

Generational ERGs: Engaging Employees of Every Age

Workspan Article

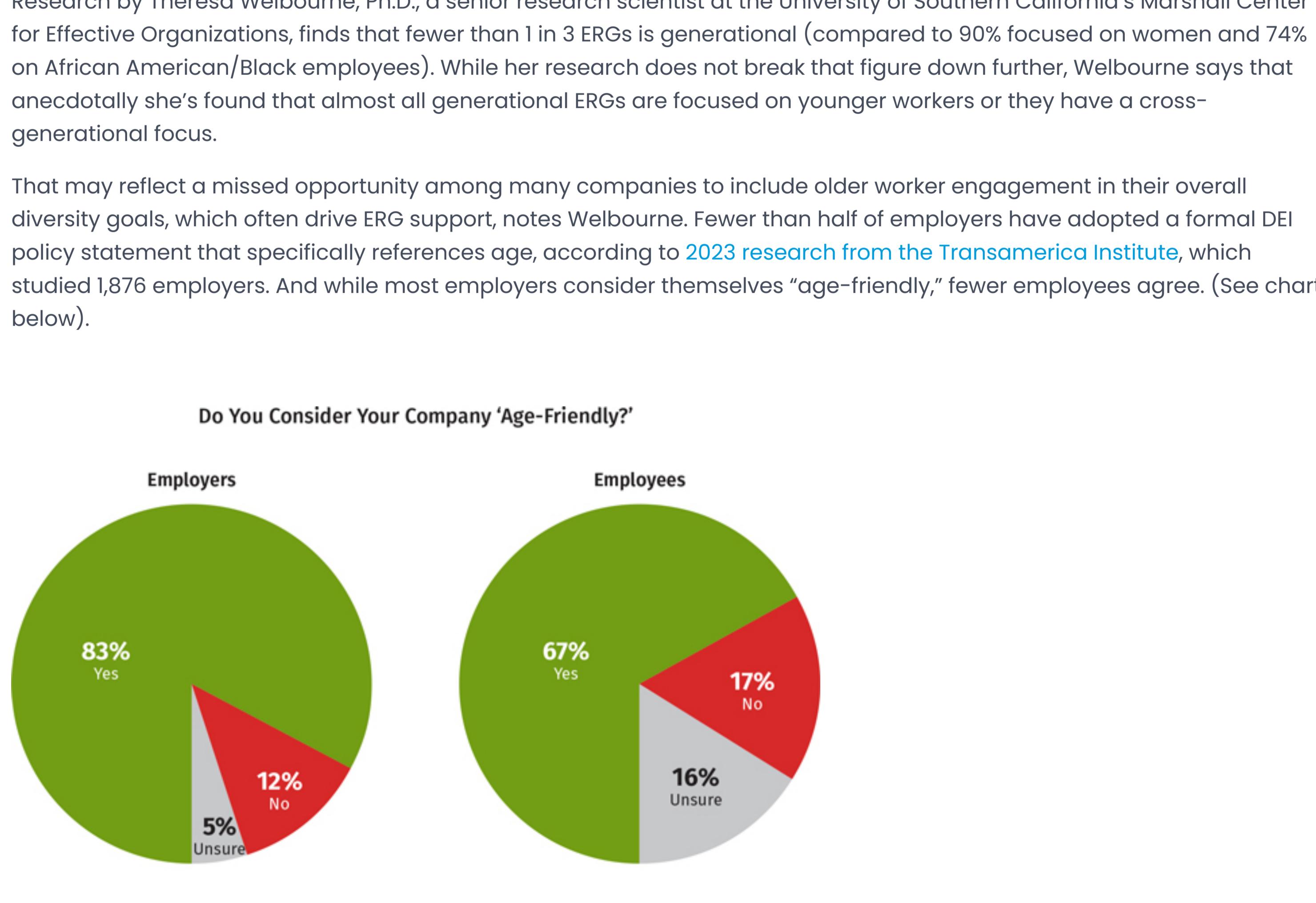
June 13, 2024

By [Beth Braverman](#)

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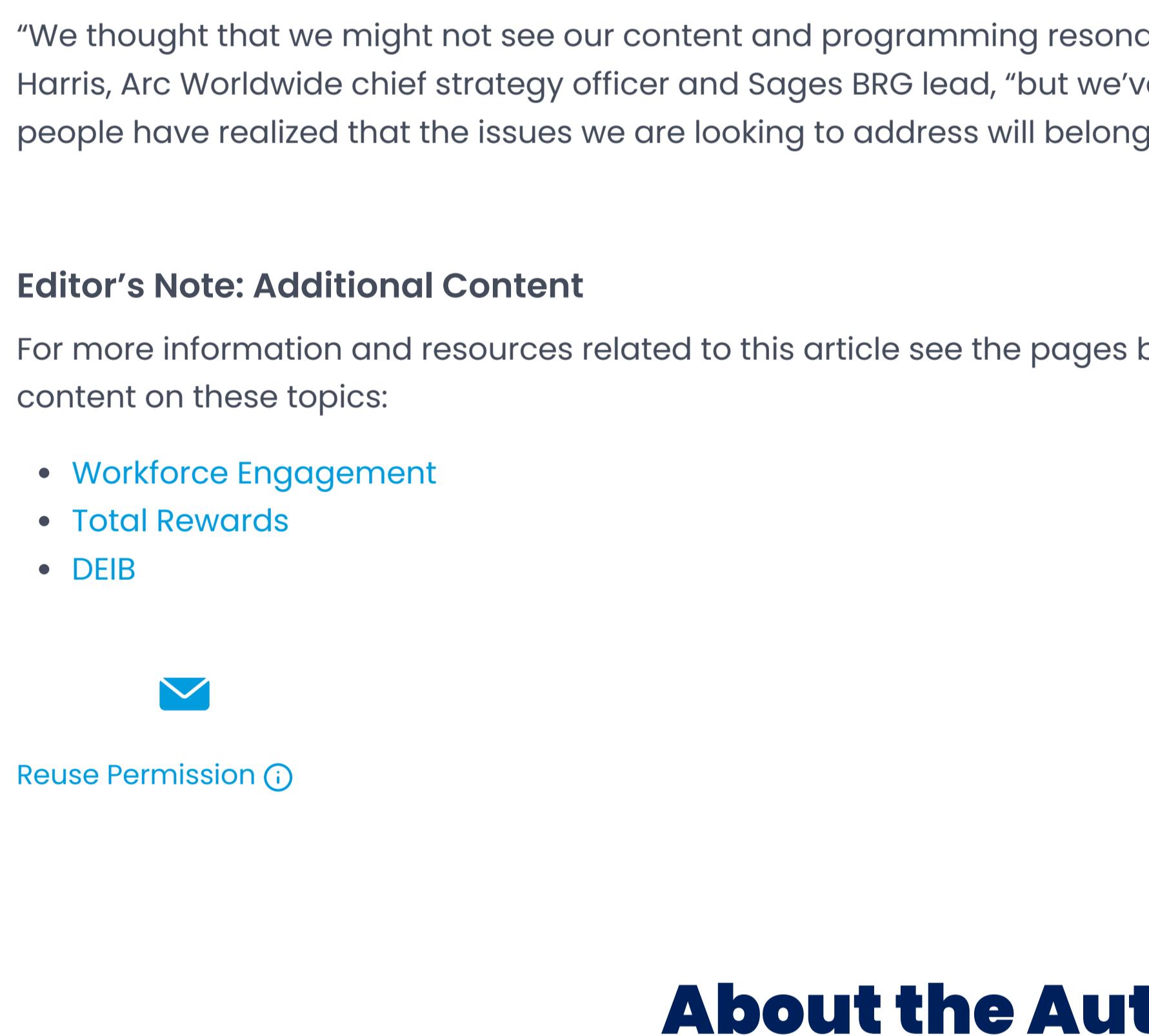

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Even as some diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs come under fire, employee resource groups (ERGs) remain a staple at large companies. But while resource groups for women, minorities, and LGBTQ+ workers abound, there are relatively few age-focused ERGs.

Research by Theresa Welbourne, Ph.D., a senior research scientist at the University of Southern California's Marshall Center for Effective Organizations, finds that fewer than 1 in 3 ERGs is generational (compared to 90% focused on women and 74% on African American/Black employees). While her research does not break that figure down further, Welbourne says that anecdotally she's found that almost all generational ERGs are focused on younger workers or they have a cross-generational focus.

That may reflect a missed opportunity among many companies to include older worker engagement in their overall diversity goals, which often drive ERG support, notes Welbourne. Fewer than half of employers have adopted a formal DEI policy statement that specifically references age, according to [2023 research from the Transamerica Institute](#), which studied 1,876 employers. And while most employers consider themselves "age-friendly," fewer employees agree. (See chart below).

Do You Consider Your Company 'Age-Friendly'?



"Retaining elderly people might be the goal of some companies, but not others," concedes Welbourne, who is also the Will and Maggie Brooke professor in entrepreneurship at the University of Alabama's Culverhouse College of Business. "But one of the goals of a lot of ERGs is mentoring and coaching, which more experienced workers would be more helpful with, but I don't know if a lot of companies have thought about it that way."

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Such multigenerational workforce programs are indeed still emerging as best practices, suggest findings from the Transamerica study. The most frequently cited programs are:

- Traditional and/or reverse mentorships, offered by 48% of employers.
- Job training/lifelong learning (46%).
- Professional development programs at all ages (32%).
- Specific training that addresses generational differences and helps prevent age discrimination (28%).
- Tuition reimbursement for continuing education (21%).

"Many employers are reevaluating their business practices and benefit offerings," said Catherine Collinson, CEO and president of Transamerica Institute and Transamerica Center for Retirement Studies. "But the question is whether they are in sync with these employees' needs."

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Cross-collaboration and Intersectionality

At Arc Worldwide, a subsidiary of the advertising giant Publicis Groupe, the Business Resource Group (BRG) "Sages" has focused on workers age 45 and older since 2018. The group currently has more than 300 members and helped play a role in getting Publicis Groupe and its agencies certified as "Age-Friendly Employers" by the AgeFriendly Institute.

Geraldine White, the chief diversity officer at Publicis Groupe US, says it's important to note that Sages is a "business" resource group, since the company's 18 BRGs are open to all employees, including allies, and help shape policies, protocols and practices across the organization.

"Our BRGs cross-collaborate and intersect often, particularly to develop programming that is relevant to intersectional identities," she said.

Recent examples include a partnership with the ParentKind ERG to develop programming around conversations on parenting, or an event — attended by younger talent in the organization — in which Sages shared advice that they'd give their younger selves.

"We thought that we might not see our content and programming resonate with those under the age of 45," said Elizabeth Harris, Arc Worldwide chief strategy officer and Sages BRG lead, "but we've actually been pleasantly surprised at how many people have realized that the issues we are looking to address will belong to everyone who has the opportunity to age."

Editor's Note: Additional Content

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About the Author



Beth Braverman
Freelance Writer, Workspan Magazine

Beth Braverman is a freelance writer for Workspan, who has been covering workplace issues, benefits and personal finance for more than a decade.

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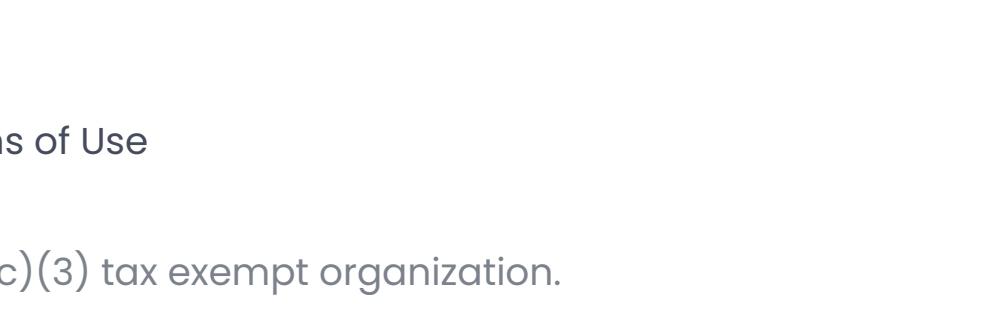
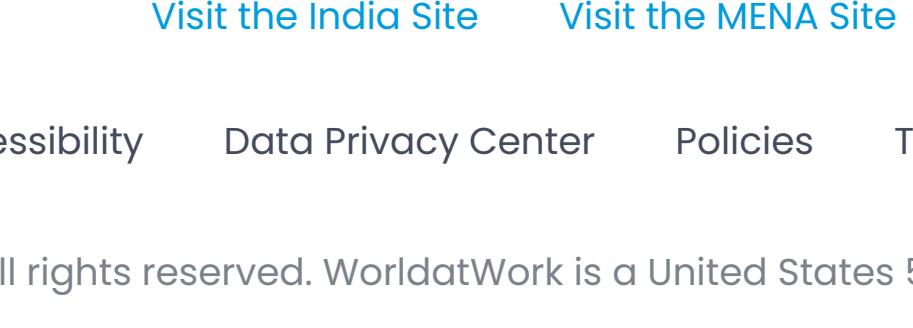
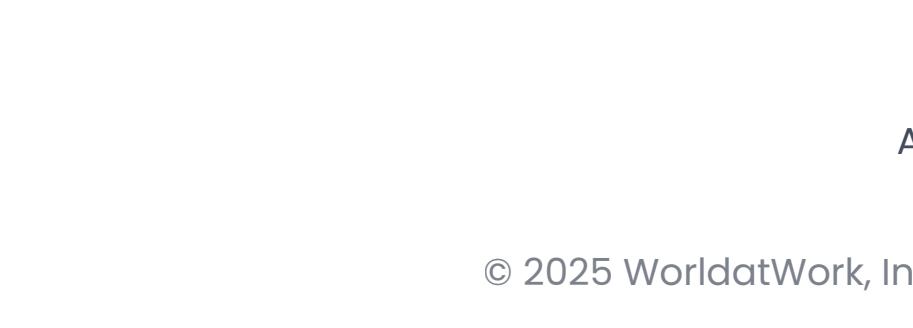
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