

Shifting the Lens: A Survey for Canadian Screen Performers

Canada Media Fund

August 2026



Foreword

At a time when Canadian media is under growing pressure to strengthen cultural connections, reflect the country's diversity, and demonstrate its public value, performers play a crucial role. They help shape how stories are brought to life and how audiences perceive themselves, their communities, and their realities on screen.

In 2025, the Canada Media Fund (CMF), in collaboration with the Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television, and Radio Artists (ACTRA) and l'Union des artistes (UDA), launched a research project to better understand the realities of on-screen performers in Canada. To support the independence of the research, the CMF commissioned the survey and report from Abacus Data, with guidance from an advisory committee of performers and experts from English- and French-language markets across Canada.

This study examines a wide range of issues affecting performer labour conditions, including employment and career pathways, on-set culture and safety, perceptions of on-screen representation, industry visibility, and the emerging implications of generative artificial intelligence (AI) in media creation. Together, these topics provide a more complete picture of this broad segment of the screen industry and offer insights to build a stronger pool of talent that can benefit the entire industry.

The project also addresses an important gap in Canadian screen-based data collection as the experiences and representation of on-screen performers remain insufficiently documented. It also supports the CMF's commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, and more data-informed decision-making.

However, these results must be interpreted in a greater context. While performers were surveyed in late 2025, many of the questions refer to their experiences in 2024, an atypical year for the screen sector due to the 2023 SAG-AFTRA and Writers Guild of America strikes that disrupted North America and likely shaped work patterns and perceptions in 2024. Views on AI may also have evolved since then.

This report aims to contribute meaningful data to inform broader conversations around performers' position in Canada's screen sector and the conditions needed for Canadian talent to thrive on screen, now and in the years ahead.

Methodology

- **Sample size:** 995 Canadian on-screen performers. The sample breakdown is as follows (note: Some participants were members of multiple unions and/or guilds).
 - ACTRA, $n=886$
 - UDA, $n=249$
 - CAEA, $n=232$
 - Non-unionized/Other, $n=84$
- Survey language: Based on the language in which performers completed the survey, 86% ($n=860$) responded in English (EN) and 14% ($n=135$) in French (FR).
- **Survey field dates:** November to December 21, 2025
- Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.
- Note: This was an opt-in survey, and the sample may not fully reflect the sector's demographics, especially for Indigenous and some Equity-Deserving Communities*.



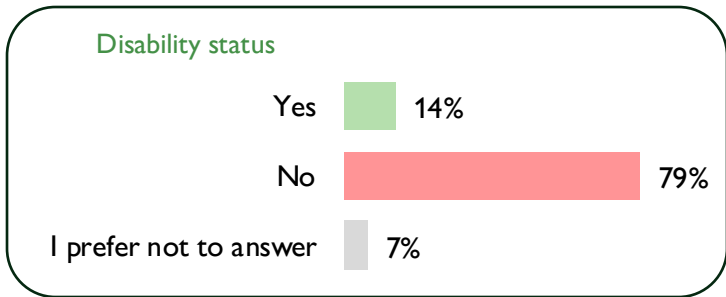
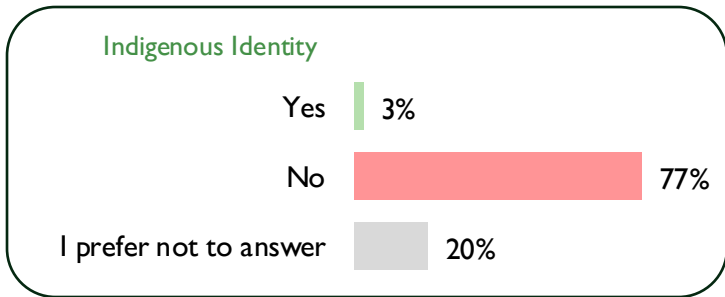
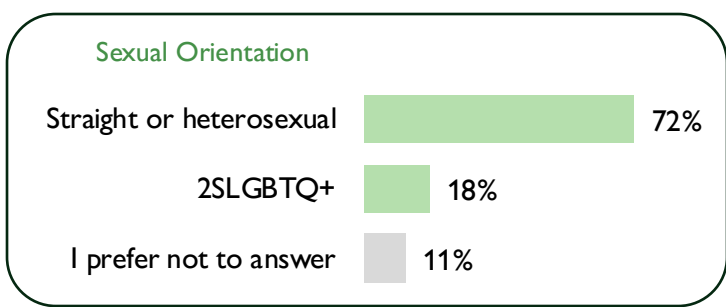
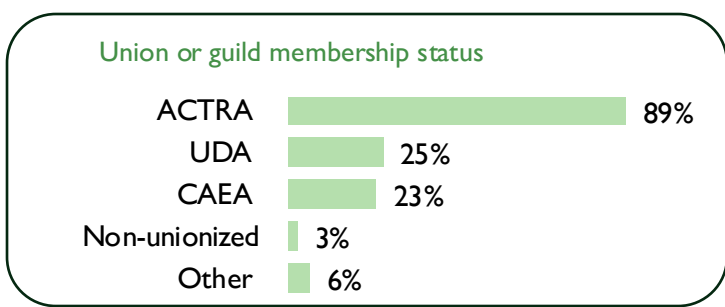
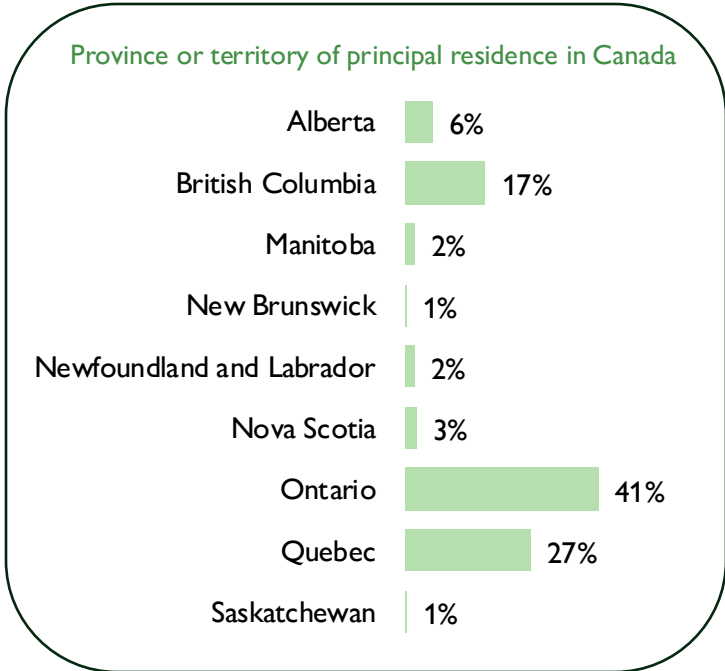
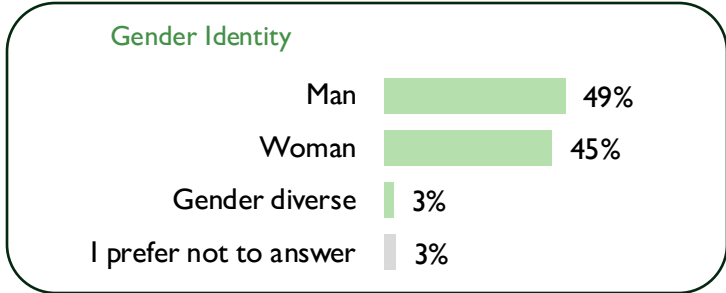
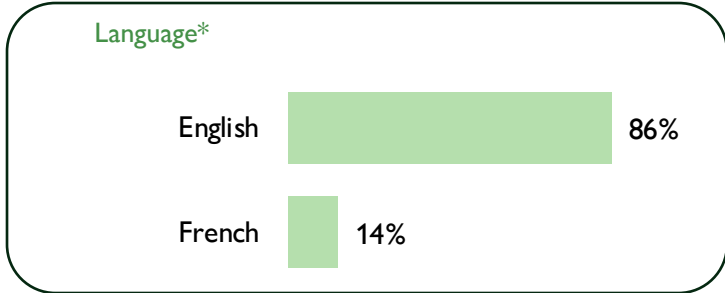
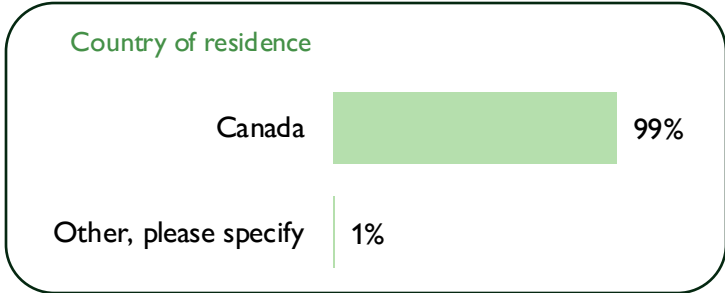
* According to the CMF, Equity-Deserving Communities refers to the following communities: Black and Racialized Communities; 2SLGBTQ+ Communities; Persons with disabilities/Disabled persons; women; and Official Language Minority Communities.

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Respondent Demographics

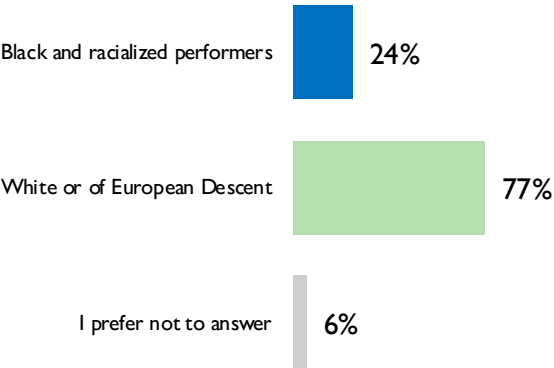
RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS



* Language defined here and throughout the report as the language participants chose to complete the survey in.

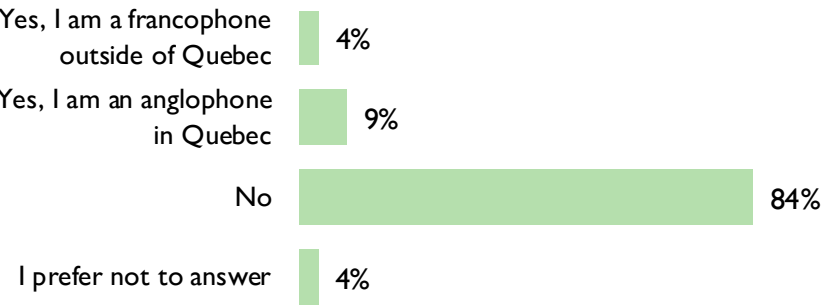
RESPONDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

Racial and ethnocultural identity

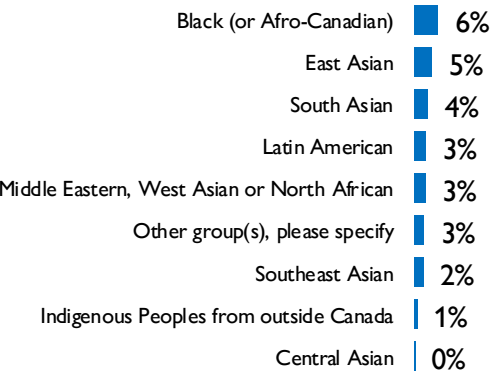


This question was in a “select all that apply” format and therefore totals may add up to more than 100.

I have belonged to an official language minority in Canada for at least the past three years:



Black and racialized communities - 24%



This question was in a “select all that apply” format.

Executive Summary

Executive Summary

Economic Reality & Career Sustainability

- Canadian screen performers face a challenging economic reality. Most earn less than \$20,000 annually from on-screen work, and many rely on income from outside the screen industry to sustain their careers. While one-third earn most of their income from performing, stable and predictable earnings remain out of reach for many.
- Despite these financial realities, performers remain highly engaged. Nearly nine in ten attended auditions in 2024, yet the path from audition to paid work remains highly competitive. On average, performers reported a 10:1 audition-to-booking ratio, with outcomes varying considerably by region and language market.
- The workforce is also highly experienced. Nearly seven in ten performers have worked in the industry for more than a decade, yet long careers do not necessarily translate into substantially higher earnings.
- Caregiving responsibilities further affect career sustainability. Nearly one-third of performers report caregiving responsibilities that influence their professional availability, often resulting in income instability, increased stress, and reduced participation in auditions, networking opportunities, or industry events.

On-Set Culture & Workplace Safety

- Most performers report that production schedules and travel affect their work-life balance at least occasionally, and one-third say these impacts occur often or always.
- While relatively few performers have requested formal accommodations on set, those who do generally report positive outcomes. However, discomfort requesting accommodations remains a concern, particularly among women and non-union performers.
- Four in ten performers report experiencing harassment, discrimination, or microaggressions on a professional set or during an audition since 2021. Experiences related to age, gender, and race or ethnicity are most common. Black and racialized performers are significantly more likely than White performers to report race- or ethnicity-based mistreatment.
- Many performers who witness or experience mistreatment do not formally report it, and confidence that concerns will be addressed by employers fairly remains low.

Executive Summary

Career Experience, Representation & Identity

- Identity continues to shape performers' experiences and opportunities. Many describe its impact as mixed, but among those who perceive a clear effect, negative impacts are reported more often than positive ones.
- Experiences of stereotyping and typecasting are particularly pronounced among Black and racialized performers, who are far more likely to link them to race or ethnicity.
- Many performers also report feeling pressure to hide, downplay, or alter aspects of their identity in order to secure or maintain work. Age, race or ethnicity, and sexual orientation are the most commonly cited factors.
- Most performers believe current screen content reflects Canada's diversity at least somewhat well, but perceptions differ sharply across communities. Black and racialized performers and Indigenous performers are notably less likely to feel adequately represented.

Industry Visibility & the “Star System”

- Perceptions of performer visibility vary significantly across Canada. In Quebec, many performers believe a recognizable star system exists and benefits both performers and productions. Outside Quebec, performers are more likely to describe visibility as fragmented or insufficient, limiting career growth and public recognition.
- Across regions, performers expressed a desire for stronger promotion of Canadian talent. Increased visibility platforms, dedicated space for Canadian content, stronger marketing support, and targeted opportunities for emerging and underrepresented performers were identified as key priorities.

Executive Summary

Industry Resources & Career Development

- Training and professional development remain important components of career growth, but access is uneven.
- Formal training programs are the most common pathway for professional development, though informal training and mentorship also play important roles. At the same time, nearly one-third of performers report participating in no training or mentorship activities since 2021.
- Cost is the most significant barrier to participation, followed by scheduling conflicts and a lack of suitable programs. These barriers are especially pronounced among performers with disabilities, 2SLGBTQ+ performers, and Black and racialized performers.

Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Rights & Emerging Industry Trends

- Although most performers report limited direct exposure to AI-related practices in their work, concern about AI is widespread.
- Performers are most concerned about consent, transparency, unauthorized use of their likeness, inadequate regulation, and the potential loss of work opportunities. Many also report uncertainty about how AI may affect performers in the future.
- There is strong support for rights-based protections, including legislation that grants performers ownership and control over their digital likeness and laws requiring consent and transparency in AI use.

What Performers Need Most

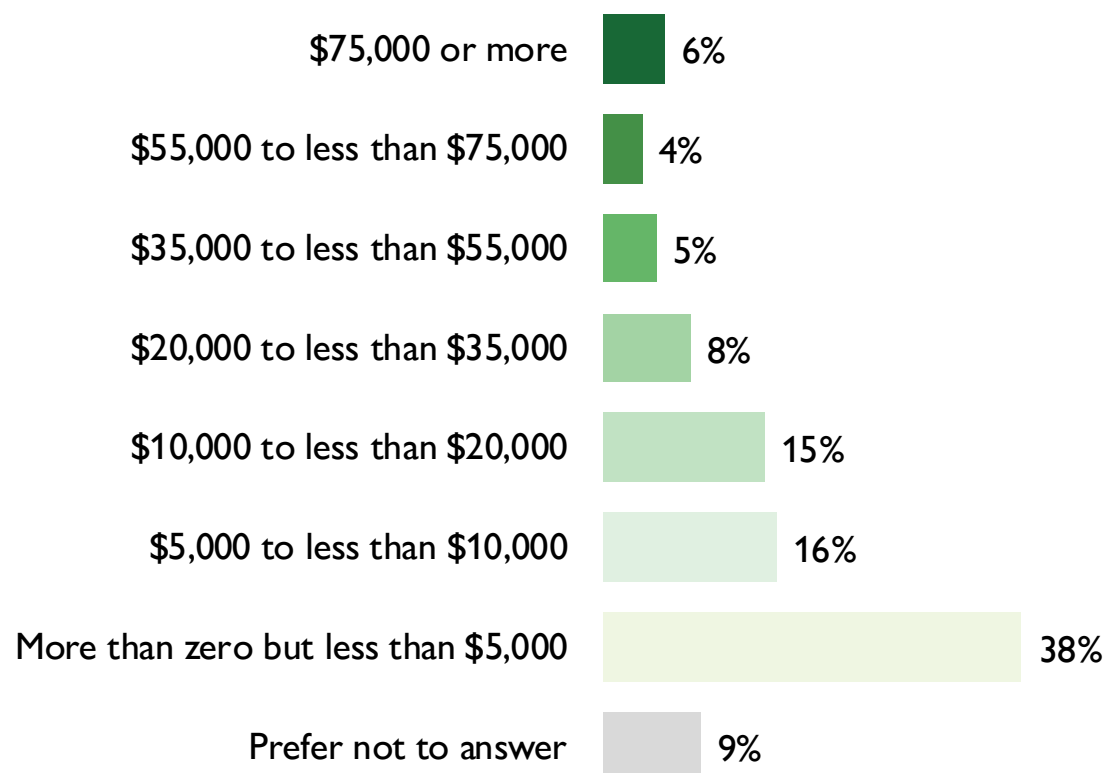
- Performers consistently identify greater stability as the industry's most pressing need. More consistent access to roles, higher pay, and ongoing residual payments emerge as the strongest priorities for supporting long-term careers. When asked what single change would most improve the industry, performers most often pointed to strengthening opportunities for Canadian performers through increased Canadian production and greater prioritization of Canadian talent in casting.

Section 1 – Economic Reality & Career Sustainability



What was your total income from on-screen performing work in 2024, before taxes?

Most (69%) performers earn under \$20,000 annually from on-screen work, with over one-third (38%) earning less than \$5,000.



Nearly 6 in 10 performers in the Prairies (58%) earn less than \$5,000 annually from on-screen work, compared with 31% in Québec. Francophone performers are also less likely than anglophone performers to report earnings below \$5,000 (23% vs. 41%).

base n = 995



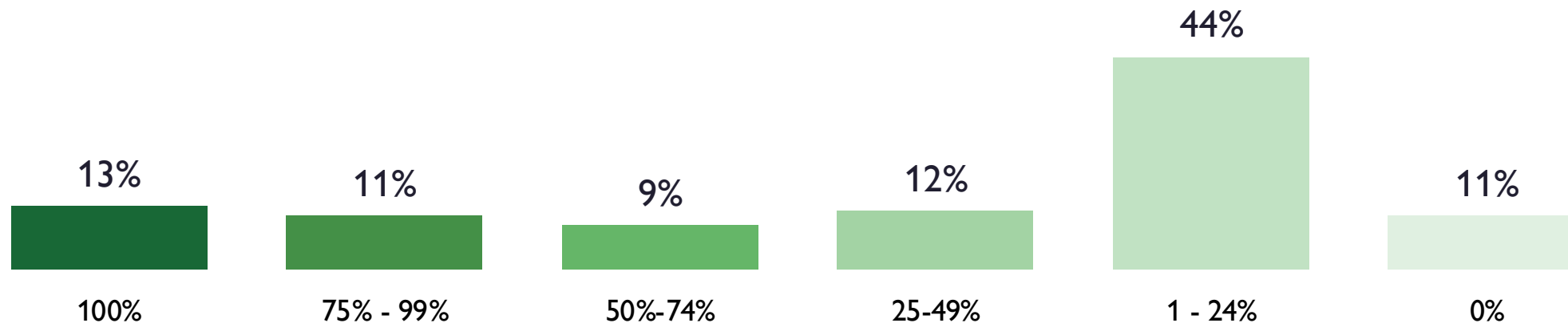


In 2024, approximately what proportion of your total annual income came directly from your performing roles?

1 in 3 (33%) screen performers say they earn more than 50% of their total annual income directly from performing roles.

33% Over 50%

Many performers earning under \$35,000 still depend heavily on performing income; for example, 42% of those earning \$20,000-\$35,000 and 24% of those earning \$10,000-\$20,000 say it accounts for 75–100% of their total income..



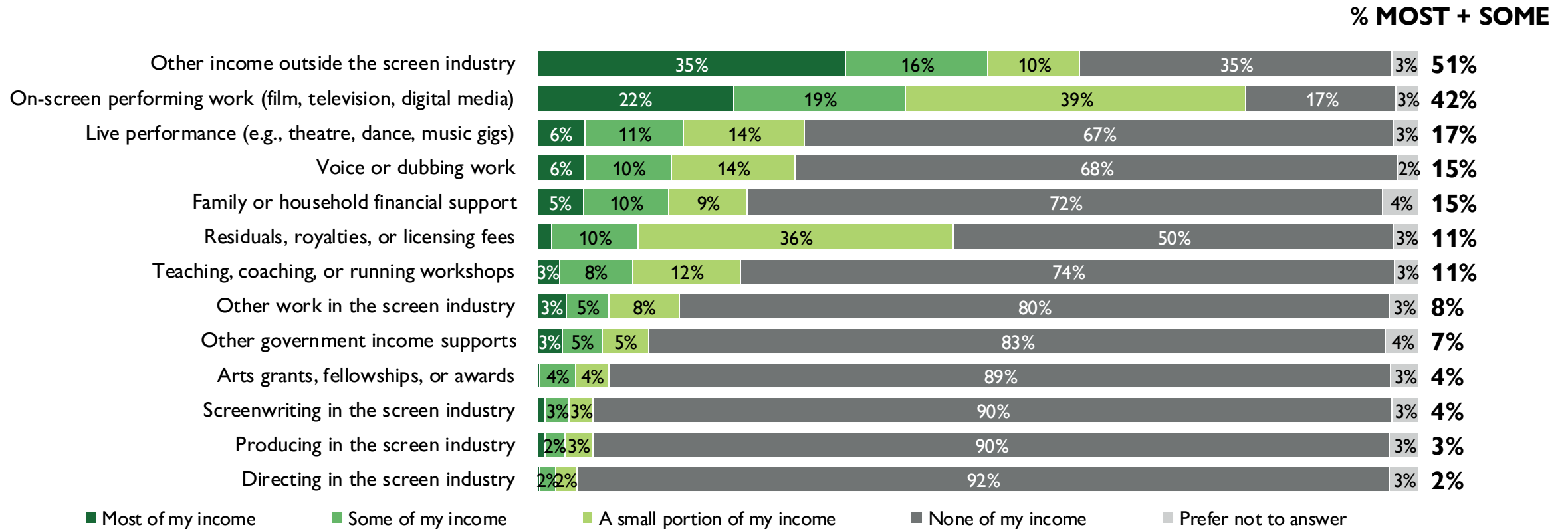
base n = 995





Thinking about your total income in 2024 (before tax), how much of your income came from each of the following sources?

About half of performers (51%) say they earn most or some of their income from work outside the screen industry, while 42% report earning most or some of their income from on-screen performing work.

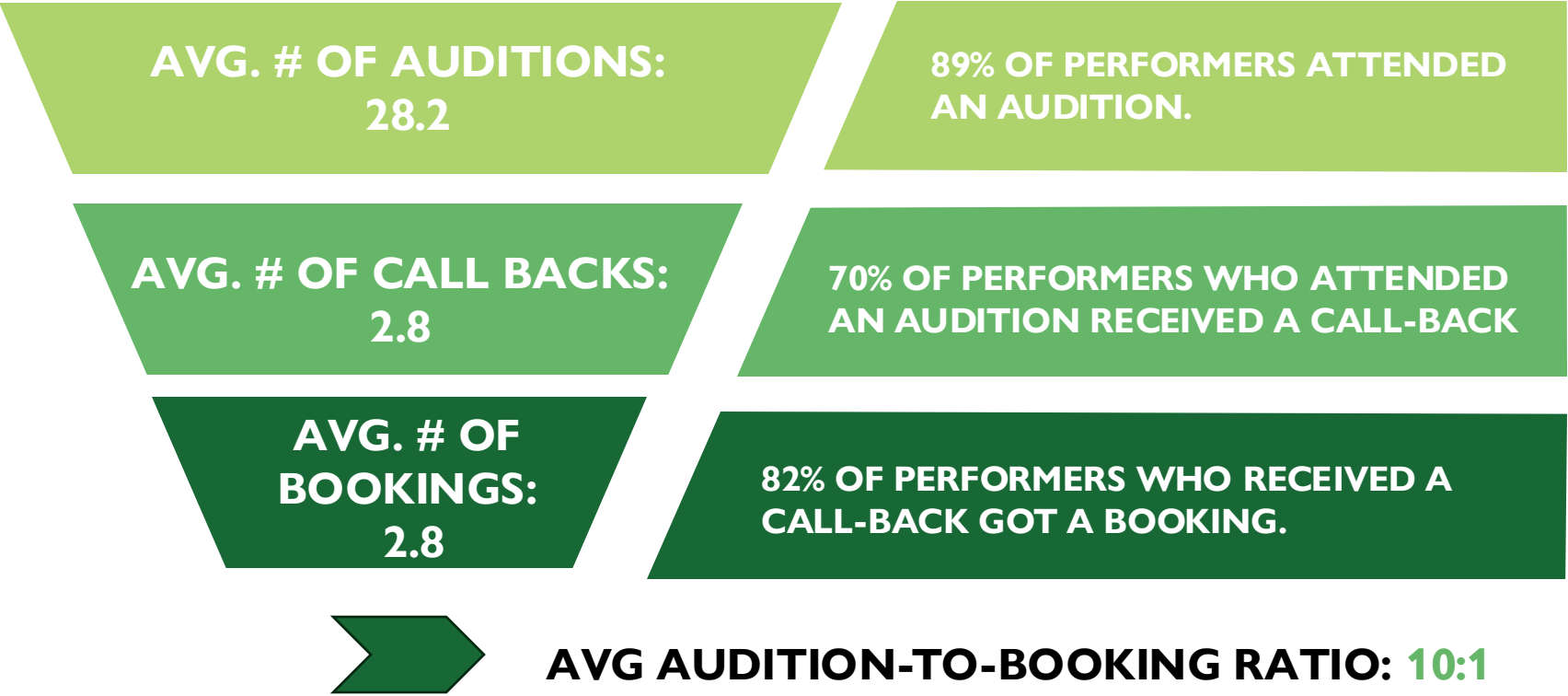


base n = 995 | Some chart labels ≤ 2% removed to improve chart legibility.



In 2024, how many auditions did you attend, and how many call-backs and bookings did you get?

On average, performers reported a 10:1 audition-to-booking ratio in 2024, though these rates varied considerably across regions and language markets.



AUDITION-TO-BOOKING RATIO	
British Columbia	14:1
AB/SK/MB	6:1
Ontario	15:1
Quebec	5:1
ATL	4:1
English	11:1
French	4:1
French in QC	4:1
French outside Quebec	9:1

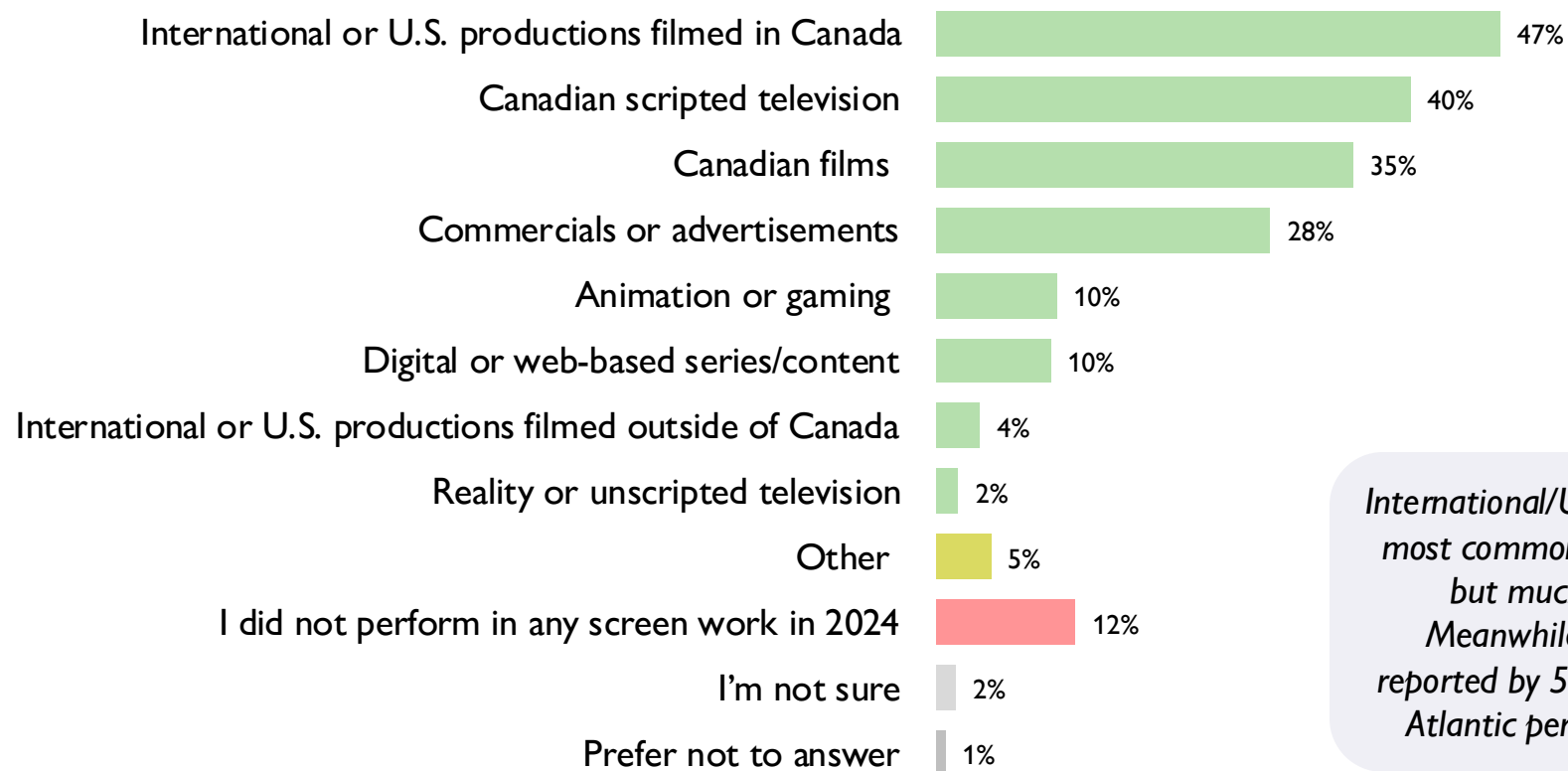
base n = 995





Thinking about your screen work in 2024, to the best of your knowledge, which types of content did you perform in? Select all that apply

Performers most frequently worked in international/U.S. productions filmed in Canada (47%), Canadian scripted TV (40%), Canadian films (35%) and commercials or advertisements (28%).



International/U.S. productions filmed in Canada were most common in BC (66%) and the Prairies (63%), but much less common in Québec (28%). Meanwhile, Canadian scripted television was reported by 56% of Québec performers and 66% of Atlantic performers, compared with 24% in BC.

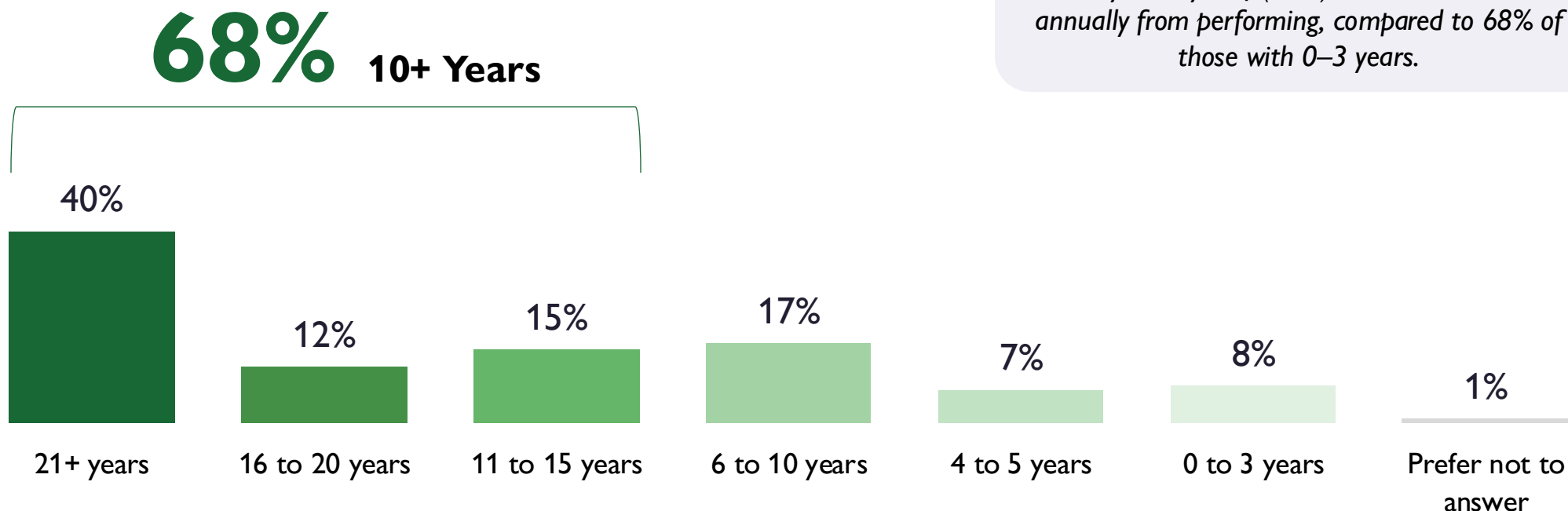
base n = 995





Approximately how many years have you been actively working as an on-screen performer? Please select one.

A highly experienced workforce: 7 in 10 (68%) performers have more than 10 years experience as an on-screen performer.



Income growth remains limited with experience: even among performers with 21+ years in the industry, nearly half (47%) earn under \$10,000 annually from performing, compared to 68% of those with 0–3 years.

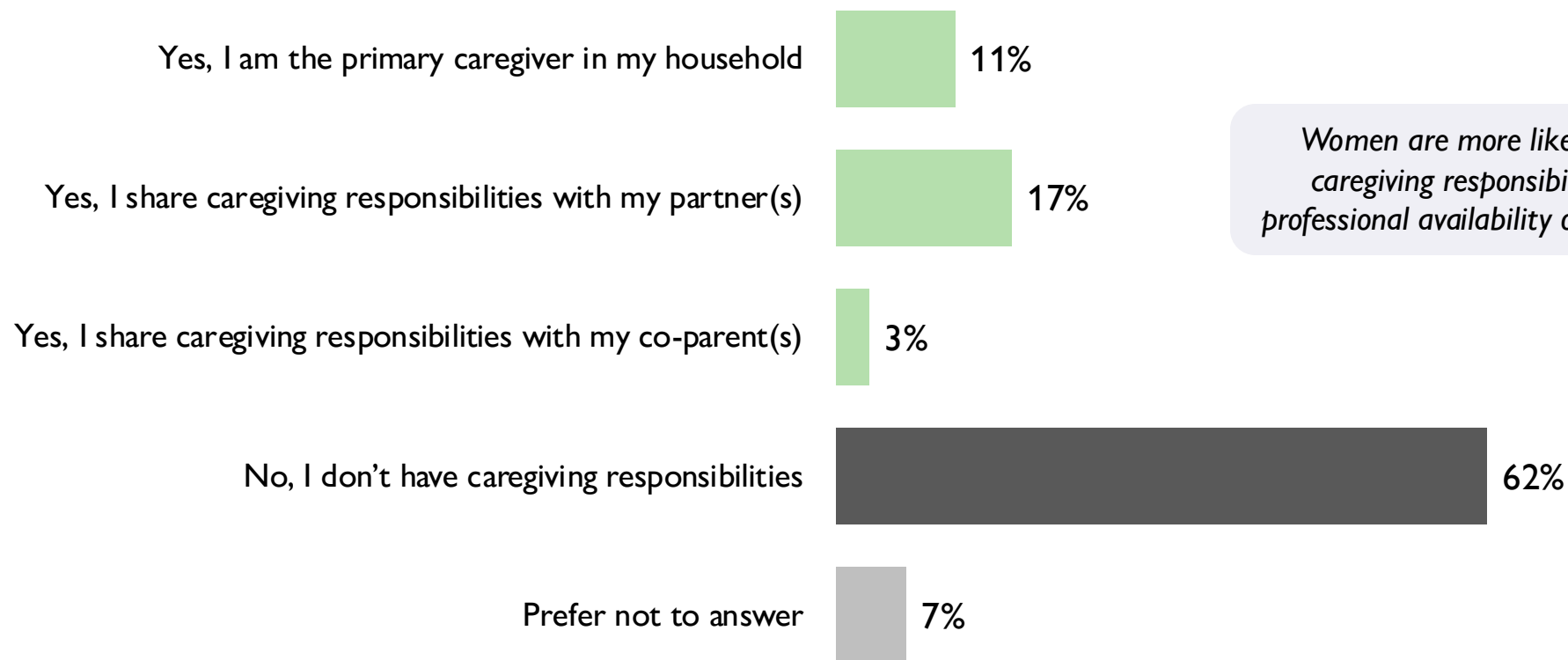
base n = 995





Do you have caregiving responsibilities (e.g., parenting, elder care) that impact your professional availability or choices?

Most performers (62%) report that caregiving responsibilities do not affect their professional availability, but nearly 1 in 3 (31%) are either primary caregivers or sharing caregiving responsibilities with others.



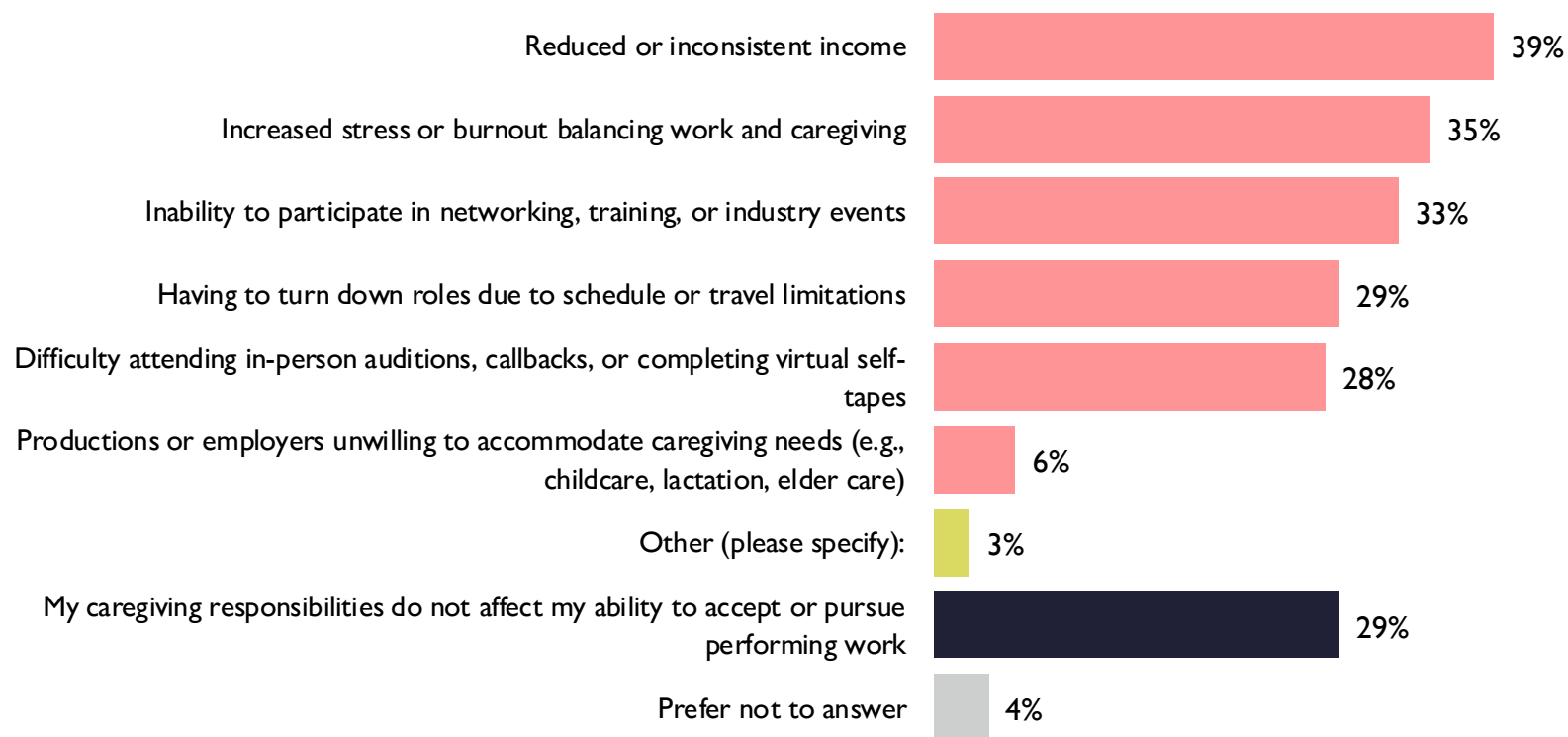
Women are more likely than men to report caregiving responsibilities that affect their professional availability or choices (38% vs. 27%).

base n = 995



Have your caregiving or personal responsibilities affected your work as a performer in any of the following ways? Select all that apply.

Caregiving affects performers' careers, most commonly through income instability, stress or burnout, and reduced participation in industry opportunities.



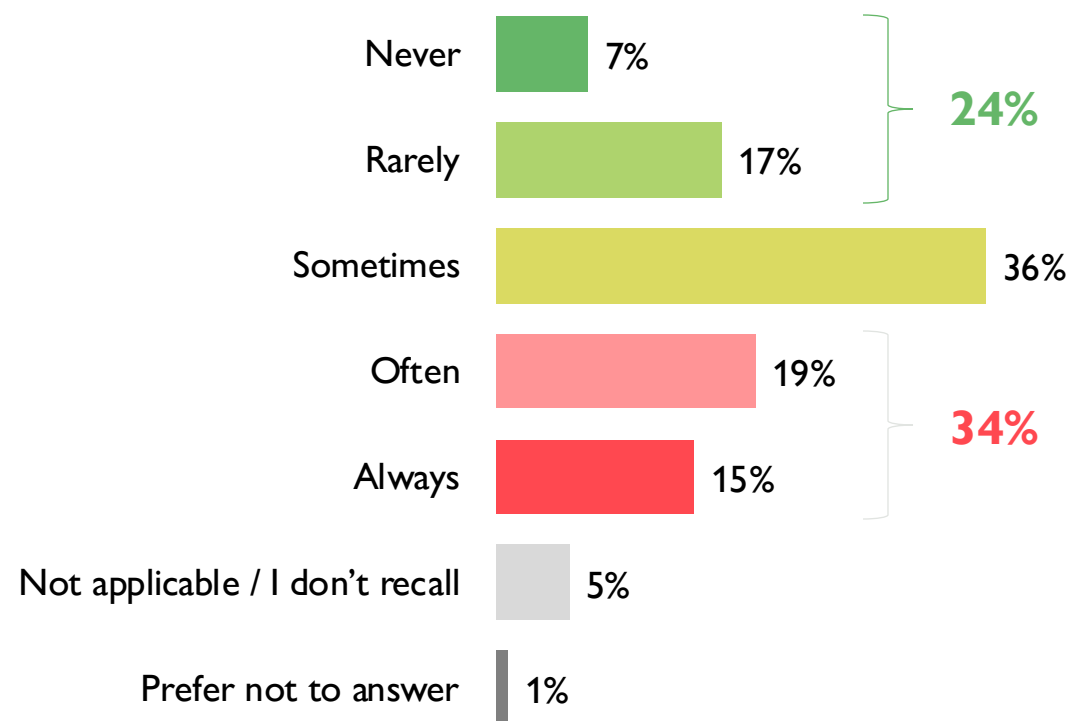
base [caregivers] n = 312

Section 2 – On-Set Culture & Workplace Safety



In your experience, to what extent do production-related factors such as work schedules or travel affect your overall work-life balance or well-being?

For most performers, production schedules and travel affect work–life balance or well-being at least sometimes (70%), including one in three (34%) who say this occurs often or always. In contrast, about one-quarter (24%) say these factors rarely or never have an impact.

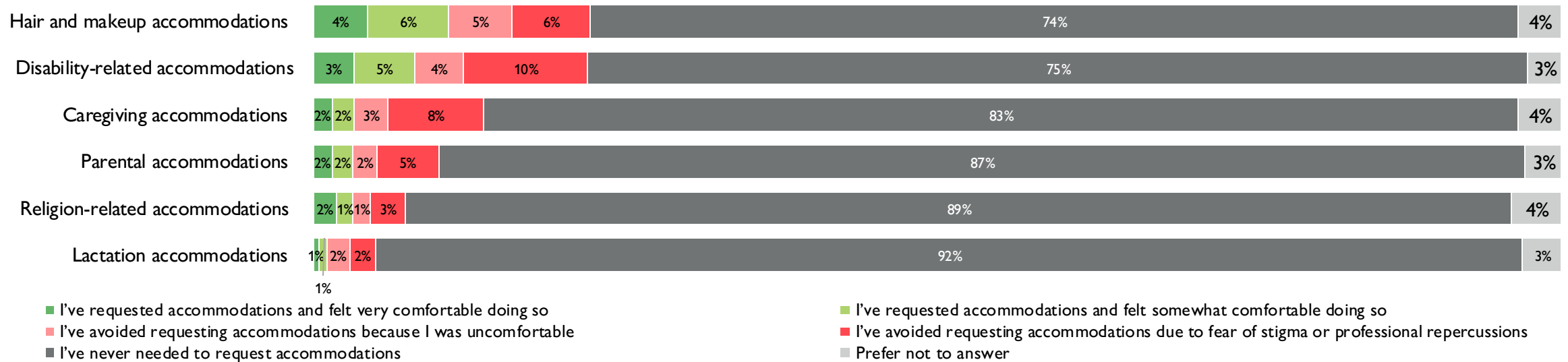


base n = 995



Since 2021, how would you describe your general experience with requesting accommodations on set (e.g., for disability, religious practices, caregiving, lactation, etc.)?

Most performers have not requested on-set accommodations (74%–92% across types), but among those who do, comfort is generally high - though disability, caregiving, and hair/makeup accommodations show higher discomfort



Women carry a disproportionate burden: Women are consistently more likely than men to report discomfort requesting caregiving accommodations (16% vs. 6% for men), as well as disability-related accommodations (17% vs. 11% for men), lactation (6%), and parental accommodations (11% vs. 4% for men).

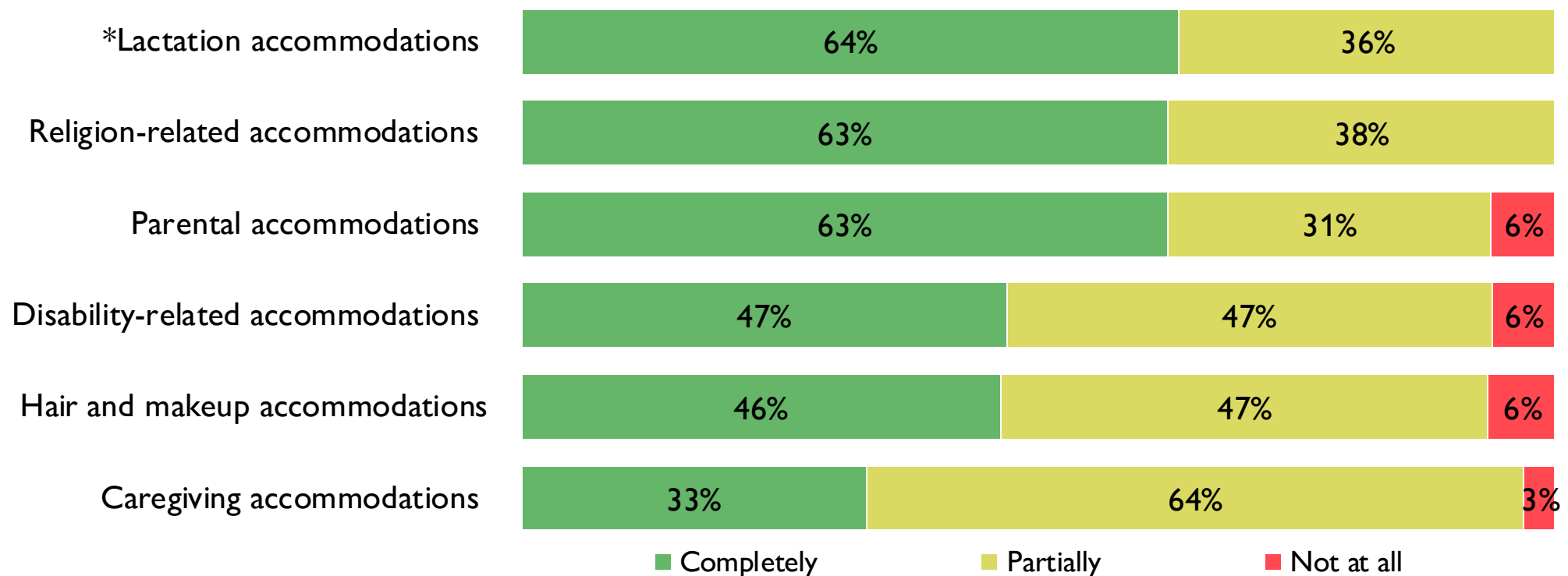
Non-union performers are most vulnerable: Non-union performers are consistently more uncomfortable requesting accommodations of any kind, including caregiving supports (31%), religion-related accommodations (27%), caregiving accommodations (31%), lactation accommodations (27%), parental accommodations (31%) and hair and makeup accommodations (35%).

base n = 995 | **Important note:** The term “accommodations” reflects the survey question wording. Some of the needs referenced in this question may be more appropriately understood as human rights considerations rather than accommodations.



In general, to what degree have your requested on-set accommodations been met?

Accommodation requests are usually well met. Across accommodation types, most performers report their needs were completely or partially met (94–97%), while only a small percentage, 6% or less, say requests for disability, parental, hair and makeup, or caregiving accommodations were not met at all.



base n [those who have requested an accommodation] = 11-108

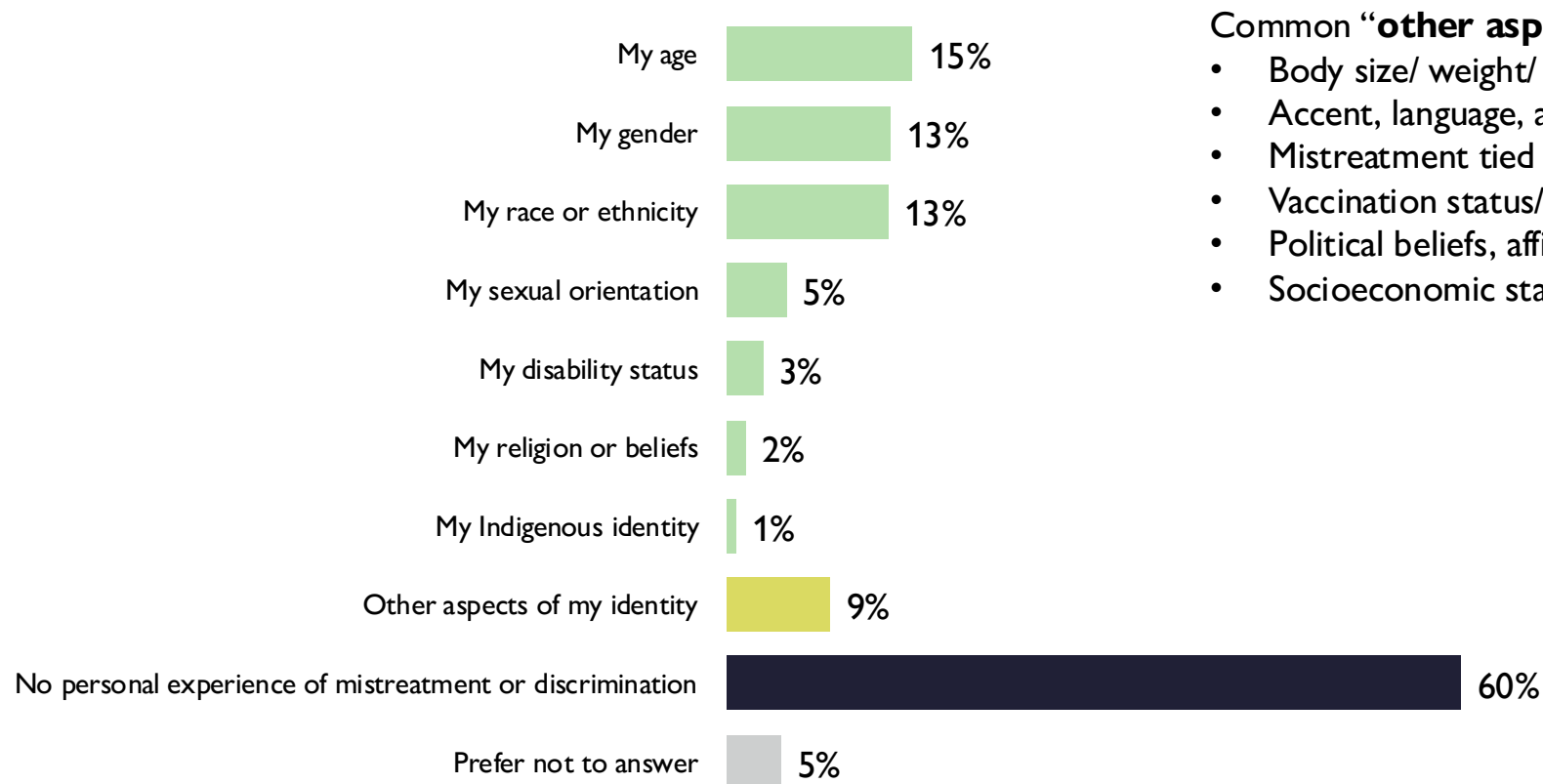
*n less than 30, interpret with caution





Since 2021, have you ever **personally experienced** harassment, microaggression, or discrimination on a professional set or audition based on any of the following aspects of your identity? Select any that apply.

Personally experienced harassment, microaggressions, or discrimination: Four in ten performers (40%) report experiencing these behaviours on a professional set or during an audition since 2021.



Common “**other aspects of my identity**” include:

- Body size/ weight/ physical appearance
- Accent, language, and national or regional identity
- Mistreatment tied to their position on set
- Vaccination status/COVID precautions including masking
- Political beliefs, affiliation, ideologies
- Socioeconomic status

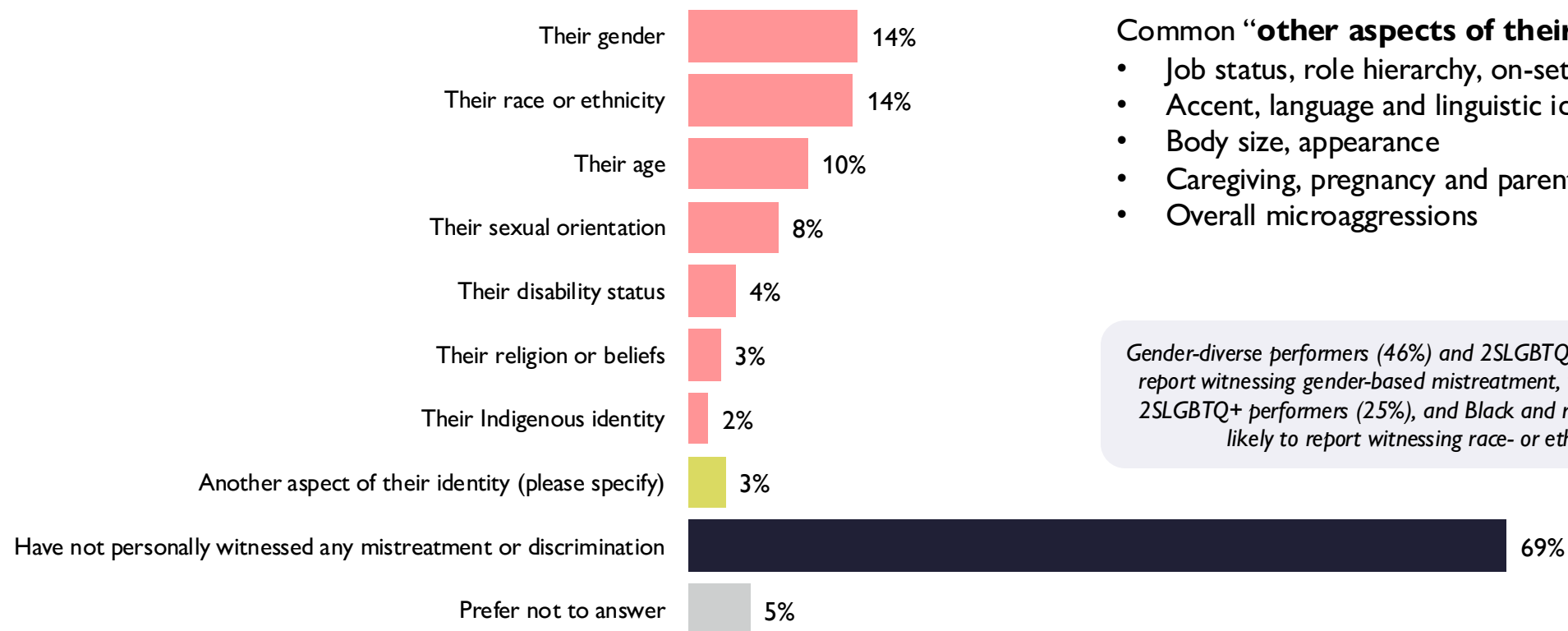
Black and racialized performers are more than three times as likely as White performers to report race- or ethnicity-based mistreatment (32% vs. 9%).

base n = 995 | Please note that these findings reflect experiences occurring specifically on professional sets. We acknowledge that harassment and discrimination may also occur in auditions, fittings, dressing rooms, communications, and other settings not captured by this question.



Since 2021, have you ever **witnessed** any harassment, microaggression, or discrimination of others on a professional set because of any of the following aspects of their identity?
Select any that apply

Witnessed harassment, microaggressions, or discrimination: Nearly one-third of performers (31%) report observing these behaviours on a professional set since 2021.



Common “**other aspects of their identity**” include:

- Job status, role hierarchy, on-set power dynamics
- Accent, language and linguistic identity
- Body size, appearance
- Caregiving, pregnancy and parental status
- Overall microaggressions

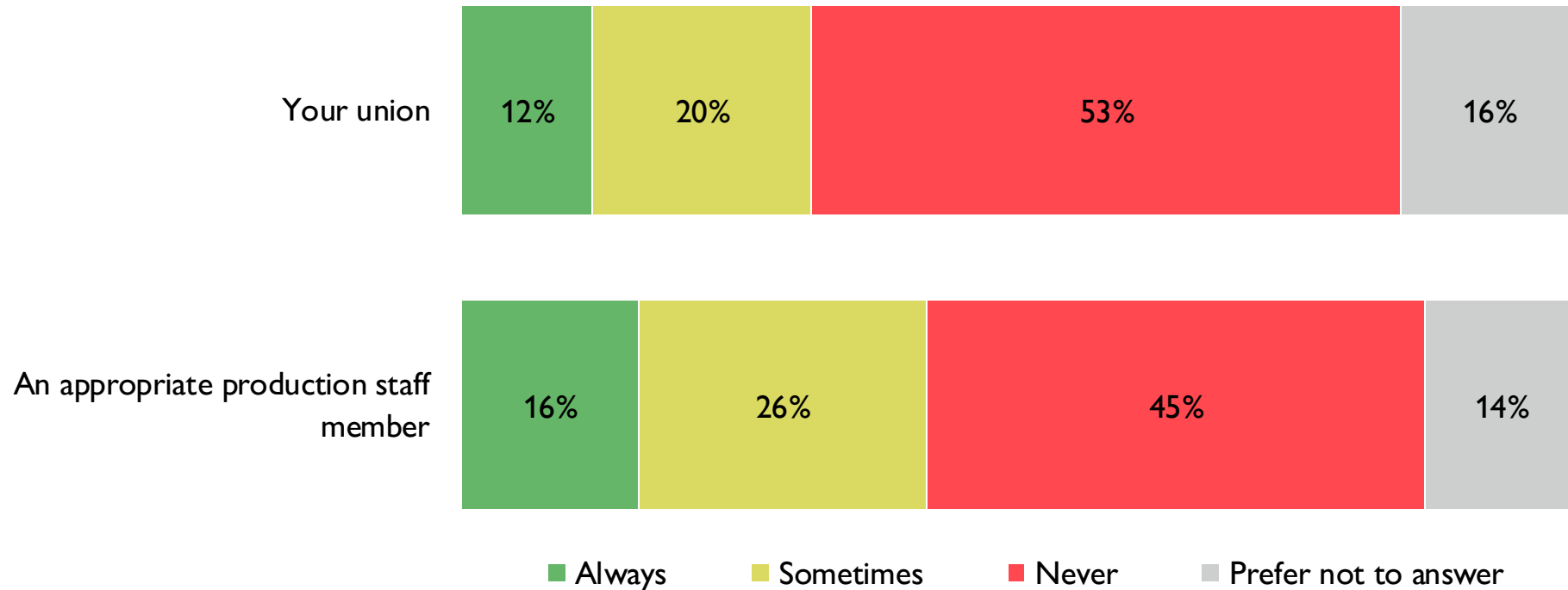
Gender-diverse performers (46%) and 2SLGBTQ+ performers (32%) are most likely to report witnessing gender-based mistreatment, while persons with disabilities (26%), 2SLGBTQ+ performers (25%), and Black and racialized performers (24%) are most likely to report witnessing race- or ethnicity-based mistreatment.

base n = 995 | Please note that these findings reflect experiences occurring specifically on professional sets. We acknowledge that harassment and discrimination may also occur in auditions, fittings, dressing rooms, communications, and other settings not captured by this question.



How often did you report the issue to [your union | an appropriate production staff member]?

Most performers who experience or witness mistreatment do not report it, though concerns are more often raised with production staff (42% report sometimes or always) than with a union (32%).



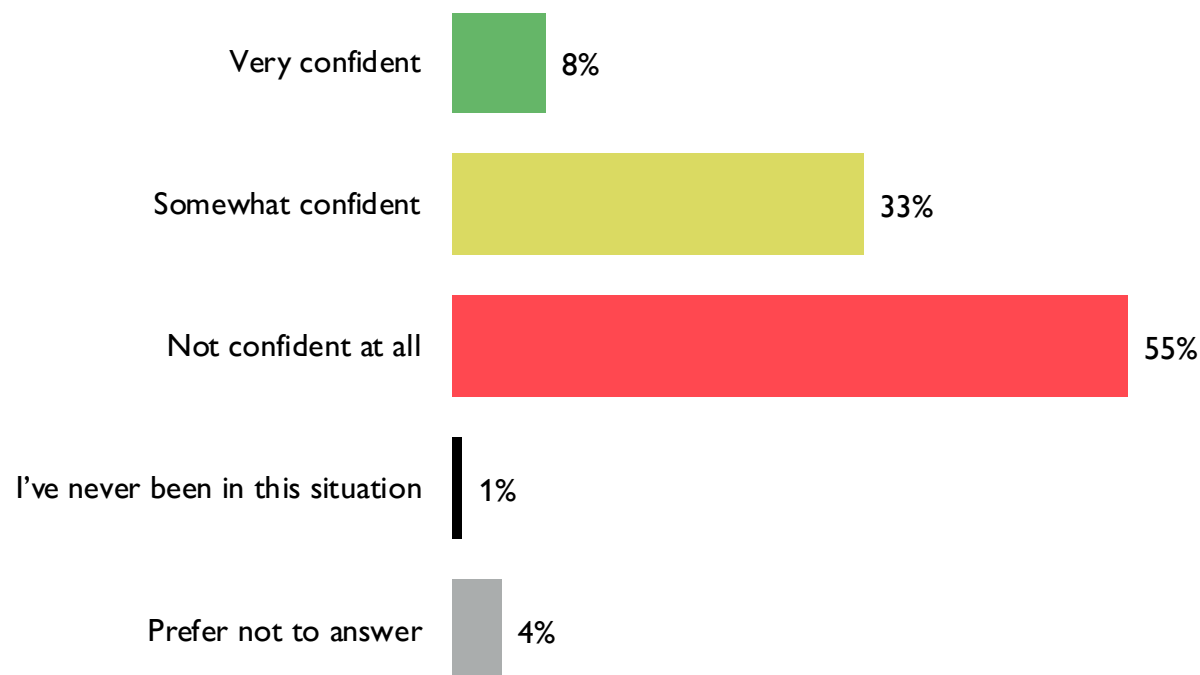
Indigenous performers are one of the only groups more likely to report concerns at least sometimes (50%) than to never report them (38%).

base n [witnessed and/or personally experienced harassment, microaggression, or discrimination on a professional set] = 417



How confident would you be that your concerns would be addressed fairly by the employer (i.e., the Production)?

Confidence that employers will address concerns fairly is limited: 55% report no confidence at all, while only 8% say they are very confident.



Confidence is particularly low among performers with disabilities (66% not confident at all) and performers in Québec (63%), both of whom are among the least likely to believe concerns will be addressed fairly by production.

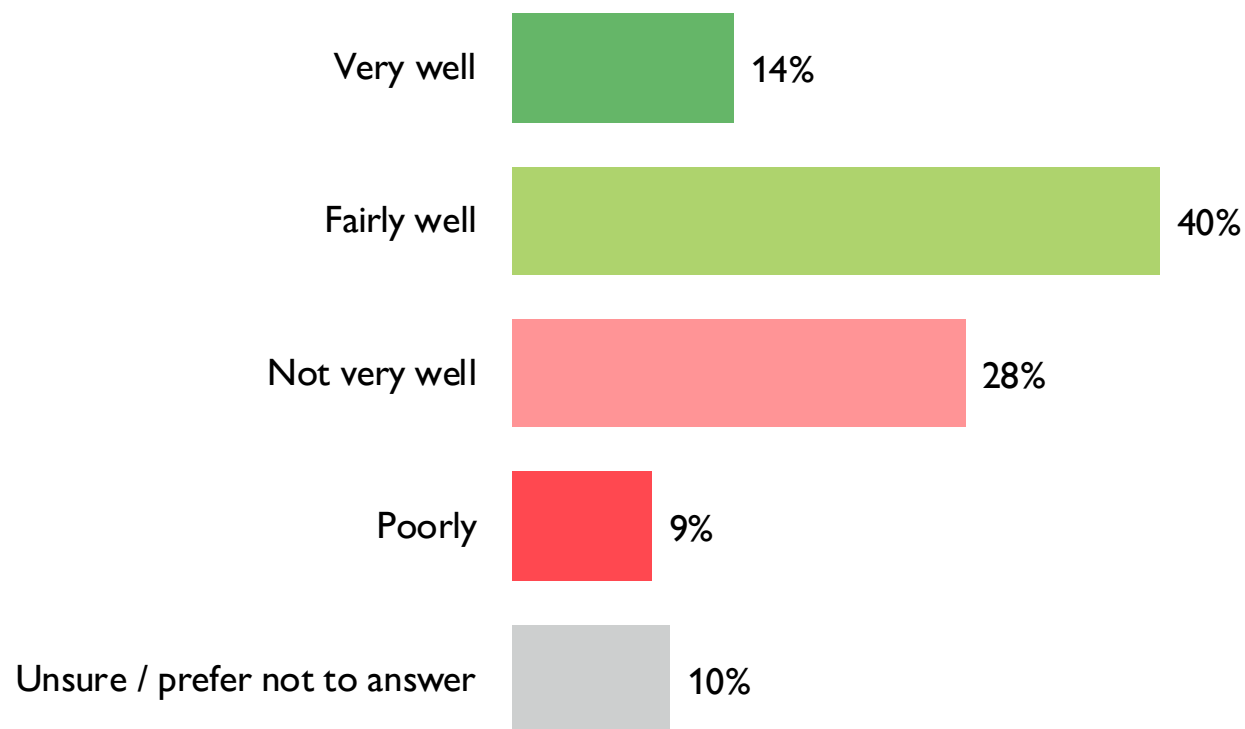
base n [if witnessed any harassment, microaggression, or discrimination of others on a professional set] = 253

Section 3 – Career Experience, Representation & Identity – Equity-Deserving Performers & Disproportionate Impacts



How well does current on-screen content represent the diversity of people living in Canada?

Just over half of performers feel on-screen content represents Canada's diversity at least fairly well (54%), while more than one-third say it does not (37%).



Black and racialized performers are substantially less likely than White performers to feel current on-screen content represents Canada's diversity well (38% vs. 59%). A similar gap exists between Indigenous and non-Indigenous performers (37% vs. 56%).

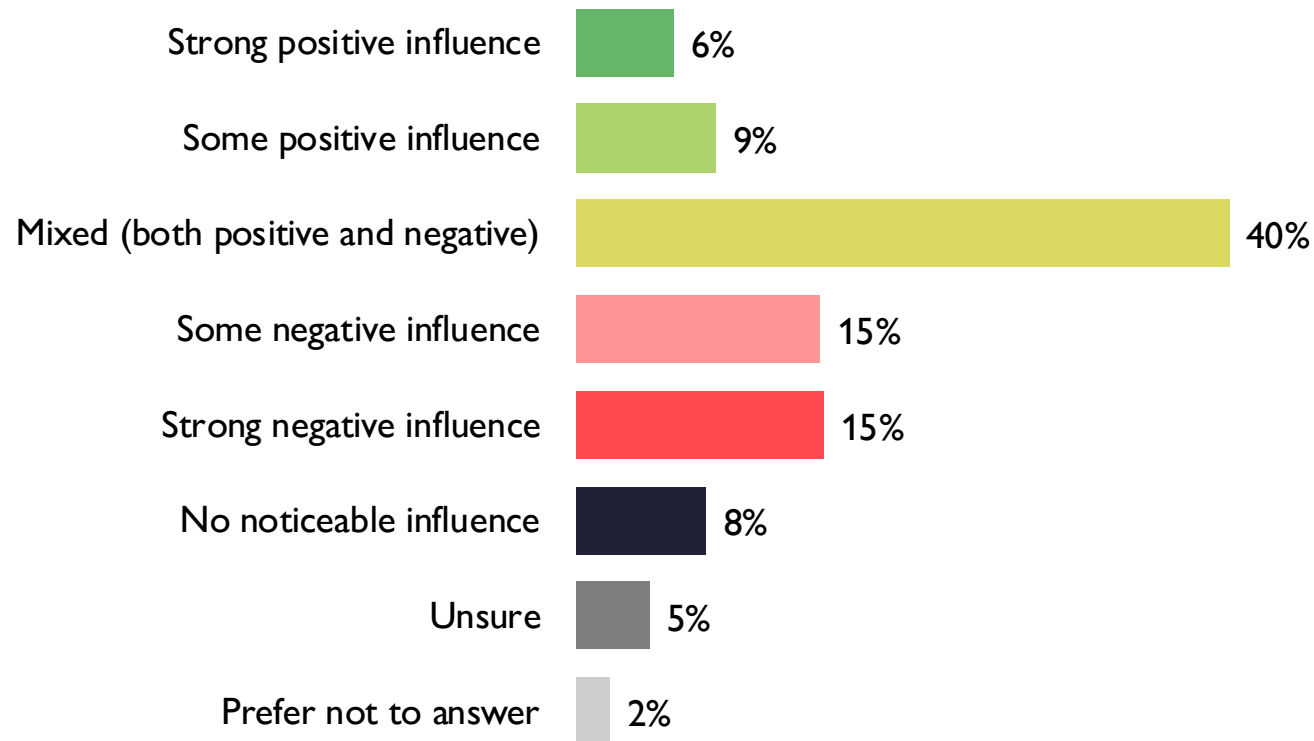
base n = 995





To what extent do you feel your **personal identity** (including factors such as gender, ethnicity, age, disability, sexual orientation, language, regional origin/location, etc.) has influenced your opportunities as a performer?

Most performers describe the influence of their personal identity on their opportunities as a performer as mixed (40%); among those who see a clear impact, negative influences (30%) are twice as common as positive ones (15%), while 8% say their identity has no noticeable effect on their opportunities.



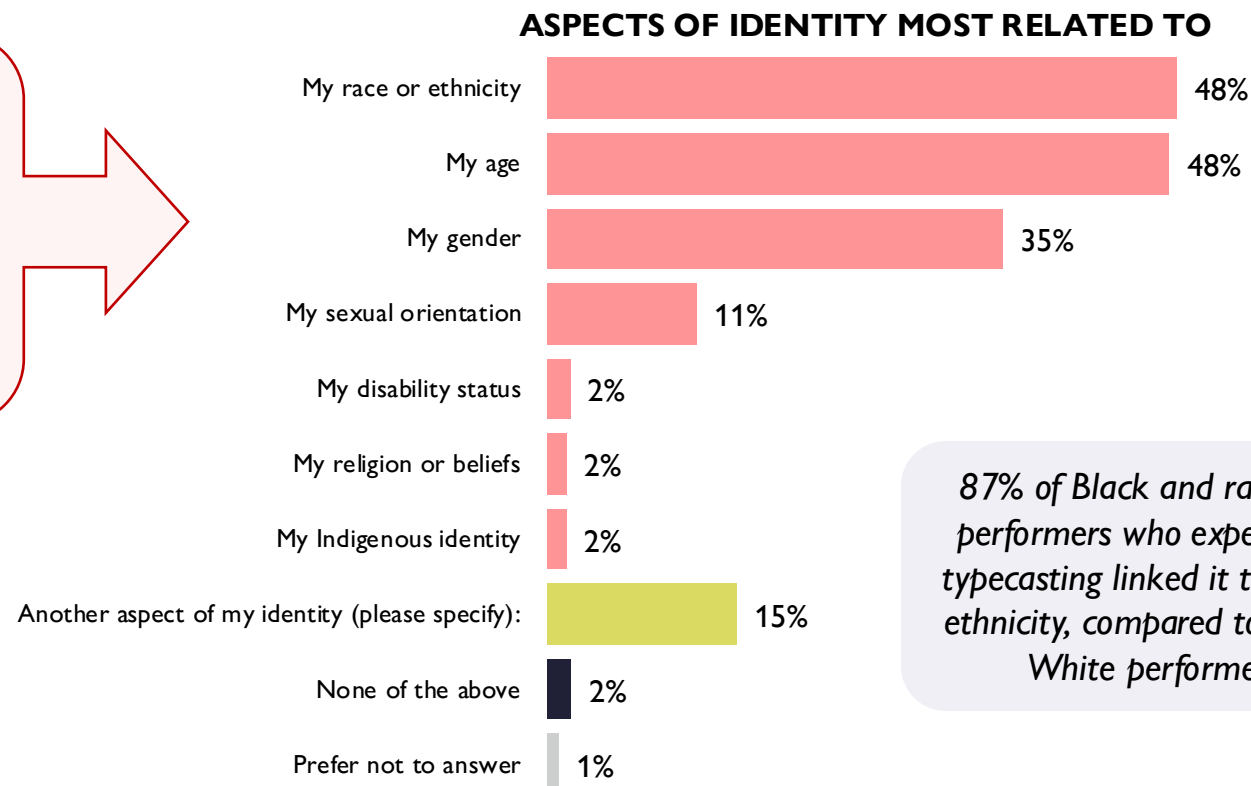
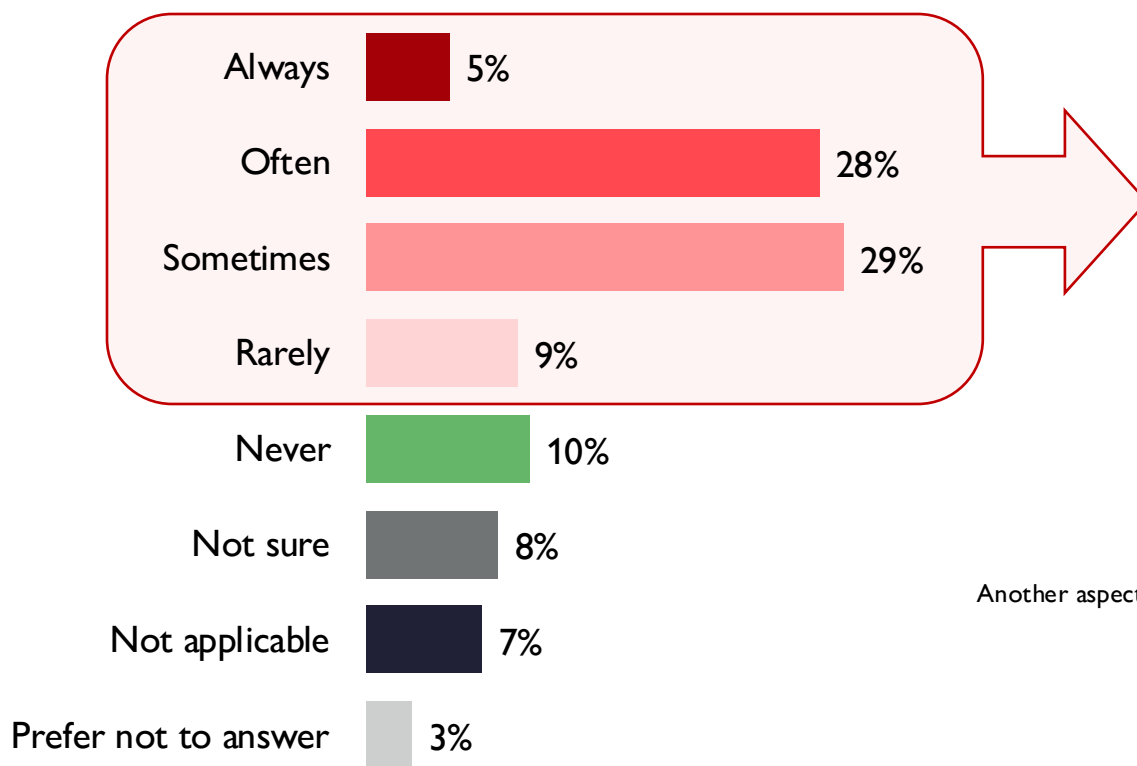
base n = 995



Based on your experience as a performer since 2021, how often have you been offered or auditioned for roles **that relied on stereotypes or typecasting**? | Which aspects of your identity was this most related to?

Nearly two-thirds of performers (63%) report being offered or auditioning for roles that rely on stereotypes or typecasting at least sometimes. When this occurs, it is most often related to race or ethnicity (48%), age (48%), and gender (35%).

BEEN OFFERED OR AUDITIONED FOR ROLES THAT RELIED ON STEREOTYPES OR TYPECASTING



87% of Black and racialized performers who experienced typecasting linked it to race or ethnicity, compared to 37% of White performers.

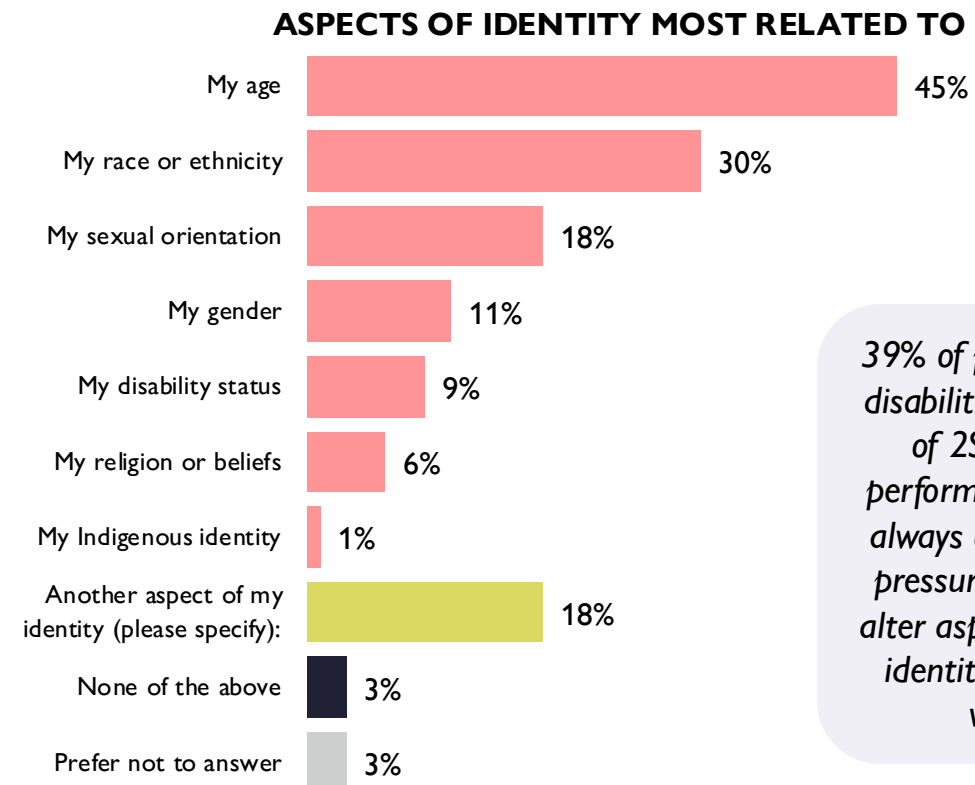
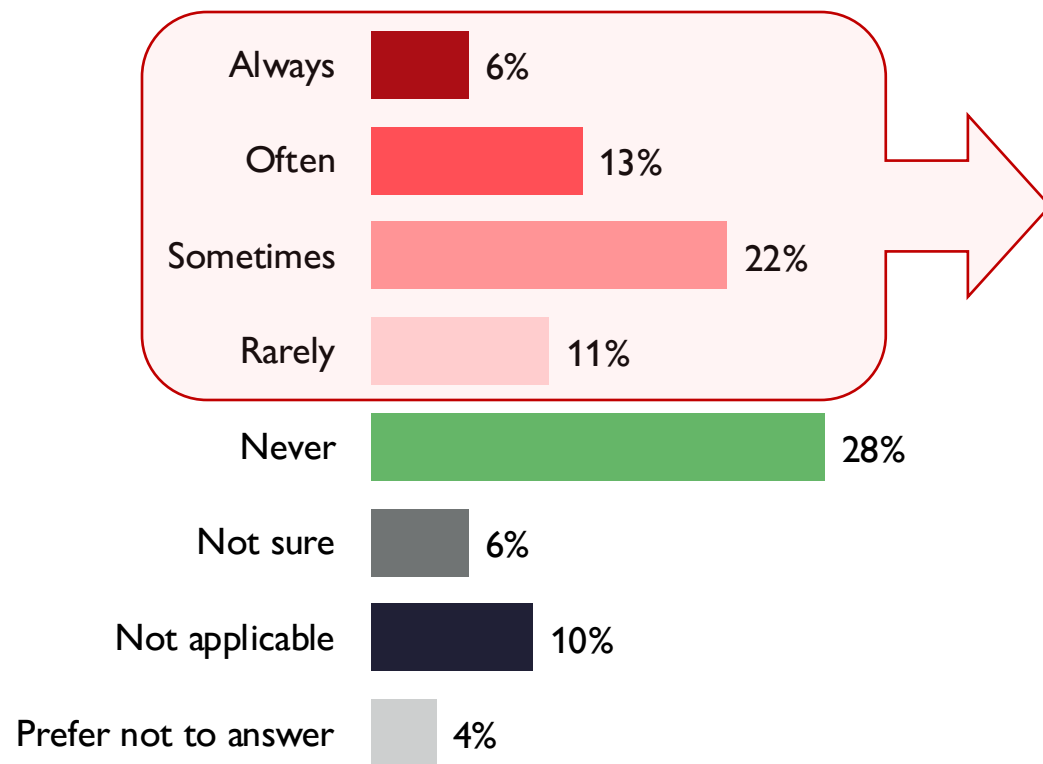
base n = 995 | base [if Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely] n = 715



Based on your experience as a performer since 2021, how often have you **felt pressure to hide, downplay, or alter aspects of your identity to secure or maintain work?** | Which aspects of your identity was this most related to?

Four in ten performers (41%) report feeling pressure to hide, downplay, or alter aspects of their identity to secure or maintain work at least sometimes. These experiences are most often related to age (45%), race or ethnicity (30%), and sexual orientation (18%).

FELT PRESSURE TO HIDE, DOWNPLAY, OR ALTER ONE'S IDENTITY FOR WORK



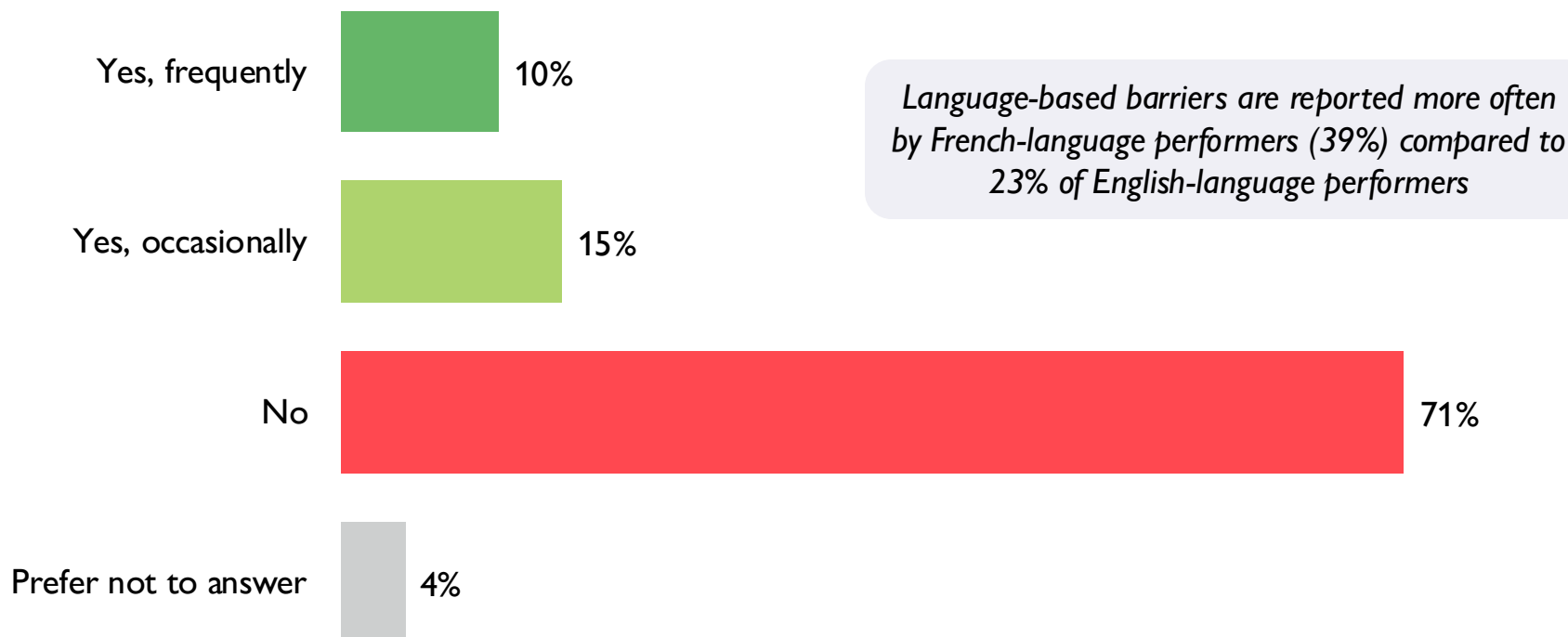
39% of persons with disabilities and 31% of 2SLGBTQ+ performers say they always or often feel pressure to hide or alter aspects of their identity to secure work.

base n = 995 | base [if Always, Often, Sometimes, Rarely] n = 522



Have you ever experienced barriers or professional limitations that you believe were related to your accent or French/English proficiency?

Most performers say they have not experienced barriers related to their accent or French/English proficiency (71%), though one-quarter report encountering such barriers at least occasionally (25%), including 10% who say this happens frequently.



base n = 995



From your perspective, what factors most influence how different identities and lived experiences are represented in Canadian screen content? Select up to three.

Representation in Canadian screen content is seen as being driven primarily by who holds creative and decision-making power (65%), followed by industry leaders’ willingness to take risks on new stories (45%) and the diversity of writing and creative teams (34%).



base n = 995



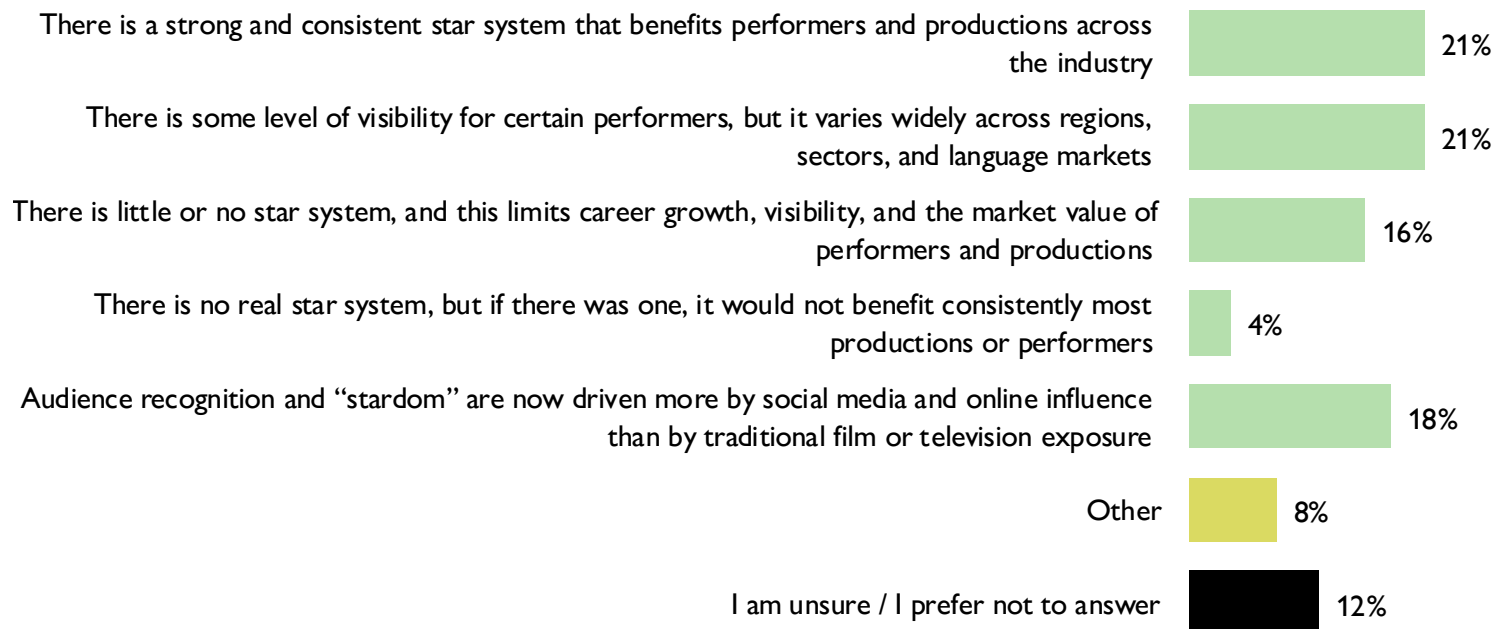
Section 4 – Industry Visibility & the “Star System”



In your experience, how would you describe the level of visibility and recognition given to performers in your region or language market - sometimes referred to as a “star system”?
A “star system” refers to how performers gain public visibility, audience recognition, and the ability for their name or reputation to help promote or finance productions.

21% of Quebec performers feel there is a strong and consistent star system that benefits performers and productions across the industry, compared to 3% of ON, 2% of BC, and less than 1% of AB/SK/MB performers.

QUÉBEC PERFORMERS



31% of French language performers (across Canada) and 33% of French language performers in Quebec feel there is a strong and consistent star system that benefits performers and productions across the industry, compared to 4% of English language performers.

base [Quebec] n = 264

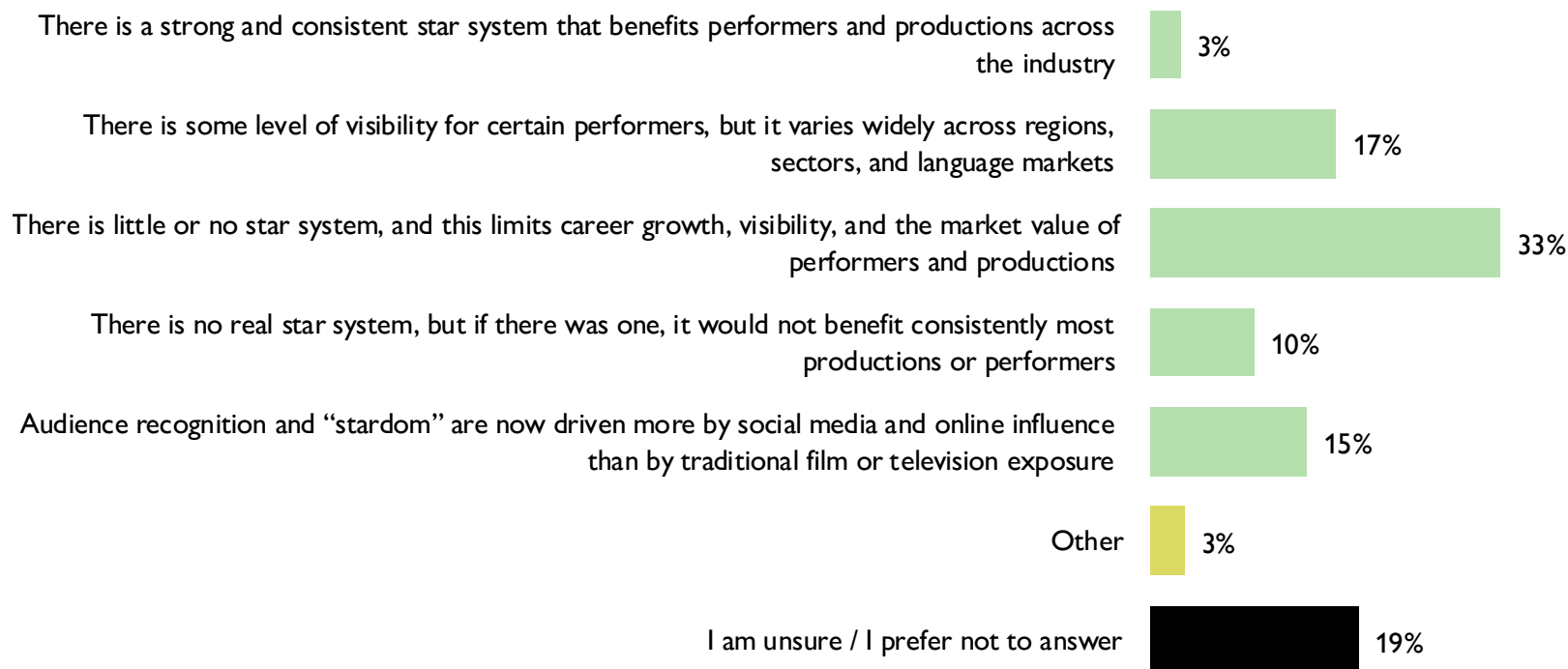




In your experience, how would you describe the level of visibility and recognition given to performers in your region or language market - sometimes referred to as a “star system”?
A “star system” refers to how performers gain public visibility, audience recognition, and the ability for their name or reputation to help promote or finance productions.

Outside Quebec, performers are far more likely to say there is little or no star system (33%) than to say a strong and consistent one exists (3%).

PERFORMERS OUTSIDE QUÉBEC



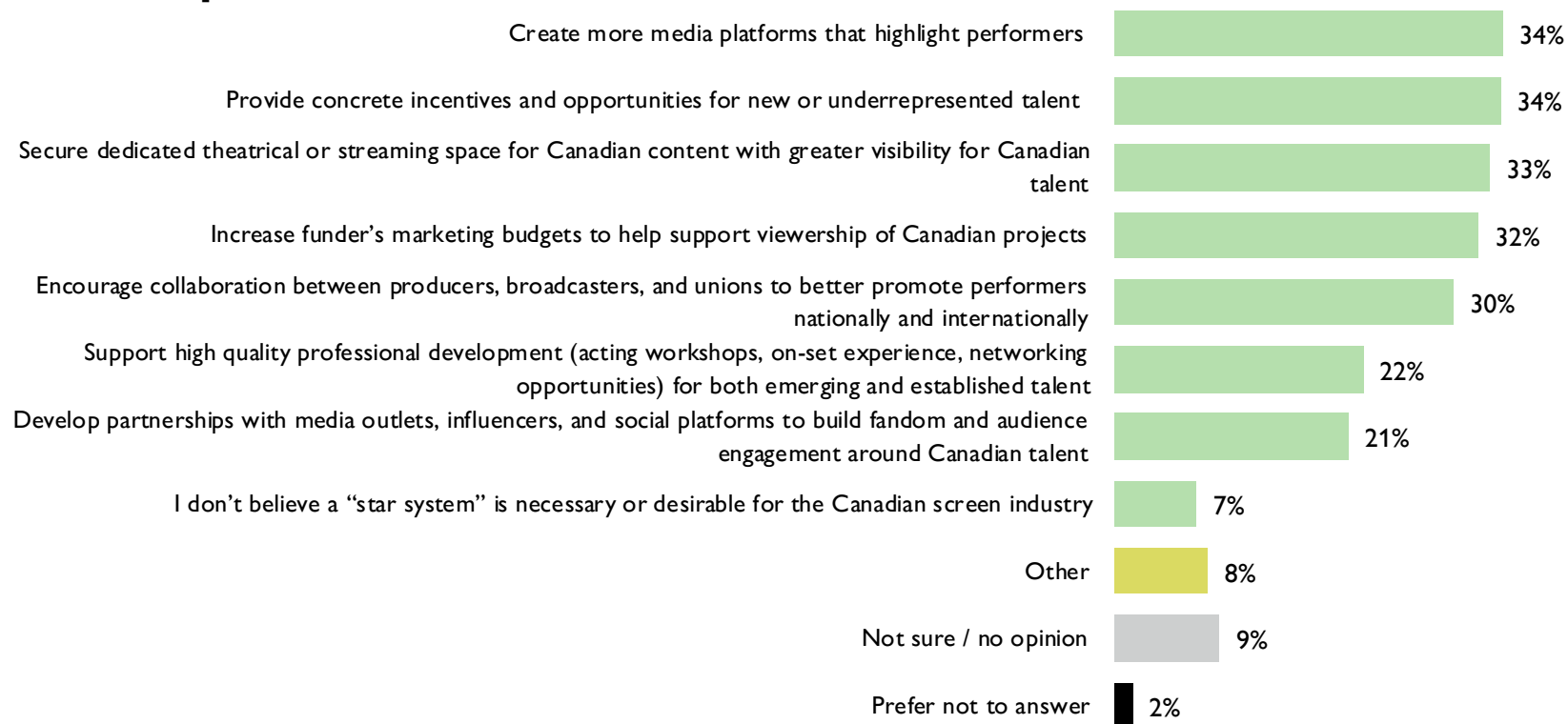
29% of AB/SK/MB performers feel there is some level of visibility for certain performers, but it varies widely across regions, sectors, and language markets, and 38% of ON performers feel there is little or no star system, limiting career growth, visibility, and the market value of performers and productions.

base [Outside of Quebec] n = 731



What could help strengthen visibility and recognition for Canadian performers in other words, build or enhance a “star system” across Canada (if you believe one is needed)? Select up to three options you believe would make the most impact.

Prioritizing more media platforms that highlight performers (34%), concrete incentives or opportunities for new or underrepresented talent (34%), dedicated spaces for Canadian content (33%), and stronger marketing for Canadian projects (32%), alongside collaboration across the industry (30%) are initiatives they believe would make the most impact in strengthening visibility and recognition for Canadian performers.



base n = 995

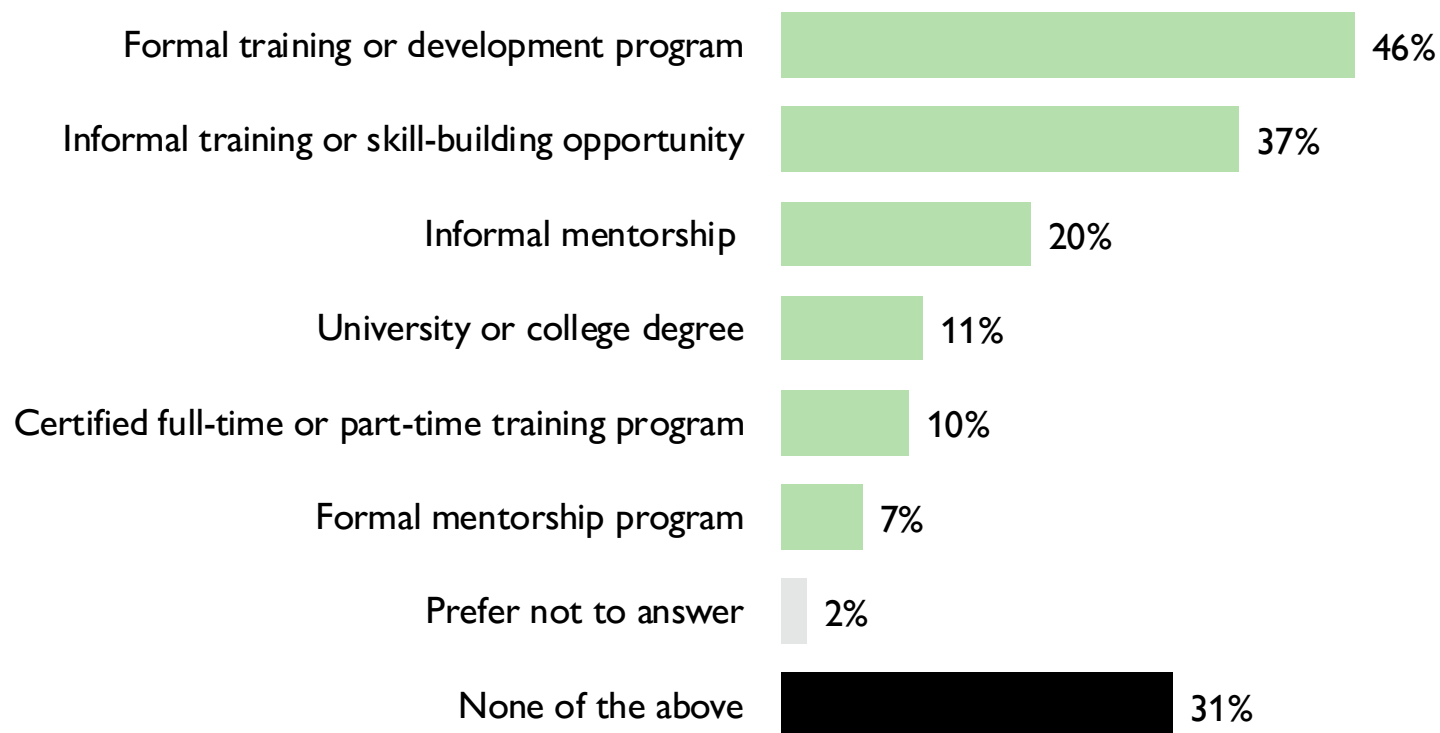


Section 5 – Industry Resources & Career Development



Which of the following types of mentorships or professional training, if any, have you participated in since 2021 as a learner/student? Select all that apply

Formal training or development programs are the most common pathway for mentorships or professional training (46%), however, informal training (37%) and mentorships (20%) also common. Around 3 in 10 (31%) report no training or mentorship.



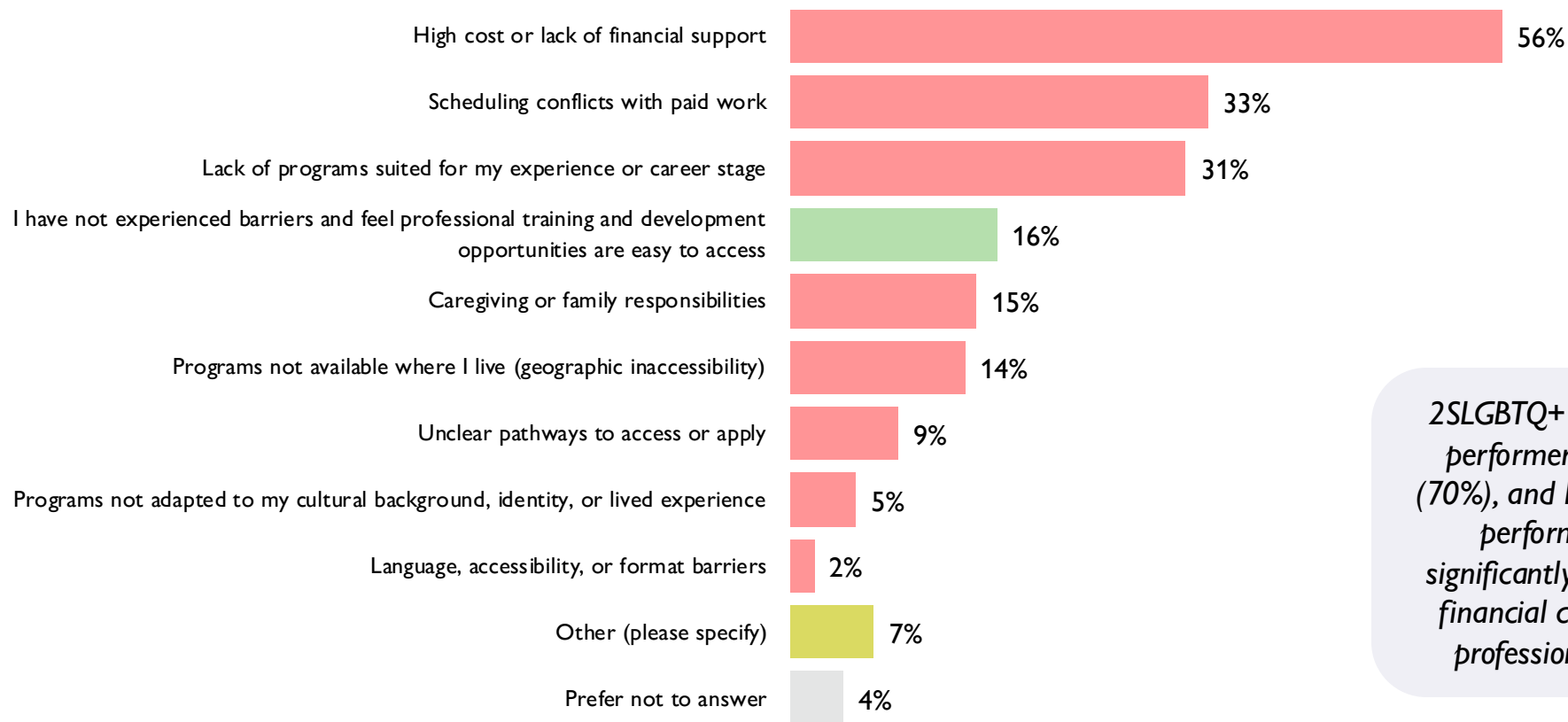
Participation in formal training and development programs is higher among performers under age 35 (63%), persons with disabilities (57%), 2SLGBTQ+ performers (57%), Black and racialized performers (53%), and women (53%).

base n = 995



Have any of the following factors made it more difficult, or prevented you entirely, from accessing training or development opportunities as a performer? Select up to three.

Cost is seen as the biggest barrier to training and development (56%), followed by scheduling conflicts with paid work (33%) and a lack of suitable programs (31%).



2SLGBTQ+ performers (73%), performers with disabilities (70%), and Black and racialized performers (64%) are significantly more likely to cite financial cost as a barrier to professional development.

base n = 995

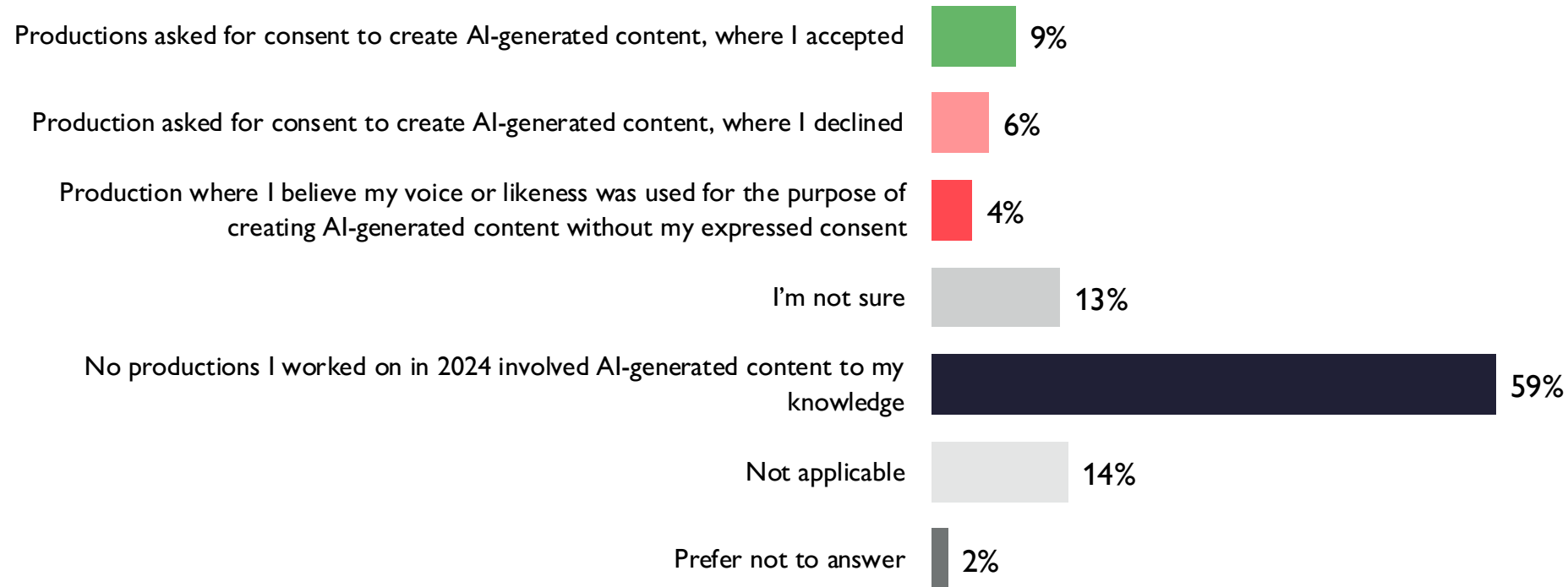


Section 6 – Artificial Intelligence (AI), Digital Rights, and Emerging Industry Trends



How many productions in 2024 have you worked on that asked for your consent to create AI-generated content (e.g., voice replication, body doubles, synthetic characters, etc.) using your voice or likeness?

Most performers report no use of AI-generated content in their 2024 productions to their knowledge (59%). However, some performers encountered consent requests (9%) or were asked and declined participation (6%). Concerningly, 4% believe their voice or likeness was used without their expressed consent, and 13% are unsure.

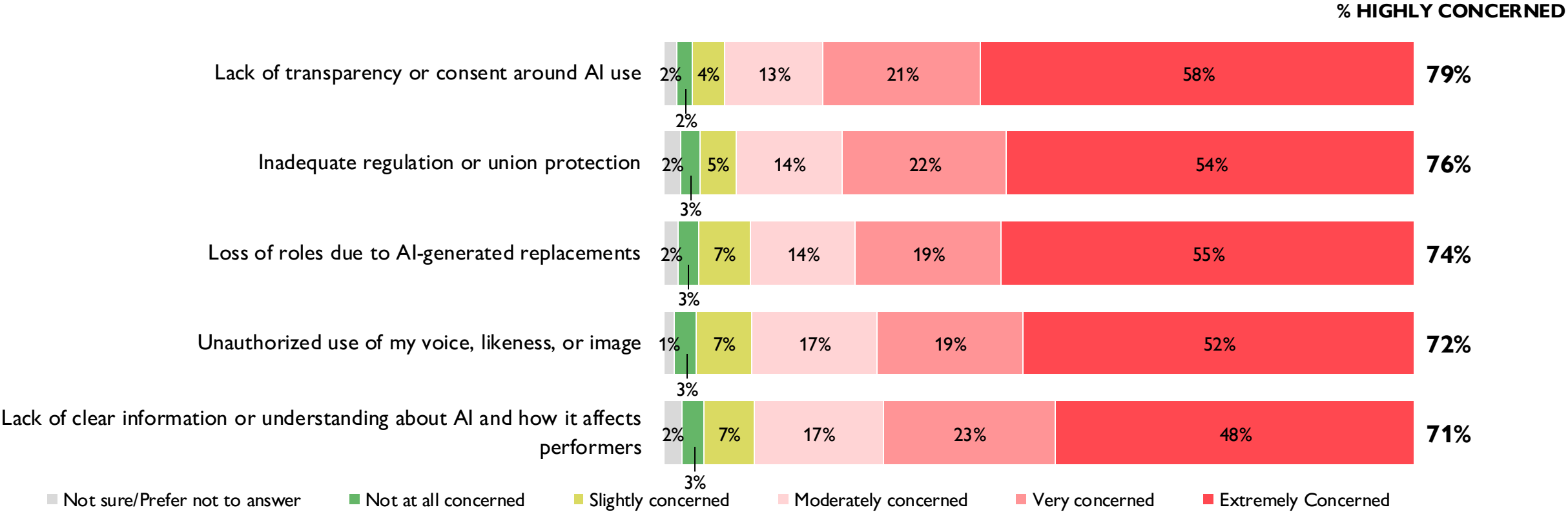


base n = 995



Overall, how concerned are you about the following AI-related issues in the screen industry as it relates to your work as a performer?

There is a high and widespread level of concern regarding AI in the screen industry. Performers are highly concerned about consent and transparency around AI use (79%), inadequate regulations or protections (76%), job loss (74%), unauthorized use (72%), and lack of clear information and understanding of its effect on performers (71%).

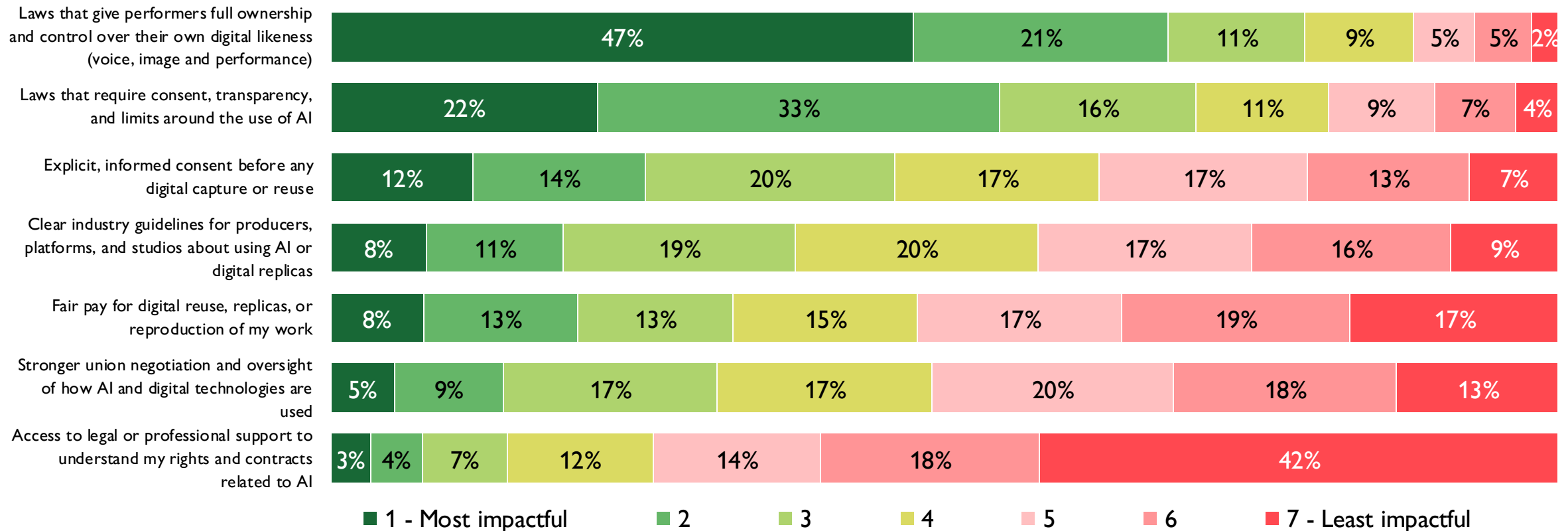


base n = 995



Which of the actions or policies below would help you feel more protected and secure regarding the use of AI and digital technologies in your work as a performer? Please rank the options from most impactful to least impactful.

Performers prioritize enforceable legal rights - specifically digital likeness ownership laws (ranked most impactful by 68%) and AI consent legislation (54%) - over voluntary industry guidelines.



base n = 995

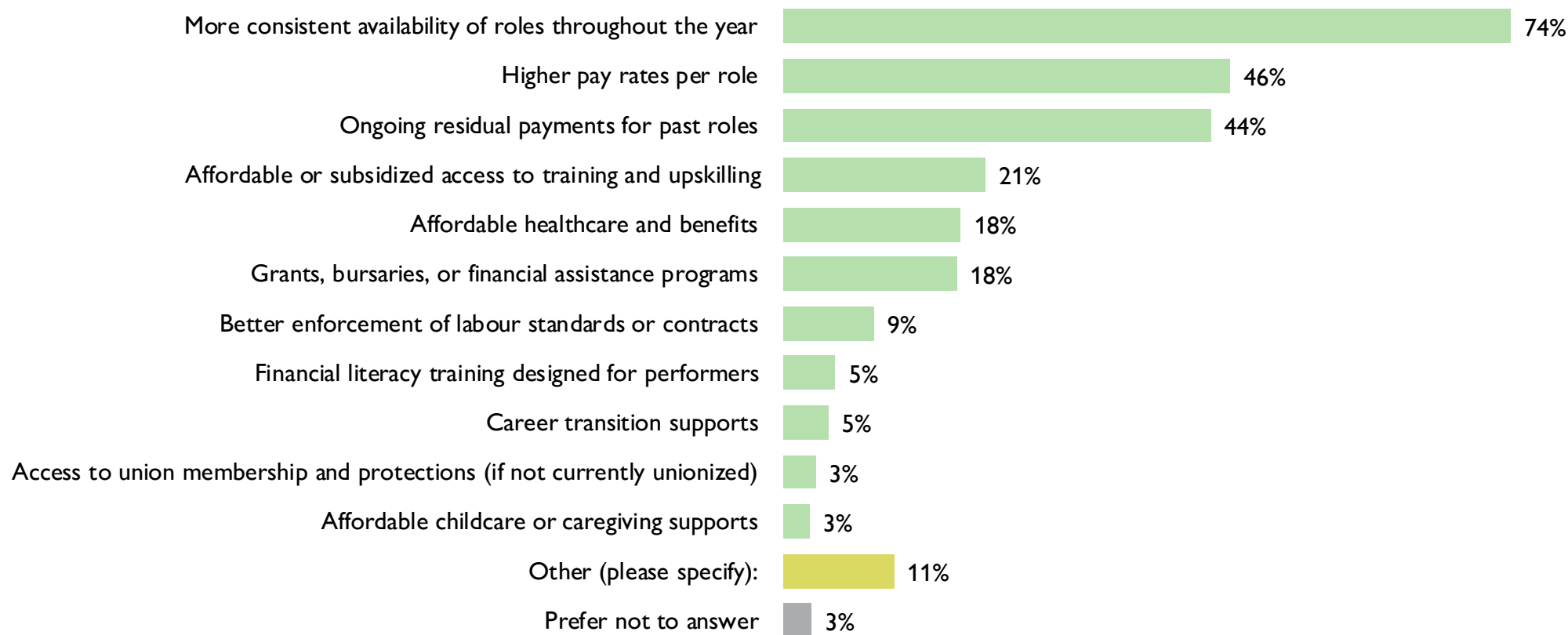


Section 7 – What Performers Need Most



From your perspective, which of the following supports would most improve your ability to sustain a stable and fulfilling career as a performer? Please select up to three options.

More consistent role availability is the clear top priority for performers, with 74% saying it would most improve career sustainability, followed by higher pay per role (46%) and ongoing residual payments (44%).



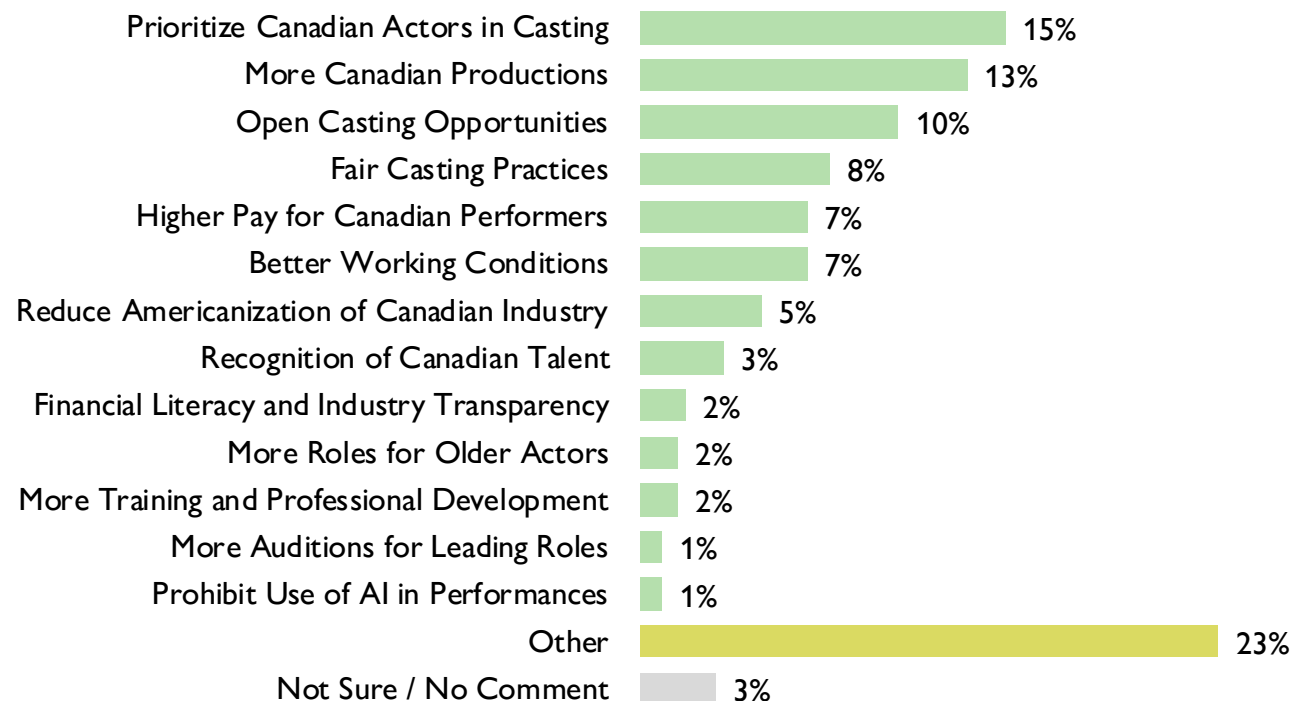
base n = 995





If you could change just one thing to improve the overall experience of performers in the Canadian screen industry, what would it be?

Structural change in casting: When asked to name a single change, performers most often pointed to prioritizing Canadian actors in casting (15%) and increasing Canadian productions (13%).



Note: This was an open-ended question. Responses were reviewed and coded into thematic categories by Abacus Data for reporting purposes. Percentages represent the share of performers whose answer was classified into each theme.

base n = 329



Thank You