

# The BOSS In Ireland

## The Business Owners Sentiment Survey

Autumn  
2025



Exploring the big issues for  
Irish business owners

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S&W

# Executive summary

**Irish business owners are planning for 2026 and beyond with a realistic outlook shaped by domestic and international challenges. While concerns persist around pricing pressures, and talent costs and retention, executives steering enterprises with turnover exceeding €5 million exhibit an ambitious and growth-oriented mindset.**

Over nine in ten of the survey cohort are actively pursuing international growth across all major global markets, with one in three targeting expansion within the next twelve months and a further 35-45% planning moves within one to five years.

On the home front, over 90% of businesses are seeking to hire additional staff, with 44% planning recruitment within the coming year. Notably, over eight in ten (83%) respondents are considering business acquisitions, demonstrating continued confidence in organic and inorganic growth strategies.

## The skills challenges

Labour shortages and rising costs dominate the concerns of business owners, with skills gaps presenting operational challenges across all sectors. Smaller enterprises are most concerned about competitive pressures, while concern about competition from AI-enabled new market entrants is particularly evident amongst Ireland's largest companies.

## Government policies

A striking generational divide is evident among business owners when it comes to their perception of government support and policies. Among those aged 25-44, nearly half (43%)<sup>1</sup> believe the government is anti-business, while only 18% of their older counterparts aged 45 and over share this view.

Across the younger business owners (25-44), 43% agree or somewhat agree that government policies are deterring them from expanding their ventures, almost double the sentiment recorded amongst their older peers aged 45 and over (21%).

## Trade upheaval

As US tariffs disrupt supply chains and dampen investment confidence, over seven in ten (72%)<sup>1</sup> business owners are diversifying into new export markets to reduce dependence on the US. Over two-thirds (69%)<sup>1</sup> report that US trade policy uncertainty has prompted

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to delay or reconsider major investment decisions in Ireland.

Younger business leaders demonstrate markedly higher levels of concern and reactive behaviours compared to their older counterparts. The 25-44 cohort appears more willing to consider structural changes, and more pessimistic about navigating current trade headwinds. Those 45 and over demonstrate greater resilience, scepticism about the need for dramatic changes, and confidence in maintaining current operations.

## Housing constraints

The housing crisis is creating a two-tier business environment in Ireland. Younger business owners face acute, immediate pressures affecting recruitment, compensation, expansion and location decisions.

Over seven in ten (72%) of younger business owners strongly or somewhat agree that the housing shortage has influenced their location decision on where to locate new offices or facilities in Ireland, the housing shortage has evolved from a social challenge into a primary economic constraint.

On the visa and work permit systems, there is strong consensus for reform. Just over four in five (81%)<sup>1</sup> business owners support merging visa and work permit

applications into a single system to reduce administrative burden for their business, with a similar proportion (83%)<sup>1</sup> backing AI-powered monitoring to help inform better employment permit policies.

## Funding and succession planning

Half of businesses find funding easy to access, but a scaling squeeze affects mid-sized enterprises seeking growth capital. Eight in ten business owners have at least started thinking about succession planning, though only 40% have detailed plans in place.

## Forward planning

Business owners have a clear-eyed view of the challenges ahead, with price pressures, talent management, supply chain resilience, and cybersecurity all featuring prominently in forward planning. What emerges is a picture of business owners who combine pragmatic awareness of challenges with determined optimism about opportunities.

For policymakers, the message is clear: Targeted policy interventions, particularly around housing, visa processing and infrastructure, would enhance Ireland's competitive position and unlock the full potential of its entrepreneurial community.

<sup>1</sup> 'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined



# Introduction

Finance minister Paschal Donohoe's Budget 2026 statement highlighted Ireland's benign economic outlook, underpinned by strong fundamentals and targeted support for entrepreneurs and businesses.

The domestic economy is performing well, with modified domestic demand projected to grow by 3.3% this year, though easing to 2.3% in 2026. Real incomes are set to continue rising, supported by inflation forecast to remain at around the 2% level.

The Department of Finance expects that goods exports will decline by 5.5% in 2026 as cross-border trade normalises. Services exports are projected to grow by 7%.

Risks are primarily external and tilted to the downside, with a potential deterioration in the international economy posing negative spillover risks for Ireland. Higher sovereign borrowing costs in several jurisdictions also risks a feedback loop between financial sectors and real economies.

Some tentative signs also suggest labour market conditions have softened, with quarterly employment growth slowing to just 0.1% in Q2 2025 and unemployment rising to 4.6% from a low of 4.2% in late 2024. Higher frequency indicators indicate slower employment growth, too.

Wage growth moderated in Q2 to 3.0% annually. This wage growth level is consistent with real earnings increases of 1.3% in Q2, with real earnings remaining positive since the end of 2022.

Consumer spending momentum is projected to continue into 2026, with household incomes benefiting from real wage gains, employment increases and strong household balance sheets. The official view is that consumer spending will increase by 2.3% in 2026, driven entirely by higher real incomes.

Public sector purchases of goods and services are estimated to grow by 3.0% in real terms in 2026. Building and construction



investment remains positive, as the revised National Development Plan ramps up. Overall, the Department of Finance expects modified investment to increase by 1.7% in 2026.

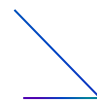
Although Budget 2026 slightly squeezed household incomes, there were several measures designed to reward entrepreneurship and innovation. Research and development receives enhanced support through an increased tax credit rate, alongside a higher first-year payment threshold.

The finance minister also enhanced capital gains tax revised entrepreneur relief, increasing the lifetime limit on qualifying gains from €1m to €1.5m for disposals made from January 2026.

At the same time, however, business owners must contend with price pressures, competition, talent retention difficulties and labour shortages that affect nearly four in ten firms.

The softening labour market and moderating wage growth signal a shifting economic environment, even as consumer spending and public investment are projected to remain positive.

Growth



# Growth

Mid-market and large businesses are implementing strategic expansion plans with urgency, combining international growth ambitions with substantial domestic investment and recruitment.

Year to date in 2025, Ireland's economy has withstood considerable external pressures, maintaining growth across key indicators even as global conditions deteriorate. Consumer behaviour and capital expenditure have both proved surprisingly strong, given the uncertainty surrounding international trade relationships.

Much of this strength stems from positive economic trends established in preceding years, though headwinds are becoming more apparent. Promising developments include the ongoing digital and AI transformation, an increased investment focus within the EU and possibilities for Ireland to enhance its position in reconfiguring international supply networks.

Against this backdrop, entrepreneurs are displaying remarkable ambition and optimism, with an overwhelming majority pursuing aggressive growth strategies across multiple fronts.

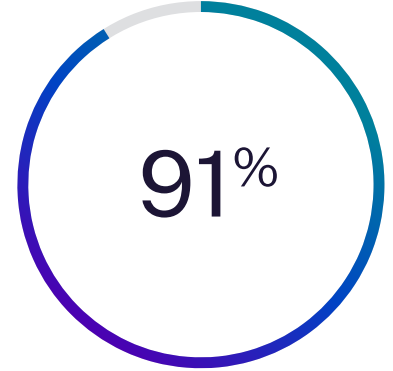
Our survey of 250 Irish business owners with turnover of €5m+ reveals around nine in ten<sup>2</sup> are pursuing international expansion in global markets,<sup>3</sup> seeking investment, hiring staff and restructuring operations. Around one in three are targeting overseas moves within the next twelve months, and another 35-45% envisage expansion within one to five years.

Employment growth is a key indicator of business optimism, and over nine in ten (91%) are looking to hire more staff at some point, and 44% looking to achieve this within the next year. The appetite for business acquisitions is strong, with 83%<sup>2</sup> of the survey cohort considering acquiring other companies.

Nearly nine in ten (88%) businesses are seeking to secure investment, while a similar proportion (90%) are exploring debt financing options to fund growth and merger and acquisition activities.

Profitability remains a central concern, and enthusiasm for outsourcing internal functions such as payroll and tax is evident among 84% of businesses. Tax efficiency remains important too, with 86% of survey respondents looking to use R&D tax reliefs.

The scale of ambition revealed in the survey suggests Ireland may be entering a period of business-led economic growth driven by international expansion.



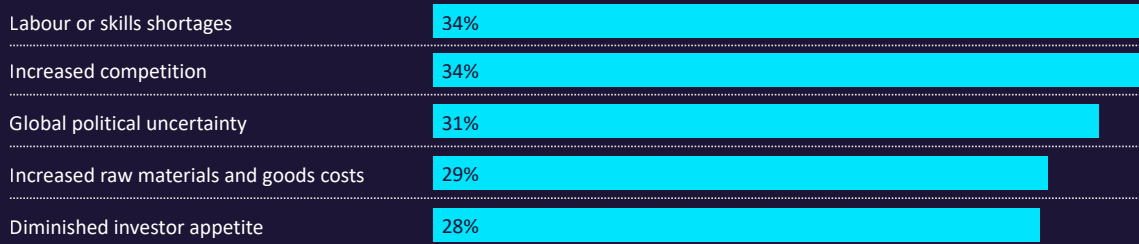
**Over 90% of businesses are actively pursuing or formulating international expansion and are looking to hire more staff.**

<sup>2</sup> 'Looking to achieve in under a year', 'Looking to achieve within one to five years', and 'Looking to achieve in over five years' responses combined

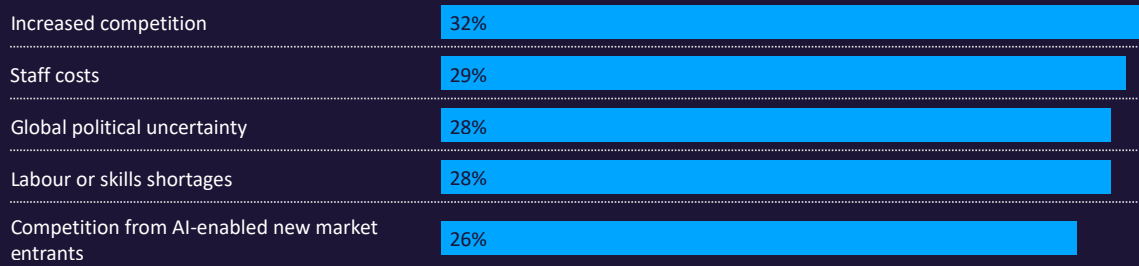
<sup>3</sup> Markets include the UK, Europe, US, Asia-Pacific, and/ or the Middle East

# Challenges

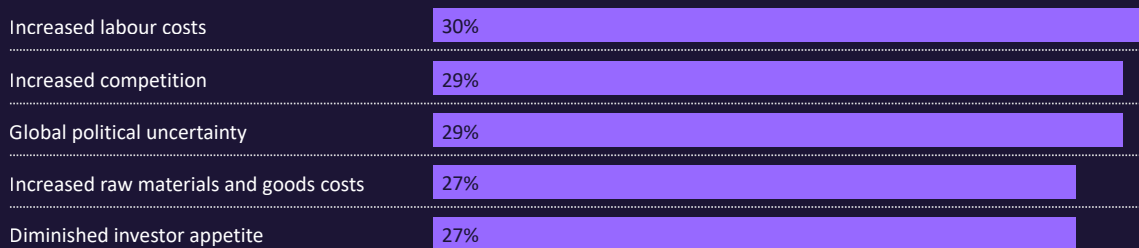
## Main impacts in the past six months



## Main barriers to growth



## Main potential impacts



**Labour shortages and rising costs dominate the concerns of business owners, with skills gaps affecting one in three companies and competitive pressures mounting across all sectors.**

Ireland's labour market continues to experience wage pressures, driven by tight employment conditions and wage increases. [According to Ibec](#), total hourly labour costs, which include wages, taxes and social insurance, have risen by 3.4% in 2025, matching the EU average. Over the past decade, labour costs in Ireland have increased by 40%, one of the fastest rates among high-income EU economies.

Looking ahead, most employers anticipate continued pay rises, with 80% of firms surveyed by Ibec

expecting to raise pay over the next year by an average of 3.1%.

At the forefront of business worries are labour and skills shortages, affecting one in three businesses (34%) in the last six months. Matching labour shortages in terms of prevalence, increased competition is impacting a third of businesses. Similarly, a similar proportion report being affected by global tariff developments.

Nearly three in ten business owners surveyed said rising staff

costs (28%), cyber-attacks or data breaches (28%) and rising energy and fuel prices (28%) have impacted their business in the past six months. Around a quarter of respondents also mentioned reduced customer demand (24%) and internal threats or fraud (24%) as issues they have had to grapple with over the past six months.

These issues are also perceived as barriers to growth. Around a three in ten survey respondents cited staff costs (29%) and labour or skills shortage (28%) as preventing them from scaling their operations effectively. For around one in four businesses, obstacles to their growth ambitions include cross-border trading impediments (24%), AI-enabled new market entrants (26%), sourcing funding (26%) and lack of government support (25%).

Looking ahead, business owners do not expect their primary worries to ameliorate in the short term. Rising labour costs (30%) top the list of pressing concerns. Closely following these concerns are worries about increased taxation and funding

gaps (29%). Taxation unease is most pronounced among larger enterprises (with turnover of €100m and over).

These larger businesses were also most likely to be worried by AI-enabled new market entrants is evident among Ireland's largest companies, with 37% of those with turnover in excess of €100m concerned about its potential impact compared with 26% overall.





# Trade

**As US tariffs disrupt supply chains and dampen investment confidence, 72%<sup>1</sup> of business owners are diversifying into new export markets to reduce dependence on the US, with 80%<sup>1</sup> urging the government to increase spending to cushion the economic blow.**

The new trade framework established between the European Union and the United States in July 2025 provides some clarity for businesses, though ambiguity remains regarding many export categories.

Most Irish trade, particularly medical devices and engineering goods, falls under a standard tariff arrangement. According to Ibec, products under a specific US government investigation temporarily remain exempt from tariffs, with any future charges capped at the flat rate.

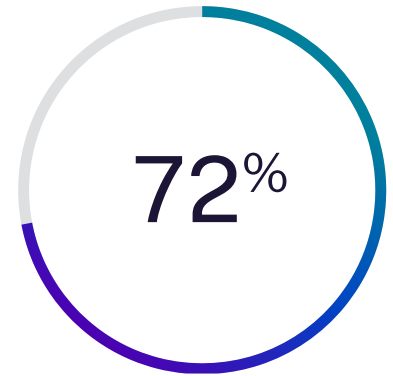
The majority of Ireland's exports to America – from the pharmaceutical and semiconductor industries – currently enjoy preferential treatment under existing rules. After the investigation concludes, in the worst possible outcome, extra tariffs could be imposed on imports from Ireland.

As a result of the altered trade

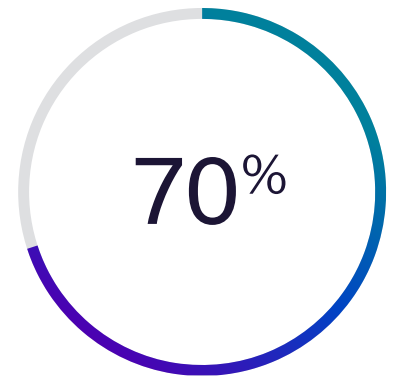
environment, just under three in four (72%)<sup>1</sup> business owners are seeking alternative export markets to reduce dependence on the US. The altered trade regime with the US is having tangible consequences for business investment within Ireland too. Over two thirds (69%) of business owners agree or strongly agree that US tariffs have prompted them to delay or reconsider major investment decisions in Ireland.

When asked whether they are considering relocating some operations outside Ireland, due to potential US trade restrictions, opinion is almost evenly split. While 46% are evaluating doing so, a nearly identical proportion are not (45%)<sup>4</sup>.

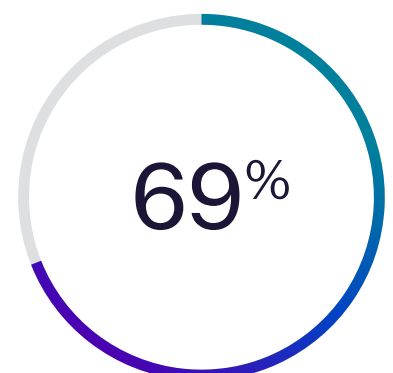
In relation to export upheaval and long-term forecasting, almost half the survey respondents (47%)<sup>1</sup> expressed the view that the current trade environment makes it difficult for their company to develop long-term business strategies. However,



**of business owners are actively seeking alternative export markets to reduce US dependence.**



**say their domestic sales have been affected by trade-related economic uncertainty.**

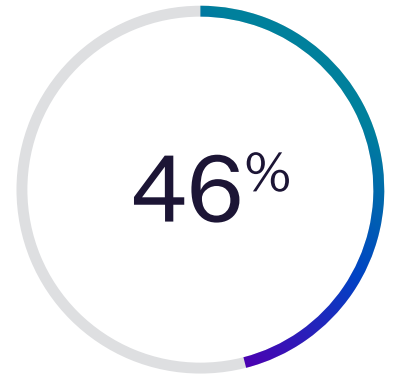


**are delaying or reconsidering major investment decisions in Ireland.**

an almost equal proportion (46%)<sup>4</sup> state the issue is not impacting investment decisions.

Almost half of business owners surveyed (49%) report that their company's supply chain has been disrupted by US tariffs. A majority of business owners (70%) also report that their company's domestic sales have been affected by broader economic worries related to trade tensions.

In response to these complications, four out of five (80%) business owners agree somewhat or strongly that the government should increase spending to offset the negative effects of tariffs. Despite the strains outlined, three out of four survey respondents said their company is optimistic about maintaining current employment levels.



**are evaluating relocating some operations outside Ireland due to potential US trade restrictions.**

<sup>1</sup> 'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined

<sup>4</sup> 'Strongly disagree' and 'Somewhat disagree' responses combined

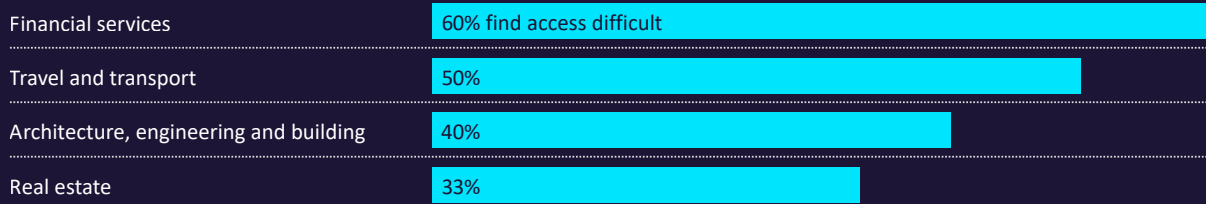




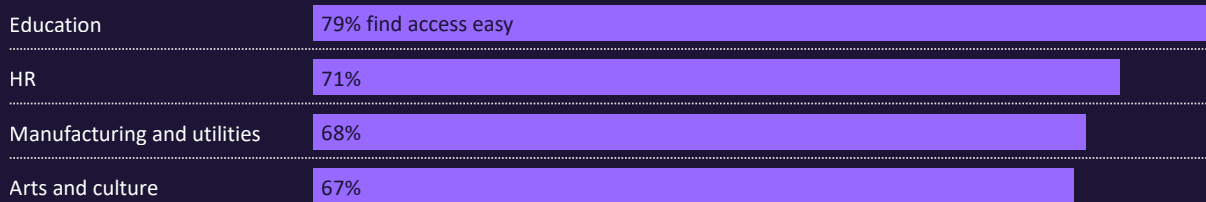
# Funding

## Access to finance:

### Difficult access



### Easiest access



**Over half (53%)<sup>5</sup> of businesses find funding easy to access, but a "scaling squeeze" affects mid-sized enterprises.**

A recent government report identified a €1.1 billion financing gap for scaling firms in Ireland over the next three to five years, particularly for equity in the €5-10m range. The study focused on equity finance, including venture capital and private equity, for innovative firms in late-stage growth phases seeking deals between €2m and €50m.

Demand for equity finance among scaling firms has grown considerably over the past decade, and the expectation is that this trend will continue. However, the gap is most severe for transactions ranging from €5m to €10m, particularly affecting Series A and Series B funding rounds.



Capital-intensive and research-heavy sectors face acute funding hurdles, as do companies requiring long-term investment where product development cycles are extended.

Half of business owners report funding either very easy (12%) or somewhat easy (40%) to access over the past six months. However, nearly three in ten (28%) businesses report difficulties accessing capital, even if the majority of these describe funding as "somewhat difficult" (25%) rather than very difficult (2%) to obtain. A further fifth of respondents (20%) characterise access as neither easy nor difficult.

A "scaling squeeze" affects mid-sized enterprises with turnover of €100m to €499.9m, with half (50%) reporting difficulties accessing capital. More broadly, there are differences in how small companies (€5m to €49.9m turnover) and mid-market companies (€50m or more turnover) experience accessing funding.

Smaller companies face more challenges in securing funding. Just over 30% of small businesses described accessing capital as difficult, compared to 26% of mid-market firms. This difference may

appear modest, but it represents approximately 18% more small companies struggling with funding access relative to their larger peers.

Mid-market companies were much more likely to describe funding as "very easy" to access (15% versus 9%), and smaller companies were more likely to find capital "very difficult" to access (4% versus 1% for mid-market firms).

<sup>5</sup>'Very easy to access capital' and 'Somewhat easy to access capital' responses combined



# Government policy

**A striking, generational divide defines business sentiment, with middle-aged leaders championing government policy while the majority of young business owners believe the coalition government is hostile to business.**

The business community retains high confidence in government policies while at the same time harbouring apprehensions about the coalition government's broader attitude towards business.

Nearly four in five (79%) respondents express faith in the government's strategy for economic growth, with over half (56%) showing strong agreement.

The survey findings reveal that the 35-44 cohort is the most optimistic segment of the business community, with over eight in ten agreeing strongly (55%) or somewhat (26%) that they have confidence in the government's policies to support economic growth.

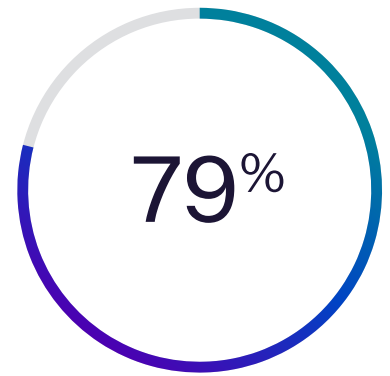
The over 45 age group shows somewhat more measured optimism, however, with just over three-quarters (77%) agreeing.

The data reveals a dramatic contrast in how business owners view the government's stance towards enterprise. Among those aged 25-44, over four in ten (45%)<sup>1</sup> believe the government is anti-business. In stark contrast, only 18%<sup>1</sup> of their older counterparts aged 45 and over share this view.

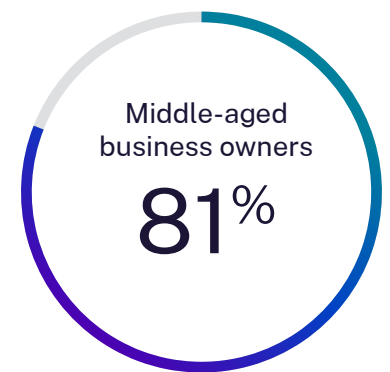
The practical implications of this negative perception become clear when examining business expansion plans. Among business owners aged 25-44, 43% report that government policies are deterring them from

expanding their ventures. This figure is double the 21%<sup>1</sup> recorded among the older cohort, a gap that highlights a generation of business owners feeling constrained by the policy environment.

Only 44% of the younger 25-44 business owners disagree strongly or somewhat that government policies are deterring expansion, compared with 71% of those aged over 44. This suggests that younger business owners are either uncertain about their growth prospects or genuinely inhibited by the current regulatory and fiscal framework.

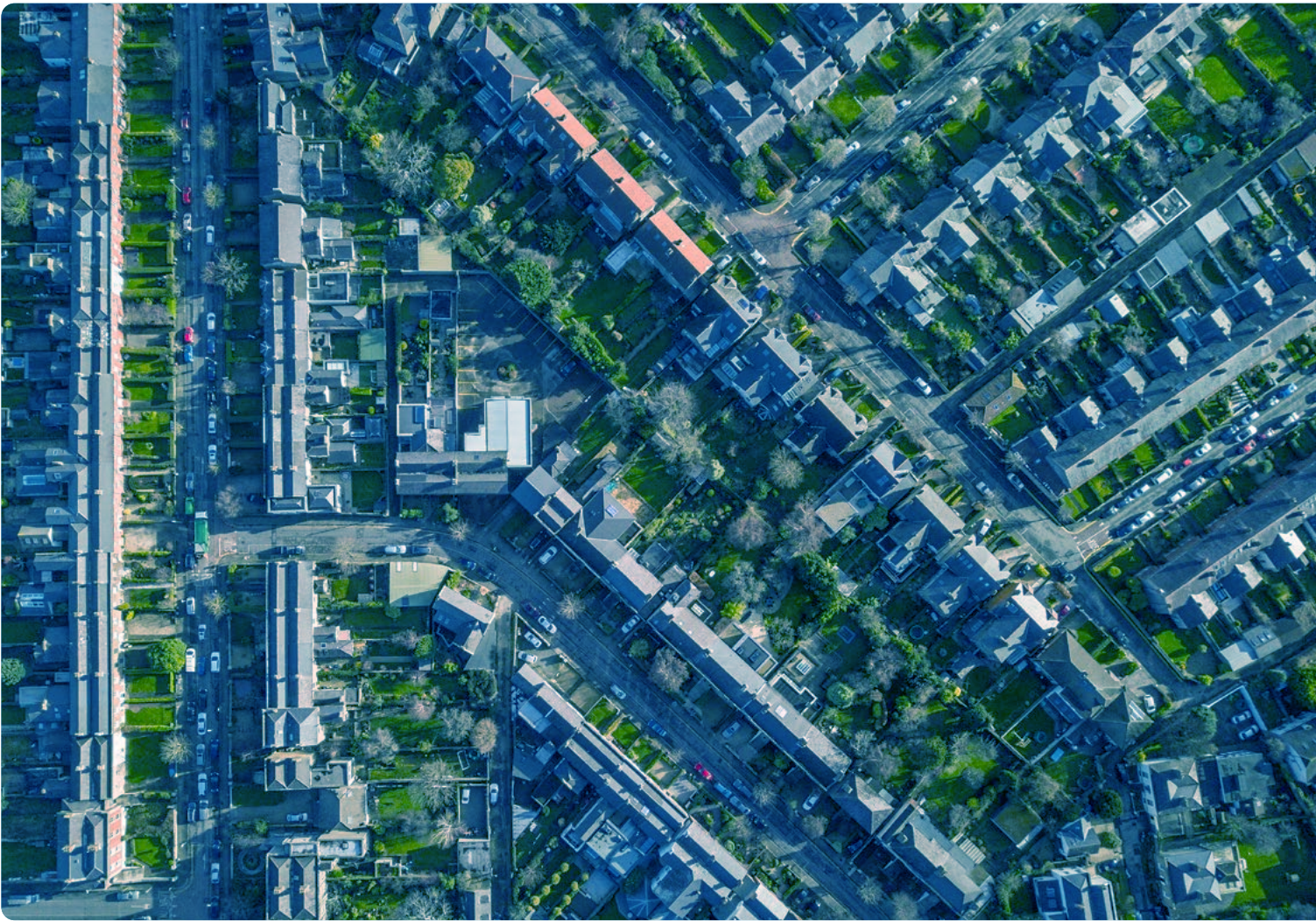


**Nearly eight in ten (79%)<sup>1</sup> of business owners have confidence in the government's economic growth strategy.**



**Middle-aged business owners (35-44) show highest confidence at 81%.<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> 'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined



# Housing

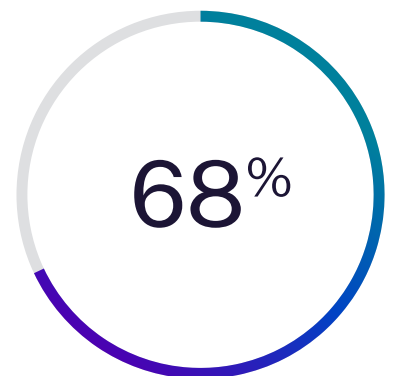
**Ireland's housing crisis is constraining business growth, with more than two-thirds of companies reporting that accommodation shortages influence location decisions and over half struggling to attract talent willing to relocate.**

Ireland's housing sector has experienced a strong start to the year, with completion rates reaching their highest levels since the financial crisis. However, despite the robust first half, the sector is unlikely to meet government targets for annual delivery.

Fundamental infrastructure constraints are the primary obstacle to sustained growth, and the shortage of affordable, available housing restricts employers' ability

to attract talent, manage costs and remain competitive.

Over half (56%)<sup>1</sup> of business owners report that the housing shortage makes it difficult to attract qualified candidates to relocate to Ireland. Just under one in two (49%)<sup>1</sup> business owners have been forced to offer higher salaries or housing allowances to compete for talent, and a similar proportion (48%)<sup>1</sup> reports that elevated housing costs have created increased wage



**68%<sup>1</sup> of business owners say housing shortages have influenced their decisions about where to locate new offices or facilities.**

pressures within their organisation.

Over two in five (43%)<sup>1</sup> businesses report they have lost potential employees who declined job offers specifically due to housing availability or affordability issues.

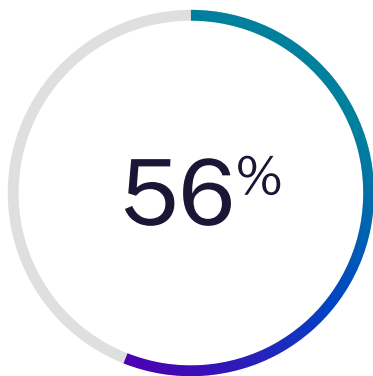
Almost half of business owners (49%)<sup>1</sup> report that the housing shortage has forced them to offer higher salaries or housing allowances to compete for talent. The impact of rising housing costs affects existing employees too, with under one in two (48%)<sup>1</sup> business owners citing housing costs as a pay pressure point.

Younger business owners feel the pressure particularly, Among those

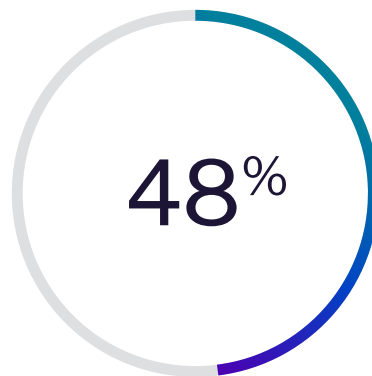
aged under 45, almost two thirds (63%)<sup>1</sup> agree that the housing shortage is making it difficult to attract qualified candidates. For older owners, the figure falls to 42%.<sup>1</sup>

Housing availability also influences business location decisions, with just under seven in ten (68%)<sup>1</sup> business owners reporting that the housing shortage has influenced where they locate new offices or facilities in Ireland. The survey data also discloses that, for a large minority, housing availability has become a decisive constraint on expansion aspirations.

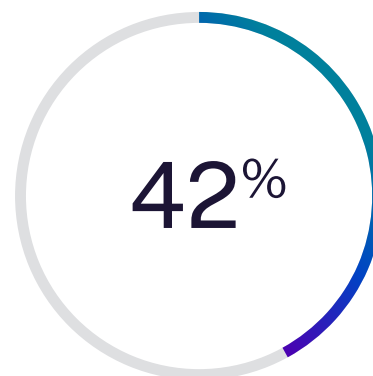
<sup>1</sup> 'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined



**56%**<sup>1</sup> agree that the housing shortage makes it difficult to attract qualified candidates to relocate to Ireland.

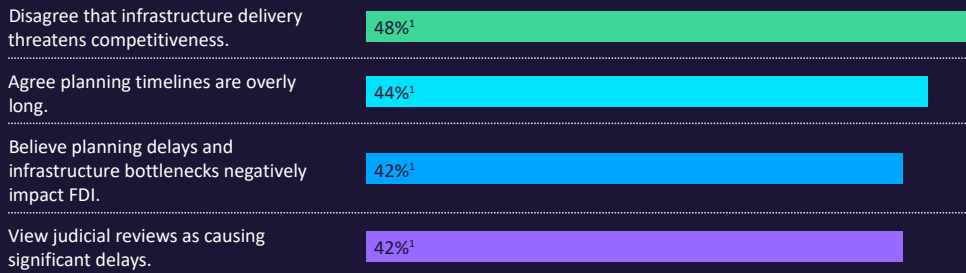


**48%**<sup>1</sup> report that rising housing costs have led to increased wage pressures.



**42%**<sup>1</sup> have had to delay or scale back expansion plans due to concerns about housing availability for future employees.

# Infrastructure



**Over two in five of survey (44%)<sup>1</sup> respondents say infrastructure shortcomings are affecting their operational decisions, although opinion is split on whether planning delays threaten Ireland’s long-term competitiveness.**

Ireland’s economic competitiveness has declined notably, dropping from second to seventh place in global rankings between 2023 and 2025. The country’s infrastructure stock sits approximately one quarter below the average for high-income nations.

The infrastructure shortfall directly impacts business costs and competitiveness, and business owners are evenly split on almost every major infrastructure question facing the country.

The research reveals a business community that recognises major obstacles in the country’s infrastructure planning system but stops short of viewing it as fundamentally broken or as a major threat to economic competitiveness.

When asked whether planning delays and infrastructure bottlenecks deter foreign direct investment, just over two-fifths (42%)<sup>1</sup> of respondents agreed, while a virtually identical proportion disagreed (42%)<sup>4</sup>. The same split was evident on the issue of the direct operational consequences of infrastructure deficits (44%<sup>1</sup> vs 43%<sup>4</sup>).

On the matter of excessive

bureaucracy, business owners again showed near-perfect division. Some 42% agreed strongly or somewhat that bureaucracy is excessive, though 43% disagreed. Likewise, asked whether planning timelines in Ireland are overly long and cumbersome, business owners were split (44%<sup>1</sup> vs 41%<sup>4</sup>).

The minority who disagrees suggests the system is not universally dysfunctional. However, the large proportion expressing concern indicates that, for many businesses, planning delays represent a genuine constraint on growth and investment.

Judicial reviews have emerged as one of the most contentious aspects of Ireland’s planning system. The survey found 42%<sup>1</sup> agreeing that judicial reviews contribute significantly to delays in building out infrastructure, against 38%<sup>4</sup> who disagreed.

Despite unease about timelines and accountability, almost one in two (48%)<sup>4</sup> business owners reject the view that the current pace of infrastructure delivery threatens Ireland’s long-term economic competitiveness, against 41%<sup>1</sup> who believe it does.

<sup>1</sup> ‘Strongly agree’ and ‘Somewhat agree’ responses combined

Visas & work permits





# Visas & work permits

Just over four in five business owners (81%)<sup>1</sup> support merging visa and work permit applications into one system, with a similar proportion (84%)<sup>1</sup> backing AI-powered monitoring to address skills gaps in rapidly changing sectors.

A recent IGEEES working paper projects employment permit demand for 2025 to 2030 ranging from 201,000 to 338,000 depending on the scenario. The Programme for Government commits to increased investment, supporting faster processing for visas and permits, including expedited visa options for high-demand sectors.

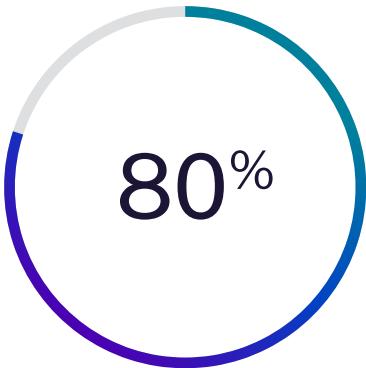
The government is also committed to merging the visa and employment permit system into a single application procedure. The current overlap between visa requirements and employment permit processes means employers must manage multiple application streams, often with different timelines, documentation requirements and processing authorities.

Over half of survey respondents (53%)<sup>1</sup> agree that the interdependence between these systems creates an unnecessary administrative burden. Just under one in two (48%)<sup>1</sup> business owners report they have lost potential

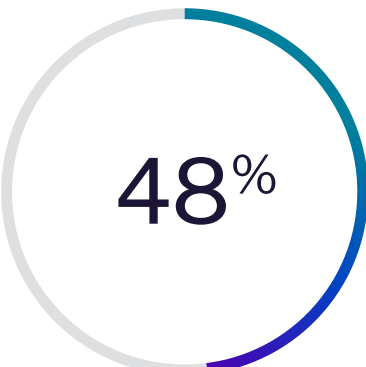
employees due to delays. Just over four in five (81%)<sup>1</sup> business owners favour the introduction of a single application system that would combine work permits and visas to reduce administrative burden for their business.

The survey explored attitudes towards real-time monitoring of labour market trends, specifically referencing the proposed AI Observatory initiative. The response was overwhelmingly positive, with four-fifths of business owners (83%)<sup>1</sup> agreeing that such monitoring would help inform better employment permit policies.

Regarding digital and AI sector skills, a similar proportion (84%)<sup>1</sup> agreed that the system should be more responsive to rapidly changing skill demands in these sectors.

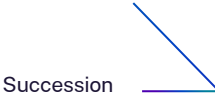


**80%**<sup>1</sup> agree their sector would benefit from expedited visa processing for high demand roles.



**48%**<sup>1</sup> report losing potential employees due to delays in the employment permit/visa processing system.

<sup>1</sup> 'Strongly agree' and 'Somewhat agree' responses combined



# Succession

Over eight in ten (85%)<sup>6</sup> of business owners have at least started thinking about succession planning, but only a minority have detailed plans. Over a third (34%) remain stuck in planning limbo with incomplete or outdated arrangements.

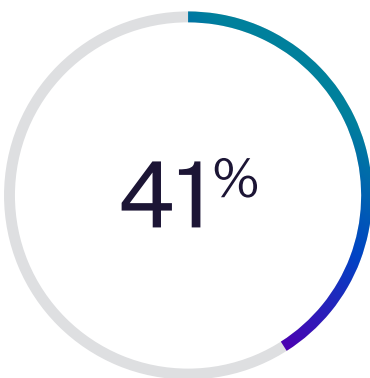
Business owners appear more engaged with succession planning than one might expect, with over eight in ten (85%)<sup>7</sup> having at least begun to think about or document their plans. Yet fewer than half (41%) have robust current plans in place.

Just over four in ten (41%) business owners report having a detailed and documented up-to-date succession plan. Over one in two (52%) business owners aged 45 and over have a detailed and documented up-to-date succession plan in place, compared with over one in three (36%) of those aged 35-44.

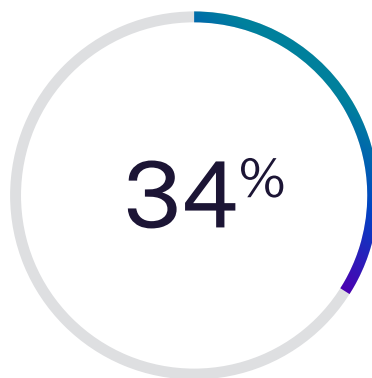
However, the remaining 34% of business owners tell a more complicated story. Among these, a notable proportion (17% in each case) find themselves in two distinct situations.

One group has basic or informal succession plans that remain incomplete or not fully documented, while another has documented plans that now require reviewing or additional steps. Together, these represent over a third of respondents who have begun the succession planning journey but not yet completed their plans.

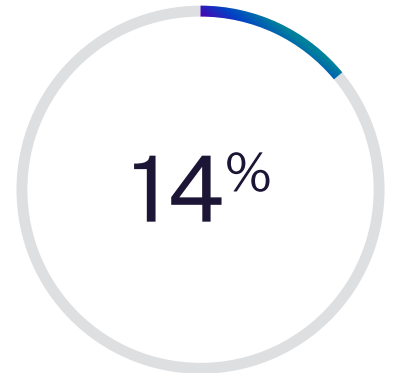
Around one in seven business owners (14%) report that they are wary of preparing to sell or pass on the family business in case tax rules change. A further 10% intend to create a succession plan but have not yet done so.



have a detailed succession plan in place.



say their plans are either incomplete, informal or need updating.



have concerns about changing tax rules.

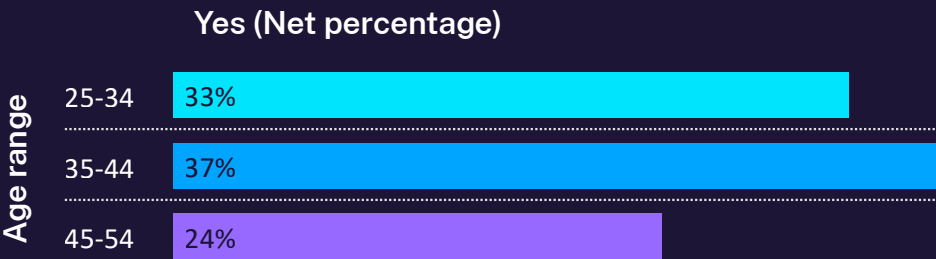
<sup>6</sup> 'I have a detailed and documented up-to-date succession plan in place', 'I have basic or informal succession plans but they are not complete or fully documented', 'I have documented succession plans, but they need reviewing or additional steps added', and 'I intend to create a succession plan, but have not yet done so' responses combined

<sup>7</sup> All 'Yes' options combined



# Exit strategies

As a business owner, are you currently planning to exit your business?



Entrepreneurs in their prime-earning years are racing to exit, but older business owners are proving reluctant to let go.

The landscape of business succession in Ireland is evolving rapidly, with traditional family handovers giving way to exit strategies that reflect the changing nature of modern enterprises and the growing appetite for external capital.

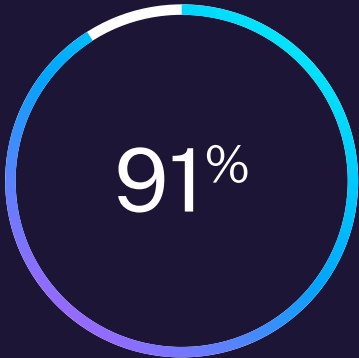
Private equity (PE) transactions now play the dominant role, with minority and majority PE sales together accounting for 34% of all planned exits. The slight preference for minority over majority sales (20% versus 15%) suggests that many business owners are not yet ready to relinquish complete control of their enterprises, however.

Family succession, once the cornerstone of business continuity in Ireland, now represents just 10% of planned exits. Combined with management buyouts at 9%, these traditional internal succession routes account for less than one-fifth of exit considerations. That employee ownership trusts are as popular as minority private equity transactions, however, suggests that business owners are still motivated by factors beyond pure financial return.

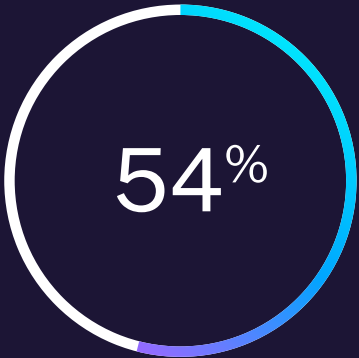
Trade sales, representing 16% of exit preferences, occupy a middle ground between private equity partnerships and internal successions. A meaningful

Middle-aged business owners (35-44) are most exit focused (38%).<sup>8</sup>

Only 24%<sup>8</sup> of older owners (45-54) have exit strategies.



91%<sup>8</sup> of owners planning exits have changed their timelines in the past 12 months.



54% have accelerated their divestment plans and 38% have postponed them.

proportion of business owners (7%) who are currently planning to exit their business, meanwhile, cannot identify viable exit or succession routes and are considering winding down their businesses through liquidation.

The age profile of business owners reveals generational differences. Business owners in their prime-earning years (35-44) are most likely to have concrete exit plans, with 38%<sup>8</sup> working towards a departure strategy. In this age bracket, 16% of business owners hope to exit within the next twelve months, the highest proportion of any cohort.

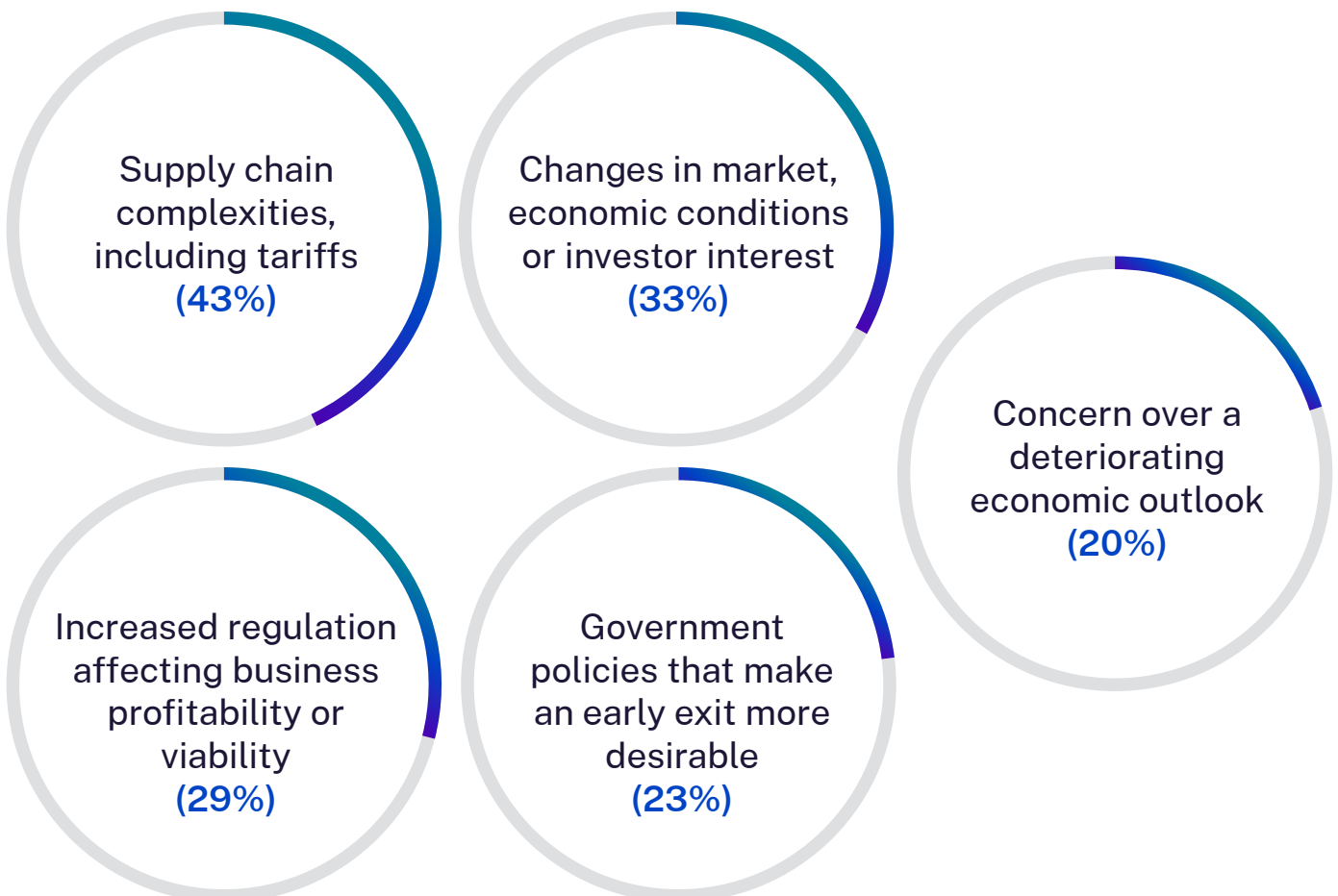
Younger business owners are more

focused on building rather than selling, and older business owners approaching traditional retirement age seem reluctant to abandon their enterprises. Across business owners aged 45-54, just under one in four (24%)<sup>8</sup> are working towards offloading their firms, and just over three in four (76%) report having no current exit plans whatsoever.

Over nine in ten (91%)<sup>8</sup> business owners preparing to exit their businesses have altered their timescales within the past year. Just over half of this cohort (54%) have brought forward their planned exit timelines. However, almost two in five (38%) business owners have taken the opposite approach, postponing their exit schedule.

<sup>8</sup> All 'Yes' options combined

**Business owners whose exit timescale has changed in the past 12 months said the main factors driving this decision are:**



Navigating complexity.  
Creating opportunity.



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