

INCENTIVE TRAVEL INDEX

2026 Survey Highlights

OCTOBER 2026



**Incentive
Travel Index**



site

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
 **OXFORD
ECONOMICS**

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Foreword

This is the eighth year of the collaboration between IRF and the SITE Foundation on the Incentive Travel Index (ITI), formerly the Incentive Travel Industry Index. With research partner Oxford Economics, the organizations have again created an indispensable annual report on the state of incentive travel, providing data on current and future evolution.

The 2026 online survey, fielded globally from May to July 2026, was customized for five distinct incentive travel professional roles:

- Corporate end user
- Destination management company (DMC)
- Destination marketing organization (DMO)
- Destination supplier
- Third-party agency (incentive travel agency)

Over 2,017 incentive travel industry professionals, representing 19 industry verticals, and 83 countries, participated in the survey.

For the latest on the Incentive Travel Index, see incentiveindex.com.

SPONSORS



1. Executive Summary

2026 SURVEY

2,017

respondents across 83 countries, of which 42.7% were buyers

ACTIVITY AND SPENDING TRENDS

\$5,500

spend per person in 2026; rising 7.8% from the previous year

RISK ASSESSMENT

60.5%

say geopolitical instability is already disrupting the destinations they use

DESTINATION LOGIC

+29.3%

net momentum for Western Europe (net buyers planning to use the destination more), the strongest-momentum destination of 2026

STRATEGIC PLANNING

2-in-5

buyers say destination choice is highly aligned with what qualifiers would choose for themselves

AI ADOPTION

6-in-10

use AI for three or more separate applications, and more than 1-in-5 for five or more

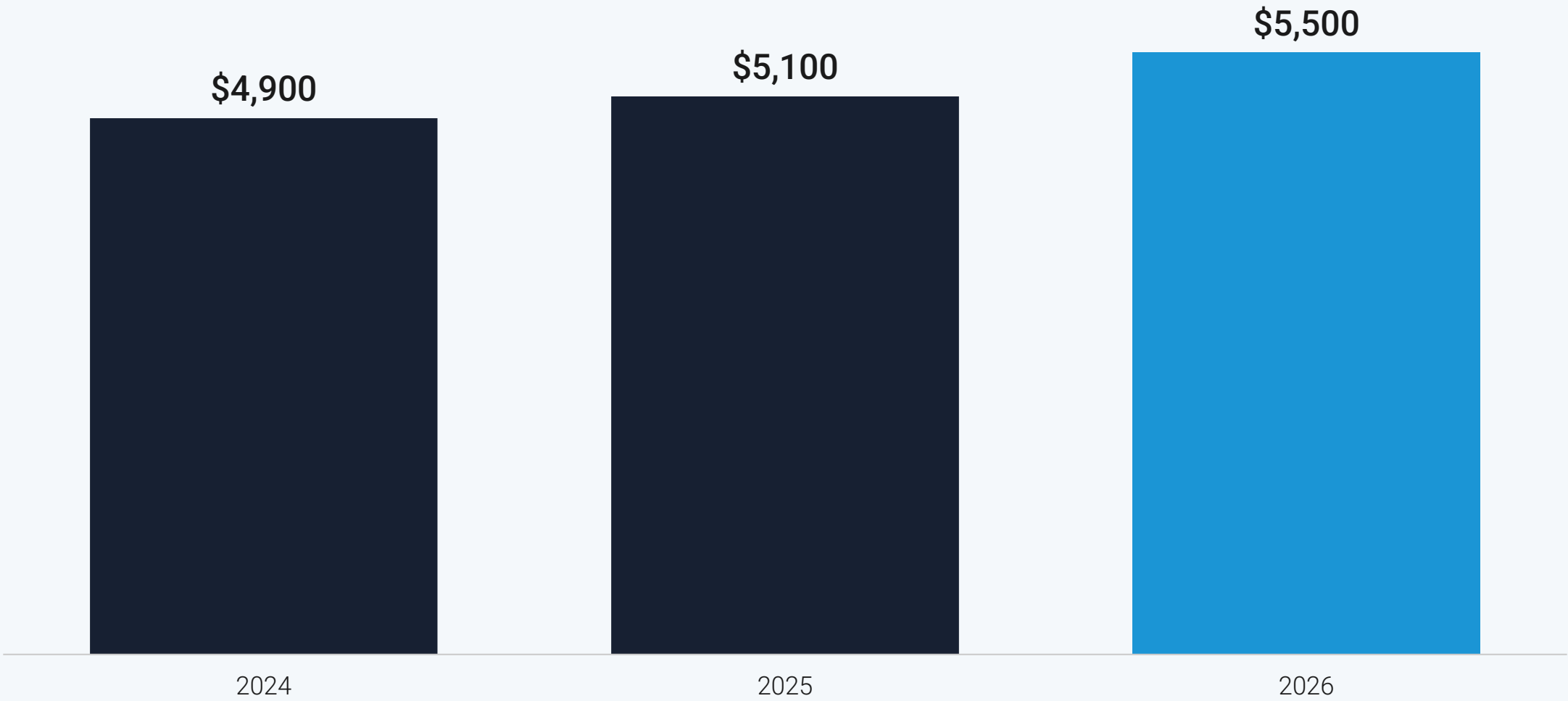
FINDING 1 OF 5

Activity and Spending Trends

Spend per person rose 7.8% to \$5,500 in 2026

More than one in five (23%) worldwide buyers report spending per person at \$5,000 to \$7,500. Buyers in the technology sector report the highest average spend in 2026 at \$6,000 per person.

Incentive travel spend per person for buyers
(Average spend per person)



KEY FINDINGS

30.7%

Budget pressure is near-term. 30.7% of buyers plan cuts next year; two years out, more expect gains than losses.

\$6,100

North America spends the most. Buyers there average \$6,100 per person in 2026, well above Western Europe and APAC (\$4,900).

25.1%

Hotel is the top cost driver. Hotel represents 25.1% of program budget, with airfare next at 21.4%.

FINDING 2 OF 5

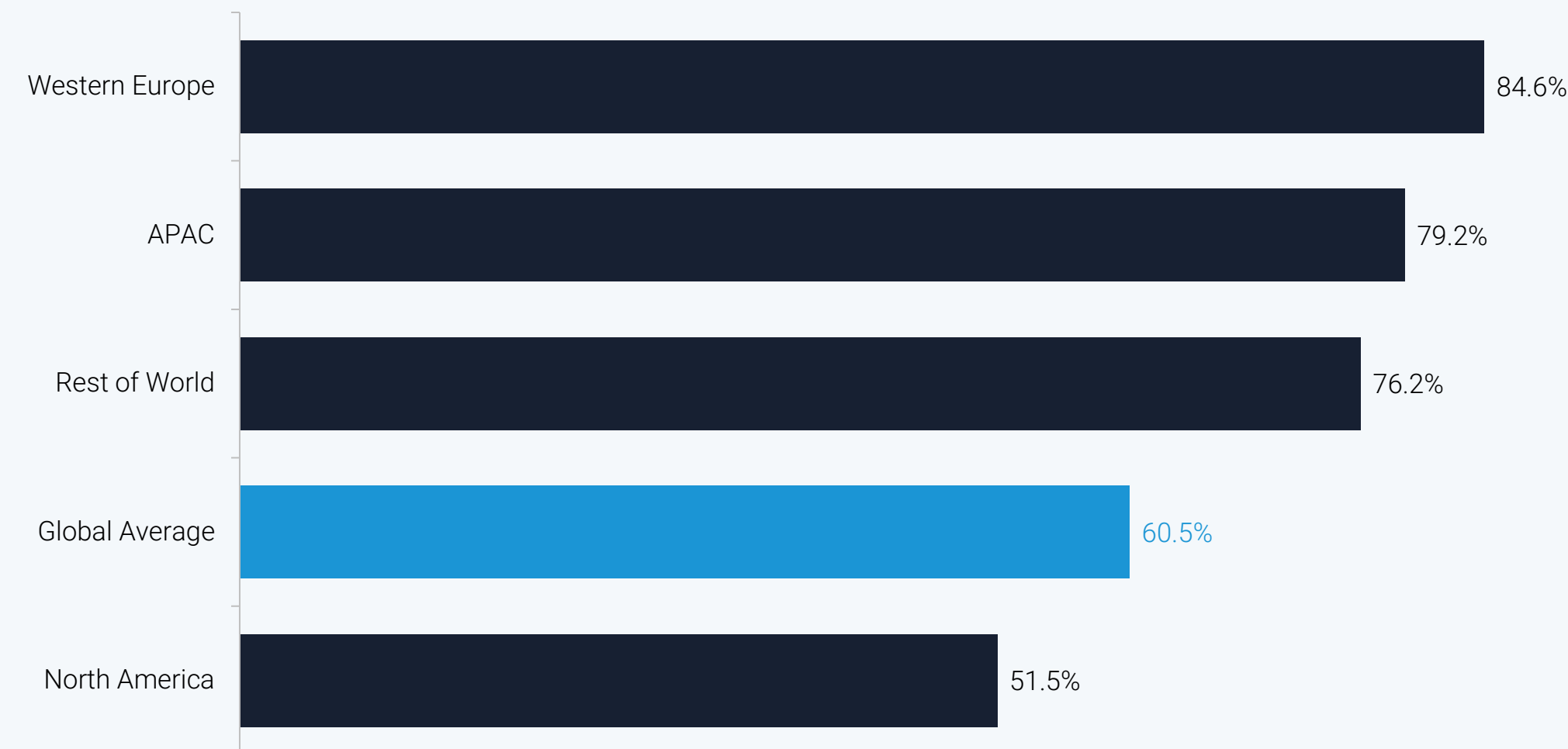
Risk Assessment

Disruption is the norm, not the exception

More than three in five buyers (60.5%) say geopolitical instability is disrupting destinations they use, an effect felt mostly outside North America.

Experiencing geopolitical disruption in destinations used, by region

(Share of buyers)



KEY FINDINGS

77.5%

Relationships matter most. When a destination hits the headlines for the wrong reason, relationships and experience help 77.5% of buyers look through the noise.

65.0%

Confidence returns quickly. 65.0% reconsider a destination once disruption settles.

83.3%

Booking behavior has shifted. 83.3% changed how they book in response to geopolitical sentiment in the past 12 months.

71.8%

Government ratings lead risk checks. 71.8% assess risk via official ratings.

FINDING 3 OF 5

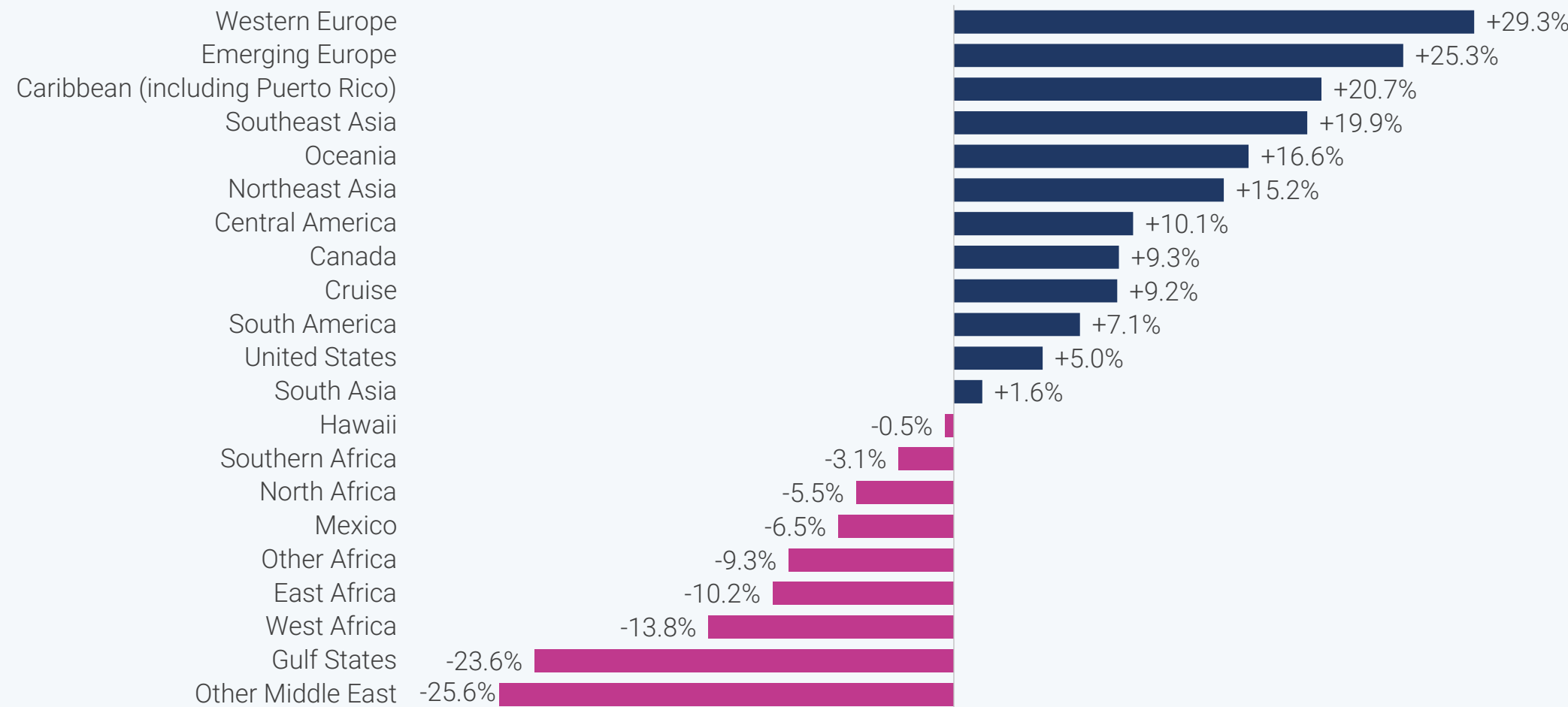
Destination Logic

More buyers plan to use Europe in the future

Europe and the Caribbean are 2026's strongest-momentum destinations (net buyers planning to use the destination more), with buyers more willing to consider Canada and South America.

Net destination momentum

(Share of buyers planning more use minus share planning less)



KEY FINDINGS

APAC buyers expanding

They plan more travel within their own region than any other region reports.

International trips

International trips stand out. The only category ranked top-three for meaningful, motivational, and memorable.

47.9%

Luxury accommodations are now the top must-have. 47.9% cite top-tier hotels, up from 34.3% in 2025, overtaking direct air access.

81.2%

Creativity drives DMC selection. Buyers choose based on creativity (81.2%) and reputation (79.5%), not scale.

FINDING 4 OF 5

Strategic Planning

Sales, profits, and productivity outrank softer goals

Program owners rate sales and profitability, as well as productivity, as the top objectives, ahead of softer engagement goals; recruiting ranks last.

Program objectives

(Average importance rating, 1 = least to 5 = most important)



KEY FINDINGS

2-in-5

Destination choice reflects qualifier preference for many but not all. Alignment is high for 39.9% and partial for 56.8%.

76.2%

The best investment is in education about incentive travel. Education is a better investment than new destinations or better hotels for 76.2% of respondents.

49.0%

APAC feels pressure most. 49.0% see platforms like Airbnb Experiences and Viator as real competition for group programs.

Information sources

Peers outrank digital sources. 62.2% rate industry-association peer recommendations as very effective.

FINDING 5 OF 5

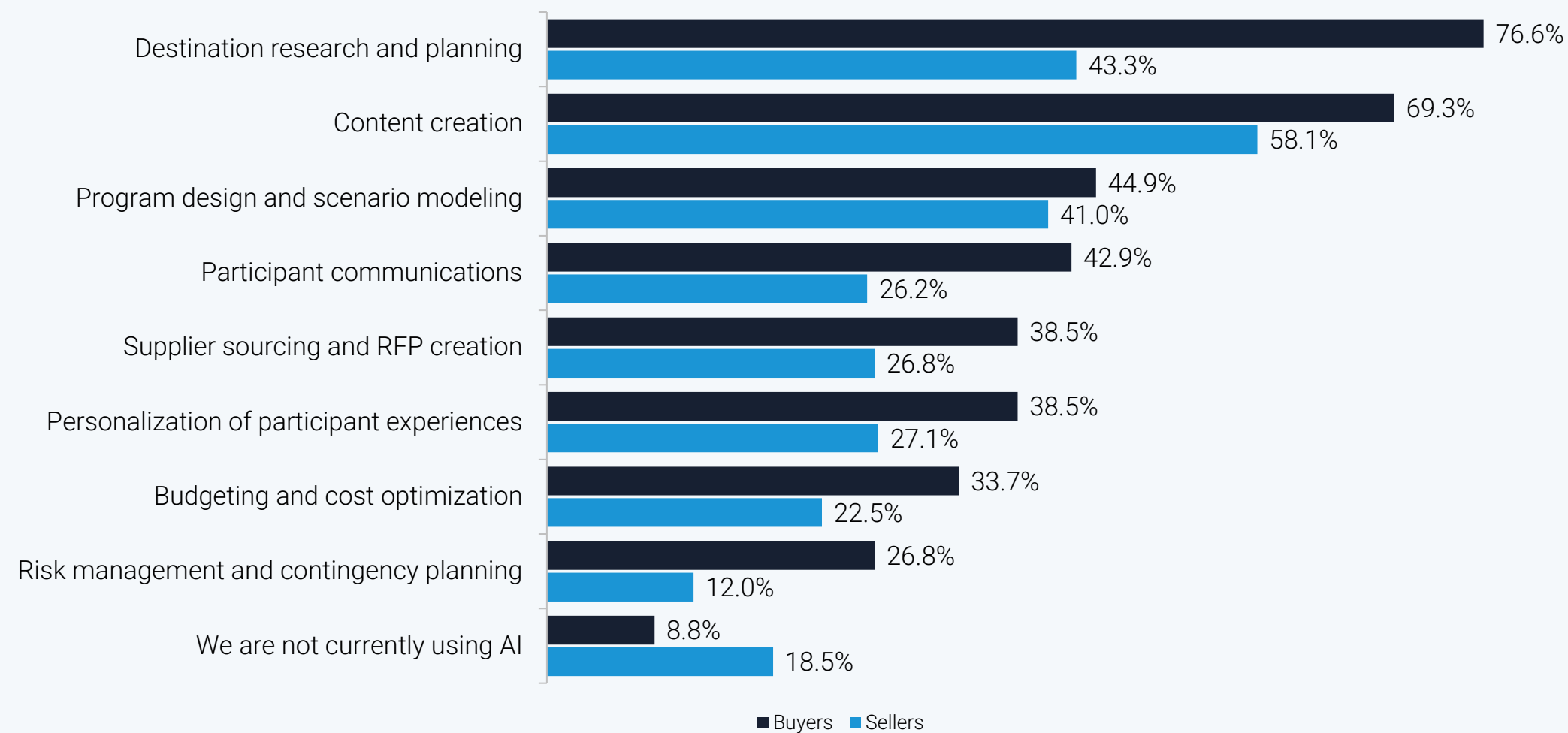
AI Adoption

Buyers lead sellers in AI adoption

Buyers lead sellers on nearly every AI use case: destination research tops buyers' use (76.6%), content creation tops sellers' (58.1%).

AI use case, buyers vs. sellers

(Share of respondents)



KEY FINDINGS

6-in-10

Multi-use is the norm. 60.8% use AI for three or more tasks; more than 1-in-5 (22.9%) use it for five or more.

24.4%

Proof still lags adoption. Only 24.4% say AI users are already out-executing rivals on price or program quality.

25%

Western Europe trails on AI. Western Europe is the least likely region to use AI, with 25% of its respondents not currently using AI, compared with 11% to 16% elsewhere.

2.

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

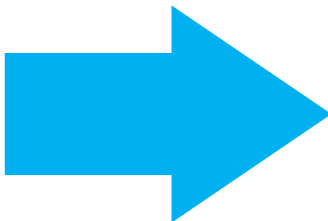
A global survey to understand incentive travel

BUYERS

- Incentive travel end users
- Incentive travel agencies

SELLERS

- Destination management companies (DMCs)
- Suppliers (hotels, cruise lines, venues)
- Destination marketing organizations (DMOs)



KEY NUMBERS

2,017 total survey respondents

861 buyers across 19 industries

83 countries represented

May to July 2026 online fielding period

Terms

- **Program owner** corporate end user
- **Agency** incentive house or planner
- **DMC** on-site delivery partner
- **Supplier** hotels, venues, transport
- **DMO** destination marketing body

INTRODUCTION

The survey reflects incentive travel buyers and sellers

A balanced, 360-degree view of incentive travel

Incentive travel comes to life through an extensive, collaborative network. The ITI is based on a balanced view of sellers (53.9%) and buyers (42.7%), with a further 3.4% who selected 'Other'.

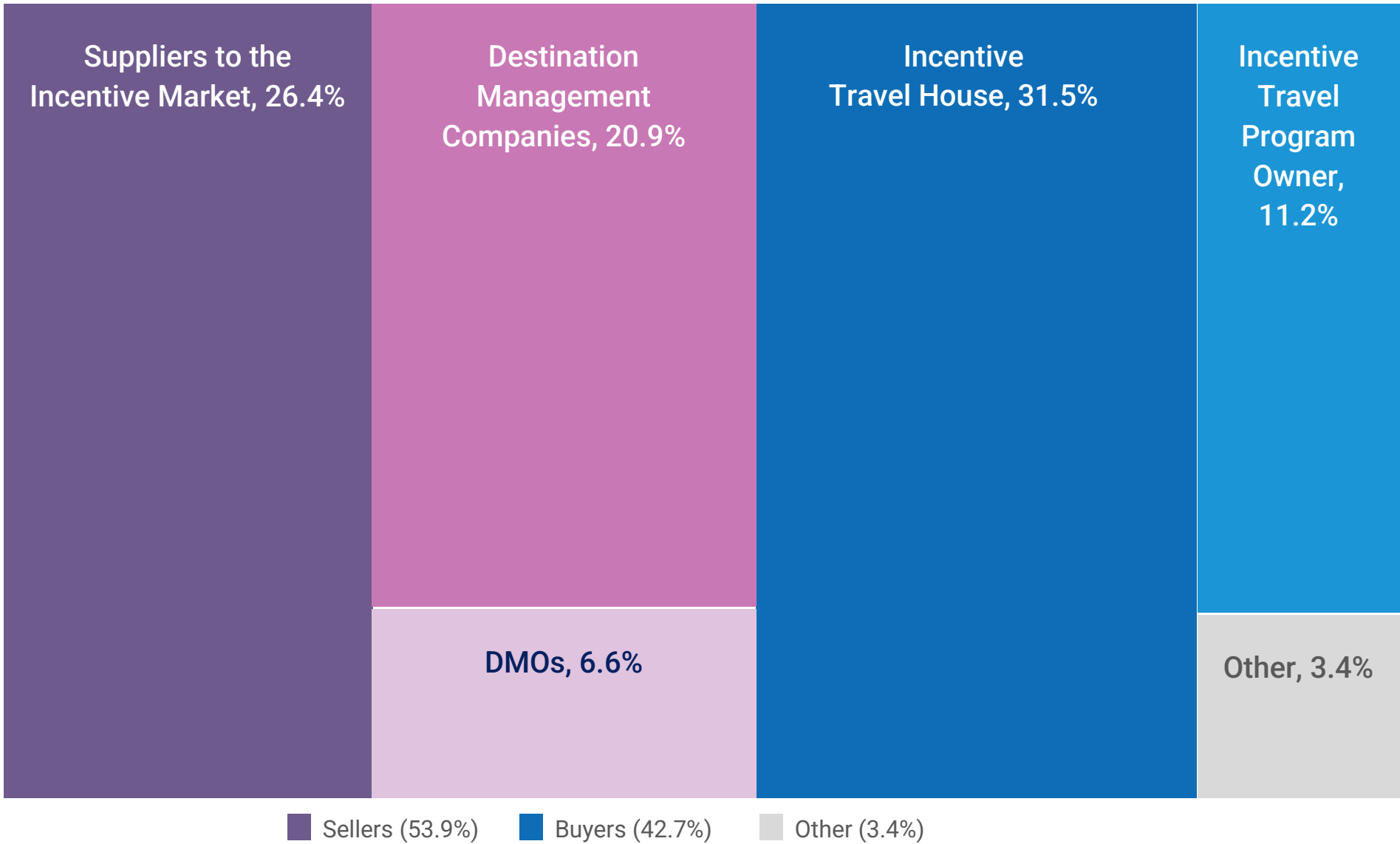
Buyers include:

- Incentive travel house organizing events on behalf of client organizations
- Incentive travel program owner sponsoring events on behalf of their organization

Sellers include:

- Suppliers to the incentive travel market (e.g., hotels, cruise lines, venues, transportation companies)
- Destination management companies (e.g., DMC coordinating local on-site implementation)
- Destination marketing organization (e.g., DMO, convention and visitors bureau, national tourism office)

Respondent roles
(Share of respondents)



L1. Please select the role that best describes your involvement in incentive travel.

Response base: n = 2,017

INTRODUCTION

Balanced respondent base provides global perspective

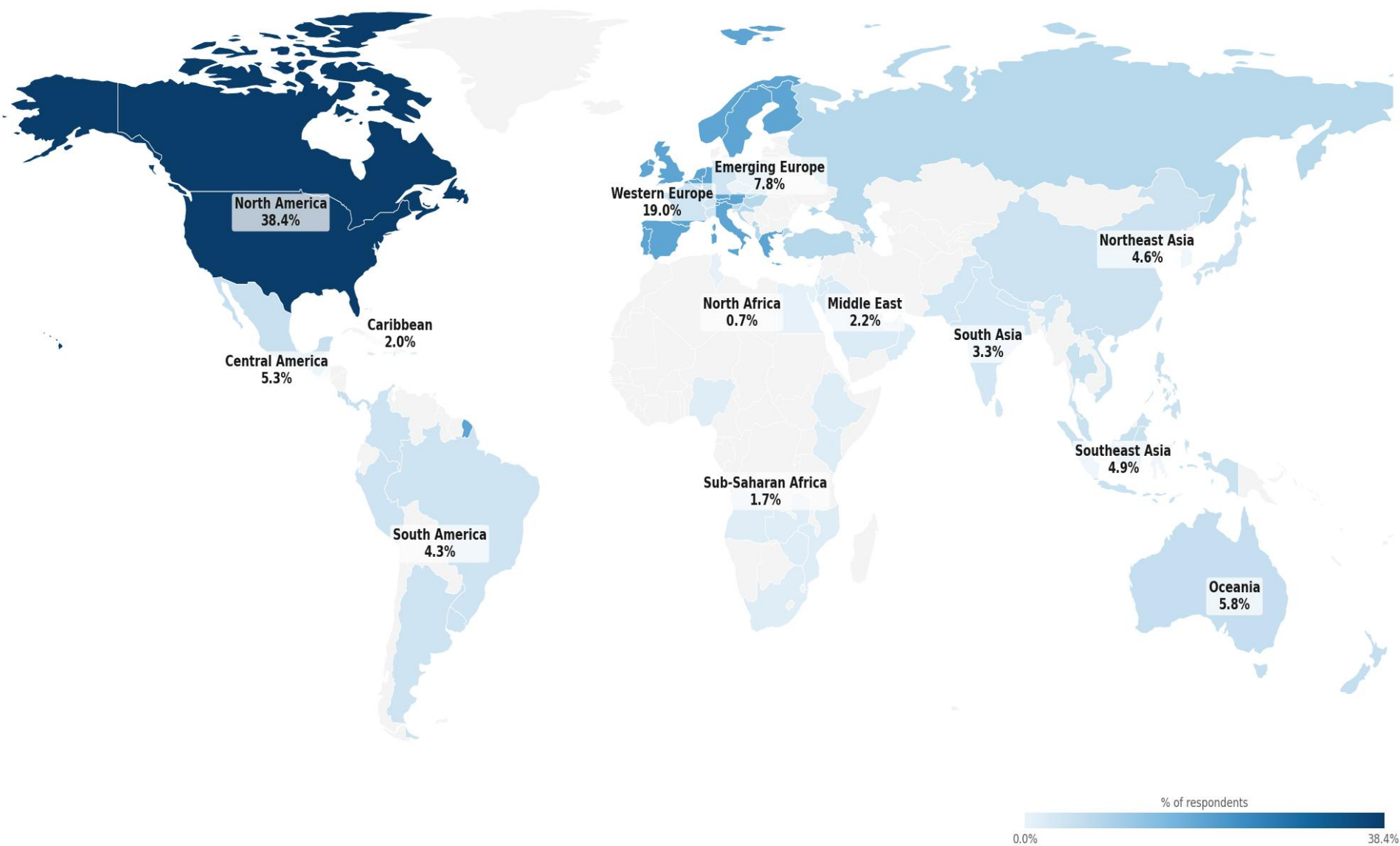
Global response base with strong representation from North America

North America accounts for 38.4% of respondents in the 2026 survey. Western Europe follows at 19.0% with Emerging Europe at 7.8%.

Asia-Pacific (APAC) represents 18.7% of the base, spread across Oceania (5.8%), Southeast Asia (4.9%), Northeast Asia (4.6%) and South Asia (3.3%).

Latin America and the Caribbean together account for 11.6%, led by Central America at 5.3%, with the Middle East and Africa making up the remaining 4.6%.

Location
(Share of respondents)



M1. Where is the organization for which you work based?

Response base: n = 1,237

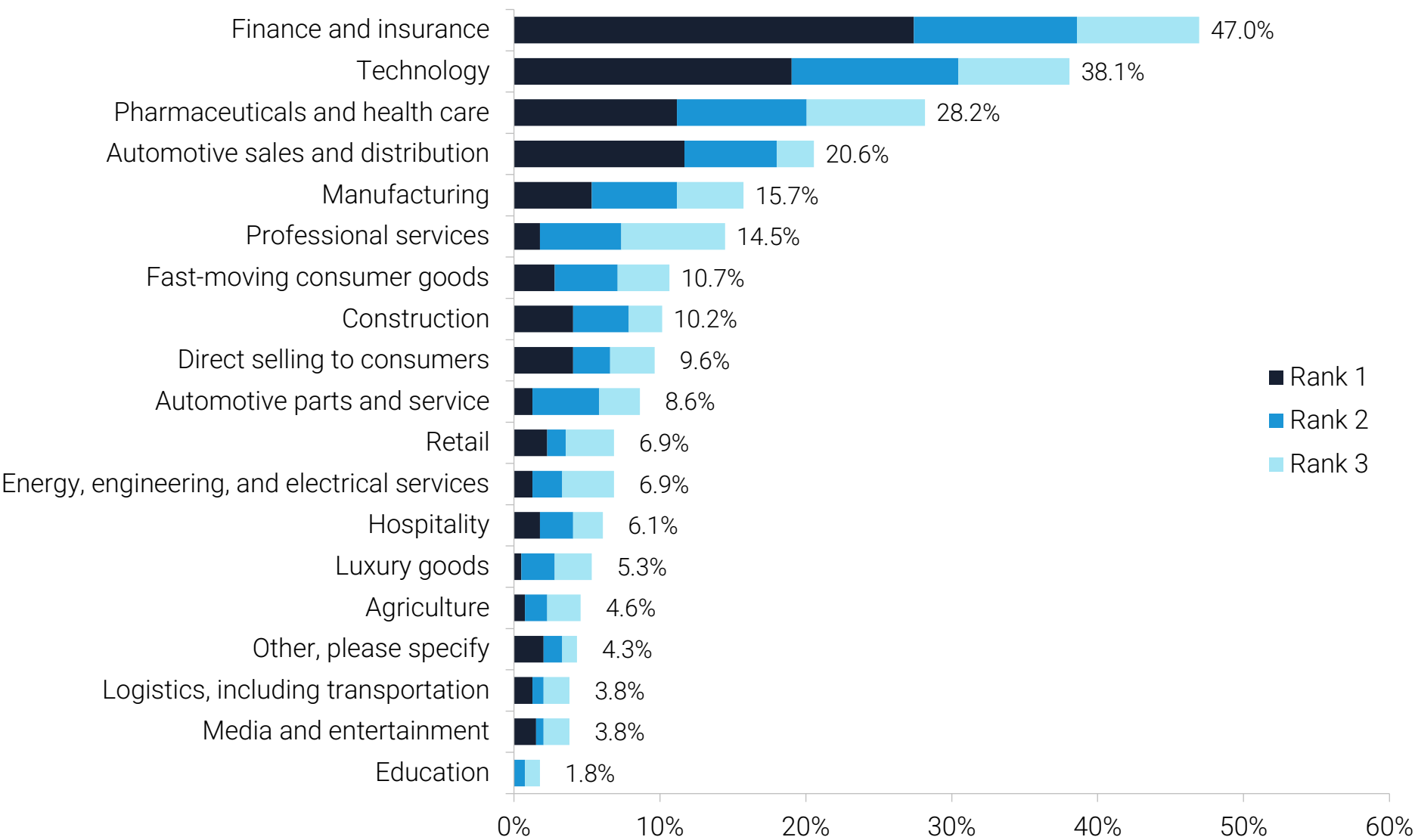
Finance, insurance, and tech top the industries served

Finance and insurance is a primary industry for incentive travel programs

Finance and insurance is the most important industry (rank 1) for 27.4% of buyers, and 47.0% rank it in their top three client sectors.

Technology (38.1% top three), pharmaceuticals and health care (28.2%), and automotive sales and distribution (20.6%) follow.

Customer industries (Share of buyers citing each industry in their top three)



M5. For which of the following industry(ies) does your team primarily organize incentive travel programs? - respondents could select more than one choice. Rank 1 is most important; label is % of all buyers choosing sector in the top three. Response base (buyers): n = 394

3.

Activity and Spending Trends

Most respondents expect activity to hold flat next year

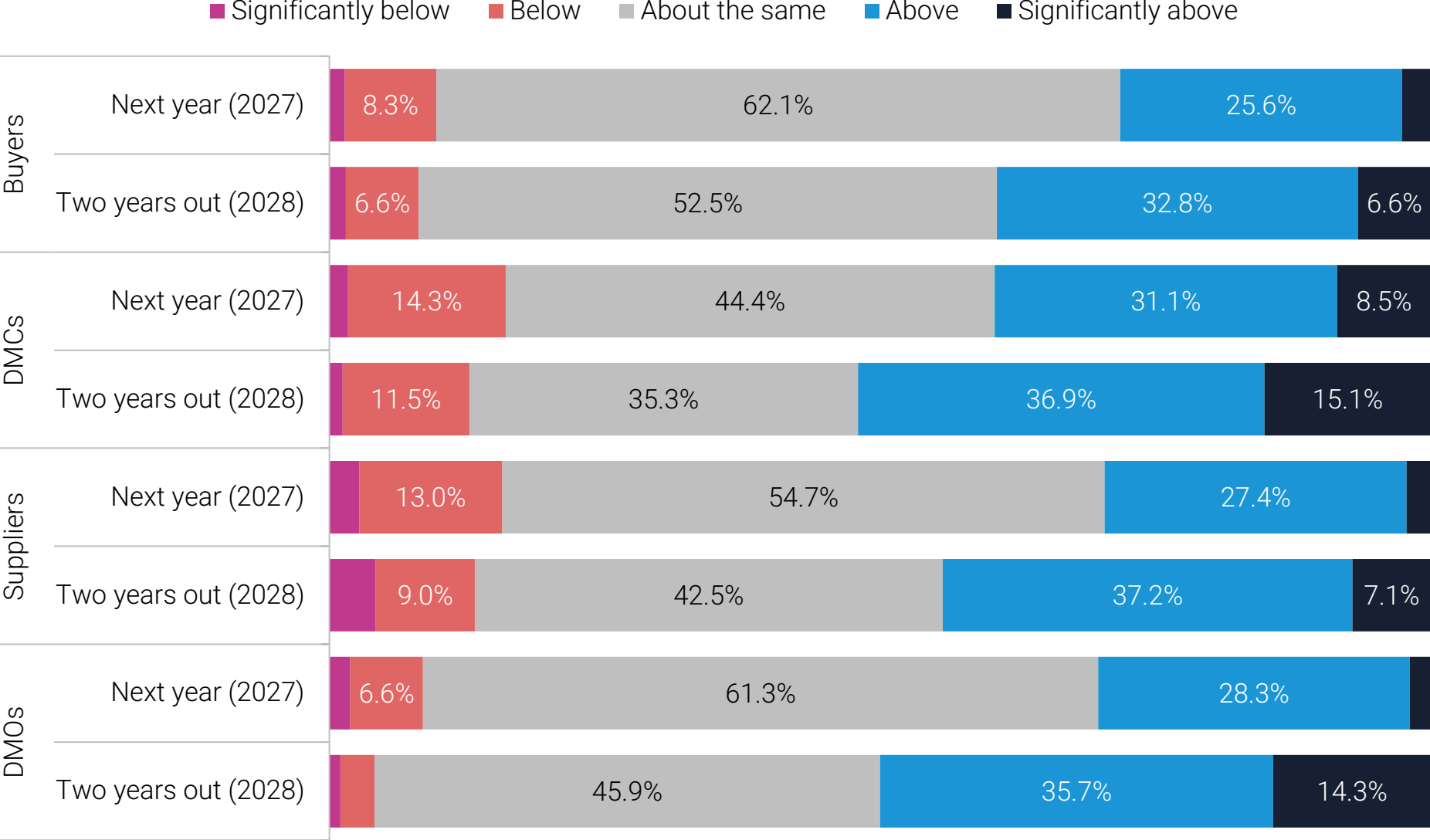
DMCs most optimistic; suppliers catch up later

The majority still expect activity to hold flat next year, with growth expectations rising for 2028.

Sellers are the most bullish but also the most exposed. DMCs are most optimistic next year, yet a meaningful share (greater than 10%) of DMCs and suppliers expect downside for 2027.

Confidence is strongest further out, where DMCs and DMOs pull ahead of buyers and suppliers.

Expectations of incentive travel activity, by role (Share of respondents)



G1a-c. How will your team's level of incentive travel activity compare to 2026, in terms of the number of people

Response base: n = 1,646

Many expect stronger activity in the coming years

Optimism is strongest among DMCs

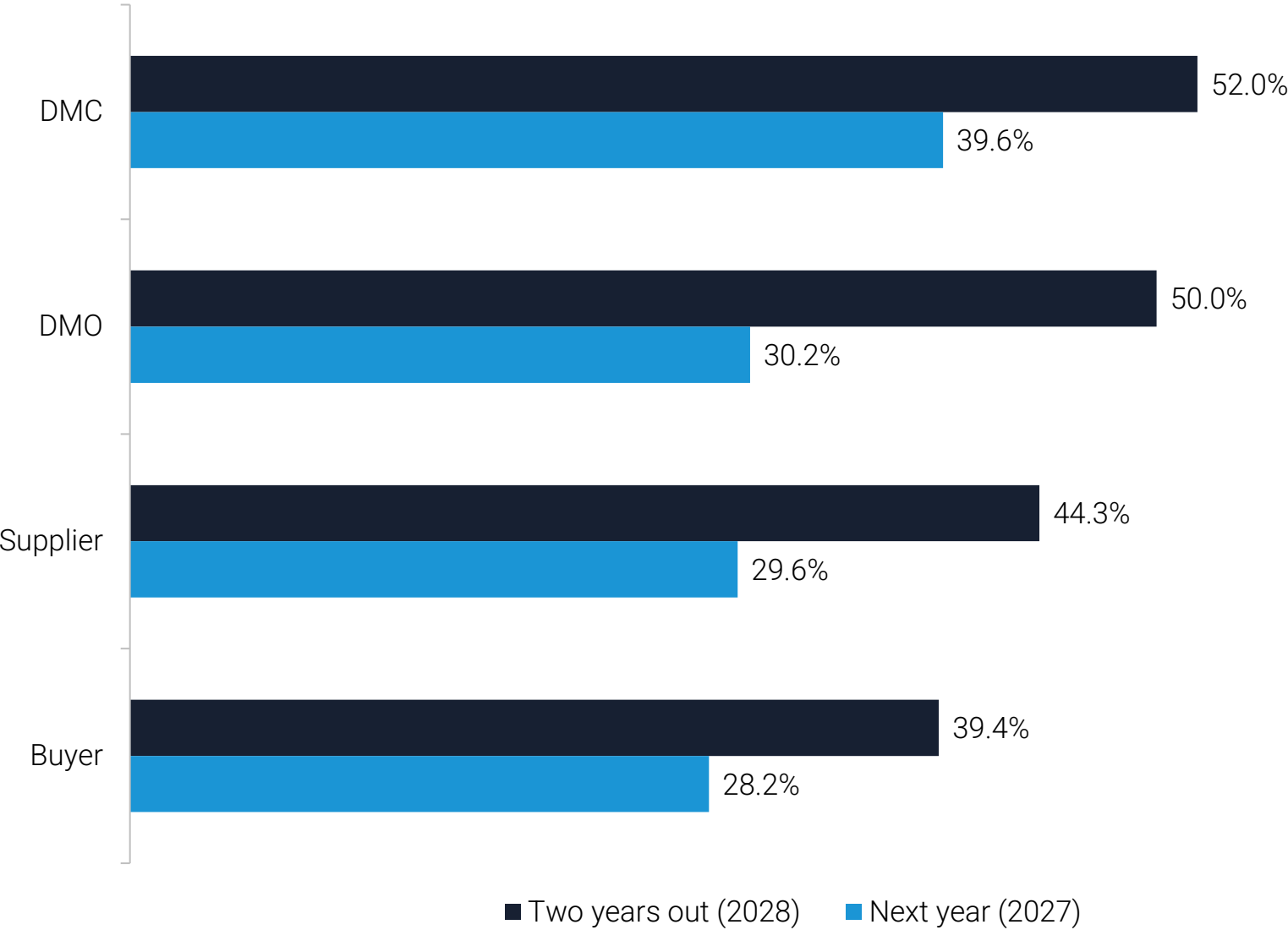
Building on the results shown on the prior page, this chart focuses on respondents who indicated they expect activity in the next two years to be “Above” or “Significantly Above” levels in 2026.

DMCs are the most optimistic in the near-term, with 39.6% expecting activity above 2026 levels next year and 52.0% by 2028.

DMOs, who led the 2025 survey, sit at 30.2% next year but rise to 50.0% by 2028.

Buyers are the most cautious, as was the case in 2025.

Expectations of greater incentive travel activity, by role
(Share of respondents reporting activity above 2026 levels)



G1a-c. How will your team's level of incentive travel activity compare to 2026, in terms of the number of people

Response base: n = 1,646

Activity to climb in 2028 for all regions except Western Europe

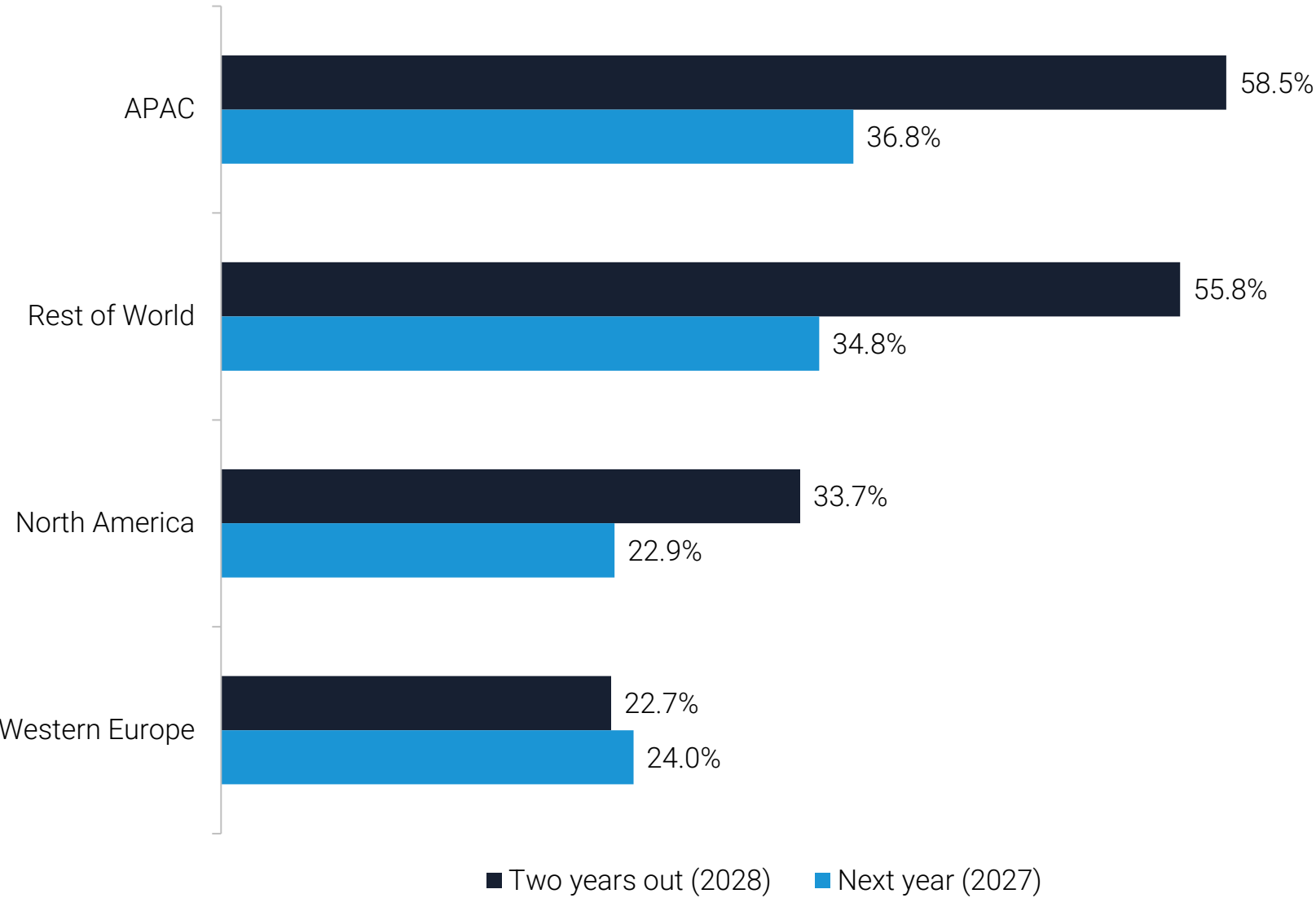
APAC leads on both the one- and two-year view

APAC buyers are the most optimistic for next year, at 36.8%, rising to 58.5% two years out, with Rest of World close behind at 55.8%.

Western Europe is the exception, and the only region where the two-year view (22.7%) sits below the one-year view (24.0%).

Expectations of greater incentive travel activity, by region

(Share of buyers reporting activity above 2026 levels)



G1a. How will your team's level of incentive travel activity compare to 2026, in terms of the number of people — by region

Response base (buyers): n = 728

Near-term optimism is up in APAC and Rest of World

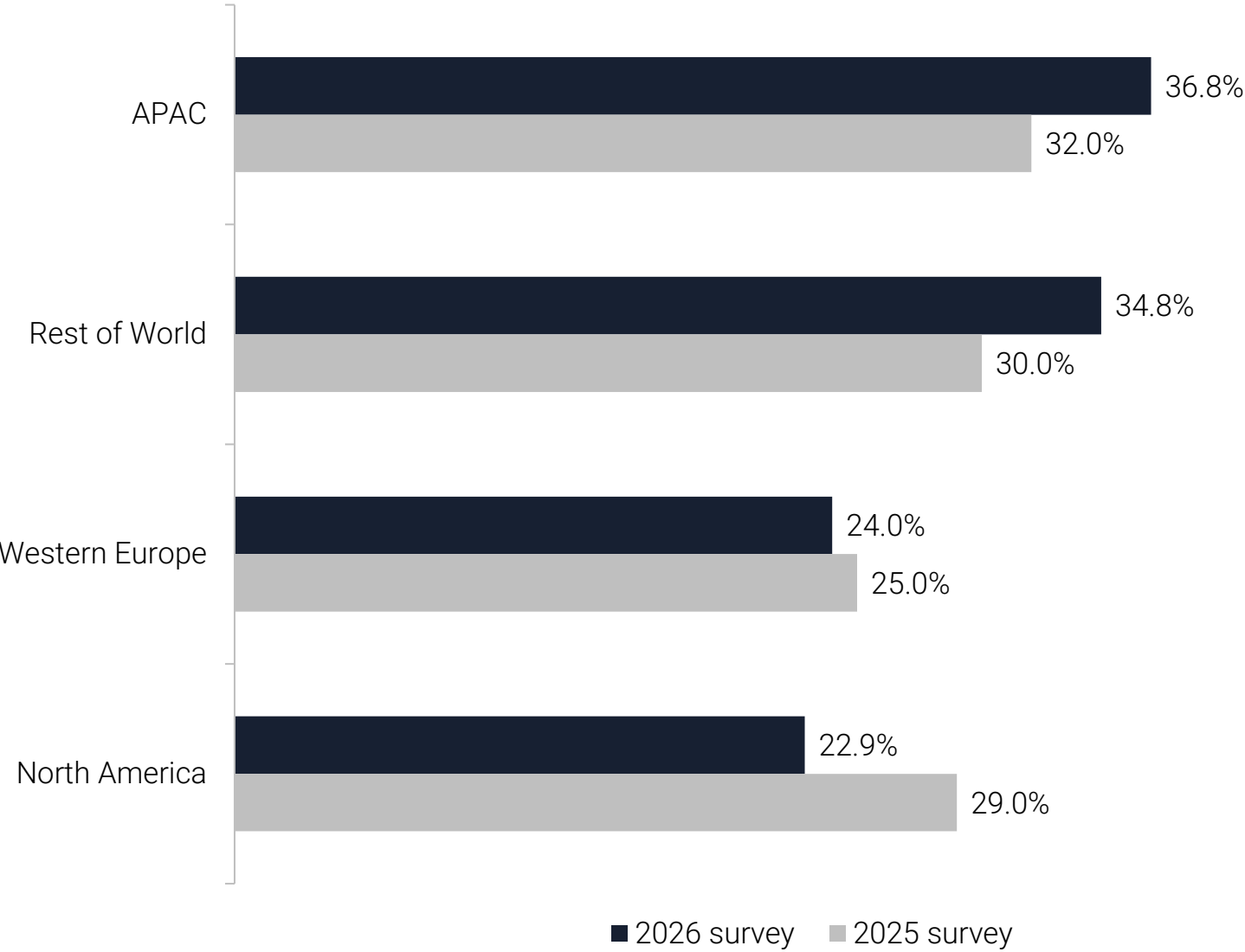
Optimism has fallen in Western Europe and North America

Near-term (one year out) optimism has increased in APAC and Rest of World compared to the 2025 survey

On the other hand, fewer buyers are expecting gains in North America and Western Europe.

Expectations of greater incentive travel activity one year out: 2026 versus 2025 survey

(Share of buyers reporting activity above survey-year levels, by region)



G1a. How will your team's level of incentive travel activity compare to 2026, in terms of the number of people — 2026 survey vs. 2025 survey

Response base (buyers): n = 728

Health care cautious near-term but holds strong 2028 view

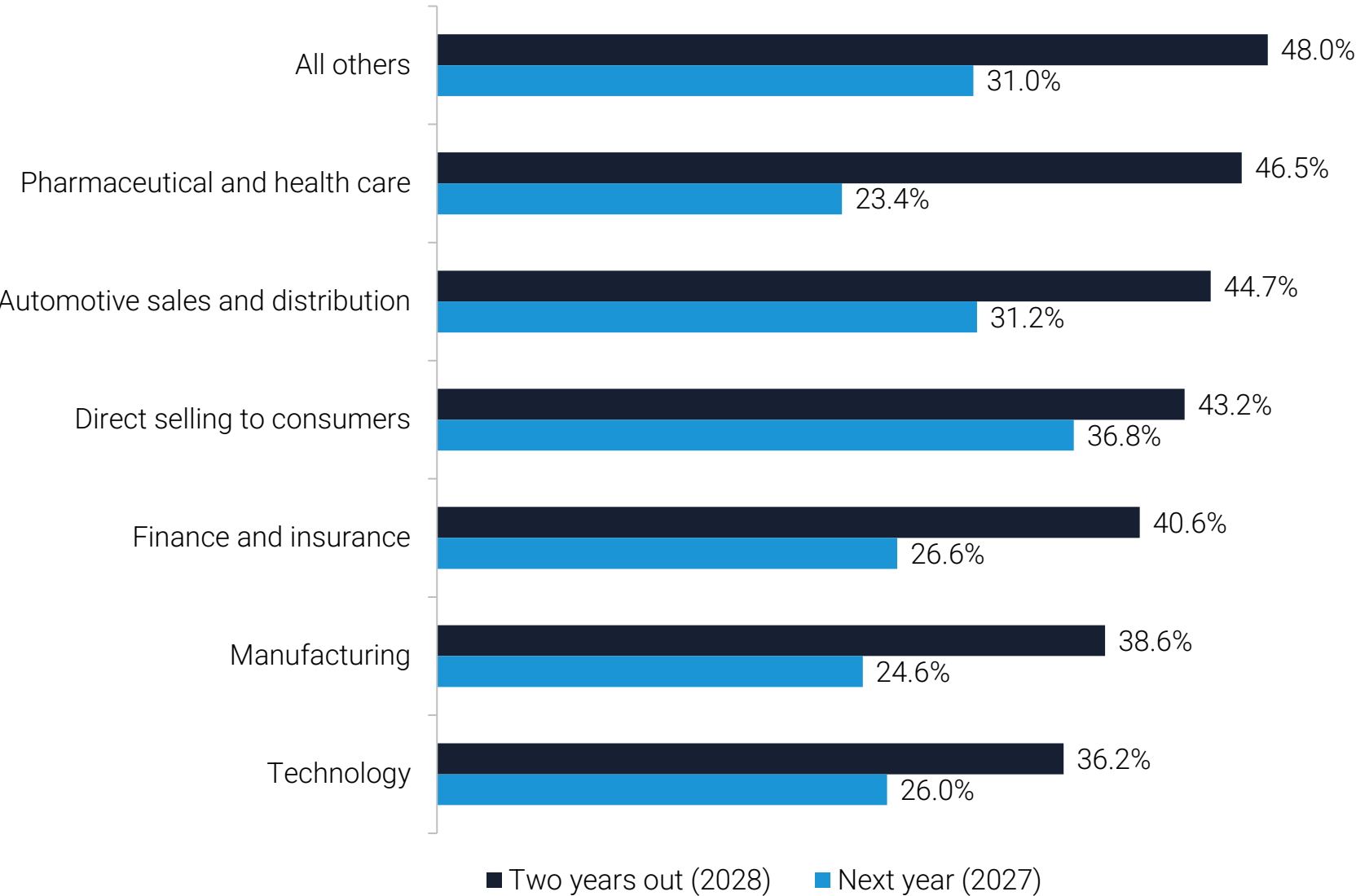
Direct selling to consumers is the most optimistic sector for 2027

Pharmaceuticals and health care holds the weakest outlook for next year, with 23.4% expecting activity above 2026 levels. Its two-year view is the strongest of any named industry, at 46.5% (after the 'All others' category).

Direct selling to consumers leads the near term, at 36.8%.

Expectations of incentive travel activity, by industry

(Share of buyers reporting activity above 2026 levels)



G1a. How will your team's level of incentive travel activity compare to 2026, in terms of the number of people — by customer industry

Response base (buyers): n = 728

Spend per person rose 7.8% to \$5,500 in 2026

Growth outpaced both inflation and business travel spend

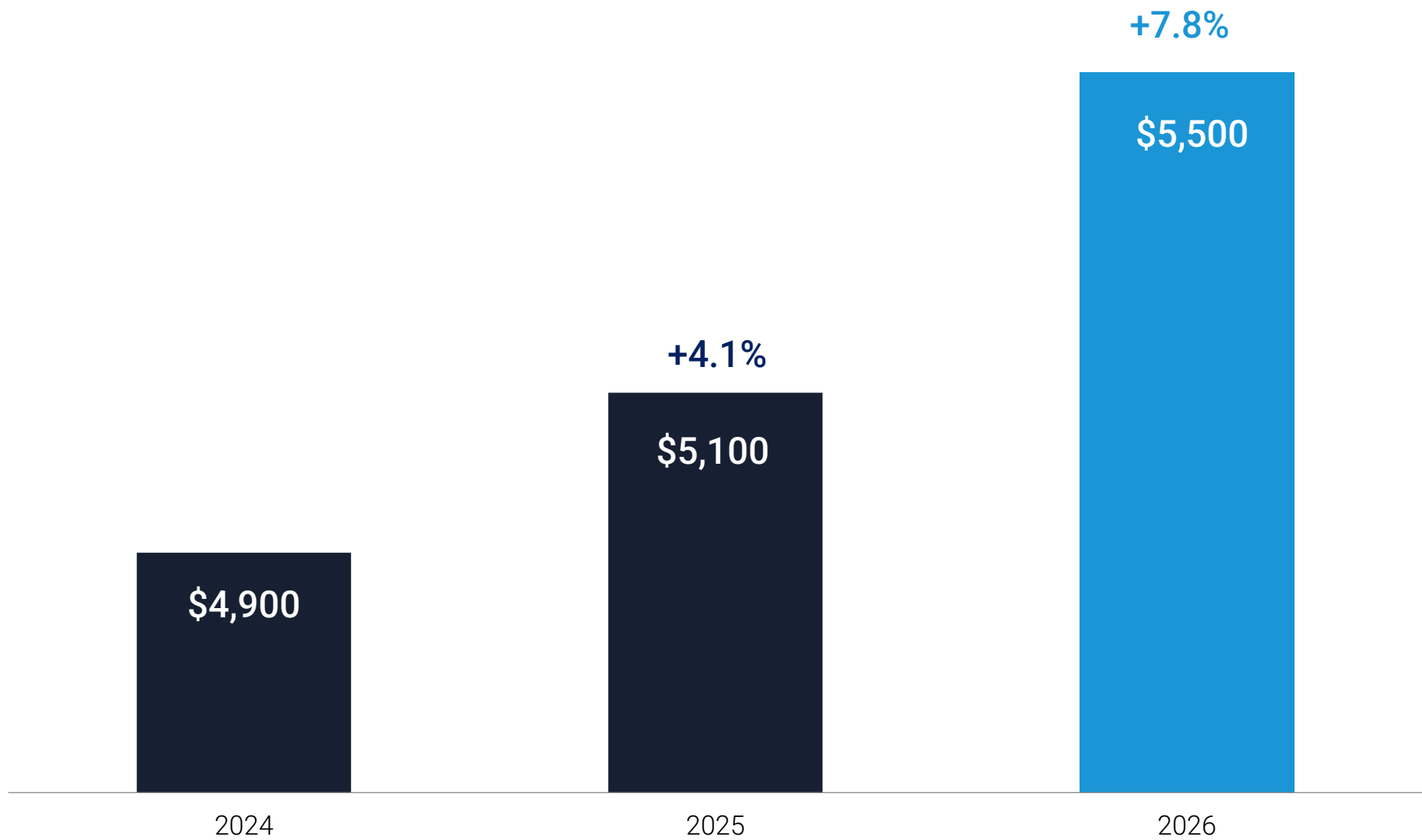
Global average spend per person rose from \$5,100 in 2025 to \$5,500 in 2026, an increase of 7.8%.

That outpaces the Oxford Economics 2026 forecasts for overall price inflation, at 4.5%, and for global business travel spending, at 7.1% in nominal terms.

23%

Share of worldwide buyers reporting spend per person at \$5,000 to \$7,500 (the most frequently cited range)

Incentive travel spend per person for buyers (Average spend per person)



G2. Please indicate the distribution of your planned incentive travel programs this year (2026) by spending per person. Response base (buyers): n = 581. Note: Current results compared to prior survey results. Spending per person refers to total program cost, including airfare divided by the number of people, including qualifiers, guests and other participants in the count of people.

North American buyers spend well above other regions

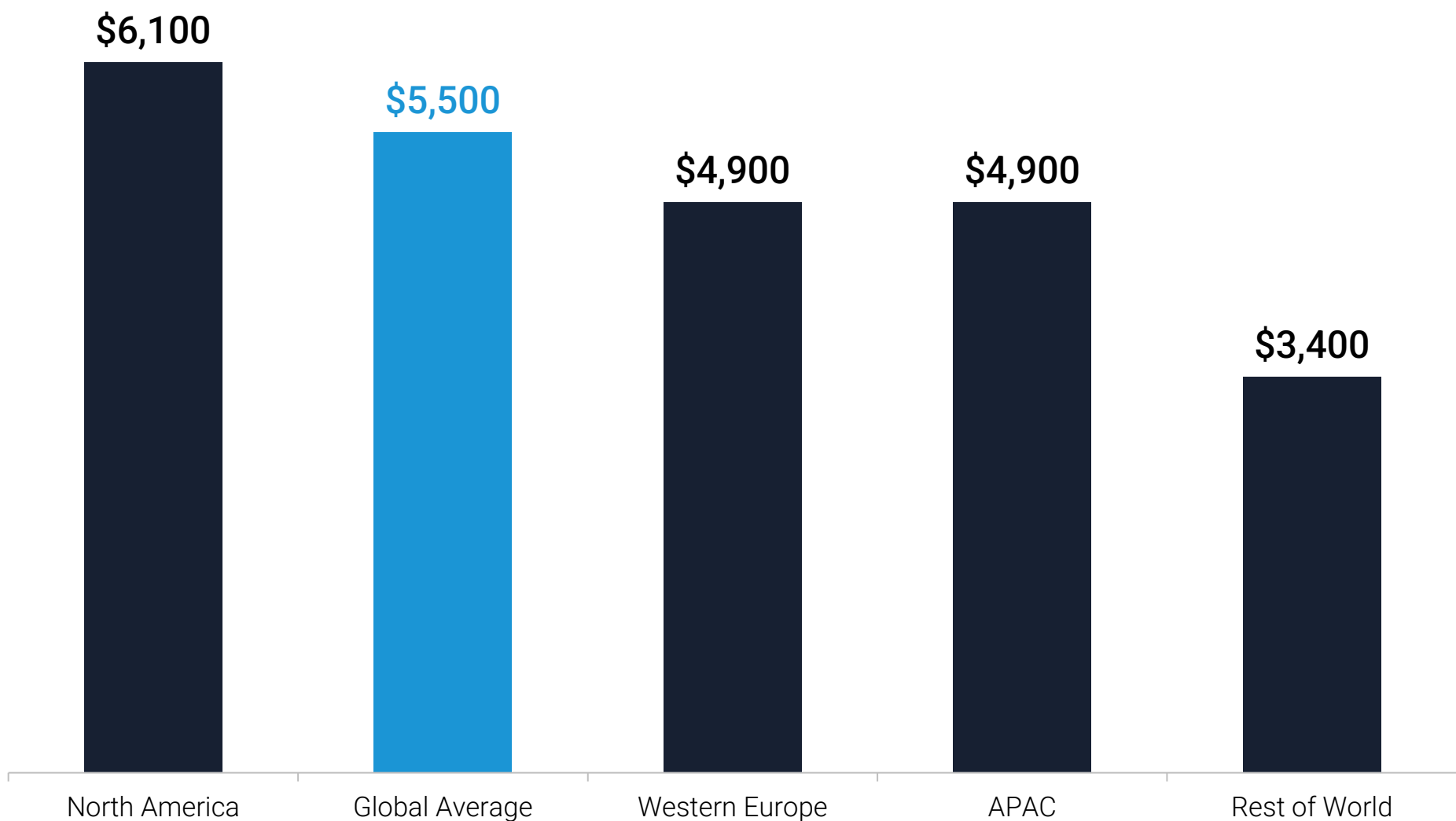
Global average boosted by American buyers

North American buyers reported the highest spend per person in 2026 at \$6,100 and are the only region above the average.*

Western Europe and APAC both average \$4,900, with Rest of World lowest at \$3,400.

*North America has a strong weighting on the average as its share of the respondent base for question G2 is 45%.

Incentive travel spend per person for buyers, by region (Average spend per person, 2026)



G2. Please indicate the distribution of your planned incentive travel programs this year (2026) by spending per person.

Response base (buyers): n = 581

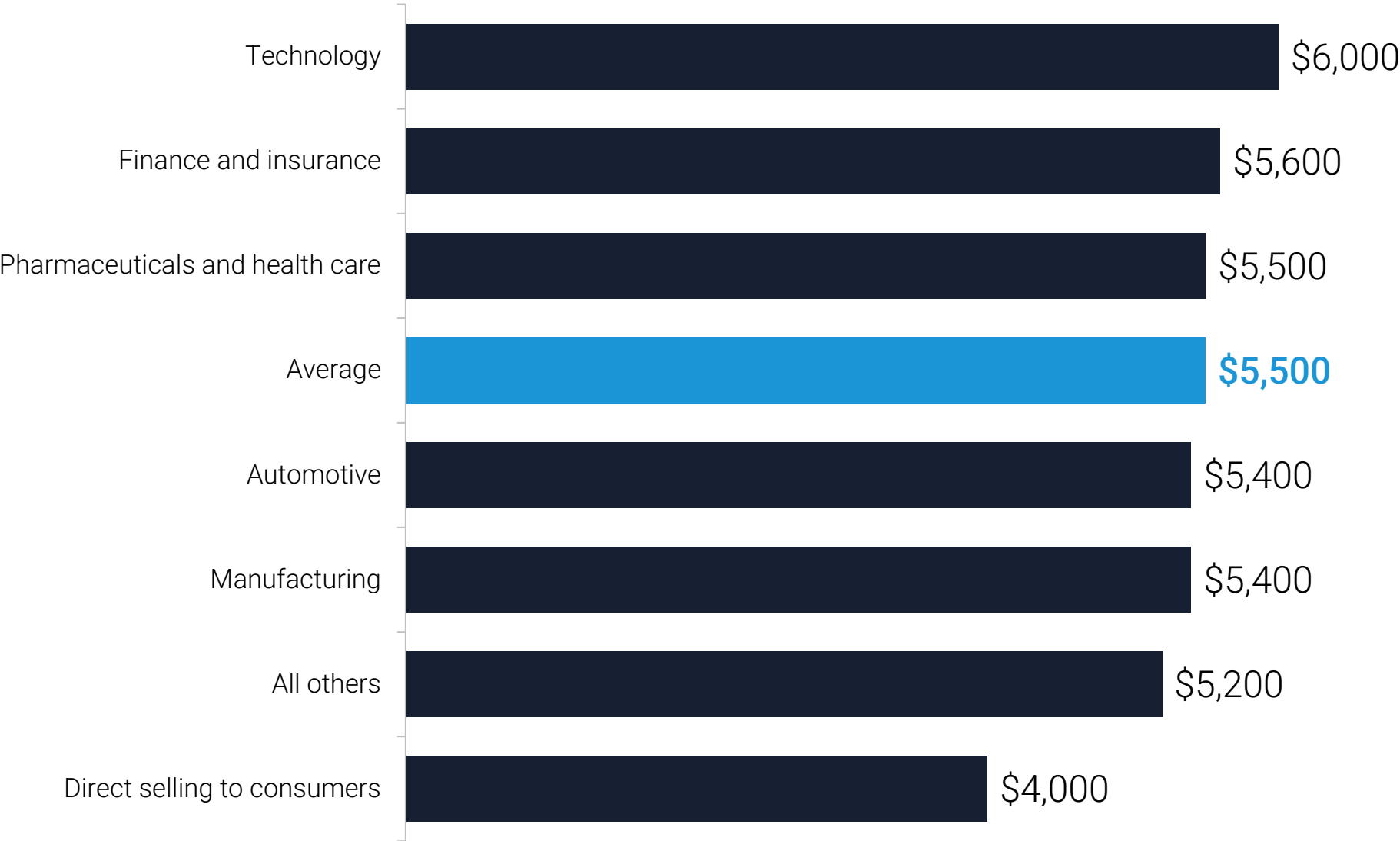
Technology buyers spend the most per person

Technology and finance sit above the overall average

Buyers in the technology sector report the highest average spend in 2026 at \$6,000 per person, followed by finance and insurance at \$5,600. Pharmaceuticals and health care (\$5,500) follow, matching the overall average.

Other sectors cluster close behind, except direct selling to consumers, at \$4,000 per person.

Incentive travel spend per person for buyers, by industry
(Average spend per person, 2026)



G2. Please indicate the distribution of your planned incentive travel programs this year (2026) by spending per person.

Response base (buyers): n = 581

Some buyers trimming programs next year

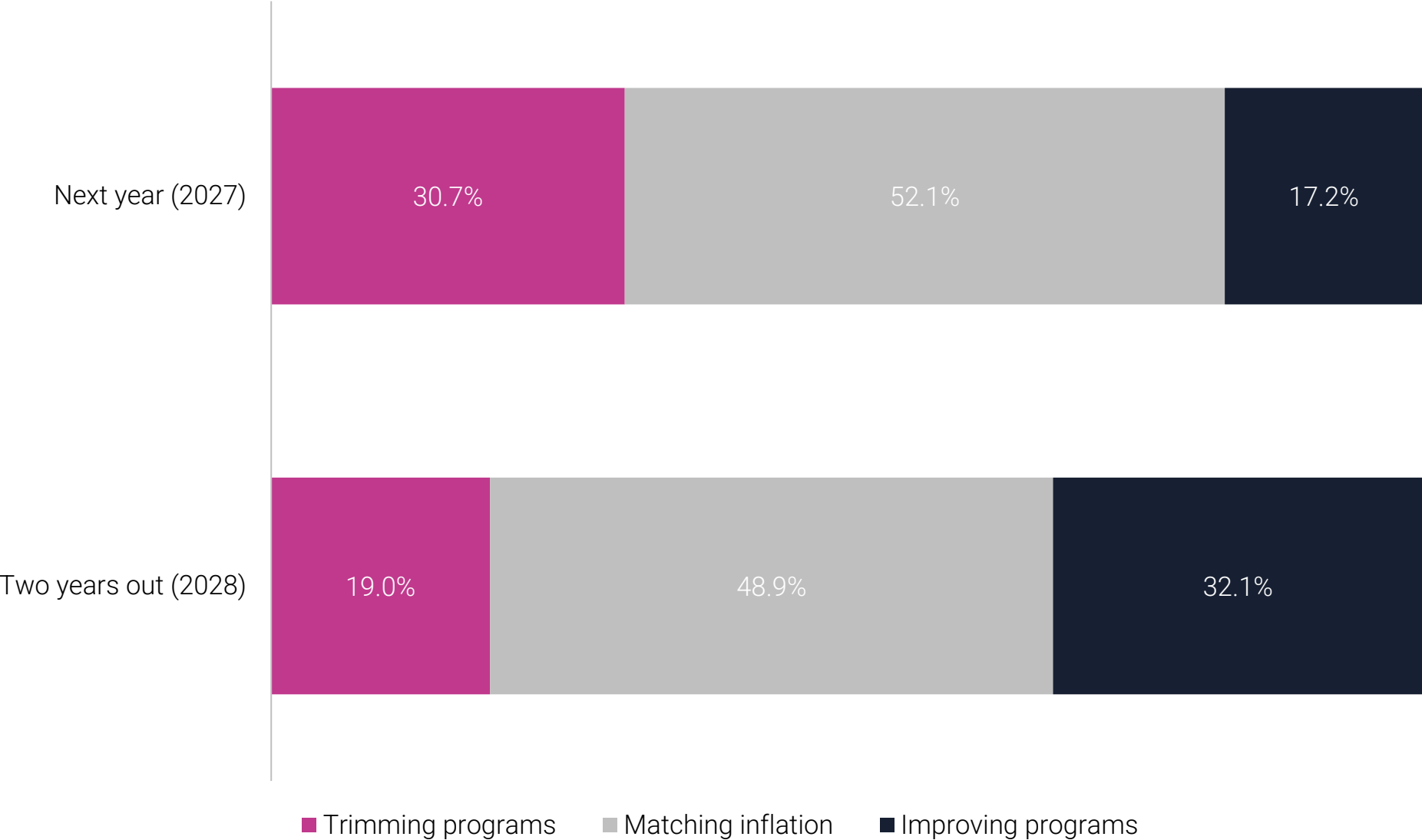
By 2028, more buyers expect to improve budgets than to trim

Most buyers (52.1%) plan to match inflation next year rather than cut or upgrade.

Trimming (30.7%) outweighs improving (17.2%) one year out. Two years out, that reverses, with 32.1% improving against 19.0% trimming.

Program cuts refer to per-person reductions such as program content, hotel and food and beverage, quality, length, and location.

Budget plan next year (2027) versus two years out (2028) (Share of buyers)



G4a. Please indicate which category best describes your incentive program budget plans in terms of spending per person (excluding ‘unsure’)

Response base (buyers): n = 538

Western Europe holds steady, Rest of World expands

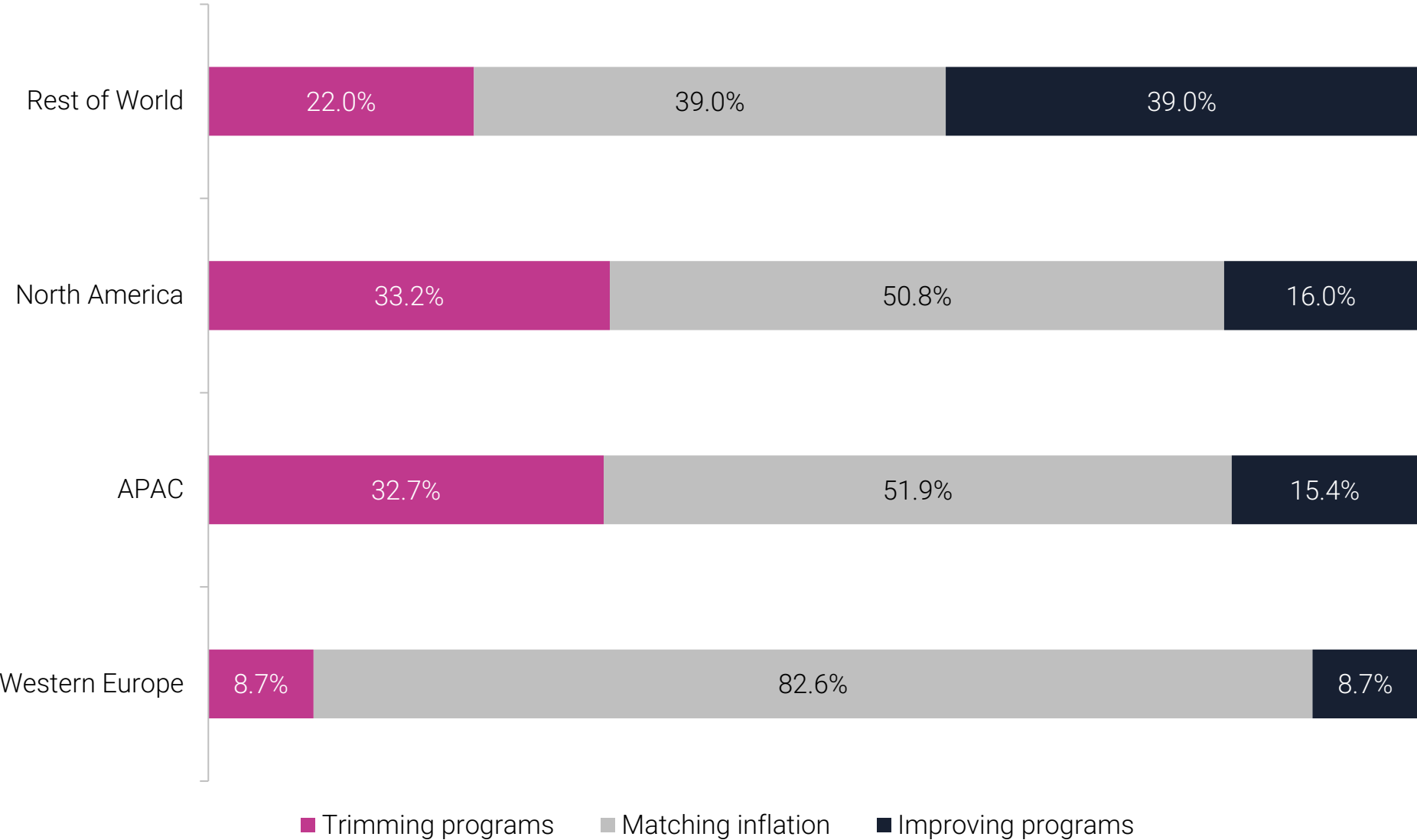
North American and APAC buyers most likely to trim in 2027

In 2027, North American buyers are most likely to trim programs (33.2%) compared to 16.0% planning to improve them. More respondents in APAC are also planning to trim versus improve.

Rest of World leans the other way, with 39.0% intending to improve program quality against 22.0% cutting.

Western Europe is the most stable, with 82.6% simply matching inflation.

Budget plan next year (2027), by region (Share of buyers)



G4a. Please indicate which category best describes your incentive program budget plans in terms of spending per person (excluding ‘unsure’)

Response base (buyers): n = 538

Industry program budget plans are weak

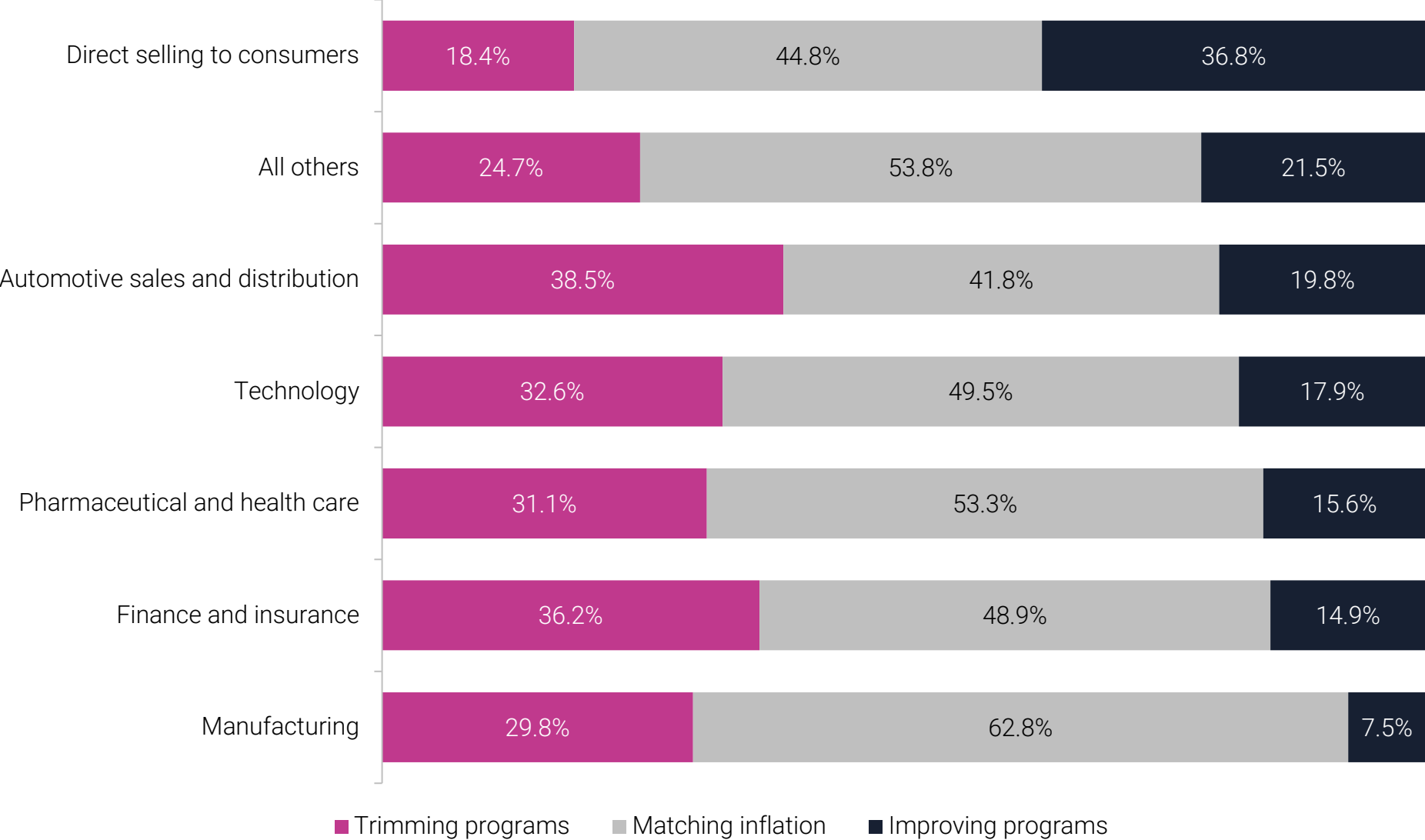
Direct selling is the only industry with more improvers than trimmers

Direct selling to consumers leads the improvers, with 36.8% expecting to raise per-person budgets, followed by all others at 21.5%.

Manufacturing is the most conservative: 62.8% simply match inflation and only 7.5% plan to improve programs.

On net, manufacturing (-22.3 pts) and finance and insurance (-21.3 pts) are the most negative, with trimmers far outnumbering improvers in both.

Budget plan next year (2027), by industry
(Share of buyers)



G4a. Please indicate which category best describes your incentive program budget plans in terms of spending per person (excluding ‘unsure’)

Response base (buyers): n = 538

Gifting remains the first to be cut

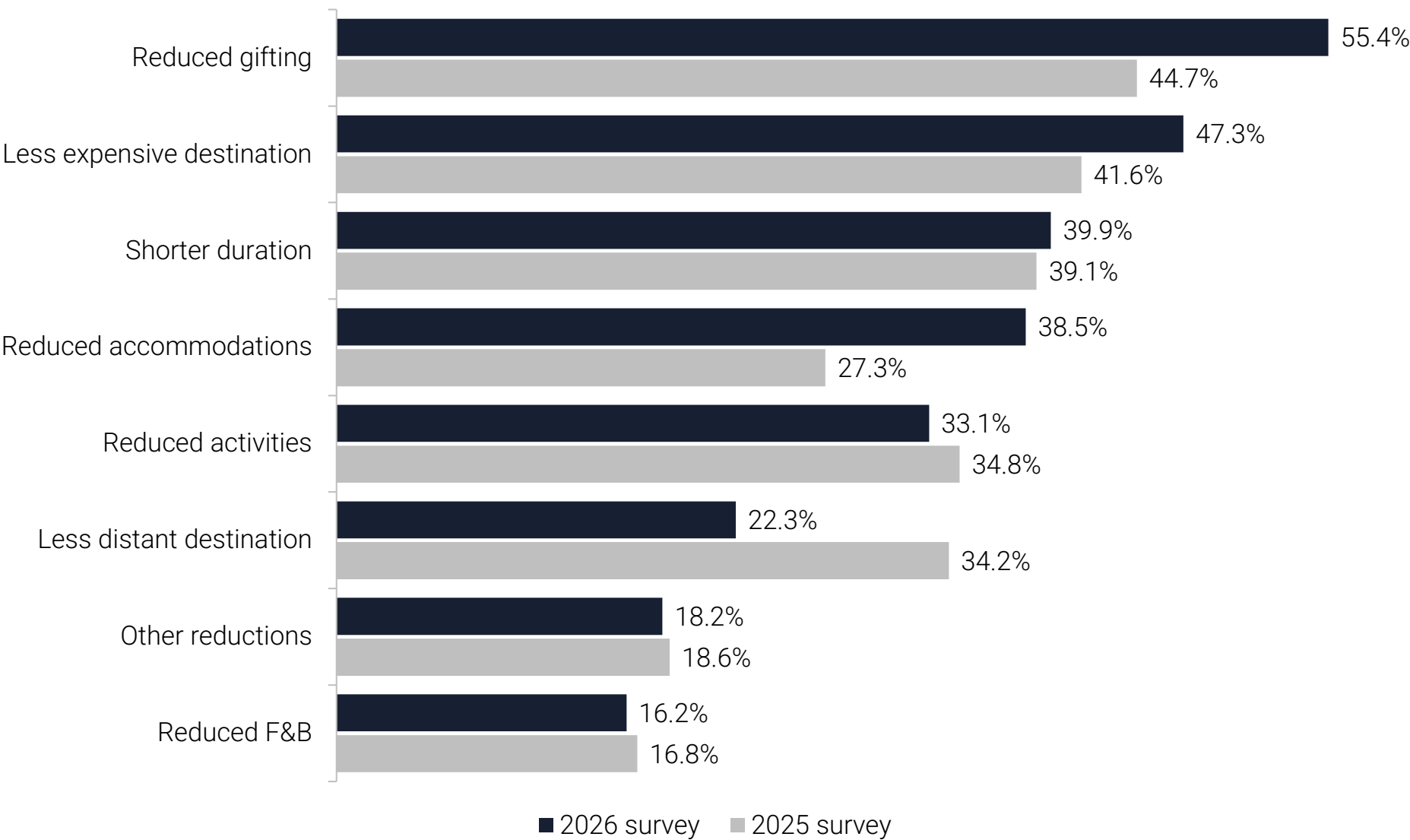
Selecting nearby locations has become a less common strategy for reducing program budgets than before

Reduced gifting (55.4%) and a less expensive destination (47.3%) are the most common ways buyers trim a program, both higher than in 2025.

Reduced accommodations is the biggest riser, moving from 27.3% to 38.5%.

Choosing a less distant destination has fallen sharply as a lever, from 34.2% to 22.3%.

Ways of trimming programs, 2026 versus 2025 survey (Share of buyers)



G4b. You indicated you plan to trim program quality next year (2027); please describe how: - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 148

Extra budget goes to activities and accommodations first

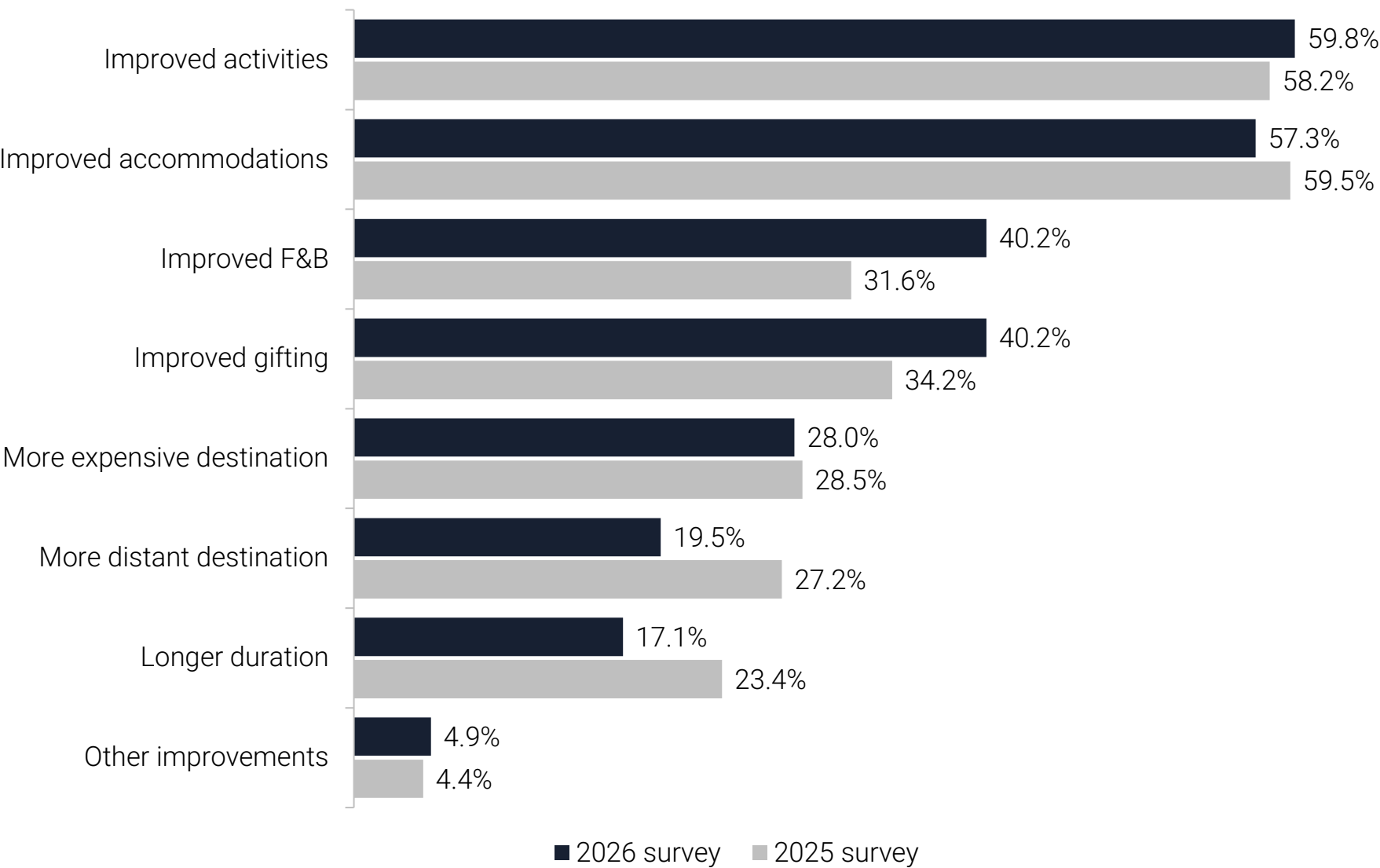
Upgrades are directed at on-site experience

Improved activities (59.8%) and improved accommodations (57.3%) remain the most common ways buyers upgrade a program.

The clearest movement is elsewhere: food and beverage rose from 31.6% to 40.2% and gifting from 34.2% to 40.2%, while accommodations edged down from 59.5%.

Spending is going into the on-site experience rather than into traveling further or for longer.

Ways of improving programs, 2026 versus 2025 survey
(Share of buyers)



G4c. You indicated you plan to improve program quality next year (2027); please describe how:
- respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 82

Hotel and airfare account for nearly half the program budget

Rooms and air dominate program spend

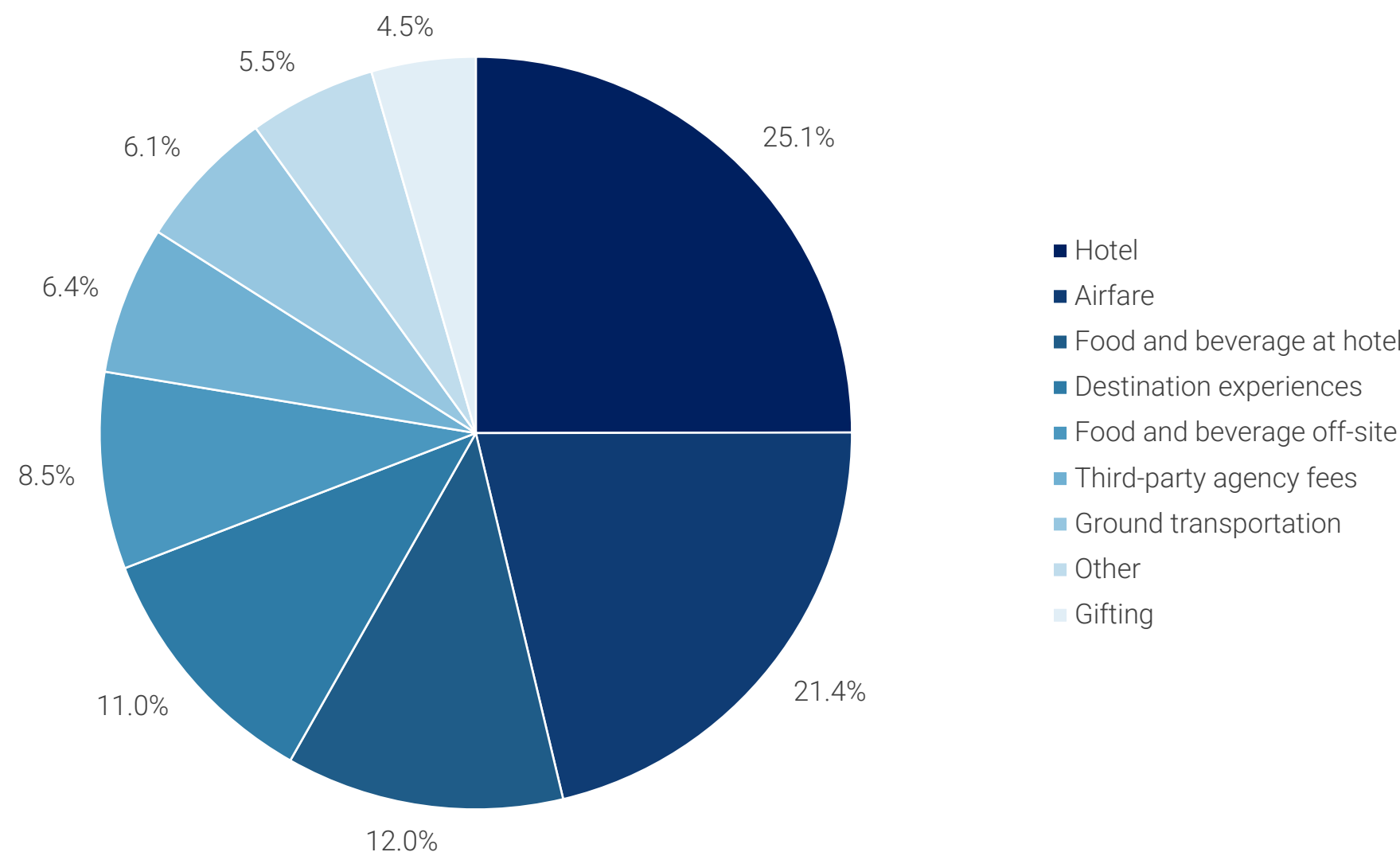
Hotel expenses represent 25.1% of the average 2027 program budget, followed by airfare 21.4%; together, nearly half of incentive travel program budgets.

Food and beverage adds a further 20.5%, split 12.0% at the hotel and 8.5% off-site.

Destination experiences and activities hold 11.0%, followed by agency fees (6.4%) and ground transportation (6.1%).

Gifting is the smallest line item, at 4.5%.

2027 program budget allocation
(Average % of program budget)



G7. While mindful that no two programs are the same, please indicate the average program budget allocation for your team’s incentive travel programs occurring next year (2027).

Response base (buyers): n = 371. Note: May not sum due to rounding

4.

Risk Assessment

Conflict and safety are the industry's hard limits

Certain risks make a destination intolerable

Military conflict (76.1%), health and safety (70.8%), and inadequate infrastructure or supplier reliability (69.9%) are the most widely cited intolerable destination risks.

More than two in five buyers cite reputational risk to the organization (44.5%), personal safety from crime (42.1%), and extreme weather (40.2%) as intolerable risks.

Intolerable risks (Share of buyers)



R1. When selecting a destination, what risks are intolerable? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 209

Geopolitical instability disrupting program destinations for most

Most buyers report heightened geopolitical instability is disrupting destinations

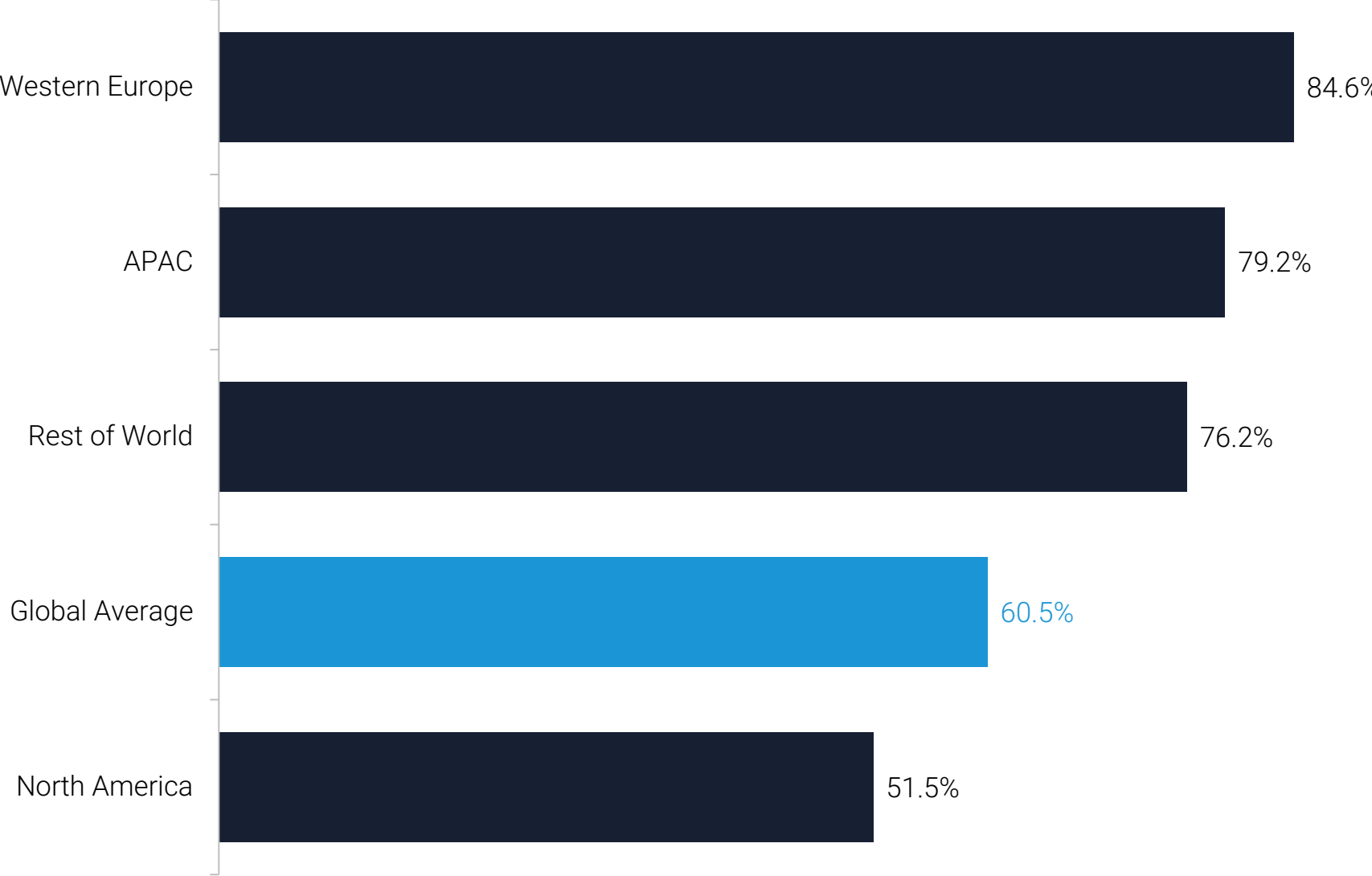
Western Europe is the most exposed at 84.6%, ahead of APAC at 79.2% and Rest of World at 76.2%. North America sits lowest at 51.5%.

North America is the least exposed region and the most likely to be trimming budgets.

60.5%

Share of worldwide buyers reporting heightened geopolitical instability is disrupting destinations used

Experiencing geopolitical disruption in destinations used, by region (Share of buyers)



R5a. Are you experiencing heightened geopolitical instability that is disrupting destinations used by your team for incentive travel programs?

Response base (buyers): n = 223

More than four in five buyers have adjusted in some way

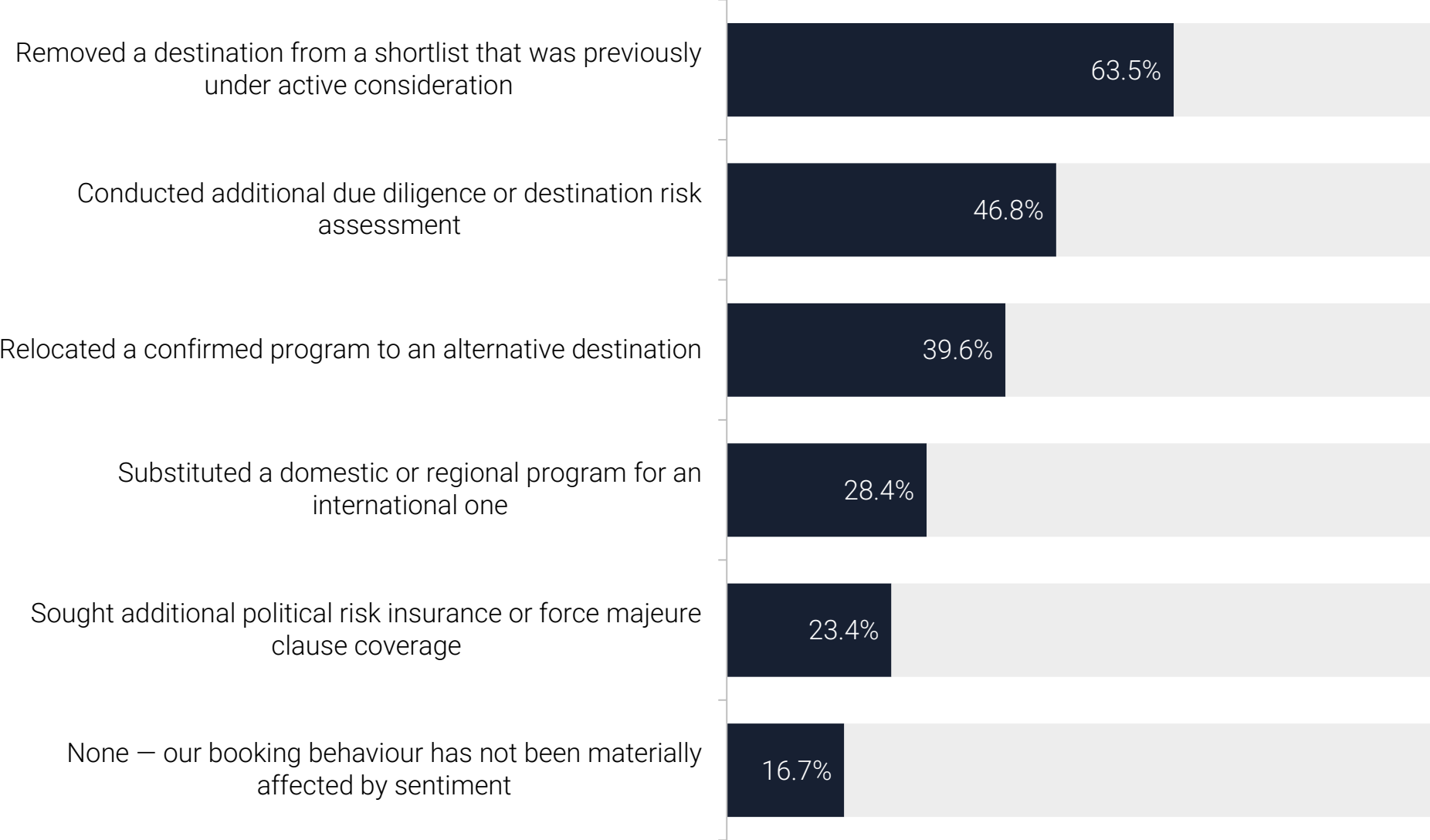
Concern has already translated into changed bookings

In the past twelve months, 63.5% of buyers have removed a previously acceptable destination from a shortlist and 46.8% have carried out additional risk assessment.

Nearly two in five buyers have relocated a confirmed program to an alternative destination.

Just 16.7% report no material change, meaning 83.3% have taken concrete action in response to geopolitical sentiment.

Response to geopolitical sentiment (Share of buyers taking each action in the past 12 months)



R2. In the past 12 months, have you or your clients taken any of the following concrete actions as a result of geopolitical sentiment rather than direct operational necessity? - respondents could select more than one choice. Response base (buyers): n = 222

Buyers split on how far sentiment should drive the decision

Data usually prevails, but sentiment alone still rules places out

A plurality takes a mixed view, with 44.6% saying sentiment matters but data prevails in the end.

Close behind, 38.2% say sentiment is primary and that they actively avoid destinations that feel uncomfortable, regardless of the data.

Only 7.7% report a real internal-alignment gap between leadership and the booking team.

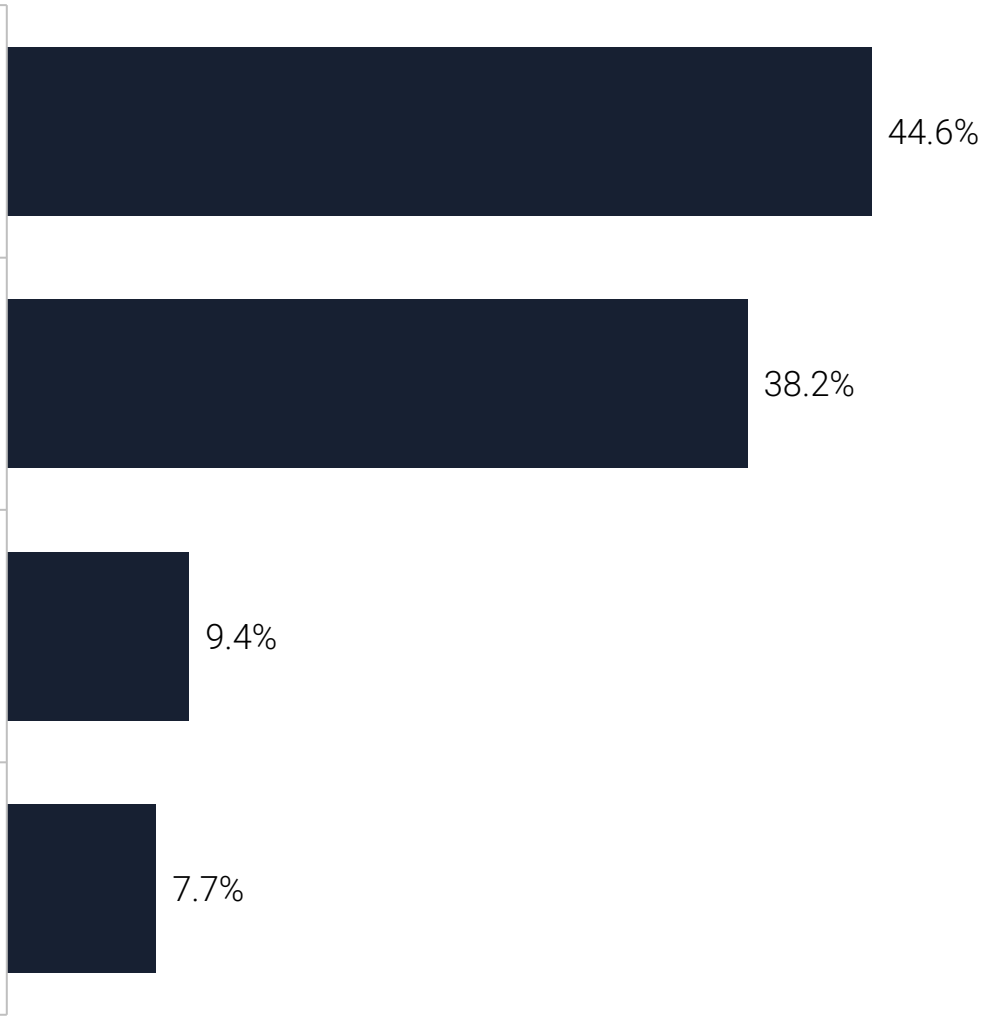
Destination-risk decision making (Share of buyers)

Sentiment matters but data prevails - We monitor sentiment closely but typically book based on logistics, cost and qualifier appeal

Sentiment is primary - We actively avoid destinations that feel geopolitically uncomfortable or reputationally risky, even if the practical case remains strong

Destination attributes override sentiment - Stated concern does not translate into actual avoidance of certain destinations, commercial considerations override

We lack internal alignment - Our senior leadership is more concerned with sentiment and organization reputation risks than our planning team, creating internal friction



R3. When considering destinations for incentive travel programs, which of the following best describes how decisions are currently being made in your organization or with your clients?

Response base (buyers): n = 233

Relationships cut through the headlines

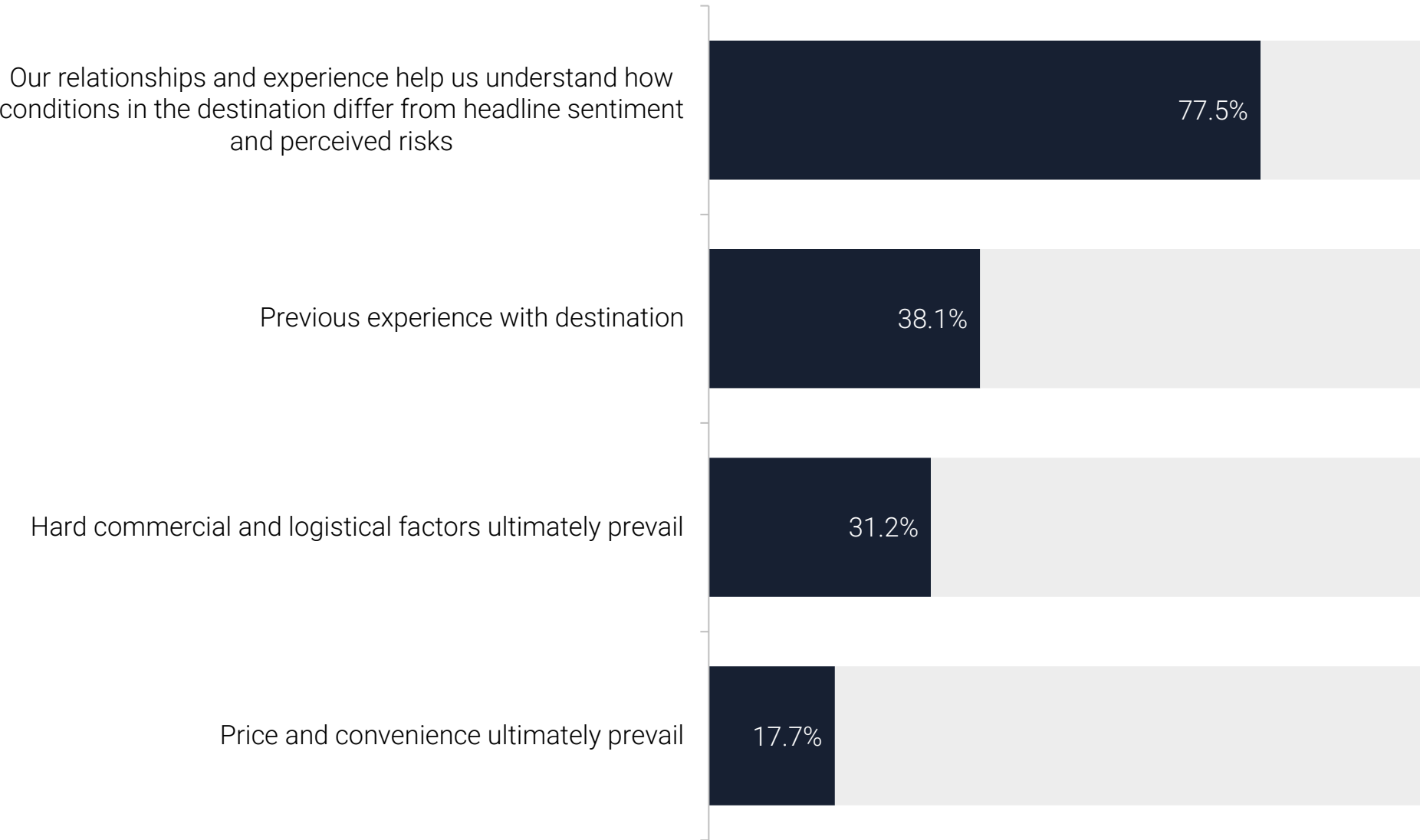
Best judgment is not dependent on hard data

More than three-quarters of buyers (77.5%) say relationships and direct experience are what allow them to see past headline sentiment to actual conditions in a destination.

That is well ahead of previous destination experience alone (38.1%) and commercial or logistical factors (31.2%).

Price and convenience come last, cited by 17.7%.

What allows a knee-jerk response to be avoided (Share of buyers)



R4. When a destination hits the headlines for the wrong reason, what allows you to look through and avoid a knee-jerk response? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 231

There is no consensus on how long destinations stay affected

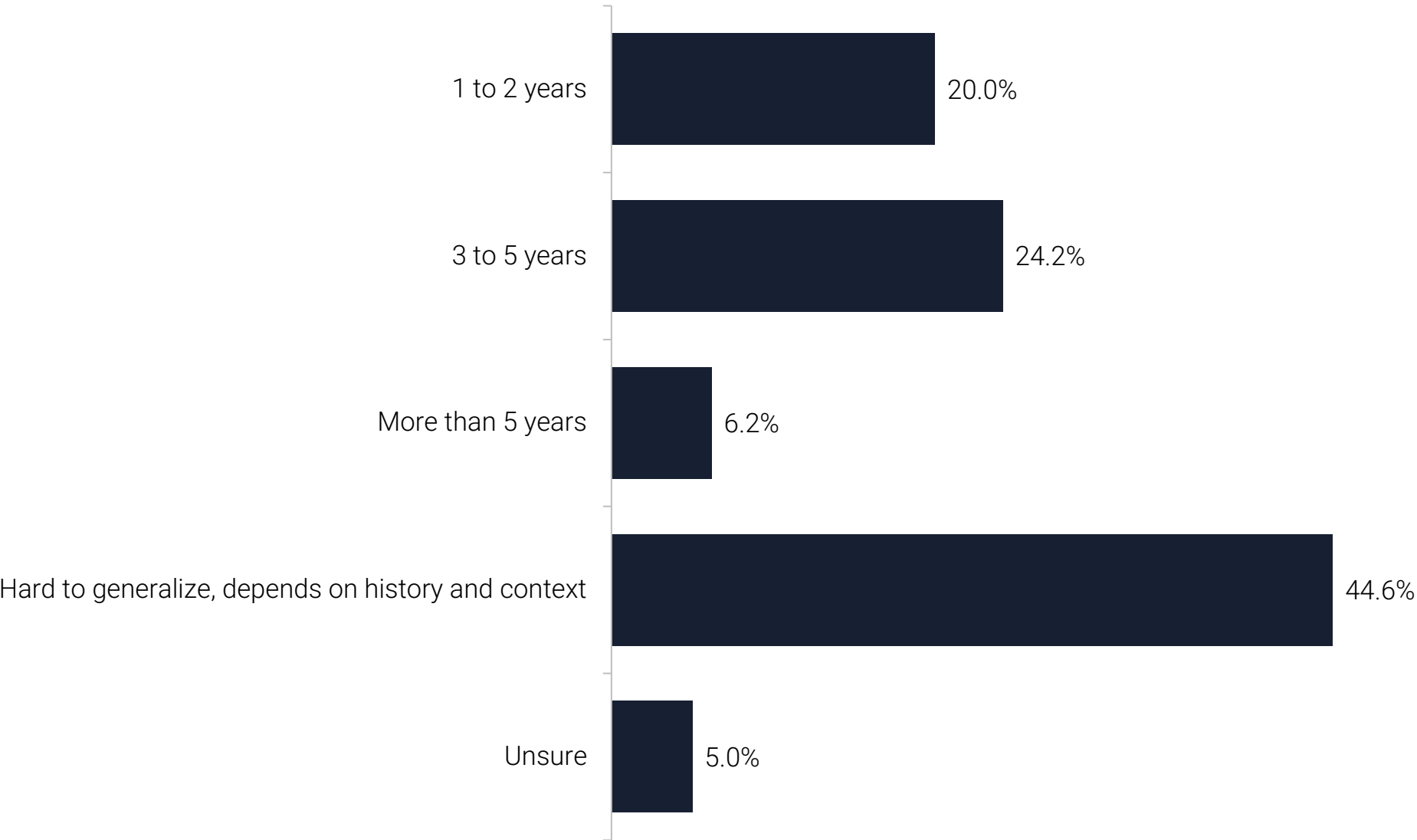
It is hard to generalize the impact of instability

Many respondents (44.6%) say high-profile instability is too dependent on history and context to generalize.

Among those willing to estimate, answers divide fairly evenly between one to two years (20.0%) and three to five years (24.2%).

The industry has no shared rule of thumb for how long reputational damage lingers.

Expected time until a destination has recovered (Share of buyers)



R6. Once a destination is recognized for high profile instability, how long do you think it will take before you would actively consider it for your programs?

Response base (buyers): n = 240

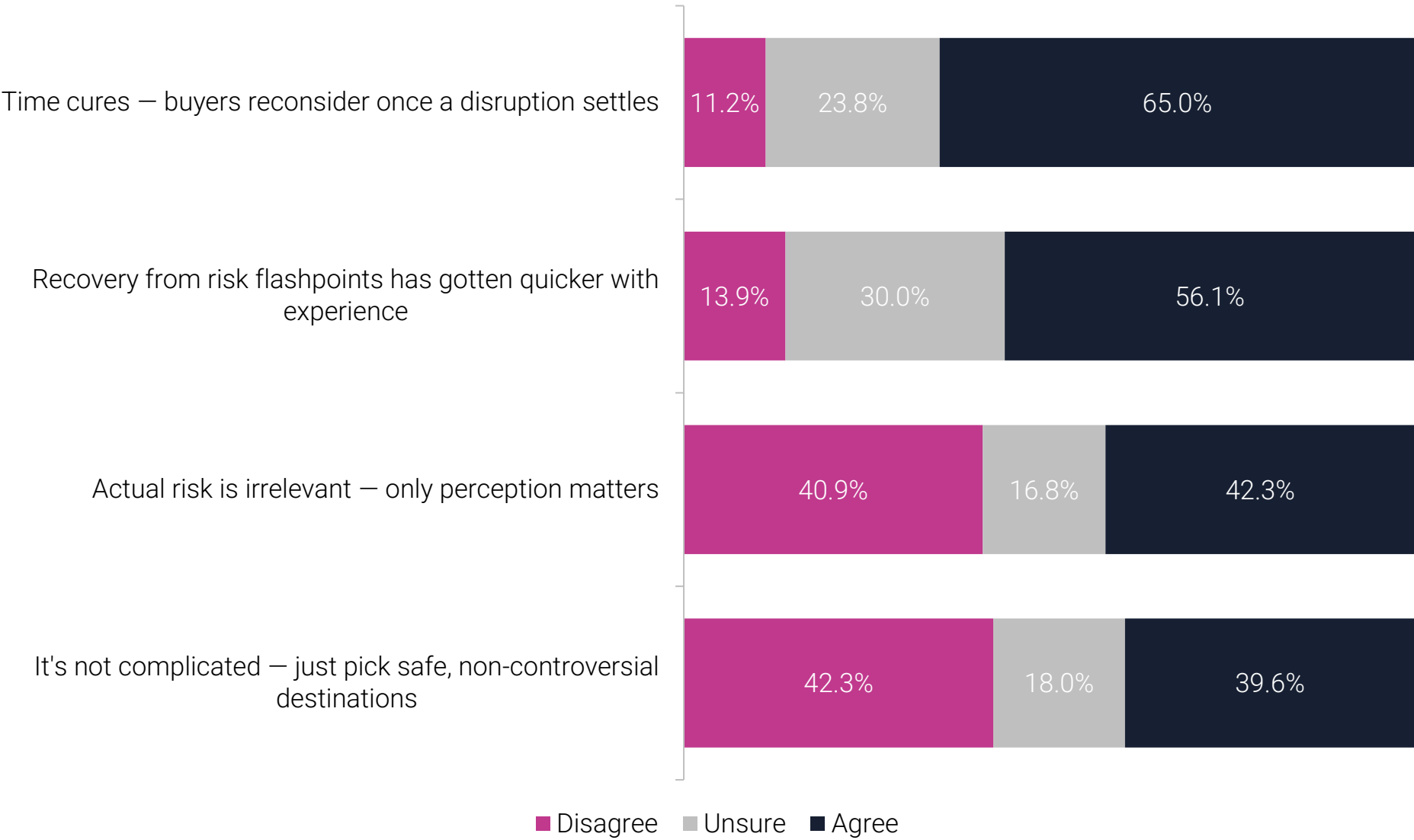
Most will reconsider a destination after disruption settles

Agreement on resilience, disagreement on perception

Two statements divide respondents almost evenly: that buyers should simply pick safe destinations (42.3% disagree against 39.6% agree), and that only perception matters (40.9% disagree against 42.3% agree).

There is far more agreement on resilience. Many (65.0%) agree buyers reconsider a destination once disruption settles, and 56.1% agree recovery has become quicker.

Attitudes toward destination risk (Share of buyers)



R7. Do you agree with the following statements?

Response base (buyers): n = 225 (survey statements edited for length)

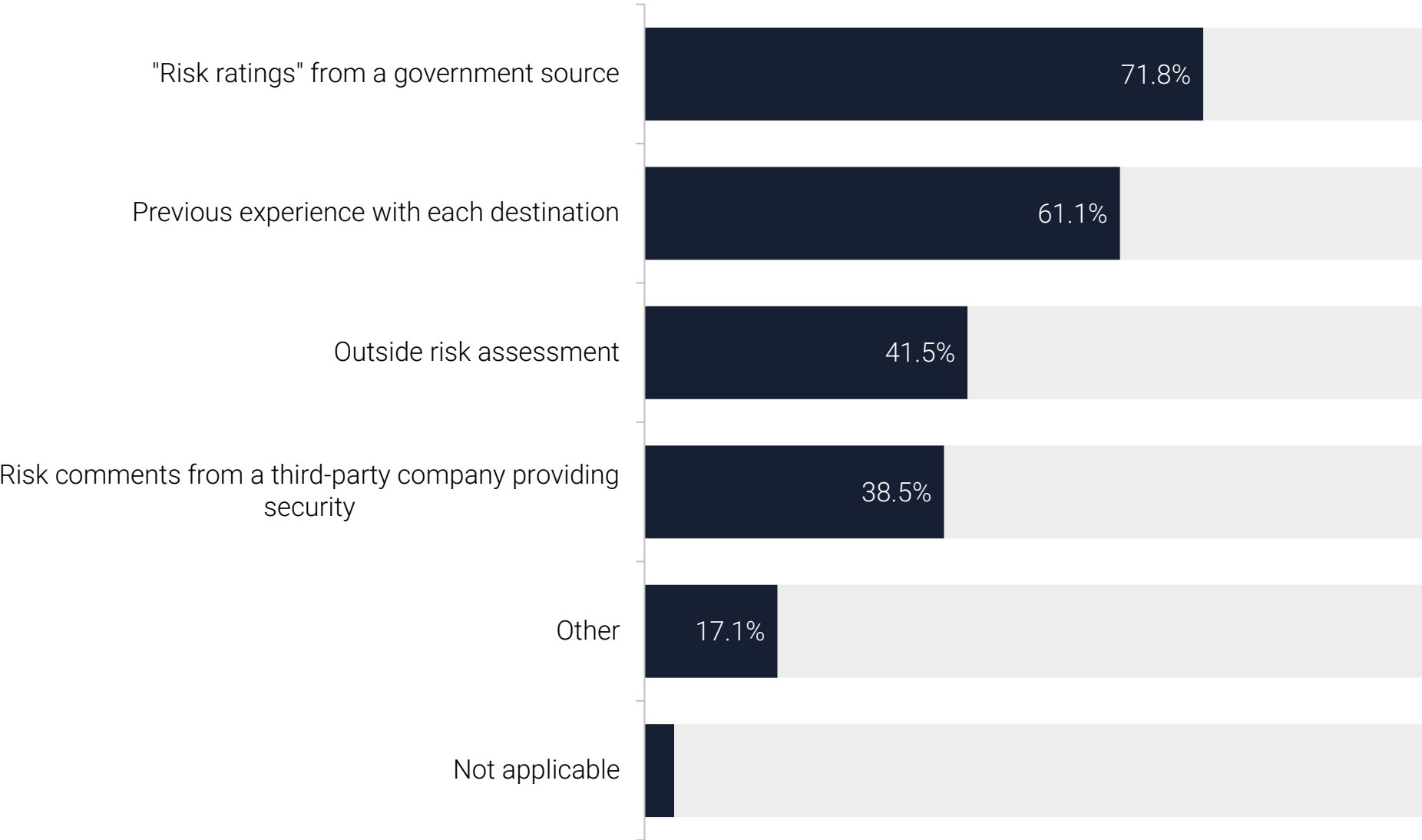
Gov't ratings lead on risk assessment, experience close behind

Formal ratings and first-hand judgment are the primary ways of assessing risk

Government risk ratings are the most cited way to assess risk (71.8%), ahead of previous experience with the destination (61.1%).

Both are well ahead of outside risk assessment firms (41.5%) and third-party security commentary (38.5%).

Sources used to assess actual destination risk (Share of buyers)



R8. How do you assess actual risk? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 234

Inflation is the biggest risk in both the short and long run

Cost pressure outranks every other challenge on both horizons

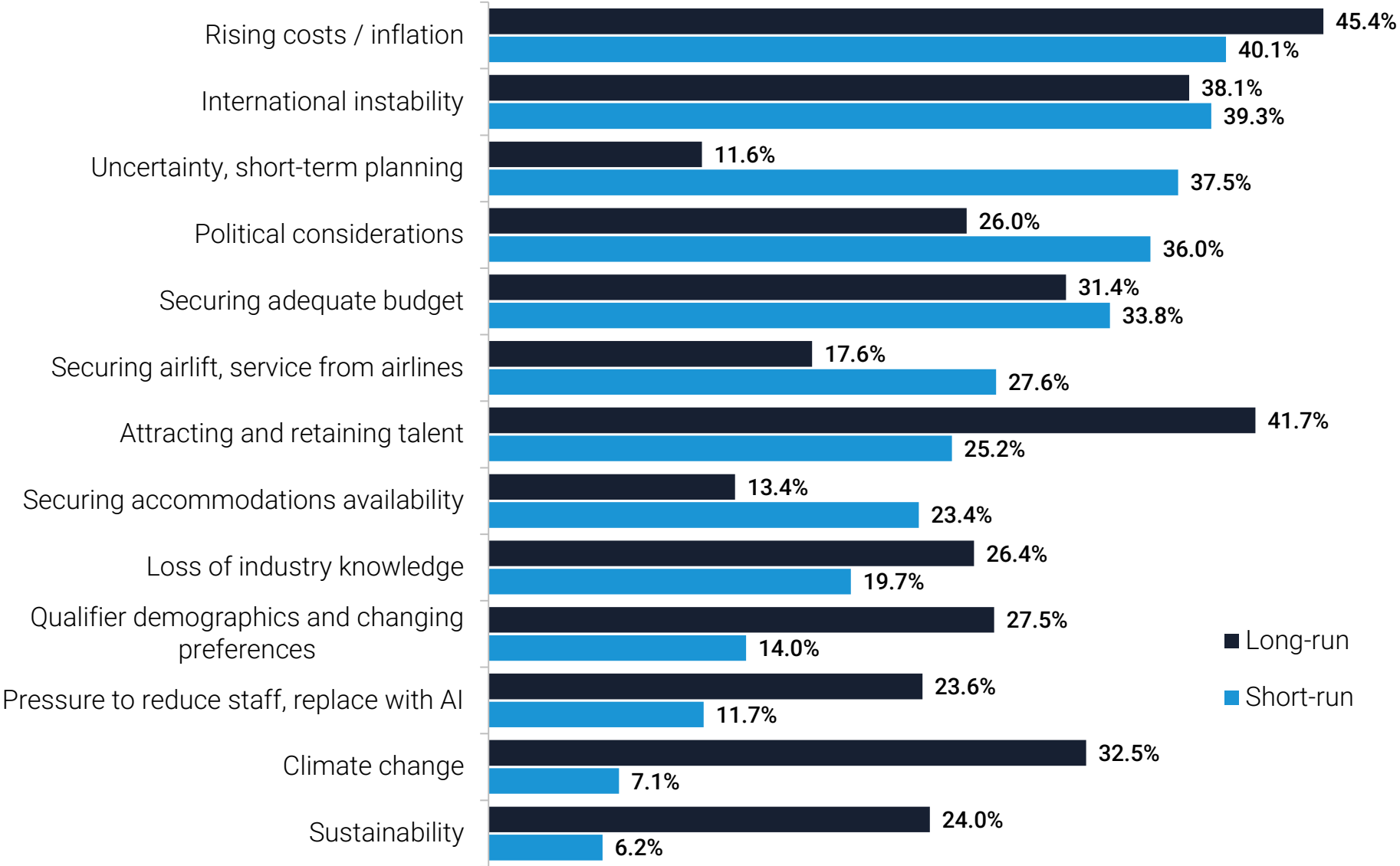
Rising costs and inflation top both horizons, with 40.1% citing it as a short-run challenge and 45.4% as a long-run one.

International instability is the closest short-run rival at 39.3%, ahead of short-term planning uncertainty at 37.5% and political considerations at 36.0%. Attracting and retaining talent becomes a top-of-mind challenge in the long-run for 41.7% of respondents.

Challenges that are lower on the list in the short-run become more important in the future. Climate change is the biggest long-run climber, rising from 7.1% in the short run to 32.5%, while sustainability rises from 6.2% in the short-run to 24.0% further out.

13 of 20 factors shown: Excluded (short-run / long-run): exchange rate volatility (21.7% / 12.2%); travel visa uncertainty (19.3% / 12.5%); fear of not being welcome (15.5% / 14.1%); less airline focus on incentive travel (11.5% / 17.3%); diversity, inclusion, etc. (9.5% / 13.8%); uninformed procurement policies (7.7% / 13.4%); none of these choices (6.6% / 3.9%)

Future challenges: short-run versus long-run (Share of respondents)



S1. What important future challenges face incentive travel professionals? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base: n = 638 (survey statements edited for length)

International instability top of mind in APAC and Rest of World

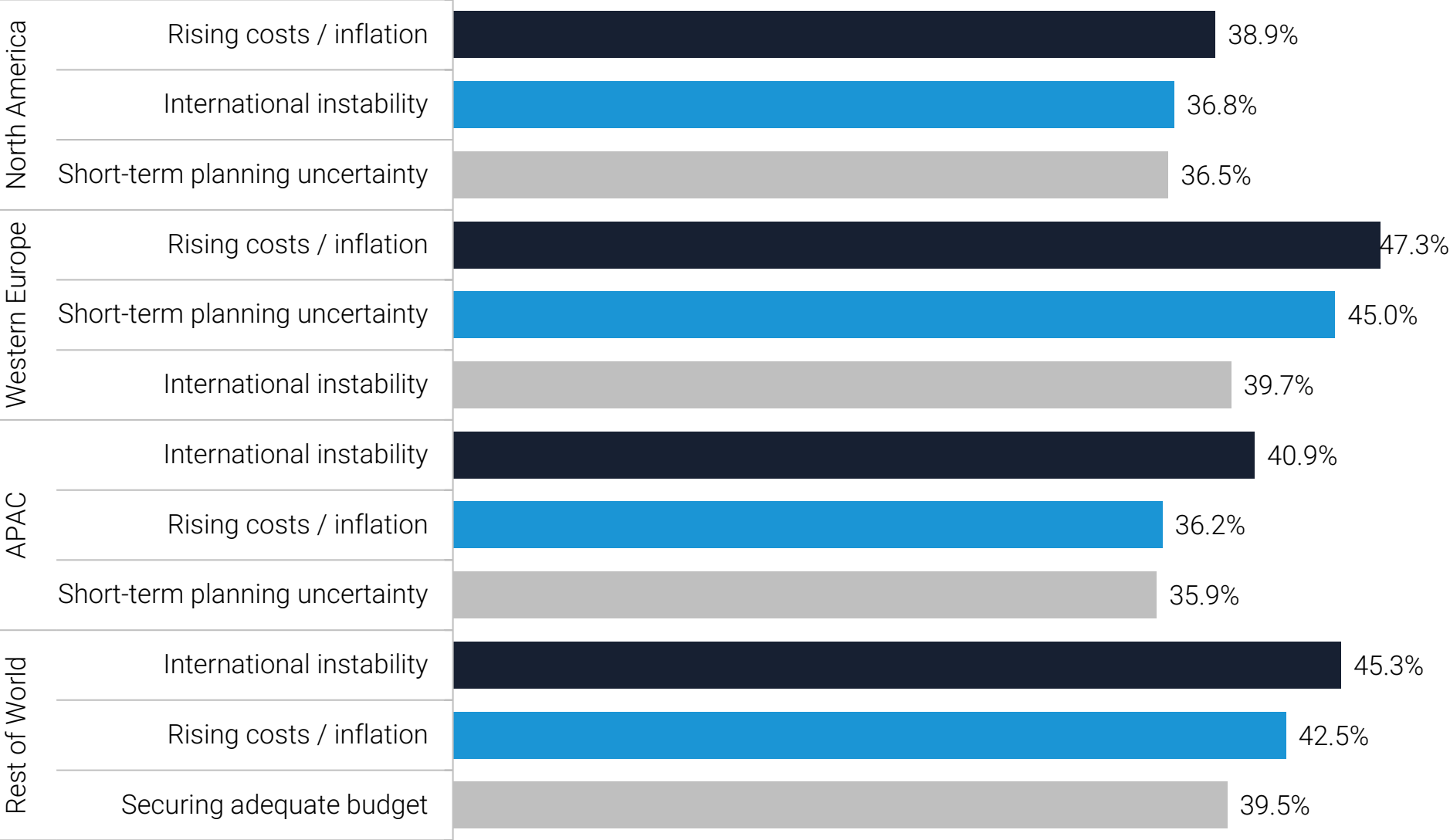
The same pressures, in a different order

Rising costs, international instability, and short-term planning uncertainty are the top three short-run challenges in three of the four regions. Only the order changes.

Western Europe feels costs most acutely (47.3%), compared to North America (38.9%). Instability leads in APAC (40.9%) and Rest of World (45.3%).

Rest of World is the exception, replacing uncertainty with ‘securing adequate budget’ at 39.5% of respondents.

Top three short-run challenges, by region (Share of respondents)



S1. What important future challenges face incentive travel professionals? — short run, by region

Response base: n = 638 (survey statements edited for length)

5.

Destination Logic

More buyers plan to use Europe in the future

Weakness in the Middle East

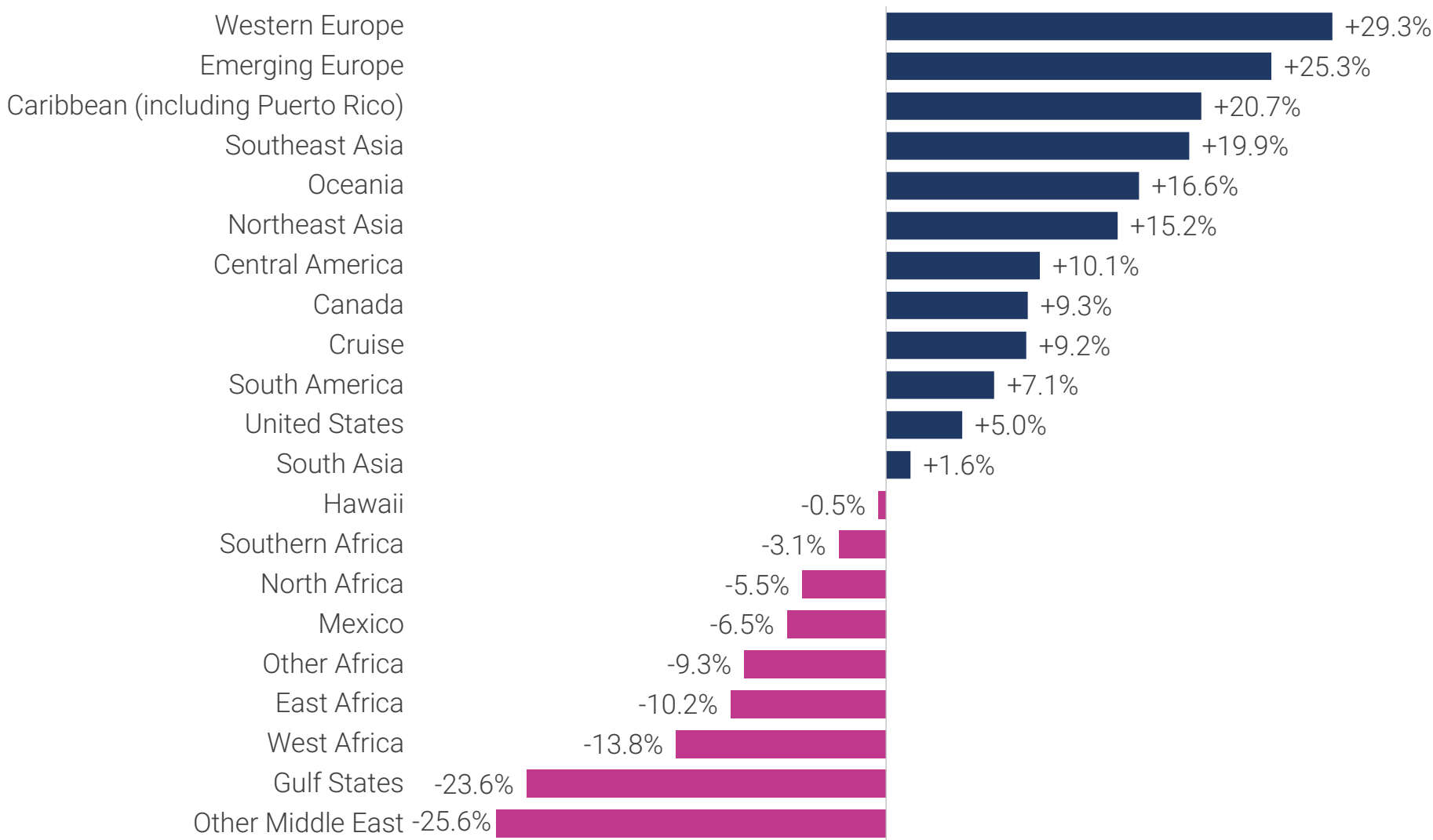
Destinations used for incentive travel are expected to change as buyers plan future events. This chart highlights the share of buyers planning more use minus the share planning less use of each destination (net destination momentum) relative to 2026.

Western Europe shows the strongest net momentum toward more use, at +29.3%. The next-strongest gainers are Emerging Europe (+25.3%) and the Caribbean (+20.7%), while the United States sits in the middle of the pack at +5.0%.

Mexico has swung to modestly negative net momentum at -6.5%, after being a top gainer in the 2025 survey. The weakest destinations are Other Middle East (-25.6%) and the Gulf States (-23.6%), followed by West Africa (-13.8%) and East Africa (-10.2%), where buyers cutting back clearly outnumber those planning more use.

Net destination momentum

(Share of buyers planning more use minus share planning less)



D1. How do you expect your planned use of the following destinations for incentive travel will change as you plan future events relative to 2026? —buyers currently using each destination

Response base (buyers): n = 205

APAC is expanding on a different scale

Expansion closer to home

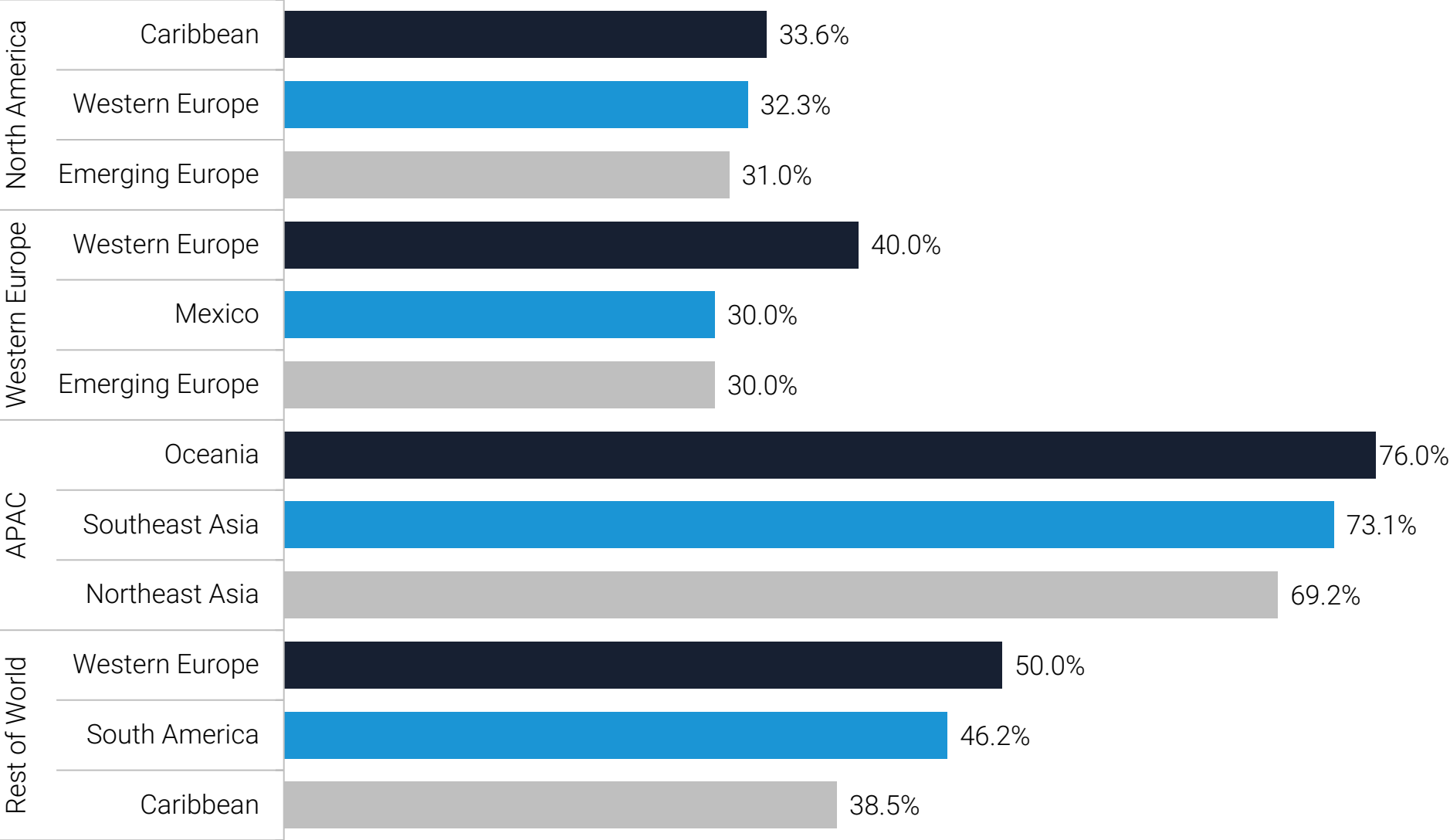
This chart focuses on respondents who indicated they are planning more use of a destination in 2026, by region.

APAC buyers plan greater travel to locations within their own region, with appetite far above what the other regions report. Oceania leads for APAC buyers at 76.0%, with Southeast Asia at 73.1%, and Northeast Asia at 69.2%.

Western Europe is the most widely cited growth market elsewhere, topping the list in Rest of World (50.0%) and in its own region (40.0%), and ranking second in North America (32.3%).

North American buyers lead, with the Caribbean at 33.6%, just ahead of Western Europe (32.3%) and Emerging Europe (31.0%).

Top three destinations for increased use, by region
(Share of buyers planning more use than in 2026)



D1. How do you expect your planned use of the following destinations for incentive travel will change as you plan future events relative to 2026? — top three destinations for increased use, by region. Response base (buyers): n = 205

Canada and South America draw the most new interest

Africa and the Middle East are being ruled out

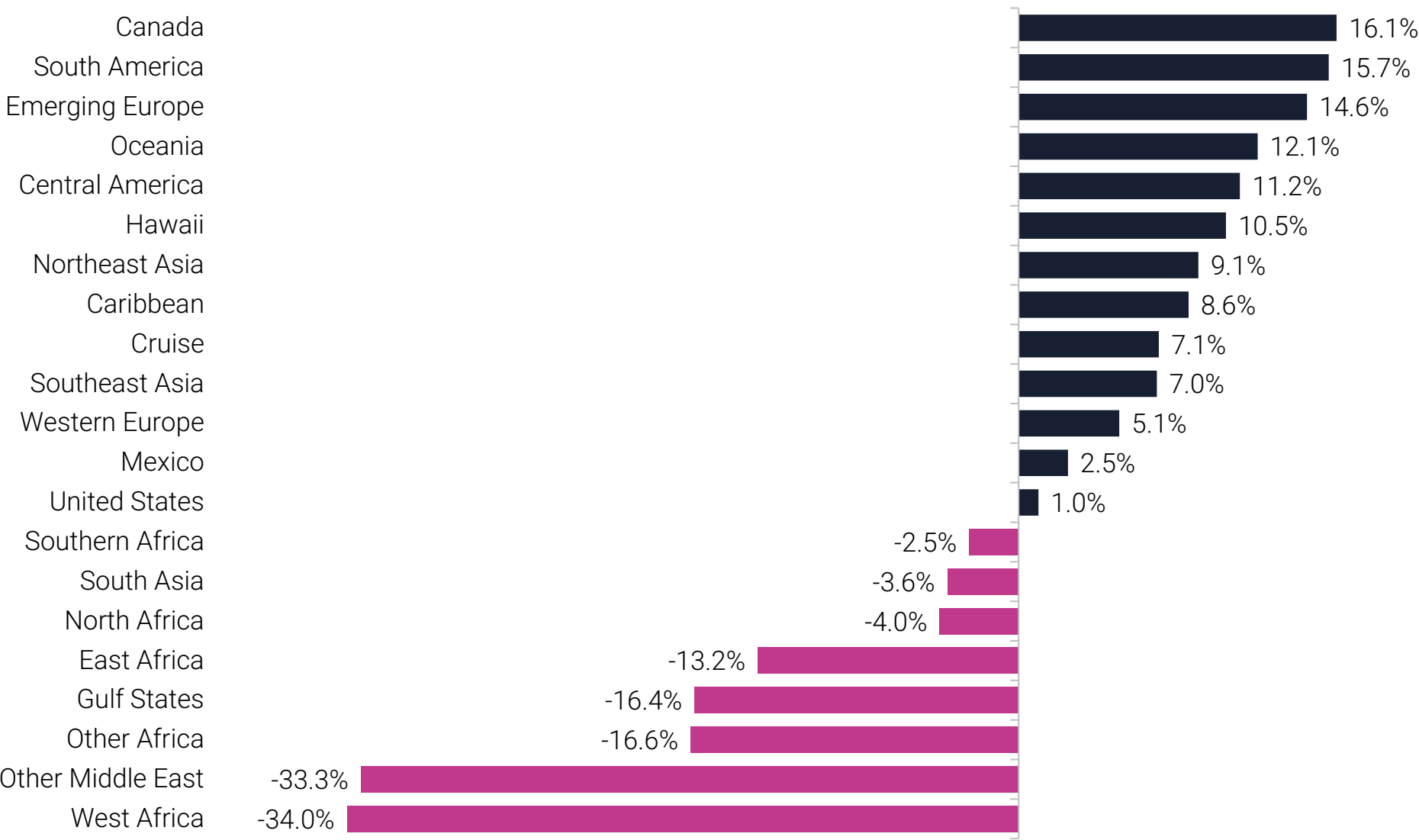
There are some destinations that are currently not being used by buyers of incentive travel. This chart shows the share of buyers not currently using a destination but willing to consider minus the share not willing to consider a destination.

Among destinations they do not currently use, buyers give the most net consideration to Canada (+16.1%), South America (+15.7%), and Emerging Europe (+14.6%).

Oceania (+12.1%) and Central America (+11.2%) follow. Cruise sits mid-table at +7.1%, a clear step down from second place in the 2025 survey.

The bottom of the list highlights refusal rather than absence of interest, possibly due to heightened safety concerns: West Africa (-34.0%) and Other Middle East (-33.3%) are ruled out by roughly half of the buyers not using them.

Change in willingness to consider new destinations (Share of buyers willing to consider minus the share not willing to consider)



D1. How do you expect your planned use of the following destinations for incentive travel will change as you plan future events relative to 2026? — buyers not currently using each destination

Response base (buyers): n = 205

Strong interest and hard refusal often sit together

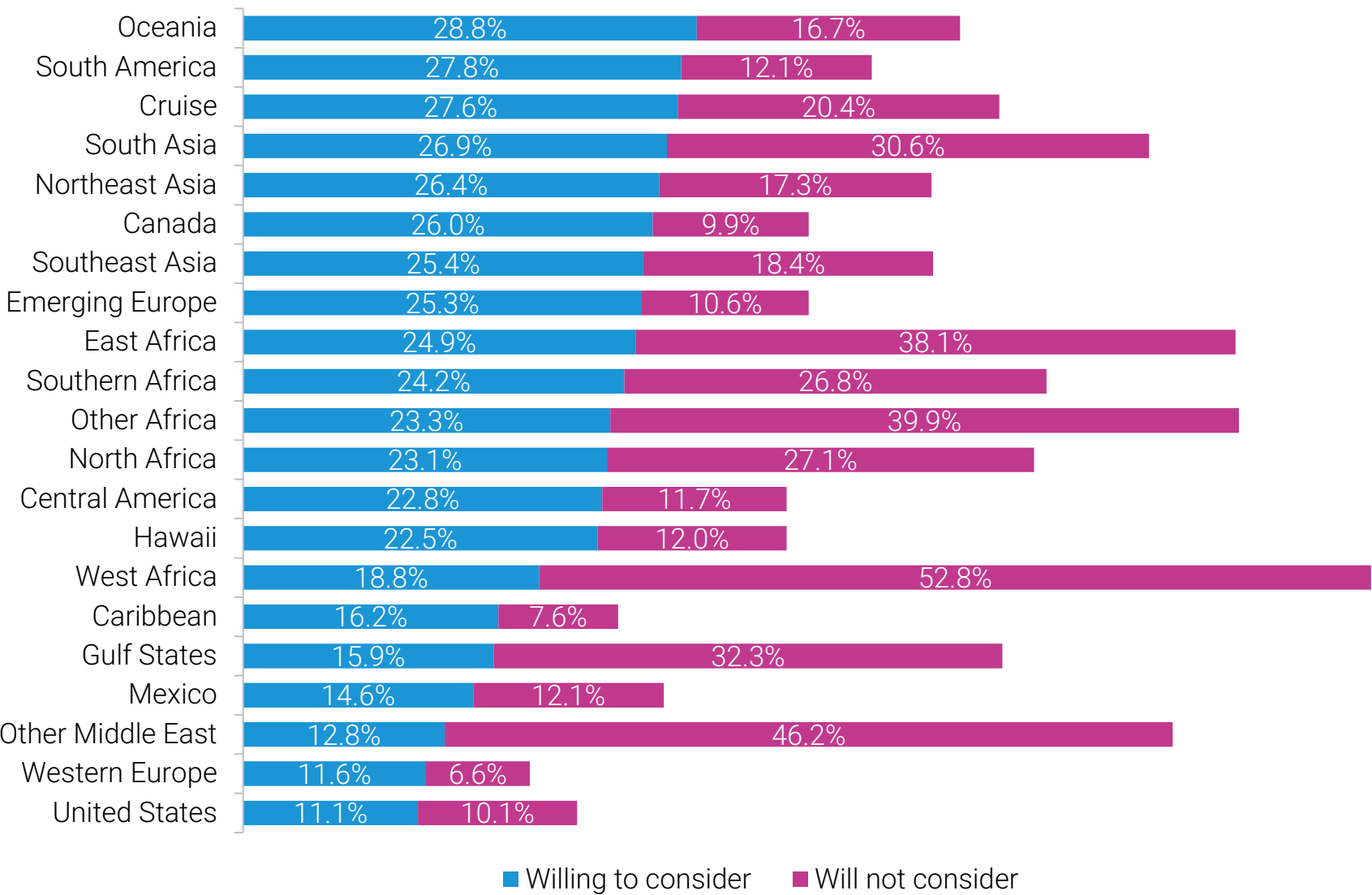
A weak net score can mean disagreement

The net scores mask two different patterns underneath (willingness versus unwillingness to consider). Oceania draws 28.8% willing against just 16.7% who rule it out, while cruise draws similar willingness at 27.6% but a steeper 20.4% refusal.

South Asia is the clearest case: 26.9% would consider it and 30.6% will not, so its negative net score reflects a split audience rather than a lack of appeal.

Western Europe and the United States sit low on both measures, at 11.6% and 11.1% willing, respectively, because most buyers already use them.

Destinations not used but under consideration (Share of buyers, sorted by highest willingness to consider)



D1. How do you expect your planned use of the following destinations for incentive travel will change as you plan future events relative to 2026? —buyers not currently using each destination

Response base (buyers): n = 205

Buyers divided on distant destinations

The share of those not willing to consider is sizable and reduces the momentum for future growth

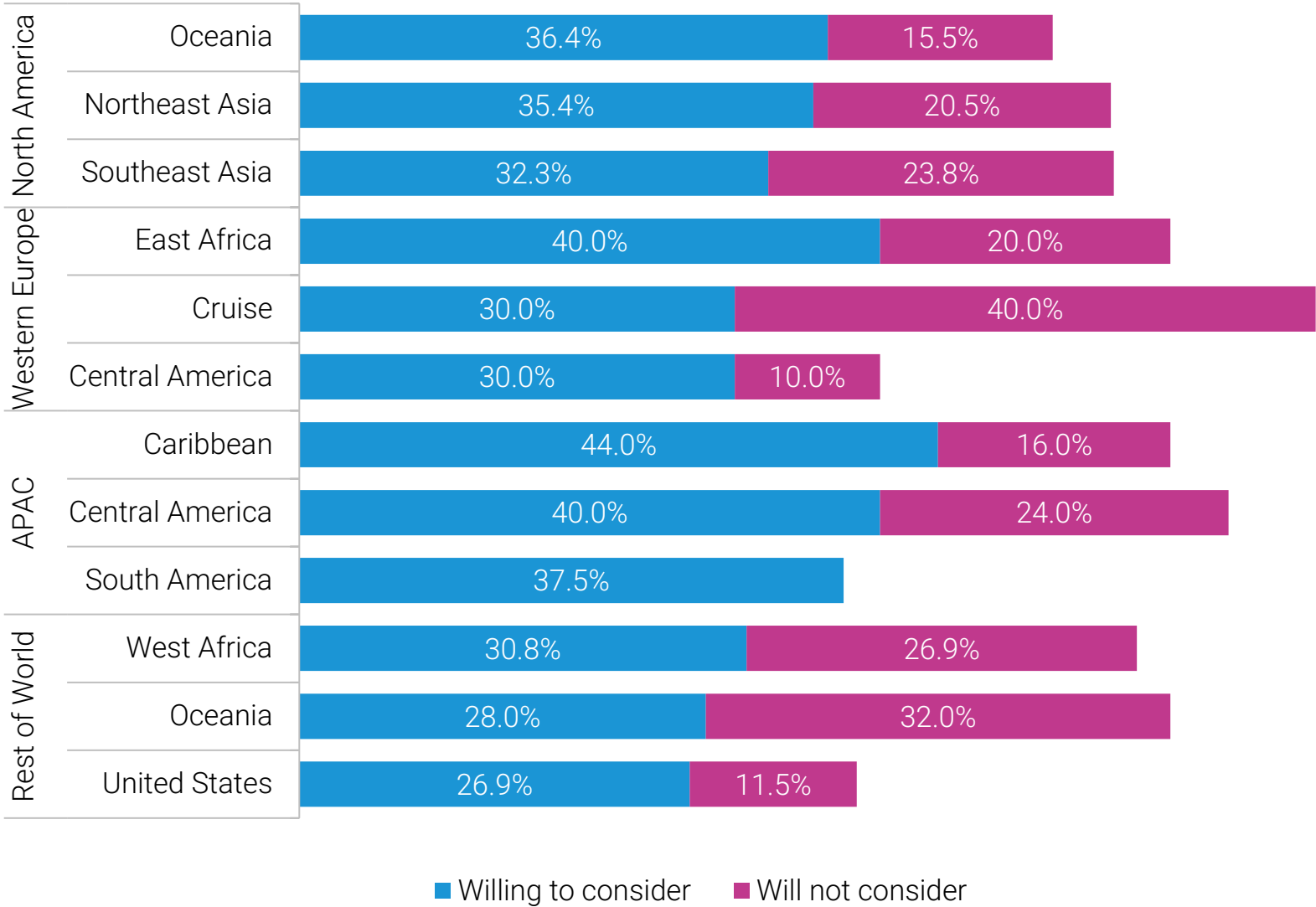
North American buyers are most open to Oceania (36.4%), Northeast Asia (35.4%), and Southeast Asia (32.3%) — the three furthest from home.

APAC is also looking further away, favoring the Caribbean (44.0%), Central America (40.0%), and South America (37.5%).

East Africa tops the “willing to consider” list for Western Europe (40.0%).

Rest of World leads with West Africa (30.8%) and Oceania (28.0%).

Destinations not used but under consideration
(Share of buyers, top three per region)



D1. How do you expect your planned use of the following destinations for incentive travel will change as you plan future events relative to 2026? — buyers not currently using each destination

Response base (buyers): n = 205

Novelty still leads destination-type momentum

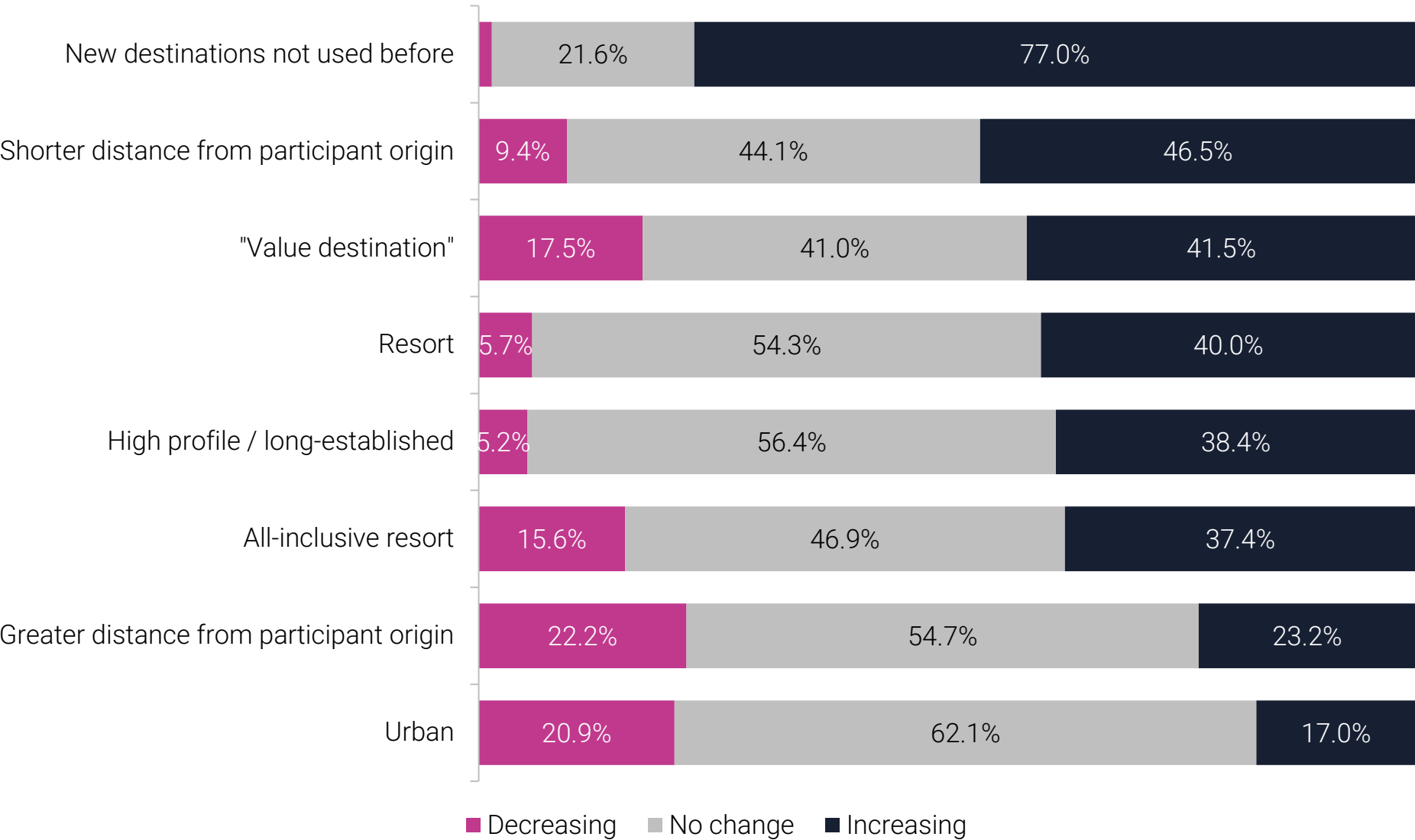
Far and urban destinations sit at the bottom

New destinations not used before lead by a wide margin, with 77.0% of buyers increasing use, against 1.4% cutting back.

Shorter-distance trips (46.5%), value destinations (41.5%), and resorts (40.0%) follow.

Far and urban destinations sit at the bottom, with more buyers cutting back than increasing use.

Destination-type momentum (Share of buyers, ranked by share increasing use)



D2. How do you see destination types changing as you plan future events?

Response base (buyers): n = 218

Cruises lose momentum

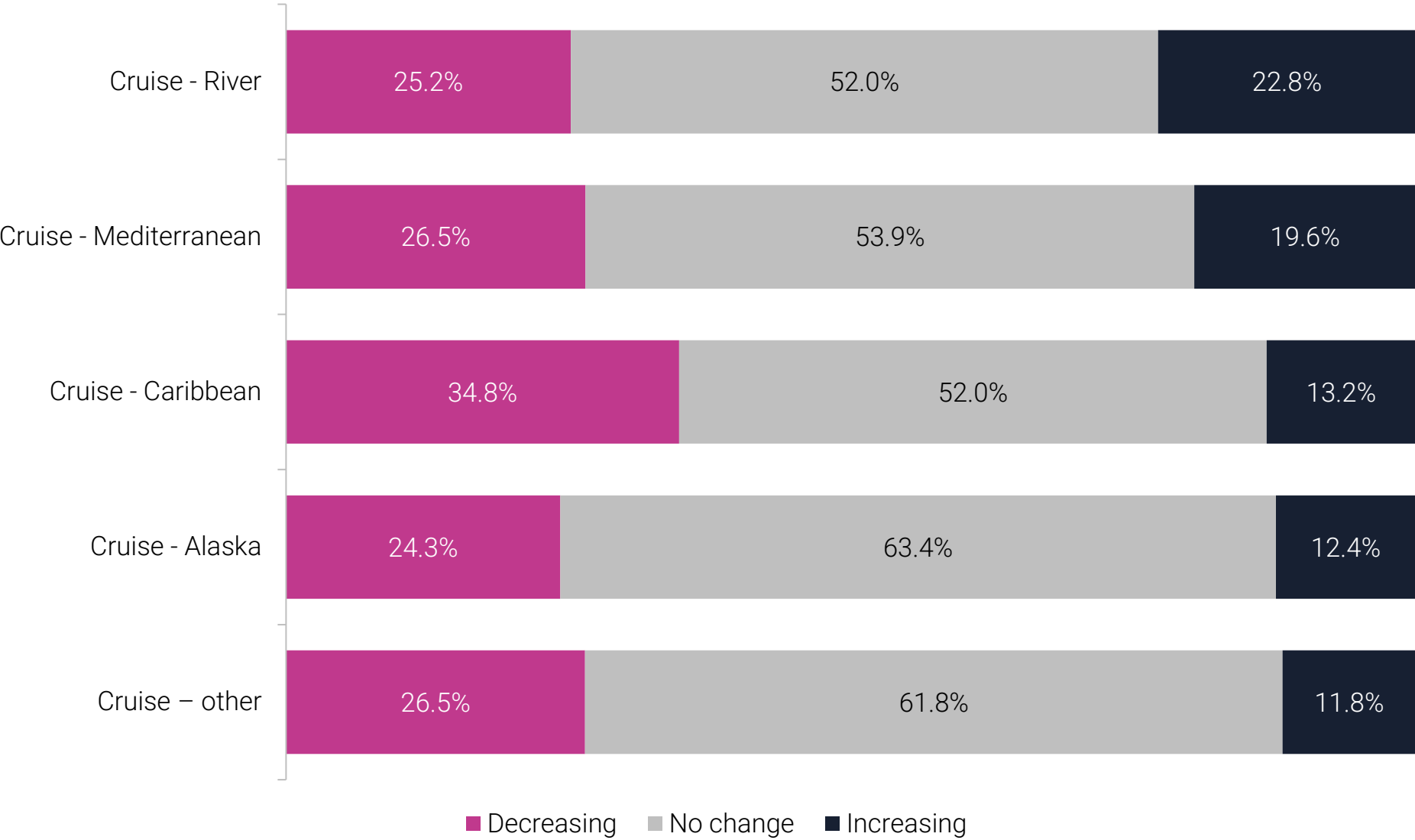
Every cruise type loses more buyers than it gains

Cruise is the weakest destination family in the survey: all five cruise types have more buyers cutting back than increasing use.

River holds up best, at 22.8% increasing against 25.2% decreasing.

Caribbean falls hardest, with 34.8% of buyers reducing use against 13.2% increasing, a net of -22 points.

Cruise destination momentum (Share of buyers, by change in planned use)



D2. How do you see destination types changing as you plan future events?

Response base (buyers): n = 218

Destinations can be motivational, memorable, and meaningful

The strongest draw is not the most meaningful experience

Beach and sunshine is the most motivational type by a wide margin, cited by 67.0%, ahead of international travel at 47.4%, and sports or concert events at 36.7%.

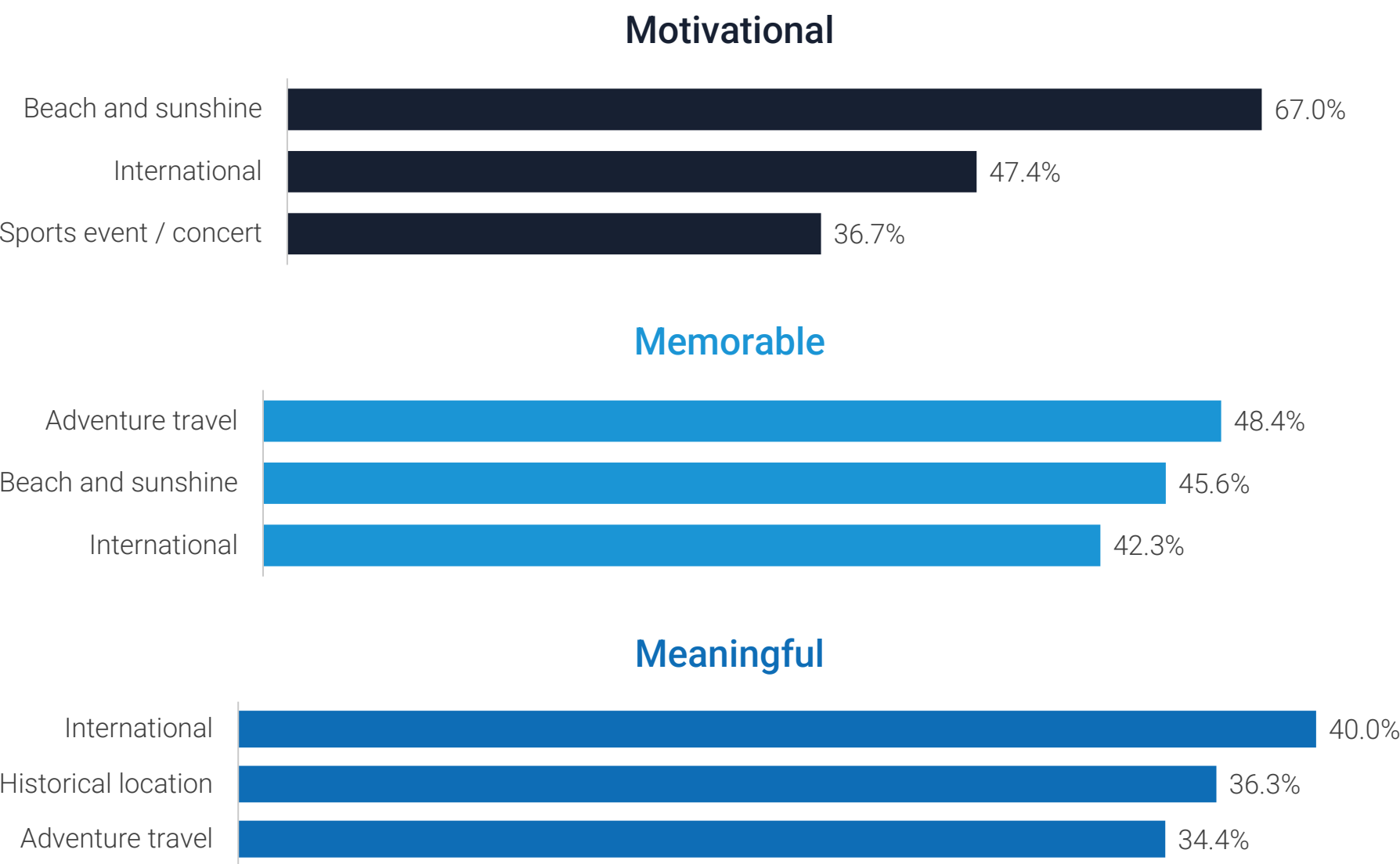
Memorable belongs to adventure travel, at 48.4%, ahead of beach at 45.6%, and international travel at 42.3%.

Meaningful ranks differently again, with international travel at 40.0%, historical locations at 36.3%, and adventure travel at 34.4%.

International travel is the only type in all three top threes; beach appears in two but is not as meaningful.

Destination-type performance

(Top three destination types on each measure, share of buyers)



D3. How well are today’s incentive travel experiences delivering on these goals for qualifiers? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 215

The strongest draw can be weak on meaning

Draw versus depth

Each line tracks one destination type from how well it motivates qualifiers to how meaningful the experience feels.

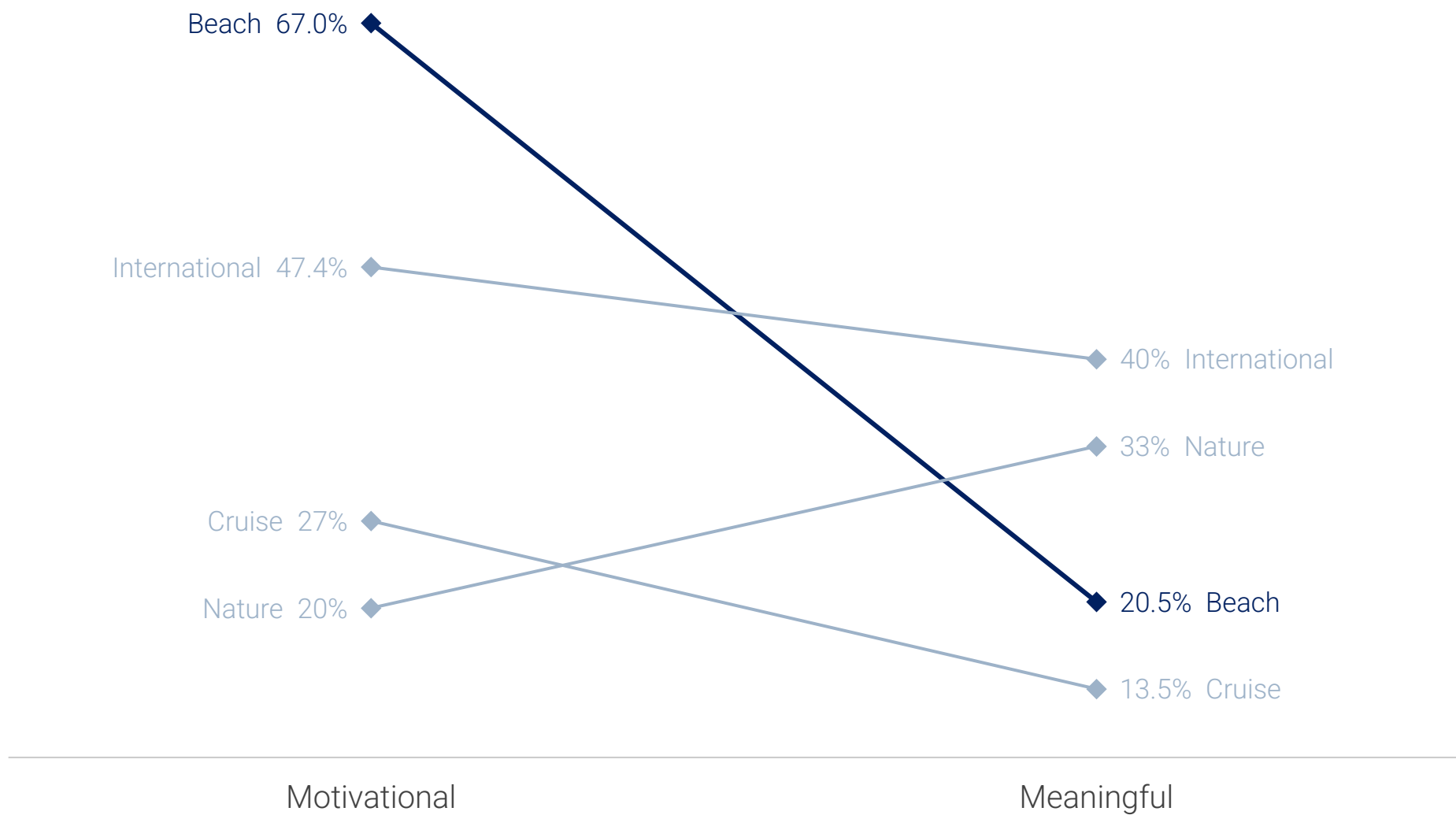
Beach and sunshine falls furthest: 67.0% saying motivational compared to 20.5% saying meaningful.

International travel largely holds its level, 47.4% to 40.0%, while natural surroundings gain, from 20.0% to 33.0%.

Cruise slides from 27.0% to 13.5%.

Destination-type performance

(Motivational vs. meaningful, selected types, share of buyers)



D3. How well are today’s incentive travel experiences delivering on these goals for qualifiers? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 215

Top-tier stays overtake direct air access as a must-have

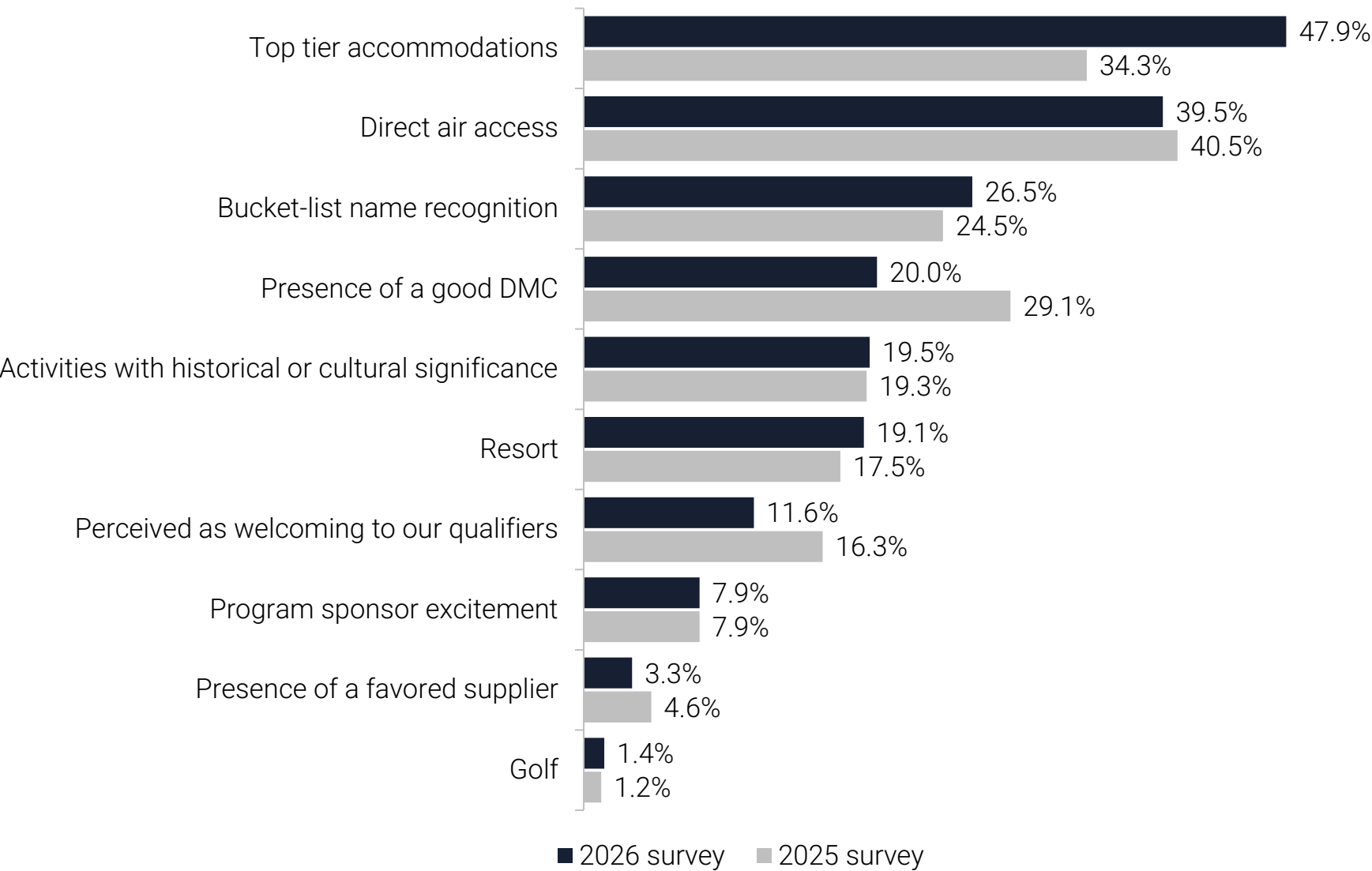
Where qualifiers stay now outranks how they get there

Top-tier accommodations are the leading destination must-have at 47.9%, up from 34.3% in 2025.

Direct air access slips to second at 39.5%, just below its 40.5% share last year, while the presence of a good DMC falls furthest, from 29.1% to 20.0%.

Bucket-list name recognition edges up to 26.5% of buyers from 24.5%, holding third place.

Destination must-haves, 2026 versus 2025 survey (Share of buyers)



D5. What are your one or two most important destination “must haves”, assuming a destination is perceived as safe (health, crime, geopolitics)? - respondents could select more than one choice. Response base (buyers): n = 215

Geopolitical factors now the primary disqualifier

More buyers are identifying major disqualifiers than a year ago

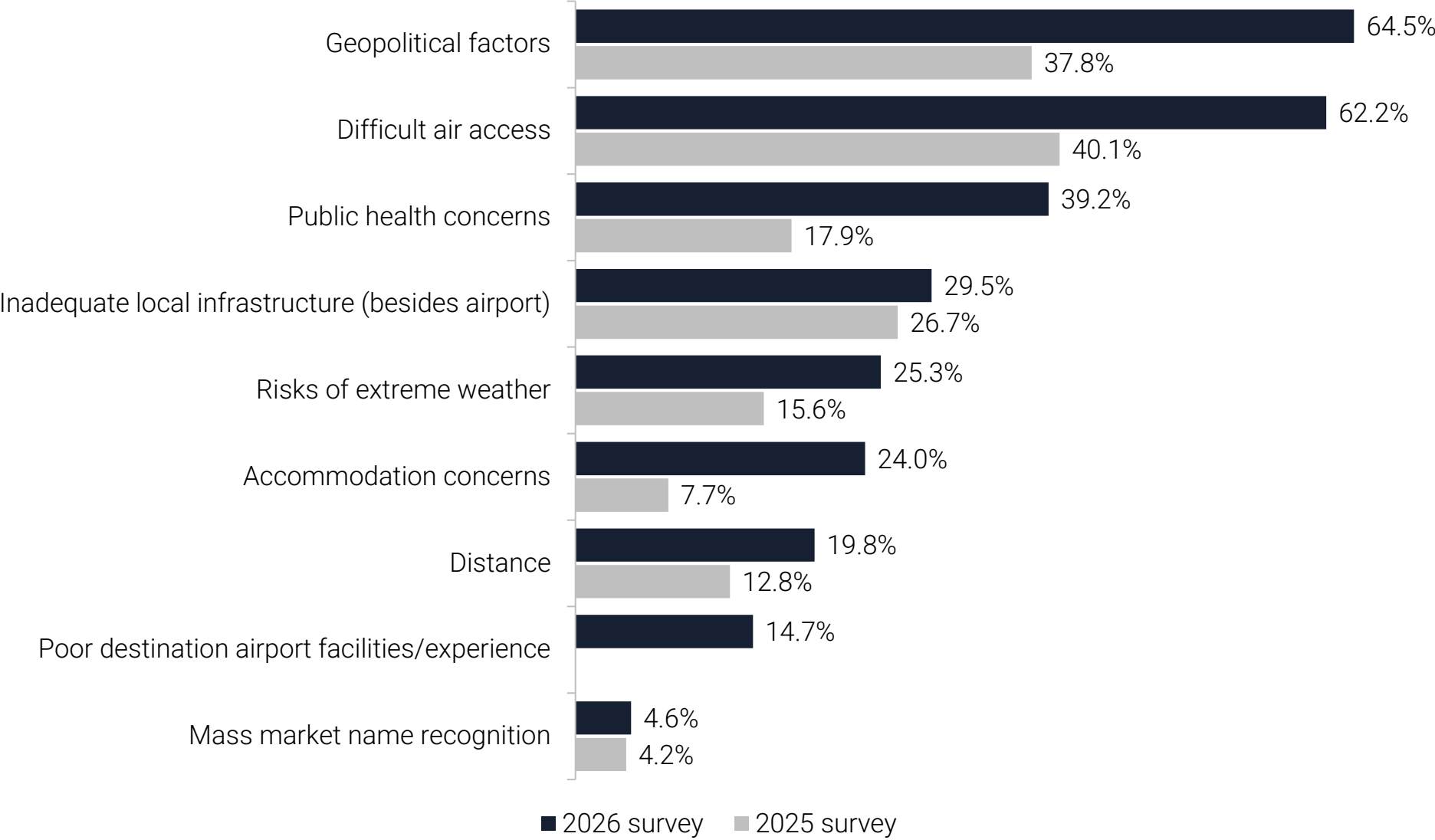
Geopolitical factors are cited by most (64.5%) as a leading reason to rule a destination out.

That is consistent with the geopolitical risk section, where a majority report active disruption to the destinations they use.

Difficult air access runs a close second at 62.2%. Public health concerns have more than doubled, from 17.9% to 39.2%.

Accommodation concerns have tripled, from 7.7% to 24.0% of buyers in 2026.

Destination disqualifiers (Share of buyers)



D6. What are your most important destination “disqualifiers”, besides cost and personal safety? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 217

Creativity and reputation key to DMC selection

Judgment-based qualities beat structural credentials

Creativity and innovation (81.2%) narrowly leads reputation through word of mouth (79.5%) and demonstrable connections in the destination (75.2%); examples of judgment-based qualities.

Structural credentials such as company size and being part of a global or national chain sit at the bottom of the list.

DMC-selection factors (Share of buyers)



C1. When selecting a DMC, what are the key factors that influence that choice? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 409

Most expect DMCs to become multi-service businesses

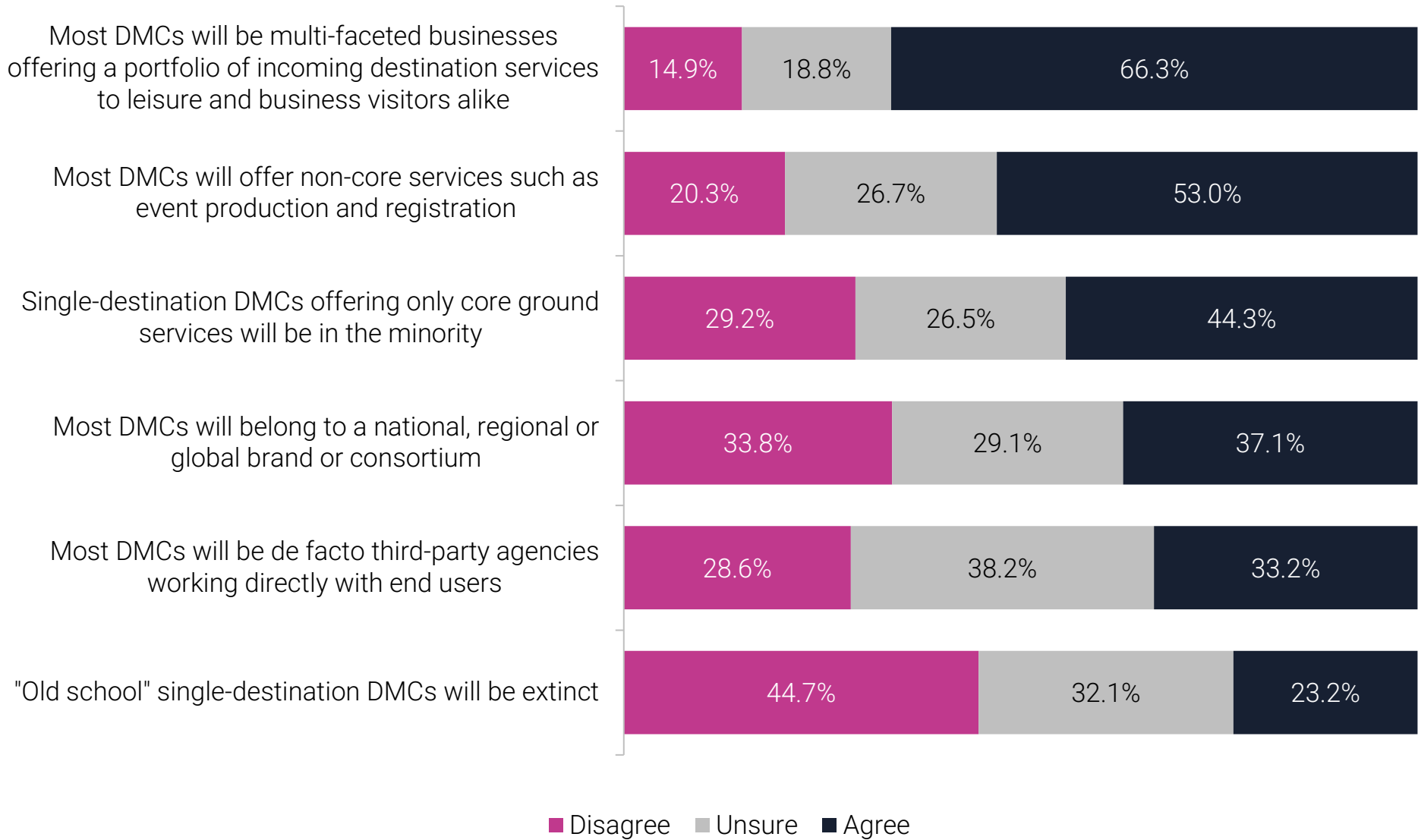
Consolidation and service expansion, rather than disappearance

The strongest area of agreement is that most DMCs will become multi-faceted, portfolio-style businesses (66.3%).

Predictions that DMCs will become de facto third-party agencies draw more mixed views (33.2% agree, against 28.6% disagree).

Respondents expect the traditional model to evolve rather than to disappear.

Predictions for the DMC sector (Share of DMCs)



C2. How do you think the DMC sector may evolve over the next five years?

Response base (DMCs): n = 308

6.

Strategic Planning

Sales and profitability still outrank engagement goals

Incentive travel is framed first as a performance lever

End-user program owners rate increased sales and profitability for the company as the single most important objective, achieving a score of 4.2 out of 5.

Softer, harder-to-measure engagement goals follow behind it.

Enhanced ability to recruit new employees ranks last at 3.0.

Program objectives

(Average importance rating, 1 = least to 5 = most important)



P1. Please rank the following objectives in order of importance as outcomes of your incentive travel program – ranking reflected as a score for aggregation purposes

Response base (end users): n = 115

Programs are converging on shared, experience-led moments

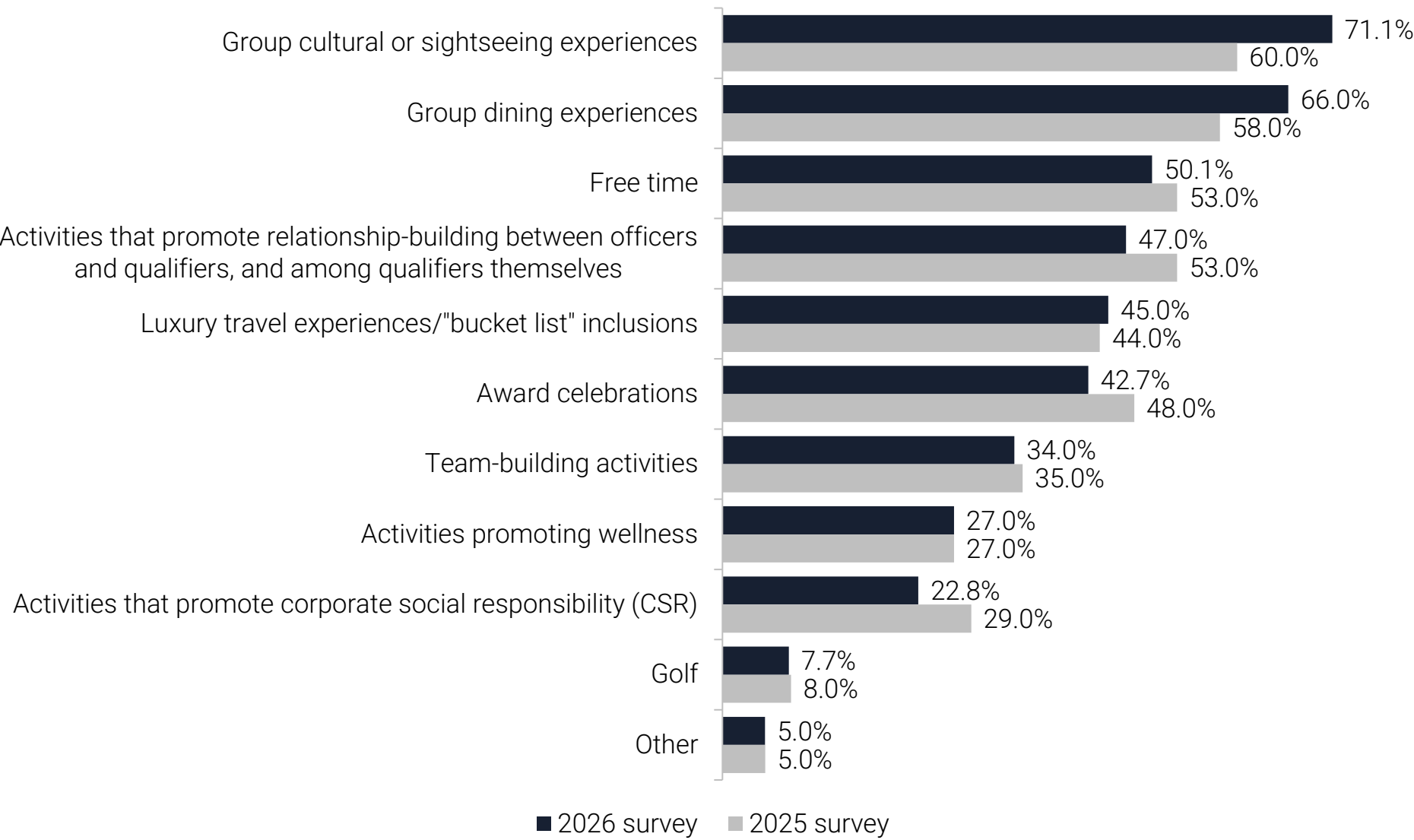
A narrower set of activities is absorbing the attention

The share citing group cultural and sightseeing experiences rose from 60.0% in 2025 to 71.1% in 2026, and group dining from 58.0% to 66.0%.

Falling over the same period is the importance of free time (53.0% to 50.1%), relationship-building activities (53.0% to 47.0%), award celebrations (48.0% to 42.7%), and CSR activities (29.0% to 22.8%).

The industry is concentrating on fewer, shared experiences rather than broadening the activity mix.

Program activity importance, 2026 versus 2025 survey (Share of respondents)



P2. Which of the following program activities are most important for a successful incentive travel program? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (all except DMOs): n = 1,252

Buyers value free time more than sellers do

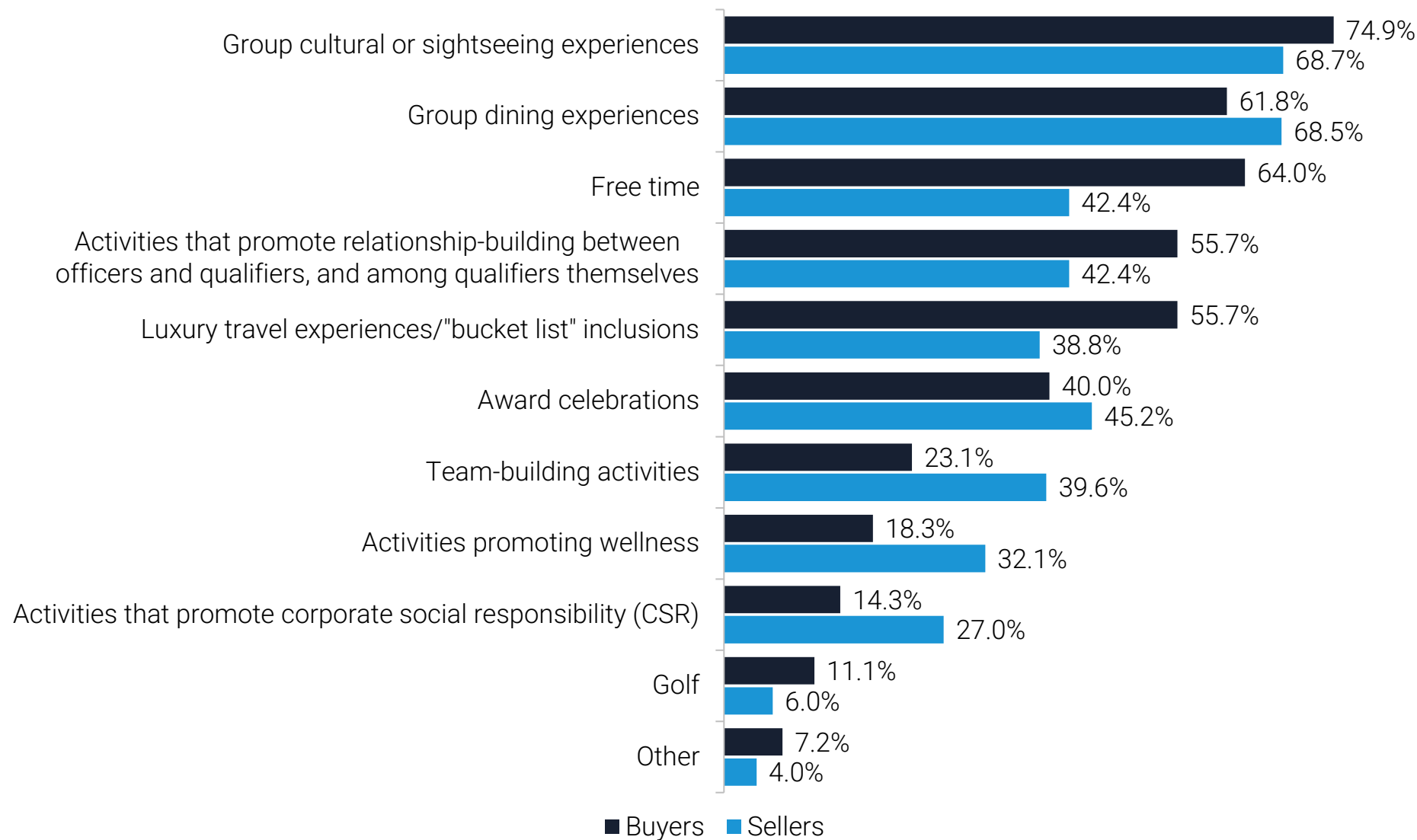
Sellers focus on group dining activities more than buyers

Group cultural and sightseeing experiences top the lists for buyers and sellers, who disagree more on the importance of activities that come after.

Most buyers (64.0%) rate free time as one of the most important program activities, compared with 42.4% of sellers.

Activities rated more by sellers than buyers include group dining (68.5% against 61.8%) and award celebrations (45.2% against 40.0%).

Most important program activity (Share of respondents, buyers vs. sellers)



P2. Which of the following program activities are most important for a successful incentive travel program? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (all except DMOs): n = 1,252

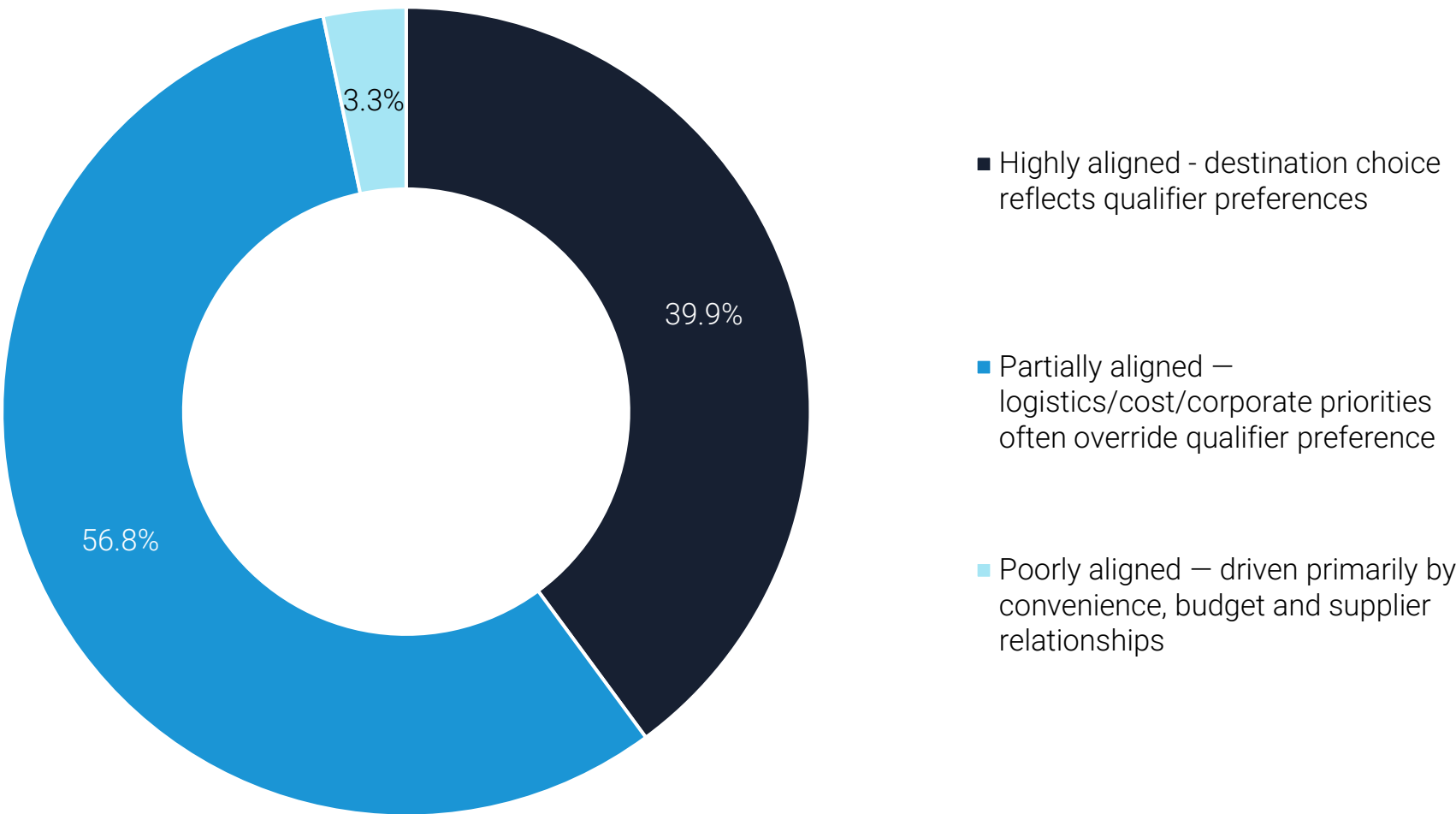
Destination choice reflects qualifier preference for many, not all

Logistics, cost, and corporate priorities frequently override the qualifier

Approximately two-in-five (39.9%) of buyers describe destination choice as highly aligned with what qualifiers would choose for themselves.

The majority (56.8%) say alignment is only partial, with logistics, cost, and corporate priorities often taking precedence.

Alignment between destination choice and qualifier preference (Share of buyers)



D4. Are the incentive travel destinations you or your clients select aligned with what qualifiers themselves would choose if given a free hand?

Response base (buyers): n = 213

Certain provocative statements generated strong agreement

Agreement on fundamentals

More than three-quarters agree that the best investment is educating leaders about what incentive travel actually delivers instead of chasing new destinations or better hotels (76.2%). The majority of respondents also back better-designed programs in secondary cities over weak programs in top destinations (61.7%), shorter stays over longer ones (58.2%), and question whether sustainability claims are more than greenwashing (51.0%).

Provocative industry statements (Share agreeing)

76.2%

Education is a better investment than new destinations or hotels

The best investment the incentive travel industry could make right now is not in new destinations or better hotels — it is in educating the next generation of corporate HR and finance leaders about what incentive travel actually delivers.

61.7%

A well-designed program beats the location it's held in

A well-designed incentive program in a secondary domestic city beats an underwhelming program in an iconic international destination every time.

58.2%

Shorter stays beat longer ones

A longer stay in a good destination is now less appealing to most qualifiers than a shorter stay in a great one — shorter, more intense incentive experiences are the future.

51.0%

Sustainability claims viewed as greenwashing

Most sustainability commitments made by incentive travel programs are greenwashing — genuine, measurable environmental progress in our industry remains the exception rather than the rule.

S2. Do you agree with the following statements? (1 of 2)

Response base: n = 629

Some provocative statements split the room as consensus fades

Disagreement on formats

Fewer than half think the industry talks to itself more than it serves clients (43.7%). Agreement thins out further as barely a third would retire the gala dinner (36.8%) or expect qualifiers to take the cash (35.9%), and just 18.1% see the experience economy as real competition for group travel.

Provocative industry statements (Share agreeing)

43.7%

Industry talks to itself

The incentive travel industry spends more time talking to itself at industry conferences than it does making the case to the C-suite.

36.8%

Retire the formal gala dinner

The formal gala dinner is the most overrated element of the incentive travel program and should be retired in favor of more intimate, authentic dining experiences.

35.9%

Qualifiers would take the cash

Given a genuine choice, the majority of qualifiers would still take the cash equivalent of the trip — incentive travel only wins when the experience is truly exceptional.

18.1%

Experience economy rivals group travel

The experience economy — Airbnb Experiences, Viator, Klook, bespoke travel companies — now offers individual qualifiers a level of personalized travel experience that incentive group programs struggle to match.

S2. Do you agree with the following statements? (2 of 2)

Response base: n = 629

APAC is the least confident in the group-program model

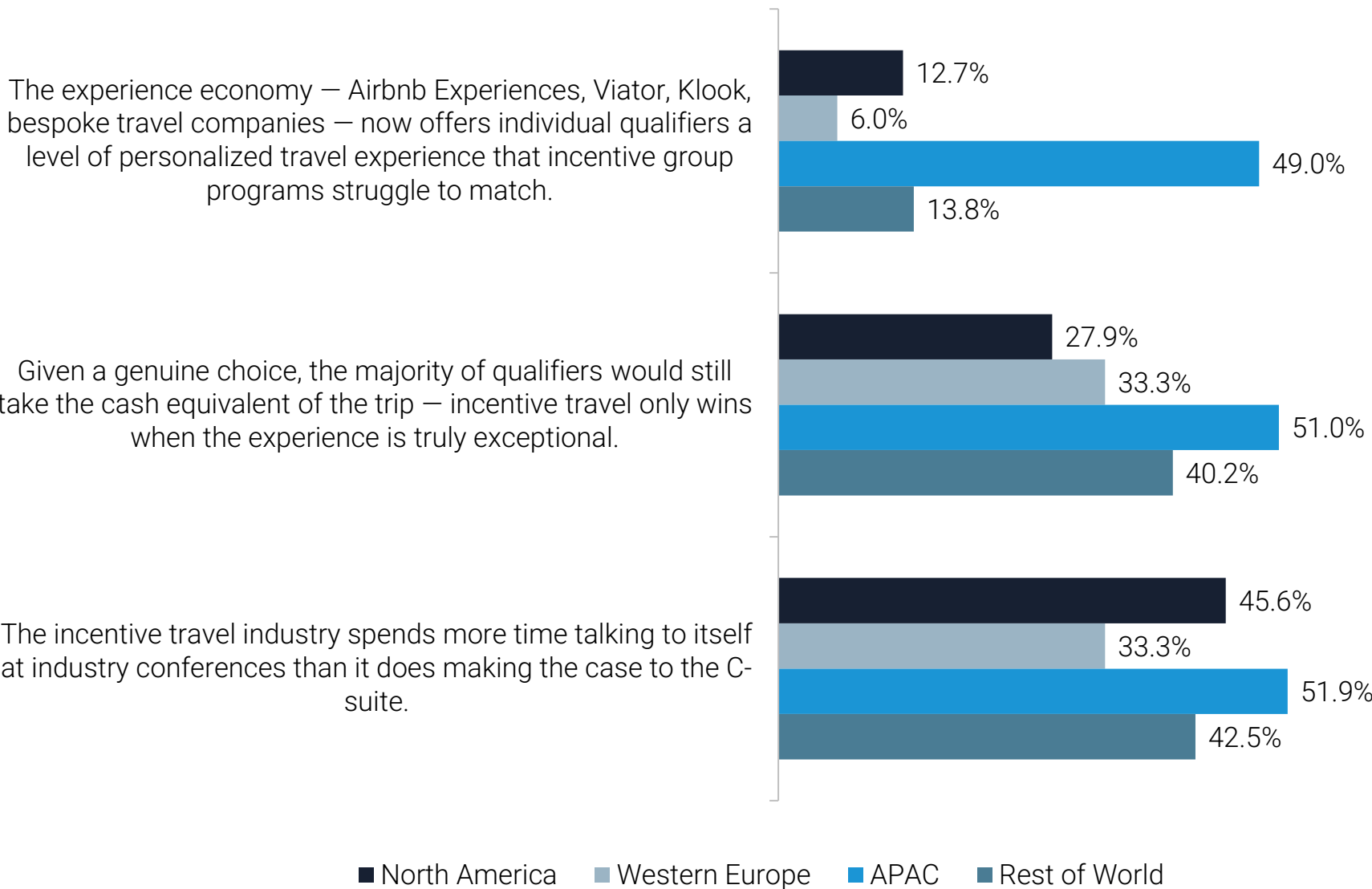
No other region comes close on the experience economy

Nearly half of APAC respondents, 49.0%, see direct-to-consumer experience platforms — Airbnb Experiences, Viator, etc — as real competition for built group programs. Much fewer in Western Europe do, at 6.0%.

APAC is also the most likely to say qualifiers would take the cash equivalent (51.0%) and that the industry talks to itself more than it serves clients (51.9%).

Western Europe is the opposite, with only 6.0% concerned about the experience economy, while North America is the least convinced that qualifiers would take the cash, at 27.9%.

Provocative industry statements, by region (Share agreeing)



S2. Do you agree with the following statements? — share agreeing, by region

Response base: n = 629

Educational site visits are by far the most effective outreach

Nothing shifts destination perception like being there

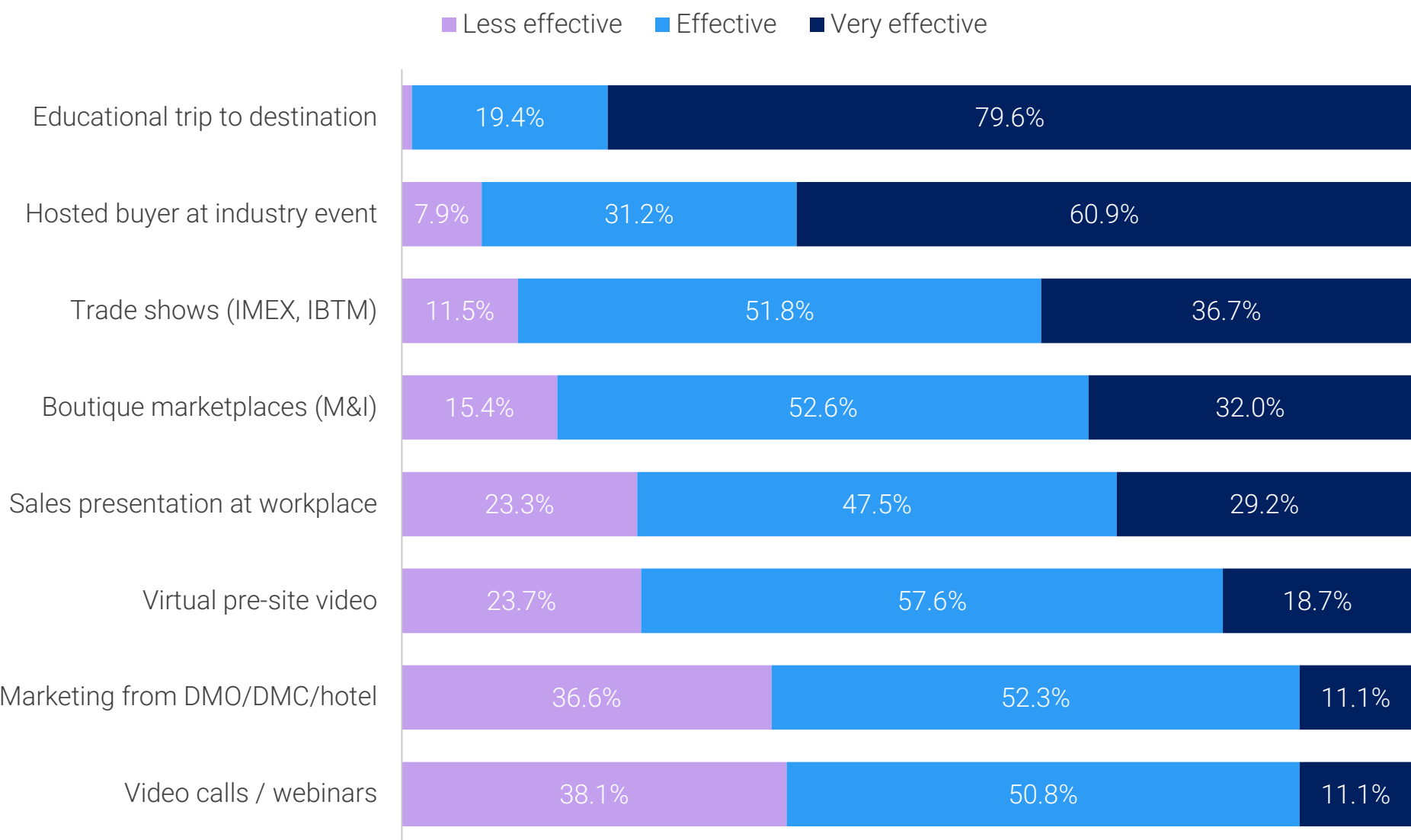
An educational trip to the destination is rated very effective by 79.6% of buyers, and only 1.0% call it less effective.

Hosted-buyer participation at an industry event follows at 60.9% very effective, with trade shows at 36.7% and boutique marketplaces at 32.0%.

Virtual pre-site video scores well on effective, at 57.6%, but only 18.7% rate it very effective.

Marketing communications and video calls or webinars are weakest, rated less effective by 36.6% and 38.1% of buyers.

Effectiveness of destination outreach methods (Share of buyers)



D7. Based on conversations with your clients, when they are learning about new destinations for incentive travel, how effective are the following outreach methods?

Response base (buyers): n = 210 (survey statements edited for length)

The most trusted channels are all human networks

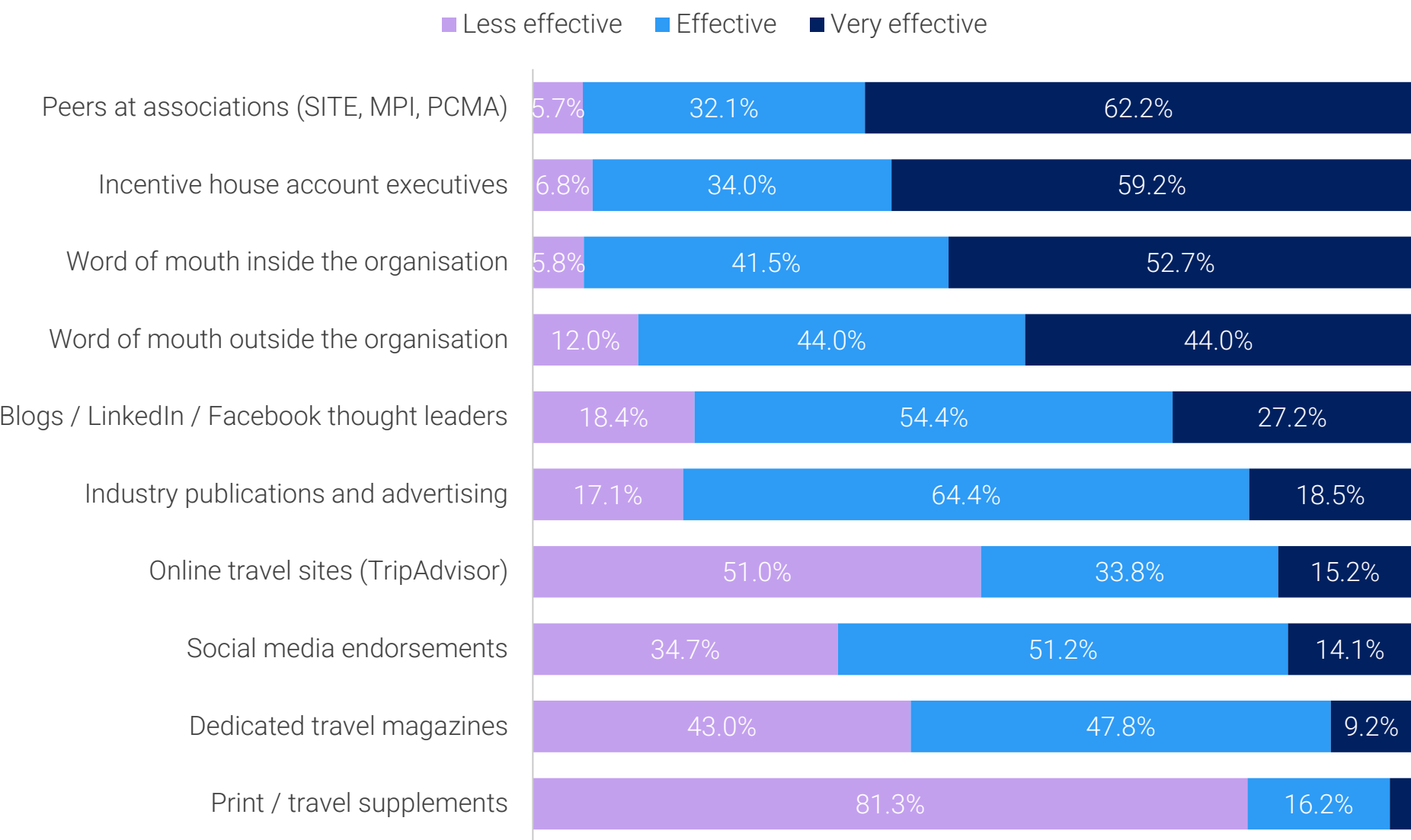
Peer recommendations still outrank any digital source

Recommendations from peers at industry associations are the most effective source, rated very effective by 62.2% and less effective by only 5.7%.

Incentive house recommendations (59.2%) and word of mouth from inside the organization (52.7%) follow.

Paid and published channels trail: online travel sites are rated less effective by 51.0%, travel magazines by 43.0% and print supplements by 81.3%.

Information sources for destination consideration (Share of buyers)



D8. When considering a destination for an incentive program, how influential are the following information sources?

Response base (buyers): n = 209 (survey statements edited for length)

7.

AI Adoption

AI has become a mainstream working tool

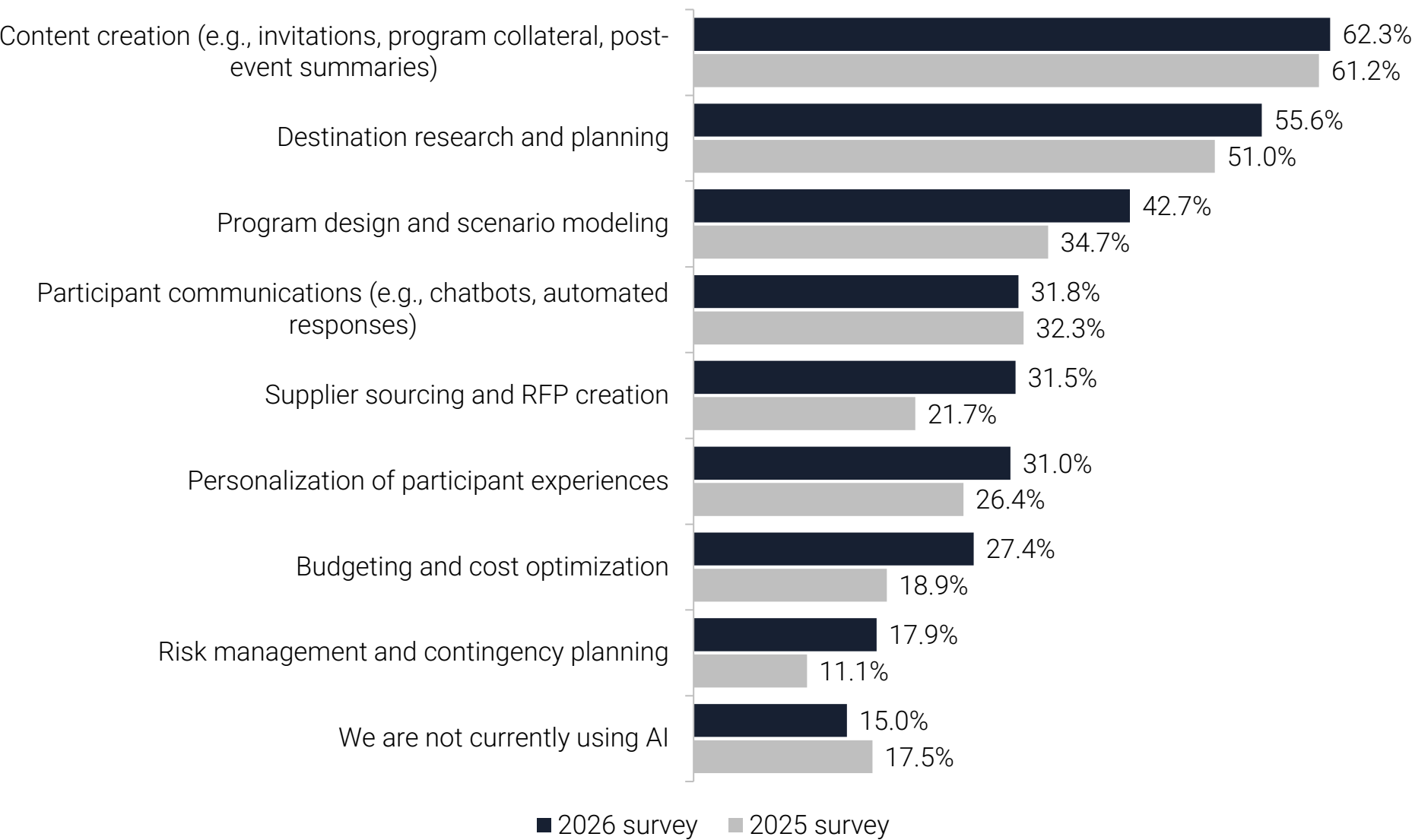
Adoption broadened across most functions

Content creation (62.3%) and destination research (55.6%) remain the two leading AI applications.

The share saying they are not currently using AI has fallen since 2025.

AI has moved from an early-adopter novelty to a routine part of how programs get built.

Current use of AI within incentive travel, 2026 versus 2025 survey (Share of respondents)



S3. How is your team currently using (or planning to use) artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to incentive travel programs? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (all except DMOs): n = 581

Adoption is deep as well as broad

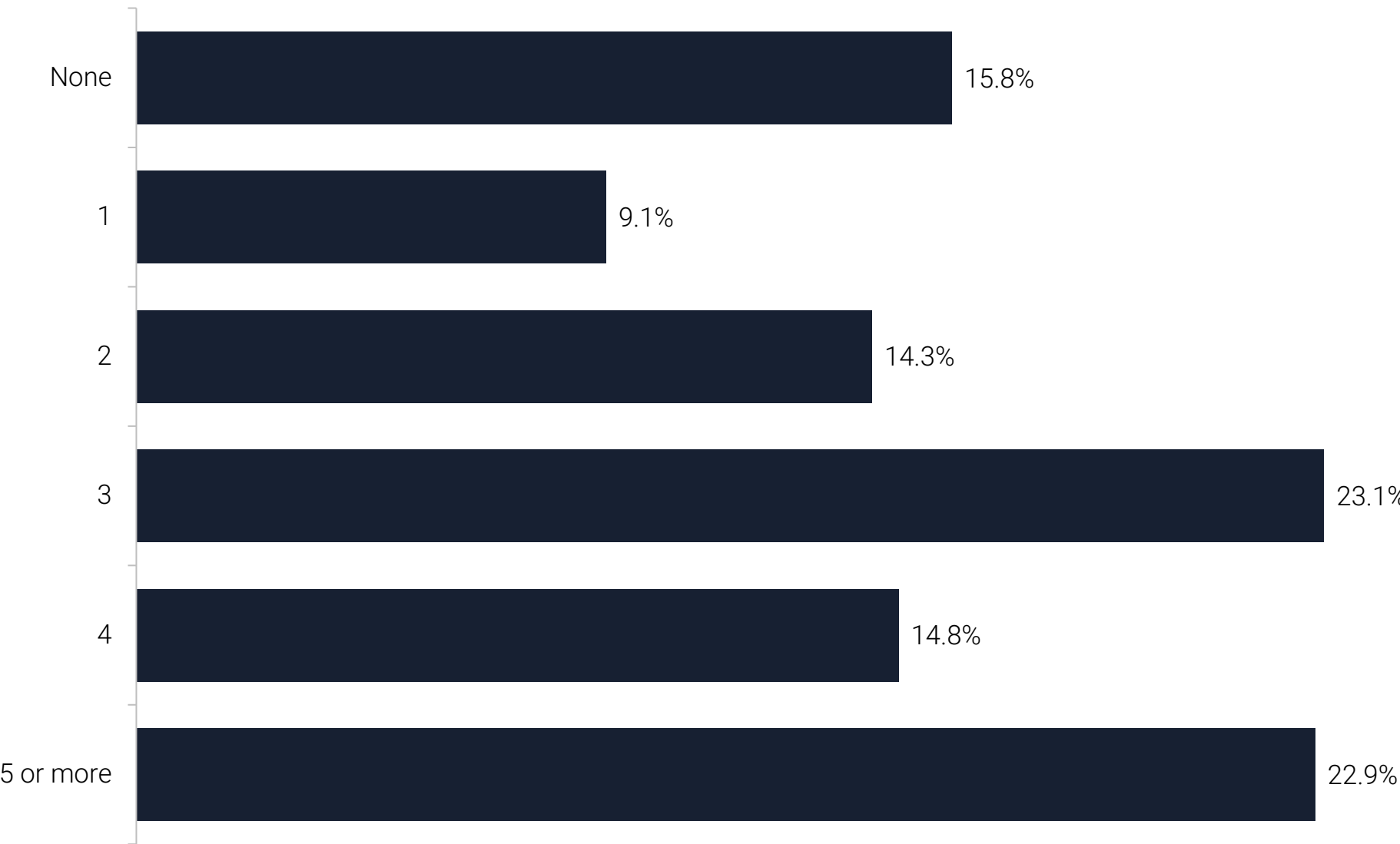
AI now spans several parts of the workflow

Six-in-ten (60.8%) respondents use AI for three or more separate applications, and 22.9% for five or more.

Only 15.8% use no AI at all. Among those who do, the average team applies it to almost four of the eight functions.

Adoption is not a single experiment per team — for most it already spans several stages of how a program gets built.

Number of AI applications in use (Share of respondents)



S3. How is your team currently using (or planning to use) artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to incentive travel programs? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (all except DMOs): n = 581

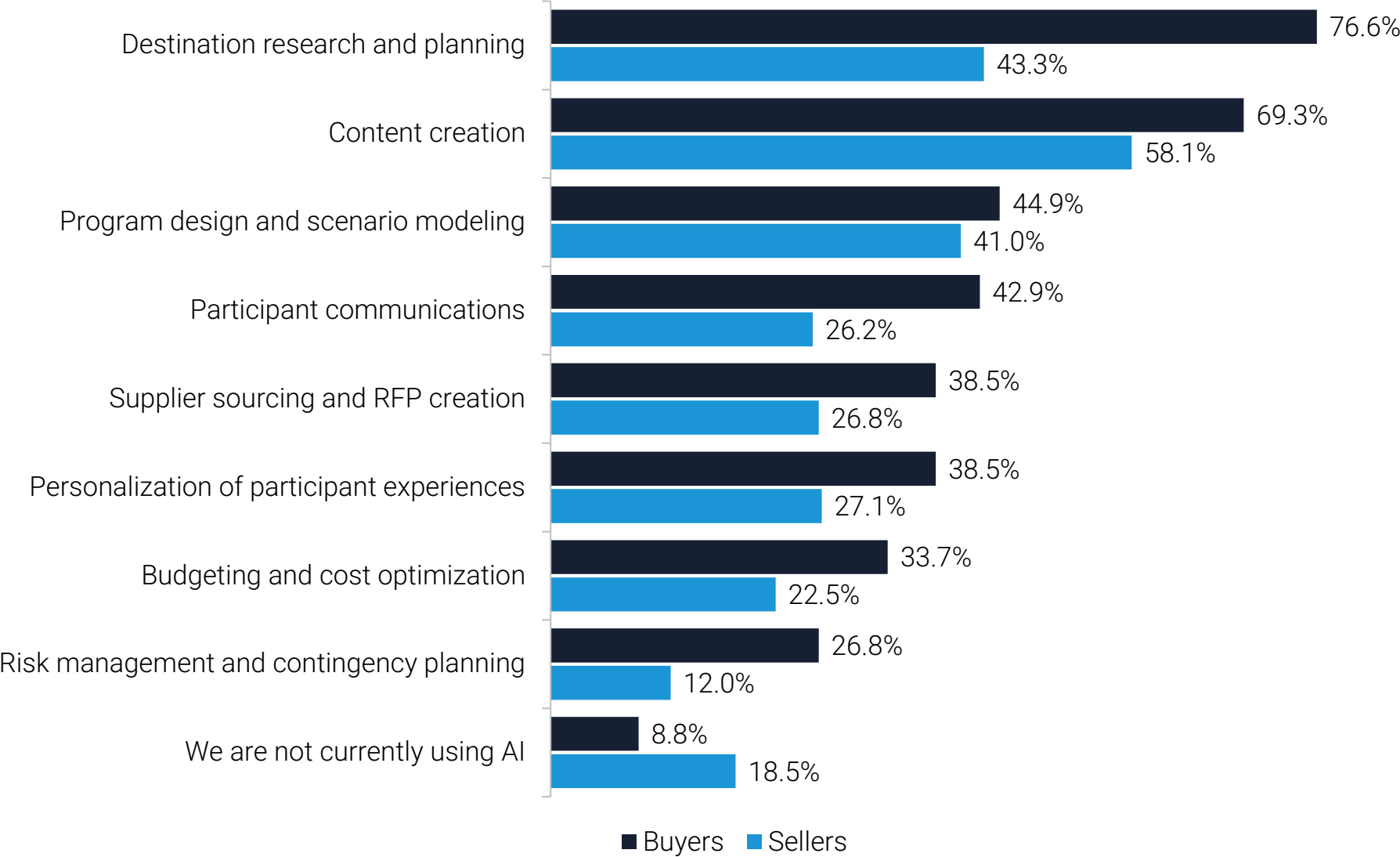
Buyers lead sellers in AI adoption

Most sellers use AI for content creation

Buyers lead sellers on every AI use case.

The leading application differs by role: destination research and planning for buyers (76.6%), content creation for sellers (58.1%).

AI use case, buyers vs. sellers
(Share of respondents)



S3. How is your team currently using (or planning to use) artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to incentive travel programs? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (all except DMOs): n = 581

Western Europe trails on all eight applications

The regional gap is widest on destination research

North America and APAC lead on almost every application, Rest of World sits between them, and Western Europe is lowest on all eight.

The spread is widest on destination research at 29 points (67% against 38%) and on risk management at 18 points (26% against 8%).

Western Europe is also the least likely to use AI, with 25% of regional respondents not currently using AI, compared with 11% to 16% elsewhere.

AI use by region, ranked by overall adoption

(Share of respondents; darker = higher)

AI application	North America	APAC	Rest of World	Western Europe
Content creation	66%	63%	61%	58%
Destination research	66%	67%	45%	38%
Program design and scenario modeling	44%	45%	44%	36%
Participant communications	36%	34%	29%	24%
Supplier sourcing / RFPs	33%	41%	31%	23%
Personalization of experiences	33%	34%	32%	23%
Budgeting and cost optimization	33%	26%	26%	19%
Risk management	22%	26%	15%	8%
Not currently using AI	12%	11%	16%	25%

S3. How is your team currently using (or planning to use) artificial intelligence (AI) in relation to incentive travel programs? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (all except DMOs): n = 581

The industry doubts AI is already a competitive edge

Most see the bigger long-term threat elsewhere

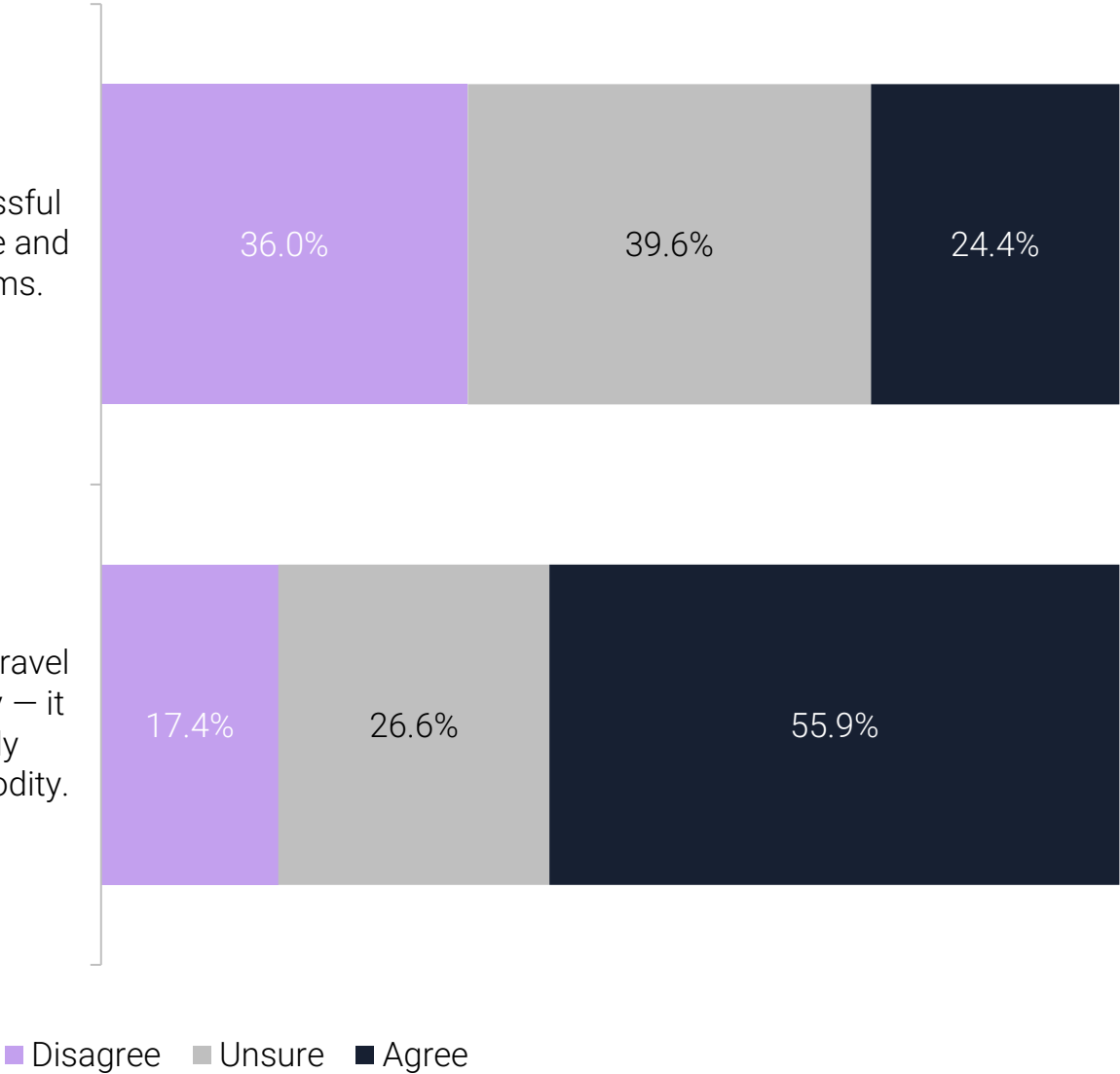
Only 24.4% agree that firms using AI are already out-executing competitors on price and program quality.

A majority, 55.9%, agree the industry's biggest long-term threat is something other than AI, Gen Z or sustainability.

Provocative industry statements on AI (Share of respondents)

The companies using AI are now more successful at designing highly personalized, cost-effective and logistically optimized incentive travel programs.

The biggest long-term threat to the incentive travel industry is not AI, not Gen Z, not sustainability — it is procurement departments systematically reducing incentive travel to a line-item commodity.



S2. Do you agree with the following statements?

Response base: n = 629

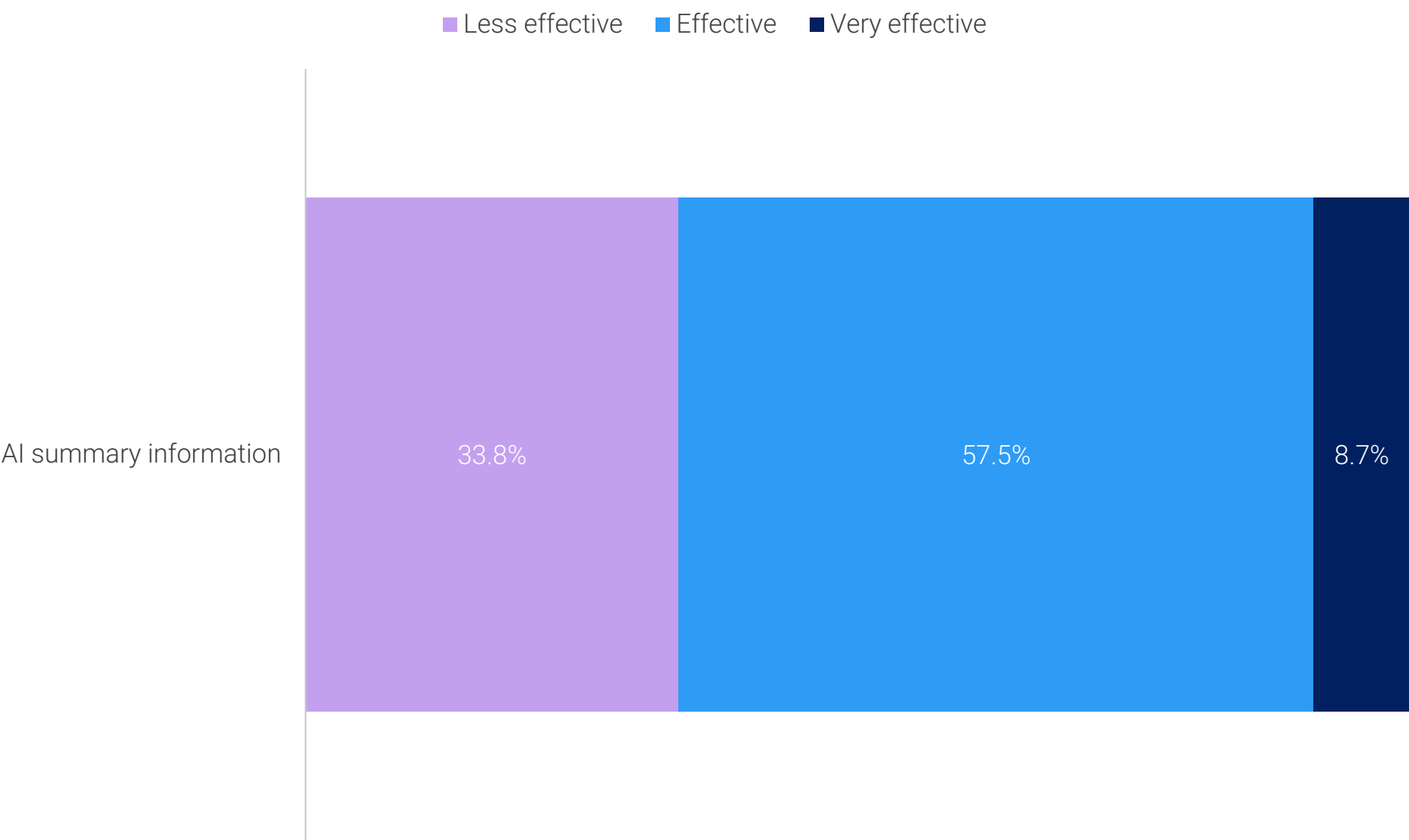
One-third find AI summary info sources less effective

Although most find AI summaries effective, many consider it less effective compared to other sources

AI summaries are less effective for 33.8% of buyers and very effective for just 8.7%.

Recommendations from peers at industry associations are the most effective source.

AI as an information source for destination consideration
(Share of buyers)



D8. When considering a destination for an incentive program, how influential are the following information sources?

Response base (buyers): n = 209

8.

Appendix

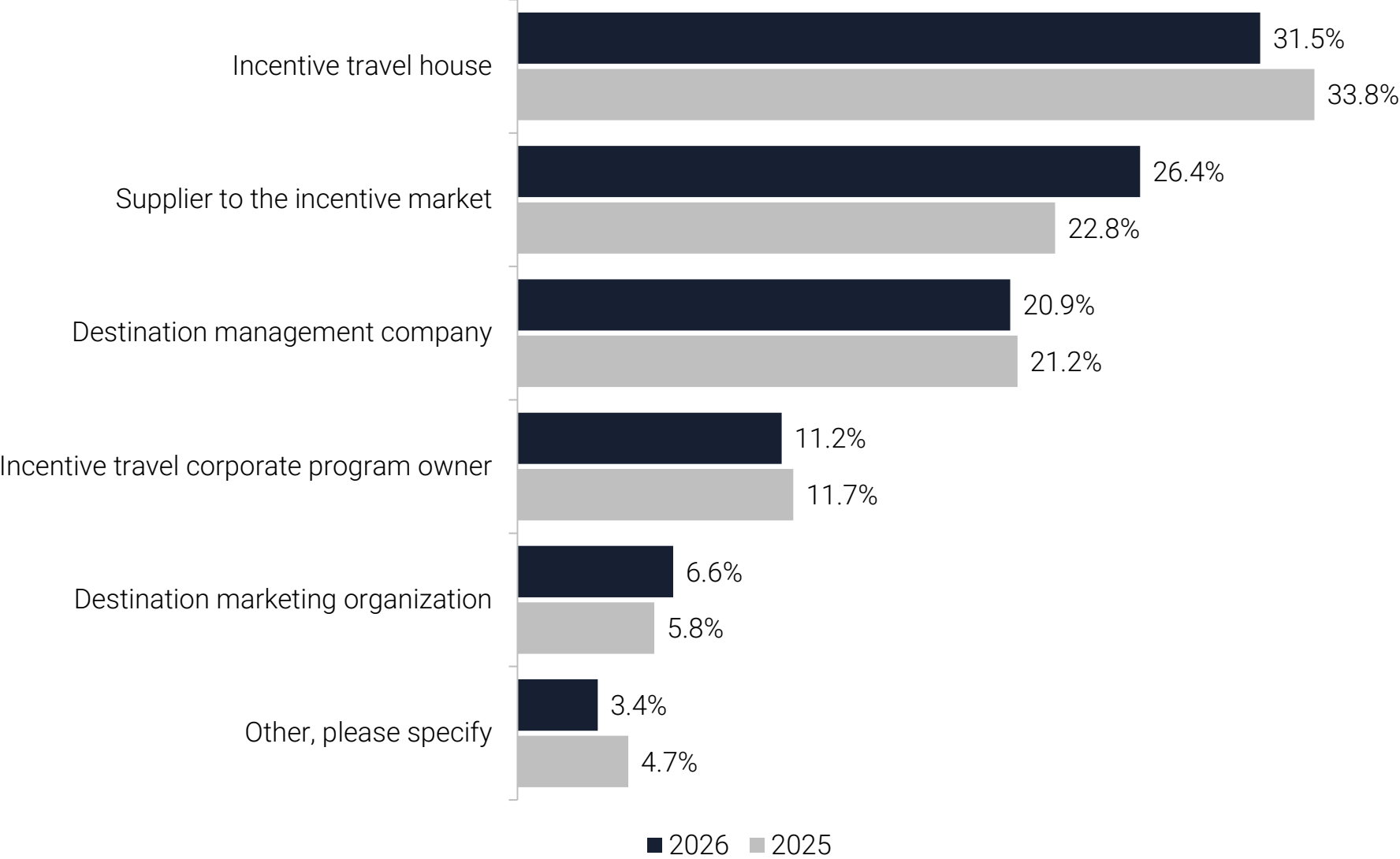
Respondent roles

Full role breakdown of the 2026 respondent base

Incentive travel houses are the largest single group at 31.5%, followed by suppliers at 26.4% and DMCs at 20.9%.

Buyers account for 42.7% of the base and sellers 53.9%, with the remainder (3.4%) being those who selected Other.

Respondent roles (Share of respondents)



L1. Please select the role that best describes your involvement in incentive travel.

Response base: n = 2,017

Origin of qualifiers

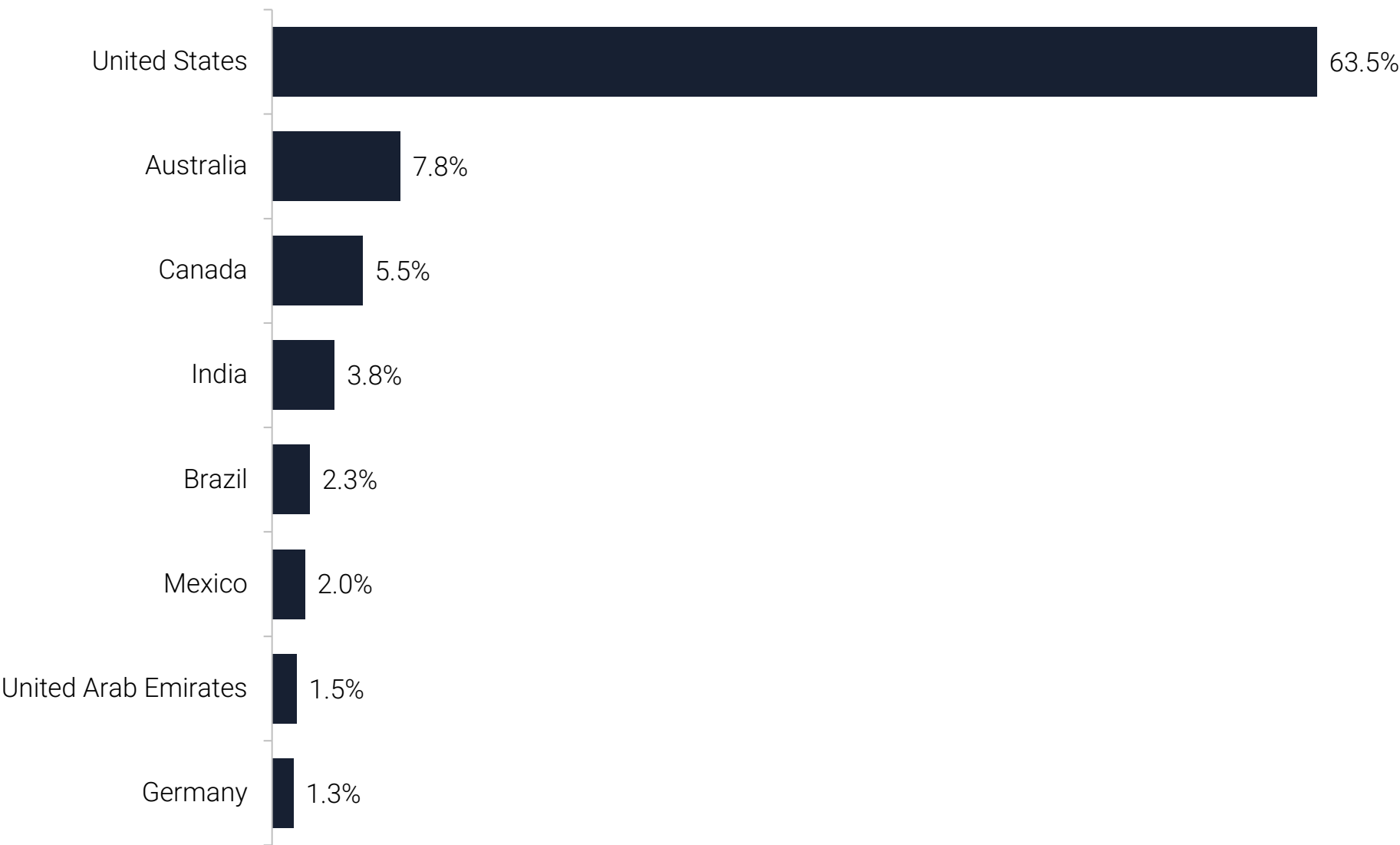
Origin is more concentrated than organization location

The United States is the primary qualifier origin for 63.5% of buyers.

That is a far higher concentration than the 35% recorded for organization location, with Australia and Canada a distant second and third.

Origin of incentive travel qualifiers

(Share of buyers, by primary country of origin)



M2. What is the primary origin of qualifiers in your team’s incentive travel programs?

Response base (buyers): n = 397

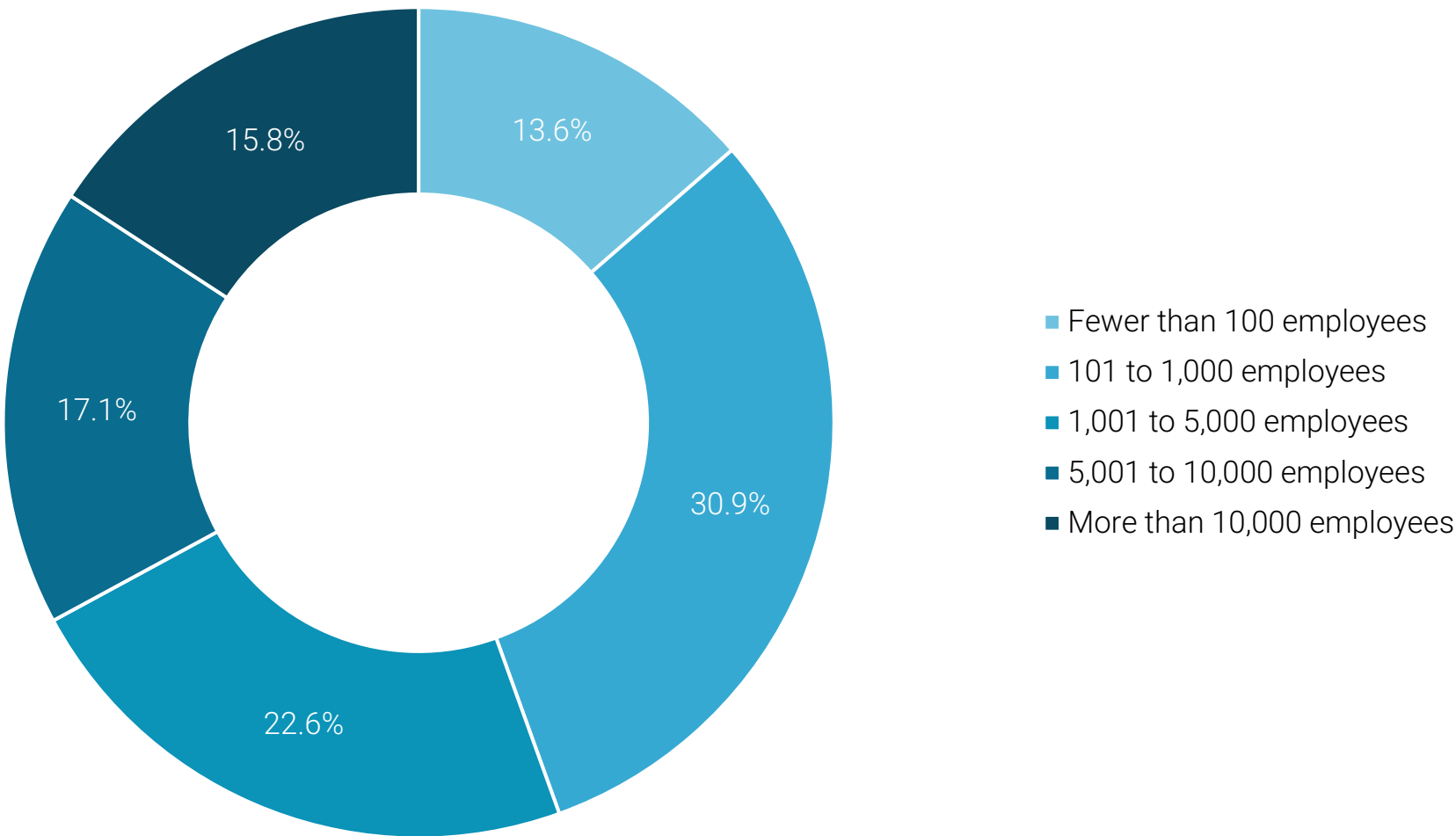
Company size

The base spans company sizes fairly evenly

Companies of 101 to 1,000 employees are the largest single bracket, at 30.9%.

Roughly a third of buyers work with organizations of 5,001 employees or more.

Participant company size (Share of buyers)



M3. Which of the following best describes the size of the company(ies) for which your team is primarily organizing incentive travel programs?

Response base (buyers): n = 398

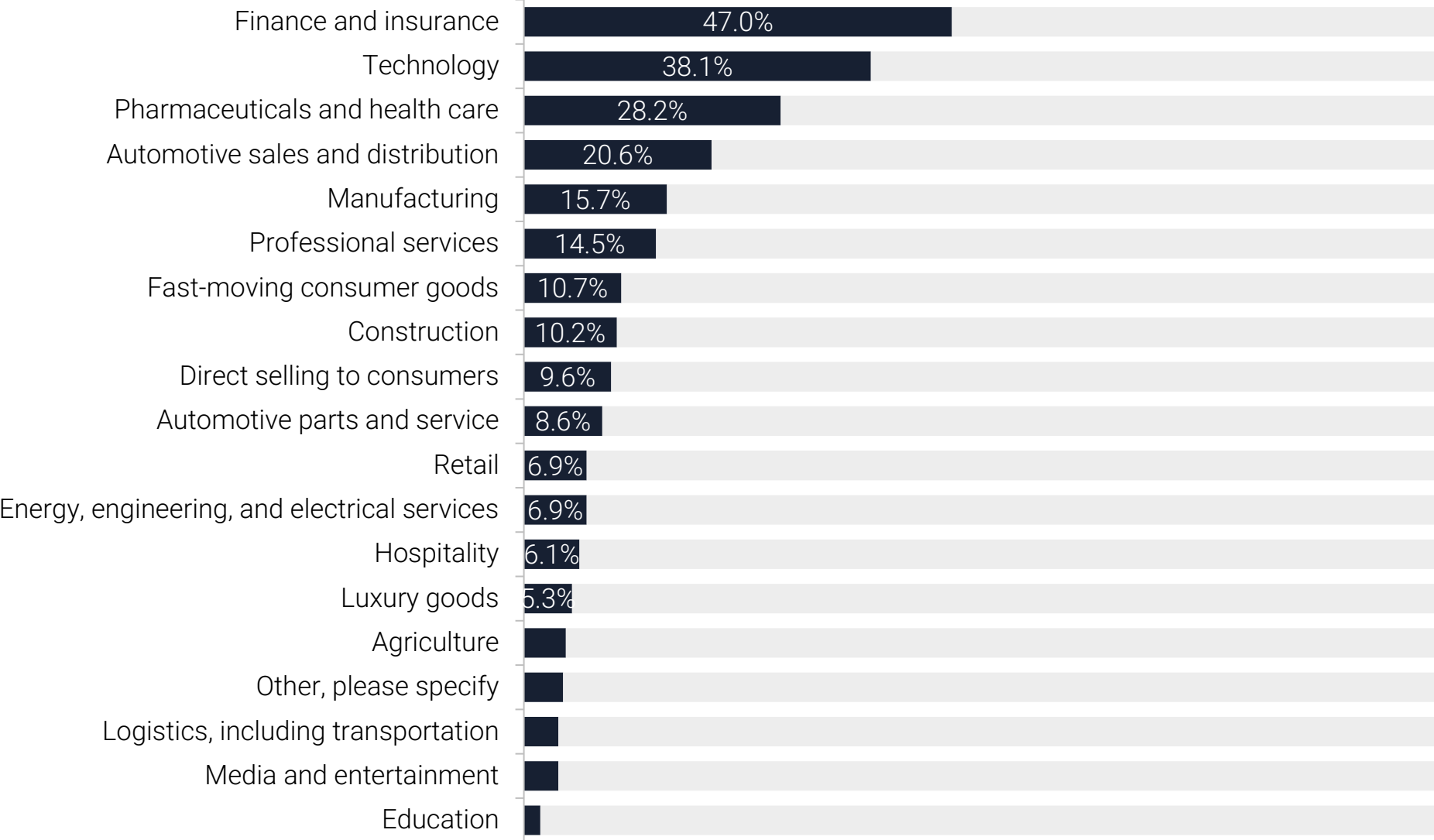
Customer industries

Finance and technology dominate the industries served

Finance and insurance (47.0%) and technology (38.1%) are the two most-cited industries among agencies and end user program owners.

Respondents could name up to three industries, so shares do not sum to 100%.

Customer industries (Share of buyers citing each industry in their top three)



M5. For which of the following industry(ies) does your team primarily organize incentive travel programs? - respondents could select more than one choice

Response base (buyers): n = 394

APPENDIX

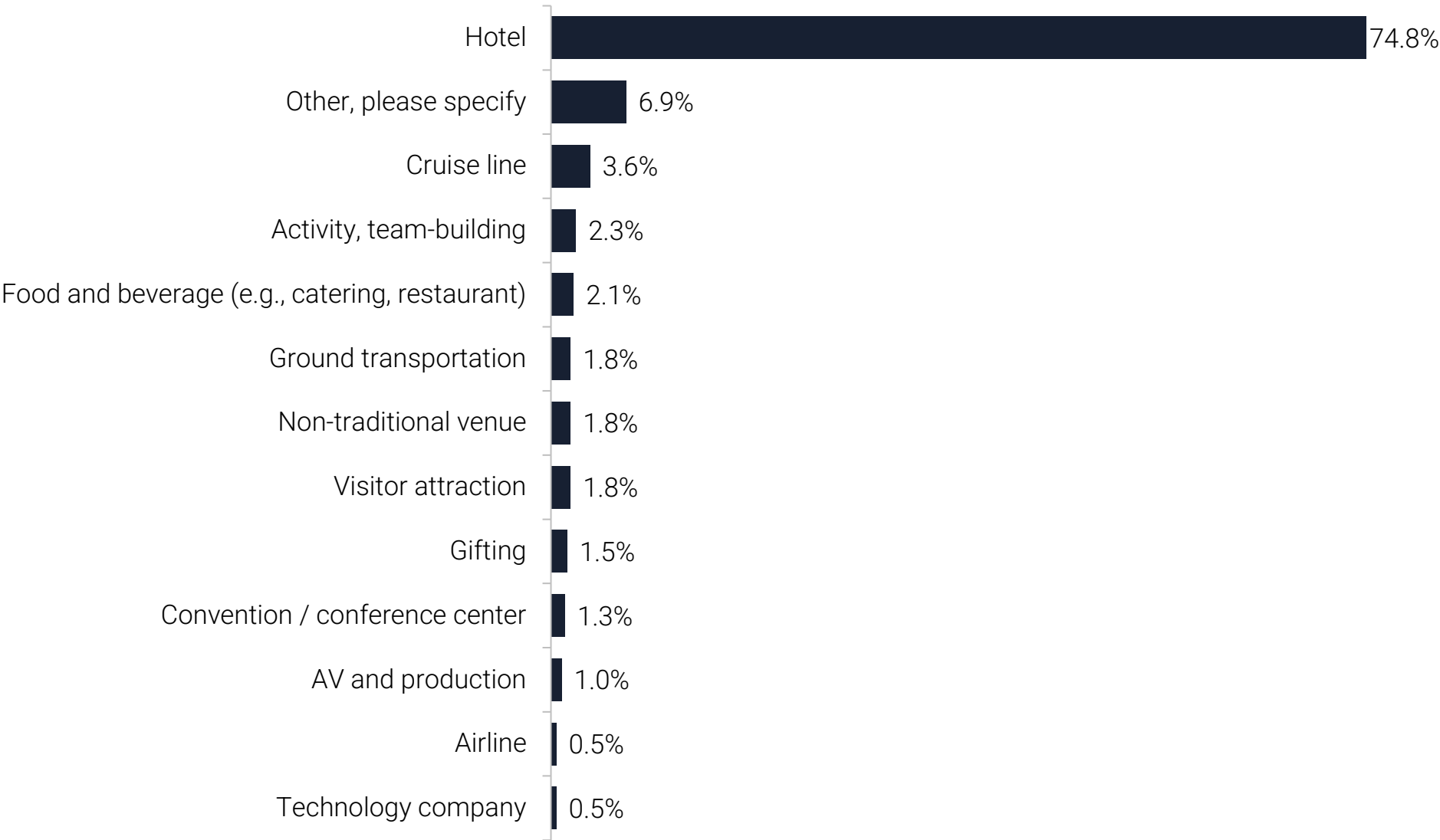
Sellers by category

Hotels dominate the supplier side of the base

Hotels account for 74.8% of supplier respondents.

Cruise lines, activity and team-building providers, and other specialist categories make up the remainder.

Sellers by category
(Share of suppliers)



M8. Which of the following best describes the company for which you work?

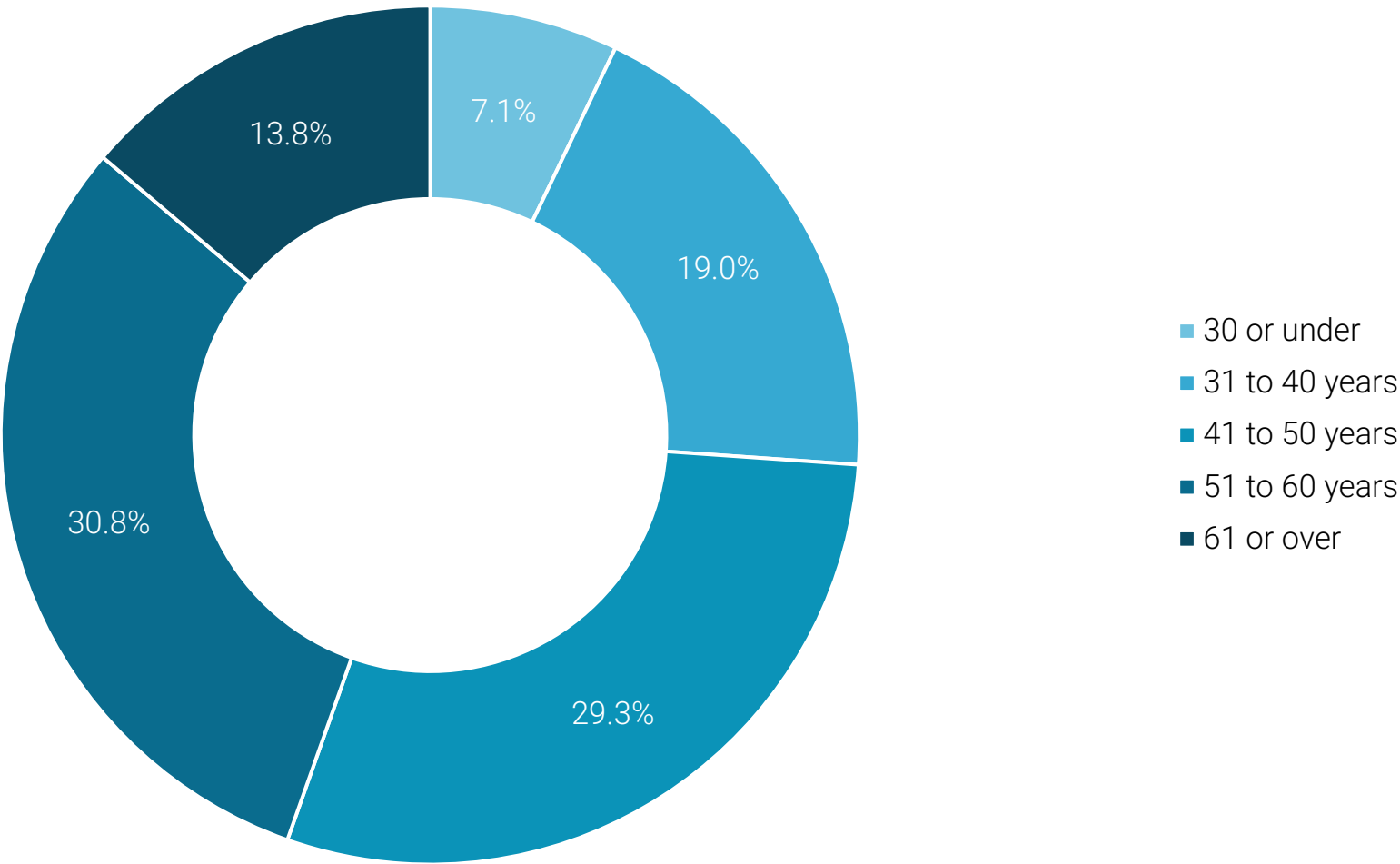
Response base (suppliers): n = 389

Respondent age

Nearly three-in-ten respondents are between 41 and 50 years of age

The base skews senior: 30.8% of respondents are aged 51 to 60 and 13.8% are 61 or over, against 7.1% under 30.

Respondent age distribution
(Share of respondents)



M9. What is your age?

Response base: n = 1,235

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