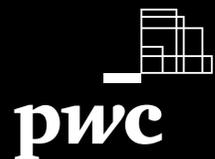


# 24th CEO Survey Dutch Results

March 2021



[www.pwc.nl/ceosurvey](http://www.pwc.nl/ceosurvey)



# 24th CEO Survey Dutch Results

At PwC, our purpose is to build trust in society and solve important problems. We're a network of firms in 155 countries with more than 284,000 people. At PwC in the Netherlands over 5,500 people work together. We're committed to delivering quality in assurance, tax and advisory services. Tell us what matters to you and find out more by visiting us at [www.pwc.nl](http://www.pwc.nl).

# Contents

<b>About the 24th CEO Survey</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Executive summary</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Economic outlook</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Concerns and risk management</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Headcount and Human Resources</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Sustainability</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>CEOs and Government</b>	<b>27</b>



# About the 24th CEO Survey

In its global CEO Survey, PwC annually asks CEOs about the prospects for the economy, their own organisation, their concerns, plans and their views on specific topics. This year, the survey was conducted for the 24th time. More than 5000 CEOs participated in the survey worldwide. In the Netherlands, PwC received responses from 141 CEOs. The survey of CEOs took place from early January to mid-February 2021.

The 24th CEO Survey was published on 11 March 2021, the same day that the WHO declared COVID-19 a global pandemic a year ago.

More information can be found on [www.pwc.nl/ceosurvey](https://www.pwc.nl/ceosurvey) (Dutch outcomes) or [www.pwc.com/ceosurvey](https://www.pwc.com/ceosurvey) (global outcomes).

Unless otherwise indicated, the figures presented in this document refer to the Dutch outcomes of the 24th CEO Survey

# Executive summary



## CEOs are hopeful about economic recovery

An improved outlook: Dutch CEOs report high optimism about the global economy, with 72 percent believing growth will improve in 2021. And the CEOs' optimism extends to their own company's performance: 65 percent of the CEOs surveyed in the Netherlands say they are confident about their organisation's prospects for revenue growth over the next year. This is a significant rebound from our 2020 survey, which was completed well before the pandemic began.

## Cyber threats moved up the list of concerns

CEOs have become more concerned about cyber threats over the past year when many processes have moved to the virtual and digital spheres. CEOs have become more aware of the downsides of digitisation. In fact, cyber threats equal now over-regulation – the number one of previous years – on top of the list of CEOs main concerns. We see the concerns of CEOs partly reflected in their risk strategy.

## Acceleration of digital transformation

As a result of the Covid 19-crisis, CEOs are planning to accelerate their organisation's digital transformation. Looking ahead, 76 percent of Dutch CEOs plan to increase their investments in digital transformation and 63 percent in cybersecurity.

## Focus on company culture and well-being of workforce

COVID-19 has had a major impact on workforce related aspects of organisations – from adapting offices and other workspaces to the one-and-a-half-meter society, to continuous efforts to engage employees who, in many cases, worked from home.

Due to the dramatic changed working conditions of their workforce, 43 percent of the CEOs want to focus more on company culture in their HR strategies and 33 percent on the health and wellbeing of their workforce.

## Half of the CEOs want to invest more in ESG initiatives

The economic impact of COVID-19 has not pushed ESG off the executive agenda, but the subject has not risen much either. 55 percent of the Dutch CEOs plans to invest more in sustainability and ESG initiatives.

## CEO's feel social responsible

According to the majority of the CEOs, solving important problems is not only a government's task. CEOs have priorities for the government but also feel a responsibility to contribute to solving important societal issues themselves, mainly in the area of educating their workforce (67 percent) and reducing climate change (55 percent).

# Economic outlook

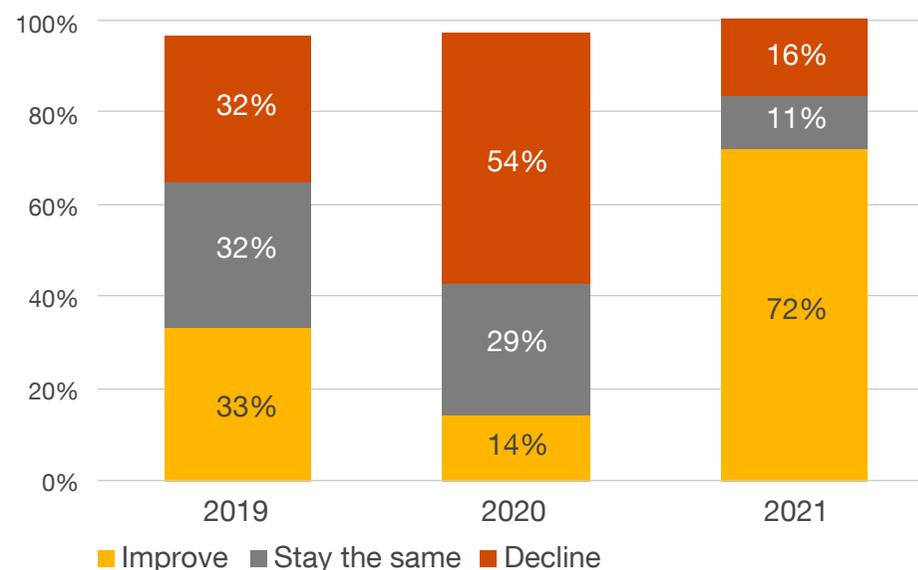


# Coming out of a global recession, a great majority of the Dutch CEOs believe that global economic growth will improve in 2021

When asked about their outlook on the global economy, 72 percent of the Dutch CEOs say they believe that the global economy will improve over the next twelve months. That is much higher than the previous years.

The CEOs optimism – they were surveyed in January and February – reflects the roll-out of vaccination programmes, which will allow the economy to get back on track. The positive mood may have been influenced by other developments: the worst imagined Brexit scenario did not happen and there is now clarity about the outcome of the US elections.

Do you believe global economic growth will improve, stay the same or decline over the next 12 months?

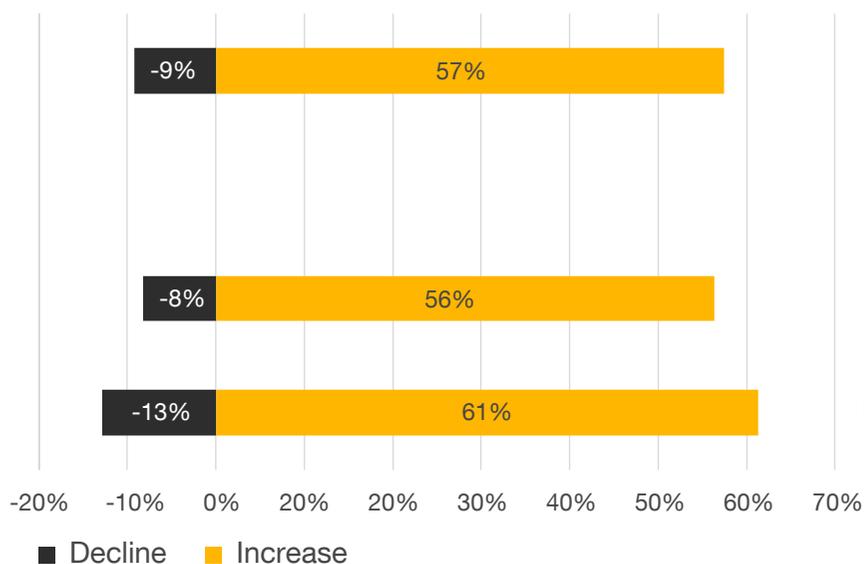


# CEOs in the Netherlands are also optimistic on the prospects of their own organisation's revenue and profitability

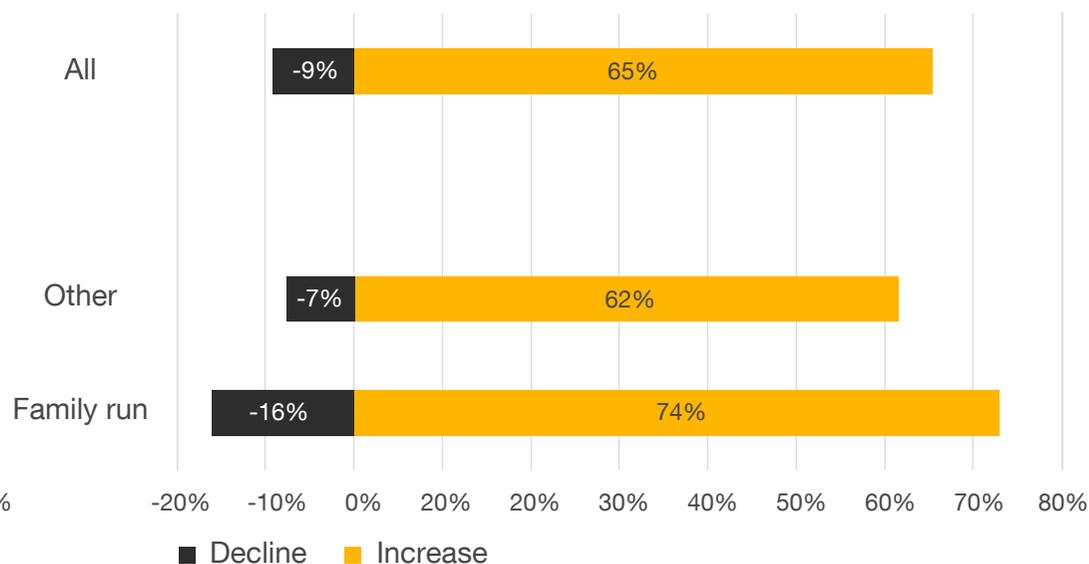


# When we compare family firms to the total we see that family firms are both more optimistic and more pessimistic when it comes to the outlook for their own business

What are your organisation's expectations for profitability over the next 12 months?

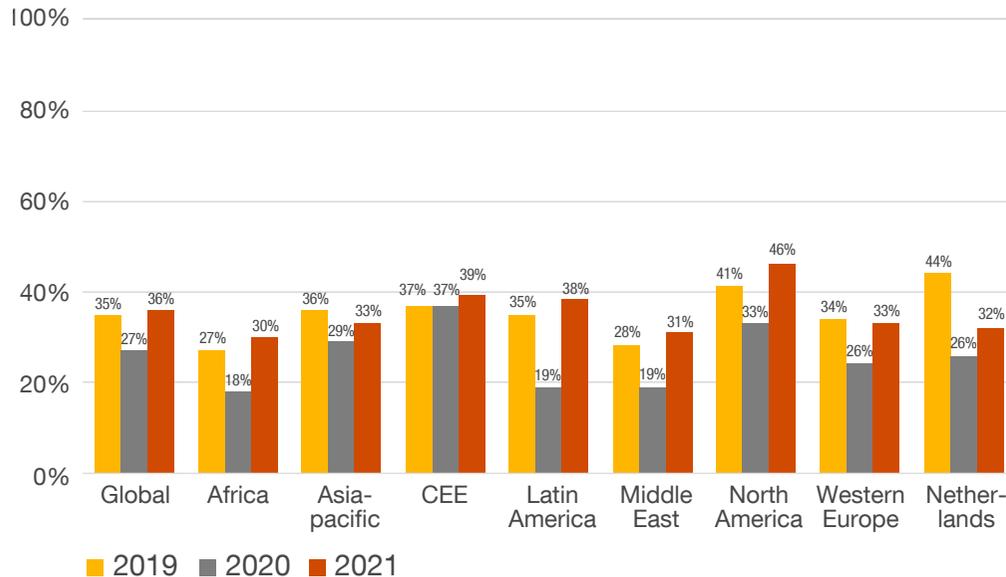


What are your organisation's expectations for revenue growth over the next 12 months?

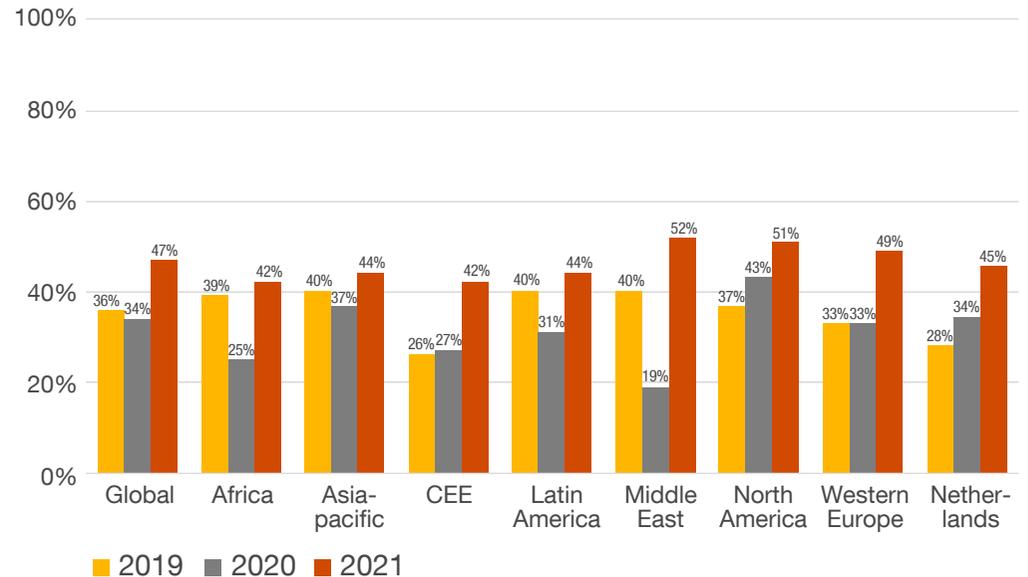


# In every region, short and medium-term confidence in prospects for revenue growth has increased

How confident are you about your organisation's prospects for revenue growth over the next 12 months? (Showing only 'very confident')

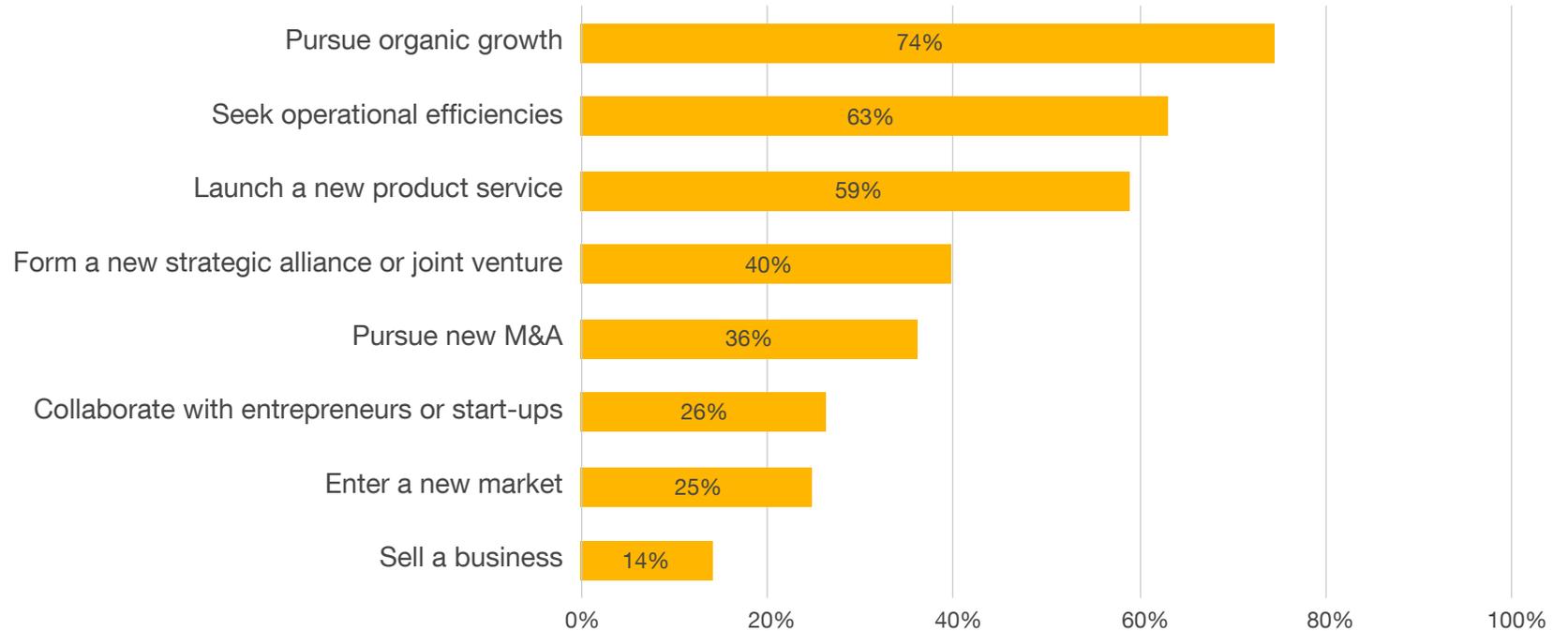


How confident are you about your organisation's prospects for revenue growth over the next three years? ('Very Confident')



# CEOs rely on organic growth to drive growth

Which of the following activities, if any, are you planning in the next 12 months in order to drive growth?



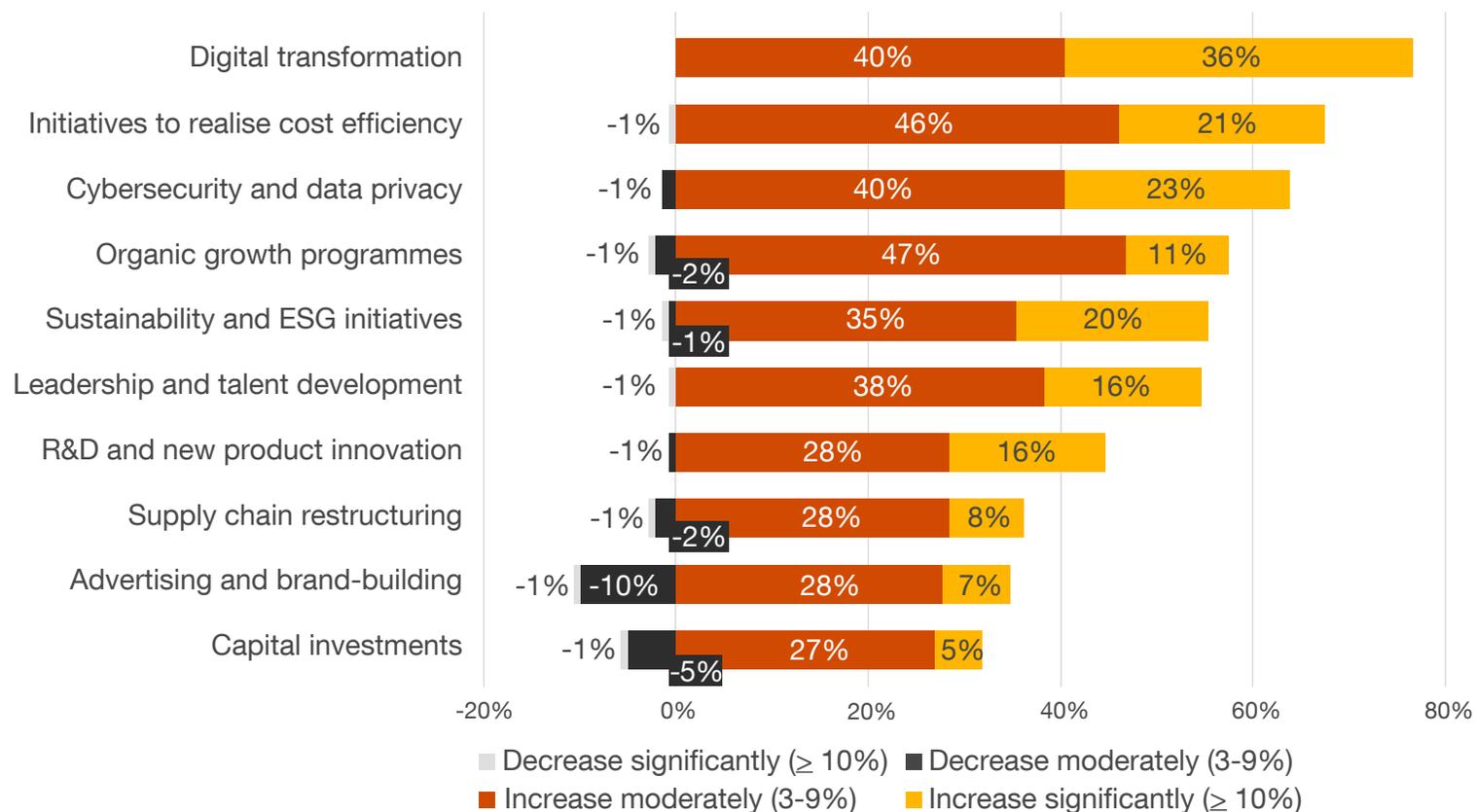
# As a result of the Covid 19-crisis, CEOs are planning to accelerate their organisation's digital transformation

Looking ahead, 36 percent of Dutch CEOs plan double digit increases in digital transformation investments and 23 percent in cybersecurity.

The current digital focus contrasts with the situation in 2010, after the global financial crisis, when the biggest priority for the CEO Survey respondents was gaining cost efficiencies.

Nevertheless, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis the latter is still high on the CEO agenda.

How do you plan to change your long-term investments in... over the next three years, as a result of the COVID-19 crisis?



# Concerns and risk management

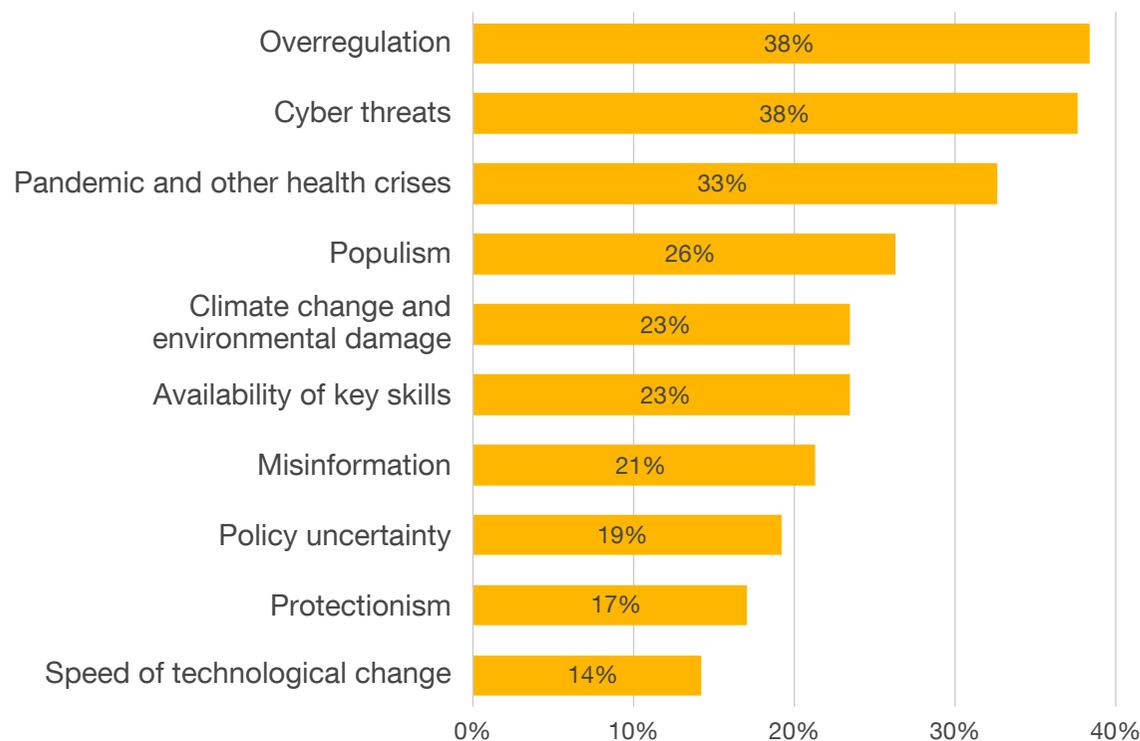


# CEOs worry about the downsides of digitisation

CEOs have become more concerned about cyber threats over the past year when many processes have moved to the virtual and digital spheres. In fact, cyber threats equal now overregulation – the number one of previous years – on top of the list of CEOs main concerns. They also see the spread of misinformation as a major concern. Not unexpectedly, CEOs now also have pandemics on their mind as a major threat.

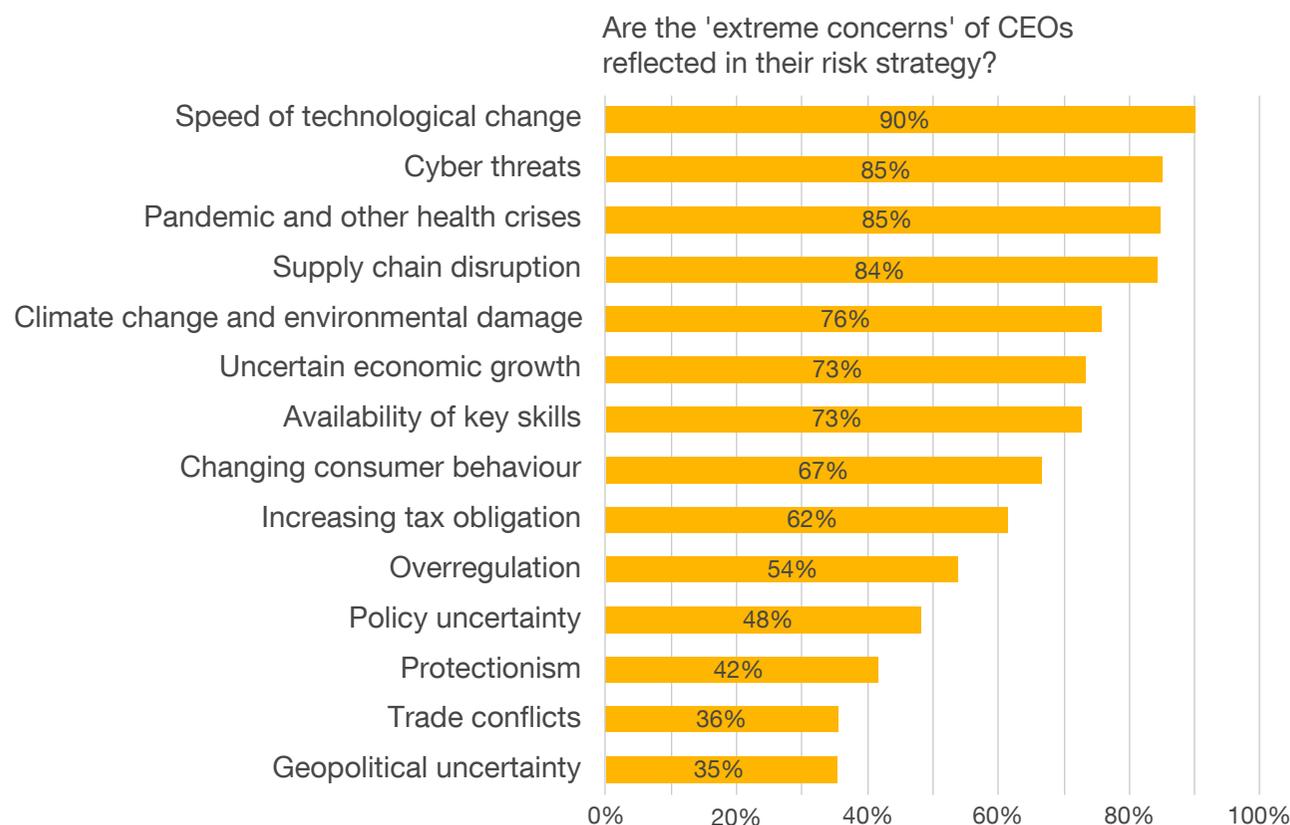
In these results, we see a trend that we have seen for several years in the CEO Survey: CEOs are uncertain about global developments over which they have no or less control, but which do have the potential to significantly affect the prospects of their own company.

Which from the following list of potential business, economic, policy, social and environmental threats to your organisation's growth prospects are you extremely concerned about?



# We see the concerns of CEOs partly reflected in their risk strategy

Here we have combined the results of two questions, namely, what CEOs are concerned about and what aspects they have explicitly factored into their risk management strategy. We see that CEOs' major concerns about cybersecurity also have a prominent role in risk management. Other major concerns, such as the spread of misinformation or policy uncertainty are not, or less, reflected in their risk management. From this we could draw the conclusion that CEOs find it more difficult to address these concerns in their risk management.



# As a result of COVID-19, CEOs are shifting focus in their risk management

This graph shows that a large part of CEOs are shifting focus in their risk management, due to COVID-19.

They are preparing among other things for so called 'Black Swans', events that are unlikely to occur, but that have a high impact on the business.

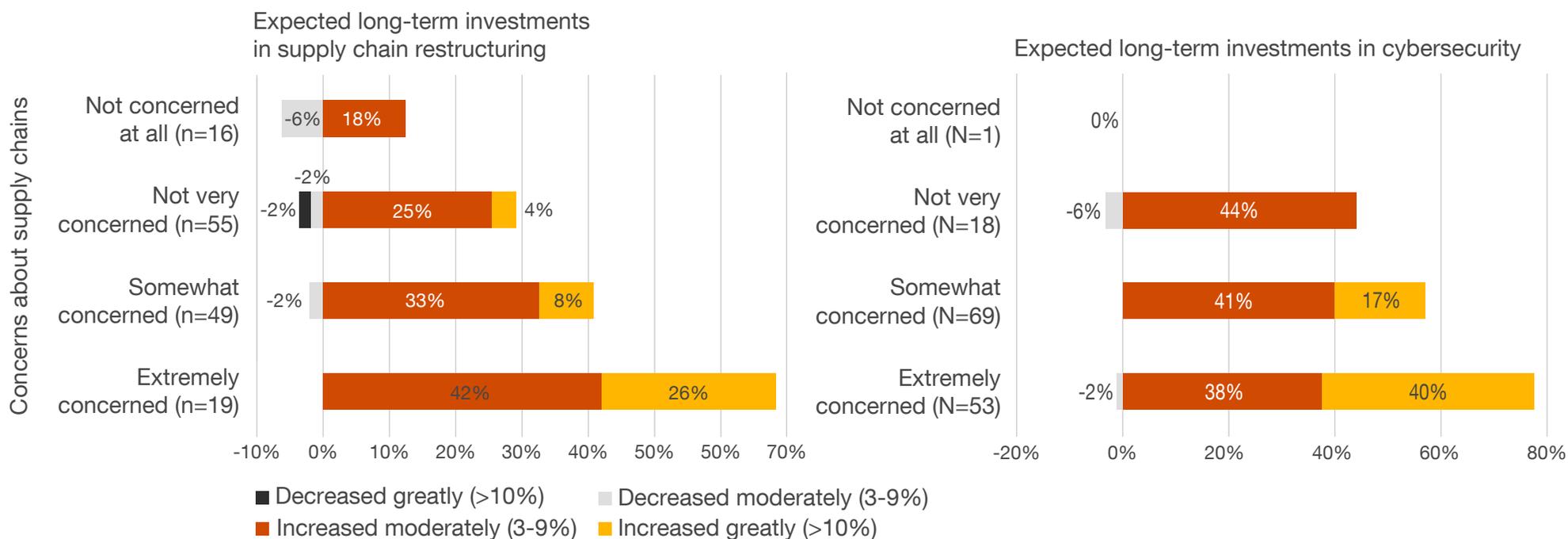
A significant percentage of CEOs aims to focus more on digitising the risk management function. Automation, advanced analytics and quantitative modelling will enable more predictive, preventive and proactive risk management.

With respect to your organisation's approach to risk management, to what extent are you increasing your focus in the following areas as a result of the COVID-19 crisis? (large extent/ significantly)



# There is also a relation between concerns and the amount of investments

CEOs who are extremely concerned about cyber threats are also the ones investing most in cyber security. The same applies to CEOs investing heavily in the supply chain.

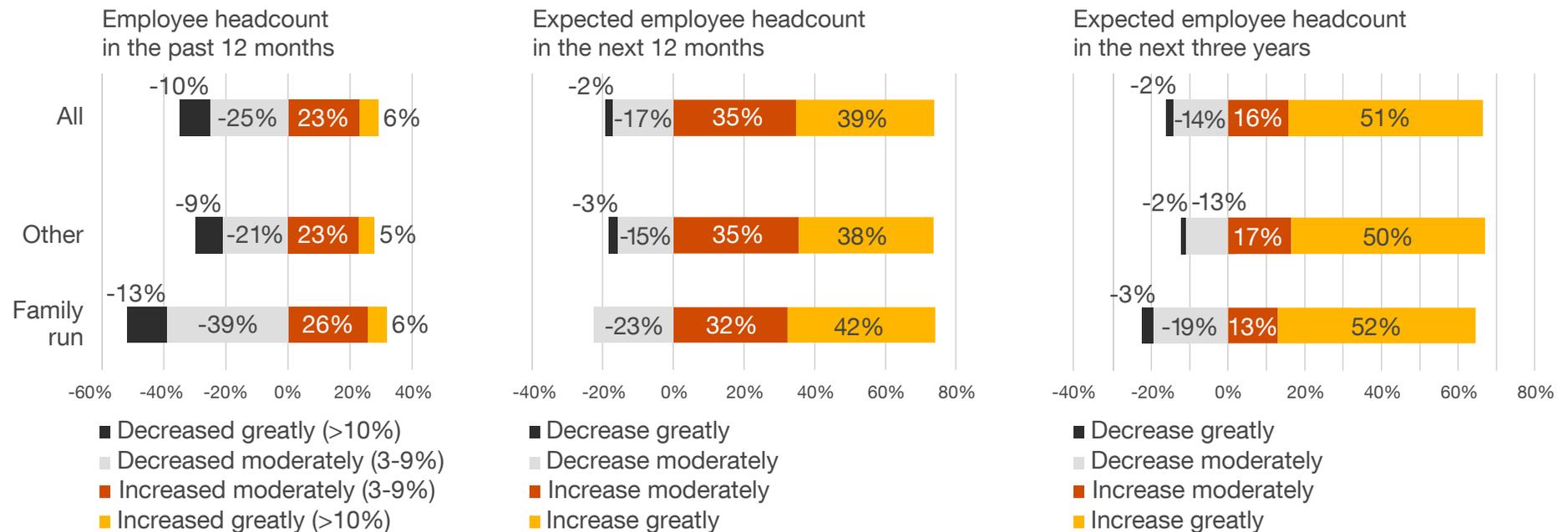


# Headcount and Human Resources



# CEOs expect steady employment improvement

The optimistic economic outlook of CEOs is also reflected in their expectations about the size of their workforce. A third of CEOs have had to reduce their headcount in the past year. If we look at family businesses that percentage is even higher. CEOs' hiring expectations suggest however a steady improvement in employment.



# COVID-19 has emphasised the ‘soft’ aspects of HR policies

COVID-19 has had a major impact on workforce related aspects of organisations – from adapting offices and other workspaces to the one-and-a-half-meter society, to continuous efforts to engage employees who, in many cases, worked from home.

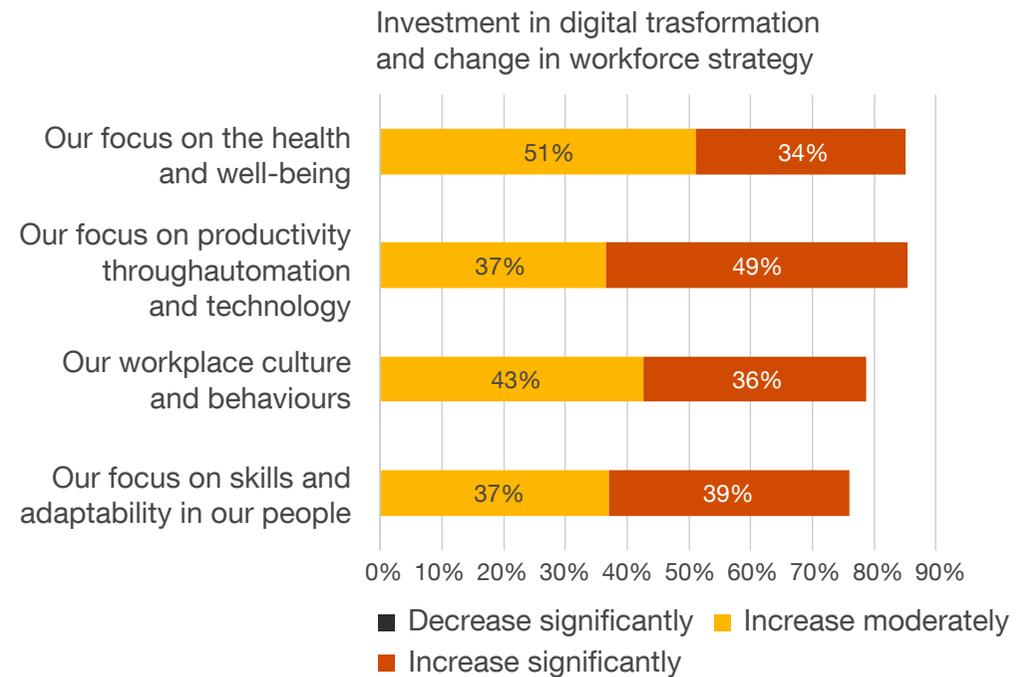
The results of the CEO Survey 2021 show how important CEOs consider the so called soft aspects of their organisation’s HR policy. When asked what they would like to change in their HR policies, improving digital skills and increasing productivity through the use of technology and automation traditionally score high. However, this year respondents consider a focus on company culture and behaviours even more important.

Which aspects of your workforce strategy are you changing, if any, to make the greatest impact on your organisation’s competitiveness?



# Relation between HR focus and investments

CEOs who indicated that they are going to invest in digital transformation, in leadership and in talent development are translating these investments into their HR strategy.

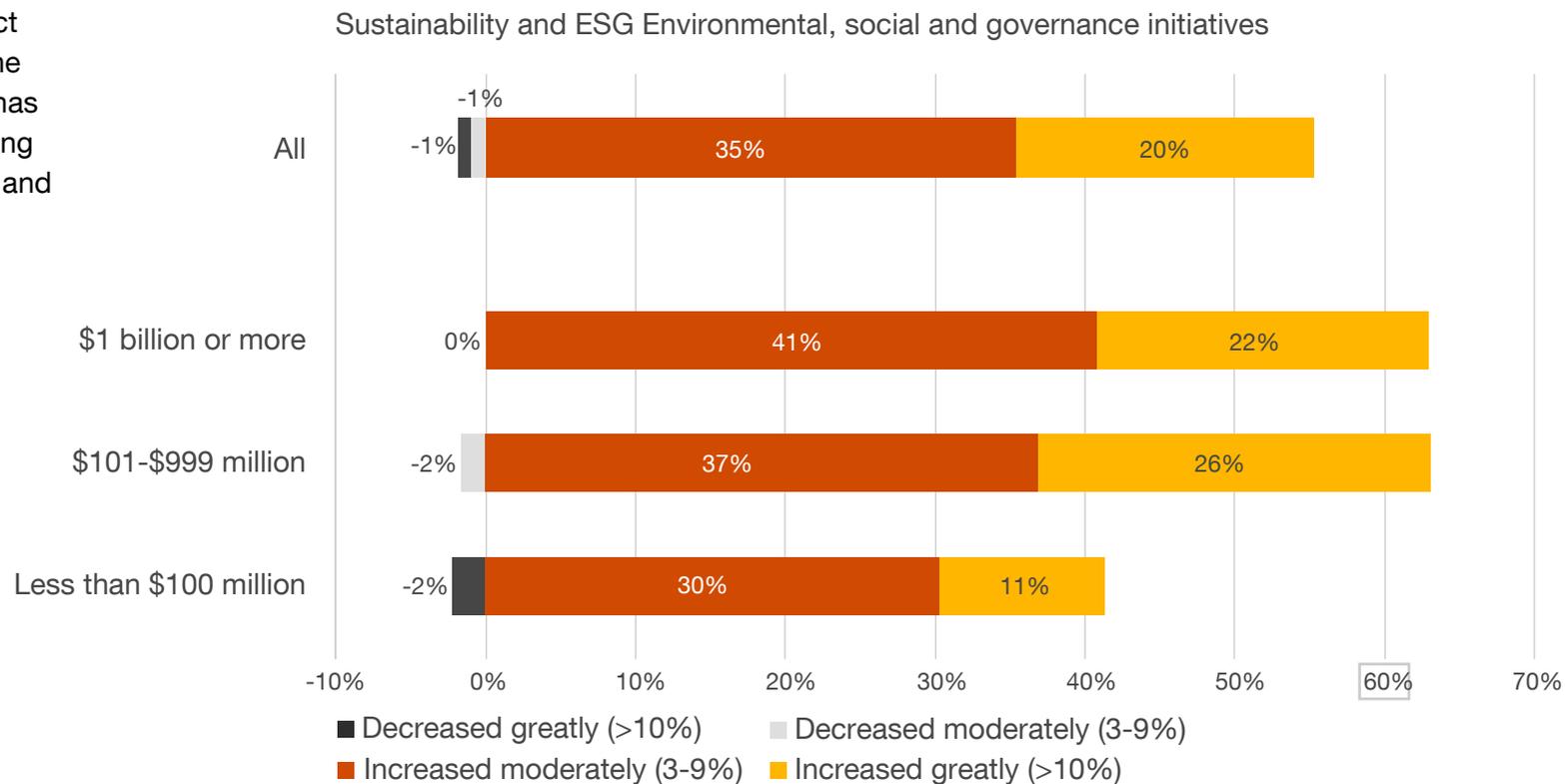


# Sustainability



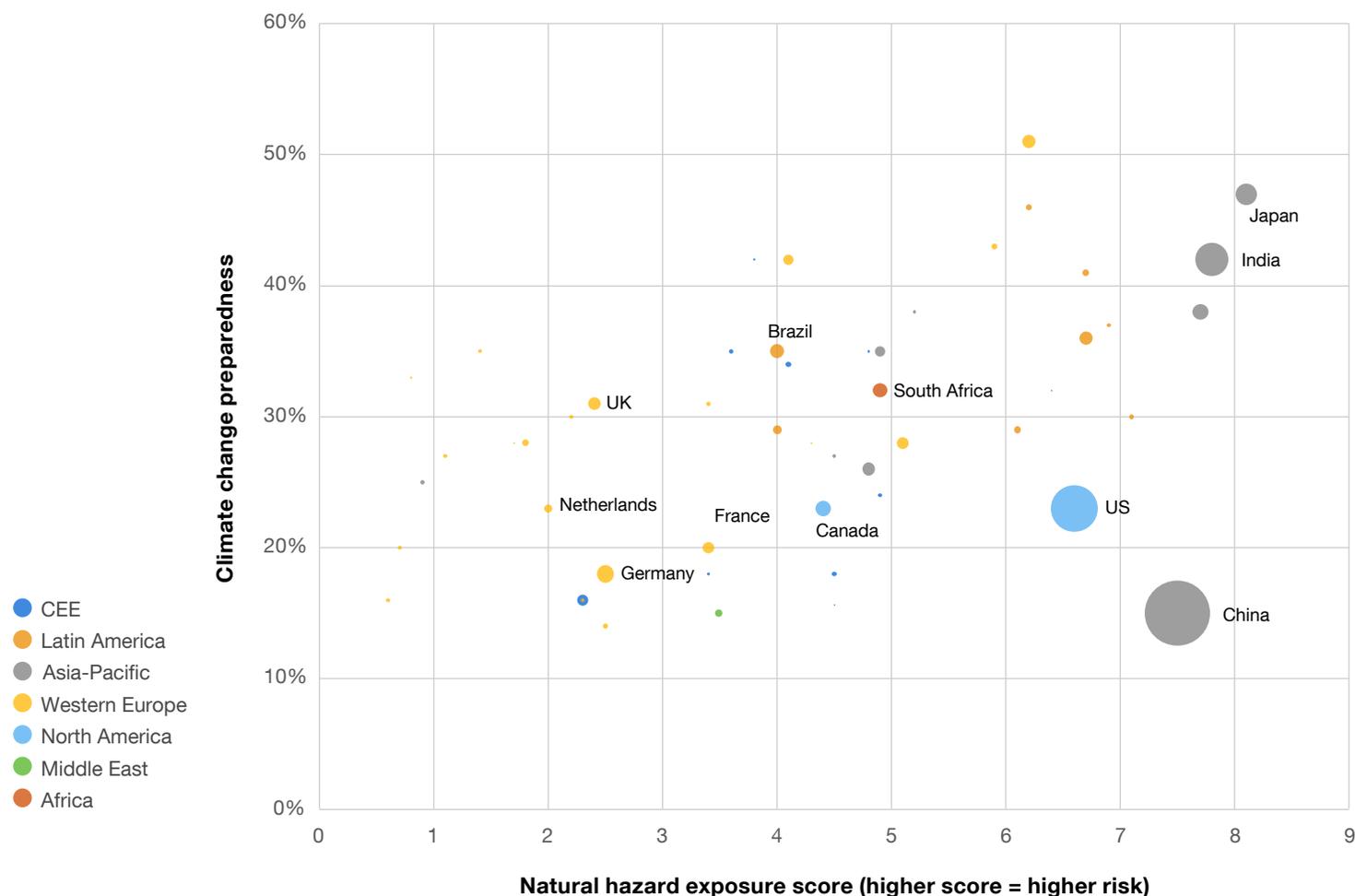
# Half of the CEOs wants to invest more in ESG initiatives

Half of Dutch CEOs indicate that they will invest more in environment, social or governance (ESG) initiatives in the coming years. The economic impact of Covid has not pushed ESG off the executive agenda, but the subject has not risen much either. What is striking is the difference between the large and somewhat smaller companies.



# The link between a country's exposure to natural hazards and the degree of its CEO's concern

When we take the global view, we see that there is often a weak link between the degree to which countries are exposed to natural hazards and the degree of concern about climate change of its CEOs. The Netherlands is somewhere in the middle.



# A clear wish for more measuring and reporting on environmental impact and innovation

For years, companies have indicated that they are increasingly taking into account the needs and expectations of a wide range of stakeholders when defining and implementing their strategy. This means that they also want to be accountable to those stakeholders. We see clearly that Dutch CEOs want to measure and report more on their environmental impact, as well as on innovation. They see less need to measure and report more on financial information.

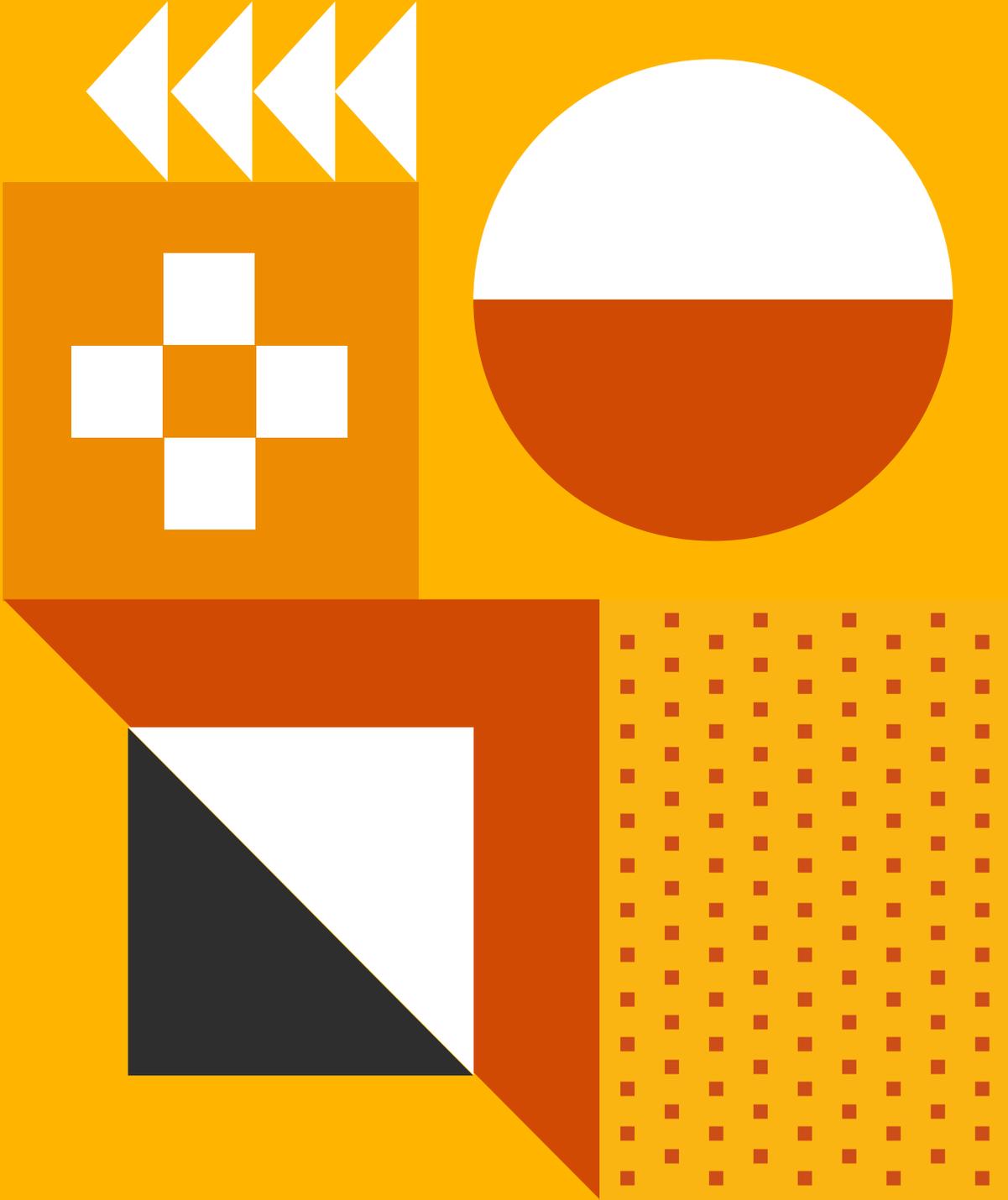
In which of the following key areas of impact and value do you believe your organisation should be doing more to measure?



In which of the following key areas of impact and value do you believe your organisation should be doing more to report?



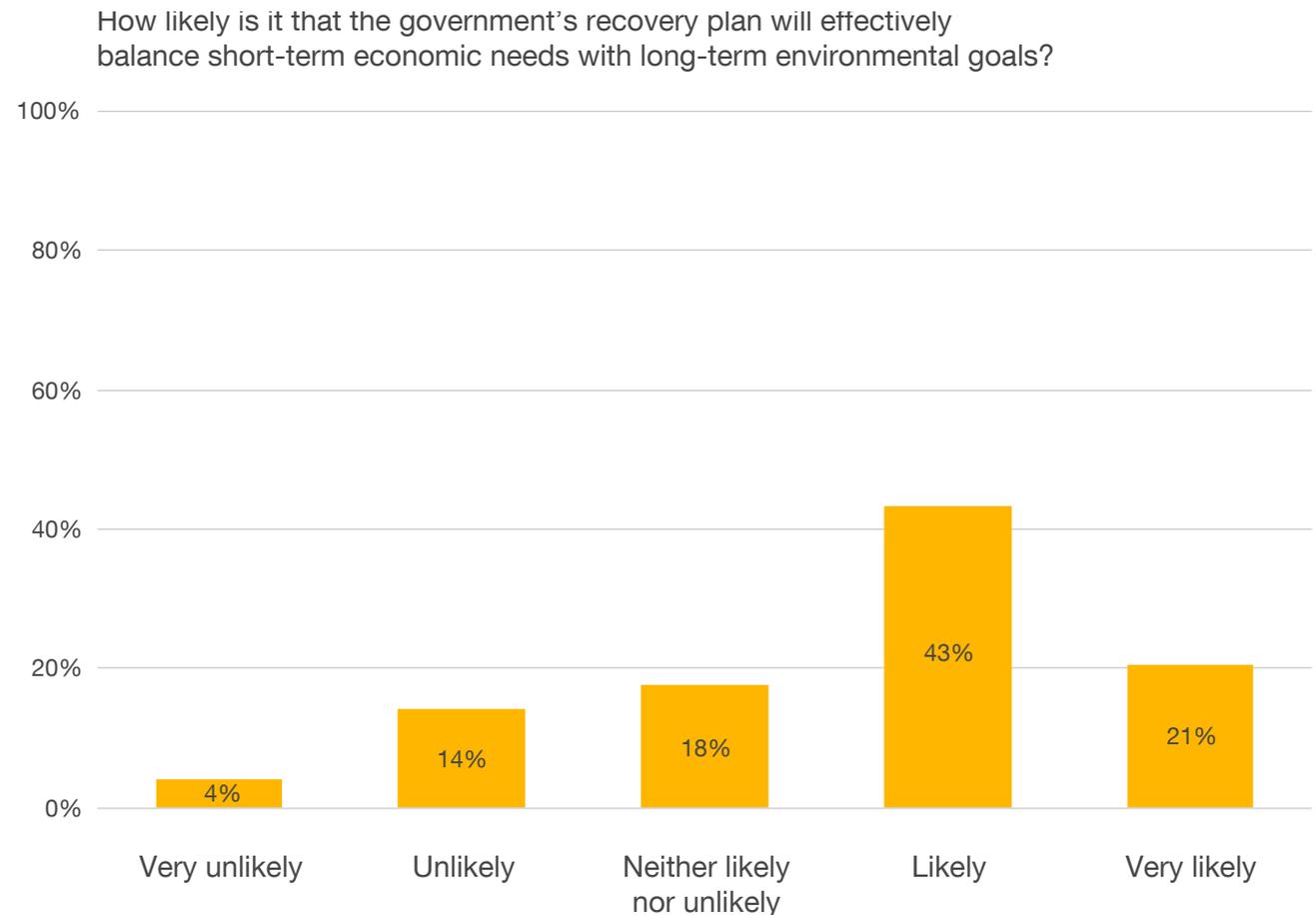
# CEOs and Government



# Half of the CEOs think that the tax burden will increase as a consequence of the rising governments debt during the COVID-19 crisis

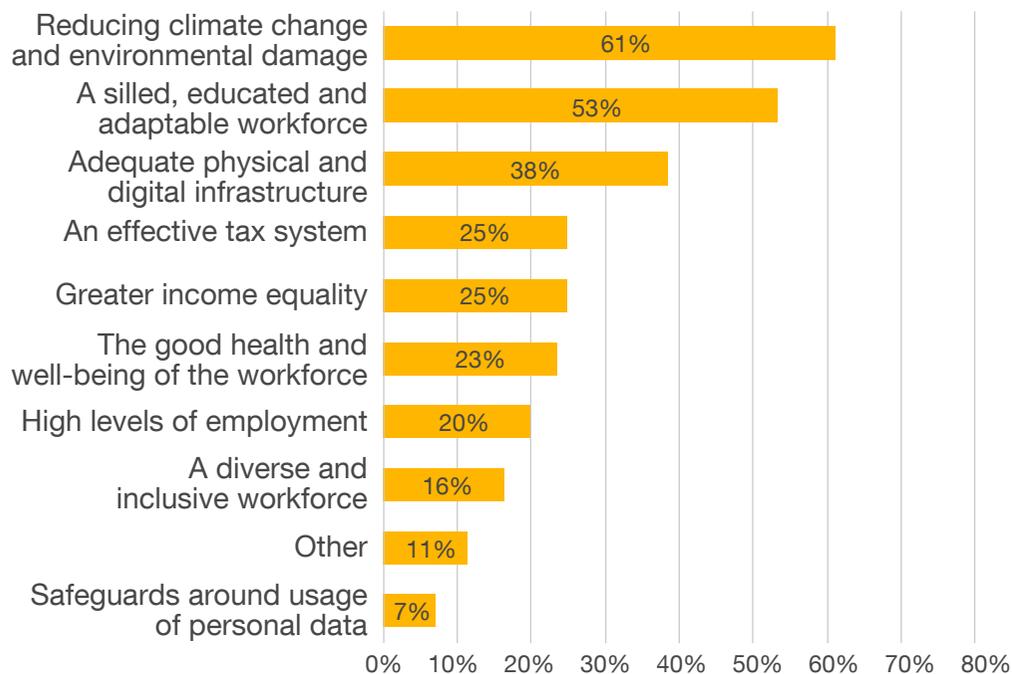


# More than half of the CEOs think the government is committed to a 'green' recovery

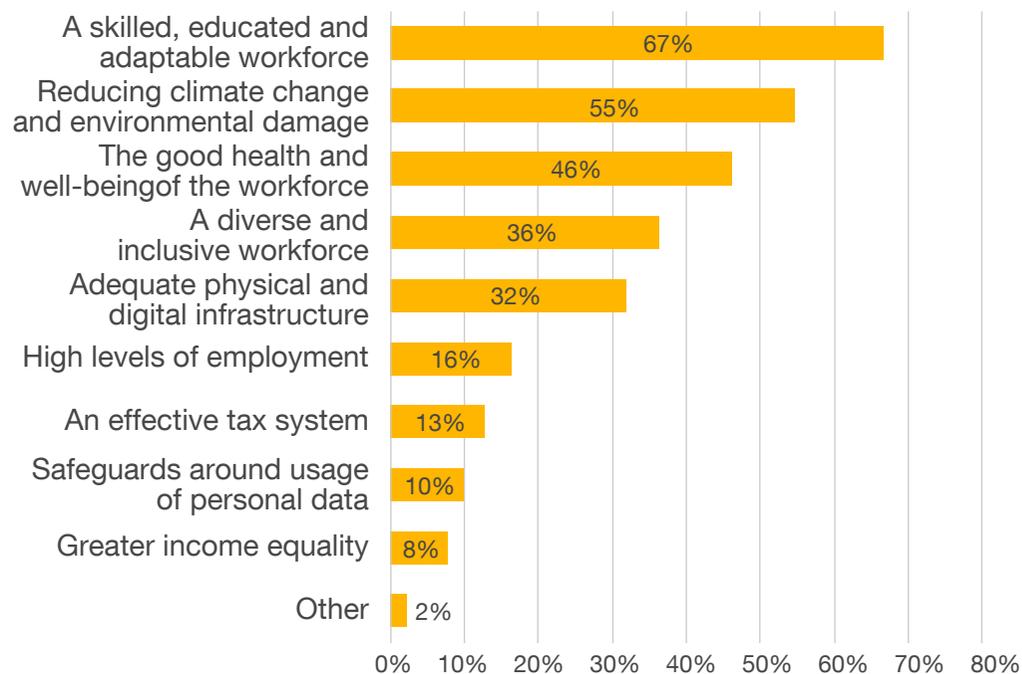


# CEOs have priorities for the government but also indicate that they feel a social responsibility themselves to contribute to solving important societal issues

Which three of these outcomes do you think should be government priorities in the country/territory in which you are based?



Which three of these outcomes do you think should be priorities for business to help deliver in the country/territory in which you are based?



# Contact



**Ad van Gils**

Chair of the Board of Management  
PwC Netherlands  
ad.van.gils@pwc.com



**Jan Willem Velthuisen**

Chief Economist  
PwC Netherlands  
jan.willem.velthuisen@pwc.com



© 2021 PricewaterhouseCoopers B.V. (KvK 34180289). All rights reserved. PwC refers to the PwC network and/or one or more of its member firms, each of which is a separate legal entity. Please see [www.pwc.com/structure](http://www.pwc.com/structure) for further details.