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Lifting the Second Glass Ceiling

UK market
overview



In the UK, workforce participation by women is relatively high, sitting at 58.5% compared with 66.3% of the male population¹. The section below explores how women in the UK are experiencing the Second Glass Ceiling, and looks at which factors are more influential.

The Equality Act 2010² helps protect against discrimination and this has had the effect of accelerating progress for women in the workplace in the UK. As a result of the Act, there is now legal precedent from a 2019 case³ in which an Employment Tribunal recognized that a woman experiencing menopause had suffered age-related harassment and she was awarded compensation. This has helped to open up the conversation surrounding menopause and the workplace in the UK and begin to tackle the taboo⁴.

However, while an important step, it is far from the norm for organizations to have policies accounting for not only the menopause, but also the multitude of issues contributing to women struggling to stay in the workplace. The original Glass Ceiling, alongside the multiple roles a woman has outside of the workplace and the potentially negative effects of menopause, are all contributing to women in the UK leaving the workforce at a higher rate than men. In the UK, opening discussions on the SGC and educating organizations about these issues is highly relevant and offers the potential to shift the dial on helping retain older women in the UK workplace.



Key findings

A mixed picture for UK women in the workplace

Only half (50%) of UK women surveyed are confident their generation will receive the same levels of flexibility and support to stay in the workforce as long as their male colleagues. This is the second lowest of the five countries polled and compares with an average of 59% across the five.

In contrast, UK women are less likely than others to say it is uncommon to see women in positions of leadership: 34% agreed with this (the lowest of the five countries) compared to a global average 42%.

Role models are considered important

Two-thirds (67%) of UK women believe the presence of more experienced female colleagues would be beneficial to the development of younger women in the workplace. This is slightly below the average of 73% across the five countries polled, but still indicates the value placed on the guidance and mentorship that can be provided.

Women encounter barriers to staying in work

Just over one in five UK women polled (21%) cited caring responsibilities (for parents or children) as a barrier to remaining in the workplace. Though significant, this figure is the lowest of the five nations surveyed. Indeed, women in the UK were most likely to say they saw no barriers to staying in work (18% compared to an average of 10%).

Menopause

In line with the global picture, one in five UK women (20%) mentioned health or well-being considerations for the menopause as a barrier to continuing work.

More than half (54%) of UK women believe it would be difficult to raise these issues, with an employer (slightly below the five-country average of 58%).

There is a marked difference depending on the gender of the manager with six in ten in the UK uncomfortable to raise these issues with a male manager (52% across all countries), but only 21% saying they would be uncomfortable talking to a female manager (18% globally).

Formal policies would help

Consistent with the global picture, 71% of women polled in the UK believe it is helpful for organizations to have formal policies to address personal health and wellbeing issues such as menopause, health issues related to menstruation, difficult pregnancies or miscarriage, but only 4% say they are aware of such policies in their organization.

[Read the full Lifting the Second Glass Ceiling report and see the recommendations here](#)

¹ [Gender Statistics](#), The World Bank, accessed June 2023

² [Equality Act 2010](#), Legislation.gov.uk, accessed June 2023

³ [Menopause and the workplace – considerations, risks, and how to manage them](#), Kennedys, February 2023

⁴ <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/menopause-at-work#gref>

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