

PREPARING FOR THE WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE



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INTRODUCTION

From labour shortage to technological adoption, different countries across Asia Pacific (APAC) are facing similar concerns with today's evolving workforce.

Businesses and HR leaders will have to find new ways to overcome these challenges and reshape their policies to prepare for the transforming future workforce. Employees will increasingly be recognised for contributing a unique set of skills and expertise to unlock new opportunities for businesses.

To better prepare for the transforming workforce of the future, PERSOLKELLY commissioned a research* across 12 markets in APAC to help organisations understand and prepare for this future workforce transformation.

With the profile of employees evolving, concerns are also surfacing. The challenge of integrating an inclusive workforce is apparent and must be acknowledged and managed.

In this report, we will focus on understanding how the inclusion of prominent groups like older workers (aged 55 years and above), people with disabilities or special needs, and returning mothers are perceived by hiring managers and employees, and how the impact of these perceptions can be managed to benefit all parties.

*The program was conducted amongst the APAC working population between the ages of 18 years old and above. The research covered 12 markets (Australia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam) in APAC and was conducted from January 2019 – February 2019. 7,277 responses were obtained, from workers coming from a wide range of industries (Accounting, Education, Engineering, Banking & Finance, Government, IT, Hospitality, Industrial, Healthcare and Professional Services among others).

CHALLENGING PERCEPTIONS OF AN INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

The APAC workforce is transforming. Most countries are faced with an ageing population. An increasing number of mothers are looking to return to work. Greater calls to welcome persons with disabilities or special needs to enter the workforce.

As a result, we will need to embrace a more inclusive workforce. To be able to do this, we acknowledge that there will be both opportunities and challenges.



How does the current APAC workforce perceive the inclusion of 55 years old and above?

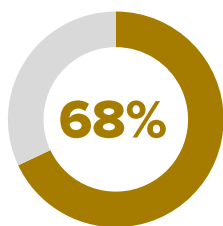
Due to rising standards of living and increasing life expectancy, people are living and working longer. Beyond monetary gains, older workers (aged 55 years and above) continue working to keep their minds active and maintain strong social networks.

The perceived benefits of employing older workers

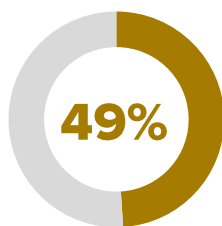
The increasing presence of older workers in the labour force can be a mutually beneficial relationship, as recognised by hiring managers and employees alike.



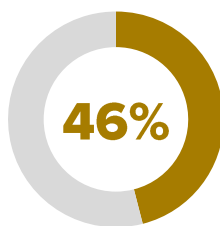
What do you think would be the benefits of having or hiring an older worker in your team?



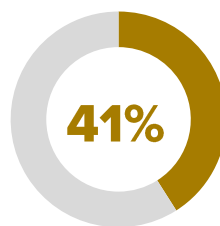
More experienced



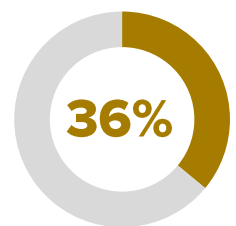
More knowledgeable



Good mentor skills



More responsible attitude

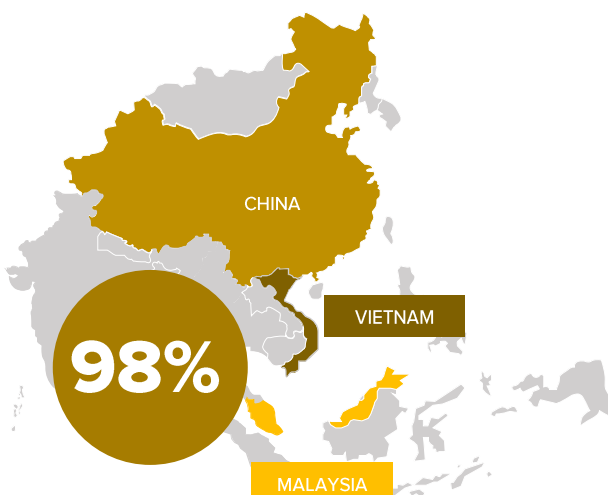


Better at resolving conflicts

Benefits by Markets



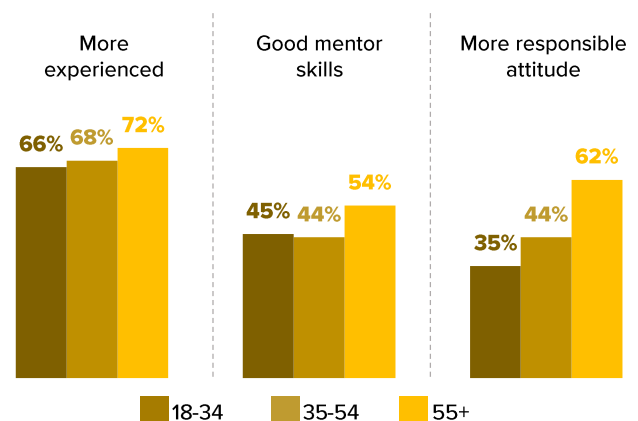
The labour forces in China, Malaysia and Vietnam are perhaps the most embracing, with the large majority agreeing that there are benefits of having employees aged 55 years and above in the company.



Benefits by Age



Unsurprisingly, older employees (aged 55 years and above) are more likely to feel positive about the skills and abilities of their own age group to contribute to the workforce, compared to the younger generation.



Benefits by Role



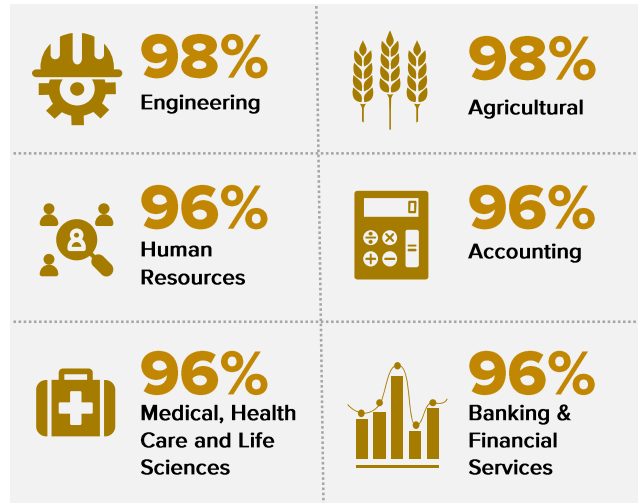
Hiring managers have a more positive outlook towards older employees. Almost all of them (98%) highlighted at least one benefit of hiring workers aged 55 years and above. This could be due to their comprehensive perspective of what older workers can bring to the business, particularly with their communication and problem-solving skills stemming from their extensive experience.



Benefits by Industry



Across all industries, there is a high level of agreement that businesses can benefit from older employees. The engineering and agricultural industries are the most positive, possibly due to the importance and impact of hands-on experience.

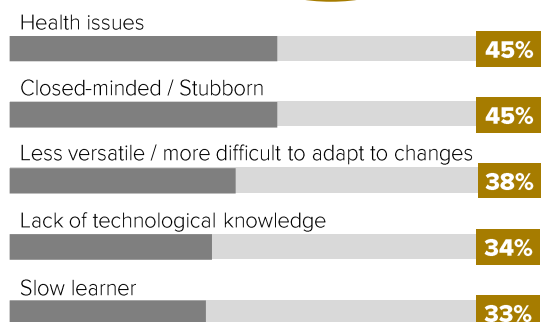


The perceived concerns about working with older workers

While most recognise the benefits of hiring and working with people over 55 years old, there is also some level of apprehension, particularly relating to older workers' physical capabilities and their ability to adapt to change.

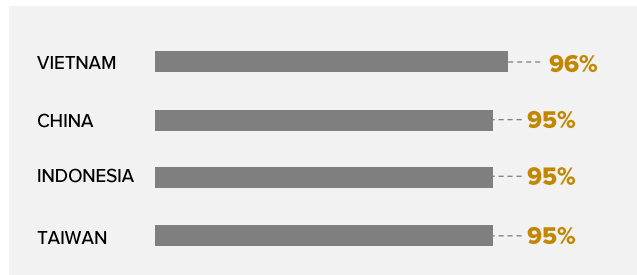


What do you think would be your main concerns of working with or hiring an older worker?



Concerns by Markets

Vietnam, China, Indonesia and Taiwan indicated the highest levels of concern in hiring or working with workers aged 55 years and above. It is interesting to note that there are plans to increase the retirement age in all of these markets in the next 5 to 20 years, which could be a reason why concerns are higher.

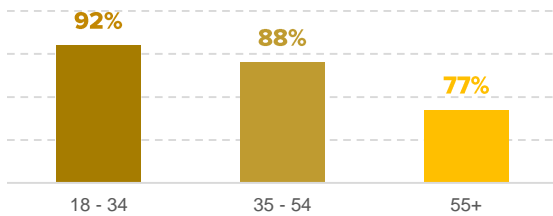


Concerns by Age

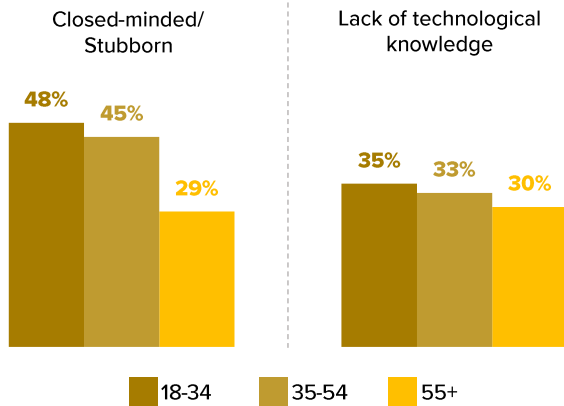


Overall the youngest groups highlight the highest levels of concern, reinforcing the prevalent impact of intergenerational differences.

Those with at least 1 concern with working with 55+ years old



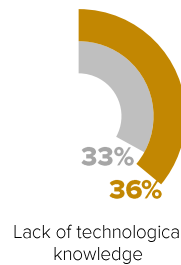
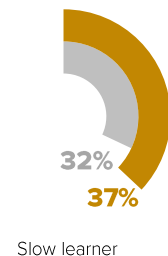
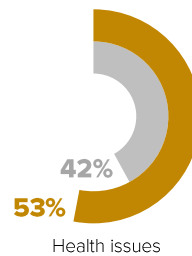
The specific concerns are similar in nature but less prevalent amongst the older age group, implying some level of self-awareness and willingness to address some of these concerns.



Concerns by Role



Hiring managers are more likely to have concerns about hiring older workers, compared to employees. Not surprisingly, hiring managers are more concerned about older employees' health issues (and the costs that this implies), their lack of technological knowledge and their slower learning skills.



■ Hiring Managers
■ Employees

KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

While concerns exist, there is a positive outlook towards having workers aged 55 years and above in the workplace.

02

Their extensive experience brings deep knowledge about the industry and the job, which in turn makes them good mentors for younger colleagues.

03

Health issues and the lack of flexibility and adaptability are key concerns amongst staff at large.

04

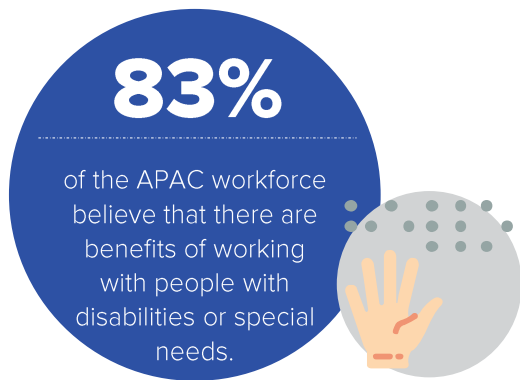
Businesses must find ways to promote the positive impact of older employees and design policies to better integrate these workers, for the benefit of their larger workforce.

How does the current APAC workforce view the inclusion of people with disabilities or special needs in their organisations?

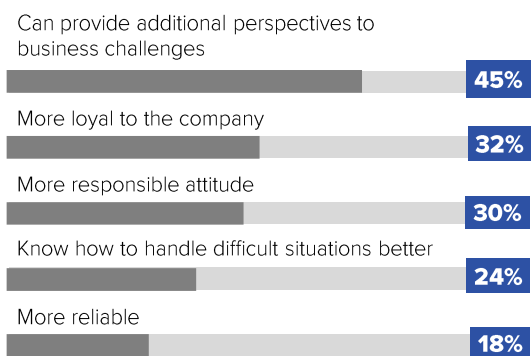
There has been increasing awareness and recognition that people with disabilities or special needs need to be included as productive members of society. Governments around APAC are encouraging organisations to hire people with disabilities or special needs so as to realise their untapped potential.

The perceived benefits of working with people with disabilities or special needs

Generally, receptivity towards hiring and working with people with disabilities or special needs is high. Most importantly, they are thought to be able to provide an additional perspective to business challenges and are perceived as loyal employees.



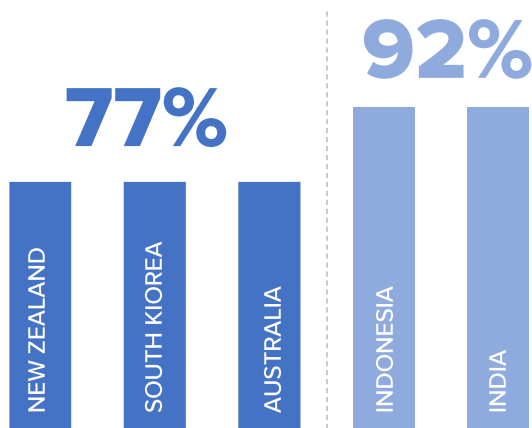
What do you think would be the benefits of having or hiring a person with disabilities or special needs in your team?



Benefits by Markets



There are some significant differences between APAC markets in terms of recognition of the benefits of employing people with disabilities or special needs.

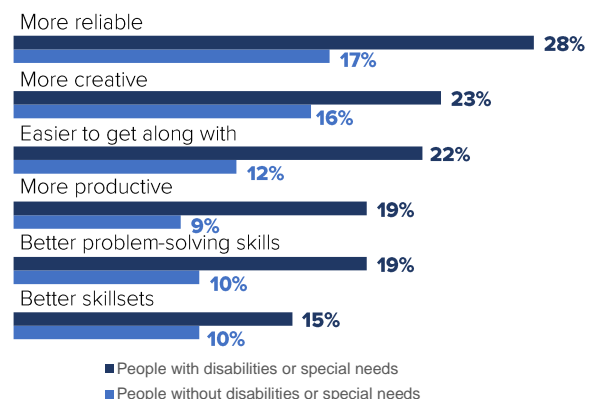


of hiring managers and employees highlight some benefits of working with people with disabilities or special needs

Benefits by persons with disabilities or special needs versus those without

Relatively unsurprisingly, people without disabilities or special needs are less likely to believe that there are benefits to working with people with disabilities or special needs, compared to those with disabilities or special needs.

People with disabilities or special needs seem confident in their abilities and recognise the value that they can bring to the workforce.

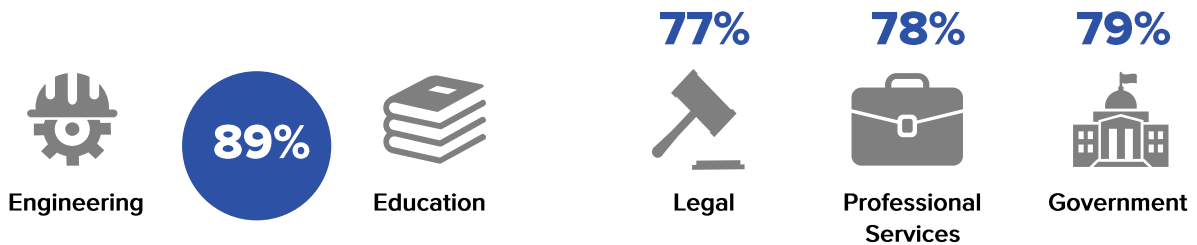


Benefits by Industry



Across industries, there is a high level of agreement that working with people with disabilities or special needs results in benefits for the business.

Although there are some industries less likely to believe so:



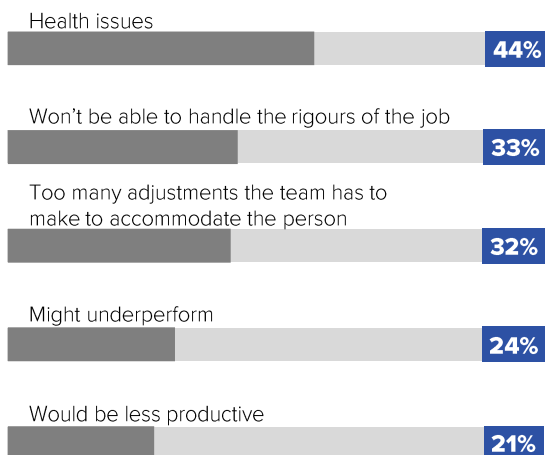
Interestingly, those who work in the human resources industry are more likely to believe that people with disabilities or special needs are more loyal to the company (40% in human resources industry vs 32% in overall APAC) and have a more responsible attitude (38% in human resources industry vs 30% in overall APAC).

The perceived concerns about working with people with disabilities or special needs

While there is strong recognition of the benefits brought by people with disabilities or special needs to the workforce, there is also an accompanying set of challenges.



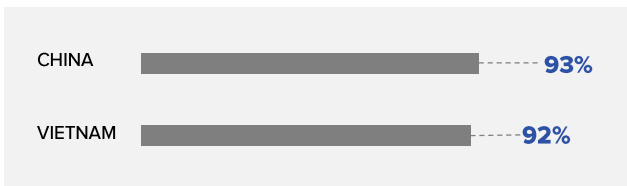
What do you think would be your main concerns in hiring or working with a person with disabilities or special needs?



Concerns by Markets



In some markets, the prevalence of such concerns is higher.

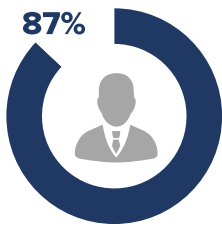


Concerns by sub-group – with persons with disabilities or special needs versus those without

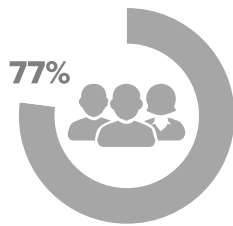
People without disabilities or special needs are more likely to express concerns about working with people with disabilities or special needs - 80% versus 74%.

However, it would be incorrect to think that people with disabilities or special needs are entirely positive about fitting in at work as they also highlight concerns about integrating into the workplace. These may be common problems faced by the disabled or special needs community when seeking employment, thus making them salient concerns in the minds of people with disabilities or special needs.

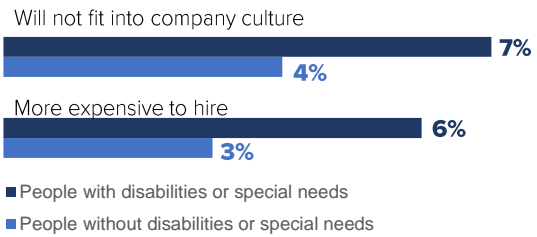
Concerns by Role



Hiring Managers

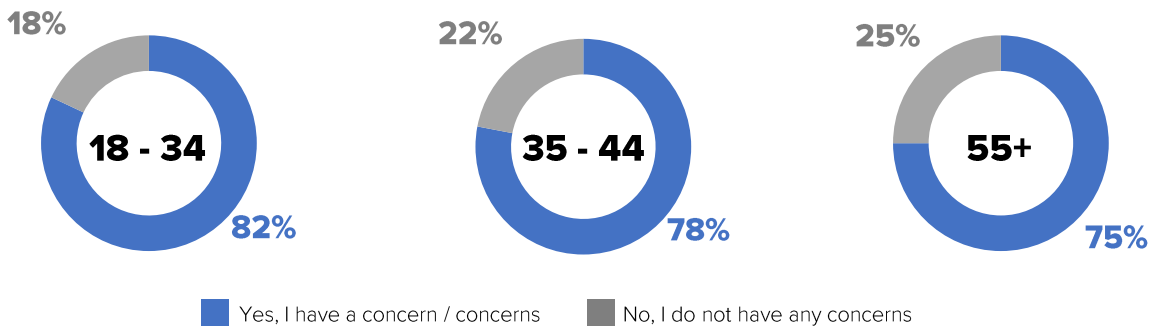


Employees



Concerns by Age

Overall, younger workers indicate higher levels of apprehension about working with people with disabilities or special needs.



Younger employees are also more likely to mention specific concerns – an attitude which may stem from their lack of working experience.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



01 A large majority of employees believe that people with disabilities or special needs can positively impact businesses, by bringing alternative perspectives and being more loyal to the organisation.



02 But similarly to older employees, they are perceived as carrying risks related to their health and the flexibility they may require.



03 Breaking misconceptions and the stigma of disabilities or special needs will require some coordinated effort from businesses and employees alike.

How does the current APAC workforce view the inclusion of mothers returning to work in their organisations?

The perceived benefits of employing returning mothers

With rising career aspirations for women, the increase of females in the workforce has led to greater number of mothers returning to work.

Despite the increase exposure of encouraging mothers to return to the workforce, organisations remain slow at adapting to this change. It is paramount that companies develop better policies to ensure a smooth return to the workplace after a career break. Beyond helping returning mothers, these practices benefit companies as they increase the retention of female talents, who the company has already invested in before their career breaks. It has also been shown that companies with more female leaders tend to be more profitable.¹ Some of the most obvious benefits of retaining new mothers have also been well-documented, such as their ability to multi-task and focus.²

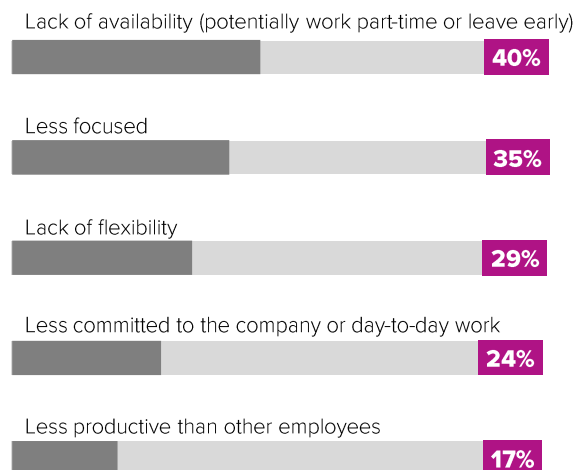
The perceived concerns about working with returning mothers

Despite this, **76%** of hiring managers and employees expressed some reservations about mothers returning to work.

The main concerns pertain to their perceived lack of availability and focus.



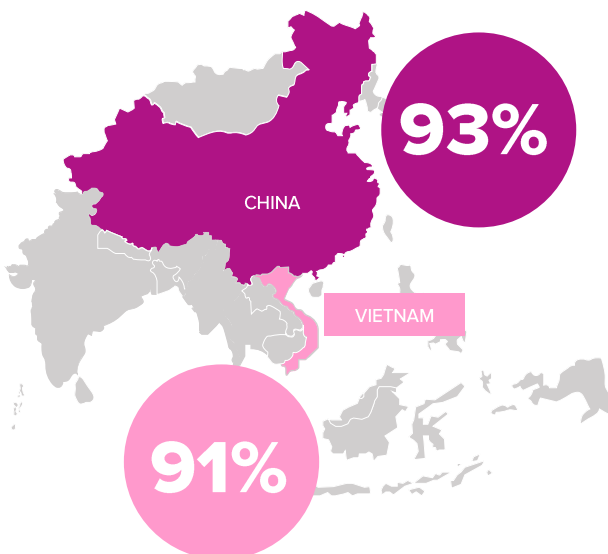
What do you think would be your main concerns in having or hiring mothers who came back to work after having a baby?



Concerns by Markets



Markets with highest levels of overall concerns about mothers returning to work



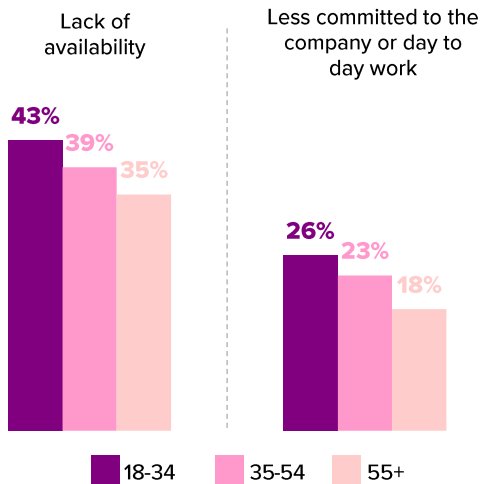
¹ Forbes (2018). Employers and new mothers benefit from flexible workschedules

² HR in Asia (2016). Pros and cons of female leaders at work

Concerns by Age

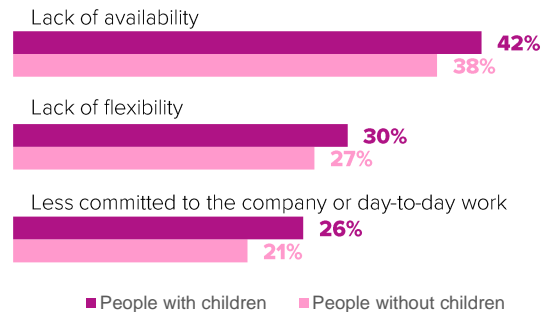


Those between 18 to 34 years old are more likely to have reservations about mothers returning to work than those aged 55 years and above (78% vs 68%), possibly due to the much lower proportion of younger employees having children. These reservations are driven by the perception that returning mothers are less available and committed.



Concerns by those who have kids versus those who haven't

Parents are less likely to be apprehensive about returning mothers, as they understand the challenges facing returning mothers and are more able to empathise with them. However, their concerns are similar in nature, hinting to the idea that parents themselves acknowledge the complex dynamics at hand when mothers return to work.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

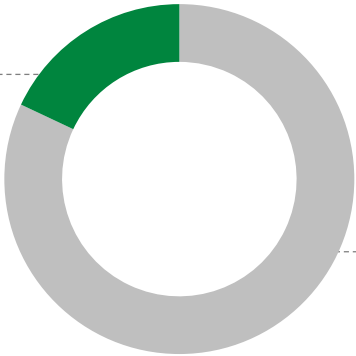
Concerns about mothers returning to work can be challenged as they stem from assumptions that are linked to a lack of experience. It must also be said that support to returning mothers will be an important part in making their return to work more positive for themselves and their teams.

It is evident that there are many benefits to having an inclusive workforce. Many organisations have chosen to help their workforce deal with these changes by offering diversity & inclusion trainings.

However, these are by far the minority in APAC, with only 16% of respondents sharing that their companies offered diversity & inclusion training.

16%

of respondents shared their companies have diversity & inclusion trainings

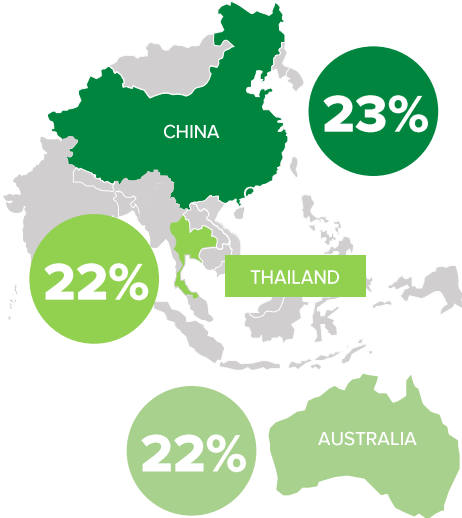


82%

of respondents shared their companies do not have diversity & inclusion trainings

Variation by **Markets**

Markets with highest proportion of respondents indicating that their companies have diversity & inclusion trainings.



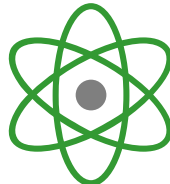
Variation by **Industry**

Diversity & inclusion trainings are also more present in the following industries:



32%

of respondents in the **government sector** shared their employers offer diversity & inclusion trainings



24%

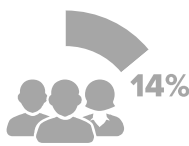
of respondents in the **scientific industry** shared their employers offer diversity & inclusion trainings

Variation by **Role**

Employees are less likely to be aware of diversity & inclusion training than hiring managers. This is possibly due to a lack of internal communication surrounding these issues and training courses, with organisations still trying to understand this complex subject.



Hiring Managers



Employees

PROMOTING AN INCLUSIVE WORKFORCE

To manage a more inclusive workforce, businesses need to equip their workforce with the right set of skills. Our survey reveals that there are two critical elements which positively impact employee satisfaction at the workplace and could be critical levers in preparing employees for a more inclusive workforce – improving employees’ soft skills and providing more flexible working arrangements.

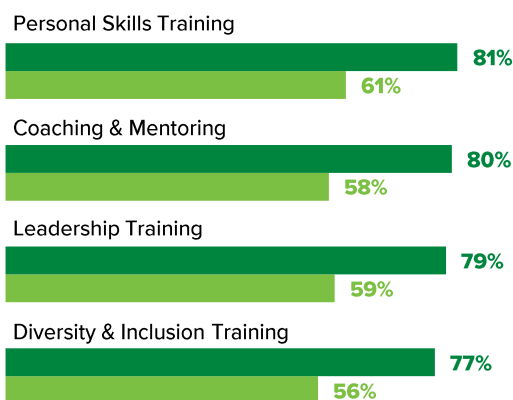
Developing employees’ soft skills to better prepare the workforce for upcoming changes

The interpersonal and interdependent nature of jobs in today’s workforce means that developing soft skills is crucial to the success of employees, regardless of seniority. Employees need to learn how to work as part of a more inclusive team, motivate and communicate to achieve their objectives and larger business goals.

Providing employees with soft skills trainings also benefits organisations as they are significantly more likely to be more satisfied with their employment, thus improving the company’s talent retention.

Trainings which help employees develop their soft skills also drives greater satisfaction amongst workers aged 55 years and above, people with disabilities or special needs, and returning mothers. In particular, diversity & inclusion training has the highest impact on satisfaction amongst people with disabilities or special needs.

However, most businesses in APAC do not offer them, signifying a large gap in what businesses provide and what the workforce needs.



- Proportion of respondents with access to these trainings who are satisfied with their companies
- Proportion of respondents without access to these trainings who are satisfied with their companies

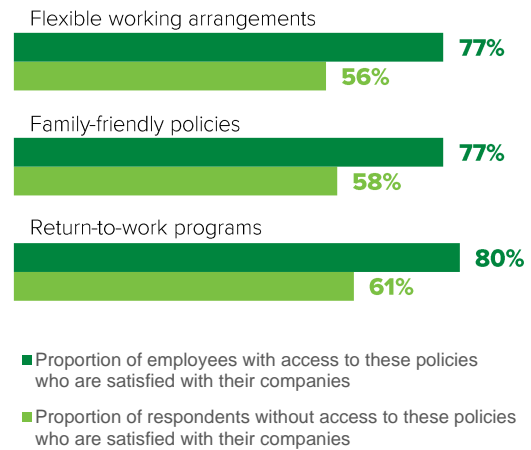


- Proportion of respondents who indicated the availability of these trainings within their organisations

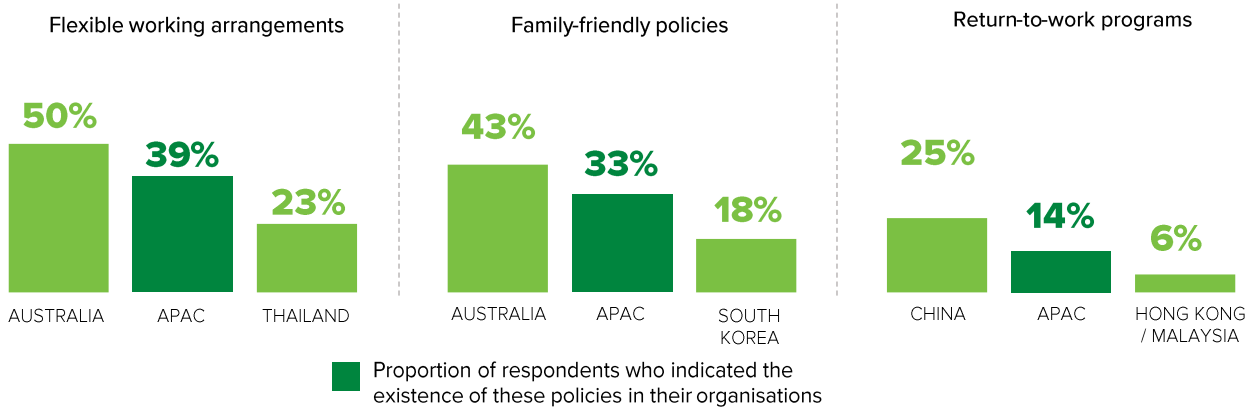
Developing flexible & family-friendly working arrangement to accommodate different needs

Flexible and family-friendly policies create a more welcoming workplace for all employees. They enable new and different opportunities, which aids in integrating and including diverse profiles to the workforce.

Further, offering flexible working arrangements and family-friendly policies drives employee satisfaction across all groups.



However, similarly to what we discovered for soft skills, the prevalence of flexible and family-friendly policies in APAC remains low.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

01

Developing soft skills and implementing flexible and family-friendly work arrangements both impact employee satisfaction significantly and are strong mechanisms to help prepare for the workforce of the future.

02

However, both remain too rare in APAC and more support from senior management will be required to enforce some of these solutions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As our workforce becomes more inclusive, we believe that companies must make a concerted effort to drive acceptance and improve integration. We also recognise that all organisations face different dynamics and challenges and that influencing behaviour change is one of the most complex challenges for leaders. For an organisation to profoundly impact their workforce, part of the solution must be organic and leaders must engage with their workforce. In other words, leaders must own their solutions.

We suggest a **TOTAL TRANSFORMATION** framework to facilitate improved integration:



ESTABLISH

Ensure **inclusion and respect** are strongly **positioned as part of the company's value system**.



DISCOVER

Have a dialogue and ask staff to share their concerns so that targeted policies can be developed to address specific issues.



DESIGN

Introduce and develop more **diversity & inclusion training** customised to handle specific needs, which may require specialised skills

Develop **training to equip employees with the soft skills** to handle and work with different groups of workers. Such training will also increase satisfaction across the board.



IMPLEMENT

Flexible and family-friendly working arrangements can help create a welcoming environment for different groups and interests.



MANAGE

Concerns from older workers, people with disabilities or special needs, and returning mothers about their own circumstances largely match the concerns of the broader workforce. As such, their own perceptions of their challenges must also be addressed in a practical way. Offering specific tactical support should go a long way towards addressing these issues:

Older workers – Provide regular health checks and technical training when appropriate, as well as additional support during change management programs.

People with disabilities or special needs – Have dedicated managers to help integrate them with their teams, while also having conversations with the team about their expectations.

Returning mothers – Hold a discussion with them before their return to work. Pair them with someone who has been through the same experience recently to help smooth transition and tip sharing. Provide the option of flexible work arrangements.

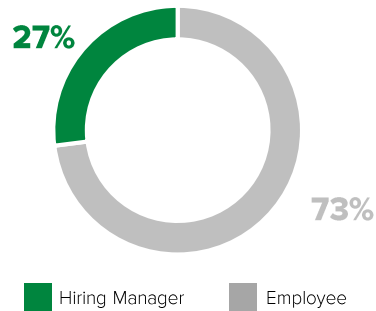
METHODOLOGY

PERSOLKELLY and Ipsos undertook quantitative research with hiring managers and candidates across Asia Pacific in January – February 2019. The survey focused specifically on the perceptions around working with people aged 55 years and above, people with disabilities or special needs, and returning mothers, specifically around the benefits and concerns of working with each group. The survey also sought to understand the various trainings available in business around APAC and the level of satisfaction employees had with these trainings. The data and insights are based on the responses of 7,277 hiring managers and candidates. Percentages will not always total to 100% as respondents could select more than one option for certain questions.

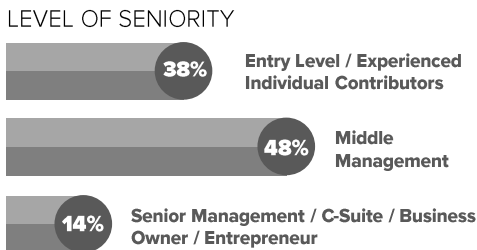
MARKETS

AUSTRALIA	1564
CHINA	501
HONG KONG	769
INDIA	351
INDONESIA	381
KOREA	479
MALAYSIA	505
NEW ZEALAND	879
SINGAPORE	507
TAIWAN	637
THAILAND	352
VIETNAM	352

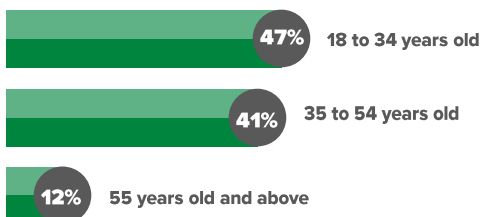
ROLE



WORK STATUS



AGE



INDUSTRY

Accounting & Finance	475
Agriculture / Natural Resources	86
Arts / Entertainment	107
Education	313
Engineering	343
Banking & Financial Services	368
Government	357
High Tech / IT	782
Hospitality / Travel / Leisure / Retail	496
Legal	39
Industrial / Manufacturing / Trades	975
Medical / Health Care / Life Sciences	407
Non-profit	85
Professional Services	321
Science	72
Transport / Logistics / Warehousing	283
Human Resources	416

About PERSOLKELLY

PERSOLKELLY is one of the largest HR solutions companies in Asia Pacific that provides comprehensive end-to-end workforce solutions. It combines resources and operational expertise of its key brands i.e., Kelly Services, Capita, PERSOL in Asia Pacific, First Alliances, BTI Executive Search, and PERSOLKELLY Consulting.

Headquartered in Singapore, PERSOLKELLY spans over 50 offices across 13 markets including: Australia, mainland China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Korea, Malaysia, New Zealand, Philippines, Singapore, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam.

