



The State of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainability

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About the cover: Artist Suhmer Hyatt created the cover, with inspiration from a quote from Sherri Mitchell Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset, of the Penawahpskek Nation. "Human diversity is just as critical to society as biodiversity is to an ecosystem; without it there can be no healthy functioning. The loss of diversity within mainstream systems and structures has left a fracture in our societies that must now be healed, through the purposeful and systematic inclusion of diverse voices, including the voices of the natural world, within the social dialogue."

About the author: Heather Mak is one of the co-founders of Diversity in Sustainability and the Principal Advisor at Heather Mak Consulting.

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First, we want to thank all the respondents who filled out the survey and those who agreed to anonymously participate in interviews with us.

Presenting Partner



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Distribution partners

We thank the following organizations for reaching out to their networks to distribute our survey.



reconsidered



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A note from Diversity in Sustainability

Many of us get into this field to create a better world. But a better world for whom and defined by whom?

We founded Diversity in Sustainability in June 2020, after the murders of George Floyd, Ahmaud Arbery and Breonna Taylor. We are four practitioners of colour, and these deaths, combined with the devastating health and economic impacts of COVID-19, disproportionately affected racialized communities around the world. These events sparked a deeper discussion among us, and soul searching within us, on racism, inequality and the failures in how society has been built.

We reflected on our own experiences working in different organizations in sustainability, where we were often the only people of colour, and where the leadership team was rarely reflective of the diversity of the communities we inhabited and the experiences we embodied – nor of the world our organizations aimed to serve.

We wanted to draw on our experience in the profession and contribute to removing the barriers for our peers and future generations of sustainability professionals.

Our mission is to equip current and future Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) sustainability leaders with the skills, networks and resources to accelerate the transition to a sustainable and just future. We also aim to shift the industry to become more inclusive and to become better allies to BIPOC communities.



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This leads us to our State of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainability Survey. While race is one of the key factors correlating with social and environmental injustice, we recognize that it is not the only dimension of diversity – the notion of intersectionality is also vital. We want to understand the experiences of those who are also neurodiverse, have different levels of social mobility or education, different politics, disabilities and other social categorizations.

It is our hope that this report sheds some light on the experiences and challenges that lie ahead for building equitable and inclusive organizations in our profession. The industry, and the solutions it creates, cannot be sustainable until it is equitable. Let's keep up the momentum.

A note from Acre

Having recruited in the sustainability space for the past two decades, Acre has observed an evolution in the role of sustainability professionals with a more significant shift in the demand and expectation of these individuals, within the last five years. We're seeing an increased reliance on this community to effect positive social and environmental change at the point where a business' performance, purpose and reputation converge.

Mounting pressure on organizations, businesses and institutions around social and economic injustice, as well as the undeniable impacts of climate inaction, are dictating a greater interest in corporate activity where these stakeholders are being held accountable for the part they play in shaping society. With this interest, and the profession's increasingly intersectional approach, we have a powerful obligation to ensure that matters related to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) keep pace and become ingrained into our thinking.

Among other social constructs, the working world is riddled with injustices and inequalities. Globally, the loss in human capital wealth due to gender inequality is estimated at \$160.2 trillion;¹ only 18.3% of American businesses are minority-owned, although minorities comprise 40.3% of the population;² race equality in the UK will potentially bring a £24 billion per year boost to the UK economy.³ Persistent discrimination and exclusion of the most marginalized or underrepresented groups come at a high cost to both people and the economy.

The survey uncovers an interesting dynamic wherein the diversity at entry to junior levels appears to be stronger than in more senior levels. This provides us with a useful benchmark to gain a better understanding of how inclusive practices can enable the profession to support these individuals to progress successfully throughout their careers.

Tackling these issues head on and determining informed solutions, however, requires us to strip back to basics – assessing the current state of EDI in the sustainability profession, as well as naming, defining and understanding the barriers to progress.

For Acre, as the world's leading sustainability recruitment and talent development firm, we recognize that we have a significant responsibility to help businesses challenge the confines of traditional recruitment practices and to promote equal hiring opportunities at all levels to help achieve this mission.

It is our ambition that, together with organizations like DiS, we'll soon see an equitable and equal playing field that enables an increase in employee engagement, a shift to more inclusive stakeholder relations, and a profession where diversity of thought and experience is embedded in every organization's value systems.



Chloe Hunt

Global Head of Research
and EDI Lead

Acre



Introduction

Welcome to State of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainability Survey.

When the phrase “VUCA” – Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous – was first coined, few could imagine a world faced with a convergence of crises – the COVID-19 pandemic, the rapidly advancing effects of climate change and social unrest. A crisis often offers a moment to pause and reflect on how our actions are shaping the future. In a profession that is focused on protecting the social and environmental commons and our collective future, we wondered – what is this collective future we’re trying to create, and who is it defined by?

With climate change advancing, the United Nations predicts that women and those living in poverty in the Global South will be disproportionately affected.⁴ Refugees, the elderly and the disabled are also more vulnerable to natural disasters, as evidenced by the floods in Germany⁵ and recent extreme heat events across the world.⁶

Additionally, environmental and social injustices are disproportionately borne by people of colour. According to studies by Christopher W. Tessum et al. and Dr. Daniela Fecht, non-White populations in the United States⁷ and United Kingdom⁸ are exposed to fine particulate matter pollution at a much higher rate than the White population.

Meanwhile, a report published by the National Resources Defense Council found a strong correlation between the racial makeup of communities and their access to safe drinking water.⁹ According to a UN report, Indigenous peoples in Canada are disproportionately exposed to toxic waste.¹⁰

In addition, a scathing report from Canada's auditor general criticized the federal government for the lack of access to clean drinking water in many Indigenous communities, even though Canada is one of the most water-rich countries in the world.¹¹

In a profession where we seek to enhance environmental and social outcomes in society, it stands to reason that we need to represent groups that are feeling more than their fair share of the effects of unsustainable development. Many studies have shown the benefits of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), in terms of enhanced decision making, innovation, employee retention, team collaboration and commitment.¹²

Yet, studies conducted in the sustainability profession have shown a lack of diversity in terms of racial ethnicity. A survey conducted by Dorceta E. Taylor in 2014, looking at "The State of Diversity in Environmental Organizations" in the US, found that only 4.6% of the members of Boards and 12% of paid staff members in 191 conservation and preservation organizations studied were ethnic minorities.¹³

Similarly, in the UK, only 3.1% of environment professionals identified as non-White minorities.¹⁴ One think tank, Policy Exchange, attempted to measure the extent of ethnic diversity across occupations in England and Wales, and found that environment professionals were the second least diverse profession in the UK.¹⁵ Of the top 15 sustainable, responsible and impact investing mutual funds in the US, Black, Latinx, AAPI, Arab/Middle Eastern and South Asian people represented 21% of staff, although these groups represented 41% of the population.¹⁶

We wanted to better understand what is happening in the wider profession of sustainability, and we initiated the State of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainability Survey to find out:

- How diverse are we across race/ethnicity, immigration status, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, social mobility/class, education, religion, political preferences, national origin, disability, neurodiversity and caregiver status?
- What barriers to entry are faced in entering the field of sustainability?
- Have we experienced inclusion and equality within our organizations?
- How do our organizations support equity, diversity and inclusion?

We have pulled together the quantitative and qualitative results from the survey and from individual follow-up interviews. We recognize that each respondent who participated is an individual, and everyone has different lived experiences. While some responses are broken down into different subgroups, we want to emphasize that these subgroups are not monolithic; however, we also wanted to recognize shared experiences to build knowledge and cultural competency in our profession, and to illustrate dynamics at the individual and institutional levels.

We hope that this research acts as a way of illuminating the collective challenges we face in the profession and to develop the impetus for more inclusion.

Please refer to the glossary at the end of this report (page 50) for definitions of words and phrases used throughout this report.

Executive summary

The State of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainability Survey was created by Diversity in Sustainability to understand the demographics of our profession, the barriers to entry faced in entering the profession, the level of inclusion practitioners have experienced within their organizations, and the EDI programs that exist within organizations.

We received 1,500 responses, with the majority of responses from Canada, UK and the US. In-depth interviews were conducted with over 30 sustainability practitioners, to provide extra perspectives to the survey responses.

Some of the key findings are as follows:



Sustainability is an elite and privileged profession, which attracts those who have the means to be in it.

People look to work in sustainability not just to earn a living, but also to make a positive impact in the world. Others see it as an industry that exists only in economically developed countries, where people have the extra time and resources to think beyond their basic needs. Entering the profession can be challenging, as it requires a pre-existing level of financial security, which is most likely to be possible for people from middle-class backgrounds (75% of respondents). Sustainability offers no linear career path that can be relied on to lead to a defined level of success in a given amount of years, and it is common for people starting out in the

profession to take unpaid internships and lower entry-level salaries before they can become fully established materially. Additionally, the level of educational attainment in the profession is particularly high – 62% of respondents have at least a master's degree, 28% have at least a bachelor's degree, and 13% have a professional designation in addition to an advanced degree. Practitioners of similar backgrounds and means can have homogeneous world views, limiting their approach to solutions that should fit society at large and separating them from those that suffer from environmental and social injustices.



Many do not see our profession as being diverse.

Only 27% of all respondents felt that their leadership teams were diverse, and Black (24%), South Asian (29%) and East Asian (37%) practitioners were less likely to agree that they saw someone like them in the profession, as compared to White women (70%).



Of all groups, White or Caucasian practitioners have the longest tenure in sustainability as a profession.

Worldviews of dominant groups tend to persist over time.

White or Caucasian people are more likely to have 16-plus years of experience in the profession compared to other groups (20% of

the White or Caucasian respondents, compared to 7% of Black, 8% Hispanic or Latinx, and 9% Asian – East Asian). Early entry in developing the sector suggests a higher level of influence in shaping the initial worldviews in the profession.



White men are the leaders of many sustainability organizations, and generally feel included within the organizations they work in.

Of the respondents in senior leadership roles, White men make up a larger demographic percentage than other groups. On measures of psychological safety, belonging and confidence, they also exhibit the highest percentages by comparison with all other groups. Ninety-three percent of White men reported they feel confident in putting forward ideas in their organizations (compared to an average of 86%), 76% of White men felt free to voice an opposing opinion without fear of negative consequences (compared to a 67% average), 89% of White men are comfortable talking about their backgrounds and cultural experiences with their colleagues (compared to a 76% average) and 85% of White men are confident putting themselves forward for leadership roles (compared to a 73% average).



Yet, a demographic shift is ahead, and we need to take considered approaches to succession planning and inclusion now, to avoid a drop-off in retention.

The diversity of racial/ethnic makeup of more junior practitioners, however, shows a different picture, and the younger the talent pool, the more diverse it is. Forty-two percent of sustainability professionals aged 25-34 are people of colour, and 54% of sustainability professionals aged 18-24 are people of colour. Those who hold junior and middle management staff roles are often women (both White and people of colour) and in the LGBTQ+ community.

While this suggests that leadership may naturally become more diverse over time, it also suggests a need for considered approaches to succession planning and inclusion now, to avoid a drop-off in retention.



Key barriers to entering the profession include a lack of networks, experience and financial means.

The barriers repeatedly mentioned include a lack of networks, experience and financial means – the last of which is made more difficult by high educational requirements and the challenge of living on an unpaid internship in a major metropolitan area. Other barriers include a lack of exposure to sustainability careers at a young age, a lack of mentorship

and role models, legacy hiring and a lack of family support. However, most respondents feel that their transferable skills are sufficient for finding work in this profession. Increasing access to networks early on, and paying at least a living wage for internships and entry-level job opportunities could help to level the playing field and open the way for a wider pool of society to enter the profession.



Once in the profession, entrants face barriers to advancement.

Practitioners noted that they can face several barriers to advancement in the sustainability profession. These include having the right networks in the workplace, the lack of access to growth opportunities, a lack of feedback/transparency in recruitment, a lack of sponsorship, a lack of turnover at more senior levels, caregiving commitments, and discrimination.



People of colour also face particular barriers within the profession, to varying degrees.

In the interviews we conducted, people of colour reported on other barriers that they have faced in the working environment, including shouldering the burden of equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives within their organizations, bearing the weight of representation, feeling that their “otherism” distracts from their work, being

required to code-switch, sensing that they are held to a higher standard, having their viewpoints ignored or co-opted, facing intra- and intercultural conflict, and being subject to a surplus of life distractions that affect their well-being.



Black and South Asian practitioners, and those from materially poor and working-class backgrounds, feel left behind in the profession, while neurodiverse and disabled sustainability practitioners do not feel psychologically safe within our organizations.

While all practitioners are confident about the contributions that they can make to their organizations, Black, South Asian and those coming from materially poor and working-class backgrounds are the least likely to feel included within their organizations, and of all groups, report the least opportunity for career progression. Practitioners who have disabilities or are neurodiverse feel the least psychologically safe within organizations. Meanwhile, White or Caucasian sustainability practitioners feel least confident in how to be allies to diverse colleagues. This offers an opportunity for all of us to build our competencies on other cultures, classes, neurodiversity and disabilities.



As an industry, we have a lot of work to do to make our organizations more inclusive.

Only half (52%) of respondents agreed that their organization has put their words into action on EDI. While larger organizations have more resources and programs for EDI initiatives, smaller organizations have the flexibility to take a personalized approach to inclusion.



Collective action is needed to move the industry toward a just future.

As with anything worth doing, inclusion takes effort and resources, but the benefits are many, both for organizations and for society. Those who are in power, and the most engaged in their organizations, have a particularly urgent role to play in encouraging inclusion, including taking the time to reflect and build a culture where everyone feels psychologically safe. A more equitable space must be created to make the profession accessible to more than just the usual suspects. We also need to look beyond our typical networks and give new people a chance, whether through new employment opportunities or by amplifying voices that are not typically heard. As an industry, we all need to build new competencies and tap into the wealth of our identities, perspectives, experiences and commitment.



About the survey

Methodology

The purpose of the survey was to assess several key research questions:

- How diverse are we across race/ethnicity, immigration status, age, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, social mobility/class, education, religion, political preferences, national origin, disability, neurodiversity and caregiver status?
- What barriers to entry are faced in entering the field of sustainability?
- Have we experienced inclusion and equality within our organizations?
- How do our organizations support diversity, equity and inclusion?

We deployed the survey through SurveyMonkey between February and April 2021 with snowball sampling, via our networks and our distribution partners across Canada, the US and the UK. The distribution partners included individuals and organizations with large networks and an affiliation with various sub-industries in sustainability. We obtained 1,500 responses, but because of the length of the survey, which included 37 questions, there were some incomplete responses. The number of responses we received for each question is included below each chart, with “N =” indicating the sample size.

The responses were not anonymous. In some cases, respondents provided their names for follow-up interviews. However, the individual information is being kept confidential, and the research team was limited to two people with access to the raw data.

We supplemented these quantitative responses with 30-plus interviews with individuals who volunteered to be contacted to elaborate on their responses. Their identities have been anonymized within the report, but their race, gender, industry and geographical location are disclosed to provide context for their comments.

How to read the survey results

Given the volume of data collected, we could have presented the data in an infinite number of ways. We provide an aggregate picture for the entire sample and supplement the overall survey results with more granular breakdowns by specific social categorizations – for example by race/ethnicity, gender, geography, social mobility, disability and neurodiversity. In some cases, geographical breakdowns are also included.

Each section also contains “Voices,” illuminating quotes from various practitioners, and we also include “Insights” where available, a deeper dive into interesting anomalies or analyses on specific subjects of interest. At the end

of the report, we also include a glossary to define terms used throughout the report, and a bibliography to provide links to source materials referred to throughout the report.

Limitations

While we were able to obtain a sample size of 1,500 participants for the research, please note that the information has certain limitations.

- **Self-selection bias:** The makeup of the survey respondents was a function of the networks to which the survey was distributed, which were predominantly focused on the markets of Canada, the UK and the US. Since the subject of the survey was equity, diversity and inclusion, some self-selection bias can be assumed.
- **Limited responses:** Certain subgroups returned under 30 responses, which, regrettably, were deemed not to be statistically significant enough to be included in the study. This includes some people who identified as non-binary, Indigenous and Middle Eastern or North African. However, their responses are captured in aggregate figures, and where possible, we have highlighted their voices to ensure that their viewpoints are still captured in other ways. In future surveys, we aim to build on our networks to ensure better representation.

-
- **Language:** The survey was conducted in English only, which limited the responses to English-speaking individuals. Future iterations of the survey may be conducted in other languages to obtain a wider pool of information.

Improvements

In future iterations of the survey, respondents have suggested several areas of improvement:

- **Expanding questions on “religiousness” to include specific faiths:** For example, several Jewish and Muslim respondents stated that these were defining parts of their identity and that they did not feel that they could be properly acknowledged within the survey.

- **Allowing for variations in social mobility:** Some respondents stated that the defined levels of social mobility within the survey (adapted from the Gilbert-Kahl model of class structure)¹⁷ did not allow for enough variations in individual situations.

For example, a highly educated family might move from a developing country, but both sets of parents might end up taking a low-wage job in the new country, or, conversely, a family in which the parents did not have a high level of education might end up in a much higher economic bracket thanks to their business success.

- **The challenge of defining universal race/ethnicities.** Race/ethnicity is extremely challenging to define and varies from region to region. Because our survey was intended to be global, we used a hybrid definition, taking into consideration racial, ethnic and geographical origins.

Given the varying definitions within each country, the information can be difficult to compare. One category that was not included in our list of racial/ethnic categories was Southeast Asian. In subsequent surveys, this will be included.

- **Defining sustainability sub-industry categories.** There are not yet any widely accepted industry categories for the profession of sustainability. We aim to refine this in subsequent surveys. Other feedback we received included adding specific industries – for example manufacturing, energy, etc. – as another way to assess the information.

Accessibility and safety considerations

We have made this PDF accessible, to allow users of adaptive technology to comprehend and navigate the content in this report.

Please note that this report includes some experiences and narratives that could potentially be triggering to read for certain individuals.



Section I: Who are we?

Who are we?

Fifteen hundred respondents took part in the State of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Sustainability Survey. To provide further context on respondents to the survey, we provide additional information on demographics and identity and a section on background and professional experience.

Demographics and identity

The section below provides further detail on the demographics and identity of the sample of respondents.

Age

N = 1,124

95% of survey respondents are between ages 25-64.

This reflects the ages of active employment.

“In the interfaith community, there is definitely some ageism. Older men are regarded as elders and looked to for input and impact. This seems like less so the case for women in the interfaith field. I have two friends in their 50s looking for new jobs, and they've told me how challenging it is finding roles. They have been told by employers that they are looking for younger people. I think having elders and younger people as part of the network is crucial. That way, people can speak to the experience they have and bring a differently informed lens about where change needs to happen.”

- Mixed-race woman (organizational lead), interfaith sustainability movement, Canada

Gender

N = 1,125

65% of survey respondents are women.

Most respondents for the survey are women (65%). Thirty-one percent of those who responded identified as men, and 2% as non-binary/third gender.

Sexual orientation

N = 1,078

The sample's share of gay or lesbian (6%) and bisexual practitioners (6%) is higher than average compared to the wider population. Eighty-three percent of respondents identified as straight/heterosexual. In Canada,¹⁸ the US,¹⁹ and the UK,²⁰ 2% to 6% of the population are estimated to identify as gay, lesbian and bisexual.

“As a queer person in Construction Sustainability, I have faced multitudes of discrimination and micro-aggressions toward my existence. Corporations in Canada like to pretend to be inclusive and allies of the LGBTQ+ community, but do not include the community in the conversation or decision-making process.”

- White woman (middle manager), green buildings, Canada

“I feel relatively privileged as a White, cisgender, gay man in sustainability in Canada. In the workplace, I have access to White male communities and feel lucky that my female co-workers see me as their confidant.”

- White man (leadership team), public affairs, Canada

“I'm a first-generation, queer, Indian American, and I've felt an unabashed pride in the unique perspective that I bring to the table. When I was young, even if other Indian parents would be less understanding of having a queer daughter, the force of my personality, my confidence in who I am and my empathy for others has helped me navigate my personal identities and experiences and defined how I create an impact in the world.”

- South Asian woman (individual contributor), corporate responsibility, US

Country of residence and immigration

N = 1,120

Respondents were born in 97 countries from around the world, and currently live in 52 countries. Thirty-five percent of the respondents were born in a country different from the one where they currently reside.

The bulk of our responses are from the key markets in which Diversity in Sustainability is focused, including the UK (33%), Canada (30%) and the US (22%). The Netherlands accounts for 3%, and Switzerland, France and Australia, 1% each.

Racial/ethnic diversity

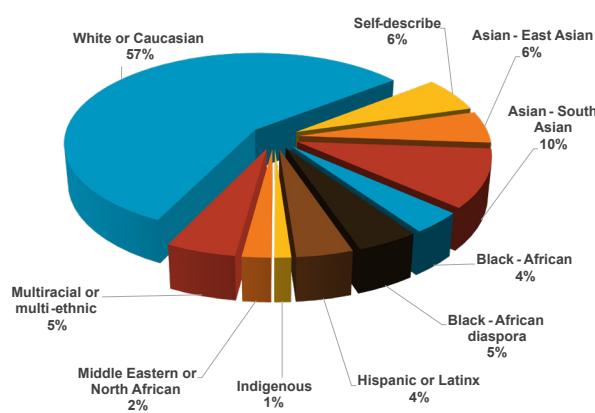
N = 1,129

63% of survey respondents identify as White or Caucasian.

Thirty-five percent of survey respondents identify as people of colour.

Figure 1: Racial/ethnic diversity

Question: What race/ethnicity(ies) do you most closely identify with?



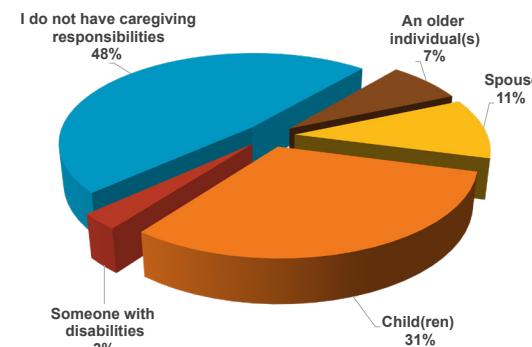
Caregiving status

N = 1,114

More than half of the respondents do not have caregiving responsibilities (55%), while the second-largest set of respondents provide care for children (36%).

Figure 2: Caregiving status

Question: I provide direct care to:



INSIGHTS:

Caregiving for children peaks between ages 35-54 (between 55-60% of the sample), and for older individuals at age 55-64 (20% of the sample). This is an important consideration when designing inclusion programs to accommodate responsibilities outside work.

Religiousness

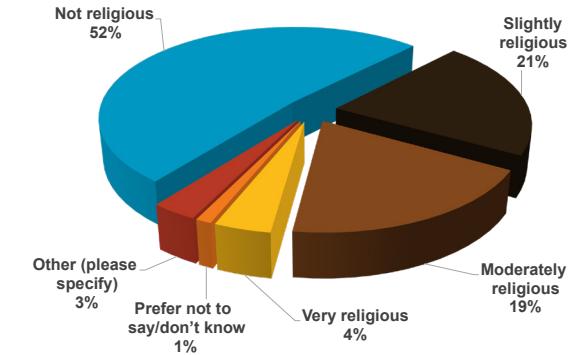
N = 1,078

52% of survey respondents do not have a religion.

Overall, the field of sustainability attracts a secular group, with 52% of respondents stating that they are not religious. In comparison, in Canada,²¹ the US²² and the UK,²³ 24%-28% of the population generally report that they are not religious.

Figure 3: Religiousness

Question: To what level do you consider yourself to be religious?



INSIGHTS:

Communities of faith can be highly compatible with sustainability. The principle of environmental stewardship is a common thread among almost all religions. Faith-based groups have been active in responsible investment for decades, which has leveraged collective action to push for change on various social and environmental issues. The UN Environment Programme launched the Faith for Earth Initiative in 2017, with the goal of strategically engaging with faith-based organizations and partnering with them to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals collectively. Grassroots groups, such as EnviroMuslims in Canada, work with the Muslim community to embed sustainability in their everyday lives wherever they live, work, play or pray.

“ Even though it's important to my identity, I am not someone you would call 'visibly Jewish.' I've met people and been told that I'm the first Jewish person that they have met, and they might say or ask something that some might consider inappropriate. I try to look at it in terms of: Are they coming from a place of curiosity? Or do they mean harm?”

- White woman (senior leadership),
public policy and government relations, Canada

“ As an ethnic and faith minority, I have experienced some shockingly inappropriate stereotyping, and I do find that my opinions and experiences are deemed less valid in communal forums than those of men or other in-group members.”

- South Asian woman (individual contributor),
corporate sustainability, UK

Disability

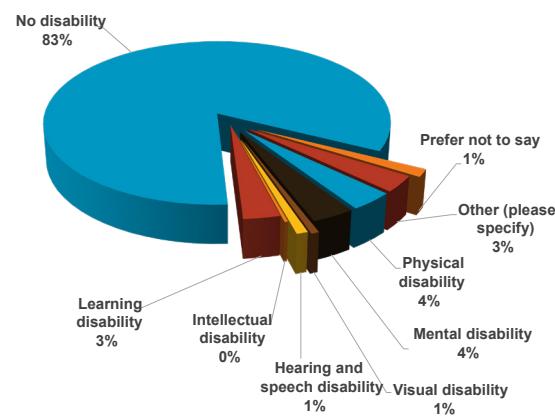
N = 1,046

13% of survey respondents have a disability.

Approximately 13% of respondents have a physical, mental, visual, hearing and speech, intellectual or learning disability, whereas between 18%-26% of the populations in Canada, US, and UK identify themselves as having a disability.^{24,25,26} In these countries, typically about half the disabled population is working.

Figure 4: Disability

Question: I identify as having one or more of the following disabilities:



“ Having a disability that allows me to work only part-time at a similar level of seniority and pay scale has been a major and limiting situation that prevents me from trying new opportunities at other organizations. Entering the field while fully able to work more than 40 hours a week without limitations or accommodations is very different from trying to navigate new opportunities while limited to part-time work and needing accommodations.”

- White woman (Individual contributor),
international development and philanthropy, US

“ When there was a big movement to phase out single-use plastics, this was not done in consultation with the disability community. In some cases, some of us are highly dependent on things like straws to eat, and therefore to live. Our needs cannot continue to be an afterthought.”

- Mixed-race woman (student),
environmental justice, Canada

Neurodiversity

N = 1,075

12% of respondents identify as neurodiverse.

Twelve percent of survey respondents identify themselves as neurodiverse, compared to the 15%-20% of the population estimated within Canada, the US, and UK.^{27,28,29} Eighty-two percent identified themselves as neurotypical.

“The basic awareness of ADHD is very low – over the last five years, there's been some changes, but it's all still very early stage. The pandemic has increased the acceptability of making changes to our physical environment, schedules and flexibility, which has been helpful. However, progress is slow. Even the companies that are seen as leaders in supporting employees who are on the autism spectrum – if you look at the actual number of people affected as a proportion of the size of the entire company, it's very low. While I appreciate that they've made these changes, it's problematic when accommodations are used as an emotional PR tool and presented as a benefit rather than the baseline of doing business.”

- South Asian man (organizational lead), climate change, UK

Politics

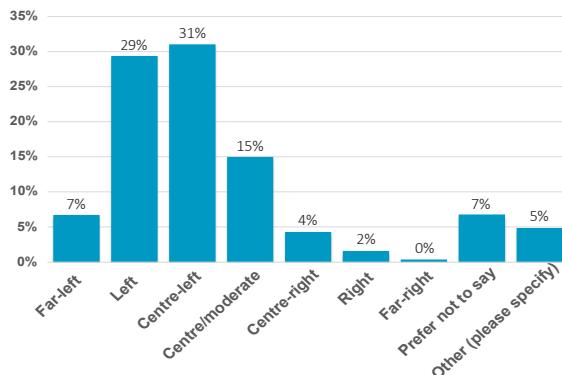
N = 1,073

67% of survey respondents are politically left-leaning.

This is not surprising, given the propensity of left-leaning party platforms to feature environmental and social issues.

Figure 5: Politics

Question: I tend to support political leaders who are on this part of the political spectrum:



INSIGHTS:

In the sample, men are more likely to be political centrists than women.

“We may have diversity of skin colour and ethnicity, but there is no diversity of thought. Everyone is expected or forced to think in the exact same way. When it comes to topics related to social justice and EDI, only popular opinions are allowed. People are afraid of voicing any opinion that counters the social justice narrative popular in liberal media.”

- Middle manager, environmental science and engineering, Canada

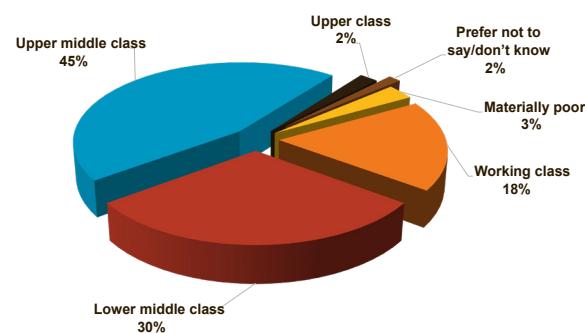
Social mobility

N = 1,123

75% 75% of respondents grew up in a middle-class household.

Figure 6: Social mobility

Question: In terms of social mobility, I consider myself to have grown up in a household that was:
Please see the glossary for the definition of each of these levels of social mobility.



“ My family immigrated to the UK when I was young, and we didn't have a lot of money. During my studies, I took out student loans and worked at a fast-food restaurant to help offset my costs. When it came time to find roles after graduation, I felt like I was at a disadvantage with my CV. There were other students who came from wealth and could afford to take unpaid internships at places like the UN. What that means post-graduation, is if you were a company hiring someone in this field, more often than not, you'd take that person with the direct UN experience, without recognizing the privilege that came along with it.”

- Middle Eastern woman (middle manager), international development, UK

“ I grew up in relatively modest surroundings, with two parents who didn't go to high school who wanted a better life for their children. For years, I dreamed of working at one of the Big Four sustainability consultancies. It was incredibly competitive to get in, and in my mind, they only took the best of the best. I perfected my experience, got the right education, progressively made connections, bided my time, and eventually made it in. However, when I got there, I was shocked to find that about a third of the staff were nepotism hires. That is, one of their parents was an executive at a large client company. Partners in other divisions would, as a favour to their clients, give their clients' children jobs on the sustainability consulting team. It was disheartening to see, because often, the quality of their work was sub-par compared to others who had made it in based on their skills, and we had to often redo their work. It made me question if merit existed in the context of privilege.”

- East Asian woman (middle manager), sustainability consultancy, Canada

Education and professional experience

The following section provides more statistics on the educational and professional experience of the sample of respondents.

Education

N = 1,122

63% of survey respondents attended public school growing up.

90% of survey respondents have at least a graduate or bachelor's degree.

Figure 7A: Public vs. private schooling

Question: In terms of schooling, I grew up attending:

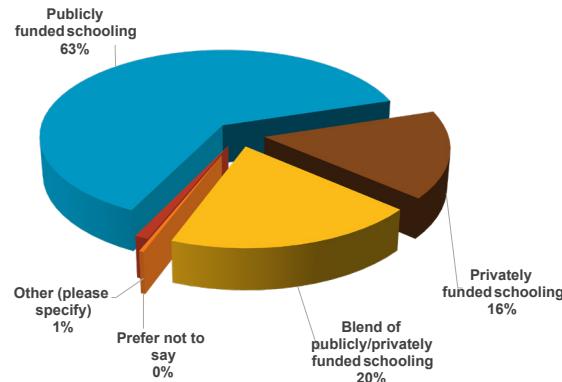
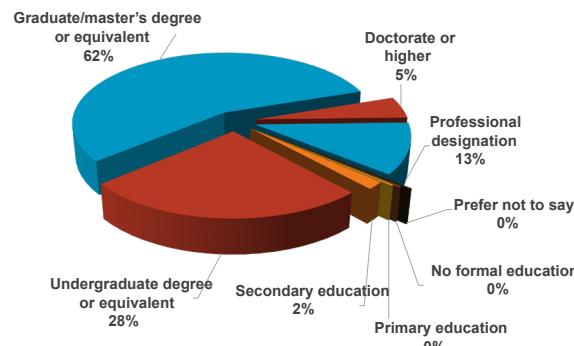


Figure 7B: Highest level of education completed

Question: I have completed this level of education (please select your highest level of education, plus a professional designation, if relevant). Total figure exceeds 100% because some people have completed degrees and a professional designation.



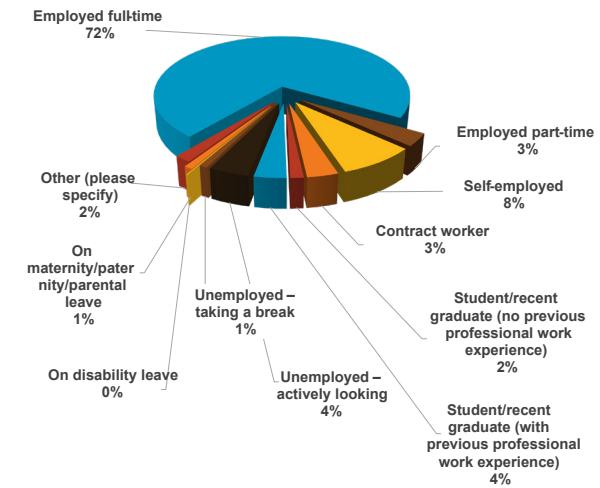
Employment status

N = 1,490

72% of survey respondents are employed full-time.

Figure 8: Employment status

Question: My current employment status is best described as:



INSIGHTS:

- Part-time working and self-employment are more common in the UK (5% of population) than Canada (2%) or the US (3%).
- People of colour (Multiracial – 8%, Black – 7%, East Asian – 6%, Hispanic/Latinx – 6%) are more likely to be unemployed and looking for work in the profession than the wider population (4%) during the survey period.

“ Both my partner and I work part-time, four days a week. It works for our life, given all our commitments outside work. But I worry it affects our career advancement prospects, particularly when our colleagues are putting in 80-hour weeks, and the leadership at our organizations are typically men who have spouses who take care of all non-work commitments for them. I also find myself creeping outside the four days a week, because not everyone realizes I have a different schedule.”

- Middle Eastern woman (middle manager), sustainability consultancy, UK

Professional focus in sustainability

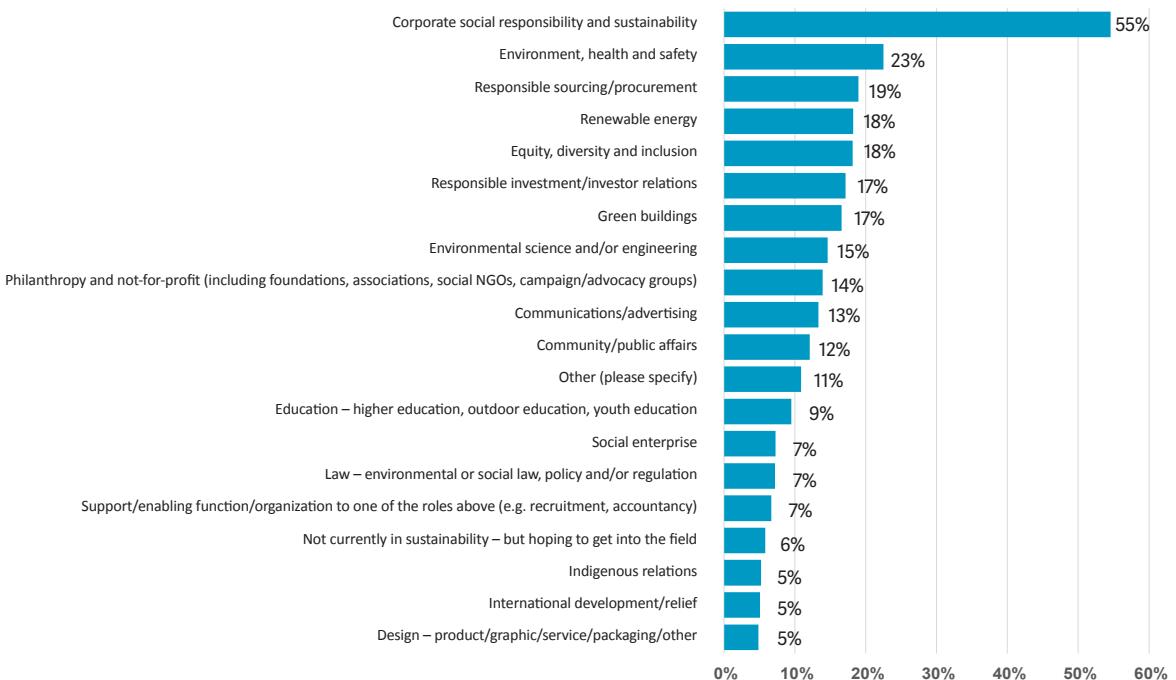
N = 1,382

55% of respondents work in corporate social responsibility and sustainability.

Others are in environment, health and safety (23%), responsible sourcing and procurement (19%), renewable energy (18%), equity, diversity and inclusion (18%), responsible investment/investor relations (17%), green buildings (17%), and environmental science and/or engineering (15%).

Figure 9: Professional focus

Question: In my most recent role, I focused on these areas of sustainability professionally (select all that apply):
Percentages exceed 100% because respondents could choose multiple areas of focus.



Years of professional and sustainability experience

Many respondents (28%) have over 20 years of professional experience, but there are far fewer with that level of experience in the field of sustainability (8%), given that it is still a nascent field. The data also suggests that, amongst younger generations, there are many people whose sole professional experience will be in sustainability.

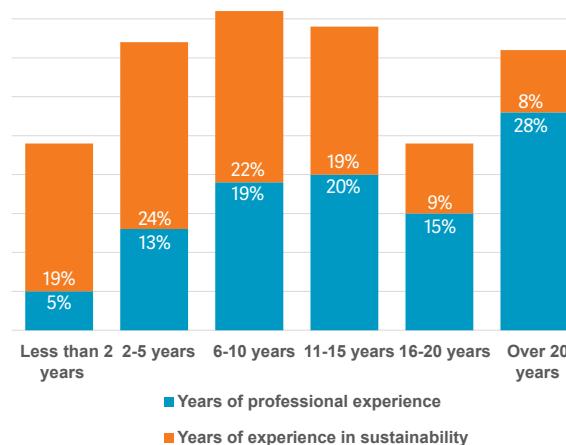
Figure 10: Years of professional experience and experience in sustainability

N = 1,374

Question: I have the following number of years of professional experience:

N = 1,359

Question: I have the following number of years of professional experience in sustainability:



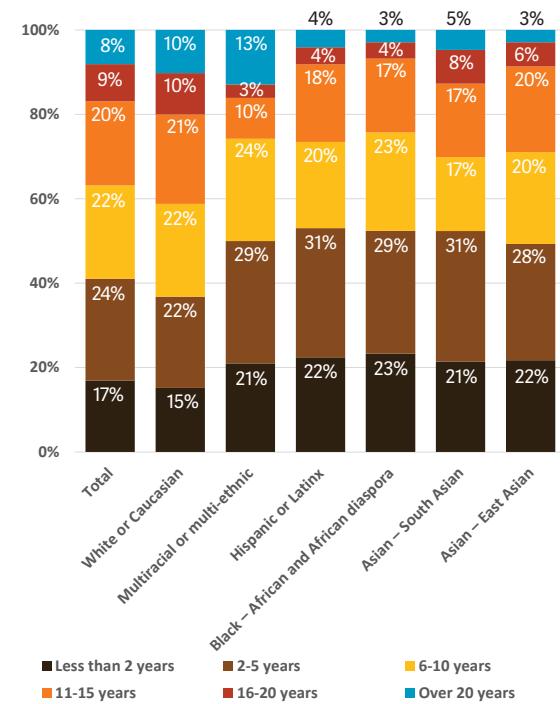
INSIGHTS:

A larger proportion of White or Caucasian professionals have more than 16 years of experience, compared to other groups.

Figure 11: Years of professional experience in sustainability, by race/ethnicity

N = 1,062

Question: I have the following number of years of professional experience in sustainability:
What race/ethnicity(ies) do you most closely identify with?



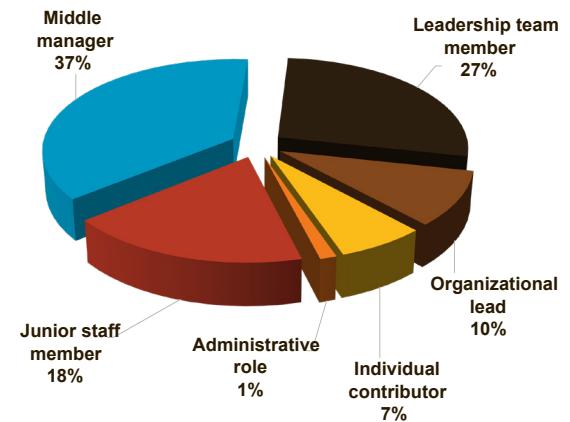
Organizational seniority

N = 1,359

The bulk of respondents are middle managers (37%), leadership team members (27%) and junior staff members (18%).

Figure 12: Organizational seniority

Question: In my most recent organization, I had this level of seniority (if the exact title is not there, please choose the closest one):



INSIGHTS:

From the sample, White men tend to hold more senior roles (organizational lead, leadership team members). Of all respondents, 10% are organizational leads and 27% are leadership team members, however, looking specifically at White men, 16% are organizational leads and 37% are leadership team members.

INSIGHTS:

- Women make up a larger proportion of middle manager roles (41% of women) than men (31% of men).
- East Asian and South Asian practitioners tend to hold more junior staff roles in organizations. Of all the respondents, 18% are junior staff, while 32% of East Asians and 23% of South Asians are junior staff.
- However, looking at the proportions of South Asian (26%), Multiracial (27%), Hispanic or Latinx (33%) practitioners who are part of leadership teams, this is close to the percentage represented by White practitioners (31%), suggesting some areas of breakthrough, although these groups are still underrepresented at the organizational lead level.³⁰

“ As we have posted roles for hire, for many of the senior roles, candidates have been disproportionately older White men – which may be a function of tenure. For junior roles, the candidates have been more diverse, but we have been finding that we have lost many of the diverse candidates to larger, better-resourced organizations.”

- White woman (leadership team), responsible investment, Canada

Types of companies

N = 1,367

Two-thirds (67%) of respondents work in publicly and privately held corporations, and a similar proportion (66%) work for medium and large-size companies with over 100 employees.

Figure 13: Types of companies

Question: In my most recent role, I work(ed) in the following type of organization:

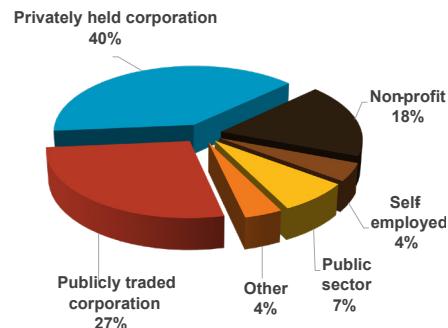
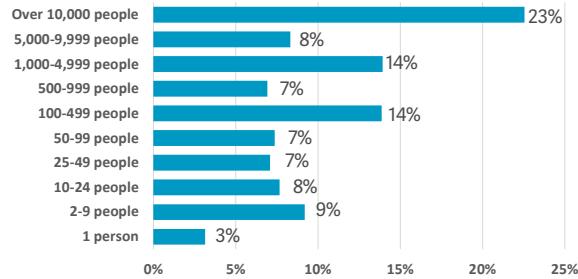


Figure 14A: Size of companies

Question: The following numbers of employees work(ed) in my most recent organization:



INSIGHTS:

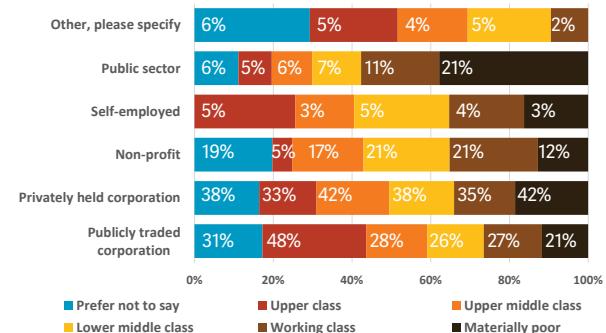
A noticeably higher percentage of materially poor respondents worked for the public sector than other social classes, and increasing social mobility seemed to correspond with working at publicly traded corporations, although not with privately held corporations. These are a few of many results in this survey that we believe merit further exploration.

Figure 14B: Type of organization, by social mobility

N = 1,102

Question(s): In my most recent role, I work(ed) in the following type of organization:

In terms of social mobility, I consider myself to have grown up in a household that was:



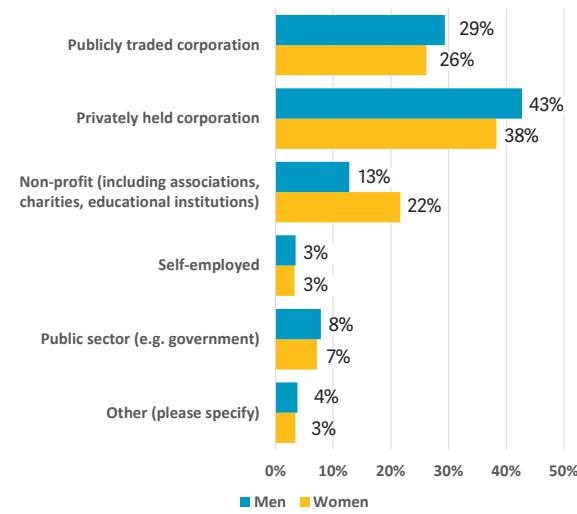
Women are more likely to work in the non-profit sector than men.

Figure 14C: Type of organization, by gender

N = 1,070.

Question(s): In my most recent role, I work(ed) in the following type of organization:

I identify myself as the following gender:



Section II: Barriers to entry and career advancement



Barriers to entry and career advancement

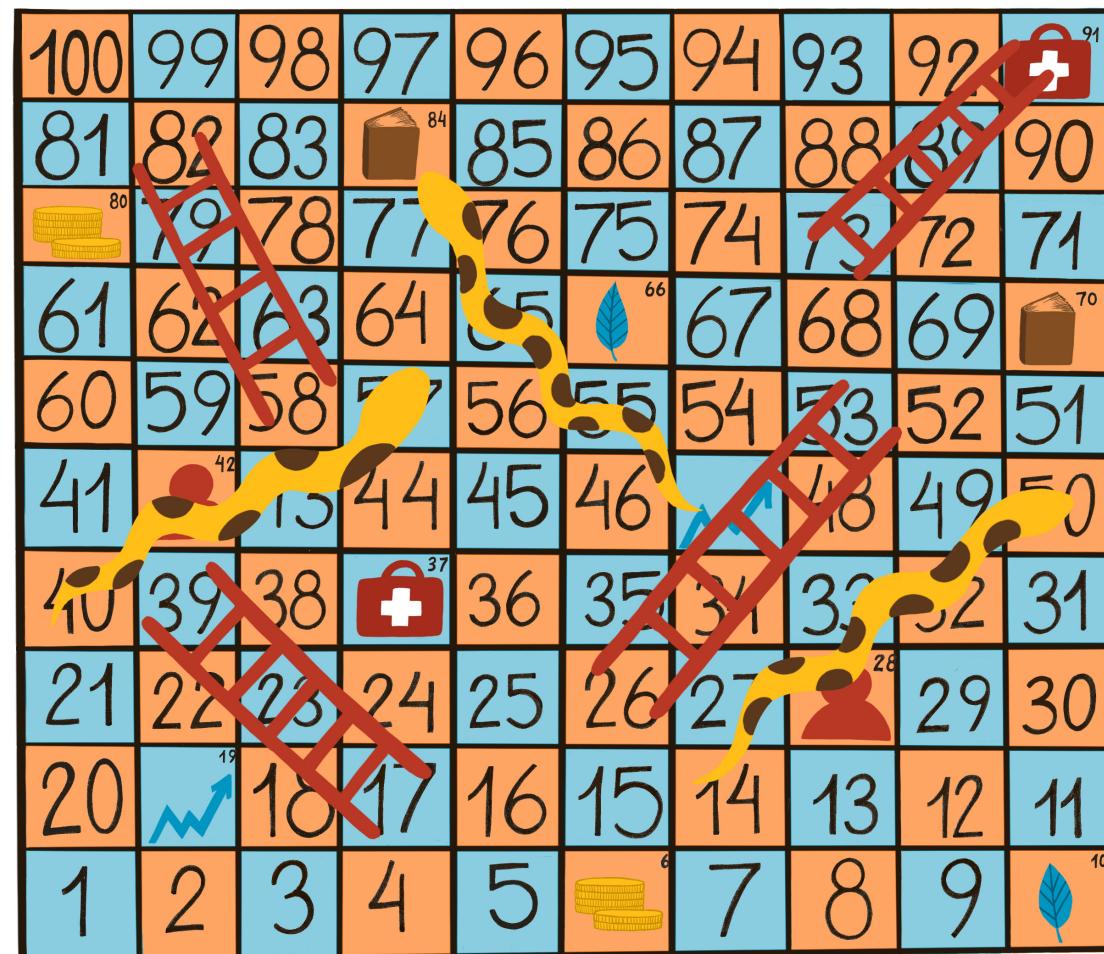
Sustainability is a competitive profession to enter. People join the profession not just to earn a living, but also to make a positive impact in the world. Others see it as an industry that only exists in economically developed countries, where people have the extra time and resources to think beyond basic needs.

Within this section of the survey, we try to better understand the barriers that respondents encounter in entering and progressing in the profession, and we also provide some insights on barriers specifically faced by people of colour.

Barriers to entry

Respondents mentioned several barriers faced when entering the profession.

Access to networks: Most respondents stated that networks were particularly difficult to access in sustainability, given that it is not a mainstream career choice. South Asian and Black practitioners, and those that come from a materially poor and working-class background, found it particularly difficult to make their way in.



“ Because my father works for the UN, I lived in many different countries worldwide. Because of this, I ended up living in Geneva, Switzerland, which is where I was first exposed to the idea of sustainability. Moreover, my father's UN benefits meant the UN paid for most of my schooling, with my family paying the rest, which allowed me to pursue any educational path that I wanted. If not for these factors, I would most certainly not have entered the field, which is an extremely rare field to pursue in a formal matter for Africans like myself.”

- Black man (junior staff),
circular economy policy, Canada

“ When I moved to Canada from my home country, I didn't know anybody, and I certainly didn't know anybody in sustainability. To compensate, I did my research on people, and reached out to so many of them for coffees. Many didn't reply. However, over time as I got more involved in the profession, I started meeting more people. To this day, I try to pay it forward because I know how hard it was getting started.”

- Middle Eastern woman (middle manager),
social impact, Canada

Financial means: The cost of entering the profession – advanced degrees, unpaid internships and living costs in major metropolitan areas – are a substantial barrier, requiring material sacrifices. Amongst survey results, materially poor and working-class, Hispanic or Latinx and Black practitioners felt the most challenged financially.

“ When I first graduated and was trying to enter the field, the only way I could get my foot in the door was to take an unpaid internship for six months, which turned into a job offer at the end of the internship. I was very privileged to have the financial support of my family in pursuing my dream career – there's no way I could have afforded it without that safety net.”

- White woman (middle manager),
sustainable packaging, US

Education: Many practitioners state that a master's degree is a minimum entry point to get into the profession. Older practitioners are less likely to have a master's degree given their work experience. Those who are likely to have advanced education are less likely to find this a barrier, particularly those of East Asian (84%), South Asian (80%) and Hispanic/Latinx (78%) descent.

“ “The importance of education was driven into me from a very young age. It is hard to find anyone else within my family and community that didn't pursue at least a master's degree, or focus on law, medicine or engineering.”

- South Asian man (senior manager),
responsible investment, UK

Do we need so much formal education to work in sustainability?

For an industry with such a pervasive impact and one focused on future proofing, sustainability as a profession needs to be accessible to all. However, given the large proportion of practitioners with master's degrees, does this create unnecessarily high barriers?

Respondents said that a master's degree is helpful in adding credibility and competitiveness to a job application. In some cases, it is a baseline requirement, such as in large multilaterals. Master's degrees also provide technical knowledge in areas such as science, engineering or finance, and help expand professional networks.

However, given how quickly the sustainability profession is evolving, soft skills such as communications, research and stakeholder engagement, are becoming increasingly important. These skills can be gained through lived experience or professional experience in other professions. Lastly, many respondents stated that a lot of topics are evolving so quickly that they are learned on the job, and the ability to adapt and learn quickly is as important as any other skill in the profession.

To attract and hire more diverse candidates to roles, it will be important to consider the skill sets actually needed.

Difficulty obtaining experience: Respondents say that there are few entry-level opportunities, and those that exist require many qualifications and have a low rate of pay.

“When I first moved to the US to pursue my PhD, as an immigrant I had to beg my supervising professor to write me a reference letter to work at a well-known NGO for a half-year long, completely unpaid internship. I was accustomed to my merit getting me places in my home country, so this was incredibly humbling.”

- South Asian woman (organizational lead), conservation non-profit, Southeast Asia

Lack of exposure to sustainability careers at a young age: Some respondents say that when they were selecting their post-secondary education, awareness of sustainability careers was quite low. In comparison, other professions, such as those focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM), have more engagement to encourage interest from future generations.

“I grew up in the Midlands, which is like the Rust Belt of the UK – a lot of heavy industry, such as coal mining or iron work. In the 1970s and '80s, employment went away, and the area became quite depressed. I never knew what job opportunities there were – the options were either to become a teacher or join the armed forces. The structural inequalities have led to a limitation of the imagination at a young age – certainly I had never imagined working in sustainability.”

- White man (leadership team), public policy, UK

Lack of mentorship and role models:

Respondents say that prior to entering the field, they found it difficult to find mentorship and role models to help them navigate the field. This sentiment is particularly acute amongst people of marginalized backgrounds – only 24% of Black, 29% of South Asians and 37% of East Asians practitioners agreed that they saw someone like them in the profession before they entered it, compared to 70% of White women.

Legacy hiring: Respondents mentioned that sustainability organizations tend to hire from specific universities – for example, Ivy League schools in the US, or Russell Universities in the UK. This limits opportunities to many. However, post-pandemic, as the profession of higher education is disrupted and learning is democratized, this may change things for younger generations.

“At one of the companies I worked at, Oxbridge graduates were the standard, no questions asked. I remember my manager picked up a CV and saw that the candidate went to Oxford, and immediately told me to call and hire them without an interview.”

- South Asian man (organizational lead), climate change, UK

Family support: In some communities, parents may support specific career paths due to their stability or status, which can create an additional hurdle in pursuing a career in sustainability.

“My parents immigrated to Canada and had an extremely hard life to make ends meet and create better opportunities for me and my siblings. They would have preferred that I pick a more traditional field like accounting, medicine or engineering, so I had to create a case for getting into sustainability. It took some convincing to win them over, and now they're very supportive. I'm still not sure they understand what exactly I do, though.”

- East Asian woman (middle manager), philanthropy/sustainability, Canada

INSIGHTS:

Eighty percent of all respondents felt that they had the necessary transferable skills to enter the profession, showing that we should consider the skillset actually required and accept other experiences beyond higher education and direct experience in the profession. Of note, Black (86%) and Hispanic or Latinx (88%) practitioners had high confidence in their transferable skills.

Barriers to advancement

Survey respondents and interviewees also went beyond barriers to entry to discuss barriers for advancement. Some of these barriers include:

Networks in the workplace: Some respondents say that not having access to the “old boys’ club” or the “pub” crowd meant that they are left out of connecting with colleagues or being privy to knowledge that could support their advancement in the workplace.

“*Ever since I became a mum, I feel less and less like I’m able to keep up with what is going on within the organization, and I think that has affected my advancement prospects. I used to be able to go to the pub with everyone after work, and now that is near impossible.”*

- White woman (middle manager),
responsible sourcing, UK

Lack of access to growth opportunities:

Respondents say that it is easier to advance when you are part of challenging projects that are tied to growth within organizations.

“*When I’ve worked on projects in a growing area of the business, that is when I’ve progressed upwards through the ranks. I’ve been in a situation where I’ve been in business lines that are stagnant, and that is when my career has stalled. Because of that, I keep looking for where we’ll grow next.”*

- Mixed-race man (middle manager),
renewable energy, Canada



Lack of feedback/transparency in recruitment:

Respondents also discuss the difficulties they face in applying for jobs. Often, they don't hear from recruiters or can't receive feedback from recruiters on why their application is not successful, even though their qualifications are similar or exceed those of the person who is hired. While it is time-consuming to give this feedback, it would support the improvement of those in the industry. Blind hiring is another tool that some companies have used to remove any potential bias.

“I've applied to dozens of jobs through different recruitment agencies, and even though I'm fully qualified and I've worked in many global companies and markets around the world, I never hear back from them on why my application wasn't successful. It leads me to wonder if it's because my name sounds ethnic.”

- South Asian woman (middle manager), diversity, equity and inclusion and sustainability, US

“To ensure we are as inclusive as possible in our hiring, we switched to a software that enables blind hiring – hiding the candidates' names and other identifying features and focusing on the answers to questions related to role requirements. The change in the candidates we have received – and the quality of the candidates – has been both surprising and refreshing.”

- Southeast Asian woman (senior leader), non-profit, UK and Europe

Lack of sponsorship: As people advance in their career, it becomes more important to find senior sponsors who will use their influence to help advance a sustainability practitioner's career. Without any formal programs within companies, this can sometimes take on the air of favouritism.**Caregiving commitments:** Responsibilities such as childcare, elder care and caring for dependents with disabilities, limits the time available for work and therefore, advancing in the profession.

“I spend time caring for my mum, who has a long-term disability. I'm not rushing to get back into full-time work, because especially with the lockdown, I need as much flexibility as I can get to help her – I'm often the only person she sees, and I help get her groceries and other necessities. In some ways, it is a whole other job.”

- Mixed-race man (freelance), green buildings, UK

Discrimination: Respondents describe situations that they encountered where not fitting "the norm" had contributed to their lack of advancement, such as ageism, ableism, sexism, racism, classism and/or immigration status. Some even described being discriminated against for having the "wrong" kind of accent.

“One of my former colleagues, who is of Korean descent, had to get speech therapy to 'correct' her accent, as she found it was limiting her progression. After she eliminated her accent, she began to progress more quickly through the ranks in the organization. It made me sad that she had to change that part of her to seem more credible.”

- East Asian woman (leadership team), green buildings, Canada

Lack of turnover at more senior levels: Those who have reached the mid-career point have discussed the "waiting game" for senior-level sustainability roles. While the total number of sustainability roles is rising, traditionally, these roles are not often vacated.

“I worked at a large entertainment company, where the chief sustainability officer had been in his role for over a decade, and he told me that was where he would likely retire. There were still 15 more years until his retirement, so that's when I decided I had to pursue other opportunities elsewhere.”

- East Asian man (leadership team), corporate sustainability, US

Other barriers for people of colour

In interviews with people of colour who work in the profession, some of the barriers repeatedly mentioned include the following:

Burden of equity, diversity and inclusion falling to people of colour: In organizations with few people of colour, many stated that they felt the burden of EDI fell to them, with the need to constantly recall stories and traumas from their lived experiences. EDI can be a heavy load, made even heavier for those who find themselves with EDI work in addition to their everyday assignments, and without the necessary resources. For organizations with few resources, such as non-profits, this burden is even more acute. The global non-profit focused on workplaces that work for women, Catalyst, has extensive research on this phenomenon, known as an "emotional tax".

The weight of representation: For organizations with few people of colour, many state that they often feel that they must represent their racial/ethnic background "perfectly" to ensure it doesn't affect future hiring opportunities or reinforce negative stereotypes.

"Otherism" distracting from someone's humanity: People of colour note that their differences become their defining characteristic and distract from the work they are doing in the organization.



Code-switching: People of colour also describe the heavy toll of code-switching – or “adjusting one’s style of speech, appearance, behaviour and expression that will optimize the comfort of others, in exchange for fair treatment, quality service and employment opportunities.”

Respondents suggest that they often change who they are to fit in, to gain social power or as a protection/defense mechanism.

Assumed deficiencies and being held to a higher standard: Some people of colour report that their colleagues assume that they are a “diversity hire” and therefore less competent and credible as employees. Some are told that standards are lowered for them, and that more challenging assignments are given to other staff. However, many respondents report that they are held to a higher standard than those in the dominant group in their organizations.

Viewpoints ignored or co-opted: Many people of colour and women (White and of colour) describe frustrating experiences where they have proposed something in their organizations, only to have it dismissed or ignored. However, once the same idea is repeated by a more “credible” colleague, the ideas suddenly acquire more currency. This can happen on a larger scale: for example, the current incarnation of “regenerative agriculture” is built on generations of farming practices used by Afro-Indigenous people.

Intra- and intercultural conflict: Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) or BIPOC communities are not monolithic, and certain groups may have past histories that have pitted one against the other. In terms of intracultural conflict, one respondent says that within her South Asian community, there can be conflict between people of different castes or genders. For intercultural conflict, one Black respondent in the US recalled the historical tensions between Black and Asian communities after the 1992 Los Angeles riots, but also noted some of the efforts for solidarity after the Atlanta spa shootings in 2021.

Surplus of life distractions affecting well-being: Certain groups may be subject to more distractions and trauma in their daily lives than others, which has knock-on effects on mental, emotional and physical well-being.

“People don’t often understand what intergenerational trauma means, and over time, talking about what happens to my community is numbing – you don’t want to ‘trauma dump’ on people all the time. Intergenerational trauma isn’t just negative impacts in your family or community, it’s a consistent hum of trauma every day. To illustrate how severe it is, I asked my colleague, ‘How many funerals do you go to in a year?’ He said, ‘I think I’ve been to three in my whole life.’ He was surprised to hear that I go to, on average, three a week. It’s suicides, accidents, addiction, health issues in my community, from generations of trauma. That is how intergenerational trauma looks every day.”

- Indigenous woman (middle manager), government and public policy, Canada



Section III: Experiences in EDI in the profession

Experiences in EDI in the profession

We aim to better understand individual experiences for equity, diversity and inclusion in the profession. In particular, we look at people's perceptions of whether organizations are "walking the talk," to the degree that they provide a level of psychological safety within their organization, if they feel a sense of belonging, their career progression, and competencies in how to support others. We include summary tables in this section for each of these attributes.

In summary

Overall, White men generally feel the most included, confident and psychologically safe within their organizations, compared to other groups.

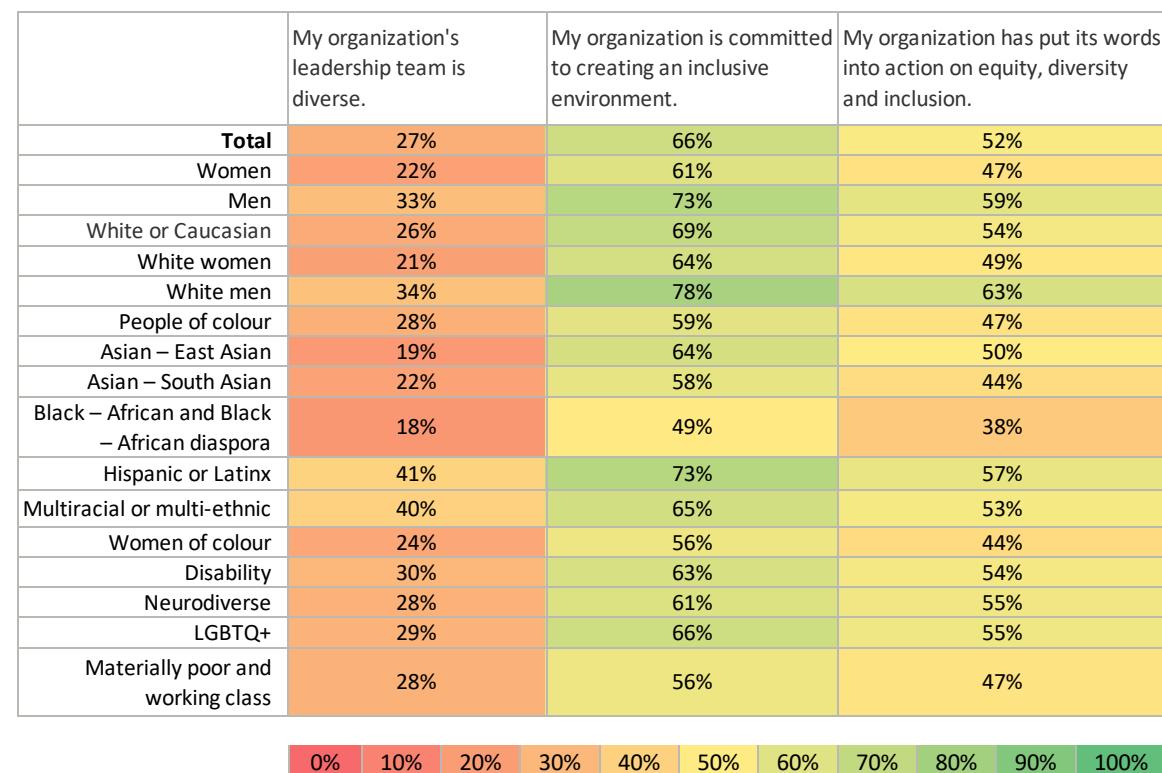
While all respondents said they feel they have a significant contribution to make in their organizations, Black, South Asian and those coming from materially poor and working-class backgrounds are the least likely to feel included in their organizations and see the least opportunity for career progression. Of all groups, practitioners who are neurodiverse or live with disabilities do not feel psychologically safe within organizations. Meanwhile, White or Caucasian sustainability practitioners feel the least confident in how to be an ally to diverse individuals.

Organizations 'walking the talk'

Figure 15: Organizations 'walking the talk'

N = 1,238

Question: To what degree do you agree with the following statements? My organization's leadership team is diverse; My organization is committed to creating an inclusive environment; and My organization has put its words into action on equity, diversity and inclusion. % who agree or strongly agree



Legend: % who agree or strongly agree. (colours from 0-100%)

Colours are given to visually demonstrate anomalies and trends.

My organization's leadership team is diverse.

27% of people agreed that their leadership team is diverse.

Very few people agreed that their leadership teams were diverse, across all groups.

“ My company's management team was originally all White men. I voiced opinions and made a real effort to ensure more women were hired in management roles. Now the management ratio between male and female is 70% male to 30% female. However, over 95% of the team are White. The issue with having an all-White management team is the lack of diversity and knowledge on cultural and racial issues. For example, the management team stayed completely silent on the BLM protests last year, and when pushed, didn't think to discuss the subject at all.”

- White woman (leadership team), green buildings, UK

My organization is committed to creating an inclusive environment.

Approximately 66% of the sample agree that their organization is committed to creating an inclusive environment. For those who feel their organizations are creating the most inclusive environment, the outliers most agreeing are 78% of White men, 73% of Hispanic or Latinx, and 73% of all men. Those practitioners who agree the least are Black (49%), women of colour (56%), materially poor and working-class (56%) and South Asian (58%).

“ Although my organization is saying all the right things about diversity, we are a very homogeneous organization, with only 4% employees from the BAME community. We're not against diversity, but there is no internal driver for change.”

- White woman (middle manager), environmental regulatory agency, UK

“ There is a lot of diversity among the Hispanic/Latinx community – people who are of Afro-Latino descent, Indigenous heritage or White Spanish descent. Although I'm a lighter-skinned Latino, I've definitely felt strange outside of a metropolitan area, and people have made comments about the 'Latin guy,' but sustainability organizations tend to be in cities where there's a large Latinx population, so I've generally felt included.”

- Latino man (middle manager), equity, diversity and inclusion/sustainability, US

My organization has put its words into action on equity, diversity and inclusion.

As an industry, just over half (52%) of respondents agree that their organizations have put their words into action on equity, diversity and inclusion. Like the previous question, White men (63%), men (59%) and the Hispanic/Latinx community (57%) see more activities being undertaken, and Black (38%), women of colour (44%) and South Asians (44%) see less activity being undertaken.

“ I think that there's an allure of working in a space where you're not constantly fighting to swim upstream, and not having to always be cognizant of appropriately representing your own culture and identity. You want to contribute to opening doors and to normalizing having people like us in these positions and fighting the good fight. But at the same time, it's a lot of work and labour, and sometimes it doesn't go anywhere, and at what point do you draw the line and say, 'This isn't worth it anymore. I'm going to run myself into the ground trying to convince my colleagues that specific behaviours are not OK? How do you uncode a lifetime's worth of engineered bias that you don't have the personal proximity to, and how do you do it in a cultivated way? I'm trying to deracialize others by osmosis, by virtue of being here. Oftentimes, there's such a professional veneer that separates us from any type of conversation of true depth. We can have these very 'professional' conversations that won't get anybody in trouble. People have questions, but don't feel safe asking questions, and the ones who feel safe are there without the intention of learning anything.”

- Indigenous woman (middle manager), Indigenous relations/natural resources, Canada

“ Earlier in my career, when I reported racist behaviours to HR, I had assumed that they were there to take care of their employees. Their responses to me were: ‘We understand,’ and ‘These are things you should bring up,’ and then they told me, ‘Maybe it’s all in your head.’ This is gaslighting, plain and simple. It made me think I was overthinking things. In hindsight, this probably isn’t ideal, but my advice to younger people to survive is to not say anything and try to leave, as opposed to making something work, because there’s a good chance what they’re looking for won’t happen.”

- Black man (middle manager), responsible investment, UK

“ When I started my role at my company, there was significant information asymmetry in terms of what I should be making, and my negotiation left me feeling uneasy. I went into the role with some distrust. It has taken some time for my pay to be what it should be, and after George Floyd’s murder happened and the business world was taking notice, there were endless discussions about creating more inclusive workplaces, yet this pay discrepancy continued to be a thorn in my side.

The past few years, there’s been a lot more diverse people being hired, but there’s a lot that the company must do to ensure that more diverse people are being paid fairly, treated fairly and have an improved experience at the company. This is the most immediately actionable piece of the puzzle.”

- Black man (junior staff), corporate sustainability, US

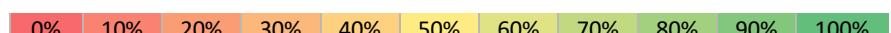
Psychological safety

Figure 16: Psychological safety

N = 1,241

Question: To what degree do you agree with the following statements? “I’m confident to put forth my ideas in my organization,” and “I can voice a contrary opinion without a fear of negative consequences.” % who strongly agree or agree

	I'm confident to put forth my ideas in my organization.	I can voice a contrary opinion without a fear of negative consequences.
Total	86%	67%
Women	83%	65%
Men	91%	72%
White or Caucasian	87%	71%
White women	84%	69%
White men	93%	76%
People of colour	84%	60%
Asian – East Asian	86%	59%
Asian – South Asian	80%	57%
Black – African and Black – African diaspora	84%	60%
Hispanic or Latinx	86%	65%
Multiracial or multi-ethnic	74%	61%
Women of colour	82%	58%
Disability	79%	57%
Neurodiverse	82%	57%
LGBTQ+	86%	70%
Materially poor and working class	81%	59%



Legend: % who agree or strongly agree. (colours from 0-100%)

Colours are given to visually demonstrate anomalies and trends.

I'm confident to put forth my ideas in my organization.

While most respondents are confident to put forth ideas in their organizations, men (91%) and in particular, White men (93%) are the most comfortable doing so. Generally, South Asian respondents (80%), those with disabilities (79%) and those who are neurodiverse (82%) are the least comfortable doing so.

“To some extent, I've always been 'performing' for the people around me. I naturally wanted to make people more comfortable. This past year, I suddenly became more aware that I was doing that, and I was so disgusted by it and suddenly stopped. Interestingly, when I stopped, I found that everyone started performing for me. There was sudden interest and concern for my experience, and it was a strange turning of tables. I have to say, I didn't like it – I didn't want people to perform for me, and I didn't want to have this endless public sharing of feelings. I just wanted tangible things to change and to move on with our lives. I didn't intend to be an EDI professional – I want to work on climate change.”

- Black man (middle manager),
corporate sustainability, US

I can voice a contrary opinion without a fear of negative consequences.

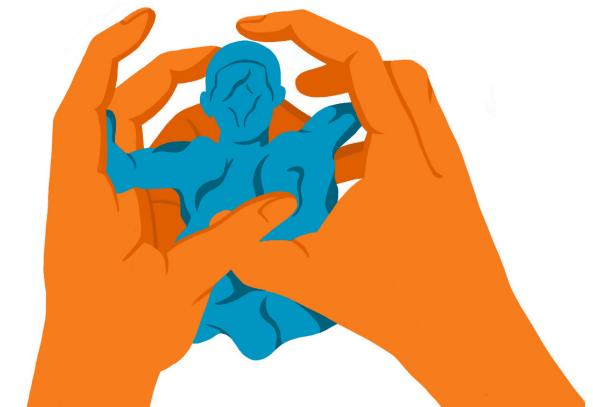
Men in general (72%) and in particular, White men (76%) agree that they can voice a contrary opinion within their organizations without repercussions. Meanwhile, practitioners who are neurodiverse, have a disability or are South Asian (each 57%), and Black practitioners feel relatively unsafe stating contrary opinions, indicating the need to expand a culture of psychological safety to all.

INSIGHTS: The tricky dynamic in discussions of racial equity

Sharing experiences of bias and exclusion can be difficult and painful for many people. Therefore, conversations about race in organizations are intensely personal and emotional, and in a setting where professional distance is the norm, this can be difficult, particularly if a culture of psychological safety has not been established.

While the benefits of diversity are well-known, having candid discussions about racism in the workplace can risk alienation or even retaliation, particularly where comments concern the leadership or business model of the organization. Sometimes, refuge can be found within employee resource groups or the safe spaces of groups of a similar culture.

Those that bring up the topic at work must do some mental math to see what effects it could have in terms of jeopardizing their career or



relationships, particularly if people do not have allies to help them challenge harmful practices. In some cases, some sustainability practitioners have stopped trying because it is too risky. They are seen as a threat – as too extreme, over-sensitive, negative or angry. In some of the worst cases, employees with good intentions might leave the organization out of frustration or exhaustion/burnout from pushing too hard.

However, by not speaking, some people then feel the guilt of silence, particularly where they believe they should have said something, and have allowed a situation to get worse. Politeness gets in the way of making change.

Ultimately, we all need to approach the topic with humility, bravery and the right tools to have these conversations – until we all develop some comfort with the topic of race, we cannot achieve a sustainable and just future.

“ When I was younger, I didn't always feel like I could be myself at work or say something when I was faced with racist behaviour. I've often been the first and only African American in environmental programs. When you are the 'only' and you speak up about racism in the workplace, people don't want to speak to you anymore. You face alienation. Now I'm close to retirement, and I don't worry about the consequences anymore, because these things need to be said.”

- Black woman (middle manager),
environmental programs, government, US

Belonging

Figure 17: Belonging

N = 1,241

Question: To what degree do you agree with the following statements? “I make an important contribution to my organization”, and “I am comfortable talking about my background and cultural experiences with my colleagues.” % who strongly agree or agree

	I make an important contribution to my organization.	I am comfortable talking about my background and cultural experiences with my colleagues.
Total	90%	76%
Women	90%	73%
Men	91%	83%
White or Caucasian	91%	81%
White women	91%	79%
White men	93%	89%
People of colour	89%	67%
Asian – East Asian	88%	65%
Asian – South Asian	92%	68%
Black – African and Black – African	86%	57%
Hispanic or Latinx	92%	71%
Multiracial or multi-ethnic	84%	63%
Women of colour	89%	64%
Disability	83%	70%
Neurodiverse	82%	69%
LGBTQ+	94%	77%
Materially poor and working-class	86%	70%



Legend: % who agree or strongly agree. (colours from 0-100%)
Colours are given to visually demonstrate anomalies and trends.

I make an important contribution to my organization.

There is general confidence across the board in the value of the work that sustainability professionals contribute to their organizations (on average, 90% agree). However, it is worth noting that there is less confidence among professionals with a disability (83%) or neurodiversity (82%) about the importance of their contributions to their organizations, and high confidence among the LGBTQ+ (94%), White men (93%), South Asian and Hispanic or Latinx (92%) groups.

I am comfortable talking about my background and cultural experiences with my colleagues.

White or Caucasian practitioners (81%) – both men (89%) and women (79%) – are more comfortable speaking about their background and cultural experiences among their colleagues. Black practitioners (57%) and multiracial (63%) practitioners felt the least comfortable.

“I am afraid to be perceived as the angry or aggressive Black woman, so I often have to overcompensate with being ‘nice’ in white spaces. It’s something I have honed since I was a child, this ability to code-switch. It’s exhausting not being yourself.”

- Black woman (middle manager),
corporate responsibility and EDI, US

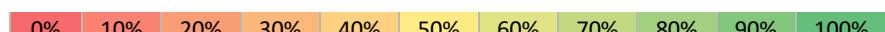
Career progression

Figure 18: Career progression

N = 1,241

Question: To what degree do you agree with the following statements? “Being a diverse member of society does not hold me back from advancing in my organization,” and “I’m confident putting myself forward for leadership roles.” % who strongly agree or agree

	Being a diverse member of society does not hold me back from advancing in my organization.	I’m confident putting myself forward for leadership roles.
Total	49%	73%
Women	43%	69%
Men	57%	84%
White or Caucasian	N/A	77%
White women	45%	72%
White men	N/A	85%
People of colour	44%	69%
Asian – East Asian	48%	64%
Asian – South Asian	38%	69%
Black – African and Black – African diaspora	34%	64%
Hispanic or Latinx	55%	73%
Multiracial or multi-ethnic	50%	55%
Women of colour	40%	63%
Disability	51%	64%
Neurodiverse	52%	69%
LGBTQ+	56%	72%
Materially poor and working-class	41%	73%



Legend: % who agree or strongly agree. (colours from 0-100%)

Colours are given to visually demonstrate anomalies and trends.

Being a diverse member of society does not hold me back from advancing in my organization.

People of colour are more likely to see their diversity as problematic for their advancement in organizations. It is particularly pronounced among Black (only 34% agree that being diverse doesn't hold them back) and South Asian practitioners (38% agree).

“ In general, it is not difficult for BIPOC to enter the sustainability field. The difficulty is career progression and being recognized for having senior leadership potential.”

- East Asian woman (middle manager), corporate sustainability, Canada

“ When I was hiring for our team, we definitely looked at skills, but when we ultimately had to decide between candidates, I had to assess cultural fit – we spend a lot of time together, so would this be someone I could go out for drinks with after work? Would we have to adjust our team dynamic to help the person fit in? When I reflect on it now, I wonder if the idea of cultural fit is unnecessarily discriminatory.”

- Mixed-race woman (support staff), human resources at a sustainability consultancy, US

“ My team is quite diverse, and I spend a great deal of time translating what my team does into 'old White man'-friendly language – who of course, make up the majority of the executives in our company.”

- White man (leadership team), green buildings, Canada

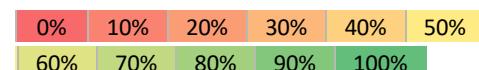
I'm confident putting myself forward for leadership roles.

Overwhelmingly, those who identify as White and/or men are the most comfortable putting themselves forward for leadership roles, with 85% of those identifying as White men agreeing, 84% who are men agreeing, and 77% who are White or Caucasian agreeing.

Those who are least comfortable putting themselves forward for leadership roles include those who identify as multiracial (55%), women of colour (63%), those with disabilities and those who are Black and East Asian (64% each).

“ I've typically had to fend for myself to advance in large organizations. However, after I joined this company, this was the first time I've had a person of colour as my manager, and she has actively taken an interest in my advancement – maybe because she inherently understands how hard it is as a person of colour. Before now, I hadn't realized how much work is required, and frankly, the invisible games you need to play and networks you need to build, to move into the upper echelons of an organization.”

- South Asian man (leadership team), environmental sustainability, US



Legend: % who agree or strongly agree.
(colours from 0-100%)
Colours are given to visually demonstrate anomalies and trends.

Supporting others

Figure 19: Supporting others

N = 1,241

Question: To what degree do you agree with the following statements? “I'm confident that I know how to be an ally to diverse individuals” and “I know how to act against bullying or harassment.” % who strongly agree or agree

	I'm confident that I know how to be an ally to diverse individuals.	I know how to act against bullying or harassment.
Total	77%	73%
Women	74%	68%
Men	82%	79%
White or Caucasian	73%	72%
White women	71%	69%
White men	77%	79%
People of colour	81%	71%
Asian – East Asian	81%	68%
Asian – South Asian	81%	64%
Black – African and Black – African diaspora	91%	71%
Hispanic or Latinx	84%	76%
Multiracial or multi-ethnic	84%	69%
Women of colour	80%	65%
Disability	79%	73%
Neurodiverse	81%	72%
LGBTQ+	85%	75%
Materially poor and working-class	77%	71%

I'm confident that I know how to be an ally to diverse individuals.

There is a generally high level of agreement (77%) in terms of sustainability practitioners knowing how to be an ally to diverse people, although given previous answers on inclusion, what we think we know may not in practice translate into desired outcomes.

Black (91%), LGBTQ+ (85%) and multiracial individuals (84%) feel the most comfortable in terms of their ability to be an ally to diverse individuals. White or Caucasian practitioners (73%), and in particular, White women (71%) felt the least confident in their allyship of diverse individuals.

“I would say that I'm a White-passing person. It has given me some selectivity in identity, and I'm incredibly proud of my heritages – I almost feel like I can be a bridge builder. It has of course benefited me to appear White, but other times, I feel like I don't belong in either world.”

- Mixed-race woman (organizational lead), international development, Canada

“With respect to being an ally – it's tough to know what you don't know. BLM reactions were an eye-opener to me.”

- White man (self-employed), sustainability consultant, Canada

I know how to act against bullying or harassment.

Overall, men and White men in particular (79%) are the most comfortable in knowing how to act against bullying or harassment. Meanwhile, women of colour (65%) and South Asians (64%) are less likely to agree that they know how to act against bullying or harassment.

“There are instances where people just wash over things – if someone said something offensive, and they don't address it. People aren't empowered to challenge discrimination, and our organization is trying to address it by empowering people. Washing over things is almost inherent in British culture – and we must go against it. In my experience, when you try to push back, and you do it in a polite way – people respond positively. I haven't had huge pushback from my approach.”

- South Asian woman (middle manager), government, UK

“I had been doing some progressive work in the urban planning division of the government, engaging minorities in the community. This division had been accustomed to only working with White communities and was predominantly White itself. Though I wasn't given many resources or support, the work I did was lauded in the public, because it had good results.

“I had a new supervisor start who didn't realize that she had unchecked racial biases, and it got even worse, given the tone from the top. The more I started showing ambition, the more she would tell me that I was spending too much time focused on disadvantaged communities, even though they were a good chunk of our service territories. She became increasingly hostile, berating me in front of people and micromanaging all my work. I began to see even fewer resources for my programs. We couldn't have honest conversations, and despite my best efforts to manage up, I could tell that she wanted to get me fired and was building a case against me. To counter that, I had to spend most of my time documenting everything that happened and then filing a racial harassment case. I ended up surviving, and the supervisor left, but I was completely burnt out. I continued to have to work with my guard up, and even six months later, starting at a new organization, I'm still recuperating. I'm not sure if it was worth it to try and change the system by myself.”

- Mixed-race woman (leadership team), urban planning/charity, US



Section IV: Organizational approaches to EDI

Organizational approaches to EDI

Much like any other program of importance in organizations, to fully realize the benefits of equity, diversity and inclusion programs, time, money and resources are needed to ensure that EDI principles are embedded within the company.

Organizations have built various diversity programs throughout the employee life cycle, to attract and recruit, engage and communicate, manage performance and advance talent, and plan for succession. However, it is important to note that while introducing such programs is an important first step, it is just as important to ensure that the programs are meaningfully set up to go beyond a tick-box exercise, and that ultimately, you need to have a critical mass of diverse individuals to change business as usual and to increase retention.

Overall, the majority of organizations have some sort of diversity and inclusion policy and a grievance mechanism/complaint-handling system, training and recruitment for diverse candidates.

Canadian companies tend to be behind both their UK and US counterparts in terms of developing formalized EDI program elements.

“ Over the past two years, the demands on EDI in all aspects of my role have increased by 80% – recruitment, governance, creating belonging within the organization. It all requires time, money and resources to be successful.”

- White woman (support staff), HR professional, sustainability consultancy, UK

“ There are huge mismatches between what organizations say they want to achieve and the efficacy of the actions they undertake to make this happen. That is not to say that there are not tens of exciting initiatives. The point is there are few breakthroughs being achieved. In part, this is due to the disconnect between people feeling it is OK to describe racism in society – stop-and-search being one example – and not being able to say, ‘Yes, these things happen in this business, but in a far more subtle way.’ As one Black leader inside a major bank said to me, ‘The Board are seeing improvements in the overall BAME score and are frankly not interested in the lack of progress for Black colleagues, because if the BAME measure is improving, they have done their job.’”

- White man (organizational lead), organizational renewal, UK

Figure 20A: Organizational programs on EDI

N = 1,157

Question: My company has the following diversity and inclusion programs in place (select all that apply):

INSIGHTS:

The larger the organization, the more likely it is to have specific EDI programs in place.

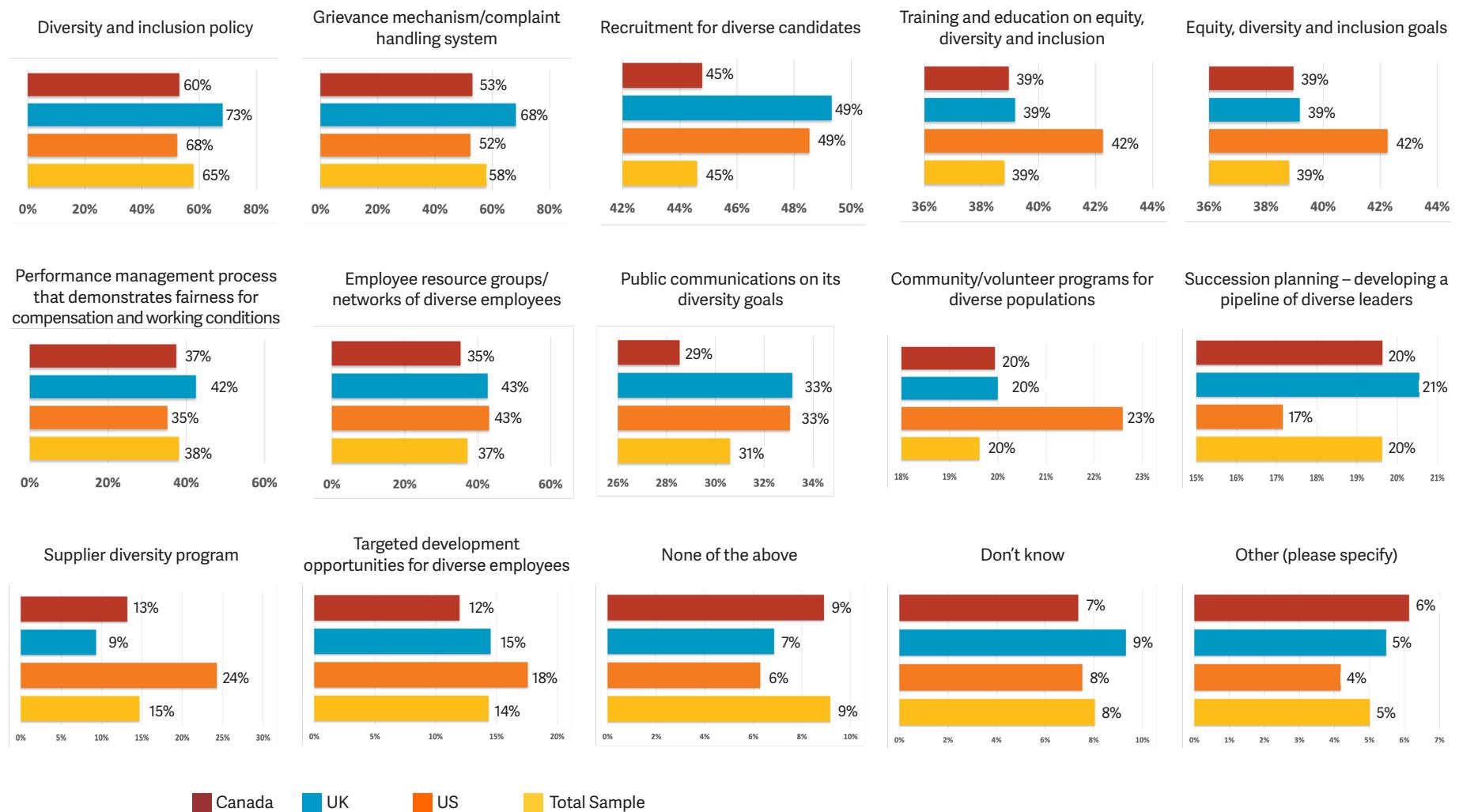


Figure 20B: Organizational programs on EDI, by company size

N = 755

Question: My company has the following diversity and inclusion programs in place (select all that apply):

The following numbers of employees work(ed) in my most recent organization:

# of employees	EDI policy	Grievance mechanism	Employee resource groups	EDI training	Diverse recruitment	EDI goals	Performance management – focus on fairness	Public communications on EDI goals	Succession planning – diverse talent	Community/ volunteer programs for diverse populations	Supplier diversity program	Targeted development opportunities – diverse employees	Don't know	None of the above	Other
1	24%	14%	10%	10%	21%	10%	7%	14%	3%	3%	10%	0%	3%	38%	31%
2-9	35%	21%	9%	13%	33%	23%	22%	13%	7%	8%	10%	6%	12%	23%	10%
10-24	47%	30%	11%	25%	42%	24%	25%	23%	9%	4%	3%	4%	9%	21%	3%
25-49	44%	37%	7%	24%	39%	23%	30%	18%	8%	6%	4%	2%	10%	19%	4%
50-99	52%	43%	13%	40%	46%	23%	31%	16%	13%	8%	2%	7%	8%	13%	3%
100-499	63%	54%	28%	32%	35%	34%	43%	23%	15%	11%	6%	9%	13%	8%	4%
500-999	65%	69%	33%	56%	40%	23%	44%	22%	18%	13%	9%	14%	10%	3%	5%
1,000-4,999	77%	71%	43%	52%	42%	46%	41%	30%	23%	26%	14%	15%	6%	4%	5%
5,000-9,999	81%	79%	68%	65%	53%	55%	43%	45%	25%	31%	20%	22%	4%	1%	2%
>10,000	87%	81%	69%	67%	60%	60%	49%	53%	35%	38%	34%	29%	6%	1%	3%
Total	65%	58%	45%	37%	45%	39%	38%	31%	20%	20%	15%	14%	8%	9%	5%



Legend: % who agree or strongly agree. (colours from 0-100%)

Colours are given to visually demonstrate anomalies and trends.

“It feels like we're stuck in a Catch-22 with recruitment at my current organization. We want to attract a more diverse range of candidates, but busting out of the very White, middle-class sustainability bubble is proving tricky. We're a women-led organization, so feel positive from that perspective, but would like to do more to champion ethnic diversity in the team.”

- White woman (leadership team), non-profit, UK

“I work in a small start-up of less than 20 employees. It would be great to be able to specify the lack of EDI resources/programs due to this context and learn more about how small employers can be proactive on these fronts.”

- Multiracial woman (leadership team), sustainability tech start-up, US

“Our organization does not reflect the diverse population of London. It has good intentions, but not enough drive, desire or motivation to bring diversity into recruiting, promotion or leadership positions. It invalidates people's experiences, because racism cannot exist in an organization that works on climate change.”

- Latinx woman (middle manager), international development non-profit, UK

“We are headquartered in London, and we have a number of offices in other parts of the world that are developing countries. I feel like we have a very transactional relationship with these other offices, despite their work being an important part of what we do. Our team calls are often at times that are at odd hours for them, and it is often quiet on the other end. I don't feel like they feel like they are part of the team, and to my knowledge, we've never asked them.”

- White woman (leadership team), responsible sourcing non-profit, UK

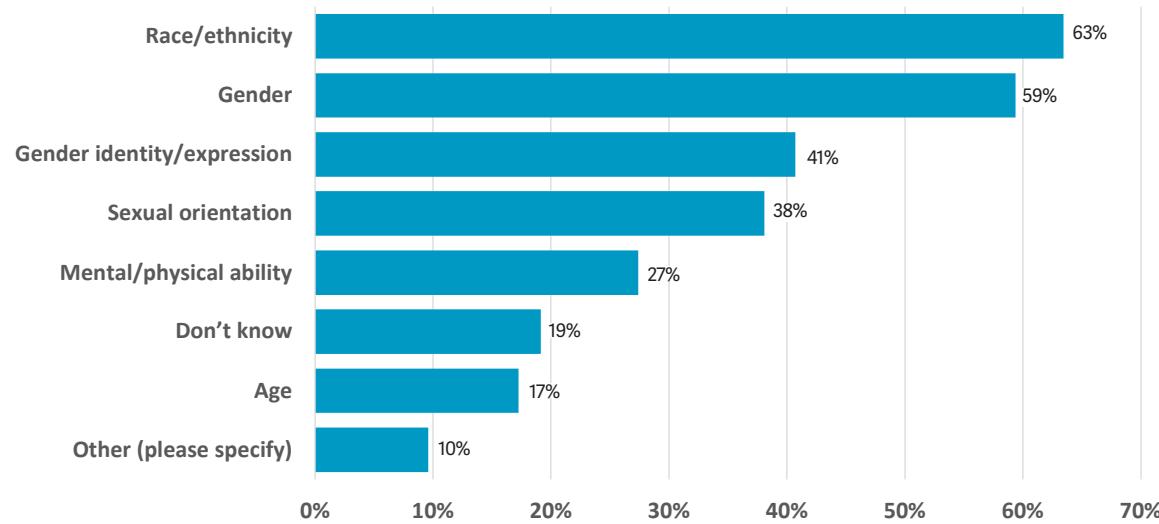
Focal points for EDI programs

The most common thematic areas for company diversity programs are as follows:

Figure 21: EDI program focus

N = 1,112

Question: My company's equity, diversity and inclusion programs are focused on:



Other diversity programs are dependent on the country's definition for protected status, including:

- Veterans
- Indigenous peoples
- Carers
- Working parents
- Disability
- Immigration
- Neurodiversity
- Religion or belief

Closing thoughts

Given the fractured state of the world with climate change, inequality and environmental degradation, the number of people focusing on sustainability will only increase. While organizations are making strides and trying to close the gap in equity, diversity and inclusion, it is clear that significant improvements are needed to ensure that the views of society – particularly the most vulnerable voices – are truly reflected. We must remember that there are adverse consequences of not being inclusive.

The heart of equity, diversity and inclusion is listening and learning with humility, and seeing our shared humanity, drawing on the wealth of our collective experiences. In subsequent research, we plan to lay out a blueprint for the role of different participants in our ecosystem to enable inclusion within our sector. Our recommendations for the profession are as follows:

- **Inclusion takes dedicated effort and resources.** Training, development and ongoing engagement activities cannot happen without dedicated resources. Make sure you include your diverse colleagues, but do not put the program on their shoulders unless they choose to engage.



- **Reflect on yourself and your organization.** Reflect on the headwinds and tailwinds that got you to where you are as a sustainability professional. Take the time with your colleagues to do an audit of whether or not you are living up to your organization's values and how inclusive your organization is, through surveys and further discussions. Do this regularly.
- **Start with a level playing field in your organization.** Understand what skills are actually needed in the roles you are hiring for. Pay at least a living wage for interns and entry-level employees, so that everyone can participate in your organization, no matter what their background. Be flexible about the timing and location of work, to accommodate those with caregiving commitments, disabilities or neurodiversity.
- **Build psychological safety within your organization.** If you manage teams, remember that conflict is not always a threat. If someone brings something up that is counter to what you believe to be true, be curious and humble instead of defensive. Make a safe and brave space for tough conversations.

- **Take the time to build cultural competency and to see your colleagues as individuals.** Spend time with people different from yourself and learn about their lived realities and strengths. Take a break with your colleagues and have open conversations, with a view to learn. Meanwhile, recognize not only that different groups have different experiences, but that even in the same social group, people can experience things in very different ways.
- **Amplify the voice of your colleagues who are not being heard.** Listen deeply to your employees and colleagues. Take the time to understand where they are coming from and give them opportunities that empower them.
- **Go beyond the typical crowd.** Collectively, we need to ensure that we are not going to the same networks for employees, board members, suppliers and speakers. We need to expand beyond our immediate networks and the people we are comfortable with and to give others a chance.

"Human diversity is just as critical to society as biodiversity is to an ecosystem; without it, there can be no healthy functioning. The loss of diversity within mainstream systems and structures has left a fracture in our societies that must now be healed, through the purposeful and systematic inclusion of diverse voices, including the voices of the natural world, within the social dialogue."

— Sherri Mitchell Weh'na Ha'mu Kwasset,
Penawahpskek Nation

This is just the start of a longer-term journey. Given the scope of the challenges that we face, we will need to fundamentally re-envision our relationships with each other, our organizations, and how our larger systems work. Our lives depend on it.

Please join us at Diversity in Sustainability in our ongoing journey, as we continue to explore, navigate and learn from these deep challenges together.

Find out more about us at
www.diversityinsustainability.com
and ensure you join our mailing list and
Google Group to have access to the latest
initiatives and news. Please contact us at
info@diversityinsustainability.com
for further details.

Diversity in Sustainability is a new, volunteer-run organization that we hope to build into a fully-staffed organization. If you find this research and our work valuable, please consider donating to us via our [website](#).

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Glossary

AAPI: Acronym used in the United States referring to Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders.

Ableism: Discrimination and prejudice that favours people who are able-bodied.

ADHD: Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder; neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by trouble paying attention, controlling impulses and/or being overly active.

Autism spectrum: Group of developmental disabilities that cause social, communication and behavioural challenges.

BAME: Acronym referring to Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic – the term used for racialized communities in the United Kingdom.

BIPOC: Acronym referring to Black, Indigenous and People of Colour – the term used for racialized communities in Canada and the United States.

Black – African: People who originated in Africa, typically of West, South, Central or East African countries.

Black – African diaspora: Descendants of native Africans/people from Africa who were born and/or live abroad.

Blind hiring: A process used to conceal a job candidate's personal information that could influence or bias a hiring decision.

Cisgender: relating to a person whose sense of personal identity and gender corresponds with their birth sex.

Code-switching: Shifting from one linguistic code to another based on the social context, the type of conversation and the individuals with whom one is interacting.

Colonial: Relating to practices of socioeconomic and/or political control by one group over another.

Cultural fit: The alignment of an individual's personal beliefs, values and attitudes with those of the larger organization and community to which they belong.

CV: Abbreviation for a curriculum vitae.

Dispossession: The fact of depriving someone of their land and/or possessions.

East Asian: Individuals who originate from the countries in Eastern Asia, like China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea and Taiwan.

EDI: Abbreviation for equity, diversity and inclusion

Gaslighting: Psychologically manipulating someone to question themselves and their sanity.

Gender: A spectrum for self-identification that covers the range between femininity and masculinity.

Gender identity: One's own sense of their gender, i.e., where on the spectrum they perceive themselves to be.

Hispanic/Latinx: Individuals (generally) living in North America of Spanish or Latin American heritage.

Information asymmetry: Denotes the unequal possession of information, where one party has more knowledge on a subject than the other.

Indigenous Peoples: First peoples/tribal nations who practice unique traditions, retain social, cultural, economic and political characteristics that are distinct from those of the dominant societies in which they live, in the Americas, Europe, Asia, Africa, Australasia and Oceania.

Individual contributor: Senior employees who are not on a management track but do not have people management responsibilities.

Institutional racism: A form of racism that is a part of the legal, educational and socioeconomic structures within an organization or society; also known as systemic racism.

Intersectional, intersectionality: The intersection and overlap of various aspects of an individual's various characteristics that create different modes of discrimination and/or privilege. Originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw.

Intergenerational trauma: The passing of trauma between generations, from traumatic events such as war, persecution, sexual abuse and/or violence.

Ivy League: Refers to eight elite private universities in the Northeastern United States, globally recognized for research and academic achievement.

LGBTQ+: An acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (or questioning).

Lower middle class: A level of social mobility with caregivers who are semi-professionals and craftsmen with some work autonomy and some college education, with an average income.

Materially poor: A level of social mobility of those living below the poverty line. Caregivers have limited or no participation in the labour force and some high school education. Adapted from the Gilbert-Kahl model of class structure.

Microaggressions: Verbal, behavioural and environmental slights that, regardless of intention, create an atmosphere of hostility and degradation for socially and culturally marginalized groups.

Middle-class: A level of social mobility referring to individuals and households whose incomes are above those of the working class but below those of the upper class; income ranges for this classification vary by region. Within this report, middle class is the combination of lower middle class and upper middle-class classifications. Adapted from the Gilbert-Kahl model of class structure.

Middle Eastern or North African: Individual originating from the countries in Northern Africa and the Middle East. While there is no standardized list of countries included in the region, the term typically includes the area from Morocco in northwest Africa to Iran in southwest Asia and down to Sudan in Africa.

Multiracial or multi-ethnic: People who are of two or more races/ethnicities.

Neoliberal: A sociopolitical ideology that pushes for free-market capitalism and economic liberalism.

Net zero: Refers to the emissions of greenhouse gases produced by a company or country equaling the amount of greenhouse gases that they remove from the atmosphere.

Neurodiversity: Variations in the social interactions, behaviours, moods and brain functions of individuals that are considered non-pathological.

Otherism: The exclusion and potential denigration of individuals who are characteristically separate from what is considered normal or acceptable.

Oxbridge: Term referring to Oxford University and the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom.

People of colour: People who are not considered to be White or Caucasian.

Political spectrum: Referring to different political positions in relation to one another. For the purposes of this survey, it was focused on left-wing versus right-wing politics.

Privilege: Special rights, structural advantages or immunity granted to particular people or groups.

Public school (Canada/US): A school funded by the government for students in high school and under.

Public school (UK): A private, fee-paying secondary school.

Racial bias: A form of implicit bias, such as attitudes or stereotypes, that affect an individual's understanding, actions and decisions in an unconscious manner.³¹

Racial justice: The fair and equitable treatment of people from all races that promotes equal opportunities and outcomes for all.

Racialized people: Individuals who are non-White in colour or non-Caucasian in race; also referred to as “visible” minorities.

Russell Universities: A group of 24 universities within the United Kingdom with a focus on research and academic achievement, headquartered in Cambridge.

Sex: A trait that characterizes an individual as being biologically male or female.

Sexual orientation: A person’s identity in relation to the gender or genders to which they are sexually attracted.

Social justice: Creating a fair and equal society where each individual matters and their rights are recognized and protected.

Social mobility: The movement of individuals within the social hierarchy of their society; often measured by career and generational changes within each socioeconomic level.

South Asian: An individual originating from Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Southeast Asian: An individual originating from Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam.

State school (UK): Schools funded by the British government that provide free education to students aged 3 to 18.

Structural inequality: Refers to when the structures of organizations, institutions, governments or other networks contain embedded bias, providing advantages for some members and marginalizing other members.

Succession planning: The process within companies for passing on leadership roles to specific employees or groups of employees, to ensure that businesses continue to run smoothly after any departures of key roles.

UN: Acronym referring to the United Nations.

Upper class: A level of social mobility defined by caregivers with great political power and wealth, educated at elite education institutions. Adapted from the Gilbert-Kahl model of class structure.

Upper middle class: A level of social mobility defined by caregivers who are well-educated white-collar professionals with large work autonomy, with postgraduate degrees and comfortable income. Adapted from the Gilbert-Kahl model of class structure.

VUCA: An acronym standing for volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity, describing the situation of constant, unpredictable change. Originally coined by Warren Bennis and Burt Nanus.

White or Caucasian: Typically referring to people of European origin.

Working class: A level of social mobility where the main caregivers work in clerical, pink-, and blue-collar environments, often with low job security and with high school education. Adapted from the Gilbert-Kahl model of class structure.

#MeToo: A social movement against sexual abuse and harassment, where people break the silence on sex crimes.

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