



MC23
Musicians' Census

Musicians' Census

Women Musicians Insight Report

March 2024

Help
Musicians

Musicians'
Union
MUU

Women
InCTRL

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Introduction

It's been a long-standing ambition of both Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union to build a comprehensive picture of the lives and careers of musicians across the UK. In 2023, we are pleased that the first Musicians' Census was delivered, and we were able to share the insights more widely to encourage greater visibility of the issues musicians currently face.

Together with the support of key organisations and individuals within music, the Musicians' Census achieved almost 6000 responses. Thank you to everyone who shared their experiences of work and life with us.

This is our fifth census report, and we are delighted to have the support and voice of Nadia Khan (Women in CTRL), to help us draw attention to the continued challenges women face in building sustainable careers in music. With 2,526 women musicians completing the survey, their responses highlight that gender inequity is still a key issue in music, shaping who creates, performs and produces music in the UK. The responses also show that more work is needed to understand what informs and influences women's careers in music so actions can be taken to promote equity where needed.

Response rates from women were highest in Classical and Musical Theatre. In other genres, women's response rates were much lower than their representation in the survey overall. Likewise, women were much less likely

to report working in certain roles in music than men, including engineers, producers and DJs. More work is needed across music to understand if these responses reflect patterns in women's entry to specific work in music, and if so, what can be done to ensure women's access and opportunity in all genres and roles. It is also important that where there seems to be positive indicators, such as 79% of women identifying as music performers (similar to the 80% of respondents overall), we consider whether this translates into real-world impact and opportunities for women, for example despite high rates of women stating they are performers, in 2022, only 13% of UK festival headliners were women¹.

The Census shows women experience greater frequency of career barriers than the wider population of musicians generally, and these are related to specific life circumstances, for example higher rates of primary caring responsibilities amongst women musicians which then leads to a higher prevalence of specific career barriers like inadequate childcare access and unsociable hours. The gender pay gap also persists with women earning slightly less overall, and being significantly underrepresented in the highest income group. Additionally, many more women report experiencing discrimination than men, with 51% of women reporting experiencing gender discrimination and 33% reporting being sexually harassed while working as a musician.



There are opportunities for positive action though. For example, women musicians are more likely to hold qualifications in music, and other subjects, than other musicians and this engagement with education may present an opportunity to take action with women to address career challenges early on and open up more varied pathways in music for women.

Finally, and not surprisingly, some women face greater barriers than others with both women from the Global Majority and disabled women experiencing higher rates of discrimination and lower rates of pay than white women and non-disabled women and so dedicated consideration and action is needed around these underserved communities.

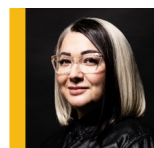
We hope these insights will encourage individuals and organisations across music to continue to collaborate to reduce gender-based barriers and ensure gender equity in every part of music.



Sarah Woods
Chief Executive, Help Musicians



Naomi Pohl
General Secretary, Musicians' Union



Nadia Khan
Founder of Women in CTRL

Our aim

The Musicians' Census 2023 is a long-term project delivered by Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union. Our aim is to provide a fuller picture of the musician population in the UK today and to track how key themes change over time. What we learn from this survey will inform the way we help musicians and support the wider music industry to understand and respond to musicians' needs. Ultimately, we hope to see the Census helping to foster a thriving and diverse musician population, now and in the future.

Our approach

Census data was collected via a 15-minute online survey, which was open from January to March 2023. Help Musicians and the Musicians' Union collaborated with music industry partners to reach as many musicians as possible. Walnut Unlimited were appointed to develop the survey, manage the data collection and run the initial analysis of the data. All aspects of the research were conducted in accordance with ISO 20252 and ISO 27001, the international standards for market research and information data security respectively. All musicians aged 16 and over "who earn or intend to earn money" from music were invited to respond. The survey was voluntary. Participants were self-selecting and required to give informed consent and complete a set of initial screening questions.

The data

A total of 5,867 musicians completed the 2023 Census, which in this report will be referred to as the overall Census sample. This results in this report are based on a total sample of 2,526 female respondents. This includes 2,495 respondents who said their gender identity was the same as was assigned at birth (99% of female respondents), 22 respondents who said their gender identity was different to that assigned at birth (1%) and 9 respondents (<1%) who preferred not to say. 128 respondents (2% of respondents to the overall Census) described their gender in another way to male or female. We have not included these respondents in this report, as we cannot definitively say that they identify as women, however we have separately [published a report into LGBTQ+ musicians](#), which examines the experiences of this group in more detail. While the findings of this Census only represent the musicians who responded, it provides a powerful snapshot of the demographics, finances, wellbeing and careers of musicians today.

In this report two phrases are used 'women musicians' and 'musicians who identified as women'. Both of these terms refer to a group which includes the 2,526 respondents who said they described themselves as female and the 1% of this group who stated their gender identity was not the same as their sex assigned at birth.

In this report 'other respondents' and 'musicians of all other genders' refer to all respondents not within the group of self-identified women. Where only respondents who self-identify as male are being referred to, this is made explicit and this group excludes musicians who identify their gender in another way.

We recognise that there were potential barriers to participation including digital accessibility, trust, language barriers and challenges in reaching musicians who aren't part of more formal industry networks. We're committed to widening access in future Census surveys to ensure that the largest possible number of participants can share their experiences.





Census stakeholder group

Representatives from across the music industry formed a stakeholder group who were involved in shaping the survey design, sharing it amongst their communities and providing feedback on the results. This group helped make sure the Census was inclusive and representative and we're thankful for their collaboration and support.

- Arts Council England (ACE)
- Association for Electronic Music (AFEM)
- Association of British Orchestras (ABO)
- Attitude is Everything (AiE)
- Black Lives in Music (BLiM)
- Drake Music
- Drake Music Scotland
- English Folk Dance and Song Society (EFDSS)
- Featured Artists Coalition (FAC)
- The F List
- Independent Society of Musicians (ISM)
- The Ivors Academy (The Ivors)
- Music Managers Forum (MMF)
- Parents and Carers in Performing Arts (PiPA)
- Phonographic Performance Limited (PPL)
- Performing Rights Society (PRS) Foundation
- Punch Records (Punch)
- Royal Society of Musicians of Great Britain (RSM)
- Safe In Sound
- she said.so
- UK Music

We would like to thank everyone who worked with us to help disseminate the census through their networks and Fourth Pillar who supported the management of the Census Stakeholder Group.



Executive summary

The first Musicians' Census gathered data from 5,867 musicians across the UK about their demographics, careers, wellbeing and their experiences in the music industry. This is the fifth report in a series of Insight Reports which will each share findings related to key Census themes.

This report presents key findings related to the 2,526 musicians who identified themselves as women. Of those musicians who self-identified as women, 1% said their gender identity was different to that assigned at birth and 99% said it was not. Both groups are reported on as one within this report.

There is a higher representation of women in younger age brackets, with 47% of those aged 16-55 being women. However, women's representation drops significantly after the age of 54 with every age bracket thereafter seeing a decline in the proportion of women working in music. Women report age discrimination at significantly higher rates than men (30% of women compared to 21% of men).

Women report more primary caring responsibilities than musicians of all other genders (28% compared to 20%) and with regards to childcare, 22% of women report being a primary carer for a child compared to 15% of other musicians. Women are also more likely to report caring responsibilities as a career barrier in music (29% compared to 18% of other musicians).

Women musicians have higher levels of both general and music education than other musicians with 14% more women having a music degree and 15% having a postgraduate music qualification. This does not correlate with higher average earnings however, and women experience a small overall gender pay gap with an average annual income from music of £19,850 compared to £21,750 for men. This gap is widest after £34,001 per year, and in the highest income bracket where women make up just 19% of those earning £70,000 or more each year from music.

Women are more likely to experience financial challenges than men, including that 27% of women musicians said that they do not earn enough money to support themselves, compared to 21% of musicians overall.

79% of women are performing musicians compared to 80% of musicians overall, but only 11% of women reported being a Producer, 3% reported being a DJ and only 2% of women reported being studio/mastering engineers and likewise, just 2% reported being live sound engineers. This is likely to reflect both gaps in Census reach, and also real-world trends in women's access to certain roles which need to be further explored.



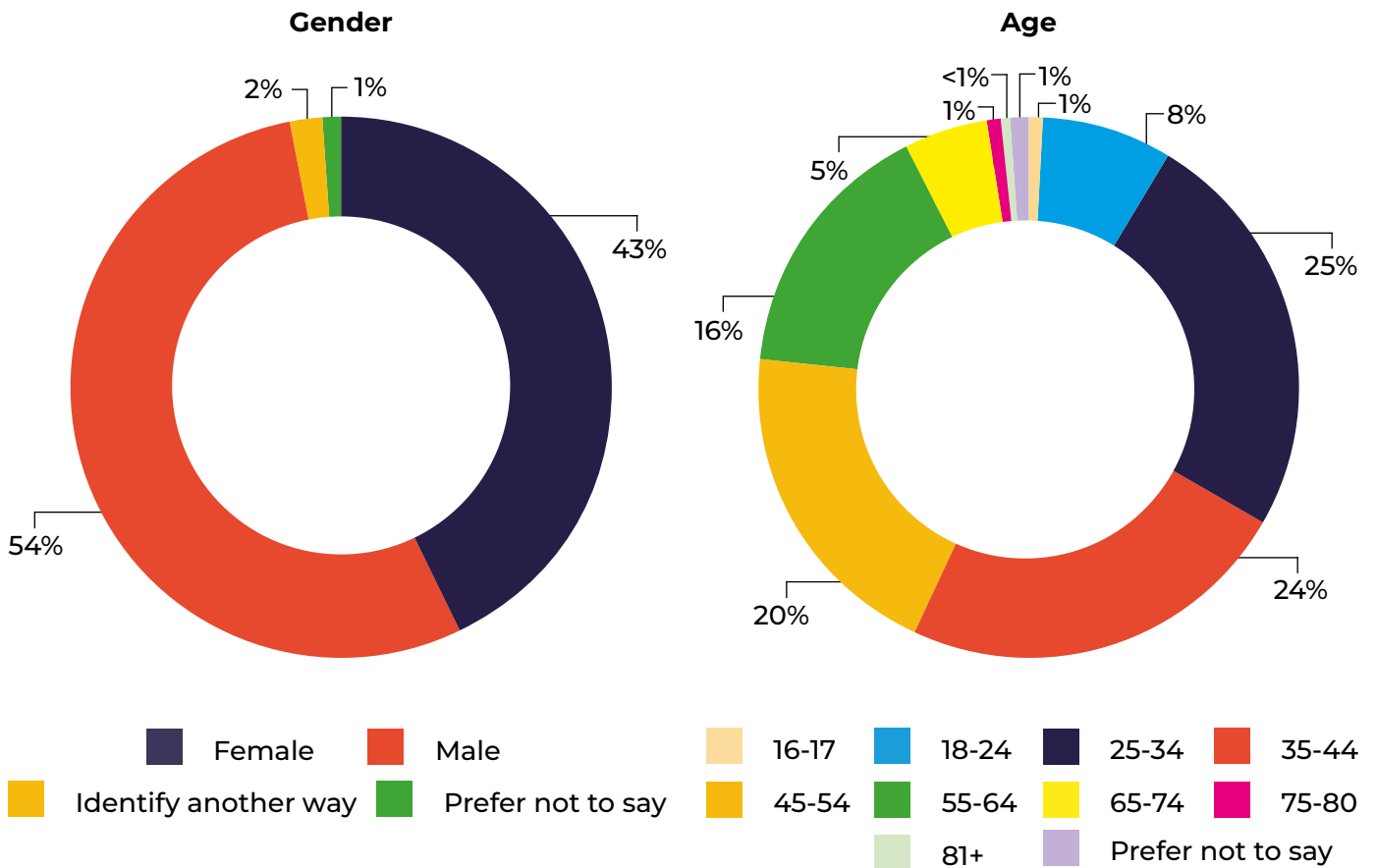
Women respondents to the census were more likely to work in Classical and Musical Theatre than any other genre. The largest gender gap in respondents is in UK rap, with only 8% of women report making music in this genre, compared to 16% of musicians of all other genders.

88% of women reported their career had been restricted in at least one way and while many career barriers are experienced at similar levels amongst women as other groups, some had marked gender differences including: cost of training and difficulty finding childcare.

Experiencing or witnessing discrimination while working in music was reported by 87% of women, compared to 65% of men. Of particular note is that more than half of women (51%) reported experiencing gender discrimination while working as a musician, compared to only 6% of men. Additionally, 33% of women report being sexually harassed while working as a musician.

These challenges are heightened for women musicians from the Global Majority and for disabled women. Disabled women are more likely to experience both disability and gender-based discrimination than non-disabled women, and 38% of women from the Global Majority have experienced or witnessed racism. Similarly, women from the Global Majority and disabled women experience a greater pay gap in music, with both groups being 10% more likely to earn within the lowest income group in music than white women and non-disabled women respectively.

Musician demographics

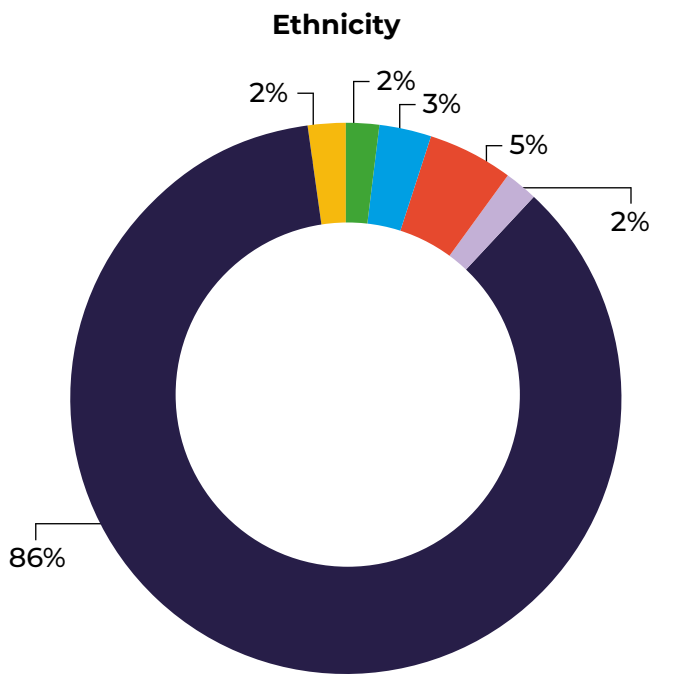


Of the 5,867 responses to our Musician’s Census, 2,526 (43%) described themselves as female, 3,172 (54%) described themselves as male, 128 (2%) described their gender in another way, and 41 (1%) preferred not to answer².

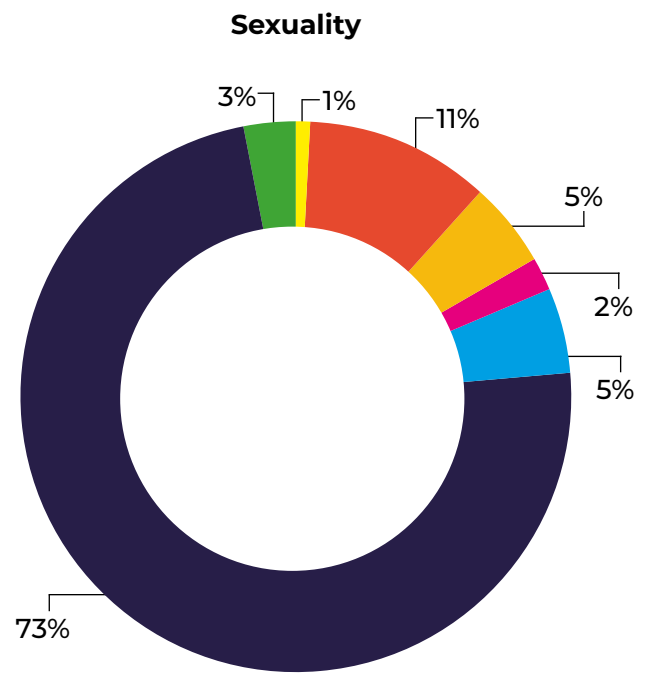
97% of overall respondents said their gender identity was the same as they were assigned at birth, as did 99% of female respondents³, so 2% of overall respondents, and 1% of female respondents said their gender identity was different to that assigned at birth.

Women were more represented in younger age brackets. While 43% of respondents were women, 47% of those aged 16-55 identified as women, with women’s largest age representation in the 35-44 years age bracket where 49% of respondents identified as women. After age 54, women’s representation significantly declines with women making up just 26% of musicians aged 55 to 81 or older and women’s representation declines in every age bracket from 55 years upwards with the steepest drop between 55-64 and 65-74 with women’s representation dropping more than 10% between these two groups. Of all women respondents, more than two thirds (69%) were across the 25-54 age groups.

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- Asian
- Black
- Mixed
- Other
- White
- Prefer not to say



- Asexual
- Bisexual
- Gay woman
- Prefer to self-describe
- Prefer not to say
- Heterosexual
- Queer

11% of women musicians (624) were from the Global Majority⁴ of which 49% were women (compared to women making up 43% of respondents as whole).

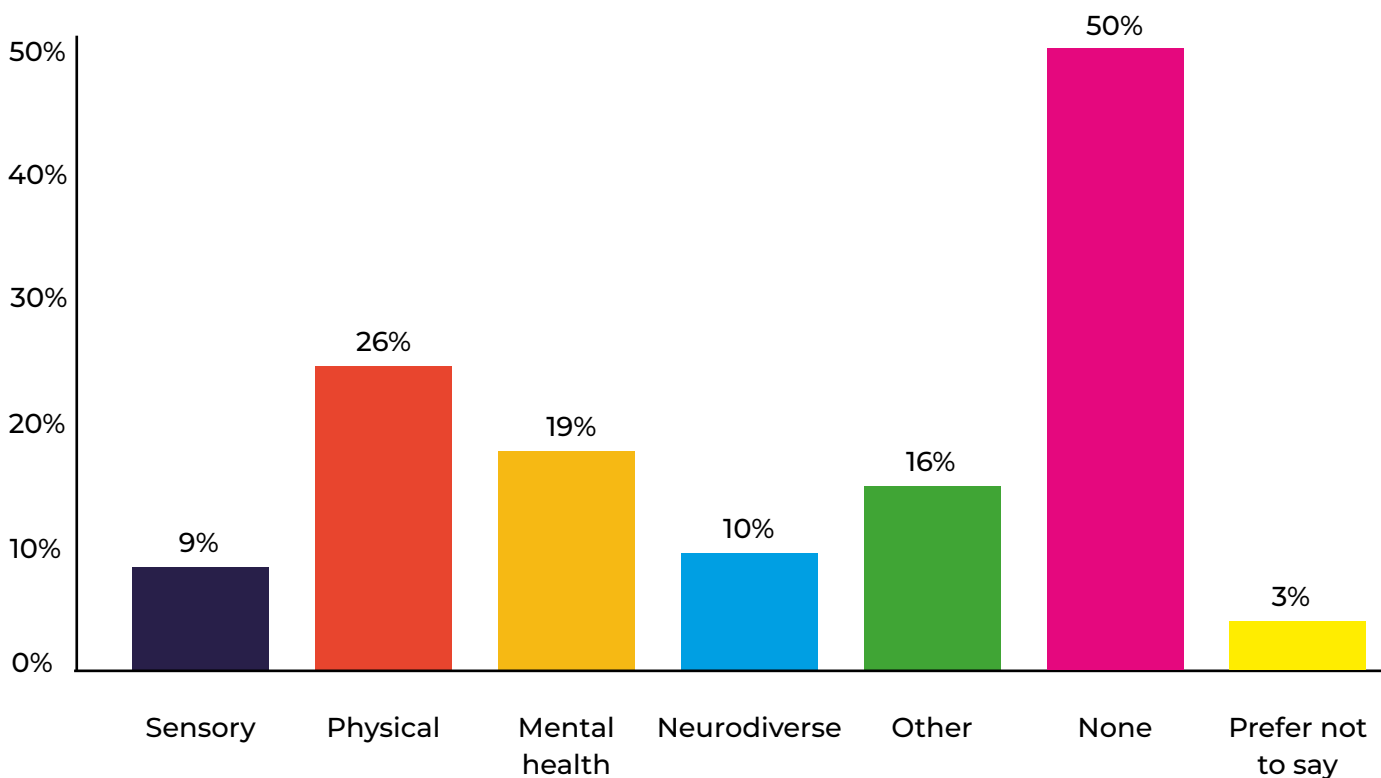
Women's representation was higher among respondents from the Global Majority than among white respondents. More than half (54%) of Asian respondents⁵ were women, as were half (49%) of Black respondents⁶. Women made up 43% of respondents from white ethnicities⁷.

21% of women respondents (534) described themselves as something other than heterosexual. Women respondents were more than twice likely as all other respondents to described themselves as bisexual (11% compared to 5%), but less likely than other respondents to describe themselves as gay⁸ (5% compared to 7%).



13 Musician demographics

Disability



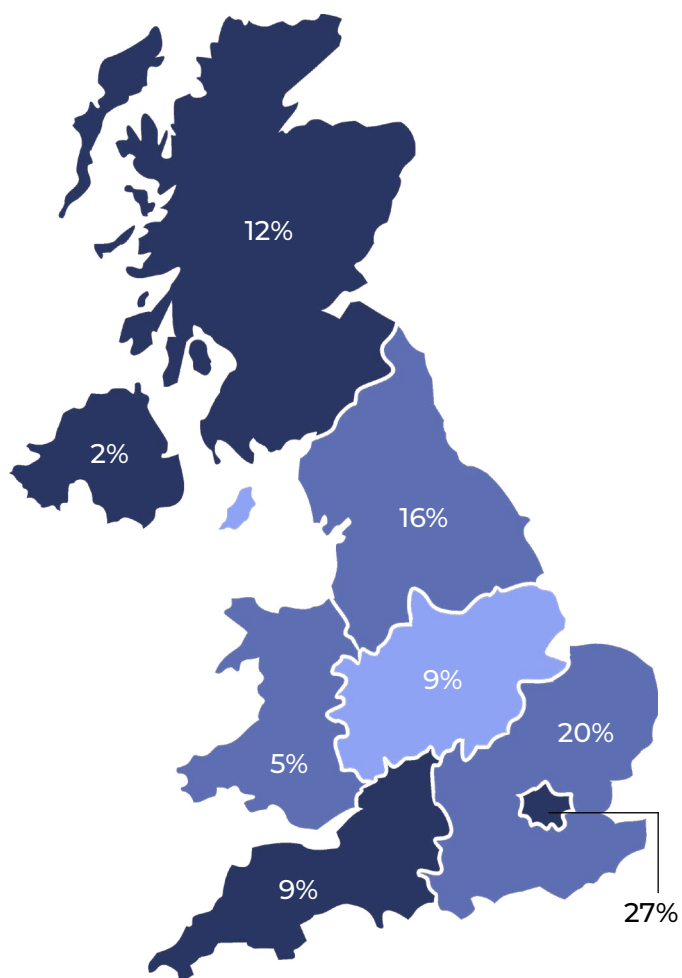
We asked respondents to report any impairments and long standing conditions, meaning those which have lasted or are expected to last for more than 12 months⁹.

50% of women respondents reported being disabled with one or more impairments, compared to 45% of all other respondents.

Women were most likely to report physical impairments (21% of women who responded) or mental ill health (19% of women who responded), and least likely to report sensory impairments (8%).

Of disabled women, more than half (51%) were open about their impairment(s) in all their workplaces, just under a quarter (24%) were only open about their impairment(s) in some of their workplaces, and just under a fifth (19%) were not open about their impairment(s) in any of their workplaces.

Where musicians live

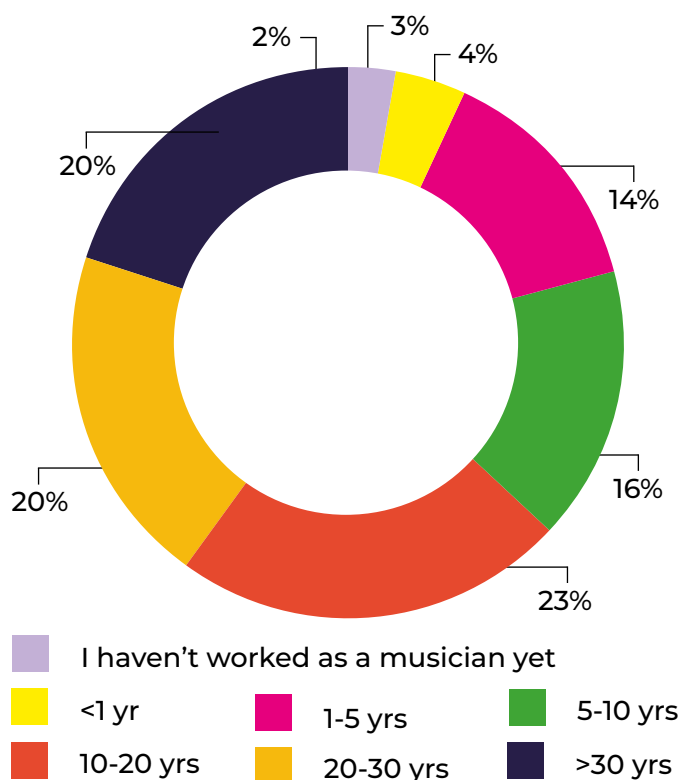




Years earning as a musician

Generally, women’s longevity in music matches that of musicians of all other genders. However, there is a steep drop at 30+ years’ experience with 26% of musicians overall and 30% of musicians of all other genders belonging to this career length group, compared to just 20% of women. This reflects the age profile of our Census sample, in which women tend to be younger and therefore haven’t worked in music for as long.

There are multiple and intersecting barriers and issues that may cause women to leave the music industry and more research is needed around this trend. Potential contributors could include the parenting and caring barriers highlighted in this report, the potential challenges for women around entering certain roles within music as responses to the Census indicate and potentially age discrimination too, with 30% of women musicians reporting experiencing age discrimination while working as a musician, compared to only 21% of men.

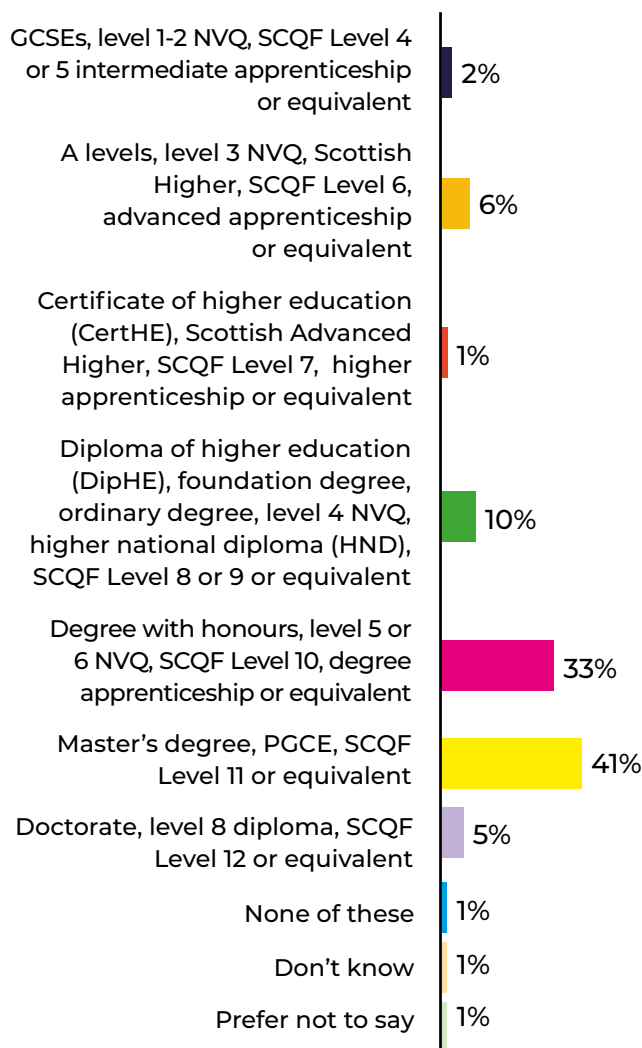


“Women in mid-life suffer from invisibility and often drop out of the industry. Women of my age have a valuable musical voice, their life experience infusing their music. There need to be more promotion of women’s music with an emphasis on midlife and older artists.”

Female, age 55-64, South West England

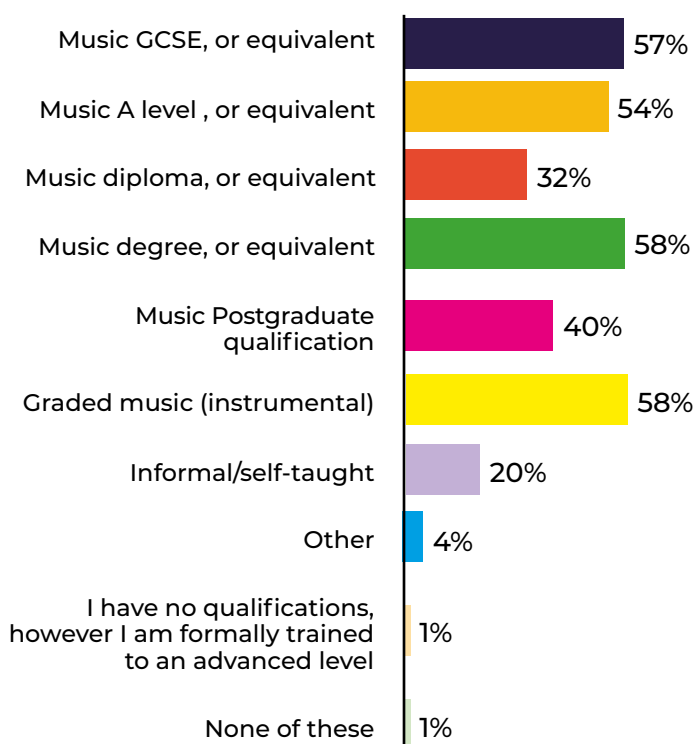
Qualifications

We asked respondents what their highest qualification level is. Women respondents to the Census report having higher levels of qualifications than all other respondents, with almost half (46%) being educated to Masters-level or above, compared to under a third (30%) of all other respondents, while similar proportions of women (33%) and all other respondents (34%) were educated to degree level. Just 3% of women, compared 9% of all other respondents, reported being educated to below A-level/Scottish Highers.



Music qualifications

Women are more likely than other respondents to hold formal music qualifications. In particular, women are more likely to have completed instrumental graded music exams (58% of women compared to 42% of other respondents).







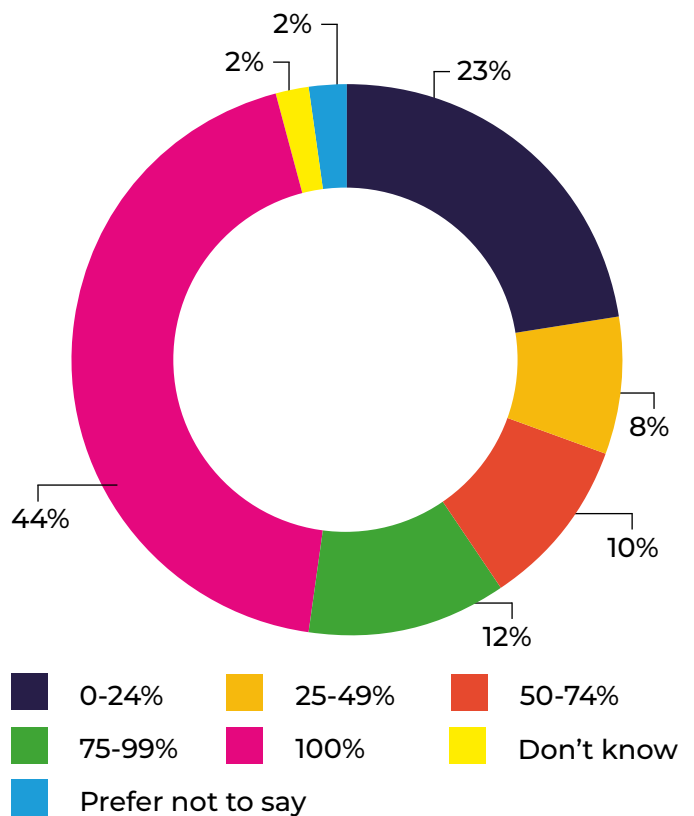
Key findings

Income

Women were more likely to report making all of their income from music than musicians of all other genders (44% compared to 38% of musicians of all other genders). Women were also less likely to be making under a quarter of their income from music compared to musicians of all other genders (23% of women compared to 29% of musicians of all other genders).

“It is difficult to plan much ahead as a freelancer because there is so little security around income. With London being particularly competitive, there are more musicians than there is work.”

Female, age 45-54, London



Women working as conductors or musical directors (54%), in music teaching roles (53%) and lecturers (54%) were most likely to be earning all their income from music. These roles are more likely to be full or part time employed roles. Women working as DJs (10%), and live sound engineers (21%) were least likely to be earning all of their income from music, and these types of role are more likely to be freelance and more financially precarious. Responses in the open text indicate that women’s choices about employment status in music may be shaped as much by financial need than career and creative preference.

As highlighted in the earlier Financial Insights Report from the Musicians’ Census, there is a gender pay gap in music. Men earn slightly more overall than women with the average annual income from music for men being £21,750, and for women £19,850. While men are the larger group in both the highest and lowest income brackets, women and men are paid equally up to the point of earning an annual income of £34,000 from music but

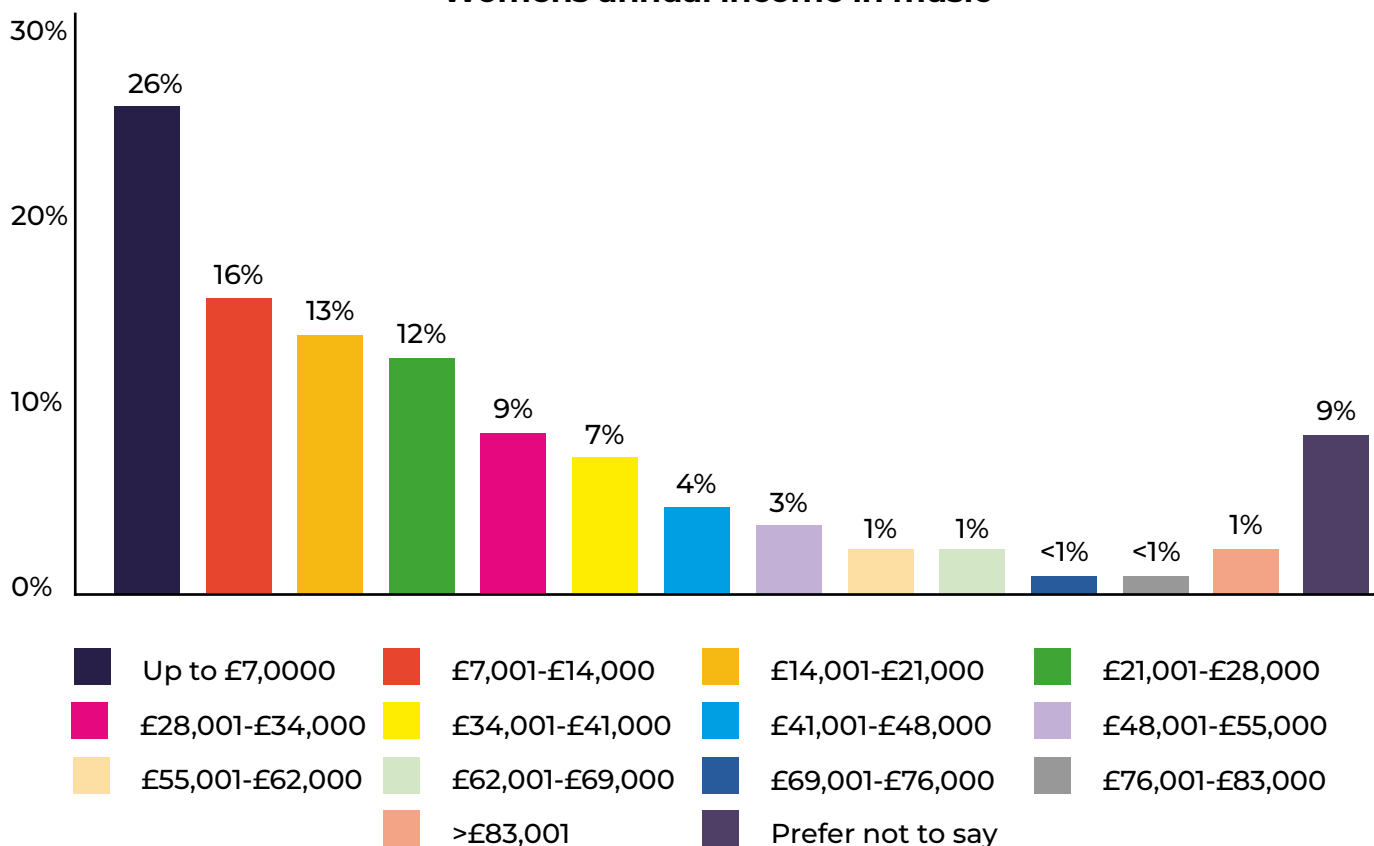
after £34,000, men report higher earnings from music than both women and musicians identifying their gender in another way. Just 152 musicians (3%) reported earning £70,000 or more from music each year and 79% of these are men, while just 19% are women.

Women were generally overrepresented in lower income groups, for example, even though women made up 43% of respondents overall, they made up 47% of those earning £7,000-£14,000; 48% of those earning £14,000-£21,000 and 50% of those earning £21,001- £28,000 and £28,001- £34,000.

“Inflexibility of rehearsal hours and need to be away from home means performing work is nearly impossible to take on as organising childcare is very hard. Teaching is much easier to fit around having children.”

Female, age 35-44, South East England

Womens annual income in music



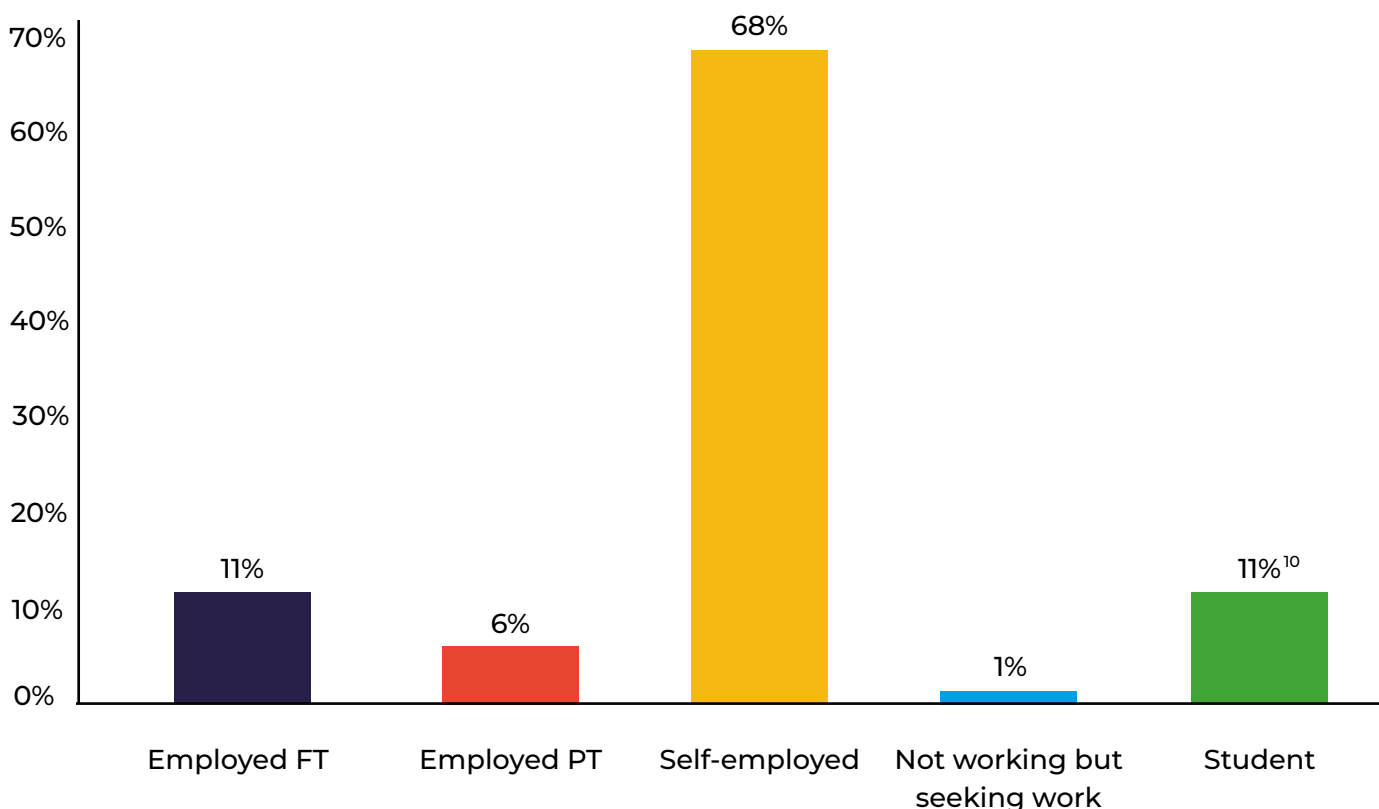
Working status

Of the 31% of women who reported their employment status in music, 68% reported being self-employed, which aligns with musicians overall (72%). 11% of women reported being employed full time, also similar to musicians overall (13%) and fewer women reported working part time (6%) than musicians overall (10%).

Only six respondents stated they were a stay-at-home parent/house person and five of these identified as women, one as male.

“It is hard to practice enough to do well in auditions whilst doing a full-time job in music.”

Female, age 55-64, West Midlands



Pay gaps

Women musicians from the Global Majority were 10% more likely to earn in the lowest income band than white women, with 35% of women from the Global Majority earning £7,000 or less, compared to 25% of white women.

Similarly, disabled women were 10% more likely to earn £7,000 or less than non-disabled women, with 31% of disabled women earning in this bracket compared to one in five non-disabled women.

At the other end, white and non-disabled women were more likely to be represented in higher-middle income groups, for example 15% of white women reported income from music across £34,001-£55,000 income groups, compared to 8% of women from the Global Majority and 10% of disabled women.



Supplementing income

Slightly more musicians who identified as women reported having to take on other work outside of music because they need to do so for financial reasons, than other musicians; 77% of musicians of women compared to 74% of musicians of all other genders.

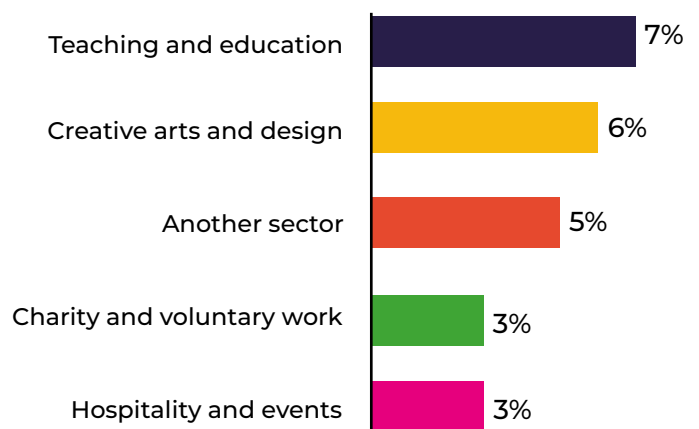
20% of women reported claiming one or more benefits, and the benefits most commonly reported by women respondents were Universal Credit (7%), Child Tax Credits (5%) and Personal Independence Payments (3%) and Working Tax Credit (3%). Benefit recipient samples are small in the Census, however, of these small groups, women made up 50% of musicians accessing Personal Independence Payments and 57% of those receiving Access to Work government support, both overrepresentations.

“Music does not provide a stable income and so progression is often slowed by needing to spend time on other work to make a living.”

Female, age 25-34, London

“It’s just not possible to have a sustainable income as a gigging musician. So you have to teach, run workshops, do other work. Then you are either unable to take playing opportunities, you get out of touch or out of practice. You can’t practice at the top of your game if you’re over stretched trying to make ends meet.”

Female, age 35-44, London



Financial challenges

27% of women musicians said that they do not earn enough money to support themselves and their family, compared to 20% of male musicians and only 27% of women said that they had enough money left over each month to pay for the things they enjoy, compared to 33% of male musicians. Women are also less likely to say they earned enough to support themselves and their families than men (41% vs 46%). Women are however slightly less likely to report being in debt compared to men, 15% compared to 19%, respectively.

“The lack of any sort of sustainable income as an unpublished songwriter who has worked in the music industry for almost 6 years has been a huge obstacle because it has meant I’ve needed to work multiple other jobs just to be able to pay my rent, but I am still in debt and living off credit and overdrafts.”

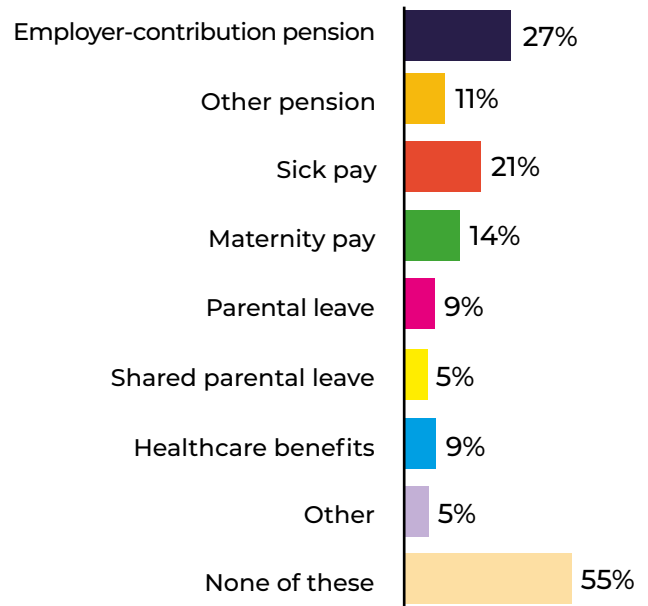
Female, age 25-34, London

Employment benefits

The majority (55%) of women, in common with respondents of all other genders, have no access to employment benefits of any kind. Only 15% have access to maternity pay, compared to 22% of women who have primary carer responsibility for children.

“Lack of sick pay as a freelancer and lack of paid holidays, lack of workplace pension are all constant worries.”

Female, age 25-34, London





Working patterns in music

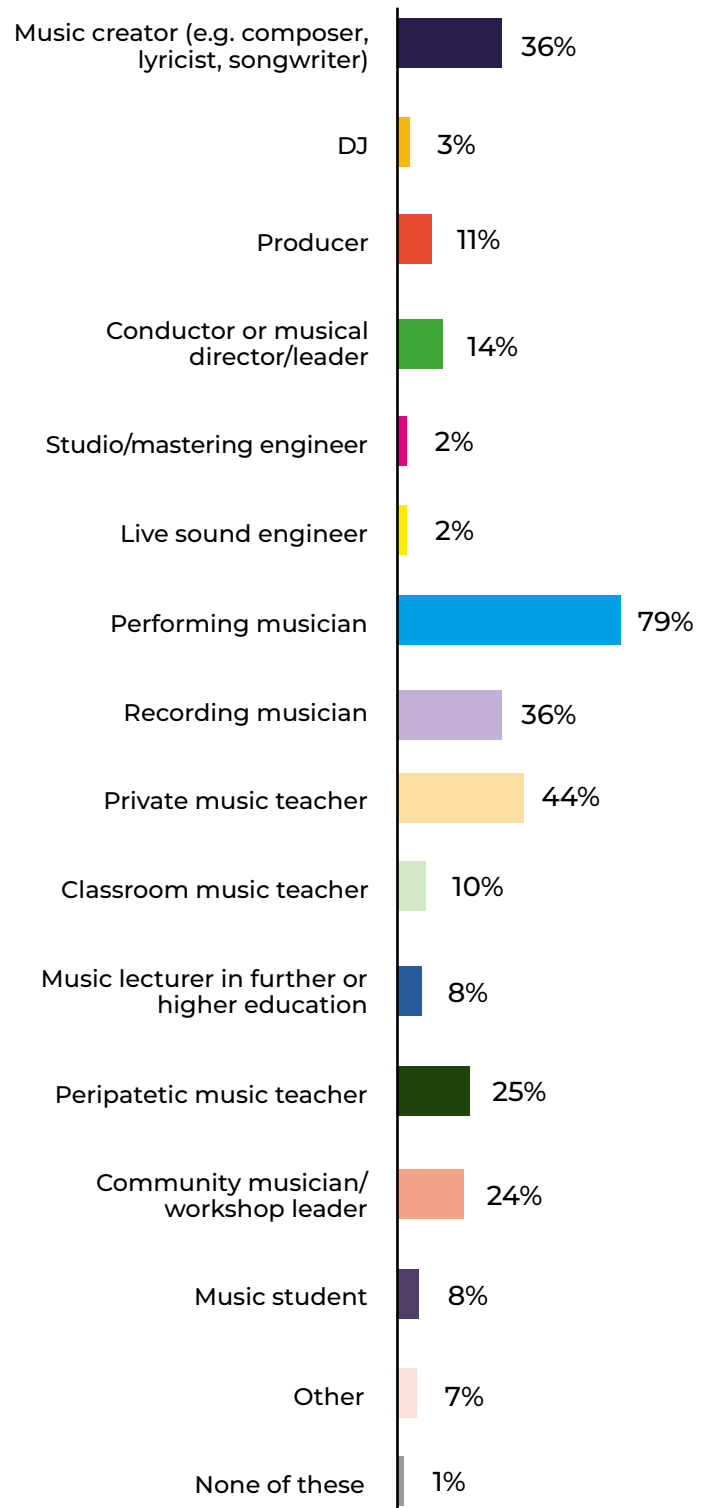
Working status as a musician

“Being a female composer is still quite a difficult area, and there’s a considerable amount of discrimination still. It’s also incredibly hard to access schemes for composers when you have young children; they are deliberately inflexible and underfunded, so there’s no support for childcare.”

Female, age 35-44, East of England

There were especially low rates of women reporting being in some roles in music. 11% of women responding to the Census reported being a Producer, 3% reported being a DJ and just 2% of women responding to the Census reported being studio or mastering engineers or live sound engineers.

There are high rates of women working in some roles including: peripatetic music teacher (53% of respondents doing this role were women); private music teacher (53% reporting this role were women); classroom music teacher (48% were women) and community musician/workshop leader (56% were women). Women were however less represented as music lecturers with 8% of women doing this role compared to 10% of musicians overall. This aligns to analysis undertaken by the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies network in 2022 which likewise indicates underrepresentation of women in academic roles in music¹¹.





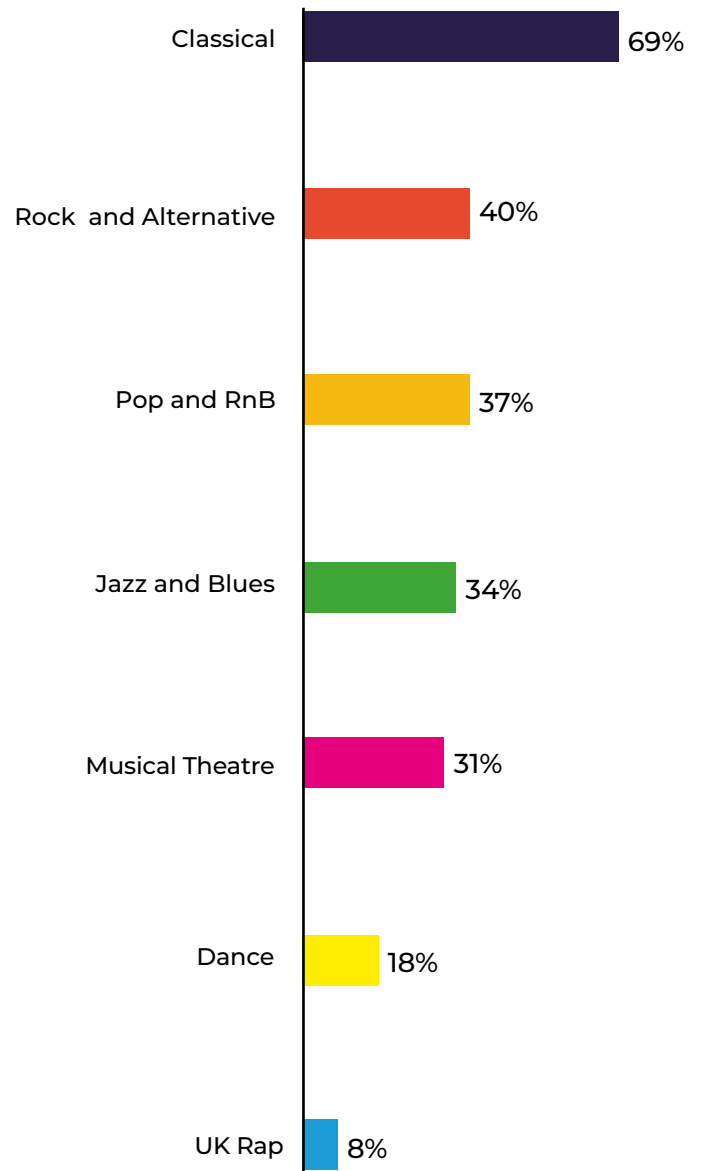
Genre

Genre information shared by women respondents may indicate some trends around the areas of music that are easier or harder for women to access. However, more research is needed to understand the pathways that women take into different genres and the factors that impact this.

69% of women respondents stated they worked in Classical music, compared to 48% of musicians of all other genders. Women were least likely to report working in UK Rap (8% compared to 16% of all of musicians of all other genders stating they worked in this genre) and Dance music (18% compared to 28% of musicians of all other genders).

“There has been a certain amount of discrimination I’ve experienced especially when I started out as a DJ because I didn’t look the right way compared to other female DJs of the time, and now I’m older and facing a new type of discrimination because of my age. For a long time I just didn’t know the right people in the industry and tried really hard to make contacts in the hope of getting gigs but it took me a long time to make the right contacts.”

Female, age 35-44, Scotland





Career barriers

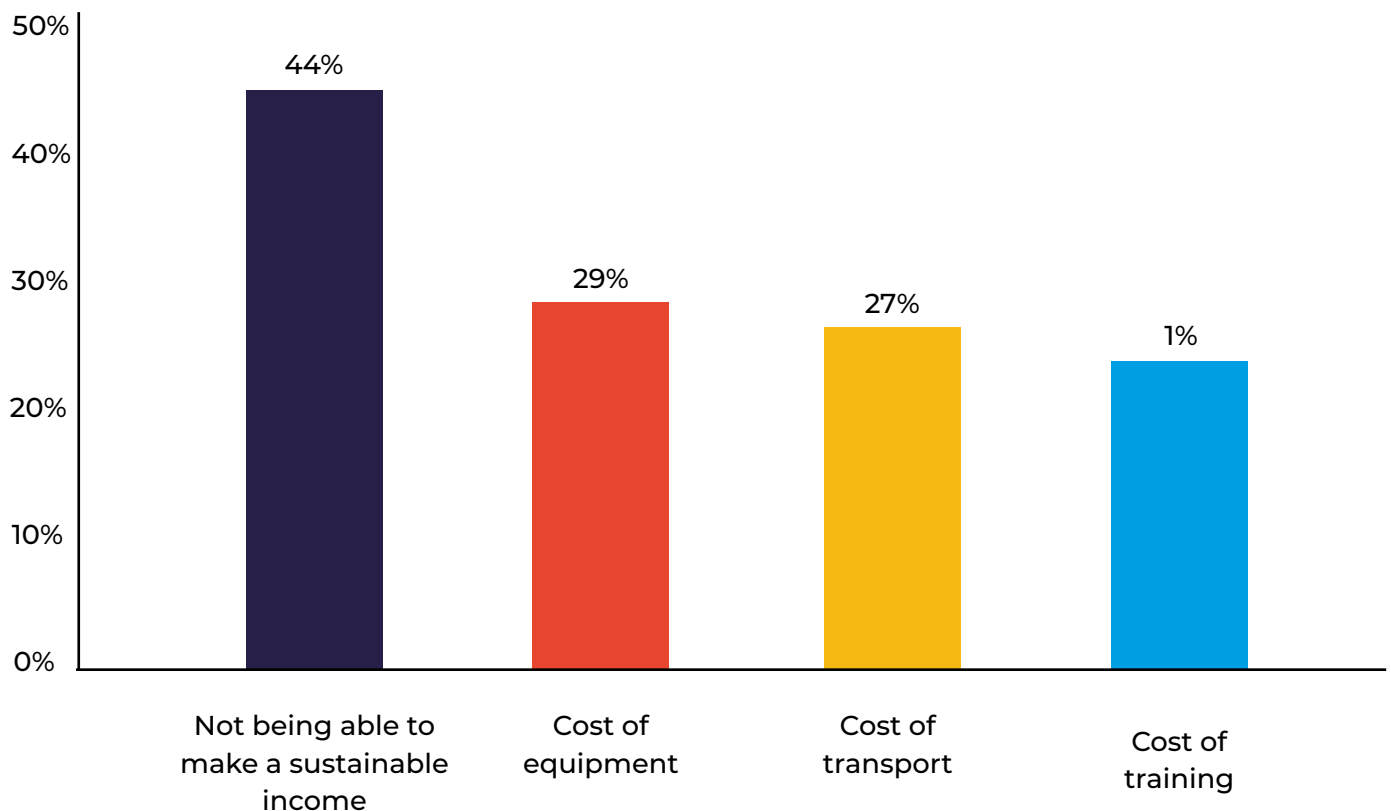
Women experience career barriers at a higher rate than male musicians. 88% of women reported their career had been restricted in at least one way, with just 12% experiencing no restrictions, compared to 81% and 19% of men, respectively.

“After the pandemic, it became more difficult to get work if one was of a certain age, so that was a discrimination. Not enough training for technology. Lack of support in higher education.”

Female, age 55-64, North West England

Financial career barriers

The most frequently reported career barrier amongst women was the same as for all musicians: not being able to make a sustainable income from music, with both 44% of women, and of musicians of all other genders reporting this as a barrier. 23% of women reported the cost of training as a barrier, compared to 14% of musicians of all other genders and inability to access professional development as a musician was also highlighted by respondents in the open text.



Non-financial career barriers

Outside of caring responsibilities, which are addressed below, women's most frequent career barriers were the same as musicians overall, with the most frequently reported barrier for both women and musicians overall being no clear route for career progression (38% of women and Census respondents generally report this as a barrier). Not knowing people in the industry (reported by 26% of women) and living too far from work opportunities (reported by 23% of women) were also key barriers and there was no significant gender differences in rates of musicians reporting these are barriers. However, the open text responses from women indicate there may be gendered differences in why these barriers occur for women or men, with women speaking in open text responses about the difficult of being taken seriously as woman in music, and the impact this has on fostering networks for example.

“Classical music does not have a clear route post studies to go into work in a structured way. Being female and non-white it has been hard to feel accepted and to make connections initially.”

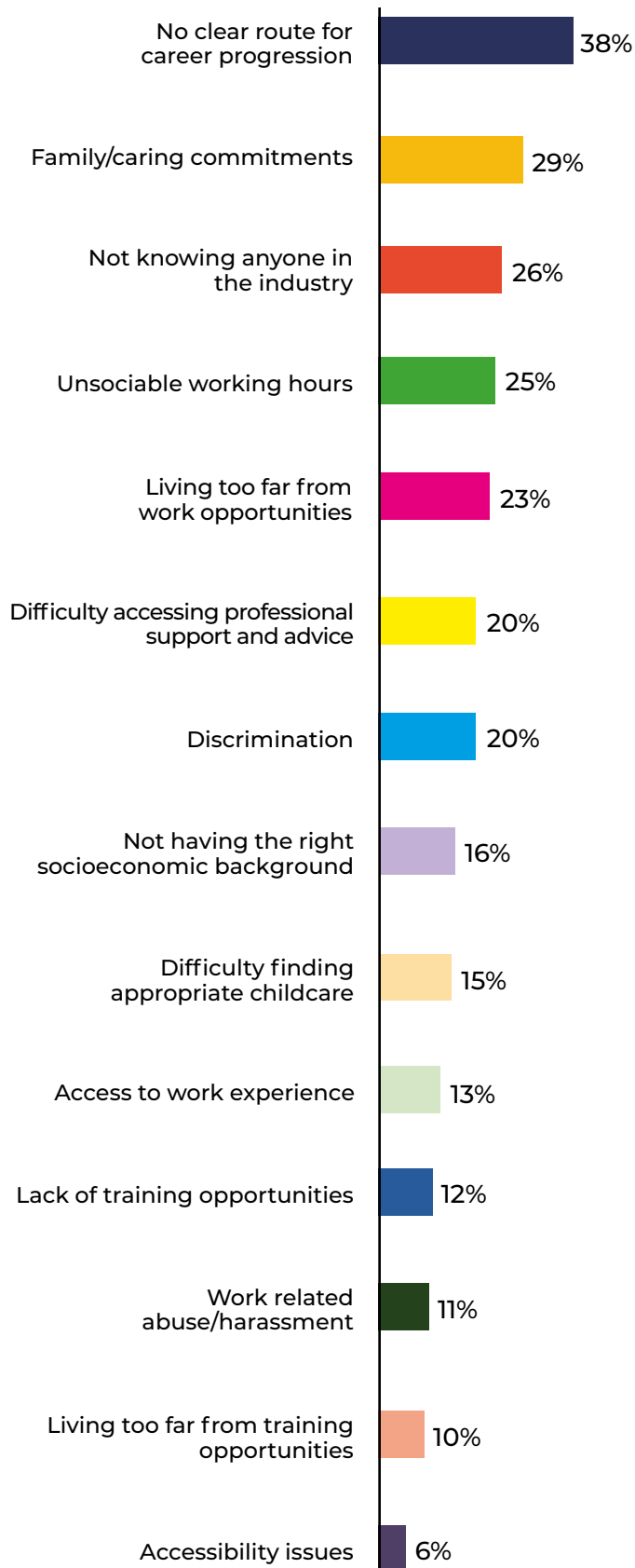
Female, age 25-34, London

“It can be difficult to gain work/work experience in orchestras and other professional ensembles owing to distance and lack of contacts. There is also a lack of information on how to access the route you would like which means you often have to discover the answers yourself.”

Female, age 23-34, North East England

“Job opportunities come about by word of mouth so no clear route for career progression.”

Female, age 45-54, Scotland





Parenting and caring

Parenting and caring was a significant area of focus for women respondents, with many opting to add additional information about the challenges they have faced in this area and the impact on their career in music, and with marked gender differences around the career barriers women and men experience in relation to caring responsibilities.

Women respondents were slightly more likely than men to report any caring responsibilities (34% of women said they had a caring responsibility compared to 30% of men). However, there were more significant gender differences between primary and secondary caring responsibilities with women far more likely to report primary caring responsibilities than musicians of all other genders with 28% of women respondents reporting one or more primary caring responsibilities compared to 20% of musicians of all other genders. Of these women, 22% reported primary caring responsibilities for children, compared to 15% of respondents of all other genders.

Further, 4% of women reported primary caring responsibilities for older people compared to 3% of respondents of all other genders. The only area of equity was with regards to primary caring responsibilities for disabled adults with 3% of both women and musicians overall reporting such a caring role.

With regards to secondary caring responsibilities men were slightly more likely to report these (9%), than women (6%).

Women were also more likely to also report that they experienced caring responsibilities as a career barrier in music with 29% of women stating family/caring commitments being a barrier to their career, compared to just 18% of all other respondents. Additionally, 15% of women reported finding appropriate childcare a barrier to their career, compared to just 7% of men. Family commitments may also be a contributing factor to 29% of female respondents reporting unsociable working hours as a career barrier compared to 19% of musicians of all other genders.

“Performing musician work is anti-social hours, in terms of family life. It is mostly evenings and weekends. The gig economy also makes it a financial risk to quit regular paid employment that come with benefits and pension. I would love to have the time to pursue a music career, I know I could probably make it work, but the risk it too high at this stage in my life, with two children and a household to provide for.”

Female, age 35-44, Scotland

15% of women respondents stated they had access to maternity leave, which is more than musicians generally but significantly lower than the 22% of women reporting primary caring responsibilities¹² for children. 9% of all musicians state they have access to parental leave and 5% report access to shared parental leave.

Additionally, 9% of women respondents state they have experienced discrimination due to pregnancy. 12% of women report discrimination due to parenting or caring responsibilities, compared to just 4% of musicians of all other genders.

“Since the birth of my daughter I have had to turn down several pieces of work due to a lack of available reasonably priced childcare. I have the impression that fewer offers have come my way as a result.”

Female, age 35-44, London

“Unsocial hours, travel and unpaid rehearsals make childcare for 3 small children very difficult to come by. I have had to turn down many performing opportunities because of this.”

Female, age 35-44, Scotland



Discrimination

87% of women report experiencing or witnessing discrimination of some kind while working in music, compared to 65% of men. Overall, just 19% of female musicians state they have not experienced discrimination of any kind while working as a musician, compared to 39% of men. This has a significant impact on women's careers with discrimination reported as a career barrier by 20% of women, compared to 10% of male musicians.

“Taking years out to care for babies and struggling to practice during that time is sure to have held me back. Also perhaps discrimination about the idea of me being a mother and how that might affect my performance when going for jobs.”

Female, age 35-44, North West England



Gender

51% of women report experiencing gender discrimination while working as a musician, compared to 6% of men. Only 11% of women stated they reported the gender-based discrimination they experience or witnessed, compared to 51% who experienced and 41% who witnessed it. Low rates of reporting indicate more action is needed to enable women to report safely and without concern for the impact on their career.

Outside of direct gender discrimination, women experience discrimination related to their caring and parenting responsibilities with 9% reporting experiencing discrimination on the basis of pregnancy.

“There are so many roadblocks for women in the music industry that get overlooked because of the complexity of the issue and how normal it has become. Gender discrimination is so engrained in us that it presents itself unconsciously which means that a lot of people deny it's existence which leaves little room for progress, perpetuates the issue and creates tension, unequal demographics in certain parts of the music industry and a wider pay gap.”

Female, age 25-34 Scotland



Disability

Only 14% of disabled women reported experiencing no discrimination of any kind, compared to 24% of non-disabled women and disabled women reported rates of all discrimination at higher rates than non-disabled women: 57% of disabled women reported experiencing gender discrimination compared to 44% of non-disabled women; 38% of disabled women reported experiencing sexual harassment in their work as a musician, compared to 27% of non-disabled women and 35% of disabled women reported experiencing age discrimination compared to 25% of non-disabled women.

13% of disabled women stated they had experienced discrimination because of their disability and just 4% of women who said they experienced or witnessed discrimination on the basis of disability said they reported it. This discrimination could be one way in which disability impacts disabled women's careers, amongst others, such as physical access barriers with 64% of disabled women reporting that their impairments and/or conditions impact on their music career or aspirations, compared to 41% of disabled respondents of all other genders. 21% of disabled women said their impairments and/or conditions impact substantially on their career.

“Due to having a disability, I am unable to access several places of opportunities or events along with being unable to travel far for work. Performance opportunities for disabled musicians are rare and due to only being able to work part time, it means I am unable to access equipment nor have the energy to work unpaid hours/creating online content to advertise.”

Female, age 25-34, South West England

Racism

Just 12% of women musicians from the Global Majority had experienced no discrimination in music, compared to 20% of white women. 47% of women from the Global Majority reported experiencing racism, and 38% reported witnessing others experiencing racism, compared to 21% of white women. Just 8% of women who experienced or witnessed racism reported it and there is much more action needed to enable reporting and support for women who experience racism and bystander engagement from those who witness it.

“I feel that my caring responsibilities, and also my age and racial background have contributed to diminishing opportunities in the last few years.”

Female, age 45-54, South East England

Type of discrimination	% of women experienced	% of women witnessed	% of women who reported discrimination they experienced or witnessed
Gender discrimination	51%	42%	11%
Age discrimination	30%	24%	6%
Socio-economic discrimination	11%	12%	3%
Pregnancy discrimination	9%	10%	3%
Racial discrimination/ racism	9%	23%	8%
Disability discrimination	7%	10%	4%
Sexuality discrimination	7%	12%	3%
Gender identity discrimination	2%	8%	3%
Discrimination due to parenting or caring responsibilities	12%	11%	3%

Wellbeing

Women reported more positive than negative levels of physical and mental wellbeing. 63% of women rate their physical wellbeing as either somewhat positive, positive or extremely positive and slightly less, 58%, rate their mental wellbeing as somewhat positive, positive or extremely positive.

There were no gender differences in low mental wellbeing, with 31% of all respondents reporting this. 58% of women selected a positive option for their mental wellbeing, compared to 61% of musicians of all other genders.

There is a slightly larger gender difference in physical wellbeing where 5% more musicians of all other genders said their physical wellbeing was positive, 68% compared to 63% of women respondents.

“To be honest, my career progression would have been much easier if I didn’t suffer mental health difficulties - these stem in part from my socio economic background. I also have had to spend a lot of time not doing music in order to pay the rent and for food etc.”

Female, age 45-54, London



Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment disproportionately impacts women in music with 32% of women report being sexually harassed while working as a musician, compared to 5% of men. These experiences reflect those outside the music industry, where 30% of women report being sexually harassed at work¹³. 25% of women have witnessed sexual harassment of others in music, compared to 16% of men. Compared to rates of experiencing and witnessing sexual harassment, only 11% of women state they have reported sexual harassment they have experienced or witnessed in music. The impact of this on women's careers is demonstrated in the fact that 62% of those who report work related abuse or harassment as a career barrier are women.

How likely is this community to still be working in the music industry?

Women's certainty about their future in music was similar to musicians overall with women only slightly less likely than musicians of all other genders to say they were very or fairly likely to be working as a musician after both one year (91% vs 93%) and five years (83% vs 84%).

"I have been sexually harassed / assaulted on stage as well as coming home late at night from DJ shifts. As a woman I have experienced discrimination based on my gender - often from security in venues who have questioned me when arriving for jobs."

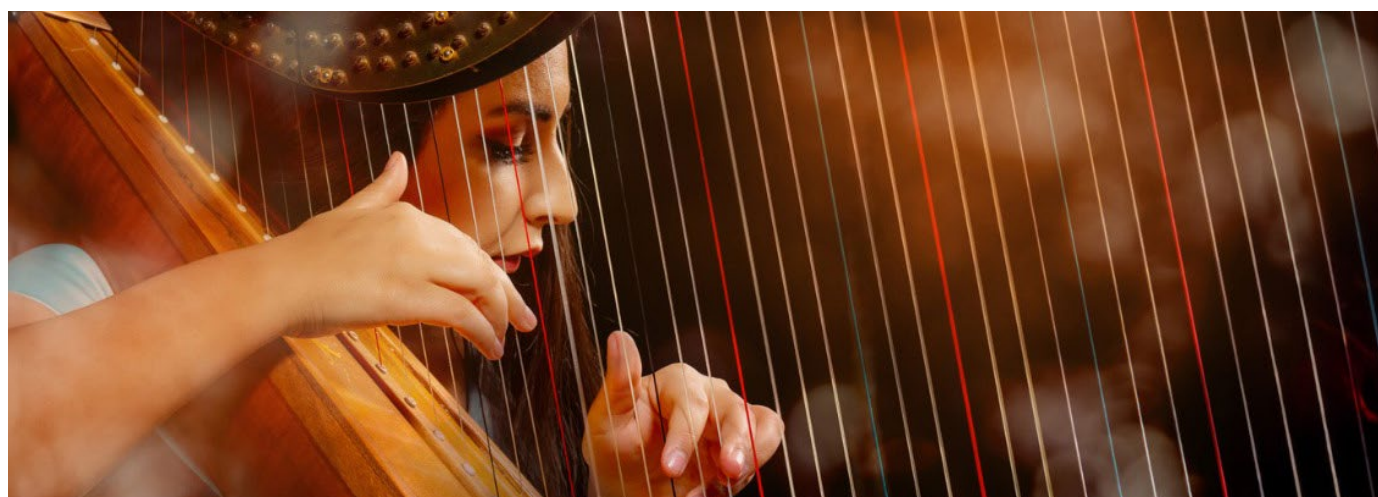
Female, age 25-34, East Midlands

"Mainly harassment from men in the industry has effect[ed] my confidence and anxiety levels when doing certain gigs."

Female, age 25-34, London

"I am committed to my career and know I do not want anything else, so I accept the struggled balance...This is why most people quit, it is so much to expect of a person and a very particular and difficult life to lead. But we love music, so there is no other choice for us."

Female, age 25-34, London





Next steps

This briefing is part of a series of Insight Reports from Musicians Census data on a range of themes.

This fifth Insight Report from the Musicians' Census 2023 highlights some of the barriers and issues women face in their careers as musicians. The Census data shows that gender remains a determinant of the kind of roles and genres of music musicians work in and may even affect career longevity and financial sustainability. Women working as musicians face much higher levels of discrimination than men in music and face significant structural barriers to career progression like higher rates of parental caring responsibilities coupled with inadequate access to parental benefits and childcare.

To move the dial for women in music, a sector-wide effort is needed to: remove structural barriers to careers as musicians for women; prevent and act on discrimination; reduce inequities amongst different groups of women in music; and to facilitate women's work as musicians in all genres and roles across music, making sure no music is off limits because of gender.

Help Musicians is committed to gender equity in music. In 2024 and beyond, the charity is establishing new ringfenced provision in all genre-based programmes for women and gender expansive musicians to ensure we champion and invest in women's creative and career development. We are also re-designing our Bullying and Harassment service for musicians in light of the Census data, and ensuring adequate recognition for sexual harassment within that service as this is a particular challenge for women working as musicians. Recognising the enhanced challenges women face as musicians, our sister charity, Music Minds Matter is working with partners to create safe spaces for women to come together and develop peer support and access mental health provision.

The Musicians' Union is working to tackle gender inequality in many ways. Safe Space is a sexual harassment reporting tool that provides survivors with a fully confidential way to share their experiences. The MU has and will continue to lobby on issues such as childcare, maternity pay, carers and gender pay gaps. Our Women's Network for members provides a member-led space for women in music to raise the issues that matter to them.

To get involved with the future development of the Musicians' Census or if you have any questions, please contact Help Musicians (communications@helpmusicians.org.uk) or Musicians' Union (equalities@themu.org).



Endnotes

- 1 www.bbc.co.uk/news/newsbeat-61512053
- 2 We asked: Which of the following best describes how you think about yourself?
Response options: male/female/In another way/prefer not to answer
- 3 We asked: Is your gender identity the same as the sex you were assigned at birth? Response options: yes/no/prefer not to say
- 4 Majority (people who are Black, Asian, Brown, dual-heritage, indigenous to the global south, and/or have been referred to as “ethnic minorities”)
- 5 Respondents who described their ethnicity as: Any other Asian background, Chinese, Indian or Pakistani
- 6 Respondents who described their ethnicity as: Any other Black background, Black African/African, Black British, or Black Caribbean/Caribbean
- 7 Respondents who described their ethnicity as: Any other White background, British, English, Northern Irish, Scottish, Welsh, European, Gypsy or Irish Traveler, or Irish
- 8 Comparing women who identified as gay women/lesbians with men who identified as gay men, people who identified their gender in another way who identified as gay women/lesbians or gay men, and people who preferred not to disclose their gender who identified as gay women/lesbians or gay men.
- 9 Disabilities have been categorised in the following ways:
Sensory: hearing condition or impairment & Visual condition or impairment
Physical: mobility condition or impairment & Musculoskeletal condition or impairment & Voice/vocal cord condition or impairment & Other physical health condition or impairment
Neurodiverse: neurodiverse condition or impairment
Mental health: mental health condition or impairment
Other: chronic coronavirus (“long Covid”) & another condition or impairment which affects my day to day life & nervous system condition or impairment & speech condition or impairment & neurological condition or impairment
- 10 This combines two questions, one on working profiles (27) and one on musical roles (116). Some respondents only indicated student status on one of the questions, others used both.
- 11 Anna Bull, Diljeet Bhachu, Amy Blier-Carruthers, Alexander Bradley, and Seferin James, 2022. Slow Train Coming? Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in UK Music Higher Education. Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in Music Studies network.
- 12 23% of respondents overall reported caring responsibilities (1,357 of 5,867). Respondents were asked ‘do you have any caring responsibilities? By caring responsibilities we mean anyone who is responsible, unpaid, for the care of a friend, family member or another person who, for a variety of reasons, is not currently able to cope without their support’ and were able to respond to one

or more of the following four options: primary carer for a child or children (aged under 18)/primary carer or assistant for a disabled adult or adults/primary carer or assistant for an older person or people/secondary carer (another person carries out main caring role). When we refer to parents in the report we are interpreting this as anyone who stated they are a primary carer for a child or children, and acknowledge that this may include other caregivers or guardians who act in this role. When we refer to carers, we specifically mean those caring for a disabled adult or older person. A limitation of that data is that, in the context of the Census, we have interpreted the term 'primary carer' as interchangeable with parent/carer because there was not specifically a question 'are you a parent or carer'.

13 2020 Sexual Harassment Survey Government Equalities Office, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1002873/2021-07-12_Sexual_Harassment_Report_FINAL.pdf