



Inclusive Leadership within the Environment Sector

Exploring the role of diverse perspectives and inclusive processes in shaping sustainably strong environmental organisations.

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Methodology	4
Demographic Data	4
Section One: Current Issues.....	8
Where Problems Begin	11
Why are organisations still struggling to get this right?	13
What are the main challenges in attracting & retaining diverse team members?	15
Section Two: Observing Trends for Improvement	17
Role of the Board	20
Inclusive Hiring: An Essential Step	21
Leadership Development & Coaching.....	22
Conclusion.....	25
Acknowledgments	27
References	28

Introduction

Oxford HR is a global leadership consultancy, dedicated to recruiting and supporting remarkable leaders, driven by their passion for urgent change. We are keenly aware that humankind is reaching, and in some cases, have exceeded planetary boundaries. Urgent action – and innovative teams – are needed more than ever before, to improve the human connection with nature and facilitate a green and fair transition. Through our suite of services and the wealth of knowledge within our team, we identify and support exceptional individuals. We are committed to placing and nurturing underrepresented leadership and challenging our clients where necessary.

Our work gives us unique insights into the challenges and opportunities facing our client organisations, many of whom operate across the global environment, climate and conservation sector. We recognise the power of collective knowledge, which is why, building on the success of our prior research initiatives, we have undertaken an exploration of diversity and inclusion within the Environment, Climate and Conservation (ECC) sectors, using our global networks and unparalleled sector understanding.

Our research agenda is simple; we want to bring to light the main barriers to creating inclusive environmental and climate organisations, and more importantly, how to address them. We hope that we can help you identify your strategic direction, offer actionable solutions to your key diversity concerns, and help you understand how your peer organisations in the sector are evolving and embracing the power of maintaining a diverse workforce and inclusive organisational culture.

Diversity, equity and inclusion are often seen as buzzwords and new ones at that. However, the importance of creating sustainably equitable work environments is not novel and many organisations and institutions have worked tirelessly to embed inclusive practices and ways of working into their structures and ethos.

Diversity refers to demographic differences of a group relating to things such as ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, religion or belief and many others. Diversity is a way of acknowledging different unique identities that can enhance knowledge, perspectives and innovation by incorporating a wide range of views.

Equity focuses on the ideas of fairness and justice in procedures, policies and practices. These aspects of fairness revolve around people having access to opportunities whilst being aware that everyone has a different starting point that may prevent them from accessing opportunities. Equity is related to evening out the playing field and provides tailored support to those who have different needs to create situations where people's barriers are removed, so they are no longer a hindrance to success.

Inclusion is the practice of creating environments where people feel like they belong, feel respected and valued in an environment. Inclusion isn't just about having a diverse range of people; it's about really embedding and empowering everyone to contribute where they need to and ensuring the employee voice includes those who may be naturally silenced. Feeling represented is an important part of inclusion. Inclusion allows levels of organisational satisfaction and authentic loyalty to an organisation.

Methodology

The primary method of data collection for this research was through an in-depth online survey that we circulated with our LinkedIn networks and internal database of c. 21,000 subscribers who work in the broad social and environmental impact space. The questionnaire was designed in collaboration with our team of organisational psychologists to ensure that questions were not weighted and were fair. We also consulted with our EDI specialist to ensure we were capturing all elements of diversity and inclusion.

The survey was divided into three sections: demographic information; current state of the sector; and improvements

and opportunities for the sector. All sections included quantitative questions, such as rating scales, and qualitative questions, to enable free text answers, which we coded to formulate different patterns.

The survey was completed by 256 individuals. These results were thoroughly analysed, and we were able to identify clear themes throughout. We supplemented these findings with roundtable discussions involving key actors in the sector. These conversations were held with an organisational psychologist and Head of Practice for the Environment sector.

Demographic Data

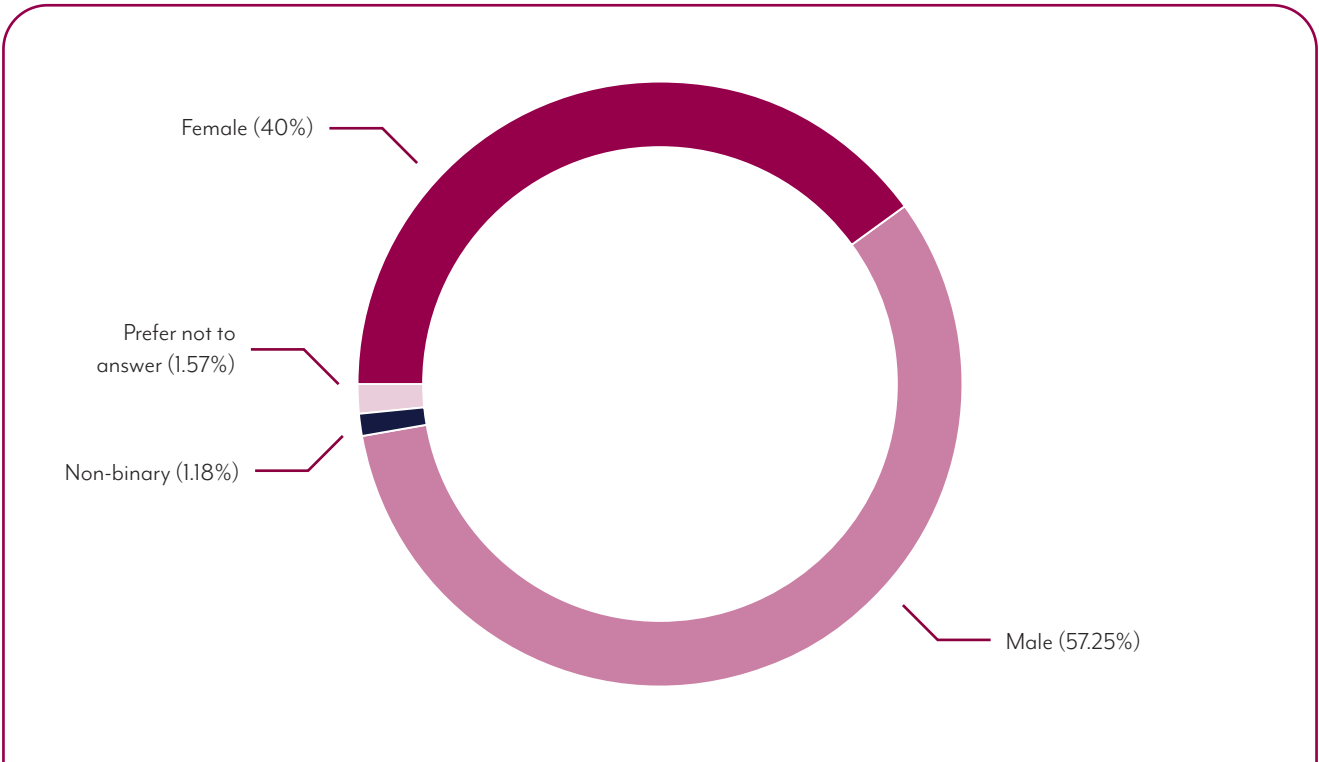


Fig 1. Gender of survey participants

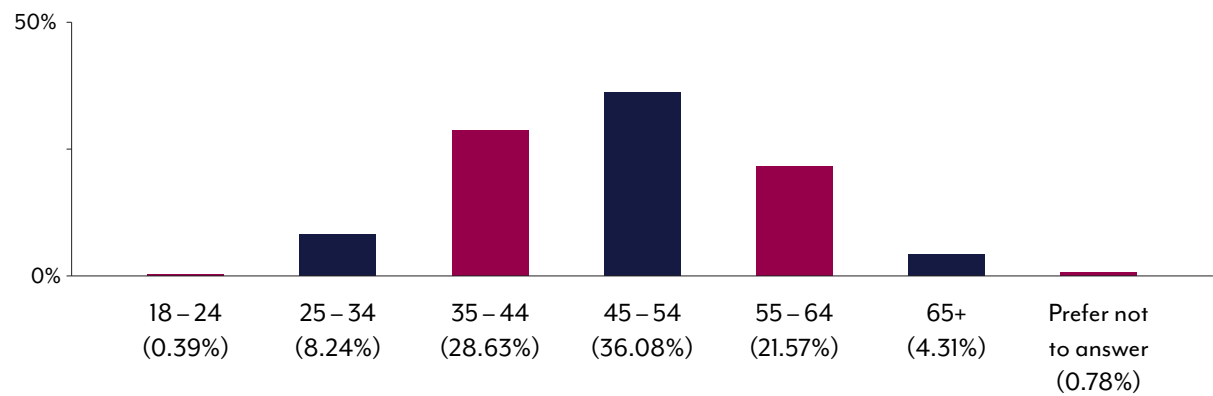


Fig 2. Age of survey participants

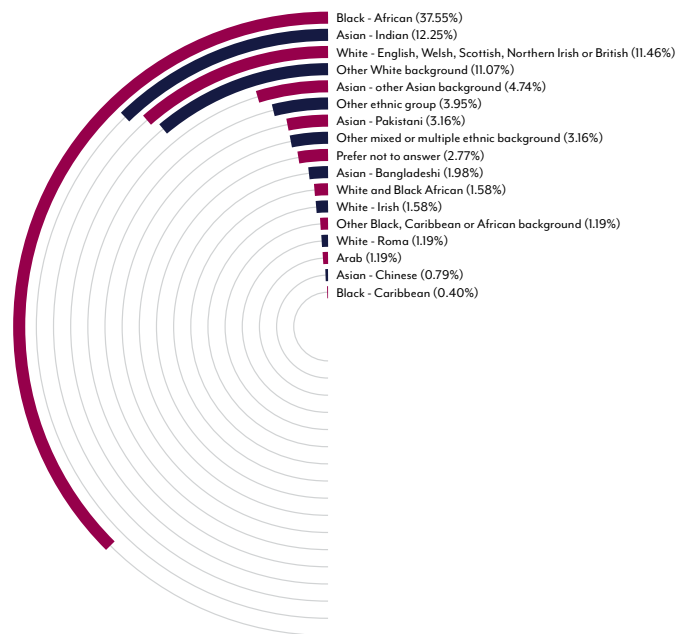
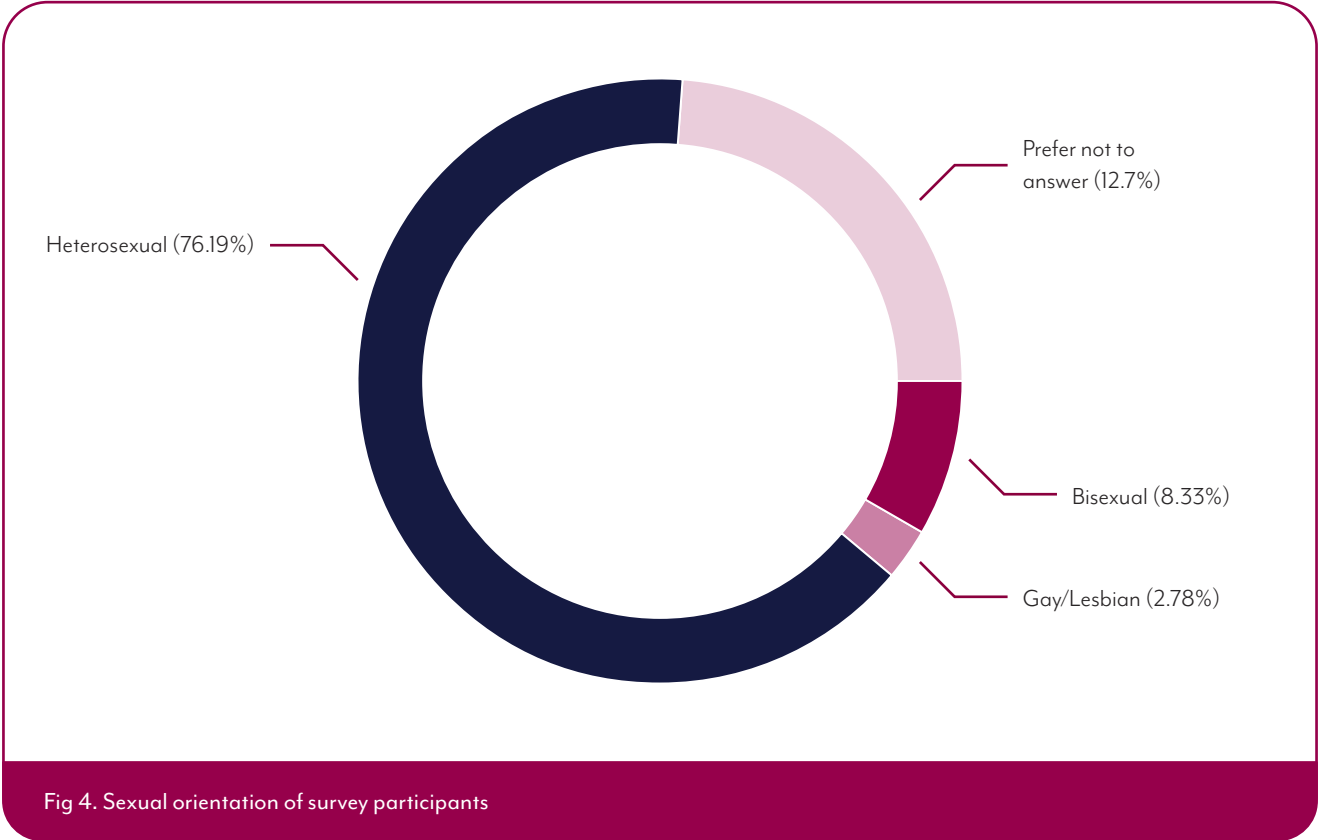
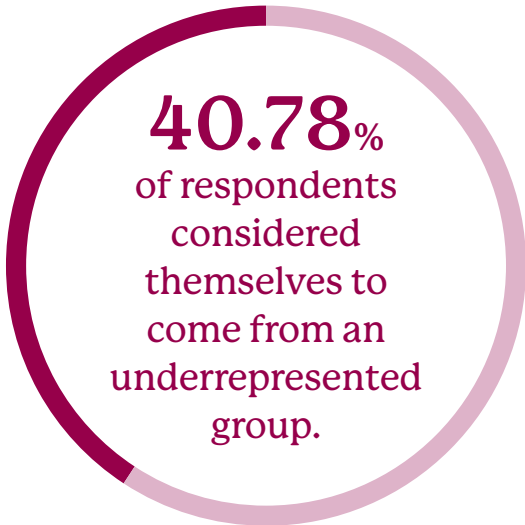
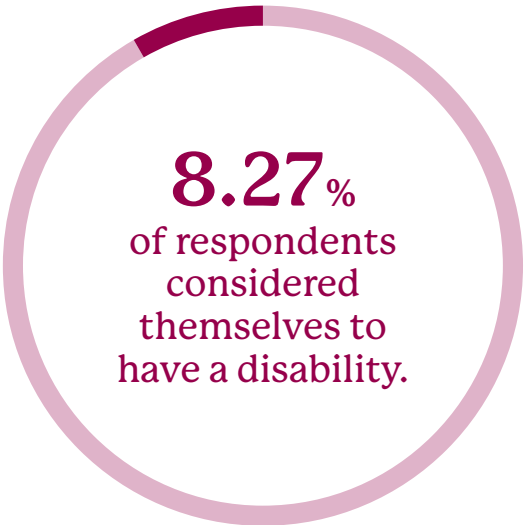


Fig 3. Ethnicity of participants



Introduction

The respondents to our survey worked across a range of environmental, climate and conservation organisations across the world. 72.5% worked at the Executive Director, Senior Functional Head, C-Suite or Senior Manager level, with 85% holding management responsibility.

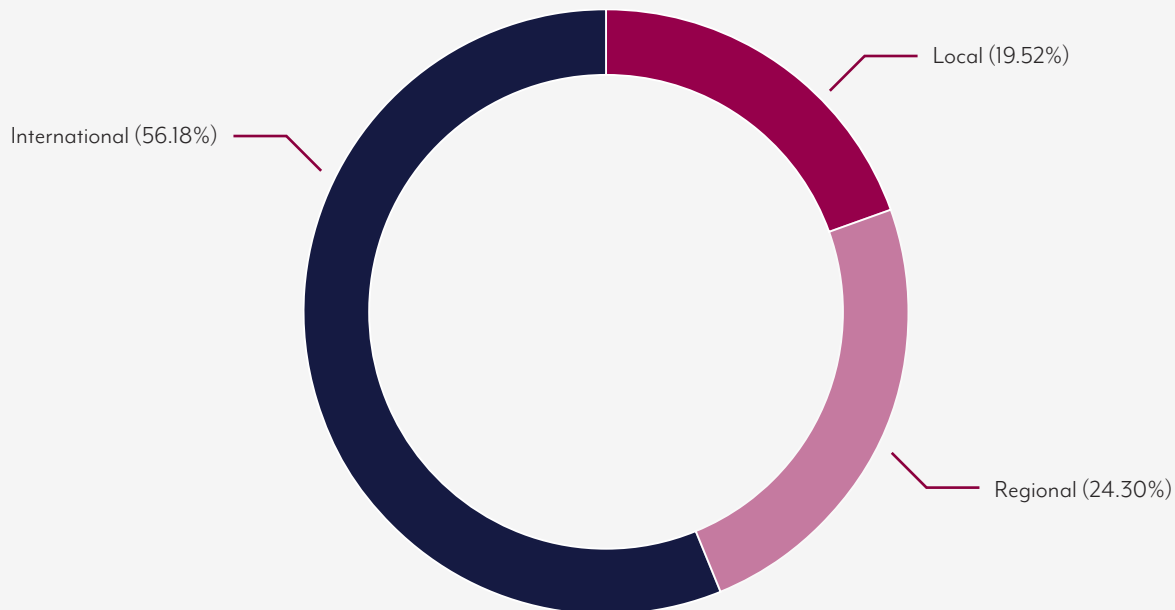


Fig 5. Geographic remit of respondent's organisation

I am delighted that we are again producing a report with insightful data from a very diverse global audience. Oxford HR is uniquely positioned to understand the nuances of this sector and those who work within it, so to be able to research, analyse and communicate those to our audience is something we will always strive to do.

David Lale, CEO



Section One: Current Issues

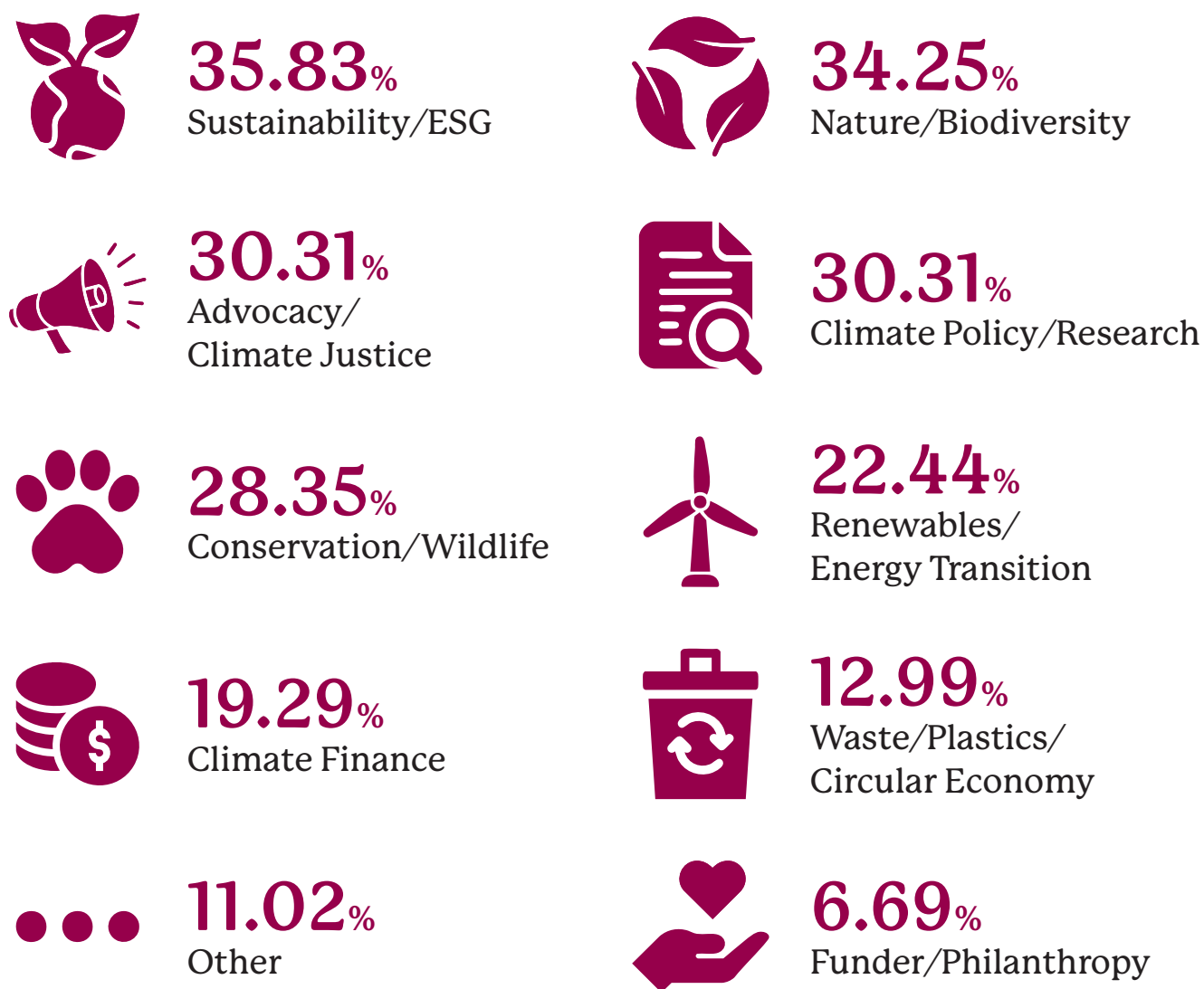
Diversity has become a critical focal point across the mission-driven sector, highlighting the importance of inclusive practices and equitable representation, with the environmental, climate, and conservation sectors facing unique challenges in particular. As these fields grapple with some of the most pressing global issues—such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and sustainable resource management—the need for diverse perspectives and inclusive participation has never been more essential.

Historically dominated by homogenous groups, the environmental, climate, and conservation fields have often overlooked the voices and contributions of marginalised communities, including people of

colour, Indigenous populations, women, and other underrepresented groups. This lack of diversity not only perpetuates social inequities but also hampers the effectiveness and resilience of environmental strategies and solutions.

Interestingly, throughout this research, certain trends have emerged regarding the sub-sectors included within the broader spectrum of environment, climate and conservation. Organisations working within the climate finance space, contrasted to the climate policy and research space, for instance, highlight different areas of priority and rate different challenges in varying orders of priority.

Our survey respondents fell into the following categories:



Section One: Current Issues

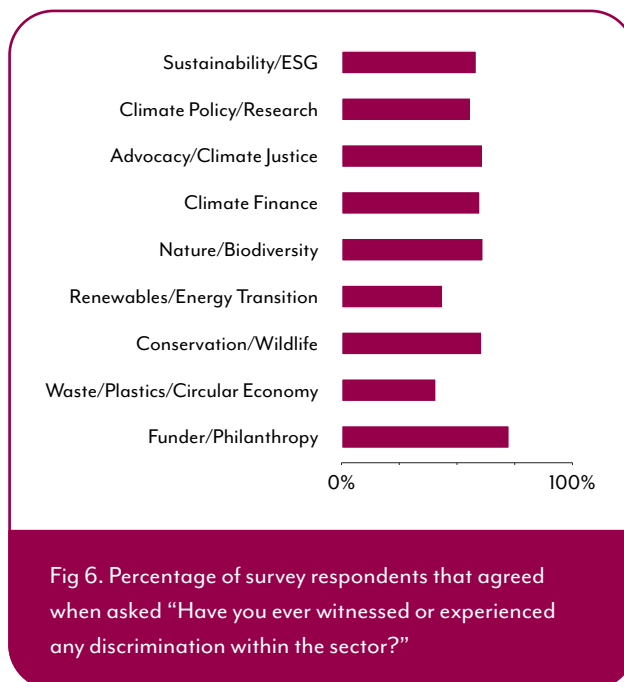
On average, across all categories, 57.2% of all respondents had witnessed or experienced discrimination in the sector. As mentioned previously, in this capacity, this means that 57.2% of respondents have been treated less favourably due to their protected characteristics.¹, or have seen someone else being treated in a discriminatory way.

This is a high number for a group of organisations that consistently report below average numbers of underrepresented employees. According to the Policy Exchange, just 3.5% of those who work in the environment sector in the UK identify as belonging to a minority group.².

As for the global reach of the survey, all continents were represented within our survey results. When analysing the data across geographical lines, we found that clear trends emerged. For example, in North America, Race & Ethnicity, Immigration and the Gender Pay Gap are prominent issues, whereas in Europe Religious Diversity and LGBTQ+ Rights were the most pertinent issues.

- Europe: 61%
- N. America: 87%
- South & Central America: 40%
- Africa: 45%
- Asia Pacific: 55%

When looking through a geographic lens, we observed the following responses as to whether individuals had witnessed discrimination, strengthening the finding that insinuates the environment sector reports low levels of diversity and high levels of discrimination.



Despite this, there was unanimous agreement across all sub-sectors, that diversity is important for environmental initiatives. A total of 95.95% of respondents answered that they either Agree or Strongly Agree when asked to what extent they agreed with the statement 'Diversity is important for the success of environmental initiatives.' This was mirrored when analysing the data by region. Oxford HR is a strong advocate for the benefits of diverse and inclusive teams; we've seen firsthand through our executive search and leadership work, improvements in productivity, employee retention, staff engagement and satisfaction.

"Across all industries surveyed, more diversity in boards and executive teams is correlated to higher social and environmental impact scores."
McKinsey, 2023

¹ <https://www.acas.org.uk/discrimination-and-the-law>

² <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/11/too-white-green-sector-launches-work-scheme-to-be-more-diverse>

Where Problems Begin

The root causes of this discrimination, as offered by the views of our respondents, varied greatly according to which sub-sector their organisation belonged to. For example, in the conservation space, we see a clear trend of outdated practices creating barriers to diversity and inclusion, as summarised by one answer;

“The whole sector operates on fairly outdated processes that I think uphold barriers; whether that’s entry requirements to the sector or the practices within it such as always following funding and not taking the time to focus on D&I properly.”

Following the funding, as we have seen previously, can lead to a myriad of problems such as short-term expat contracts and straying from organisational mission and values. It appears that this focus on funding can also inhibit organisational progress on Diversity, Inclusion and Equity because it is a longer-term strategy that requires significant resource. Within the Funding and Philanthropy category of our data, we see that this area is viewed as ‘very white and homogenous’ - including both institutional and individual donors. Grantmaker and grantee relationships are crucial in the mission-led space, and this lack of diversity can lead to systemic biases in funding decisions and resource allocation.

“The organisational culture is shaped by the leadership team, where power is concentrated. It is their responsibility to democratise processes and policies, particularly for individuals from diverse backgrounds. The key question is: how do we decentre ourselves and recognise our own privilege?”

Many respondents noted that the historic marginalisation of women also causes issues within the sectors and regions we studied. Organisations operating in the renewables and circular economy space emphasised this point, that the space is still heavily male dominated and that women still need to work harder than men to achieve the same recognition. Closely linked to this are outdated working environments, whereby women are further hindered due to more likely having caregiving responsibilities and therefore being unable to take executive-level roles due to inflexible working arrangements.

‘It is still a very valid fear for women in conservation that their careers and paths to promotion and leadership will be significantly impacted by their parental leave and subsequent work-life balance.’

‘In one case, my colleague’s job description was changed to a more senior job title and advertised at a higher salary while she was on leave, and a man was hired with far less experience than her.’

It was also noted during interviews that being a young person in the environment/conservation sector felt difficult at times, with voices not being actively welcome and on occasion deliberately marginalised.

When assessing our data geographically, we see a slight variation in the main issues by region, however, Elitism appears to be a thread that runs through all continents.

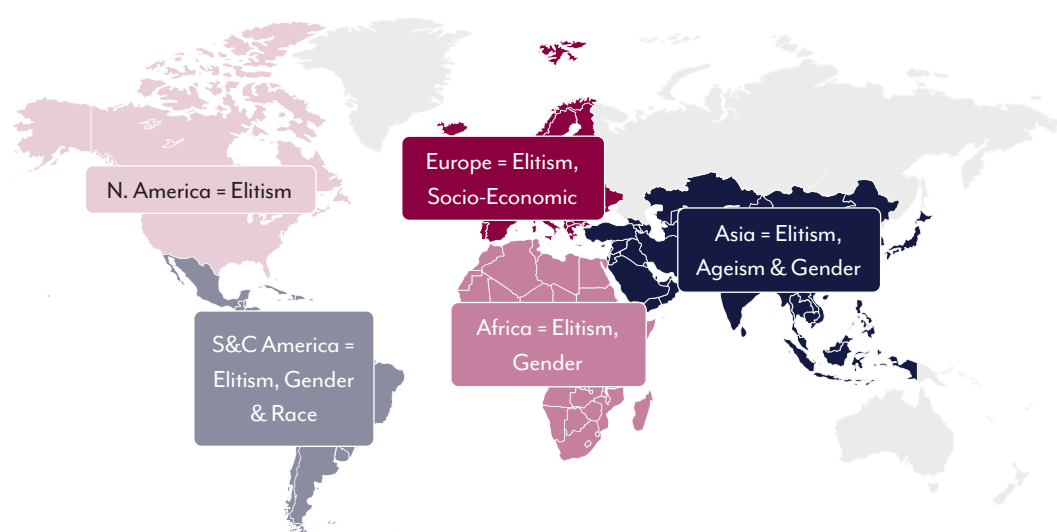


Fig 7. Main diversity & inclusion issues perceived by survey participants in each geographical region

‘In the international environment class is a barrier: a disconnect between privileged bubbles and people directly affected’

European respondent

This represents a significant barrier to achieving diversity and inclusion. This issue arises when individuals from privileged backgrounds predominantly occupy positions of influence and decision-making power—usually those with higher levels of education, wealth, and social connections. As a result, the perspectives, voices and needs of

marginalised groups, such as Indigenous communities, people of colour, and those from lower-income backgrounds, are often excluded or underrepresented in climate discourse and roles within the sector.

Oxford HR attended Reset Connect in June 2024; a sustainability event linked to London Climate Week, where the topic of Elitism was hotly discussed by one panel. It is something the environment Sector has been charged with repeatedly over the years and can be significant for several reasons. Careers in environmental science, policy, and advocacy often require advanced degrees, internships, and networking—all of which tend to favour individuals who can afford the high costs associated with

Section One: Current Issues

higher education and unpaid or underpaid entry-level work. Those from disadvantaged backgrounds may lack the financial resources, social capital, or access to the same educational pathways, thus reducing the diversity of voices. Elitism also prevents meaningful progress on environmental justice, which focuses on addressing the disproportionate impacts of environmental degradation on marginalised communities.

“The main one being traditionalism/ elitism from dominant groups (white, middle class, able) who sometimes exist in an echo chamber and are unconnected to audiences in other groups and resistant to different perspectives and ways of thinking”

European respondent

Other barriers were noted by our respondents based in Africa and Asia with some African respondents citing a “largely male dominated culture” with “women and minority groups being particularly underrepresented” and the anti-LGBTQ laws causing members of this group to be repeatedly overlooked, despite their experience and/or qualifications. There was commentary from Asia-based respondents which suggested that many people do not want to hire South Asians or Southeast Asians without a degree from a University in the Global North. Organisations may advertise when hiring that they encourage diverse applicants from these regions, but the reality is that these applications are not moved forward with.

Governments and Politics also featured highly in commentary, with many people stating the sector is highly politicised and that there is no room given in policy formulation and implementation to those at a grassroots level, leading to marginalisation. As seen across most sectors, including within the environment sector, governments or Boards of organisations are not

diverse and this has a major impact on the consideration of underrepresented groups.

“The figures show there isn’t a lot of people of colour in the sector. EDI needs to evolve. Its currently seen as training employers need to do, but it needs to be deeper than that – its base level understanding of how to work and communicate with other types of people. Charity sector is still seen as white middle class so there needs to be more of an open conversation about how EDI is embedded within organisations in this sector.”

Why are organisations still struggling to get this right?

The answers given to the question ‘What are the main challenges for your organisation in attracting and retaining diverse team members?’ allowed us to identify seven key themes amongst responses:

- 1. Access to networks** - Historically, many organisations in the environment, climate, and conservation sectors have been dominated by homogenous groups, often composed of individuals from similar educational backgrounds and social circles. As a result, these networks can become insular, limiting the ability of underrepresented groups to gain visibility and access to job opportunities.
- 2. Elitism** - Elitism within these sectors can manifest in various ways, including a preference for candidates from prestigious universities or those with advanced degrees. This focus on academic pedigree often excludes individuals from diverse backgrounds who may not have had access to elite educational institutions but possess valuable skills, experiences, and perspectives.

3. Non-inclusive recruitment - Recruitment practices that are inefficient or not intentionally inclusive can also pose significant barriers to attracting diverse talent. Many organisations rely on traditional hiring methods, such as posting job openings on mainstream platforms or using standardised job descriptions, which may not reach or resonate with a diverse audience. Additionally, conscious discrimination as well as unconscious biases during the recruitment process can lead to the intentional and unintentional exclusion of qualified candidates from underrepresented groups

4. Lack of resources - Implementing effective EDI initiatives requires dedicated resources, including funding, specific staff and time. However, many organisations, particularly smaller ones or those operating in the nonprofit sector, may struggle with this due to limited resources. This can result in EDI efforts being underfunded or deprioritised, hindering the ability to develop and sustain programs aimed at attracting and retaining diverse employees. A lack of resources can also affect the availability of training, mentorship, and support systems that are essential for creating an inclusive workplace culture.

5. Salary - Competitive and equitable salaries are a key factor in attracting and retaining talent. However, many roles within the environment, climate and conservation sectors are not highly compensated, particularly in nonprofit and grassroots organisations. This can be a significant deterrent for diverse candidates, especially those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who may prioritise financial stability. Moreover, salary disparities within organisations can contribute to inequities that disproportionately affect underrepresented groups, such as women, people from minoritised racial groups as well as those with disabilities, further challenging

retention efforts. This contributes to higher levels of pay disparities and may point to evidence of pay gaps such as the gender, ethnicity or disability pay gap. Pay and remuneration were cited from our respondents in Africa and Asia, with one individual noting:

“People are evaluated for a job on their education credentials and work experience, but salaries are defined by national identity”

Asia respondent

6. Unpaid experience - The reliance on unpaid internships, volunteer positions, or low-paid entry-level roles is a widespread practice in these sectors, particularly in conservation and environmental organisations. While these voluntary roles can provide valuable experience, they are often inaccessible to individuals who cannot afford to work without pay. This practice disproportionately impacts candidates who may come from backgrounds where they have less social and economic capital, as they may not have the financial means to accept unpaid or low-paid positions, thus limiting their opportunities for entry and advancement within the field.

7. Working practices - Working practices, including organisational culture, work-life balance, and flexibility, play a significant role in employee satisfaction and retention. Many organisations in these sectors may have traditional or rigid working practices that do not accommodate the diverse needs of their employees. For example, lack of flexibility in work hours or remote work options can be particularly challenging for individuals with caregiving responsibilities or those with disabilities.

“One of the largest barriers to diversity and inclusion in the workplace is the presence of unconscious biases. It becomes increasingly difficult to meet the ever-evolving needs of diverse teams when managers and employees are not addressing their own internalized prejudices.”

Survey respondent

What are the main challenges in attracting & retaining diverse team members?



Our data illustrated that many organisations do have EDI initiatives in place, but according to respondents, they are often seen as tokenistic and not combined with the appropriate capacity to affect meaningful change. Respondents also noted that this leads to a cyclical lack of representation, with one respondent noting:

‘There are efforts, but we are far from perfect and there are things outside of our control. Some of it is a self-perpetuating cycle of students don’t choose to pursue careers in the environment space due to lack of representation.’

Section One: Current Issues

It was highlighted in the research by participants that often, these diversity and inclusion initiatives lack sufficient resources, both financial and human. Organisations may announce ambitious EDI programs but fail to allocate the necessary budget, staff, or time to implement them effectively. This under-resourcing can manifest in several ways, including inadequate staffing such as teams of single individuals with an overbearing workload and lack of monitoring and evaluation. It was also highlighted that EDI is often seen to be the property of people who have themselves experienced some kind of discrimination, rather than integral to company strategy.

To be truly effective, EDI programmes need continual measurement and adjustment, rather than being a one-off activity, such as standalone training sessions. Without sufficient resources, organisations may not have the tools or capacity to track their initiatives' impact, making it difficult to measure success or identify areas for improvement. This then affects an

organisation's capability to attract and retain diverse team members, including those in leadership roles. With a lack of representation in environmental leadership, underrepresented groups may feel even more reluctance to join organisations.

“A lack of diversity in leadership positions can discourage diverse candidates from joining or staying with an organisation, as they may not see a clear path to advancement. Leadership Commitment: Without a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion from leadership, efforts can appear superficial and fail to drive meaningful change.”
African respondent

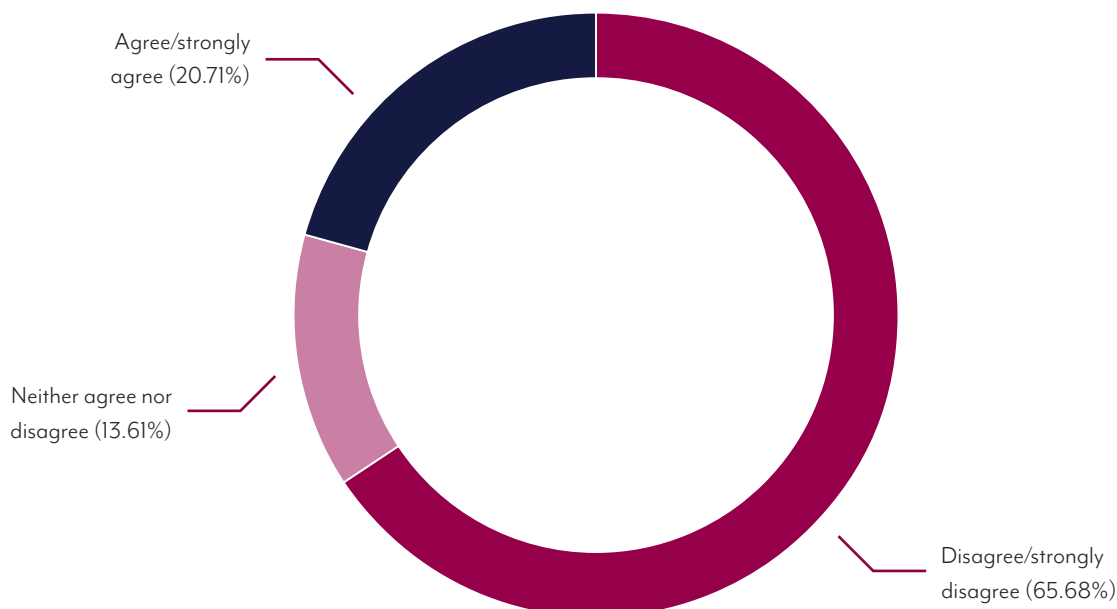


Fig 9. Participant responses to the statement “I think there is adequate representation of marginalised communities in leadership roles within the environment sector.”



Section Two: Observing Trends for Improvement

Our findings show that organisations working across the environment, climate, and conservation sectors are increasingly prioritising equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) as critical components of their strategic frameworks. This shift reflects a growing recognition that addressing global environmental challenges requires the involvement and perspectives of diverse communities. As environmental issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion impact people unequally across different demographics, EDI initiatives are essential not only for ethical reasons but also to enhance the effectiveness and resilience of these sectors.

This section examines the key EDI strategies and trends currently being employed within the same sub-sectors and regions that were explored in Section One. These strategies range from inclusive hiring practices and targeted outreach programs to the incorporation of Indigenous knowledge and the promotion of environmental justice. By exploring these initiatives,

we gain insights into how organisations are working to ensure that their efforts are inclusive and equitable, reflecting the needs and contributions of all communities. Understanding these trends is crucial as they underscore the importance of EDI in creating sustainable and just environmental solutions, ultimately helping to foster a more inclusive and resilient global response to environmental challenges.

Once again, we see some interesting patterns emerging across various sub-sections of the sector. Respondents working in conservation organisations, note that their organisations are working to improve culture as a key effort in creating a truly inclusive environment, with one response saying *‘physically demonstrating the values that are shared in an organisation’s mission and values. By having open and honest conversations with all staff about their experiences and how to make things more inclusive, suggesting that transparency is of paramount importance.*

Section Two: Observing Trends for Improvement

This trend was also reflected in respondents from North America, who also most frequently cited culture improvements as steps taken by their organisation to create a more welcoming and inclusive environmental sector. Similarly, the importance of transparency was noted, with one individual writing:

“Create an action plan based on the outcomes and issues identified. Provide transparency on the results. Report back annually on how you are tracking to your action steps.”

“We needed an integrated sense of what we were doing and why, and a clear engagement on why diversity is central for durable outcomes.”
North American respondent

Within the Sustainability & ESG sector, focus was placed on mentorship and professional development by respondents. It was highlighted that these initiatives play a key role in creating a more equitable workplace by providing underrepresented groups with the support, guidance, and opportunities necessary to thrive. However, it is important to note that these programmes are set up to fail if the necessary steps, such as equal pay and reducing nepotism, have not been taken. This often means that even well-meaning mentoring projects can come across as tokenistic and patronising. As with all EDI initiatives, strong foundations of inclusive cultures must be created to see true success. Another

approach to mentorship may be to put in place other elements to ensure the professional development of those from minoritised groups can be seen. These include implementing coaching programmes where development is championed, and empowerment is embedded by qualified and experienced coaching practitioners. Support and inclusion can also be embedded by creating a system of senior leader sponsors to champion and encourage those from minoritised backgrounds to succeed.

Focussing on responses from the African continent, many noted that inclusive policies and training and awareness were key components in creating an inclusive environment. Included within this are: raising awareness of issues with staff; equal opportunity of expression and employee resource groups; good and appropriate remuneration; and a commitment from leadership. Furthermore, respondents from the Asia Pacific region also cited ending wage disparity as a key component, feeding into the wider issue of expat salaries and fair salaries for employees in different regions.

“Leadership should demonstrate a clear commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) by integrating DEI principles into the organization’s mission, values, and strategic goals. This commitment should be communicated consistently and reinforced through organizational policies and practices.”
African respondent

Section Two: Observing Trends for Improvement

An interesting point that was raised within the Funder and Philanthropy space was that of the role of the funder in promoting EDI. Previous research carried out by our team has highlighted the power of the funder in grant-making relationships; with some organisations creating programmes outside of their mission and scope to ‘follow the funding.’ This suggests that donors carry considerable power amongst nonprofit organisations, which could be harnessed to ensure that organisations are implementing real change regarding EDI.

“Funders should set expectations for organizational DEI as much as programmatic DEI for the organizations they’re funding.”

Asia respondent

Role of the Funder

Funders can play a pivotal role in promoting Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion within the organisations they support. By integrating EDI principles into their funding strategies, they can drive meaningful change and help create more equitable workplaces.

- **Incorporating EDI Criteria in Funding**

Applications: By making EDI a priority, funders signal their commitment to fostering inclusive environments and can require organisations to demonstrate their commitment to EDI as part of the application process. This might include asking for information on the diversity of their leadership team, their EDI policies, and how they plan to address inequality within their organisation.

- **Encouraging Innovation in EDI:** By offering grants or incentives for innovative EDI projects, funders can encourage organisations to develop creative solutions to address diversity and inclusion challenges. This could include funding for research, pilot programs, or partnerships with community organisations.

- **Facilitating Peer Learning and Networking:**

Funders can create opportunities for organisations to learn from one another by facilitating peer learning networks or communities of practice focused on EDI, as they often have large networks of grantees. These networks can provide a platform for sharing best practices, challenges, and successes.

- **Conducting EDI Audits:** Funders can require organisations to report regularly on their EDI progress as a condition of funding. This could include quantitative metrics, such as the diversity of staff and leadership, as well as qualitative assessments of the organisation’s culture and inclusion efforts.
- **Leading by Example:** By leading by example, funders can set a powerful precedent for the importance of diversity and inclusion. They should ensure that their leadership and staff reflect the diversity they seek to promote, and they can review their own funding processes to ensure that they are inclusive and accessible.

Role of the Board

Our data also shows that the Board can play a critical role in establishing effective and consistent EDI initiatives. Having buy-in from the Chair and Trustees is crucial for the success of EDI projects within any organisation. The board of directors plays a critical role in setting the overall tone and strategic direction of the organisation. When the board is genuinely committed to EDI, it signals to the staff that diversity and inclusion are not just optional extras, but core values integral to the company’s mission. That said, we did also hear that sometimes the blockers can be on senior management teams, even when the Board are actively championing change.

EDI projects often require significant investment, whether it’s for training programs, hiring diversity experts, or developing new policies and practices. A committed

board is more likely to allocate the necessary budget to support these initiatives, recognising that they are essential for the organisation’s long-term success. The board’s involvement can also provide strategic oversight, ensuring that EDI initiatives are implemented effectively and are aligned with the organisation’s overall goals. This oversight can help avoid tokenistic or superficial efforts and instead focus on impactful, long-term changes. Most importantly, the board can hold the executive team and other leaders accountable for making progress on EDI initiatives. This ensures that EDI remains a priority at the highest levels of the organisation, rather than being sidelined by other business pressures.

On the whole, across all sectors and regions, our data showed that Boards of organisations are generally supportive of EDI initiatives:

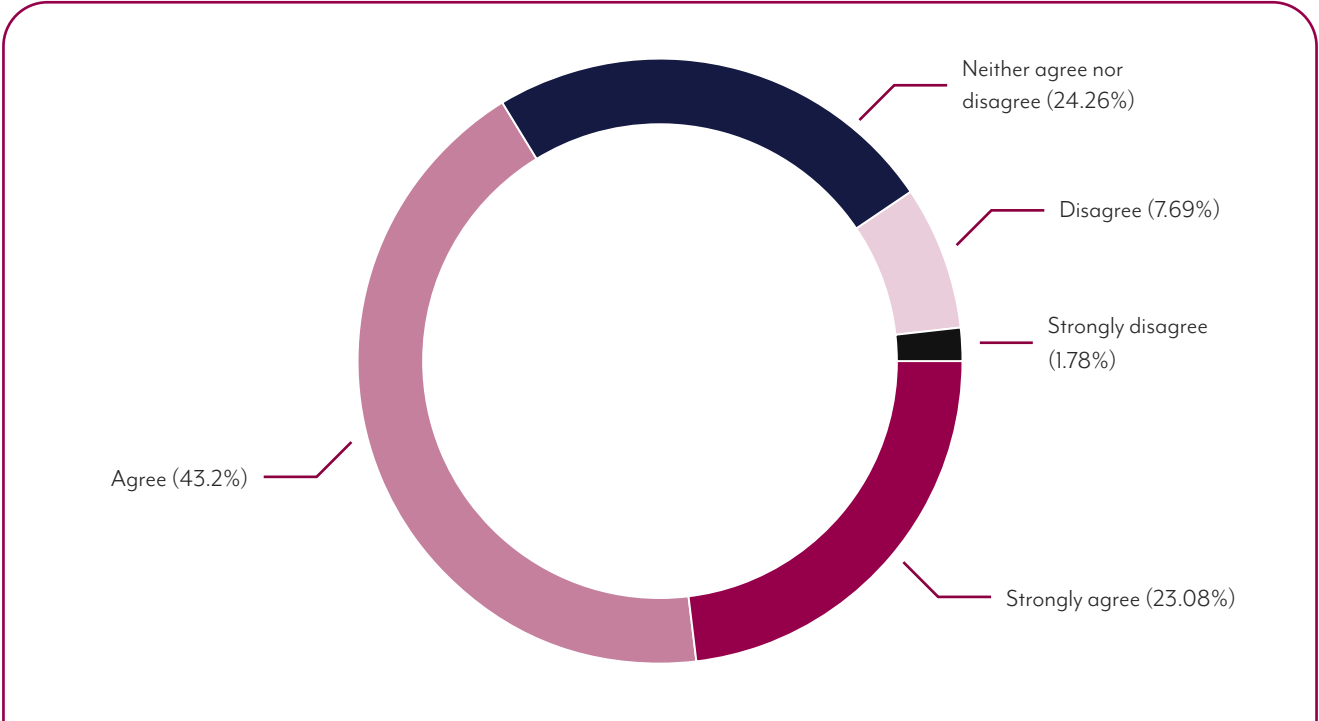


Fig 10. Participant responses to the statement “I feel like the board of my organisation is supportive of EDI initiatives.”

Section Two: Observing Trends for Improvement

Sectors that reported the least support of their board for initiatives were Renewables & Energy transition and Nature & biodiversity; both with Disagree rates of 31.25%. On the other side of the spectrum, the Sustainability & ESG sector had 51.28% of people respond with 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree'. Regionally, European respondents were most likely to Disagree or Strongly Disagree with the statement, at 12.82%, but also showed the highest levels of respondents selecting the 'Neither Agree Nor Disagree' at 23.08%, potentially indicating some ambivalence at the Board level.

Improving the diversity of lived experience and voices at a board level would also heighten the commitment to organisational EDI, further illustrating the importance of inclusive recruitment, even for non-executive and trustee roles.

“To create a more inclusive environment, it’s important to communicate inclusivity and embed it into the organisation’s culture until it becomes the norm. Training people to discuss it openly is also key. Leadership plays a critical role by budgeting for inclusivity efforts, leading by example, and highlighting it through their communications.”

Inclusive Hiring: An Essential Step

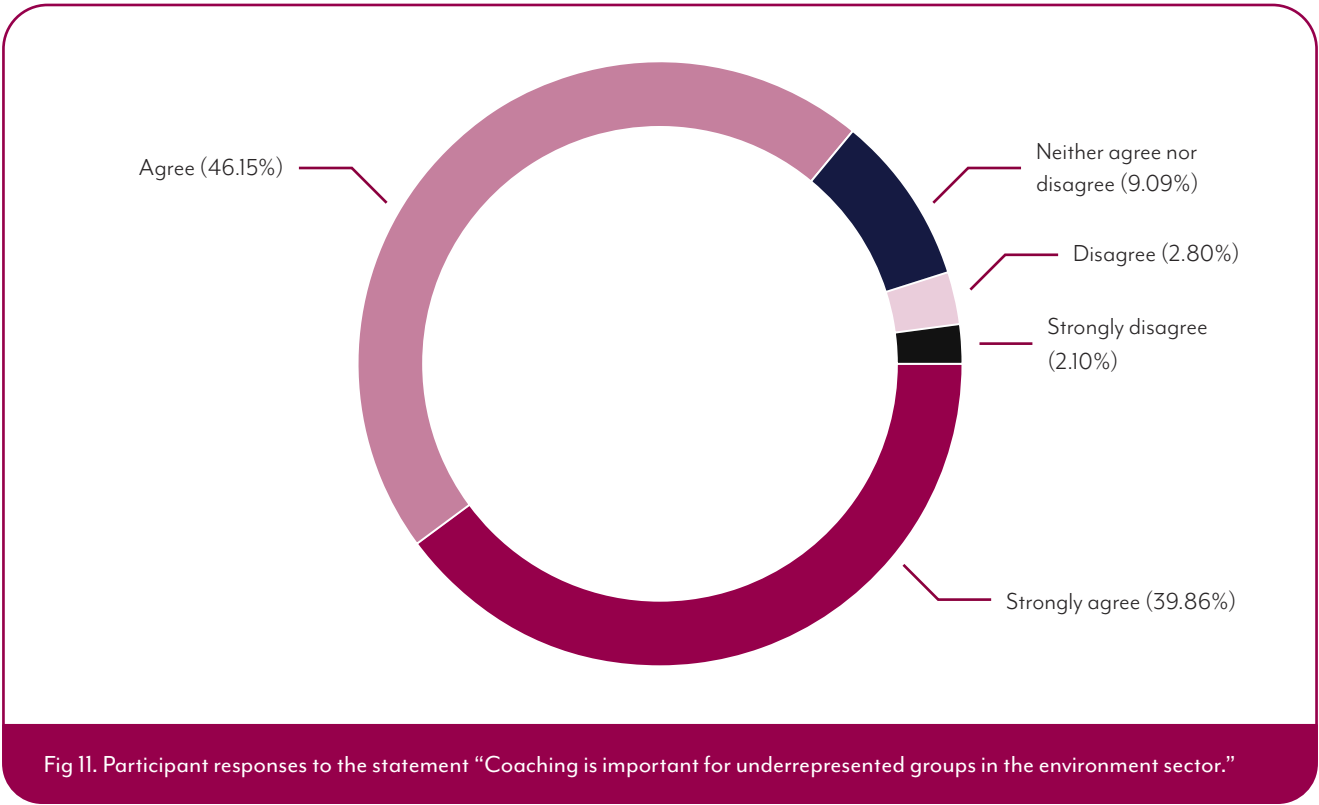
A key theme for Oxford HR is the idea that inclusive recruitment can play a vital role in facilitating a more welcoming and inclusive environmental sector. Through our work, we see first-hand the impact of reducing bias and eliminating discrimination from the hiring process, ensuring that candidates with protected characteristics feel able and confident in their applications.

Respondents from across the world and from varying types of organisations noted the importance of the recruitment process at different stages of our research. The issues identified above can also feed quite heavily to this stage if not carried out carefully, for example, remuneration, gender focused language, elitism and nepotism.

“The recruitment stage: it has to be very open and without the element of favouritism.”

Organisations can help to mitigate these issues by ensuring candidate packs are screened to ensure neutrality, taking part in regular salary benchmarking, ensuring that salaries are stated on the job posting and sharing the interview questions ahead of time. Training on inclusive recruitment and inclusive leadership for hiring managers can make people aware of their unconscious biases and that underrepresented groups are advocated for. This can start far before the hiring process, as one respondent noted, “self reflection is critical for organisations, and they must ask themselves how open they are really to other views and backgrounds”. Additionally, ensuring that recruitment addresses the gaps by targeting underrepresented groups through advertising roles in areas where people from underrepresented groups are more likely to see and engage with them and by creating development programmes.

Leadership Development & Coaching



A total of 86.01% of respondents across all sub-sectors and regions cited that coaching was important for underrepresented groups in the sector.

Leadership coaching is a process that specialises in supporting individuals to develop the high-level skills needed to succeed as organisational leaders. Conducted by trained and experienced professionals, participants build greater self-awareness, while enhancing their people management, interpersonal, communication, conflict management and goal-setting skills. Those who have partaken in leadership coaching can experience

improved confidence and job satisfaction, better performance and productivity.

When asked what other aspects of leadership support would be beneficial, the results varied by group. For example, respondents in Europe cited mentorship as an important part of leadership development in this area, while those based in the Asia Pacific region noted networking as being key, whilst those in Africa highlighted professional development and effective appraisal systems.

Section Two: Observing Trends for Improvement

Sector-wise, Conservation and Wildlife noted that support from senior management was vital:

“Having senior leaders actively promote and advocate for the work and ideas of underrepresented colleagues can significantly boost their visibility and credibility. - Connect underrepresented leaders with influential figures and opportunities that can advance their careers and the causes they care about. - Publicly acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of underrepresented leaders to inspire others and showcase their talent.”

The Climate policy and research sector mirrored Asia Pacific in putting an emphasis on networking in order to develop careers, but also to find support in the networks of other leaders. In both cases, whether the leadership support is more emotional, or technical, these initiatives are important in addressing the systemic barriers that often hinder advancement and success. By investing in the growth of underrepresented leaders, organisations not only empower individuals, but also foster a more equitable environment, where diverse talent is recognised and nurtured.

How our survey participants responded to the question “What sort of training would you like to see more of relating to EDI in the sector?”



Bias recognition



Cultural sensitivity



Development of soft skills



Disability awareness



LGBTQ+ awareness



Learning about the history of colonialism



Inclusive leadership



Inclusive recruitment



Purpose and benefits of organisational EDI

Section Two: Observing Trends for Improvement

Regarding extra EDI-related training, the consensus was that all organisations need more of it, in order to develop effective strategies, regardless of location or mission focus. Often overlooked or moved to the bottom of a priority list due to financial or time constraints, EDI training equips individuals with the tools to recognize unconscious biases, challenge inequities, and engage in respectful communication, ultimately driving better decision-making and innovation. Additionally, organisations may view EDI initiatives as a one-time obligation rather than an ongoing process of learning and growth, leading to underinvestment.

When asked what their organisation would like to do next in terms of EDI, after an increase in training initiatives, many respondents cited that strategy was crucial, with one individual even noting that:

‘all proposals and projects should have an EDI component, as a compulsory section in addition to safeguarding and risk.’

Deeply embedding EDI into strategy signals a genuine commitment to fostering an equitable workplace and it moves beyond being a compliance measure or isolated initiative, becoming a fundamental aspect of the organisation’s mission and values.

“We would like to have our vision and processes aligned with how the EDI should look in the future & what path to take to achieve it.”

A photograph of two women sitting at a table in a modern office setting, engaged in a conversation. The woman on the left, with long brown hair, is smiling and gesturing with her hands. The woman on the right, with curly dark hair, is seen from the back, wearing a blue top. Large windows in the background show a cityscape.

Conclusion

There is no one route to creating a diverse and inclusive environmental organisation. Our data has highlighted that, despite trends across sub-sectors and regions, nearly all organisations operating in this space are still on the journey to true inclusion. Furthermore, the main issues within EDI, such as inclusive culture, salary and remuneration, flexible working, supportive senior leadership, recruitment and professional development, are closely entwined, suggesting that solving one in isolation will not automatically create the change we need to see across the sector. Key themes that we have identified can be summarised as:

- **Leadership buy in** - A real commitment is needed from Boards and senior leadership teams, otherwise, EDI initiatives are set up to fail
- **Embrace transparency** – we must set measurable goals and regularly report on progress to hold ourselves accountable and deliver real change

- **Inclusive recruitment** – We cannot create diverse organisations without inclusive hiring processes, and it is vital to ensure recruitment is free from bias and discrimination

Please find at [this link](#) a comprehensive EDI recruitment checklist for your use and if you have any further questions around this topic, don't hesitate to get in touch.

- **Ongoing support** - Professional development and support is critical for underrepresented groups, to set individuals up for success and ensure that EDI initiatives are not tokenistic

Despite the clear need for more concrete action, many organisations are showing genuine commitment to creating real, lasting change, providing a source of great inspiration. There is also huge potential for organisations in this sector, across the world, to come together in this conversation, to spread best practices and hold each other accountable in a supportive network.

Conclusion

All organisations working in this space are tackling the greatest issue of our time, and there is no doubt that these organisations would become more productive and create more effective solutions if they had a greater representation of voices in their teams. It is therefore imperative that organisations in this sector create robust

EDI plans and take action to promote underrepresented actors. In the words of one respondent,

*I believe what Robert Chambers says,
"Putting the last first"*



Fig 12. Wordcloud of answers to the question: “What are the benefits of having a diverse workforce in the Environment sector?”

Acknowledgements

We would like to thank everyone who took the time to respond to the online survey and for sharing their thoughts and experiences freely.

About the authors



Ruth Davis
Global Communications
& Impact Manager

Ruth joined Oxford HR in 2018 after graduating from the London School of Economics and Political Science. She is particularly passionate about social impact and how purpose-led businesses can communicate their impact. Working within the communications team at Oxford HR, Ruth works on supporting regional hubs with their marketing needs in addition to content creation and partnerships.

Learn more about Ruth →



Suzie Mills
Global Communications
Director

Suzie joined the Oxford HR Team in January 2019. Prior to working for Oxford HR, Suzie has developed campaigns and worked on the global strategies for companies such as P&G, Nissan, Delta Airlines, Barclays, COI, World Horse Welfare, Vodafone and VTECH. Suzie is particularly interested in how technology and digital innovation can contribute to the global UN goal of ending hunger and poverty by 2030 and global problems in general.

Learn more about Suzie →



**Dr. Grace
Mansah-Owusu**
Organisational
Psychologist

Grace is a chartered psychologist, diversity and inclusion expert, trainer, career coach and psychotherapist. She has over twelve years of experience working in people and organisational development, research and facilitation roles in the for purpose sector, academia, transport and logistics and various consultancies. Building on her academic and theoretical knowledge, Grace provides opportunities for people to grow, develop and flourish in the workplace.

Learn more about Grace →



Zoe Greenwood
Head of Practice,
Environment, Climate
& Conservation

Zoe joined Oxford HR in 2018 after 16 years working in environment and climate. She has led the growth of the Environment, Climate, Conservation and Sustainability sector specialism in the organisation, working with a wide range of client such as WWF, Greenpeace, Mighty Earth, Global Canopy, Ethical Tea Partnership, the Clean Air Fund, Manufacture 2030, Climate Impact Partners and many more.

Learn more about Zoe →

References

Neal-Holder, P., McInnis, K (2022) Climate Change: Environmental groups need more diversity. BBC News. Available online: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-63661594>

The Race Report (2023). Available online: <https://www.race-report.uk/>

Gayle, D (2022) Environment sector has failed to become more inclusive, study suggests. The Guardian. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/oct/05/environment-sector-has-failed-to-become-more-inclusive-study-suggests>

Laville, S (2021) 'Too white' green sector launches work scheme to be more diverse. The Guardian. Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/feb/11/too-white-green-sector-launches-work-scheme-to-be-more-diverse>

McKinsey (2023) Why diversity matters even more: the case for holistic impact. Available online: <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact>



Report designed by Oxygen

Oxford

46 Woodstock Road
Oxford
OX2 6HT

United Kingdom

+44 (0) 1865 985 457

Nairobi

Indigo Cowork Space
Off General Mathenge Road
Westlands
Nairobi

Kenya

+254 (0) 715 163 631

Singapore

6 Battery Road
#06-16
049909

Singapore

+65 (0) 9114 1439

Washington

1250 Connecticut Avenue NW
Suite 700
Washington, DC
20036

United States of America