



unLeash

INSIGHTS REPORT

Hiring for the Future Workforce



In partnership with

hireEZ

About UNLEASH



UNLEASH is a global information business providing the latest HR, learning and recruitment news & analysis, trends and events on the challenges and opportunities shaping the new working world.

Since 2011, UNLEASH has served as a strategic transformation engine for the most powerful network of human resources leaders. They represent a range of organisations from the world's leading employers from the Fortune 2000, public sector organizations to innovative start-ups and everything in between. Built to inspire, connect and empower leaders to navigate the fast-changing world of work and exponential technologies.

We love our community. They are a diverse group of innovators laser focused on the future of work, who are passionate about people and getting the most out of technology. They reimagine work and new ways of working that improve the lives of 10's of millions of people each year.

Ultimately, we provide a platform to share ideas that work, network and do business. UNLEASH's mission is to be the world's #1 destination and marketplace for human resources, recruitment and learning leaders globally.

unleash.ai

About hireEZ



hireEZ is an award-winning, comprehensive outbound recruiting platform helping over 5,000 leading recruiting teams proactively connect jobs to people. With a scalable approach to finding and engaging quality talent, integrating across tech stacks, and consolidating internal and external talent data, teams are able to collaboratively recruit better, faster and stronger. For more information, visit hireEZ.com.

hireez.com



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Executive Summary

It feels like a cliché to say we are at a pivotal moment in time. The world is throwing momentous events at us with alarming regularity. But when it comes to gender parity in the workplace and planning how to hire for the workforce of the future, there truly has never been a better time than now to make workplaces equitable.

Yet, the events of the last two years have impacted the labor market more than anyone could have predicted. And women have, unfortunately, been at the forefront of these changes. There is now a body of research that exists to show just how negatively women have been affected by the changes to work, with many having left in their droves as they struggle to balance family and personal commitments with remote and hybrid models of working.

In parallel, we are also at a point in time where the concept of gender is being explored and held to account in new and important ways. It is quite rightly, no longer a binary issue.

The focus of this research is on women as a result of the documented post-pandemic impact on this particular population. But it is critical that in considering the results, we consider all genders and how in continuing to hire for, and building a more diverse workforce, we all benefit.

hireEZ has partnered with UNLEASH to research and highlight what organizations are doing to tackle this challenge thanks to their prioritization of diversity, equity and inclusion in its work in recruiting. UNLEASH is grateful to the team at hireEZ for suggesting this topic and championing gender parity, particularly at this moment.

We hope you find the results both useful and thought provoking, and would like to thank everyone who took the time to be a part of this research.



KATE GRAHAM
Head of Content Labs and Insights,
UNLEASH



SHANNON PRITCHETT
Head of Marketing and Community
HIREEZ

**There truly has never
been a better time
than now to make
workplaces equitable.**

The Big Picture

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion has now (finally) become a part of every good talent conversation.


Research from McKinsey shows that \$12 trillion could be added to global GDP by 2025 if the gender gap is narrowed (That's the size of the current GDP of Japan, Germany and the UK combined!)¹

Which *sounds* fantastic. But if the events of the last two years have taught us anything, it's that nothing is straightforward any more. The pandemic and its global aftereffects are still rippling through the workforce even as we write. And the effect on the gender balance will continue to be felt for many years to come.

1.1 Pandemic Effect

Hybrid and flexible working offer many more options for women in work. Being able to juggle caring roles and other responsibilities around home working has been a gamechanger in more ways than one. But there are (unintended) consequences that organizations must consider.

Forbes asked at the beginning of 2022, whether hybrid workplaces could turn women into 'second-class employees'³. At the height of the first wave of the pandemic, women left the workforce at four times the rate of men—prompting some to call it a female recession⁴.



“As workers re-enter the office, managers and employers must actively combat bias that favors in-person and equitably distribute opportunities.”

Sian Beilock, Fast Company²

¹ [How advancing women's equality can add \\$12 trillion to global growth, McKinsey](#)

² [It's time to talk about the unintended consequences of flexible and hybrid work for women, Fast Company](#)

³ <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nazbeheshti/2022/01/20/could-the-new-hybrid-workplace-turn-some-women-into-second-class-employees/?sh=3b6c813512ff>

⁴ [How Covid-19 triggered America's first female recession in 50 years, Economist](#)

1.2 The Great Reshuffle and Economic Uncertainty

In 2022, economic uncertainty is pushing some organizations to re-evaluate their recruiting strategies altogether. If you're in recruitment, it's tough out there. We see you. And its knock on effect is being felt throughout the hiring process – and beyond. The 'Great Resignation' or 'Great Reshuffle' followed next, which compounded the situation. The labor market recovered far more quickly than predicted in 2021, but people are either being much more selective about where they work and who they work for, or choosing not to return to work at all. This has created the most candidate-driven market on record. And 'worker-starved businesses are having to offer particularly attractive offers to attract new hires.'⁵

If you're in recruitment, it's tough out there. We see you. And its knock on effect is being felt throughout the hiring process – and beyond.

1.3 Who Did We Speak To And Why?

HR and talent professionals are on the coal face of this unique confluence of factors day in, day out. Charged with hiring, onboarding, developing and retaining the best people, they are also often the custodians of organizations' diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) agendas and the employer brand. With people at the heart of what they do, this makes a lot of sense, but changing the dynamics of the workforce can never sit with HR alone. It has to be a collective effort.



Worker-starved businesses are having to offer particularly attractive offers to attract new hires.

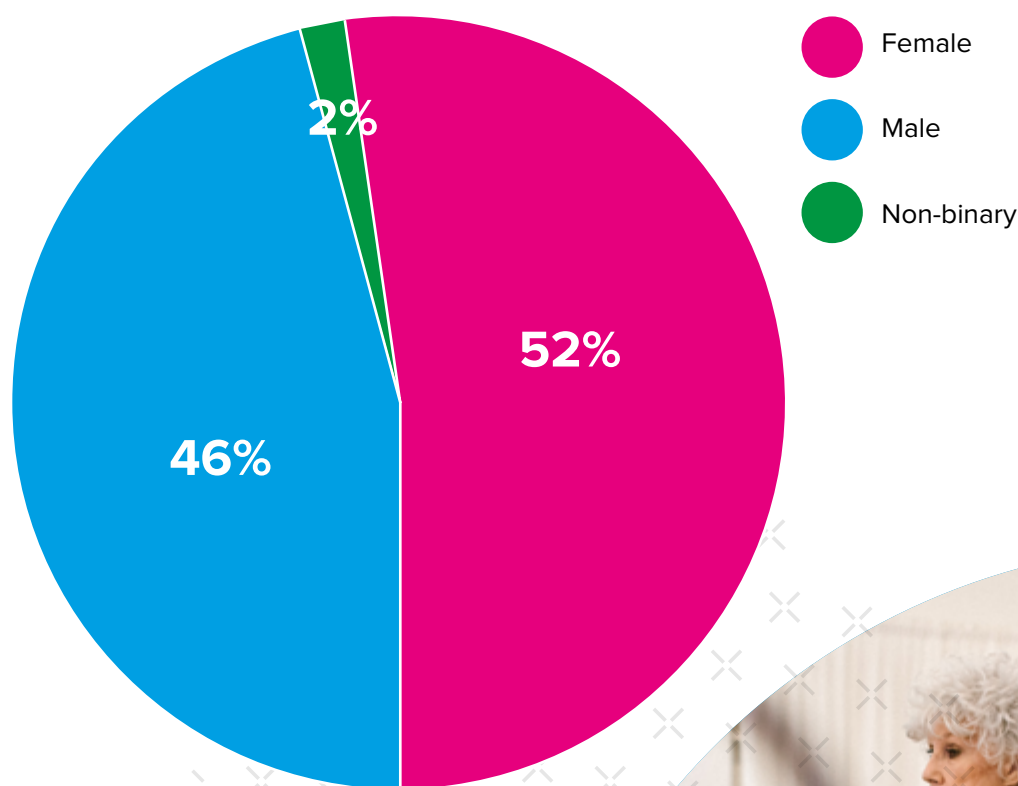
⁵ [8 ways to succeed in a tight labor market, Ziprecruiter](#)

That said, we wanted to speak to people on the frontline and share their insights to help others understand how they are shaping the workforce of the future.

This research was conducted with HR and talent leaders to get under the skin of this now non-negotiable topic. 150 of them responded to our questions, with the gender split revealed below. It is important that the sample is a cross-section of the workforce in order for the resulting insights to be as balanced as possible. There is additional information in the Appendices on the respondents including location, industry, role, specialism and decision making level.

It is also particularly relevant to note the gender split here as it demonstrates that the insights in this report are rounded and unbiased when it comes to gender balance in the workplace.

If you are comfortable sharing, it would be helpful for our research if you could tell us your gender.





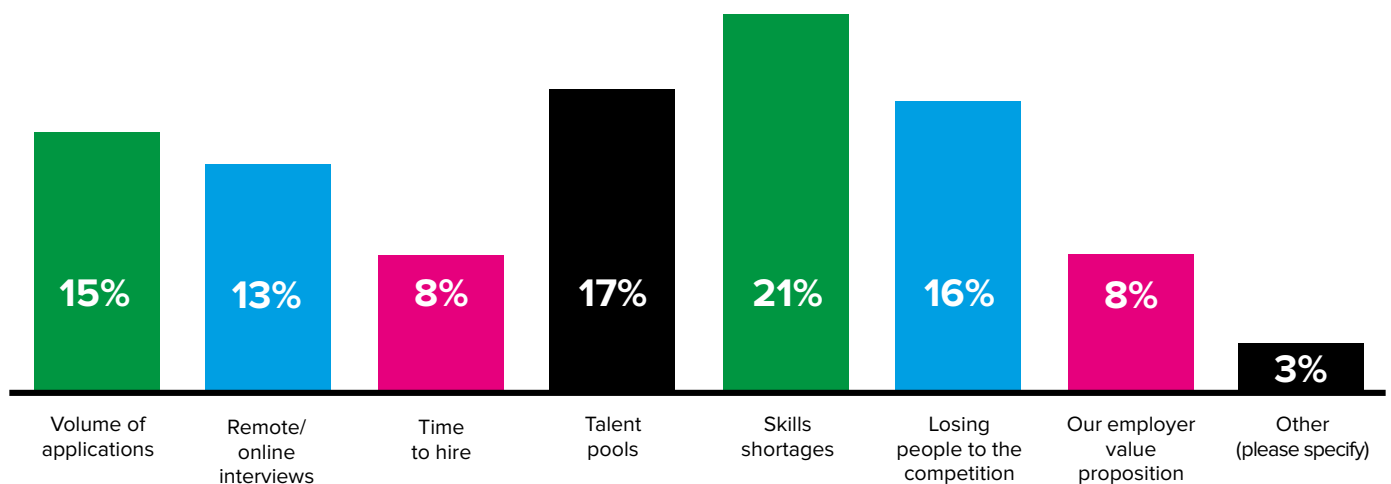
What's Happening Now?

74% of our research respondents confirm they are finding it difficult to hire the right people at the moment. Given the current broader statistics that show the labor market was the 'tightest since World War II, this result is hardly surprising. In the US (include month), Economists calculate a 5.3 million gap between jobs and workers⁶.

Now, with fears of an economic downturn, the talent market continues to shift. In Europe, the picture is less stark but nevertheless the churn has increased. In France for example, the number of resignations during the third quarter of 2021 (the most recent data available) was the highest since 2007. Meanwhile in the UK, the rate of employees switching jobs was at an all-time high of 3.2% between October and December last year. In Australia, the rate is almost 10% above the pre-pandemic average and in Singapore, research has found that almost half of people were unsure if they'd stay in their current role over the next six months⁷.

As we unpack the overall hiring challenge, it is fascinating to see where the pain points lie.

What's currently your biggest challenge when it comes to hiring?



⁶ [U.S. Labor Market Is Tightest of Postwar Era, Bloomberg](#)

⁷ [The Great Resignation is Taking Root Around the World, CNN](#)

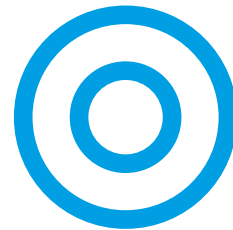
Skills shortages top the list of challenges with nearly a quarter of our respondents citing this as their biggest hiring challenge. As early as the start of 2021, 87% of organizations recognized they either already had skills gaps – or expected to within the next few years⁸. As a result, those job seekers with in-demand skills are being snapped up, leaving very few in the market for a new role.

This creates a natural follow on to the second biggest challenge which are small talent pools and third, losing people to the competition. This is the very opposite of a golden triangle. In fact, for hiring managers and talent acquisition professionals, it is more of a perfect storm. As we shall see in later sections, this precarious situation demands new approaches to hiring that help circumnavigate these shortages and the tough competition to fill vacancies.

With the stage grimly set in the search for new hires, it makes the desire for gender parity in hiring even tougher. There is a strong desire to improve DE&I within organizations today – stronger than ever before – with 93% of leaders agreeing that it is a top priority. But sticking to this strategy when the desired skills and talent is so thin on the ground, can be a real challenge. Indeed, only 34% of leaders from the same study believe their DE&I agenda is a strength in their organization⁹.

When we break that down further into the specifics of gender parity, just over half of our respondents confirmed that gender parity is a major part of their DE&I strategy. Less than 20% of organizations are not prioritizing it now. And with companies like Adobe not only achieving, but sustaining gender parity, it is hard to argue with it as a measurable business outcome.

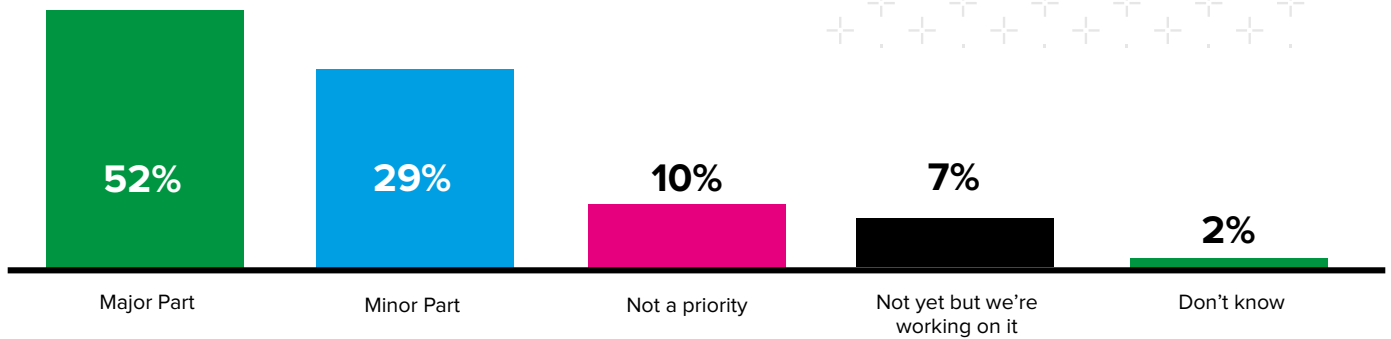
In 2018, Adobe achieved gender pay parity and are now focusing on 'opportunity parity'. Organizations should stop looking at addressing DEI with a stop-gap approach and implement a holistic strategy – from building talent pipeline, attracting diverse candidates, enhancing employee experience, to driving diversity across the industry. When people feel appreciated and included, they are more creative, innovative and successful.



⁸ [Mind the \(Skills\) Gap, McKinsey](#)

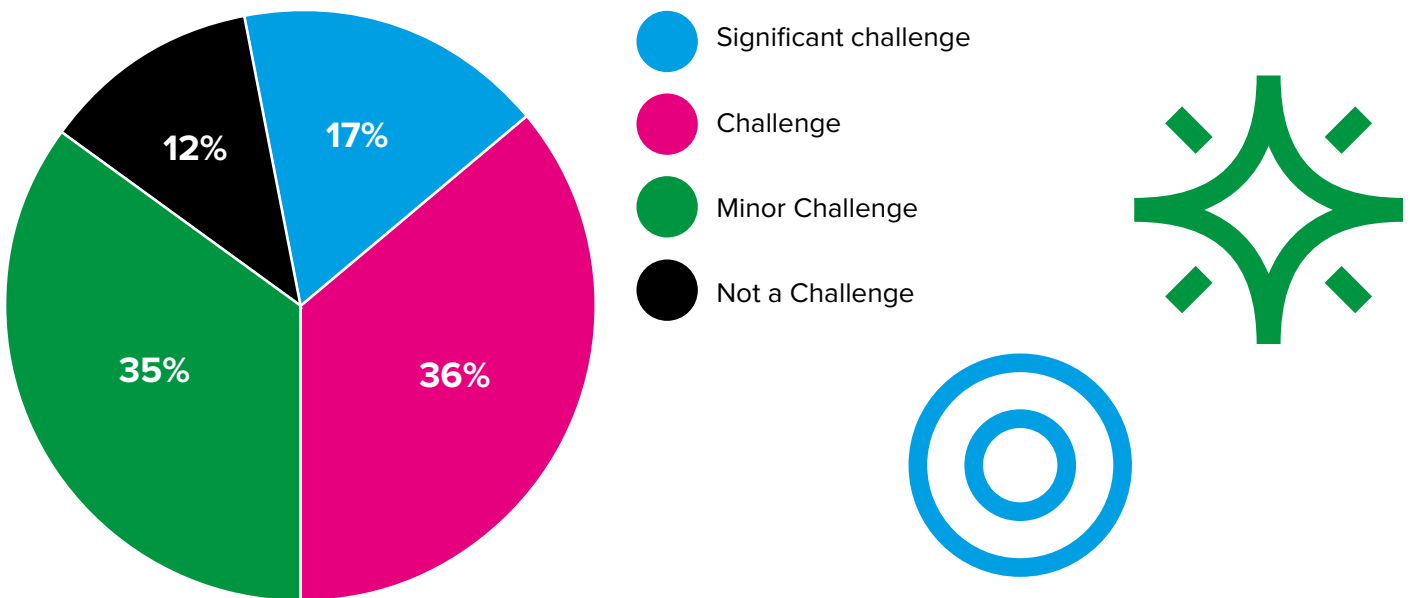
⁹ [#Me to #We Study, Hack Future Lab](#)

Is gender parity part of your current diversity, equity and inclusion strategy?



Drilling down yet another layer, the picture is further complicated by differences of company and industry. Interestingly, only 17% report gender parity being a significant challenge.

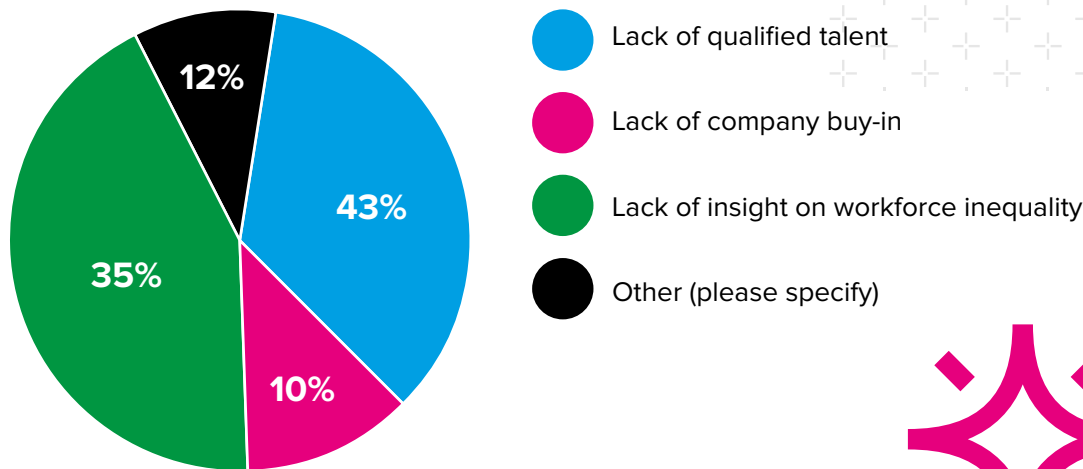
How big a challenge is gender parity in your organisation/industry?



There are several different obstacles to achieving gender parity reported by our research participants. The biggest challenge comes back full circle to where we began this section with skills shortages/a lack of qualified talent with 43% citing this at the top of their list.

A lack of insight on workforce inequality comes in as the second biggest challenge at 35%. This is a nod to the growing importance of employee listening and accurate and timely people analytics internally in an organization. And the need to keep pace with market movements and trends externally.

What is the biggest challenge to achieving gender parity for your organization?



2.1 Current Hiring Approaches

Despite the big picture trends referenced in Section 1 and the difficult circumstances that many women have faced since the onset of the pandemic, as many as 30% of organizations state that gender parity has improved over the last two years. Only 6% say it has worsened and 58% believe it has stayed about the same. This is encouraging. But set against the backdrop of broader research data, we must be careful not to celebrate too soon.

The mood among HR leaders is bullish however. As many as 89% believe gender parity will be achieved in their organizations within the next four years. Not many wanted to put a specific year on it. But given the predictions of the World Economic Forum reference previously stated that it will take up to four generations for gender parity to be achieved, getting there by 2027 feels ambitious at best.

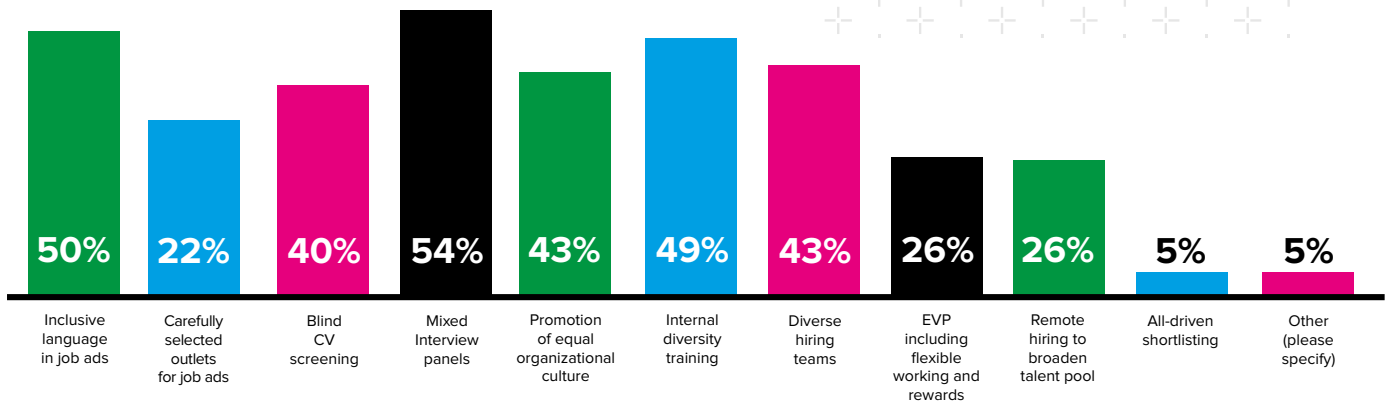
At worst, it is indicative of a potentially dangerous complacency or over confidence that it will be easy for organizations to tweak their hiring practices and focus more heavily on their DE&I strategy and reach this goal.

2.2 Current Measures of Success

It is said that 'what gets measured, gets done'. There are some obvious lever for organizations to pull in the case for hiring the workforce of the future in terms of reporting metrics and what is valued by the C-Suite.

This research shows that 69% of organizations feel they currently are receiving enough applications from women. But 74% are also saying they are finding it challenging to hire the right people at the moment. Which begs the question, how many applications constitute 'enough'? It would seem that this measure needs revising. Or else we run the risk of increasing the complacency reference above. For most organizations, gender parity will not be reached within the next four years. And if we were able to get to the raw statistics, it is doubtful that organizations are truly receiving 'enough' applications from women at present to a) fill all the vacancies they have and/or b) do this in a way that promotes gender parity and supports DE&I targets or goals (the notion of mandated ratios could be a whole separate report in itself).

Do you use any of the following to help the gender balance of your recruitment process? (Tick all that apply)



Over half agree that the language used in job descriptions matters. Gaucher, Friesen and Kay reported that coded language like “energetic” can deter older candidates, just as phrases associated with masculinity like “crushing it” or “guru” can deter women. By removing such language and actively aiming to be more inclusive, companies can strip the hiring process of some bias.¹⁰

Meanwhile, just under half of respondents cited internal diversity training as a factor that is making the difference in the gender balance of their recruitment processes. This has been a controversial area¹¹ but with repetition and consistency, is hopefully starting to make a difference according to our talent leaders.

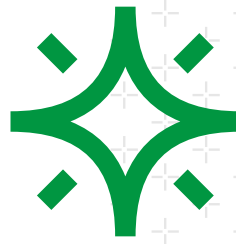
Of the answer options provided, AI-driven shortlisting makes perhaps a surprisingly small showing at just 4.5%. Given the hype, it could have been anticipated that this would be much higher. But there has also been significant controversy around AI solutions learning to be biased in hiring more men into roles, based on the success rate of previous candidates¹². Buyer beware indeed...



¹⁰ [10 ways to remove gender bias from job descriptions, Glassdoor](#)

¹¹ [Why ineffective diversity training won't go away, BBC](#)

¹² [Amazon scraps secret AI recruiting tool that showed bias against women, Reuters, 2018](#)



What's Coming Next?

When we asked what organizations can start doing differently to improve their gender balance in hiring, a mix of tools and tactics emerged. Screening emerged particularly strongly to ensure a fair opportunity for enough women to be put forward for interviews. And there are now a myriad of technology solutions that can support automated or blind screening now.

Other recommendations that emerged strongly include:

- Hiring from more diverse universities and colleges, as well as diverse professional associations.
- Gender balanced interview panels were consistently highlighted as an immediate way to make an impact.
- Offering mentorship to every employee once they enter the company can help with retention (more on this below).
- Hiring a diversity officer or task force to oversee these strategies and measure results.

3.3 The Next Generation of EVP

Much of what was recommended however, transcends talent acquisition alone. It requires organizations to really sit back and consider their whole Employee Value Proposition (EVP). Increasingly, recognition and reward are going beyond just salary and financial benefits. And there are powerful generational shifts at play which are seeing swathes of employees searching for purpose, fairness and diversity as the cornerstones of their employer's values and every day work.

Meanwhile, most organizations are still trying to figure out their hybrid and remote working models for the long term. This can be a lever for those prioritizing gender parity. As one article states, we should not underestimate the impact that "hybrid, or even fully remote, working arrangements can play in organizations' diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging (DEIB) strategies. Flexible and hybrid work – if done right – can be a vital tool in the quest for equity in the workplace¹³."

HR has a golden opportunity now to harness these trends to create an EVP that appeals to the future workforce and paves the way for parity.



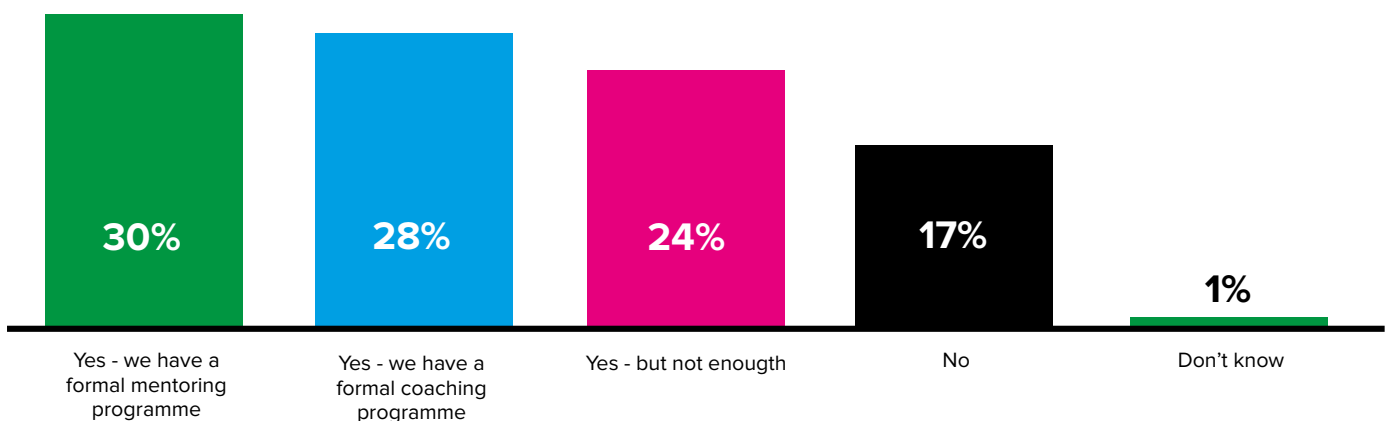
¹³ [Why hybrid, remote & flexible work appeals, Great Place To Work](#)

3.3.1 Mentoring and Coaching

The provision of mentoring and coaching is increasingly an important driver in the broader EVP and it emerged strongly in the recommendations for practical tips to attract and retain a better gender balance. But it is truly encouraging to see nearly a third of organizations providing formal mentoring and coaching programs for women.

Broader research has shown the positive impact that mentoring in particular can have on women's career progression. And it is important to note that these programs do not need to be gender specific in terms of who provides the mentoring. The point is that women are supported, encouraged and developed by people either higher up the organization – or outside of it – that they might not otherwise have had access to. Many women do not like to ask for this kind of support, so having a formal program to enroll in removes that barrier and is a huge enabler of progress.

Does your organization provide mentoring/coaching to enable/facilitate progression for women?



It is also important to note that while there are platforms and solutions that exist to support and augment mentoring and coaching programs, not having one does not need to be a blocker here.

All you need is the organization directory and a spreadsheet to get started!

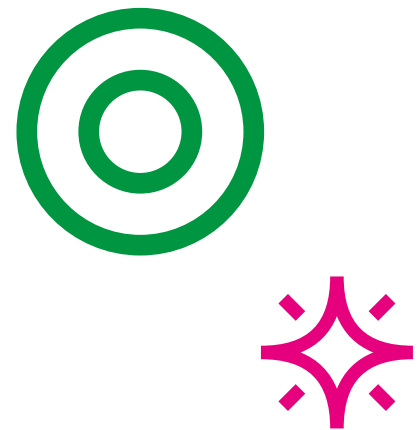
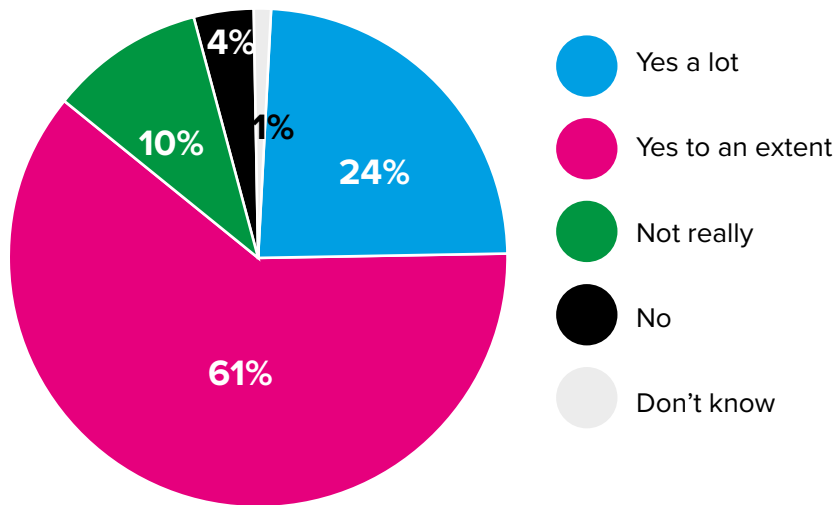
Oana Iordachescu, Head of Technology TA – Europe, Wayfair

14 [Women need mentors now more than ever, Forbes](#)

3.3.2 Internal Talent Mobility

Another trend that has emerged as an upside of the pandemic is the explosion of internal talent mobility and marketplaces in organizations today. So it is not surprising to see it included in the list of recommendations for aiding gender balance going forwards. The same approach and mindset that will aid the hiring of a more balanced future workforce when it comes to bringing in external talent, can be applied to internal processes too.

Do you believe internal recruitment marketplaces/talent mobility programmes can aid gender parity?



It is worth noting that 61% are only recognizing internal talent mobility aids this cause 'to an extent'. However, as one of our research respondents reflected.

As a practice, true talent mobility is not yet a mature HR practice and as it is strengthened, consolidated and refined as an approach, there is an enormous opportunity for it to have a larger impact on the opportunities for women within organizations.

Manjuri Sinha, Global Head of Talent Acquisition, OLX Group

Building internal mobility case studies, scenarios and opportunities into your organizations EVP can be an easy win, even as talent mobility emerges as a practice and matures within the HR function.

3.3.3 Performance Reviews

Another lever in the EVP toolkit is the ever-present performance review. An area of HR that has itself undergone scrutiny and subsequent transformation in recent years. From a rigid annual process, performance reviews are now much more frequent and more agile to keep pace with the rapid change that organizations now face. A trend that was already well underway pre-pandemic, but which the COVID-19 crisis accelerated further.

When it comes to how they can support the advancement of women in the workplace, over a quarter of our respondents believe performance reviews can help a great deal. And overall, only 19% disagree they can help at all.

Again, this is a golden opportunity for HR as a whole to address the gender parity of organizations and stop making it solely a challenge for recruitment. Providing a formal platform where the discussion of promotion, progression and pay is expected can combat some of the documented barriers women in particular face in the workplace.

3.2 Hiring Tools, Tactics and Technology

One of the upsides of the past couple of years is the huge advances in technology. But more than that, hiring can now be viewed through a different lens. Rather than relying on inbound applications – which in this context, may or may not include a fair and inclusive gender balance – there is the opportunity to take on a more outbound approach, and more proactive mindset.

The systems and strategies that recruiters use today were built to support a market that just doesn't exist anymore. Recruiters need to be more proactive and strategic than ever.

Steven Jiang, CEO and Co-Founder, hireEZ

AI sourcing can now take recruitment teams beyond job boards and across the Internet to bring the candidates to them, regardless of whether or not that person is looking for a role. Better still, this technology can bring underrepresented talent to the fore, driving diversity, equity and inclusion from the very front end of the talent pipeline. Once candidates have been identified, automation can then drive outreach and engagement at a scale heretofore unseen. Learning lessons from the marketing industry, the technology within the new look recruitment stack enables nurturing and interview scheduling en masse.

Then once a candidate is into the talent pool, the technology can now also rematch them to future roles and keep them 'alive' through future hiring cycles if they are unsuccessful on the first attempt. The ATS can be much-maligned but usually there are good candidates in there if they can be surfaced by the right hiring manager at the right time.

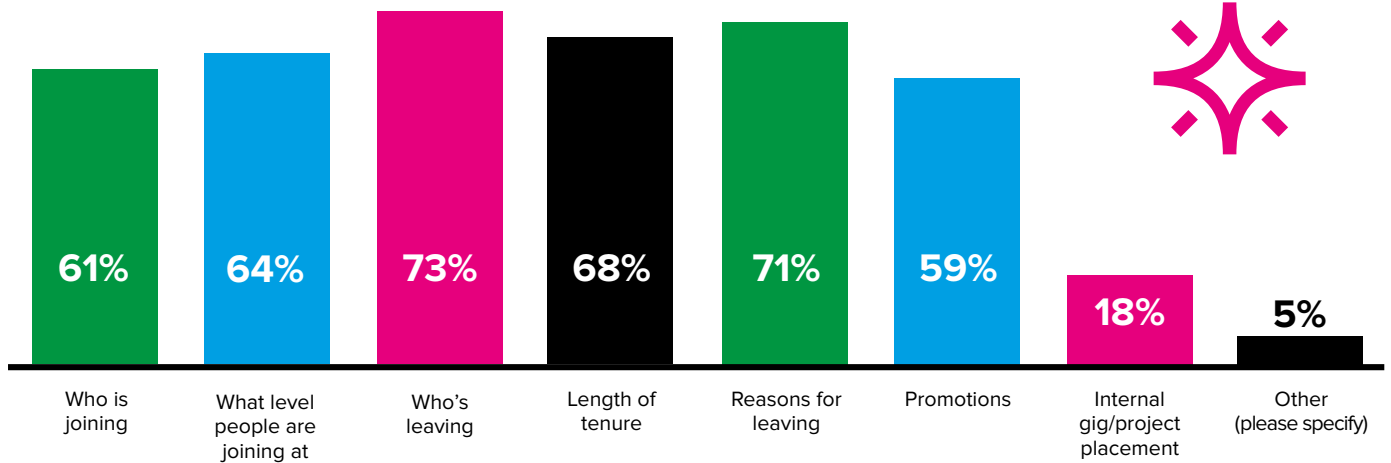
Perhaps the most exciting part of the advances in recruitment technology is not the individual components but the versatility and potential around your tech stack/ecosystem going forwards. The ATS is still a core component, alongside CRM and onboarding solutions. But there are exciting specialist providers making their mark in the market and providing straightforward collaborations and integrations with existing systems. This opens up a world of possibilities when it comes to hiring for the future workforce.

¹⁴ [Women need mentors now more than ever, Forbes](#)

3.3 What Gets Measured, Gets Done

When we asked about the people analytics that organizations are currently reporting on, the results were interesting. Deciding which metrics to report on and highlight is a constant talking point for the UNLEASH audience in our live online sessions. So seeing the trend of ‘who is leaving’ and ‘reasons for leaving’ top the answers, we have to question why some of the other metrics – those that might provoke action and prevent people leaving – do not rank higher.

What people analytics data do you currently report on? (Tick all that apply)



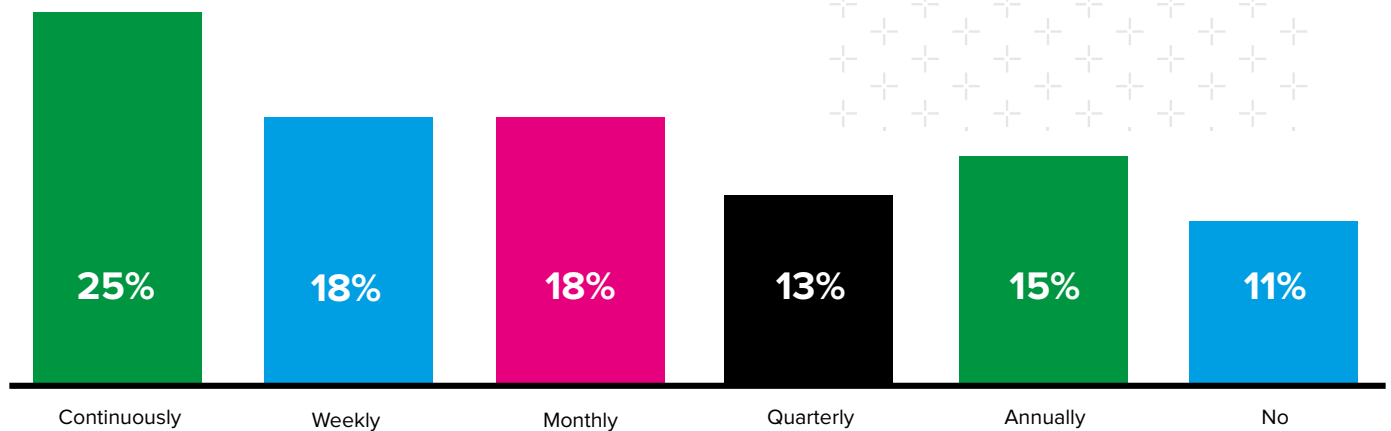
If we unpack this and dive into the area of employee listening data, the plot thickens further. Employee listening has exploded in the wake of the pandemic¹⁵. Trying to understand what people need and want has never been more important – and with the Great Resignation and potential economic downturn creating higher turnover than ever.

We have to ask, if we don't understand why people are leaving then how can we help to stop that from happening? And if we aren't proactively addressing that, what is even the point of reporting on it?



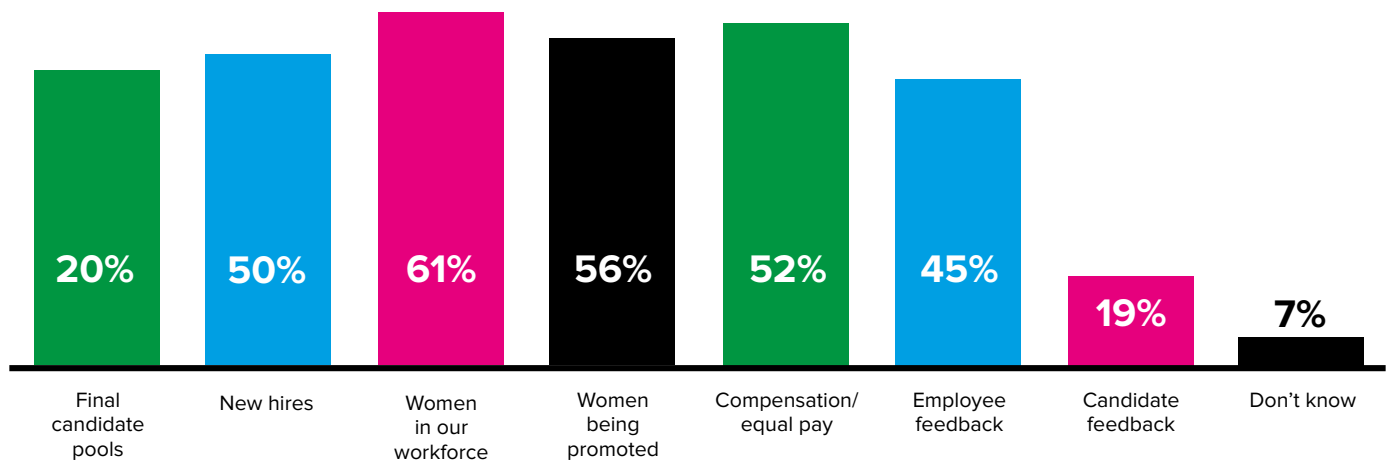
¹⁵ [Why listening to employees supports a positive return to work, World Economic Forum](#)

Do you capture employee listening data in your organization?



Only one quarter of organizations are continuously listening to their employees. With 46% - almost half – only checking in monthly or even less often. In the current climate, this feels like a huge miss. So much effort, time and resource (not to mention cold hard cash) is put into recruiting good people and the best talent – and hopefully a good gender balance within that – but how much is wasted if we are unable to retain them?

When it comes to gender parity, what are your current measures of success? (Tick all that apply)

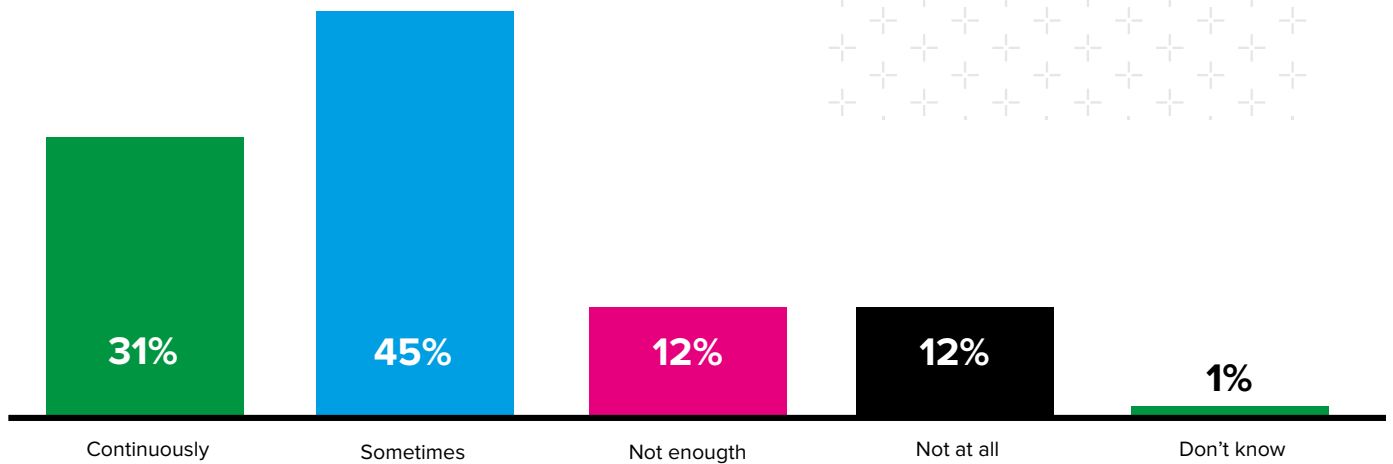


It is however, encouraging to see a number of key metrics being measured and reported on that are specific to the challenge of the future workforce and a better gender balance. Over half of organizations are actively reporting on:

- **The number of women in the workforce**
- **The volume of women being promoted**
- **Whether or not their pay and compensation is equal**
- **The split of gender represented in new hire numbers**

The news then gets better again when we see that this data is proactively being analyzed for its impact on gender parity. Three quarters of organizations are at least trying to do this, with almost on third saying they are applying this data to their gender parity agenda continuously.

Is this data analyzed for its impact on gender parity?



This is extremely encouraging as the old adage ‘what gets measured gets done’ remains as true today as it ever did. So if organizations are actively tracking, measuring and analyzing the right data that will champion gender parity – it is far more likely to actually happen!



A Shift in Mindset

While the overall results of this research are hopeful and show a positive direction for gender parity in the workforce, there are concerning elements of complacency. It not just a given that gender parity will happen. The comparison of our respondents' optimism that gender parity will be reached within the next five years is a long, long way from the predictions of the World Economic Forum. 103 years out to be exact. This then sits alongside a sense of those of us involved in recruitment and talent acquisition being in a tough spot. These are indeed challenging times and the aftermath of the pandemic, Great Resignation and economic uncertainty continue to impact our hiring options. And when candidates are scarce, gender parity can suffer.

But much of that is if we come at this issue with a reactive mindset.

Changing this is not just about a 'can do' attitude. It is about fundamentally rethinking how we approach recruiting. Candidate pools might be shifting – and within that the number of women available to hire. But those are the people currently searching for a new role. What about all those people that could be a candidate and just don't realize it yet?

The time has come for a new approach here. In order to successfully grow and perform, HR's mindset needs to switch to become more proactive. If the candidates aren't there then we have the power and opportunity to go and find them. Many people would love an opportunity but perhaps don't know it yet – or haven't plucked up the courage to do anything about it.

And we know that when it comes to gender diversity and women in particular, the sense of imposter syndrome and other internalized barriers can prevent them from putting themselves out there for roles they potentially feel are beyond them.

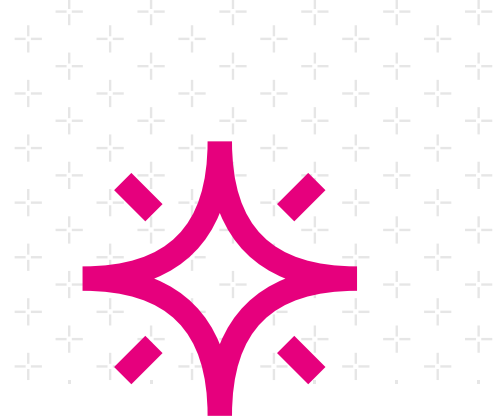
But if we flip this on its head and think about how they might respond if we approached them. Giving a sense of a compliment, of confidence right from the outset of the process, how different could the results be? And how much more quickly could we get to that golden state of gender parity?

With a proactive mindset, suddenly, everyone in the workforce, in any role, in any organization becomes hiring material. If you want to hire more women – go and get them! This shift in mindset has the opportunity to build on the positives captured in this research. There has never been a better time than now to close the gender gap and proactively hire for the workforce of the future.

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Appendix: About this Research



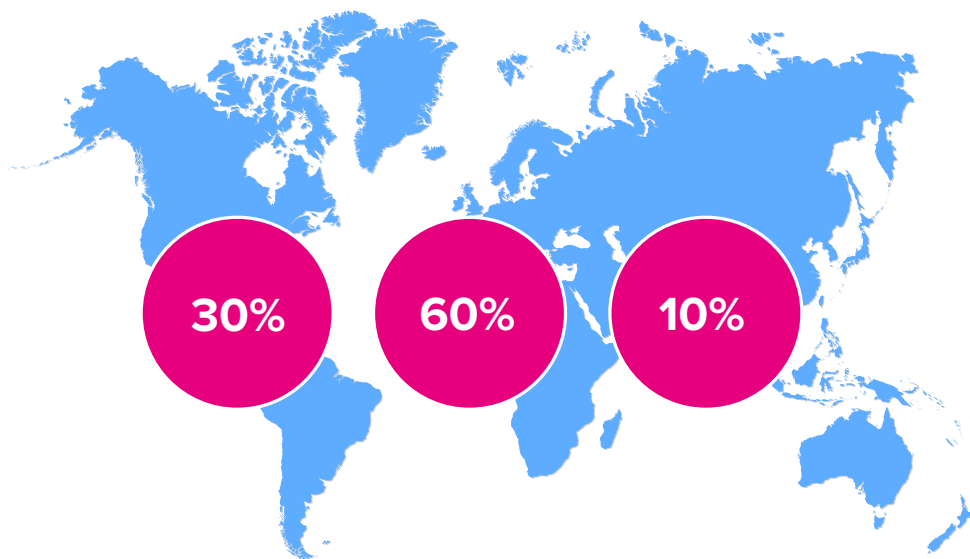
How was this research conducted?

The research was conducted by UNLEASH Group using two surveys combined with in-depth, qualitative interviews with HR leaders.

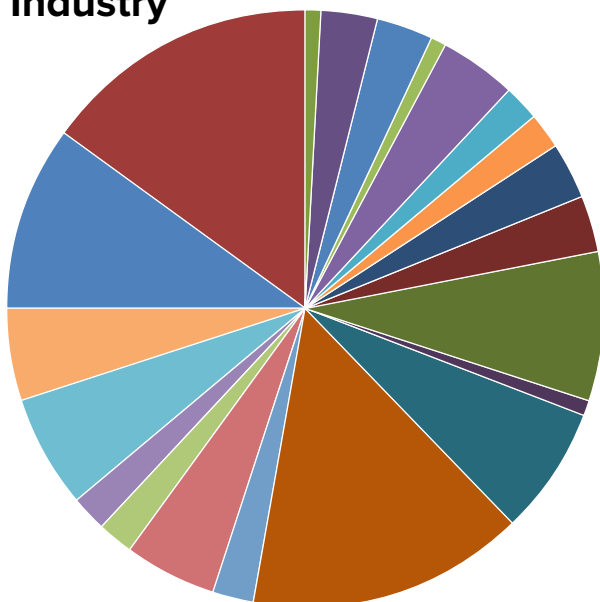
About the respondents

UNLEASH engaged with over 150 senior HR, talent and recruitment professionals from around the world.

Where are they?



Industry



- Advertising & marketing
- Agriculture
- Airlines & Aerospace
- Automotive
- Business Support
- Construction
- Education
- Entertainment & Leisure
- Finance
- FMCG
- Government
- Healthcare & Pharmaceuticals
- Insurance
- Manufacturing
- MICE
- Nonprofit
- Professional Services
- Real Estate
- Retail & Consumer Durables
- Telecoms & Technology
- Transportation & Delivery
- Utilities, energy & extraction

Role



Organizations represented include:



Qualitative input

Our thanks go to the UNLEASH audience worldwide who took part in this research. In particular, we'd like to thank those senior HR leaders who gave up their time to talk to us in the qualitative aspect of the research. These conversations bring the data to life and add depth to the insight we can provide to the readers of this report. Their frontline insights and experience are invaluable as they continue to drive our profession forward worldwide.

Accuracy of Information and Warranties

The analysis and recommendations made in this research are based on the information currently available to UNLEASH Group and its supporting partners and from sources believed to be reliable. UNLEASH and its partners disclaim all warranties as to the accuracy, completeness or adequacy of such information. UNLEASH and its partners will have no liability for errors, omissions or inadequacies in the information contained herein or for interpretations hereof.

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