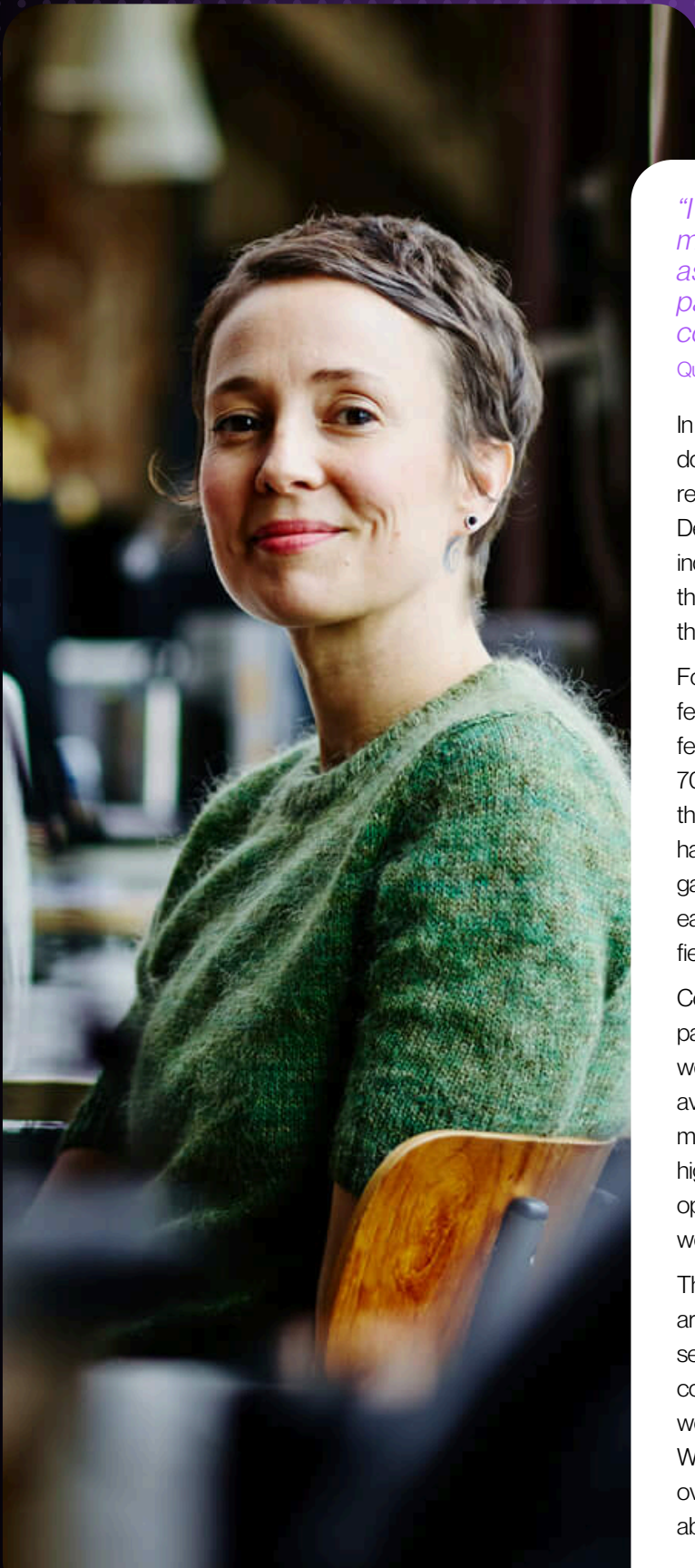


Women in Contracting



"I am taking on work that I enjoy and am free to manage my own workload. Better work / life balance as I am available for my children but also able to participate in the workforce and make a valuable contribution in my sector."

Quote from Respondent

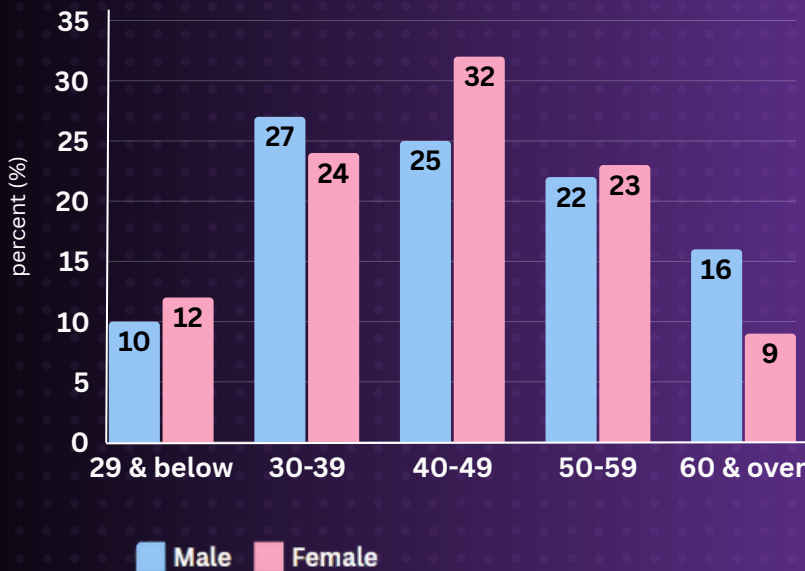
In 2025, professional contracting in Ireland continues to be male dominated; however, for the second consecutive year, women now represent more than a quarter 27% of professional contractors.

Despite this progress, gender representation remains uneven across industries. Female participation in the medical locum sector is higher than average at 44%, but women are still underrepresented in most of the other major contracting sectors.

For the first time in this five-year study, the average daily rate for female contractors is higher than that of male contractors, however female annual earnings remain lower than male annual earnings (€114,705 v's €119,069), this is due to the fact that women work fewer days than men in a year. The gender pay gap within the contracting sector has narrowed to 3.6%, significantly lower than the 6.9% gender pay gap in the wider Irish labour market, (CSO 2023). This increased earning potential may be drawing more women into the contracting field.

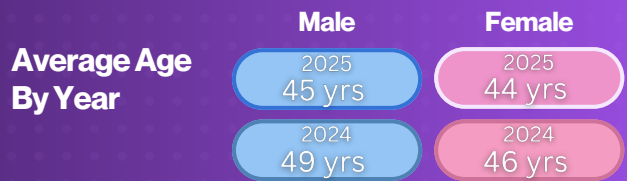
Contracting is becoming increasingly popular among women, particularly younger women. Results show 12% of female contractors were aged 29 or younger, compared to 10% of male contractors. The average age of female contractors is 44, slightly younger than the male average of 45. The benefits of contracting such as flexibility and higher pay rates are key factors in attracting women, offering them the opportunity to engage in meaningful work while maintaining a better work-life balance than traditional employment.

The 2025 results reveal that 84% of women in the contracting sector are satisfied with their overall life. 81% of female contractors chose self-employment voluntarily, compared to 76% of their male counterparts. This highlights the growing appeal of contracting for women, offering greater autonomy, flexibility, and work-life balance. Women remain optimistic about the future of the contracting sector over the next 3 to 5 years, with a confidence index score of +27 and about the Irish economy with a confidence index score of +13.



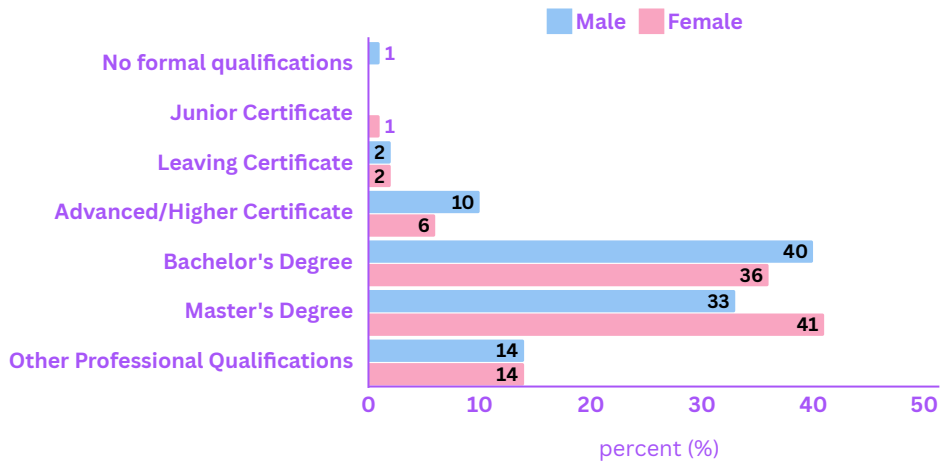
Age by Gender

The report reveals that 36% of female contractors are now under 40 years old, marking a 6% increase from the previous year. There has also been a 4% rise in the number of female contractors aged 40–49. However, the data shows a 10% decline in female contractors aged 50 and older.



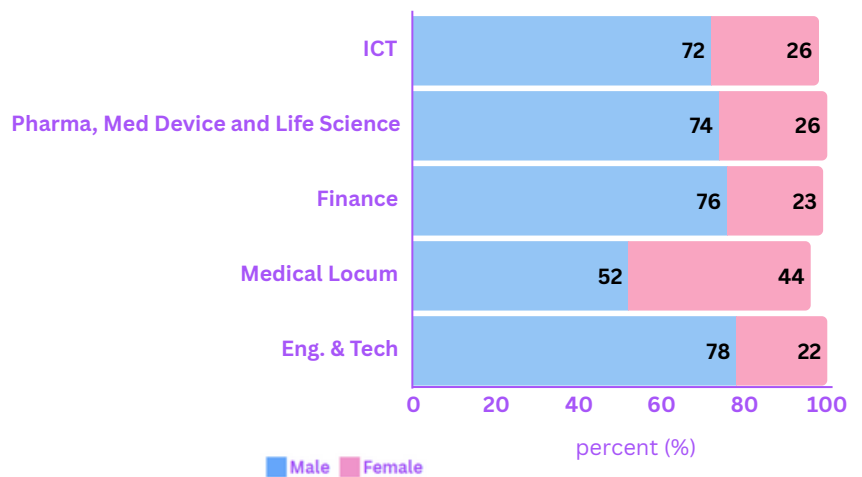
Education

Both male and female contractors are highly educated with 97% of both genders having a third level education or equivalent professional qualification.



Industry Split by Gender

The survey revealed that while industries, such as medical locums, have a higher-than-average proportion of female contractors at 44%, women are still underrepresented in most of the other major contracting sectors (Pharma 26%, ICT 26%, medical devices 25%, life sciences 25%, finance 23% and engineering 22%). The medical device sector has seen the largest increase in the number of female contractors over the past year up from 14% in 2020 to 25% in 2025. Engineering and ICT sectors have also seen an increase in the percentage of female contractors up 4% and 2% respectively year on year.

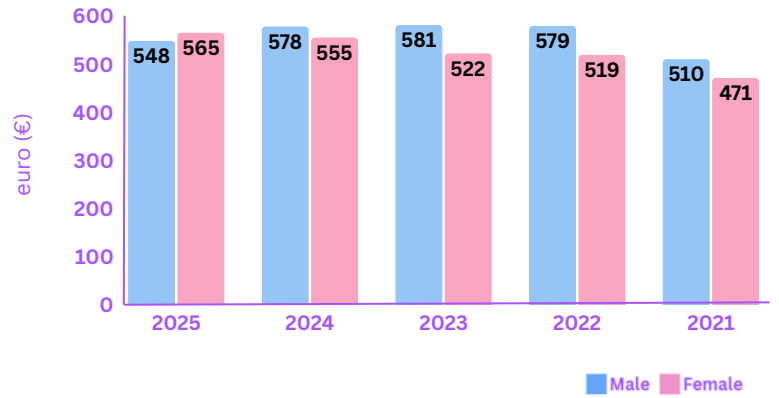


Contractor Earnings

For the first time since the start of this report five years ago women in independent professional roles are out-earning their male counterparts. The average daily rate for females was €565 while the average daily rate for males was €548. The daily rate for male contractors fell by €30 from €578 in 2024 to €548 in 2025, while the daily rate for females increased by €10 in the same period.

However, it not all good news our survey shows that the age of the female contractor will also have an impact on her average daily rate. Women aged between 30-49 years have a higher daily pay rate than males of a similar age, however younger and older women are paid less than their counterparts, while female contractors aged 50-59 years earn the same daily rate as male contractors.

Average Daily Rate By Gender



Annual Earnings

Female average annual earnings were at €114,705 and male average annual earnings were at €119,069. This reflects a drop in average annual earnings of 6% for female contractors and 8% for male contractors since 2024 report. Women work less days per annum than men which explains why their annual earnings are lower despite the fact that their average daily rate is higher.

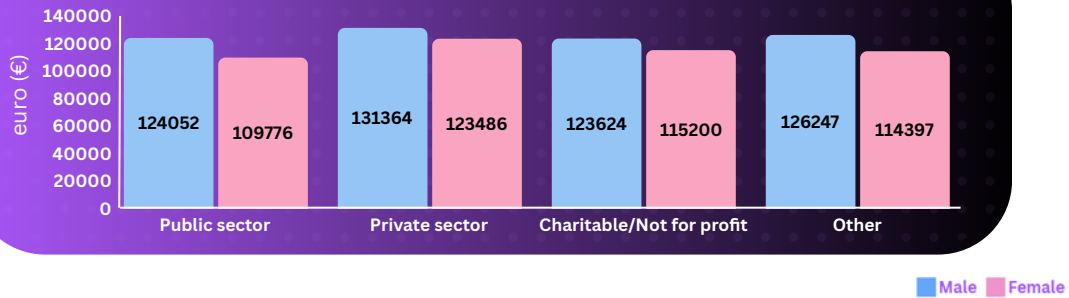
In terms of average annual earnings this year's survey findings show more progress has been made in the reduction of the gender pay gap in the contracting sector. The gender pay gap has moved from 15% in 2022, to 9.5% in 2023 to 6% in 2024 to this year where the gap is reduced to 3.6%!

According to the CSO 2023 data, Ireland's labour market gender pay gap was 6.9%. The fact that a smaller gender pay gap exists in the contracting sector compared to the Irish labour market, suggests that people are finally being paid for their skills, expertise and experience regardless of gender.

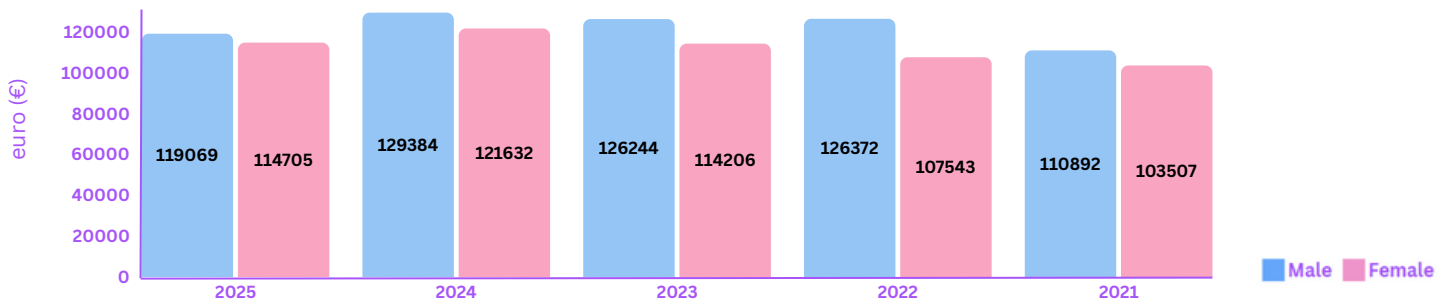
Average Female Annual Earnings **€114,705**

Average Male Annual Earnings **€119,069**

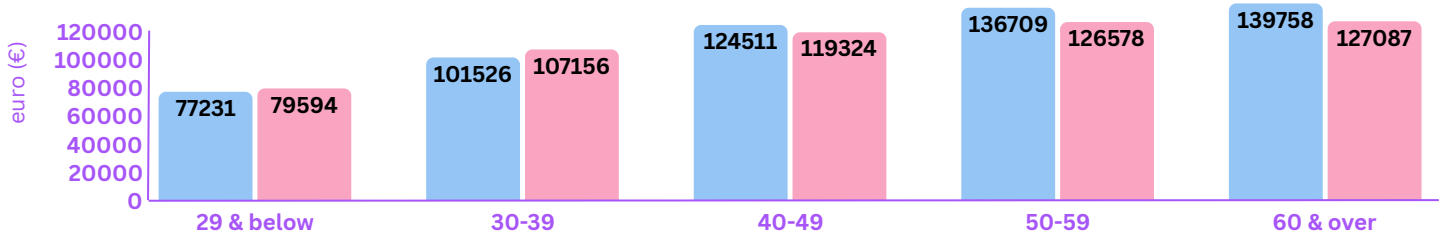
Average Earnings By Sector



Annual Earnings By Gender



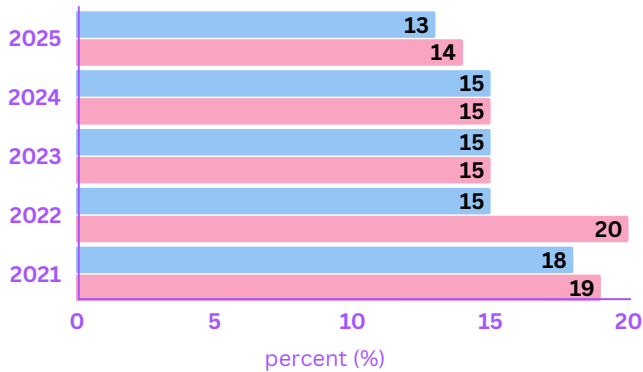
Annual Earnings By Age



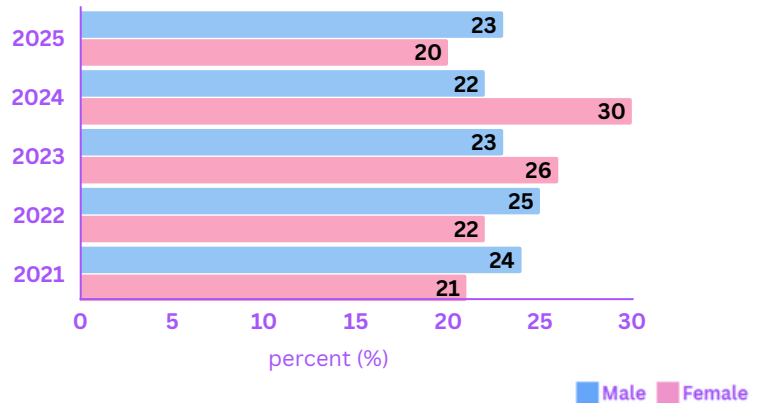
Wellbeing

Both female and male contractors show relatively high levels of well-being, which is indicated by the low levels of perceived loneliness at 20% for female and 23% for male contractors. Loneliness has decreased for females from 30% in 2024 and increased slightly for men from 22% in 2024. Both males and females report low levels of burnout, with females experiencing slightly higher burnout levels at 14% compared to males at 13%.

Experience Burnout

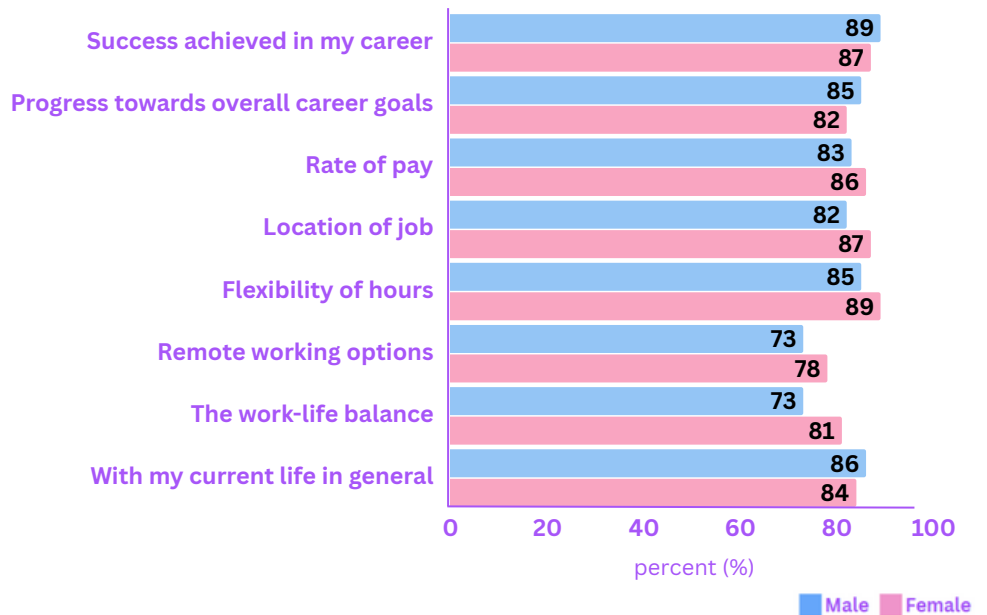


Experience Loneliness



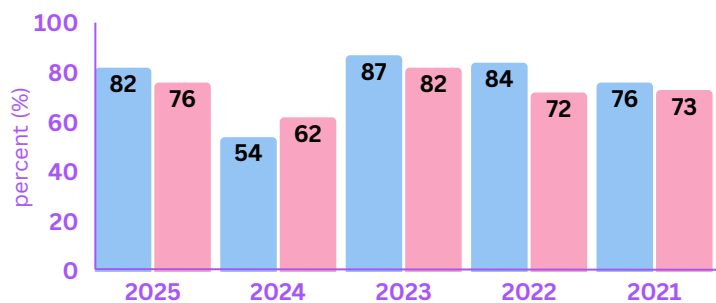
Career Satisfaction

The survey results show that 81% of women choose to become contractors. 87% report that they are satisfied with the success they have achieved in their career. 84% are satisfied with their life in general. Female contractors reported satisfaction levels higher than their male counterparts around 5 key elements of their working life. Female contractors are more satisfied than males with the rate of pay, 86% versus 83%, the location of their job 87% versus 82%, the flexibility of hours 89% versus 85%, the remote working options 78% versus 73%, and their work life balance 81% versus 73%. 76% of female participants intend to continue working as contractors in the future, up from 62% in 2024 report.



Intention to Stay Contracting

In 2025, the majority of both male and female contractors expressed a strong intention to continue working as independent professionals, with figures showing a significant increase since 2024. The percentage of female contractors planning to remain in contracting rose from 62% in 2024 to 76% in 2025, while male contractors saw an even sharper rise from 54% in 2024 to 82% in 2025.



Reason to Become Self-Employed

The data also highlights that more women are voluntarily choosing self-employment, with 81% of female contractors making this choice in 2025 compared to 76% of male contractors.

These findings suggest a growing confidence in contracting as a career choice, particularly among men, whose intent to continue has increased significantly.

81% of Women Voluntarily Choose to be Contractor

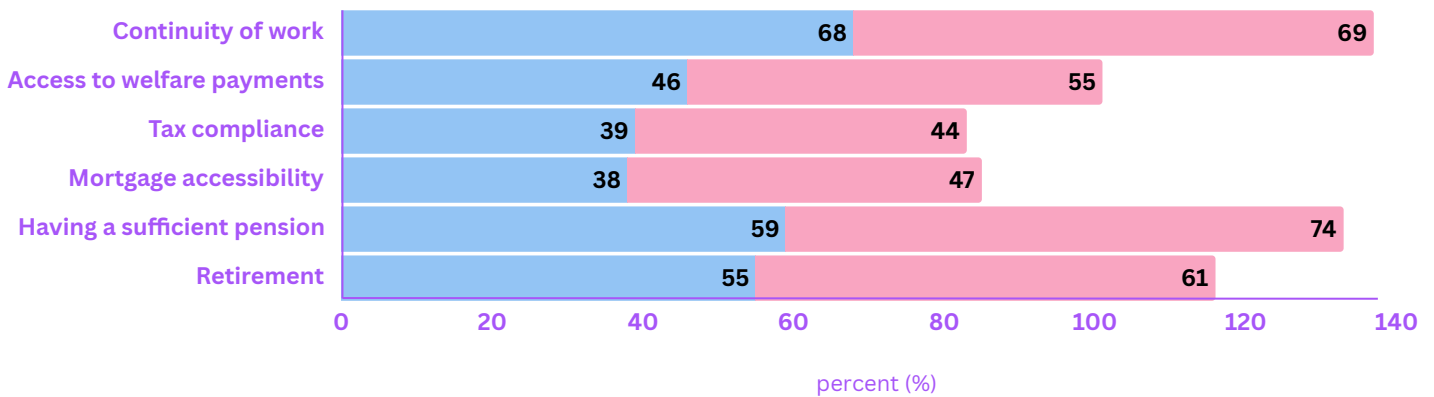
19% of Women Involuntarily (necessity driven)

76% of Men Voluntarily Choose to be Contractor

24% of Men Involuntarily (necessity driven)

Contractors greatest concerns about independent working?

Female contractor's biggest concern about independent working is around having a sufficient pension, whereas male contractor's primary concern is around the continuity of work.



Confidence Index

Both male and female contractors remain optimistic about the future of the contracting sector over the next 3 to 5 years, with closely aligned confidence levels. Female contractors reported a confidence index of +27, while male contractors recorded a slightly lower score of +25. However, confidence in the sector has declined for both genders compared to 2024, when females had a confidence index of +33 and males scored +28.

Regarding the performance of the Irish economy, female contractors expressed a positive but reduced confidence level, with a score of +13 in 2025, down from +20 in 2024. In contrast, male contractors showed increased confidence in the economy, rising to +18 in 2025 from +15 in 2024.

The Contracting Sector Confidence Index

| | 2025 | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 |
|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Male | +25 | +28 | +30 | +38 | +30 |
| Female | +27 | +33 | +32 | +37 | +30 |

The Irish Economy Confidence Index

| | 2025 | 2024 | 2023 | 2022 | 2021 |
|--------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Male | +18 | +15 | +12 | +39 | +10 |
| Female | +13 | +20 | +3 | +37 | -87 |

Women In Contracting is an abstract from the full Ireland's Project Economy 2025 report, which will be available at a later date.

