

ADVANCING EQUALITY:

Women in the Hybrid Workplace

A new IWG study shows that hybrid working levels the playing field for women at work and improves the career trajectory for those in minority groups.

IWG

The Global
Workspace
Leader





This year's International Women's Day theme, 'Inspire Inclusion,' is a powerful call to action, and hybrid working stands at the forefront as a transformative force in achieving a more equitable workplace. The latest findings from IWG are a testament to this, revealing a trend where women, particularly from a range of diverse backgrounds, are actively shaping their careers around the flexibility that hybrid working offers. This shift is not only enhancing work-life balance but also fostering a wealth of new professional opportunities.”

Fatima Koning,
Group Chief Commercial Officer,
IWG



Introduction

A new report by IWG published to mark International Women’s Day (IWD) – Advancing Equality: Women in the Hybrid Workplace – shows that the flexibility of hybrid working is making the workplace more inclusive and levelling the playing field for female employees previously hampered by the demands of a more rigid work structure. The flexibility of the hybrid model enables women to get access to more promotions and higher-level roles, and at the same time, they are finding it easier to balance their working and family lives. The theme of this year’s IWD is ‘Inspire Inclusion’, and the report shows that women from minority groups especially benefit from the hybrid model.

Thanks to hybrid working, professional women are increasingly able to realise their full potential in the workplace. IWG’s ground-breaking research conducted independently with Mortar discovered that more than half of women are now far more likely to apply for senior roles, and the proportion is even higher for women in minority groups. Overall, two-thirds of women say that the hybrid model has given them opportunities at work that they would not otherwise have had, with nearly three-quarters of those from minorities agreeing.

The hybrid working model, which allows people to divide their time between a local flex



space, a central HQ and home, is already revolutionising the lives of millions around the world, enabling them to live happier, healthier, more productive lives. For women, the flexibility enabled by hybrid working holds a particularly powerful appeal. Research in 2023 by IWG found that nearly three-quarters of women (72%) would look for a new job if their employer took away the option of working in a hybrid way.

Fatima Koning, Group Chief Commercial Officer at IWG, has a 12-year-old daughter,

Lamisse, and understands the pressures of trying to juggle motherhood and a successful career. “Raising a child is a tremendous responsibility and in my life, hybrid working makes a vital difference,” she says. “I’m able to co-parent my daughter, take good care of myself and progress in my career – priorities that would be far more difficult to manage if I were travelling back and forth to a central office every day.”

Opening Up

IWG's report clearly shows that women have substantially more opportunities to access senior roles within the hybrid model. More than half (53%) of the women surveyed say that the flexibility of hybrid working has empowered them to apply for a promotion, and this figure rises to nearly two-thirds (61%) for those in a minority group.

Women's increased desire to progress up the career ladder was confirmed by the latest edition of the annual Women in the Workplace report by McKinsey in partnership with LeanIn.Org. The largest study of women in corporate America and Canada found that women are "more ambitious than ever", and that their ambitions are being fuelled by the flexibility brought by hybrid working.

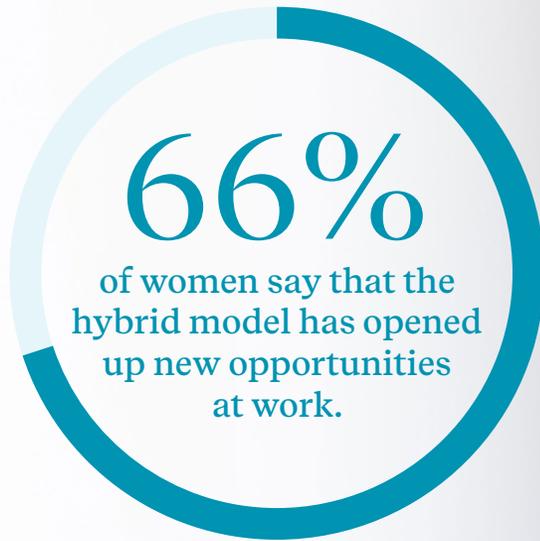
But it isn't just access to senior roles that the hybrid model is improving, it's the chance to shine in all areas of the workplace. The switch to hybrid working enables women to be more visible to senior leadership. As a result, their achievements are more likely to be recognised, they are more likely to be involved in new initiatives, their

networking possibilities are increased, and they are more likely to have influence on their organisation.

A staggering two-thirds (66%) say that hybrid working has opened up new opportunities at work in general that they would not have had otherwise, with this figure rising even higher to nearly three-quarters (73%) for those in minority groups. And women are not only looking at new opportunities with their current employer – two-in-five (44%) say they are thinking about a career change they would not have considered without hybrid working, and a similar number have already made the leap to an entirely new industry thanks to the hybrid model.



New Opportunities



“Too few firms have too few female leaders to begin with... but the figures show that the hybrid model is rapidly narrowing it.”

“Once women are able to work to their full potential because of hybrid working, their talents are far more likely to be recognised and utilised,” says Koning. “It levels the playing field, and women no longer feel they are at a disadvantage.”

However, McKinsey notes that there is still a long way to go. As in the past nine iterations of its report, it found that women – and particularly women of colour – remain under-represented throughout the corporate pipeline. There is some good news, however: numbers in the C-suite were found to be increasing, albeit to only 28% of the total.

“Too few firms have too few female leaders to begin with,” says Koning. “In my home country of The Netherlands, there are more CEOs named Peter than there are women CEOs. It sounds almost laughable, but it’s a serious issue. There’s still a big gap at the top, but the figures show that the hybrid model is rapidly narrowing it.”

Increasing Inclusion For Minority Groups

Diverse teams make better decisions

87%

of the time.



The benefits of hybrid working are particularly pronounced for women in minority groups which, in IWG's report, includes those who identify as LGBTQIA+, disabled or as coming from an ethnic minority background. Despite government regulations in most countries, all can find themselves intentionally or unintentionally marginalised in the workplace. However, research shows that diverse companies are 70% more likely to capture new markets, and that diverse teams make better decisions 87% of the time.

"It's not just about who you're getting through the door, but how you retain them," says anti-racism educator Jess Mally. "Companies bring in all these people from different socio-economic backgrounds, ethnic backgrounds, cultural backgrounds, people with disabilities and so on, and then they're surprised that, after a year, most of them are gone, because they weren't able to thrive in the environment that was provided. People need the flexibility to allow them to work in a way that feels right for them."

Nearly half (44%) of the women from minority groups surveyed by IWG say hybrid working has enabled them to be more productive and efficient, and a similar number (49%) say it has helped them learn more about other roles at their company. Nearly a third (32%) say working in a hybrid way has increased their visibility with senior leadership, and nearly three-quarters say hybrid working has brought them opportunities they would not have had otherwise.

When it comes to those with a mobility disability, nine out of 10 (86%) say that hybrid working has made office-based jobs more viable for them, while 61% agree it has made their job more inclusive. This is significant: recent figures in the US show that only 29% of Americans of working age with disabilities participate in the workforce, compared with 75% of Americans without a disability. In the UK, the latest figures from the Office for National Statistics show that just over

half of disabled people are employed, compared to more than four-fifths of non-disabled people.

In total, two-thirds (67%) of women say that hybrid working, which supports a number of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, including the advancement of gender equality, a reduction in inequality in general, and inclusive and sustainable economic growth, has helped to level the playing field for career progression. Even more (70%) think that hybrid working has made their job more inclusive.

"The flexibility offered by hybrid working is a great equaliser," says Koning. "It can make the workplace a far more welcoming environment for those who have previously felt excluded, and everybody benefits."

61%



of women with a mobility disability agree the hybrid model has made their job more inclusive.

75%



of women from minority groups say hybrid work has brought them greater opportunities.





The Benefits of Women in the Workplace

Improved gender diversity can bring significant gains for companies.

Women make up 50% of the world population, yet the global labour force participation rate for women is 47%, compared to 72% for men. Women are also paid less than men on average: in the UK, they earned 14% less in 2023, and in the US they earned 18% less. It is estimated that the gender pay gap costs the world economy around 15% of GDP.

Improved gender diversity can bring significant benefits to companies, including a wider talent pool, different perspectives, enhanced collaboration and even bigger profits – a growing body of research shows that the number of women on corporate boards has a relationship to financial

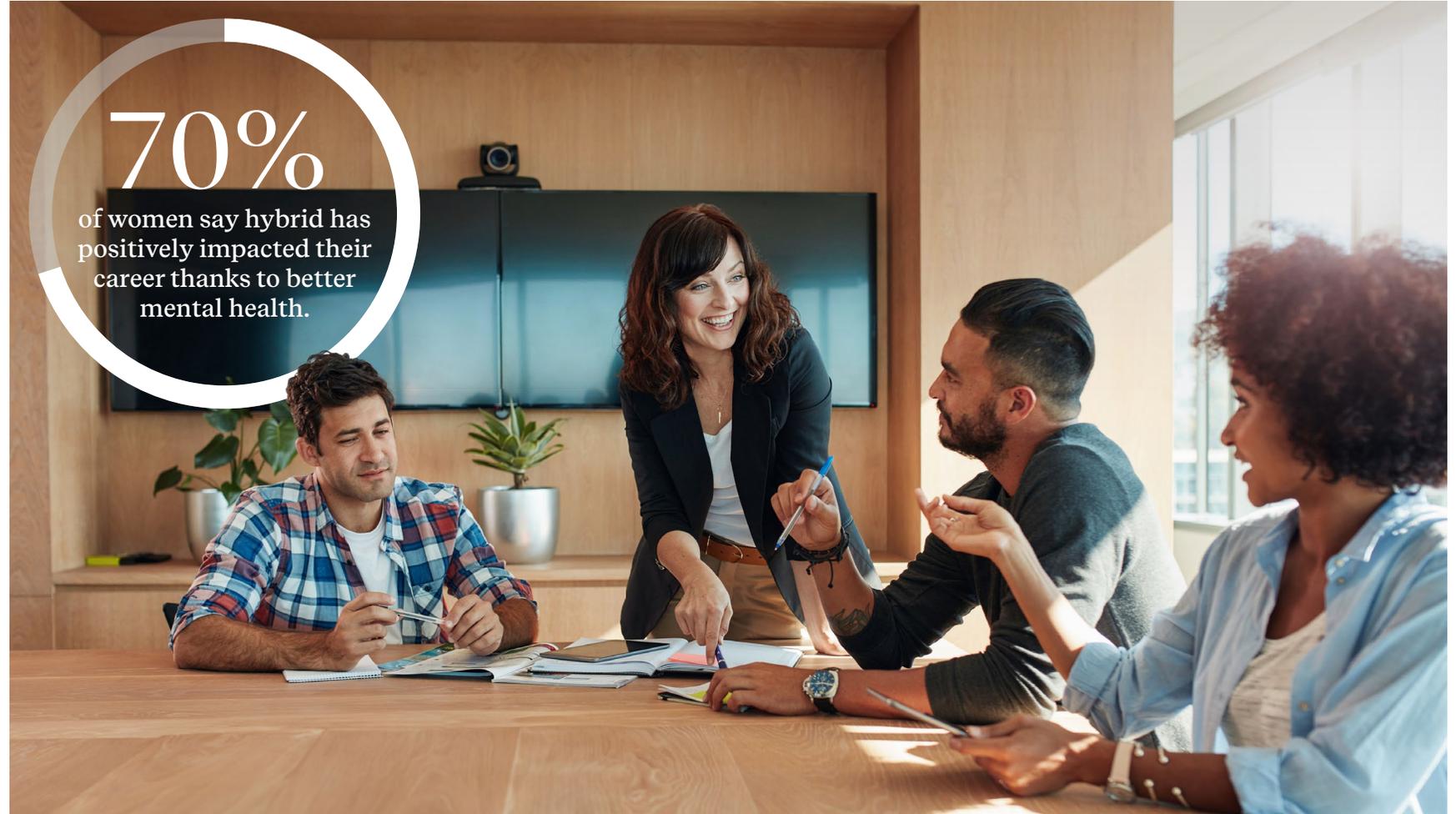
performance. A study by McKinsey found that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on their executive teams were 15% more likely to experience above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile.

A Gallup report based on more than four decades of research and 27 million employee responses also found that female managers outperform their male counterparts when it comes to driving employee engagement. This is highly significant, as 87% of employees worldwide report being disengaged at work. Companies that have engaged employees outperform their peers by 147%.



Of the women who suffer from mental ill health surveyed by IWG, three-in-ten (27%) say they have experienced improved mental wellbeing as a result of working in a hybrid manner, with nearly three-quarters (70%) agreeing that hybrid work has positively impacted their career growth trajectory as a result. This mirrors a major global study of hybrid working by Cisco, in which more than half (55%) of the 28,000 respondents from 27 countries reported that working in a hybrid way had decreased their stress levels.

Mental health at work is a pressing – and growing – issue. According to the World Health Organization, 15% of working adults live with a mental disorder, and 12 billion working days are lost every year to depression and anxiety alone. Gen Z, the latest demographic cohort to enter the workplace, are much more likely than their older colleagues to report experiencing negative emotions such as stress, anxiety and loneliness, and less than half of them report their mental health as very good or excellent, according to the American Psychological Association.



Boosting Mental Health

A report by the UK's Mental Health Foundation found that women are three times more likely than men to experience common health problems. In the workplace, women have reported higher levels of burnout than men for years, and the gap has more than doubled since 2019, a recent Gallup survey showed. There are several reasons for this, including the fact that women are more likely to head up single-parent families and take on unpaid labour. In addition, affordable and accessible childcare is becoming harder and harder to find.

The hybrid model offers many benefits for mental health. By spending less time commuting, people can achieve a far healthier work-life balance. That means more time for doing the things they want to do, such as being with family and friends, exercising and cooking healthy meals. And getting an all-important good night's sleep.



In an earlier IWG study of the benefits of hybrid working for fitness and mental health, two-thirds (66%) of respondents said that their mental health was good thanks to shifting to the hybrid model.

“Being able to spend time with family and friends is particularly important,” says GP and leading TV doctor Sara Kayat. “The lockdowns during the pandemic showed us what social isolation can do. We saw sharp increases in referrals to mental health services, and I think that was partly due to a lack of social interaction. We’re coming to understand more and more how imperative social connections are when it comes to our health.”

Local flex spaces also play a pivotal role in boosting feelings of wellbeing, as they offer the chance of interaction with colleagues and like-minded individuals without the need for a long commute.



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The Key Drivers Behind the Rise of the Hybrid Model



People

Hybrid working offers improved work-life balance, promoting better health and wellbeing for employees, and a reduction in stressful and expensive commuting.



Profit

Happier and more time-rich people are more productive. Hybrid working also helps talent attraction and retention, reducing recruitment costs.



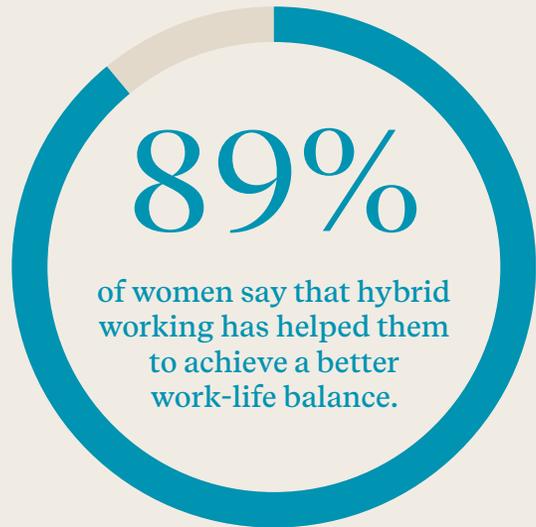
Planet

A reduction in commuting because people work close to home and visit a central office less frequently means companies can reduce their carbon footprint as well as the size of their main office.



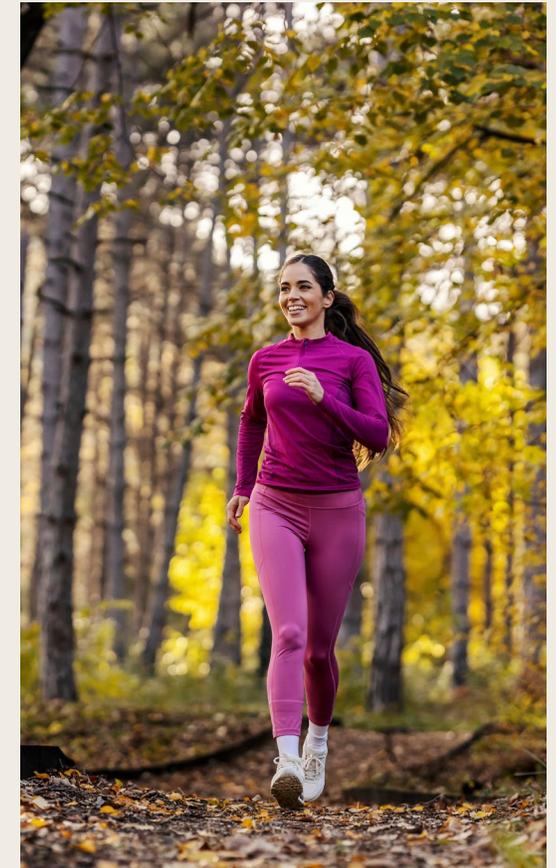
Creating A Better Balance

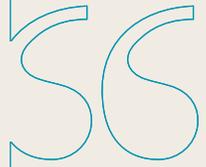
An overwhelming majority (89%) of women in IWG's report say that hybrid working has helped them achieve a better balance between work responsibilities and family commitments. This is a key finding, as women's share of domestic commitments tends to be much greater than that of men. Research has shown that working mothers and carers can suffer from fatigue and stress, and often feel guilt when their job prevents them carrying out family responsibilities.



A recent survey by the Pew Research Center in the US found that women are increasingly earning as much as their partners (in nearly a third of marriages, both spouses now earn around the same amount of money). However, the way that couples divide their time between paid work and home life remains unbalanced. Women bear a heavier load when it comes

to household chores and caregiving responsibilities, while men spend more time on work and leisure. The only marriage type in which husbands devote more time to caregiving than their wives is one in which the wife is the sole breadwinner. Overall, on average women spend two more hours a day on caregiving than their partners, and 2.5 more hours on housework.





Hybrid offers the opportunity for women to play an equal role in the workplace - with all the opportunities that can bring.”

The division of time between a local flexible workspace, a corporate HQ and home makes balancing the demands of work and home much easier. Perhaps more importantly, where both partners are able to work in a hybrid manner and undertake an equal share of household chores and childcare, a levelling of the playing field is possible. While women may find new freedom and energy to step up at work, their partners – whatever their gender – will be able to enjoy more involvement at home.

Women who are able to more efficiently organise their time as a result of hybrid



working are also likely to be more productive. A quarter (24%) of the women questioned in IWG’s report said their productivity has increased thanks to the hybrid model.

“Traditionally, women have often taken on an unfair share of home responsibilities,” says Koning. “But hybrid offers the opportunity for them to free themselves from those shackles and to play an equal role in the workplace – with all the opportunities that can bring.”

Working Closer to Home

Women are saving time and money thanks to the hybrid model

One of the most significant benefits of hybrid working is the fact that it allows work to take place close to home. Research by IWG found that 72% of hybrid workers said they would only consider new jobs and roles that allowed them to base themselves at workspaces close to home for at least part of the week. This is boosting the creation of 15-minute cities, an environmentally friendly concept in which all of life’s necessities and amenities, including a place to work, are within a 15-minute walk or cycle ride from people’s homes. As a result, IWG has launched a major programme of expansion around the world, with the vast majority of new openings in suburbs and commuter towns.

By working at a local flex space, workers save time and money on a long, daily commute to a city-centre office and have more time and money to spend on leisure pursuits and home life. Over a third (38%) of women in IWG’s new report say that hybrid working has given them more time to pursue personal passions outside of work. A similar number (38%) say they have saved money on commuting as a result of working closer to home, with the time saved from commuting contributing to the increase in productivity mentioned above.



Conclusion

It is clear from IWG's ground-breaking report that hybrid working can make a significant positive difference to the lives and careers of working women, particularly those who come from diverse backgrounds.

"Having personally experienced the myriad benefits of hybrid working, it's heartening for me to witness its role in increasing opportunity and driving diversity and inclusion, allowing more women to thrive in their chosen fields," says Koning. "Women are rejecting corporate cultures and structures that don't serve them, and companies that aren't prepared to adapt will see talent depart in favour of their competitors. Hybrid is here to stay, and it's ushering in a brighter working future for all."

As we celebrate International Women's Day, it is encouraging to find that the glass ceiling that for so long has held women back may soon be considered to be as outdated as the 9-5 daily commute. In the meantime, women are smashing it – and that's good news for everyone.



We help more than eight million people work the hybrid way, with over 4000 locations across more than 120 countries. Find out more about what we do at iwgplc.com.