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Speak Up 2025

How Women in Tech Weigh RTOs and AI Alongside Their Leadership Ambitions

Unpacking progress drivers for women in tech —
and continued barriers to lasting change in the industry



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Introduction

This is a pivotal time for employees in tech as they navigate return-to-office (RTO) mandates, reevaluate their leadership ambitions, and capitalize on career-accelerating technologies like generative AI.

These shifts are reshaping how tech industry professionals work, grow, and lead — and for women in tech, they present both opportunities and challenges. To better understand their workplace experiences over the past year, Ensono surveyed 1,500 full-time tech employees who identify as female in the U.S., U.K., and India in December 2024.

The 2025 Speak Up survey reveals bright spots for women in tech, from enhanced collaboration for in-office workers to stronger organizational commitments to DEI. But it also unveils challenges that stand in the way of a truly diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace — underscoring the need for sustained action and accountability.





Key findings



92% of respondents report improvements to the experiences of women in tech in terms of equity and inclusion over the past year



75% of women in tech believe their organization's commitment to DEI has grown stronger over the past 12 months, with only **4%** reporting a weakened commitment to DEI



Flexible working hours emerged as a top priority for women in tech across generations and geographies, highlighting the critical role of flexibility in driving retention



89% of respondents agree that their generative AI skills have helped accelerate their career, with the percentage of respondents ranking their skills as "expert" doubling year-over-year



1 in 4 women in tech still feel uncomfortable or unsafe due to microaggressions or other forms of discrimination that happen while working in person.



49% of women in tech struggle to balance caregiving responsibilities with work responsibilities, down **2%** from last year



76% of respondents aspire to advance into a people management role and **85%** want to advance into executive leadership



Half (50%) of respondents who do not want to pursue executive leadership roles don't want the additional stress or pressure that comes with a leadership position, and a little over one third (**36%**) say they value their work-life balance too much to compromise it

Women in tech thrived over the past 12 months, from DEI growth to generative AI expertise

The tech industry offers plenty of reasons for optimism in 2025, with 92% of women in tech reporting improvements in equity and inclusion over the past year.

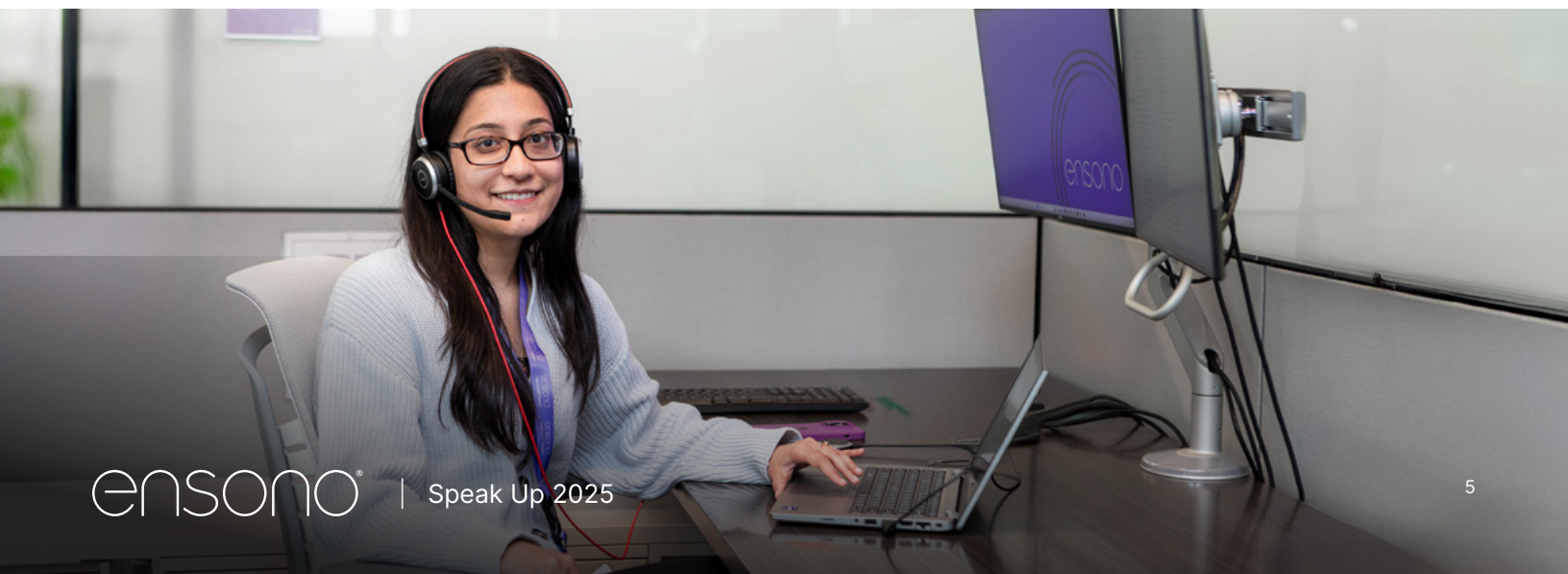
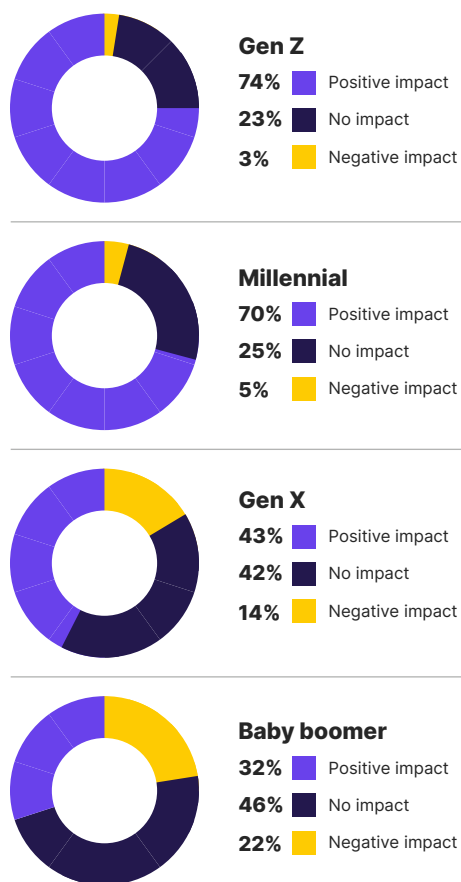
While many organizations are scaling back DEI initiatives, many tech companies continue to demonstrate a strong commitment to DEI. In fact, **75%** of respondents believe their organization's **commitment to DEI has grown stronger** over the past 12 months — and only 4% reported a weakened commitment.

This trend is particularly notable in India, where 85% of respondents reported a stronger commitment, compared to 73% in the U.K. and just 67% in the U.S. Yet the impact of these efforts varies by work arrangement. While 77% of hybrid workers and 76% of in-person workers see positive DEI progress, only 56% of remote employees feel their organization's commitment to DEI has grown stronger, underscoring potential challenges with reaching distributed teams.

Beyond working arrangements, age also plays a role in shaping workplace experiences. Although 66% of respondents feel their current age positively impacts their career opportunities, ageism may still present challenges for baby boomers and Gen Xers [Fig. 1].

[Fig. 1]

How respondents' current ages influence career opportunities, by generation





The Speak Up 2025 data also highlights generative AI as a powerful catalyst for career growth, with **89%** of respondents agreeing that their AI skills have accelerated their career — whether by enhancing performance in their current roles or unlocking new opportunities. This doesn't come as a surprise considering the share of respondents that ranked their skills as "expert" doubled year-over-year [Fig. 2].

[Fig. 2]

How women in tech rank their generative AI skills, 2025 vs. 2024

	2025	2024
1 No experience or knowledge	2%	9%
2 Basic knowledge and understanding	9%	26%
3 Intermediate knowledge and skills	23%	31%
4 Advanced knowledge and skills	37%	21%
5 Expert knowledge and skills	28%	14%

Key takeaway:

Women in tech are making significant strides in DEI and generative AI, driving optimism and career growth across the industry. But progress is uneven, with remote workers and older generations facing challenges like limited access to DEI initiatives and slower AI adoption.

Who's leading — and falling behind — in generative AI?



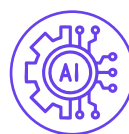
India is leading the charge:

64% of respondents in India strongly agree that their generative AI skills have helped them accelerate their career, versus 45% of U.S. and 41% of U.K. respondents



Millennials are outpacing other generations:

70% of millennials rank their skills as "advanced" or "expert," versus 61% of Gen Zers, 55% of Gen Xers, and just 30% of baby boomers



Remote employees may be falling behind:

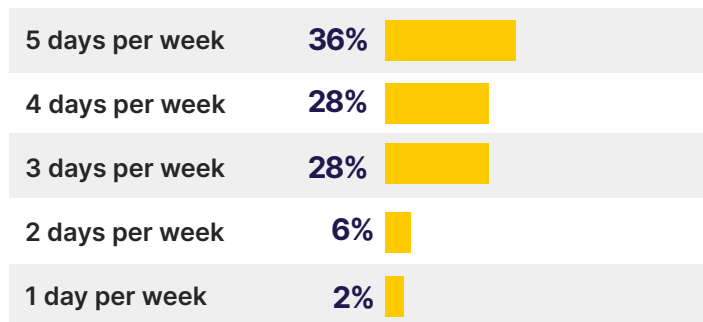
Only **6%** of remote respondents ranked their generative AI skills and knowledge as "expert," compared to 31% of hybrid and 29% of in-person respondents

The impact of return-to-office policies: A double-edged sword for women in tech

RTO policies that shaped 2024 continue to impact the tech industry. In the past 12 months, 82% of women in tech faced mandatory RTOs, with 64% working in-office at least four days per week [Fig. 3]. India may be emphasizing RTOs more than the U.S. and U.K., with 48% of respondents in India required to work in-office 5 days per week — compared to just 21% of U.K. respondents and 38% of U.S. respondents.

[Fig. 3]

Weekly in-office requirements for respondents impacted by RTO policies in the past 12 months



RTOs have delivered notable benefits, positively impacting:

- Collaboration with colleagues **(84%)**
- Productivity **(82%)**
- Career growth opportunities **(81%)**

But are these benefits worth compromising employee well-being? RTO policies have also negatively impacted the following areas:

- Work-related stress **(23%)**
- Flexibility in working hours **(20%)**
- Work-life balance **(19%)**





These aren't the only drawbacks of working in person. When asked about their biggest challenges with in-person work, 49% of respondents pointed to balancing caregiving responsibilities with work — the same top challenge with in-person work for the second year in a row [Fig. 4]. Moreover, 1 in 5 respondents struggle to maintain breastfeeding and breast pumping while working in person.

Alarming, 1 in 4 respondents still report feeling uncomfortable or unsafe due to microaggressions or other forms of discrimination with in-person work — a figure virtually unchanged year-over-year. The issue is even more pronounced in India, where 32% of respondents face microaggressions and other forms of discrimination.

[Fig. 4]

Top challenges respondents experienced with in-person work in the past year

1	Balancing caregiving responsibilities	49%
2	Experiencing stress related to commuting	37%
3	TIE: Taking on responsibilities outside my role that pull me away from my work (e.g., cleaning up after meetings, organizing in-office events, unloading the office kitchen dishwasher, etc.) TIE: Experiencing more stress and/or anxiety in general	35%
4	Struggling to concentrate in the office	32%
5	Feeling uncomfortable or unsafe due to microaggressions or other forms of discrimination	25%

Key takeaway

RTO policies have brought improvements to collaboration and productivity for women in tech — but at what cost? In-office work also exacerbates long-standing issues, including caregiving pressures, commuting stress, and persistent discrimination. Organizations must tackle these barriers head-on to better support all female tech employees, but especially those who are working in person.

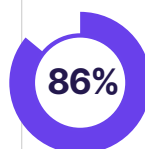
Women in tech are driven to lead, but cautious about the trade-offs

Leadership ambitions are strong among women in tech, with 76% aspiring to advance into people management roles and 13% already in one. Generationally, the data shows that 90% of Gen Zers and 93% of millennials aspire to or already hold management positions, compared to 74% of Gen Xers and 64% of baby boomers. This divide may simply reflect career-stage differences, with older generations valuing the focus and autonomy of individual contributor roles later in their careers.

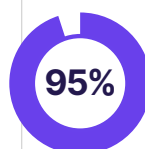
Beyond people management, most respondents have their sights set on even greater responsibility — 85% of women in tech want to advance into an executive leadership position during their careers. Intrinsic motivators like taking on new challenges and responsibilities (57%) and a desire to develop leadership and decision-making skills (27%) are driving interest in these roles. Others are more inclined to pursue leadership roles so they can increase their earning potential (46%) and represent women in leadership (26%).

Ambitions across borders: India leads the way in leadership aspirations

Respondents located in India show the highest drive for leadership:



86% aspire to move into people management roles, surpassing their counterparts in the U.K. (72%) and U.S. (70%)



95% want to advance into executive leadership positions, compared to 81% in the U.K. and 78% in the U.S.

While gender equity progress in India has been positive overall, the gender gap at the highest levels of leadership is still shockingly wide. Women's interest in rising through the ranks is encouraging, but organizations must implement systemic changes that remove structural barriers to equitable growth to see real change.



What about the share of women (15%) who are not pursuing executive leadership roles? Nearly half of these respondents (46%) say they are content with their current role and responsibilities, but job satisfaction isn't the full story. Half (50%) are opting out of the additional stress and pressure that come with leadership positions, and a little over a third (36%) say they value their work-life balance too much to compromise it [Fig. 5].

[Fig. 5]

Top reasons for not pursuing executive leadership roles

1	I don't want the additional stress or pressure that comes with a leadership position	50%
2	I'm satisfied with my current role and responsibilities	46%
3	I don't want to compromise my work-life balance	36%
4	I prefer to focus on more hands-on, technical work	35%
5	I lack the confidence to take on a leadership role	16%

Key takeaway

Many women in tech are eager to lead, but they weigh the trade-offs carefully. Organizations that value equity should develop career tracks that reflect women's diverse career ambitions and bear in mind that leadership isn't a universal goal. To support those who decide to pursue leadership positions, targeted training and mentorship can help bridge confidence gaps and prepare women in tech for the distinct challenges of both executive leadership and management roles.



Organizations risk losing high performers if they fail to address retention

Nearly **1 in 5** women in tech (19%) plan to leave their current companies within the year — a figure unchanged from 2024.

So, what’s driving the urge to quit? The desire for more flexibility to work remotely (41%) reigns supreme, which may also reflect dissatisfaction with RTOs [Fig. 6]. Interestingly, the desire for better pay — the No. 1 reason for wanting to leave in 2022, at 59% — fell to 21% this year. Has compensation taken a backseat or are companies finally closing gender-linked pay gaps?

Additionally, the percentage of respondents who want to leave in pursuit of a more impactful voice in decision-making dropped 16 percentage points year-over-year. This could signal that more women have already taken on roles where their voice is heard and valued. Or it might be a sign women are becoming disengaged from advocating for influence because they feel their inputs aren’t being considered.

[Fig. 6]

Top reasons women in tech want to leave their companies within the year

	2025		2024		2023	
1	I want more flexibility to work remotely	41%	I want to have a more impactful voice in decision-making	51%	I am looking for better pay	59%
2	I want to have a more impactful voice in decision-making	35%	I want more flexibility to work remotely	41%	I am looking for better benefits	42%
3	I am looking for a better work/life balance	29%	I am looking for a better work/life balance	31%	I am looking for a better work/life balance	35%





As organizations work to retain top talent, it's essential to pay attention to the top areas where respondents say organizations should invest to improve the experiences of women in tech. Their priorities are ranked as follows:

- 1 Flexible work hours
- 2 Remote work opportunities
- 3 The inclusion of women in decision-making roles
- 4 TIE: Childcare support
TIE: Leadership development initiatives
- 5 Upskilling programs

A universal call for flexibility

Flexible work hours emerged as the top priority for women in tech — not just across generations, but also across countries. This data signals that regardless of cultural or generational differences, the need for flexibility remains a universal value. Whether it's arriving at the office after a school drop-off or accommodating a doctor's appointment, flexible hours can help employees better balance their professional and personal lives.

Key takeaway

Retaining women in tech in 2025 demands more than just competitive pay: Flexibility, inclusion, and leadership development are non-negotiable. With flexible work hours topping the list of priorities, organizations should consider its impact on retention — and its potential to make RTO mandates more palatable.

Where women in tech thrive, innovation flourishes

Women in tech are driving progress in the industry as they continue to champion inclusive leadership and develop career-accelerating skills. But the responsibility doesn't rest on their shoulders alone — employers have to meet them halfway. By offering flexibility, implementing inclusive retention strategies, and fostering diverse career paths, organizations can create workplaces where women excel as leaders, innovators, and contributors to the future of tech.

Explore our prior Speak Up reports from [2019](#), [2020](#), [2022](#), and [2024](#) to uncover additional insights on the evolving challenges and opportunities for women in tech.



Methodology

In December 2024, Ensono surveyed 1,500 female-identifying, full-time professionals in the technology industry. Of the respondents, 500 were located in the U.S., 500 in the U.K., and 500 in India.



About Ensono

Ensono is an expert technology advisor, innovation partner, and managed service provider. As a relentless ally, we specialize in helping enterprise clients transform their organization, innovate new and disruptive technologies, and optimize their IT operations to achieve better business outcomes. Our team excels in managing over 1 million MIPS, reflecting our leadership in mainframe services. We offer a comprehensive suite of services, including consulting, mainframe and application modernization, public cloud migration, and cloud-native development. With certified expertise in AWS, Azure, and Google Cloud, Ensono is well-equipped to navigate complex hybrid environments. Recognized as the Microsoft Datacenter Transformation Partner of the Year, we maintain a strong global presence with over 3,500 associates and are headquartered in greater Chicago.

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