CMA

PROGRESS, PRACTICE AND PERSISTENCE

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Canadian Marketing

2026 Research Report

FOREWORD

Firstly, I'd like to thank you for taking the time to read the Canadian Marketing Association's sixth EDI in marketing report. This report, titled Progress, Practice and Persistence, illustrates that the success of EDI efforts in our profession is not determined by one individual success or a neat completion date, but by how the work reshapes the way we as a marketing collective look at and impact the world around us, how our organizations and teams operate, and what it enables for our brands. The Canadian marketing profession continues to make meaningful progress, demonstrated most by the strong support and acceptance for EDI amongst marketers. It's also reflected increasingly in the characteristics of our most celebrated work. At our recent 2026 CMA Awards, nine Signature or Featured category gold awards were given for work that demonstrated inclusive teams, inputs and strategy including Kids Help Phone's "Feelings to Text" campaign, the winner of three gold awards, in addition to the Inclusive Marketing Award.

As we recognize the signals of progress, we also acknowledge that progress is uneven. Our data sheds light on a critical tension: discrimination, disengagement and perceptions of unequal treatment remain substantial. A workplace can become more inclusive overall while inequities in opportunity or daily treatment remain. Employees recognize the value of inclusion even as they observe the dilution of formal EDI initiatives and workplace ERGs. Organizations can maintain gains in leadership diversity while still having significant work ahead in diversifying the representation in their talent pipelines.



This is not a reason to dismiss our collective gains and the positive impact on our workplaces. Rather, this is an opportunity to take what we've learned and continue to implement an ongoing standard such that momentum endures and is visible, translating into a consistent, day-to-day reality for all marketers. Progress is a repeatable milestone for inclusion. Practice and persistence will make that inclusion tangible. And as marketers who recognize the value of inclusion to creativity and innovation, we've clearly got some ideas. Beyond casting, hiring protocol and training, we are asking how inclusion shows up in leadership choices, workplace dialogue, support for employee-led initiatives and more. EDI integration as an organizational priority is what will drive lasting change and give root to the benefits associated with inclusive workplaces that resonate so broadly across our industry.

Factors such as polarization and workplace design affect how we express our support for EDI individually, including a shift of the conversation to an increasingly practical and operational discussion. This report provides data on where we, as marketers, see the opportunity for that conversation to take us. As sentiments evolve and we engage in ongoing discussion and work, we must persist in our commitment to continued awareness, learning and the outcomes that matter most: opportunity, fairness, belonging, better decisions and stronger teams.

Progress matters. Practice makes it real. Persistence gives it the power to endure. This is the central story of this year's report and of the ongoing work. Thank you for being a part of it.



Barry Alexander
Chief Marketing & Diversity Officer,
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the members of the CMA's EDI Committee for their assistance in developing the survey and interpreting the results:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since 2020, the Canadian Marketing Association (CMA) has examined equity, diversity and inclusion across Canada's marketing profession as part of its broader commitment to address racism, discrimination and systemic barriers to inclusion. Now in its sixth year, the research continues to track where progress is being made, where inequities remain and how workplace practices are shaping the experiences of Canadian marketers.

The 2026 findings reflect both meaningful progress and persistent challenges. Progress is visible but uneven, shaped by everyday workplace practices and by the persistence needed to sustain gains while continuing to address challenges that have proved harder to shift.

There is clear progress in how marketers describe their workplaces. Almost 80 per cent now rate their workplace as excellent or very good at making employees feel included, up from 71 per cent in 2025 and the highest result recorded to date. The improvement is even larger among marginalized respondents, whose inclusion rating is 77 per cent, up from 67 per cent in 2025.

At the same time, those gains sit alongside a less encouraging set of findings. Reports of discrimination have increased, more employees say systems of discrimination affect their engagement at work, and a growing number feel they have to work harder than their peers to receive equal treatment. Younger and marginalized marketers are especially likely to report these experiences. The picture that emerges is not one in which progress has stalled, but one in which a stronger overall sense of inclusion has yet to translate into equitable experiences for everyone.

Leadership remains one of the clearest areas where workplace practice matters. For the sixth consecutive year, greater diversity in senior leadership is associated with more favourable outcomes. Almost all (94 per cent) of respondents in organizations with well-diversified leadership rate their workplace highly on inclusion, compared with 46 per cent where senior leadership is not diversified. Organizations with well-diversified leadership report lower levels of discrimination, less disengagement related to discrimination, and less preventable employee loss.

The findings also show that employees are looking for inclusion to be reflected in how organizations operate day by day. Respondents point to fair pay, equitable access to opportunities, accountable leadership, benefits that reflect diverse needs and flexible work as areas where organizations can make a difference. Inclusion is being understood more broadly, with workload, career advancement, well-being, polarization, and changing needs across a working life all shaping the employee experience.

Persistence becomes particularly important as attitudes and workplace pressures evolve. Active support for EDI initiatives stands at 57 per cent, down from 66 per cent in 2025, while acceptance stands at 25 per cent, up from 15 per cent, leaving the combined proportion who support or accept EDI essentially unchanged at 82 per cent. Opposition remains low, and 98 per cent of marketers continue to identify at least one benefit of a fully inclusive workplace.



KEY FINDINGS

1. Inclusion is improving, but progress remains uneven.

There is real progress in how marketers experience inclusion at work. Seventy-nine per cent now rate their workplace as excellent or very good at making employees feel included, up eight points from 2025. However, reports of discrimination, disengagement and unequal treatment are all higher than in 2025, showing that progress is not being experienced equally.

2. Leadership diversity remains a powerful marker.

For the sixth year, the research shows a consistent relationship between diverse senior leadership and stronger workplace outcomes. Where leadership is well-diversified, employees are more likely to feel included and less likely to report discrimination, disengagement and preventable staff loss. While the proportion of organizations with well-diversified senior leadership remains at 28 per cent, unchanged from 2025, the broader leadership picture continues to evolve, with fewer organizations in the least-diversified category and more describing their leadership as aspiring to greater diversity.

3. Overall engagement with EDI remains steady, while the balance between support and acceptance shifts.

Four in five marketers continue to either support or accept EDI initiatives, with the combined proportion remaining essentially unchanged at 82 per cent, compared with 81 per cent in 2025. Within that overall level of engagement, active support declined from 66 per cent to 57 per cent, while acceptance increased from 15 per cent to 25 per cent. Opposition remains low at 4 per cent, and almost all marketers continue to see value in a fully inclusive workplace.

4. Marketers want practical action.

When asked what would make the biggest difference, respondents point to concrete workplace practices: fair pay, equitable access to opportunity, accountable leadership, benefits that reflect diverse needs, and flexible work. Almost all (91 per cent) identify at least one EDI initiative or policy that could improve their workplace. Many also identify simple leadership behaviours, such as modelling inclusion and ensuring people feel heard, as meaningful ways to improve the employee experience.

5. Inclusion extends beyond representation.

Flexibility, workload, career opportunities, well-being, polarization and different life-stage needs all play a role in how inclusion is experienced at work. Most respondents (91 per cent) say return-to-workplace policies disadvantage at least one group of employees, while 81 per cent say polarization has affected their work life. Preventable employee loss remains high at 67 per cent, with limited career advancement, increased workload without additional pay and workload- or stress-related mental-health challenges continuing to rank as the three leading reasons employees leave.

6. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) can add value, but they need the right support.

Employee Resource Groups are widely seen as contributing to inclusion, workplace culture, networking and career development. Among respondents whose organizations have ERGs, 99 per cent identify at least one positive contribution. However, respondents flag unease about additional workload, questions about business value and concerns about how participation is perceived. Their impact depends not only on whether they exist, but on how well they are supported and integrated into the organization.

INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth annual survey conducted by the Canadian Marketing Association in partnership with *strategy* to examine the state of EDI within the marketing profession in Canada. The research is designed to better understand the barriers faced by members of BIPOC and other systemically marginalized communities, how those barriers are experienced in the workplace, and where there are opportunities to build more supportive and inclusive environments.

The 2026 survey took place amid changing conversations around EDI. This year's research examines both how marketers experience inclusion at work and the workplace practices and conditions that accompany those experiences, including leadership, access to opportunity, flexibility, workload, polarization, employee resource groups and changing needs across a working life. The 2026 findings point to three recurring themes: progress, practice and persistence.

PROGRESS

Where is inclusion improving, and where do gaps remain?

PRACTICE

How is inclusion reflected in everyday policies, behaviours and decisions?

PERSISTENCE

How do organizations sustain gains and address challenges that remain?



These themes are closely connected. Progress without practice can be fragile, and practice without persistence can fade when priorities shift. Persistence keeps the work moving, but without a clear view of progress, it can become activity without direction.

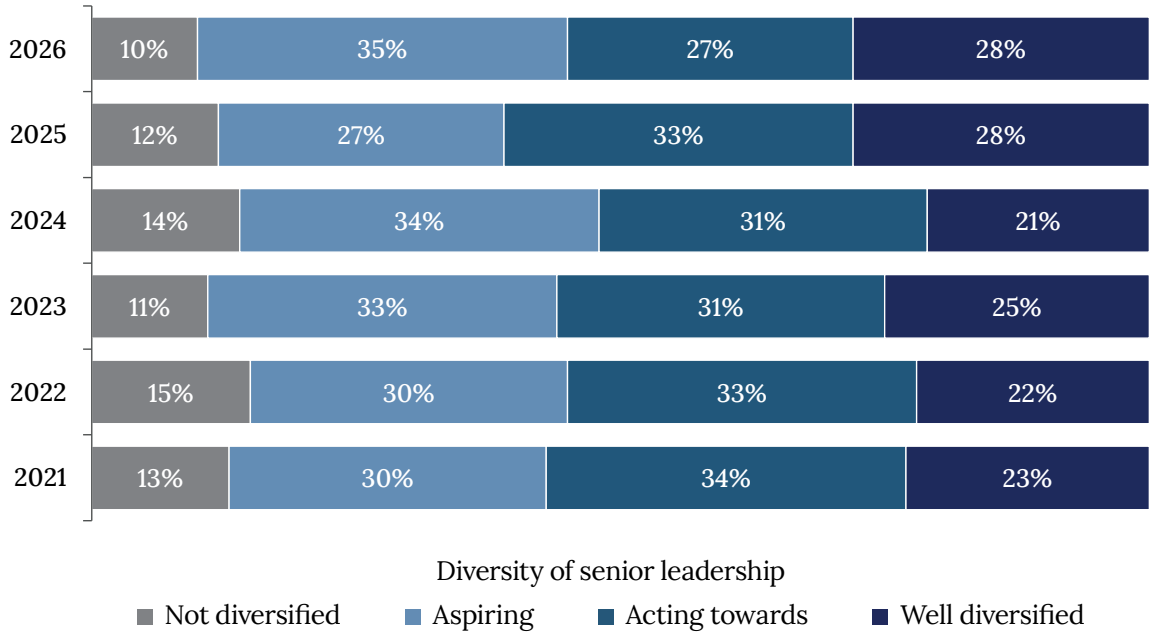
KEY METRIC: DIVERSITY OF SENIOR LEADERSHIP

Across six years of research, the findings have consistently shown a relationship between greater senior leadership diversity and more favourable workplace outcomes, including stronger inclusion and higher employee engagement. This pattern continues to stand out in 2026, reinforcing the importance of leadership representation in shaping employees' experiences at work.

Each year, participants are asked to describe the diversity of their organization's senior leadership across dimensions such as age, gender, ethnicity, race, religion, sexual orientation, physical ability, cultural background and country of origin. Responses fall into four categories, which provide an important basis for comparing workplace experiences throughout 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

The 2026 findings show continued progress at the earlier stages of the senior leadership diversity continuum. The proportion of respondents describing their senior leadership as not diversified declined from 12 per cent in 2025 to 10 per cent in 2026, while the share describing leadership as aspiring to greater diversity increased from 27 per cent to 35 per cent. At the more advanced end of the continuum, 28 per cent describe their leadership as well-diversified, unchanged from 2025, while the proportion in the "acting towards" category declined from 33 per cent to 27 per cent. Taken together, the results show fewer organizations at the least-diversified stage and more demonstrating an intention to diversify, even as progress into the more advanced stages remains uneven.



DETAILED FINDINGS

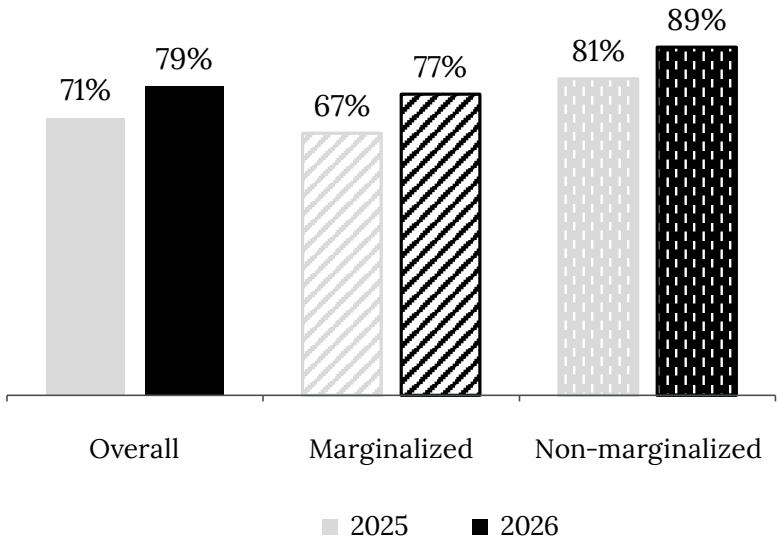
1. Progress continues, though unevenly

Progress in 2026 is most evident in how marketers describe their overall sense of inclusion at work. At the same time, other measures show that those gains are not yet reflected consistently across the employee experience. Looking at both the improvements and the areas where progress remains limited provides a fuller picture of how the profession is changing.

Inclusion is improving, but inequities persist

The clearest positive signal in this year's research is the rise in overall workplace inclusion. Almost 8 in 10 marketers (79 per cent) rate their workplace as excellent or very good at making employees feel included, up from 71 per cent in 2025. It is the highest result to date.

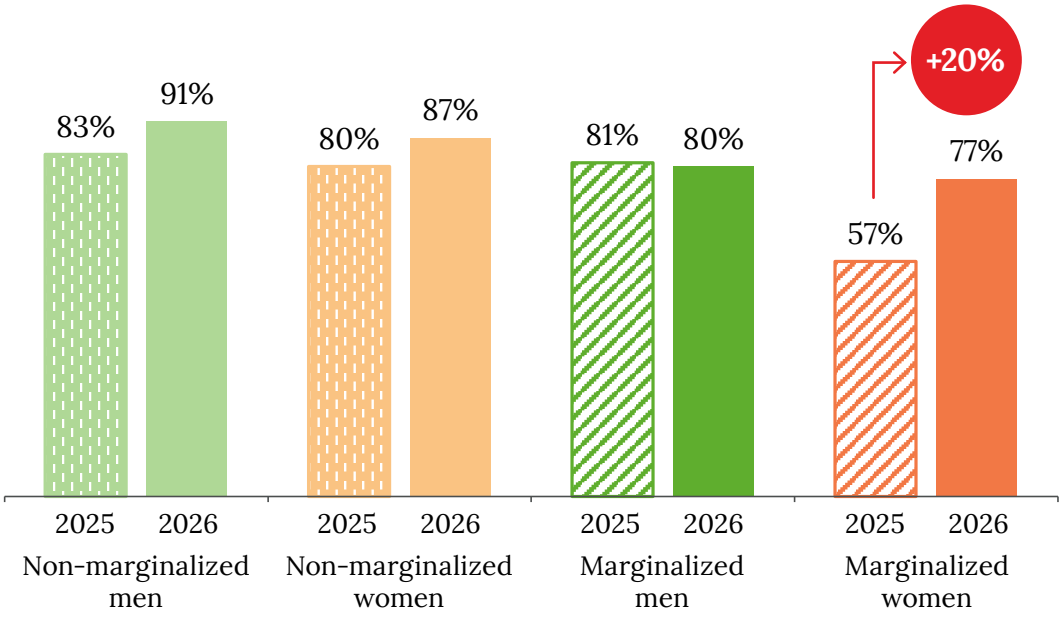
Workplace inclusion improved in 2026, with the largest gain among marginalized respondents



Q: How well does your current workplace make employees feel included?

There is also meaningful improvement among marginalized respondents, whose inclusion rating rose 10 points from 67 per cent to 77 per cent. The gap with non-marginalized respondents narrowed from 14 points in 2025 to 12 points in 2026, although non-marginalized respondents continue to report a higher inclusion rating, at 89 per cent.

Marginalized women reported substantially higher levels of workplace inclusion in 2026



Q: How well does your current workplace make employees feel included?

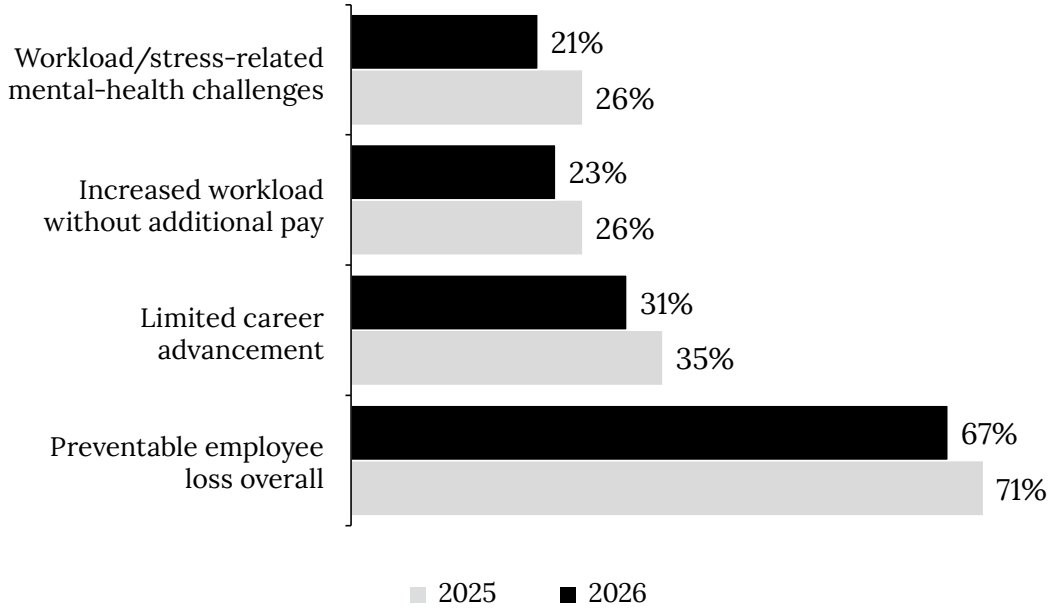
The improvement is broad rather than concentrated in a single group. Workplace inclusion ratings increased across every generation measured, with the largest gain among Gen X, rising 15 points from 61 per cent to 76 per cent. The change is especially notable among marginalized women, whose inclusion rating rose 20 points from 57 per cent to 77 per cent. Non-marginalized women and men also report higher levels of inclusion than in 2025.

Preventable employee loss eases

Preventable employee loss shows a more favourable trend in 2026, standing at 67 per cent, down from 71 per cent in 2025. The decline is evident across every level of senior leadership diversity and is particularly pronounced among organizations with well-diversified leadership, where preventable loss stands at 49 per cent, down from 57 per cent.

The three leading reasons for preventable employee loss are also cited less often than in 2025. Reports of employees leaving because of limited career advancement stand at 31 per cent, down from 35 per cent in 2025. Increased workload without additional pay stands at 23 per cent, down from 26 per cent, and workload- or stress-related mental-health challenges stand at 21 per cent, down from 26 per cent. While preventable employee loss remains high overall, the decline from 71 per cent to 67 per cent marks a clear improvement from 2025.

Preventable employee loss and its leading causes declined in 2026



Q: As far as you know, have employees left your organization for any of the following reasons over the past 12 months?

Progress is uneven across key measures

The gains in inclusion and retention are encouraging, although other measures show less favourable trends. A majority (61 per cent) of marketers say they have witnessed at least one form of discrimination in the past year, up from 55 per cent in 2025. More than half (51 per cent) report being less engaged at work at least sometimes because of systems of discrimination, compared with 46 per cent last year. Nearly six in 10 (59 per cent) feel they have to work harder than their peers to be treated equally, up from 52 per cent.

These findings show why progress cannot be assessed through a single measure. Marketers are more likely than last year to rate their workplaces highly on inclusion, while reports of discrimination, disengagement and unequal treatment have also risen. The gains in inclusion are meaningful, but they are not mirrored across every measure of the employee experience.

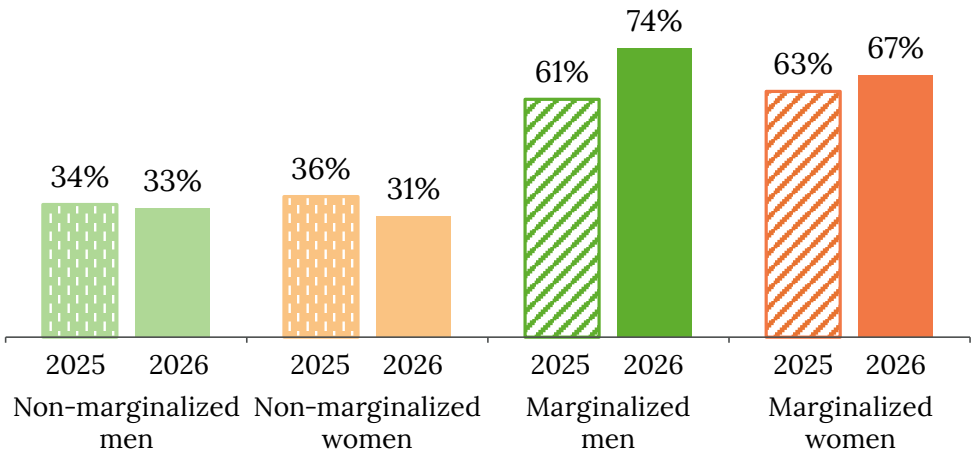
Measure	2025	2026	Change
Workplace inclusion: excellent/very good	71%	79%	+8 pts
Marginalized respondents: workplace inclusion	67%	77%	+10 pts
Witnessed discrimination	55%	61%	+6 pts
Less engaged due to systems of discrimination	46%	51%	+5 pts
Feel they must work harder for equal treatment	52%	59%	+7 pts

Note: Measures shown reflect responses to questions on workplace inclusion, witnessed discrimination, disengagement due to systems of discrimination, and feeling they must work harder than their peers to be treated equally.

Progress remains uneven for younger and marginalized marketers

The overall numbers mask large differences between groups. Most (70 per cent) of marginalized respondents report witnessing discrimination, compared with 32 per cent of non-marginalized respondents. More than half (57 per cent) say systems of discrimination make them less engaged at work, compared with 39 per cent of non-marginalized respondents.

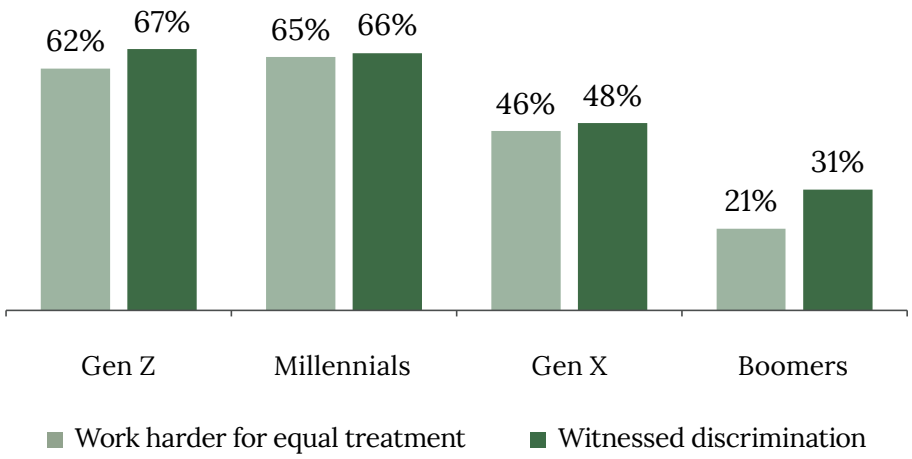
Marginalized marketers remain more likely to report witnessing discrimination



Q: In the past 12 months have you seen any of the following at your organization (at least some form of discrimination)?

Age differences are similarly evident. Majorities of Gen Z respondents (62 per cent) and Millennials (65 per cent) say they have to work harder than their peers to receive equal treatment, compared with 21 per cent of Boomers. Two-thirds of Gen Z and Millennial respondents report seeing discrimination, compared with 31 per cent of Boomers.

Younger marketers report greater experiences of workplace inequity



Q: I feel like I have to work harder than my peers to be treated equally/In the past 12 months, have you seen any of the following at your organization (at least some form of discrimination)?

The most frequently cited forms of discrimination include biased hiring and promotion practices, pay inequity, and withholding important work information or opportunities from specific groups. These are not peripheral issues. They are tied directly to how careers develop and how employees judge whether a workplace is fair.

2. Best practices continue to support stronger workplace outcomes

How inclusion shows up in the everyday workplace

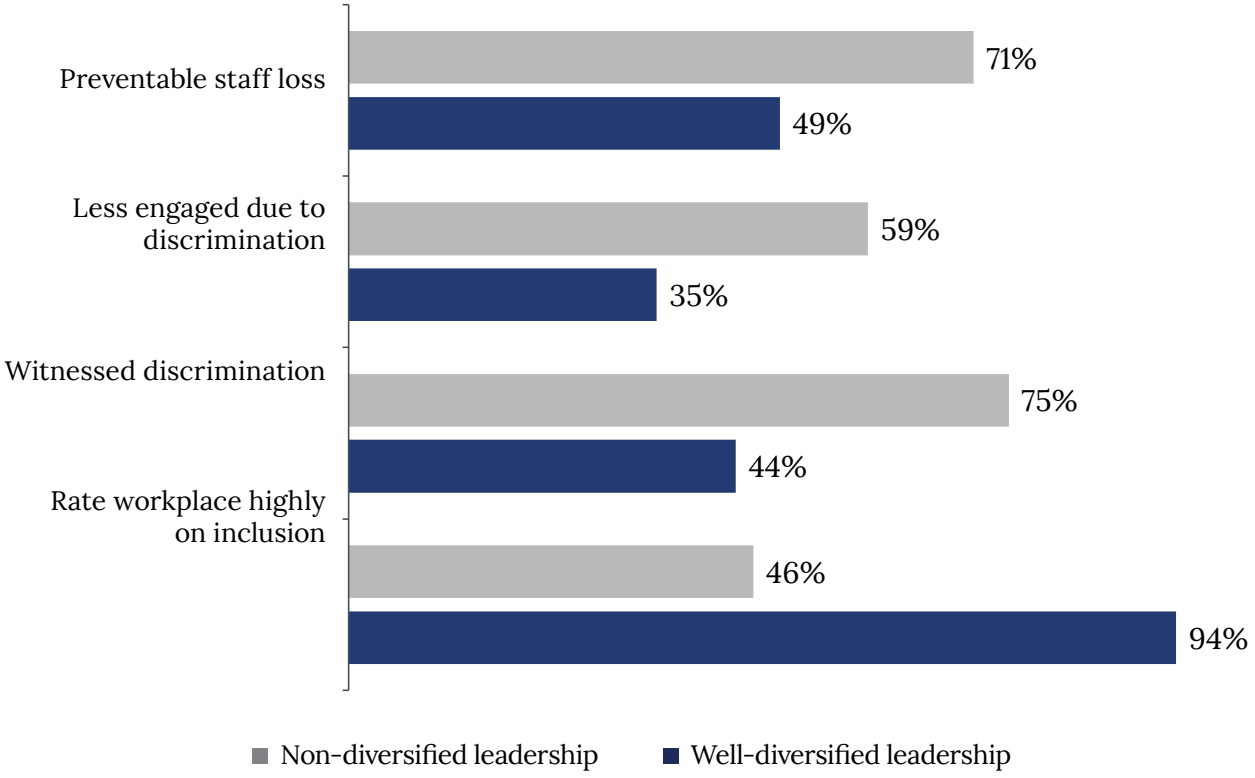
If progress tells us where the profession is moving, practice tells us what employees see when they decide whether inclusion is real. The 2026 results repeatedly bring the conversation back to everyday organizational choices: who leads, how work and opportunity are distributed, how flexible policies are applied, whether employees feel heard and how inclusion efforts are resourced.

Leadership diversity remains a key metric

As demonstrated in the Key Metric section, leadership diversity remains one of the strongest and most consistent indicators of workplace inclusion across the research. The 2026 findings also show continued movement within the leadership diversity continuum, even as the proportion of organizations with well-diversified senior leadership remains unchanged.

The importance of leadership diversity becomes particularly clear when looking at workplace outcomes. Respondents in organizations with well-diversified senior leadership are substantially more likely to rate their workplace highly on inclusion and less likely to report discrimination, disengagement related to discrimination and preventable employee loss.

Well-diversified leadership is associated with stronger workplace outcomes



Note: Measures shown reflect responses to questions on workplace inclusion, witnessed discrimination, disengagement due to systems of discrimination, and preventable employee loss.

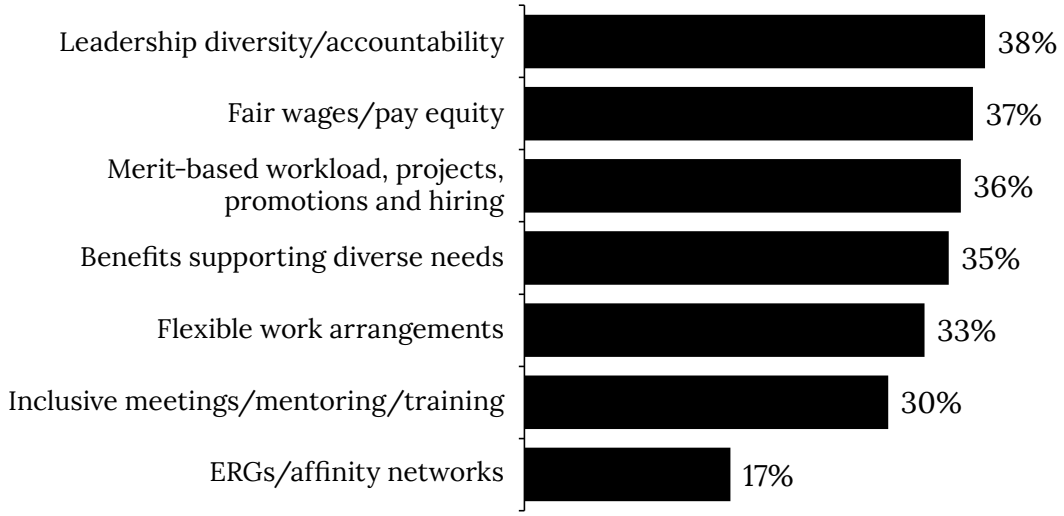
This is the sixth consecutive year in which the research has shown a consistent relationship between greater leadership diversity and more favourable inclusion and retention outcomes.

Employees want practical action — not only formal commitments

Almost all marketers (91 per cent) identify at least one EDI policy or initiative that could improve their workplace.

Leadership diversity and accountability rank first overall, cited by 38 per cent of respondents, followed closely by fair wages and pay equity for women at 37 per cent. More than a third of respondents point to merit-based decisions, expanded benefits and flexible work as priorities for improving inclusion.

Marketers favour practical changes to leadership, pay and opportunity



Q: Which of the following EDI initiatives/policies would cause the greatest improvements if implemented at your organization?

Younger respondents are most likely to identify opportunities for improvement. Gen Z respondents are the most likely to identify at least one improvement (96 per cent), compared with 93 per cent of Millennials, 88 per cent of Gen X and 62 per cent of Boomers.

Inclusion priorities differ considerably by generation

EDI initiative	Gen Z	Millennials	Gen X	Boomers
Leadership diversity/accountability	#2	#1	#1	#4
Fair wages/pay equity	#2	#1	#2	#4
Merit-based workload, projects, promotions and hiring	#5	#4	#3	#1
Benefits supporting diverse needs	#1	#3	#5	#4
Flexible work arrangements	#2	#6	#3	#2
Inclusive meetings/mentoring/training	#7	#5	#5	#4
ERGs/affinity networks	#6	#7	#8	#8

Darker green = higher relative priority (rank #1).

Q: Which of the following EDI initiatives/policies would cause the greatest improvements if implemented at your organization?

Priorities vary by age group. Expanding benefits is the top-ranked improvement among Gen Z respondents. Merit-based decisions rank first among Boomers. Flexible arrangements are especially important to non-marginalized respondents and men.

Workplace improvement priorities by marginalization status

Non-marginalized		Marginalized	
#1	Flexible work	#1	Leadership diversity/ accountability
#2	Merit-based decisions	#2	Fair wages/pay equity
#3	Fair wages/pay equity	#3	Benefits supporting diverse needs
#4	Benefits supporting diverse needs	#4	Merit-based decisions
#5	Leadership diversity/ accountability	#5	Flexible work

Note: Rank #1 = highest priority. Rankings are shown by marginalization status.

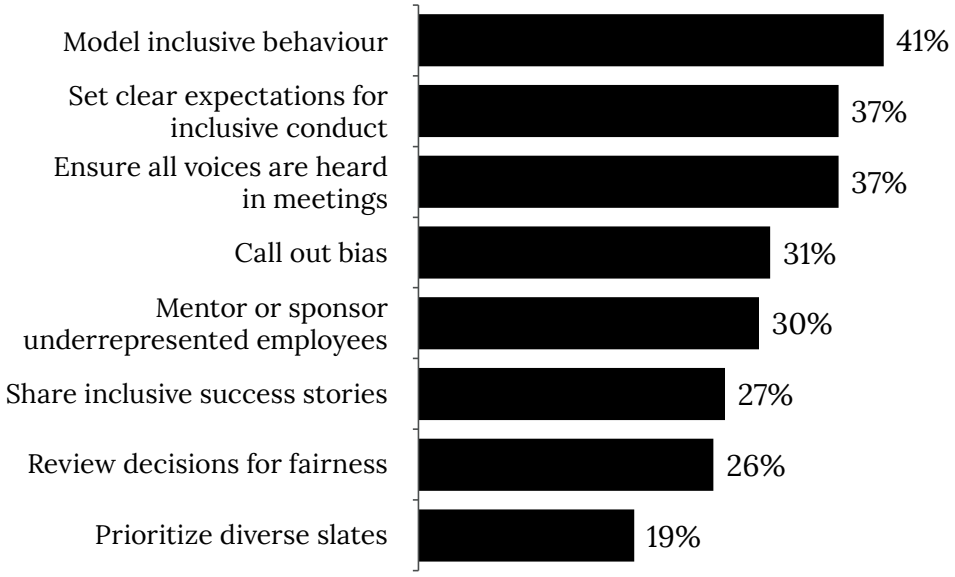
Q: Which of the following EDI initiatives/policies would cause the greatest improvements if implemented at your organization?

The pattern is a reminder that inclusion does not have one universal expression.

Leadership does not need a new budget to make a difference

That emphasis on practice carries through when marketers are asked what senior leaders can do with little or no additional spending. Almost all (93 per cent) identify at least one action from senior leaders that would matter to them. The leading responses are modelling inclusive behaviour (41 per cent), setting clear expectations for inclusive conduct (37 per cent) and ensuring all voices are heard in meetings (37 per cent). Calling out bias in conversations and meetings, mentoring or sponsoring underrepresented employees, and reviewing team decisions for fairness were also cited by more than a quarter of respondents.

Marketers identify practical actions leaders can take without additional budget



Q: Which of the following low or no budget EDI actions from senior leadership would matter most to you?

Notably, even respondents who are personally neutral or opposed to EDI can identify actions they would like leaders to take. That reinforces a distinction: attitudes toward the label or formal initiative do not always map neatly onto expectations for fair and inclusive workplace behaviour.

> "We already do most of these, but need to remind each other to ensure they are consistently met."
>
> *— Senior-level marketer, organization acting towards greater leadership diversity, non-marginalized background*

Inclusion is shaped by how work is designed

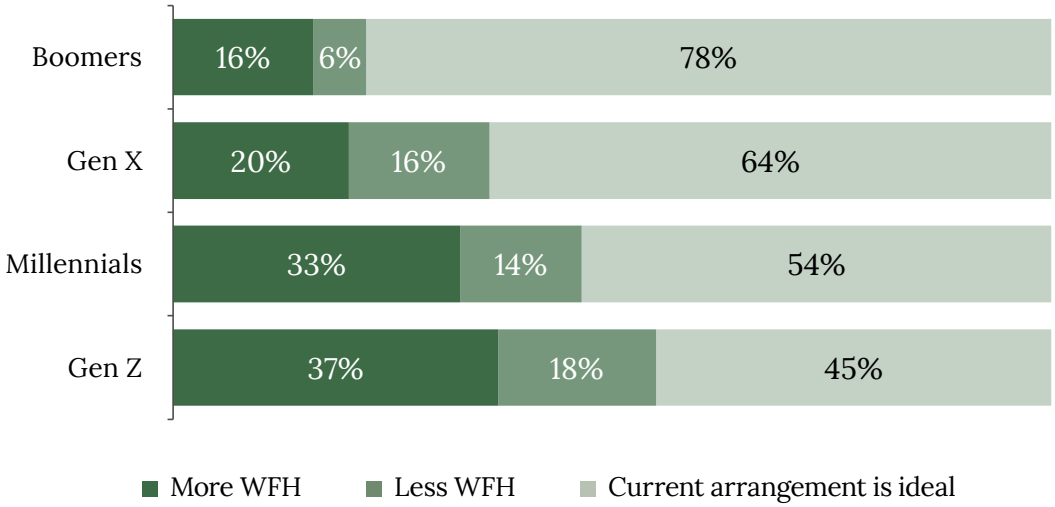
The 2026 results broaden the inclusion conversation beyond representation. Respondents highlight the importance of workplace structures that accommodate different circumstances and enable employees to do their best work.

Flexibility is widely available — but needs are not uniform

A strong majority (89 per cent) of marketers report having at least some ability to work from home. For 56 per cent, the current arrangement is ideal. Thirty per cent would prefer to work from home more, while 14 per cent would prefer less remote work.

The differences become more apparent across groups. Thirty-four per cent of marginalized respondents would prefer more time working from home, compared with 19 per cent of non-marginalized respondents. Gen Z and Millennials are also more likely than Boomers to want to work from home more than they currently do.

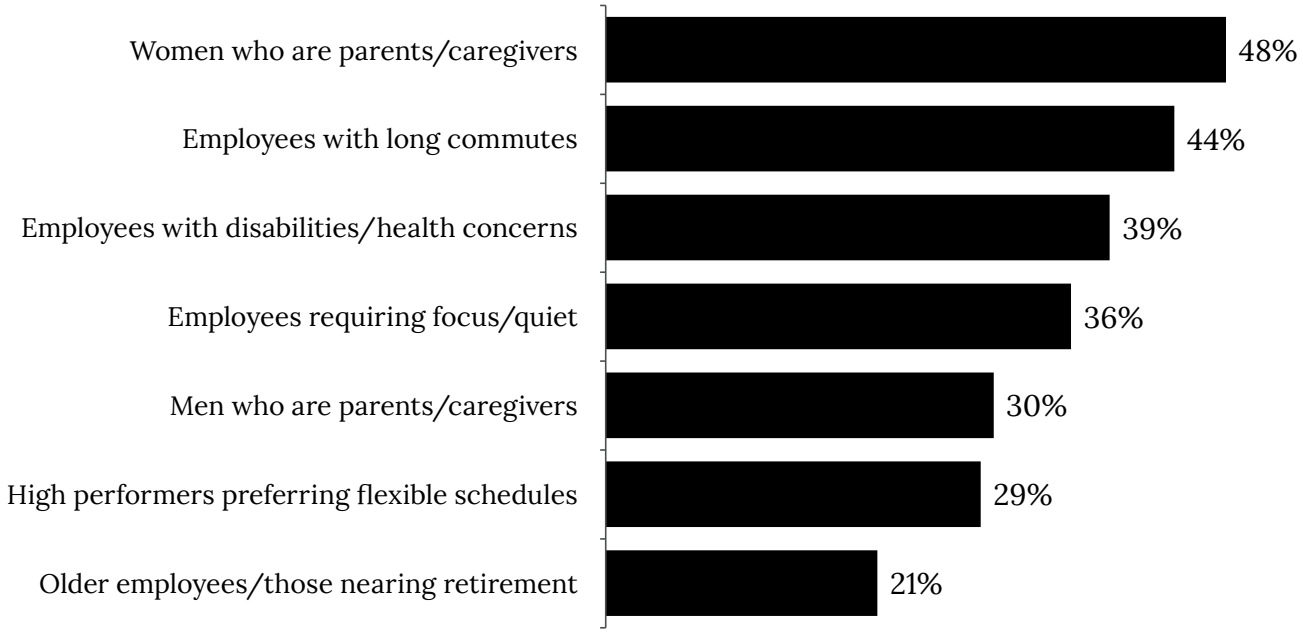
Workplace flexibility preferences by generation



Q: What would be your preference (working arrangements)?

Return-to-workplace policies bring those differences into sharper focus. A strong majority (91 per cent) believe at least one group is disadvantaged by policies requiring employees to work in the office. That rises to 95 per cent among marginalized respondents, compared with 78 per cent of those from non-marginalized communities. Women who are parents or caregivers are cited most often (48 per cent), followed by employees with long commutes (44 per cent) and those with disabilities or health concerns (39 per cent).

Who is disadvantaged by return-to-workplace policies



Q: Who do you feel are most disadvantaged by return to workplace policies?

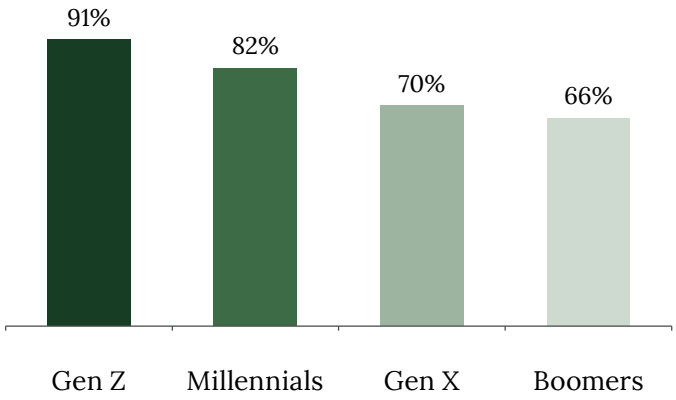
> "This is primarily because of a lengthy commute. In-office interactions are great, but a two-hour train ride each way is far from ideal to do three days a week."
>
> *— Senior-level marketer, organization acting towards greater leadership diversity, marginalized background*

The findings do not suggest that one work model will affect all employees in the same way. Instead, they show that the impact of the same policy can vary considerably depending on an employee's circumstances.

Polarization is affecting more marketers

A large majority (81 per cent) of marketers say polarization has affected them at work, up from 76 per cent in 2025 and 73 per cent in 2024. The impact is particularly pronounced among younger and marginalized respondents.

Younger marketers are more likely to feel the effects of workplace polarization



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

Self-censorship remains the most common response: 35 per cent say they are less likely to discuss anything they consider controversial. That figure has barely changed from 36 per cent last year, even as the overall proportion of marketers affected by polarization continues to grow.

Self-censorship remains the most common effect of workplace polarization



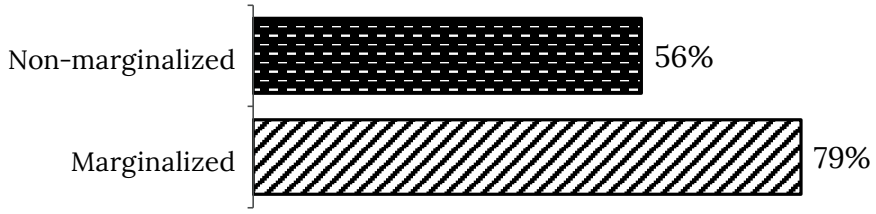
Q: Has the rise of polarization affected your work life in terms of any of the following?

> "Performance across the board (and creativity) has suffered as we all temper our conversations and are unwilling to speak opinions."
>
> *— C-suite executive, well-diversified organization, marginalized background*

Ageism remains highly visible in the workplace

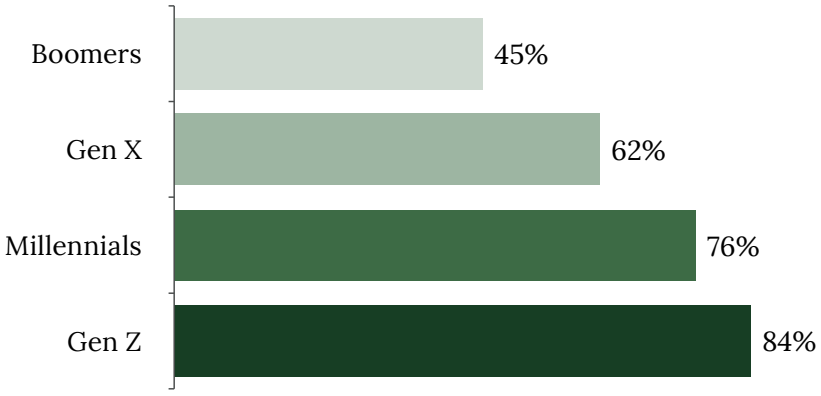
Almost three-quarters (73 per cent) of marketers report seeing at least one example of ageism at work. Reported exposure is higher among marginalized respondents (79 per cent vs. 56 per cent) and is especially high among Gen Z (84 per cent) and Millennials (76 per cent).

Ageism by marginalization status



Q: Have you seen any of the following related to ageism at your organization?

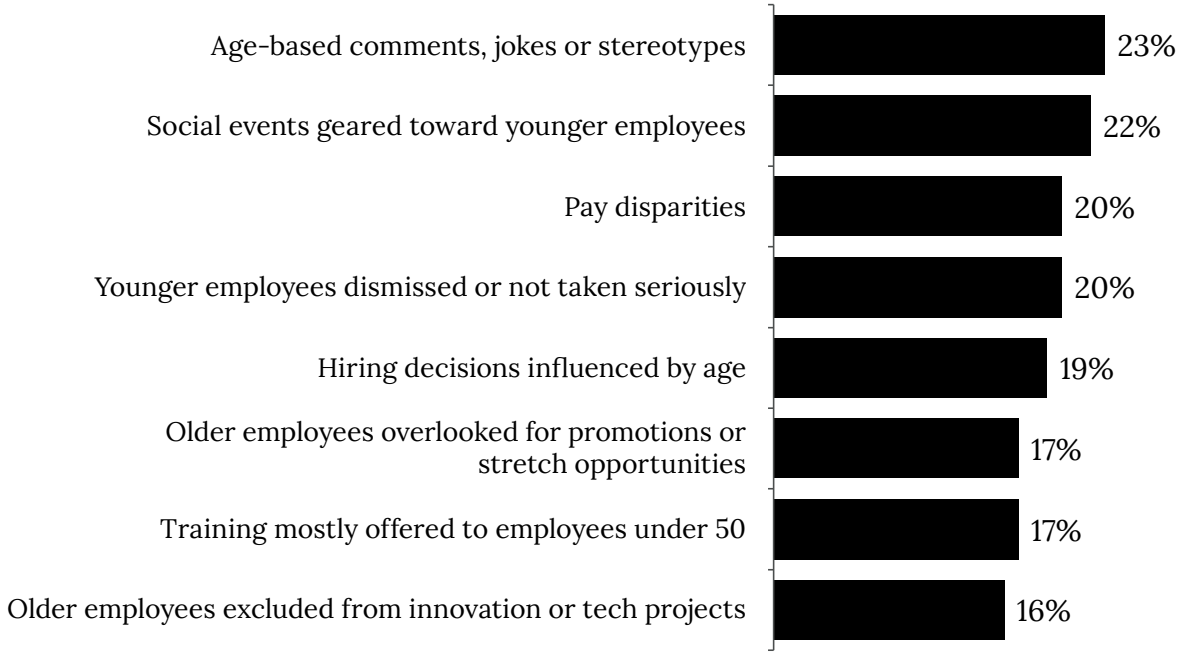
Younger marketers are more likely to report witnessing ageism



Q: Have you seen any of the following related to ageism at your organization?

The most commonly cited examples include age-based comments, jokes or stereotypes (23 per cent), and social activities geared toward younger employees (22 per cent). One in five respondents point to pay disparities or younger employees being dismissed as inexperienced or not taken seriously (20 per cent). Age also factors into hiring decisions (19 per cent), while 17 per cent say older employees are overlooked for promotions or stretch opportunities.

Most commonly observed examples of ageism



Q: Have you seen any of the following related to ageism at your organization?

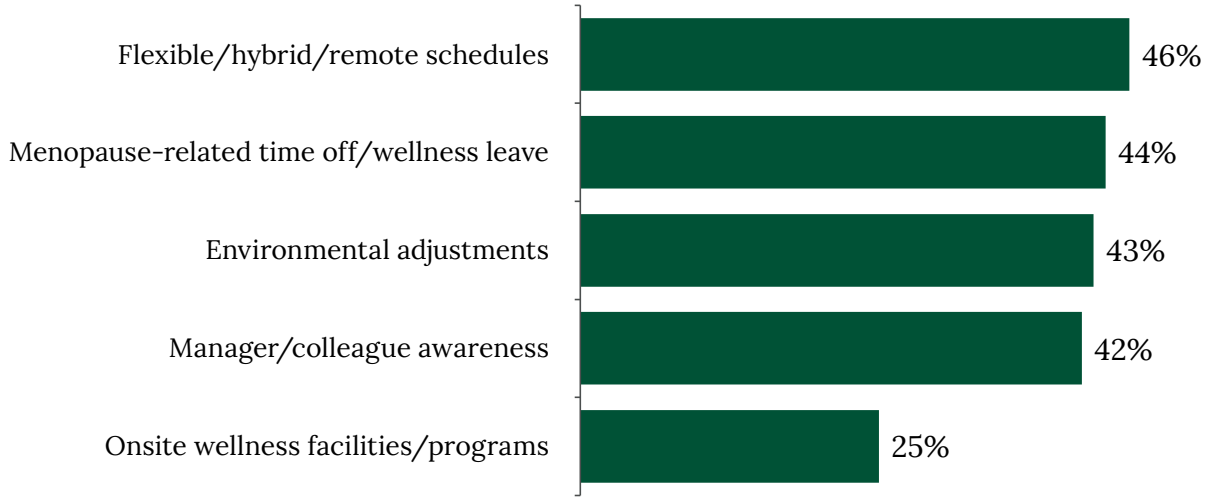
> "Younger/More junior people are not included in major meetings as they don't have 'speaking roles'. Yet no one takes the time to debrief them on what happened in the meeting and the next steps."
>
> *— Senior-level marketer, well-diversified organization, marginalized background*

Life-stage inclusion: menopause support is still limited

Age is only one way that inclusion needs can shift over the course of a career. The 2026 research also examines menopause. Among women aged 40 and older for whom the question applied, 16 per cent say menopause-related symptoms interfere with their ability to work comfortably or productively at least sometimes. Workplace support, however, remains limited. More than half (56 per cent) describe their organization as providing no or minimal support, while another 16 per cent do not know whether support is available.

The accommodations respondents identify as most helpful are flexible schedules or hybrid and remote work (46 per cent), menopause-related time off or wellness leave (44 per cent), environmental adjustments (43 per cent) and greater awareness among managers and colleagues (42 per cent).

Women 40+ point to practical workplace supports for menopause



Base: women aged 40+ (n=103)

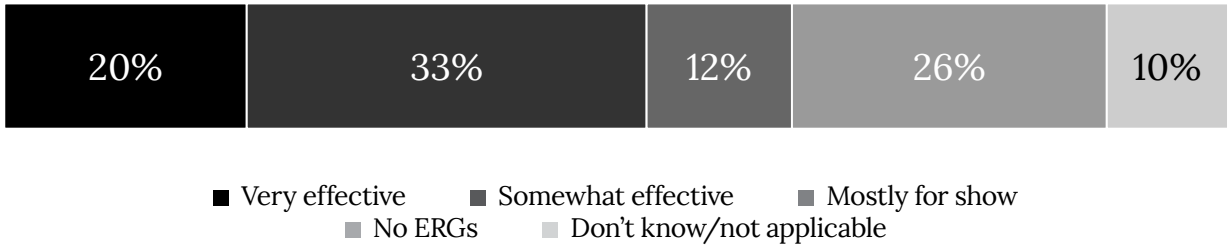
Q: Which of the following do you feel would be most helpful for employees going through menopause? RANK ORDER

Menopause is one example of how inclusion needs can shift over the course of a career. The findings reinforce a broader point in the research: workplace experiences are shaped not only by who employees are, but also by the circumstances and life stages they move through.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs): positive contributions, real trade-offs

Nearly two-thirds of respondents (64 per cent) say their organization has ERGs. Twenty per cent describe them as very effective at driving real change, 33 per cent say they are somewhat effective, and 12 per cent say they are mostly for show.

How respondents describe ERGs in their organizations



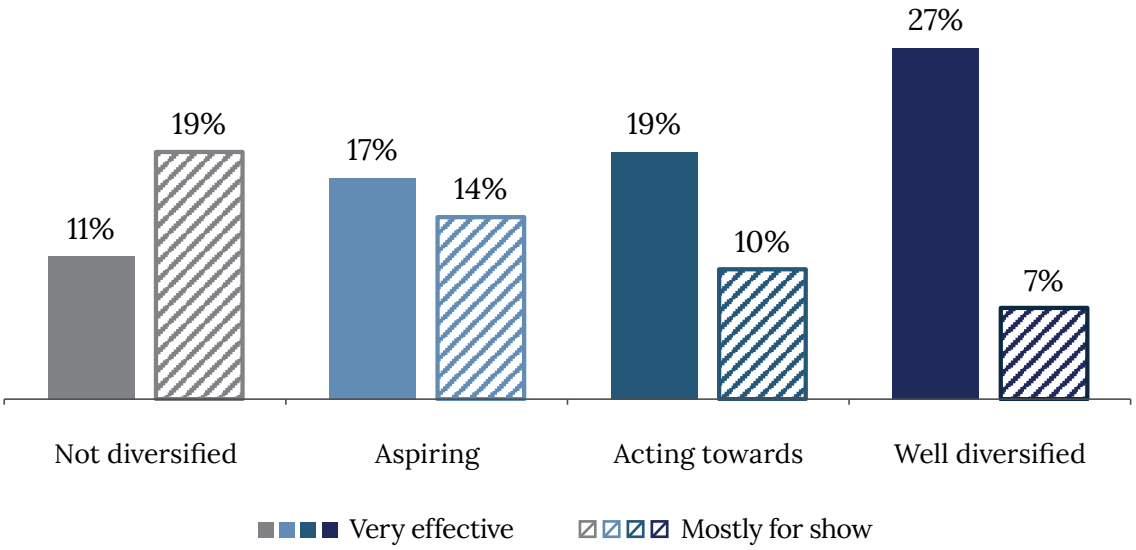
Q: Do you have any Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in your organization?

Younger marketers are much more likely to work in organizations with ERGs: 75 per cent of Gen Z and 70 per cent of Millennials report having them, compared with 43 per cent of Gen X and 34 per cent of Boomers.

Among respondents in organizations with ERGs, virtually all (99 per cent) identify at least one positive contribution. The most common are support for EDI initiatives (44 per cent), employee engagement and workplace culture (41 per cent), networking (35 per cent) and career development (33 per cent).

At the same time, 91 per cent identify at least one unintended consequence. One-third say ERGs place extra workload on members or leaders, and the same proportion say they can consume time without clear business value. A similar share say participation can be viewed negatively or as non-essential. Others point to the risk that only certain groups benefit or that sensitive topics become harder to navigate.

Perceived ERG effectiveness varies by senior leadership diversity



Note: Shown by senior leadership diversity.

Q: Do you have any Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) in your organization?

> "ERGs are welcomed but not adequately funded or supported when they make recommendations. This creates alienation of the groups (and their allies) that were encouraged to be a part of the ERG."
>
> *— Senior-level marketer, well-diversified organization, marginalized background*

These findings highlight the important role of ERGs in providing meaningful organizational support. For ERGs to have a lasting impact, their work should be integrated into the organization and recognized as a shared responsibility, rather than an additional burden placed on employees who volunteer their time.

3. The value of inclusion persists

Sustaining progress as attitudes and workplaces evolve

Progress is rarely linear. Some measures improve quickly and then level off, while others move in the wrong direction before they improve. Attitudes can shift even when underlying values remain broadly intact. The 2026 results show why persistence matters: sustaining inclusion means continuing the work as expectations evolve and workplace pressures endure.

Overall engagement with EDI remains steady as the balance between support and acceptance shifts

EDI sentiment remains broadly positive in 2026, with 82 per cent of marketers either supporting or accepting EDI initiatives. Four in five marketers continue to support or accept EDI initiatives. In 2026, that combined proportion stands at 82 per cent, essentially unchanged from 81 per cent in 2025. Within that overall level of engagement, active support declined from 66 per cent to 57 per cent, while acceptance increased from 15 per cent to 25 per cent. Opposition remains low at 4 per cent.

Attitude toward EDI initiatives	2025	2026	Change
Support	66%	57%	-9 pts
Accept	15%	25%	+10 pts
Support + accept	**81%**	**82%**	**+1 pt**
Neutral	**14%**	**14%**	**No change**
Oppose	**5%**	**4%**	**-1 pt**

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

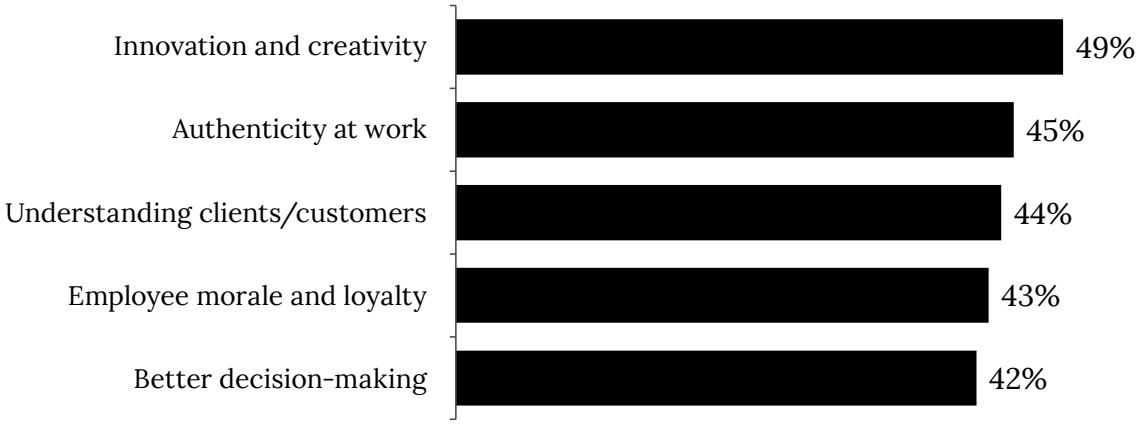
The composition of that engagement has changed. The proportion of respondents who say they 'applaud' EDI initiatives declined from 31 per cent to 22 per cent, while the proportion who 'appreciate' them remains unchanged at 35 per cent. Acceptance increased from 15 per cent to 25 per cent.

The value of inclusion remains widely recognized

While the balance between active support and acceptance has shifted, the value placed on an inclusive workplace remains remarkably consistent. Virtually all respondents (98 per cent) identify at least one benefit, unchanged from 2025 and in line with the near-universal recognition seen in previous years.

Innovation and creativity remain the most frequently recognized benefit, alongside authenticity at work, stronger understanding of clients and customers, employee morale and loyalty, and better decision-making.

Innovation and creativity lead the recognized benefits of workplace inclusion

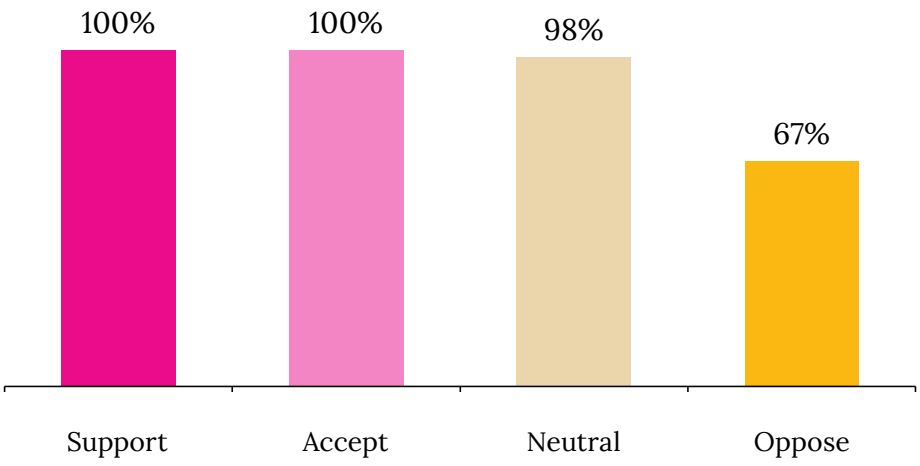


Q: What are the main benefits of working in a fully inclusive work environment?

> "More lived experiences at the table = more interesting creative."
>
> *— C-suite executive, well-diversified organization, marginalized background*

Recognition of these benefits extends well beyond those who actively support EDI. All respondents who support or accept EDI initiatives identify at least one benefit of a fully inclusive workplace, as do 98 per cent of those who are neutral. Even among the small group who oppose EDI initiatives, two-thirds (67 per cent) continue to see value in an inclusive workplace.

Recognition of inclusion's benefits spans EDI attitudes



Note: Shown is the proportion of respondents identifying at least one benefit, by attitude toward EDI initiatives.

Q: What are the main benefits of working in a fully inclusive work environment?

Some inclusion challenges remain difficult to shift

The stronger inclusion ratings recorded in 2026 are accompanied by movement in the opposite direction on several other measures. Reports of discrimination, disengagement linked to discrimination and unequal treatment are all higher than in 2025. Ageism remains widespread, while polarization is affecting a growing share of marketers.

This year's findings nevertheless point to meaningful progress. The continued strength of overall inclusion ratings, together with broad recognition of the value of an inclusive workplace, shows how far the profession has come. The challenges that remain underscore the importance of sustaining those gains.

CONCLUSION

Progress requires practice, and practice requires persistence

Now in its sixth year, CMA's research provides a growing view of how equity, diversity and inclusion are evolving across Canada's marketing profession. The 2026 findings add to that understanding by capturing both change and continuity: some measures have reached new highs, others have remained remarkably stable, and some continue to prove more difficult to shift.

Together, the findings reinforce the value of examining inclusion across multiple dimensions and over time. Progress, practice and persistence emerge as recurring themes in how workplace inclusion develops and is experienced, offering a clearer sense of where the profession stands today and how it continues to evolve.

METHODOLOGY

The 2026 research was conducted by Research + Knowledge = Insights (RKI), an independent market research company. An online survey of Canadian advertising and marketing professionals was conducted between April and July 2026. The survey took approximately 10 minutes to complete and received 411 completed responses. The reported margin of error is +/- 4.3 percentage points at a 95 per cent confidence level.

Participants were recruited through CMA and strategy invitations, distribution partners and a panel sample. Participating organizations included Ad Standards Canada, Sponsorship Marketing Council Canada (SMCC), Association of Canadian Advertisers (ACA), Digital Advertising Alliance of Canada (DAAC), Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC) and Le Grenier. About half (49 per cent) of respondents are senior marketers and 51 per cent are mid/junior marketers. Respondents come from all regions across Canada.

Organizational Characteristics

Organization type	
Agency	27%
Client	37%
Marketing services/other	36%

Total number of employees	
200 or fewer	59%
201 to 5,000	34%
More than 5,000	8%

Participant Characteristics	2026	2025	2024
Raised or educated outside of Canada or United States	22%	19%	19%
Mental health challenge/neurodiverse	21%	19%	15%
Learned English as a second/third+ language (non-mother tongue)	18%	18%	26%
Member of a religion that experiences discrimination	12%	11%	16%
2SLGBTQIA+ communities/sexual orientation/gender identity	12%	12%	11%
Have an evident physical or health challenge/disability	11%	7%	5%
Have taken more than 6 months Maternity/Paternity leave in the past 5 years	9%	8%	9%
Other (write in)	3%	3%	6%
None of these	36%	36%	30%

Age cohort	
Gen Z	17%
Millennial	62%
Gen X	13%
Boomer	8%

Location	
Ontario	46%
West	20%
Quebec	27%
East	7%

Gender	
Female	53%
Male	44%
Non-binary	2%
Prefer not to disclose	<1%

Marginalized communities	
Learned English as a second/third+ language (non-mother tongue)	18%
Raised or educated outside of Canada or United States	22%
Member of a religion that experiences discrimination	12%
Mental health challenge/neurodiverse	21%
2SLGBTQIA+ communities/sexual orientation/gender identity	12%
Have taken more than 6 months maternity/paternity leave in the past 5 years	9%
Have an evident physical or health challenge/disability	11%

Note: For identity/background and race/ethnicity questions, respondents could select more than one response; percentages therefore do not total 100.

Race/ethnicity	
White/Western European ancestry mostly or all	58%
Métis/Inuit/First Nations	5%
Black	11%
East Asian	6%
Latin American	6%
South Asian	8%
Southeast Asian	6%
West Asian	2%
Arab	4%
Other (write in)	4%

Time in Canada	
Born in Canada	71%
Immigrated to Canada more than 10 years ago	17%
Immigrated to Canada in the past 10 years	12%

APPENDIX: CONVERSATION STARTERS

Turning the 2026 findings into dialogue

The data is most useful when they prompt organizations to look more closely at their own employee experience. The following questions are designed to help leaders and teams move from findings to discussion.

01 Where do our employees experience inclusion most strongly, and where do they still experience barriers in pay, opportunity, workload or treatment?

02 What does the composition of our senior leadership signal about who can advance here, and how are we moving from aspiration to action?

03 Which inclusion practices are embedded in everyday management behaviour rather than confined to formal programs or annual initiatives?

04 Who bears the greatest cost of our workplace policies, including return-to-office expectations, flexibility and workload distribution?

05 Are ERGs and other employee-led inclusion efforts adequately resourced, recognized and connected to decision-making?

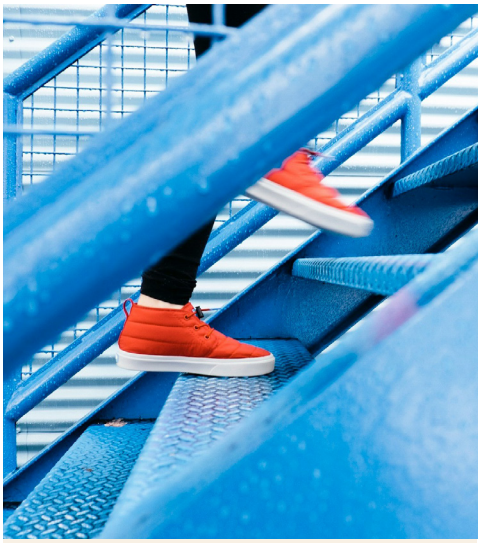
06 As attitudes toward EDI evolve, how can we stay focused on the outcomes employees continue to value: fairness, authenticity, better decisions, innovation and belonging?

07 What progress do we need to protect over the next year, and which persistent challenges require a different approach?

The value of these conversations lies in looking beyond the overall numbers to understand how inclusion is actually experienced within an organization, where progress is holding and where closer attention is still needed.

Sustaining that progress requires organizations to keep measuring what is changing, examine how workplace policies affect employees and remain open to what the findings reveal, even when the answers are uncomfortable.

WHAT PROGRESS, PRACTICE AND PERSISTENCE MEAN FOR ORGANIZATIONS



PROGRESS

Measure more than representation.

Track belonging alongside fairness, opportunity and employee experience.



PRACTICE

Make inclusion visible in everyday decisions.

Look at leadership behaviour, pay, workload, promotion, flexibility and voice.



PERSISTENCE

Protect gains and keep adapting.

Continue what works, address what remains unresolved and evolve as needs change.

The three Ps are not separate stages but rather reinforce one another. Progress tells organizations whether change is occurring, while practice reveals what that change looks like in the everyday employee experience and persistence determines whether gains are sustained when attention shifts or conditions become more difficult.

For organizations, the 2026 findings point to a practical question: not simply “Do we support inclusion?” but “Where, specifically, do employees experience it, and where do they not?” The answer is often found in everyday workplace decisions and practices such as who is promoted, how pay is set, who receives stretch assignments, whether flexibility is available, whether bias is challenged and whether inclusion work is properly resourced.

ABOUT THE CANADIAN MARKETING ASSOCIATION (CMA)

The CMA is the voice of marketing in Canada, and our purpose is to champion marketing's powerful impact. We are the catalyst to help Canada's marketers thrive today, while building the marketing mindset and environment of tomorrow.

We provide opportunities for our members from coast to coast to develop professionally, to contribute to marketing thought leadership, to build strong networks, and strengthen the regulatory climate for business success. Our Chartered Marketer (CM) designation signifies that recipients are highly qualified and up to date with best practices, as reflected in the Canadian Marketing Code of Ethics and Standards. We represent virtually all of Canada's major business sectors, and all marketing disciplines, channels and technologies. We advocate with government stakeholders and provide Canadian consumers with information to help them better understand their rights and obligations. For more information, visit thecma.ca.

ABOUT RESEARCH + KNOWLEDGE = INSIGHTS

RKI: Research + Knowledge = Insights is a full-service market research firm located in Toronto. Led by an innovative team of award-winning professionals, RKI focuses on content and media research, recently developing a number of high-profile reports in the areas of workplace diversity, equity and inclusion. Their areas of expertise span the complete gamut, from standard market research's qualitative and quantitative components to projects designed to promote thought leadership and editorial/advertorial content placement. RKI's practice is tailored to a range of audiences, from elite C-suite executives to small, medium, and large business leaders, and to employees and consumers across a range of industry verticals. The RKI team provides insight and inspiration to realize changes specific to particular industries in an evolving global scene.

For more information, visit rkinsight.com