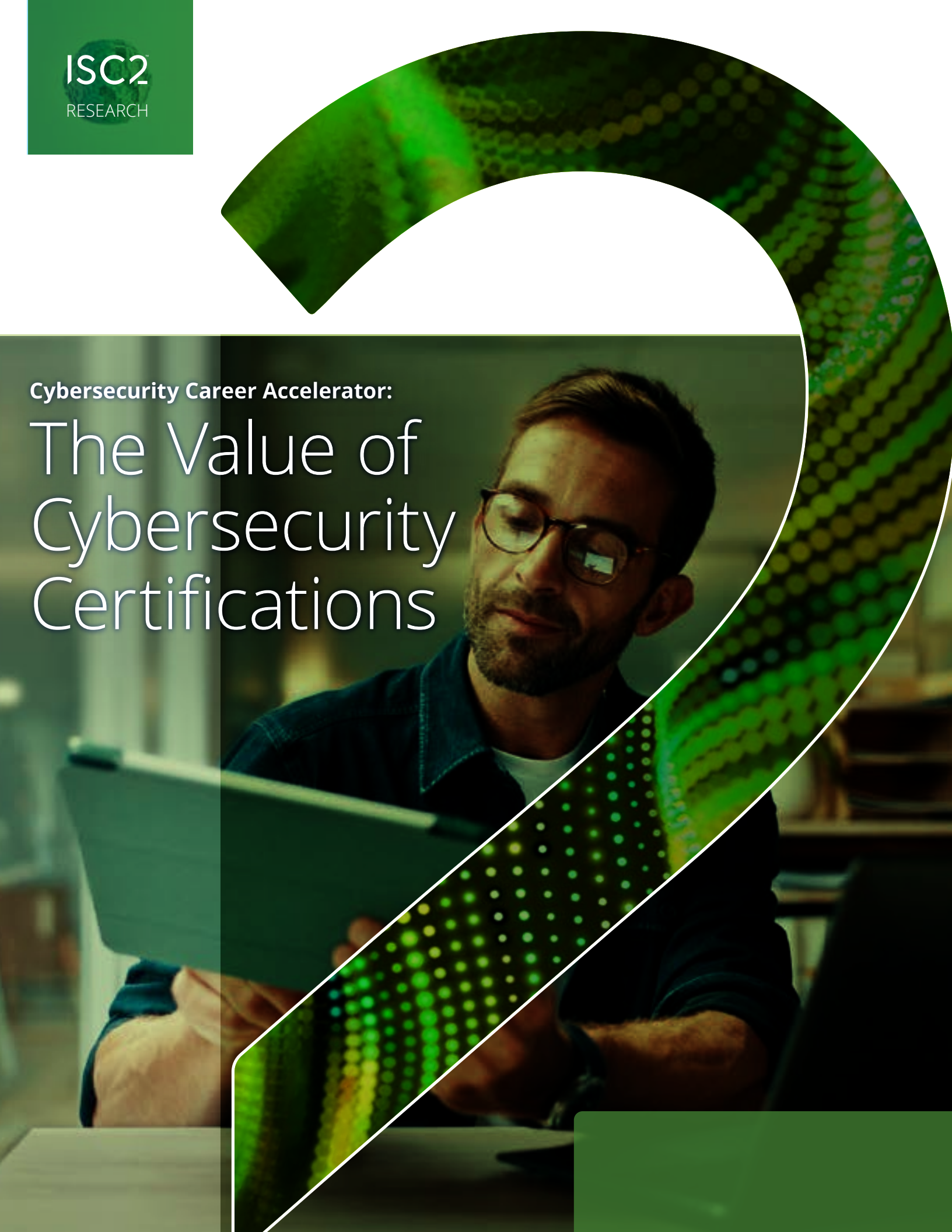


Cybersecurity Career Accelerator:

# The Value of Cybersecurity Certifications



## About this Research

This report is based on an online survey of 1,533 cybersecurity professionals who hold at least one vendor-neutral certification. 71% also reported holding vendor-specific certifications. C-suite and executive-level leaders were excluded. Among employed respondents, 91% work in managerial roles, 5% in mid- or advanced-level staff roles and 4% in junior-level roles. Participants were required to have at least one year of cybersecurity-related work experience. 49% had seven or more years, 40% had 4–6 years and 11% had 1–3 years. Responses collected from Canada, Germany, India, Japan, the U.K. and the U.S. between December 2025 and January 2026. Because all respondents hold at least one vendor-neutral certification, findings describe certification pathways among this group and do not represent the broader population of cybersecurity professionals.

**A complete profile of respondents is included at the end of this report.**



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# Certifications are Extremely Valuable – The Data Makes It Clear

Cybersecurity certifications are widely used across the profession. They often appear in job descriptions as a way for employers to assess knowledge and skills and professionals to demonstrate their capabilities. ISC2 surveyed 1,533 cybersecurity professionals to understand how much value they place on certifications and found that this type of credential ranks alongside hands-on experience as being the most impactful career accelerator in the field.

When asked what has had the greatest impact on their careers, 68% of respondents named hands-on work experience as very impactful, while 67% said the same of their vendor-neutral certifications. Vendor-specific certifications were close behind; 65% indicated they are very impactful. Both types of credentials rank well ahead of formal education (52%), and mentorship and networking (54%).

**67%**

of respondents  
said their  
vendor-neutral  
certifications were  
very impactful on  
their cyber career

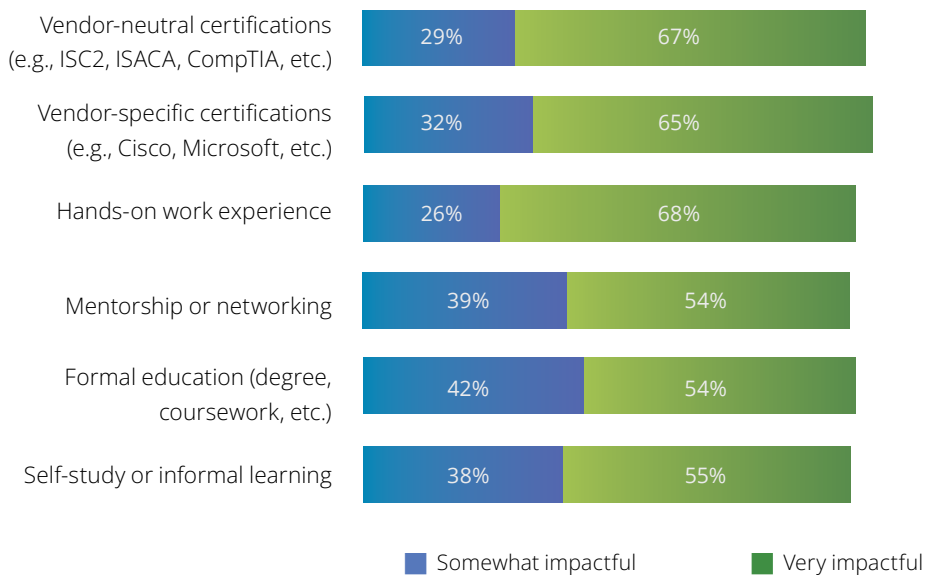
## Understanding Certification Types

**Vendor-Neutral Certifications** cover knowledge and skills that apply across different technologies and tools, and are not tied to any one company's products. Broadly recognized across employers and industries, often globally, they are awarded by independent organizations.

**Vendor-Specific Certifications** focus on the products or technologies of a particular company. They are issued directly by that vendor and are especially useful in roles that require proficiency with a specific platform or tool.



## Impact of Certifications on Career in Cybersecurity



*Percentages for those who selected 'not impactful' and 'not applicable' are not shown.*

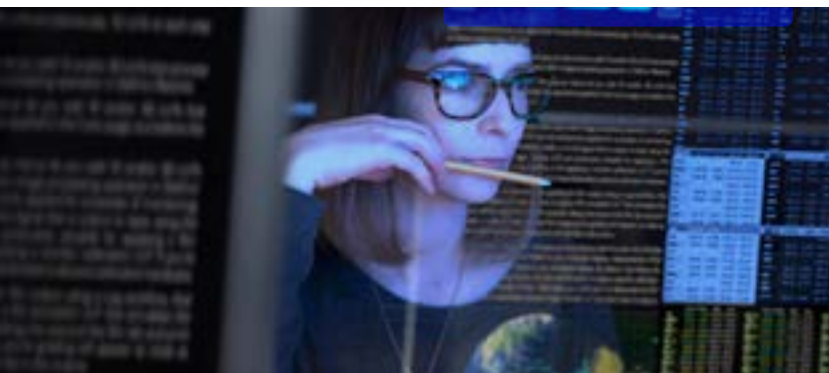
This research also highlights that professionals pursue certifications for different reasons at different points in their careers, and that both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certifications play important, complementary roles.

# Why Professionals Pursue Certifications and How Reasons Evolve

Motivations for earning certifications are not static. They shift meaningfully as careers mature, and understanding these shifts helps explain why cybersecurity professionals pursue different kinds of credentials at different times in their careers.

## First Certifications: Building a Foundation for Career Entry

When professionals pursue their first certification, the top motivations center on gaining foundational cybersecurity knowledge or skills (45%), qualifying for a cybersecurity-related job (44%) and gaining credibility or professional recognition (42%). Entering or breaking into the field is the primary driver at this stage.



“To keep pace in this rapidly evolving field, continuous learning and improvement are essential. Mastering these skills directly benefits my daily work, and these certifications have given me confidence.”

— Director/middle manager  
vendor-neutral certified

The type of first certification pursued didn't dramatically change these motivations. Those who began with a vendor-neutral certification were more likely to cite qualifying for a cybersecurity job and standing out in the job market as key reasons for this first venture into earning a certification. Those who began with a vendor-specific certification showed a similar overall profile, suggesting that at the earliest career stage, the "why" is fairly consistent regardless of which path professionals choose first.

### Motivations for Obtaining First Certification (by Certification Type)



### Most Recent Certifications: Growing and Staying Current

By the time professionals pursued their most recent certification, the motivations shift and reflect the need for professional growth rather than career entry. The top drivers include staying current with new technologies (40%), deepening expertise in a specific area (39%) and increasing earning potential or salary (37%). Notably, these motivations were consistent across experience levels, suggesting that the “why” behind continued certification remains stable even as careers develop.

Where experience does show up is in the certification pathway itself. Professionals with more years in the field, particularly those with 7–15 years of experience, were more likely to have started with vendor-specific certifications and moved toward vendor-neutral credentials over time (54% and 57% respectively, compared to 39% among those with 1–3 years). Those earlier in their careers, meanwhile, were more likely to hold only vendor-neutral certifications. This reinforces a broader theme in the data: vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certifications tend to play complementary rather than competing roles, with the balance shifting as professionals grow.

### Certification Pathway by Years of Experience

	1–3 years	4–6 years	7–10 years	11–15 years	More than 15 years
Vendor-Specific → Vendor-Neutral	39%	48%	54%	57%	55%
Vendor-Neutral → Vendor-Specific	22%	18%	20%	24%	23%
Vendor-Neutral only	39%	34%	26%	19%	22%



These certifications have helped me build a stronger technical base and gain more respect in my field. They also opened doors to better job opportunities and leadership roles.

— Director/middle manager, both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certified

## What Certifications Professionals Hold

Among the 1,533 respondents surveyed, all held at least one vendor-neutral certification, with 71% also holding vendor-specific credentials. This is important context: the data does not suggest that professionals choose one type and stop there. Rather, certifications accumulate over time in ways that reflect career goals, employer needs and evolving areas of focus. That nearly three-quarters of vendor-neutral holders also carry vendor-specific credentials points to how commonly professionals draw on both types across their careers.

... certifications accumulate over time in ways that reflect career goals, employer needs and evolving areas of focus ...



“The process of obtaining these certifications improved my problem-solving skills, strategic thinking abilities and ability to lead security teams effectively.”

— Manager, both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certified

# What Professionals Look for When Choosing a Certification

When it comes to what professionals prioritize when selecting certifications, global recognition by employers (36%), alignment with leading skills frameworks (34%) and accreditation by an independent standards body (32%) topped the list. Verifiable badges (31%) and vendor-neutrality itself (22%) also featured prominently alongside practical considerations such as flexible or quick completion (24%), affordability (22%) and hands-on components (22%).

## What Professionals Look for When Choosing a Certification



# The First Certification: A Defining Early-Career Moment

The first certification a professional earns tends to be a foundational milestone. Across all respondents, the first certification was most commonly reported as helpful at the start of a cybersecurity career (61%), when seeking a promotion or advancement within their current organization (49%) and before getting a first job in the field (44%).

These patterns held broadly regardless of the type of first certification pursued, though with some notable nuances. Professionals who began with a vendor-neutral credential were more likely to report that it helped them at the start of their cybersecurity career (65%) and before getting their first job in the field (45%). Those who began with a vendor-specific certification reported slightly stronger impact around seeking an internal promotion (50%) and pursuing new opportunities at other organizations (45%).



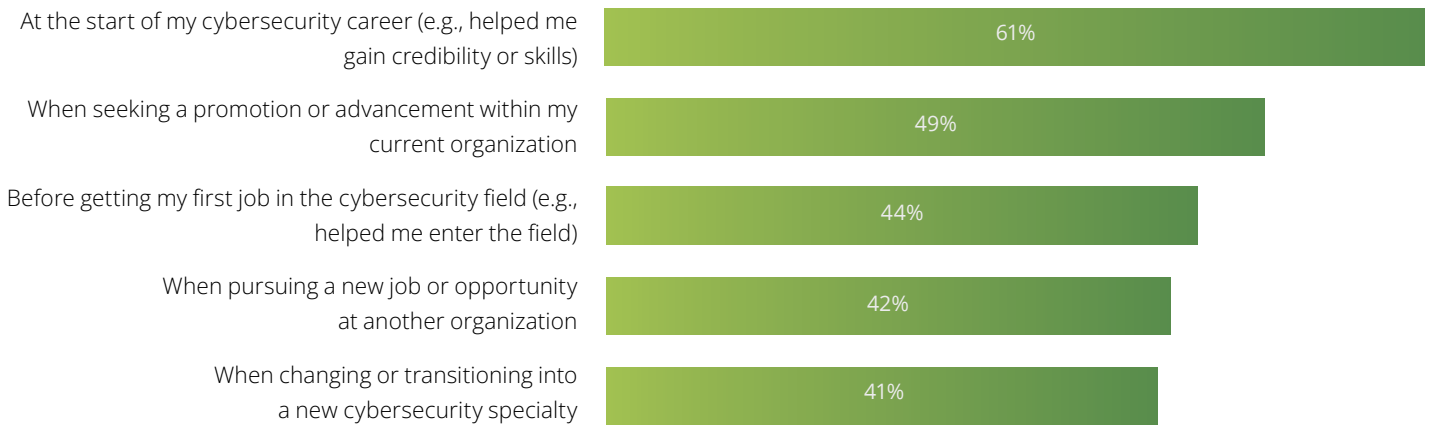
“These certifications compelled me to study theory diligently rather than rely solely on experience. They paved the way for me to secure my first security job.”

— Director/middle manager, both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certified

These distinctions suggest that when selecting a first certification, professionals may benefit from considering which early-career outcomes, such as entering the field broadly or advancing within a specific organizational context, are most relevant to them. That said, both paths were associated with meaningful early-career value.

### When First Certifications were Most Helpful

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# How Certification Value Shifts Across Career Stages

One of the clearest takeaways from this research is that certifications do not lose value as careers progress. Instead, they gain new meaning. The most recently earned certification was most helpful when seeking a promotion or advancement (62%), changing or transitioning into a new cybersecurity specialty (44%) and pursuing a new opportunity at another organization (42%).

Importantly, this pattern holds for both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific credentials. Recent vendor-neutral certifications were associated with value across a wide range of career moments, namely internal promotion (60%), changing specialties (48%) and external opportunities (45%). Recent vendor-specific certifications were most associated with seeking a promotion within a current organization (64%).

All this data points to a key insight: earning vendor-neutral credentials does not negate the value or need for vendor-specific certifications as a career matures. Professionals holding both types consistently reported strong impacts across multiple career dimensions. The data suggests that these two paths are more complementary than competing.



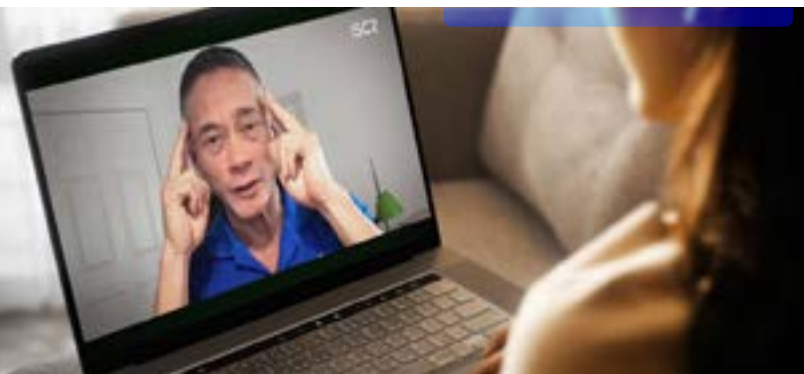
“[Certifications] strengthened my credibility, opened doors to higher-level roles, and helped me communicate security concepts with more authority across technical and executive teams.”

— Director/middle manager, both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certified

## Concrete Outcomes: What Certifications Actually Deliver

Beyond general career impact, respondents pointed to specific, tangible outcomes from their certifications. Among those with vendor-neutral certifications, 70% said their credentials expanded their technical or professional knowledge; 70% said they increased their credibility or trust with peers, employers or clients; and 69% said they improved their ability to complete roles or projects.

Two-thirds (67%) of vendor-neutral holders reported higher salary or better compensation as a result of their certifications and 64% said their credentials helped improve their overall economic mobility, defined as enabling relocation, immigration or greater financial stability.

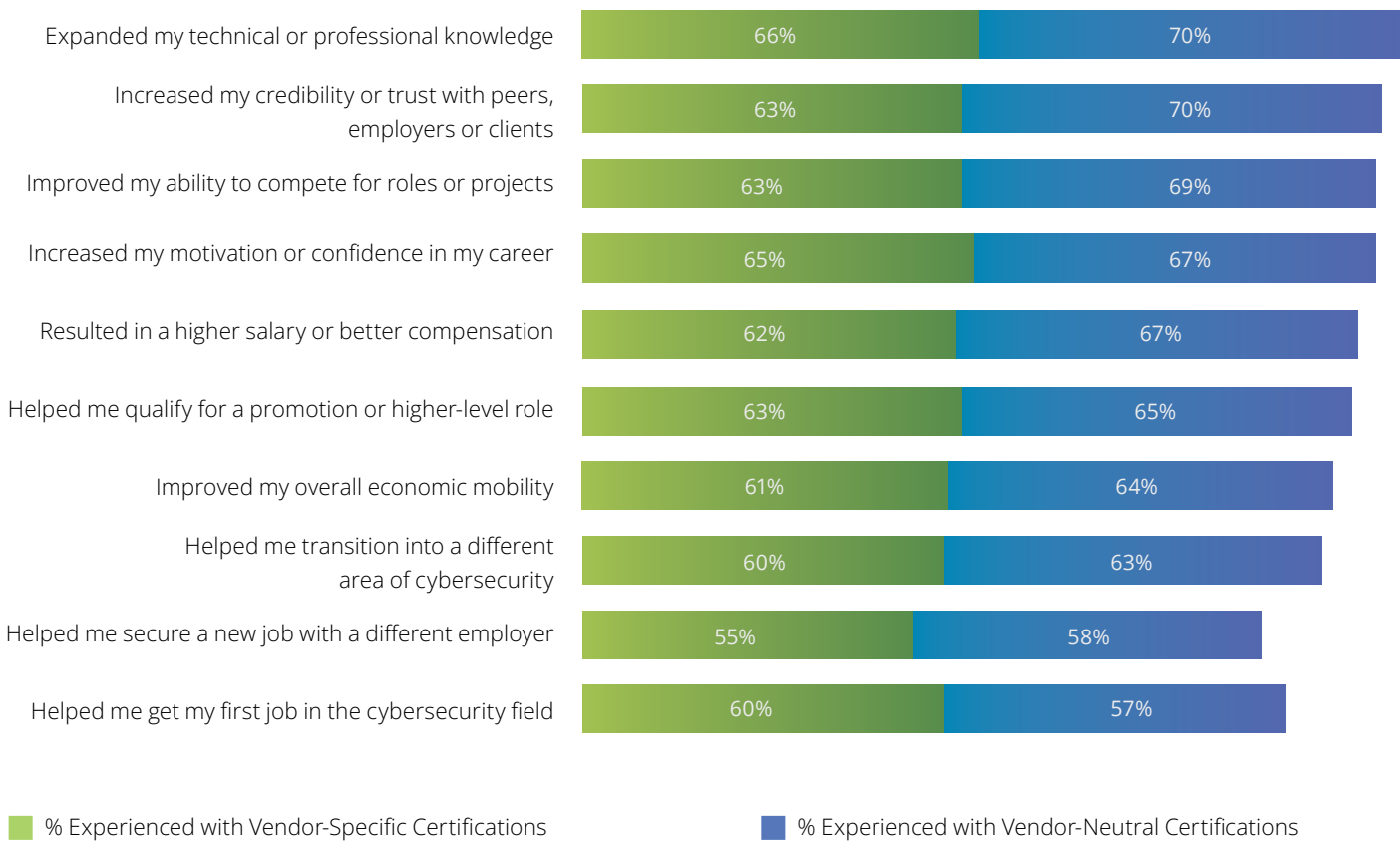


“These certifications have strengthened my understanding of security best practices and given me a more structured approach to risk, governance, and incident response. They’ve also helped build credibility in my role, making it easier to work with stakeholders and lead security-related decisions with confidence.”

— Manager, both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certified

Vendor-specific certification holders also reported strong outcomes, with some differences in emphasis. Both groups showed comparable levels of increased motivation and confidence (67% vendor-neutral, 65% vendor-specific) and similar rates of promotion-related benefits (65% and 63% respectively).

### Impacts of Obtaining Certifications



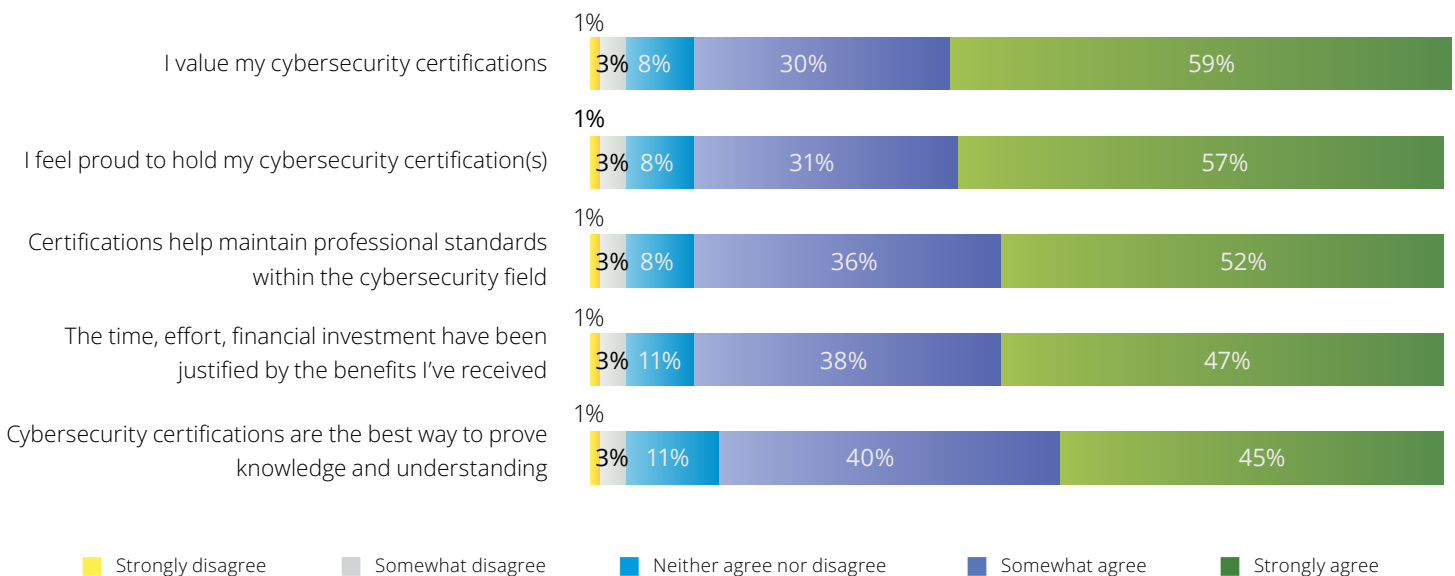
# Professionals Place High Value and Pride in Their Certifications

The value professionals assign to their certifications goes beyond utility; it is also deeply personal. Nearly seven in ten respondents rated vendor-neutral certifications as very important for career advancement (68%), while comparable importance levels were reported for increasing earning potential (66%) and demonstrating professionalism or credibility (65%).

A majority of respondents (59%) strongly agreed that they value their cybersecurity certifications, and 47% strongly agreed that the time and financial investment had been justified by the benefits received. Nearly six in ten strongly agreed they feel proud of their certifications (57%).

Perhaps most telling, 67% of respondents have not allowed any certification to expire — a sign that professionals view these credentials as ongoing assets worth maintaining. Among those who did allow one to lapse, the most common reason was focusing on a more advanced or relevant certification (33%), not a loss of confidence in certifications themselves.

## Perceived Value of Certifications



## Vendor-neutral vs. Vendor-specific Certifications — Key Differences

While both certification types deliver strong career value, the research surfaces some consistent differences in how and when each tends to be most useful:

- **Vendor-Neutral certifications** are more strongly associated with foundational skill-building, broad employability and value across a wide range of career moments from early entry to mid-career transitions.
- **Vendor-Specific certifications** are more strongly linked to meeting employer requirements, seeking internal promotion within a specific organization and pursuing role-based advancement tied to a particular platform or technology.
- **Motivation profiles differ.** Those who first pursued vendor-neutral credentials were more likely to cite qualifying for a cybersecurity job and standing out in the job market. Those who most recently earned vendor-specific credentials more frequently cited meeting employer requirements and seeking advancement within their current organization.

*These differences are complementary, not competitive. The data suggest that the most effective certification strategies draw on both types across a career.*



59%

strongly agreed that they value their  
cybersecurity certifications

# What These Findings Mean for Professionals

The findings from this research carry practical implications for cybersecurity professionals at every stage of their careers.

## 1. Consider which certifications support where you are and where you're going.

Both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certifications can deliver meaningful value, but they tend to shine at different moments. Vendor-neutral credentials showed particular strength in early-career entry and broad skill development. Vendor-specific certifications were more strongly associated with role-specific advancement and employer requirements. When selecting a certification, consider what outcome you're working toward, not just the credential itself.

## 2. Don't stop at one type.

Most professionals don't choose between vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certifications but instead accumulate both over time. Nearly three-quarters of respondents (71%) held both types. Professionals with more years of experience were increasingly likely to hold vendor-specific credentials alongside their vendor-neutral ones. The data suggests these two paths are complementary: vendor-neutral certifications tend to build the broad foundation, while vendor-specific credentials layer on role-based and employer-driven expertise as careers develop.

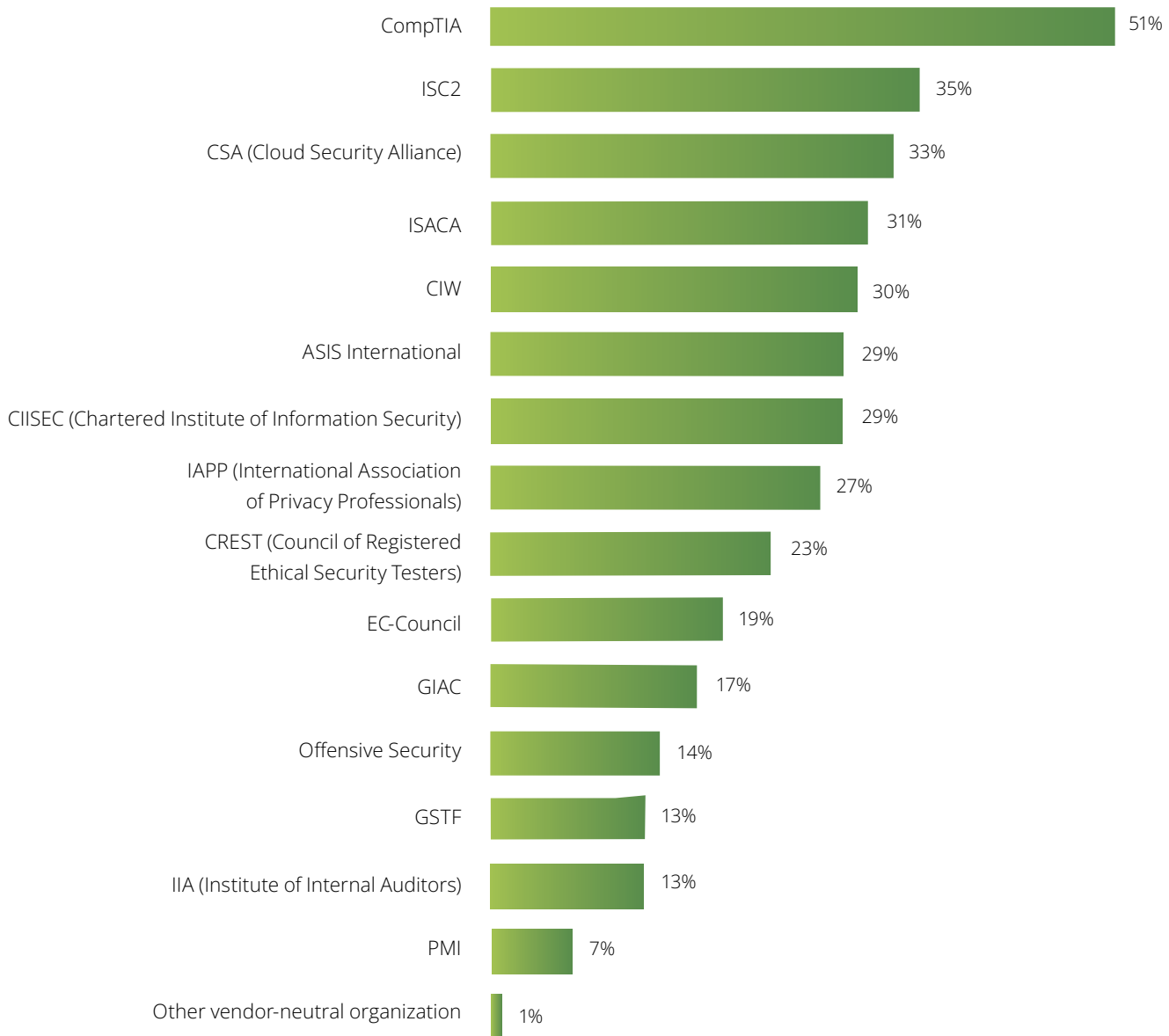
## 3. Look for certifications that are widely recognized and trusted.

Respondents consistently prioritized recognition and legitimacy when choosing certifications. Global employer recognition (36%), alignment with leading skills frameworks (34%) and independent accreditation (32%) topped the list. Selecting well-recognized credentials, regardless of type, helps ensure the investment translates into outcomes employers and peers can understand and trust.

Both vendor-neutral and vendor-specific certifications can deliver meaningful value, but they tend to shine at different moments.

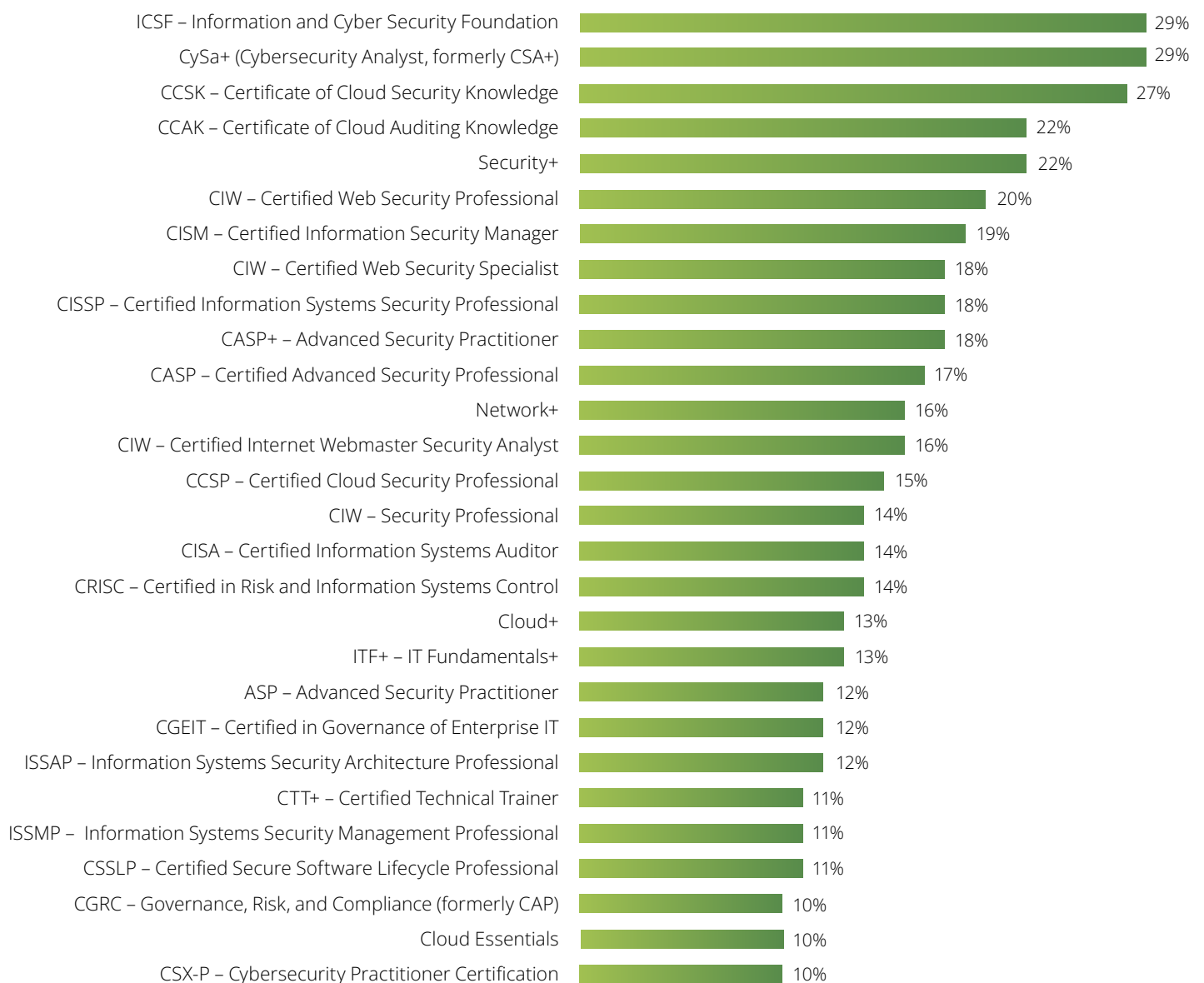
# Profile of Respondents

## Organizations from which Respondents have Held Certifications



# Profile of Respondents

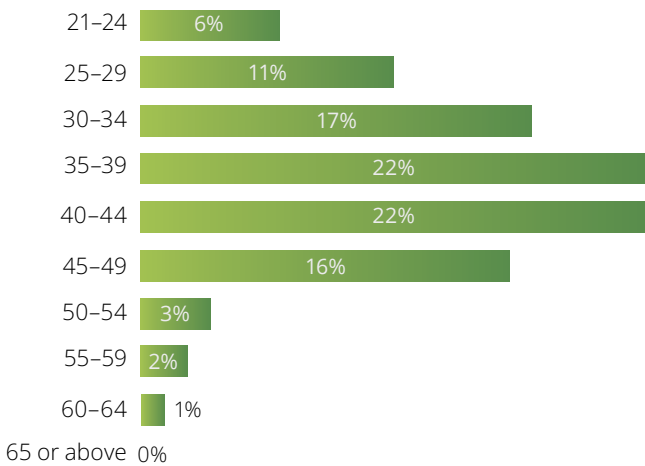
## Vendor-Neutral Certifications Ever Held by Respondents



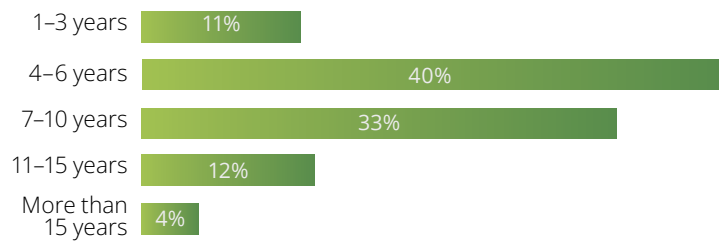
*Data reflects certifications held by survey participants only and is not representative of the broader cybersecurity profession.*

# Profile of Respondents

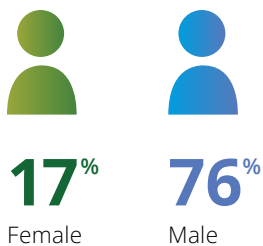
## Age



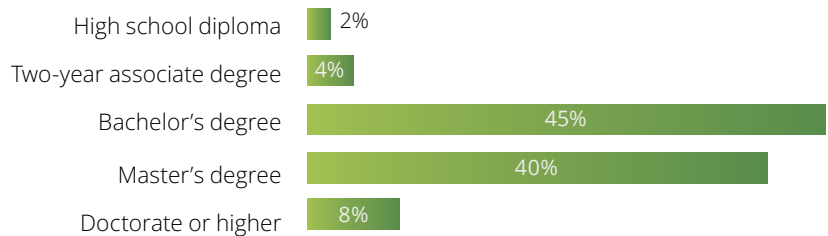
## Years of Experience



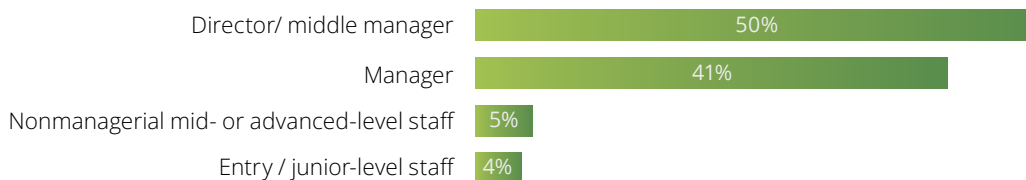
## Gender



## Education

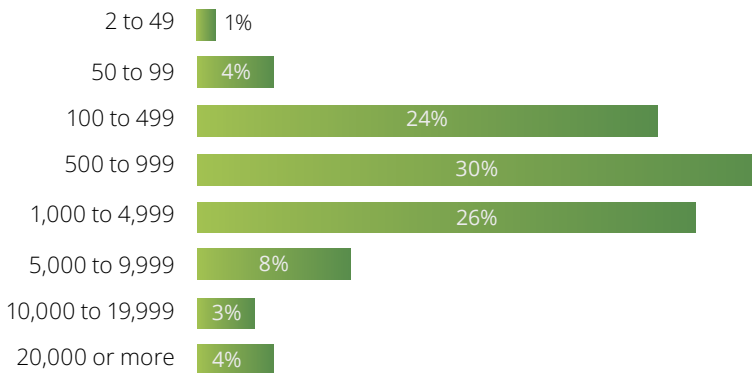


## Position Level

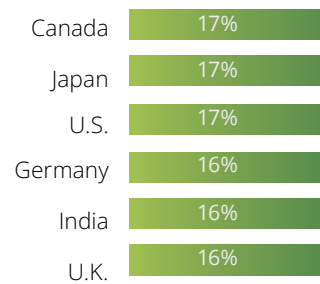


# Profile of Respondents

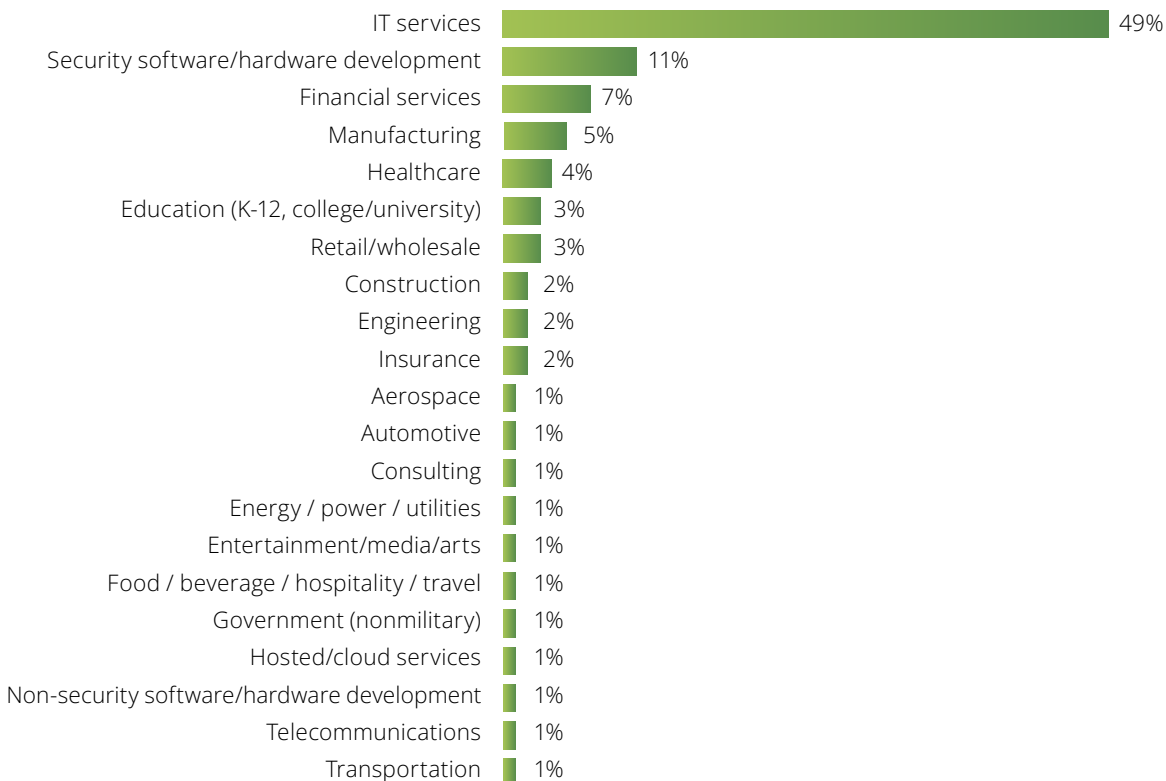
## Organization Size



## Countries Represented



## Industry Worked In



## About ISC2

**ISC2** is the world's leading member organization for cybersecurity professionals, driven by our vision of a safe and secure cyber world. Our more than 265,000 certified members, and associates, are a force for good, safeguarding the way we live. Our award-winning certifications – including cybersecurity's premier certification, the CISSP® – enable professionals to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and abilities at every stage of their careers. ISC2 strengthens the influence, diversity and vitality of the cybersecurity profession through advocacy, expertise and workforce empowerment that accelerates cyber safety and security in an interconnected world. Our charitable foundation, the **Center for Cyber Safety and Education**, helps create more access to cyber careers and educates those most vulnerable. Learn more, get involved or become an ISC2 Candidate to build your cyber career at **ISC2.org**. Connect with us on **X**, **Facebook** and **LinkedIn**.

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