

*Generation*

**MEETING  
THE WORLD'S  
MIDCAREER  
MOMENT**

**Authors:**  
Mona Mourshed,  
Ali Jaffer, Helen Cashman,  
Karen Salazar Ruiz, and  
Jennifer Sikes

July 2021

# INTRODUCTION

**Every moment is a crossroads. But the diverging paths ahead are especially stark for older, midcareer workers: they make up the bulk of the long-term unemployed in many countries, and they face growing barriers to finding good jobs. If we choose to recognize the talents of this group and help them adapt to workplace disruptions, we can prosper together. But if we stick with the status quo, a bad situation will only get worse.**

That is the key takeaway from a global survey—the first of its kind—commissioned by our nonprofit organization Generation to provide an in-depth view of individuals aged 45–60 who are seeking or working in entry-level and intermediate roles. Generation was founded to tackle youth unemployment, and has so far placed more than 43,000 young adults in careers. But we have recently expanded our programs to help meet the unique adaptation challenges faced by midcareer individuals.

We quickly discovered that, while various organizations had examined pieces of this puzzle, no one had taken a comprehensive view. Our new survey fills that gap: it spans seven countries and includes unemployed midcareer individuals, unemployed young adults, those midcareer individuals who have successfully switched careers, and the employers who do or don't hire them (see Methodology and Definitions).

The key insight from our research, presented in this report, is that midcareer individuals across the world are finding it harder to get jobs—despite rising calls to address inequality and advance social justice.

Our data confirm and quantify the dark anecdotal story captured in today's headlines: people age 45+ face persistent and rising pressure in the global job market. They are unemployed for much longer than the median, and their age is indeed one of the greatest barriers to their finding a job. Those from underrepresented communities face even greater barriers: they engage in 53 percent more interviews to get a job offer. Our research also confirms that hiring managers have a strong perception bias against 45+ job candidates—they believe that members of this age cohort have poor skills and low adaptability.

Other findings point to deepening problems ahead. One warning light: people age 45+ who did manage to switch careers successfully express high dissatisfaction with the quality of their entry-level jobs—even as employers, especially in the booming tech sector, keep raising the qualification bar on those very jobs. Another: the 45+ individuals who need training the most to get a job are the most hesitant to pursue it. By contrast, 45+ individuals who have successfully switched professions believe that training has been central to their ability to do so, and employers concur.

Happily, one key insight that leaps out from our survey is hugely positive. Yes, hiring managers express bias against 45+ individuals. But those very same employers also acknowledge that, once they hire people over 45, **those workers perform on the job just as well as or even better than their peers who are a decade younger.**

In a world in which decisions are made on the basis of fact, the employment prospects of 45+ individuals should be much better than they are today.

Critically, these core insights are universal across all seven countries in our survey, despite their very different circumstances. Which leads to our final big takeaway: the shared reality confronting 45+ individuals represents a truly global challenge.

Our research confirms that older workers are capable of tremendous adaptability in switching careers and mastering new roles, but it also provides a sobering reminder that they cannot meet all their challenges alone. As 45+ individuals continue to seek work in a world where retirement ages are being pushed up by higher life expectancies and inadequate savings, they need employers and policymakers to take steps to counter the rampant ageism that this survey has confirmed and quantified.

Our collective response will determine whether business and society rise to meet the world's Midcareer Moment. Older workers are our friends, neighbours, and parents. Do we seize the compelling opportunity they offer, or abandon them to lives of quiet desperation and long-term unemployment? In the report that follows, we dive deeper into our findings and their implications, and offer emerging thoughts on a few key interventions to help improve the employment prospects of age 45+ individuals across the globe.

## METHODOLOGY AND DEFINITIONS

**The findings presented in this report are drawn from a survey commissioned by Generation between March and May 2021. The study included employed and unemployed people, age 18–60, as well as hiring managers at employers.**

**This report adopts specific terms for people of particular age cohorts: **youth** (aged 18–34); **midcareer** individuals (35–60); and, within the midcareer cohort, **45+** individuals (45–60).**

We chose age 60 as the cut-off for this survey's definition of midcareer because 60–65 is the average retirement age in member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). The retirement age is likely to rise in many countries over the coming decades, and we look forward to sharing insights about the challenges and opportunities faced by an older cohort in future.

The survey drew 3,800 responses from employed and unemployed people, and 1,404 responses from hiring managers, across Brazil, India, Italy, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The research reflects the views and opinions of online populations in these countries, and the surveys of the unemployed and employed are representative of the population by age, gender, household income or socioeconomic level, region, and—in all countries except India—ethnicity.

Our figures on underrepresented communities are drawn from survey respondents' self-identification as a member of an underrepresented community in their country.

Respondents included the following:

### **Seekers**

These individuals were unemployed, employed part time (less than 30 hours per week), or caregivers looking for full-time work. They were looking for entry-level roles (requiring less than one year's experience) or intermediate-level positions (between two and four years' experience). They were not looking for self-employment.

### **Switchers**

These midcareer individuals were currently employed (not self-employed) and had been hired into an entry-level or intermediate-level position. They had switched professions in the past three years, and currently were not actively looking for employment.

### **Hiring managers**

These individuals were responsible for recruiting entry-level or intermediate-level job applications, having done so at least three times in the past year, and had hired a midcareer switcher specifically in the past three years.

**AGE 45+ INDIVIDUALS  
MAKE UP A HIGH SHARE  
OF THE LONG-TERM  
UNEMPLOYED**

# LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT

- Singapore (Age 40+, > or = 25 weeks)
- Spain (Age 45+, > or = 6 months)
- Canada (Age 45+, > or = 27 weeks)
- USA (Age 45+, > or = 27 weeks)

Share of the long-term unemployed who are midcareer individuals by country.  
Source: national statistics.

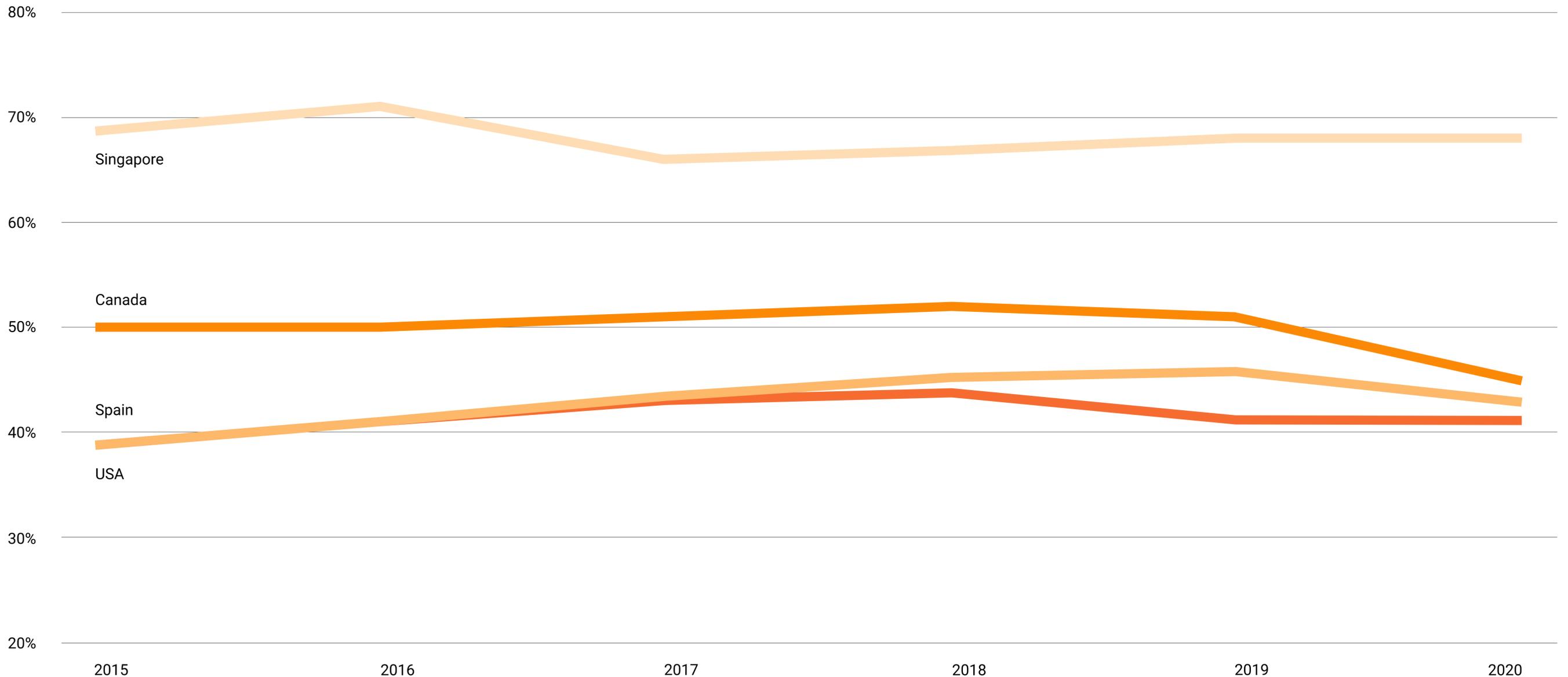
Figure 1

## Midcareer individuals have remained a consistently high percentage of the long-term unemployed over the past six years\*

Globally consistent unemployment figures for the 45–60 age bracket are hard to come by. For example, the World Bank, OECD, and International Labour Organization (ILO) aggregate a range of age bands into a single bracket (for example, 25–74 or 25–54) given limitations in the national data they pull from. Such aggregation makes trends harder to see, and, by extension, makes specific age groups harder to help.

However, where available, national statistics point to a significant and growing problem. For example, in Canada, Singapore, Spain, and the United States, 45+ and 50+ individuals have consistently made up 40 to 70 percent of the long-term unemployed since 2015.

\*Refers to the long-term unemployed definition by the country (e.g. = 25 weeks) and the closest age bracket to 45+ by country.



# AGE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

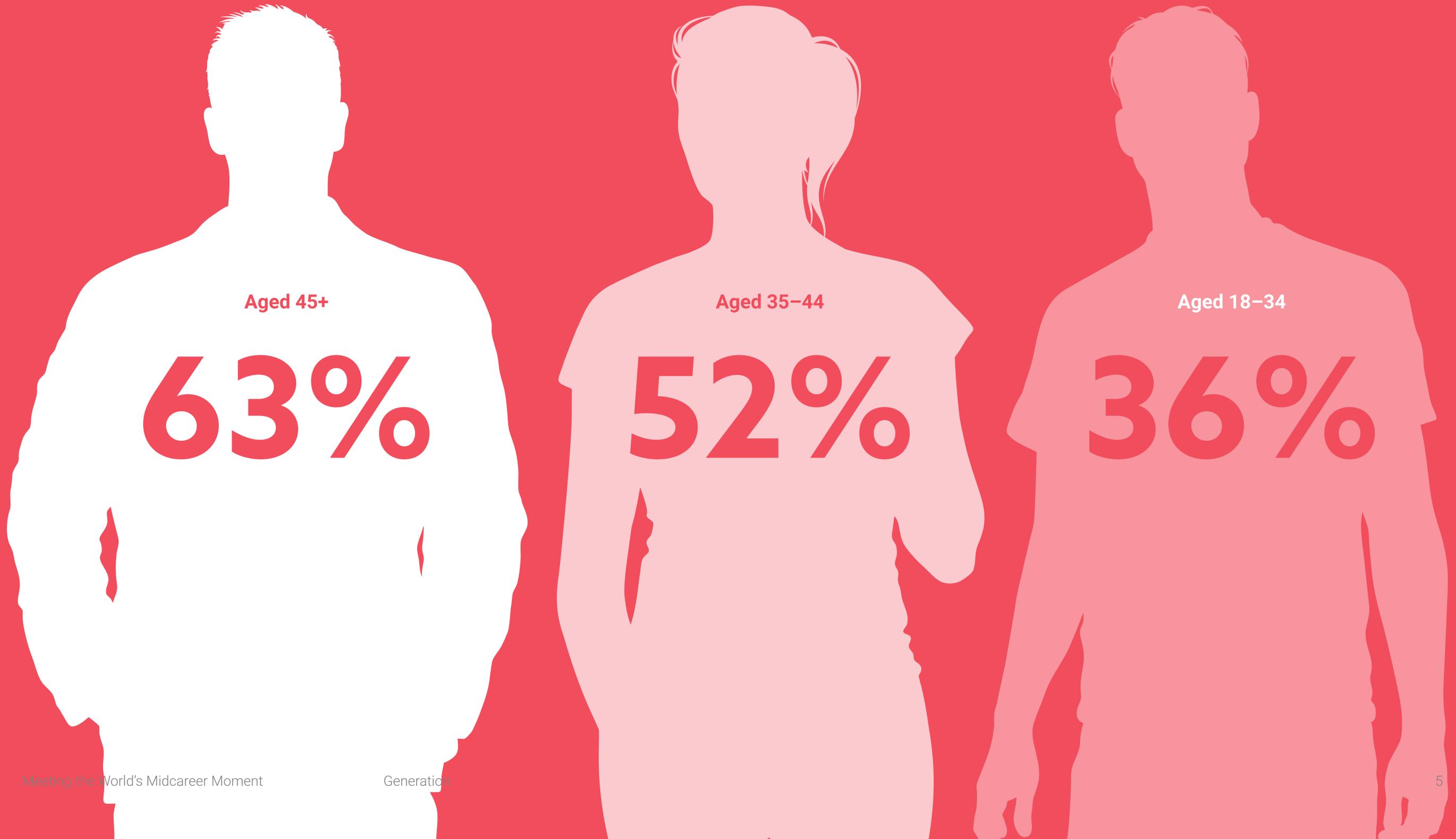
Share of the unemployed who remain unemployed for 12+ months.

For age 45+, n = 1096,  
for age 35-44, n = 1039,  
for age 18-34, n = 1013.

Figure 2

Of those who are unemployed, 63% of those 45+ have been unemployed for longer than a year versus 52% of those 35-44 and 36% of those aged 18-34.

We see this trend echoed in our survey. Across the seven countries, unemployed people over 45 are much more likely than their younger counterparts to be jobless for the long term. Among the respondents to our survey who lacked jobs, 63 percent of 45+ individuals had been unemployed for longer than a year, compared to 36 percent of job seekers aged 18-34.



## AGE AS A BARRIER

Share of midcareer seekers and switchers who view age as a barrier to their employment.

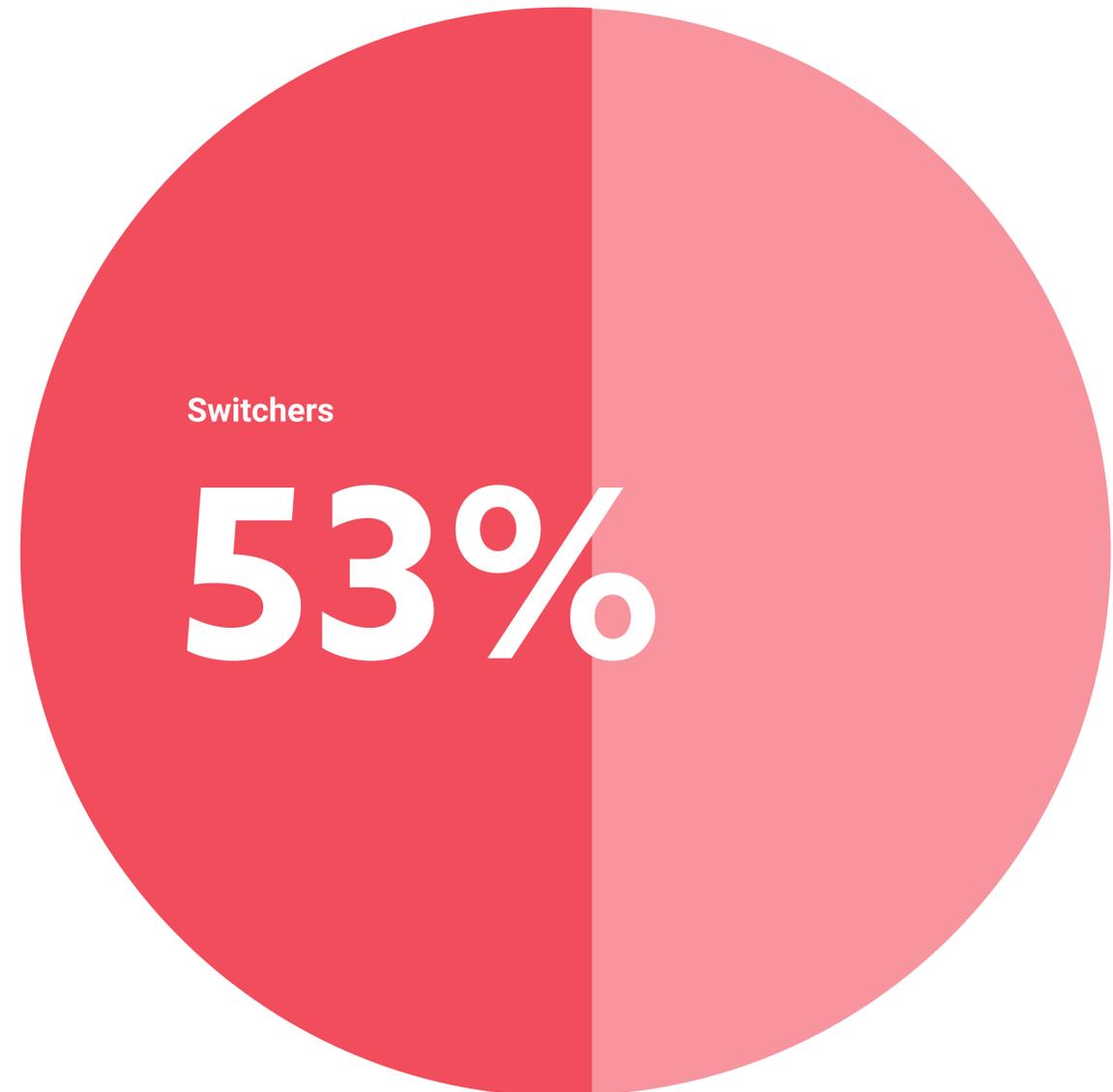
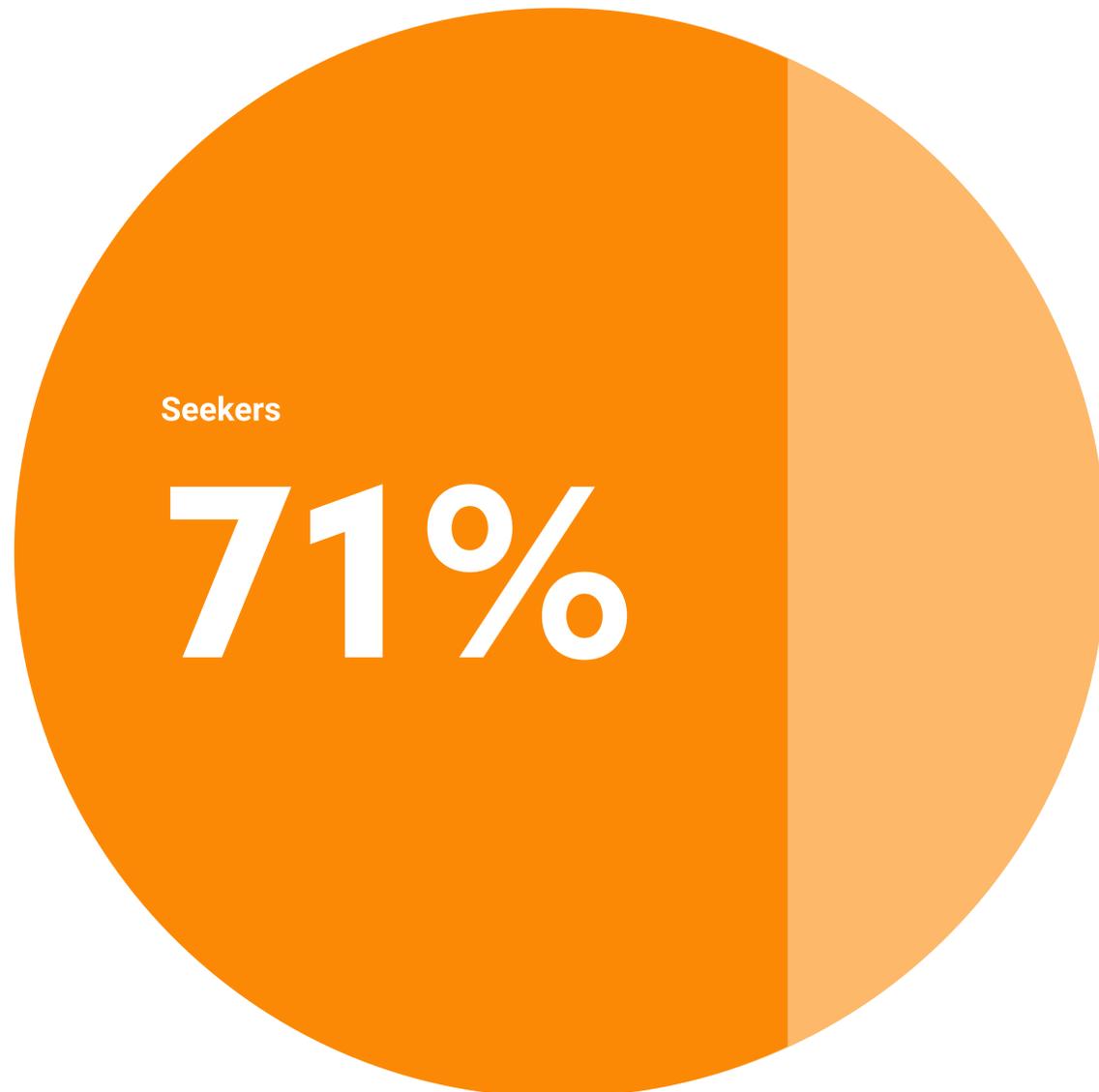
For seekers n = 1096,  
and for switchers n = 250.

Figure 3

**45+ individuals commonly regard age as one of the biggest barriers they face in finding a job.**

The startlingly high prevalence of long-term unemployment among 45+ job seekers represents a human tragedy on a global scale. People in long-term unemployment typically face significant financial strain—and are more likely to experience mental-health issues such as anxiety and depression, with each job rejection being felt on a deeply personal level. Long-term unemployed people also report widespread difficulties in their family relationships.

It's no surprise that 45+ individuals commonly regard age as one of the biggest barriers they face in finding a job. Among our survey respondents, this view was held by 53 percent of successful career switchers, rising to 71 percent of those who are unemployed. There is some variation across countries; for instance, 85 percent of 45+ job seekers in Singapore agree that age is a major employment obstacle, while the corresponding figure in India is 46 percent. But the belief that age is a formidable barrier is significant across all countries.

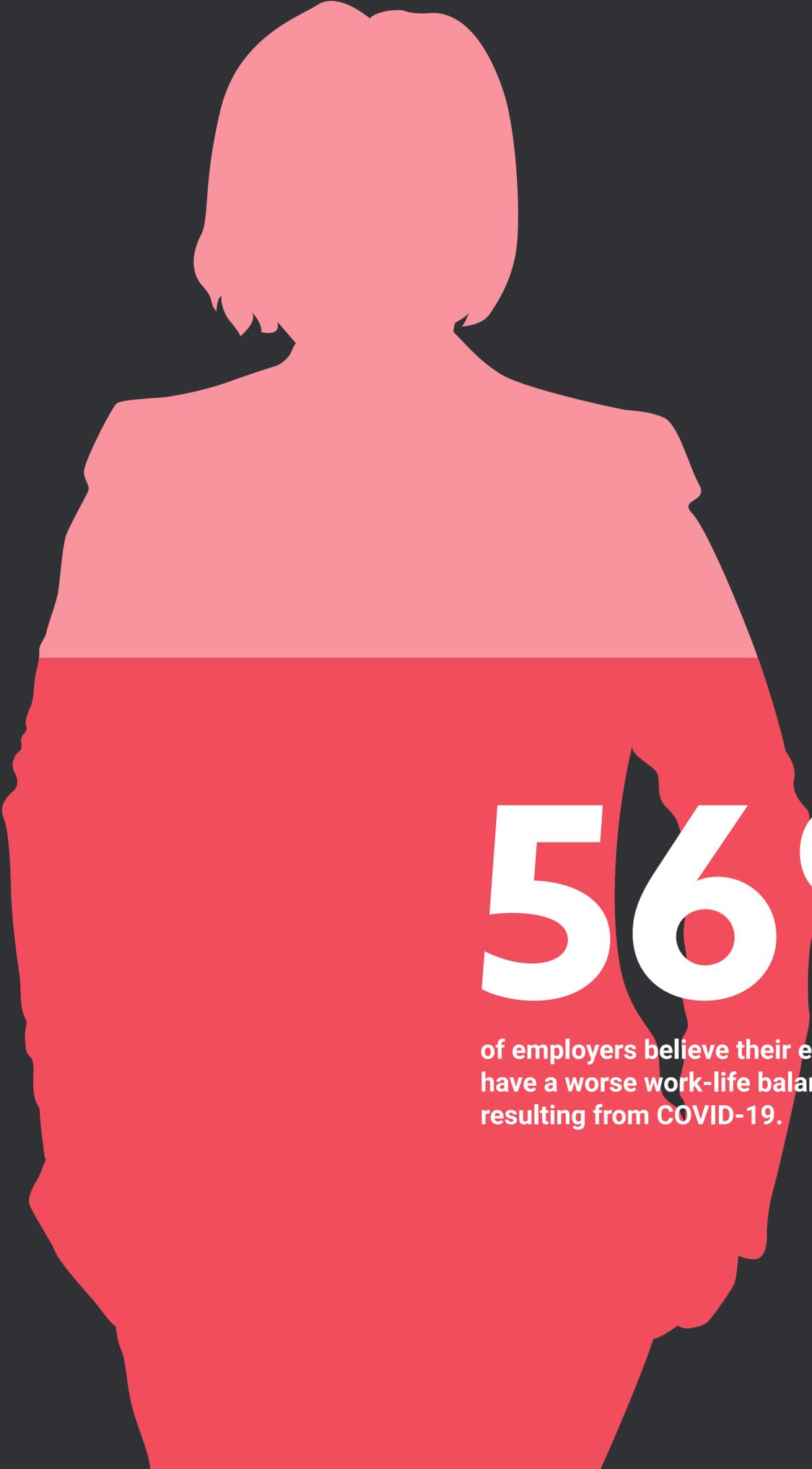


## HOW THE PANDEMIC HAS HIT MIDCAREERS

COVID-19 has harmed employment opportunities for midcareers, and has worsened employment conditions for midcareers and other workers alike.

According to 37 percent of midcareer switchers and over 50 percent of midcareer seekers, COVID-19 has had a major impact on their employment status. Close to half of employers have reduced pay increases and stopped offering certain benefits since the COVID-19 pandemic began.

Among employers, 56 percent believe that their employees have a worse work-life balance resulting from COVID-19. Within small companies in particular, 70 percent of hiring managers believe their employees have a worse work-life balance than before, and 58 percent believe that employees have more mental health challenges.



**56%**

of employers believe their employees have a worse work-life balance resulting from COVID-19.

**HIRING MANAGERS HAVE  
A NEGATIVE VIEW OF 45+  
JOBSEEKERS, EVEN THOUGH  
EMPLOYERS RATE HIGHLY  
THE JOB PERFORMANCE OF  
THOSE THEY HIRE**

# HIRING MANAGER PERCEPTIONS

Our survey finds strong evidence that perceptions of ageism are well-founded: an unwarranted bias is at work. Hiring managers hold negative perceptions of 45+ individuals, even though employers experience strong job performance from those whom they hire from this age group.

Hiring managers strongly favor job candidates aged 35–44 over 45+ individuals. Indeed, according to hiring managers, this younger group greatly outperforms the 45+ cohort in every area of evaluation. Candidates aged 35–44 are much more often seen as the most **application-ready** group, in the sense of having well-prepared documents and portfolios, offering good referrals, and doing well in their interviews.

Hiring managers are more inclined to rate those 35–44 as having the best **experience**, in terms of relevant education, salient prior work, and the right technical skills for the job. And individuals aged 35–44 are also more often thought to be the group that has the best **fit**, demonstrating strong behavioral and mindset skills, and a persona that suits the dynamics of the team, the culture of the workplace, and the industry in general. In addition, the youngest age group—job candidates aged 18–34—was also better regarded than their 45+ peers in all categories.

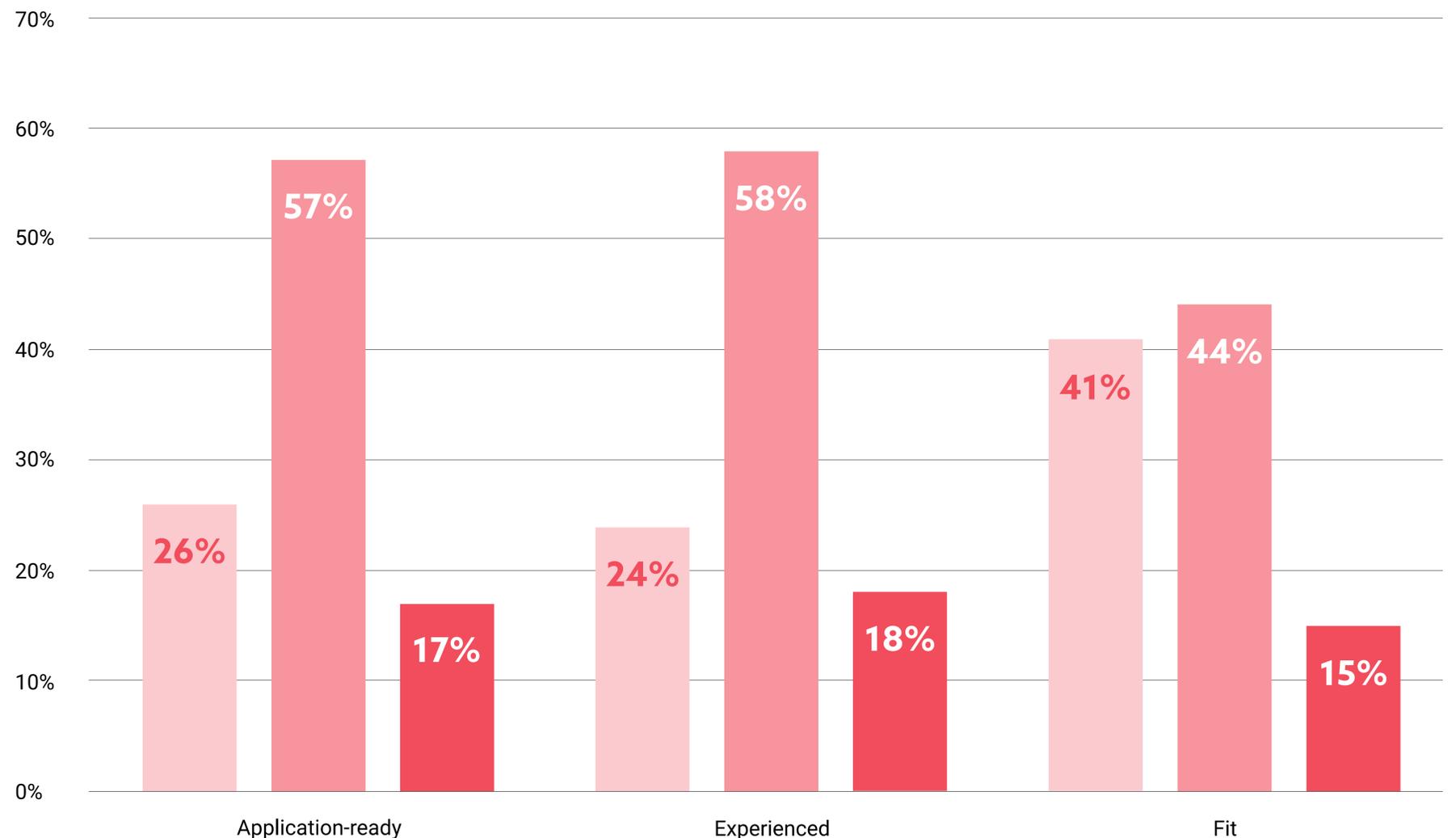
Figure 4

## Hiring managers do not perceive age 45+ job candidates as having any strengths relative to other age groups.

Hiring managers' perception of which age group of workers was the most or best ...



n = 1404; Application ready is formed by Well-prepared application documents, Good referrals, Do well on the interview, Experience is formed by Relevant education background, Good knowledge of the specific technical skills needed for the job, Relevant job experience; Fit is formed by Have a persona that is a fit with team dynamics, Good soft skills, Have a persona that is a fit with workplace culture, Have a persona that is a fit for the industry.



# HIRING MANAGER CONCERNS

Hiring managers' top concerns about 45+ candidates.

n = 1404

Figure 5

**Hiring managers stated three top concerns with regards to age 45+ job candidates.**

Asked to cite the three characteristics most likely to hamper the success of 45+ individuals in the job market, hiring managers most often mention reluctance to try new technologies, inability to learn new skills, and difficulty working with coworkers of a different generation. In a global workplace that increasingly demands more skills and qualifications, is being transformed by new technologies, and requires deeper collaboration with colleagues, this is a daunting set of concerns.

38%

reluctant to try new technologies

27%

unable to learn new skills

21%

have difficulty in working with other generations

## STRONG MIDCAREER JOB PERFORMANCE

Figure 6

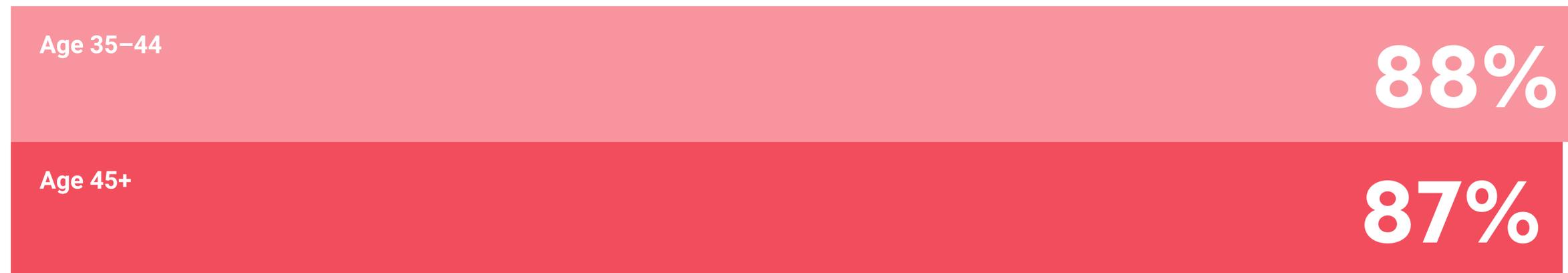
**Employers rate 45+ hires as strongly as their younger peers in performance and in potential for retention.**

But what about the actual job performance of the age 45+ individuals whom these employers hire? Here the responses tell a completely different story. Asked about the performance of 45+ individuals compared to their younger peers, hiring managers declare that 87 percent of their 45+ hires are as good as—or better than—younger employees in terms of their overall performance on the job.

They add that 90 percent have as much—or more—potential to stay with the company long term. Indeed, this highly favorable evaluation of job performance is comparable to that of the 35–44 age group, even though, as previously noted, the younger group is **far** more appealing to hiring managers than 45+ individuals.

n = 1404

**% of midcareer switchers age 35–44 and 45+ who performed better than or about the same as their peers at the same employer**



**% of midcareer switchers age 35–44 and 45+ whose potential to stay with the company long term is equal to or greater than their peers**



A negative opinion of 45+ job candidates, despite their strong performance—why does this stunning mismatch between perception and reality arise? Not because of disagreement among different sets of respondents about the capacities of 45+ individuals. Rather, the mismatch occurs within the **same** survey respondents.

**One reason, surely, is the truism that like often connects with like. Of the hiring managers in our survey, 39 percent were 35–44 (while 33 percent were 18–34 and 28 percent were 45+), which could make them inclined to regard peers their age in general as more suitable and competent colleagues.**

**A second explanation may lie in the phenomenon of belief perseverance, the well-documented tendency for a general bias to survive despite clear counter-examples. Even when managers hire 45+ individuals who do very well, they can continue to believe, despite their experience to the contrary, that this cohort will prove to be poor performers.**

**Whatever the reason, the fact remains: ageism is real and global—and addressing it calls for further attention and reflection.**

**AGE 45+ INDIVIDUALS WITH  
THE GREATEST NEED FOR  
TRAINING ARE THE MOST  
HESITANT TO PURSUE IT**

## HIRING MANAGER CONFIDENCE

Our survey shows that employers value reputable training and credentialing, and that 45+ individuals who have successfully switched careers regard training as being important to securing their new job. By contrast, 45+ individuals whose job prospects would most benefit from training—people who have a high school education or less, and have a lower income—are often especially hesitant to undertake training.

Let's start with the views of employers. Across the countries we surveyed, employers view reputable training and credentialing as being able to equate with years of experience in a job with adjacent skills, giving them more confidence when considering hiring an applicant. For instance, hiring managers in India prioritize applicants who can prove their skills with a well-known industry certification, like those of Microsoft, AWS, or Google.

Figure 7

**Hiring managers gain confidence from robust training and certification and adjacent work experience, while government subsidies are less compelling.**

Share of hiring managers who selected option as one of the top three things that would increase their confidence when considering hiring an applicant.

n = 1404

78%

If the applicant had experience in a past job with clearly adjacent skills to the role for which I am hiring them.

75%

If the applicant had attended a high-reputation training and employment program that specializes in the profession for which I am hiring.

73%

If the applicant can prove their skills with a well-known industry certification for their role.

41%

If government subsidizes the salary of this hire.

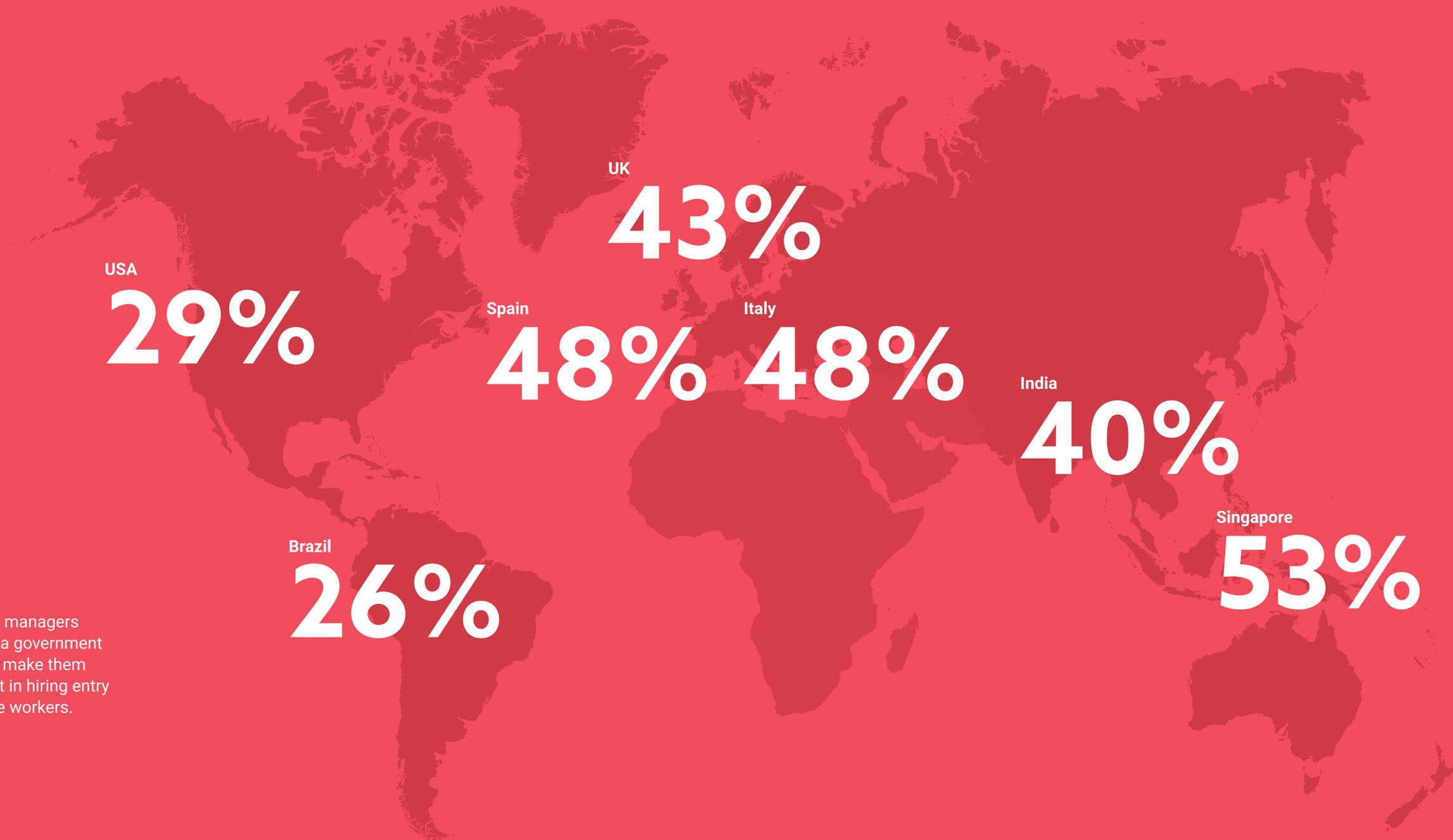
# HIRING MANAGERS AND GOVERNMENT SUBSIDIES

Figure 8

Hiring managers had different perceptions of government subsidies depending on the country where they were based.

Notably, government incentive programs that subsidize wages to encourage employers to hire an applicant are less valued, with only 41 percent of hiring managers rating such programs as an effective confidence booster.

In the wake of the pandemic, multiple countries have subsidized wages for six to twelve months as a mechanism to induce employers to hire applicants of various age brackets and attributes. Singaporean employers rate this lever the highest of all seven countries in our survey.



Share of hiring managers who indicated a government subsidy would make them more confident in hiring entry or intermediate workers.

n = 1404

## THE POWER OF TRAINING

Figure 9

**Did age 45+ switchers think training helped them to secure their new jobs?**

n = 250

Employers' appreciation of training is shared by 45+ individuals who have successfully switched careers, a group that regards training as a significant step towards employment. Among these switchers, 74 percent say that attending training helped them to secure their new position.

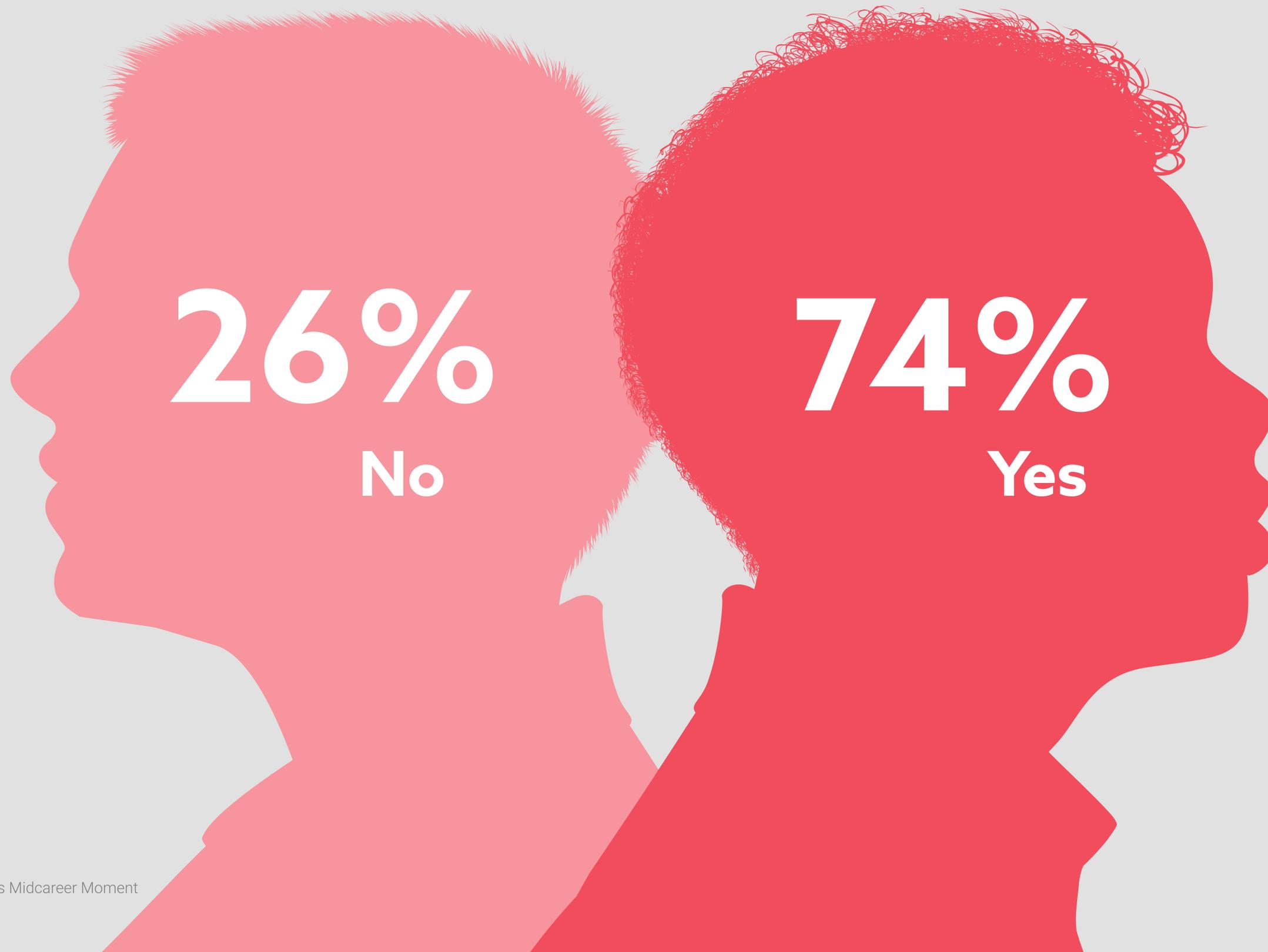
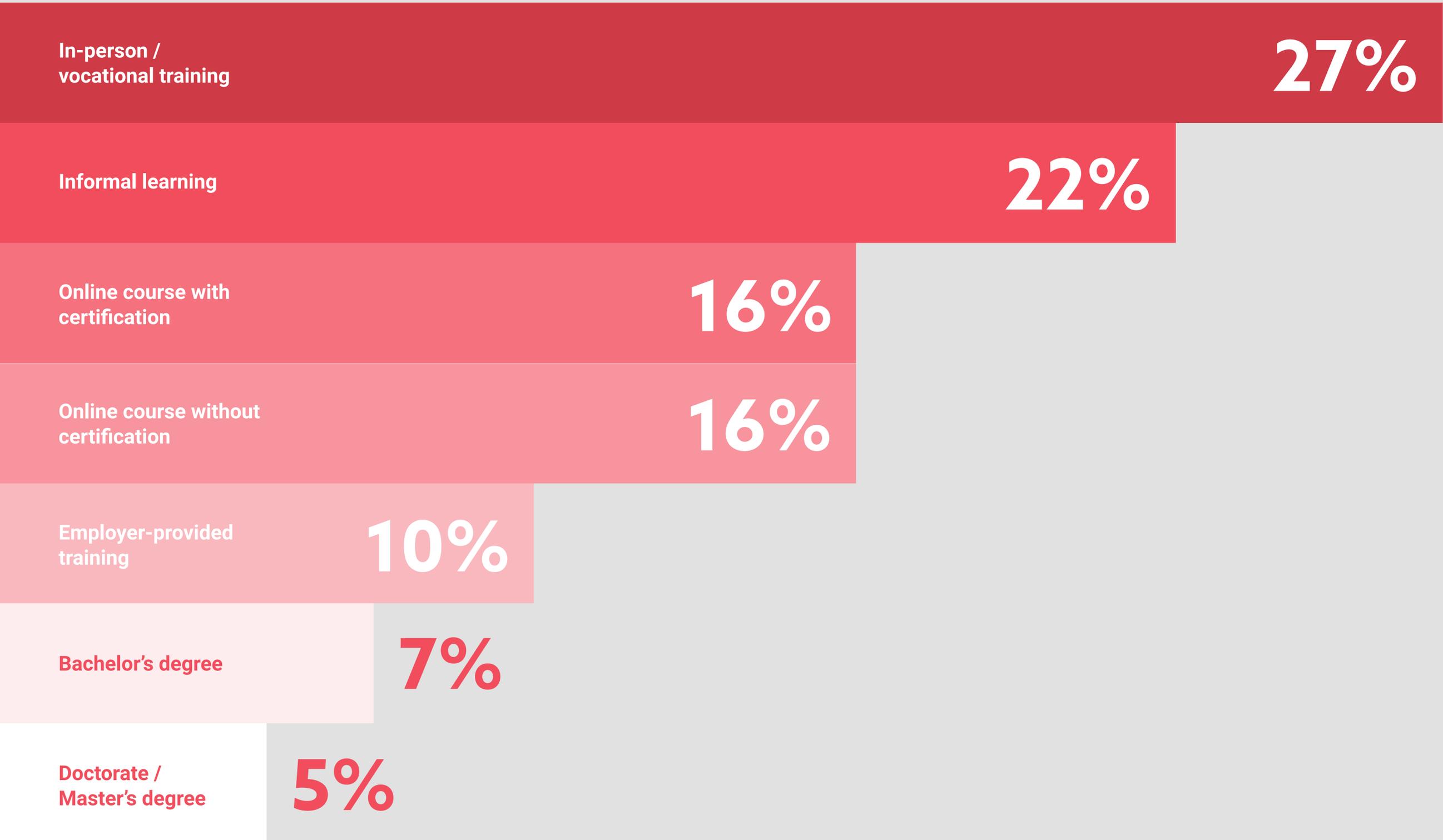


Figure 10

**The most popular forms of training for midcareer switchers aged 45+ were in-person training and informal learning.**

Which types of training did age 45+ switchers who found training helpful do to learn new skills?

n = 185



# TRAINING HESITATION

Figure 11

**Share of 45+ individuals who  
are excited about pursuing training.**

n = 1346

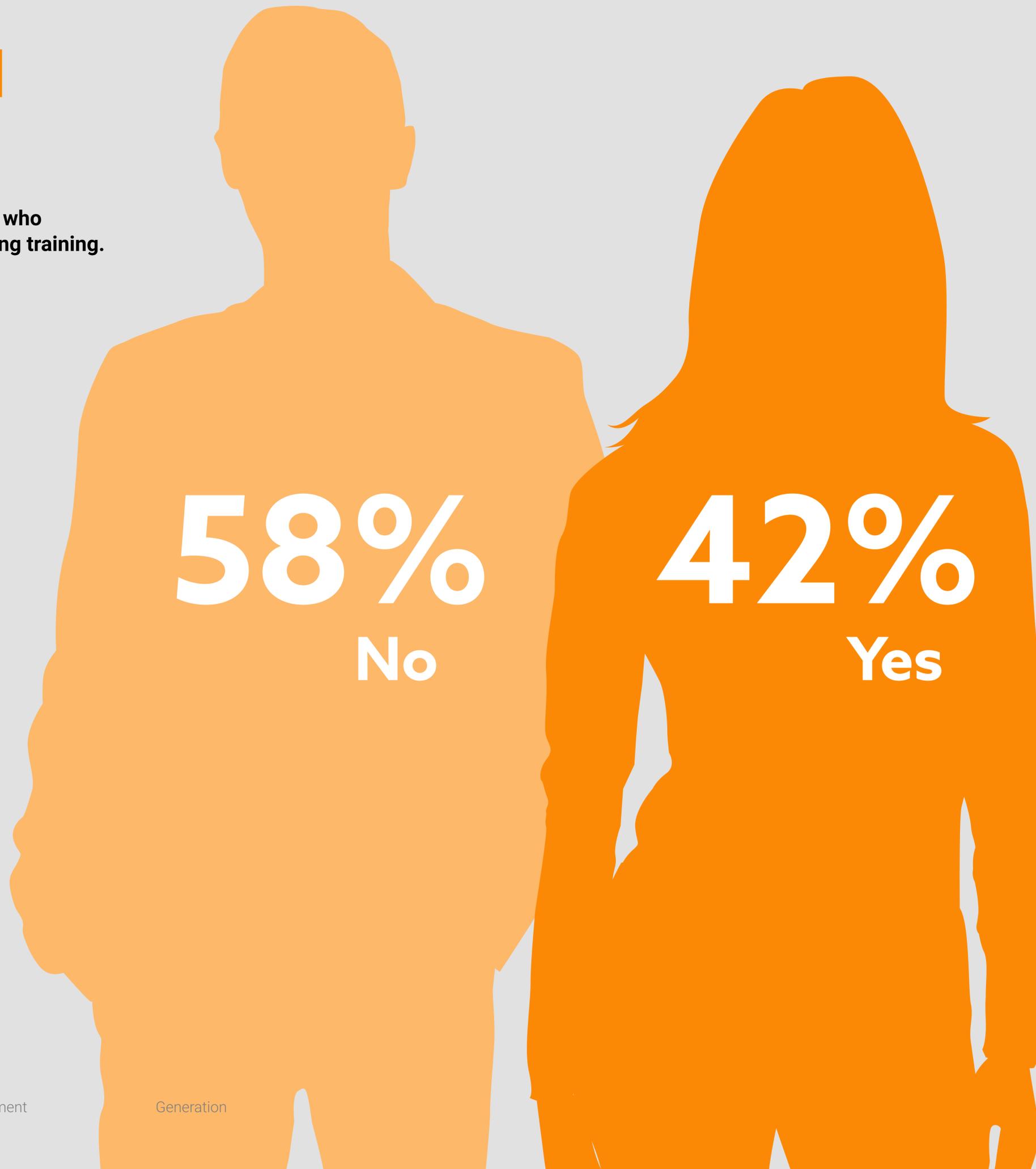


Figure 12

**63% of individuals 45+ who were not excited about pursuing training had secondary school education or less and 70% barely have enough to make ends meet.**

Who are the individuals aged 45+ who aren't interested in pursuing training?

n = 765

Age 45+ switchers who identify as being part of an underrepresented community respond especially positively to training: 89 percent of them state that attending training helped them to secure their current job.

In contrast to these success stories, however, 45+ individuals who are still seeking jobs have a very different attitude towards training. In our survey, 58 percent of 45+ job seekers say they are not excited about pursuing training, and fewer than 1 percent say that training makes them feel confident.

Among those who are not keen to pursue training, 63 percent had a secondary school education or less, and 70 percent have just enough income—or not enough—to meet their daily needs. These midcareerers who are less likely than their peers to pursue training also have worse outcomes in terms of interviews, job offers, and employment rate. For example, only 18 percent of people 45+ in this group receive job offers, compared to 31 percent of midcareer job seekers who are keen to pursue training.

**70%**

have just enough or don't have enough to meet their daily needs.

**63%**

have a secondary school education or less.

**54%**

have been unemployed for more than 18 months.

## TRAINING INCENTIVES

One possible reason for this behavior: training could be seen as a luxury by those whose struggle to meet basic needs makes it hard to justify spending time and effort on something that offers only a potential return on investment. In addition, people in this group tend to have had negative past experiences with formal education, and so may hesitate to jump back into an environment that for them holds neither interest nor efficacy.

By contrast, midcareer switchers who have higher incomes participate in more and higher-value training, which supports the “luxury” hypothesis. Switchers with higher incomes participate in 2.5 training programs on average, while switchers with lower incomes participate in 0.9. People with higher incomes are more likely to participate in training that offers a degree or certification—which, for employers, substitutes for job experience and boosts their confidence enough to hire someone. In addition, informal training done independently comprises one-third of the training that switchers with lower incomes take, but only one-fifth of what those with higher incomes do.

Finally, our survey shows that those who are excited by training are unemployed for less time, receive more job offers, and are more satisfied with the offers they receive. Among individuals who did receive offers, more than three-fifths of people who were excited about training said that their job offer met their expectations, compared to fewer than two-fifths of those who were not excited—despite these groups applying for a comparable number of jobs.

Given the importance that midcareer switchers place on the right training to help them get the right job, we clearly need to find new ways to boost the appeal of training for the hesitant segment. Our survey offers some answers. Of all the 45+ individuals who have been unemployed for over a year, 60 percent would attend training if there were a job guarantee afterwards, and 40 percent would attend if they received a stipend to participate. This finding underscores the necessity of helping those with lower incomes meet basic needs first.

# 60%

**of 45+ individuals who have been unemployed for over a year would attend training if there were a job guarantee afterwards.**

# 40%

**of 45+ individuals who have been unemployed for over a year would attend training if they received a stipend to participate.**

## WHAT WE SEE AMONG GENERATION'S MIDCAREER GRADUATES

# 80%

of age 40+ graduates retain their job after six months of work versus 73% at six months for Generation graduates overall.

Generation trains and places people of all ages into jobs. We extended beyond our original young adult learners into serving midcareers through pilot programs in 2018 that have since expanded to include more learners, professions, and countries. We have served 886 people aged 40+ to date, the majority in mixed-age classes. Along the way, we have learned what works, what doesn't, and what we still need to crack. We see many familiar trends in our work that the survey echoes.

### **Midcareer graduates face significant barriers when looking for work**

Our midcareer graduates take longer to be placed in the same types of roles as our younger graduates, despite demonstrating similar levels of skills mastery in our program. For 40+ graduates, 56 percent are placed in jobs by three months after completing our program, compared to 83 percent for Generation graduates overall. By six months post-program, job placement rises to 72 percent for 40+ graduates. Consistent with the survey, we find that age 40+ graduates from underrepresented communities must undertake more interviews in order to receive a job offer.

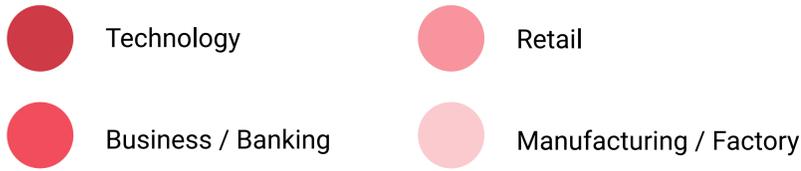
### **But, once hired, midcareer workers have higher retention rates than younger employees**

Though it takes them longer to be placed, 40+ graduates stay in their jobs more than younger graduates. The job retention rate for those age 40+ is 80 percent at six months after starting work, versus 73 percent at six months for Generation graduates overall.

The world's need for midcareer employment programs will only grow, which is why we are continuing to expand our offering. That growth should provide richer insights that can help us, in turn, to design better future programs and to share what we are learning from this virtuous cycle with the broader workforce field.

**JOB REQUIREMENTS HAVE  
GONE UP—AND THOSE  
FROM UNDERREPRESENTED  
COMMUNITIES WORK MUCH  
HARDER TO GET A JOB OFFER**

# INCREASED JOB REQUIREMENTS



Compared to 1–2 years ago, what % of employers require ...

Tech: n = 381, Business/ Banking: n = 232, Retail: n = 144, Manufacturing/Factory n = 188.

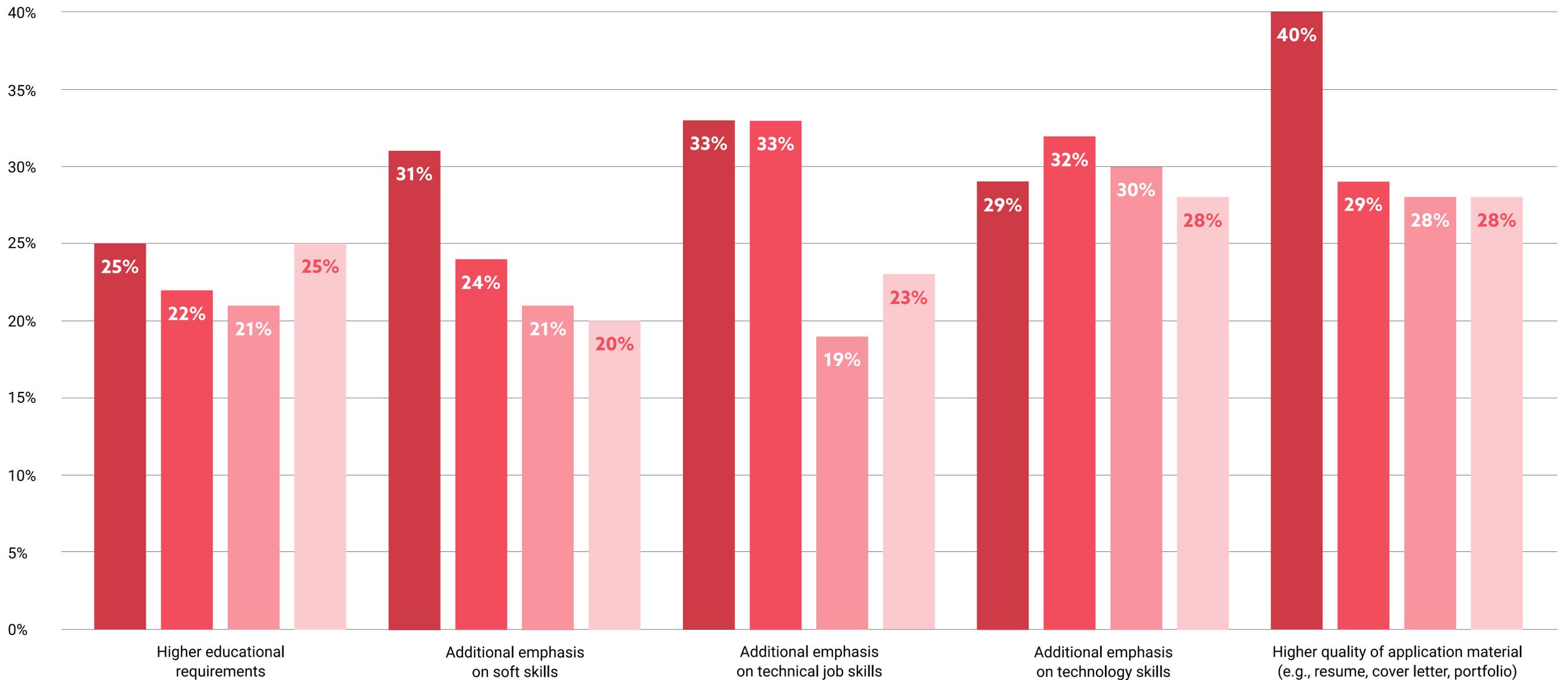
Figure 13

**The requirements for entry-level roles have increased more in the technology sector than in other sectors.**

Long-term workforce trends, such as automation and digitization, have been expedited by the pandemic, prompting employers to increase their requirements for entry-level and intermediate roles. The barrier to getting a job is higher—and, for underrepresented communities, the task is extra-difficult.

Our survey finds that employers have raised job requirements relative to one to two years ago. Requirements have become more stringent in at least one way for 73 percent of entry-level roles for which surveyed employers hire and for 63 percent of intermediate roles.

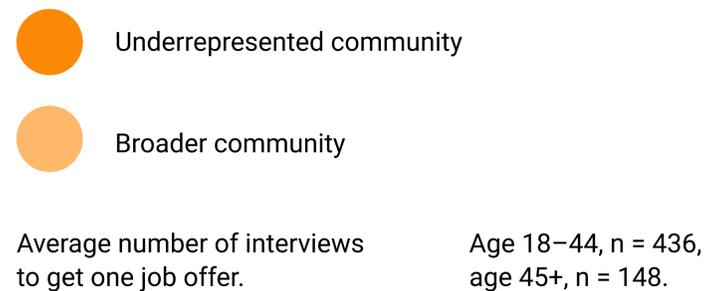
Hiring managers are calling for higher levels of education, behavioral skills, tech skills, and technical or job-specific skills, and they are more often requiring work experience for entry-level positions. Tech roles lead the increase in job requirements.



# INTERVIEW INEQUITY

Figure 14

**Seekers from underrepresented communities undertake more interviews to secure a job offer than their peers, with even more effort exerted by those who are 45+.**



Age 18–44



Age 45+



We are seeing more stringent requirements from large companies: 44 percent of large firms require a bachelor’s degree for entry-level roles, and 65 percent expect a degree for intermediate roles, compared to 33 percent and 41 percent respectively for small companies.

Among entry-level roles globally, 70 percent of such positions require previous work experience or a bachelor’s degree—and India and the USA are even more demanding, with employers tending to expect both previous experience and education for a larger number of roles.

While this trend held across the countries we surveyed, it differs from what other surveys have shown in the United States in recent months as the economy starts to recover. One reason for this discrepancy may be that those surveys have looked at job postings, while we spoke with hiring managers about their expectations; there may also be a disconnect between what job postings state and what hiring managers seek.

In addition to stringent job requirements, other surveys have shown that candidates face more job-screening methods than they did one to two years ago, including background checks, skills and personality tests, group panel interviews, candidate presentations, and drug tests.

For 45+ individuals from underrepresented communities, the difficulty of finding work is especially acute. Those who self-identify as belonging to an underrepresented community in their country need to participate in 53 percent more interviews on average before they receive a job offer, even if they choose not to take it. This is relative to 31 percent for their younger peers (18–44). In the wake of the social justice movement, understanding and rectifying this “interview inequity” for all age brackets must be a top priority for hiring teams.

Given these trends, it is unsurprising that only around half of the 35–44 and 45+ age brackets are willing to change careers. Our survey finds that 53 percent of the 35–44 seekers and 48 percent of the 45+ seekers embrace moving from their current profession to a new one. Identifying how to make the other half more comfortable with a career shift is increasingly important as rising automation and digitization alter the job market.

**LOSING HOPE  
OF FINDING A  
GOOD JOB**

**Change in expectations after accepting a new role.**

More than anything, people want a good job—not just any job, but a good one. Other research has shown this is true across geographies, income levels, and other factors.

Our survey finds that midcareer switchers had to make multiple compromises in their pursuit of a new career. Among age 45+ switchers, 66 percent lowered their expectations in some way: 30 percent accepted a position in a different industry than they wanted, 29 percent lowered salary expectations, 24 percent accepted a lower starting position, and 18 percent accepted a temporary role.

**66%**

**of successful age 45+  
midcareer switchers lowered  
their expectations of their  
role in at least one way**

n = 250

Accepted a  
different industry

**30%**

Accepted a  
lower salary

**29%**

Accepted a lower  
starting position

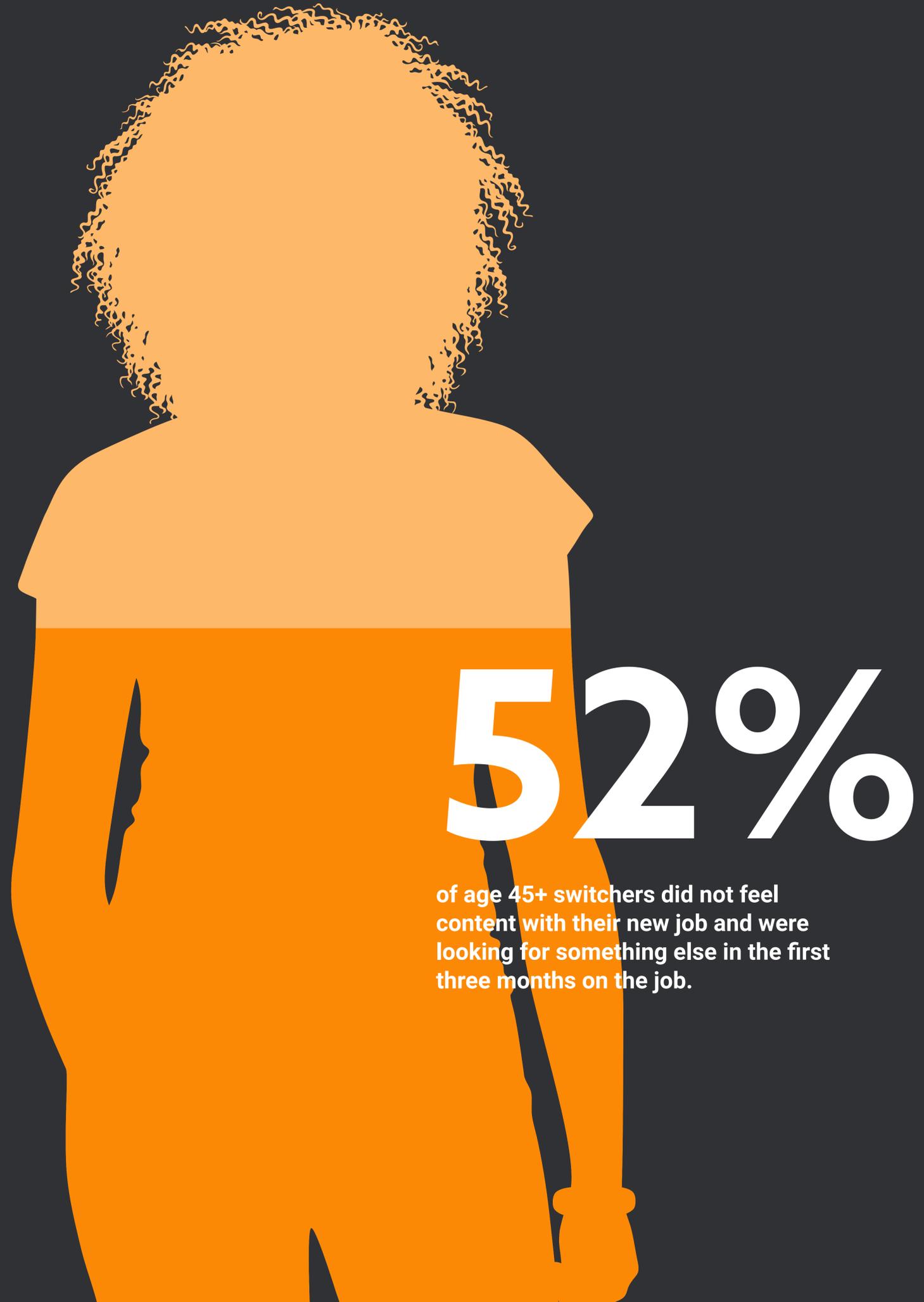
**24%**

Accepted a  
temporary role

**18%**

Perhaps unsurprisingly, 52 percent of age 45+ switchers did not feel content with their new job, and were looking for something else in the first three months on the job.

Discontent so widespread is not just a statistic: if it persists, such unhappiness could point to further social or political problems ahead, unless conditions improve.



**DESPITE NATIONAL  
DIFFERENCES, THE  
CHALLENGES AND  
EXPERIENCES OF 45+  
INDIVIDUALS ARE GLOBAL,  
DISPLAYING STRIKING  
CONSISTENCY AROUND  
THE WORLD**

# AGE AND UNEMPLOYMENT

Figure 15

**More 45+ individuals have been unemployed for longer than a year than those aged 35–44 and 18–34.**

We spoke with workers and employers across seven countries—Brazil, India, Italy, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom and the United States. These geographies have vastly different economies, cultures, and pandemic experiences. You might expect that the employment challenges and experiences of midcareer individuals would vary greatly across these different countries as well.

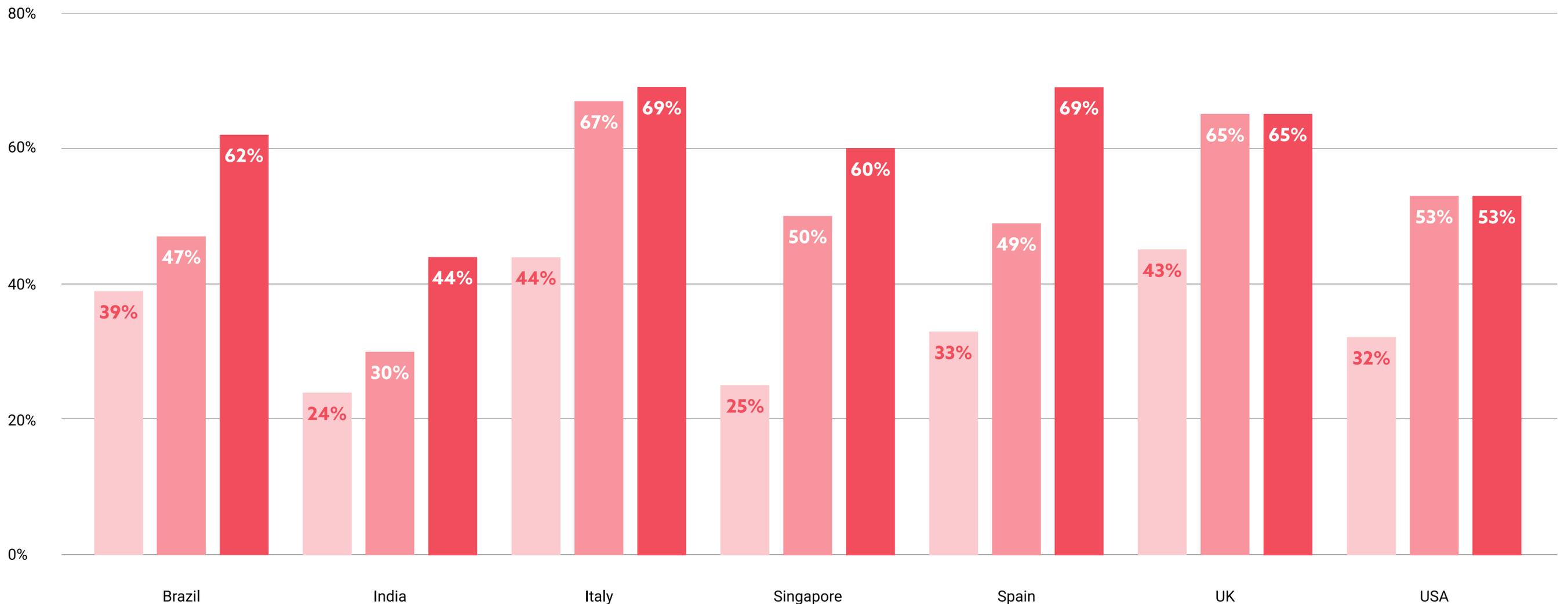
Instead, most of our findings among 45+ individuals are universal and strikingly consistent.

In every country we surveyed, the experience of looking for work is harder for 45+ individuals than other age groups, and they typically find themselves unemployed significantly longer than those who are younger.

- 18–34
- 35–44
- 45+

Share of the unemployed who remain unemployed for 12+ months.

Brazil n = 461, India n = 458, Italy n = 526, Singapore n = 165, Spain n = 527, UK n = 487, and USA n = 524.



# AGE AS A BARRIER

Figure 16

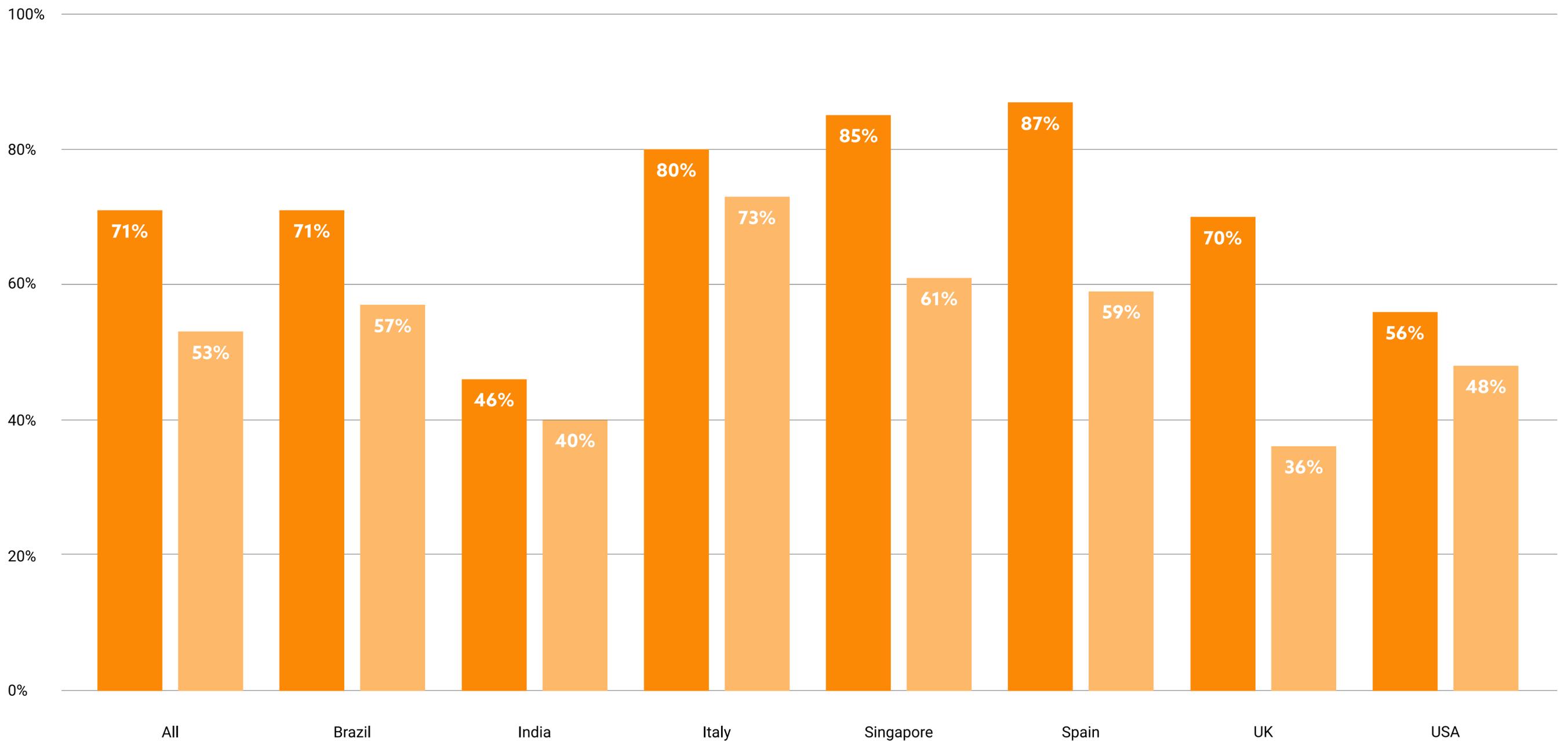
**45+ individuals commonly regard age as one of the biggest barriers they face in finding a job.**

These 45+ individuals face tall barriers in the form of hiring biases, and commonly regard age as one of the biggest challenges they face in finding a job.

- Age 45+ seekers
- Age 45+ switchers

Share of 45+ seekers and switchers who view age as a barrier to their employment.

Brazil n = 125, India n = 118, Italy n = 248, Singapore n = 76, Spain n = 243, UK n = 260, and USA n = 276.



## BOOSTING JOB PROSPECTS FOR 40+ INDIVIDUALS: THE CASE OF SINGAPORE



# 80%

of employers report our digital marketing graduates (across all cohorts) perform as well as or better than peers, who often have greater work experience.

Generation partnered with [SkillsFuture Singapore](#) (the government agency that manages the skilling ecosystem) and the country's five public polytechnics to train learners and place them into digital careers (see "[A new way to close Asia's digital skills gap](#)," *Fortune*). Since 2018, we have worked with the polytechnics to design and deliver 8–12-week training bootcamps for profession-specific tech roles, immediately followed by placing graduates into full-time jobs with employers hungry for digital talent.

In these programs, those aged 40+ comprised 30–50 percent of each cohort. While these students had to deal with challenges from ageism to lack of confidence, they showed the same skills mastery as younger peers.

Based on surveys conducted by Generation, 80 percent of employers report that our graduates in digital marketing, across all cohorts, perform as well as or better than peers, who often have greater work experience. Since 2018, our under-40 graduates and our over-40 graduates have enjoyed, on average, nearly identical job retention rates of 91 percent and 92 percent respectively at three months post job placement. Especially striking, even amid the pressure of the pandemic in 2020, is that our over-40 learners posted 85 percent job-retention rates last year.

## **SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

- 1** Age 45+ individuals make up a high share of the long-term unemployed.
- 2** Hiring managers have a negative view of 45+ jobseekers, even though employers rate highly the job performance of those they hire.
- 3** Age 45+ individuals with the greatest need for training are the most hesitant to pursue it.
- 4** Job requirements have gone up—and those from underrepresented communities work much harder to get a job offer.
- 5** Despite national differences, the challenges and experiences of 45+ individuals are global, displaying striking consistency around the world.

# WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

## WHERE WE GO FROM HERE

No single action will solve the challenges uncovered by our survey. Deep-seated societal issues and attitudes lie at the heart of age-based biases, and they will take time to address.

Nonetheless, four practical steps can help accelerate progress.

**National governments and global multilaterals can publish short-and long-term unemployment statistics with narrower age brackets.** More often than not, global data sets assembled by multilateral organizations such as the ILO, the World Bank, and the OECD combine a wide span of ages into a single bracket—typically 25–74 or 25–54—on which they report short- and long-term employment and unemployment outcomes. They do this to accommodate the wide variation in how national governments gather this data.

The sprawling aggregation of data that results obscures the unique issues faced by the age 45+ population, making their plight much harder to track. Further, at the national level, tracking of the long-term unemployed by age bracket is uneven. Global multilateral organizations and national governments can move to reporting long-term unemployment by narrower age brackets (for example, 20s, 30s, 40s ...) so that statistics consistently enable policymakers to spot the distinct problems faced by different cohorts as they move through their working lives.

**Practitioners and policymakers can link training programs directly to employment opportunities, and provide stipends, to support 45+ individuals who are hesitant to train.** Midcareer switchers overwhelmingly say that training enabled them to shift to a new career trajectory. But for the segment of the 45+ population who are hesitant to undertake training—those with secondary school attainment and an income level that barely allows them to make ends meet—training can conjure up memories of negative school experiences. It can also require time and money that they cannot afford.

Our survey indicates that coupling free training with job guarantees (or at least job-interview guarantees), along with stipends to cover living expenses, can make the hesitant much more willing to participate.

**Employers can change hiring practices to get a clearer view of potential 45+ candidate talent.**

Our survey shows that most of the 45+ individuals who manage to make it through the interview process perform as well as, if not better than, their younger peers; they also have longer retention. Yet too few 45+ individuals are making it through the door—particularly those from underrepresented communities. Pushing through requires overcoming a host of biases held by hiring managers about this group's job readiness, technical skills, and fit.

One answer could be to shift from a traditional CV-centered interview to an interview process that enables 45+ candidates to show their skills through demonstration-based exercises.

**Employers can rethink current approaches to make it easier to fill new and revamped roles with existing 45+ employees, instead of relying solely on new hires.** Given forecasts that one-third of all jobs worldwide will be transformed by technology, simply hiring new graduates will not suffice to fill all the new roles required. Employers have 45+ employees who have been with them for decades; and, as our survey shows, about half of the 45+ workforce are ready to move from their current profession to a new one. Success in reskilling 45+ employees will demand deeper reflection and concerted action by employers to overcome age-based biases within their own organization.

This starts with recognizing, as our survey has shown, that the 45+ population is adaptable and capable of achieving the same job performance as their younger peers, or higher. Harnessing the talent of the 45+ workforce requires that employers incorporate proven learning methods, such as repeated and intensive practice of actual job tasks, into employee-training programs for new roles.

The truth is, we are just at the beginning of our global Midcareer Moment. The clash between deep, ongoing changes in the way we work and the rapid aging of societies across most of the world is only going to intensify. Think of our survey results as early indicators, flashing crucial warning lights about the immensity of the challenge ahead—and emphasizing the scale of the opportunity if we get this right. Hundreds of millions of lives are at stake. We have much to learn, and then even more to do.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## Authors

Mona Mourshed, Ali Jaffer, Jennifer Sikes, Helen Cashman, and Karen Salazar Ruiz.

## Acknowledgments

The authors would like to shine a light on the contributions of the many people who were part of the making of this report.

Kat Kelley and the Generation learner engagement team laid the groundwork with the early analyses they did about our midcareer graduates. Salla Majuri, Viviana Roseth, Zhen Ting, and Christina Powers developed the initial survey questions that ultimately gathered such fascinating insights.

The team at LRW were dedicated and thoughtful partners in refining and fielding the survey and analyzing the results. Colin Douglas, Greg Fried, Rik Kirkland, and Ira Handler provided brilliant writing, and editorial and graphic guidance.

The team at OPX brought endlessly creative design vision to the content. And the Darby Films team created a home on the web that brings the findings to life. Many thanks to all of them and everyone else who provided support along the way.

This research was made possible through the funding and support of Generation's global jobs recovery coalition members: BlackRock, McKinsey & Company, Microsoft Corporation, and Verizon.

 [generation.org](https://www.generation.org)

 [linkedin.com/company/generationorg/](https://www.linkedin.com/company/generationorg/)

 [twitter.com/youemployed](https://twitter.com/youemployed)

 [facebook.com/youemployed](https://www.facebook.com/youemployed)

 [instagram.com/youemployed/](https://www.instagram.com/youemployed/)

# Generation