



Sustainability Professionals in Sport Survey 2023



Once upon a time,
finding a sustainability professional
working in sport was a rare as hitting
a hole-in-one. But today the landscape
is changing.

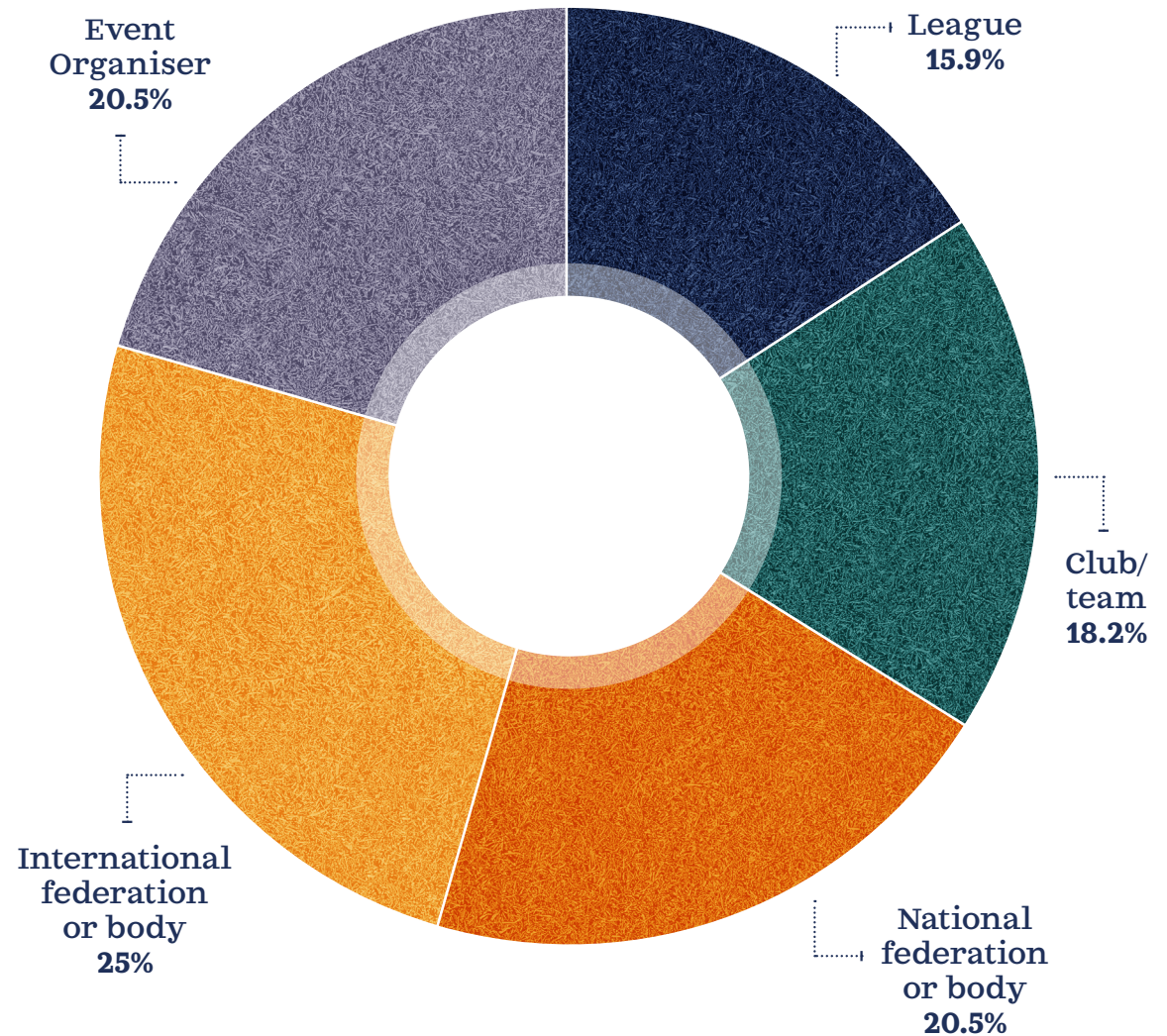
Although professionals with an environmental background in sport are still few and far between, the tides are turning. The industry is witnessing a gradual influx of passionate and qualified individuals who are filling the gap, bringing their expertise, insights and unique perspectives. As the spectre of climate change and other environmental risks loom over the sports sector, these professionals are answering the call, ready to make a difference.

In this report, the first Sustainability Professionals in Sport Survey, Touchline Earth and The Sustainability Report have gathered the views and insights of 44 sustainability professionals who are actively shaping the future of the sports industry. Our goal is to assess the industry's trajectory – through their eyes – and shed light on how they feel they are perceived by colleagues in leadership roles and traditional sporting positions.

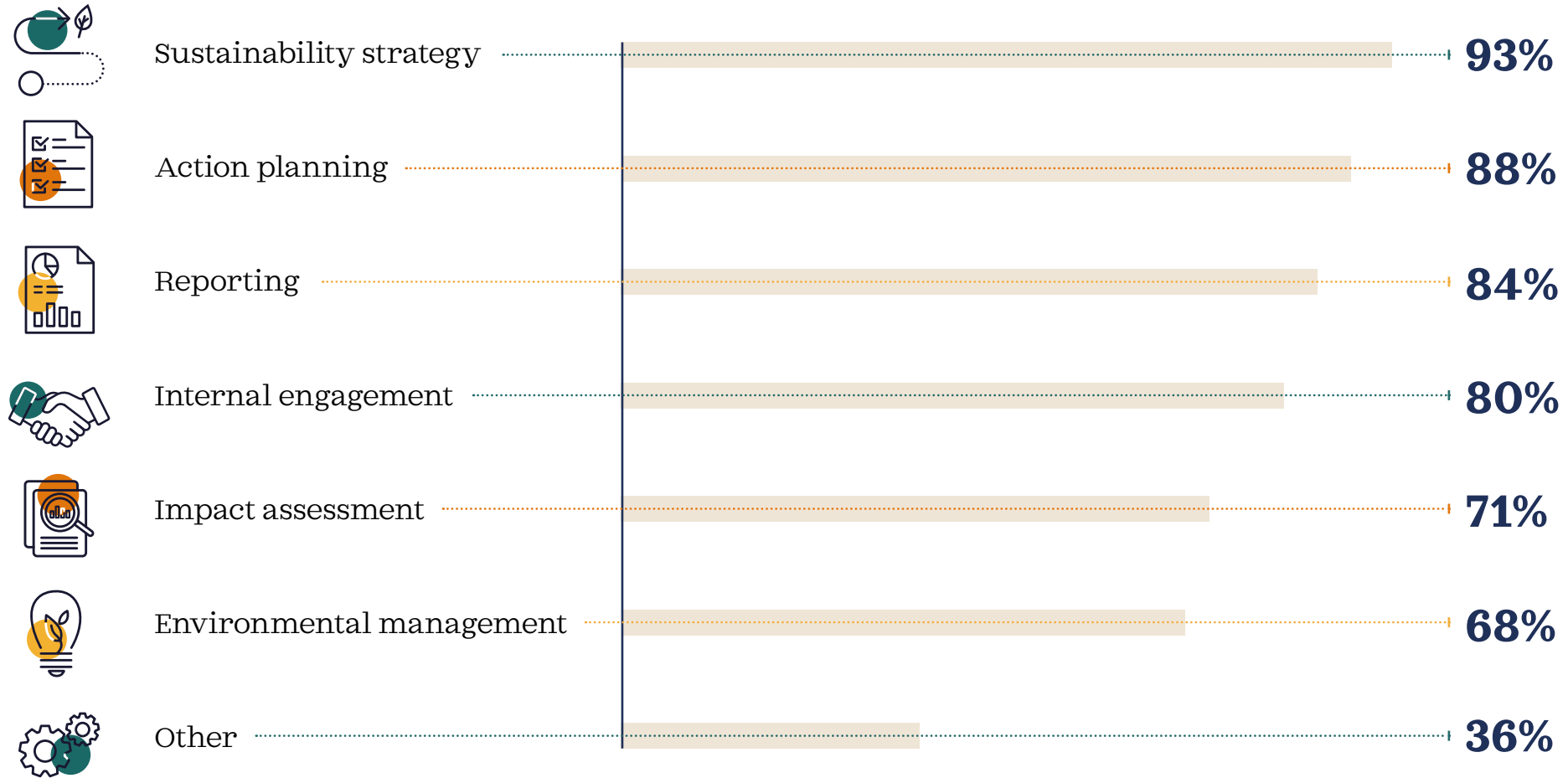
To ensure confidentiality and freedom of expression for each professional, we have maintained their anonymity throughout the survey. Although our sample size consists of a relatively small number of individuals, it mirrors the small but growing number of people occupying sustainability roles working within sports properties.

Our respondents were split fairly evenly into different types of sports organisation, with 11 (25%) working for international federations or bodies, 9 (20.5%) having roles with event organisers, a further 9 (20.5%) with national federations or bodies, 8 (18%) employed by clubs or teams and 7 (16%) working for a league.

What type of sports organisation do you work for?



When it comes to their day-to-day work, the respondents identified the following roles as part of their remit:



What sustainability professionals told us



46%
said that sustainability was a 'core strategic priority' in their sports organisation



64%
have more than two colleagues supporting them in sustainability-specific roles



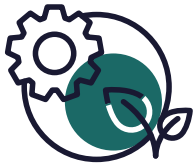
50%
felt they had a better than average level of support from leadership for their work



48%
feel the most progress they will make in 2023 will be around climate action



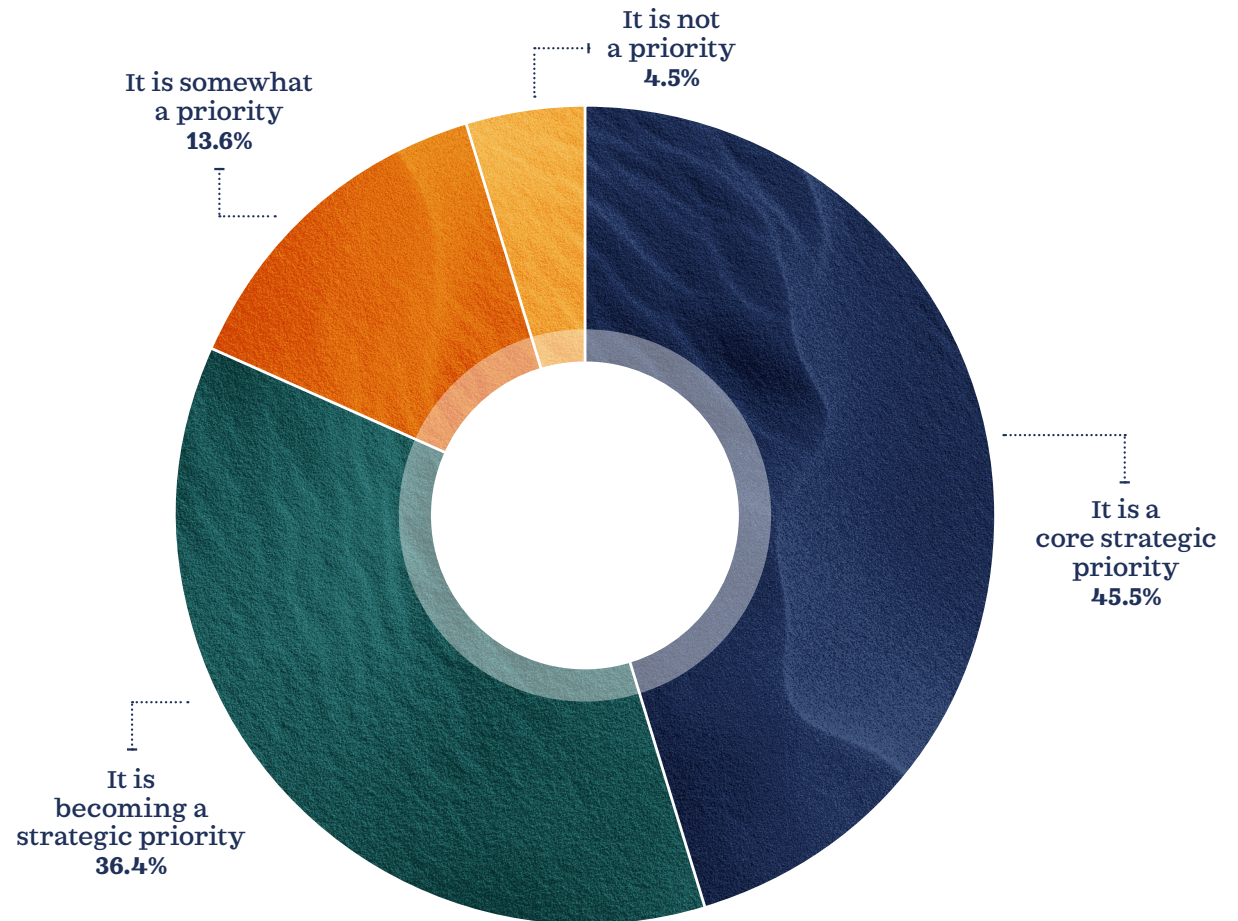
61%
have budgets of more than \$50,000 for sustainability work



How integrated is sustainability in sport?

Overall, 20 (45%) of the respondents characterised sustainability as a 'core strategic priority' within their organisation, while 16 (36%) and 6 (14%) said it was 'becoming a strategic priority' and 'somewhat a strategic priority' respectively. Only 2 (5%) believe that sustainability is 'not a priority' within their organisations.

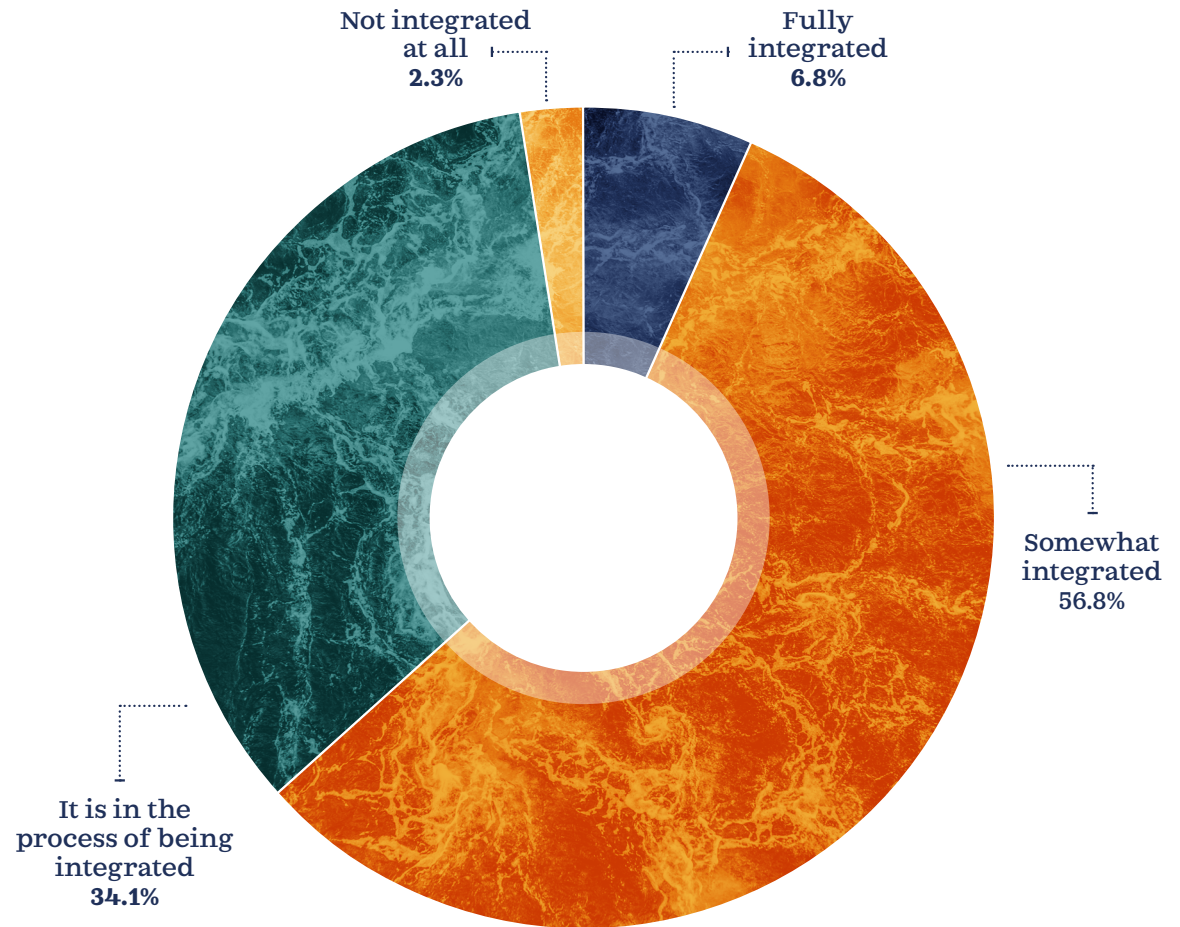
To what extent do you feel sustainability is strategic priority for your organisation?



In general, event organisers and clubs or teams perceived sustainability as a core priority more than international or national federations. This carried over when respondents were asked ‘to what extent do you feel sustainability is integrated into your company culture?’

Just over half of the sustainability professionals surveyed (25) ventured that sustainability was ‘somewhat integrated’, with 15 (34%) suggesting that it was ‘in the process of being integrated’. Three respondents said it was ‘fully integrated’ compared to the one professional claiming that ‘it wasn’t integrated at all’ in their organisation.

To what extent do you feel sustainability is integrated into your company culture?





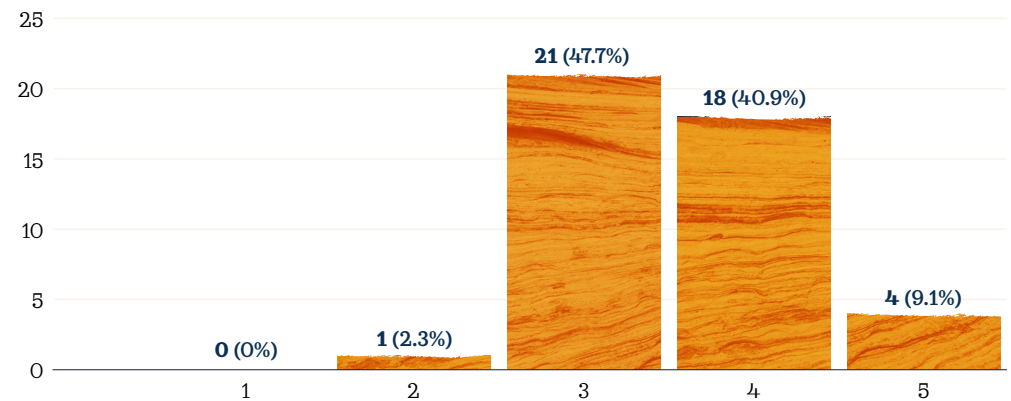
Sustainability professionals in sport: Supported and valued?

The sustainability professionals were surveyed to assess the level of value they perceive for their work within their respective organisations, rated on a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 indicating 'fundamental to organisational success' and 1 indicating 'not valued at all'.

Around 41% (18) of respondents considered their role as a 4 on the scale, suggesting that they feel relatively valued, but not at the level of being indispensable to the organisation. Nearly half of the respondents (21) rated their value at 3, indicating a perception of being somewhere in between vital and not valued at all. This might imply that their role is seen as a 'nice-to-have', but not as critical as other departments or colleagues.

A small number of individuals (4) regarded themselves as fundamental to organisational success, showing a high level of perceived value. Conversely, only one respondent rated their value at 2, indicating a minimal level of appreciation within the organisation.

To what extent do you feel your work is valued within your organisation?



Notably, sustainability professionals working for clubs/teams and event organisers tended to feel more valued, with an average rating of 4 on the scale. On the other hand, professionals associated with national federations/bodies and international federations/bodies exhibited slightly lower levels of optimism, averaging at 3 on the scale.

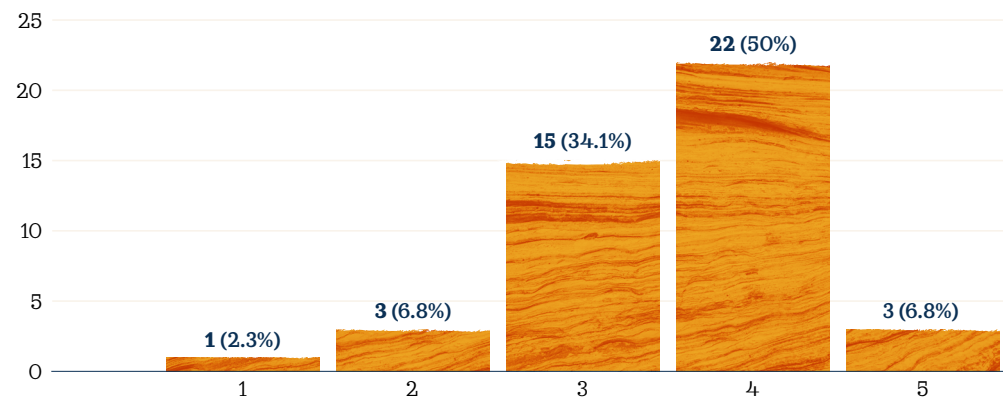
Respondents defined “valued” in relation to their work as sustainability professionals, with common themes emerging. They sought recognition and awareness both internally and externally, with people invested in their efforts. Integration into various aspects of the organisation, including decision-making and strategic planning, was crucial.

Demonstrating a positive impact on communities and the organisation through sustainability initiatives was emphasised. Feeling valued involved showing the link between sustainability and revenue generation, risk management and supporting overall business strategy. Adequate resources, such as budget and human resources, were also key to their sense of being valued.

“ Valued to me is represented by the numbers of people invested and aware of what it is I am doing. The more people involved, the more highly valued I feel.”

Exactly half (22) of respondents rated their level of support from leadership as 4 on the scale, indicating a substantial degree of support. Three professionals each chose 5, reflecting they feel ‘totally supported’, and 2, indicating limited support. Only one individual felt ‘not supported at all’. Additionally, 15 respondents (34%) selected 3, placing their sense of support in the middle range.

To what extent do you feel support from leadership for your work?

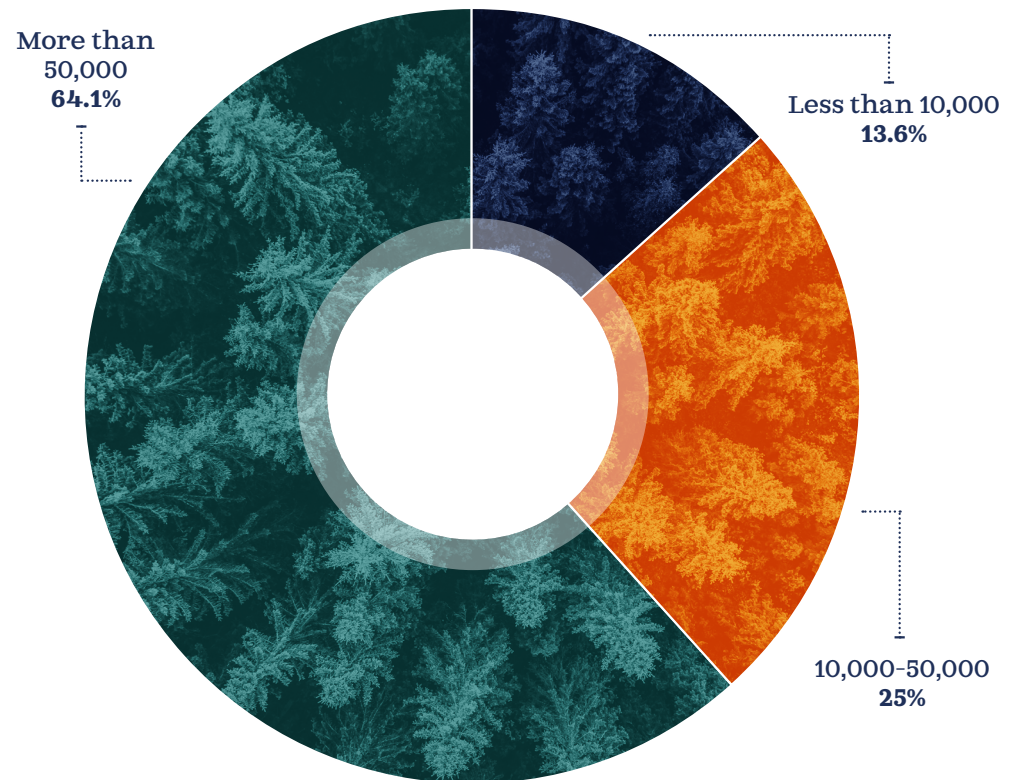


When asked about support from leadership, respondents highlighted the significance of providing financial and human resources, integrating sustainability into decision-making, championing its importance and advocating for sustainability both internally and externally. Trusting professionals to address sustainability challenges independently was also emphasised. When sustainability is prioritised and defended as a core organisational value, professionals feel valued and empowered.

“Verbally saying that ‘we are committed to sustainable business practices’. Support is exemplified by the financial resources that go towards funding sustainability programmes. It means ensuring that my role does not go away once the industry and my organisation face economic headwinds.”

Financial support is a key indicator of leadership’s backing, with 61% of respondents having budgets of \$50,000 or more for sustainability initiatives. A quarter (11) have budgets ranging from \$10,000 to \$50,000, while 14% (6) have budgets of less than \$10,000.

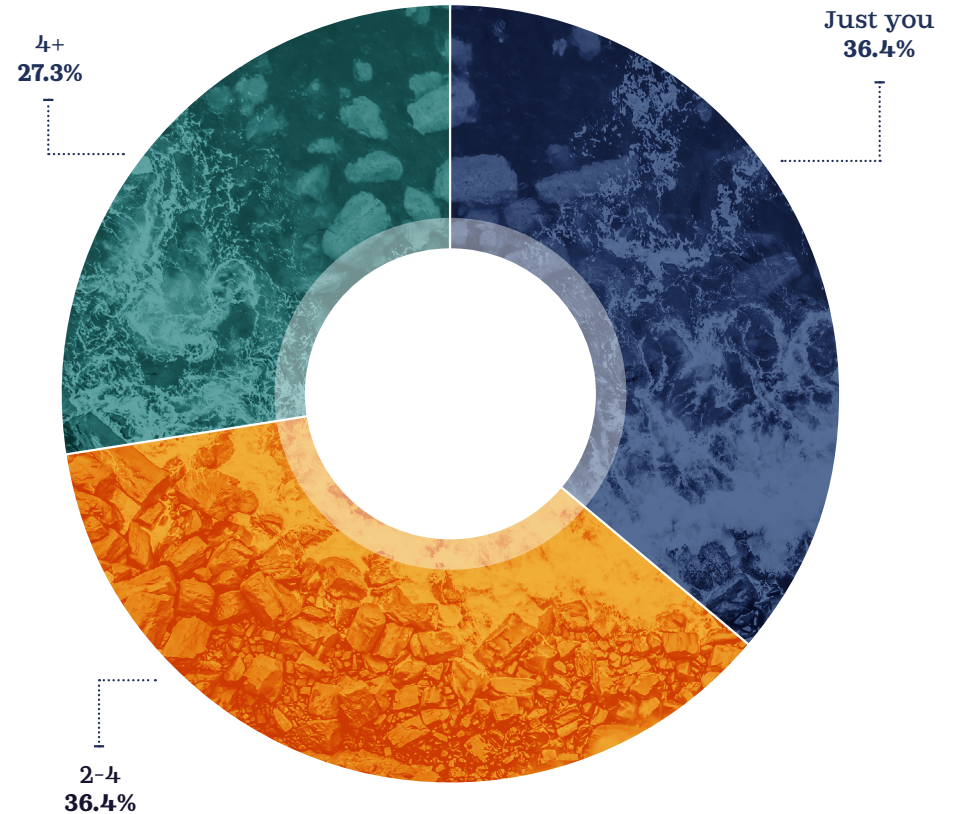
What is your current budget for sustainability work? (\$, €, £)



International federations/bodies and clubs/teams generally have higher sustainability budgets, while national federations/bodies and event organisers show more diverse budget ranges, including smaller budgets.

More than a third of respondents (16) reported being the sole full-time employees dedicated to sustainability. An equal number have two to four colleagues working on sustainability. Just over a quarter (12) have more extensive teams, with more than four colleagues working specifically on sustainability.

How many full time employees are working on sustainability in your organisation?





Future opportunities and challenges

When asked where they felt their organisation would make the most progress in 2023, there was an array of responses. However, almost half (21) felt they would make more progress with climate action and carbon reduction and measurement.

Around 21% (9) felt they would make most progress with general advocacy, while 11% (4) felt they would move forward with transitioning to a more circular model of consumption and waste. Smaller percentages saw most progress in biodiversity protection, stakeholder engagement, improving data collection, moving to clean energy and influencing regulation.

When asked what they were most excited about, respondents expressed growing optimism despite challenges. Integration of sustainability thinking and reducing carbon footprint are key priorities. Collaboration and knowledge exchange are seen as crucial for advancing sustainability and addressing Scope 3 emissions. Data-driven decision-making was emphasised to demonstrate the business value of sustainability efforts.

“The topic of sustainability had a breakthrough year in our industry and is finally being taken seriously and better understood.”



Participants generally articulated their eagerness to formalise sustainability efforts, engage fans through campaigns and develop partnerships and alliances to foster collective sustainability initiatives, extending beyond individual organisations.

The challenges faced by sustainability professionals in the sports industry revolve around limited resources, with many organisations lacking dedicated budgets and sufficient personnel. Delegating sustainability work across the organisation is seen as crucial to avoid overwhelming individuals and ensure progress in embedding sustainable practices.

Communication and awareness presents another hurdle, as sustainability professionals seek better strategies to engage the global community and address climate change denial in certain demographics. Consistent and effective messaging is necessary to drive meaningful change.

Delivering concrete impact and achieving sustainability goals, addressing data collection, behaviour change and supply chain management, as well as sustaining momentum and buy-in, pose challenges for sustainability professionals. Moreover, navigating political and economic influences, securing long-term financial

“ Challenging the status quo. With so many individuals involved, often bad decisions are made because those in decision-making roles aren't thinking about the most sustainable choice. It's difficult to consistently reach everyone, and the nature of events is that there's a short-term workforce who come together at the last minute doing what they've always done.”

investment and unifying environmental priorities are essential steps to advance sustainability efforts.

Smaller organisations and clubs may require support in finding resources for environmental actions. But despite obstacles, sustainability professionals in sport remain committed to driving tangible impact.



The upshot

The sports industry is witnessing an increase in the presence of dedicated sustainability professionals who are actively shaping the future of the sector. Around 46% of respondents in the survey consider sustainability a “core strategic priority” within their organisations, reflecting the growing importance of environmental concerns. However, these professionals face challenges such as limited budgets and resources, including financial and human support, hindering the full potential of their sustainability initiatives.

Despite the obstacles, sustainability professionals in the sports industry remain committed to driving positive change. Financial support is a crucial indicator of leadership’s backing, with 61% of respondents having budgets of \$50,000 or more for sustainability work. Top areas for expected progress in 2023 include climate action, carbon reduction and general advocacy.

Challenges revolve around resource constraints, effective communication strategies and addressing data collection, behaviour change and supply chain management. Nevertheless, these professionals continue to strive for tangible impacts, integrating sustainability into the core fabric of the sports industry.