2026 STATE OF THE GAME INDUSTRY

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FOREWORD

This past year, the Game Developers Conference transformed, becoming the GDC Festival of Gaming. The State of the Game Industry has also transformed, expanding to better represent the full game ecosystem. We spent the past year taking a deep dive into our annual survey and report, consulting with key stakeholders and members of the community to refine our questions and diversify our reach.

Our goal was to ensure results not only represent the thoughts and perspectives of all game industry professionals, but also their areas of expertise. Surveys were customized for each participant group, ensuring that developers, marketers, executives, investors, and others answered questions tailored to their unique skillsets. We also performed a small survey of game educators and students to capture a snapshot of the challenges facing the next generation.

This year, we surveyed over 2,300 game industry professionals (with a ±3 percent MoE) on layoffs, generative AI, platforms, and more, collaborating with research partners at Omdia and the Game Developer editorial team. Internal AI tools were used sparingly during the research phase, to assist in sentiment analysis. No written or visual content was generated through AI—with one exception, but you'll see why.

Thank you to everyone who participated by sharing your thoughts and perspectives. This year's State of the Game Industry has given us a new look inside the game industry puzzle, and we look forward to putting the pieces together with you.
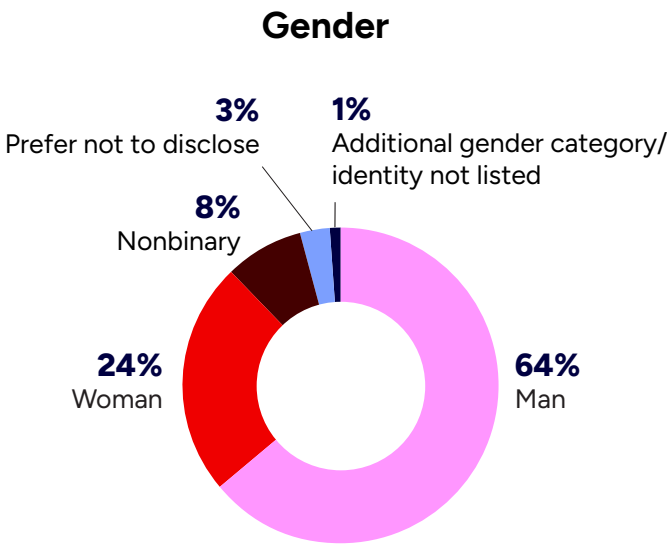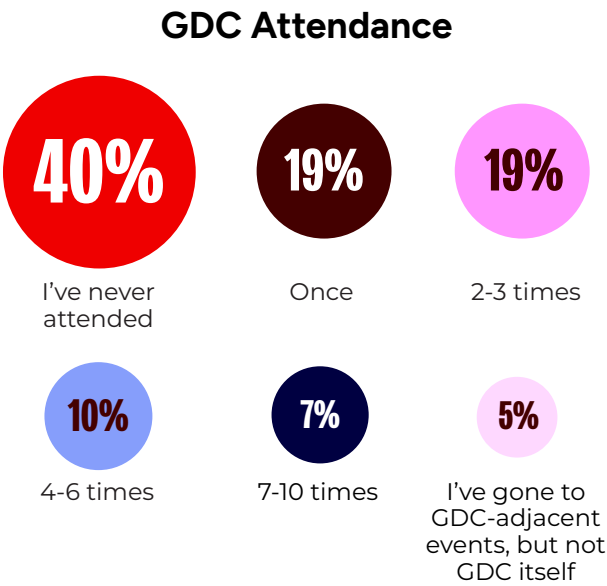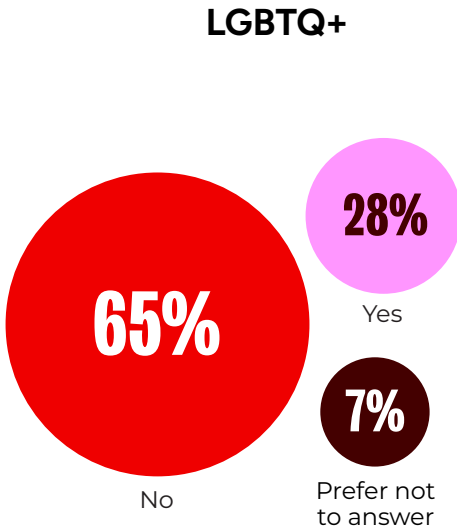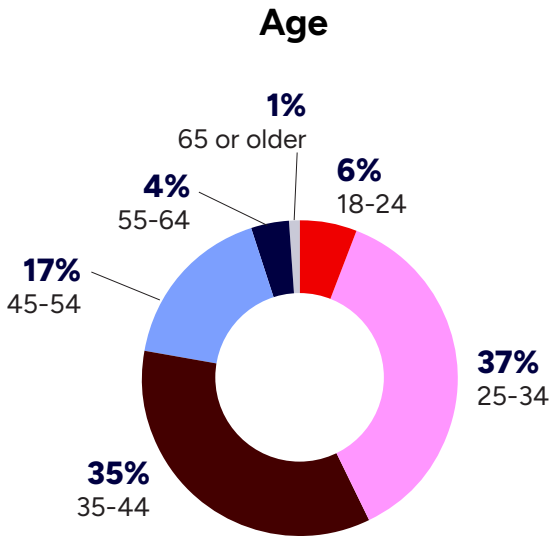
1 DEMOGRAPHICS

A PIECE OF THE INDUSTRY

Changes to the 2026 survey make year-on-year comparisons difficult; so, for the most part, we will be avoiding them. We will note where we see patterns or similarities, with the caveat that reliable YoY data will not be available until 2027.

About two-thirds (64%) of this year's respondents are men, one-fourth are women (24%), and 8% are non-binary. About 28% of respondents identify as LGBTQ+, increasing to 31% for those living in the United States. About 39% of respondents 18-34 identify at LGBTQ+ (and that percentage rises to 46% among respondents 24 and younger). This year's demographic breakdown tracks with changes we've seen over the past few years, but a direct comparison is not recommended.

We asked our respondents whether they've attended the Game Developers Conference in the past 10 years. Overall, over half (55%) have been to GDC at least once; 5% have gone to GDC-adjacent events, but not GDC itself; and 40% have never been. Attendance rates were much higher for folks based in the US, with 71% having gone to the event at some point in the past decade (compared to 37% for international respondents).

Age

1%
65 or older

6%
18-24

4%
55-64

17%
45-54

37%
25-34

35%
35-44

LGBTQ+

65%
No

28%
Yes

7%
Prefer not
to answer

GDC Attendance

40%
I've never
attended

19%
Once

19%
2-3 times

10%
4-6 times

7%
7-10 times

5%
I've gone to
GDC-adjacent
events, but not
GDC itself

Gender

3%
Prefer not to disclose

1%
Additional gender category/
identity not listed

8%
Nonbinary

24%
Woman

64%
Man

This year, we limited the race and ethnicity question to respondents living in the United States, as our more limited international pool risked an inaccurate representation of diversity outside of the US. Two-thirds (67%) identified as White or Caucasian; 6% as Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin; 5% as Black, African, or Caribbean; 5% as East Asian; 2% as Southeast Asian; 1% as South Asian; and 1% as Middle Eastern or North African.

About 7% described themselves as having a multi-ethnic background; 83% as part-White or Caucasian, 36% as part-East, South, or Southeast Asian, 26% as part-Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin, and 20% as part-Black, African, or Caribbean.

What race, ethnicity, or origin best describes you?
(US ONLY)

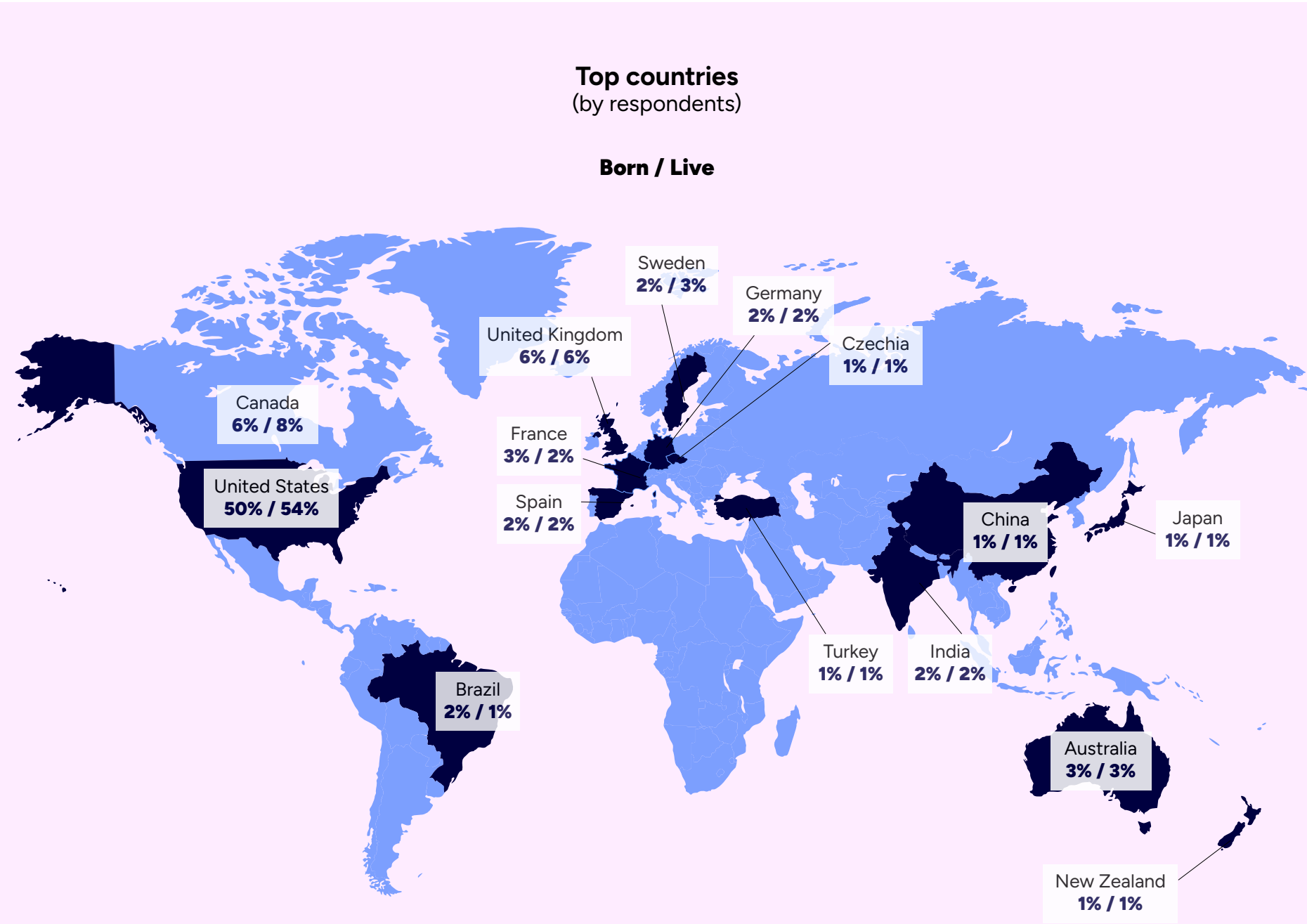|	
White / Caucasian	67%
Hispanic, Latino or Spanish origin	6%
Black / African / Caribbean	5%
East Asian	5%
Southeast Asian	2%
Middle Eastern or North African	1%
South Asian	1%
American Indian or Alaska Native	0%
Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander	0%
Multiple ethnicities / Not listed	7%
Prefer not to answer	4%

WHERE THEY'RE FROM AND WHERE THEY LIVE

We've spent the past year doing community outreach to increase non-US representation in this year's survey, and we've seen small signs of progress. This year, 54% of respondents were based in the United States, down from 58% in 2025.

However, we still have a disproportionate number of people from North America and Western Europe. It's far from truly representative of the global community, and we know more work is needed.

We asked respondents to share both where they were born and where they currently live, to get a sense of what countries and US states see more relocation. We saw some interesting results for the United States, but other countries had too small a sample size to be an accurate representation.

Top countries
(by respondents)

Born / Live

Sweden
2% / 3%

Germany
2% / 2%

Czechia
1% / 1%

United Kingdom
6% / 6%

Canada
6% / 8%

France
3% / 2%

Spain
2% / 2%

United States
50% / 54%

China
1% / 1%

Japan
1% / 1%

Turkey
1% / 1%

India
2% / 2%

Brazil
2% / 1%

Australia
3% / 3%

New Zealand
1% / 1%

Half (50%) of respondents were born in the United States, but 54% currently live there. This shows a net increase in immigration to the United States by game industry professionals. When we looked at relocation by state, we saw some some interesting results. We focused on US-born game workers, seeing what states have seen the most relocations. It should come as no surprise that California ranks at the top—one-fourth (25%) of US respondents were born there, and one-third (34%) currently live there. Washington state had the largest percentage increase, and New York saw the most departures.

3%
born in Washington state

12%
live there now

Top states
(by US respondents)

Born / Live

Washington
3% / 12%

Oregon
1% / 2%

California
25% / 34%

Colorado
2% / 3%

Texas
5% / 6%

Illinois
5% / 6%

Pennsylvania
4% / 3%

New York
9% / 5%

Massachusetts
3% / 4%

New Jersey
4% / 2%

Maryland
3% / 3%

North Carolina
1% / 2%

Florida
4% / 3%
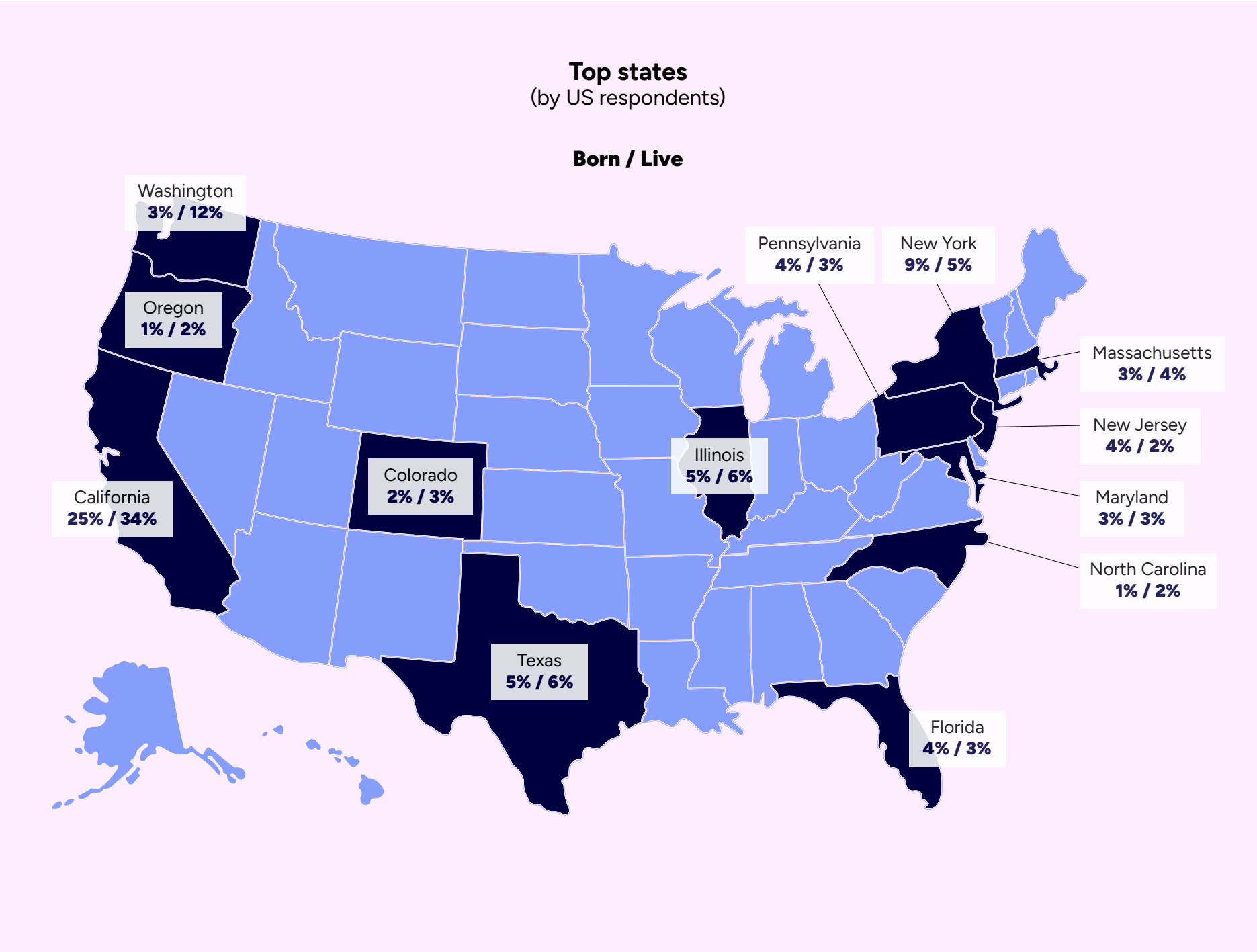
THE GAME MAKERS

We expanded this year's survey to better include investors, marketers, support teams, educators, and other vital members of the game ecosystem. However, developers are still our bread and butter. The top job roles for respondents were game design and narrative (22%), programming (17%), visual and technical arts (16%), and game production (11%).

These top jobs were consistent across age ranges and years of experience, although we did see a rise in business roles among older game industry professionals.

One-tenth (11%) of respondents responded "Other," with several of them noting that they work multiple roles—either because they are in leadership positions, work on small teams, or are solo developers.

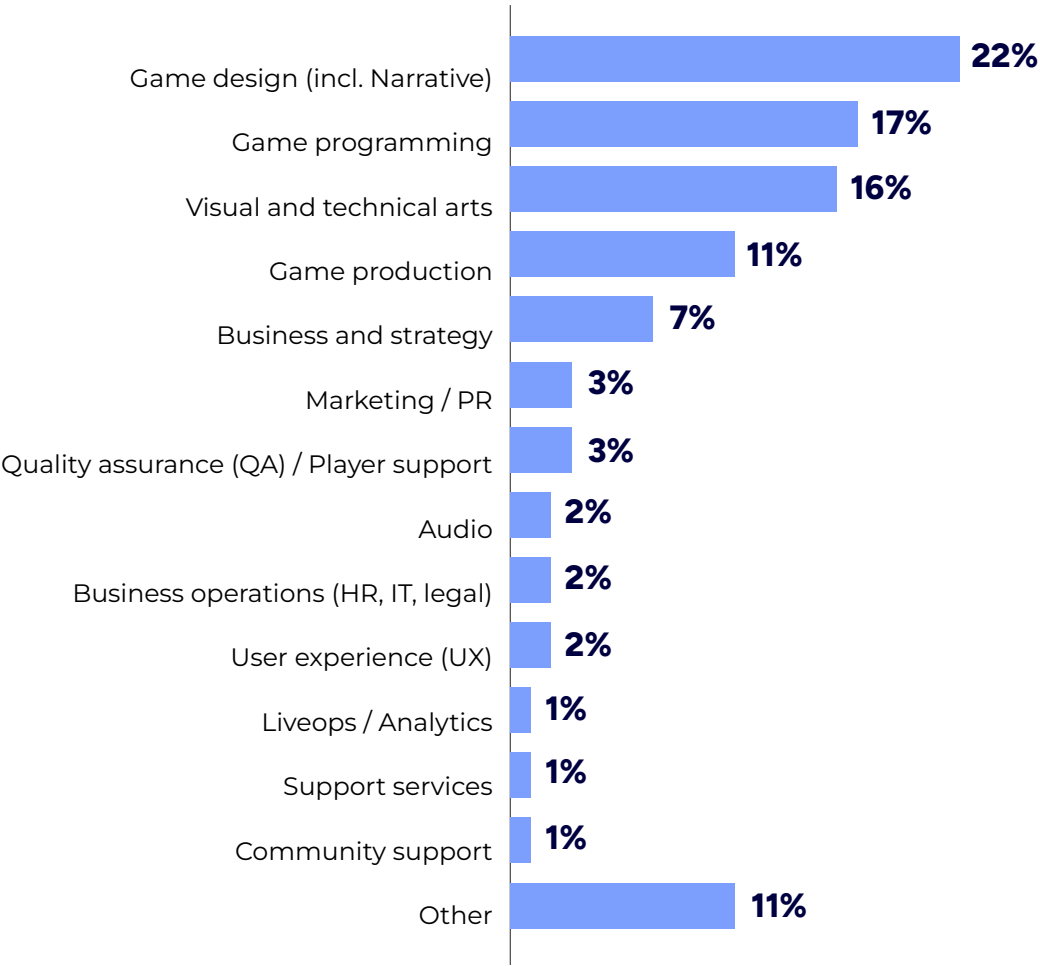## Top jobs for 18-34 year olds

1 Quality assurance

2 Visual and technical arts

3 Marketing / Community management

Job discipline

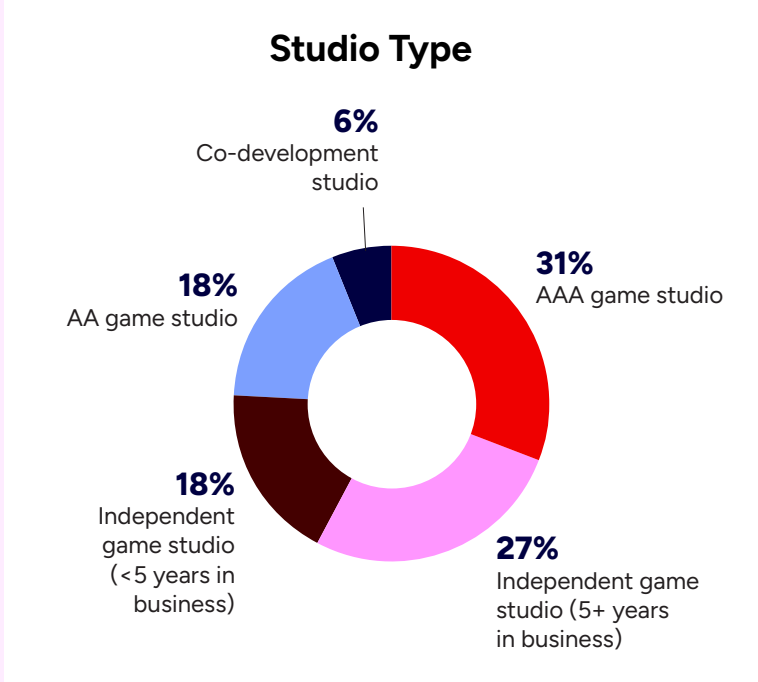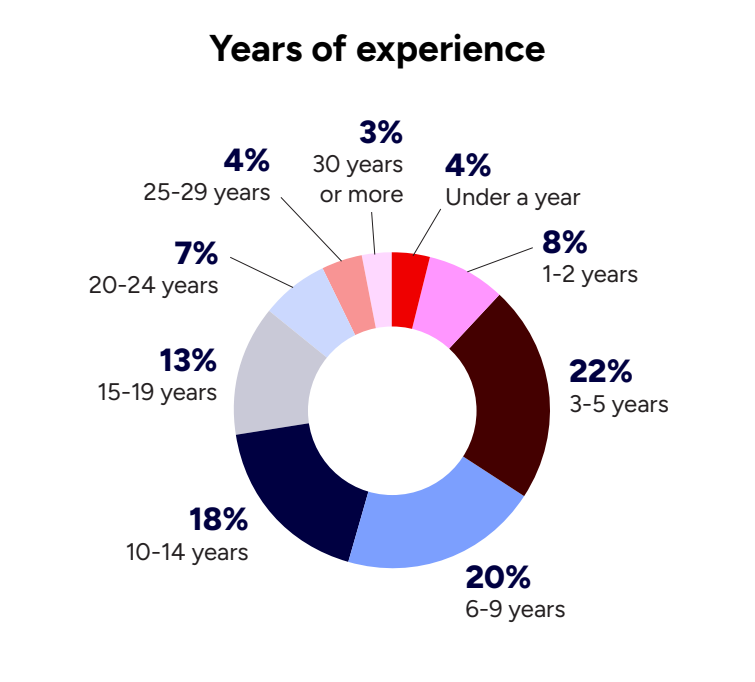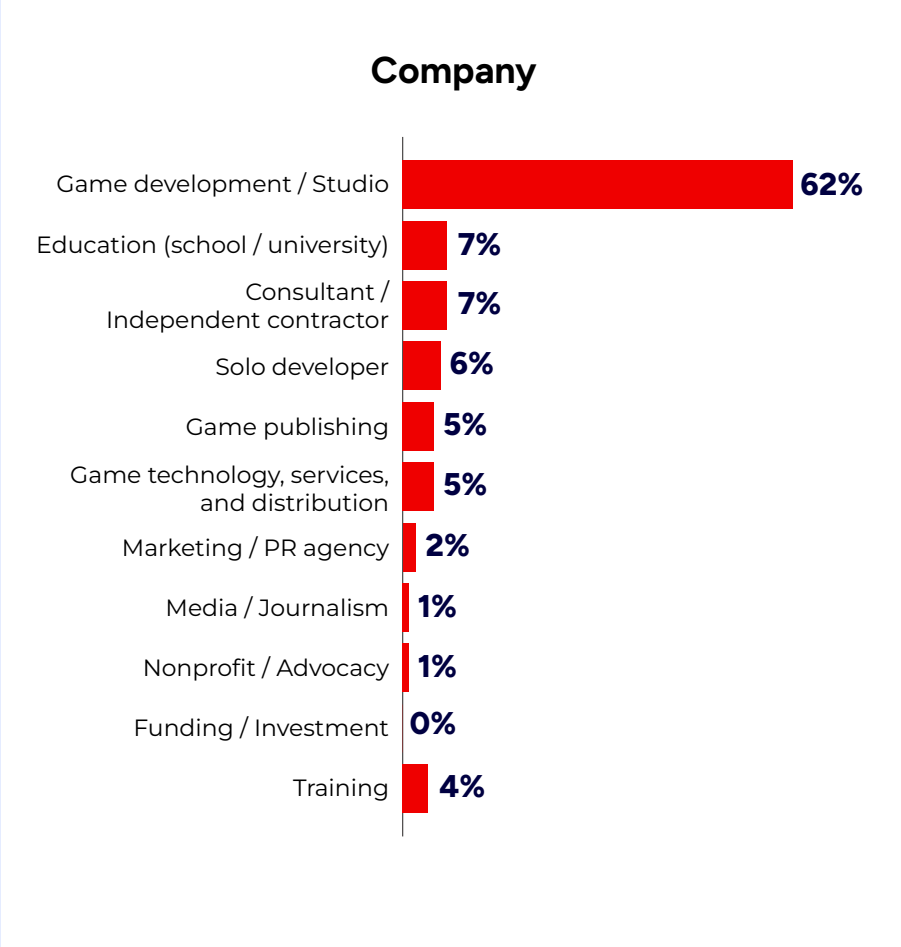| Discipline	%
Game design (incl. Narrative)	22%
Game programming	17%
Visual and technical arts	16%
Game production	11%
Business and strategy	7%
Marketing / PR	3%
Quality assurance (QA) / Player support	3%
Audio	2%
Business operations (HR, IT, legal)	2%
User experience (UX)	2%
Liveops / Analytics	1%
Support services	1%
Community support	1%
Other	11%

Over half (54%) of respondents reported less than 10 years of experience in the game industry. The results were higher for respondents in quality assurance (76%) and marketing and community support (68%), and lower for those in business services and operations (37%).

Currently, 62% of respondents work at game companies or studios in a variety of roles. Breaking it down, 45% of those folks work at independent studios, 31% at AAA studios, 18% at AA studios, and 6% at co-development studios.

To better account for the variety in independent studio size, revenue, and prominence, we created two categories: older (at least five years old) and younger (less than five years old). Over one-fourth (27%) of respondents from game companies said they work at older indie studios, and 18% are at younger indie studios. For company size, two-thirds (68%) of workers at older indie studios say there are at least 20 people employed there. On the other hand, three-fourths (77%) of respondents at younger indie studios have less than 20 employees, and 11% work by themselves.
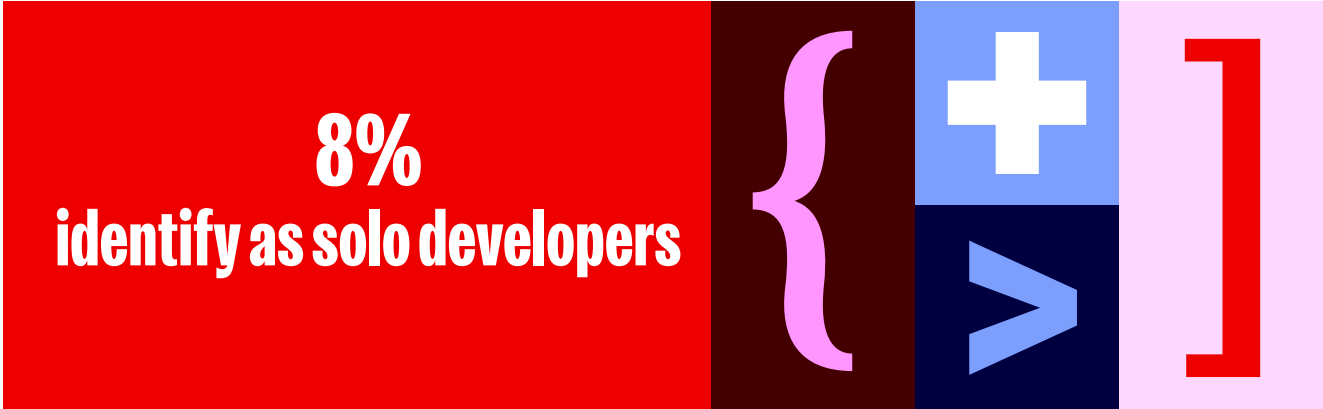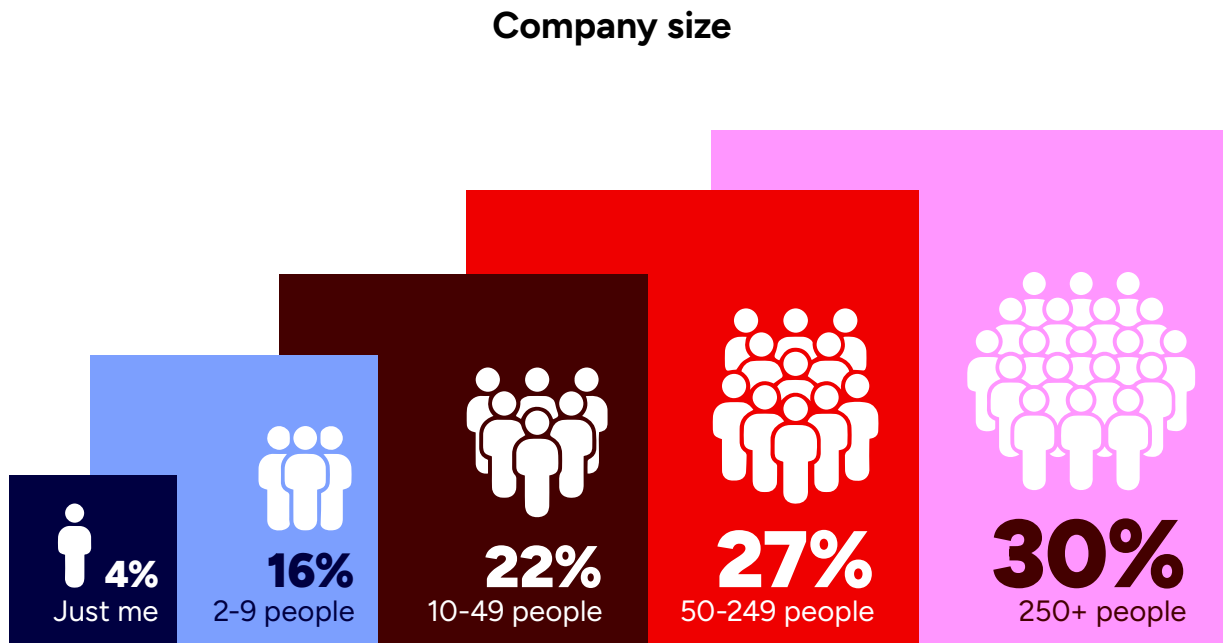
Company

Game development / Studio	62%
Education (school / university)	7%
Consultant / Independent contractor	7%
Solo developer	6%
Game publishing	5%
Game technology, services, and distribution	5%
Marketing / PR agency	2%
Media / Journalism	1%
Nonprofit / Advocacy	1%
Funding / Investment	0%
Training	4%

Years of experience

- 4% Under a year
- 8% 1-2 years
- 22% 3-5 years
- 20% 6-9 years
- 18% 10-14 years
- 13% 15-19 years
- 7% 20-24 years
- 4% 25-29 years
- 3% 30 years or more

Studio Type

- 6% Co-development studio
- 31% AAA game studio
- 27% Independent game studio (5+ years in business)
- 18% Independent game studio (<5 years in business)
- 18% AA game studio

37% Business

Have less than 10 years experience

76% QA

In addition to studio workers, there were consultants and independent contractors (7%), game publisher employees (5%), and those who work support services like game technology and distribution (5%). We had over 100 respondents who work in support services, with their top fields being software and middleware (25%), game engine technology (17%), and software-as-a-service (16%).

About 4% of respondents identified as full-time solo developers, and 4% said they work as part-time solo developers.

8%
identify as solo developers

Company size

4%
Just me

16%
2-9 people

22%
10-49 people

27%
50-249 people

30%
250+ people

> " The market has been so challenging I'm not sure I'll remain in games."
>
> **- FORMER C-LEVEL (MARKETING/PR), CALIFORNIA / LAID OFF <12 MONTHS AGO**

2 INDUSTRY LAYOFFS

[1-IN-4] HAVE BEEN LAID OFF IN THE PAST 2 YEARS

For the past few years of layoffs, there's been the promise of an eventual "course correction." That the post-pandemic layoff surge, which followed COVID-era investment and hiring, would sort itself out. Some hoped this would be the year. It was not. Not only have layoffs continued to afflict the game industry; they've gotten worse.
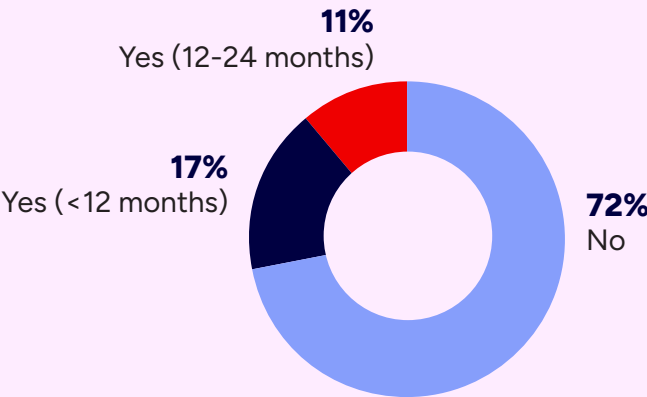
According to our survey, 17% of game industry professionals reported being laid off in the past 12 months, while 11% said they were laid off during the 12 months prior (lining up with our 2025 survey data). Altogether, that means over one-fourth (28%) of respondents have experienced a layoff in the past two years, increasing to one-third (33%) for those in the United States. The total number of layoffs could be higher, though, as some may have experienced more than one layoff in the past two years.

Game designers (including narrative) reported the highest percentage of layoffs within the past 12 months (20%), and those working in business operations and services said they experienced the least (8%). Of those who've experienced a layoff, almost half (48%) said they haven't found another job yet. This includes 36% of game industry professionals who were laid off 1 to 2 years ago.

Half of respondents said their current (or most recent) companies have conducted layoffs in the past 12 months, while 42% said they haven't.

Over 450 respondents reported experiencing an acquisition, closure, or merger in the past year. About 31% of those people also reported being laid off, though it's unclear how many were a direct result of said company changes. AAA and older indie respondents were more likely to report their companies were acquired, and newer indie studios were more likely to close.

Have you been laid off in the past 24 months?

- 11% Yes (12-24 months)
- 17% Yes (<12 months)
- 72% No

Did your current or former company experience any of the following?

(by layoff status) 450 respondents

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

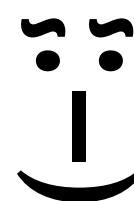|	Acquisition	Closure	Merger
Laid off	41%	63%	13%
Not laid off	79%	18%	16%

[AAA STUDIOS] CONTINUE TO SHED WORKERS

Perceptions about whether we're heading toward that long-promised "course correction" are mixed. About half (47%) of currently employed respondents said they don't anticipate layoffs in the next year, one-fourth (23%) said they do, and 30% were unsure. However, people who'd been laid off previously (and since found another job) were more likely to feel unsure (40%) of future layoffs.
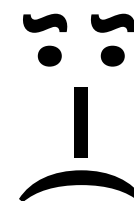
Respondents at AAA studios were more likely to say they anticipate future layoffs, and there appears to be a reason for those concerns. While 8% of AAA game workers said they were laid off 1 to 2 years ago, 19% said they were laid off within the past 12 months.

Overall, two-thirds of respondents at AAA studios said there were layoffs at their companies. Only one-third of people working at indie studios reported the same. Given how 15% of respondents from indie studios said they were personally laid off in the past year, these numbers suggest that company layoffs were more likely to have a personal impact on indie professionals, possibly due to their smaller studio sizes, while AAA workers had a stronger likelihood to see layoffs happening elsewhere at their companies.

Do you anticipate future layoffs at your company in the next 12 months?

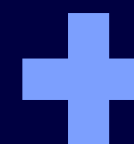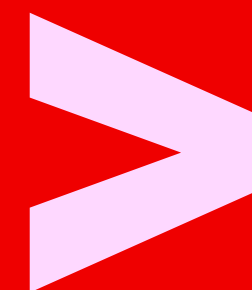| 47%	23%	30%
No	Yes	Unsure

> " I've been laid off so many times in the last 5-6 years, had so many turbulent issues working in games. I have trauma and can't ever fully trust anywhere now.
>
> - MANAGER (GAME DESIGN), CALIFORNIA

EDUCATION POV: [LAYOFFS]

3-in-4 students worry about future jobs

Layoffs don't just affect game workers currently in the industry, it also impacts future developers and leaders eager to enter the space. We surveyed over 100 educators and 50 students about what they're seeing and anticipating.
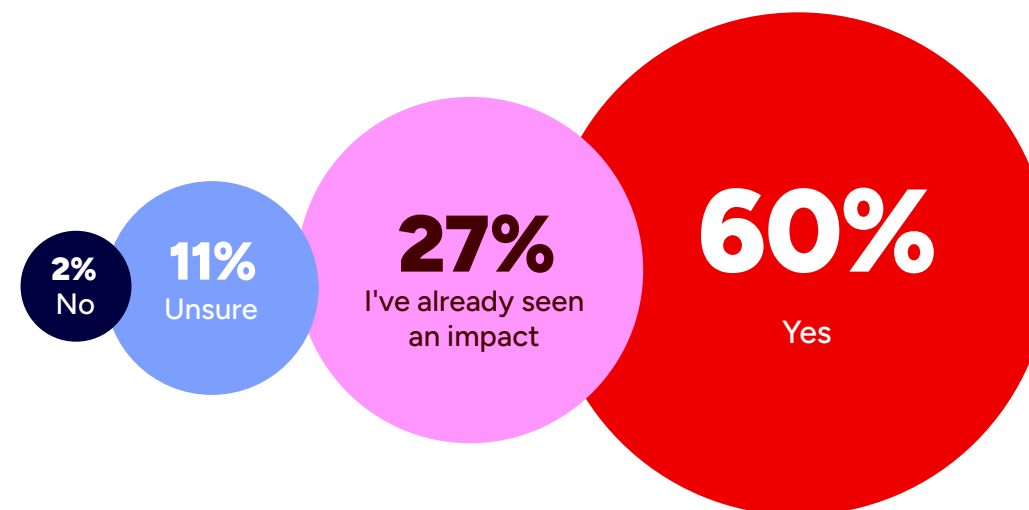
Three-fourths (74%) of surveyed students said they're concerned about their future job prospects in the game industry. In open responses, students noted the lack of entry-level jobs, increased competition from laid-off workers with more experience, and AI-led displacement (not to mention the rise in AI résumé screening). One person said they've been applying for internships for three years now, with no success.

Professors are echoing this sentiment: A large majority (87%) of surveyed educators said they either expect to see a negative impact on student placement post-graduation, or it's already happening. Some of them said they're seeing more students, in response, pursuing indie development, launching their own studios, or continuing in higher education.

Do you expect the current economic and industry climate to have an impact on the placement rate of your students into the game industry?

Total Respondents 105

2% No **11% Unsure** **27% I've already seen an impact** **60% Yes**

> Most of my students will not have a career in game development.
> - EDUCATOR (COMPUTER SCIENCE), MICHIGAN

> There aren't any jobs. Everyone's getting fired. It's fucked.
> - STUDENT (GAME DESIGN), CALIFORNIA

COMPANIES CALL IT [RESTRUCTURING] WORKERS BLAME [MISMANAGEMENT]

We asked respondents to share up to three reasons their current or former companies gave for layoffs in the past 12 months. Company restructuring (43%) was the most cited reason, followed by budget cuts and market conditions (38% each), as well as project cancellation (32%).
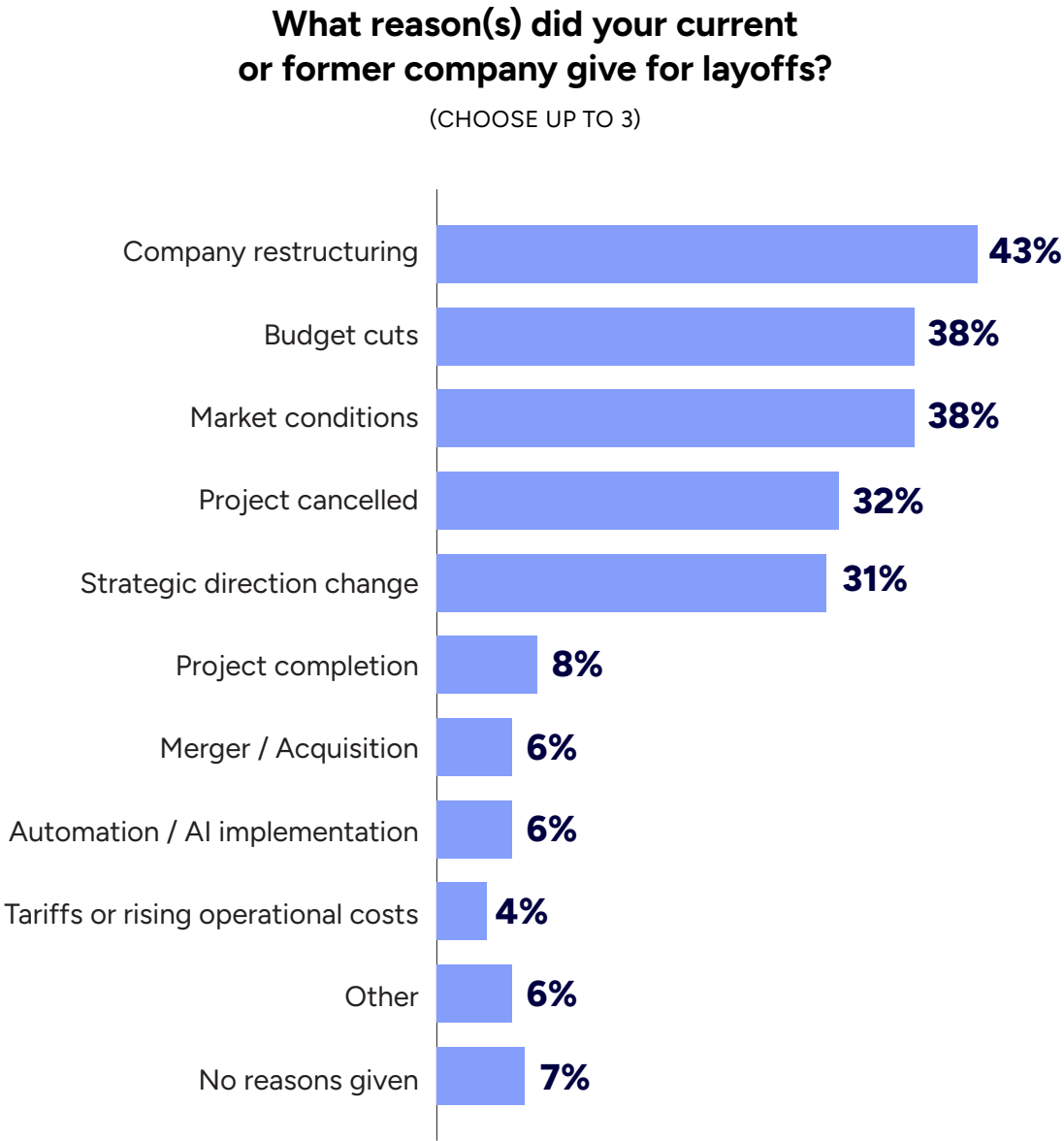
These percentages were much higher than last year's, but that's likely because we limited the question to those who'd been impacted by layoffs.

We also wanted to hear what the overall game community thought were the reasons for more layoffs; so, we analyzed more than 1,200 open responses, 700 of them from people directly impacted by layoffs. Apart from budget constraints and market conditions, a lot of responsibility was placed on mismanagement and greed, unrealistic expectations, US-based tariffs and other global economic issues, and the adoption of AI tools.

That said, some respondents noted that their companies have worked hard to retain employees, in spite of ongoing challenges.

Top reasons for layoffs
(by studio type)

AAA
1. Company restructuring
2. Project cancelled
3. Strategic direction change

AA
1. Budget cuts
2. Company restructuring
3. Market conditions

Indie
1. Market conditions
2. Budget cuts
3. Company restructuring

What reason(s) did your current or former company give for layoffs?
(CHOOSE UP TO 3)

Reason	Percentage
Company restructuring	43%
Budget cuts	38%
Market conditions	38%
Project cancelled	32%
Strategic direction change	31%
Project completion	8%
Merger / Acquisition	6%
Automation / AI implementation	6%
Tariffs or rising operational costs	4%
Other	6%
No reasons given	7%

IN [YOUR] WORDS

From your perspective, what is responsible for the rise in layoffs at your company / in the game industry?

> Leadership failed to see that the COVID-era boom was not permanent, [and the] company went on an acquisition spree before being acquired. Now, money is a lot tighter because the goldfish with the money want returns yesterday so they can funnel it into the current fad (genAI).

— SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME PROGRAMMING), INDIA

> El problema es el capitalismo.

— SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME DESIGN), CANADA

> I feel like this question implies there's a justified reason for layoffs at large studios, which I can assure you there almost always is not.

— CONTRIBUTOR (GAME PRODUCTION), WASHINGTON STATE

> We're coming up towards launch, and if sales aren't good enough, there'll be layoffs.

— OWNER (INDEPENDENT STUDIO 5+ YEARS), AUSTRALIA

> Executives who have never actually worked as a dev are pulling up the boards on their ships, throwing people overboard, and expecting these scuttled ghost ships to keep making them infinite money.

— FORMER SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME DESIGN), NEW YORK / LAID OFF <12 MONTHS AGO

> At my current company, there has been SOME layoffs due to company restructure and budget costs, but overall they've tried hard to retain folks.

— MANAGER (GAME DESIGN), WASHINGTON STATE

> " AI is theft. I have to use it, otherwise I'm gonna get fired.
>
> **- SENIOR EMPLOYEE (VISUAL AND TECHNICAL ARTS), UKRAINE**

3 GENERATIVE AI

[1-IN-3] GAME WORKERS TURN TO GENERATIVE AI FOR RESEARCH, EMAILS, AND MORE

Over one-third (36%) of game industry professionals use generative AI tools as part of their job, but there are some differences in who's adopting those tools. Men (41%) reported using it more than women (35%), older workers (46%) more than younger ones (34%), and those with a Master's or PhD (45%) said they turn to it more than those with a Bachelor's degree or lower (33%). But some of the biggest differences are in what kind of job you have and where you work.

Respondents at game studios reported using AI tools (30%) less than those at publishing companies, support teams, and marketing/PR firms (58%). Business professionals' usage (58%) far outweighs most other job disciplines. And upper management (47%) uses AI tools more than those in the lower decks (29%). Studio directors (36%) sit between the two groups.

Do you use generative AI tools as part of your job?

36%	64%
Yes	No

> " We are a small team, so it is making us capable of achieving more than we would without it.
>
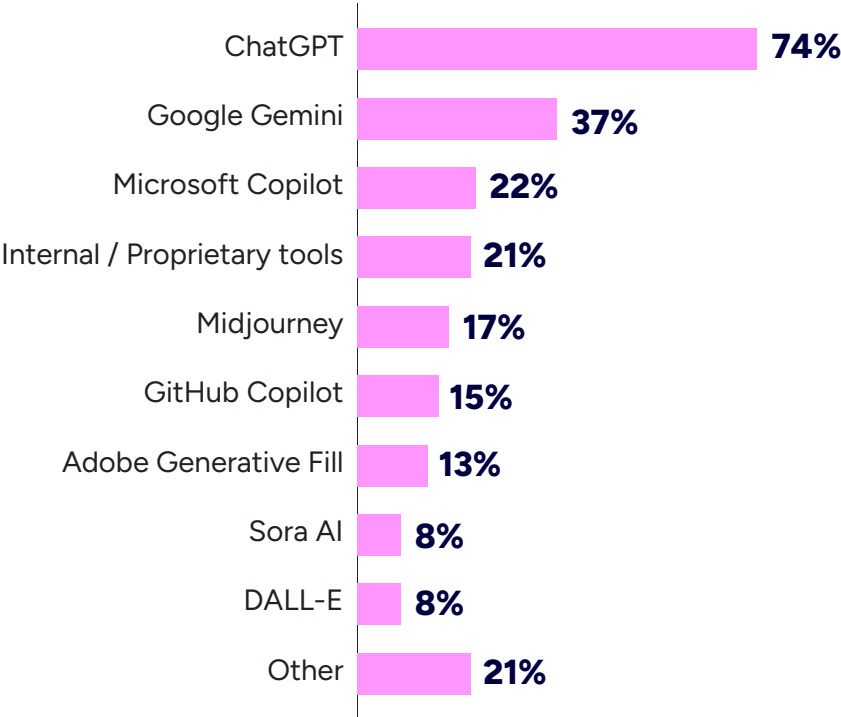> - EXECUTIVE VP (INDEPENDENT STUDIO <5 YEARS), CALIFORNIA

Given the increasing number of available tools, we asked our genAI adopters what tools they turn to for work. The most used AI tool for game industry professionals were large language models (LLMs)—mainly ChatGPT (74%), followed by Google Gemini (37%) and Microsoft Copilot (22%). Midjourney (17%) was the most used text-to-image or video tool, alongside Adobe Generative Fill (13%) and Sora AI (8%)

One-fifth (21%) of respondents said they use internal tools from their companies, increasing to 30% for AAA workers. And several respondents wrote in Claude Code, an LLM that was not included in this year's survey.

We also asked those respondents what they use the tools for. The most common use was research or brainstorming (81%), followed by daily tasks (like writing emails) and code assistance (47% each), and prototyping (35%). Generative AI tools appear to be used less for creative tasks like asset generation (19%), procedural generation (10%), and player-facing features (5%).

Which [generative AI] tools do you use?
(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

Tool	%
ChatGPT	74%
Google Gemini	37%
Microsoft Copilot	22%
Internal / Proprietary tools	21%
Midjourney	17%
GitHub Copilot	15%
Adobe Generative Fill	13%
Sora AI	8%
DALL-E	8%
Other	21%

How do you use generative AI tools?
(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

Use	%
Research / Brainstorming	81%
Writing emails / Scheduling / Other daily tasks	47%
Code assistance	47%
Prototyping	35%
Testing / Debugging	22%
Marketing / Promotional content	20%
Asset generation	19%
Personalized content	12%
Procedural generation	10%
Player-facing features	5%
Other	8%

Overall, about half (52%) said generative AI tools are being used at their companies, including one-third (35%) of those who don't use AI themselves. So, it's no surprise that we're seeing more companies adopt policies on generative AI. According to the survey, over three-fourths (78%) of respondents work at companies with some form of internal policy on AI use, while 15% said there's no policy and 7% were unsure.

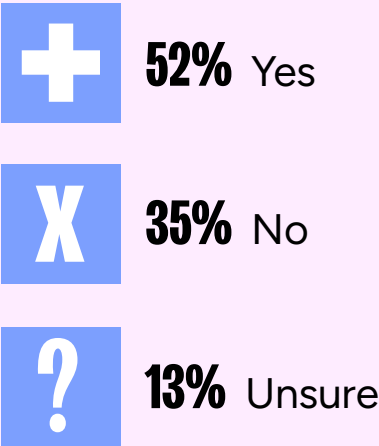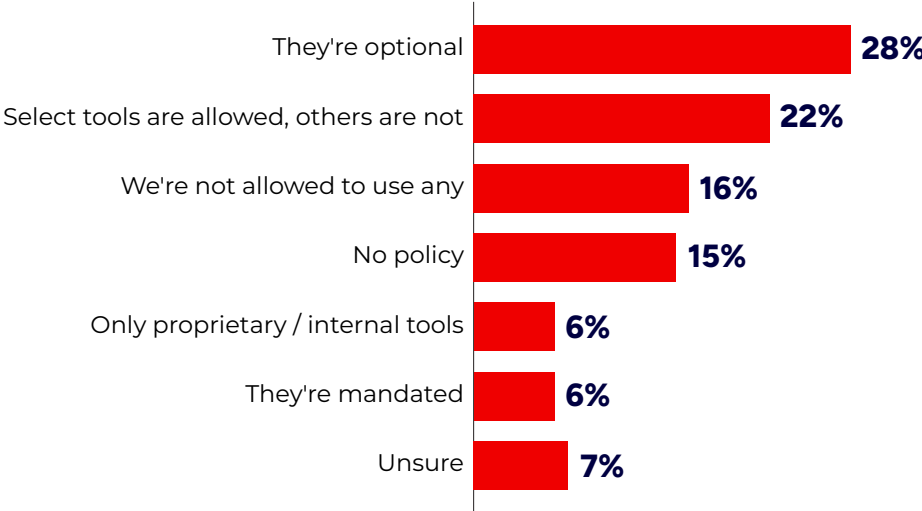Like last year, the most common policy was optional use—but we saw an increase in respondents whose companies allow select tools to be used. Those tools were primarily LLMs like ChatGPT (58%), Microsoft Copilot (44%), and Google Gemini and internal tools (39% each).

Are generative AI tools used at your company or in your department?

+ **52%** Yes

X **35%** No

? **13%** Unsure

What is your company's policy regarding the use of generative AI tools in the workplace?

They're optional	28%
Select tools are allowed, others are not	22%
We're not allowed to use any	16%
No policy	15%
Only proprietary / internal tools	6%
They're mandated	6%
Unsure	7%

> We are not allowed to [use AI tools]. I'm not privy to the reasons behind that decision. However, I'm with my employer on this.

- SENIOR EMPLOYEE (VISUAL AND TECHNICAL ARTS), GERMANY

HALF OF WORKERS THINK GENERATIVE AI IS [BAD] FOR THE INDUSTRY

It appears that the more game industry professionals know about generative AI, the less they like it.

This year's survey shows that over half (52%) of game industry professionals think generative AI is having a negative impact on the game industry, up from 30% last year and 18% the year prior. Workers in visual and technical arts (64%), game design and narrative (63%), and game programming (59%) hold the most unfavorable views. We also saw a great deal of opposition among those in quality assurance and community support, but those sample sizes were relatively small.

About 7% of respondents said generative AI is having a positive impact on the game industry, down from 13% in 2025. That amount was higher for executives and those in business operations and services (19% each). Those same professionals were more likely to say generative AI is having a mixed impact—an opinion that was more prevalent among all game industry workers in previous surveys. In 2025, it was half (51%) of them. This year, it was 30%.

We asked our respondents to share what considerations or values guide their decisions whether to use generative AI tools, and over 1,600 responded.
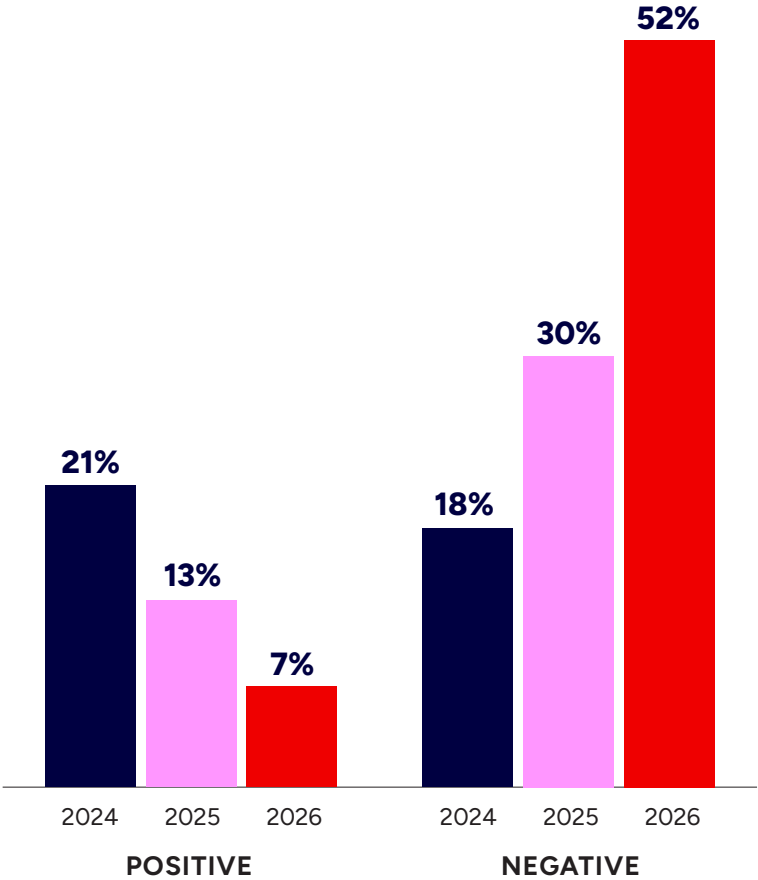
Sentiment analysis (generated by our internal AI tool) showed some support for using AI tools for non-creative tasks like code assistance or prototyping. But about 30% of the responses were opposed to using AI tools in any capacity. Their biggest issues were data sourcing, energy consumption, and the risk of AI replacing jobs (including creative roles).

As part of a thought experiment, we fed the anonymous open responses into our internal AI tool (no other survey data was included). We asked it a simple question: "Based on these responses, would you recommend game industry professionals use generative AI tools?"

This was its conclusion:

" Generative AI tools can be beneficial for **specific, non-creative tasks** that improve efficiency and streamline workflows. However, their use in creative processes or player-facing content is **strongly discouraged** due to ethical, legal, environmental, and reputational concerns."

What impact do you think Generative AI is having on the game industry?

POSITIVE: 2024 21%, 2025 13%, 2026 7%
NEGATIVE: 2024 18%, 2025 30%, 2026 52%

EDUCATION POV: [GENERATIVE AI]

We surveyed over 100 educators and 50 students about how (or whether) they use AI tools, and what impact they believe they're having on the industry. According to our survey, 58% of educators and 39% of surveyed students use generative AI tools as part of their job or studies. Both groups reported using ChatGPT more than other AI tools and said they use them most often for research/brainstorming and code assistance.

Interestingly, educators appeared to have a more favorable view of generative AI than their students: 53% of educators said the tools are having a mixed impact on the industry, while 57% of surveyed students said they're having a negative impact. However, given the small sample sizes, these numbers may be more of a snapshot than a truly representative group.

> Right now, I'm in school and my focus is on learning the skills to make games, so I feel like using AI would run counter to my goals.
>
> - STUDENT (GAME DESIGN), ILLINOIS

> Gen AI is inescapable, so everyone needs to learn to use it to enhance their productivity. Students and teachers who do not understand how to incorporate AI will be jobless in the future.
>
> - EDUCATOR (USER EXPERIENCE), INDIA

> All work using AI should declare and cite the specific use. Students unfortunately do not consistently follow this requirement.
>
> - EDUCATOR (GAME DESIGN), PENNSYLVANIA

> I personally never use them, their impact [on] the environment is too high for my personal values. But I allow students to use tools for coding, as long as they are capable of explaining how the end result works and why.
>
> - EDUCATOR (GAME DESIGN), PANAMA

IN [YOUR] WORDS

What considerations or values guide your decisions about if, when, or how to use generative AI tools in your work?
(categorized by responses to generative AI's impact on the game industry)

POSITIVE IMPACT

Anything that needs to scale but would not be possible for a one-man-show with a few freelancers is up for grabs for AI. It is worse to NOT make the game.

- SOLO DEVELOPER (GAME PRODUCTION), GERMANY

It's a tool and tools are meant to be used by humans.

- SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME PUBLISHING), CALIFORNIA

I use it to help me project manage. As a neurodivergent person, I struggle with segmenting big picture ideas to manageable small tasks. AI is great for those kinds of help.

- CONSULTANT (MARKETING/PR), CALIFORNIA

I think the reaction to AI is a moral panic similar to when computer graphics started being used in the movie industry.

- CONTRIBUTOR (SECURITY), CALIFORNIA

We are intentionally working on a platform that will put all game devs out of work and allow kids to prompt and direct their own content.

- SENIOR EMPLOYEE (MACHINE LEARNING OPS), NEW MEXICO

IN [YOUR] WORDS

MIXED IMPACT

> As a solo dev who needs to self-fund with a limited runway, I can't compete without using AI to some extent. But I refuse to use any AI output as in-game assets.

- SOLO DEVELOPER (VISUAL AND TECHNICAL ARTS), WASHINGTON STATE

> « I don't tell anyone how I use AI, for fear of backlash. »

- CONTRIBUTOR (GAME DESIGN), CALIFORNIA

> In our studio, none of the gen AI survives to a stage where players experience it. That joy is reserved solely for our incredibly talented humans.

- DIRECTOR (AUDIO), NEW YORK

> I believe AI can be a fantastic tool to streamline tedious work and help a lot in the STEM space. It, however, can never replace human creativity and artistic expression.

- FORMER CONTRIBUTOR (GAME DESIGN), PENNSYLVANIA / LAID OFF <12 MONTHS AGO

> « AI is wonderful for process improvement and rote tasks, it should not be used for art or coding. »

- FORMER MANAGER (USER EXPERIENCE), FLORIDA / LAID OFF <12 MONTHS AGO

> I've already lost a job and known countless others who have lost their jobs to AI, and so I think it's foolish to not prepare for the inevitable future and try to learn and understand as much as possible about the tooling and its potential usage. Because company heads and leaders will always be looking for where they think they can save a buck or two.

- DIRECTOR (BUSINESS AND STRATEGY), WASHINGTON STATE

> I guess I'm hypocritical about it. I'm outspokenly against AI, but then do use ChatGPT as a sounding board for some of my marketing ideas.

- MANAGER (MARKETING/PR), CANADA

IN [YOUR] WORDS

NEGATIVE IMPACT

"Gen AI on the whole is wretched. It's built on theft and plagiarism, it uses insane amounts of energy. It's convinced so many gullible rich idiots that it's a magic wand, but it's just a bullshit generator. All it can do is spew out predictive garbage that vaguely resembles things it's been trained on. Fuck you for even asking, honestly.

- FORMER SENIOR EMPLOYEE (VISUAL AND TECHNICAL ARTS), WASHINGTON STATE / LAID OFF <12 MONTHS AGO

« Why would I replace human creativity with a regurgitated amalgamation of everything that's come before? »

- SENIOR EMPLOYEE (VISUAL AND TECHNICAL ARTS), WASHINGTON STATE

"If it's ethically sourced, practical to use, doesn't distract from development time, and is likely to still be around in FIVE years, maybe we'd be interested after we scale up. But right now we have no use for tools that create assets for us, because creating the game is what gives us joy.

- OWNER (INDEPENDENT STUDIO 5+ YEARS), NORWAY

"Our standing rule is: If one of us brings up using GenAI in any of our work, then it's safe to assume we've been assimilated by *The Thing* and should be burned alive by Kurt Russell.

- CONSULTANT (GAME DESIGN), WASHINGTON STATE

"The only problem generative AI solves is the one where people with money have to pay people without money. There is no problem gen AI solves in this industry that is worth the kind of loss to creativity and jobs.

- FORMER MANAGER (GAME PRODUCTION), CALIFORNIA / LAID OFF <12 MONTHS AGO

"AI is great at a lot of things, but don't let it take center stage just because it's quick and convenient. AI has a bad rap and people are sensitive to it. Use it mindfully, present it with caution and care. People will notice and they will judge.

- FORMER CONTRIBUTOR (QUALITY ASSURANCE), CALIFORNIA / LAID OFF 12-24 MONTHS AGO

« I'd rather quit the industry than use generative AI. »

- SUPERVISOR (GAME DESIGN), UNITED KINGDOM

4 ENGINES, PLATFORMS, & FEATURES

IT'S FULL STEAM (DECK) AHEAD, UNREAL [SURPASSES] UNITY

This year, we limited the game engine and platform questions to those with job titles most likely involve interacting with game engines—including game designers, programmers, and visual/technical artists—and this group will be referred to as "developers." While experts in other roles may take on development tasks at times, we wanted to make sure that the people working on games consistently were shaping the conversation around what's being used.

According to our survey, 42% of developers are using Unreal Engine and 30% are on Unity. This is the first time we've seen this discrepancy, as the previous two State of the Game Industry surveys had Unreal Engine and Unity sitting at a dead heat. However, it's unclear whether this indicates an actual shift or is a result of offering this question to a more concentrated demographic.

What game engine do you primarily use for game development?

UNREAL ENGINE	Unity	Proprietary / In-house	GODOT	User-generated content tools (e.g. Roblox, UEFN)	N/A
42%	30%	19%	5%	1%	3%

Unreal Engine adoption appears to be more common for developers at AA (59%) and AAA (47%) studios, along with those working at newer indies (41%). Not so much at older indie studios, of which a majority (54%) of developers are still using Unity. We also see higher use of Unity among those making free-to-play games (38%) compared to premium games (28%). Godot has gained some use with newer indie developers (11%), but less so with those at more established studios.

User-generated content tools like Roblox remain on the fringe of professional development. As of now, 3% of free-to-play game developers use UGC tools to make games, and two (not 2%, just two) premium developers in our survey said they're doing the same. This could be because the Roblox ecosystem doesn't often directly intersect with the world of traditional game development.

What game engine do you primarily use for game development?

(by business model and studio type)

Legend: Unreal Engine, Unity, Proprietary / In-house, Godot

	Premium Games	Free-to-Play Games	AAA developers	AA developers	Newer indie studios	Older indie studios
Unreal Engine	45%	31%	47%	59%	41%	30%
Unity	28%	38%	5%	21%	40%	54%
Proprietary / In-house	20%	22%	44%	18%		11%
Godot					11%	

Finding the right platform(s) for your game can be a daunting task, but it is key to finding success in an often overcrowded marketplace. We asked respondents what factors take top priority in deciding what platforms to put their games on. According to our survey, audience reach (78%) is most important, followed by business model success (44%) and discoverability (43%).

What are you or your company's top factors for choosing a platform to release a game?

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

Factor	Percentage
Audience reach	78%
Business model success	44%
Discoverability	43%
Ease of use	28%
Accessibility	16%
Content policies	10%
Player monetization tools	7%
Payment tools	4%
Other	9%

IN [YOUR] WORKS

What are your thoughts on the value of paid subscription libraries for games (e.g. Apple Arcade, Xbox Game Pass)?

> Can be initially good for consumers but not great for indie developers or non-LiveOps games, which in the long run may hurt consumers.

- SENIOR VP (PAYMENT PROCESSING), CALIFORNIA

> I think they can be valuable if developers are given fair equity in the subscription model.

- C-LEVEL (FUNDING/INVESTMENT), CALIFORNIA

> Mixed thoughts. If a player is dedicated to a specific brand, then it provides great benefits to the player. However, many of these platforms are lacking in trackable metrics in player behavior between the player purchasing a premium game and engaging with a premium game as part of the subscription service. These two player behaviors are vastly different, and it causes the developer to not have accurate retention and acquisition data—resulting in inefficient choices in how to best serve their communities.
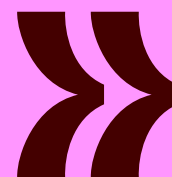
- DIRECTOR (LIVEOPS/ANALYTICS), OHIO

> Subscription libraries can change the perception of the value of games and the expected attention time. This works well with mobile because of the monetization challenges. The benefit for traditional box titles is still to be proven in the long run.

- CONSULTANT (BUSINESS AND STRATEGY), TEXAS

> For us at the midsize indie scale, these buyouts provide significant operational revenue for both us and our developers. We often make more from biz dev deals than unit sales.
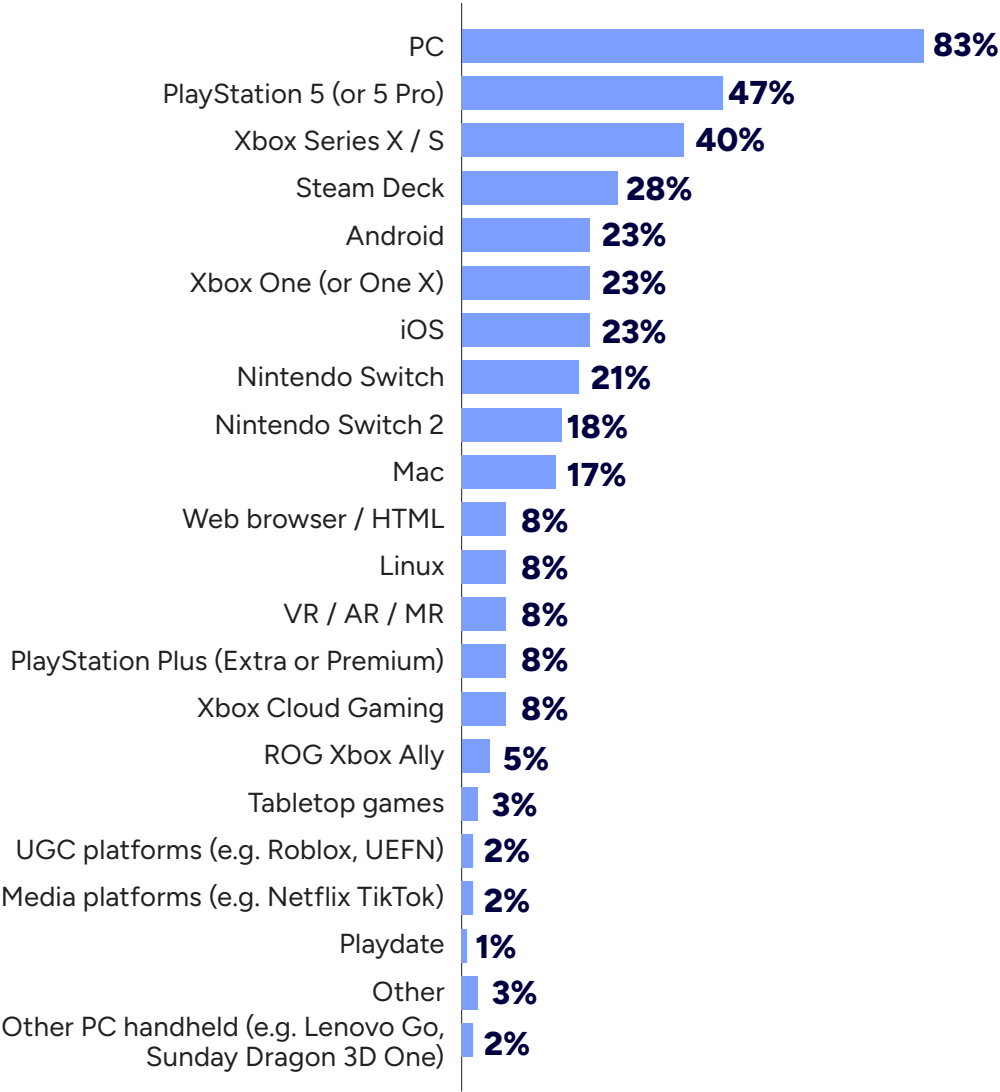
- C-LEVEL (GAME PUBLISHING), CALIFORNIA

> ROI of these models is falling, and not a long-term strategy. The impact of being on Game Pass [and other subscription platforms] is not what it used to be.

- DIRECTOR (COMMUNITY SUPPORT), CANADA

Which platform(s) have been used for your most recent game or project?

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

Platform	%
PC	83%
PlayStation 5 (or 5 Pro)	47%
Xbox Series X / S	40%
Steam Deck	28%
Android	23%
Xbox One (or One X)	23%
iOS	23%
Nintendo Switch	21%
Nintendo Switch 2	18%
Mac	17%
Web browser / HTML	8%
Linux	8%
VR / AR / MR	8%
PlayStation Plus (Extra or Premium)	8%
Xbox Cloud Gaming	8%
ROG Xbox Ally	5%
Tabletop games	3%
UGC platforms (e.g. Roblox, UEFN)	2%
Media platforms (e.g. Netflix TikTok)	2%
Playdate	1%
Other	3%
Other PC handheld (e.g. Lenovo Go, Sunday Dragon 3D One)	2%

When it comes to the platforms themselves, PC remains at the top, with 83% of surveyed developers currently making games for it and 80% saying they're interested in doing so. More developers are working on games for PlayStation 5 hardware (47%) than Xbox Series X/S (40%).

40%
want to make games for Steam Deck

PlayStation also outranks Xbox in developer interest, with twice as many respondents wanting to make games for the PS5 (40%) than the Xbox X/S (20%). We've also seen a possible decrease in Xbox Cloud Gaming services—with 8% of developers making games for the platform, compared to 13% of developers in similar roles last year.

Newly added for 2026, Valve's Steam Deck has already become the fourth most-used platform on the market (at least according to our survey) with 28% of developers making (or optimizing) games for the PC handheld. In addition, 40% of developers said they're interested in making games for Steam Deck, putting it on par with the newer Nintendo Switch 2 (39%).

Other PC handhelds don't seem to have caught on quite yet, with interest for ROG Xbox Ally and similar handhelds sitting at 7% and 6% respectively.

It's important to note that the survey opened before the announcement of the new Steam Machine and Steam Frame VR headset, so they were not included (but it's possible the announcement impacted developer interest in Steam products). It also closed before Meta announced cuts in its Reality Labs division focused on VR, so that information would have no bearing on these results.

TOP 5 PLATFORMS

[FREE-TO-PLAY]

PC	Android	iOS	PlayStation 5 (or 5 Pro)	Xbox Series X / S
68%	**57%**	**55%**	**38%**	**31%**
PC	Android	iOS	PlayStation 5 (or 5 Pro)	Xbox Series X / S

[PREMIUM]

PC	PlayStation 5 (or 5 Pro)	Xbox Series X / S	Steam Deck	Xbox One (or One X)
88%	**55%**	**47%**	**32%**	**25%**
PC	PlayStation 5 (or 5 Pro)	Xbox Series X / S	Steam Deck	Xbox One (or One X)

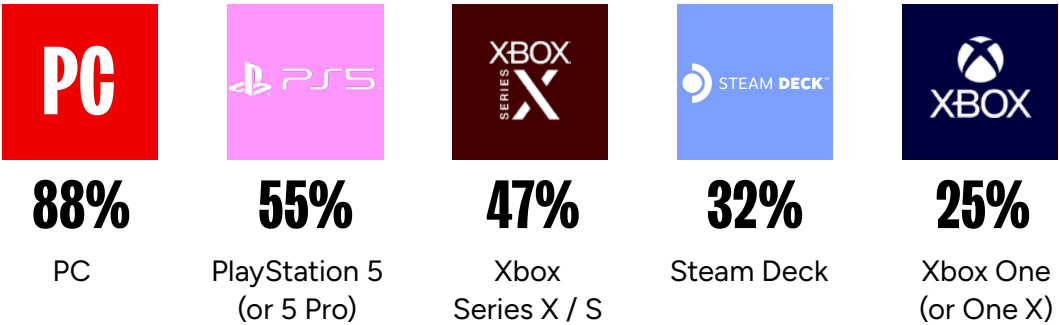### Which platform(s) most interest you as a developer right now?

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

Platform	Percentage
PC	**80%**
PlayStation 5 (or 5 Pro)	**40%**
Steam Deck	**40%**
Nintendo Switch 2	**39%**
Xbox Series X / S	**20%**
Android	**16%**
iOS	**16%**
Nintendo Switch	**13%**
Tabletop games	**12%**
Linux	**12%**
Mac	**12%**
VR / AR / MR	**12%**
Web browser / HTML	**10%**
Xbox One (or One X)	**9%**
ROG Xbox Ally	**7%**
PlayStation Plus (Extra or Premium)	**6%**
Playdate	**6%**
Xbox Cloud Gaming	**5%**
Media platforms (e.g. Netflix, TikTok)	**4%**
UGC platforms (e.g. Roblox, UEFN)	**4%**
Other	**1%**
Other PC handheld (e.g. Lenovo Go, Sunday Dragon 3D One)	**2%**

IN [YOUR] WORDS

Given recent payment processor issues and state/country age verification policies, what do you expect the impact to be on the game development environment?

> Age verification and stricter payment processes are definitely increasing friction, but I actually think this shift is healthy. It's forcing the industry to become more compliant, transparent, and ultimately more trustworthy.
>
> - MANAGER (GAME PRODUCTION), INDIA

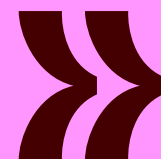> Ultimately, this sucks for the industry and society. Payment processors should not be allowed to choose what art people are allowed to create.
>
> - SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME PROGRAMMING), CANADA

> Creators of adult media deserve support, for one—but also, we all know the goalposts will keep moving. It starts with sex, it continues with the mere existence of queer people or mentions of accurate history of racism and colonialism. AAA studios need to join companies that are fighting these laws. The rest of us do not have lawyer money.
>
> - SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME PROGRAMMING), FRANCE

> I'm already affected by it: Payouts from my asset sales on Itch.io are always late.
>
> - SOLO DEVELOPER (GAME PRODUCTION), AUSTRALIA

> People are going to be talking to legal a lot more now.
>
> - MANAGER (GAME PRODUCTION), CALIFORNIA

> LGBTQ+-focused work will be targeted as 'inappropriate for minors,' disincentivizing developers from incorporating those themes at all into their games—reducing LGBT visibility and, in general, moving those works underground.
>
> - SOLO DEVELOPER (AUDIO), VIRGINIA

> Developers will have to choose between compromising their vision or losing out on a certain market. I fear many people will be forced to compromise for survival.
>
> - MANAGER (GAME DESIGN), MASSACHUSETTS

> I believe the core intent—protecting citizens, particularly minors, from predatory monetization practices—is justified.
>
> - EDUCATOR (VISUAL AND TECHNICAL ARTS), PORTUGAL

[8%] OF DEVELOPERS WORKED ON VR/AR/MR THIS YEAR

Virtual, augmented, and mixed reality (VR/AR/MR) is where things shift a bit. Last year, we surveyed respondents who, at any point, had worked on VR/AR/MR. This time around, we limited our query to developers who had worked on VR/AR/MR within the past year. This totaled about 8%, which is less than 100 participants—meaning the following section reports on a smaller, focused base.

Our respondents marked the Meta Quest / Horizon Store as the top platform for alternative reality experiences, with 82% of VR/AR/MR developers making games for the platform. This was followed by Steam VR (37%) and PlayStation VR/VR2 (21%).

Which VR/AR/MR platform(s) have been used for your most recent project?

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

94 participants

Platform	%
Meta Quest / Horizon Store	82%
Steam VR	37%
PlayStation VR / VR2	21%
Apple VisionOS	11%
Epic Games Store	9%
Pico Store	7%
HTC Viveport	6%
Google ARCore	4%
Apple ARKit	3%
SideQuest	2%
Magic Leap	2%
Snap OX	1%
Other	7%

For developer interest, we expanded our reach to include anyone who said they're interested in making games for VR/AR/MR, which more than doubled our number of participants. For this group, the Steam VR (68%) platform surpassed Meta Quest / Horizon Store (64%) as the space they're most interested in making games for. These were followed by PlayStation VR/VR2 (34%) and Apple VisionOS (15%).

However, when we focused on the developers who've actually worked on VR/AR/MR games, they still seemed to prefer Meta Quest (72%) over Steam VR (59%).

Which VR/AR/MR platform(s) have been used for your most recent project?
(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)
193 participants

Source	Percentage
Self-funding	35%
Publishing deal / Project-based funding	20%
Co-development contract	9%
Private investment	5%
Venture capital	5%
Government funding / Grants	3%
Platform-based funding	2%
Crowdfunding	1%
Seed funding	1%
Friends or family	1%
Bank loan	0%
Accelerator	0%
Initial public offering	0%
Unsure / N/A	16%

[ONE-THIRD] OF DEVELOPERS WORK ON ACCESSIBILITY FEATURES

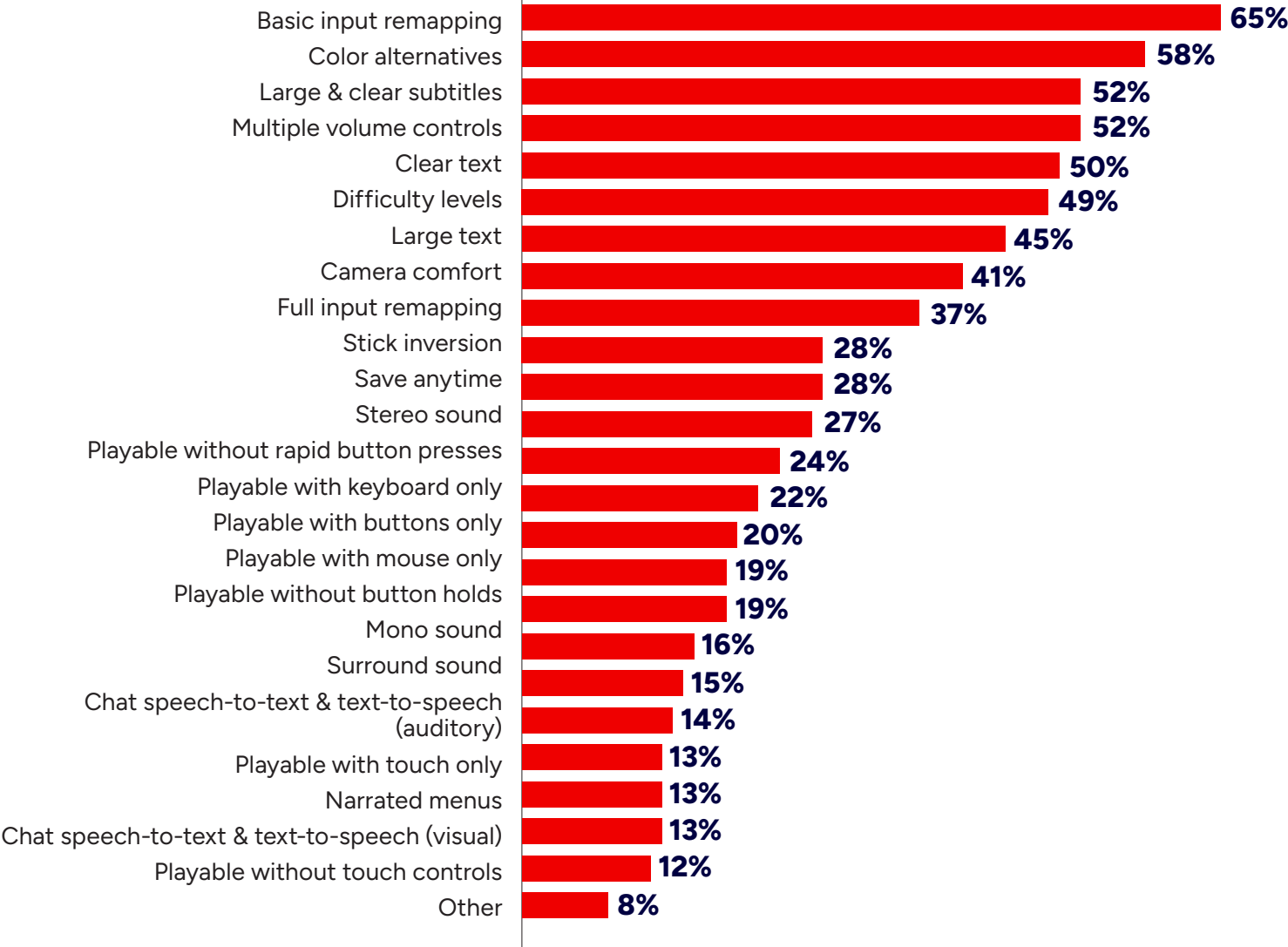One-third (33%) of surveyed developers said they work on accessibility features, totaling 425 participants. Using the ESA Accessible Games Initiative's features list, which debuted at GDC 2025, we asked these developers to share what features they're working on (or know are being implemented) for their next games. The top three accessibility features they cited were basic input remapping (65%), color alternatives (58%), and large & clear subtitles or multiple volume controls (52% each).

What [accessibility] features are you working on, or know are being implemented, for your next game?

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

Feature	Percentage
Basic input remapping	65%
Color alternatives	58%
Large & clear subtitles	52%
Multiple volume controls	52%
Clear text	50%
Difficulty levels	49%
Large text	45%
Camera comfort	41%
Full input remapping	37%
Stick inversion	28%
Save anytime	28%
Stereo sound	27%
Playable without rapid button presses	24%
Playable with keyboard only	22%
Playable with buttons only	20%
Playable with mouse only	19%
Playable without button holds	19%
Mono sound	16%
Surround sound	15%
Chat speech-to-text & text-to-speech (auditory)	14%
Playable with touch only	13%
Narrated menus	13%
Chat speech-to-text & text-to-speech (visual)	13%
Playable without touch controls	12%
Other	8%

5 THE BUSINESS OF GAMES

RESPONDENTS WORK MORE ON [PREMIUM] GAMES

The type of game a studio makes can dramatically change the way they finance, market, and profit from their product, so we wanted to know the ones our studio workers and solo developers are working on. Three-fourths (74%) of survey takers reported working on premium games, while 26% said they work in the free-to-play market. AAA workers were more likely to be in free-to-play (33%) than those at older (20%) or newer (13%) indie studios.

For full transparency, this may be more an indication of the respondents our survey received than a true representation of the industry. This year's survey had a higher number of workers from indie studios than those from AAA companies. In addition, free-to-play studios are more prevalent outside of the United States, and this year's survey had a higher concentration of. US-based respondents.
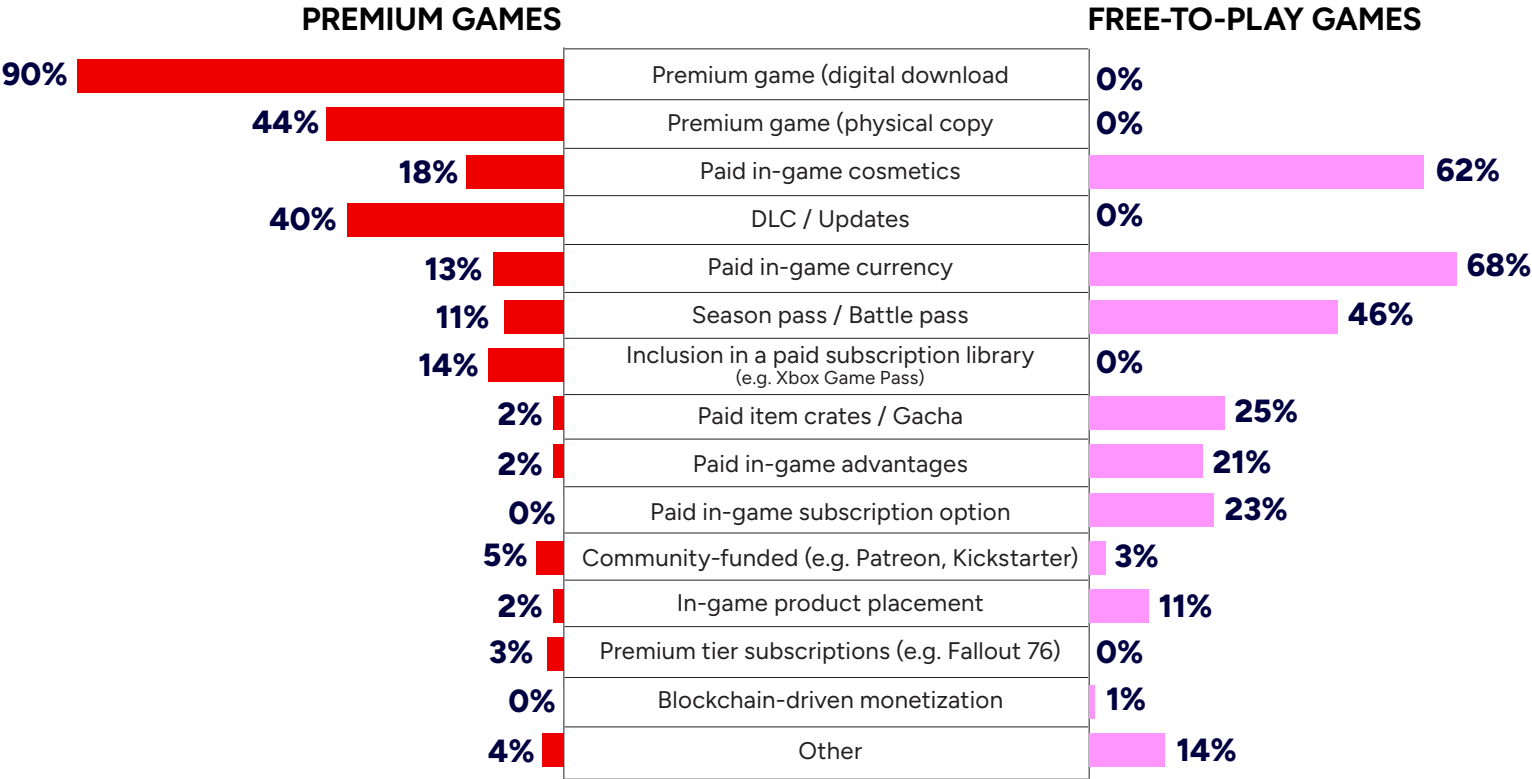
When it comes to monetization, we wanted to gauge the different models for premium games vs. free-to-play. For premium games, digital downloads (90%) were the most common monetization model, followed by physical copies (44%), DLCs and updates (40%), and paid in-game cosmetics (18%). For free-to-play games, the top monetization models were paid in-game currency (68%), paid in-game cosmetics (62%), season or battle passes (46%), and paid item crates or "gacha" mechanics (25%). Only five total respondents (0.4%) reported using blockchain-driven monetization models, and four of them were in free-to-play games.

In the wake of the Epic Games vs. Apple judicial ruling, which declared that Apple could not collect fees on purchases made outside apps (nor stop developers from pointing users to outside-app purchases), we wanted to see where mobile games were encouraging users to buy content. According to about 170 mobile game workers, their most widely offered space for purchases is the in-app platform marketplace (72%). Over half (55%) said they guide users to third party marketplaces like the Apple Store and one-third (37%) offer an outside website or storefront.

How is your game monetized?

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

PREMIUM GAMES		FREE-TO-PLAY GAMES
90%	Premium game (digital download	0%
44%	Premium game (physical copy	0%
18%	Paid in-game cosmetics	62%
40%	DLC / Updates	0%
13%	Paid in-game currency	68%
11%	Season pass / Battle pass	46%
14%	Inclusion in a paid subscription library (e.g. Xbox Game Pass)	0%
2%	Paid item crates / Gacha	25%
2%	Paid in-game advantages	21%
0%	Paid in-game subscription option	23%
5%	Community-funded (e.g. Patreon, Kickstarter)	3%
2%	In-game product placement	11%
3%	Premium tier subscriptions (e.g. Fallout 76)	0%
0%	Blockchain-driven monetization	1%
4%	Other	14%

Where are you offering the ability to purchase in-app goods?

(CHOOSE ALL THAT APPLY)

169 respondents

72% In-app platform marketplace

55% In-app third party marketplace (e.g. Apple Store)
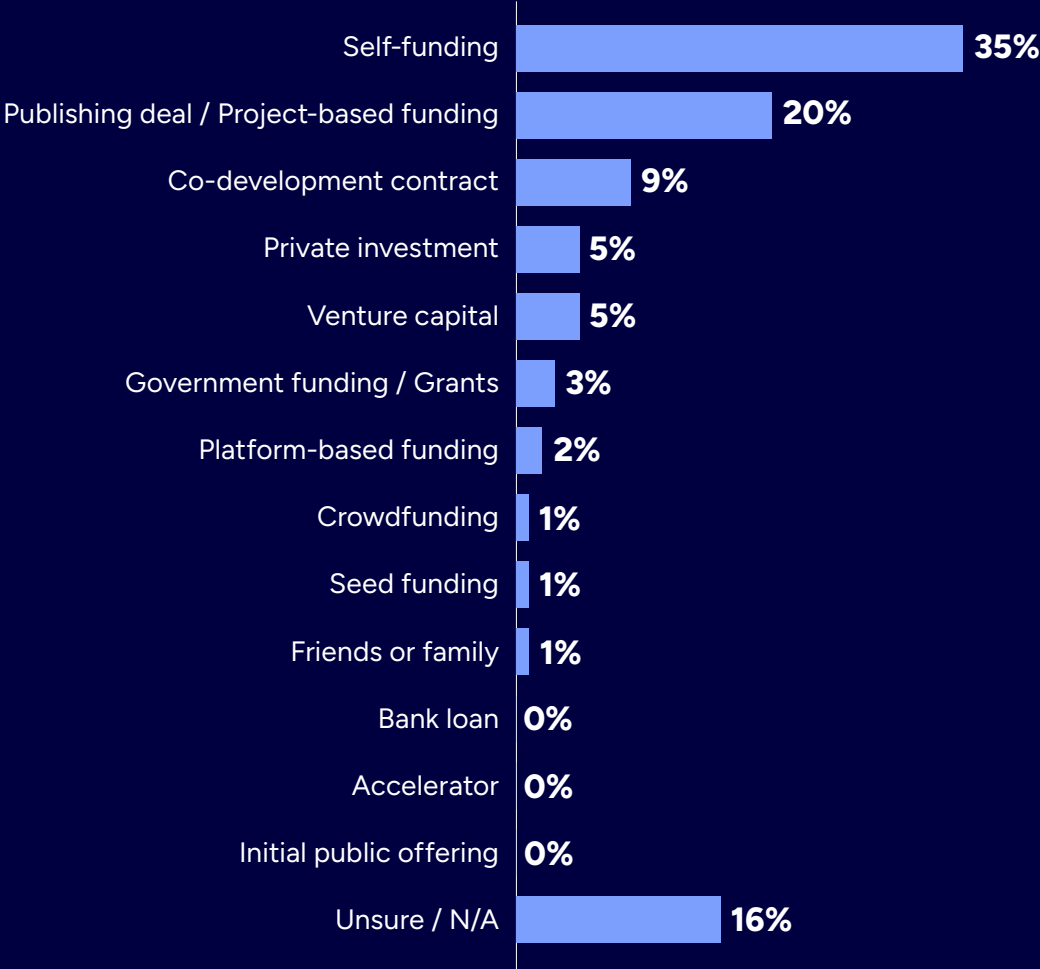
37% Outside website or storefront

ONE-THIRD OF STUDIO WORKERS AND SOLO DEVS TURN TO [SELF FUNDING]

Last year, we asked respondents about the sources of funding their companies have utilized to make their games a reality. This time around, to better understand where studios are prioritizing their efforts, we limited the response pool to studio workers and solo developers and narrowed the focus to their predominant source of funding.

Over one-third (35%) of respondents said they mainly turn to self-funding for their games. That number increased to 86% for solo developers (though there were only 36 respondents in that category). The other primary sources of funding were publishing deals or project-based funding (20%), co-development contracts (9%), and private investment or venture capital (5% each). About 16% were unsure or said the question didn't apply to them, with several noting that their games are not currently monetized.

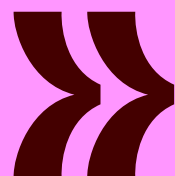**What is the predominant source of funding for your game or studio?**

Source	Percentage
Self-funding	35%
Publishing deal / Project-based funding	20%
Co-development contract	9%
Private investment	5%
Venture capital	5%
Government funding / Grants	3%
Platform-based funding	2%
Crowdfunding	1%
Seed funding	1%
Friends or family	1%
Bank loan	0%
Accelerator	0%
Initial public offering	0%
Unsure / N/A	16%

IN [YOUR] WORDS

What are the biggest obstacles you or your company have faced in securing funding, and how has it impacted projects you have worked on?

> The competition is so fierce right now, so getting a really good demo is taking us a lot of time and money—but we need one before we go to publishers.

— DIRECTOR (GAME DESIGN), AUSTRALIA

> Publishers only want to invest in sure things, basically just taking the game to market while still collecting 50% of revenue.

— SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME PROGRAMMING), CANADA

> There's basically no funding out there right now at our scale: we're too expensive/large for indie, too small for AA/AAA. Award-winning studio, 'Triple I,' prestige and history, but there's a gap in the publishing market at our size.

— SENIOR EMPLOYEE (GAME PROGRAMMING), VIRGINIA

> It's hard to find any money to develop video games at the moment, especially without a long AAA history and even more so as a woman. Most grants only cover a month of development for a five-person team.
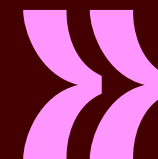
— OWNER (INDEPENDENT STUDIO <5 YEARS), CALIFORNIA

> Platform deals have dried up (Game Pass, PS+ etc.), which used to be a great way to finance indie games.

— C-LEVEL (INDEPENDENT STUDIO 5+ YEARS), CALIFORNIA

> We attempted to secure venture capital to hit our target budget but got 0 bites and a lot of: 'Wow, if you have pitched this 2 years ago, you'd already be funded.'

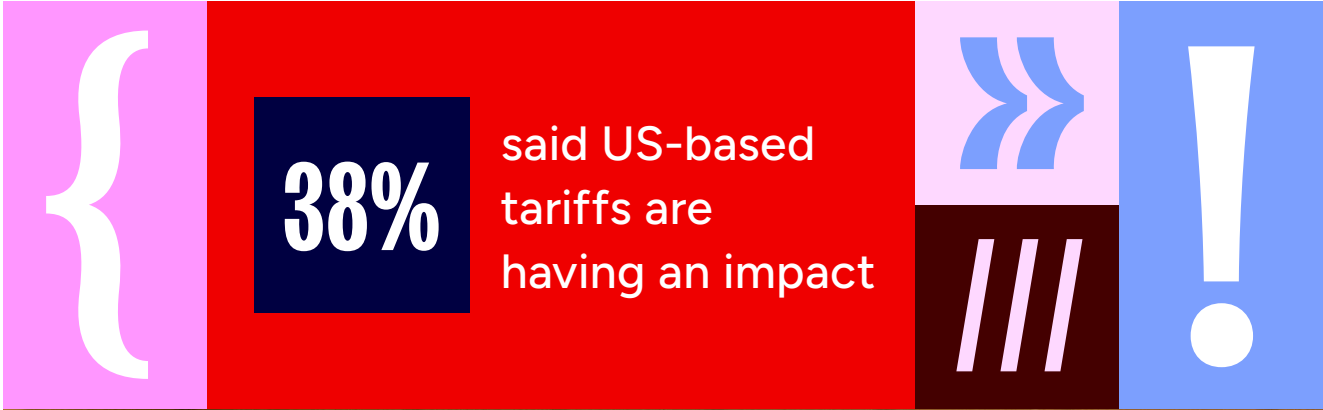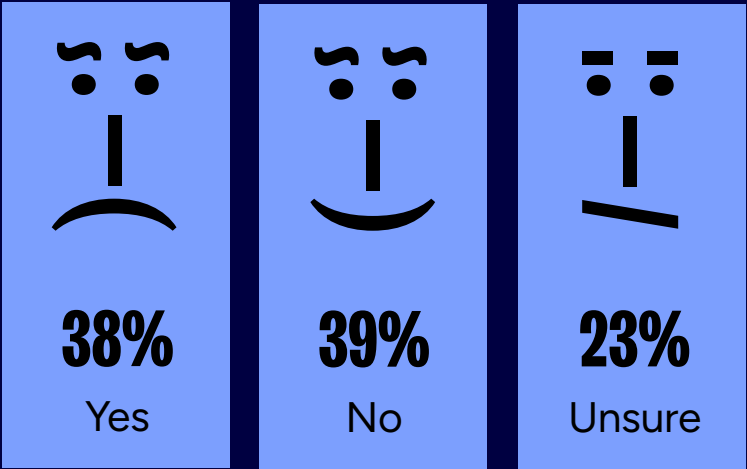— DIRECTOR (GAME DESIGN), CALIFORNIA

US-BASED [TARIFFS] IMPACT BUSINESS LEADERS AROUND THE WORLD

In 2025, the US government's executive branch issued a series of tariffs on goods coming in from other countries, including video game hardware and the products needed to manufacture them.

We asked over 200 industry executives, investors, and business and finance professionals to share whether the tariffs have taken a toll. About 38% of respondents said US-based tariffs are impacting their expenses, revenue, or financial decisions; 39% said there's been no impact, and 23% were unsure. The numbers were similar for those inside and outside the United States.

38% said US-based tariffs are having an impact

Have US-based tariffs impacted your expenses, revenue, or financial decisions?

38% Yes
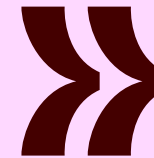
39% No

23% Unsure

IN [YOUR] WORDS

Please describe the impact [of tariffs] and what could be done to address it.

" It's become more expensive to do business in the Americas, the exchange rate has worsened for currency and our North American players are having less to spend. "

- DIRECTOR (LIVE OPS/ANALYTICS), NETHERLANDS

" We are an EU company working with US partners. I don't want to go into too much detail but it's been a downright mess trying to set up pipelines and plan physical releases when Trump's moods dictate how much products and components get taxed. Even if we ship and partly produce products for the US market in the EU, we can never know if we or our partners will get a higher import tax bill than estimated while simultaneously making their customers wait.

- DIRECTOR (MARKETING/PR), SWEDEN

" Investments are drying up. "

- FOUNDER (INDEPENDENT STUDIO, 5+ YEARS), VERMONT

" We seek to use more open-source products and, for paid services, we use US-based service providers as much as possible.

- MANAGER (LIVEOPS/ANALYTICS), CALIFORNIA

" We are currently appealing tariffs on components of our physical limited edition that added multi-hundreds of thousands of dollars to our costs.

- DIRECTOR (GAME PUBLISHING), CALIFORNIA

" Our overall profit is down about 30% across-the-board versus even revenue, and our ability to travel and participate in events has been cut in half. "

- CONSULTANT (BUSINESS AND STRATEGY), CALIFORNIA

THE [MARKETING] PERSPECTIVE

We surveyed about 100 marketers on the top discovery methods for promoting their games or products.
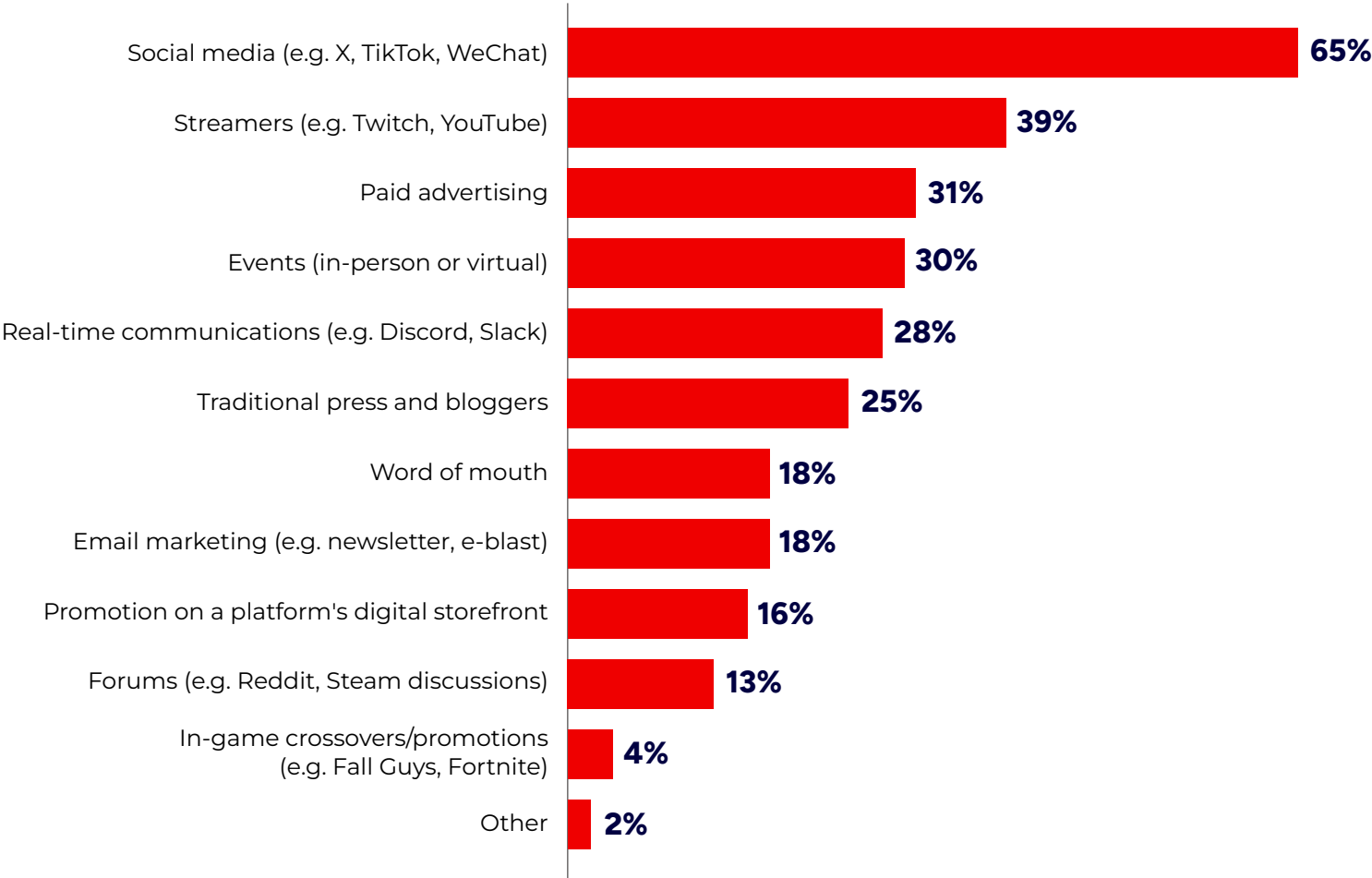
Social media (65%) was the top discovery method for marketers—and in that world, video reigns supreme. Their top social media platforms were Instagram/Reels (66%), TikTok (64%), and YouTube/Shorts (63%). Other top discovery methods include streamers (39%), paid advertising (31%), and in-person or virtual events (30%).

When looking at marketers specifically from game companies, social media (69%) was still the top discovery method. This was followed by streamers, whom almost half (49%) of game marketers said they use in marketing efforts. In addition, real-time communications like Discord and Slack (29%) were used more often than promotion at events (23%).

However, this was a pool of only 35 respondents, most of whom were from indie or AA studios, so it should be viewed as more of a focused sample.

Which discovery method(s) are you using most often to promote your games or products?

(CHOOSE UP TO 3)

102 participants

Method	%
Social media (e.g. X, TikTok, WeChat)	65%
Streamers (e.g. Twitch, YouTube)	39%
Paid advertising	31%
Events (in-person or virtual)	30%
Real-time communications (e.g. Discord, Slack)	28%
Traditional press and bloggers	25%
Word of mouth	18%
Email marketing (e.g. newsletter, e-blast)	18%
Promotion on a platform's digital storefront	16%
Forums (e.g. Reddit, Steam discussions)	13%
In-game crossovers/promotions (e.g. Fall Guys, Fortnite)	4%
Other	2%

6 ADVOCACY

HALF OF GAME WORKERS HAVE PUT IN A [50+ HOUR] WORKWEEK

This year, we made some changes to the section about working hours and crunch—including a complete redesign of the questions themselves. For example, instead of 36-40 hours per week, it's now 40-44 hours (and so on).

Our aim was to draw clear lines between full-time and part-time employment and gain a better understanding of who is working more and why, and our results show promise. However, as a result, we cannot perform any reliable year-on-year comparisons for this data set. That will need to wait until 2027.
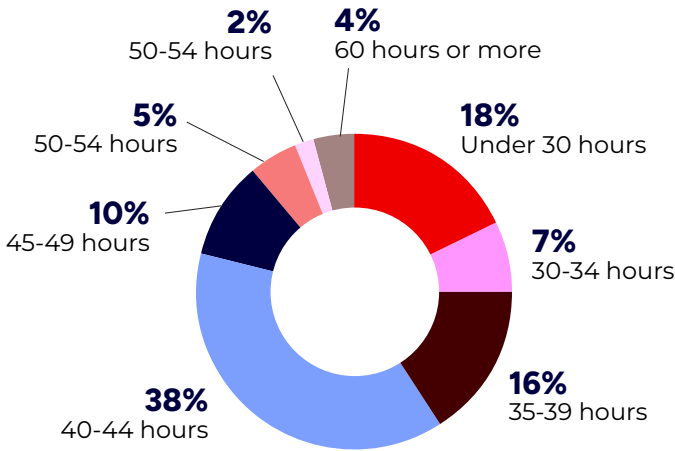
This year's survey shows that 59% of game industry professionals (who do not identify as solo developers) work at least 40 hours per week on average, and about one-tenth (11%) typically work 50 hours or more per week. One-third (35%) of contract workers, consultants, and solo developers work less than 30 hours per week. However, one-fourth have done a 60+ hour week at some point during the past year, including 37% of solo developers. Altogether, 83% of respondents have worked over 40 hours during a single week, and 50% have done 50+ hours.
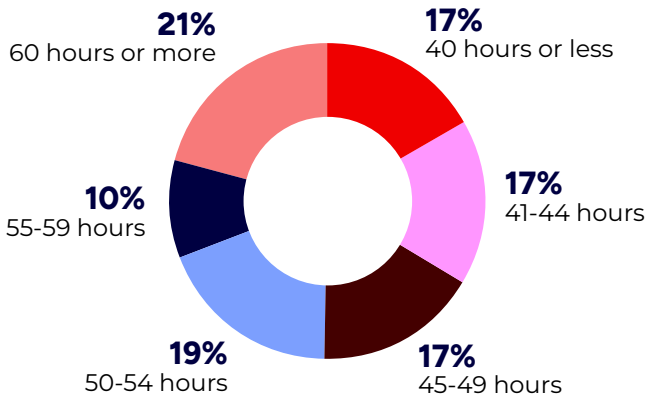
1-in-4 have worked 60+ hours in a week

On average, how many hours per week have you worked on games over the past 12 months?

- 2% 50-54 hours
- 4% 60 hours or more
- 5% 50-54 hours
- 18% Under 30 hours
- 10% 45-49 hours
- 7% 30-34 hours
- 38% 40-44 hours
- 16% 35-39 hours

What are the maximum number of hours you have worked in a single week on games in the past 12 months?

- 21% 60 hours or more
- 17% 40 hours or less
- 10% 55-59 hours
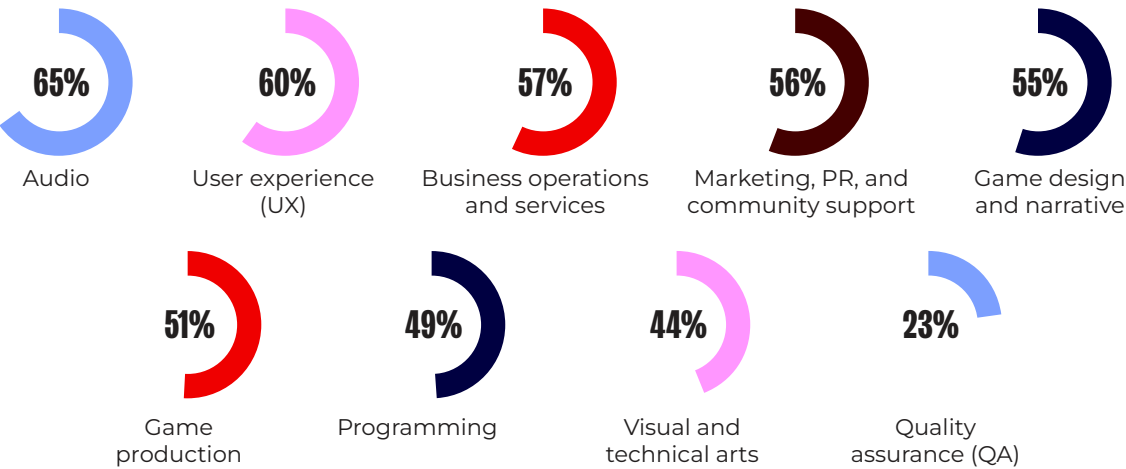- 17% 41-44 hours
- 19% 50-54 hours
- 17% 45-49 hours

About 43% of respondents who marked themselves as full-time employees reported a 40 to 44-hour workweek; for US-based full-time workers, that number increased to 47%. There's a higher concentration of full-time workers based outside of the US (29%) clocking in 30-39 hours than those who live in the US (15%), likely due to differing labor laws.

Of those full-time workers who perform 40-44 hours per week on average, 13% of them said they've worked a maximum of 40 hours in a single week—meaning 87% of full-timers have done some form of overtime or crunch this past year. Half (49%) said they worked at least 50 hours a week, and one-fifth (21%) did at least 60 hours.

When respondents (who didn't identify as solo developers) were asked to share their reasons for working overtime or crunch, a majority said there was either too much essential work to do (60%) or they pressured themselves to do it (56%). When looking at solo developers, 89% of them cited self pressure as a top reason for working extra hours. One-tenth (10%) of respondents wrote in their own explanations, several of them noting that they either have multiple jobs or they've taken on side projects.

Have worked 50+ hours in one week (by job discipline)

65%	60%	57%	56%	55%
Audio	User experience (UX)	Business operations and services	Marketing, PR, and community support	Game design and narrative

51%	49%	44%	23%
Game production	Programming	Visual and technical arts	Quality assurance (QA)

What are the main factors that caused you to work more than 40 hours per week? (Choose up to 3)

59% There was too much essential work to fit into a standard 40-hour week

56% Self pressure (I simply needed or wanted to)

22% I don't consider the amount of time I worked to be excessive

16% Fear of repercussions (e.g. losing my job, missed growth opportunities)

14% Staff reductions (fewer people available to do the work)

10% Management pressure (they made it clear that we needed to work those hours)

6% Peer pressure (everyone else was working those hours)

10% Other

2% Unsure

MAJORITY OF GAME WORKERS WOULD LIKE TO JOIN A [UNION]

Unionization has been a hot topic in the game industry—particularly in the United States, where we've seen a rise in company and industry-based unions over the past few years.
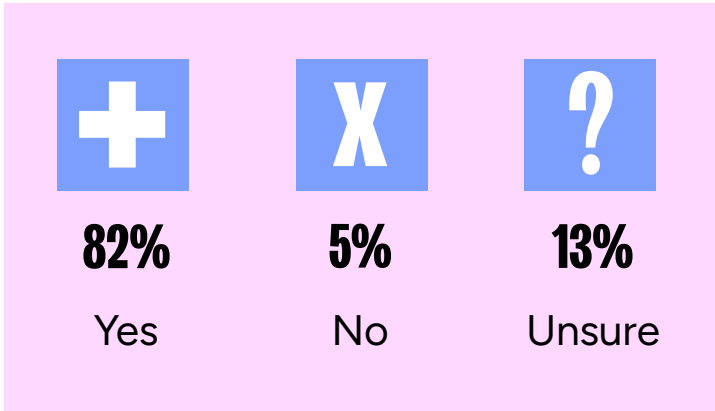
82% support unionization

Our results show that 82% of US-based respondents support the unionization of game industry workers, 5% are opposed, and 13% are unsure. Given how we updated the question for 2026, a direct comparison to last year's numbers is not recommended. However, we will note that 60% of 2025's US-based respondents said game industry workers should unionize and 22% said maybe; it's possible the removal of "maybe" as an option contributed to this year's increase.

Support was higher among workers making under $200,000 per year (87%), those who'd been laid off sometime in the past two years (88%), and people younger than 45 years old (86%). In fact, there were zero 18 to 24-year-olds opposed to unionization.
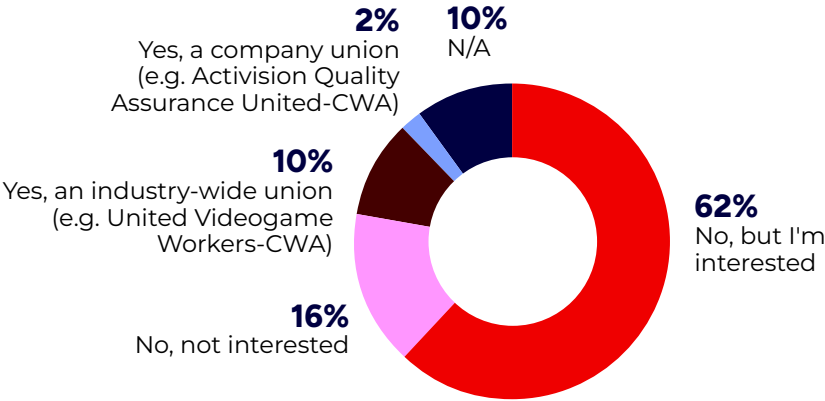
Those in leadership roles had a slightly different view. When we looked at owners and executives from companies with at least 20 employees, 58% said they support unionization, 18% were opposed, and 24% were unsure.

One-tenth (10%) of respondents said they're members of an industry-wide union like the United Videogame Workers-CWA (which was announced at GDC 2025), and 2% are members of a company union. But that could change: 62% of game industry professionals said they were interested in joining a union.

Do you support the unionization of game industry workers?

+	X	?
82%	5%	13%
Yes	No	Unsure

Are you part of a union?

2%
Yes, a company union (e.g. Activision Quality Assurance United-CWA)

10%
N/A

10%
Yes, an industry-wide union (e.g. United Videogame Workers-CWA)

62%
No, but I'm interested

16%
No, not interested

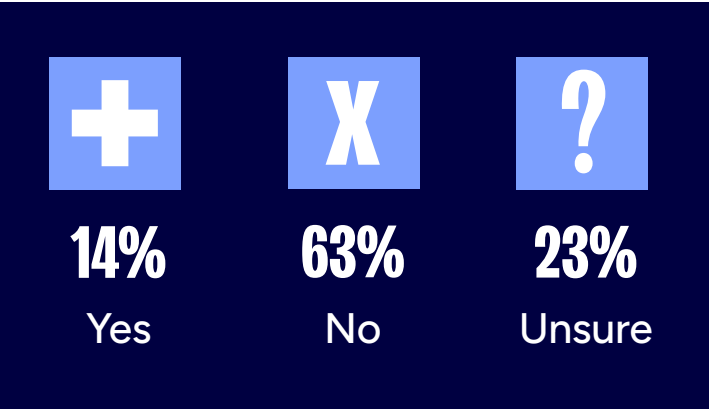# MARGINALIZED WORKERS MORE LIKELY TO SPOT [DEI CHANGES] ON THE JOB

Over the past 12 months, we've seen companies like Meta, Disney, and IBM roll back some of their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs and initiatives—along with reports of implied shifts, ambiguity, and the "chilling effect" of anti-DEI rhetoric. We wanted to see if these changes are having an impact on the game industry.
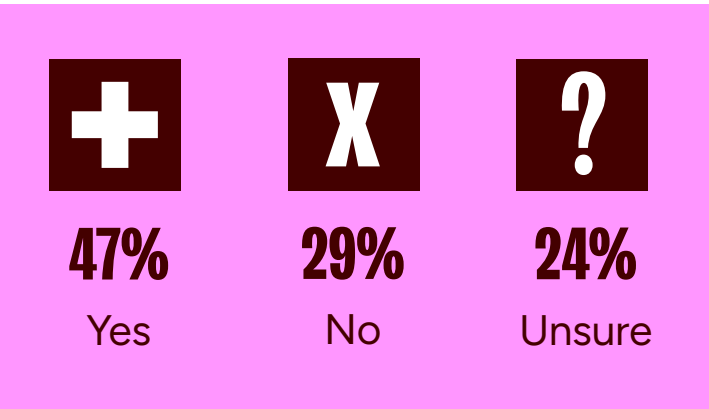
For currently employed people in the United States, one-fifth (22%) who identify as LGBTQ+ and 18% of women and non-White participants said they've noticed changes related to diversity and equity issues or free speech. However, only one-tenth (10%) of men and 13% of White respondents reported the same. Altogether, 14% said they've seen changes, 63% said they have not, and 23% were unsure.

Campuses are a different story. Almost half (47%) of surveyed educators and students said they've noticed changes at their schools. However, only 76 respondents answered this question, so the smaller sample size limits its impact.

2x as many

LGBTQ+ US repondents have noticed workplace changes over non-LGBTQ+

In the past 12 months, has your workplace made changes related to diversity and equity issues or free speech?

+	X	?
14%	63%	23%
Yes	No	Unsure

In the past 12 months, have you noticed changes at your school or university related to diversity and equity issues or free speech?

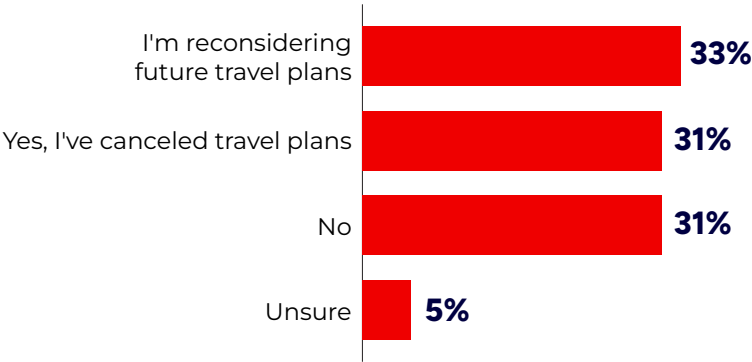| +	X	?
47%	29%	24%
Yes	No	Unsure

NEARLY [ONE-THIRD] OF NON-US GAME WORKERS HAVE CANCELED TRAVEL PLANS TO US
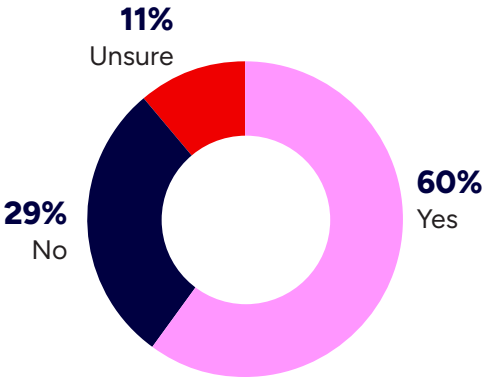
We asked workers based outside of the United States whether current immigration or gender identity policies have impacted current or future travel plans. Almost one-third (31%) said they've canceled travel plans to the US, and one-third (33%) are reconsidering future plans. The percentage increased to nearly half (47%) for those who identify as LGBTQ+.

When it comes to non-US industry leaders and investors, 60% of them said current immigration policies have impacted their ability or desire to do business with American companies. For US-based business professionals at companies with at least 20 employees, 18% said immigration and gender identity policies have impacted their ability to recruit or retain talent, 42% said there's been no impact, and 40% were unsure. When looking at folks from companies with at least 100 employees, one-fifth (21%) said there's been an impact, 38% said no impact, and 41% were unsure.
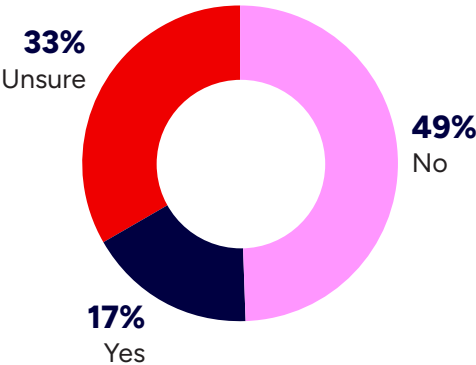
Have you avoided traveling to the United States because of current immigration or gender identity policies?

I'm reconsidering future travel plans	33%
Yes, I've canceled travel plans	31%
No	31%
Unsure	5%

Have current immigration policies in the United States impacted your ability or desire to conduct business with companies based in the US?

- 11% Unsure
- 60% Yes
- 29% No

Have current immigration or gender identity policies in the United States impacted your ability to recruit or retain talent for your company?

- 33% Unsure
- 49% No
- 17% Yes

AUTHOR

Beth Elderkin serves as content marketing manager for GDC Festival of Gaming, part of Informa Festivals, helping to tell the stories of the people and ideas shaping the game industry. She's also the primary author and researcher for the annual GDC Trends Report and GDC Insights.

DATA SUPPORT

Cheryl Ball is a senior research analyst for Omdia, part of Informa TechTarget, that frequently collaborates with GDC Festival of Gaming. As part of Omdia's research team, she works on survey creation and ensuring data quality and integrity through survey tools and data creation.

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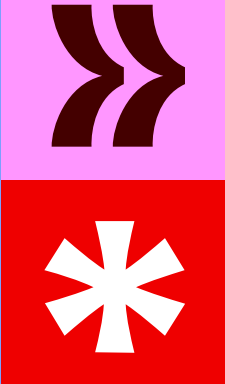
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