



# Global Women in PR

## Annual Index 2023



#GWPRAnnualIndex

# ABOUT GWPR

Global Women in PR exists to champion, connect and support women in senior PR and Communications roles. We inspire women to become leaders and promote public relations as an important global industry.



## Who We Are

A global membership organisation for women in senior PR and communications roles. GWPR comprises national networking groups, whose members come from agencies, in-house and independents.

There are GWPR national groups and affiliates across Europe, India, Africa, the Middle East, Central America, Australia and Asia Pacific. We are expanding fast with more groups developing in Europe, Africa and North America.

We are a not-for-profit organisation driven by our desire to change the landscape to benefit women working in our industry.

We are an inclusive organisation that celebrates diversity and works to engage with the leaders in our industry and other business leaders.

A key focus for GWPR is the issue surrounding leadership and gender equality - from flexible working practices to career progression and the working environment. The boardroom continues to be dominated by men (64%), despite the global industry being 2/3 female

We highlight the well-researched fact that companies with a balanced boardroom are more successful on many levels.

We aim to empower the next generation of female leaders to inspire them to fulfil their potential.

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## OUR SUPPORTERS



# INTRODUCTION

This is the fifth edition of GWPR's (Global Women in PR) Annual Index, a research programme that measures the status of women working in PR and communications across the world. It was launched as a five-year plan to track and measure progress towards gender equality in the workplace, and to understand the factors that have either impeded or accelerated this progress.

In the five years since we launched the research programme, much has changed. The COVID pandemic brought with it a whirlwind of change, most notably in the way we worked. Suddenly, flexible ways of working became the norm, but what we believed would pave the way for more women to progress in their careers was not necessarily the case. Around half of the women surveyed believe that women with children are still discriminated against in terms of career progression. Our study finds that flexible ways of working are not enough in themselves unless they are accompanied by flexible work policies and benefits.

Our research shows that three-fifths of women in PR continue to work in companies where the boardroom is male dominated. Flexible work policies top the list of requirements to break the barrier to women on boards. In addition our survey found that 53% of women had faced harassment...

**Around half of the women surveyed believe that women with children are still discriminated against in terms of career progression.**



Last year our research revealed that ageism was an issue for our industry. This year’s report revealed that a quarter of women said they did not see themselves continuing in the industry after the age of 50. This is something we need to be concerned about given that we could potentially lose some of our best and most experienced women in an industry where there is already a lack of female role models.

This year we added a new question on harassment and all its forms, not just sexual. The results are disturbing with just under a third of those who reported the harassment either leaving or being eased out of their organisation.

## On a more positive note, flexible working has become an accepted norm with more employers positively inclined towards flexi work while employees are also reaping its benefits.

Flexible working in itself is not a universal panacea, and whilst we need to embrace hybrid models there is still a need to create a more enabling environment for women to bring their best selves to work every day – one not impeded by age or toxicity and other forms of bias and discrimination.

The McKinsey Women in the Workplace 2022 reports says that to “make meaningful and sustainable progress toward gender equality, companies should consider focusing on two broad goals: getting more women into leadership and retaining the women leaders they already have.” The same is true of the PR industry too! The road is not easy, but we’ve got to strengthen the building blocks.

The GWPR Annual Index owes a lot to GWPR co-founder, Angela Oakes. Angela sadly passed away after a brief illness earlier this year but her legacy of helping to change the landscape for women working in our industry will go on.



**Susan Hardwick**  
Co-founder, GWPR



**Melissa Arulappan**  
GWPR India



# TOPLINE FINDINGS



Levels of **flexible working** have been maintained since this time last year and are anticipated to stay.



**Flexible working** is increasingly being seen in a positive light in the world of PR.



However women continue to see **progression and promotions slower than men**, and boardrooms continue to be male dominated, though we see small changes each year.

**Half of female PR professionals** have experienced harassment or inappropriate behaviour at work.



In-house teams continue to be behind agencies when it comes to **women in the boardrooms**.



**Three in ten** agency workers see themselves working in agency roles in their 50's.



With **under half** reporting the harassment to their employer



# THE WORK ENVIRONMENT

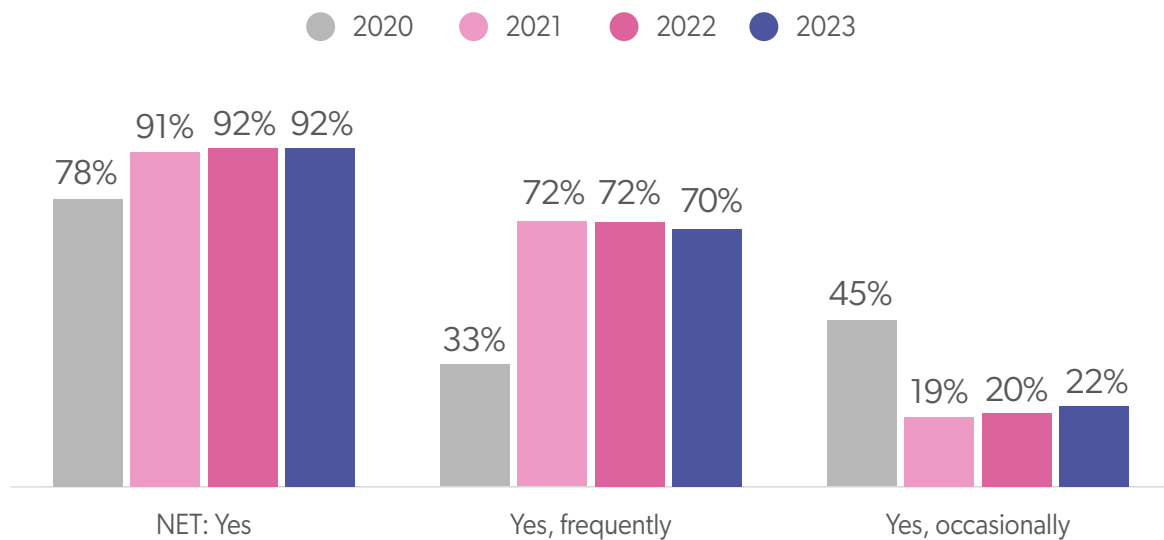
Flexible working remains in the workplace and is expected to stay following the adjustments during the pandemic. We are seeing further shifts in the perceptions of people who work flexibly, with fewer associating it with slower career progression indicating a positive shift in attitudes. There have been further increases in PR professionals reporting a positive perception by their company of the benefits of flexible working.

## Flexible working practices are maintained post-pandemic and are anticipated to remain

We observed a significant increase in the number of PR professionals working flexibly as a result of the pandemic and it appears that flexible working is here to stay. Levels of flexible working have been maintained this year with the same amount (92%) currently working flexibly. In the next year we don't expect to see a change as 93% of PR professionals are expecting to work flexibly in the next year.



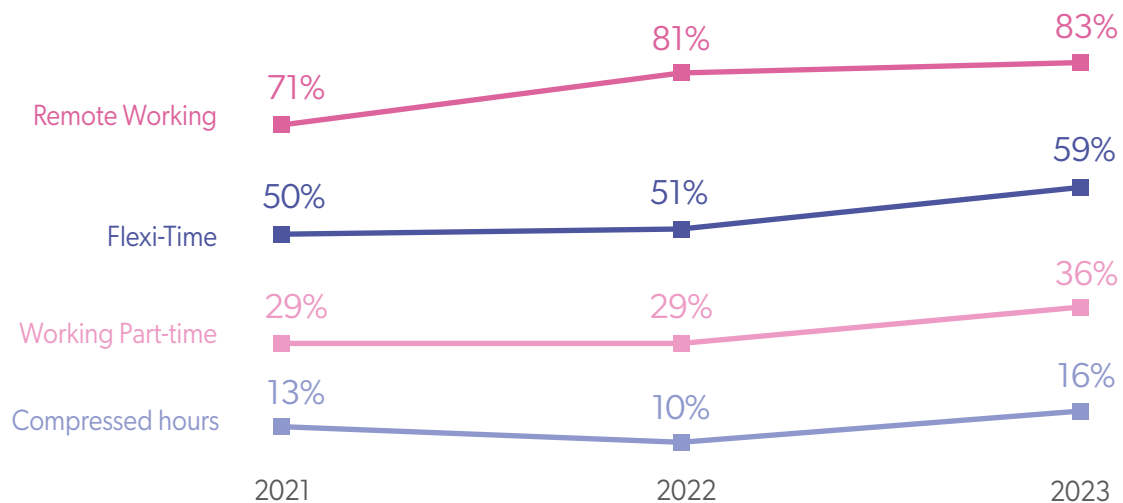
### Flexible working



PR professionals expect to be working remotely for an average of 2.7 days a week, a slight drop in comparison to 2022 (3 days). Once again, we see a drop in those expecting to be working remotely full-time (5 days a week). 12% expect to do so over the next 12 months compared to 16% in 2022 and 21% in 2021, indicating that the workforce is moving back to the office at least some of the time.

When it comes to the opportunity for flexible working, we can see an increase in the number of PR professionals being offered remote working - now 83%, up from 81% in 2022 and 71% in 2021. The opportunity of working flexi-time (59% vs. 51% in 2022 vs. 50% in 2021) and part-time (36% vs. 29% in both 2022 and 2021) have both increased this year. The opportunity to work compressed hours increased from 2022, after a slight decline last year (16% vs. 10% in 2022 and 13% in 2021).

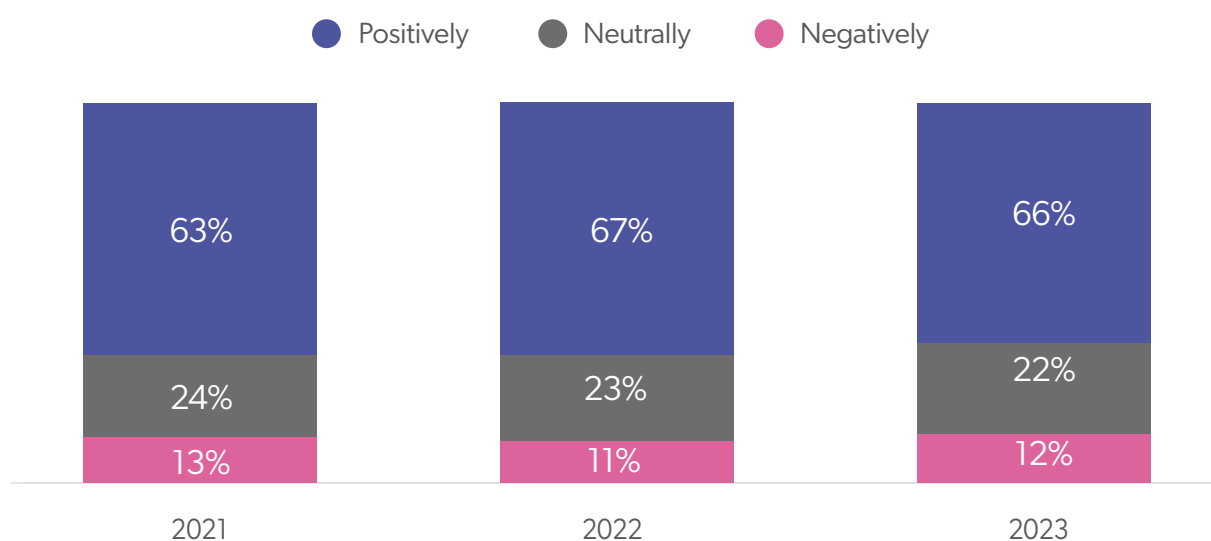
### Flexible working offered by organisations in 2020, 2021 and 2022



## Flexible working continues to be seen positively whilst the benefits remain recognised

Encouragingly, flexible working is increasingly being seen positively in the world of PR, particularly for women. We have continued to maintain a similar level of positive perception this year (66% vs. 67% in 2022). Interestingly, those working agency-side are more likely to report a positive perception (68%) to flexible working, compared to in-house (63%).

### How is flexible working generally perceived at your company?



The benefits of working flexibly continue to be regarded positively amongst PR professionals. With regard to wellbeing, seven in ten (73%) feel it helps employees maintain their mental wellbeing and four fifths (81%) feel it helps maintain a healthy work-life balance, up from 77% in 2022. In addition, 77% think flexible working is a really good idea, the same amount as 2022.

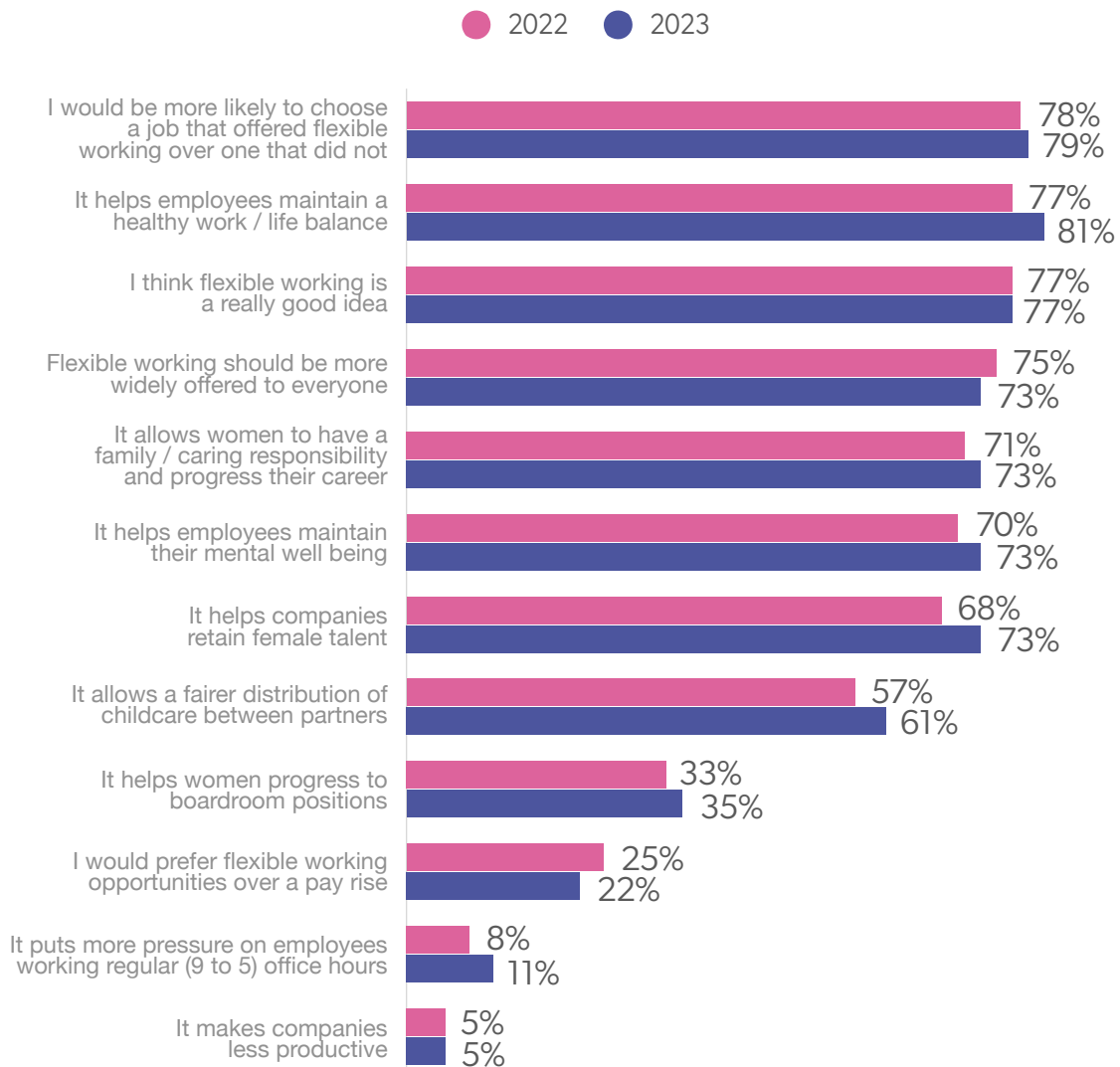
Thinking specifically about the benefits for PR women, 73% believe flexible working allows women to have a family or take on caring responsibilities and still progress in their careers; up slightly from 71% last year. Whilst 73% agree that it helps retain female talent (increasing from 68% in 2022).

Over a third (35%) believe that flexible working helps women progress into the boardroom, a small increase from 33% last year.

Flexible working continues to be desired and an important consideration when making decisions about changing jobs, with four fifths (79%) saying they would be more likely to choose a job that offered flexible working over one that did not – up slightly from 78% last year.



## Which if any of the following statements do you agree with about flexible working?



## However, overall flexible working is still associated by some with slower career progression

Despite flexible working becoming more cemented in the PR industry and the benefits well-understood, we continue to see flexible working being associated with slower career progression. When asked how flexible working impacts the careers of PR professionals, over a fifth (23%) believe they progress more slowly, which is a reduction from 25% in 2022 and even further from 28% in 2021.

Whilst we can see a decrease in this perception year on year and the benefits of flexible work are noticed, it appears that there is still work to be done to ensure progression is not inhibited by flexible working opportunities.

# BOARDROOMS & BARRIERS

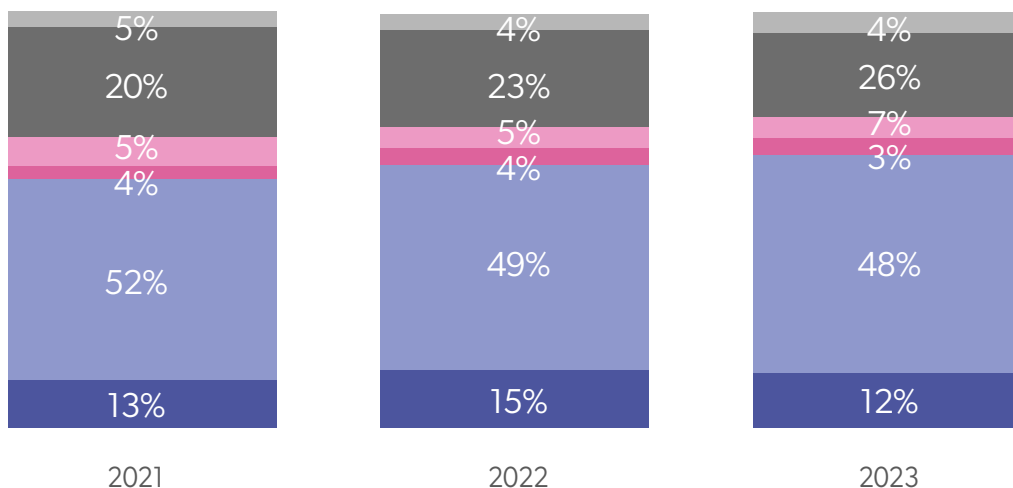
We continue to see very little change in the gender split in boardrooms, though the small changes we have started to see over time are promising. We can see a slight increase in the number of boardrooms that have an equal split between men and women. And, encouragingly, we continue to see the importance of having women in the boardroom through the benefits that this provides to businesses. Though, progress for in-house remains much slower than at agencies.

## Three-fifths of PR women continue to work in companies where the boardroom is male dominated

Looking into the gender split of boardrooms, three in five (60%) PR women work in companies with a male dominated board, slightly down from last year (64%) and continuing a slight decrease year on year. Half (48%) say their board of directors is mostly made up of men, and just over one in ten (12%) state their board is made up entirely of men. The number of PR professionals who say that their board is made up of mostly, or all women, is at 10% this year, having sat at 9% for the previous two years, after dropping from 14% back in 2019.

### Which of the following best describes how your board of directors is made up?

● All men  
 ● Mostly men  
 ● All women  
 ● Mostly women  
 ● Equal split  
 ● Don't know



This year we saw a slight decline of the proportion of those surveyed that have a board of directors<sup>1</sup> feel the gender split on their board is unfair. Just under half (48%) feel this way, compared to 54% last year.

<sup>1</sup> Defined as those who are answerable to shareholders and responsible for the strategic direction of the company

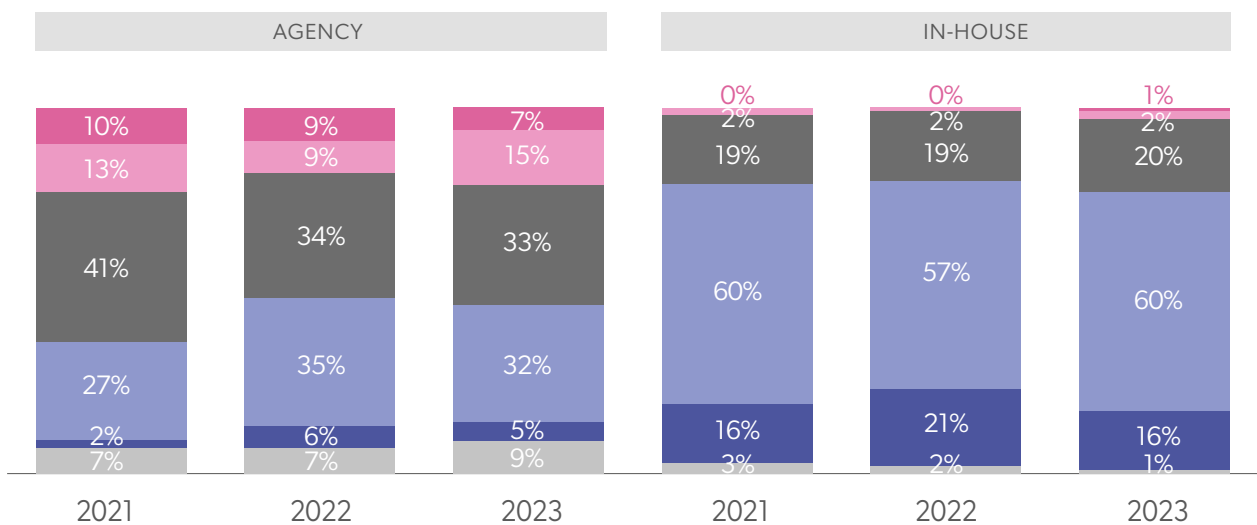
## In-house progression for women remains much slower than in agencies

The proportion of PR professionals who feel that women are promoted more slowly at their company has decreased slightly since last year (43% versus 45% last year) however it continues to be a concern. As we saw last year, progression for PR women working in-house appears trickier. Those working in-house were more likely to think women are promoted more slowly at their company compared to those in agencies (55% vs 30%).

The makeup of agencies boards and in-house boards remains wildly different again in 2023. We still see in-house boards remaining heavily male-dominated, whereas agency side there is a higher percentage of equal / female dominated boards.

### What is the gender split of your board?

● Don't know  
 ● All men  
 ● Mostly men  
 ● Equal split  
 ● Mostly women  
 ● All women



When it comes to comparing mothers and fathers, the gender difference in relation to career progression continues to be stark. Slightly under **half (47%) of PR professionals feel mothers are promoted more slowly, compared to just 2% of fathers.** This is down from 50% and 4% last year.



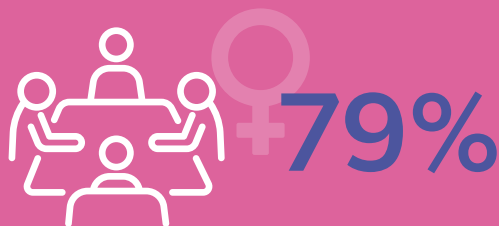
## The prospect of women in the boardroom continues to remain a positive one for business

Despite the relatively low levels of PR women in boardrooms, we can once again highlight the growing importance of having more women in the boardroom and the significant benefits to businesses of greater gender equality.

Almost eight in ten believe that having women in the boardroom helps improve working practices (79%) and the creativity (76%) of companies. Just under three quarters (72%) believe that having women on boards clears barriers to promotion for other women – just in line with last year's findings (73%).

Nine in ten (91%) believe more needs to be done to ensure women in the PR industry have greater boardroom presence, slightly higher than last year (89%).

This once again clearly highlights the need for businesses to take note of the barriers to women progressing and to continue addressing them sooner rather than later, so that businesses can start to see the positive impact of women in their boardroom.



**79%**

believe that having women in the boardroom helps to improve working practices in the PR industry

**79%**

feel having women in the boardroom improves the creativity of the company



**77%**

feel having women in the boardroom helps to improve company productivity

## The barriers to women entering the boardroom are consistent with previous years, suggesting there is still work to be done

Looking at the potential barriers women face when it comes to progressing into senior positions, **the biggest barrier is believed to be childcare or caring responsibilities (87%)**. This has, however, slightly decreased since last year (89%) after having previously increased for 2 years in a row (since 2020). Related to this, 74% feel that the lack of flexible working and family-friendly policies prevents women from progressing into senior positions (75% last year). Therefore, flexible working does not necessarily translate into family-friendly policies.

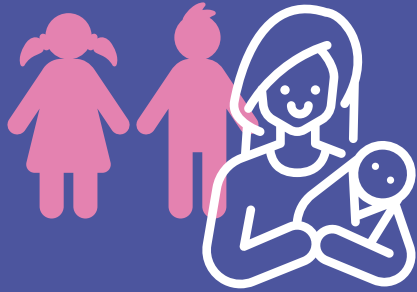
In addition to caring responsibilities, there is also a feeling of inequality when it comes to promotion and recruitment. Nearly three quarters (74%) feel that women tend to be less proactive about asking for promotions than men (up from 71% last year). A similar proportion (71%) believe there is a lack of transparency around recruitment and promotion, which creates a barrier for women attaining more senior roles (again slightly up from 70% last year).

Two thirds (67%), slightly up from 66% last year, believe the lack of work-life balance in a senior role prevents women from getting into the boardroom.

Three fifths (61%) believe that progress is being made to remove barriers that prevent women progressing into senior positions; slightly down since last year (63%).



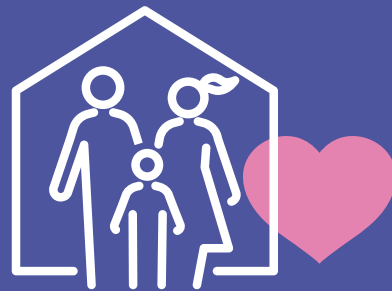
The top 5 barriers preventing women from progressing into senior positions are:



87%

Women predominantly taking on childcare or caring responsibilities

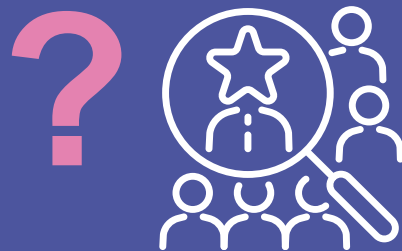
74%  
Lack of flexible working or family-friendly working policies



74%

Women tend to be less proactive about asking for a promotion

71%  
Lack of transparency around recruitment and promotion

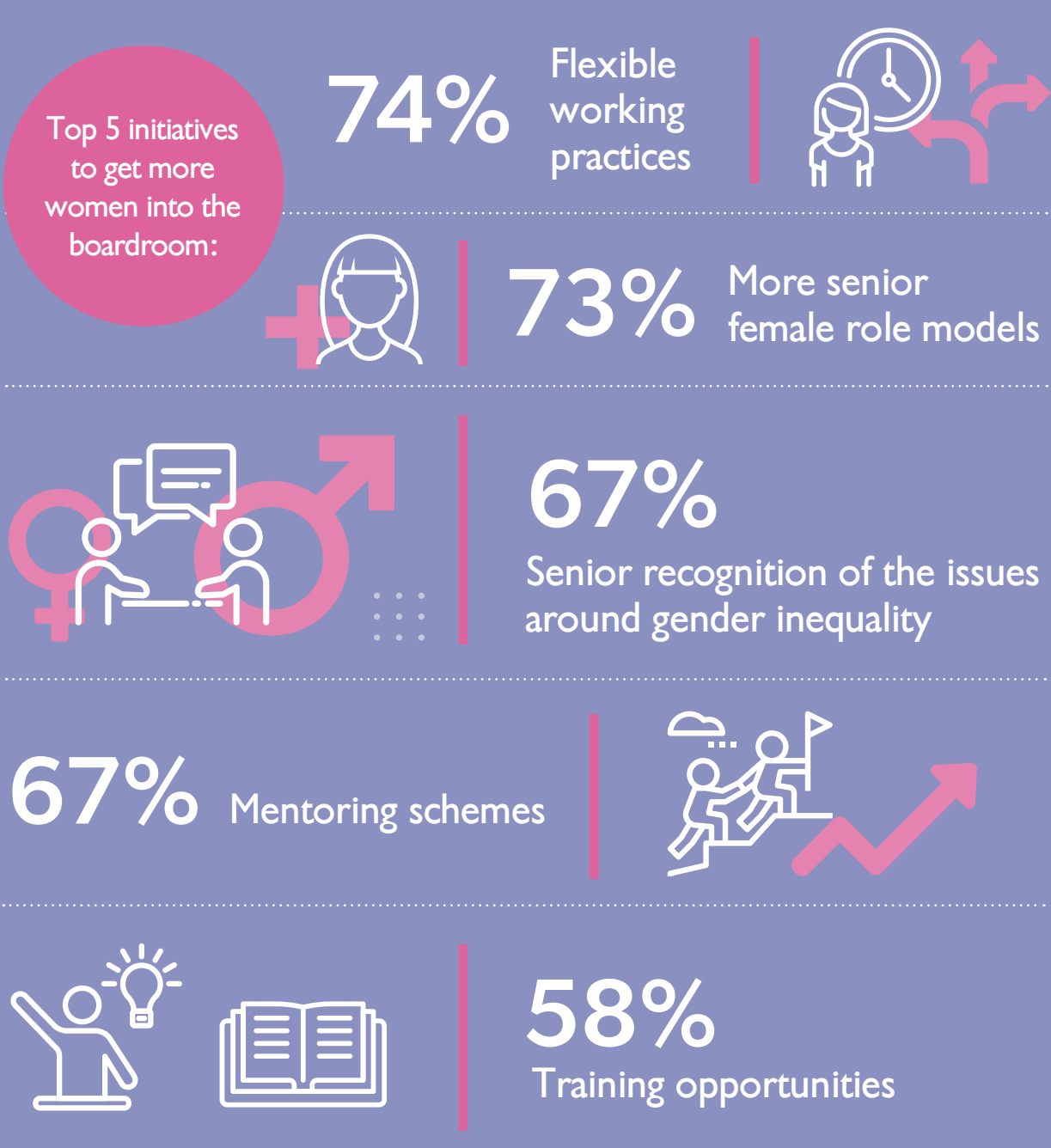


67%

Lack of work / life balance in a senior role

# More needs to be done to break down boardroom barriers

Flexible working practices continue to be considered the best initiative to enable more women to take on board room roles (74%, up from 71% last year). Other initiatives identified to help women’s career progression are having more senior female role models (73%), more senior recognition of the issues around gender inequality (67%), and mentoring schemes (67%).



When asked what initiatives PR professionals believe will enable more women to take on boardroom roles, having flexible working practices (74%) and more senior female role models (73%) came out top. These were followed by having senior recognition of the issues around gender inequality and mentoring schemes (both 67%). While training opportunities and unconscious bias training within recruitment were thought of by three fifths (58%).

# AGEISM

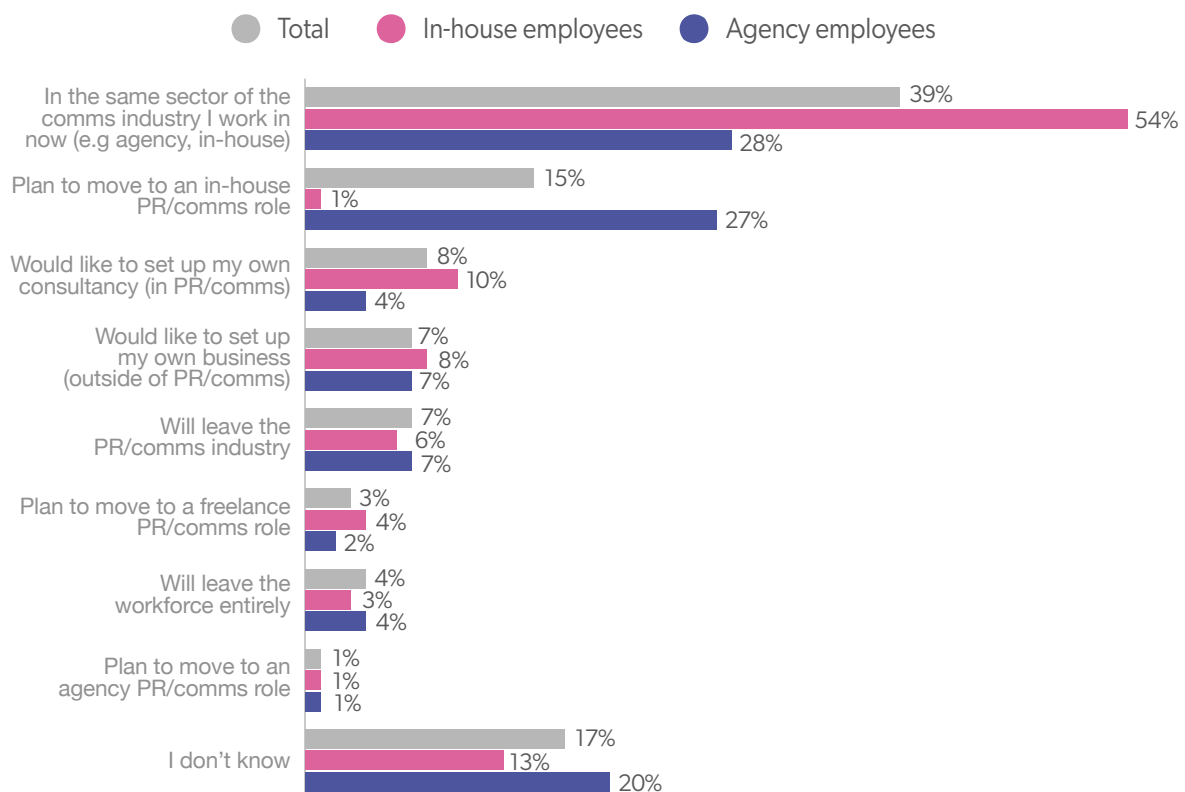
## Three in ten agency workers see themselves working in agency roles in their 50s

Last year we noted that just one-third of PR women working in agencies saw themselves there beyond 50 years of age. This has decreased slightly to 28% in 2023, comparative to the 54% of in-house professionals who say the same.

27% of PR agency women now plan to move to an in-house role in their 50's, up from 22% last year. In contrast only 1% of in-house PR's would consider moving to an agency role at this stage of their career. Less than 1 in 10 (8%) would like to set up their own consultancy.

Only 2 in 5 (39% 43%) of those under 50 years of age think they will be in the sector they work in now when they reach their 50s. This is higher for in-house (54%) PR women than agency (28%) PR women.

### Where do you see yourself working at 50+



If this is the case, the talent pipeline at senior levels is likely to narrow. This combined with issues that we already see at the boardroom level where women are getting promoted more slowly and not being in the boardroom, means this is an even bigger issue.



# GENDER EQUALITY

## Two thirds of employers have gender equality policies in place

Two thirds (66%) of PR professionals say their employer has gender equality/diversity/inclusion policies in place, increasing to 74% for in-house compared to 63% of agencies. However a fifth (21%) do not have any policies in place, and a further 14% are unsure of whether these exist or not.

Of those who have policies, three in ten (30%) have targets related to these.



# HARASSMENT

For the first time this year we asked female PR professionals about their experience of harassment or inappropriate behaviour whilst at work.

Alarmingly, over half (53%) of those surveyed experienced harassment or inappropriate behaviour at work – including one in ten (11%) who have experienced it at their current workplace.

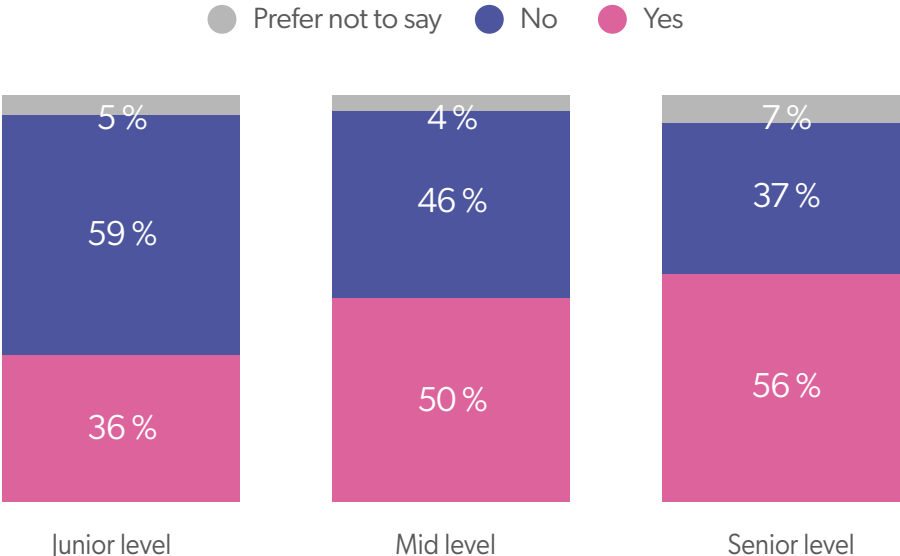
Amongst those, the most common types of harassment were psychological (64%), power (59%), and personal (45%). Other types of harassment experienced by women in PR include discriminatory (29%), sexual (27%), physical (7%), and online/digital (4%).

Harassment has been experienced across all levels – with 30% experiencing it as a junior, 39% in mid-level, and 27% in senior level. Worryingly, one’s boss was the person who most commonly behaved inappropriately towards those who experienced harassment (65%), followed by a colleague (45%) and a client (17%). For those working in an agency, harassment by clients is the highest at 26%.

Just under half (46%) of those who suffered harassment in the workplace reported this to their employer – with the figure once again worryingly lower for those working in an agency (37%). Those who experienced harassment as a junior were less likely to report this than those who experienced this in a mid-level or senior position.



## What was your job seniority at the time of the incident?



It is most disappointing to see that as a result of reporting the experience, a third (32%) of those who reported it left or were encouraged to leave, and a similar proportion (31%) said that nothing happened as a consequence. Just an eighth (12%) reported internal disciplinary procedures once the incident was reported, and a tenth (10%) reported that the perpetrator left or was encouraged to leave the business.

While under a half (46%) reported suffering harassment in the workplace, another half (48%) did not report. Of those who did not report, primarily this came from the fear of a negative impact on their career (41%) or not thinking it was serious enough (36%). About a quarter (24%) did not report the incident because they feared retaliation, and 17% wanted to protect their own mental health.

Worryingly, 27% of those who experienced harassment and didn't report it did not do so because they didn't know what action to take. This is sadly unsurprising, as just three in five (59%) state that their company have policies or training in place to deal with harassment or inappropriate behaviour in the workplace. Nearly a quarter (23%) state that their workplace has no such policies, while nearly a fifth (18%) are unsure.

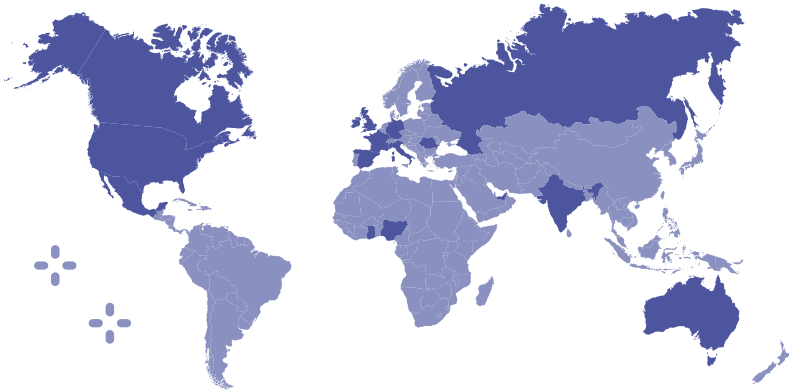


# METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

## What did we do?

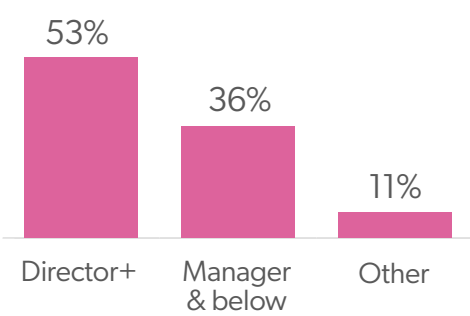
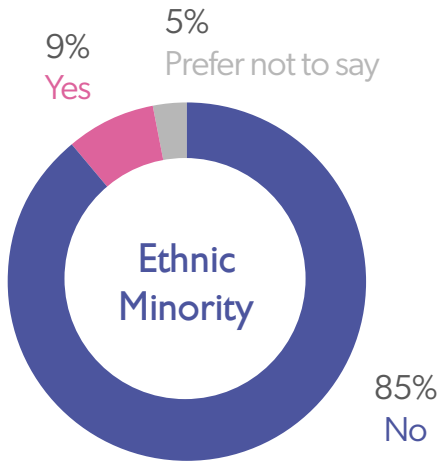
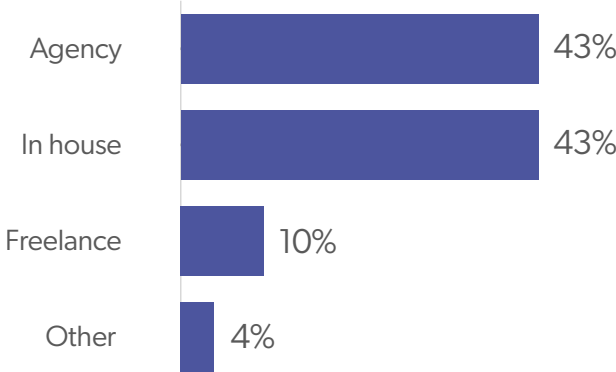
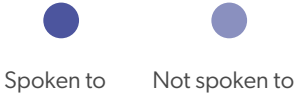
Responses were collected via an online survey designed by Opinium which was distributed by Global Women in PR through their global network. Fieldwork took place between August and September 2023.

## Who did we speak to?



### We spoke to 560 Female PR professionals around the world

Respondents were highly experienced and working at a senior level. Over half (53%) were at board director level and 48% had over 15 years experience in the PR industry.



# ABOUT OPINIUM



Opinium is an award winning strategic insight agency built on the belief that in a world of uncertainty and complexity, success depends on the ability to stay on pulse of what people think, feel and do. Creative and inquisitive, we are passionate about empowering our clients to make the decisions that matter. We work with organisations to define and overcome strategic challenges – helping them to get to grips with the world in which their brands operate. We use the right approach and methodology to deliver robust insights, strategic counsel and targeted recommendations that generate change and positive outcomes.

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