

RESEARCH CENTRE

# THE LONG ROAD TO CHANGE

Young Women's Trust Annual Survey 2023



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# Foreword



My name is Billie (they/she) and I am a Peer Researcher for Young Women's Trust. I stepped into this position after accessing the fantastic Work It Out coaching support that Young Women's Trust offers.

While writing this foreword, I've reflected on the discrimination I have faced as a young neurodiverse gender fluid woman/non binary person in the LGBTQIA+ community. My preferred pronouns are not regularly used and my identity isn't fully welcomed or included in many professional fields.

Reading this report unfortunately didn't surprise me, We find that this year 50% of young women have experienced discrimination at work. It did however surprise me that this has risen from 2022, when this figure was 42%. It's unclear whether this rise is a result of a greater awareness around what constitutes discrimination or whether the discrimination itself has risen – or both.

Being subject to discrimination can become so much a part of our everyday, that we can ourselves begin to ignore, downplay or dismiss discriminatory behaviour. And then there is the often giant leap from experiencing discrimination to doing something about it, often made greater by a

lack of support or encouragement to do so in the workplace. Our report finds that 19% of young women don't know their rights in relation to workplace discrimination and 25% would not feel comfortable to challenge or report discrimination, compared to 17% of young men.

So how do we begin to improve self-advocacy in the workplace? I think it starts with spreading awareness. Increasing understanding of what discrimination can look like and how it manifests is fundamental, and this report can be a vital resource to support that. Page 15 suggests actionable steps for employers, colleagues, managers, services and the government to tackle gender-based discrimination specifically, including creating work spaces in which calling discrimination out is safe and taken seriously.

Let's hope both next year's and future figures leave us feeling more hopeful for a fairer world and workplace.

## Methodology

We spoke to a representative sample of 4,061 18-30 year old young women in England and Wales and a comparison group of 1,049 young men.

Fieldwork was carried out between 19 June and 1 July 2023.

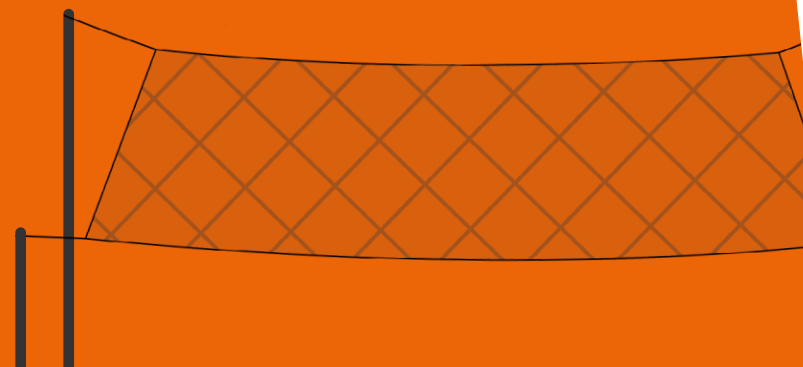
The overall sample of young women contains 73 responses from trans young women and 64 responses from people who identify as non-binary. For the sake of brevity, we will refer to this group as 'young women' throughout the report.

The 2022 survey used as a comparison was carried out between 11 and 19 April 2022, with 4,075 young women aged 18-30 and 1,040 young men. The survey included 51 responses from trans young women and 64 people who identified as non-binary.

In a separate survey, we also heard from 907 professionals with responsibility for recruitment and/or HR decision making about their organisation's employment practices, attitudes and behaviours towards young women in the workplace.

The data was weighted at analysis to be representative of the UK business population by location and sector.

# COST OF LIVING



# The impact of the cost of living crisis on young women is worsening, and the gulf between young women and young men is growing

Young men’s experience seems to be stabilising whereas young women’s has got substantially worse, and the gap is widening

**56%** of young women described their current financial situation as **‘not that comfortable’** or **‘not at all comfortable’**, compared to **41%** of young men.

This has increased from **49%** of young women in 2022 and **42%** of young men.

**46%** of young women told us that their **financial situation has got worse** over the last 12 months, compared to **31%** of young men.

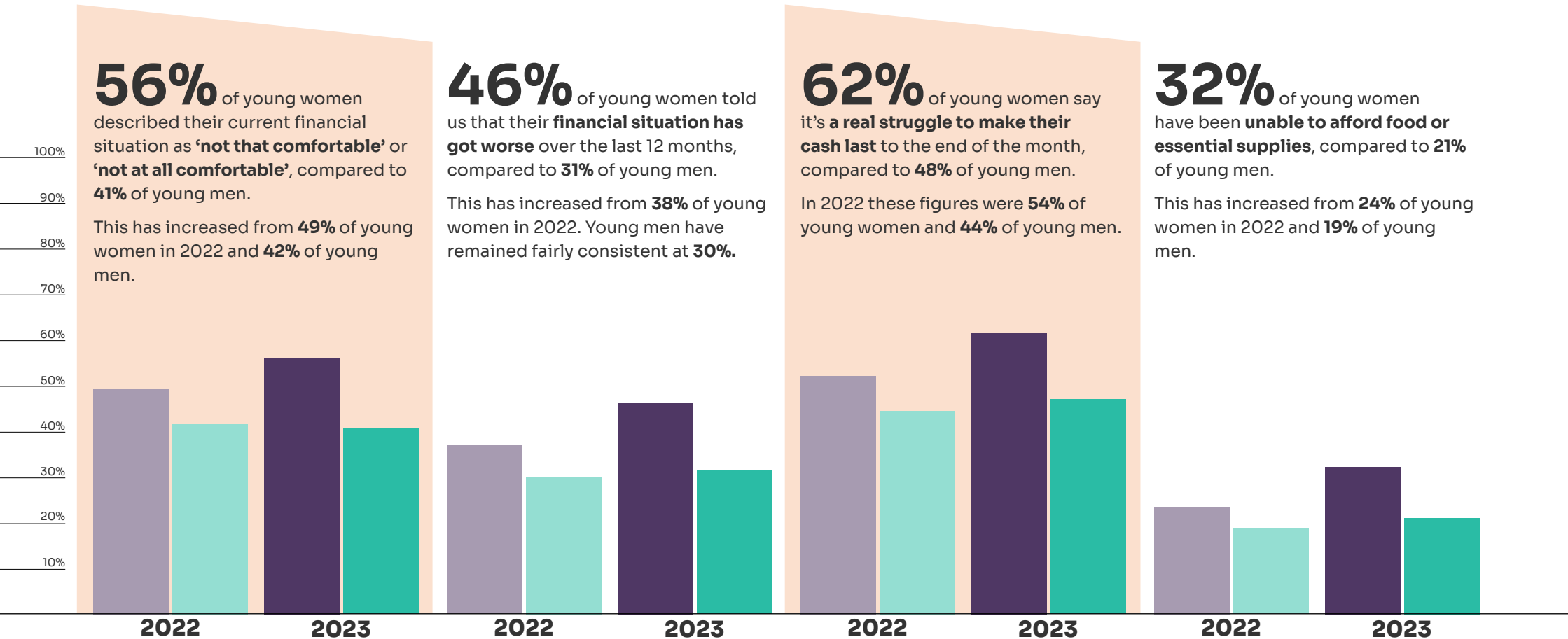
This has increased from **38%** of young women in 2022. Young men have remained fairly consistent at **30%**.

**62%** of young women say it’s a **real struggle to make their cash last** to the end of the month, compared to **48%** of young men.

In 2022 these figures were **54%** of young women and **44%** of young men.

**32%** of young women have been **unable to afford food or essential supplies**, compared to **21%** of young men.

This has increased from **24%** of young women in 2022 and **19%** of young men.



# Shocking numbers of young women are filled with dread when they think about their finances

**58%**

of young women are filled with dread when they think about their finances...

...a rise from **52%** in 2022.

This figure was **27%** in 2020.

**44%**

of young men feel this way...

a smaller rise from **42%** last year.

This figure was **21%** in 2020.

# The cost of living is forcing young women to make impossible choices

**27%** have had to choose between heating and eating, up from **23%** in 2022.

**40%** of young women with children sometimes have to choose between feeding themselves and feeding their children, up from **30%** in 2022.

This figure rose to **52%** for young women with children in receipt of benefits.

# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

Young women are faring worse in the cost of living crisis because of the underlying inequality in income that they face. On average, a young woman earns around £4,000 less than a young man of the same age.

**This is down to many factors, including:**

- Young women being in lower paid jobs and industries
- The impact of having children on the number of hours women can work in paid roles
- Direct discrimination.

**These underlying causes need to be addressed through:**

- **Fair and equal pay** - including transparency about salaries in job adverts, and robust action to address pay gaps.
- **Tackling the barriers to work for young women** - including increasing the availability of affordable, flexible childcare; more inclusive recruitment processes; and better rights to flexible working.
- **More support for young women to progress at work** - including transparent career paths and routes to promotion.
- **Better job security** - with a limit on the use of zero hours contracts unless it is the employee's choice, and a guaranteed minimum number of hours per week.
- **Action to tackle discrimination in the workplace** - with more robust reporting mechanisms and more support for young women to challenge discrimination.



Find out more about how the cost of living crisis is impacting young women in our [Cost of Living snapshot](#).

**In the short term, to help young women who are struggling right now, we need:**

- The government to go further in the forthcoming extension to the National Living Wage, so that 18-20 year olds receive it too.
- Increased support through the benefits system, through an Essentials Guarantee which makes sure the basic rate of Universal Credit is always enough to cover the costs of essentials.
- The government to listen to the voices of young women as they create policies to respond to the cost of living crisis.

# WORKPLACE WORRIES





## Young women are paid, on average, a fifth less than young men per year

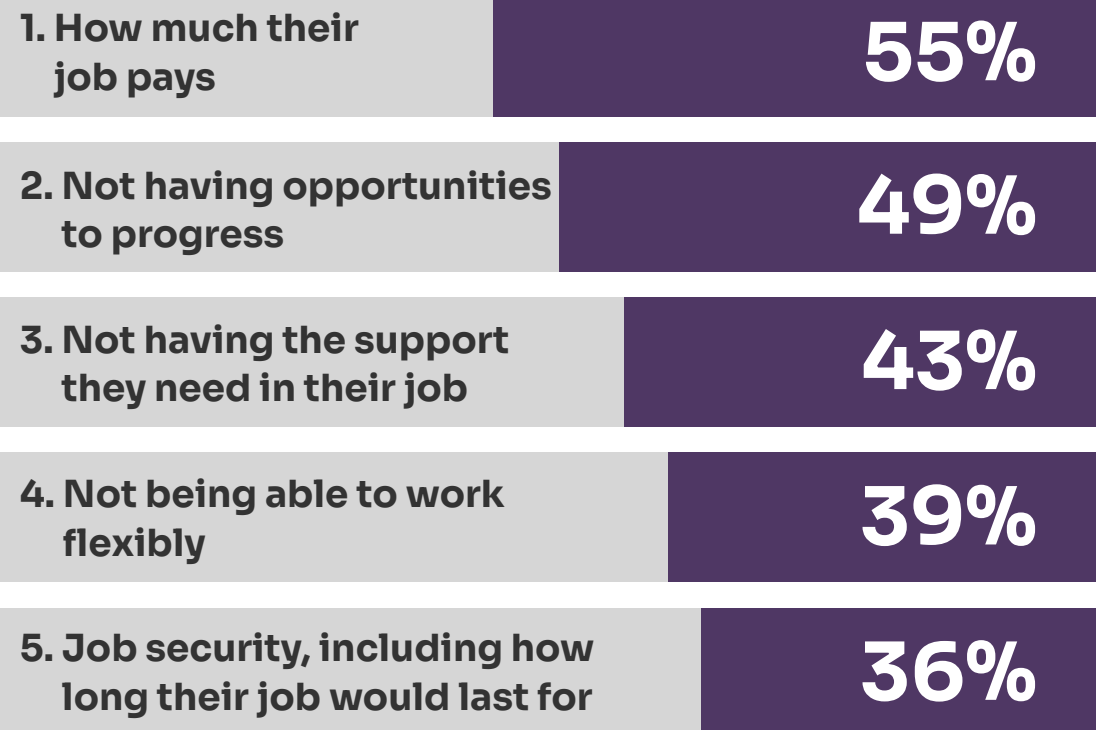
So it's hardly surprising that young women are faring so much worse than young men in the cost of living crisis. The survey paints a picture of the challenges and inequalities they experience at work which cause this income gap.

Young women are facing persistent low pay, discrimination, barriers to work and to progression and lack of job security on a worrying scale.



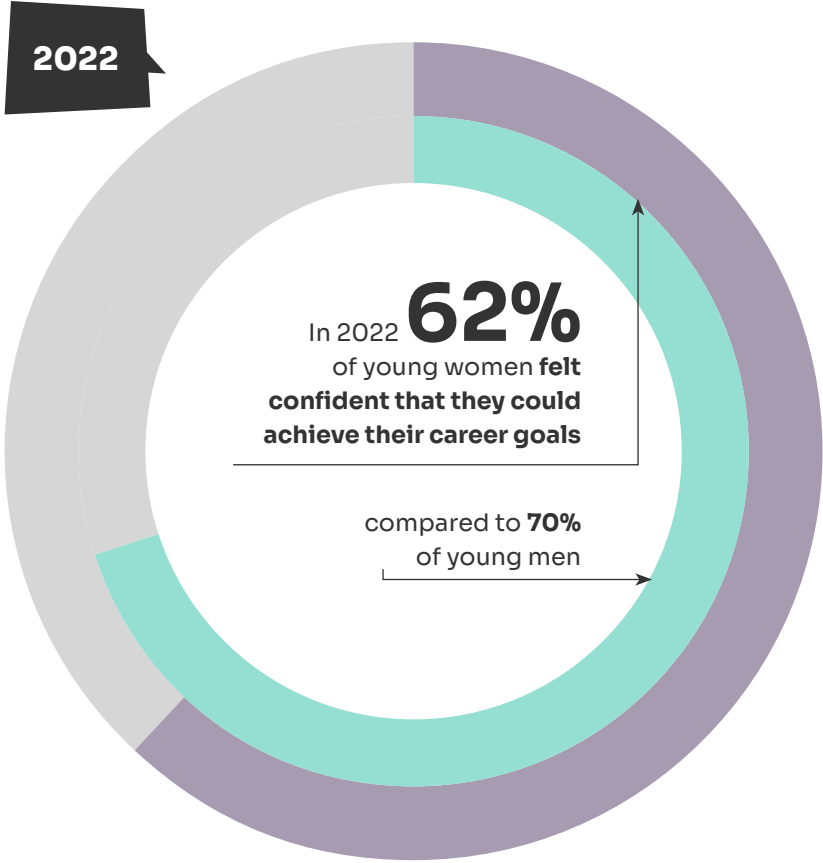
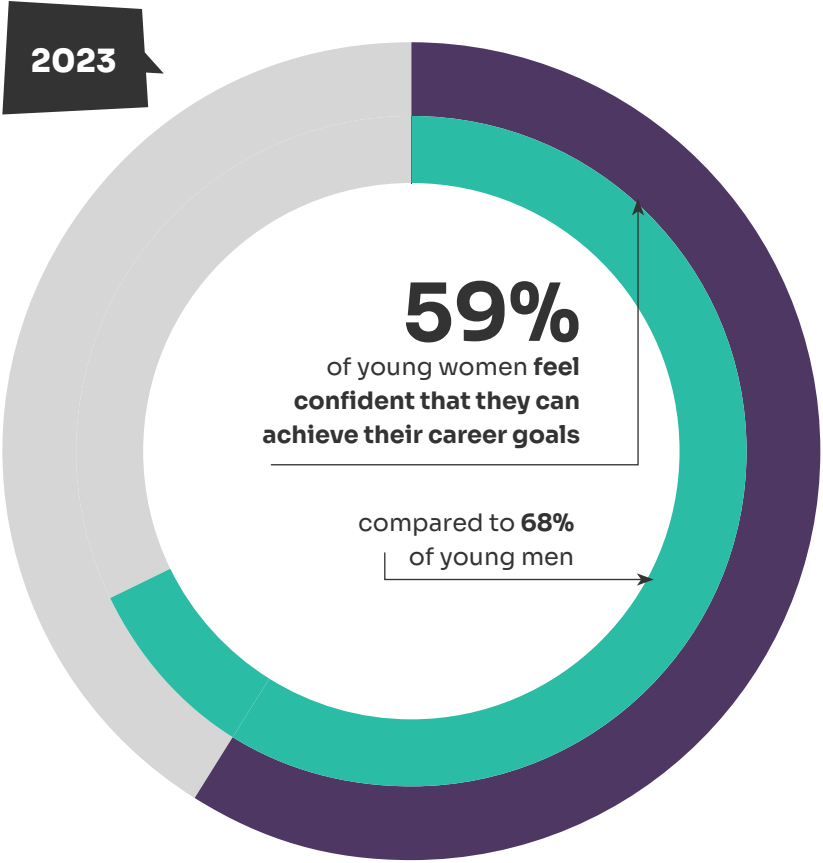
Read our [Income Gap Research](#).

When asked about their worries relating to their jobs, the top five things young women were concerned about were:

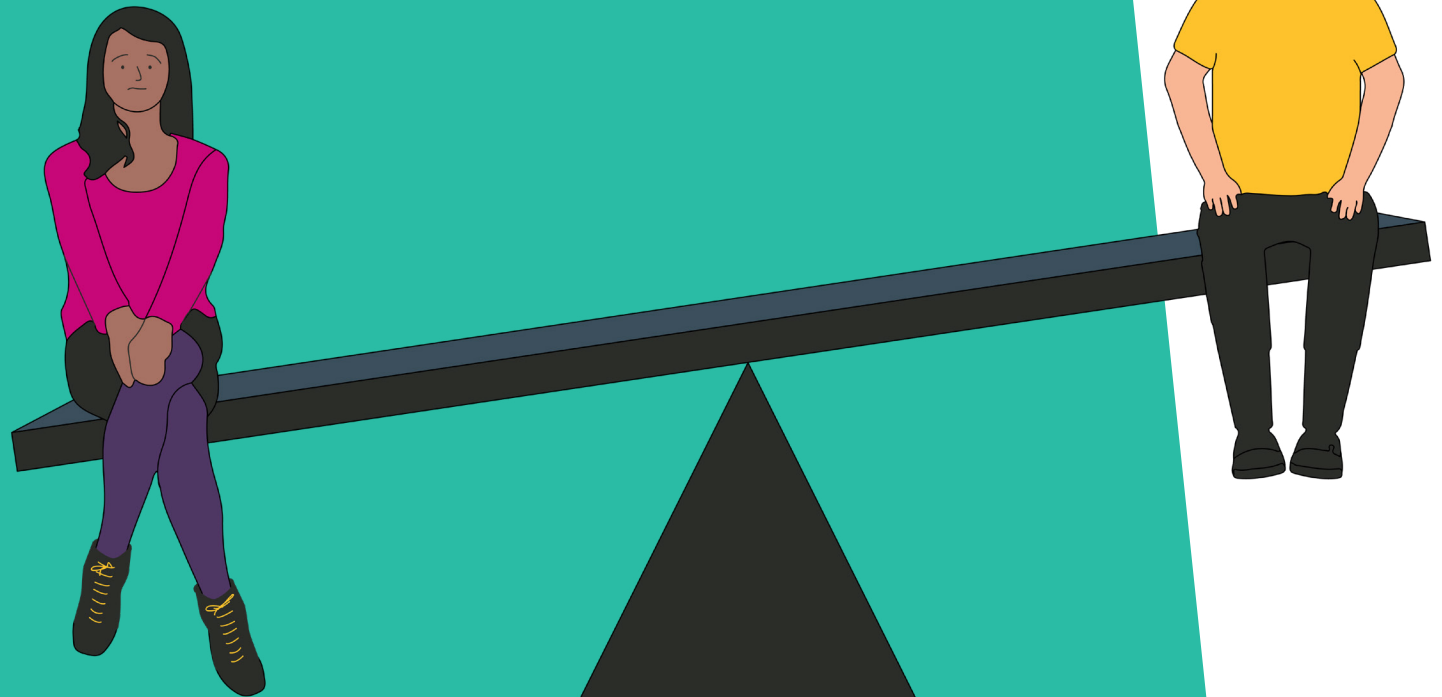


# These worries are chipping away at young women’s hope for the future

Young women are feeling less optimistic about achieving their ambitions than young men, and even less confident that they can achieve their career goals than last year.



# DISCRIMINATION



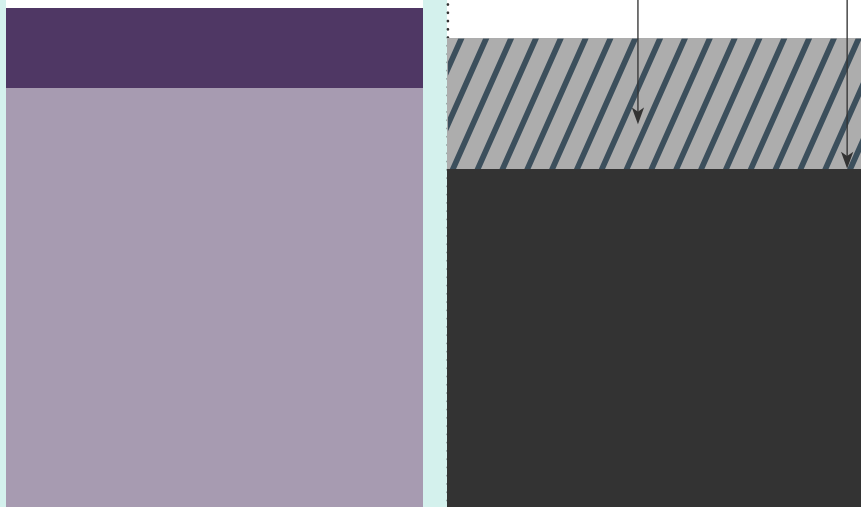
# Shockingly, discrimination at work appears to be becoming the norm for young women

**50%** of young women have **experienced discrimination at work.**

This has risen from **42%** of young women who told us this in 2022'

**34%** of HR decision makers are **aware of instances of young women being discriminated against** in the past year.

This increases to **47%** of respondents working in the **public sector.**



# Sexist behaviour is still far too common in organisations

**34%** of HR decision makers **agree that sexist behaviour still exists within their organisation.**

HR decision makers in these sectors were most likely to agree that **sexist behaviour still exists in their organisation:**

Public sector	<b>50%</b>
Education	<b>41%</b>
Infrastructure	<b>41%</b>
Production & construction	<b>37%</b>
Health & social care	<b>36%</b>

## Too many HR decision makers still hold outdated and discriminatory views about women and men

**15%** of HR decision makers agree or strongly agree that **men are better suited to senior management jobs** than women.

**19%** of HR decision makers told us that they would be reluctant to **hire a woman who they thought might go on to start a family**.

While the vast majority of young women can recognise discrimination, many don't know their rights and don't feel comfortable to challenge it



**86%** of young women feel they'd be able to **recognise discrimination** if it happened.



but **19%** don't know their rights in relation to workplace discrimination.



**25%** of young women **would not feel comfortable to challenge or report discrimination**.

"I didn't know enough about my rights. Things like discrimination, being paid fairly, pensions... You don't know what you don't know, so it's even harder to search for it. It can get tiring to almost always have to somehow, at times by chance, uncover seemingly hidden knowledge on top of everything else. The information should just be more transparent and readily available."

## To find out more about young women's experiences of discrimination at work, our peer researchers carried out qualitative research with young women and employers

The research findings showed that young women face discrimination directed at multiple aspects of their identities: their ethnicity, appearance, mental health, disability, religion, class, sexuality, gender, age and having caring responsibilities.

Age is a common factor that exacerbates other experiences of discrimination and makes it harder to challenge it.

## Discrimination takes many different forms.

The most common types of discrimination young women described were:



Discrimination has far reaching impacts for young women, including on their career progression as they report losing confidence and even leaving their roles as a result.

Discrimination often goes unreported and unaddressed, as young women are scared to report it or don't know how. When they do, they often see little action taken.

“...It's just subtle. I think it's on very rare occasions where people do it directly. But indirect discrimination and the general company culture, that really affects it, and it's just such a subtle way of grinding people away. I think it's time that we acknowledge those things more, because where things are that indirect, and subtle, it's harder to slash out specifically and provide a strong case of evidence of that happening, but it does really affect your wellbeing.”



Read the full findings of our discrimination research [here](#).

# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

It's shocking that around half of young women experience discrimination at work. They face discrimination based on different aspects of their identities, but being young and female makes discrimination even harder to challenge.

We can rebalance power by creating stronger reporting processes, building workplace cultures where discrimination is challenged, putting in place more support for people facing discrimination and strengthening young women's voices.

## Employers should:

- Put in place and communicate clear processes for reporting discrimination
- Create workplace cultures where discrimination can be called out and challenged without retribution
- Consult young women when developing policies around discrimination and listen to their experiences of workplace culture.

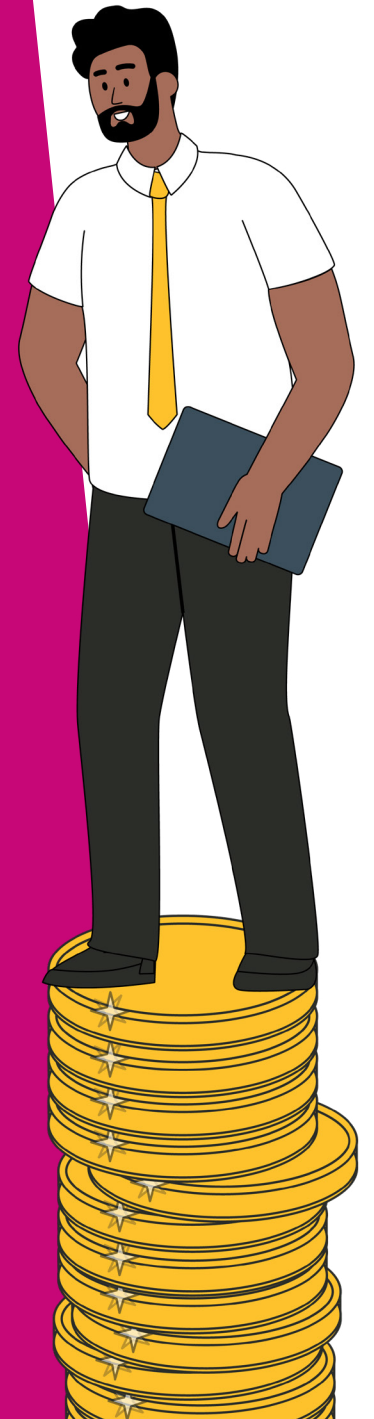
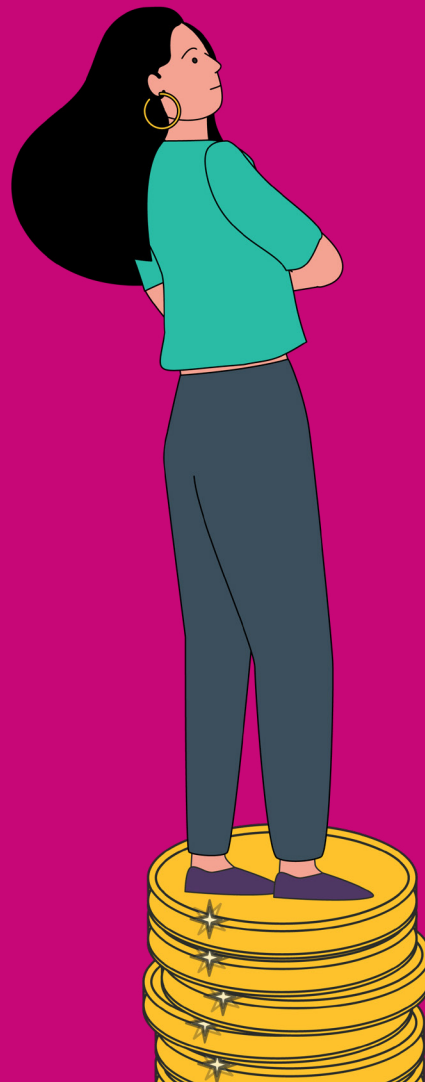
## Colleagues and managers should:

- Call out discriminatory behaviour when it happens, so the onus isn't on the individual affected.

## Young women also need:

- Better support when they have experienced discrimination, to report it and then to rebuild their confidence and take their next steps
- Better access to unions so their voices can be heard louder and clearer.

**PAY**





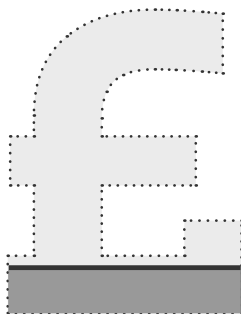
**UNEQUAL PAY**

Young women are being paid less than young men even for the same work - and despite this being illegal, it's showing little sign of changing



**23%**

of young women have been **paid less than young men for the same work**. There has been only a marginal downwards shift from **24% in 2022**.

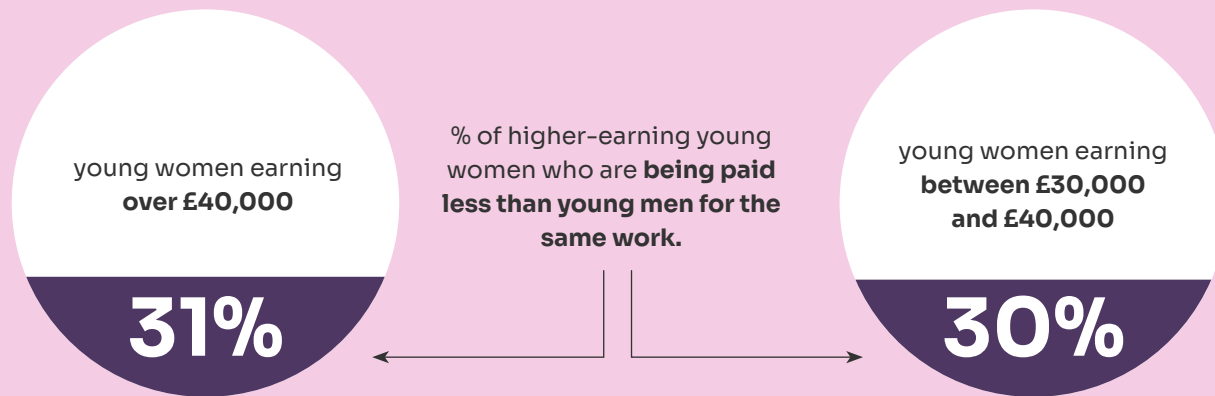


**13%**

of HR decision makers are **aware of women being paid less than men** for jobs at the same level, a slight rise from **11% in 2022**.

# Higher-earning young women are more likely to have experienced pay inequality

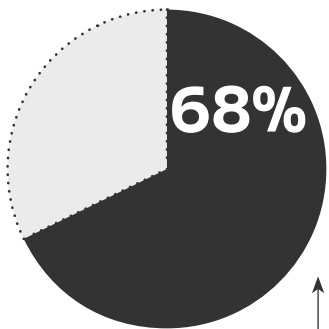
This shows that even when young women do progress out of low pay, they're still not treated equally to male colleagues



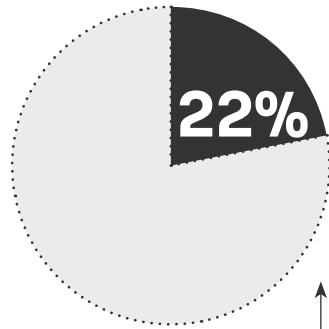
“I found out that one of my colleagues who was a male, he’d been in the business a lot less time than me, and he was, I think he was about six months older than me. And I found out kind of by accident that he was getting paid more than me. Like quite a bit. And, like I say, his experience and length of time in the company, it just didn’t match up. And I thought that was quite upsetting, you know, with the responsibilities that I had at that time. I was getting underpaid.”

**TACKLING THE GENDER PAY GAP**

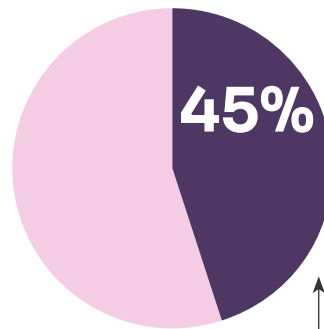
# Not enough is being done by employers to tackle the gender pay gap



68% of HR decision makers agree that **their organisation is making efforts to tackle the gender pay gap.**



22% of HR decision makers **don't think that their organisation takes gender pay gap reporting seriously enough.**



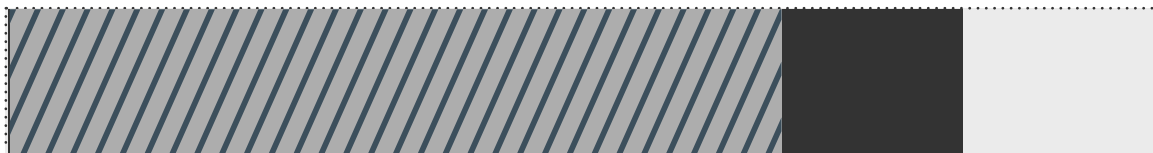
45% Less than half of young women **think their employer is doing enough to tackle the pay gap**, a decrease from **48% in 2022.**

HR decision makers in the private sector were least likely to agree that **their organisation is making efforts to tackle the gender pay gap.**

**67%**

HR decision makers in the third sector were most likely to agree that **their organisation is making efforts to tackle the gender pay gap.**

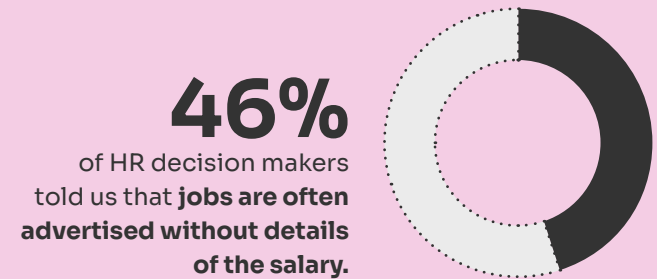
**83%**



# Salary transparency

There are steps that employers can take to tackle pay inequality, including advertising salaries transparently and not asking candidates for their salary histories as a starting point for setting pay.

Not showing the salary and asking for salary history disadvantages women and bakes in pay gaps, as women tend to be on lower salaries to begin with. However, unfair practices are still commonplace and there seems to be less recognition of the importance of salary transparency compared to flexible working measures as a way of increasing equality for women.



46% of HR decision makers told us that **jobs are often advertised without details of the salary.**



50% of HR decision makers said that in their organisation **applicants/interviewees are asked what their current salary is.**

### LOW PAY

As well as being paid less for the same work, ONS data tells us that young women are more likely to be in lower paid jobs and industries.

This is reflected in our survey.

100%  
90%  
80%  
70%  
60%  
50%  
40%  
30%  
20%  
10%



Workers from school leaving age must legally be paid the National Minimum Wage, while workers over 23, and from 2024, those over 21 must be paid the National Living Wage.

Despite this being a legal requirement, young women are reporting in large numbers that they're not being paid what they're entitled to.

23%

of young women told us that they have been paid less than the minimum wage, compared to 20% of young men.

This has increased from 20% of young women in 2022.



In 2022, the Government announced that the National Living Wage would increase from April 2023 roughly in line with inflation, and in October 2023 a further rise to at least £11 per hour was announced. This has been welcomed by young women.

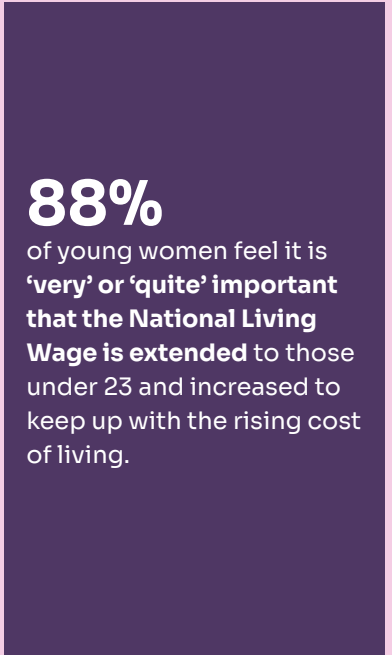
66%

of young women told us they found the recent increase in the national living wage helpful, compared to 57% of young men.



### MINIMUM WAGE

At the moment, only workers aged 23 and over are entitled to the National Living Wage and from April 2024 this will be extended to everyone from age 21 and upwards. Young women strongly agree that this should be extended to all adults over 18.



100%  
90%  
80%  
70%  
60%  
50%  
40%  
30%  
20%  
10%

# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

Young women earn, on average, around a fifth less per year than young men of the same age and the survey has highlighted aspects of government policy and employer practice which are perpetuating this.

## Employers should:

- Advertise all jobs with the salary
- Never ask for salary history and use this to set pay
- Put in place transparent pay bands, with clear routes for moving up through them
- Offer fair pay for traditionally 'female' work such as shop floor and caring roles.

## The government should:

- Create the right for women to know what a male colleague doing the same job is paid
- Make ethnicity as well as gender pay gap reporting mandatory
- Require organisations who report pay gaps to publish action plans, and strengthen the powers of the EHRC or an equivalent body to sanction organisations which don't take sufficient action to reduce their gaps
- Go further in the forthcoming extension to the National Living Wage, so that 18-20 year olds receive it too.

# JOB SECURITY



# Worries about job security and insecure work are growing for young women

**36%**

of young women are worried about job security, including how long their job will last for

**30%**

of young women are worried about not having regular or predictable hours

...a rise from

**33%**

in 2022.

...compared to

**25%**

in 2022.

**46%**

of racially minoritised young women feel this way.

# A large proportion of young women don't have predictable or regular working hours

**42%**

of young women have been offered a zero hours contract, compared to **33%** of young men.

**64%**

of young women told us that they would like **more predictable/regular working hours**.

This is particularly the case for:

Young women earning between £10,000 and £20,000 (**70%**)

Racially minoritised young women (**77%**)

Young single mums (**78%**)

Young women earning under £10,000 (**79%**)

**17%**

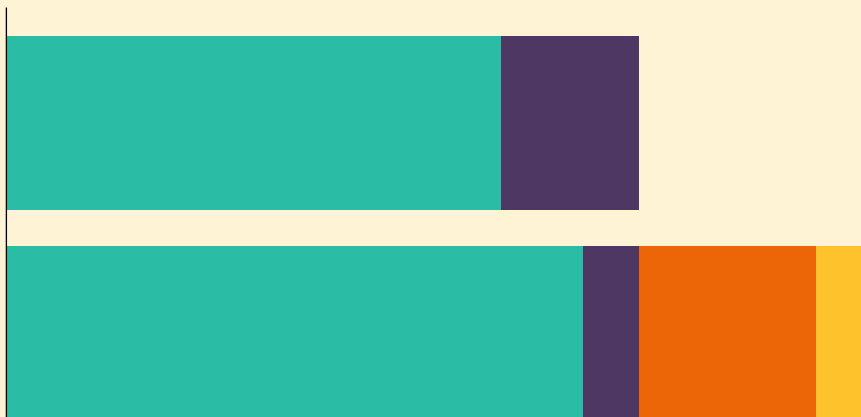
of HR decision makers told us that **their organisation does not provide employees with a minimum of four weeks' notice** about their working hours.

# Many young women don't have enough paid hours

**35%** of young women are **worried about not having enough paid hours**. In 2022 this figure was 29%.



# Many are in precarious working situations, working without contracts, or have been asked to work for no pay



**33%** of young women have been **employed without a contract**, compared to **29% of young men**.

**37%** have been asked to work for no pay, compared to **30% of young men**. This is higher amongst **young women aged 18-24 (42%)** and young women from **lower socio-economic backgrounds (44%)**

**10%** of **HR decision makers** are aware of **young women leaving their organisation because their hours or income were not guaranteed**.



# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

Our findings echo other evidence that young women are more likely to be in insecure work and offered zero hours contracts than men of the same age. Often the need for flexibility can push young women into precarious and insecure work, without enough hours to get by or the predictable working patterns they need to be able to plan.

This can be tackled by limiting the use of zero hours contracts, offering advance notice of shifts and providing compensation for last minute cancellations.

## **Employers should:**

- Provide at least four weeks' notice of shifts
- Pay employees for shifts cancelled with less than 4 weeks' notice.

## **The government should:**

- Limit the use of zero hours contracts, unless the employee requests it
- Create the legal right for employees on a zero hours contract to request a regular contract.



# PROGRESSION



# Even when young women do have secure work, there's a 'broken rung' on the ladder which stops them progressing as fast as their male peers

**49%** of young women are worried about **not having enough opportunities to progress**. This has risen from **47% of young women in 2022**.

This is higher for young women from **racially minoritised communities (57%)**, those in **receipt of benefits (55%)** and **young single mums (55%)**.



Only **53%** of young women told us they have **the support they need to progress in their careers**, compared to **62% of young men**.



**30%** of young women **disagree that women and men are given the same opportunities to progress in their organisation**.



**28%** of HR decision makers **agree that it is harder for women to progress in their organisation than men**.

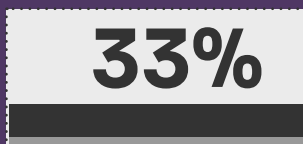


**10%** of HR decision makers are **aware of a woman being overlooked for a promotion she deserved**.



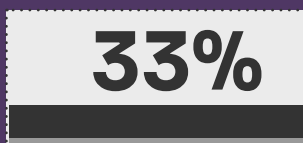
# Young women say they feel less confident to put themselves forward for opportunities, pay rises and promotions than young men

HR decision makers agree with this



of HR decision makers think **young men are more likely to ask for a promotion** than young women.

**Only 9%** believe that **young women are more likely to ask for a promotion.**



of HR decision makers think that **young men are more likely to ask for a pay rise than young women.**

**Only 8%** think that young women are more likely to ask for a pay rise.

Over the last year, there has been some improvement in organisations' training and skills development provision for young women - though many still don't offer any support with progression.



of HR decision makers told us that their organisation offers training/skills programmes to support the development of young women. This has increased from **51% in 2022.**

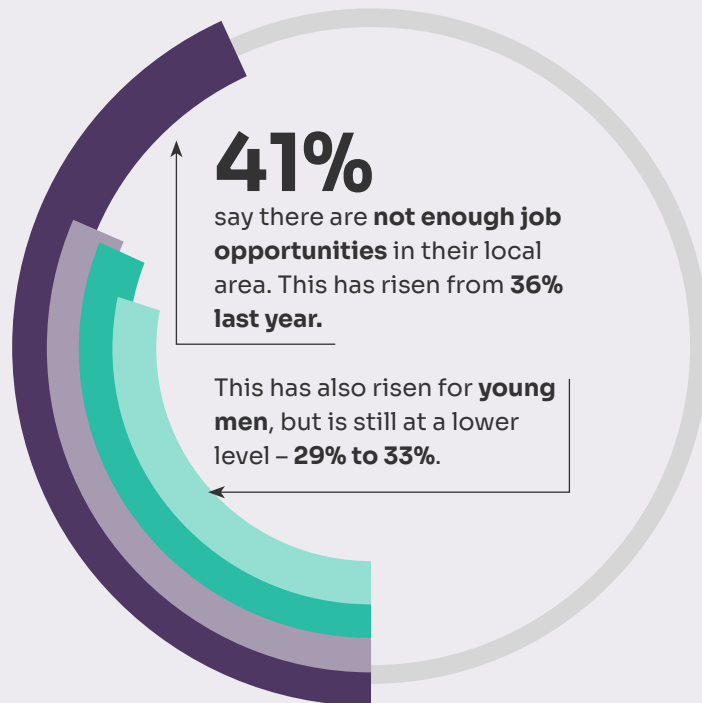


of HR decision makers say that their organisation offers specific support or development opportunities for young women. This has increased from **50% in 2022.**

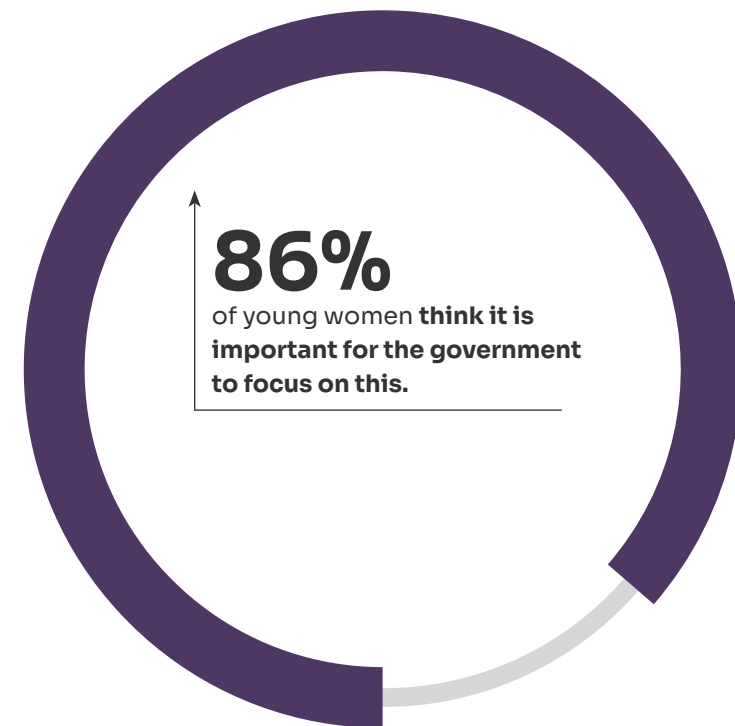


don't offer anything to support the development of young women. This suggests some progress, as **in 2022 25%** didn't offer any support.

## Young women are finding it harder than young men to find job opportunities in their area



## Investment in development opportunities for young women is a top priority



“In my current company, we have future leaders. They’re really trying to support and push people to gain extra skills to be better managers. However, it’s predominantly white, and it’s predominantly male. They’re not creating a pipeline for opportunities for people of colour, for LGBT, for women even.”

# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

There's a 'broken rung' on the ladder for young women, who don't progress as quickly and are more likely to be stuck in low-paid jobs. Evidence indicates that men get more of a premium for staying in a job for a long time than women do.

We can solve this through fairer progression processes, support to help young women progress, and action to make sure young women aren't unfairly disadvantaged.

## Employers should:

- Use positive action in internal promotions
  - Provide regular development reviews and feedback as standard
  - Create clear career pathways within their organisations, with transparent pay grades and what skills and experience employees need to gain to move up
  - Make supervisor and manager positions available as flexible or job-share roles
  - Offer more training, mentoring, sponsorship and shadowing opportunities for young women
- Create peer and professional networking opportunities for young women, so they can meet people in more senior roles and support each other
  - Provide training for line managers in how to support young women's development.

## Line managers should:

- Make sure young women aren't given the 'non-promotable' work like administrative tasks which don't allow them to develop or demonstrate their skills
- Not make assumptions that a young woman doesn't want to progress because she's having a child
- Open up their networks to young women and make connections that could help them progress
- Encourage young women to take up training and development opportunities, and ensure those working part-time don't lose out on these.

# BARRIERS TO WORK



**FLEXIBLE WORKING**

**Flexible working is hugely valuable to young women, particularly those with caring responsibilities.**

**On the flipside, a lack of flexible working options can be a barrier to getting into work or moving jobs**

**88%** of young women would be more likely to apply for a job that was advertised as flexible. This rises to **93%** of young women with caring responsibilities.

**84%** of young women agree that the ability to work flexibly is important to them. This is higher (**88%**) for young women with caring responsibilities.

**27%** of young women told us that a lack of flexibility has made it difficult for them to apply for a job, compared to just over a fifth (**22%**) of young men.

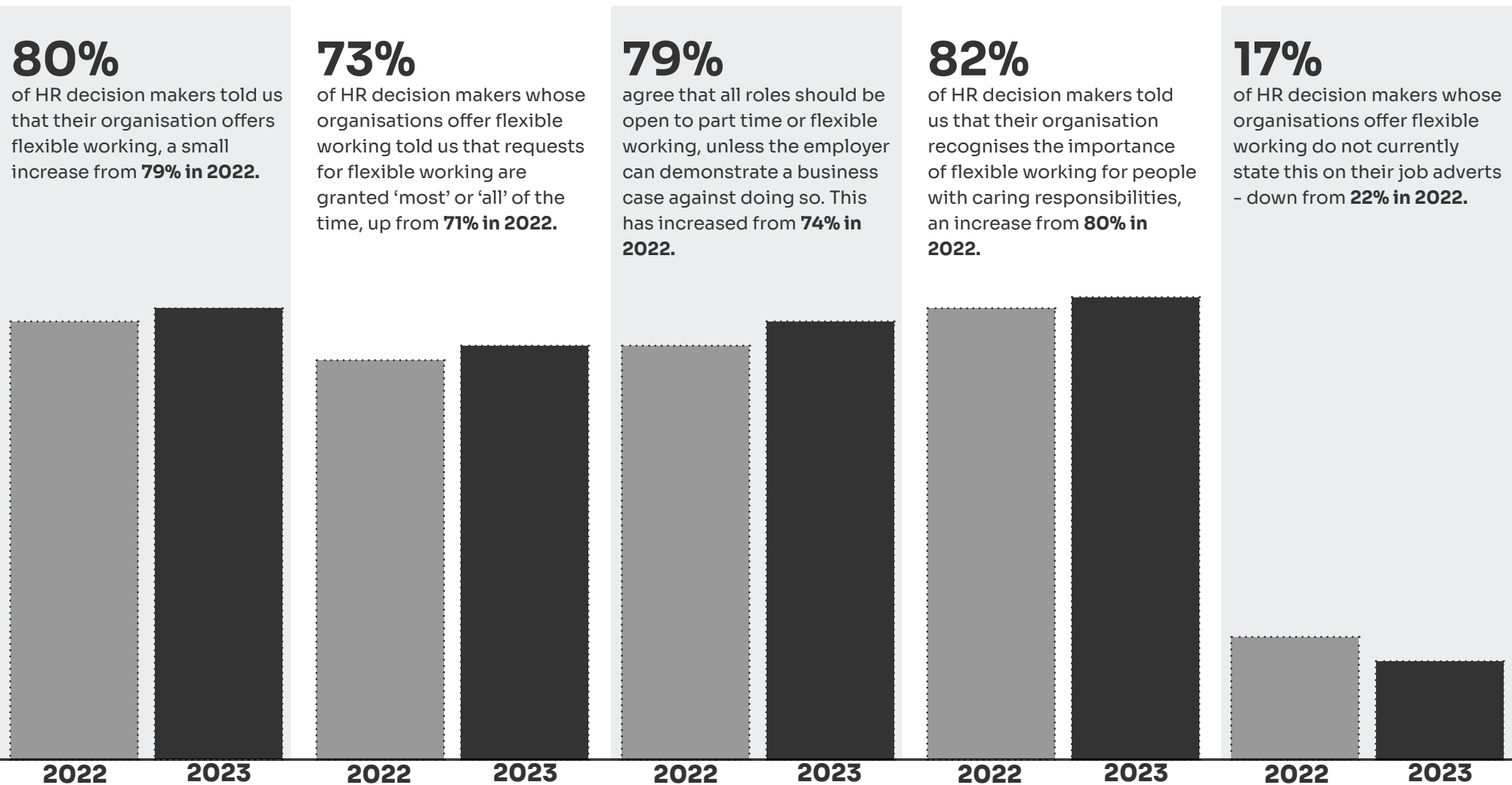
**21%** of HR decision makers are aware of young women leaving their organisation in the past year due to the job not being flexible enough to meet their needs. This is up **5%** on last year.

Young women are more likely to say they don't feel confident to ask about flexible working. Employers need to make it easier to ask.

**27%** of young women said that they would not feel comfortable asking their current employer to work flexibly, compared to **21%** of young men.

**40%** of young women would not feel comfortable asking a new employer to work flexibly if it was not in the job description, compared to **29%** of young men.

# The majority of employers are offering flexible working, with small improvements over the last year





## CHILDCARE AND OTHER CARING RESPONSIBILITIES

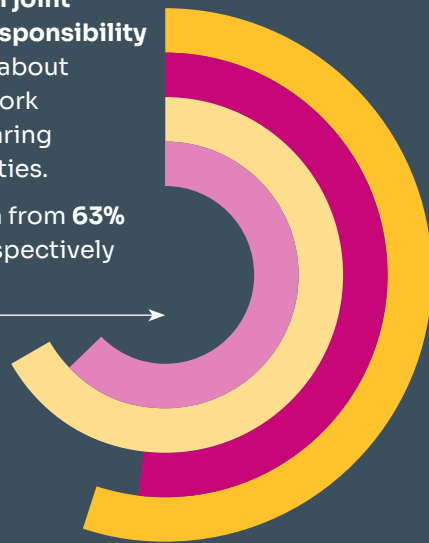
For many young women, balancing work and caring responsibilities remains a major concern. The cost, lack of availability and lack of flexibility of childcare is an additional barrier to work for many.

Albeit from a bleak start, there are some signs that young women are worrying less about this in 2023 compared to last year.

# 55%

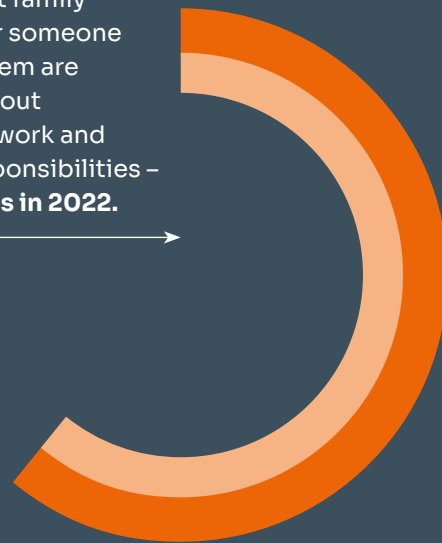
of **young single mums** and **52% of young women with joint childcare responsibility** are worried about balancing work with their caring responsibilities.

This is down from **63%** and **60%** respectively last year.



# 61%

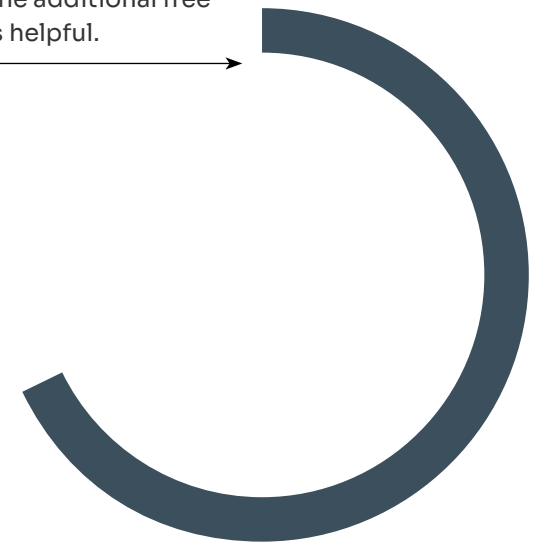
of **young women with caring responsibilities** for an adult family member or someone close to them are worried about balancing work and caring responsibilities – **the same as in 2022.**



## Young women with children feel positive about the government's planned childcare reforms

# 68%

of **young women with children** say they will find the additional free hours helpful.



# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

This section has shown how young women face barriers to getting decent, fairly paid jobs which allow them to use their talents and thrive. To overcome these we need inclusive recruitment practices; better flexible working rights and options; fairer benefits and employment support; and childcare that meets young women's needs.

## Employers should:

- Make more flexible working options available including in the sorts of 'frontline' roles that young women often do, such as in retail and social care.
- Advertise flexible working options and encourage discussion about flexibility at the recruitment stage. Legislation passed in 2023 means that employees can legally make flexible working requests from day one in a job. But if someone needs flexibility, having to wait till they start employment to ask for it could be a barrier to moving jobs. So employers should go further and allow requests to be made when a candidate is offered a job.
- Offer flexibility for parents to deal with caring commitments. When a young woman has to take time off for caring reasons, this should be classed as a no-fault absence, they shouldn't lose pay and if possible, home-working arrangements should be made.

## The government should:

- Ensure that the commitment to provide 30 hours of free childcare to all parents from 9 months is deliverable, by adequately funding providers and investing in the vital early years workforce.
- Support the development of more flexible childcare models. Many young women don't work within 9-5 roles and their hours may change from week to week. They need more flexible childcare options to fit with the reality of their lives.
- Fund wraparound childcare provision for children throughout primary school.



# DIFFERENCES BY SECTOR

# We have looked in more detail at the sectors where there are high numbers of young women on low pay, and those with the biggest pay gaps for under 30s

## Sectors with large numbers of young women on low pay include:

- Retail
- Hospitality
- Health and social care
- Education
- Arts, entertainment and recreation.

On many measures in this survey, they appear to be doing less to increase equality and support young women to thrive.

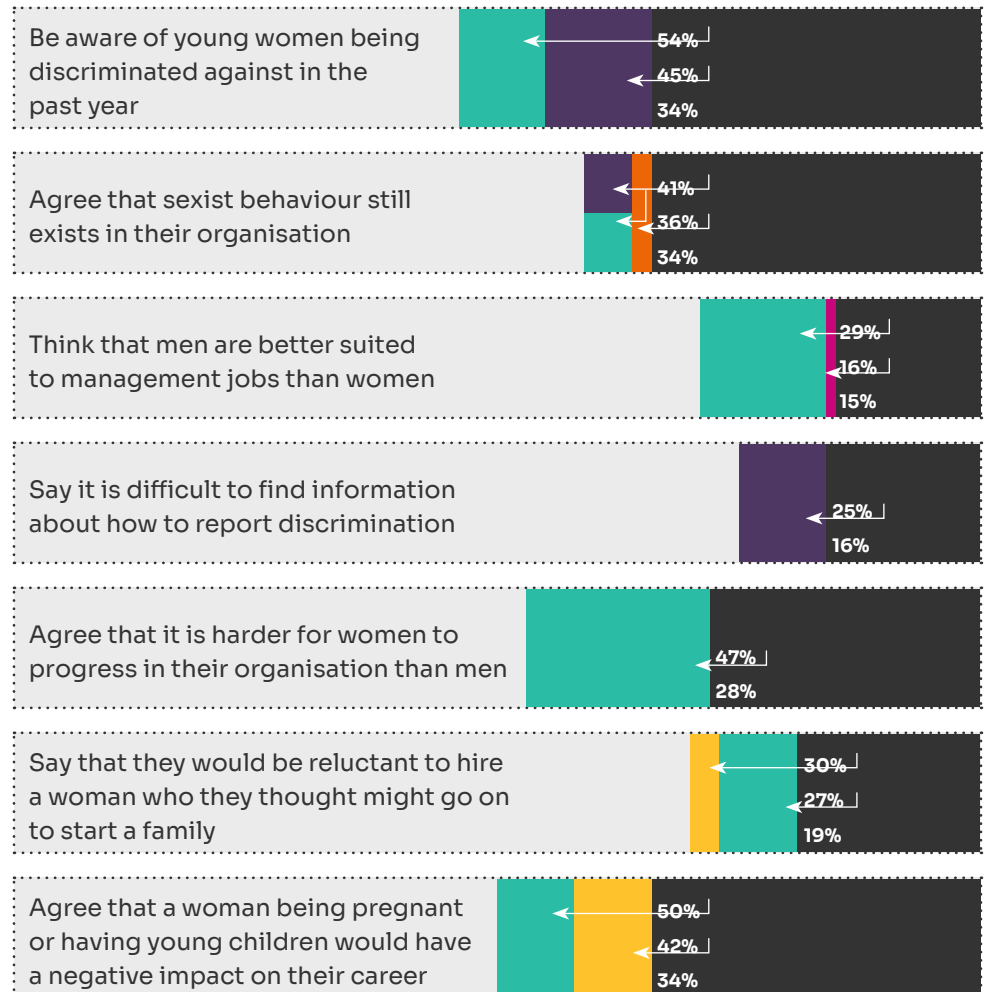
## Those with the biggest pay gaps for under 30s include:

- Finance
- Electricity and gas (in this survey, electricity and gas form part of the 'Infrastructure' category, along with transport, travel and water supply).

We found that HR decision makers in all of these sectors tend to report higher than average levels of sexism and less action to reduce inequality.

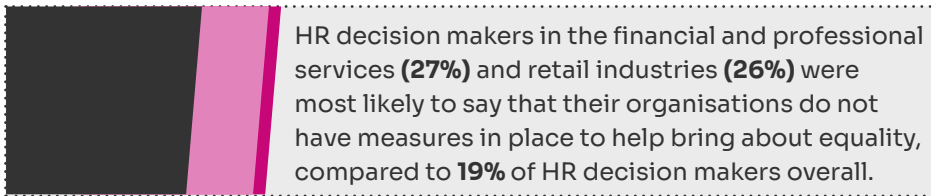
# Sexism and discrimination at work

Compared to HR decision makers on average, HR decision makers in these sectors were more likely to:

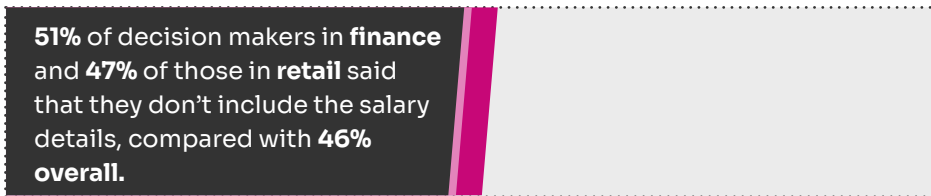


# Action to tackle inequality

My organisation has no measures in place to help bring about equality:



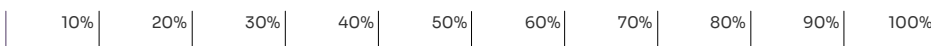
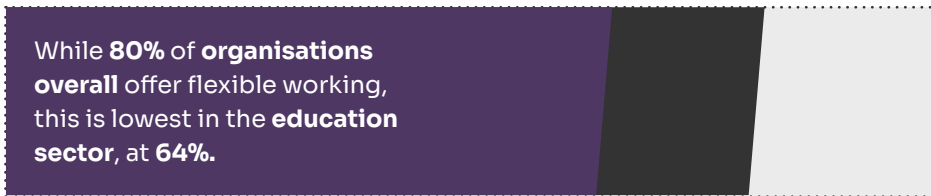
Jobs in my organisation are often advertised without details of the salary level:



In my organisation, job applicants/interviewees are asked what their current salary is:



My organisation offers flexible working:



# Support for young women

HR decision makers working in health and social care and hospitality were more likely to disagree that their organisation supports young women aged 18-30 to progress their careers.

Hospitality (20%), Health and social care (18%), compared to 16% of HR decision makers overall.

The hospitality, retail and finance and professional services sectors were less likely to offer training or skills development to support the development of young women.

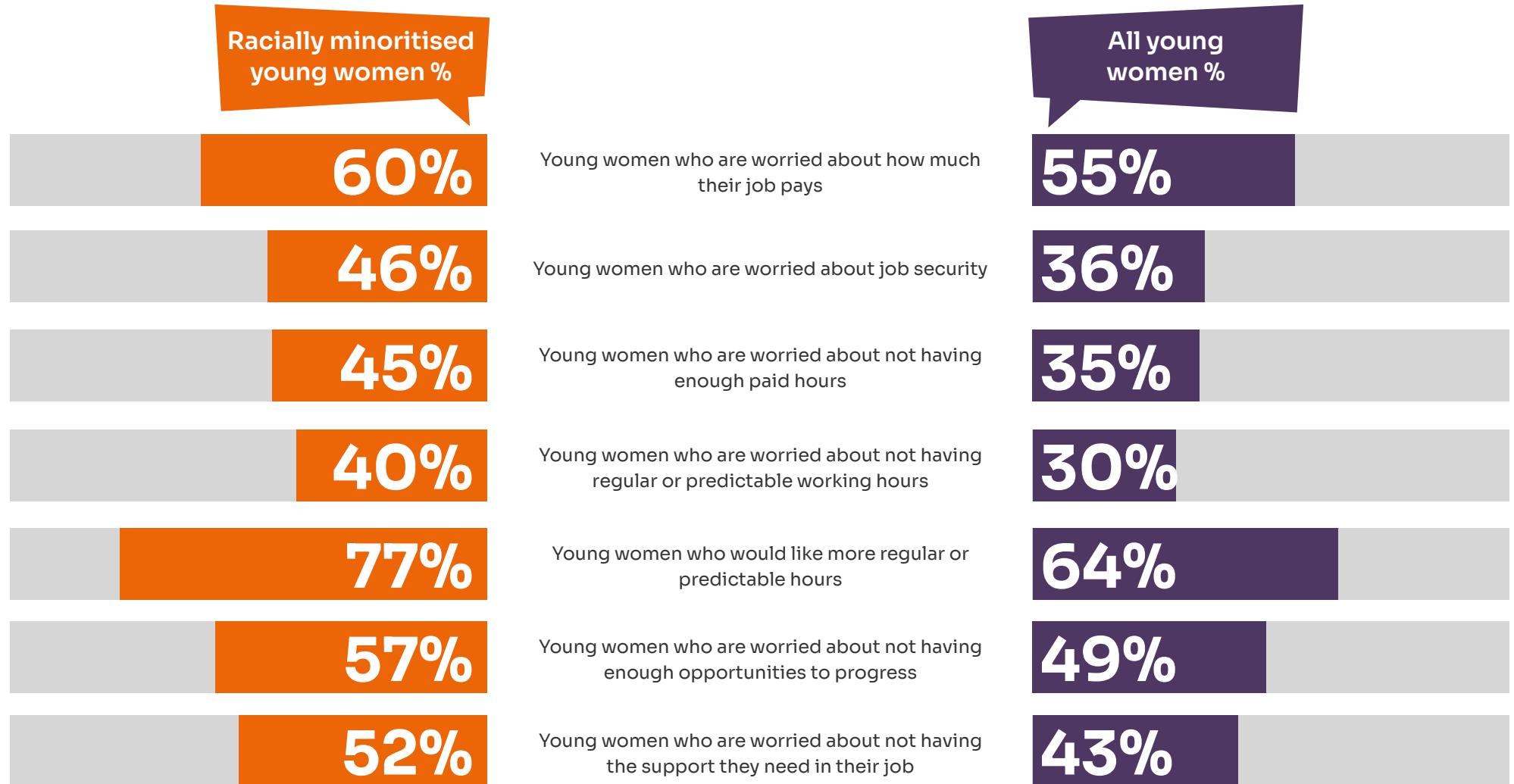




Spotlight on  
**RACIALLY  
MINORITISED  
YOUNG WOMEN**

# Our survey shows that, in many ways, racially minoritised young women are having a much harder time at work

This shows how age, gender and race combine and leave this group significantly worse off.



# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

Any action to tackle gender equality must start with those facing the greatest barriers, including racially minoritised young women.

Making ethnicity pay gap reporting mandatory, and requiring organisations to produce action plans to improve both, is a starting point.

Measures recommended earlier in this report to improve the basic pay, conditions and job security of those on the lowest incomes – such as raising the minimum wage and limiting the use of zero hours contracts – would also have a disproportionately positive impact on racially minoritised young women.



**I will say that I have been discriminated against my sex. I've been discriminated against my race. I've been discriminated against my age, and I've been discriminated against because of my disability.”**



**Spotlight on  
DISABLED OR  
NEURODIVERGENT YOUNG  
WOMEN AND YOUNG  
WOMEN WITH MENTAL  
HEALTH PROBLEMS**



# Young women with mental health problems, long-term physical health conditions and neurodivergent young women are more likely to have seen their quality of life, finances and mental health worsen over the last year

**% of young women who say that their quality of life has got worse over the last 12 months:**

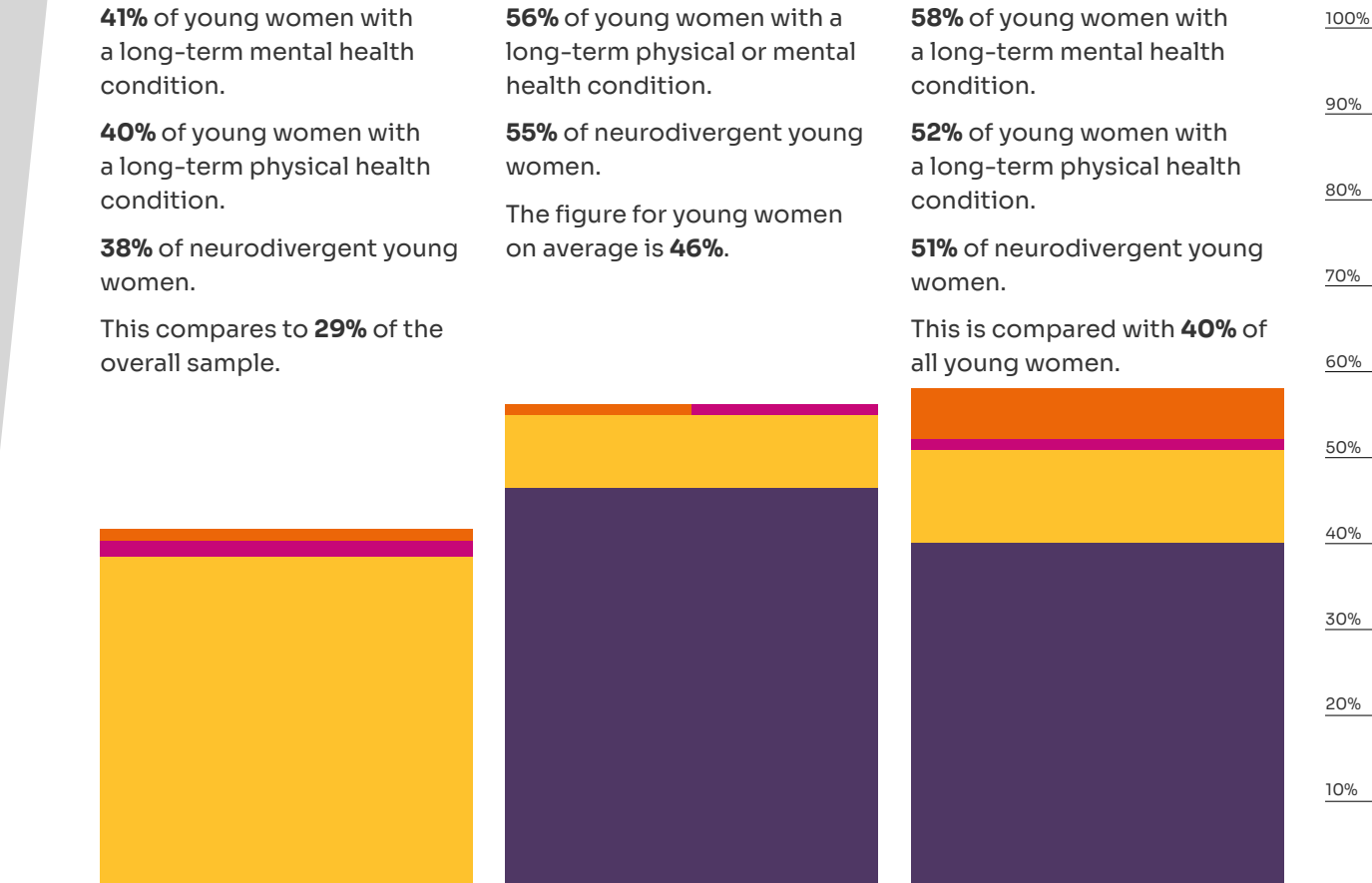
- 41%** of young women with a long-term mental health condition.
  - 40%** of young women with a long-term physical health condition.
  - 38%** of neurodivergent young women.
- This compares to **29%** of the overall sample.

**% of young women who say that their financial situation has got worse over the last 12 months:**

- 56%** of young women with a long-term physical or mental health condition.
  - 55%** of neurodivergent young women.
- The figure for young women on average is **46%**.

**% of young women who say that their mental health has got worse over the last 12 months:**

- 58%** of young women with a long-term mental health condition.
  - 52%** of young women with a long-term physical health condition.
  - 51%** of neurodivergent young women.
- This is compared with **40%** of all young women.



Young women who are neurodivergent and those who have mental health problems report lower levels of knowledge and confidence when it comes to their rights at work

**23%**

of young women with a long-term **mental health** condition and **neurodivergent** young women wouldn't know their rights with regards to discrimination in the workplace, compared to **19% overall**.

**32%**

of young women with a long-term **mental health** condition and **neurodivergent** young women would not feel comfortable to challenge or report instances of discrimination in the workplace – compared to **25% overall**.

Neurodivergent young women and those with long-term mental and physical health conditions are more likely to have been in certain precarious working situations

**52%**

of **neurodivergent** young women, **47%** of young women with a long-term **mental health** condition and **44%** of those with a long-term **physical health** condition have been asked to **work for no pay (e.g. a trial shift)**.

The figure for young women overall is **37%**.



**41%**

of **neurodivergent** young women, **40%** of young women with a long-term **mental health** condition and **39%** of those with a long-term **physical health** condition have been **employed without a contract**.

This is compared to **33% of young women overall**.



They are also feeling less supported and confident in progressing at work

Only **50%** of young women with a long-term physical health condition, **49%** of young women with a long-term mental health condition, **43%** of neurodivergent young women, **feel positive that they can achieve their career goals**, compared to **59%** of young women overall.



Young women with a long-term mental health condition (**35%**) or who are neurodivergent (**30%**) are more likely to say they **don't feel confident to put themselves forwards for work or training opportunities** they are interested in, compared to **23%** of all young women.



Young women with a long-term physical health condition (**43%**) or mental health condition (**39%**) or those who are neurodivergent (**43%**) were **less likely to have they support they need to progress in their careers**, compared to **53%** on average.



The majority of employers now recognise the importance of flexible working for people with physical health conditions, but less understand the importance of flexible working for people with mental health problems and neurodivergent people

**80%**

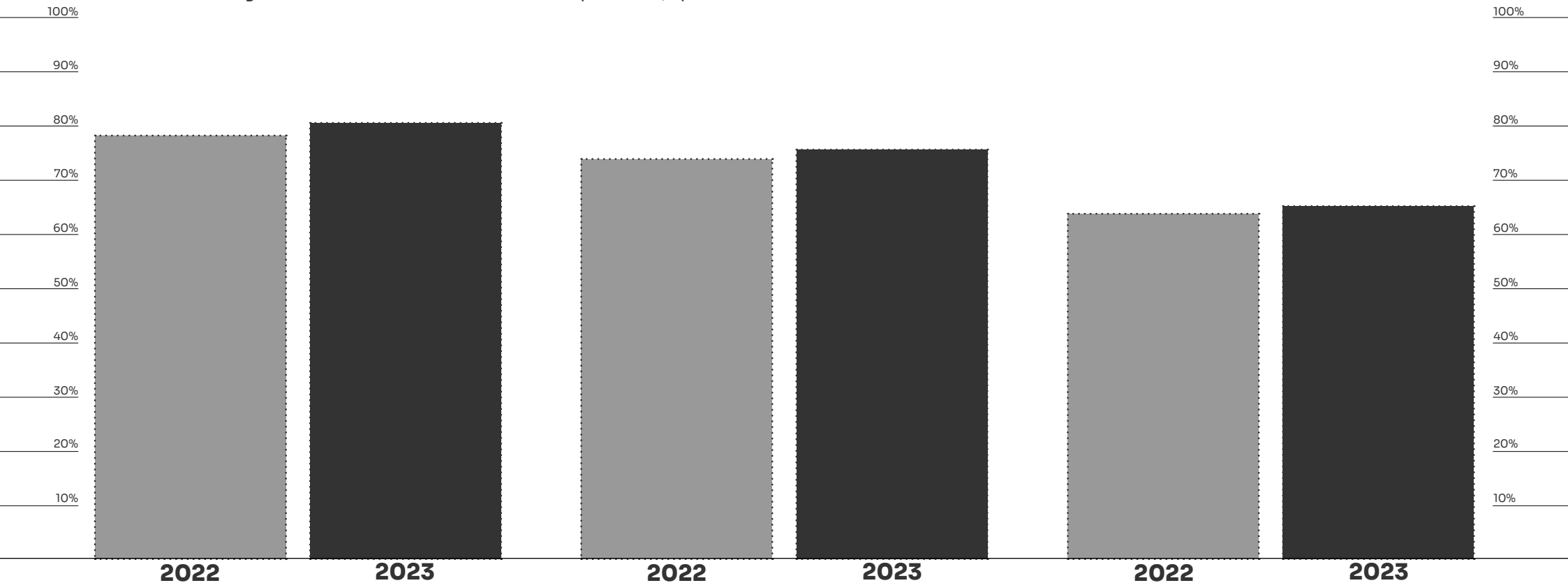
of HR decision makers told us that their organisation recognises the importance of flexible working for people with physical health conditions. This figure was **79% in 2022**.

**75%**

of HR decision makers felt that their organisation recognises the importance of flexible working for people with mental health problems, up from **73% in 2022**.

**65%**

of HR decision makers recognised the importance of flexible working for neurodivergent people, up from **63% in 2022**.



# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

The challenges faced by disabled and neurodivergent young women and those with mental health problems highlight the need for more tailored support for these young women. There is no 'one size fits all' approach: the starting point must be listening to and responding to their individual needs.

These young women would also benefit from more information about their rights and the support that's available to them: for example, their right to request reasonable adjustments, and the support that's on offer through the Access to Work scheme.

Young women who are neurodivergent, disabled and who have mental health problems are more likely to be in precarious and insecure work. This could be because they are trading security for the flexibility they need to manage their conditions. If flexible working was more universally available in all jobs, they could avoid having to make this kind of trade-off.



**“Instead of going for higher paid roles, I’d rather choose lower paid jobs because I don’t want to have to disclose my health needs and ask for adjustments at work. There’s a lack of understanding to make workplaces truly more disability friendly environments.”**

# POLITICS AND VOTING



# The majority of young women don't feel the government is responsive to their needs

However, there are signs that young women are feeling a little more positive about politicians than they were in last year's survey, when Boris Johnson was in power.

100%  
90%  
80%  
70%  
60%  
50%  
40%  
30%  
20%  
10%

**27%**

of young women agreed that **the government is aware of and responsive to the needs of young women.**

This figure has increased from **23% in 2022.**

**28%**

of young women agree that **the government is committed to achieving equality for young women,** compared to **24% last year.**

This figure is **50% for young men.**

**30%**

of young women agree that **the government is supporting young women to access employment and training,** an increase from **26% in 2022.**

**9%**

of young women think that **women's equality has got better** over the last 12 months.

**61%**

of young women told us that **their confidence in politicians has got worse** over the last 12 months.

This figure is **52% for young men.**

**3%**

of young women told us that **their confidence in politicians has got better** over the last 12 months.

This figure is **7% for young men.**



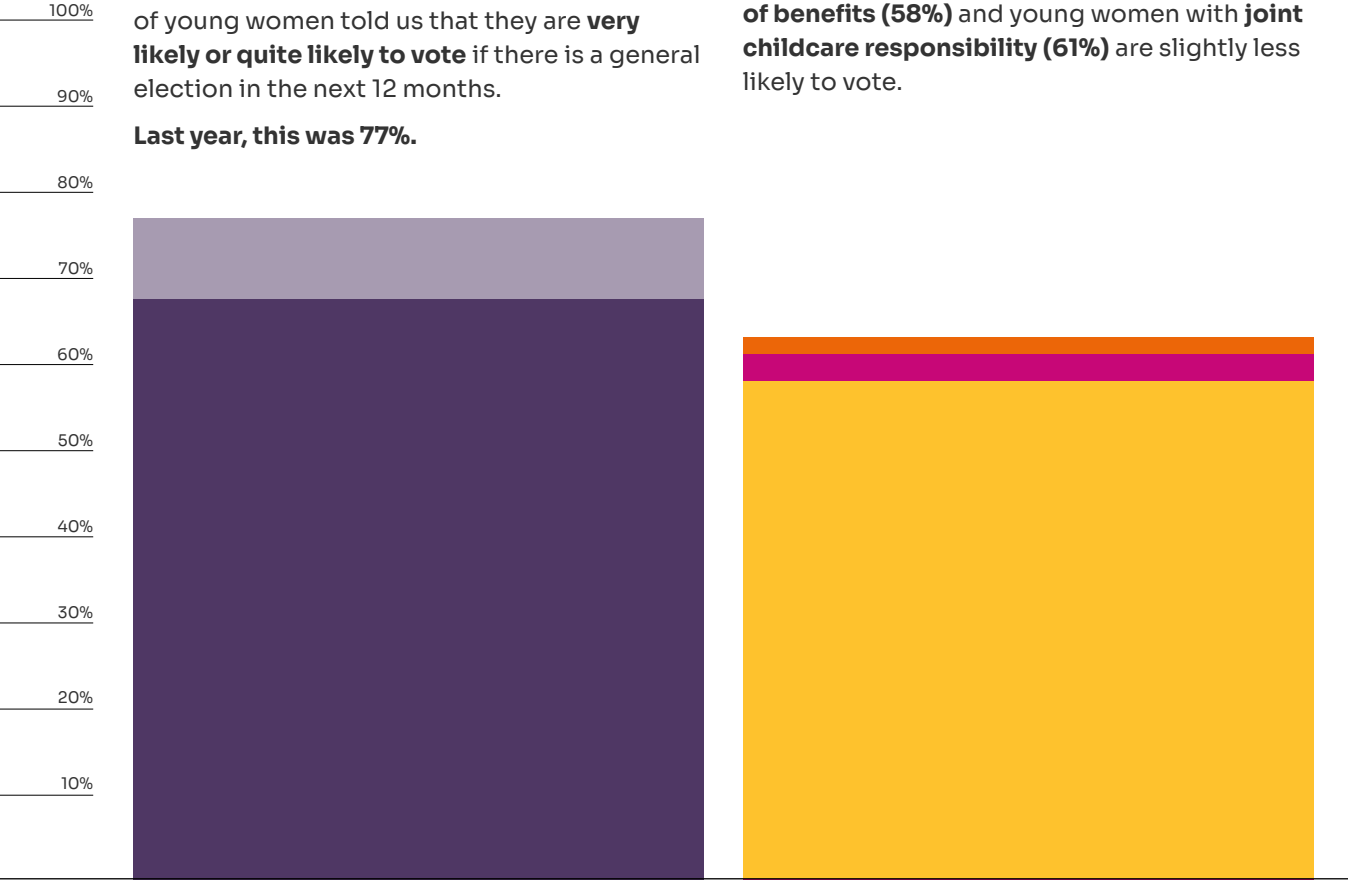
# As the General Election approaches, there has been a steep drop in young women’s likelihood to vote

## 67%

of young women told us that they are **very likely or quite likely to vote** if there is a general election in the next 12 months.

Last year, this was **77%**.

Young women from **racially minoritised communities (63%)**, young women in **receipt of benefits (58%)** and young women with **joint childcare responsibility (61%)** are slightly less likely to vote.



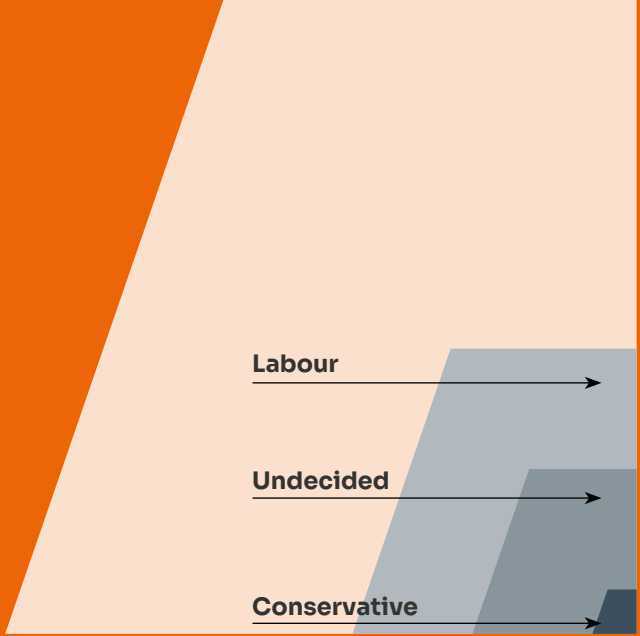
## Voting intentions

## 45%

of young women would **vote for Labour** if there were a general election now.

Only **7%** of young women would **vote Conservative**.

**26%** are still undecided.





# YOUNG WOMEN'S PRIORITIES



# We asked young women about their support for a range of policies to increase equality and support them at work. They rated them as follows:

(% ranked 'very' and 'quite' important combined)



# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

The finding that the majority of young women feel the government is neither responsive to their needs nor committed to achieving equality should act as a wake-up call to all political parties as the General Election gets closer. While the majority of young women are still likely to vote, there has been a steep drop in those who are considering voting in the last year. Parties who listen and respond to what young women need could reap rewards at the ballot box.

In sharing their priorities and creating a manifesto for an equal world of work, young women have already shown what needs to be done. Now it's time for action.

## All political parties should:

- Listen to the specific needs of young women, their experiences and views when developing policies. Young Women's Trust can help to arrange meetings and focus groups.
- Create policies that tackle inequality at every stage of working life.
- Support young women to influence policies as members, and stand for elected office, to increase the representation of young women in political life.

## A manifesto for an Equal World of Work

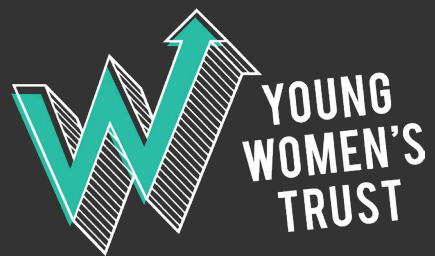
Young women's recommendations as to what needs to be done to tackle the workplace challenges they're facing have been highlighted throughout the report.

They have created a manifesto for an Equal World of Work setting out everything they want to see change, which brings these recommendations together. The manifesto has 5 big asks:

- **Fair and equal pay**
- **No unfair barriers to work**
- **Support to progress**
- **Job security**
- **No discrimination**



Read the full manifesto [here](#).



**RESEARCH CENTRE**

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