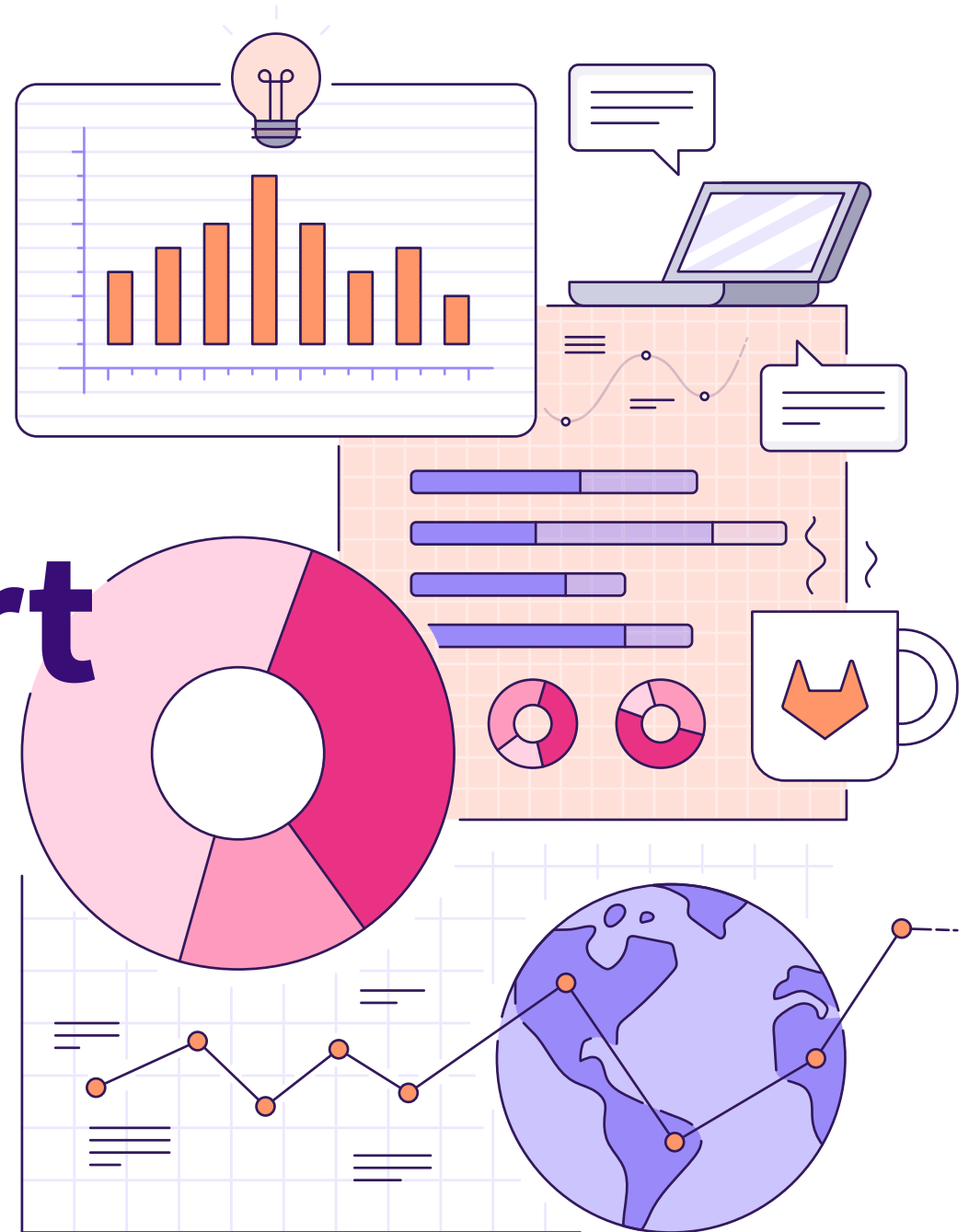# GitLab

2021
Remote Work Report

The leading report on remote work, from one of the world's largest all-remote organizations.

- Workplace trends across six continents
- Opportunities and challenges for employers
- In-depth insights for remote leaders

# What's Inside?

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Introduction

2020 was an unprecedented year with many people working from home. Companies are currently evaluating whether they should re-open their offices, require employees to be in a physical office, have a flexible policy that enables employees to work remotely as often as they like, or pursue a 100% remote work policy.

GitLab's 2021 Remote Work Report captures this seminal moment in history. In the very moment where it became clear that the intersection of work and life would be forever changed through mass proliferation of remote work, these are the trends that defined the turn. 3,900 remote professionals on six continents were surveyed for one of the most comprehensive reports ever created on remote work.
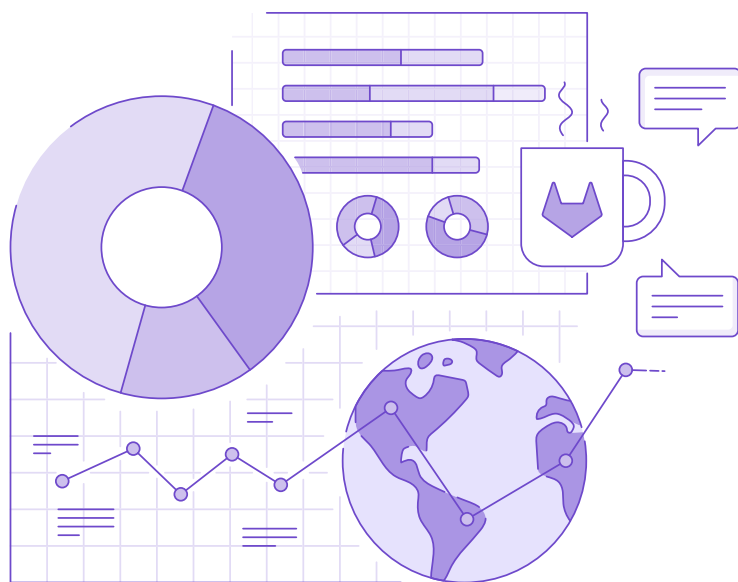
Project Background

This is the second annual Remote Work Report. GitLab's pre-pandemic, March 2020 report sought to look forward to the future of remote work; we now know that the future of work is distributed. We are no longer asking "if" remote can scale — now, we are seeking to understand how, what the challenges are, and what's next. This survey set out to ask new questions that will form the basis of global discussions in 2021 and beyond.

Fielding: February 12 - March 10, 2021

Sample: N=3,900

- Adults 21+ years old

- Will work remotely or have the option to work remotely post pandemic

- Roles with digital output

- Live in US, UK, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Brazil or South Korea

- Independent research conducted by Savanta

Key Takeaways

01

TALENT FLOWS WHERE FLEXIBILITY REIGNS

52% of remote workers noted that they would consider leaving their co-located company for a remote role—particularly significant given the global job market volatility. If remote work was suddenly no longer an option, 1 in 3 respondents would leave their job—either by finding a new role, or retiring completely.

02

TRANSPARENCY = BELONGING

34% of respondents noted that transparency from leadership leads to connectedness at work, while **38%** noted that more visibility into the organization improved their sense of connection. There's an interesting parallel between transparency and belonging. Put simply, it's easier to feel like part of a team when you can easily see what others are working toward.

03

THE COPY-AND-PASTE CONUNDRUM

Only **10%** default to a visual collaboration tool, while **19%** rely on project and task management tools. The vast majority are still leaning on tools used for office-centric, largely synchronous workflows. There is a massive opportunity for tools, technologies, and workflows to move organizations toward more inclusive, asynchronous methods.
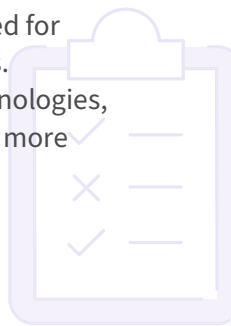
04

THE CONTRAST OF PERCEPTION AND REALITY

There's a disconnect between the ostensibly high levels of satisfaction with remote work and the actual pain people are feeling day-to-day. While 4 in 5 would recommend remote working to a friend and **81%** of people are satisfied with productivity, teamwork across organizations is struggling. Just **37%** report that their organization does a good job of aligning work across projects.

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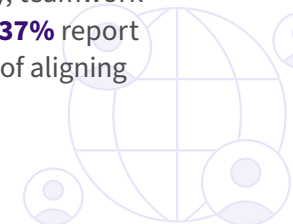
The New Distributed Workplace

Employers are experimenting with new models

Out of the companies that allow remote work, **1 in 3 have a 100% remote policy** where employees work in their own native time zone. **42% will take a hybrid approach.**

Companies in the US and UK are significantly more likely than those in Australia, South Africa, Brazil, and South Korea to allow employees to work **100%** remotely and in their own time.

According to remote workers, the top 3 remote-work benefits to employers are increased productivity (**42%**), increased efficiency (**38%**), and increased employee morale (**31%**).

Remote is working: 82% of workers praised their leadership for understanding how to operate a team remotely. The same number of respondents believe that remote work is the future, and that they have the tools and processes now that they need to communicate with their teams.

Given the choice, **52% of respondents would leave a co-located company** for a remote role.

If remote work was no longer an option, 1 in 3 people would not go back to their commute. **26%** would look for a new remote role, and the rest would relocate or retire. There was significant regional variation: Only **57%** of Australians would go back to their commute, while **72%** of South Koreans would resume commuting.

Company policy on remote work

42%
Hybrid-remote (part of the team works in-office, part of the team works remotely)

32%
100% remote, each employee works in their own native time zone

12%
100% remote, every employee is synched to a company-mandated time zone

14%
Remote work is allowed or tolerated, but is not the norm or default
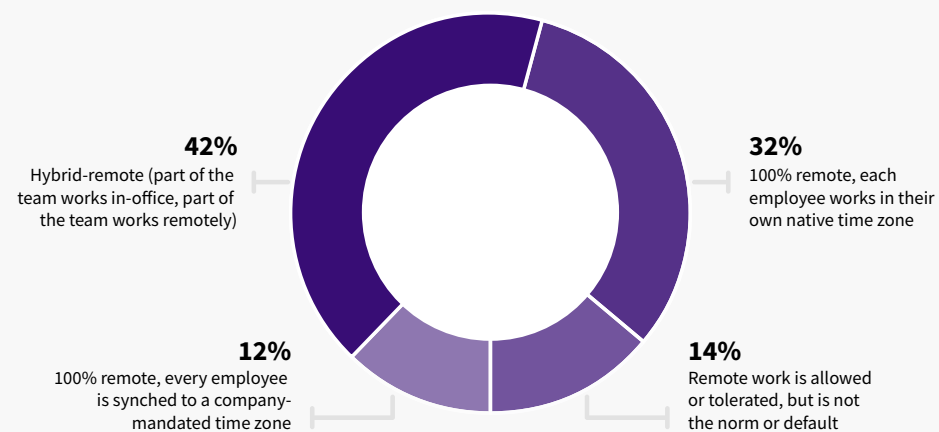
Benefits to employers for allowing remote environment

Increased productivity	**42%**
Increased efficiency	**38%**
Increased employee morale	**31%**
Improved employee loyalty & retention	**30%**
Improved carbon footprint	**30%**
Improved communication	**28%**
Hiring the best, regardless of where they live	**25%**
Less bureaucracy & politics	**24%**
Increased diversity	**21%**
Improved documentation & process	**20%**
Increased inclusivity	**20%**
Increased time zone coverage	**17%**

Attitudes on remote working

I am satisfied with tools and processes that enable remote team communication	**82%**
Remote work is the future of work	**82%**
My leadership team understands what it takes to operate a team remotely	**82%**
I am able to accomplish all of my tasks remotely	**80%**
My leadership team gives me agency and autonomy while working remotely	**80%**
I would recommend working remotely to a friend	**80%**
I would consider leaving my co-located company for a remote role	**52%**

Demographics

This survey was limited to only people who **will continue working remotely** in some form after the COVID-19 pandemic. **78%** of respondents are employed full time. **45%** of respondents started working remotely during the pandemic—indicating **the remote workforce has nearly doubled since March 2020.**

Worldwide, women only make up about **38%** of the workforce[1]. In remote work, they are the majority at **58%**.

More than half of respondents (**55%**) have children under 18. That's lower than the average of **72%**[2] of professionals in the US. **15%** of respondents are caregivers.

Remote workers include significantly higher numbers of Boomers (**27%**). In the global workforce in 2020, Boomers only represent **6%** of workers[3].

9% of respondents self-reported as LGBTQ+ — significantly higher than the known global representation[4].

Racial demographics vary by country polled, and we were not able to collect ethnicity data in South Korea. Overall, remote work employs White people at higher rates than any other racial or ethnic group. Please see the Appendix for full data tables on ethnicity, as well as income in each country polled.

[1]*World Bank*; [2]*BLS*; [3]*Statista*; [4]*Catalyst*

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Frequency of working remote post-pandemic

Frequently	**48%**	
Very often	**26%**	
All the time	**26%**	
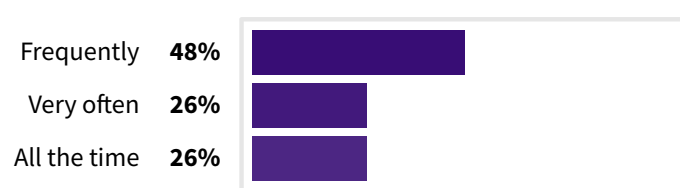
Importance of all company working remote

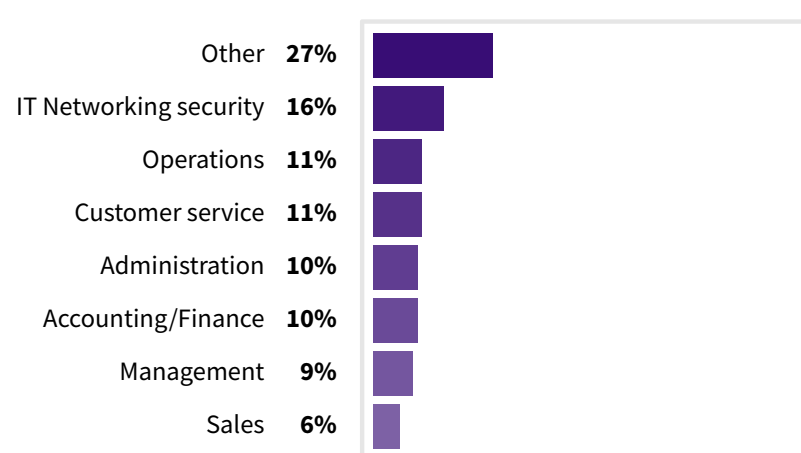|		
Important	**40%**	
Neutral	**36%**	
Not important	**24%**	

Department

Other	**27%**	
IT Networking security	**16%**	
Operations	**11%**	
Customer service	**11%**	
Administration	**10%**	
Accounting/Finance	**10%**	
Management	**9%**	
Sales	**6%**	

Length of time working remote

Less than a year	**45%**	
1 - 3 years	**30%**	
4 - 6 years	**10%**	
7 - 9 years	**5%**	
10 - 15 years	**5%**	
16+ years	**5%**	

Title

Associate/Assistant	**28%**	
Manager	**25%**	
C-level/Owner/President	**13%**	
Other	**13%**	
Senior Manager/Senior Director	**9%**	
Director	**9%**	
VP/SVP/EVP	**3%**	

Employment status

Full time	**78%**	
Part time	**14%**	
Small business owner	**8%**	

GitLab | SafetyWing
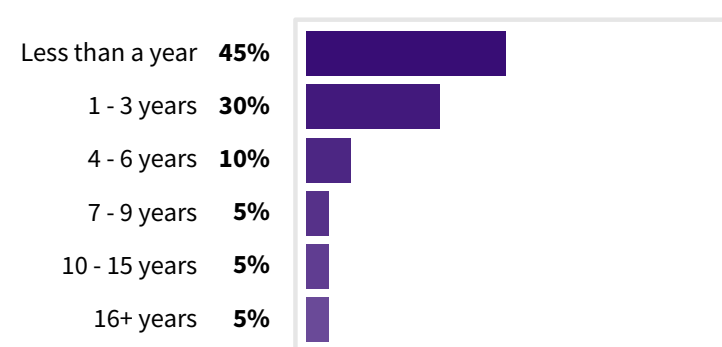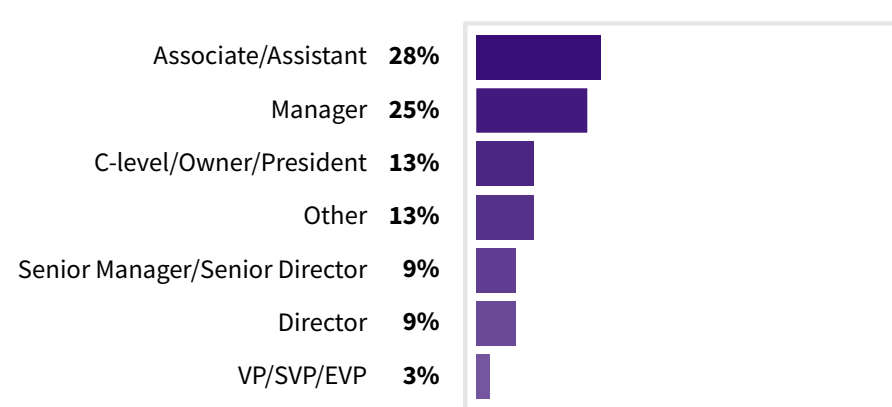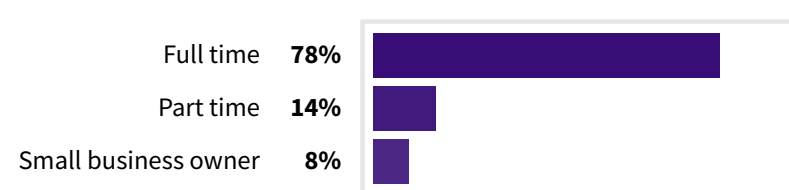
Presented in partnership with SafetyWing

The great relocation is already underway

Nearly **1 in 3 remote workers plan to relocate or to work from abroad** after lockdowns are lifted. Of these respondents:
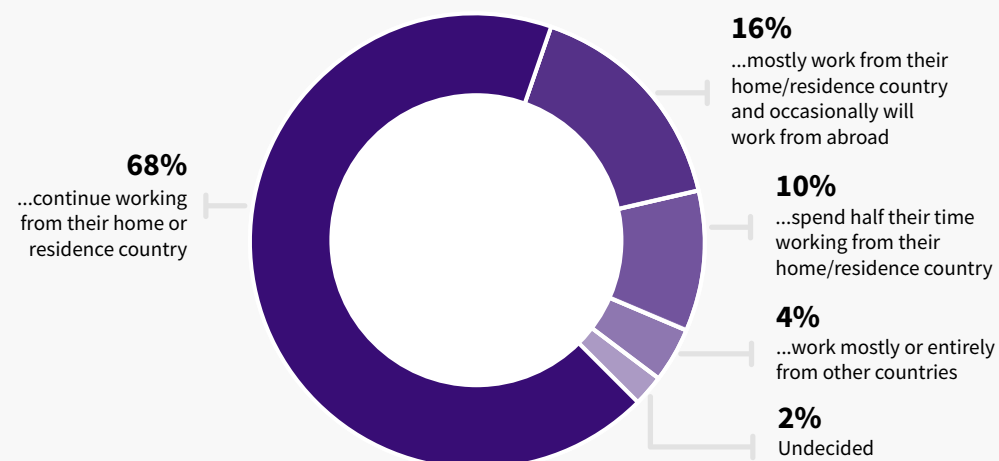
- **25%** will relocate to seek a lifestyle change

- **18%** want the experience of living somewhere new

- **15%** want to relocate someplace with a lower cost of living

- **14%** want to live closer to family

- **16%** will work outside their country of residence occasionally

- **12%** will spend half or more of their time working from abroad

There are notable gender differences: significantly more women (**70%**) than men (**65%**) will stay in their country of residence. Men are also more likely to travel occasionally (**19%** vs. **15%** of women).

After the pandemic, remote workers plan to...

68%
...continue working from their home or residence country

16%
...mostly work from their home/residence country and occasionally will work from abroad

10%
...spend half their time working from their home/residence country

4%
...work mostly or entirely from other countries

2%
Undecided

Likelihood to relocate

No, but I would be open to doing so	**38%**
No, I am not interested in relocating	**32%**
Yes, I am considering relocating	**21%**
Yes, I am in the process of relocating	**5%**
Yes, I have relocated recently	**5%**
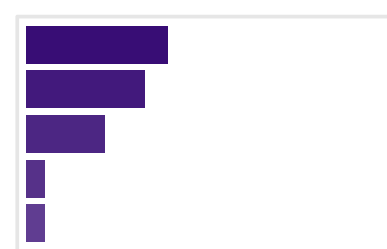
Reasons for relocating

Lifestyle change	**25%**
Experience a new location	**18%**
Cost of living	**15%**
Be closer to family	**14%**
Better schools/opportunity for family	**12%**
Move to bucket list destination	**9%**
Become a digital nomad	**5%**
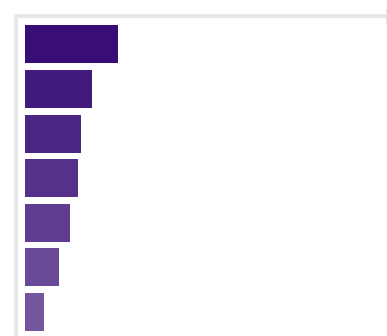
Working from outside home country?

82% No

18% Yes
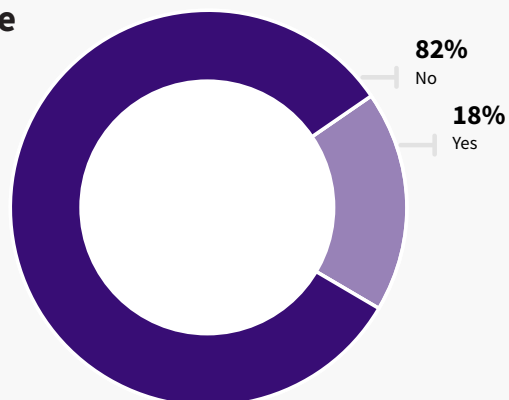
The new employer perk: supporting digital nomads

For the nearly 1 in 5 people working outside their home countries, the biggest challenges employers can address are local connections (**32%**), visas (**23%**), taxes (2**2%**), and lodging (**19%**).

Access to government-sponsored healthcare

Yes, and I think it is enough	**45%**
Yes, with additional health insurance	**39%**
No, prefer private & public healthcare	**9%**
No, and I don't feel I need health insurance	**7%**
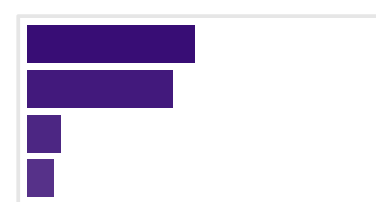
Challenges while working abroad

Meeting new people & finding community	**32%**
Applying & obtaining proper visas	**23%**
Dealing with taxes	**22%**
Finding monthly lodging	**19%**
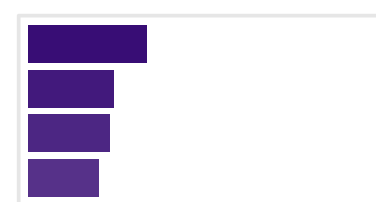
Health insurance continues to be a volatile topic, depending on your nationality. **56%** of remote workers would rather receive company-sponsored health insurance than a higher salary. These numbers increase among US and Canada respondents, and among respondents over 55.

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Collaboration & Workflows

Do we truly understand how to work async?

71% of remote workers say that their organization does a good job balancing asynchronous and synchronous work. But this statement is in conflict with some other responses: **70%** of organizations default to tools (video, chat, and phone) used for office-centric, largely synchronous workflows.

Nearly half **(48%)** of teams would call a meeting before communicating asynchronously. Only **10%** default to a visual collaboration tool, while **19%** rely on project and task management tools.

Communication scheme

Default to video or voice meetings first	**48%**
Default to chat tool	**20%**
Default to project management tool	**10%**
Default to shared documents	**14%**
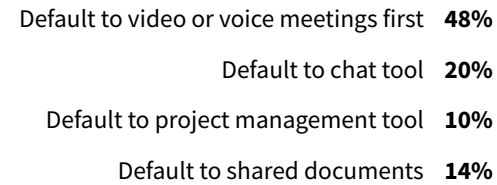
Communication tools used

Video conferencing	**63%**
Messaging and collaboration	**55%**
Phone and SMS	**51%**
Document sharing	**45%**
Chat app	**35%**
Project and task management	**19%**
Visual collaboration	**10%**
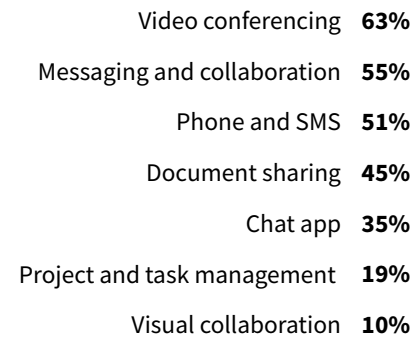
A mounting challenge: setting boundaries with your inbox

Burnout reached an all-time high in 2020[1]. **42%** of our respondents admit that they struggle with maintaining boundaries while working away from the office.

This aligns with the findings in GitLab's 2021 Out of the Office report. In that study, we also found that people everywhere have begun taking extra steps to proactively set boundaries and protect themselves from overwork.

More than half of respondents stay organized by maintaining their calendars. They take regular lunch and coffee breaks. And they try to work consistent schedules.

There's room for improvement: **53%** of people start their day with their email inbox, rather than with async-friendly project management tools or dashboards.
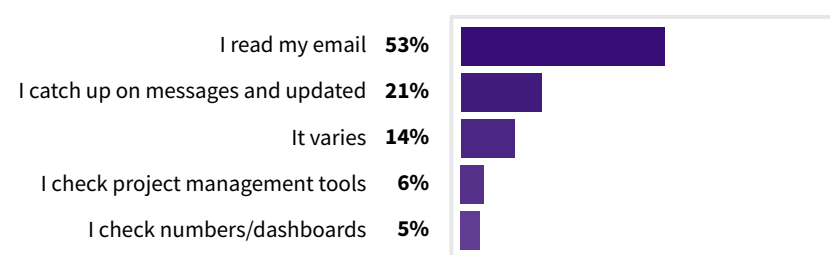
How the workday is started

I read my email	**53%**
I catch up on messages and updated	**21%**
It varies	**14%**
I check project management tools	**6%**
I check numbers/dashboards	**5%**

Rituals followed

Take regular lunch and coffee breaks	**59%**
Work a consistent schedule most days	**59%**
Exercise	**49%**
Schedule regular social time	**26%**
Meditate	**17%**

How to stay organized

Maintaining my calendar	**56%**
Set myself time for lunch	**41%**
Set times for regular meetings	**41%**
Adhering to a 7-8 hour workday	**40%**
Mindfulness around checking work after hours	**40%**
Turning off devices when I am finished working	**32%**
Set time for myself to exercise	**30%**
Blocking no-meeting time for myself	**26%**

[1] PNAS

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Teams are connected, but work is siloed

85% of respondents are satisfied with their productivity, and **76%** feel that most processes are clear and well-documented. But there is clear room for improvement: **61% of people report that teams are siloed because they use different tools. 70%** of people often ping colleagues for information, and **48%** report losing time searching for information.

Presented in partnership with Qatalog

Attitudes on collaborations and workflows among remote workers

Statement	%
I am satisfied with my productivity	85%
I am clear on our org goals and how my individual goals contribute to them	83%
My team is well-aligned with the rest of the organization	81%
I am satisfied with the level of productivity in my team	81%
Accountability is promoted in the organization	79%
I am satisfied with the level of automation in my daily work	79%
I consider working from home/ from anywhere a competitive advantage for an employer	78%
I have a good view into teams and projects in the organization	76%
Most processes in the business are clear and well-documented	76%
I feel visible in my organization most of the time	71%
I often ping my colleagues for information, status updates, etc.	70%
Different teams use different tools in my org, creating work silos	61%
We update our process documents manually	55%
I often feel that I lose time searching for documents and links across tools and folders	48%

Respondents in Brazil rated some responses significantly higher than those in other countries.
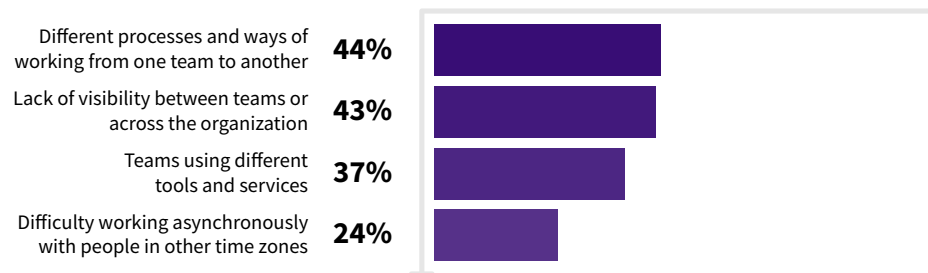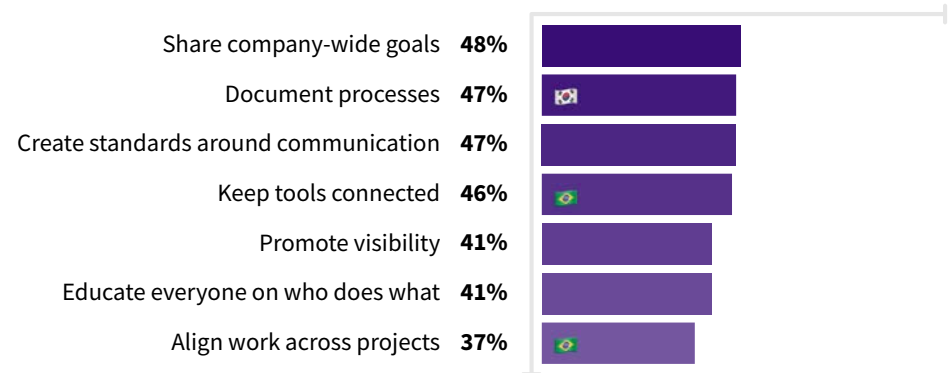
91% of remote workers feel the tools and services for productivity and collaboration create a connected workplace.

What creates silos in the workplace

Different processes and ways of working from one team to another **44%**

Lack of visibility between teams or across the organization **43%**

Teams using different tools and services **37%**

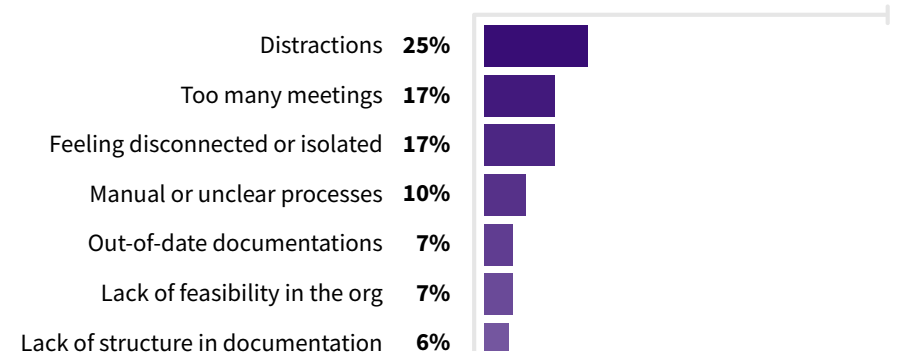Difficulty working asynchronously with people in other time zones **24%**

Fewer than **50%** feel that their organization is doing enough to share company-wide goals, document processes, create communication standards, and promote visibility amongst workstreams. Barely a third believe their leaders are appropriately aligning work across projects.

What organizations are doing well

Share company-wide goals **48%**

Document processes **47%**

Create standards around communication **47%**

Keep tools connected **46%**

Promote visibility **41%**

Educate everyone on who does what **41%**

Align work across projects **37%**

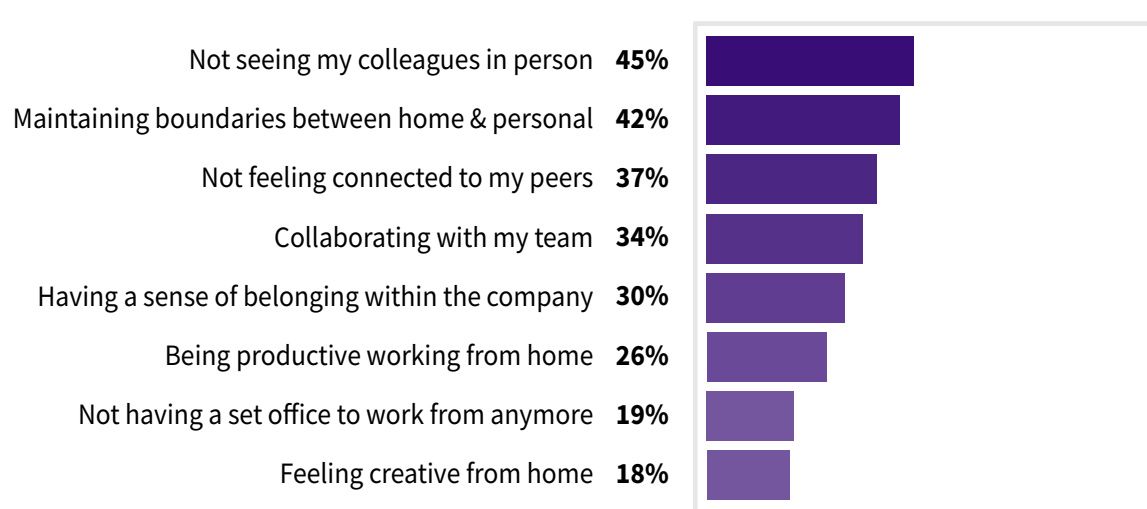*Respondents in South Korea and Brazil rated some responses significantly higher than those in other countries.*

What are the biggest pains in daily work

Distractions **25%**

Too many meetings **17%**

Feeling disconnected or isolated **17%**

Manual or unclear processes **10%**

Out-of-date documentations **7%**

Lack of feasibility in the org **7%**

Lack of structure in documentation **6%**

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Culture & Belonging

Despite overwhelming positivity for more flexible work policies, **45% of respondents worry over not seeing colleagues in person**, while **34%** are concerned about their ability to collaborate effectively.

Concerns about not working in a physical office

Not seeing my colleagues in person	**45%**
Maintaining boundaries between home & personal	**42%**
Not feeling connected to my peers	**37%**
Collaborating with my team	**34%**
Having a sense of belonging within the company	**30%**
Being productive working from home	**26%**
Not having a set office to work from anymore	**19%**
Feeling creative from home	**18%**

Notably, only **28%** are concerned about being productive while working from home, and just **18%** worry about their creative output outside the office.

61% of remote workers feel that their company took meaningful actions toward increasing team diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the past year, while **64%** feel that their company has effective policies for recruiting, supporting, and developing team members from minority racial, ethnic, or cultural groups. Non-male respondents were less likely to make this statement (**61%**) than males (**65%**).

GitLab | Dropbox

Presented in partnership with Dropbox

Culture is key to the success of distributed work. Get started with Dropbox's guide to supporting your team and GitLab's guide to building and reinforcing a sustainable culture.

Additional resources from Dropbox:
- » Team Summit Toolkit
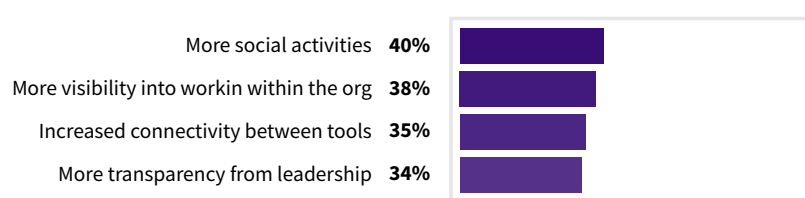- » Permission to Speak Workbook
- » Team Values Toolkit

1 in 3 respondents feel disconnected from their peers. **34% of respondents noted that more transparency from leadership leads to a deeper feeling of connectedness at work**, while **38%** noted that more visibility into the work within the organization improved their sense of connection.

Younger generations in the remote workforce feel the pain more than older generations. 55% of people report having to update process documents manually. This is more pronounced in younger professionals, with **63%** of 21-38 year olds indicating this as a pain point versus **45%** of those over 55. **66%** of 21-38 year olds report siloes created by different teams using different tools, versus **55%** of those over 55.
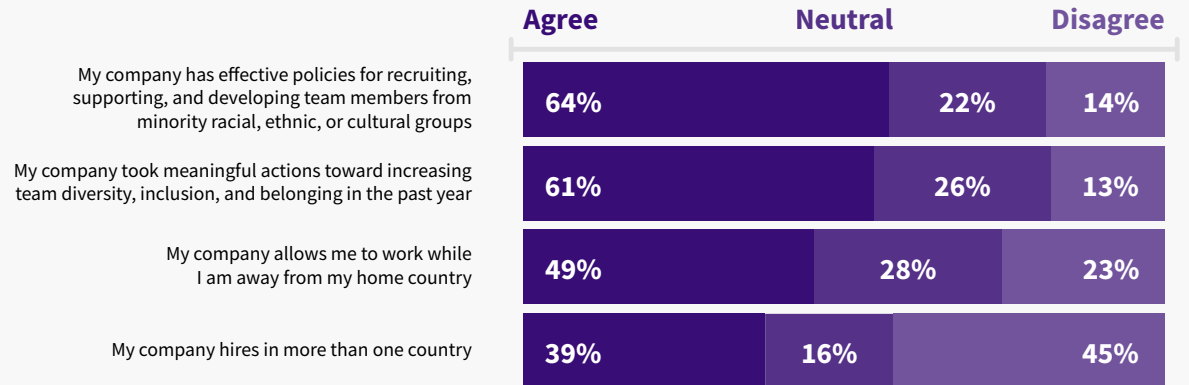
There is plenty of opportunity for improvement in remote team and culture building: just **33%** of companies are taking simple actions such as implementing virtual coffee or tea breaks.
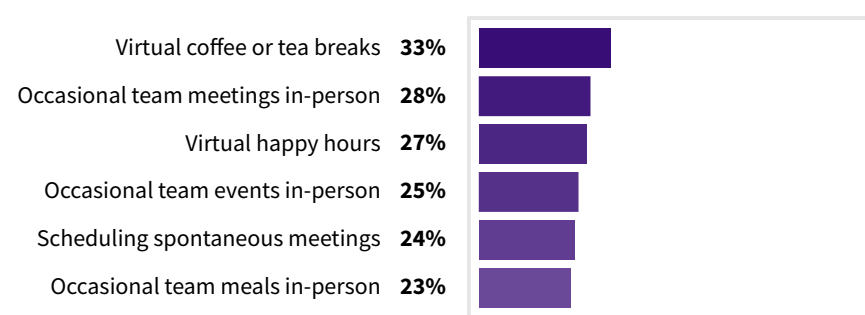
Diversity and inclusion

In general, organizations are doing well to address diversity and inclusivity. However, there is still more that can be achieved.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
My company has effective policies for recruiting, supporting, and developing team members from minority racial, ethnic, or cultural groups	64%	22%	14%
My company took meaningful actions toward increasing team diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the past year	61%	26%	13%
My company allows me to work while I am away from my home country	49%	28%	23%
My company hires in more than one country	39%	16%	45%

How to feel more connected at work

More social activities	**40%**
More visibility into workin within the org	**38%**
Increased connectivity between tools	**35%**
More transparency from leadership	**34%**

What companies are doing to foster a sense of community

Virtual coffee or tea breaks	**33%**
Occasional team meetings in-person	**28%**
Virtual happy hours	**27%**
Occasional team events in-person	**25%**
Scheduling spontaneous meetings	**24%**
Occasional team meals in-person	**23%**

What's Next?

We're in the middle of a sea change: work is rapidly becoming more distributed, more global, more connected, and more asynchronous. But the future is very much unknown. As an open-core company with 1,300+ global team members, GitLab has been documenting its all-remote operating practices since 2014. In 2021, we released The Remote Playbook: a comprehensive guide to building, running, and scaling a distributed team.

ALL-REMOTE CERTIFICATION

For individuals
No-cost training program covering best practices for effective remote work.

Get certified

HOW TO MANAGE A REMOTE TEAM

For management
No-cost Coursera course offering high-level training and remote transition guidance

Get certified

REMOTE WORK NEWSLETTER

Stay informed on industry trends with our selection of the latest news and resources that matter to remote leaders

Sign up

Get GitLab's remote work newsletter

Meet Our Partners

GitLab is thrilled to partner with these remote-work leaders. Our partners helped guide the 2021 Remote Work Report, sharing insights and input in their unique areas of expertise.

Dropbox

Dropbox is redesigning the way the world works. Back in 2007, making work better for people meant designing a simpler way to keep files in sync. Today, it means designing products that reduce busywork so you can focus on the work that matters. Read how we're designing for the workplace of tomorrow in our Virtual First Toolkit.

Qatalog

A great restructuring is rapidly unfolding in our working lives. The ground beneath us is shifting to a new form of collaboration, where we work wherever and whenever we like. We should have a new way of working that we couldn't have anticipated, or even imagined, just a few years ago. In pursuit of our mission to connect the world of work and unlock human potential, we'll remove millions of tiny friction points to make room for craftsmanship and creativity.

SafetyWing

SafetyWing believes remote work can remove the role of geographical borders as a barrier to equal opportunities and freedom for everyone. We provide global benefits, like health insurance and retirement savings, to remote workers and teams.

Methodology

Research findings are based on a survey conducted by Savanta Inc. across the US, UK, Canada, Australia, South Africa, Brazil and South Korea between February 12 – March 10, 2021. For this survey, 3,900 respondents were asked general questions about working remotely.

The study targeted employees who were currently working remote and will continue to after the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents were recruited through a number of different mechanisms, via different sources to join the panels and participate in market research surveys. All panelists passed a double opt-in process and completed on average 300 profiling data points prior to taking part in surveys. Respondents were invited to take part via email and were provided with a small monetary incentive for doing so.

Results of any sample are subject to sampling variation. The magnitude of the variation is measurable and is affected by the number of interviews and the level of the percentages expressing the results. In this particular study, the chances are 95 in 100 that a survey result does not vary, plus or minus, by more than 1.6 percentage points from the result that would be obtained if interviews had been conducted with all persons in the universe represented by the sample.

Appendix

Not all of our findings were conclusive or clear. We are including some additional information that may be interesting or informative.

How many people on a given team are working remotely?

This data is highly subject to change due to ongoing COVID-19 lockdowns and restrictions worldwide. We can expect major shifts in these numbers over the next year.
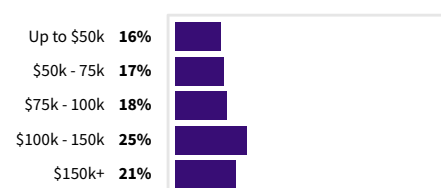
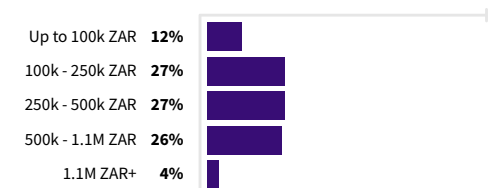### Percentage of company working remote

1 - 25%	**13%**
26 - 50%	**24%**
51 - 75%	**27%**
76 - 99%	**21%**
76 - 99%	**15%**
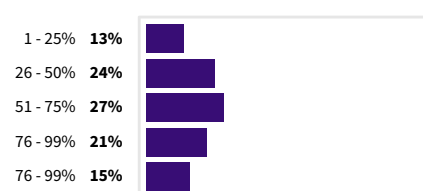
How much do remote workers earn?

This data is clear, but it's subject to major variation from one country to the next.

Household income 🇺🇸

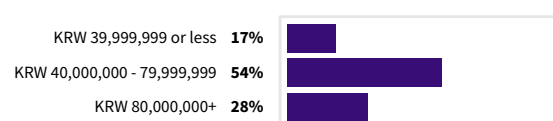|	
Up to $50k	**16%**
$50k - 75k	**17%**
$75k - 100k	**18%**
$100k - 150k	**25%**
$150k+	**21%**

Household income 🇿🇦

Up to 100k ZAR	**12%**
100k - 250k ZAR	**27%**
250k - 500k ZAR	**27%**
500k - 1.1M ZAR	**26%**
1.1M ZAR+	**4%**

Household income 🇬🇧

Under £30,420	**25%**
Over £30,420	**70%**

Household income 🇧🇷

Under BRL 5.999	**74%**
BRL 6.000 and over	**23%**

Household income 🇰🇷

KRW 39,999,999 or less	**17%**
KRW 40,000,000 - 79,999,999	**54%**
KRW 80,000,000+	**28%**

Household income 🇨🇦

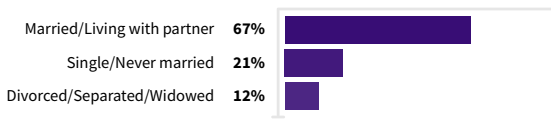|	
Under CA$84,950	**40%**
Over CA$84,950	**56%**

What are the demographics of remote workers?

Ethnicity data varies greatly from one nation to another. It's still a compelling look at the global challenge to improve equitable access to employment in digital work.
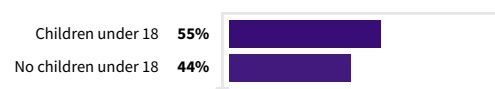
Marital status

Married/Living with partner	**67%**
Single/Never married	**21%**
Divorced/Separated/Widowed	**12%**

Age distribution

21 - 38 years	**36%**
39 - 54 years	**37%**
55+ years	**27%**

Family composition

Children under 18	**55%**
No children under 18	**44%**

Gender split

Female	**58%**
Male	**42%**

Caregiver status

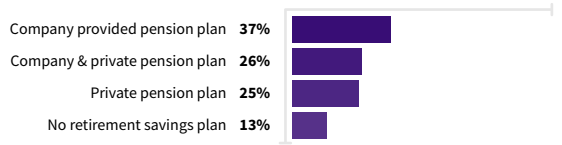|	
No	**78%**
Yes	**15%**

Identify as a member of LGBTQ+
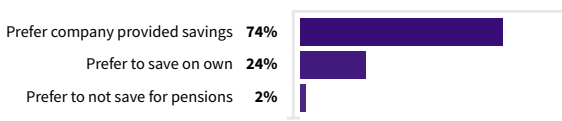
No	**88%**
Yes	**9%**

How are remote workers planning for retirement?

These results weren't entirely conclusive, but there's one important trend: remote workers everywhere want their employers to help with retirement savings.
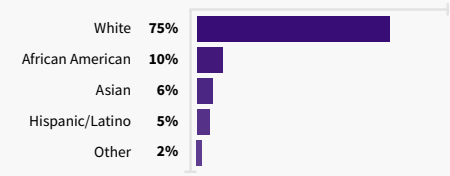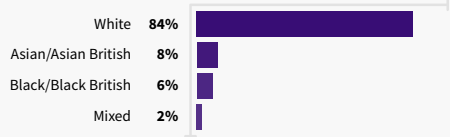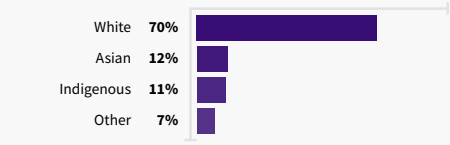
Current retirement/saving strategy

Company provided pension plan	**37%**
Company & private pension plan	**26%**
Private pension plan	**25%**
No retirement savings plan	**13%**

Retirement preferences

Prefer company provided savings	**74%**
Prefer to save on own	**24%**
Prefer to not save for pensions	**2%**

Ethnicity 🇺🇸

White	**75%**
African American	**10%**
Asian	**6%**
Hispanic/Latino	**5%**
Other	**2%**

Ethnicity 🇬🇧

White	**84%**
Asian/Asian British	**8%**
Black/Black British	**6%**
Mixed	**2%**

Ethnicity 🇳🇿

White	**70%**
Asian	**12%**
Indigenous	**11%**
Other	**7%**

Ethnicity 🇿🇦

White	**41%**
Black African	**41%**
Mixed	**11%**
Indian/Asian	**4%**
Other	**2%**

Ethnicity 🇨🇦

White	**60%**
Asian	**27%**
Black	**8%**
Other	**3%**

Ethnicity 🇧🇷

White	**59%**
Mixed	**25%**
Black	**10%**
Other	**4%**

About GitLab

GitLab is a DevOps platform built from the ground up as a single application for all stages of the DevOps lifecycle enabling Product, Development, QA, Security, and Operations teams to work concurrently on the same project. GitLab provides a single data store, one user interface, and one permission model across the DevOps lifecycle. This allows teams to significantly reduce cycle times through more efficient collaboration and enhanced focus.

Built on Open Source, GitLab works alongside its growing community, which is composed of thousands of developers and millions of users, to continuously deliver new DevOps innovations. More than 100,000 organizations from startups to global enterprises, including Ticketmaster, Jaguar Land Rover, NASDAQ, Dish Network, and Comcast trust GitLab to deliver great software faster. All-remote since 2014, GitLab has more than 1,300 team members in 68 countries.

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