

# The State of Software Developer Careers in Canada

A report by Commit Solutions with software  
developer members from Angus Reid Forum

# Where Do All the Skilled Software Developers Go?

Trading intel about good jobs is a table stakes conversation among software developer communities. It's no secret that software engineers want to be paid well for the skills that they bring to the table. As they should. But how do developers know whether the salary they're being offered is a reasonable one, let alone, a competitive one? And what else are engineers looking for in their next role?

"Do what's right for the engineer," is our core mission here at Commit. In an effort to better understand software developers' core values, we conducted a survey of over 500 Canadian software developers who are members of the Angus Reid Forum—a leading market research firm. We asked software developers about their experiences in three areas:

- 1. Salary and Compensation
- 2. Culture and Benefits
- 3. Remote and Flexible Work

What our report shows is that software engineers certainly are salary savvy, but developers aren't myopically focused on compensation alone. There are a litany of other factors that influence developers in their career decisions. Things like the ability to work remotely, the types of challenges they're solving, and how well they collaborate with their peers and teammates.

For software developers, we hope this information sheds some light as you navigate your next career move—especially as the circumstances around how and where we work continues to evolve.

For hiring managers, recruiters, founders and other seekers of top tech talent: we hope this information helps you join us in our mission of doing what's right for engineers.

“

**It's not about spending money on fancy offices with kombucha taps. Corporate culture is about the human beings who work in your company and how they interact on a day-to-day basis.**

- Greg Gunn, CEO

(as quoted by *The Globe & Mail*)

”

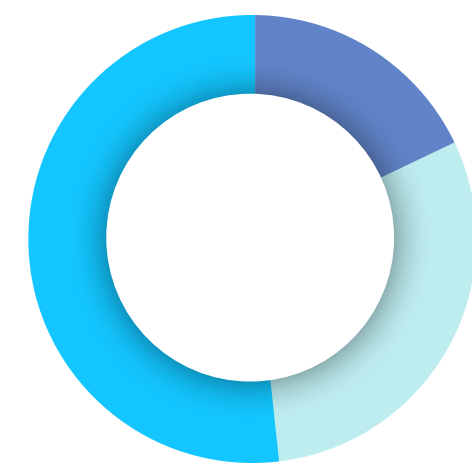
508  
SOFTWARE  
DEVELOPERS

## 2021 Software Developer Survey: Who, What, Where



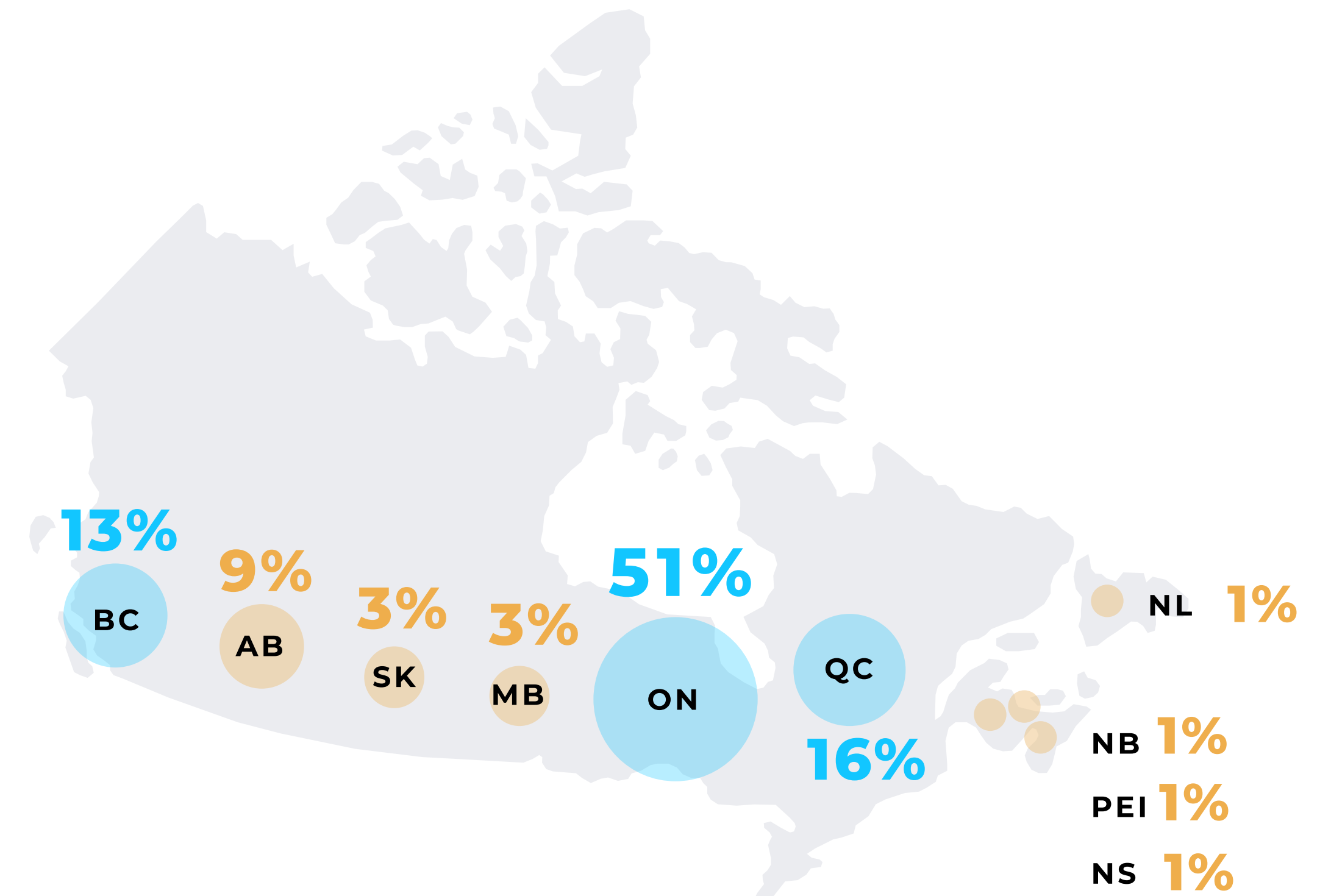
### Seniority

Jr Developer	6%
Developer	37%
Sr Developer	47%
Principal	9%



### Specialization

Back-end	20%
Front-end	29%
Full Stack	51%



# Top Talent Trends & Key Findings

## Salary and Compensation

**Software developers know their worth.**

Software developers know their worth. Nearly half (46%) of software developers surveyed received a salary increase of at least 5% since the start of the pandemic. Despite this, 63% of software developers reported being only “somewhat satisfied” or less with their current base salary. So, how much does salary sway employee exits? 50% of software developers said they’d expect to be paid a higher salary if they were to change jobs. As for negotiating power, 87% of software developers said they are familiar with salary bands in Canada, meanwhile 58% of software developers surveyed said that they believe salary bands in the U.S. are higher than those in Canada.

1

## Culture and Benefits

**Community and camaraderie rank highly for developer job satisfaction.**

Turns out, money isn’t everything.

Despite half of developers stating that they could probably get a higher paying job elsewhere, most stayed at the same company over the course of the pandemic. Why? Developers who stayed at their jobs during the pandemic said they did so because they enjoyed the work they do (46%) and the colleagues they work with (46%)—these two values came ahead of compensation (43%).

2

## Remote and Flexible Work

**Developers want benefits that support remote work and flexible hours.**

48% of software developers reported working primarily from home during the pandemic, with 92% of those developers working from a primary residence. And yet, less than half of developers reported receiving remote-friendly workplace benefits (such as work from home stipends and increased home internet coverage).

3



# **Salary & Compensation**

# Salary and Compensation - Median Salary

How much are software developers in Canada getting paid?

Median salary (by seniority)\*

Jr. Developer

\$59,000 CAD

Developer  
Intermediate

\$85,000 CAD

Sr. Developer

\$90,000 CAD

Principal/  
Executive

\$125,000 CAD

Taken altogether, the median annual income of software developers (as reported by this survey) comes in at \$90,000 CAD. If that feels like a low number, it's because it is. Especially when it comes to senior-level developers. Here at Commit, we start Senior Developer salaries at \$115,000 CAD.

Compare this to the median annual income of software developers in the U.S., which, according to the [Bureau of Labour Statistics](#), came to \$110,140 USD in 2020.

It's no wonder that Canadian software developers, especially those with established careers, struggle to find opportunities that are worthy of their skills and experience.

What this data also shows us is that there's ample opportunity for organizations across the country to standardize developer salary bands so that we're creating a more competitive ecosystem overall. One that truly captures and capitalizes on all the talent coming out of our world-renowned computer science programs (like Waterloo's Cheriton School of Computer Science, to name just one.)

44%

Received an  
annual bonus

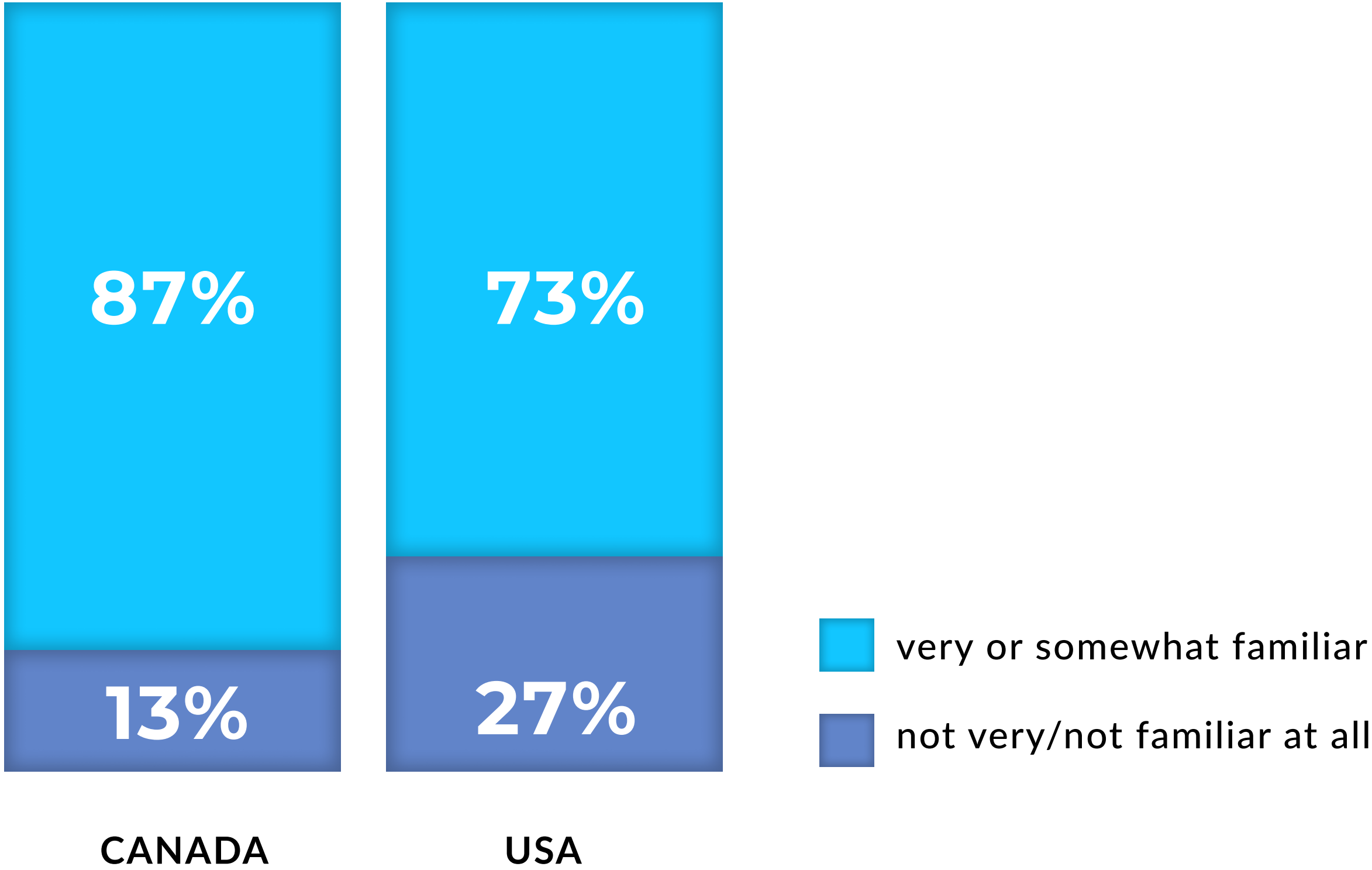
36%

Received  
stock options

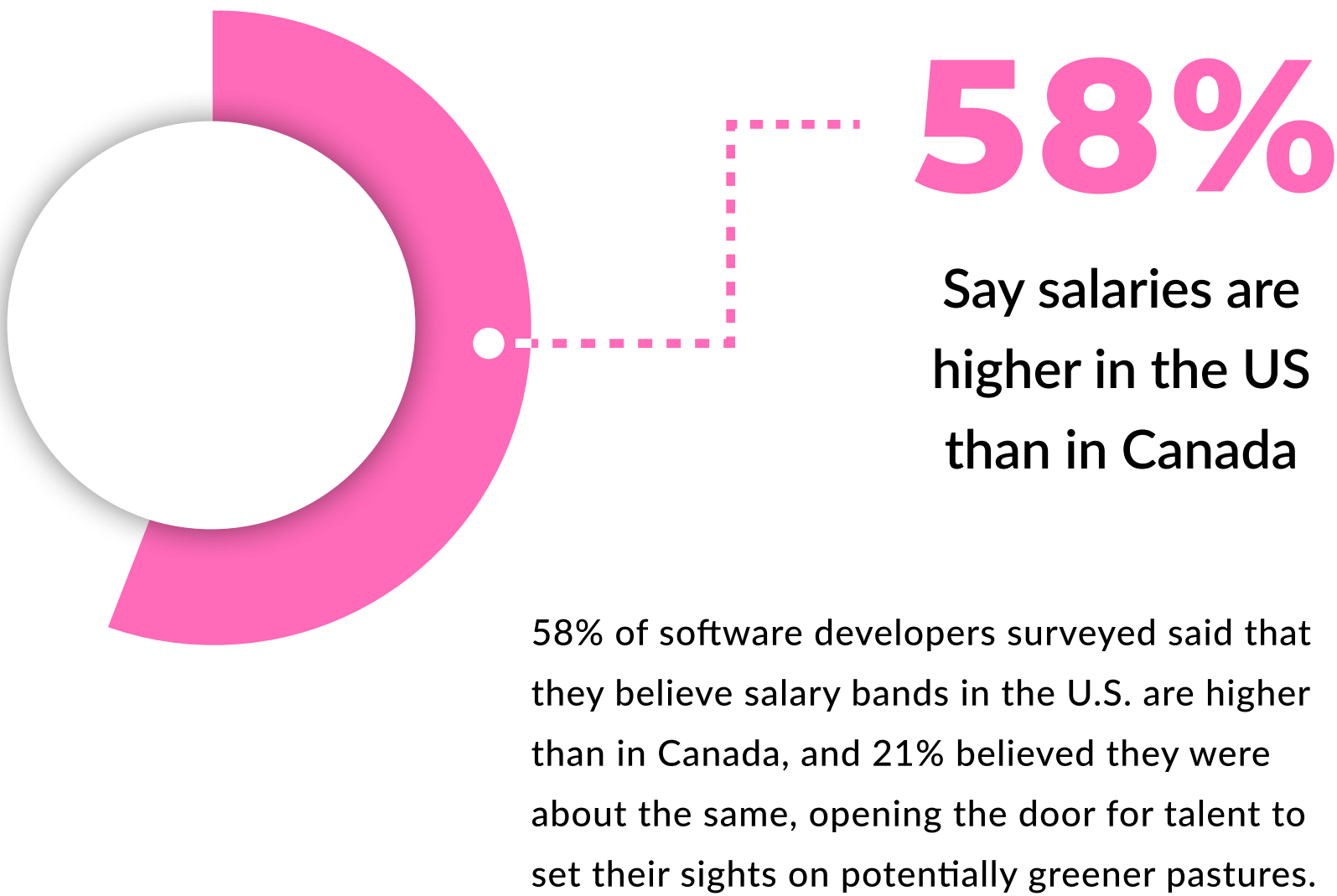
\*Median salary based on self-reported data

# Salary and Compensation - Salary savvy software engineers

How familiar are software developers with salary bands in Canada vs US ?



Are Salaries Higher in Canada or the US?



# Salary and Compensation - Pandemic pay raises

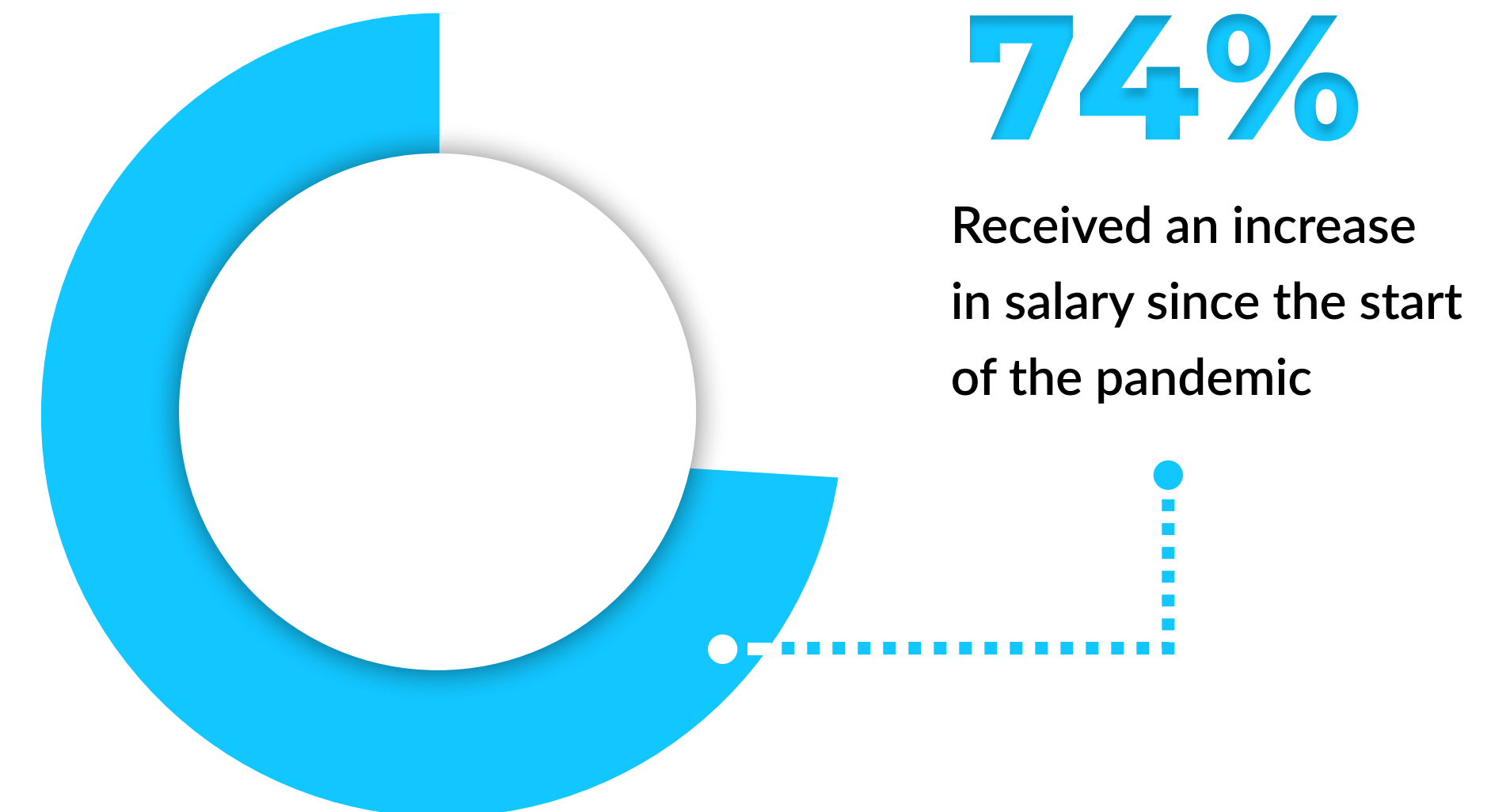
Software developer salaries have largely increased during the pandemic.

A whopping three-quarters of all software developers surveyed (74%) reported receiving an increase in salary since the start of the pandemic. Of the software developers who received an increase, nearly half reported receiving an increase of more than 5% to their base pay.

84% of software developers who identified as a “developer” (intermediate level) reported receiving salary increases during the pandemic. Meanwhile, 68% of senior developers surveyed said they received a raise, and that was mostly among developers working at Enterprise companies.

The shift to working remotely was more than just a geographic shift; it changed how people show up to work and, by extension, how their output is tracked and measured.

Could the pandemic have opened employers’ eyes to the true value of their developers, causing a surge in pay raises? Or was this a last ditch effort to retain employees so that they’re not tempted to look for other roles that may fit their work and life styles better? Time will tell...



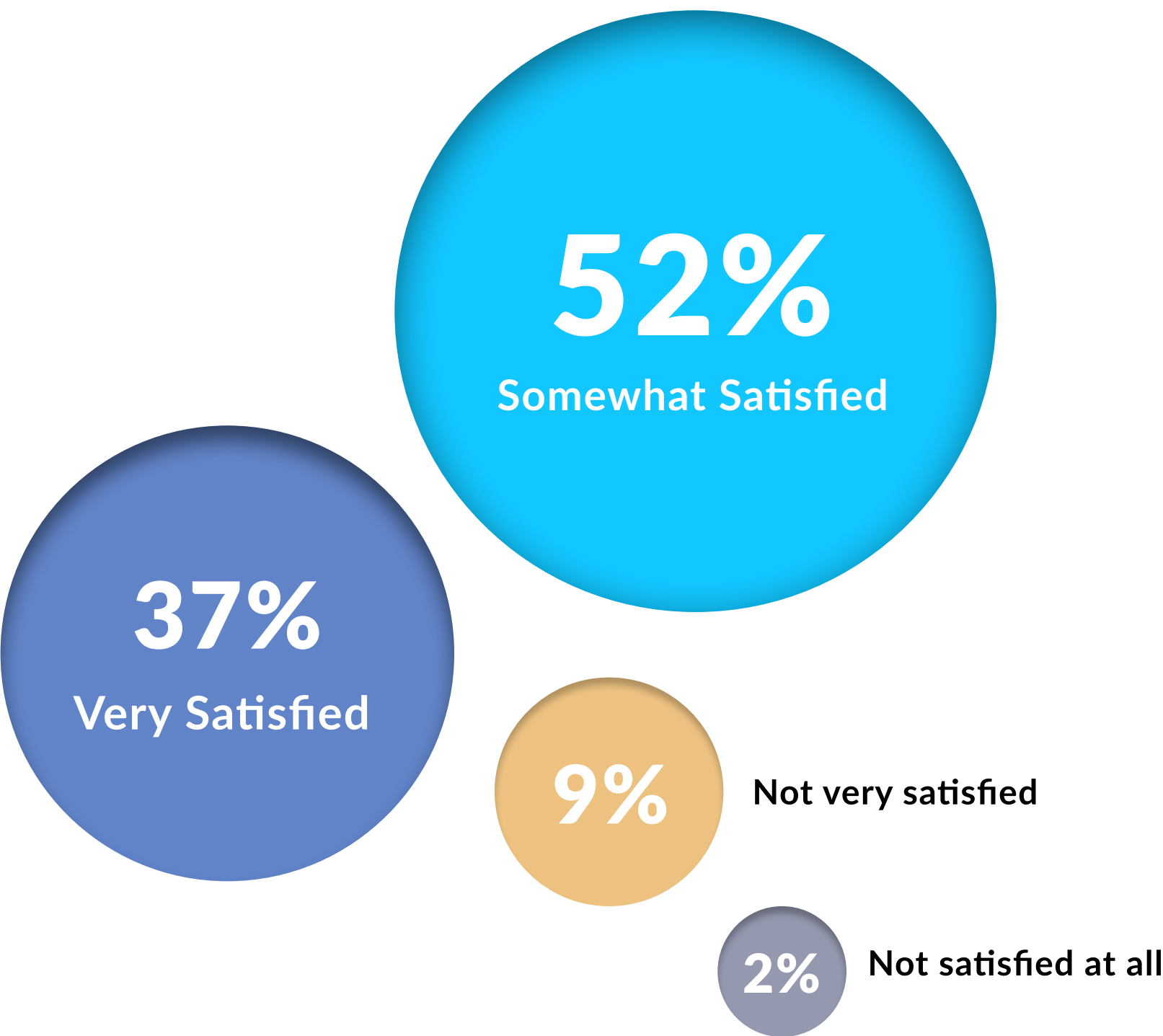
# Salary and Compensation - Salary Satisfaction

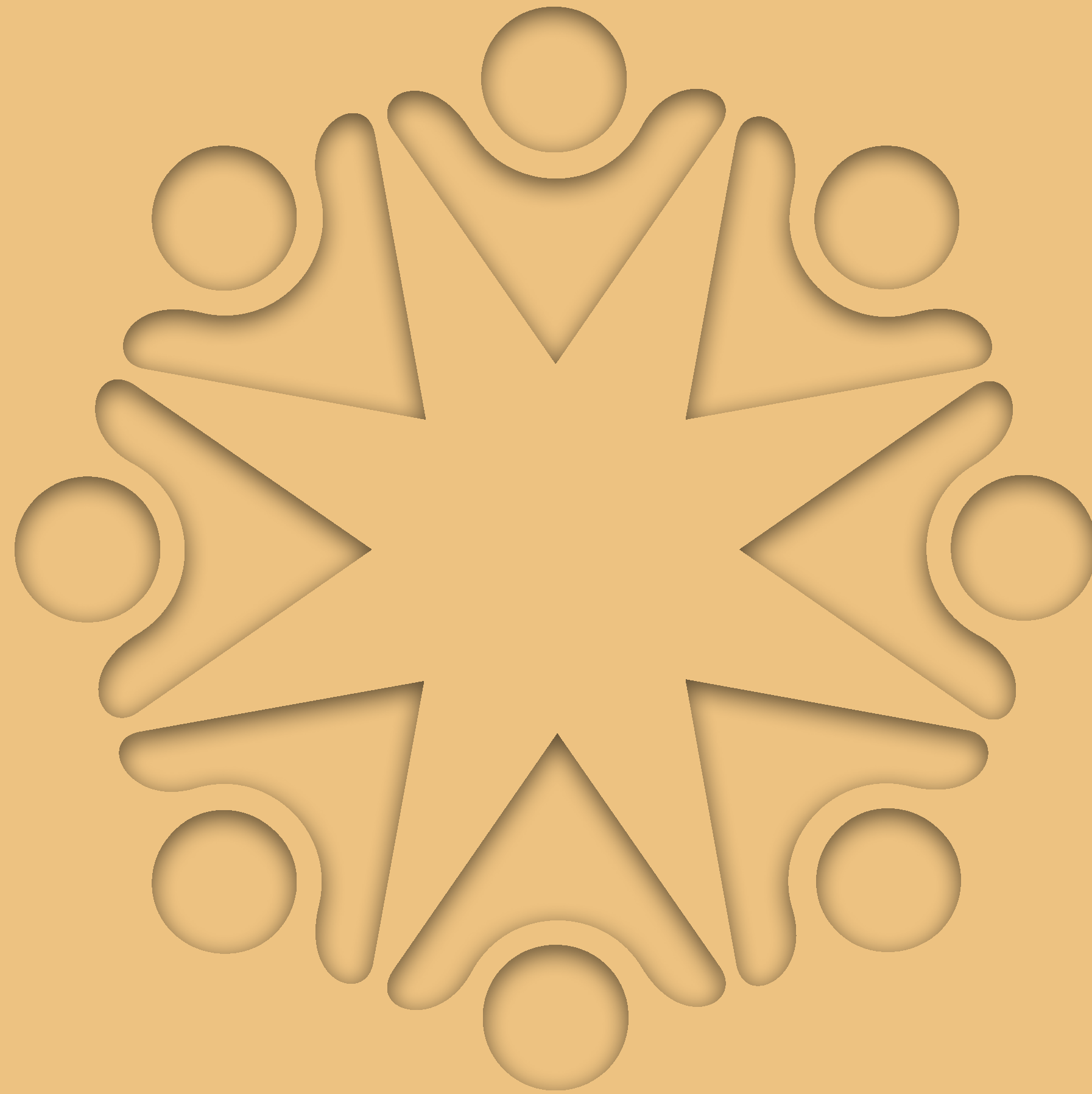
Despite pandemic pay raises, general salary satisfaction among software developers is just OK. Which means: it could always be better.

**63% of software developers surveyed report being only “somewhat” or “not very/not at all” satisfied with their current salary.**

50% of software developers said they’d expect to be paid a higher salary if they were to change jobs. This was especially prevalent amongst junior (67%) and senior (54%) developers.

While base salary is a crucial consideration for candidates, it’s not the be all and end all of job satisfaction. A truly competitive, employee-first hiring package goes far beyond compensation.



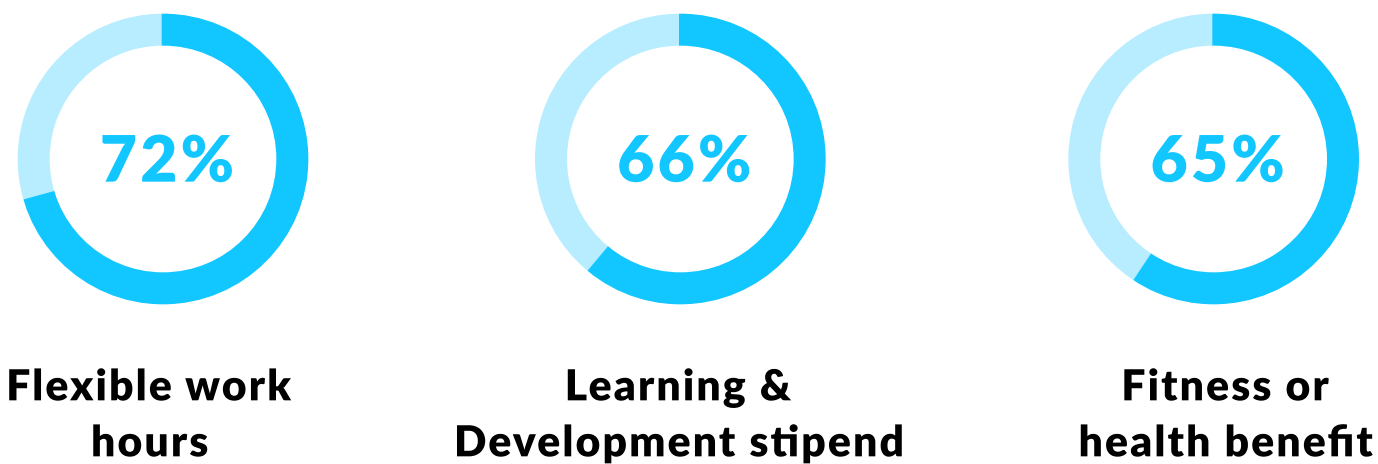


## **Culture & Benefits**

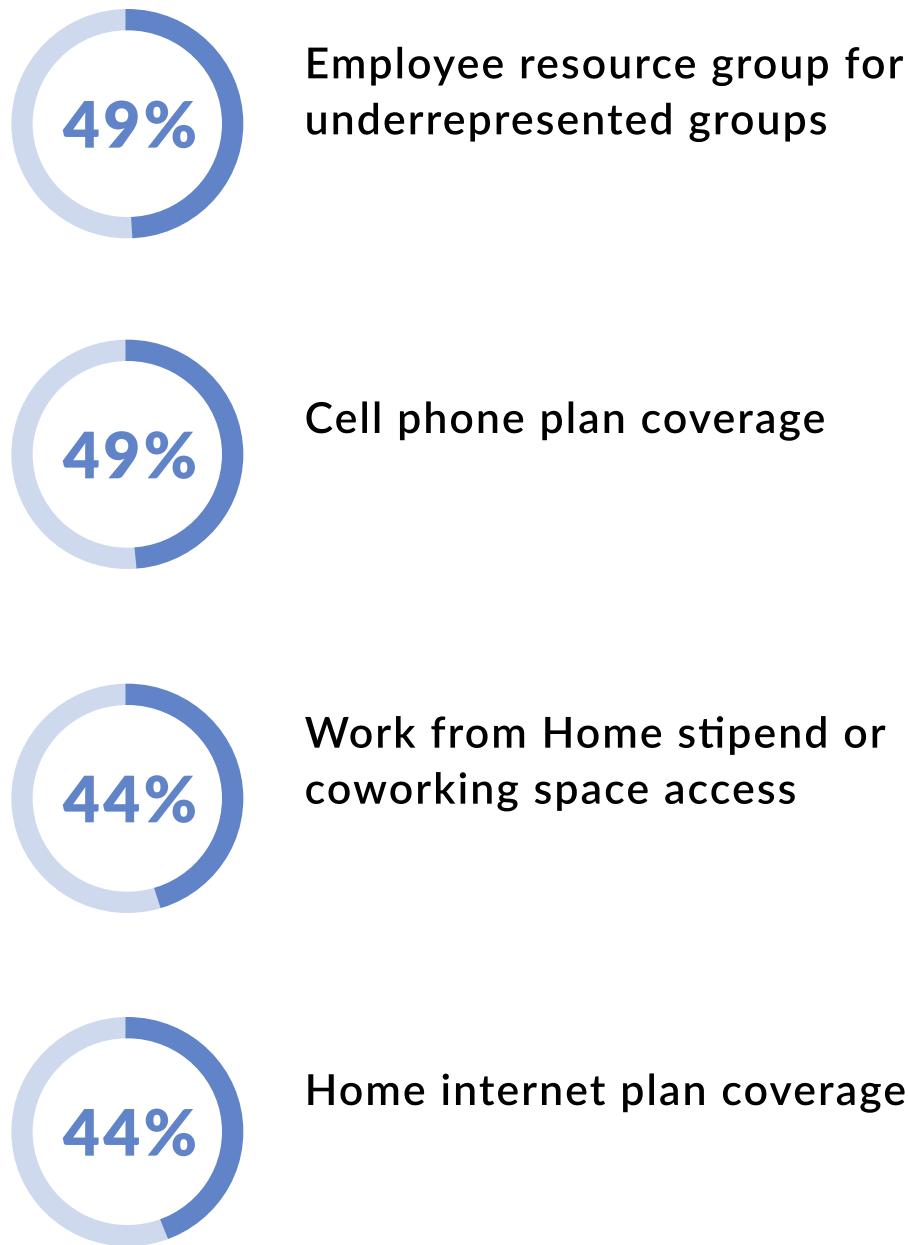
# Culture and Benefits - What are organizations offering?

Workplace benefits can be the unsung heroes of compensation packages. It may be time to treat them as more than just a perk-filled cherry on top of a competitive base salary offering. But what kinds of benefits do developers actually value? And how does that compare to what they're being offered today?

## Common benefits and perks offered today:

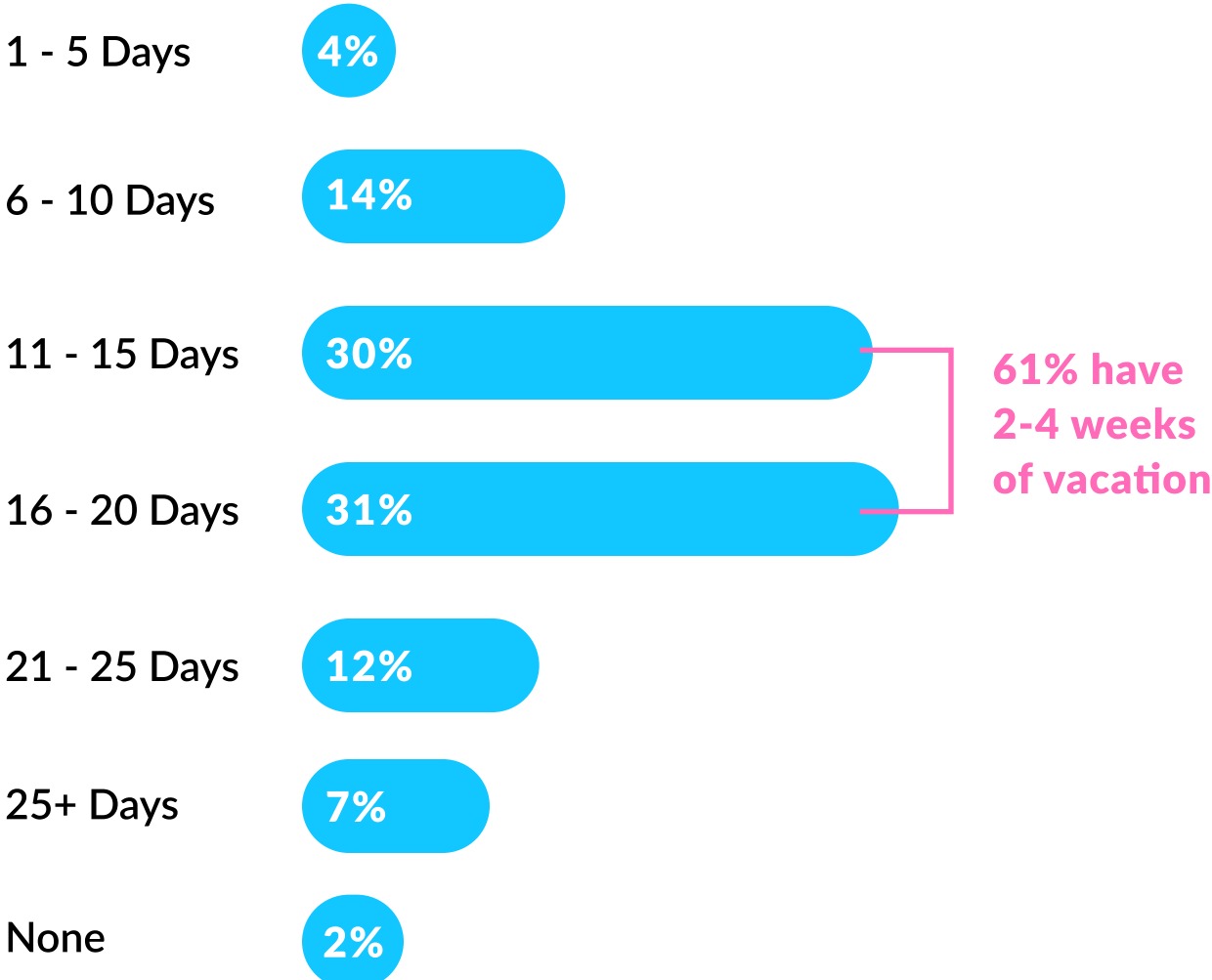


Less than half of software developers have been offered other essential benefits, such as:



On average, software developers receive between 11 to 20 working days off a year as vacation time; just about two to four weeks in total.

## Number of Vacation Days

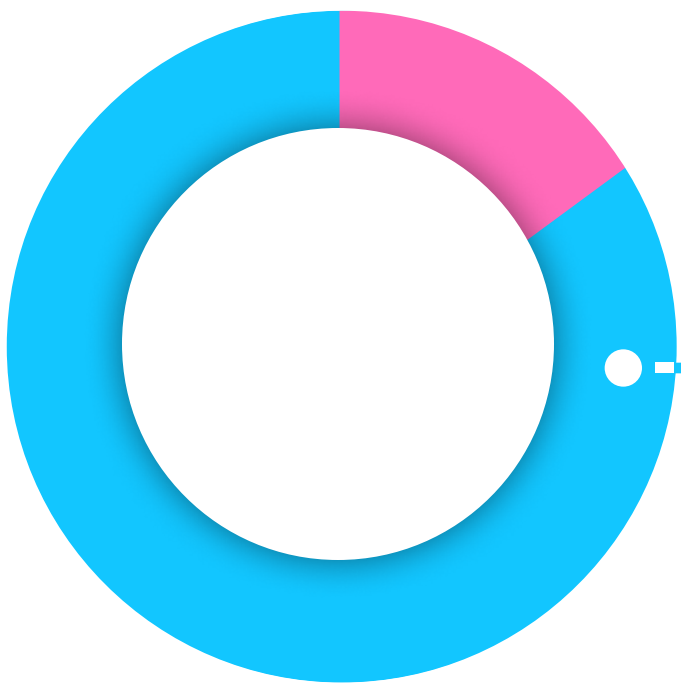


# Culture and Benefits - What really matters to developers?

Unsurprisingly, software developers reported that some of the most essential elements of job satisfaction come down to factors that are much more fundamentally human: community, camaraderie, and craft.

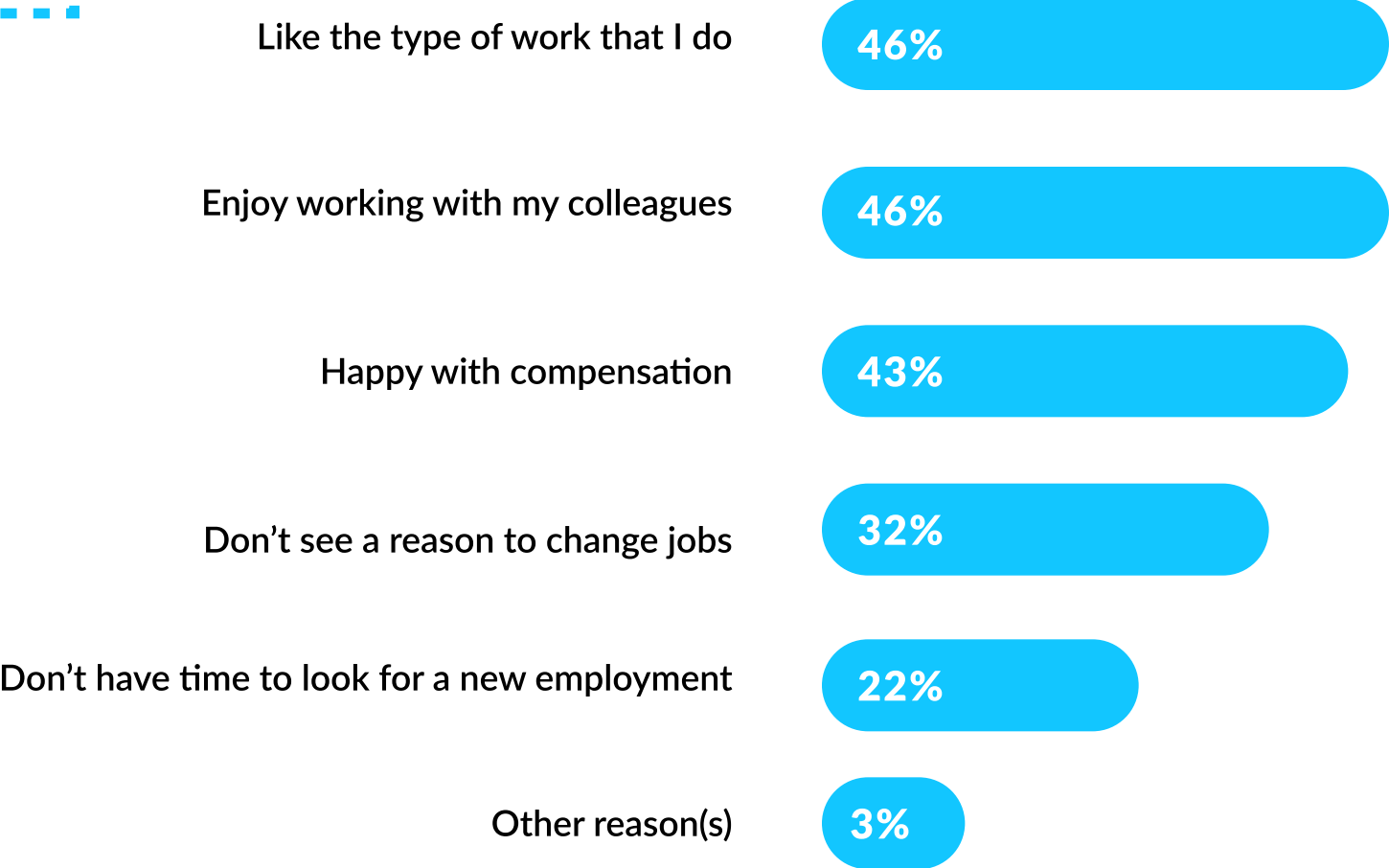
80% of software developers stayed at the same job during the pandemic. But salary satisfaction only came in third on the list of reasons for staying.

- The top reasons developers said they stayed at their jobs are:
- Liking the type of work they do (46%)
  - Enjoying the colleagues whom they work with (46%)



80%

Have stayed at the same  
job during COVID-19



# Culture and Benefits - What really matters to developers?

“Should I stay or should I go?” isn’t just a popular song lyric.

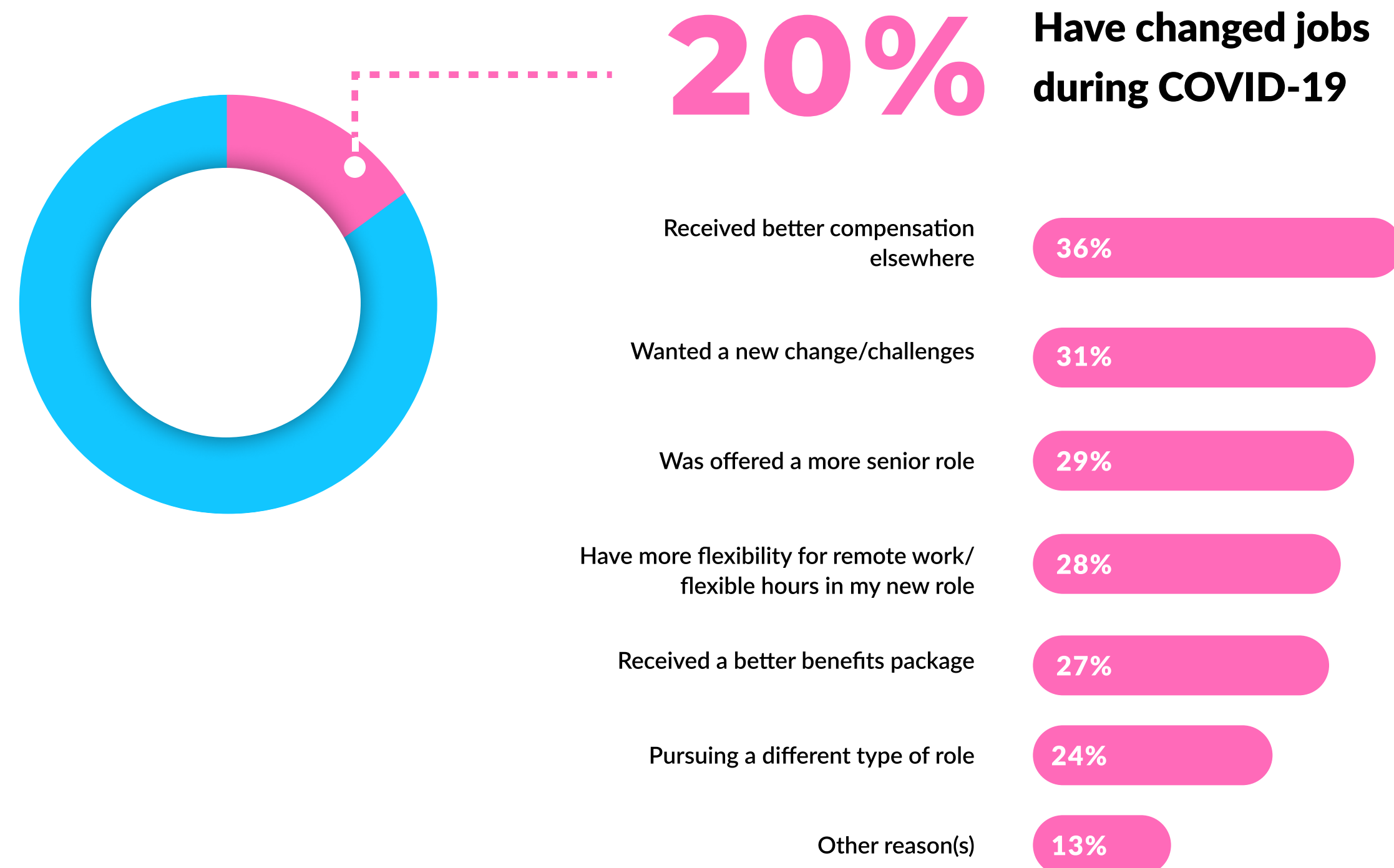
20% of software developers said they changed jobs during the pandemic and, yes, compensation came in as the top reason why.

Other reasons cited include:

- Wanting to solve new challenges
- Being offered a more senior position
- More flexible hours/ remote work

The pandemic threw employees and employers into uncertainty, and with most developers reporting increases in their annual base salary over the past year, it’s not surprising that the majority of them have opted to stay put at their current jobs. But how long will this loyalty last?

We’re already seeing how factors like flexible hours and remote work are becoming essential considerations for developers. The fact that these reasons were followed closely by “Received a better benefits package,” means we can conclude that salary and compensation are not the only things that are top of mind for software developers.

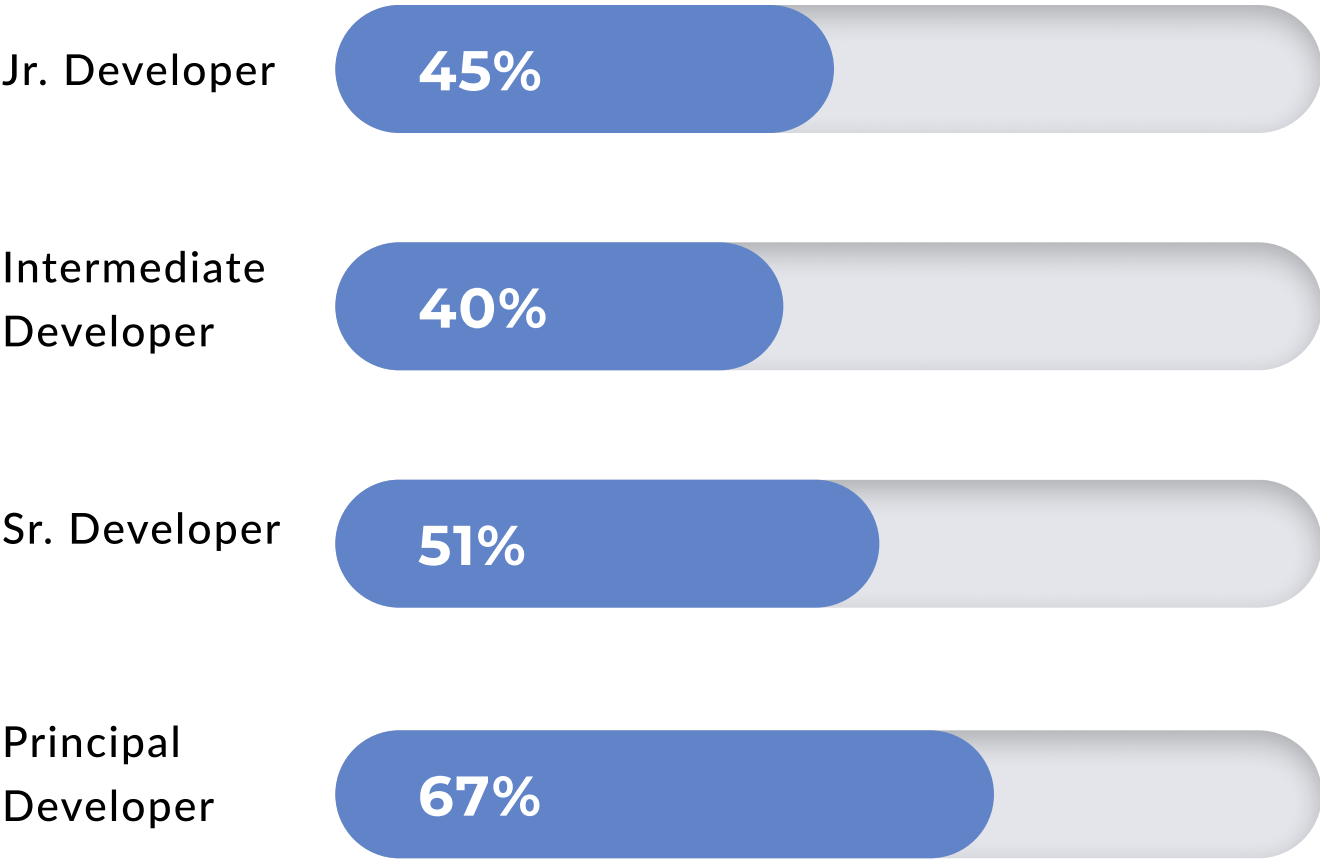




# Remote & Flexible Work

# Remote & Flexible Work — Home is where the workplace is?

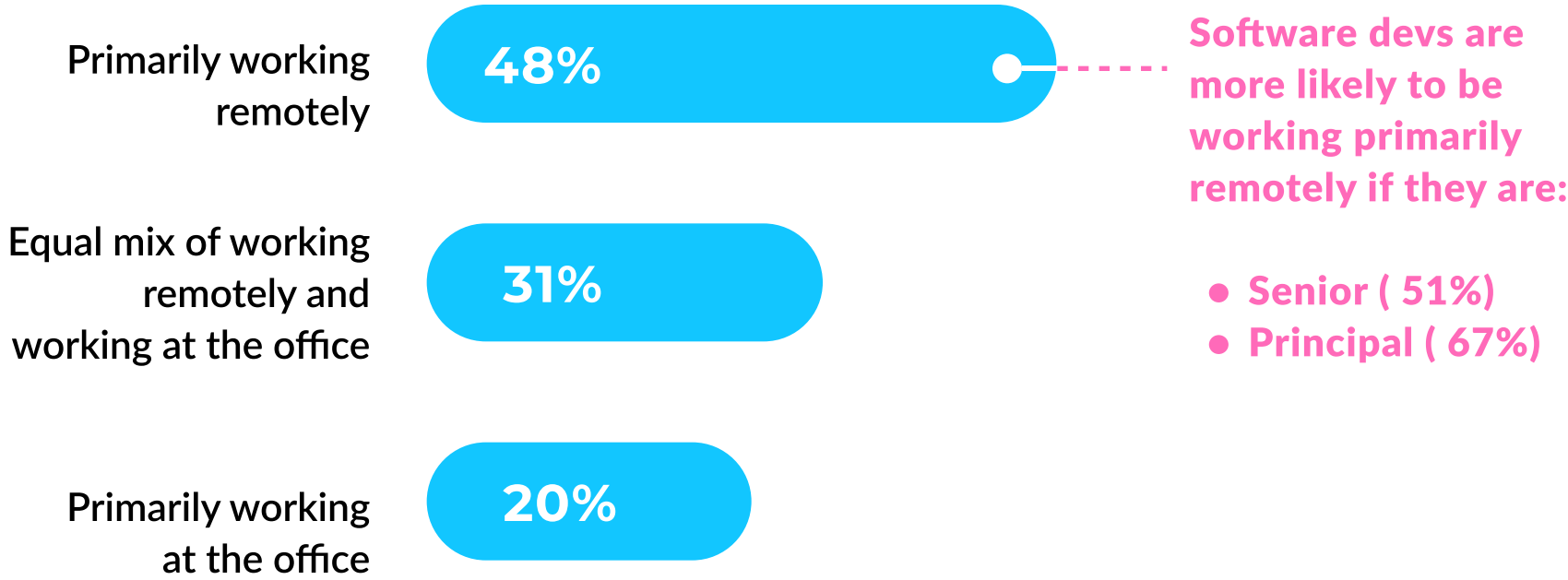
48% of software developers surveyed are primarily working remotely.



Over the years that we've spent building up the Commit community, we've recognized that Senior and Principal-level developers are more likely to have honed the leadership and communication skills necessary to effectively collaborate in a fully asynchronous way.

Meanwhile, junior and intermediate developers are more likely to prefer a hybrid model of in-office and remote work to both maintain a state of camaraderie with their peers (which we've determined is a major value for developers) and to ensure support and mentorship is readily available to them when needed.

## Currently working remote vs in-office



Software devs are more likely to be working primarily remotely if they are:

- Senior ( 51%)
- Principal ( 67%)

## Remote & Flexible Work — Home is where the workplace is?

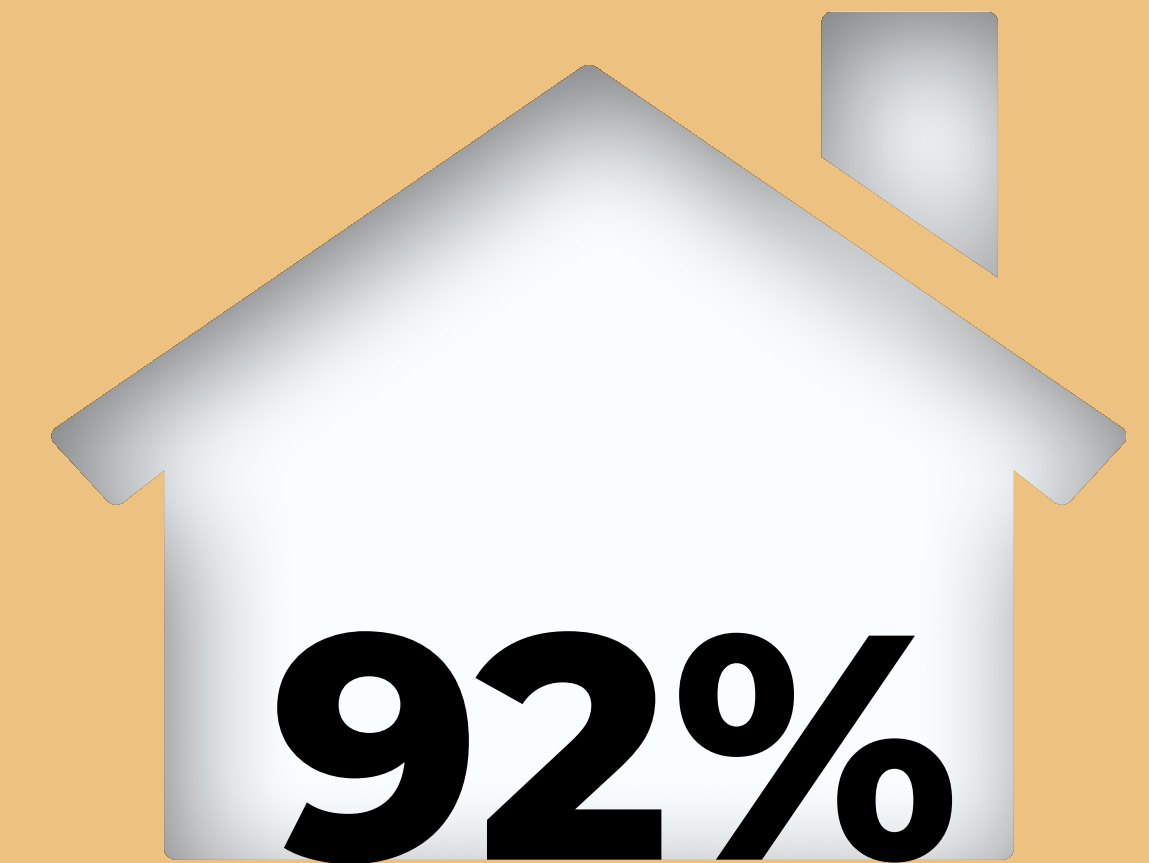
Nearly all (92%) of the software developers who reported working primarily remotely work from their primary residence.

It's easy to romanticize remote work and flexible hours as something that allows workers to better balance their work and home lives.

But without the right guardrails, work life can easily spill over into the rest of life. That's not what remote workers want.

The burden of preventing burnout is on employers. With this stat, we can ascertain that those who are working remotely aren't necessarily working from a charming café or living out some kind of digital nomad dream. They're probably in a makeshift home office or parked at the dinner table for the day.

Is this really the vision of flexible work that workers had in mind?

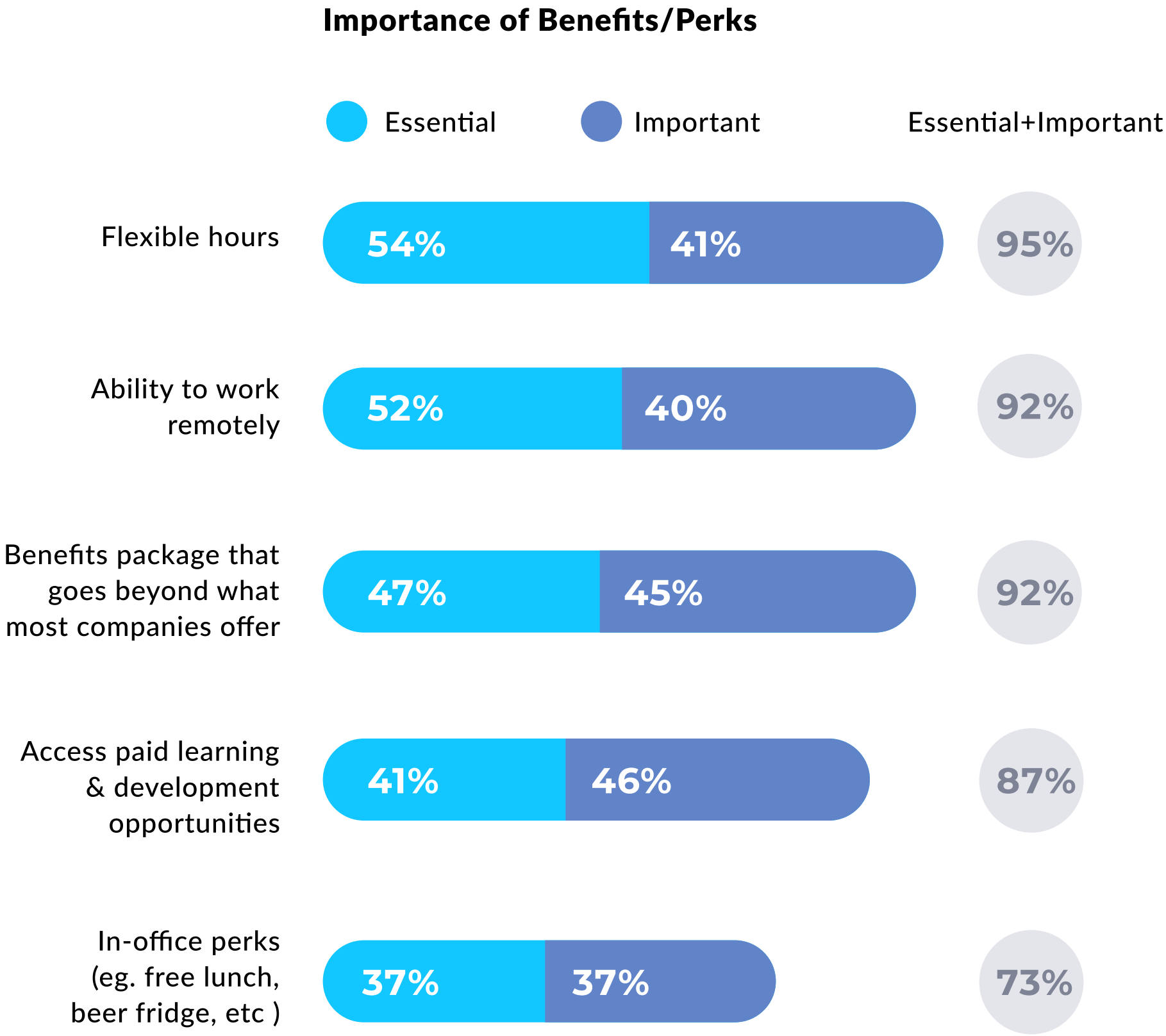


**of software developers  
who are working primarily  
remotely work from their  
primary residence.**

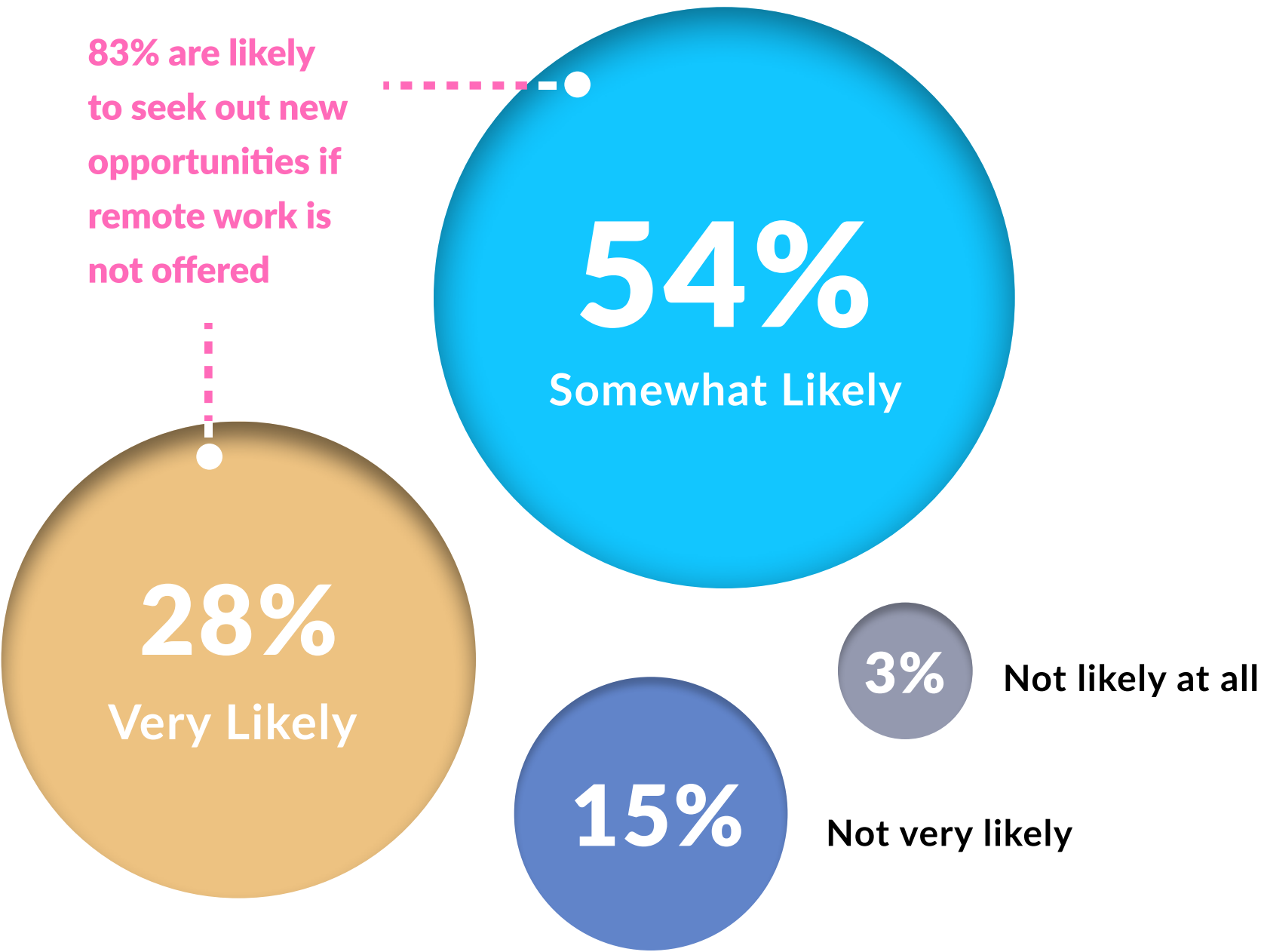
# Remote & Flexible Work + Culture & Benefits — Big Picture

**95%**  
of software developers listed Flexible hours (i.e. setting their own schedule) as an essential or important benefit.

**92%**  
said that they considered working remotely to be an essential or important benefit.



## Likelihood to switch jobs if remote work not offered/revoked



Those at the developer level are more likely to seek out new opportunities if they lost the ability to work remotely ( 91% )

# Remote & Flexible Work + Culture & Benefits — Big Picture

Software developers—especially those with more experience—have shown a clear preference for working remotely and have expressed a strong desire to manage their own schedules. Isn't it time that employers double down on benefits packages that support these shifts in values?

Giving employees spontaneous mental health days or weeks off may seem innovative, even revolutionary. But our research reveals that employees are looking for increasingly more practical and enduring benefits that support them equally in their work lives and their lives outside of work.

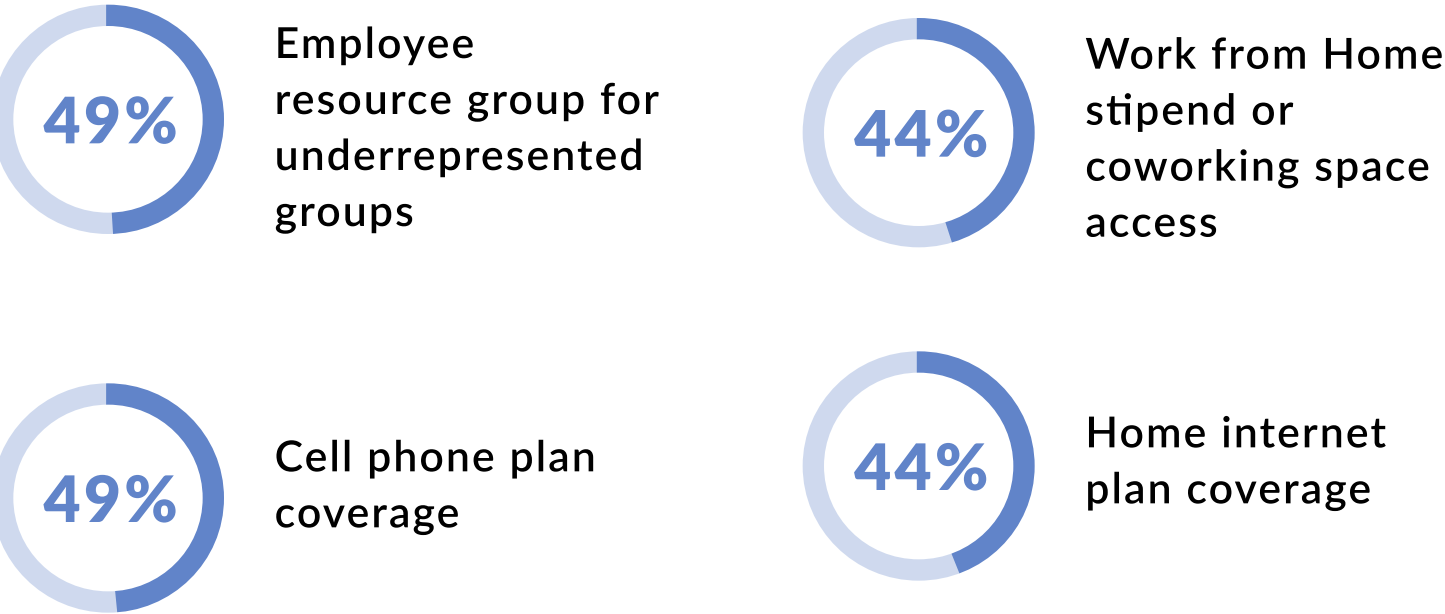
If things trend towards employee-first needs, we'd hope to see things like work from home stipends and home internet plan coverage jump into the category of most common benefits offered. And there's definitely room for improvement in terms of Paid Time Off policies.

It's encouraging to see employers are taking steps towards offering employees these essentials. To make sure these offerings become commonplace, we encourage developers to advocate for these items to be included in their job offers.

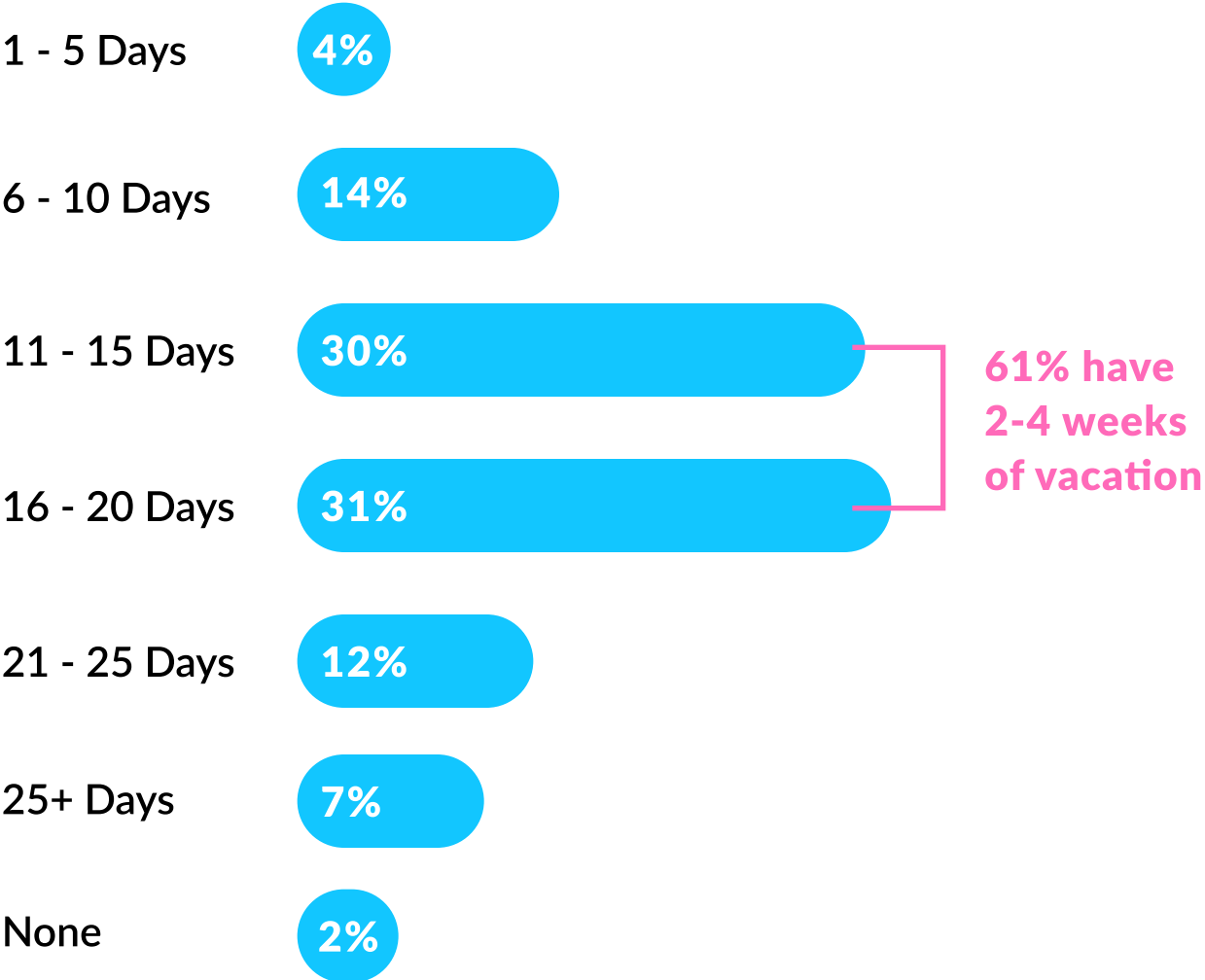
## Common benefits and perks offered today:



Less than half of software developers have been offered other essential benefits, such as:



## Number of Vacation Days



**Creating Better Jobs and  
Work Experiences for  
Canadian Software Developers**

Where have all the good  
software developer jobs gone?

We can create them,  
**with  
your  
help.**

Employers already know that we're in the midst of one of the biggest and most profound shifts in terms of the workplace and how, where, and when employees contribute their skills and talents. For a long while, workplaces trended towards mega-office compounds and benefits packages that were driven more towards delightful perks and social gatherings.

What's clear now is that — in addition to a competitive base salary offering — employees value much more fundamental and practical benefits.

The pandemic posed a plot twist for the ages. Without the forcing function of communal office life, employees have begun to ask themselves critical questions about the nature of their work and how that work fits into their lives; not the other way around. And we absolutely applaud this endeavour.

The picture of the modern software developer that we received from this data is of a group of highly skilled, highly career-savvy, and highly autonomous people who are driven by their love of craft, the perpetual pursuit of knowledge and an ongoing commitment to paying that knowledge forward.

We believe that these are traits to be rewarded. So when software developers say that they value flexibility and autonomy, are employers today ready and willing to support these needs? We know from this data, it's paramount that they do.



# Get in Touch

## **For Engineers: Join the Commit community**

We're hiring senior developers who know their worth and are looking for their next great remote work opportunity. Fill out an application with us and we'll get back to you.

[Apply Now](#)

## **For Startup Founders: Put your confidence in Commit**

If you're a startup founder looking for stellar engineering talent, we can help! Fill out a startup partner form and we'll get in touch.

[Register Now](#)



# Methodology

## WHO

The survey includes n=508 Canadians currently employed as software developers. For comparison purposes only, a sample of this size would yield a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

## WHEN

The survey was fielded from September 2nd - 15th, 2021

## WHAT

Commit Solutions Inc. contracted the Angus Reid Group to conduct an online survey of software developers.

## WHY

The purpose of this study was to understand the job characteristics and perceptions/priorities of software developers in Canada.

