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Arab Hi-Tech Workers in the Current War – Situation Report

January 2024

A NAS Research Survey for Tsofen

Research Team: Avivit Hai, Jasmine Tamuz and Nagham Ghantus



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Rationale





Dear readers,

In December 2023, Tsofen decided to embark on a survey among Arab engineers in the local hi-tech industry, to examine how they felt at work, how they were treated and the change – if any – to their social and professional status and their overall sense around the public arena.

Following the events of October 7 and the ensuing war we, at Tsofen were contacted by Arab engineers who expressed fear for their employment. They reported change in how they are treated, including callousness, suspicion, and failure to accommodate them, in some extreme examples they felt persecuted and accused of failing to empathize and associate with the Israeli society. Some have told of friends and family from their wider circles who were interrogated or even detained for voicing their opinions on social media. These engineers have turned to us, as the organization that trained them and facilitated their placement, for an attentive ear, counselling and support, which we have extended on a personal level, through Tsofen's staff, as well as occupational-psychological and legal professionals.

To validate our notions vis-à-vis Arab engineers' reports and substantiate them with figures, we initiated this survey, which was distributed among Arab hi-tech professionals through Tsofen's network of connections, alumni and volunteers. The survey's findings will help raise public awareness of the Arab society's situation during the current war, particularly across the hi-tech sector, so as to allow the state, hi-tech companies and philanthropy players to justify the funneling of resources and programs designed to address their needs.

Yours truly,

Ms. Maisam Jaljuli
Chief Executive Officer
Tsofen High Technology Centers Ltd



Methodology, Sample



When?



The survey was open for responses on December 12-22 2023

What?



- An online survey was distributed among alumni of different Tsofen programs, to volunteers in the organization, and directly to contact people in hi-tech companies, as well as on social media, particularly LinkedIn.
- 437 responded to the survey, of which 333 proved relevant.
- The survey encompassed 24 questions, of which 6 concerned personal and professional background (gender, type of employer, seniority, and more). Most questions comprised multiple choices.
- 3 open questions were asked, where reply was optional. The quotes in this document are sourced from the open questions.
- All multiple-choice questions included the option of “I prefer not to answer/irrelevant”; given the sensitive issues, we realized some respondents would rather avoid certain questions.
- Percentages presented in the graphs are rounded to the nearest whole number. In the case of summed columns, percentages were rounded after summing.

Who?



Arabs currently holding technology positions in the hi-tech industry and elsewhere

Survey Sample Characteristics

333

Arab workers holding technological positions



Approximately half of respondents – **women**

Employed in



83%

Global hi-tech companies



9%

Hi-tech companies operating exclusively in Israel



7%

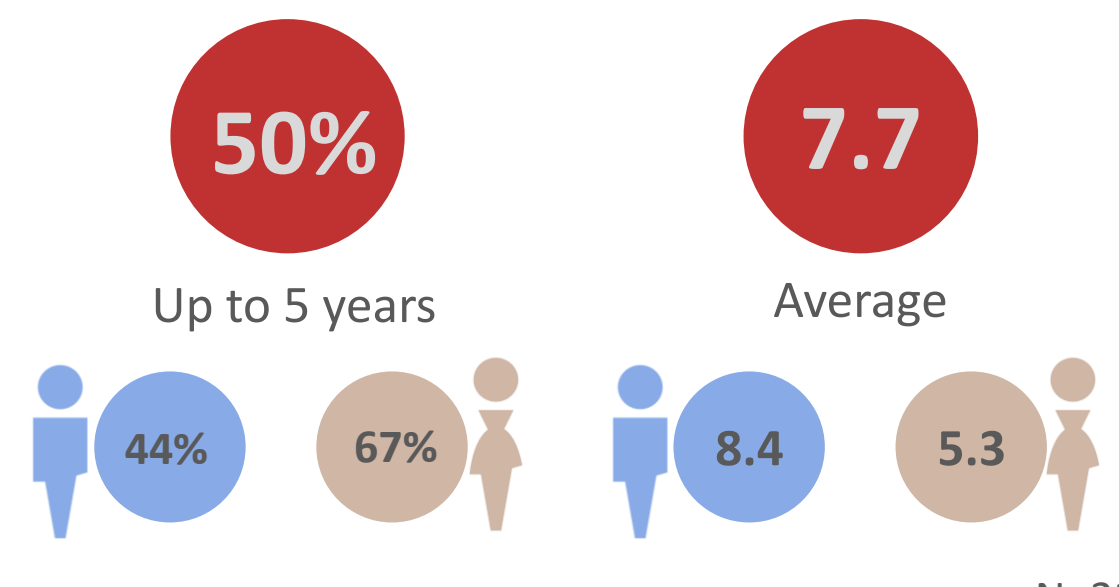
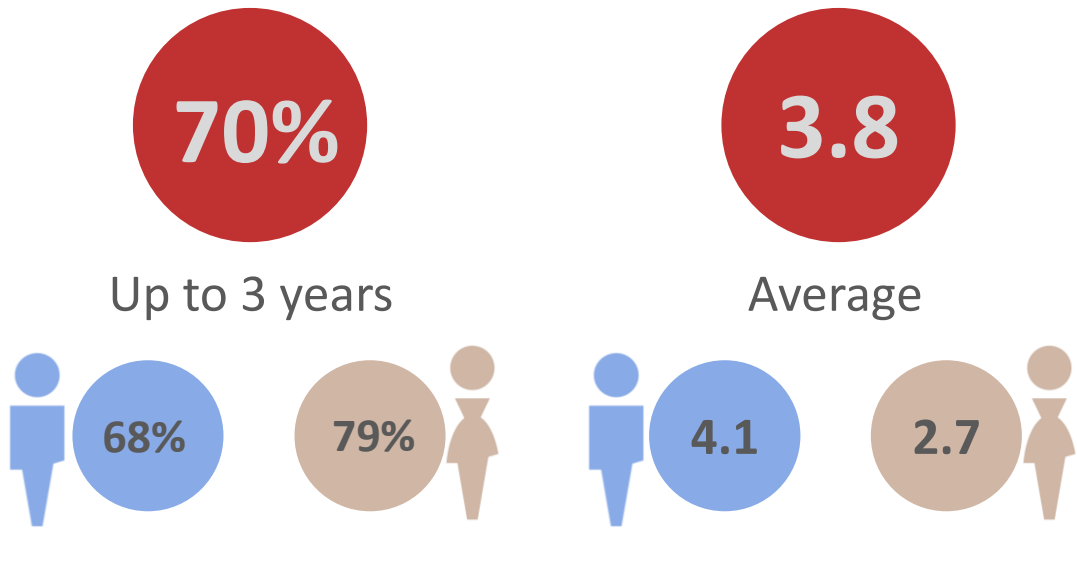
Technology department in a non hi-tech company*

*Approximately 2% replied "other".

Survey Sample Characteristic Seniority

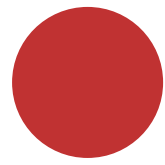
Seniority in Current Company by years

Seniority in the Hi-Tech Industry by years



N=327

- Women respondents' average years of seniority are significantly lower than the men's – whether in the company in which they currently work (2.7 years on average for women, 4.1 for men) – or in the hi-tech industry (5.1 years on average for women, 8.4 for men).
- Half of respondents have up to 5 years of seniority in the industry.



Does the company have Arab employees with whom you interact on a daily basis?*

49% of respondent report daily interactions with **few or no** Arab employees.



30% selected the option **"I work alongside other Arab employees."**



21% report working in an environment with a **majority or significant number** of Arab employees with whom they interact on a daily basis.



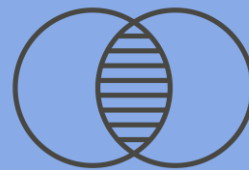
N=332

*Phrasing an objective question regarding the rate or number of Arab employees in the company was inapplicable, due to the varying nature of companies (small or medium companies vs. global, multi-site companies) and given that this information is inaccessible to some respondents. The question regarding the number of Arab employees in the workplace was phrased vis-à-vis respondents' everyday environment.

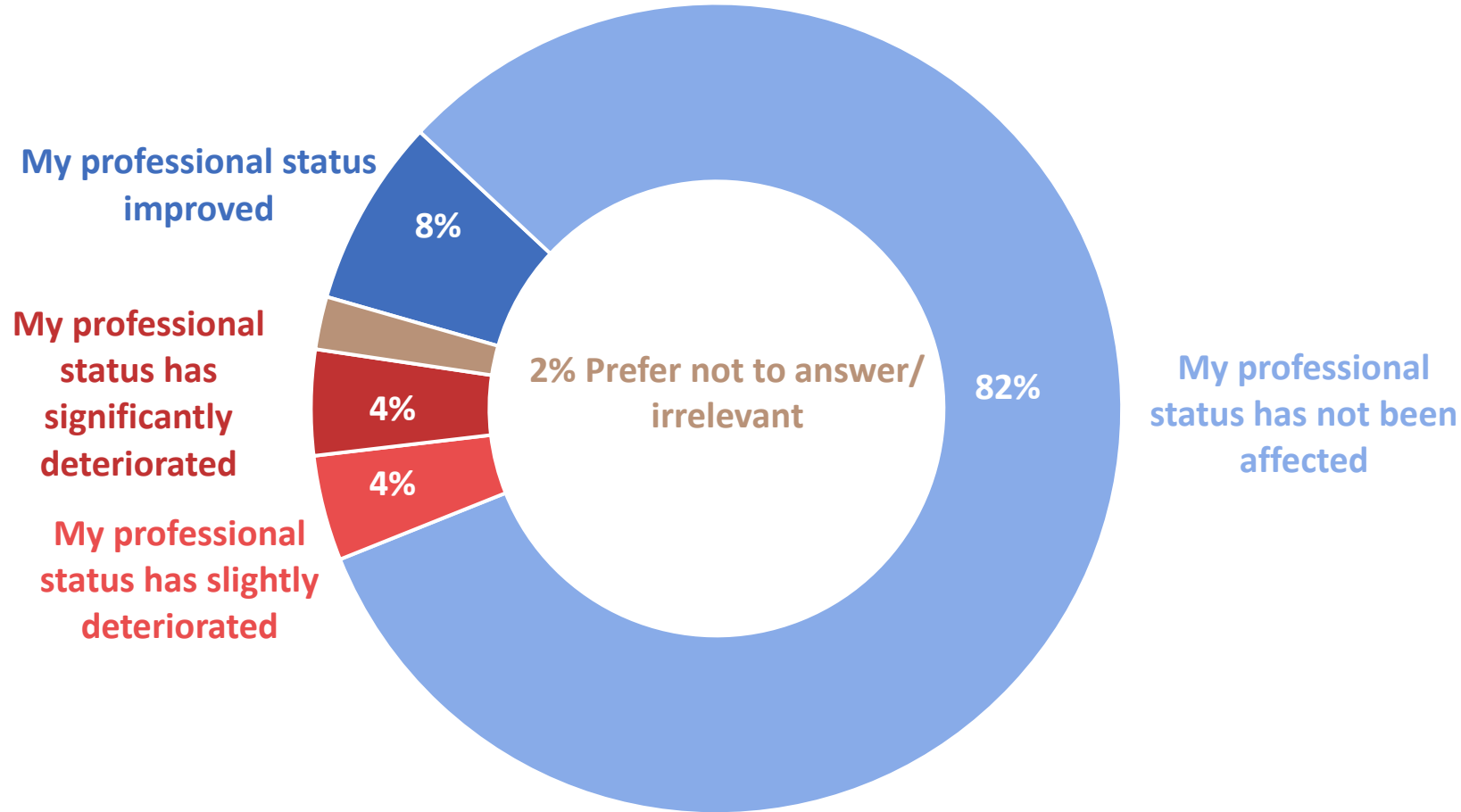
- Approximately half of respondents work in an environment where they are the only Arabs, or where they only interact on a daily basis with a handful of Arab colleagues.

3

Findings



● Has your professional status been affected following October 7?



- Most respondents (82%) feel that their professional status has not been affected by the war.
- 16% of respondent describe a change in their professional status, with half citing deterioration, and the other half citing improvement. See details below.
- Gender segmentation found no significant gaps.



Has your professional status been affected following October 7? Details and examples

“They fired me under the pretext of cutdowns.”

“Facing an upcoming hearing, following a very good period prior to the war.”

“Arabs constitute a fraction of the staff here but form a majority among those fired or moved to other teams, like me, with no explanation.”

“I’ve been on unpaid leave since war broke out.”

“A total change of attitudes and conduct. We’re obviously third class.”

“I’ve been moved to a position where I fill in for other people, rather than leading them.”

“I couldn’t believe I was getting this kind of treatment at one of the largest, best-recognized companies in the industry. It feels like employees, even seniors, are looking at me differently now, as if I’m somewhat involved in everything that’s been going on, and I haven’t even spoken up recently.”

“I’ve been getting fewer important tasks, and there’s a sense of lay-offs looming.”

“My status has improved, because I moved to a different company, with different conditions.”

“I’ve been promoted.”

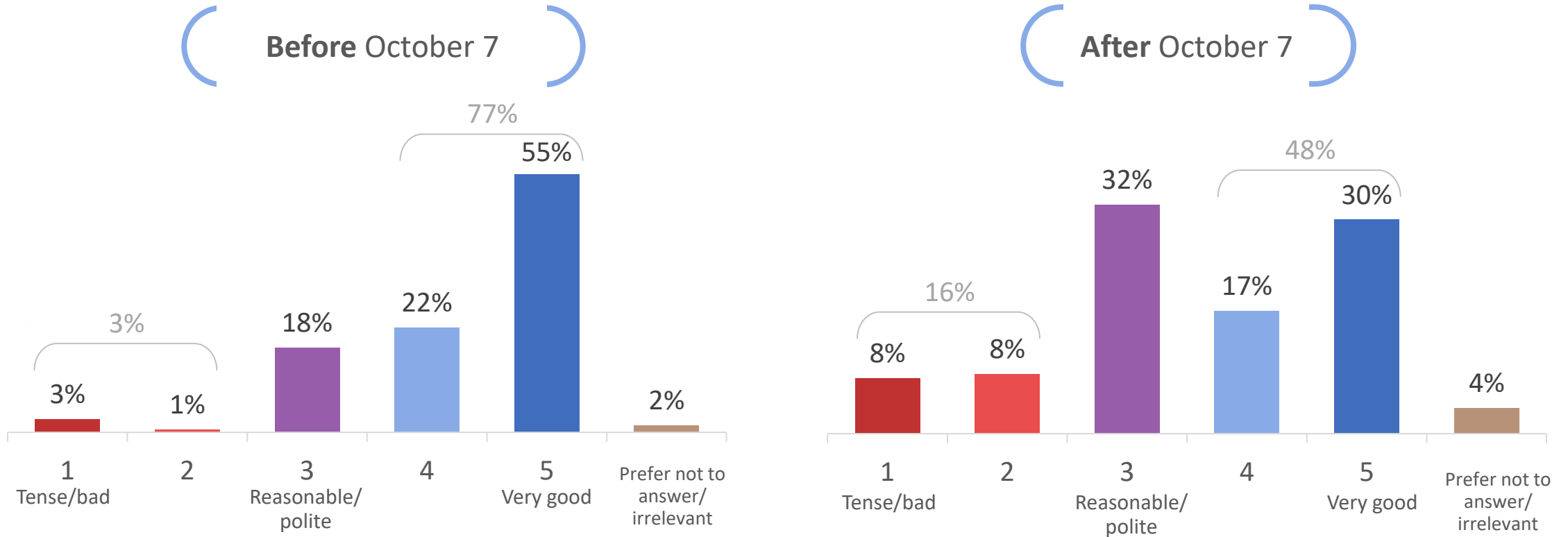
“The company sends employees to work with clients; as an Arab employee, I suppose I’ll find it harder to get to the next client.”

“I’ve received a major promotion.”

- This question was optional.
- In the previous question, the overwhelming majority of respondents say their professional status has not been affected; those who chose to answer this question are mostly respondent that report a change to their professional status (improvement or deterioration).



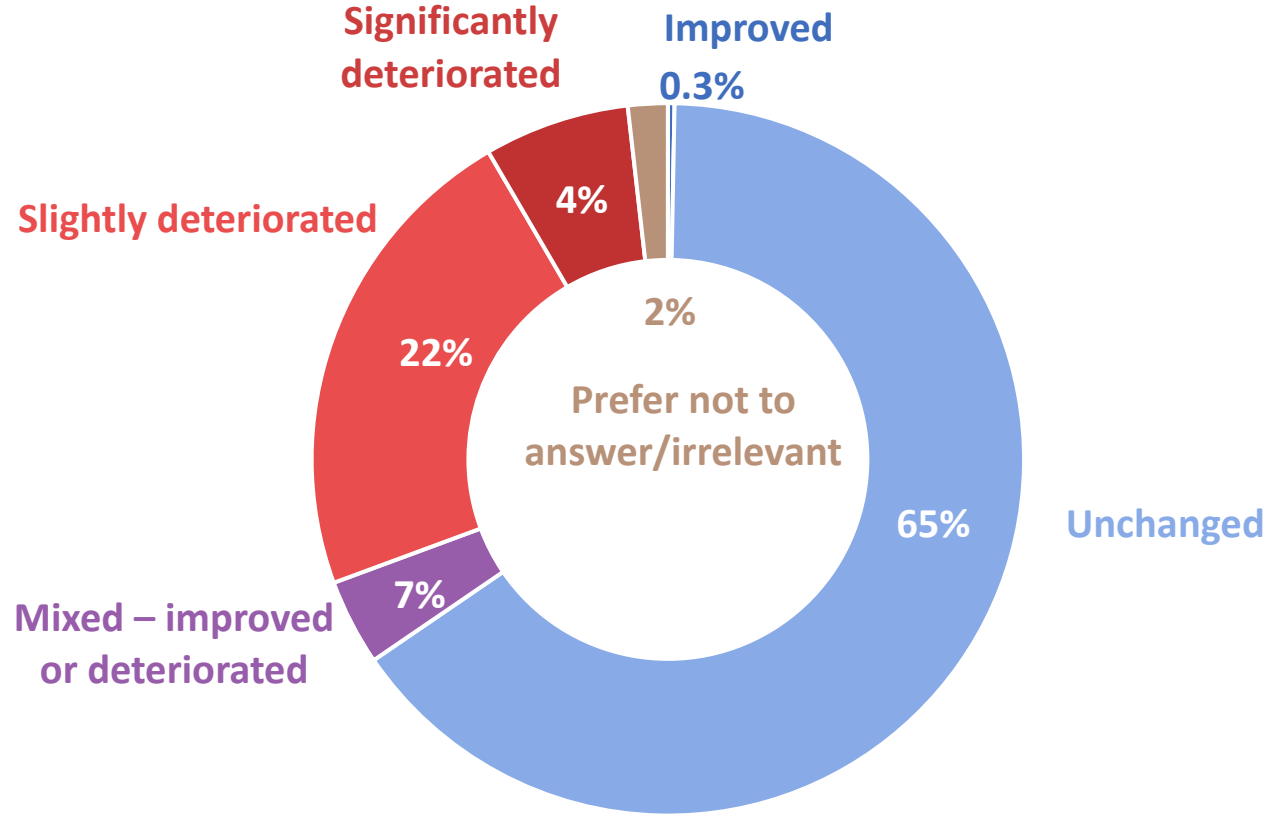
How would you describe the Jewish-Arab relations at your workplace?



- The quality of Jewish-Arab relations in the workplace has been significantly affected following the war:
 - The rate of **respondents who reported relations as good or very good (4-5)** decreased by almost **40%**, from 77% to 48%.
 - The rate of **respondents who reported relations as tense or bad (1-2)** **quadrupled**, from 3% to 16%.
- Gender segmentation shows that **women mark Jewish-Arab relations worse compared to men**, before or after October 7.



How would you describe the change in Jewish colleagues' treatment of you following October 7?



- Most respondents (65%) have experienced no change in Jewish colleagues' interactions with them since October 7, with one respondent reporting improvement.
- Approximately quarter of respondents have experienced a change for the worse in Jewish colleagues' interactions with them since the war.
- See details below.



How would you describe the change in Jewish colleagues' interactions with you following October 7?

Details and examples

"Attempts at social exclusion."

"I'm no longer invited for morning coffee; everyone goes quiet when I arrive. They keep asking me to explain Hamas, condemn Hamas."

"I was asked to condemn, pick sides, donate, and in these situations, I feel I owe something to people, because I'm an Arab."

"At work and with my daily assignments, things are better, but general conversations have a tinge of tension and Islamophobia to them [...]"

"Some female employees [...] pressure me to echo their opinions of choice. They've gone too far, the thought police, as I call them."

"Weird, irrelevant inquiries."

"There's more whispering, the subject is changed when I walk in, with more racist statements traded."

"Allegiance tests, as I refer to them."

"Some employees won't say hi, others say reluctantly, and my team behave as normal. The manager makes a point of asking how I'm doing."

"Some of the people I'd share lunch with hardly exchange a word with me now."

"One employee pesters me about my stance on the war, asking if I have relatives in Gaza and about my city – are they for or against the Hamas. It was intimidating."

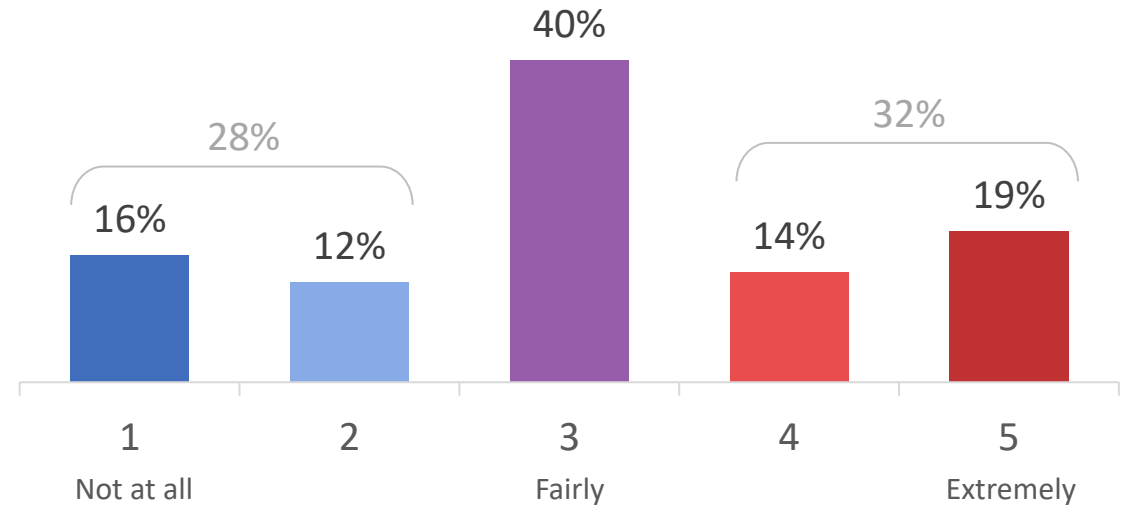
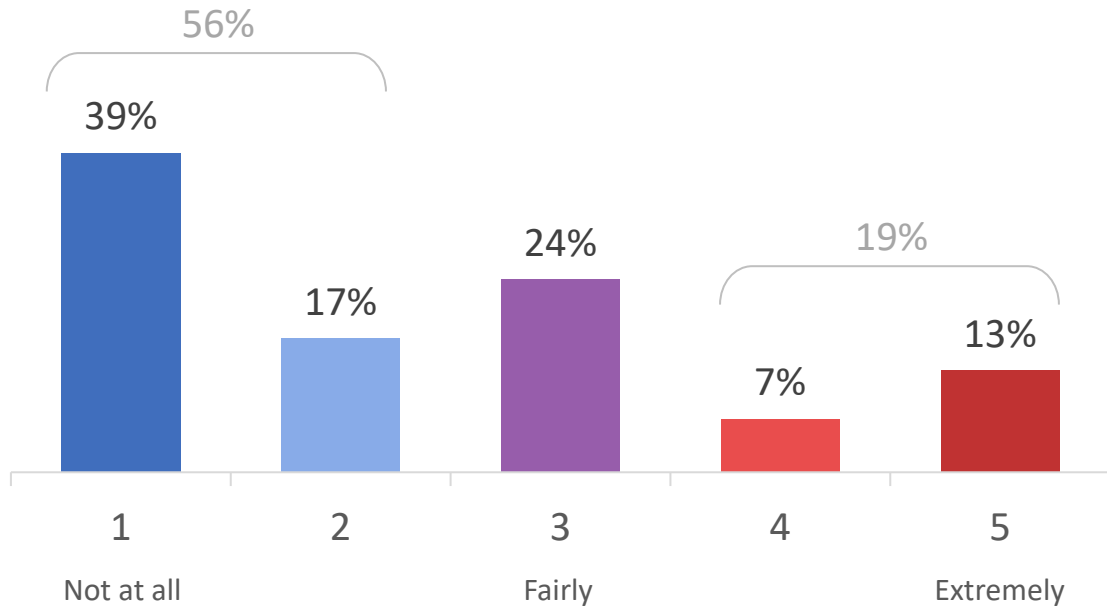
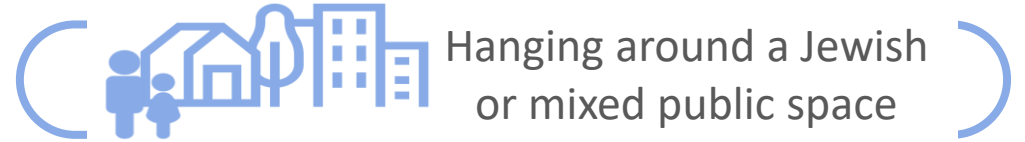
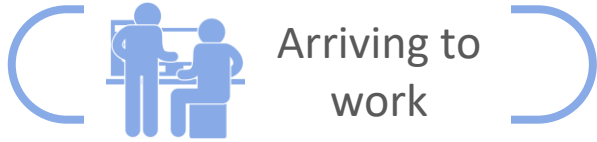
"Before and after October 7 we'd discuss political issues, the election, the legal overhaul, the occupation, and the two-state or one-state solutions."

"No change has been felt, but I had to be over-sympathetic to their feelings and muffle mine, so this helped."

"I work in a professional, respectable place, where no one belittles, undermines or subjects me or the other Arab colleagues to racism. Each to their own ideology."



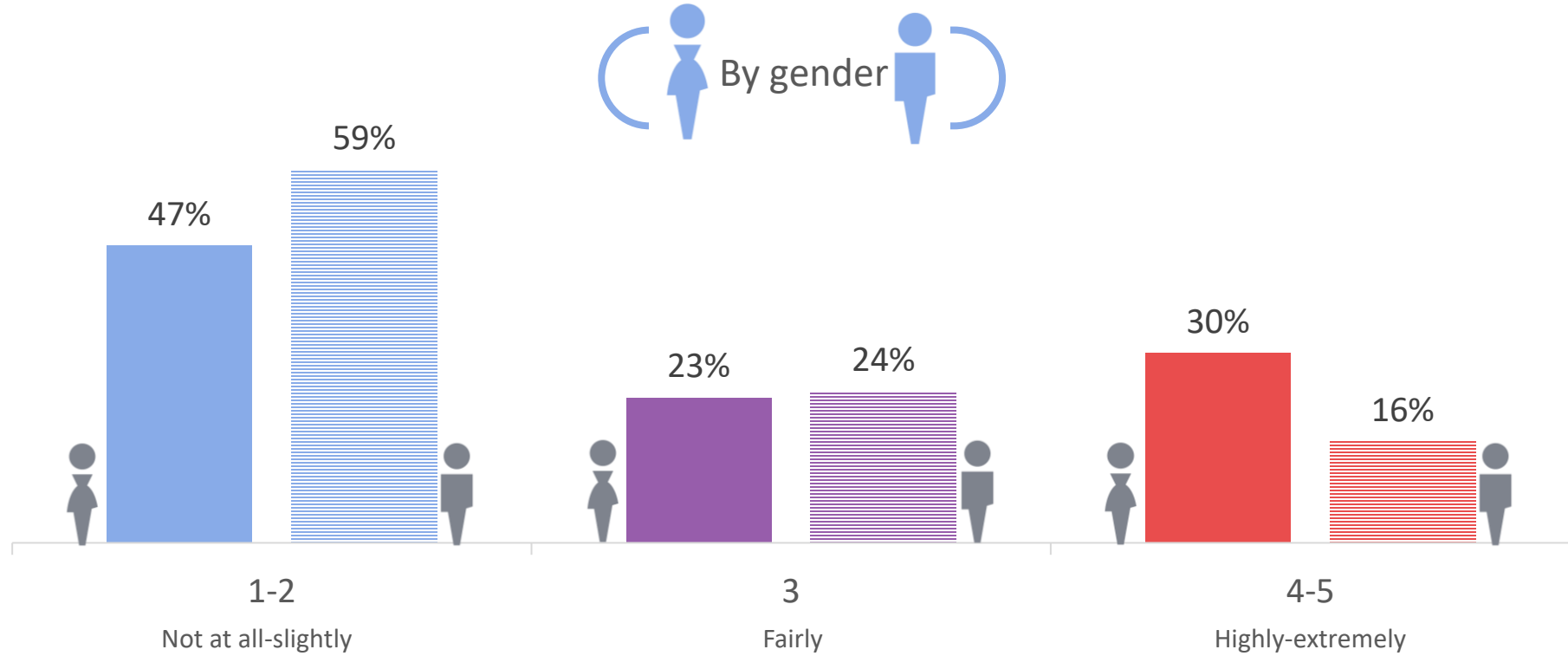
During this time of war, how afraid are you of...



Excluding 1% of respondents who opted for "Prefer not to answer/irrelevant".

- **The workplace is a safer place than the public space for respondents, with half of them not afraid at all or just a little afraid of arriving there (56%), versus 28% regarding the public arena.**
- **However, approximately fifth of respondents are highly-extremely afraid of arriving at work.**

During this time of war, how afraid are you of arriving to work?



Excluding 1% of respondents who opted for "Prefer not to answer/irrelevant".



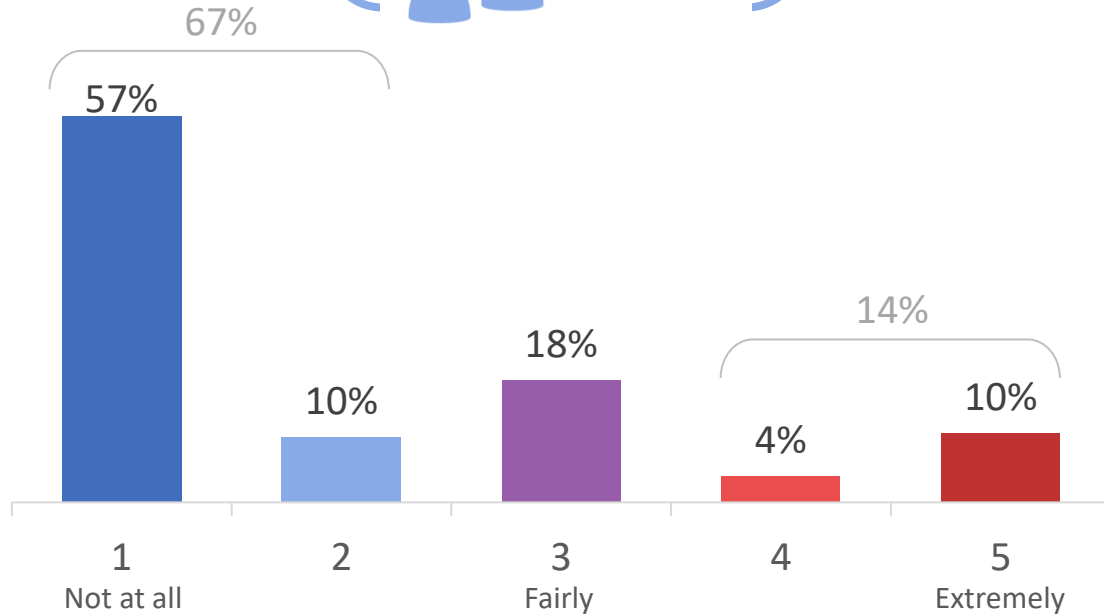
- **Women are significantly more afraid than men of arriving at work:** 30% of women are highly-extremely afraid, versus 16% of men (almost double the rate), while the mirror image shows a lower percent of women who are slightly or not afraid at all (approximately a 25% gap).
- **Gender-based segmentation of replies regarding the fear of hanging out in Jewish or mixed public spaces also shows a gap,** though smaller: 38% of women versus 30% of men are highly-extremely afraid.



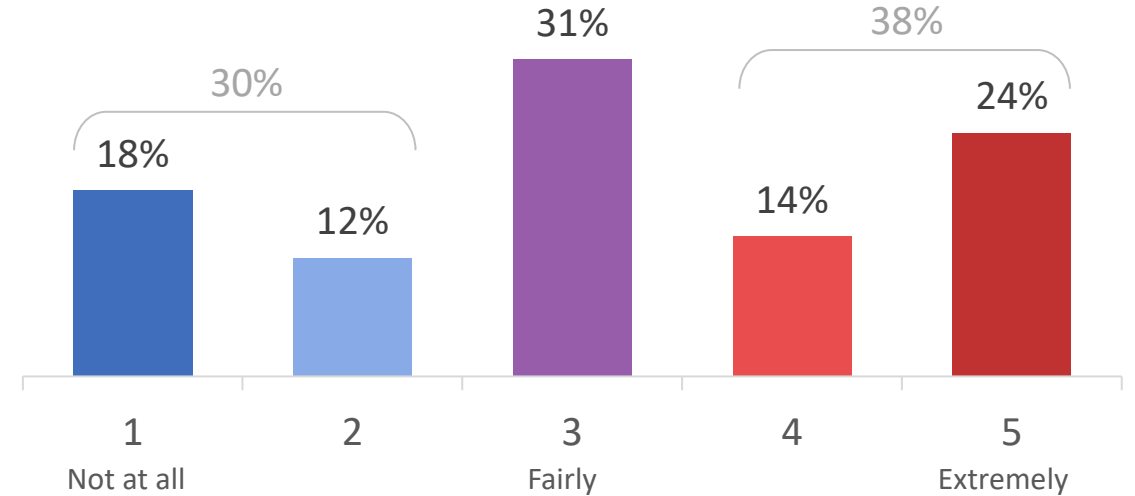
During this time of war, how afraid are you of speaking Arabic...



At work



In a Jewish or mixed public space

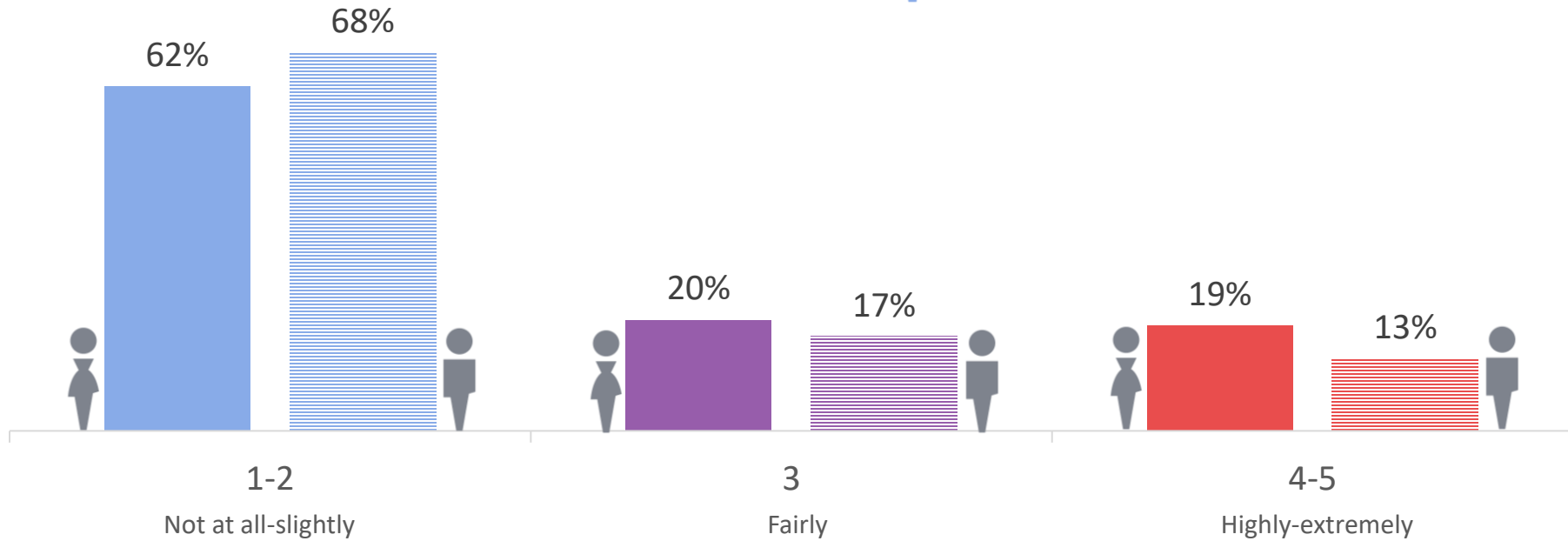


Excluding 1% of respondents who opted for "Prefer not to answer/irrelevant".

- In the context of language too, **the workplace is experienced by Arab employees as safer than the public space.**
- **Roughly two thirds of respondents are slightly or not at all afraid of speaking Arabic at work, versus a third who feel afraid in a Jewish or mixed public space.**
- Segmentation by number of Arab employees in one's everyday work environment significantly suggests that **respondents that reported being the only Arab or part of a handful of Arabs in their work environment are more fearful of speaking Arabic than peers with more Arab colleagues.**

During this time of war, how afraid are you of speaking Arabic at work?

By gender



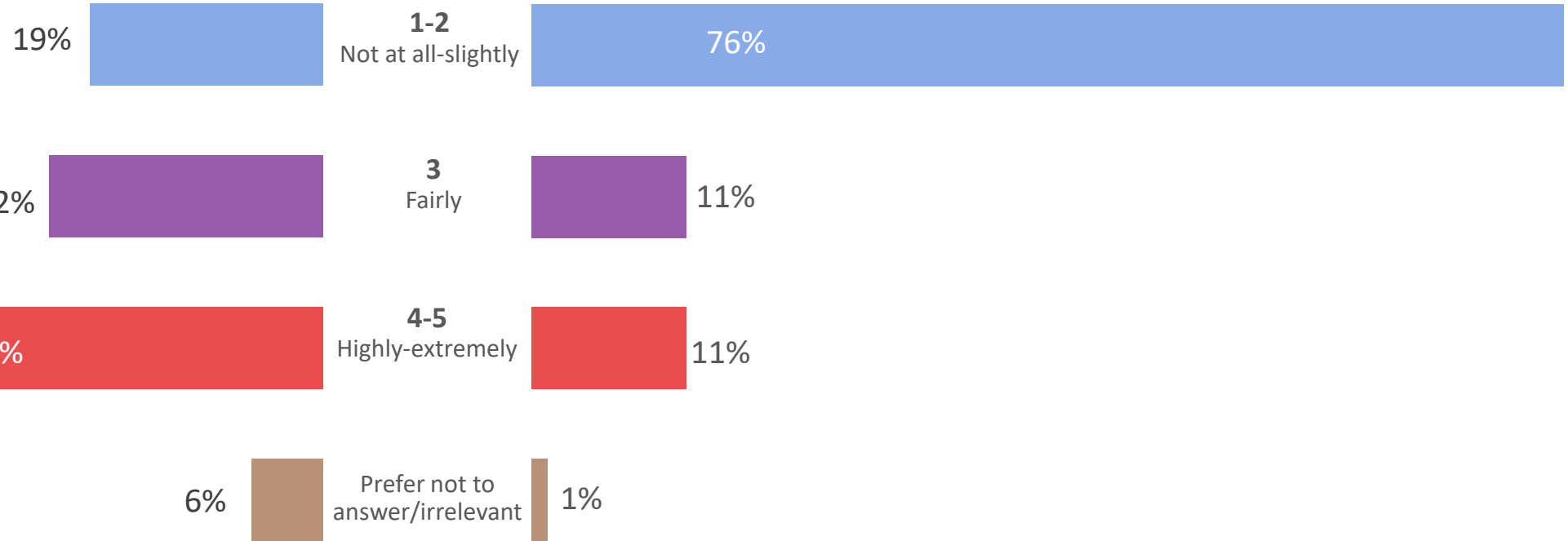
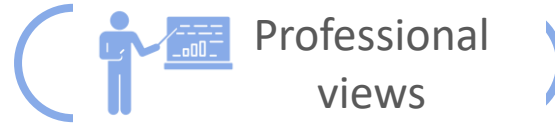
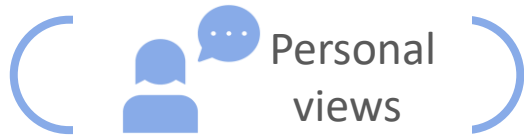
Excluding 1% of respondents who opted for "Prefer not to answer/irrelevant".



- **Women are currently more fearful than men about speaking Arabic at work:** 19% of women reported being highly-extremely fearful, versus 13% of the men – approx. 50% more.
- **A similar trend** was observed in the gender-based segmentation of replies regarding **the fear of speaking Arabic in a Jewish or mixed public space:** 42% of women versus 37% of men are highly-extremely fearful.



During this time of war, how afraid are you of expressing



- A vast majority of respondents (76%) are not at all-slightly afraid of expressing their professional views, while over half of them (56%) are highly-extremely afraid to express their personal views.
- Alongside a majority who feel comfortable to express professional views, 11% are highly-extremely afraid of expressing them.
- A relatively high percentage of respondents opted to avoid the question concerning personal views (6%).



Fear of expressing views

“As long as you keep your views to yourself, you’re ‘almost good’, otherwise it’s de-legitimization and you’re screwed: You’re a terrorist endorser and an antisemite, plus all the other adjectives and titles that come with it. You’re either with us or against us.”

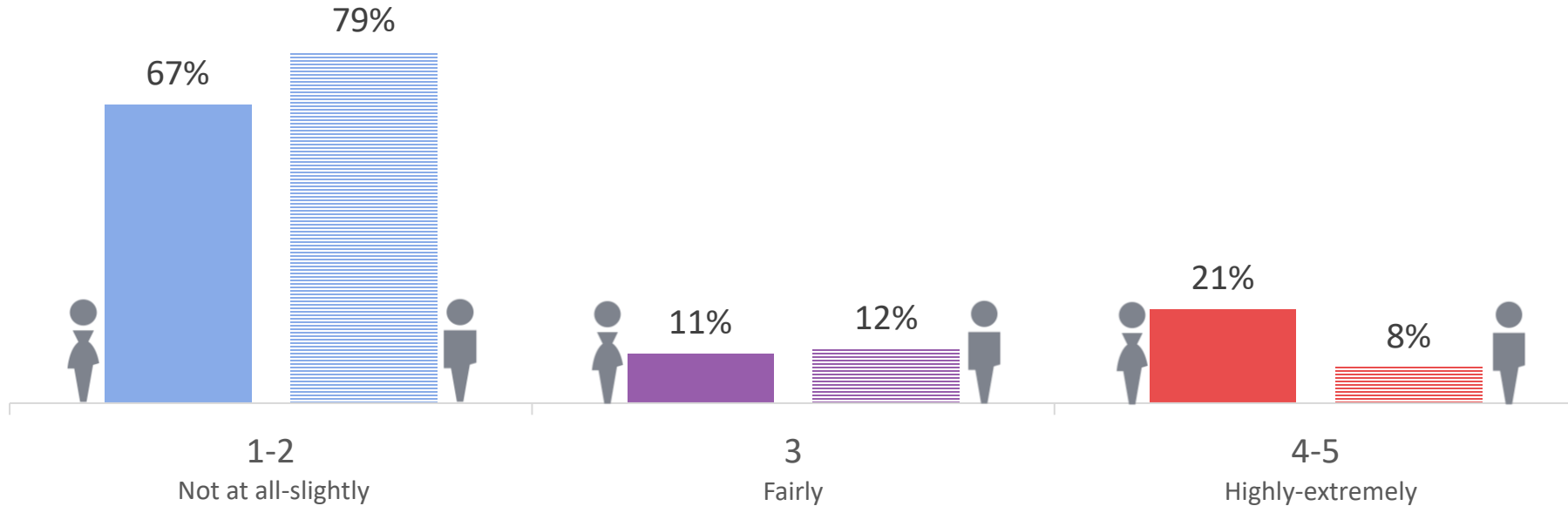
“If I express my views, which are neither pro-Hamas nor extreme, it may nevertheless threaten my position in the company, and when I do say something, people stare.”

“I’m a Christian Arab, [colleagues] feel all too comfortable to curse Muslim Arabs when I’m around, and I never respond, because I’m afraid to speak up.”

“In previous rounds, I’d call out people inciting and remind them not to lump in Arab Israeli Muslim citizens together and Hamas, a Gaza civilian who doesn’t participate in the fighting with Hamas; but this time around, I never bothered to begin with, because with the Ben Gvir government’s laws it’s now forbidden to talk and I might be subjected to shaming in those different media pages or lose my job. So I prefer not to speak, especially on social media.”

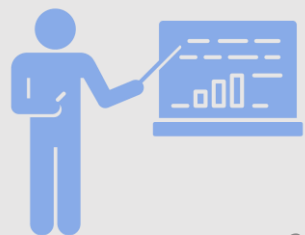
During this time of war, how afraid are you of expressing your **professional views** at work?

By gender



Excluding 1% of respondents who opted for "Prefer not to answer/irrelevant".

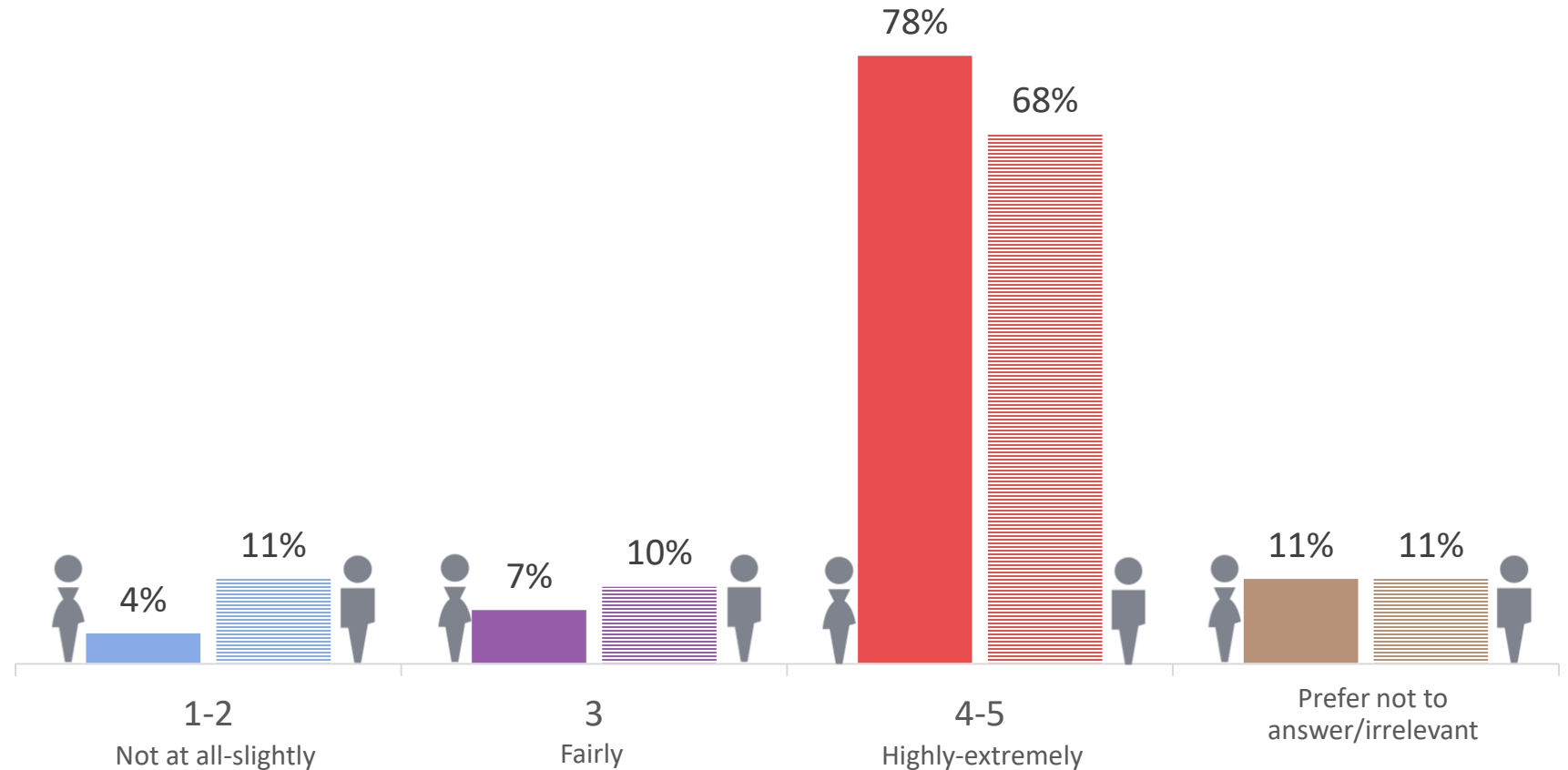
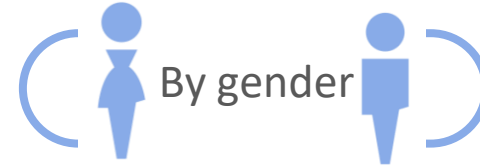
- **Women are more fearful than men about expressing their professional views** in the workplace: 21% of women are highly-extremely fearful versus 8% of men – 2.5 times as many.
- **A similar trend, though with a smaller gap, was also found in the gender-based segmentation of replies regarding fears of expressing personal views in the workplace:** 68% of women are highly-extremely fearful, versus 49% of men.





During this time of war, how afraid are you of expressing your views **across social media**?

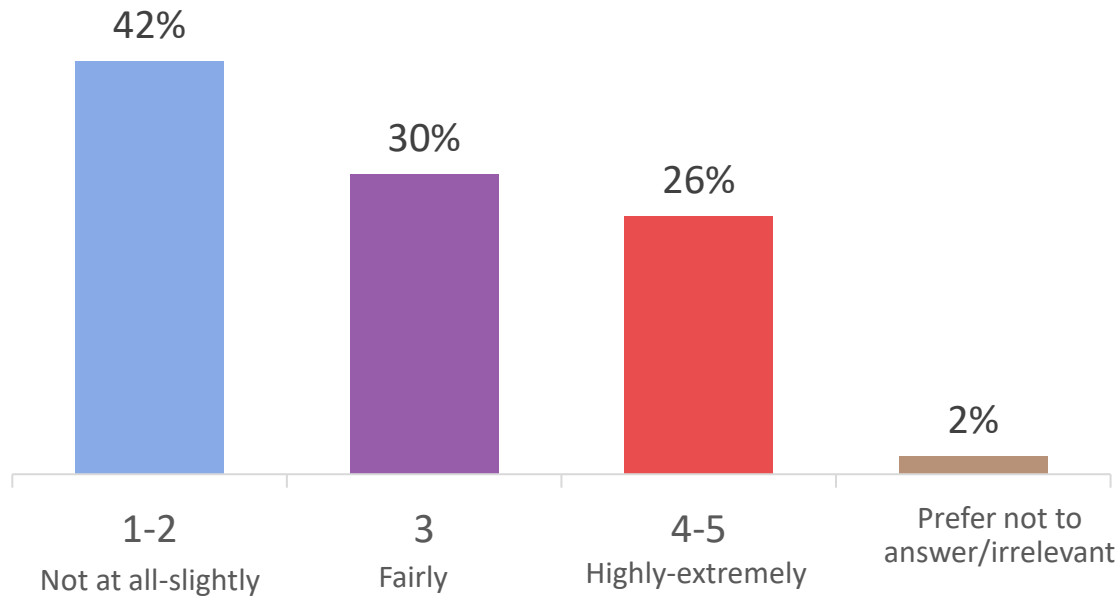
- A clear majority of respondents are afraid about expressing their views on social media, and here too, women are more fearful than men.
- This question has the highest rate of respondents opting not to answer – 11% among both genders.
- Comparing to expressing professional and personal views in the workplace (see above), respondents are more fearful about expressing personal views across social media.



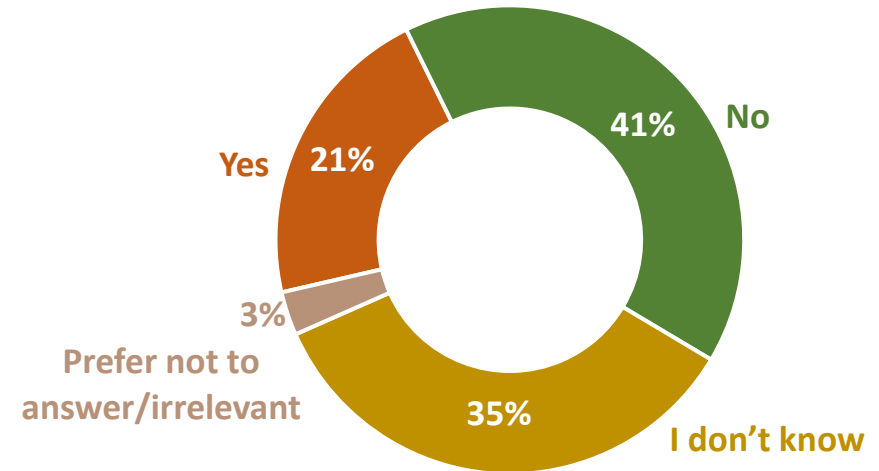


Fear of being laid off or put on unpaid leave

During this time of war, how afraid are you of being laid off or put on unpaid leave, in light of the looming economic crisis?



Do you think you face a higher risk of being laid off or put on unpaid leave due to being Arab?

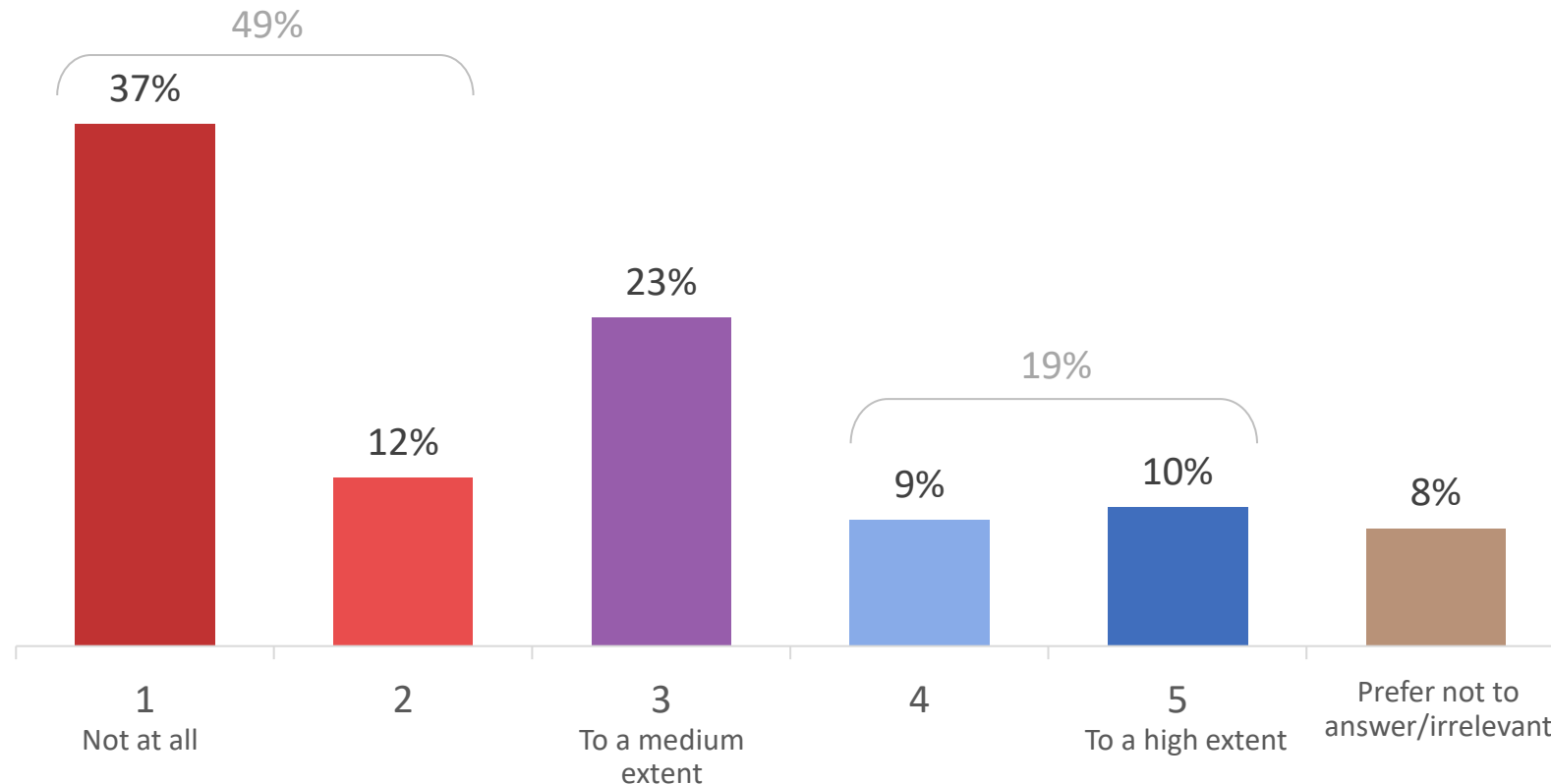


- In the context of fear of layoffs or unpaid leave, it emerges that **roughly 40% are not afraid or only slightly afraid of this prospect, while a third are fairly afraid, and roughly a quarter are highly-extremely afraid.**
- Approx. 40% of respondents believe that being Arab does not place them under higher risk of layoff, while 20% believe it to be the case.



To what extent do you feel that your workplace has been making efforts to improve Arab-Jewish relations following October 7?

- **Approx. half of respondents feel that their workplace has made little or no effort to improve Arab-Jewish relations among employees, with over a third responding “not at all”.**
- Segmentation by companies (global, exclusively Israeli or technology department in a non-hi-tech company) yields no significant differences.
- 8% of respondents preferred not to answer the question or found it irrelevant.



We'd love to hear examples of actions taken to improve relations at your workplace, and any relevant ideas or suggestions you might have

“As a global, American company, the management adopted the Israeli narrative early into the war, expressing support of Israel’s stance and actions and extending every resource that might help Israeli employees to cope during the war; all company employees in Israel and overseas received emails from central management, explaining their position. But a week in, we received emails and messages to say the company had withdrawn its absolute support, and that as the company’s employees, we must realize the Palestinian side too had its narrative! And as a company employing workers from 150 countries, they must guard their interests, which made local management adopt the change in head management’s position!”

“As part of the team, our manager would always talk with people during such events, so we can discuss it all and get it off our chests; the team has two Arab female members, and he’d always involve us and make us feel we belong... he allowed us to speak first. He made sure to inquire about me personally on a daily basis, and helped and advised about how to cope.”

“Simply ask employees (without exemption) to avoid political issues.”

“We had this presentation [about] inclusion at work, and how to deal with the current situation in our workplace. We were asked to try and be considerate of others and avoid offensive terms.”



We'd love to hear examples of actions taken to improve relations at your workplace, and any relevant ideas or suggestions you might have

“The people and management treated all employees equally, rather than by Jews and Arabs, and even treated us to a gift, to lift our spirits up during the war. [The company] really looks after its people, regardless of their race, sex and faith.”

“We used to go about our business as family, which hasn't changed. War has not interfered with our good customs of wishing health and peace on everyone, including combatants, and we attend one another's social events.”

“Three weeks into the war, an email arrived from the site manager to tell us we're allowed to resume work as normal at the campus. One of the senior managers replied-to-all, asking to allow people with (licensed) firearms to carry them into the offices, rather than deposit them at the entrance to the building (as normal procedure dictates), so as to 'enhance security'. The email offended Arab employees' feelings and we felt targeted (who is it that you want those armed employees to protect you from? Their Arab colleagues?). Importantly, the site manager denied her request, but it took him a whole week to reply-to-all, following some pressure from the Arab community. He did reply to the head of the Arab community's request personally that same day, to say the request was denied.”

4

Insights



Arab-Jewish relations: Unsurprisingly, the high tensions between the Jewish and Arab populations in Israel following the war have not spared the workplace.

- Most respondents assess Arab-Jewish employee relations to be affected negatively by the war.
- Most respondents feel that Jewish colleagues' treatment of them remains unchanged, while a quarter feel that their treatment has been affected negatively.
- Most respondents experienced the workplace as safer than the public sphere, in terms of physically entering it, and feeling at ease to speak in Arabic and to express views. However, quite a few respondents, particularly women, expressed a sense of fear at work.

Gap between the professional and social levels: A previous survey exploring Arab hi-tech workers' workplace experiences, conducted by NAS Research and Consulting for Tsofen in the first half of 2023, found that Arab hi-tech workers felt more comfortable in their workplace on a professional level, rather than on the social and cultural levels. The current survey shows this trend persists and is even enhanced:

- Most respondents reported no impact on their professional status and no fear of expressing professional views.
- On the other hand, there was a significant fear of expressing personal views.
- The sense of fear was much higher when it came to expressing views on social media.

Gender gaps: Major gaps were found between men and women respondents across almost all parameters examined.

- Women's assessment of the quality of Arab-Jewish relations among employees was lower, before and after the war.
- Women were more fearful than men about arriving to work, speaking Arabic in the workplace, and expressing personal and even professional views.
- Women expressed more fear than men about the public sphere as well, but smaller inter-gender gaps were found vis-à-vis this issue.

Companies promoting Arab-Jewish relations: Half of respondents felt that their employing companies made no major effort to improve Arab-Jewish relations among employees.

- About a third of respondents said their companies had been making no effort at all to improve relations since October 7.
- Only 10% felt that their company made such efforts to a “high extent”.

Fear of layoffs: opinions among respondents varied regarding fear of layoffs or unpaid leave, as well as regarding the significance of their being Arab employees in this context.

- Approx. 40% replied that they were either slightly or not at all afraid, while roughly 30% were afraid to a medium extent, a 25% said they were afraid to a high-very high extent.
- Approx. 40% replied that being Arab did not place them at greater risk of being laid off or put on unpaid leave, while 20% felt at a higher risk due to being Arab, with 35% saying they did not know .