

## 2023 STAGE MANAGER SURVEY GLOBAL STUDY

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<https://www.stagemanagersurvey.com/>

The ninth edition of the Stage Manager Survey revealed several indicators of a rebound for stage management. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic was fully transparent in the 2021 survey: a substantial drop in employment, a rise in career pessimism, and strong concerns about the future of the profession. While not universally optimistic, the 2023 survey recorded increases in employment opportunities and wages and a renewed interest in the long-term health of the field.

The Stage Manager Survey started in 2006 as a volunteer study of stage management in terms of production practices, education and training, working conditions, and employment. This biennial study is open to anyone who has served as a stage manager or assistant stage manager on at least three live audience productions. The first seven editions of the study were limited to American participants, but the survey went world-wide in 2021. The 2023 edition took a significant step forward in becoming a global study by being offered in French, Mandarin, and Spanish. I would like to thank Elaine Normandeau, Ada Zhang, and María Dávila for translating not just the text but also the stage management vocabulary and practices of both the survey and this report. I have already learned so much from these three stage managers and will be incorporating new questions in 2025 based on our conversations.

I also would like to thank the US-based Stage Managers' Association, both for the 410 members who participated (a new record!) as well as the formation of the SMA's International Cohort, lead by Hope Rose Kelly. This group of stage managers from around the globe tested many questions and offered additional response options.

This study is not connected to any advocacy group or media company; there are no call-outs or sidebars to draw attention to some data over other information. The goal is to be as neutral as possible, though bias certainly exists: the mere existence of questions about topics such as salary negotiations implies that it is important to negotiate. The attempts at neutrality and the amount of data collected may make for a slow read. I hope that you will discuss with other stage managers the individual findings and the reasons behind the responses. And, most importantly, I hope that this study will help you know that you are not alone: you have a place in a global community.

*David J. McGraw*

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## SECTION I: STAGE MANAGER DEMOGRAPHICS

This study was conducted online over three weeks beginning on International Stage Management Day: October 10 - 31, 2023. The survey recorded 1,979 viable responses, an increase of 530 more responses than received in 2021 and the most that this survey has ever recorded. The viability of a response was determined by the participant answering at least 10% of the survey. The initial count included 2,103 responses; it is suspected that some of these partial responses were due to discovered ineligibility or the need to take the full survey at another time. Language selection did not have significant impact on whether a response proved viable, but it should be noted that two countries were removed as their single representatives did not complete at least 10% of the survey. This study reports the results of the 1,979 viable responses.

Participants were not required to answer every question and some questions only appeared based on earlier responses (e.g., a set of questions if the participant identified working in the United States), so percentages are determined by the number of responses to that question. For instance, the question about years of experience [**Figure 5**] lists percentages along with "n=1,856" where 1,864 is the number of responses received for that question. It should be noted that, due to uncertainty about the number of stage managers in any country, let alone globally, this study does not include margin of error or confidence levels for responses. In other words, we are only reporting the responses of the survey takers and not extrapolating the beliefs or actions of the full stage management community. Moreover, to avoid skewed percentages, as well as preserve participant anonymity, no second layers of analysis will be applied to groups smaller than 20 people. We received four responses from Argentinian stage managers; if three of them agree on a question, we will not claim that the majority of Argentines believe something or cause any of the participants to worry that their anonymity has been compromised. This reporting threshold applies to all demographic questions.

This study was created in the United States and therefore the strong majority of participants are American: 1,533 reported working primarily in the United States or on tours originating in the United States; 440 participants work primarily in 31 other countries. While not yet back to the pre-pandemic record of 1,775 American responses, there was a 32% increase in the number of American stage managers compared to 2021. Meanwhile, the non-US-based stage management participants have climbed by 54% in just the second edition offered to a global audience. To provide a global perspective, the responses to many questions in this report are reported by country or country grouping. The stage managers of Australia, Canada, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States all had a large enough group to list their responses separately. For countries that did not have at least 20 representatives, the following grouping and abbreviations [**Figure 1**] will be used. The "Multinational" grouping (MULTI) has 93 participants, including 8 that selected non-US-based but did not select a specific country.

Figure 1: Primary Country and Country Groupings

(n=1,603)

Country	Participants	Grouping Abbreviation
Argentina	4	MULTI
Armenia	1	MULTI
Australia	61	AUS
Canada	124	CAN
China	8	MULTI
Denmark	12	MULTI
France	1	MULTI
Germany	5	MULTI
Haiti	1	MULTI
Hong Kong (S.A.R)	4	MULTI
India	1	MULTI
Ireland	3	MULTI
Israel	1	MULTI
Italy	1	MULTI
Japan	1	MULTI
Mexico	4	MULTI
Netherlands	1	MULTI
New Zealand	13	MULTI
Norway	3	MULTI
Philippines	1	MULTI
Poland	1	MULTI
Romania	1	MULTI
Saudi Arabia	2	MULTI
Serbia	1	MULTI
Singapore	2	MULTI
South Africa	5	MULTI
Spain	33	ESP
Sweden	2	MULTI
United Arab Emirates	5	MULTI
United Kingdom	129	UK
United States	1,553	USA
Uruguay	1	MULTI

Stage managers working outside the United States received several questions before the main survey, including which language(s) they used to communicate with performers and crew during a performance. Of 438 responses, 325 responded English and another 52 noted English and another language. Among the 61 other responses, Spanish received 27 votes, French 14, and Danish 7; other languages were noted but reported by fewer than 5 participants. Canada reported the highest percentage of bilingual work: 10% reported working in French and another 10% reported working in both English and another language.

Non-US-based participants were also asked whether stage management pays enough to be a career [Figure 2] and are there enough paying jobs for experienced stage managers [Figure 3].

Figure 2: Stage Management Career Viability by Country Grouping (n=437)

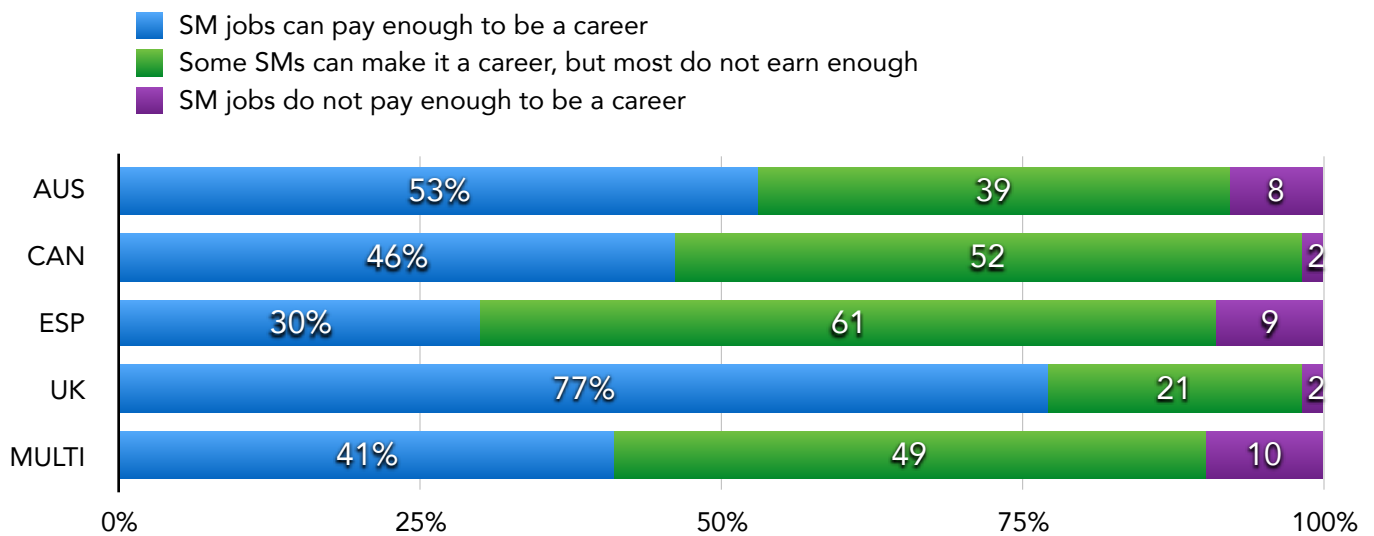
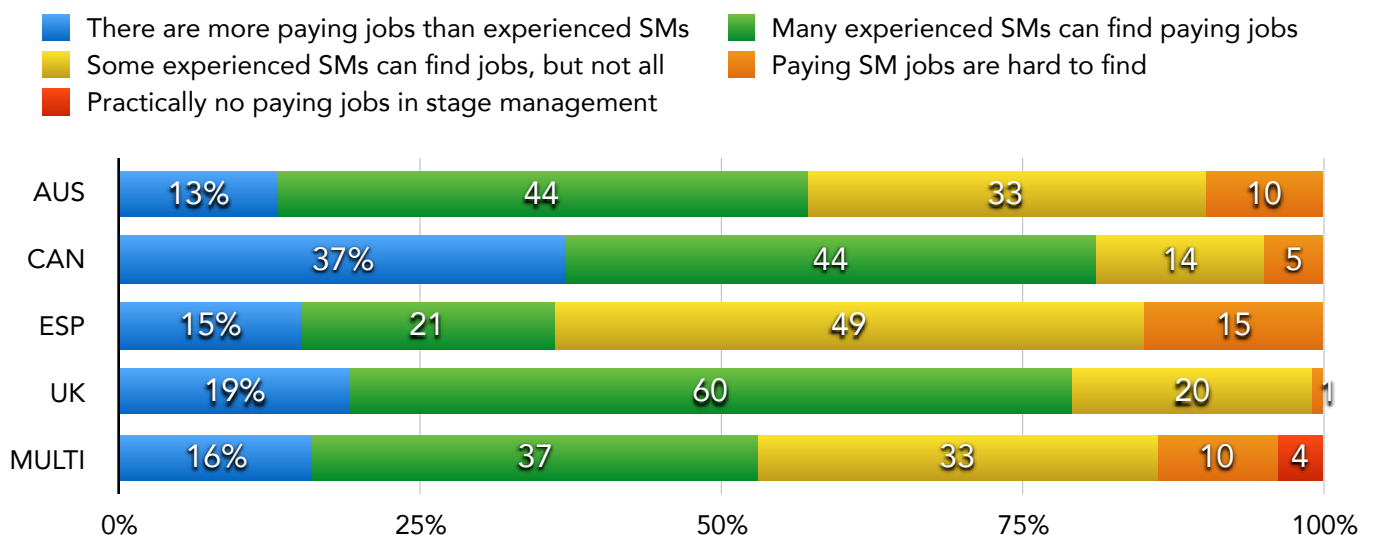


Figure 3: Employment Availability by Country Grouping (n=438)



All survey participants were asked a series of demographic questions to determine both the pandemic’s immediate impact on who remained (or returned) in the profession and the long-term evolution of who chooses to be a stage manager. Participants were asked both their age [Figure 4] and the number of years they have worked as a stage manager [Figure 5]. The United Kingdom has the most balanced mix of brackets whereas Spain has the oldest and most experienced stage managers participating in this study. In terms of experience levels, there is a notable decline in representation from the 1-5 years and 6-10 years experience categories, the reasons for which may be deduced from later questions about job satisfaction. Compared to the 2021 survey, the “Under 21” participation rose from 4% to 7%, perhaps due to an increase in stage management education offerings. In terms of years of experience, the 2023 survey saw a similar increase in “1-5 Years” (28% to 33%) category with corresponding minor decreases for the other categories. Figure 6 compares the age and experience categories for all participants.

Figure 4: Age (n=1,610)

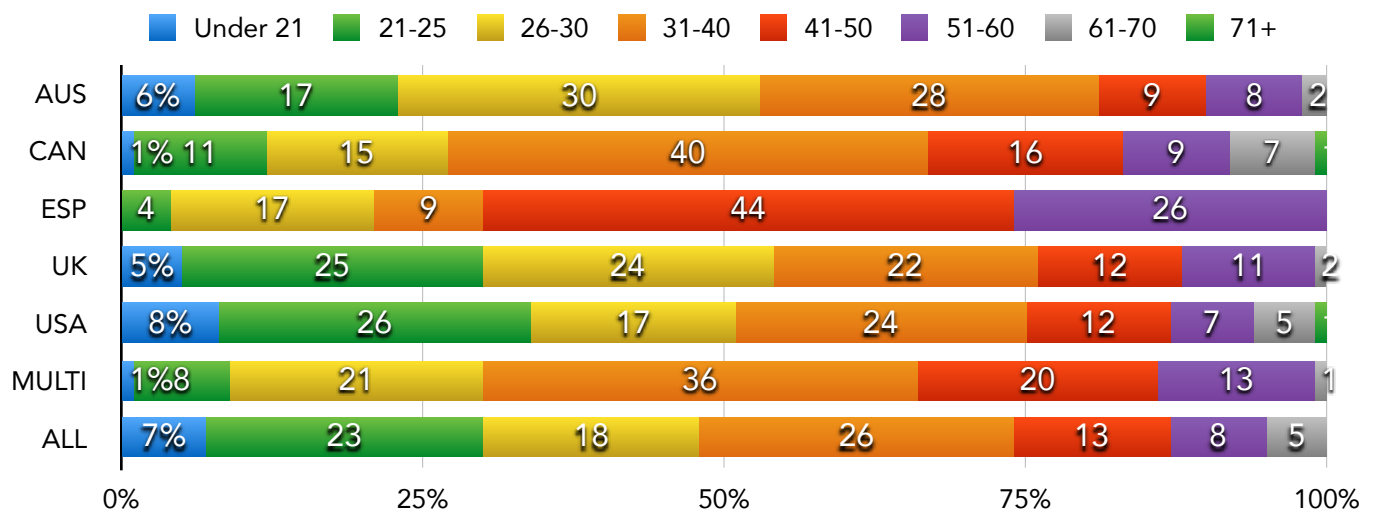


Figure 5: Years of Experience (n=1,856)

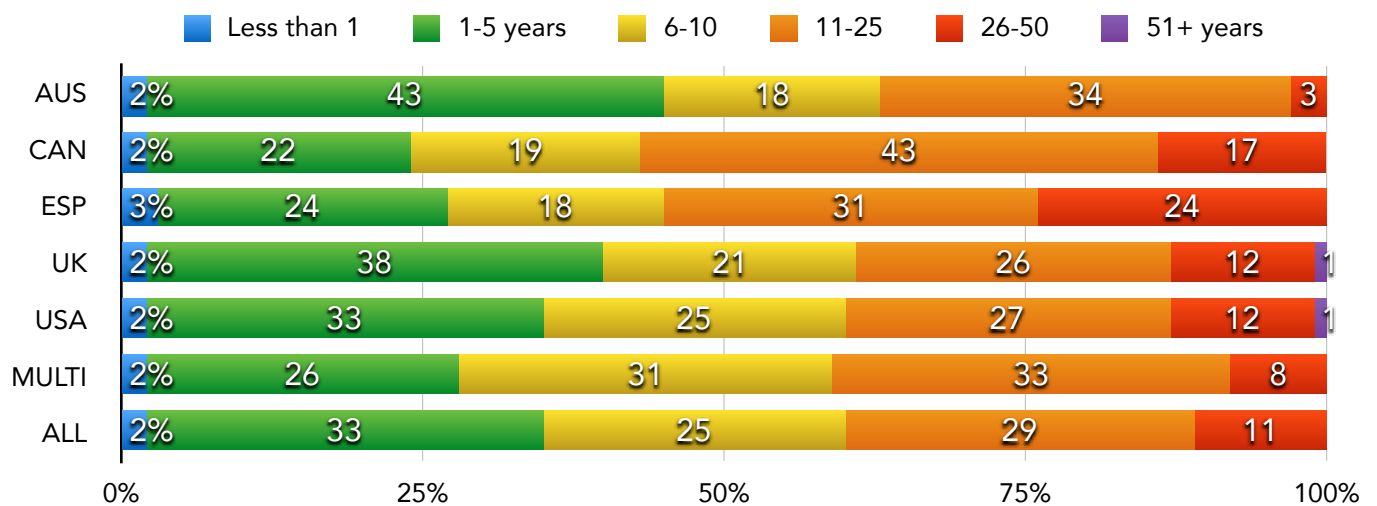




Figure 6: Age Brackets by Experience Levels

(n=1,617)

Age	SMs by Age Group	<1 Year as SM	1-5 Years	6-10 Years	11-25 Years	26-50 Years	51+ Years
Under 21	110	6%	89%	5%	—	—	—
21-25	375	3%	71%	25%	1%	—	—
26-30	284	1%	35%	56%	8%	—	—
31-40	419	<1%	7%	27%	66%	<1%	—
41-50	210	—	4%	9%	69%	18%	—
51-60	130	—	2%	8%	23%	68%	—
61	89	—	1%	1%	10%	83%	4%

Unlike Figure 5, Figure 6 does not include a separate category for the 14 participants who were over 70 years old as it falls below the demographic threshold for reporting. For comparisons of age groupings, a combined “61+” category is used for both 61-70 and 70+ age brackets.

One goal of the original survey in 2006 was to test the claim that a growing majority of stage managers identify as female. While this survey not a true longitudinal study as the participants vary each edition, **Figure 7** tracks how gender identification has been reported in all nine editions. “Non-Binary” also includes the self identifications of Trans, Genderqueer, Genderfluid, Gender Non-conforming, and Agender, whereas 12 participants (<1%) preferred not to answer.

Figure 7: Gender Identity

(2023 n=1,602)

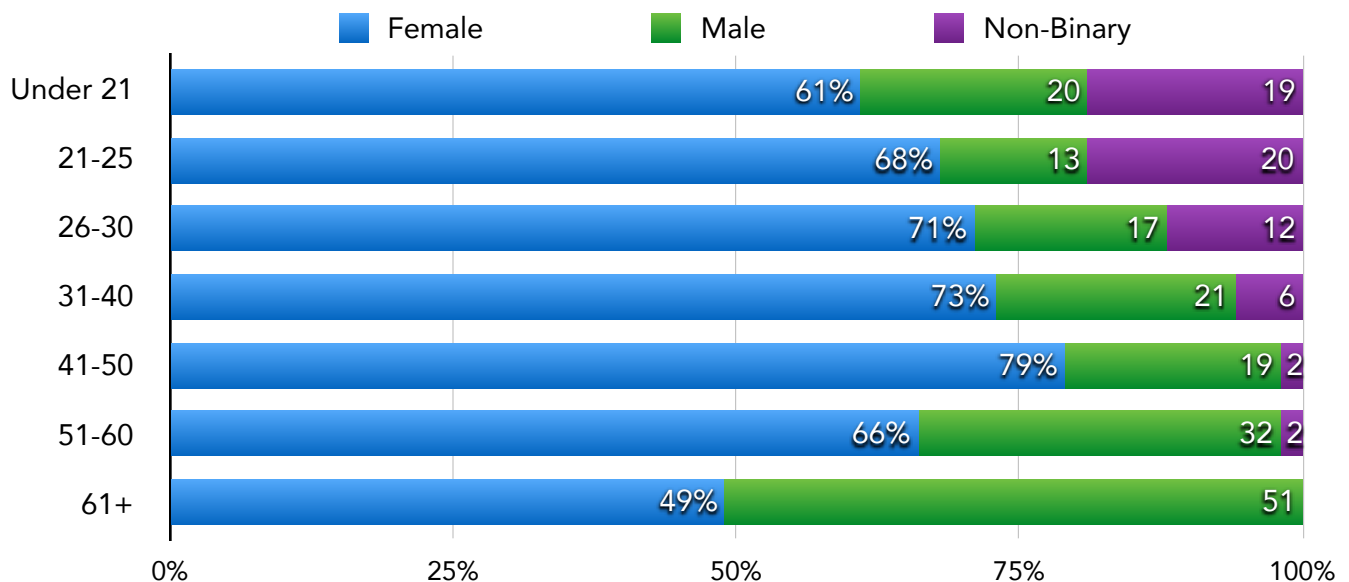
	Female	Male	Non-Binary
<b>2023 Survey</b>	69%	20%	10%
<b>2021 Survey</b>	70%	23%	6%
<b>2019 Survey</b>	71%	23%	4%
<b>2017 Survey</b>	70%	26%	2%
<b>2015 Survey</b>	73%	25%	< 1%
<b>2013 Survey</b>	69%	31%	< 1%
<b>2011 Survey</b>	70%	30%	No Data
<b>2009 Survey</b>	68%	32%	No Data
<b>2006 Survey</b>	66%	34%	No Data

While the percentage of male-identifying stage managers has continued to decline, the growth has been among non-binary stage managers. Moreover, the some of the “growth” may be in the reporting and public identification of a community that had always been present: the first three editions of the survey provided only a binary division of genders and the next two editions did not provide a self-identification text box. We received a request this year to not restrict this question to a single selection in future surveys.

**Figure 8** compares gender identity by age bracket. The gender response of “Prefer Not to Answer” was spread evenly over multiple age brackets. Compared to the pre-pandemic 2019 report, a higher percentage of stage managers under 30 years old identify as non-binary and lower percentages of stage managers over age 50 identify as male than two years ago.

Figure 8: Age Brackets by Gender Identity

(n=1,589)



**Figure 9** compares gender identity by country. There is no consistent trend that applies to all countries in terms of 2021 gender responses. Survey participants were also asked if they identify as “part of the LGBTQIA+ community;” with an overall majority of participants identifying as such [Figure 10]. By country (n=1,616), the United States had the highest percentage of LGBTQIA+ stage managers (56%), followed by the United Kingdom (50%), Australia (40%), Spain (39%), Canada (29%) and the Multinational country grouping (29%). In reference to gender identities (n=1,608), 59% of male stage managers identified as LGBTQIA+ compared to 42% of female stage managers and 100% of non-binary stage managers. Among all 834 participants who identified as LGBTQIA+, 26% reported having felt unsafe in a performing arts community at some point in their careers.

Figure 9: Country by Gender Identity

(n=1,602)

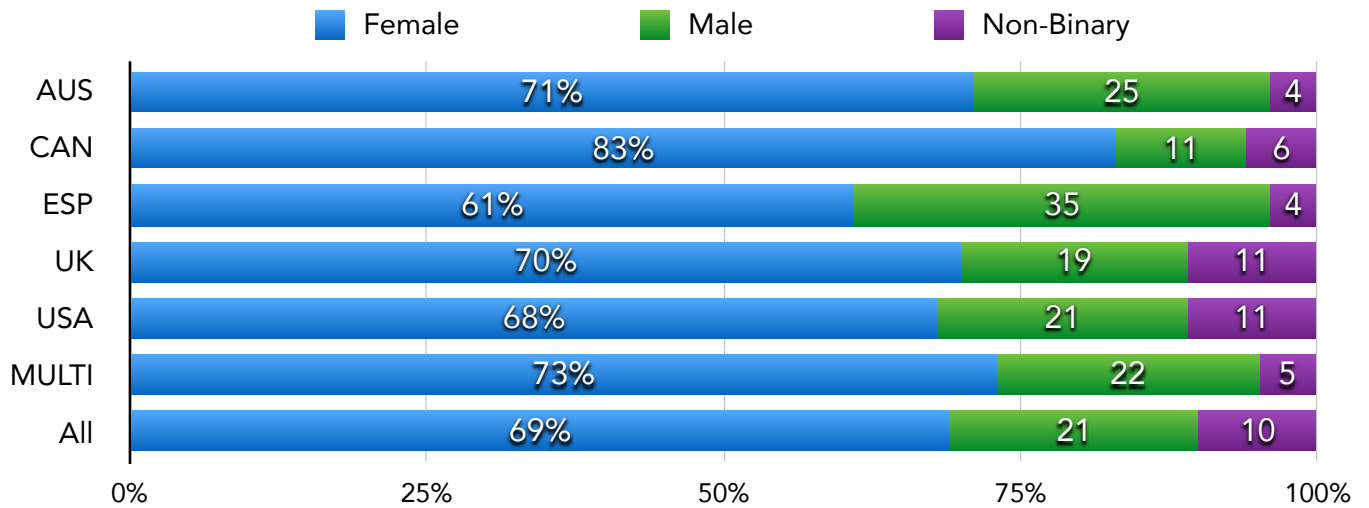


Figure 10: Identification as Part of the LGBTQIA+ Community

(2023 n=1,623)

	Affirmative
2023 Survey	52%
2021 Survey	43%
2019 Survey	41%
2017 Survey	35%
2015 Survey	30%
2013 Survey	27%

The survey also asked participants their relationship status (n=1,617), which can be viewed by gender identity [Figure 11] and country [Figure 12]. Widows/widowers and those who preferred not to answer comprised less than 1% of survey participants and are not included in these figures. For the 433 participants with spouses and legal partners, 39% reported that their partner also works in the performing arts and another 18% responded that their partner formerly worked in the performing arts.

Figure 11: Gender by Relationship Status

(n=1,581)

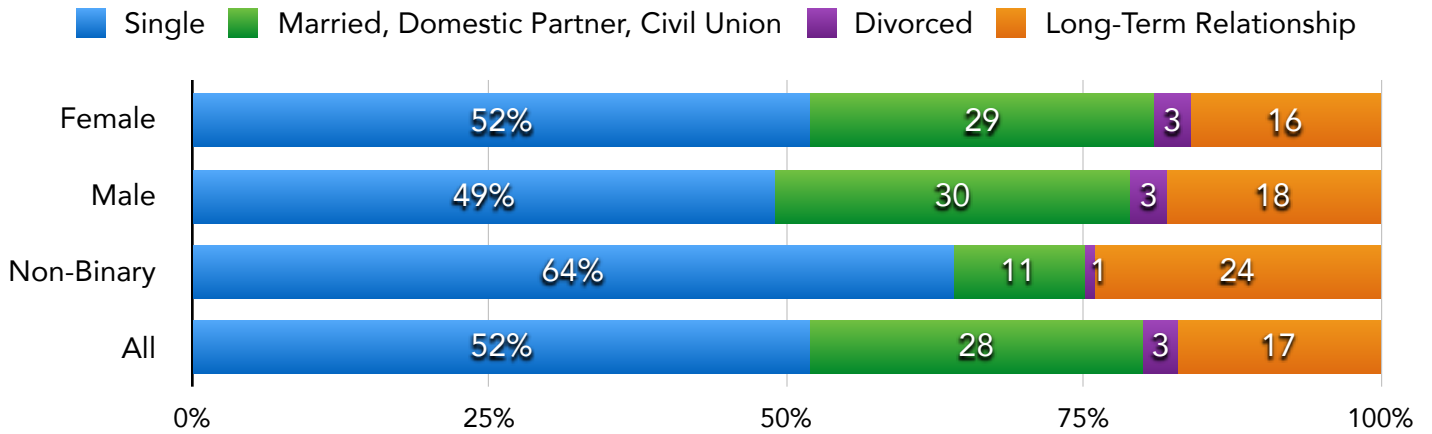
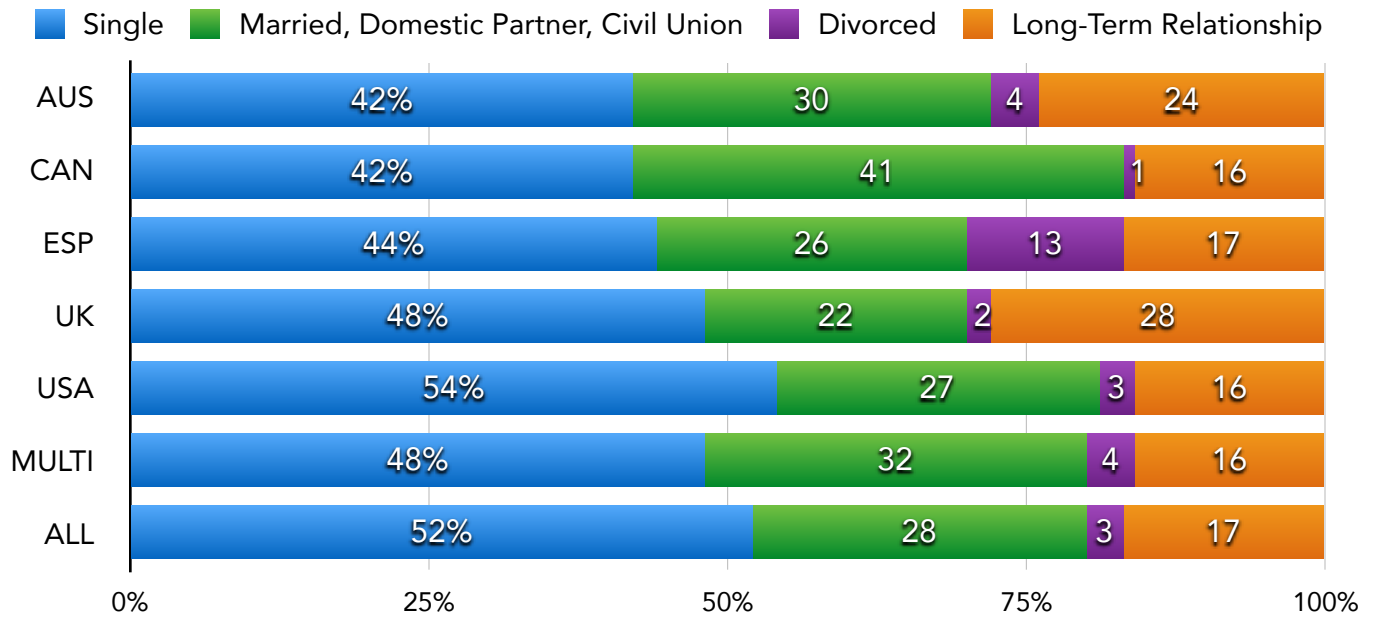


Figure 12: Country by Relationship Status

(n=1,587)



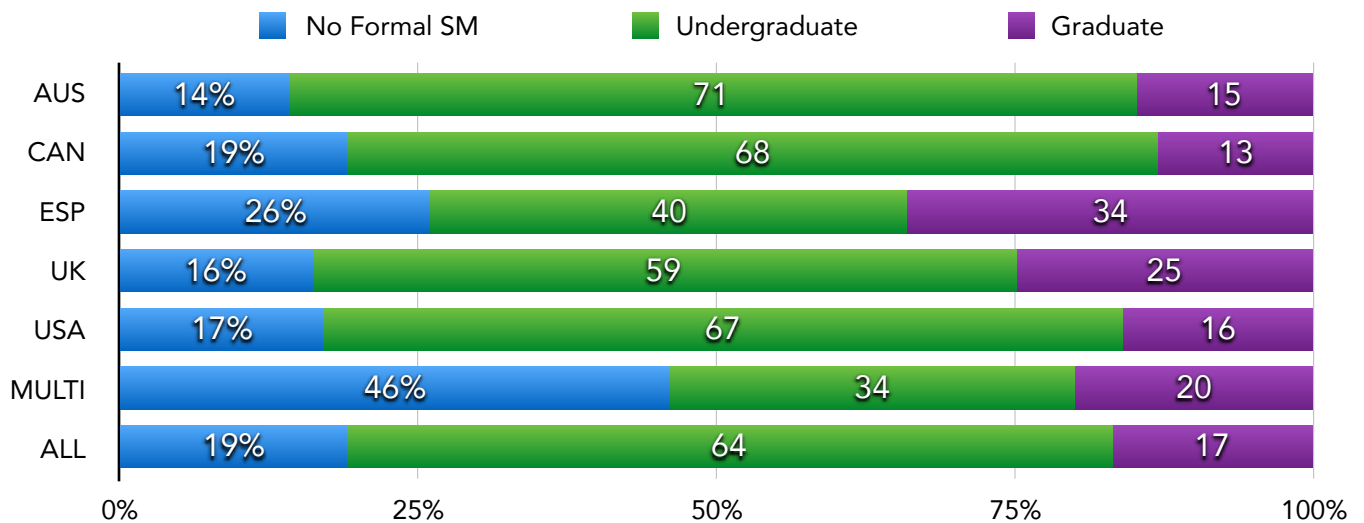
The 2023 survey registered a slight decline in the number of participants (n=1,593) with “a child or dependent under the age of 18”: 9% in 2023 compared to 11% in 2021. Spain recorded the most parents (22%), followed by the Multinational group (15%), Canada (13%), United States (9%), Australia (8%), and the United Kingdom (6%). By gender (n=1,579), the highest percentage of stage manager parents were female-identifying (11%), then male (6%), and non-binary (1%).

The question of stage management education is difficult to ask on a global scale due to the many different formats of higher education. In addition to the 11 options presented in the question, 139 participants listed other categories of education. Three large groupings were made of all responses (n=1,660), which yielded almost identical percentages as the 2021 data:

- No formal education in stage management: 19%
- Undergraduate/University education in stage management: 64%
- Graduate or post-graduate education in stage management: 17%

The education groupings by country [Figure 13] also remain very similar to the 2021 data even with the increased global participation.

Figure 13: Country/Region by SM Education Groupings (n=1,652)



Several participants noted that education will only take you so far as a stage manager. To this effect, 86% of respondents (n=1,647) had completed some form of career training with the highest representation among stage managers in their twenties and thirties [Figure 14]. Training options provided by the question included shadowing (observation) of someone calling cues (69%), shadowing backstage or crew (63%), a stage management internship (47%), a production assistantship (32%), and some other kind of internship in the performing arts (18%). Participants listed other training opportunities such as shadowing rehearsals and the technical process, workshops such as SMARTS (Stage Managing the Arts in Canada), cohorts such as Beyond the Stage Door in the United States, and apprenticeships. Future editions of the survey may try to parse the distinctions of internships, apprenticeships, fellowships, and assistantships.

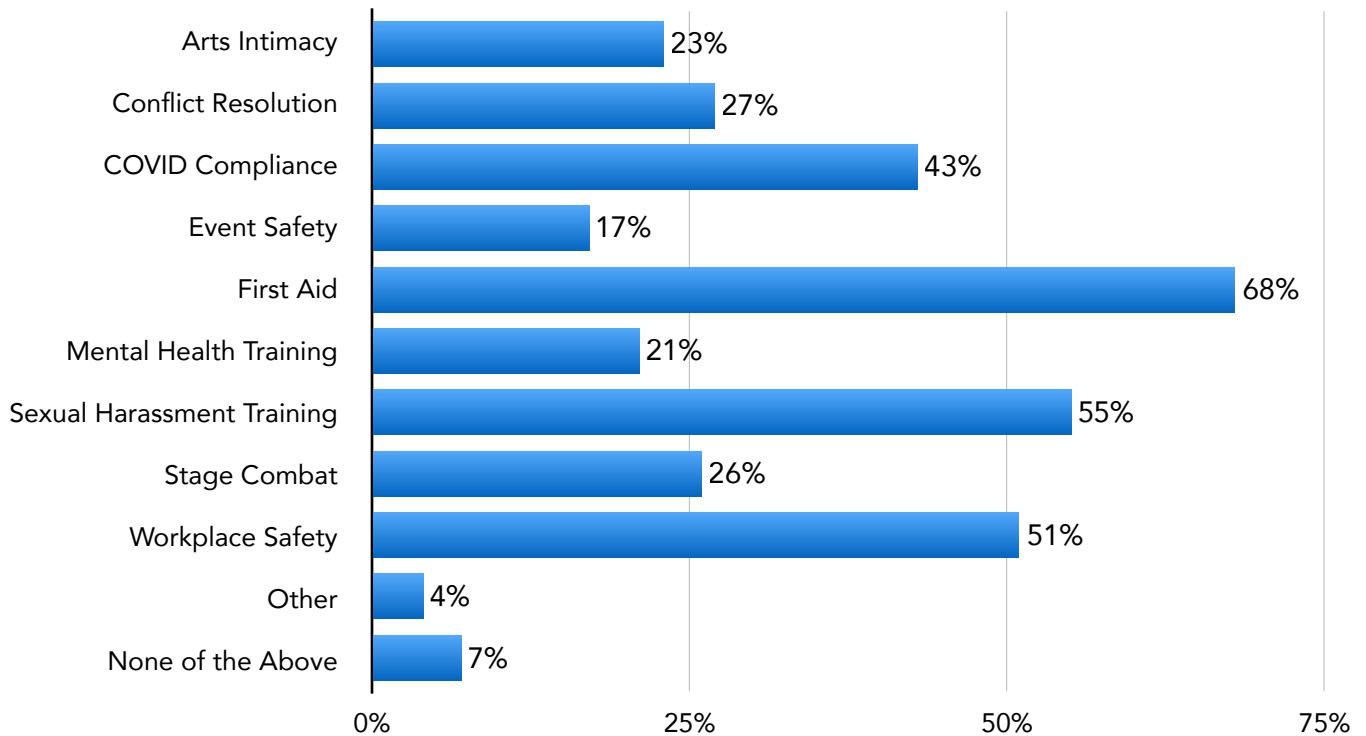
Figure 14: Stage Management Job Training by Age Bracket (n=1,647)

Age	Under 21	21-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70
Any Job Training	79%	89%	90%	91%	82%	80%	72%

Like many professions, stage managers have also undertaken workshops or skill-focused training in specific job-related topics [Figure 15]. The biggest increases from the 2021 survey were in COVID Compliance (a testament to the long-term impact of the pandemic), Conflict Resolution, and Arts Intimacy.

Figure 15: Job-related Workshops and Training

(n=1,622)



There is a growing awareness of disability as an identity both within the stage management community and the larger population. In 2023, 17% of participants (n=1,614) reported having a disability, which is in line with 16% of the global population according to the World Health Organization. This also represents an increase from 11% of the 2021 survey participants and 8% of responses to the 2019 survey. Hiring discrimination based on disability is detailed in Section III [Figure 69]. Similar to the 2021 survey, there appears to be a connection between reporting a disability and the age of the respondent.

Figure 16: Disability by Age Bracket

(n=1,598)

Age	Under 21	21-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
Have a Disability	34%	25%	20%	12%	10%	6%	14%

Two demographic identity questions were posed to just the American stage managers. The first question was about race and ethnicity. The U.S. Census uses very specific and often outdated terminology (e.g., Caucasian) that would not apply in other countries and combines many different peoples under certain categories. **Figure 17** compares the responses of 2023 to the previous three surveys using these census categories. Part of the complexity of the U.S. system is that Hispanic/Latino(a) is categorized as an ethnicity rather than a race. For Figure 17, participants could select more than one racial identity; the White/Caucasian percentage counts those who chose this race and no other. In 2023, 9% of American stage managers identified as Hispanic/Latino(a), compared to 6% of participants in 2021. At the time of this study, newer categories such as BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) and Global Majority are being used to identify Americans who do not classify themselves as Non-Hispanic White. In order to study both representation and discrimination, the BIPOC/White dichotomy will be used for several questions regarding American stage managers [**Figures 18, 19, 45, 62, 65, 66, 69, 73, 74, and 75**].

Figure 17: Race (United States)

(2023 n=1,201)

	White/ Caucasian	Black/ African- American	Asian	Native American/ Pacific Islander	Multi- racial	Other	Prefer Not to Answer
<b>2023 Survey</b>	82%	3%	5%	2%	3%	<1%	<1%
<b>2021 Survey</b>	87%	2%	1%	<1%	6%	<1%	2%
<b>2019 Survey</b>	86%	2%	4%	1%	6%	1%	1%
<b>2017 Survey</b>	91%	3%	3%	1%	3%	—	1%

Figure 18: BIPOC Representation by Age Bracket (United States)

(n=1,189)

	Under 21	21-25	26-30	31-40	41-50	51-60	61+
<b>BIPOC</b>	27%	23%	20%	19%	9%	11%	9%
<b>White</b>	73%	77%	80%	81%	91%	89%	91%
<b>Total Response</b>	96	310	199	295	145	85	59

Figure 19: BIPOC Representation by Gender (United States)

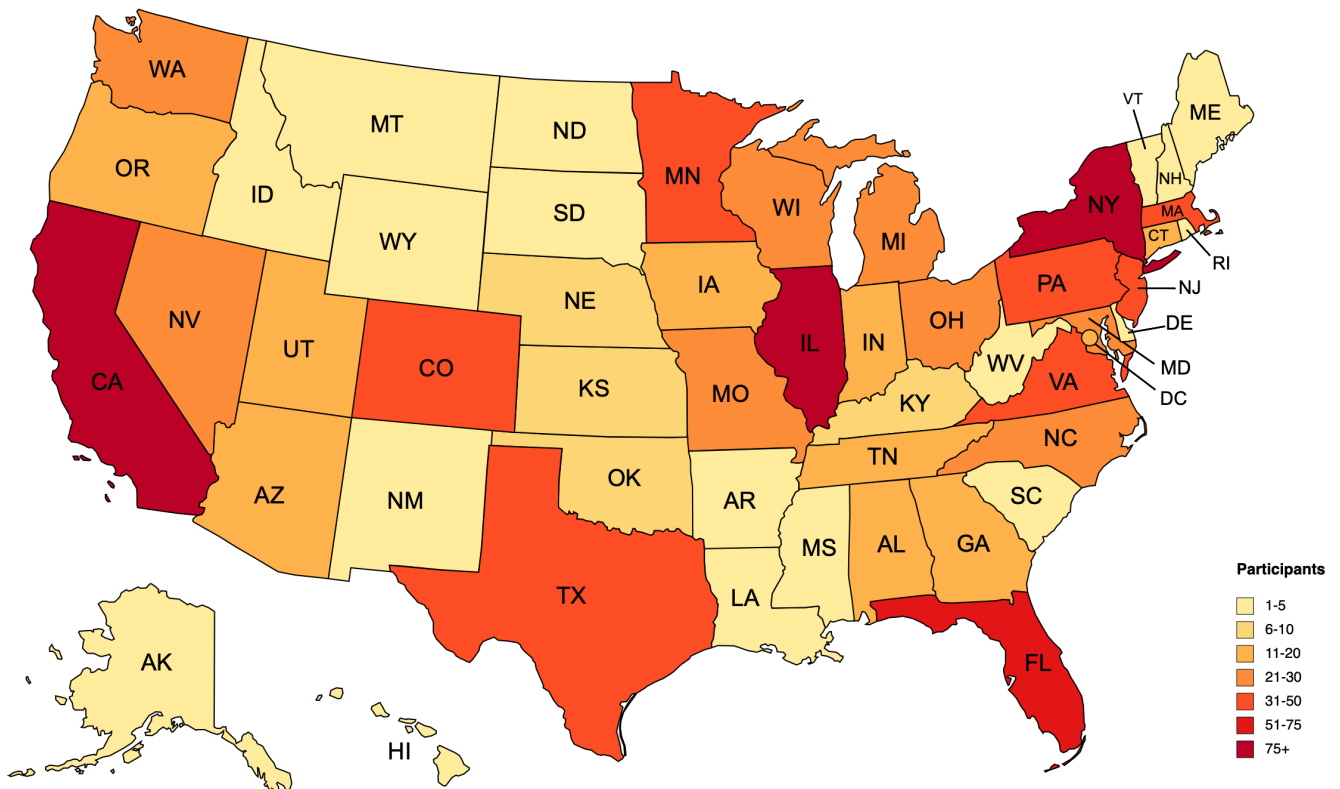
(n=1,193)

	Female	Male	Non-binary
BIPOC	16%	24%	24%
White	84%	76%	76%
Total Responses	812	251	130

The second demographic question posed to only the American stage managers was the state of residence. For the first time in the history of this study, all 50 states were represented [Figure 20, created with mapchart.net]. There has been no change in the order of states with the most participants: New York (214), California (125), Illinois (80), Florida (60), and Massachusetts (48).

Figure 20: State of Residence (United States)

(n=1,208)



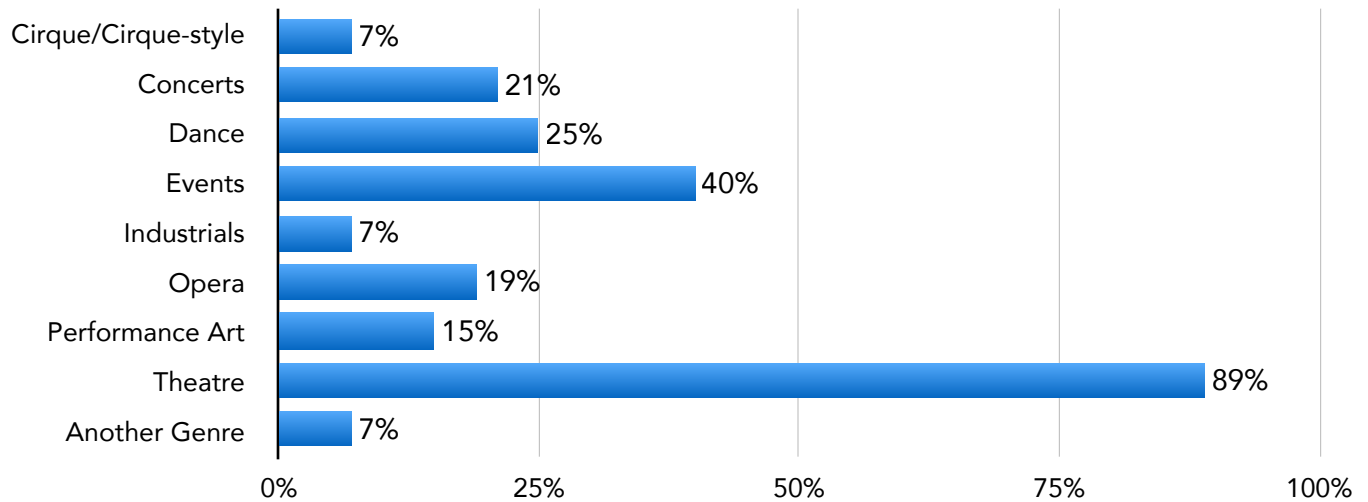


## SECTION II: STAGE MANAGEMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Survey participants have managed a wide array of live productions; **Figure 21** lists the art forms/genres worked from October 2021 to October 2023. When asked their choice of genres, 77% of respondents (n=1,863) preferred Theatre, followed by Opera (6%), Dance (4%), and Events (4%).

Figure 21: Art Forms/Genres of Stage Management Work in the Past Two Years

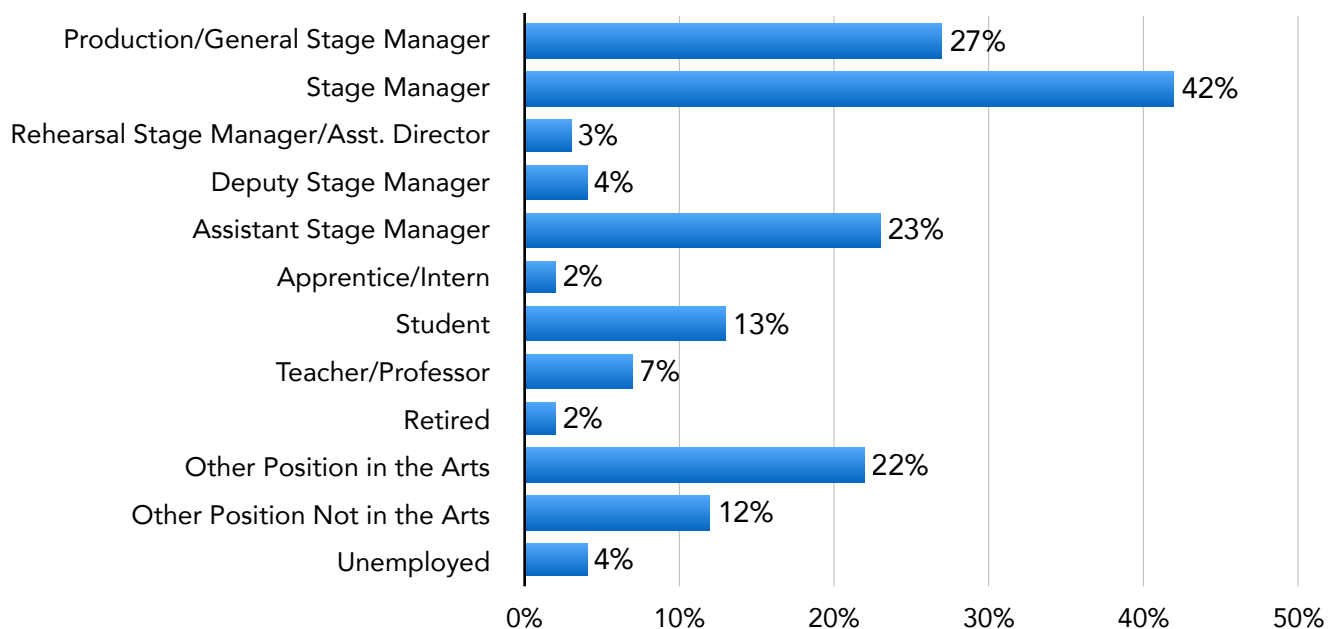
(n=1,847)



Participants were asked their current occupation [**Figure 22**] and could select more than one response. As perhaps a sign of improved employment opportunities, the 2023 survey saw increases in the Stage Manager and Assistant Stage Manager categories and decreases in the Other Position Not in the Arts and Unemployed categories.

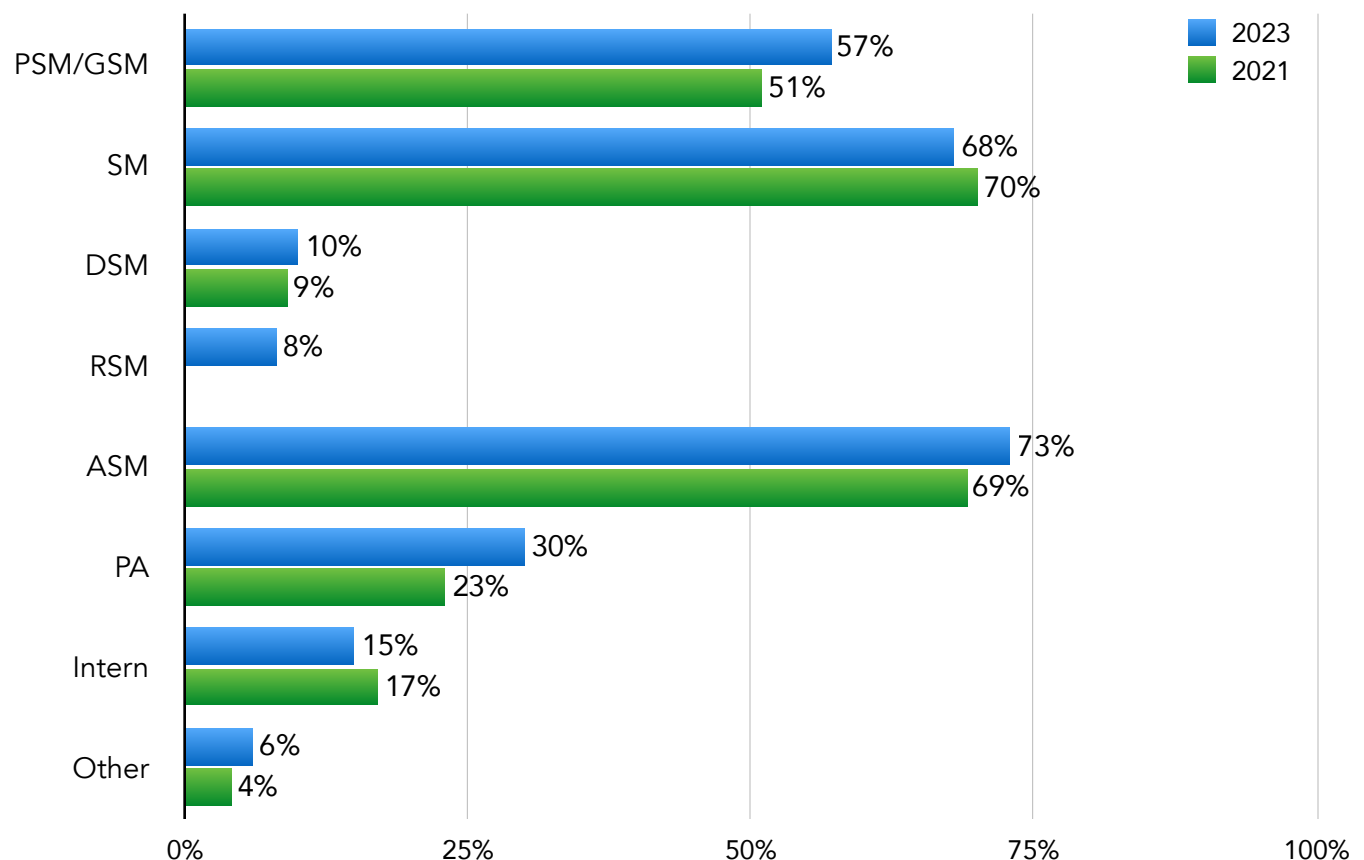
Figure 22: Current Occupation

(n=1,864)



Participants were asked which role they preferred on a stage management team. Among 1,865 responses, 39% preferred Stage Manager (SM), 28% Production/General Stage Manager (PSM), 20% Assistant Stage Manager (ASM), 5% Deputy Stage Manager (DSM), 2% no preference, 1% Rehearsal Stage Manager/Assistant Director (RSM), and 1% listed other roles such as Company Stage Manager, Showcaller, and the German role Inspizient. But not all roles are available on each production. **Figure 23** indicates that stage management teams are more likely to include an ASM or PA than two years ago, but several participants noted that their teams are still smaller than before the pandemic and others noted that in their country it is common for the stage manager to work alone. The "Other" category included a wide range of roles (Company Stage Manager, Assistant Direct, etc.) but none that equaled at least 1% of total responses.

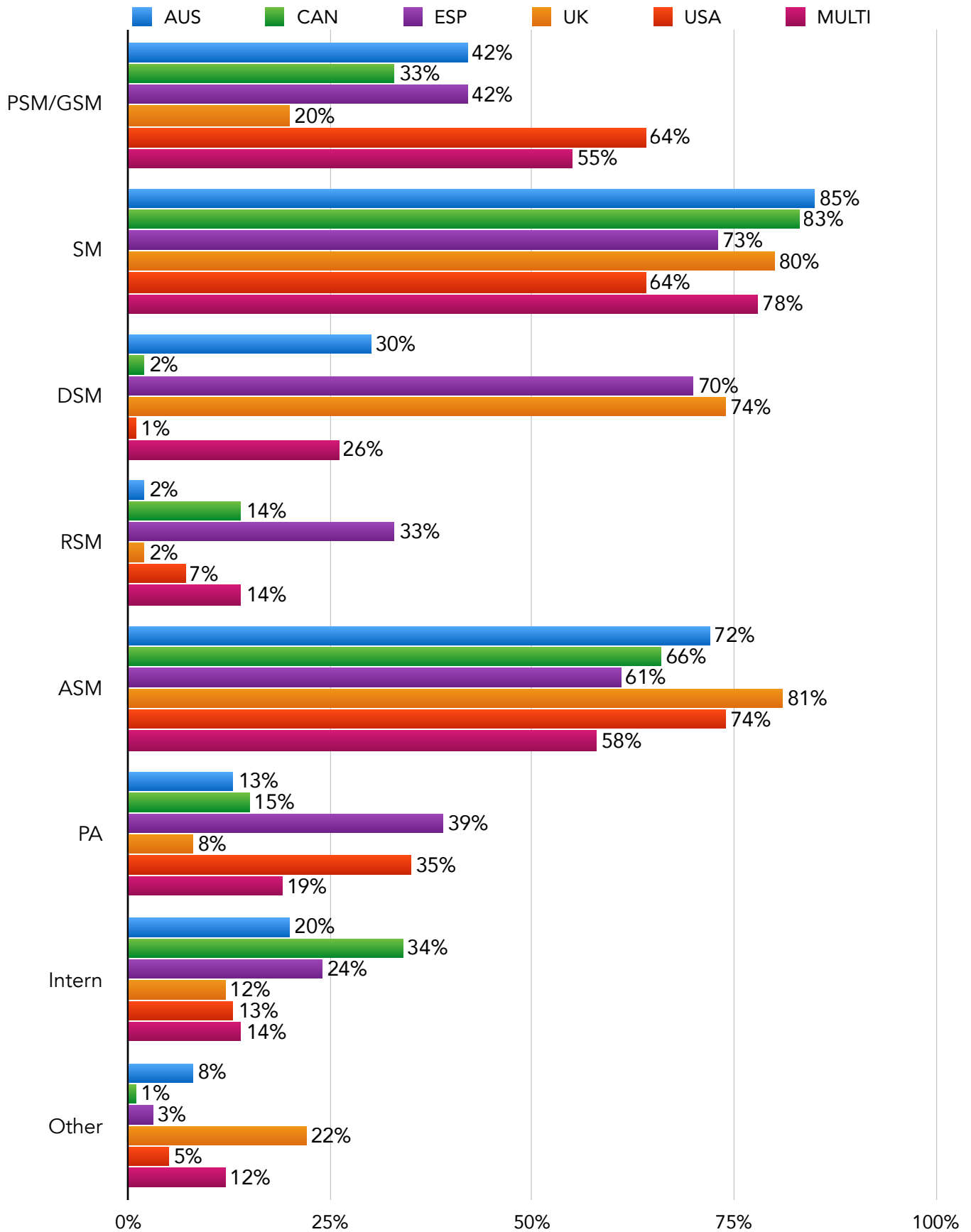
Figure 23: Stage Management Positions on Most Recent Project (2021 n=1,114, 2023 n=1,759)



Moreover, some stage management roles are more common in certain countries and regions **[Figure 24]**: the Deputy Stage Manager in the United Kingdom and Spain, the Rehearsal Stage Manager/Assistant Director in Spain and Canada, the Intern/Apprentice in Canada, and the Production Assistant in Spain and the United States. These comparisons are based on 60 responses from Australia, 125 from Canada, 33 from Spain, 127 from the United Kingdom, 1,315 from the United States, and 91 from the Multinational group.

Figure 24: Stage Management Positions on Most Recent Project by Country

(n= see text)

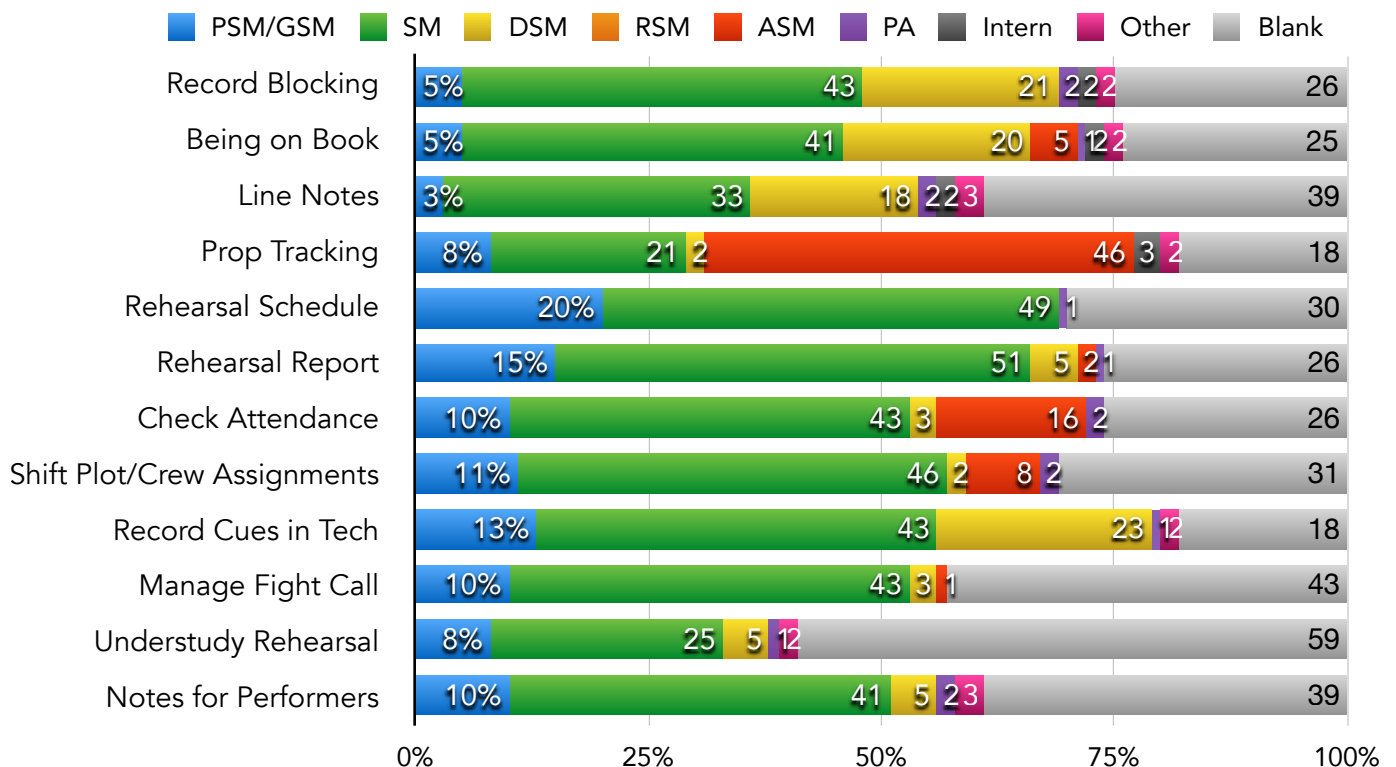


Not only do position titles vary by country, but so do the responsibilities of each position. **Figures 25 - 30** examine a dozen responsibilities for the stage management team and which position is most likely to be assigned that responsibility. If the responsibility is not part of the participant’s most recent production (e.g., there were no understudies) or if it is not normally handled by stage management (the director rehearses understudies), it is listed as blank (grey). Note that the SM title will appear to have many responsibilities if the “team” is just a single stage manager.

One limitation of Figures 25-30 is that responses are based on the participant’s most recent project: if the most recent project was not theatrical, perhaps a musical concert or a dance piece, many of these responsibilities would not apply. Nevertheless, several observations can be made about generalized regional differences:

- While the Australian and Spanish participants also reported use of the Deputy Stage Manager, this position is predominantly used in the United Kingdom and many of these dozen responsibilities fall to this position.
- The Canadian stage management teams assign the most responsibilities to the SM position; the Spanish teams assign the fewest to this position. It is possible, but not confirmed, that more Canadian projects use single stage managers rather than teams. This scenario might also explain the high use of the SM position among the Multinational participants.
- Based on the high percentage of “blank” responses on the Spanish chart, stage management in Spain focuses on a different set of responsibilities.
- Canadian and American participants noted the most use of the ASM position for these specific responsibilities.

Figure 25: Responsibilities by Position on Most Recent Project - Australia (n= 61)



(n= 125)

Figure 26: Responsibilities by Position on Most Recent Project - Canada

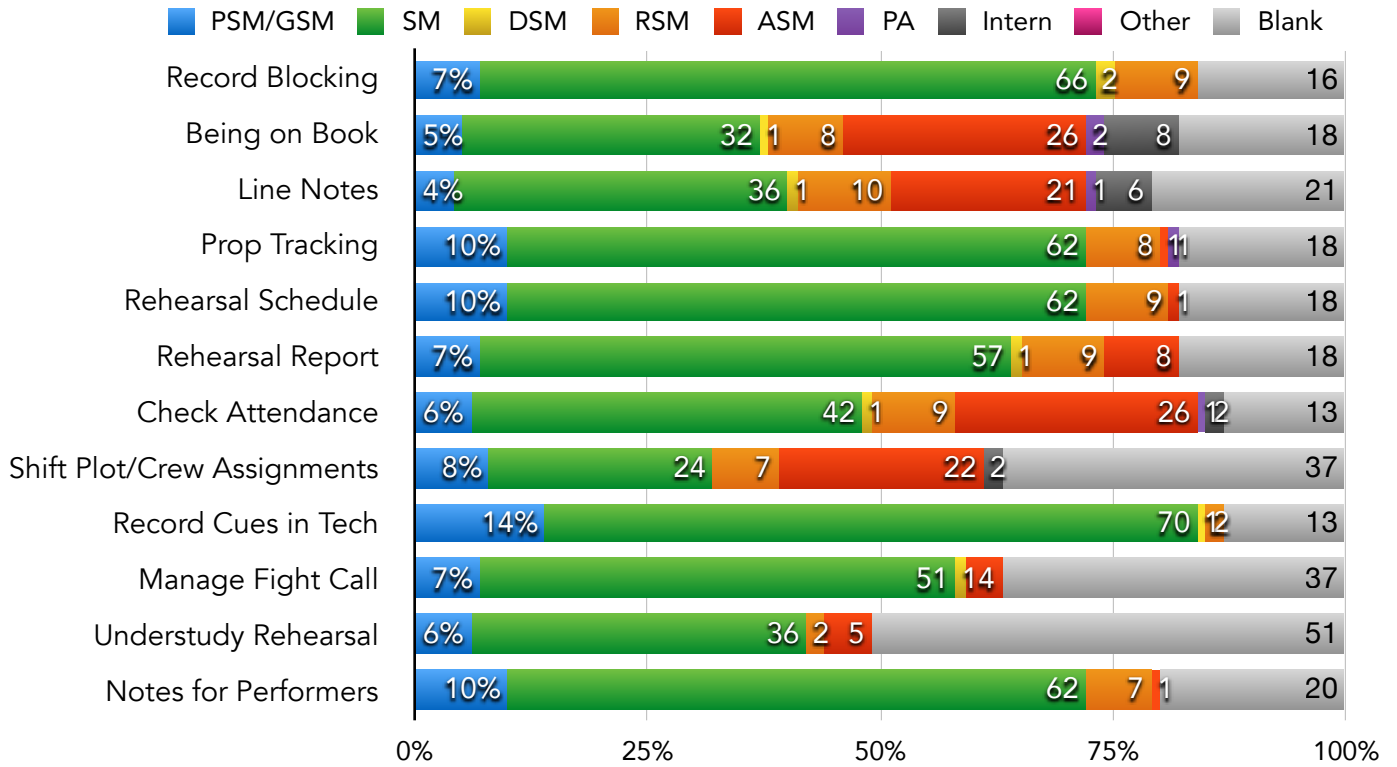


Figure 27: Responsibilities by Position on Most Recent Project - Spain

(n= 33)

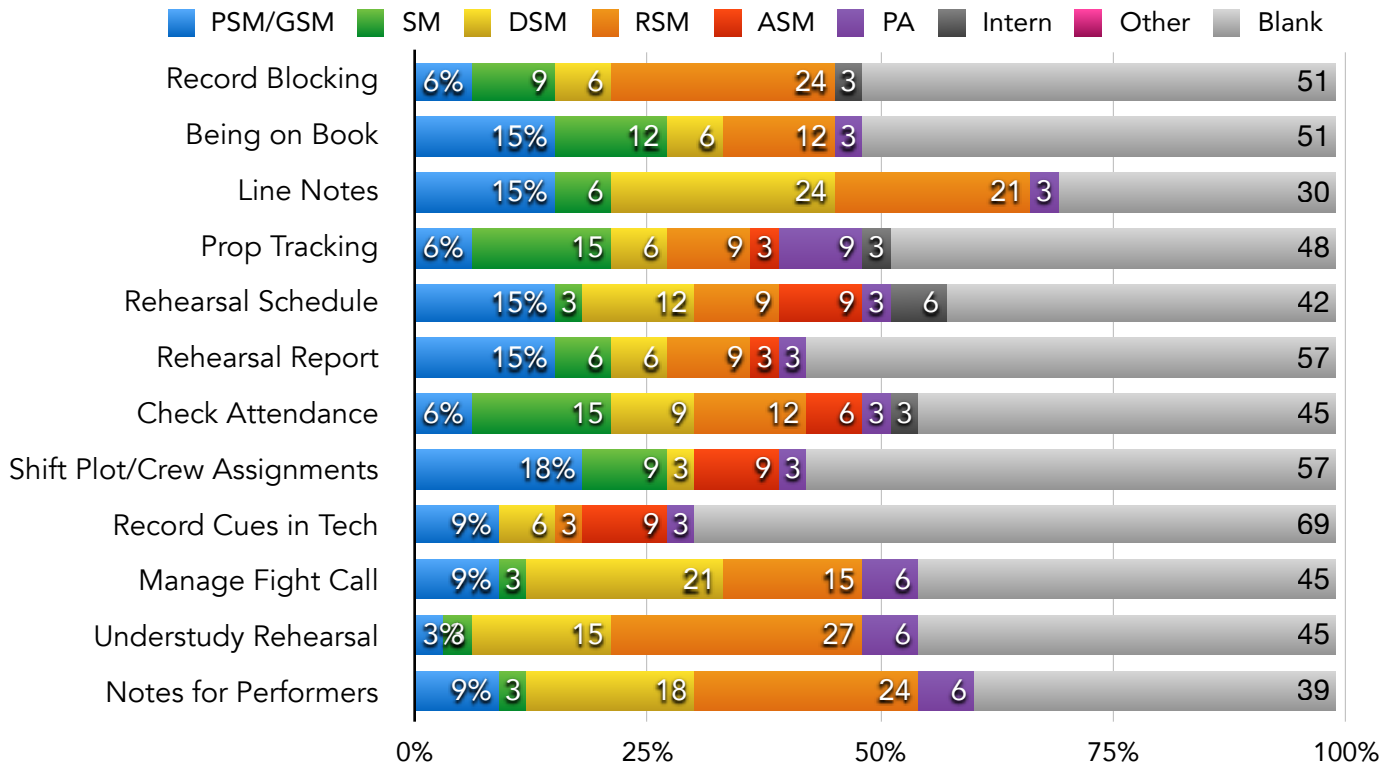


Figure 28: Responsibilities by Position on Most Recent Project - United Kingdom

(n= 128)

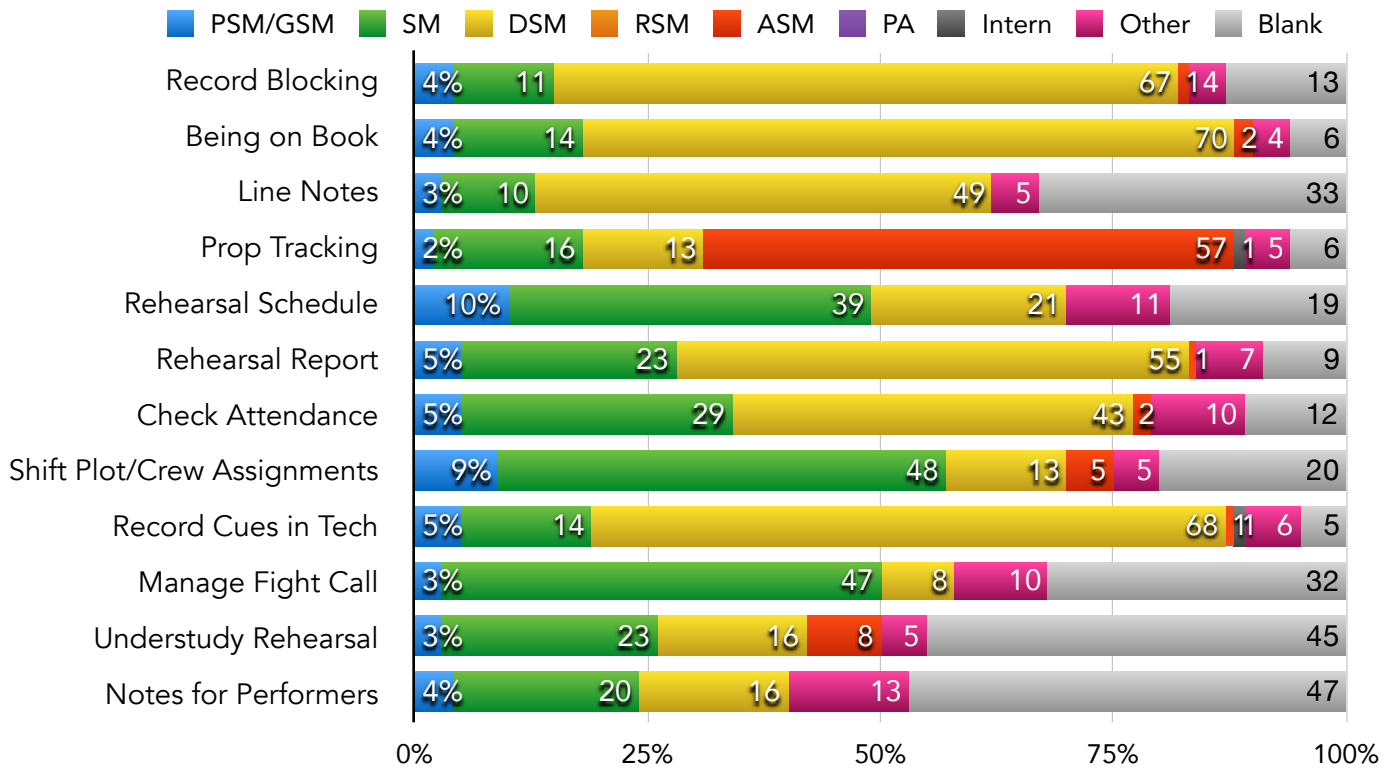


Figure 29: Responsibilities by Position on Most Recent Project - United States

(n= 1,533)

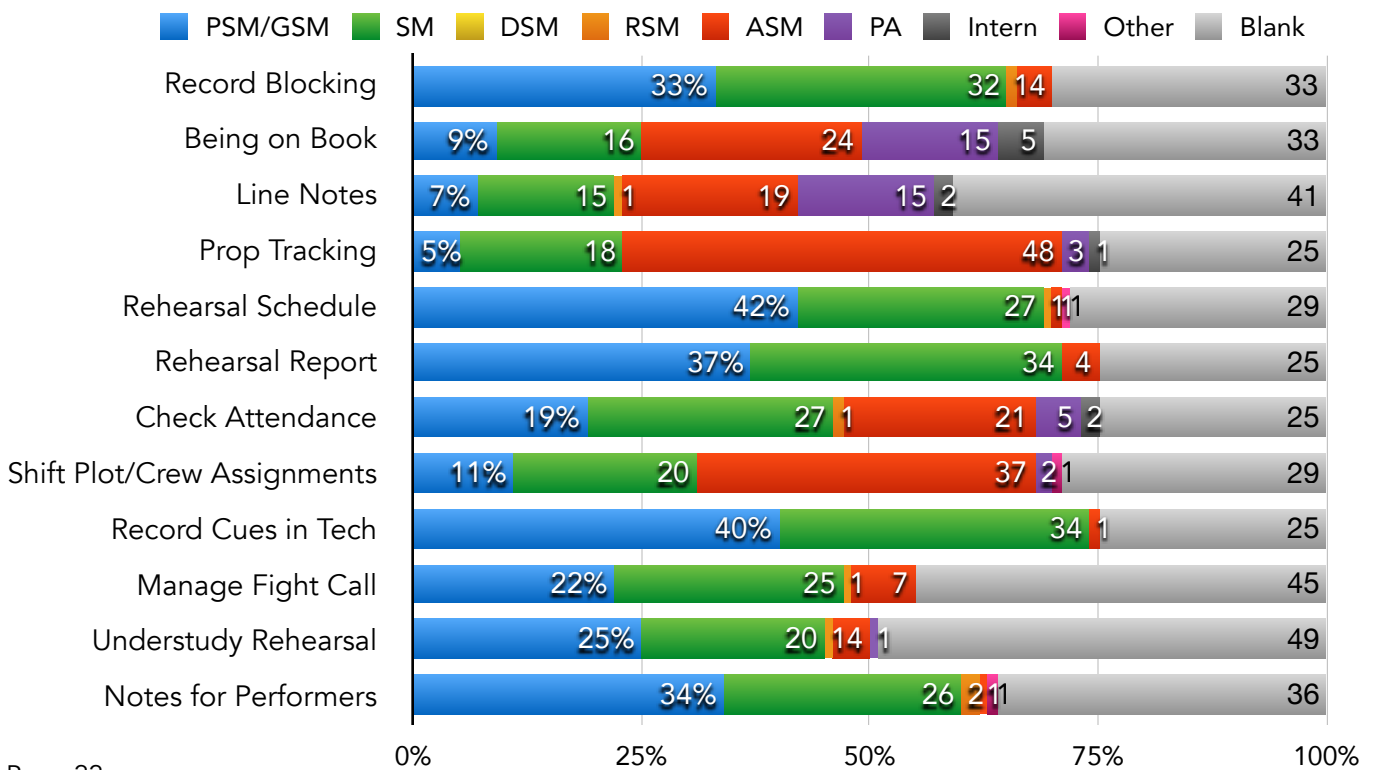
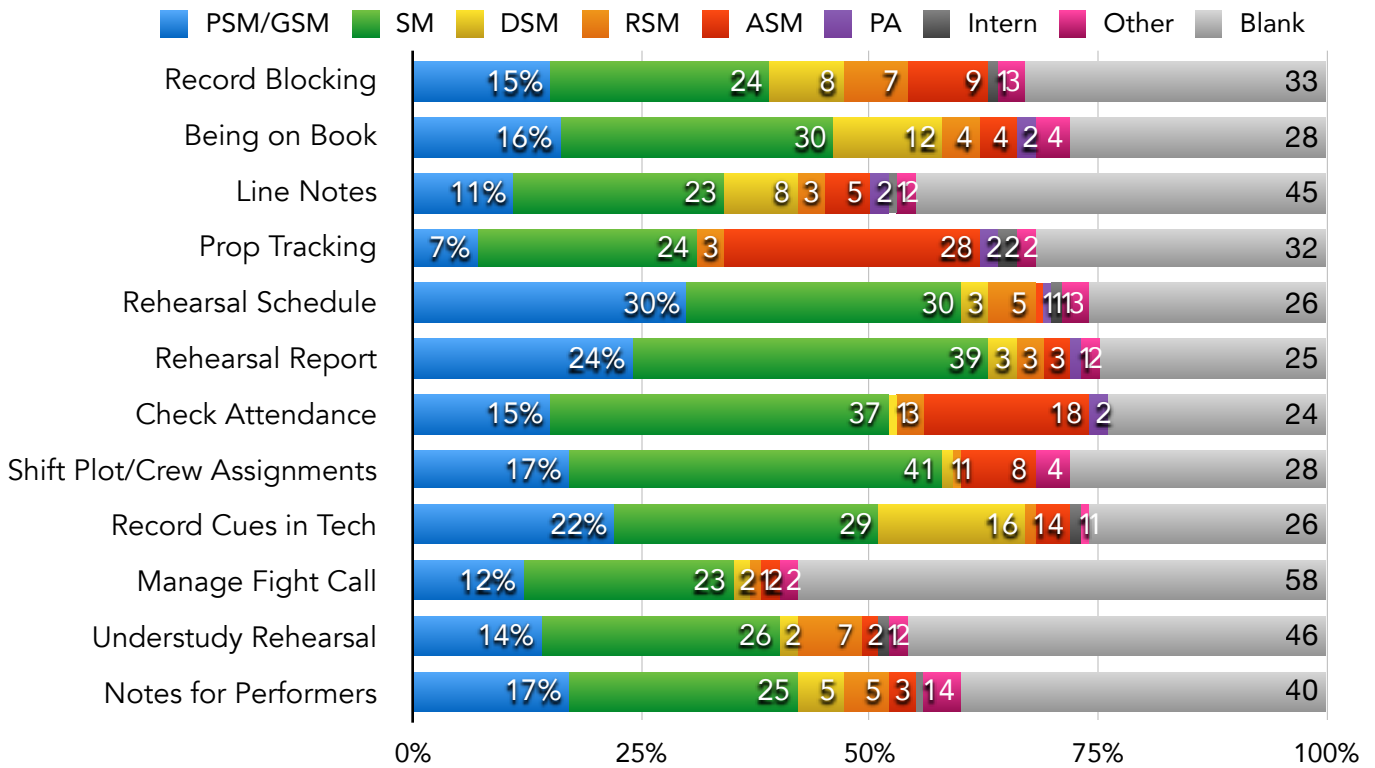


Figure 30: Responsibilities by Position on Most Recent Project - Multinational

(n= 92)



The responsibility most associated with stage management is calling cues: 83% of 1,981 participants confirmed that they call cues to their crews. Canadian and Spanish participants reported the practice most often (92%), followed by American (84%), Australian (80%), Multinational (79%), and participants in the United Kingdom (69%). Age (and years of experience) directly align with likelihood of calling cues: the likelihood steadily rises from 68% for Under 21 years old to 96% of participants over age 60. Interestingly, reports of cue calling vary by gender identity: 90% of male-identifying, 83% of female-identifying, and 74% of non-binary-identifying participants.

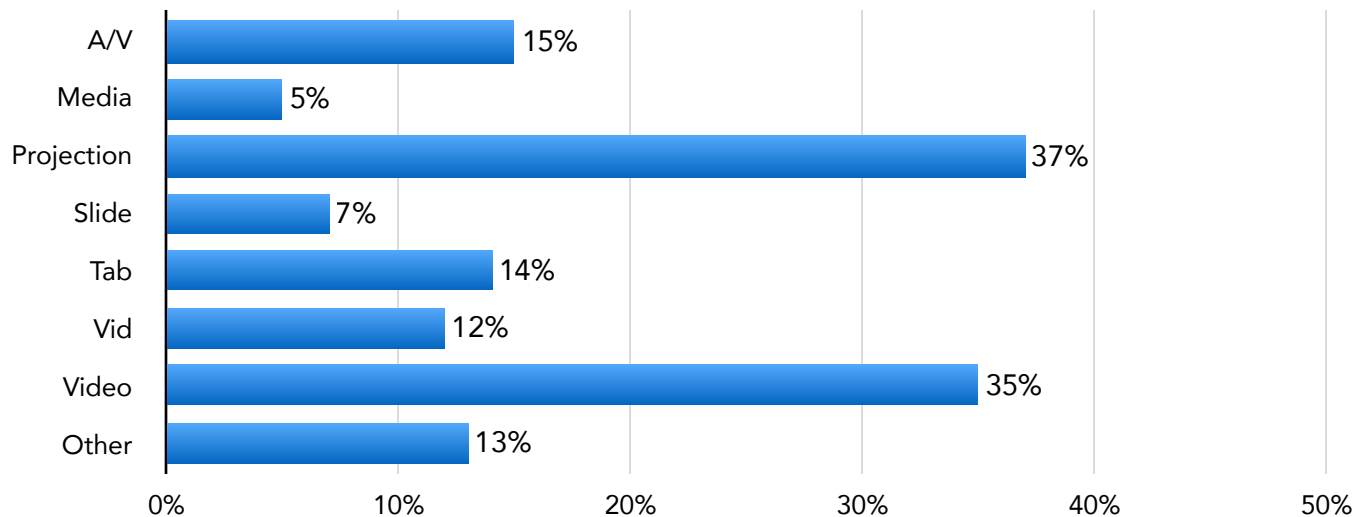
Survey participants were asked how the cues appeared in the script on their most recent project. Among 1,380 responses, 66% chose hand-written, 23% typed and printed cue scripts, 22% chose "Sticky Note/Sticker/Flag," and 20% typed cues into a digital calling script. While the question was limited to the most recent script, participants could select more than one answer. Other approaches included spreadsheets, handwritten cues on digital tablets, software such as ShoFlo and StageWrite, and handwritten cues transferred to a digital copy after opening the show.

While "Standby" is the preferred term for "the announcement prior to calling a cue" in the United States (over 90% in 2021), it is also the preferred term globally: among 440 non-US-based stage managers, 86% use Standby, 9% use Warning, and 1% use Ready. Other terms include Achtung, Attentie, Prevenido, Varsel, and Attention.

While “Standby” has increased in usage over the years, the calling name for “cues that include projections and/or video” is still up for debate. For **Figure 31**, participants could choose more than one term. Projection has overtaken Video in popularity, but no term is anywhere near a majority. In addition, many noted under “Other” that these cues are often run through either a sound program (i.e., Qlab) or the light board, so the cues are labeled as such. Additional terms used are Graphics, Millumin, Multi-media, Playback, and VT depending upon the format.

Figure 31: Terminology for Project and Video Cues

(n= 1,377)



Another method of communicating cues to crew members (as well as performers) is a cue light system: small lights at crew positions or the edges of the stage that the person calling cues triggers directly by buttons or switches. Among 1,662 responses, 73% of participants have used cue lights. Geographically, stage managers in the United Kingdom are most likely to have used them (91%), followed by Spain (75%), the United States (73%), the Multinational grouping (69%), Canada (65%), and Australia (59%).

Being able to read musical scores is essential for some stage management projects but not as necessary in others. While there is no proficiency test for being able to read music, the survey asked participants their comfort level [**Figure 32**] and their training [**Figure 33**] in this skill. While those with higher levels of stage management education also reported higher levels of musical training, it is possible that this training happened outside of their stage management studies. Those who were able to pursue formal studies in stage management may have also had more music education opportunities growing up.



Figure 32: Comfort Level in Reading Music

(n=1,691)

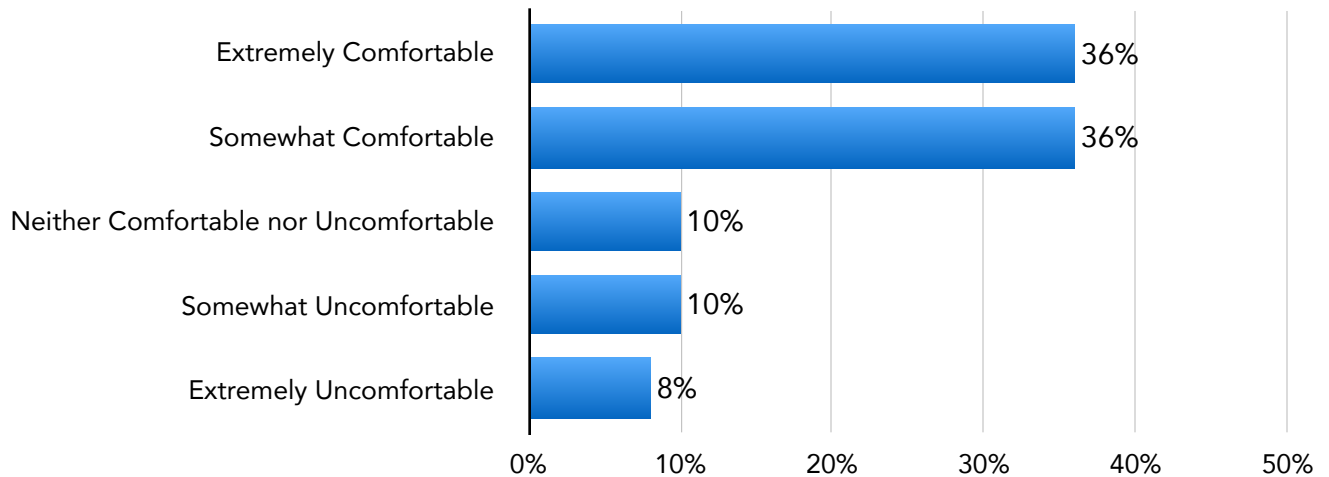
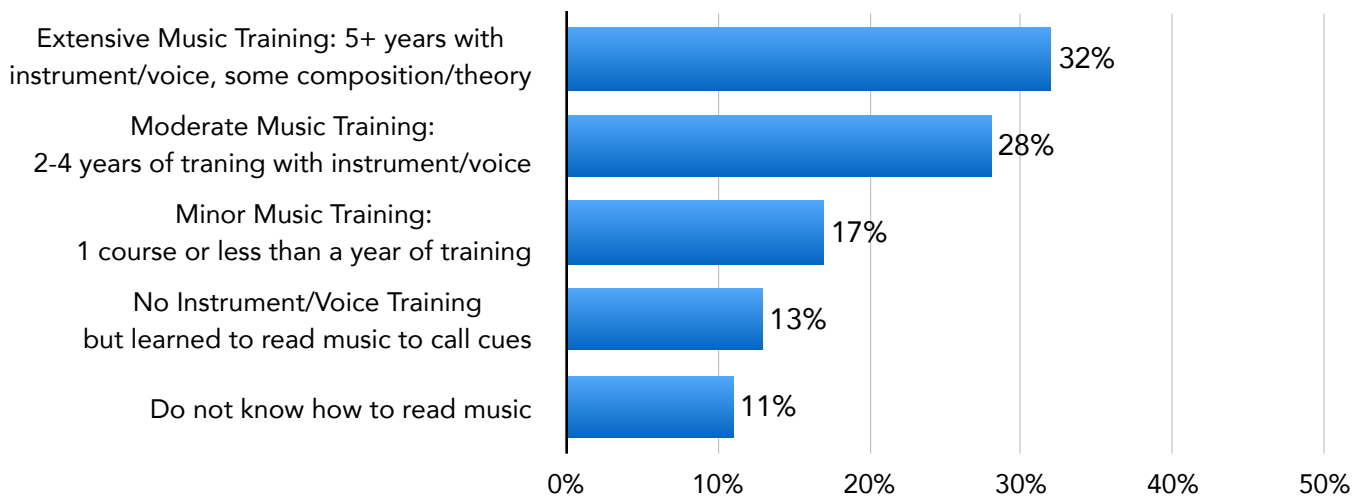


Figure 33: Training in Reading Music

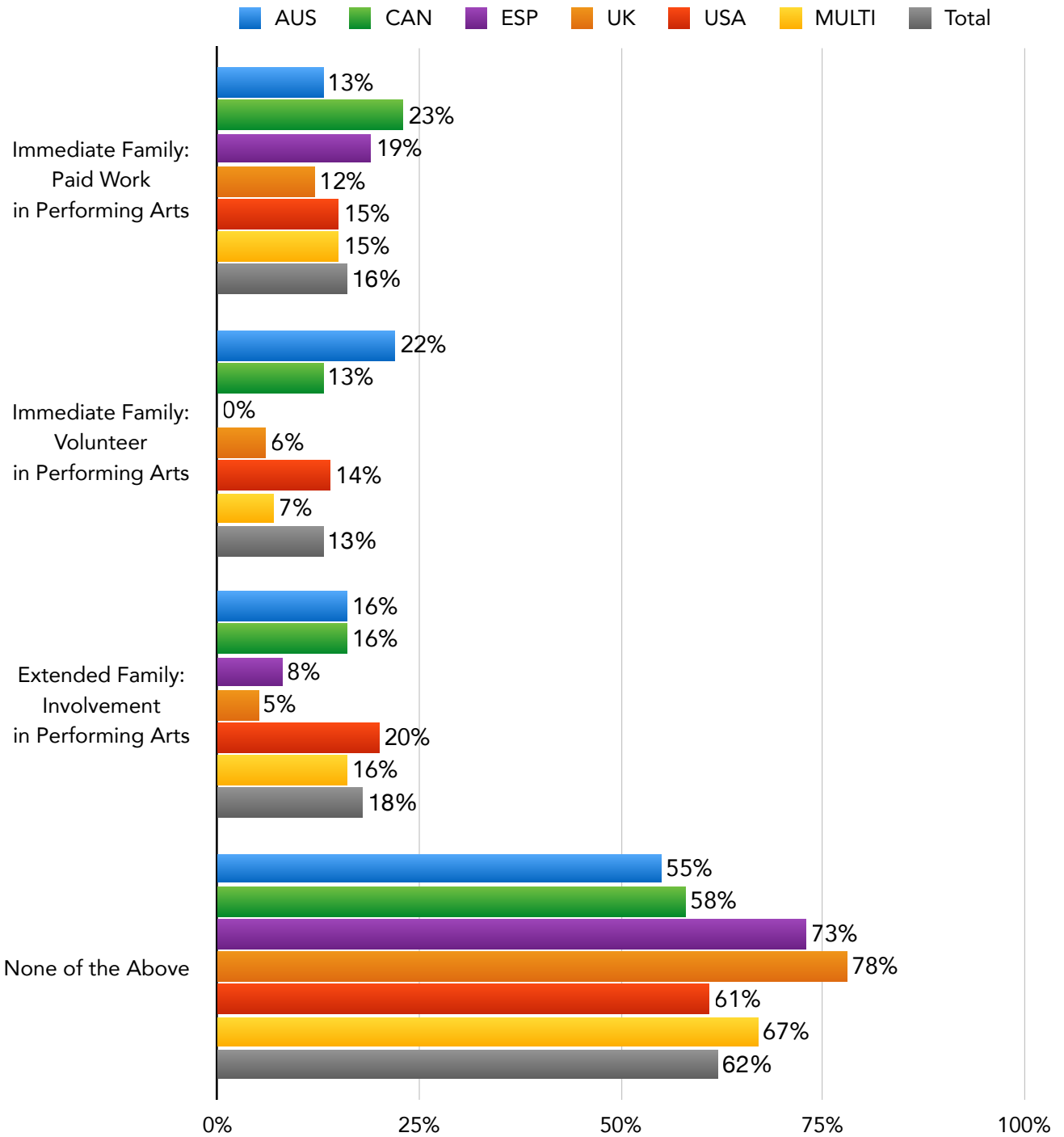
(n=1,692)



To further examine the impact of the childhood environment on a career in stage management, survey participants were asked about any family connections to the performing arts **[Figure 34]** and their pre-university access to art **[Figure 35]**. For both these questions, participants were asked to indicate all connections and art-based activities that apply and the data is reported by geography. For these questions, the participation counts for Figures 34/35 were Australia: 55, Canada: 118, Spain: 26, UK: 124, USA: 1,277/1,278, and Multinational: 82.

Figure 34: Family Connections to the Performing Arts

(Total n=1,682)



Analyzing the family connections by age bracket, there is no identifiable trend: the 41-50 year age bracket had the highest percentage of no family connections (65%), but both the 31-40 and 51-60 brackets had some of the lowest percentages. Male-identifying stage managers had the highest percentage of no family connections (68%), followed by female (61%) and non-binary 59%.

Figure 35: Access to the Arts Growing Up (Pre-University)

(Total n=1,682)

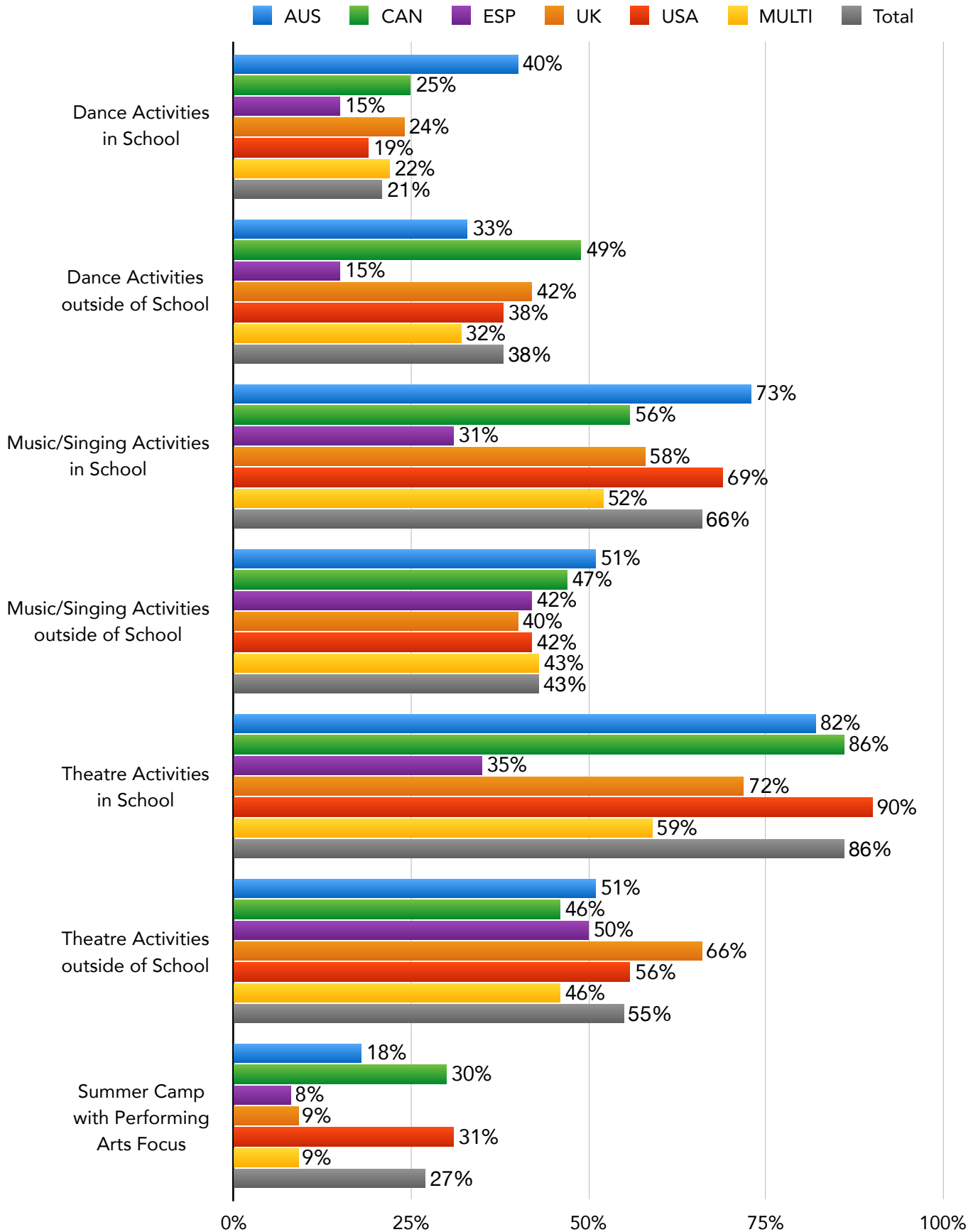


Figure 35 can be used to compare the in-school versus outside-school access to participation in the performing arts. The dark grey Total category is based on all responses, so it is weighted with the larger number of American responses. Australian participants reported the most access to dance and music activities within their educational systems while Spanish participants reported the least. Summer camps in the performing arts appear to be a North American phenomenon. And, as to be expected, there is a very strong alignment between participating in music/singing activities in school with training in reading music (n=1,119).

These questions about family connections and childhood access to the arts relate to an ongoing discussion about whether careers in stage management are restricted to those with financial resources. In the United Kingdom, this discussion has included debates about the educational system whereas in the United States the conversation often has been about the impact of unpaid or underpaid internships. Another way to examine whether people can afford to become stage managers is to examine how much financial support participants received from their families, spouses, or partners at the start of their careers. Among 1,424 responses, 10% reported receiving support for all of their cost of living expenses whereas 32% reported no financial support when they began their careers. **Figure 36** examines financial support by country grouping and **Figure 37** compares responses by age bracket. The response rates for Figure 36 were Australia: 49, Canada: 110, Spain: 23, United Kingdom: 103, United States: 1,059, and Multinational: 73. Figure 37 does not include the Under 21 age bracket as the total responses from that age grouping were too small and includes both minors and those living independently. While the lower levels of financial support (<25% and 25-49% categories) do not vary much by age bracket, No Support and the higher levels of financial support show a clear trend over time.

Figure 36: Financial Support Received at Start of Career by Country

(n=see text)

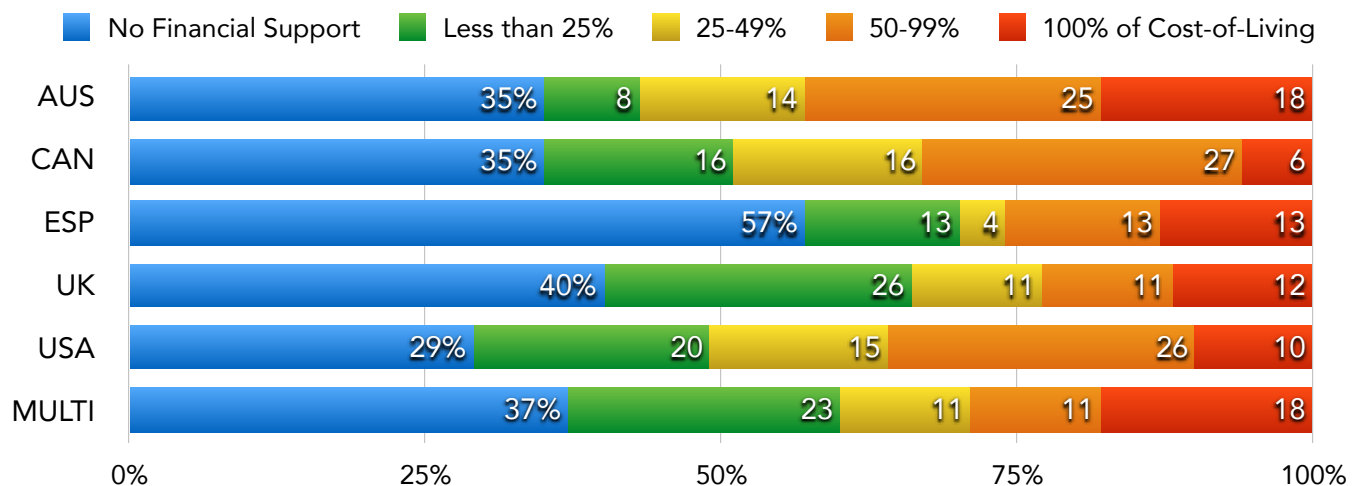
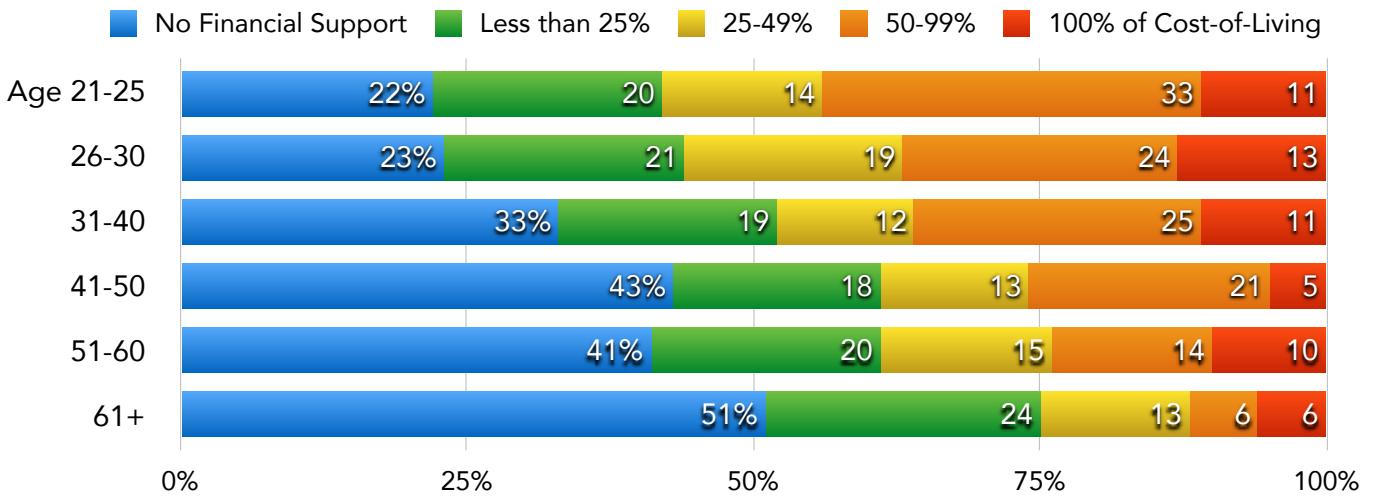


Figure 37: Financial Support Received at Start of Career by Age Bracket

(n=1,389)



As we consider the financial support that a stage manager receives, it is also important to consider whether the stage manager is financially supporting others. This question was only given to participants who identified their current occupation as PSM, SM, DSM, RSM, or ASM. **Figure 38** compares the number of people dependent upon the stage manager’s salary by country grouping (AUS n=35, CAN n=87, ESP n=22, UK n=95, USA n=889, MULTI n=66). A dependent could be a child or spouse, but it could also be a parent or extended family member. This data can be compared to the 11% of participants who stated they had children or dependents under age 18 (page 12). The count of None, Only Myself responses may be underreported, particularly in the United States, as a number of participants did not answer this question. **Figure 39** cross-references the number of dependents by the stage manager’s gender identity. It may also be useful to examine salary levels (Section III) as they may impact whether a stage manager chooses to have children.

Figure 38: Number of People Dependent Upon Participant’s Salary by Country

(n=see text)

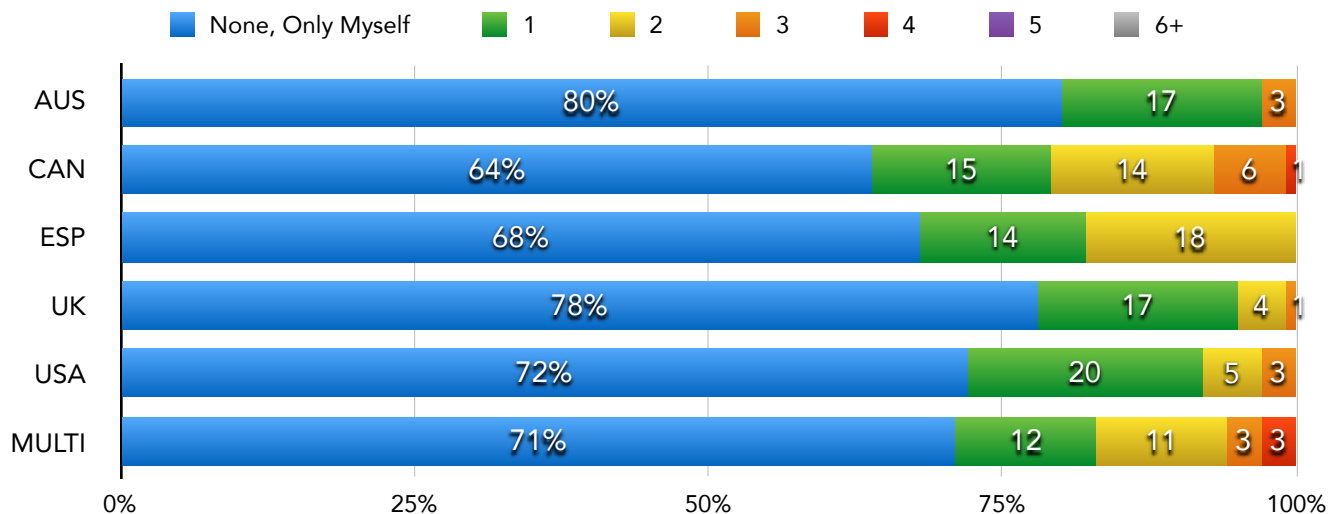
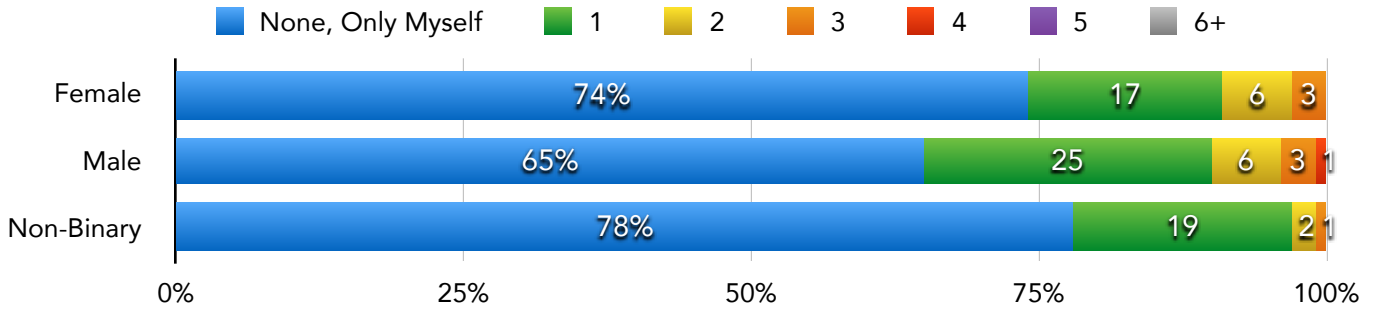


Figure 39: Number of People Dependent Upon Participant's Salary by Gender

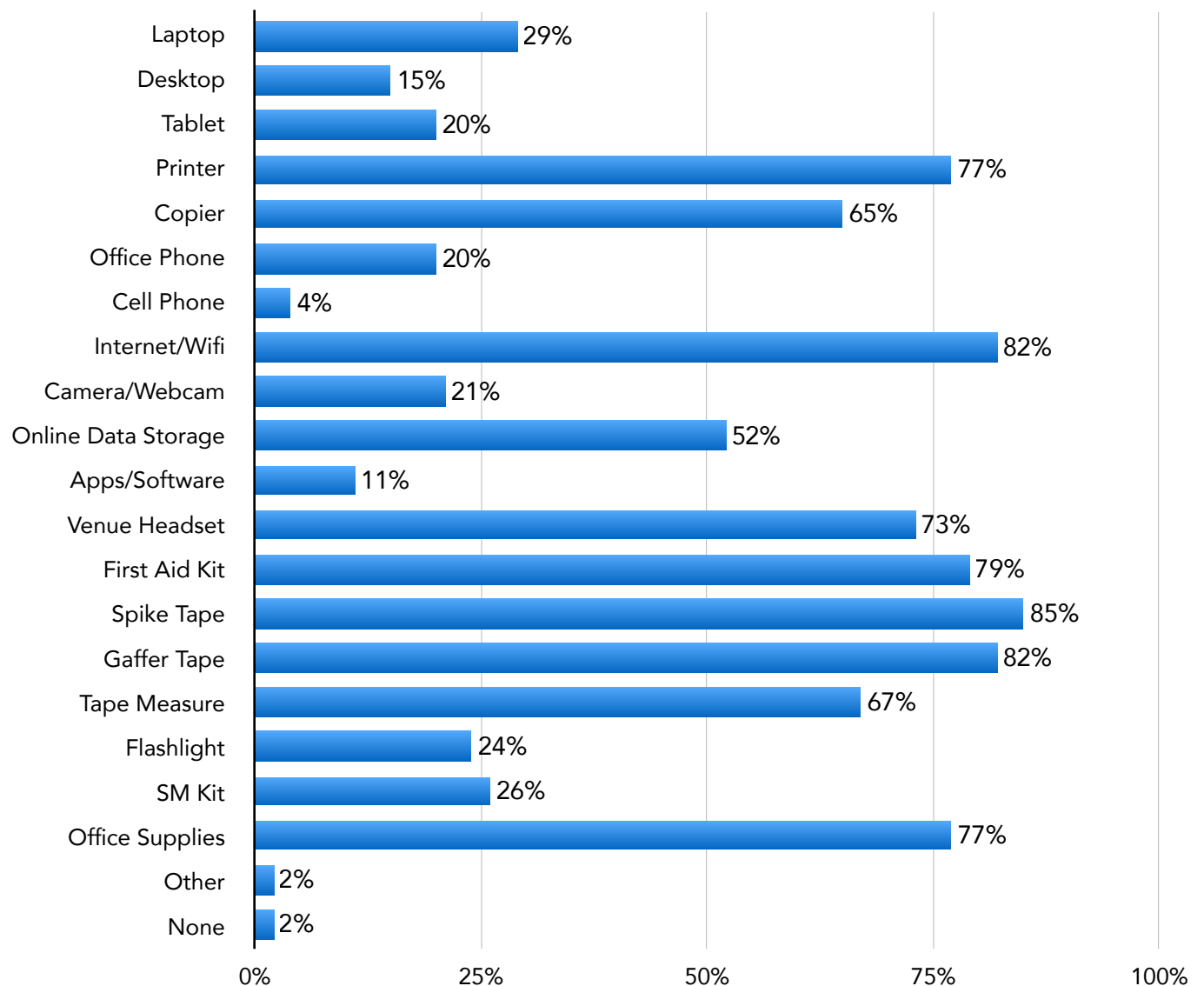
(n=1,178)



The ability to support dependents may also be connected to the expenses of doing one's job. Participants were asked, based on their most recent production, what technical equipment was provided by the producer.

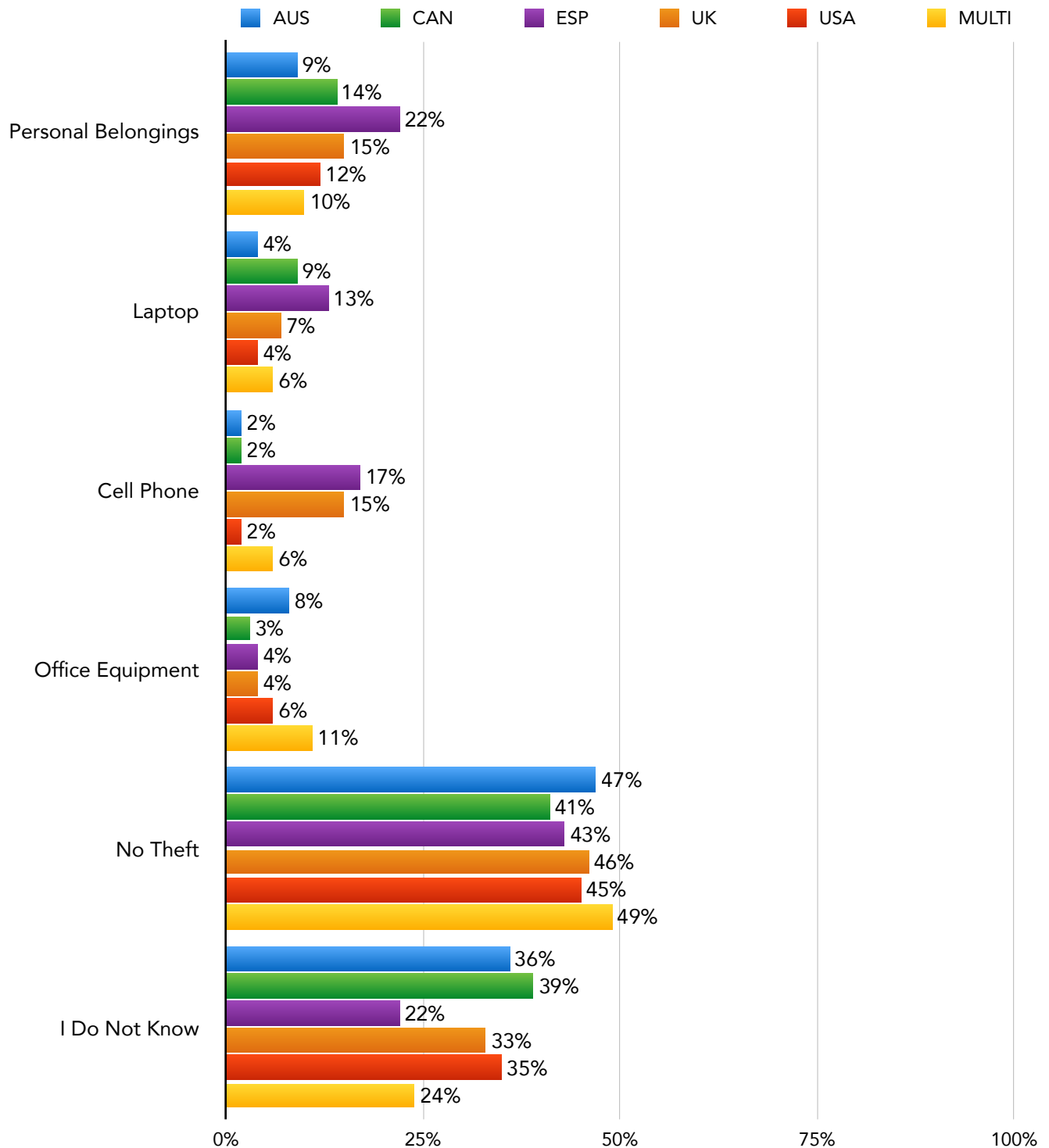
Figure 40: Technical Equipment Provided by Most Recent Producer

(n=1,448)



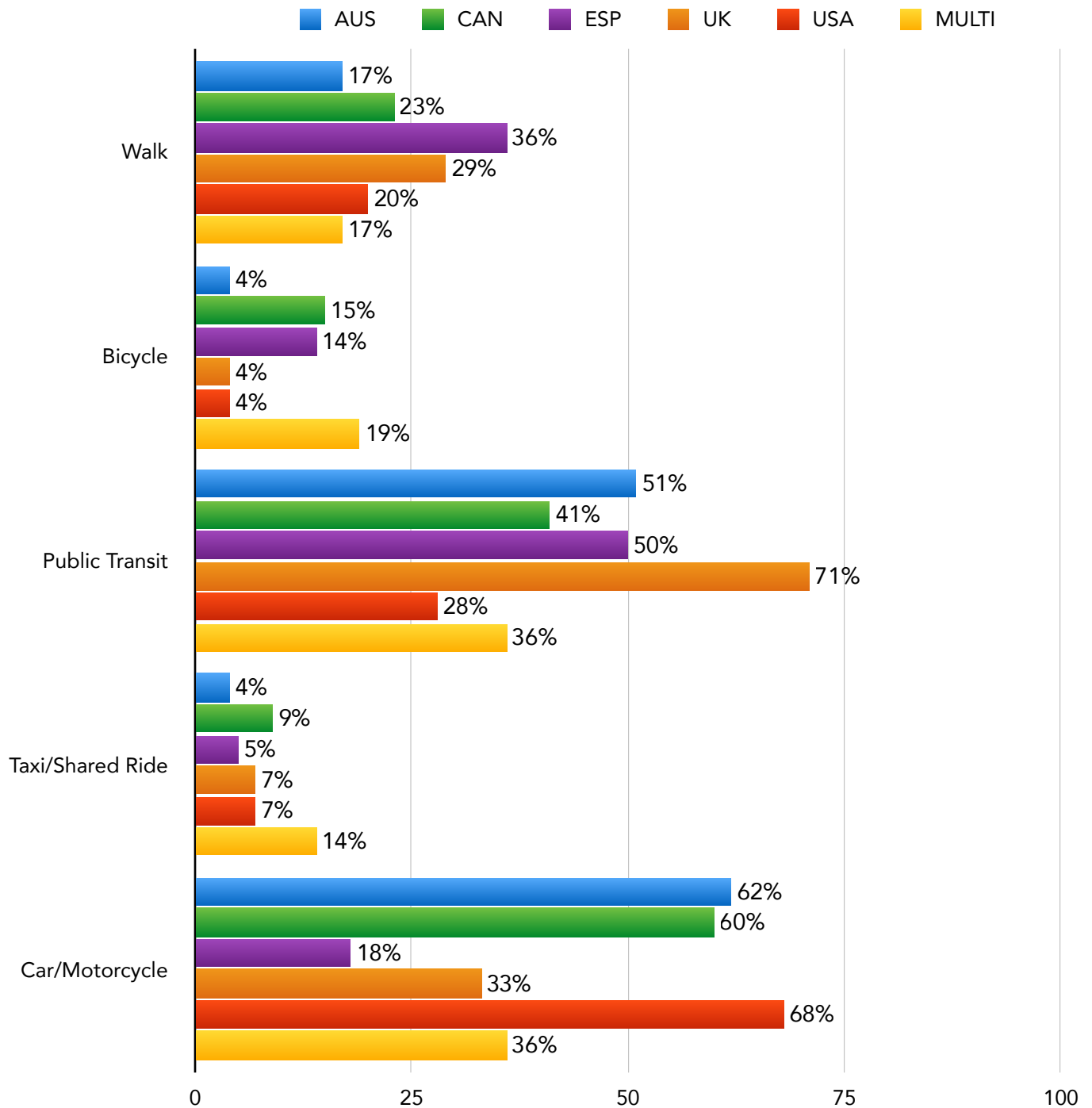
Survey participants were also asked about workplace theft, including both personal items and technical equipment owned by the producer. While 46% of participants (n=1,599) reported no theft and another 33% did not know whether theft had occurred, **Figure 41** breaks down workplace theft by country (AUS n=53, CAN n=115, ESP n=23, UK n=117, USA n=1,219, MULTI n=72).

Figure 41: Theft in the Workplace in Past 5 Years by Country (n=see text)



Survey participants were also asked several questions about daily life while working. **Figure 42** displays how participants commuted to their most recent stage management job (AUS n=47, CAN n=103, ESP n=22, UK n=102, USA n=1,046, MULTI n=70). Some participants used a combination of transportation options. Indirectly, transportation methods can also provide clues as to the number of stage managers working in urban areas that provide public transportation. Four percent of the total responses listed other methods such producer-provided transportation on tour, no commute due to working on cruises or online, carpooling, and scooters.

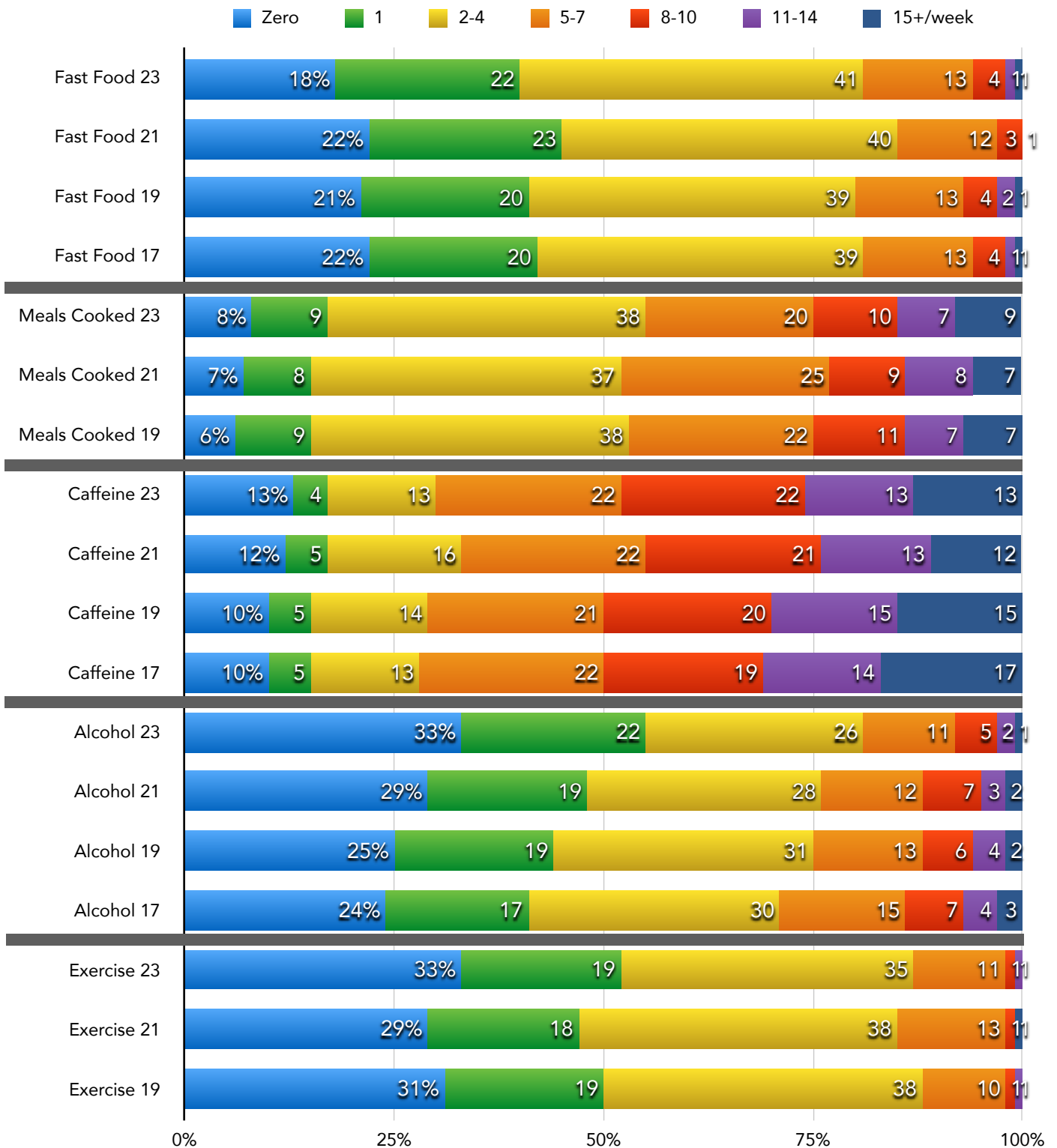
Figure 42: Method of Work Commute on Most Recent SM Job (n=see text)





**Figure 43** indicates consumption of fast food, meals cooked by oneself, caffeine, and alcohol, as well as exercise during a work week. To track how our lives have - and have not - changed, the percentages for 2017 (n=1,497), 2019 (n=1,365), and 2021 (n=1,197) are also included. The survey did not include a global community of stage managers until 2021.

Figure 43: Food/Drink/Exercise in a Regular Work Week by Year (2023 n=1,589)



Stage managers working primarily in the United States were asked if they belonged to a union, as it is a significant factor for questions in the next section of this report. The 1,187 responses were evenly divided: 51% belonged to at least one union while 49% did not. The most represented union was Actors’ Equity Association, which saw 529 members or 45% of responses to this question. Both union/non-union and AEA representation levels were the same as the 2021 survey. Other unions with at least 1% representation were AGMA (7%), IATSE (5%), AGVA (1%), and SAG-AFTRA (1%).

Actors’ Equity Association publishes an annual report that includes self-reported data on the gender identity and race/ethnicity of its members. The same survey that collects this information also asks members if they identify as an actor or stage manager (the union serves both), but the union has never published that information, so it is not possible to determine what percentage of AEA stage managers participate in this study. **Figures 44 and 45** compare the AEA members who took this survey (n=529 for gender, n=515 for race/ethnicity) to the AEA members (both actors and stage managers) who provided demographic information to the 2022-23 AEA Annual Report (n=47,936 for gender, n=40,924 for race/ethnicity).

Figure 44: AEA Gender based on SM Survey and AEA 2022-23 Annual Report (n=see text)

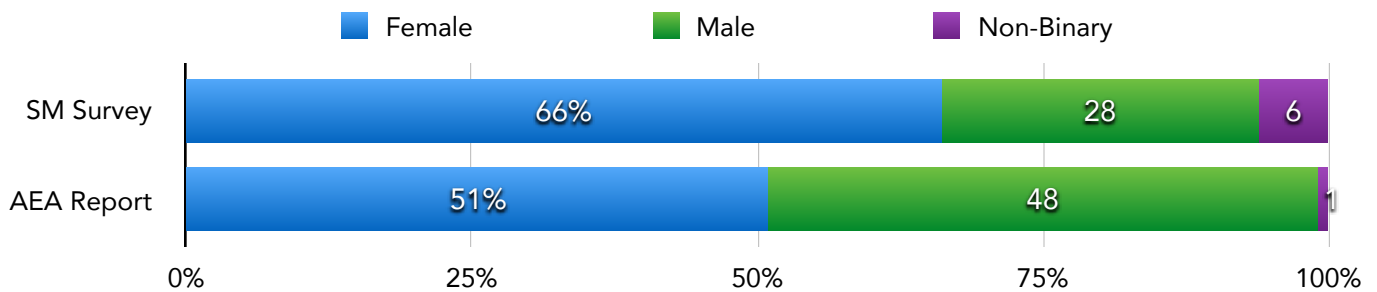
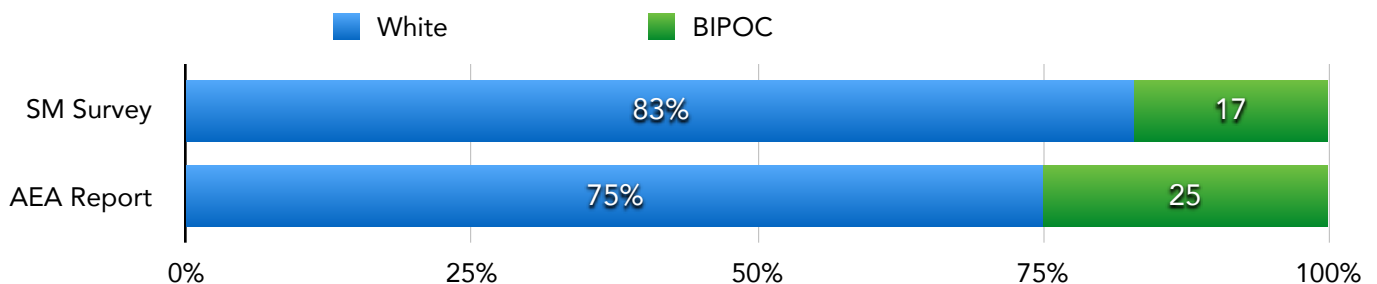


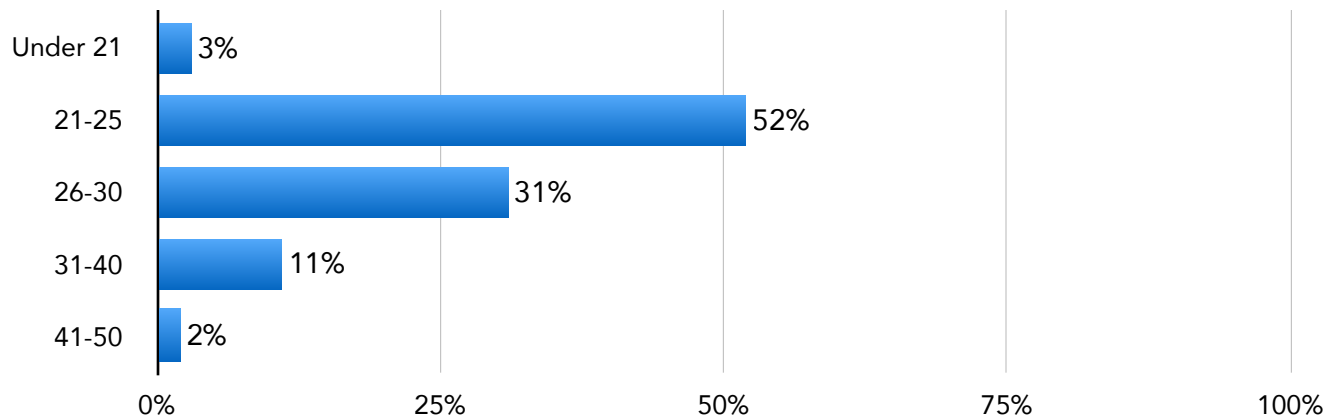
Figure 45: AEA Race/Ethnicity based on SM Survey and AEA 2022-23 Annual Report (n=see text)



American survey participants who were not members of Actors' Equity Association (n=694) were asked about potential future membership: 31% planned to join the union and another 36% were undecided. Since AEA prohibits its members from taking non-union stage management jobs, many stage managers try to gauge the right time in their careers to join. Although less than 1% of members joined after age 50, there were stage managers who joined in their sixties.

Figure 46: Age at joining Actors' Equity Association

(n=529)



### SECTION III: EMPLOYMENT

A worker advocacy group in the United Kingdom published the third Big Freelancer Survey (BFS3) report based on a March-April 2023 online survey of 1,156 participants from a range of professions, including 123 stage managers, in the UK theatre and entertainment industries. The BFS3 asked two questions about income and expenses over the past year that we wanted to replicate in our study using pre-pandemic and present day. **Figures 47 and 48** are divided by country groupings (AUS n=37/39, CAN n=85/89, ESP n=22/21, UK n=76/73, USA n=824/880, MULTI n=60/60). Note: 514 survey participants found this question to not be applicable because they did not work as a stage manager prior to the pandemic or they have since changed professions. The Stage Manager Survey reports a higher percentage experiencing income increases than BFS3 but both show a majority of participants with increased work expenses.

Figure 47: Stage Management Income Compared to Pre-pandemic Levels (n=see text)

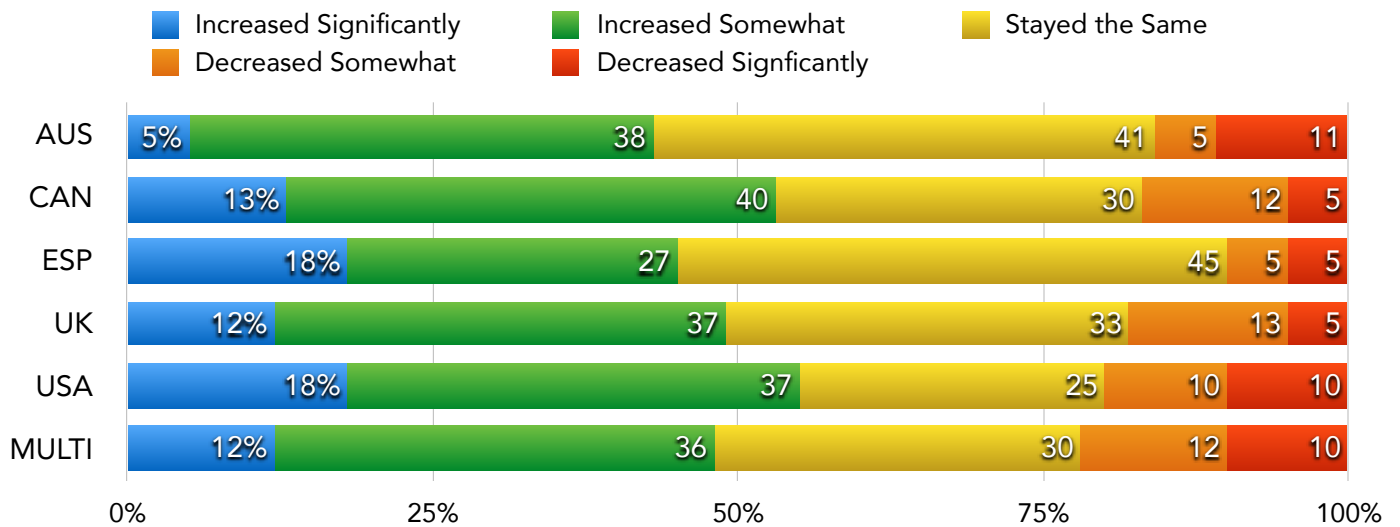
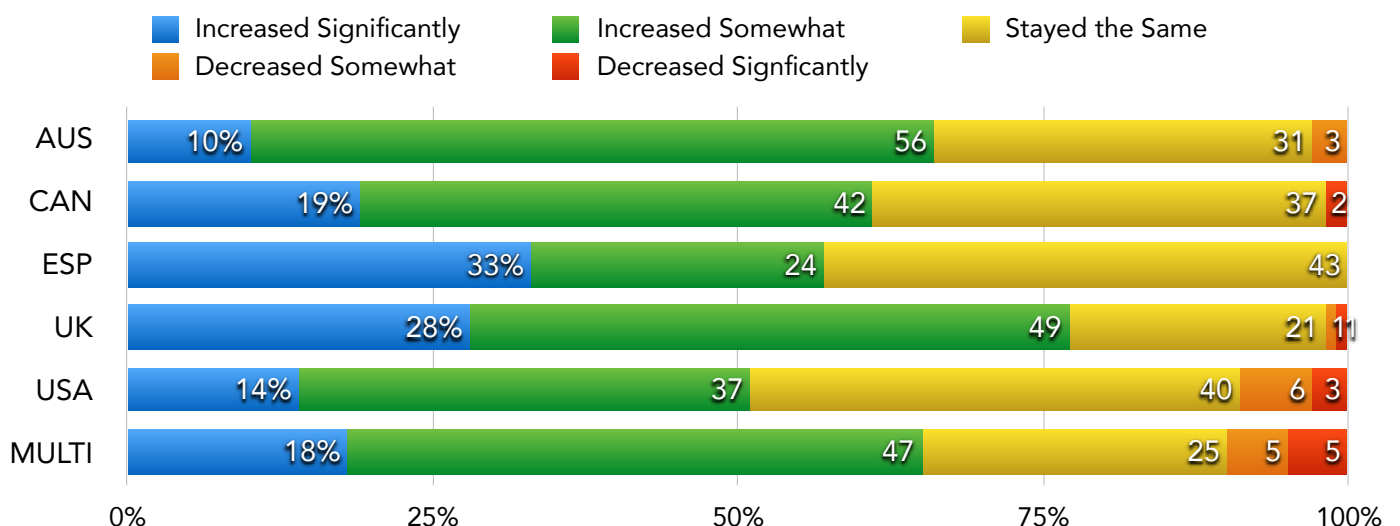


Figure 48: Stage Management Expenses Compared to Pre-pandemic Levels (n=see text)



While it is very encouraging that 56% of survey participants have experienced increases in stage management income, do the increased expenses outweigh the gains? Is stage management income sufficient? As the cost of living varies by country, and often by regions of each country, participants were asked if they believed a stage management salary was sufficient to afford four potential life events.

Figure 49: Affordable on a Stage Management Salary - Australia (n=35)

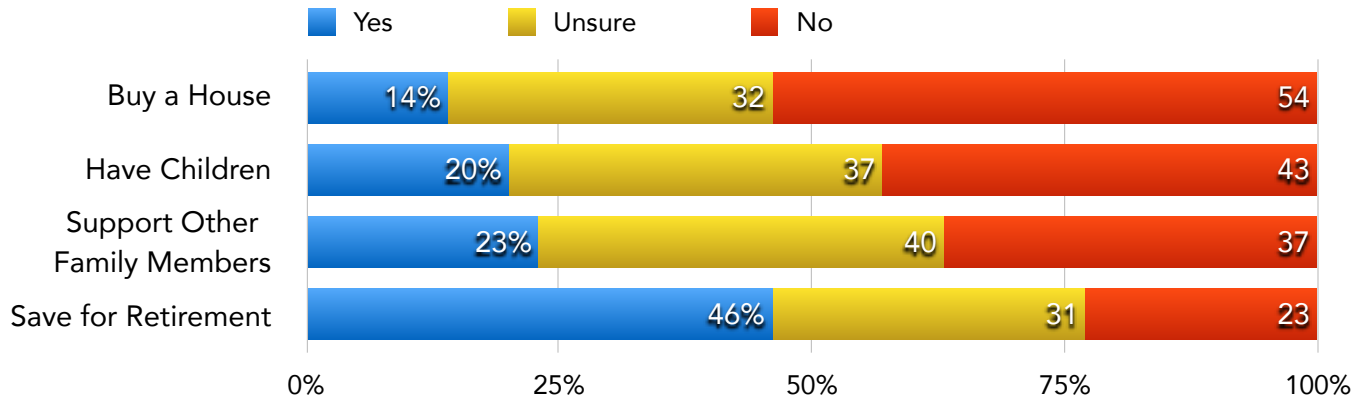


Figure 50: Affordable on a Stage Management Salary - Canada (n=86)

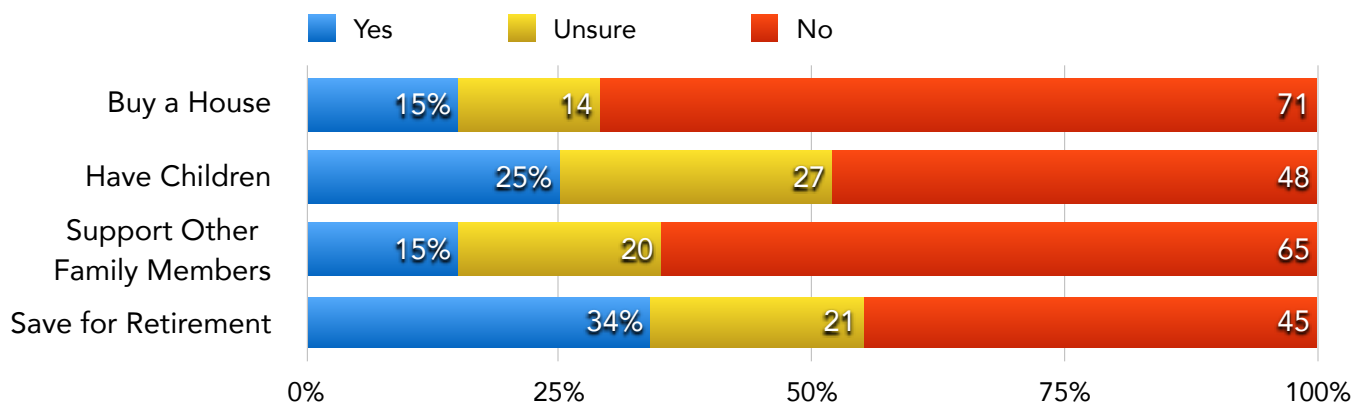


Figure 51: Affordable on a Stage Management Salary - Spain (n=22)

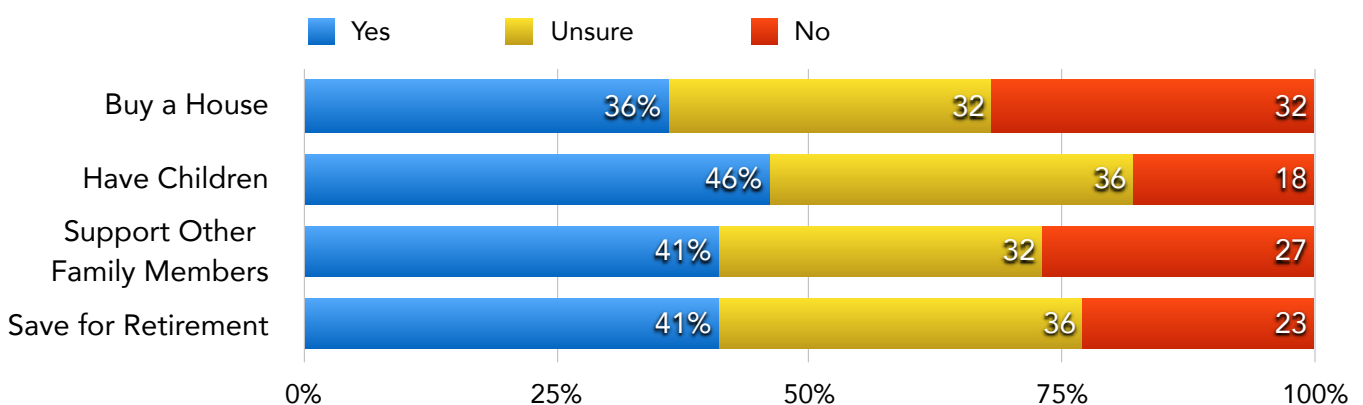


Figure 52: Affordable on a Stage Management Salary - United Kingdom

(n=95)

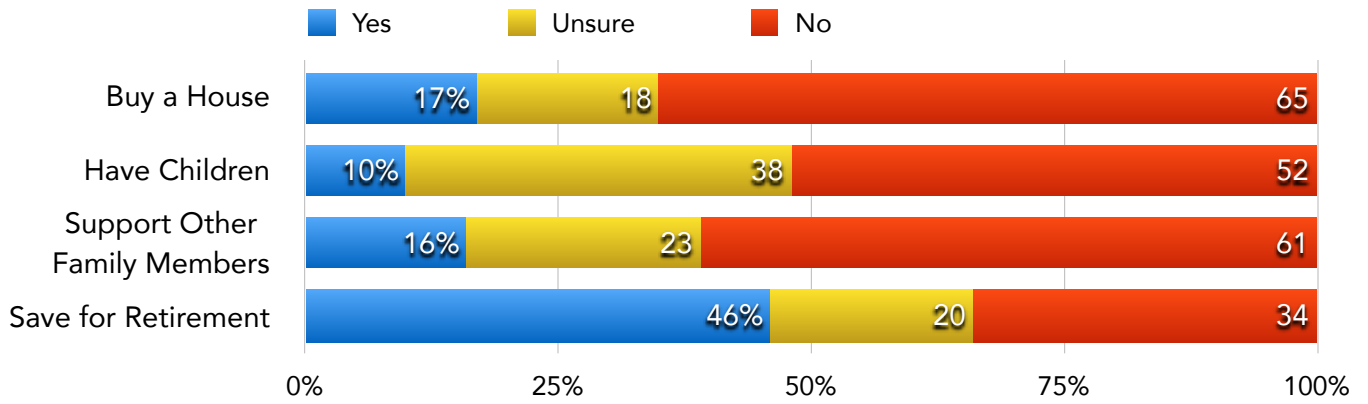


Figure 53: Affordable on a Stage Management Salary - United States

(n=880)

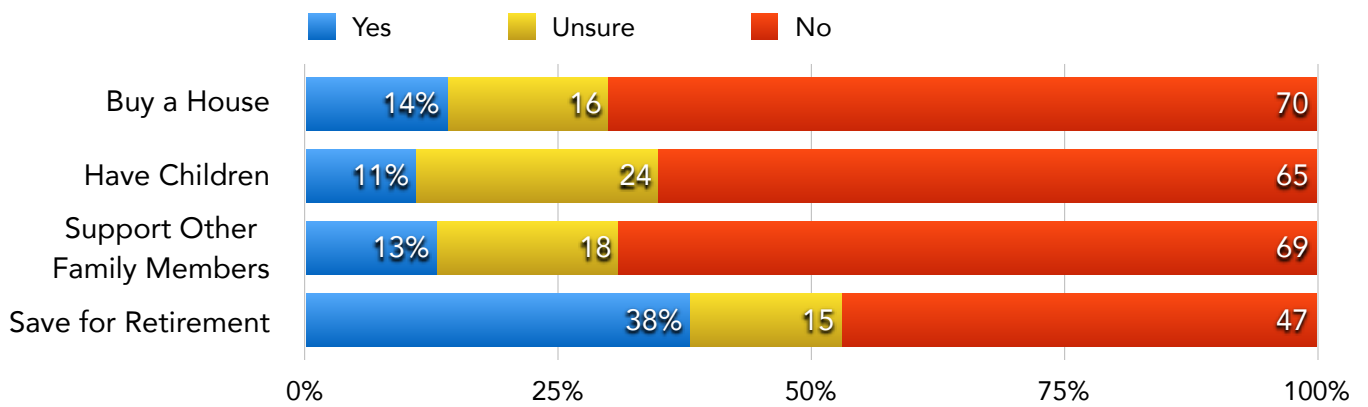
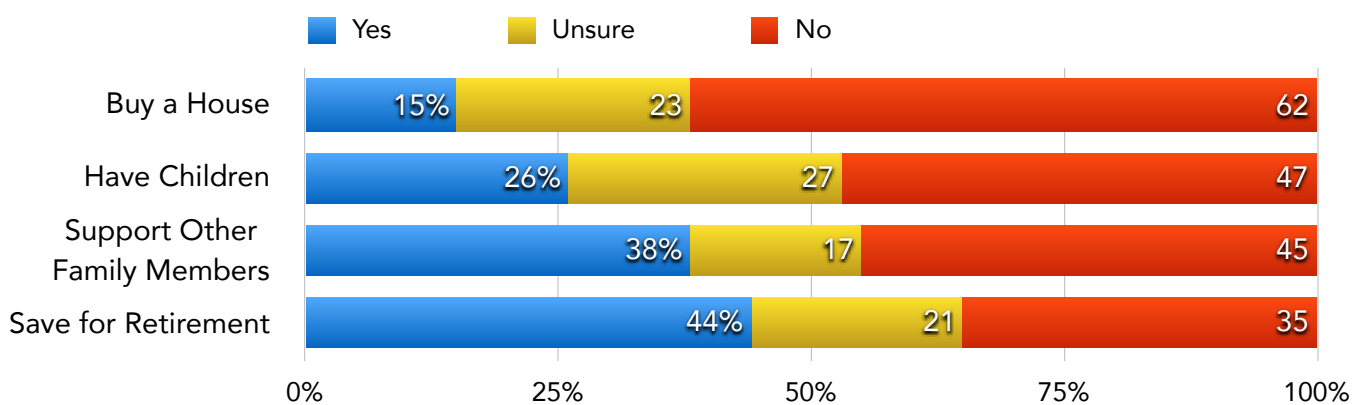


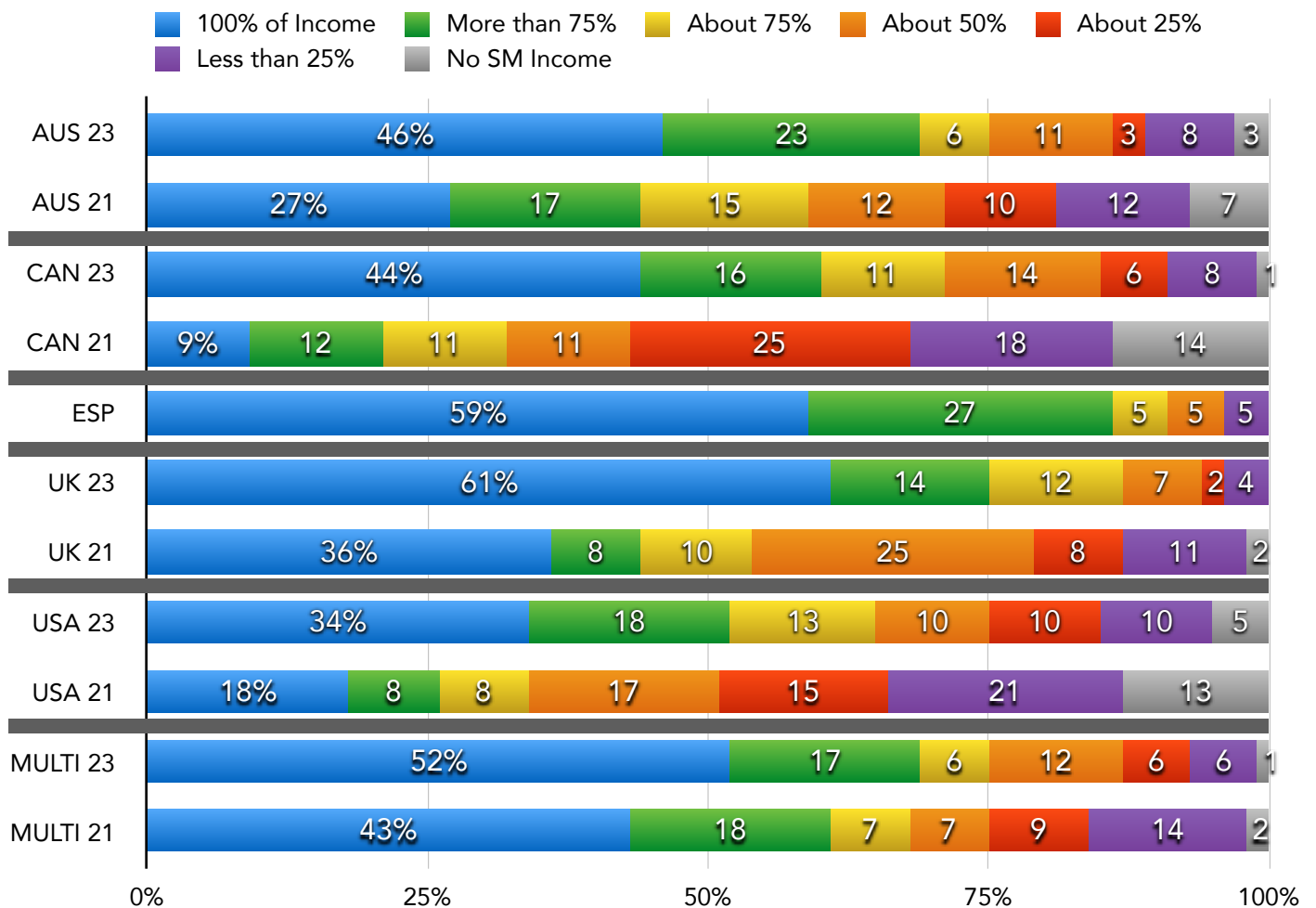
Figure 54: Affordable on a Stage Management Salary - Multinational Group

(n=66)



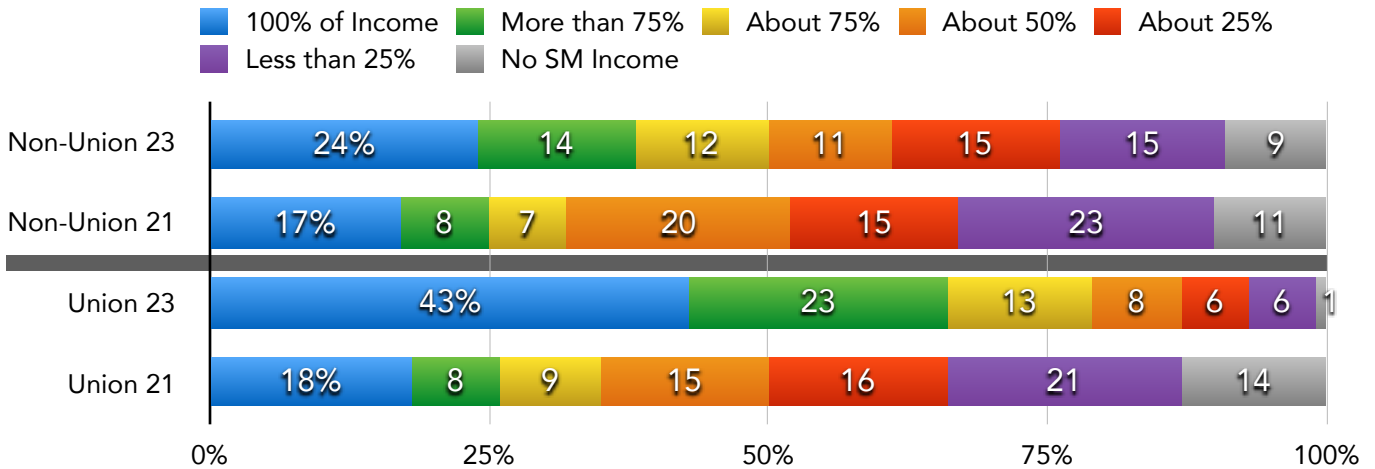
The above data about purchasing power should be balanced with how much of a stage manager’s total income comes from stage management work. **Figure 55** shows the percentage of annual income over the past 12 months (October 2022 - October 2023) factored by country grouping (AUS n=35, CAN n=87, ESP n=22, UK n=95, USA n=891, MULTI n=66). Without exception, the 2023 percentages of income from stage management are significantly higher than the levels reported in 2021. To illustrate this difference, each country grouping (with the exception of Spain, which did not have its own grouping two years ago) includes both the 2023 and 2021 data (AUS n=41, CAN n=44, UK n=52, USA n=602, MULTI n=44).

Figure 55: Percentage of Annual Income from Stage Management by Country (n=see text)



**Figure 56** narrows the United States percentage of annual income by non-union status (2023 n=369, 2021 n=270) and union membership (2023 n=482 and 2021 n=314). Whereas there was very little difference between non-union and union numbers in 2021 and both groups showed growth this year, union members reported much higher percentages of annual income in 2023.

Figure 56: Percentage of Annual Income from Stage Management by Union Status (n=see text)



The increases in Figures 55 and 56 align with the increased income reported in Figure 47. The survey also attempted to determine if there was an increase in the amount of work, but it is difficult to connect work weeks and income as there may be more work but lower pay. In addition, the question “How many weeks have you worked in a stage management role over the past 12 months” was interpreted by some to include volunteer projects or unpaid educational projects. **Figure 57** indicates how many weeks the participants worked in each stage management job category (a separate RSM category was not yet included). Using the included percentages for Zero Weeks and 41-52 Weeks from the 2021 report (tracking October 2020 - 2021), there is a substantial increase in weekly work. The exception of more Zero Weeks reported for DSMs may be due to an increase in survey participation from countries that do not utilize the position.

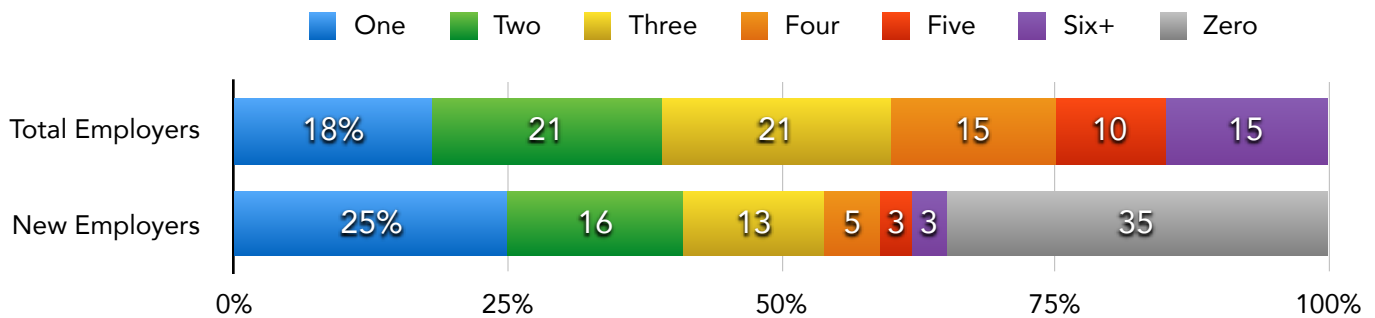
Figure 57: Weeks Served in a Stage Management Role in the Last Year (n=1,192)

	Zero Weeks 2021	Zero Weeks 2023	1-2 Weeks	3-10 Weeks	11-20 Weeks	21-30 Weeks	31-40 Weeks	41-52 Weeks 2021	41-52 Weeks 2023
<b>Intern</b>	N/A	87%	3%	4%	3%	1%	1%	N/A	1%
<b>PA</b>	N/A	66%	9%	14%	4%	3%	2%	N/A	1%
<b>ASM</b>	40%	28%	8%	23%	19%	10%	7%	1%	5%
<b>DSM</b>	70%	77%	3%	7%	5%	2%	2%	<1%	4%
<b>SM</b>	52%	17%	7%	24%	20%	12%	10%	1%	11%
<b>PSM</b>	62%	30%	6%	16%	14%	12%	10%	<1%	12%



This increase in work weeks may be connected to an increase in the number of employers. Some participants were unsure whether “new” meant new to them or producers who just started operations entirely. Perhaps due to this uncertainty, 1,342 answered the question about total and 1,281 answered the question about new employers.

Figure 58: Number of SM Employers and New Employers Over the Past Twelve Months (n=see text)



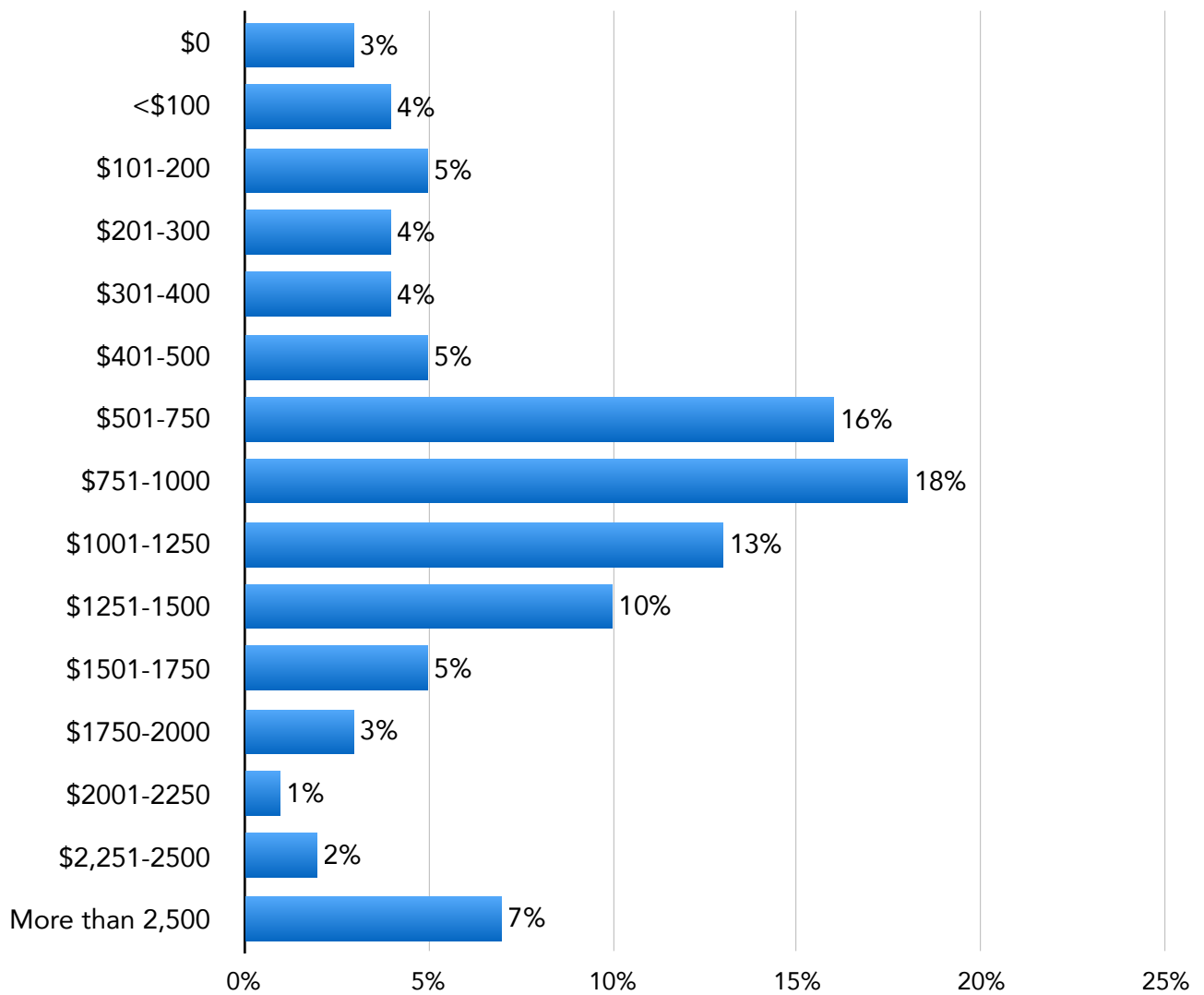
Work has also largely returned to in-person: 17% reported managing an online performance in the past two years (October 2021-October 2023, n=1,766) compare to 39% of responses in 2021 (n=1,301). In that 2021 survey, 94% of participants preferred in-person work when available.

While earlier questions about total income were asked of all participants, a question about weekly pay rates was limited to the United States as it may be misleading to use a simple currency conversion since the cost of living and taxes vary so much by country. If an American stage manager was paid a single fee for the entire project, they divided the amount by what would be weekly pay. The 2023 survey added four more pay brackets (in 2021, the final bracket was \$1500+), but there is need to continue the scale. In addition to total responses [Figure 59], this data is also analyzed by union status [Figure 60], gender [Figure 61], and race [Figure 62]. Figures 60, 61 and 62 include a note that a full factor analysis, accounting for years of experience, job title, and geographic location, is needed to speak with confidence about the impact of individual factors such as union status, gender, and race. For instance, given the data presented in Figure 8 that stage managers who identify as Non-Binary tend to be younger, there is cause to question whether age may be a factor in why Non-Binary participants reported lower weekly pay rates. We are happy to collaborate with researchers to further investigate these questions.

Compared to 2021 data, the non-union pay bracket distribution has remained fairly steady but the union participants reported higher frequency of the under \$500/week brackets in the latest survey. The gender wage gap appears to have shrunk slightly since 2021 with the exception of participants earning more than \$2,500/week on their most recent projects. Analyzing by race using a White/BIPOC lens, there are only minimal differences (less than 2%) for all but one of the middle pay brackets.

Figure 59: Weekly Pay on Most Recent Project (USA)

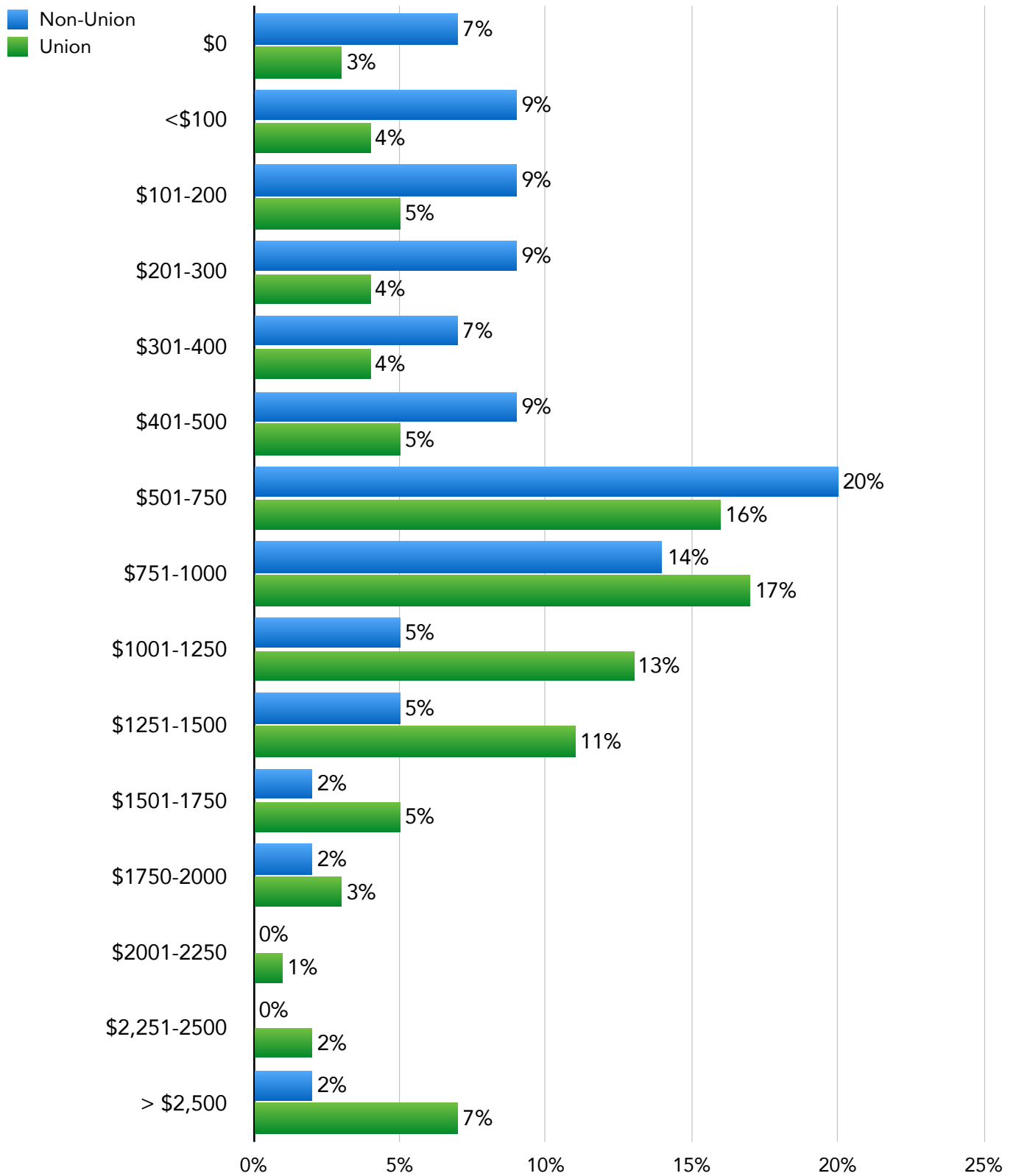
(n=846)



American stage managers were also asked about Unemployment; the question was limited to a single country as each country uses different requirements for the status. In 2023 (n=879), only 16% of participants indicated collecting Unemployment in the past twelve months, compared to 51% in 2021, and 17% in 2019.

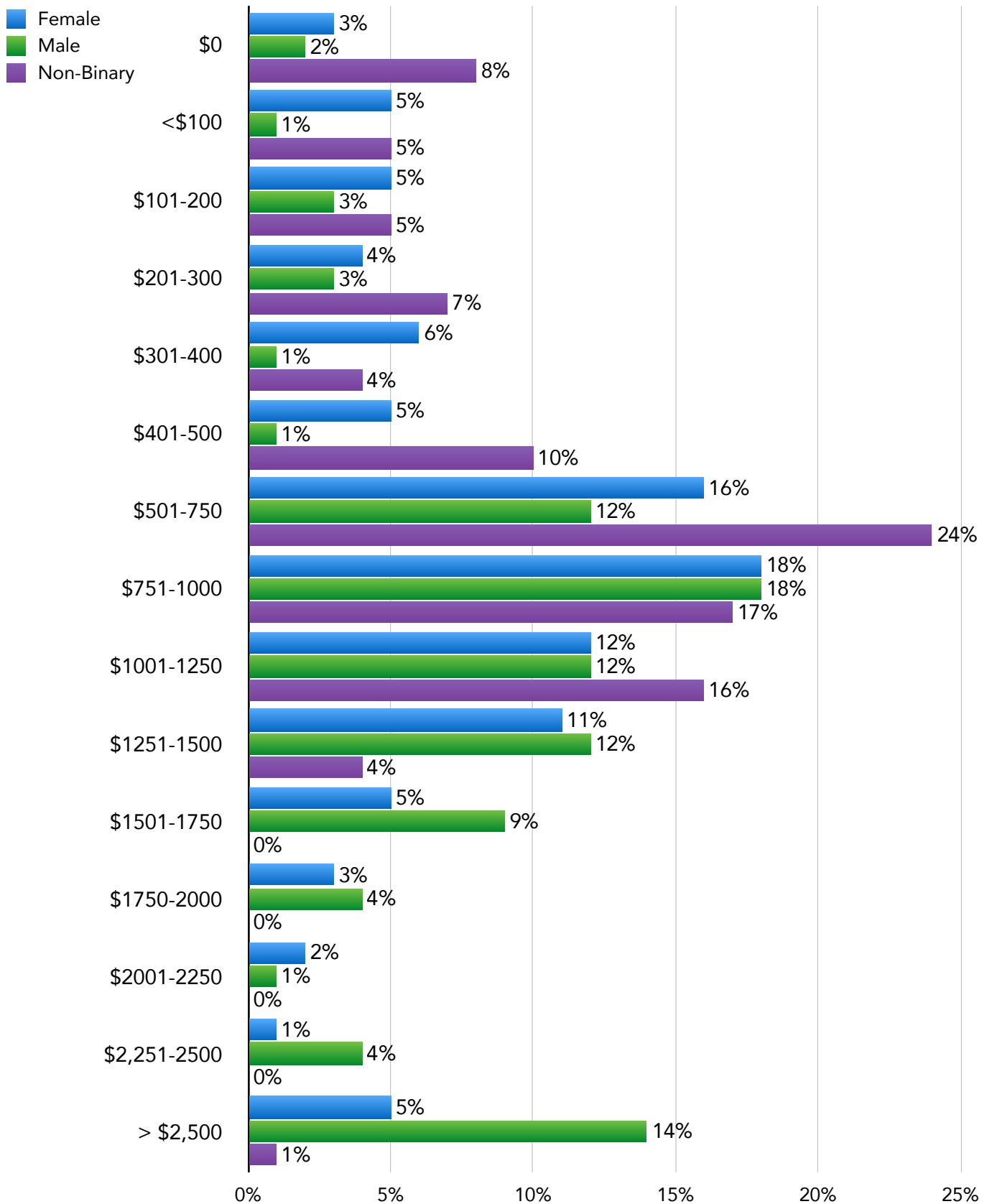
Figure 60: Weekly Pay on Most Recent Project by Union Status (USA)

(n=822)



NOTE: This analysis does not account for years of experience, job title, and geographic location.

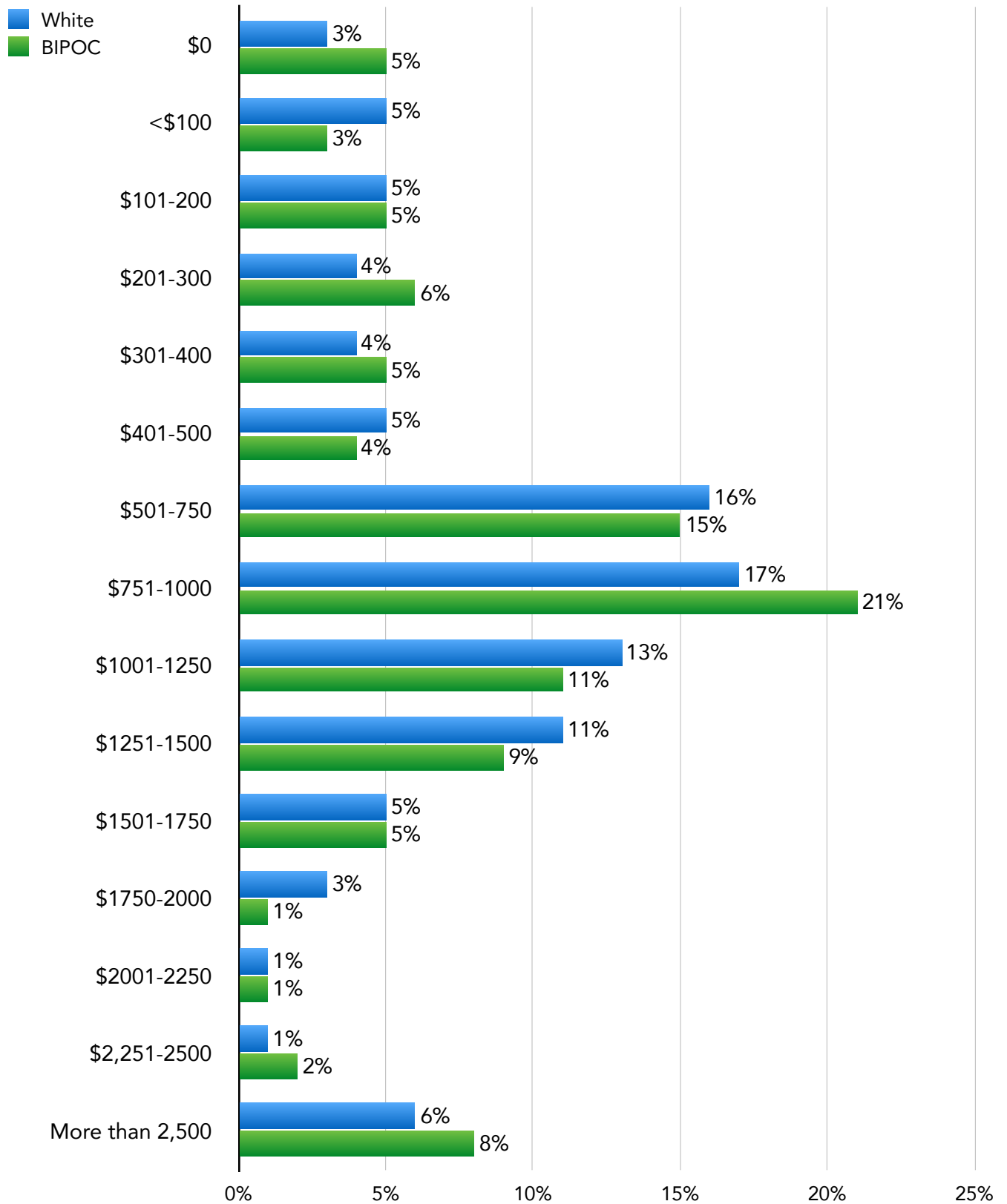
Figure 61: Weekly Pay on Most Recent Project by Gender (USA)



NOTE: This analysis does not account for years of experience, job title, and geographic location.

(n=827)

Figure 62: Weekly Pay on Most Recent Project by Race (USA)



NOTE: This analysis does not account for years of experience, job title, and geographic location.

Employment, at least in the United States, provides not only salary but also the potential for health insurance. American participants who identified their current occupation as PSM, SM, ASM, or Intern were asked if they currently had health insurance and how they obtained it. Among 885 responses, 6% did not possess health insurance. Another 35% reported buying their insurance through their stage management work, which often involves union-offered insurance but can be directly through an employer. Outside of stage management, 12% got their health insurance through Non-SM work, 17% purchased a plan through an exchange, and 30% had health insurance through someone else's policy.

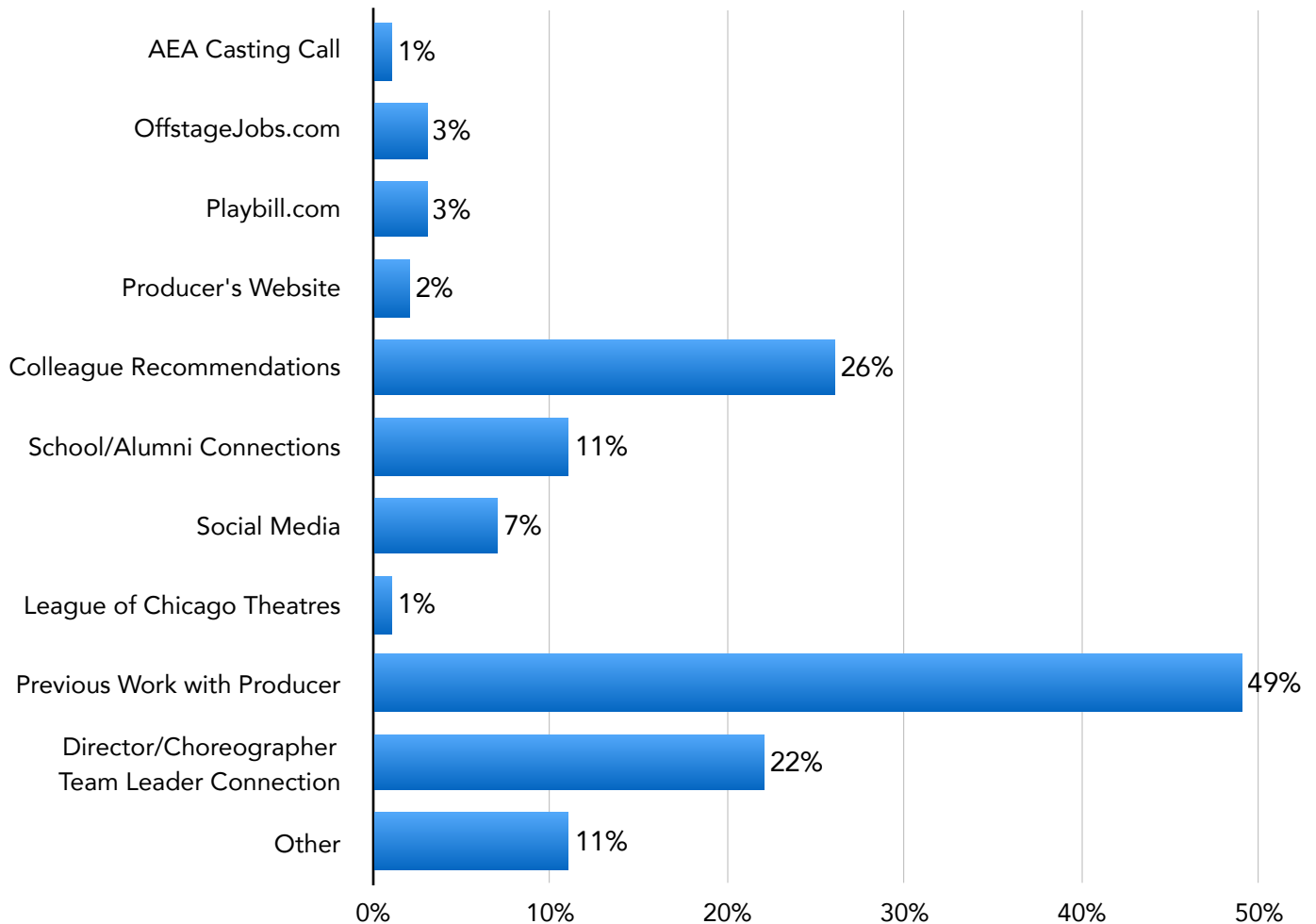
In order to determine the level of competition for jobs, the survey turned to some of its own participants: 371 survey-takers indicated they they hold positions in which they hire stage management team members. When asked how many applications they receive on average for advertised positions (n=360), a majority responded just 1-10 applications (55%). Another 26% received 11-25 applications, 11% received 26-50 applications, 2% received 51-75, and 4% received more than 75 applications for advertised positions. As for the qualities they searched for in a candidate (this was an open-ended text question; responses were then categorized), the most common responses were: prior experience, job skills, personality, ability to work on a team, and willingness to learn. Some notable responses included:

- "Responsiveness to notes and directives, reading the room, professionalism."
- "Someone who is willing to learn. I work in a unique industry where stage management is unlike any other place. So they have to be willing to set aside their usual ways of doing things and adapt to our methods."
- "Kindness, Sense of humour, adaptability, good listening skills."
- "Someone who is organized, has an attention to detail, ability to multi-task and understand simple instructions with a work history showing increasing levels of responsibility at their job and/or promotion to supervisor-level."

Several employers noted that they try to hire people they know and not all positions are advertised. American participants were asked their sources for their most recent job and could indicate more than one source. Sources that received votes but less than 1% of the 860 responses included ARTSEARCH, DanceUSA, Opera America, Stage Managers' Association, SETC, USITT, city/regional associations (the League of Chicago Theatres did make the list with 1%), and referrals from other stage managers.

Figure 63: Sources Used to Find Stage Management Work (USA)

(n=860)



The past five editions of this survey have included questions about negotiating for job compensation. With a general increase in job opportunities, are more stage managers attempting to negotiate and, if so, are they being successful? Participants were asked a series of questions:

- Over the past three stage management jobs, did you try to negotiate for a higher salary?
- Were your attempts successful?
- On the last successful negotiation, how much more did you earn?
- Did you negotiate for something other than salary (list all that apply)?

For the first two questions, **Figure 64** shows total responses by year and then the 2023 data is divided in **Figure 65** by gender (n=1,401), race in the United States (n=1,016), union status in the United States (n=1,014) and country grouping (n=1,405). Additional earnings by percentage of original pay offer appear in **Figure 66**.

Figure 64: Frequency of Negotiation and Negotiation Success by Year

(n=1,412)

	Negotiated All 3 Times	Negotiated at least Once	Never Negotiated	Always Succeeded	Sometimes Succeeded	Never Succeeded
<b>2023</b>	15%	36%	49%	33%	50%	17%
<b>2021</b>	14%	31%	55%	31%	53%	16%
<b>2019</b>	10%	33%	56%	34%	47%	19%
<b>2017</b>	8%	26%	66%	29%	51%	20%
<b>2015</b>	8%	33%	59%	24%	69%	7%

Figure 65: Frequency of Negotiation and Success by Multiple Factors

(n=see text)

	Negotiated All 3 Times	Negotiated at least Once	Never Negotiated	Always Succeeded	Sometimes Succeeded	Never Succeeded
<b>Female</b>	12%	37%	51%	34%	48%	17%
<b>Male</b>	22%	34%	44%	30%	56%	15%
<b>Non-Binary</b>	13%	38%	49%	33%	46%	21%
<b>BIPOC</b>	16%	31%	53%	24%	46%	30%
<b>White</b>	15%	38%	47%	38%	47%	15%
<b>Non-Union</b>	9%	34%	57%	39%	44%	17%
<b>Union</b>	20%	40%	41%	34%	48%	18%
<b>AUS</b>	12%	31%	57%	19%	67%	14%
<b>CAN</b>	15%	32%	53%	22%	67%	12%
<b>ESP</b>	14%	15%	71%	50%	50%	0%
<b>UK</b>	8%	39%	53%	38%	44%	19%
<b>USA</b>	15%	37%	48%	35%	47%	17%
<b>MULTI</b>	16%	41%	43%	21%	65%	14%



Figure 66: Additional Earnings of Last Successful Negotiation by Multiple Factors (Overall n=588)

	Up to 5% of Salary	6-10% of Salary	11-20% of Salary	>20% of Salary
<b>Overall</b>	49%	32%	12%	8%
<b>Female</b>	50%	32%	12%	6%
<b>Male</b>	42%	35%	13%	11%
<b>Non-Binary</b>	52%	24%	12%	12%
<b>BIPOC (USA)</b>	41%	32%	17%	10%
<b>White (USA)</b>	48%	33%	11%	8%
<b>Non-Union</b>	43%	32%	14%	12%
<b>Union (USA)</b>	51%	31%	11%	6%
<b>AUS</b>	67%	22%	11%	0%
<b>CAN</b>	55%	34%	9%	2%
<b>ESP</b>	17%	33%	33%	17%
<b>UK</b>	53%	32%	8%	8%
<b>USA</b>	47%	33%	12%	8%
<b>MULTI</b>	47%	22%	18%	11%

Employment negotiations can include more than just pay. **Figure 67** lists other areas of contracts that participants negotiated beyond what the producer originally offered. The category “Improved Housing” included a larger space or housing closer to the venue; “Personal Tech” was reimbursement for personal expenses such as a cell phone plan.

Paid vacation time is another topic that can be negotiated. **Figure 68** illustrates vacation time from October 2022 to October 2023 for those indicating their current occupation was in stage management. The data is divided by country groupings (AUS n=29, CAN n=74, ESP n=21, UK n=84, USA n=730, MULTI n=56) as national laws and customs have a major impact on vacation length.

Figure 67: Non-Salary Items Negotiated on Stage Management Jobs

(Overall n=1,362)

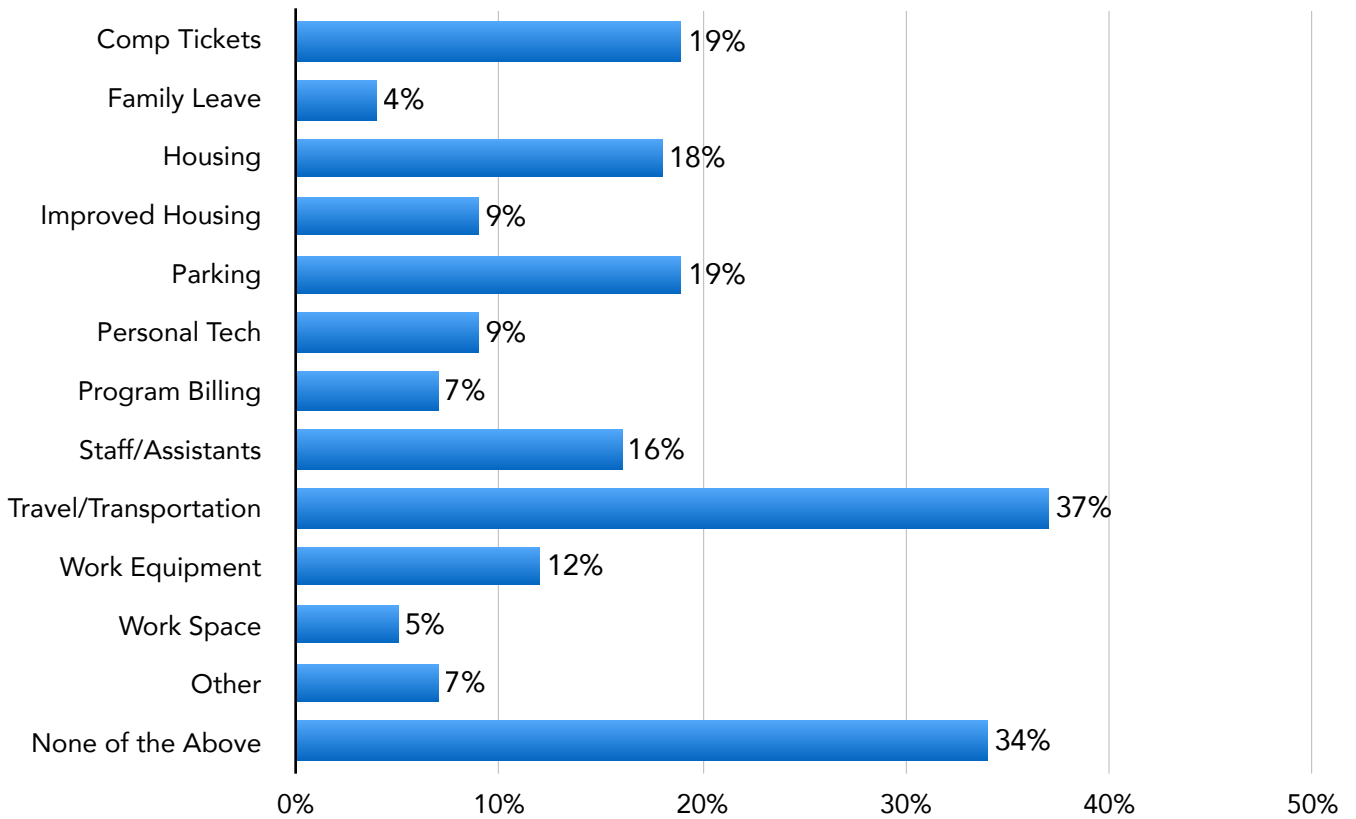
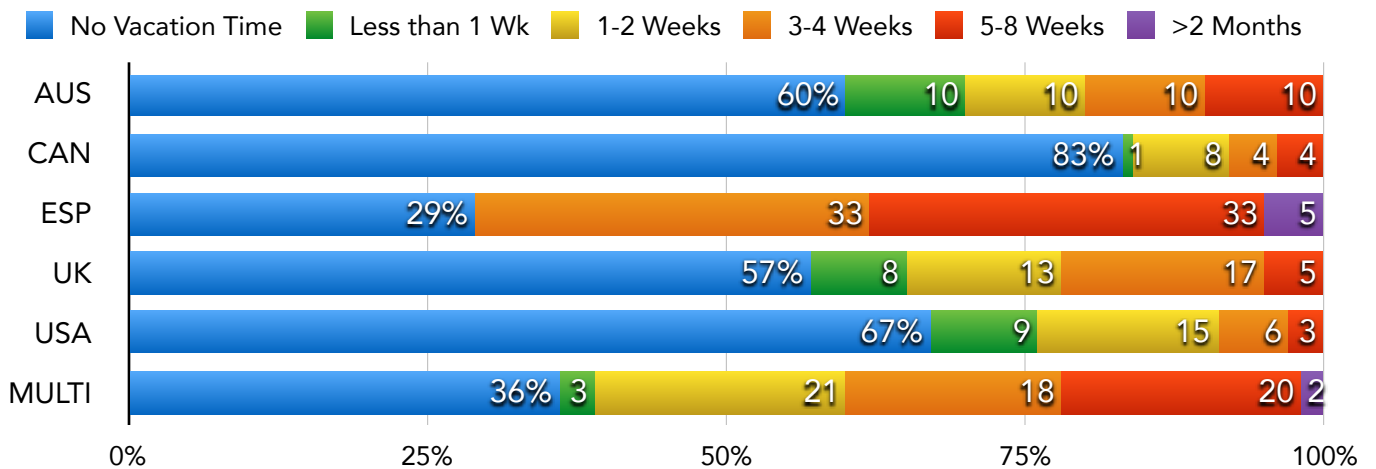


Figure 68: Paid Vacation Time in the Past 12 Months by Country

(n=see text)



Employment trends cannot be analyzed without also examining hiring discrimination. Fifty-two percent of survey participants (n=1,594) reported that identity discrimination had impacted their ability to get stage management work and another three percent selected “prefer not to answer.” This is a self-reported statistic that applies to the participant’s entire stage management career, so this data cannot be used to identify a specific number of instances or track whether discrimination rates are changing each year. It is also worth noting that many stage managers reported facing hiring discrimination related to an intersection of multiple demographic identities.

**Figure 69** presents the percentage of survey participants who identify within a demographic group that have self-reported stage management hiring discrimination about that characteristic. Two categories of discrimination cannot be analyzed in this format. The first is “nationality/ country of origin” (3% of all responses) as this category extends beyond identities of race, plus race was only asked of American participants. The second category was age: 39% of all participants reported experiencing age discrimination at some point in their careers. Of the 614 stage managers who reported age discrimination, 81% were for being too young, 14% for being too old, and 5% had faced discrimination during the course of their careers both for being too young and later too old. In addition, 3% of participants noted hiring discrimination based on other identities such as religion, parental status, and physical size.

Figure 69: Identity Discrimination in Stage Management Hiring

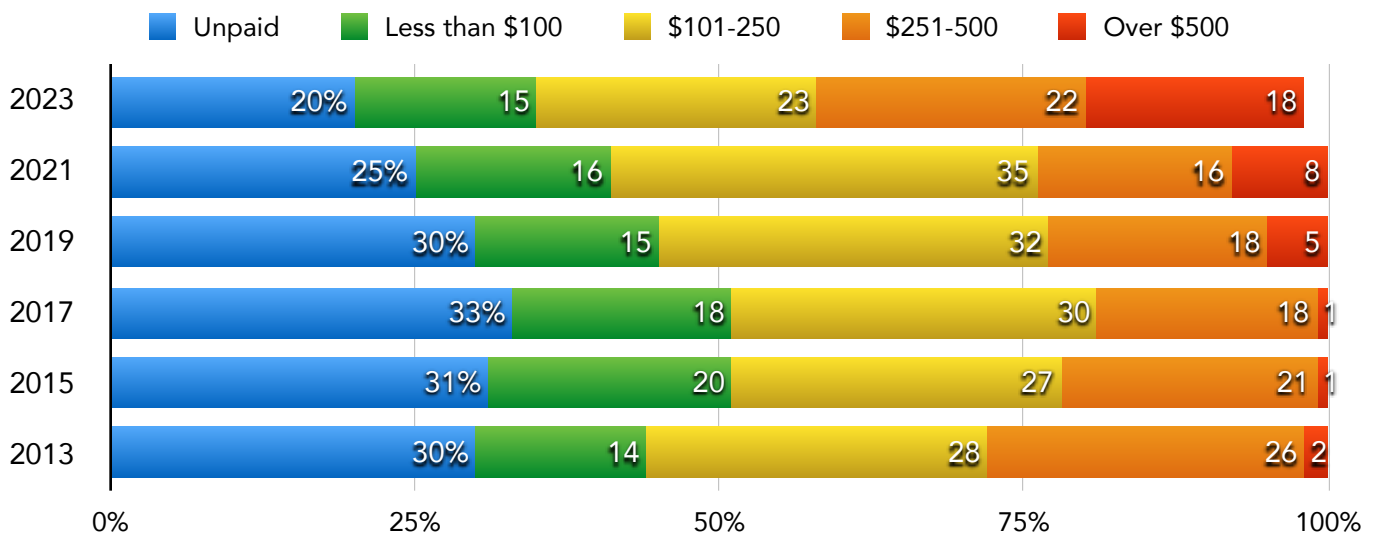
(n=see chart)

Discrimination	Identity Group	n= for Group	Reporting Discrimination in Hiring
Gender	Female	1,093	26%
	Male	328	19%
	Non-Binary	158	34%
Race (USA)	BIPOC (USA)	219	26%
	White (USA)	963	6%
Sexual Orientation	LGBTQIA+	820	6%
	Not LGBTQIA+	725	3%
Disability	Have Disability	282	28%
	Not Have Disability	1289	<1%

Participants were also asked about sexual harassment in their stage management work. In a group of 1,615 stage managers, 53% had witnessed sexual harassment at work (3% chose Prefer Not to Answer) and 35% had experienced sexual harassment themselves (3% chose Prefer Not to Answer). By gender identity (n=1,570), 38% female, 29% male, and 31% of non-binary stage managers reported experiencing sexual harassment in the workplace. There were not significant distinctions by country: 36% in the United States, 35% in Canada and Spain, 34% in Australia, 33% in the UK, and 31% in the multinational grouping. One way to combat sexual harassment in the workplace is through employing Arts Intimacy coaches, coordinators, choreographers, and consultants. Arts Intimacy only addresses specific forms of workplace harassment, but 71% of stage managers globally (n=1,614) have worked with an Arts Intimacy representative at least once.

The last set of employment questions were for participants at the start of their careers. Among 217 surveyed interns, apprentices, and students, 67% were “extremely likely” to pursue a career in stage management with another 25% being “somewhat likely.” As examined earlier, the decision to pursue stage management can be impacted by whether one can afford the training process. Americans who had participated in an internship or apprenticeship over the past two years were asked how much they were compensated. **Figure 70** includes data from five previous surveys to show how internship compensation has changed since the pandemic (2023 n=175, 2021 n=142, 2019 n=207, 2017 n=312, 2015 n=420, 2013 n=204). The 2023 data adds up to 98% as 2% reported having to pay for their internship. Of 137 participants who received compensation, 23% reported receiving overtime pay, an increase since the pandemic.

Figure 70: Weekly Pay for Most Recent Internship/Apprenticeship (USA) (n=see text)



Just as stage managers can be compensated with more than just salary, interns and apprentices can also receive non-pay-based compensation [Figure 71]. “Local Transport” included public transportation passes whereas “Contract Travel” included travel to/from the venue city. Overall, 40% of 173 responses felt that their internship/apprenticeship compensation was fair, an increase from 32% in 2021 but still not a majority of responses.

Figure 71: Intern/Apprentice Non-Pay Compensation Based on Weekly Pay

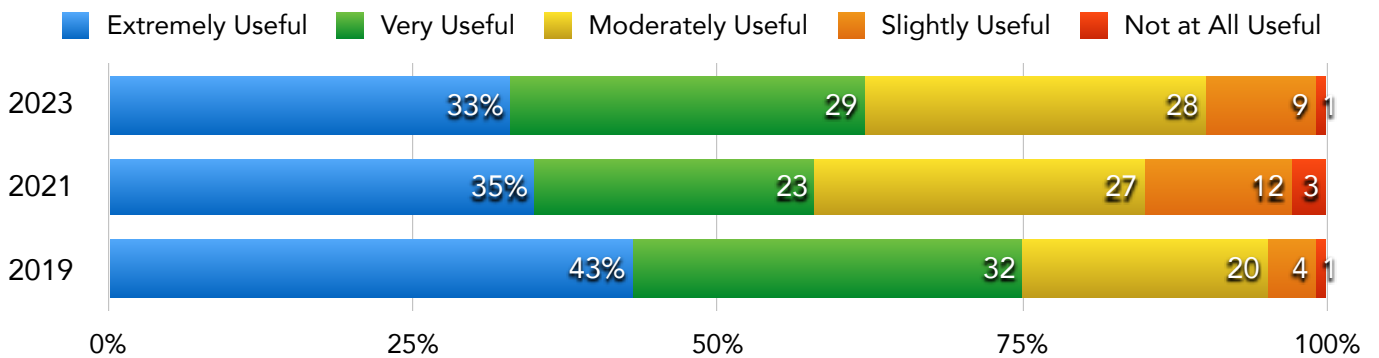
(n=168)

Weekly Pay Category	Housing	Discounted Housing	Meals	Local Transport	Contract Travel
I Paid Producer	33%	33%	67%	0%	0%
Unpaid	9%	0%	0%	3%	0%
Less than \$100	38%	0%	4%	4%	8%
\$101-250	72%	8%	13%	10%	10%
\$251-500	50%	11%	5%	11%	8%
Over \$500	34%	3%	14%	10%	14%

Although compensation is improving, the perceived value of stage management internships in the United States has not returned to pre-pandemic levels [Figure 72]. What are the goals of an internship, are they being effectively conveyed to participants, and are they being met by the producer, stage management team, and intern?

Figure 72: Usefulness of Internship/Apprenticeship in the Past Two Years

(n=173)

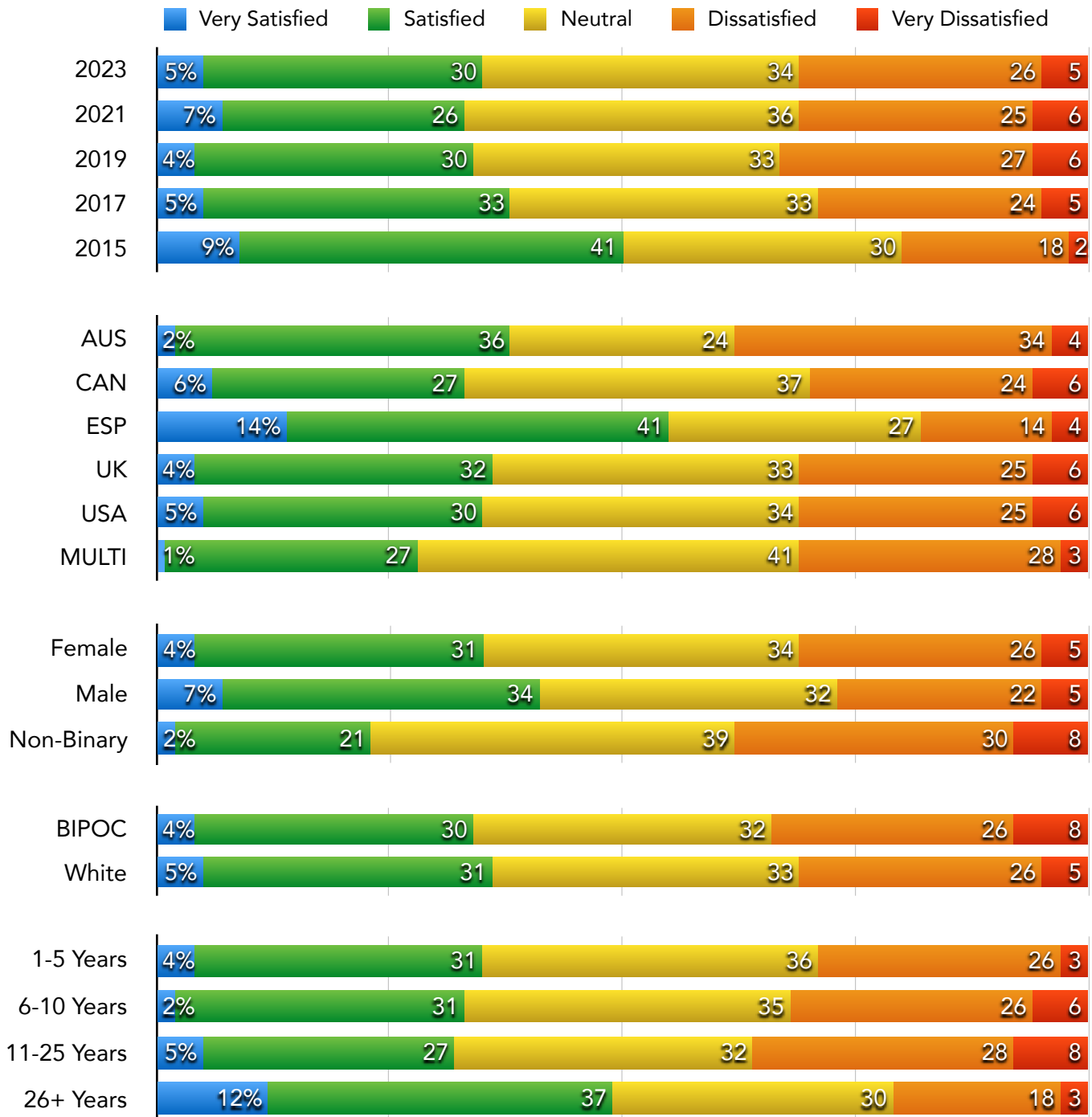


## SECTION IV: LONG-TERM OUTLOOK

The global pandemic presented an opportunity to realign priorities. **Figure 73** analyzes participant satisfaction with a work/life balance overall (n=1,403), by country grouping (AUS n=47, CAN n=104, ESP n=22, UK n=103, USA n=1,049, MULTI n=71), gender identity (n=1,391), race in the United States (n=1,021), and years of experience in the field (n=1,391).

Figure 73: Satisfaction with Work/Life Balance

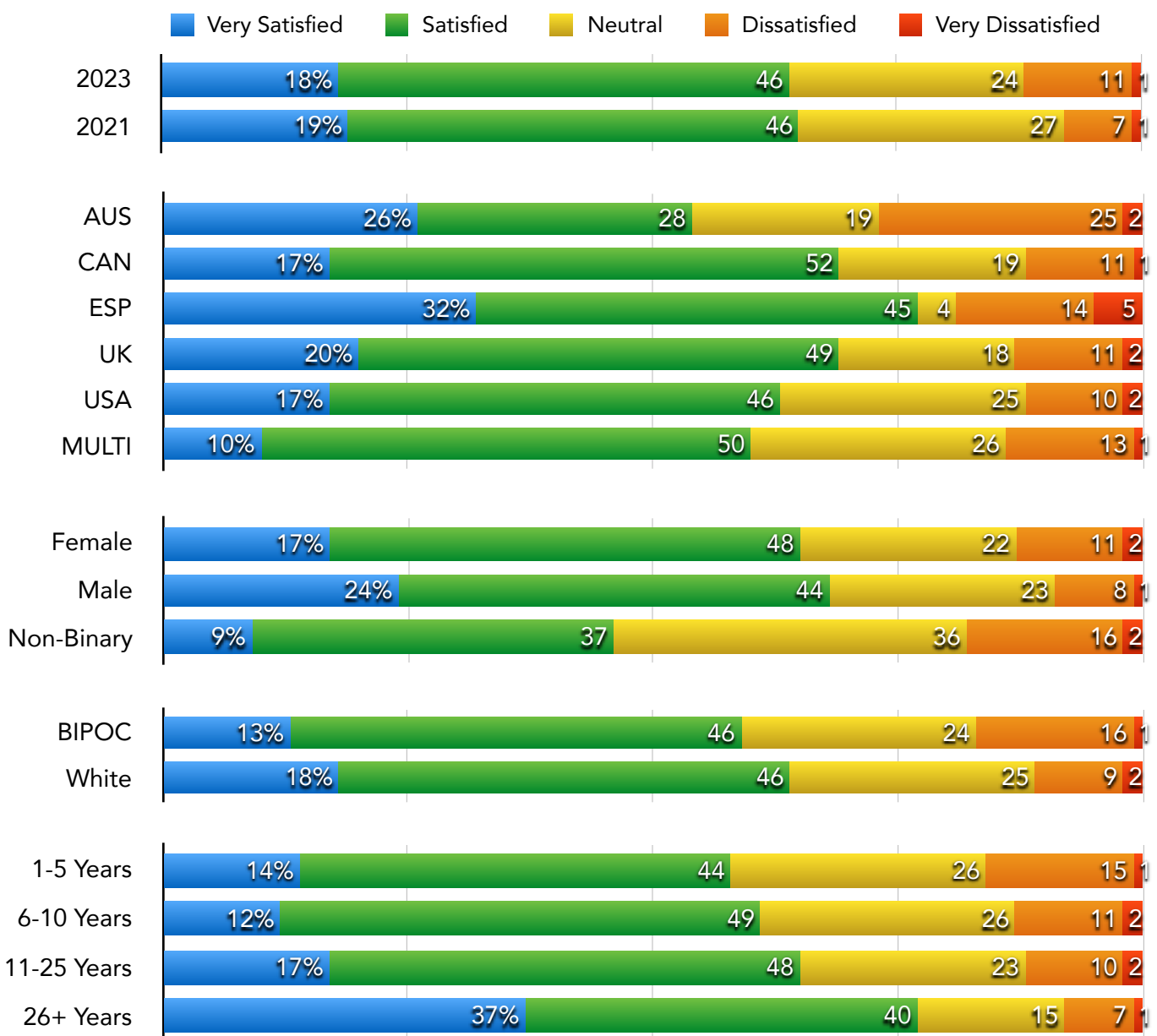
(n=see text)



Partnered with the work/life balance question was a question about overall satisfaction with stage management as a career. Both questions were open to all participants other than current students and those with less than one year of experience. **Figure 74** analyzes participant satisfaction by year (2023 n=1,406, 2021 n=731), by country grouping (AUS n=47, CAN n=105, ESP n=22, UK n=103, USA n=1,050, MULTI n=72), gender identity (n=1,394), race in the United States (n=1,022), and years of experience in the field (n=1,394). As noted in each edition of this survey, people who are dissatisfied with stage management are less likely to spend 10-15 minutes on a volunteer survey about the field, so dissatisfaction levels may be underreported.

Figure 74: Satisfaction with Stage Management Career

(n=see text)



Survey participants were asked to identify factors that contributed to their level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. We received 577 responses related to career satisfaction, which were then categorized with representative quotes from participants:

#### Passion for Making Art, 27% of all satisfaction factors

- J'adore mon travail! J'ai l'impression d'avoir trouvé une job qui me stimule et correspond à mes habiletés, envies, qualités personnelles et à mon expérience variée. Il me reste tant de choses à essayer et à apprendre en régie, ce qui est très excitant car je me sens en même temps très compétente et en contrôle, je ne prends pas de contrat qui soit au-delà de mes habiletés, que j'ai appris à connaître avec mes précédentes expériences. Je suis satisfaite quand je sens que j'ai donné plus que ce qui était attendu de moi et quand j'ai prévenu des problèmes potentiels.... (*I love my job! I feel like I've found a job that stimulates me and matches my skills, desires, personal qualities and varied experience. There are still so many things to try and to learn in stage management, which is very exciting, because I feel very competent and in control at the same time. I don't take on contracts that are beyond my abilities, which I've come to know from my previous experience. I'm satisfied when I feel I've given more than was expected of me, and when I've avoided potential problems....*)
- I'm paid decent (definitely should be paid more and getting benefits would be nice, but better than other folks I'm aware of anyway), I work with good people, I have an adventure of a lifestyle, and I'm challenged and growing every day I work. I have a healthy social/home life, and while there's room for growth, I feel my trajectory is going the right direction at a good speed.
- El cambio de producción teatral cada 2 meses, y disfrutar del arte en primera fila. (*The theatre production changes every 2 months, and I enjoy art in the front row.*)
- I have been lucky enough to work as a full-time stage manager for over 25 years. - doing the thing I love, working with all sorts of artists, all while feeling financially secure. As a member of AEA, I have health insurance, a 401K. And after 25 years, I still find joy in going to work.

#### Availability of Work, 19%

- I've been able to work consistently and I'm making enough to live comfortable and save for the future.
- I'm working sustainably and continuously, and connections I've made throughout my career are leading to job offers and opportunities. It's satisfying to see that pay off over time, and allow me to make choices that best serve me now.
- I love the job overall, and I've built a place within the community where I am feeling appreciated and wanted. I'm finally at a place where I can choose contracts with good companies rather than taking whatever I can get to keep a roof over my head.
- Doing interesting and challenging work, having a variety of different positions (SM, ASM) booked for a season, working with great collaborators on productions. Variety is everything!



Sense of Community or Team, 16%

- People I'm working with, the shows that I'm working on (are they exciting and enticing to me?), flexibility in my workday, reframing expectations away from perfection, how well the work feeds into my passions.
- I'm satisfied when I'm employed, because I love what I do. Working with people I like makes a huge difference. Feeling appreciated makes a huge difference.
- I've made a name for myself and made connections with people who continue to hire me for work on multiple projects throughout the year. I have many past actors who are still friends and praise my work ethic and love having me on their productions
- Un milieu de travail agréable, les collègues/ami.e.s qu'on retrouve sur un projet, les nouveaux défis relevés, la découverte de nouveaux textes, nouvelles personnes, nouvelles perspectives. *(A pleasant working environment, the colleagues/friends that we find on a project, the new challenges met, the discovery of new texts, new people, new perspectives.)*

Work Structure and Wages, 12%

- Better pay, genuine care from the hiring company, and support from producers that allow ample time, space, and funds to foster a healthy creative and collaborative environment.
- Decent pay, decent work-life balance, good team relationship, good managerial relationship, opportunity for advancement, opportunity for feedback/input
- I'm a freelance corporate show caller. I take as much work as I want and (for the most part) have the choice to turn down work for suppliers whose work style doesn't suit my own. I work intensely hard for long periods, but then have the freedom to take larger chunks of time off because I am well-compensated for my work and experience level.
- Moving to a 5 day work week, having extra time off during shows, having employers more open to needed time off

We also received 147 responses related to causes of career dissatisfaction:

Lack of Opportunities, 28% of all dissatisfaction factors

- Low pay, not knowing enough people in my area so I get less jobs, no full time stage management work
- Inability to move up the career ladder and feeling stalled in mid-career purgatory.
- The COVID pandemic was a major setback for my career progression, I was on track to a position in the industry I desired, and still desire, and was forced to put that on hold to survive. It is only as of very recently that I've been able to start working towards my career progression again.
- I'm having a hard time maintaining consistent work. I want to be hired reliably and I'm just not there yet.

Workload, 20%

- The need to be 'on-call' all of the time, especially in response to covid and managing cast change.
- The lack of resources (human and financial) that make working as a stage manager in the theatre difficult. The hours were always long and intense and post-pandemic that has just become intolerable.
- Lack of adequate support for SMs especially in light of increasing needs of the theatre process (neuro divergencies, video recording rehearsals, zooming, technology expectations.) The job is no longer recognizable to what it used to be and has only increased in the work/life imbalance. When working on a piece of theatre everything else stops, no friends or family, no cooking, no cleaning the house, there is only time to dissolve into the show schedule and commitments. When I am not working in theatre I have a wonderful balance with a social life, home cooked meals, clean laundry, etc. It is just not worth the pain anymore at this stage of my life, life is too short to forfeit so much of it to ungrateful producers for lousy/unsustainable pay.
- No work life balance, continued additions to my job description given that I pick up the slack for others and then those duties get added to me because clearly I can

Wages, 16%

- Pay and an inability to escape freelancing as a young equity SM. Lack of job security is my #1 problem in my life.
- Las pocas o nulas oportunidades laborales que existen. La precarización del trabajo y el salario. En la gran mayoría de empresas la Regiduría se considera innecesaria o entra dentro de las labores de otra sección como Utilería o Sastrería (*The few or no job opportunities that exist. The precariousness of work and salary. In the vast majority of companies, Regiduría is considered unnecessary or falls within the tasks of another section such as Props or Tailoring.*)
- I've had to pivot away from stage management as my primary career for a number of reasons —bad pay, poor hours, mistreatment, etc. At 30 years old it's left me in a weird place of needing to essentially start fresh in a new field, one that I'm not entirely sure I'll stay in either. I have practically no money saved for retirement or in general, which is a worrying position to be in. And even despite that, the theater scene/community I'm in is so incredibly hostile to trans artists, and so centered around capitalism, that it was dissatisfying to begin with.
- In recent years since my move to New York I have more times of unemployment. While my jobs are higher paying, the sporadic nature of jobs equates to the same or less money. I wish there weren't so many barriers to entry in the career in NY.

The challenge of any occupational study is reaching the people who are so dissatisfied that they left the profession. While this survey cannot directly reach that group, since 2009 it has included the question, "what is the likelihood that you will be leaving the field of Stage Management in the next five years?" **Figure 75** breaks down the responses by year (2023 n=934, 2021 n=634), country grouping (AUS n=30, CAN n=75, ESP n=20, UK n=83, USA n=676, MULTI n=48), gender identity (n=923), race in the United States (n=657), union status in the United States (n=664), and years of experience in the field (n=925).

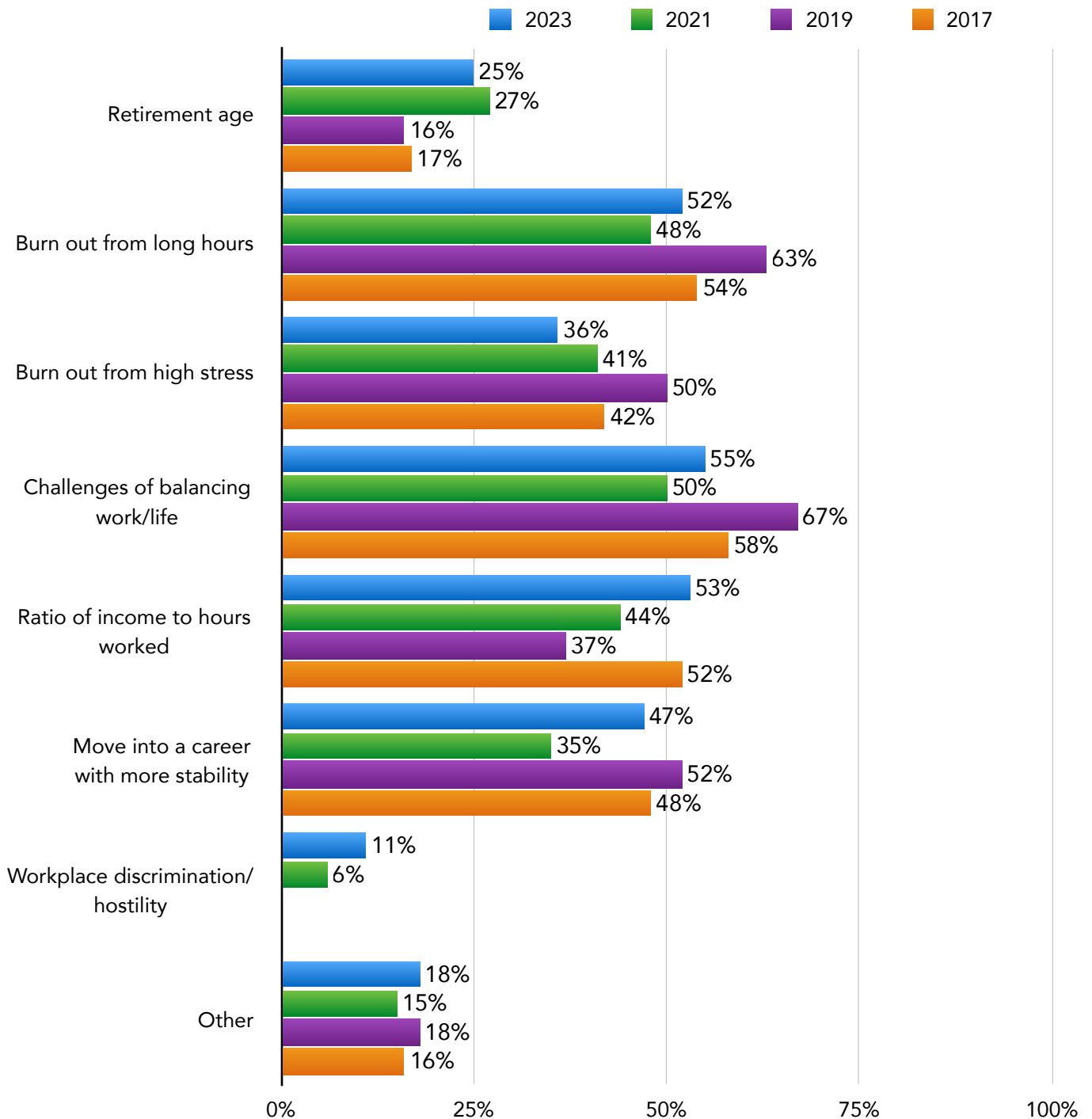
Figure 75: Likelihood of Leaving Stage Management in the Next Five Years

(n=see text)



There are many potential reasons for leaving the profession of stage management. Survey participants who indicated they were “Very Likely” or “Likely” to leave the field were asked why (Participants could provide more than one response). **Figure 76** compares the most common factors pre-pandemic, during the height of the pandemic, and as the world emerges from the shut-down. Some of the “Other” responses related to health, caring for family, lack of job satisfaction, and looking for new challenges.

Figure 76: Contributing Factors in Likelihood to Leave Stage Management (2023 n=195)



The final question of the 2023 survey was a new one: what is the most important thing that should change in stage management? We received 900 responses, which fell into the major categories of the need for better schedules and work/life balance (40%), fair compensation for the work (26%), and appreciation and respect from employers and team members (18%). These 900 recommendations could be their own report but this report is ending with a dozen samples:

- Working hours, it is common amongst those I know to work long hours and work while others are on breaks. The intense scheduling of the industry overall needs to become more reasonable, and sustainable for people to continue working for many years rather than 'burning out' or having to quit for family.
- 報酬的提高 (*Increase in remuneration*)
- Une augmentation des salaires qui nous permettrait de prendre quelques jours de vacances entre les projets plutôt que de les enligner un après l'autre sans jamais arrêter. (*An increase in salaries that would allow us to take a few days of vacation between projects rather than doing them one after the other without ever stopping.*)
- We need more people on SM teams. Staffing appropriately allows for better delegation, better workflows, and will help mitigate some of the martyrdom that is expected in stage management.
- We are not just observers who "sit in the back and take notes"; we are artistic collaborators. From rehearsals through production meetings, our responsibility lies in laying the groundwork for others to explore freely. We are as much part of the creative team as anyone else.
- Upper Management needs to understand that as these shows get technically bigger and as social climate of the world gets more complex, they need to support and validate their Stage Managers in their work since they represent them at the theatre....
- Unpaid/unaccounted-for labor (reports, schedules, emails, prep time, tear down, etc.)
- Unpaid internships and the professionalization of non-union work. Those increased expectations on what young stage managers should be able to do without the support and pay that comes with being an experienced union stage manager are unfair and a barrier to entry for a lot of stage managers.
- Two days off a week. Without cutting the already compressed schedules, or having you miss stuff ("we'll have the asm take that rehearsal" "you don't need to be there")
- Transitioning to be greener: embrace and develop technology that is intuitive, reliable, and flexible... Reducing the amount of paper and ink waste.
- To not have to move back to London if you don't want to have work away from home all the time. Also the assumption that you live in London so they don't pay subs/job not financially viable.
- There should be more coverage for SMs. Understudy SMs, essentially. I see it slowly becoming common, but producers should really budget for that and make it common across all theatres. Without SM understudies, SMs feel forced to work when ill, feel forced to miss out on life events (weddings, birthdays, graduations, funerals), and just in general does not give them the opportunity to advocate for themselves and better work-life balance.

## CONCLUSION

A study of this scale reveals just how broad a field stage management has become over time. We all have our perceptions of the job and the work environment but hopefully this report has expanded that view, particularly about stage managers working in other parts of the world. In the comments section, a number of participants apologized because they thought they would be an outlier - it is directly through these responses that this study has grown from a peek at nonprofit regional theatre in the United States to a much wider understanding (e.g., should stage management for events have its own track of questions?). There are still assumptions and biases present in the survey; I ask your forgiveness for these limitations and I hope you will share recommendations to improve the survey in future years.

While this report has grown in scale, the survey itself was actually shorter than previous editions. In the 2010's, the survey offered a unique track of questions for returning participants to test new questions. Due to the loss of so many stage managers during the pandemic, the 2021 and 2023 versions did not offer this "survey veteran" track, but it will return in the tenth edition of the study! Please participate in this survey again in October 2025 to answer new questions and share what has changed. You can sign up for a mailing list that is solely used to announce the survey and its report at [www.stagemanagersurvey.com](http://www.stagemanagersurvey.com).

I would like to thank the 1,979 stage managers from around the globe who collectively volunteered over 550 hours to provide this incredibly valuable information about our profession. I would also like to thank all of the leaders in our field for promoting this study, Elon University for supporting this research, and Brianna Boucher for assisting me throughout the process. If you have corrections or recommendations for future surveys, please contact me at [davidjmcgraw@gmail.com](mailto:davidjmcgraw@gmail.com). I would like to ensure that a new generation of stage managers can continue this conversation: if you would like to help produce future studies, please contact me!

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