

DUSA Salary Survey 2026

Compensation, HR trends and labor market outlook among foreign-invested companies in the Suzhou area



Survey period: July–August 2026 · 82 respondents

TALENT FISHERS

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82

respondent companies

4

weeks in the field, July–August 2026

40

questions across company profile, HR, and remuneration

The 2026 edition was fielded exclusively among member companies in the Suzhou area, covering company profile, labor cost and HR management, recruitment and retention, workforce composition, and detailed remuneration benchmarks.

Survey key results

01 — Introduction

1. RISING LABOR COSTS

73% of companies report higher total labor costs in 2025 than 2024

Annual salary increases and social security base increases are the two largest drivers, together accounting for two-thirds of the increase.

2. TALENT IS THE BOTTLENECK

Recruiting qualified employees and rising labor costs are the top two HR challenges

57% also cite a gap between internal salary structures and new joiners' expectations as a major challenge.

3. RETENTION IS ABOUT GROWTH

83% of leavers cite personal development as a top-3 reason for leaving

Career development now outranks monetary reasons (74%) as the leading driver of attrition.

SECTION 02

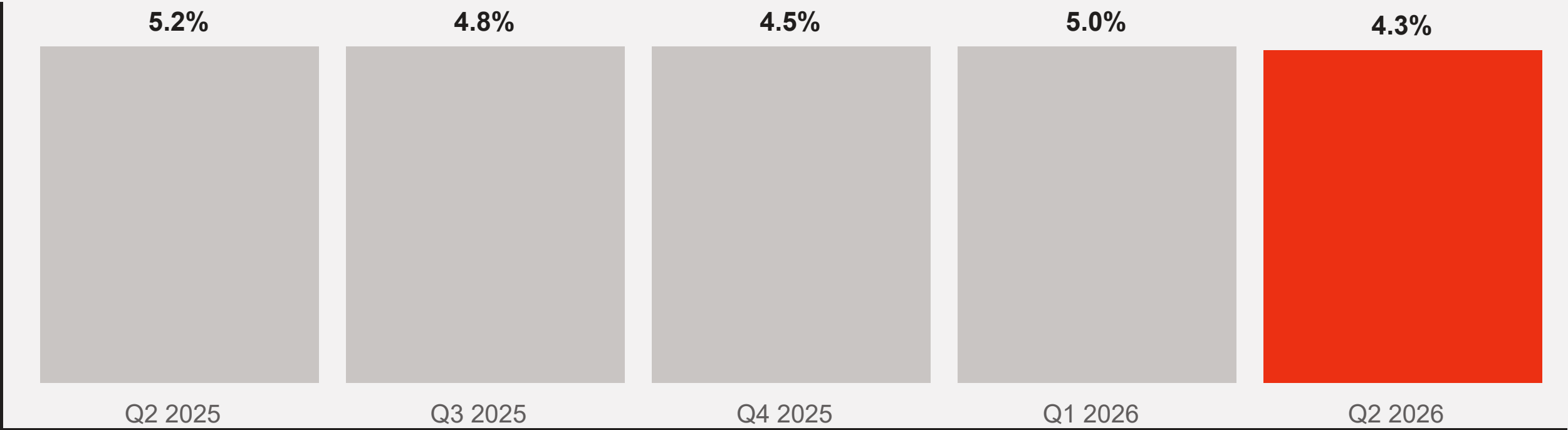
Salary and labor market developments

General labor market environment and outlook — DUSA European Association Suzhou

China GDP growth is decelerating

4.3%

Q2 2026 GDP growth, year-on-year — the weakest quarterly reading since Q4 2022

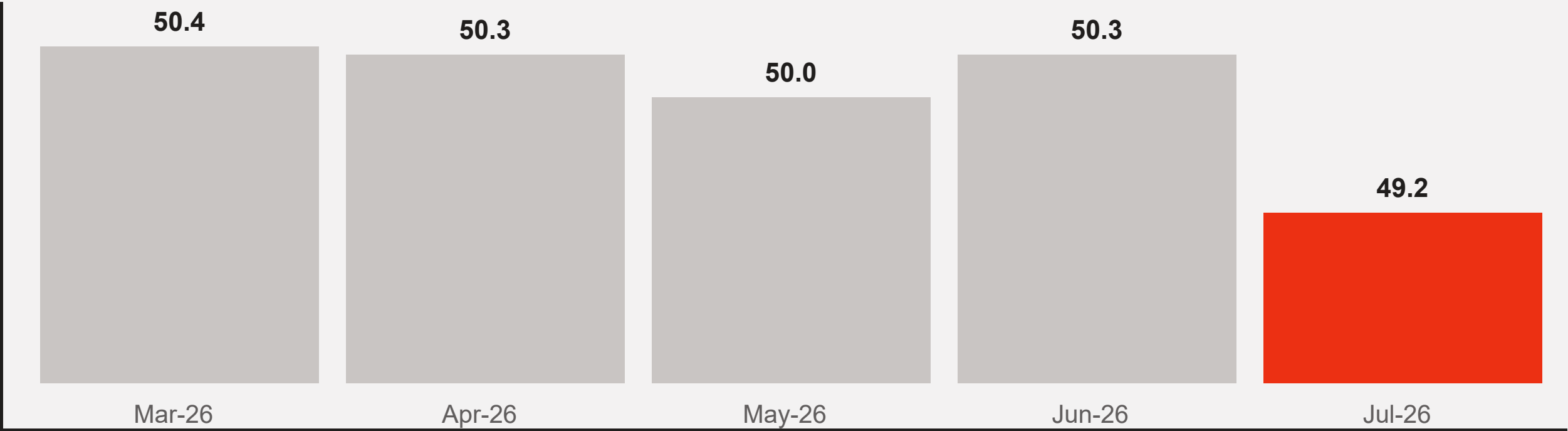


China's GDP grew 4.3% year-on-year in Q2 2026, down from 5.0% in Q1, as soft consumer sentiment, tight fiscal policy and continued property-sector weakness weighed on growth. Full-year growth is expected to land within the official 4.5%–5.0% target range.

Manufacturing activity slipped into contraction in July

49.2

Manufacturing PMI, July 2026 — down from 50.3 in June, the first reading below 50 since February



A reading above 50 signals expansion, below 50 contraction. The July drop ended a four-month run at or above the 50-point threshold, driven by weaker new orders — both domestic and export — and a high base from earlier export front-loading.

SECTION 03

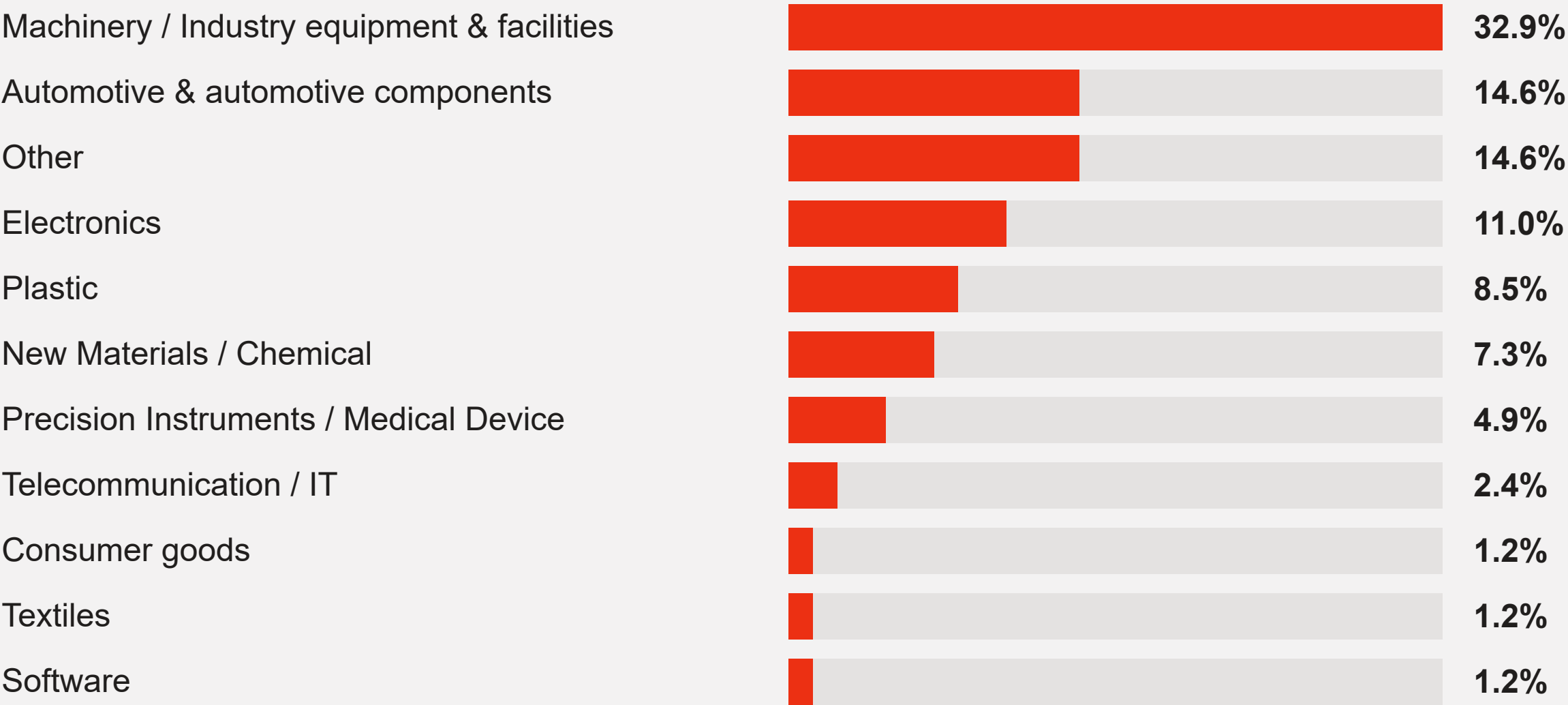
Surveyed companies

Industry, legal structure, size and location of the 82 respondent companies

03 — Surveyed companies

Surveyed industries

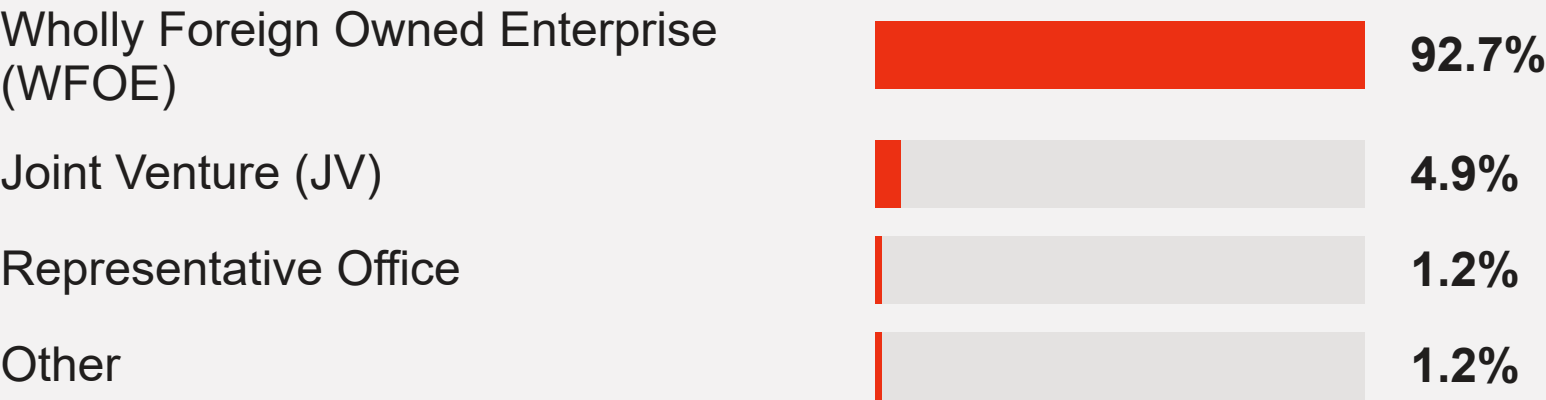
Machinery / Industry equipment and facilities represents the largest share of surveyed companies at 33%, followed by Automotive at 15%.



Company profile

03 — Surveyed companies

Legal structure



Number of employees



92.7% of respondents are Wholly Foreign Owned Enterprises. Most companies (59%) employ between 50 and 250 people, based mainly in Suzhou and Taicang.

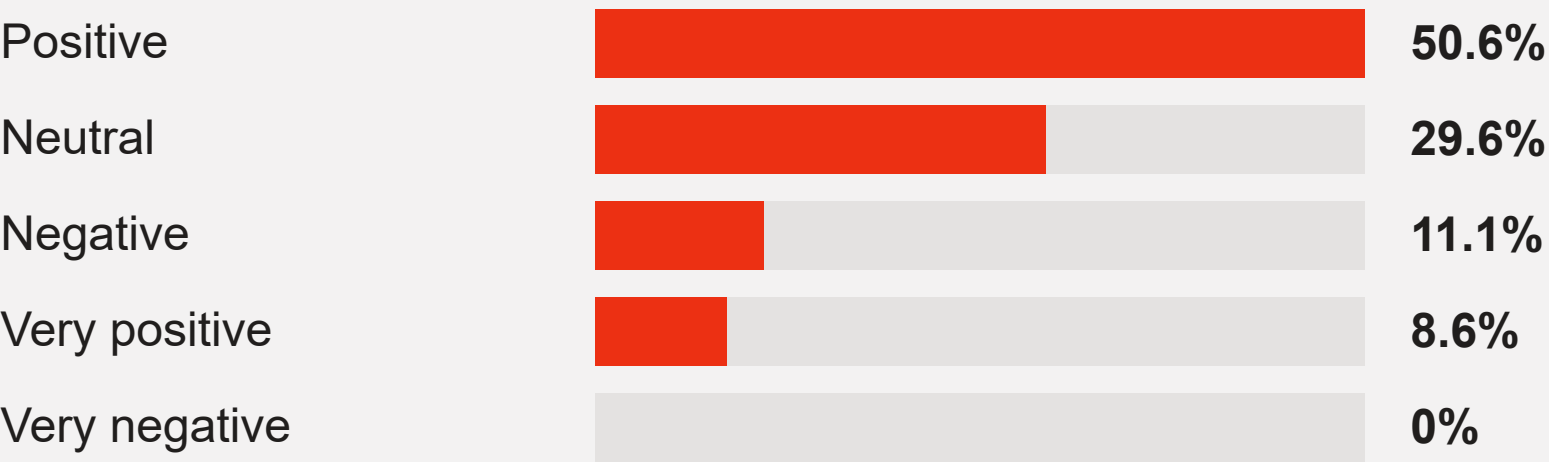
SECTION 04

HR & labor cost management

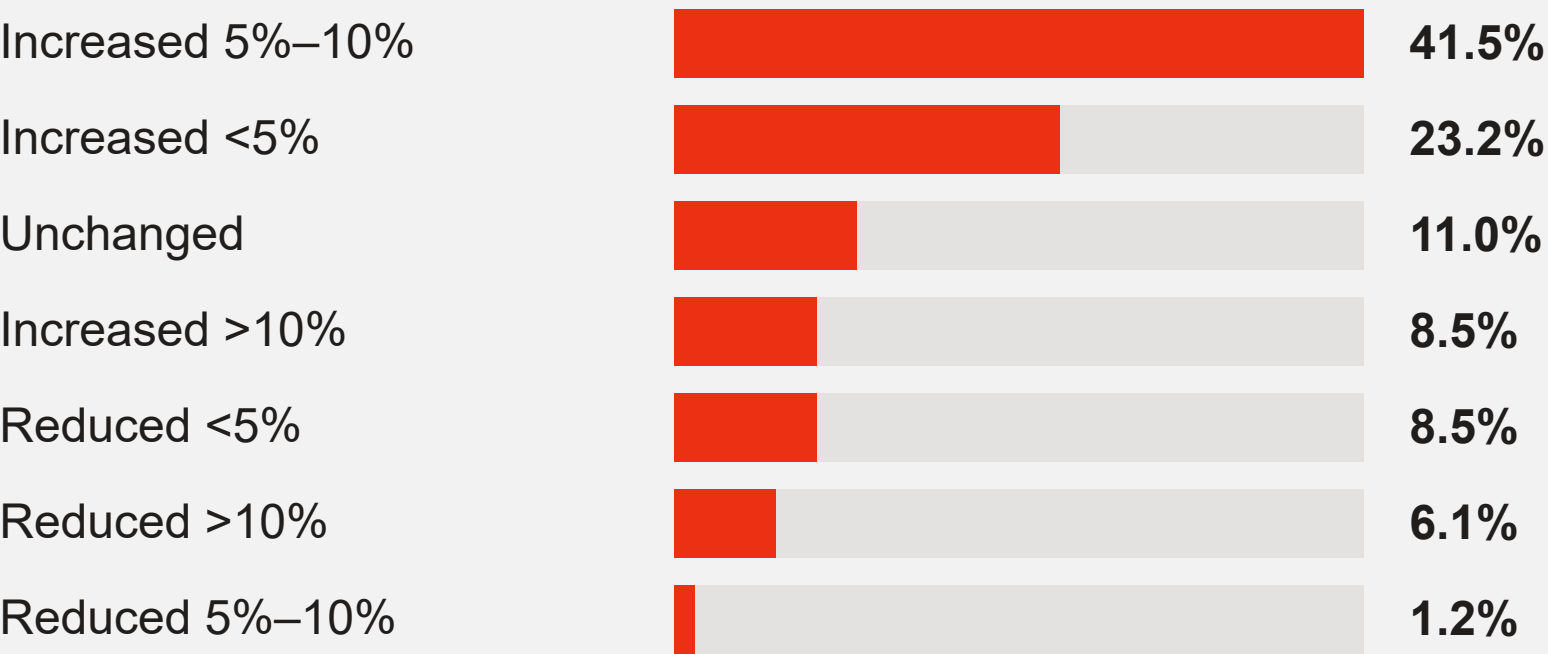
Business development, labor cost trends, and how companies are responding

Business development & labor costs in 2025

Company development in 2025



Total labor costs, 2025 vs. 2024



59% of respondents describe 2025 as positive or very positive, yet 73% also report an increase in total labor costs versus 2024.

What is driving the increase?

Among companies that saw labor costs rise, annual salary increases and social security base increases together account for two-thirds of the increase.

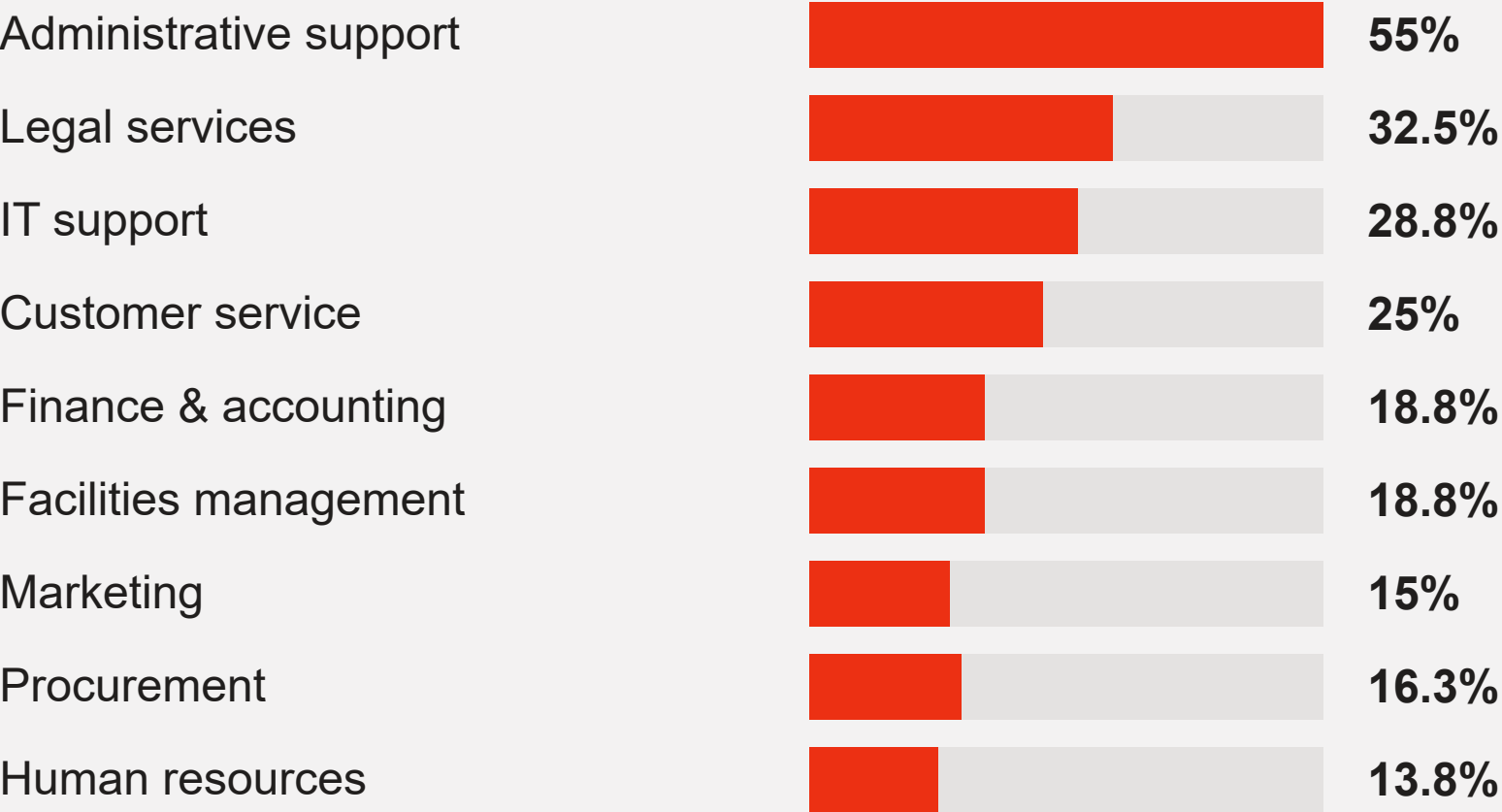


Reducing labor costs & increasing efficiency

Most effective HR measures



Back-office functions likely to be reduced first



SECTION 05

Recruitment & retention

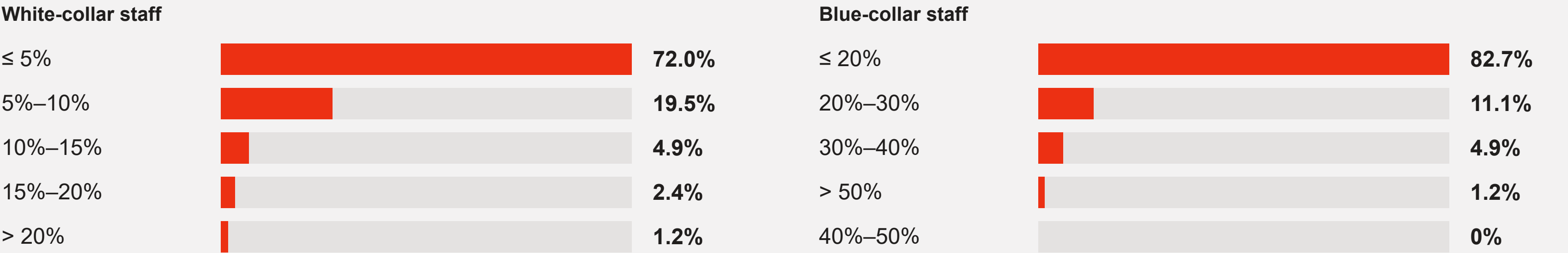
Channels, turnover, reasons for leaving, and current HR challenges

Recruitment channels



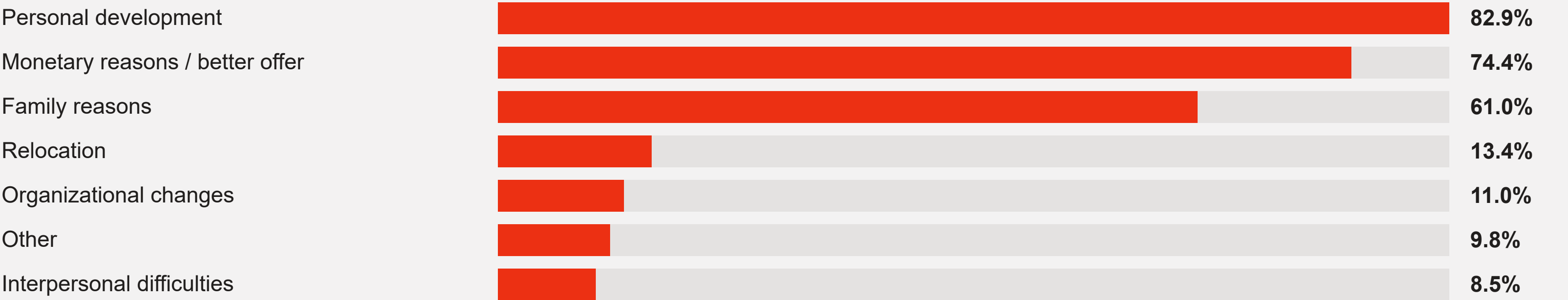
Digital platforms remain the most widely used white-collar recruitment channels, while headhunting firms are rated the most effective — 72% of respondents who use headhunting rate it their most effective white-collar channel.

Yearly staff turnover



72% of companies keep white-collar turnover at or below 5% a year; 83% keep blue-collar turnover at or below 20%.

Why employees leave



Personal development (83%) now edges out monetary reasons (74%) as the top driver of attrition — a reversal that puts career pathing at the center of retention strategy.

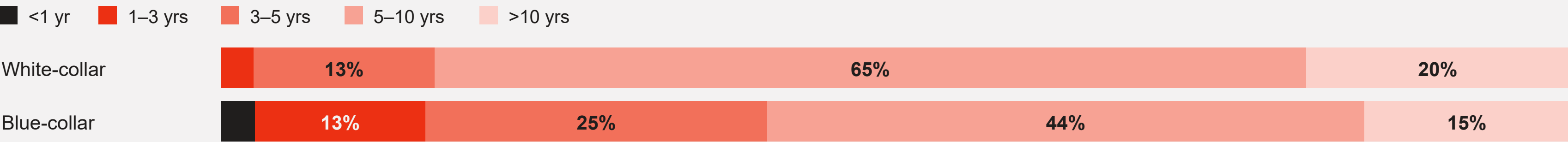
What has changed since 2024 — reasons for leaving

2024 2026



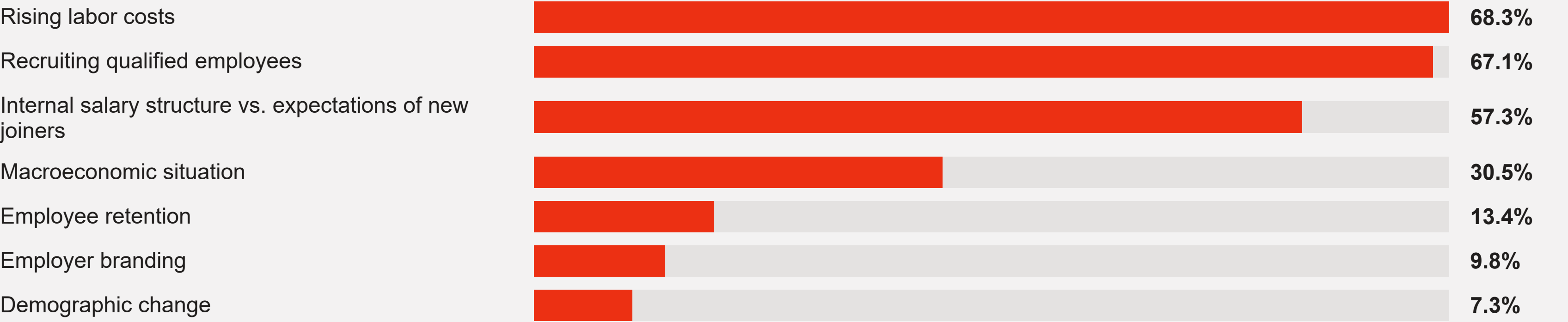
Career development remains the leading reason employees leave. Both career- and compensation-related attrition have moderated compared with 2024, but personal development still ranks clearly first.

Average employee tenure



65% of white-collar staff stay 5–10 years on average, compared with 44% of blue-collar staff — white-collar employees show markedly higher long-term stability.

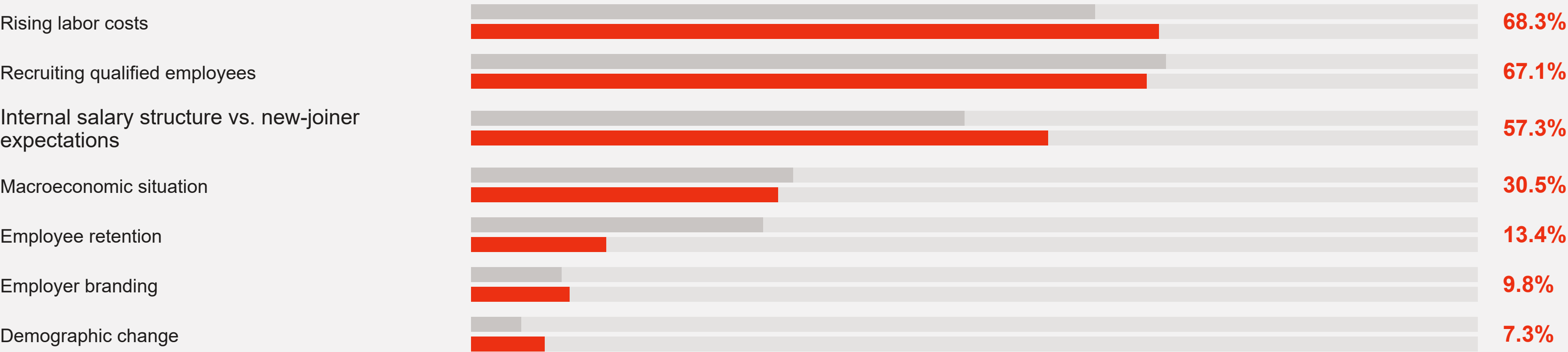
Biggest current HR challenges



Maximum three answers per respondent. Rising labor costs (68%) and recruiting qualified employees (67%) are the leading concerns, followed closely by a mismatch between salary structures and new-joiner expectations (57%).

What has changed since 2024 — HR challenges

2024 2026



Talent scarcity remains structural, while compensation pressure and the mismatch between internal salary structures and candidate expectations have intensified since 2024.

Strategic response to rising labor costs

Nearly half of companies plan no strategic changes. Among those that do, automation and new business directions are favored over relocation.



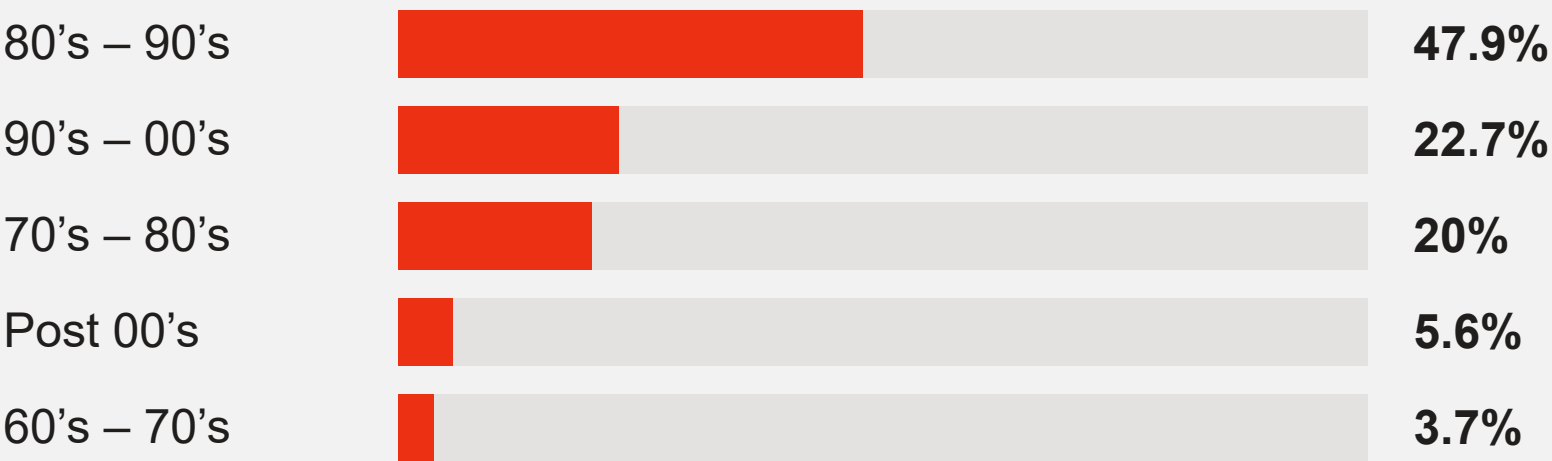
SECTION 06

Workforce & generations

Age composition, generational challenges, training and international hiring

A workforce dominated by the 80's–90's generation

Staff by birth decade



Biggest challenges for staff born in the 90's–2000's and later



96%

of companies spend 10% or less of total labor costs on training & education

10%

plan to recruit foreign undergraduates in 2026/2027

8%

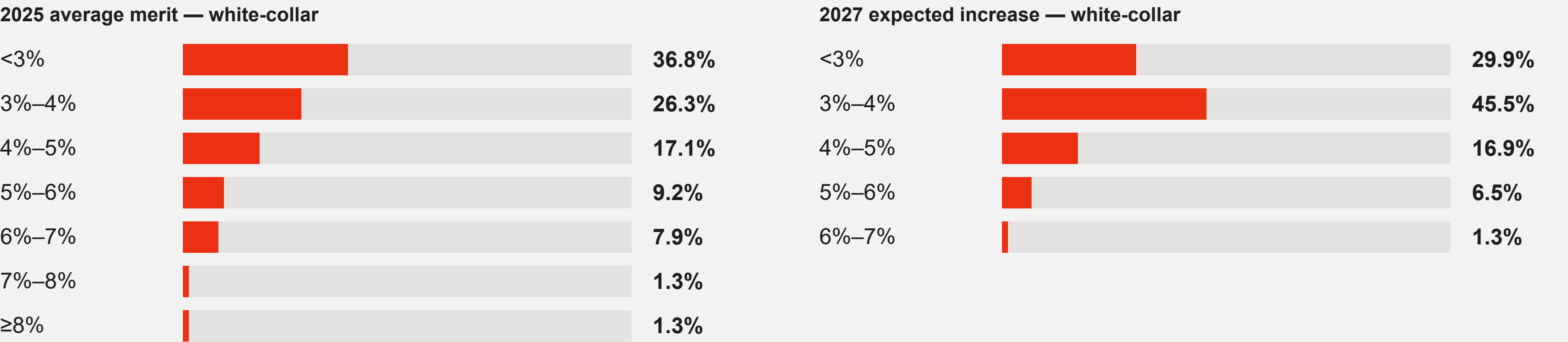
of companies employ staff with German dual education qualifications

SECTION 07

Remuneration

Merit increases, salary ranges by function, operators & technicians, graduates, key positions and benefits

Salary merit & 2027 increase expectations

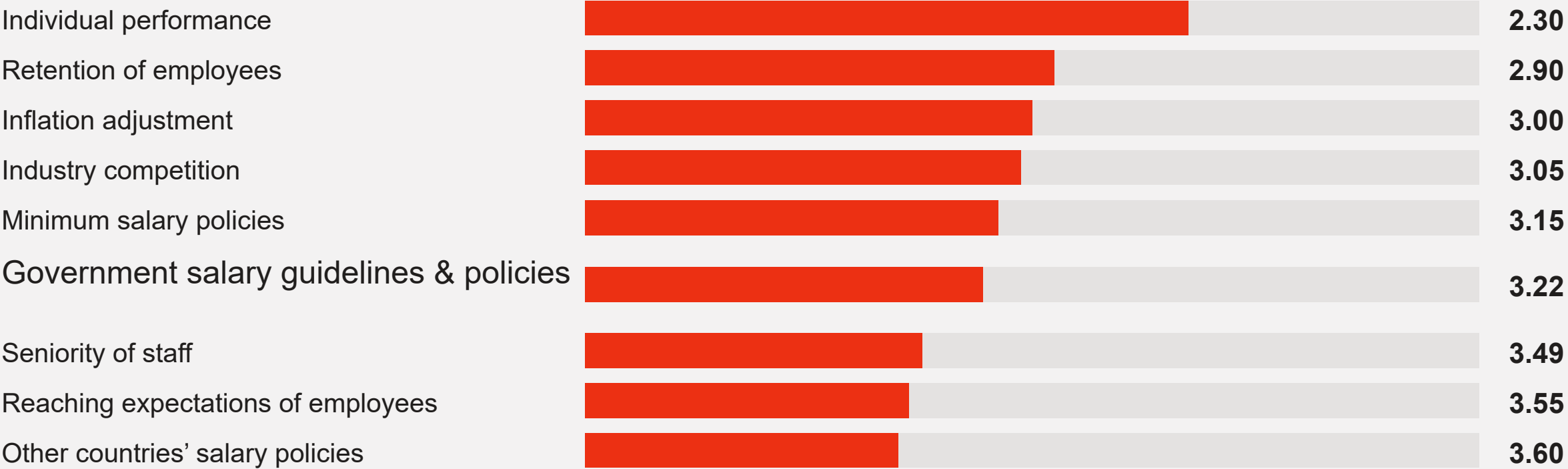


Blue-collar, 2027 expected	White-collar, 2027 expected	Managers & supervisors, 2027 expected
44.7% in 3%–4%	45.5% in 3%–4%	36.4% below 3%

45% of respondents expect white-collar salary increases of 3%–4% in 2027, making this by far the most common expectation. Managers & supervisors are the population most likely to expect an increase below 3%.

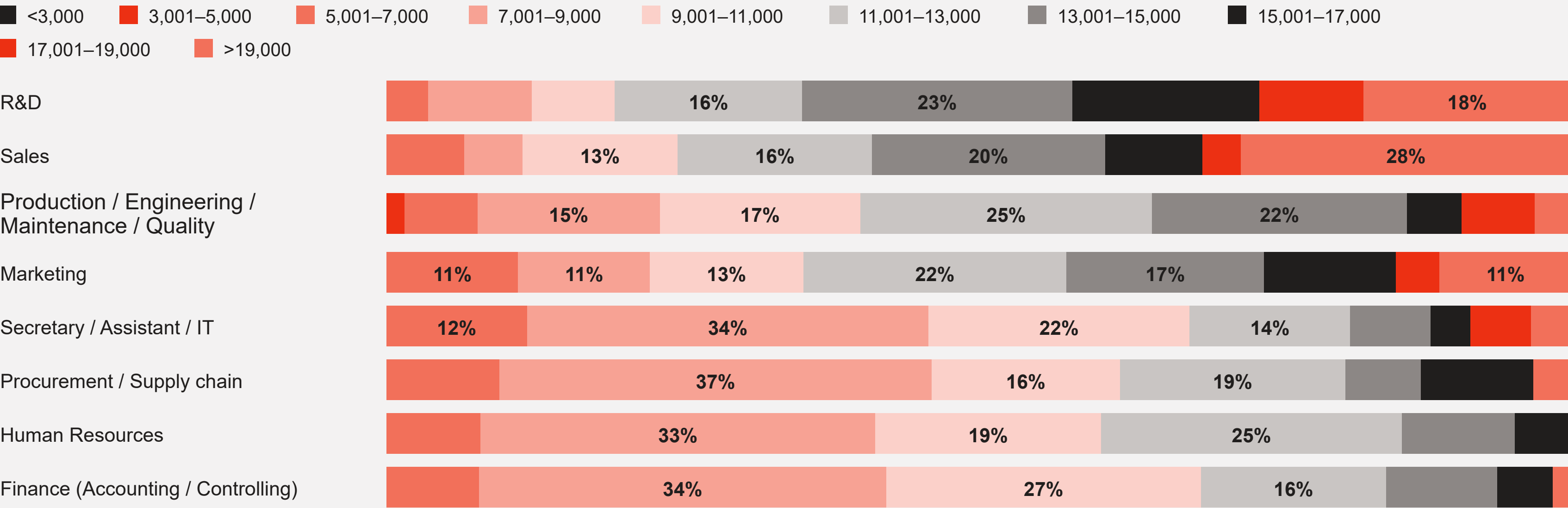
What drives salary adjustment decisions

Average importance score, 1 = very important, 5 = unimportant. Individual performance is by far the most important factor for salary adjustments.



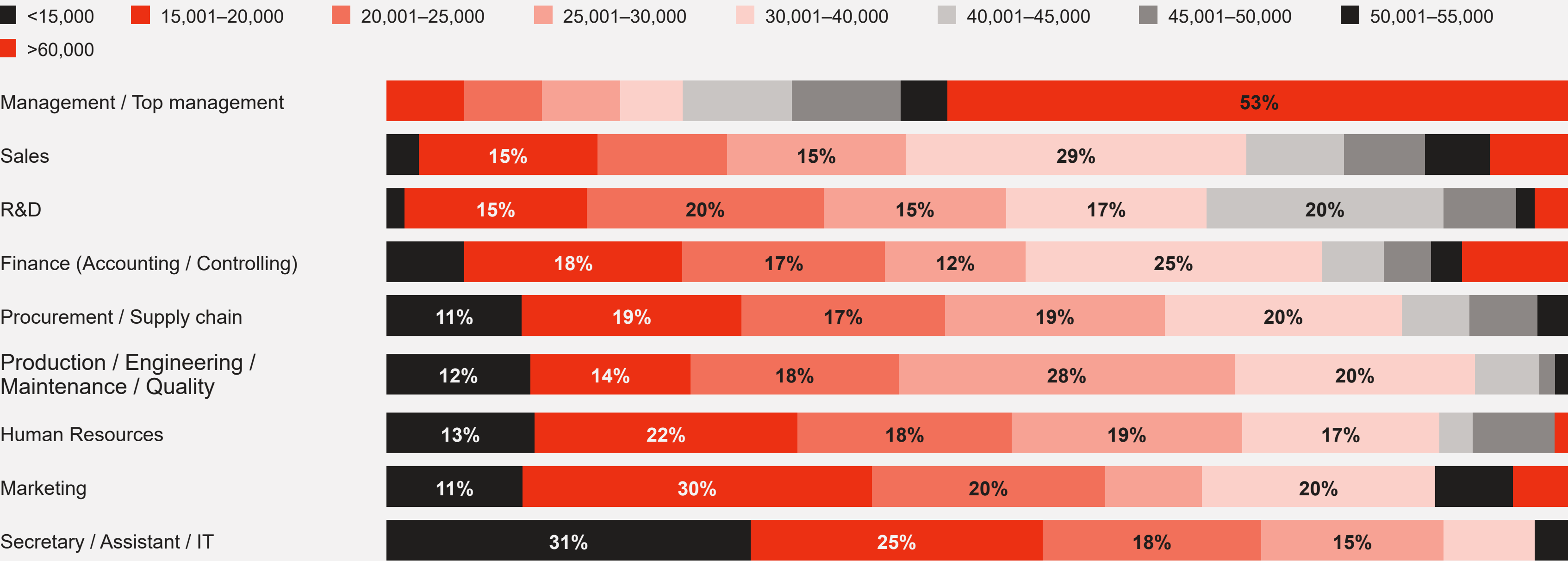
Salary ranges — junior & mid-level staff

Average monthly gross salary in RMB, by function. Bars sorted by highest-paid function.



Salary ranges — senior staff

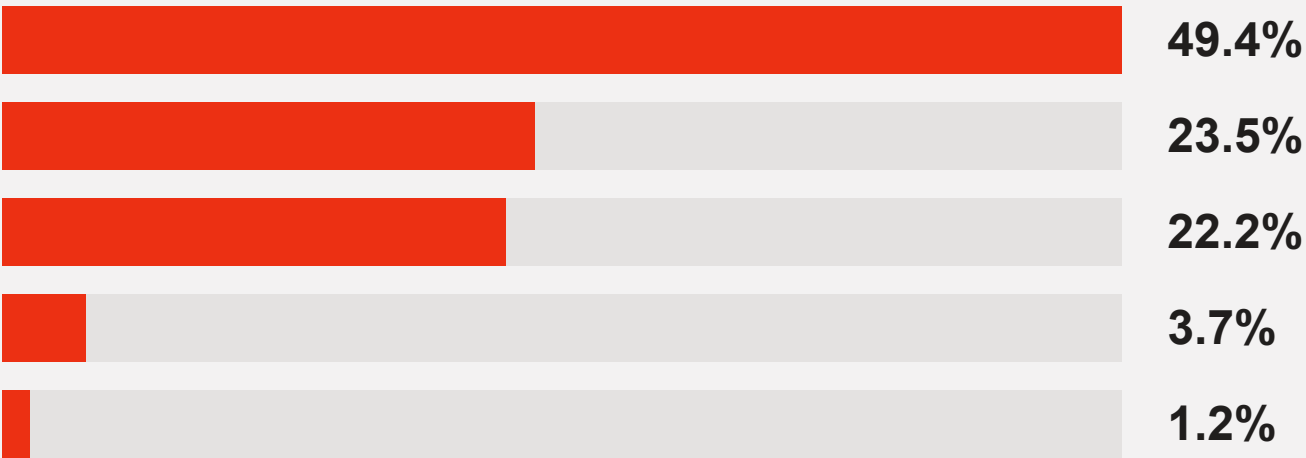
Senior professionals, managers and above. Average monthly gross salary in RMB.



Fixed vs. variable pay for white-collar staff

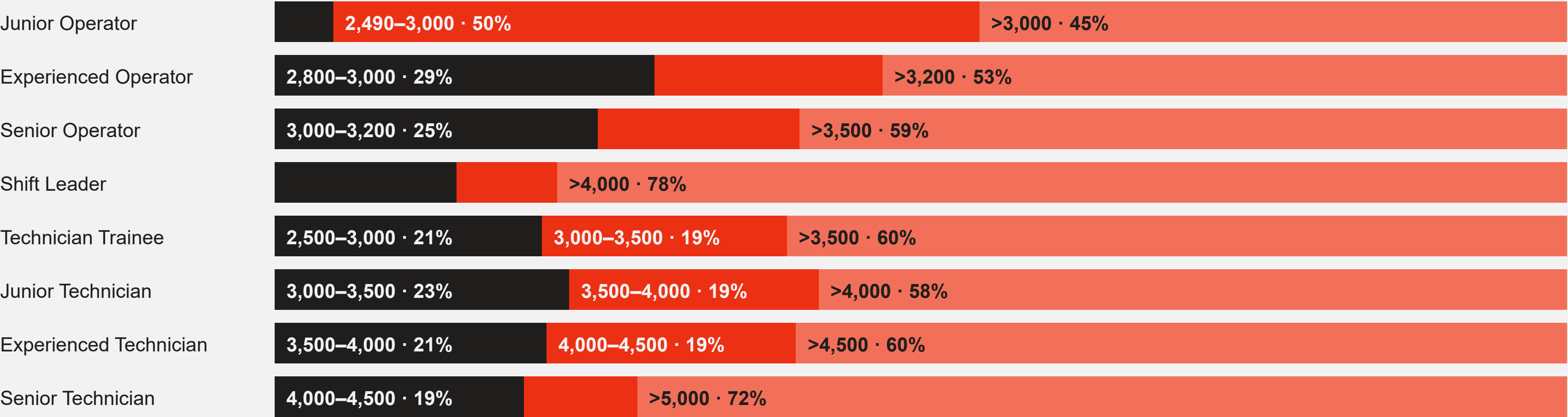
A 75% fixed / 25% variable structure is the norm for nearly half of respondents, indicating a strong preference for pay stability over performance-linked variability.

- 75% fixed – 25% variable
- 100% fixed – 0% variable
- Other
- 50% fixed – 50% variable
- 25% fixed – 75% variable



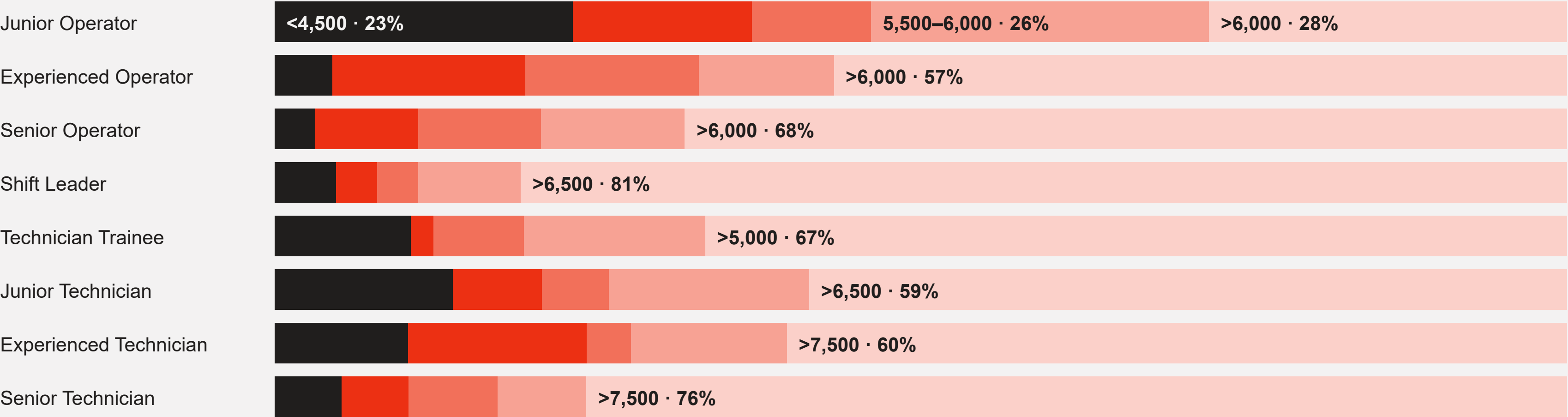
Operators & technicians — base salary

Actual monthly base-salary brackets in RMB, by role. Share of respondents in each bracket.



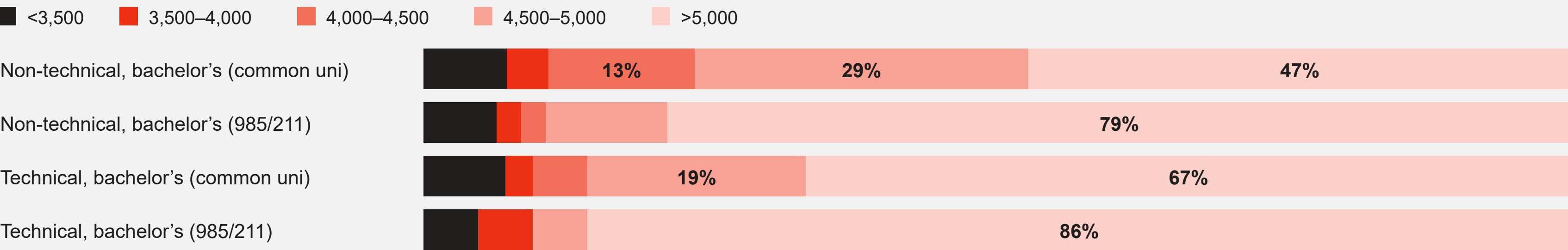
Operators & technicians — monthly gross salary

Including allowances and bonus components. Actual monthly gross-salary brackets in RMB, by role.



Fresh graduate compensation — monthly base salary

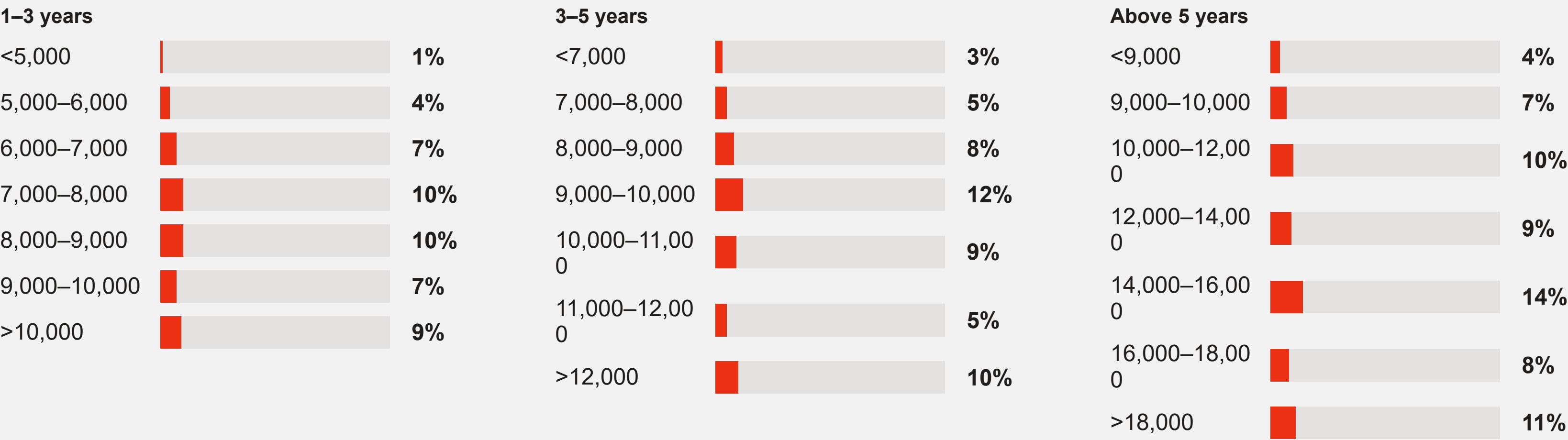
Bachelor's degree holders, by field and university tier (985/211 = China's top-tier national universities).



Graduates from 985/211 universities command a clear premium over common-university peers in both technical and non-technical tracks.

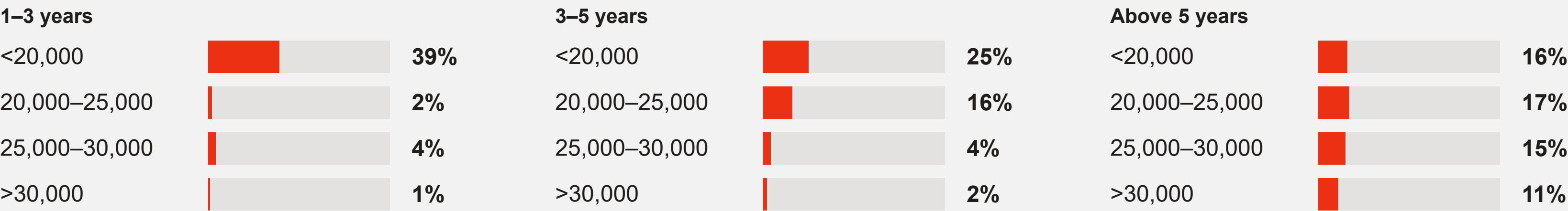
Key position benchmark — Engineer

Monthly base salary in RMB by years of related experience. Bracket widths widen with seniority.



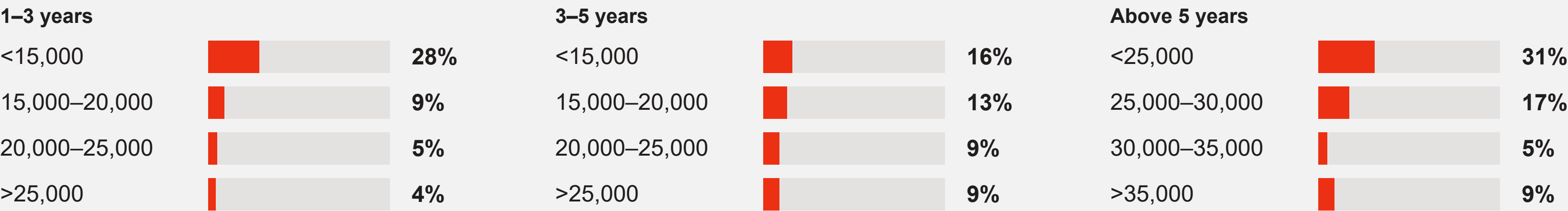
Key position benchmark — Production Manager

Monthly base salary in RMB, single-function scope, by years of related experience.



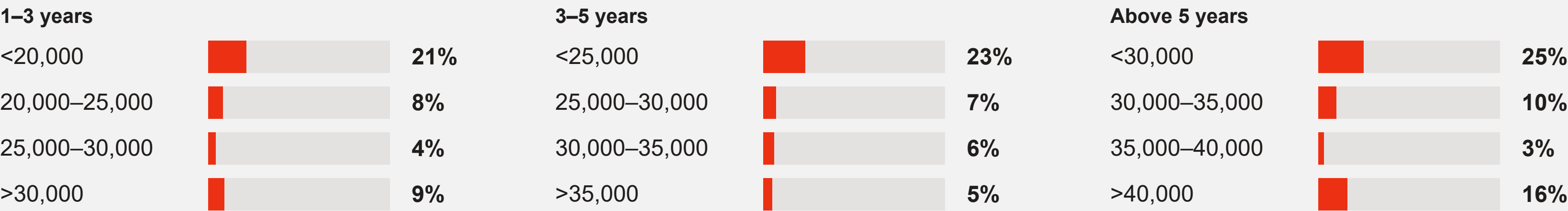
Key position benchmark — Sales / BD / KAM, Individual Contributor

Monthly base salary in RMB by years of related experience.



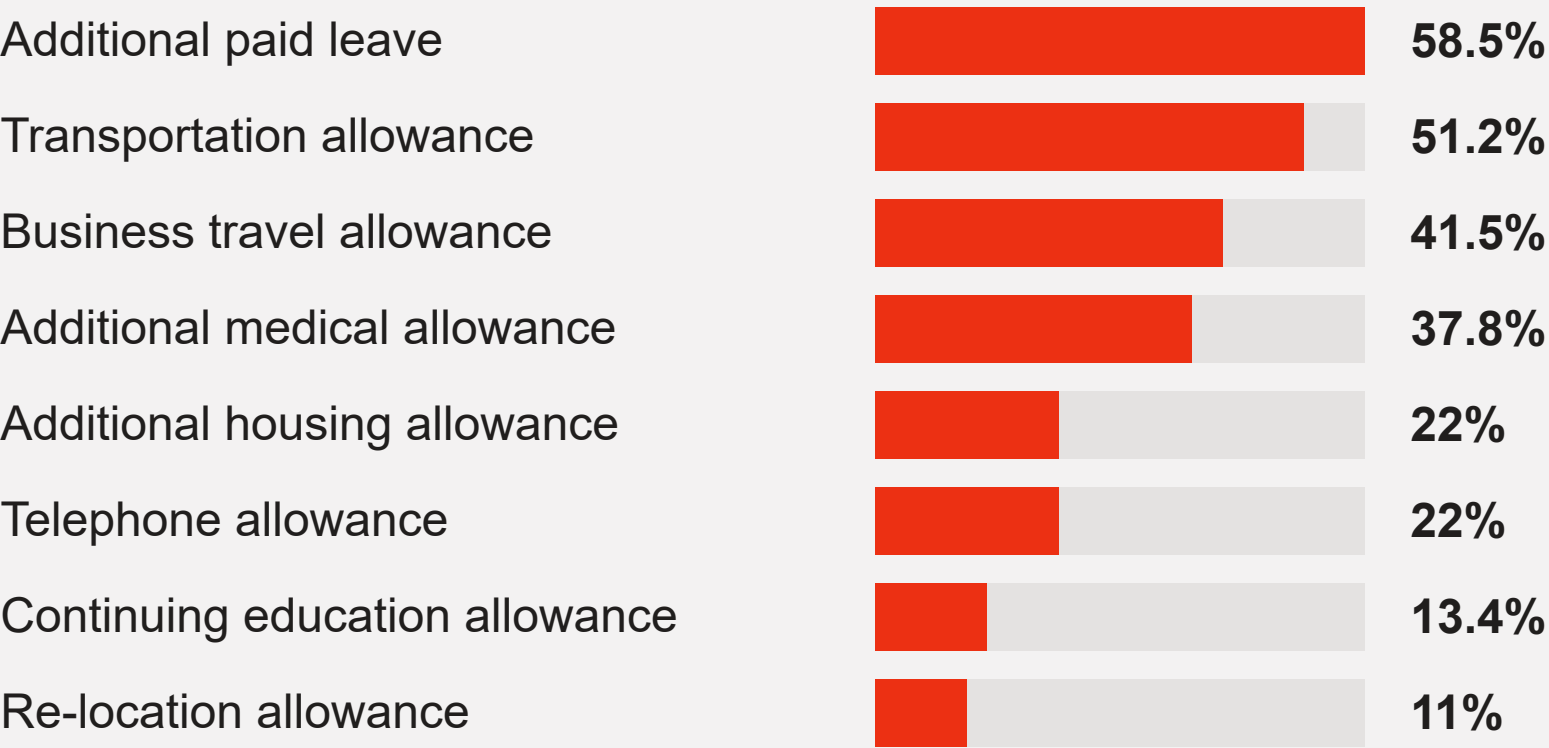
Key position benchmark — Sales / BD / KAM, Team Leader

Monthly base salary in RMB by years of related experience.

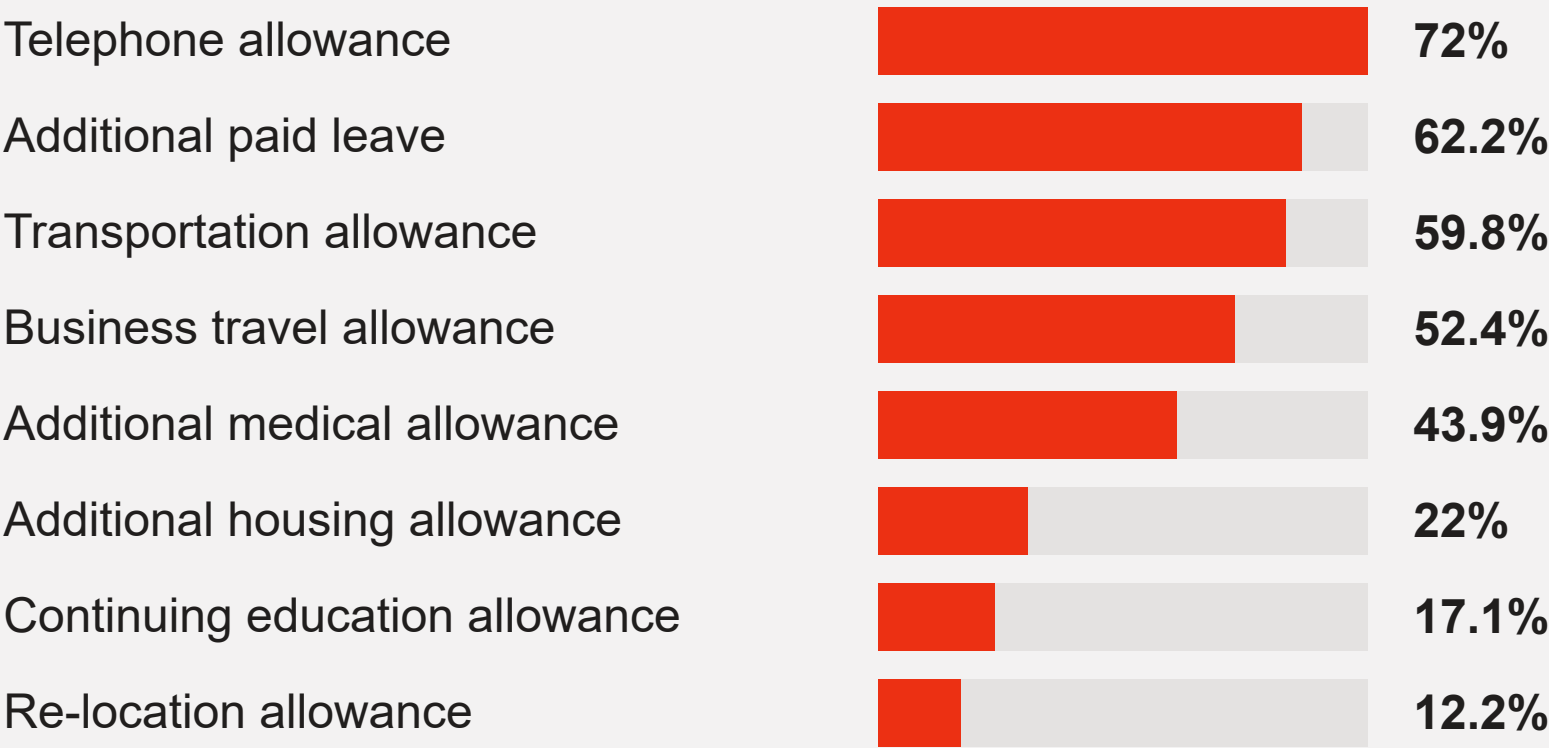


Standard benefit plans

Blue-collar



White-collar



Additional paid leave and transportation allowances are the most common benefits across both groups; telephone allowances are markedly more common for white-collar staff.

SECTION 08

About Talent Fishers

DUSA's new partner for the Salary Survey

This survey was powered by Talent Fishers, Recruitment and Human Capital Solutions experts.

Since 2007 — nearly two decades supporting international companies in Asia and across borders, markets and cultures.

Recruitment

Executive, senior management and technical-expert search — matched to the salary benchmarks in this report.

"Talent Fishers supports your strategic and critical permanent, interim or fractional recruitment needs. Contact us if you are searching for your Country or Regional Managing Director, CFO, Sales Director, Plant Manager, Maintenance, Quality or Sourcing executive... or for any expert talent to support your local and international operations."

Regional reach

Active desks across China, Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe — supporting cross-border hiring and relocation strategies.

"Talent Fishers combines deep local-market expertise with over 20 years of cross-border recruitment and advisory experience — connecting you to talent and insight across Asia, the Middle East, Africa and Europe."

Coaching and Leadership / Advisory solutions

Executive coaching, leadership assessment and advisory support — directly addressing the top retention driver identified in this survey.

"Talent Fishers supports your leaders through executive coaching, leadership assessment and advisory solutions — helping your management teams navigate change, succession planning and cross-cultural leadership challenges."

Market intelligence

Ongoing salary and labor-market benchmarking for DUSA members, building on this survey year after year.

"Talent Fishers can support you with strategic mapping, evaluation and compensation research for critical development projects."

CONTACT



Thank you

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