

Sticky Floors: Only 26% of working-class female professionals have been offered a promotion at their company

1 year ago



26% of female professionals from working class backgrounds have received a promotion at their current company – less than half the number of female professionals from upper-middle class backgrounds (59%).

In light of International Women's Day this Friday (8 March), specialist recruitment company [Robert Walters](#) releases new figures on the pay and progression of women from working class backgrounds in the UK & Ireland.

Social Mobility's [2023 report](#) found that on average, professionals from working class backgrounds are paid 12% less a year – which means they are working one out of every eight days for free.

However – new research from Robert Walters' [annual ED&I report](#) highlights how inequalities are disproportionately impacting working class women's rates of progression and pay – as they are forced to carry the double burden of both class & gender pay gaps.

Coral Bamgboye, Head of Equity, Diversity & Inclusion at [Robert Walters UK](#): "We are conscious of the glass ceiling stalling the progression of female professionals however, our research attests to 'sticky floors' placing further constraints on female professionals from working class backgrounds."

Progression obstructed

Just a quarter (26%) of women from working class backgrounds have received a promotion at their current company – 20% less than their male counterparts and 34% less than women from upper-middle class

backgrounds.

Not only that, but 32% of women from working class backgrounds report not being at all aware of what they need to do to get a promotion – the highest across gender & socio-economic class.

Coral comments: “The poor promotion rate of working-class women is closely tied in with their limited awareness of the steps necessary to secure one.

“Disparities start to form right from higher education when it comes to career advancement – with working class women struggling to easily access or afford career advice, work experience or unpaid internships at school, right through to mentorship opportunities goal-setting resources and clear pathways upwards at work. This has a knock-on impact on progression – leading them to become stuck in junior positions on significantly lower rates of pay.”

Rates of pay lag

Women from working class backgrounds bear a double burden when it comes to pay – grappling with both the class pay gap of 12% and the gender pay gap which sits at 7.7% for full-time employees in the UK.

The Robert Walters report found that 52% felt underpaid at work – 17% more than women from upper-middle class backgrounds.

Whilst 50% of women from working class backgrounds experience a salary ceiling of £21k – twice the rate of men from similar backgrounds (25%) and 32% more than female professionals from upper-middle class backgrounds (18%).

The gaps are even more pronounced further up pay brackets – just 1% of women from working class women are earning between £55-100k (group least likely to be earning in this bracket) – compared to 19% of women and 29% of men from upper-middle class backgrounds.

Cost of living bites

A recent [study](#) by money.co.uk found that on average, women save 35% less than men – so, they have less of a safety net from cost-of-living hikes.

Robert Walters’ report found that women from working class backgrounds are most likely to either be living paycheque-to-paycheque (31%) or relying on additional streams of income (20%) – 14% more than men from similar backgrounds and over double the number of men from upper-middle class backgrounds.

Negotiations falling flat

Despite being on the lowest rates of pay, over two-thirds (64%) of women from working class backgrounds haven’t negotiated for a raise in their entire career (the highest across all genders and socio-economic groups).

Factors preventing working class women from negotiating:

- 26% did not think their employer would offer them a pay-rise – 10% more than upper-middle class women

- 22% lacked the confidence to negotiate – 10% more than men from similar backgrounds
- 12% did not negotiate due to their company's low profit / cost cuts – twice the amount of men from similar backgrounds

Of those who did negotiate, 26% received less than half of their desired raise and nearly a third (32%) did not receive any of raise at all. Whilst 64% of men from upper-middle class backgrounds received between 50-100% of what they negotiated for.

Coral comments: "It's clear to see why rates of pay for women from working class backgrounds are lagging and the 'sticky floor' problem persists – with employees suffering increasing pay instability as the cost of living continues to rise.

"What is more, when this group feel empowered to negotiate for more, they are then faced with diminished chances of success. Therefore, as businesses we have a role to do more than simply advertise that 'these advancement opportunities exist.'"

Coral's advice on how companies can clean up sticky floors and uplift working-class women:

- Equal advancement opportunities – introducing mentorship programmes for professionals targeted at lower socio-economic classes can support their professional growth and prevent them hitting progression ceilings. It is not only important that all employees are provided with clear paths to progression but that promotion processes are always transparent.
- Transparency on pay-gaps – women from working-class backgrounds are met with a double burden when it comes to pay – impacted by both the class pay gap and the gender pay gap. That is why it is more important than ever for companies to report transparently on their own pay gaps and coordinate a strategy to address them.
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) – having specific ERGs can help provide a sense of community and support for professionals from similar backgrounds.
- Ongoing assessments & adjustments – As an employer, it is important to constantly be assessing your own culture and levels of inclusion – from the start of the hiring journey to on-the-ground within the workplace. Through implementing things like anonymous surveys and evaluations, regular Q&As and open discussions.