



# Emerging Trends and Challenges in the Consulting Landscape

February 2024

A market survey from Ework Group

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# General information

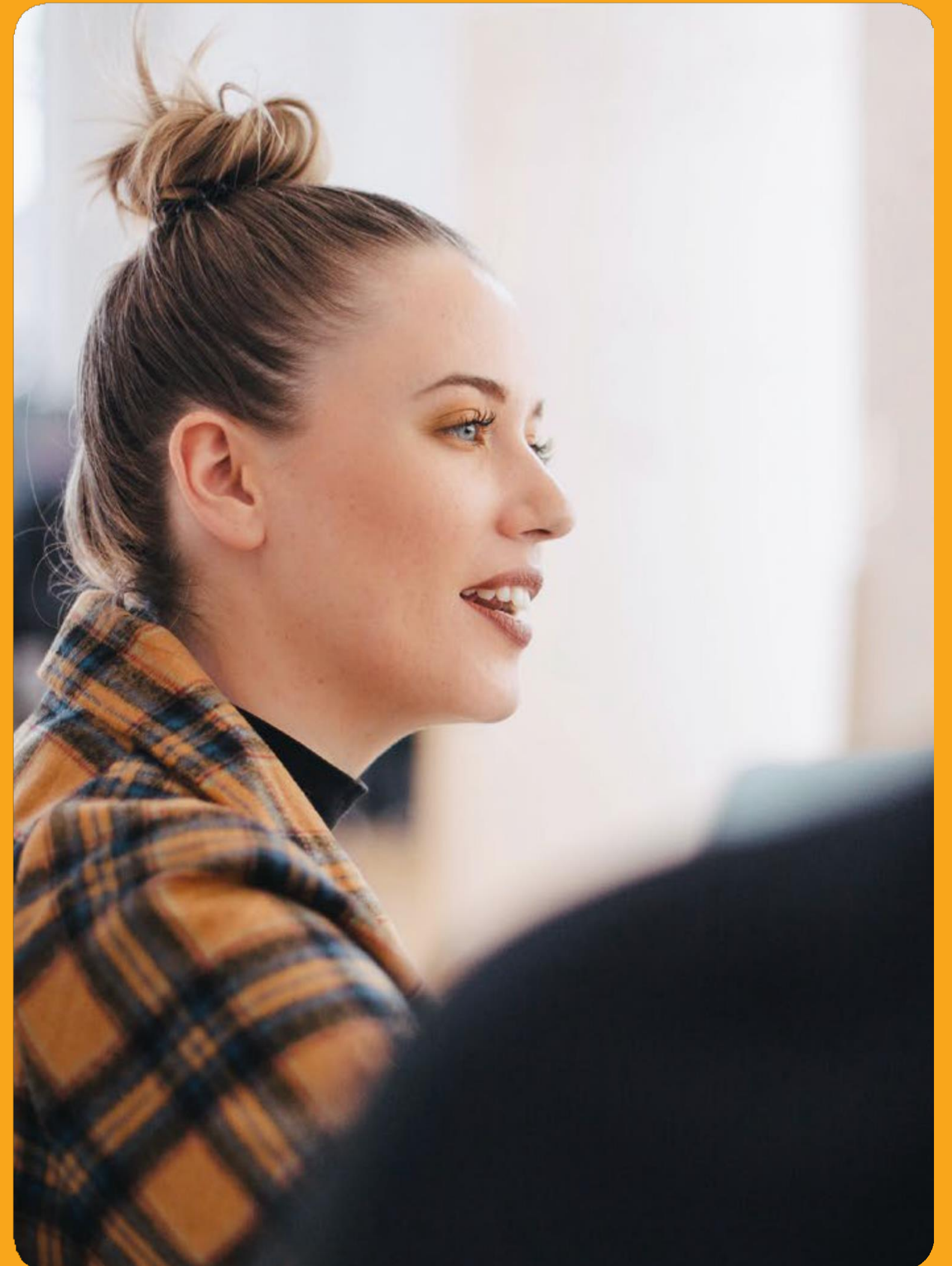




# A market survey from Ework Group

In a comprehensive survey, conducted by Ework Group between 26th of October until 12th of November 2023, 1297 respondents gave their view of the work landscape of today and the challenges they think we face in the near future.

In the survey, covering six different areas, we delved into the dynamic landscape of the consulting market, shedding light on key insights that will shape the industry's trajectory in the coming years. This anonymous survey, conducted primarily in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Poland, provides a holistic view of the opinions and experiences of freelancers, consultants, and representatives from a diverse array of companies both in the private and public sector.



# In summary:

The survey with nearly 1,300 respondents from diverse industries and companies provides a comprehensive overview of the consulting market. The majority of participants were freelancers or consultants that is over 40 years old with a high level of education and extensive work-experience.

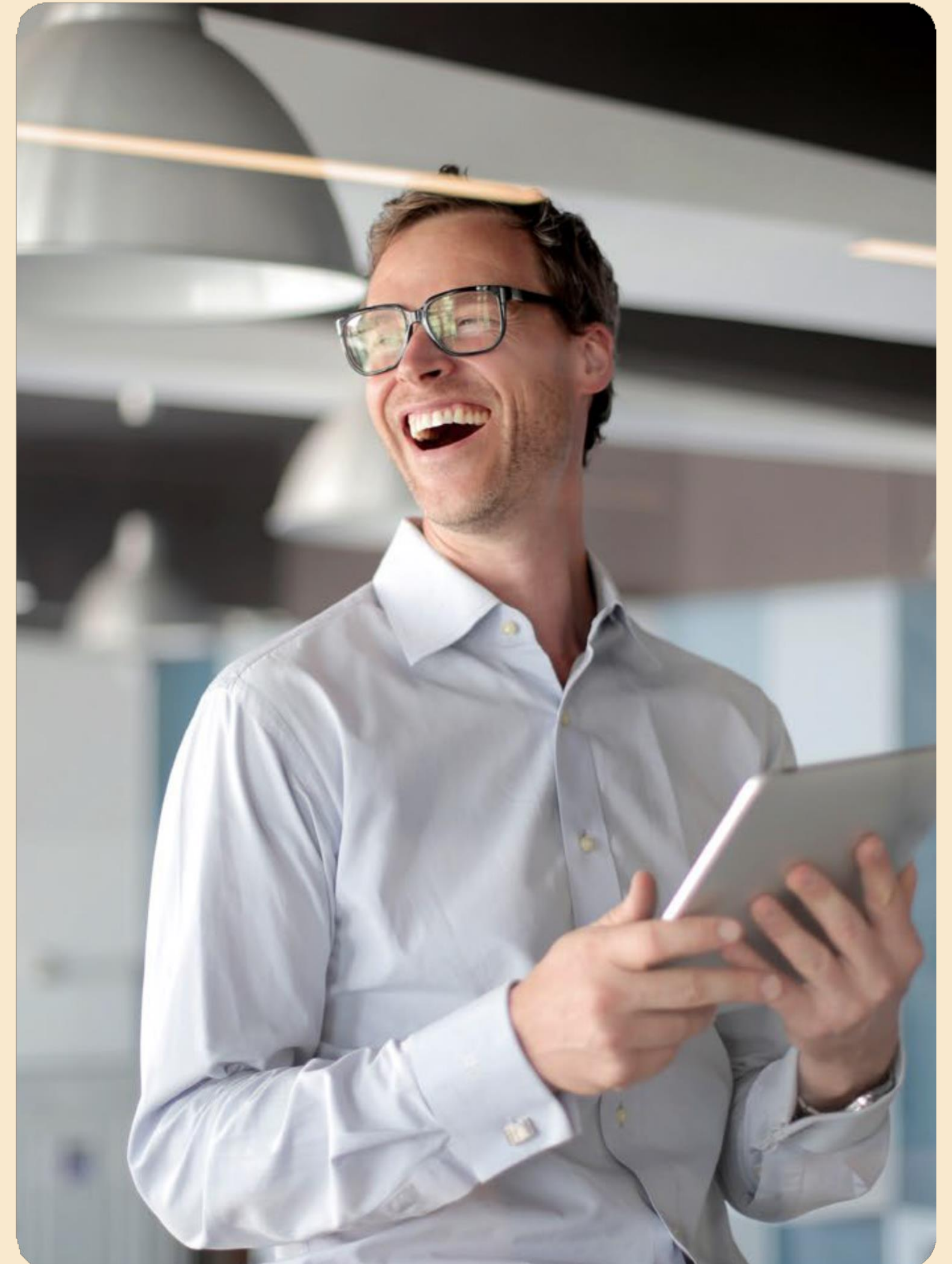




The key findings indicate a prevailing preference for hybrid work models, with flexibility and hourly rates being crucial factors for consultants when selecting assignments. Despite global economic challenges, consultants expressed confidence in finding work.

Digitalization emerged as the dominant megatrend in 2024, shaping the market significantly.

The most pressing challenge identified is the skills shortage. The most sought-after skills in the market, according to the respondents, revolve around digitalization, AI, and automation. Skills shortage has been on the agenda all over the world the last couple of years and the survey shows that many companies offers reskilling/upskilling initiatives.







The trends and challenges also put demands on leaders. Successful leaders must navigate this complexity, prioritize continuous learning, and foster innovation and inclusivity within their organizations.

Despite economic uncertainties, a significant portion of companies (52 percent) are not reporting any major changes to the projects they are conducting.

Cybersecurity is another area in focus. Approximately 35 percent of respondents prioritize and have made investments in cybersecurity, and 11 percent have experienced cybercrime, primarily in the form of internet and email fraud.



Additionally, new laws are affecting the consulting market, impacting both consultants and companies with contingent workforces. However, a substantial portion of participants remains unaware of these legislative changes and their potential effects.

In conclusion, the survey provides valuable insights into the evolving landscape of the consulting market, highlighting key trends, challenges, and opportunities that will shape the industry in the coming years.





# Demographic profile





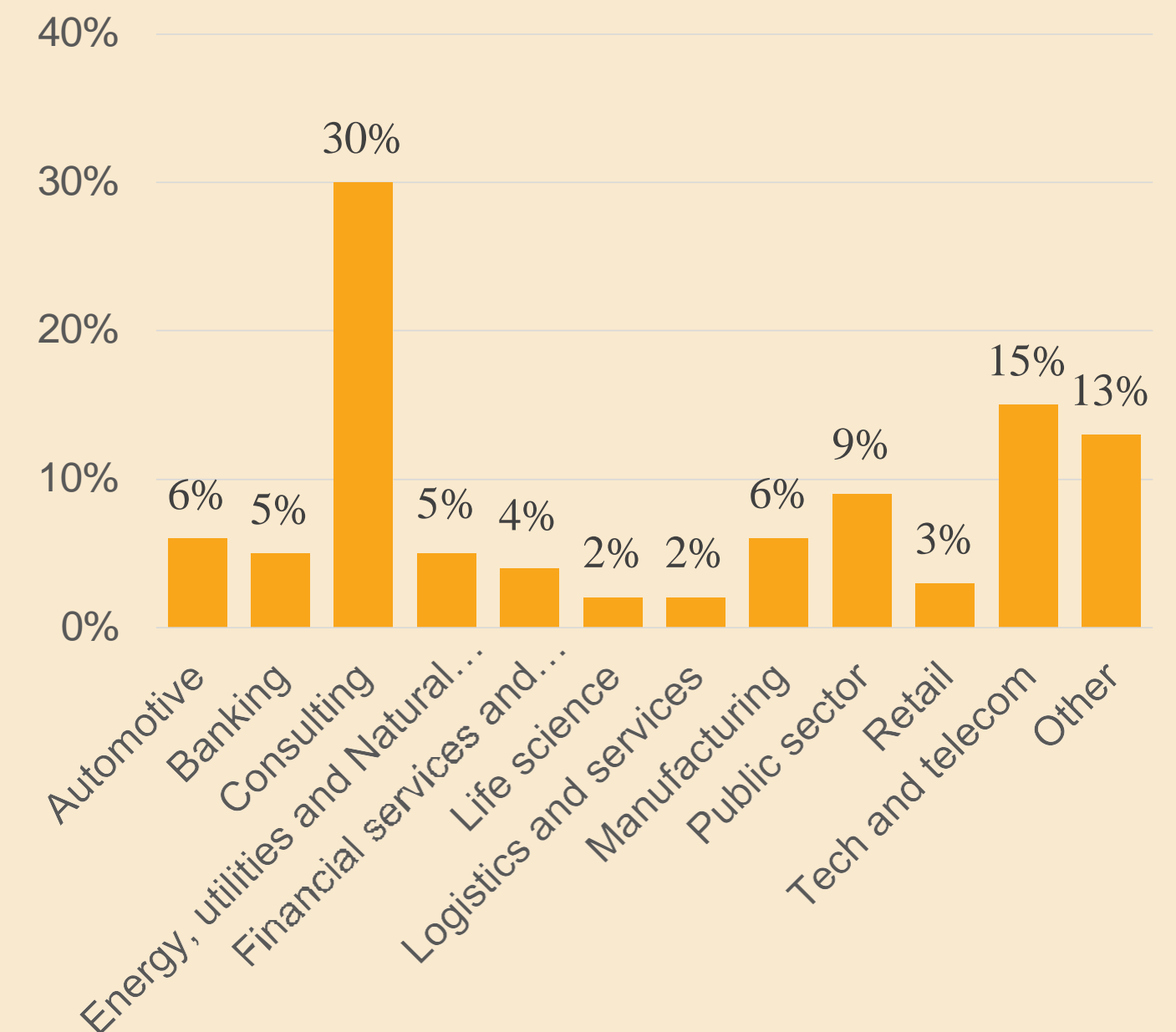
# Demographic profile

The respondents, predominantly freelancers and consultants (72 percent), represented a broad spectrum of professionals. A majority, over 80 percent, was 41+ years. 74 percent of the respondents were male.

The respondents were highly educated, 32 percent had a bachelor degree and 46 percent had a master's degree. 95 percent of the respondents had expert experience over 7 years in their respective field of work. The majority of the respondents, 71 percent, worked and resided in Sweden.

The respondents works in a large variety of industries, the top industry being consulting.

What industry are you working in?





# Respondents spread over all Ework Group's markets

Ework Group operates in five different markets and have consultants spread over 50 countries. The remaining 29 percent of respondents, that did not reside in Sweden, was spread as followed: 9 percent Norway, 8 percent Denmark, 5 percent Finland, 3 percent Poland and 4 percent other countries.





# Conclusion

The demographic profile of the respondents gives an overview of how Ework's network is structured and what kind of level of expertise you can expect from the majority of consultants and freelancers. Two important conclusions you can draw from the survey is that the consultant market is in need for more diversity in both gender and age. Only 24 percent of the respondents were female and over 80 was over 41 years old.



A close-up photograph of a person's hands and forearms working on a laptop. The person is wearing a mustard yellow, ribbed knit sweater. Their left hand is on the trackpad, and their right hand is on the keyboard. They are also wearing several gold-toned bangles on their left wrist. The laptop is silver and sits on a dark wooden desk. The background is softly blurred, showing a dark green wall and some papers on the desk.

# Hybrid work is here to stay





# No turning back

How and where we work has changed dramatically post the corona pandemic. During the pandemic we saw a global shift towards remote work and the adoption of digital communication tools. After the pandemic, many workplaces continued to offer remote work or hybrid work, where you split your time between office and working from a different location.

This flexible way of work had before the pandemic only been available on a larger scale for freelancers but is now the most common way of work. In our survey 66 percent of the respondents said that they are working in a hybrid way. 16 percent worked fully remote and 13 percent fully at the office. The number of people working remotely was higher in Poland than in the other countries.



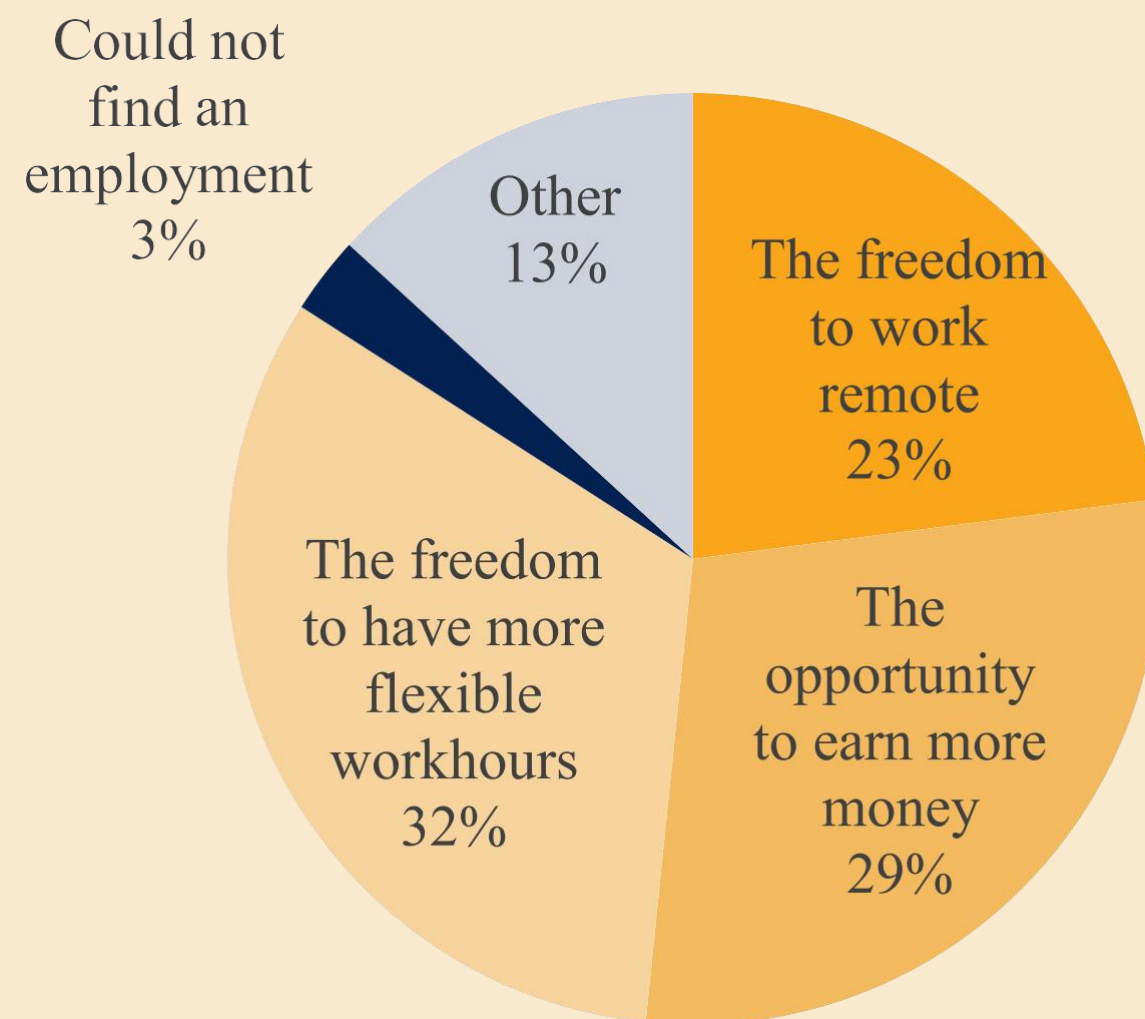
Today many companies want to get their workforce back in to the office, but our survey shows that most people do not want to return. Only 5 percent would like to go back to work fully in the office.

77 percent would like to work in a way if they could choose. Compared to the 66 percent that already have a hybrid work situation.

The difference between the respondents' situation today and the way they would like to work is quite similar. The main difference is that people that today work full-time in the office would prefer a hybrid way.



## Why did you become a freelancer/consultant?



## 2-3 days is the optimal time spent at the office

When asked how many days the respondents would like to work in an office the majority answered two and three days (29+32 percent). One fifth of the respondents opted for a more fluent schedule that varies every week.

### A key factor

Before the pandemic, the flexible lifestyle was one of the key factors for becoming a consultant. In fact that was the reason most of the consultants and freelancers in our survey, became freelancers in the first place, with the ability to earn more money in second place.

Flexibility is still one of the most crucial factors when choosing a new assignment. In the survey consultant and freelancers said that the hourly rate and flexibility were the key factors when choosing a new assignment. Notable was that women to a higher extent choose flexibility over other factors.



# Conclusion

The flexible way of work is here to stay. In our survey 66 percent of the respondents said that they are working in a hybrid way, 77 percent said that they would like to work in a hybrid way preferably 2-3 days at the office. The number of people working remotely was higher in Poland than in the other countries.

Flexibility is a key factor for many consultants and freelancers. When choosing new assignments, the consultants said that the hourly rate and flexibility was the most crucial factors. Notable was that women to a higher extent choose flexibility over other factors.





# A growing market for contingent workforce





# Enormous spend on a global scale

The global B2B gig economy is enormous. According to the SIA report: *The global gig economy 2023*. The spend is a staggering 3.8 trillion dollars on a global scale. The European spend is 1.5 trillion dollars and the largest markets are Italy, France, and Germany. The spends are spread in different kind of sources like platform related, SOW and sourced directly.

According to SIA the market is expected to grow exponentially during the coming years.

# Large and Growing Market for Contingent Workers





# One of the market leaders in the Nordics

Ework Group is a Swedish Company that operates in five countries, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Poland. With over 20 years of experience, Ework Group is one of the market leaders in the Nordics when it comes to contingent workforce and talent solutions. Right now, Ework Group has around 13,000 consultants on assignment, more than five hundred clients and a network of over 130,000 partners and professionals.

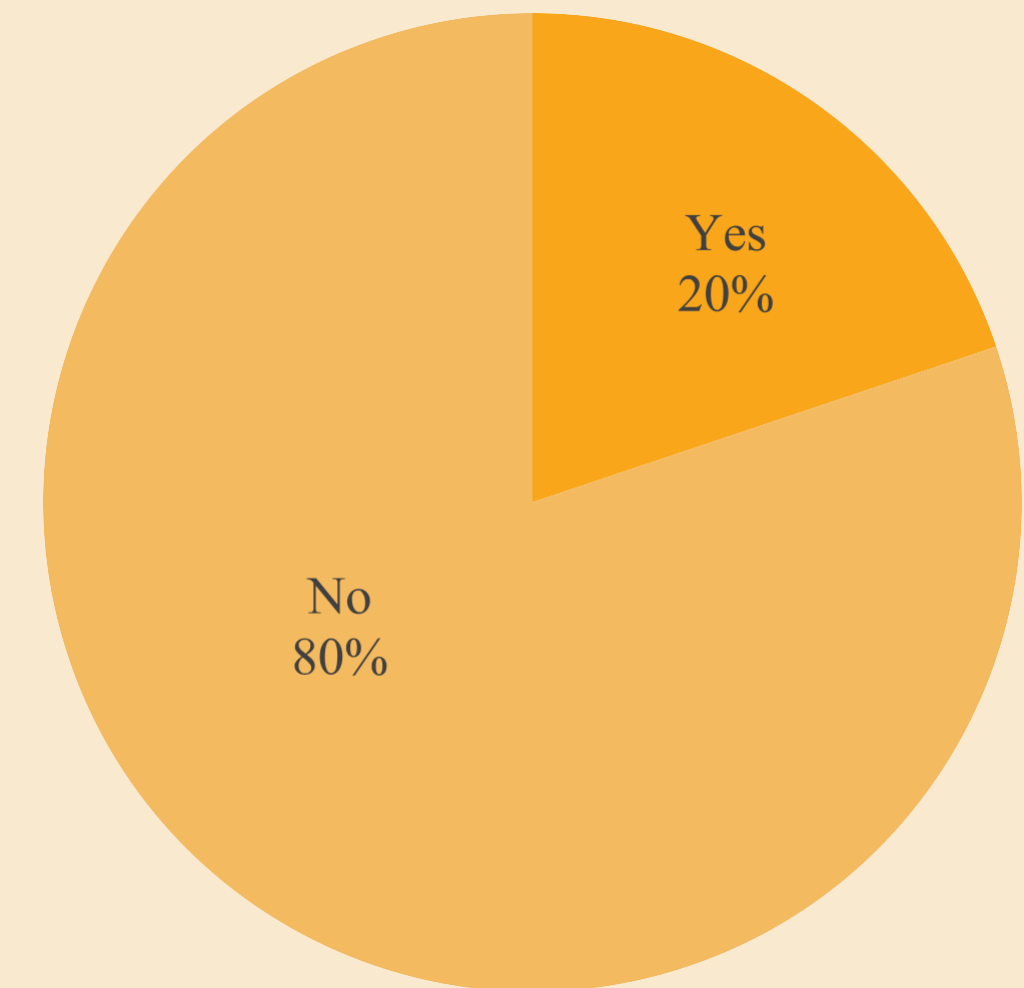


# Fearless Freelancers

## Riding the Waves of Economic Challenges with Confidence

Even though the market has been tough over the last year, facing a recession, economic downturn, and heightened fears of rising unemployment, freelancers and consultants in the survey expressed unwavering confidence in continuing their work. Eighty percent stated that high interest rates and inflation did not prompt them to consider a shift in lifestyle or seek traditional employment to secure their income.

Do general worries and high interest rates on the market make you value job security more instead of self-employment?



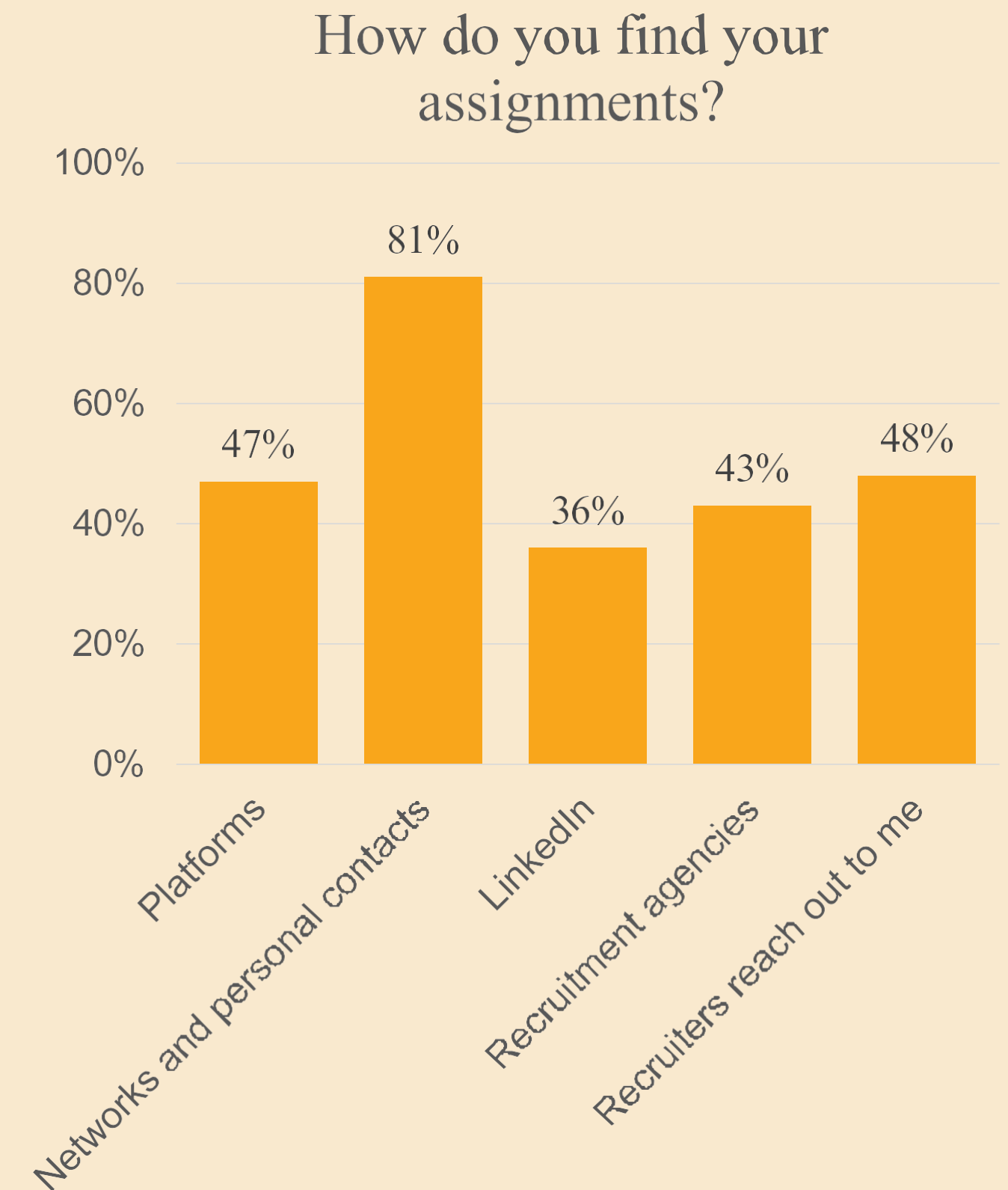


# Freelancers' Strategies

## From Networks to Recruitment Channels

In our survey, we inquired about the freelancers' and consultants' methods for securing work, and the results are crystal clear. While many utilize platforms and recruiters, the overwhelmingly most common approach is through personal networks and contacts. Following closely in second place is the scenario where recruiters actively reach out to them.

This is influenced by the fact that a significant majority of the Ework's network comprises highly experienced consultants operating at a seniority level.



# Conclusion

According to our survey, consultants envision a promising future for this sector. Remarkably, 80 percent expressed their resilience, stating that high interest rates and inflationary concerns did not compel them to alter their lifestyle or seek traditional employment for financial security.

When it comes to job acquisition, the prevailing approach is through personal networks and contacts, closely followed by proactive outreach from recruiters. It's worth noting that these insights are drawn from a pool of highly experienced respondents. With a younger demographic, responses might vary.



# Trends and challenges





# Future of business and future of work

**The future of business** is shaped by transformative megatrends that will redefine industries, reshape consumer behavior, and revolutionize the way companies operate.

- **Technological innovation**, with the rapid advancement of artificial intelligence, automation, and data analytics, is set to drive unprecedented efficiency and disrupt traditional business models.
- **Sustainability** is emerging as a non-negotiable imperative, with businesses increasingly recognizing the importance of environmentally conscious practices in response to global challenges such as climate change.





- **The globalization and the digitalization** of commerce and the rise of e-commerce are fundamentally altering the landscape for many business not at least the retail landscape, demanding businesses to adapt to evolving consumer preferences and embrace new strategies.
- **Moreover, the future of work** is undergoing a paradigm shift with the gig economy, remote work, and flexible arrangements becoming integral components of organizational structures.



# Navigating megatrends

Navigating these megatrends will require agility, adaptability, and a forward-thinking approach, as businesses seek to thrive in a landscape characterized by constant change and innovation.

In our survey we asked the respondents what megatrend they think would impact the market the most in 2024 the answer was clear - **digitalization**.

Digitalization

Green  
transistion

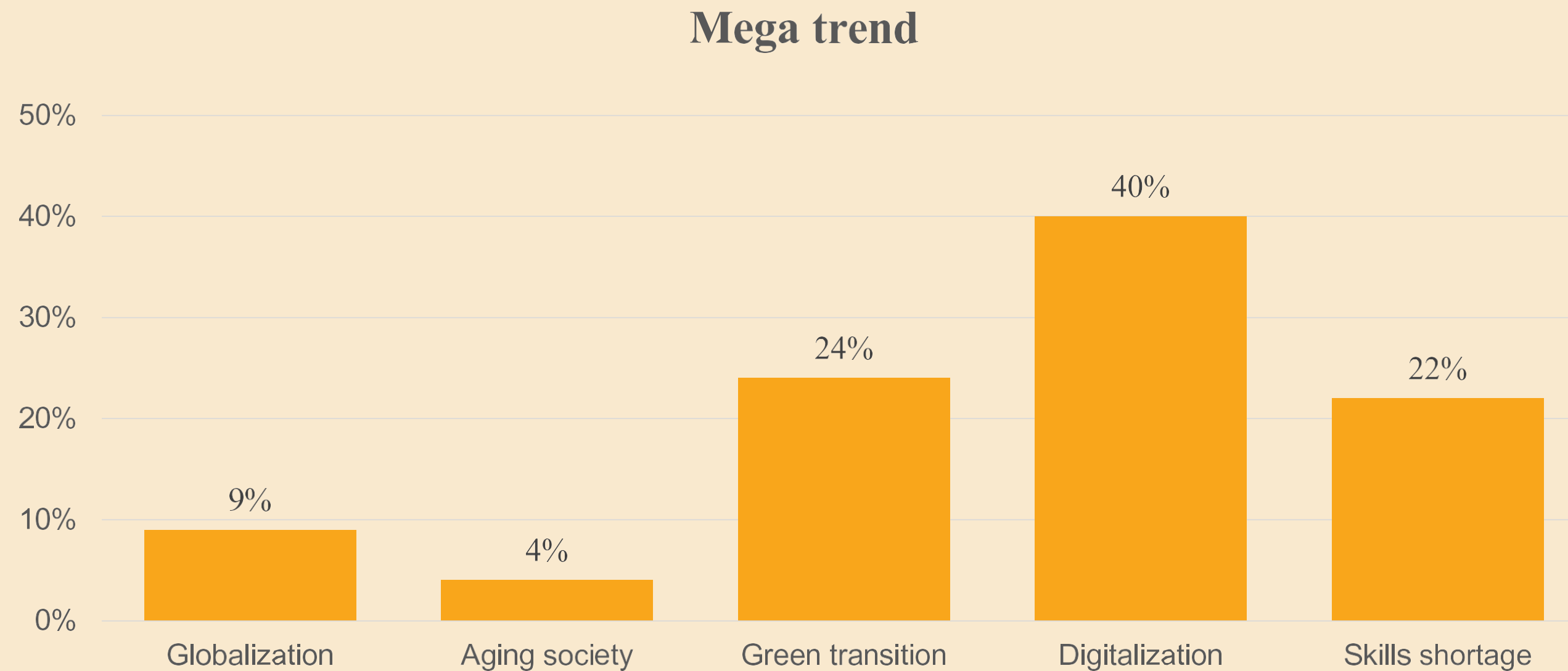
Aging society

Globalization

Skills shortage



# What megatrend in society do you think will affect the market the most in 2024?



# Skills shortage is affecting the market right now

In the survey we also asked everyone to rank the different challenges that are *affecting the market right now*. 1 being not important at all and 5 being very important. The one challenge that stood out the most was skills shortage with an average score of 3.54. Other challenges that rated higher than others were “Cutbacks at the company” 3.02 and “Cybersecurity” 3.07. On the other end there was one challenge that very few people worried about and that was “Large group of people retiring” with an average of 1.87.





# Conclusion

The future of business is shaped by transformative megatrends that will redefine industries, reshape consumer behavior, and revolutionize the way companies operate. The one megatrend that the respondents think will affect the market the most in 2024 is Digitalization. But megatrends is not the only thing affecting the market. There are a lot of challenges that affect the market. The top that stood out in our survey was skills shortage, cutbacks and cybersecurity.

# Future of leadership

Trends and challenges put demands on leaders

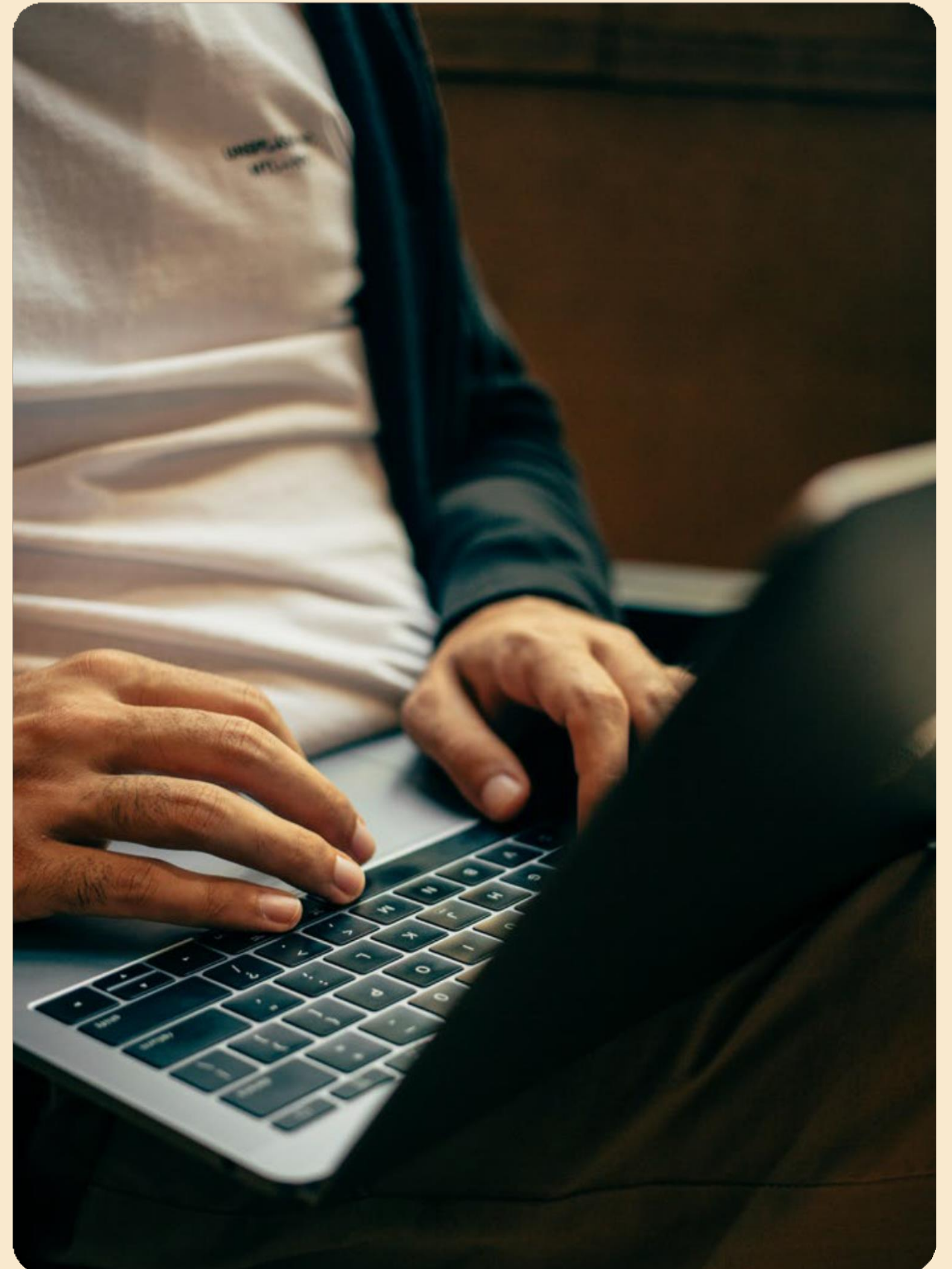




# The future of leadership puts demand on flexibility and navigating a complex landscape

The demands of future leadership are diverse and dynamic, reflecting the evolving landscape of business technology, and global challenges. In this new era, leaders must embrace a completely transformed platform for thinking about business strategies, employee branding, development and investments.

We asked all 1297 respondents to answer the question „**What demands do you believe these global trends put on future leadership?**”





# The following key aspects summarize the multifaceted demands of future leadership:

1. Adaptability and flexibility
2. Digital competence and AI integration
3. Sustainability and Social responsibility
4. Global awareness and cultural competence
5. People-centric approach
6. Continuous learning and development
7. Strategic thinking and vision
8. Data literacy and technological insights
9. Embracing change and innovation
10. Leadership in hybrid organizations
11. Economic considerations and global trends
12. Focus on soft skills and integrity





# Conclusion

In conclusion the demands on future leadership are multifaceted requiring a combination of strategic thinking adaptability, technological expertise and a strong commitment to sustainability and social responsibility. The successful leaders of tomorrow will need to navigate a complex landscape prioritize continuous learning and foster a culture of innovation and inclusivity within their organizations.

# Effects on business and projects





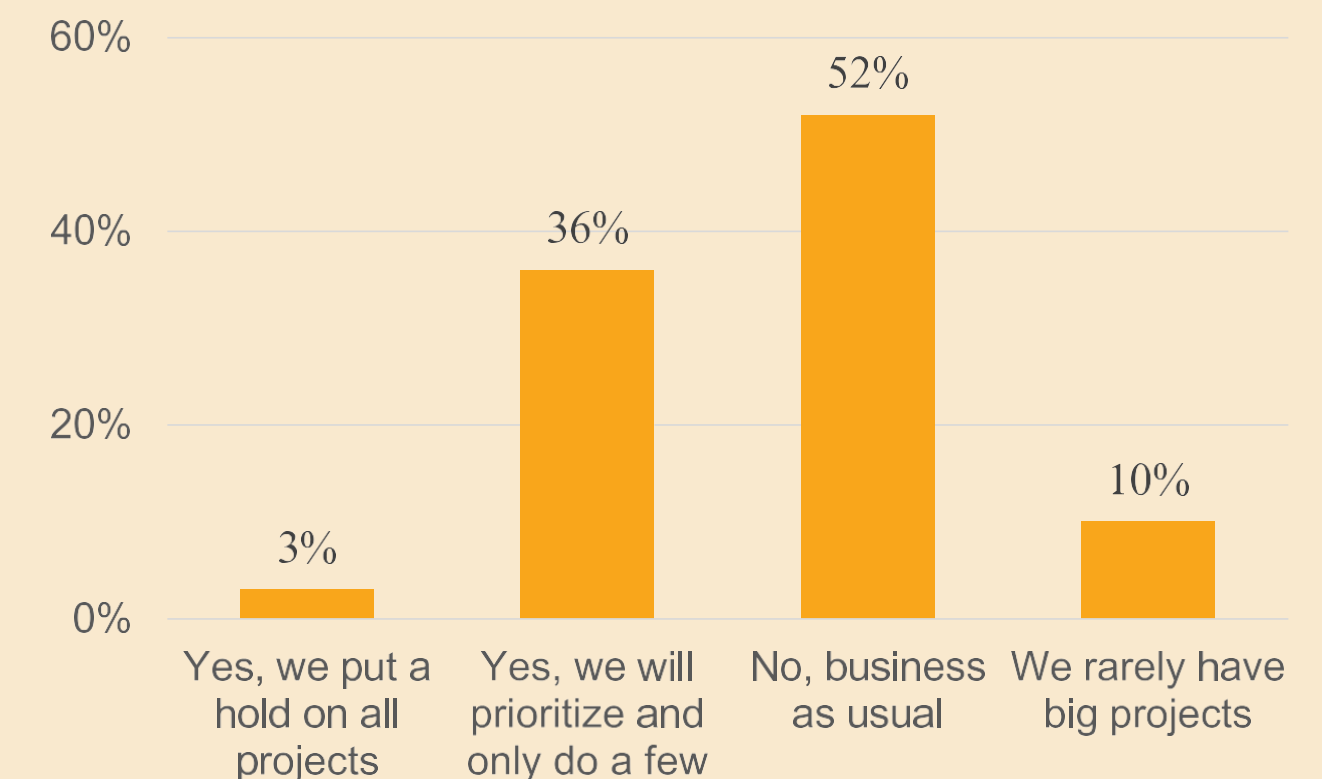
# Not holding back on projects 2024

The respondents, which represented companies and organizations, were spread throughout separate roles in their respective company but the majority, 56 percent, was either in management, 32 percent or CEO, 24 percent. The respondents came both from the private and the public sector.

Last year has been tough for companies and organizations with both geopolitical challenges and a turbulent economic situation in the world.

However, most of the respondents said that they are not holding back on projects for 2024. Over half of the respondents said that it was business as usual. Thirty-six percent said that they are holding back and will only do a few prioritized projects.

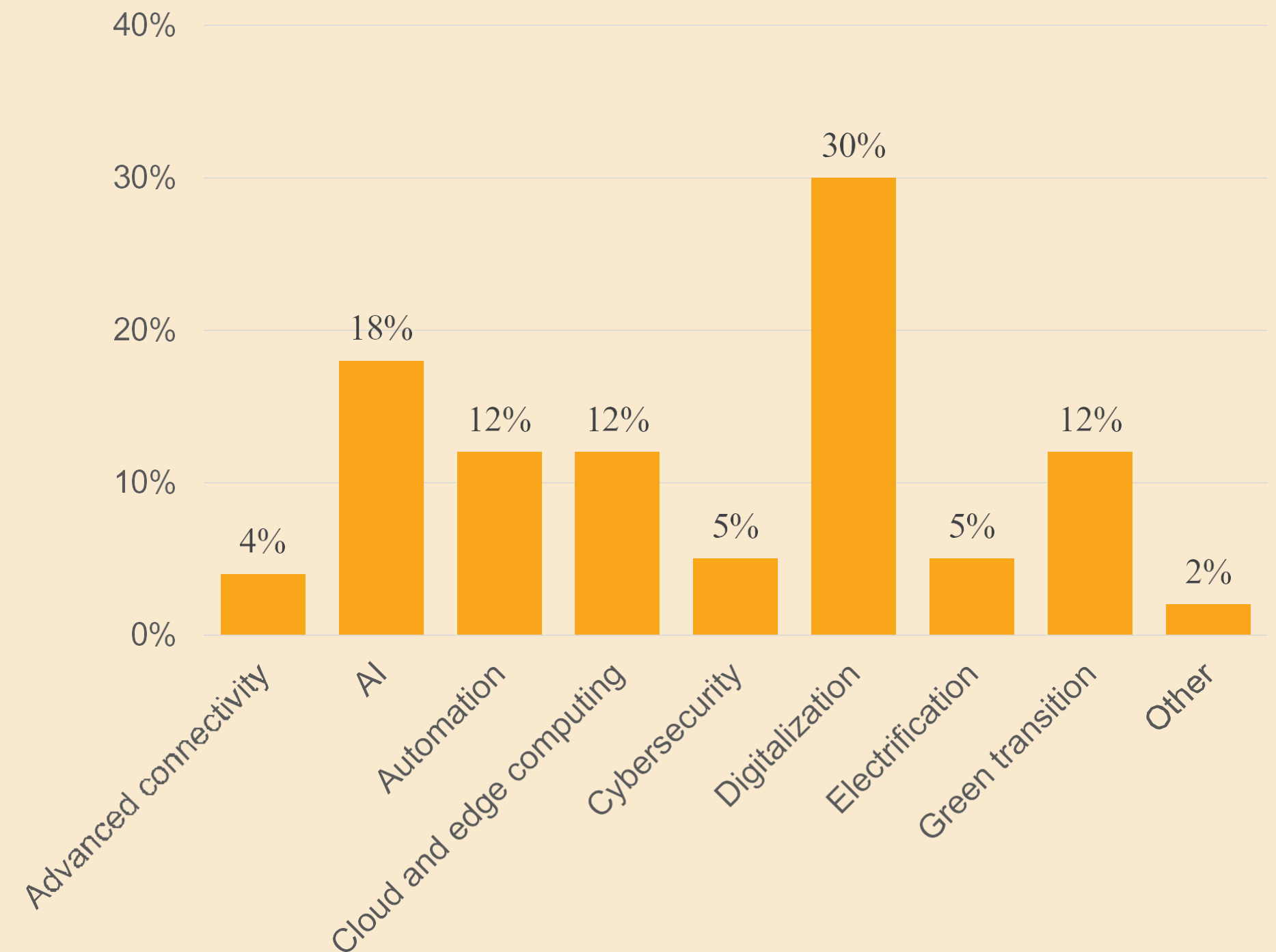
Are you holding back on projects during 2024 due to the world economic situation?



# Technological trends

When we asked what technological trends that are most relevant to their business or projects today the answer was clear. **30 percent** said digitalization followed by AI at **18 percent**.

What technological trend and area is most relevant to your business or projects today?

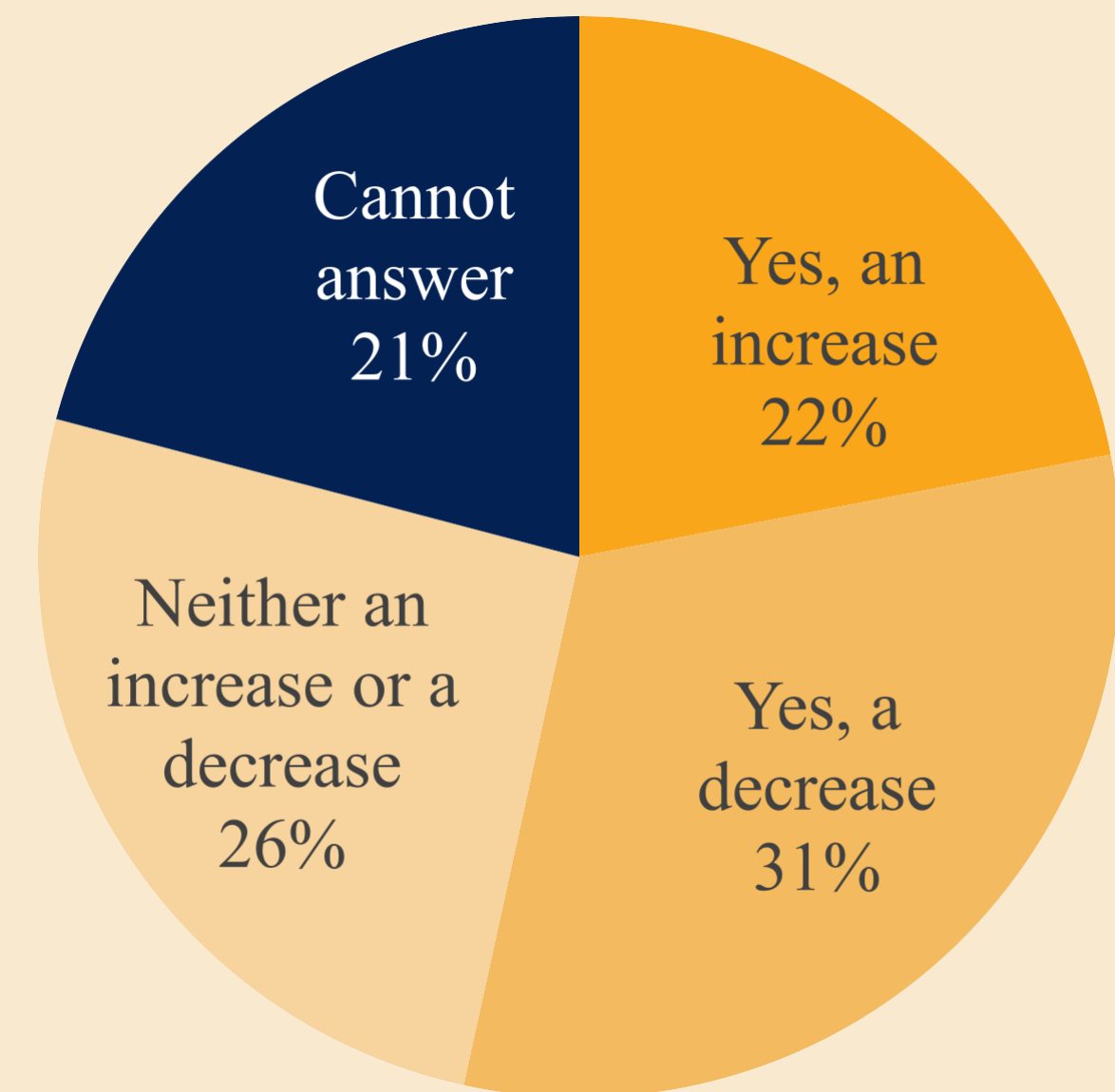




# A decrease in IT-consulting during 2023

Ework Group has many consultants working with IT-projects for our clients. In that context, we wanted to gain insights about IT-consulting and whether the respondents had noticed a decrease in demand on the market during the past year. Thirty-one percent of the respondents said that they had noticed a decrease.

Have you noticed an increase or decrease in demand for IT-consulting in the past year?



# Conclusion

A majority of the respondents, representing a company, had a high position. 56 percent was either in management or a CEO. They represented both the private and public sector.

Even if 2023 has been hard 52 percent said that they will not hold back on projects during 2024. Regarding the IT-consultant market 31 percent said they have noticed a decrease during 2023



# Skills shortage





# Skills Shortage

## Trends and Challenges in Today's Job Market

The issue of skills shortage has been a prominent concern for the past few years. In the inaugural release of the Future of Jobs Report by the World Economic Forum in 2016, surveyed companies predicted a disruption in the skills of 35% of workers over the following five years. Fast forward to 2023, and that projection has increased to 44%.

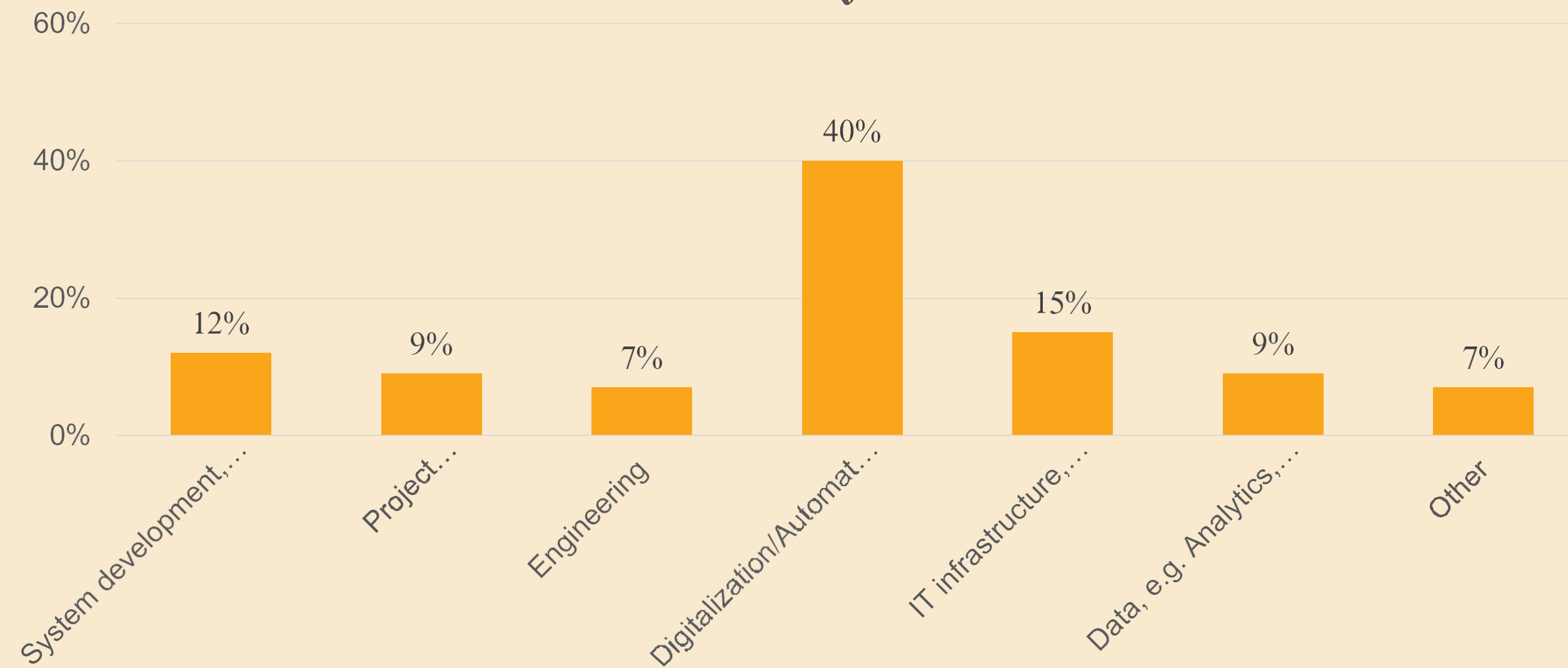
As highlighted earlier in our report, we invited participants to rank the current challenges affecting the market. Unsurprisingly, the standout challenge was the skills shortage, receiving a notable score of 3.54 on a 1-5 scale.

According to our survey, the most coveted skills in demand are those related to digitalization.



# Digitalization/ automation is the skill most in need during the coming years

What do you think will be the most sought after skill in the next few years?





# Work Worries

**Divergent Outlooks Among Consultants and Business Leaders.** While 60 percent of consultants and freelancers expressed confidence in securing work over the next few years, a contrasting sentiment emerged among company representatives and consultancy firm managers. Forty-five percent of them expressed concerns about their businesses' future requirements for consultants.



# A high percentage of the companies offer reskilling

One way to close the skills gaps is upskilling and reskilling of the workforce. We asked the representatives from companies if they offered any form of reskilling/upskilling and sixty-seven percent said that they did.

But reskilling is also the responsibility of the consultant or the employee. We asked all of the respondents how they stay updated. This was a multi-choice question. But there were nevertheless some alternatives that stood out. Engagement in networks, sixty-two percent, and courses and certifications, sixty percent.



# Conclusion

Skills shortage has been a hot topic for many years. In our survey skills shortage was affecting the market right now. The most sought after skills being within digitalization.

45 percent of the respondents, that representated companies, said that they were worried that they would have a hard time finding consultants in the coming years.

Regarding upskilling and reskilling, a significant sixty-seven percent mentioned providing some form of upskilling as a means to address the skills gap.



# Cybersecurity on the agenda

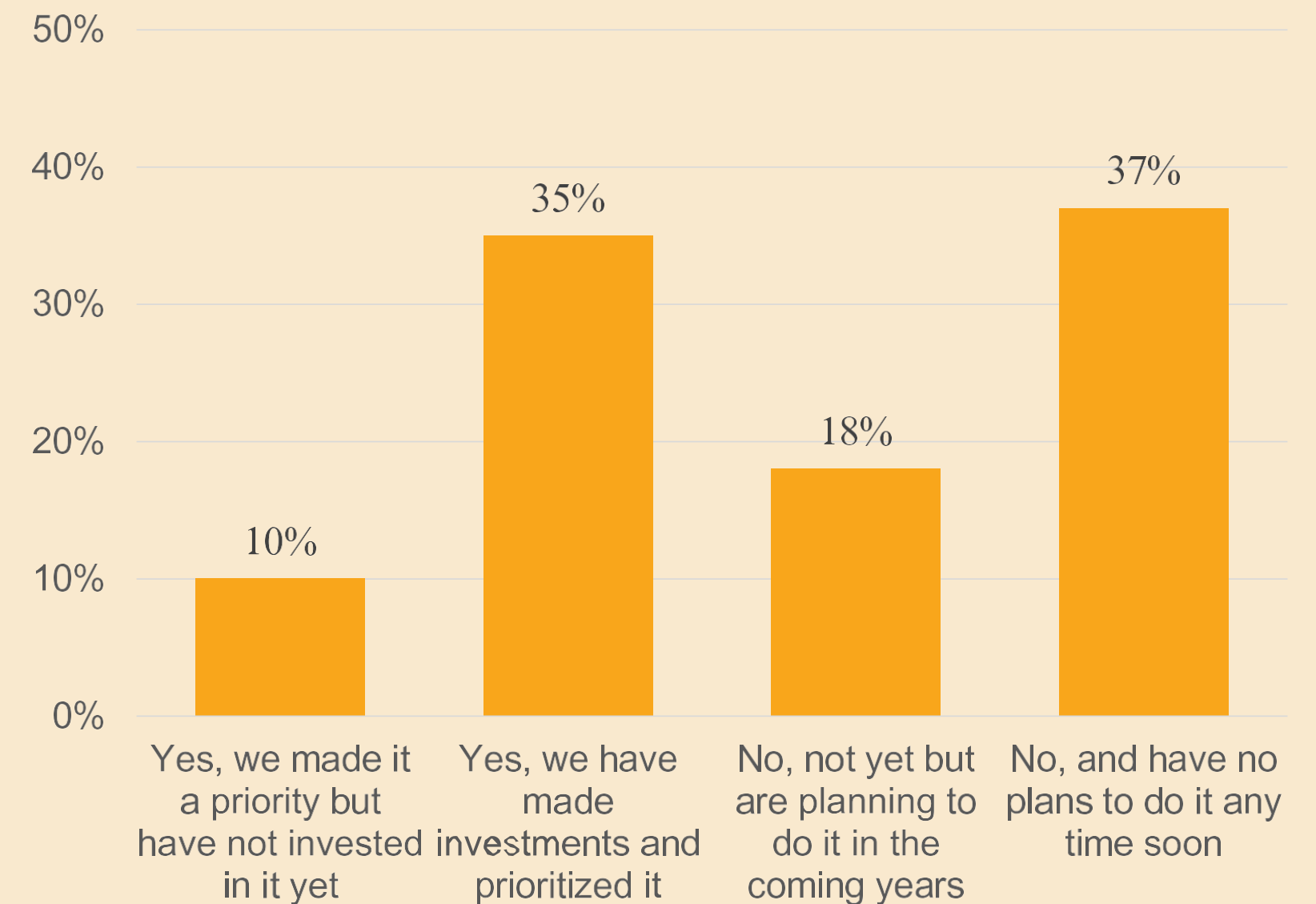




# Awareness of cybersecurity

As technology continues to advance, so does the need for robust cybersecurity measures. Our survey unveiled a heightened awareness and concern regarding cybersecurity threats. The majority of respondents expressed an increased emphasis on cybersecurity practices, reflecting a growing recognition of the importance of safeguarding sensitive data and systems.

Have you invested in cybersecurity and made it a priority for the coming years?





# Victim of cybercrime

The survey revealed that 11 percent had been a victim of cybercrime. The majority of them, 47 percent, had been a victim of some form of email and internet fraud.





# Conclusion

The last few years cybersecurity has been a hot topic. Our survey unveiled a heightened awareness and concern regarding cybersecurity threats. 35 percent of the respondents had made cybersecurity a priority and invested in it. And a lot more have it on the agenda for the future.

The survey also revealed that 11 percent of all respondents had been a victim of some form of cybercrime.



# Laws and Legislations





# Laws and Legislations impact:

During the year, changes were introduced in the legislative field. Reporting requirements for companies increased, partly as a result of the altered security situation. This development contributed to an increased need for advice on how clients should navigate to comply with rules and legislation, and to what extent they are affected by new legislation and regulations. Through information gathering, exchange of experiences, and analysis, Ework Group had good opportunities to support clients in these matters.

Because of these changes the regulatory environment was a focal point in the survey. Navigating compliance requirements and staying ahead of changing regulations is of significant concerns, both for companies and consultants and freelancers.





# Laws changed in both Sweden and Norway

During the last few years there have been changes in the laws in both Sweden and Norway and on EU level there is ongoing work with a new platform directive for gig-workers.

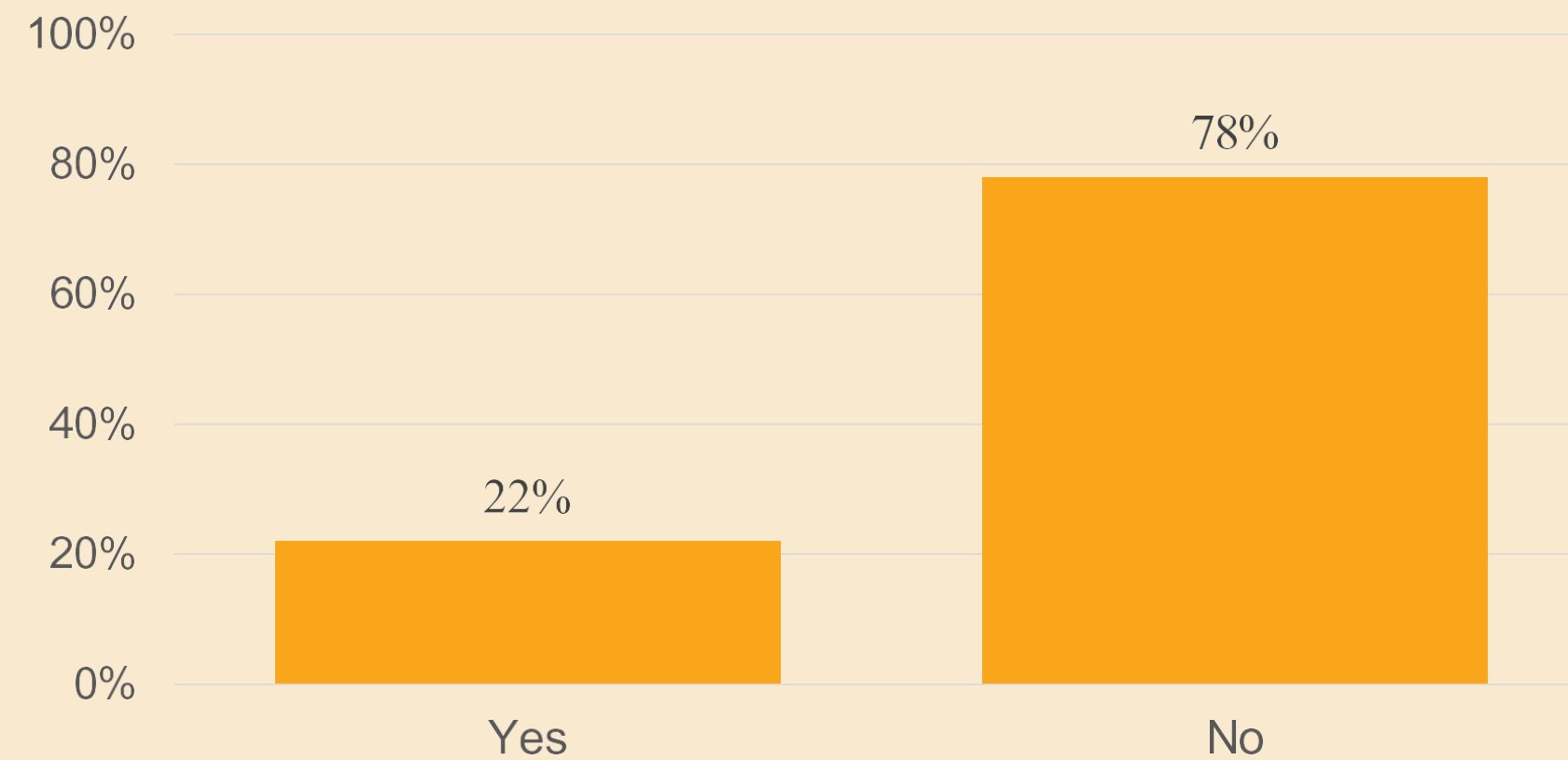
Even though these are laws and legislations that can have a big impact on both consultants and freelancers and the companies that have contingent workforce, the knowledge about the new laws and their impact were surprisingly low in our survey. Notable is that the knowledge and impact was higher in Norway than in other countries. More than half had been impacted by the new laws.

The respondents that represented companies gave these answers:



# All respondents:

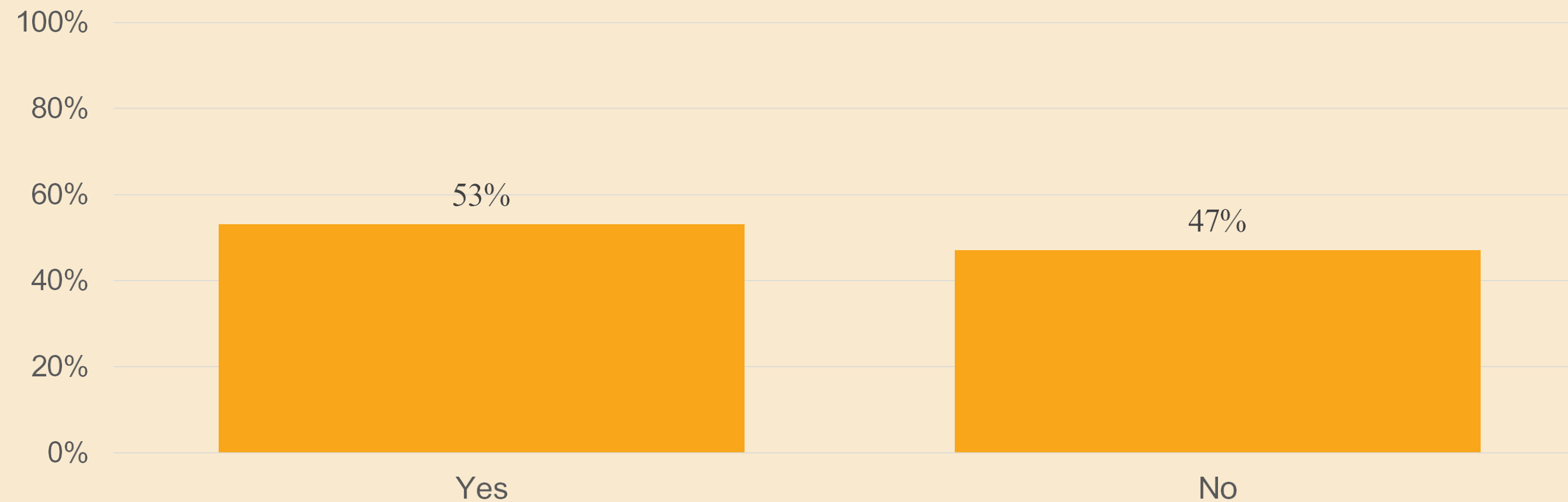
**Have you been affected by new or adjusted laws that are in place in for example Sweden and Norway?**





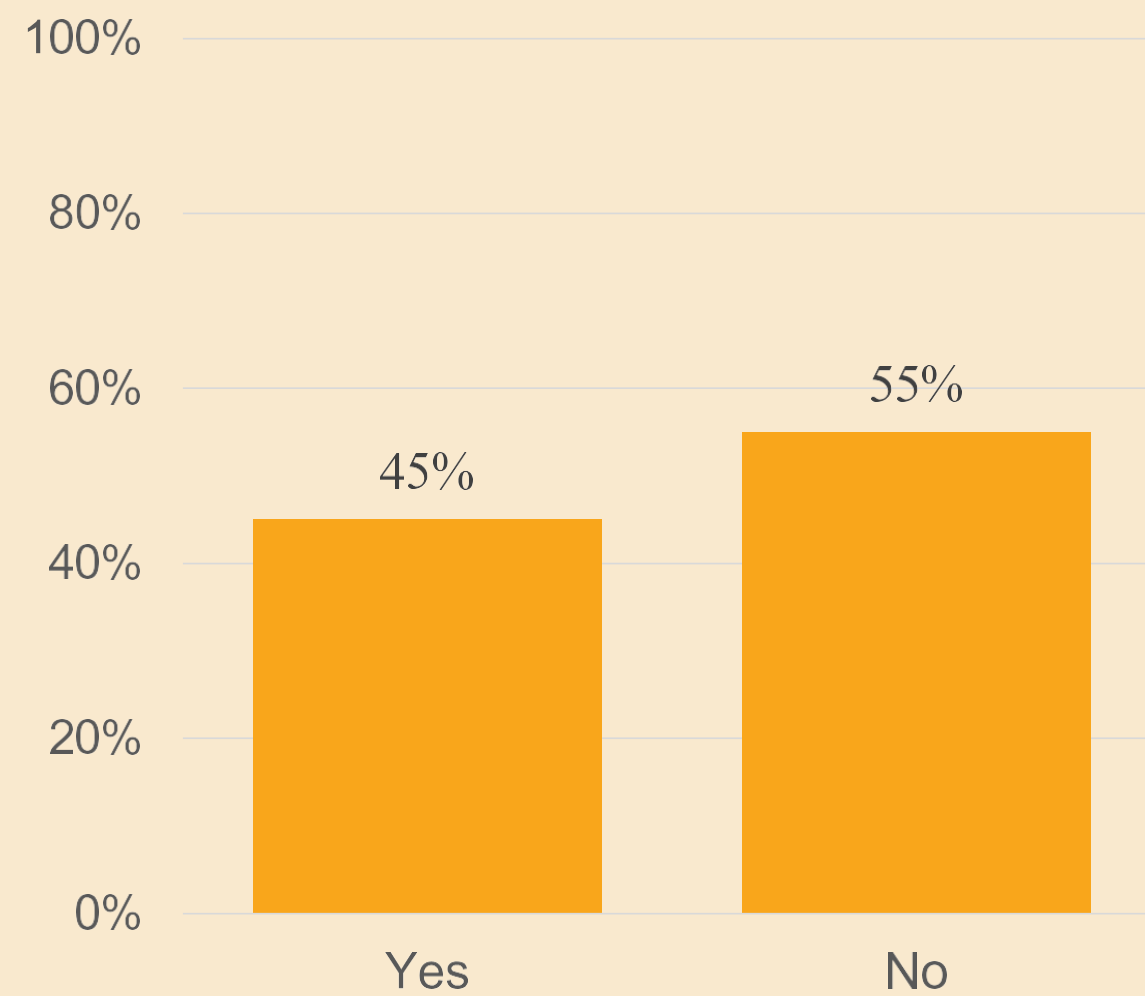
# Companies and organizations

Are you aware of new laws and legislation that affects your **company**?

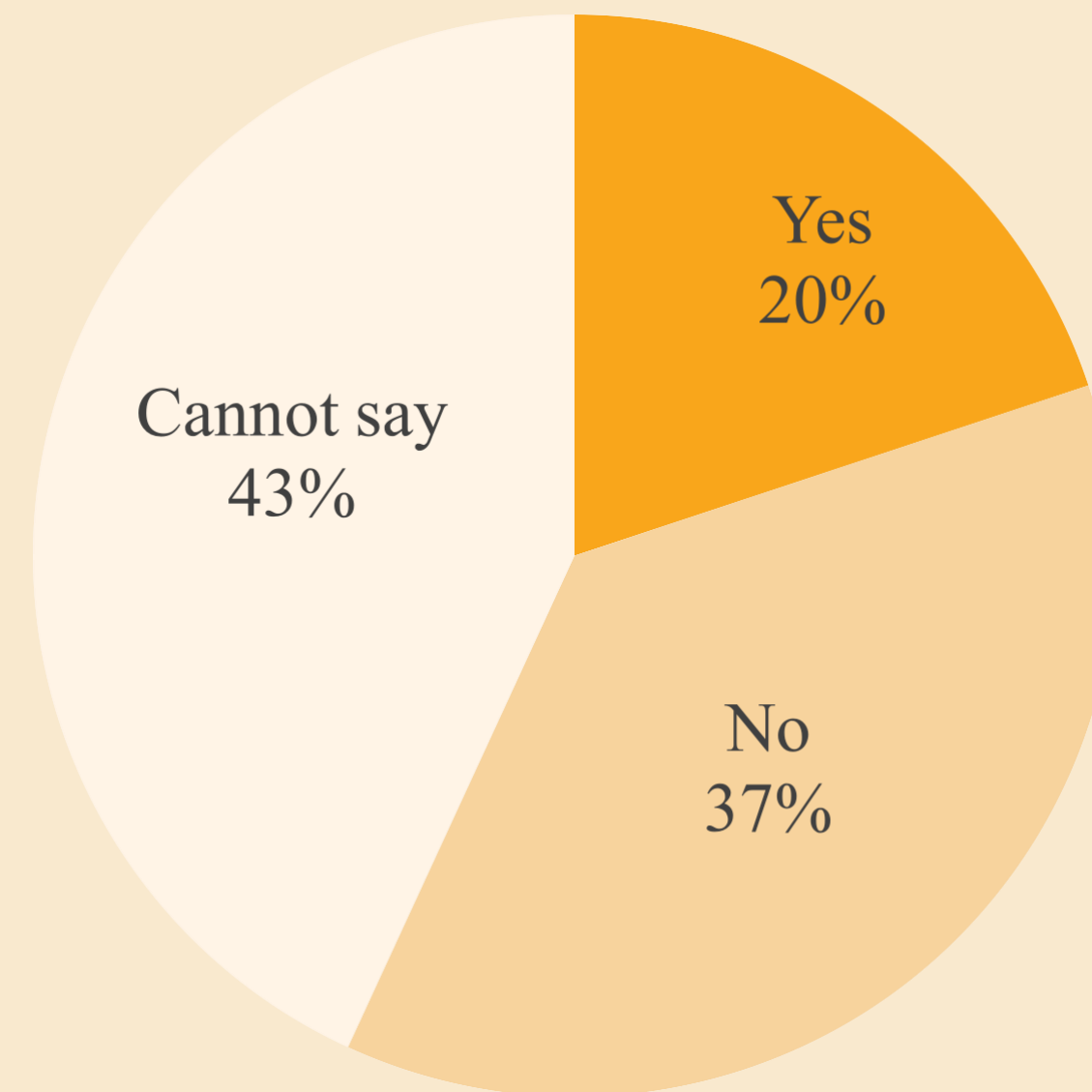


# Consultants and freelancers

Are you aware of new laws and legislation that affects your work as a **consultant**?



Do you feel empowered by the new laws and legislations?

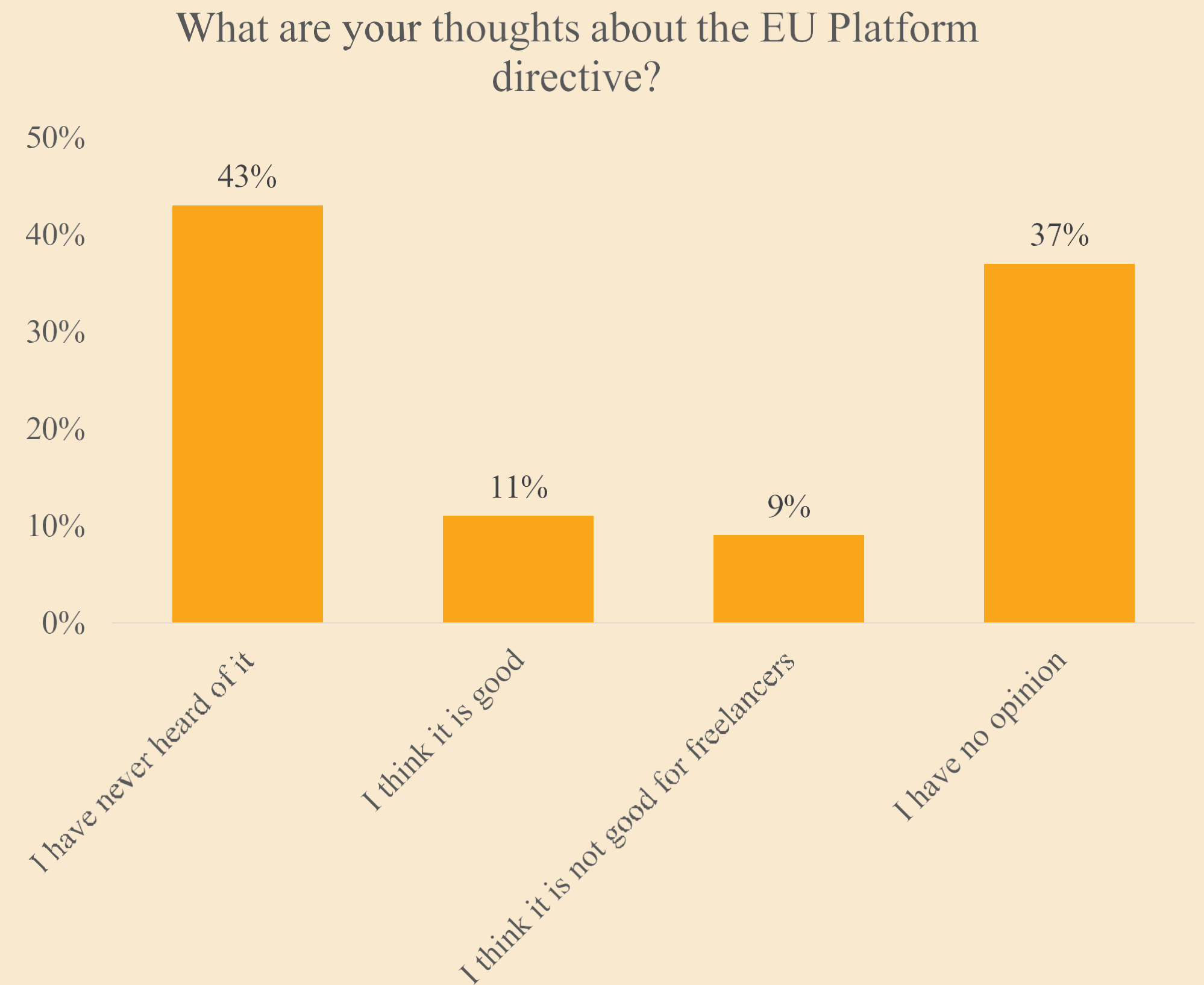




# Platform directive:

We also asked the consultant and freelancers about their thoughts about the new platform directive from EU.

43 percent has never heard of it.



# Conclusion

During the year, changes were introduced in the legislative field however the awareness in the field was relatively low in our survey both when it came to laws and legislations that affected companies and consultants.

One country that stood out were Norway where the awareness and impact has been higher than in the other countries.



# Highlights



**Highly educated  
and experienced  
respondents**  
Over 70 percent had  
a bachelor degree  
or higher



**Hybrid work is here to  
stay 77 percent prefers  
to work hybrid  
splitting time  
between office and  
remote**



**The market for  
contingent  
workforce is growing  
and the consultants  
are not worried about  
finding work**



**Digitalization is the  
megatrend that the  
respondents think will  
affect the market most  
in 2024**



**Skills shortage,  
cutbacks and  
cybersecurity is  
affecting the market  
right now.**



**The new way of  
business will put new  
demands on  
leadership such as  
flexibility and  
adaptability**



**52 percent said they  
won't hold back on  
projects during 2024**

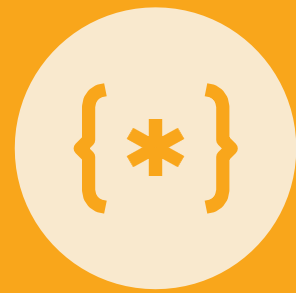


**The most sought after  
skills, according to our  
survey, was skills  
within digitalization**





**35 percent had  
prioritized  
and made investments  
in cybersecurity**



**11 percent had been  
avictim of cybercrime**



**The knowledge around  
new laws and  
legislations  
in the nordic countries  
and EU were low**



**43 percent of  
consultants  
and freelancers have  
never heard about the  
EU platform directive**



# Contact information





# Ework Group

Founded in 2000, listed on Nasdaq Stockholm, with around 13,000 independent professionals on assignment - we are the total talent solutions provider who partners with clients, in both the private and public sector, and professionals to create sustainable talent supply chains. Our efforts increase the pace of green transition, accelerate digitization, boost competitiveness and increase growth using a sustainable holistic view of talent management.

Visit our webpage at:

<https://www.eworkgroup.com/>

# Contact us:

Get in touch with us and let us know what we can do for you!

**Clients, partners and professionals  
contact us at:**

**[support@eworkgroup.com](mailto:support@eworkgroup.com)**

**Press and media:**

Reach out to our CMCO Caroline Lönnquist

**[Caroline.lonnquist@eworkgroup.com](mailto:Caroline.lonnquist@eworkgroup.com)**





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