EDI in Canadian Marketing:
Positive Progress and Persistent Challenges

Executive Summary

This marks the fifth consecutive year the Canadian Marketing Association, in partnership with *strategy*, has asked Canadian marketers about their experience with equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This year's research took place amid shifting global attitudes toward EDI, most notably major policy reversals in the U.S. and subsequent organizational responses to either hold firm to EDI initiatives or let them fall by the wayside.

This year's findings underscore important progress and persistent challenges in fostering equitable workplaces.

On the positive side, support for EDI remains robust among Canadian marketers with the majority (66%) of marketers "applauding or appreciating" EDI, and only 5% expressing opposition. An overwhelming majority recognize its value in fostering fairness, authenticity and innovation.

For the first time, there has been visible progress in the diversity of leadership teams: the share of organizations with well-diversified senior teams rose to 28% in 2025 and more are embedding EDI into leadership roles. This institutional commitment is the most powerful indicator of positive change and correlates with stronger inclusion, higher engagement and reduced turnover. In a polarized climate, the data confirms a strategic truth: inclusive leadership indicates better outcomes.

However, the lived experiences of professionals from marginalized communities tell a more complex story: reports of discrimination have increased, especially among women from marginalized communities. Three-quarters of marketers say polarization has impacted their work life, often leading to self-censorship and reduced collaboration. Persistent biases also remain against newcomers and older marketers, especially when it comes to hiring and advancement.

In the face of these challenges, the research uncovered increasing levels of disengagement at work across all employee groups.

This year's report probed new areas, including questions about the impact of hate speech and the extent to which marketers feel their workplace is a safe space for people in their community. Alarmingly, hate inside and outside the office is seen as affecting the well-being of colleagues, especially in organizations lacking diverse senior leadership.

For the first time, this research asked Canadian marketers about whether they've witnessed pushback toward EDI initiatives over the past year and how that is playing out in organizations. People from marginalized communities are more likely to report seeing this pushback (64% vs 42% among people from non-marginalized communities). The most cited forms of opposition are:

- Reluctance to allocate available resources (time, money, or personnel) to EDI initiatives, and
- Passive opposition – such as ignoring policies or not participating in EDI training.

Nearly 500 marketing professionals participated in the research, which was conducted online in February and March of 2025.

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Key Findings

EDI support is strong. Despite what we may perceive as an increasingly polarized climate, two-thirds (66%) of marketers applaud or appreciate EDI initiatives, and another 15% accept them. The vast majority recognize the organizational benefits of inclusion, including creating fair opportunities for all, authentic representation of audiences, fostering unity and collaboration and enhancing innovation and problem solving.

Workplaces are increasingly stressful, and increasingly polarized, particularly for members of marginalized communities. At the same time, the report reveals growing complexity in the lived experiences of marketers from marginalized communities. Respondents report rising stress and heightened opposition in the workplace over the past year, disproportionately affecting people from marginalized communities. These marketers report increased experiences of discrimination over the previous year, with just over half having witnessed some form of discrimination. This impacts women from marginalized communities to a greater degree than others. Furthermore, three-quarters of marketers say the rise of polarization has affected their work life, leading to self-censoring and less socializing with colleagues who think differently.

Hate impacts the workplace. The impact of hate outside of work remains a sobering reality. About one-third of marketers report that they see evidence of colleagues being impacted by hate in the community. This perception is significantly more prevalent among those in organizations that lack diverse senior leadership.

Bias against older marketers. Ageism continues to be persistent and widespread. Age-related discrimination is increasingly normalized, rising four percentage points this year.

Bias against newcomers. Even experienced newcomers continue to face barriers in hiring and advancement, particularly when they lack Canadian experience.

Leadership as a lever. The proportion of organizations with well-diversified senior leadership rose to 28% this year, up from 21% in 2024. More organizations are embedding equity into formal roles, with a 13-point increase in senior EDI positions since last year. This institutionalization of EDI in leadership correlates with a number of stronger inclusion outcomes, most notably, increased employee engagement.

Progress under pressure. This year's report emphasizes the urgent need to sustain momentum in EDI, even amid cultural headwinds. Organizations with well-diversified leadership consistently show stronger inclusion outcomes, fewer declines in engagement and a lower rate of preventable staff oss. As the Canadian marketing industry navigates complex global influences, this data points to a clear conclusion: inclusive leadership is not just a moral imperative—it's a strategic one.

Introduction

This is the fifth annual survey conducted by the Canadian Marketing Association in partnership with *strategy* to examine the state of EDI within the marketing profession in Canada. First launched in 2020 as part of the CMA's broader commitment to address racism and all forms of discrimination, the survey continues to provide a data-driven foundation for meaningful change.

By highlighting the barriers and inequities experienced by marketers – particularly those from BIPOC and other marginalized communities – this research helps identify what type of action is needed most. The findings are clear: discrimination, microaggressions, and systemic exclusion remain present in the workplace. Compounding this is the growing influence of global polarization, which is increasingly shaping workplace culture and dialogue.

To dismantle barriers, we must first understand them. This report is an essential step in building more inclusive, respectful, and equitable environments across the Canadian marketing sector.

CANADIAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION
CMA

strategy

> **Inclusivity fuels diversity of thought. And through diversity of thought, we get ideas that break through. Too many of the same kind of person in a room will mean the ideas are all the same.**

– Senior marketer, acting towards organization, non-marginalized background

Acknowledgements

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- Digital Advertising Alliance of Canada
- Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council
- L'Association Marketing Québec
- Growclass
- Matisse Hamel-Nelis
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
- Marketing News Canada
- Le Grenier
- Digital Marketing Sector Council
- Biloa-magazine.com

Finally, thank you to the CMA's major sponsors for their continued support.

Colour Palettes

To make it easier to absorb the data, we have created the following series of colour palettes:

Diversity of senior leadership

■ Not diversified	■ Aspiring	■ Acting towards	■ Well diversified

Support for EDI initiatives

■ Applaud	■ Appreciate	■ Accept	■ Neutral
■ Dislike	■ Reject		
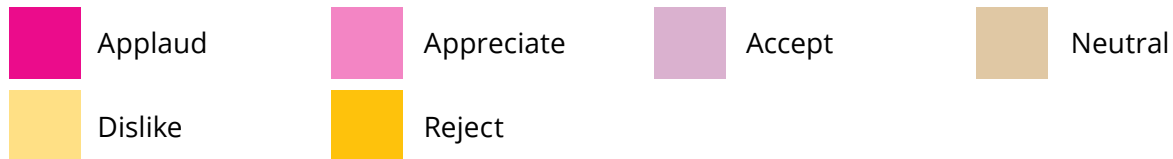
In some charts, the findings are grouped into these categories

■ Support EDI initiatives includes Applaud and Appreciate (66% of marketers)

■ Oppose EDI initiatives includes Dislike and Reject (5% of marketers)
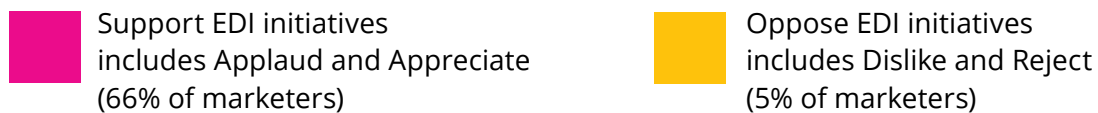
Marginalized vs non-marginalized communities

■ Non-marginalized men	■ Marginalized men	■ Non-marginalized women	■ Marginalized women

Generational cohorts

■ Boomer	■ Gen X	■ Millennial	■ Gen Z

Socio-economic background

■ Comfortable	■ Stable	■ Basic	■ Challenged

Newcomers

■ Canadian citizen	■ Newcomer

Other categories
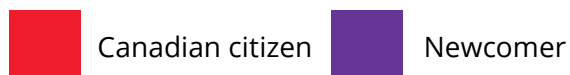
■ All marketers	■ Marketers from various ethnic backgrounds

Key Metric:
The impact of diverse senior leadership

An indisputable theme over the five years of collecting this data is that there is a strong correlation between diverse senior leadership teams and having more engaged and productive employees.

Each year, participants are asked to describe the diversity of their organization's leadership across dimensions such as age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, cultural background, and country of origin. Responses fall into the following four categories, which shape much of the analysis in this report:

Not diversified	Mostly not diverse with no apparent interest in change
Aspiring	Mostly not diverse, making attempts to diversify
Acting towards	Definite formal plans to address diversity with some diverse representation
Well diversified	There is representation from several groups

Throughout the first four years of this research, the diversity of senior leaders remained relatively stagnant. However, in 2025, 61% of organizations were described as having well-diversified leadership or acting towards diverse senior leadership – an increase of 9 points (17%) over 2024, while the percent whose senior leadership is not diverse, or who are at the early aspirational stage, is down correspondingly by 19%.

17% more organizations have strengthened diversity in leadership over the past year

Year	Not diversified	Aspiring	Acting towards	Well diversified
2025	12%	27%	33%	28%
2024	14%	34%	31%	21%
2023	11%	33%	31%	25%
2022	15%	30%	33%	22%
2021	13%	30%	34%	23%

Diversity of senior leadership
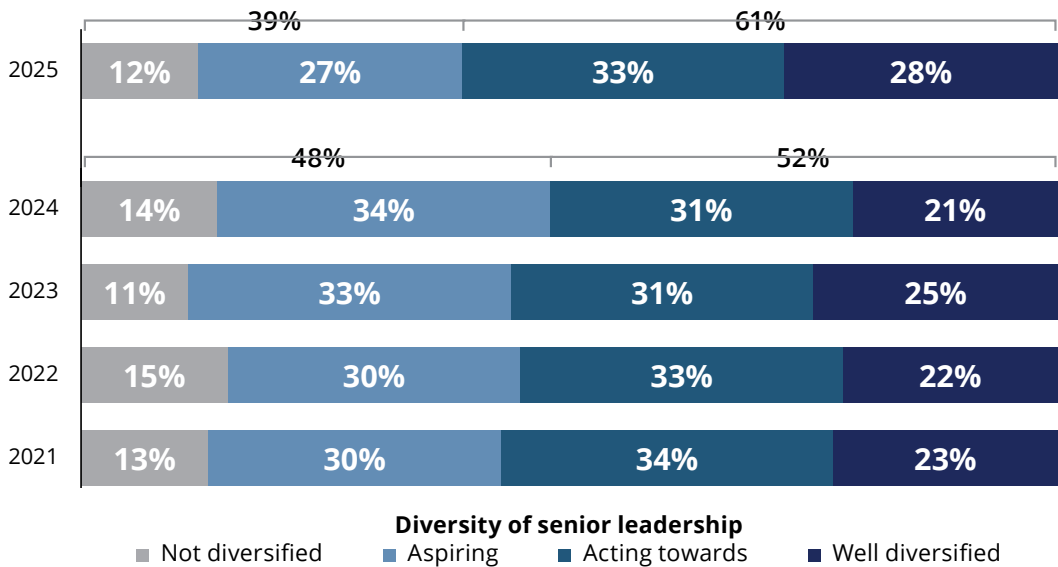
It is also notable that the presence of formal senior EDI roles has increased by 13 percentage points, with the most significant growth, 24 points, coming from organizations that do not yet have diverse senior leadership.

This is an extremely important finding because organizations with diverse senior leadership have significantly better results in several respects:

(1) Engagement is significantly better

28% of employees in organizations with diverse senior leadership report being less engaged due to systems of discrimination, compared to 68% in organizations that are lacking diverse senior leadership.

When senior leadership is not diverse, employees are twice as likely to feel less engaged at least some of the time

Diversity of senior leadership	
■	Well diversified — 28%
■	Acting towards — 45%
■	Aspiring — 57%
■	Not diversified — 68%

How often are you personally less engaged at work due to either institutional, interpersonal, structural and/or internalized systems of discrimination?
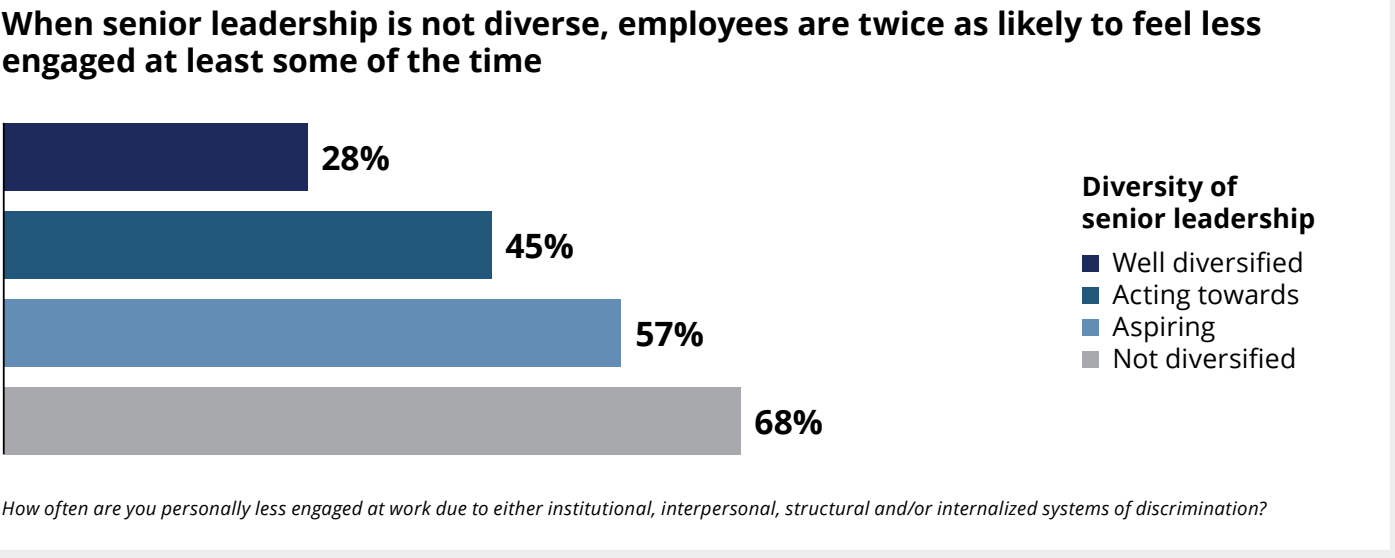
(2) Feeling included

93% of employees feel included compared to just 39% in workplaces without leadership diversity.

When senior leadership is diverse, employees are more than twice as likely to feel included

Diversity of senior leadership	
■	Well diversified — 93%
■	Acting towards — 72%
■	Aspiring — 62%
■	Not diversified — 39%

How well does your current workplace make employees feel included? (Good sense of belonging and being valued)
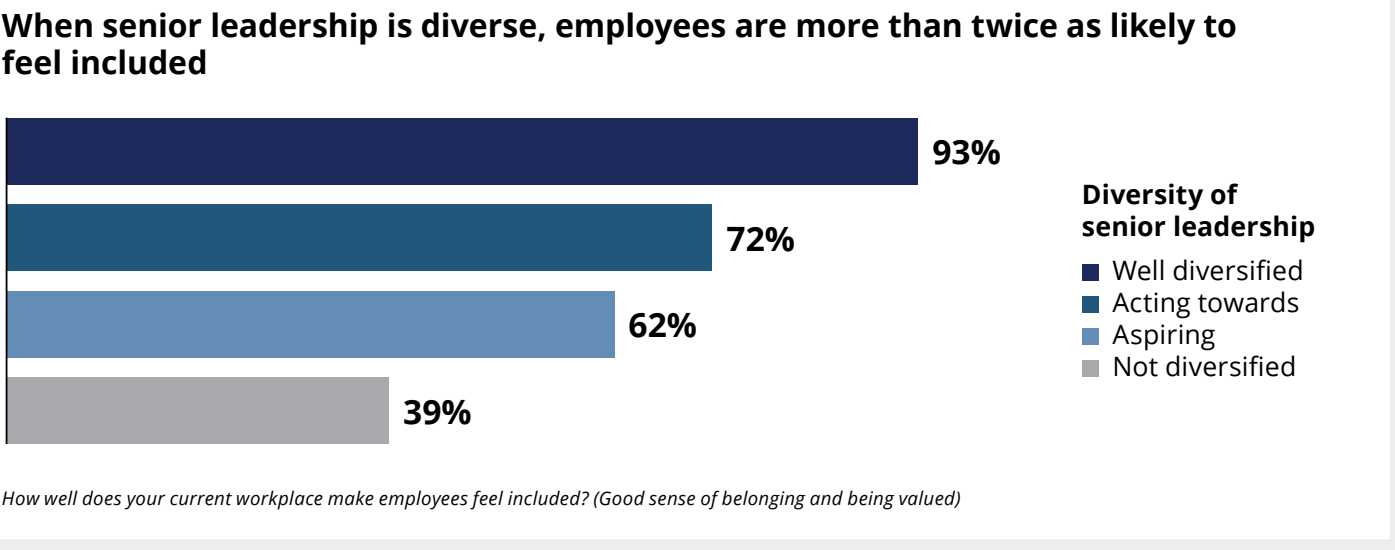
(3) Psychological safety

Diverse senior leadership correlates with healthier dialogue and psychological safety. Employees in these environments are more likely to feel safe discussing polarizing topics without workplace fallout and more likely to say their organization creates a safe space for people with different identities and from different communities. Reports of racial, ethnic, and gender-based jokes—indicators of exclusionary culture—are lower in organizations with diverse senior teams.

Workplaces feel significantly less safe for employees when senior leadership is not diverse

97% — Well diversified
96% — Acting towards
90% — Aspiring
64% — Not diversified

Diversity of senior leadership
- Well diversified
- Acting towards
- Aspiring
- Not diversified
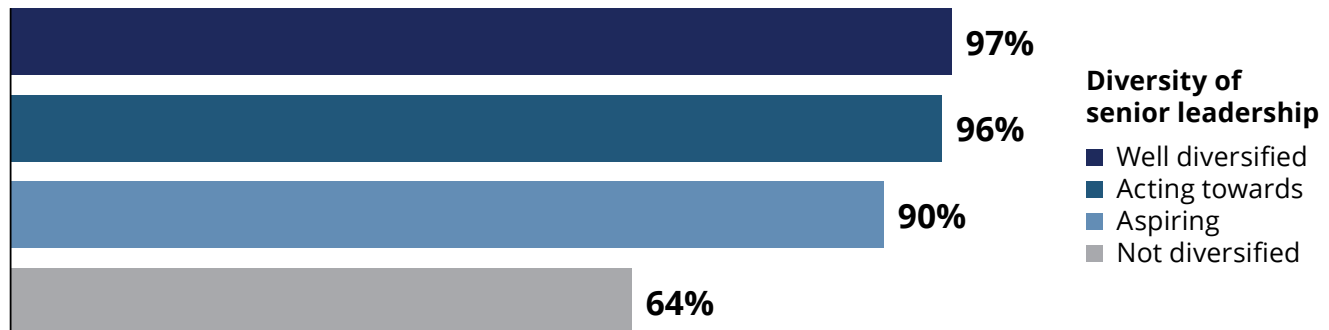
Rate the following: My workplace is a safe place for my community. (Figures shown are those who agree.)

(4) Newcomer inclusion

Employees who have been in Canada for five years or less are more likely to be seen as "set up for success" in organizations with diverse senior leadership. In contrast, EDI pushback is far more common in companies without representation at the top.

Diverse leadership aligns with newcomer success potential

61% — Well diversified
66% — Acting towards
62% — Aspiring
50% — Not diversified

Diversity of senior leadership
- Well diversified
- Acting towards
- Aspiring
- Not diversified
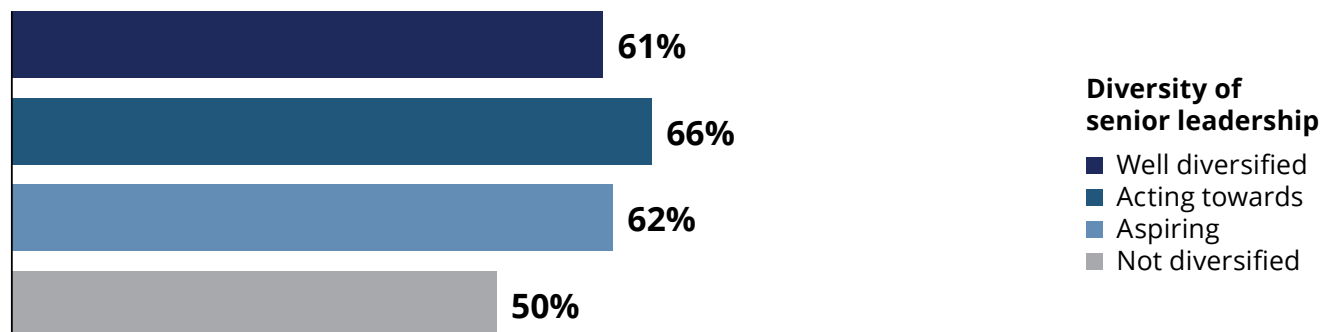
Please rate the following regarding your organization: Employees who have been in Canada for five years or less are set up for success. (Figures shown indicate those who agree.)

(5) Preventable employee loss

Overall, more than two-thirds (71%) of marketers have observed preventable employee loss in their organization over the past 12 months, which is higher than it has been in other years. However, companies with diverse senior leadership are significantly less likely to encounter this.

Preventable employee loss is most commonly caused by:
- Lack of career advancement opportunities (35%)
- Increased workload without additional pay (26%)
- Mental health challenges due to workload stress/trouble coping with work challenges (26%)
- Wanted more flexibility with work hours/work-life balance issues (20%)

Companies with diverse senior leadership are significantly less likely to encounter preventable job loss

Diversity of senior leadership	
■ Well diversified	57%
■ Acting towards	73%
■ Aspiring	80%
■ Not diversified	79%
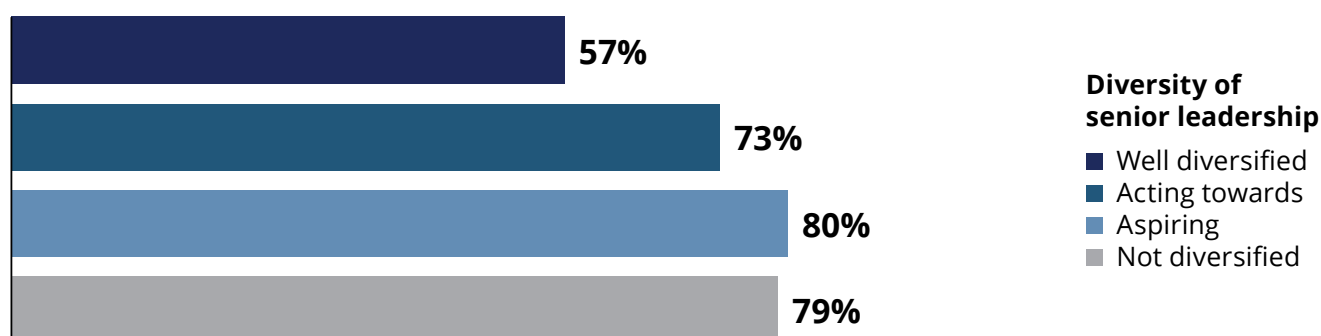
As far as you know, have employees left your organization for any of the following reasons over the past 12 months?

> **I appreciate that my CEO speaks out against discrimination. It matters.**
>
> *– Senior-level marketer, well-diversified organization, marginalized background*

Detailed Findings

1 **Support for EDI remains strong among Canadian marketers but organizational commitment is softening**
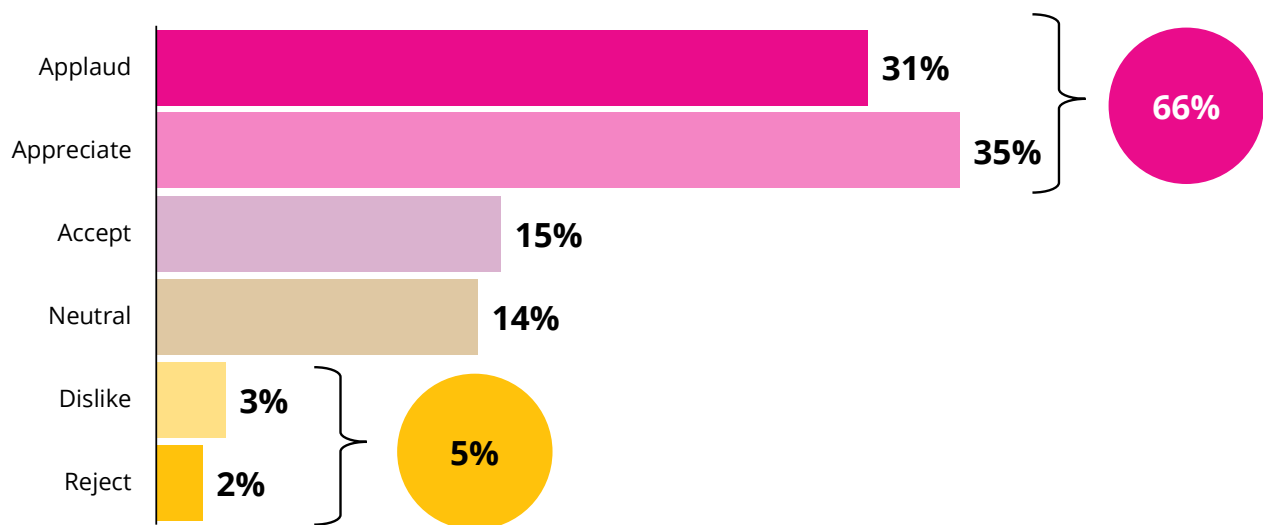
Support for equity, diversity, and inclusion remains strong among Canadian marketers. In 2025, 66% of respondents either applaud or appreciate EDI initiatives in the workplace and another 15% accept it. Only a small minority (5%) dislike or reject these efforts, and 14% are neutral.

A strong majority of Canadian marketers support (66%) or accept (15%) EDI initiatives, while only 5% are opposed

Category	Value
Applaud	31%
Appreciate	35%
Accept	15%
Neutral	14%
Dislike	3%
Reject	2%

Applaud + Appreciate = **66%**

Dislike + Reject = **5%**

Which of the following most represents how you feel personally about equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives in your community or workplace.

Even in organizations without diverse senior leadership, 71% of marketers support or applaud EDI initiatives.

> " I didn't always see the benefits of working with people raised and educated in a different culture. I only truly understood them when I became the 'different' one—realizing how privileged my position had been, and how protective, protectionist, and territorial my circle and craft were. In that moment, I retrospectively understood what I and my previous organizations were missing when we would ever so often overlook such candidates. "

– Mid-level marketer, well-diversified organization, marginalized background

Almost all marketers (98%) believe it is beneficial to work in a fully inclusive work environment, a finding that has not changed in the five years of this study.

Almost all marketers believe that it is beneficial to work in a fully inclusive work environment, a proportion that has not changed in all years measured

2025	2024	2023	2022	2021
98%	96%	98%	99%	99%
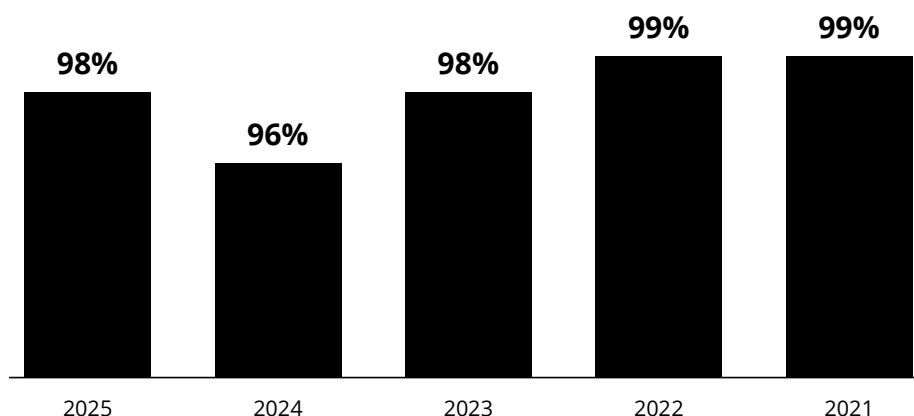
What are the main benefits of working in a fully inclusive work environment?

A strong majority (91%) of Canadian marketers agree that better ideas and solutions are derived from greater diversity of employees. However, the momentum for change appears to be slowing. Half (50%) of Canadian marketers say their organization has placed less focus on EDI compared to last year.

Small percentage of opponents, loud voices

While the number of EDI detractors is very small (5%), they can be quite outspoken. They cite concerns that such policies are unfair or foster division and resentment. Among this group, nearly half of detractors, representing 2.3% of Canadian marketers, report feeling personally disadvantaged by workplace EDI policies.

> **I'm in favour of DEI but disagree with how it's implemented at my organization. They focus on the wrong things or take initiatives that are inefficient and ineffective at actually achieving DEI goals.**

– Mid-level marketer, aspiring organization, non-marginalized background

Acknowledged value of inclusive workplaces

Yet, two-thirds (68%) of those who oppose EDI initiatives identify at least one benefit of working in an inclusive environment, most often citing increased innovation/creativity, a better understanding of customers, and company reputation (reduced perception of discrimination and inequity).

Nearly three-quarters (68%) of those who oppose EDI initiatives identify at least one benefit of working in an inclusive environment

<u>Note</u>: these are the views of the 5% of Canadian marketers who oppose EDI initiatives.

Category	Percentage
Any	68%
More innovation/creativity	28%
Understand clients/customers better	28%
Company reputation/reduced perception of discrimination and inequity	24%
Being authentic in the workplace	16%
Improved collaboration	16%
Doing the right thing	16%
Better decision making	16%
Employee morale and loyalty	12%
Access to the highest quality employees	12%
Higher revenue/more clients/business success	12%
Other (write in)	8%
None of these	32%
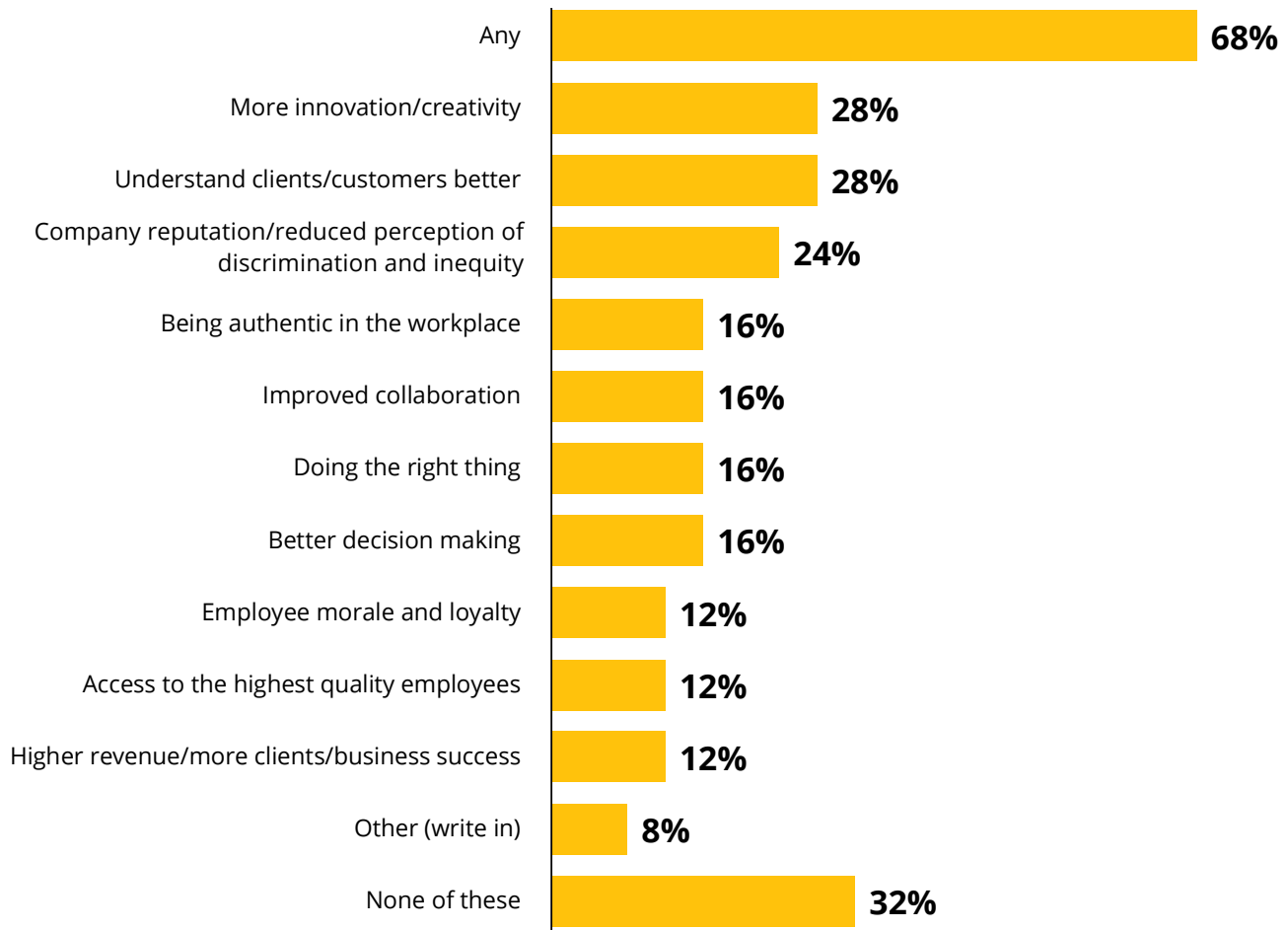
What are the main benefits of working in a fully inclusive work environment?

The 66% who accept/support EDI initiatives believe they create fair opportunities for all, build authentic representation, foster unity and collaboration, and enhance innovation and problem solving.

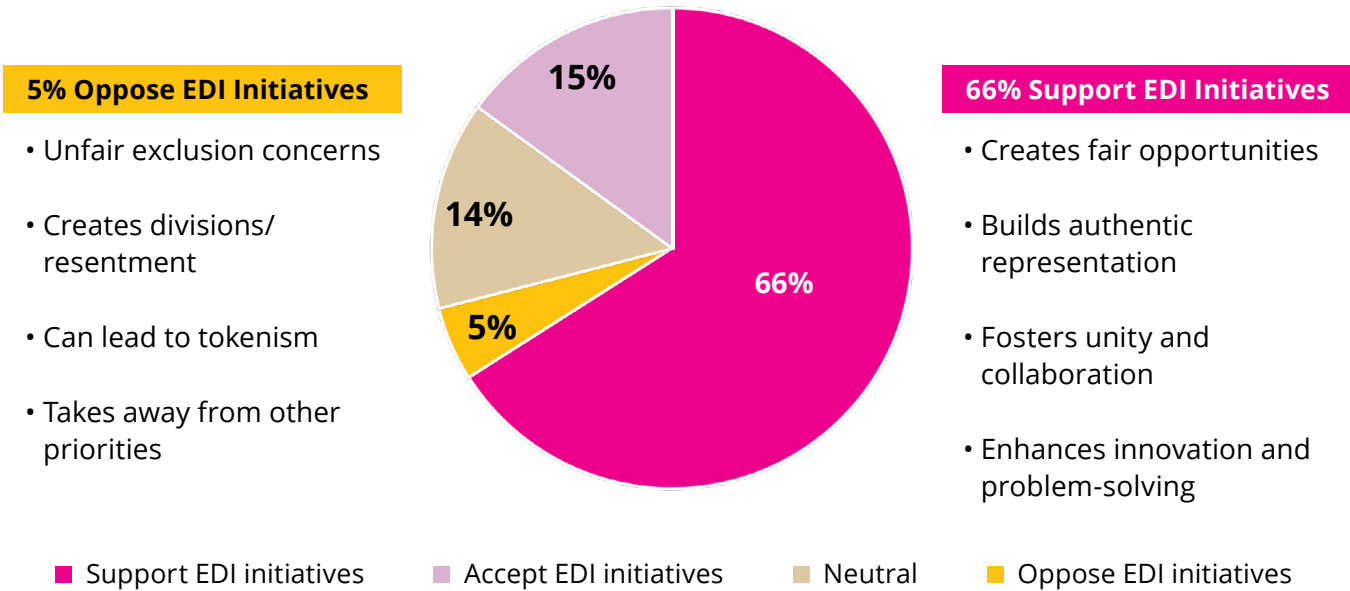The 5% who oppose EDI say they are concerned about unfair exclusion, creating divisions and/or resentment, the possibility that it could lead to tokenism, and that it takes away resources from other priorities.

81% of marketers support or accept EDI initiatives, only 5% oppose

5% Oppose EDI Initiatives

- Unfair exclusion concerns

- Creates divisions/ resentment

- Can lead to tokenism

- Takes away from other priorities

66% Support EDI Initiatives

- Creates fair opportunities

- Builds authentic representation

- Fosters unity and collaboration

- Enhances innovation and problem-solving

15%

14%

5%

66%

■ Support EDI initiatives ■ Accept EDI initiatives ■ Neutral ■ Oppose EDI initiatives

What are the main reasons you support, feel neutral or oppose EDI initiaties?

Yet, even among the small percentage (5%) of Canadian marketers who oppose EDI initiatives, almost half believe these initiatives should continue.

Addressing opposition

Most marketers believe that organizations have a responsibility to address opposition to EDI initiatives. An overwhelming 93% – including more than half of the 5% who are personally opposed to EDI initiatives – say companies should respond to opponents by ensuring implementation with fairness and transparency, engaging in dialogue, listening respectfully, and communicating benefits.
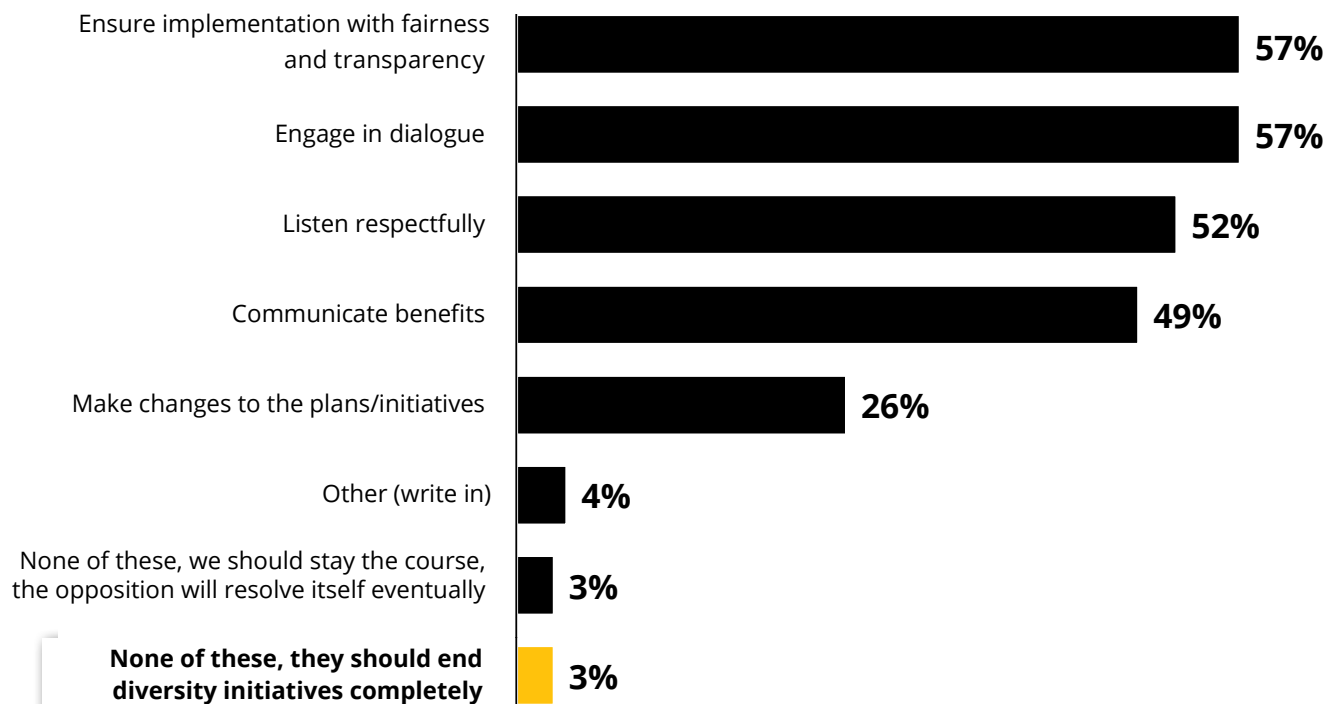
> **I believe the feeling that criticizing EDI initiatives in any way (including fair critiques of program management or operations) has been thoroughly discouraged over the past few years which has ultimately alienated audiences who were skeptical and/or endorsed those who were opposed entirely from the onset. There seems to be a "throw the baby out with the bath water" mindset right now, so the best way to proceed is to provide clear avenues for feedback, listen and engage in dialogue with critiques that are fair without judgment.**

– Mid-level marketer, acting towards organization, non-marginalized background

Most marketers believe organizations should respond to opposition to EDI initiatives. Only 3% believe they should be discontinued.

Ensure implementation with fairness and transparency	57%
Engage in dialogue	57%
Listen respectfully	52%
Communicate benefits	49%
Make changes to the plans/initiatives	26%
Other (write in)	4%
None of these, we should stay the course, the opposition will resolve itself eventually	3%
None of these, they should end diversity initiatives completely	3%

What do you think organizations should do in response to opposition to EDI initiatives?

2 Many experience a stressful and sometimes hostile workplace

Nearly three-quarters of Canadian marketers (71%) say their workplace is excellent or very good at making employees feel included.

However, those from marginalized communities tell a more complex and troubling story. For these individuals, the workplace can be a source of stress, resistance and disengagement. This year's data highlights how persistent inequities, polarization, hostility and systemic barriers undermine well-being and belonging at work. Equally troubling, as layoffs occur, they are more likely to affect racialized individuals, women, people with physical disabilities and those whose first language is not English or French or who speak with an accent. The reverberations are amplified for women from marginalized communities who face discrimination both as women and as people of colour.

> **Agencies not reflecting the makeup of Canadian society will eventually find themselves less relevant and less contemporary. Best to be ahead rather than behind.**

– Senior-level marketer, aspiring organization, marginalized background

Nearly three-quarters of Canadian marketers (71%) say their workplace is excellent or very good at making employees feel included

- ■ Total — 71%
- ■ Non-marginalized men — 83%
- ■ Non-marginalized women — 80%
- ■ Marginalized men — 81%
- ■ Marginalized women — 57%
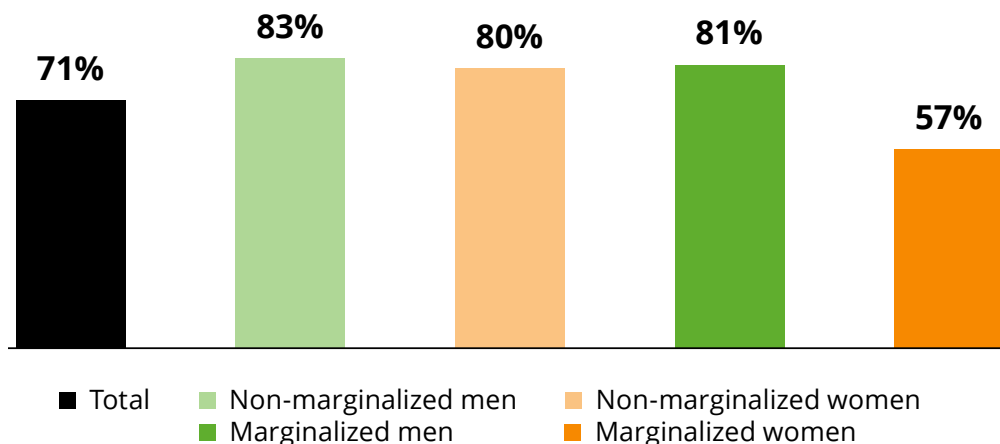
How well does your current workplace make employees feel included?

Discrimination is widespread

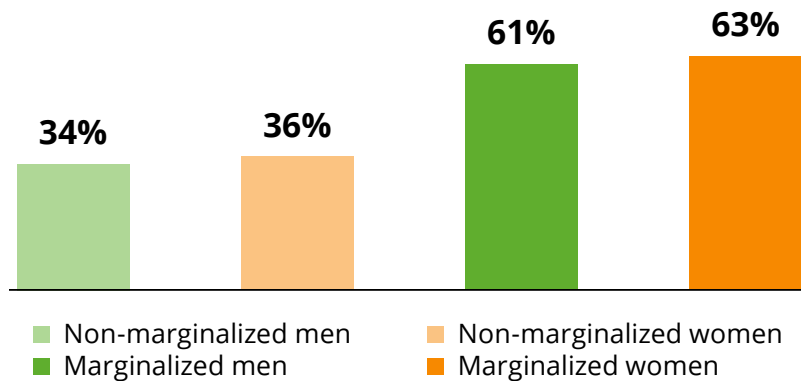More than half (55%) of marketers say they have witnessed acts of discrimination, inequity or exclusion in their organization over the past 12 months. The top reported forms of discrimination include pay inequity, biased hiring and promotion practices, and mockery or derogatory jokes about someone's race, faith or identity.

This figure climbs sharply among certain groups.

- Almost three-quarters (73%) of marketers in organizations with no diversity in senior leadership report witnessing acts of discrimination, inequity or exclusion, compared to less than half (42%) in organizations with well-diversified leadership.

- Nearly two-thirds of women from marginalized communities (63%) and men from marginalized communities (61%) have witnessed these acts—nearly double the 35% reported by their colleagues from non-marginalized communities.

- Younger marketers are more likely to report witnessing these situations.

Marginalized men and women are more likely to observe discrimination in the workplace

Bar chart:
- Non-marginalized men: 34%
- Non-marginalized women: 36%
- Marginalized men: 61%
- Marginalized women: 63%

Legend:
- ■ Non-marginalized men
- ■ Non-marginalized women
- ■ Marginalized men
- ■ Marginalized women

*In the past 12 months have you seen any form of discrimination, inequality or exclusion?*

Women from marginalized communities face intersectionality.

Women from marginalized communities are among the most affected groups continuing to face significant barriers to inclusion, engagement and equity. This year's data highlights the cumulative effect of multiple systemic challenges on their workplace experience.

Women from marginalized communities are less likely to feel that their workplace makes employees feel included – a notably lower rate compared to their peers from non-marginalized communities. Women from marginalized communities experienced a 7-point decline (64% to 57%) between 2024 and 2025 - the only group to lose ground.

Marginalized women feel significantly less included than others - and this has worsened in the past year

	2025				2024		
	83%	80%	81%	57%	76%	77%	77%	64%

Legend:
- Non-marginalized men
- Non-marginalized women
- Marginalized men
- Marginalized women
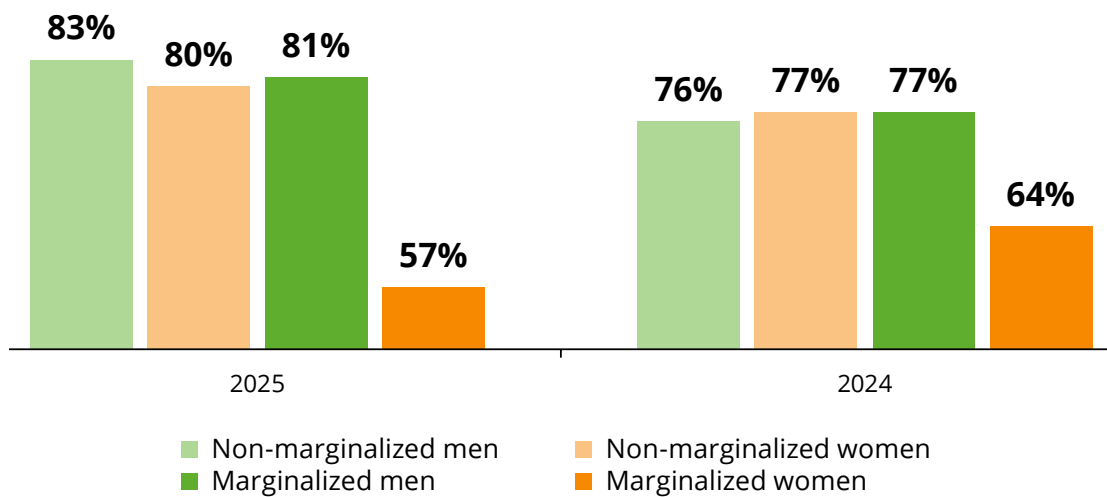
How well does your current workplace make employees feel included?

Many (61%) women from marginalized communities continue to feel they must work harder than their peers to be treated equally, compared to men from non-marginalized communities (31%) and women from non-marginalized communities (35%). This feeling is also prevalent, to a slightly lower extent, among men from marginalized communities (56%).

Almost two-thirds of marginalized men and women continue to feel they must work harder than their peers to be treated equally

Non-marginalized men	Non-marginalized women	Marginalized men	Marginalized women
31%	35%	56%	61%

Legend:
- Non-marginalized men
- Non-marginalized women
- Marginalized men
- Marginalized women
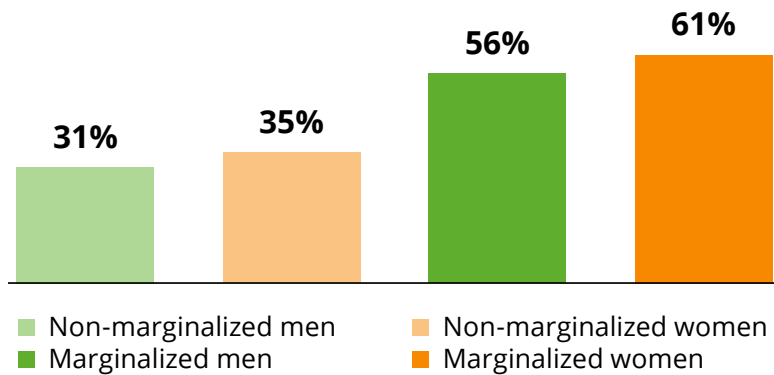
*I feel like I have to work harder than my peers to be treated equally.*

Polarization intensifies these challenges

Both men and women from marginalized communities are 20% more likely to say the rise of polarization has affected their work lives. They report organizational impacts such as reduced morale, self-censorship, and anxiety in the workplace.

Microaggressions through discriminatory humour

There has been a noticeable rise in discriminatory humour in the workplace. In 2025, 39% say they have heard racial, ethnic or gender-based jokes at work — an increase of eight percentage points over the previous year. Consistent with other findings, 51% of those in organizations with no diversity in senior leadership report hearing such jokes, compared to 31% in organizations with well-diversified senior leadership.

Discriminatory jokes are observed in one-third of organizations with diverse leadership, compared to just over half when leadership is not diverse.

31%	
39%	
43%	
51%	

Diversity of senior leadership
- ■ Well diversified
- ■ Acting towards
- ■ Aspiring
- ■ Not diversified
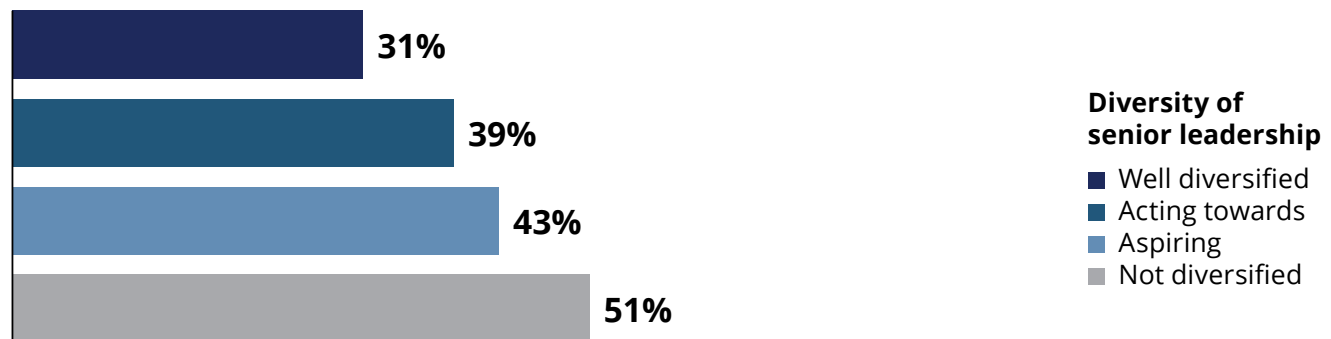
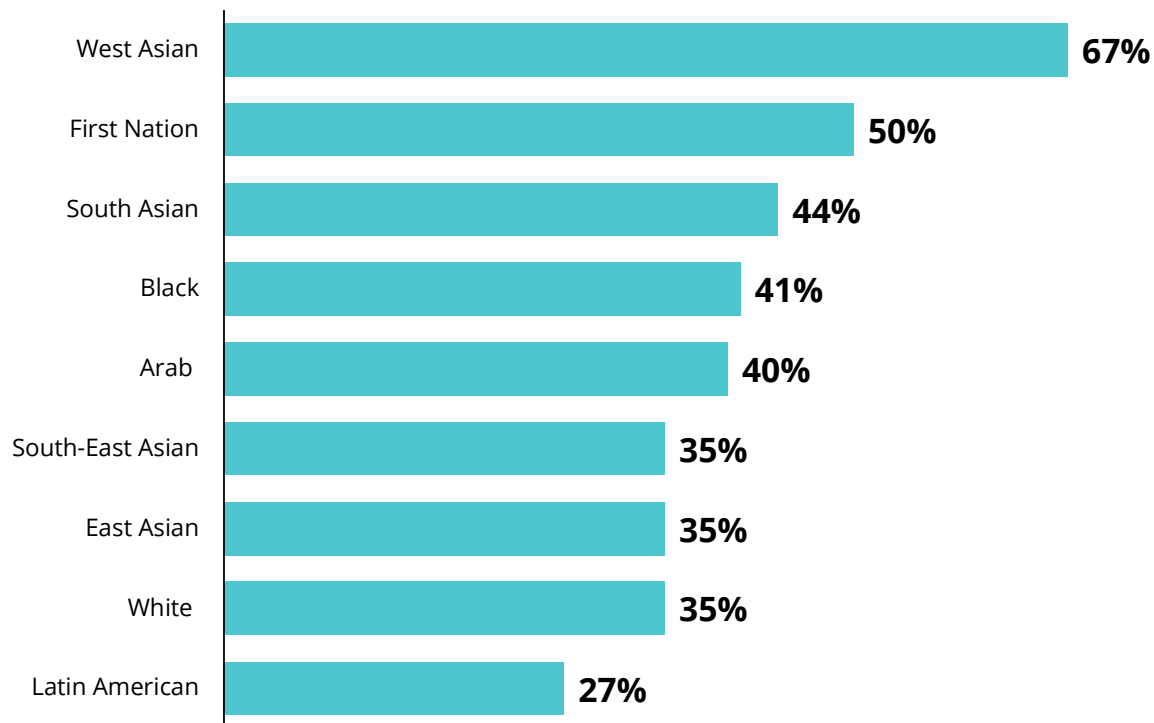*I have heard racial, ethnic and gender-based jokes at work.*

> " We have recently added an Inclusive Content Specialist to our team, who handles ensuring internal and external communications are held to a high standard of inclusivity. "

– Senior-level marketer, well-diversified organization, marginalized background

Members of different ethic communities report different experiences with discriminatory humour

Community	Percentage
West Asian	67%
First Nation	50%
South Asian	44%
Black	41%
Arab	40%
South-East Asian	35%
East Asian	35%
White	35%
Latin American	27%

I have head racial, ethnic and gender-based jokes at work.

Gen Z members are almost twice as likely to notice discriminatory jokes at work compared to Gen X

Generation	Percentage
Gen Z	52%
Millennial	40%
Gen X	27%
Boomer	43%
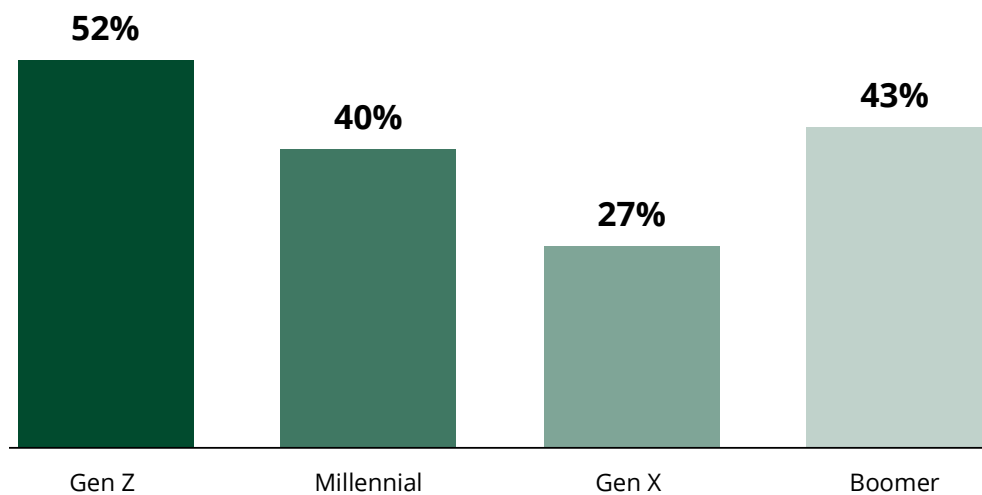
I have heard racial, ethnic and gender-based jokes at work.

Almost two-thirds (63%) of marketers from 2SLGBTQIA+ communities, and 55% of those with physical disabilities say they've heard these jokes. The prevalence is also higher among people from marginalized communities (45%) compared to peers from non-marginalized communities (24%). It's also higher among those from financially challenged childhoods (60%) compared to those from more stable or comfortable backgrounds (31–38%).

Discriminatory jokes are observed much more frequently by marginalized men and women compared to non-marginalized

- Non-marginalized men
- Non-marginalized women
- Marginalized men
- Marginalized women
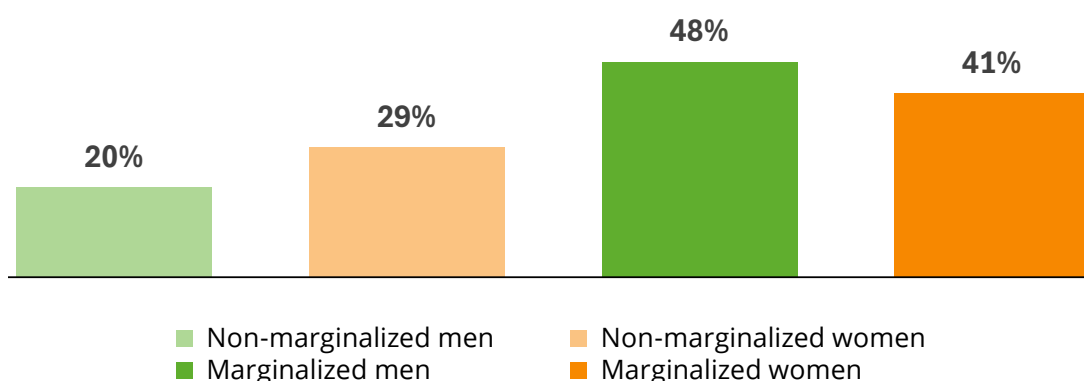
I have heard racial, ethnic and gender-based jokes at work.

Disengagement is rising

Almost half (46%) of marketers report that they have felt less engaged at work, at least some of the time, due to systems of discrimination, an increase of 13 points (39%) compared to last year. This is most prevalent among men, younger populations, and people from marginalized communities:

- 28% of men said they were disengaged at least sometimes in 2024. This number has risen to 45% in 2025.
- Last year, younger populations, Millennials (36%) and Gen Z (39%) said they were disengaged at least sometimes.
- In 2025, more than 50% of Millennials and Gen Z report some disengagement compared to Gen X and Boomers who were at about 20% and are now about 30%.
- 37% of people from marginalized communities reported some disengagement in 2024. This year, that number has risen to 50%.

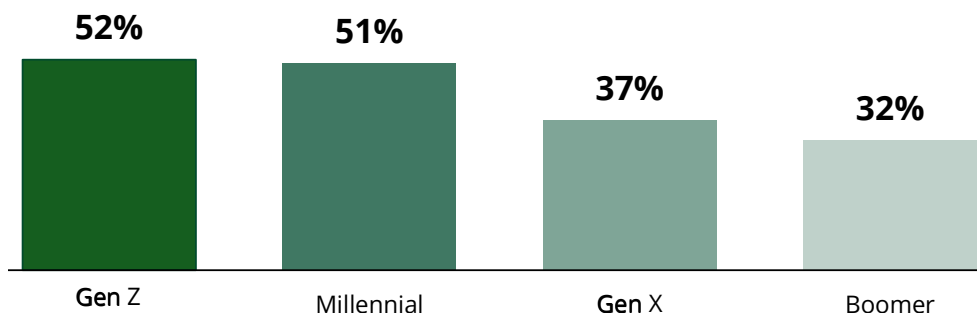> **Not internalized systems of discrimination, but when I see new senior leadership being hired that is lacking diversity, I feel emotionally impacted.**

– Senior level marketer, aspiring organization, non-marginalized background

Just over 50% of Millennials and Gen Z report some disengagement compared to Gen X and Boomers.

|			
52%	**51%**	**37%**	**32%**
Gen Z	Millennial	Gen X	Boomer

How often are you personally less engaged at work due to either institutional, interpersonal, structural and/or internalized systems of discrimination?

Meanwhile, 52% report having to work harder to be treated equally – up nine points over last year (43%). That feeling of unfairness is significantly higher among those working in organizations without diverse senior leadership (67% not diversified vs 41% well-diversified). Those who are from marginalized communities are nearly twice as likely to agree with that sentiment (59% of people from marginalized communities vs 34% of people from non-marginalized communities).

A third of marketers are witnessing hostility at work

One-third of marketers have witnessed targeted harm, smear campaigns (19%), acts of vandalism (12%), or physical threats (12%), directed at individuals based on their religion, race, gender, sexuality or other identity markers. These incidents are most frequently reported by men from marginalized communities.

One-third of marketers have witnessed targeted harm

34%	24%	6%	46%	35%

■ Any ■ Non-marginalized men ■ Non-marginalized women
■ Marginalized men ■ Marginalized women
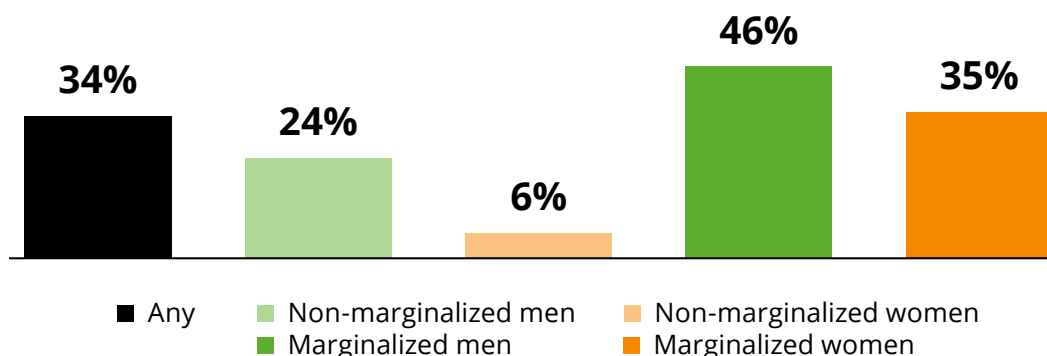
In the past 12 months have you seen any of the following that could be frightening for some employees at your organization?
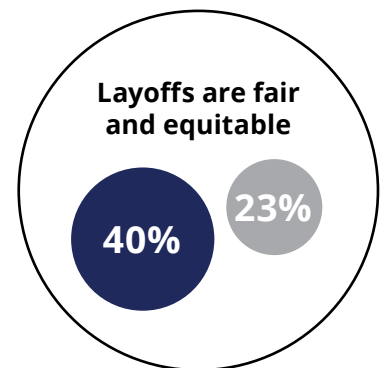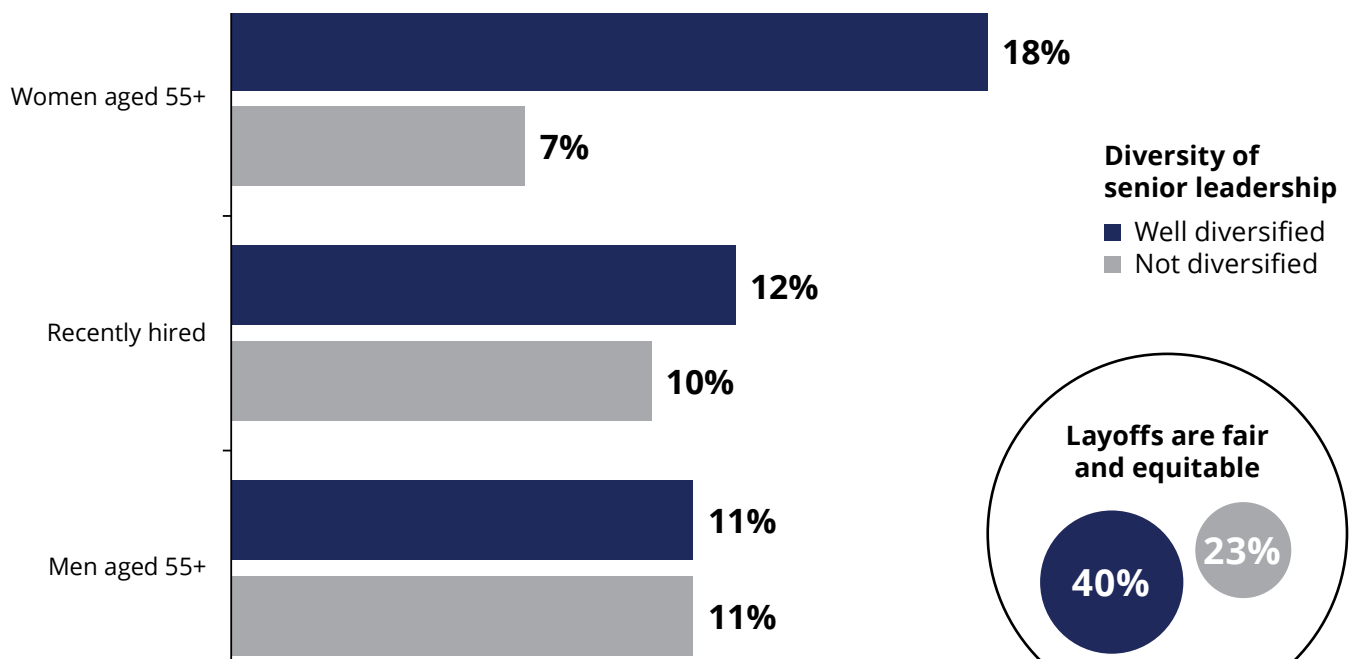
Layoffs aren't experienced equally

Job losses and layoffs have risen. Half of marketers say they have noticed layoffs are more likely to affect certain groups, up 12 points over last year (from 38% to 50%). The impact is not evenly distributed: those most likely to be affected include racialized individuals, women, people with physical disabilities and those whose first language is not English or French or who speak with an accent.

About a third (34%) of marketers view the process as completely fair and equitable, with recently hired at 13% most affected.

In organizations whose senior leadership is not diverse, 67% of respondents say layoffs have disproportionately affected specific groups compared to 39% in companies with diverse senior leadership.

- Women over 55 are twice as likely to be seen as disproportionately impacted in non-diverse organizations (18%) than in those with well-diversified leadership (9%).
- Women overall are three times as likely to be affected in non-diverse organizations (18%) compared to well-diversified ones (5%).
- BIPOC employees were 10 times more likely (25%) to be perceived as targeted by layoffs in organizations lacking diverse senior leadership compared to organizations with diverse senior leadership (2%).

Older women are almost 3x more likely to face layoffs in organizations without diverse leadership compared to those with diverse leadership

Diversity of senior leadership
- ■ Well diversified
- ■ Not diversified

Women aged 55+: 18% (Well diversified), 7% (Not diversified)
Recently hired: 12% (Well diversified), 10% (Not diversified)
Men aged 55+: 11% (Well diversified), 11% (Not diversified)

Layoffs are fair and equitable
40% / 23%

In your organization, have you noticed that layoffs are more likely to affect any of the following groups?

Half of marketers notice layoffs target specific groups

Group	Percentage
Those recently hired	13%
Men aged 55+	10%
Women overall	9%
Racialized/BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Colour)	9%
Women aged 55+	9%
Members of a 2SLGBTQIA+ community	6%
Those going through serious life events (health crisis/family emergency, etc.)	6%
Those whose first language is not English or French or speak with a heavy accent	6%
Have an evident physical health challenge / disability	6%
Mental health challenge / neurodiverse	5%
Women recently returning from maternity leave	5%
People from non-marginalized communities	4%
Members of a religious group because of their affiliation	4%
Men recently returning from paternity leave	2%
Other (write in)	4%

In your organization, have you noticed that layoffs are more likely to affect any of the following groups?

3 **Perceptions of hate vary, but the impact is real**

Nearly all marketers agree that their workplace is a safe space for members of their community. However, those who work in organizations without diversity in senior leadership are significantly less likely to agree (64% vs 97% in organizations with well diversified senior leadership).

Similarly, nearly everyone agrees that they feel safe from hateful speech in their workplace, but those who work in organizations without diversity in senior leadership are significantly less likely to agree (77% vs 94% in organizations with well-diversified leadership).

In organizations with diverse senior leadership, 82% of marketers say that their CEO often explicitly reminds people that racism and other types of discrimination are not tolerated at their organization, compared to only 39% in organizations without diverse senior leadership.
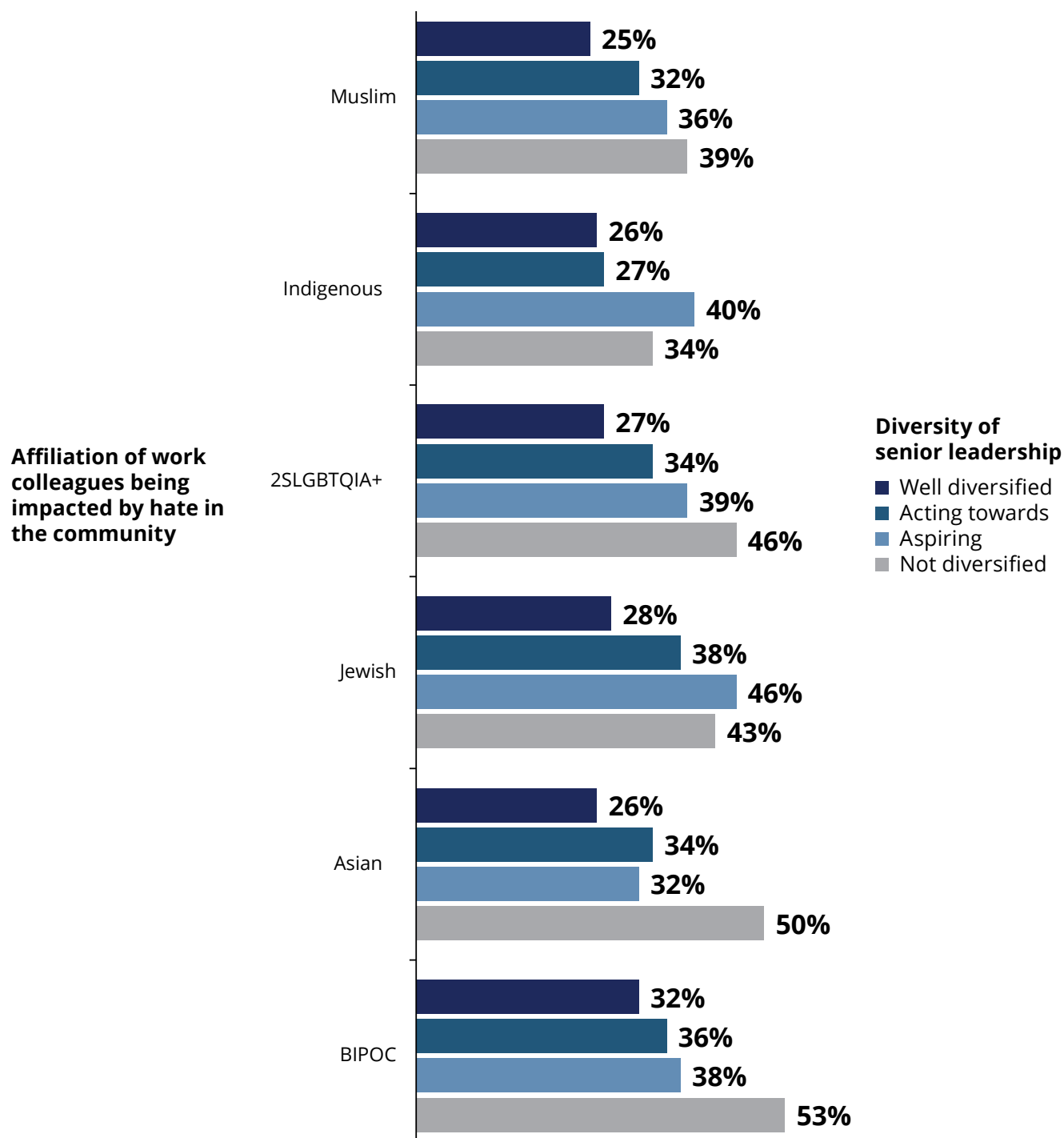
About one-third of marketers who work with individuals from marginalized communities report that these colleagues are affected by hate in the community (outside of work), ranging from targeted slurs and microaggressions to more overt forms of exclusion and hostility.

Those who support EDI initiatives report greater awareness of hate affecting colleagues. Men from non-marginalized communities are the least likely to see evidence of hate directed at coworkers. Close to half of non-marginalized women, and at least one-third of marketers from all demographics, have seen targeted hate directed at Jewish colleagues. Younger marketers, especially those in Gen Z, are more likely than Boomers to report seeing colleagues affected by hate.

Men from non-marginalized communities and Boomers are significantly less likely than other groups to recognize or report the presence of hate affecting their coworkers.

Some communities are more likely to be impacted by hate. Employees in organizations with less diverse leadership are more likely to notice
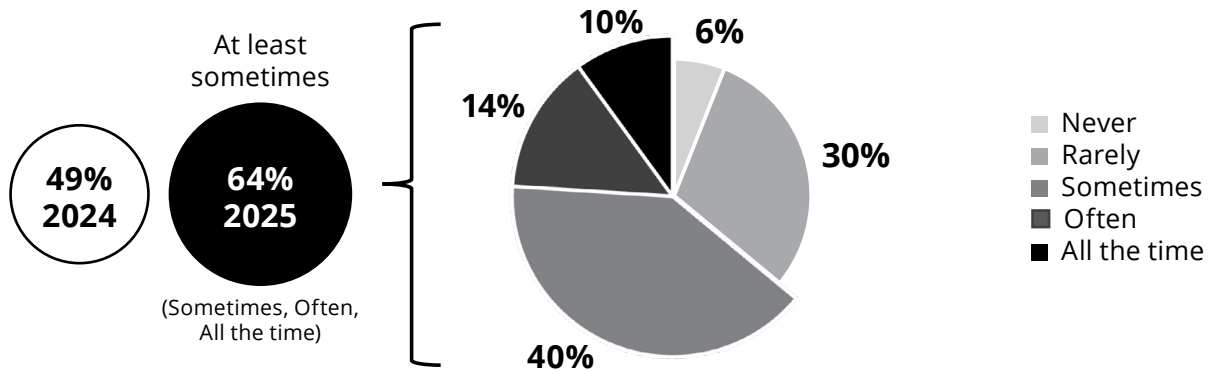
Affiliation of work colleagues being impacted by hate in the community

Muslim
- Well diversified: 25%
- Acting towards: 32%
- Aspiring: 36%
- Not diversified: 39%

Indigenous
- Well diversified: 26%
- Acting towards: 27%
- Aspiring: 40%
- Not diversified: 34%

2SLGBTQIA+
- Well diversified: 27%
- Acting towards: 34%
- Aspiring: 39%
- Not diversified: 46%

Jewish
- Well diversified: 28%
- Acting towards: 38%
- Aspiring: 46%
- Not diversified: 43%

Asian
- Well diversified: 26%
- Acting towards: 34%
- Aspiring: 32%
- Not diversified: 50%

BIPOC
- Well diversified: 32%
- Acting towards: 36%
- Aspiring: 38%
- Not diversified: 53%

Diversity of senior leadership
- Well diversified
- Acting towards
- Aspiring
- Not diversified

Do you see evidence of your co-workers from any of the following groups being impacted by hate in the community?

4 **Polarization in the workplace is rising**

In 2025, 64% of Canadian marketers said there are polarizing discussions at work at least sometimes compared to 49% in 2024 – an increase of 31%.
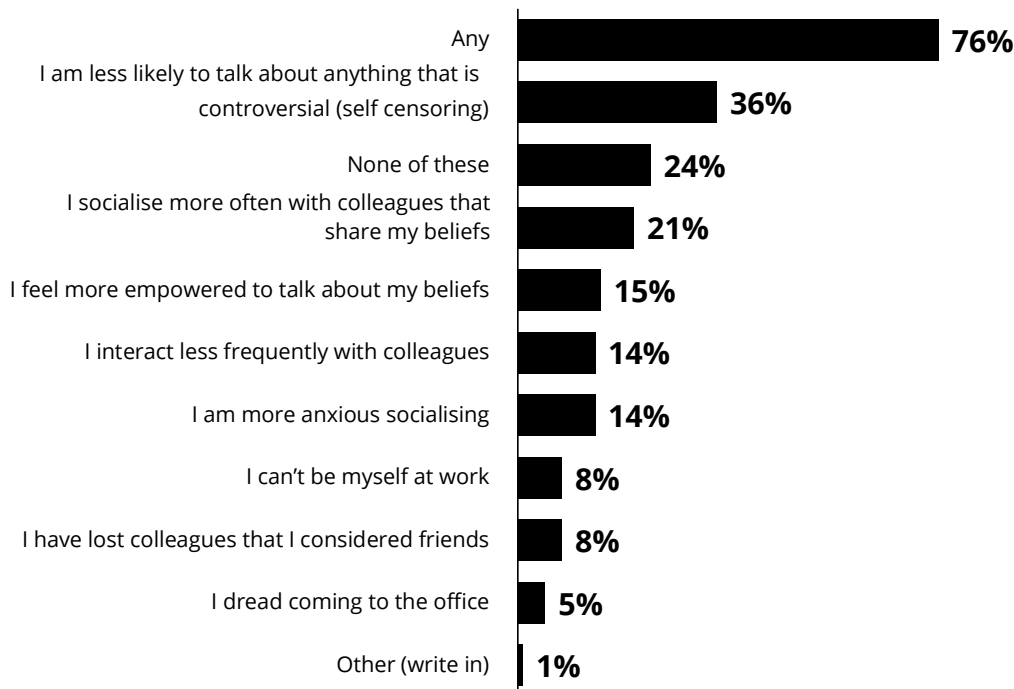
Almost two-thirds of marketers hear discussions about polarizing topics at work

At least
sometimes

49%
2024

64%
2025

(Sometimes, Often,
All the time)

10%   6%

14%

30%

40%

■ Never
■ Rarely
■ Sometimes
■ Often
■ All the time

How often do you hear discussions about polarizing topics at work?

Three-quarters (76%) of marketers say polarization has affected their work life in some way, a figure consistent with last year.
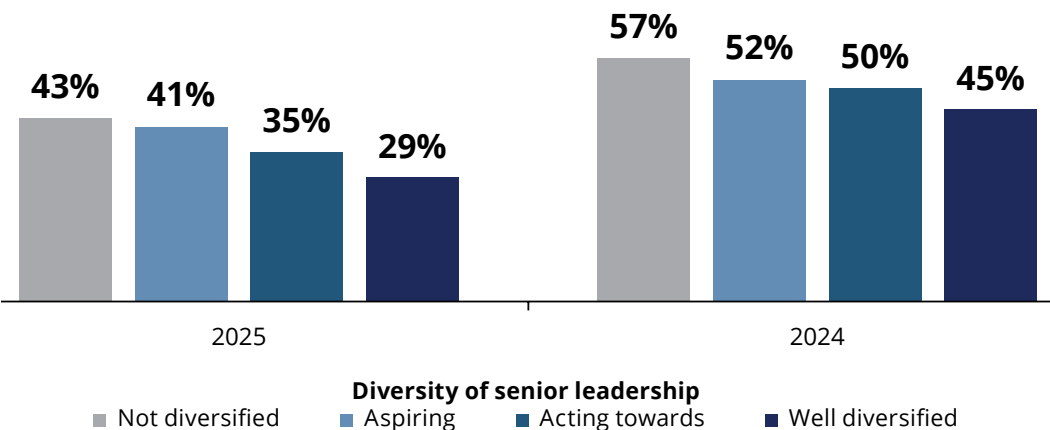
Effects of polizarization at work

Any	**76%**
I am less likely to talk about anything that is controversial (self censoring)	**36%**
None of these	**24%**
I socialise more often with colleagues that share my beliefs	**21%**
I feel more empowered to talk about my beliefs	**15%**
I interact less frequently with colleagues	**14%**
I am more anxious socialising	**14%**
I can't be myself at work	**8%**
I have lost colleagues that I considered friends	**8%**
I dread coming to the office	**5%**
Other (write in)	**1%**

Has the rise of polarization affected your work life in terms of any of the following?

Fewer filters, greater risk

The likelihood that people will talk about anything controversial is 36%, a notable 15-point drop (decrease of 29%) from the previous year, indicating a shift in how marketers are navigating difficult conversations. At the same time, a growing number of people (15%) feel empowered to speak up about their personal beliefs. While this is a small number, it is nearly double the 8% who said the same in 2024.

**People are more likely to speak up about their beliefs than they were a year ago**

	2025	2024
Not diversified	43%	57%
Aspiring	41%	52%
Acting towards	35%	50%
Well diversified	29%	45%

Diversity of senior leadership
■ Not diversified   ■ Aspiring   ■ Acting towards   ■ Well diversified

I am less likely to talk about anything that is controversial (self censoring).

Openness is not without consequences

The most cited organizational concern tied to these conversations is reduced morale and engagement, fears of toxic culture taking root, poor teamwork and loss of good talent.

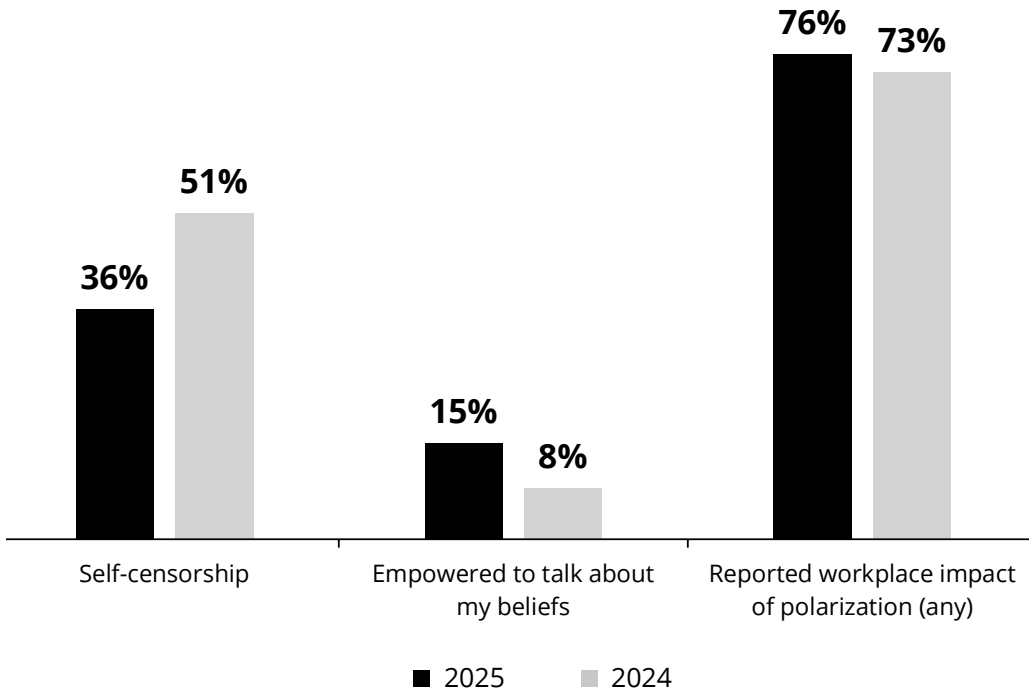**The most cited organizational concern tied to these conversations is...**

Reduced morale / engagement	41%
Toxic culture starts to take root (or further entrenches)	33%
Poor teamwork	29%
Loss of good talent	27%
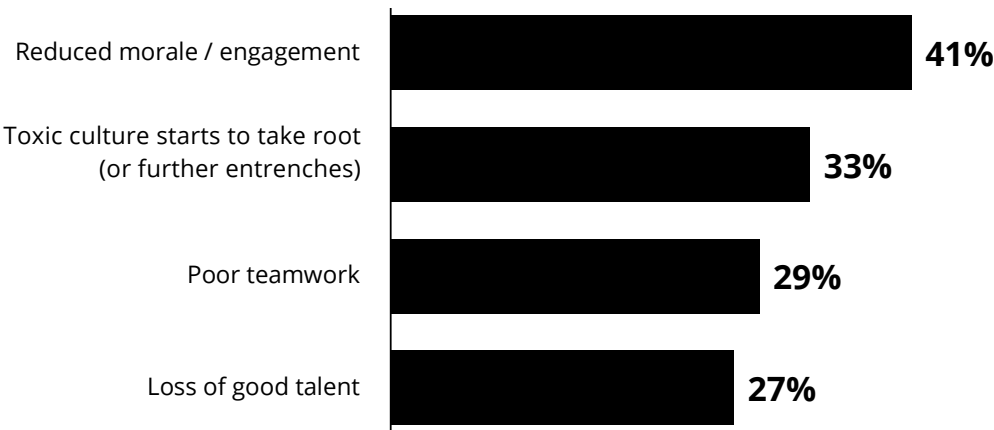
After a discussion on a polarizing topic, which of the following are of greatest concern to your organisation?

Organizations with well-diversified senior leadership experience less impacts from polarization

Marketers working in organizations with well-diversified senior leadership are somewhat less likely to report frequent discussions of polarizing topics at work (59% vs 67%). Employees in organizations with well-diversified leadership teams are also less likely to experience negative consequences. This reinforces a key theme throughout the data: inclusive leadership is linked not just to representation, but to a healthier, more stable work culture.

Polarization is impacting life at work

	2025	2024
Self-censorship	36%	51%
Empowered to talk about my beliefs	15%	8%
Reported workplace impact of polarization (any)	76%	73%

Has the rise of polarization affected your work life in terms of any of the following?

The small percentage (5%) who oppose EDI are more likely than those who support EDI to:
- Self-censor (46% vs 37%)
- Interact less frequently with colleagues (23% vs 11%)
- Feel like they cannot be themselves at work (15% vs 8%).

> **I am selective about who I talk to about some topics.**

– Senior marketer, well-diversified organization, marginalized background

5 Ageism continues to persist within marketing organizations

Ageism continues to be one of the most tolerated forms of discrimination in the workplace. Discrimination against older professionals, particularly those over 55, is reflected in hiring decisions, layoffs, and assumptions about adaptability or relevance. These patterns disproportionately affect experienced marketers, who remain among the top groups impacted by layoffs.
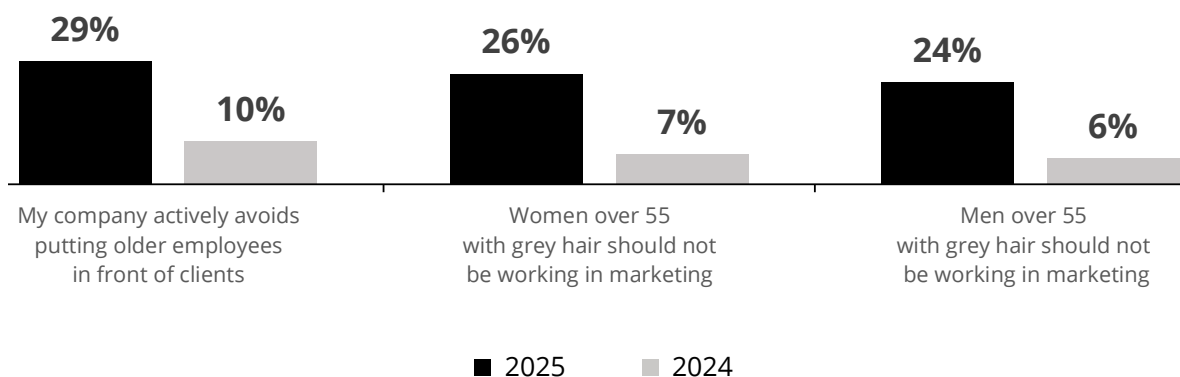
Marginalized men are most likely to notice ageism being tolerated at work
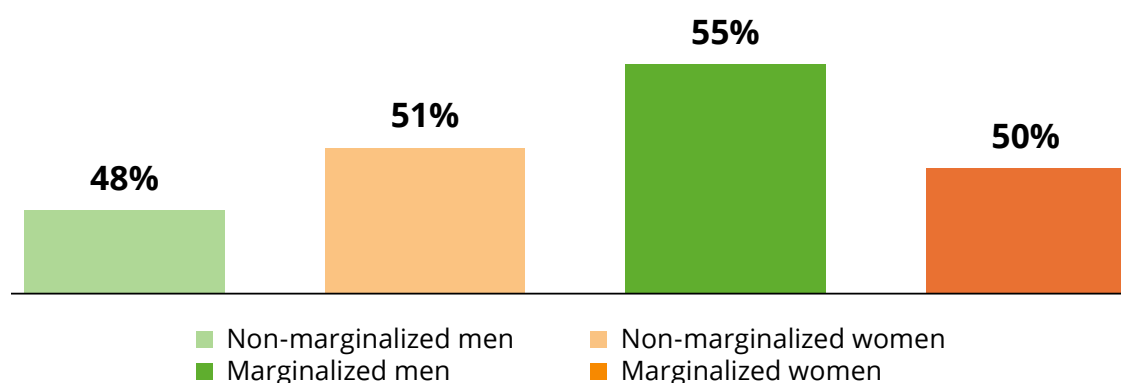
48%
51%
55%
50%

■ Non-marginalized men   ■ Non-marginalized women
■ Marginalized men   ■ Marginalized women

Please rate the following regarding your organization: Age discrimination is tolerated in the workplace more than other forms of discrimination.

This year's data shows a marked rise in age-related bias, particularly in attitudes toward older professionals. The following chart shows that agreement with ageist statements has increased by close to 20 points compared to the previous year.

Age-related bias is on the rise

29%   10%   26%   7%   24%   6%

My company actively avoids
putting older employees
in front of clients

Women over 55
with grey hair should not
be working in marketing

Men over 55
with grey hair should not
be working in marketing

■ 2025   ■ 2024

These beliefs persist despite near-universal recognition that older employees bring valuable experience.

Ironically, the people who hold these beliefs most strongly are Boomers.
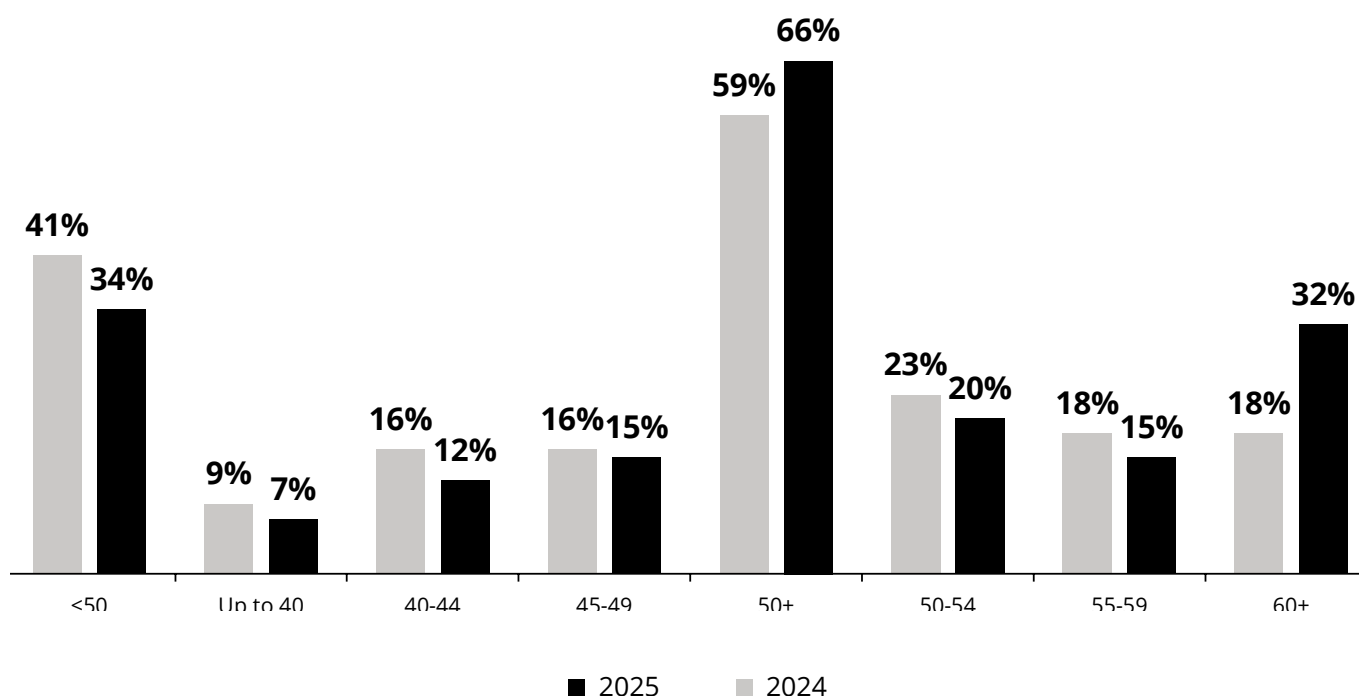
Baby Boomers are most likely to hold ageist beliefs

Men over 55 with grey hair should not be working in marketing
- Boomer: 32%
- Gen X: 23%
- Millennial: 23%
- Gen Z: 21%

Women over 55 with grey hair should not be working in marketing
- Boomer: 37%
- Gen X: 25%
- Millennial: 25%
- Gen Z: 23%

My company actively avoids putting older employees in front of clients.
- Boomer: 38%
- Gen X: 23%
- Millennial: 29%
- Gen Z: 31%

Legend: ■ Boomer   ■ Gen X   ■ Millennial   ■ Gen Z
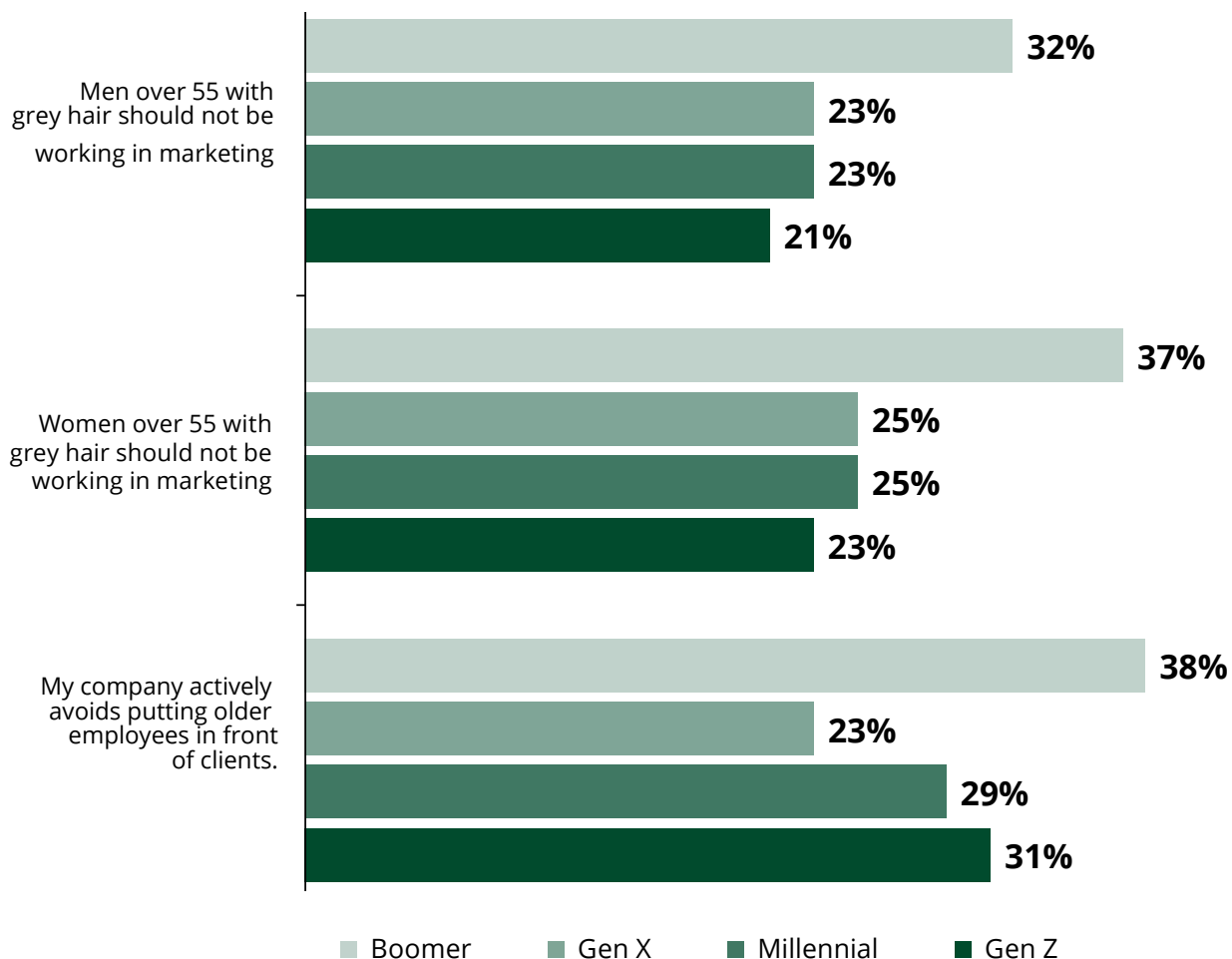
How old is old?

On average, marketers define an "older" employee as someone over 52 years of age—up from age 49 last year and 48 in 2023.

One-third (34%) of respondents selected an age below 50 as the threshold for being older, with 7% choosing a number under 40. However, 66% selected an age over 50, and nearly one-third (32%) placed that threshold beyond age 60. These perceptions vary somewhat by generational cohort.

Categorized as an 'older' employee

	<50	Up to 40	40-44	45-49	50+	50-54	55-59	60+
2024	41%	9%	16%	16%	59%	23%	18%	18%
2025	34%	7%	12%	15%	66%	20%	15%	32%

■ 2025   ■ 2024

If you had to divide the employees at your organization into two groups, "older" and "younger", at what age would you say an employee is in the "older" group

> " Working with older and longer tenured employees are a well of institutional and industry knowledge. If these employees are also open minded and curious of new ideas, it can be incredibly rewarding as they bring a perspective to innovation that improves the go-to-market planning discussion. "

– Senior marketer, well-diversified organization, marginalized background

Tolerance of age-based discrimination is also rising

One-in-two marketers (51%) believe that ageism is accepted in the workplace – a four-point increase over last year. This shift is especially pronounced among people from marginalized communities, with men from marginalized communities most likely to perceive that ageism is tolerated. In contrast, men from non-marginalized communities are reporting this less frequently, down 20 points (from 65% to 48%) compared to the previous year.

Acceptance of ageism has increased over 2024 except for non-marginalized men
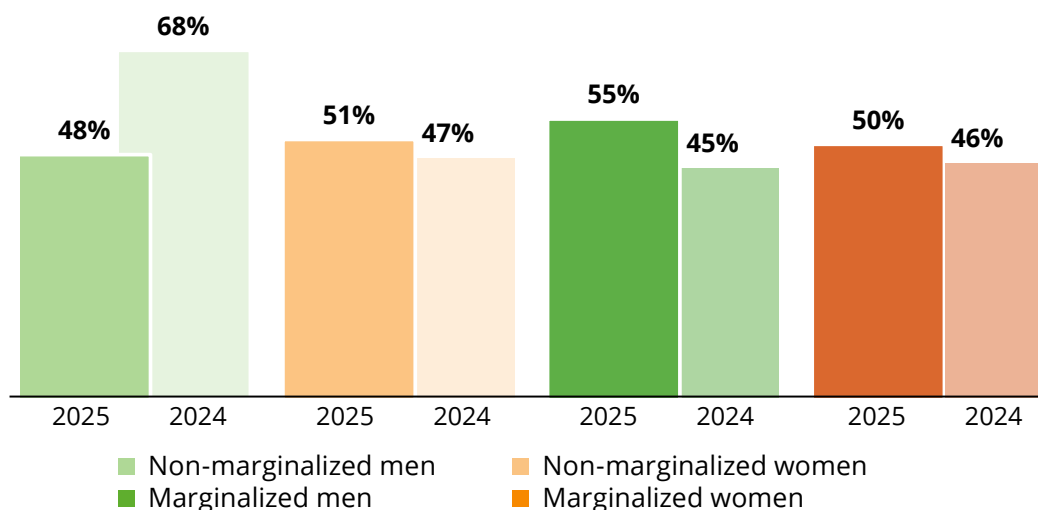
Legend:
- Non-marginalized men
- Non-marginalized women
- Marginalized men
- Marginalized women

Please rate the following regarding your organization: Age discrimination is tolerated in the workplace more than other forms of discrimination. (Data shown represents those who agree.)

Ageism, like other forms of bias, operates subtly yet pervasively. Even in organizations with well-diversified leadership 25% of marketers in these organizations agree that "my company avoids putting older employees in front of clients".

Employees of organizations with diverse senior leadership have less ageist attitudes
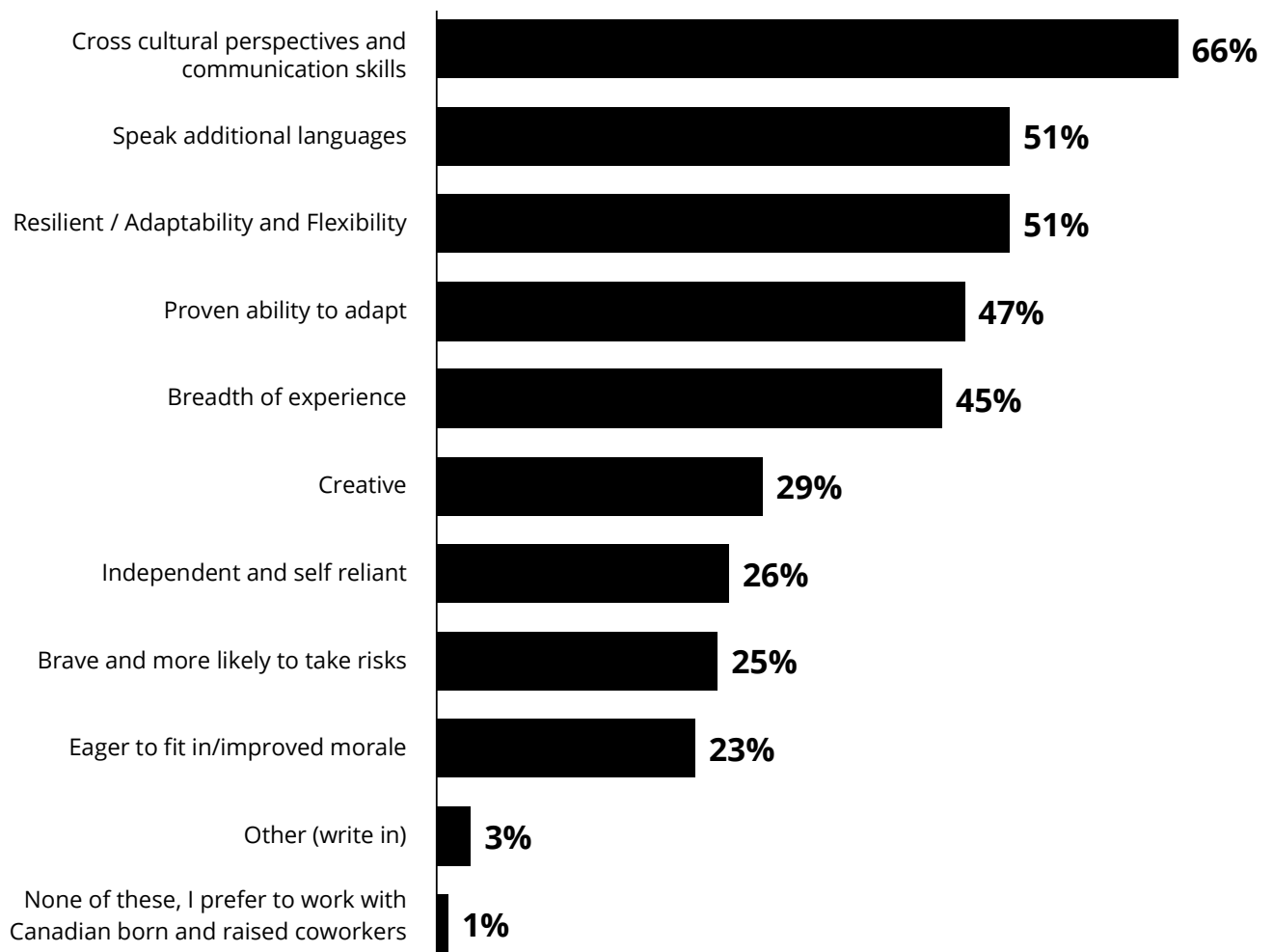

Diversity of senior leadership
- Well diversified
- Acting towards
- Aspiring
- Not diversified
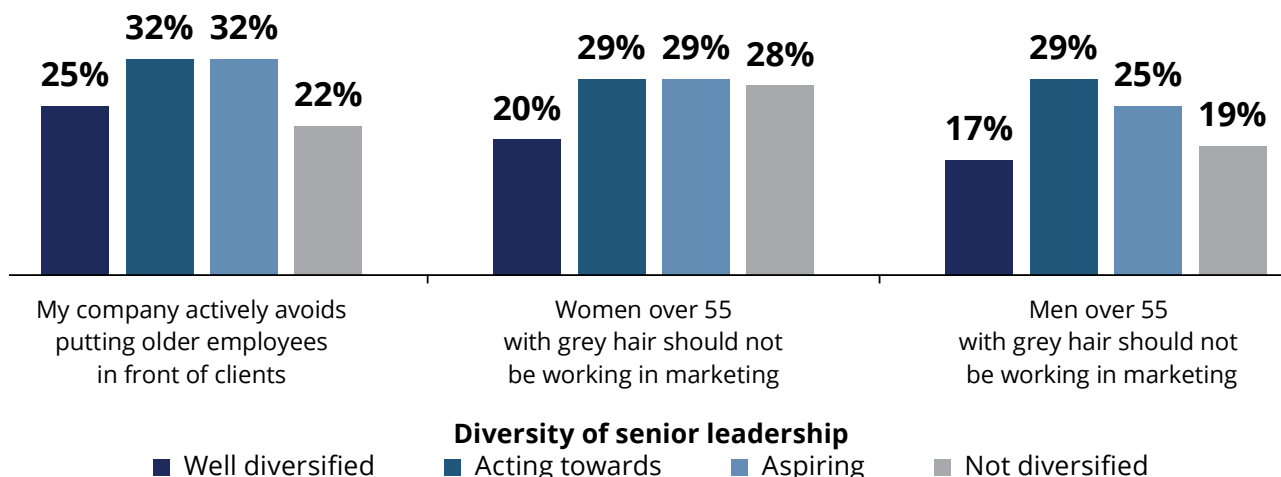
6 Newcomers are valued but opportunities can be elusive

Newcomers to Canada, those educated and with work experience in different countries, are widely recognized as valuable contributors to the marketing profession. Nearly all marketers (99%) agree that working with someone from a different cultural and educational background brings clear benefits. Even among those who oppose EDI initiatives, an overwhelming 92% cite advantages to working with internationally educated colleagues.

The top perceived benefits remain consistent year over year: cross-cultural perspectives and communication skills, multilingualism, and traits such as resilience, adaptability, and flexibility.

Marketers recognize many benefits of working with someone who was raised and educated in a different country/culture

Cross cultural perspectives and communication skills	66%
Speak additional languages	51%
Resilient / Adaptability and Flexibility	51%
Proven ability to adapt	47%
Breadth of experience	45%
Creative	29%
Independent and self reliant	26%
Brave and more likely to take risks	25%
Eager to fit in/improved morale	23%
Other (write in)	3%
None of these, I prefer to work with Canadian born and raised coworkers	1%

What are the benefits of working with someone who was raised and educated in a different country with different culture?
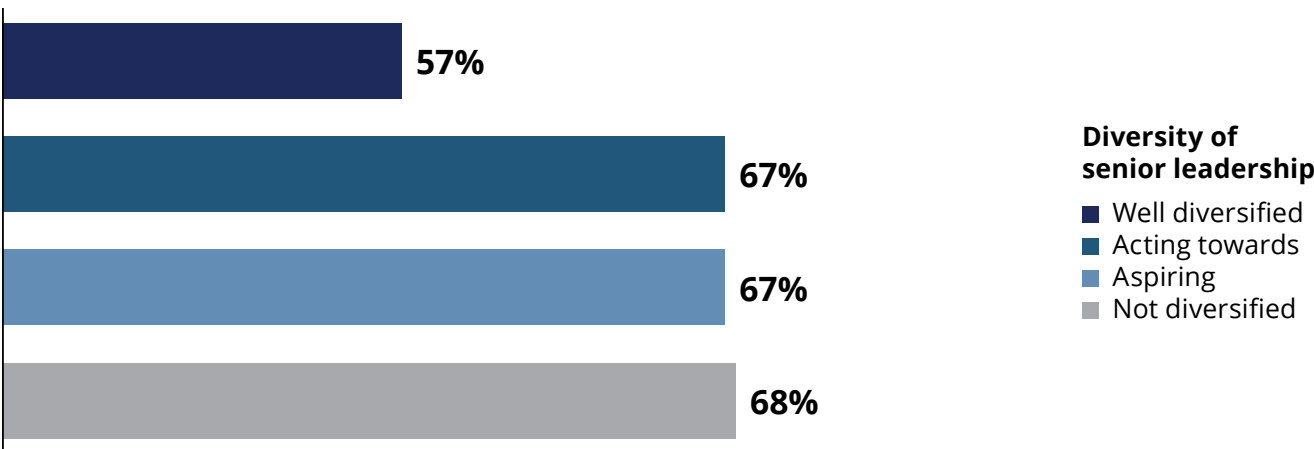
Despite this widespread recognition of the benefits, biases persist. Preference for Canadian experience and education has risen nine points (16%) over last year. This creates a systemic barrier for newcomers, often outweighing their qualifications, skills, and global insights. Even marketers who support EDI initiatives prefer Canadian experience, at a rate of 59%.

Even marketers who support EDI initiatives prefer Canadian experience and education when hiring employees

Applaud	55%
Appreciate	62%
Accept	70%
Neutral	75%
Dislike	80%
Reject	80%

Please rate this statement: Canadian experience/education is preferred.

Marketers in organizations with diverse leadership are much more likely to accept an employee who doesn't have Canadian experience or education

Diversity of senior leadership	
Well diversified	57%
Acting towards	67%
Aspiring	67%
Not diversified	68%

Please rate the following regarding your organization: Canadian experience/education is preferred. (Data shown represents those who agree.)

Set up for success

That said, perceptions of newcomer success are beginning to shift. The proportion of marketers who believe that employees who have been in Canada for five years or less are "set up for success" has risen to 62%, up 15 points from 47% in the previous year.

A robust majority (81%) of marketers do not feel disadvantaged by a workplace EDI policy. However, a notable minority (19%) believe EDI initiatives have not worked in their favour. This is consistent for marketers in marginalized, as well as non-marginalized communities.
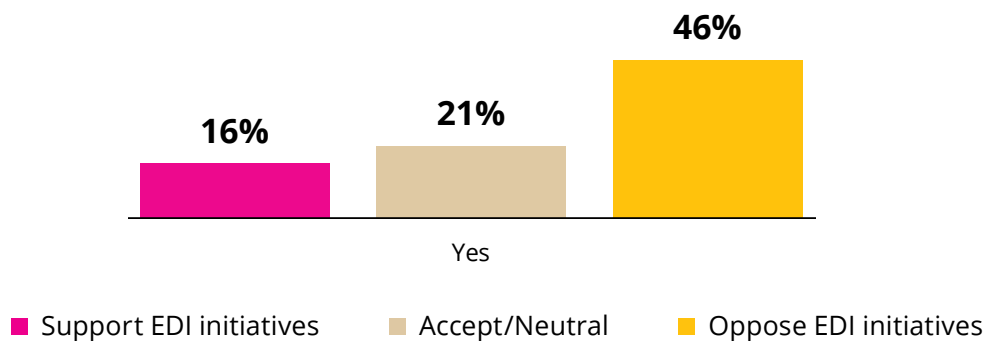
81% of marketers do not believe they have ever been disadvantaged by a workplace EDI policy
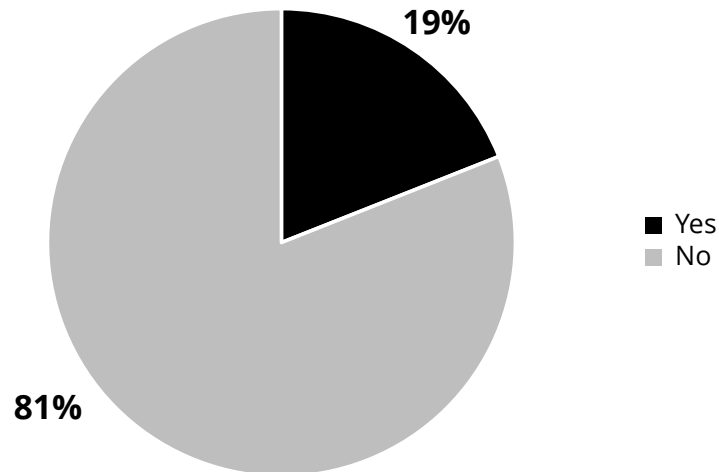
- Yes
- No

19%

81%

Do you believe you have ever been disadvantaged by a workplace equity, diversity and inclusion policy?

This sentiment is significantly more common in organizations with no diversity in senior leadership, and among people who oppose EDI initiatives. The perception that they are personally losing out could be impacting their support for EDI.

46% of those who oppose EDI personally feel that they have been disadvantaged by a workplace EDI policy

16%   21%   46%

Yes

- Support EDI initiatives
- Accept/Neutral
- Oppose EDI initiatives

Do you believe you have ever been disadvantaged by a workplace equity, diversity and inclusion policy?

Both Gen Z and Boomer-age respondents are more likely than other generations to report negative personal impacts from EDI policies.

Gen Z and Boomers are most likely to report negative personal impacts from EDI policies
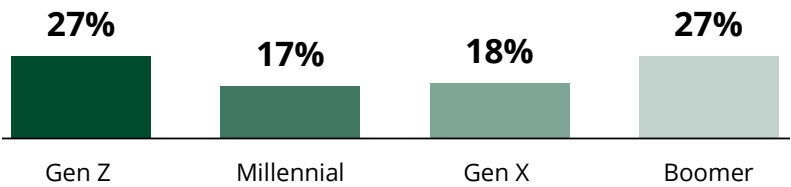
27% — Gen Z
17% — Millennial
18% — Gen X
27% — Boomer

Do you believe you have ever been disadvantaged by a workplace equity, diversity and inclusion policy?

Upbringing matters

Marketers who grew up in financially or socially challenging environments are twice as likely to feel disadvantaged compared to those who describe their upbringing as comfortable.

People from challenged childhoods are most likely to feel disadvantaged by EDI initiatives

16% — Comfortable
16% — Stable
20% — Basic
29% — Challenged

Legend:
- Comfortable
- Stable
- Basic
- Challenged

Perceived disadvantage by respondents from different background.

Surprisingly, newcomers are twice as likely than their Canadian-born peers to feel disadvantaged by an EDI policy.

Newcomers are twice as likely than Canadian-born peers to feel disadvantaged by an EDI initiative

16%
Canadian citizen

27%
Newcomer
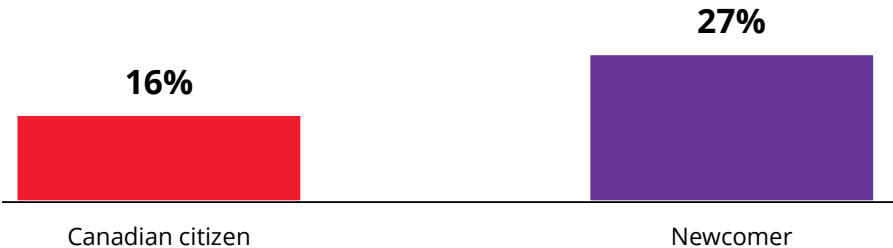
Perceived disadvantage by newcomers.

> "These initiatives are mostly just for face value. To make a real difference, I believe people should know how to communicate with other people from diverse backgrounds without offending them or without making them feel like they don't belong. We have initiatives where we get to know the variety in food, etc but that doesn't help in making the work environment better. If better communication was taught or multicultural awareness was made a priority, I think it would significantly improve work culture.

– Mid-level marketer, aspiring organization, marginalized background

8 Methodology

This research was conducted by Research + Knowledge = Insights (RKI) — an independent research company that adheres to the highest standards of practice. The survey was in the field between February 18 and March 28, 2025. Surveys were sent to marketers working in agencies, brands, not-for-profit organizations, service providers and independent consultancies.

Nearly 500 usable responses were collected and analyzed by RKI. CMA and its distribution partners did not receive individual responses. The survey has a margin of error of +/- 4% 19 times out of 20.

Appendix: Conversation Starters
Turning data into dialogue

To move EDI from analysis to action, organizations must create space for honest, informed conversations. Based on the 2025 findings, here are some key questions to help marketing leaders, teams, and partners reflect on progress, gaps, and opportunities for deeper inclusion.

1 What does inclusion look like in our day-to-day work culture? Are all employees— especially those people from marginalized groups—experiencing the same level of belonging, safety, and engagement?

2 How diverse is our leadership team—and how visible is that diversity? Does our senior leadership reflect the communities we serve and the talent we aim to attract? How are we ensuring that inclusion is embedded in decision-making at the top?

3 Where is opposition to EDI showing up in our organization? Have we addressed passive or active pushback in ways that are transparent, respectful, and constructive?

4 Do we understand the unique barriers faced by women from marginalized communities, newcomers, and older professionals? How are these groups represented and supported in hiring, advancement, and workplace culture?

5 How are we talking about polarization—and about how safe it is to express differing perspectives? Are we creating space for productive dialogue or are important conversations being avoided?

6 What systems are in place to monitor and respond to hate, bias, or discrimination? Are employees confident their concerns will be taken seriously and addressed with due process?

7 How are we preparing for the next five years of EDI? Do we have measurable goals, dedicated roles, and a strategy that goes beyond compliance?

These questions aren't about having perfect answers—they're about fostering accountability, curiosity and shared responsibility. As this year's report makes clear, sustained inclusion isn't just a leadership imperative. It's a conversation that needs to continue to foster healthy workplaces and reflect our audiences and customers.