Tribepad

The 2023 #EndGhosting Report

Revisiting the call to end ghosting in recruitment with new insight

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Introduction

In 2022 we set up an industry wide campaign to End Ghosting in recruitment after finding out just how often it happens, the impact it has on individuals, and on a company's reputation. Why? Because we're on a mission to make recruitment fairer, faster and better for everyone.

We know the landscape is hard - for everyone. Layoffs are occurring, the cost of living crisis is making people reconsider their career moves or take on second jobs, and automated systems are causing a spike in job applications, making it hard for hiring managers to filter through and identify the best people for their vacant positions. Hundreds, if not thousands, apply for every single job. It's a lot of work for candidates and hirers. Last year we shared how, at the height of the pandemic, Tesco were receiving 300 job applicants for vacancies every single minute. That's a lot of applications to handle. But they managed to do so while respecting each applicant.

So, a year on, what's changed? Is ghosting still a challenge candidates are facing? How is it impacting them? How do we ease the strain on HR? And what can we do about this very real challenge? It's our belief that technology can be the answer - as long as we keep people at the core.

We commissioned an independent survey of over 2,000 people so we could dig a little deeper.

Ghosting has gone down

Whether it's our campaign, a reduction in the pressure to hire, or talent teams' consciousness, the prevalence of ghosting seems to be declining. When we first asked this question in 2022 two thirds (65%) of candidates had been ghosted, and it's now only 4 in 10 (42%) - a decrease of a third.

This is really positive news, given the effect it has on everyone involved. It's unprofessional, and leaves a bad taste in the mouth, affecting overall mental health.

Worth noting is the fact that the number of vacancies in the 12 months prior to our research in 2021 ranged from 294,000 to 540,000 open roles, versus this past year where open roles were consistently over a million prior to this latest survey. At the same time, employment rates bottomed at 74.6% in 2021, and are now at 76%. With more vacancies and less candidates, we should expect to see fewer applications per vacancy.

Perhaps the heat is slightly off recruitment teams, but the numbers claiming to have been ghosted are significantly lower, so we hope that campaigns such as #endghosting are having a positive impact.

% of candidates who have been ghosted by a potential employer

-31%

65% (2022)
43% (2023)

■ 2022　■ 2023
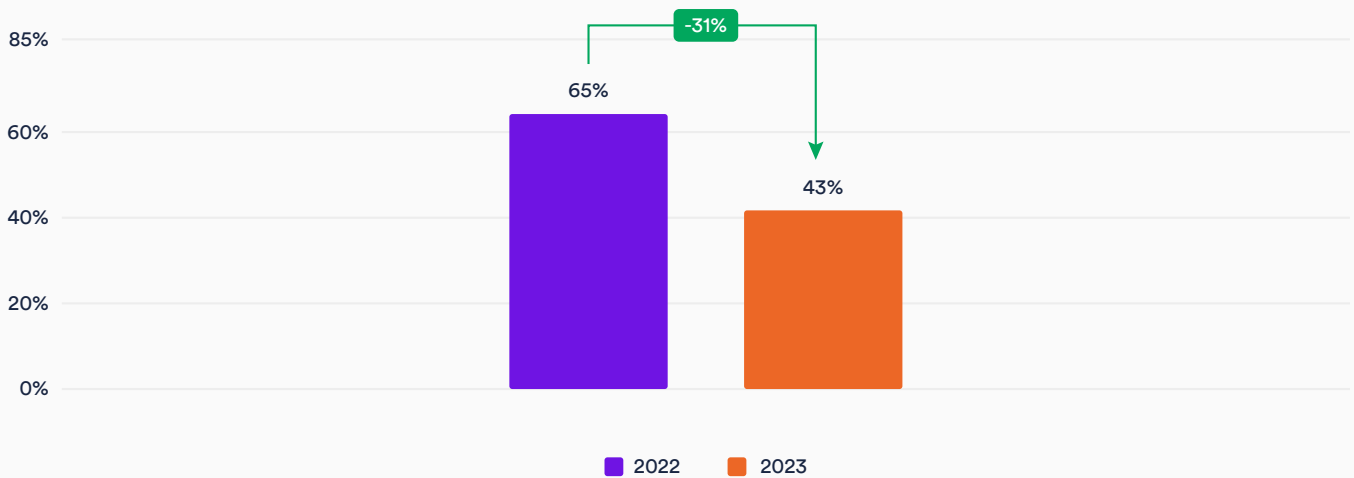
Men are slightly more likely than women to have been ghosted - 46% vs 38%. Londoners are most likely to have been ghosted - 60%, compared to just 41% in the Midlands. The simple number of people and jobs in London, as well as the fast pace of the capital, means that hiring moves at rapid speed - and simple communications can be forgotten. However, in all areas, ghosting has reduced.

London	East Midlands	East of England	North East	North West	Scotland	Northern Ireland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & The Humber
60%	41%	37%	44%	39%	37%	41%	36%	37%	38%	34%	44%

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Ghosting leaves candidates feeling low

While ghosting candidates appears to be in decline, it still happens. But it must stop. Ghosting makes people feel down and can affect them for months or even years. Interestingly some candidates seem to be getting thicker skinned, with two fifths (43%) saying it bothers them moderately or severely, compared to 57% in 2022. Perhaps candidates are no longer surprised to be ghosted as this trend continues. Still, the vast majority are left feeling down or depressed to some degree - an astonishing 87%.
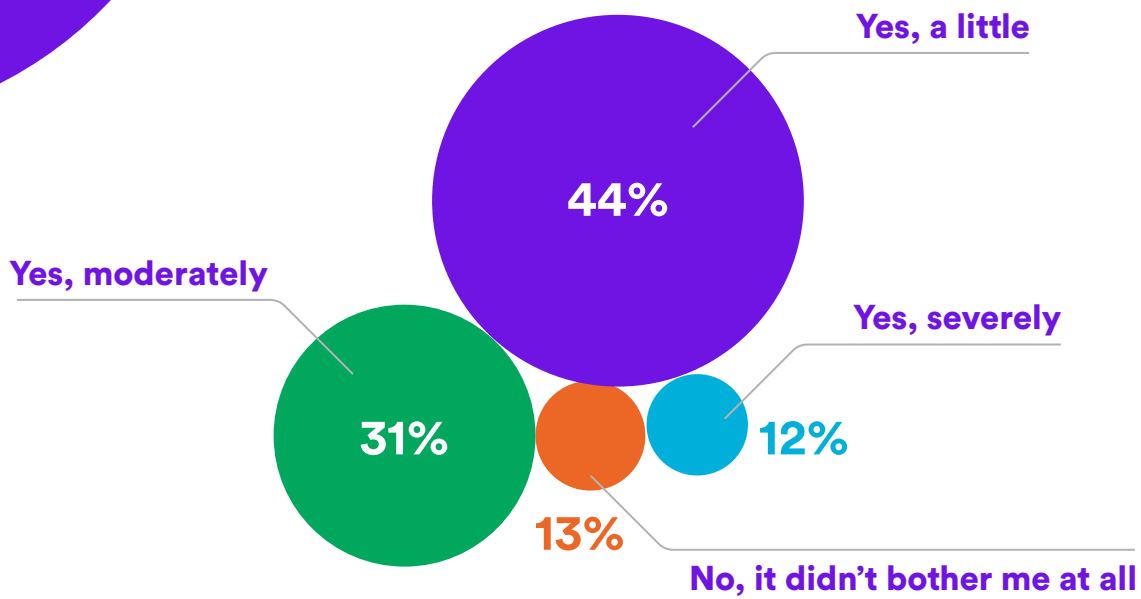
87% are emotionally affected by being ghosted

Did being ghosted by a recruiter or prospective employer leave you feeling down or depressed?

Yes, a little

44%

Yes, moderately

Yes, severely

31%

12%

13%

No, it didn't bother me at all

Nearly two fifths (39%) say it takes several weeks or even months to get over the experience of being ghosted. This goes up to 53% in London. It's pretty disheartening trying to get a job, especially in tricky climates like we have had in recent years where the pandemic and financial crisis has caused lay offs in all sorts of sectors. Many people put days of effort into crafting the perfect cover letter and CV - the least we can do is get back to them. Anecdotally we've heard that people are not just not hearing back after they have sent in an application, but even after one, two or even three interviews. They're left hanging waiting for an answer that never comes.

With mental health and wellbeing a big part of the discourse in businesses and organisations, it would be valuable if we put that same level of focus and empathy on people who are looking for a role in our teams, as well as those in it. In our Salary, security and purpose report we found that 1 in 3 (30%) of people want to move jobs, but it's just too time consuming. And we're making them feel like that time is wasted, as they put effort and energy into add attending interviews or filling out an application form, and are left waiting, wondering.

We know that recruiters and hiring managers are busy people, but a simple email goes a long way. We all know it's the right thing to do.

% saying that it takes several months/several weeks to recover from ghosting - by age
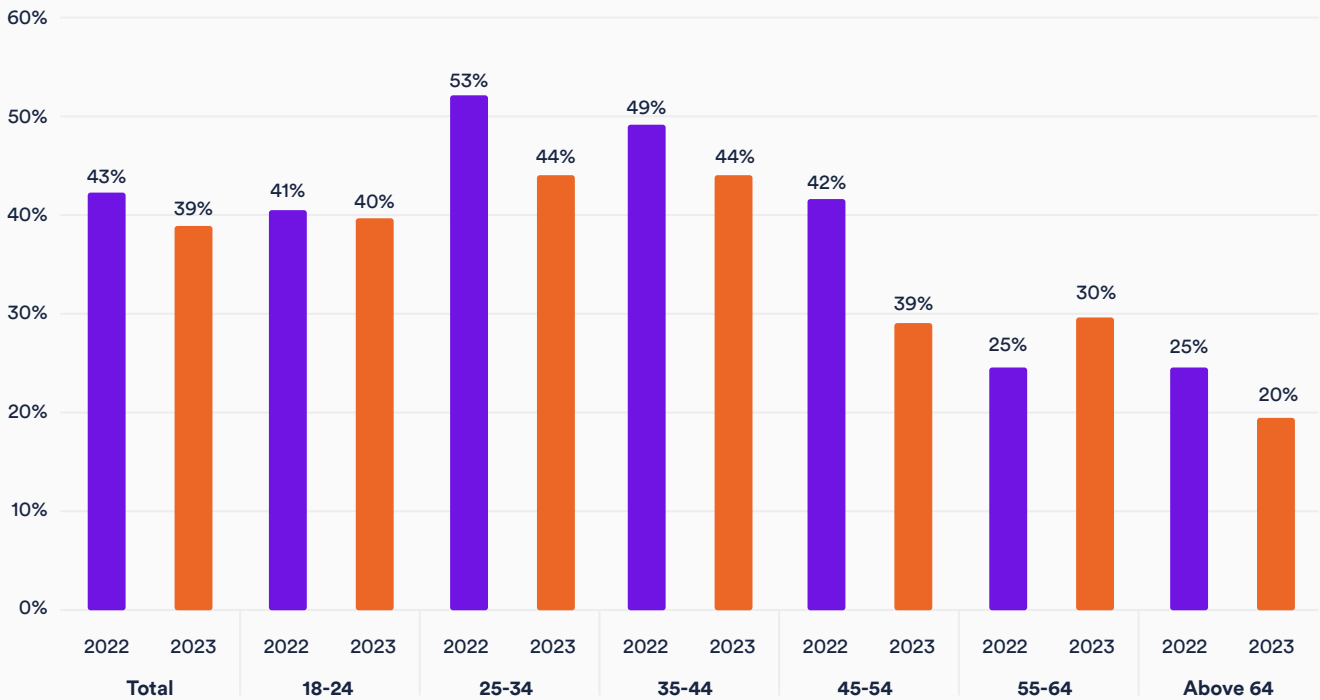
Generational ghosting

Younger people are much more likely to have been ghosted - or at least recognise it as such. 69% of 18-24 year old candidates have been ghosted, compared to just 14% of over 64s. Why is this? Many will be applying for entry level jobs where there are more candidates per role than in senior positions. Or there's a bit of bias happening, where senior managers and directors are afforded more respect. Respect that should be given to everyone.

18-24 year olds are 5x as likely as over 64s to have been ghosted

Our campaign calling out ghosting might have helped people recognise it when it's happening. It's also a bigger part of Gen Z and millennials' language and experience, with many recognising it from the dating and friendship world.

> *I think for most graduates, we've come to expect ghosting as normal. You have to apply for so many jobs, filling out lengthy forms and doing aptitude tests, and it takes a long time. It felt like a joy to get a response, even not a positive one, as at least there was closure. In the end I decided to go freelance, as I was fed up of being led on what seemed a bit of dance.*
>
> **Toni, 25, PR**

% of candidates who have been ghosted by a potential employer - by age

	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	Above 64
2022	78%	79%	76%	66%	50%	37%
2023	69%	68%	49%	41%	28%	14%
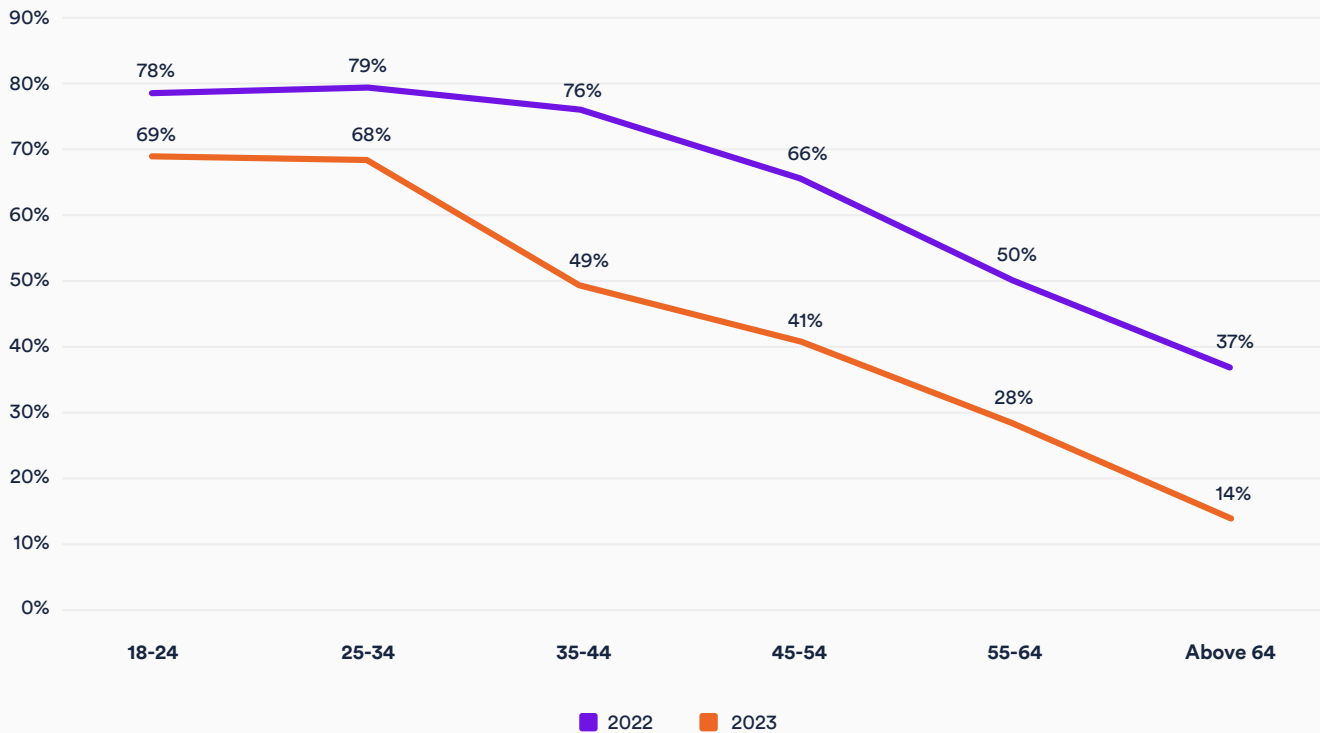
But it doesn't matter the reasons - the tough fact is that nearly 7 in 10 of 18 - 34 year olds have been ghosted by an employer or recruiter. That's too many, and it's having a negative effect on the youngest generations in our workforce - those who it bothers the most. Over half (54%) of 18-24 year olds said being ghosted left them feeling moderately or severely down or depressed, compared to only a third (31%) of over 64s. Entering into the working world can be daunting, and we're not making it any easier for people looking to develop their careers in a modern and dynamic workplace.
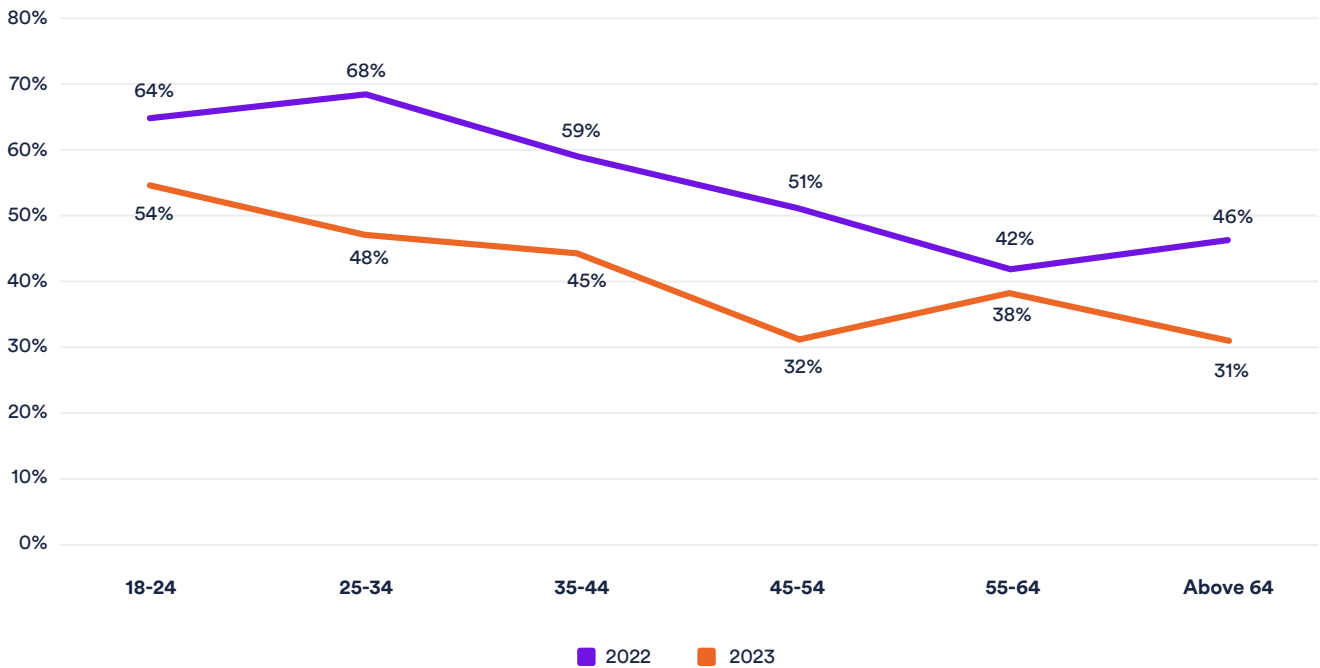
> *I had one recruiter reach out via LinkedIn with what sounded a great role. They asked me to make changes to my CV, and I got invited for interview. On the day of the interview, despite reaching out numerous times, I still hadn't received the Zoom link. I followed up a few times, and still to this day have never heard back. I was so excited, and then nothing. I know now that I would never work with that organisation as they lacked any sense of courtesy or compassion. When applying for jobs you have to jump through so many hoops, filling in forms, doing tests, and give your time and energy - and then you don't even get a letter of rejection. Applying for jobs is already hard enough.*
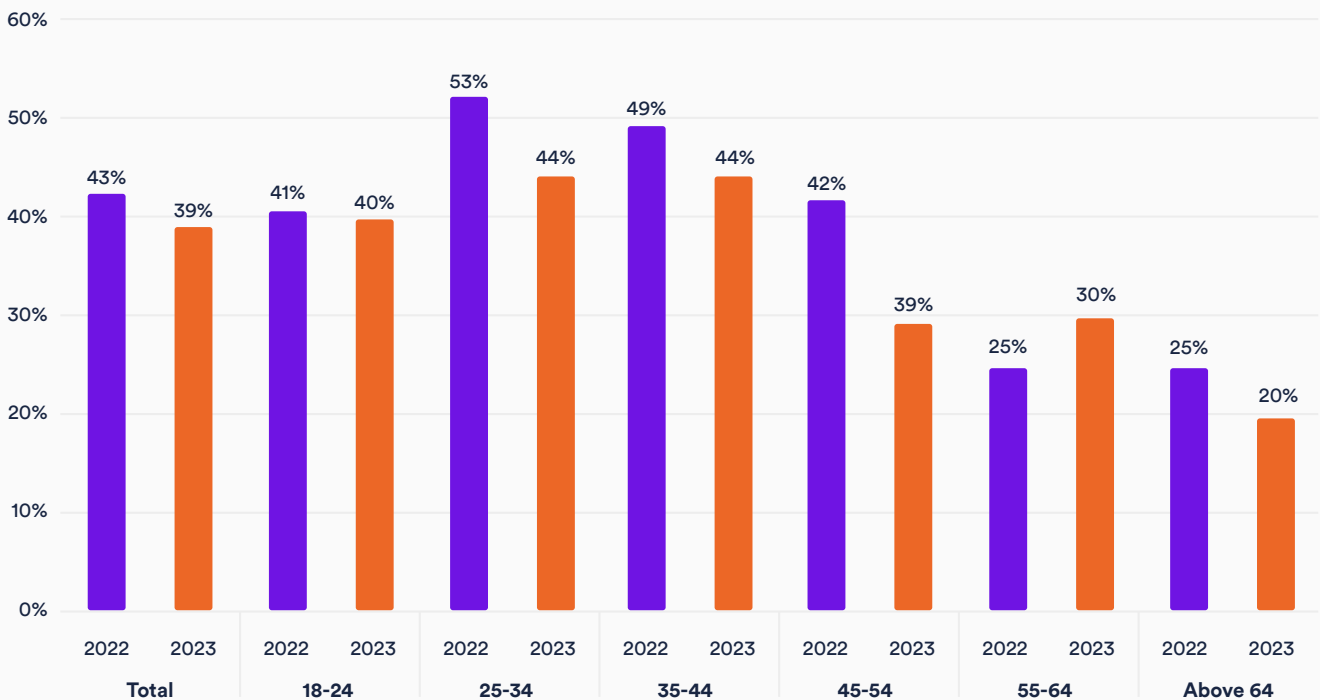>
> **Carmela, 25, Tech**

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% saying ghosted by a recruiter or prospective employer left them feeling moderately or severely down or depressed - by age

Legend: ■ 2022 ■ 2023

2022 values: 18-24: 64%, 25-34: 68%, 35-44: 59%, 45-54: 51%, 55-64: 42%, Above 64: 46%

2023 values: 18-24: 54%, 25-34: 48%, 35-44: 45%, 45-54: 32%, 55-64: 38%, Above 64: 31%

Four in 10 (44%) of 25-44 year olds say it takes several weeks or months to recover from ghosting. This long term impact could be affecting their wellbeing and productivity. It can be hard to bounce back from a rejection, but at least there's a clear endline. When ghosted, people are left with no answers or feedback, just wondering 'was it me?' This isn't just irritating people - it's having a major impact on confidence, wellbeing and potentially future job prospects.

It may be that older people are more resilient, and have assets and experience to fall back on. It may be that they have other options. But it's just not fair.

% saying that it takes several months/several weeks to recover from ghosting - by age

Legend: ■ 2022 ■ 2023

Age	2022	2023
Total	43%	39%
18-24	41%	40%
25-34	53%	44%
35-44	49%	44%
45-54	42%	39%
55-64	25%	30%
Above 64	25%	20%

Ghosting harms company reputation

Ghosting a candidate is bad for business and leaves a negative impression of your brand - a huge 9 in 10 (91%) say it makes them think less of a brand. Women are slightly more likely than men to be left with a bad taste (94% vs 89%) and 94% of 25-34 year olds form a negative opinion of a company compared to 87% over 64. But the message is the same - it harms everyone.

% saying being ghosted leaves them with a negative impression of a brand - by gender

	Total		Male		Female	
	2022	2023	2022	2023	2022	2023
	93%	91%	93%	89%	94%	94%
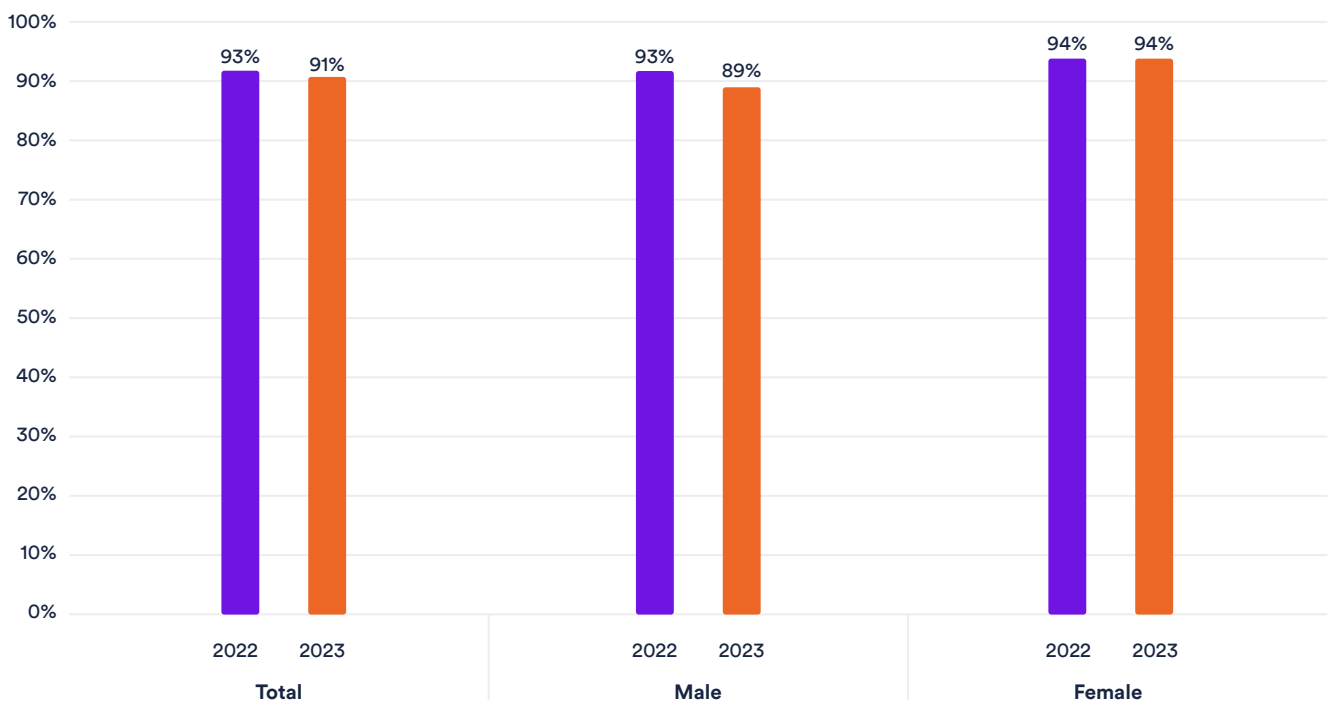
Our Salary, Security and Purpose report found that 67% of people find out about potential jobs via colleagues, friends and family - so leaving a bad taste in the mouth of a candidate can harm your brand and employer value proposition, making you less attractive to candidates in the future. Candidates who experience ghosting are less likely to apply for future positions at the company or recommend it to others. This loss of potential talent and brand advocates can impact the company's ability to attract qualified candidates in the long run, shrinking your talent pool.

> " *It's worse with external recruiters I find, and is a much bigger problem in the UK than other places I've lived. It's usually that it all sounds friendly, they ask for CVs, and then don't even follow up with a response. It's frustrating and upsetting. And affects the reputation of the company who use these recruiters too, leaving people with a bad impression of them.* "
>
> **Ivy, 35, Tech**

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Ghosting recruiters in return

Ghosting in recruitment isn't just one way. Candidates ghost recruiters too. A third (36%) of 18-34 year olds admit to ghosting a potential employer, compared to only 1 in 5 overall (19%) and a fractional 5% above 64. In a world of one click applications it becomes easy to apply for multiple jobs at any given time, which is resulting in people from both sides of the equation perhaps forgetting that there are people involved.

% saying they ghosted a recruiter or prospective employer part way through the recruitment process - by age
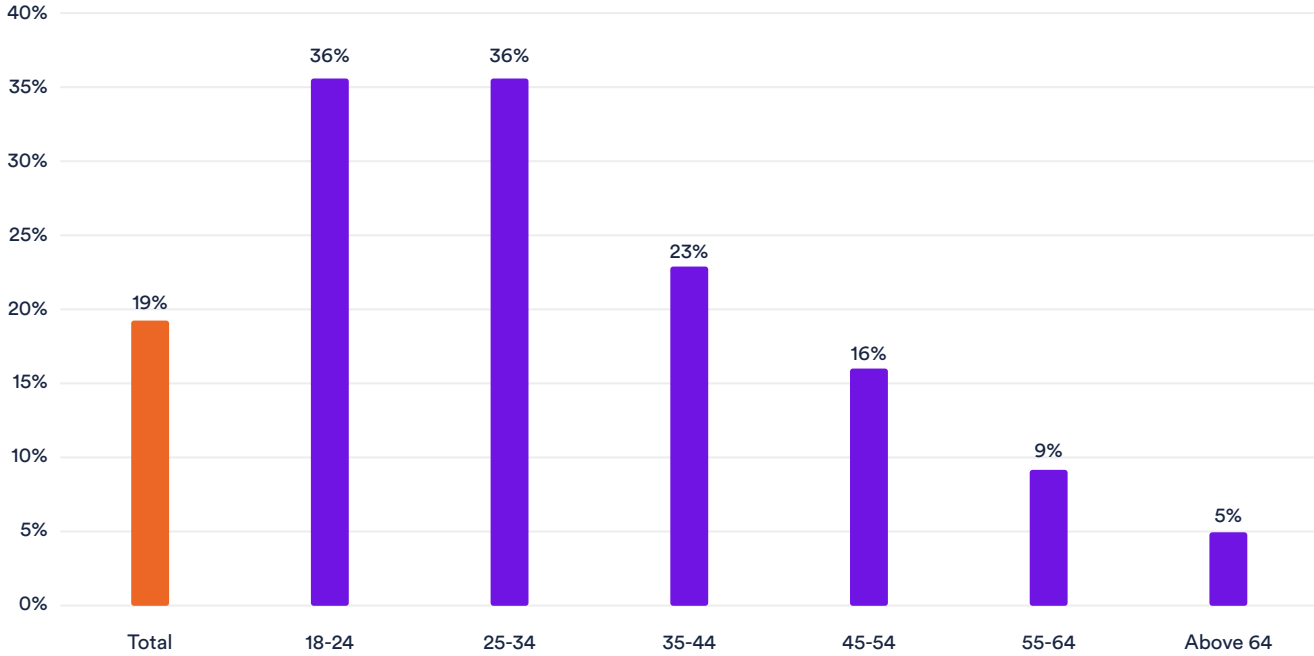
Londoners are more cut-throat - 36% have ghosted a recruiter or prospective employer part way through the recruitment process, which is twice as many as the national average (19%), and almost three times as many as in Wales (13%).

London	East Midlands	East of England	North East	North West	Scotland	Northern Ireland	South East	South West	Wales	West Midlands	Yorkshire & The Humber
36%	20%	15%	14%	18%	23%	20%	15%	16%	13%	16%	15%

And men are also more likely to disappear during the process, with a quarter (23%) of males admitting to having ghosted a hiring manager or recruiter, versus only a sixth (16%) of women.

The key trend to note is that more than twice as many people have been ghosted by a recruiter than have ghosted, showing it's candidates who are bearing the brunt of the trend.

% having been ghosted vs having ghosted a recruiter

Have Ghosted	19%
Been Ghosted	42%

0%　5%　10%　15%　20%　25%　30%　35%　40%　45%

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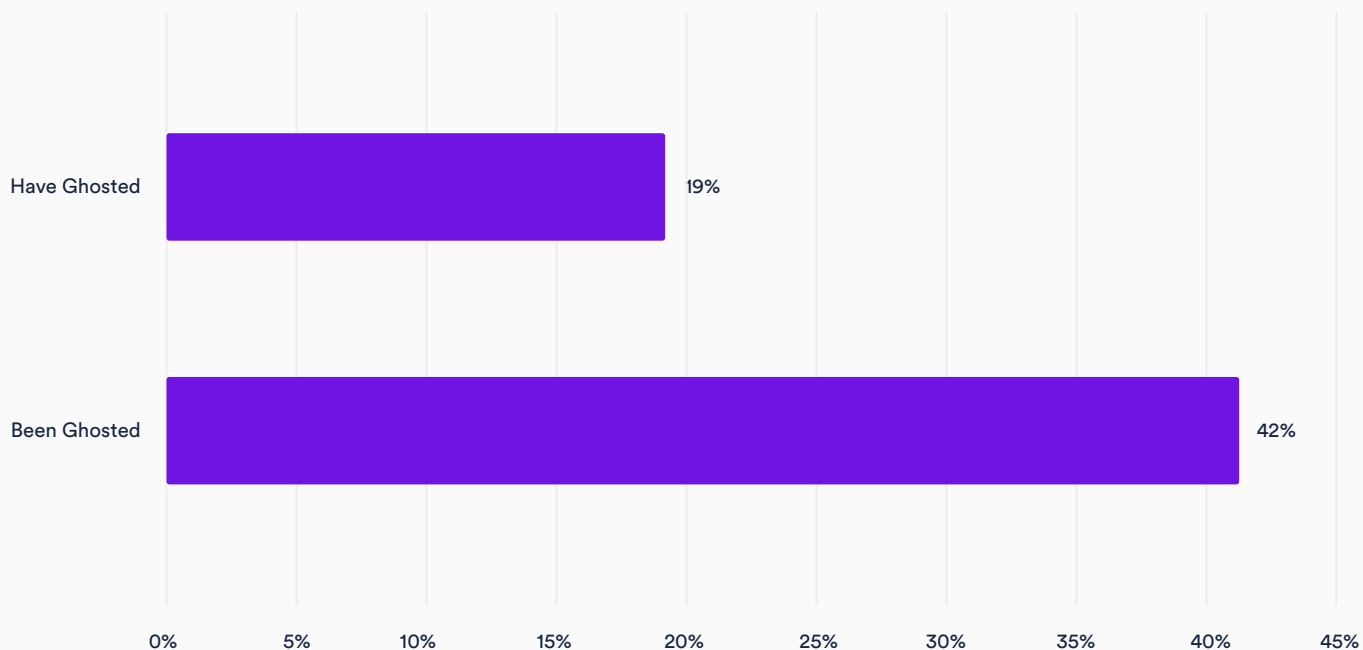
Conclusion

Overall the level of ghosting candidates has decreased, which is great news. We're not going to take all the credit, but we hope our campaign made some contribution to curbing the trend by calling out this practice and making a call for industry wide change. We need to nurture talent to develop the next generation of employees and leaders to elevate our businesses to success. We need to maintain the reputations of the companies we work for, and not risk it through a shoddy candidate experience. And we can use great tech to do so, as long as we keep humans at the core. A little bit of empathy goes a long way.

> " *I travelled the two hours each way for three interviews at what I thought would be a dream company. I thought the endless questioning, tasks and activities, and requirements to develop strategies as examples were normal. After the third interview, they ghosted me. I now see they were taking my ideas, and it's certainly made me more cynical of long interview processes.* "
>
> **Francesca, 36, Marketing**

Top tips to avoid ghosting candidates

01.

Put yourself in the candidate's shoes. Would you be annoyed and upset not to hear back from a job you wanted? Then don't do it to someone else.

02.

Use technology to automate the process. If you're receiving thousands of applications for every vacancy it is of course impossible to phone each person with bespoke feedback. But an email that can be automated but is written with human empathy at least lets people know the outcome so they're not left waiting.

03.

Use applicant tracking systems (ATS) or candidate relationship management (CRM) platforms to automate communication with candidates. Set up personalised email templates or text messages to keep candidates informed about their application status, interview updates, and any changes in the hiring process.

04.

Implement a portal or dashboard where candidates can log in to view the status of their application. This provides candidates with transparency and enables them to track the progress of their application in real-time.

05.

Establish dedicated channels for candidate communication, such as a dedicated email address or a chatbot on the company website. Respond promptly to inquiries to maintain candidate engagement. Do it with compassion and empathy, so you sound human even as being professional.

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06.

Commit to providing regular updates to candidates throughout the hiring process. Even if there are no significant changes, a simple email or message to inform candidates about the ongoing status shows respect and keeps them engaged. Don't leave people hanging.

07.

Set clear timelines for each stage of the hiring process and communicate them to candidates. Let them know when they can expect to hear back from you, such as after an initial screening or interview. And stick to these deadlines.

08.

Provide timely feedback to candidates, especially after interviews or assessments. Constructive feedback, even if it's a rejection, allows candidates to understand their strengths and areas for improvement. This closure helps them move forward and appreciate the transparency in the hiring process.

09.

While technology plays a crucial role, it's essential to maintain a personalised approach. Address candidates by their names, mention specific details from their application, and acknowledge their efforts. This personal touch shows candidates that you value their time and contributions.

10.

Conduct candidate experience surveys to gather feedback on the recruitment process. This feedback can highlight areas for improvement and identify potential gaps where candidates may have felt ghosted. Use the survey results to enhance your recruitment practices and ensure a better candidate experience.

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