

# Accompanying Partner Survey 2019

*Keeping the international community of the Netherlands  
working*



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# Introduction

ICAP Amsterdam was founded to build a bridge between the city's international community and government and civic organisations.

In particular, ICAP has established an independent forum which represents and reflects the views of the international community on issues which have an impact on the city's attractiveness as a place to live in and do business.

As part of this, IN Amsterdam commissioned ICAP to carry out a survey to assess the experiences of the international community with regard to the experience of accompanying partners entering the job market.

# Background

There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence about the experiences of the partners of people posted to work in the Netherlands, and those of people who move to the Netherlands to join a partner. Much of this focuses on the difficulties people face in finding both work and a community.

ICAP set out to find out more about the experiences of partners in terms of finding work and pursuing a career, using both anecdotal and empirical evidence.

The aim of the research is threefold:

- To find out more about the partners of traditional expats and people who moved to the Netherlands for love
- To find out what specific problems they experienced in finding work and continuing their careers
- To make recommendations about future strategy and initiatives which could both ease the problems and benefit Dutch society as a whole

# In The Press

***Nearly three-quarters of Dutch women still work part time***

***Vrouw wordt expat. Dan ook een baan voor partner***

***Een blij partner maakt een blij expat***

<https://www.dutchnews.nl/news/2018/12/nearly-three-quarters-of-dutch-women-still-work-part-time/>

<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2017/06/14/vrouw-wordt-expat-dan-ook-een-baan-voor-partner-11074517-a1562896>

<https://www.nrc.nl/nieuws/2019/03/06/charmant-aan-het-zwembad-liggen-is-niks-voor-mij-a3920029>

# Methodology

The research was commissioned to find out more about the experiences of partners of traditional expats and people who moved to the Netherlands to join a partner already living here.

The aim was to produce relevant statistics and a wealth of actual experiences which officials can use to help manage expectations and to better understand the challenges.

To this end, we approached dozens of expat groups, websites and other organisations with strong links to the international community and asked them to circulate the survey's website link.

Most of the groups were approached by email at the start of the survey, others were added as the survey progressed.

The survey was also sent to 2,730 people on the ICAP mailing list who had indicated they were willing to be contacted.

# Methodology

The survey was based on multiple choice, sliding scale and open questions.

In total, 956 people responded to the survey, 25% of whom were resident in the Amsterdam region. This is lower than in previous surveys, in which between 40% and 50% came from Amsterdam, and may reflect that fact that Amsterdam's international population would appear to be younger and therefore more likely to be single.

The survey had a 68% completion rate.

The questions were drawn up by ICAP with input from officials at IN Amsterdam

The questionnaires were completed on a voluntary basis without incentives.

# About this report

In total, 265 people living in Amsterdam and Amstelveen completed the survey or just under 25% of the total sample of 960.

In addition, a handful of respondents came from Almere, Lelystad, Purmerend, Zaandam, Zaanstad and Hoofddorp. In total, 31 came from Haarlem and 34 from Hilversum.

The proportion of Amsterdam and Amstelveen respondents in the total is smaller than in previous surveys. In the healthcare, housing and education surveys, between 40% and 50% of respondents lived in Amsterdam/Amstelveen.

This may be because more internationals come to Amsterdam alone, rather than as part of a couple but it would require further research to establish if this is the case. In terms of age, skills and origin, there was little difference between Amsterdam/Amstelveen and the main sample.

In addition, given that the AMA now includes Hilversum and Haarlem, anything particular about the Amsterdam and Amstelveen international community is becoming increasingly diluted.

We have, therefore, opted to use the full results in this report and to highlight the few areas where there was a discernible difference between Amsterdam and Amstelveen and the rest, in a separate section after the main results.

# Key Findings

- One in five respondents were male
- Seven in 10 gave up their career or business to relocate
- Four in 10 would have welcomed more help from their partner's employer to find work
- Just over half were looking for a full-time job
- Almost seven in 10 said their lack of Dutch was a problem in finding work
- Two-thirds were prepared to retrain to find work in an area where there is demand
- Many respondents said their struggle to find a job had left them depressed and unhappy and having relationship issues.

# *About the Respondents*

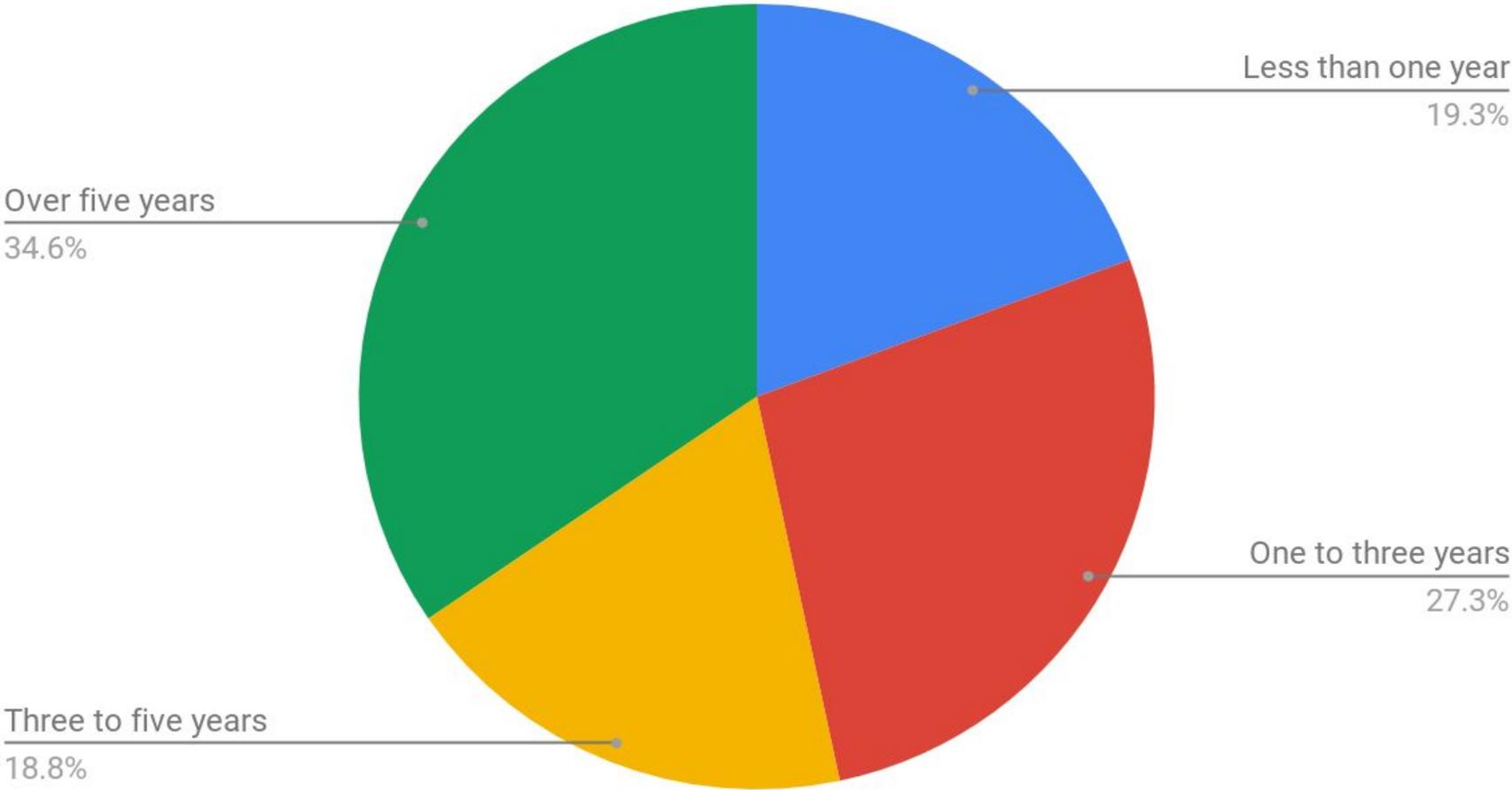
In this section, we look at the demographics of the survey respondents

# Main points

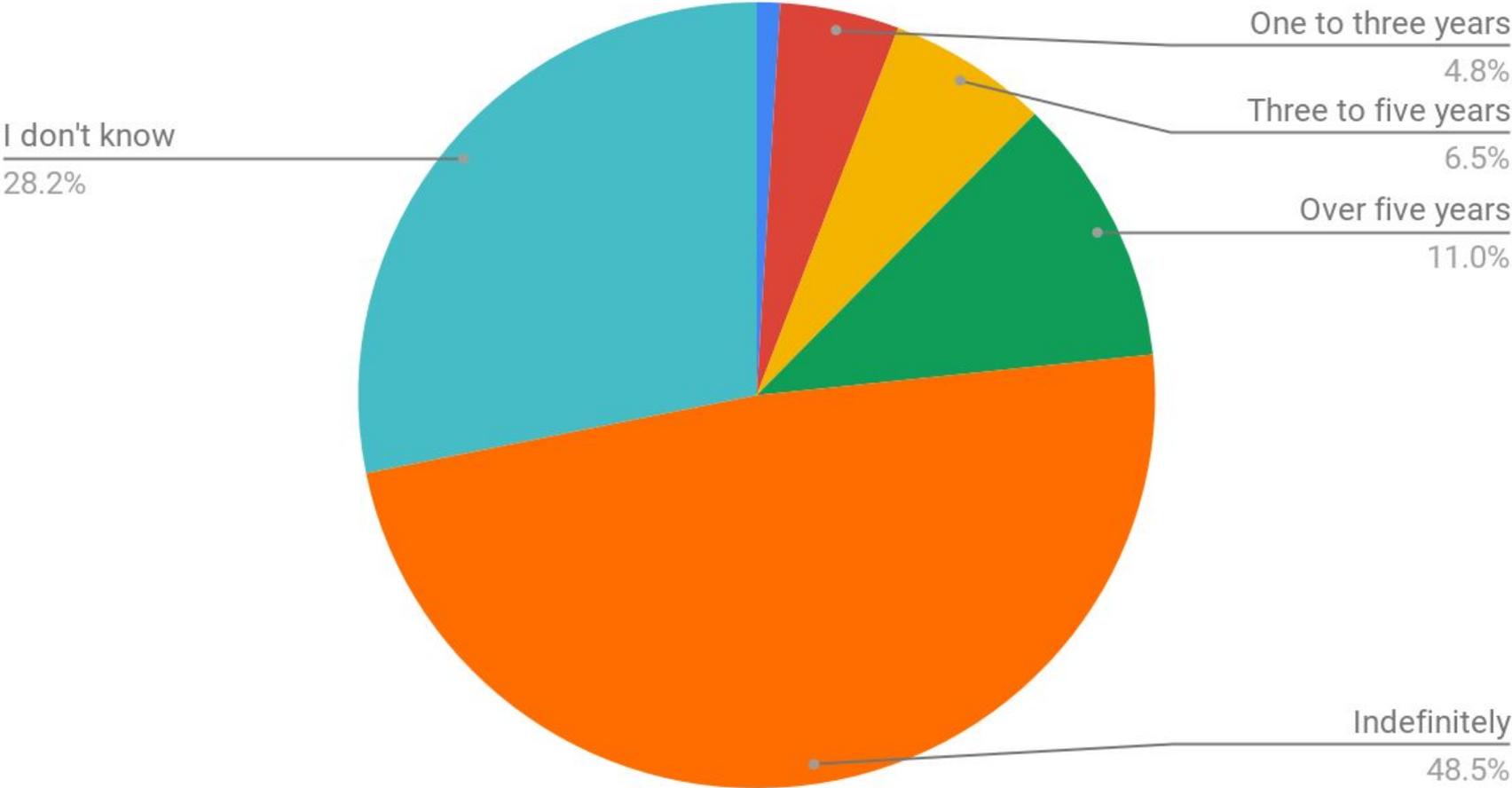
In total, 956 people filled in the survey

- 36% of the total number of respondents moved to the Netherlands to be with a partner and 53% moved to the Netherlands because their partner was posted here or secured a job here.
- 19% have been in the Netherlands for less than one year while 35% have lived in the Netherlands for over five years
- 76% have no plans to leave
- 44% came from the EU, 22% from North America and 8% from India.
- 52% have household income below €5,000 per month.

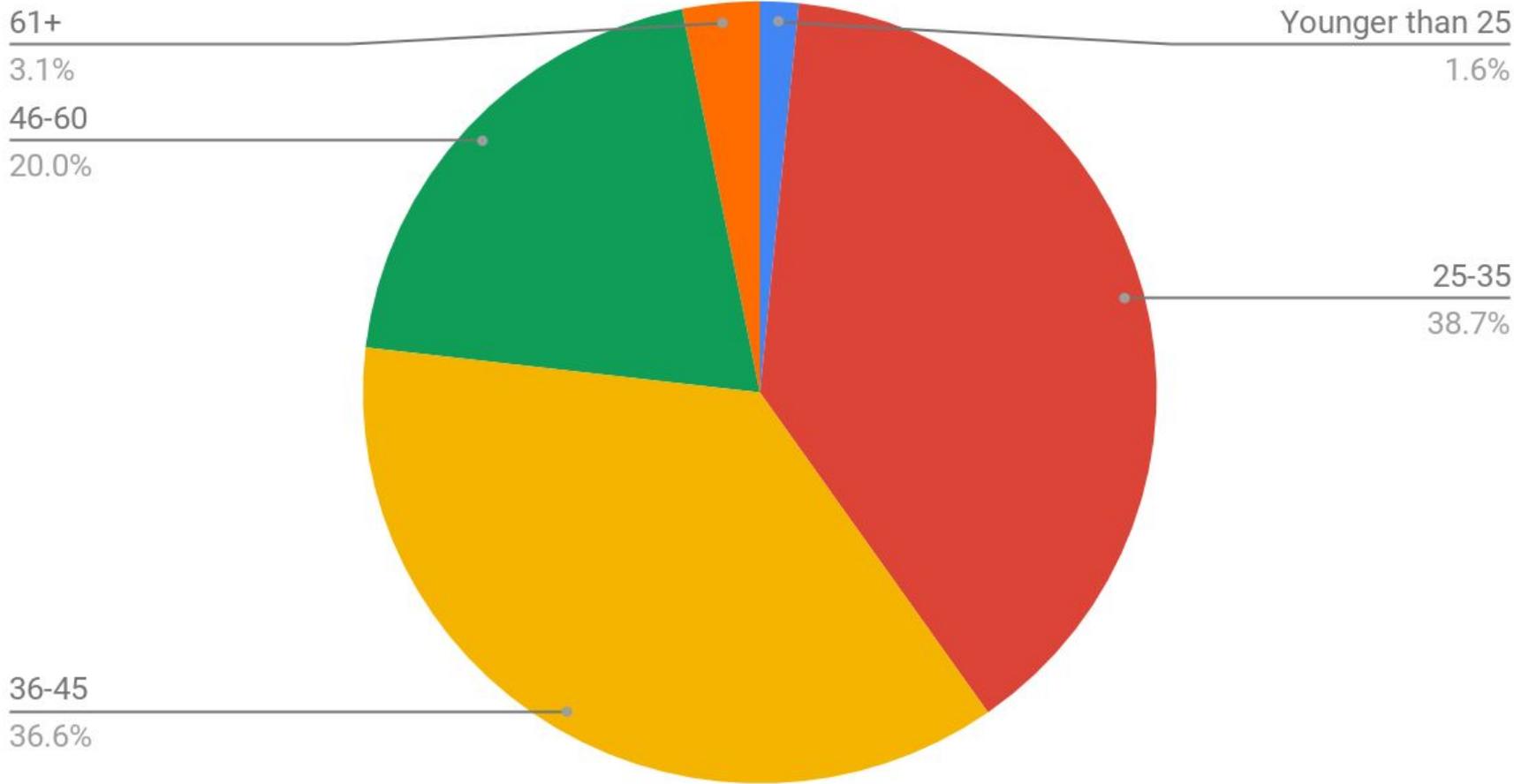
# How long have you been in the Netherlands?



### How long do you intend to stay?



### How old are you?

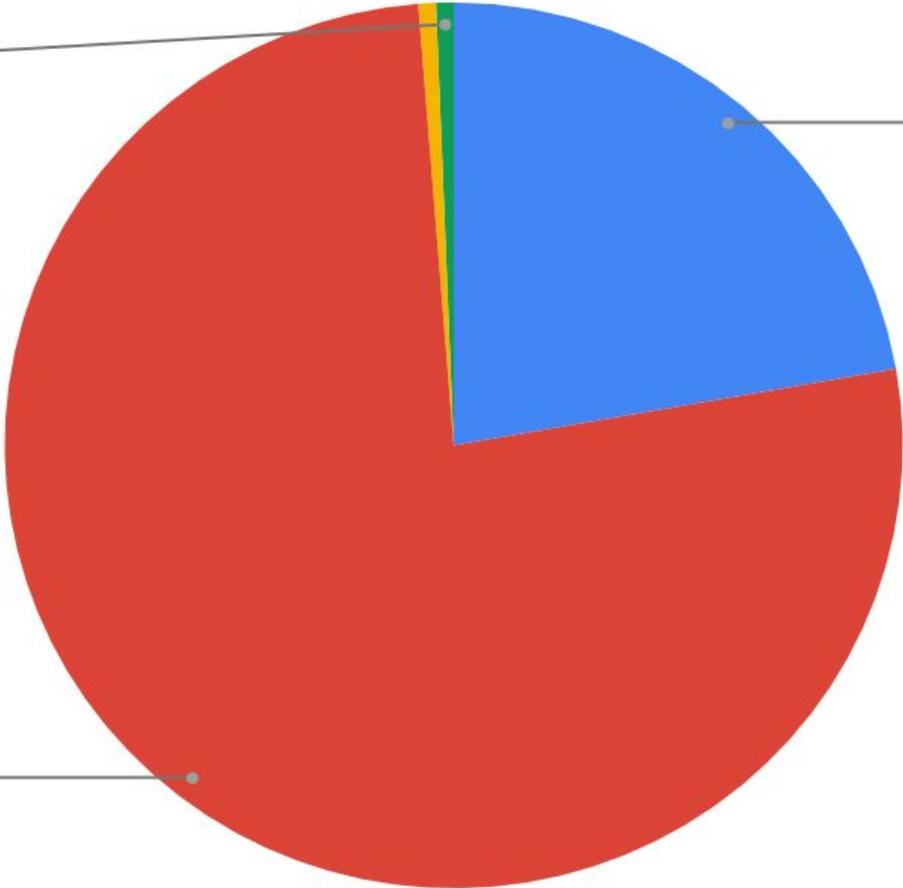


### To which gender do you most identify?

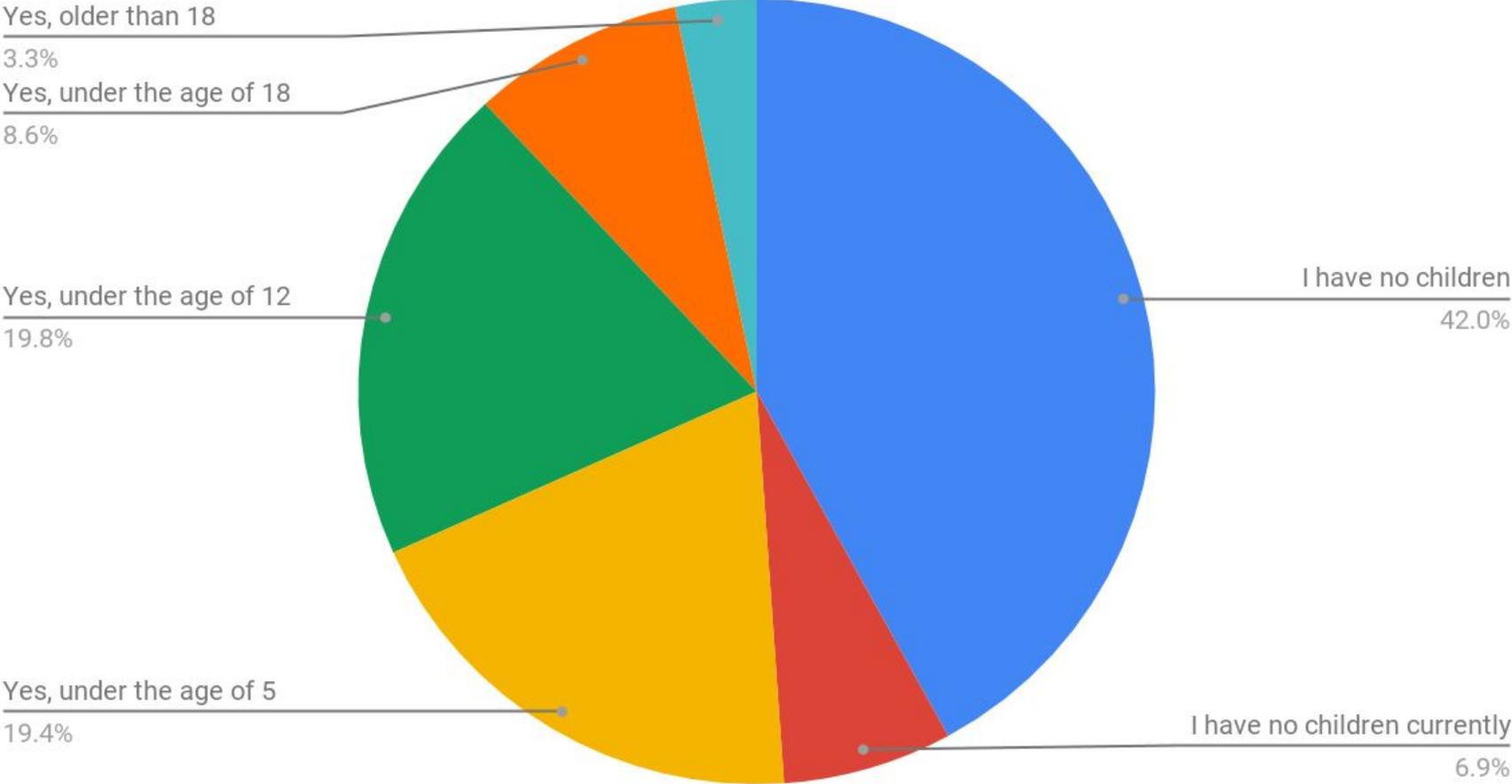
I prefer not to answer  
0.6%

Male  
22.2%

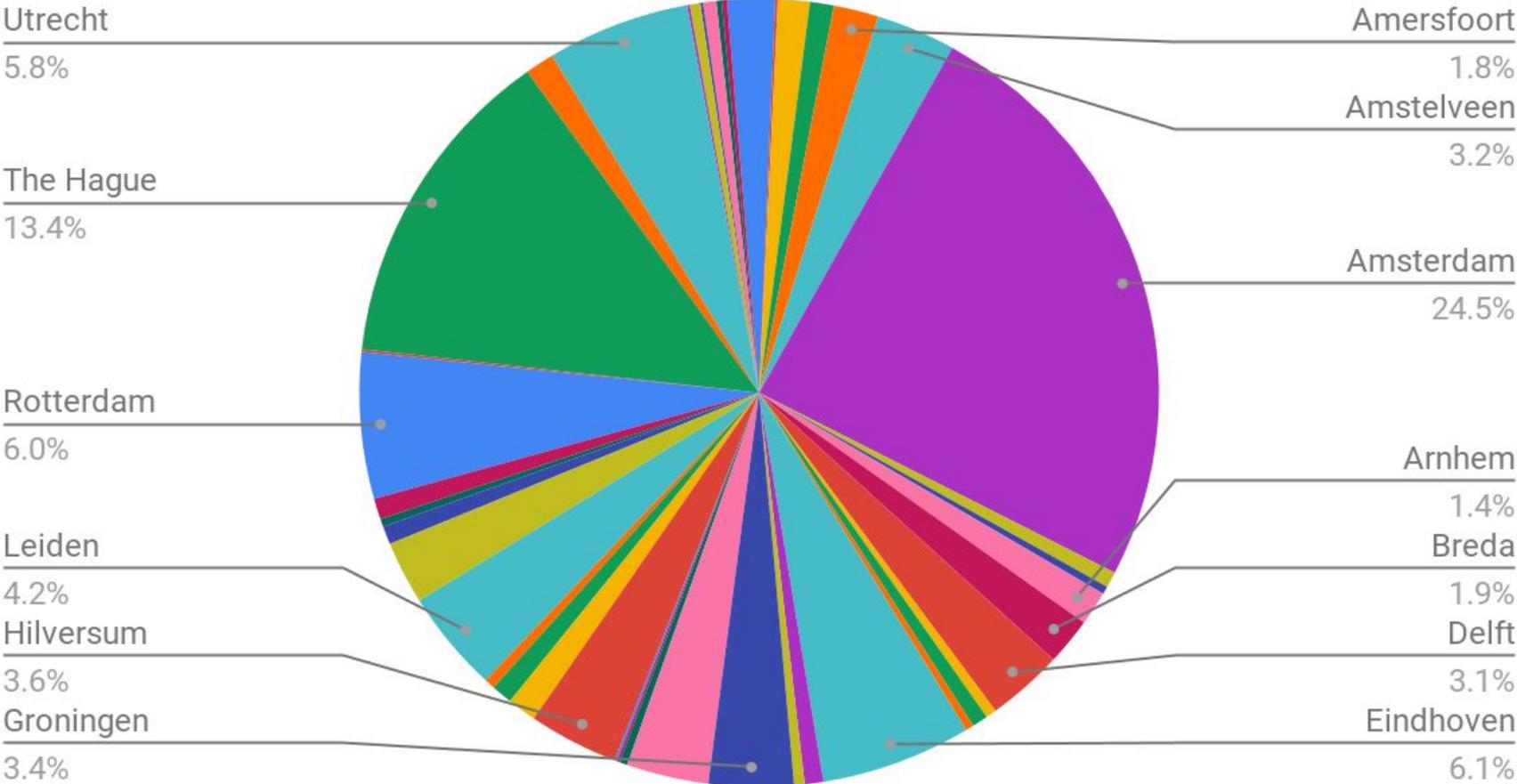
Female  
76.5%



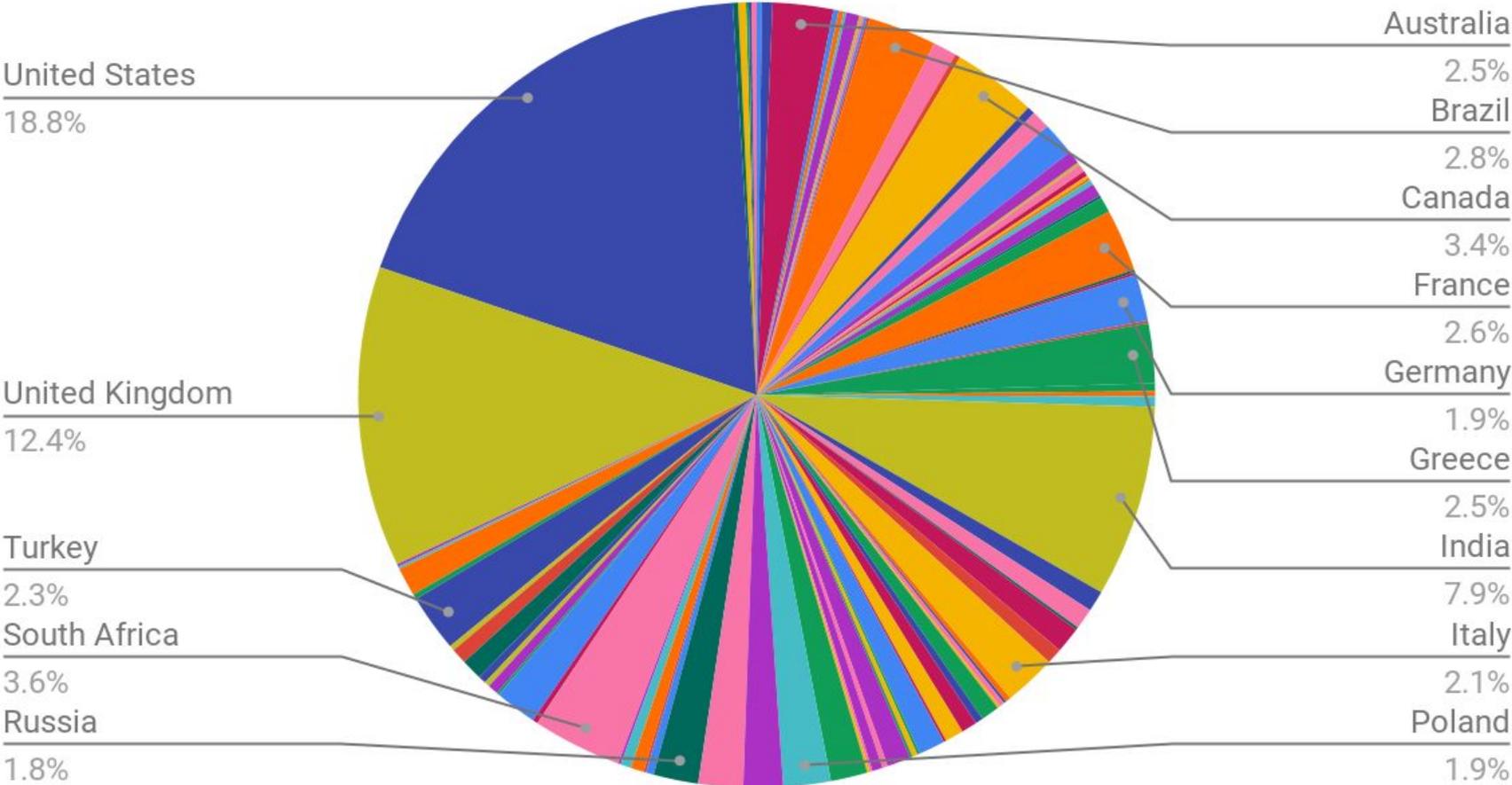
# Do you have have children currently living with you?



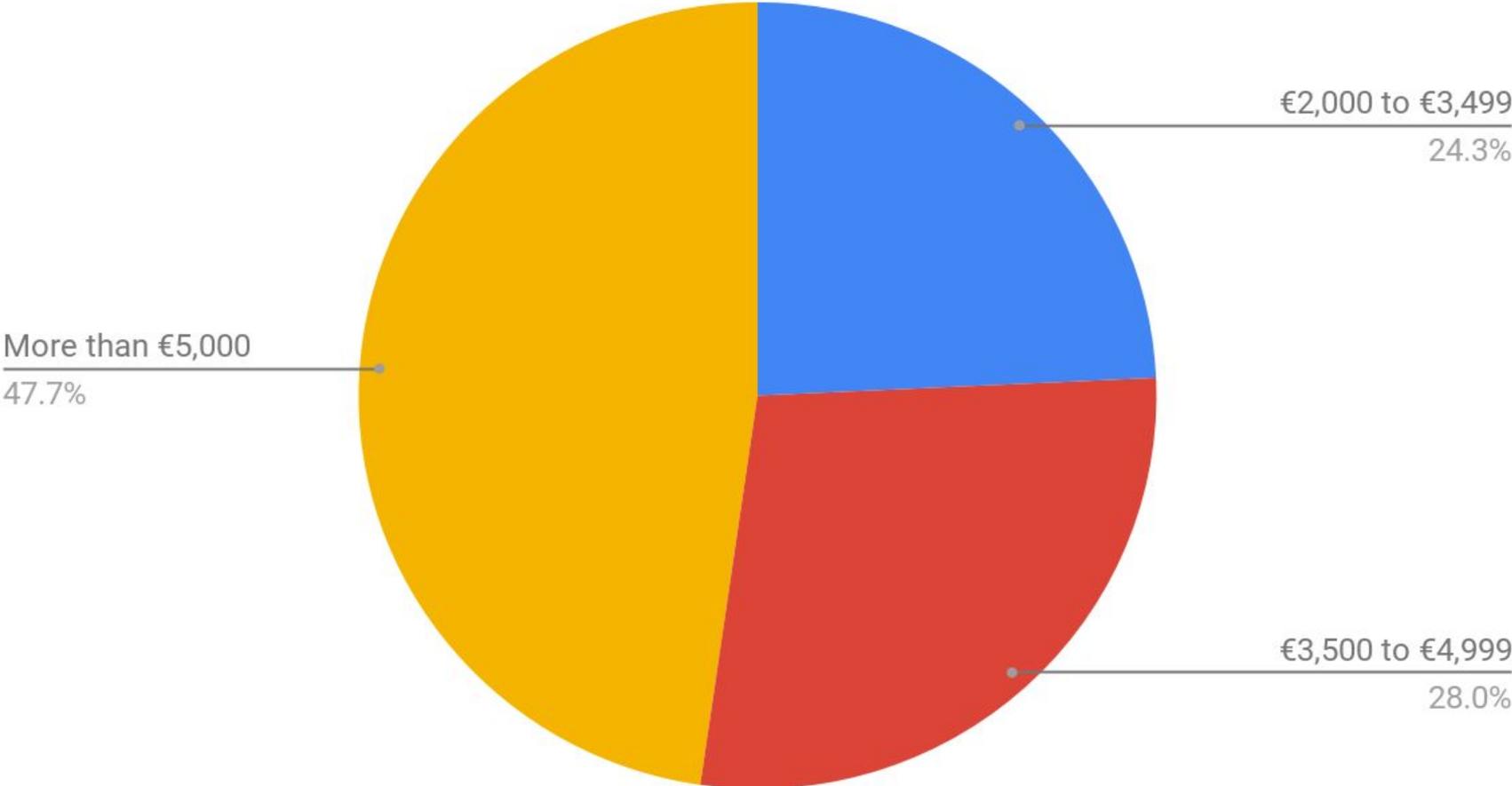
# Where do you live in the Netherlands?



# What is your country of origin?



# What is your gross monthly household income?



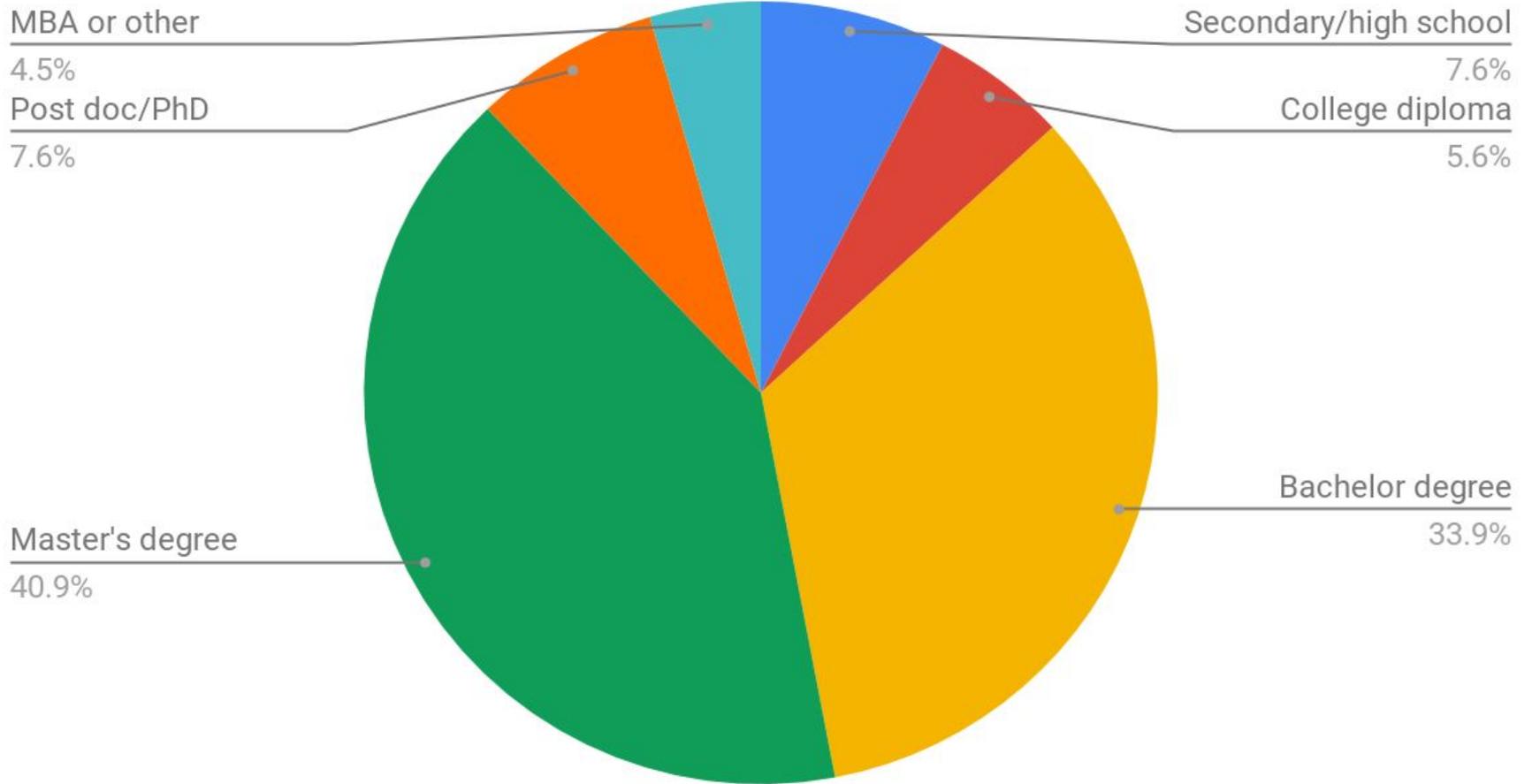
# *Before the Move*

In this section we look in more detail at the careers of partners before they moved to the Netherlands, how they prepared to move and what they are looking for in terms of a job.

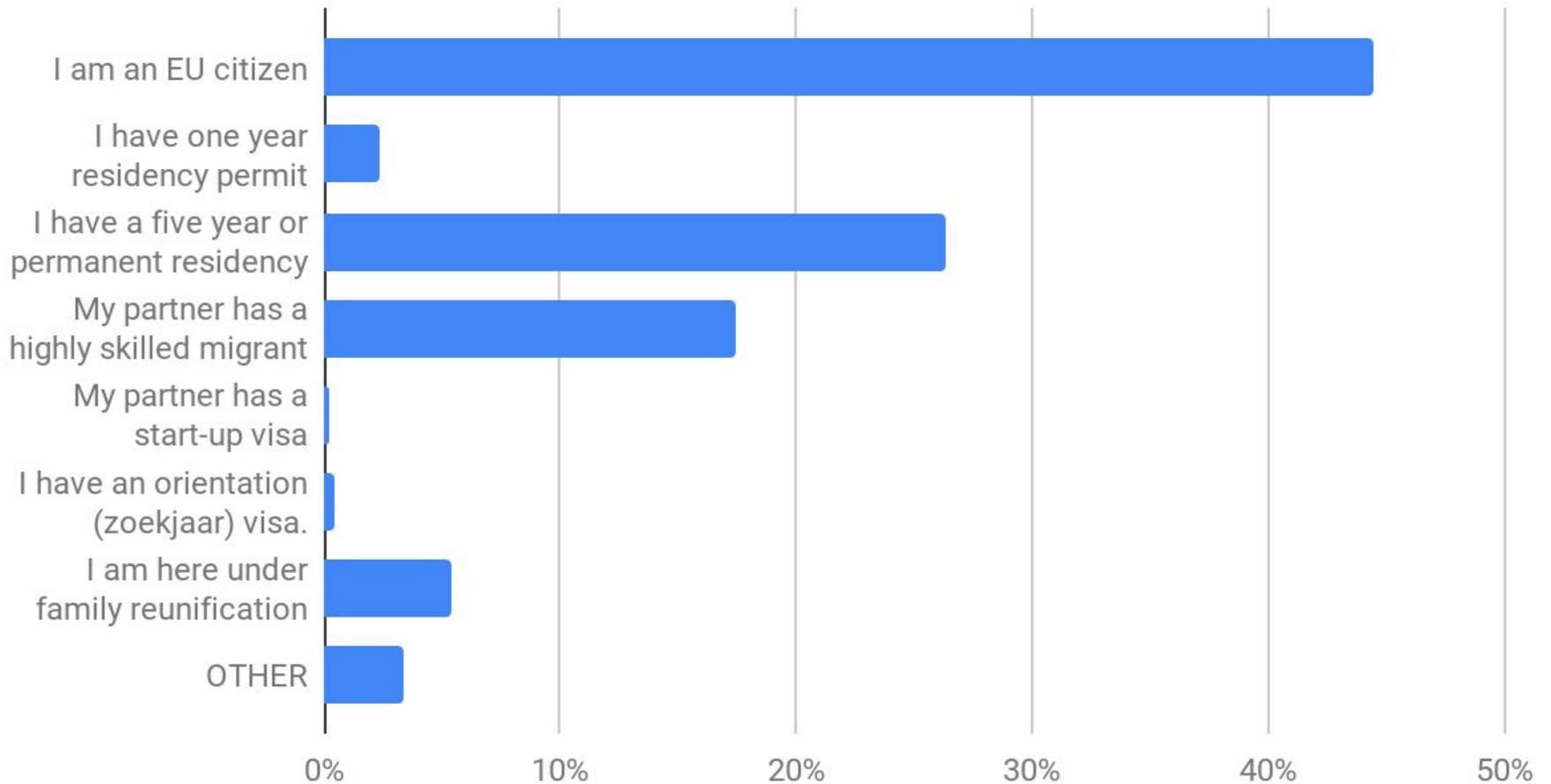
# Key Findings

- 80% of respondents had a degree and 7% a postdoc qualification
- Respondents were looking for work in a wide variety of fields, with an even split of 12% to 13% focusing on education, IT and technology and management or consulting.
- Over half (52%) were looking for a job of over 36 hours a week
- Although 33% started their search for work before moving to the Netherlands, just 14% succeeded.

## What level of education do you have?



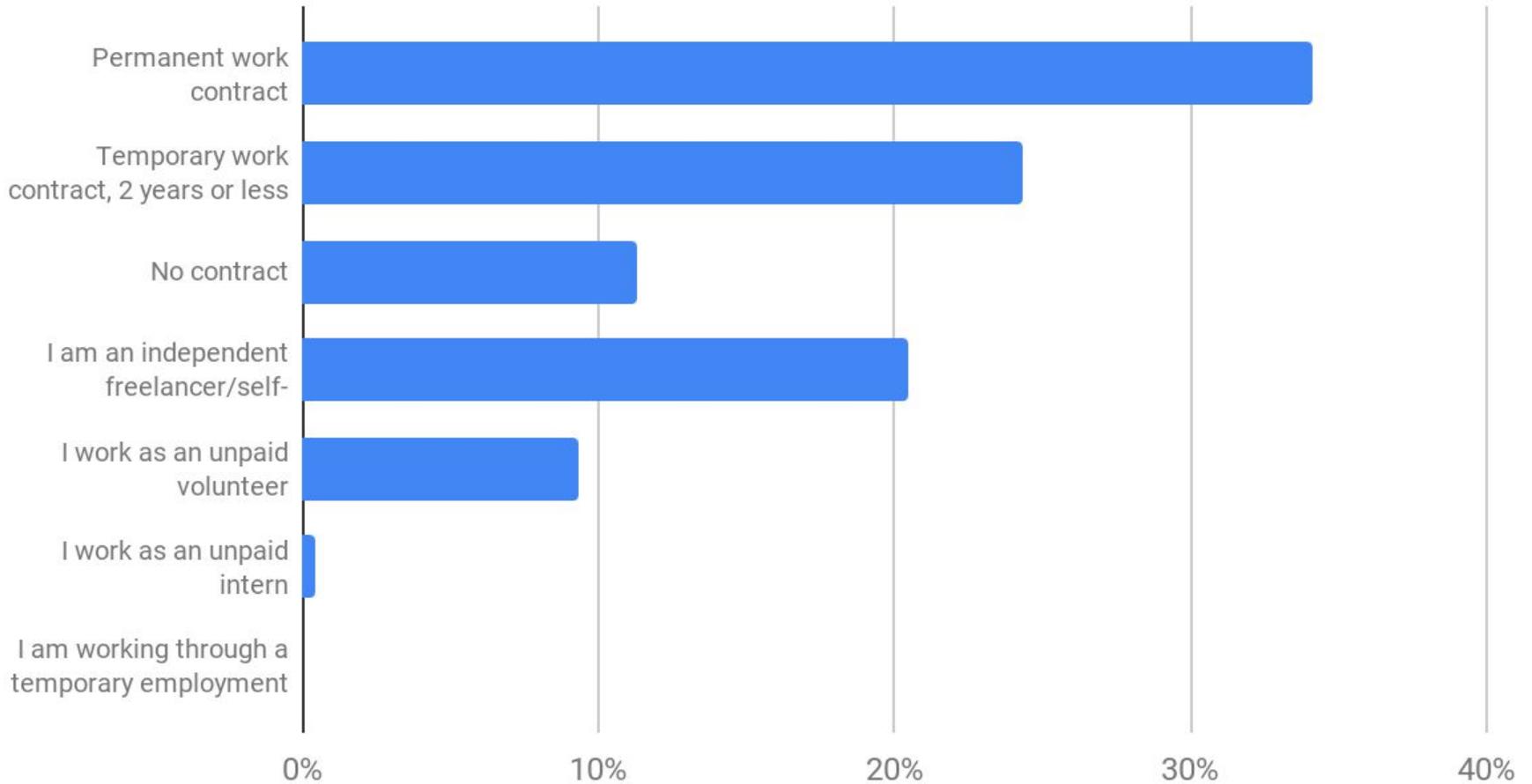
## What is your residency status?



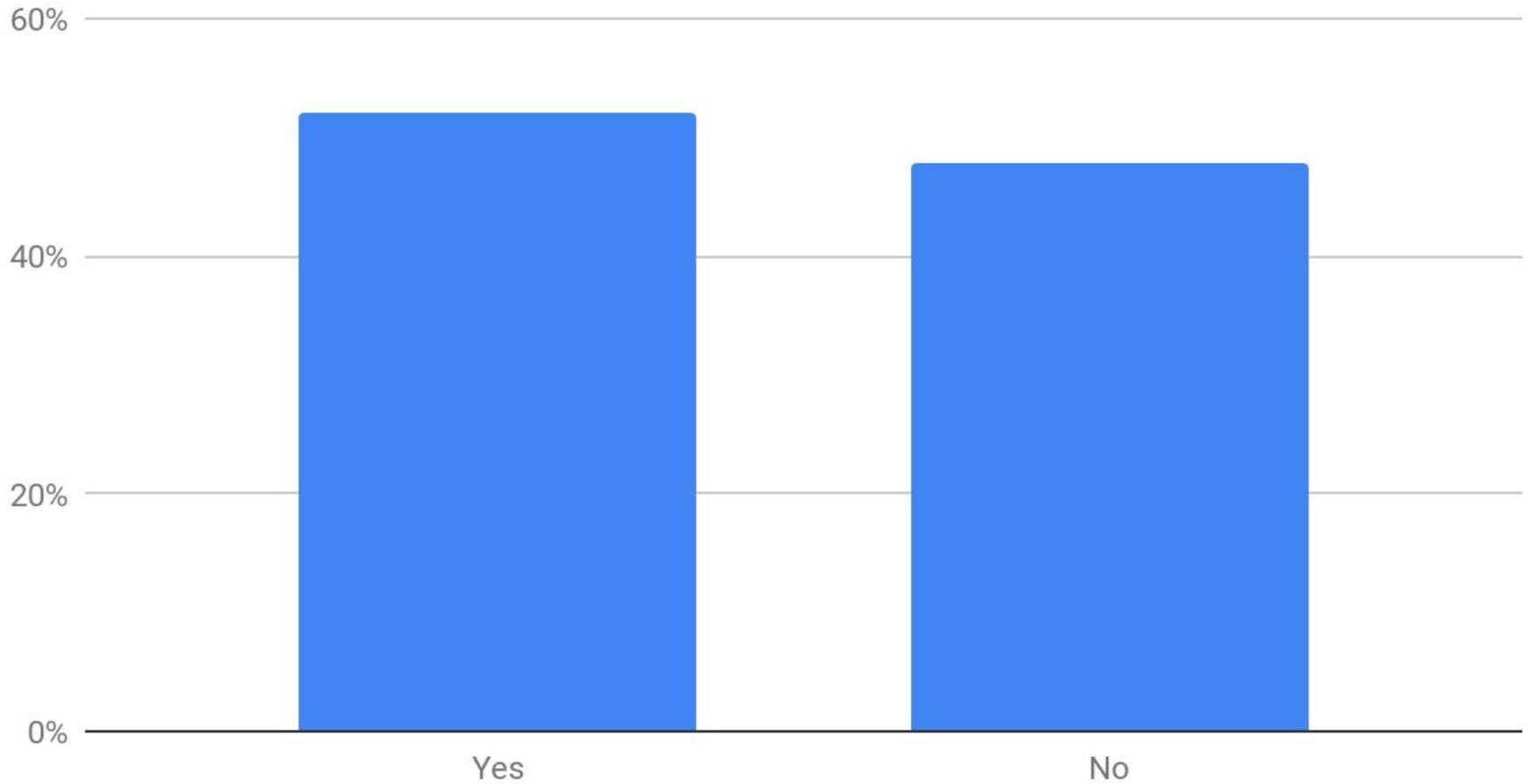
## Are you currently in paid employment or looking for paid work?



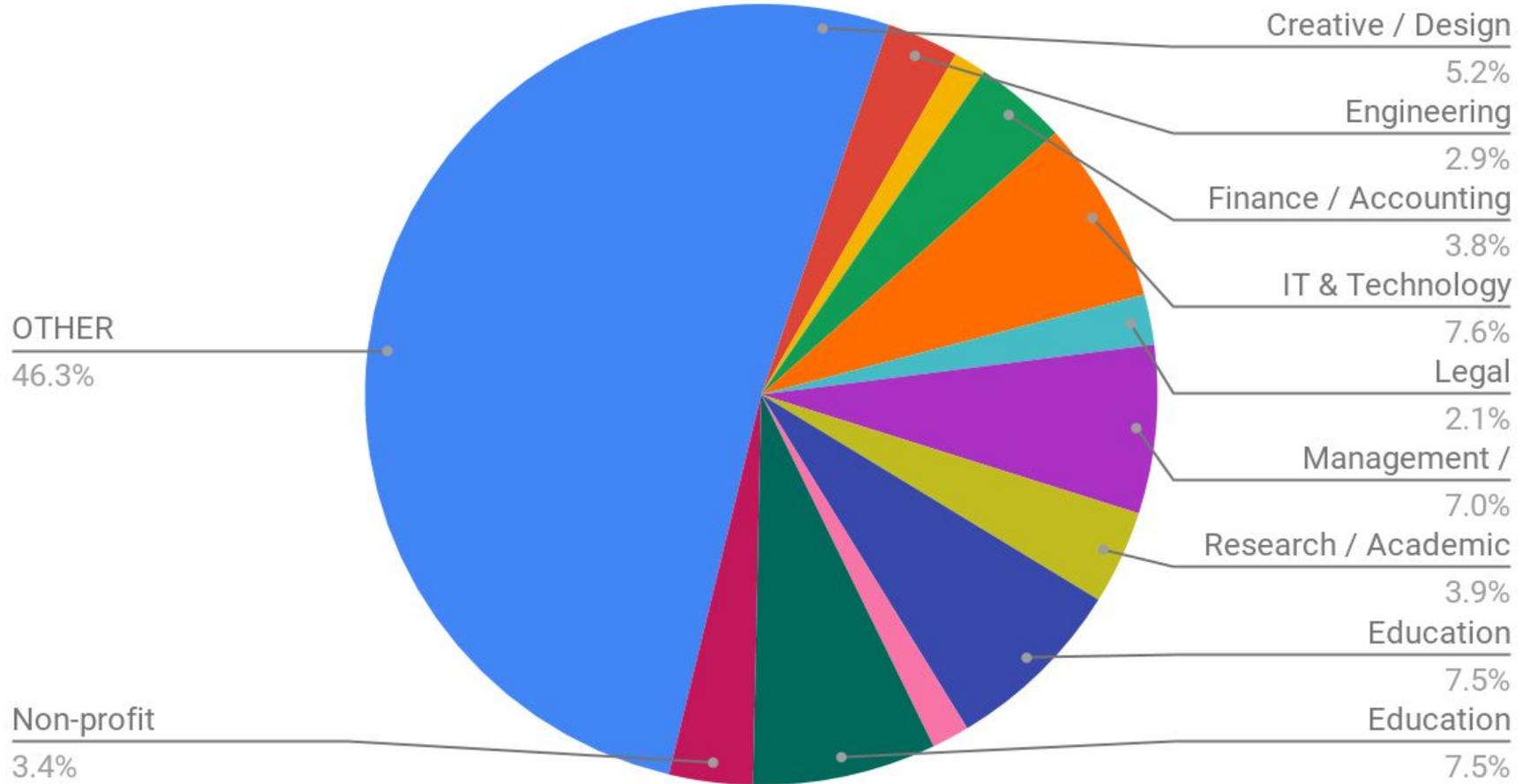
## If you are working (paid or unpaid) what is your status?



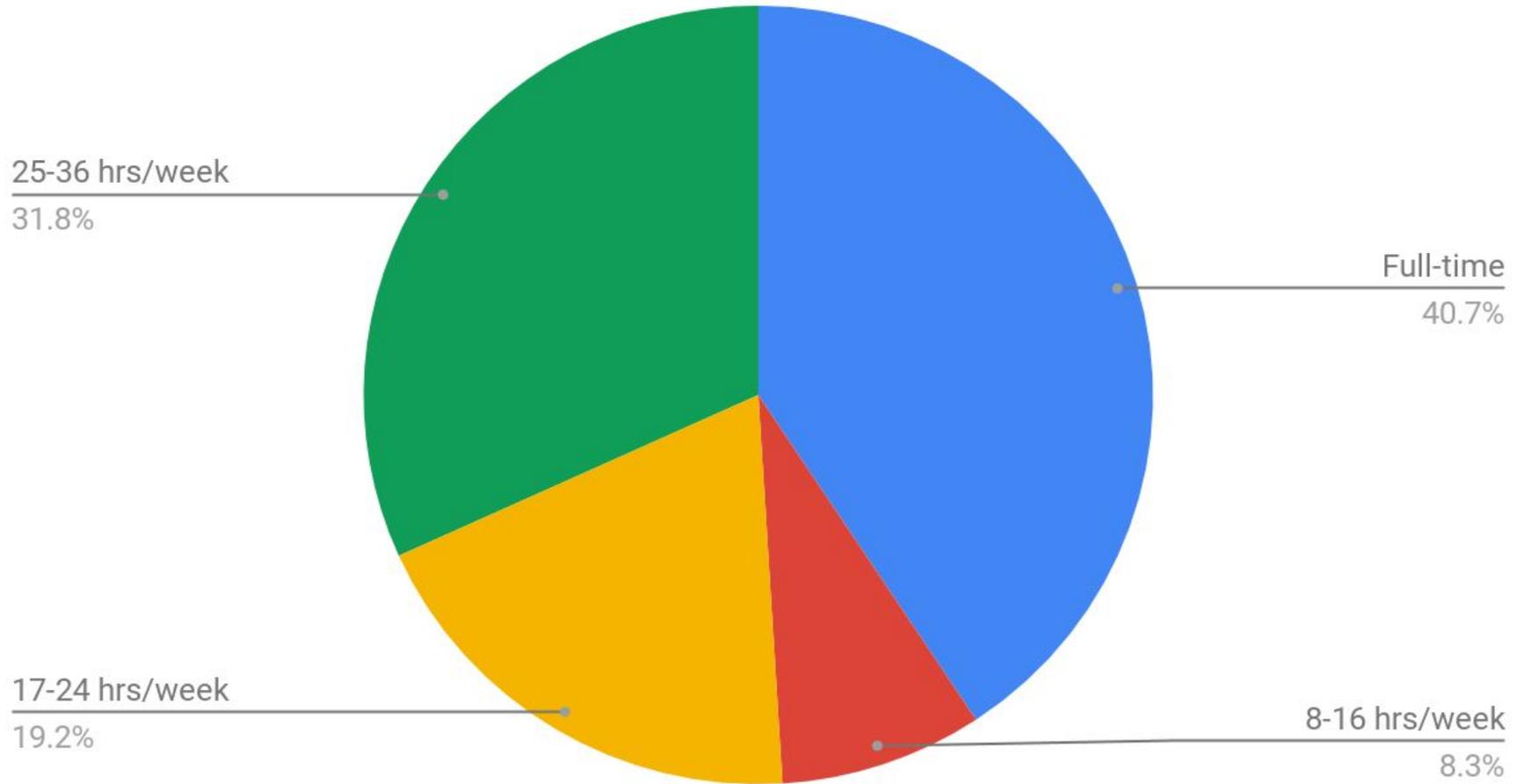
## Is it common in your country of origin to do voluntary work?



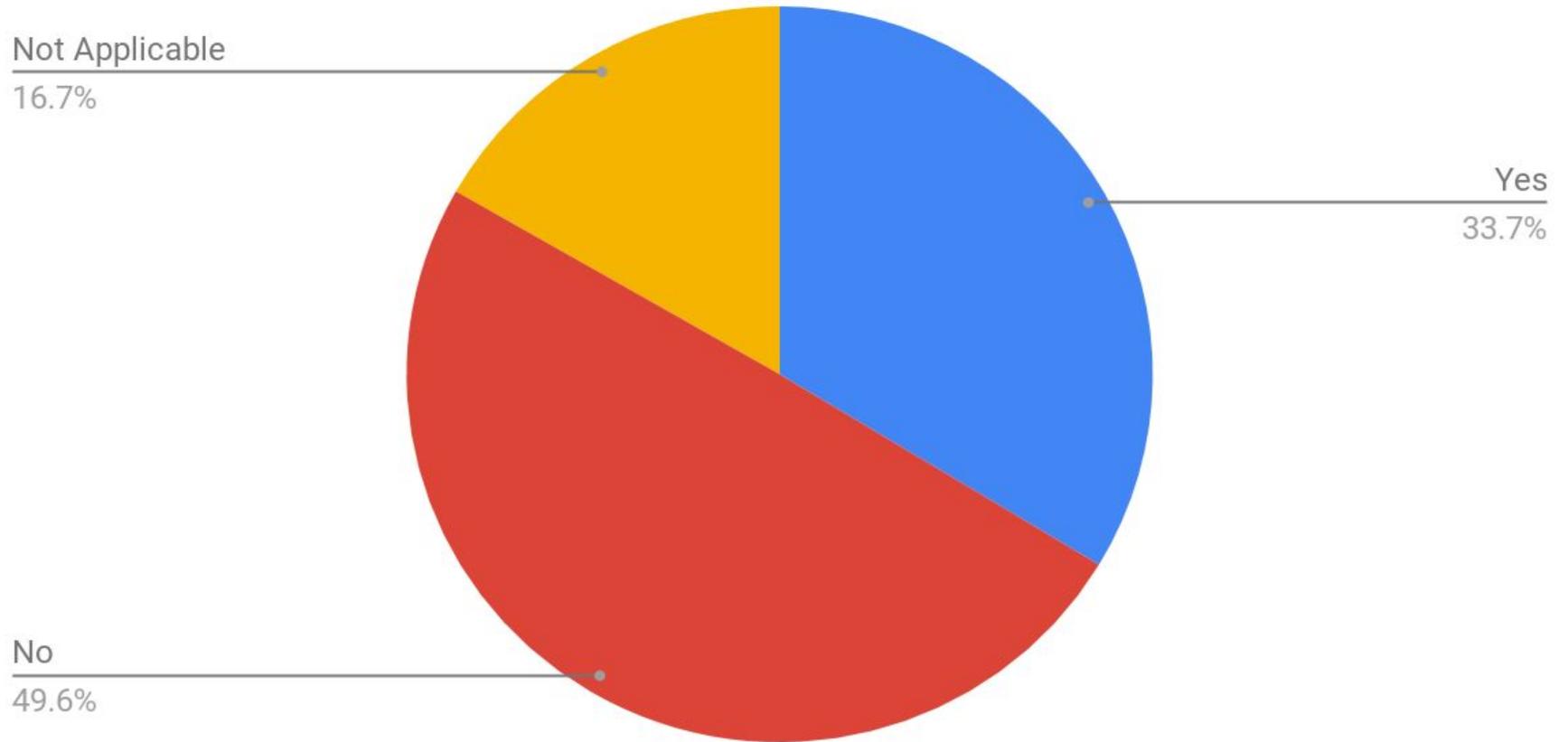
# What field do you work in or are you looking in?



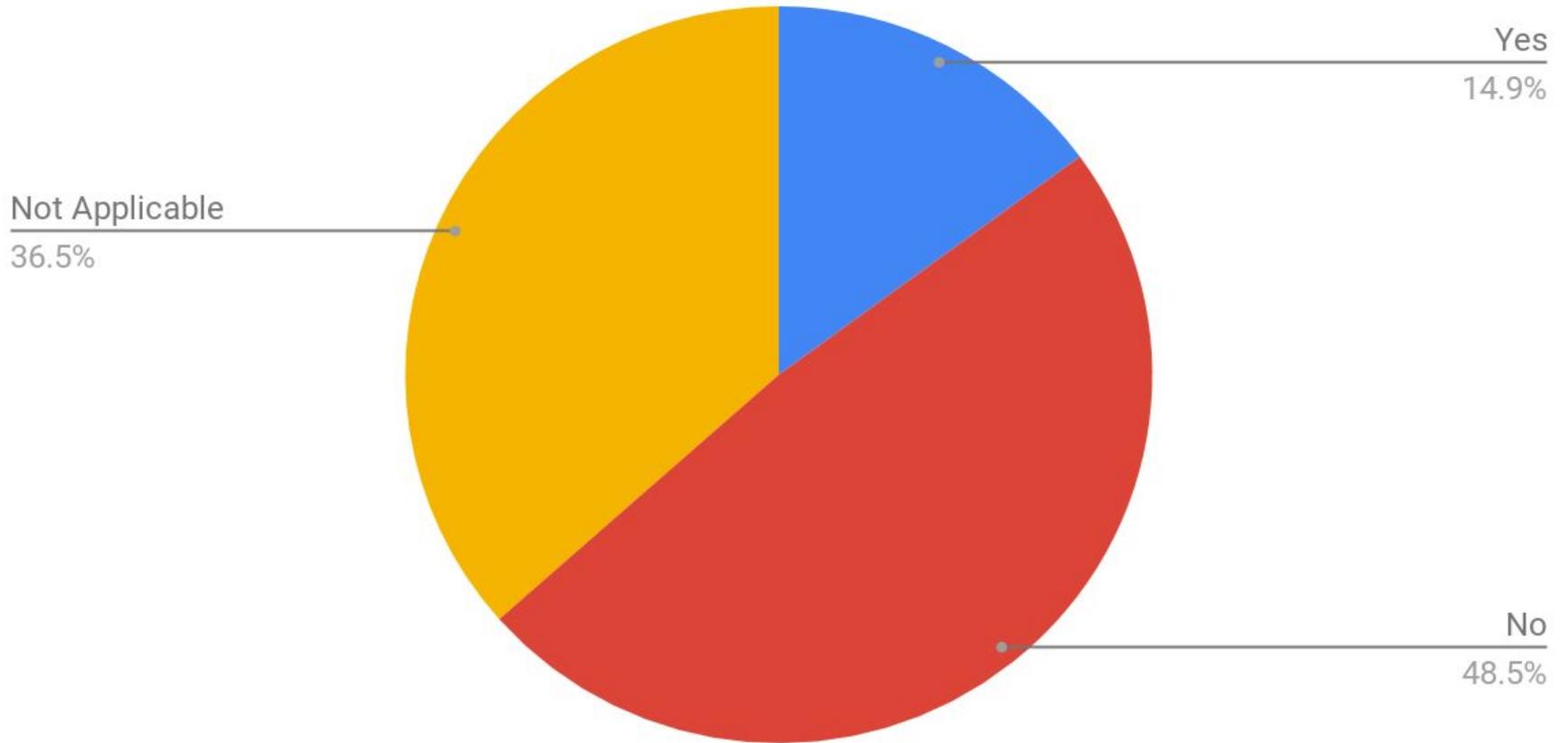
## Would you prefer to work full-time or part-time?



If you are in work, or still looking for a job, did you start your job search before moving to the Netherlands?



If you have a job, did you find it before you arrived in the Netherlands?



# What the Respondents Say

Many of the respondents to the survey commented on how difficult they had found it to find a job, and how this had made them unhappy and depressed.

*'I always get the "you're overqualified for this position" reason. I've noticed that most recruiters lack skills because they generalise my total years of experience. As a "gezinsmigrant", it's my obligation to help the Dutch economy and be employed but NO employer or company is giving me a chance here.'*

*'I have been able to find employment within the international community, but not utilising the skills I have from my previous employment. There are countless women in the same situation'*

*'I am struggling to find employment, especially one that fits with my background and interests. This has caused me a lot of frustrations and sadness, which in turn impacts negatively on my relationship with my partner.'*

*'I am in a career conundrum. I was a teacher in my country of origin. I got the permits to teach here, but I feel the language is still a barrier for that to be feasible. I miss teaching and even if I have a job (under my qualifications), I feel underpaid and wasted.'*

*'It was incredibly difficult (and humbling) to try and find work in the first three years after moving here. I had assumed I would be able to pick up where I left off in my career in America, but that was not the case... I love working. My partner earns enough to provide for us both, but I did not move here to be a stay-at-home partner.'*

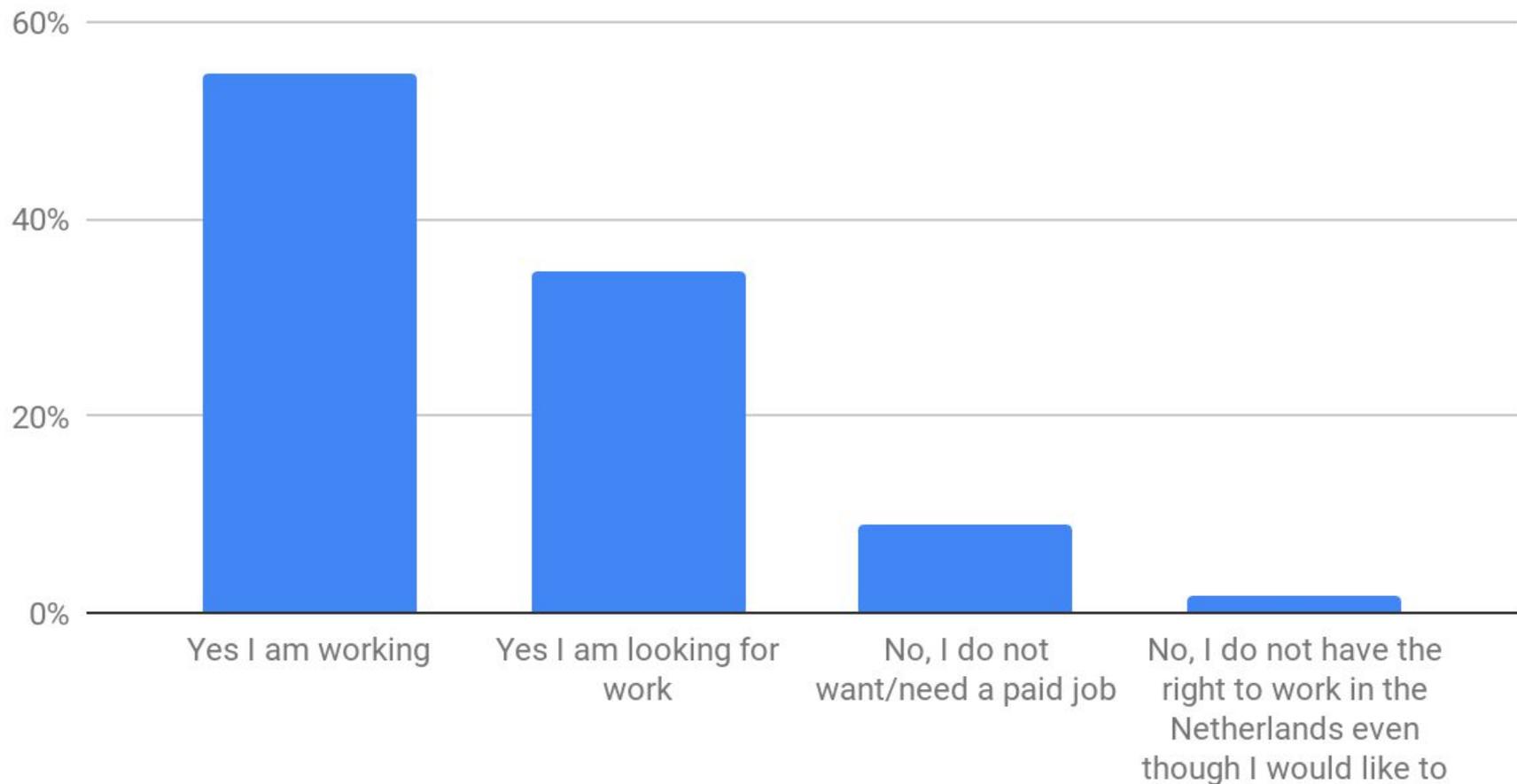
# *Finding a Job*

In this section, we look at what the respondents did or are doing to find a job and the problems they have experienced.

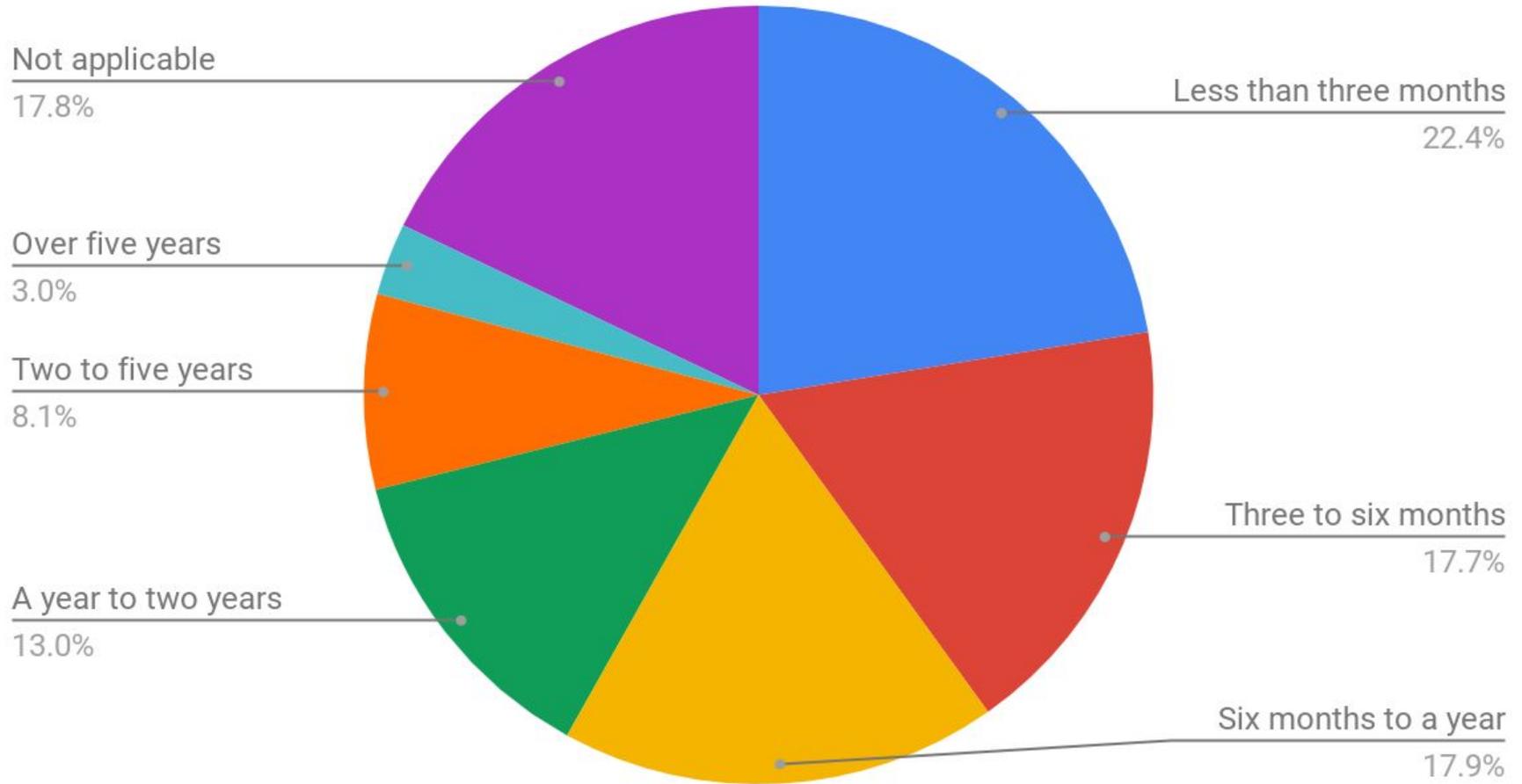
# Key Findings

- Almost seven in 10 said their [lack of] Dutch language skills were hampering their efforts to find work.
- Just 10% of respondents did not want or need a job, while a handful would like to work but were not allowed to.
- Four in 10 would have welcomed help from their partner's employer in finding work.
- One in five respondents found a job within three months but 13% had been looking for over a year
- Four in five respondents searched online for vacancies but just 46% registered with recruitment agencies
- Three in 10 said either their work experience or diplomas were not recognized

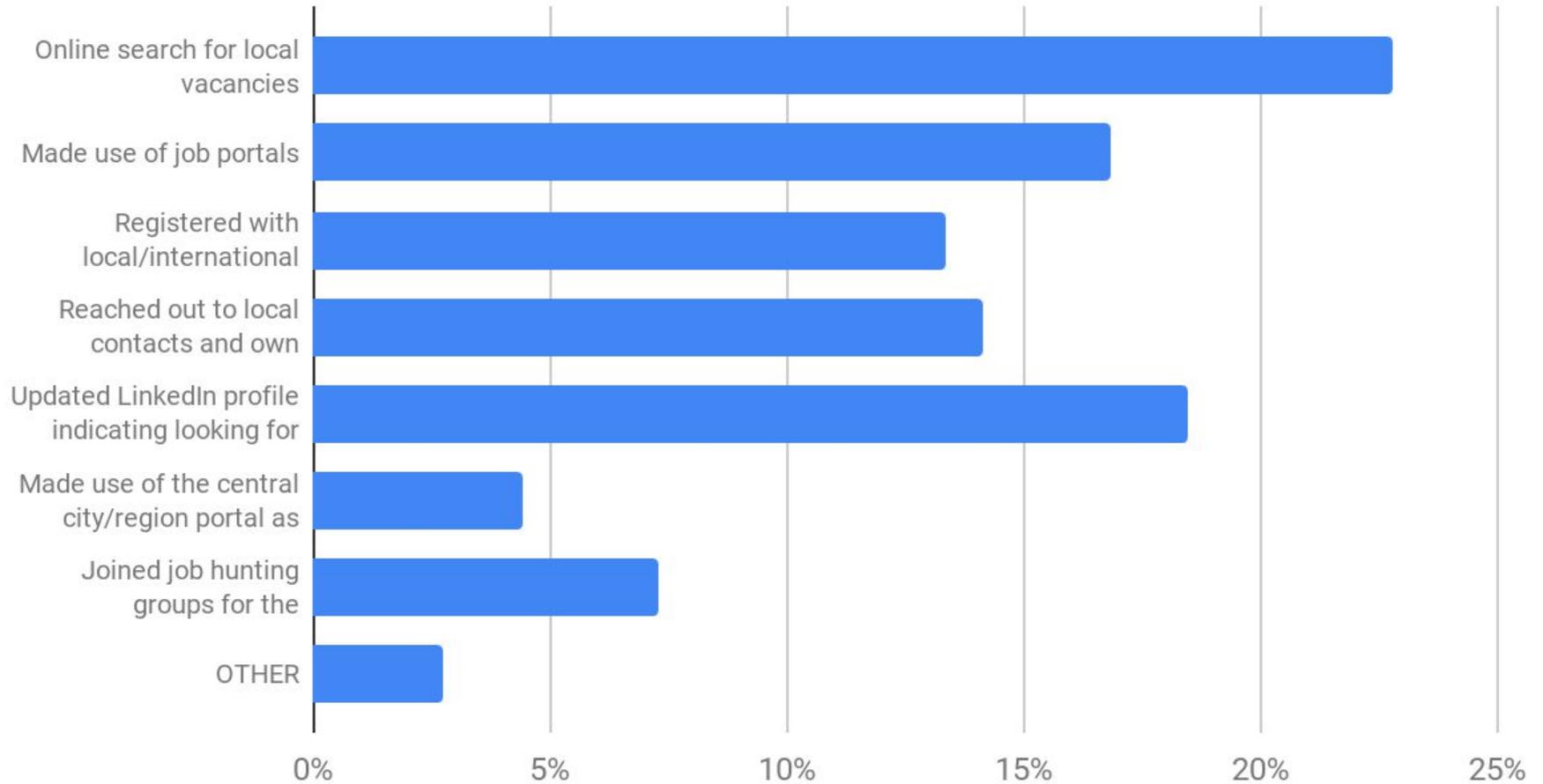
## Are you currently in paid employment or looking for paid work?



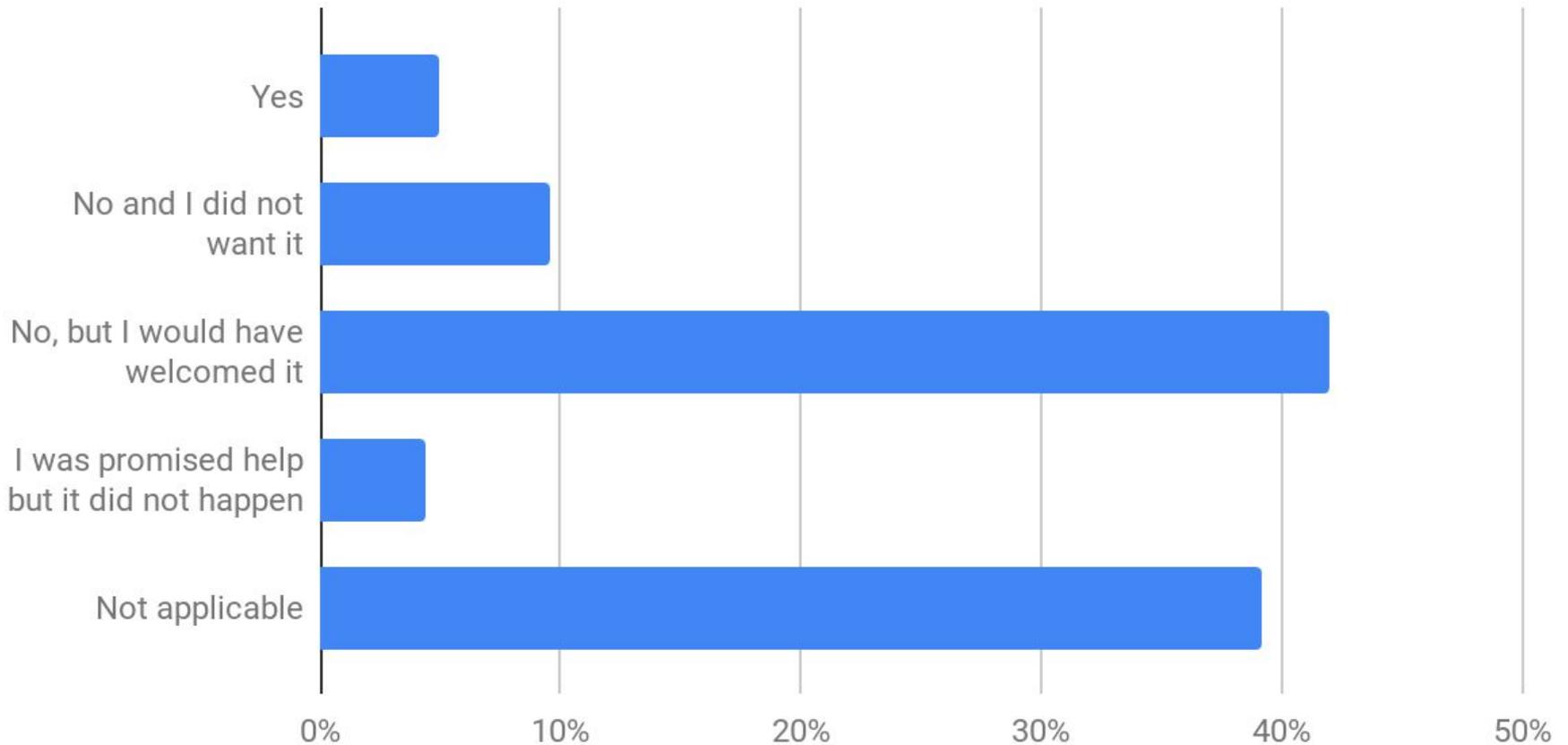
## How long have you been looking or did you look for work?



## What steps did you take/are you taking to find a job?



If you relocated because of your partner's job, did your partner's employer help you to find work?

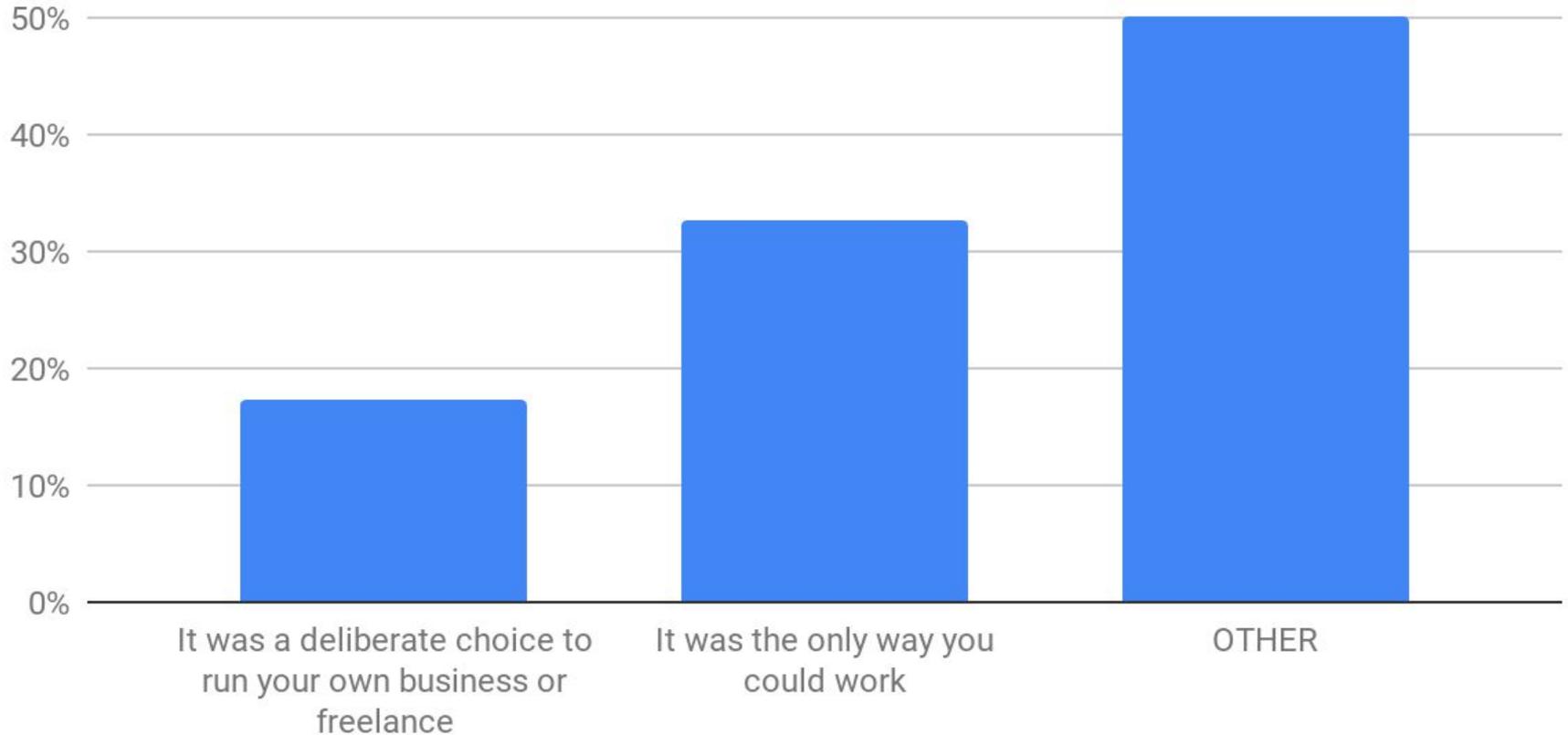


# What the Respondents Say

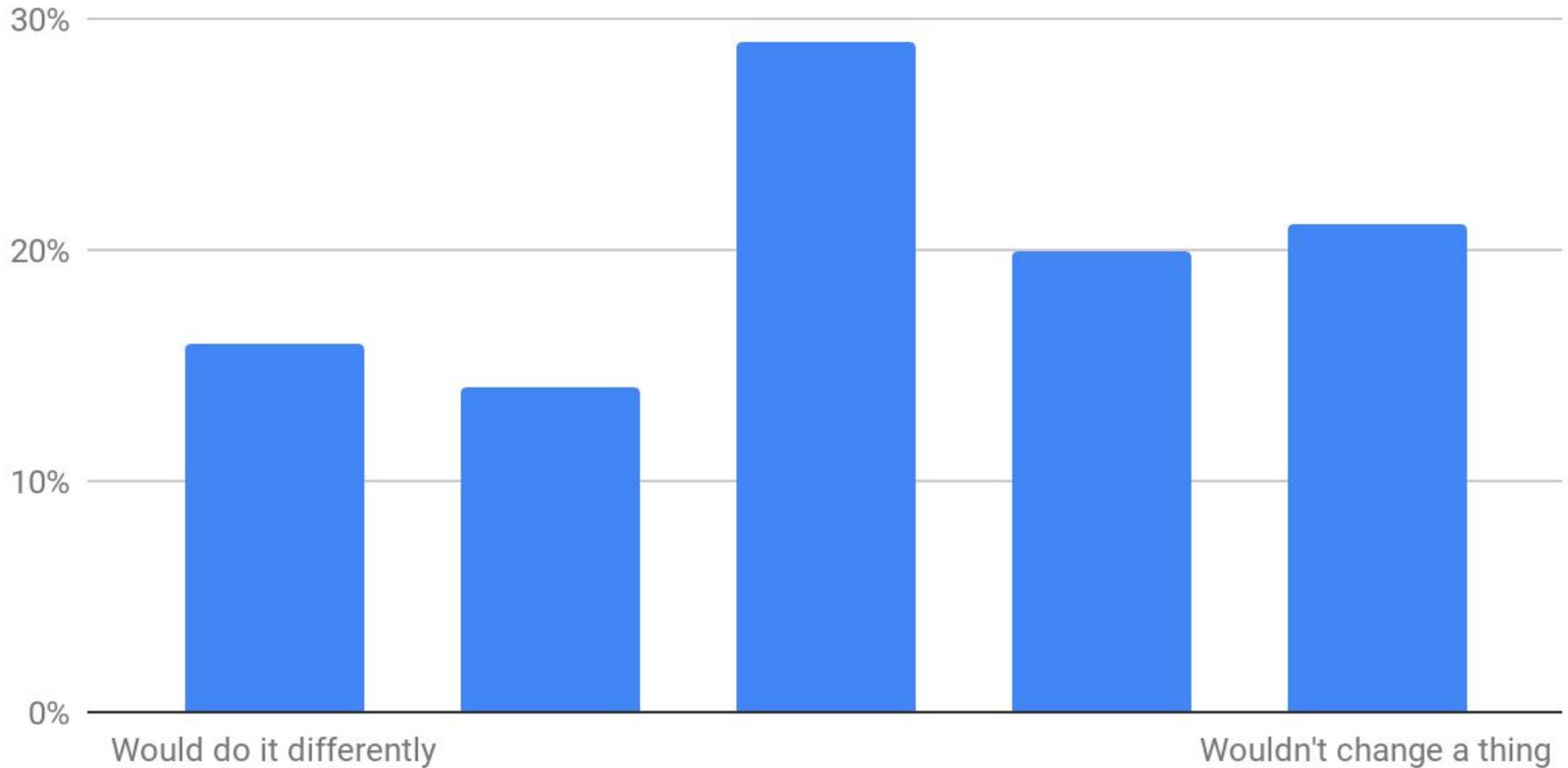
Four in 10 respondents said they would have welcomed help from their partner's employer to find work and made the following suggestions about what form this could take:

- Training - in language skills, CV update and interview skills/coaching for local market
- Cross-cultural training - for socialisation as well as work-place
- Access/introductions to professional networking opportunities
- List of/introduction to recruitment agencies and employers' own professional networks
- Introduction of CV/self to partner's own HR - for internal opps and/or networking links
- Assistance with credential verification

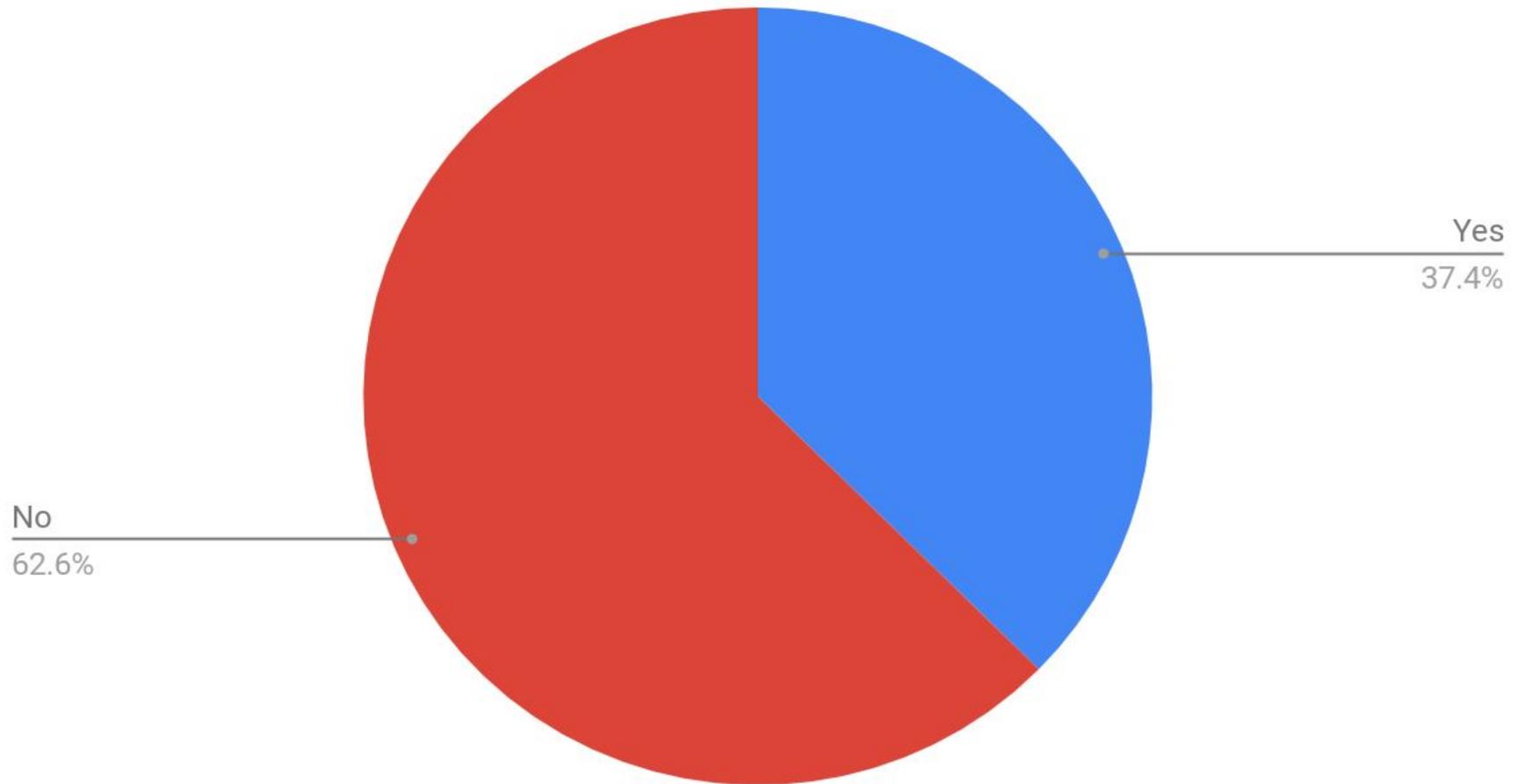
If you are working as a freelancer or have set up your own business, was this because...



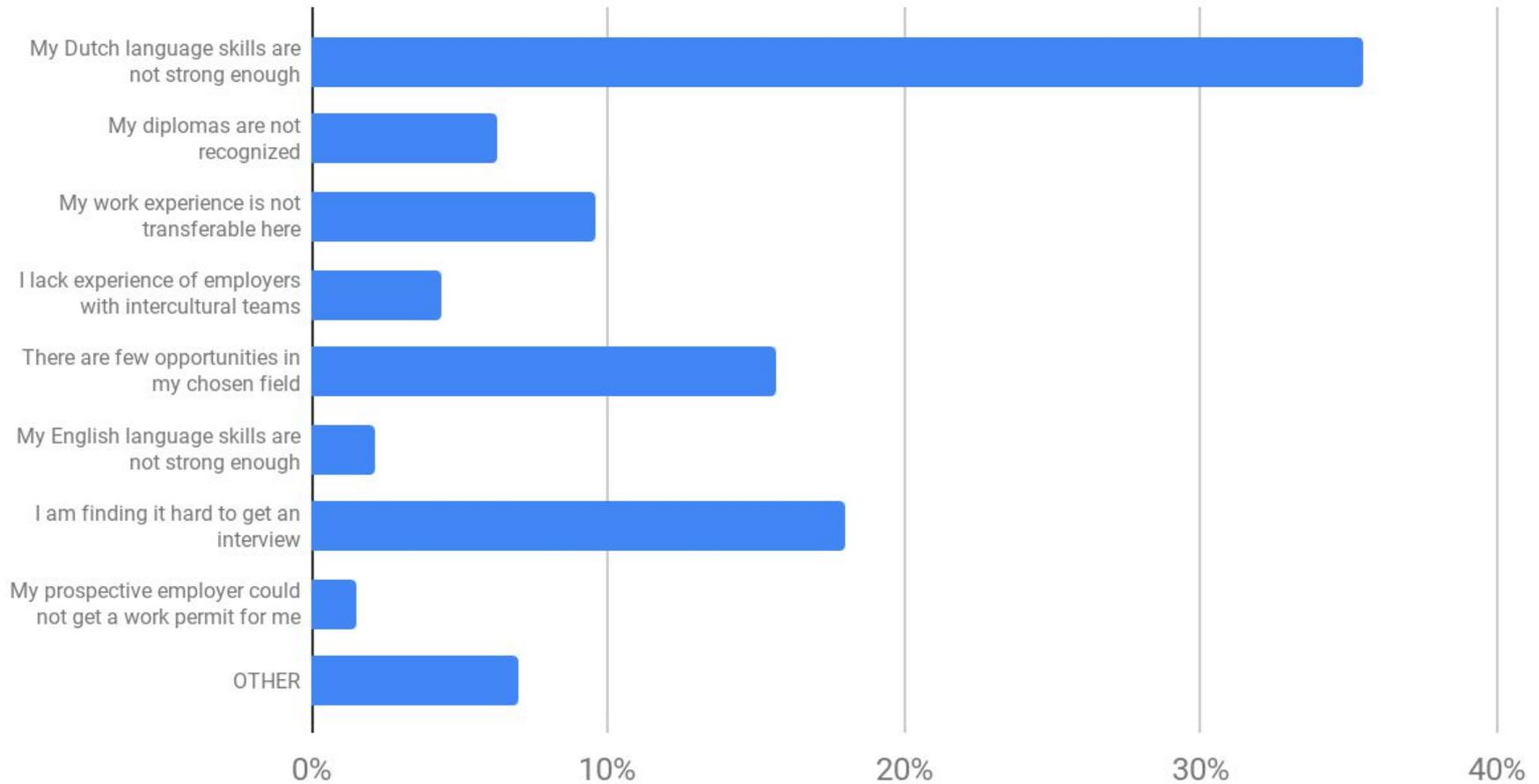
If you were to redo your job search when you relocated to the Netherlands, would you approach it in the same way or differently than you did this time?



## Are you aware of the iamsterdam jobsearch portal?



## What problems, if any, have you found looking for work?



# What the Respondents Say

Respondents were asked if they had any advice for others who might be considering coming to the Netherlands as an accompanying partner or relocating from the Netherlands to live with someone?

*'Update your LinkedIn, take Dutch lessons, do a course in your specific field in the Netherlands, be open to other fields as well. Do some voluntary work to socialize with other Dutch people. More importantly: don't have any high expectations and go with the flow. I succeeded in doing that.'*

*'Don't try to do your job search completely online...or even 50% online. Get involved in social activities and network face-to-face. Especially in the north, this is critical.'*

*'If you can, take Dutch classes as soon as possible. Expecting local people to speak English is a mistake and it can result with difficulties to adapt to your new reality.'*

*'Build your network, have coffee chats. I am in HR and a lot of employees get hired via network vs job boards.'*

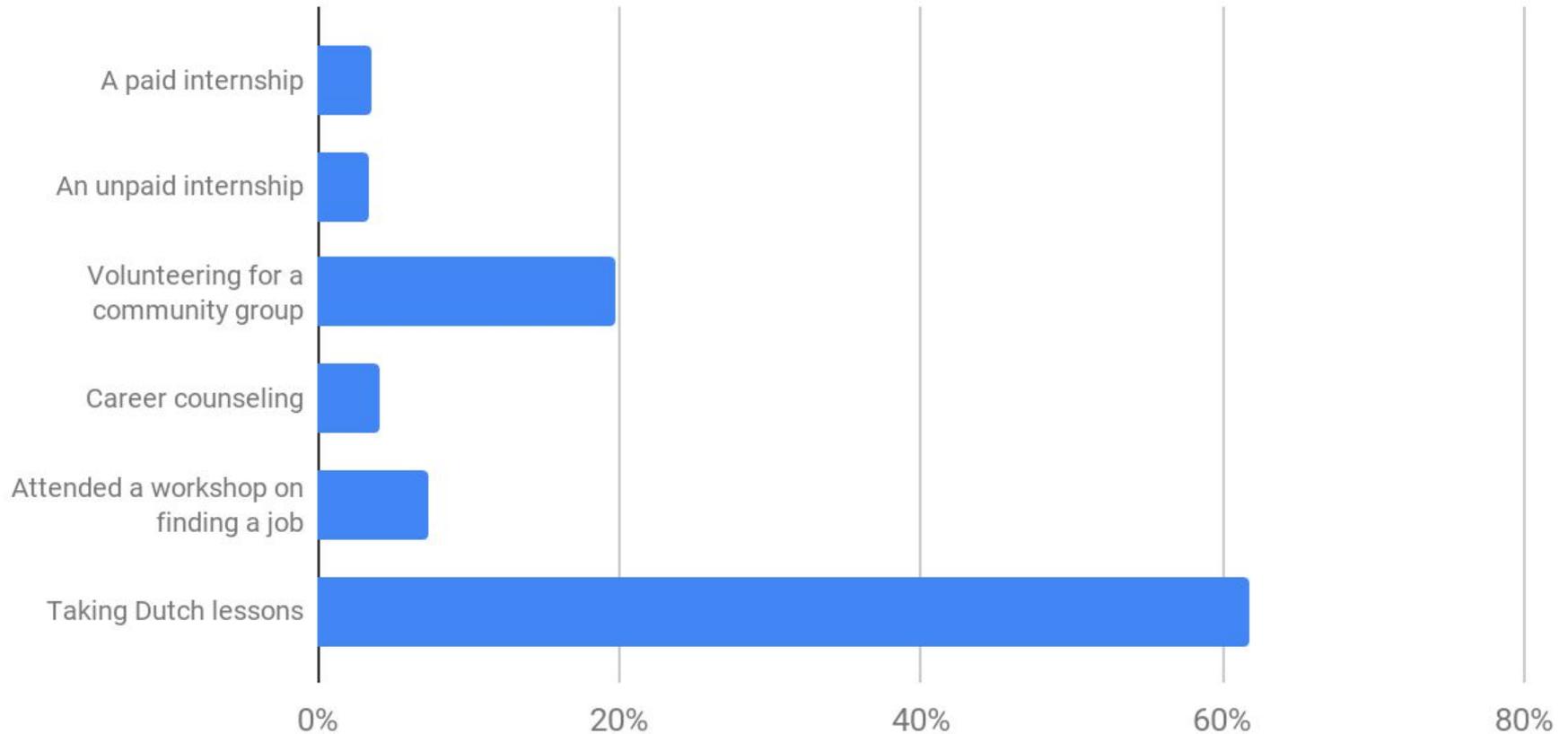
# *Speaking Dutch & Retraining*

Many respondents commented on the fact that not speaking Dutch is a problem in finding work, even in international companies. In this section we look at partners' views on speaking and learning Dutch and on retraining to work in other sectors

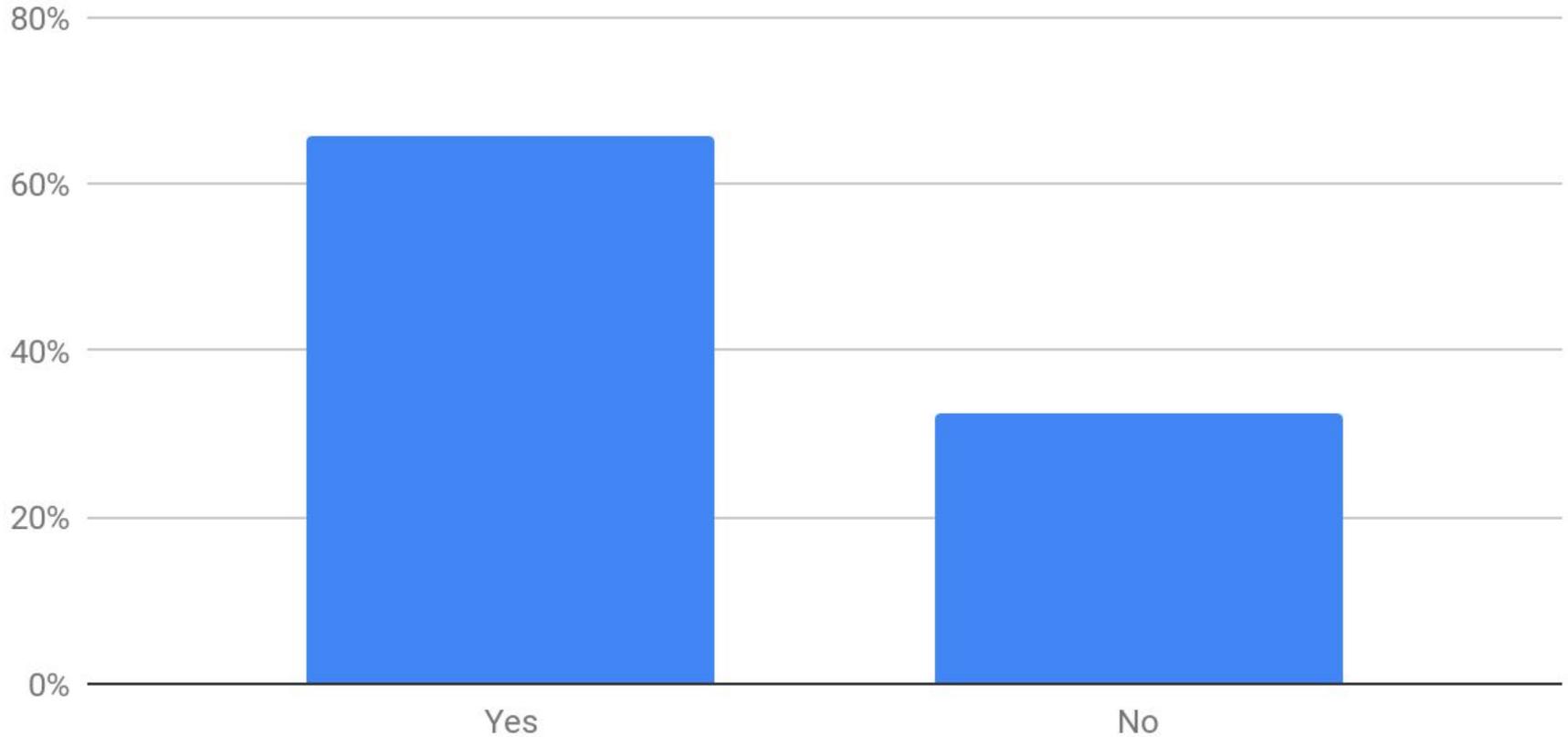
# Key Findings

- Six in 10 respondents had taken Dutch lessons and 20% had volunteered for a community group
- 70% said speaking Dutch is beneficial to essential in their field but just 53% said speaking Dutch is beneficial/essential in the job they are actually doing.
- Two-thirds would recommend people started learning Dutch before moving to the Netherlands.
- Two-thirds were also open to retraining in another sector where there is more demand

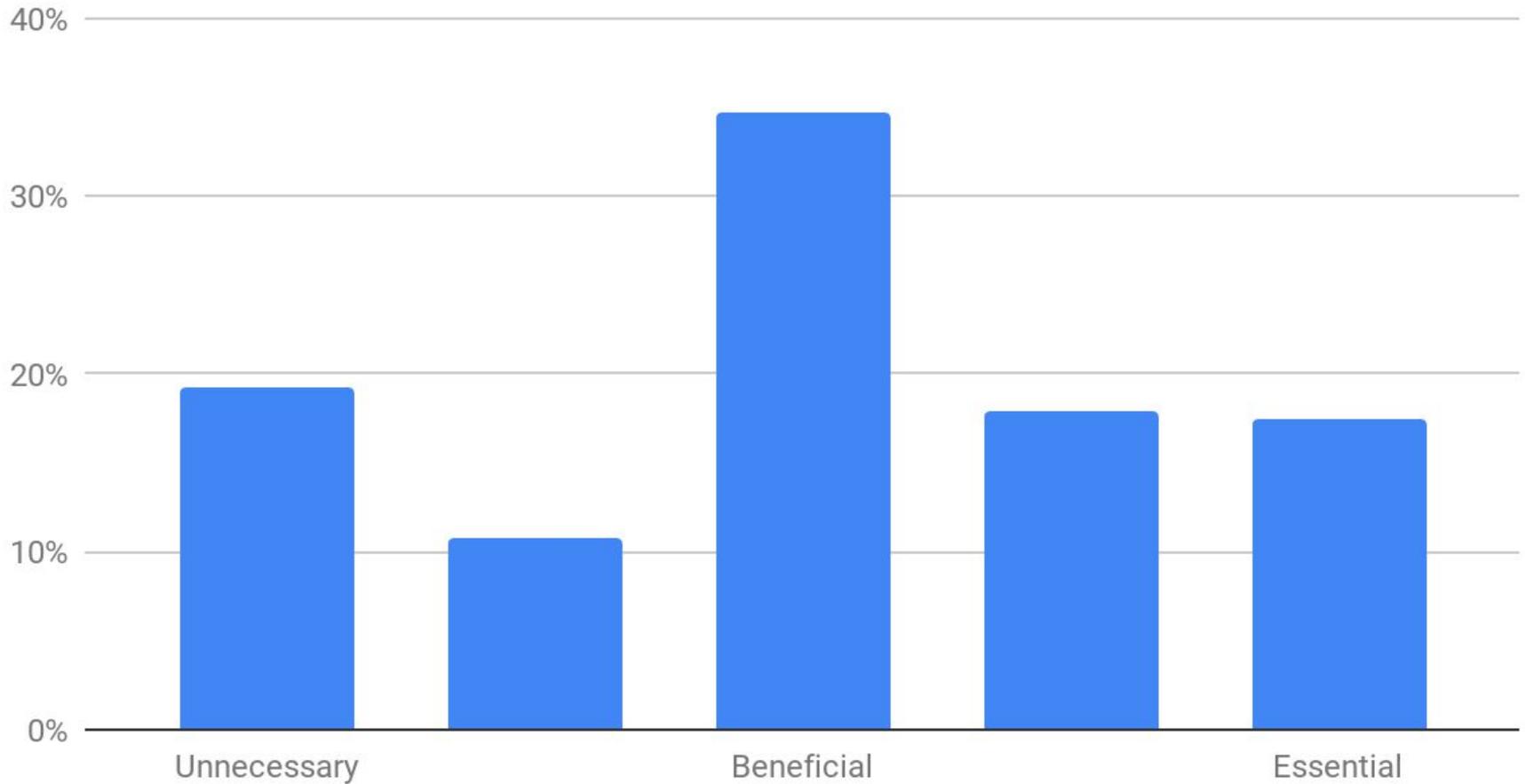
## Are you currently doing or have you done any of the following in the Netherlands?



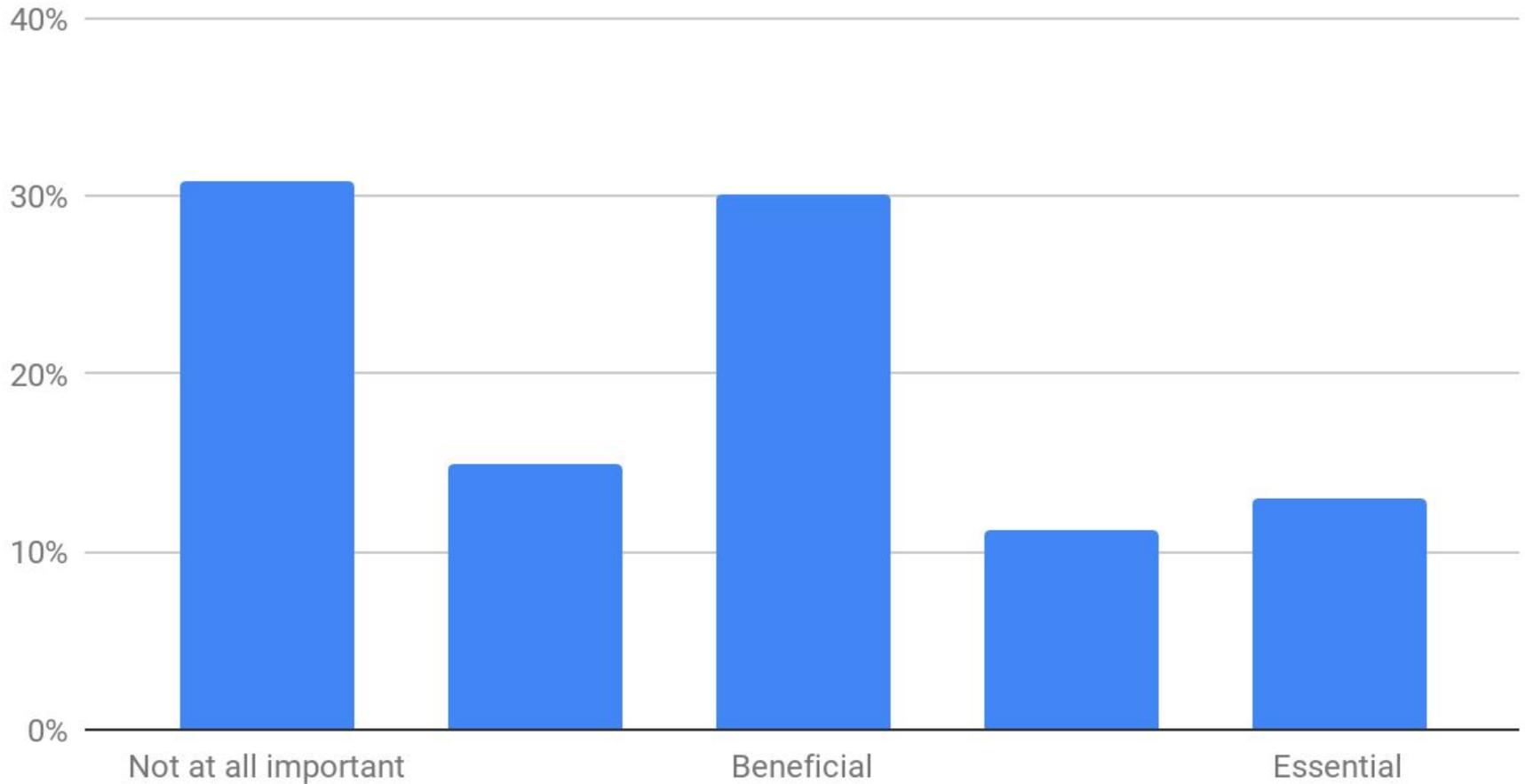
Would you be open to retraining in another sector where there is demand in the Netherlands, such as IT?



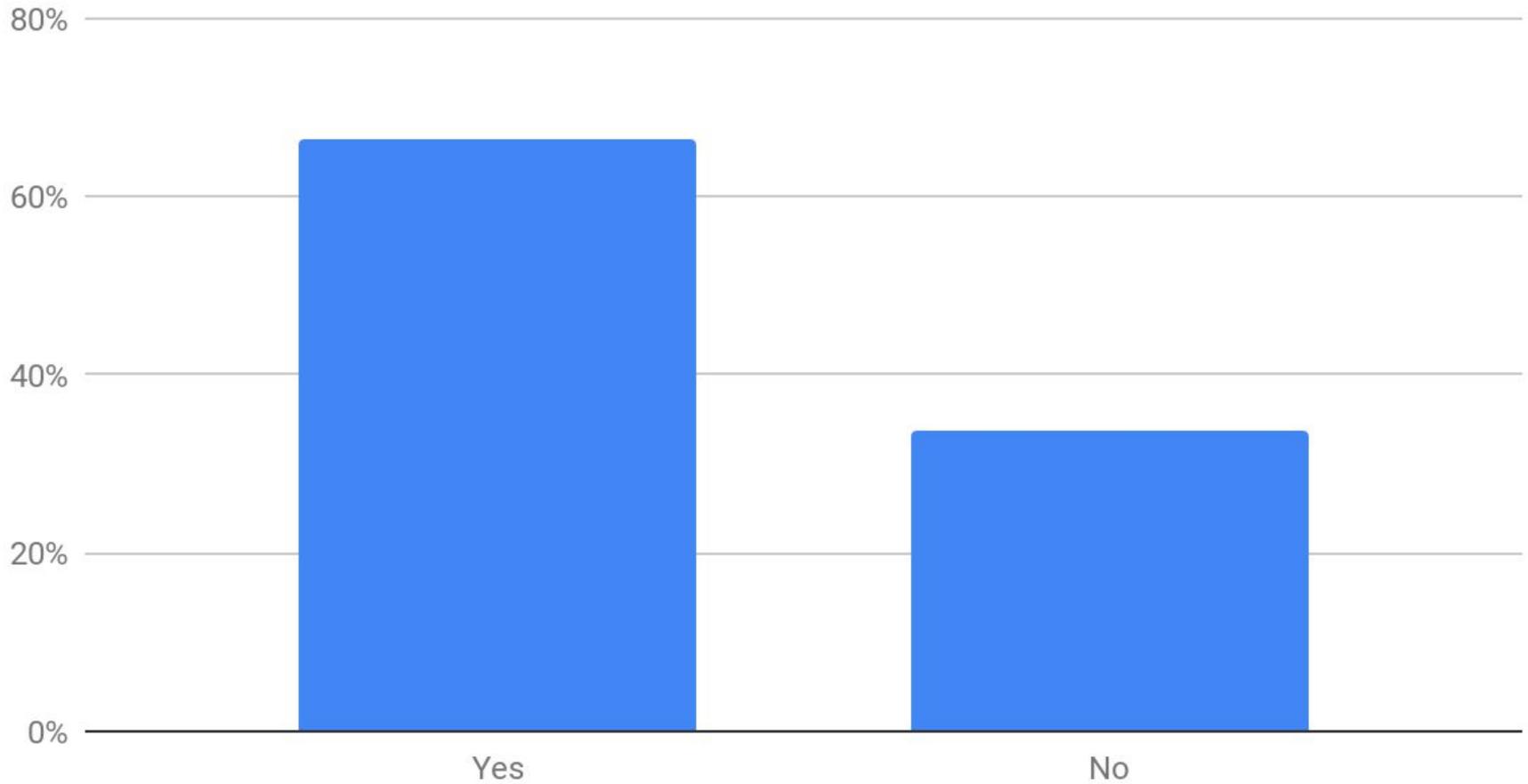
## Is it important to speak Dutch in your field?



## How important is speaking Dutch in the job you are doing?



## Would you recommend learning Dutch before relocation?



# What the Respondents Say

What stood out about the comments on language learning was the frustration of many who reiterated the conundrum many encounter: they are trying to learn but have difficulty in practicing. Others highlighted the fact Dutch skills are often preferred but not stated as such on job openings.

*'It's always easier to settle in when you speak the local language, even if you can survive without it.'*

*'I have noticed that most other companies in my field have a strong preference for fluency in Dutch and English. So if you can start learning Dutch now, it opens a lot of options later. Realistically, no one is going to become fluent in Dutch until they live here for quite a while but the sooner you start, the sooner you get there.'*

*'Even though the level you can achieve with taking lessons will not be sufficient, speaking at least basic Dutch helps with applications and creates a first positive atmosphere during the interview.'*

*'I have found a large number of employers use speaking Dutch as a way to filter applicants even if the business language is English.'*

*'Even though the official work in all the tech companies is done in English, the culture within the organisation compels you to learn Dutch or else you will not be interviewed. A completely qualified Java developer will not be considered if they don't speak Dutch or have English as their native language. I am from India, and living here with my husband. I am fluent in English but still I never get called back.'*

*Amsterdam vs.  
the Netherlands*

# Key Findings

The difference in responses between the Amsterdam/Amstelveen respondents and the total was minimal, with a few exceptions. Given the size of the sample, we have only highlighted areas in which the difference was at least five percentage points.

## **Higher income**

Amsterdammers had a higher household income. 60% reported an income of over €5,000 a month, compared with 48% of the total sample.

## **More men**

In total, 31% of Amsterdam respondents were male, compared with 22% of the sample as a whole.

## **More likely to be childless**

50% of Amsterdammers did not have children, compared with 42% of the total sample

## **More likely to be working**

Amsterdam respondents were also more likely to be working – 65% had a job, compared with 55% of the total response.

47% of Amsterdam-based respondents were aware of the Amsterdam jobs portal

There were slight differences in several other areas, but these were not statistically significant, given the size of the sample.

# *Conclusions & Recommendations*

# Conclusions

- Do not assume that expat partners do not want to work. Most of the partners who completed our survey are keen to work, and at least half want to work full time.
- Accompanying partners represent a pool of skilled, willing employees who are often ignored.
- Most respondents would like to stay here indefinitely and are taking efforts to make that possible.
- Many respondents say [in open questions] that the struggle to find work has left them depressed, angry and having problems with their partners because they feel dependent.
- Respondents would value more help from their partners' employers in finding work.
- Learning Dutch may not be essential to their job, but most respondents say speaking Dutch is beneficial in finding work and for their career prospects.

# Recommendations

- Everyone involved in the chain, from the NFIA to local authorities and employers, should be upfront about the advantages new arrivals will get from knowing at least a bit of the local language.
- Expectations about the ease of finding work could be better managed.
- Companies employing international staff should be actively encouraged to organise language lessons or to help pay staff and their partners to learn Dutch – before they move if possible.

# Recommendations

- Companies bringing in staff from abroad should be encouraged to help their partners in finding work – they may have useful skills which can be tapped into and it will also boost their employees' home-life happiness.
- Make sure companies use the schemes open to them, such as the *werkkosten regeling*, to boost international employees' language skills.
- Make new arrivals more aware of the option of retraining, highlighting retraining options open to internationals

# About Stichting ICAP

ICAP is an initiative put together by four long-standing members of the international community to act as an independent bridge between the international community itself and government and civic organisations.

In particular, we aim to establish an independent forum which represents and reflects the views of the international community on issues which have an impact on the city's attractiveness as a place to live in and do business.

The city regularly scores very highly in international comparisons – facts which officials are keen to promote whenever possible. However, these glowing reports do not always reflect the reality on the ground. And Amsterdam lacks a broad framework for communicating with and receiving input/feedback from the international community and assessing its diverse needs and concerns. ICAP aims to change this.

[www.icapnl.com](http://www.icapnl.com)