

How everyday workwear practices impact food safety and sustainability

LINDSTRÖM GROUP

study among
food Industry employees
2025





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Key findings

Workwear hygiene practices

Employee wellbeing and sustainability

73%

of food industry employees have brought workwear to home for washing

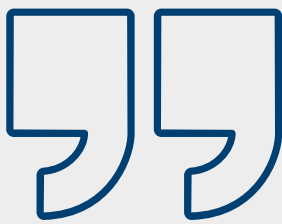
64%



wash the workwear in lower than 70 degrees temperature, not enough to kill bacteria

33%

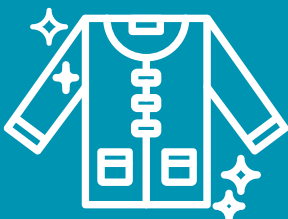
are not aware of any standards or regulations the factory is required to follow



Csilla Kovács-Rahói
Regional Head of Food industry

Improper workwear practices may compromise even the strictest food safety protocols. Garments may become cross-contaminated with household bacteria or washing process may simply be not effective enough to eliminate pathogens.

18%



say that workwear fit to job impacts their productivity

85%



say that workwear cleanliness and comfort impact their satisfaction

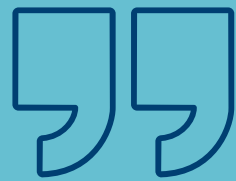
79%



of employees say sustainability matters to them

64%

say that higher-quality materials would be the best way to extend the workwear lifespan



Employers should look beyond compliance and consider how workwear contributes to employee comfort, safety, and a sense of pride. It must be functional and well-suited to the demands of the job, with the right fit and features for day-to-day tasks.

Irena Kostelanská
Product manager





Study overview

This study was conducted by Nortstat, the leading independent European data collector for market research

The data was collected in February 2025 across 11 European countries: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Türkiye. A total of 2,276 employees who use workwear participated in the survey, of which 940 work in the food industry.

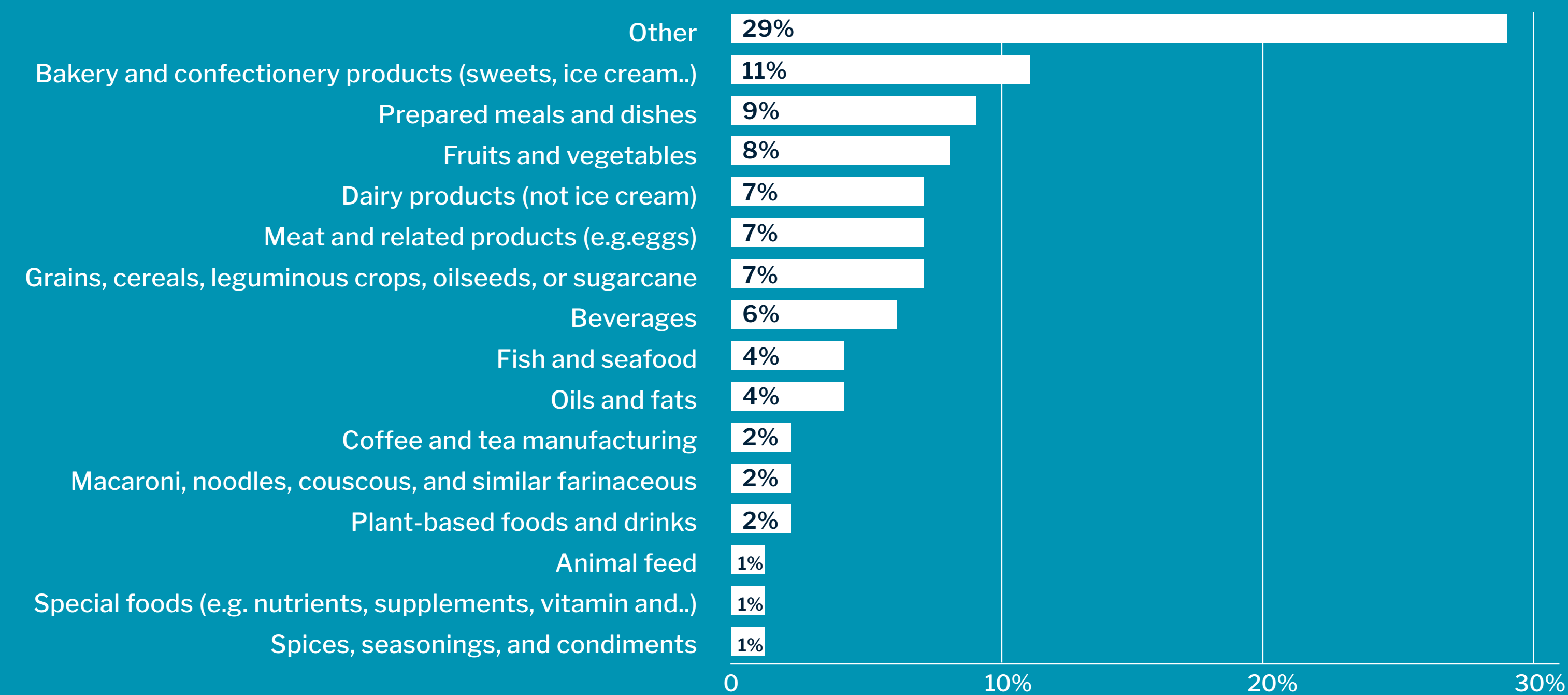
This paper focuses specifically on analysing the findings related to the food industry segment.

About the respondents:

Within the food industry group, the majority of respondents were permanent employees, (76% of participants) and women made up 61% of this group.

The most commonly reported sectors were bakery and confectionery (11%), followed by prepared meals and dishes (9%). Additionally, 29% indicated that they worked in other food-related sub-industries.

Manufacturing industry



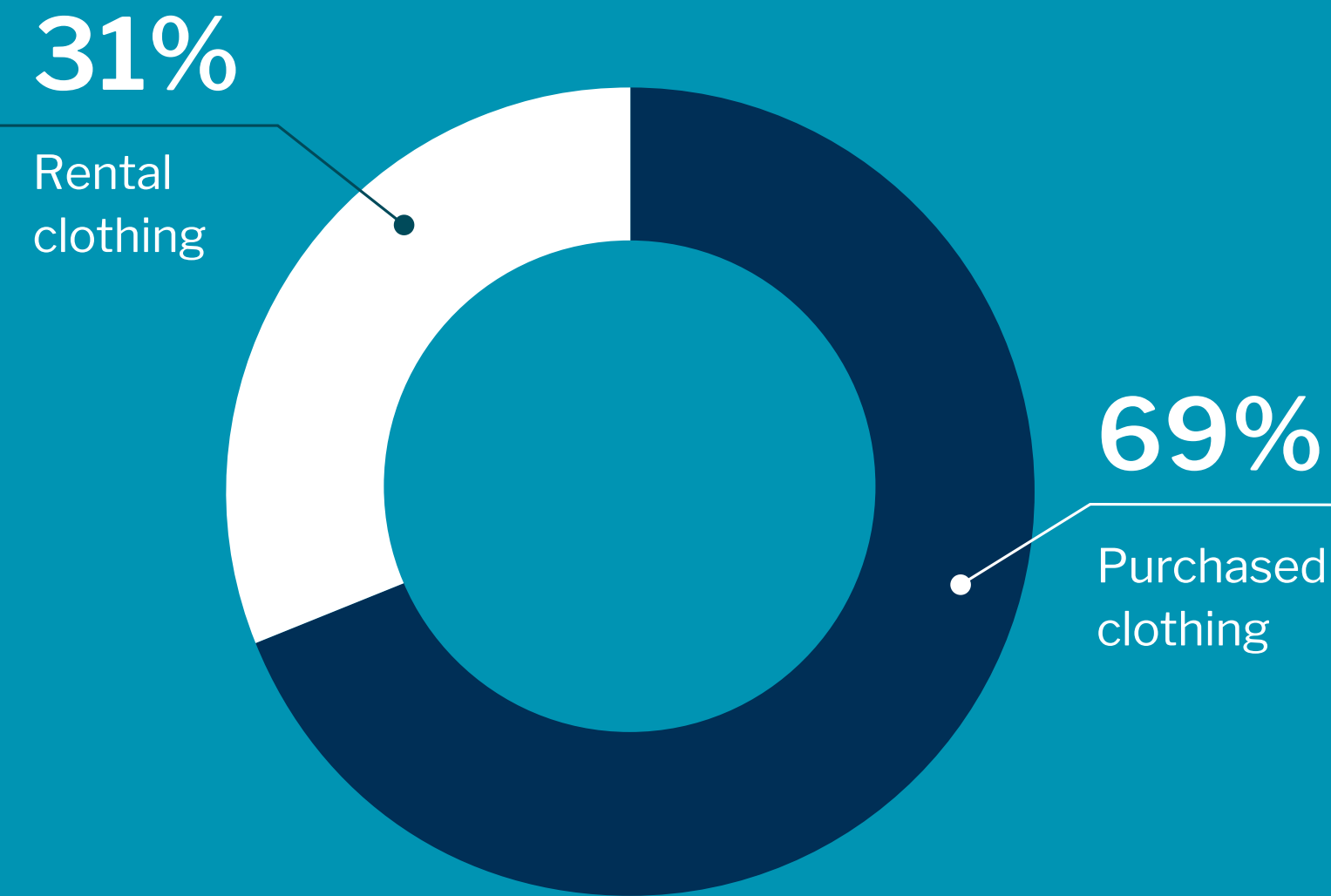


Study overview

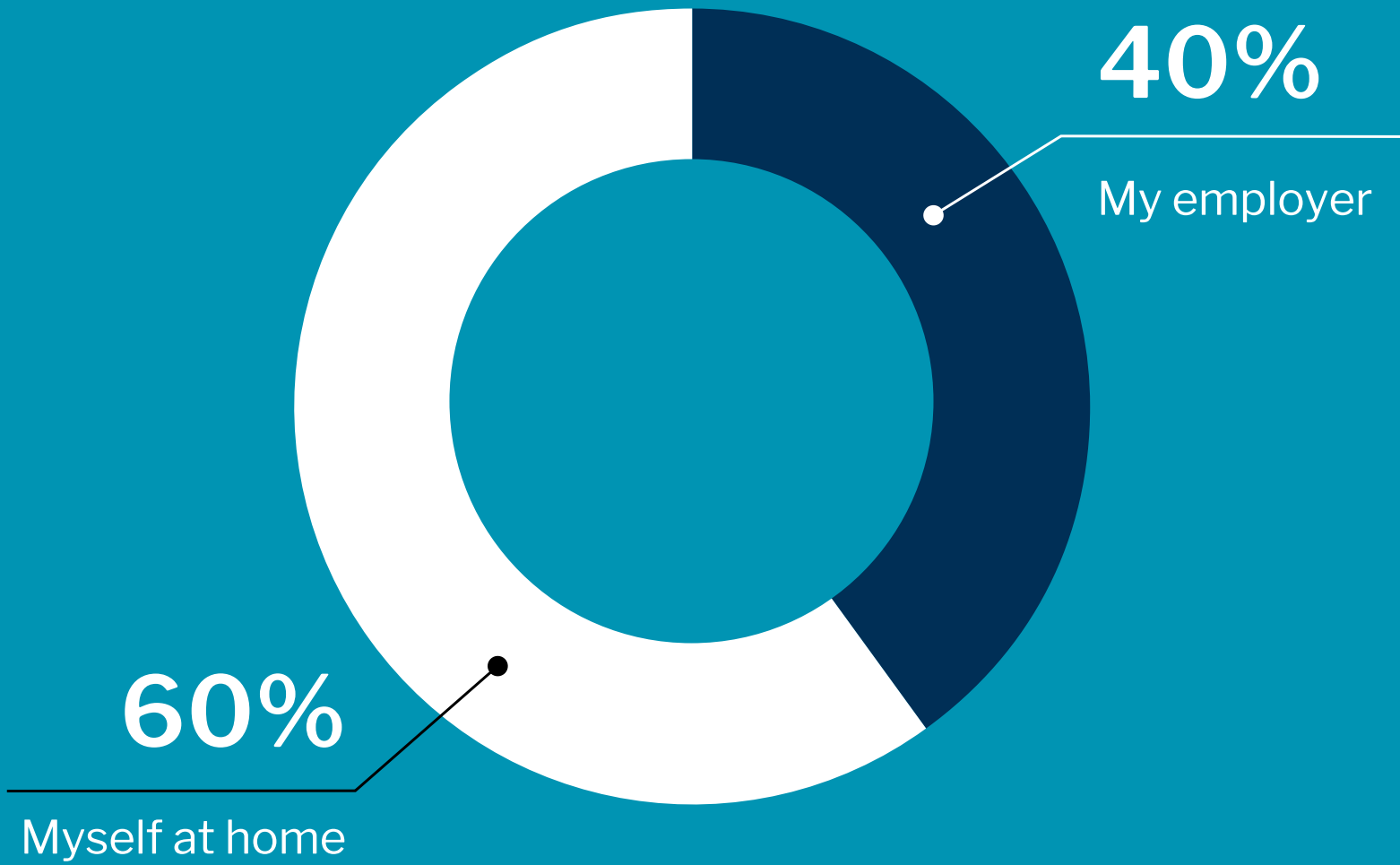
The study found that in the food industry, most employees use purchased workwear and the clothing is most often washed at home.

When employers offer a washing service, the most common solutions are to use an external laundry provider (37%) and workwear service provider (36%). In-house laundries were the least commonly used option (26%).

Clothing provided by your employer



Who is primary responsible for your washing and maintaining your workwear?



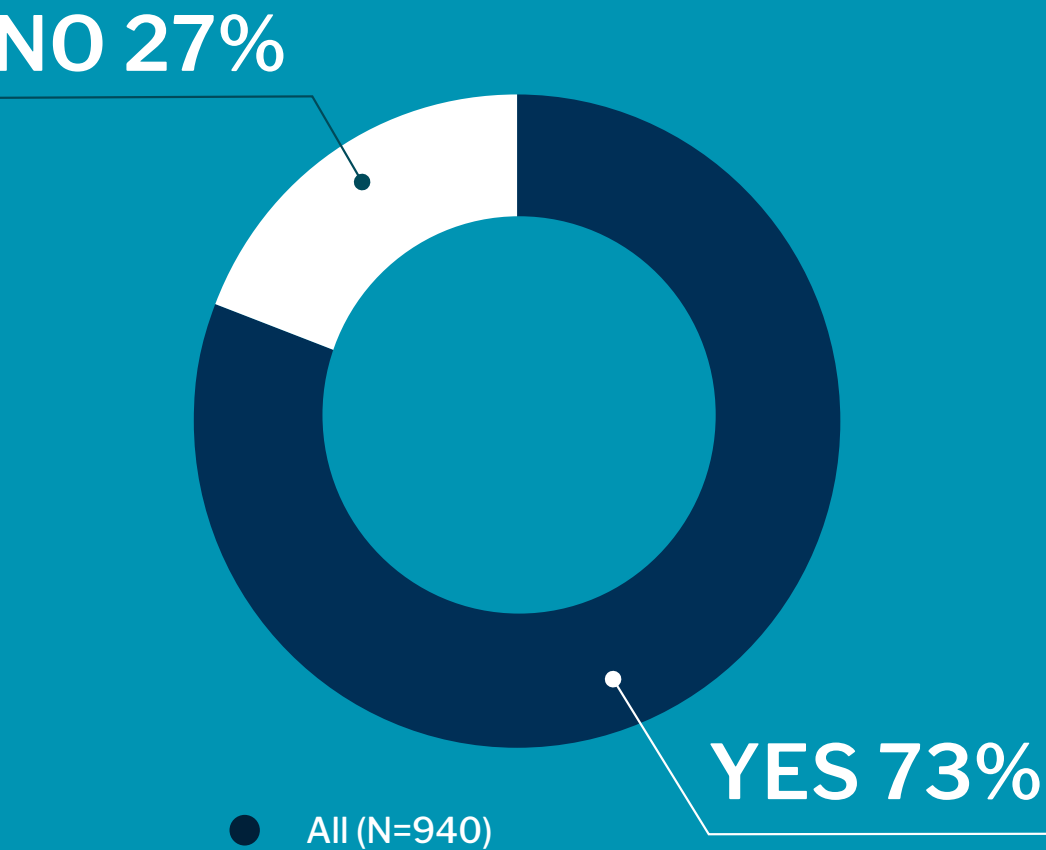


Improper workwear practices may risk food safety





Have you ever brought
workwear home to wash?

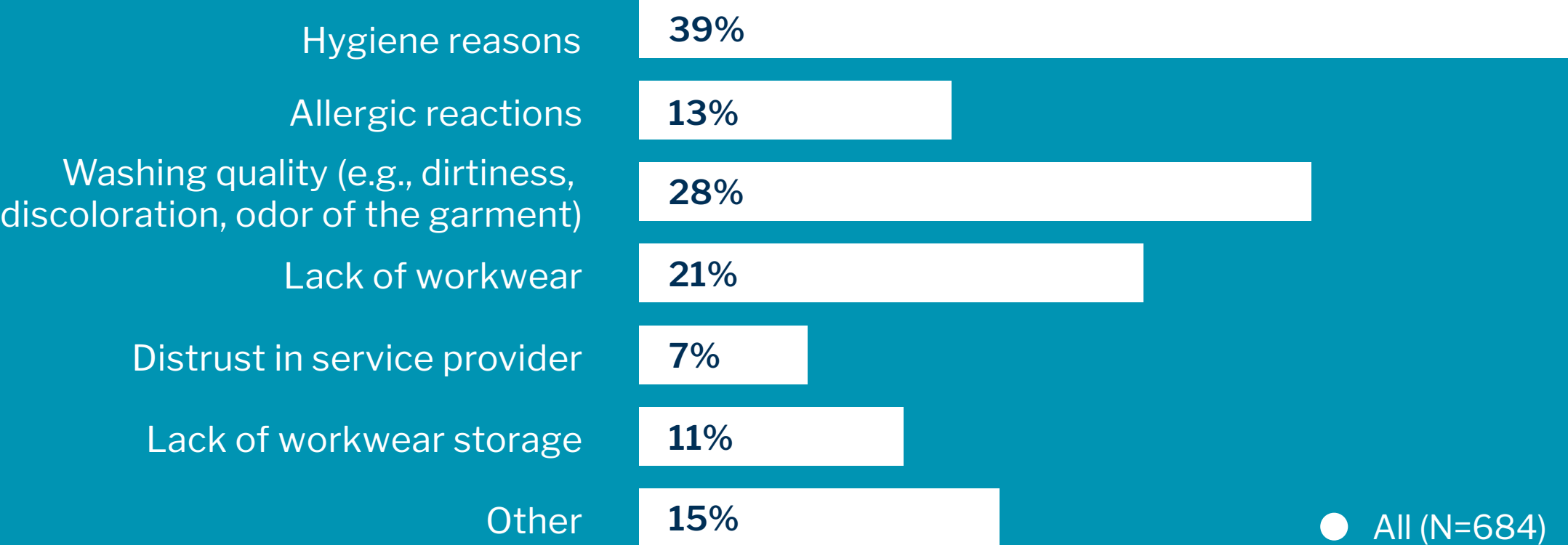


Hygiene gaps of home washing

The study revealed that 73% of employees have taken their workwear home for washing. Even more concerning, the majority wash garments at temperatures below 70°C and rarely iron them—both key steps in effectively killing bacteria.

The primary motivation for home washing was concern over hygiene and cleaning quality, with 18% believing that home washing delivers better results than industrial laundering. One fifth also reported that lack of workwear was the main reason for taking workwear for home to wash.

Main reasons for bringing
workwear home to wash



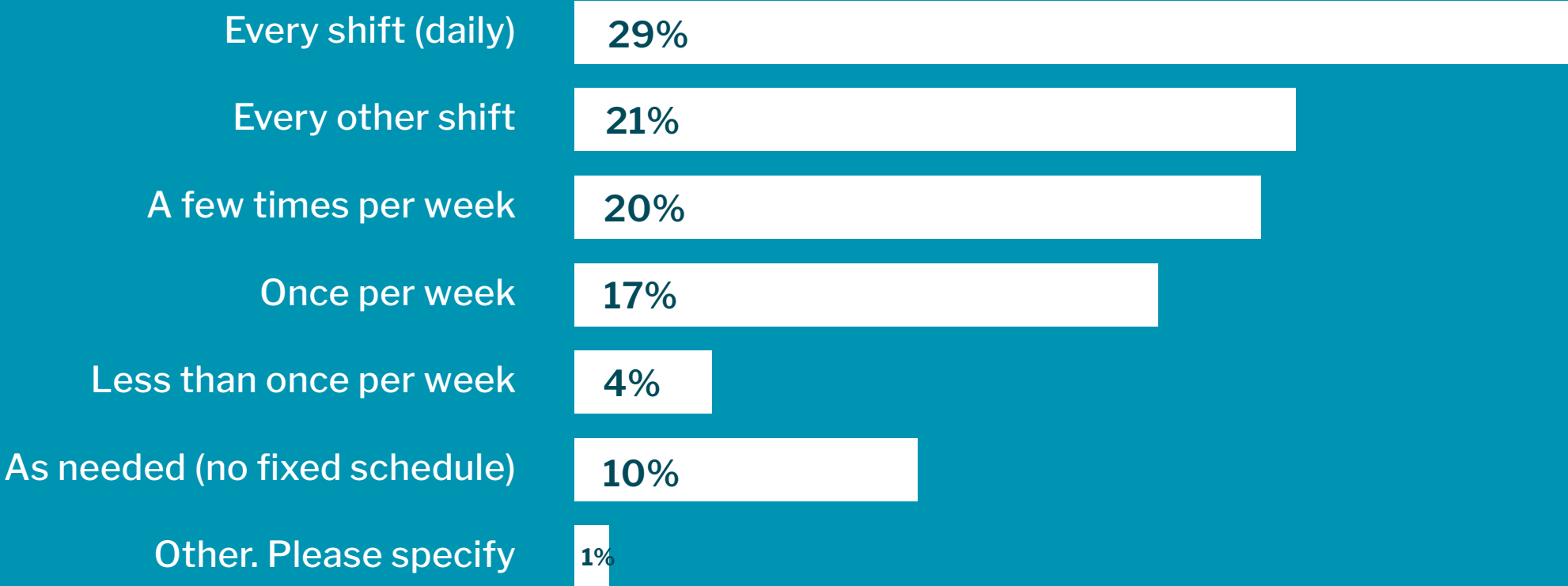


Employees lack hygiene knowledge

There is also significant room for improvement in overall hygiene practices. Only one in five change workwear only once a week or less. Additionally, 24% admitted to wearing workwear outside the workplace, posing a potential hygiene risk.

Awareness of food industry hygiene standards is also lacking. One-third of respondents said they were unaware of any hygiene regulations their facility should follow.

How often do you change your workwear for a clean and fresh set?





64%

wash garments
below 70 degrees

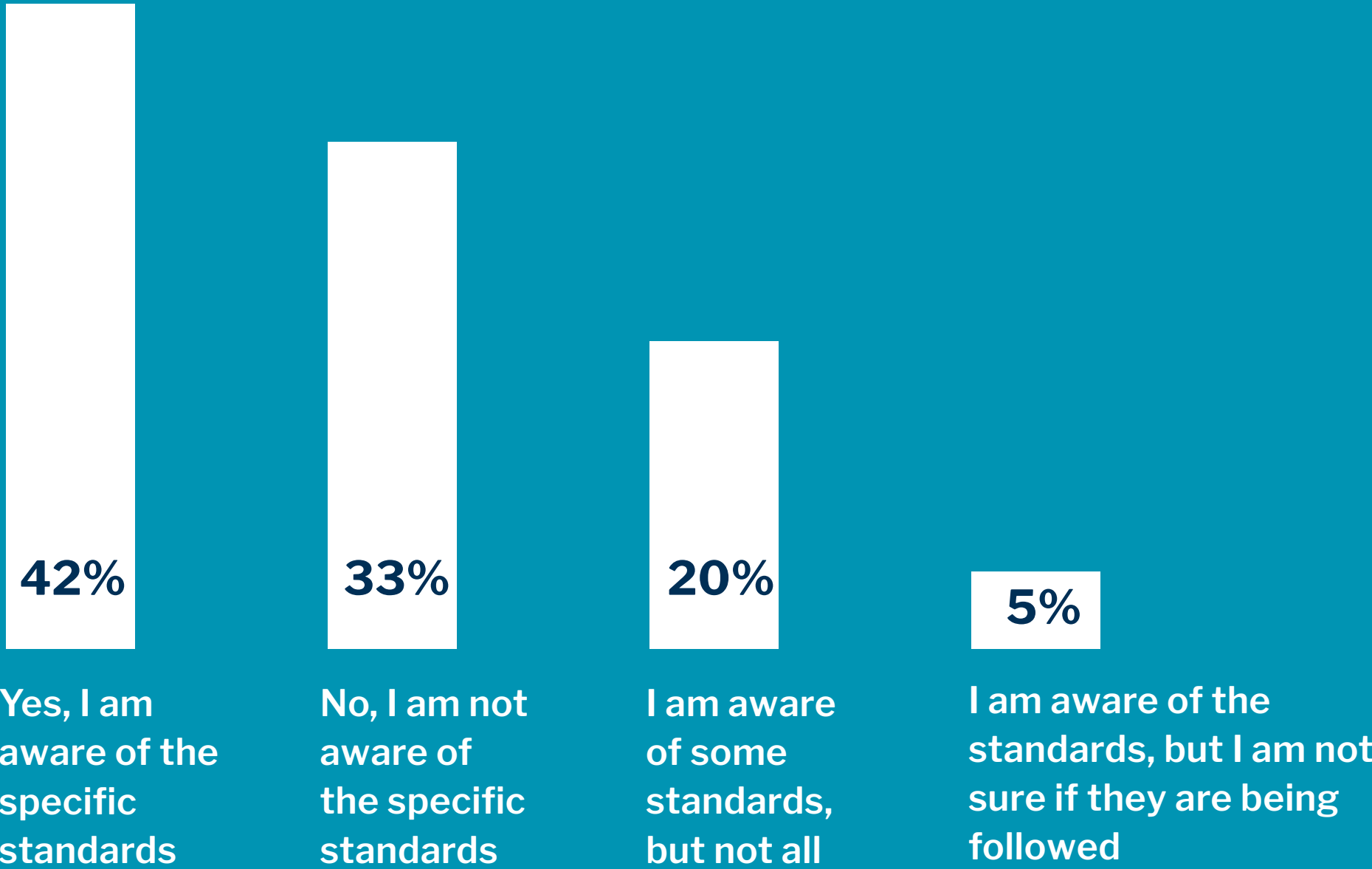
24%

have used their
workwear outside
work premises

Do you iron your workwear?



Are you aware of the specific standards or regulations that your factory is required to comply with?





EXPERT INSIGHT - HYGIENE PRACTICES

How to enhance workwear hygiene practices?



Csilla Kovács-Rahói
Regional Head of Food industry

What are the core hygiene requirements for workwear in food production environments?

In food production, maintaining hygiene workwear processes is crucial for ensuring product safety and preventing contamination. The requirements are shaped by several established food safety standards such as GHP, HACCP, ISO 22000, and the European EN 14065 standard for laundry hygiene. While there is no single harmonised global standard for food industry workwear, these frameworks provide a comprehensive foundation.

Effective workwear in these environments must be purposefully designed to prevent cross-contamination. This means, for example, avoiding garments with buttons, outer pockets above the waist, or any external openings. Long sleeves are recommended to minimise skin contact with food, and all fasteners should be concealed and made of metal for easier detection in case of accidental detachment.

Workwear must also be tailored to the specific hygiene risk level of the working environment. For example, in high or extremely high-risk areas, garments should be changed daily. Importantly, laundry processes must follow EN 14065 guidelines, ensuring disinfection through thermal or chemothermal means. Segregation of clean and soiled garments during storage, handling, and transport is also important to prevent recontamination.

Can you walk us through how improper workwear practices can lead to contamination incidents?

Improper workwear practices can quickly compromise even the strictest food safety protocols. One of the most common issues is the lack of clean workwear, which may lead employees to take garments home for washing. This practice introduces several risks. Garments may become cross-contaminated with household bacteria, or the washing process may simply not be effective enough to eliminate pathogens.

Another issue arises from the use of damaged or unsuitable garments. For example, a torn sleeve or a missing fastener can act as a harbour for bacteria or even end up in the food itself. Poor changing room practices also increase contamination risk. If employees skip hand hygiene or cross hygiene barriers improperly, they can bring external contaminants into clean areas.

What would be your top three recommendations for companies trying to elevate hygiene through better workwear practices?

First, I recommend that companies ensure the hygienic washing and maintenance of workwear. The most effective and effortless approach is to partner with a professional service provider that guarantees hygiene

through certified processes, such as EN 14065. This standard ensures all garments undergo validated disinfection and that hygiene is maintained throughout laundering and delivery. Selecting a provider with backup systems and comprehensive process documentation also supports audit readiness and helps prevent service disruptions.

Second, it is important to review whether workwear and related hygiene practices reflect the risk levels of different production zones. Garments should also be durable, functional, and light-coloured to easily show signs of soiling.

Lastly, regular employee training is crucial, as people are often the weakest link in hygiene. Staff must understand why workwear shouldn't be taken home and why strict hygiene protocols matter. To support this, we have developed a service that prevents garments from leaving the premises. It uses digital technology to trigger a visual or sound alarm if workwear crosses a designated boundary.

Together, these actions significantly enhance food safety and reduce the risk of contamination.



Workwear impacts employee wellbeing





Workers link poor workwear to lower productivity and satisfaction

Employees in the food industry generally report high levels of satisfaction. Only 4% expressed dissatisfaction, while a majority (64%) rated their wellbeing as high or very high. The main factors influencing employee wellbeing were salary and compensation (49%), followed by workload and stress levels (29%), job security (24%), and social connections within teams (24%).

However, when asked to evaluate their employer across various dimensions, support for employee wellbeing received the lowest ratings. While 82% gave high marks for hygiene and safety practices and 71% for sustainability, only 62% rated their employer positively in terms of promoting wellbeing.

One actionable area for improvement is workwear practices, which clearly influence both wellbeing and productivity. This may be an underestimated aspect, as many

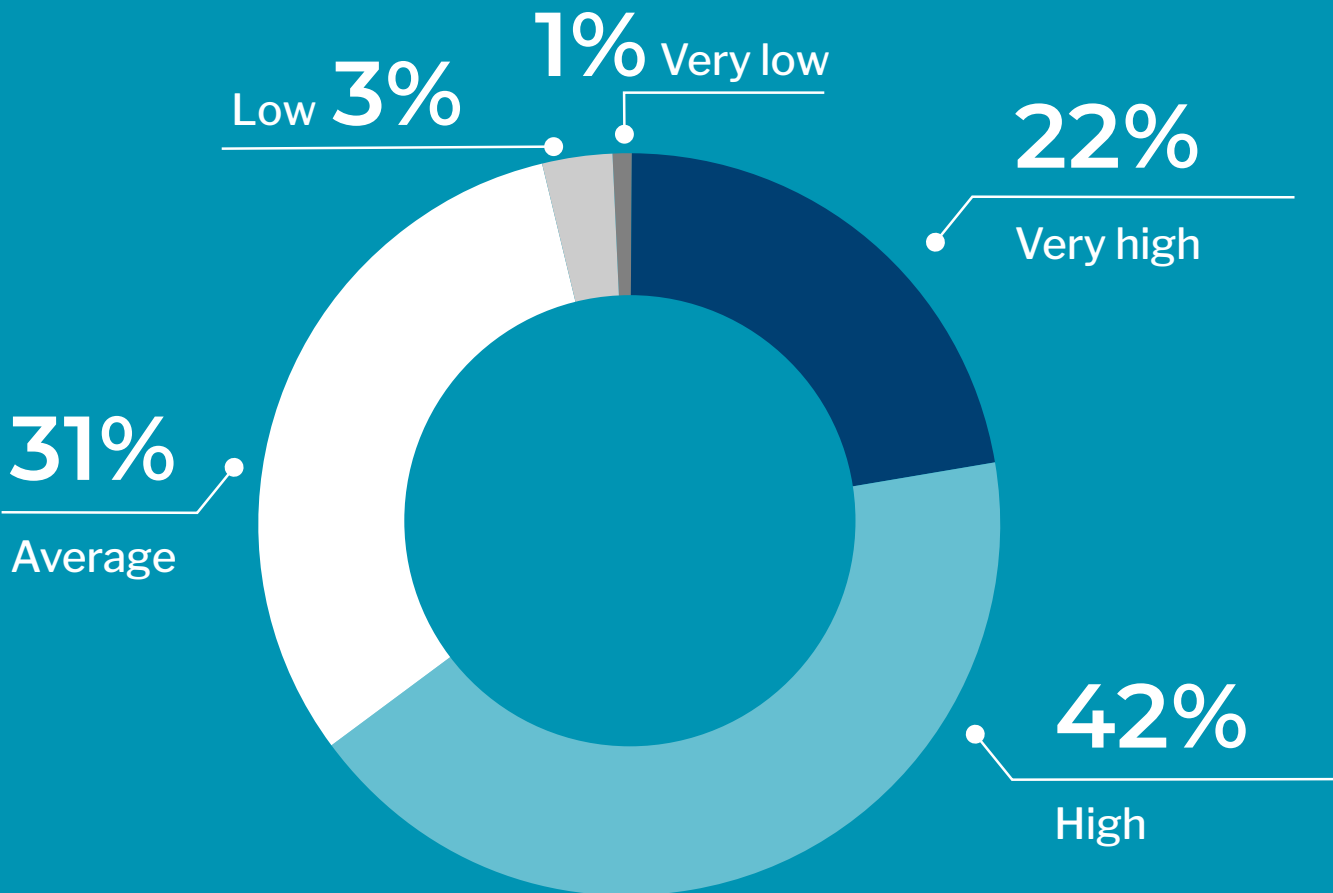
employers still expect employees to maintain their own workwear. In fact, majority of employees wash and iron workwear themselves, and 15% even repair damaged workwear on their own.

Workwear also plays a key role in overall employee satisfaction, with comfort, functionality, and cleanliness rated as the most valued attributes. Moreover, 18% of employees stated that properly fitting workwear directly impacts their productivity.

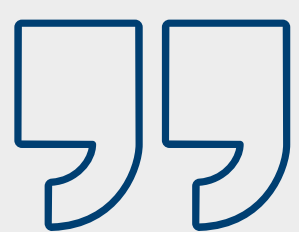
The most common complaint was poor durability, cited by 28% of respondents. Notably, improved durability was also the top suggestion for enhancing the lifespan of workwear—highlighting the strong link between workwear durability and environmental responsibility.



How would you rate your overall wellbeing at work?



18%
**say that
workwear
fit to job impacts
their productivity**



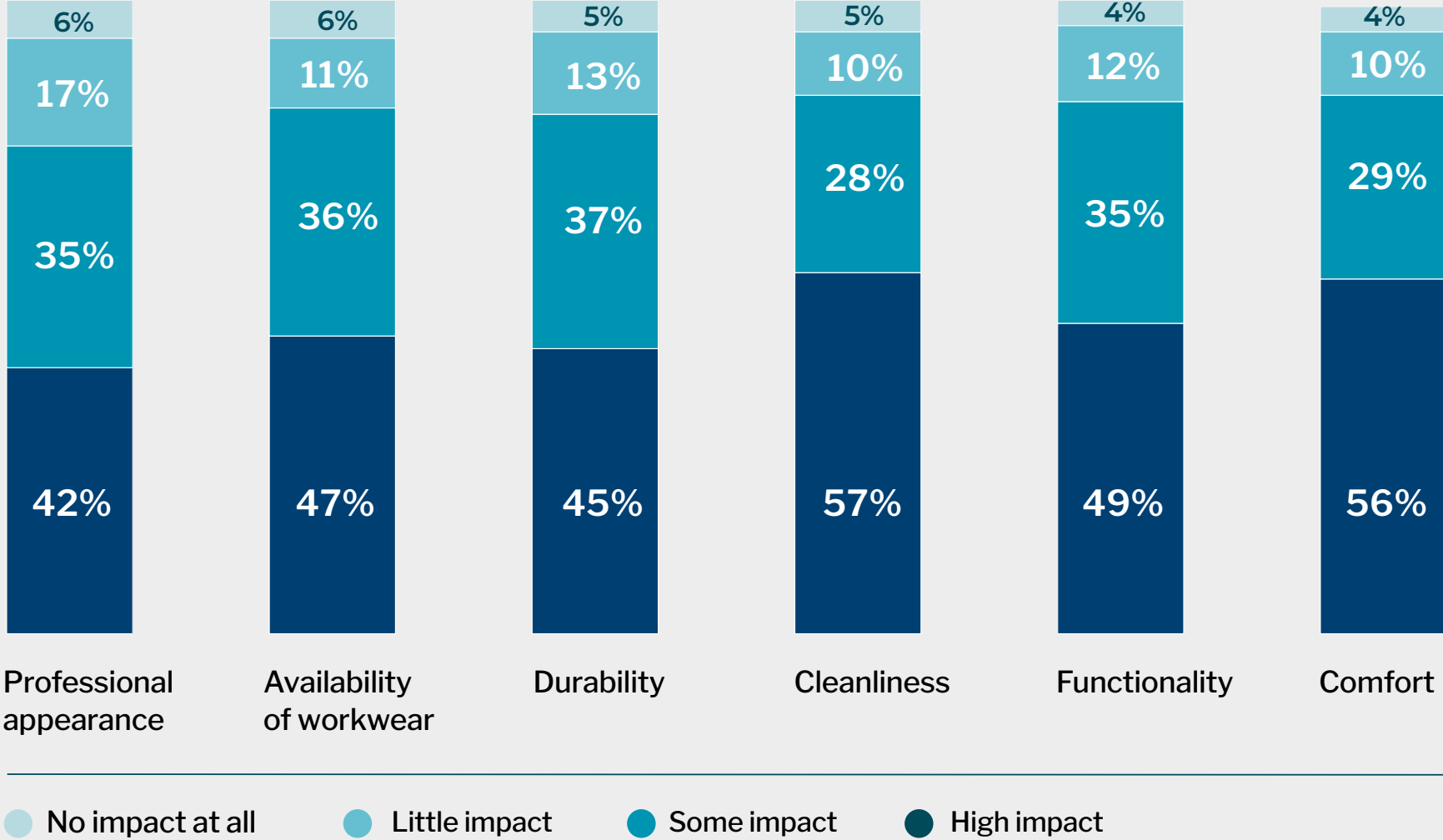
How would you grade your employer in following topics?

Hygiene and safety practices	4.12
Sustainability	3.90
Productivity and processes	3.81
Promotion of employee wellbeing	3.70

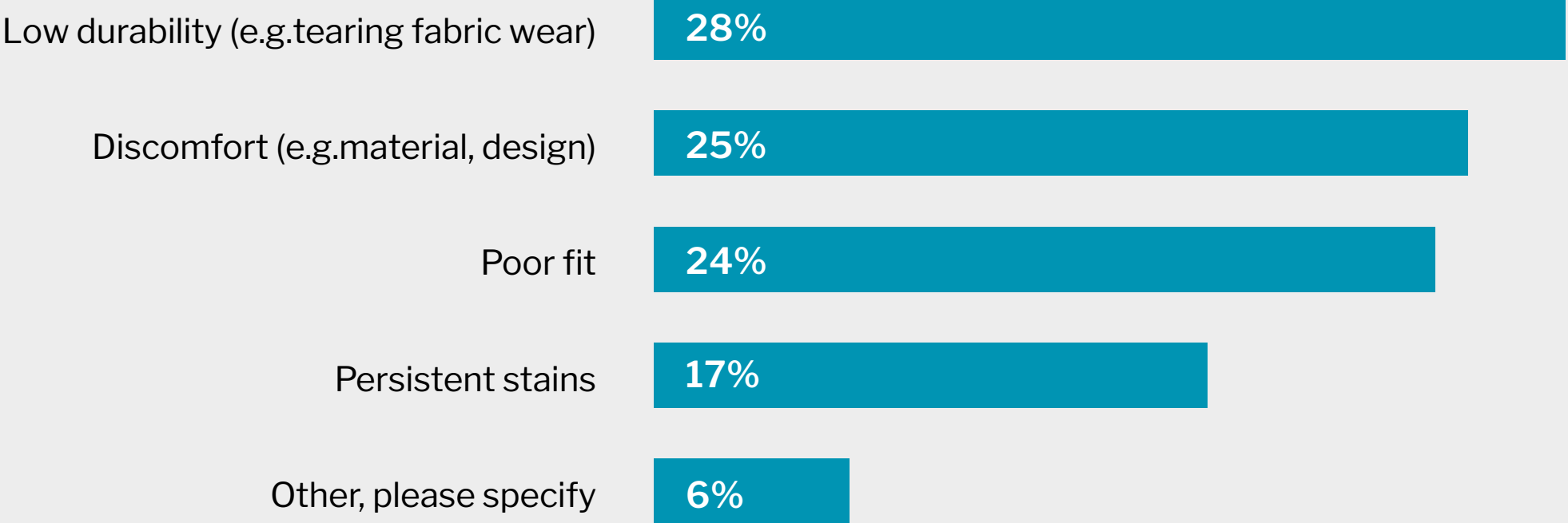
● All (N=940) / Scale (1-5)



How do you think these workwear features affect your satisfaction?



What issues in workwear bother you most?





EXPERT INSIGHT – EMPLOYEE WELLBEING

What to consider when choosing workwear?



Irena Kostelanská
Product manager

What are the most important factors employers should consider when selecting workwear for their employees?

Employers should look beyond compliance and consider how workwear contributes to employee comfort, safety, and a sense of pride. It must be functional and well-suited to the demands of the job, with the right fit and features for day-to-day tasks. Poorly fitting or uncomfortable garments can negatively affect not only morale and performance but also workers’ safety - for example, too loose garments may pose a risk of entanglement in machinery.

Sustainability is also becoming increasingly important. Choosing durable, repairable and responsibly sourced workwear, not only supports environmental goals but also reflects values that matter to employees.

Another factor often overlooked is ease of use. Providing a professional laundry and maintenance service removes the burden from employees and ensures they always have clean, high-quality garments available when needed.

How do you assess whether workwear is comfortable and fit-for-purpose across different roles?

We combine real-world user testing with technical garment profiling to make sure workwear suits each role. Employees trial garments in their actual working conditions and provide feedback on comfort and functionality.

We also analyse the physical demands of the job to tailor features like breathability, flexibility, and protection. Regular surveys and service feedback help us stay responsive, and we use this input to continuously improve. We also work with textile experts to select high-quality materials, and we make sure our designs reflect real diversity by offering gender-specific cuts and modification options when needed.

What innovations or trends in workwear do you think will shape employee experience in the next few years?

We are seeing exciting progress in both digitalisation and sustainability. Digital platforms and smart workwear are transforming how garments are tracked, managed, and maintained, offering greater transparency and efficiency.

Circular design is becoming increasingly important, especially with upcoming EU regulations driving change. Workwear must be designed for durability, repairability, and reuse, with new requirements on recycled content reinforcing the shift towards more sustainable practices.



Sustainability matters to employees





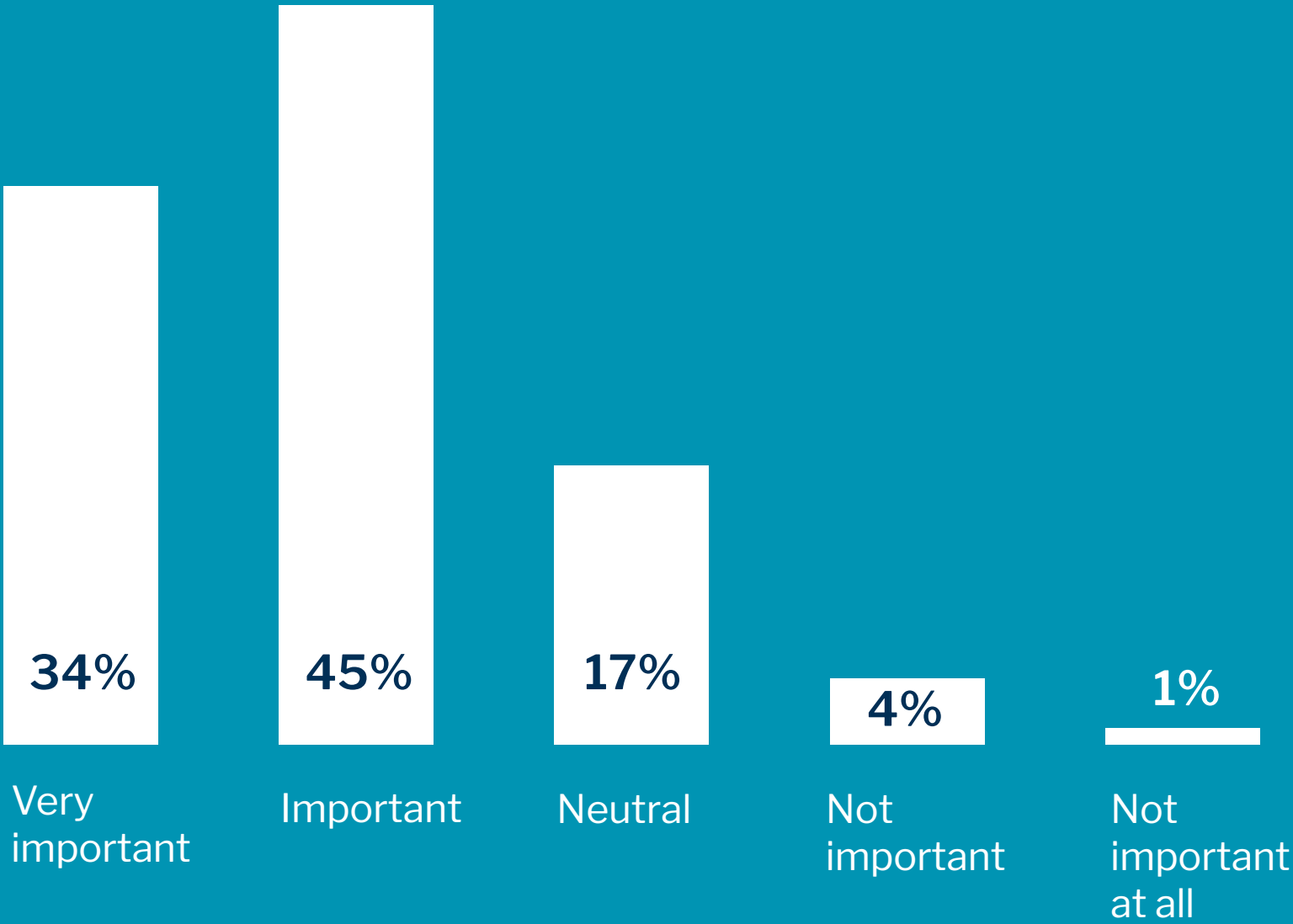
Sustainability matters to employees – but damaged workwear still ends up in landfill

Sustainability matters to food industry employees: 79% said it is important or very important in their personal lives, and 54% expressed interest in learning more about the sustainability of their workwear. However, there is still room for improvement when it comes to sustainable practices regarding workwear.

Currently, 30% of damaged workwear is not repaired. Nearly half (47%) of employees are unaware of what happens to discarded garments. Among those who are informed, 29% reported that they still end up in landfill. Encouragingly, half of the respondents who knew how their garments are handled said that the items are now being recycled.

According to employees, the most effective ways to extend the lifespan of workwear are by investing in higher-quality materials (64%) and improving maintenance practices (30%).

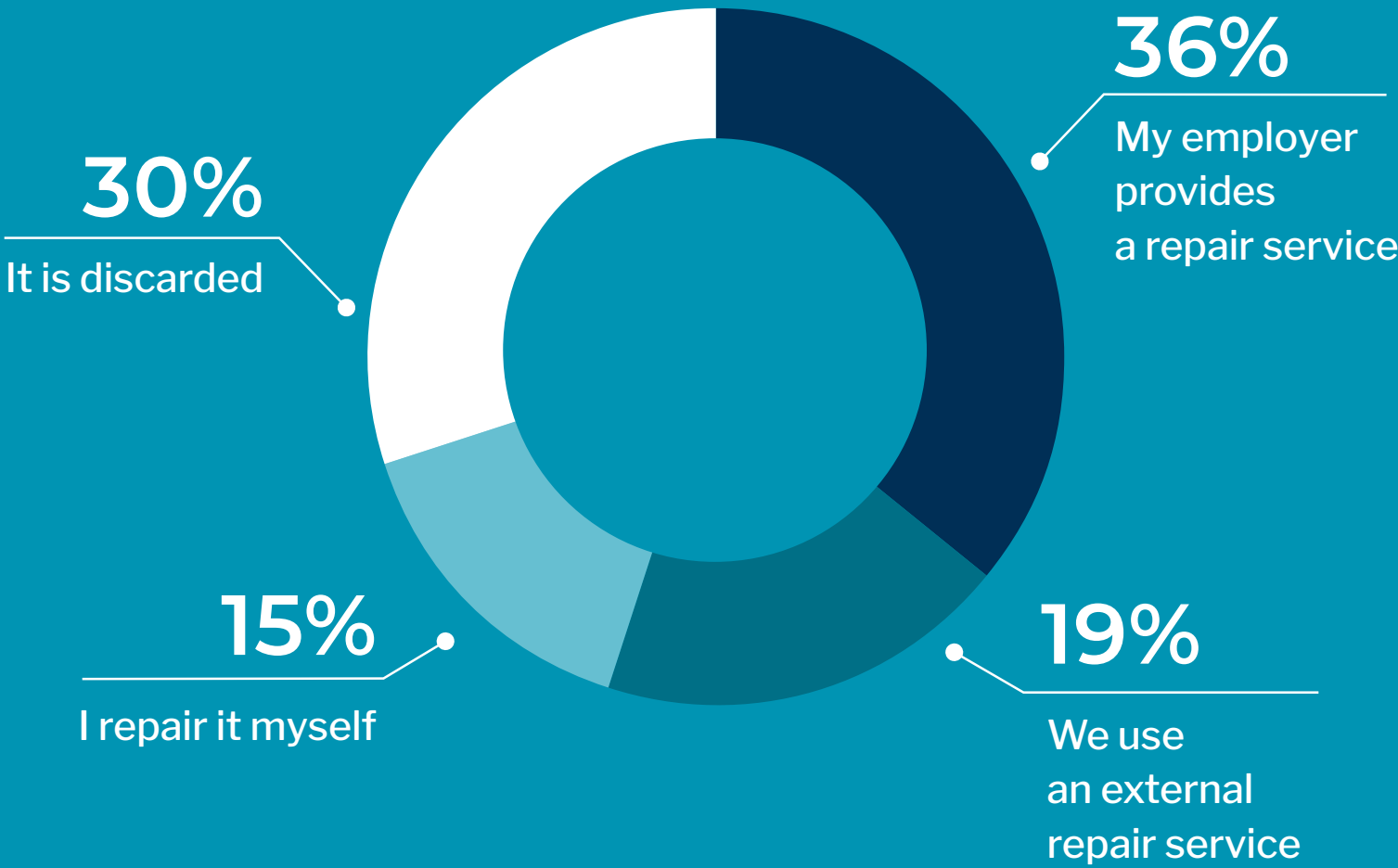
How important is sustainability to you in your personal life?



● All (N=940)



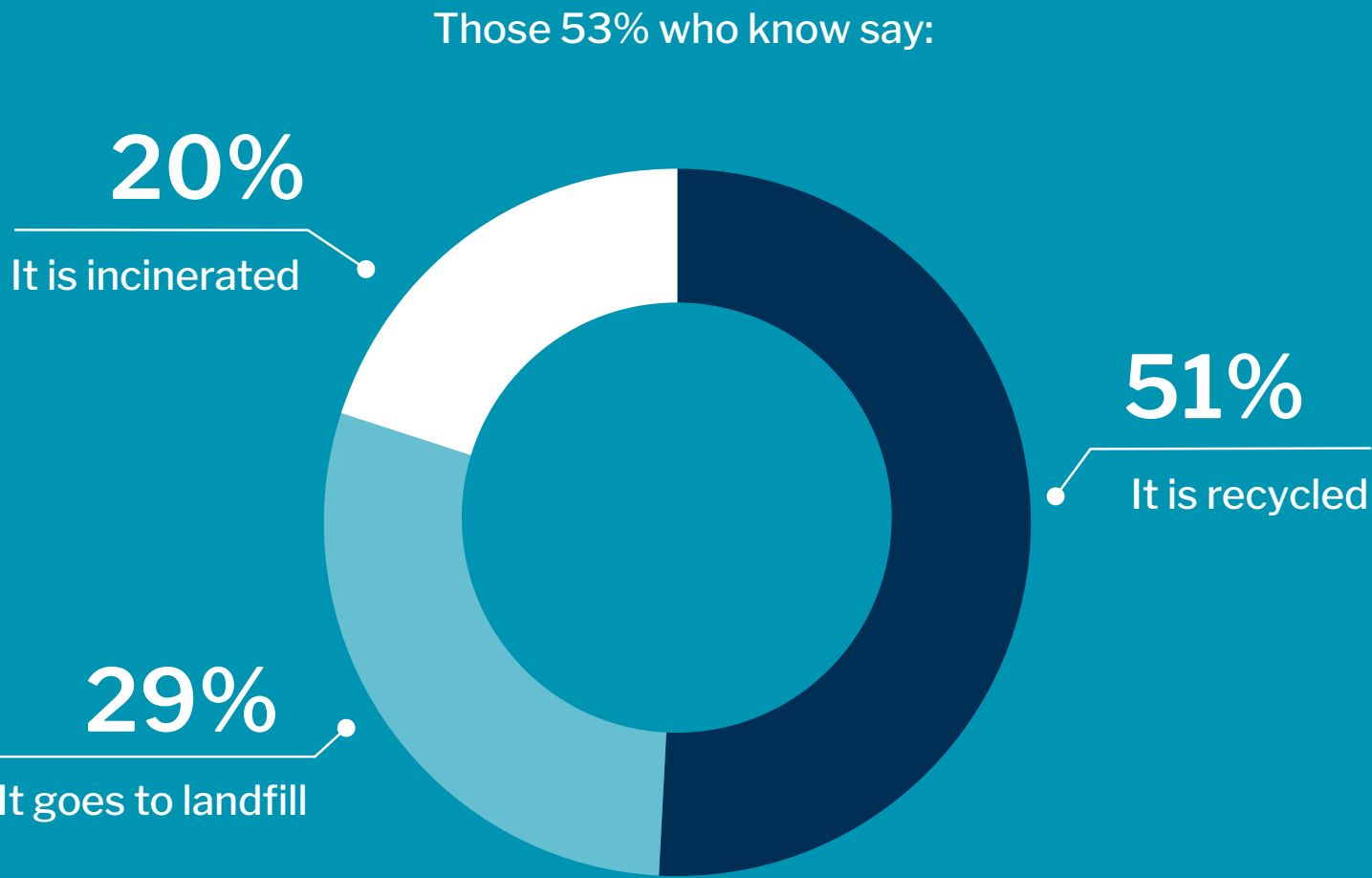
If your workwear is damaged, what happens to it?



30%
**of damaged
workwear is not
repaired**



How is your discarded workwear handled?





EXPERT INSIGHT – WORKWEAR SUSTAINABILITY

How to improve workwear sustainability?



Ulla Luhtasela
Sustainability Director

How to ensure that the raw materials used in your workwear are sustainably and ethically sourced?

The key requirement is longevity—the longer workwear stays in use, the more sustainable it becomes. Material selection should never compromise durability.

Fortunately, some recycled materials are proving to be strong alternatives. For instance, recycled polyester performs similarly to virgin polyester. It offers both durability and wearer comfort without reducing the garment’s lifespan. According to some estimates*, producing recycled polyester generates 30% fewer CO² emissions, uses 45% less energy, and requires 20% less water compared to virgin polyester.

One way to ensure responsible sourcing is by working with suppliers who maintain long-term relationships across their supply chains. These suppliers should also have clear policies and audit mechanisms in place. Independent sustainability ratings—such as EcoVadis—can further help assess suppliers’ ethical and sustainable procurement practices in addition to our risk-based audits conducted annually.

What design features can help extend the lifespan of garments in industrial settings?

Reusability and repairability should be considered right from the design stage. Reusability can be improved, for example, with adjustable features. Repairability benefits from simple, modular designs and minimal accessories. Reinforcement patches in high-stress areas can also help garments last longer.

At Lindström, the digitalisation of workwear has opened up new possibilities. Data on garment wear and repairs now informs future design decisions. This helps us create more durable and easier-to-maintain products.

It’s also important to consider emotional durability. A garment needs to feel good, not just perform well. When real users are involved in the design process, it often leads to better functionality and higher satisfaction—key factors in long-term use.

What barriers prevent more companies from repairing or recycling workwear?

The main barriers are a lack of time, awareness, and practical solutions. It’s often quicker to discard a damaged garment than to organise repair or recycling through external partners.

In some regions, recycling infrastructure is still limited. In certain cases, we have had to ship textile waste across borders for proper recycling—which is far from ideal. Finding, auditing, and working with reliable recycling partners takes time, expertise, and resources. For many companies, this leads to choosing the simpler path: sending textiles to landfill or incineration.

* REPREEVE® Unifi, Inc. manufacturing process, <https://www.klopman.com/greenwear-old/fabrics-made-with-recycledpolyester#fabric/58293>

