



# THE ANNUAL ROTORCRAFT PRO

## U.S. PILOT SALARY & BENEFITS SURVEY 2020—2021

*Rotorcraft Pro's* annual U.S. Pilot Salary & Benefits Survey was initially launched seven years ago in an effort to monitor and report trends on the salaries of pilots in the industry. Traditionally, surveys were sent directly to employers via snail mail in ballot form, then collected and tabulated. This old method did provide interesting results, but because employers are reluctant to reveal the exact salaries and benefits they provide, the sampling could be rather small and probably wasn't always representative of the larger whole.

Online technologies have given us the ability to survey many working pilots and their employers, thus generating more participation throughout the industry. This year's survey had excellent participation and obtained the latest information on helicopter pilots:

- What are their qualifications?
- What do they fly?
- In what sector do they fly?
- What ratings do they have?
- How much money do they make?
- What type of benefits do they receive?

We think you'll find the answers to these questions revealing. The goal was for *Rotorcraft Pro* to interact with our readers in the industry by focusing on two main questions:

- How much do helicopter pilots earn while plying their trade?
- Are helicopter pilots generally satisfied with their place in the industry?

The answer to the first question is fairly easy to gather; all it requires is collecting and analyzing data. However, the second question is more personal. In addition to comparative analysis, that answer also requires introspection. Both employers and pilots want to know where they stand in relation to their peers in the industry. We hope our results will help you find answers for your specific situation.

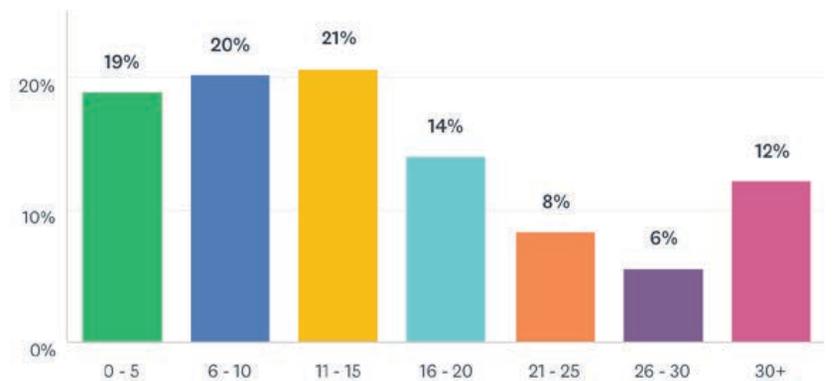
### WHO TOOK THE SURVEY?

Hundreds of pilots took our survey, and they came from all sectors of the industry including EMS, offshore oil support, tours, electronic news gathering, utility/lifting, law enforcement, firefighting, SAR, ag/spraying, corporate (business & private owner), training, and multi-type flying. Here's the breakdown:

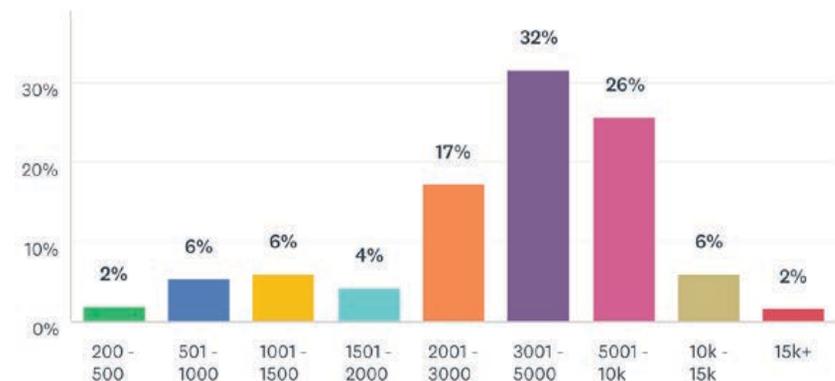
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
CFI at primary training school	6%
CFI at advanced school (i.e. FlightSafety, CAE)	1%
Lead Pilot	11%
Line Pilot	69%
Owner/Operator Pilot	2%
Company Training Captain or Check Airman	2%
Chief Instructor Pilot	0%
Chief Pilot	4%
Director of Operations	1%
Other (please specify)	4%

**INSIGHT:** 6% OF RESPONDENTS ARE U.S. PILOTS WORKING AS EXPATS IN OVERSEAS MARKETS

### RESPONDENTS BY YEARS IN INDUSTRY:

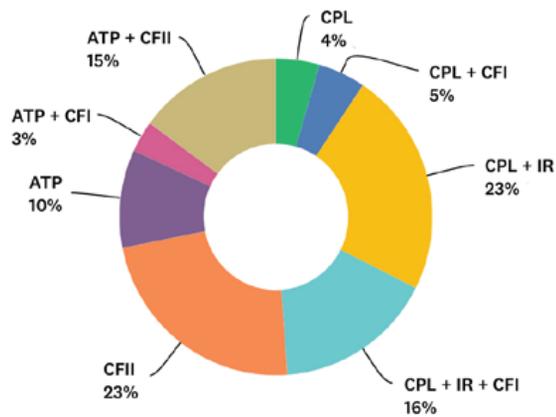


### RESPONDENTS BY FLIGHT-HOURS EXPERIENCE:

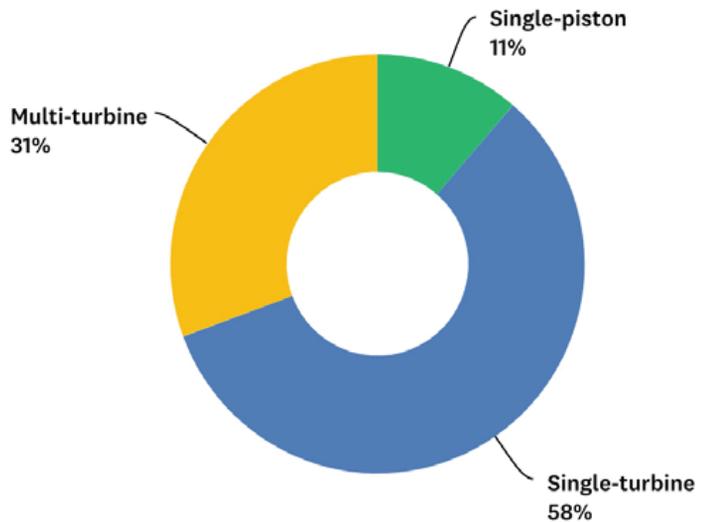




## RESPONDENTS BY RATINGS HELD:



## RESPONDENTS BY TYPE AIRCRAFT FLOWN:



## METHODOLOGY

This survey was distributed widely through use of email, social media, websites, and our magazine. All pilots were encouraged to participate. An online third-party survey company was used as the medium for survey completion, data collection, and analytics. Although personal data was collected from respondents as a qualifier, that information remains anonymous.

As in any survey, there will be certain considerations and assumptions that must be made when analyzing and tabulating data. Some of our considerations and assumptions were:

- This survey is designed to report 2020 data, which is the most recent full tax year.
- We implemented the survey in early 2021 during the time when pilots were filing tax returns for 2020.
- We assume that respondents are aware of their own compensation and benefits in enough detail to answer the survey questions accurately.

## HOW TO READ THE NUMBERS

For any category of data, we try to consistently present three pieces of information:

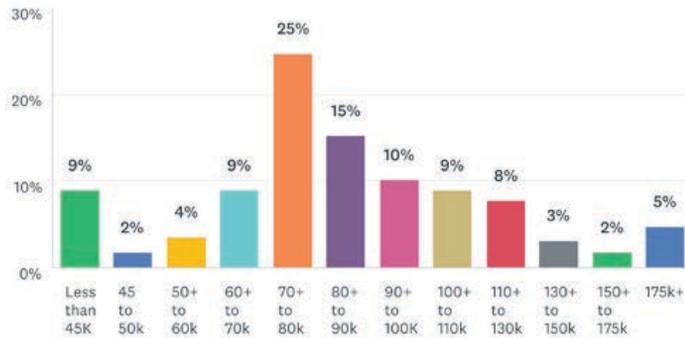
1. Gross Salary Ranges: L = Low / M = Median / H = High
2. The numerical value range is in annual USD. Example: 60-75K = \$60,000 to \$75,000 per year
3. The percent (%) of respondents in a category that make up the L, M or H ranges

**EXAMPLE:** L 60-75K (10%) = LOW SALARY RANGE IN CATEGORY IS \$60,001 TO \$75,000 AND 10% OF RESPONDENTS MAKE UP THE LOW RANGE IN THAT CATEGORY.



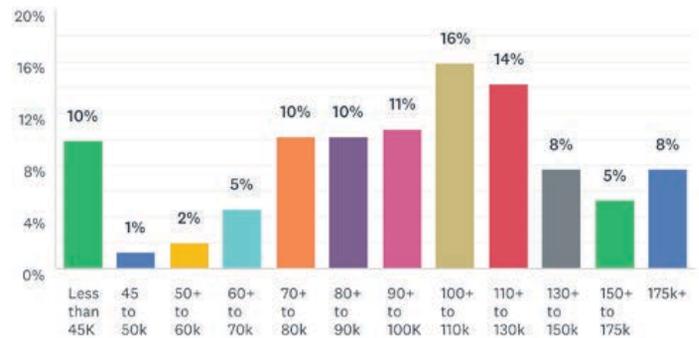
# THE SURVEY RESULTS

## BASE SALARY RANGES IN OVERALL INDUSTRY



**INSIGHT:** IN 2020, THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE OF PILOTS IN THE INDUSTRY GROSSED BETWEEN \$80,000 AND \$130,000 PER YEAR.

## GROSS SALARY RANGES IN OVERALL INDUSTRY



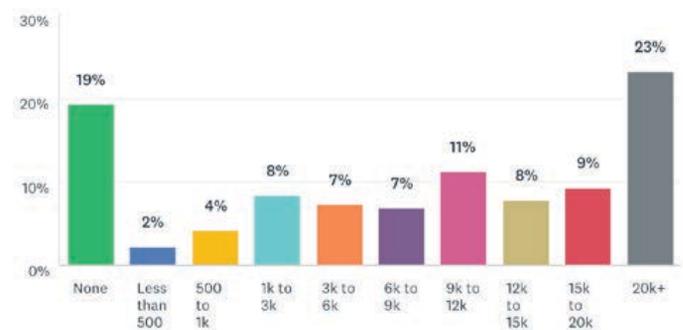
**INSIGHT:** MEDIAN GROSS SALARIES HAVE RISEN IN THE INDUSTRY. THE MEDIAN GROSS SALARY FOR ALL PILOTS RESPONDING TO THE SURVEY WAS \$100,000 PER YEAR, WHICH IS A \$25,000 INCREASE SINCE 2014.

## DIFFERENCES BETWEEN BASE AND GROSS PAY

It's clear that overall gross and base pay have increased over the years for helicopter pilots. However when you strip away the overtime and incentives, the base pay numbers are quite a bit lower across the industry. This is especially true in the sector of helicopter air ambulance (HAA), where four-pilot bases may be short staffed, and pilots regularly work overtime shifts. For example, specifically in HAA, 38% of the pilots earned an extra \$9k to \$20K in overtime and incentives, and another 27% earned more than \$20K!

## EXTRA PAY

(OVERTIME, BONUS, INCENTIVES) EARNED ABOVE BASE PAY IN OVERALL INDUSTRY



**INSIGHT:** ANECDOTALLY, ALTHOUGH IT APPEARS THAT OVERALL GROSS PAY HAS BEEN RISING FOR HELICOPTER PILOTS, FOR A MAJORITY OF PILOTS THEIR PAY IS NOT GROWING DUE TO A SIGNIFICANT RISE IN BASE SALARY, BUT RATHER DUE TO WORKING MORE HOURS OF OVERTIME.

## KEY DRIVERS

In 2020 we saw an upward shift in median salaries for certain groups of helicopter pilots. This was the result of the continuation of a tightening labor market during the first half of the year. Competition for supply came from both the military, which was letting fewer pilots out, as well as the airlines that were successfully attracting experienced helicopter pilots from both civil and military ranks.

opposite direction faster than we had ever experienced in our industry's history. With global travel bans, the airlines began furloughing pilots, at which point former helicopter pilots came running back to the industry they had fled just a short time ago.

In a matter of just a few months, the pilot supply-demand status went from a critical shortage to a near-equilibrium situation for most helicopter operators.

In mid-2020 however, as COVID-19 swept the globe, the pendulum swung in the

## MEDIAN SALARIES HAVE RISEN

Beginning in 2015, the rapidly tightening helicopter pilot labor pool precipitated a group rise in salaries, but it seems to have broken through the plateau that was experienced from 2017 to 2019.

- 2015 47% of pilots made between \$40k to \$75K
- 2016 33% of pilots made between \$60k to \$90K
- 2017 40% of pilots made between \$76k to \$110K
- 2018 40% of pilots made between \$76k to \$110K
- 2019 43% of pilots made between \$76k to \$110K
- 2020 41% of pilots made between \$90k to \$130K

## SALARY RANGES BY POSITION

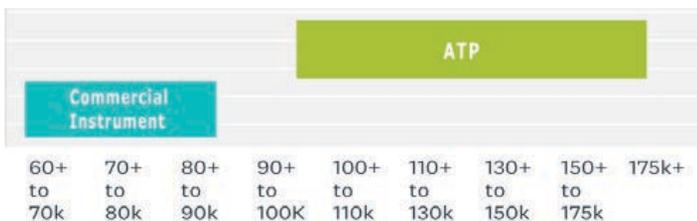
POSITION	LOW	MEDIAN	HIGH
PRIMARY SCHOOL INSTRUCTOR	<45K (79%)	50-60K (4%)	60-70K (4%)
OWNER-OPERATOR PILOTS	<45K (13%)	110-130K (13%)	>175K (13%)
LINE PILOTS	<45K (5%)	90-110K (12%)	>175K (8%)
LEAD PILOTS	<45K (6%)	90-110K (11%)	>175K (4%)
CHIEF PILOTS	70-80K (22%)	110-130K (17%)	>175K (17%)
TRAINING/CHECK AIRMAN	<45K (10%)	110-130K (20%)	>175K (10%)
ADVANCED SCHOOL INSTRUCTOR	100-110K (20%)	110-130K (40%)	150-175K (20%)
DIRECTOR OF OPS	100-110K (14%)	150-175K (29%)	>175K (43%)

## SALARY RANGES BY CERTIFICATE/RATINGS

Pilots who hold an ATP not only have a \$10,000 to \$15,000 per year higher gross median salary than those who do not, but a larger percentage of them also make up the higher income brackets. Three factors may influence the higher earnings for ATP certificate holders:

1. Many employers pay an ATP bonus.
2. Higher-paying jobs generally require an ATP as a prerequisite to being hired.
3. Pilots may have more tenure as a working pilot prior to obtaining the ATP.

**INSIGHT:** THE ATP RATING COULD WELL BE WORTH IT! THE ILLUSTRATION BELOW SHOWS A MAJORITY CONCENTRATION OF ATP HOLDERS (APPROX 51%) RESIDING IN THE UPPER INCOME BRACKETS WHEN COMPARED TO A SIMILAR CONCENTRATION OF CPL-INSTRUMENT CERTIFICATE HOLDERS WHO CONTINUE TO REMAIN IN THE MIDDLE INCOME BRACKETS.



## EDITOR'S COMMENT ON COVID-19 PANDEMIC IMPACTS

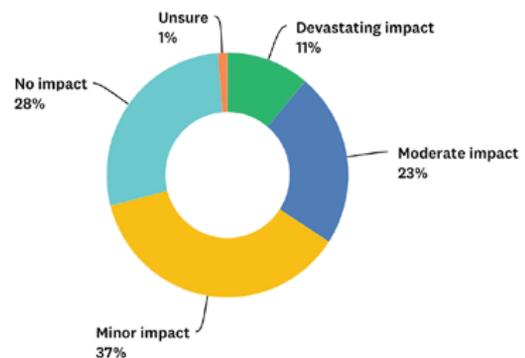
This survey data was collected in the midst of the pandemic and the slowdown of the global economy. Anecdotally, the underlying demand for helicopter pilots still remains, but the shortage the industry was facing just 12 months ago has been temporarily satisfied.

From 2016 through the spring of 2020, fending off the pull of the airlines posed a serious challenge for the helicopter industry, as employers had lost many more seasoned pilots seeking better pay, benefits, and schedules.

These questions remain: What will happen once COVID-19 fears recede and the public returns to full travel? Will helicopter pilots furloughed by the airlines run back to the higher pay and benefits as their seniority numbers come up for reassignment?

Many operations in the industry such as utility, tours, and training were irreparably damaged by travel restrictions. Additionally, these restrictions and stay-at-home orders meant that fewer people were moving about for work and recreation, which in turn reduced the call volumes of most air ambulance operators. That reduction in call volume equated to less hiring of pilots and less pressure to raise wages.

In this survey we asked pilots an additional question related to the coronavirus: "Has the COVID-19 pandemic had an impact on your helicopter operations?" A full 34% of respondents indicated that the pandemic had a moderate to devastating impact on their operations.



# SALARY RANGES BY SECTOR

LOW, MEDIAN, AND HIGH SALARY RANGES PER SECTOR

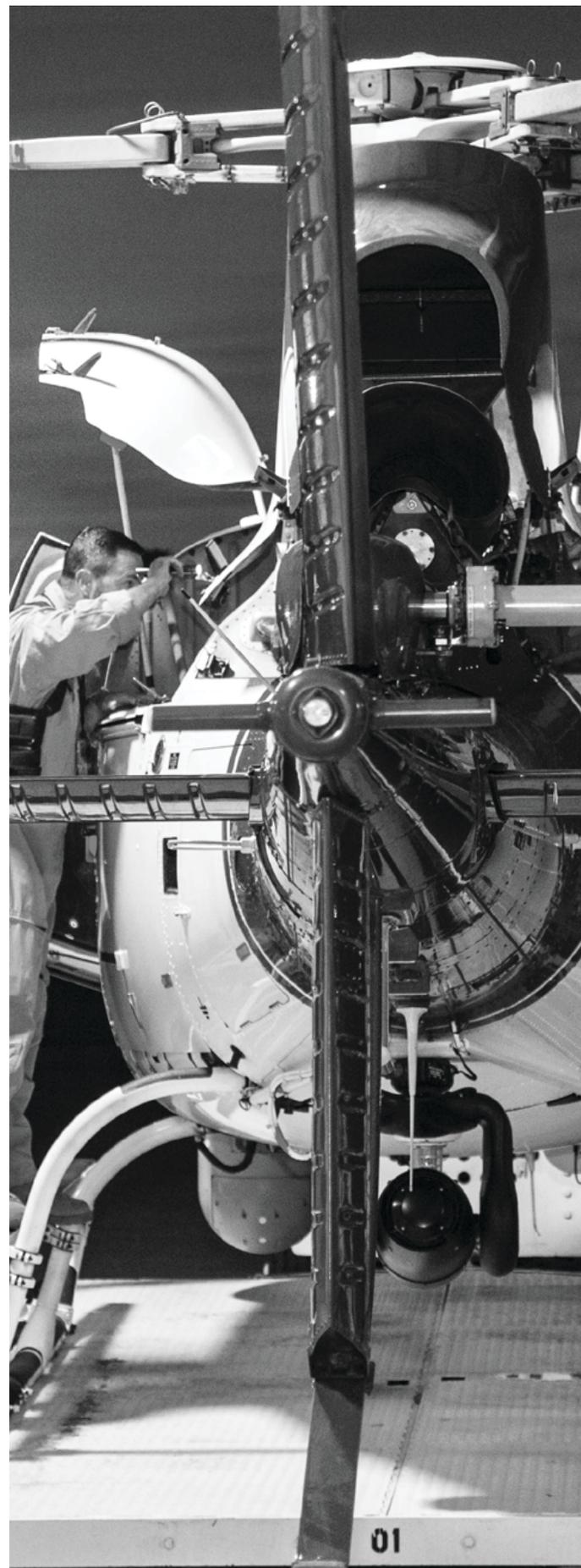
SECTOR	LOW	MEDIAN	HIGH
TRAINING	<45K (66%)	90-110K (7%)	>175K (3%)
ENG	50-60K (25%)	70-80K (25%)	80-90K (50%)
TOURS	<45K (60%)	50-60K (12%)	70-80K (4%)
MULTI-TYPE FLYING	<45K (8%)	80-90K (8%)	130-150K (17%)
AG/SPRAYING	50-60K (10%)	90-110K (10%)	110-130K (30%)
HELICOPTER AIR AMBULANCE	60-70K (7%)	90-100K (13%)	130-150K (1%)
LAW ENFORCEMENT	60-70K (5%)	100-110K (10%)	>175K (10%)
FIREFIGHTING	45-50K (3%)	80-90K (28%)	>175K (9%)
UTILITY/LIFTING	<45K (4%)	100-110K (21%)	>175K (10%)
OFFSHORE OIL SUPPORT	<45K (6%)	80-90K (11%)	130-150K (6%)
CORPORATE	60-70K (5%)	100-110K (10%)	>175K (25%)

**INSIGHT:** IF YOU WANT THE BEST CHANCE OF REACHING A SALARY OF \$175K OR HIGHER AS A HELICOPTER PILOT, YOUR BEST OPPORTUNITIES ARE IN THE SECTORS OF LAW ENFORCEMENT, UTILITY/LIFTING, FIREFIGHTING, AND CORPORATE.

## EXPERIENCE

### SALARY RANGES BY FLIGHT HOURS

TOTAL HOURS	LOW	MEDIAN	HIGH
200 - 500	<45K (29%)	80-90K (29%)	150-175K (14%)
501 - 1000	<45K (50%)	80-90K (4%)	150-175K (4%)
1001 - 1500	<45K (62%)	60-70K (8%)	90-110K (4%)
1501 - 2000	<45K (35%)	60-70K (35%)	100-110K (5%)
2001 - 3000	<45K (4%)	70-80K (42%)	110-130K (3%)
3001 - 5000	60-70K (7%)	100-110K (10%)	>175K (4%)
5001 - 10000	60-70K (3%)	100-110K (16%)	>175K (7%)
10000+	50-60K (4%)	90-100K (20%)	>175K (16%)
15000+	70-80K (25%)	110-130K (13%)	>175K (38%)





## EXPERIENCE

### SALARY RANGES BY YEARS WORKING AS HELICOPTER PILOT

YEARS	LOW	MEDIAN	HIGH
0-5 YEARS	<45K (40%)	70-80K (6%)	110-130K (5%)
6-10 YEARS	<45K (7%)	70-80K (35%)	110-130K (3%)
11-15 YEARS	50-60K (2%)	100-110K (11%)	>175K (6%)
16-20 YEARS	60-70K (6%)	100-110K (14%)	>175K (5%)
21-25 YEARS	45-40K (3%)	90-110K (21%)	>175K (5%)
26-30 YEARS	60-70K (8%)	100-110K (12%)	>175K (8%)
30+ YEARS	70-80K (13%)	110-130K (24%)	>175K (13%)

**INSIGHT:** WHEN IT COMES TO SINGLE- VS. MULTI-ENGINE HELICOPTERS, THE SOONER YOU CAN GET INTO MULTI-ENGINES, THE SOONER YOU'LL MAKE MORE MONEY. ONLY 25% OF ALL SINGLE-ENGINE PILOTS REACHED THE TOP SALARY RANGES, COMPARED TO 55% OF THEIR MULTI-ENGINE PILOT COUNTERPARTS.

## EXTRA PAY

### HOLDS STEADY FROM 2019 TO 2020

It's a mixed bag when it comes to pay raises, bonus/incentive pay, and compensation for extra work hours. The majority of our industry (79%) still received no pay raise, or a pay raise less than 3%.

The main factor for earning extra pay is overtime. The largest majority of pilots (51%) are paid overtime at 1.5 times their normal rate, which is up from 35% in 2017. A full 23% either get no extra pay for working extra hours or do not work extra hours at all; whereas 7% get paid straight-time for extra hours worked. The remaining respondents' compensation for extra hours was based on a variety of formulas.

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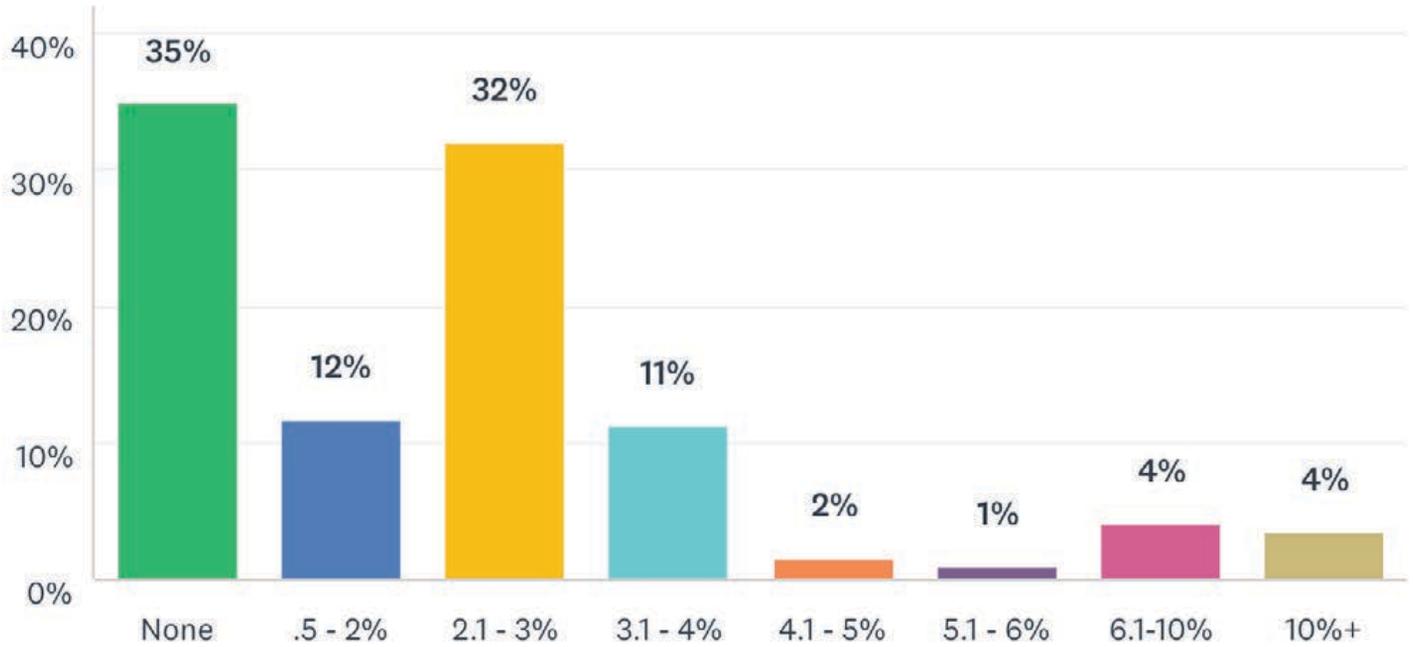
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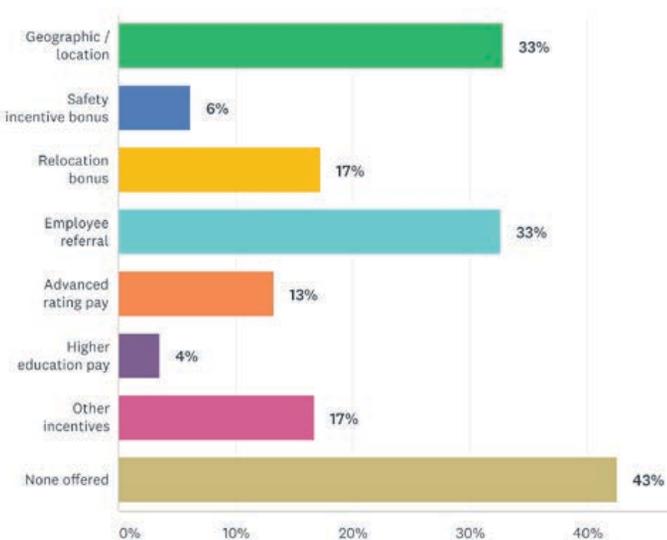
**QUESTION:**

WHAT PERCENT PAY RAISE DID YOU RECEIVE IN 2020?



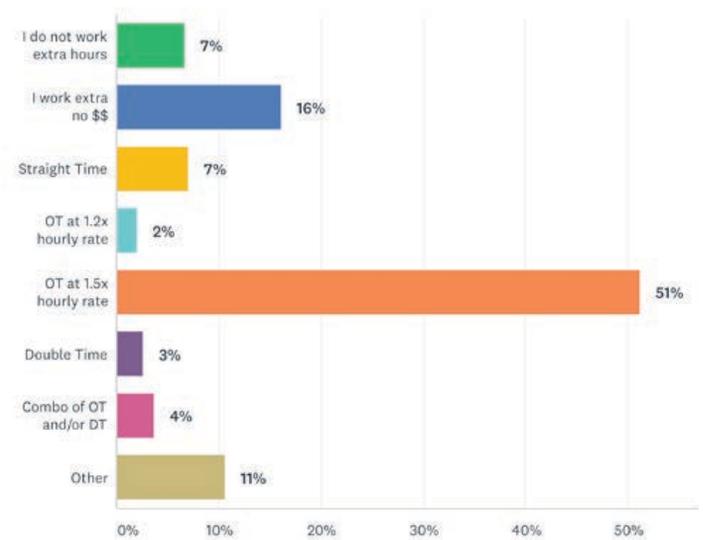
**QUESTION:**

WHAT TYPES OF INCENTIVES/BONUS PAY DOES YOUR EMPLOYER OFFER?



**QUESTION:**

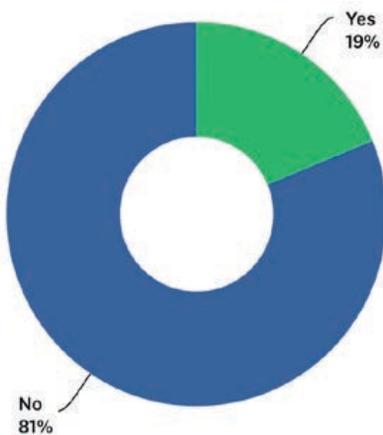
HOW ARE YOU COMPENSATED WHEN YOU WORK EXTRA HOURS OR SHIFTS?





**INSIGHT: VFR & IFR**

- CAREER PILOTS WHO FLY ONLY VFR ARE MOST LIKELY RELEGATED TO PAY OF \$70,000 TO \$110,000 PER YEAR.
- CAREER PILOTS WHO FLY BOTH VFR AND IFR WILL BE COMPENSATED MUCH MORE. THE PAY FOR THE LARGEST GROUP OF THESE PILOTS FELL IN THE RANGE OF \$130,000 TO \$175,000.



**INSIGHT: MOONLIGHTING PILOTS**

- 19% OF PILOTS RESPONDED YES TO THE QUESTION, "DO YOU FLY PART-TIME (OR AS A CONTRACT PILOT) TO EARN EXTRA INCOME OUTSIDE OF YOUR FULL-TIME FLYING JOB?"
- OF THOSE MOONLIGHTING PILOTS, A BROAD RANGE OF INCOME RANGED BETWEEN \$5K (6% OF MOONLIGHTERS) TO OVER \$30K (2% OF MOONLIGHTERS).

**\*This is not a helicopter.**  
This is a very realistic simulator.

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# RETIREMENT

Helicopter operators have come a long way in the last decade in the area of retirement. According to 81% of respondents, their employers offer some sort of retirement plan. Of those who offer plans, 74% of employers contribute to employee plans by either straight and/or matching contributions.

**INSIGHT:** THE NUMBER OF EMPLOYERS OFFERING MATCHING RETIREMENT FUNDS HAS DECREASED BY 1% SINCE LAST YEAR'S SURVEY.

## QUESTION: HOW MUCH DOES YOUR EMPLOYER CONTRIBUTE TO YOUR RETIREMENT PLAN?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
None	19%
1 - 3% straight contribution	10%
4 - 6% straight contribution	8%
6%+ straight contribution	1%
1 - 3% matching contribution	10%
4 - 6% matching contribution	25%
6+% matching contribution	14%
Combination of match and straight contributions	5%
Other (please specify)	7%



# HEALTH BENEFITS

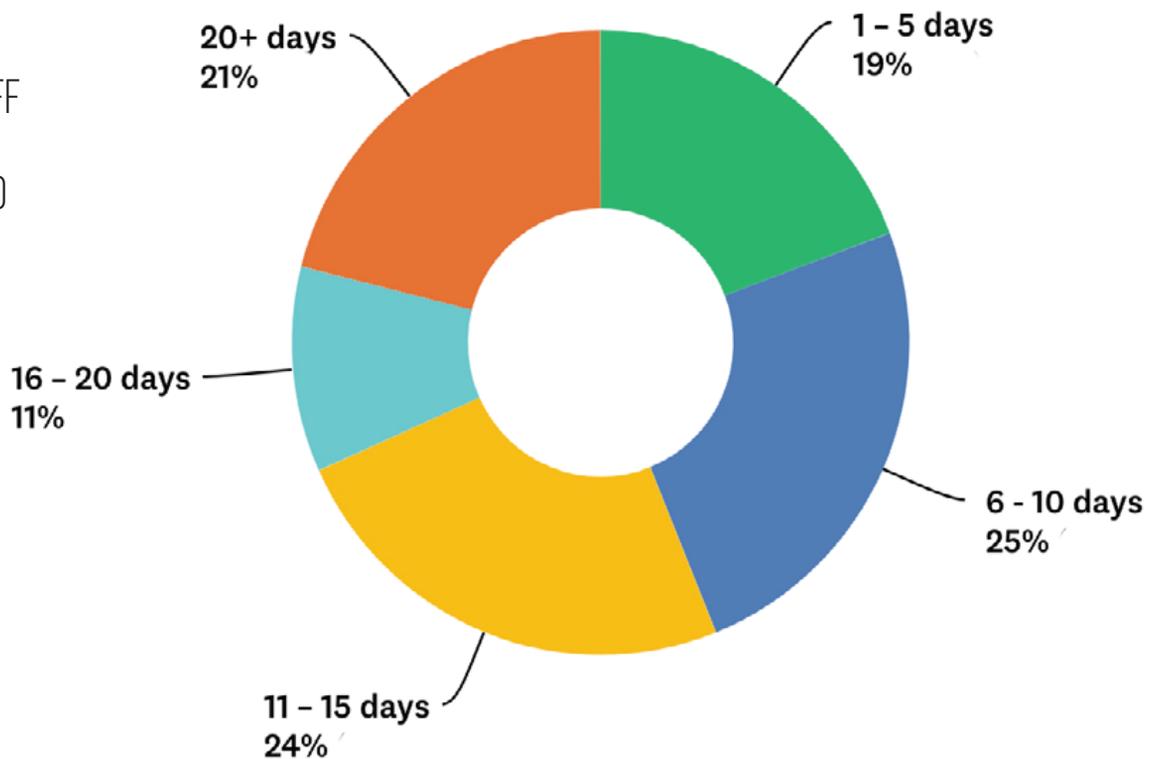


A full 88% of respondents are provided healthcare benefits. How the cost of benefits are divided up between the employer and the employee is a mixed variation, with the majority of respondents having some portion covered by the employer.

**QUESTION:**  
HOW ARE YOU  
AFFORDED HEALTH  
BENEFITS?

ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ Employer provided, no cost to me	14%
▼ Employer pays majority, I cover the rest	43%
▼ I pay majority, employer the rest	12%
▼ I pay 100% independently	4%
▼ Covered under spouse's plan	5%
▼ Military coverage or post-service plan	15%
▼ Federal government plan	2%
▼ I have no coverage at this time	6%

**QUESTION:**  
HOW MANY PAID  
PERSONAL DAYS OFF  
(VACATION/SICK)  
ARE YOU AFFORDED  
ANNUALLY? *(DO NOT  
INCLUDE HOLIDAYS.)*



# JOB SATISFACTION

## WHAT MATTERS MOST?

When it comes to job satisfaction, 79% of respondents are generally happy with their jobs. However, nearly half of those respondents indicate that although they are happy, they are open to a better opportunity. The remainder indicate that they are happy, but plan on staying put for at least three years. The other 21% indicate that they are unhappy in their current job.

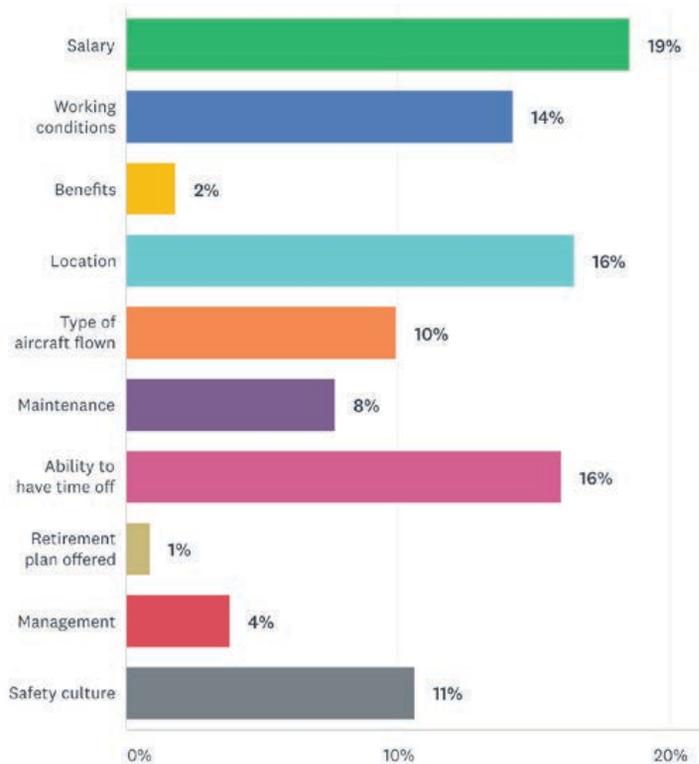
### INSIGHT:

#### WHAT PILOTS WANT, LOVE, AND HATE THE MOST ...

- **TOP 3 WANTS:** MONEY, BETTER WORKING CONDITIONS, BETTER SAFETY CULTURE
- **TOP 3 LIKES:** LOCATION, SALARY, ABILITY TO TAKE TIME OFF
- **TOP 3 DISLIKES:** SALARY, MANAGEMENT, LOCATION

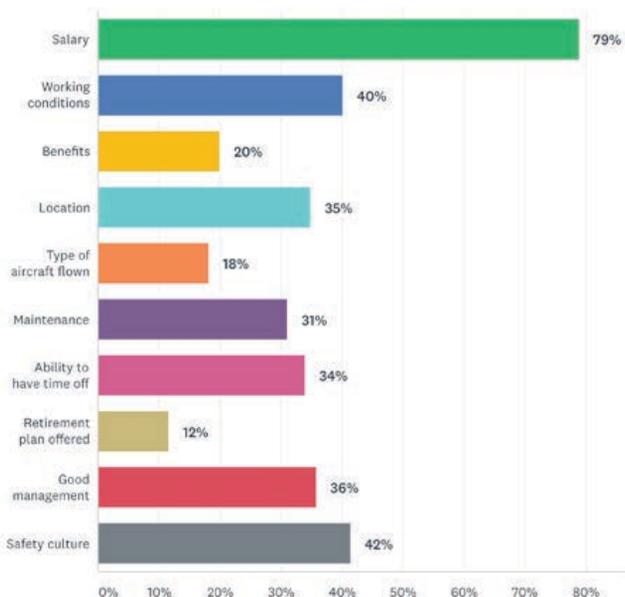
### QUESTION:

AT YOUR CURRENT JOB WITH A HELICOPTER OPERATOR, WITH WHICH ATTRIBUTE ARE YOU MOST SATISFIED?



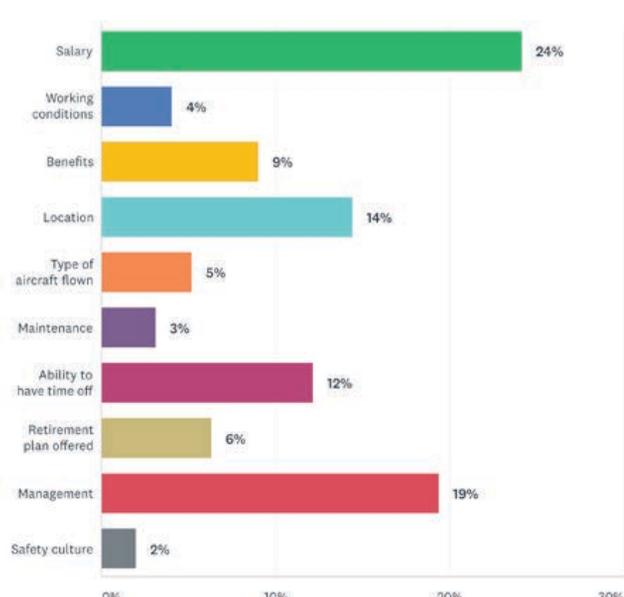
### QUESTION:

AS AN EMPLOYEE OF A HELICOPTER OPERATOR, WHICH ATTRIBUTES OF THE JOB ARE MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU? (CHOOSE 3)



### QUESTION:

AT YOUR CURRENT JOB WITH A HELICOPTER OPERATOR, WITH WHICH ATTRIBUTE ARE YOU LEAST SATISFIED?





**SO THERE YOU HAVE IT,**

*ROTORCRAFT PRO'S*  
ANNUAL U.S. PILOT  
SALARY & BENEFITS  
SURVEY.

Please let us know what you think. Do you find any surprises? Were there any results that had you saying, "Yes, that goes for me too!" Keep the dialogue going by heading to our social media sites and adding your voice. Until next year, fly safe. Be safe.



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