

THE CHALLENGES OF THE METALS INDUSTRY

A survey with participants from more than 60 companies



CONTENTS

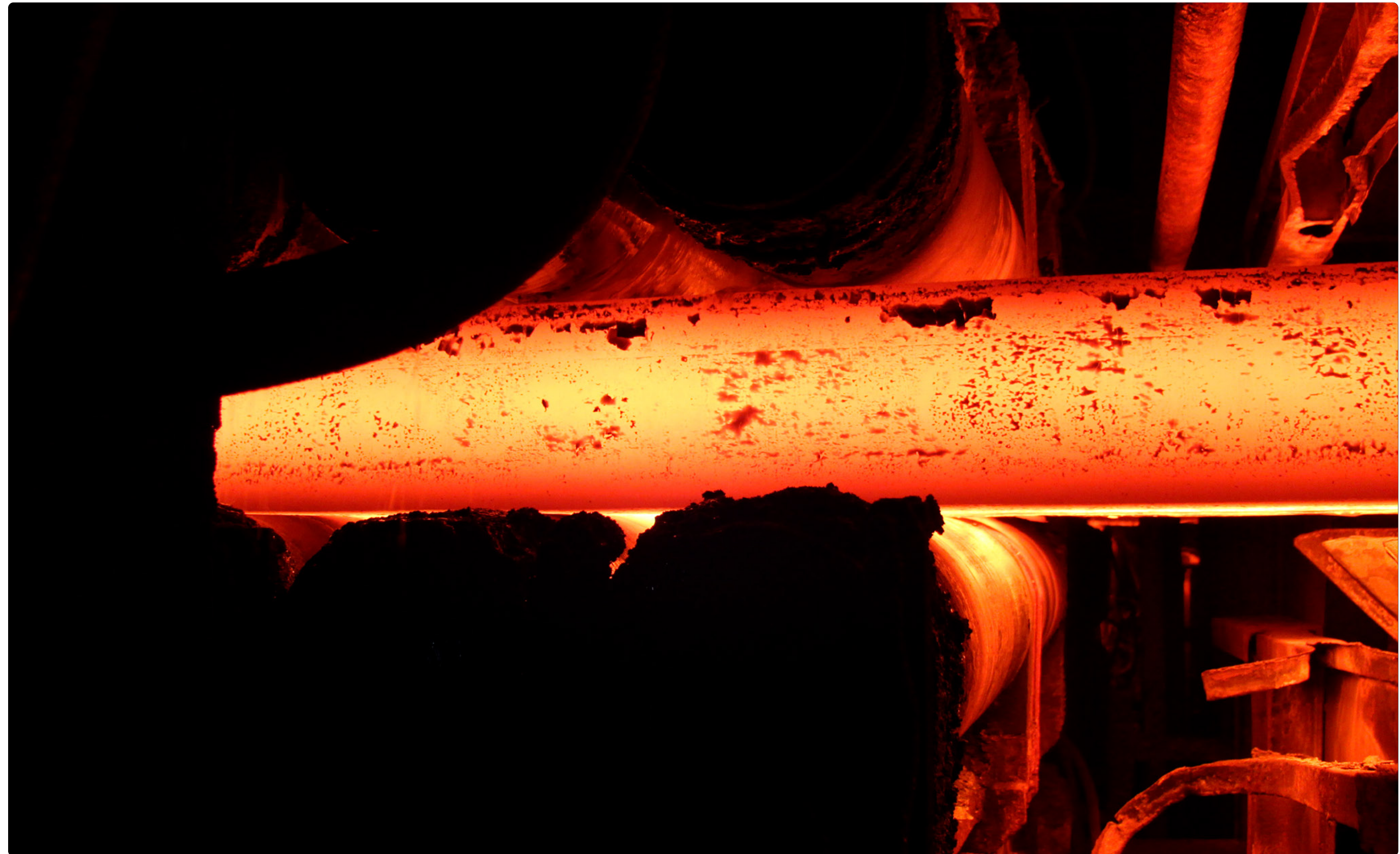
01	Introduction	p.03
02	Key findings	p.04
03	Questions and answers	p.05
	Type of industry and responsibilities	p.06
	The biggest challenge right now	p.08
	Meeting the energy challenge	p.09
	Prioritized areas within sustainability	p.10
	Maintenance and operations challenges	p.11
	Collaboration and partnerships	p.18
04	What challenges do you face?	p.19

Finding the way forward through insights

This survey gives you a clear snapshot of the current priorities and challenges within the metals industry. It highlights key areas such as cost management, energy efficiency and workforce development, which are crucial for maintaining competitive operations.

The findings also explore how companies are navigating regulatory changes and supply chain disruptions, emphasizing the need for adaptability and strategic planning. By leveraging insights from professionals across the sector, the survey provides a roadmap for fostering innovation and resilience in an evolving market.

These insights offer practical guidance for anyone looking to stay ahead and succeed in a rapidly changing industry.



The five most essential takeaways



Cost management. Rising energy, workforce and materials costs are the top challenges, prompting companies to optimize operational processes and explore energy efficiency measures.

Workforce development. A lack of skilled personnel and an untrained workforce are significant concerns, underlining the need for continuous learning and targeted recruitment strategies.

Sustainability focus. Waste reduction, CO₂ reduction and workplace safety are prioritized areas, reflecting a strong commitment to environmental and regulatory standards.

Maintenance and operations. Companies increasingly leverage data analytics and predictive maintenance technologies to reduce downtime and enhance efficiency.

Adaptation to change. Supply chain disruptions and regulatory changes require ongoing adaptability, driving innovation and strategic planning within organizations.

Questions and answers

Type of industry and responsibilities

The biggest challenge right now

Meeting the energy challenge

Prioritized areas within sustainability

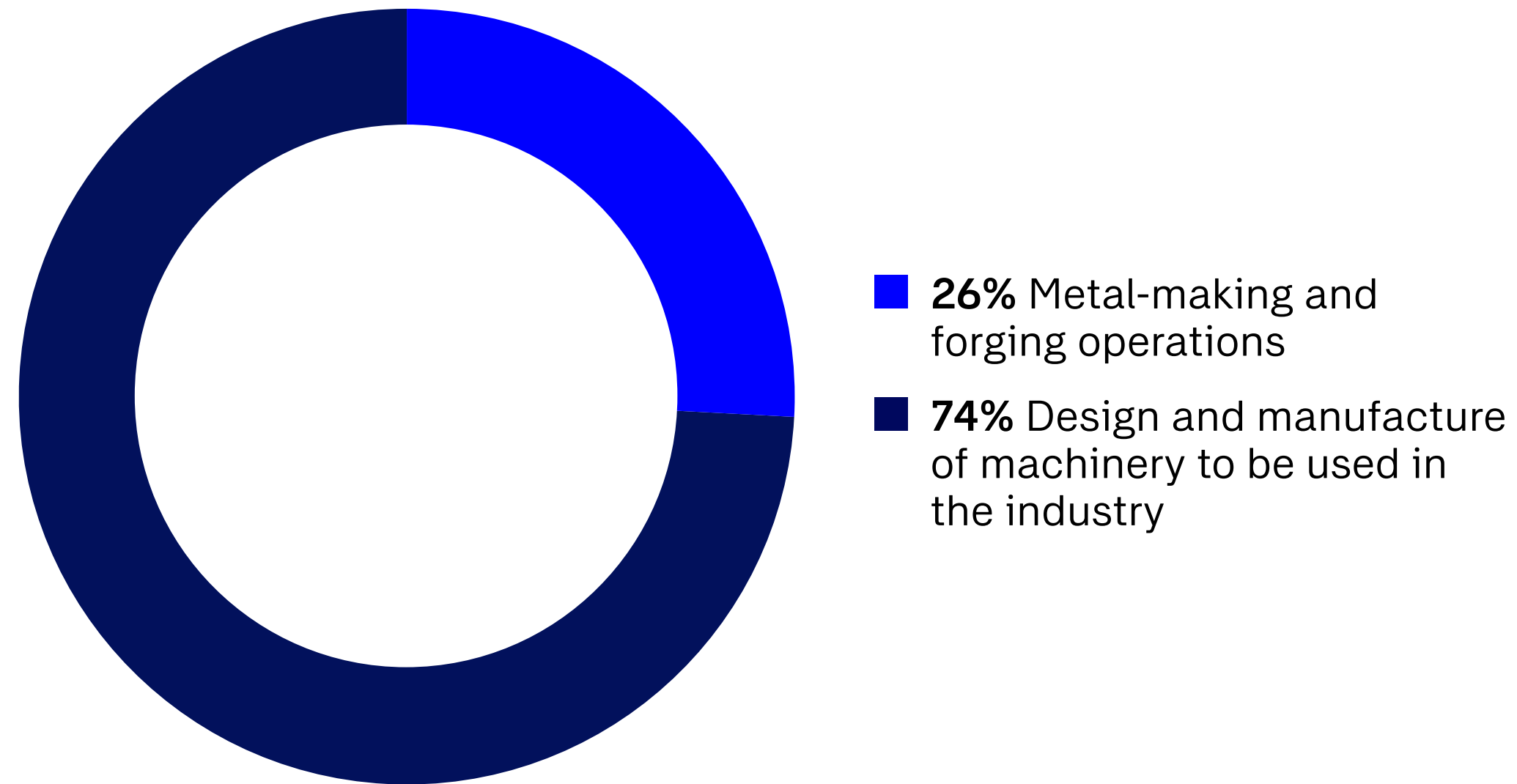
Maintenance and operations challenges

Collaboration and partnerships



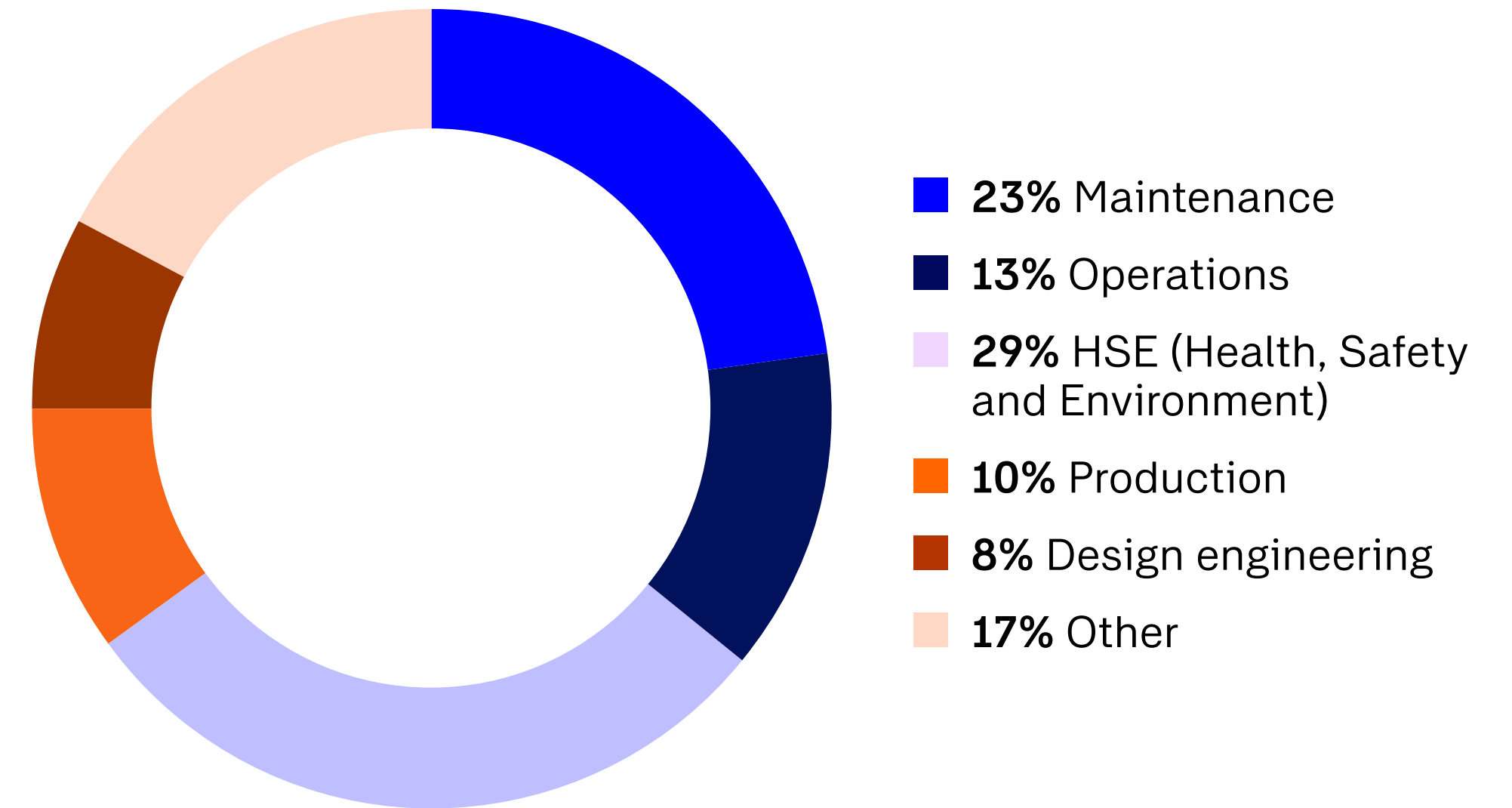
Question #1 – Type of industry and responsibilities

What is your field of work within the metal industry?



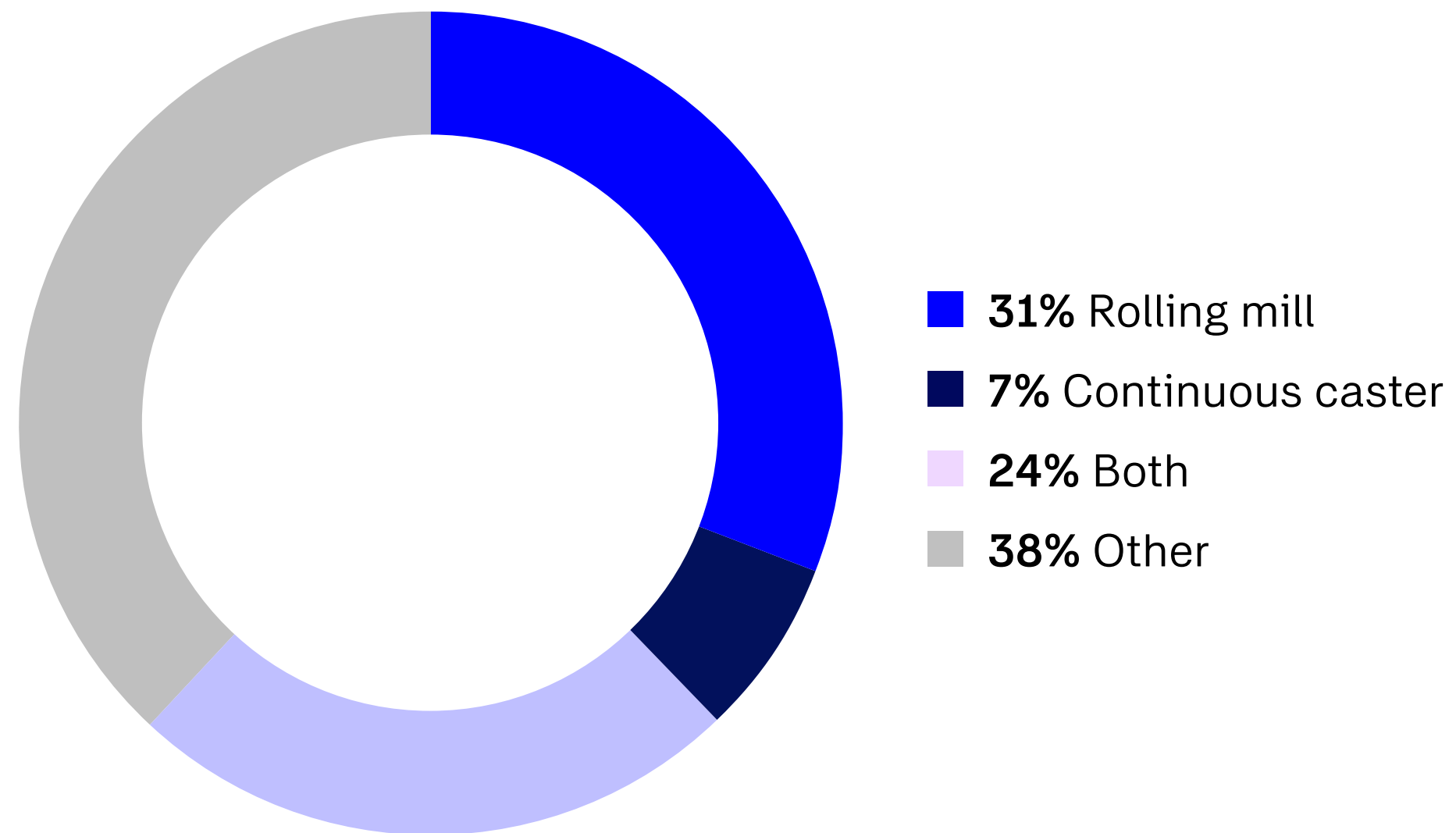
Question #2 – Type of industry and responsibilities

What is your primary responsibility within the organization?



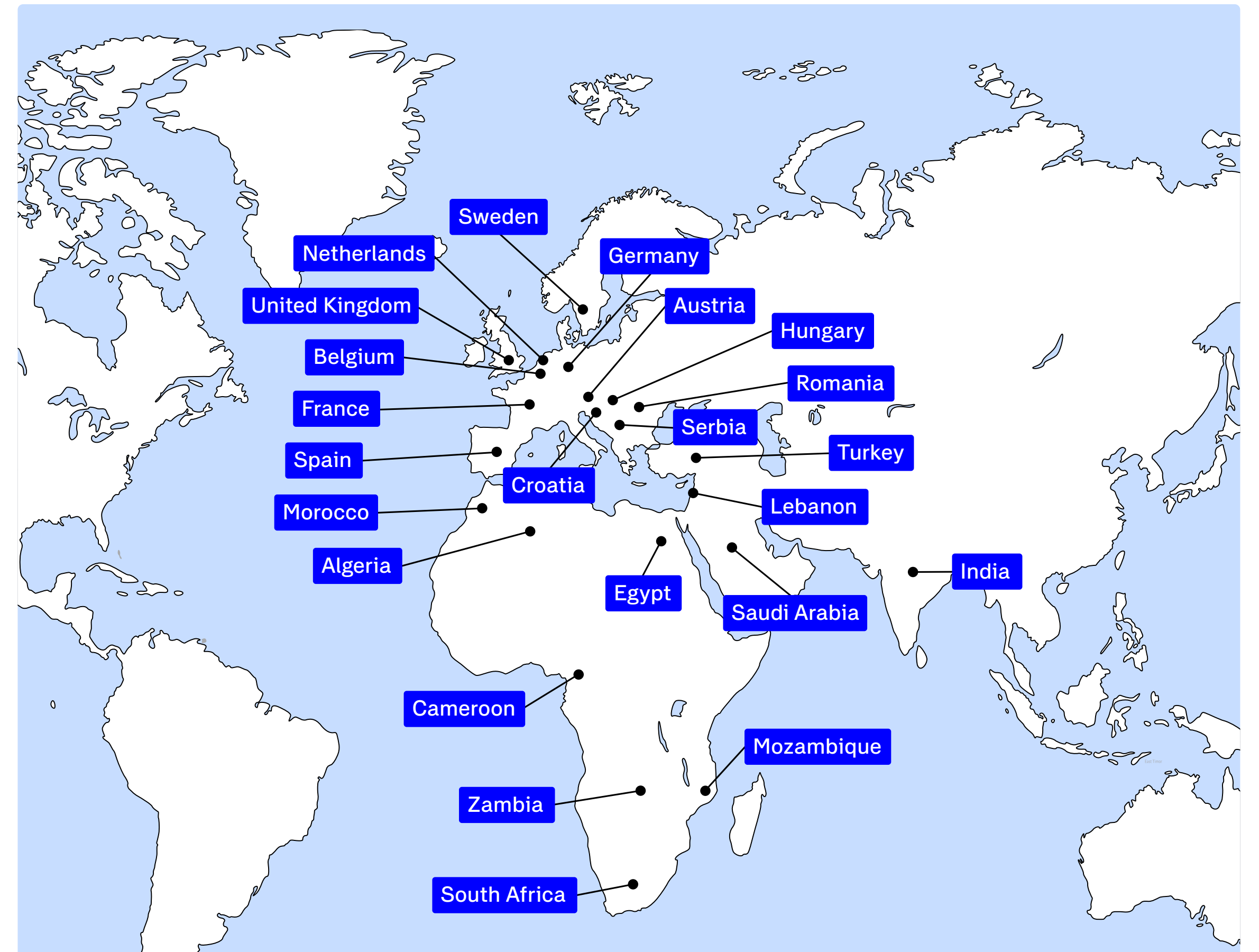
Question #3 – Type of industry and responsibilities

Which part of the steel-making process are you primarily involved in?



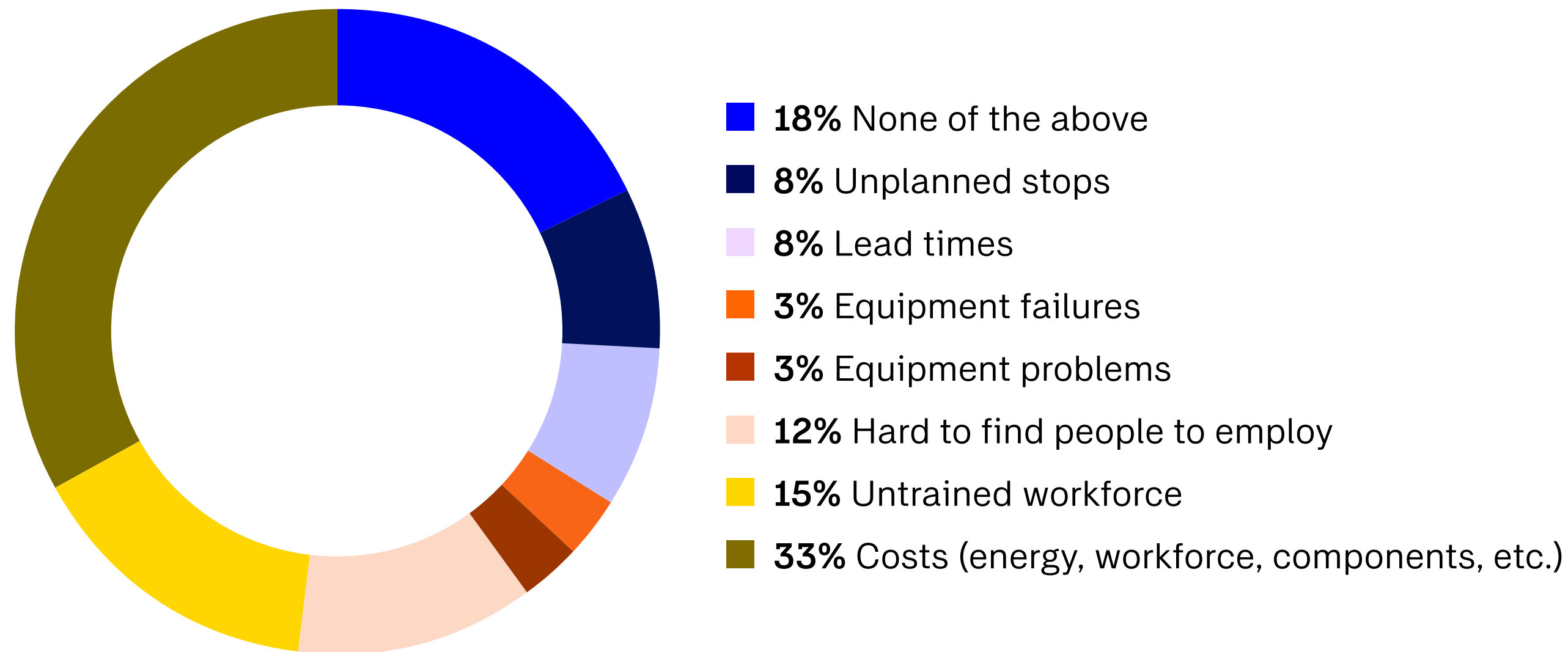
Question #4 – Type of industry and responsibilities

In which country do you work?



Question #5 – The biggest challenge right now

In your opinion, what is the biggest challenge in the metal industry right now?



Summary

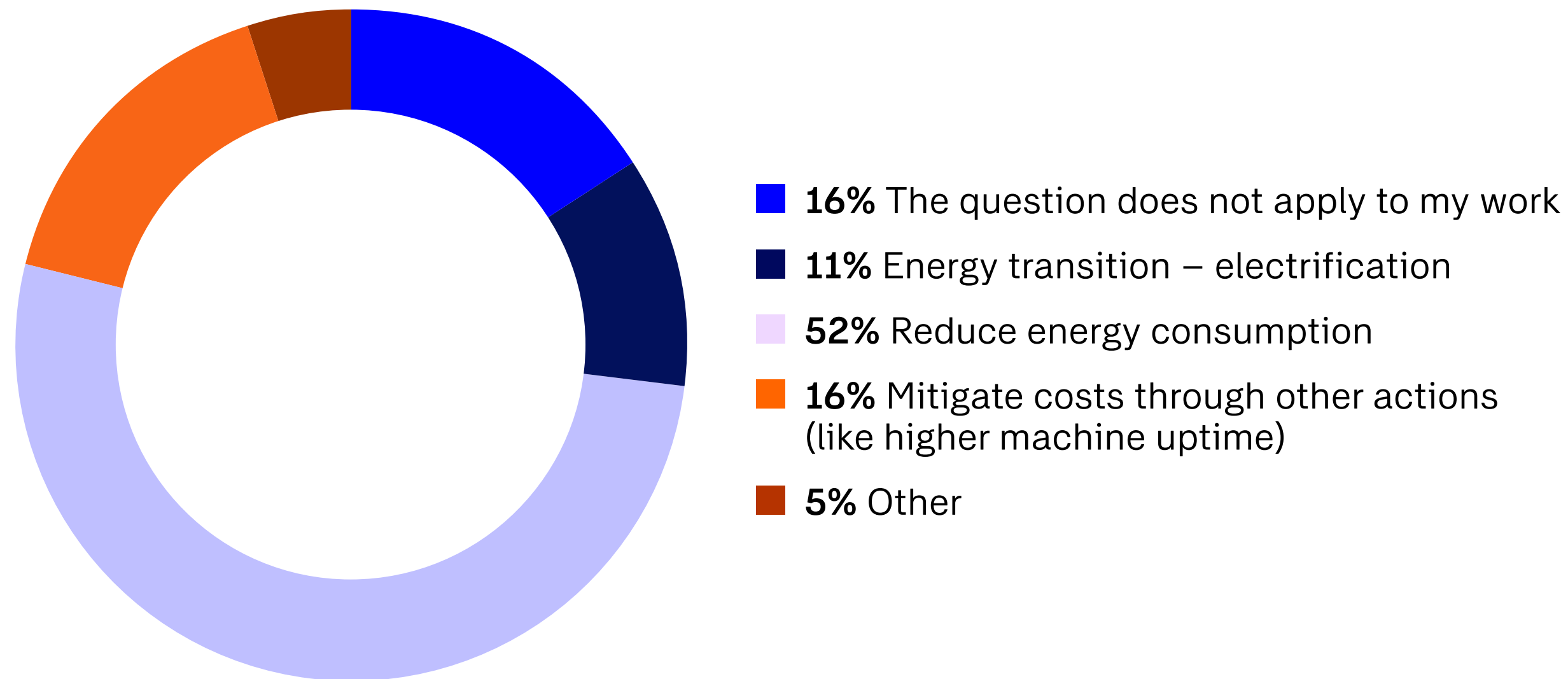
The survey reveals that the biggest challenge currently facing the metals industry is cost-related issues cited by 33% of respondents. Other significant concerns include an untrained workforce (15%) and difficulties finding qualified employees (12%). Issues like unplanned stops and lead times are also mentioned, but to a lesser extent.

Conclusions

The findings indicate that managing costs is the primary concern in the metals industry today. Workforce-related challenges, both in terms of finding qualified employees and dealing with an untrained workforce, also present notable difficulties.

Question #6 – Meeting the energy challenge

What are you doing to meet the energy challenge?



Summary

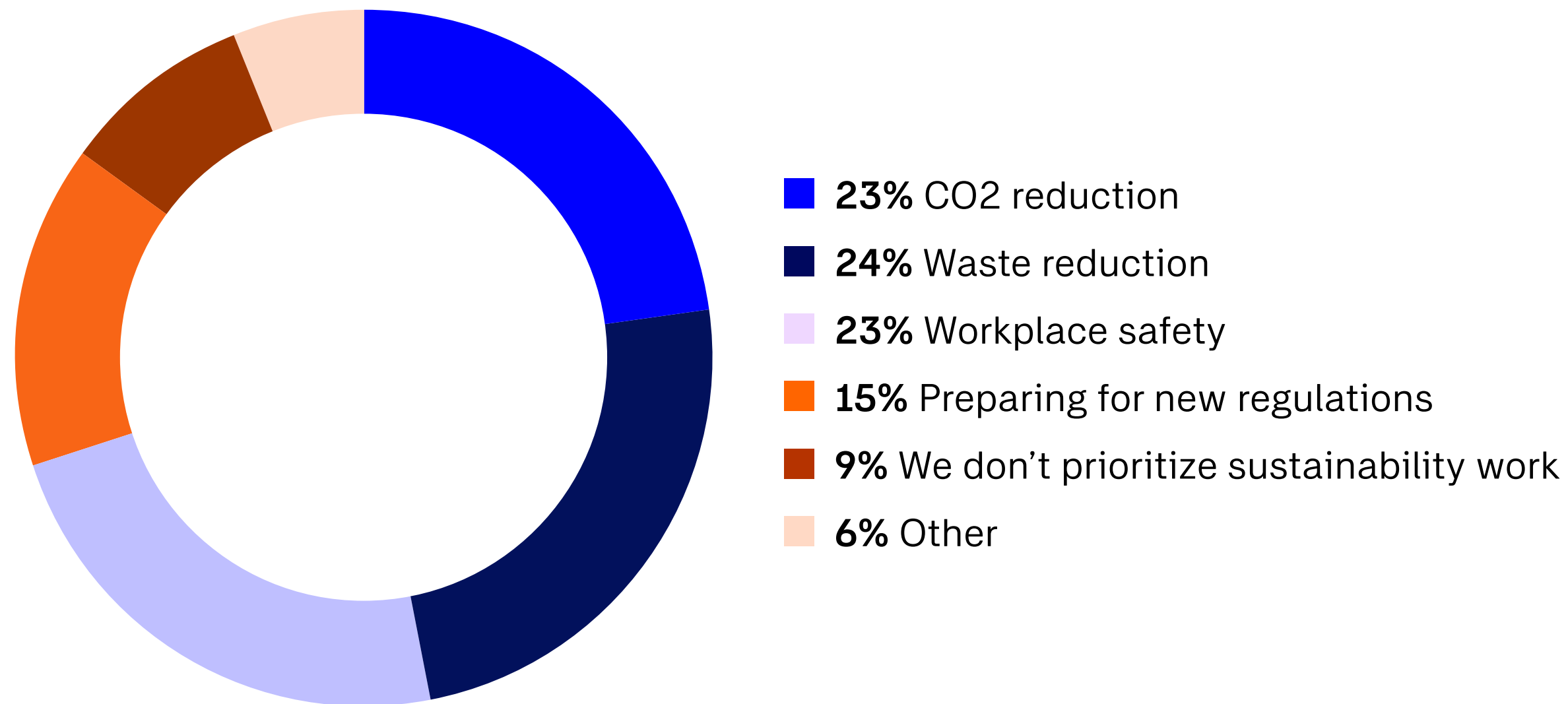
The survey indicates that the primary strategy to address the energy challenge in the metals industry is to reduce energy consumption, as chosen by 52% of respondents. Other common approaches include mitigating costs through actions such as increasing machine uptime (16%) and transitioning to electrification (11%).

Conclusions

Reducing energy consumption is the most prevalent approach to managing energy challenges in the metals industry, highlighting a focus on efficiency. Some companies are also exploring cost mitigation strategies and transitioning to electrification as part of their energy management efforts.

Question #7 – Prioritized areas within sustainability

What are the prioritized areas in your sustainability work?



Summary

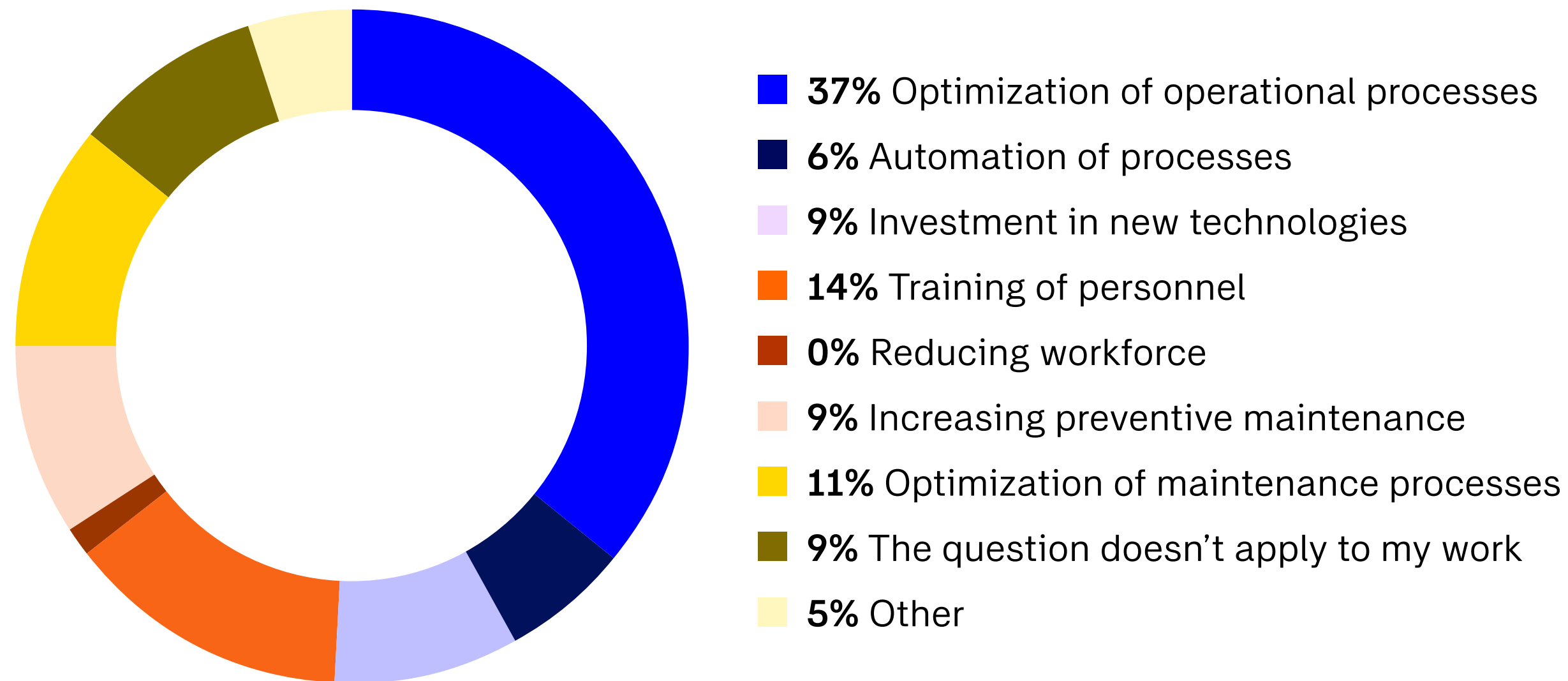
The survey results show that the metal industry's sustainability efforts are primarily focused on waste reduction (24%), CO₂ reduction (23 %) and workplace safety (23 %). Preparing for new regulations is also a priority for some (15%), while a smaller group (9%) doesn't prioritize sustainability work at all.

Conclusions

Sustainability efforts in the metals industry are balanced between waste management, emissions reduction and safety improvements. These priorities reflect a broad approach to sustainability, aligning with both environmental and regulatory pressures.

Question #8 – Maintenance and operations challenges

What strategies are you employing to manage costs associated with maintenance and operations?



Summary

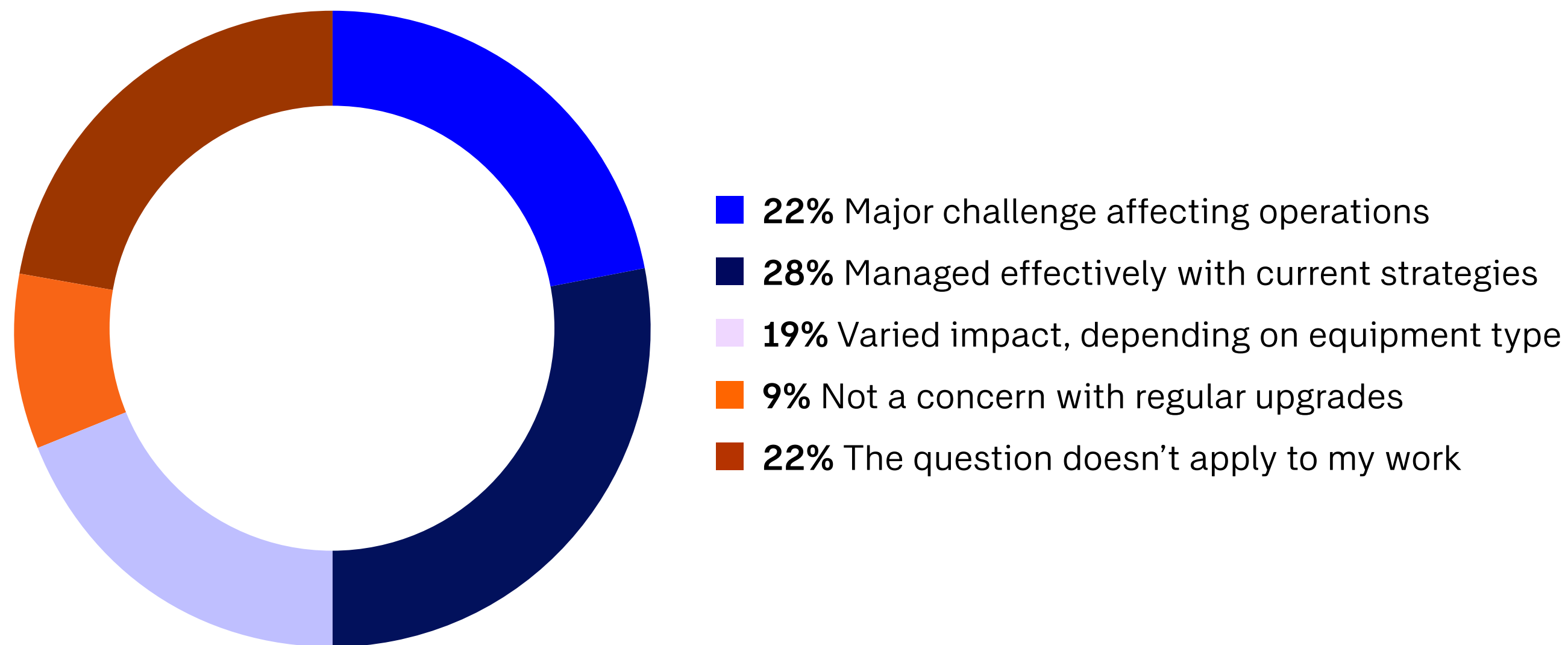
The survey reveals that the primary strategy for managing costs related to maintenance and operations in the metals industry is the optimization of operational processes, as indicated by 37% of respondents. Other methods include training personnel (14%), optimizing maintenance processes (11%) and investing in new technologies (9%).

Conclusions

Optimizing operational and maintenance processes is the key approach to cost management in the metals industry. Investment in personnel training and new technologies also plays a role, reflecting a focus on efficiency and innovation over workforce reduction.

Question #9 – Maintenance and operations challenges

How significant is the challenge of extending the lifespan of your equipment under current operational demands?



Summary

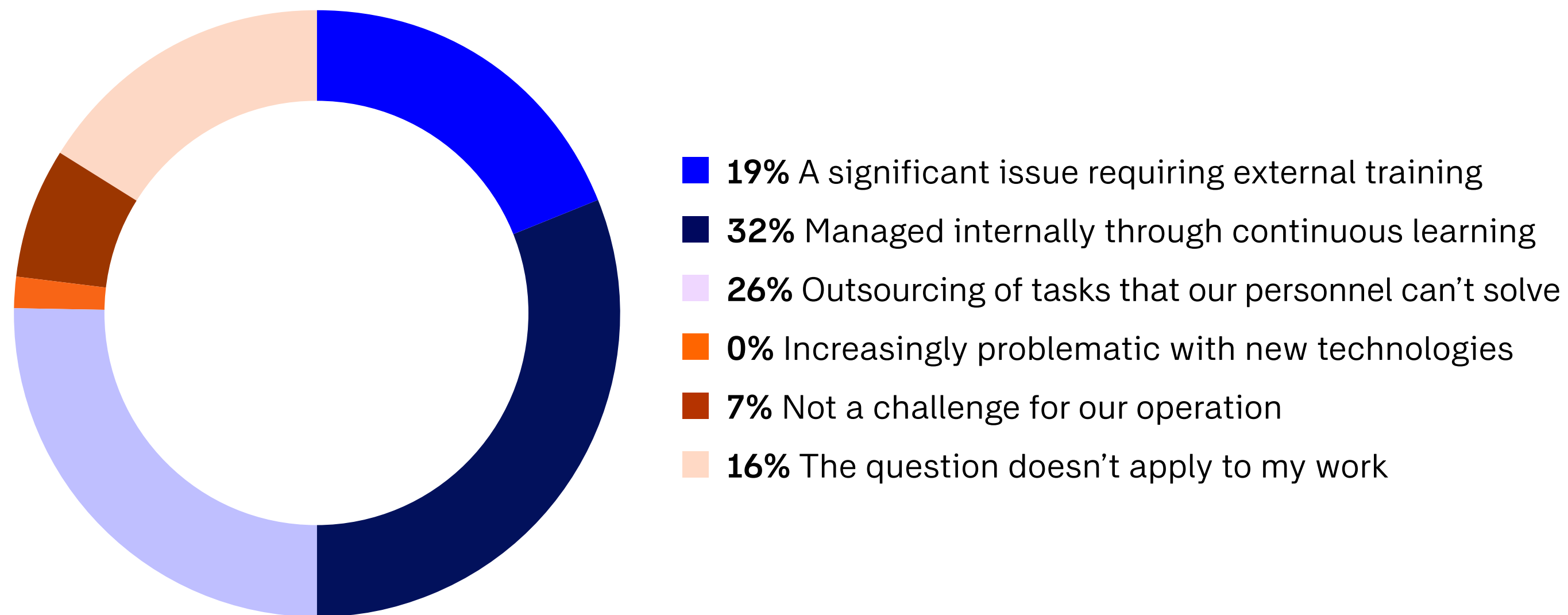
The survey results show that extending the lifespan of equipment under current operational demands is a significant challenge for 22% of respondents, affecting their operations. However, 28% believe it's managed effectively with their current strategies. For some, the impact varies depending on the equipment type (19%).

Conclusions

The challenge of extending equipment lifespan is a notable issue for many in the metals industry, but effective management strategies are in place for some organizations. The varied impact across different equipment types suggests a need for tailored approaches to maintenance and upgrades.

Question #10 – Maintenance and operations challenges

Are any skill gaps or maintenance challenges impacting your maintenance and operations?



Summary

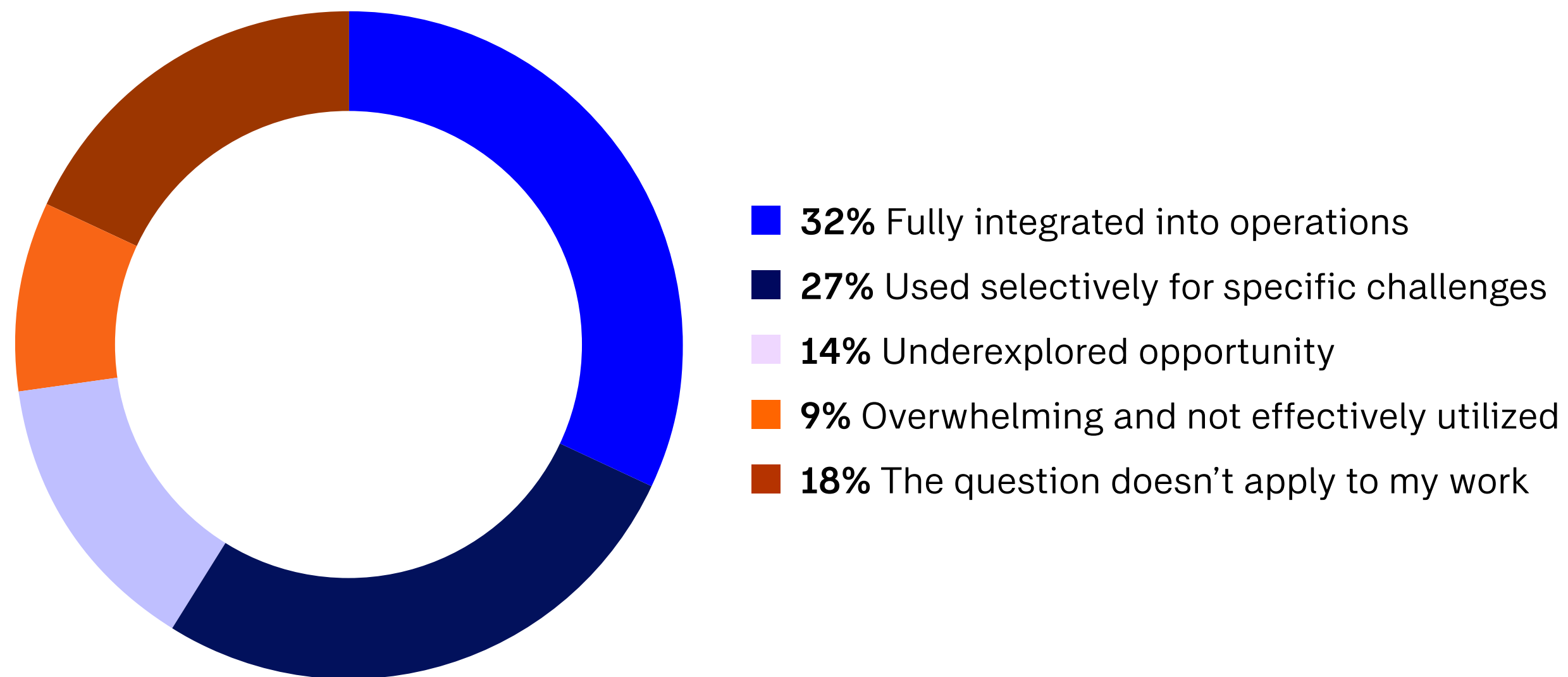
The survey indicates that skill gaps and maintenance challenges are primarily managed internally through continuous learning, as reported by 32% of respondents. However, 26% of organizations outsource tasks that their personnel can't handle. A notable portion (19%) sees this as a significant issue requiring external training.

Conclusions

While many organizations in the metals industry manage skill gaps internally, there's still a considerable reliance on external training and outsourcing to address maintenance challenges. This suggests a mixed approach to skill development and maintenance management, reflecting the diverse needs across the industry.

Question #11 – Maintenance and operations challenges

How are you leveraging data analytics in your maintenance and operational strategies?



Summary

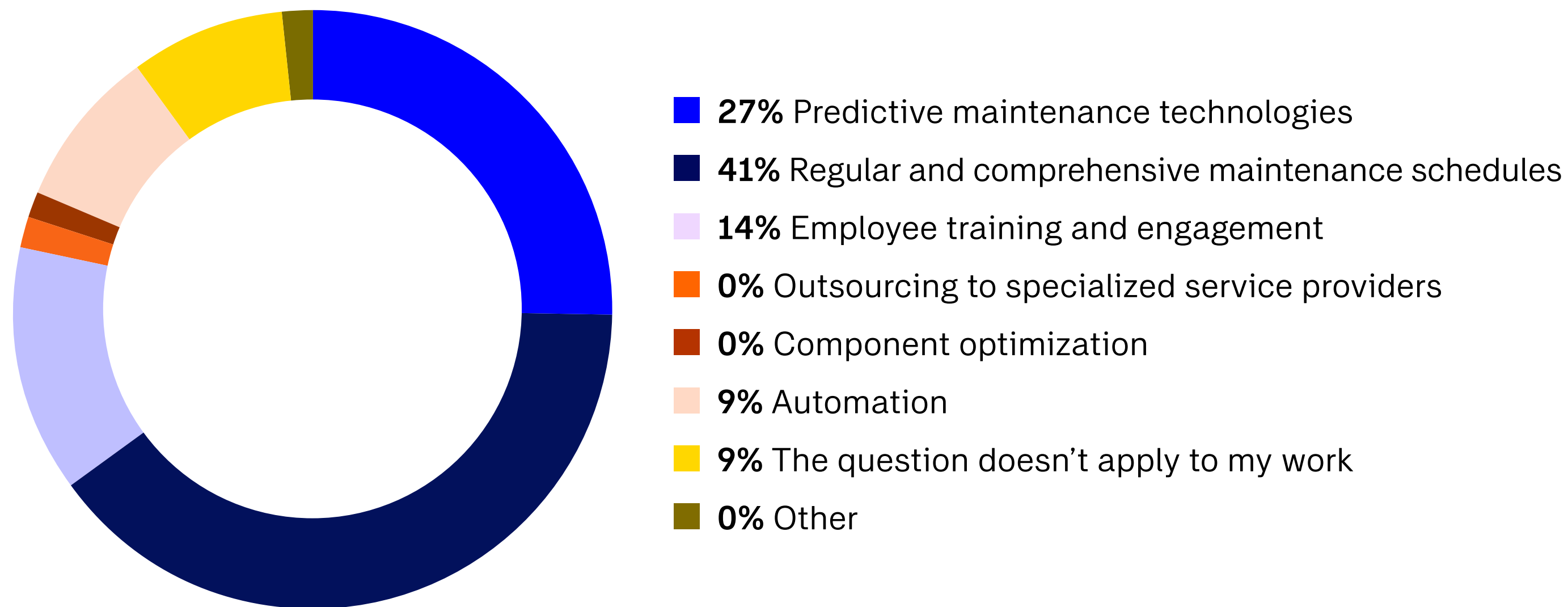
The survey shows that 32% of respondents have fully integrated data analytics into their maintenance and operational strategies, while 27% use it selectively for specific challenges. A smaller group (14%) views data analytics as an underexplored opportunity, and 9% find it overwhelming and ineffective.

Conclusions

Data analytics is increasingly being integrated into operations within the metals industry, although its application varies. While some organizations have fully embraced it, others see it as an area for growth or face challenges in effective utilization, highlighting a range of approaches to leveraging data.

Question #12 – Maintenance and operations challenges

What methods are most effective in reducing downtime and improving operational efficiency?



Summary

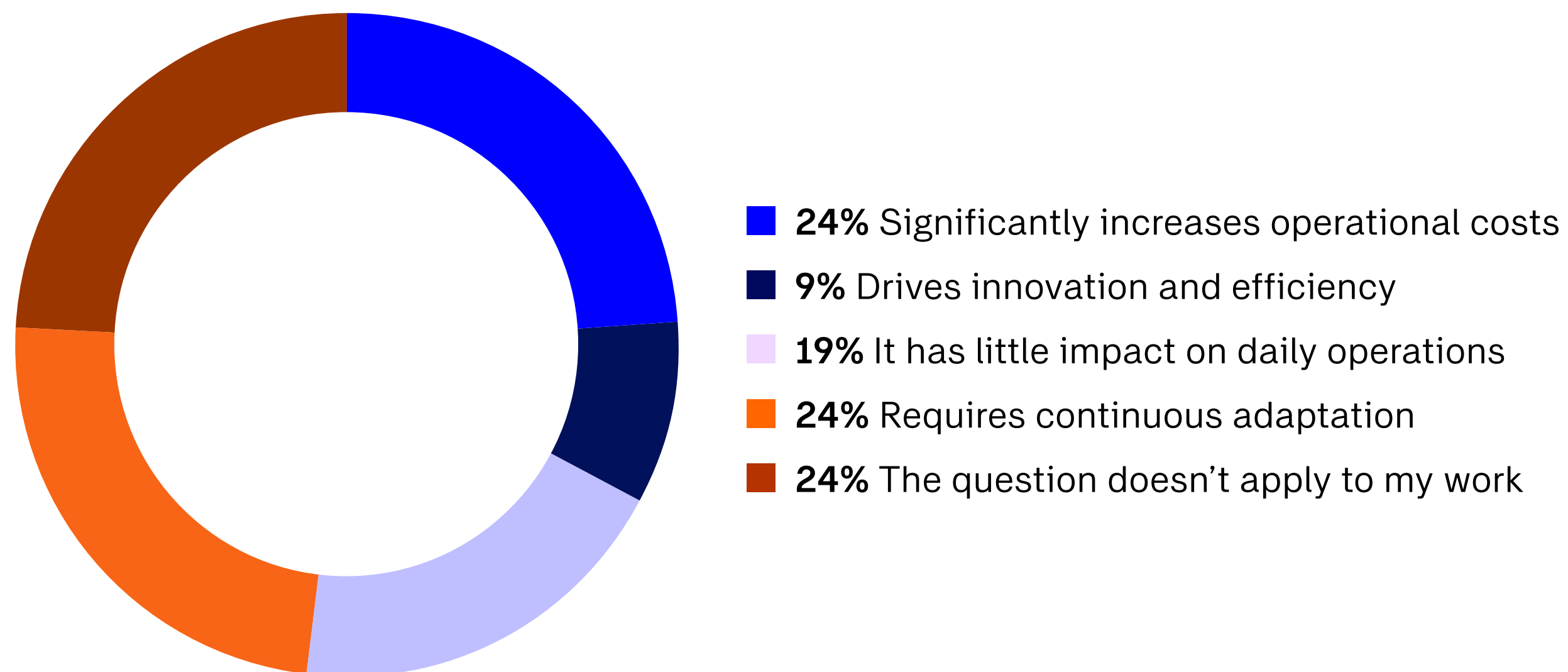
The survey results indicate that regular and comprehensive maintenance schedules are the most effective method for reducing downtime and improving operational efficiency, as cited by 41% of respondents. Predictive maintenance technologies are also highly valued, chosen by 27%. Other methods are less frequently mentioned.

Conclusions

Regular maintenance schedules and predictive technologies are the preferred strategies for enhancing operational efficiency in the metals industry. The low interest in outsourcing and component optimization suggests a focus on in-house solutions and proactive maintenance.

Question #13 – Maintenance and operations challenges

How are regulation changes affecting your maintenance and operational practices?



Summary

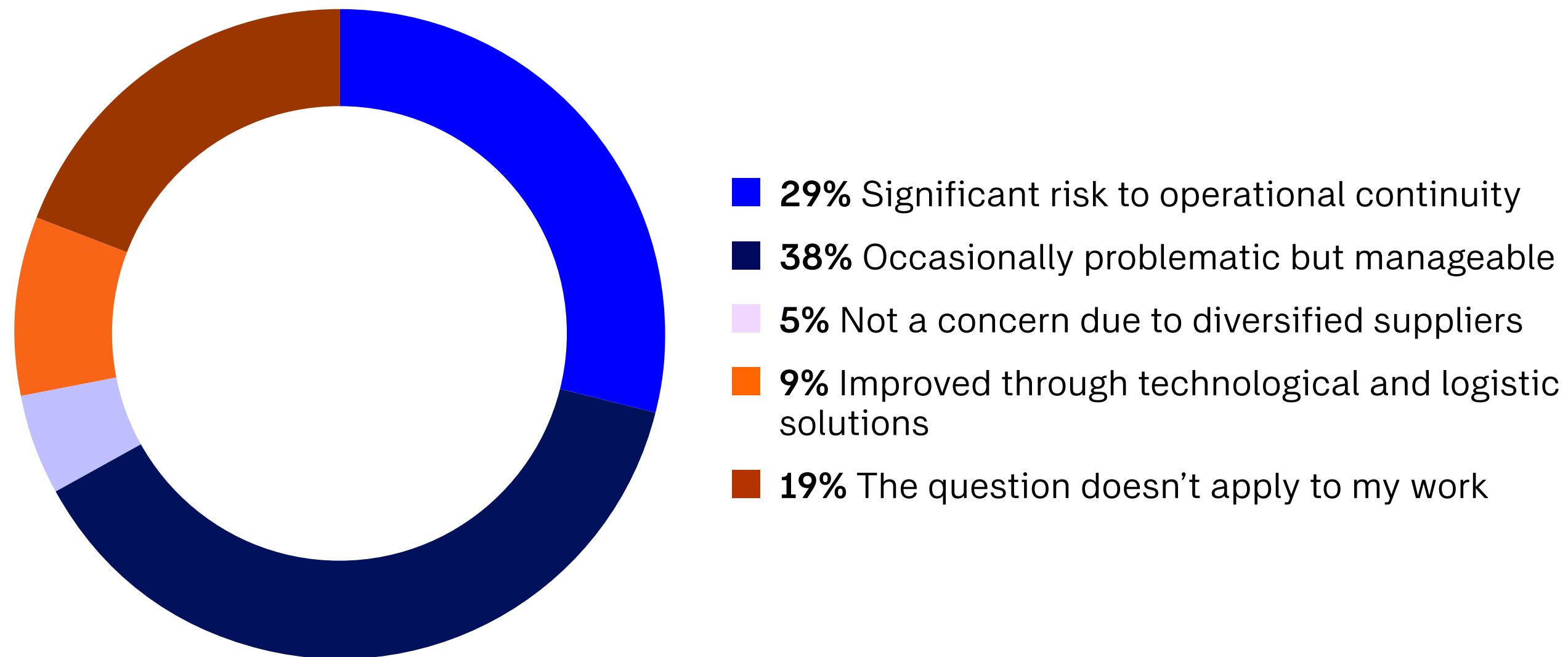
The survey indicates that changes in regulations have a mixed impact on maintenance and operational practices in the metals industry. For 24% of respondents, these changes significantly increase operational costs, while another 24% find that they require continuous adaptation. A further 19 % report little impact on daily operations.

Conclusions

Regulation changes pose both challenges and opportunities for the metals industry, with a significant portion experiencing increased costs and the need for constant adaptation. However, some view these changes as a catalyst for innovation, suggesting a diverse response to regulatory pressures.

Question #14 – Maintenance and operations challenges

How do supply chain issues impact your operations, particularly maintenance parts and equipment?



Summary

The survey reveals that supply chain issues pose a significant risk to operational continuity for 29% of respondents in the metals industry. However, 38% find these issues occasionally problematic but manageable. A smaller proportion has mitigated concerns through diversified suppliers (5%) or technological and logistic solutions (9%).

Conclusions

Supply chain issues are a notable concern for many in the metals industry, with some viewing them as a major risk. While certain organizations have found ways to manage or mitigate these impacts, the challenge remains prevalent, suggesting a need for robust supply chain strategies.

Question #15 – Collaboration and partnerships

Regarding your relationship with suppliers,
please rank the following statements from 1-10

(skip if the questions don't apply to your work).

They are essential for accessing
new solutions that can enhance
our operations.



8.4

I value suppliers that are open to
forming partnerships and offering
a collaborative approach over
traditional supplier agreements.



8.9

Finding suppliers who consistently
provide high-quality and reliable
solutions is a challenge.



7.8

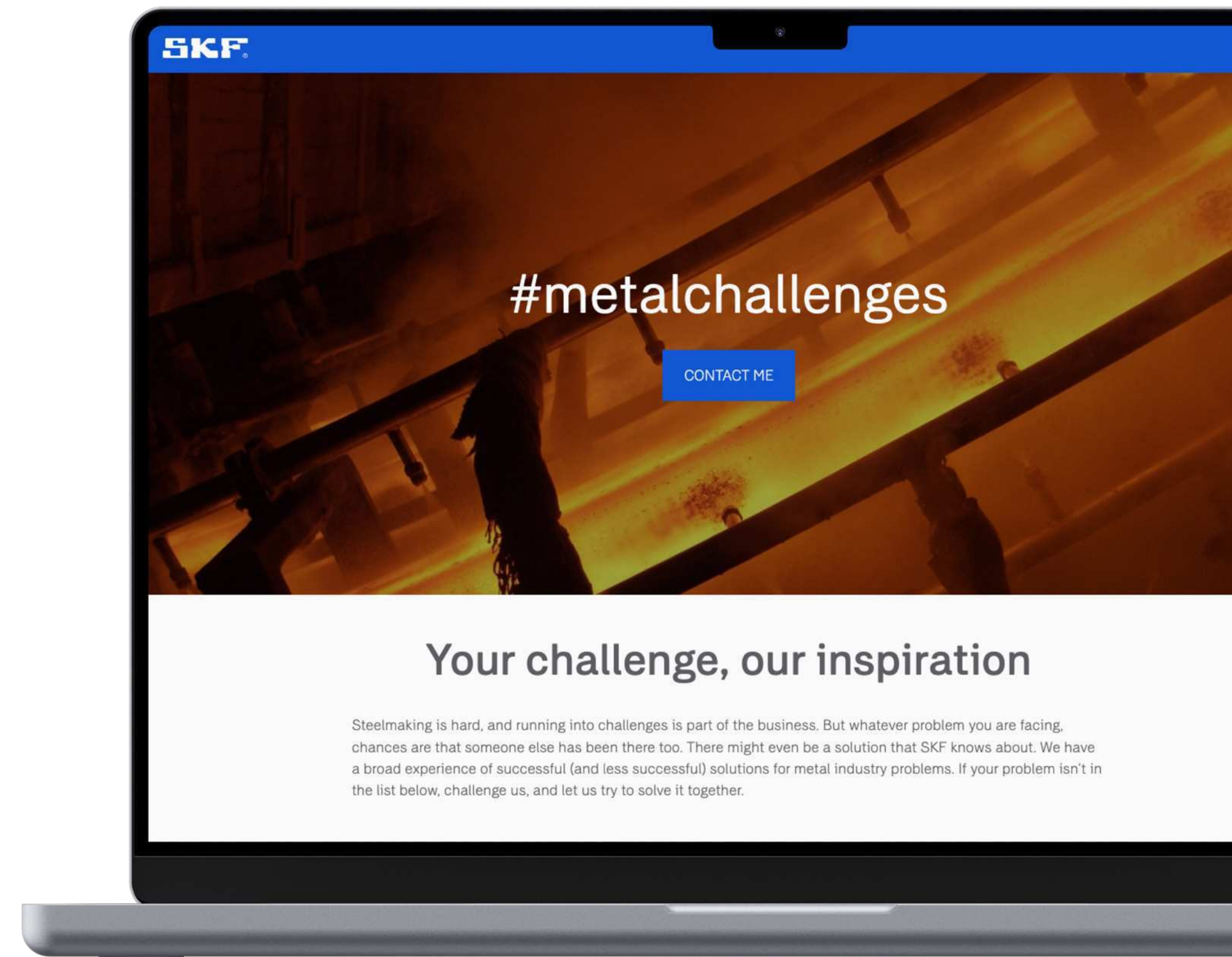


What challenges do you face?

Challenges in the metals industry are often interlinked across various areas. Explore our [webpage](#) for valuable insights and inspiration.

Here's a preview of some common challenges covered on the page:

- [Unexpected bearing failure](#)
- [High costs of replacing large bearings](#)
- [It's hard to determine the conditions of bearings](#)
- [Cut cost per ton](#)
- [Having the correct availability of spare segments](#)
- [Increased risk of bearing failure due to increased load and speed](#)
- [High costs due to long unplanned downtime](#)
- [Steel contamination due to leaking lubricant](#)
- [Finding optimal maintenance routines](#)
- [Bearings fail due to mounting errors](#)
- [Decarbonization demands](#)
- [Increase output and machine performance](#)
- [Premature roll neck bearing failures](#)
- [Balancing sustainability goals and cost](#)
- [Grease in cooling system creates high costs](#)
- [Still-useful bearings are scrapped](#)
- [Hydraulic systems that fail](#)





skf.com

® SKF is a registered trademark of AB SKF (publ).

© SKF Group 2025. All rights reserved. Please note that this publication may not be copied or distributed, in whole or in part, unless prior written permission is granted.

Every care has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information contained in this publication, but no liability can be accepted for any loss or damage whether direct, indirect or consequential arising out of the use of the information contained herein.

PUB 71/S9 19989/1 EN · March 2025
Certain image(s) used under license from shutterstock.com