

The Three Barriers® to Women's Progression

Globally we remain 4 - 5 generations from gender parity. The reasons for this are explained by three types of barriers, each containing distinct yet interrelated sub-barriers. Many of these barriers have a disproportionate impact on women from minoritised backgrounds.

GENDER STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes of 'men take charge and women take care' persist

% very comfortable with a woman as a CEO

Source: Reykjavik Index, 2024



DOUBLE BURDEN

(paid & unpaid work)

Women perform more unpaid care work than men

Expected time spent as part of working life on caring

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2024



CHILD PENALTY

Societal pressures and discrimination mean women are **20%** less likely to be employed a decade after having 1st child

Source: Child Penalty Atlas



NEGOTIATION PENALTY

% of women experiencing a social backlash for negotiating on their own behalf

50% Overall **54%** Black **55%** Asian **56%** Disabled

Source: Shape Talent, Reality Gap Report, 2024

DOUBLE BIND

Assertiveness is penalised in women

41% avoid raising problems to avoid being seen as a problem themselves

Source: Shape Talent, Reality Gap Report, 2024

CONFIDENCE

Systemic barriers erode women's confidence

42% worry how they are seen in meetings

Source: Shape Talent, Reality Gap Report, 2024



'ALWAYS ON' CULTURES

Combined with the Double Burden, 'always on' cultures limit women's ability to **compete fairly** at work.

Source: McKinsey & Co, Understanding Organizational Barriers to a More Inclusive Workplace, 2020



EVERYDAY SEXISM

% of women who often feel undermined in meetings

28% Overall **35%** Asian **40%** Black **41%** Disabled

Source: Shape Talent, Reality Gap Report, 2024

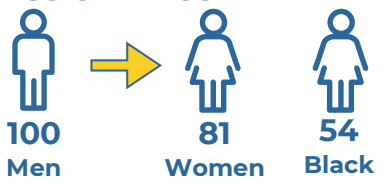
SPONSORSHIP

% of women who experience barriers to sponsorship

27% Overall **33%** Black **41%** Disabled

Source: Shape Talent Reality Gap Report, 2024

GLASS CEILINGS



Promoted to 1st line manager

Source: Office for National Statistics, 2024

MICROAGGRESSIONS

Microaggressions impact minoritised women the most

51% White **57%** Asian **61%** Disabled **64%** Black

% of women experiencing microaggressions at work

Source: Shape Talent, Reality Gap Report, 2024

Further reading and recommendations

Shape Talent (2025). The Three Barriers® to Women's Progression: What organisations can do about them. Available at: <https://shapetalent.com/the-three-barriers-to-womens-progression-3rd-edition>

Shape Talent (2024). The Reality Gap: Three Barriers® to Women's Advancement in European Corporates. Available at: <https://shapetalent.com/the-reality-gap-three-barriers-to-womens-advancement-in-european-corporates/>