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Lifting the Second Glass Ceiling

China market
overview



In China, workforce participation by women is low compared with western countries, sitting at 50.5% compared with 72.9% of the male population¹. The section below explores how women in China are experiencing the Second Glass Ceiling and looks at which factors are more influential.

There are multiple challenges to women staying in the workplace in China. Chinese labour rules require that women in different professions, such as factory workers, retire earlier than those in white collar jobs, something that some women in China are suing their employers for. China is balancing its ageing workforce and youth unemployment, immediately presenting a barrier to women remaining in the workplace². However, this is something that is currently being debated and that may necessarily become subject to change due to the country's rapidly ageing population³.

Despite China's mandatory retirement age being lower than that of men, women also face other more familiar challenges seen in the UK and the USA, such as family duties preventing them from being fully dedicated to work, but this is paired with deep-rooted Chinese culture that men lead outside and women lead inside the home⁴. While policy and culture are currently the driving factors of the SGC in China, opening up the discussion there could be step one to overcoming it.



Key findings

A mixed picture for Chinese women in the workplace, but an optimistic outlook

Over eight in ten (83%) Chinese women surveyed are confident their generation will receive the same levels of flexibility and support to stay in the workforce as long as their male colleagues. This is considerably higher than the average of 59% across the five countries polled. However, well over half of Chinese women (56%) agree it is uncommon to see women in positions of leadership, which is above the average of 42% across the five countries.

Role models are considered important

Nine in ten (89%) Chinese women believe the presence of more experienced female colleagues would be beneficial to the development of younger women in the workplace (73% globally).

Women encounter barriers to staying in work

Over four in ten Chinese women (41%) cited caring responsibilities (for parents or children) as a barrier to remaining in the workplace (the highest of all five countries, compared with an average of 29%).

Menopause

Over a quarter of Chinese women (28%) mentioned health or well-being considerations for menopause as a barrier to continuing work (above the five-country average of 21%). Only 5% of Chinese women believe there are no barriers at all to staying in work (10% globally).

Nearly seven in ten (69%) Chinese women believe it would be difficult to raise issues like menopause, menstruation, difficult pregnancies, and miscarriage with an employer (58% globally). In terms of how comfortable they would be raising such issues, there is a marked difference depending on the gender of the manager: 32% would be uncomfortable with a male manager (52% globally), and 5% with a female manager (18% globally).

Formal policies would help

70% of Chinese women believe it is helpful for organizations to have formal policies to address personal health and wellbeing issues such as menopause, health issues related to menstruation, difficult pregnancies or miscarriage. Only 18% say they are aware of such policies in their organization, although it is worth noting that this is far higher than for any other country polled.

[Read the full Lifting the Second Glass Ceiling report and see the recommendations here](#)

¹ [Gender Statistics](#), The World Bank, accessed June 2023

² [The Chinese women desperate to keep working but forced to retire](#), Financial Times, June 2021

³ [China to raise retirement age to deal with aging population](#), Reuters, March 2023

⁴ [China Needs More Women in Executive Leadership](#), Bain, March 2023

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