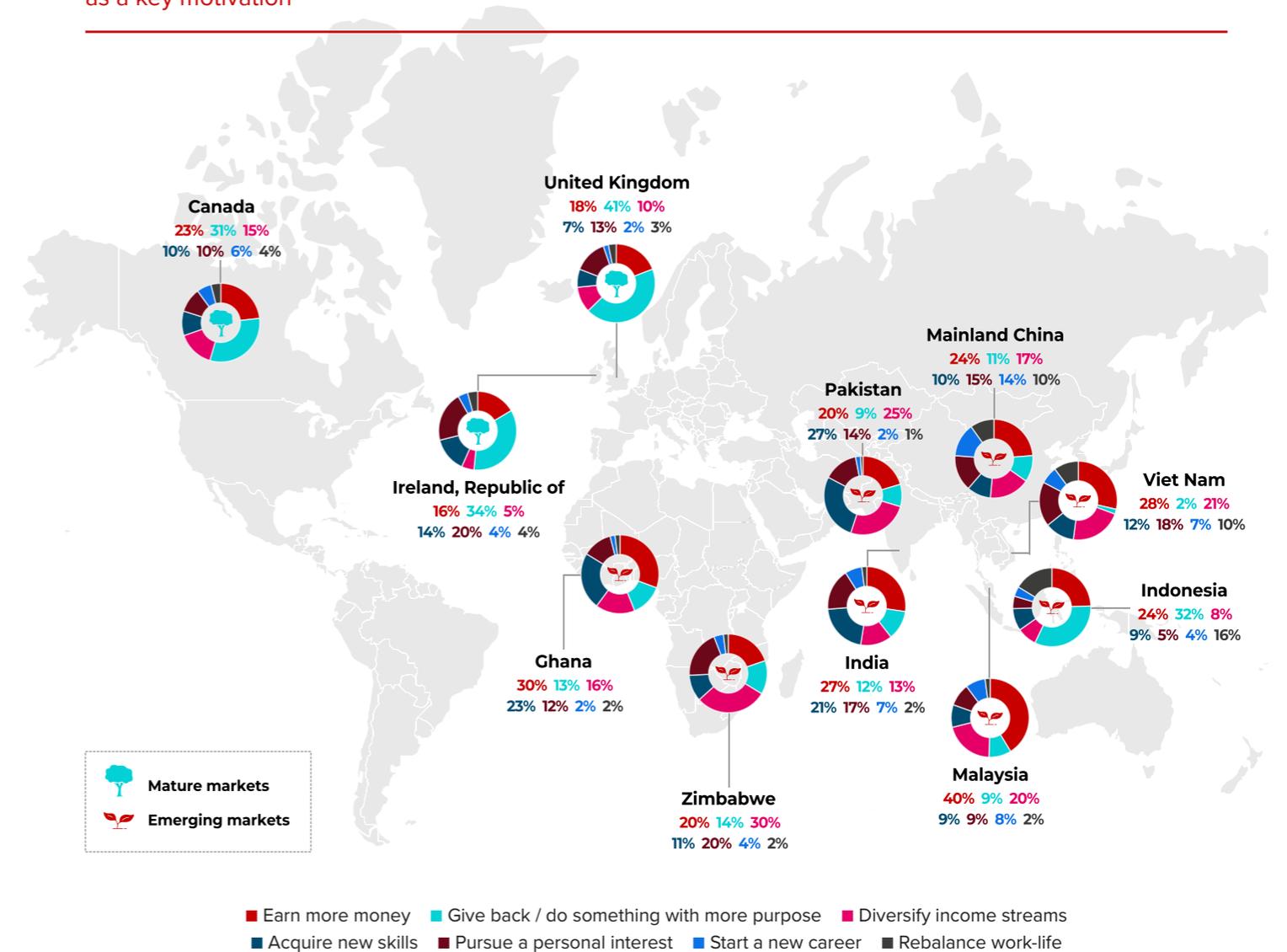
'It's also interesting to note the reasons why individuals are pursuing these opportunities are broadly demarcated between earning more money in developing countries and give back / purpose in mature economies.'

'Side hustle' ambitions appear correlated to wealth of country / location



Source: GDP information sourced from IMF estimates of GDP per capita at constant prices (purchasing power parity, 2021 international dollar).

Earning more money and diversifying income streams is a key reason for 'side hustles' in emerging markets driven by younger respondents, in contrast to respondents in mature economies citing give back / purpose as a key motivation



Box 4:

‘Side hustles’ and concurrent jobs have potential implications for employee engagement

For some time, well established career paths have been transitioning – with the one ‘career for life’ proposition diminishing. More individuals are switching careers midpoint, with a multitude of complex reasons why, ranging from:

- shifting social norms and ambitions
- rebalancing work-life priorities
- gaining financial independence / retiring early
- caring responsibilities
- transitioning work patterns
- physical relocation
- business model change
- technology related skills shifts.

This transition has implications for traditional employer talent management and retention strategies. Flexible and more personalised approaches to employee engagement are key, as employees seek to better fit work around their lives.

But how far does this flexible approach to employee engagement stretch? Would most employers in the accountancy sector want their employees to be pursuing additional roles outside of their organisation? Does it matter? Allowing employees to pursue ‘side hustles’ may help with engagement or developing skills – but it could also result in decreased productivity as well as conflicts of interest and reputational risk.



6 **The “side hustle” data is not surprising. But, for employers with accountants doing side work, from an independent perspective (if it’s under the radar)... does this mean contracts would need a moonlighting clause or something similar?**

Americas roundtable participant





‘I fully agree with your research data – we feel every day when we place our students in companies... they are looking for a job only with hybrid working arrangements.’

Middle East and Eurasia roundtable participant

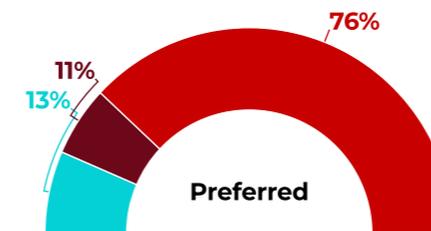
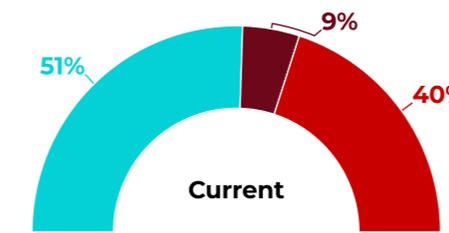
3. Hybrid work preferences remain elusive for many

■ **Workers’ demands are still not being met on hybrid working.** There’s an ongoing discrepancy between current working patterns and how workers would prefer to work – reflecting similar patterns to previous years. Currently, **40%** of all respondents are working under hybrid arrangements, but **76%** would prefer to. Hybrid working is also a phenomenon closely associated with more mature developed economies.

It’s clear this workplace mismatch fuels poor engagement – with the data suggesting hybrid workers and remote workers are more satisfied. And hybrid/remote working opportunities are cited as key to improving work life balance. It’s perhaps not difficult to understand why – with advocates for remote work citing greater control, a more effective work-life balance, less stress due to office commuting, and reduced costs. Working patterns are not the only lever that can be used by organisations to increase satisfaction, but they impact with our respondents.

Current vs preferred working pattern, 2025

■ Fully office based ■ Fully remote / home based
■ Hybrid working (ie mix of office and home-based working)



Hybrid and remote workers are more satisfied at work than respondents that are fully office based

% indicating they are satisfied at work



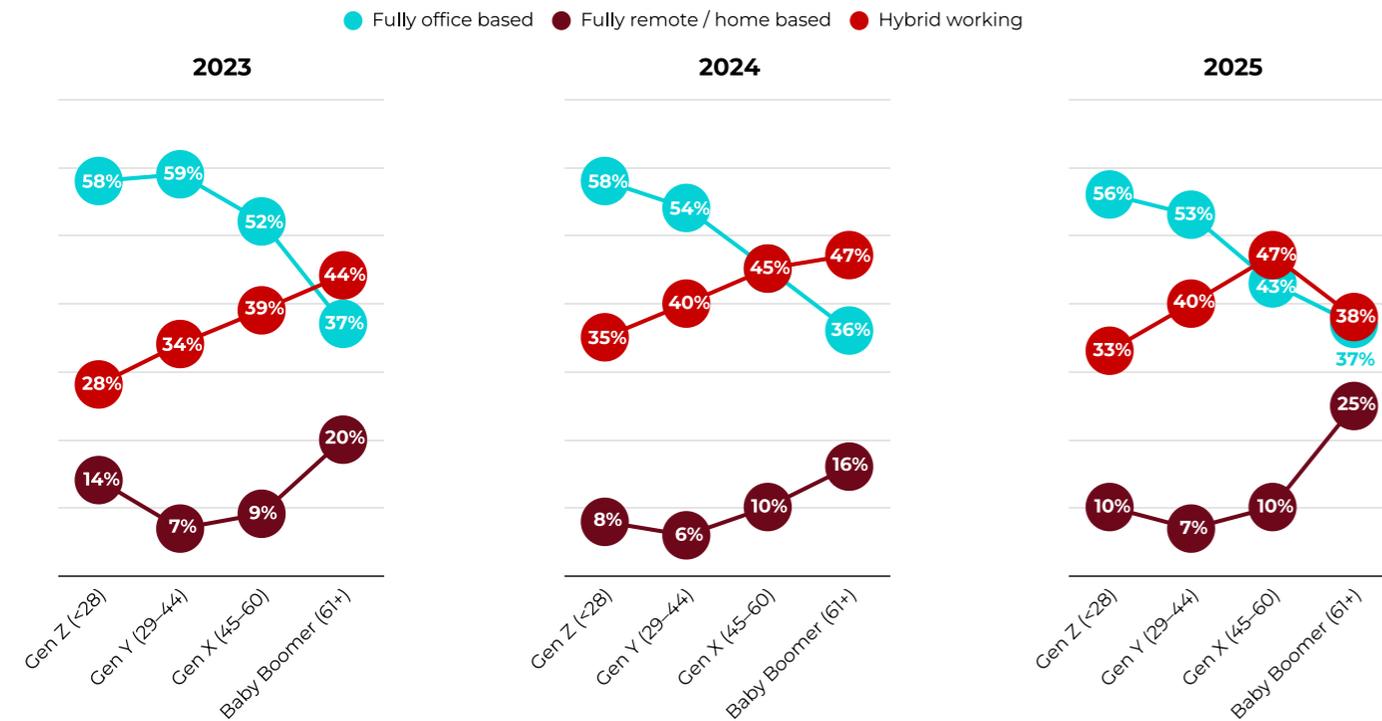
‘Hybrid working is definitely the future.’

APAC roundtable participant

■ **Does the mismatch in office presence risk skills development?** Our data suggests Gen Z respondents and those in more junior positions are more likely to be in full-time office employment. It's the potential impact on training and longer-term skills development that's perhaps one of the most controversial challenges of shifting work patterns – with concerns cited that older and more experienced employees are not office present to support younger employees to 'learn their craft'.

This isn't just about skills per se either, but more broadly concerns the culture and behaviours that can be learned over time by multi-generational workforces physically working in proximity together. Some argue that those lessons learned 'over the water cooler' can be difficult to recreate in virtual and remote working environments. This possible disconnect may take on extra significance where situational and contextual skills, such as problem solving and critical thinking through active learning, become more important.

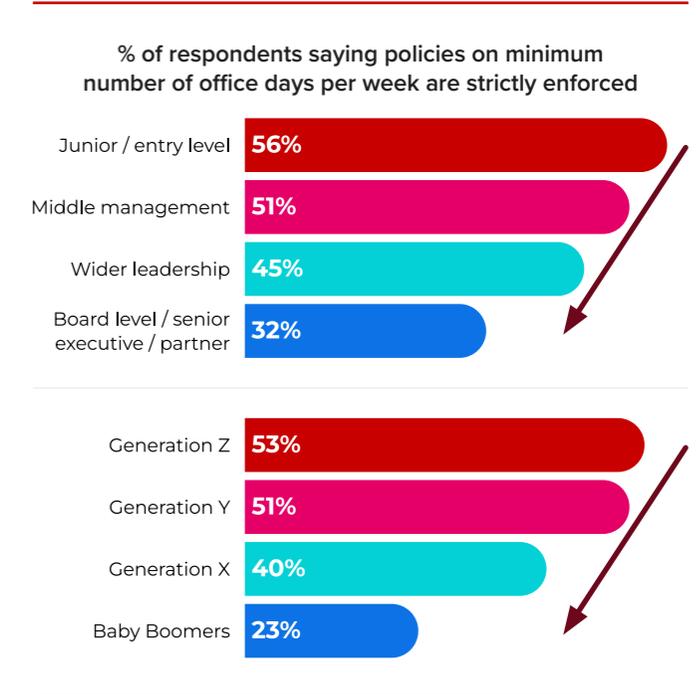
Working patterns have stayed consistent over a three-year period (2023 – 2025), with younger respondents much more likely to be working in the office full time



■ **'Hushed hybrid' and two-tier workforces in accountancy?** Is the 2024 rising phenomenon of 'hushed hybrid' working – where managers acquiesce to employee demands for more flexibility and allow them to work remotely on days that should be spent in the office – gaining traction in accountancy?

While there's an obvious appeal to those being managed in such teams, detractors cite concerns that such approaches create inconsistencies in wider employee treatment and two-tier workforces. Almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) suggest their employer has put policies in place for a minimum number of days spent in the office. Yet there's a real difference of opinion in our data – with younger and more junior employees saying policies are strictly enforced while their older or more senior colleagues cite much greater flexibility in practice. This is reflected in younger respondents being in the office more – presenting a risk for organisations that senior employees are treated differently.

'Hushed hybrid' for some in accountancy? Are flexible work policies being equally applied?

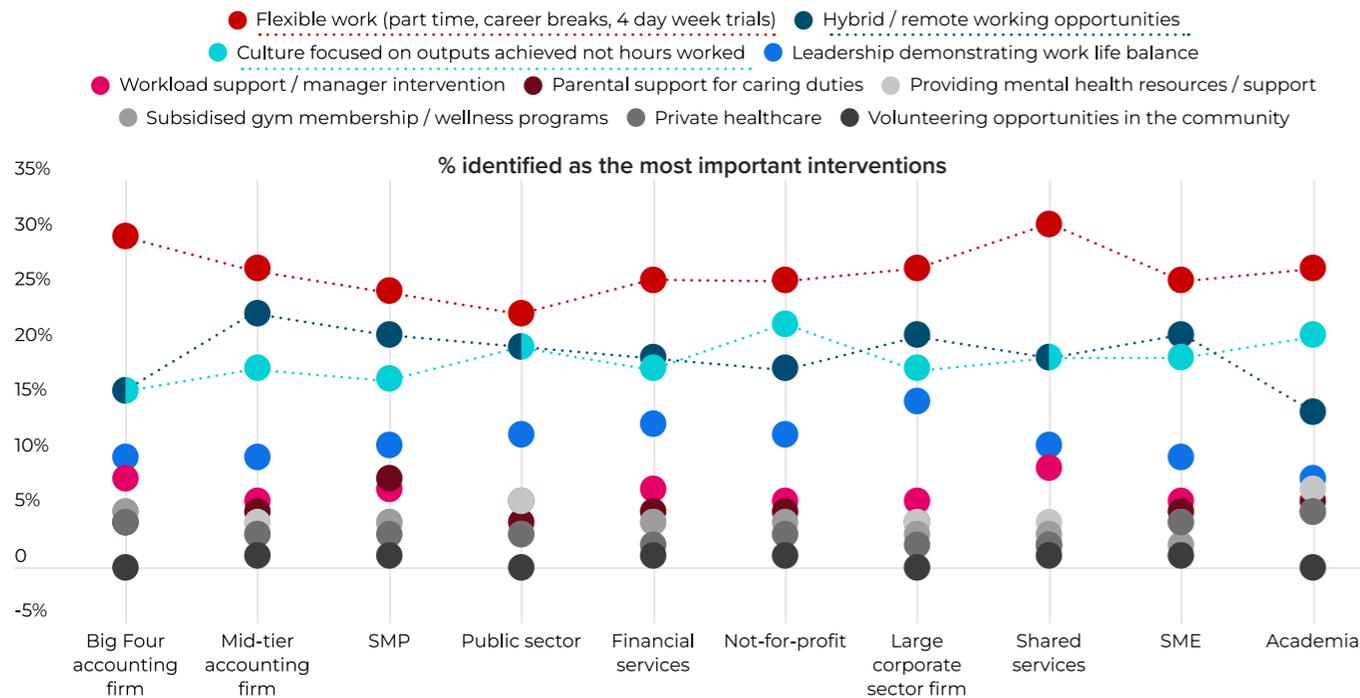


'Almost two-thirds of respondents (65%) suggest their employer has put policies in place for a minimum number of days spent in the office. Yet there's a real difference of opinion in our data – with younger and more junior employees saying policies are strictly enforced while their older or more senior colleagues cite much greater flexibility in practice.'

■ **Flexible work is the key to improving work-life balance.** Research led by the [Harvard T H Chan School of Public Health and Penn State University](#) published at the end of 2023, concluded that interventions implemented by organisations to lower conflict between employees work, and personal / family lives interventions, such as increased workplace flexibility, helped reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease by the equivalent of five to 10 years of 'age-related cardiometabolic change in employees at higher baseline risk'.

Aside from the possible physical health benefits, there's a growing body of data to suggest flexible work opportunities make employees happier and more engaged. From part time roles to career breaks, four-day week trials, or job sharing – flexible work is associated with improved work-life balance, productivity, job satisfaction, and inclusivity metrics. It's clear from our data across all sectors that employees feel it's the most influential factor that can make a difference to their lives. Respondents see many 'costs' to commuting.

The top 3 best ideas for improving work-life balance are consistent across sectors



Box 5:

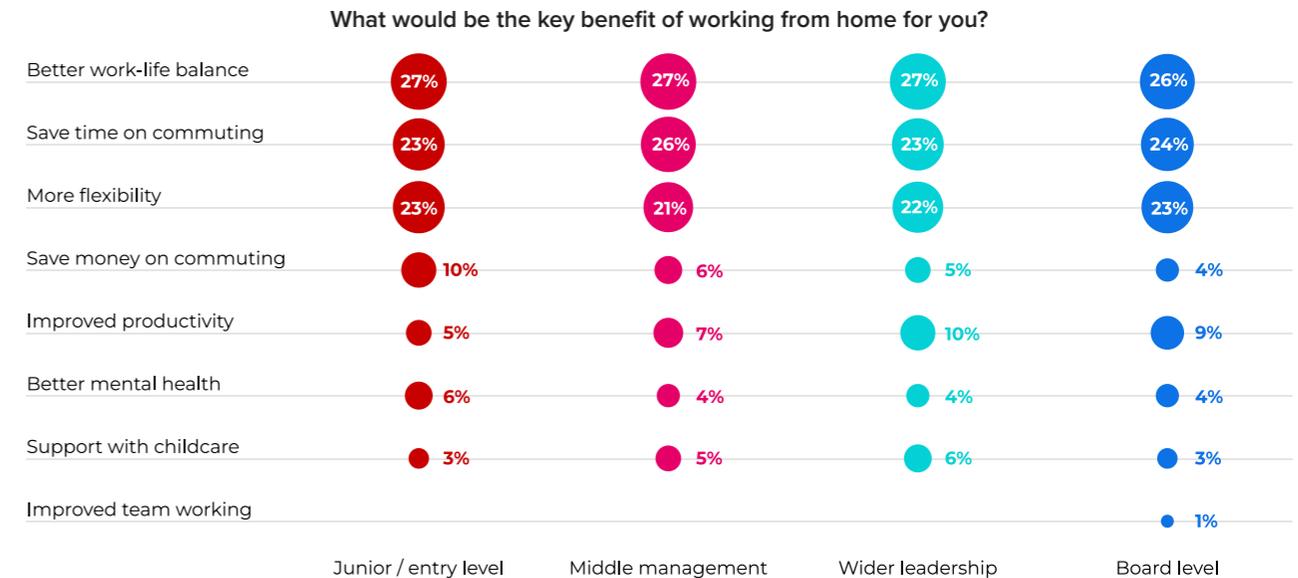
The price to pay for commuting to work?

There's clear evidence from our data that respondents associate a significant cost with 'in-office work', particularly from both a time and financial perspective. This represents a further shift in the employer/employee relationship – with organisations no longer able to just assume workers will bear these costs.

The challenge for organisations with more stringent 'return to office' policies is that they risk alienating much of the potential talent pool, particularly younger workers who expect at least some working from home options. For those employers expecting at least some office presence, this is creating more pressure to think innovatively about how these costs can be addressed or supported – eg through supporting childcare costs or subsidised travel.

Some employers are insisting on full-time office returns, but much of the data is currently conflicting on the link between employee productivity and office presence.

Saving the 'cost' of commuting is a key reason why most respondents want to work from home



Box 6:

Will hybrid work be the future for most?

The battlelines have been drawn. There’s a difference between what employers and employees want and expect from working practices. While the return to the office mandate for knowledge workers continues to gain momentum across the world, a minority of employers are still outliers against the trend – citing the benefits to employees of fully remote work. There are also distinct regional and jurisdictional differences apparent in our data on actual working practices, which may reflect both cultural as well as technological and logistical reasons for different working arrangements in different parts of the world.

Yet, according to our data, for many organisations and certainly for most employees irrespective of geography, hybrid working is the preference. It’s here that organisations can offer structured hybrid working approaches where they can specify minimum number of days / specific days per week in the office / minimum hours in the office.

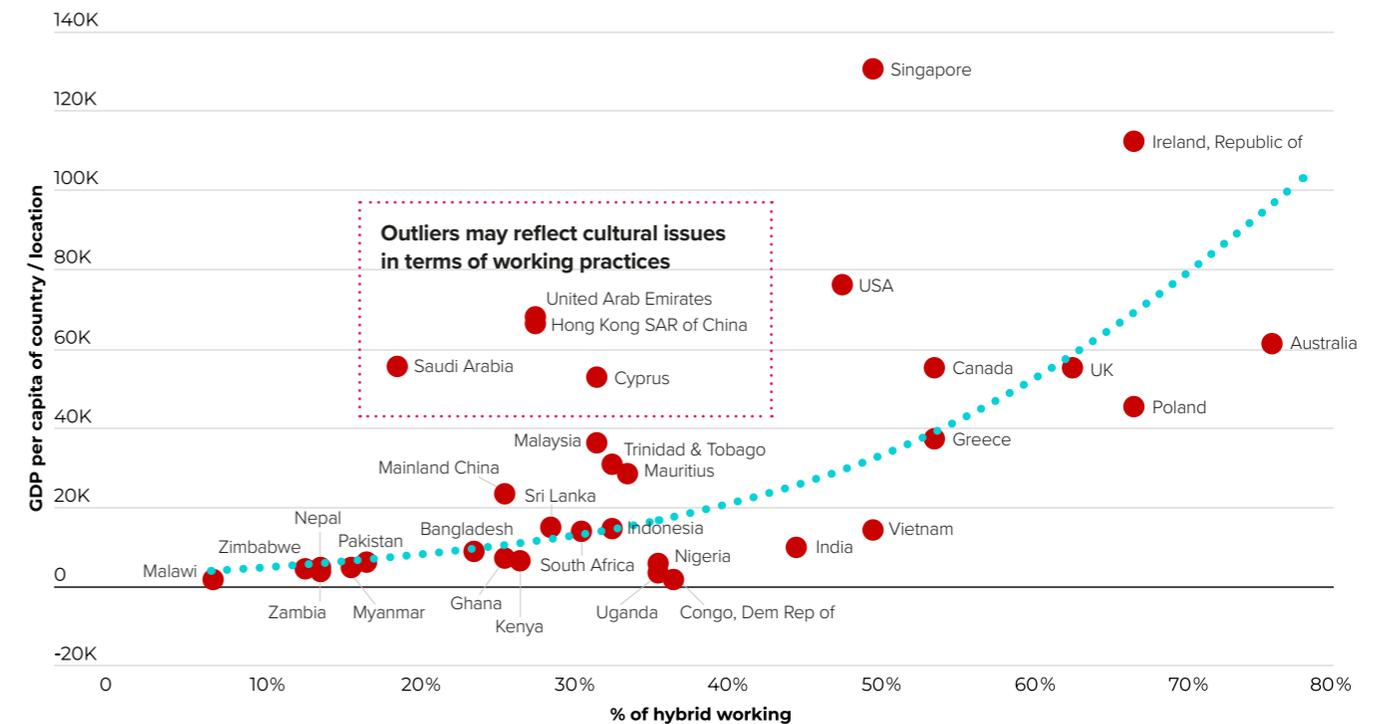
Currently, an estimated 82% of large US companies and 62% of all sized companies offer some work location flexibility; in the UK, 72% of employers offer total work location flexibility – with only 28% requiring staff to be in the office full time.¹

Proponents of hybrid working note it offers the best of both worlds to employers and employees alike – from improved productivity, improved engagement, lower absenteeism, improved collaboration and better retention. But, in the absence of longitudinal data, it may be too early to truly understand the different impacts of these emerging work constructs – it’s unlikely a ‘one size fits all’ model will work in all circumstances.



¹ Flex Index Report April 2024.

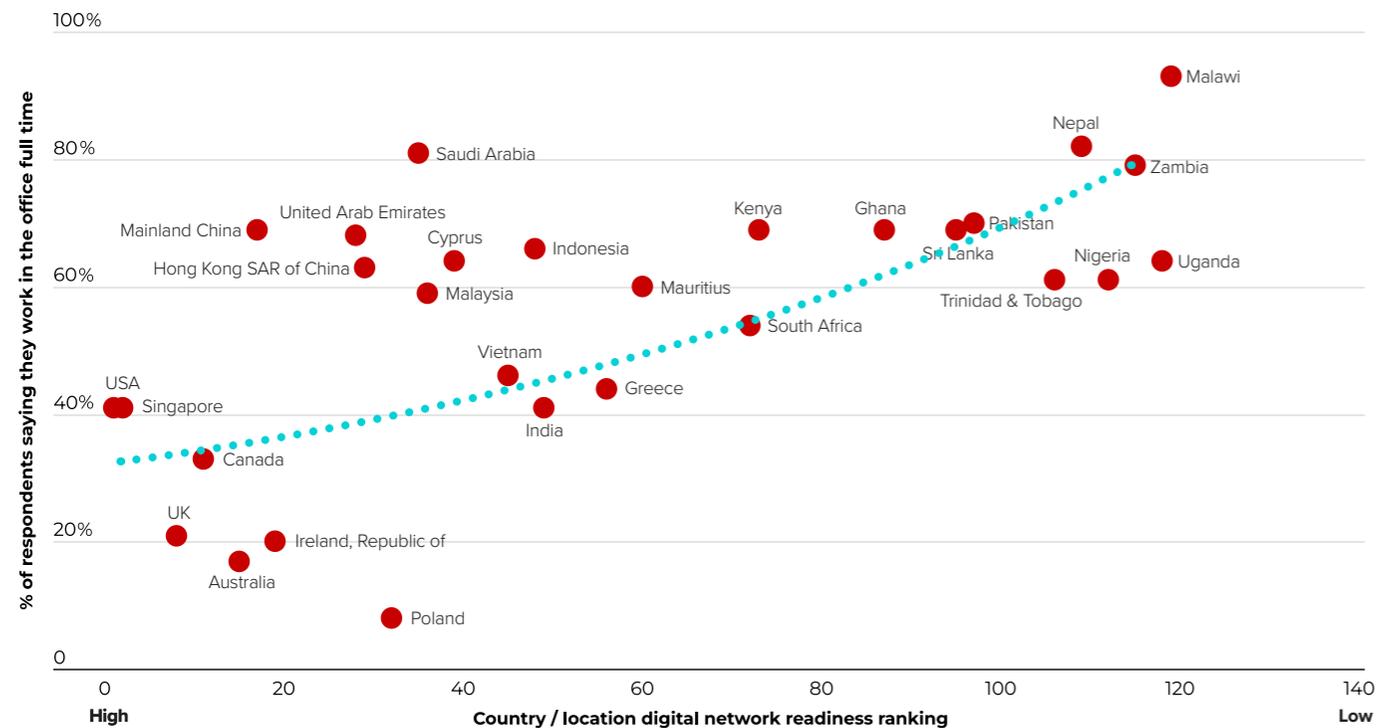
Hybrid working practices are more common as wealth increases, but some outliers may be culturally driven



Source: GDP information sourced from IMF estimates of GDP per capita at constant prices (purchasing power parity, 2021 international dollar).

‘There are also distinct regional and jurisdictional differences apparent in our data on actual working practices, which may reflect both cultural as well as technological and logistical reasons for different working arrangements in different parts of the world.’

Is full time office work related to challenging IT infrastructure in country / location?



Source: Network readiness index ranking produced by Portulans Institute and University of Oxford Said Business School.

‘Remote work is possible and sustainable. However, productivity is a general concern where the facilities, such as internet and power, are not up to standard to encourage remote work.’

Africa roundtable participant

Box 7:

Gen Z, remote working and audit quality – a headache for auditing firms?

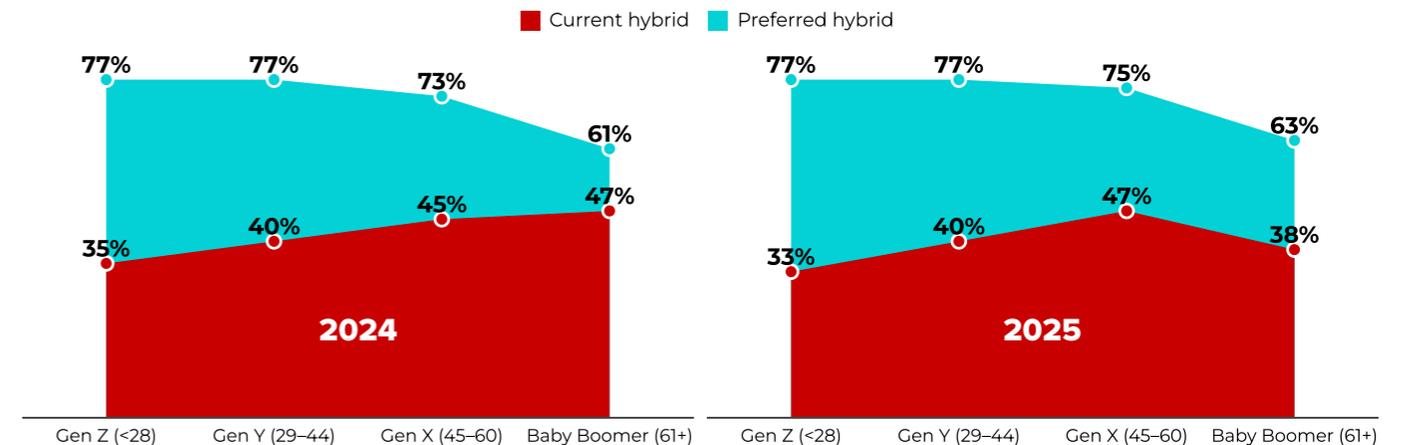
In September 2023, the US Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) undertook a review focused on organisation culture within US audit firms.² The primary objectives were to understand the factors that influence audit firm culture, and whether firm culture in turn had an impact on audit quality. Two issues stand out:

1. While talent loss is routinely identified by audit firms as potentially having adverse impacts on the quality of audits performed, the report cites how those firms with the highest percentage of partner respondents who started their careers in the same firm had lower audit deficiency rates – possibly linking retention success to audit quality.
2. Equally interesting, the survey also suggested the audit firms’ apprenticeship model, quality on-the-job training, progression opportunities, and a consistent culture have all been negatively impacted through remote work adoption. Indirectly, this could have an impact on audit quality too.

How audit firms should balance the need to ensure the highest audit quality standards while also attracting the next generation of talent – most of whom demand flexible and home working – remains to be seen.

² [PCAOB Staff Report on Audit Firm Culture Offers Considerations for Firms Looking To Improve Audit Quality | PCAOB](#)

Mind the gap? The preference for hybrid working is not being met across the generations of employees



Box 8:

Flexible working – will the ‘four-day’ working week ever be introduced to accountancy?

‘Flexible working’ ranks top of our list for desired interventions that employers can make to improve work-life balance. In practice it covers a range of options, from:

- part-time working
- job-sharing arrangements
- earlier start and finishing times
- compressed hours over a shorter number of days
- remote working.

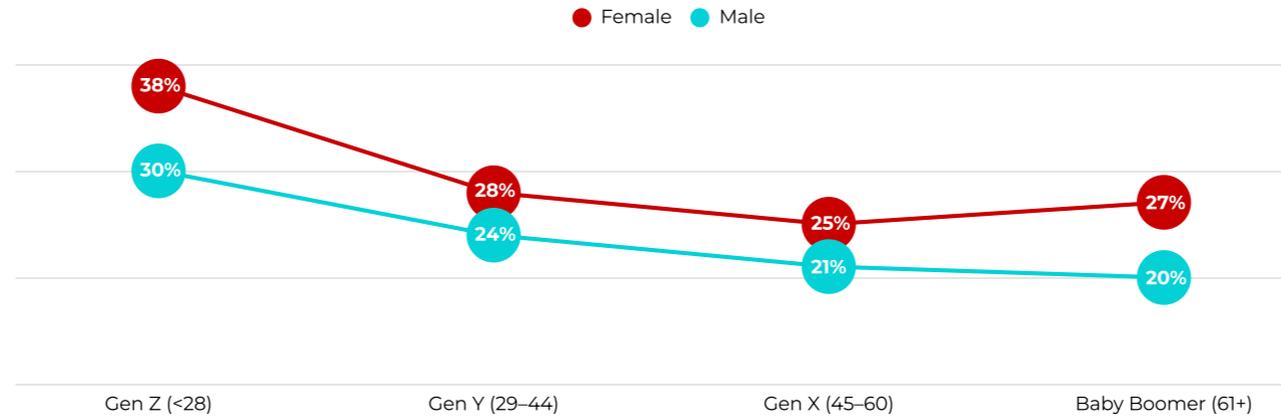
In recent years, significant interest has grown in the UK following the pilot of the ‘four-day working week’³ – a UK based trial comprising 61 companies and 2,900 employees in the latter half of 2022. Based on the 100:80:100 model (workers retain their full 100% weekly salary but reduce their hours to 80% while delivering the same amount of work outputs / productivity 100%) the initial results looked good – with both productivity and worker satisfaction increasing, although detractors caution on the impact on operational workflows and potential longer-term impacts on employees in terms of burn-out.

Across the world, other countries including Spain, Portugal, Belgium, Finland and Japan have now been introducing similar initiatives, and demand from employees appears to be growing. At the end of 2024, the UK introduced a new pilot to bench test different working patterns, exploring other forms of flexibility, such as differing start and finish times, compressed hours, and even nine-day fortnightly working. The results are expected mid-summer 2025. Whatever the future may hold, what is certain is that employee demands for greater flexibility in working patterns as work changes is likely here to stay.

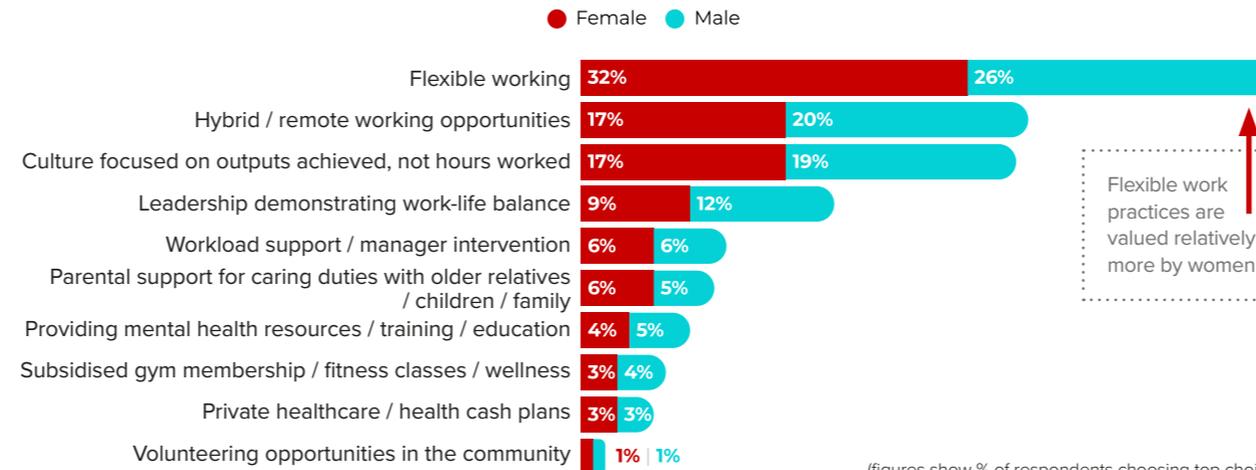
3 [Autonomy 2023](#)

It’s Gen Z who particularly seem to be demanding ‘flexible work’ as the most important benefit to improve work life balance

% of respondents who feel flexible working (eg part time, extended career breaks, 4-day week trials, job sharing) is the most important benefit an employer could provide to support a positive work-life balance



Men and women broadly agree on the most valuable interventions for improving work-life balance

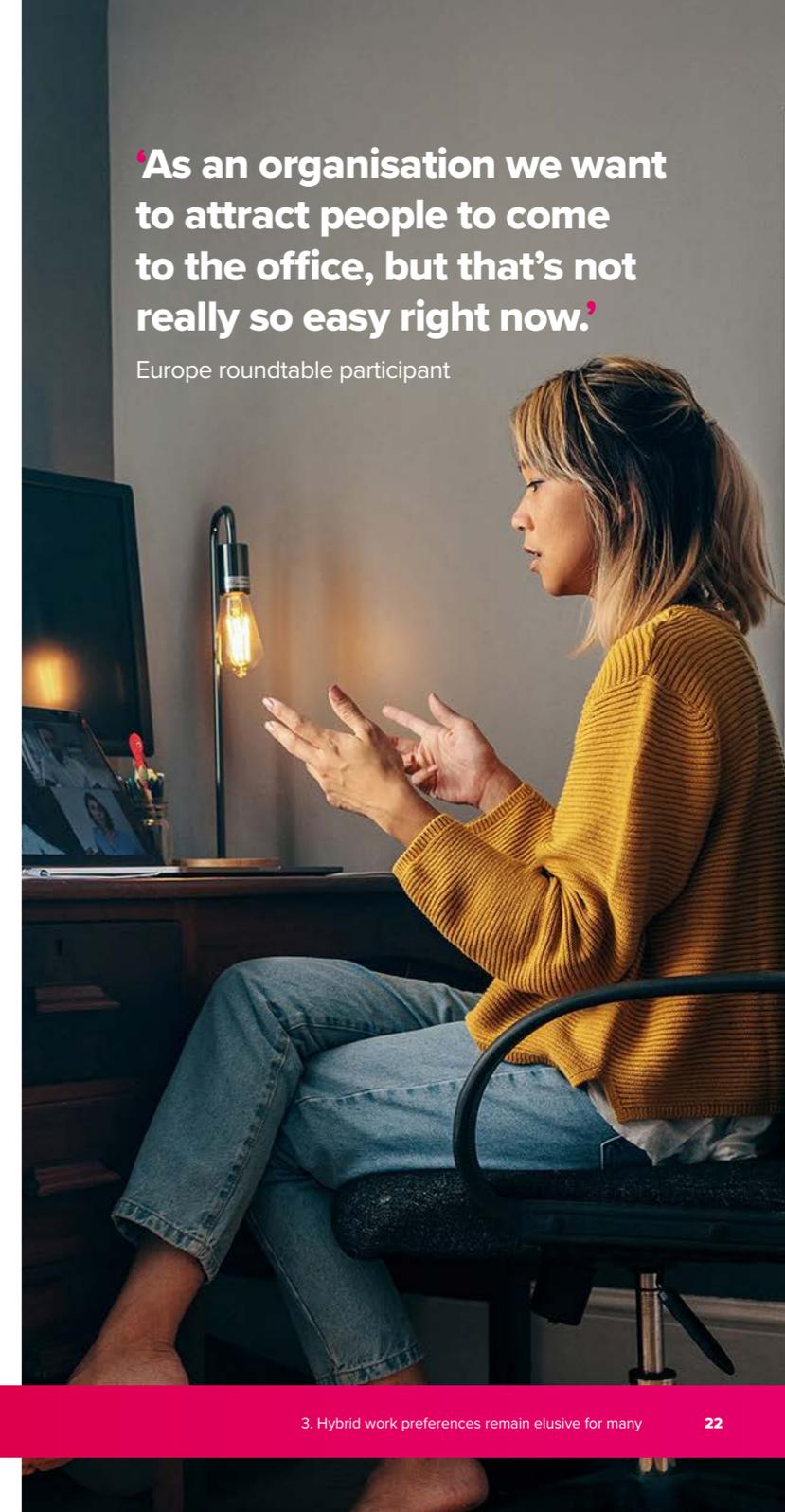


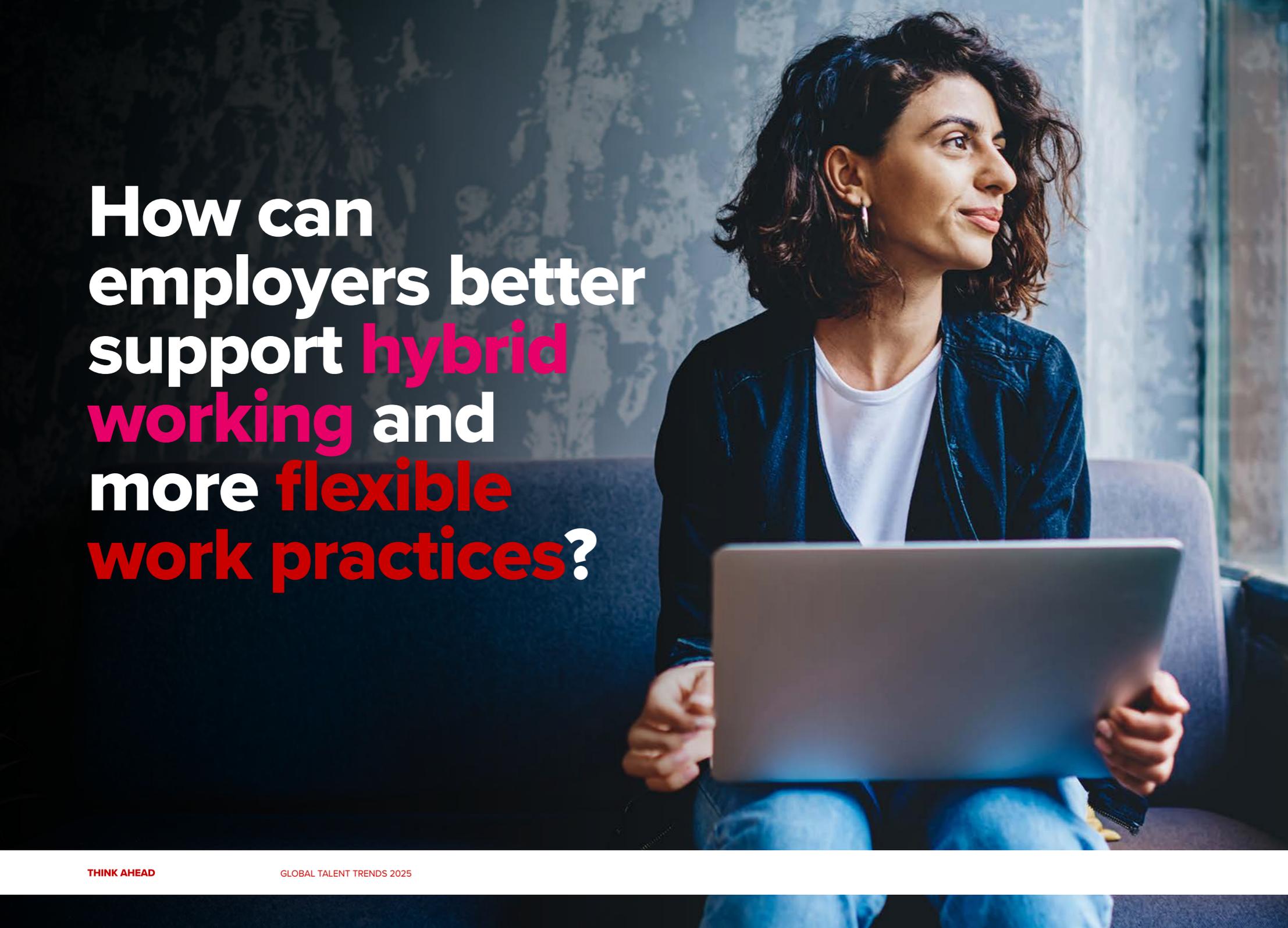
(figures show % of respondents choosing top choice)

Flexible work practices are valued relatively more by women

‘As an organisation we want to attract people to come to the office, but that’s not really so easy right now.’

Europe roundtable participant





How can employers better support hybrid working and more flexible work practices?

In our **Global Talent Trends 2025** survey, we explored thousands of comments, reflections and insights – using AI to crowdsource the best ideas that respondents have seen their employer introduce to support hybrid working and more flexible work practices.

Hybrid working models

- **Structured policies:** introducing formal hybrid models, typically requiring 2-3 days in the office each week provide clear guidance on expectations.
- **Customisable schedules:** if organisations consider giving employees the freedom to choose their remote-working days, they can accommodate personal circumstances like caregiving or health needs.
- **Anchor days:** team-focused office days can help foster collaboration and social connection.
- **Support for special circumstances:** some employers are offering full remote-working options for employees with long commutes, health challenges, or family responsibilities.

Work-life balance initiatives

- **Reducing workloads:** increased staffing levels and better workload management help prevent burnout and ensure fairer distribution of responsibilities.
- **Mental health support:** employers are introducing counselling services, mental health workshops, and well-being hours to promote emotional resilience, as well as placing boundaries on email times.
- **Skill development:** mentoring and training programmes provide opportunities for professional growth, improving morale, and retention.
- **Team engagement:** frequent catch-ups, in-person meetings, and team-building events strengthen relationships and improve collaboration.
- **Fun and recreation:** creative initiatives like sports days, social events, and hobby clubs encourage relaxation and reduce stress.



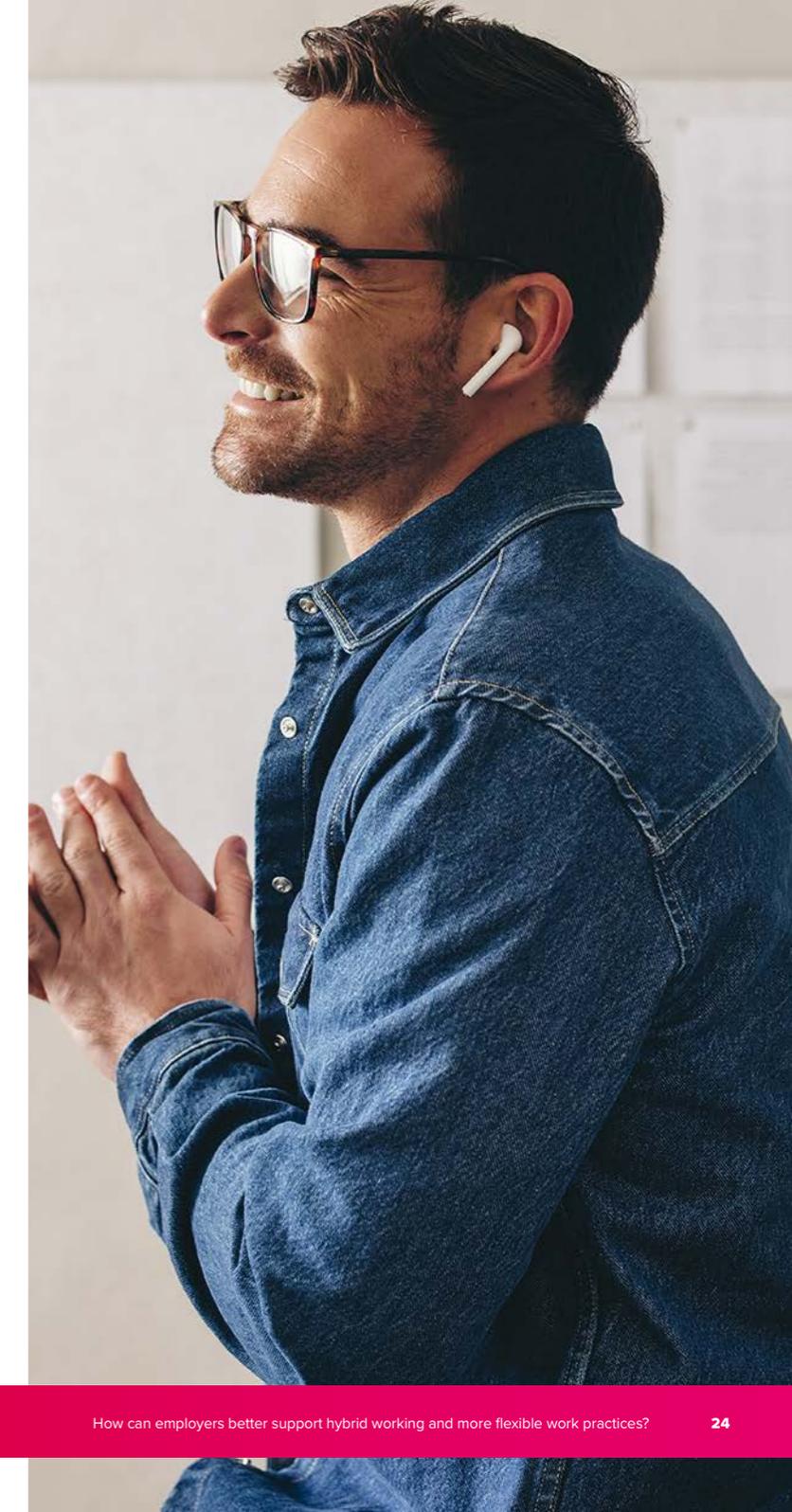
Empowering flexible work practices

- **Adjustable hours:** policies allowing employees to choose their start and end times ensure work aligns with personal routines and peak productivity – accommodating childcare, health concerns, or commuting challenges.
- **Compressed schedules:** four-day working weeks or reduced weekly hours help employees balance life and work without sacrificing output.
- **Outcome-based approaches:** employers focusing on results rather than hours worked foster trust and encourage independence.
- **Personalised policies:** flexibility extends to parental duties, caregiving, and other life demands – ensuring a supportive and inclusive environment.

Enhanced home working infrastructure

- **Tech investments:** laptops, monitors and virtual desktop solutions are enabling seamless productivity from home.
- **Ergonomic setups:** subsidies for desks, chairs and other equipment help employees create sustainable home offices.
- **Connectivity support:** internet reimbursements, data bundles, and VPNs ensure reliable access and secure communication.
- **Proactive IT services:** quick remote troubleshooting, software upgrades, and AI-driven solutions enhance efficiency and minimise downtime.
- **Hybrid-friendly systems:** dual setups, hot-desking, and portable equipment ensure smooth transitions between home and office.
- **Remote collaboration tools:** investments in platforms like Teams, SharePoint and cloud systems improve task-sharing and communication across dispersed teams.
- **Resource flexibility:** employers are funding home-office upgrades, alternative energy solutions (eg solar), and co-working spaces for employees with limited home setups.

‘Aside from the possible physical health benefits, there’s a growing body of data to suggest flexible work opportunities make employees happier and more engaged.’





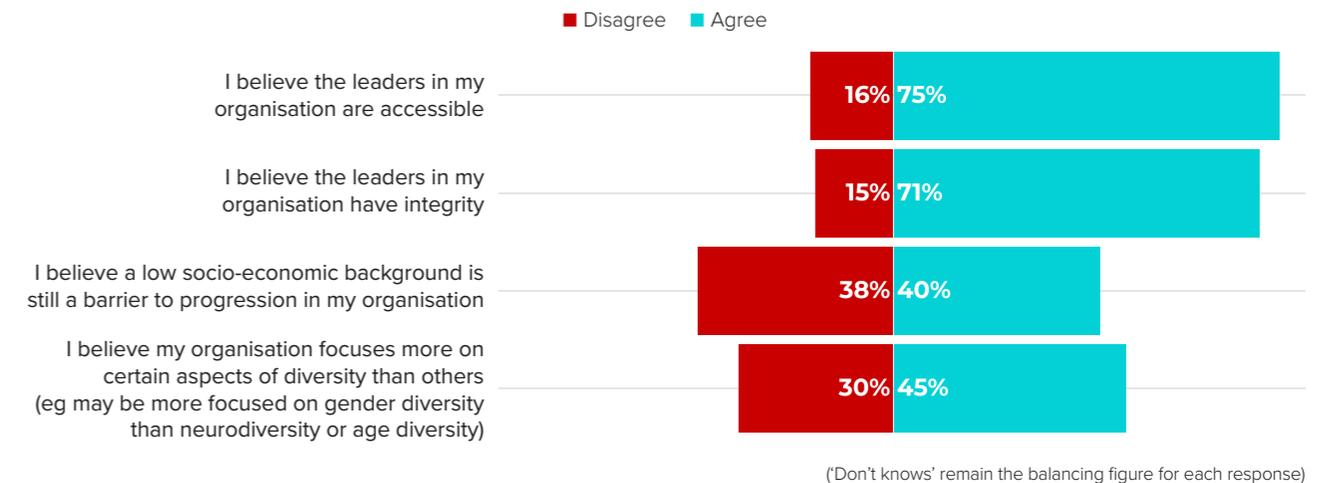
4. Ageism in accountancy?

■ Leadership inclusivity indicators score well.

More diverse workforces and inclusive work practices are commonly cited as helping organisations drive productivity. The common wisdom suggests inclusive teams make better decisions, are more engaged, more innovative, and operate in healthier work environments.

There's some good news from our own data on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) – with a broad consensus that organisations are inclusive, and that leaders demonstrate integrity (71% agree) and are accessible (75%). Our culture indicators from last year showed similar findings.

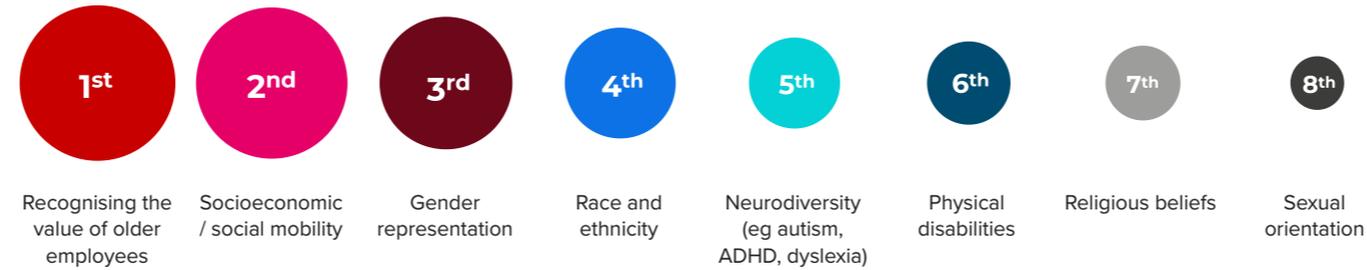
Some measures on EDI such as leadership are encouraging



‘Results on inclusivity and accessibility and concerns on being overly focused on certain markers of diversity are consistent across generations and job levels.’

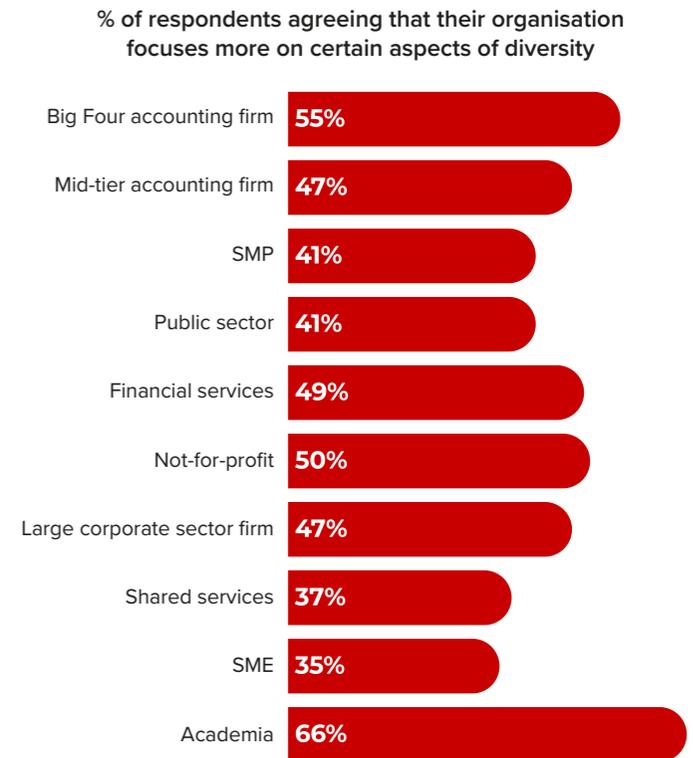
■ **Recognising the value of older workers is the biggest inclusivity concern.** There are major concerns that diversity initiatives are too narrowly focused – with almost half of respondents (45%) believing this is the case, but there are noticeable sectoral differences in response. Younger respondents also have the greatest concerns that different markers of diversity are not being treated equally. Perhaps most surprisingly, it's recognising the value of older workers that tops the list of where diversity initiatives are felt to be falling short. This should serve as a wake-up call for employers to promote workforce change – transforming career patterns and trajectories, and skills shortages in many jurisdictions as economies transition. Multi-generational workforces are productive and innovative, and older employees are likely easier to retain for a variety of reasons.

Recognising the value of older employees was identified as the area where organisations need to make greater progress on diversity*



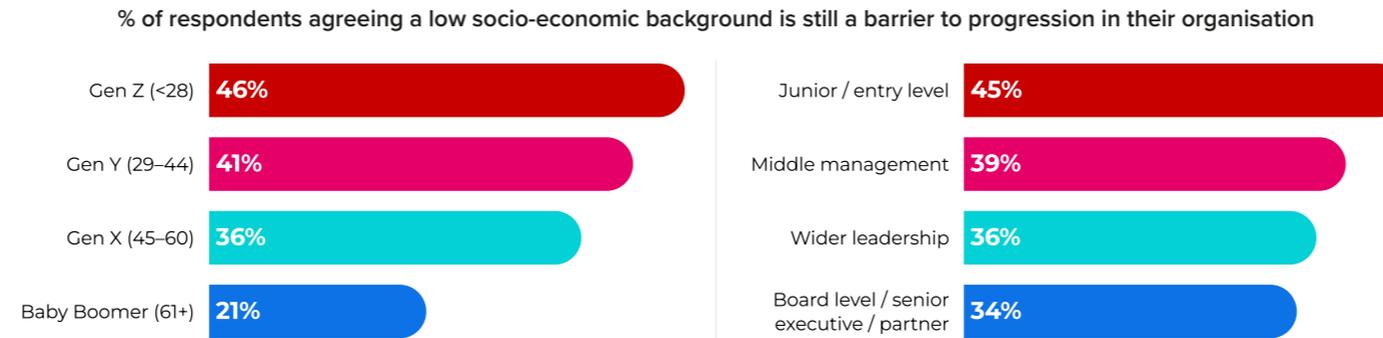
* Respondents were asked to choose only one marker of diversity where they thought greater progress needed to be made.

Perceptions on the extent to which organisations focus more on certain aspects of diversity than others vary across sectors

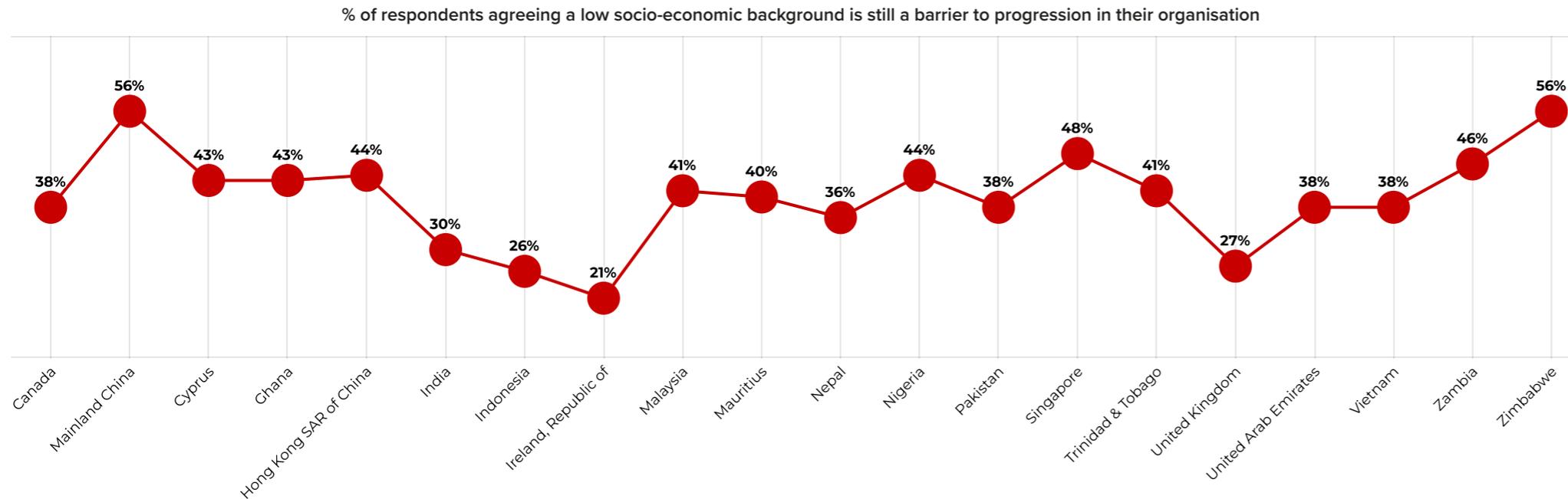


■ **Social mobility remains a concern for many.** Not all of our EDI indicators are so encouraging. Social mobility concerns continue to be evident, particularly among younger and less experienced respondents in our data – with **46%** of Gen Z respondents citing concerns. There are also stark differences across different regions and countries. Social mobility concerns also score second highest when respondents are asked which markers of diversity need greater attention in their organisations. This is set against a backdrop where some organisations have sought to introduce recruitment and career development interventions to address social mobility barriers for many years now.

Social mobility concerns are still evident, particularly with younger and more junior respondents



Concerns on social mobility vary widely by different countries / locations



Why the older workforce in accountancy should matter to employers

One thing we all have in common is ageing. So, it's disappointing that our survey respondents cited 'recognising the value of older employees' as the area in need of greatest progress in terms of diversity. It's disconcerting – but also a valuable insight for employers.

Demographic changes – including falling birthrates in many countries, rising retirement ages, and people living longer, healthier lives – mean the global workforce is growing older all the time. A [global study](#) by consultancy Bain & Company predicts that 150m jobs will shift to workers over the age of 55 by 2030 and, according to insurer [Allianz](#), 30% of the global workforce will be 50 or older by 2050.

Yet ageism – against both older and younger members of the workforce – continues to be a problem. In fact, [research](#) by the World Health Organisation (WHO) suggests that every second person in the world holds ageist attitudes.

With fewer younger people entering the workforce, employers will need to be proactive with recruiting and retaining older workers in the future, or risk losing out in the war for talent. They must be able to tap into the talent pool of older people, both to fill their skills gaps and ensure that critical knowledge is passed on to younger generations.

Sally Percy, journalist

To engage with older workers, employers can offer flexible working and encourage them to act as mentors to younger colleagues. Like other members of the workforce, older workers should be equipped with essential digital skills and offered career pathways that enable them to continue learning and progressing within their organisation.

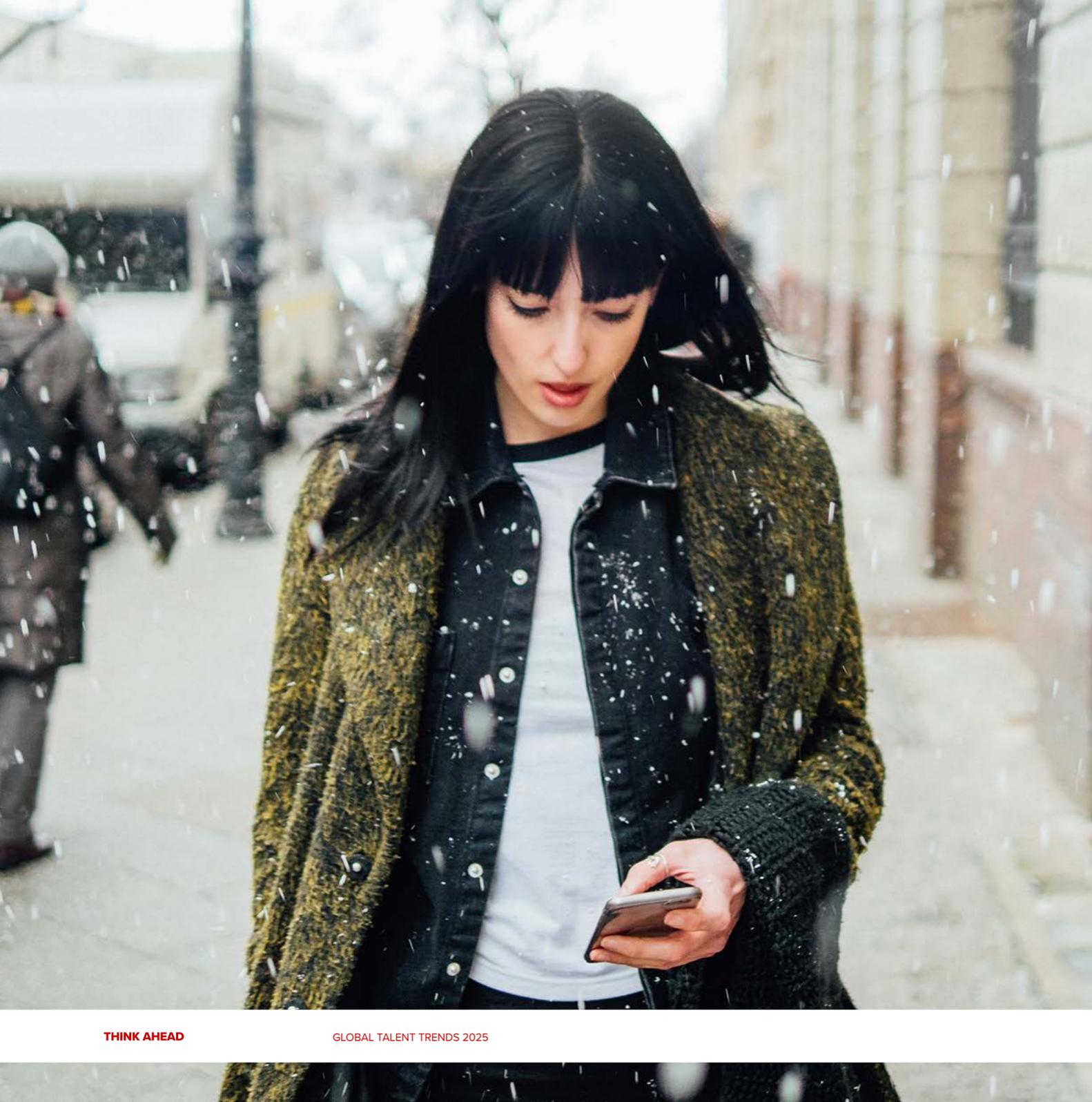
Training can help to address the issue of unconscious bias, which can prevent older workers from achieving their potential while feeling that their contributions are valued. Employers should also consider possible incentives that might spur people to work beyond retirement age.

[Research](#) by Korn Ferry predicts that by 2030, more than 85m jobs globally will be unfilled because there are not enough skilled people to take them. Meanwhile, many people lack the financial security to enjoy a comfortable retirement – so, it's in the interests of both employers and employees that older people remain active members of the workforce. Age should not hold anyone back.

Almost half of respondents this year suggest their organisation continues to focus more on certain aspects of diversity than others* (up from 41% in 2024)



* eg may be more focused on gender diversity than neurodiversity or age diversity.

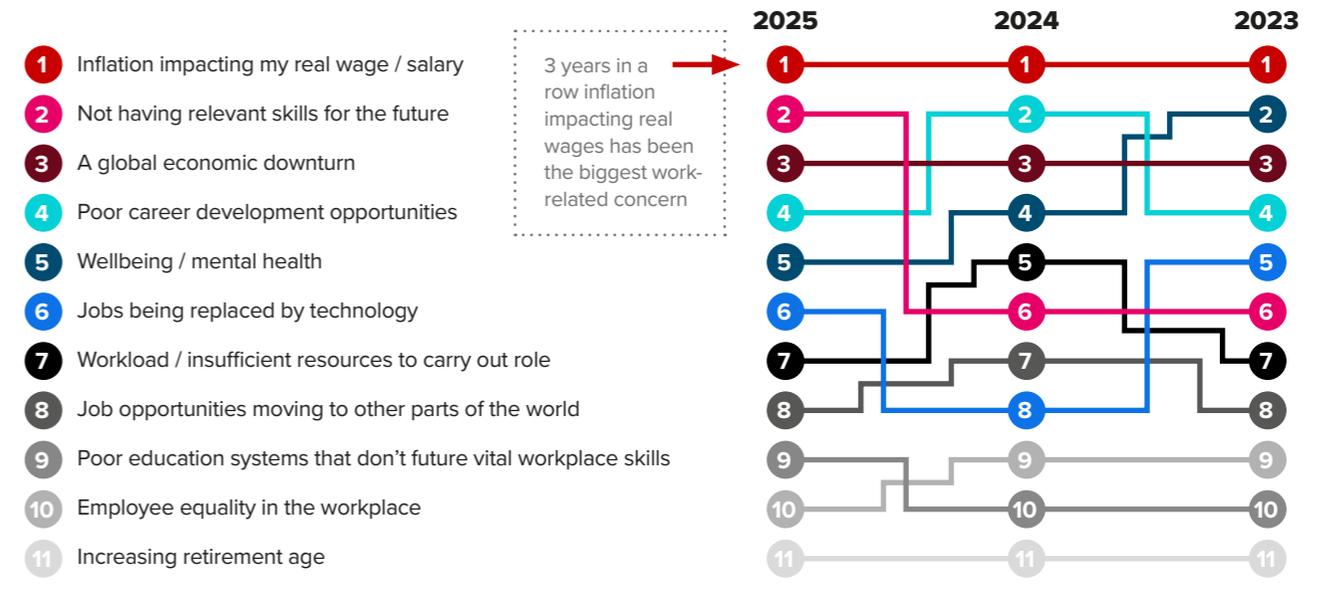


5. Cost of living continues to top our 'workplace fears' index

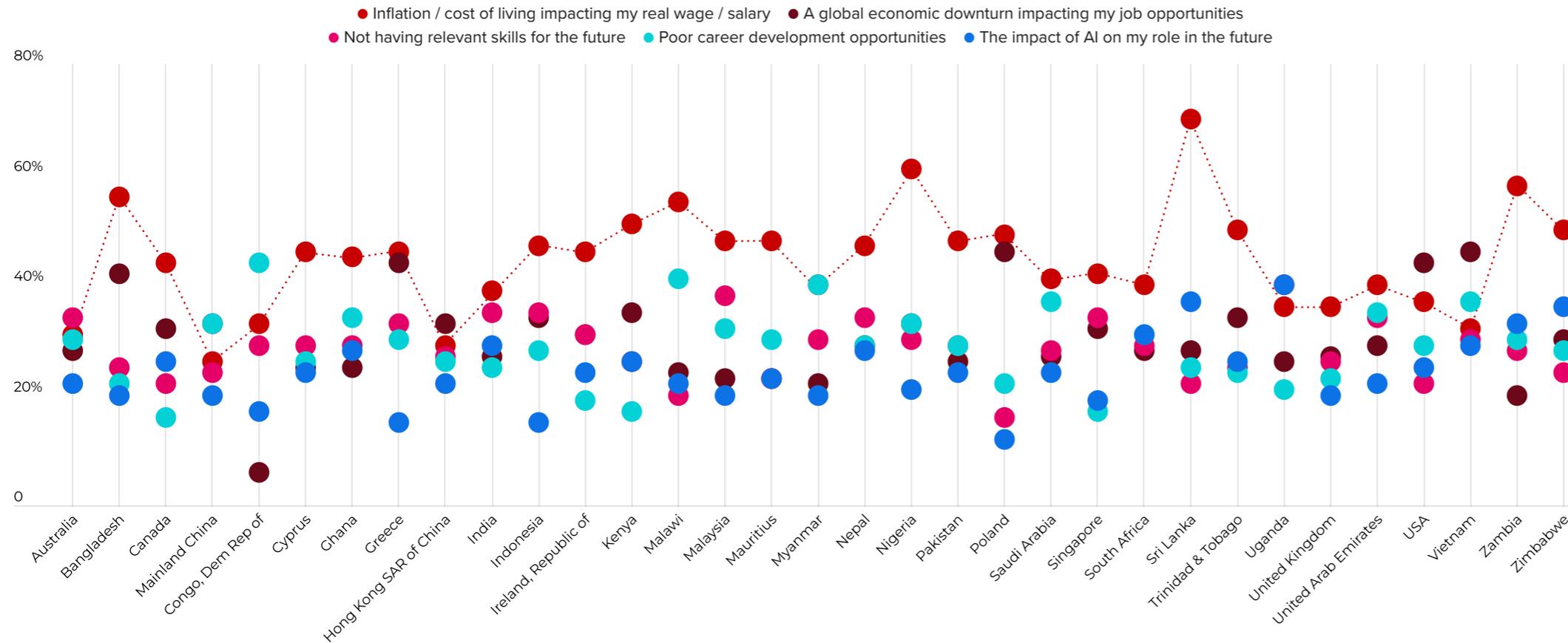
■ **The cost of living crisis isn't over.** It's now three consecutive years that concerns over the cost of living impacting real wages tops our workplace fears index – continuing to place significant pressure on organisations trying to manage salary costs. Headline inflation rates have broadly responded to the tighter monetary policy initiatives evident from central banks in some of the world's

major economies during 2023 and into 2024, yet many survey respondents continue to express serious concerns that current compensation levels are not enough. Universally across our data, cost of living tops respondents' concerns – irrespective of the sector in which they work – and its identified as the biggest workplace concern in the vast majority of countries in the world.

The biggest work-related work concerns for the future



Inflation / cost of living impacting my real wage, is the biggest work-related concern for the future



‘Inflation and expected price rises top of the priority list for us. We try to engage in upfront negotiations and management with the unions. And where pay and salaries may not compensate, we try to think about all of the other benefits.’

Americas roundtable participant



■ **Wage demands continue to rise.** The concern around cost of living is also reflected in wage demands – having both a direct and indirect effect. It's creating significant challenges to organisation budgets and retention strategies in 2025. This year, over half of respondents (52%) are expecting to ask their employer for a pay rise – with 41% expecting at least an 11% pay rise.

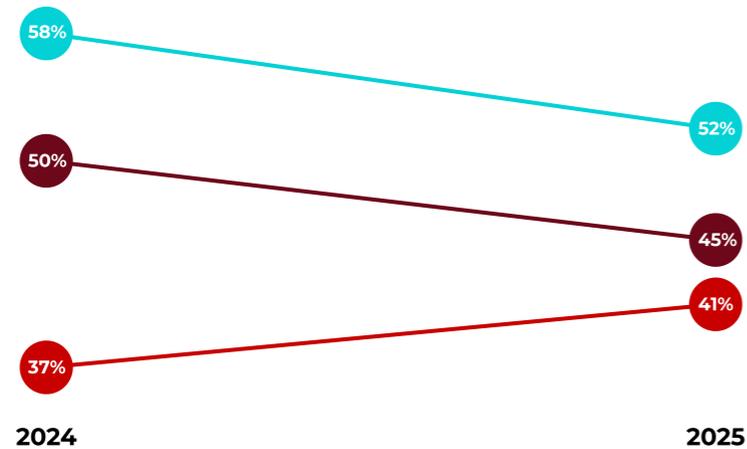
Men and younger respondents are the most demanding in their expectations. Almost half of respondents (45%) believe the best way to improve their salary is to leave their current organisation. It's no surprise perhaps that 58% expect their next career move to be external – with improved salary cited as the second highest reason for leaving.

‘The inflation challenge has changed salary expectations. This also triggered another thing – people really wanted to change jobs if they didn’t get that (pay) raise in six months. The retention rates are also going down.’

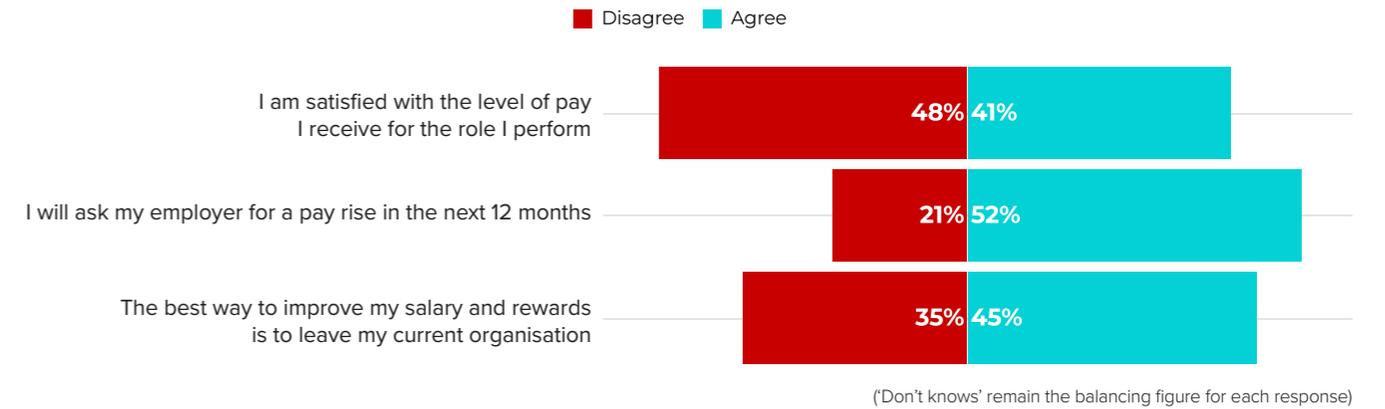
Middle East and Eurasia roundtable participant

Indicators on salary levels have improved slightly but challenges are still evident for employers

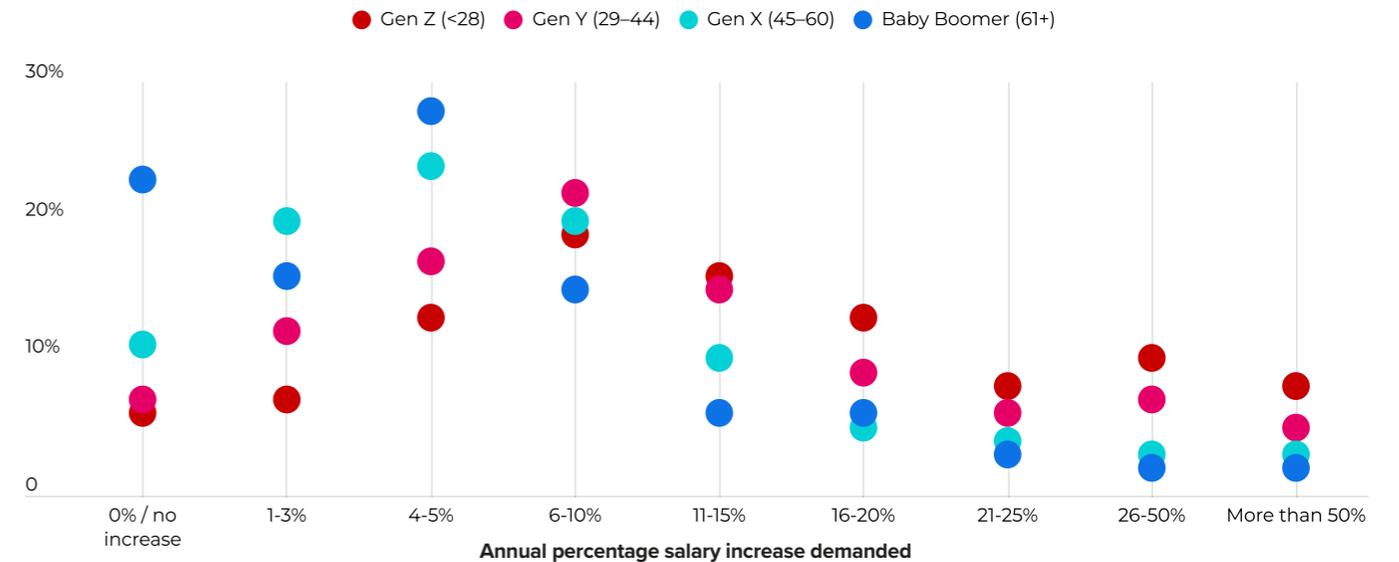
● I am satisfied with the level of pay I receive for the role I perform ● I will ask my employer for a pay rise in the next 12 months
● The best way to improve my salary and rewards is to leave my current organisation



The majority of respondents to our survey are still not satisfied with salaries – creating more retention challenges for employers



Are the pay rises demanded by employees, particularly younger members of the workforce, realistic?



Box 9:

Big Four accounting firms face the most acute wage pressures, but salary dissatisfaction isn't necessarily leading to higher retention risk

The Big Four accounting firms are facing different employee engagement challenges, but it's pay demands which have consistently emerged most acutely over the last three years.

Respondents from the Big Four accounting firms are least pleased with their pay compared with any other sector – a remarkable **58%** expect at least an **11%** pay rise next year, with over a quarter (**28%**) expecting at least a **21%** rise. This dwarfs the pay demands being made across other sectors, and improved salary is easily the most important factor cited by those suggesting their next career move is external.

Yet we shouldn't necessarily be surprised by this finding. The proportion of Gen Z respondents from Big Four organisations versus any other sector is significantly higher – a reflection of the workforce structures within the larger accounting firms.

Pay rise demands in the Big Four far outstrip other sectors, and are putting huge pressures on pay increase expectations in all sectors

While improving salaries is easily cited as the key reason for respondents being tempted to move to a different organisation, interestingly, likely retention rates (reflected by the proportion of individuals who expect their next career move to be external to their current organisation) for Big Four respondents compare favourably to other sectors – a fact more remarkable given the higher proportion of Gen Z respondents.

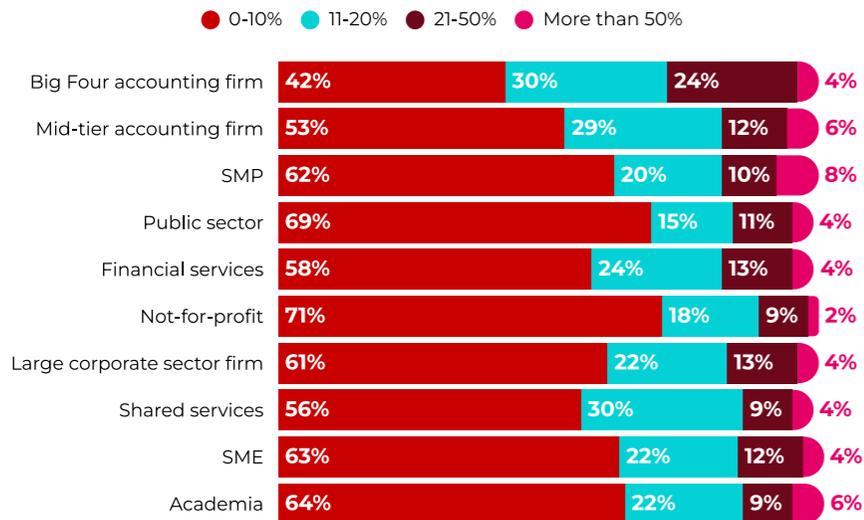
Similarly, with the mental health challenges cited by Big Four respondents, there's a sense in our data that Gen Z realise some of the real benefits that Big Four accounting experience brings, particularly around career opportunities and learning.

Ambitions to move externally are primarily driven by two key factors – improved career opportunities and improved salary

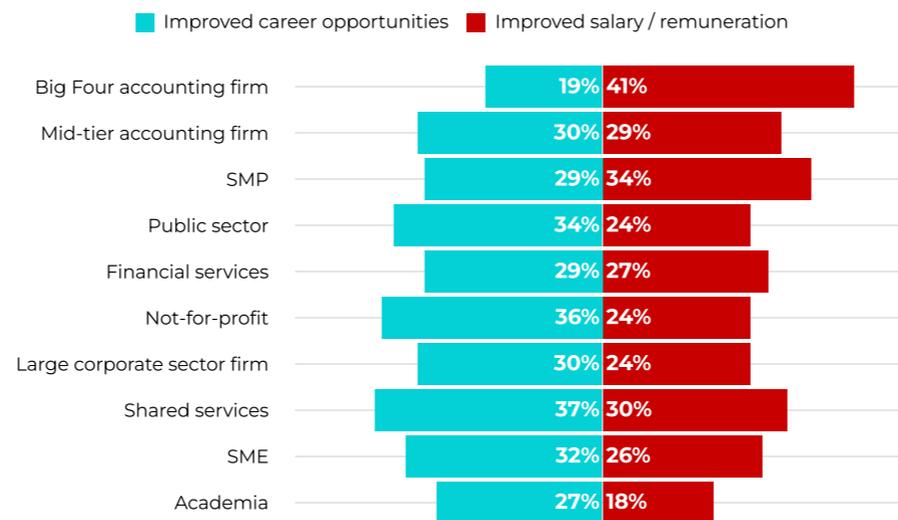
Respondents from the Big Four firms have the least concerns about not developing the skills they need for the future workplace, and are way out in front when it comes to being provided with specific opportunities by the organisation to learn AI skills. They are also more likely to pursue roles that help organisations, or their clients respond to sustainability and climate change issues. In terms of career barriers, it's salary and mental health challenges that are cited as the top two issues for Big Four respondents.

The Big Four accounting firms score relatively well on retention, even given the high number of Gen Z respondents to our survey from the Big Four

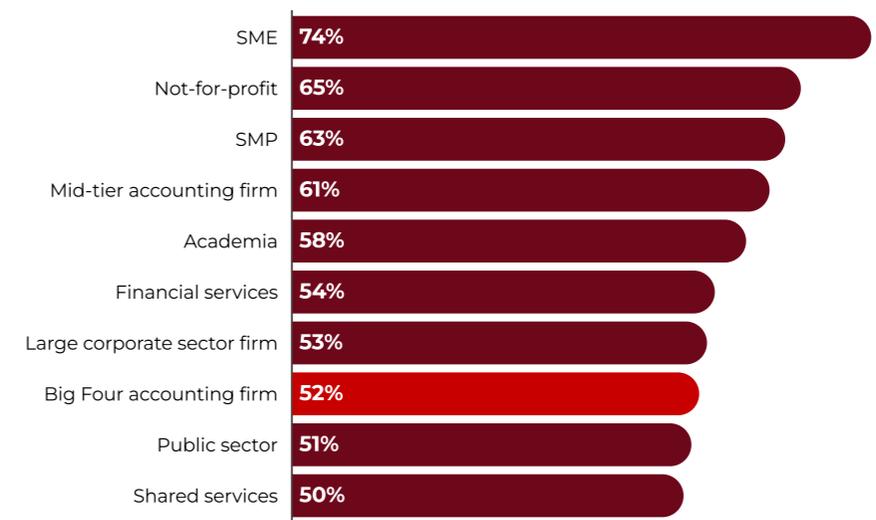
The minimum pay rise I would expect from my employer in the next 12 months



Improved salary is the top reason for wanting to move externally from Big Four firms



% agreeing their next move is external to their current organisation



Box 10:

World Economic Forum Future of Jobs 2025 report identifies rising cost of living as the second highest macrotrend driving business transformation

'The 2024 economic performance was marked by a global decrease in inflation and an unusually resilient economy throughout the disinflationary process. While easing inflation and loosening monetary policy offers some optimism, slow growth and political volatility keep many countries at risk of economic shocks.'

'The International Monetary Fund (IMF) projects growth to hold steady at 3.2% in 2025, despite sizable downward growth revisions in a few economies, particularly low-income developing ones. Despite this comparatively steady outlook, price pressures persist in many economies. Inflation remains particularly high in services – at almost twice pre-pandemic levels – and is especially persistent in low-income countries. These countries are disproportionately affected by rising inflationary pressures because of elevated food prices due to supply disruptions influenced by climate shocks, regional conflicts, and geopolitical tensions.'

'Against this backdrop, companies expect economic pressures to be among the most transformative drivers. The figure below shows rising cost of living remains a top concern – with half of all surveyed employers expecting it to drive transformation, making it the second-most influential trend. Slower economic growth is also a major concern – with 42% of respondents expecting it to impact their operations.'

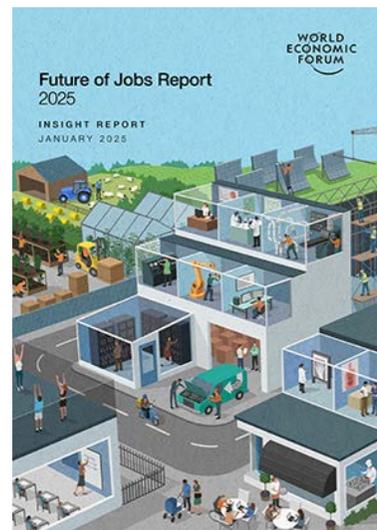
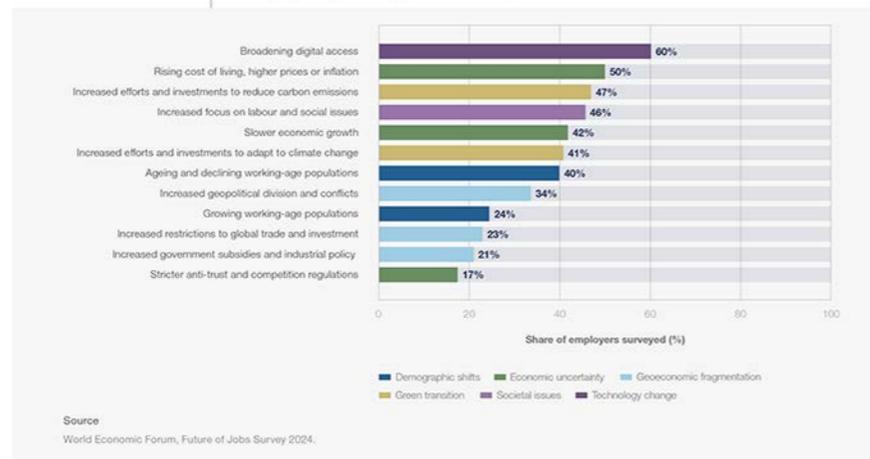
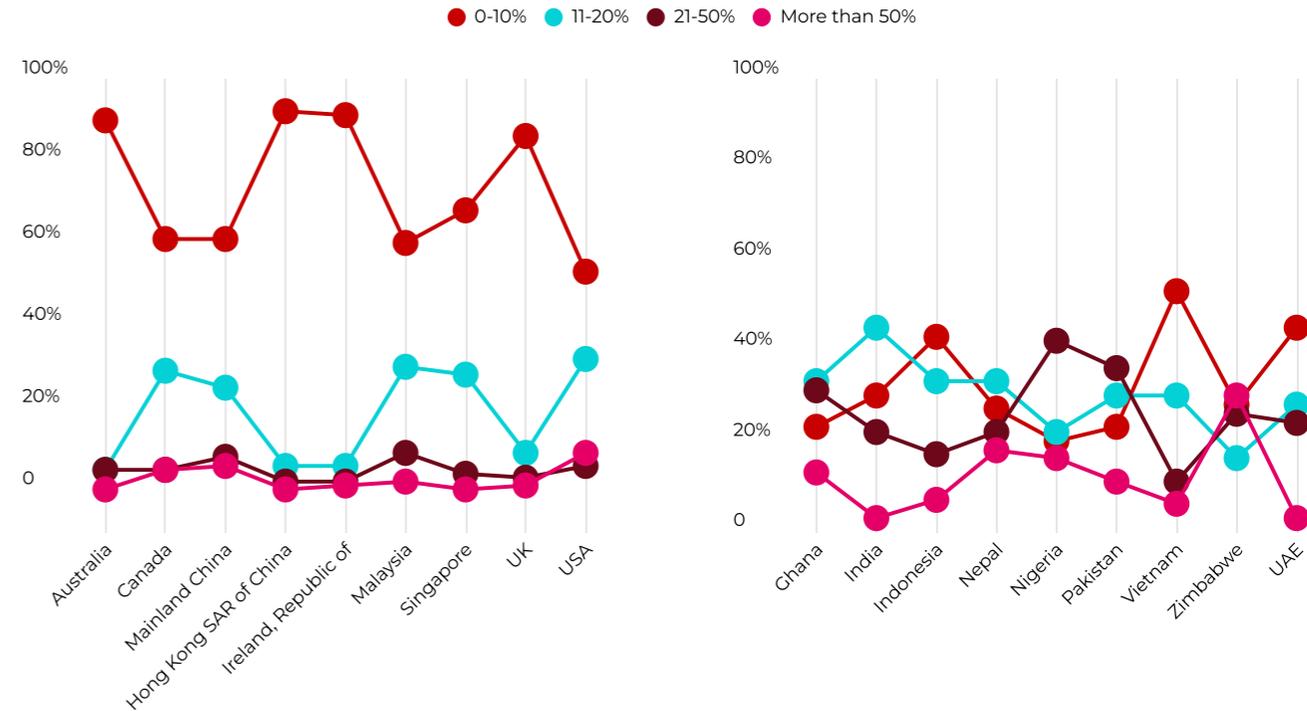


FIGURE 1.1 Macrotrends driving business transformation
Share of employers surveyed that identify the stated trend as likely to drive business transformation.



Source: World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Survey 2024.

Pay rise expectations in developed countries / locations are generally more conservative than in developing nations



Many continue to be worried about the cost of living – particularly those in the most junior roles



Box 11:

Inflation in 2025?

Inflation impacting my 'real wage/salary' remained the top work-related concern for the third consecutive year in 2025. This is despite the fact that, after surging in 2021 and 2022, inflation continued to improve across much of the world in 2024 and is now at or close to central bank targets in a number of countries.

Continued concerns on this front likely reflect that nominal wage gains in recent years in some countries may not have sufficiently compensated for the surge in inflation, as well as ongoing difficulties caused by the high cost of living in many countries (housing, food, energy prices etc).

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD),⁴ while real disposable income per head in Q2 2024 was above its pre-pandemic level in most advanced economies, it remains below levels associated with a continuation of pre-pandemic trends in over two-fifths of countries. Meanwhile, the OECD highlights the sensitivity of consumer confidence to changes in food and energy prices – whose inflation outstripped the growth of nominal disposable incomes in around half of the advanced economies between Q4 2019 and Q3 2024.

Given that food and energy typically constitute a much higher share of consumer spending in emerging and developing economies, large gains in their prices have likely had a significant negative impact on real incomes in these countries.

Ultimately, despite the continued improvement in the inflation picture across much of the world, it's clear that the high cost of living remains a major concern for global accountants. Moreover, the overall importance of economic-related concerns is reinforced by the fact that a 'global economic downturn' remains the third biggest concern for three consecutive years. With global trade tensions intensifying in recent months, economic-related concerns look set to remain prominent in next year's survey.

Jonathan Ashworth, ACCA Chief Economist



⁴ <https://www.oecd.org/en/publications/2024/12/oecd-economic-outlook-volume-2024-issue-2_67bb8fac.html>

6 **Ultimately, despite the continued improvement in the inflation picture across much of the world, it's clear that the high cost of living remains a major concern for global accountants.**

Jonathan Ashworth, ACCA Chief Economist





‘To foster a work environment where people can be creative and can do something outside the box is very important.’

Asia Pacific roundtable participant

6. Is AI upskilling in the workplace falling short?

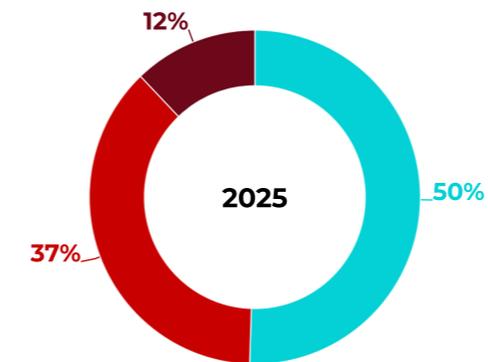
■ **Not having the right skills in the future is a major concern for individuals.** As work transforms in accountancy, the technology narrative is shifting from automation to augmentation. We can expect continued routine task displacement due to technological advances, but the real promise of AI tools for accountants is greater innovation, productivity and insight provision.

Enhanced human capabilities such as critical thinking, creativity, big picture and systems thinking, will complement technology and business change. Yet our data also presents a concern – with exactly half of respondents (**50%**) suggesting they believe they are not developing the skills needed for the future workplace.

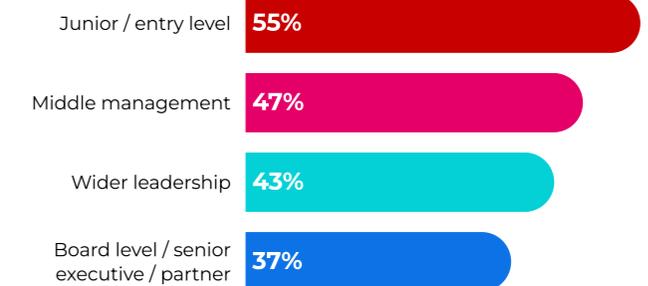
Significant concerns are identified in terms of a possible skills gap for the future, particularly from more junior respondents

% concerned they are not developing the skills they need for the future, overall

● Agree ● Disagree ● Don't know



% concerned they are not developing the skills they need for the future, by level of role



■ **AI is a skills area causing major concern.**

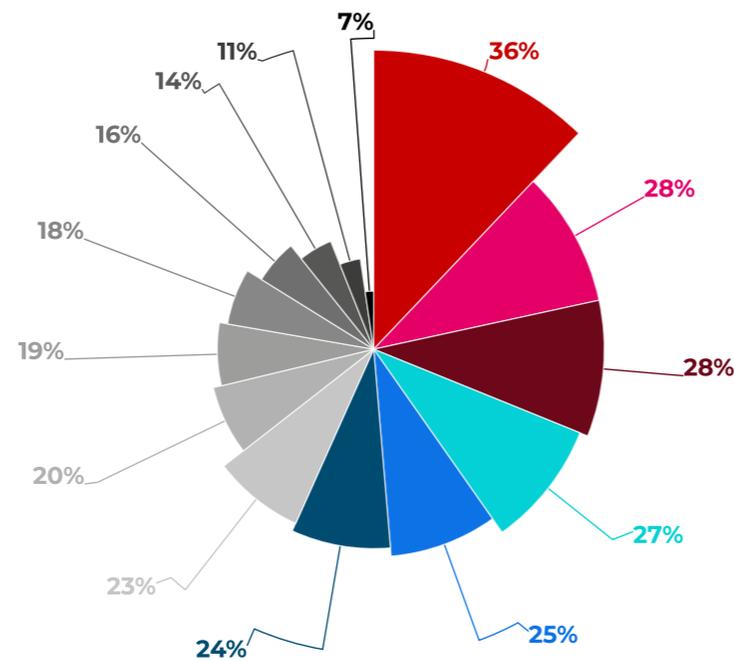
Unsurprisingly, it's AI capabilities where respondents feel particularly exposed, but AI is also identified as the most valuable workplace skill needed. In our survey, **38%** suggest they are not confident in their knowledge of AI – with many citing insufficient opportunities to learn more about being a key barrier to skills development. Almost half (**44%**) have concerns about the impact of AI on their own roles, yet there is also broad confidence cited in being able to apply and learn AI skills.

■ **Younger employees are more concerned about technology change and AI adoption.**

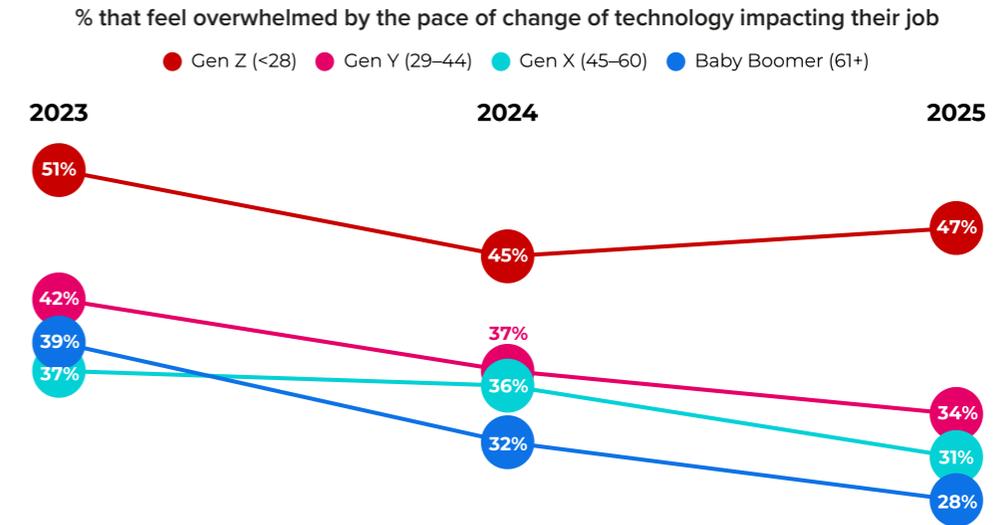
It's the younger and more junior respondents who are most concerned about not developing the skills for the future, the pace of technology change, and the impact of AI on their own roles. Younger peoples' concerns on technology are consistent with those that have emerged over the last three years. Only **30%** of Gen Y respondents and **27%** from Gen X – a core constituency of the workforce – suggest their employer is currently providing upskilling opportunities in AI. There are huge sector disparities in our data too.

Top 10 identified most valuable skills for the future (Net top 3 ranked)

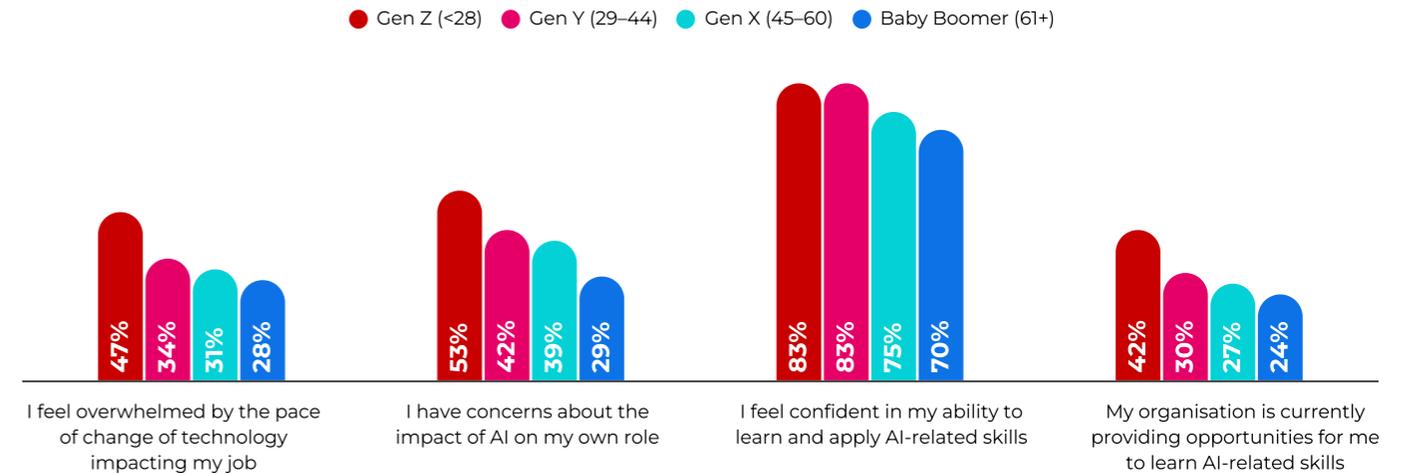
- Artificial intelligence (AI) proficiency
- Strategy and big picture thinking
- Data analytical skills
- Problem solving skills
- Technology / systems understanding
- Adaptability and change orientation
- Leadership skills
- Relationship building and team skills
- Communication and story telling
- Resilience and stress management
- Creativity and ideation
- Emotional intelligence
- Entrepreneurial skills
- Working across different cultures



Younger respondents have consistently indicated greater concerns on the pace of technology change



Younger respondents more concerned on technology, but more confident around upskilling in technology



Box 12:

Upskilling in AI – are employers failing to live up to the promise?

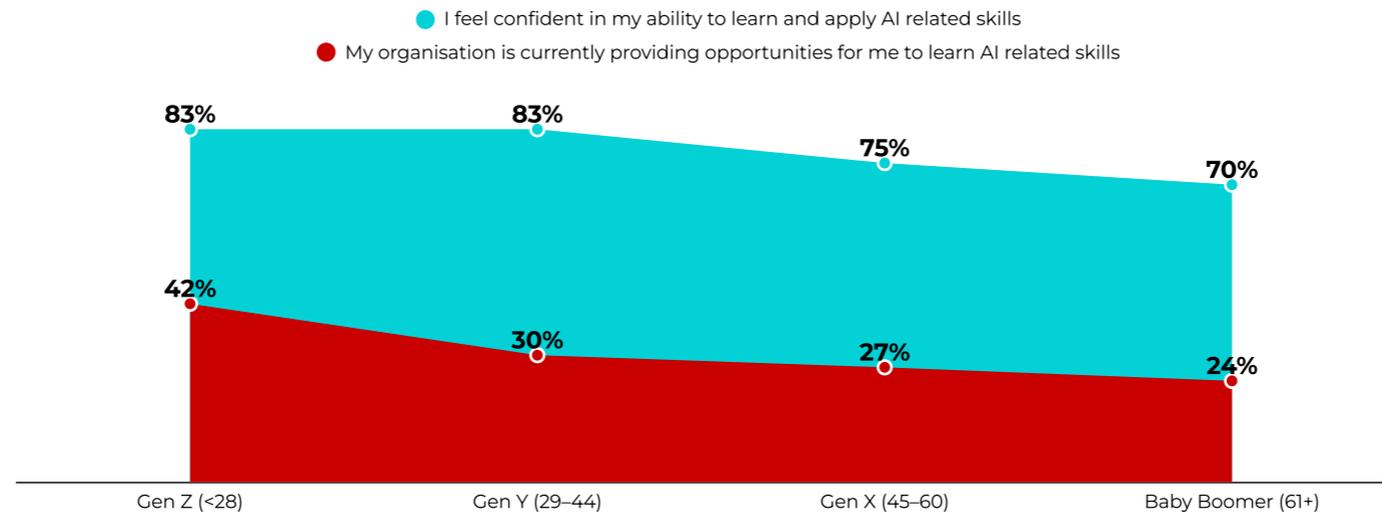
There are two sides to this story in our data. Concerns on technology continue to be evident in our survey findings, particularly with the younger generation who may feel it's their jobs that are most likely to be impacted by the acceleration of AI in the workplace.

Yet, at the same time, although many are confident in their ability to acquire new AI skills, opportunities to gain these – whether through workplace learning, or more formal classroom-based opportunities – are less apparent for many employees. While some of our youngest respondents (42%) appear confident that they're getting opportunities provided by their organisation to learn AI related skills, this significantly tails off for the rest of the workforce. This asks the question – are organisations focusing their AI training efforts on their youngest employees only?

'When people think about job losses due to AI, the risk isn't people losing their jobs to AI, it's losing their job to somebody else who knows how to use AI. That is going to be a much greater displacement.'

Hadi Partovi, Founder / CEO, Code.org

Significant concerns on AI upskilling

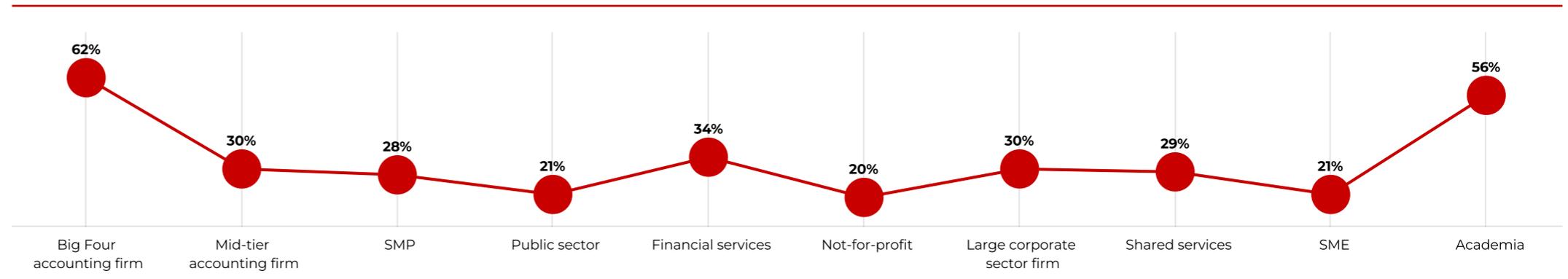


What is stopping you feel confident with AI?

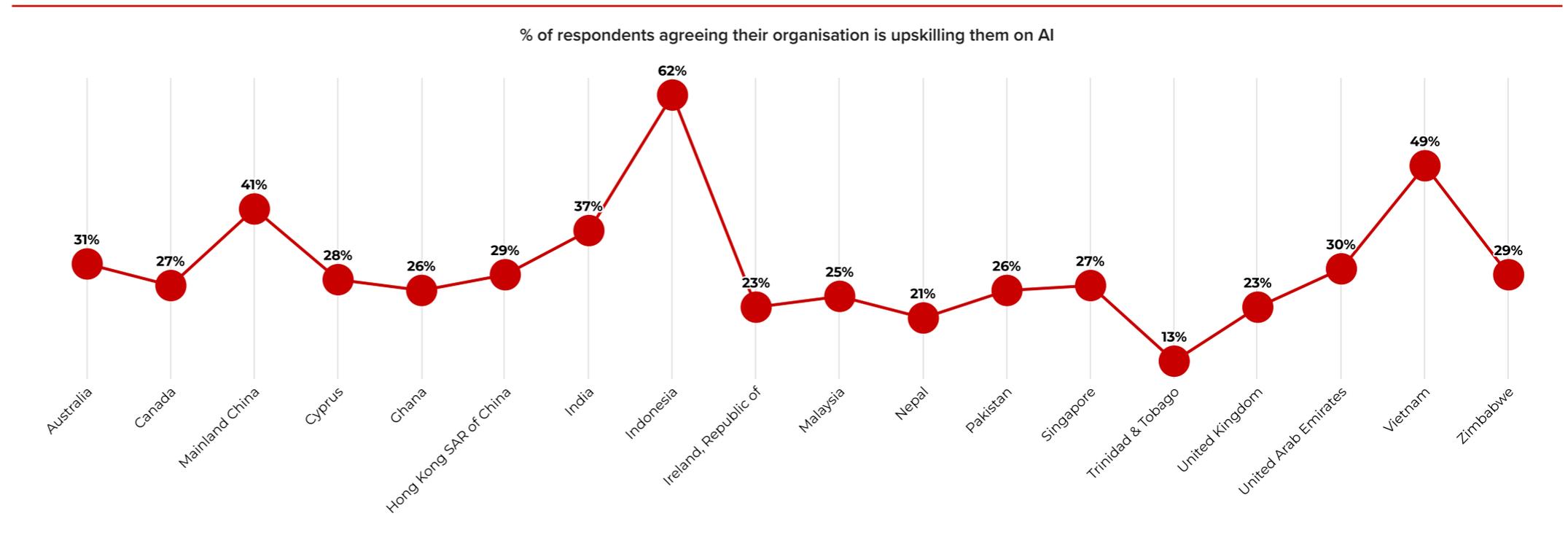




Significant sectoral differences are observed in organisations providing opportunities to employees to learn new AI skills



Organisational upskilling support on AI by different countries / locations



Box 13:

The growing interest in ‘skills-based hiring’ and its possible implications

Work and job transformation in accountancy means skills transition too. Technology advances and a growing sustainability and regulatory agenda will call for roles with deeper levels of specific finance and accounting expertise. But broader business change and complexity will equally place a new premium on wider, less domain specific and more transferable capabilities, such as critical thinking, systems thinking and problem solving. In this transition, there will be an over-supply of skills in some areas and an under-supply in others.

These dynamics are partly fuelling the increasing interest in ‘skills-based hiring’ – a shift away from primarily assessing the suitability of job candidates based on long-term academic achievements or previous job ‘experience’ towards more specific skills they could bring to a particular role. This doesn’t necessarily represent an entire departure from previous recruitment practices but is probably a more nuanced way for organisations to consider the skills and possible common ‘skills pathways’ needed for the future.

‘Skills-based hiring’ practices do, however, have implications for businesses in terms of potentially disrupting traditional career pathways across the organisation. Proponents argue that it opens new job

opportunities for individuals who possess the right skills, but who have not come through traditional career pathways or gateways – thereby increasing the talent pool and workforce diversity, and boosting innovation. It demands a more flexible approach to career planning at both an organisational and individual level and logically could lead to more dynamic talent pathways than before – cutting across more traditional workplace domains.

Skill pathways may also further amplify the importance of self-directed, bite-sized learning and micro-qualifications – as well as ‘short and sharp’ experiential learning interventions to provide upskilling opportunities quickly as the demand for new capabilities increases at pace.

‘Upskilling can address the root cause of why people leave organisations – if employees feel they aren’t growing in their roles, they seek career advancement elsewhere. To truly retain talent and foster growth, upskilling must be approached holistically and strategically.’

India roundtable participant

6 Finance professionals must be agile. They must be people who can develop analytical skills and soft skills. We need people who are ethical and have integrity. The profession is rewarding for those who can embrace lifelong learning and evolve constantly.

Africa roundtable participant

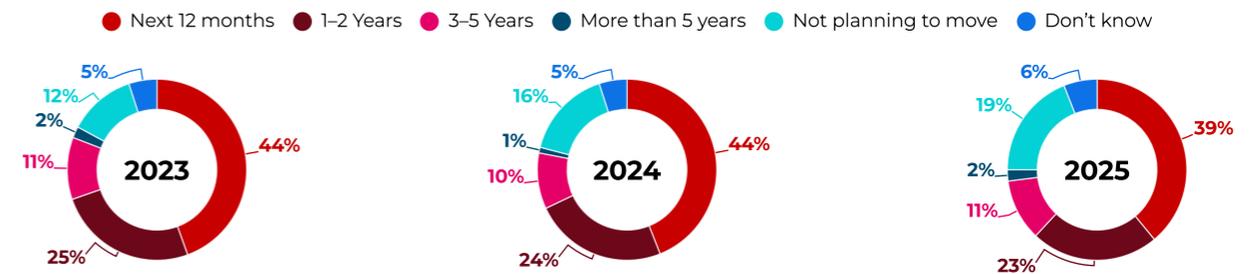


7. Employability confidence is high

- High mobility and fast changing job ambitions reflect employability confidence.** The retention challenge for employers evident from this year's data relates to the employment opportunities that are available for professional accountants. Three years of data paints a consistent picture, irrespective of sectoral, geographic or demographic cuts:
 - Respondents are ambitious in the speed of their desired career moves – with **62%** expecting to move role within two years, and younger respondents (unsurprisingly) particularly eager.
- The retention challenge continues to be a concern for employers – with over half our respondents (**58%**) expecting their next career move to be outside of their current organisation (though again here organisation size does matter when it comes to the likely success of being able to retain staff).
- The consistent reasons why individuals wish to move externally to other organisations are for improved career opportunities and salary uplifts.

Retention challenge for employers is also an employability opportunity for individuals

How quickly do you want to move to your next role?



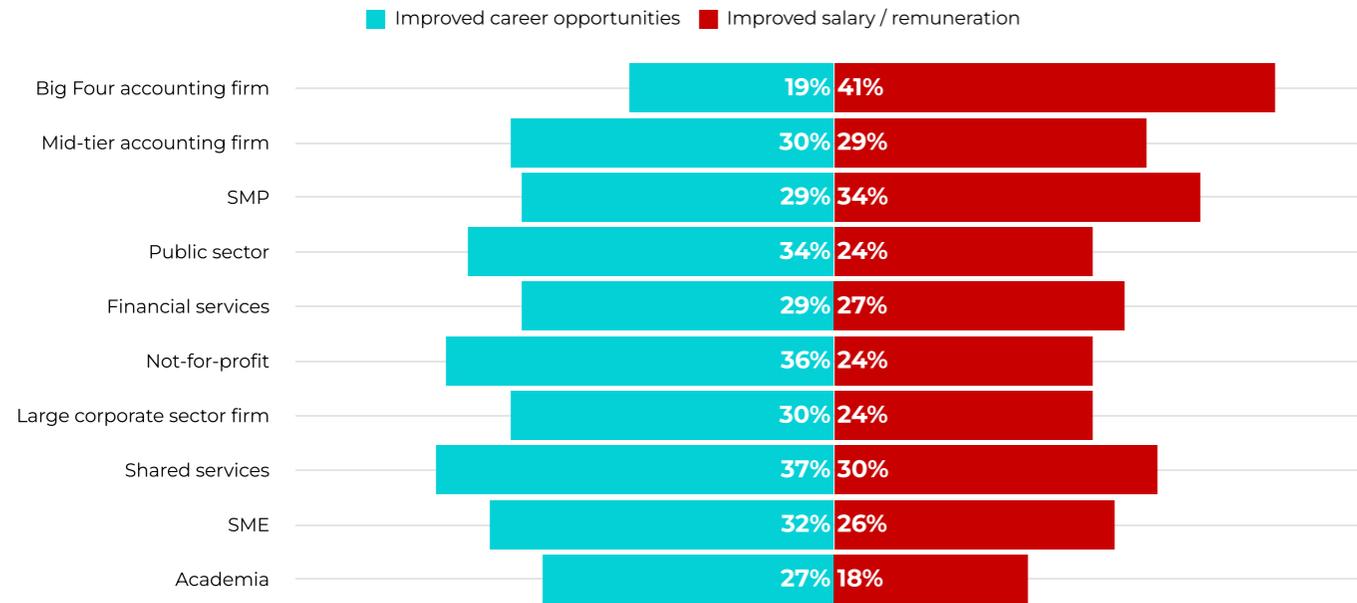
Would you like your next move to be internal or external?



■ **Work transformation requires different career strategies.** Our 2025 data identifies ongoing workplace change. Concerns over technology disruption continue to be prominent and more jobs in accountancy will need to fuse AI literacy with human creativity and judgement. But this point of inflection across the work landscape is driving other narratives, such as upskilling, shifting roles, blurred career paths, new work patterns, unprecedented work pressures, less job security, and more competition for jobs. At the same time, respondents feel they are facing a significant and broad range of career barriers.

This transition in the workplace, and fluidity in how career paths and job roles are evolving, demands a rethink on career planning. Specifically, it places value on the ability of individuals to adapt as their career unfolds. Our analysis crowdsourced thousands of comments from respondents to understand optimal career strategies in this changing environment – with concepts such as resilience, a focus on wellbeing, and authenticity some of the key recommendations.

Ambitions to move externally by respondents are primarily driven by two key factors – improved career opportunities and improved salary



Biggest career barriers faced? (by sector) (Results on a Net based 1 ranking)

	Big Four accounting firm	Mid-tier accounting firm	SMP	Public sector	Financial services	Not-for-profit	Large corporate sector firm	Shared services	SME	Academia
Few internal promotion opportunities	6%	8%	6%	16%	16%	18%	15%	13%	14%	8%
Career paths not transparent	9%	9%	6%	8%	6%	7%	8%	9%	6%	9%
Stress / mental health	13%	8%	10%	6%	7%	5%	7%	5%	6%	8%
Family / caring responsibilities	4%	9%	9%	7%	7%	9%	8%	10%	9%	7%
Insufficient reward opportunities	12%	10%	8%	8%	9%	7%	7%	10%	10%	8%
Poor networking opportunities	4%	5%	8%	5%	4%	3%	3%	3%	4%	5%
Poor learning and development support	4%	7%	6%	7%	5%	5%	6%	6%	8%	5%
Poor work-life balance support	10%	9%	6%	5%	5%	4%	7%	6%	5%	8%
Selection/promotion process unfair/biased	9%	6%	3%	9%	7%	6%	7%	8%	4%	5%
No mentors or coaches	5%	4%	5%	4%	7%	6%	4%	7%	6%	6%
Static / fixed organisation structures	3%	4%	3%	9%	8%	8%	7%	7%	7%	6%
No flexible working options	3%	5%	6%	3%	3%	2%	4%	2%	3%	5%
Lack of secondment opportunities	6%	2%	2%	2%	4%	2%	3%	2%	2%	2%
Poor visibility – many colleagues home working	1%	0%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	1%	2%	3%
Other (please specify)	3%	2%	3%	1%	2%	4%	1%	1%	2%	2%



8. Mental health improves, but remains challenging

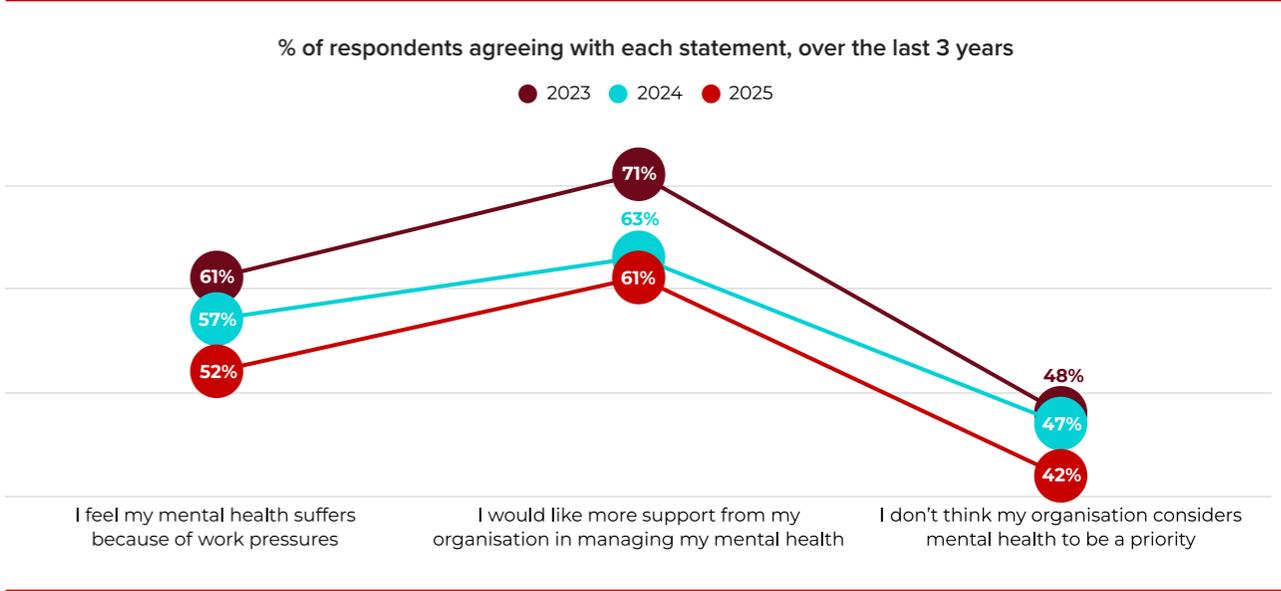
■ **Mental health challenges remain endemic.**

In both our 2023 and 2024 surveys, mental health challenges were significant across the profession, and relatively agnostic to sector or geographic origins of survey respondents. Our 2025 data tells a similar story, although overall indicators are slightly more positive. Three factors stand out as being particularly correlated with workplace satisfaction when it comes to mental health:

- overall poor mental health impact from work
- individuals wanting more mental health support
- a perception that organisations are not doing enough to support mental health in the workplace.

Flight risk is cited too as a key issue linked to mental health.

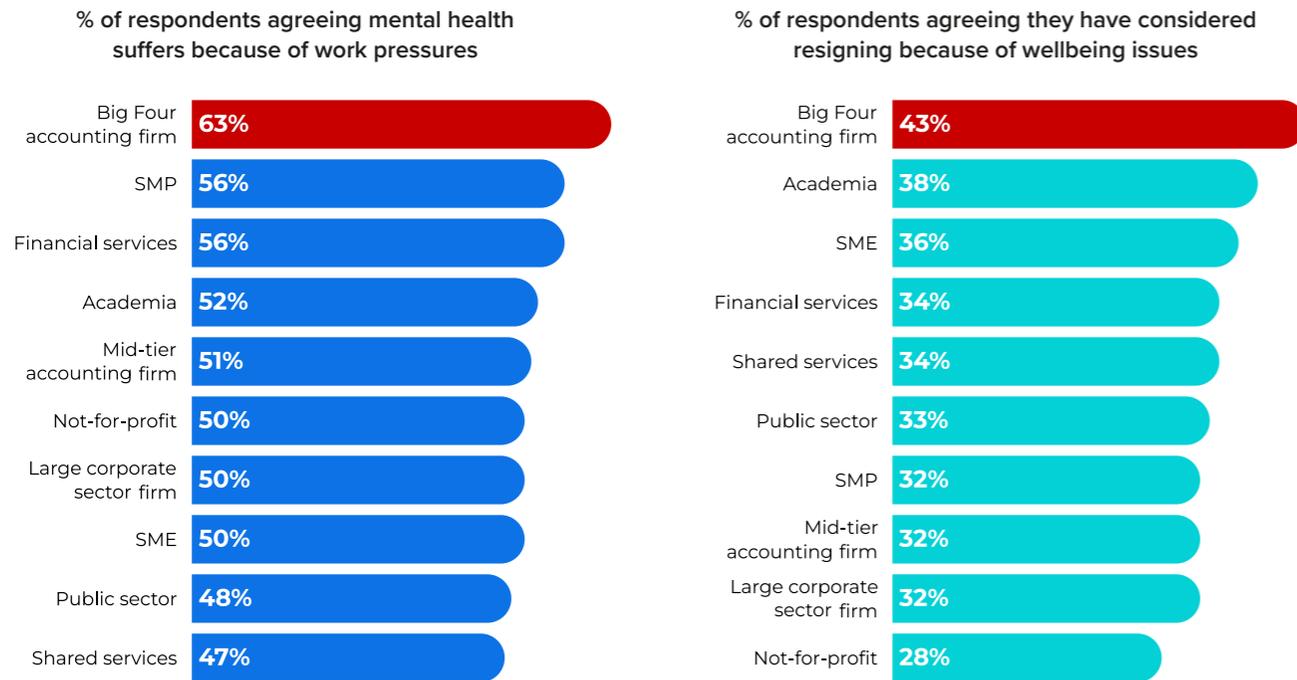
Slightly better news in our mental health indicators?



■ **Big Four accounting firms score poorly when it comes to mental health.** Big Four accounting firm respondents have consistently cited the highest levels of poor mental health across three years of data. Long hours, peak-season work stress, and tight deadlines were also identified in ACCA's recent report on audit talent success.⁵ It's a particular problem for the profession more widely, especially given the crucial nature of the Big Four accounting firms as an attraction and supply gateway for talent.

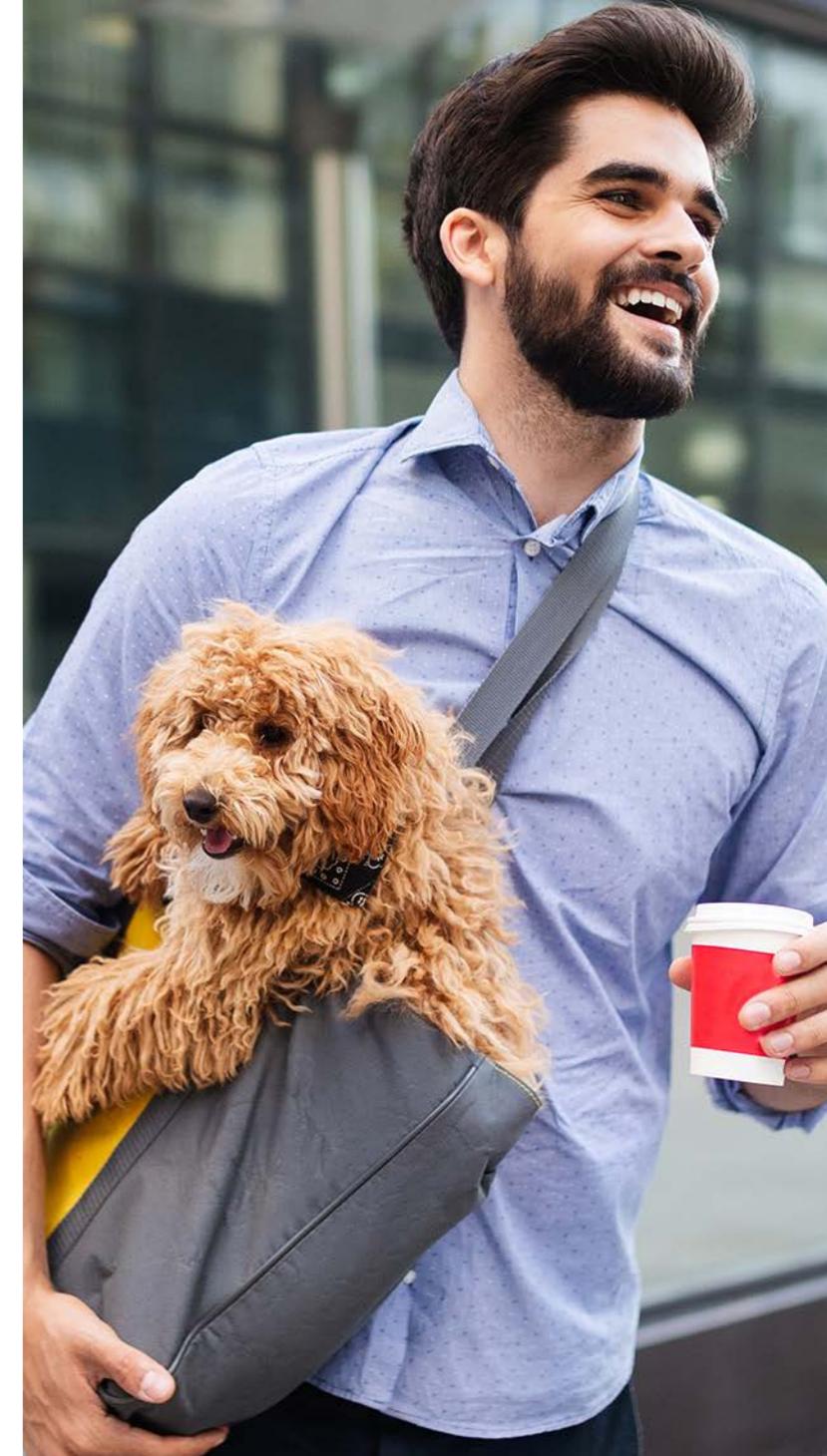
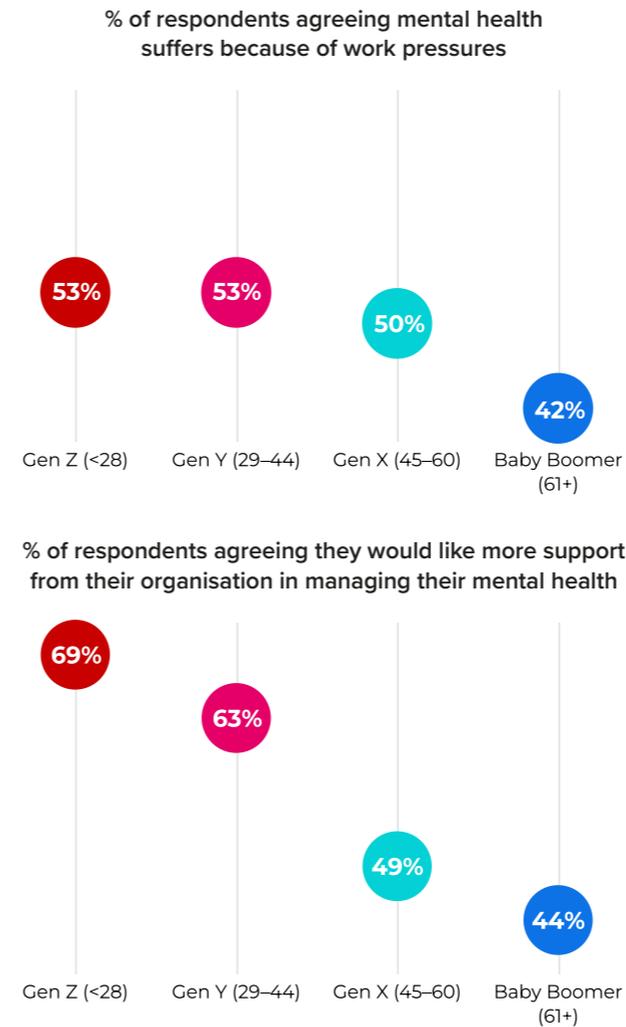
Two other key trends are evident; those seeking a move externally from their current organisation are more likely to cite poor mental health, and there are indications – as with previous years – that younger members of the workforce are more likely to suffer, and want more support from their employers.

Big 4 Accounting firms score less well on particular mental health indicators



⁵ *Attract, engage, retain: insights and recommendations for audit talent success*, ACCA and CA ANZ.

Younger respondents indicate slightly higher mental health concerns and want more support from their employers



Box 14:

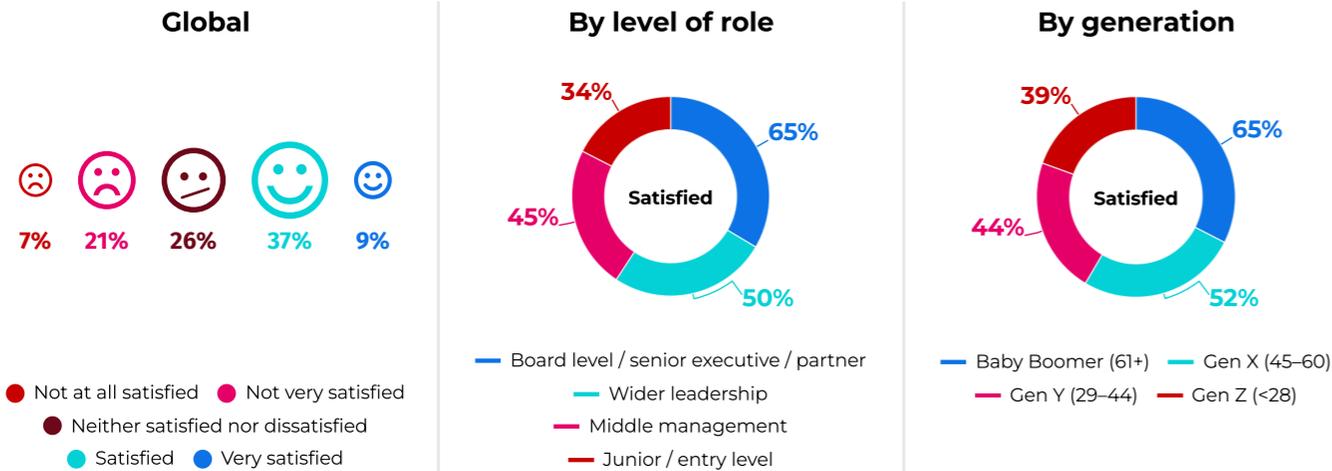
Workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction – it’s always personal

Our indicators on workplace dissatisfaction suggest significant differences across all respondents – with younger workers and more junior workers much less happy with the status quo.

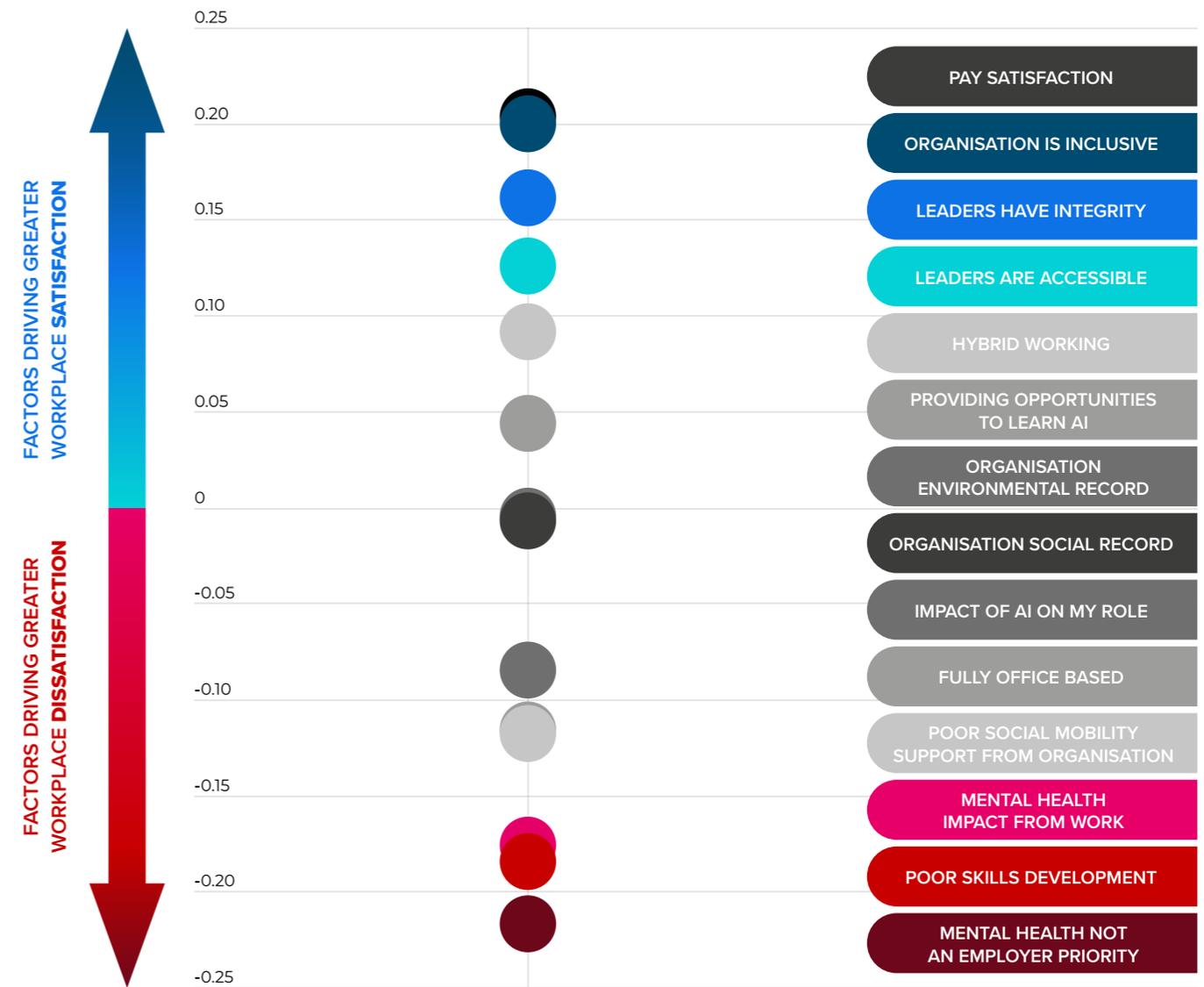
Understanding which levers to pull to transform employee propositions and improve engagement, particularly for younger and more junior workers, is a continuing puzzle for organisations to solve in the context of transforming work and personal lives and expectations. Our data identifies a wide range of issues that are linked to either improved work satisfaction, or detract away from it.

One reflection is that the issues causing the most positive or negative feedback are invariably of a highly personal nature – with pay satisfaction topping the list as the factor most likely to be identified with work satisfaction, and poor mental health and lack of skills development the opposite. Organisation culture also appears to have a relatively significant impact – with both leadership integrity and accessibility seen as correlated to workplace satisfaction. But an organisations’ record on environmental or social issues appears to have less of an influence.

Satisfaction at work



Workplace satisfaction and dissatisfaction – it’s always personal



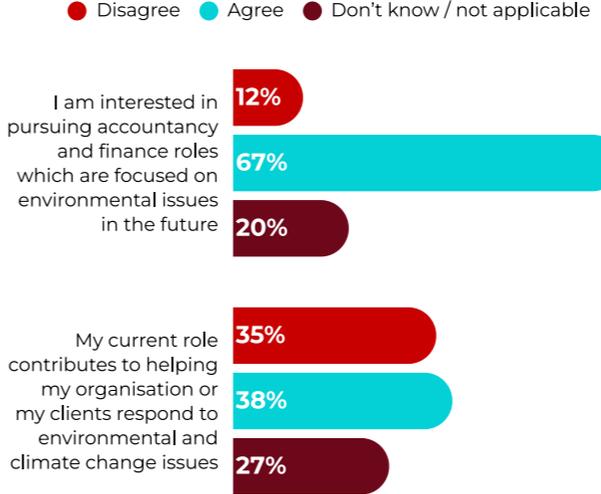


9. Demand for sustainability-related careers flies high

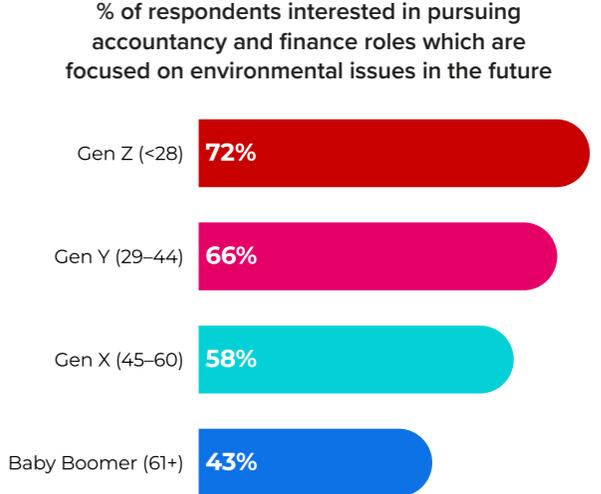
■ **The demand for pursuing sustainability related roles is high.** There's a real demand from respondents to pursue careers and jobs that help address environmental issues, but opportunities in practice continue to fall short. This demand spans across the age groups, but it's an acute ambition

for Gen Z respondents – particularly those who are yet to enter the workforce. The data also suggests respondents in emerging markets are more likely to want to pursue such roles, which may reflect the challenge and impact of sustainability issues in certain countries.

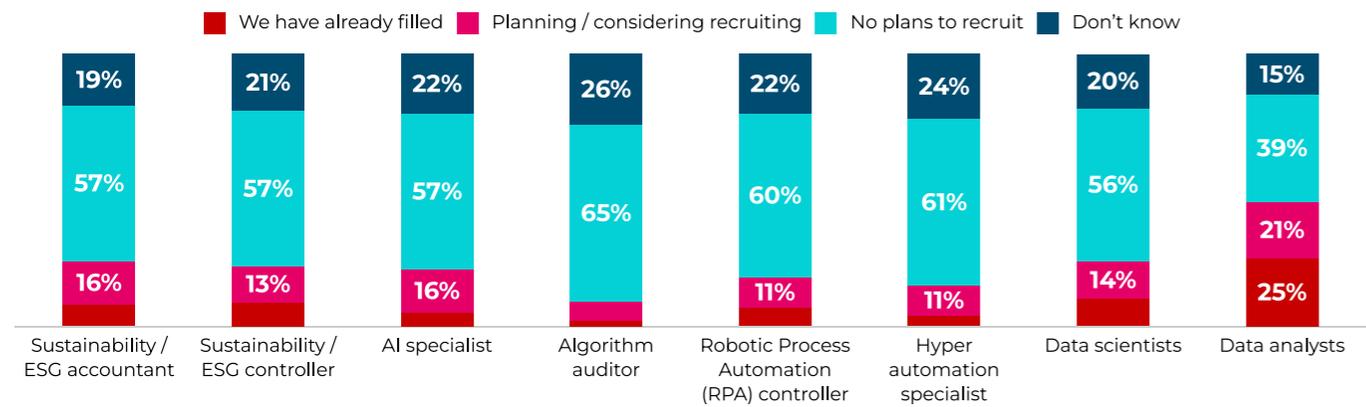
Demand for pursuing environmental-related jobs outstrips supply



Younger respondents are more likely to want to pursue roles focused on the environment

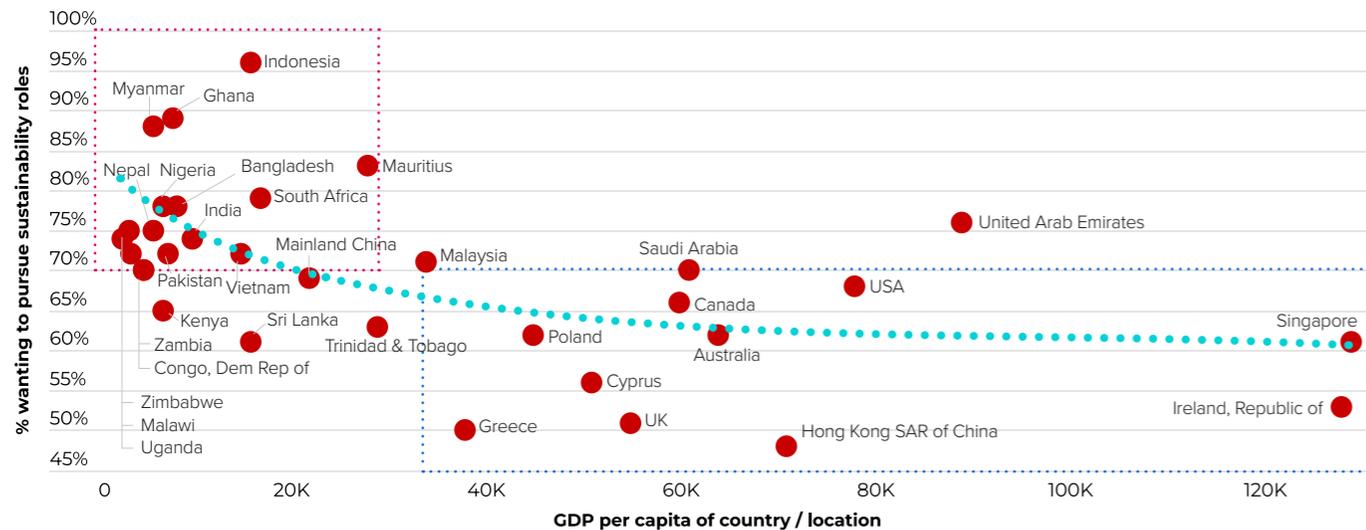


Many finance teams are still to consider recruiting into sustainability roles



Source: *Finance evolution: embracing the future of finance and technology*, ACCA, CA ANZ and PwC, September 2024.

Are ambitions to pursue sustainability roles even more likely for respondents from developing economies?



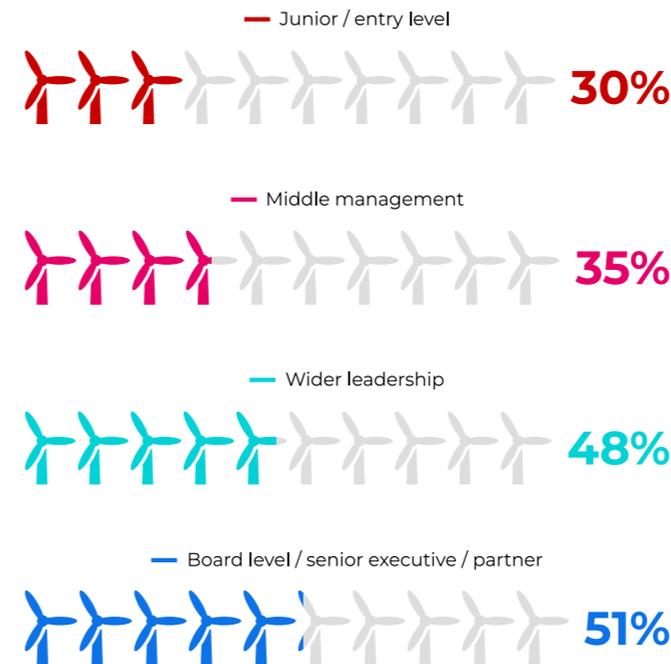
Source: GDP information sourced from IMF estimates of GDP per capita at constant prices (purchasing power parity, 2021 international dollar).

■ **Sustainability related finance roles are undertaken by more senior jobholders.** Our survey also shows that roles with environmental or sustainability responsibilities typically fall at the more senior end of the respondent base. This could be partly due to the high regulatory influence on current accounting and finance roles, and the need for organisations to be responding to fast moving regulatory requirements in this space.

Similarly, it's no surprise that Big Four respondents are more likely to state that their roles include elements of environmental or climate change consideration – given the likely size profile of their client organisations and where regulation is currently focused.

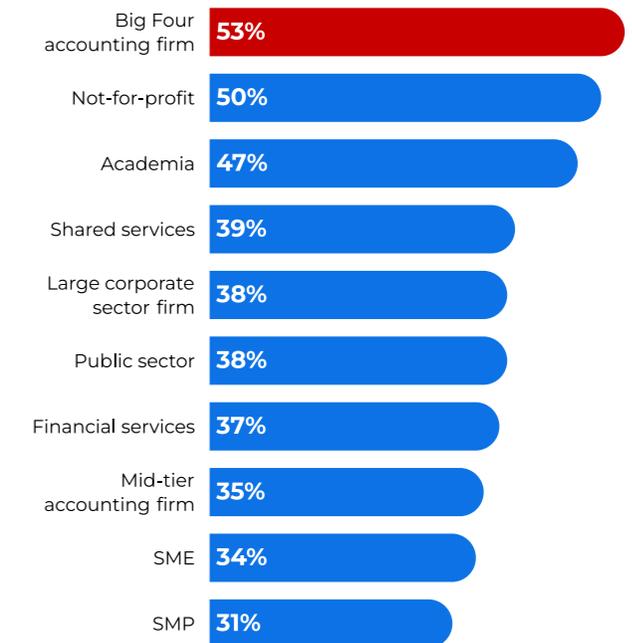
Contribution to environmental and climate change issues varies by role level

% of respondents who say their role contributes to environmental and climate change issues



The Big 4 accounting firms and respondents in the not-for-profit sector are most likely to be pursuing roles which contribute to environmental and climate change issues

% of respondents who say their role contributes to environmental and climate change issues

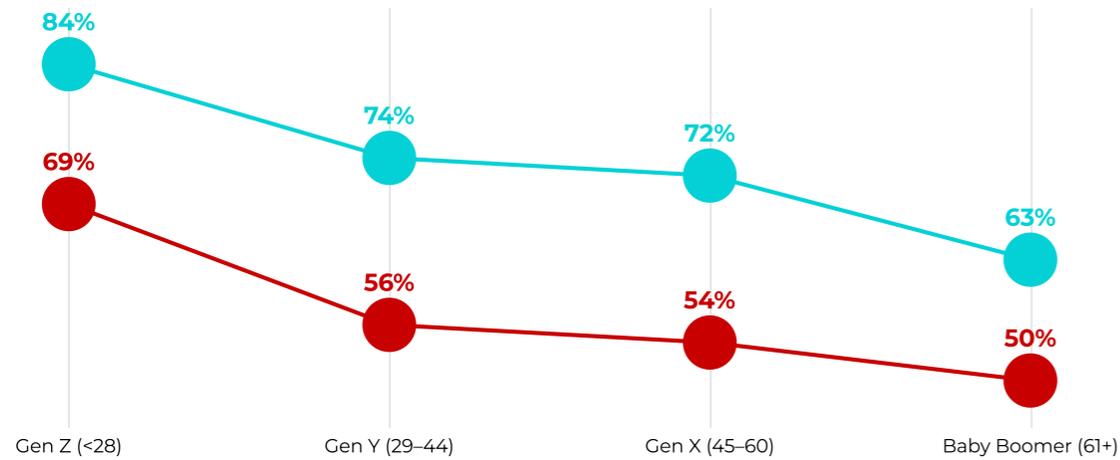


■ **Social record concerns trump environmental worries when it comes to attraction.** An organisation's record on social and human rights issues overrides its stance on environmental issues when it comes to attraction. What's interesting

here is that these issues matter more to students yet to find employment; for those already in work, it appears to have less impact on satisfaction at a particular organisation, but it is relevant when considering other employment opportunities.

The environmental and social record of an organisation are key attraction factors to employees

- An organisation's stance on environmental issues would be a key factor in deciding to work there or not
- An organisation's reputation on social and human rights issues would be a key factor in deciding to work there or not



‘An organisation’s record on either environmental or social issues seems to have little impact on work satisfaction for those actually in work, but it remains relevant to them when considering other employment opportunities.’





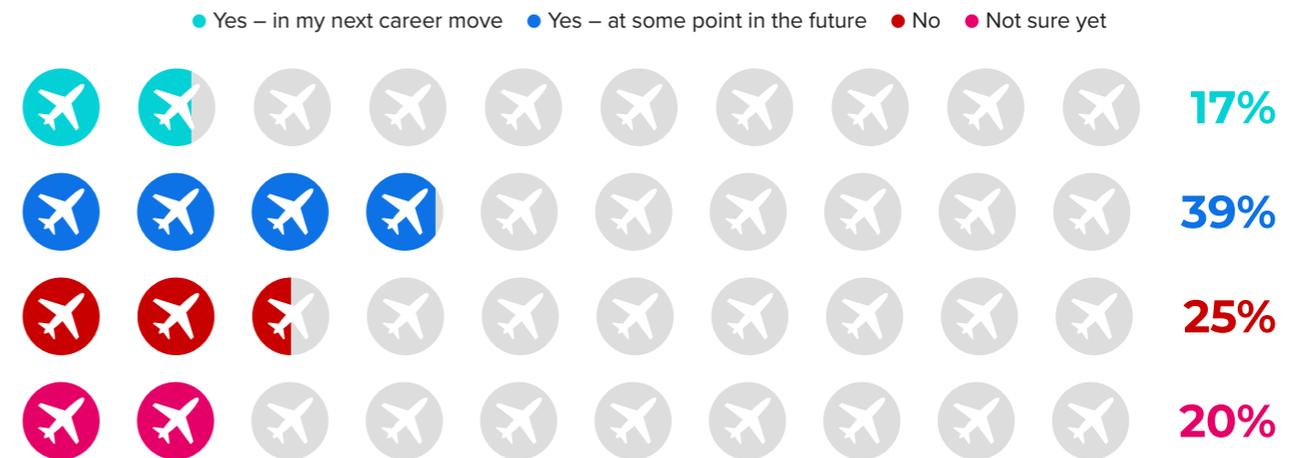
10. Accountancy training remains a gateway for global careers

■ **Accountancy – the lingua franca for business across the world.** With over half of all respondents (**56%**) expecting to move internationally in their career – and **17%** suggesting this would be in their next career move – we again see a real appetite for using accountancy as a passport to pursuing international career opportunities.

Unsurprisingly, it's the youngest respondents who are the trailblazers for travel, and there's a significant appetite here from those who are full time students.

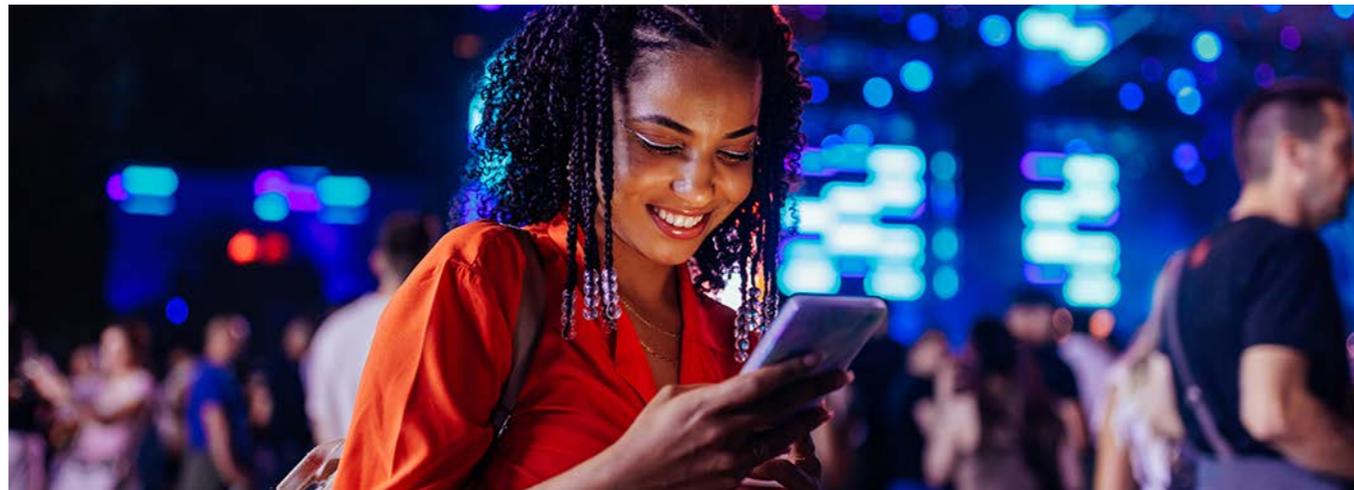
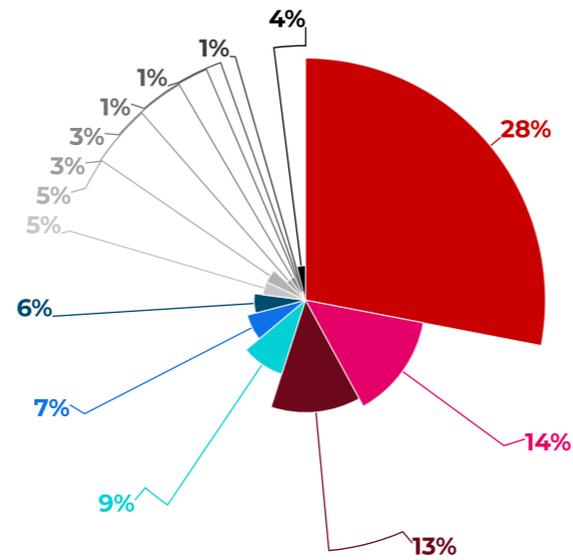
Over half of Gen Y respondents expect to pursue career goals internationally at some point too. There are also marked differences in our data reflecting the various international opportunities afforded in different sectors and the greater geographic footprint of particular organisations – notably respondents from the Big Four accounting firms and shared services / outsourcing / GBS were more likely to cite the desire to move to different countries.

Do you expect to move to a different country / location in your career?



What is the main reason for moving to a different country / location?

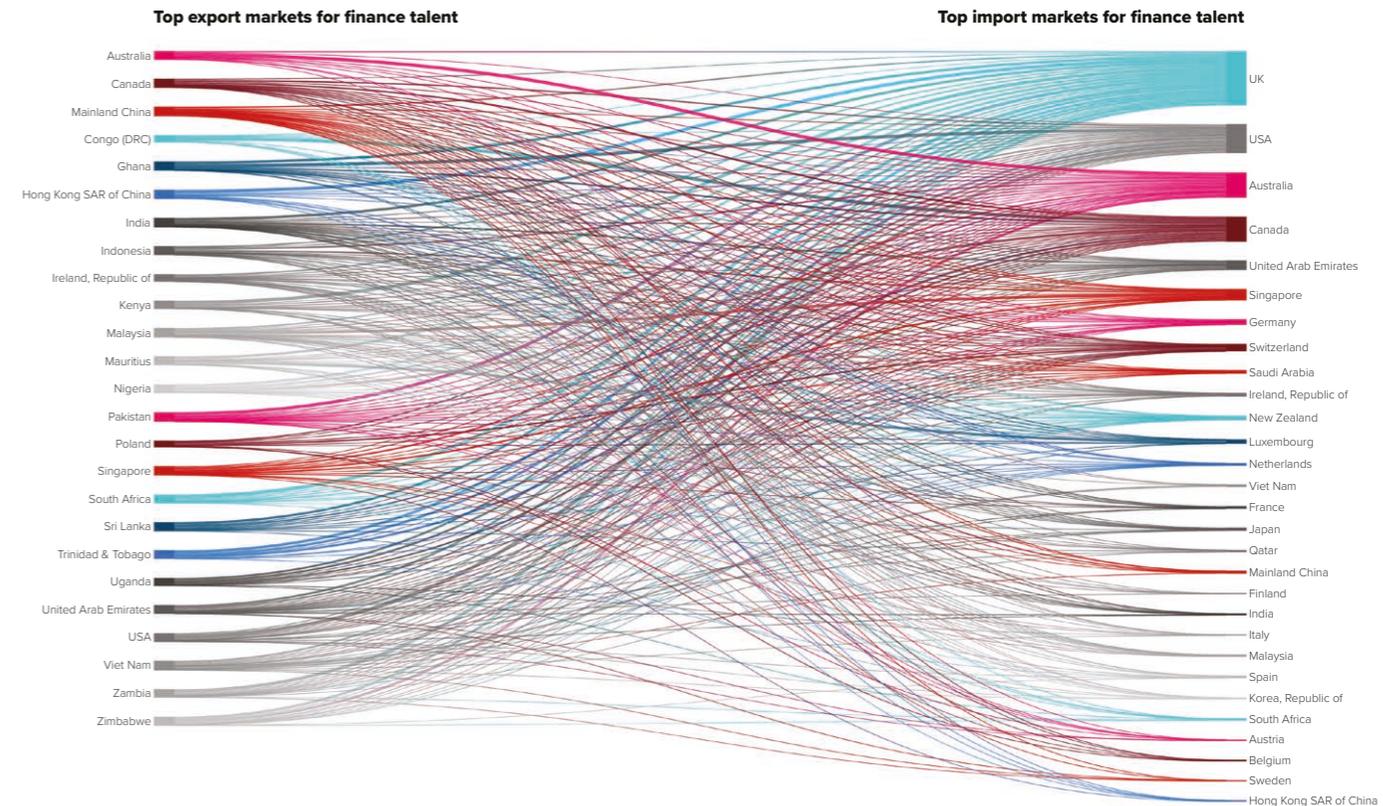
- Improved career opportunities abroad
- International work experience to add to my resume
- Improved salary / remuneration
- Better work-life balance
- Acquire a foreign post-graduate degree / educational certificate to advance career
- Better quality of life for children
- Better culture elsewhere
- Concerns around political system in my country
- Better education system for children
- Cost of living challenges
- Learning another language
- Concerns around future climate impacts in my country
- Healthcare reasons
- Other (please specify)



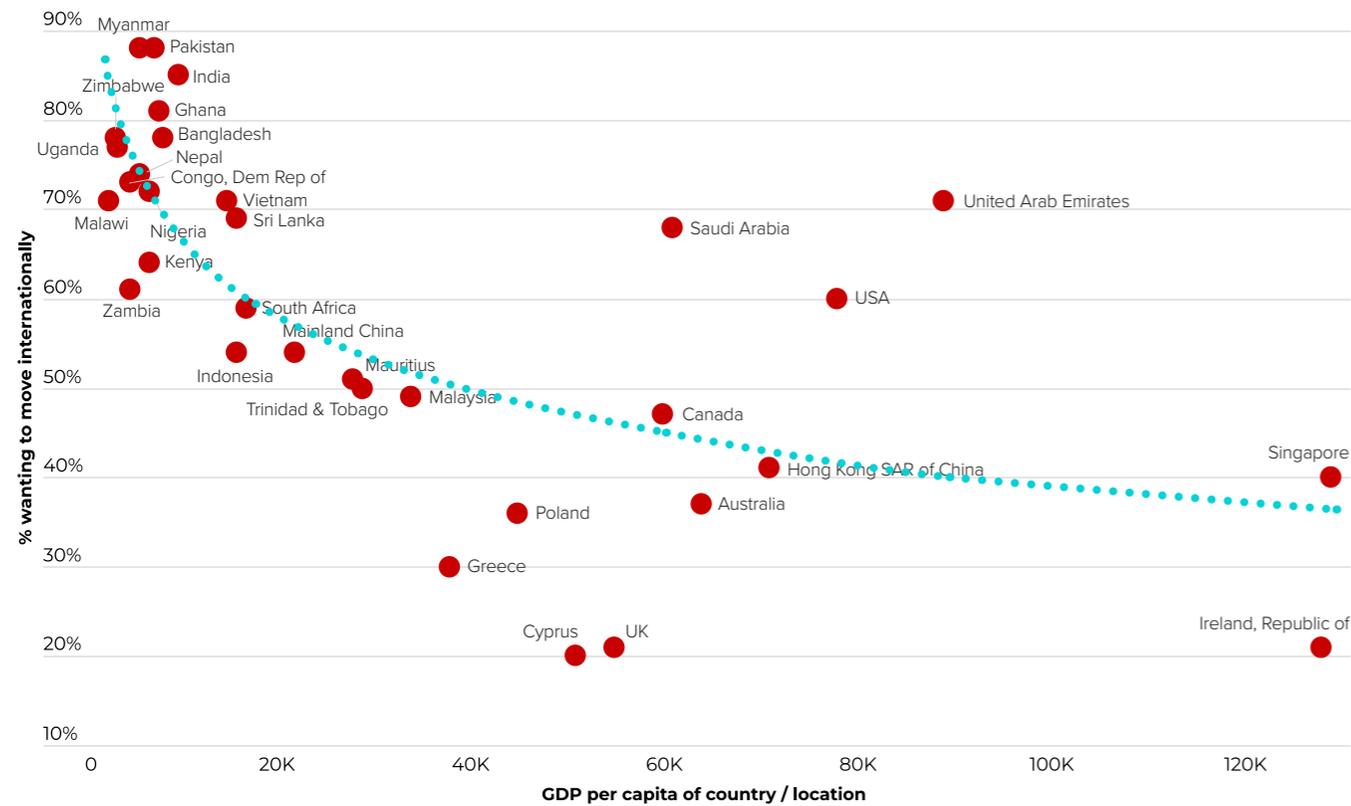
■ **Possible exodus of finance talent in emerging markets?** There is, however, a clear demarcation in our data that suggests a significant ‘one-way’ direction of travel – from developing economies to developed economies – in the pursuit of career goals and job moves. Where respondents work in terms of size of

organisation matters – perhaps because experience of working in larger, often international, organisations provides the exposure to cross cultural and cross jurisdiction opportunities. But these trends do raise the question of whether emerging markets risk losing strong finance bench talent.

Ambitions for international career moves – talent migration



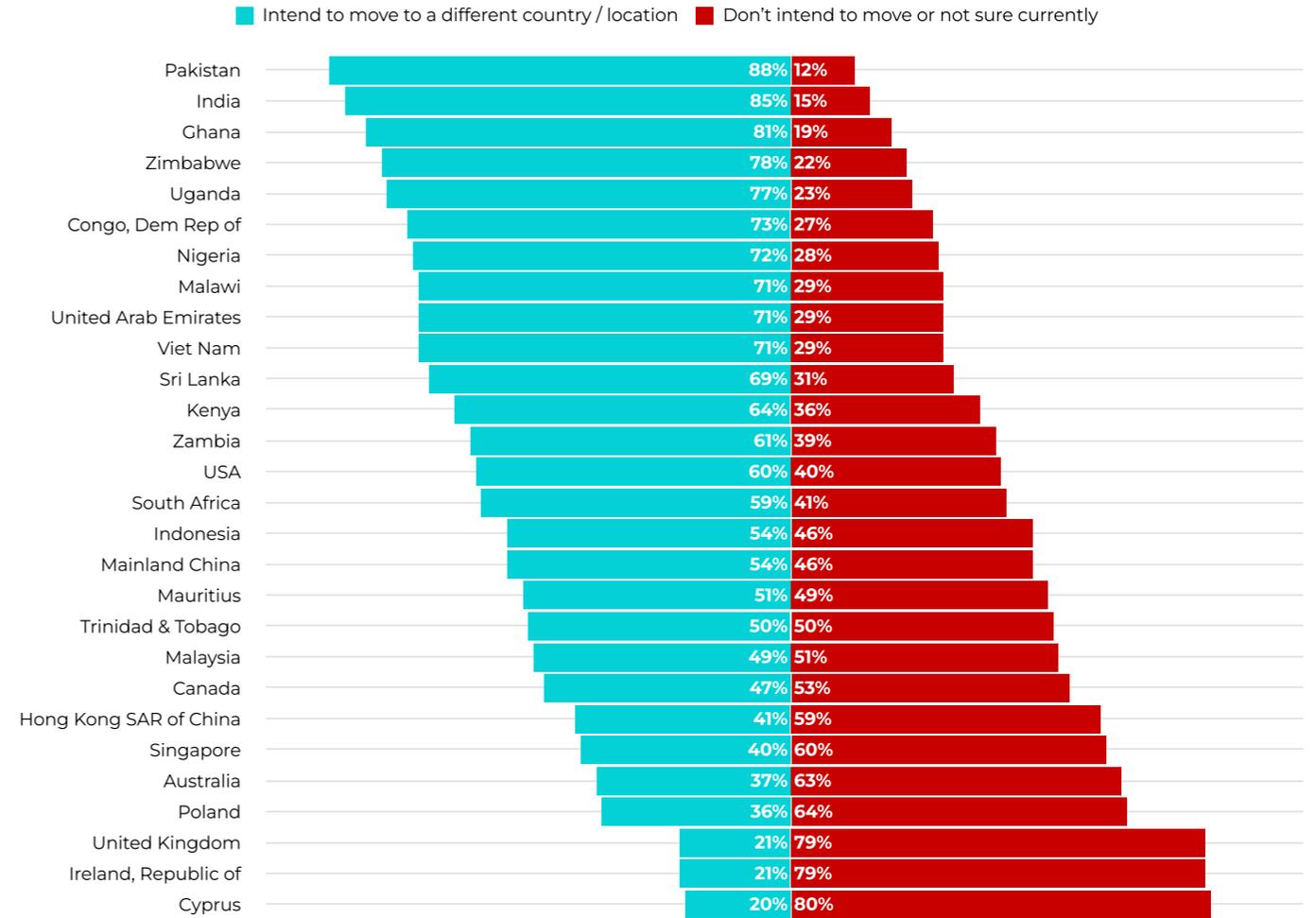
There is a clear correlation between GDP per capita of country / location and ambition to move internationally



Source: GDP information sourced from IMF estimates of GDP per capita at constant prices (purchasing power parity, 2021 international dollar).

‘There is a clear demarcation in our data that suggests a significant “one-way” direction of travel – from developing economies to developed economies – in the pursuit of career goals and job moves.’

Do international mobility ambitions risk a talent exodus from developing economies in accountancy?



‘These trends do raise the question of whether emerging markets risk losing strong finance bench talent?’

Final reflections.

Global Talent Trends 2025 and ACCA's global policy priorities

We believe finance and accounting capabilities are vital to sustainable economies and organisations, and that accountancy as a profession is a force for good in a changing and complex world. ACCA's Global Talent Trends 2025 continues to point to a workplace in transition, but also a world that is full of opportunities for professional accountants in the future. The evidence from our global talent trends project, and wider research programme continues to drive ACCA's focus on three core global policy priorities.

BRIDGE THE ACCOUNTANCY SKILLS GAP Build accountancy capacity so that businesses, the public sector and economies have access to skills and expertise to thrive.	DRIVE SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS Drive policies, regulations and standards that deliver prosperous, ethical, sustainable organisations and economies.	CHAMPION THE PROFESSIONAL ACCOUNTANT Champion a refreshed understanding of the vital contribution of professional accountants in a changed world.
Call to action for policymakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Widen access to the accountancy profession through inclusive educational, vocational and workplace policies that allow anyone to develop the accountancy skills needed. Develop and grow the accountancy profession across all sectors, championing sustainability and technology skills to ensure the profession meets market needs. 	Call to action to policymakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Drive the adoption of policies and regulations related to sustainable practices and ethical decision-making which reinforce corporate responsibility and enable the transition to net zero while fostering diverse and inclusive workforces. Drive the adoption of international standards which draw on global best practice, enable harmonisation across jurisdictions, facilitate international trade and maintain accountability and trust. 	Call to action to policymakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Champion and draw on the insights of professional accountants to influence policy linked to audit, tax, public sector reform and easing the SME regulatory burden, as well as sustainability and technology risks and opportunities. Champion the role of professional accountants in creating and delivering value in the public interest – from entrepreneurship to organisations of all sizes and sectors – through their ethical, sustainable and innovative contribution to business and society.

We believe finance and accounting capabilities are vital to sustainable economies and organisations. That's why it's our vision to develop the accountancy profession the world needs.

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organisation)

Lin Ruidong, (please confirm role and
organisation)

Mu Menggang, (please confirm role and
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GBS India Pvt. Ltd.

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