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Game Development Industry Workplace Trends Report

March 2022

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As the video game industry accelerates, it bears new challenges. To succeed in an environment shaped by the COVID-19 pandemic and **shifting employee preferences**, executives and management **must find new tactics** to hire, retain and advance their employees.

80 Level Research team decided to explore gaming's current workforce landscape in hopes of answering the question **"What do game developers want?"** The results of our survey are in - and the answers are complicated.

This report is based on responses from **800 industry professionals** from Europe, the US., Asia, and South America. Their answers helped highlight some of the main **trends seen in the market today.**

- **A hybrid work format** is now preferable among specialists due to a combination of remote work benefits with work-life balance. The change in work format is due in part to the pandemic and the resulting collateral damage: Companies closures, role redundancies, and employers' failure to provide safe work conditions.

- **Traditional salary** still remains the most popular compensation model; however, a percentage of survey respondents indicated they would like to augment salary with a form of revenue-share for work performed — something rare in the video game industry.

- These global changes are also a catalyst for new aspirations in gaming's creative and development community. Many respondents indicated an increasing **desire to create their own game**. They're more than ready to pursue dreams of starting a development studio and are not intimidated by a lack of funding.

Our intent is to provide more detail about these and other relevant topics in the information and data presented below.

Key Takeaways

About our data

80 Level surveyed **over 800 respondents**, including game artists, developers, managers, marketers, and designers all over the world, including Europe, Asia, and the United States.

Which region do you reside in?

Canada
4.1%

USA
11.8%

Western Europe
20.1%

Central/Eastern Europe
32.2%

Central/South America
6.5%

Africa
3.2%

Middle East
3.5%

Asia
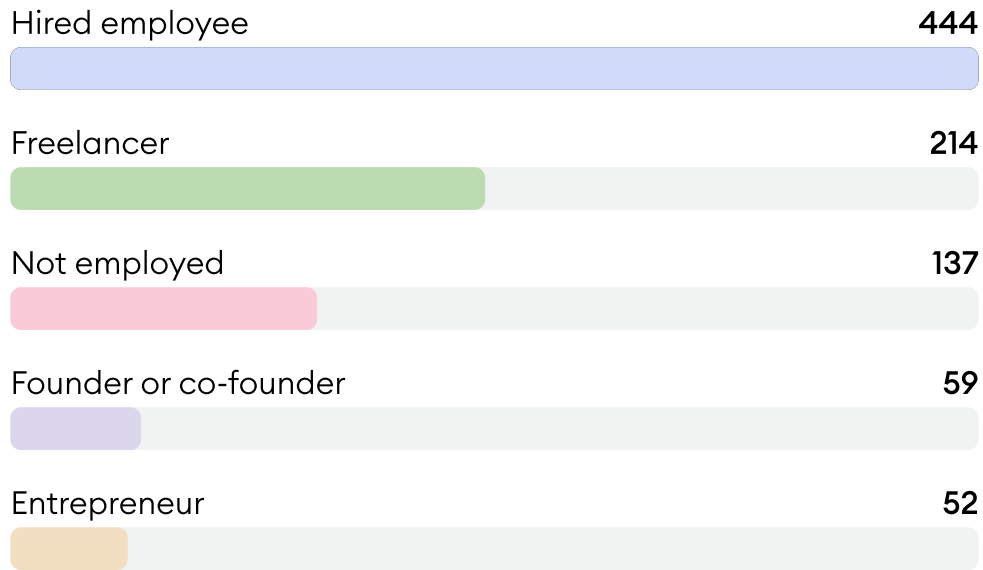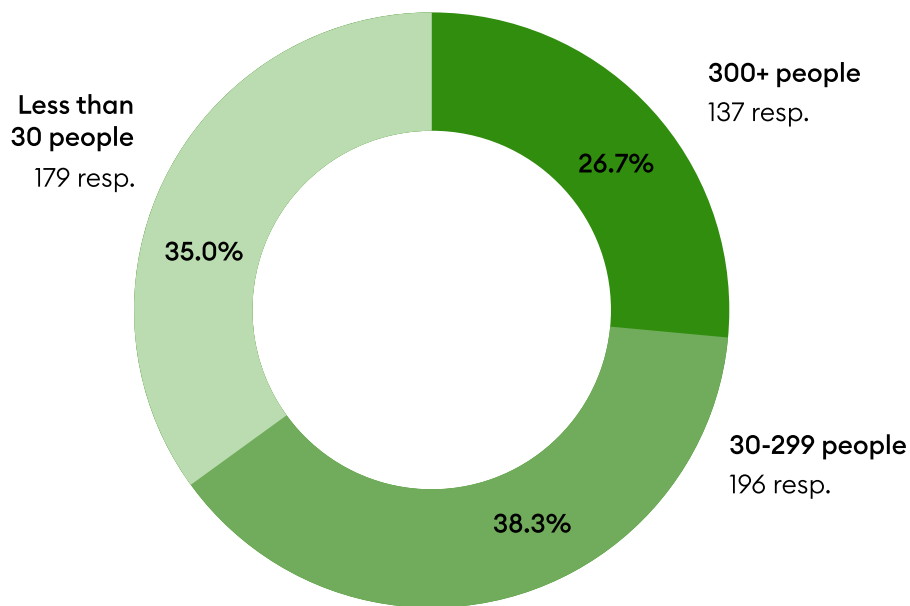**17.3%**
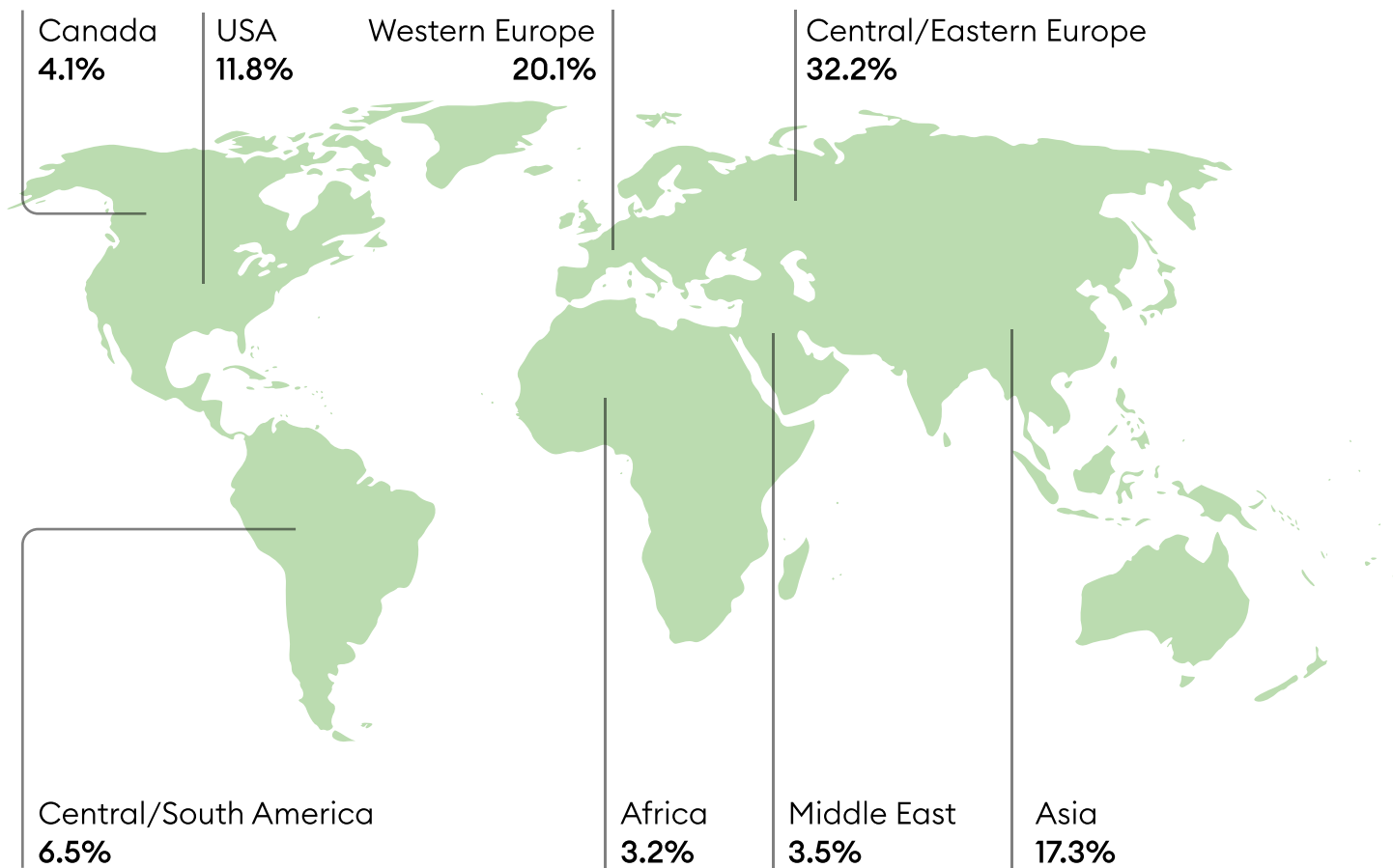
The **majority** of respondents are **full-time employees** working for game development companies with headcounts averaging between **30 and 300+ people** ±27% of respondents are freelancers and 14% run their own game development business.

What's your employment status?

Hired employee   **444**

Freelancer   **214**

Not employed   **137**

Founder or co-founder   **59**

Entrepreneur   **52**

What is the size of your company?

Less than 30 people
179 resp.

35.0%

38.3%

300+ people
137 resp.

26.7%

30-299 people
196 resp.

Key working trends

To better understand the behavior of video game developers, the survey focused on two topics: **Work format and change.**

- 46% of our respondents **changed jobs during the pandemic**, although for some, the reason behind the decision was not directly related to the pandemic. **Bigger salaries, better working conditions, professional growth, and new opportunities** were among the influencing factors.
- Of those that changed jobs because of COVID-19, many did so **due to company closures**. The pandemic hit the game industry hard - especially small indie companies with fewer than thirty people and many could no longer afford to honor payroll had to shut their doors.
- Another impactful element was respondents' **desire to stay safe by working remotely**.
- Finally, some people changed companies simply to take advantage of a **growing pool of work-from-home opportunities**.

The "hybrid" work format is preferable by game developers

One universal shift affected most of the respondents, regardless of whether they changed jobs. Despite the fact that — in most places — lockdowns have lifted, workplaces have yet to return to pre-pandemic formats. **Hybrid work is here to stay**. Hybrid now means a combination work schedule: 2-3 days of the week working remotely with the balance of days in the office. For some employees, the entire week is worked remotely with a minimum of required in-office appearances.

50% of respondents prefer a hybrid schedule

39% want to work entirely from home

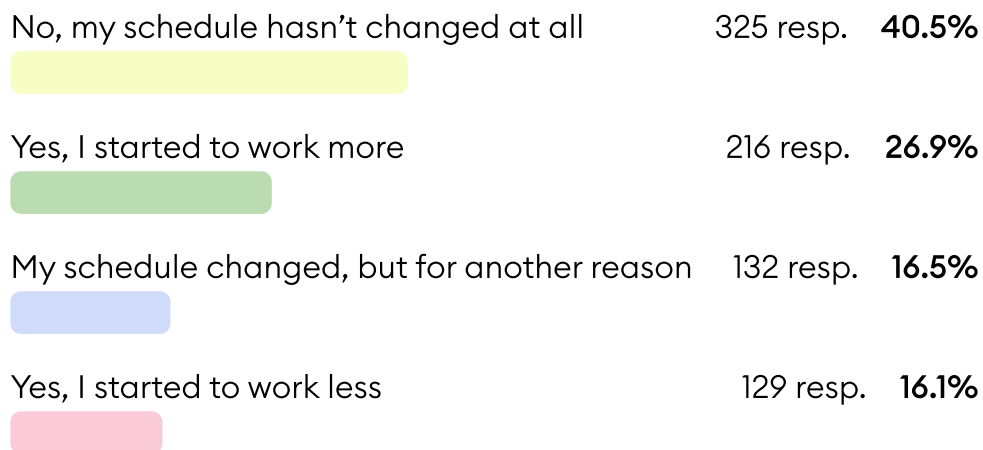**11%** want to contribute to the project from the office.

Lauren Helling
Maximum Games
Associate Manager of People

*Employees really seem to appreciate the flexibility to be able to come into the office and bounce creative ideas off. We do three days in office and two days working from home. **Employees seem to really appreciate that balance and flexibility**.*

Developers still work as hard as ever

40% of respondents stated that — during the pandemic — they experienced **no change in the amount of work** given to them, while 26% said that their workload actually increased.

Did the pandemic affect your working schedule or routine?

No, my schedule hasn't changed at all   325 resp.   **40.5%**

Yes, I started to work more   216 resp.   **26.9%**

My schedule changed, but for another reason   132 resp.   **16.5%**

Yes, I started to work less   129 resp.   **16.1%**

The 2022 GDC Report revealed that 24% of developers work more than twelve hours a day during tight deadlines, impacting work/life balance. While remote work does provide a certain level of freedom, there are definitely drawbacks.

Emily Shepard
Maximum Games
Senior Manager of People

> *Hybrid work affords everyone the opportunity to do their **best work where and how they prefer.** The only disadvantage to this is that sometimes it's hard to know when to end your day and can **easily lead to burnout**.*

Fianna Wong
SideFX
Technical Marketing Lead

> *I don't know how beneficial hybrid form because even today **we are all still work from home**. There were few occasions where I had to go into the office and there was maximum four or five people.*

The survey's respondents also commented on some **pros and cons related to working from home**.

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PROS

Work/Life Balance

"Don't have to think about getting ready and commuting. I shower and I'm ready for work."

"I have more time for personal project."

"Work from home - balancing a newborn, new projects with overseas clients and virtual reality development QA'd remotely."

Control over work schedule

"The pandemic is a perfect opportunity as I find the appropriate environment at home to get rid of the restrictive and bigoted structure of the company and to find time to work at night and to use my creativity in all aspects."

"I can work on my own schedule - if my build breaks, I can go do some chores while I update and just work a bit later to make up for it."

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CONS

Overtime

"I find myself working after core hours because my work is always present."

"Longer hours with fewer breaks."

Remote collaboration is slow

"Waiting for other people to reply to important messages. That could lead to working extra shifts to meet deadlines."

"Discussions that could have taken a few minutes face-to-face, can now take hours and span days or weeks due to most people working remotely."

"Having to compensate for time zones."

Reduced interpersonal connection

"Online meeting and onboard, and mainly you don't have too much connection with people."
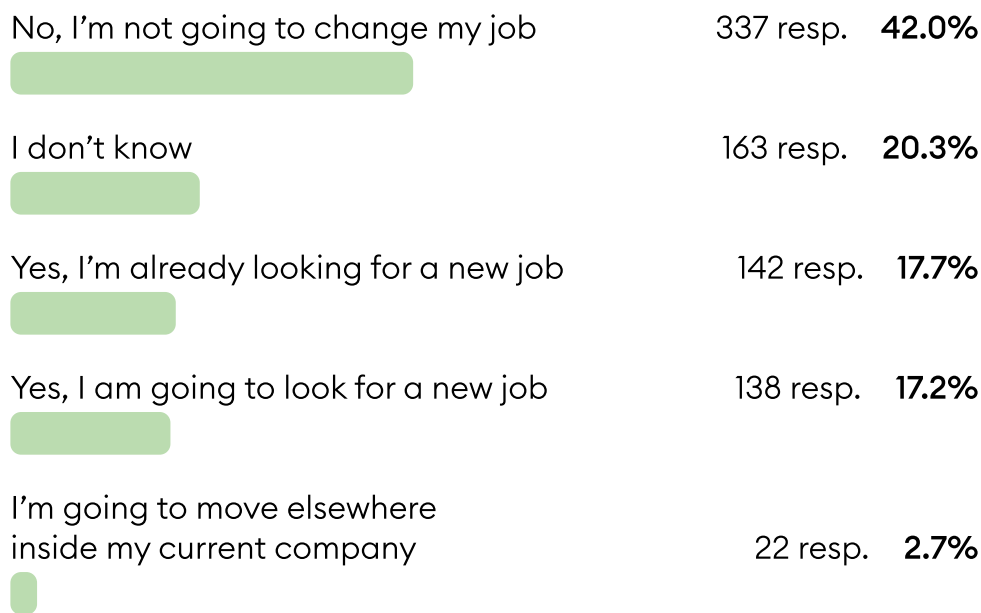
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In summary, the desire for a work/home balance is strong and the primary reason the **survey's respondents prefer a hybrid work format**.

Moving on: Career change plans among game developers

42% of the respondents said they **don't expect to change their job** in the next couple of months. Not unexpected, given **many of them shifted positions earlier** in the pandemic; however, 38% are actively considering new options. 20% remain undecided.

Are you going to change your job in the next few months?

No, I'm not going to change my job	337 resp.	**42.0%**
I don't know	163 resp.	**20.3%**
Yes, I'm already looking for a new job	142 resp.	**17.7%**
Yes, I am going to look for a new job	138 resp.	**17.2%**
I'm going to move elsewhere inside my current company	22 resp.	**2.7%**

In the previous survey in **2020**, some **reasons** for survey participants' job jumping were: **salary increase, better working conditions, and professional growth**. Later answers in **2021** revealed more respondents are looking for a job due to **unemployment**. As the pandemic progressed, the more of an impact it had on game development team members' careers.

There is a correlation, where respondents' **willingness to change jobs increases** if
- **game development is less accessible** to people in their region;
- they yearn to **change their compensation model**;
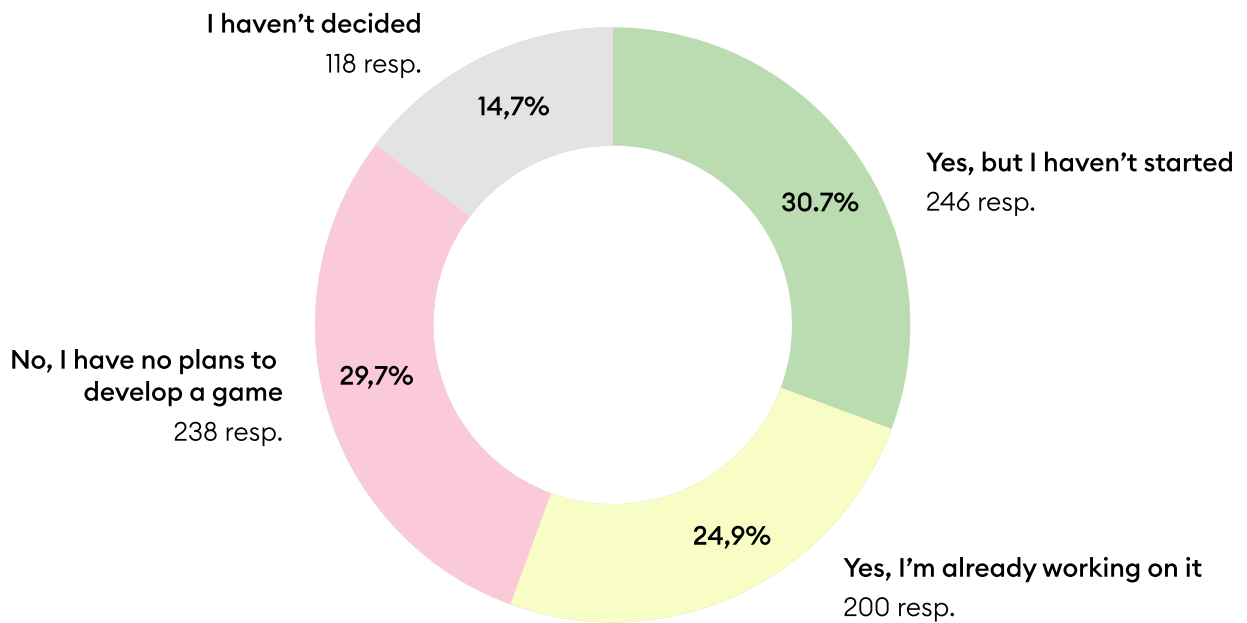- **earnings decreased** due to pandemic-related changes.

One interesting fact arose from this line of survey questions. In **2021**, some people indicated **a desire to move to another country** as their main driver for switching jobs. Given this answer was not presented in 2020, it bears asking the question: Are we beginning to see a return of "better opportunities" from a pre-pandemic era?

Insights from indie developers

Developers dream of building their OWN games

A **quarter** of the respondents are **already working on their own game** development project and **31%** of participants **plan to do so** in the future.

Are you going to develop your own game?

I haven't decided
118 resp.
14,7%

Yes, but I haven't started
246 resp.
30.7%

No, I have no plans to
develop a game
238 resp.
29,7%

24,9%

Yes, I'm already working on it
200 resp.

From the data received, it appears that creatives' **desire to make their own games directly correlates** with **working in smaller companies**. It does not relate to their desire to leave their current job or whether game development is accessible in their country. People who develop their own games (self-employed) also **favor stocks or royalties as a compensation model**.

Most self-employed developers do not believe funding is required to create their own game
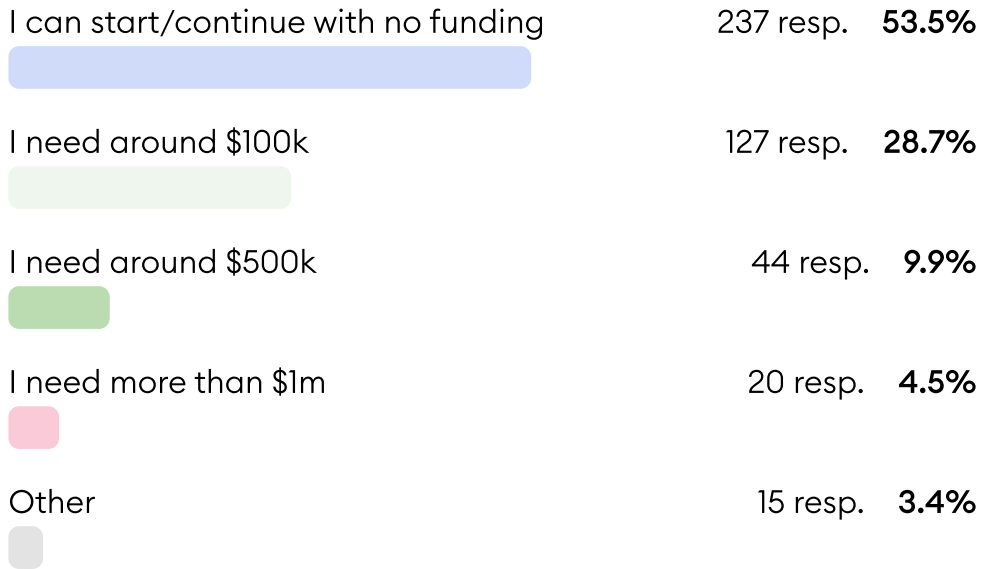
The most popular sources of **game development funding** are **crowdfunding and publishers**. Almost half of the participants are prepared to share up to 30% with their publishing/distribution partner.

What sources of funding do you consider?
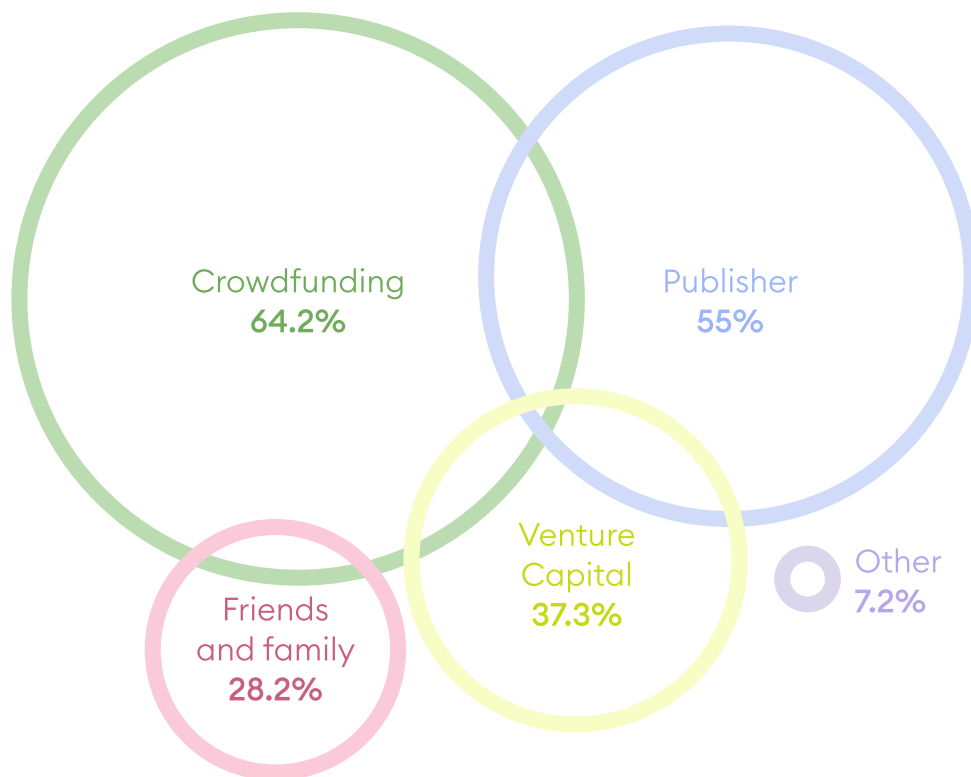

More than a half feel they do not need financing to begin game development. Other respondents stated they need varying amounts: $100k (29%), $500k(10%), or $1m (4.5%). The survey data appears to **correlate the need for funding with respondents' desire to change compensation models** and receive revenue share for work performed.

Do you need funding to start or continue developing your game?

I can start/continue with no funding   237 resp.   **53.5%**

I need around $100k   127 resp.   **28.7%**

I need around $500k   44 resp.   **9.9%**

I need more than $1m   20 resp.   **4.5%**

Other   15 resp.   **3.4%**

75.8% of participants responded that **game development is more accessible** in their countries.

Is video game development becoming more accessible in your country?

75.8%   **Yes,** it is   **No,** it's not   **13.1%**

                          I don't know   **11.1%**
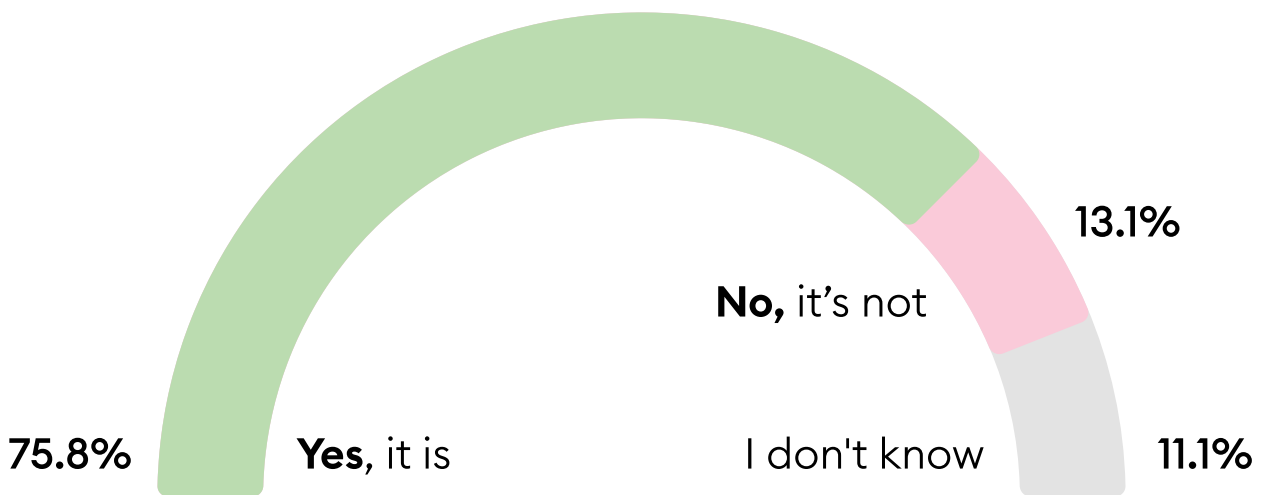
Compensation model evolution

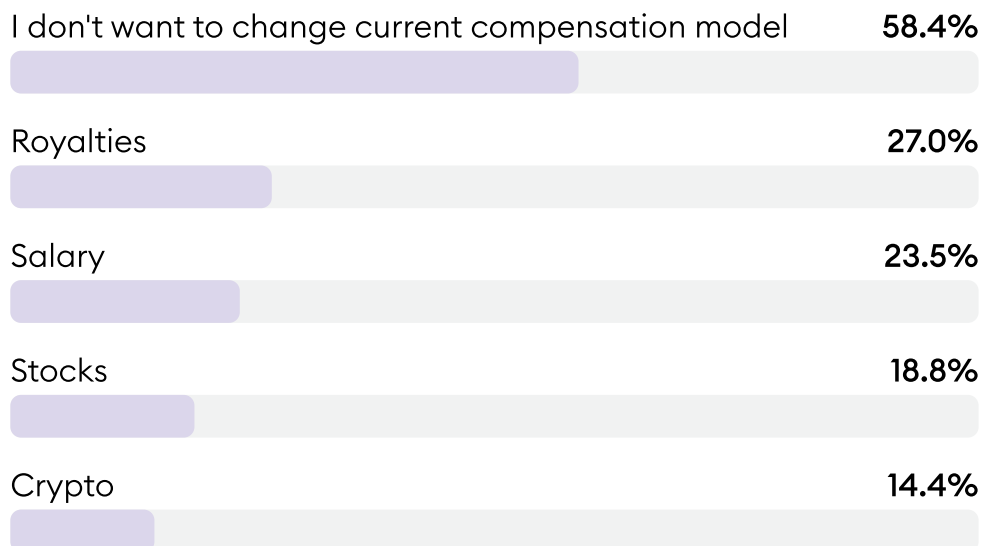## Salary remains the most desirable form of compensation

The majority of developers remain dedicated to **a traditional compensation model**, though more than **40% are open to new forms** of payment for work performed. With the possible hourly rate reaching its maximum, companies might need to find new ways of incentivizing employees and freelancers. **Stocks or royalties — or even crypto** — may be more modern ways of enticing new team members to join a project or motivating existing employees to stay long-term.

When asked about the way they are paid, respondents revealed the most popular compensation model is salary. Of that group, 58% of participants would NOT change the current model in which they are paid. The remaining 7% currently receive some form of revenue share in lieu of salary.

What compensation model(s) does your company currently offer?

Salary — 93.4%
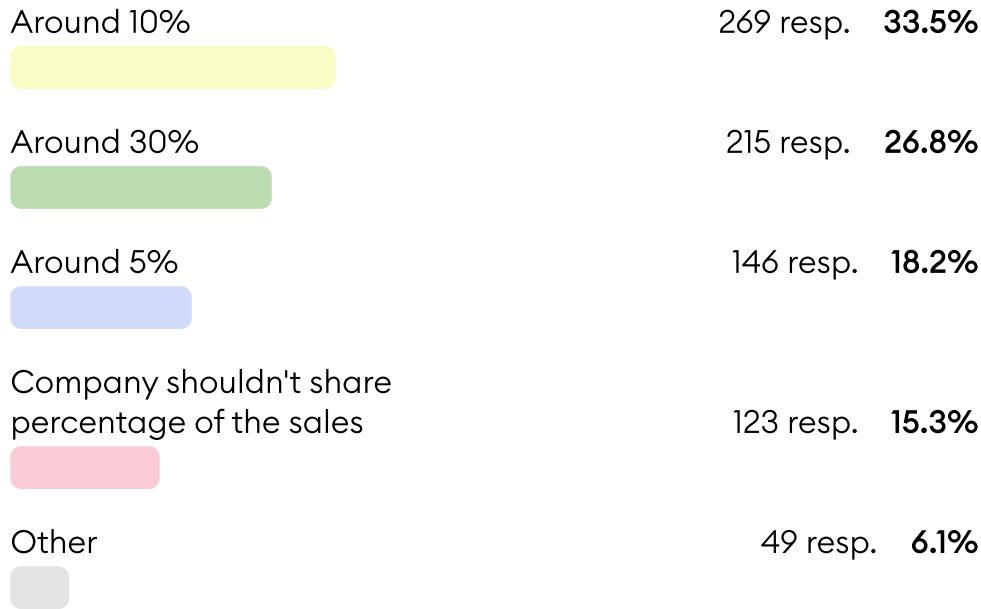
Stocks — 10.1%

Royalties — 9.7%

Crypto — 3.5%

Other — 3.2%

Would you change the current compensation model?

I don't want to change current compensation model — 58.4%

Royalties — 27.0%

Salary — 23.5%

Stocks — 18.8%

Crypto — 14.4%

33% of respondents believe their **employer should share around 10% with development teams**. More than a quarter would like their company to share as much as 30%.
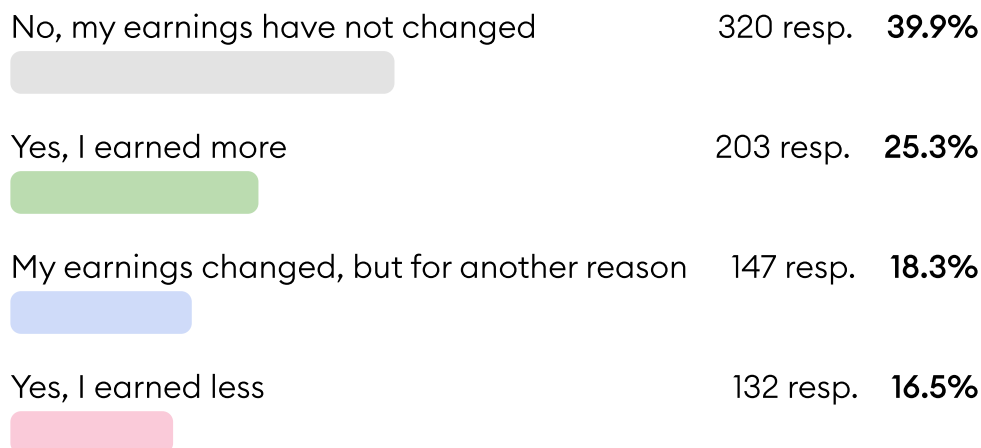
What percentage of the sales should the company share with developers?

Around 10%	269 resp.	**33.5%**
Around 30%	215 resp.	**26.8%**
Around 5%	146 resp.	**18.2%**
Company shouldn't share percentage of the sales	123 resp.	**15.3%**
Other	49 resp.	**6.1%**

Despite mounting challenges, creatives and developers maintained a stable income and felt their business stayed about the same

Data revealed that **the pandemic did not affect the majority of respondents' salaries**. Approximately 25% earned more.

Did the pandemic affect your earnings?

No, my earnings have not changed	320 resp.	**39.9%**
Yes, I earned more	203 resp.	**25.3%**
My earnings changed, but for another reason	147 resp.	**18.3%**
Yes, I earned less	132 resp.	**16.5%**

Survey data did connect the pandemic with a desire to change job or working schedule and the craving to start their own game development project or business. So, **people who do want to change their job have in mind a different model of schedule** (probably it has something to do with work-life balance) and the desire to work on their own projects. These are the main drivers to change the current position.

Summary and observations

Kirill Tokarev
Editor in Chief
80 LEVEL

" *The pandemic brought another **huge shift in the way people work**. With great new tools and more accessible powerful hardware, one can stay at home and do all the work required without leaving the comfort of one's bedroom. With this come new challenges for video game companies and game developers. New situation for managers calls for new tools and solutions.*

*We see **the biggest challenge in letting companies give employees more freedom and accountability**, while linking their salary and compensation bonuses directly to project performance.*

*Introduction of **royalty-share might be another way to do it**.*

Thank you for your interest in learning more about current video game industry insights. If you're ready to consider implementing new compensation models to motivate and retain project teams, learn more by visiting 80 Level Talent.

If you're a company in need of detailed surveys or market research, visit or email us at 80lv-mra.team@80.lv - we're always happy to help.

Head to 80.lv to learn more about ongoing video game industry research and related topic.