

SPRING UPDATE

# 2026 Job Outlook

Sponsored by

**nace**  
national association of  
colleges + employers





# 2026 Hiring Projections





Employers Project  
**5.6% INCREASE  
IN HIRING**  
for the Class of 2026



# Hiring by industry



## Top 5 Industries **Increasing** Hiring

Information

Engineering Services

Wholesale Trade

Construction

Miscellaneous Professional Services



## Top 5 Industries **Decreasing** Hiring

Utilities

Computer + Electronics Mfg.

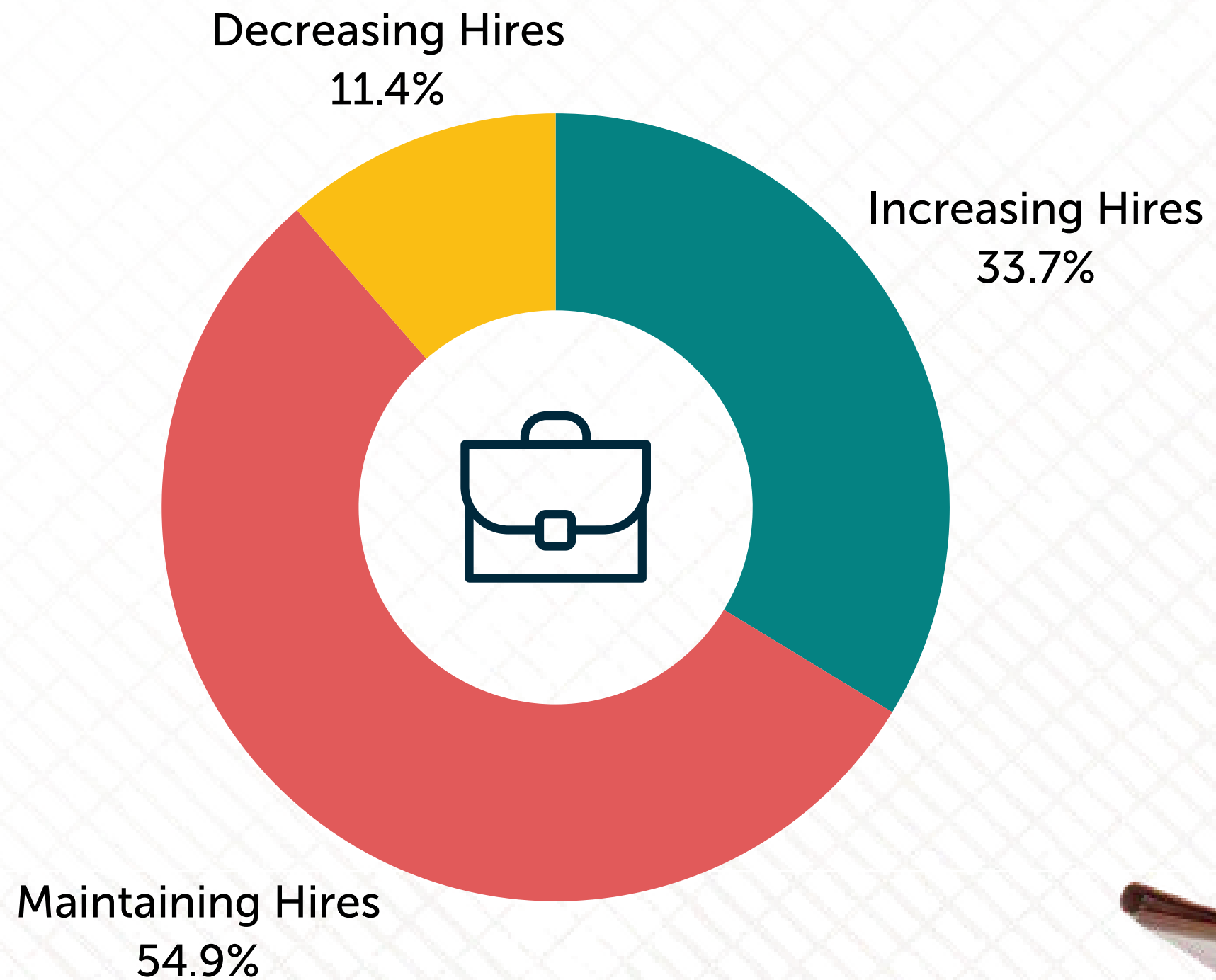
Miscellaneous Mfg.

Food + Beverage Mfg.

Chemical (Pharmaceutical) Mfg.



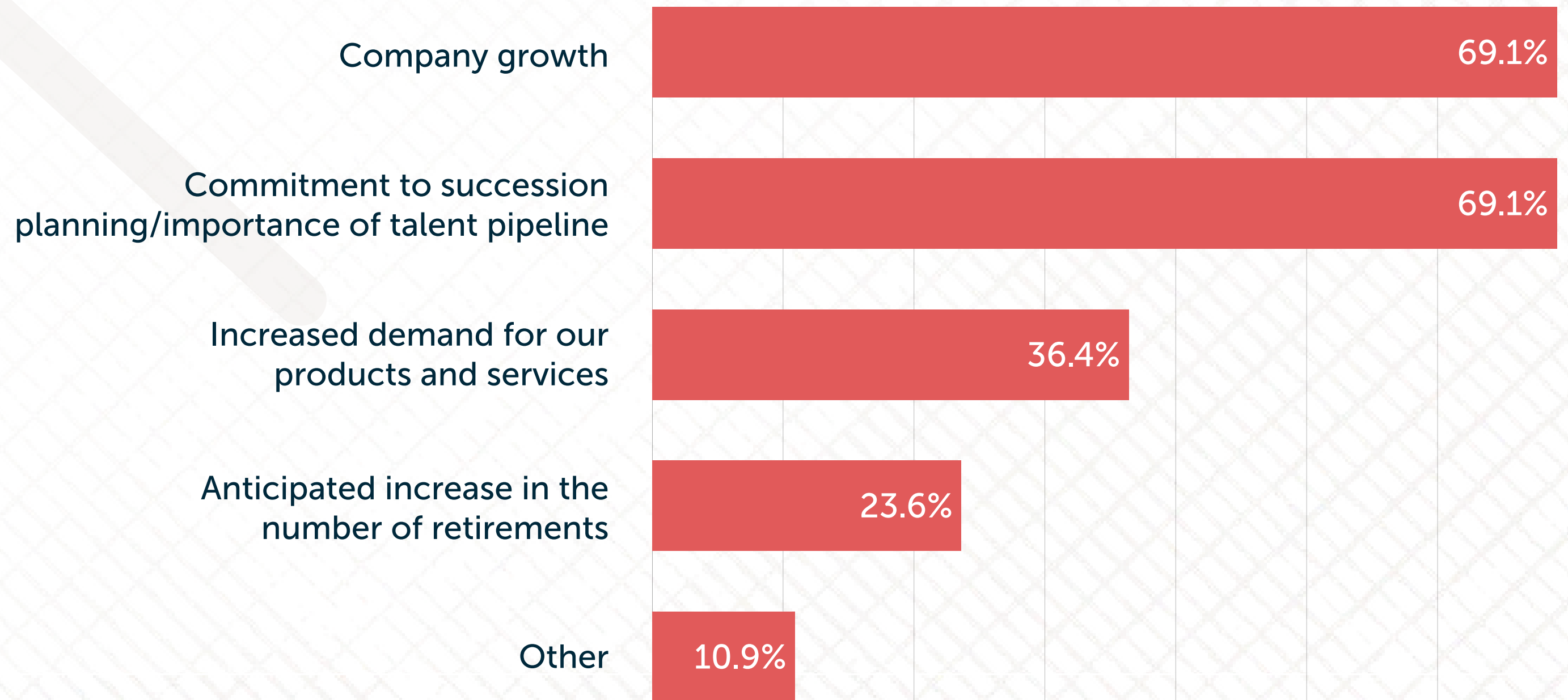
# Employer hiring plans



Number of respondents = 166



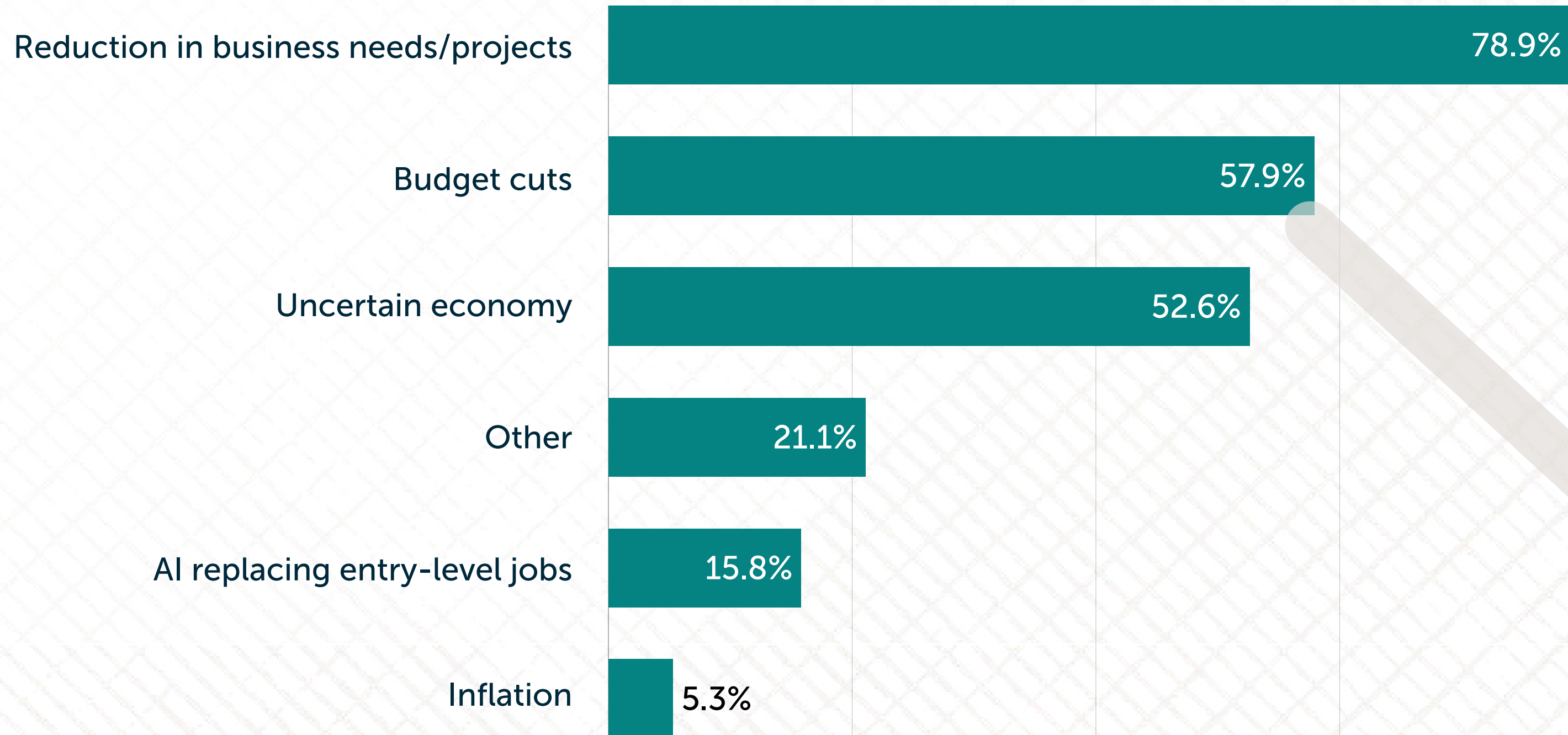
# Top reasons employers are increasing hires



Number of respondents = 55

\*Percentages do not equal 100, as respondents were able to select more than one factor.

# Top reasons employers are decreasing hires



Number of respondents = 19

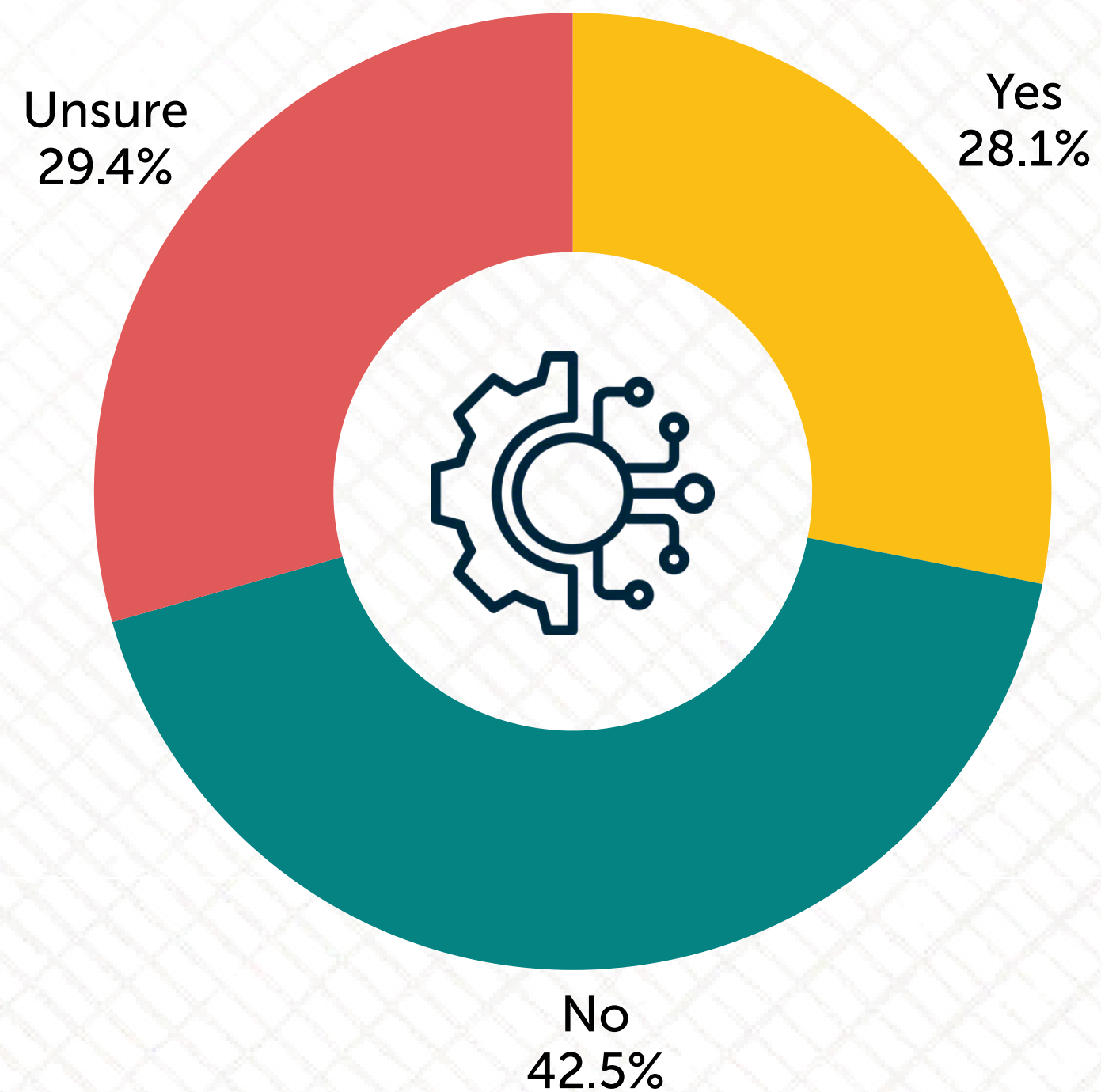
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# Artificial Intelligence

→ Demand for AI skills more than doubled in the last 6 months for entry level jobs. However, only 11% of employers are discussing eliminating positions due to AI.



# Majority of employers are not yet seeking candidates with AI skills



Number of respondents = 160

## AI skills



**35%**  
of entry-level jobs  
**require AI skills**

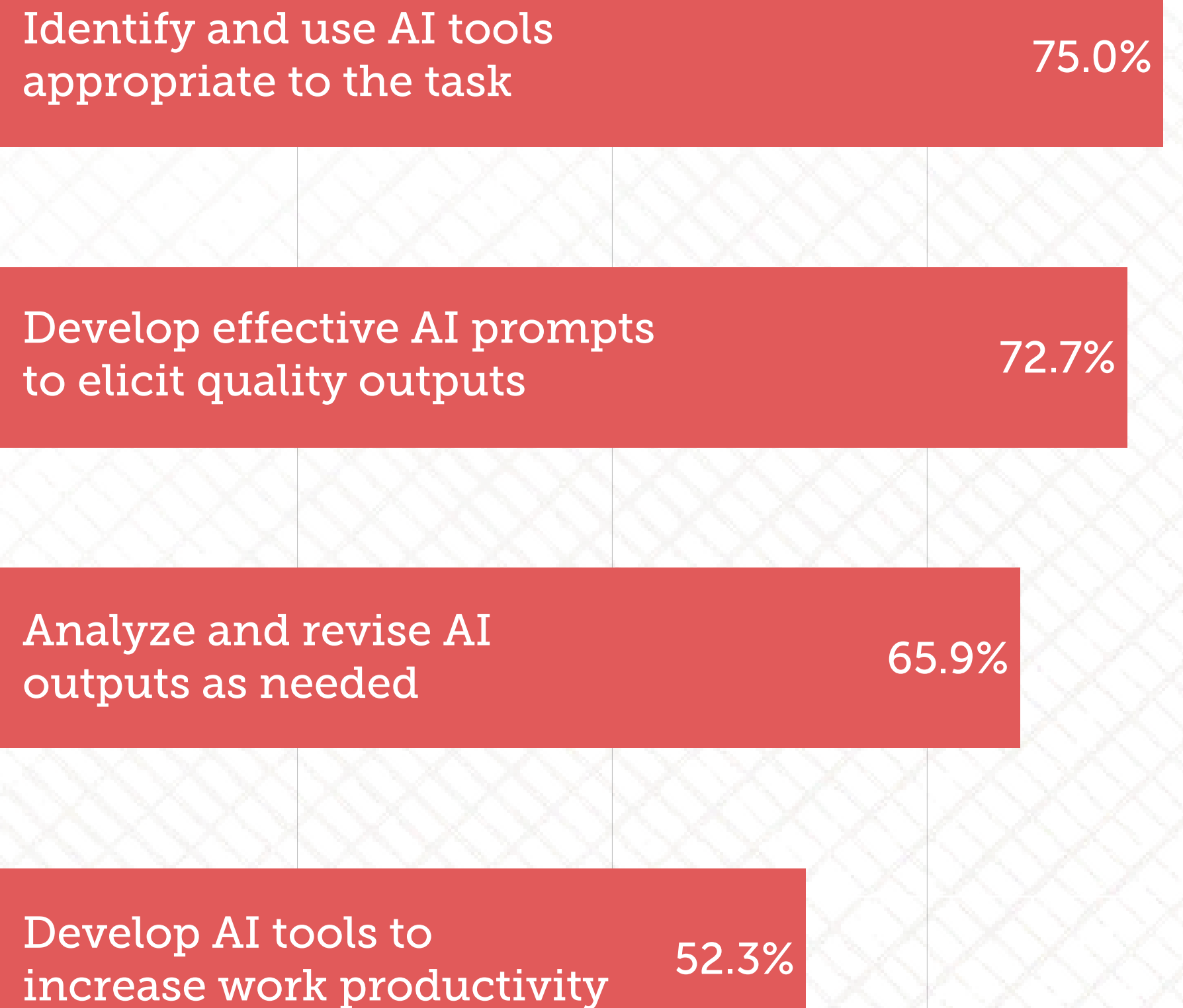


**16.5%**  
of entry-level job  
descriptions include  
AI skills



# Types of AI skills employers are seeking

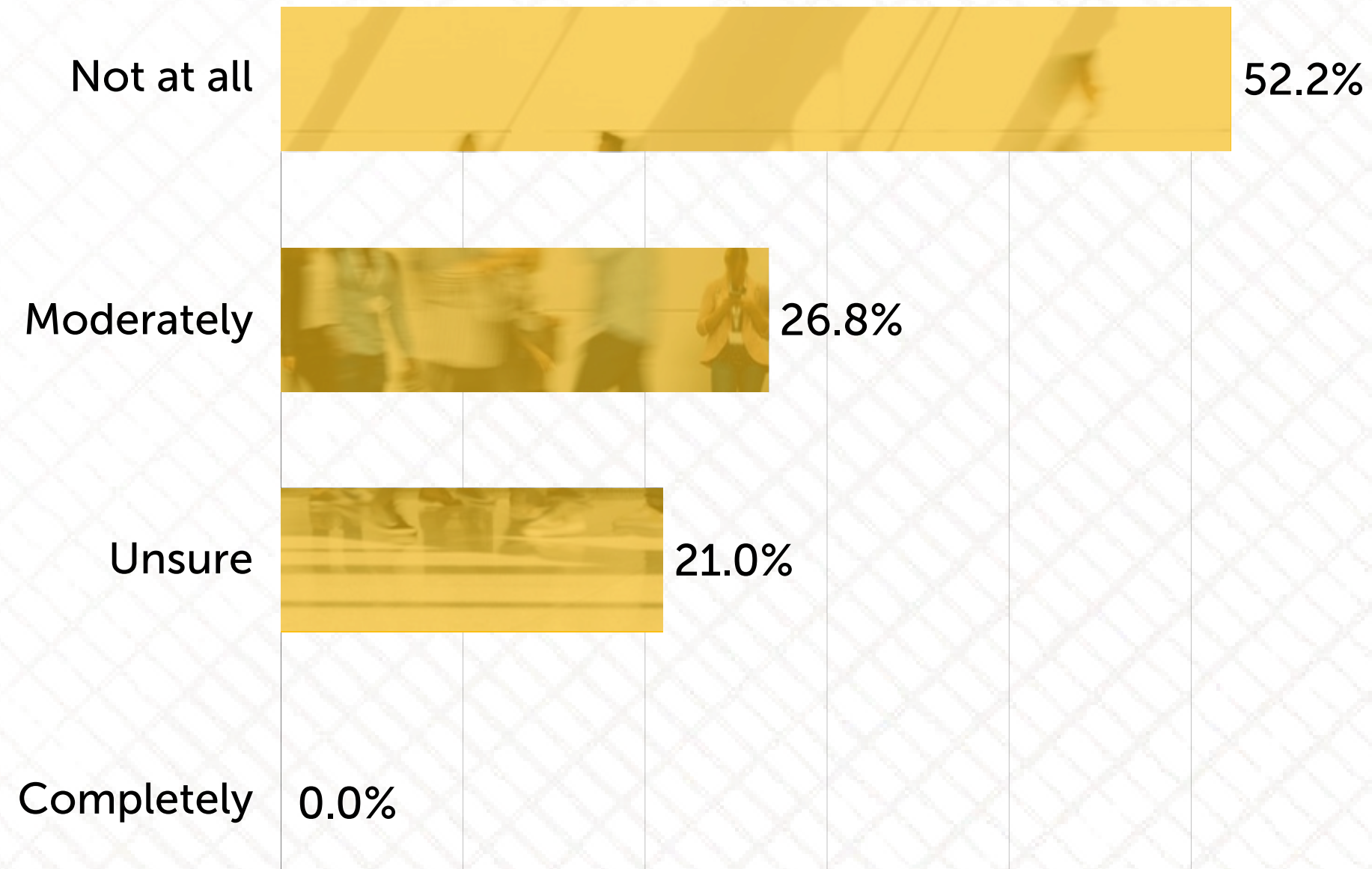
Number of respondents = 44





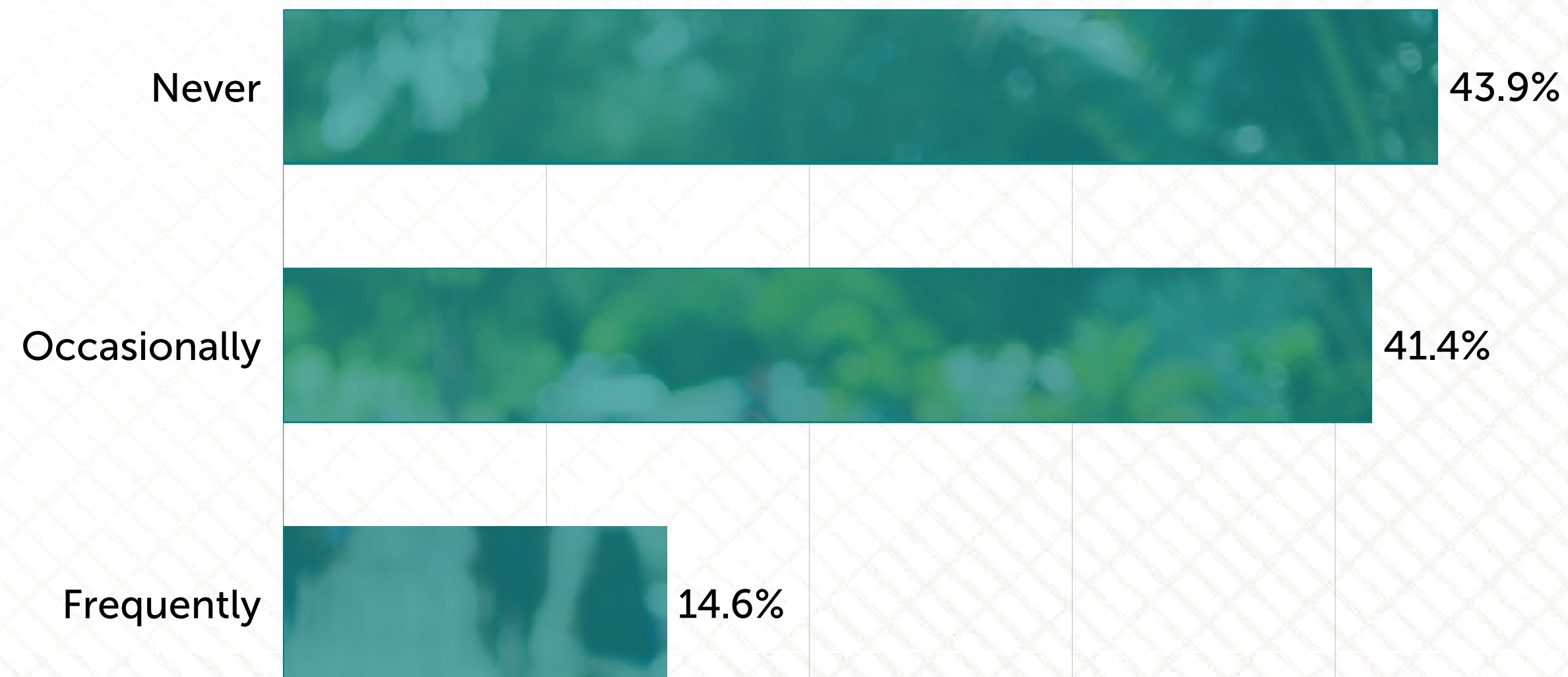
## Has AI reduced the need for entry-level workers' tasks?

Number of respondents = 157



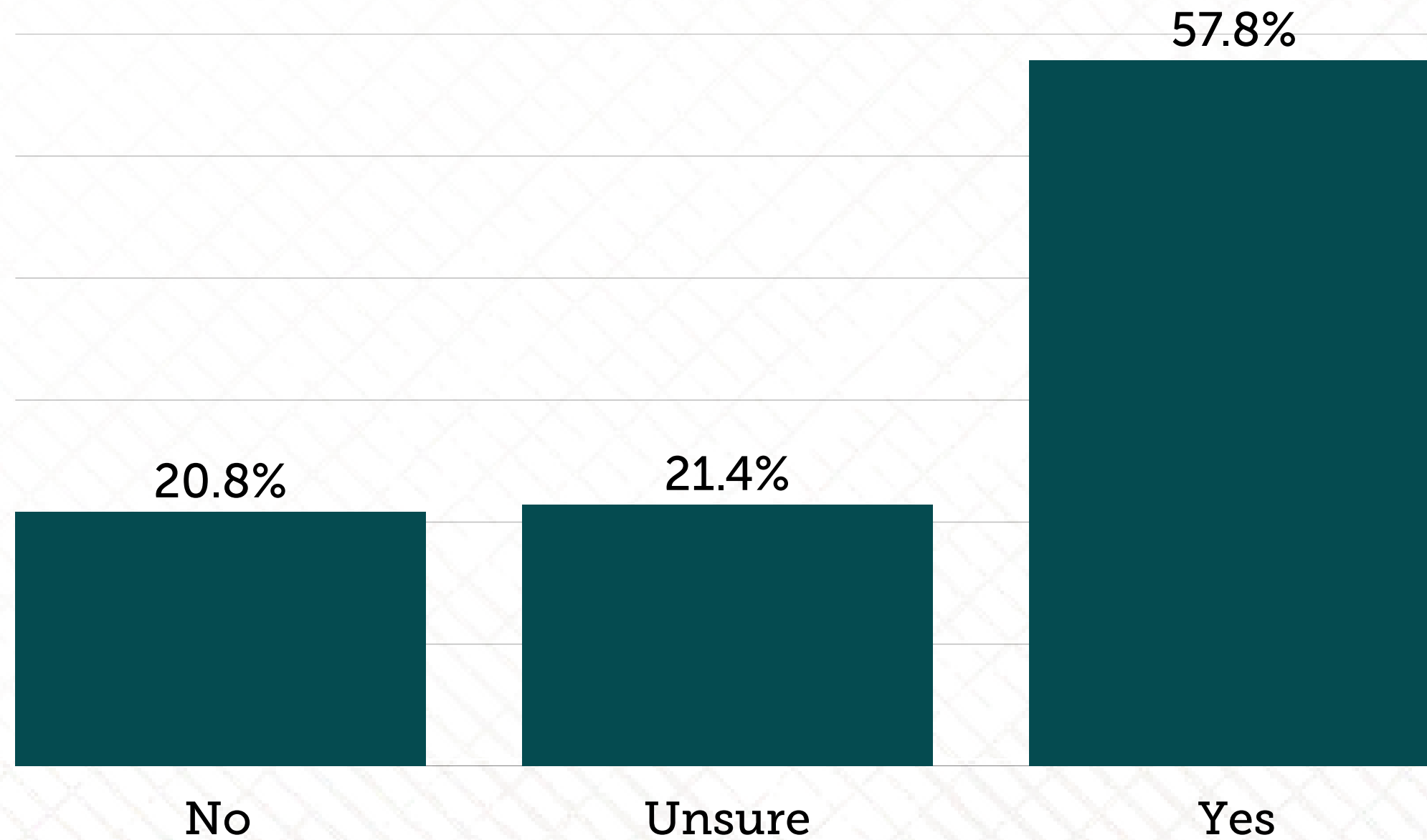
# How often are employers having conversations about replacing early-career work?

More than half of employers have discussed using AI to replace early-career work



Number of respondents = 157

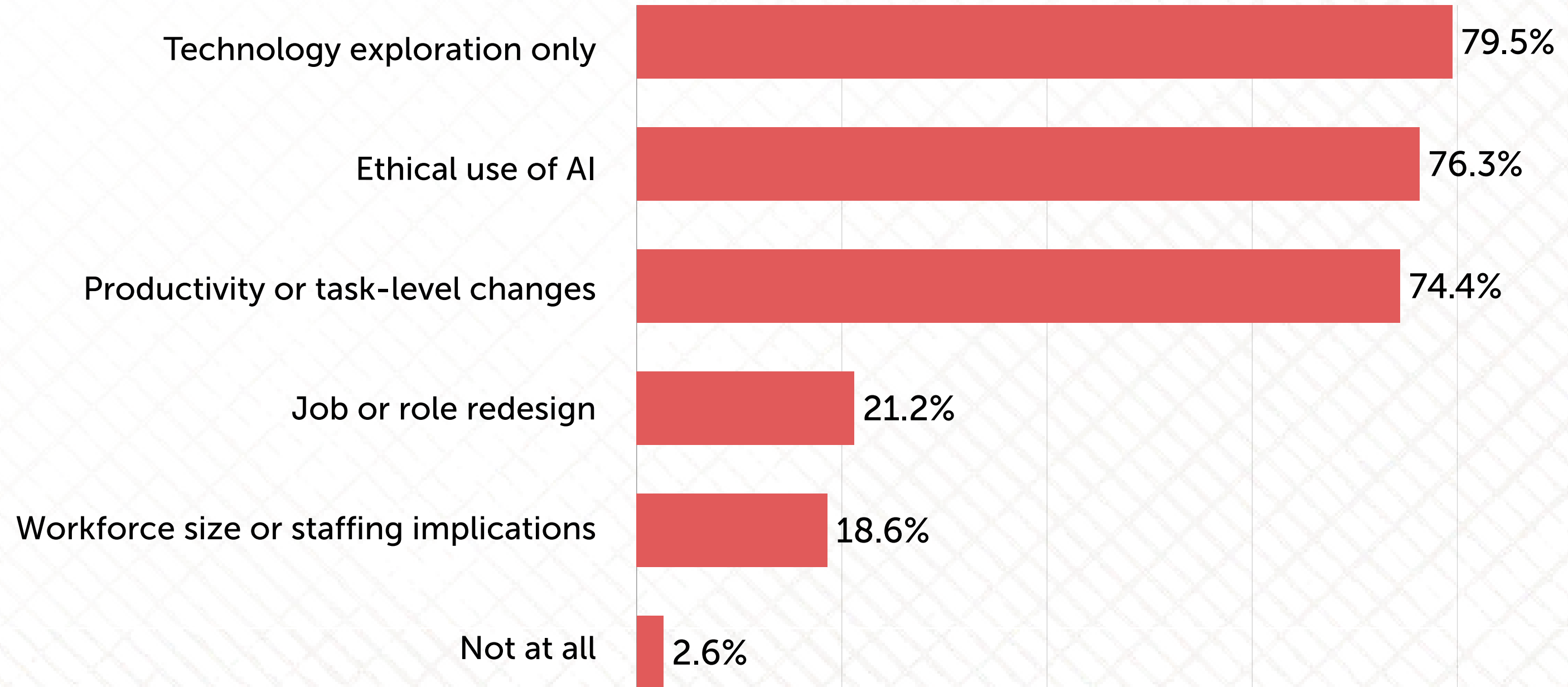
# Majority of employers assign interns projects that use AI tools and skills



Number of respondents = 159



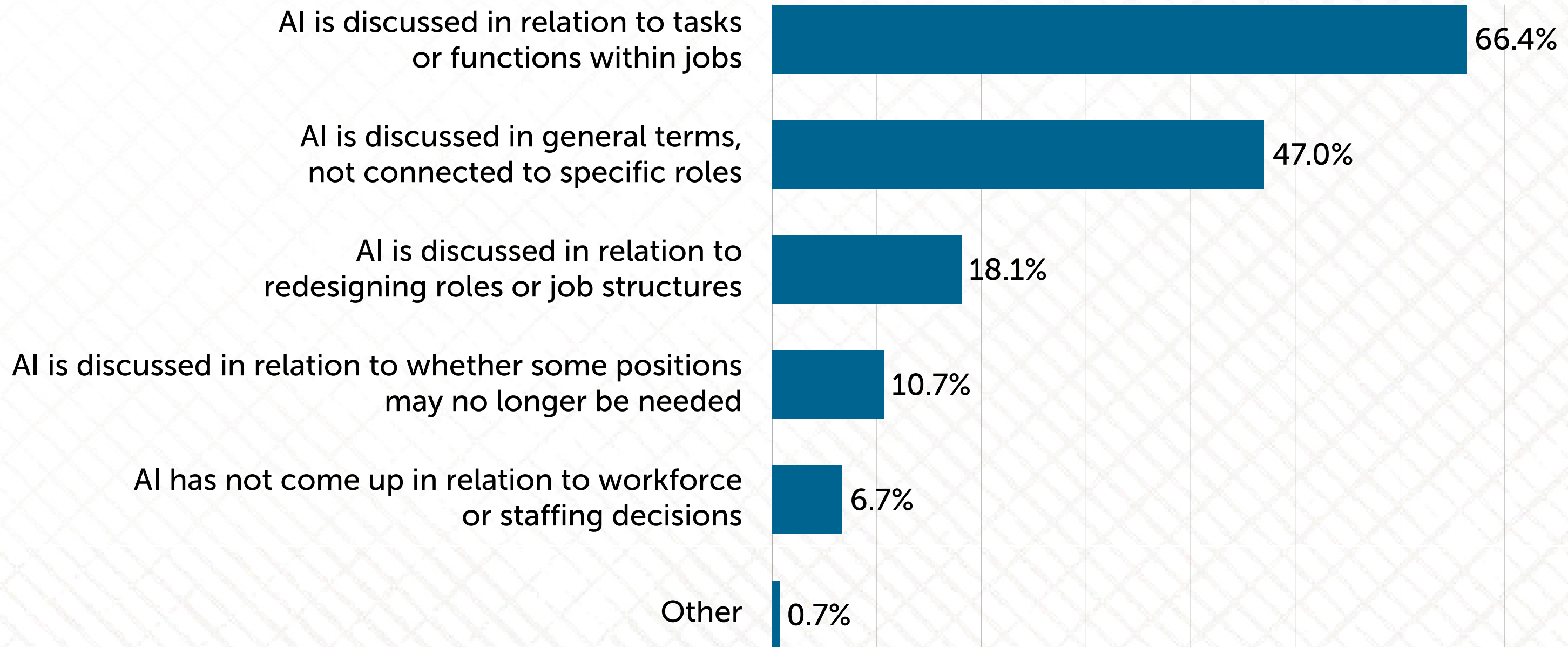
# Ways AI is being discussed across organizational aspects



Number of respondents = 156

# Ways employers are considering AI integration in regard to workforce planning

Two-thirds of employers are discussing AI for tasks but 11% are discussing it in terms of positions being eliminated



Number of respondents = 149



# Artificial Intelligence

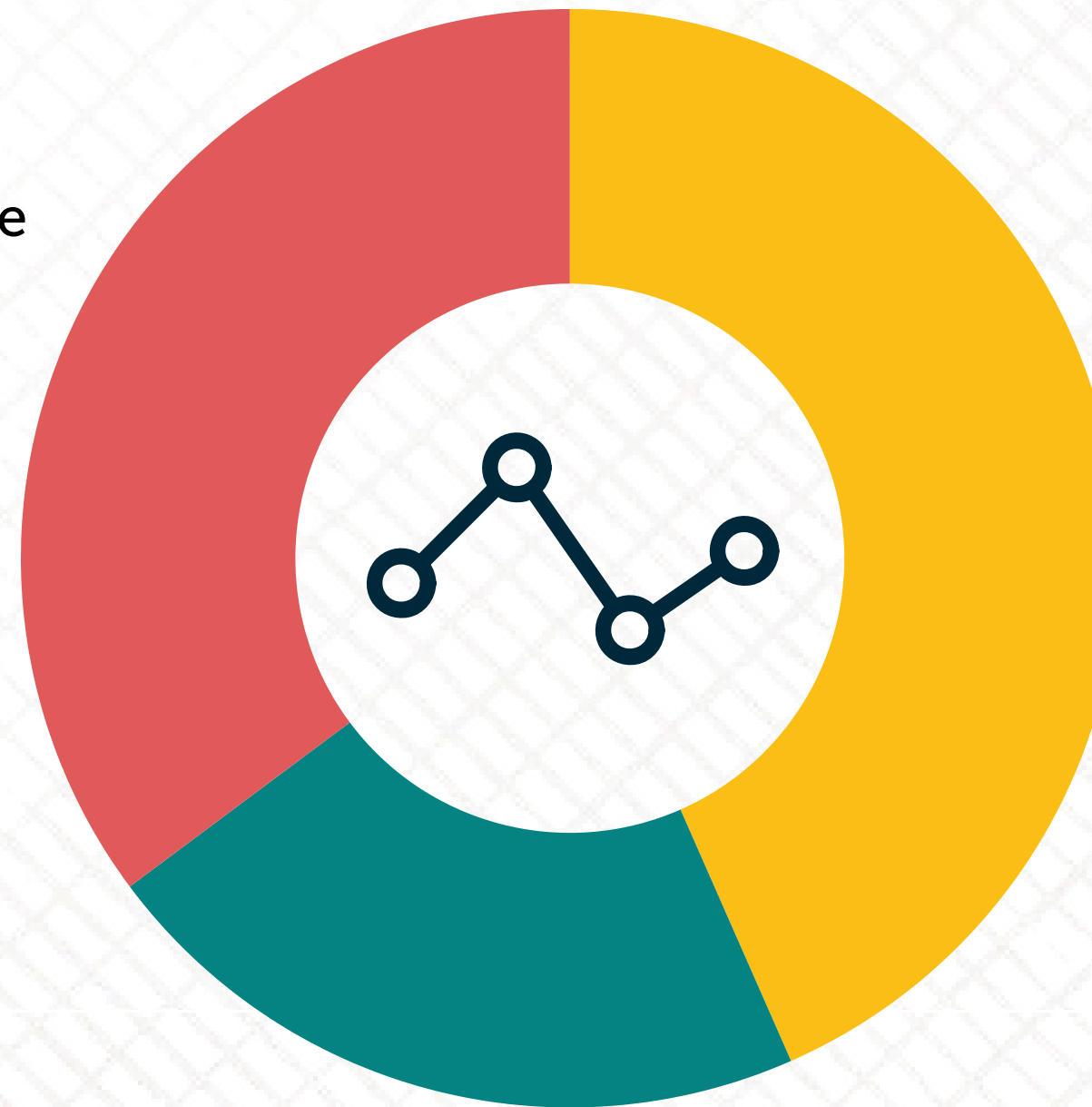
→ AI and Job Applications



# 44% of employers say they have detected AI-generated applications



Unsure  
35.2%



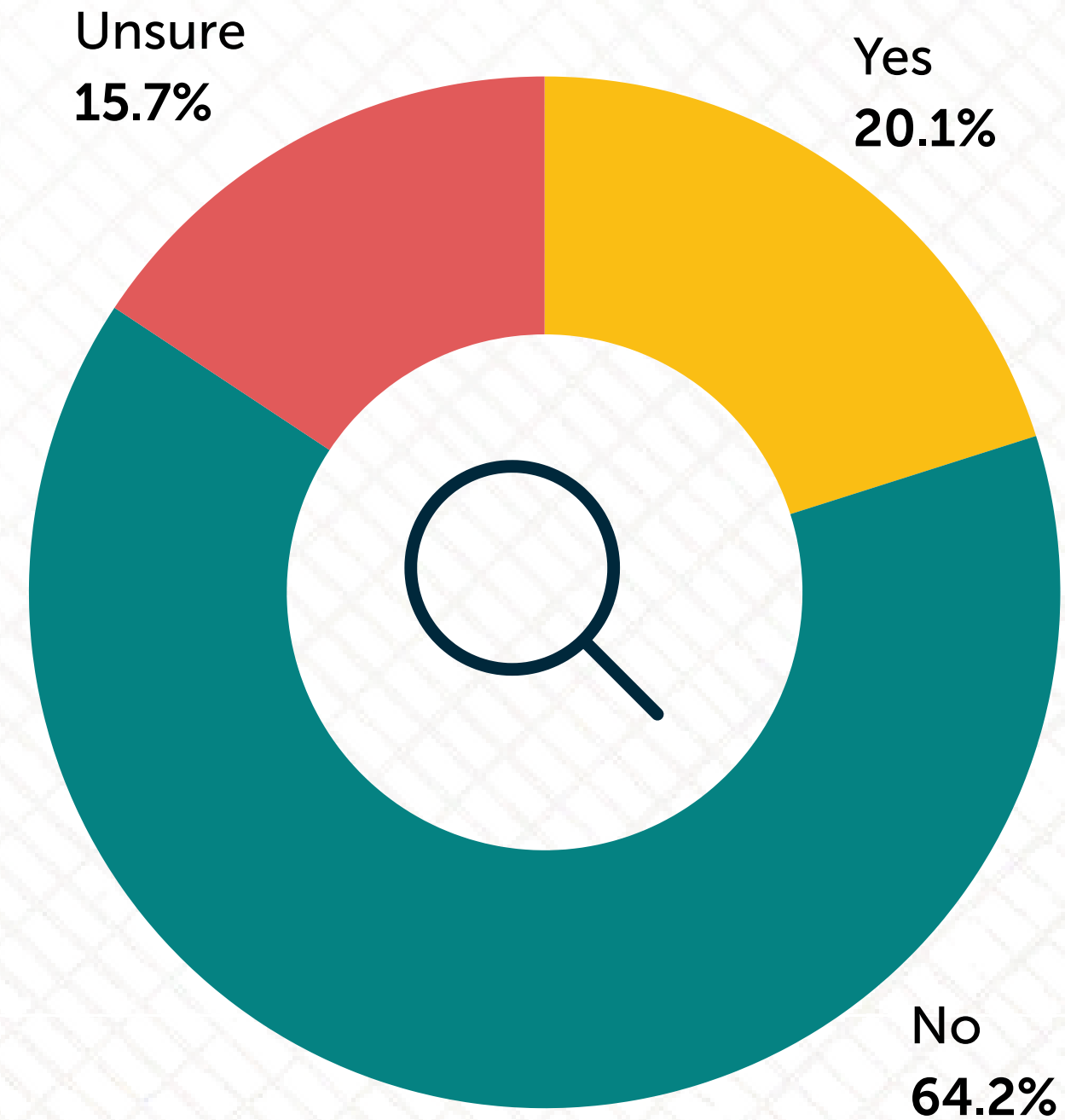
Yes  
43.4%

No  
21.4%

Number of respondents = 159

# Employer use of AI-related tools in recruiting

Just 20% of employers use tools to detect AI-related assistance in application, testing, and/or interview process



Number of respondents = 159

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# Skills and Attributes on Resumes



# What employers seek on a candidate's resume

\*Percentages do not equal 100, as respondents were able to choose more than one attribute.



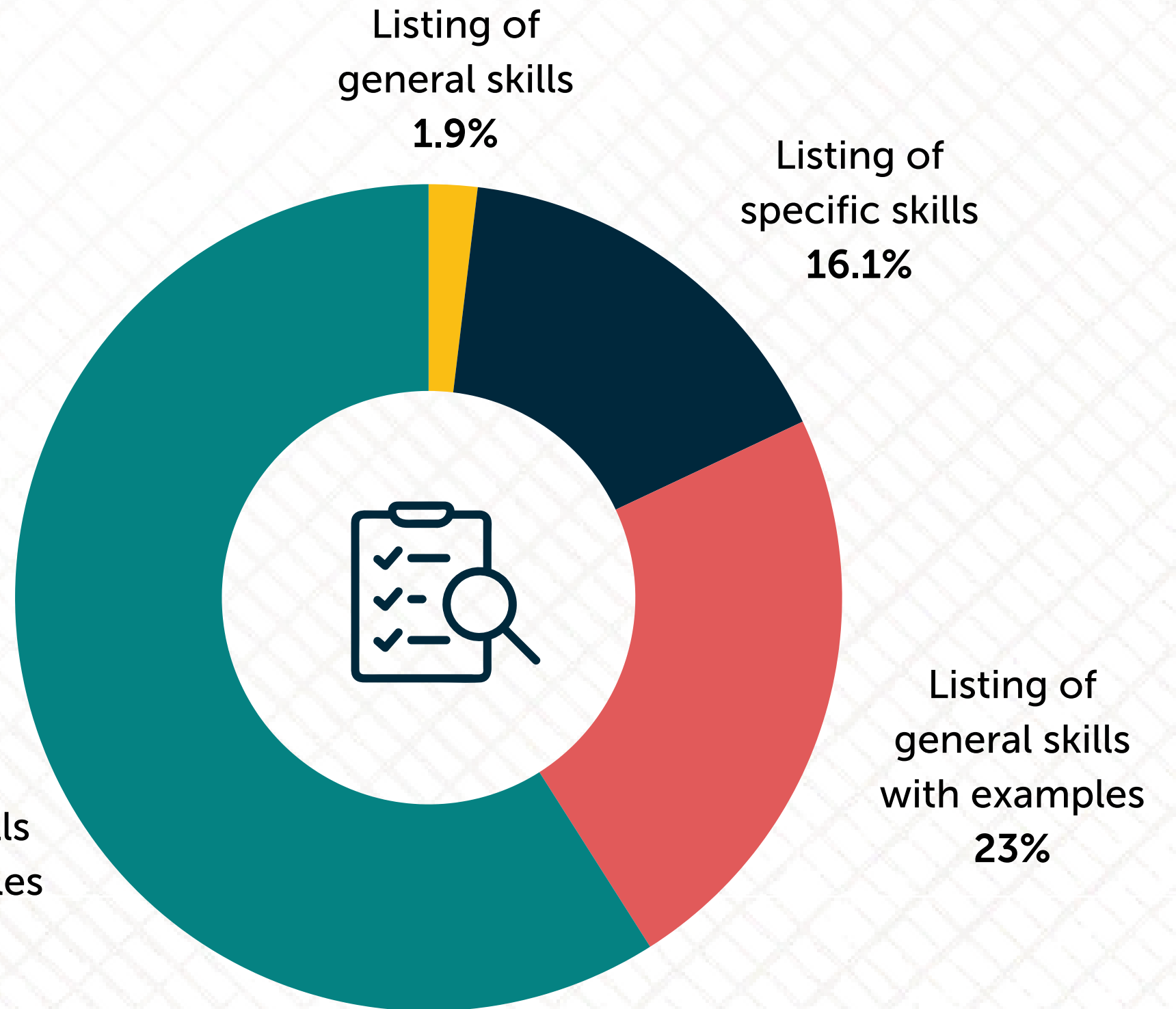
Number of respondents = 163

# College graduates should demonstrate skills, not just List them

Number of respondents = 161



Listing of specific skills with examples  
59%



—  
Skills  
→



# Importance of career readiness skills

Communication, teamwork, and critical thinking top the list of skills employers look for in college graduates

Number of respondents = 153

## Weighted average rating

5-point scale, where 1=Not at all important, 2=Not very important, 3=Somewhat important, 4=Very important, and 5=Extremely important



# Proficiency of recent graduates on career readiness skills

Employers rate college graduates' skill proficiency highest on teamwork and technology, but lowest on AI skills

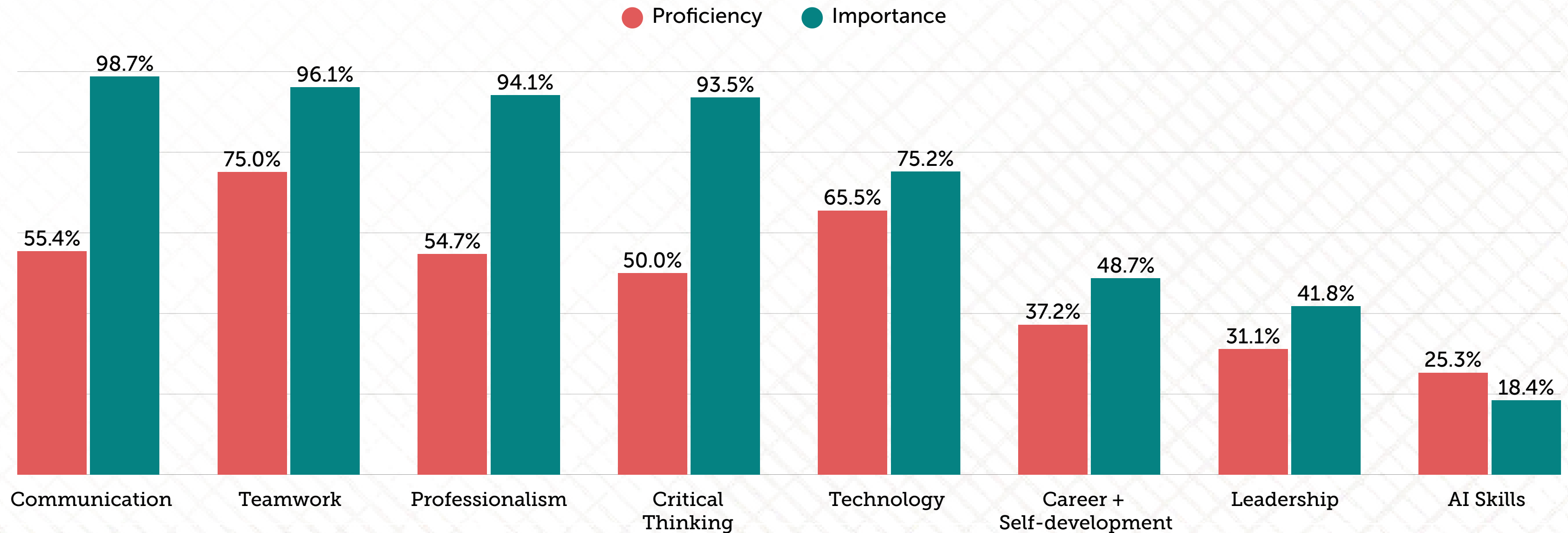
Number of respondents = 148

## Weighted average rating


5-point scale, where 1=Not at all proficient, 2=Not very proficient, 3=Somewhat proficient, 4=Very proficient, and 5=Extremely proficient



# Importance vs. Proficiency in career readiness competencies, by percent of respondents\*



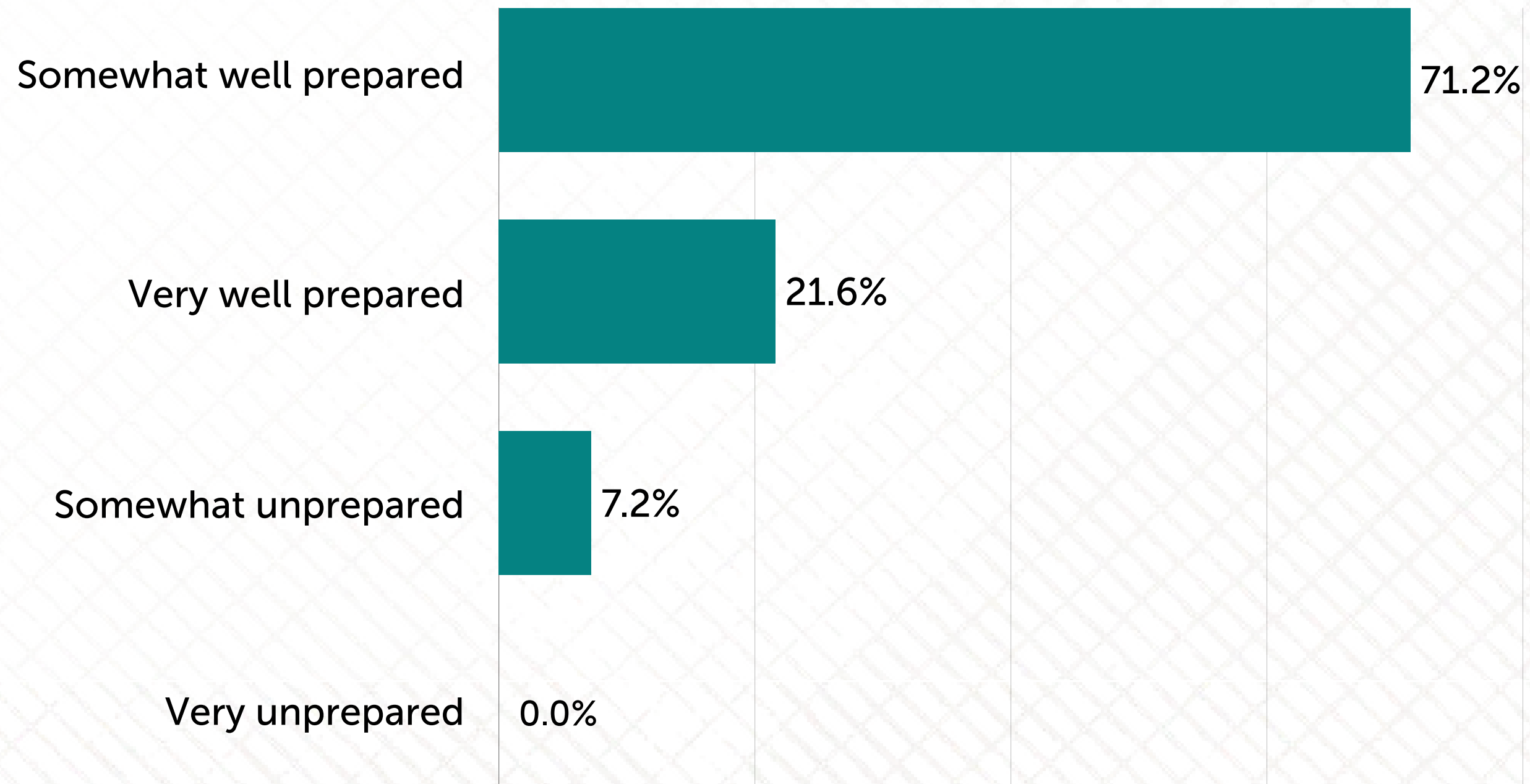
\*The percentages corresponding to "importance" represent, among all responding employers, the percentage that on a 5-point scale, indicated that the respective competency was either "very important" (4) or "extremely important" (5) for college graduates to have to enter their workforce. The percentages corresponding to "proficiency" represent, among all responding employers, the percentage that, on a 5-point scale, rated recent graduates either "very proficient" (4) or "extremely proficient" (5) in the respective competency.



# How Prepared College Graduates Are For Workforce

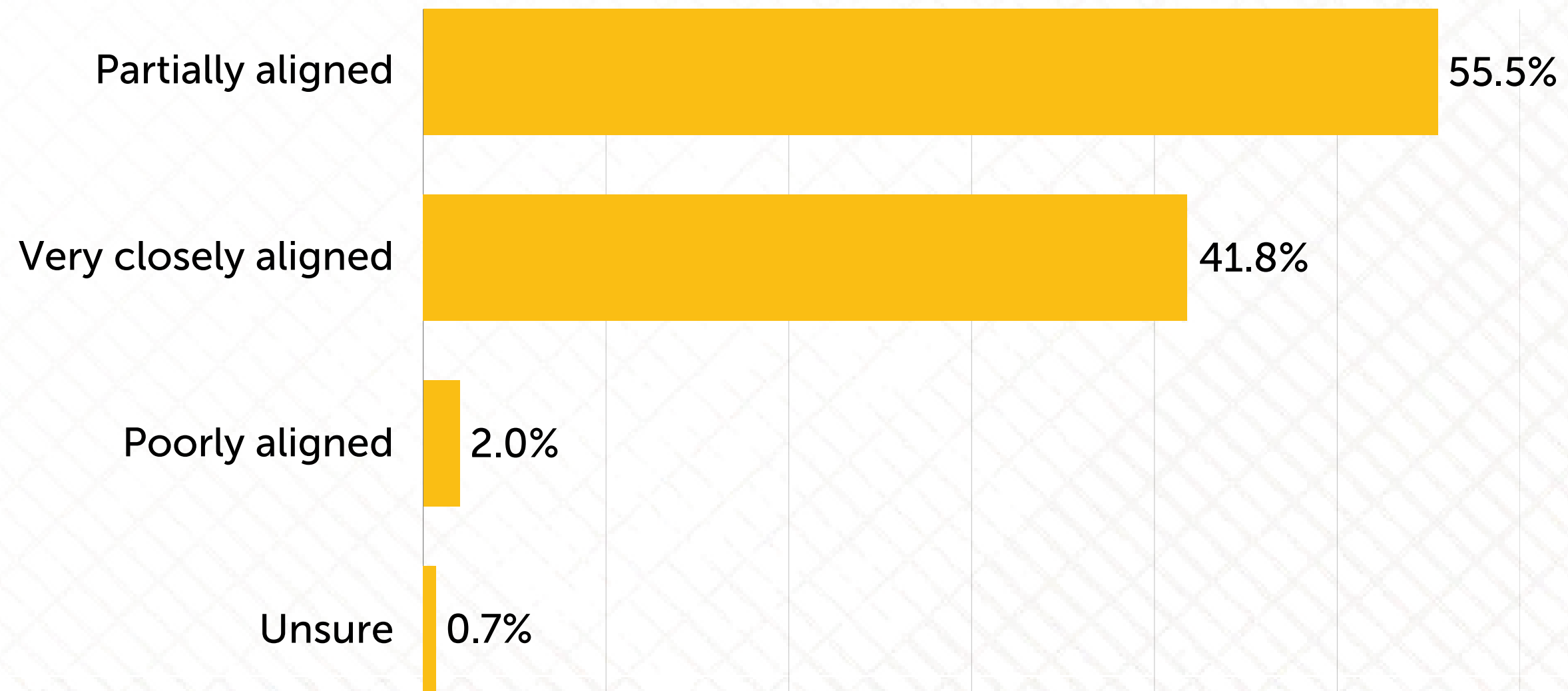


# Employers rate college graduates As somewhat prepared for workforce



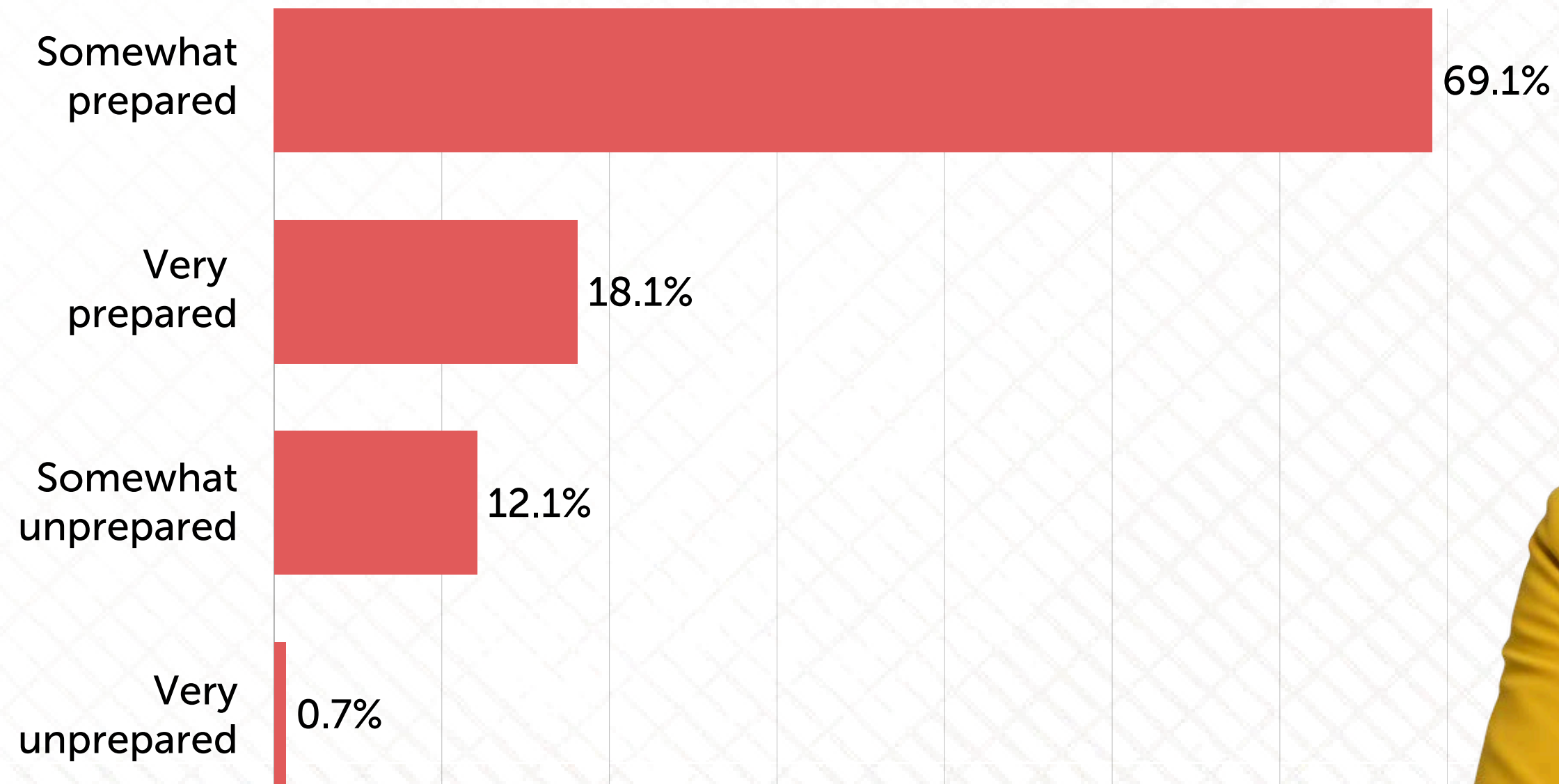
Number of respondents = 153

# Employers generally say graduates' skills match hiring needs



Number of respondents = 153

# Employer perceptions of college graduates preparedness to use AI in the workplace



Number of respondents = 153



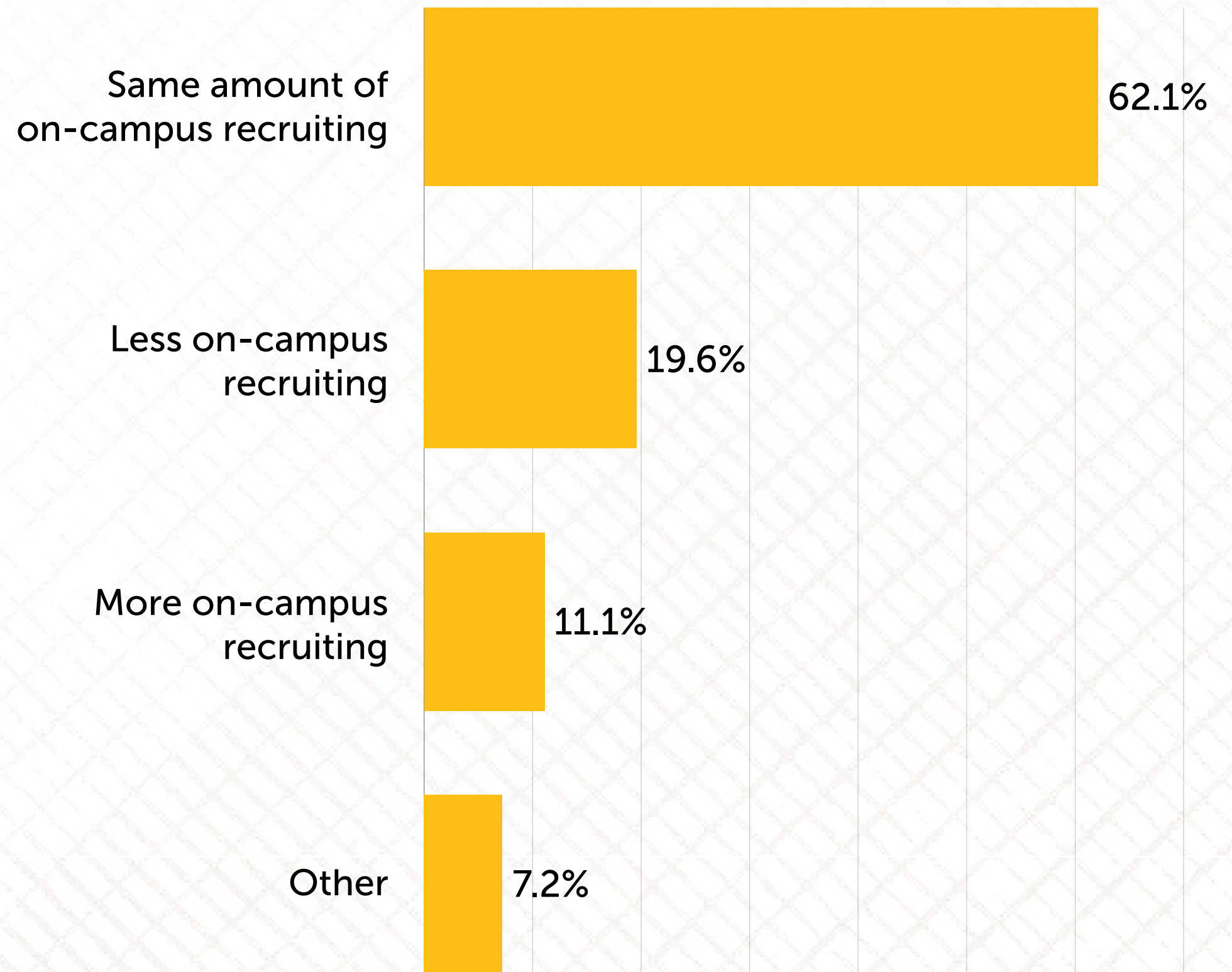
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# Spring + Fall Recruiting Activities

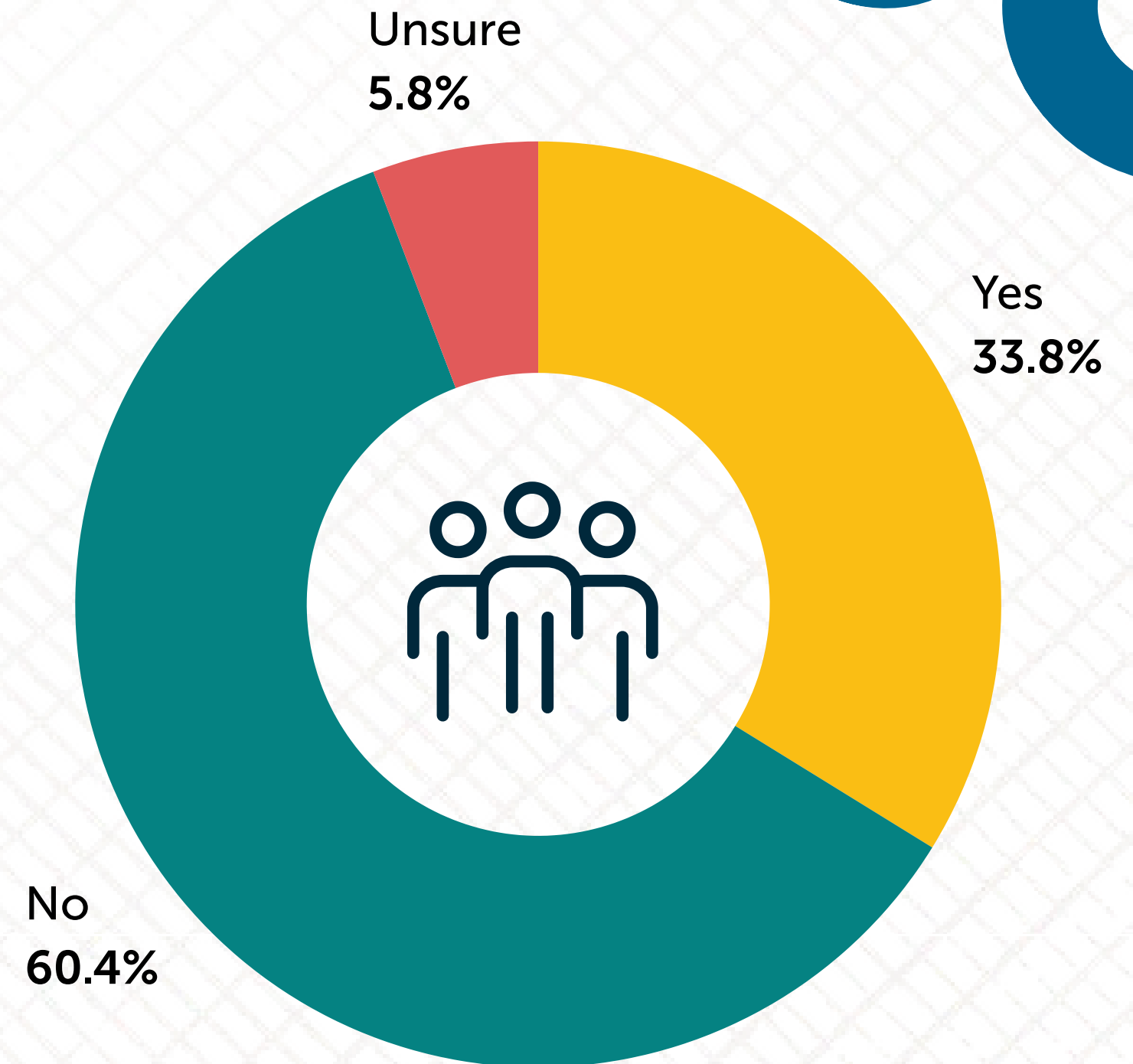


# On-campus recruiting plans for the spring 2026 Season

Number of respondents = 153



# Just one-third of employers have made their fall recruiting plans



Number of respondents = 154

# Fall 2026 recruiting plans



43.1%

Will hire **more**  
in the fall



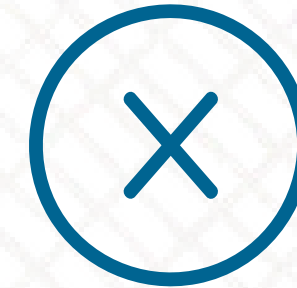
41.2%

Will hire the **same**  
number in the fall



13.7%

Will hire **fewer**  
in the fall



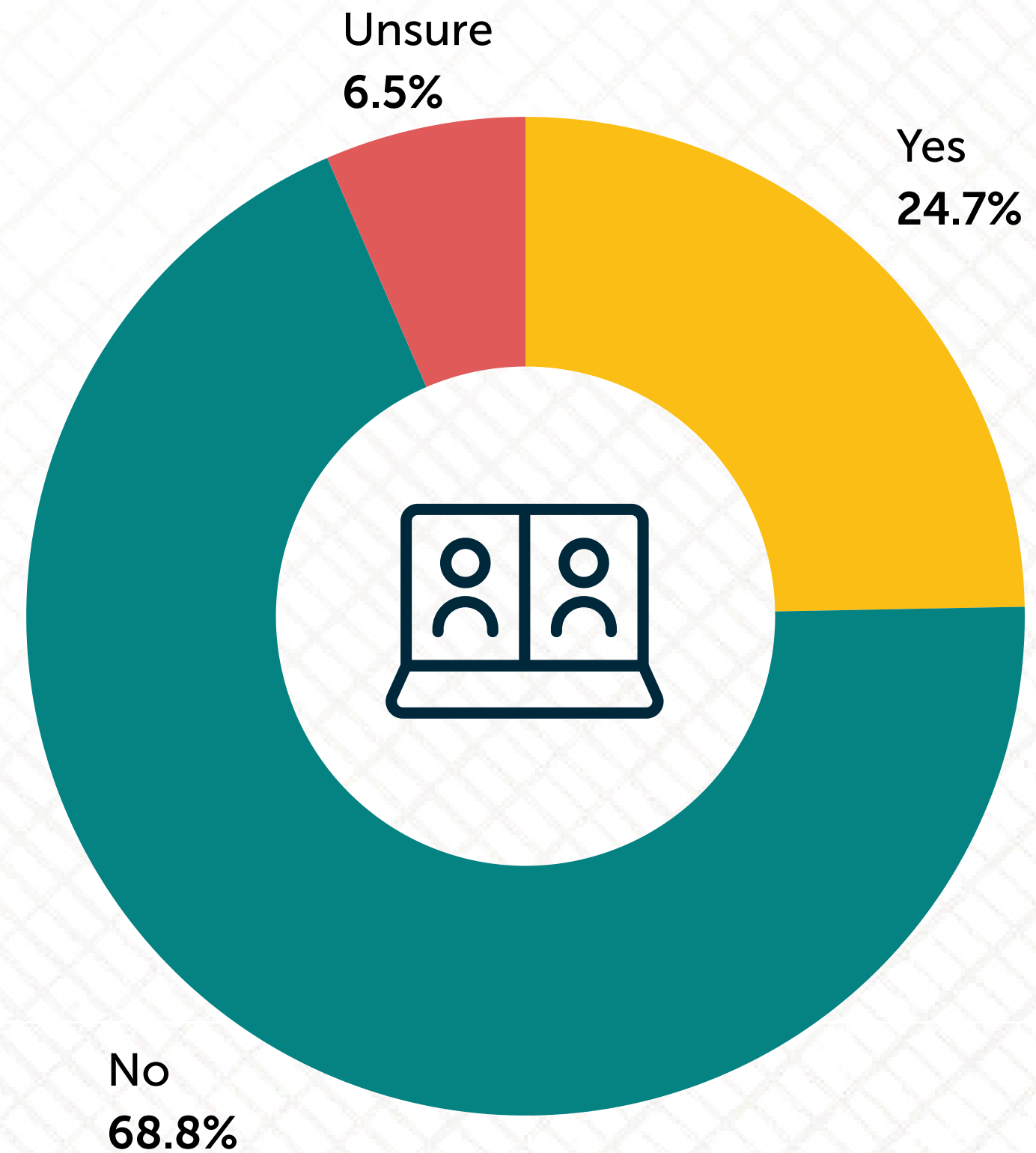
2.0%

Are **not hiring** during the  
2026-27 recruiting year

# One-quarter of employers have replaced on-campus recruiting with virtual recruiting activities



Number of respondents = 154



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# Participants





# Respondents by industry

	# of respondents	% of respondents
Oil + Gas Extraction	2	1.10%
Utilities	7	3.80%
Construction	10	5.40%
Food + Beverage Mfg.	13	7.00%
Chemical (Pharmaceutical) Mfg.	8	4.30%
Computer + Electronics Mfg.	18	9.70%
Motor Vehicle Mfg.	6	3.20%
Misc. Mfg.	25	13.50%
Wholesale Trade	6	3.20%
Retail Trade	5	2.70%
Transportation	3	1.60%
Messaging + Warehouse	1	0.50%
Information	7	3.80%
Finance, Insurance, + Real Estate	21	11.40%
Accounting Services	4	2.20%
Engineering Services	13	7.00%
Management Consulting	12	6.50%
Misc. Prof. Services	8	4.30%
Social Services	8	4.30%
Recreation + Hospitality	1	0.50%
Misc. Support Services	3	1.60%
Government	4	2.20%
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	

# Respondents by region

	# of respondents	% of respondents
New England	12	6.5%
Mid East	31	16.8%
Great Lakes	57	30.8%
Plains	16	8.6%
Southeast	28	15.1%
Southwest	24	13.0%
Rocky Mountains	6	3.2%
Far West	11	5.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	



# Respondents by organization size + type

Size	# of respondents	% of respondents
500 or less	27	14.6%
501 - 1,000	11	5.9%
1,001 - 2,500	26	14.1%
2,501 - 5,000	29	15.7%
5,001 - 10,000	24	13.0%
10,001 - 20,000	25	13.5%
More than 20,000	43	23.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	

Type	# of respondents	% of respondents
For profit - private	85	45.9%
For profit - publicly held	85	45.9%
Nonprofit	11	5.9%
Government agency	4	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>185</b>	



## About the job outlook 2026 **spring update** survey

The Job Outlook 2026 Spring Update survey was conducted from February 12 – March 17, 2026. Of the 185 total respondents, 142 were NACE employer members, representing 19.9% of eligible member respondents. The Job Outlook 2026 Spring Update survey was also distributed to nonmember companies; this group provided an additional 43 responses. The survey updates hiring projections for the Class of 2026; those projections were collected from NACE employer members from August 7 – September 22, 2025, and were reported in Job Outlook 2026, which was published in November 2025.

By region, 6.5% of respondents are from New England, 16.8% are from the Mideast, 30.8% are from the Great Lakes, 8.6% are from the Plains, 15.1% are from the Southeast, 13.0% are from the Southwest, 3.2% are from the Rocky Mountains, and 5.9% are from the Far West. (For additional information about the respondents, see the slides.)

Data are calculated based on the number of respondents to each specific question. Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding.





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