

India

talent trends.

2025



About ACCA.

We are ACCA (the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), a globally recognised professional accountancy body providing qualifications and advancing standards in accountancy worldwide.

Founded in 1904 to widen access to the accountancy profession, we've long championed inclusion and today proudly support a diverse community of over **252,500** members and **526,000** future members in **180** countries.

Our forward-looking qualifications, continuous learning and insights are respected and valued by employers in every sector. They equip individuals with the business and finance expertise and ethical judgment to create, protect, and report the sustainable value delivered by organisations and economies.

Guided by our purpose and values, our vision is to develop the accountancy profession the world needs. Partnering with policymakers, standard setters, the donor community, educators and other accountancy bodies, we're strengthening and building a profession that drives a sustainable future for all.

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India talent trends 2025.

Global Talent Trends 2025 is the largest annual talent survey of accountancy and finance professionals across the world.

Our third edition identifies the key issues facing finance professionals this year. We collected compelling data, insights and perspectives – shared by over **10,000** respondents from **175** countries – on **the transforming world of work** and **emerging career aspirations**.

For India, our regional survey reveals that AI is playing an influential role in how employers and employees are preparing for the future. While employers need to focus on upskilling, mental health and wellbeing – talent should be proactive in their learning and adapt an entrepreneurial mindset.



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Foreword.

As we step into 2025, the evolving talent landscape continues to reflect both optimism and uncertainty.

Compared to the insights from the 2024 Talent Trends, this year’s findings reveal a subtle shift: a smaller percentage of finance professionals now feel overwhelmed by the rapid pace of technological change – **53%** compared to over **60%** last year. This growing awareness reinforces why **43%** of respondents from India identify AI as the most valuable skill for the future. There’s good news on work-related mental health concerns: from being among the top three countries with the highest work-related mental health issues in 2023 – the percentage of respondents reporting mental health challenges has fallen below the global average of **52%** in 2025.

ACCA’s launch of the annual Global Talent Trends survey seeks to capture these challenges and opportunities for talent in finance and accountancy – thereby shaping the future of the profession globally and locally. The India Talent Trends 2025 report builds on the Global Talent Trends survey. It takes a deep dive into country-specific insights and attitudes captured via India respondents within the global survey of over 10,000 respondents from 175 countries.

The world of work continues to evolve at a rapid pace. Gaining insight into what keeps talent going, and what motivates and demotivates them, provides evidence to work towards building a better workplace of the future – one that’s inclusive, promotes innovation, prioritises wellbeing, and equates rewards with performance. This report is a part of ACCA’s public value agenda contributing to insights on workplace trends, which are relevant for all stakeholders in the talent ecosystem, including employers and finance leaders; employees- current and future, as well as policymakers.

With a keen focus on reinforcing our purpose as a force for public good, we will continue to collaborate with our strong network of stakeholders across regions in shaping strategies for finance talent management, adapting and experimenting with new ways of working, as we enable an ever-relevant profession to be ready for the future.



Md. Sajid Khan
Director – India, ACCA



Introduction.

India's workforce is getting younger – with **52%** of the population either in Gen Z or Gen Y age groups (global average 47%), and **20%** of the global Gen Z population located in India¹. This significant demography is well represented by **98%** of our respondents from India, as we ask finance and accountancy professionals from over 10 sectors about their work concerns and future aspirations.

Young talent is India's key growth driver: Studies show that 34% of India's Gross National Income (GNI) is contributed by the youth, aged 15-29 years². Young professionals are unsurprisingly key drivers of innovation and technology adoption – with 65% of Gen Z respondents having ambitions to become entrepreneurs/business owners. While over half (53%) continue to be overwhelmed by the pace of technological change, 86% of Gen Z respondents are confident in their ability to learn and apply AI-related skills. Creating workplaces that support this young talent is key to maximising their contribution.

Regional talent trends offer key insights for shaping the future workplace: The world of work continues to evolve at a rapid pace. Gaining insight into what keeps talent going, and what motivates and demotivates them, provides evidence to work towards building a better workplace of the future – one that's inclusive, promotes innovation, prioritises wellbeing, and equates rewards with performance.

ACCA's annual Global Talent Trends survey provides regional nuances on talent and workplace trends for accountancy and finance professionals.

Key trends covered in 2025:

	1. Future skills, technology and AI
	2. Stress/mental health
	3. Work patterns
	4. Salary and cost of living
	5. Equity, diversity and inclusion
	6. Environment, social and human rights
	7. Entrepreneurial ambitions

Box 1:

Who can benefit from these insights?

This report is a part of ACCA's public value agenda contributing to insights on workplace trends, which are relevant for all stakeholders in the talent ecosystem:

Employers and finance leaders

- to understand the concerns and preferences of current and future employees
- to gain knowledge into solutions that industry peers are implementing.

Employees, current and future

- a window into the perception, aspirations, needs, and fears of their counterparts
- future skills and competencies.

Policymakers

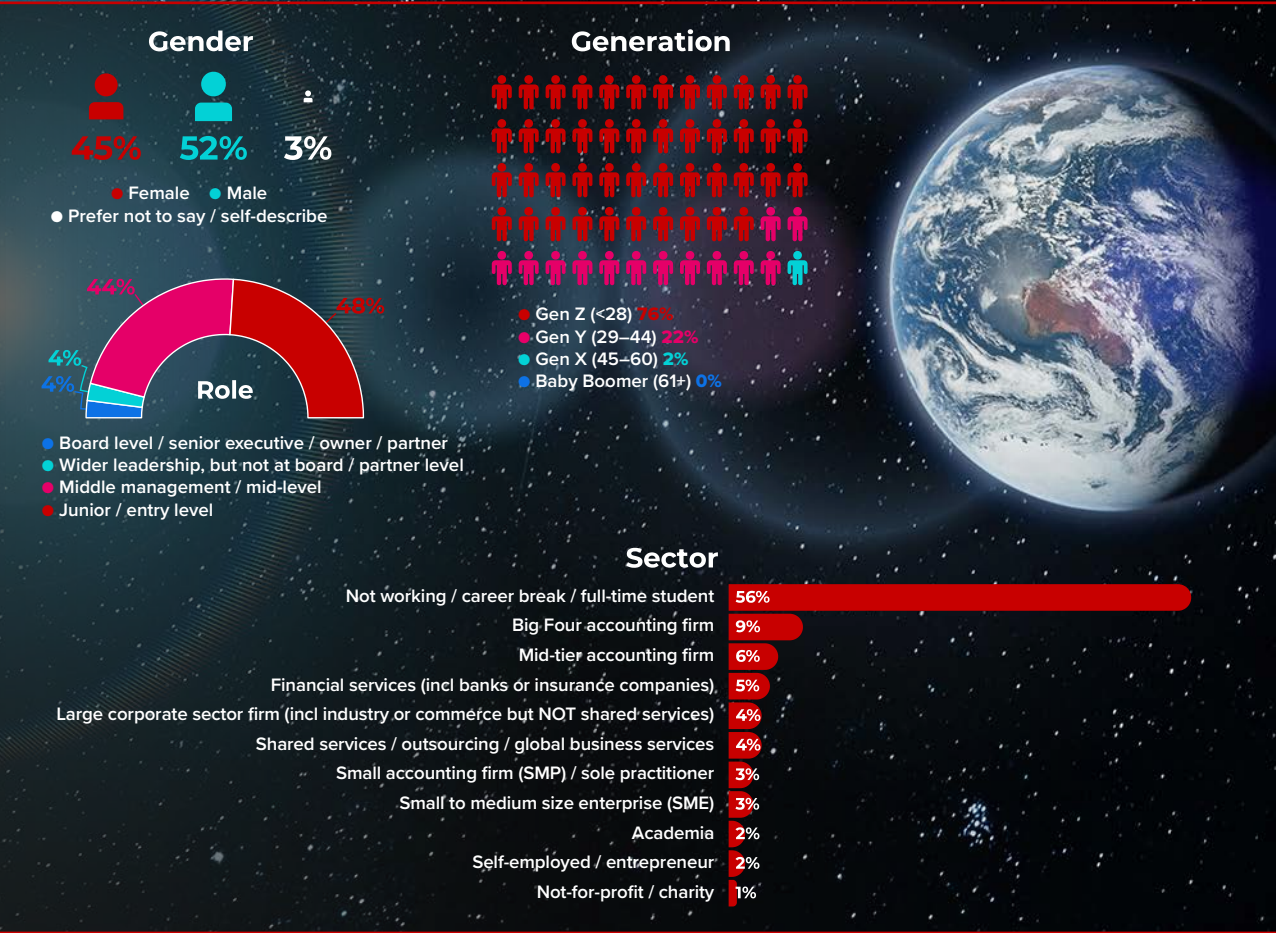
- to support with policies that meet aspirations of the workforce – eg support for entrepreneurs, macro-economic measures to manage cost of living, EDI regulations.

¹ <<https://www.nasscom.in/knowledge-center/publications/gen-z-and-millennials-reshaping-future-workforce>>.

² <<https://www.undp.org/india/projects/strengthening-nyks-and-nss>>.

Demographics.

With India’s data captured as a subset of our Global Talent Trends survey of over 10,000 respondents – 664 respondents (20% members and affiliates, and 80% students) participated from the region.

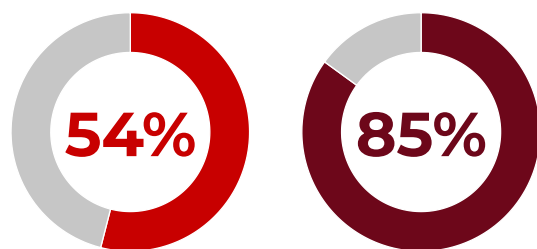


7 key findings for India.

	1. Future skills, technology and AI Amidst concerns over future skills gap, 43% identify AI as the #1 future skill
	2. Stress/mental health #1 career barrier for 35%
	3. Work patterns Flexible work #1 perk , but there is a 30% gap between preference and reality
	4. Salary and cost of living #1 concern , driving dissatisfaction with pay and job changes
	5. Equity, diversity and inclusion 55% say EDI efforts are too narrow; 16% demand focus on older talent
	6. Environment, social and human rights Over 80% prioritise social and human rights reputation in employer choice
	7. Entrepreneurial ambitions Over 60% have entrepreneurial ambitions

1. AI skills are a top priority amidst skills gap concerns

Over half (**54%**) of respondents from India are concerned about not developing the required future skills – and the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on their role. This partly explains why **43%** see AI as the most valuable work skill. Confidence levels around the knowledge of AI are low due to a lack of learning opportunities and complexities – with only **27%** suggesting they are confident. However, all is not lost – with **85%** of respondents confident in their ability to learn and apply AI-related skills, which is higher than the global average of **81%**. For upskilling on AI, as well as other future skills to take effect – employers recommend closing the disconnect between the skills employees learn and what they use on the job.

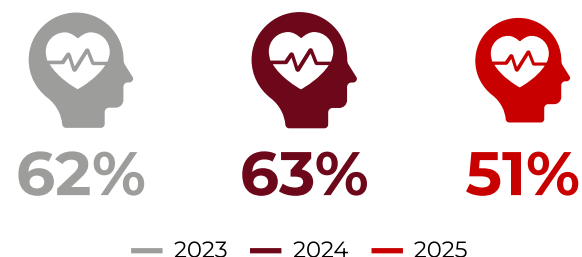


54% are concerned they're not developing the required future skills, but **85%** are confident in their ability to learn and apply AI-related skills

‘Employers recommend closing the disconnect between the skills employees learn and what they use on the job.’

2. Work-related stress is the main career barrier

Over a third (**35%**) of respondents identify stress/mental health as the top career barrier. Over half (**51%**), meanwhile, agree their mental health suffers because of work pressure and want more support from their organisations. Across age groups, Gen Y (**56%**) are the most stressed and in need of support. Beyond providing the required support infrastructure such as helplines, installing a culture of empathy – where listening and communication between employees, managers and leaders is key to addressing mental health concerns.



Mental health indicators have improved in comparison to our 2023 and 2024 results – but over half of respondents in 2025 still agree that their mental health suffers due to work pressures

‘Beyond providing the required support infrastructure such as helplines, installing a culture of empathy... is key to addressing mental health concerns.’

3. Flexible working is the most valued perk

When asked about the key benefits that employers could provide to improve work-life balance, close to half (**49%**) of India respondents chose flexible work and hybrid/remote working. However, current working patterns indicate that only **45%** work in a hybrid model while **75%** would prefer hybrid working. Employers feel that, while there’s a trade-off between hybrid working and skills development, hybrid arrangements could work with the right strategies in place.



75% of respondents from India would prefer hybrid working arrangements, yet **41%** are still working in the office full time

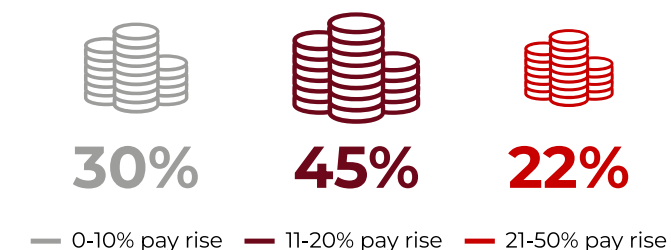
‘Employers feel that, while there’s a trade-off between hybrid working and skills development, hybrid arrangements could work with the right strategies in place.’

Click  to learn more



4. Cost of living is the top reason for job changes

Common across all sectors and age groups, cost of living is a major concern for **39%** of respondents from India. Inflationary pressure could partially explain the dissatisfaction with pay scales among **65%** of respondents, and retention issues – with half (**50%**) feeling the best way to improve their salary and rewards is to leave the current organisation. From our India survey, **45%** of respondents expect a pay rise of 11-20% in the next 12 months, which is the highest among all regions. Employers feel that, while compensation is a key determinant for retention – a strong employer brand, better transparency around roles and linked salaries, and initiatives to make employees feel valued could help create staying power.



Annual pay rise expectations of respondents overall, with **45%** of respondents expecting a pay rise of at least 11% in the next 12 months

‘Concerns over the cost of living continue to top our ‘workplace fear’ index in 2025, a trend we’ve seen for three years in a row.’

5. EDI needs to look beyond gender diversity

Over half (**55%**) of India respondents feel their organisation focuses more on certain aspects of diversity than others. Surprisingly, the equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) marker identified as needing more attention is recognising the value of older employees. Employers feel the upskilling aspect of ageing employees could be developed, along with the integration of neuro and physically diverse employees.



Over half of India respondents suggest their organisation focuses more on certain aspects of diversity than others (compared to **45%** globally)

‘Employers feel the upskilling aspect of ageing employees could be developed, along with the integration of neuro and physically diverse employees.’

6. Demand for sustainability-related careers outstrips supply

While **74%** of respondents are keen to pursue roles focused on environmental issues, only a third (**33%**) are currently in roles where they contribute to the organisation/clients’ related environmental and climate change issues.



Nearly three quarters of respondents suggest they are interested in pursuing accountancy and finance roles focused on environmental issues

‘Only a third are currently in roles where they contribute to the organisation/clients’ related environmental and climate change issues.’

7. Over 60% have entrepreneurial ambitions

From our regional survey, **63%** of respondents have career ambitions to be an entrepreneur/business owner in the future – the second highest regionally after Africa (**80%**). Equipped with the required expertise on financial and business models, it's not surprising, however, that seasoned professionals highlight the challenges finance professionals need to overcome to help realise these ambitions.



Respondents who have career ambitions to be an entrepreneur, compared with **52%** globally and the second highest regionally after Africa (**80%**)

‘Seasoned professionals highlight the challenges finance professionals need to overcome to help realise these ambitions.’

Expectations versus reality: what explains the gap?

As employees share their aspirations and challenges, employers attempt to understand the gaps between expectations and reality. For example:



While over **60%** of our respondents want to be entrepreneurs, there are few real-life cases of successful entrepreneurs coming from an accountancy and finance background. Sandhya Sriram explains:

‘The strong emphasis on compliance and gatekeeping – both in finance curriculum and professional training – may be one reason why entrepreneurial thinking isn’t more prevalent in the field. One way finance professionals can overcome this is by stepping into “intrapreneurial” roles within their organisations. These roles offer a safe environment to experiment, take initiative, and develop the skills needed to eventually build and lead their ventures.’

Sandhya Sriram, CFO, Narayana Healthcare



We found **65%** of respondents are dissatisfied with their level of pay, with most Gen Z and Gen Y age groups keen to ask for a pay rise. Sandeep Shukla explains:

‘While employers recognise the cost of living as a challenge (partially due to macro-economic factors outside their control), employees need to realise balance between work responsibilities and compensation.’

Sandeep Shukla, Chief People Officer, Acobloom

Beyond pay, other incentives – such as upskilling employees and enabling consistent career growth – are also important markers of employee satisfaction.



A **30%** gap between those working in hybrid arrangements versus those keen on hybrid working. A roundtable participant explains the way forward:

‘While both models have their pros and cons, hybrid working will continue to be valued high on the list of perks that employers could offer, and everyone – the employees and the leaders – need to modify their behaviours and soft skills to make it work, with being on camera while on calls being one such example.’

The world of work is transforming – with both employers and employees needing to adapt to meet future-ready demands. Employers need to focus on providing development opportunities within a safe and inclusive workplace while employees need to adapt intrapreneurial skills. As Sandhya Sriram explains:

‘When you think about your future self, focus on becoming a better version of who you are today. This journey is multifaceted – it involves continuously acquiring new skills, embracing emerging technologies, and approaching change with enthusiasm. Ultimately, the goal is to consistently add value in everything you do – whether that means taking on stretch assignments, leading cross-functional projects, mentoring others, or stepping outside your comfort zone in meaningful ways. Whatever path you choose, let it be driven by your commitment to growth and impact.’

Sandhya Sriram, CFO, Narayana Healthcare

2025 findings in detail.



‘Upskilling should have a clear purpose and direction. Understanding the path one is working towards is key to effective upskilling.’

Kesav M, Management Consultant,
Management and Governance Consulting

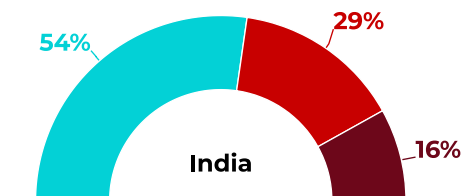
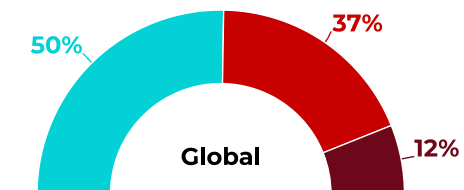
1. AI skills are a top priority amidst skills gap concerns

Over half of our respondents (**54%**) are concerned about not developing the required future skills. This concern is inversely proportional to seniority – with mid and junior-level professionals more concerned than senior leadership and board level respondents.

Significant concerns are identified in terms of a possible skills gap for the future

% concerned they are not developing the skills they need for the future, Global vs India

● Agree ● Disagree ● Don't know



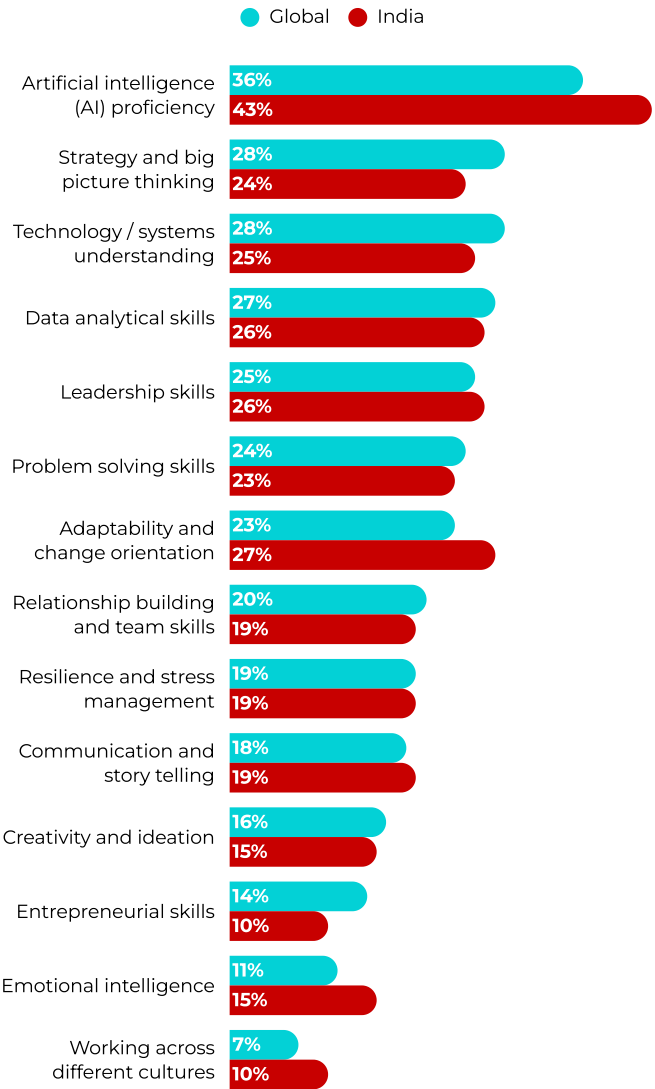
Deconstructing the definition of ‘upskilling’ and linking the journey with career paths is key to addressing this challenge. Organisations need to work with employees to help them define specific skills. This can be done through offering personalised assessments to align upskilling with employees’ career goals.

For upskilling to be effective, employees need opportunities to both learn and apply these new skills. Sridhar RS, Senior Vice President, Client Lifecycle Management, Standard Chartered GBS India, shares the practices his firm implements:

‘We’ve set up a “talent marketplace”, where employees can offer their newly acquired skills by dedicating a few hours each week to support projects. This not only helps individuals apply what they’ve learned but also promotes internal talent – as employees gain visibility for future opportunities in those roles.’

Sridhar RS, Senior Vice President, Client Lifecycle Management, Standard Chartered GBS India

AI is the most valuable future workplace skill



Box 2:

A recent Microsoft and LinkedIn report finds that India has one of the highest AI adoption rates among knowledge workers – with **92%** using generative AI at work. This is significantly higher than the global average of **75%**³, which also explains the higher optimism about AI in our regional survey when compared to global results.

Reiterating the importance of upskilling, the roundtable participants concluded that upskilling efforts and retention are directly proportional. Upskilling can address the root cause of why people leave organisations. To truly retain talent and foster growth, investing in well-rounded skill development is key. As with careers, however, while organisations need to provide opportunities – it’s ultimately the individual’s responsibility to own their upskilling journey.

‘Upskilling can address the root cause of why people leave organisations. To truly retain talent and foster growth, investing in well-rounded skill development is key.’

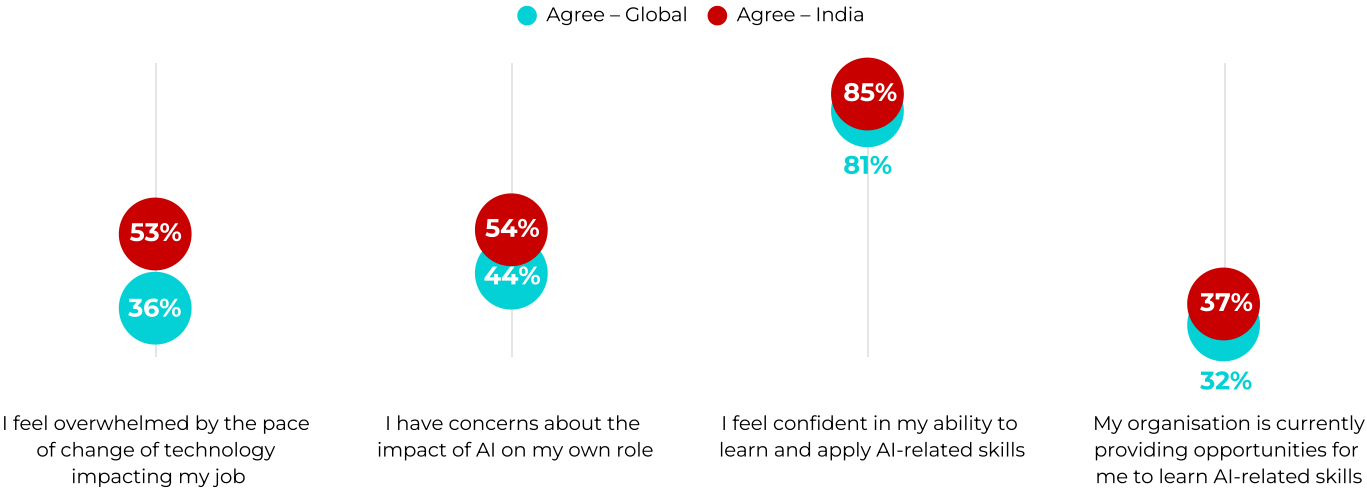
Over half of respondents (**53%**) feel overwhelmed by the change of pace of technology and **54%** are concerned over the impact of AI on their role, which explains why AI is the most valuable future skill for **43%** of respondents from India (higher than the global average of **36%**).

Only **27%** of respondents from India are confident in their knowledge of AI. The key reasons cited are – not enough opportunities to learn more about it (**44%**), followed by

complexities involved in the subject (**29%**). Over a third (**37%**) agree that their organisation is currently providing opportunities to learn AI-related skills – but a higher percentage (**41%**) want organisations to do more.

However, when asked about the ability to learn and apply AI related skills – an encouraging **85%** of respondents in India are confident, higher than the global average of **81%**.

Pace of change of technology – concerns and confidence



‘When asked about the ability to learn and apply AI related skills – an encouraging **85% of respondents in India are confident, higher than the global average of **81%**.’**

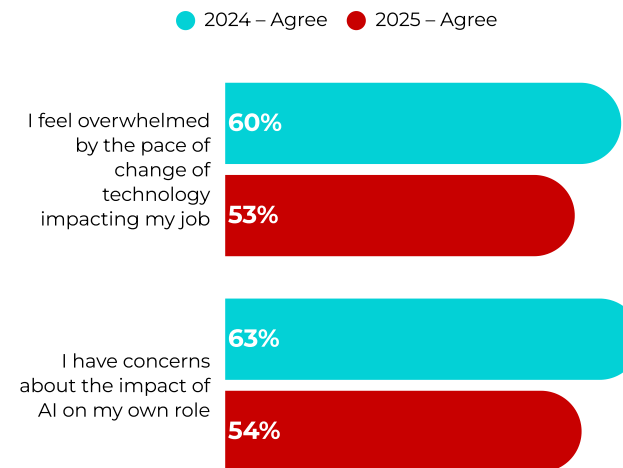
3 <<https://news.microsoft.com/en-in/92-of-indian-knowledge-workers-use-ai-in-the-workplace-finds-microsoft-and-linkedin-2024-work-trend-index/>>.

Box 3:

The readiness for AI integration among India's workforce is also evident in the QS World Future Skills Index, where the country ranks second on strong preparedness for future-focused skills, particularly in areas like AI, digital technologies, and green industries.

By contrast, the same index scores India the lowest among 30 countries on 'skills fit'. This suggests a significant gap in the workforce's ability to meet rapidly evolving job market demands, with employers noting a lack of entrepreneurial and innovative mindsets among graduates – the key skills needed to be developed to fully capitalise on opportunities^{4, 5}.

While concerns around upskilling remain, India respondents aren't as overwhelmed by technology as they were in 2024



‘In the QS World Future Skills Index, India ranks second on strong preparedness for future-focused skills, particularly in areas like AI, digital technologies, and green industries.’

4 <<https://www.livemint.com/news/india/qs-skills-index-indias-job-market-ranks-among-worlds-most-prepared-for-recruitment-pm-modi-calls-it-heartening-11737032747406.html>>.

5 <<https://www.qs.com/reports-whitepapers/world-future-skills-index>>.

To thrive in the future workplace, a thorough understanding of technology is non-negotiable. I feel very excited to see that finance professionals are getting more comfortable with technology.

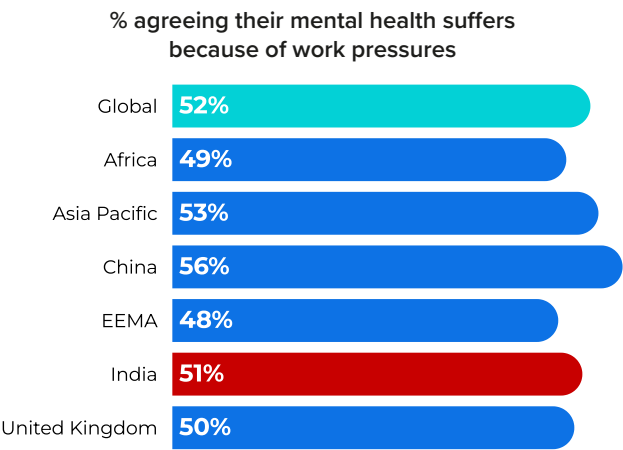
Emma Jindal, CFO of Accenture, India



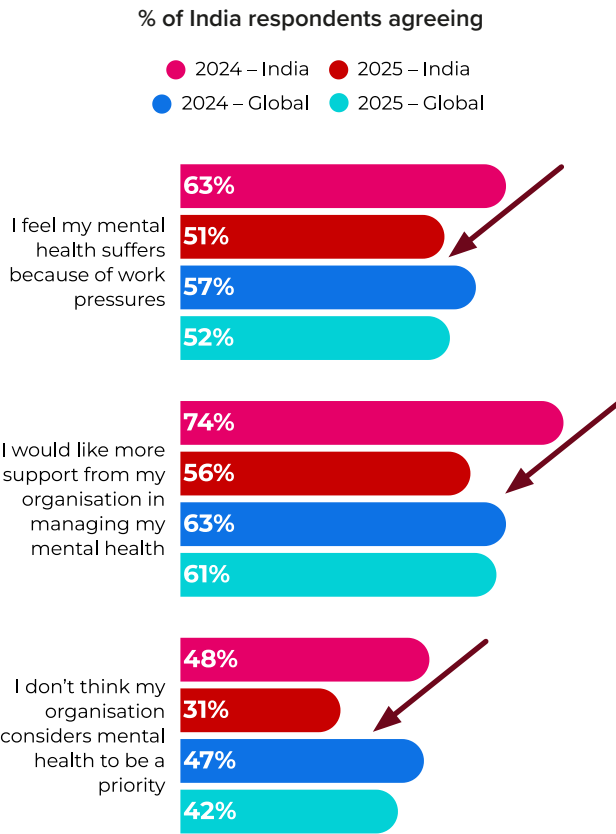
2. Work-related stress is the main career barrier

In both relative and absolute terms, India has made significant progress in work-related mental health since our first Global Talent Trends survey three years ago. While it was among the top three countries with the highest work-related mental health issues in 2023 – by 2025, the percentage of respondents reporting mental health challenges has fallen below the global average **of 52%**. However, half of our respondents (**51%**) still feel their mental health suffers because of work pressure and want more support from their organisations.

Mental health challenges are reported globally



Improvement in mental health related indicators in 2025



Gen Y respondents (29-44 years) are most stressed and in need of support, with:

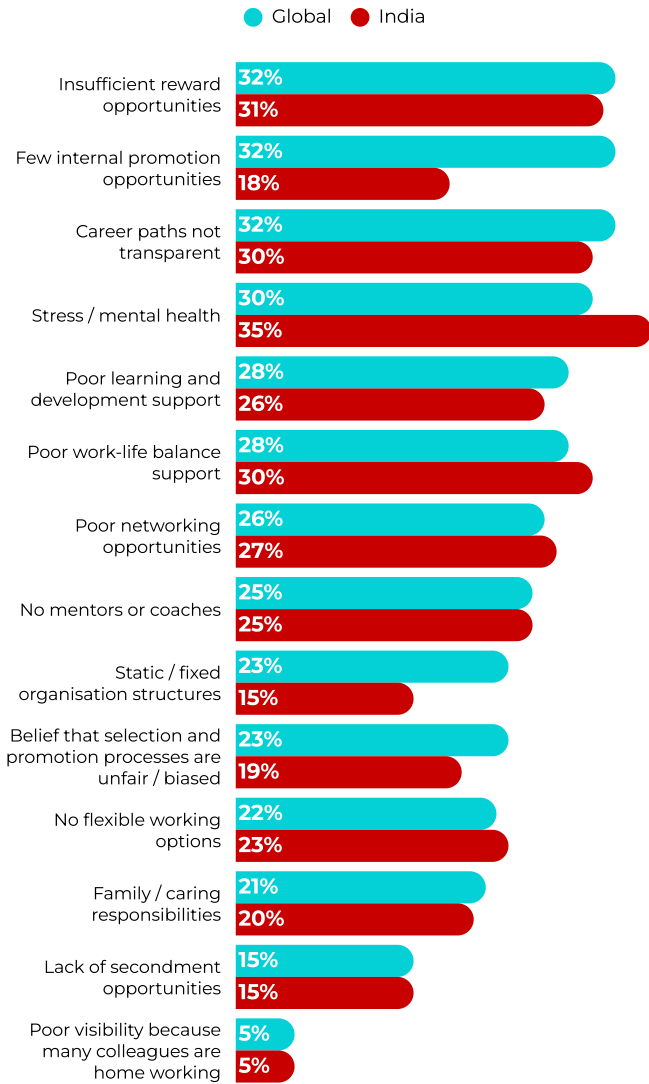
- **56%** feeling their mental health suffers
- **65%** wanting more support
- **48%** agreeing their organisations don't consider mental health a priority
- **42%** having considered resigning – the highest percentage among age groups across all three categories.

The issue is reflected in barriers to work – with stress/mental health ranking as the top career barrier, chosen by **35%** of all respondents.

Box 4:

India's latest Economic Survey (2024-25) places mental wellbeing at the centre of the economic agenda. It reiterates that hostile work cultures and excessive hours spent at a desk can adversely affect mental wellbeing – ultimately, impacting the pace of economic growth – and recommends improving the workplace culture for better mental health outcomes⁶.

Biggest career barriers



Mental health is a complex issue that requires thoughtful consideration and personalised initiatives. Most importantly, leaders need to embrace vulnerability to create a safe working environment where seeking help is encouraged. *‘Mental health in the workplace is shaped by a range of factors — from career progression and upskilling opportunities to hybrid work models and everyday routines like long commutes or the isolation of working from home. Supporting mental well-being requires organisations to create multiple, meaningful touchpoints with employees. Managers play a crucial role in this effort — not just by driving policies, but by building real, human connections with their teams. It’s about being present, paying attention to subtle cues, and developing the awareness to support individual needs, even when interactions happen virtually,’* explains Sandhya Sriram.

Empathy as a key skill and a supportive work environment emerged as a requisite at the people and organisational level. *‘Instead of offering their own experience while offering advice on mental health, leaders need to adapt, understand generational differences, and genuinely connect with their teams.’* adds Sridhar RS. Building a sense of trust emerged as another important factor.

‘Managing mental health comes down to trust. If people feel like they can be open about what they’re going through, they’re more likely to speak up. And when they do, it’s on the organisation to listen and make a real effort to help.’

Jaywardhan Semwal, Vice President, HPE

‘Managing mental health starts with open communication. As leaders, we must understand our team’s challenges and encourage them to talk – whether it’s with family, friends, or anonymously. The key is to create a safe space for them to share and seek support.’

Swati Arora, Assurance Manager, EY

Our 2025 data also indicates a correlation between the better use of technology and improved mental health outcomes, potentially as the use of technology helps boost efficiency. Another way to improve work-life balance is through cross-industry/sector learning.

‘Particularly on the employee benefits that some segments, such as large corporates offer their employees, could be emulated among smaller set-ups such as small and medium Practices (SMPs), to make the sector attractive and sustainable.’

Karthik Krishnan, CFO and Company Secretary, TIGS

6 <<https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=2097865>>.



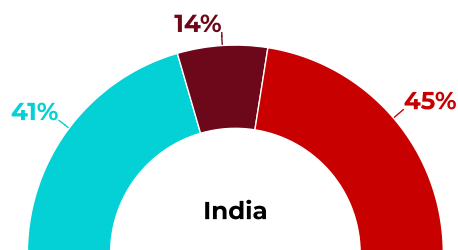
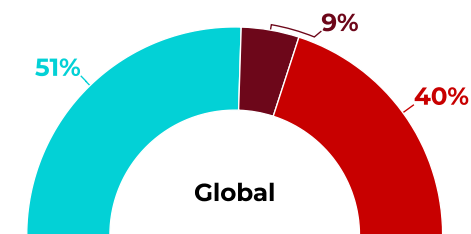
3. Flexible working is the most valued perk

While **41%** of respondents in India are fully office-based, only **13%** prefer to be – with **75%** preferring hybrid working. Furthermore, we found **45%** currently work in a hybrid model – a **30%** gap between preference and reality. The data on key benefits

offers a nuanced view on this preference, which is consistent across sectors – flexible work and hybrid/remote working are the most chosen (**49%**) benefits an employer can provide to support a positive work-life balance

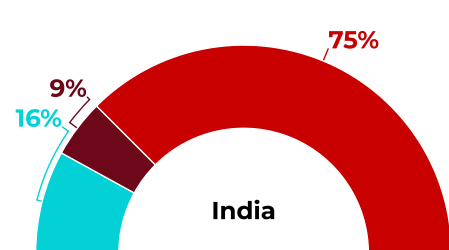
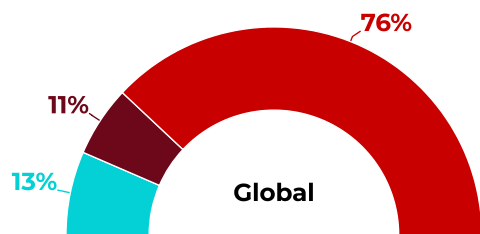
Current working patterns

■ Fully office based ■ Fully remote / home based
■ Hybrid working (ie mix of office and home-based working)



Preferred working patterns

■ Fully office based ■ Fully remote / home based
■ Hybrid working (ie mix of office and home-based working)



Working patterns are also linked to wellbeing. When asked about the key benefit of working from home, most (31%) chose work-life balance, followed by saving time and money on commuting (28%), and more flexibility (20%).

‘Hybrid working offers significant advantages, especially in roles where client-interaction is limited. In technology companies, for example, many employees can effectively work from anywhere, provided they can access secure systems through VPNs and multi-factor authentication. Additionally, the hybrid model helps reduce real estate costs, benefiting both employees and organisations by offering flexibility while maintaining security and efficiency. However, this model might not work for industries such as manufacturing and banking that involve day-to-day client interactions,’ explains Manikantan T, Senior Vice President, Mphasis.

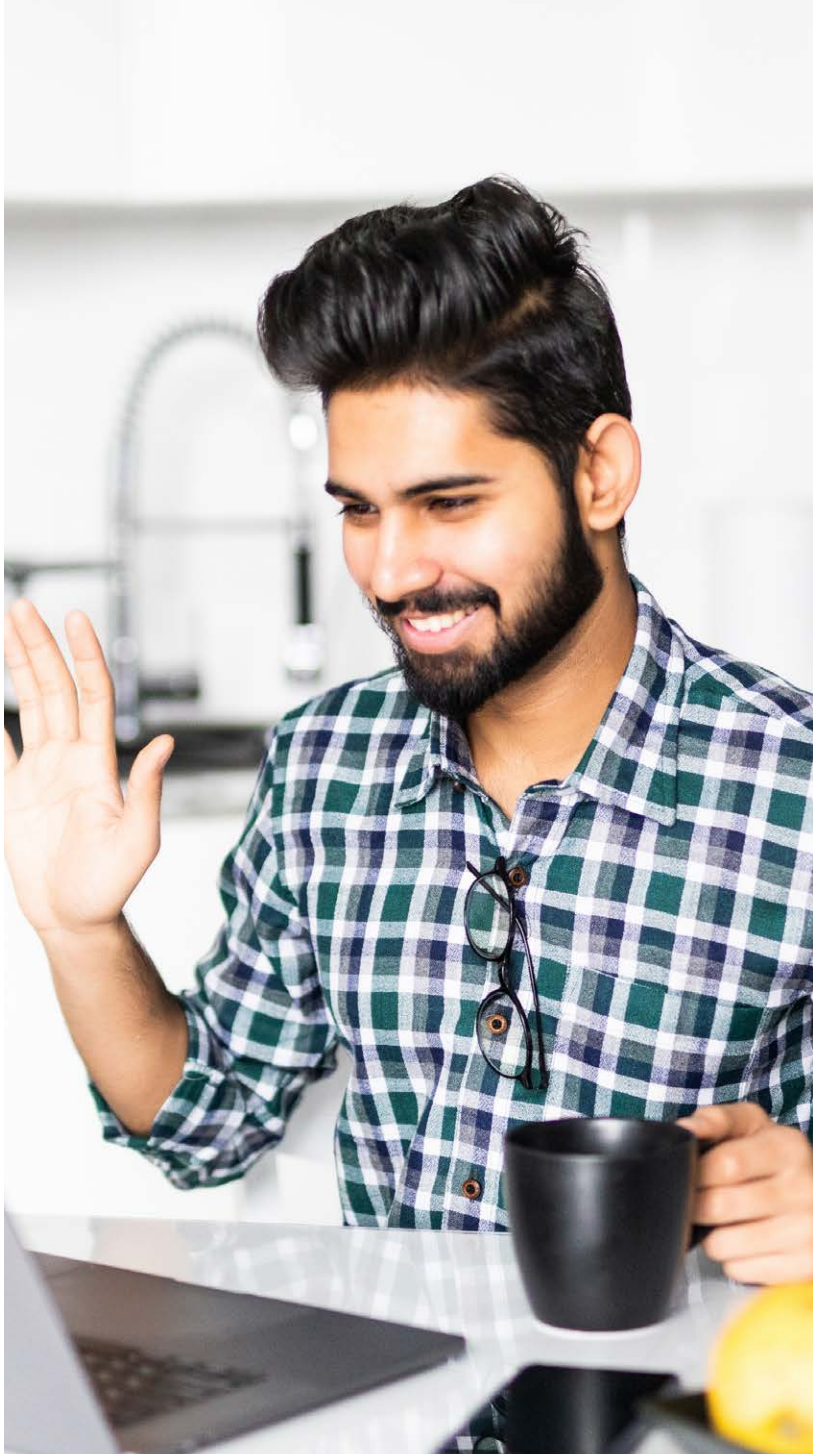
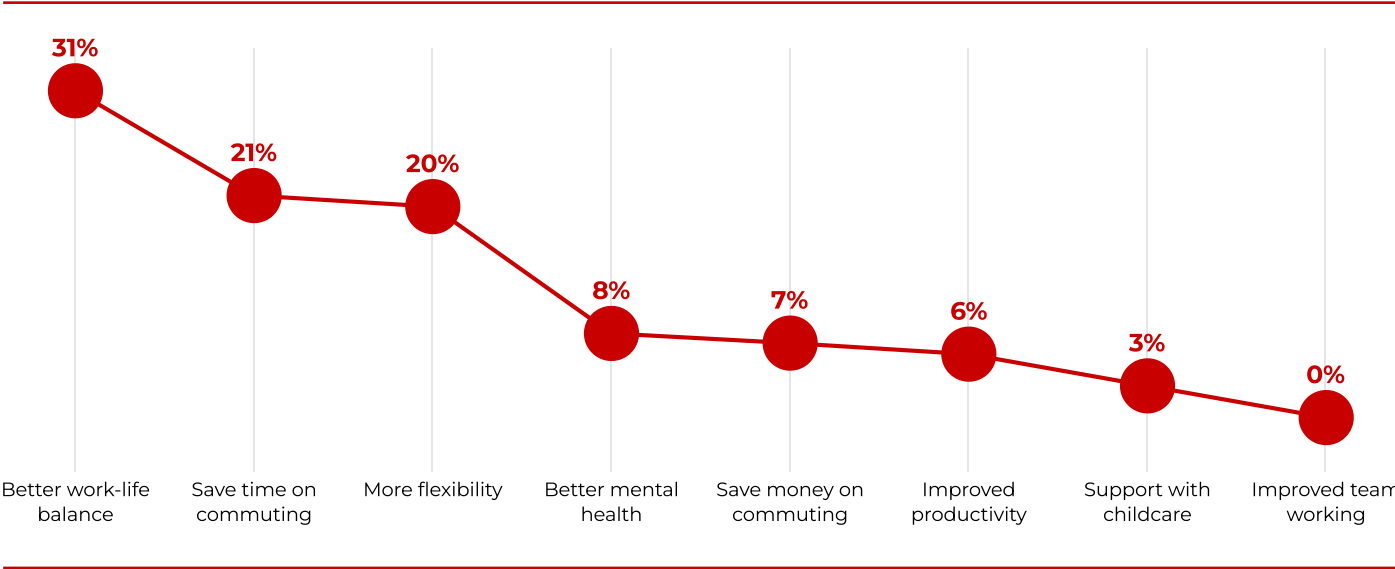
While it offers flexibility and convenience, hybrid working comes with its own set of challenges and requires careful planning for organisations to make it effective. *‘While it’s popular to suggest otherwise, the reality is that hybrid work can, to some extent, limit the development of well-rounded skill sets. Many of the soft skills that are critical for leadership – such as building trust, reading body language, and navigating complex interpersonal dynamics – are often best developed through in-person interactions. As employees travel up the leadership pyramid, these capabilities become increasingly essential, and hybrid arrangements may inadvertently constrain opportunities to build them effectively,’* explains Sandhya Sriram.

‘Particularly for new joiners, it’s important to interact with the team for them to know the people they are going to work with, and the organisation. When they are working remotely, they don’t know whom to reach out when they are stuck. Therefore, hybrid working is preferable over remote working arrangements,’ concurs Swati Arora.

Making the weekly/biweekly visit to the office purposeful and having a framework to help employees navigate between office and work from home days are potential ways to encourage successful hybrid work. *‘While hybrid work is here to stay, it requires us to make certain behavioural changes. We believe that when employees come to the office, it should be worth the commute and should be purposeful. So that’s a philosophy we are guided by as we determine who should come to the office, when and what will they do when they are in office,’* explains a roundtable participant.

‘To support hybrid working, my organisation has implemented the 3PT® (Policy, Process, People and Technology) framework – we have clear Policies (what is allowed) and Processes (the how-to) in place, so employees know when to clock in and how to manage their time. Technology plays a critical role here, with the use of tools that allow for remote clocking in without being invasive. This combination of technology, structured processes, and strong support for People (the remaining aspect of 3PT®) is crucial for hybrid arrangements to work,’ shares Kesav M.

What is/would be the key benefit of working more from home for you?



‘Topping the charts for key work-related concerns for a third consecutive year, is inflation/ cost of living impacting real wages. For all global regions including India, it remains the primary concern across all sectors and generations.’



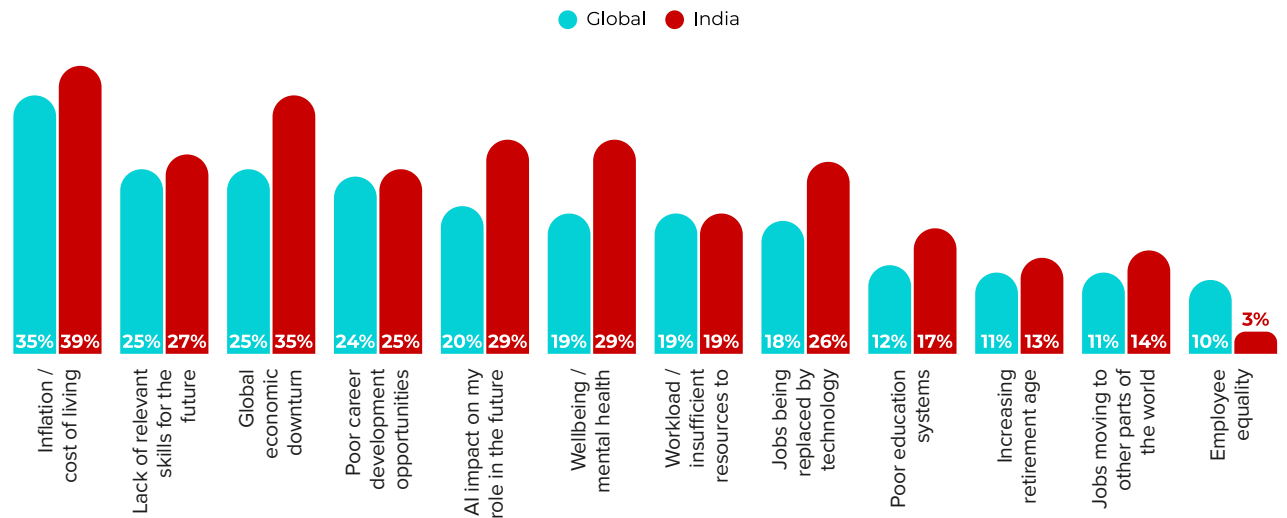
4. Cost of living is the top reason for job changes

Topping the charts for key work-related concerns for a third consecutive year, is inflation/cost of living impacting real wages. For all global regions including India, it remains the primary concern across all sectors and generations (except Baby Boomer respondents).

This concern around cost of living is reflected in wage demands – with **65%** of employed professionals dissatisfied with their pay, and **67%** planning to ask

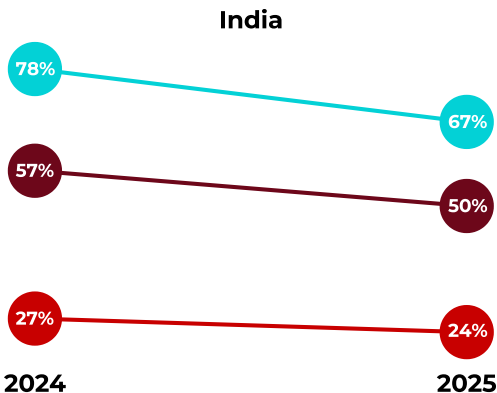
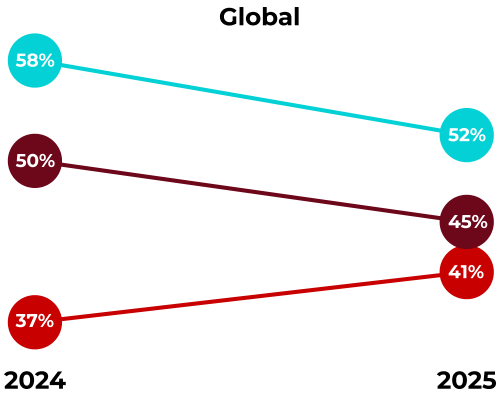
for a pay rise in the next 12 months. Wage-related dissatisfaction is leading to retention issues – with **50%** of respondents feeling the best way to improve their salary and rewards is to leave the current organisation. The global averages have improved since **2024**, with **41%** satisfied with the pay in 2025, compared to **37%** in 2024. For India, while those keen to ask for a pay rise or planning to leave the organisation has fallen, those satisfied with the pay rise have also fallen, by **3%**.

The biggest work-related work concerns for the future



Pay expectations – 2024 vs 2025

- % of respondents agreeing
- I am satisfied with the level of pay I receive for the role I perform
 - I will ask my employer for a pay rise in the next 12 months
 - The best way to improve my salary and rewards is to leave my current organisation

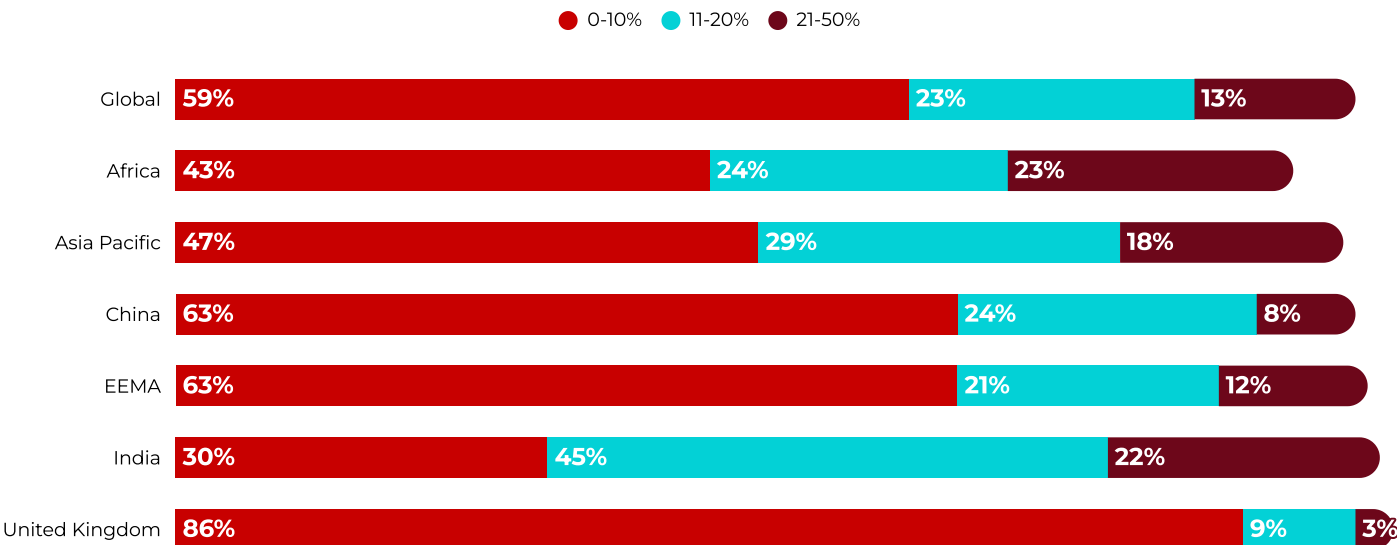


Box 5:

Inflation-related concerns are evident in macro-level data. India's Union Budget 2025 survey identified rising inflation as the primary concern for respondents (59%), highlighting the growing anxiety about the increasing cost of living⁷. Inflation coupled with modest salary increments has led to low real wage growth in India ranging from -0.4% to 3.9%, negatively impacting disposable incomes⁸.

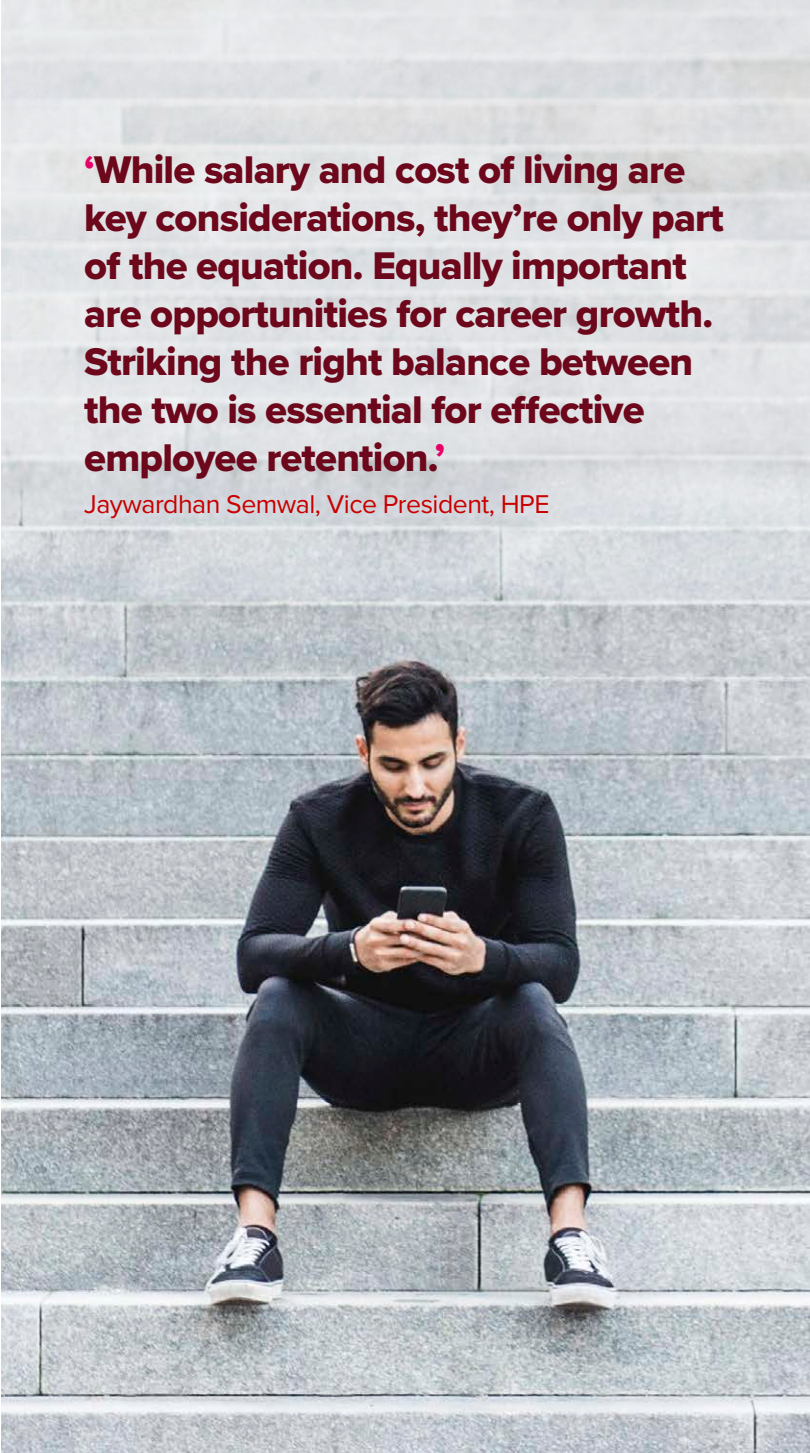
Salary is an important consideration for employee retention. *'In today's talent market, compensation plays a critical role in attracting and retaining skilled professionals. When considering opportunities, candidates are increasingly mindful of factors like relocation, cost of living, and the city they'd be moving to. With recruiting becoming more skill-focused, talent is well-informed about their market value and what competitors are offering. Having a strong employer brand, continuous engagement with employees and making them feel valued through upskilling initiatives helps create stickiness,'* explains Rakesh Almal, Head of Talent Acquisition – India, ZF Associates.

Payrise expectations, compared globally



‘While salary and cost of living are key considerations, they’re only part of the equation. Equally important are opportunities for career growth. Striking the right balance between the two is essential for effective employee retention.’

Jaywardhan Semwal, Vice President, HPE



7 <<https://www.financialexpress.com/budget/union-budget-2025-rising-inflation-tops-concerns-heres-what-indians-expect-3723820/>>.
8 <<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/indicators/disposable-income-and-consumption-take-a-hit-as-inflation-tepid-hikes-keep-real-wages-on-the-downswing/articleshow/117361111.cms>>.

Over half of respondents from India (55%) would like to move to their next role in the next 12 months, of which 67% expect this move to be external – considerably higher than the respective global averages of 39% and 58%. Improved salary/remuneration is the key reason for over a third of respondents (36%), which is higher than the global average (27%) and highest across all regions. Furthermore, 45% expect a pay rise of 11-20%, the highest among all regions.

Organisations are trying to address this retention issue by creating better transparency around roles and linked salaries, which helps create realistic expectations.

‘We hold regular sessions to help employees understand their career path, compensation, and how it aligns with their work. This takes effort but is key to showing employees their contributions are well-compensated, driving retention.’

Sandeep Shukla, Chief People Officer, Acobloom

Opportunities to move laterally is another retention strategy for organisations to consider.

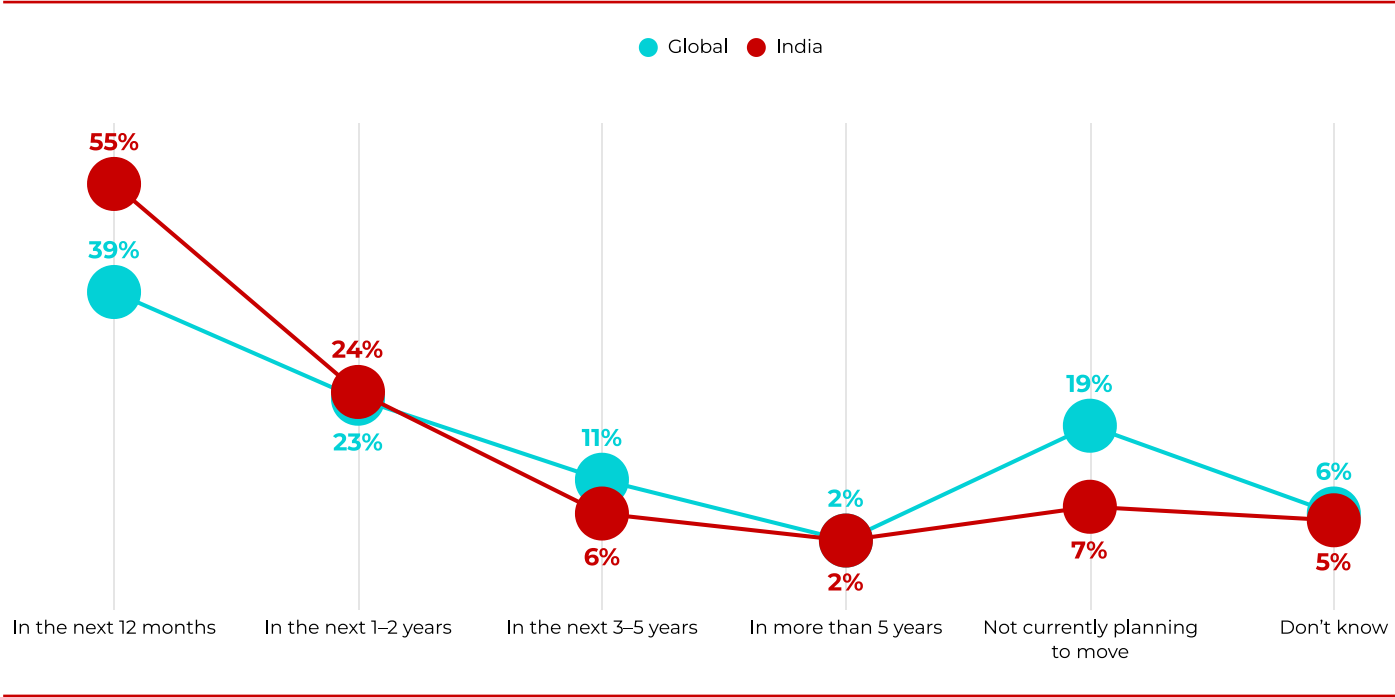
‘We’ve adopted a policy of not looking outside for talent and instead focusing on lateral placements unless it’s a niche skill. When employees move laterally, we ensure their compensation stays competitive, often matching 80-90% of the market median.’

Sridhar RS, Senior Vice President, Client Lifecycle Management, Standard Chartered GBS India

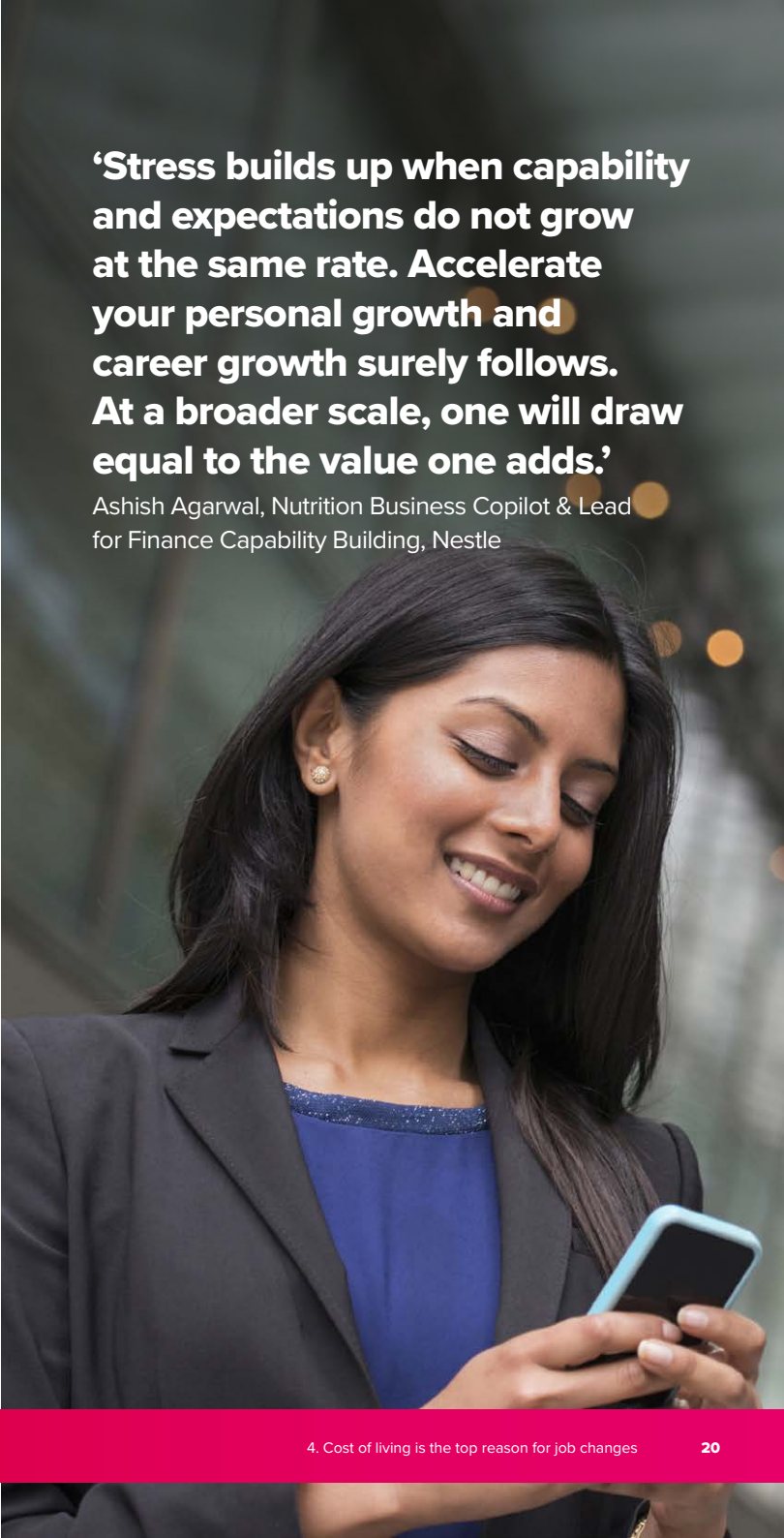
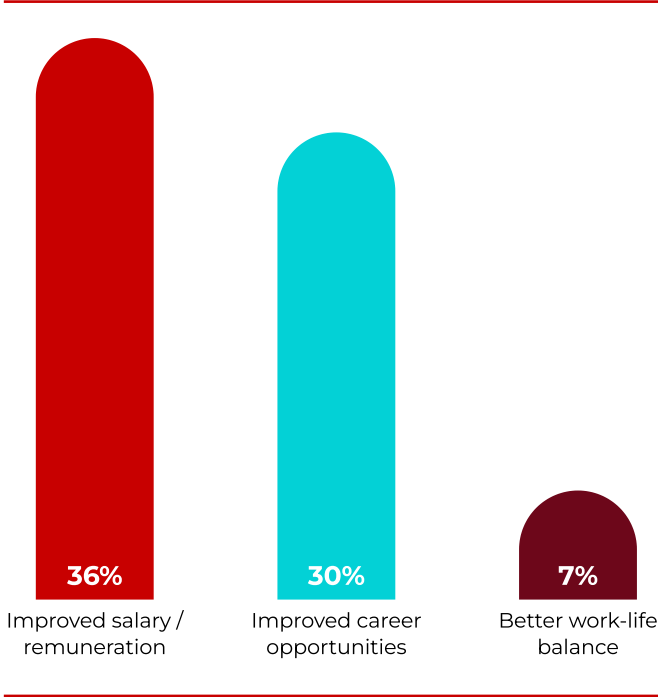
‘Stress builds up when capability and expectations do not grow at the same rate. Accelerate your personal growth and career growth surely follows. At a broader scale, one will draw equal to the value one adds.’

Ashish Agarwal, Nutrition Business Copilot & Lead for Finance Capability Building, Nestle

How soon would you like to move to your next role?



Top 3 reasons for moving externally to another organisation



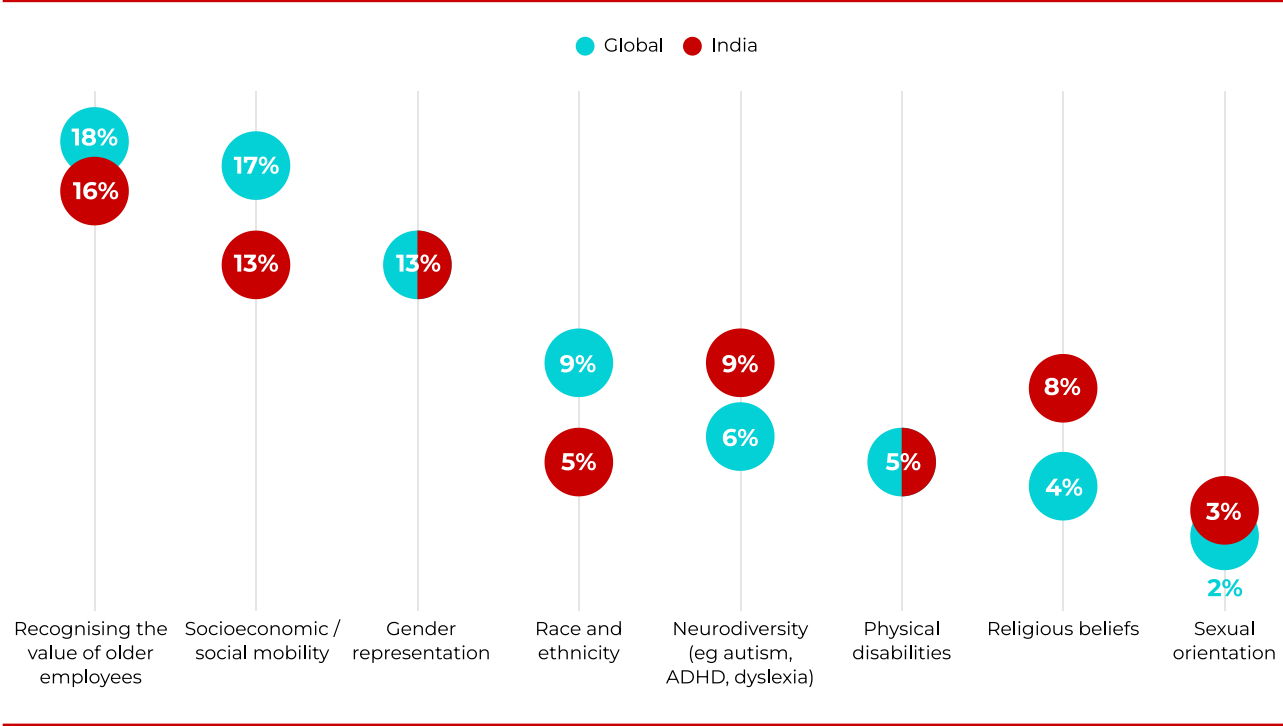


5. EDI needs to look beyond gender diversity

In India, **65%** of respondents feel their organisation is inclusive where all employees are equally valued and supported. However, over half (**55%**) say that their organisation focuses more on certain aspects of diversity than others – eg greater focus on

gender diversity than neurodiversity or age diversity. This is one of the few indicators that has seen a decline since 2024, globally as well as in India – **45%** in 2024 feeling that the focus is on certain aspects of diversity.

Where does greater progress need made on diversity?



Rakesh Almal explains the nuances: ***‘To embrace diversity, organisations need to focus on different aspects –like regional talent, people with disabilities, neurodiversity, and the LGBTQI community. These aspects of EDI are scattered but something that organisations will have to eventually focus on. Since some of these identities are still sensitive and aren’t embraced openly, organisations need to have a strong process to attract this talent and raise awareness. Leaders and hiring managers need to understand how to support and manage a diverse team, once such talent joins. It’s an end-to-end process going beyond just hiring to retention.’***

Among the greatest inclusivity concerns, recognising the value of older employees tops the charts across the world, including India. Only **8%** of Indian companies integrate age into their inclusion strategies⁹.

‘Organisations are yet to figure out the upskilling aspect of ageing employees and, therefore, keeping the career meaningful for them is still an unanswered question.’

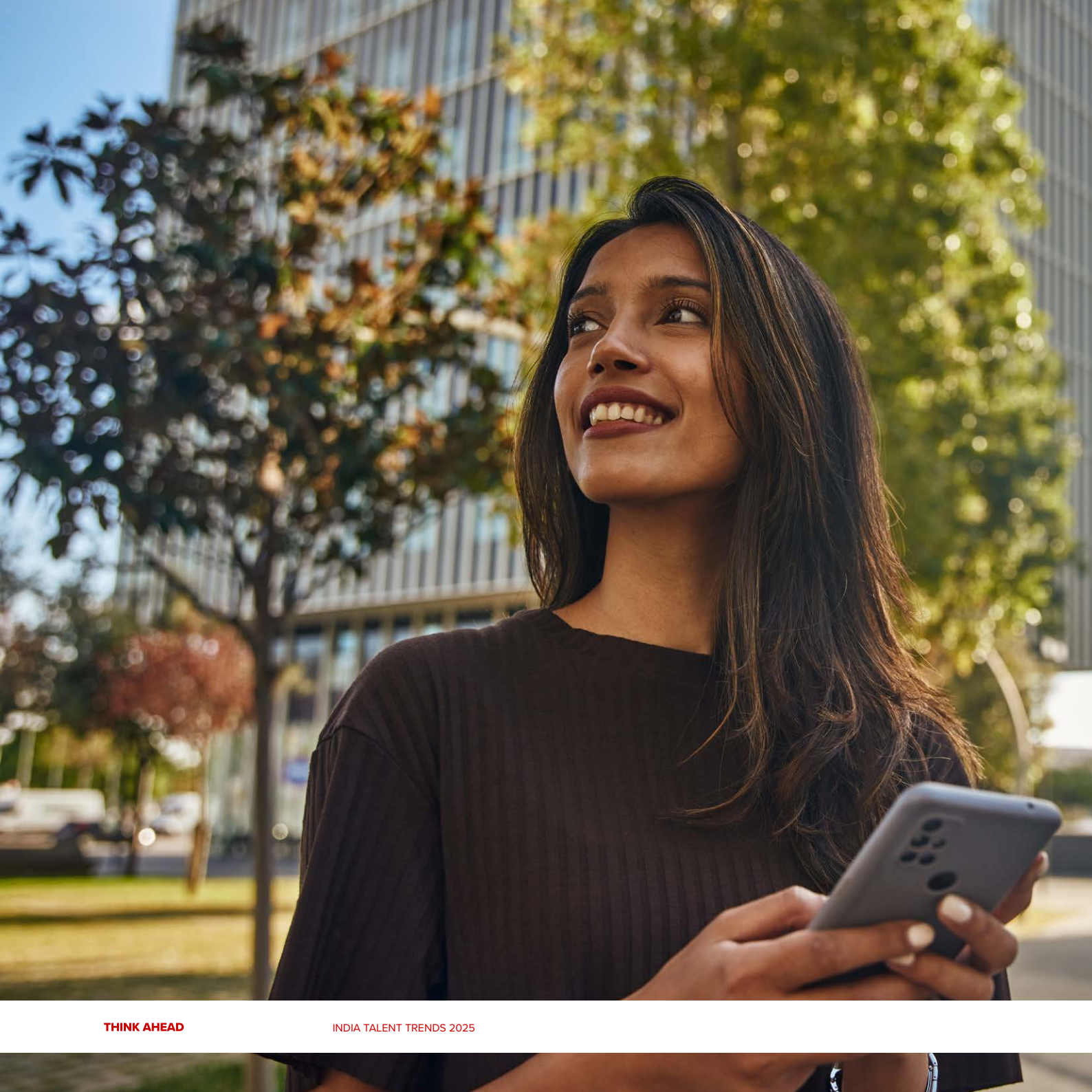
Organisations are yet to figure out the upskilling aspect of ageing employees and, therefore, keeping the career meaningful for them is still an unanswered question. Manikantan T explains:

‘Retaining senior employees can be challenging, especially in technology firms where the focus is often on hiring freshers to manage costs and lateral recruitment is limited to backfills or new business needs. While younger employees quickly adapt to new skills, senior employees may struggle with upskilling, making it harder to align them with evolving demands.’

There has been considerable progress on leadership inclusivity indicators – with over **70%** of respondents feeling their leaders are accessible and inclusive.

⁹ <[https://info.randstad.in/hubfs/Thought%20leadership%20reports/Ageism%20Report%202024%20\(1\).pdf](https://info.randstad.in/hubfs/Thought%20leadership%20reports/Ageism%20Report%202024%20(1).pdf)>.

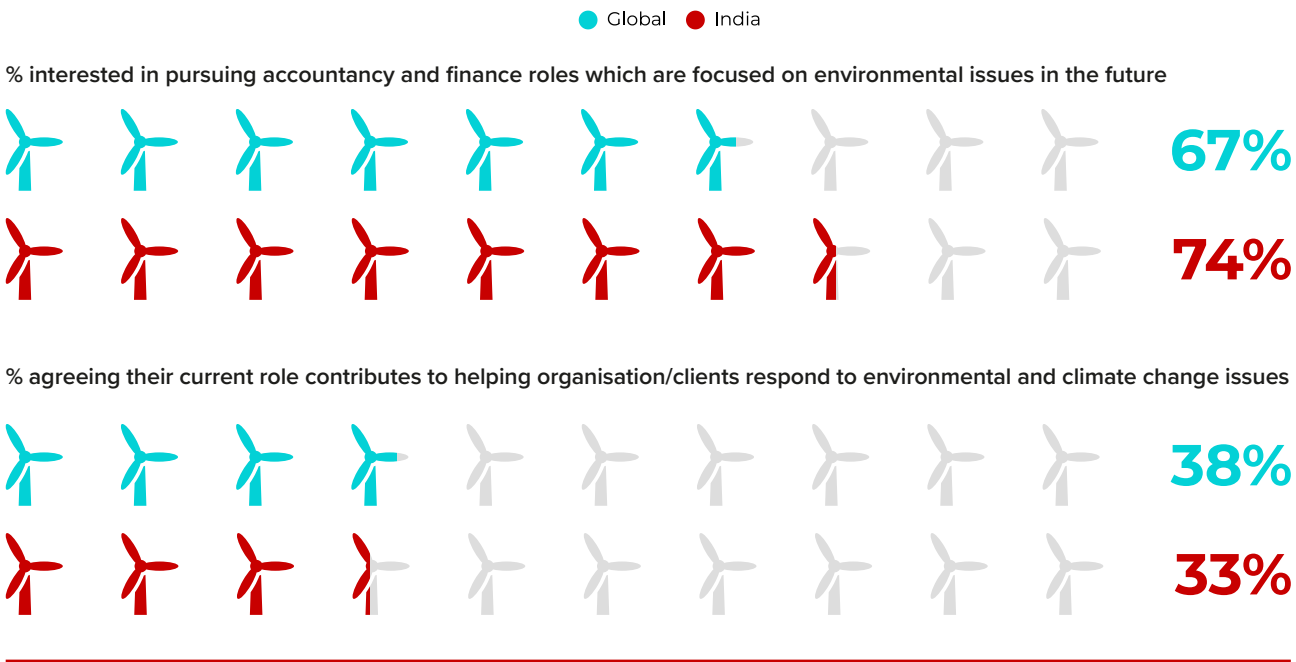




6. Demand for sustainability-related careers outstrips supply

There is a considerable demand from respondents in India to pursue careers and jobs that help address sustainability issues; however, the supply is limited. While close to two-thirds of respondents (**74%**) are keen to pursue roles focused on environmental issues (higher than the global average of **67%**), only a third are in roles where they contribute to helping their organisation/ clients respond to environmental and climate change issues. At **33%**, the contribution of India respondents to such issues is lower than the global average of **38%**.

Demand for sustainability-related careers outstrips supply



Roles with environmental or sustainability responsibilities typically fall at the more senior end of India's respondent base. We found **57%** of senior leadership and board level stakeholders currently contribute to such issues – compared to only **30%** of mid-level and junior professionals. This could be due to the high regulatory influence on current accounting and finance roles, and the need for organisations to be responding to fast moving regulatory requirements in this space.

The pursuit of purposeful jobs and meaningful work is evident in the fact that an organisation's stance on environmental issues is a key factor in deciding to work there for **67%** of respondents in India. And **87%** care about the organisation's reputation on social and human rights issues, which is higher than the global average of **79%**.

Box 6:

India's Union budget 2025 and previous green initiatives – Sovereign Green Bonds, the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme for renewables, and green credit programmes from the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) – are expected to create a significant increase in green jobs across various sectors, with projections indicating up to 35m green jobs by 2047¹⁰. As green sectors grow, the need for finance professionals with skills in sustainable investments, environmental risk assessment, and green project financing will increase. There will also be greater demand for climate finance experts to handle global reporting and compliance requirements.

‘As green sectors grow, the need for finance professionals with skills in sustainable investments, environmental risk assessment, and green project financing will increase. There will also be greater demand for climate finance experts to handle global reporting and compliance requirements.’

¹⁰ <<https://indiaccsr.in/india-has-the-potential-to-create-35-million-green-jobs-by-2047-study/>>.

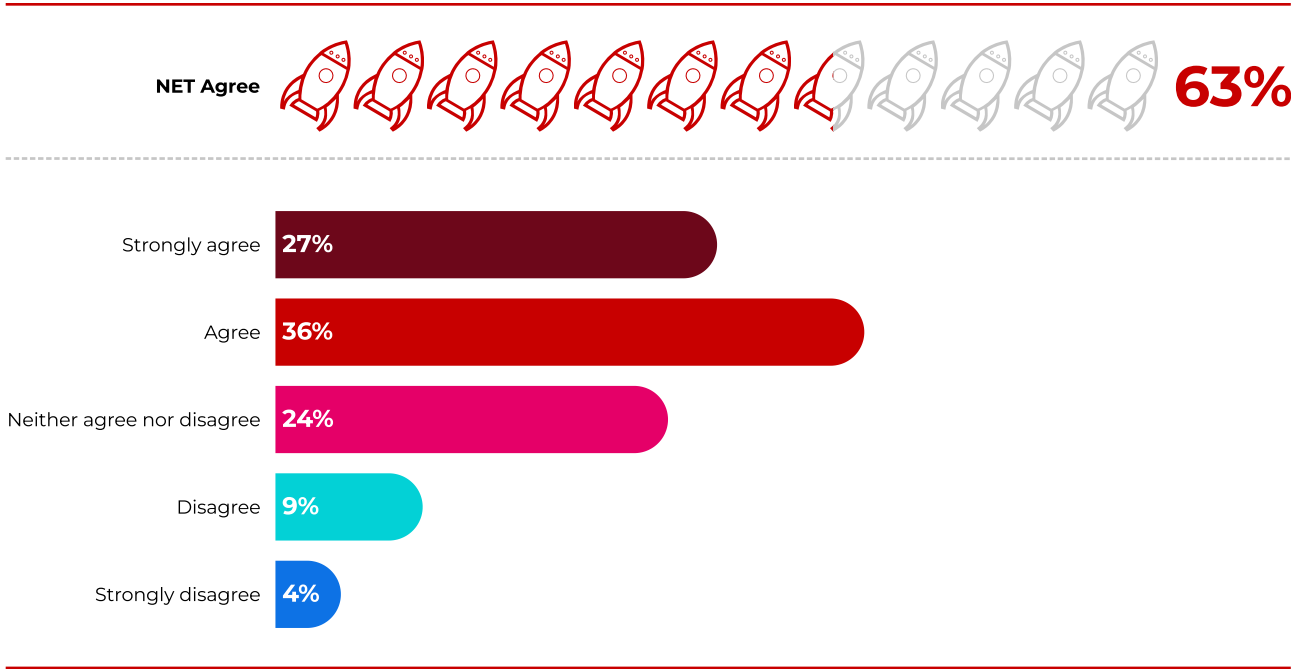




7. Over 60% of finance professionals have entrepreneurial ambitions

From our survey, **63%** of respondents in India have career ambitions to be an entrepreneur/business owner in the future – the second highest regionally behind only Africa (**80%**). Male respondents are keener to pursue this path (**71%**) than female respondents (**56%**). Generationally and seniority-wise, Gen Z and board level respondents are keener on pursuing entrepreneurial ventures.

Entrepreneurial ambitions in India



Karthik Krishnan explains the nuances: *‘While younger Gen Z professionals and senior leaders show a stronger inclination toward startups and entrepreneurial ventures, the type of ventures they are keen on starting could be different. Senior leaders and board level professionals may lean toward ventures in the social sector or pursue roles that reflect a sense of fulfilment and purpose after achieving career milestones. These off-beat sunrise sectors, with global funding opportunities, could see a healthy requirement for professionals.’*

The start-up ecosystem in India has seen quantum growth in the last decade, owing to the supportive policy ecosystem, and the focus on success stories emerging from the country. India is now the world’s third-biggest start-up ecosystem, with over 100 unicorns¹¹. While this growth is impressive, Manikantan T encourages caution: *‘The growth of India’s startup ecosystem is undoubtedly promising but we must approach this opportunity with a clear understanding of the challenges. Historically, only a minuscule number of startups – less than 5% – succeed, while the remaining 95% fade into obscurity. As we celebrate the success stories, we need to focus on building a robust and sustainable ecosystem. The government’s impetus is commendable, but consistency in support is vital. Lessons can be drawn from the earlier growth of technology companies, where targeted benefits like tax holidays, duty-free imports, and supportive policies under ‘Software Technology Parks of India’ and ‘Special Economic Zones’ rules propelled the sector.’*

Kesav adds his take on enthusiasm towards entrepreneurialism: *‘Young professionals could be influenced by reality shows that often focus on the 5% who succeed while ignoring the 95% who don’t, leading to unrealistic expectations about the efforts needed and realistic success rates. At the board level, however, it makes sense, as ambitions often shift toward less risky ventures, like fractional CFO roles or consulting. It raises an important question – what does entrepreneurship mean for finance professionals, and how realistic are these aspirations given their exposure and training?’*

As finance professionals have the necessary financial skills to run a business, the extent of entrepreneurial ambitions is not surprising. ACCA’s [Founders guide for start-ups and entrepreneurs](#) outlines how finance professionals can own/support start-ups. However, the qualification comes with its challenges. The traditional role of finance professionals – as gatekeepers and compliance officers – often places them in high-pressure positions with limited incentives to explore entrepreneurship.

‘Leaders should engage with their finance teams, helping them identify their strengths and encouraging them to explore diverse roles and skill sets... Creating more opportunities for exposure and learning outside the traditional finance roles is essential for fostering entrepreneurial mindsets.’

Sandhya Sriram explains: *‘Accountancy and finance professionals often face unique hurdles when it comes to embracing entrepreneurship. One contributing factor may lie in how we’re trained – our education emphasises concepts like opportunity cost, risk management, and return on investment, even when it comes to how we spend our time. While these skills are undoubtedly valuable, they can also make us overly cautious, sometimes holding us back from taking the bold steps entrepreneurship requires.’*

To guide aspiring entrepreneurship among finance professionals, the curriculum needs to integrate real-life success stories. Further, to promote a sense of ‘intrapreneurship’ among finance teams, organisations need to go beyond just valuing effective accounting. Leaders should engage with their finance teams, helping them identify their strengths and encouraging them to explore diverse roles and skill sets. Finally, creating more opportunities for exposure and learning outside the traditional finance roles is essential for fostering entrepreneurial mindsets.

¹¹ <<https://www.investindia.gov.in/blogs/role-government-initiatives-boosting-startups>>.



For a future-ready talent: Top-tips.

- **Being patient, yet proactive about making the best of available opportunities.**

'Don't rush your life through and give yourself the time to learn the ropes. Remember it's a marathon and not a sprint,' says Kesav M.

- **Cultivate a mindset of intrapreneurship.**

'As finance professionals, we need to move beyond seeing ourselves solely as accountants or bookkeepers. Our role is no longer just about recording numbers — it's about owning business outcomes. We must position ourselves as co-pilots to the business, actively contributing to strategy, decision-making, and growth. This requires a willingness to learn continuously, adapt to change, and evolve alongside the business we support,' adds Sandhya Sriram.

- **Own your learning journey and career.**

'It's your career — think about what you want to do. Create an all-round personality and define career growth for yourself beyond just a salary hike,' explains Sridhar RS.

- **Continue to learn for life.**

'Keep learning and always be open to newer roles even if they are not in someone's comfort zone. Be willing to take up additional responsibilities,' encourages Manikantan T.

- **Be agile and resilient. Build lasting relationships.**

'The speed of change isn't going to come down and the best way to ride the wave of change is to learn how to be agile and resilient, build strong relationships with your seniors and colleagues, and leverage mentoring,' concludes Ashish Agarwal.

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Sandhya Sriram, Group CFO, Narayanan Healthcare

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Swati Arora, Manager- Assurance, EY-GDS



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