



national union of **students**

Student perceptions of sustainability in higher education

An international survey

August 2018

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1. About this research

About this research

Since the academic year of 2010-2011, the National Union of Students (UK) has carried out research with higher education students in the UK into their experiences of, and demand for, education for sustainable development. We've consistently found that students expect their universities to be taking action on sustainable development, both in terms of their impact and in terms of teaching. We've also found a strong desire amongst students to learn more about sustainable development.

In 2018, we worked with a number of international partners to expand the UK research, gathering the opinions of students studying in higher education around the world. The survey was promoted online, and with the recommendation to do so without referring to sustainability, sustainable development or the environment to avoid biasing responses towards those with a strong interest in the area.

The responses to the survey were gathered in February and March 2018, and a total of 3247 responses were received.

This report starts with a summary of the findings, presenting the data from all respondents around the world. The detailed findings for each question are then presented, showing the 'all respondent' data alongside a breakdown of the responses for all countries where 100 or more respondents identified this as the country which they are studying in.

It's worth noting that in some instances, respondents within a country are studying at one institution only whereas in others, respondents represent multiple institutions. Therefore the data is not comparable between countries.

We hope that this survey will be repeated annually, building up a stronger picture of student experiences and expectations linked to sustainable development.

Acknowledgements

We'd like to thank all the organisations and individuals who helped promote this research in some way including:

Danske Studerendes Faellesrad, Denmark
 Campus Responsables, France
 OIKOS (Universitat Paderborn, Germany and University of Graz, Austria branches)
 Aalto University, Finland
 University of Liberal Arts, Bangladesh
 University of Cyprus
 University of Athens, Greece
 Union of Students in Ireland
 AASHE, USA
 ACTS, Australia
 University of Toronto, Canada
 Vlaamse Vereniging van Studenten, Belgium

We'd also like to thank all the students who completed the survey.

2. Research summary

Students around the world show a strong interest in sustainable development

Students are keen to learn more about sustainable development, but also want to see action by their institution, and also to see it embedded in all courses



91% say they agree their place of study should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development



70% would like to see sustainable development actively incorporated and promoted through all courses

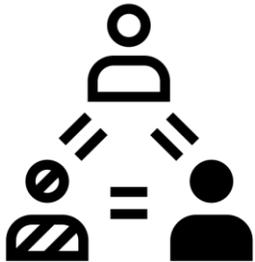
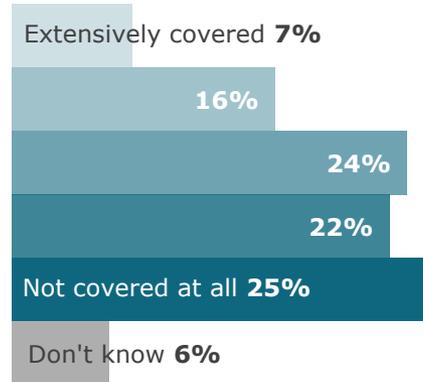


81% say sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about

Most say they have experienced some teaching related to sustainable development, however, a quarter say it hasn't been covered at all

Looking at specific issues and concepts related to sustainable development also reveals variation in coverage

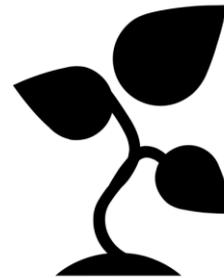
25% say sustainable development has not been covered at all by their course



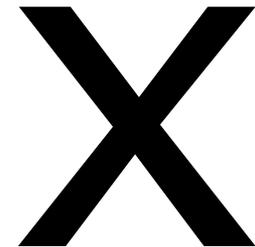
55% say cultural equality and diversity has been included in the teaching during their time in education so far



45% say climate change has been included in the teaching during their time in education so far



31% say biodiversity and nature has been included in the teaching during their time in education so far

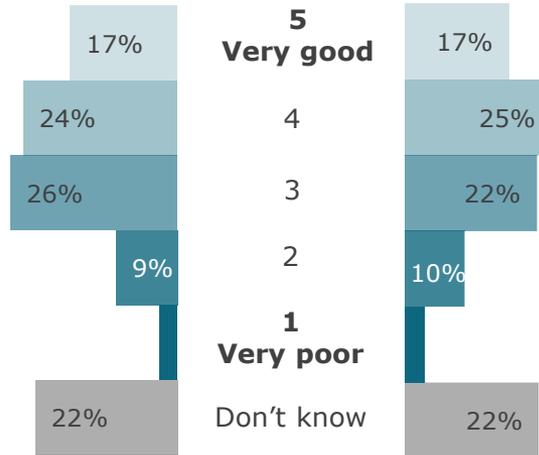


5% don't recognise any of the concepts related to sustainable development listed as having been taught during their time in education so far

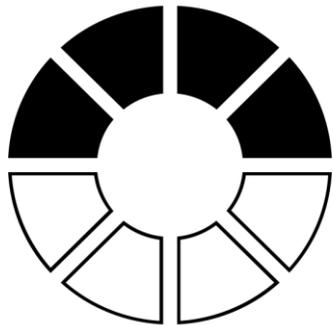
Respondents recognise the action taken by their institution to address negative impacts, though for some this is a gap in knowledge

Respondents also reflect a strong influence of their studies on their personal ability to contribute to change

“My university/college takes action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society.”



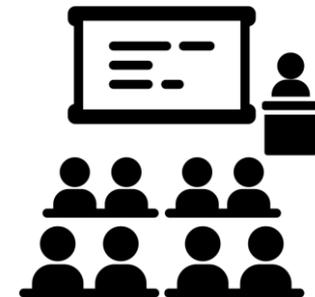
“My university/college provides opportunities for students to get involved in action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society”



50% told us their studies are helping them to learn how to make changes to their lifestyle to help the environment



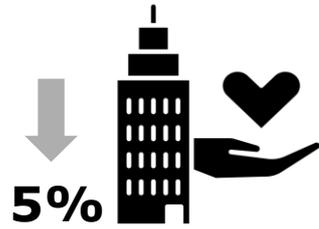
68% say their studies are helping them to learn how to have a positive impact on the world around them



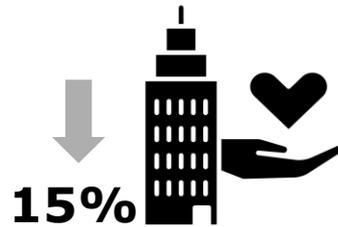
36% say university is the place they've studied that has encouraged them to think and act to help the environment and other people the most

Looking beyond their time in education, respondents show a desire to work for companies that perform strongly in relation to sustainable development

More broadly, respondents also show a strong demand for action on climate change



88% would accept a salary 5% lower than average to work in a company with a good social and environmental record



61% would accept a salary 15% lower than average to work in a company with a good social and environmental record



61% would accept a salary 15% lower than average to work in a job that contributes to positive social and environmental change

Governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change



I am concerned about the effects of climate change



I would vote for a Government that increased action to tackle climate change



Climate change will negatively affect me and my lifestyle



25% say they've never heard of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

3. Results in detail

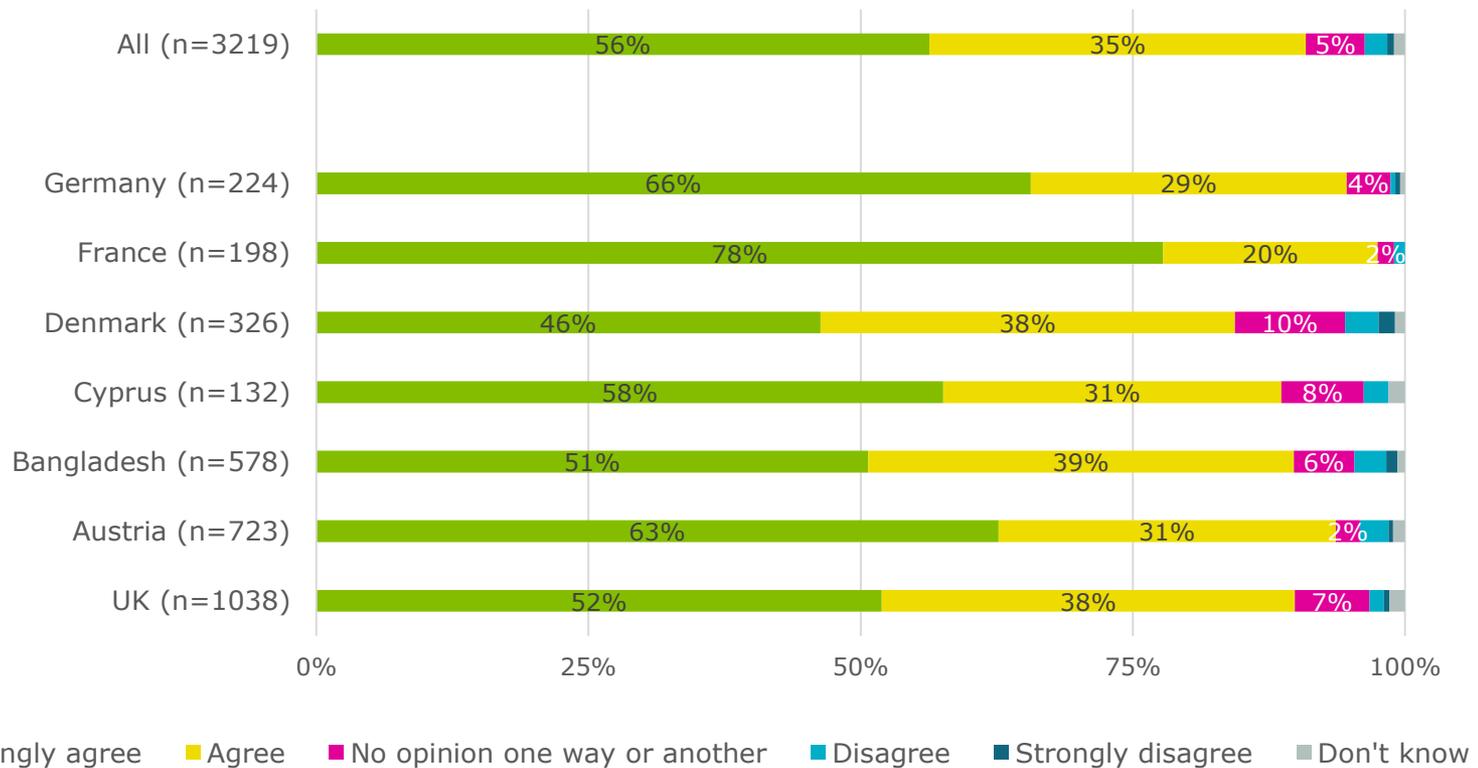
This next section presents the full data from each question in the survey. The data from all respondents is presented, along with a breakdown by country of study for all countries that received over 100 responses.

It's worth noting that in some instances, respondents within a country are studying at one institution only whereas in others, respondents represent multiple institutions. Therefore the data is not comparable between countries.

Please refer to the appendix for details of the characteristics of respondents studying in each country.

Overall, respondents agree that their universities and colleges should be taking action on sustainable development, with 91% saying they agree their place of study should actively incorporate and promote sustainable development.

“Sustainable development is something which all universities/colleges should actively incorporate and promote.”

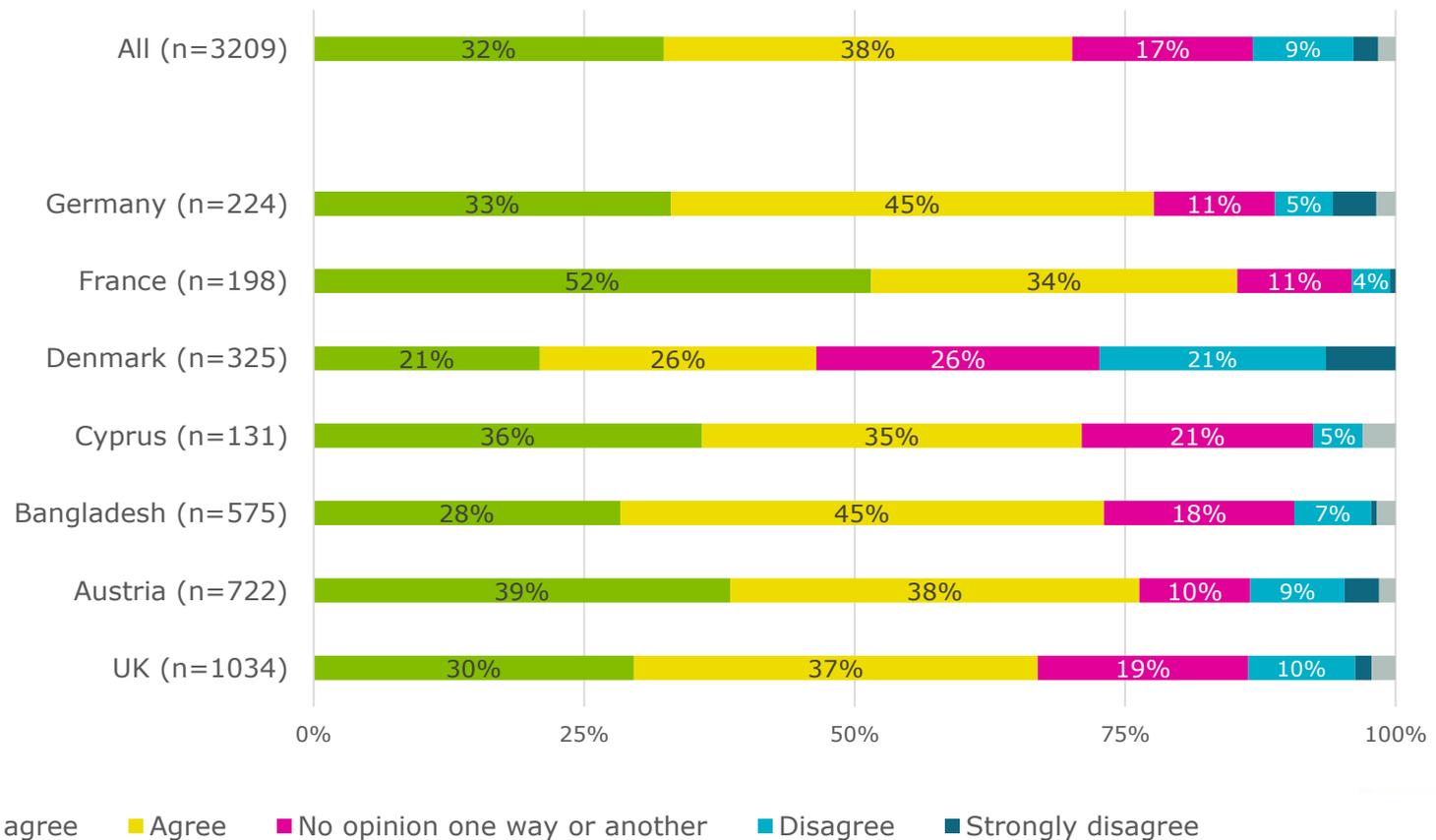


Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Respondents were asked for their thoughts on the extent to which they would like to see sustainable development incorporated into and promoted through all courses – overall 70% of respondents would like to see this.

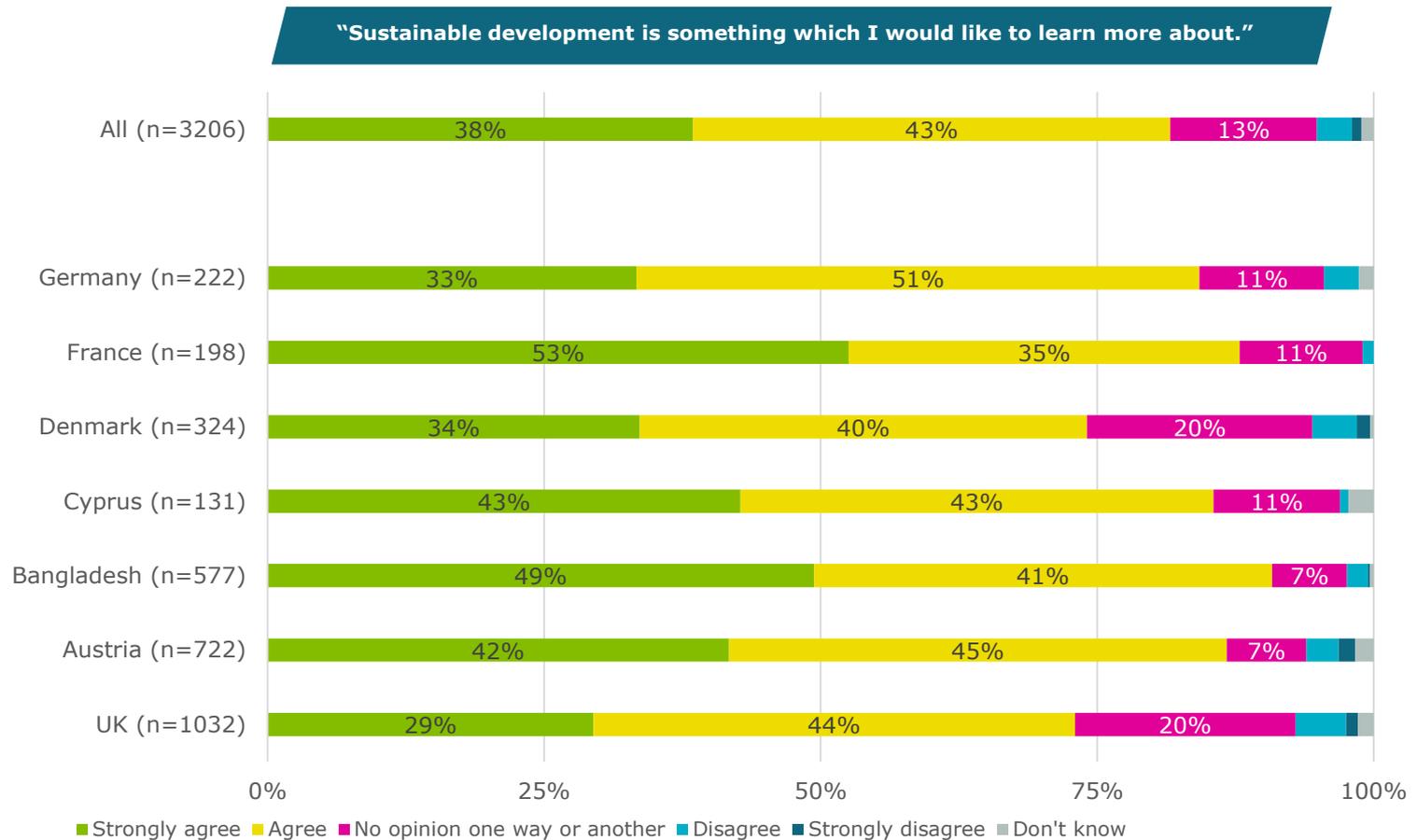
“Sustainable development is something which all courses should actively incorporate and promote.”



Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

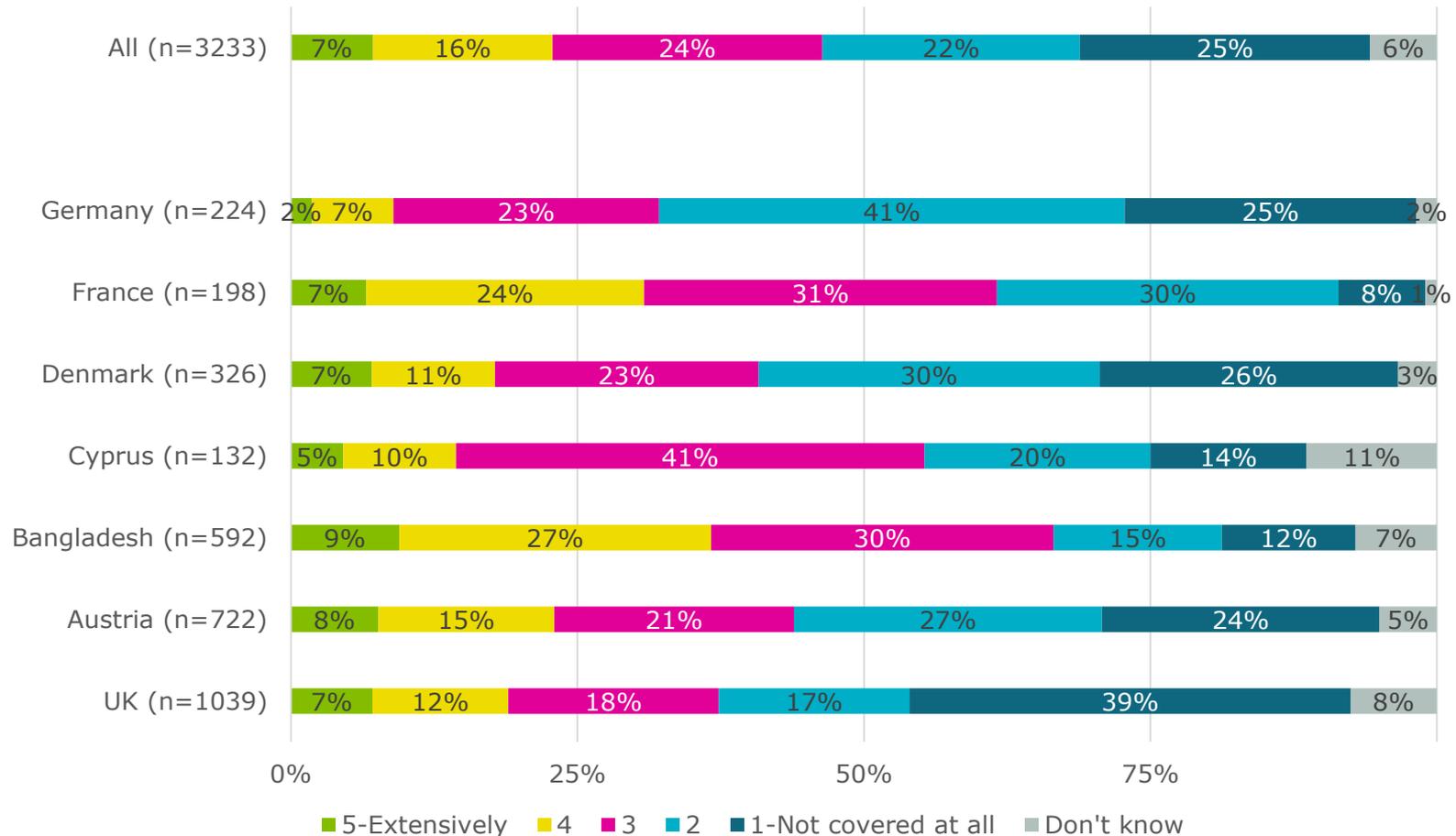
81% say sustainable development is something they would like to learn more about.



Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

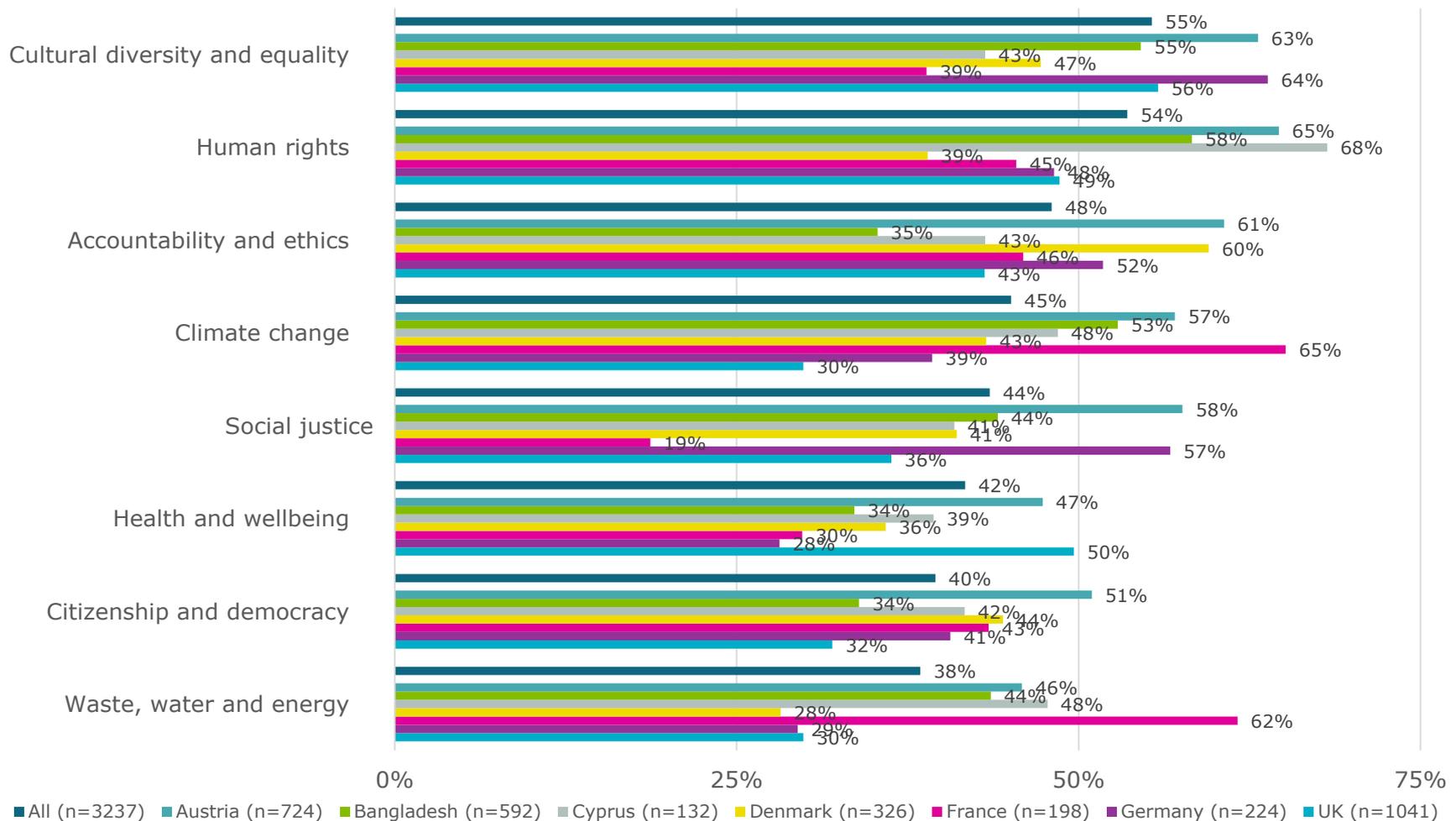
23% say sustainable development has been covered in detail by their course (rating coverage as 4 or 5, where 5 is extensively covered). 25% say the concept hasn't been covered at all.



Q. To what extent has sustainable development been covered by your course?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

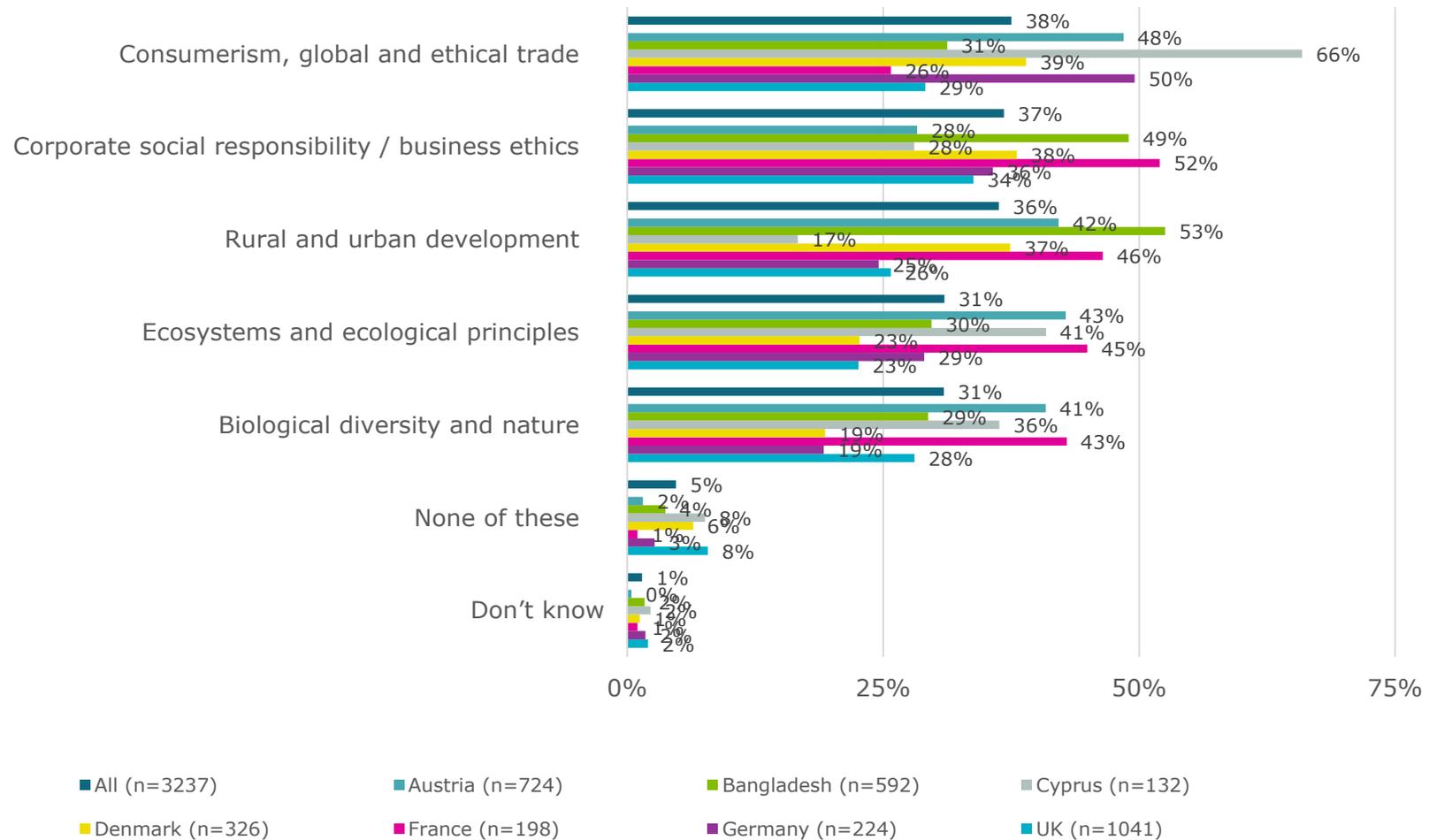
Looking in detail at the concepts and issues associated with sustainable development, cultural diversity and equality is the most commonly covered issue with 55% saying the teaching during their time in education so far has covered this.



Q. Thinking of your time in education so far, which of the following issues have been covered in the teaching?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Biological diversity and nature (31%) and ecosystems and ecological principles (31%) are the least commonly covered concepts related to sustainable development according to respondents when thinking about their time in education so far.



Q. Thinking of your time in education so far, which of the following issues have been covered in the teaching you received?
 Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

When describing their understanding of the term 'sustainable development', the most commonly used words reflect the 1987 Brundtland Definition of Sustainable Development. This understanding is common across the range of countries respondents are studying in.



All respondents



Bangladesh



Austria



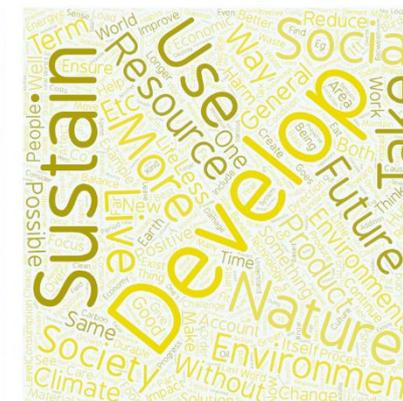
Germany



Cyprus



France



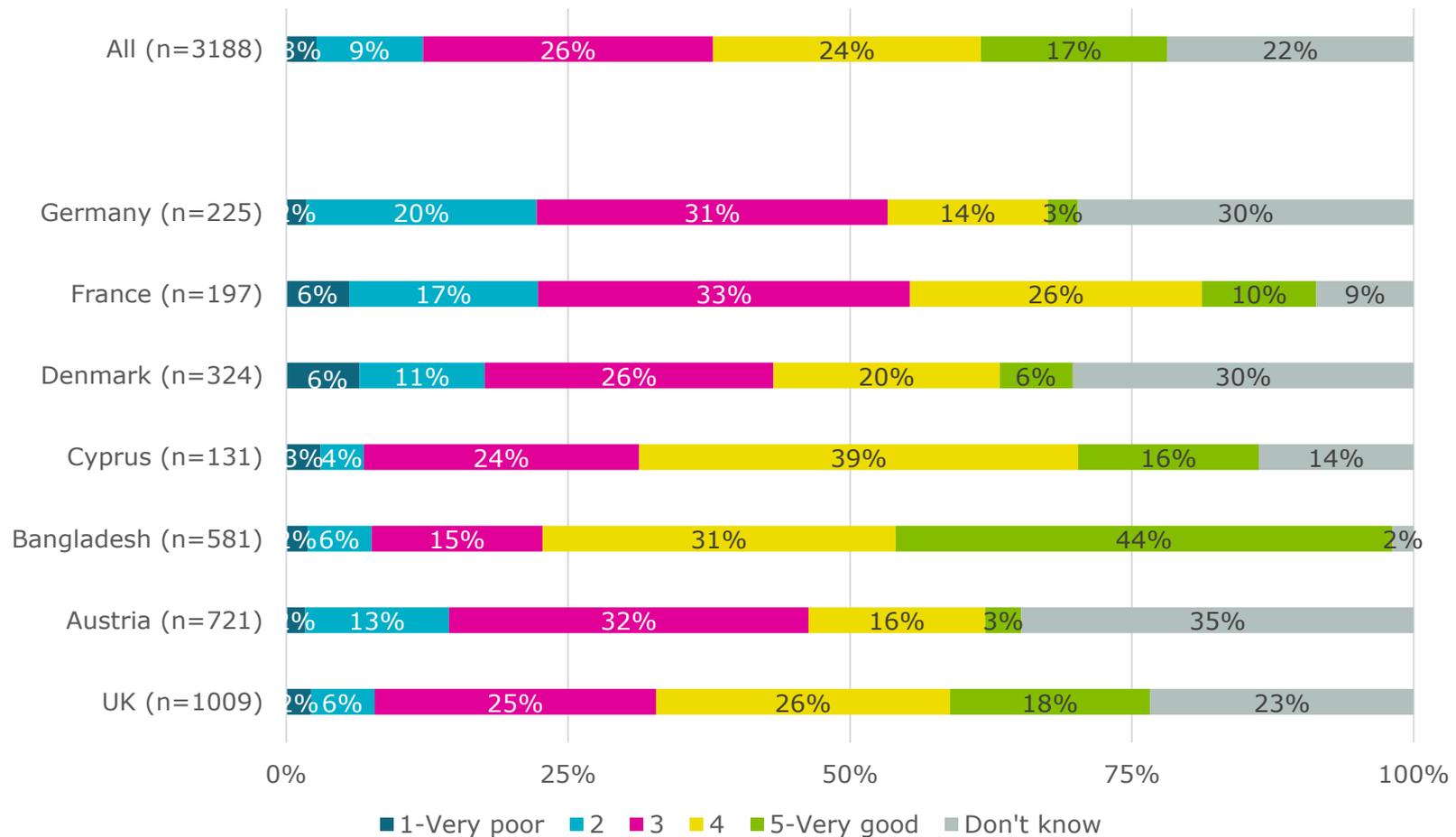
Denmark



UK

Q. Please tell us what you understand the term 'sustainable development' to mean?

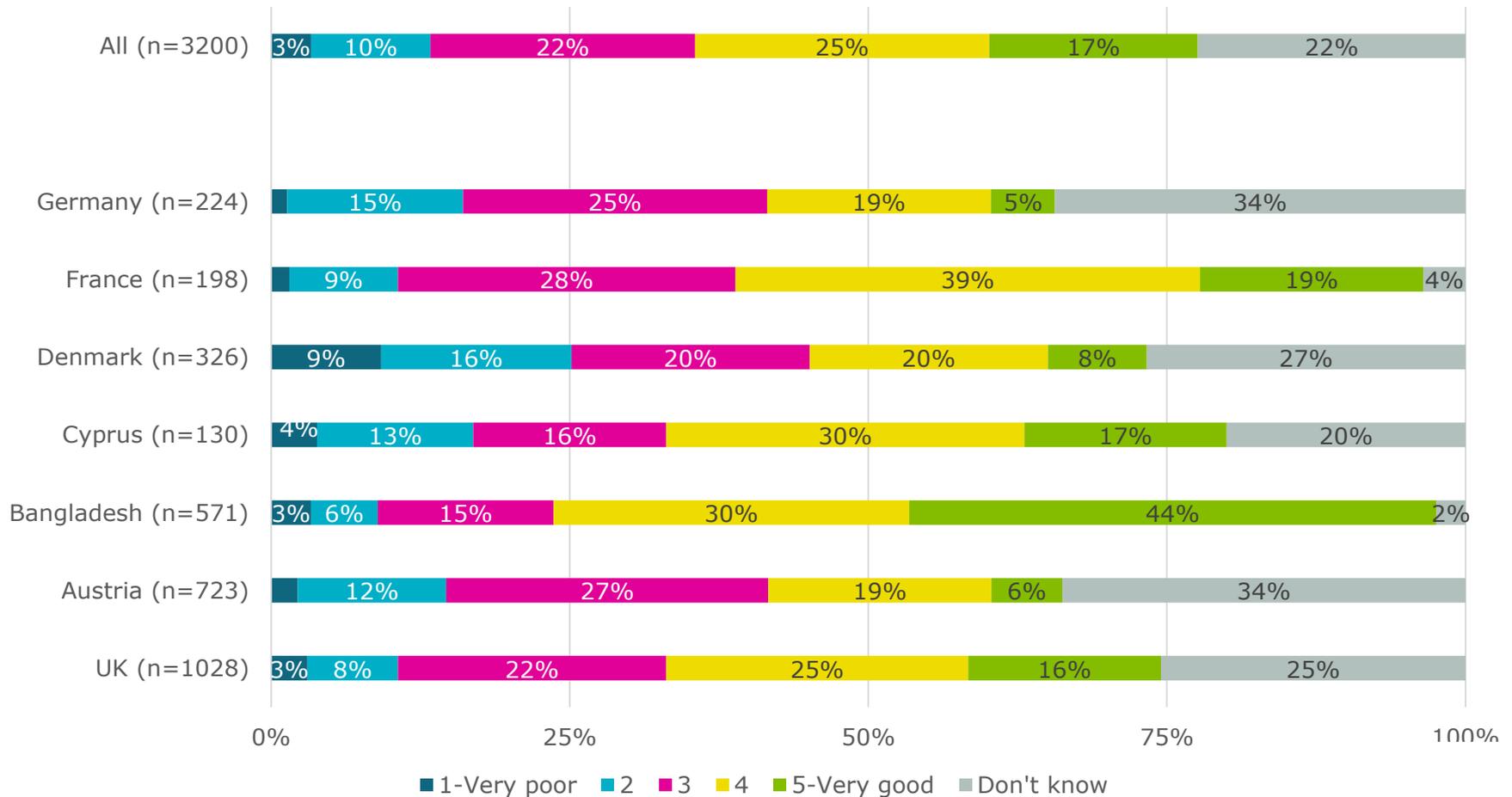
41% of respondents are positive about the action taken by their institution to limit its negative impact on the environment and society. 22% say they don't know how their university or college is doing in this area.



Q. How would you rate your current place of study against the following actions? "My university/college takes action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society."

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

42% rate their institution as good or very good in terms of the opportunities offered to students to take action on sustainable development. However 22% say they don't know how their university or college is performing in this area.

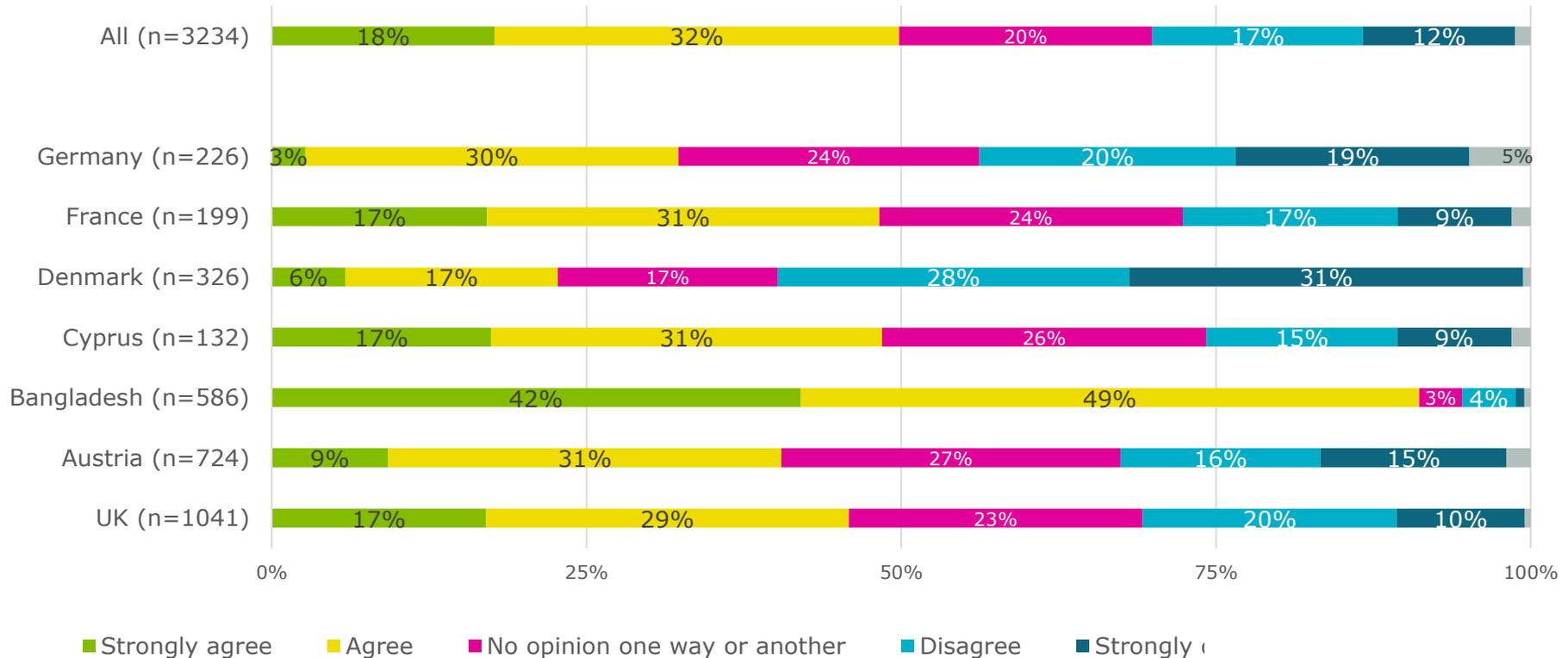


Q. How would you rate your current place of study against the following actions? "My university/college provides opportunities for students to get involved in action to limit the negative impact it has on the environment and society"

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, 50% of respondents agreed that their studies are helping them to learn how to make changes to their lifestyles to help the environment.

"My studies are helping me to learn how to make changes to my lifestyle to help the environment."

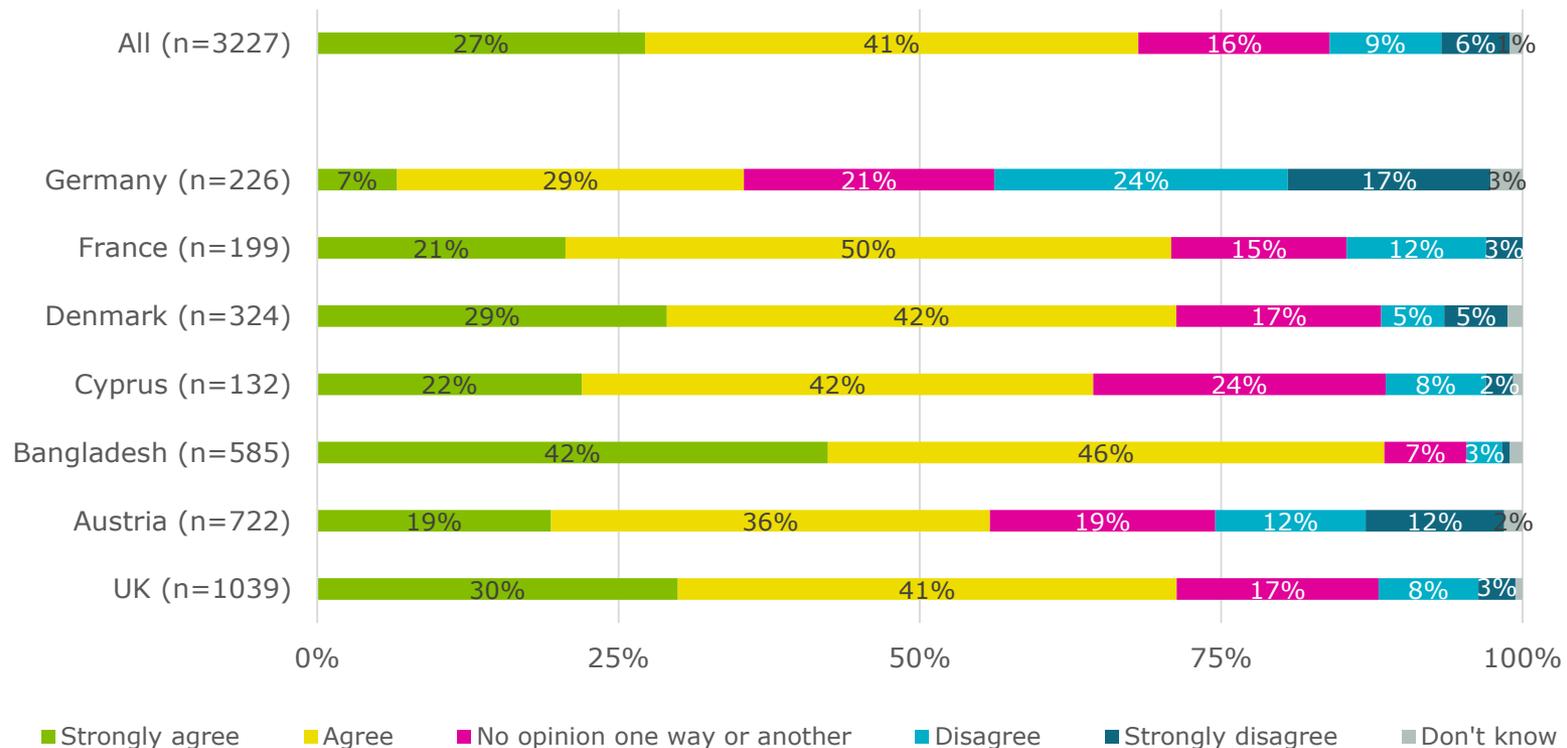


Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Respondents were also asked to reflect on the extent to which their studies are helping them to learn how to have a positive impact on the world around them. Overall, 68% of respondents agree that their studies are helping them to learn how they can have a positive impact on the world around them.

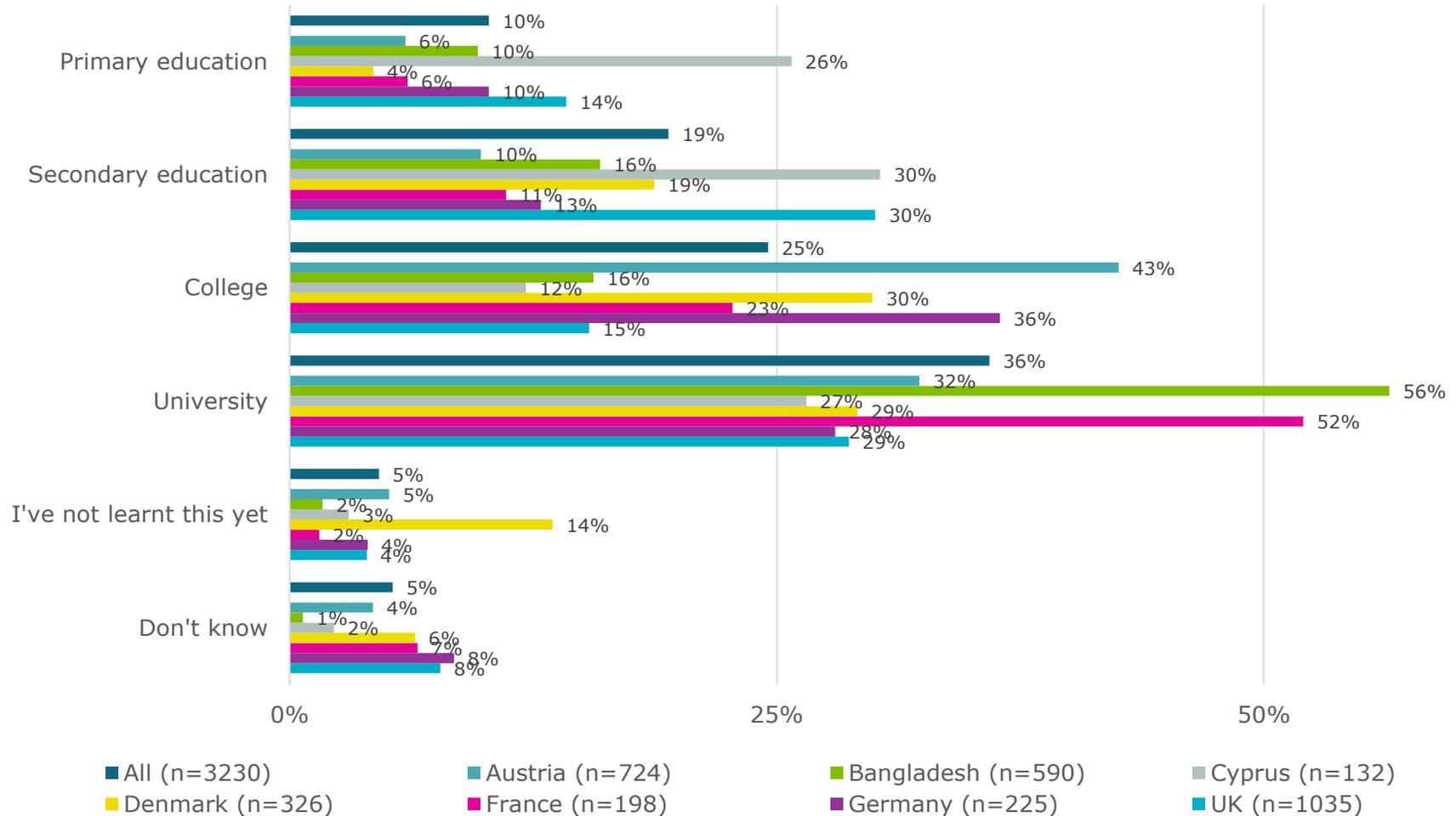
"My studies are helping me learn how I can have a positive impact on the world around me"



Q. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

36% of respondents say university is the place where they've studied that has encouraged them to think and act to help the environment and other people the most, when thinking about their time in education as a whole.



Q. Thinking about your time in education as a whole, what place where you have studied has encouraged you to think and act to help the environment and other people the most?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Respondents identified a range of educational experiences that had influenced them to think and act to help other people and the environment. Respondents also indicated that this learning had happened through everyday life, outside of formal education.

I study translation and have very often treated texts on these issues.

'Classroom' learning

An oral presentation with slides on the hidden worldwide disasters happening currently really touched me...The slides containing graphs/statistics showing figures about the disappearance of the species of animals or the failure of clean air had a big impact in my life...From there, I feel I must be more responsible to nature.

During a school trip with my SVT teacher. See everything that could offer nature and to see that we were not enough to protect me encourage them to reconsider the impact of my daily activities.

Documentaries on mass farming and its impacts on the environment, quite shocking.

Films and documentaries

Trips and excursions

Inspirational teacher

In addition to scientific articles, films and studies on the environment and their pollution, there were several active and involved teachers who have campaigned for environmental protection also at my secondary school. Through various presentations and workshops, my attention was piqued.

On the beach, to the Atlantic ocean, an awareness campaign on the preservation of the beach, the dune and the ocean. Facilitators presented the flora and fauna, posed questions, interacted with the children and the environment of the beach. Being already aware through diving and surfing, it reminded me I could act in a simple way every day. After that, whenever I walked on the beach, I was picking up waste that I met and was going to throw them in the trash.

The study of ecosystems, geology, climatology and all the factors constituting the nature. This awareness was made by a highly motivated geography teacher, who has done classes, organized trips, work research, and oral exams.

At Engineering School I could engage in Engineers Without Borders, which enabled me to have access to training on the themes of sustainable development and the international solidarity that have done much change my perception of these topics.

Practical projects / 'real world learning'

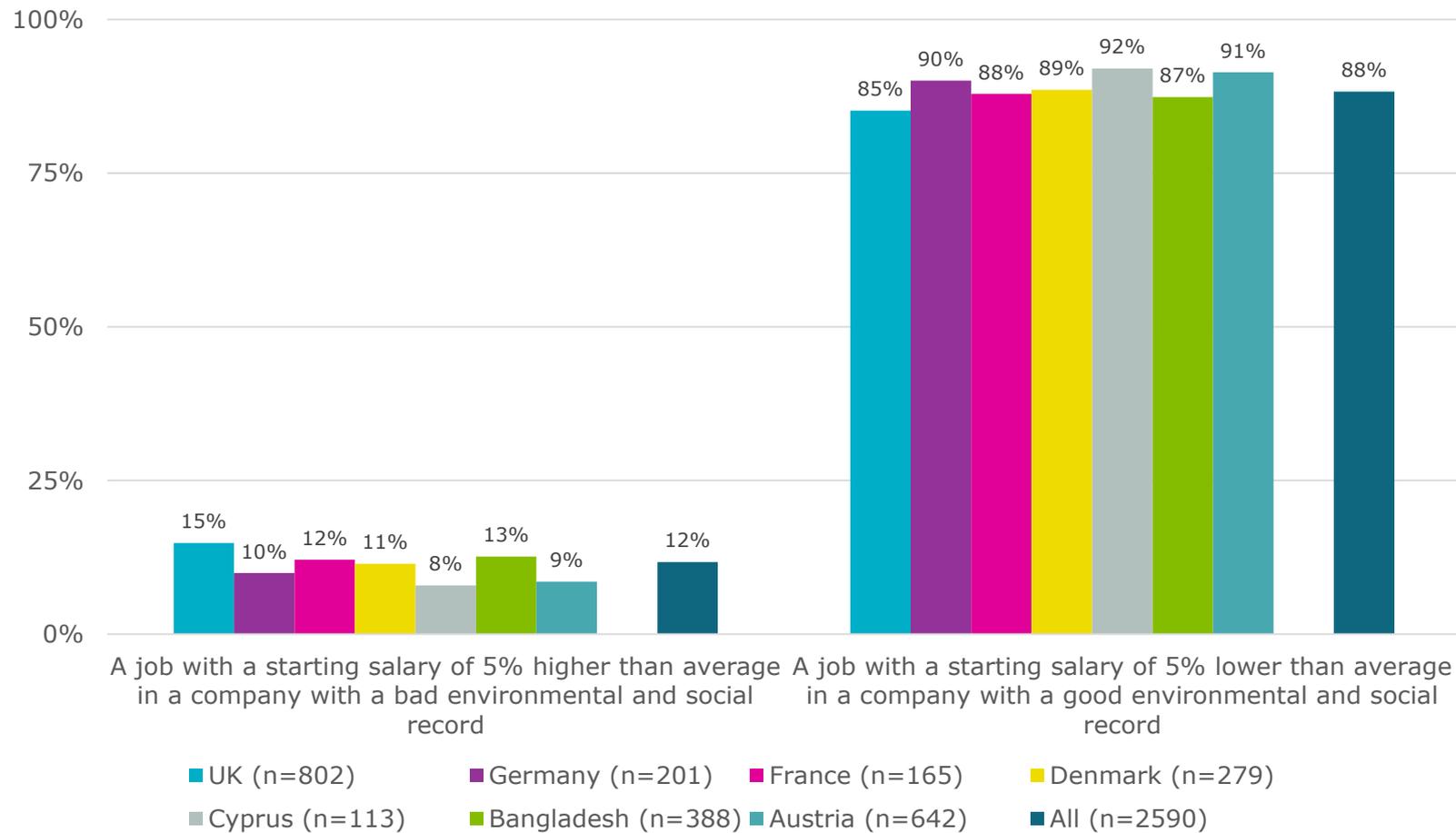
Influence beyond education

...all educational institutions I have attended both had little influence on my knowledge concerning the environment, cultural diversity, tolerance and human rights issues. This knowledge was more of my social environment (family, friends) and the media, especially the Internet...

...the professional part of my learning in the environment service of the nuclear fleet at EDF. I was not born in environmental training, so this is the experience that I live at EDF, which prompted me to wonder about our impact on the environment and what actions can be made to minimise and see to have a positive impact. It's led me to do a lot of change at the level of my patterns in general and to try to push my thoughts up on my actions and the choices I make and the impact that they have on my future life.

Q. Using the box below, please describe the experience during your time in education so far that has encouraged you to think and act to help the environment and other people the most.

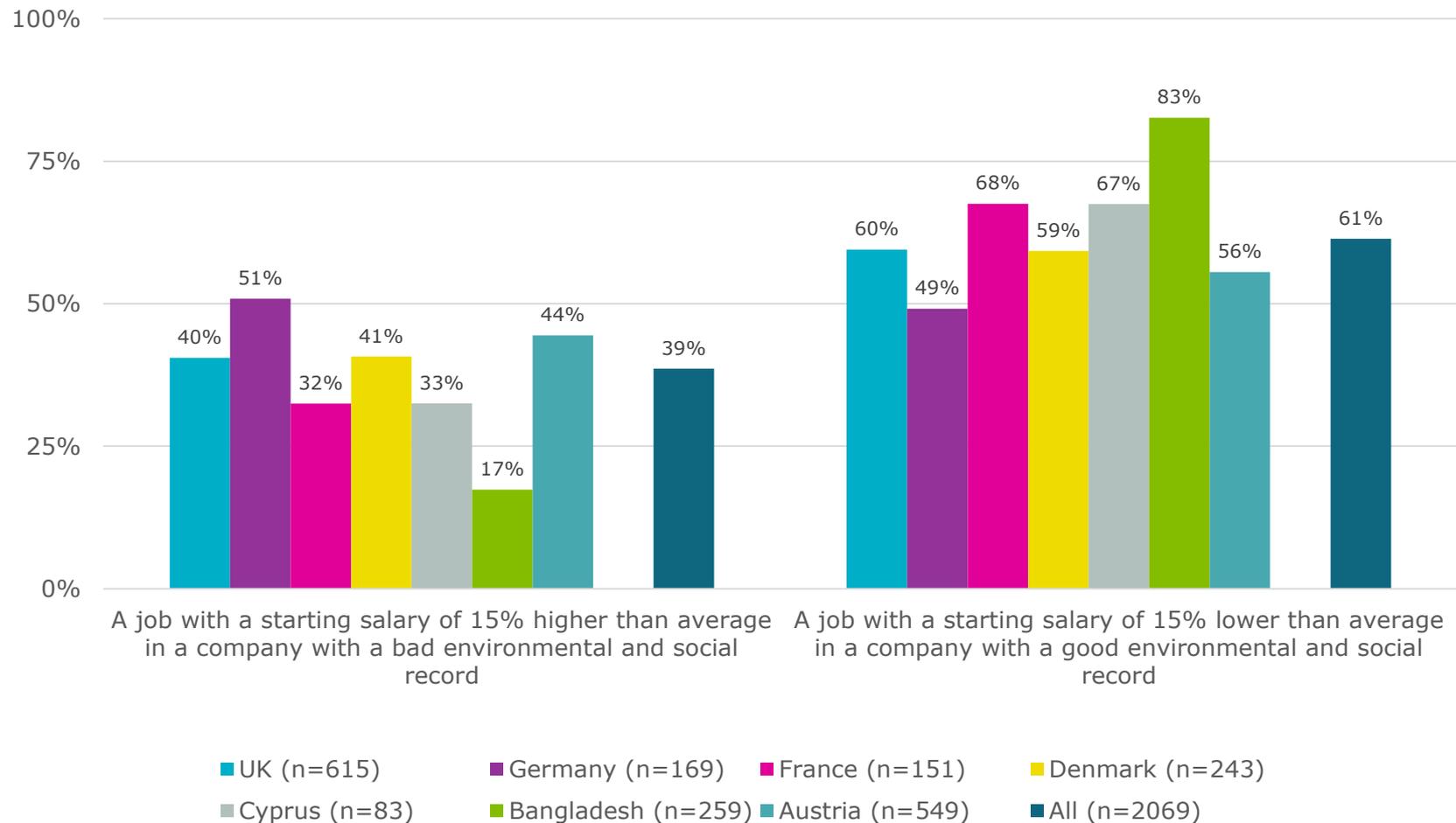
88% say they would be willing to accept a starting salary of 5% lower than average to work in a company that has a good environmental and social record.



Q. Finally, we're interested in hearing about your plans for after you finish studying and find a job. Of the two choices presented below, assuming all factors are equal, in each case please tell us which option you would choose.

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

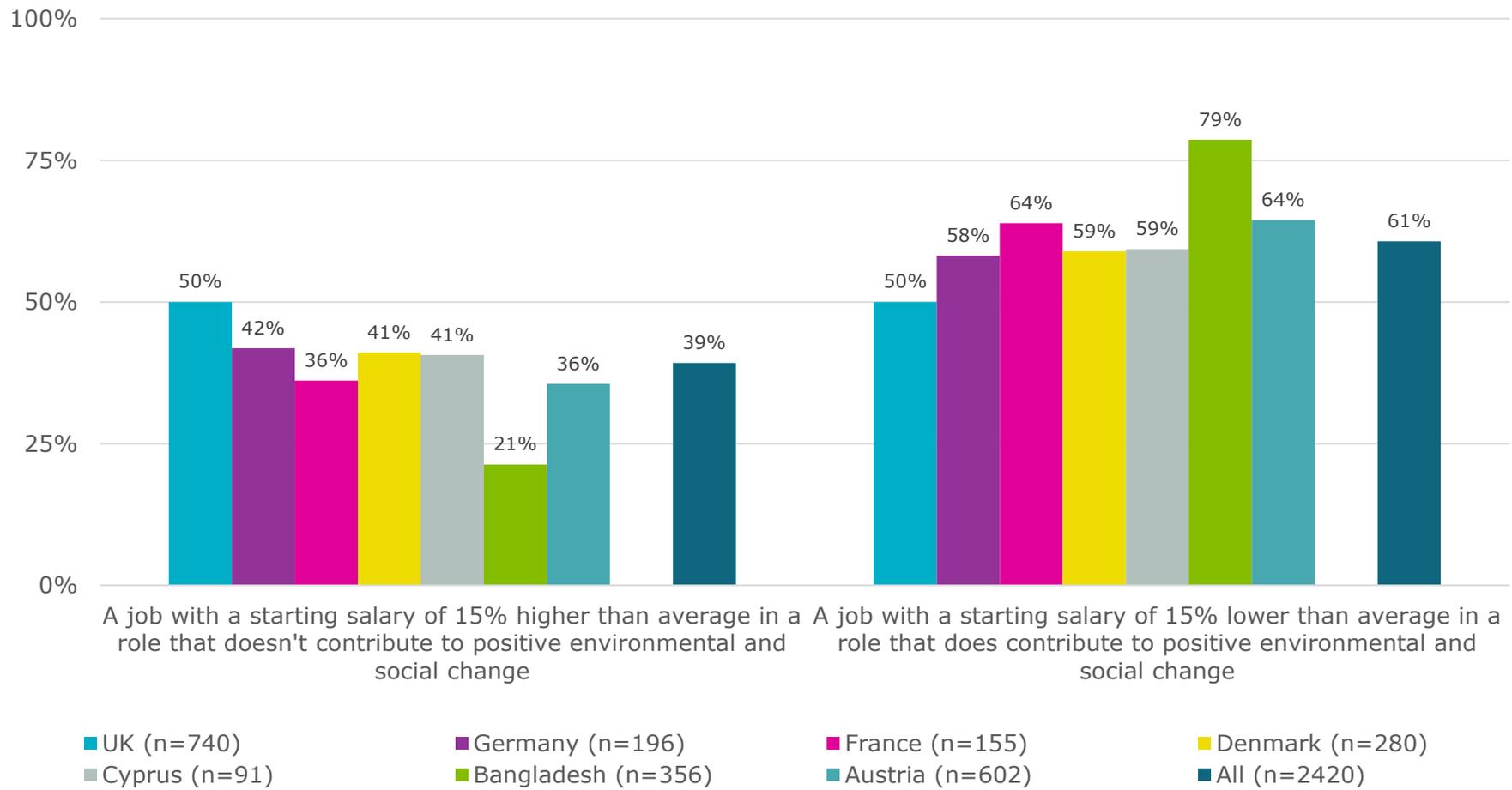
61% say they would accept a starting salary of 15% lower than average to work in a company that has a positive environmental and social record.



Q. Finally, we're interested in hearing about your plans for after you finish studying and find a job. Of the assuming all factors are equal, in each case please tell us which option you would choose.

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

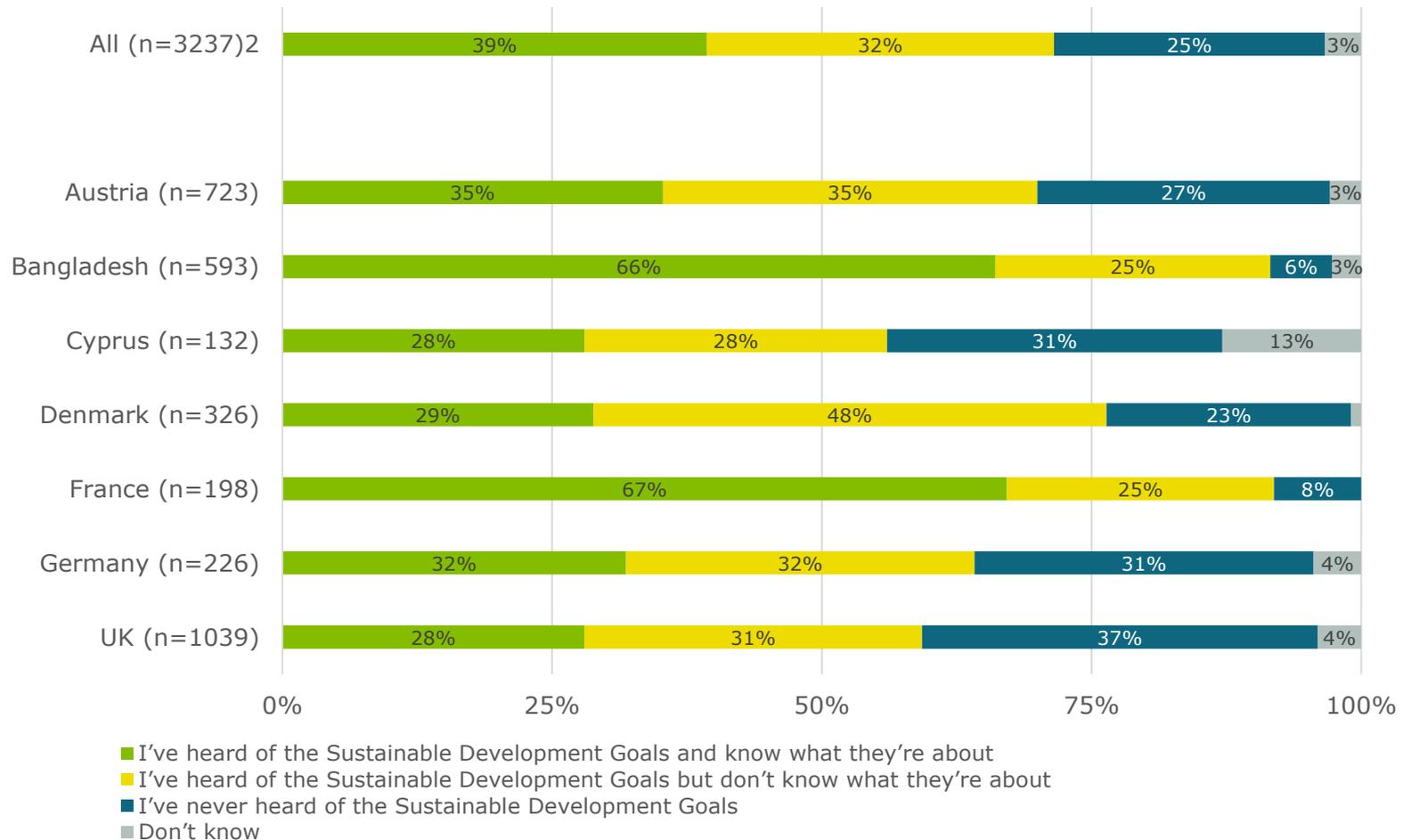
61% say they would accept a salary 15% lower than average to work in a specific role that contributes to positive environmental and social change.



Q. Finally, we're interested in hearing about your plans for after you finish studying and find a job. Of the two choices presented below, assuming all factors are equal, in each case please tell us which option you would choose.

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

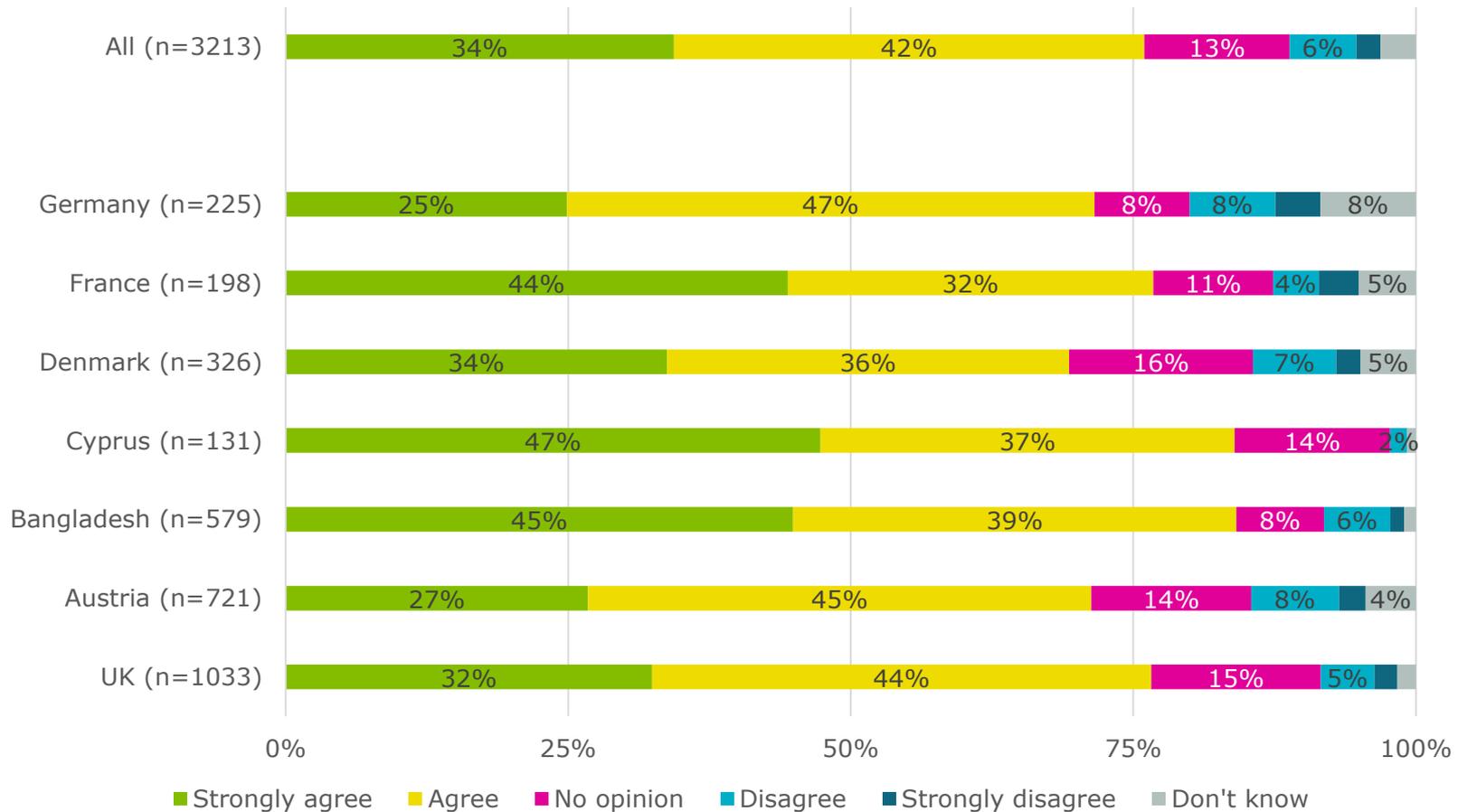
Over a third (39%) of respondents say they have heard of the Sustainable Development Goals and know what they're about. Around a third also say they have heard of the goals, but don't know what they're about (32%). A quarter of respondents say they have never heard of the goals.



B10. Which of the following options describe what you know about the Sustainable Development Goals?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

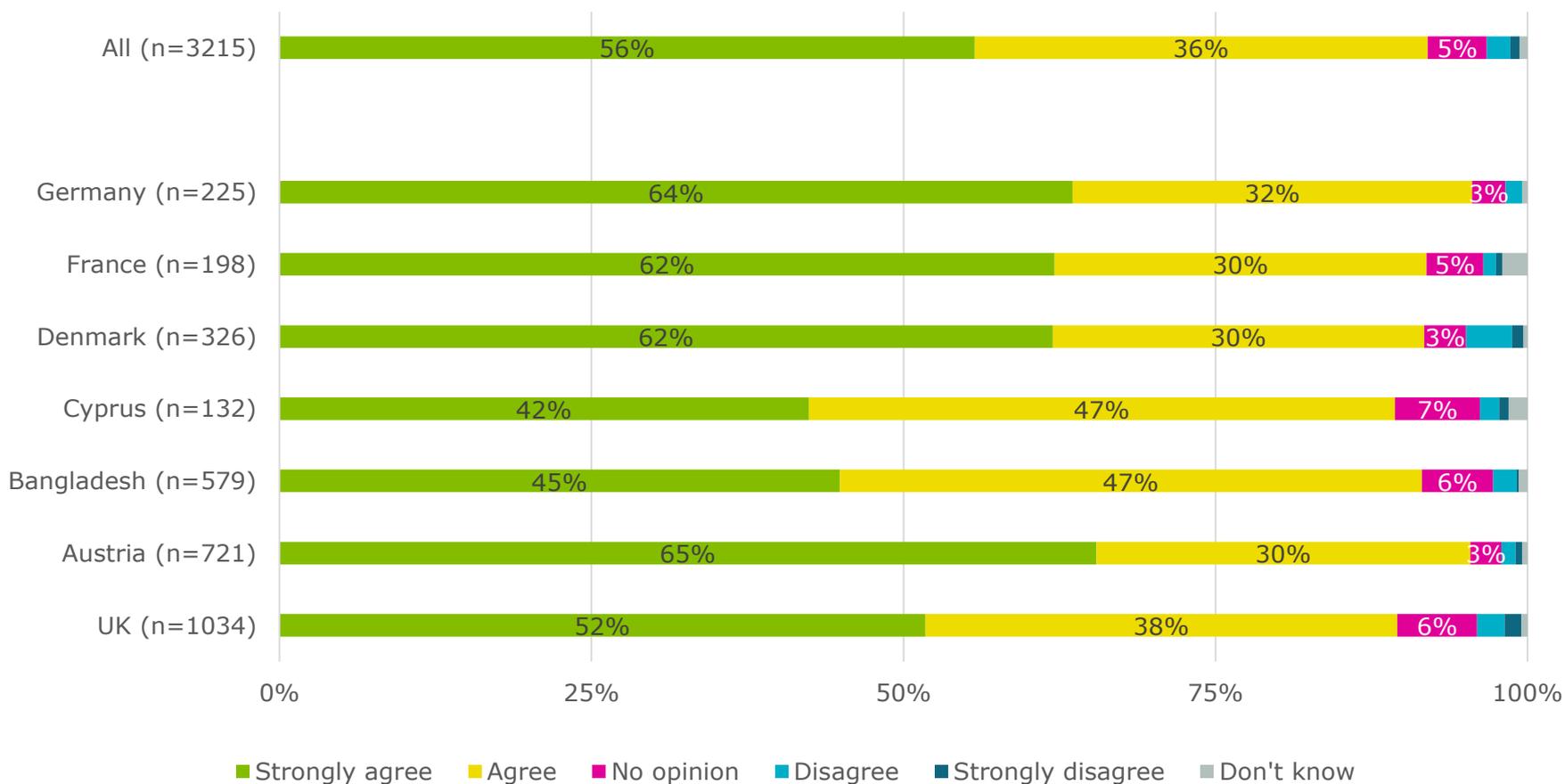
Three quarters of respondents (76%) agree that climate change will negatively impact them and their lifestyle.



Q. Please consider the following statements about climate change and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each: Climate change will negatively impact me and my lifestyle.

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

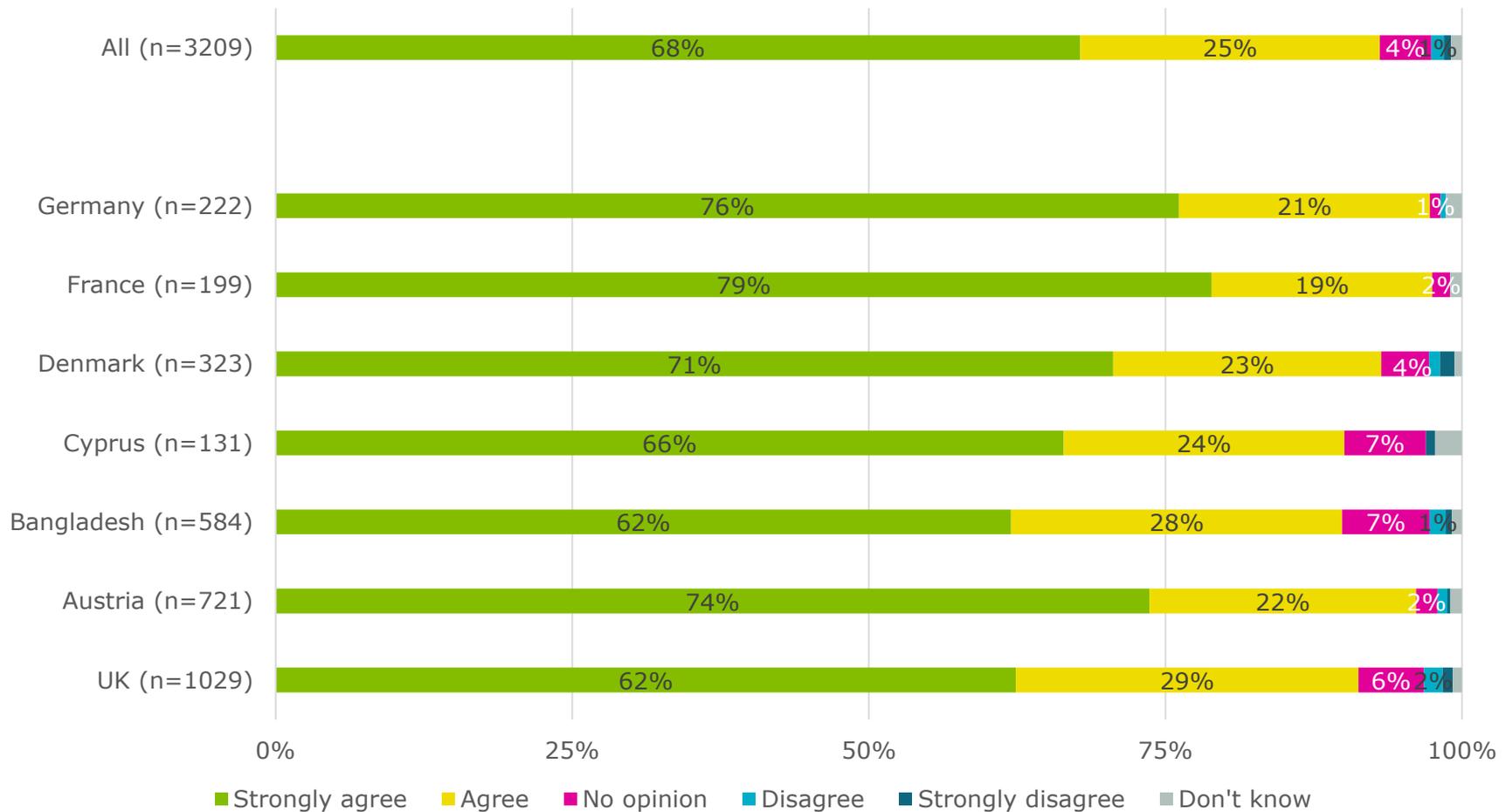
92% say they are concerned about the effects of climate change.



Q. Please consider the following statements about climate change and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each: I am concerned about the effects of climate change

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

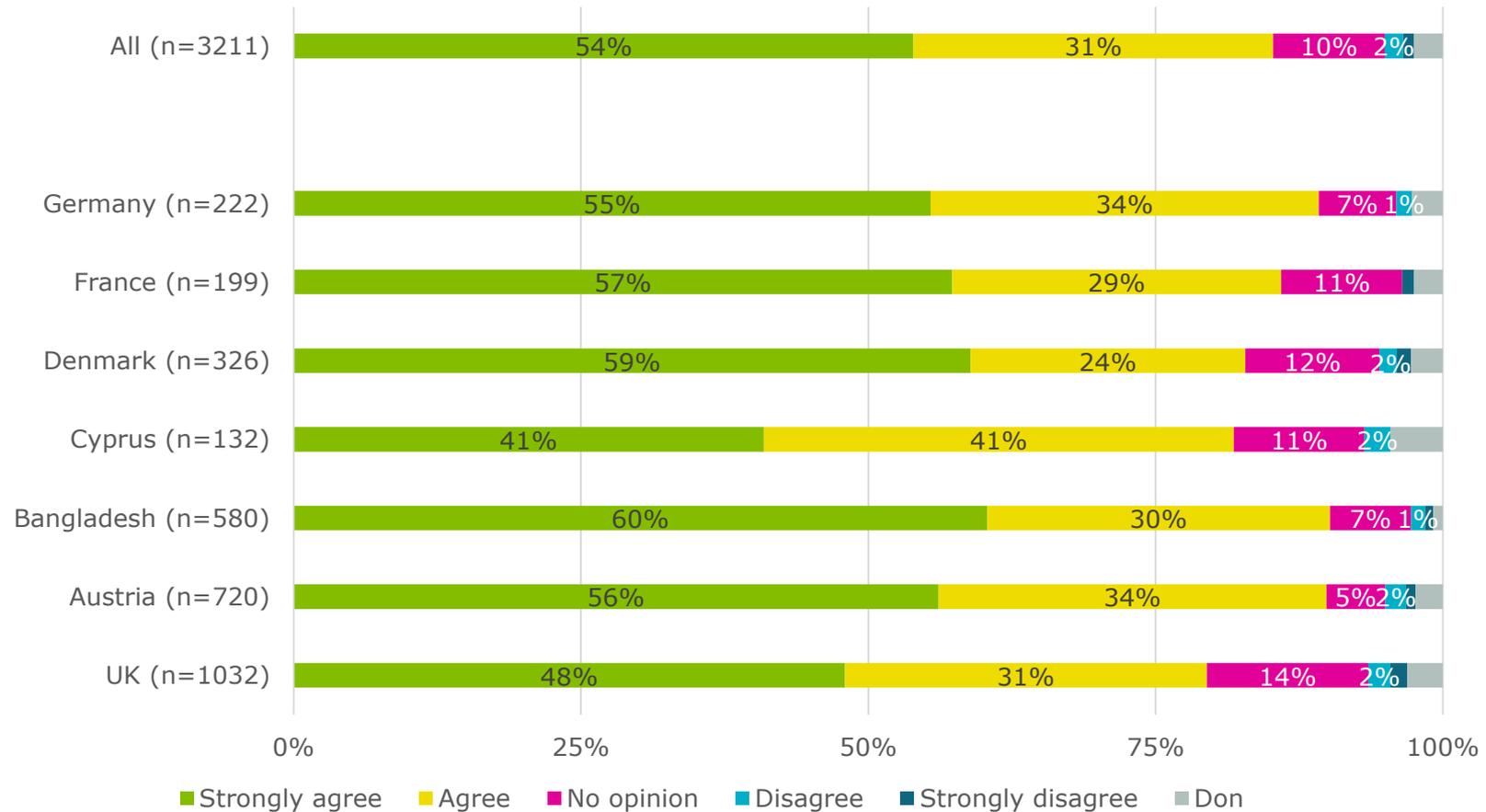
93% agree that governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change.



Q. Please consider the following statements about climate change and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each:
Governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

85% say they would vote for a government that increased action to tackle climate change.

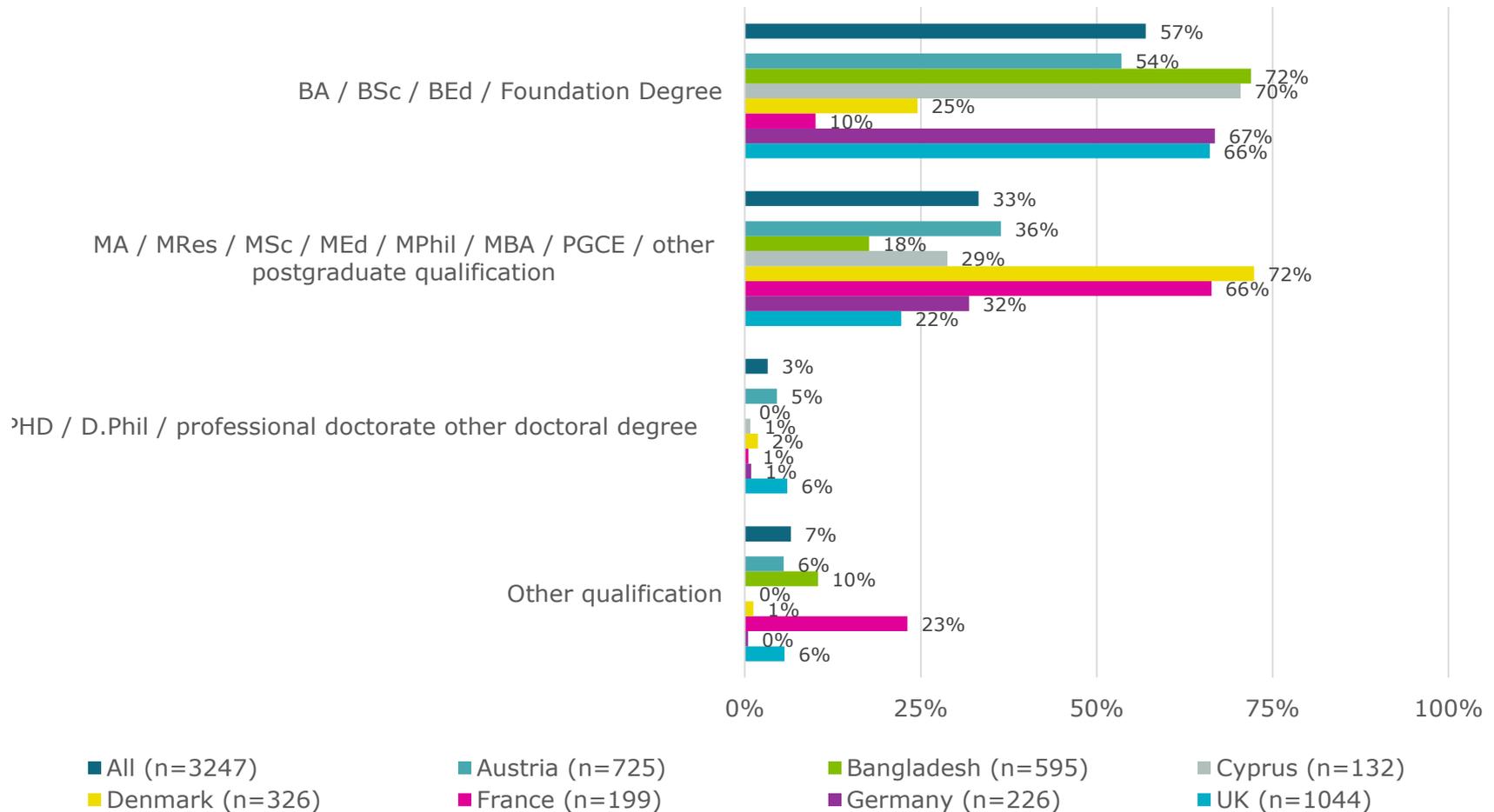


Q. Please consider the following statements about climate change and indicate how strongly you agree or disagree with each: "I would vote for a Government that increased action to tackle climate change."

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

4. Appendix | The respondents

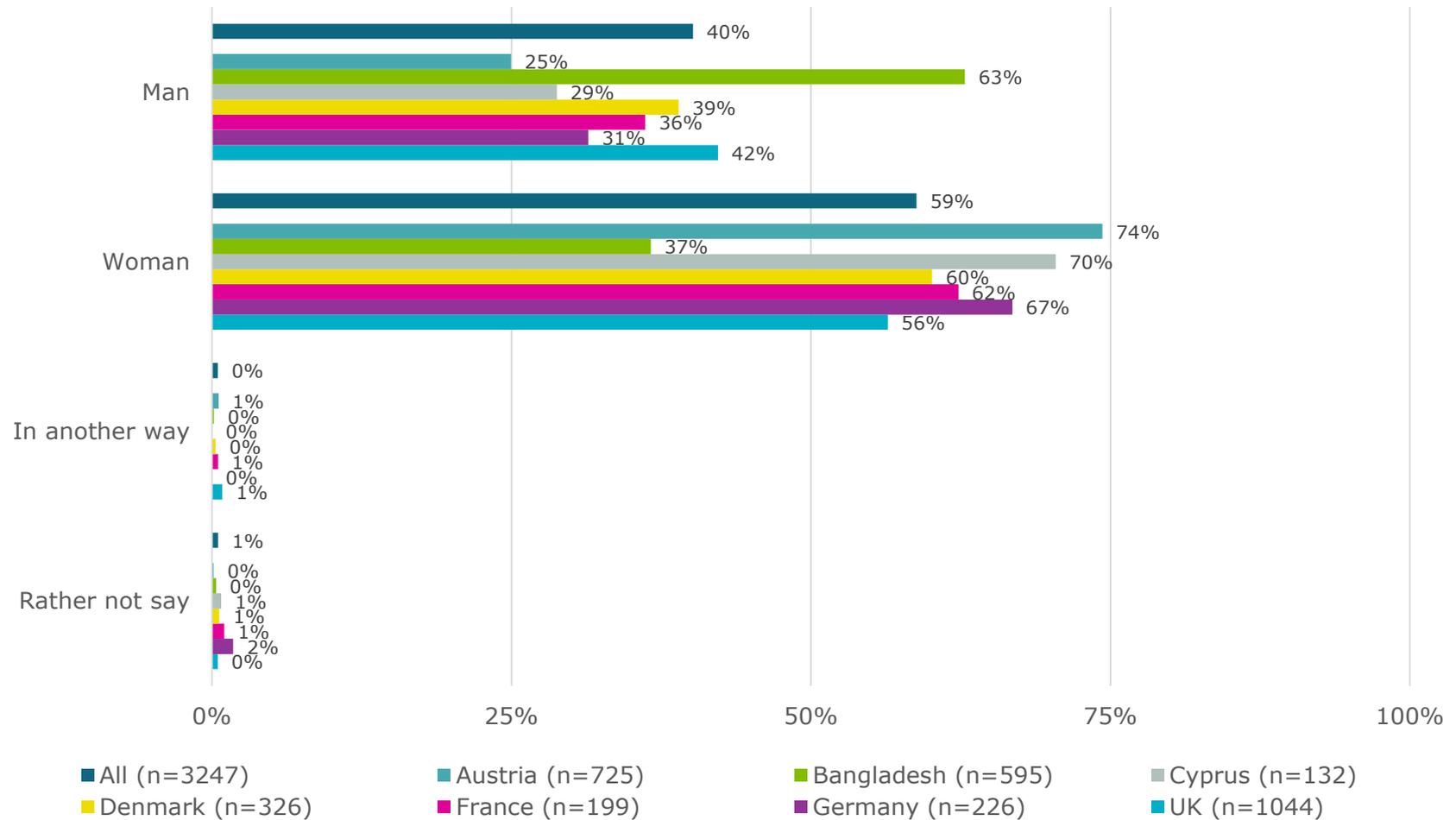
Overall, over half of respondents (57%) are studying for their first degree.



Q. Please tell us what type of course you are studying.

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

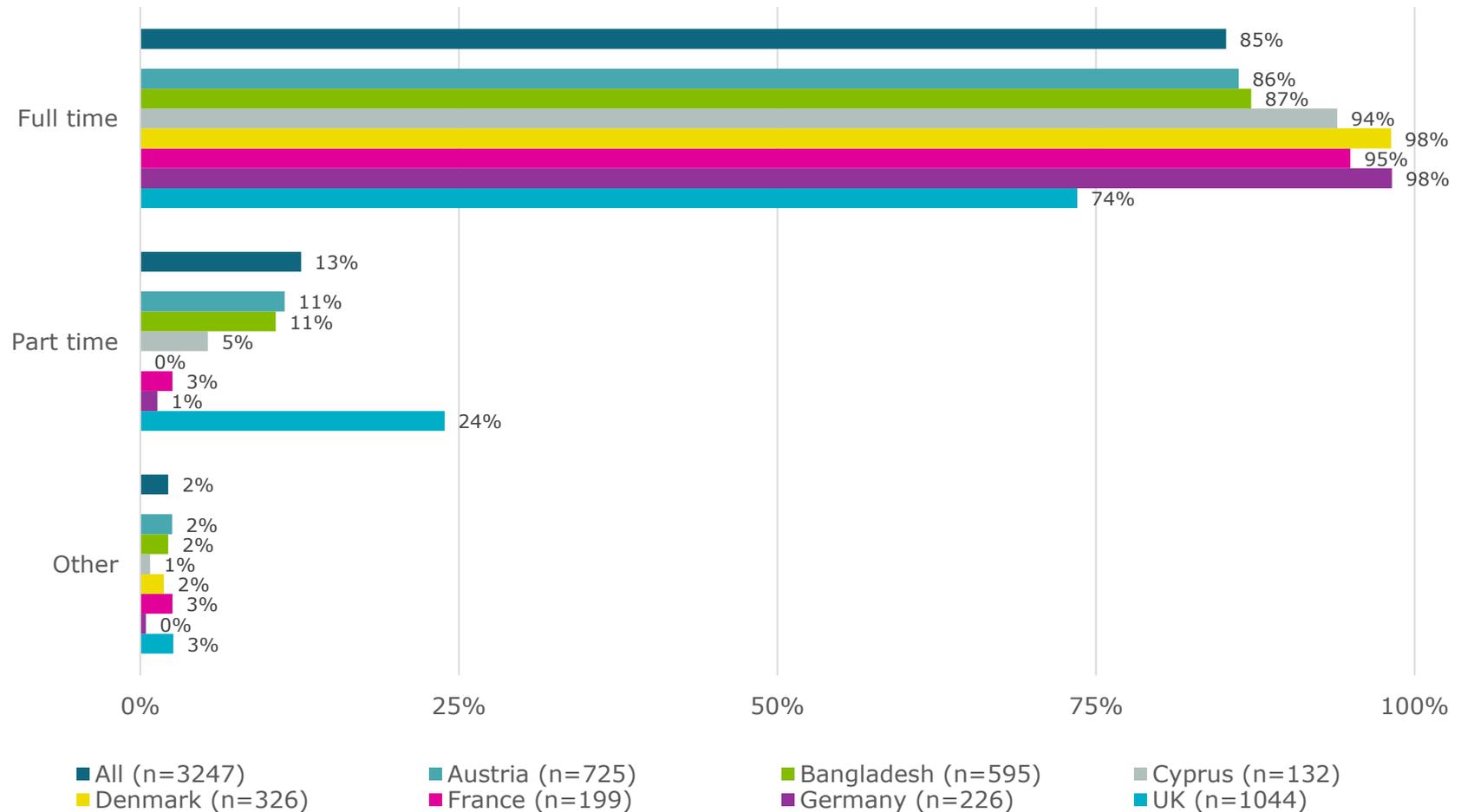
Overall, 59% of respondents identify as women, and 40% as men.



Q. Which of the following best describes your gender identity?

Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response

Overall, 85% of respondents are studying full time.



Q. Do you study full or part-time?
Base: (In brackets) Balance: No response



national union of **students**

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