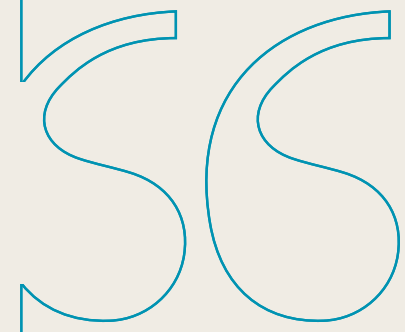


Accelerating Action: How Hybrid Working Can Fast-Track Equality at Work for Women

To mark International Women's Day 2025 – and in line with the theme 'Accelerate Action' – International Workplace Group's latest study shows how hybrid and more flexible ways of working can fast-track women's career progression and speed progress towards parity.

IWVG International
Workplace
Group





This year's International Women's Day theme, 'Accelerate Action', should provide inspiration and provoke questions. As business leaders, what are we doing to speed up progress towards equality at work? Are we laying the foundations for a fairer future or simply supporting the status quo?

International Workplace Group's latest study shines a light on the key role hybrid and more flexible ways of working can play in achieving parity. Our findings underline the importance of this flexibility for promoting women's career advancement, improving productivity and attracting, as well as retaining, female talent."

Fatima Koning,
Group Chief Commercial Officer,
International Workplace Group Plc



Addressing inequality in



A new report by International Workplace Group, published to mark International Women's Day 2025, has highlighted the importance of hybrid working for fast-tracking female equality. In line with this year's theme, 'Accelerate Action', it shows that the hybrid model promotes career progression for women – supporting those who might otherwise struggle to stay in their job roles – and is considered a key workplace benefit.

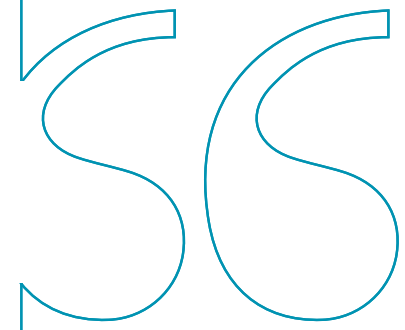
Already revolutionising the lives of millions around the world, the hybrid model allows people to divide their time between a local, flexible workspace, home and a central office. By removing the need for an arduous daily commute, hybrid working supports improved

work-life balance, happiness and health. Just as importantly, it also enhances productivity and offers environmental benefits.

For women, however, the appeal of the hybrid model is especially strong. As Fatima Koning, Group Chief Commercial Officer at IWG points out: "I'm a working mother, so I understand the unique benefits the hybrid approach brings for anyone with an array of responsibilities to juggle. Hybrid working makes a crucial difference for me, as it does for so many other women, empowering me to balance priorities such as coparenting my daughter, taking good care of myself and ensuring I stay focused on my ambitions and career progression."

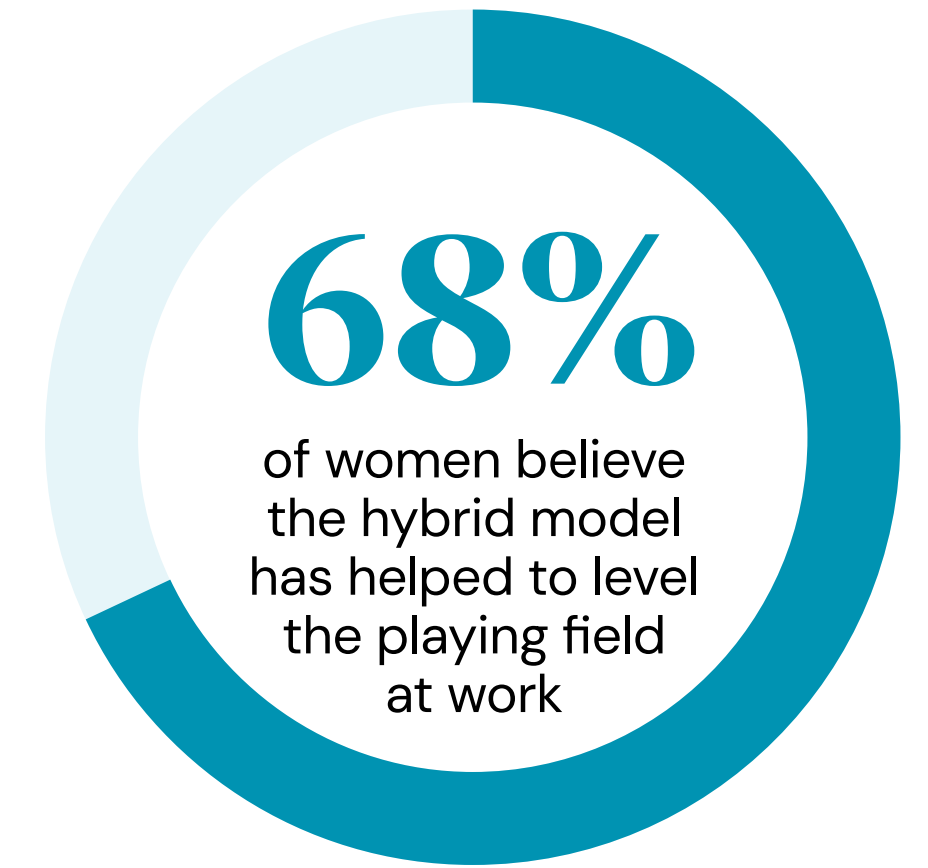
the workplace

Fast-tracking equality and broadening career horizons



When you think about the levers business leaders can pull to accelerate action for women, enhancing opportunities for hybrid working is among the most important.”

Fatima Koning,
Group Chief Commercial Officer,
IWG



On the question of career progression, IWG’s findings are unequivocal. According to the survey, 68% of women believe that the enhanced flexibility offered by the hybrid model has helped to level the playing field at work. Meanwhile, 67% say hybrid working has positively impacted their career trajectory.

“The rapid rise of hybrid working in the wake of Covid-19 was of huge benefit to women exhausted by trying to ‘have it all,’” says Koning. “It has allowed them to give their best at work and at home without burning out. It’s also vital to recognise that, where both partners in a relationship are able to work in a hybrid pattern, this provides the foundation for improved equality at home. The promotion of parity behind closed doors is just as important as corporate initiatives that support women to smash through glass ceilings and achieve their career goals. The reality is that one feeds into the other.”

According to IWG’s report, half (49%) of women say that hybrid working has helped them to achieve a more senior role at work, while 48%

say it has been key in advancing their career. Koning describes the findings as “incredibly encouraging. They show that the sea change in how we work is having a real impact on women’s prospects and levels of confidence in the workplace.” She explains: “In previous years, women might have worried that needing any kind of flexibility would see them passed over for career progression. However, there is now a real appreciation by businesses of all sizes that more flexible and hybrid ways of working can be a win-win for all concerned, leading to greater productivity and more engaged teams.”

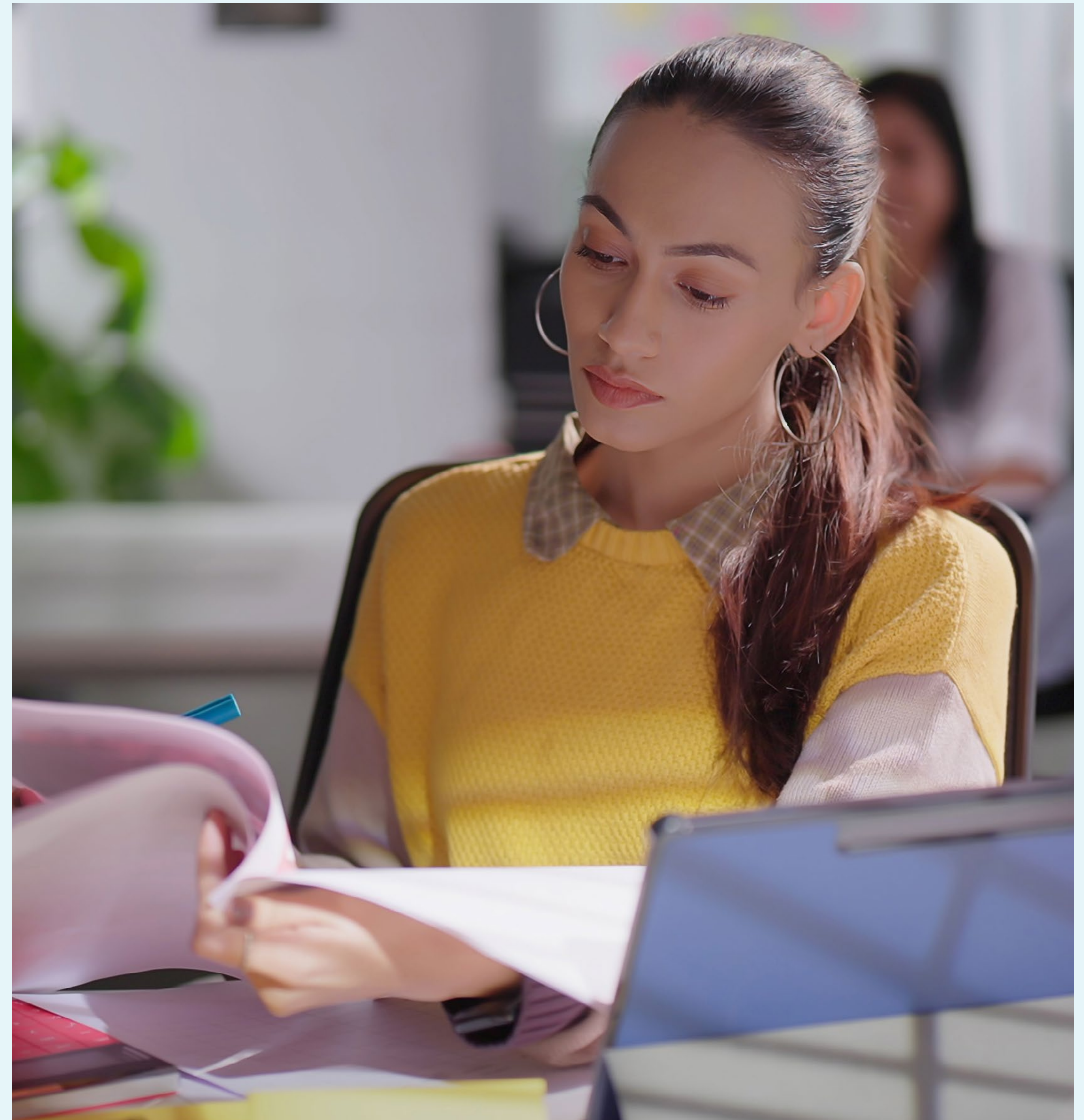
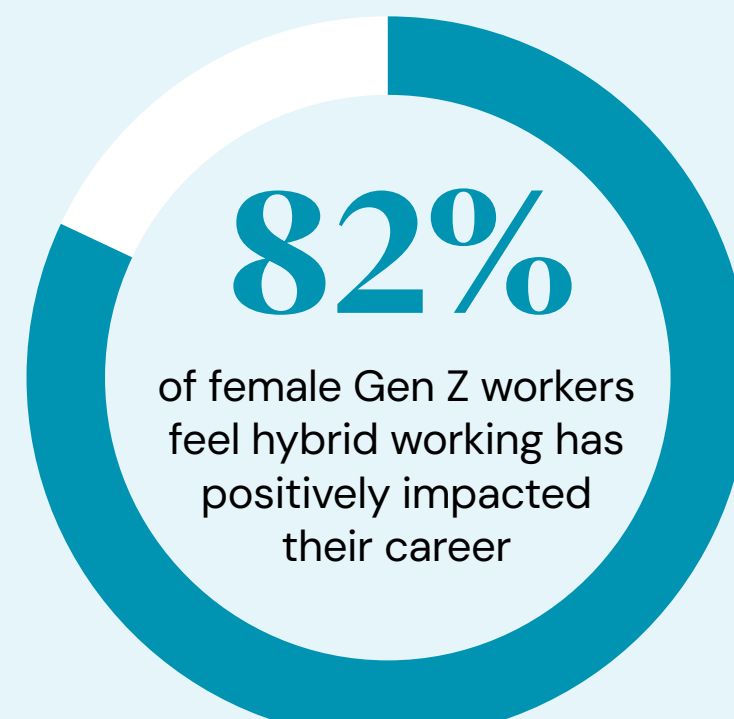
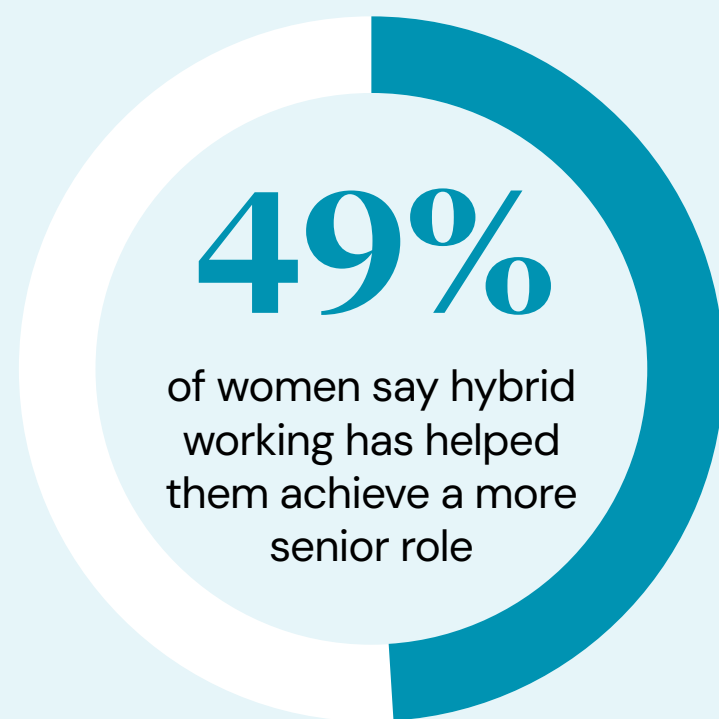
What’s more, argues Koning, “the positive effects of hybrid working are not limited to women like me, who are further on in their careers and managing responsibilities at home.” Indeed, IWG’s study reveals that 59% of Gen Z employees believe hybrid working has helped to advance their careers; 66% say it has been instrumental in helping them achieve promotion, while 82% feel that, overall, hybrid working has positively impacted their career.

“It may be that, for younger women, the freedoms that come with more flexible ways of working allow them to shine,” suggests Koning.

“Perhaps they are able to develop and grow in ways that might have been more difficult for them in a traditional, potentially male-dominated work environment. It goes back to that sense of levelling the playing field; when you feel trusted to work independently, you’re more motivated – and then, on your office days, you come together with colleagues to share your ideas with enthusiasm. There isn’t this strict sense of a hierarchy holding you back.”

For all its positivity, however, IWG’s report underscores that there is still much to be done in terms of reducing, and ultimately eliminating, the gender pay gap. Some 68% of the women surveyed expressed their disappointment that, based on current projections, it will take until 2158 – five more generations – to reach parity.

However, the report also showed real confidence in the role hybrid working can play in reducing the divide and speeding up progress towards equality. Half (52%) of women said they believed it could make a positive difference, and Koning agrees. “When you think about the levers business leaders can pull to accelerate action for women, enhancing opportunities for hybrid working is among the most important,” she says.



The race for female talent



But what of the recent headlines that have been dominated by discussion around Return To Office (RTO) mandates?

Companies of all sizes are prioritising time for their teams to collaborate in person, and on a regular and curated basis. However, the question of where and how people work is actually far more complicated than much of the current conversation implies. "Forward-thinking employers will be having complex, nuanced conversations around hybrid working," Koning argues. "They'll understand that reverting to

the old expectation that employees commute long distances each day could trigger a wave of resignations – and they will also be aware that such a sweeping move could affect women disproportionately."

A recent conference at Stanford University explored the implications of remote work, with three research papers looking specifically at RTO policies. They found that when companies switch to asking their employees to commute long distances on a daily basis, there is a corresponding increase in staff looking for

Women's Worth by Numbers

7 Weeks the length of time the average woman will effectively work for free in 2025, compared with the average man

16 Feb 'Gender Pay Day': the day women stop working for free in 2025, compared with the average man

14.5% the gender pay gap for all UK employees**

17% the gender pay gap in the USA**

£55bn the potential annual increase in women's earnings from eradicating the gender pay penalty**

20% the potential increase in global GDP if gender pay gaps close***

Sources: *TUC, **PwC, ***World Bank Group

new jobs. The research also showed that this particularly applies to more tenured, senior employees – a finding supported by S&P Global Market Intelligence, which recently reported that the number of women in C-suite positions has begun decreasing for the first time since it began collecting data in 2005.

IWG's own figures bear out the Stanford and S&P conclusions. According to its study, 60% of female employees say they would leave a job if required to be in the office five days a week and undertake a long commute. This rises to 63% for those aged between 25-44; a critically important period in women's lives, and often

one where they can progress into more senior roles with greater earning potential.

On the other hand, 63% of the women surveyed said that hybrid working had enabled them to stay in a role they might otherwise have had to leave due to caring responsibilities. This is key, insists Koning. "Women bring so much to the workplace – and any business leader should be thinking seriously about the best ways to retain female talent," she says. "Losing a raft of women would be problematic for any firm, with respect to productivity, but also in terms of equality and diversity, because hiring new women in their place would likely prove difficult."

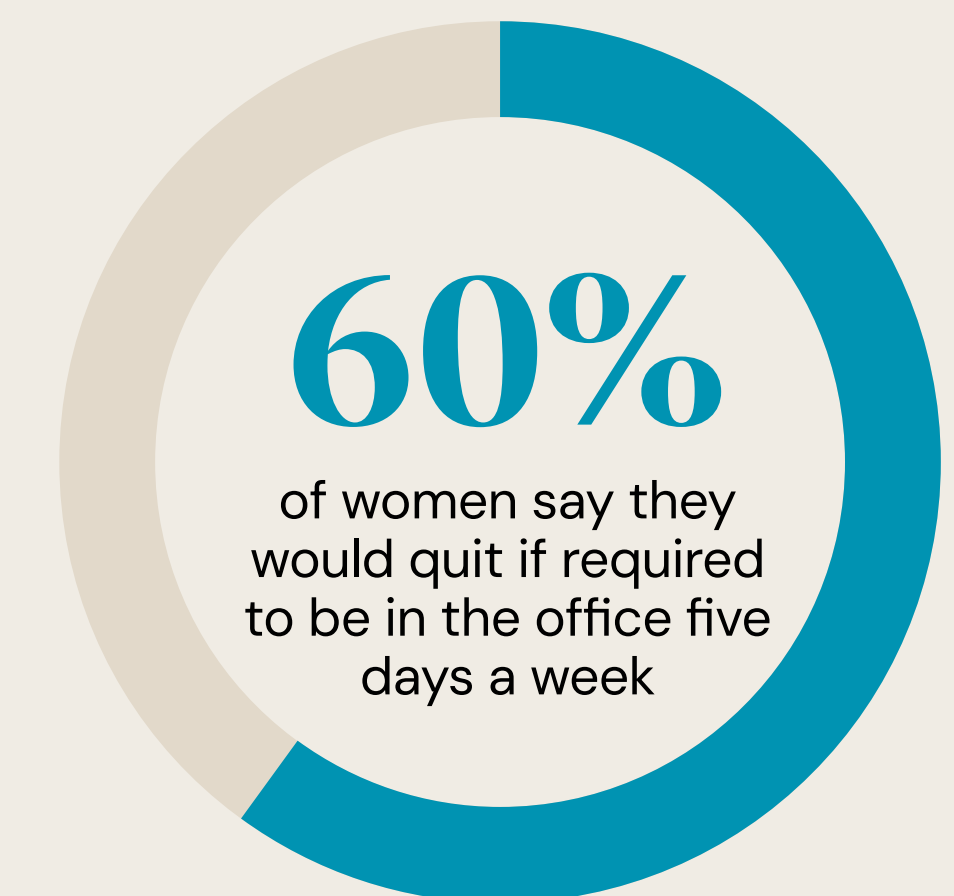
This is because, on the flip side of the coin, IWG's research shows hybrid working is crucial when it comes to attracting women into job roles, as well as retaining them. Some 84% of women who participated said the ability to work in a hybrid way would impact their decision when applying to new jobs. Meanwhile, 58% said that, for them, hybrid working was a "non-negotiable" workplace requirement.

"Overall," Koning concludes, "businesses that do not offer hybrid work risk missing out on hiring and keeping the best female talent. The flexibility it brings is no longer 'nice to have' – it's a necessity."



Multiple studies have highlighted the productivity and retention benefits to companies that offer more flexibility to their people. Conversely, employees that travel long distances daily are more likely to seek another role, with resignations disproportionately affecting women."

Fatima Koning,
Group Chief Commercial Officer, IWG



Women, hybrid working and promoting productivity

It's also worth remembering that hybrid working is now firmly established as a key way for firms to enhance their productivity. IWG research has found that 37% of business leaders offering flexibility at work saw increased productivity, while Stanford University professor Nicholas Bloom's research remains the definitive scientific study into the effects of hybrid working. It found that adopting hybrid working practices led to average productivity increases of 3% to 4%.

IWG's most recent poll reveals that 81% of women believe hybrid working has boosted their productivity and efficiency. Elsewhere, another IWG survey of leading HR executives showed that more than 80% agreed hybrid

working increases productivity, while a separate poll saw three-quarters of workers describe themselves as more productive and more motivated as a result of their employer rolling out the hybrid model.

"There was a time when productivity was measured simply by the number of hours people worked seated at individual desks in a company's central office," Koning says. "Leaders convinced themselves that if they could see their teams, useful work must be being done. In fact, productivity is about managing people well; setting clear KPIs and holding effective reviews. It's not about requiring anyone to work from a specific location."



Companies with representation of women **exceeding 30%** are significantly more likely to financially outperform those with 30% or fewer.

Source: McKinsey

Women's presence and productivity in the workplace – whether virtual or face-to-face – is worthy of specific consideration, Koning argues, because research shows that businesses with more women in senior positions are more profitable, more socially responsible and provide customers with better experiences. "Firms must understand that diversity drives productivity," she says. "When you have a greater variety of individuals with different experiences and backgrounds around the table during decision making, you make better decisions."

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of business leaders offering flexibility at work saw increased productivity.



The value of cutting the commute

“One thing we must also remember,” Koning continues, “is that hybrid working does not represent a binary choice between working from a traditional city centre office and working from home. There’s a third option: working out of a local coworking space or office, near to home, with like-minded people. This ‘middle way’ is particularly appealing to women.”

IWG’s study found that time-consuming commutes can be off-putting for women managing family commitments such as school runs, children’s extracurricular activities and caring for elderly parents. Half (50%) of participants in the survey said time saved on commuting was a key benefit of hybrid working.

However, working from home also has its challenges. In a world where women still seem to shoulder the greatest share of domestic labour, trying to work from the kitchen table can be uniquely problematic. When you can’t physically escape from tasks such as laundry, ongoing DIY projects or simply stacking the dishwasher, it can be difficult to concentrate. “That’s why the option of working from a local flexible workspace

– somewhere calm and pleasant, where you can be at your most productive – has such immense value,” Koning explains.

In the IWG survey, 77% of women said that a shorter commute to a local office would help them to accelerate their career. Additionally, 73% said that working locally would help them achieve a better balance between their career and personal lives.

“At IWG, we’re quite literally seeing the demand for local, flexible workspace play out on the map,” Koning explains. “Our global network now comprises more than 4,500 locations, and they are increasingly in suburbs and small towns. Great examples are Bluffton, South Carolina and Kodak, Tennessee in the USA, and Gerrards Cross in Buckinghamshire, UK. What all these towns and suburbs have in common is that they offer great quality of life. They’re places where people want to make their homes, raise their families and socialise. This is work coalescing around life – not the other way around. It’s exciting and an absolute boon for women.”



The domestic divide



75% of people say domestic labour should be split evenly*

BUT



63% of women say they do more than their fair share of the housework*



32% of men admit they do “less than they should”**



38% of women with a full-time job and a partner say the majority of domestic work falls to them. Just 9% of men say the same**



Only **6%** of working women who have a partner say that their partner is responsible for domestic chores. This includes 4% who say their significant other doesn’t work**

Sources: *British Social Attitudes Survey, 2023, **YouGov, 2021

Forward into the future

Overall, it's little wonder that, when questioned about the most important workplace benefits for women, most considered hybrid working almost twice as important (67%) as parental leave (36%). Women also list greater work-life balance (58%) and increased flexibility (58%) among its key benefits.

While true equality at work still feels some way off, the hybrid model is a beacon of hope for the future. "Women aren't strangers to navigating difficult headwinds or fighting for what they need," Koning says. "As our research shows, there is real determination to support hybrid working and lock in its benefits for female talent, and for businesses generally, both now and in the future.

"The world of work has changed permanently – and for the better – for all of us. The best business leaders understand that hybrid and more flexible ways of working remain a key driver of improving working life for women, accelerating action and fast-tracking us towards equality."



We help more than eight million people work the hybrid way, with 5000 locations across more than 130 countries. Find out more about what we do today at iwgplc.com.