

CIPD

Championing better
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY | *February 2023*

People Profession 2022

International survey report



The CIPD is the professional body for HR and people development. The registered charity champions better work and working lives and has been setting the benchmark for excellence in people and organisation development for more than 100 years. It has almost 160,000 members across the world, provides thought leadership through independent research on the world of work, and offers professional training and accreditation for those working in HR and learning and development.

Executive summary

People Profession 2022: International survey report

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1 Introduction

The 2020s have thrown up some unprecedented and exceptional circumstances. The majority of European countries are feeling the rippling aftermath of the pandemic and slow economic recovery, as well as the ongoing war in Ukraine and its subsequent economic impact.

But how do we move forward while grappling with continuous uncertainty? What role will HR play in that future scenario? To understand the future, we need to understand the shape and sentiment of the profession as it stands today.

Following our [People Profession survey: 2020 global results](#), this research aims to gather insight on the challenges and opportunities faced by practitioners across eight countries in Europe and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) regions. It provides insights on current HR practice and people professionals' perceptions of their careers and working lives.

Section 1 provides a global comparison for the people profession by asking the following questions:

- 1 What are the top workforce priorities for organisations?
- 2 What's driving change in organisations?
- 3 How are people teams operating across European and MENA regions?
- 4 How do people professionals feel about their careers?
- 5 How does the wellbeing of people professionals differ across regions?

Section 2 looks at each country individually, to investigate the in-region variations on the following:

- 1 At an organisational level:
 - What are the most common organisational cultures?
 - How are people teams operating across European and MENA regions?
 - How has hybrid working affected HR practices?
 - What are the priorities for improving HR capability?
 - What is the perceived strategic value of the profession?
 - How have people professionals developed their skills post-pandemic?
- 2 At an individual level:
 - How do people professionals perceive their career progression to date?
 - What are the perceptions of a career in the people profession?

In this executive summary, we highlight the key findings from the [main report](#).

About the survey

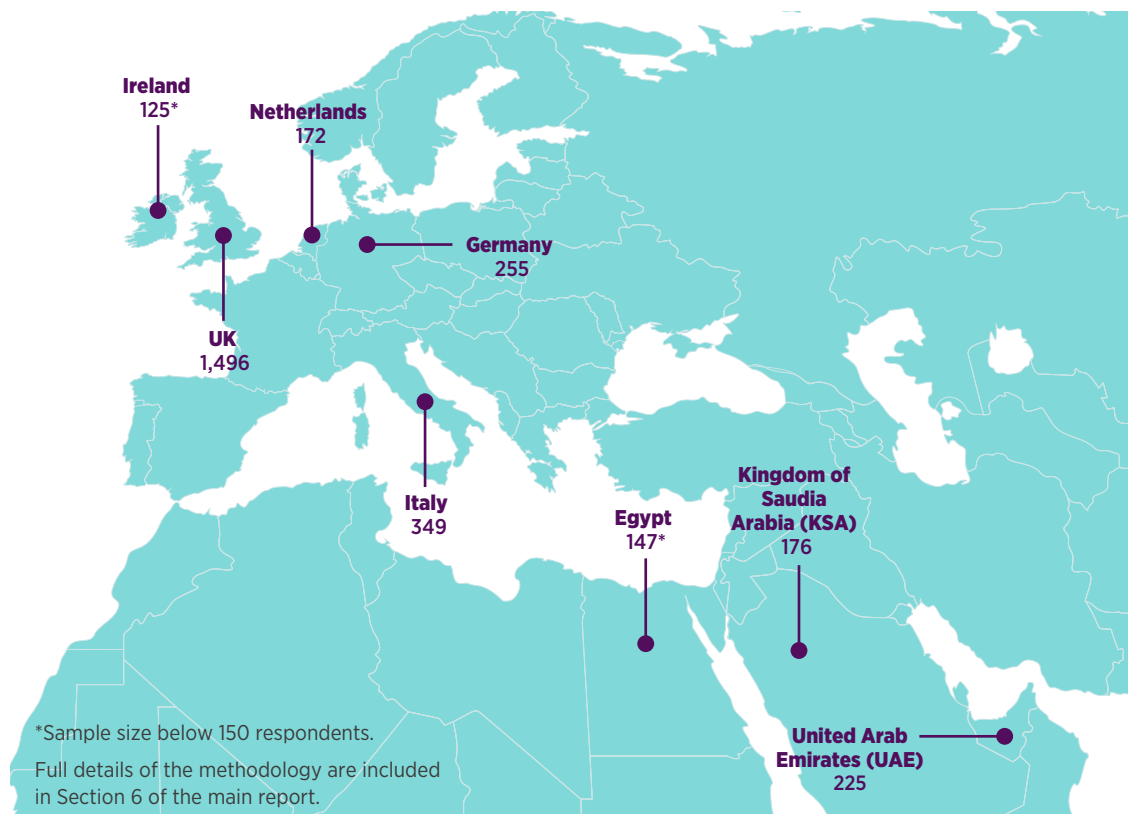
The fieldwork for this research was collected by YouGov, commissioned by the CIPD, between 5 April and 25 May 2022. The survey was translated and piloted in the official language of each country to ensure the questions were accessible and correctly interpreted within each region.

Our sample includes both in-house and independent people professionals, across a range of people specialisms, within eight countries: the UK, Ireland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Egypt, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

We surveyed a total of 2,945 people professionals and include the sample sizes for each region below. The demographic details of each country sample are included within the individual country chapters in the [main report](#).



Figure 1: Sample sizes of the countries surveyed in this report



2 The people profession 2022: An international comparison

What are the top workforce priorities for organisations?

Key findings:

- The top workforce priority for organisations across the global sample was recruitment, retention and turnover.
- Organisational culture was another immediate priority area and key focus, especially in the UK and Europe.
- We found some stark differences in business priority areas across the eight markets; for example, absence management was a priority in the Netherlands, upskilling and reskilling was a priority in Italy, inclusion and diversity was more commonly selected in the UK and Ireland, and health and safety was a key consideration in the MENA regions.

What's driving change in organisations?

Key findings:

- The demand for flexible and hybrid working was the largest driver of change across the international sample, followed by digital transformation and economic change.



- At a regional level, the top drivers of change for the MENA countries included industrial change, employment relationships and social media.
- External disruptors such as the pandemic and political change were also cited as key levers of change for UK and Ireland respondents.

How are people teams operating across European and MENA regions?

Key findings:

- Thirty per cent of respondents across the international sample said they operate in a generalist HR role.
- There were some differences in HR specialism areas across the sample; for example, there was a higher proportion of professionals specialising in employee relations and employee experience in Ireland and the UAE.
- MENA had the greatest proportion of respondents with early-career experience within the profession. Conversely, the UK and Italy had the highest proportions of respondents with 16+ years of experience.
- Globally, the most common operating model for people teams was a single HR team that includes specialists, generalists and administration colleagues. In terms of outsourcing, we found respondents from the MENA region were significantly more likely to outsource HR activities than the rest of the sample.

How do people professionals feel about their careers?

Key findings:

- The vast majority of respondents said that the people profession offers good career prospects, with respondents in KSA, Ireland and the UAE most likely to agree.
- We found that respondents in Italy and Germany were more sceptical about the ease of entry into the profession. On the other hand, opinions in the MENA countries were more positive about easy access into the profession.
- Three-quarters of our sample said their progression had met or exceeded expectations. Respondents in the Netherlands and Ireland were most positive about their career advancement.
- Skills development was identified as a key enabler to career progression within the profession, and the biggest barrier to advancement was a lack in self-confidence.

How does the wellbeing of people professionals differ across regions?

Key findings:

- When it comes to the impact of work on health and wellbeing, we found that under a third of respondents globally said their work positively (or very positively) affects their mental health.
- Sadly, just over one-fifth said work negatively (or very negatively) affects their mental and physical health.



- We note some vast differences around the perceptions of how work impacts personal health and wellbeing across the sample. For example, UK respondents were more likely than those in other countries to feel their work negatively impacts their mental and physical health.

3 The people profession 2022: Individual country findings

Egypt

Key findings:

- Egyptian people professionals were more likely to outsource the majority of HR activities, compared to the global sample. High levels of HR outsourcing is also reflected within the other MENA countries (KSA and the UAE).
- Supporting line managers to manage their teams, building organisational culture and values and managing performance were perceived as easier to manage in a hybrid setting.
- Egyptian people professionals are focusing on working more collaboratively across the business, demonstrating the value of HR as a credible business partner and building organisational development and change management skills.

Germany

Key findings:

- A significant proportion of German respondents reported that attracting, recruiting and retaining talent had become more difficult in a hybrid workplace. This was also identified as the top hybrid working challenge globally.
- The prevailing HR model was a single HR team with generalists, specialists and administration together. German respondents were more likely to say that they don't outsource any function of HR.
- Collectively, the vast majority of German practitioners feel positively about their career progression to date and were more likely to say there had not been any barriers in relation to career progression.

Ireland

Key findings:

- Irish people professionals reported finding several areas more challenging whilst operating in a hybrid working environment; for example, supporting employees' mental health and wellbeing, building organisational culture and supporting line managers with their people management.
- Irish respondents were focusing on building capability to support flexible people operations across the business, supporting line managers and developing organisational development and change management skills.



- Irish people professionals had positive views on the strategic alignment of the people function to the business, the reputation of the function and the perceived value-add of the people team – these were more positive than the global average.

Italy

Key findings:

- Forty-four percent of Italian respondents said their people team outsources their payroll function, significantly higher than the global average. The prevalence of payroll outsourcing was significantly different between sectors.
- Our Italian sample cited building organisational culture, supporting the mental health and wellbeing of employees and attracting, recruiting and retaining talent as areas that were more difficult to navigate within a hybrid working environment.
- Organisational development and change management skills were a key priority area for improving capability within people teams. We also found that respondents from the private sector were more likely to identify this capability as a priority area compared to those working in the public sector.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Key findings:

- Relatively higher proportions of the KSA sample said they outsource all elements of the HR activities included in the survey. We also found significant differences between business size and HR outsourcing.
- KSA people professionals were much more likely to feel that all aspects of HR management mentioned in the survey had become easier as a result of the shift towards hybrid working.
- The top priority areas for building HR capability were improving organisational development and change management skills, working collaboratively with colleagues throughout the organisation, reorganising and/or automating HR work and building specialist HR expertise.

The Netherlands

Key findings:

- Nearly half of Dutch respondents said supporting employees' mental health and wellbeing and attracting, recruiting and retaining talent had become more of a challenge within a hybrid context.
- The majority of respondents (63%) have not had to change their skills in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, which was much higher than the proportion of global respondents who reported this.
- Collectively, 82% of Dutch respondents felt positive about their career progression, saying it had either met or exceed their expectations. Skills development was a key factor to achieving career advancement, as well as developing a personal network of colleagues to support career progression.



United Arab Emirates

Key findings:

- Thirty-nine per cent of respondents outsourced administrative HR activities, which was significantly higher than the global average. Small and medium-sized businesses were more likely to outsource administrative HR activities compared to large organisations.
- On the whole, it appears that UAE professionals found hybrid working to be a positive influence over their work and that HR management had become easier; this is significantly higher than the global average in all aspects of HR activity.
- The vast majority said they have had to upskill in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. There was an even split between professionals upskilling in a reactive manner and those upskilling in a more planned and measured way.

United Kingdom

Key findings:

- The general sentiment of UK people professionals was that hybrid and remote working has made several people practices more challenging. The most challenging HR management areas included building organisational culture and values, supporting employees' mental health and wellbeing, and attracting, recruiting and retaining talent.
- UK people professionals saw supporting line managers in their people management as the top priority for capability improvement across people teams.
- People teams in the UK were more likely to adopt a business partnering model compared to the global sample. UK people teams were also less likely to outsource their HR activity compared to the global sample.

4 Conclusion

Overall key findings:

- **Recruiting and retaining talent is a key priority for businesses in the UK/Ireland and European regions:** another global report by [Adecco](#) found that 27% of employees (across 25 countries) plan to quit their jobs within the next year and 45% say they are actively keeping an eye on the job market and applying for new roles.
- **Flexible and hybrid working is the biggest lever of change within businesses:** experts suggest long-term hybrid and remote working will require more training and support for employees and managers and will have a wider impact on the environment and energy consumption ([UK parliament post brief, 2022](#)).
- **Economic change is impacting differently across regions:** it appears to be more prominent across the UK, Ireland and MENA regions compared to those in wider Europe.
- **The digital transformation ripple continues to impact all regions:** digital HR and being hands-on with digital change will be key skills for people professionals in order to become future-fit. We found digital transformation to be a key trend in our [People Profession 2030](#) research.



- **HR maturity and professional experience varied considerably across our surveyed countries:** MENA countries had the greatest proportion of respondents with early-career stage respondents and were also more likely to outsource their HR functions.
- **HR in a digital world reveals some divided opinions:** the impact of hybrid working on HR functioning and delivery was perceived more positively in MENA regions, with these countries citing HR delivery to be easier under hybrid settings.

For people professionals, particularly those working at a multinational level (either operationally or commercially) or those that have supply chains across regions, these findings matter greatly. The insight from this report highlights areas that are important for businesses, and therefore for HR, and enables practitioners to reflect on how to position themselves as strategic and credible business partners. It is vital that businesses and people teams develop their horizon-scanning capabilities and look beyond the organisation to anticipate the pressures and opportunities that each business and industry will face within the context that they operate from.

As the professional body for HR, the CIPD recognises the importance of understanding the sentiment of the people profession. This report is part of our ongoing commitment to listen to and reflect on people professionals' working lives and develop our global insight and voice to support the profession and ultimately, champion better work and working lives.

Access the CIPD's [People Profession 2022 UK and Ireland](#) survey report for key findings from these markets.



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