





Women and the charity sector

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Pro Bono Economics uses economics to empower the social sector and to increase wellbeing across the UK. We combine project work for individual charities and social enterprises with policy research that can drive systemic change. Working with almost 500 volunteer economists, we have supported over 500 charities since our inception in 2009.



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Summary

The charity sector is vitally important for women. With women more likely than men to be in poverty at every stage of their adult lives, more likely to experience ill health, and more likely to be carers for parents, children and partners alike, the charity sector provides an essential source of support, community and advocacy. The sector also provides a growing source of employment for women, having created an additional 120,000 jobs for women over the past decade, to become the source of one in every 25 jobs filled by women in 2022. It also provides volunteering opportunities to 31% of women across England, which fosters skills, nurtures relationships and communities, and yields a myriad of wellbeing benefits.

Overall, Pro Bono Economics (PBE) estimates that women in the charity sector contributed approximately £19 billion to the economy in 2019. This includes a contribution of £9.9 billion through volunteering and £9.2 billion through their work as employees in the charity sector.

Across the charity sector, there are brilliant examples of women building solutions to the knotty problems their communities face. There are outstanding female leaders running organisations from food banks to cancer research charities. To the female leaders interviewed for this report, the charity sector has enabled them to achieve their ambitions, forge friendships, and provided the means to care for their families.

However, the charity sector is far from a panacea for women. There is a profound – and often under-discussed – gender imbalance in the sector. While women make up 68% of the charity sector's employees, they only make up between 56% and 63% of the sector's CEOs. That falls to 35% of the CEOs of the largest charities and 46% of the CEOs of the oldest charities. While women are fractionally more likely to volunteer than men, last time it was measured, male trustees outnumbered female trustees by two to one. And while women are more generous than men - with 72% of women giving to charity, compared to 61% of men - the nature of wealth means that they are significantly less likely to be major philanthropists. Women account for fewer than 11% of high-net-worth individuals, and correspondingly just seven women featured in The Sunday Times Giving List independently last year, compared to 69 men.

This dominance of men in positions of power in the charity sector; at leadership level, at board level, and in philanthropy, has consequences. The prejudices, misogyny and sexism, which affect women at work and women in leadership across all sectors of the economy, are prevalent in the charity sector too. Women and girls' charities are too often deprioritised and are chronically underfunded. Gender stereotypes about the types of roles women 'should' be doing persist and are felt to affect team make-up. Women running charities still balance the majority of the responsibilities for caring and the home, and

this impacts the shape of their careers. Women in the charity sector can be and are underestimated and undermined. They can and do experience discrimination, tokenism, objectification, and harassment.

All of this is felt most keenly by women of colour, disabled women, LGBT+ women, and other women in the sector who face forms of systemic disempowerment. It also plays out differently at different points in women's lives.

Over the years, the charity sector has improved for women, but the job of achieving equal representation for women in the charity sector is not yet done. Instead, equality is often taken for granted because the charity sector can 'feel' very female as a result of its workforce.

How funders use the power they hold is evidently critical in changing this. Increased funding for the women and girls' sector is essential. There is also a clear need for more consistent support for current and future female leaders, particularly around confidence and network-building – and infrastructure organisations need to consider how they reach beyond their current audience to support the women unaware of their services.

Boards have a critical role to play as well. Boards could be much more proactive in raising issues that affect women, including reviewing benefits, fair pay, leave arrangements, flexible working and policies to ensure that they are family-friendly, supportive of caring responsibilities, and competitive in the tight labour market that the sector operates in. Boards could be offering more encouragement to the female leaders in their organisations to make time and resources available for their own development as leaders. It is also essential that boards continue to make progress on recruiting trustees from more diverse backgrounds, and go further to ensure that all trustees feel included, able to contribute and are listened to equally.

Making the charity sector a better place for women to work, volunteer and lead is not just a women's issue. It is about building a sector that is even better at meeting the needs of its services users, which should matter to everyone. It is about unlocking more of the potential of women at all stages of their lives, which should matter to everyone. And, of course, it is about fairness and equity, which should matter to everyone too.

In 2019, women in the charity sector contributed

£19bn

to the UK economy - £9.9 billion through volunteering and £9.2 billion through their work as employees in the charity sector.

Women contribute an estimated

64%

of the hours worked in civil society, compared to men's 36%.

Just

32 out of **93**

chief executives leading the UK's 100 biggest charities by income are female.

Women are more likely to give to charity than men.

In 2022, **72%** of women

gave money to charitable causes in the previous month, versus 61% of men.

By supporting women, charities build a fairer society and strengthen the economy

Despite the great strides towards equality made over the past century, it remains the case that women disproportionately experience numerous disadvantages. For example, women in the UK continue to earn less than men,¹ are more likely to be disabled,² and are more likely to be unpaid carers.³ As a result, women rely more heavily on social security than men do, making up 57% of people on Universal Credit,⁴ 55% of people receiving Personal Independence Payments, and 73% of people receiving Carer's Allowance.⁵ As many charities exist to support people in poverty, or experiencing other kinds of disadvantage, it follows logically that these charities disproportionately support women too.

Data from Citizens Advice illustrates the importance of the organisation's network of local charities to women. Between October 2022 and September 2023, 59% of Citizens Advice service users were women, meaning that more than 660,850 women reached out to them for help within that year. As Figure 1 shows, almost two-thirds (65%) of the individuals that Citizens Advice referred on for additional charitable support were women, while women made up six in ten (60%) referrals to food banks.⁶

¹ [Employee Earnings in the UK: 2022](#), ONS, October 2022

² [Disability by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#), ONS, February 2023

³ [Unpaid care by age, sex and deprivation, England and Wales: Census 2021](#), ONS, February 2023

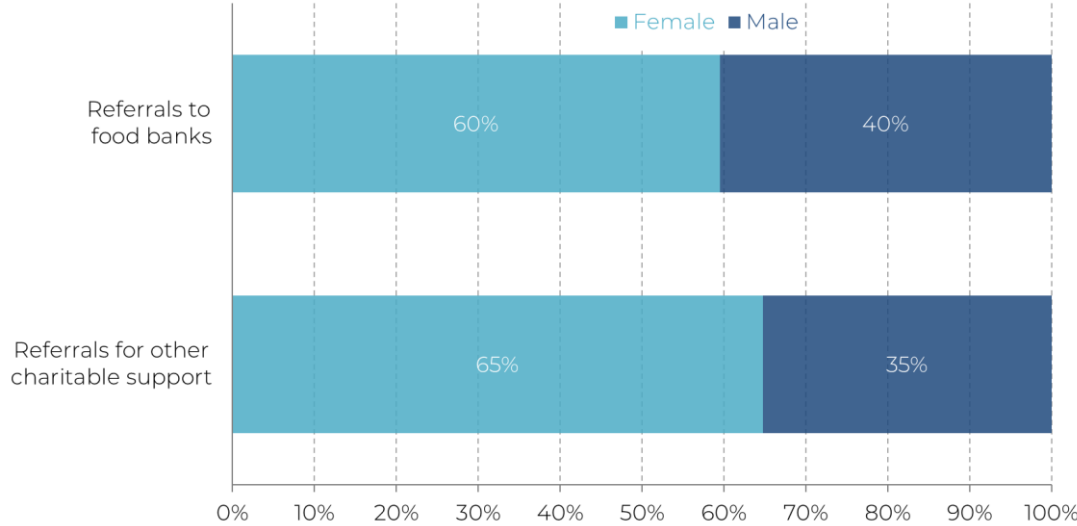
⁴ [Universal Credit: 29 April 2013 to 13 July 2023](#), Department for Work and Pensions, August 2023

⁵ M Howard and I Pinto, [Social Security and gender, Women's Budget Group](#), March 2023

⁶ [Advice Trends Sept 2023](#), Citizens Advice, October 2023

Figure 1. The majority of people referred for charitable support and to food banks by Citizens Advice are women

Proportion of Citizens Advice referrals for charitable support or food banks by gender, October 2022 to September 2023



Source: PBE analysis of Advice Trends, Sept 2023, Citizens Advice.

The significance of charities in women’s lives is not limited to hardship support for those in poverty. Women also undertake the bulk of childcare - spending 22% more of their time doing unpaid childcare than men in March 2023⁷ - perhaps explaining why Pro Bono Economics (PBE) analysis finds that women are correspondingly more likely to make use of charity-run youth clubs (9% versus 6%).⁸

Additionally, women are more likely to experience poor mental health than men, with one in five women reporting symptoms of common mental disorders, compared to one in eight men.^{9 10} From 2017-19 to 2018-20, maternal mortality rose by nearly 20% - with suicide continuing to be the leading cause of death for women who are pregnant or within six weeks of giving birth - accounting for 18% of maternal deaths in 2018-20.^{11 12} PBE analysis of the Community Life Survey reveals that women are significantly

⁷ [Time Use in the UK: March 2023](#), ONS, July 2023
⁸ [Community Life Survey 2021/22](#), Department for Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023
⁹ [Adult Psychiatric Morbidity Survey: Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing, England 2014](#), NHS, September 2016
¹⁰ This difference is believed to have widened since this survey. See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-spotlights/gender-covid-19-mental-health-and-wellbeing-surveillance-report#introduction> COVID-19 mental health and wellbeing surveillance: report - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk)
¹¹ [Saving Lives Improving Mothers' Care - Lessons learned to inform maternity care from the UK and Ireland Confidential Enquiries into Maternal Deaths and Morbidity 2018-20](#), MBRRACE-UK, November 2022 [MBRRACE-UK Maternal MAIN Report 2022 UPDATE.pdf \(ox.ac.uk\)](#)
¹² Ibid

more likely than men to access the support of mental health charities (9% versus 5%).

Charitable services aimed exclusively at women are unique, and important to everyone

The vast majority of the UK's 166,000 charities provide services regardless of gender. However, to meet gender-specific needs, there are a significant number of charities which have been established to provide targeted support to women, using gender-specific solutions to longstanding disparities in women's health, from pregnancy and menopause, to eating disorders and anxiety; from violence against women and girls, to domestic abuse and street safety; and to help build women's self-esteem, happiness, and chances of success at every stage of life. There are an estimated 9,900 charities which identify women as a specific beneficiary group and 4,600 charities which have girls as a specific beneficiary group (though there is likely to be some overlap between these).¹³ Specifically, there are estimated to be around 500 maternity charities, 2,200 Women's Institutes, 2,000 Girlguiding groups, and over 600 domestic abuse charities (though some of these also provide support to men).¹⁴

The vast majority of the women's and girls' charities tackling these big, systemic issues are small grassroots organisations. This is quite typical of the charity sector, as approximately eight out of ten charities are small or micro-organisations.¹⁵ But what sets these organisations apart is that they are often run by women for women, and they are often deeply embedded in their communities. This makes them uniquely positioned to understand and meet the needs of those communities.

Between July and September 2023, PBE interviewed female leaders from across the sector, including many with experience of women's and girls' charities. They emphasised just how vital organisations run by women for women are to creating trust, safety, solidarity and spaces to reimagine the world:

"It's a super important thing that all women organisations do, that [the women coming to them] feel safe and understood and not judged... A lot of these women have been through such huge challenges - really awful, awful situations... And they won't be able to engage if they don't feel safe. And that's the number one thing that you know, nothing else can follow if you don't feel safe and trusted, and not judged."

¹³ C Damm, D Kane & O Chan, [UK Charity Classification](#), accessed October 2023

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ [UK Civil Society Almanac](#), NCVO, 2023

“We create a great non-competitive space for the girls that don't fit in to other groups. There are so few places for girls to have that.”

This sense of trust and safety is particularly important where women's and girls' organisations support women experiencing 'invisible' issues, such as homelessness, where many women stay out of sight for safety reasons or are in 'hidden homeless' situations,¹⁶ or sexual violence, where stigmatisation, underreporting and sensitivity and privacy concerns make it difficult to share stories and case studies. This lack of visibility impacts funders' understanding and ability to make a connection with the women and the challenges they face, fuelling disparities in awareness and service provision.

The leaders PBE spoke with also recounted how much of the work women's and girls' charities do is to tackle complex, compounding issues, making a difference both to the women they support and to UK society at large. By building women's and girls' confidence and skills, charities are working to strengthen the economy in the future. By supporting women and girls to escape cycles of violence, charities have the potential to reduce burdens on a host of public services. From the start of a woman's journey out of abuse to safety, charities play a pivotal role offering crucial support for their mental health, with paperwork for benefits, safety planning, securing housing, finding employment and supporting their children's education and wellbeing. The economic benefits of this are significant: reducing domestic abuse by 5% has been estimated to correspond to a reduction in economic and social costs of around £3.9 billion.¹⁷

As several leaders stated:

“If you have happy women, and successful women, generally families are happier, and so society is happier and more successful. So I think there's a very clear link between supporting women and girls and making society generally better.”

“Women's issues aren't just women's issues. They're family issues, they're health service issues, they're education issues. I often go back to the paid childcare - it's an economic issue. It's not just a women's issue.”

“It's not just how much difference [these organisations] make to the individuals' lives that are right on the sharp line at that point, but that they have those knock-on effects to criminality, to homelessness, to further

¹⁶ [Rebuilding Shattered Lives, “Women's Homelessness is so often invisible”](#), St Mungo's, November 2015

¹⁷ [Investing to save: the economic case for funding specialist domestic abuse support](#), Women's Aid, March 2023

future abuse - that you can break the cycle of abuse by giving a much better outcome to those women and children at that early stage."

It is perhaps notable then that the groups of the population that these organisations support are more inclined to recognise the impact charities have. YouGov polling in 2020 found that about nine in ten women (87%) surveyed thought that charities and community groups play an important role in British society, 7 percentage points higher than male respondents (80%).¹⁸

For many women, charities play an important role in community building

At different points in their lives, women may also turn to charities to build their communities, relationships and networks. As time, needs, interests and opportunities vary for any individual, so too does their involvement in the charity sector. But there may be particular reasons for women to reach for the charity sector to build community as a result of the isolation they can face. Young women and girls are almost twice as likely than young men to report being lonely,¹⁹ while older women are almost twice as likely than men to live alone after the age of 65.²⁰ Meanwhile, in midlife, women are overwhelmingly more likely than men to be single parents, making up 84% of lone parent households.²¹ They also remain significantly more likely than men to be unemployed or in part-time work, and therefore can miss out on the relationships that a workplace can foster.

Each of these circumstances may encourage women to look to charities as places to meet new people in similar circumstances to themselves, and so particularly value this role that charities play. Over a third of women (36%) think that charities' role in creating a sense of community is one of their most important roles, compared to just over a quarter of men (27%).²²

In addition to accessing the support of charities as 'users' or 'beneficiaries', one of the ways women seek out community within the sector is by volunteering. Women appear to be slightly more likely than men to be motivated to volunteer by the opportunities for connection, development or communal need that volunteering presents. Men seem to be more influenced by people they know, as Figure 2 shows.

¹⁸ [YouGov / Pro Bono Economics Survey Results](#), YouGov, November 2020

¹⁹ [Trends in personal wellbeing and loneliness by age and sex](#), ONS, March 2022

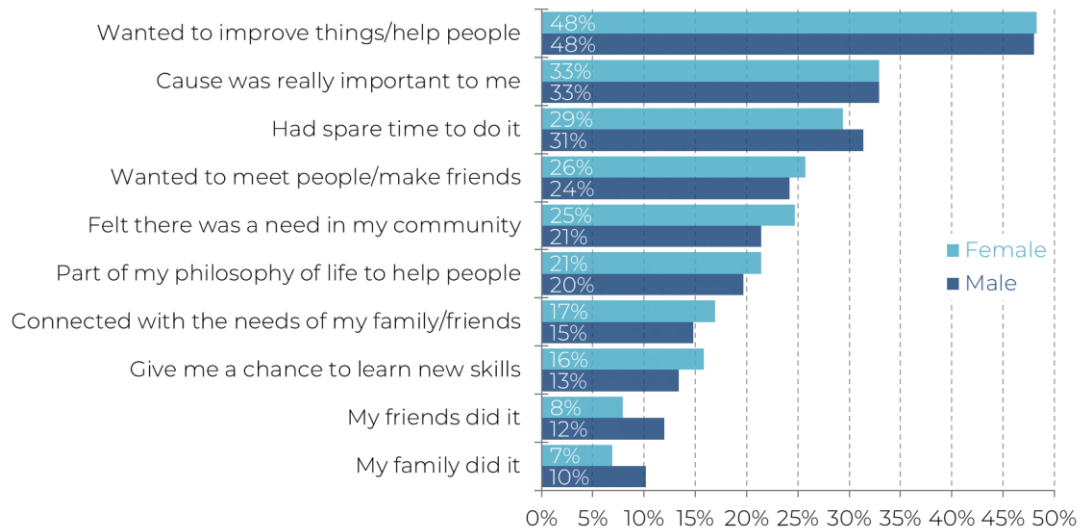
²⁰ [Families and households in the UK: 2022](#), ONS, May 2023

²¹ [Families and households in the UK: 2022](#), ONS, May 2023

²² [YouGov / Pro Bono Economics Survey Results](#), YouGov, November 2020

Figure 2. There are only very marginal differences between the sexes when it comes to motivation to begin volunteering

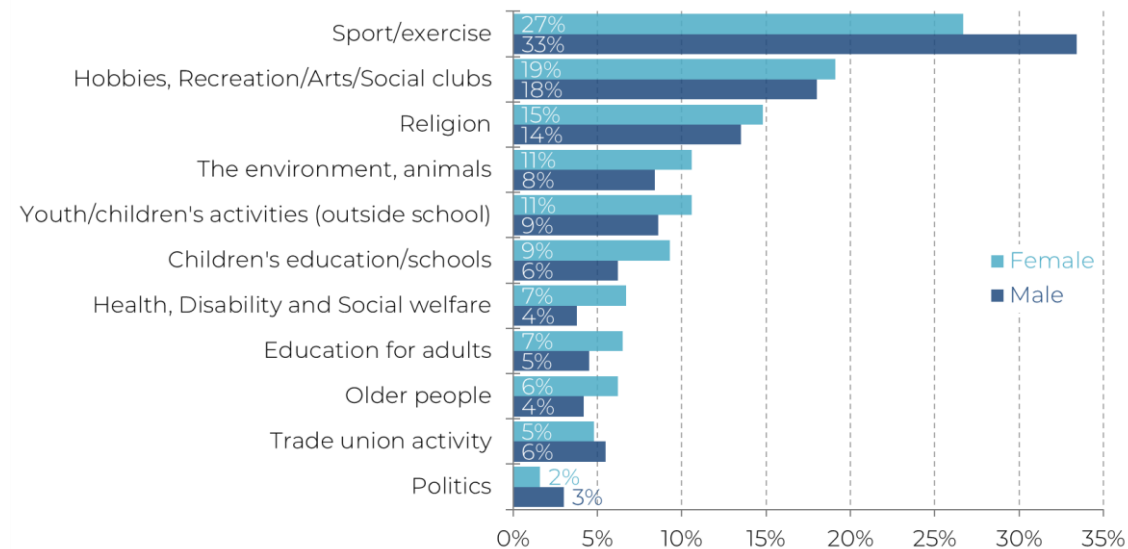
Reasons given for starting formal volunteering, by sex



Source: PBE analysis of Community Life Survey 2021/22, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023.

The causes that women volunteer to support are broadly similar to those that men do. However, where there are differences, they follow a predictably similar pattern to the causes that women utilise support for the most. Women are more likely than men to volunteer with educational and children’s charities, those supporting older people, those focused on health, disability and other social causes, and animal charities. Men are substantially more likely to be involved with sports organisations and slightly more likely to be involved with trade union and political organisations, as Figure 3 shows.

Figure 3. While still small, differences are a little more pronounced when it comes to the type of organisation men and women volunteer with. Have you been involved with any of the following groups, clubs or organisations during the last 12 months?



Source: PBE analysis of Community Life Survey 2021/22, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023.

By volunteering, women benefit in a myriad of ways. Studies have shown that, in the right circumstances, volunteering can improve wellbeing,²³ employability²⁴ and health outcomes.²⁵ In addition to this, research has also identified certain gender-related impacts of volunteering. Analysis has shown that frequent volunteering by economically inactive women can help to reduce the negative impact of the other forms of unpaid work they undertake.²⁶

Not only do women benefit themselves from volunteering, volunteering is also an important means by which women contribute to the economy and to society. According to the Community Life Survey, 31% of women reported volunteering formally with charities, clubs or other organisations at least once in the preceding 12 months in 2021/22. This compares to 29%

²³ R Lawton et al, [Does Volunteering Make Us Happier, or Are Happier People More Likely to Volunteer? Addressing the Problem of Reverse Causality When Estimating the Wellbeing Impacts of Volunteering](#), Journal of Happiness Studies, 22, 599–624, 2021

²⁴ A Ellis Paine et al, [Does volunteering improve employability? Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey](#), Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 100, July 2013

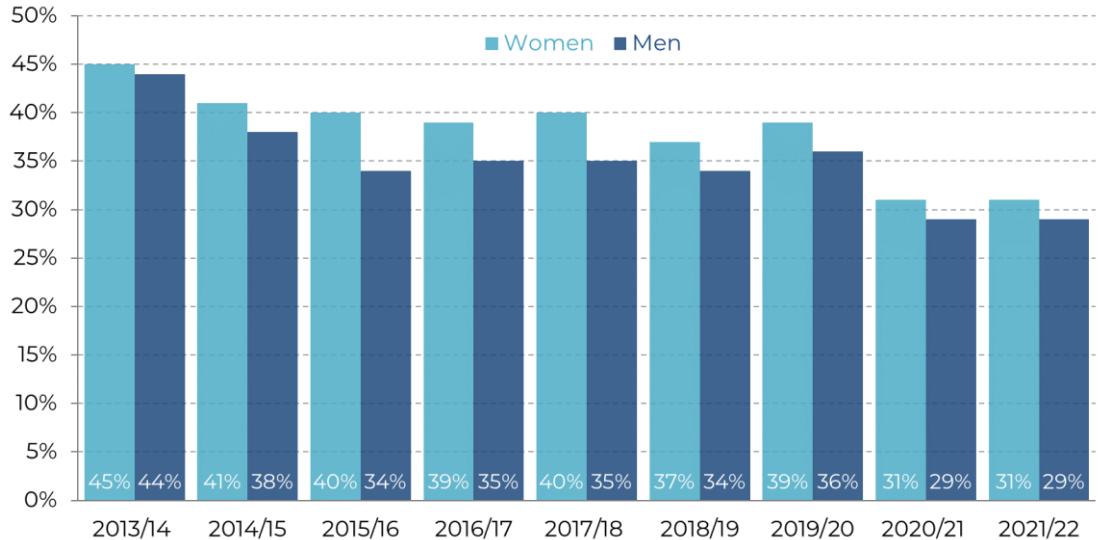
²⁵ Eric S. Kim et al, [Volunteering and Subsequent Health and Well-Being in Older Adults: An Outcome-Wide Longitudinal Approach](#), American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 176-186, Volume 59, Issue 2, August 2020

²⁶ S Wang et al, [Can Volunteering Buffer the Negative Impacts of Unemployment and Economic Inactivity on Mental Health? Longitudinal Evidence from the United Kingdom](#), International Journal of Environ Res Public Health, June 2022

of men, and this difference has been relatively consistent over time as Figure 4 shows.

Figure 4. Despite participation rates declining, women have consistently been more likely to volunteer than men

Participation in formal volunteering at least once in the last year, by sex, 2013/14 to 2021/22



Source: PBE analysis of Community Life Survey 2020/21 reference tables, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023 and Community Life Survey 2021/22 reference tables, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, July 2021.

However, in that same year, women contributed 49.6% of weighted volunteer hours (compared to men’s 50.2%). This suggests that more women volunteer, but that the average female volunteer contributes fewer hours to formal volunteering than the average male volunteer. As a result, PBE estimates that women’s volunteering generated around £9.9 billion of gross value added (GVA) in 2019 – almost half of the total GVA contributed by volunteers of £19.9 billion.²⁷

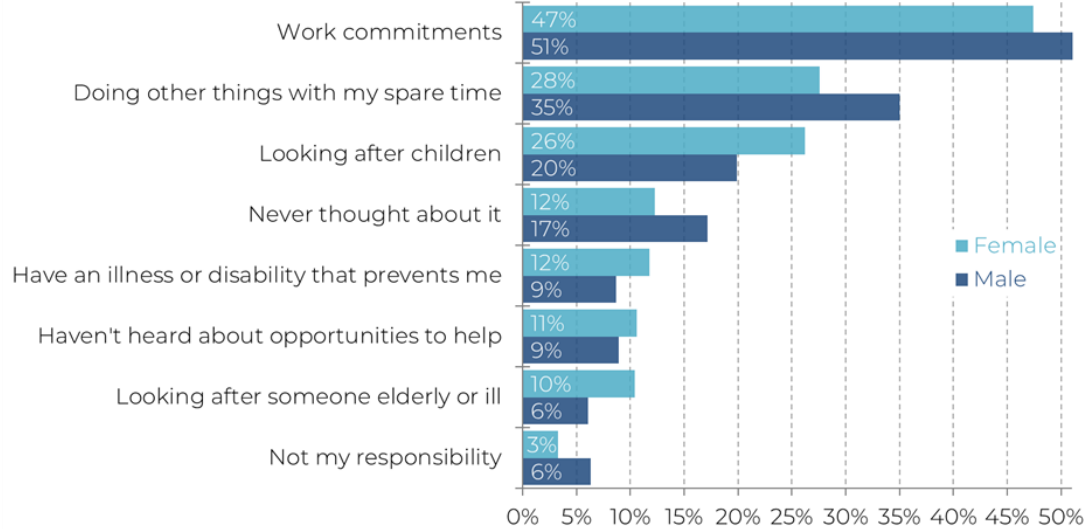
Given the significance of the benefits of volunteering to women and the benefits of women’s volunteering to society, it is troubling for women, the economy, and charities alike, that volunteering has been in decline over the past decade. In 2021/22, around one in six people (16%) in England participated in regular volunteering with clubs, groups or organisations.

²⁷ It should be noted that informal volunteering hours are not captured in this measure of volunteer hours; in that same year 37% of women surveyed responded that they had informally volunteered compared to men’s 28%. It is possible that women potentially contributing more to informal volunteering may restrict their ability to engage in formal volunteering more than men. Further, the GVA estimates do not include value generated by informal volunteering; as a result contributions of women volunteers in particular may be significantly underestimated due to the “unseen” nature of their contributions in publicly available data.

This is the lowest figure ever recorded and is a significant fall from the more than one in four (27%) recorded in 2013/14, meaning that millions fewer women are benefiting from the opportunities presented by volunteering.

Figure 5. Barriers to doing more volunteering are broadly similar, however women are more likely to be restricted by ill health or caring responsibilities

Reasons given for not undertaking formal volunteering more regularly, by sex



Source: PBE analysis of Community Life Survey 2021/22, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023.

There are also some signs that gender norms may be stopping women from volunteering. Work commitments, doing other things with their spare time, and childcare, are the three main reasons given by both male and female volunteers as to why they do not volunteer with charities and other organisations more regularly. Nevertheless, as Figure 5 shows, men are more likely to have stopped volunteering because they are undertaking different activities, while women’s volunteering has been more likely to be affected by childcare. Caring for someone elderly or ill tends to be a bigger barrier for women as well.

But while women’s participation in volunteering is in decline, a very different story is playing out when it comes to women’s participation in the charity sector workforce.

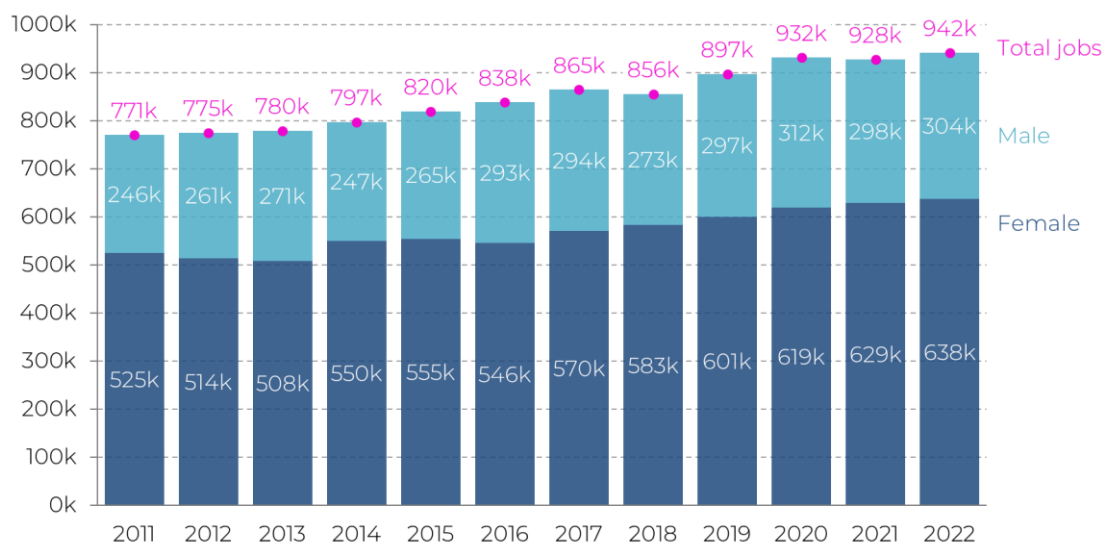
Women’s ‘formal’ involvement in the charity sector has been accelerating

The charity sector is an important source of employment for women. Just under 1 million people work in the charity sector, and 638,000 of those are

women, meaning that more than two-thirds (68%) of the sector's workforce is female. Proportionally, this is significantly higher than the rest of the economy, in which women fill fewer than half (47%) of all jobs. As a result, one in every 25 jobs filled by women in 2022 was within a charity.²⁸

As Figure 6 shows, the importance of the charity sector to women has been growing steadily over time. Since 2011, the number of jobs in civil society has increased by more than one fifth (22%). This means that the charity sector's growth has been outstripping the rest of the economy, where growth has been 12%. As a result, charities have created an additional 120,000 jobs for women over the past decade.

Figure 6. Women make up over two-thirds of the charity sector's workforce
Total number of filled jobs in the civil society sector, by sex



Note: DCMS economic estimates for the civil society sector are derived from the Labour Force Survey. Respondents are considered to be part of the civil society sector if the organisation they work for is not "a private firm or business, a limited company", and is a "charity, voluntary organisation or trust".

Source: PBE analysis of Economic Estimates: Employment in the DCMS Sectors, January to December, 2011-2022.

The high incidence of flexible working arrangements within the charity sector is likely to be one of the factors which makes it so attractive to women. Women are almost three times more likely than men to work part-time,²⁹ and just over one third (35%) of all jobs in the charity sector are part-time. This is considerably higher than the proportion in the rest of the economy, where a quarter (25%) of all jobs are part-time. This aligns with

²⁸ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Economic Estimates: Employment in DCMS sectors and Digital sector, January 2022 to December 2022](#), July 2023

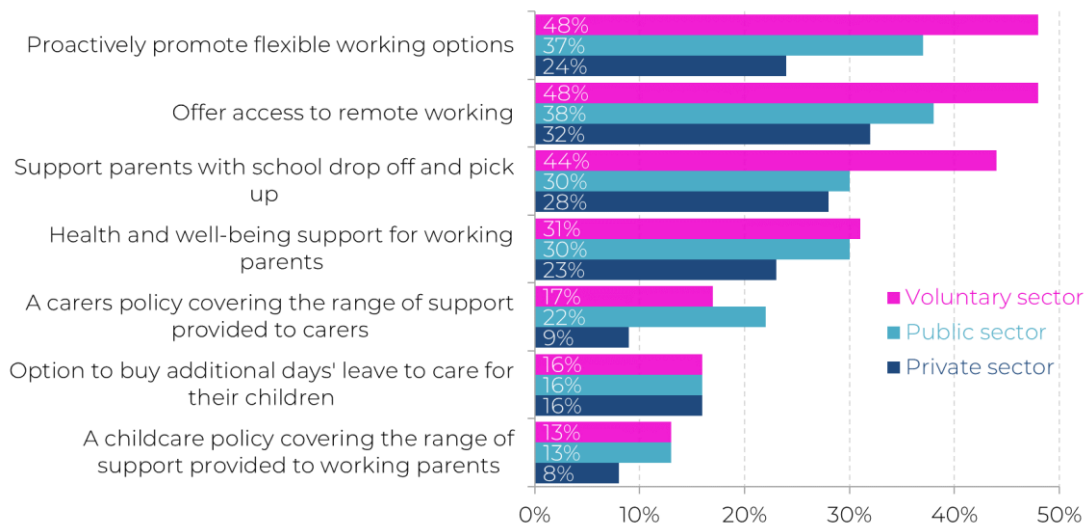
²⁹ I Buchanan, A Pratt and B Francis-Devine, [Women and the UK economy](#), House of Commons Library, March 2023

PBE's estimates that the average woman in the sector works 26.3 hours a week, compared to the average man's 31.4 hours.³⁰

In addition to offering part-time employment opportunities, charities are also more generous to their employees in the provision of other kinds of flexibility. Voluntary organisations are 10ppts more likely than public sector organisations and 16ppts more likely than private sector organisations to offer remote or hybrid working, and 14ppts more likely than public sector organisations and 16ppts more likely than private sector organisations to support parents with school drop-off and pick-up timings.³¹ These additional forms of flexibility undoubtedly contribute to the sector's attractiveness as a positive place for women to work.

Figure 7. Voluntary sector employers are particularly good at offering a range of support for employees with caring responsibilities

Support for employees with caring responsibilities by sector (%), UK



Note: n = 2,000 senior decision makers in the UK, surveyed online by YouGov in June and July 2022.
 Source: [Employer focus on working parents: Parental leave and pay and childcare policies](#), CIPD, August 2022.

The female leaders PBE spoke with highlighted how part-time and flexible working, and the surrounding culture, have helped them to shape their own work and careers around their lives. This included the advantages of being able to adapt their work patterns around periods of maternity leave, childcare, and care of older relatives.

“When I had small children, people were accommodating in terms of making that work for me so that I could continue to work and in a senior leadership position... With one CEO - she was very pragmatic - I was able to work on a flexible schedule that enabled me to do what I needed

³⁰ PBE analysis of Labour Force Survey, ONS, 2022

³¹ [Employer focus on working parents: Parental leave and pay and childcare policies](#), CIPD, August 2022

to do at home with relatively small children, but also recognise that when I was at the office, I was very productive. And I was also flexible the other end as well. And I would try and make things work. So I think it's about women supporting women."

There is undoubtedly an interaction between the sector's workforce being dominated by women and a positive approach to flexible working, as the interviewee above suggests. The female-majority workforce is also likely to influence the prevalence of other healthy attitudes to issues predominantly associated with women. For example, voluntary organisations have been shown to be more likely than private sector organisations to encourage an open and supportive culture where employees can discuss menstrual health, menopause transition,³² fertility treatment and pregnancy loss.³³ These healthy attitudes have the potential to drive a virtuous cycle, of an increasingly positive working environment for women to work within.

Overall, through their employment in the charity sector, women contribute significantly to the economy. PBE estimates that women working in civil society contributed £9.2 billion to the economy in 2019 through GVA generated by employment, a majority of the total £14.4 billion GVA generated by employees in the sector.³⁴ This is because women contribute an estimated 64% of the hours worked in civil society, compared to men's 36%.

This means that not only is the charity sector a more important source of services and community for more women in the UK, women also drive most of the charity sector's activity. In combination with the contribution that women make as volunteers, PBE's analysis suggests that the GVA of women in civil society is £19 billion, compared to men's £15.2 billion.³⁵

³² A Sinclair & R Suff, [Health and wellbeing at work](#), September 2023

³³ J Miller & R Suff, [Workplace support for employees experiencing fertility challenges, investigations or treatment](#), CIPD, May 2023

³⁴ The underlying methodology behind these GVA estimates uses ONS data on the proportion of GVA in each industry that comes from the NPISH sector. At the time of writing this paper, this data has not been republished with newer data beyond 2019. Thus, this report does not include an updated GVA of the sector for 2020 onwards. See Annex for methodology.

³⁵ PBE analysis of various data including: Labour Force Survey, ONS, 2022; Community Life Survey, ONS, 2020; NPISH series, ONS, 2022; Household Satellite accounts, ONS, 2022.

Decision-making in charities is often dominated by men

Despite the clear importance of the charity sector to women as users, volunteers and employees, decision-making in the sector is often dominated by men. There is a paradox within the sector. As one charity leader points out, despite the sector being *“very welcoming for women... that is at the lower levels of organisations. As soon as you get into the charity leadership space, it becomes much more... male and much less ethnically diverse as well. And it's the same at board level too.”*

Men are more likely than women to be managers, and to run the largest charitable organisations

Despite making up more than two-thirds (68%) of employees in the charity sector, women are nevertheless proportionally less likely to hold leadership positions – making up between 56% and 63% of the sector’s CEOs.³⁶

Women are also less likely to hold management positions. PBE’s analysis shows that, in 2022, 30.5% of women employed in the charity sector were managers compared to 37.8% of men. This means that a man working in the charity sector is 7.3ppts more likely to be a manager than a woman is.³⁷ This is slightly more positive than in the economy as a whole (where a man is 8.6ppts more likely to be a manager than a woman is) but must be set against the context of a sector which is so significant to women as a place of employment, services and community.

This gender imbalance is at its most stark among the leadership of the largest charities. The largest charities play an outsized role in the sector with the 64 ‘super-major’ charities in the UK making up just 0.04% of all charitable organisations, but receiving 22% of the income.³⁸ With this financial firepower comes a substantial proportion of the sector’s employees, volunteers, campaigning voice, influence and attention. Yet men are twice as likely to run the most powerful organisations than women are. Just 32 out of the 93 chief executives leading the UK’s biggest charities by income are female – something the leaders interviewed for this

³⁶ PBE analysis of ACEVO Pay and Equalities Surveys 2018-2022

³⁷ [Labour Force Survey](#), ONS, 2023. Note that the data refers to “supervisors” and “foremen” – for the purposes of this paper PBE has combined the data from these two categories under “supervisors”.

³⁸ [UK Civil Society Almanac 2020/21](#), NCVO, 2023

report recognised strongly, given the signal it sends out, and what it means for women's progress.³⁹

"As a woman, you're more likely to be leading the small charities. And you're more likely to be getting the lower pay, and having a diddly squat pension, and quite possibly not getting any professional development, and working with chairs who don't necessarily understand what they need to be doing and all of those things. And as a man, and especially as a white publicly-educated man, the chances are you're going to get to lead the big organisations with everything that goes with that. And that is so depressing."

There were a number of reasons identified by the women interviewed for this report as contributing to this imbalance at the top of the big charities. One of the most significant was a feeling that the larger organisations tended to act *"more like corporations"*, with more politics and more of the hang-ups of the private sector in operation – with more stereotypical ideas of what leaders look like in play. This was reflected by one woman, who said, *"It's like we have to earn the right to be in those interviews in ways that men don't, it's just assumed that they can manage at scale in a different way."* One of the other significant reasons identified for this gender imbalance was that the boards of the larger charities might profess to want to change, but were often not altering their recruitment processes to facilitate that change. One leader pointed out: *"If your lens of success is a particular set of characteristics, you're always going to fish in the same pool. And then if you're always fishing in the same pool, you can't really be surprised that... the only people that bite are the same people that you've always had."*

One leader shared her frustration with the *"endless narrative that we've had about getting women in leadership or getting black people in... 'Well, we need to bring them in as trainees, and we'll train them up.' And I'm thinking... We exist fully ready to step into these jobs. And the issue is, you've got to get out of your job and give it to me."*

Additionally, many of the female leaders who were interviewed for this report were concerned that, in their experience, even if women were in senior positions in the smaller and medium-sized organisations, they weren't necessarily the positions making the most critical decisions.

"Women are in certain roles. You definitely see more women in HR. Fundraising teams are almost entirely female in fact, and men are often

³⁹ <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/third-of-ceos-at-largest-100-charities-are-women-research-shows.html#sthash.IJ5zY57I.dpuf> Accessed 1 June 2023

seen as a novelty at that level. But when you do have men in fundraising, they're usually at the top."

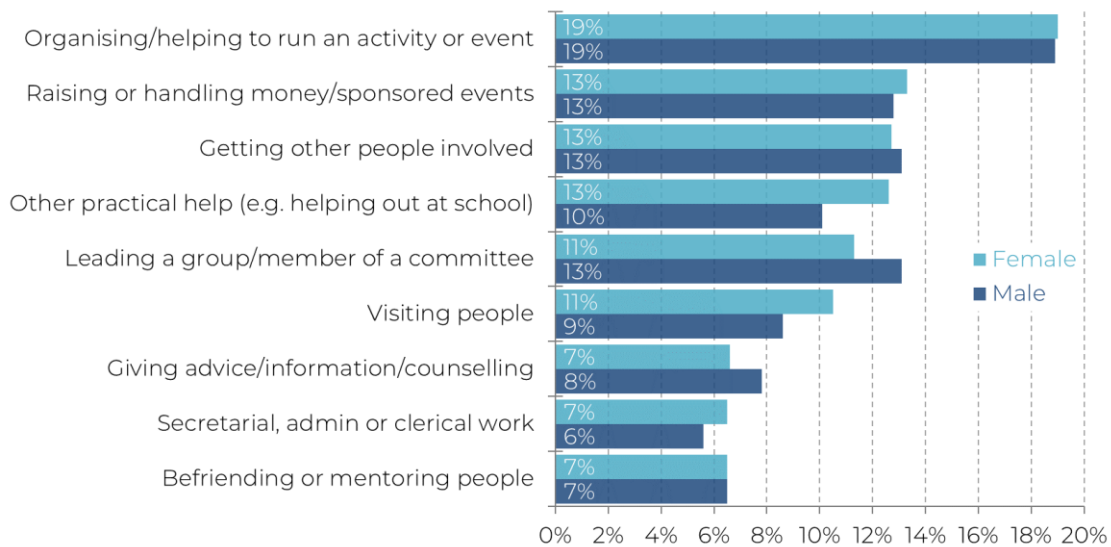
"It's not enough to say in your annual report, 'Oh 50% of our SLT... are female,' if their voices aren't carrying 50% of the weight, or if they're in roles such as say... Chief of Resourcing, or in roles that are not seen to be powerful. It's more likely that the Director of Strategy, the Director of Finance, the Director of Operations... are going to be the men. And fundraising, HR, communications, [which] are almost always perceived as soft skills, all fall to the women."

There is still some way to go before women are adequately represented on charity boards

These gendered imbalances in leadership also play out at different levels of volunteering. In most instances, the type of help given by men and women on a voluntary basis is generally similar. But as Figure 8 shows, men are notably more likely to lead a group, or be a member of a committee, while women are notably more likely to be giving practical help and fulfilling secretarial roles. This suggests that not only are these gendered power dynamics playing out in the largest charitable organisations, but within the smallest as well, creating an environment in which men are at the top of the most powerful organisations and influential in shaping the charity sector's pipeline of resource at the grassroots too.

Figure 8. Women are slightly more likely to 'do the doing', whereas men are slightly more likely to undertake leadership activities

Type of help given by formal volunteers, by sex



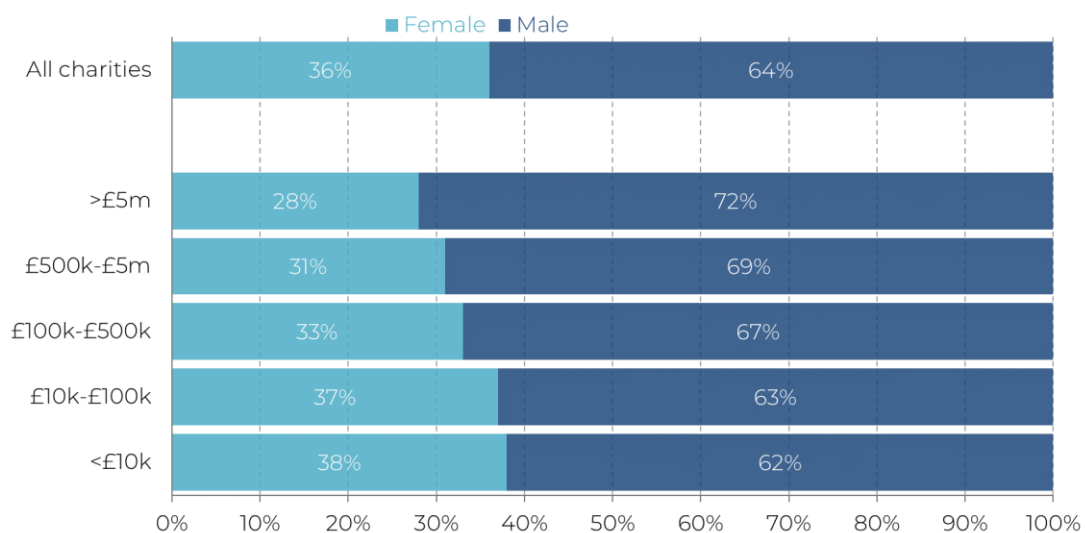
Source: PBE analysis of Community Life Survey 2021/22, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023.

One of the major ways that volunteers have influence over the direction of charities is through the trustees that make up boards. But in contrast to the ratio of male-to-female employees, men make up the majority of trustees. According to the most recent Charity Commission data on the gender of trustees, 36% of the 700,000 charity trustees in 2017 were women.⁴⁰ In other words, men outnumbered women by a ratio of 2:1.

Once again, this plays out far more dramatically in the make-up of large charities. As Figure 9 shows, among charities with annual income of more than £5 million, 72% of trustees are men, compared to the average of 64%.⁴¹ This reinforces the gender imbalance that already exists among the largest charities.

Figure 9. Across charities of all sizes, the majority of trustee positions are filled by men

Proportion of trustee roles filled by men and women, by organisation size



Source: PEB analysis of Taken on Trust: The awareness and effectiveness of charity trustees in England and Wales, Charity Commission for England and Wales, November 2017.

The gender imbalance only increases when the focus is on the most significant decision-making trustee roles. In 2017, only 29% of chairs and just 32% of treasurers were women. Therefore, not only are men disproportionately more likely to become trustees in the first place, but they also have a greater chance of taking a leadership role once on the board. These results again indicate a structural inequality between women

⁴⁰ [Taken on Trust: The awareness and effectiveness of charity trustees in England and Wales](#), Charity Commission, 2017

⁴¹ [Taken on Trust: The awareness and effectiveness of charity trustees in England and Wales](#), Charity Commission, 2017

and men in leadership roles, even to the point where a woman is less likely to chair a governance meeting than attend as a trustee.

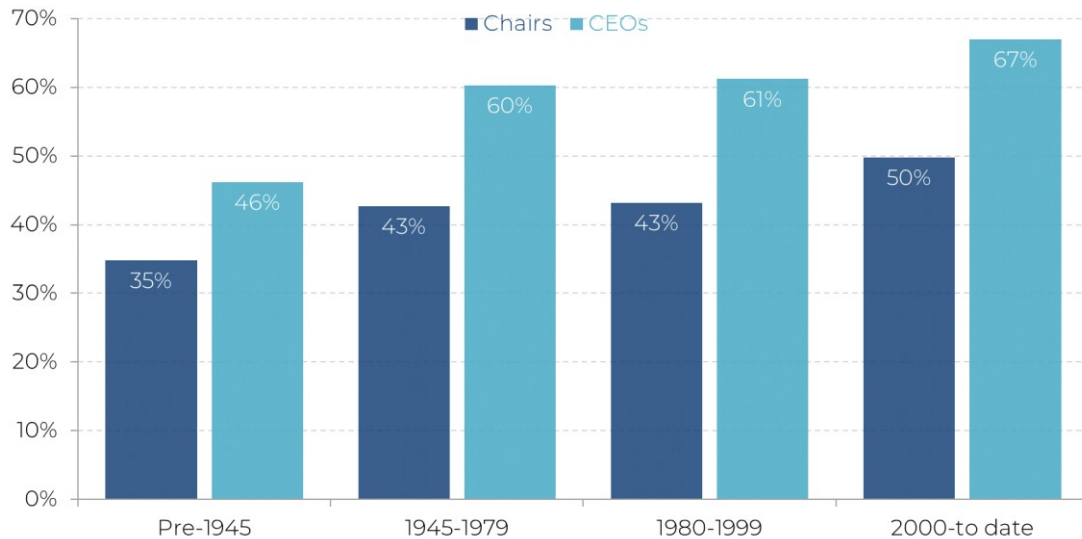
"I think what's really important is there are stats on paper and there are behaviors in real life. And, you know, I've witnessed boards that have diversity on paper, but there are certain voices which carry more weight and voices which are quiet - they're talked over and hushed. And I think it'd be bold to claim it, but I think there is definitely a line between whose views are noticed and listened to more carefully and [those who aren't]... You might have 50% women on paper, but it's not 50% of women making the decisions."

"Your numbers might show that you're hitting diversity stats, but actually where does the power lie and where does the privilege lie? Most charity chairs are male, and most boards have a white man called John on them. I think the joke is that there are more Marks and Johns than there are women. And it makes you laugh, but it's also a little bit of a tragic situation and reflection on things. It's still an old boys' club."

There are signs of the 'old boys club' in the kinds of charities in which men have the greatest dominance at a governance level. Men are significantly more likely to be trustees of older organisations, make up two-thirds (65%) of trustees of charities set up before 1945 and half (50%) of trustees of charities set up after 2000. There is also a 21ppts difference between the proportion of female CEOs of organisations set up post-2000 and the proportion at the top of organisations set up before 1945, as Figure 10 shows. It is likely that these older organisations represent more establishment, or 'traditional' charities, which have not modernised, and have even more concerning gender imbalances than average.

Figure 10. Older organisations are significantly less likely to have female chairs or CEOs than newer ones

Percentage of female chairs and chief officers by age of organisation, England and Wales 2022



Source: T Chapman, [Third Sector Trends in England and Wales 2022: employees, volunteers, diversity and investment in people](#), Community Foundation, December 2022.

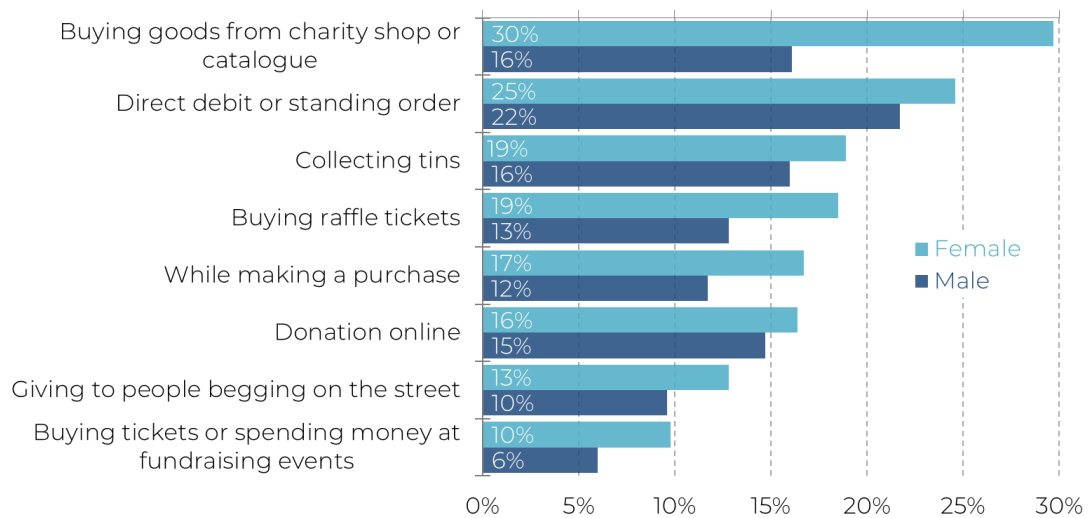
When it comes to major philanthropy, the gender imbalance is even sharper than it is at the big charities, or on boards

Just as women disproportionately give their time to, or work for, charity, women are also consistently more likely to give to charity. In 2022, 72% of women gave money to charitable causes in the previous four weeks, compared to 61% of men.⁴² As Figure 11 shows, women are more likely than men to be involved with charities in every way, from donating and fundraising, to buying from charities – women are twice as likely than men to have made a purchase in a charity shop, 6ppts more likely to have bought raffle tickets and 5ppts more likely to have donated while making a purchase that includes a charitable donation, or where you can add a charitable donation.

⁴² PBE analysis of Community Life Survey 2021/22, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023

Figure 11. Women are more likely to give to charity in every way

Type of giving to charity in the last four weeks, by sex



Source: PBE analysis of Community Life Survey 2021/22, Department of Culture, Media and Sport, February 2023.

These patterns play out at all levels of wealth. Like women with less money, wealthy women are more likely than wealthy men to have given to charity in a variety of ways. Indeed, as the cost of living crisis was at its most severe in the first quarter of 2023, 40% of female millionaires in the UK made a gift to charity of £10,000 or more, compared to 27% of male millionaires.⁴³

Wealthy women’s giving activity also often goes beyond the direct provision of money, as wealthy women tend to take a more active role in fundraising. Figure 12 shows how wealthy women are 7ppts more likely than wealthy men to have participated in, or organised, a fundraising event.

⁴³ <https://www.beaconcollaborative.org.uk/uk-millionaires-respond-to-cost-of-living-crisis/>, Accessed 13 September 2023

Figure 12. Wealthy women are more likely than men to be involved in fundraising activity

Ways engaged with charity, people with assets of £500,000+ by sex



Source: PBE analysis of Savanta Polling, detailed in C Dovey, [The Giving Experience: Overcoming the Barriers to Giving Among the Wealthy in the UK](#), March 2020.

Note: Sample of individuals in the UK with assets over £500,000, n=894 male, 410 female.

But despite this greater preponderance towards generosity among women, major philanthropy is dominated by men. Just seven women featured on The Sunday Times Giving List independently in 2022, compared to 69 men.⁴⁴ And wealthy women give less than their male counterparts - with wealthy men donating £46,400 on average in 2019, compared to women's average of £40,700.⁴⁵

This philanthropic gender divide stems from the overall wealth divide that exists in society: compared with men, there are fewer wealthy women who can make substantial gifts to charity, and many of them have less to give. On average, women are paid less, own fewer businesses, have smaller pensions, smaller savings pots, and have fewer investments than men.⁴⁶ When it comes to the wealthiest in society, the gender wealth divide is particularly stark – as just 10.8% of the global ultra-high-net-worth population (with net worth in excess of \$30 million) are women.⁴⁷ That means that the pipeline of funds with the potential to come from wealthy women to the charity sector is much smaller.

⁴⁴ <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/chris-hohn-rishi-sunak-uk-hedge-funder-sunday-times-rich-list-m8khbl5sn>, accessed 1 September 2023

⁴⁵ PBE analysis of Savanta Polling, detailed in C Dovey, [The Giving Experience: Overcoming the Barriers to Giving Among the Wealthy in the UK](#), March 2020

⁴⁶ R Palmer, [Wealth, tax and gender](#), TaxJustice.UK, January 2020

⁴⁷ [World Ultra Wealth Report 2022](#), Altrata, November 2022

There are consequences for a charity sector in which decision-making is dominated by men

With men holding the philanthropic purse strings of the charity sector, residing in the positions of greatest seniority on charity boards, sat in the majority of CEO positions at the largest charities, and perceived to often hold the majority of decision-making power at senior leadership level, it is important to examine the consequences of this.

Misogyny, sexism and the consequences of a patriarchal society are alive and well in the charity sector

The majority of women leaders interviewed for this report felt keenly that the charity sector has a gender problem. Some of this stemmed from the structural imbalances noted above, and some from the broader societal challenges which exist – but both fed each other.

Many of them had personal stories of the casual sexism they had experienced during their careers in the charity sector. That included stories of how their appearance drew comments that men's appearances didn't; being assumed to be the note-taker in the room because they were the only woman; feeling as if they have to shout to be heard equally in board meetings; having men unconsciously claim their ideas and receive the credit; having their ambition seen as a negative trait; being mocked for demonstrating emotion and much more. Essentially, *"dealing with a lot of crap"*, as one leader put it.

"Without a shadow of a doubt... across the course of my career, I have been underestimated... I can definitely say, looking back, that I've had to work harder to get to where I am. There are various [times] when I've been in a room and I have thought, "Okay, if I was a man, that wouldn't have happened, or you wouldn't have said that."

Some of the female leaders spoken to for this report also shared their experiences of more serious sexual harassment at fundraising events and in the workplace. These individuals were particularly keen to emphasise that the impression that the charity sector is very female-friendly - because of the significant number of women employed within it - should not allow for complacency about gender in the sector.

It is also important to emphasise how sexism interacts with other forms of prejudice within society and within the sector. The LGBT+ women, women of colour, and women with disabilities interviewed for this report all spoke of feeling forms of isolation, from being *"the only brown face in a room of*

several hundred charity leaders” to “feeling the responsibility of speaking up for the entire LGBT community, and on trans issues in particular, because I’m the only gay member of the board”. A number also spoke about how often diversity and inclusion felt like tokenism in their experience: that they were *“rarely the token woman in the room, but often the token black woman,”* despite assurances from charitable organisations that this was not the case.

“One philanthropist sort of wanted me to be their new best friend, so I was going to be the black person at their dinner parties. Anyway, I did manage to keep the money and not become... a pet, a social pet.”

Younger women interviewed for this report also shared their experiences of how age and gender interact. They appreciated the meritocracy the charity sector enabled by providing them with opportunities to take up leadership roles as CEOs, chairs, or directors, at a younger age than they would have been able to in the private or public sectors. Those who had positive experiences were also very aware of the benefits that were brought to the organisation through the representation of different generations. Nevertheless, they were conscious of how they presented to funders, boards, colleagues and other external organisations as a result of both their age and gender.

“I think part of this is due to internalised misogyny and internalised ableism on my part, as well as the structures outside of my control... But because of my health, I’m quite petite... I often get mistaken for being in my 20s. And I think I’m probably fairly young to be in a role like this. And because of my health condition, I’m acutely aware I have this stupid, squeaky voice... So I can present as younger ... And I think that combined with presenting my gender as female, [I often think in] my head when I walk into a room... ‘Oh, god, what are they going to [think]? Are they going to think I’m going to make the coffee or whatever?’ And part of that is genuinely [because] I have been mistaken for being much younger than I am, and I have been not taken seriously over a lot of things.”

A lack of confidence was particularly keenly felt among younger and more diverse female leaders, but it was pervasive across the female leaders interviewed for this report. Many spoke of struggling to find their voices as authentic leaders. Notably, this included women who led organisations with a stated purpose to boost confidence in young women. This gendered confidence gap is well-documented and exists across society,⁴⁸ with evidence suggesting that it starts at a very early age. For example, only 9% of girls and young women think that the word ‘brave’ relates mostly to

⁴⁸ D Bibeault, [Gender Bias in Self Perceived Confidence and Competence, Trinity College](#), Spring 2019

girls,⁴⁹ and teenage girls rank an average of 13.8 out of 20 for self-esteem, compared to teenage boys, who rank an average of 15.1 out of 20.⁵⁰ That it is still felt and experienced by very successful female leaders in the charity sector should be a cause for concern.

“Believing in myself and believing that what I said mattered and was important has always been difficult to accept and therefore articulate.”

“It's very difficult when you're a brown face and you're a woman. I have many a time been in an environment where I won't say anything. Because sometimes it can feel like everybody else in the room knows everybody and everything.”

“Women always say to me, ‘I'd like to move on, it's time I stepped away, but I don't know what I'd do, I don't know if anybody will want me, I don't know if I'm good enough, I don't feel like I'm good enough.’

“I'm only now at the stage where I'm just starting to recognise that people are looking at me and listening to me, and I'm in a powerful position and what I say matters and that's a real shock to me.”

The charity sector is missing out by failing to make the most out of the strengths of women's leadership

The gender imbalances that exist at the top of the charity sector means that women's leadership remains underutilised. This was a source of significant frustration for the women who were interviewed for this report.

“Who in their right minds would look at 50% of their workforce and say, ‘Yeah, we're not going to get the best out of them? We'll make do with two-thirds of what they're capable of, because we've got the other 50%.’ By the law of averages, half of both of those groups are going to be not as brilliant as the other half. So, ‘We'll cope with the half that's not so good on the male side, because they're easy to look after.’ It just doesn't make sense, does it?”

The influence of patriarchy on the concept of leadership – what a leader looks like and how they behave – creates a complex web of stereotypes and expectations. Many of the women interviewed for this report - both those new and those well-established in their careers - reported that they had battled negative perceptions, for instance when displaying assertiveness, or around the perceived ‘bitchiness’ of female-dominated workforces.

⁴⁹ [Girls' Attitudes Survey 2021](#), Girlguiding, September 2021

⁵⁰ <https://uomseed.com/beewell-neighborhoods/2022/measures/> accessed 30 October 2023

Many of the older women interviewed reported that they had to break free from the mould of 'iron woman' leadership, perpetuated by a society that values traditionally masculine traits in leadership. Women who were among the first to shatter glass ceilings and get to the top of organisations were often felt to have been "hard", "loud", and "ruthless" – demonstrating a leadership style which few of the women interviewed felt that they aspired to. Yet these were the models of female leadership that they had. Several of the female leaders interviewed recounted how emulating this style of leadership is unsustainable, and often resulted in feelings of inadequacy and burnout. They grappled with self-doubt and the feeling that they didn't truly belong in their positions of leadership. Preconceived notions of leadership cast a pernicious shadow over the women, chipping away at their sense of self-worth. One woman spoke candidly about the profound toll this pressure to conform took on her.

"I had a breakdown... And I'm not saying it's all to do with this, but a lot of it was to do with facing into failure and feeling like things had not played out as I had planned. And the difficulty and challenge I was experiencing with my board. There was a sense in my mind that I had to be the hero and put right what had gone wrong. And therefore I was working 16-hour, 20-hour days for a very long period of time, and I broke myself and I felt shame I could not tell people that I wasn't working. I wasn't succeeding. It felt really, really difficult to say I was not surviving, I was struggling. And I was thinking [that] I couldn't say that. And I think a lot of the roots of me not being able to say 'help' was because I thought I would be penalised for it. I was really worried that that would be used against me."

Now in positions where they are thriving, many emphasised that they had worked hard to find their own authentic style of leadership, often in defiance of the managers who had taught them more about what leadership should not look like, than what it should look like. There was a consensus among most of the leaders that women have the potential to bring a different lens to their roles, one that is empathetic and understanding of psychological safety and their teams' and colleagues' strengths and needs. There was a sense that many female leaders were better at creating spaces where dialogue and discussion can thrive. One woman reflected on how her experience as a mother fostered her view on leadership, and how she viewed life through a "*much more empathetic lens*" after that event.

There was also a strong sense that women often ended up in leadership positions almost by accident. They described their career paths as "*meandering*", "*unpredictable*", "*unusual*", and "*still surprising me.*" It was

felt that this was very different from men, where leadership positions could feel like more of a right.

"I think a lot of women tend to end up in leadership roles by accident. Right place, right time, and nobody else is going to do it - that is often the way... So many of them have found themselves in that position, not necessarily unwillingly, but quite often not entirely willingly either. It's a sense of 'nobody else is going to step up. I don't want to let these things fail. I will then carry all of that burden.' Again, it's very different to: 'Actually, the job I really want is that one over there. And I'm going to go get it,' which is the conversation I have with so many of our more senior men. It's like the world is literally their oyster and they are making the choices about which role they want to go for next. And very occasionally, they get the slight shock factor if they don't get it, but that doesn't seem to happen very often. Whereas I never hear that sort of assumption from women."

The charity sector is missing out by failing to embrace diverse approaches to leadership at its very top. A broad spectrum of leaders, each with their unique perspectives and strengths, would enrich the decision-making landscape, bringing more innovative solutions to the table. As one woman said, *"If the pyramid gets narrower as you get to the top, you have fewer and fewer different perspectives around that decision-making table."*

Different giving behaviour by men and women may shape the sector

Philanthropists can exert a lot of power over the charities that they fund. While philanthropic capital can provide charities with essential freedoms and the ability to innovate, there are inevitable power imbalances between charities and their funders. By providing restricted funds, major philanthropists can have a lot of say about how money can be spent, what projects can proceed, and what timelines charities must act to, for example. Importantly, the levels of funding that they are willing to provide can have a major influence over how much a charity's work is valued.

There is an extensive literature about power dynamics in philanthropy⁵¹ and the paternalistic nature of philanthropy – with some donors seeking with all good intention to improve the welfare of recipients, but doing so at the expense of the recipients' liberty and personal preferences.⁵² One leader summarised her experience of it in the context of moving from the private sector to the charity sector:

⁵¹ F Asif et al, [A rebalancing act: How funders can address power dynamics](#), NPC, March 2020

⁵² L Gangadharan, PJ Grossman & K Jones, [Donor Types and Paternalism](#), Monash Business School, June 2015

“The [power dynamic] is the thing that I found the hardest to get my head around in the charity sector... it's just not a straightforward relationship. In business, you sell a good, or a service, or product, to someone who gives you money in exchange. It's a really simple direct relationship. Whereas in the charity world, it's just not like that. You have your beneficiaries or service users, or whoever your charity is supporting. And then you have a whole different set of people who are giving you money. And I find that a really difficult dynamic, really difficult.”

“There's plenty of people who are well-intentioned and handle it well. And there's other people who are equally well-intentioned, but handle it badly... It's not that they're bad people, but they're not necessarily aware of the power that they have or how [what they say] gets interpreted by a charity.... They might have an idea which is actually totally inappropriate, but the charity feels that they... have to give it a go or pay lip service to it.”

It is important that the gendered element of these power dynamics is examined. As one leader stated:

“If you think about the balance of power that goes on around fundraising, the idea that you have... sources of funding [which] tend to be much more male-dominated. And then who's doing the asking for that money? More women. Yeah, I think there's... a dynamic there, which isn't ideal.”

Many female leaders interviewed for this report were clear that philanthropists of any gender could exert power inappropriately over charities, and cautious about making too many generalisations. Nevertheless, there was a sense that wealthy men and women can tend to direct their giving in different ways. For example, one leader stated:

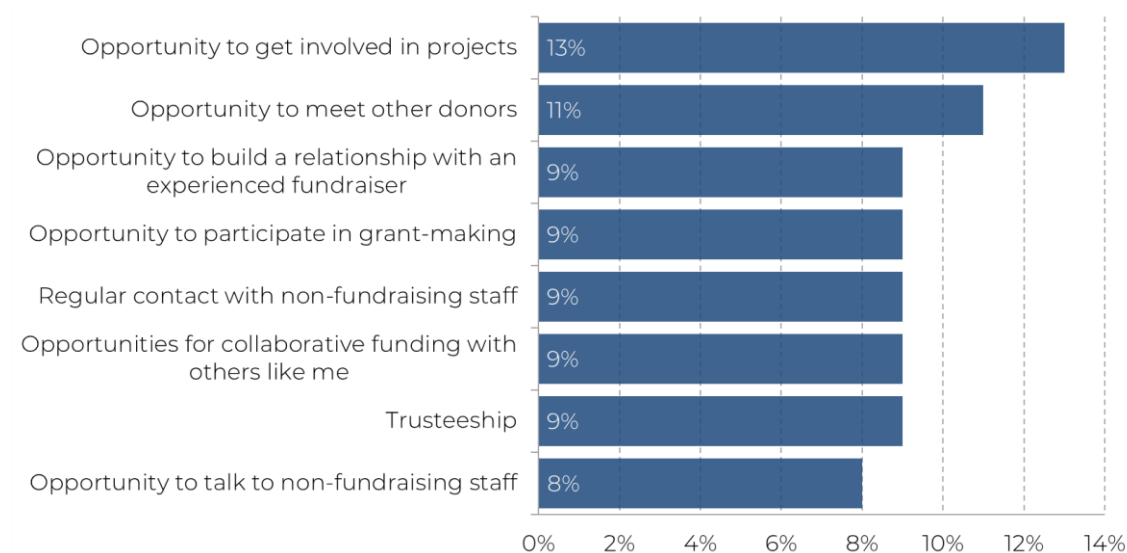
“Most of the women that I've met that are philanthropists... often aren't just giving money, they're also giving of their time. And they're really trying to address the barriers that they personally themselves experienced.”

“Now, I'm going to play to the worst excesses of the male version that I've experienced. And I hasten to add, this is not all the men that I've seen that are philanthropists. But the worst excesses are tax efficiency, and ego. So, ‘I want something named in my name.’ And an extension of ego, a big dose of ‘look at how nice and good I am.’ I have also come across male philanthropists who are totally and utterly driven by purpose and intent. And many of them have still wanted to dictate how that money is spent. They've got a very clear view of what would make a good use of that money. And from what I've personally experienced, they are much more directive in how their gifts are used.”

Despite the caution, the data does indeed bear out some notable differences in how men and women tend to give. Wealthy men and women both state that information about an organisation's work, evidence of strong financial management and governance, understanding impact, financial stability, and evidence of innovation, are more likely to encourage them to give to a certain organisation. But, as Figure 13 shows, women are more likely to donate to an organisation if they have the opportunity to get involved, meet others, develop relationships and collaborate. These are all acts which are likely to lead female donors to possess a greater understanding of the organisations and the causes they are giving to, and so have the potential to be better givers on average.

Figure 13. There are some differences in what motivates wealthy men and women to donate

Differences in women's likelihood to be motivated to donate to an organisation, compared with men



Source: PBE analysis of Savanta Polling, detailed in C Dovey, [The Giving Experience: Overcoming the Barriers to Giving Among the Wealthy in the UK](#), March 2020.

Note: Sample is construed of individuals in the UK with assets over £500,000, n=894 male, 410 female.

The gender divide in wealth and therefore in major individual philanthropy may mean that charities are missing out on these involved givers. It might also be influencing the shape of the charity sector in some ways, as women and men have a tendency to give to slightly different causes. In particular, wealthy men are 10ppts less likely than women to have donated to international aid or animal welfare organisations, and 9ppts less likely to have donated to national poverty relief and homelessness efforts. Critically, they are also 11ppts less likely than women to give to women's and girls' organisations. It was also strongly felt by the female leaders interviewed for

this report that male-dominated philanthropy had consequences for the gender-specific services provided to women. As two leaders stated:

"The purse strings are still held by white men predominantly. So there is never enough money for the women's sector. It doesn't matter whether it's for Asian women or black women or just generally, in terms of women services: women still continue to be abused."

"I think they are so underfunded and underappreciated that I'm amazed they manage to achieve what they achieve with the support and funding that they have..."

The resources that women's and girls' charities have do not meet the scale of the need that women have of them. Many of the charity leaders specialising in women's and girls' issues described their organisations as operating on a knife edge, systemically underfunded and undervalued.

"Women's and girls' charities have had to be resilient, and they've had to fight really hard to get whatever they have been given. They're not given things. We have to fight for them. And I think that if you look at the outcomes that organisations have, they're brilliant. People's lives have been saved. Generally, they work really hard with very little resources, very little time to get people into much better positions, and [they] continue to fight and challenge in spite of everything that really stands against them."

"It's a sector that's led by and for women. However, I'm going to say this, because I firmly believe that women - it doesn't matter who we are, whether we are right at the top of our game, and that can be cabinet ministers - above them is still a male prime minister most of the time, and we are still being abused. And we are being abused financially as organisations, because there is not enough money. So that still trickles down. That's certainly the way I see it."

This perception plays out in the numbers. In 2021, £4.1 billion was awarded in grants to the charity sector, yet just 1.8% of these funds found their way to organisations focusing on women and girls, and one-third of all grants designated for women's and girls' activities went to organisations with no specific focus on women and girls.⁵³ One of the potential counterbalances to the gender divide in major philanthropy is the existence of institutional trusts and foundations, which have the ability to appoint trustees and hire grant managers from diverse backgrounds – but these numbers would suggest that such abilities are not yet feeding through to balance in funds.

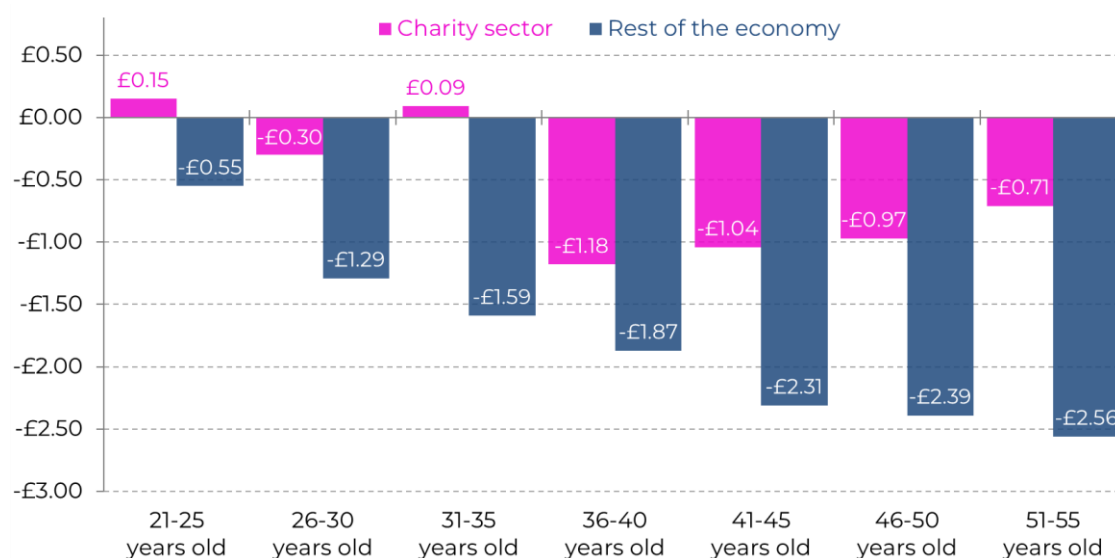
⁵³ [Mapping the UK Women and Girls Sector and its Funding: Where does the Money Go?](#) Rosa, May 2023

Women workers in the charity sector experience a gender pay gap, and fewer benefits than if they worked in other sectors

Compared to the rest of the economy, the charity sectors pays women more fairly in relation to their male counterparts, but there is still a gender pay gap. On average, women in the charity sector are paid 4.1% less per hour than men in the sector after controlling for personal, job, occupational, and sector characteristics. The gender pay gap in the rest of the economy is estimated to be 12%.⁵⁴

Figure 14. Women in the charity sector tend to earn less than men, but the gender pay gap is smaller than in the rest of the economy

Difference between women's average hourly wage and men's average hourly wage at different age bandings, by sector



Note: This graph provides the estimates for the average hourly wage by sector and sex if all other characteristics controlled for were the same (all else being equal). We control for personal characteristics, job characteristics and occupational and sector characteristics.

Source: J O'Halloran, *The price of purpose? Pay gaps in the charity sector*, Pro Bono Economics, August 2022.

There is a significant literature which examines the causes behind the gender pay gap. In addition to the factors of hours worked and occupation which this analysis controls for, there is the 'wage penalty' women experience for child rearing, the burden of housework which falls predominately on women, and the impact of caring.⁵⁵ It is particularly notable in the charity sector how small the gender pay gap is before the age of 35 and how it then takes a major jump at the peak of the years women tend to spend raising children - and lasts for decades after, as Figure 14 shows.

⁵⁴ J O'Halloran, [The price of purpose? Pay gaps in the charity sector](#), Pro Bono Economics, August 2022

⁵⁵ M Brynin, [The gender pay gap](#), Equality and Human Rights Commission, August 2017

There are also links to the confidence gap, noted above, as men are 50% more likely to ask for a pay rise and to receive one as a result of asking.⁵⁶

“There's so many layers in terms of gender stereotypes, in terms of confidence, with typically men seeming to be more confident in just asking and negotiating better pay, and that actually has an impact as well. So whereas women perhaps tend to accept a pay offer that's made on the hopes that it's fair, whereas oftentimes, they are making you an offer with the expectation that you will negotiate and go higher. That's actually an unfair frame anyway and it ends up being who shouts loudest gets paid more.”

The female leaders interviewed for this report were keen to see more ‘calling out’ of this issue in the charity sector, and a greater appreciation that the gendered expectations of caring responsibilities affect women in the charity sector just as much as they do women in other sectors.

“And I think there needs to be more of a calling out... That yes, there is a pay gap. And I think that it's historic. It's come from many years of women not being seen to be equal to men in terms of leadership roles.”

“Even when it comes to salary conversations, the expectation is because you're a woman, you might accept a lower offer, and things like that, in terms of promotions and progression.”

“Particularly for the women who are in that sandwich generation now, as I was 10 years ago... It was when my kids were teenagers that I really needed to take the time out, and you've got elderly parents, and you're completely squished in the middle. And you're just at that point in your career when you really should be making the progress. And you don't and you can't. And I genuinely can't think of a male colleague I've known who's been in that position, and I could run you off a dozen women's names right now that are. And obviously that goes way beyond our sector. We're just missing out - we're losing so much on that basis.”

This gender pay gap must also be set against the lower levels of pay that employees in the charity sector receive compared to their counterparts in the rest of the economy. On average, female charity sector workers are paid 4.7% less than they could be earning in the rest of the economy.⁵⁷

This gap is at its widest in middle age. At 21 to 25-years-old, on average, women working in the charity sector have almost no difference in their

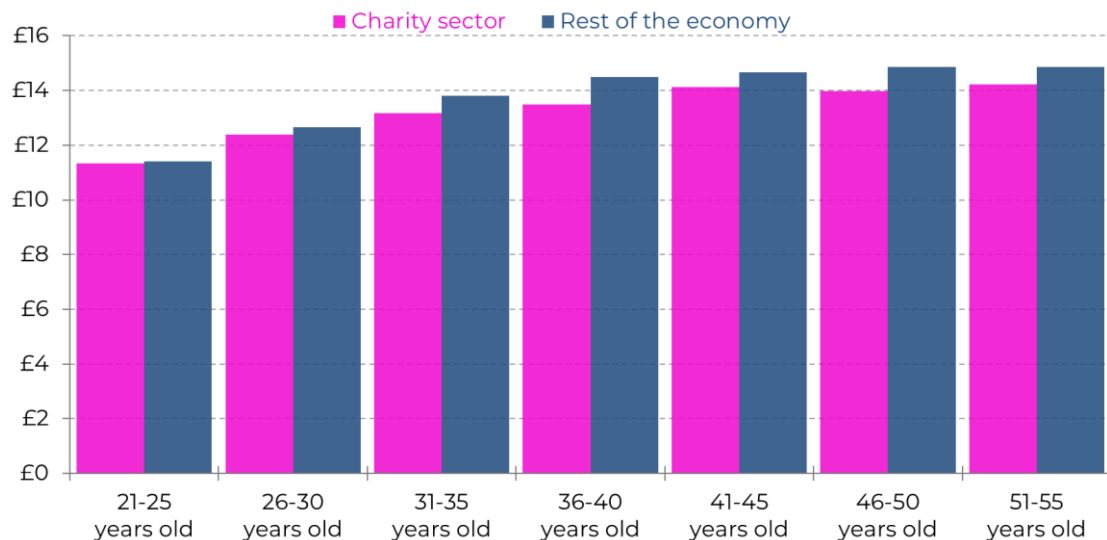
⁵⁶ YouGov, [Survey results – pay rises](#), February 2022

⁵⁷ J O'Halloran, The price of purpose? Pay gaps in the charity sector, Pro Bono Economics, August 2022

levels of pay compared to the rest of the economy. However, as Figure 15 shows, the gap grows to around 7% by the time women hit their late 30s.

Figure 15. On average women earn less in the charity sector than in the rest of the economy

Women's average hourly wage at different age bandings, by sector



Note: This graph provides the estimates for the hourly wage by sex and sector if all other characteristics controlled for were the same (all else being equal). It controls for personal characteristics, job characteristics and occupational and sector characteristics.

Source: J O'Halloran, The price of purpose? Pay gaps in the charity sector, Pro Bono Economics, August 2022.

It is important to consider the pay cut which most people take to work in the charity sector, and how that shapes the diversity of employees more broadly, by creating barriers to people from ethnic minority backgrounds and people from lower income backgrounds in particular.

“We did start off as an organisation where there were lots of women working there part-time, but they could only afford to do that job because they were married to someone who was in a very well-paid job. And that doesn't feel like a kind of particularly sustainable dynamic.”

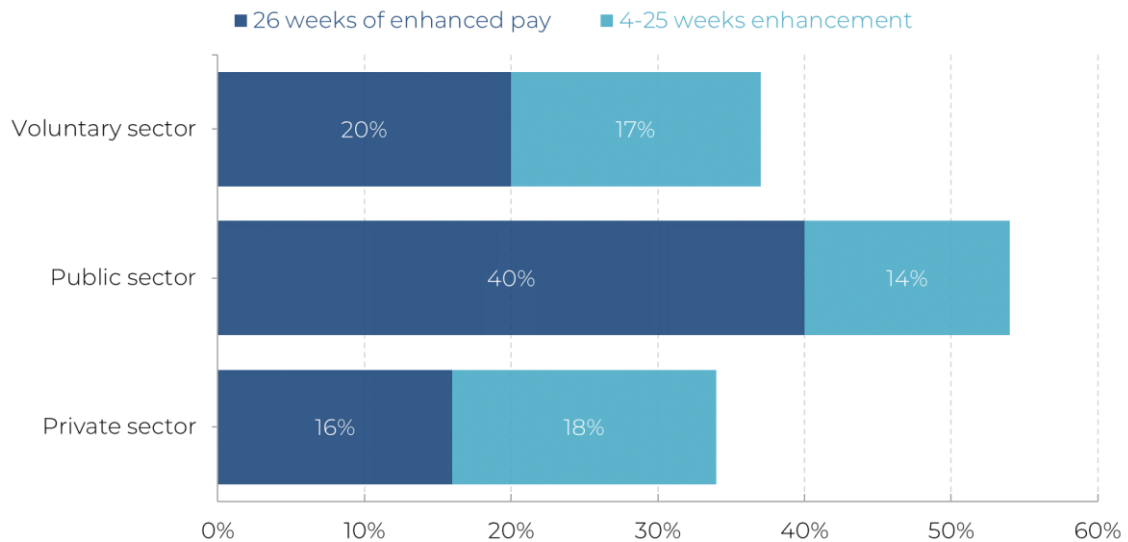
And it is also important to consider how male-dominated boards and male-dominated philanthropy might be shaping pay and benefit levels in the charity sector. Men are twice as likely than women to believe that their workforce has salary equality.⁵⁸ If this complacency exists among the men making up the majority of boards – who make remuneration decisions – and among the men making funding decisions – which often fail to account for salaries and other core costs – then it is likely to be a factor in both the existence of the gender pay gap in the charity sector and the

⁵⁸ [Workplace Gender Equality survey](#), Morgan McKinley, March 2020

phenomenon of the female-majority workforce receiving suppressed levels of pay.

Figure 16. Voluntary sector maternity benefits are better than the private sector's but substantially behind the public sector's

Maternity pay policies in organisations by sector (%), UK



Note: n = 2,000 senior decision makers in the UK, surveyed online by YouGov in June and July 2022.

Source: [Employer focus on working parents: Parental leave and pay and childcare policies](#), CIPD, August 2022.

It should also be considered whether such dynamics have an impact on family benefits within the charity sector, which lag substantially behind the public sector's benefits. As Figure 16 shows, voluntary sector organisations are less likely to offer substantially enhanced maternity pay – indeed 29% of voluntary organisations only offer their employees the statutory minimum requirement for maternity leave, compared with 13% of public sector organisations and 38% of private sector organisations. Additionally, more than a third (35%) of voluntary organisations offer paternity pay at the statutory minimum level, similar to the 40% of private sector organisations. This compares to a quarter (24%) of public sector organisations.

This stands in contrast to the benefits of flexibility which are offered to employees with caring responsibilities examined above – something which charity leaders need less approval from above to offer, and so may not be subject to the same male-dominated scrutiny.

The charity sector is a positive place for women, but needs further improvement

Despite some of the negative consequences which might stem from male dominance in the sector's decision-making structures and the impact of a patriarchal society on the sector, the women interviewed for this report were keen to emphasise that the charity sector is a good place to work.

"I do think it's a good place for women to work. I think there are opportunities to go right to the top of your game and find a place to work that gives you the opportunity to grow as an individual and to lead a team and lead a team in a way that sits with your own values as well."

Many felt that the sector was welcoming of their "meandering" or "different" career paths, which often resulted from changing priorities as a result of family needs. Many felt that they had been offered opportunities that might have been held further out of reach had they been in another sector. And many, particularly in the women's and girl's sector, appreciated the sense of solidarity and support which could be nurtured in organisations that are run by women for women – something which was felt to be particularly special to them.

Indeed, it is possible that the charity sector is incrementally becoming a better place for women to work in. Since the Charity Commission's 2017 survey on trustee demographics, there has been a concerted push to improve diversity on charity boards. There is some evidence that this has been paying off, with suggestions that the percentage of female chairs in the north of England increased 3ppts between 2019 and 2022, with similar increases in the representation of chairs with disabilities and chairs from ethnic minority backgrounds.⁵⁹ Even as this report has been in development, several of the largest charities have announced new female CEOs.

These changes were very visible to the women who were interviewed for this report.

"We're becoming more aware now of the need to have diverse voices around the table. We need organisations to represent the communities they serve. Lord knows the vast majority of the charity workforce is women. So to have a really unbalanced leadership structure, where your board and your senior leadership is male, and then there's lots of women

⁵⁹ T Chapman, [Third Sector Trends in England and Wales 2022: employees, volunteers, diversity and investment in people](#), Community Foundation, December 2022

working in more junior roles, I think charities now recognise that that is not a good look, and probably demonstrates a way of working that doesn't do anything for them reputation-wise and doesn't attract more people to the organisation. And obviously, they end up defending it all the time and that doesn't help them to run their organisation well."

"Things really are changing. When I started out, women would often be embarrassed [to take time out to attend a child's sports day]. And she probably wouldn't take the time off and it would be her parents, or her neighbours, or her sister, that went to the sports day. So she'd miss it. And I definitely took turns with my husband when my kids were small; we couldn't both be there. And I didn't feel like I had permission to. I was thinking about that just yesterday, about how... somebody wanted to come in on a KIT day for training and bring their newborn baby and breastfeed at the day. We never would have even had a conversation about that when I had little ones."

"There is that slight shift from having women not be almost disadvantaged because of flexible working, to that being much more the norm. And men as well standing up and being allies in that space. And encouraging it and understanding what it means. We're not there yet. I don't think it's moved far enough. But hopefully, it is moving in the right direction."

The changing nature of wealth is also likely to bring about a change in philanthropy in the decades ahead, as women are set to inherit significant wealth in the 'great wealth transfer'. Some estimates go as far as to say that as much as 60% of wealth in the UK will be in the hands of women by 2025.⁶⁰ This is likely to create a significant opportunity for charities seeking to diversify their base of philanthropists, and a better gender balance among major philanthropists may also be beneficial for the sector in the long-term.

These changes to the sources of philanthropic funds also coincide with the changing approach to philanthropy, and efforts to democratise philanthropy more effectively. The rise of participatory grant-making, the increased scrutiny grant-makers are under with regard to racial justice, the willingness of some funders to confront the sources of their wealth, and the growth of tax justice movements, like Patriotic Millionaires, are all relatively recent trends which may act to counterbalance some of the unhealthy power dynamics that exist in philanthropy.⁶¹ Through transparency,

⁶⁰ <https://cebr.com/reports/financial-times-neglected-heirs-widows-who-take-over-the-family-finances/>, accessed 30 October 2023

⁶¹ R Davies, [Better Giving](#), Law Family Commission on Civil Society, December 2021

organisations like 360Giving are allowing greater scrutiny of where money is – and is not going. Networks like Impact 100 London are creating the infrastructure for giving, information-sharing and activation of female donors. And ongoing campaigns to encourage funders to provide sufficient core funding continue to work to increase the likelihood of fair pay and benefits that make workplaces more attractive for women.

Together, these changes to governance, funding and leadership could make the charity sector an even better place for women to work in, to volunteer with, and to access the services and communities that charities create.

Improving the gender balance in the charity sector's decision-making is part of building a more inclusive and equitable society

The gradual gender rebalancing act underway in the charity sector across trustees, CEOs and philanthropists is positive. But as the charity sector still has room for improvement, those imperfections must be highlighted so that they are dealt with. The majority of women interviewed for this report felt strongly that the job of gender equality in the charity sector was *“not yet done”*, though it was often treated that way. As one sector leader said:

“Looking at the various diversity threads, there's a bit of a gap around the gender one, and I think it's like, ‘Yeah, that's done. That's old hat...’ I think other things have risen up in terms of visibility, and they needed to, but it's never going to be an either or. I think I'm starting to see more... of an understanding and the language being used around intersectionality. We know that nobody is just the one thing. But I think the systemic challenges that we have in the sector around gender are still utterly prevalent.”

For a number of women interviewed for this report, there was an interaction between the charity sector's role in fighting for a better, fairer society and the need for the charity sector itself to be fairer. There was a clear perception that a more equitable charity sector which better represented the people that it serves – at all levels – would be better able to build a more equitable society. But the charity sector also exists within an inequitable system. As one sector leader explained it: *“We're still fighting a structure that is born of a patriarchal white privilege society.”* More simply, people interacting with the charity sector as workers or volunteers, as CEOs or chairs, do so burdened with the hang-ups, stereotypes, prejudices and behaviours that they have developed outside it – for better and for worse.

“I think we have to collectively challenge not just the overt misogyny, and the structures that enable men to carry on operating in a sort of toxic masculinity space. But we also have to deal with the things that are more

subtle. So how are we raising our boys? How are we challenging some of the shaming that happens to women? Too fat, too thin, too ugly... All of these things are expressions of a toxic patriarchal society where we tell girls that they've got to play with dolls and wear pink and be pretty and be quiet. Until we start at a societal level, leaning into and challenging those things much more robustly, and it not being weaponised and expressed as men-hating... How are we going to get this nailed as a sector?"

To tackle the source of this imbalance, increased funding for the women's and girls' sector is essential. The need for the services of women's and girls' charities is evidently higher than the provision these organisations have the resources to offer.

But there are also steps that leaders in the charity sector itself can take to tackle the gender imbalances which exist. There are already initiatives which exist within the sector to provide support specifically to women, but they are not always known and some women interviewed for the report felt that they were not *"involved enough in 'the sector'"*, or were too far outside the group of *"usual suspects"* to be aware of them, or comfortable accessing them. Infrastructure organisations and networks could therefore be more proactive in reaching out to organisations which are unaware of their offering.

Boards have a major role to play in continuing to make progress on recruiting trustees from more diverse backgrounds, but also to ensure that all trustees feel included, able to contribute and are listened to equally. They also have a role in better supporting their female leaders in their own development and in managing the caring pressures that often disproportionately fall on women. When the women interviewed for this report had good, supportive boards – and chairs in particular - they were effusive about them. They called them *"inspirational"*, *"lifesavers"* and *"unbelievably impressive."* But when they had boards which were less supportive than others, the women often described their role as *"lonely"*.

Boards could be offering more encouragement to the female leaders in their organisations to make time and resources available for their own development as leaders. Not only would that strengthen the individual and the organisation, but it is often felt that more visible women leaders encourage more women leaders. Several women mentioned that they did not think that they would be able to access other professional networks or training courses which their counterparts in social enterprises, or the private sector, would be able to access, because their pay was comparably lower and they did not feel able to justify the costs from within the

organisation, even though it would enable them to lead better and likely introduce them to philanthropists.

Boards could also be more proactive in raising issues that affect women at meetings. This could include reviewing benefits, leave arrangements, flexible working and policies to ensure that they are family-friendly, supportive of caring responsibilities, and competitive in the tight labour market that the sector operates in. It could also include reflections on how board meetings are run, to ensure the full diversity of opinions are heard. Several of the women interviewed for this report were keen to see boards challenging their own preconceptions about whether their organisations really were reaching expectations and creating environments which were conducive for women to excel – or confront where perhaps they might have been complacent. Even by raising the issue on their agendas, boards may realise that a conversation on gender balance is very much overdue.

The sector is also in an interesting position in currently having a Minister for Civil Society who is also Minister for Equalities. This may create an opportunity to open up discussions with government about how they can do more to encourage commissioners to pay fairly – a major issue in the sector at present⁶² - and to encourage more funders to provide core funding, in order to ensure that the pay and benefits gaps do not widen any further for this female-majority workforce.

None of these are solutions for the entire problem of mismatched gender imbalances at different levels of power in the charity sector. But with this report, PBE hopes to begin a conversation about what the manifold solutions might be and to nudge forwards progress for women working and volunteering in the sector, and for the women who rely upon it.

⁶² <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/charities-handing-back-completely-unsustainable-public-contracts-says-ncvo-chief.html> accessed 30 October 2023

Conclusion

The charity sector plays an essential role in the lives of women at all stages of their lives, in providing services, community and advocacy, and as a source of employment and opportunity. In numerous ways, the sector is a brilliant place for women to thrive, to rise through the ranks, to balance work and the responsibilities in their lives, and to make a positive difference in the world. And in every part of the sector, there are passionate, successful women leading, funding and governing charities.

But there is an often-undiscussed gender imbalance that exists in the charity sector, where many of the decisions are made by male funders, male trustees, male chairs, and male CEOs of the largest charities. In these areas, men are in the majority and operating in a position of power over service users which may be majority-female, a workforce that is majority-female, and a volunteer base which is approximately gender-balanced. While there has been some improvement in this gender imbalance over the last half-decade, it has not been fast enough.

The charity sector itself, funders, boards of trustees, and perhaps even government, have a role to play in driving greater gender balance in the charity sector. Efforts to achieve this should sit alongside an acceleration of serious, dedicated work to increase diversity and inclusion and representation of service users overall.

Rebalancing the levels of male-dominated decision-making in the charity sector is important in itself: for fairness and for equity for the women involved as employees and volunteers in the sector. But it is also important to build a fairer, more equitable and more effective sector for the women who charities serve; a sector which is then better placed to build a growing economy that works for all and a society in which the negative impacts of the patriarchy are diminished for everyone.

Annex A – Methodology of gross value added (GVA) estimates

The following steps were taken to estimate the GVA of women and men in the social sector:

Step 1: Building on recent work on the value of civil society

In 2022, the Economic Statistics Centre of Excellence (ESCoE) and Pro Bono Economics (PBE) published work estimating the value of civil society.⁶³ In this, the value of volunteering and non-pecuniary benefits experienced by employees working in the sector are both included in the GVA estimate, thus going beyond the national accounts. This forms the basis of this report's analysis of the GVA by women and men through employment and volunteering in the sector respectively. In addition to this core finding, PBE needed to understand the hours contributed by men and women in volunteering and employment.

The GVA estimates in the Martin & Franklin paper extend to 2019 only; this is because the methodology uses ONS data on the proportion of GVA in each industry that comes from the NPISH sector, and at the time of their writing the data covered 1997-2019.⁶⁴ Thus, it was outside the scope of this report to update the GVA of the sector.

Note that the Labour Force Survey (LFS) and Community Life Survey data only records the sex of the respondent, not the gender. While this report focuses on women and gender in the social sector, rather than sex, in the absence of data on the gender of respondents, PBE has had to approximate sex to gender in the methodology. This is a limitation of our approach.

Step 2: Volunteer hours

Using the Community Life Survey results from 2019/20, PBE estimated the split of reported volunteering hours by men and women in the social sector.⁶⁵ The results were weighted to account for differences in representation in the sample by gender. Unweighted, males were estimated to contribute 47.1% of volunteer hours, compared to 53.7% by females. However, weighting to allow for the overrepresentation of females in the sample suggested that males contributed 50.2% and females 49.6%.

⁶³ J Martin & J Franklin, [Fuller measures of output, input and productivity in the non-profit sector: a proof of concept](#), ESCoE, October 2022.

⁶⁴ ONS, [Non-profit institutions serving households \(NPISH\) gross value added \(GVA\) proportions](#), April 2022.

⁶⁵ Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, [Community Life Survey](#), UK Data Service, 2023.

Note that the remainder is made up of those who did not answer as male or female.

Step 3: Employment hours

Using the LFS, PBE estimated the split in hours of employment between men and women in the social sector. The variable SECTRO03 allowed for filtering of the respondents by those who had reported working in “Charities, trade unions and private schools”. This was applied to approximate those who worked in the social sector. The variable SEX allowed for filtering of respondent by sex, both within and outside of the social sector. The data were cleaned to exclude those who did not answer, or for whom this response was missing.

Filtering by sex and only including respondents working in the social sector, the data was tabulated to estimate the average weekly hours worked by women and by men respectively in their social sector job. Again, the data was cleaned to omit non-responses or missing responses. It was found that women worked approximately 26.3 hours per week in their social sector role, compared to men’s 31.4 hours.

To understand the percentage split in total hours worked contributed by men and by women, PBE multiplied these averages by the estimated number of men and women in the social sector. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) reported that 638,000 women and 304,000 men worked in the sector. Multiplying hours by numbers of workers, this suggested that 16.7 million work hours were contributed by women per week compared to 9.6 million by men, totalling 26.3 million across the genders. Taking each as a percentage of the total, PBE finds that 64% of hours worked in employment for the sector are contributed by women, with 36% by men.

Step 4: Applying percentage splits to GVA estimates

The Martin & Franklin paper suggests that employees in the social sector contributed £14.4 billion in GVA in 2019. By applying the hours worked by employees of each gender in this sector, PBE estimates that £9.2 billion were generated by women, and £5.2 billion by men.

Similarly, the first paper presents an estimate of total GVA by volunteers in the sector as £19.9 billion. By applying the percentage estimated to have been driven by each gender, this approach suggests that £9.9 billion was generated by women, and £10 billion by men.

Combining the two, it is estimated that women contribute £19 billion in GVA, or 56% of the total, compared to men's £15.2 billion or 44% of the total GVA contributed by volunteers and employees.

Annex B – Managerial positions by gender

The following steps were taken to understand the distribution of employees across managerial and non-managerial positions in the sector by gender:

Step 1: Using the Labour Force Survey 2022 data

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) is the largest household study in the UK.⁶⁶ Conducted by the Office for National Statistics (ONS), it is a study of the employment circumstances of the UK population. This survey was used in Pro Bono Economics' (PBE's) estimates as this data set holds respondents' data regarding their sex, the sector that they work in, and whether they are in managerial, supervisory or foremen roles. It is the most recently published at the time of writing.

The data is published quarterly; the datasets for Jan-Mar 22, Apr-Jun 22, Jul-Sep 22 and Oct-Dec 22 were appended together to form a yearly dataset. This was done with a view to minimising the impact of seasonality on the findings.

Note that the data only records the sex of the respondent, not the gender. While this report focuses on women and gender in the social sector, rather than sex, in absence of data on the gender of respondents, PBE has had to approximate sex to gender in the methodology. This is a limitation of our approach.

Step 2: Filter those in social sector

The variable SECTRO03 allowed for filtering of the respondents by those who had reported working in "Charities, trade unions and private schools". This was applied to approximate those who worked in the social sector. All respondents who did not report this way were in contrast used to estimate the statuses of those outside of the sector.

Step 3: Filter by gender

The variable SEX allowed for filtering of respondent by sex, both within and outside of the social sector. The data was cleaned to exclude those who did not answer, or for whom this response was missing.

Step 4: Those in managerial and supervisor/foreman roles

Filtering by sex and whether the respondent was in the social sector, the data was tabulated to estimate the percentage of respondents who were

⁶⁶ ONS, [Labour Force Survey](#), UK Data Service, 2023.

in managerial roles, in supervisor/foreman roles, or neither. Again, the data was cleaned to omit non-responses or missing responses.



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