

Voice of Payroll



2024 Ireland Report



Produced by Bright, in partnership with IPASS

Discover insights from our survey of over 1,000 payroll professionals in Ireland – and the key takeaways for leadership.

Contents

A word from Bright's CEO, Stephen Murdoch	3
Key findings	4
Methodology	5
Sections	6-34
1 Who makes up the payroll industry?	6
2 Career paths and salary potential	9
3 What drives job satisfaction?	11
4 The benefits of continuous learning	14
5 The search for skilled talent	18
6 Office vs. home working – trends and preferences	21
7 How time is spent	25
8 Looking to the future	28
Conclusion	35

A word from Stephen Murdoch

As CEO of Bright, it's an exciting moment for me to introduce our first ever 'Voice of Payroll' report, created in partnership with IPASS.

Over the past year, I've had the pleasure of speaking with many of our customers, partners, and industry peers which has given me a deep appreciation for the unique challenges and opportunities within the Irish payroll landscape.

Like many sectors, the Irish payroll industry is undergoing significant transformations, especially when it comes to technology. Cloud-based solutions, automation, and AI are revolutionising payroll processes. These advancements aren't just about making processing payroll faster and more compliant—they're about creating a seamless, stress-free experience for both employers and employees. Alongside these innovations, the Irish payroll sector faces ongoing changes that add complexity to the work. Earlier this year, we saw the introduction of Enhanced Reporting Requirements,

and soon auto-enrolment will arrive. It's no surprise that 60% of participants reported a significant increase in their workload over the past 12 months.

This signals a critical moment for leaders. Managing workloads, fostering employee engagement, and prioritising workplace wellbeing are essential to keeping valuable talent and attracting new people to the industry. This report delves into what drives employee satisfaction, the skills gap, and what employers need to do to help their teams succeed.

Thank you to everyone who participated in this report. Your contributions have enabled us to share these insights with the wider payroll community.

I hope you find this report insightful as we move forward into 2025.

Stephen
CEO of Bright



Key findings

1 Payroll is a great industry to work in

Overall, job satisfaction was very positive. More than **16%** of payroll professionals reported strong satisfaction in their role, with a further **57%** saying they were satisfied.

2 Job satisfaction is more than a number

Feeling valued and supported are among the most important factors for employees' satisfaction in their roles, while factors like salary or experience are less important.

3 You're losing time handling queries

Dealing with payroll queries is a challenging aspect to manage and was consistently reported as one of the top three most time-consuming parts of the role. Improving communications is a must.

4 Finding skilled payroll professionals is difficult

Nearly **70%** of those involved in hiring found it difficult to find skilled payroll processors. At the same time, there was a strong demand for more training, suggesting that boosting training opportunities could help bridge the skills gap in the industry.

5 Practical actions needed for data security

While awareness of payroll data protection and cybersecurity risks was high, payroll professionals still need clear, actionable guidance on managing data loss and preventing cyber-attacks.

6 Artificial Intelligence is a personal choice

While AI faces high distrust in general, businesses with tech-savvy employees may be the first to benefit from AI in payroll. Its use seems to be a personal choice, and those who do use it find it very helpful.

Methodology

This report is based on a nationwide survey conducted in the Republic of Ireland from the 17th – 31st of July, 2024.

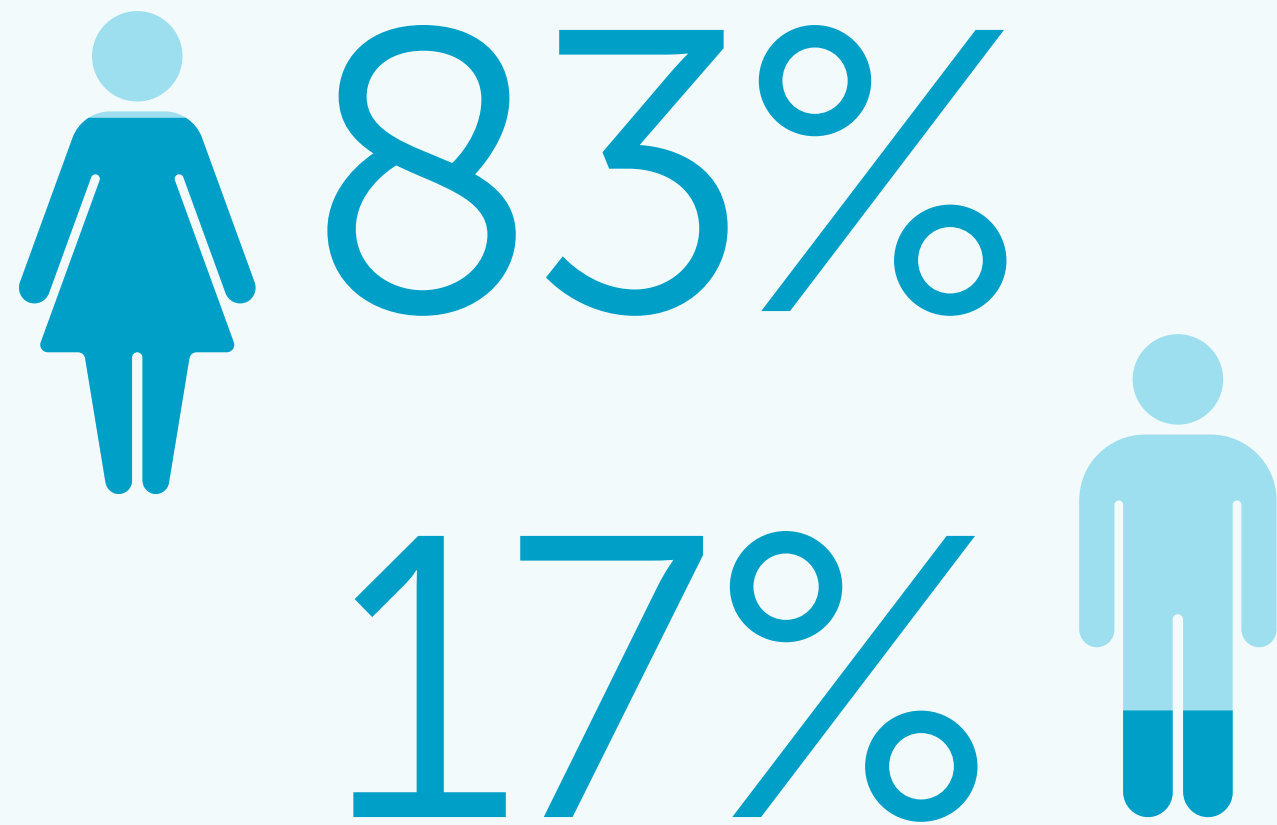
A total of **1,099 payroll processors** participated in the survey. The respondents included individuals working in practices or payroll bureaus, those processing payroll in-house for businesses as well as contractors and self-employed professionals, providing a comprehensive overview of the payroll industry. The survey was conducted independently by Ragdoll Research & Planning.

Who makes up the payroll industry?

Bright teamed up with IPASS to survey 1,099 payroll professionals across Ireland.

The results give a fascinating look at the industry's makeup and at future challenges. The survey revealed that the payroll field is predominately shaped by women over the age of 35. These professionals often work by themselves or with just one other colleague, with close to **50%** solely responsible for payroll.

Gender breakdown



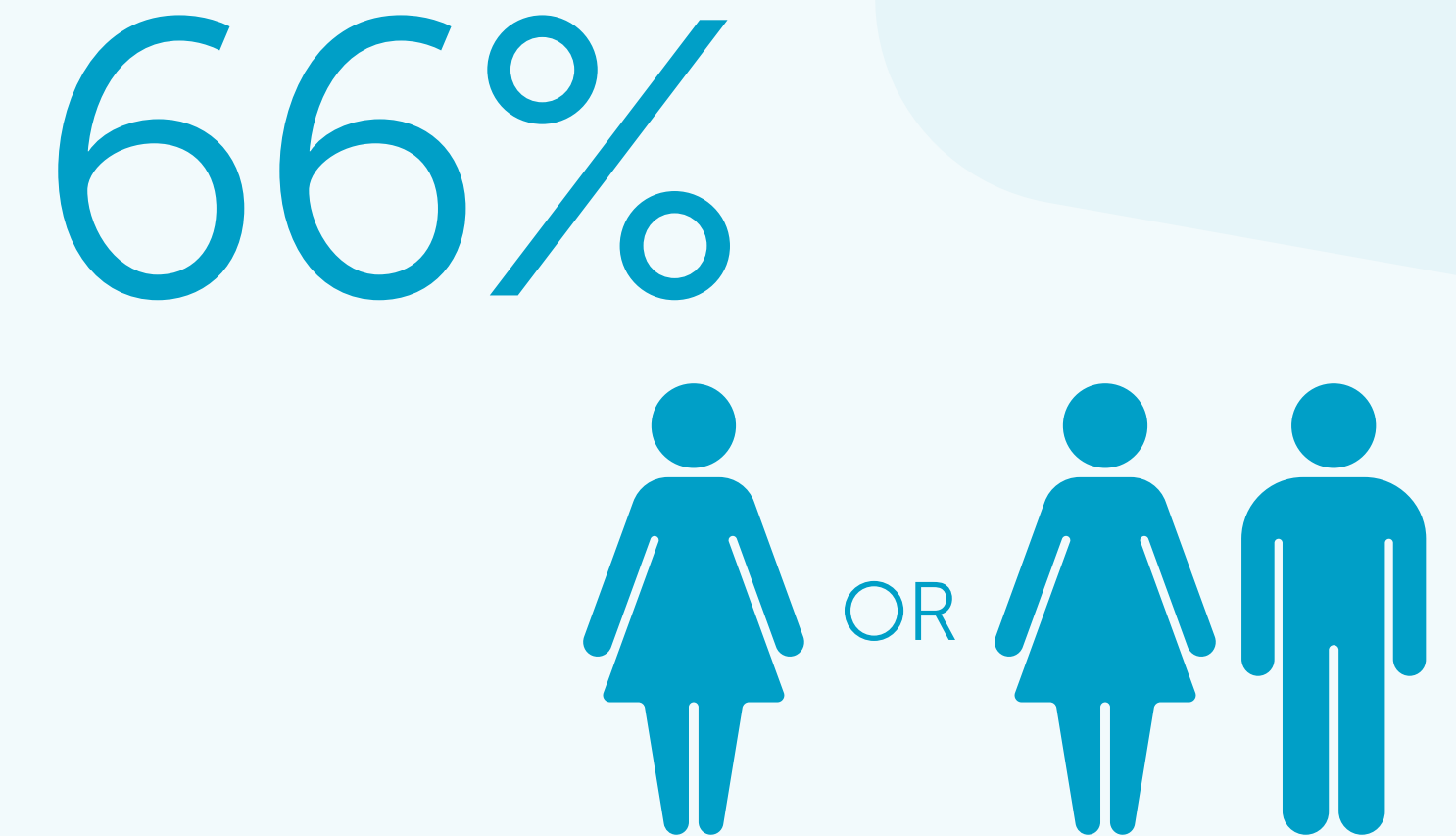
The gender breakdown of payroll workers in Ireland is notable, with women representing **83%** of the workforce and men, **17%**.

Average age



The payroll industry in Ireland is predominantly made up of a more mature demographic, with the highest cohort aged between **45-54 years**. As many skilled workers approach retirement age, it will be crucial to train and develop new employees to ensure continuity and maintain expertise in this sector.

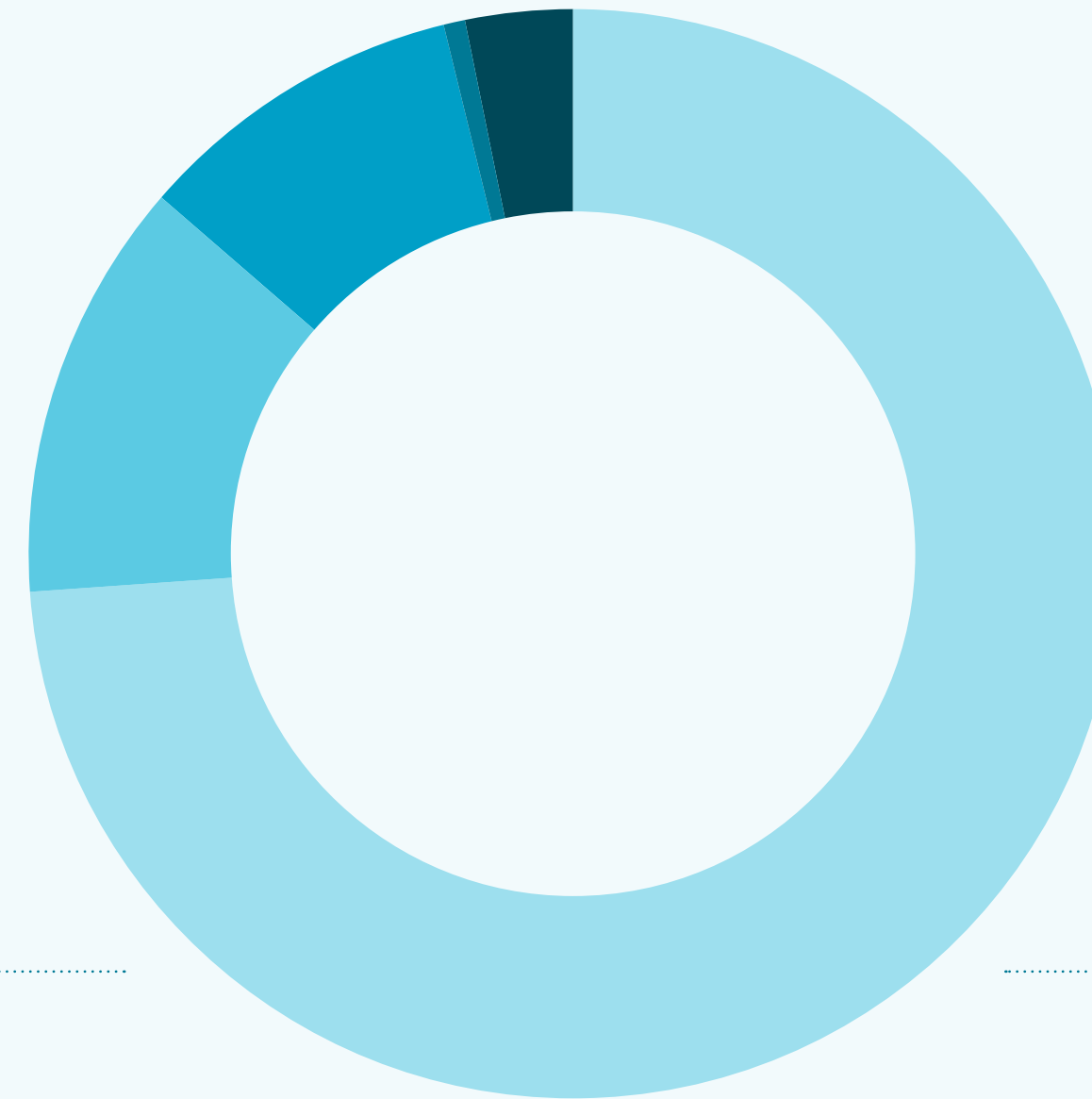
Payroll team size



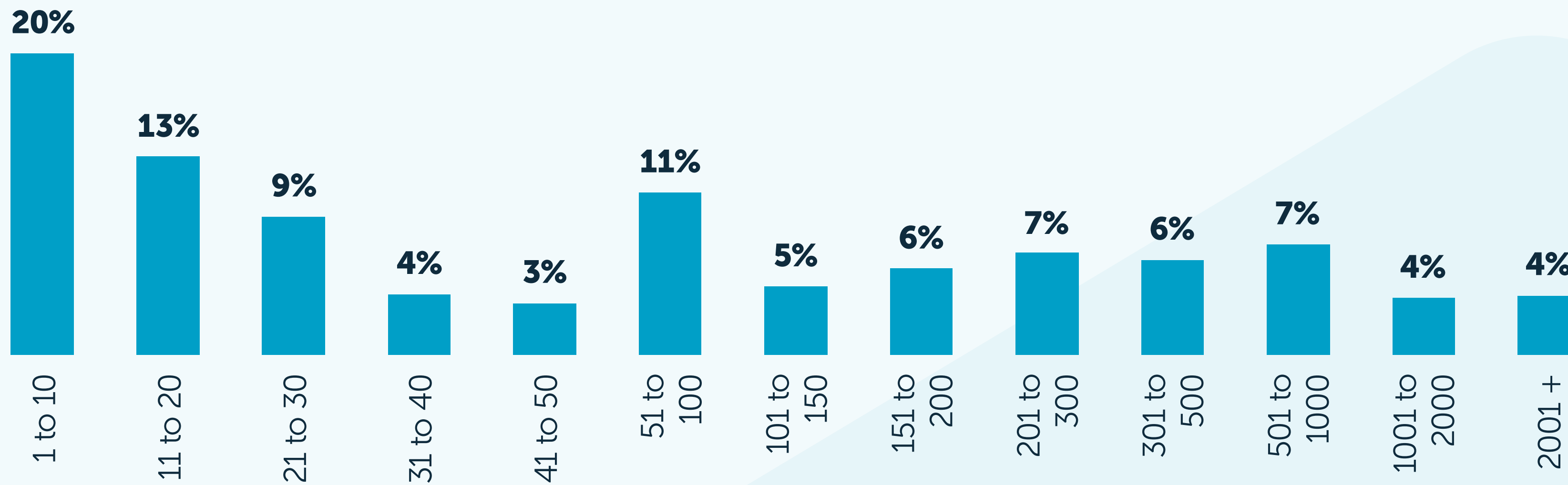
Most payroll teams are quite small, with **66%** consisting of either one or two people. This highlights the need for efficiency and adaptability in handling payroll tasks.

Work status

- 74%** - I am employed by a company
- 12%** - I work for a payroll bureau or accountancy practice
- 10%** - I am self-employed
- 1%** - I work as a contractor
- 3%** - Other



Individuals paid in a typical month



Key takeaways

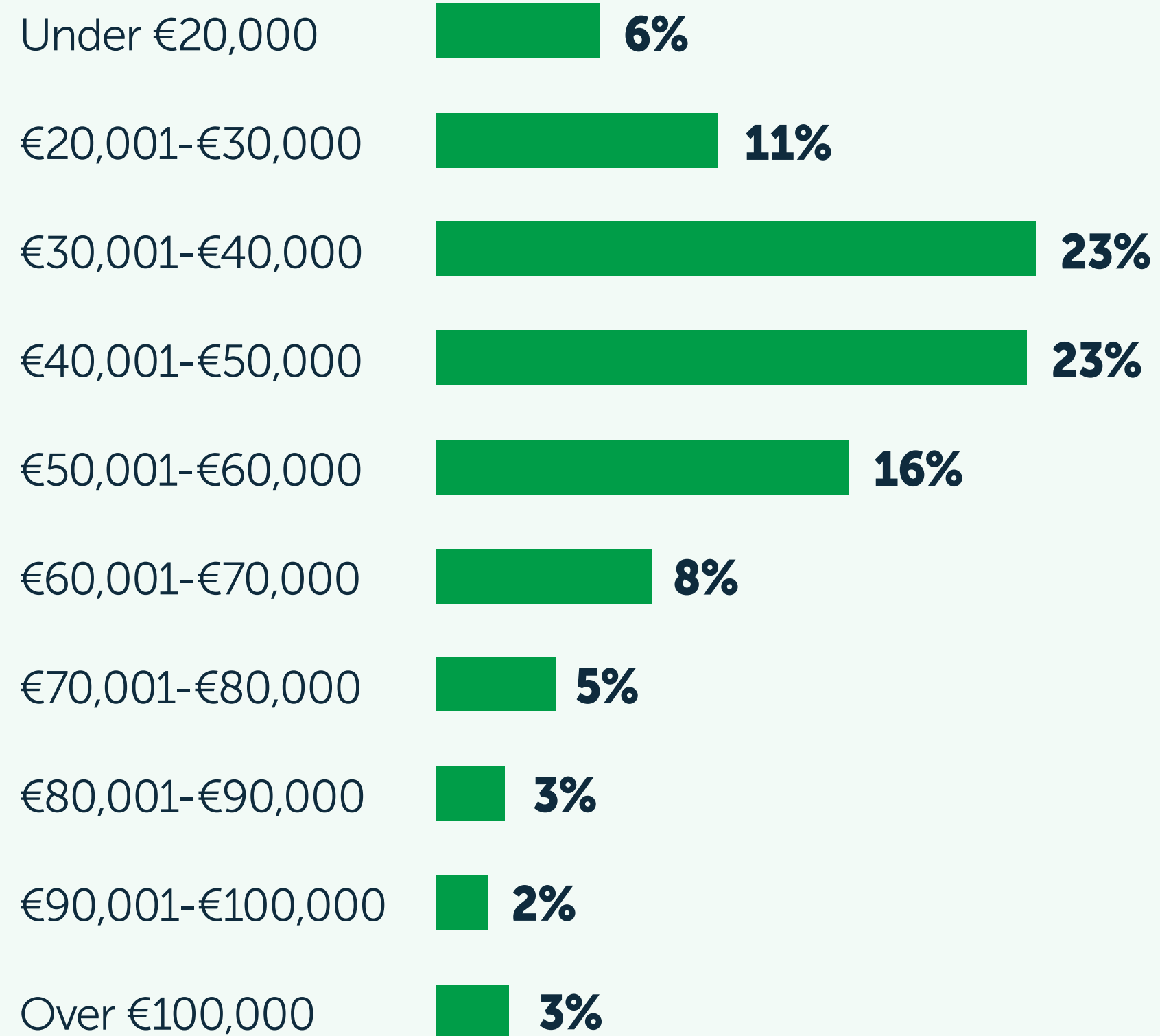
With 1 in 4 payroll professionals set to retire in the next decade, the industry faces a talent gap. Attracting skilled talent will be crucial to maintaining smooth operations and continued growth. There is also an opportunity to enhance diversity, sparking fresh ideas and innovations. Tackling these challenges will be vital to the future success and development of the payroll industry.

Career paths and salary potential

Payroll processing is an essential function for every business, but is it a rewarding career path?

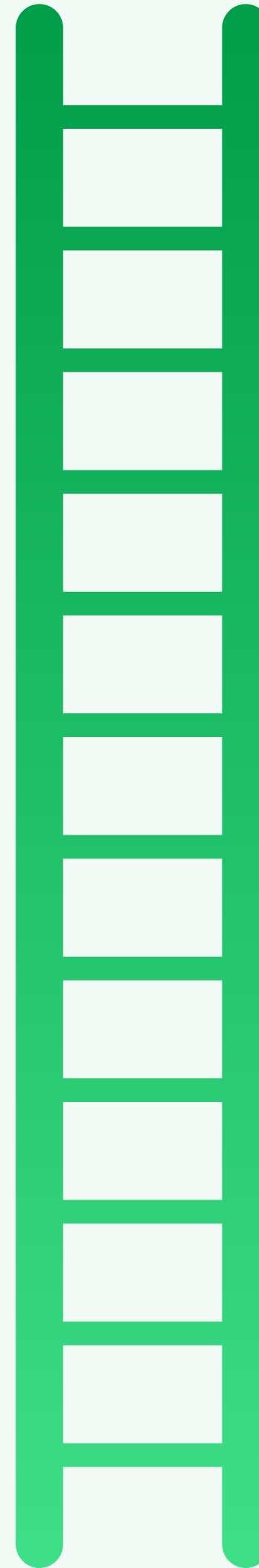
The majority of those with two years or less of experience in the industry earn between **€30,000 - €40,000** a year, and there's lots of potential for growth with the right qualifications and continuous development. As you move up the career ladder, it's evident that advancing in your role, earning relevant certifications, transitioning from a business to a bureau or choosing the self-employed route, can increase your earnings.

Average salary



The average annual salary for those working in the payroll industry is **€42,000**. For those with a payroll qualification, the average salary goes up to **€43,000**. For those starting off in the industry, running payroll in-house for a company, or in a practice or payroll bureau, the average salary is **€30,500**.

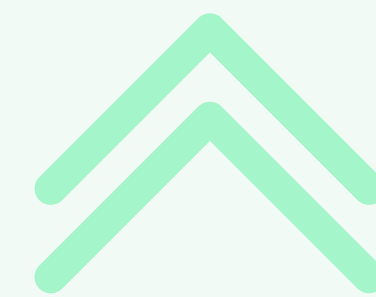
Moving up the pay ladder



28% of those with 12+ years' experience in payroll earn a salary of **€60,000** or more.



Self-employed individuals often face more income variability than others in the industry. **14%** earn less than **€20,000** a year, compared to **6%** of those employed by a business. Their average salary is **€47,000**. **31%** of self-employed professionals' annual incomes exceed **€60,000**, versus **20%** of company workers.



The average salary increases with industry experience. **59%** of those with 5-8 years of experience earn above **€40,000**, and **14%** of those with the same experience earn above **€60,000**.

Key takeaways

While entry-level salaries in payroll might be modest, there's significant growth potential with the right qualifications and career development. By supporting employees in gaining certifications and advancing their careers, employers can boost motivation, enhance skills, and attract ambitious talent, ultimately strengthening their team.

What drives job satisfaction?

The industry is seeing high overall job satisfaction, with **73%** of payroll professionals feeling satisfied in their role, and **63%** feeling valued.

However, while these results are positive, of those reporting middle to low satisfaction, it's important to take stock of the reasons why. The main issues seem to be a lack of support and poor work-life balance.

Job satisfaction

"I feel satisfied in my job and role"



Overall job satisfaction in payroll in 2024 is high. **73%** are satisfied in their role and job. The number of respondents who are very satisfied was **16%**.

Feeling valued at work

"I feel valued in my role"



Payroll professionals often navigate a unique intersection between HR and finance, which can sometimes lead to feelings of being over-looked. But your hard work is not going unnoticed. **46%** reported feeling valued at work, and **17%** expressed that they felt very valued. Those working in smaller businesses felt more valued in their roles compared to those in a bigger business.

Feelings of dissatisfaction

"I feel supported in my role (those who are unsatisfied)"



"I am happy with my work-life balance (those who are unsatisfied)"

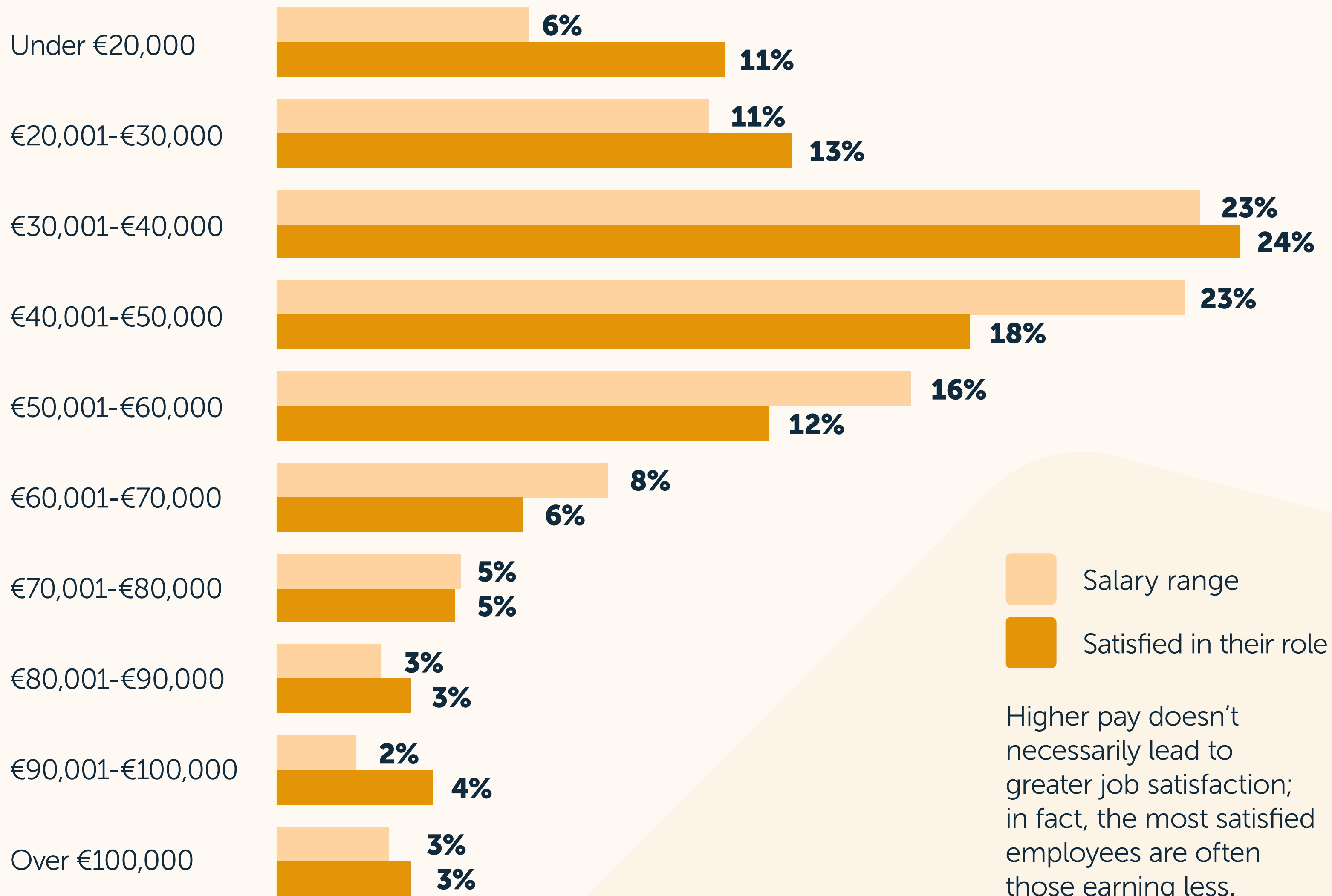


When it comes to feeling supported at work, **61%** of those who reported being highly satisfied in their roles also felt very well supported. In general, **64%** of all respondents felt well-supported in their workplace. However, among those who were unsatisfied with their roles, only **20%** felt supported. We can also see that, unlike the majority who enjoy a good work-life balance, those dissatisfied with their roles struggle to maintain this balance.

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- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Relationship between job satisfaction and salary



Key takeaways

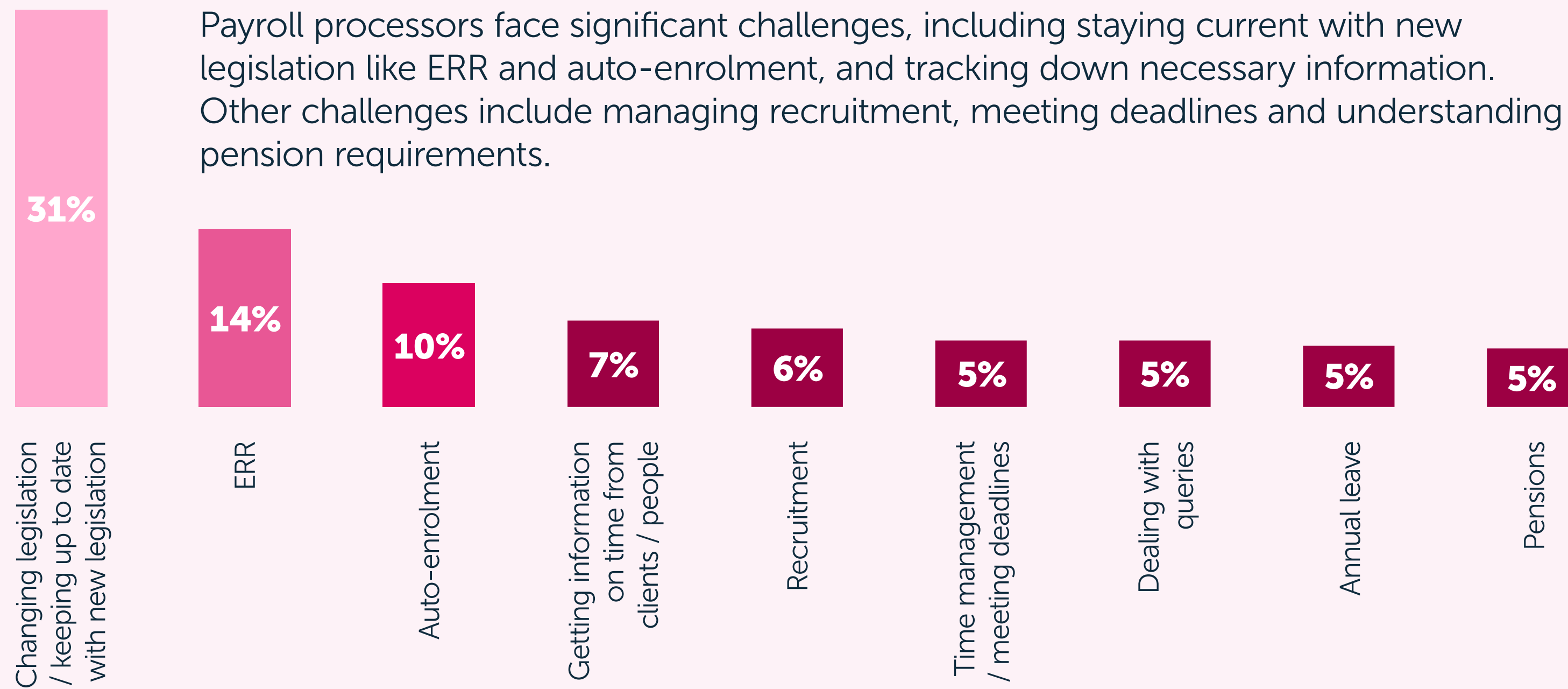
The report brings positive news for the industry, highlighting high job satisfaction and a strong sense of feeling valued among employees. Since satisfied employees are typically more dedicated and productive, it's important for employers to stay proactive in addressing concerns if they do arise. For those feeling less satisfied, employers should focus on providing the necessary support to improve work-life balance and help ensure tasks are completed within regular working hours.

The benefits of continuous learning

In the ever-changing world of payroll, the importance of continuous learning and development has never been more critical.

This became particularly evident with the rollout of Revenue's Enhanced Reporting Requirements (ERR) in January 2024. As businesses strived to keep pace with the new rules and requirements, many expressed concerns about feeling unsupported in adapting to ERR. Looking ahead, the introduction of auto-enrolment in 2025 is expected to pose similar challenges.

Main challenges and concerns

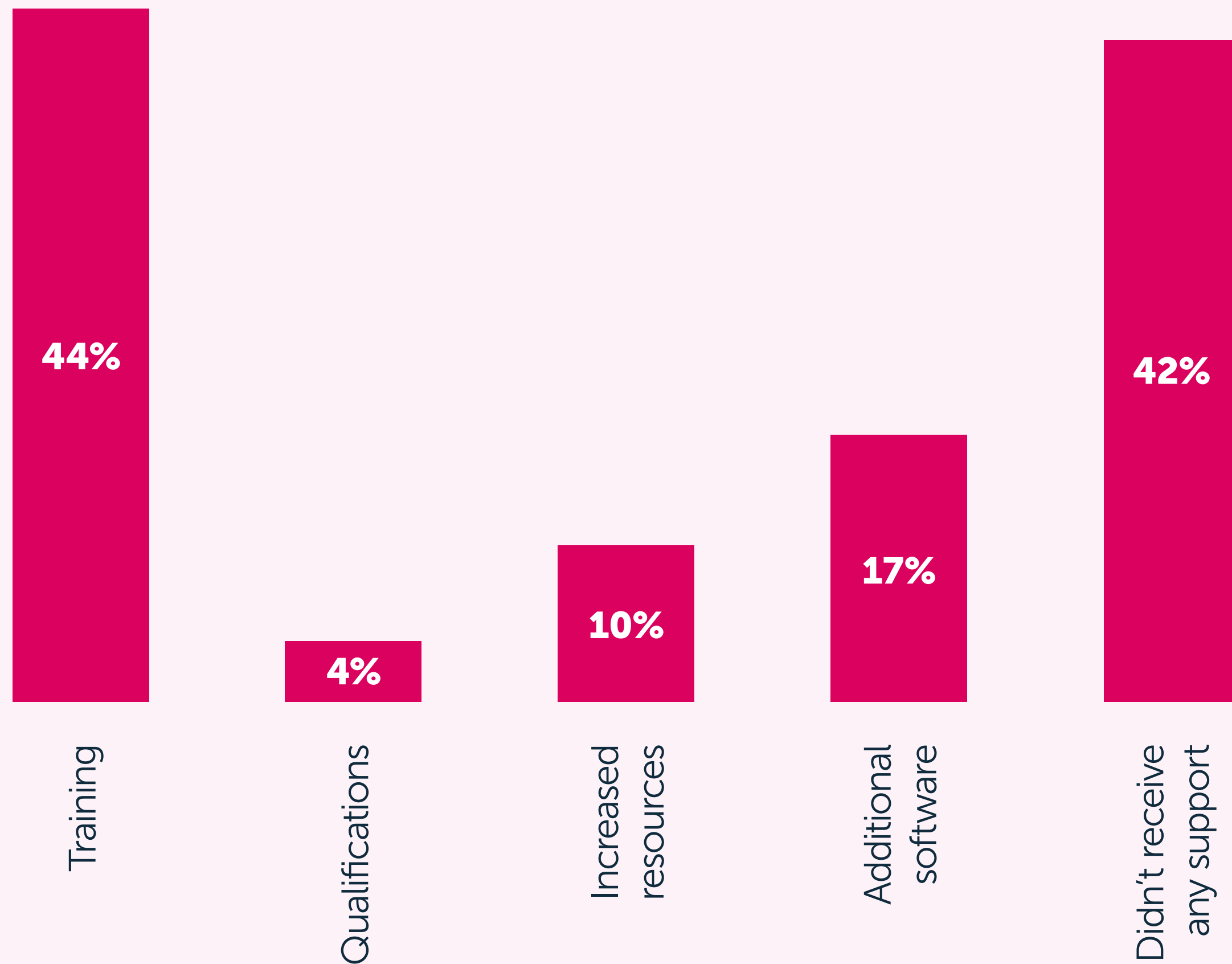


“I think we need a better understanding around pensions and the implications for staff in the run up to auto-enrolment so that any queries can be addressed with little to no delay and with accurate information.”

Survey participant

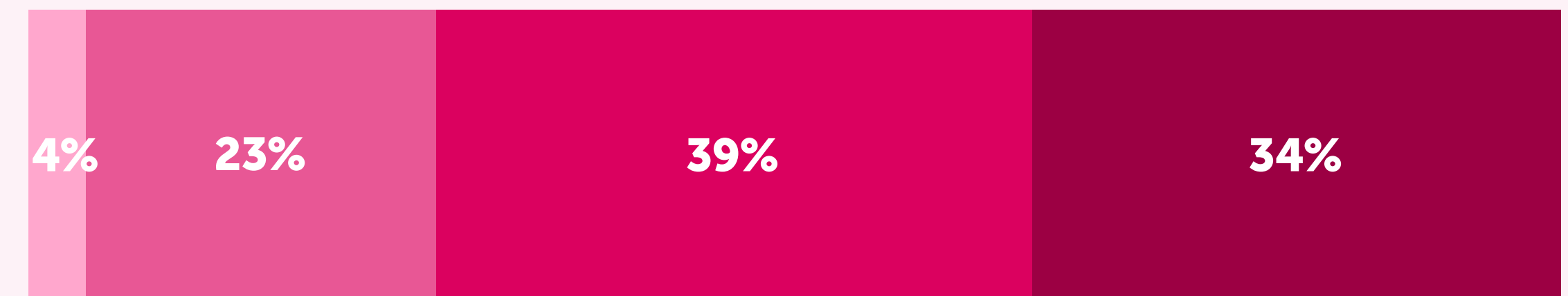
Support received for Enhanced Reporting Requirements

42% of businesses did not provide any extra support to help employees get to grips with ERR. Those who received support when it came to preparing for ERR, reported feeling more satisfied in their roles than those who received none.



Preparing for auto-enrolment

73% of payroll processors feel unprepared for the rollout of auto-enrolment next year, with **43%** saying their business has no plans in place to help them.



“Auto-enrolment has very little employee engagement. The queries and complaints will end up with payroll dept, regardless of it being legislation as employees are unaware it is coming.”

Survey participant

The need for payroll learning and development opportunities



89% of respondents highlight the need for more learning and development opportunities in payroll. Beyond legislative updates, payroll professionals want to deepen their skills in areas like pensions, leave management, Benefits in Kind, tax credits, and international payroll.

Key takeaways

Supporting payroll processors during legislative changes is crucial for success. Employers must prioritise offering comprehensive training, resources, and tools to enhance job satisfaction and efficiency. By learning from past experiences with Enhanced Reporting Requirements, businesses can ensure that payroll staff feel well-supported as they navigate the upcoming introduction of auto-enrolment and other future changes.

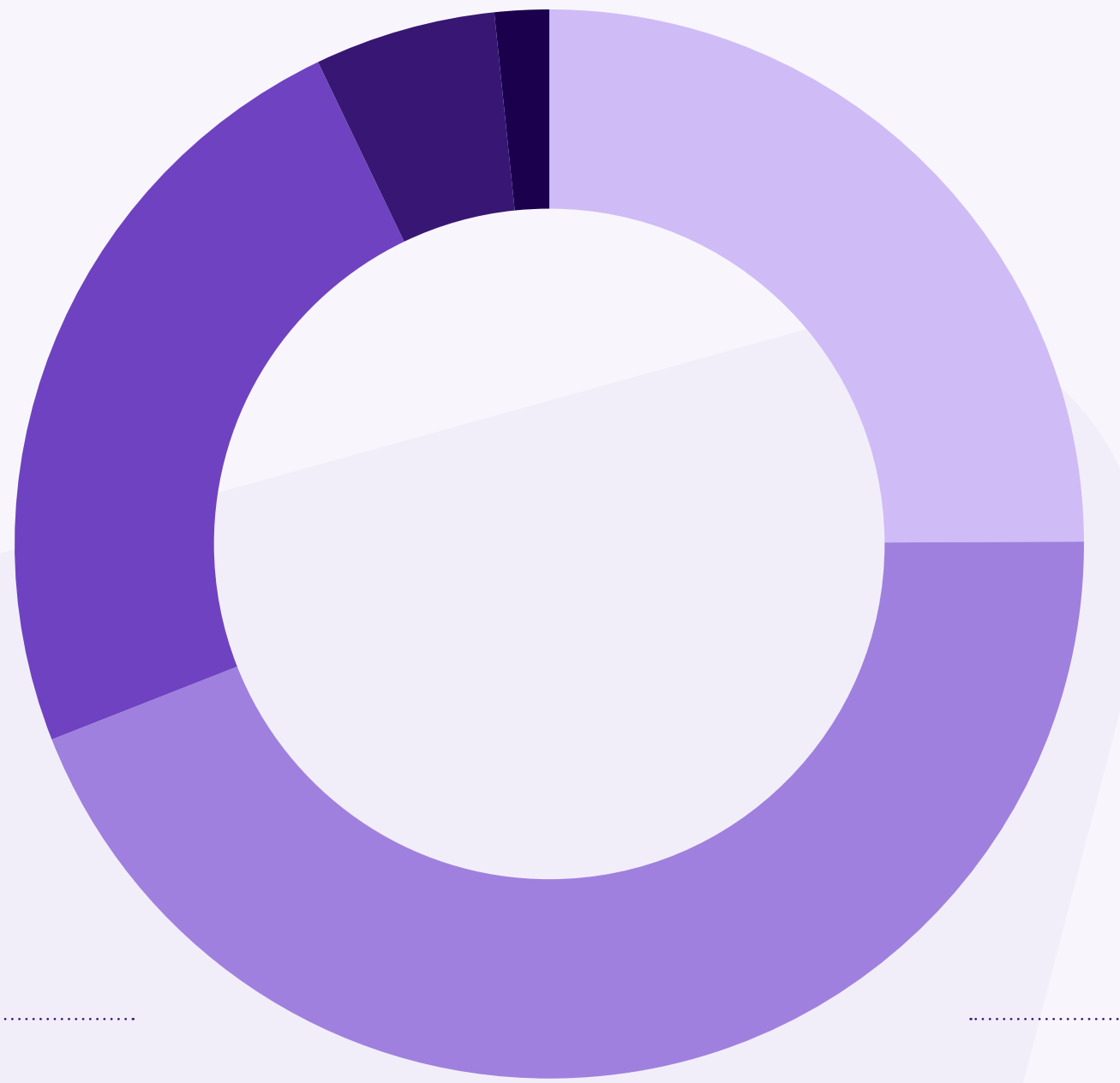
The search for skilled talent

Businesses everywhere are struggling to attract skilled talent, and payroll is no exception.

While payroll qualifications are highly valued, around one in three of payroll professionals surveyed admitted they didn't have any. Yet, they still prefer to hire candidates with qualifications. This highlights a unique challenge: balancing the demand for qualified talent with the reality that many experienced professionals might lack formal certifications.

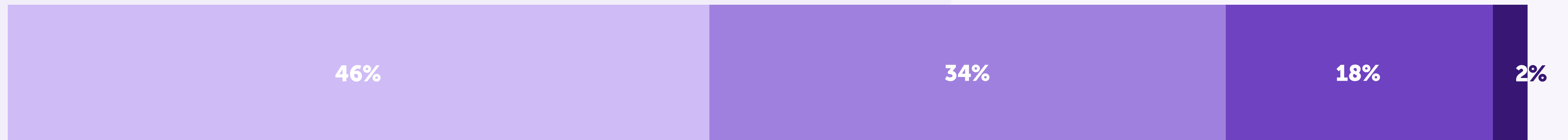
Ease of finding skilled payroll processors

Finding skilled payroll processors is considered a challenge. **69%** of those involved in the hiring process find it difficult to find skilled payroll processors.



- 25% - Very difficult
- 44% - Quite difficult
- 24% - Neither difficult nor easy
- 5% - Quite easy
- 2% - Very easy

The importance of payroll qualifications



Among respondents involved in hiring, **80%** of them viewed payroll qualifications as an important factor when making hiring decisions. This is particularly relevant for individuals considering a career in payroll. Although **35%** of survey respondents currently working in the industry do not have a payroll qualification, qualifications are key for getting hired and career progression.

- It's very important
- It's quite important
- It's not very important
- It's not at all important

Key takeaways

A payroll career requires a blend of technical skills in processing, compliance, and reporting, proficiency with payroll technology, and strong soft skills in communication, teamwork, and time management. Responses show that finding candidates with this combination of skills can be difficult. If we compare the data, we can see that a large cohort of those surveyed do not have any formal payroll qualifications, which differs from what employers demand. To stand out as a potential candidate when entering the industry, looking to move jobs, or progress in the industry, having a payroll qualification could make you a more appealing candidate.

“The results of this survey show a clear demand for more training and education, reflecting how much professionals want to grow in their careers and handle job challenges better. At IPASS, we encourage payroll professionals to invest in their futures by earning relevant qualifications and showcasing their expertise.”

Shane Ormsby | General Manager at IPASS



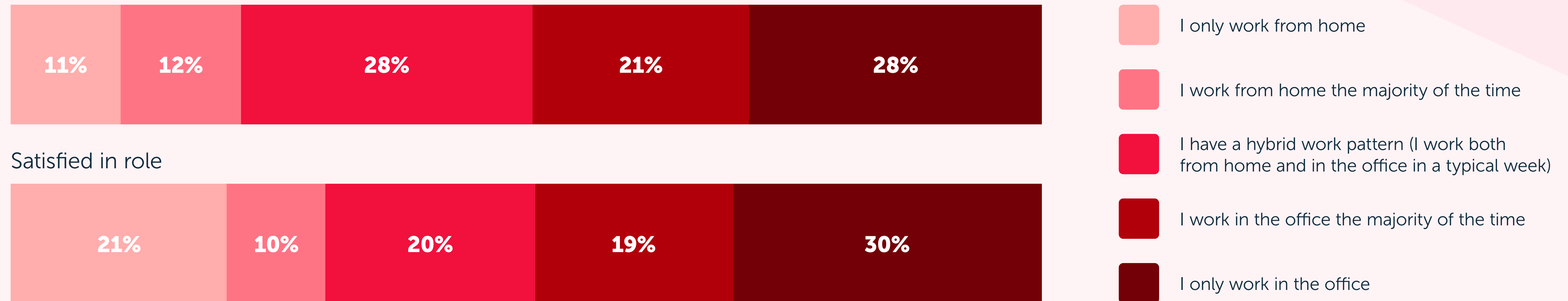
Office vs. home working – trends and preferences

Almost **50%** of payroll professionals surveyed work in the office full-time or most of the time, **28%** work a hybrid model and **22%** primarily work from home.

Over the past year, the majority haven't faced any increased pressure from employers to return to the office. Valuing the benefits of both remote and in-office working, many employees appreciate the flexibility that a hybrid approach can offer.

Workplace schedules

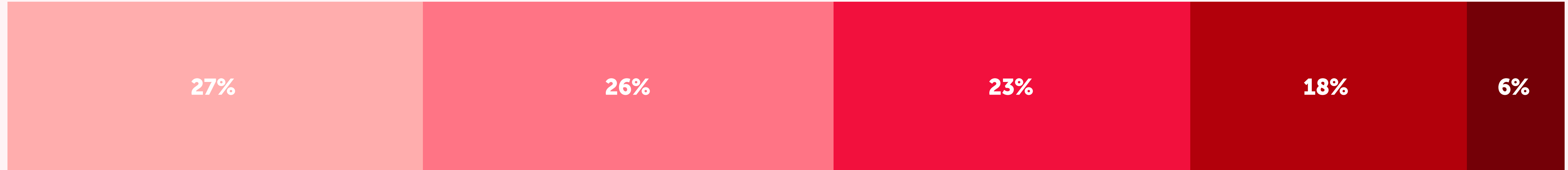
Overall



Just under **50%** spend the majority of their time working in the office. The other half are hybrid working or working mostly from home. This flexibility seems to be important and can be seen more clearly when we look at those most satisfied in their roles. With our highly satisfied group, we can see an uptick in those working from home.

Productivity

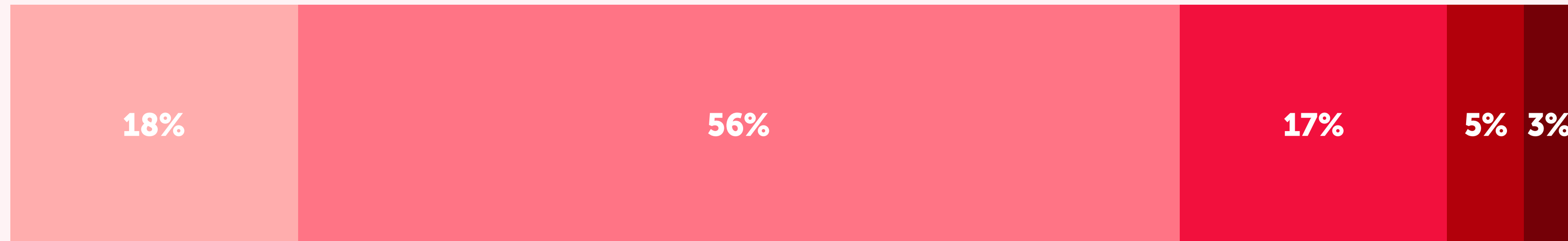
"I get more work done when working from home"



When it comes to productivity, working from home can be a real benefit. Over **50%** believe that they can get more work done when they work from home.

Socialising

"I enjoy the social aspect of working in the office"



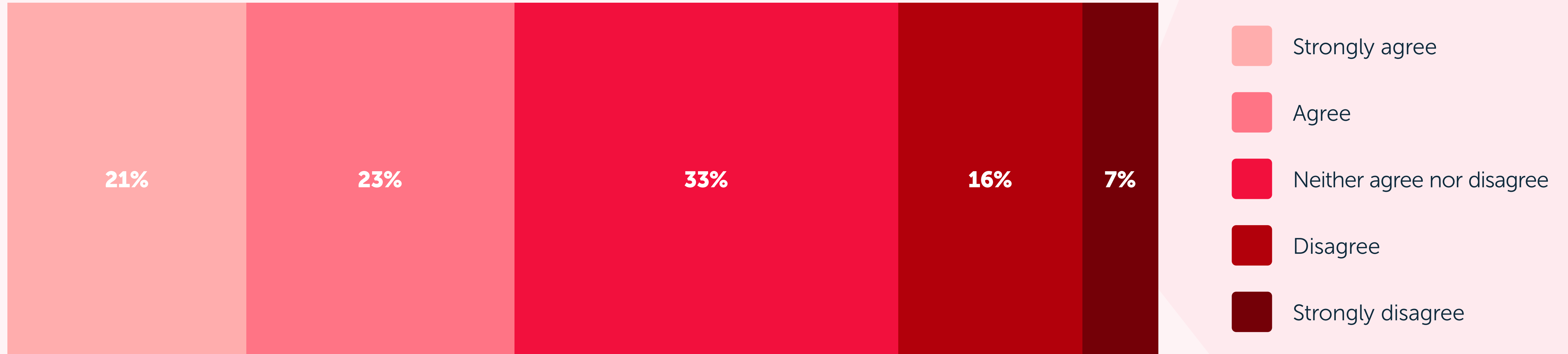
Although working from home can boost productivity, the clear preference for working from the office emerges when we consider the desire for socialising with colleagues. **64%** of the industry like the social element of the office and over half feel that it helps improve their overall wellbeing.

Page key:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Wellbeing while working from home

"Working from home more would help improve my wellbeing"



44% of all respondents think that working from home more often could help improve their wellbeing.

Key takeaways

The payroll industry values a balanced approach to workplace scheduling. Striking the right balance between remote and on-site work can lead to a happier, more productive and dedicated team. When considering how to make the most of a hybrid schedule, focus on optimising in-office days to foster socialisation and relationship building. It's also crucial to use the right tools for effective communication and payroll processing across locations.

How time is spent

Aside from processing the payroll itself, payroll processors find handling employee enquiries, generating reports, and managing employee leave to be the most time-consuming tasks.

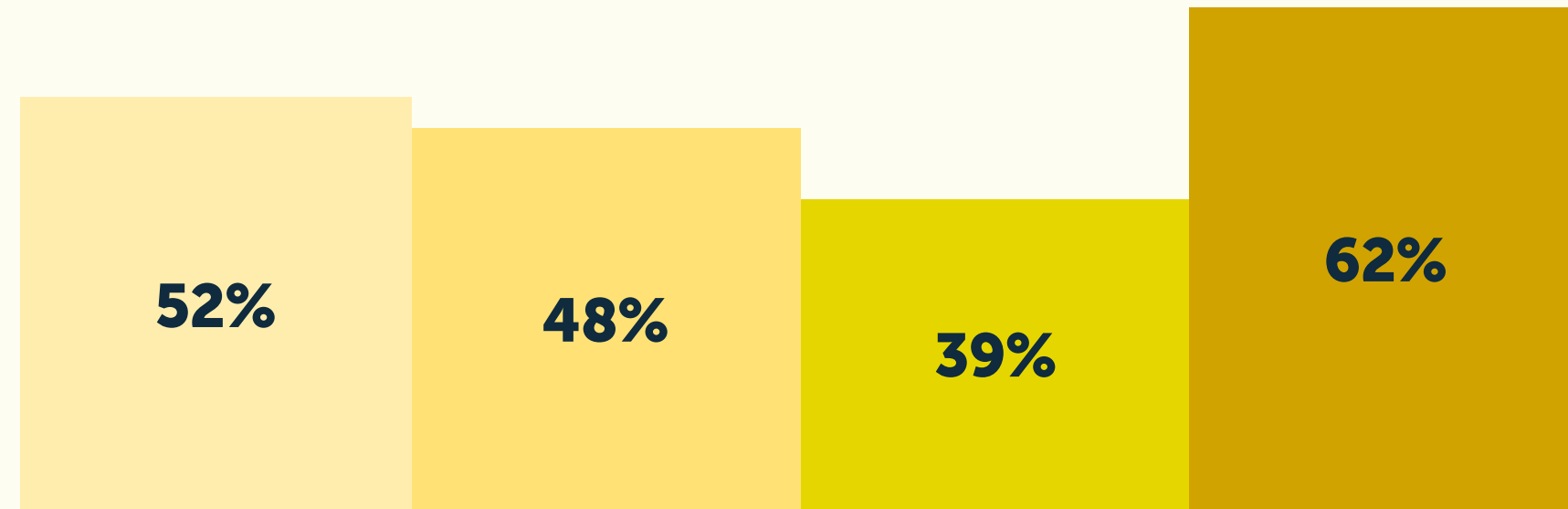
Interestingly, payroll processors at larger companies spend less time managing annual leave, possibly because they separate this task from payroll or utilise HR tools to streamline leave management.

Tasks that take up the most time

77%	Processing wages and salaries Unsurprisingly, payroll processors spend the majority of their time processing wages and salaries.
52%	Handling payroll enquiries Dealing with payroll queries takes up a significant amount of time for many. As company size increases, so does the time spent on this task. However, a simple tool like an online employee portal could help reduce requests for things like payslip history, as well as overall queries.
45%	Reporting Streamlining the reporting process through automation can help reduce the amount of time it takes to complete this task.
31%	Managing employee leave Managing employee leave can be made more efficient with software that assists payroll, HR, or direct line managers in handling leave requests.
22%	Assisting the finance department to carry out tasks
20%	Coordinating with HR for new employee onboarding
20%	Paying employees
7%	Distributing payslips
4%	Assisting in hiring of payroll staff

Relationship between company size and time-consuming tasks

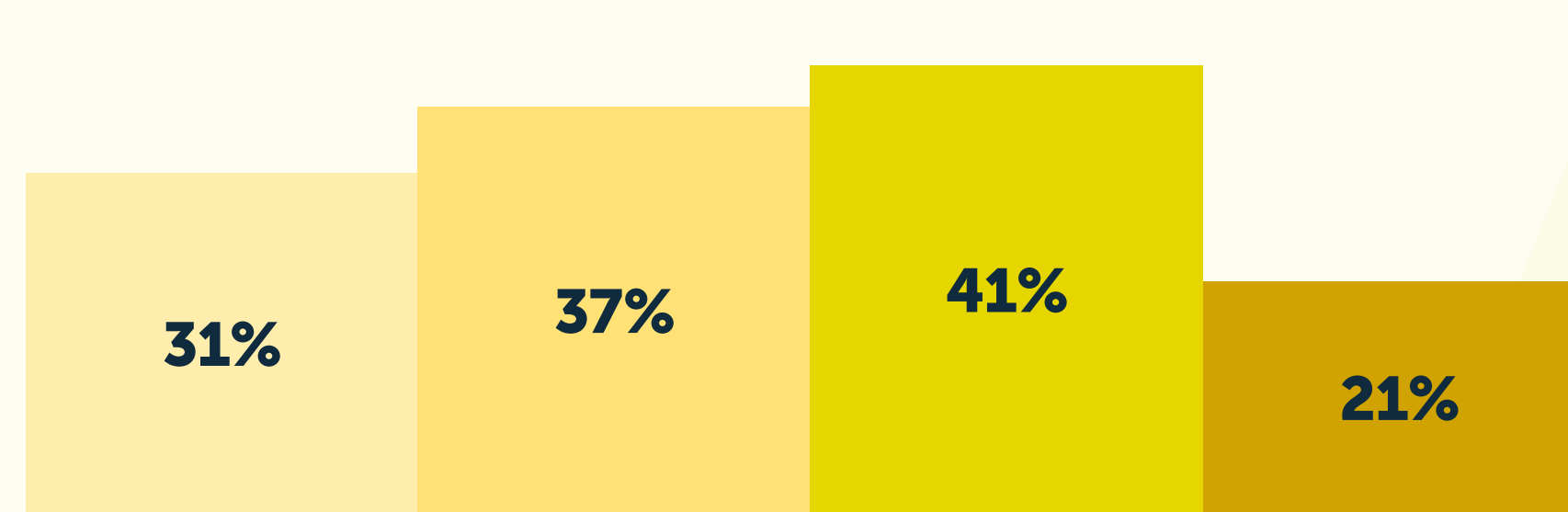
Handling payroll enquiries



Percentage of people who find handling payroll enquiries time consuming

62% of those working for companies with over **50** employees, unsurprisingly, reported that handling payroll enquiries was a task that takes up a lot of their time.

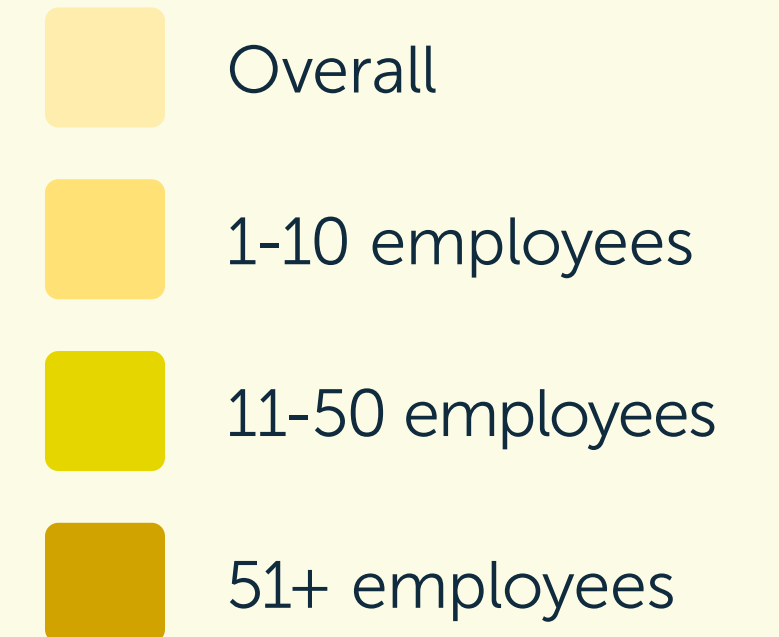
Managing employee leave



Percentage of people who find managing annual leave time consuming

As companies grow in size, payroll processors generally dedicate more time to managing annual leave. However, interestingly, companies with over **50** employees were less likely to report annual leave management as one of their most time-consuming tasks, indicating that they have implemented more efficient processes.

Page key:



Key takeaways

Using the right tools can greatly streamline many time-consuming tasks for payroll processors. Employee enquiries, often related to payslips and leave entitlements, can be significantly reduced by implementing an online employee portal. This self-service access allows employees to find answers themselves, saving time on managing queries while also reducing the workload involved in leave management.

Looking to the future

As we look ahead, three critical areas—rising costs, artificial intelligence, and cybersecurity—are set to impact the payroll industry in the coming year.

By exploring these factors, we can better prepare for the challenges they present, while also identifying opportunities to optimise and innovate payroll processes.

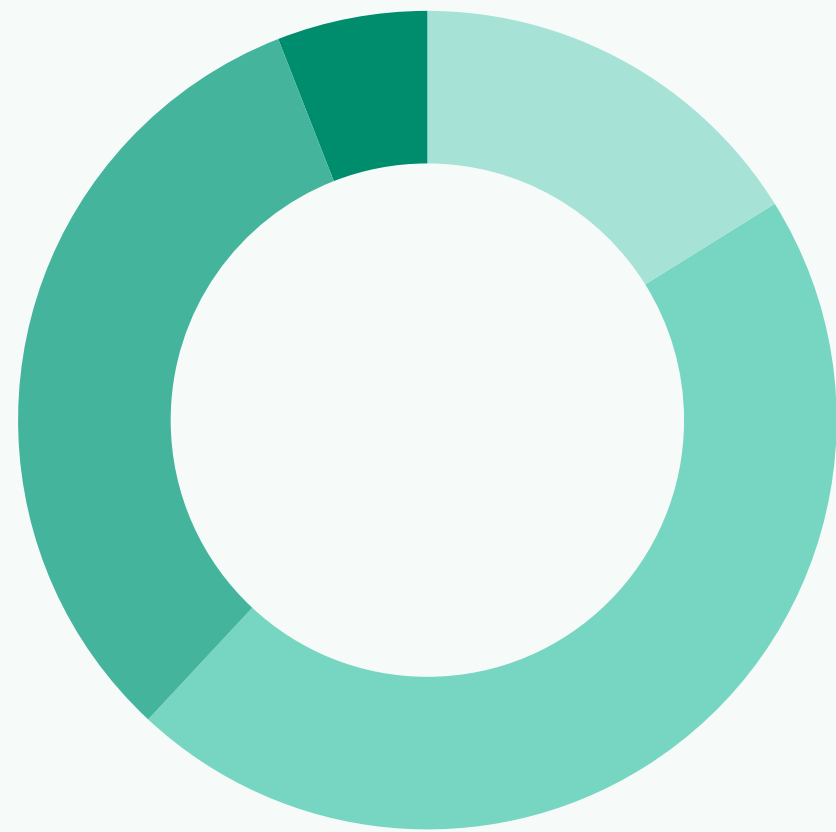
8a. The cost of payroll - Over the past year, the cost of managing payroll has risen, mirroring the increase in overall business expenses. This trend is expected to continue, affecting businesses regardless of whether they handle payroll in-house, outsource it, or provide payroll services.

Rising payroll costs for businesses

“My business has experienced increased payroll costs in the last 12 months”

- 16%** - Yes, definitely
- 46%** - Yes, probably
- 32%** - No, probably not
- 6%** - No, definitely not

78% of companies managing payroll in-house experienced increased costs over the past 12 months, and **62%** anticipated further rises in the coming year.



Payroll bureau fees

“We have increased our fees for payroll services in the past 12 months”

- 10%** - It has increased by over 20%
- 18%** - It has increased between 10% and 20%
- 44%** - It has increased between 1% and 10%
- 28%** - It has not increased at all

Bureaus offering payroll services are managing cost increases by raising their fees. **72%** reported having raised their prices for payroll services in the previous 12 months.



Key takeaways

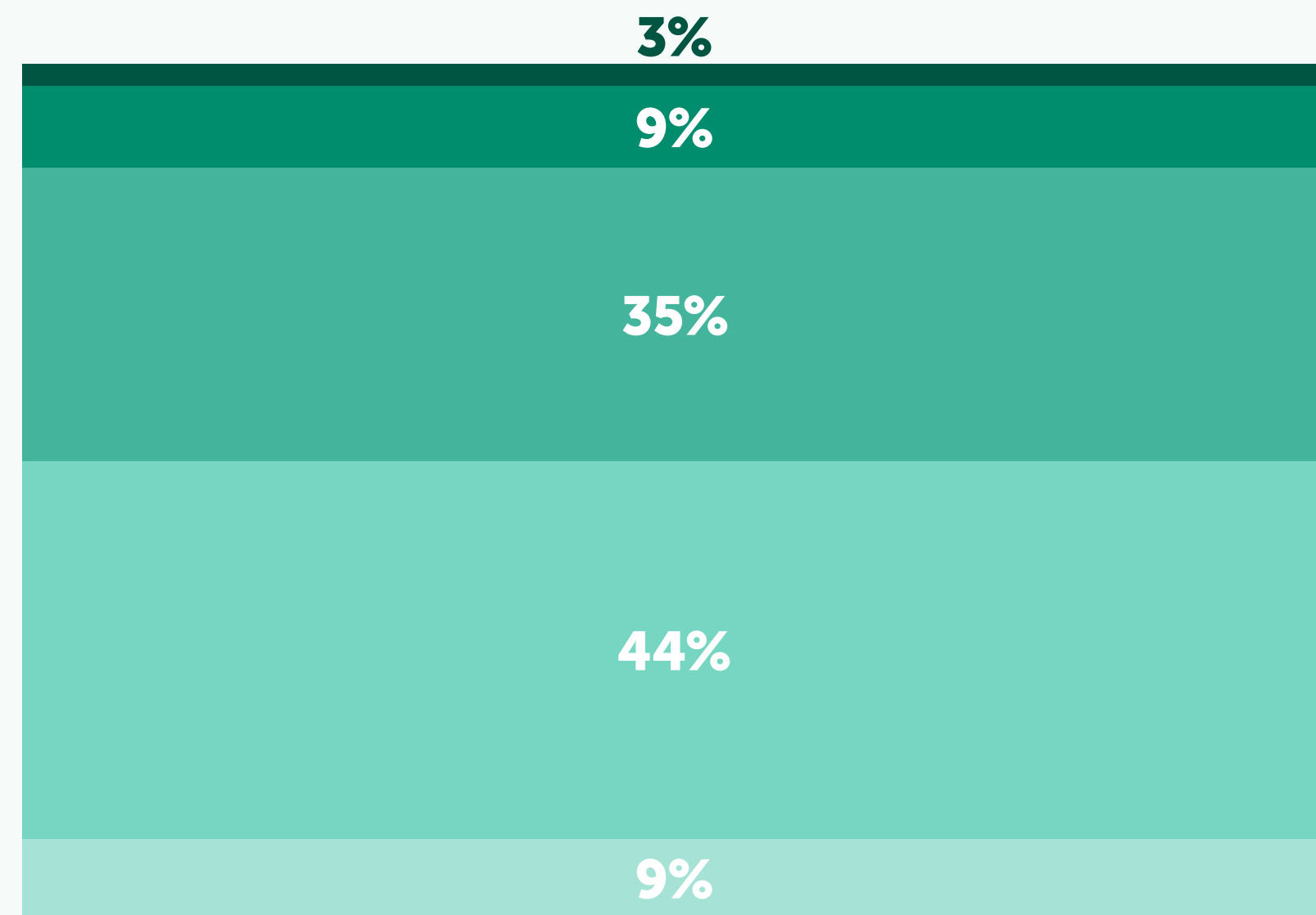
Payroll processors who are facing rising costs and the need to increase client fees should reassess their pricing models. Consider using a tiered pricing system to offer basic services at lower rates and charge more for extra features. Clearly explain the value and improvements in your services to help clients understand any price changes. Offering package deals or discounts for loyal clients can also encourage them to stick around and help keep your revenue steady during tough economic times.

8b. The importance of cybersecurity - In an era where cyber threats are becoming increasingly common, cybersecurity is a growing concern for businesses. Despite this, only **36%** of payroll professionals feel equipped to handle such incidents. Smaller businesses, in particular, struggle with setting up effective cybersecurity policies and procedures, leaving them more vulnerable.

8b

Cybersecurity concerns

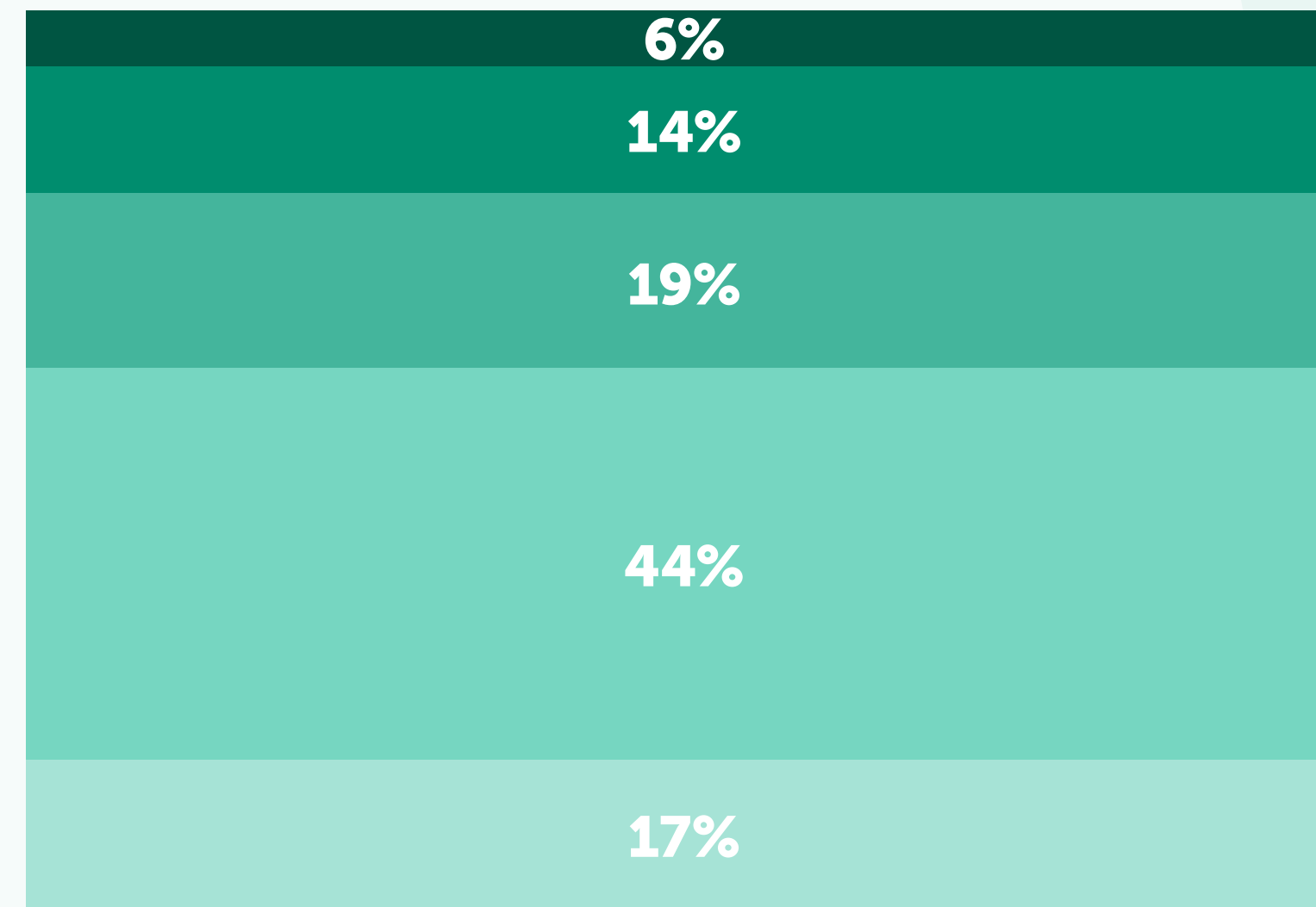
"Cyber and data security is a growing concern for me"



53% of payroll processors feel that cyber and data security is a growing concern.

Cybersecurity policies and procedures

"My business has policies and procedures in place on cybersecurity"



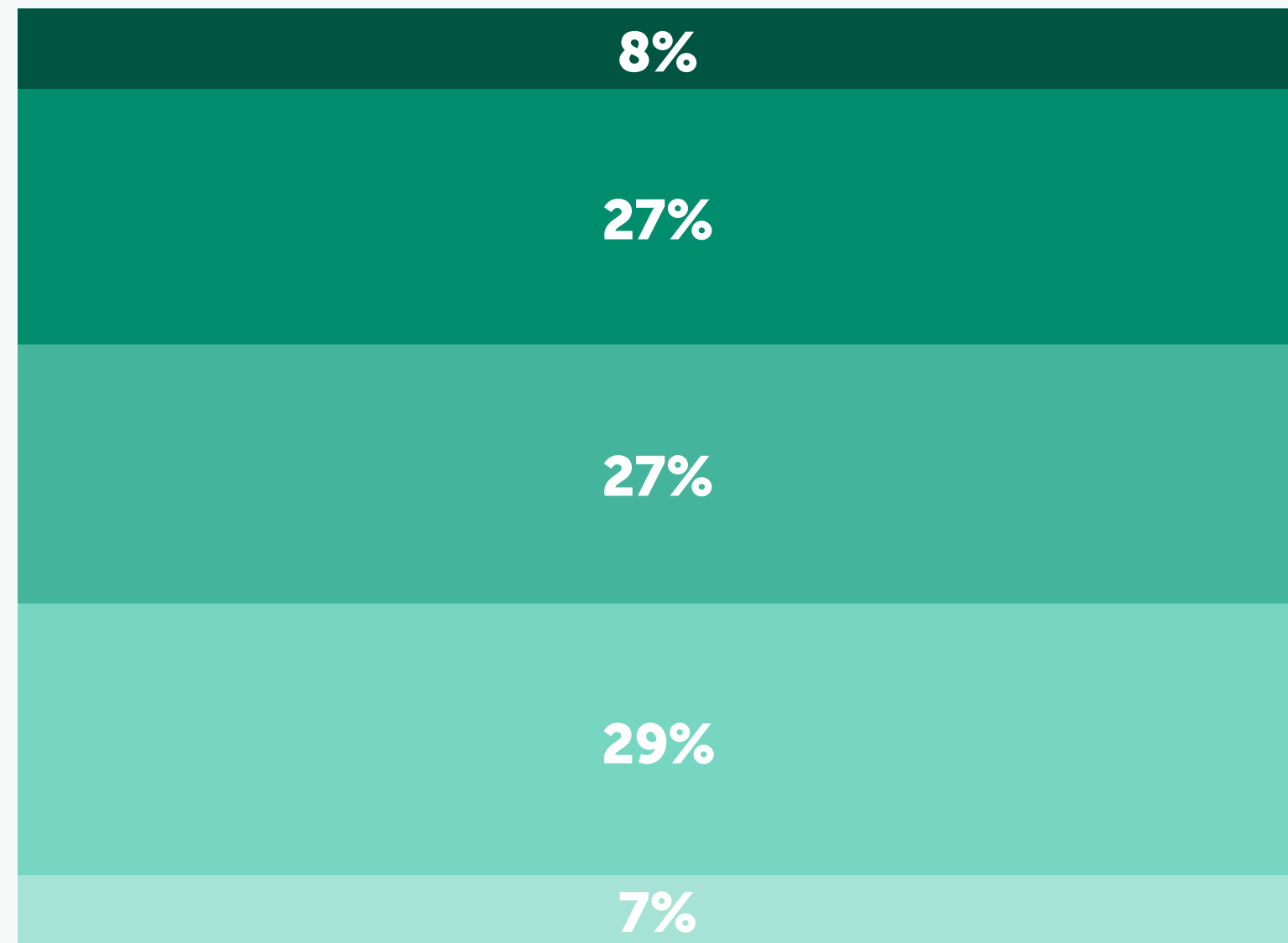
61% of businesses have policies and procedures in place on cybersecurity.

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- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Cyberattacks

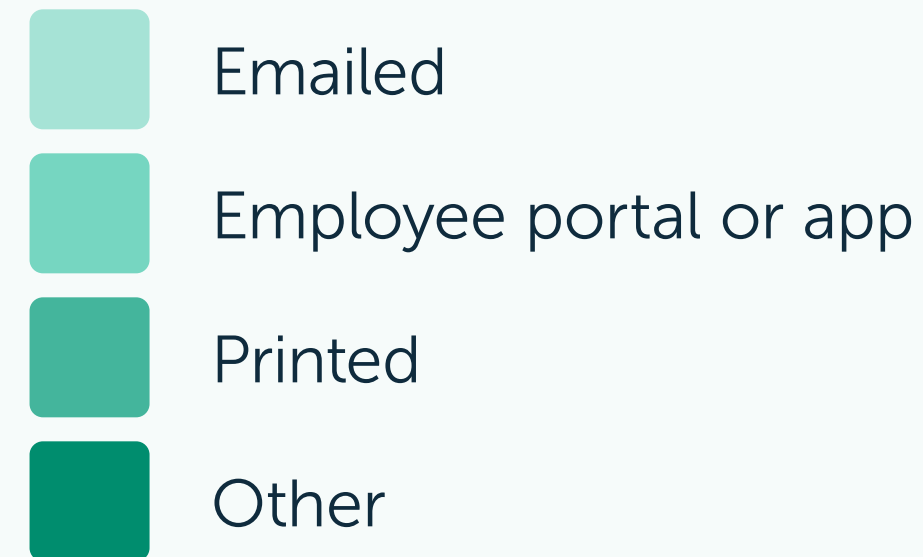
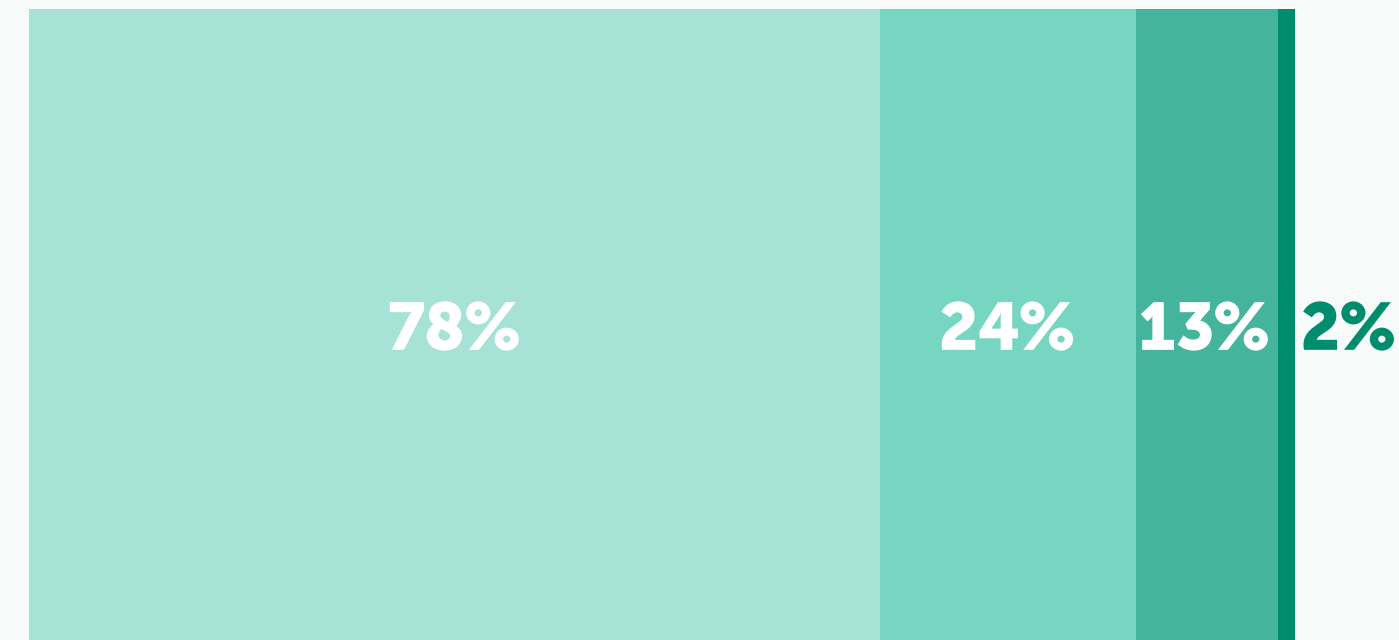
"I'd know what to do in the event of a cyber-attack"



Only **36%** said they would know what to do in the case of a cyber-attack.



How payslips are distributed



Interestingly, while payroll professionals recognise cyber and data security as a growing concern, **91%** of respondents still share payslips via email or print them for distribution—a practice that puts sensitive information at risk. The adoption of employee portals could address these vulnerabilities by offering encrypted data storage on secure remote servers.

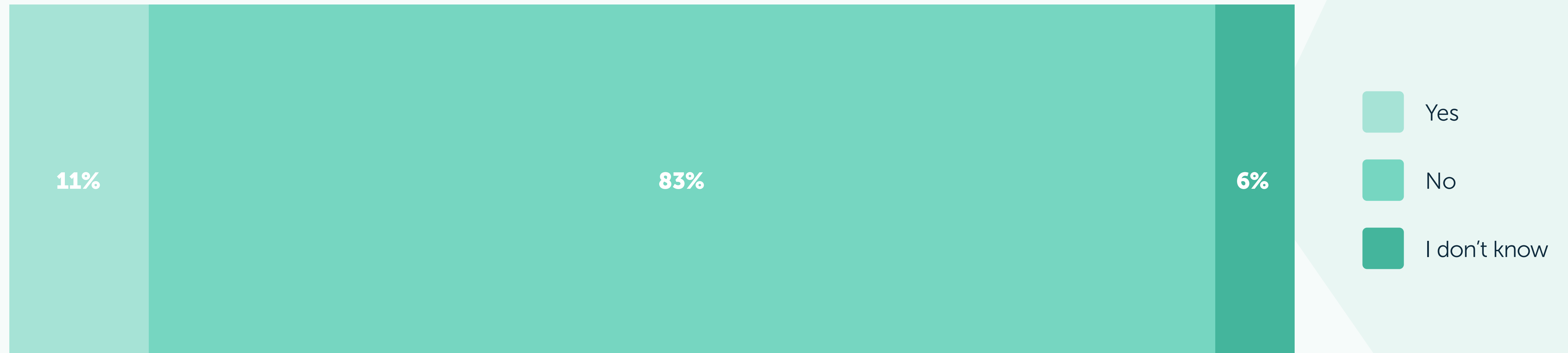
Key takeaways

As cybersecurity threats continue to evolve, protecting employee data will become increasingly critical for businesses of all sizes. To prepare for the future, companies should consider investing in cloud-based payroll software, which offers enhanced security features like data encryption and automatic backups. We were surprised to see that **91%** of businesses still share payslips via email or by printing them, which is putting sensitive information at risk. By transitioning to an online employee portal to distribute payslips, you can help safeguard sensitive information against emerging cyber threats. By taking these proactive steps now, businesses can better position themselves to handle the growing challenge of data security in the years ahead.

8c. Artificial Intelligence: friend or foe? - The adoption of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in payroll has been slow, with many professionals cautious about integrating it into their workflows. This hesitation stems from a general distrust of AI and fears of potential errors. However, amongst those who have started using AI in their jobs, a significant percentage, **76%**, report finding it beneficial in their roles. It seems that it's those who haven't yet embraced AI who are the ones most concerned about its potential negative impacts.

Using AI to help with payroll

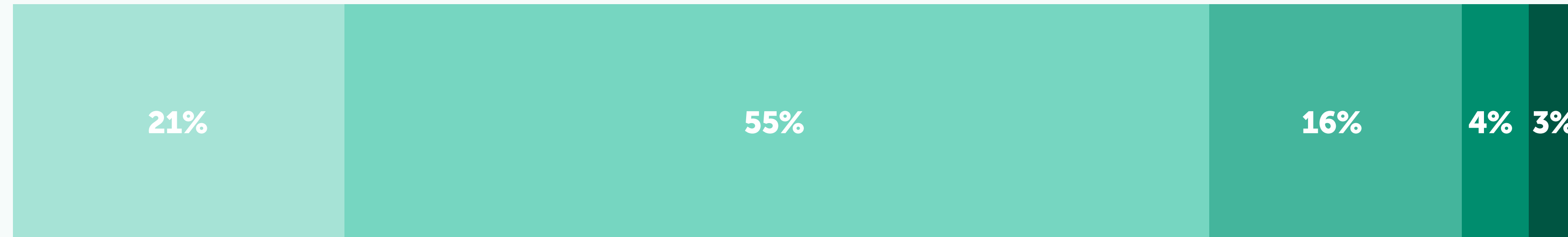
"I use AI in my job"



Only **11%** of those surveyed used AI in their job. When we compare AI use with the business size, we can see that business size has no impact on the use of AI. This suggests that the uptake of AI is more personality-led, rather than the availability of resources.

The helpfulness of AI

"I find the use of AI helpful in my role"



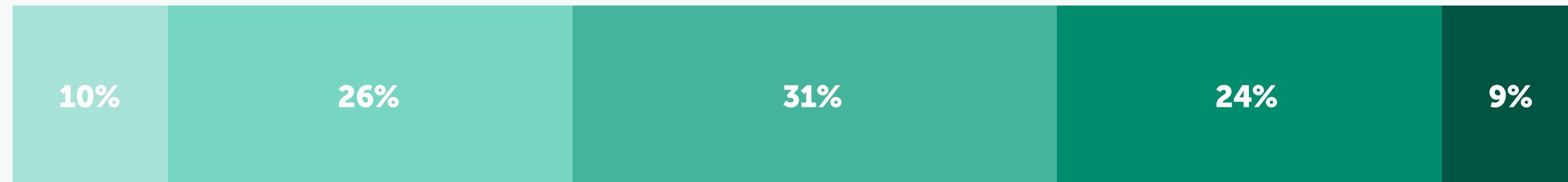
Those who use AI reported finding it helpful in their roles. Among AI users, **76%** said it's beneficial, whereas only **21%** of all respondents shared this view.

Page key:

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

The impact of AI

"I'm worried about the implication of AI on my role and the payroll industry"



Opinions in the payroll industry are divided over concerns about AI's impact on their roles and in the field. While **36%** expressed worry about its implications, **33%** are unconcerned. Given the low adoption of AI amongst payroll professionals, it suggests that the technology has not yet made a substantial impact on the industry, and its influence remains minimal for now.

Distrust of AI

"I trust AI for important tasks (All respondents)"



"I trust AI for important tasks (Who use AI)"



Trust in AI remains low. **51%** of those who use AI (and **60%** of all respondents) still do not trust the technology. Mistakes in payroll can be costly. And while AI can enhance productivity, it also poses risks due to the nature of payroll data. It's not surprising that **49%** of all respondents worry about not catching a mistake made by AI. This is even higher in the group that uses it, at **55%**. Understanding the current limitations of AI's usefulness in payroll may be key here. With time, and as technology develops further, trust in AI may build.

Key takeaways

Payroll professionals who have begun using AI are already experiencing its benefits, which suggests that firsthand experience can highlight its advantages. For those looking to introduce AI use into their business, payroll processors can gradually integrate AI by using tools like ChatGPT to draft responses to employee payroll inquiries or leveraging Microsoft's Power BI to turn raw payroll data into interactive and insightful visual reports. By proactively introducing AI through formal processes, businesses will be better prepared to capitalise on future AI advancements in payroll, ensuring they stay ahead of the curve and fully grasp the value these technologies offer.

Conclusion

The first edition of the 'Voice of Payroll' paints a clear picture of the payroll profession in Ireland. A career in payroll can offer great job satisfaction, a good work-life balance, and flexibility. With a strong demand for skilled payroll professionals, formal qualifications can give newcomers a competitive edge.

It's an ever-evolving industry, and 2024 has brought its fair share of challenges. New legislation, such as Revenue's Enhanced Reporting Requirements and the introduction of auto-enrolment in 2025, demands ongoing attention. Supporting your payroll team with opportunities for further training will help them navigate these changes, maintain high morale, and stay motivated. By investing in their development, you'll ensure they continue to thrive in this dynamic and rewarding field.

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