

# ASSOCIATION LEADERSHIP SURVEY 2023



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# FOREWORD FROM MAVENCE BY ANNA KOJ

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Life in our modern world requires grappling with increasingly multi-layered and complex issues, requiring concerted action and engagement at a time where growing division seems to be the norm across all layers of society.

In such an environment, associations play a crucial unifying role – bringing together representatives of industries, professionals, and entire sectors to develop common action plans and address issues larger than any one organisation's ability to address. With this growth in importance, and given the scope of challenges and potential divisions, comes a corresponding evolution in the skillsets and vision needed at the helm to continue upholding this vital role.

Thanks to their unique position, the importance of associations across international policy hubs such as Brussels has been steadily advancing. This in turn attracts top talent, bringing fresh ideas and new management practices. Having supported dozens of associations in their growth efforts over the years - be it through recruitment, improvement of their internal processes or talent management practices - we have witnessed a fantastic evolution towards their greater overall professionalisation. What naturally follows such evolutions is an increased focus on the attractiveness and competitiveness of associations on the employer market.

While as a whole, associations are a very heterogeneous group, we still often lack a more nuanced insight into what trends and practices may be specific to associations across sectors. Numerous conversations with our clients have highlighted a lack of data that could show them how they fare against comparable associations on the market, depriving leadership of clear points of reference and useful data – and have motivated us to devote greater attention to addressing these significant blind spots in the market.

This Association Leadership Survey and the present report, developed in partnership with ESAE - the European Society of Association Executives, were driven by our wish to respond to that need and provide our clients and the broader association community with precisely that missing point of reference, especially as they continue to evolve and adapt to the dynamic job market.

To that end our aim was to take a closer look at leadership structures in associations with the aim of better understanding the current trends and trajectories at top levels across trade associations and professional societies, from the perspective of talent diversity, compensation and benefits packages offered, most valued leadership skills and specific career advancement opportunities.

I am excited to be presenting you with this report, which I hope will offer interesting insights to international association professionals. Having surveyed hundreds of association professionals, it was exciting to analyse the data and see the key findings emerge. It has also opened up new conversations and ideas for what we can further look into as we keep working with international associations on their talent management needs.

**Anna Koj**  
Managing Director, Brussels  
Mavence



# FOREWARD FROM ESAE BY RAFAEL PLATA

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This study is a dream come true. During an event of the ESAE Leadership Circle, it became apparent that ESAE Members were interested in sharing views about key association leadership features, such as their skills and compensation. One year later, and thanks to the involvement of ESAE members and the excellent cooperation between Mavence, a recruitment and talent management firm specialised in working with international associations, and ESAE, the Association Leadership Survey is born.

In line with ESAE's goal of acting as a forum where association professionals can further develop and learn from each other, this first ever Association Leadership Survey aims to ensure that association professionals understand even better the industry they are in so that they become even better leaders and professionals within it. The combined work of Mavence and ESAE has led to a high degree of association management and leadership expertise in the preparation of the survey.

The Association Leadership Survey has specific characteristics that make it a unique source of value for the industry. First, it analyses both trade associations and professional societies, which generally form the two largest types of associations. Second, it investigates three elements of associations: i) leadership skills to run a successful association; ii) compensation of association professionals and iii) implementation of diversity, equity and inclusion mindset within associations. Third, it looks at different leadership levels within associations, ranging from the professionals responsible for communications, events, office management and policy amongst other through those in the top leadership position with an association's secretariat.

I am very grateful to the more than 200 association professionals that have contributed with their responses to making this study a reality. The number of responses received and the care taken in

carefully designing the study ensure the significance of its results within the different elements analysed.

A trademark of the ESAE work is that it is an organisation of association executives that works for its peers. In line with this, this study has been made by and for association professionals, hopefully resulting in very targeted and highly value-adding service to the ESAE community.

The Association Leadership Survey is an important milestone in the work of ESAE. I hope that you will find it interesting and useful in further developing as an association leader. I wish you a happy reading and would be more very glad to receive any feedback you may have on it.

## **Rafael Plata**

Chair, ESAE Leadership Circle and ESAE Vice-President  
Secretary General, European Association of CCP Clearing  
Houses (EACH)

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This first joint ESAE-Mavence survey takes a closer look at leadership structures in associations with the aim of better understanding the evolution trends at top levels across trade associations and professional societies - from the perspective of talent diversity, compensation and benefits packages offered, most valued leadership skills and specific career advancement opportunities for an inclusive array of senior figures in professional societies, trade, and industry associations and federations. Drawing upon the unique networks, insights, and first-hand experience of Mavence, ESAE, and ESAE's members as leaders and practitioners in their own right, this report is the product of both quantitative and qualitative analysis, discreet engagement, and comparative study.

The structure of the following report mirrors that of the survey which was shared with association leaders and other relevant senior profiles, and which formed the basis for our findings. Coupled with our aim to make the findings and flow of the report easy to follow and reflect upon, as well as to provide a level of detail that lends itself to actionable insights for leaders going forward, this translates more concretely into four main sections, each with their own sub-sections built around specific survey questions or data visualizations: Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; Organisations and Roles; Remuneration and Benefits; and Skills and Professional Development.

The first section on DEI seeks to build a comprehensive picture of the talent diversity across industries and sectors within international trade associations and professional societies, with specific findings on demographics including self-identification, age, and ethnicity. The second section, on organisations and roles, shifted the focus from the individuals to the types of organisations and responsibilities they represent, and include findings on geographic distribution, sector, office structure, seniority, and career progressions.

Armed with these foundational elements, section three - which represents the most robust and comprehensive questions in the study - looks at the structural components of employment, remuneration, benefits, and legal frameworks, matrixed to cut across the different backgrounds, functions, sectors, and types of bodies in which they arise.

Finally, concluding the report is a dive into what skills are considered as the most important and impactful in these roles, as reported by the association leaders themselves, with the goal of understanding and illustrating not only what it takes to deliver effective leadership, but what organisations as a whole can expect or can evolve to embrace in terms of offerings or investments to attract, build, and retain leaders in the future.

## METHODOLOGY

This joint report reflects the work of both the ESAE and Mavence teams working collaboratively to bring the findings of this unique and tailored study to life. Captured below are their analyses and assessments, building upon a 4-part survey with over 40 total questions encompassing diverse organisations and roles, remuneration and compensation packages, seniority and benefits, and skill and professional development across different levels, sectors and types of organisation.

The survey was shared with an exclusive group of senior association professionals and leadership from diverse sectors, drawing heavily from the membership of the European Society of Association Executives and complemented by Mavence's unique perspective and network as a talent partner. In total, 210 responses from senior association leaders have been synthesised in the following report, representing an interesting cross section of senior association leaders working not just in the Brussels Public Affairs realm/scene, but beyond for an international minority as well.

The survey itself was structured around a number of main segments and contingent sub-sections, where individuals would be branched into the appropriate tailored tracks based on their particular profiles and earlier responses. This approach was designed to balance macro insights on association leadership as a function of seniority and background, with more nuanced subsets that provide clearer pictures of differentiated groups and can more easily translate into individually recognisable, actionable analysis.

**4**  
SECTIONS

**11**  
COUNTRIES

**40**  
QUESTIONS

**210**  
UNIQUE  
RESPONSES





SECTION 1:

# DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION



*'Promoting gender balance within leadership roles is not only a matter of fairness, but also a strategic advantage. Research consistently demonstrates that diverse teams, including gender-balanced ones, tend to outperform homogeneous teams.'*

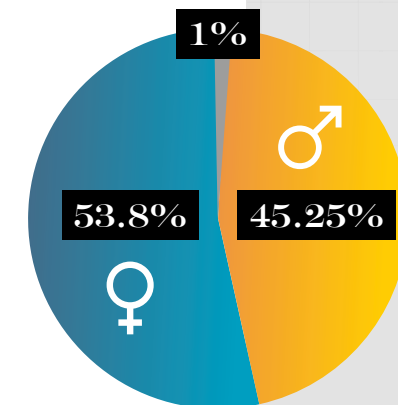
Liesbeth Switten, Secretary General, AIB (Association of Issuing Bodies) & Board member responsible for DEI, ESAE

The first section of the survey, through a series of questions around **diversity, equity and inclusion**, aimed at building a comprehensive picture of the talent diversity across industries and sectors within international trade associations and professional societies.

The first question focused on **gender self-identity**, resulting in an almost even split with 53.8% of the respondents self-identifying as female and 45.25% self-identifying as male. None of the respondents identified as transgender and/or non-binary, while two preferred to self-describe through an open response: one responding "Other" and one "Female-presenting and using she/her/hers, but using they/them, too".

This split roughly carries both across the top-level jobs (CEO and Deputy CEO level) and at the level of Head of departments, with a slightly higher number of respondents self-identifying as female in both groups.

RESPONDENT SELF IDENTIFICATION



WOMAN

# LGBTQIA+

## ETHNIC / MIXED RACE

### DISABILITY

In the second question, respondents were asked to reflect on whether they considered themselves to be part of a **minority group**. An overwhelming majority of the respondents (184/210) did not consider themselves to be members of any minority group (be it religious, ethnic, sexual or otherwise). 5 respondents preferred not to respond to the question, while one in ten responded positively to the question. Of those, over half identified as members of the extended LGBTQIA+ community. Four respondents self-identified as members of an ethnic and/or mixed race minority group. One person considered to be part of a minority group in relation to their disability and two reflected that being a woman these days feels like being part of a minority group. The remaining responses proved to lack a thorough elaboration on the specific minority status.

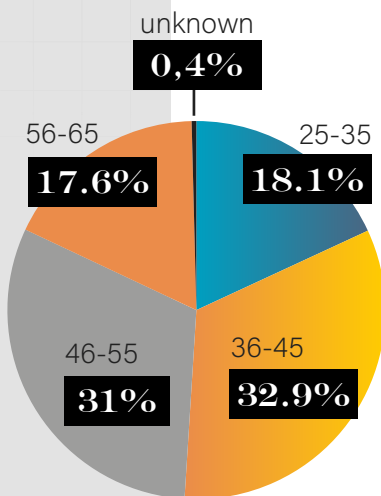
In the third question, respondents were asked whether they considered themselves to be a person with **disability**. Out of all the respondents, only two identified as such: one declaring to have a physical disability, with the other responding that they suffer from immunodepression. One preferred not to answer. The rest – representing the vast majority (98.6%) responded negatively to the question.

The fourth question considered **age demographics** of the surveyed association leaders. The results show a more even split between the respondents.

Close to one in five respondents (18.1%) fell within the 25-35 age bracket, while proportionally speaking the largest age bracket amounting to one in three respondents (32.95%) consists of the 36-45 age group, with the 46-55 age group following tightly behind (31%). The smallest consists of those between 56 and 65 years of age (17.6%).

None of the respondents were over 65 years of age, however one respondent declined to disclose their age.

#### AGE DEMOGRAPHICS



#### COMMENT BY MAVENCE

The picture emerging from this first section of the survey reconfirms observations from our day-to-day work with numerous European associations, showing good progress on gender balance across association leadership roles. Looking beyond the gender aspect, however, it seems clear that associations still have a way to go in ensuring their talent at the highest levels is more diverse.

The fairly even split in terms of age groups is also emblematic of a changing approach to identifying top talent for association leadership roles. While in the past, when it came to it, the top job was usually reserved for the most senior member of the team and was often considered to be a job for life, this is no longer the case. With an increased number of external recruitments and a greater turnover on the talent market, further accentuated post-Covid, we see ever younger professionals accessing top jobs in associations.



## SECTION 2:

# THE ORGANISATION AND YOUR ROLE



*The amazing response we have received from the ESAE community of Association Leaders and Executives demonstrates real engagement and passion for their work, and the success of both their Associations and their own careers. Those of us who have worked for Associations in a range of sectors know that the skills and experience required are quite unique, ensuring that implementing the strategy and decisions of a Board of experts (most of them used to running their own organisations or departments) while also providing the Board with solid advice and direction based on our expertise in running Associations. It's a fine balance sometimes, but with a successful and trusting partnership between Board and Association staff leadership, it can be a real success story!*

Mike Morrissey, CEO, European Cancer Organisation & President, ESAE

## 2.0 INTRODUCTION

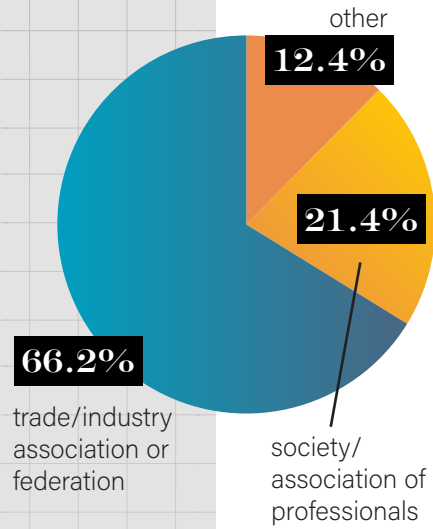
While in the first section we looked at the talent diversity in association leadership across sectors and industries, the second section aimed at building a more nuanced picture, reflecting on the types of organisations and specific sectors that survey respondents represent. We also looked deeper into the individual respondents' role in their organisation and their own professional journey.

## 2.1 TYPE OF ORGANISATION

We asked the respondents whether they represent a trade association / federation or a professional society, providing an option to specify further if the respondent felt their organisation was not falling into either of the two categories.



**YOUR ROLE IN THE ORGANISATION**



According to the responses the survey participants successfully represent the width and diversity of Europe's professional and industry associations.

Two third of the participants (66.2%) are currently working at a trade/industry association or federation, and one in five (21.4%) represent a professional society/association of professionals.

The picture, however, becomes much more diverse within the remaining 12.4% (the participants who further specified the type of their association). Individual respondents specified they represent associations of public authorities and/or government agencies, semi-professional societies, non-governmental organisations, non-profit organisations with a mixed membership (individuals, organisations, corporate members), consultancies, conference centres, patient umbrella organisations, intergovernmental networks, city and/or regional networks, research & development-focused organisations, as well as think tanks and NGOs.

Two individual responses remained vague by only stating they represented an AISBL/ASBL.



*The geographical location of the organisation can play a considerable role in understanding not only its leadership structures but also the specific remuneration schemes. Helping associations recruit top talent we realise the importance of being able to provide guidance on this to both our clients and candidates. In case of international recruitments, the added complexity of understanding a foreign taxation system builds on lack of credible data around association-specific market standards. With growing flexibility around remote-working, this becomes of even greater importance.*

**Anna Koj, Managing Director Brussels, Mavence**



**2.2 GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD**

With Brussels being such an important association hub in Europe, the vast majority of respondents (81%) and/or their associations' secretariats were perhaps unsurprisingly located in Belgium.

Among the remaining 19%, a remote runner-up would be France according to the survey results, which hosts a total of 7 secretariats. Followed by:

- 6 in the Netherlands
- 5 each in UK
- 4 in Switzerland
- 3 in Germany
- 2 in Spain, Ireland and the USA
- One each in Luxembourg and Sweden

It is interesting to note that several secretariats do not have a set location or are spread between countries, which is the case for three respondents.

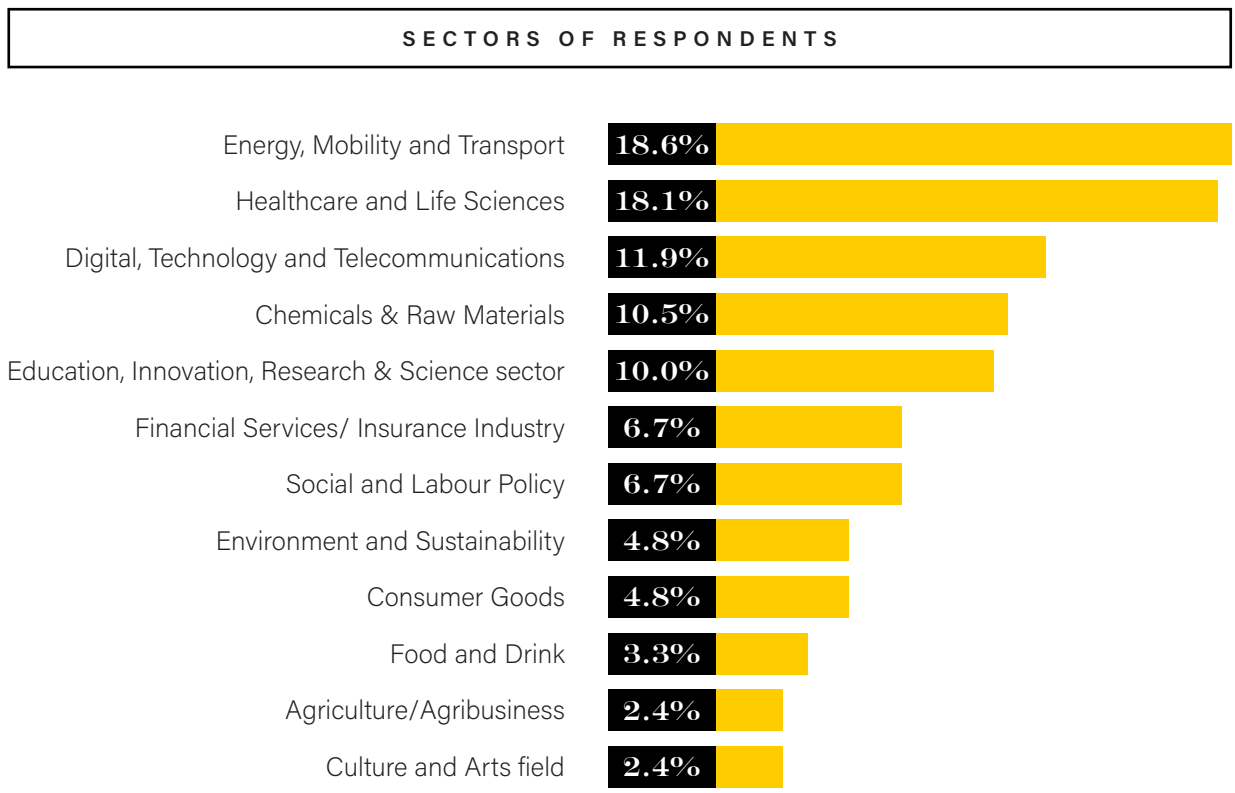
**GEOGRAPHICAL SPREAD**



## 2.3 SECTORS

The 210 respondents represent a wide range of different sectors, reflecting well the diversity of interest groups active across Europe.

- Almost one in five respondents - 18.6% represent organisations active within the field of **Energy, Mobility and Transport**
- Nearly as many - 18.1% represent another sizeable field, **Healthcare and Life Sciences**
- 11.9% of the respondents are professionals active within the field of **Digital, Technology and Telecommunications**
- 10.5% are part of organisations working within the field of **Chemicals & Raw Materials**
- Another 10% represent the **Education, Innovation, Research & Science sector**
- 6.7% of respondents represent the **Financial Services/ Insurance Industry**
- Equally, 6.7% work in organisations focusing on **Social and Labour Policy**
- 4.8% each, or one in twenty represent the **Environment and Sustainability** sector, and the **Consumer Goods**, while another 3.3% work at organisations active within the **Food and Drink** field
- Some of the more sparingly represented sectors would be **Agriculture/Agribusiness**, as well as the **Culture and Arts field**, with 2.4% of respondents each



## 2.4 TEAM SIZE

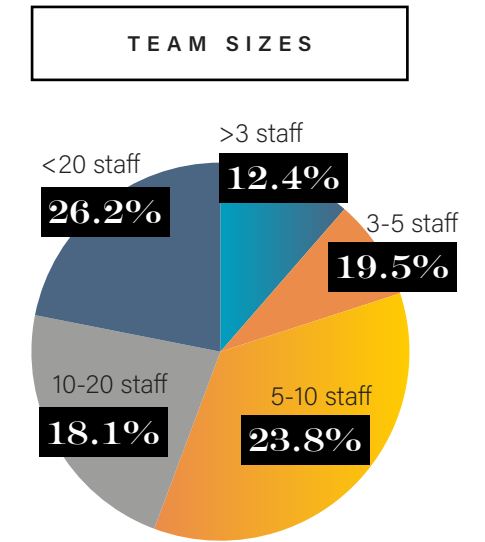
In terms of team size, over one in four association secretariats (26.2%) represented in the survey counts a team of over 20 team members. Almost as many (23.8%) are small-to-medium sized, with 5-10 members of staff.

A little under a fifth (19.5%) of secretariats consist of 3-5 people teams, with another 18.1% being medium-to-large with 10-20 members of staff.

Teams of under 3 staff members make up 12.4% of answers, being the smallest category represented.

Looking more closely at the associations with the biggest teams, 75% of those with more than 20 staff members have their secretariats based in Belgium.

Sector wise, close to half (45%) of them represent (combined) healthcare and life sciences or education, innovation, research & science. 21% of the associations with the largest teams represent the energy industry. When we extend the analysis to organisations with secretariats counting 10 people and more, the picture becomes more nuanced but healthcare and life sciences, together with education, innovation, research & science still leads (34%), followed by the energy (23%).



### COMMENT BY MAVENCE

Albeit limited to the sample of respondents to this survey, the deeper analysis of the associations with the largest teams shows an interesting pattern in terms of market trends and concentration of resources, reflective also of the current policy debates across Europe.

## 2.5 ROLE IN THE ORGANISATION

Indicating their current role in the organisation, close to half of the respondents - 49% lead their organisations, working as a Secretary General, Director General, Chief Executive Officer, Head of Office or equivalent. 7.6% work as Deputies of the Secretary General, Director General, Chief Executive Officer, Head of Office or equivalent.

The remaining 43.4% of responses were somewhat evenly split between the other leadership functions surveyed, with 14.3% working as a Head of Communications / Events / Stakeholder Engagement or equivalent, 11% working as Head of Policy/ Advocacy/ EU Affairs/Public Affairs, 9.5% working as Heads of HR/Operations/Finance or similar. 5.2% of respondents are active as Heads of Projects or similar in addition to another 3.4%, who lead on Membership relations or equivalent.

## 2.6 OVERALL YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

In the second part of the second section of the survey, we moved away from the organisations and focused again on individuals making up the associations' leadership structures.

Regarding the overall years of professional experience of those surveyed, the responses align neatly on a bell curve: not even one in ten of the 210 respondents have fewer than seven years of professional experience (9%), while one in five falls within the 7-15 years of experience range.

The majority of respondents (43.3%) have between 15 and 25 years of experience, while the senior-most cohort (over 25 years of experience) made up around a quarter of the responses.

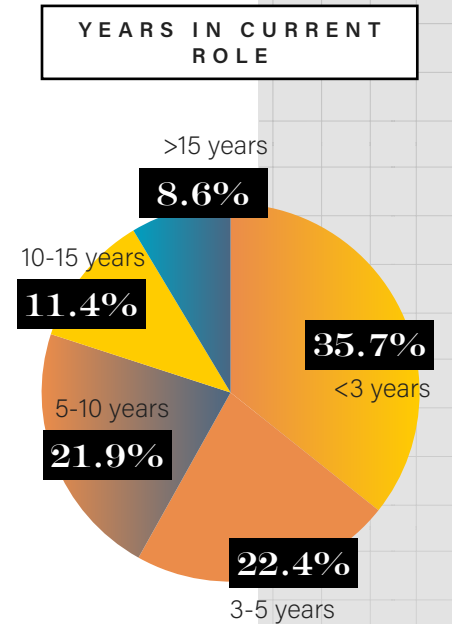
OVERALL YEARS OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE



## 2.7 NUMBER OF YEARS IN THE CURRENT ROLE

Looking at how long the respondents have been in their current roles, over a third (35.7%) have started after the COVID-19 outbreak in spring 2020 (or more recently than three years ago).

Just over a fifth have occupied their current role for a period of 3-5 years (22.4%) or for 5-10 years (21.9%). Increasingly fewer respondents have been in their role for 10-15 years - 11.4%, and over 15 years - 8.6%.



## 2.8 OPEN TO NEW, PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

When leaders were asked if they are open to new, professional opportunities within the next year or so, their responses can be grouped into (mostly) 4 categories:

- 1) The first and largest category are those who are happy where they are and who are moreover willing to stay in their current role for another year or more. This demographic makes up 40% of the respondents.
- 2) A fifth of respondents fall within the Maybe-camp
- 3) Around a third can be divided into different shades of yes:
  - 21.9% are open to new opportunities even though they enjoy their current role
  - An additional 6.7% are partly/fully dissatisfied in their current function, thus being interested in a new challenge if it comes up
  - The remaining individual answers indicate a mix of other reasons, including respondents stating that they would be willing to consider new opportunities, if they are being approached directly (passively looking) or that they are open to consider opportunities depending on the role and salary at hand.
  - 2 respondents are about to leave their roles in the near future, while one respondent is seeking to move away from one of their current roles, but not the others
- 4) The last group of respondents (5.7%) preferred not to provide a specific answer to this question

Looking at the more nuanced data, we see that most respondents from amongst the top leadership level (Secretary General / Director General / CEO / Head of Office or equivalent, and the Deputies) - unsurprisingly - range between 46-55 years of age



(39.5%) and 36-45 years of age (31.1%). Naturally, this is also reflected in the overall years of professional experience these leaders bring with them, with most (47.9%) having 15-25 years of overall experience, followed by 37.8% having over 25 years of experience.

What is quite interesting, however, is to observe that at the same time, the majority of respondents from amongst the top leadership levels have been in the role for about 3-5 years (26.9%), followed by 24.4% who have been in the role for 5-10 years and 21.8% who joined within the last 3 years.

When it comes to the Heads of Departments level, the majority range between 25-35 years of age (36.2%) and 36-45 years of age (35.2%). In terms of years of overall professional experience, 37.4% have 15-25 years of experience, and 31.9% have 7-15 years of overall professional experience.

At this level of seniority, over half of the respondents (53.8%) have been in their current role for less than 3 years. Followed with 18.7% of respondents who have been in their role for 5-10 years and 16.5% who have been in their role for 3-5 years. Respondents who have been in the same role for 10+ years represent only 11% of the surveyed group.

Looking at possible overlaps between the openness to leave and the sector a professional is working in, professionals within the social/labour policy field as well as the digital/technology sector appeared to be more interested in moving to a different organisations than those operating within e.g. the consumer goods and food and beverage sectors.

## 2.9 DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TRADE ASSOCIATIONS AND PROFESSIONAL SOCIETIES

Comparing the two largest groups of associations - trade associations and professional societies, who together make up a near totality of responses, a number of interesting data points have crystallised based on the answers received.

Professional societies are more sector specific than their industry peers, with a majority of organisations representing professionals from the Healthcare/Life Sciences & Education, Innovation and Research sectors. A minority represents the Financial/Insurance sector, the Energy, Transport and Mobility sector, Digital and Technology, Environment and Sustainability, as well as Culture and Arts.

Generally, team sizes across professional societies also differ with the average secretariat numbering over 10 team members, and two in five consisting of over 20 team members. Trade associations are smaller on average, with only around a third of secretariats consisting of teams of 10 team members or larger, and only around one in seven numbering over 20 team members.

With regards to salaries among employees of professional societies, they are generally lower: over three in five or 63% of professional society leaders earn annual gross figures under 100,000 as employees, compared to 38% of leaders working within trade associations falling within the same category. Invoices among freelancers on the other hand are near equal.

The secretariats of professional societies are also significantly more widely spread: as many as two in five or 40% are located outside of Belgium, compared to one in seven trade associations (13%).

### COMMENT BY MAVENCE

The results we see above clearly show evolving dynamics on the association leadership talent market. While we're often tempted to see primarily the younger professionals (aged 30 or below) prone to changing professional roles more often, the results of the survey show us that it is rather a more widespread phenomenon.

Expectations with respect to what a career should look like and what a job should offer shift across all seniority levels. Leaders in associations no longer see the top job as a destination. Based on our own observations, we clearly see them as eager to keep growing and learning in their professional roles as the more junior professionals are.



### SECTION 3:

# YOUR REMUNERATION AND BENEFITS



*A major strength of Associations is its strong social diversity with people coming from many different backgrounds, cultures and geographies. However, because of such a diversity it is also sometimes difficult to navigate the different expectations from employees when it comes to remuneration and benefits. This survey offers an extremely valuable reference to guide employers as they construct the appropriate package for their workforce.*

**Nicholas Hodac, Director General, Unesda - Soft Drinks Europe & Board member responsible for membership, ESAE**

### 3.0 INTRODUCTION

One of the main purposes of this survey has also been to gain a better grasp of the conditions, benefits and salaries across leadership positions in associations. Focusing on the top leadership (CEO and Deputy CEO level), but also on those leading specific teams / departments (Head of communications, policy/ public affairs, membership, HR and/or any other team).

The following section is dedicated to the remuneration, extra-legal benefits, flexibility and work arrangements of senior/executive level team members in associations. To be able to delve below the surface and examine this question in better detail, the survey has split some questions into (1) CEO/Deputy level or equivalent on an employee contract, (2) head of team level or equivalent on an employee basis, as well (3) CEO/Deputy/head of team on an independent/freelance basis.

### 3.1 CONTRACTUAL WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND SALARIES - CEO/DEPUTY CEO LEVEL

#### 3.1.1 Contractual Arrangements - CEO/Deputy CEO level

With regards to their current contractual work arrangement and status of employment, 66.4% of association leaders/their deputies have responded that they work as full-time employees. Another 5.9% indicated that they are part-time employees, with some specifying that they work anywhere between a 50% to over 90% basis. Around a quarter of the respondents – 27.7% - are working as independent contractors/freelancers or via their own management consultancy companies. A near totality of freelancers work for the organisation that they represent full-time or on a full-time equivalent basis, while individual independent respondents have further specified that they additionally service other clients or split their time 50/50 between two associations.

#### CONTRACTUAL WORKING ARRANGEMENT - CEO/DEPUTY CEO LEVEL



#### 3.1.2 Remuneration levels - CEO/Deputy level

Looking at the remuneration levels across leadership roles in associations, we have asked all respondents who work as employees to provide an overview of their **annual gross salaries**. To allow for a better comparison across various tax jurisdictions, with respondents being based in different countries, we considered the gross annual salary on the basis of 12 months, excluding a potential 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> month or any other type of benefits.

Based on the information provided by the respondents, the spread of salaries on the CEO/**Deputy level** for full-time employees can be broken down into the following brackets:

19% earn under 80,000€	10.1% earn 81,000 – 90,000€	6.3% earn 91,000 – 100,000€
8.8% earn 101,000 – 110,000€	5.1% earn 111,000 – 120,000€	3.8% earn 121,000 – 130,000€
2.5% earn 131,000 – 140,000€	15.2% earn 141,000 – 160,000€	6.3% earn 161,000 – 180,000€
3.8% earn 181,000 – 200,000€	3.8% earn 201,000 – 220,000€	5.1% earn 221,000 – 240,000€
3.8% earn 241,000 – 270,000€	1.3% earn 271,000 – 300,000€	5.1% earn 301,000 – 350,000€

The numbers above are based on a 12 month basis

90% of the organisations whose top leaders work based on an independent / self-employed basis are based in Belgium.





15.2% of self-employed respondents at the CEO/ Deputy CEO level invoice up to 100,000€ per year for their work done with the association, while 18.2% invoice anything between 200,000 and 220,000€ gross/year.

Looking at the correlation between the lowest and the highest salary levels and the size of the association, we can observe that out of those association leaders who earn under 80,000€ gross/year on a 12 month basis, 46.7% manage a team of fewer than 3 staff members. While at the top end of the salary levels, 75% of those who earn between 301-350,000€ gross/year manage a team of at least 10 staff members.

For those who work as independent contractors / via their own management consultancy firm, we asked the respondents to provide the level of the annual invoice for the work done for the association.

Based on the responses provided, the spread of invoice levels on the CEO / Deputy CEO level can be broken down into the following brackets:

15.2% invoice under 100,000€	3% invoice 101,000 – 110,000€	3% invoice 111,000 – 120,000€	3% invoice 131,000 – 140,000€	3% invoice 141,000 – 160,000€
6.1% invoice 161,000 – 180,000€	9.1% invoice 181,000 – 200,000€	18.2% invoice 201,000 – 220,000€	9.1% invoice 221,000 – 240,000€	9.1% invoice 241,000 – 260,000€
9.1% invoice between 271,000-300,000€	3% invoice 401,000 – 450,000€	3% invoice 451,000 – 500,000€	6.1% invoice over 500,000€	

Cross-referencing the levels of invoicing with the specific sectors of activity, we can observe that three sectors seem to cover all those who invoice above 400,000€ per year, with respondents at that level representing the digital, technology & telecommunications industry, the financial services & insurance industry, and the social / labour policy industry.

The respondents that fall under the most commonly chosen bracket (annual invoice between 201,000€ and 220,000€) represent the following sectors: chemicals & raw materials; digital, technology & telecommunications; energy, mobility & transport; environment & sustainability.

Finally, those who invoice up to 100,000€ per year represent the following sectors: consumer goods; education, innovation, research & science; energy, mobility & transport; healthcare & life sciences.

### COMMENT BY MAVENCE

It is interesting to observe that both for those working under employee contracts, and those who work as self-employed there seems to be a pattern with important numbers of respondents being either on the lower end of the scale, or roughly in the middle.

The responses are otherwise fairly evenly spread across the salary/invoice brackets.

This shows the incredible diversity across remuneration levels in associations, which depend on many factors – such as industry, size of the secretariat, etc.

In some instances, the results also clearly indicate the fragmentation on the market, even within the same industry. We can observe this in our daily work at Mavence, too. Within the same sector, depending on the size of the association or the specific focus it represents, the remuneration levels can vary greatly.

### 3.1.3 Regularity of Salary Increases - CEO/Deputy CEO level

Discussing the regularity of their salary increases, over half of organisation leaders, who work for their organisation directly, as employees (be it full-time or part-time), indicated that their pay rises are fully at the discretion of their organisations, amounting to 51.2% of respondents, while one in five (19.8%) have not or are not receiving any salary increase whatsoever. Another fifth of respondents (19.8%) receive a pay rise annually and 5.8% bi-annually. An increase in remuneration is fully subject to key performance indicators for 2.4% of the respondents, while 1.2% declared that according to internal rules and procedures, they benefit from a pay rise every three years.

### 3.1.4 Bonus Plan – CEO/Deputy CEO level

A little over half (54.7%) of the respondents at the CEO/Deputy CEO level, who are directly employed by their organisation, have stated that they profit from having a bonus plan in place, while the remaining 45.3% do not.

With respect to those who lead associations working as self-employed / via their management consultancy firm, 42.4% benefit from a bonus plan.

An overall detailed assessment of the bonus plans follows in section 3.3

## 3.2 CONTRACTUAL WORK ARRANGEMENTS AND SALARIES - HEAD OF DEPARTMENT LEVEL

### 3.2.1 Contractual Arrangements - Head of Department level

With regards to their contractual work arrangement, 80.2% or four in five respondents at the Head of department level have indicated that they are currently working as full-time employees for their organisations, while another 6.6% are working as part-time employees. Not many respondents have provided precise indications on how much they work on a part-time basis, however the responses received indicate anything from 50% to 90%.

Another 13.2% have indicated that they are self-employed/ work via their own management consulting firm. Of those, all indicated they work on a full-time or almost basis for the association, with one respondent additionally occasionally servicing other clients.

### 3.2.2 Remuneration levels – Head of Department level

Looking at the remuneration levels across leadership roles in associations, we have asked all respondents at the Head of Department level who work as employees to provide an overview of their annual gross salaries. To allow for a better comparison across various tax jurisdictions, with respondents being based in different countries, we considered the gross annual salary on the basis of 12 months, excluding a potential 13<sup>th</sup> or 14<sup>th</sup> month or any other type of benefits.

Based on the information provided by the respondents, the spread of salaries on the Head of Department level for full-time employees can be broken down into the following brackets:

39.7% earn under 60,000€	15.1% earn 61,000 – 70,000€	12.3% earn 71,000 – 80,000€	5.5% earn 81,000 – 90,000€	8.2% earn 91,000 – 100,000€
8.2% earn 101,000 – 120,000€	6.8% earn 121,000- 140,000€	Only around one in one hundred (1.4%) earn between 141,000€ and 160,000€; 161,000€ and 180,000€; and 181,000€ to 200,000€ gross each respectively.		

The numbers above are based on a 12 month basis

As such, 80.8% of respondents employed full-time at this seniority level earn 100,000€ gross or less per year excluding any additional benefits.

For those who work as independent contractors / via their own management consultancy firm, we asked the respondents to provide the level of the annual invoice for the work done for the association.

Based on the responses provided, the spread of invoice levels on the Head of Department level can be broken down into the following brackets:

25% invoice under 100,000€	8.3% invoice 101,000 – 110,000€	8.3% invoice 111,000 – 120,000€	8.3% invoice 121,000 – 130,000€
16.7% invoice 131,000 – 140,000€	8.3% invoice 161,000 – 180,000€	8.3% invoice 181,000 – 200,000€	16.7% invoice 241,000 – 270,000€

The sectors that pay highest at the Head of Department level are: digital, technology & telecommunications; chemicals & chemicals and raw materials industries; energy, mobility & transport; financial services & insurance.

### 3.2.3 Regularity of Salary Increases – Head of Department level

Discussing the regularity of their salary increases (or lack thereof) and excluding legally mandated salary increases such as compulsory salary indexation in Belgium, three in five, or 59.5% of the respondents have indicated that their salary increases are fully at their employer’s discretion, while over one in ten (11.4%) have indicated that they have not and are not receiving any salary increases. One in five (or 21.5%) receive pay rises annually and 3.8% bi-annually. For 2.5%, salary increases are subject to fulfilling agreed key performance indicators.

#### COMMENT BY MAVENCE

Interestingly, professionals at the CEO/Deputy CEO level are almost twice as likely NOT to receive a pay rise as those, working at Head of Department level. In our experience this may be related to leaders of organisations at times prioritising salary increases for senior members of their team in the short-to-medium term, while preferring to increase their own salaries when their organisations have an added capacity to do so.

### 3.2.4 Bonus Plan – Head of Department level

A little over half of respondents at the Head of Department level, who are employed by their organisation, (55.7%) have stated that they do not currently have a **bonus plan**, while the remaining 44.3% do.

41.7% of the respondents who work at the Head of Department level as self-employed / via their own management consultancy firm benefit from a bonus plan under their current remuneration package.

An overall detailed assessment of the bonus plans follows in section 3.3

*“Based on the raw data, salaries across levels are higher on average for professionals based in Belgium compared to those working in other countries. Likely, this is tied to the comparatively higher employment cost and taxation rate employers and employees encounter in Belgium.*

## 3.3 BONUS PLANS – DETAILED ASSESSMENT

### 3.3.1 Type of Bonus Plans among Employees across all levels

Discussing **bonus plans** more generally and looking at the aggregate data for employees across all levels of seniority and type of roles, those who do receive a bonus plan can be divided into two similarly sized groups. 51.2% of employees with a bonus plan receive a percentage of their gross annual salary or X equivalent of their gross monthly salary, while the remaining 48.8% receive a specific, oftentimes fixed and/or proportional amount every time they receive a bonus.

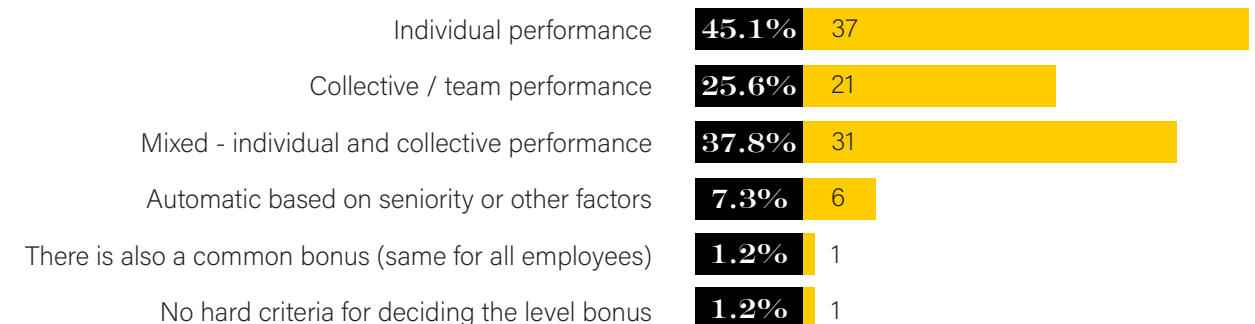
The amount of individual bonus payments varies depending on each organisation, sector, salary and other conditions and cannot be grouped into larger categories.

Among those who profit from a bonus based on a set percentage of their salaries, numbers can vary from anywhere starting from 1% going up to 30% of their annual gross salary for some selected individuals. For other individuals, the bonus can vary starting from 50% to 100% of a gross monthly salary, while for others it is a fixed percentage worth 2-3 monthly salaries.

For those, who receive a set amount it can also vary greatly, ranging from 2400 € per year (based on the lowest, individual response) to amounts as high as 110,000€ per year.

Some respondents receive their bonus in gross terms, while others profit from a net amount. As covered in other sections of this report in further detail in some cases the bonus may also vary being subject to performance indicators, while in other cases it is subject to the overall organisational budget/turnover.

#### BONUS PLAN CONDITIONS AMONG EMPLOYEES ACROSS ALL LEVELS





### 3.3.2 Bonus Plan Conditionalities among Employees across all levels

In terms of **bonus conditionalities**, almost half of the respondents (45.1%) employed directly by their organisation, mentioned that it is fully based on individual performance.

For a quarter of the survey participants that work as employees and benefit from a bonus scheme, the bonus is subject to collective/team performance, while for 37.8% of the respondents, an additional payment is subject to a mix of both, personal and collective performance.

7.3% benefit from an automatic, individual bonus payment due to e.g. seniority benefits or other contractual arrangements.

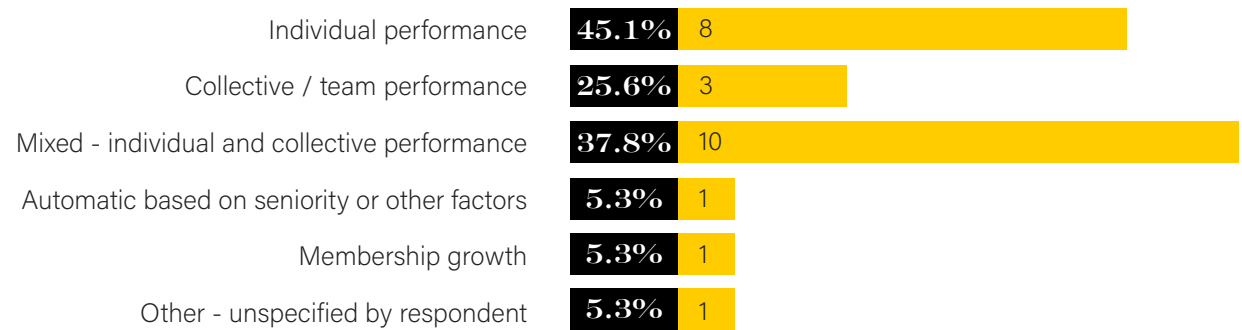
In specific organisations, there is an automatic bonus for all employees that consists of the same amount. Another individual response indicated that the bonus conditionalities are fully discussed as part of the individual performance review.

### 3.3.3 Type of Bonus Plan among Freelance/Independent Professionals across all levels

Out of those self-employed professionals across all levels who do benefit from a bonus scheme, 57.9% receive a fixed percentage, while 42.1% of respondents stated that they receive a fixed amount.

Among those who receive a fixed percentage, the bonus rate varies anywhere from 8-25% of the annual invoice, while those who receive a fixed amount can expect to receive anywhere between 10,000-40,000€. An individual response also indicated that their bonus is fixed with an additional on-top payment decided by the board that is variable.

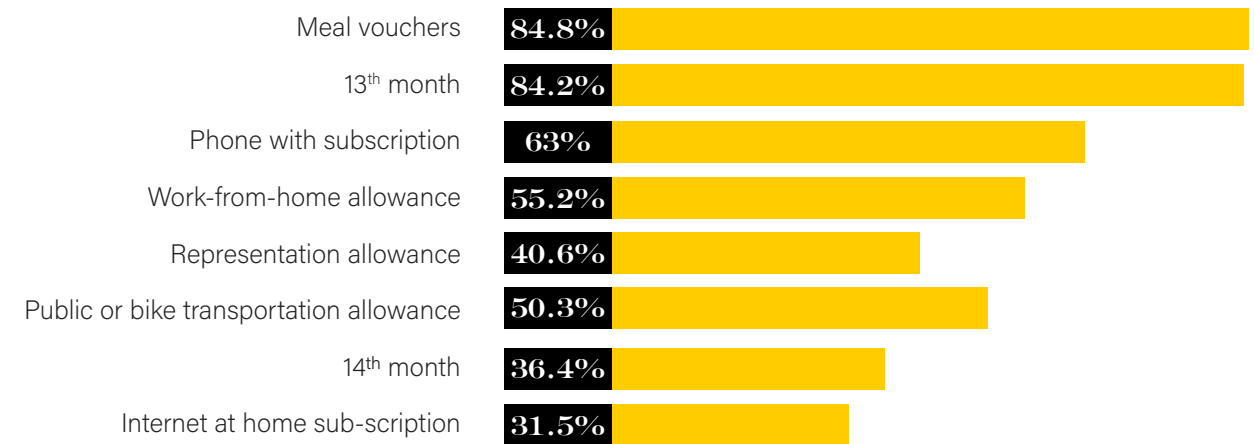
#### BONUS PLAN CONDITIONS AMONG FREELANCE/INDEPENDENT PROFESSIONALS



### 3.3.4 Bonus Plan Conditionalities among Freelance/Independent Professionals across all levels

Delving further into the conditionalities of the bonus plan among those who benefit from one and who are self-employed, a total of 42.1% receive a bonus payment that is subject to their individual performance, while 15.8% receive one subject to collective performance instead. Over half profit from a mixed arrangement, where they receive a bonus tied to both, their individual performance and that of their team and in one specific case, the bonus is tied to growing the membership of the organisation. In another individual case, the bonus has no conditionalities attached to it and they benefit from one thanks to their seniority or other related factors.

#### MOST COMMONLY OFFERED EXTRA-LEGAL BENEFITS



## 3.4 EXTRAL-LEGAL BENEFITS ACROSS BOTH LEVELS

### 3.4.1 Breakdown of Extra-legal Benefits across all levels by regularity

As part of the survey completion, respondents have shed further light on the benefits that they receive from their employer, highlighting both, common and less common extra-legal perks:

- A vast majority of respondents receive **meal vouchers** (84.8%)
- 84.2% benefit from a **13<sup>th</sup> month**, 36.4% receive a **14<sup>th</sup> month salary** and a selected few (around one in a hundred) benefit from a **15<sup>th</sup> month salary**

**WORKING-FROM-HOME ALLOWANCE - VALUE SPREAD**



% of those who indicated they benefit from the work-from-home allowance

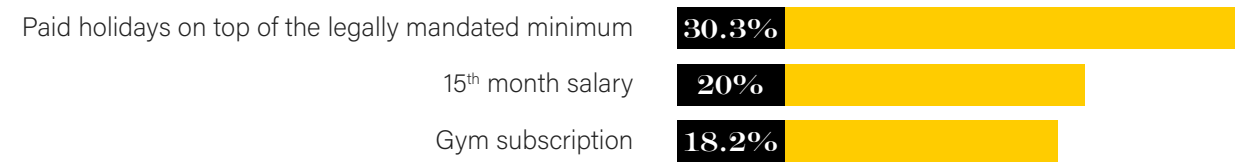
**REPRESENTATION ALLOWANCE - VALUE SPREAD**



% of those who indicated they benefit from the representation allowance

- 63% of respondents benefit from receiving a **phone** from their employer that includes a phone subscription for both, professional and private use, with another 16.4% benefiting from a phone + subscription, which ought to cover professional use only.
- Over half of all respondents (55.2%) receive a **working-from-home allowance** of varying size. Of those who benefit from this specific allowance, one in five receive over 150€ per month, over half receives between 100-150€ per month. 13.2% receive between 50-100€, while 12.1% profit from an allowance equivalent to under 50€ per month.
- Half of all respondents benefit from a **public transport OR bike allowance**, with a total of 27.9% benefitting from a **car provided via their employer**. Additionally, 24.8% of all respondents (and thus most of those, who benefit from a company car) are also receiving a fuel card from their employer. On top of receiving a transportation/bike allowance and/or a company car, 13.3% receive a bike allowance on top of their transportation allowance/company car.
- Four in ten respondents receive a **representation allowance** as part of their extra-legal benefits. For 53.7% of those who benefit from it, the representation allowance amounts to over 150€ per month, while 40.3% receive an allowance ranging from 100-150€ per month. 3% receive a representation allowance between 50 and 100€ per month, and 3% receive under 50€ per month.
- 31.5% benefit from their employers paying their **internet subscription** at home
- Almost three in ten receive an **allowance to attend trainings** of various kinds. The training allowance however differs greatly. While it is not fixed in some cases or may depend on specific, personal or collective demand, other individuals profit from a fixed amount ranging from 250€ to 5000€. Several individuals are aware of profiting from said extra-legal benefit but were unsure about the specific amount they are entitled to
- 17.6% receive a **salary compensation in case of prolonged illness** (1+ month of absence), with an individual receiving the same but in case of 2+ months of absence)
- Selected individuals also indicated a range of other, slightly less common benefits that they receive, such as **family-related perks** like kindergarten/babysitting allowances.

**TOP THREE EXTRA-LEGAL BENEFITS RESPONDENTS DO NOT CURRENT BENEFIT FROM BUT WOULD APPRECIATE TO HAVE**



*3.4.2 Additional extra-legal benefits respondents would like to benefit from*

Respondents were moreover asked to select three benefits, which they would wish to, but currently do not, receive.

- 30.3% of all the respondents would like to receive additional days of paid leave on top of those mandated by the law
- Out of all respondents, 11.5% would like to receive a 13<sup>th</sup> month salary, 17.6% a 14<sup>th</sup> month and 20% a 15<sup>th</sup> month.
- 18.2% wish to receive a gym subscription, and 17% each would like to profit from an annual training allowance and from a family/children's allowance to cover additional costs.
  - 18.1% would either like to receive a representation allowance or a higher one if they do not have one yet.
- 15.8% chose a company car as their most desired extra-legal perk with a fuel card featuring in the top three choices of 3.6% of respondents. 4.2% would furthermore like to receive a bike allowance/subscription in addition to their company car.
- 12.1% of the respondents chose a working from home allowance if they do not yet have one (or a higher one if they do).
- 10.3% who are not currently benefiting from an internet subscription paid for by the employer would like to receive one.
- Other individual respondents wish to gain other perks such as a pension scheme, more coverage as part of their health insurance, lunch vouchers, or higher payments/contributions as part of the benefits that they are already receiving.

### 3.4.3 Pension Scheme

Generally, four out of five respondents benefit from a **pension scheme** as part of their extra-legal benefits package. For 17.6% this amounts to a pension contribution equivalent to under 3% of their gross annual salary paid by the employer. 33.9% of respondents benefit from an employer's pension contribution of 3-5% of their gross annual salary, while for 27.3% of respondents, this contribution is larger than 5% of their gross annual salary.

### 3.4.4 Health Insurance

Many respondents of the survey also benefit from different **types of insurance**. Of those who are employed directly by their organisation:

- 45% receive hospitalisation insurance via their employers, with another 37% benefiting from insurance that includes close family members. 17.5% do not benefit from any hospitalisation insurance.
- One in four also have dental treatment covered by their insurance, with one in five or 20% also receiving dental coverage for close family members on top of their own coverage. A majority, or 54% however receive neither individual nor family coverage.
- 21.2% receive an outpatient care coverage and 21.8% receive it with their family members included. 56.9% do not receive it.
- 38.7% are covered by life insurance and another 12.7% have both themselves and their families covered by a life insurance scheme. Close to half of the respondents or 48.4% though are not covered via their employers.
- Three in ten are covered by disability insurance through their employment contract, and one in ten benefit from both, personal and family coverage. The remaining three in five or 60.6% are not covered on the other hand.

The extent to which employers/employees **divide the insurance** contribution differs quite strongly depending on the individual agreement, however the most common type of coverage includes a total employer coverage (100%) or a ratio, whereby the employer covers a substantial part of the contributions (mostly between 70 and 90%). In a number of cases, the split is even (as is e.g. legally mandated in countries like Germany), while in a handful of cases, employees foot the bill entirely. Several respondents were additionally unsure about the exact split.

TOP THREE  
COMPONENTS OF  
THE INDIVIDUAL  
HEALTH INSURANCE  
COVERAGE:

**45%**  
HOSPITALISATION

**38,7%**  
LIFE INSURANCE

**30%**  
DISABILITY

% of all respondents who are directly employed by their organisation and, therefore, receive extra-legal benefits

### 3.4.5 Extralegal Paid Leave

With regards the amount of **days of paid leave on top of the legally mandated number**, conditions too differ rather greatly. Based on the individual responses that we received there is little generalisation to make except that some individuals do not benefit from any extra-legal days of leave whatsoever. Most answers fell within the 5-15 day margin, while in some individual cases additional leave is as high as 32 extra days on top of the legally mandated number.

In some cases, respondents specified that while they benefit from 12 days of extra holidays, they work under the 40h work week scheme. In some cases, individual respondents differentiated further between extra-legal paid holidays offered to all staff in their organisation, and their individual situation (e.g. seniority holidays, individually negotiated extra holidays as part of salary package).

### 3.4.6 Seniority Leave

44.8% of the respondents directly employed by their organisation and thus receiving extra-legal benefits profit from seniority leave, where they accumulate a specific amount of paid extra-legal holidays based on the number of years they work in their organisation.

A majority of beneficiaries receives one extra-legal day of leave for every five years worked in an organisation. In some cases, employers are less generous, with some individuals receiving e.g. one extra day only after ten years. In other cases, individuals receive an extra day off every three or two years, with a handful of individuals even benefiting from an added day off for every year of working in an organisation.

### 3.4.7 Flexibility in the Work Place – Working from the office, at home or remotely

Almost every single respondent, or 98.2% benefit from some form of flexible work arrangement, with an overwhelming majority of answers indicating a sizeable amount of flexibility.

One in five profit from a fully flexible work arrangement, while almost half (47.9%) have a minimum amount of days on which they have to come to the office, however which they get to choose for themselves. Another 24.8% benefit from a fixed hybrid arrangement, where they have a minimum of compulsory days where they have to be present (generally between one and three), including specific week days, while retaining other specific days on which they work remotely. 3% work exclusively from home, while 1.8% conversely work exclusively from the office. For 3-4

*Almost every single respondent, or 98.2% benefit from some form of flexible work arrangement, with an overwhelming majority of answers indicating a sizeable amount of flexibility.*



self-employed individuals who work in several capacities, the specific answer depended on their position/organisation.

One element that we have noticed in the data set is a clear correlation between the flexibility professionals enjoy in the work place and their overall seniority. Mid-to-senior tier professionals are significantly more likely to benefit from a fully flexible work arrangement than more junior team members.



*The fact that 98.2% of respondents benefit from some level of flexibility clearly indicates that the Covid-19 Pandemic has overhauled the way we work, operate and manage teams.*

Sergey Golyshin, Director Mavence Brussels

### 3.4.8 Remote Work

Among those benefiting from a hybrid work arrangement, a minority has no flexibility to **work remotely from another location**, such as for instance another country. The majority of those who do benefit from flexi-work however do enjoy different levels of flexibility in this regard.

A plurality of the respondents for instance specified that they have the flexibility to work remotely anywhere from one week up to twenty days/three weeks per year.

A minority have an even greater level of flexibility, with several respondents profiting from as much as 1-3 months of legally feasible telework per year.

Individual respondents even had as many as 120-140 days of accepted telework, with another handful of individuals indicating that they have no maximum on remote work from e.g. other countries.

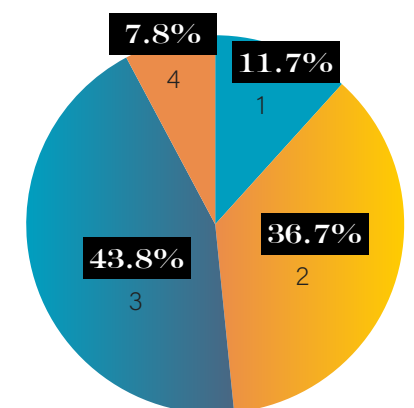
Another sizable minority indicated that such flexibilities are generally granted to them on a case-by-case basis, mostly being subject to approval by senior management and/or within reason.

Two individuals also indicated that their flexibility to work remotely has a geographical limit: they were not permitted to work remotely from outside the EU due to legal reasons and/or insurance coverage.

### COMMENT BY MAVENCE

Even though organisations provide a greater degree of flexibility to their team leaders/members (in particular since the Covid-19 pandemic) a hesitancy vis-à-vis remote work remains in place compared to other employment sectors. In many ways, in particular when it comes to associations whose core role is to engage in public affairs, this highlights how public affairs remain to be considered a very personal and people-centric profession.

OBLIGATORY DAYS TO WORK FROM THE OFFICE



As previously mentioned, a vast majority of respondents stated that they benefit from a hybrid work arrangement (neither fully from the office, nor fully from home). Of those, 7.8% are obliged to be present four days per week, while 43.8% have to come to the office three days per week. 36.7% must work from the office at least three days per week, while around one in nine (or 11.7%) only have to come in once a week.



## SECTION 4:

# SKILLS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



*Professional development enhances knowledge, skills and performances of individuals working in associations. It allows them to thrive and make meaningful contribution to their associations. By fostering professional development of their leaders, managers and employees, associations unlock the key to their own resilience and long-term growth.*

**Mohamed Mezghani, Secretary General, UITP (International Association of Public Transports) & Board Member, ESAE**



*Skills assessments, soft and management skill development, and coaching for association executive all are very valuable to their personal development and their ability to better run their associations. I encourage all association Sec Gens and CEOs to include this in their staff development plans as well as advocate for themselves to their board to include it in their packages. Everyone benefits when the entire team has access to these opportunities.*

**Dianna Steinbach, COO of NAW (National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors) & Board Member, ESAE**

## 4.0 INTRODUCTION

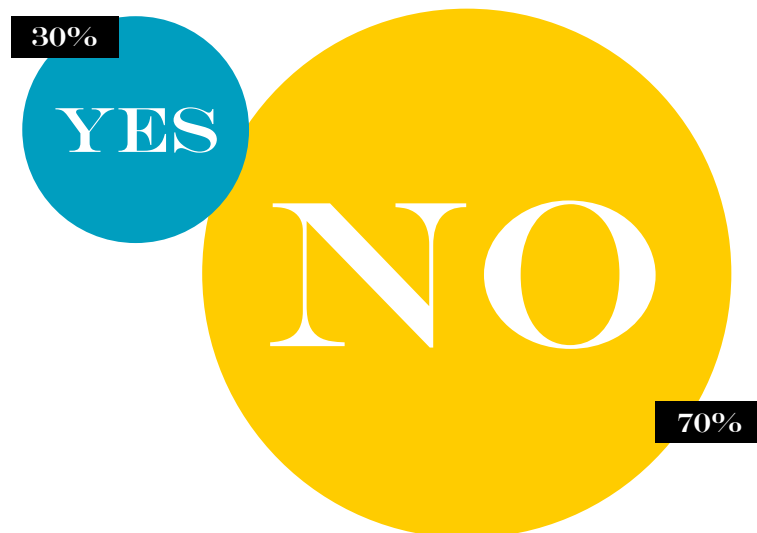
Traditionally, any surveys looking at providing insights into market trends and standards around talent management focus on salary levels and benefits packages. While these aspects have been explored in detail in the previous section of the report, we find it equally important to reflect on the evolving skillsets, which are key these days to thrive in a senior association role.

In this section, therefore, we are specifically focusing on the skills considered (by the association leaders themselves) as most valuable and important in their roles. We further explore how organisations adapt to these changing circumstances by offering their staff opportunities to acquire new skills and keep building up their leadership potential while in the role.

### 4.1 Career Progression and Development Plan

When asked if their organisation had any structured approach to individual employees' career progression in the form of a development plan only 30% of the total respondents indicated that their organisation offered such a plan. The remaining 70% responded negatively to this question.

DOES YOUR ORGANISATION HAVE A STRUCTURED APPROACH TO INDIVIDUAL EMPLOYEES' CAREER PROGRESSION & DEVELOPMENT PLAN?



## COMMENT BY MAVENCE

These results are not particularly surprising as we often hear how association leaders struggle with putting in place more structured career growth plans for their staff given the unique structure, and often a relatively small size of the team, limiting opportunities for direct promotions.

At the same time, considering the feedback we at Mavence receive daily from professionals involved in recruitment processes, this should be a wake-up call for many organisations.

Professional growth does not mean exclusively direct promotions but can, in fact, encompass a much more nuanced process that gives individual employees room to acquire new skills, get increased exposure to external stakeholders and growing responsibilities. Many might be tempted to say this already is part of a professional journey in associations.

While it might be the case, professionals these days present a much more strategic and structured approach to managing their careers. Associations will need to depend less on the implicit growth opportunities and espouse a more proactive approach in identifying and outlining clearly how individual team members will be able to grow professionally throughout their journey within the organisation.

### 4.2 Most valuable Leadership skills

We asked the respondents to self-assess which skills they reckon to be the most important in their role. We kept the question open on purpose so as not to influence the answers and see whether we could identify a pattern.



## COMMUNICATION SKILLS

## MANAGEMENT SKILLS

## LEADERSHIP SKILLS

We grouped the answers that roughly fall into the same category, while ensuring to retain the right level of granularity and the top three skills cited by the vast majority of the respondents. The most regularly mentioned answers have been the following:

- **Communication skills** (including listening, synthesis, presenting, writing skills, assertiveness, political savviness, good negotiation skills)
- **Management skills** (including people management, project management, strategic planning, prioritisation, understanding of basic legal requirements and accountancy, change management, operations, problem-solving)
- **Leadership skills** (including soft skills, strategic thinking and vision, motivating, team player, people skills, coaching, being a connector, empathy, transparency, ability to inspire and guide others, relationship building, big picture and sense of details)

### 4.3 Value of training

In a follow-up question, we asked the respondents to comment on whether they would benefit from specific training to perfect / further develop some of the skills they identified as being key in their role. The respondents could choose more than one answer and provide their own comments where they saw fit.

From the options provided, these were the most commonly picked answers:

- 67.6% of the respondents declared they would appreciate following specific training as part of their individual growth plan (51.4%) or in their own time (16.2%)
- An additionally, 18.1% would appreciate professional coaching support on top of skill-specific training, while 6.7% would appreciate professional coaching support even though they don't feel they need any skill-specific training
- 23.8% already follow/have followed specific trainings as part of their individual growth plan, while 18.1% have already followed or follow specific trainings, albeit in their own time
- 9% believe that they already possess the necessary skills to thrive in their role

Additionally, two respondents suggested finding time for additional training would be tricky, with one of those further specifying that while there is often a structured career growth and development plan for employees in non-managerial roles, such plans are lacking for those with management responsibilities.

What emerges from a further deep dive into the data is that only 18.5% of the respondents at the top leadership level (Secretary

General / Director General / CEO / Head of Office or equivalent, and the Deputies) have already followed or follow specific training, with 60.5% saying they would appreciate following specific training/coaching regardless of whether they may have already followed some training in the past.

The levels are similar for the Heads of Department level, with 20.8% stating they have already followed or follow specific training and 71.4% expressing they would appreciate following specific training/coaching regardless of whether they may have already followed some training in the past.



*“The last section of the survey builds an intricate picture of the evolving expectations that association professionals have when it comes to building up their skillset.*

*While the general interest in additional training is not necessarily such a new development, it is interesting to observe the growing appreciation of professional coaching.*

*Close to 25% of the respondents highlighted they would be interested in receiving professional coaching support – regardless of whether they feel they could also benefit from skills-specific training or not.*

*We see this reconfirmed in our daily exchanges with individual professionals, as well as organisational clients. There seems to be a growing realisation that what makes a difference for professionals in leadership positions these days is rarely exclusively built on technical knowledge or skills.”*

**Anna Koj, Managing Director Brussels, Mavence**

# CONCLUSIONS

We greatly appreciate the level of engagement of the association community on this report. More than 200 association professionals have generously provided their insight with the objective of better knowing our industry and learning from each other, two key goals and principles that both ESAE and Mavence espouse in their everyday activities.

This survey represents the first systematic attempt at examining the **two largest families of associations**: trade associations and professional societies. Conducted by the European Society of Association Executives and Mavence, the survey was able to combine EASE's unique position and expertise on the association sector with Mavence's understanding of wider market trends and insights on EU and international affairs talent across the senior and executive level. While trade associations and professional societies have been the focus, we have also seen that there are other association types that warrant further investigation in the future.

The overall picture that surveyed association secretariats present us with is one quite evenly divided, with slightly over **50% of respondents reporting secretariats of fewer than 10 people**. We observe a good gender balance across leadership positions in associations, with a slight majority of them led by women who have held their positions for up to 5 years. This shows an interesting evolution in terms of the renewal of the leadership guard at the top level, as well as – possibly – a stronger push in the recent years towards ensuring greater gender balance across leadership levels. The majority of leaders are employees of the association, although a significant number are independent or self-employed. **Hybrid work set-up** is prevalent within associations, indicating a combination of remote and in-person work arrangements. Monitoring this trend over time will help determine whether it is a temporary post-COVID phenomenon or a more permanent feature, though arguably, employment generally and the relation between work and life as we know it have been fundamentally transformed.

We were also able to observe some fundamental structural differences between the biggest groups of organisations – **trade associations** and **professional societies**, with the latter being more geographically spread out, bigger, and more focused on specific sectors than their industry association peers.

In terms of **leadership skills**, empathy and communication are highly valued among the respondents, underscoring the people-centric nature of association management and the value soft skills add in an EU affairs environment. It is noteworthy that soft skills seem to override organisational skills, which are not as prominently emphasised, despite the primary goal of associations being to organise on behalf of their members.

Nevertheless, the survey has also shown that there are areas in which associations can strive for **further improvement**.

First, fostering **diversity** within association secretariats by having a team that encompasses a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. While women occupy leadership positions in a majority of associations, representation of other minority groups, except for LGBTQIA+ individuals, appears to be relatively low, only slightly reflecting Europe's diversity.

Additionally, there is potential for associations to explore **bonus and benefit plans** as a compensation component (no bonus plan in place in almost 50% of associations for top leaders and around 55% for heads of departments) and delve into the benefits and incentives they offer to employees in order to retain increasingly mobile talent. The survey shows there are some benefits that employees particularly appreciate, which offers a unique insight for associations and would be an interesting area to explore further.

Lastly, more effort ought to be made to enhance **professional development** opportunities for staff through continuous training and career planning, with the supply not always matching the

demand by team members to grow and develop as association professionals.

This report is a remarkable milestone for the association community in Europe. It sheds light on various aspects of associations, offering insights into their structures and areas for potential enhancement. It paints a picture of a sector that is adaptable in the face of challenges, while requiring to follow suit on other societal developments, and at times struggling to retain excellence in talent. By addressing these areas, associations can strengthen their effectiveness and thus better meet the needs of their members and employees.

Given the level of responses and feedback received, we can only think of running this survey on a regular basis in the future to dive deeper into some of the areas explored, cover potential additional subjects of analysis and expand the number of respondents to make future surveys give an even better picture of the European association world. In line with the strategy followed by association leaders that responded to this survey, we are proud of what we have done and intend to do even better in the future, counting on crucial engagement of the ESAE Members and the broader ESAE and Mavence association community to do so.

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If you would like to discuss the survey's findings or have ideas as to what we could further explore in the future editions, please contact:

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