

Diversity and inclusion survey of UK agencies

2023



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What's changed?

It's been over a year since the partnership between The Agency Collective and Hallam created their [first-ever diversity and inclusion survey of UK agencies.](#)

The purpose of our second survey has been to find out whether last year's benchmarks have been reached, and which issues are still in need of tackling, so we can set fresh goals to aim towards.

In that time a lot about the world has changed. But what, if any, changes have there been when it comes to diversity and representation in the agency world?





Last year's report helped raise awareness of the diversity and inclusivity which exist in the agency world. Now we want to go one step further and see what's changed in the time since and provide more guidance for agency owners.



Kiorhte Aghoghogbe

Senior Account Manager and Diversity & Inclusion Lead, Hallam





It's great to hear from so many agency owners about the different initiatives they have for improving diversity and inclusion in their agencies. We need to showcase these agencies so that others may take their lead.



Sarah Hoyle

Head of People & Wellbeing, The Agency Collective



The benefits of embracing diversity

A number of recent reports¹ have come to the conclusion that an inclusive culture gives companies a competitive edge, with socially and ethnically diverse groups being more creative, innovative and productive.

An inclusive and diverse workforce can provide many benefits for employees too. These include exposure to diverse perspectives, increased empathy and, through a deeper understanding of the world, opportunities for personal growth.

But are agencies aware of these benefits? And, if they are, what action are they taking? As this year's survey shows, some progress has been made, but there is still a lot of work to be done to improve diversity within our sector.

¹[Catalyst](#)

¹[Association of MBAs](#)

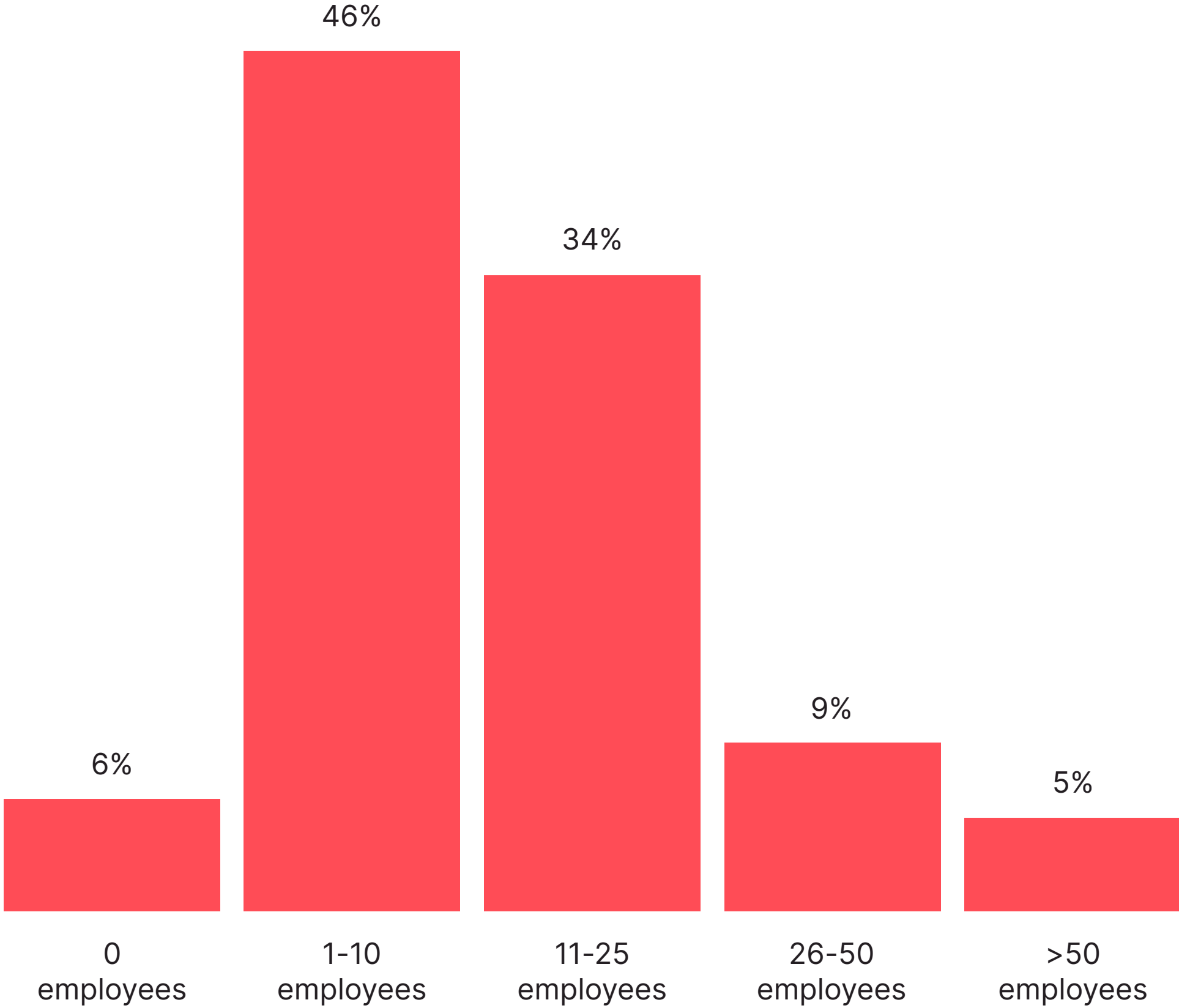
¹[Forbes](#)



Who completed the agency survey?

Size of agencies in the survey

Number of Employees	% of Total
0 employees	6%
1 - 10 employees	46%
11 - 25 employees	34%
26 - 50 employees	9%
More than 50 employees	5%



Who completed the agency survey?

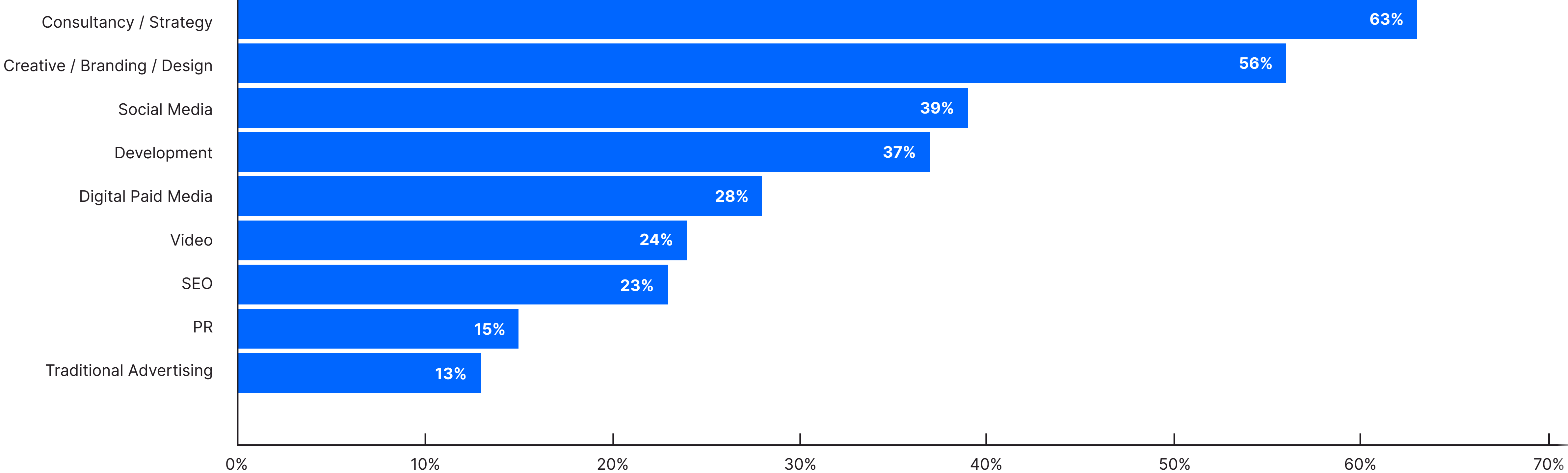
Agency locations

Location Area	% of Total
South England	34%
London	30%
North England	15%
No HQ	8%
Midlands	6%
None of the above	5%
Scotland	2%



Who completed the agency survey?

Services offered



The headlines



The headlines

Minority ethnic groups underrepresented

All minority ethnic groups, particularly the Asian demographic, are underrepresented in the workforce and even more so in management positions.

Leadership teams still dominated by men

There are more women than men in the workforce, however not enough women are making it onto the leadership teams.

LGBTQ+ representation is positive

7% of the agency workforce identify as LGBTQ+. This is more than twice the figure for the UK population.

Agencies failing to accommodate neurodiversity

Not enough agencies are making reasonable adjustments for employees who are neurodiverse or have a disability.

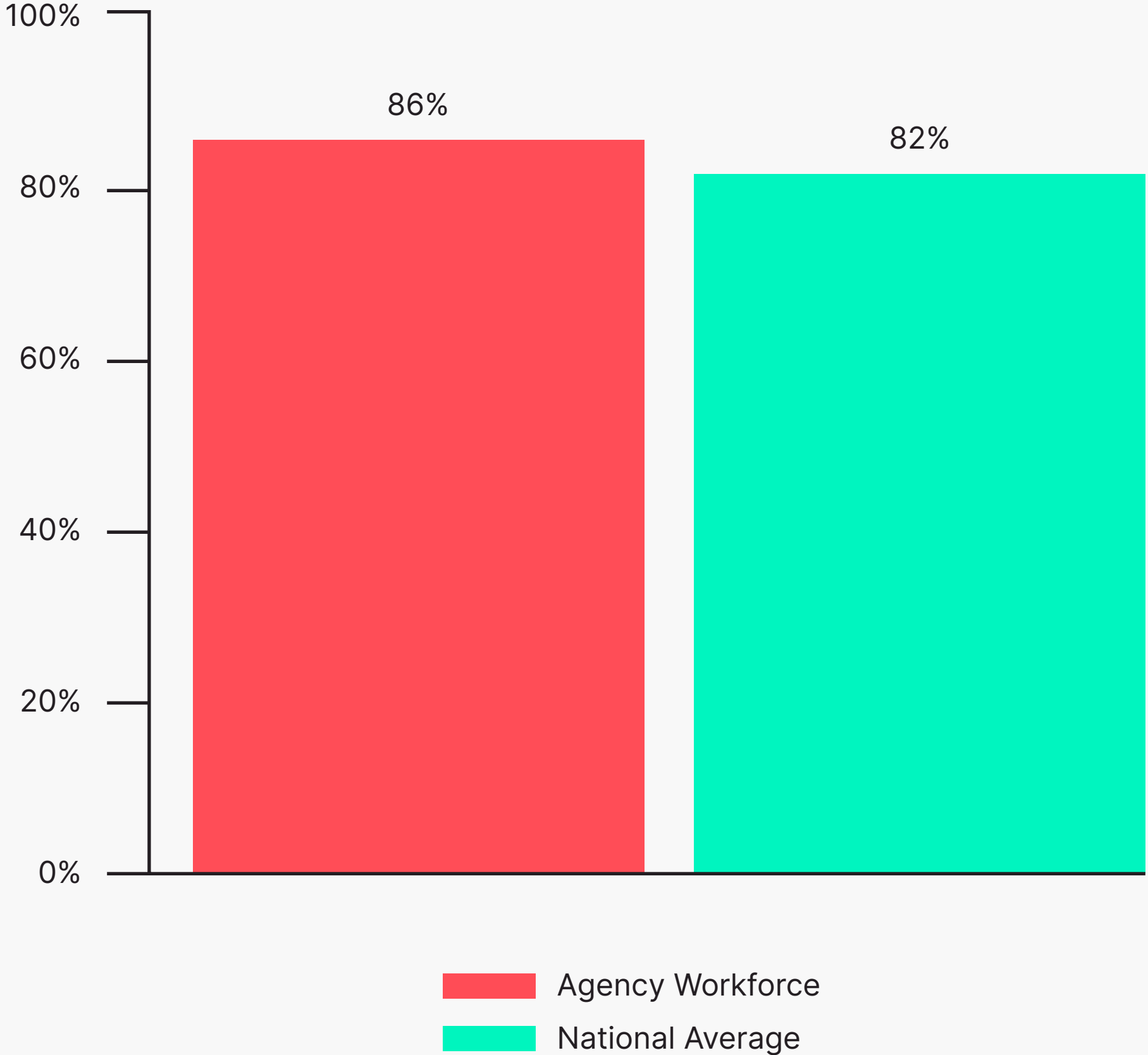


The headlines

86%
of all industry employees
are white

Set against a national figure of an 82% Caucasian population, the industry sector is slightly underperforming in its representation of ethnic groups.

Caucasian Ethnicity Percentage Agency Workforce vs. National Average

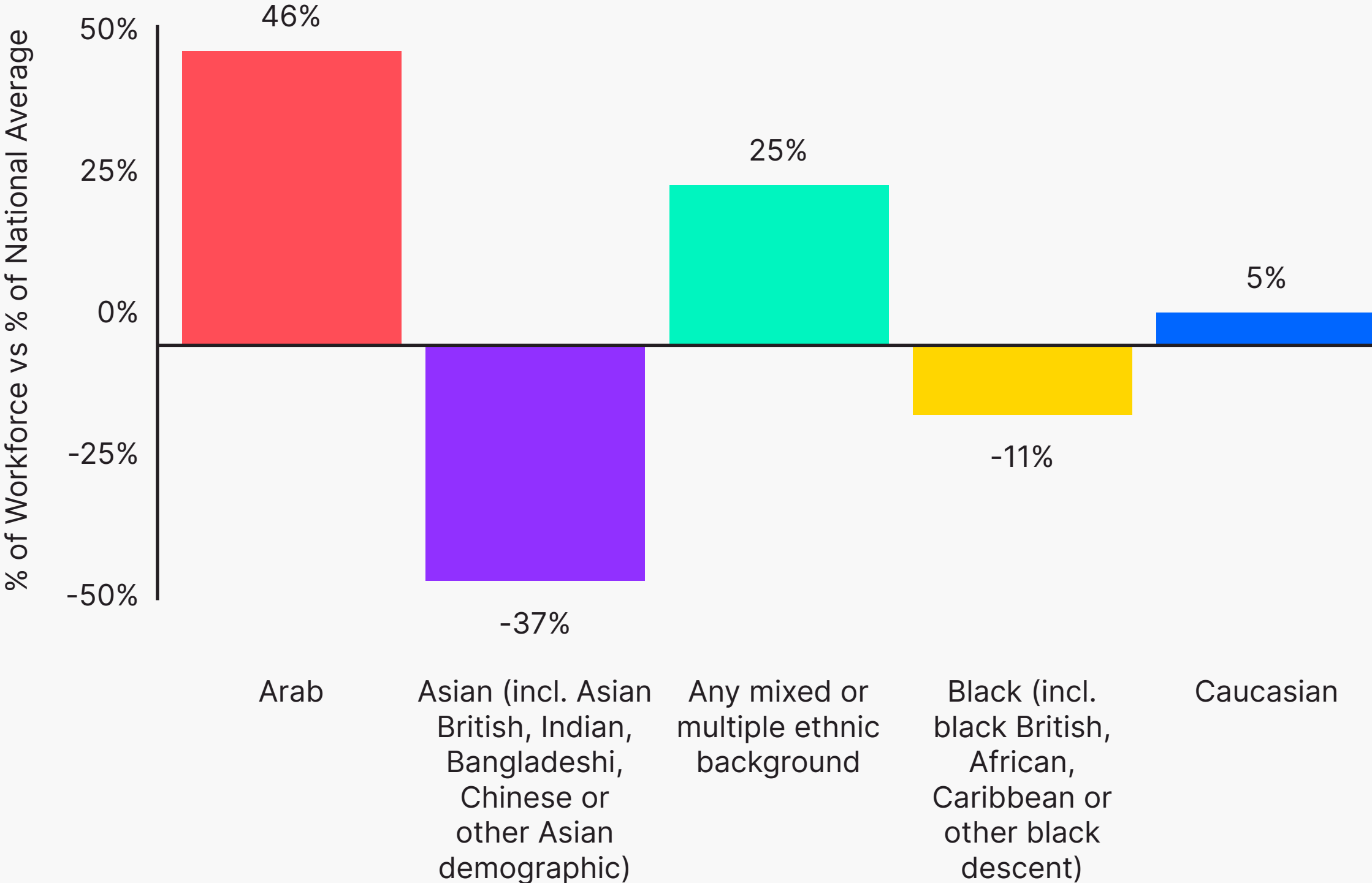


The headlines

-37%
underrepresentation
of people of Asian ethnicity

While there is a 4% disparity when it comes to the representation of all ethnic groups in comparison with the make-up of the UK population, the figure for Asian people is far lower than expected.

Agency Workforce compared to the National Average



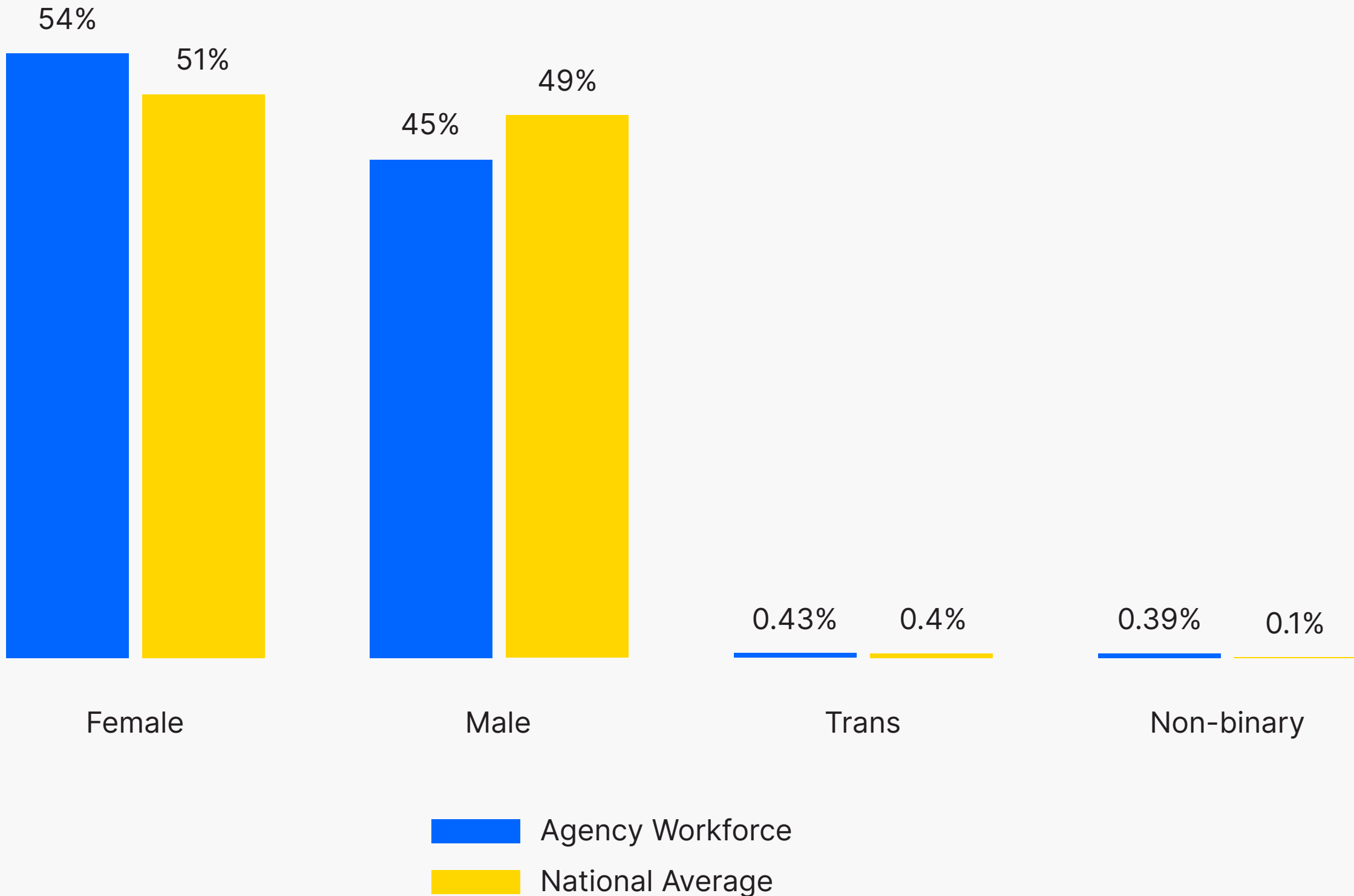
The headlines

54%
of industry employees
are women

This figure is 3% above the national average (51%) when it comes to the gender split of the population.

0.82%
of people in the industry identify as
transgender or non-binary

Agency Workforce compared to the National Average



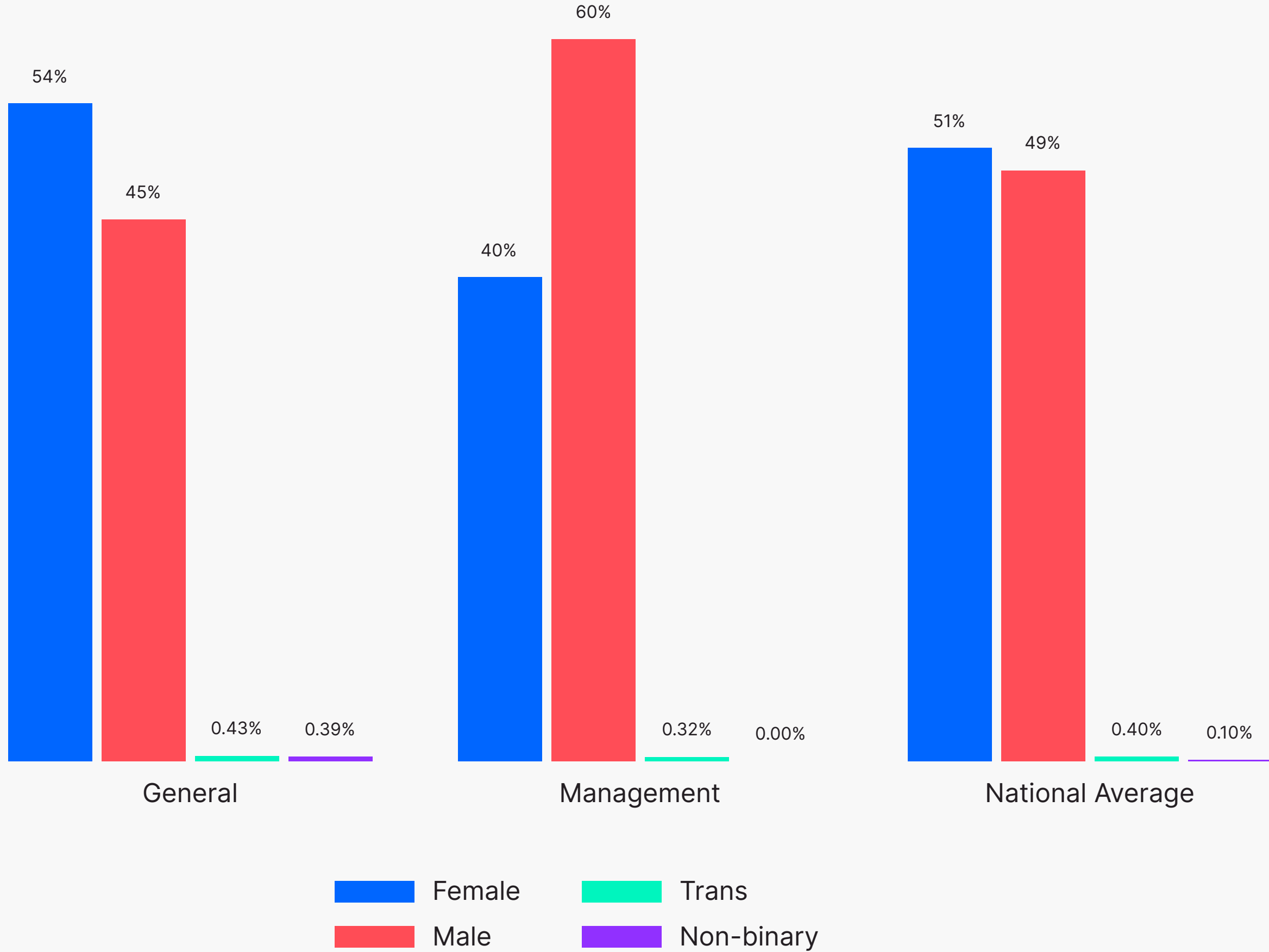
The headlines

40%

of senior management team members are female

While women outnumber men at junior level, they aren't progressing through agencies at the same rate as men. In fact, when it comes to the representation of women at management level, the figure is down 3% from 2021.

General, Management and National Average Genders



The headlines

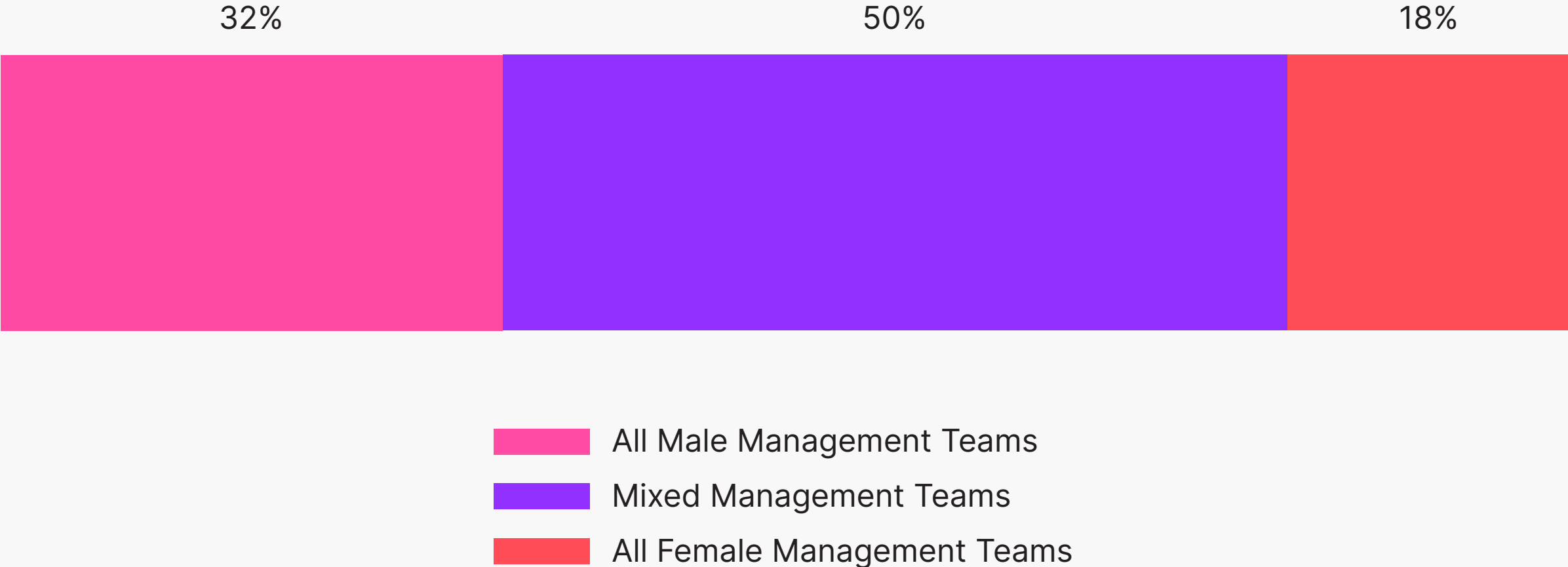
68%

of management teams contain at least one woman

32%

of management teams are all male

Gender make-up of Management Teams



The headlines

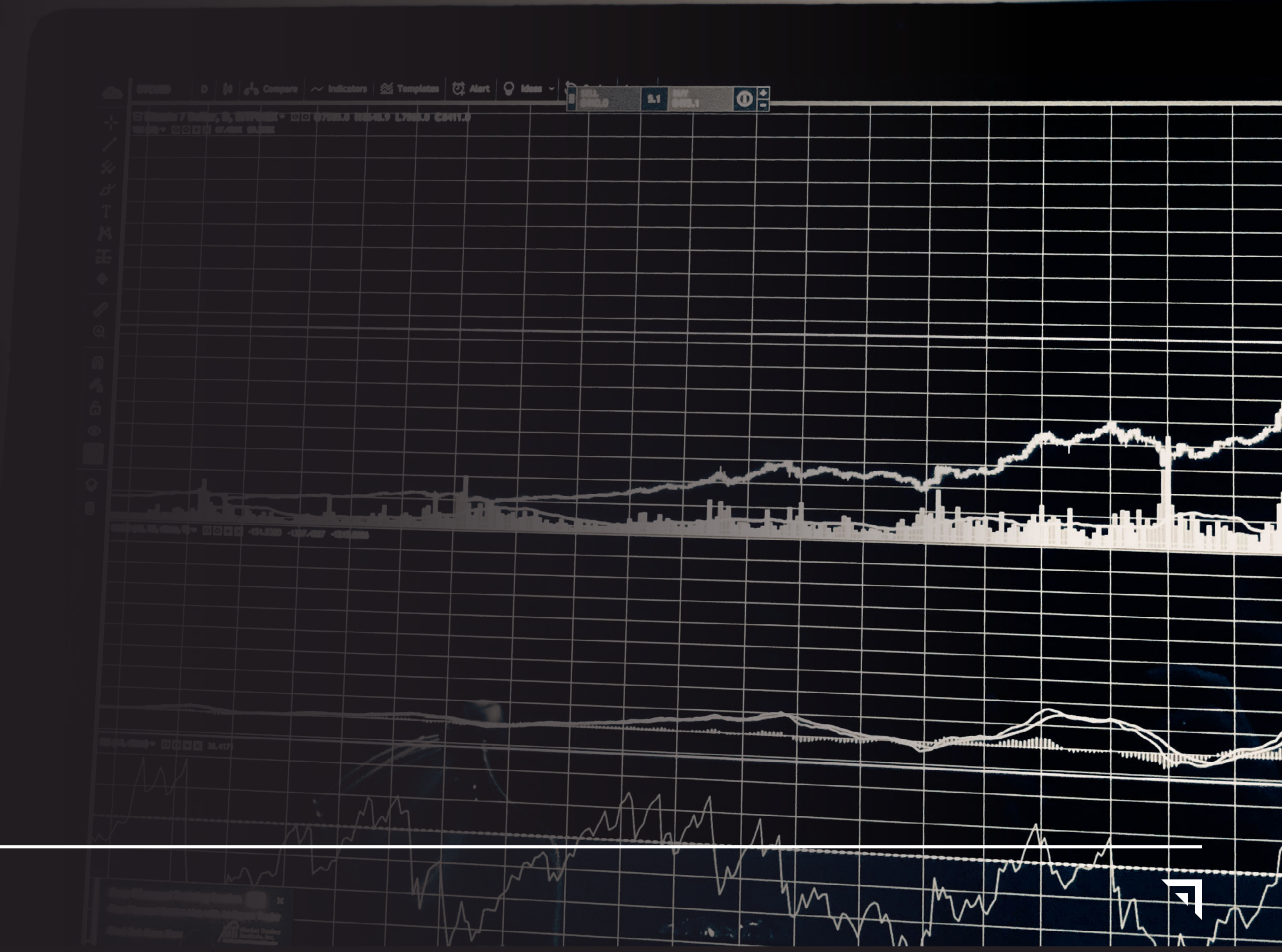
7%
of the Agency Workforce
identify as LGBTQ+.

This is encouraging when compared to a figure of 3.1% for the UK population.

Agency Workforce who identify as LGBTQ+ vs National Average



Key stats



Minority representation

43%
of agencies are
100% white

This is an increase of 4% on 2021 figures. It's a statistic which demonstrates that, far from making progress, ethnic groups are still not fully represented.

Minority representation in the Agency Workforce



Predominantly Minorities	5%
Above UK Average	17%
Approximately UK Average	17%
Lower than UK Average	18%
No Minorities	43%



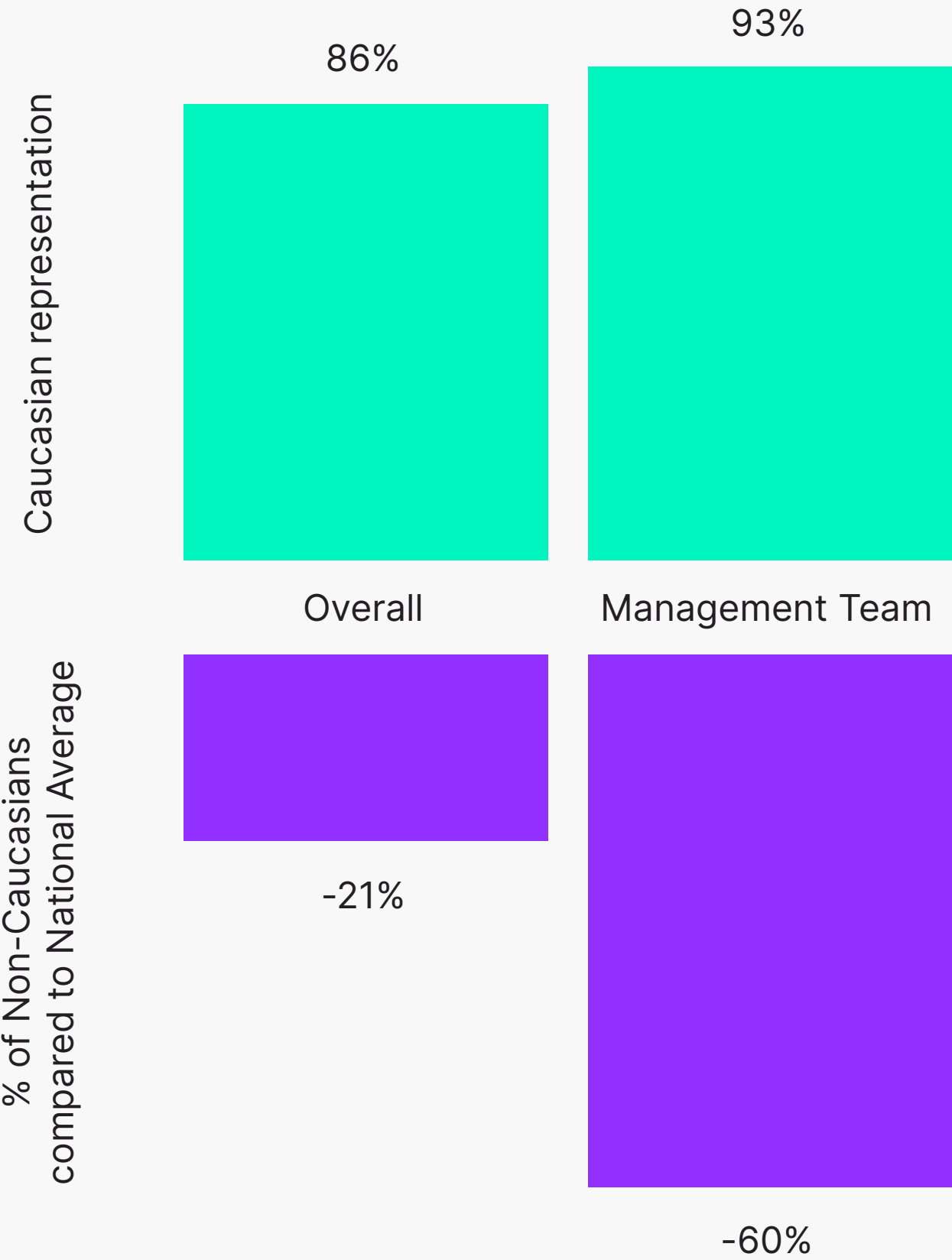
Minority representation

7%

more caucasians in management than the general workforce

This means that, when compared to national population figures, there are less than half as many people from under-represented groups working in management than there should be.

Caucasian Only Agency Workforce vs. Management Team



Underrepresentation of Minority Groups



Inclusivity

34%

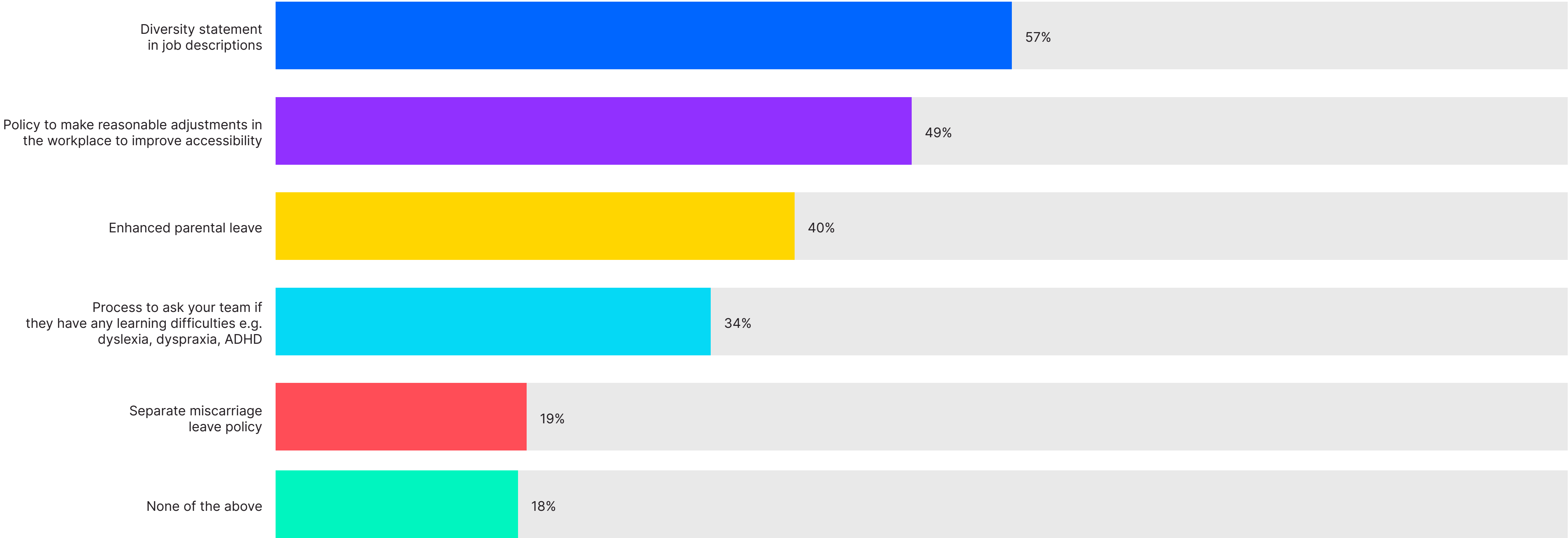
of agencies ask if an employee
is neurodiverse.

When compared to last year's figure of 43%, there remains a lot to be done when it comes to agencies making reasonable adjustments to aid inclusivity in this area.



Inclusivity

Does your agency have any of the following?



Ethnicity

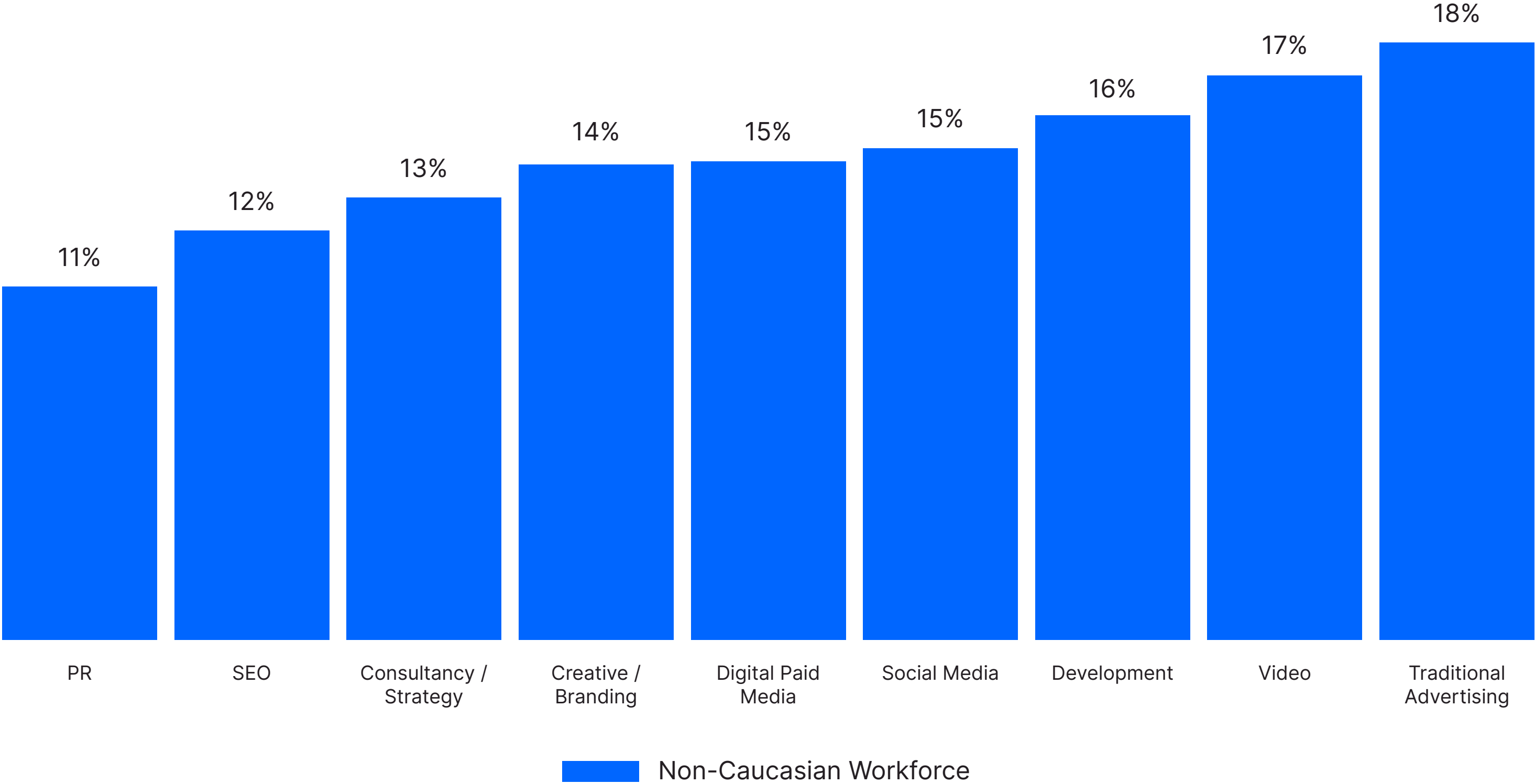


Ethnicity

Non-Caucasian Workforce vs. Digital Marketing Sector

11%
Non-Caucasian workforce
in PR sector

PR is the industry specialism with the lowest average representation of black and mixed ethnic groups

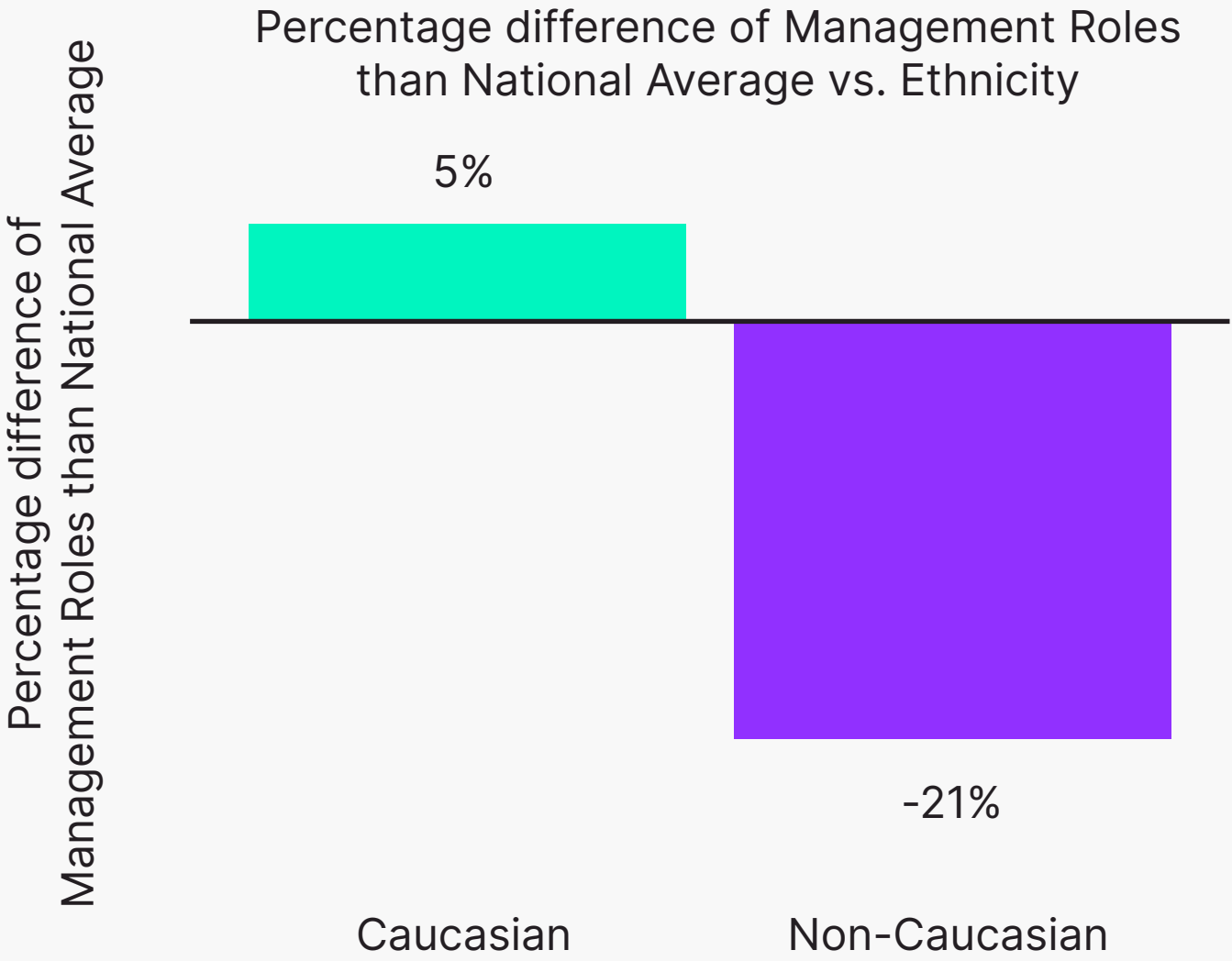
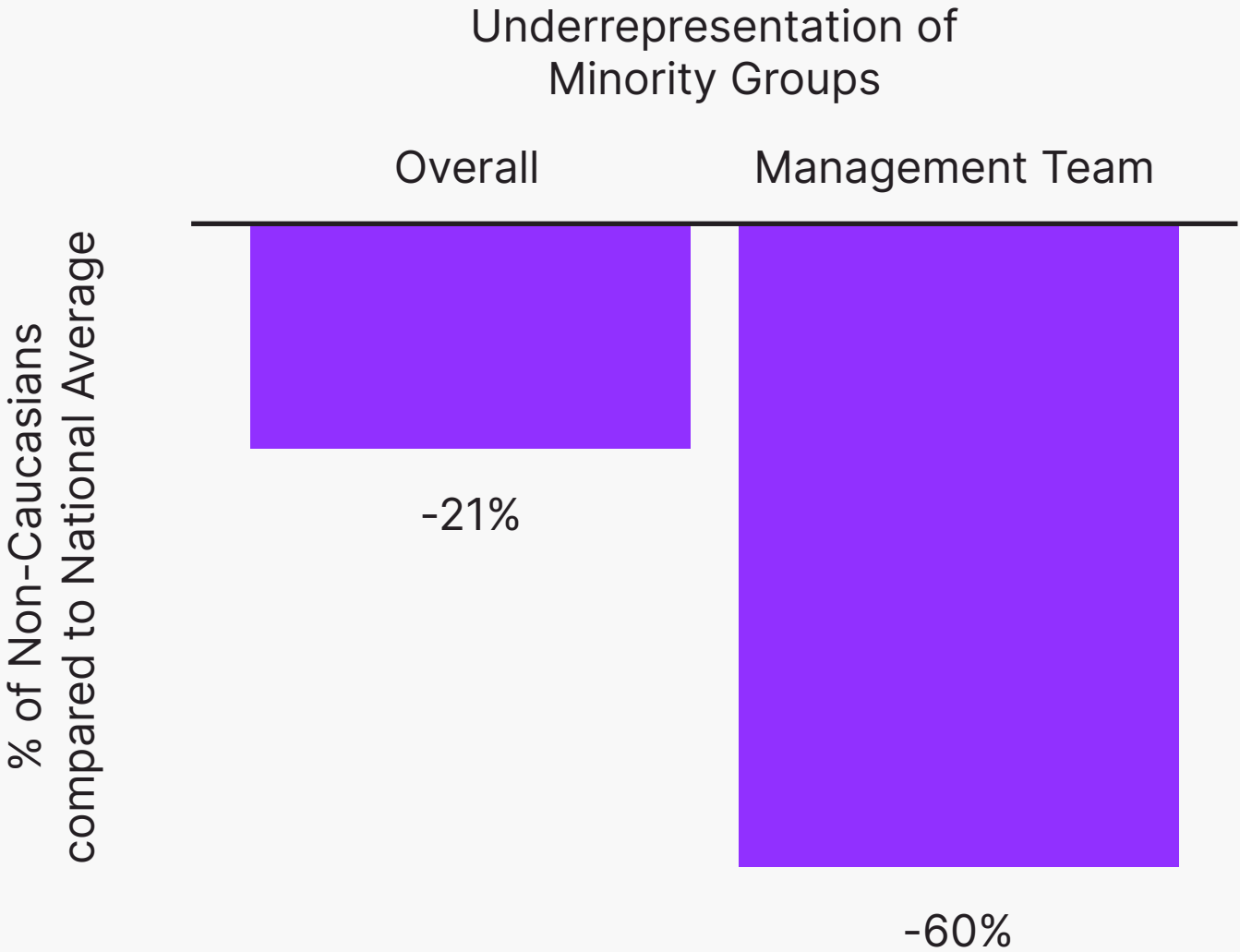


Ethnicity

60%

the percentage by which ethnic groups are underrepresented in management, based on national demographics

Ethnicity	Percentage Difference of Management Roles than National Average	2023 Management Roles	National Average
Caucasian	5%	86%	82%
Non-Caucasian	-21%	14%	18%



A photograph of three people sitting around a wooden table in a meeting or study environment. They are looking at laptops and smiling. The background is a chalkboard with some faint writing. The text 'Gender representation' is overlaid in large white font across the center of the image.

Gender representation



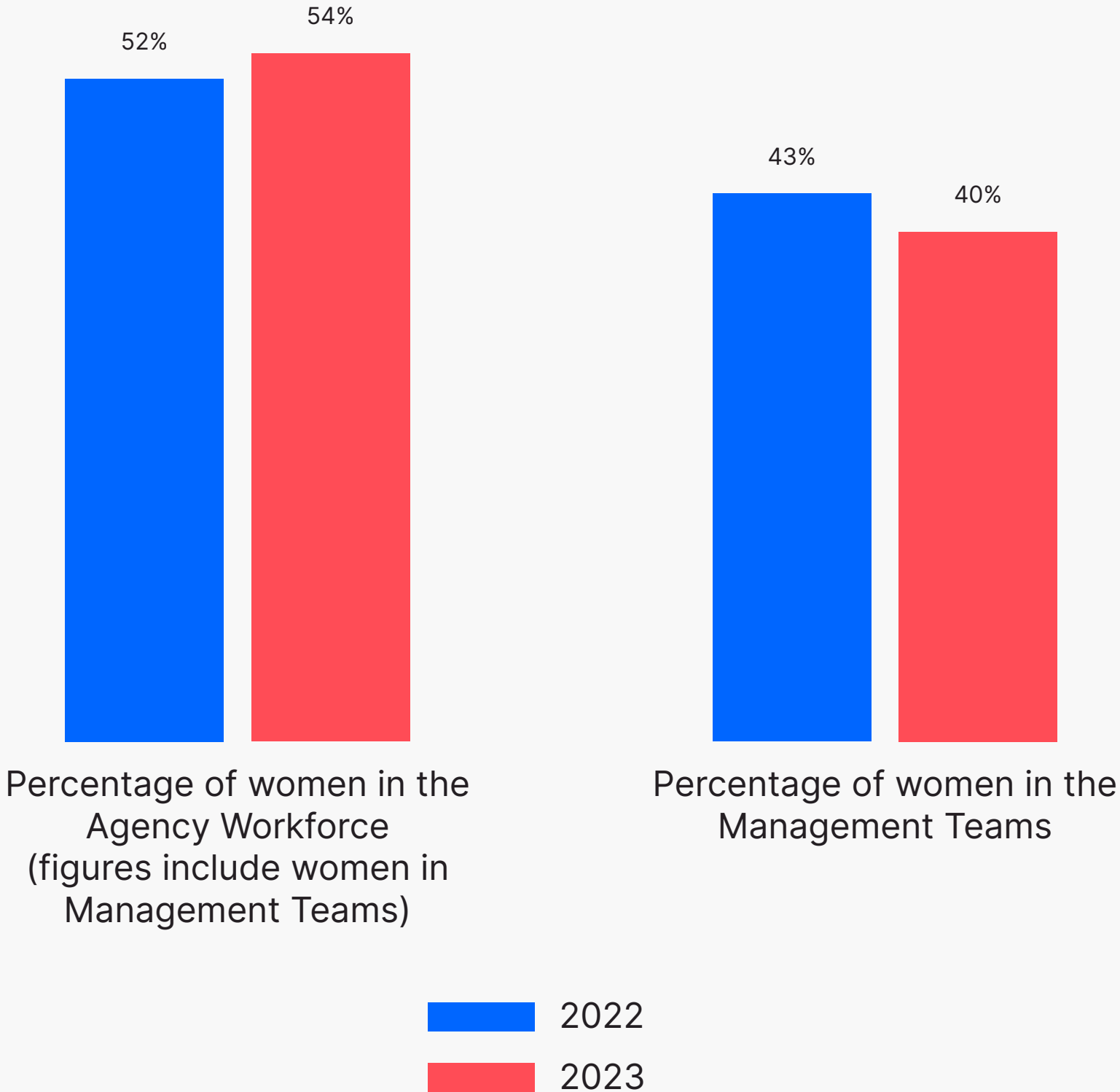
Gender representation

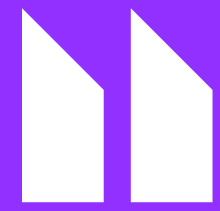
While there are now more women working in the sector, it appears they are still not progressing through agencies at the same rate as men. In fact, compared to 2021, there has been a decrease of the number of women at managerial level.

Generally speaking there is an equal number of men and women in most specialisms within the industry, but there's noticeable gender disparity in the areas of PR (almost 80% female) and Website Development (over 57% male).

Despite women making up the majority of the workforce in Traditional Advertising and Video, they are less well represented at managerial level in these areas.

Percentage of women in the Agency Workforce and Management Teams





For recent roles we've used female-biased job portals, like Investing In Women, to attract people who are finding it difficult to return to work in traditional agency setup.



Steven Bennett-Day
Founder, Ourselves



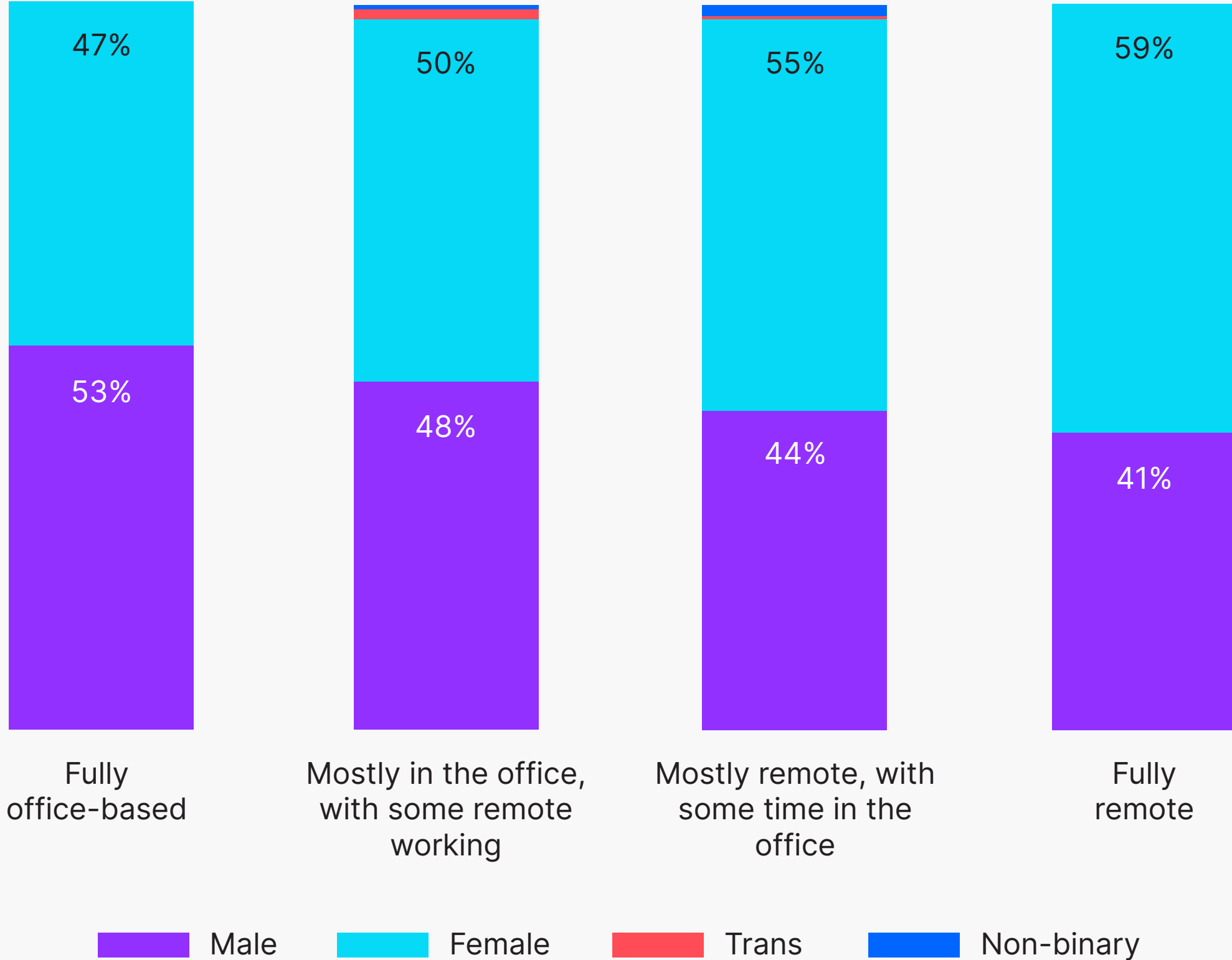
Gender and remote working

59%
women work on
a fully remote basis

41%
men work on
a fully remote basis

With more women than men choosing to work on a mostly or fully remote basis, this could be seen as a way to create a more level playing field when it comes to gender diversity and inclusion. The flexibility offered by remote working may be another factor, particularly for people with caregiving responsibilities, who are disproportionately women.

However, it's most likely down to a number of factors interacting in complex ways. To fully understand the benefits of remote working for women, further investigation is needed.



Disability and accessibility



Disability and accessibility

7%

of employees have shared the fact that they have a disability with their employer

3%

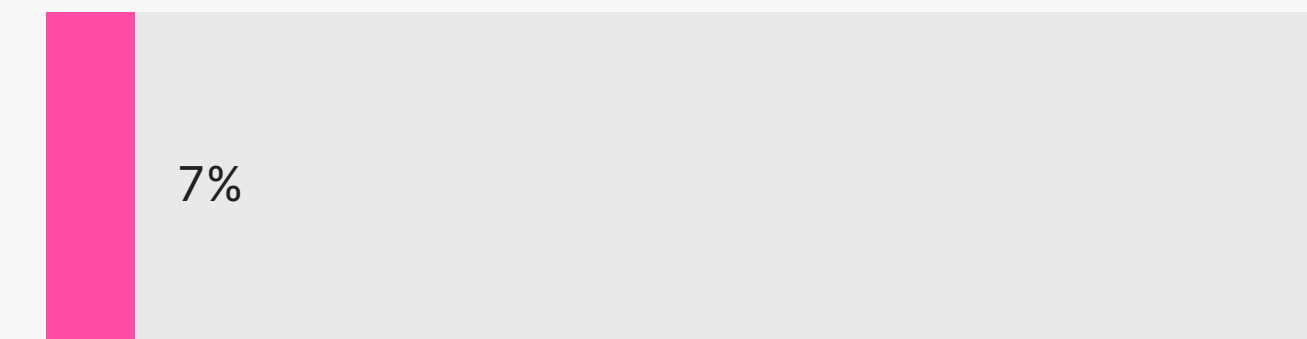
of management teams have someone with a disability

An estimated 14.6 million people in the UK had a disability in 2020/21². This represents 22% of the total population.

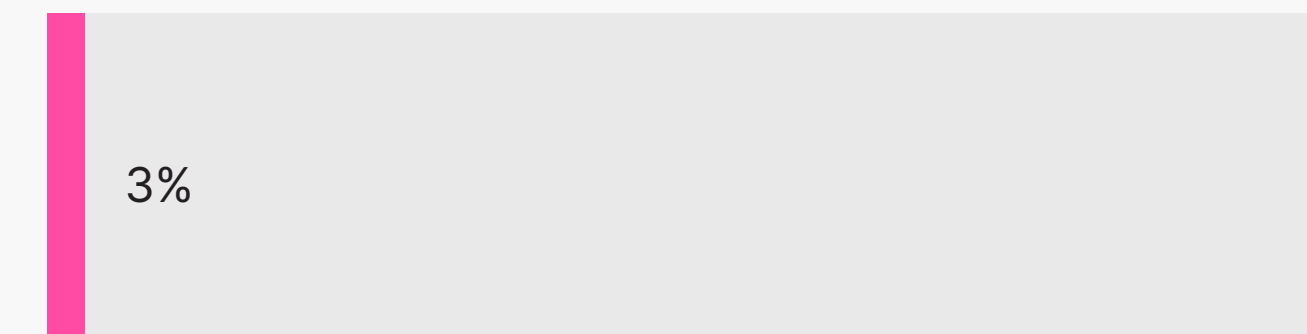
So you can clearly see that more work is needed to increase the representation of disabled people in the industry, even to bring the figure close to the national average.

²[Source: Parliamentary research briefing](#)

What percentage of your employees have disclosed a disability?



What percentage of your management team have disclosed a disability?

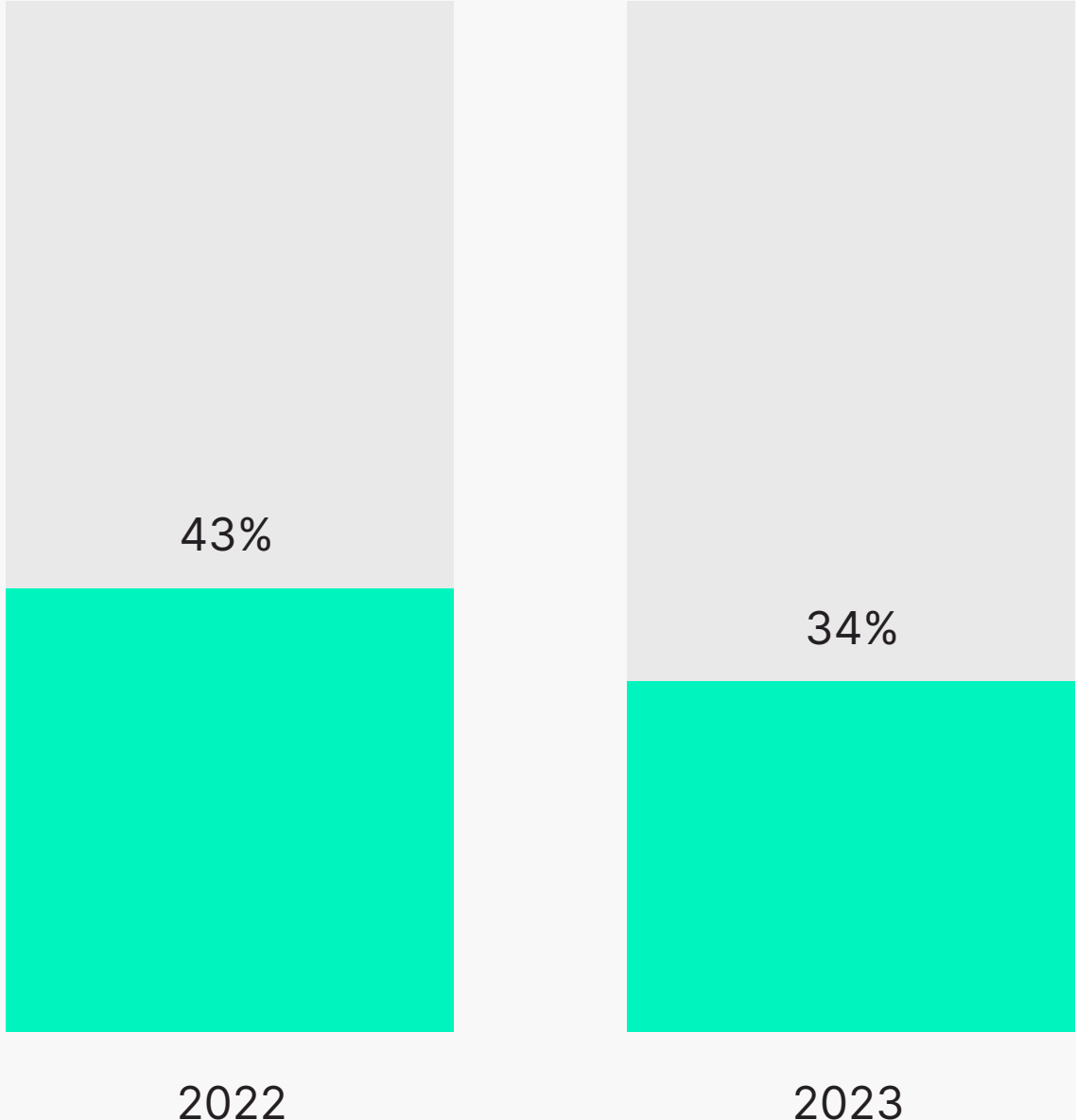


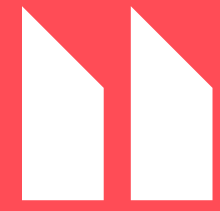
Neurodiversity

With a considerable majority of agencies not asking about neurodiversity, how many people are hiding their disability? And how many of those suffer in silence through fear of discrimination or lack of career progression?

Knowing who in your team needs support not only shows you care, but also allows you to make adjustments that can enhance their performance and increase their motivation. So ask the question.

% of agencies that ask if their employees are neurodiverse? (i.e. they have dyslexia, dyspraxia, autism or ADHD)





There's active engagement in diversity, equity and inclusion among all our staff. We have a regular DEI training session for everyone at our monthly lunch meetings and have appointed three mental health first aiders. We're proud to have created a culture where people can talk openly about personal issues, such as neurodiversity.



Kate Gorringer
Creative Director, Mr B & Friends





**We offer free counselling and GP appointments,
plus virtual wellness sessions to support
mental health.**



Claire Hutchings
Founder, Chime Agency



Disability and accessibility

Percentage of agencies that have made adjustments to the workplace to improve accessibility.

2022	2023
30%	50%

According to the latest data from the Office for National Statistics, there were 4.8 million disabled people in employment in the UK in the first quarter of 2022.

While there has been an encouraging 20% increase in the number of agencies putting measures in place to make the workplace accessible for everyone, that still means 50% are doing nothing at all.

There are many benefits to be gained from creating an accessible workplace, for both employers and employees. These include an improved reputation and brand image, increased customer loyalty, higher staff retention levels and a greater degree of job satisfaction, often leading to an increase in productivity.



A vibrant, flowing rainbow flag is the background of the slide. The colors transition from dark purple on the left to bright yellow and green in the center, and then to blue and pink on the right. The flag appears to be draped or blowing in the wind, creating soft folds and gradients.

LGBTQ+ representation



LGBTQ+ representation

46%

of respondents said they had employees identifying as LGBTQ+

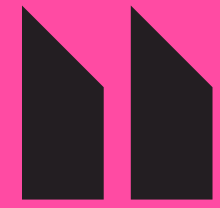
7%

Average representation of LGBTQ+ employees within agencies

Corresponding to around 7% of all employees across the industry, this figure demonstrates that LGBTQ+ representation remains good, particularly in small agencies.

But we can't afford to be complacent about this encouraging figure, and should continue to strive to create an inclusive and supportive environment that is appealing to the LGBTQ+ community.





To ensure our events are as inclusive as possible and any areas of diversity not represented within our team have a voice, we work with those diverse communities. We recently worked with charities that focus on LGBTQ+ and disabled communities to help us deliver an inclusive event for Netflix.



David Ogiste
Founder, Nobody's Café



LGBTQ+ representation

1%

of employees identify as transgender or non-binary

0.3%

of Management Teams identify as trans or non-binary

The increasing number of people within our industry able to identify as trans or non-binary is encouraging.

It is perhaps growing public awareness of the challenges faced by trans individuals that has led agencies to adopt ways of working which more effectively attract, retain and promote the wellbeing of their trans employees.



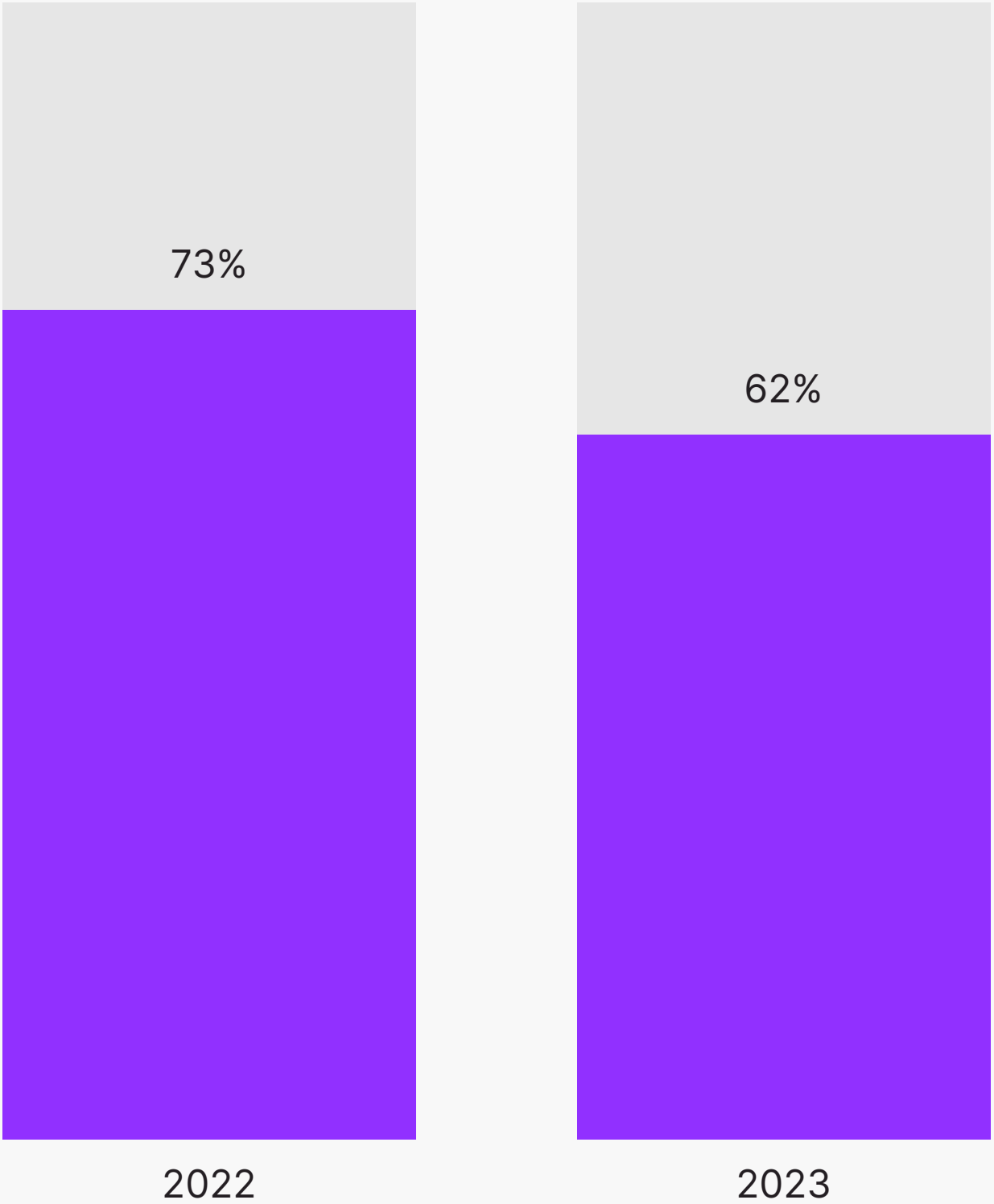
LGBTQ+ representation

-11%

decrease in the number of people who include pronouns in their email signature or LinkedIn profile

There has been a decrease in the number of people including personal pronouns in work-related messaging. It's such a simple policy to implement and costs nothing, but it can demonstrate an organisation's commitment to trans equality.

% of people who include pronouns in their email signature or LinkedIn profile



How you can help



Search

Search out the opinions of people from underrepresented groups, who may be able to offer valuable advice on how to improve diversity, equity and inclusion. This can easily be done through regular employee surveys, round table discussions, open forums or team meetings.

Create

Build a short and long-term plan for diversity, equity and inclusion that is suitable for the size, finances and needs of your agency.

Communicate

Once created, it's important that any DEI plans are shared with and communicated clearly to your wider team.

Adapt

Adapting job statements, employee feedback and reviewing policies are not costly and can be done relatively easily.



Events

Inviting guest speakers and attending in-person or online events can also have a big impact on people when seeking to build a fairer, more equitable workplace.

Take ownership

While successful DEI initiatives have been instigated by employees, it's really the ultimate responsibility of an employer to ensure the working environment is inclusive and welcoming for all.

Listen to your team

If you're a business leader, we'd encourage you to speak with your teams and find out just what DEI means to them, and what changes they'd like to see. Similarly, if you've got people from underrepresented groups in your agency, ask about their experiences and their opinion on your current approach to DEI.



Training examples you could follow

With 75% of agencies not offering any training at all on issues related to DEI, that may be a good place to start. There are many modules and training plans available, and many DEI specialists to provide that training.

If you're looking for some inspiration to encourage an understanding of DEI issues within your agency, here's what some of our survey respondents have done.



We run sessions on inclusive language, to make sure we're using the relevant terminology. We also attend workshops run by organisations like Creative Access and 26.



A transgender member of the team ran an internal workshop to build awareness of trans issues and consensus around the terminology to use.




We had a neurodiversity expert give a talk at a company event, which prompted others to share their previously undisclosed 'differences'.



As part of a wider initiative around understanding personalities and managing behaviours, we ran an 'Anti-Racism For Beginners' session.



A woman with dark hair, wearing a dark blue polka-dot button-down shirt and large gold hoop earrings, is smiling and shaking hands with someone whose hand is visible from the left. They are standing behind a wooden table. The background is a blurred office or meeting room.

**Think hiring the best
person for the job is a
fair way to recruit?**

Think again.



Six Steps to Fairer Recruitment

- 1** Stop looking for the 'culture fit' and start looking for the 'culture add'. In other words, people who are going to add to your culture.
- 2** Source candidates from new places. Don't advertise roles on the same old websites if you get the same sort of people applying. It's worth using diversity-focused recruitment sites.
- 3** Don't stop recruiting for a role until you have candidates from various ethnic backgrounds and an equal gender split.
- 4** Make sure the interview panel is diverse and gender balanced. This is proven to make a significant difference.
- 5** The questions you ask at interviews should be exactly the same for each candidate. Use a score chart to keep the process consistent and as objective as possible.
- 6** Develop fresh talent by engaging with young people from underrepresented backgrounds, many of whom may be unaware of the wide variety of jobs available in the industry. This can be done in a number of ways, from delivering talks in schools or colleges to offering work experience and paid internships.



Recruitment examples you could follow

Although these examples provided by survey participants may not be suitable for all agencies, it will give you an idea of what can be achieved when it comes to recruiting a more diverse and inclusive workforce.



We've hired a brand and culture manager and have made hires via the 10,000 Black Interns programme.



We advertise all our roles through sites that aim to reach diverse candidates, including Creative Access, Diverse Jobs Matter and Evenbreak.



As our network of editors was all male, we recently used an initiative called Edit Girls when recruiting freelance editors.



To ensure we hire on expertise first, we work with external HR support to provide us with blind CVs.



Be the change



Be the change

We know that creating an inclusive culture is challenging. And, in an increasingly uncertain world, you may be focusing on other issues.

What you may not realise is that promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in your agency could help address these issues.

Since our 2022 survey there have been changes made. There's a long way to go. But we remain optimistic. We remain hopeful that the agency sector industry can help to drive change.

If, like us, you believe that everyone must be fairly represented, let's join together to change our world for the better.

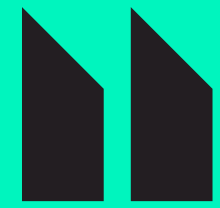


Create your own DEI policy

A diverse business is a healthy business. So why not put together a DEI policy for your agency and change the way you recruit and engage with people from less represented backgrounds.

The Agency Collective website has lots of resources to get you started, or you can download [The Agency Collective DEI Guide.](#)





It's great to see the improvements agencies have made in the past 12 months, and interesting to see that there are definite areas which agencies struggle with. We hope that by raising awareness of these issues and learning from others, we can continue on our mission to help agencies with their diversity and inclusion journeys.



Jeni Bond

Agency Relationship Manager, The Agency Collective



Thank you

