



STUDENTS
ORGANIZING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
INTERNATIONAL

Students, sustainability and education

Results from a survey of students in higher
education around the world

-
February 2021

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About the research

We know students care about sustainability and education but there is little research to support this that is recognized as representative enough. A robust data set can be used to leverage change within business cases, funding and resource applications and to inform policy. Individual organizations can also benchmark against the international data. Ideas and examples of how the data presented in this report can be used can be found [here](#).

Between April and October 2020, SOS International invited higher education institutions and student-facing organisations to send out a survey designed to gather insight into student experiences of sustainability and education. More than 100 organisations took part and we received just under 7000 responses from students in higher education around the world. Responses were incentivized with a prize draw of the equivalent of ten €100 prizes. Organisations which captured 100 or more student responses were provided with anonymized data from their students.

Promoting organizations were instructed to promote the survey in a neutral manner, avoiding references to the environment and sustainability to avoid biasing the results.

This report sets out the overall findings followed by regional breakdowns for UN regions which received 100 responses or more (Africa, Asia, Europe and Oceania), with questions forming the following themes:

- Experiences of sustainability in education
- Impacts of sustainability in education
- Sustainability and employability
- Climate change

About SOS International

We support student and youth groups globally to lead on sustainability and social justice. We connect, strengthen and scale impactful initiatives – so together we can go further, faster.

Globally, less than 3% of people go to university, but 80% of leaders have a higher education degree. However, **most universities are not yet ensuring that all their graduates are equipped** with the knowledge and competencies needed to be leaders for a sustainable and just future.

Meanwhile, as students have always been at the heart of social change, we are witnessing an increasing number of student-led sustainability initiatives. **Yet most of these do not reach further than their own institutions**, while students who want to develop such projects on the other hand, do not always know how to get started.

We convene (inter)national student-led and student-focused organisations, working on sustainability and social justice, to

- **support more and better action** among education institutions and student organisations
- **scale programs and campaigns** to have wider reach and greater impact
- **strengthen capacity** of member organisations to empower student leadership
- **Amplify the voice of students** worldwide to influence systemic change

We run multiple **sustainability programs, projects and campaigns**, together with the SOS members. Building on over a decade of experience, this portfolio is designed to be easily adapted in new organisations and countries. Read more about our programs [here](#).

We do research **on students and sustainability**, that can leverage action to transform education and direct society to a more sustainable and fair future.

We strengthen **collaboration and capacity** among our members, and **mobilize funding** together. Find out more on our [membership page](#).

We offer **workshops, event facilitation and consultancy** to all organizations interested in sustainability and/or working with students and youth. Have a look at our [services page](#).

Survey results

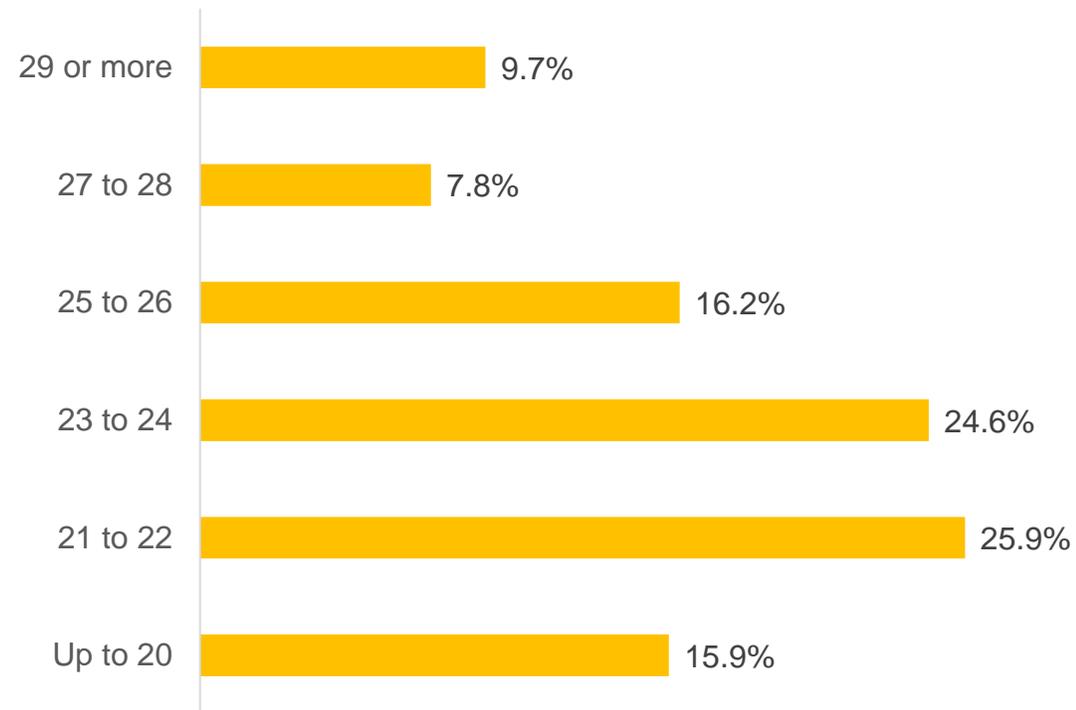
Overall data



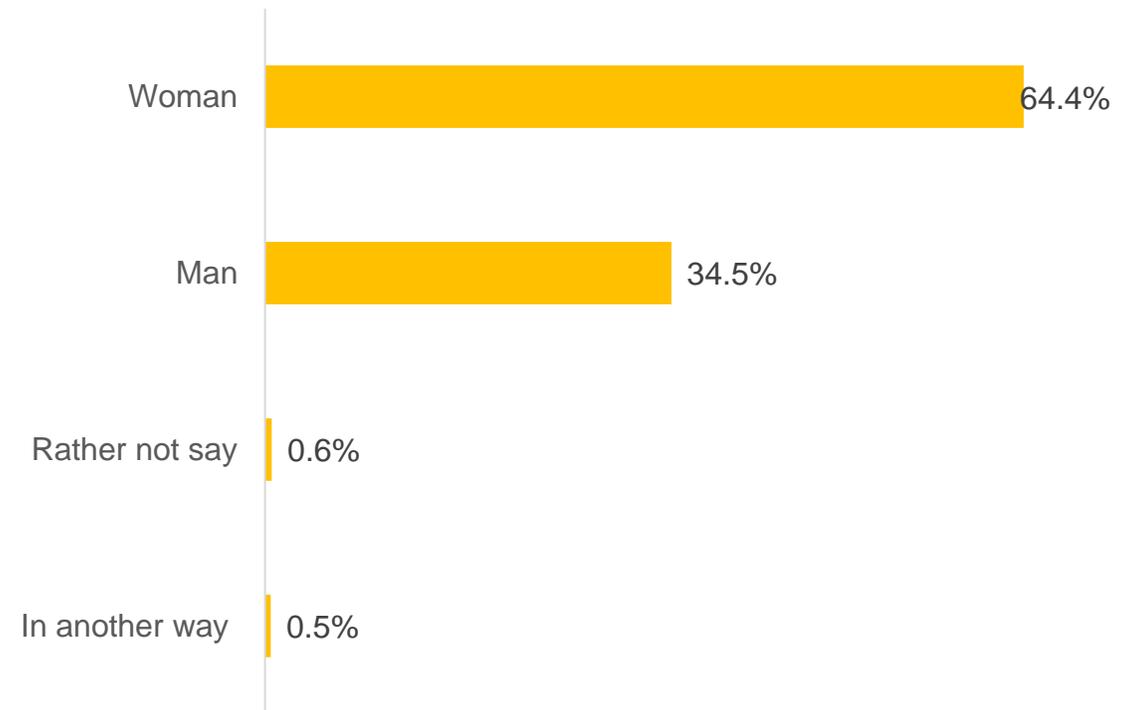
The respondents

Respondent demographics

AGE

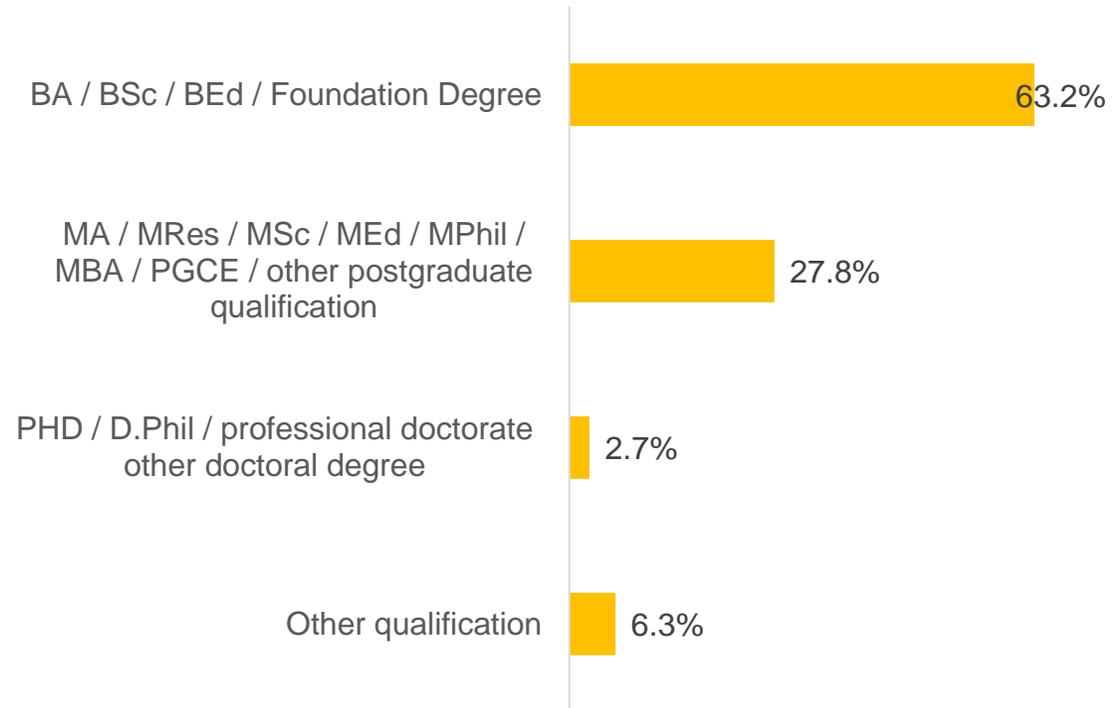


GENDER

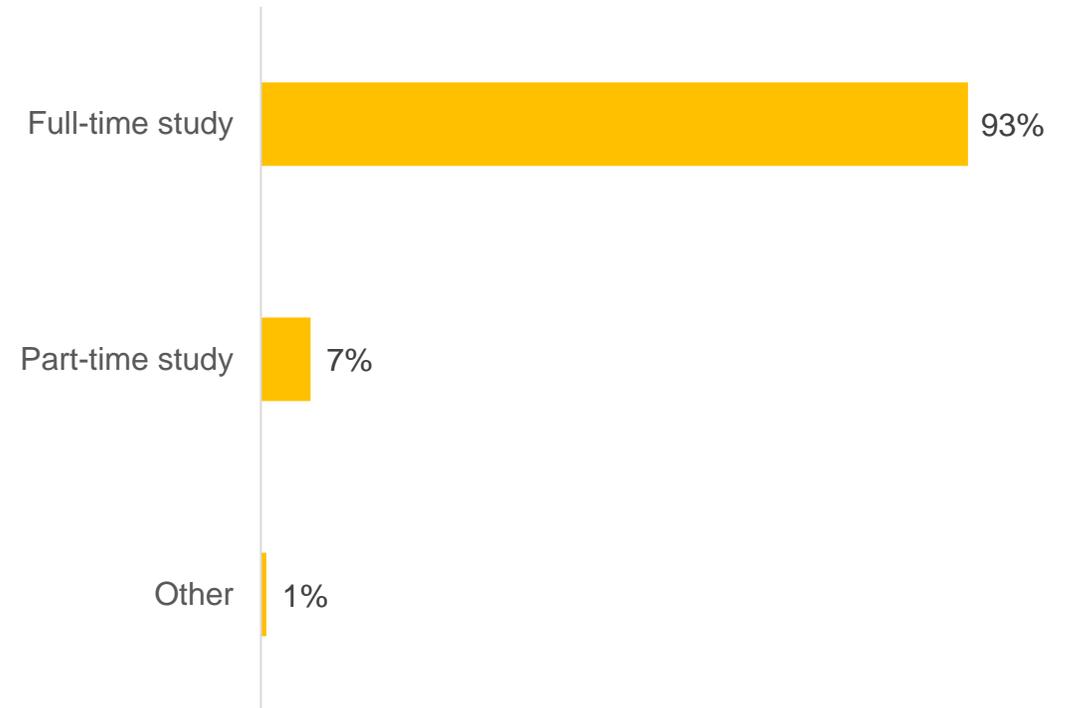


Respondent demographics

COURSE TYPE

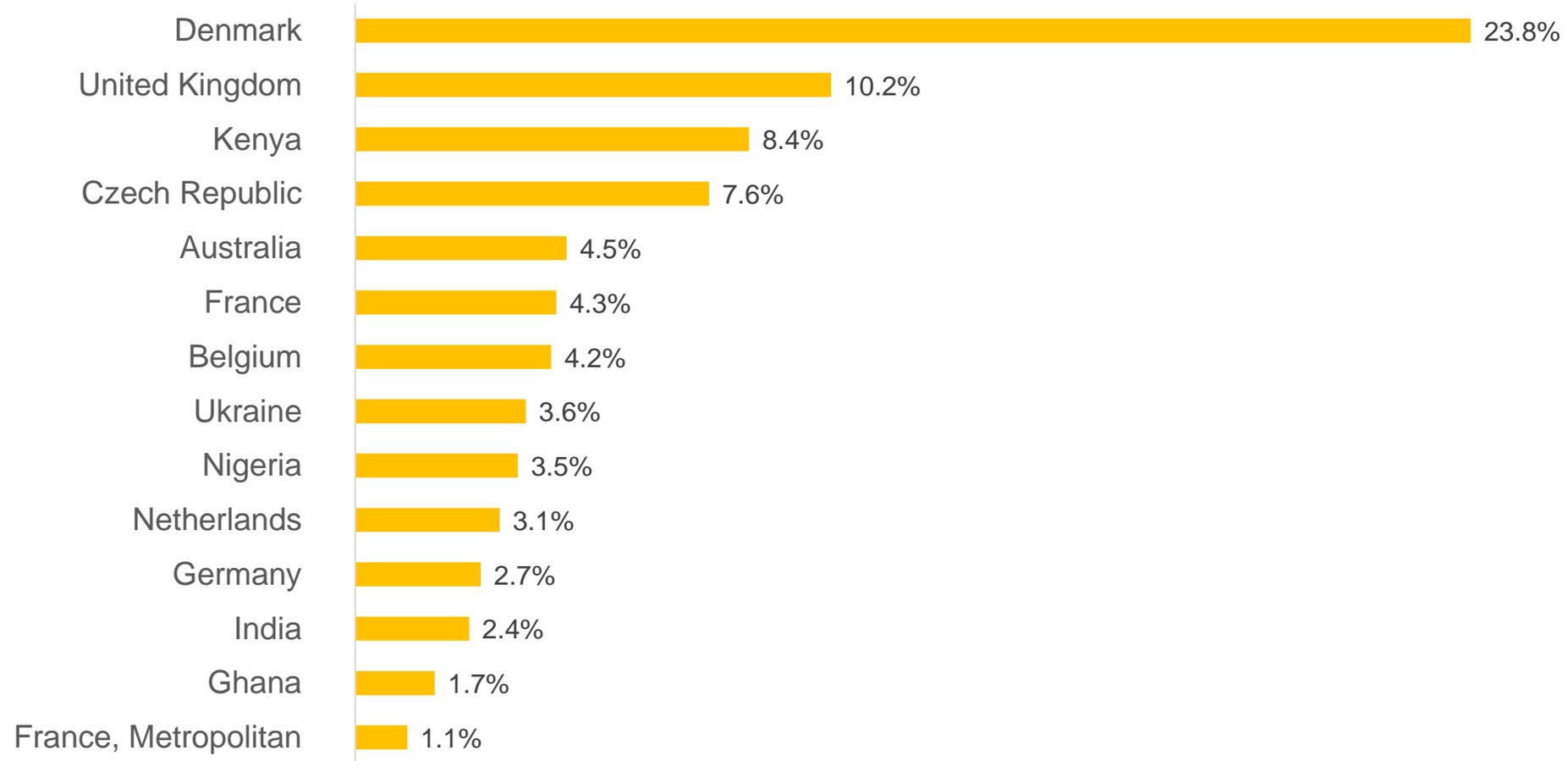


STUDY MODE



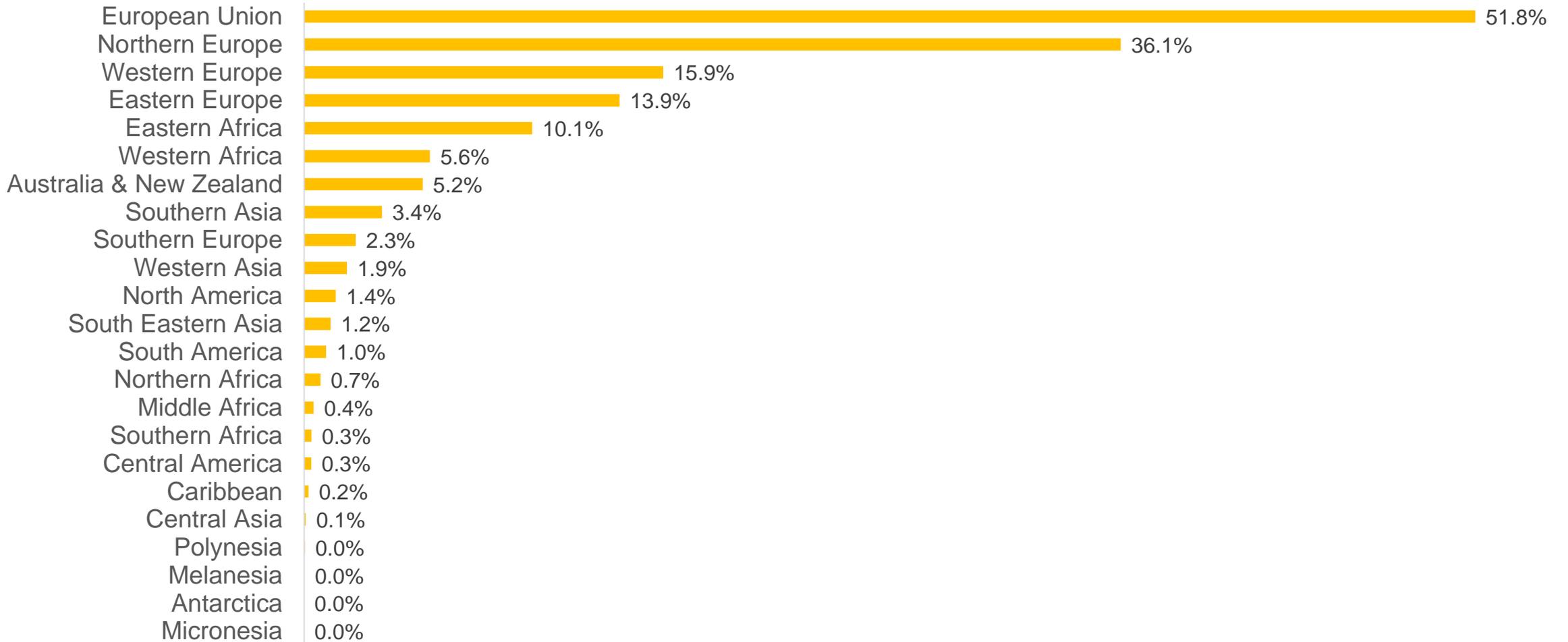
Respondent demographics

NATIONALITY COUNTRY



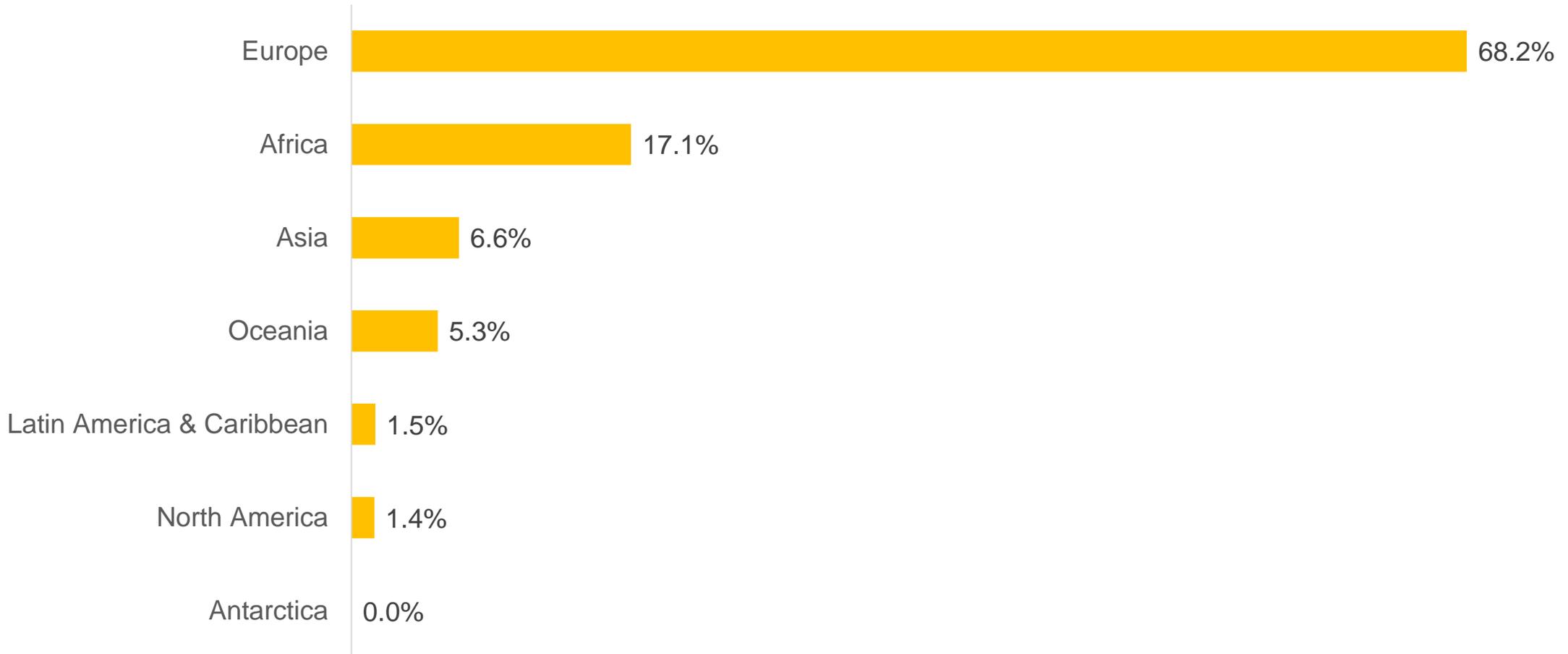
Respondent demographics

NATIONALITY SUB-REGION



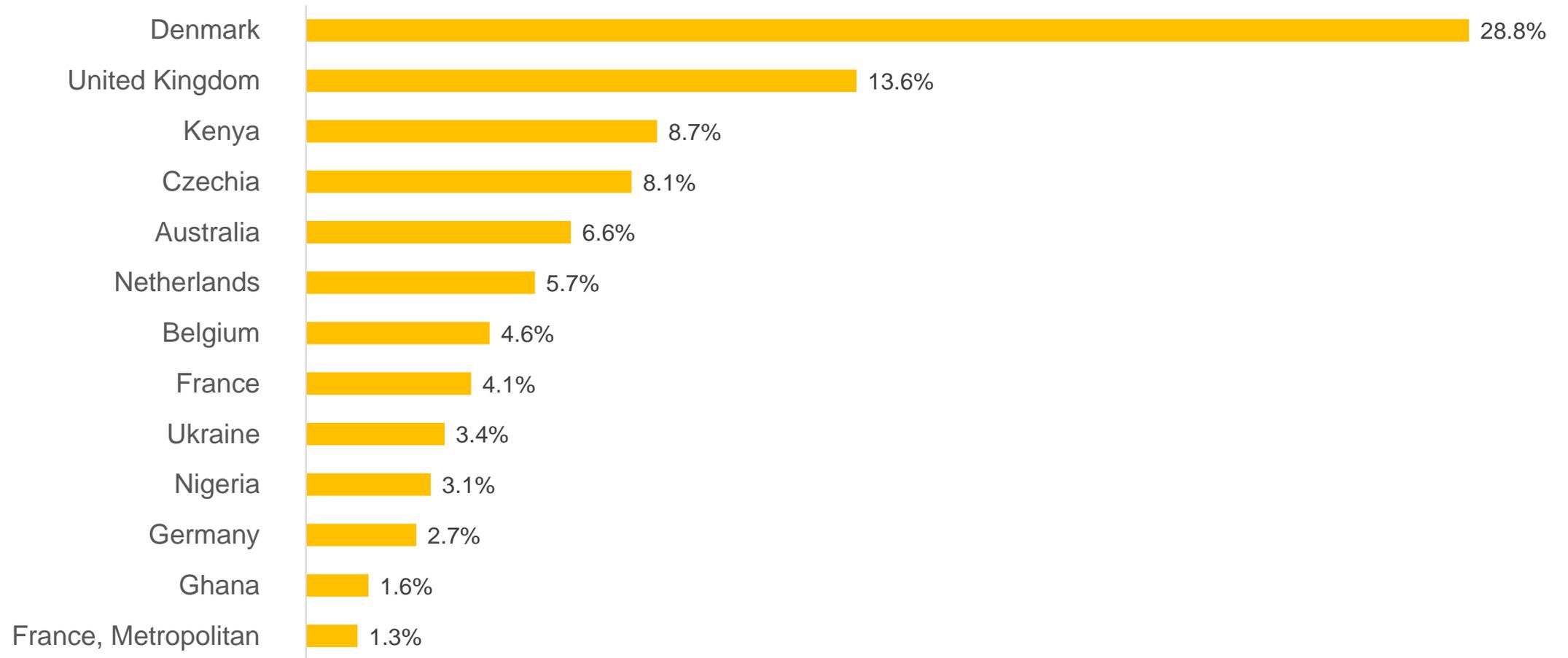
Respondent demographics

NATIONALITY REGION



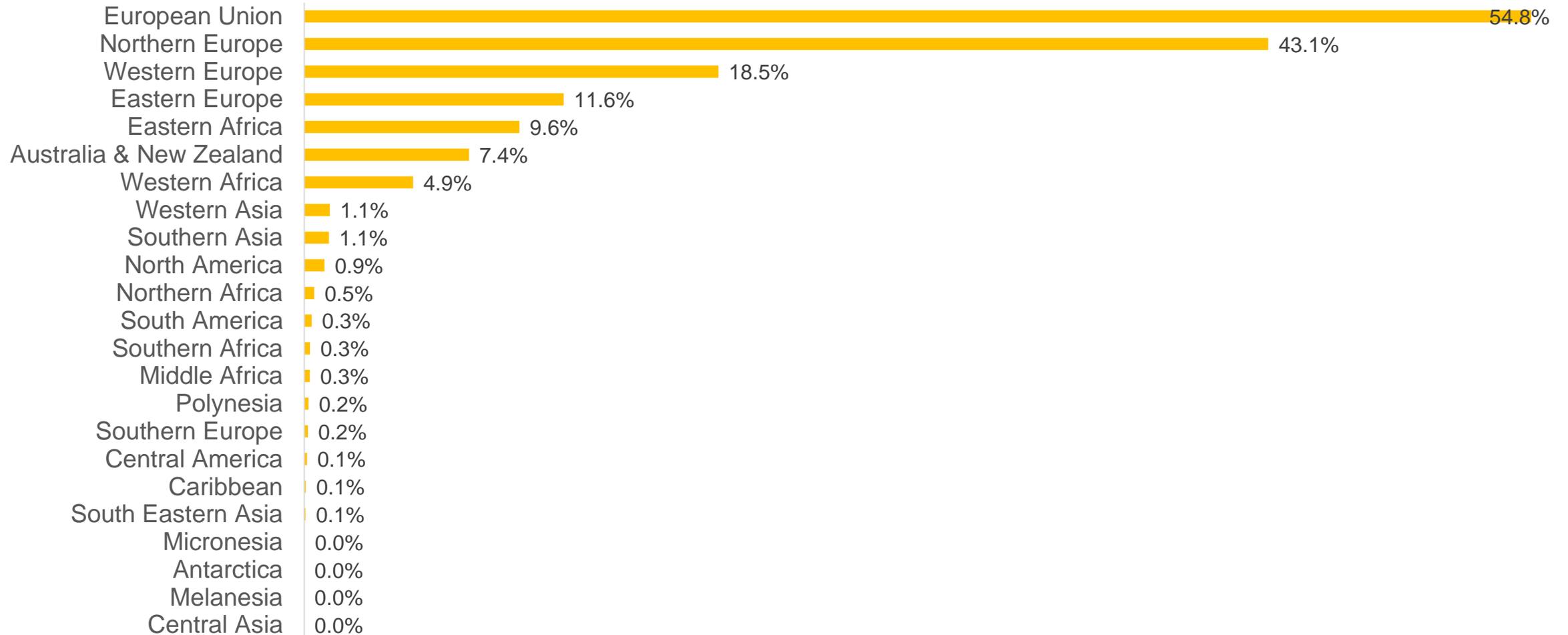
Respondent demographics

STUDY COUNTRY



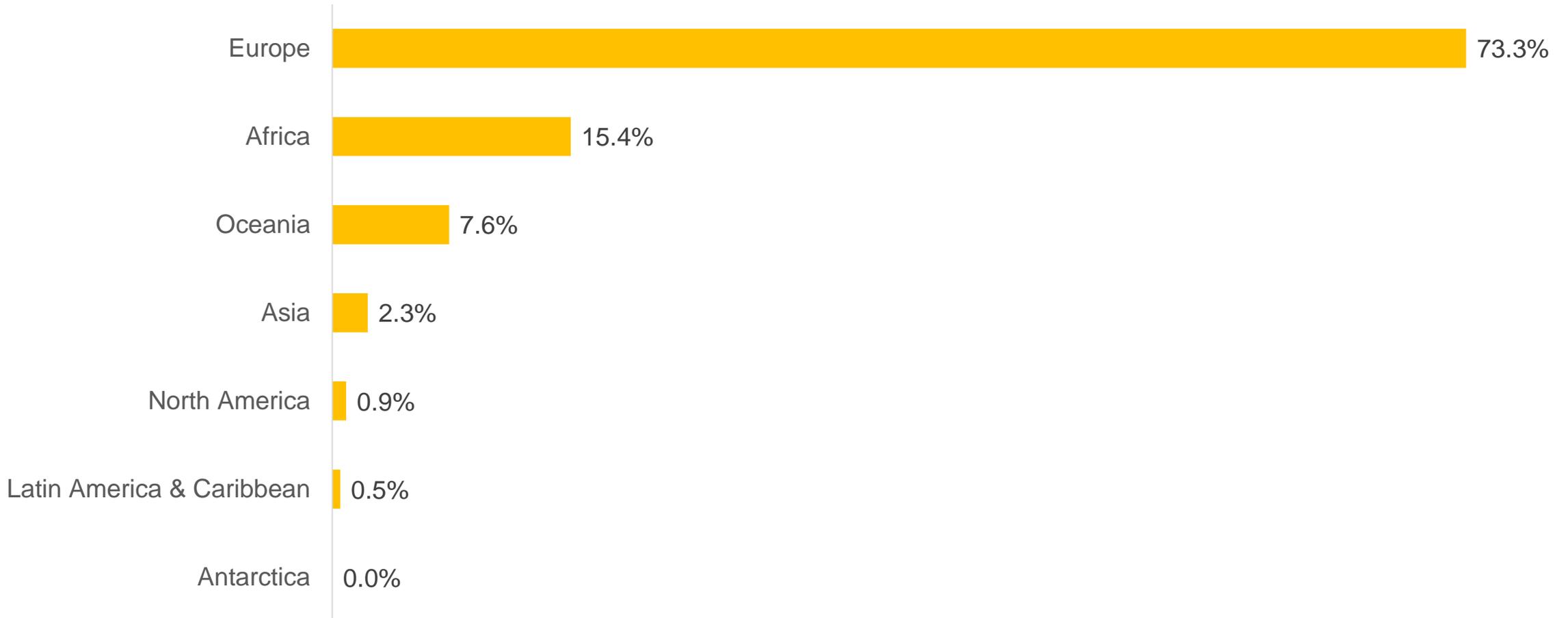
Respondent demographics

STUDY SUB-REGION



Respondent demographics

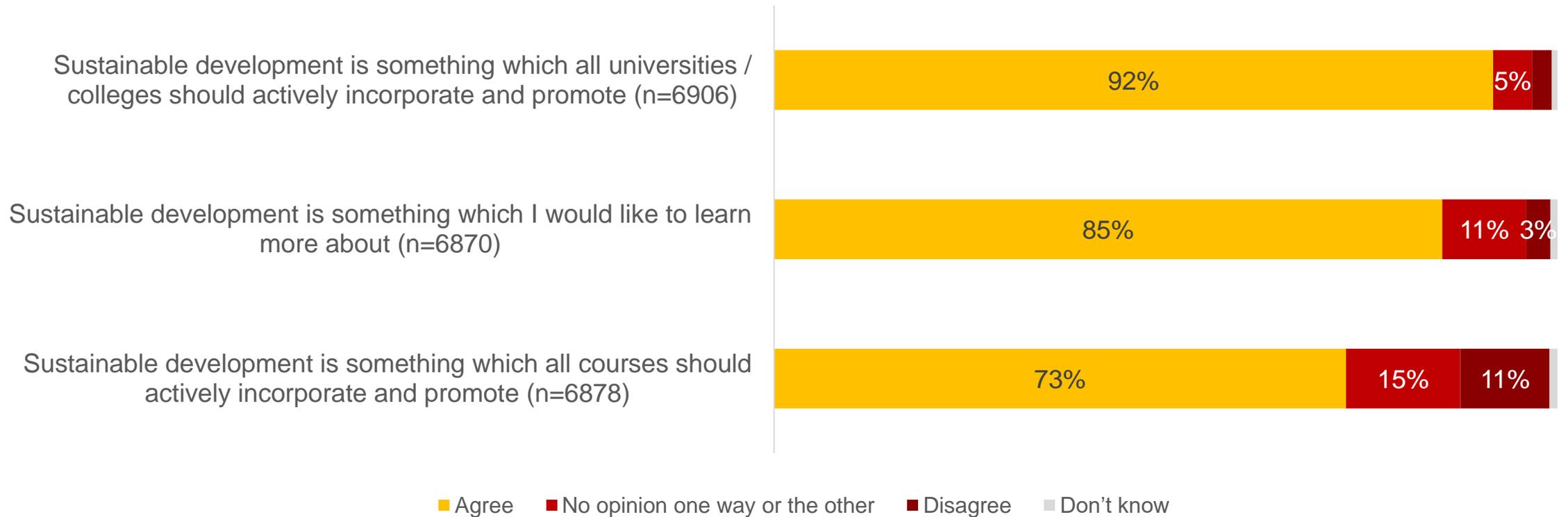
STUDY REGION



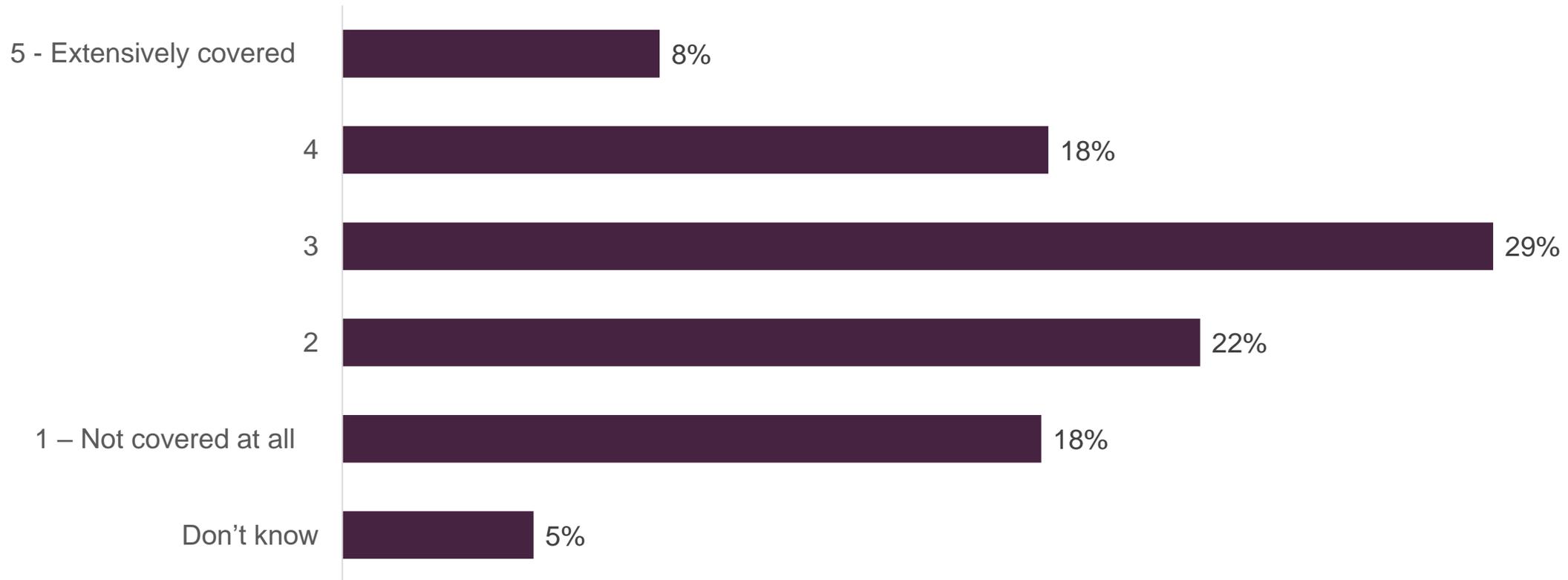


Experiences of sustainability in education

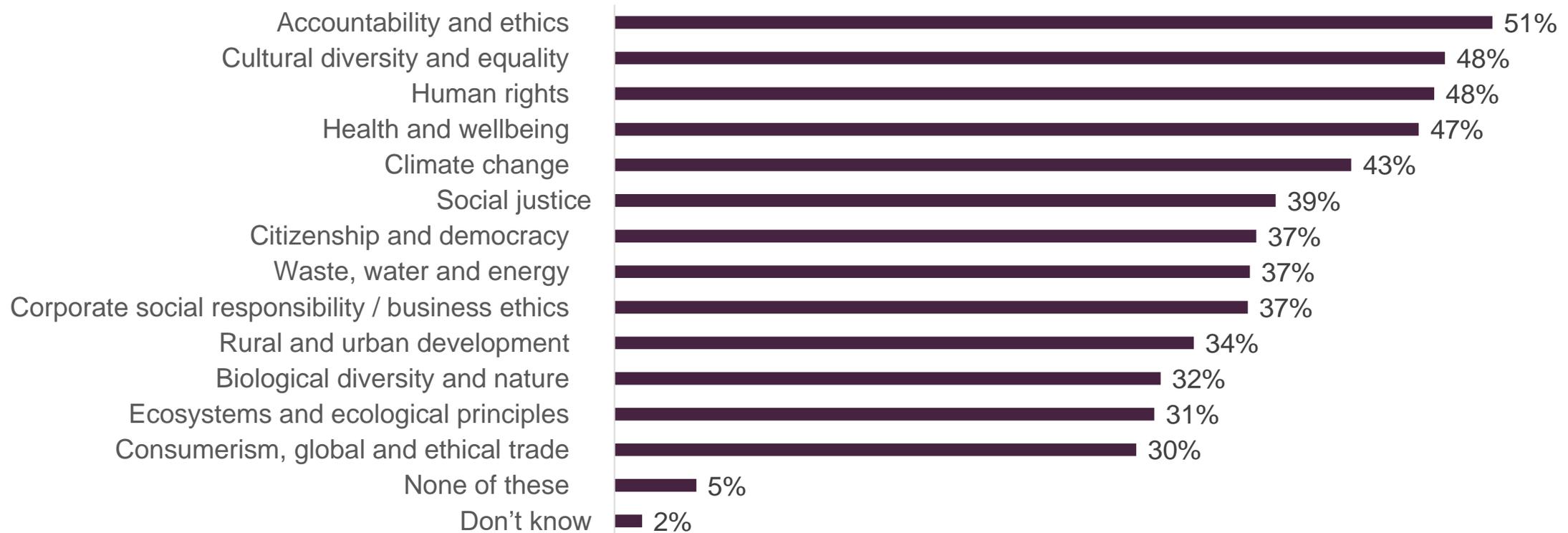
92% agree that sustainable development is something which all universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote. 85% say the concept is something they want to learn more about, and 73% want to see it covered by all courses.



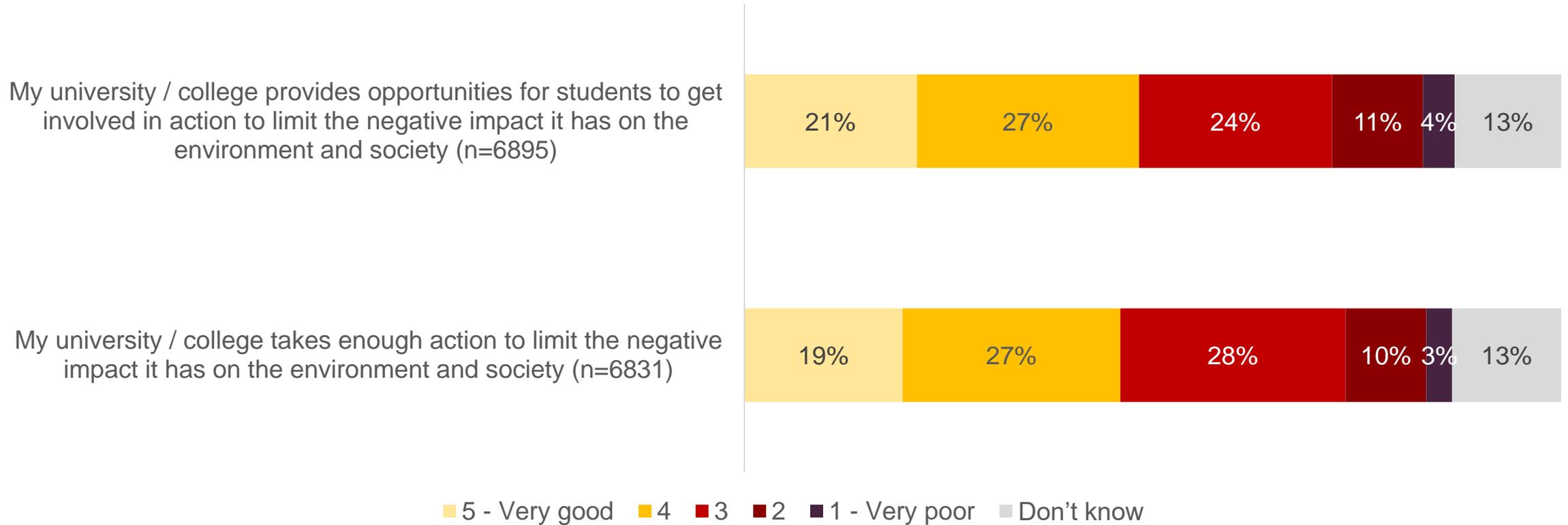
26% of respondents say sustainable development has been covered in depth by their course. However 40% report low or no coverage of the concept.



When considering individual issues covered by sustainable development, respondents most commonly report experiencing learning on accountability and ethics (51%), human rights (48%) and cultural diversity and equality (48%).



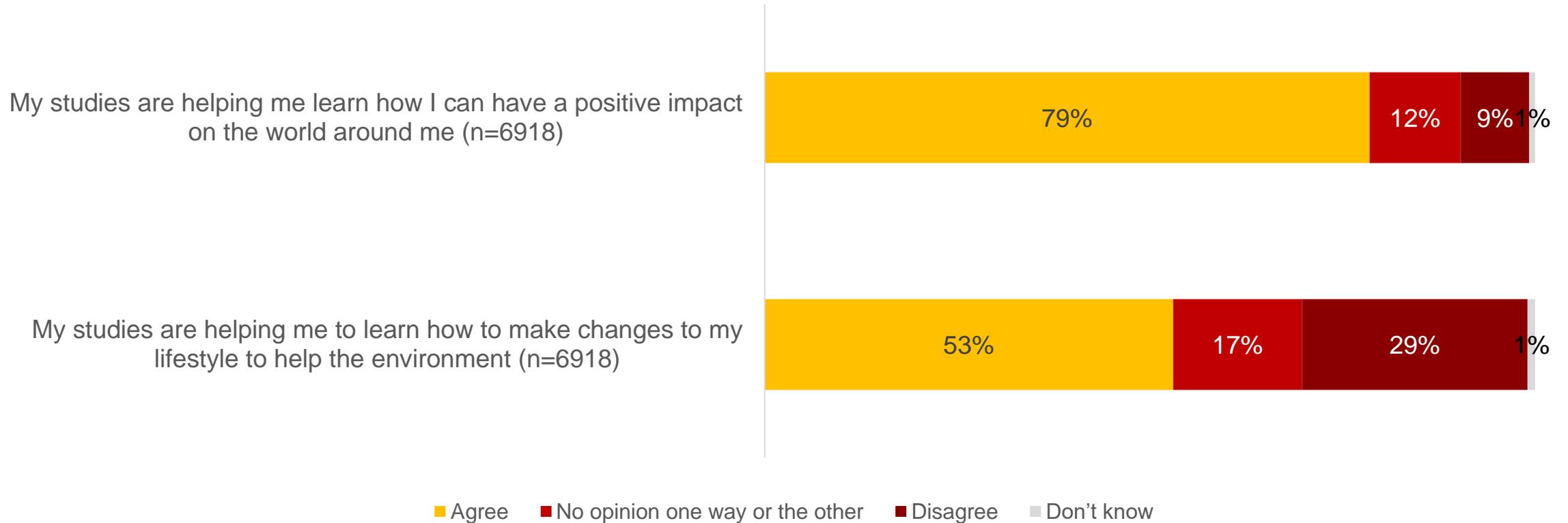
48% say their university or college is good at providing opportunities for students to engage in action on sustainability. 46% say their place of study takes enough action to limit its own impacts on the environment and society.



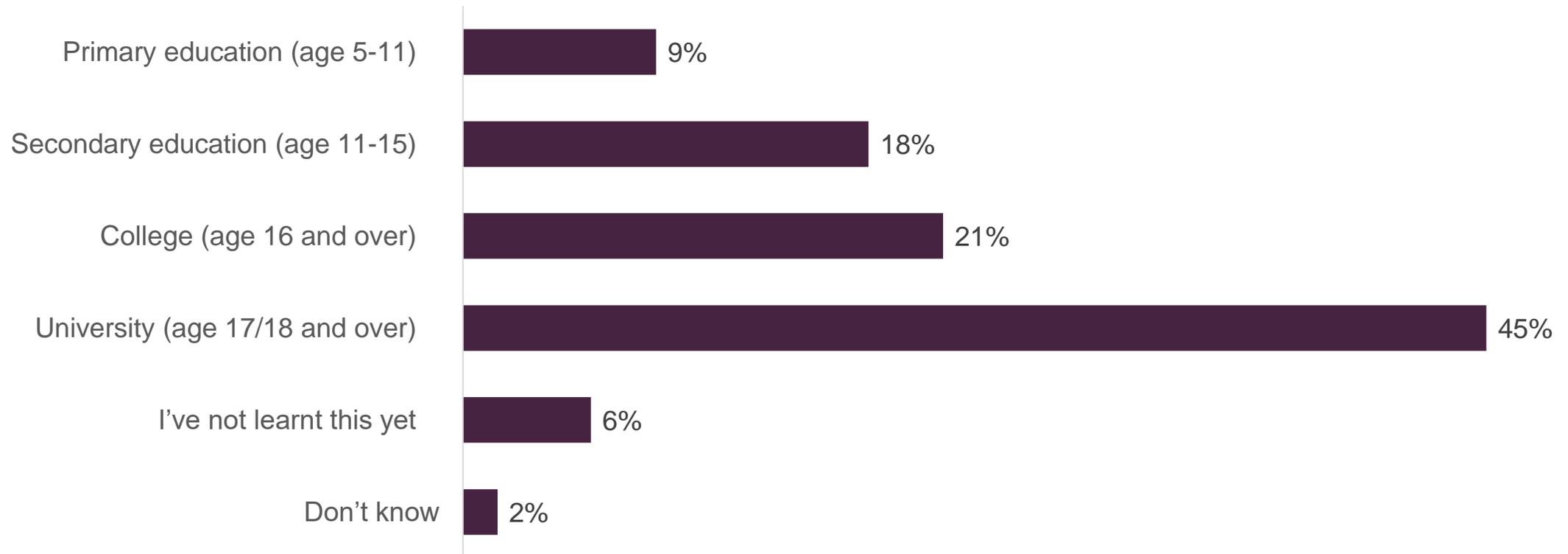


Impacts of
sustainability in
education

79% agree that their studies are helping them learn how they personally can positively impact the world around them. 53% agree that their studies are helping them learn how to make positive changes to their own lifestyles.



45% of respondents identify their studies at university as being the place where they've studied that has encouraged them to think and act to help the environment and other people the most.





Sustainability
and
employment

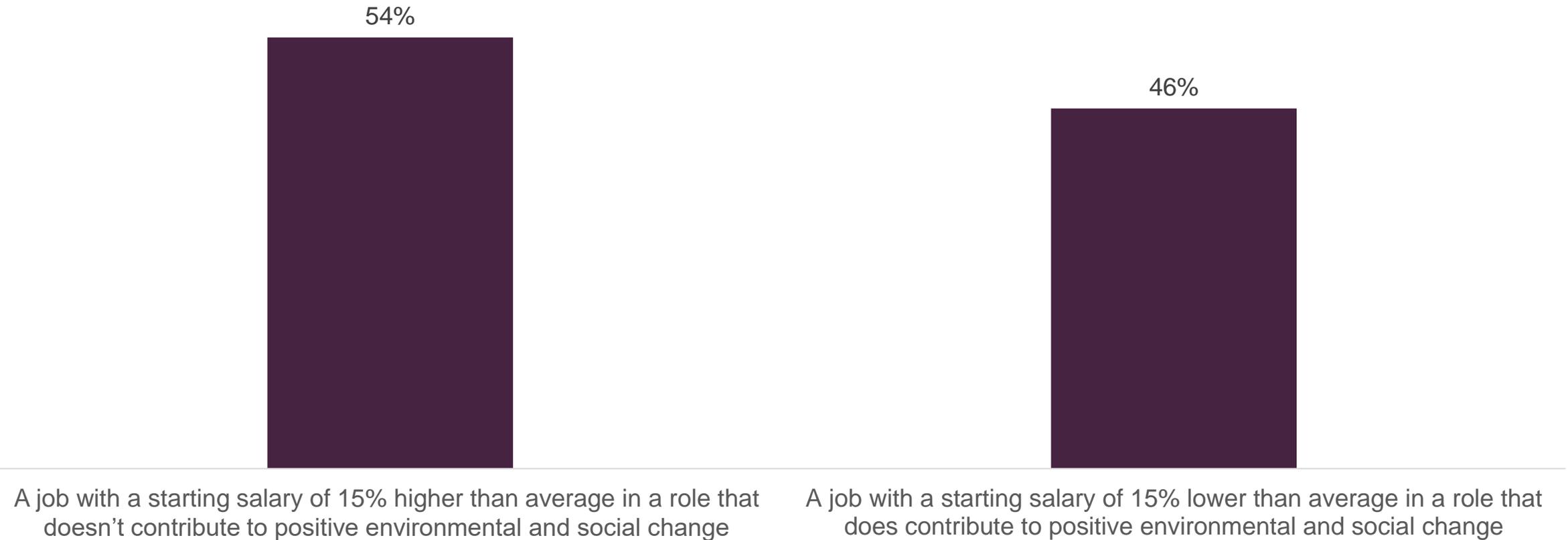
90% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 5% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



Two thirds of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



Half of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in a role that contributes to positive environmental and social change



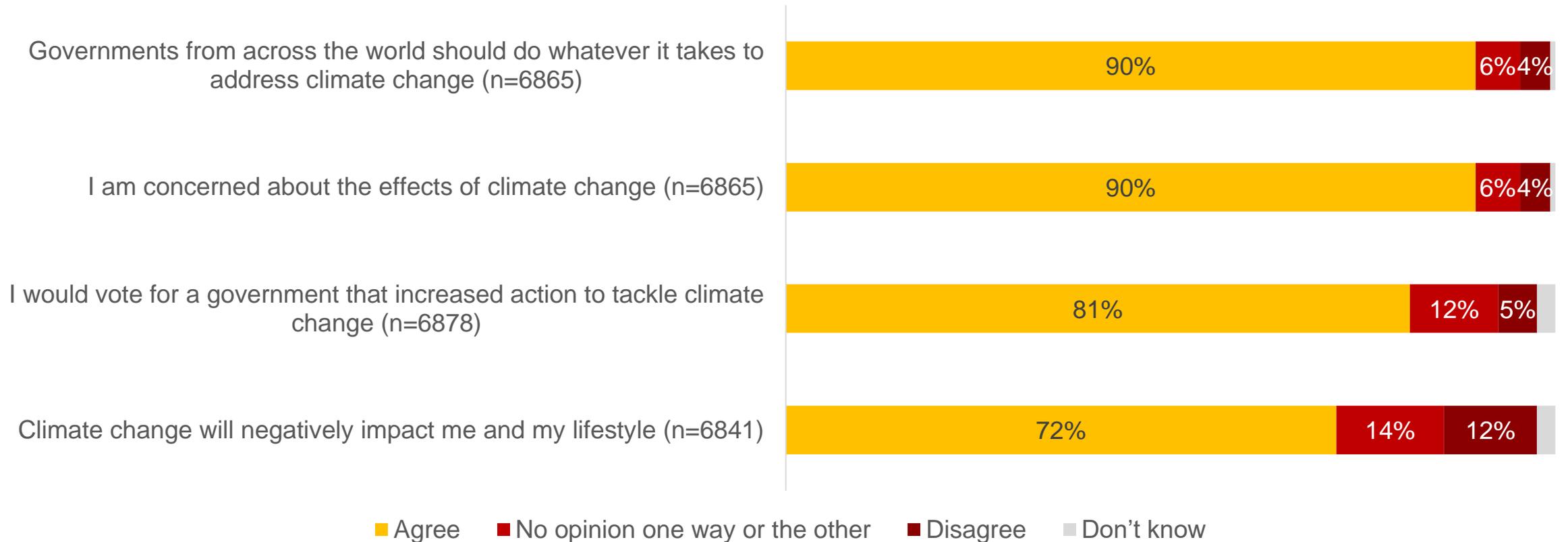
Personal attributes, job security and using skills developed through courses are the main factors respondents will take into account when considering their future career or job





Climate change
and awareness
of the SDGs

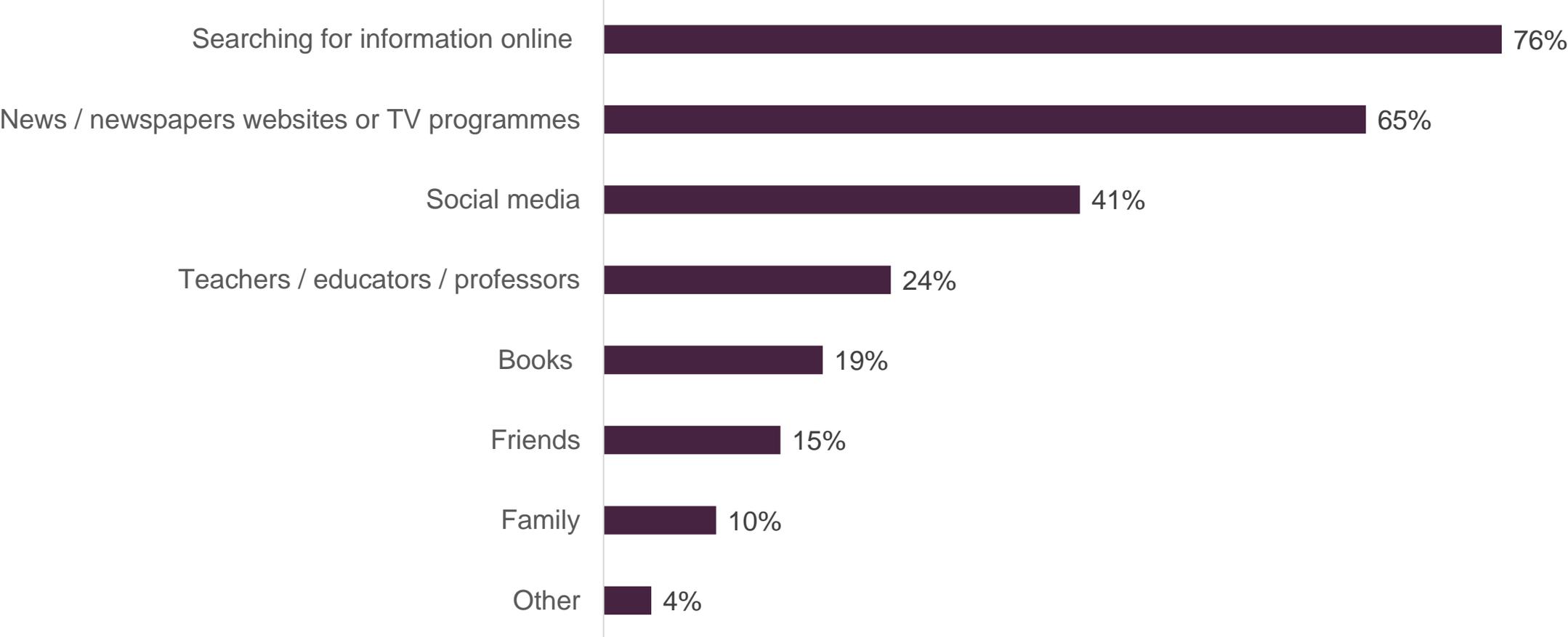
90% say they're concerned about the effects of climate change, and also agree that governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change.



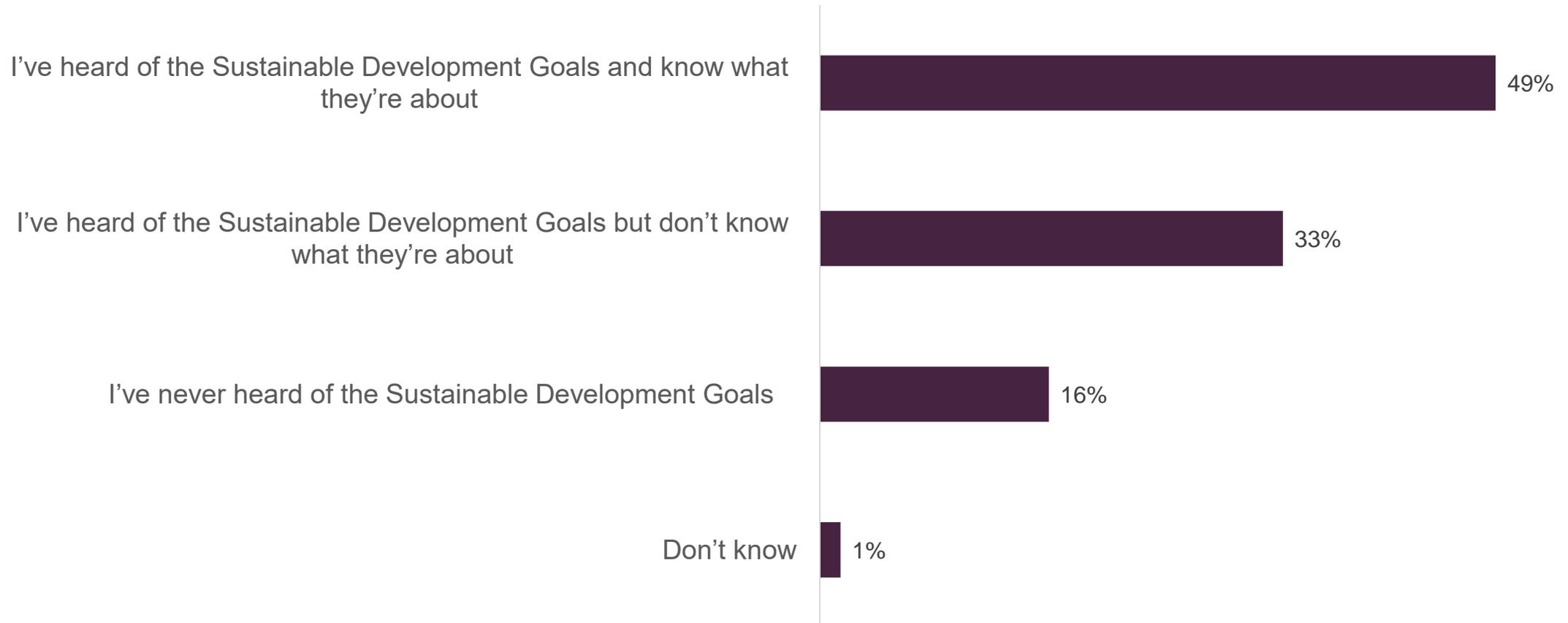
When asked to identify the word that best describes their feelings about climate change and their future, 75% say they're worried.



Three quarters of respondents search online when looking for information about climate change.



Almost half of respondents have heard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and know what they're about.

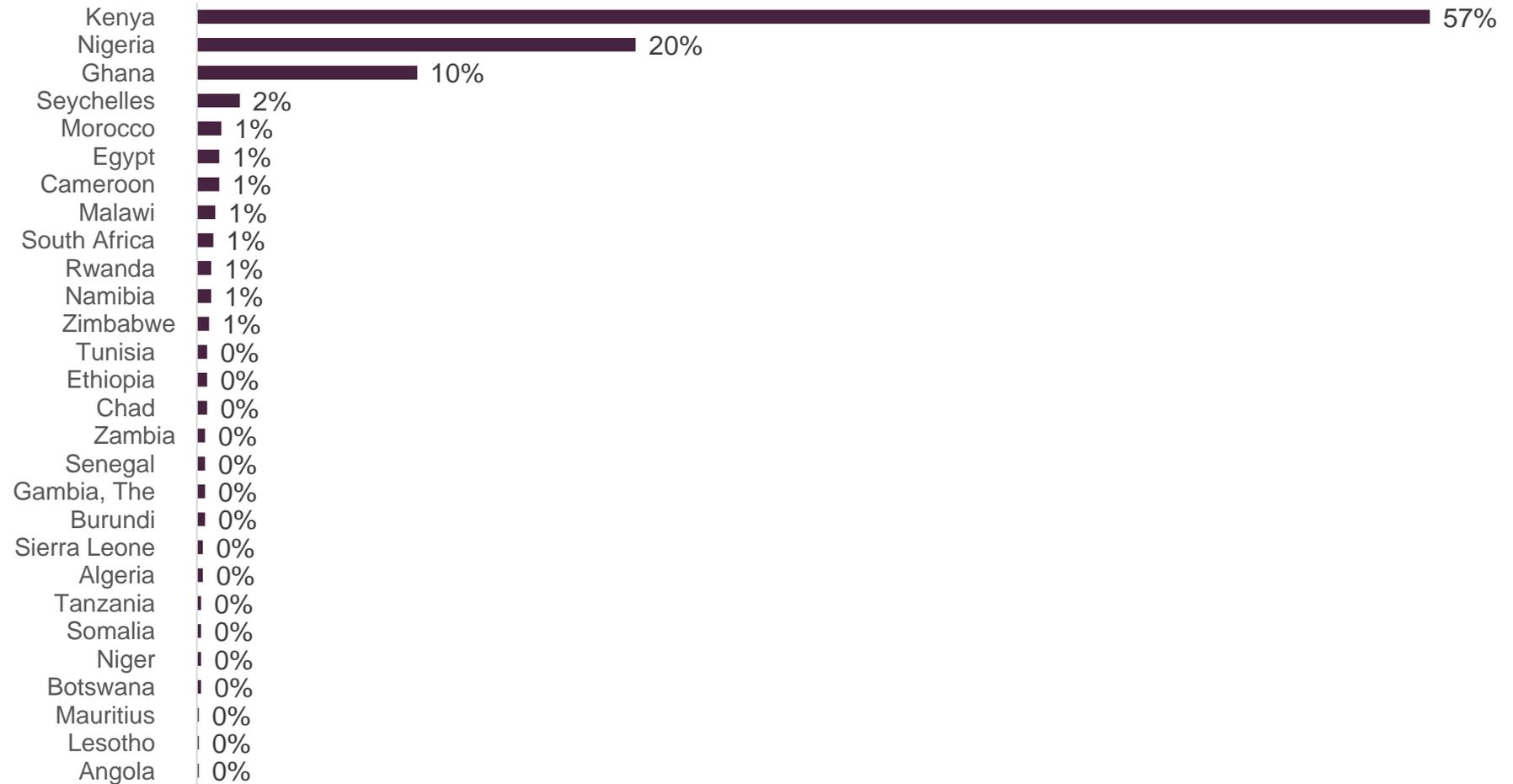


Survey results

Regional breakdown

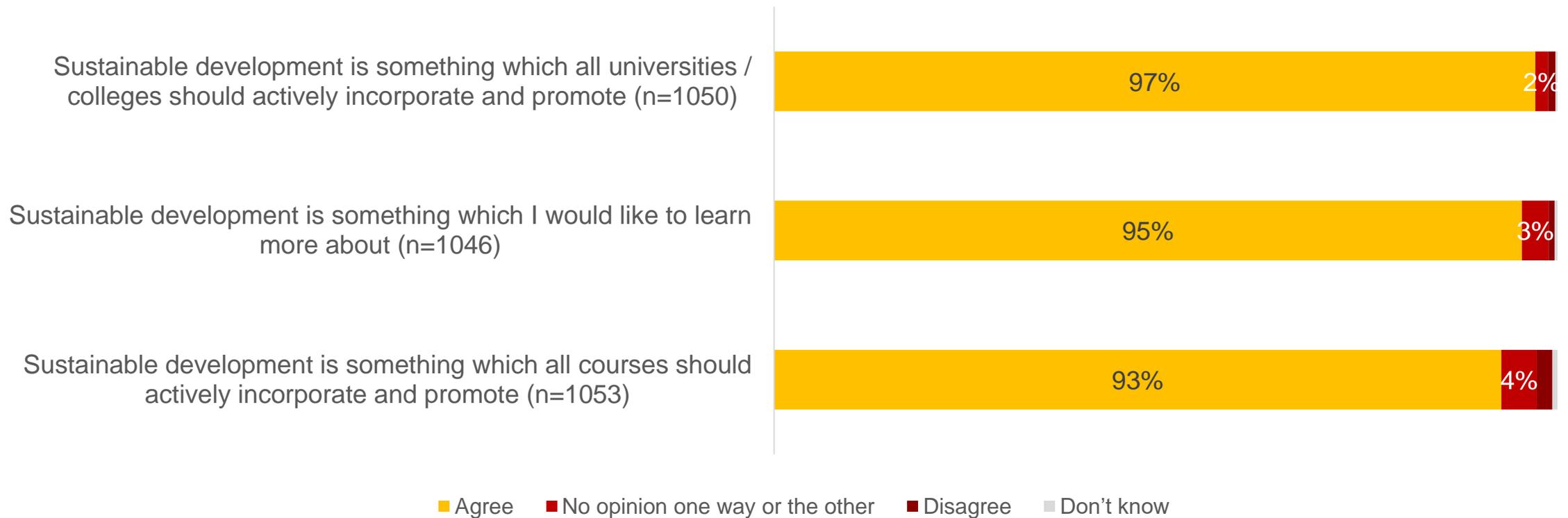
Africa

1067 respondents completed the survey and reported they were studying in the following countries in Africa...

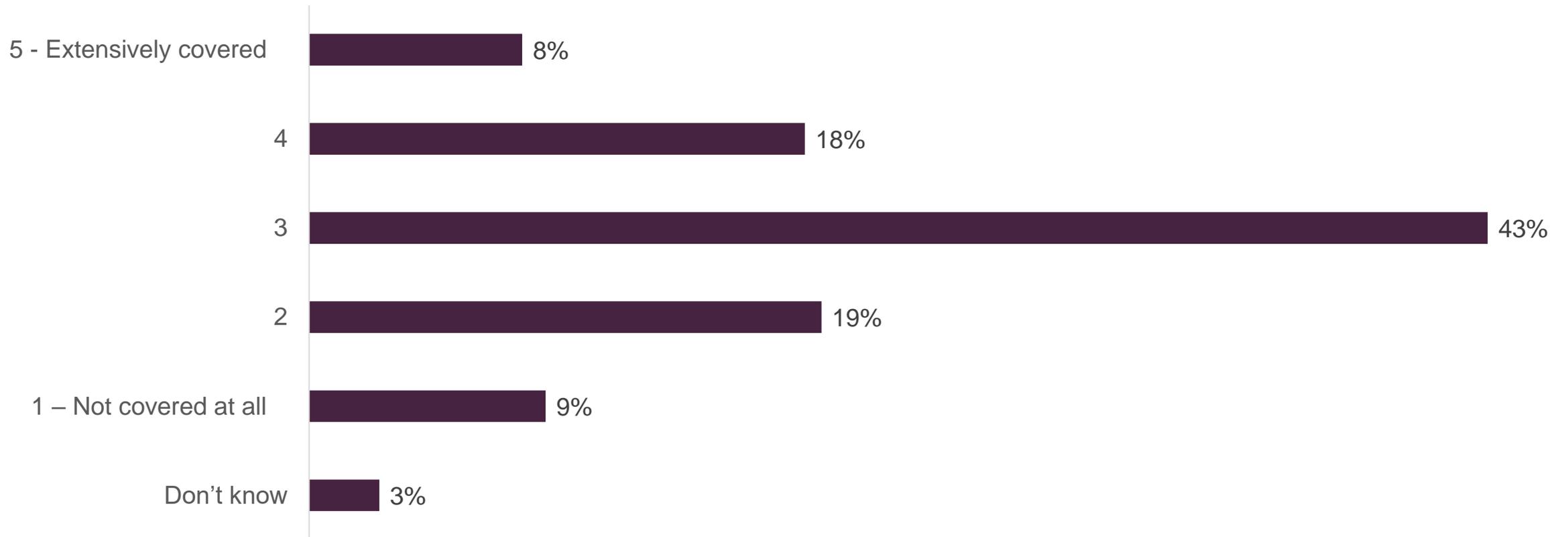


Experiences of
sustainability in
education
(Africa)

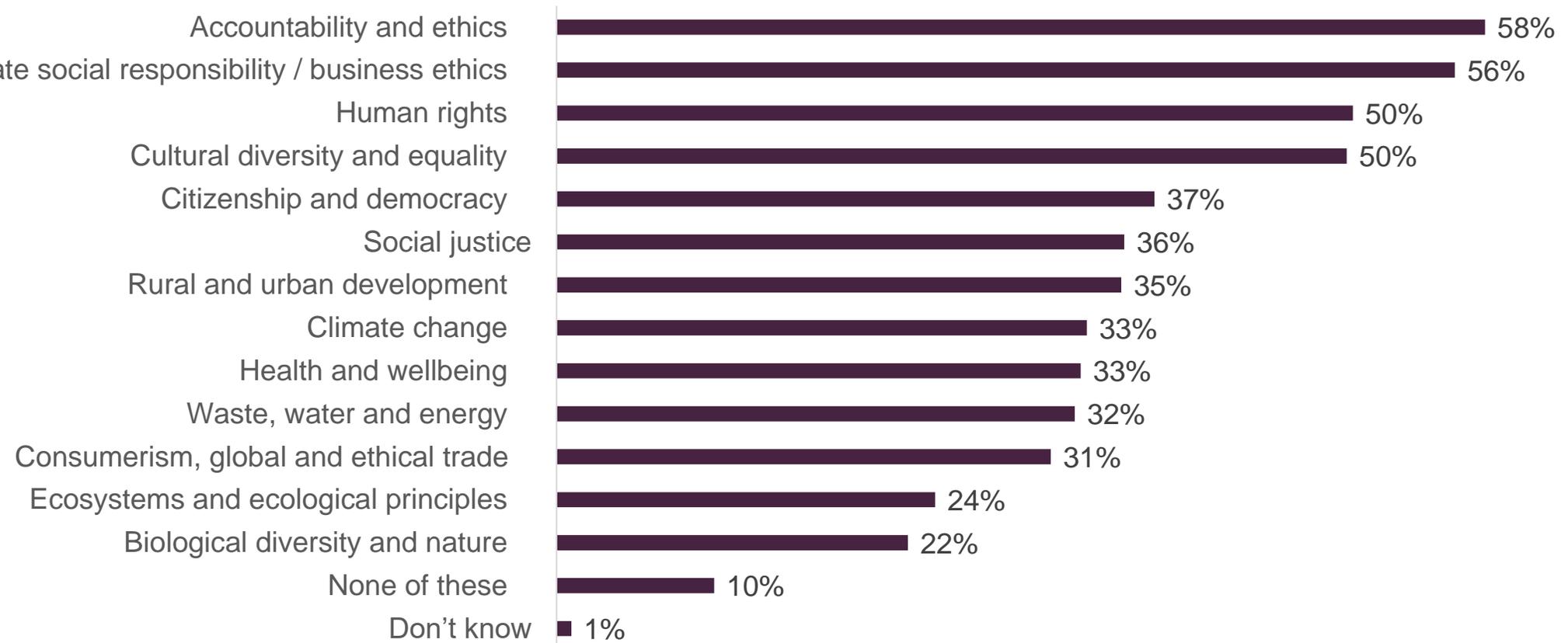
97% agree that sustainable development is something which all universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote. 95% say the concept is something they want to learn more about, and 93% want to see it covered by all courses.



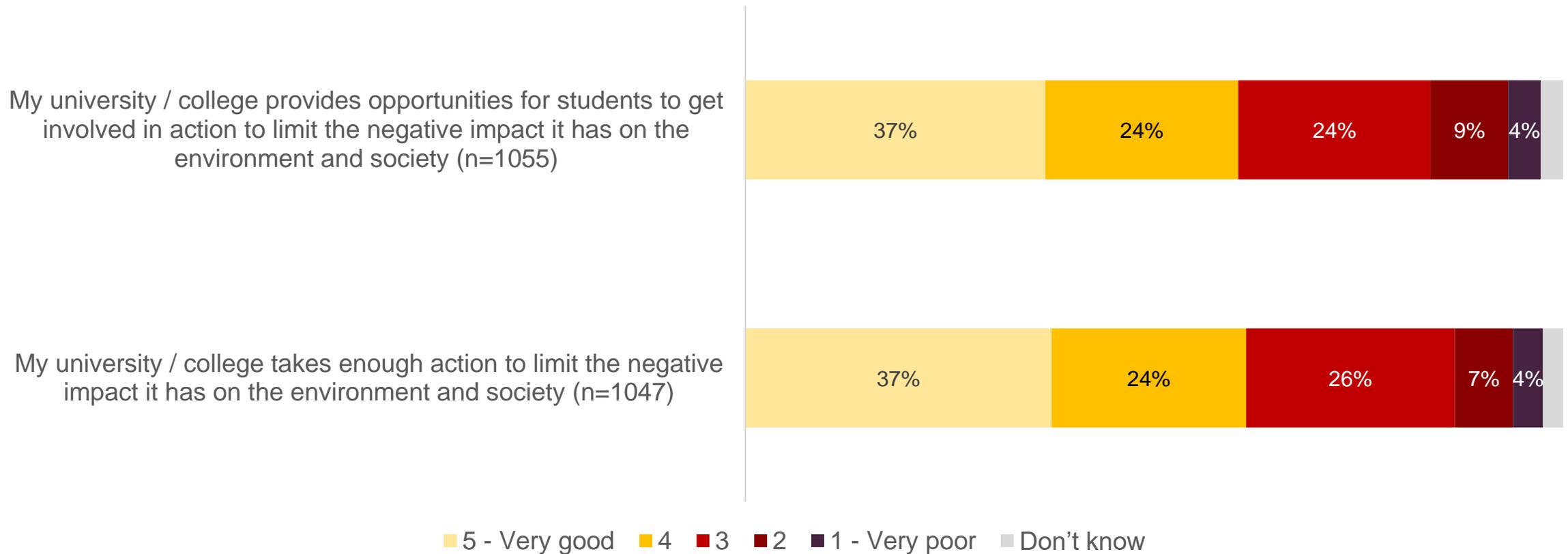
26% of respondents say sustainable development has been covered in depth by their course. However 38% report low or no coverage of the concept.



Accountability and ethics (58%), business ethics (56%) are the issues respondents report most frequently as having been covered by their education so far.



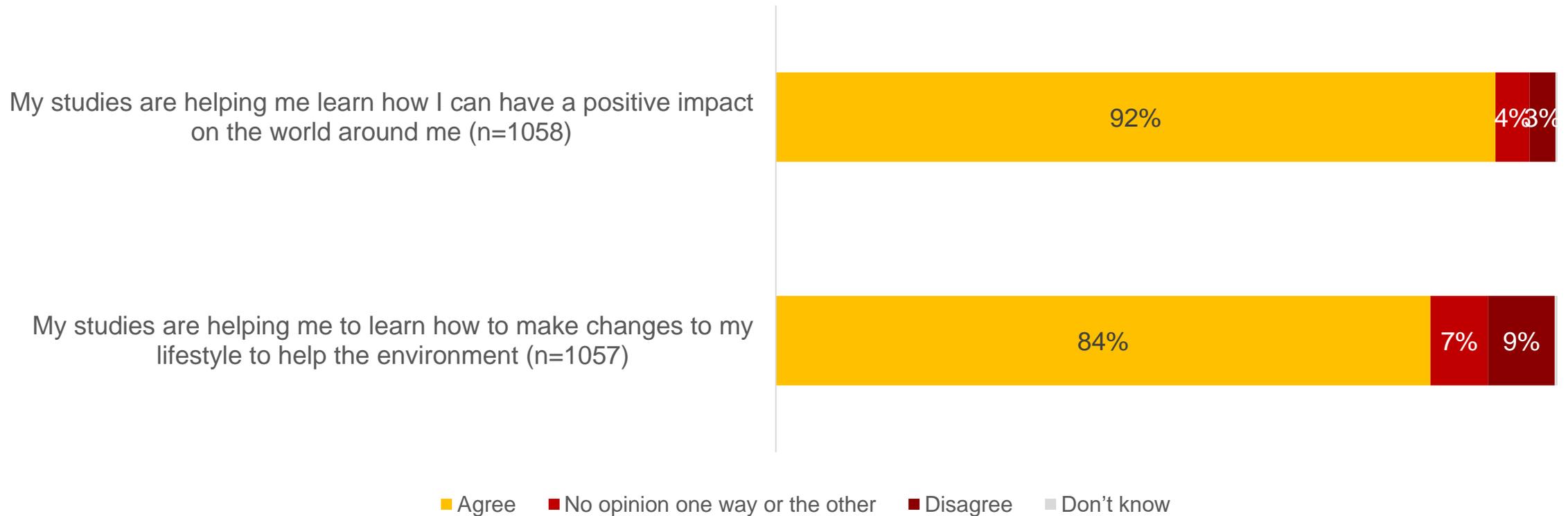
Two thirds say their place of study is very good at providing opportunities for students linked to sustainability, and at addressing its own negative impacts.



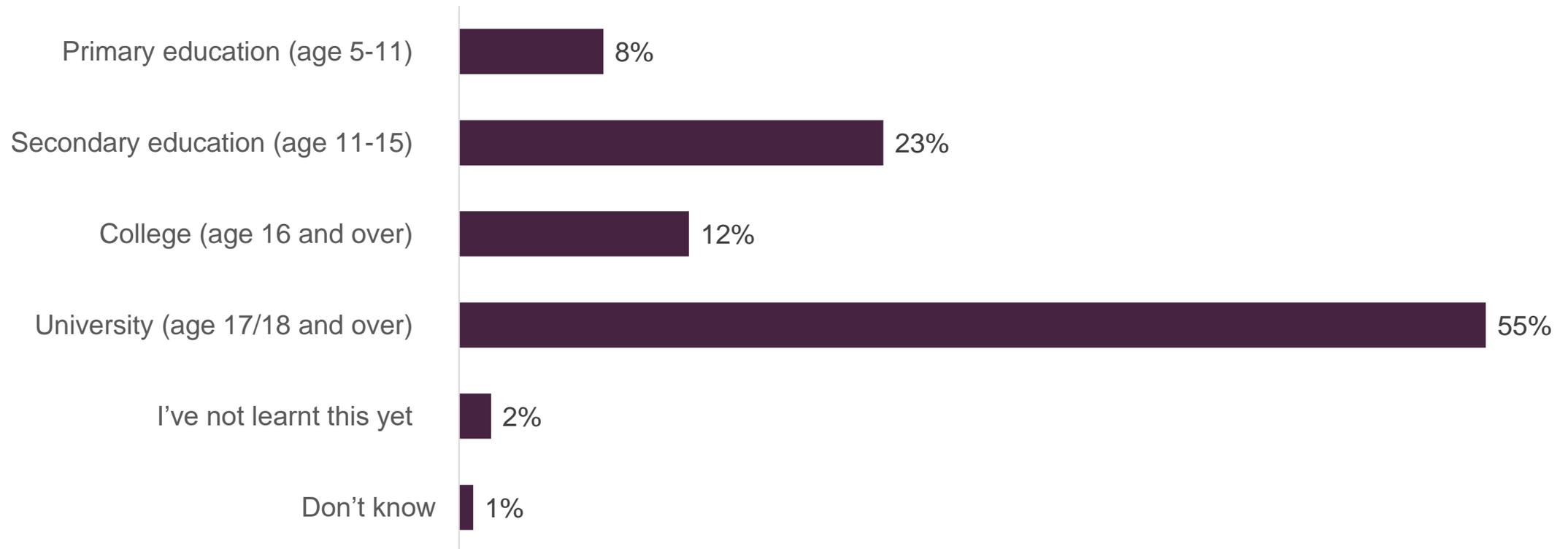


Impacts of
sustainability in
education
(Africa)

92% agree that their studies are helping them learn how they personally can positively impact the world around them. 84% agree that their studies are helping them learn how to make changes to their lifestyle to help the environment.



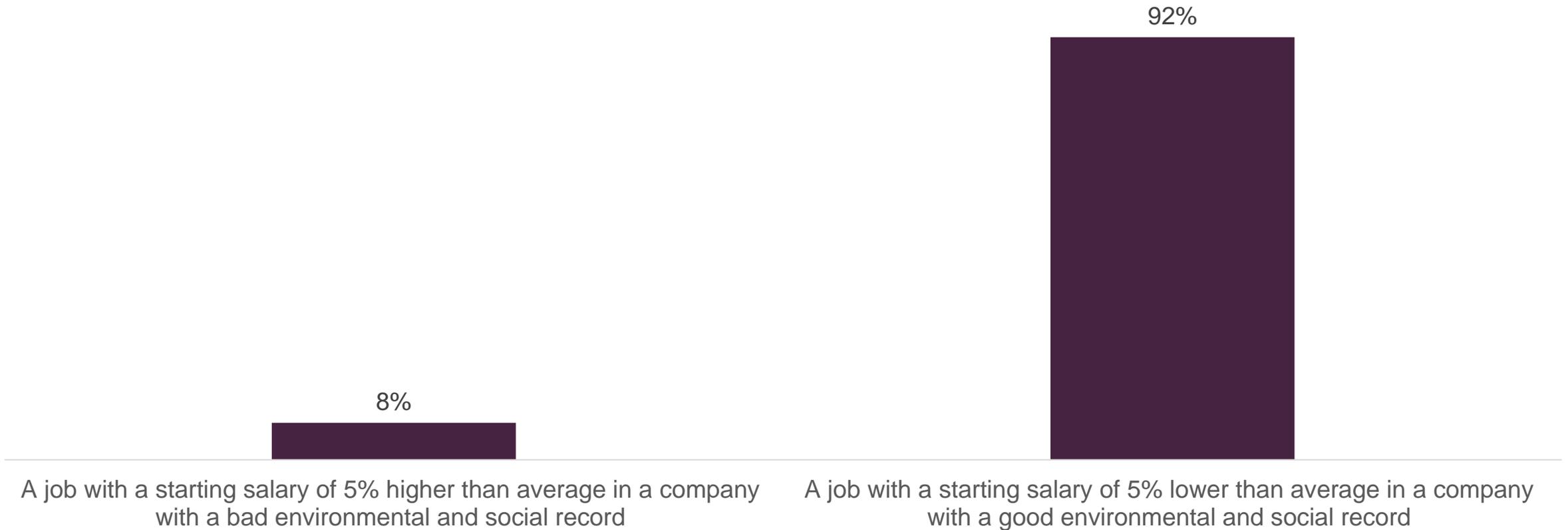
55% of respondents identify their studies at university as being the place where they've studied that has encouraged them to think and act to help the environment and other people the most.





Sustainability
and
employment
(Africa)

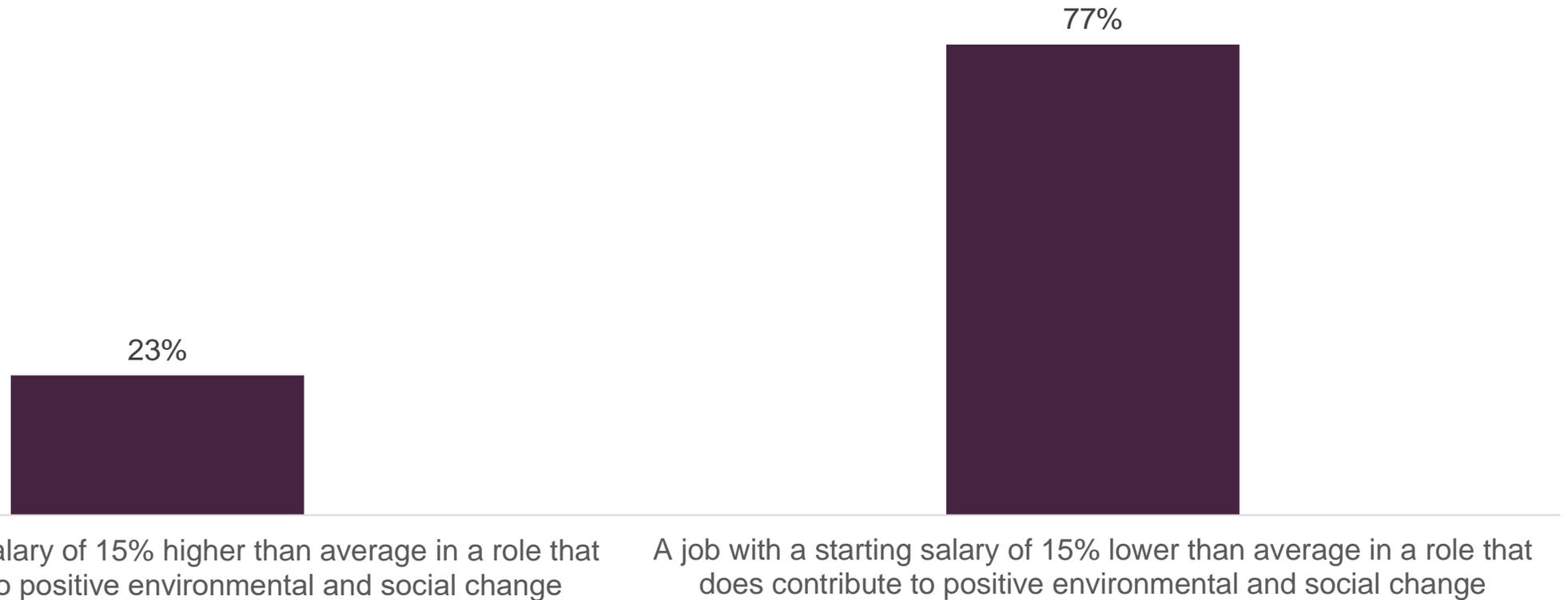
92% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 5% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



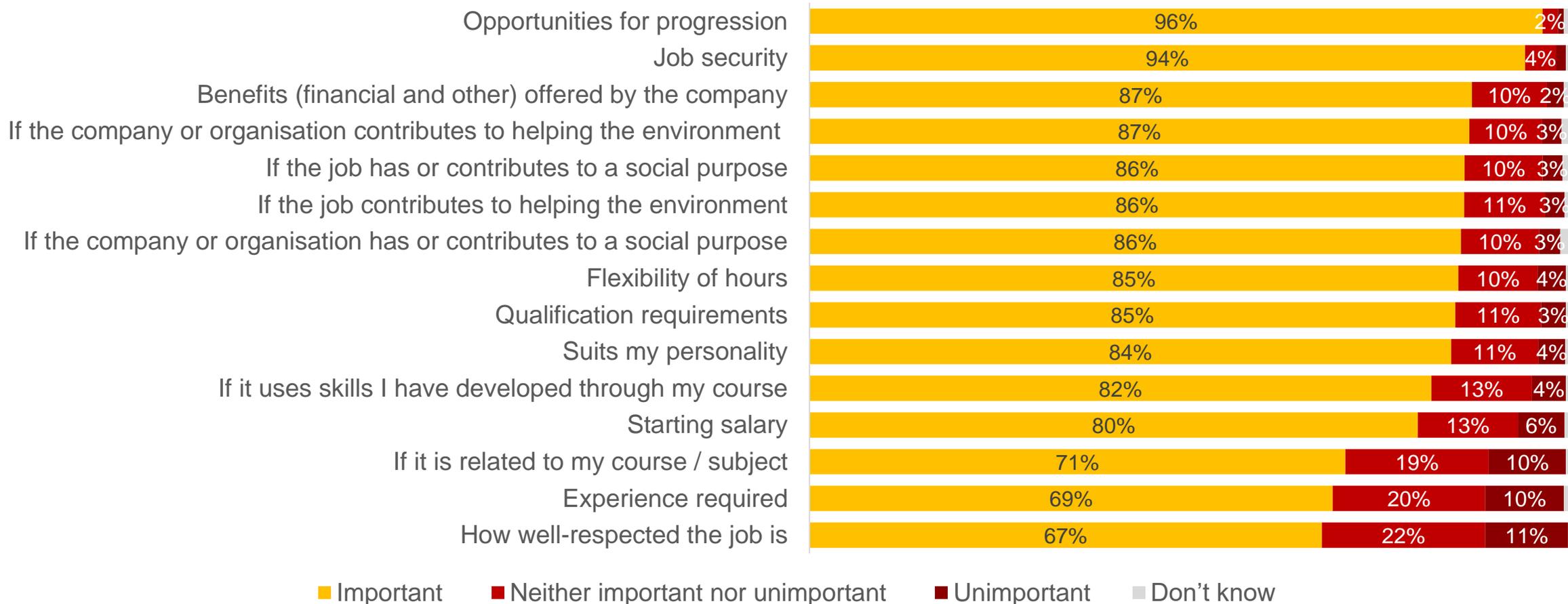
85% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



Three quarters of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in role that contributes to positive environmental and social change

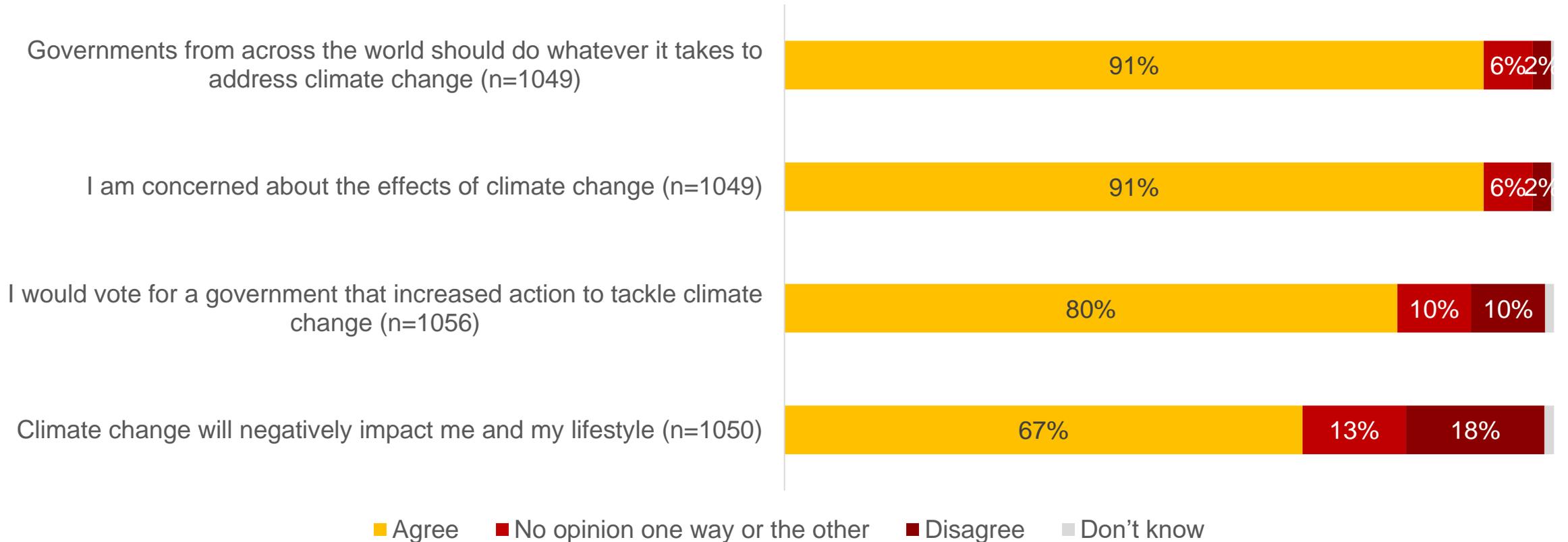


Opportunities for progression, job security and benefits offered by the company are main factors respondents will take into account when considering their future career or job

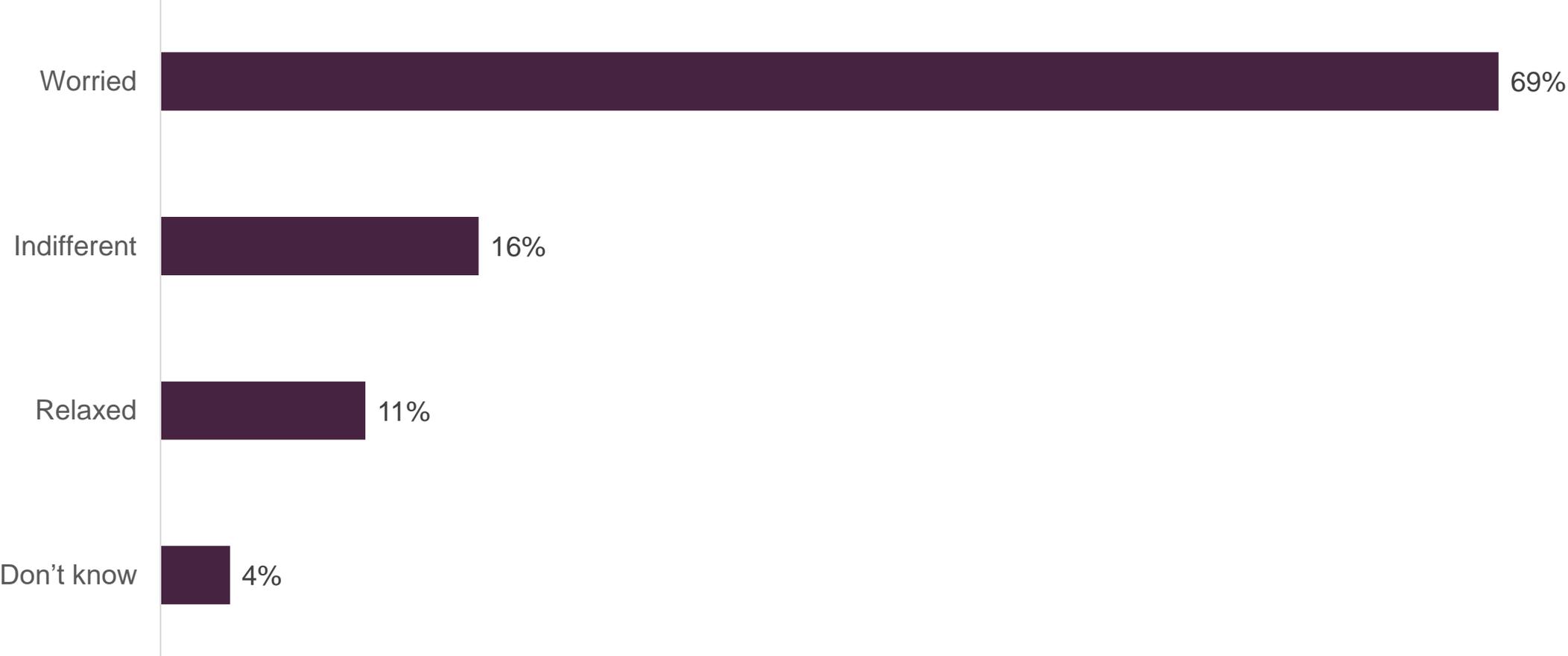


Climate change
and awareness
of the SDGs
(Africa)

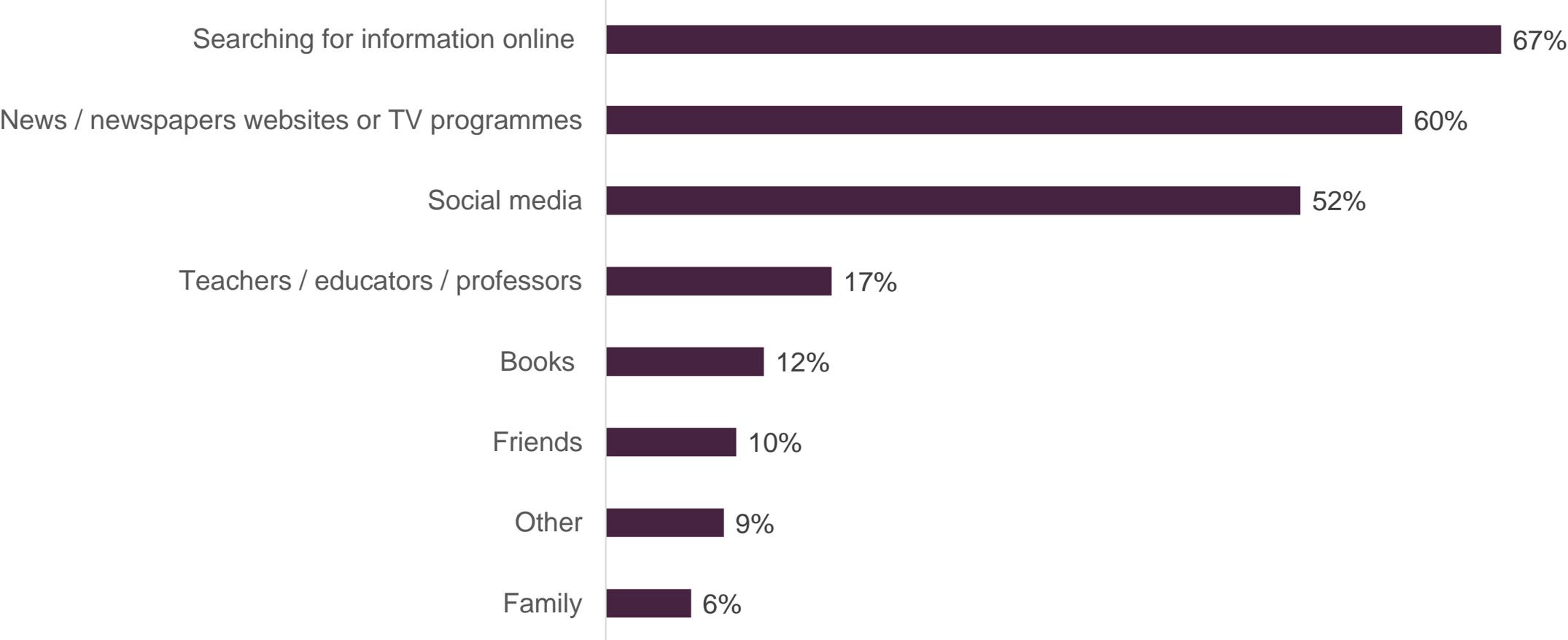
91% say they're concerned about the effects of climate change, and also agree that governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change.



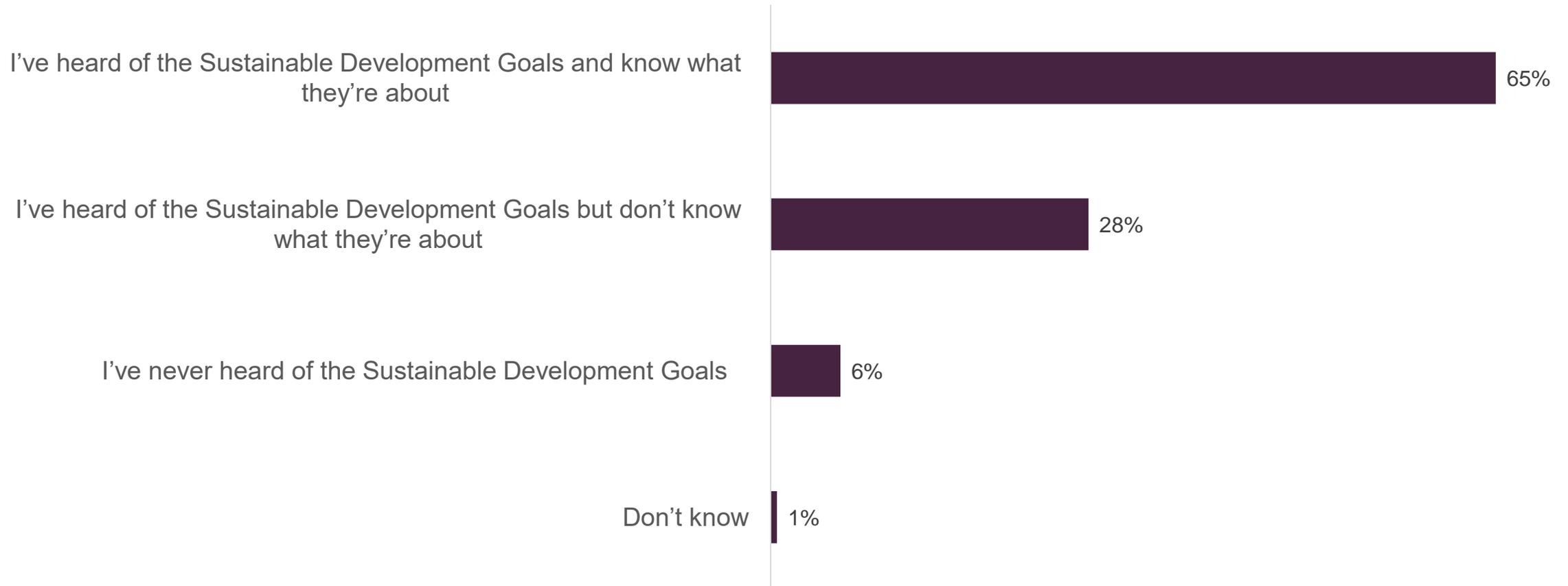
When asked to identify the word that best describes their feelings about climate change and their future, 69% say they're worried.



Two thirds of respondents search online when looking for information about climate change.



Almost two thirds of respondents have heard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and know what they're about.

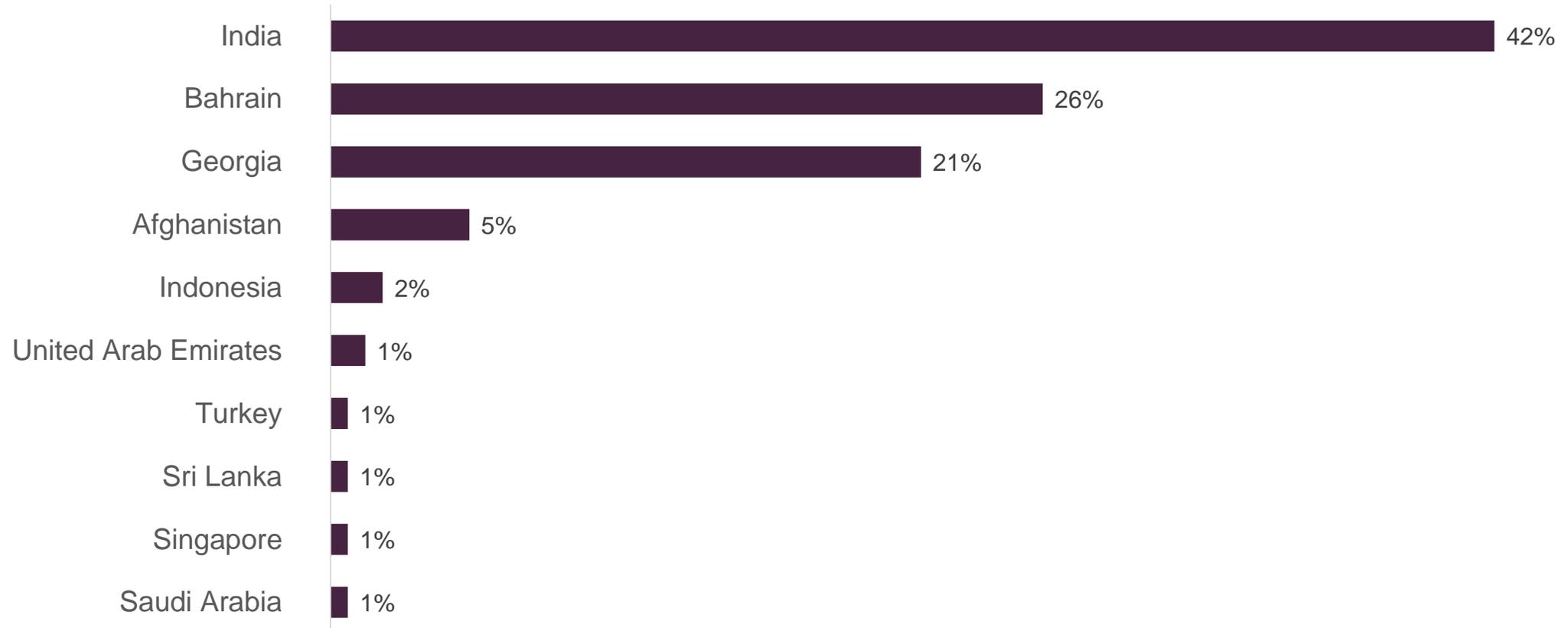


Survey results

Regional breakdown

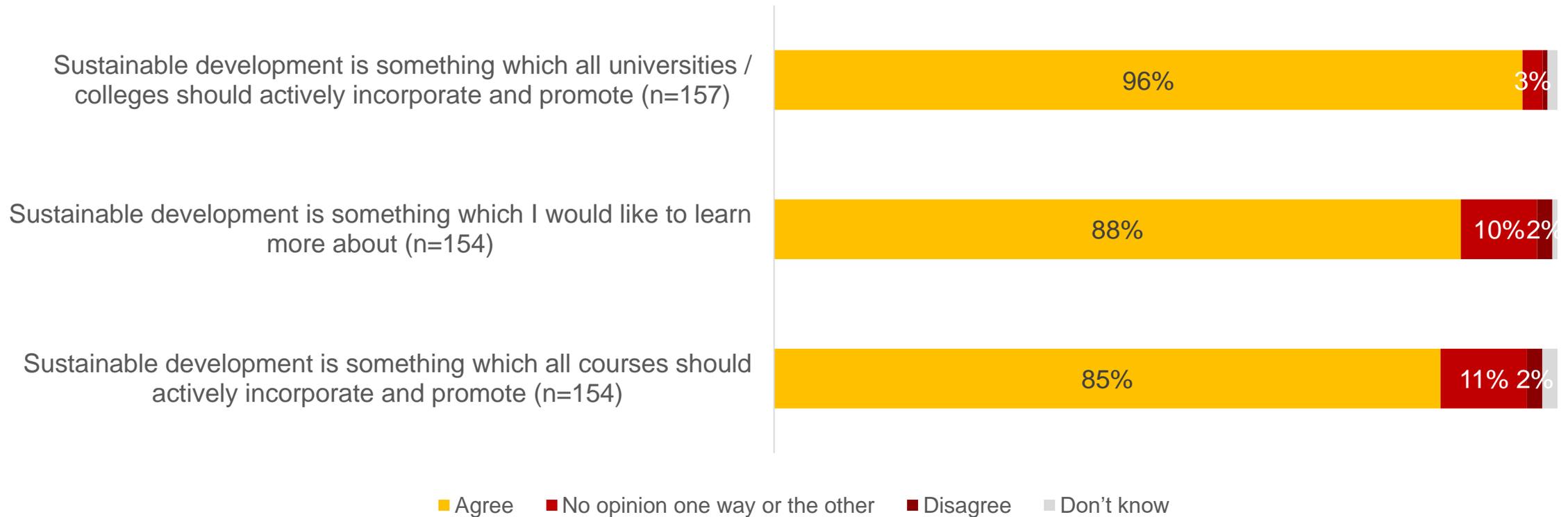
Asia

159 respondents completed the survey and reported they were studying in the following countries in Asia...

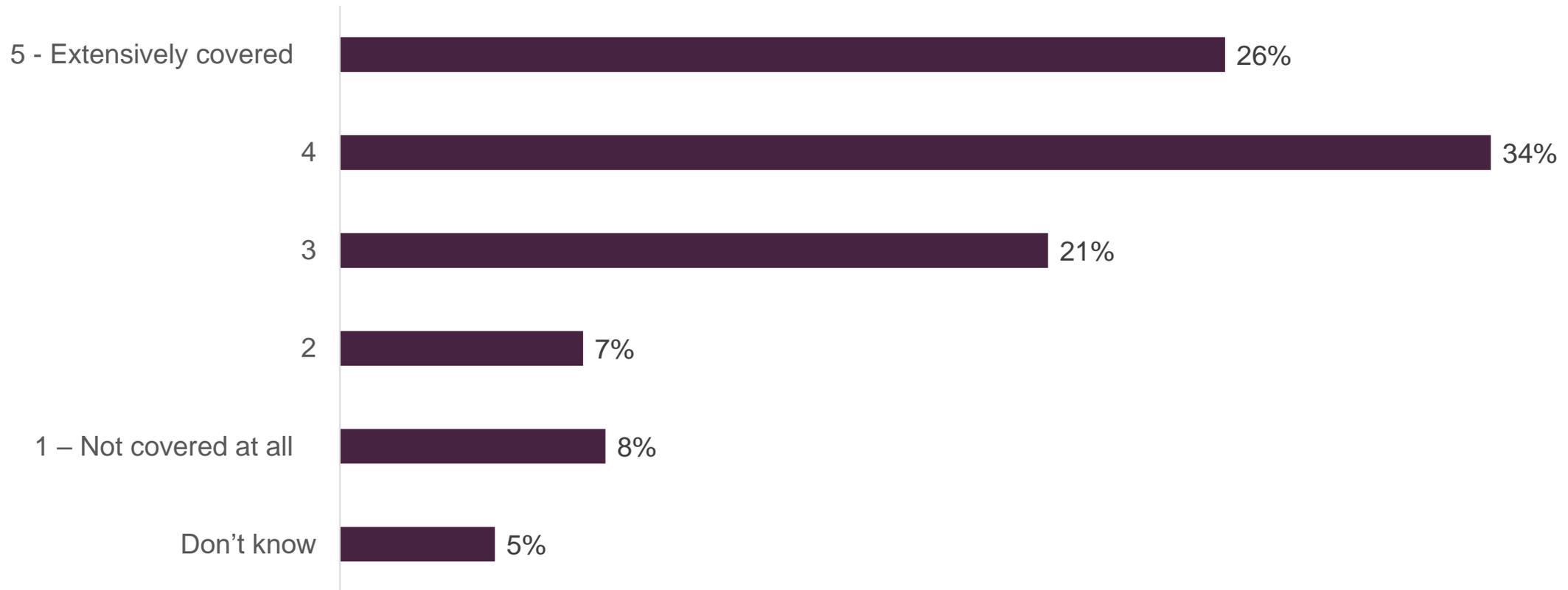


Experiences of
sustainability in
education
(Asia)

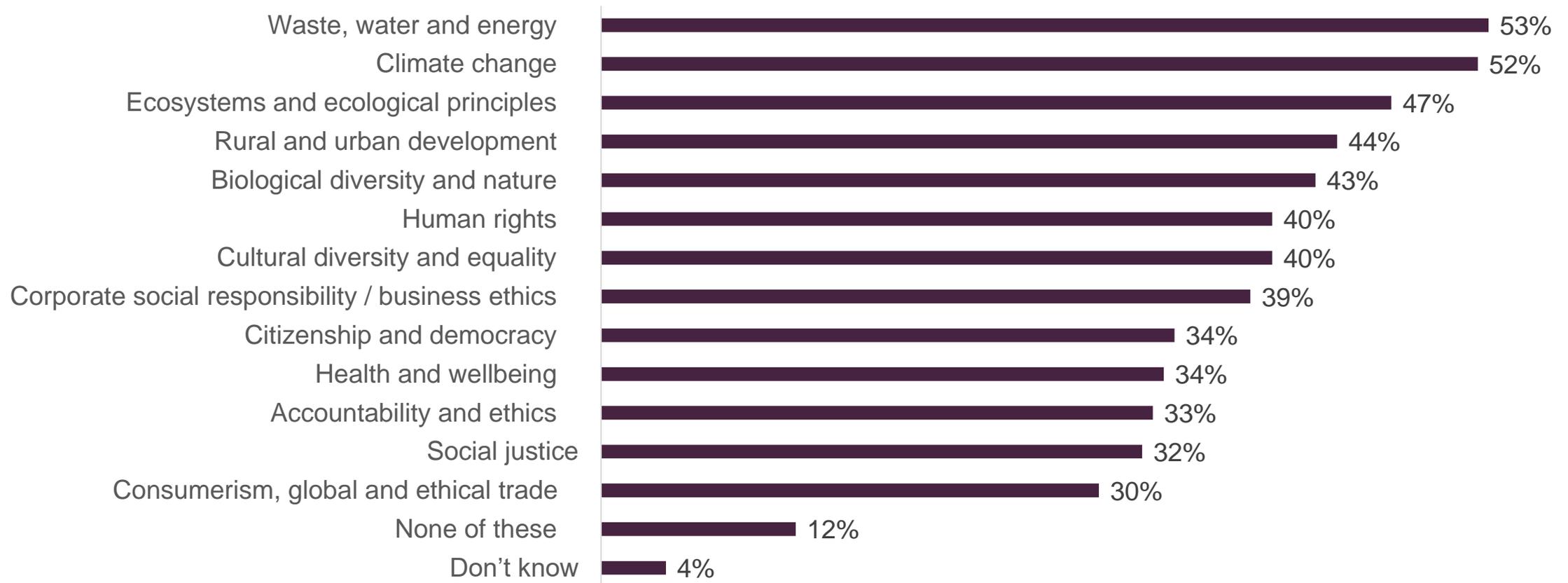
96% agree that sustainable development is something which all universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote. 88% say the concept is something they want to learn more about, and 85% want to see it covered by all courses.



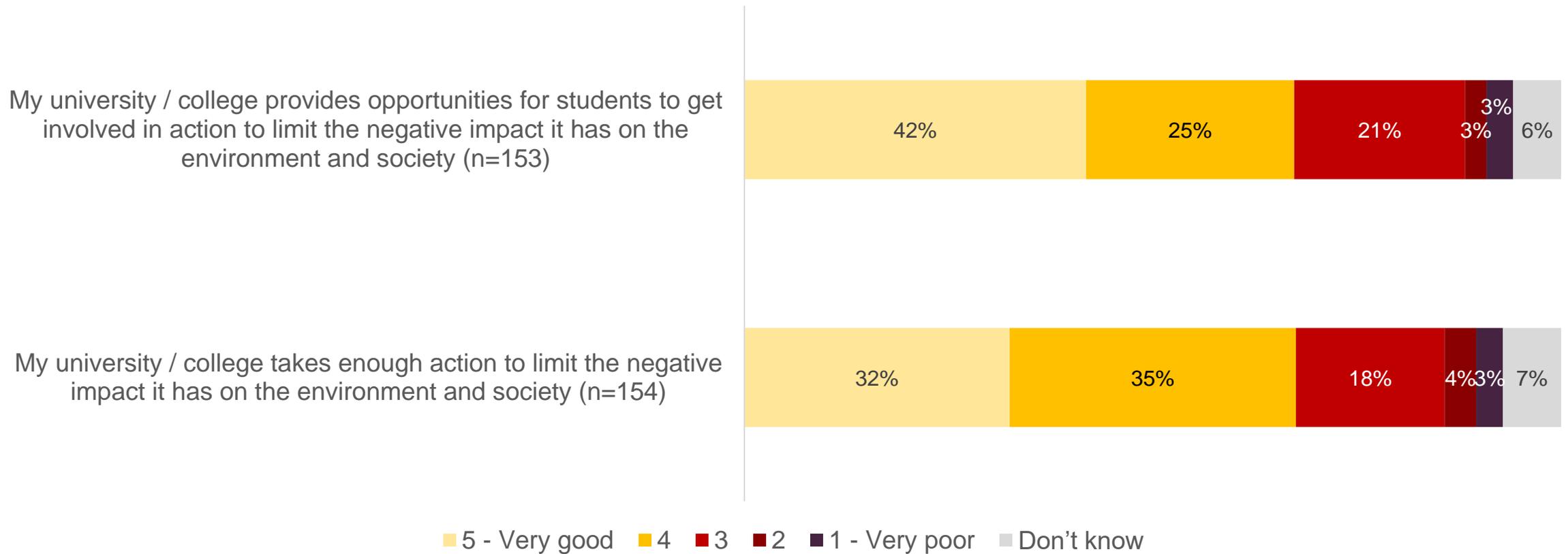
60% of respondents say sustainable development has been covered in depth by their course. 15% report low or no coverage of the concept.



Waste, water and energy (53%), climate change (52%) and ecosystems and ecological principles (47%) are the issues respondents report most frequently as having been covered by their education so far.

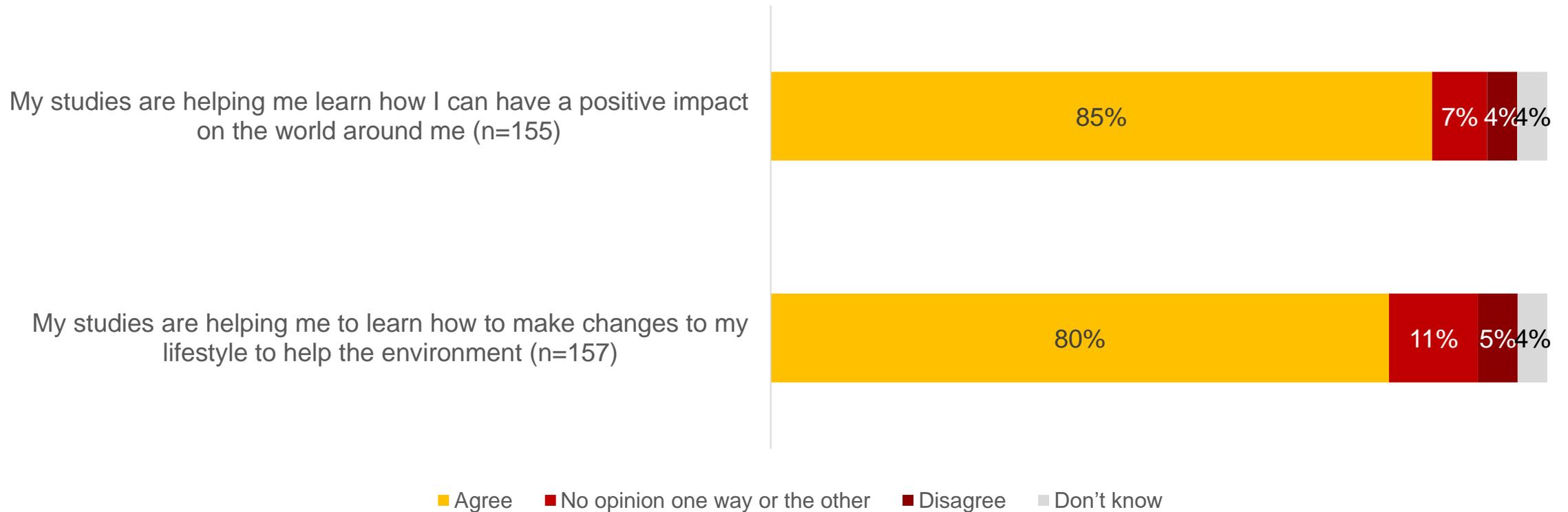


Two thirds say their place of study is very good at providing opportunities for students linked to sustainability, and at addressing its own negative impacts.

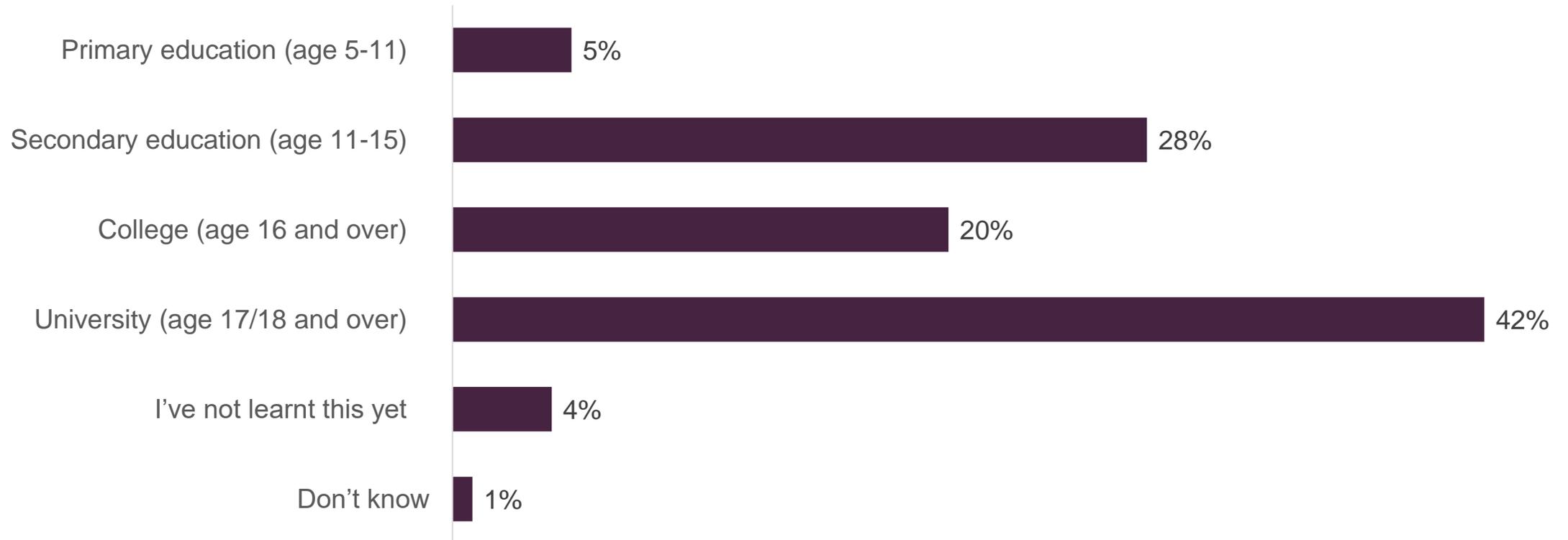


Impacts of
sustainability in
education
(Asia)

85% agree that their studies are helping them learn how they personally can positively impact the world around them. 82% agree that their studies are helping them learn how to make changes to their lifestyle to help the environment.



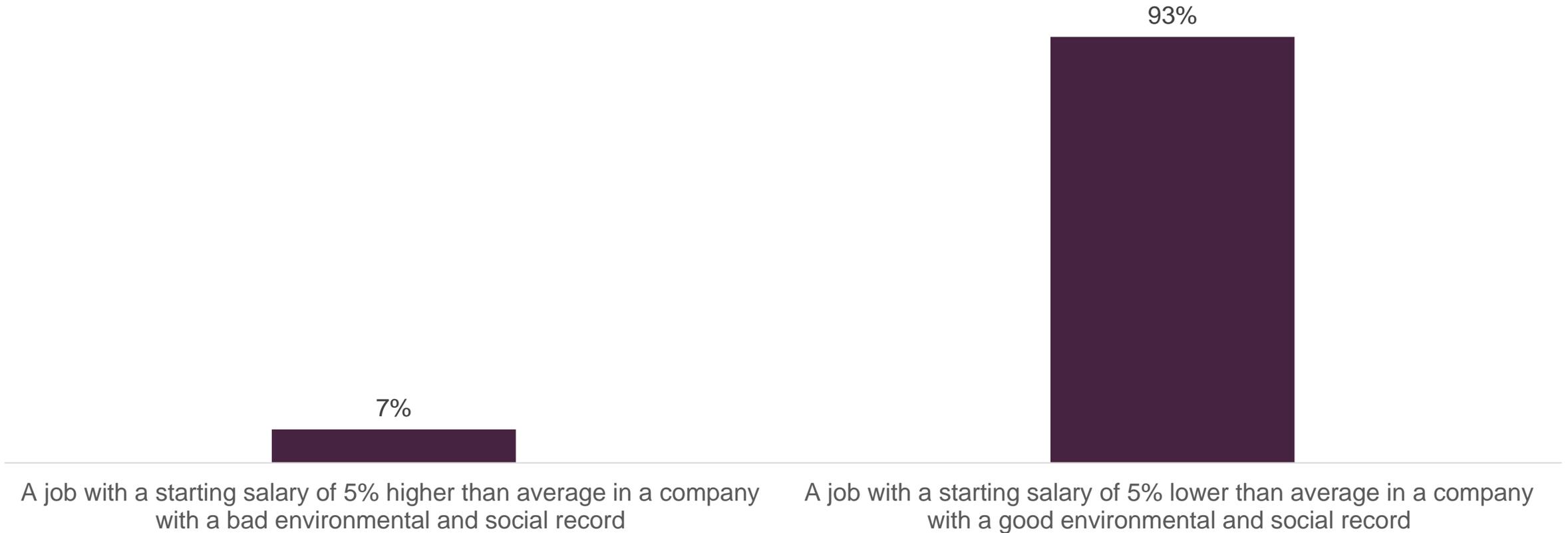
55% of respondents identify their studies at university as being the place where they've studied that has encouraged them to think and act to help the environment and other people the most.



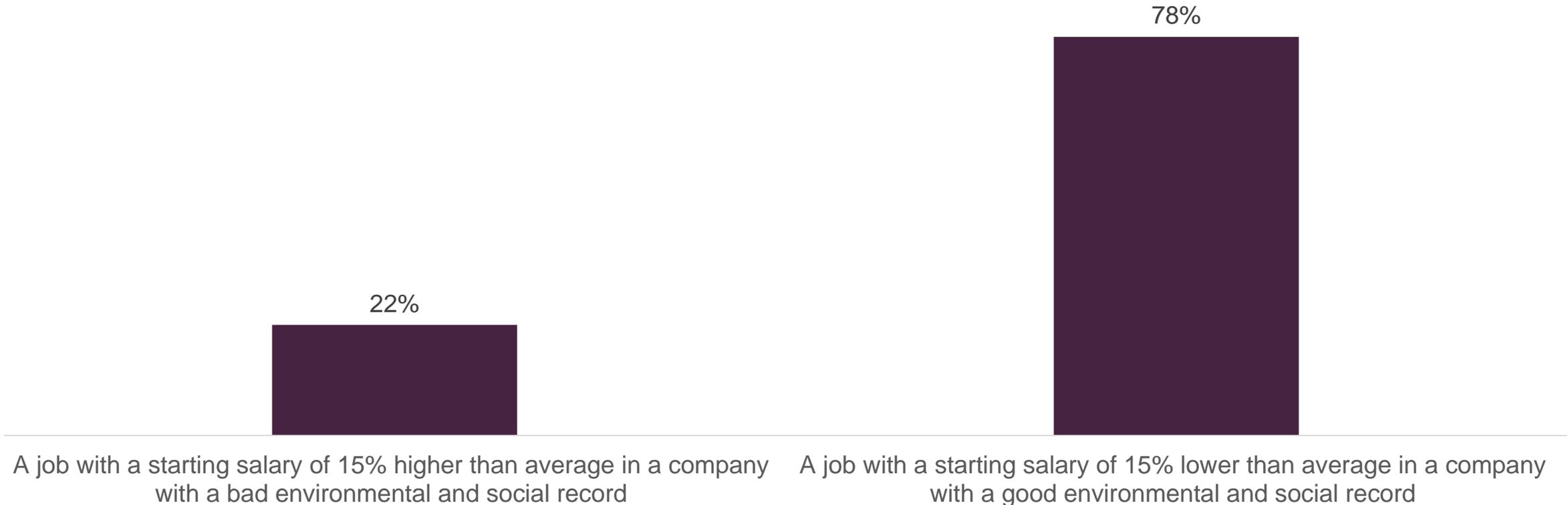


Sustainability
and
employment
(Asia)

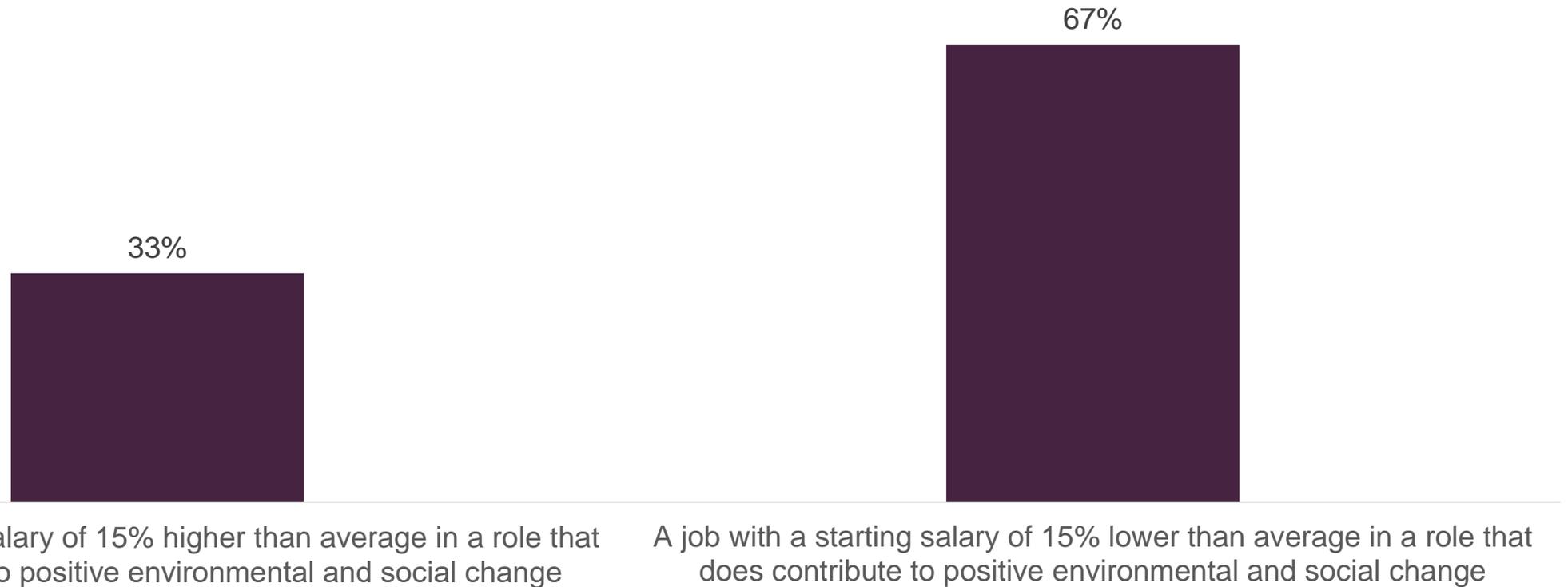
93% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 5% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



78% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



Two thirds of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in role that contributes to positive environmental and social change

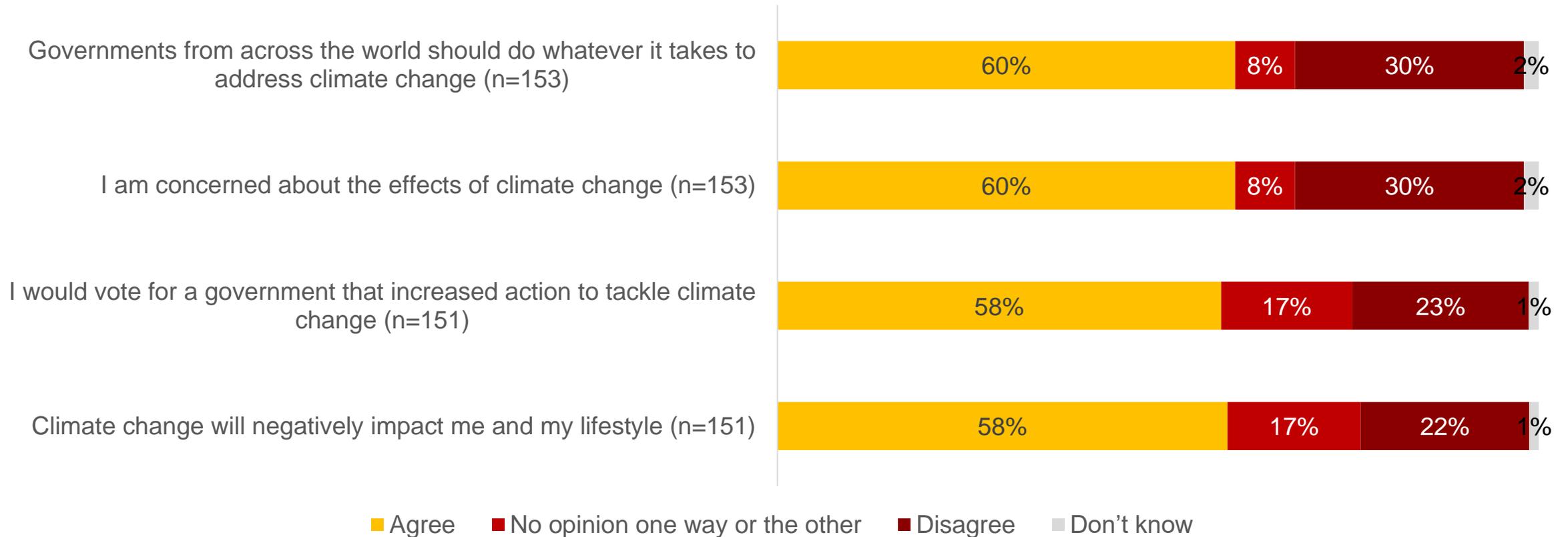


Using skills developed through their course, opportunities for progression and job security are the main factors respondents will take into account when considering their future career or job.



Climate change
and awareness
of the SDGs
(Asia)

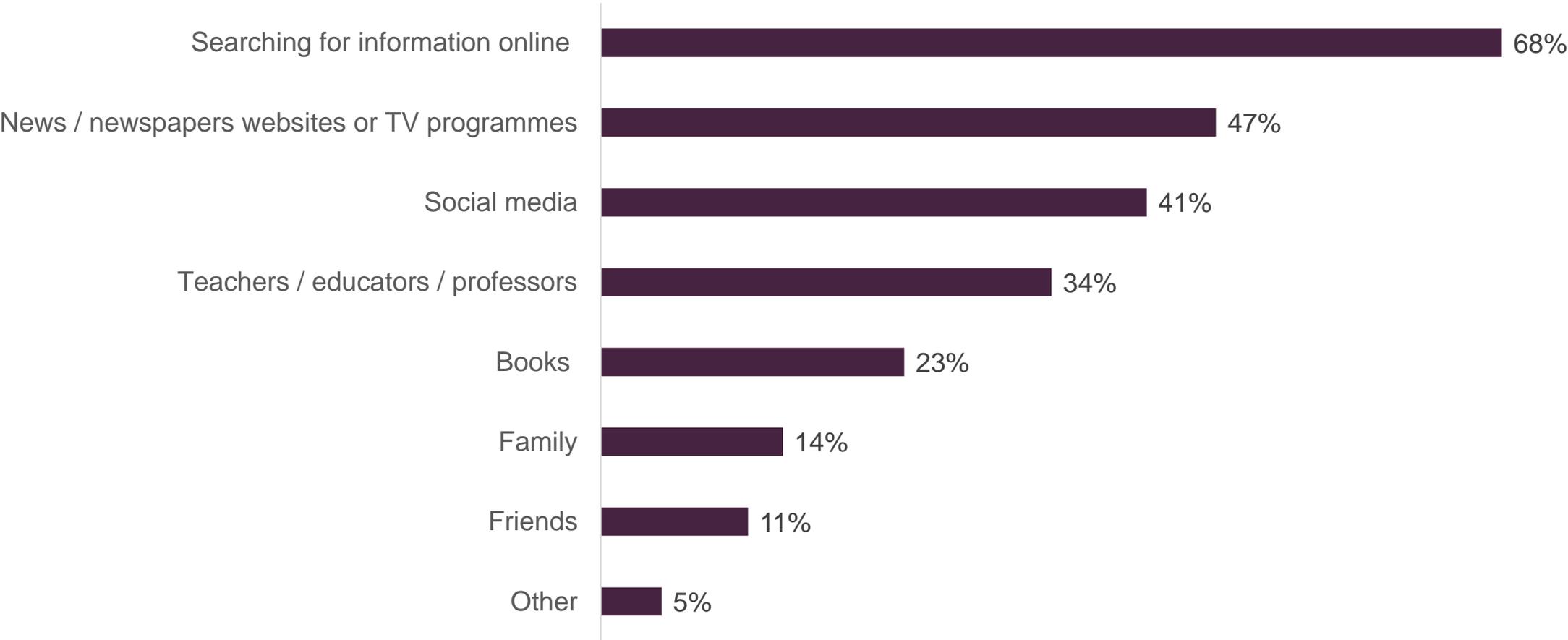
60% say they're concerned about the effects of climate change, and also agree that governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change.



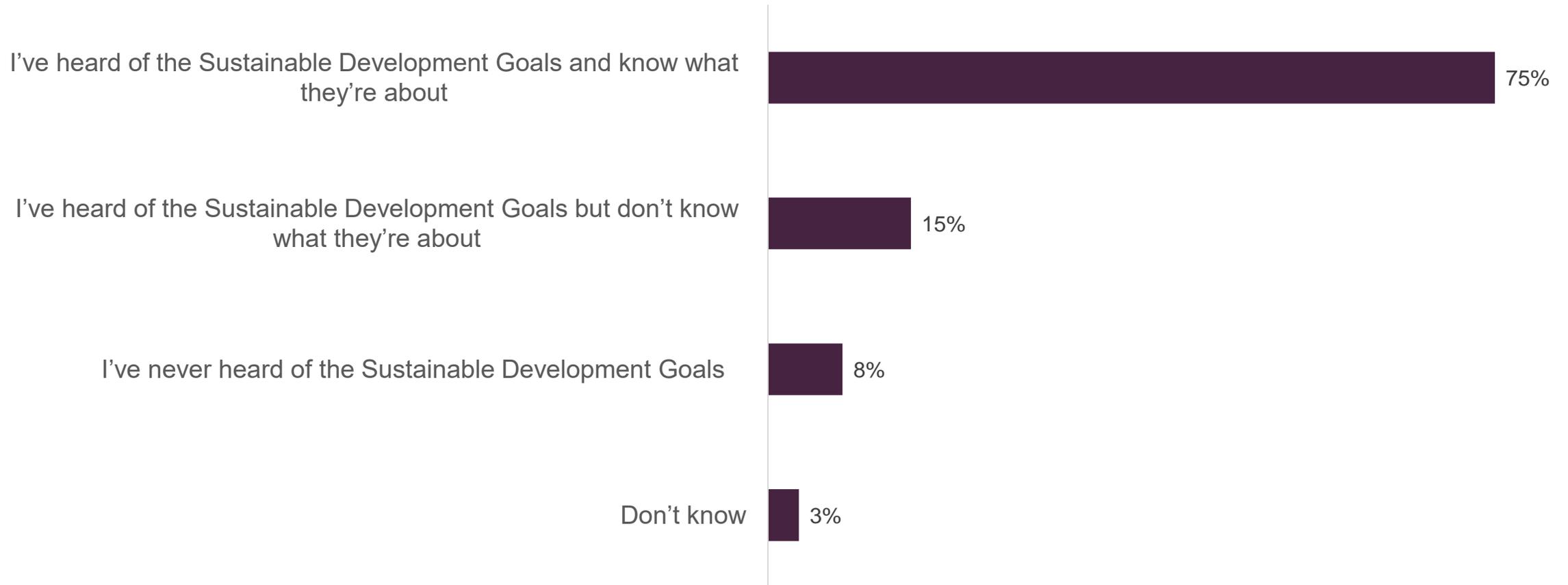
When asked to identify the word that best describes their feelings about climate change and their future, 69% say they're worried.



Two thirds of respondents search online when looking for information about climate change.



Three quarters of respondents say they have heard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and know what they're about.

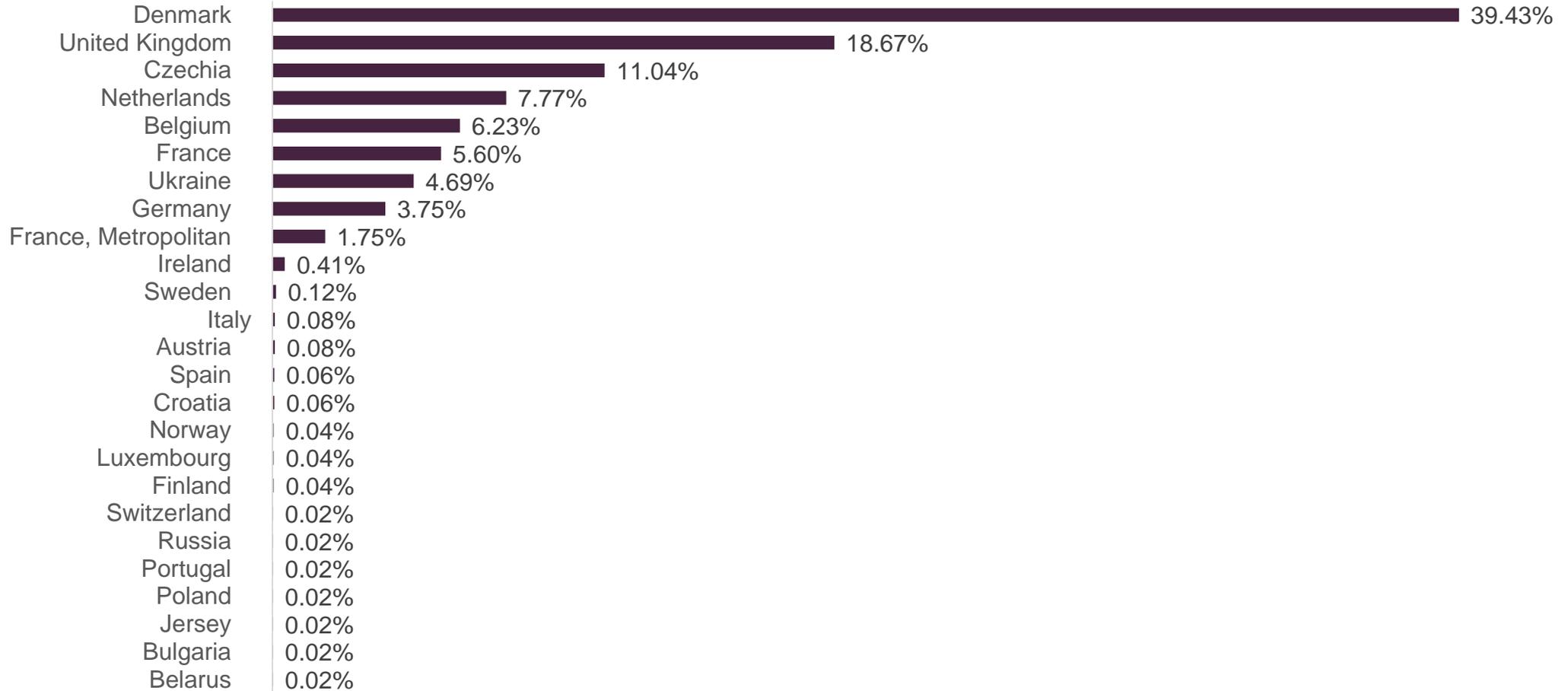


Survey results

Regional breakdown

Europe

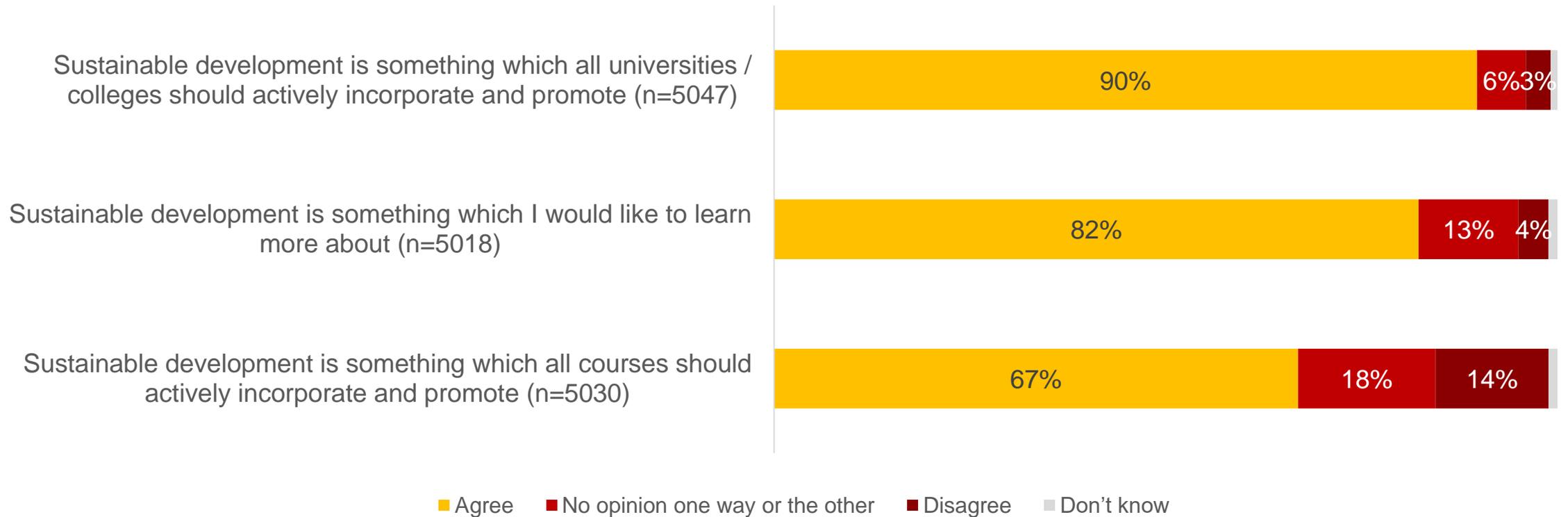
5072 respondents completed the survey and reported they were studying in the following countries in Europe...



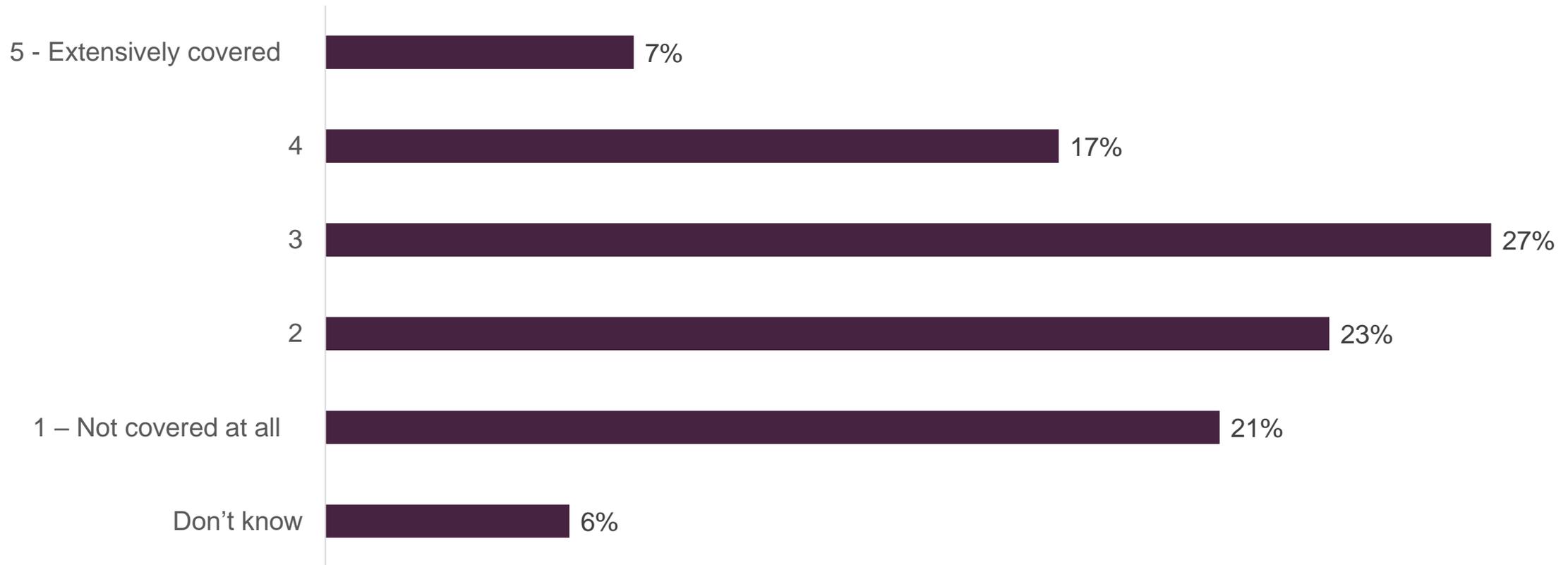


Experiences of
sustainability in
education
(Europe)

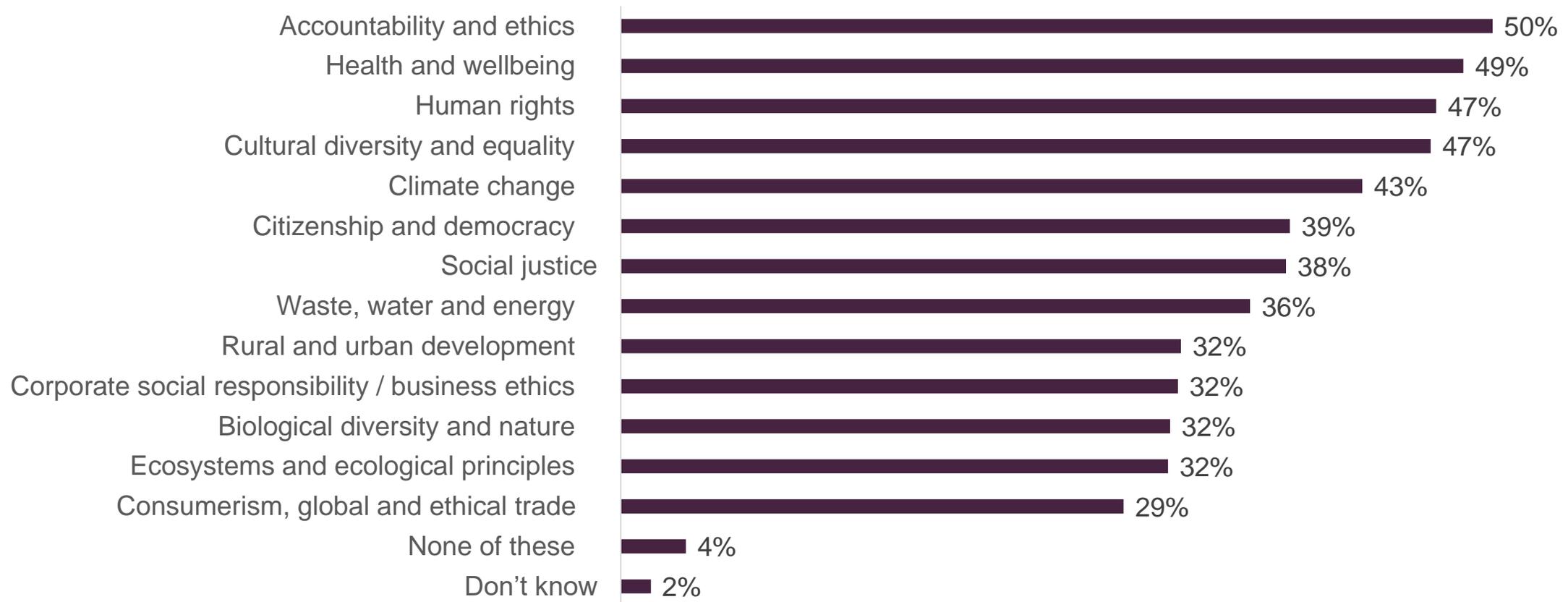
90% agree that sustainable development is something which all universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote. 82% say the concept is something they want to learn more about, and 67% want to see it covered by all courses.



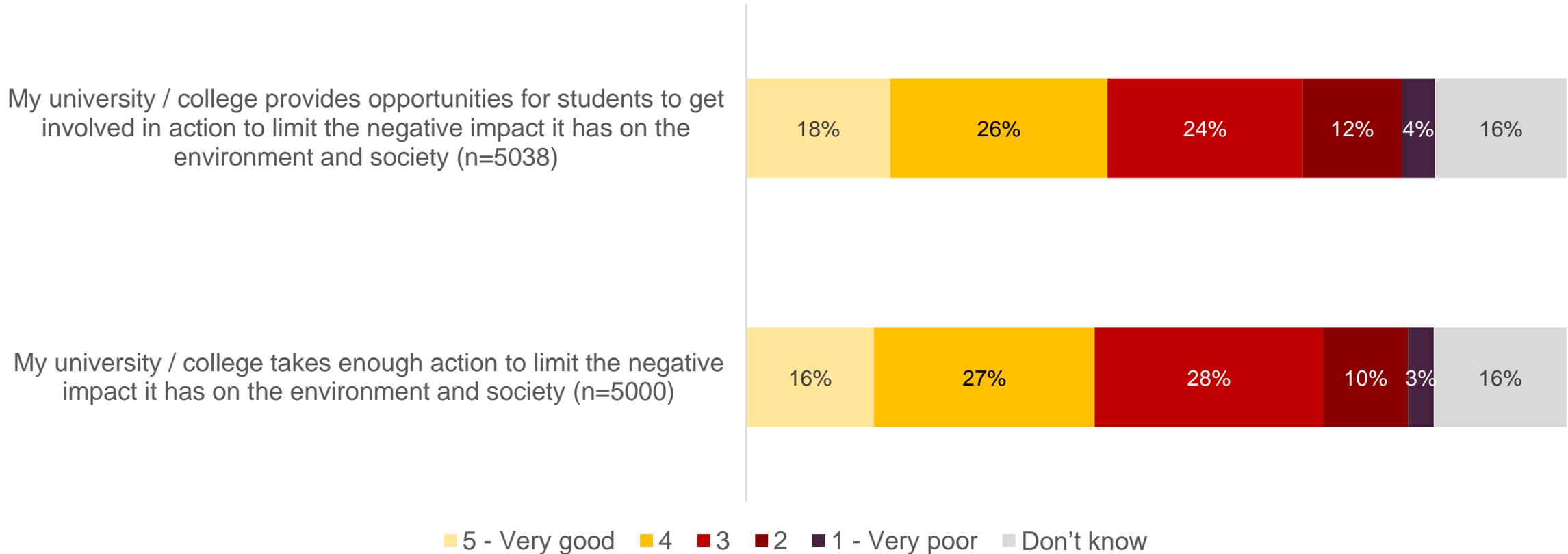
24% of respondents say sustainable development has been covered in depth by their course. 44% report low or no coverage of the concept.



Accountability and ethics (50%), health and wellbeing (49%) and human rights (47%) are the issues respondents report most frequently as having been covered by their education so far.



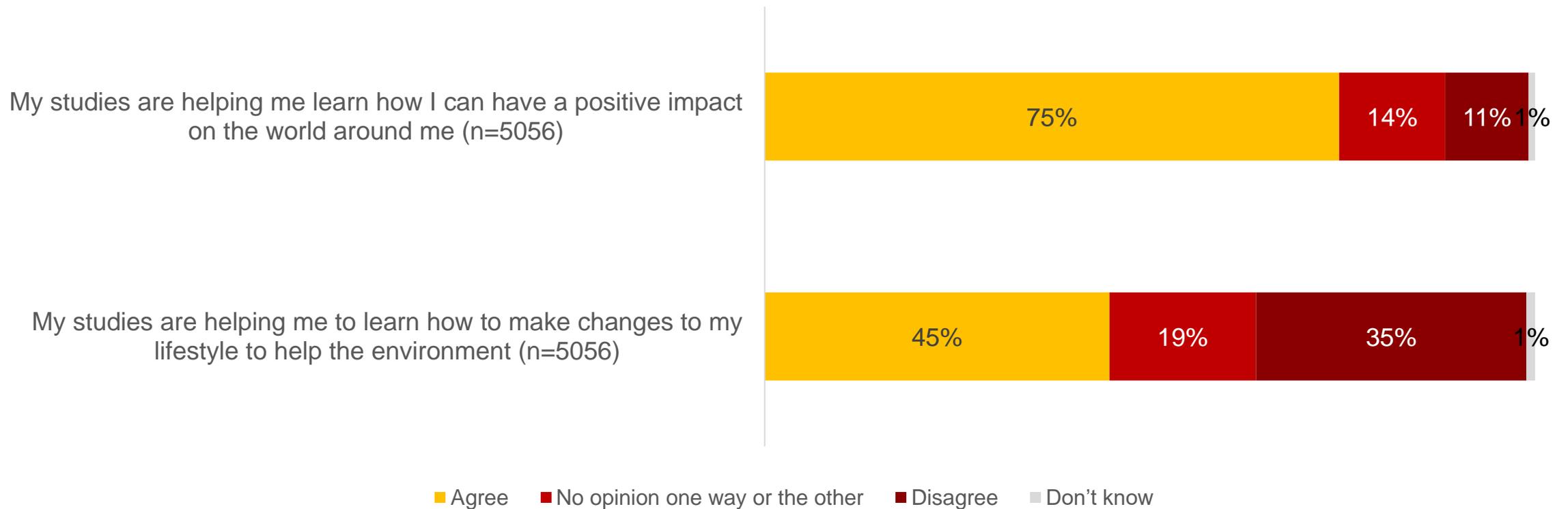
18% say their place of study is very good at providing opportunities for students linked to sustainability, and 16% say it's very good at addressing its own negative impacts.



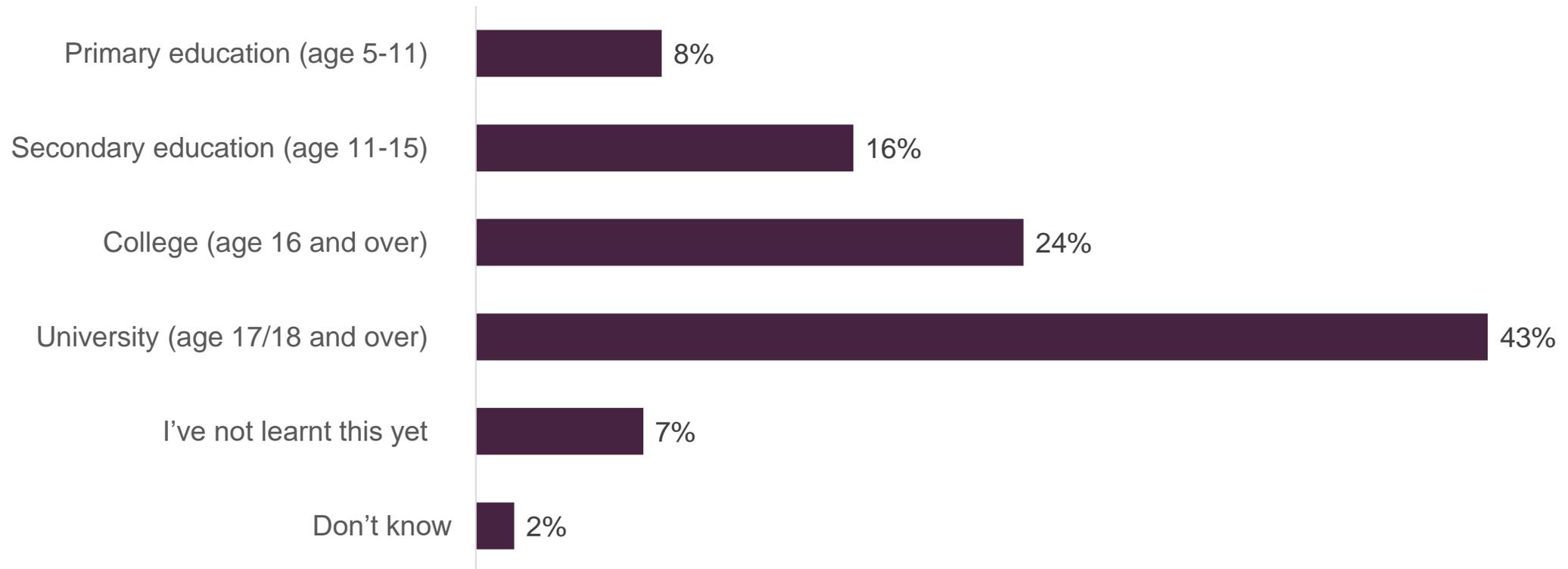


Impacts of
sustainability in
education
(Europe)

75% agree that their studies are helping them learn how they personally can positively impact the world around them. 45% agree that their studies are helping them learn how to make changes to their lifestyle to help the environment.



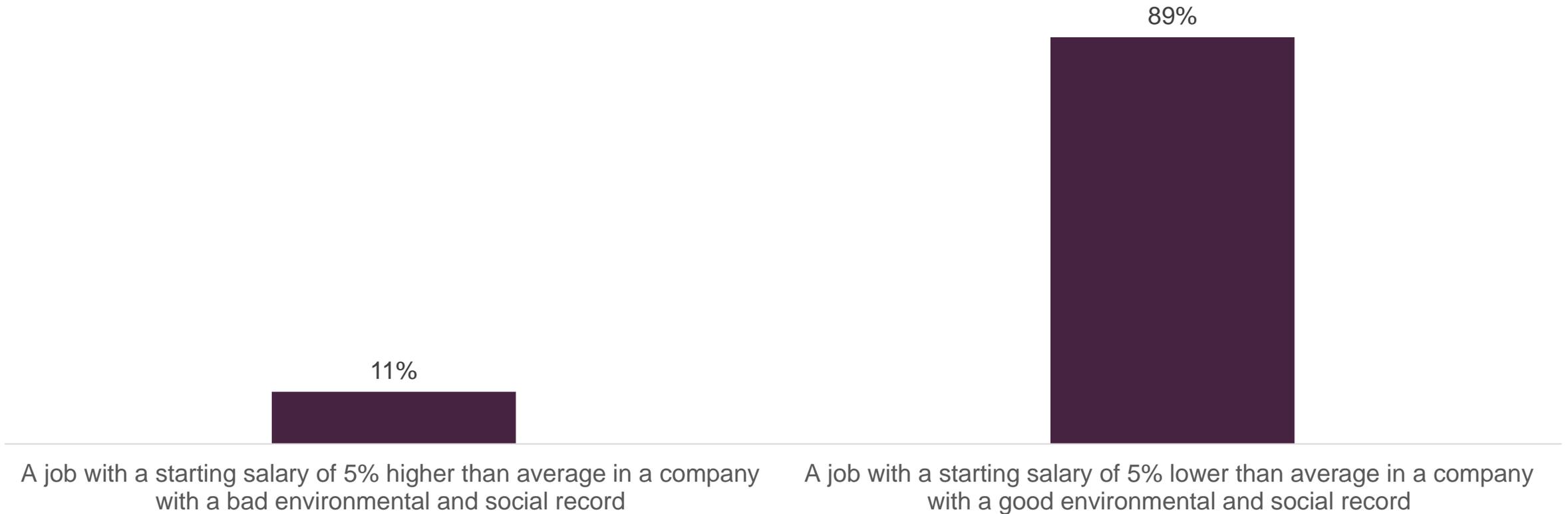
43% of respondents identify their studies at university as being the place where they've studied that has encouraged them to think and act to help the environment and other people the most.





Sustainability
and
employment
(Europe)

89% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 5% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



62% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



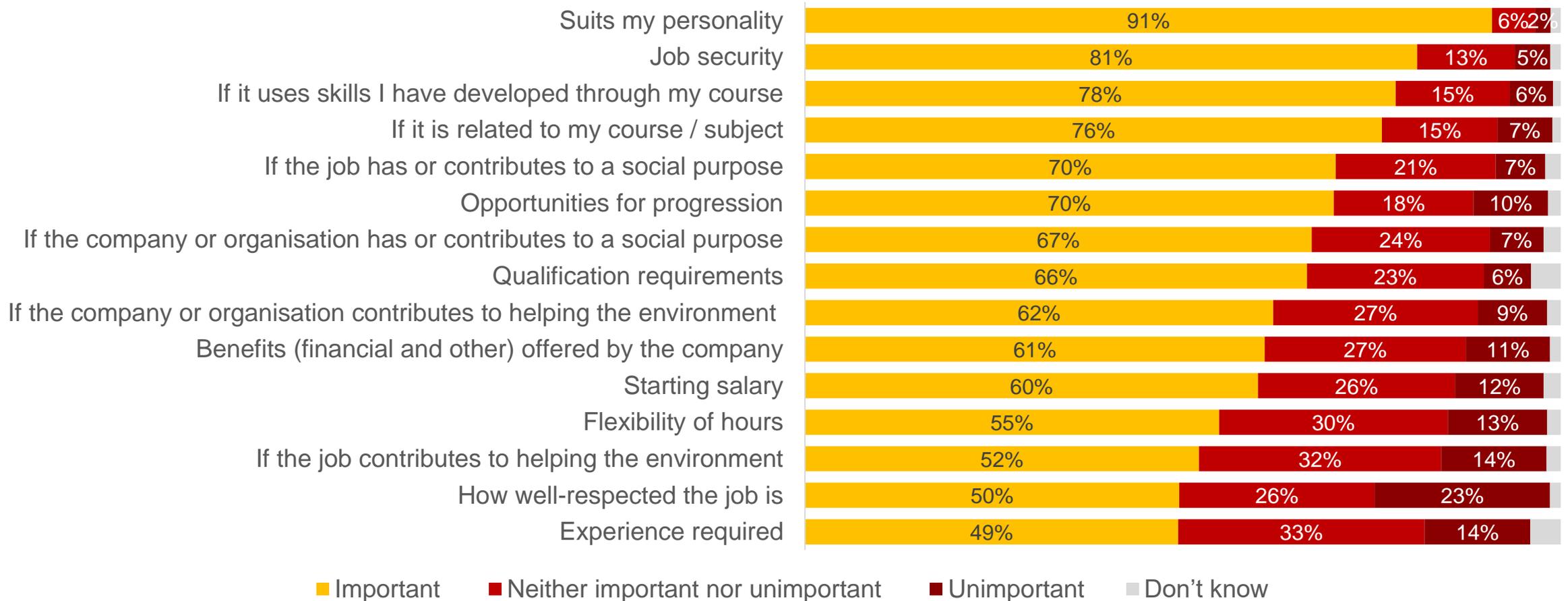
A third of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in role that contributes to positive environmental and social change



A job with a starting salary of 15% higher than average in a role that doesn't contribute to positive environmental and social change

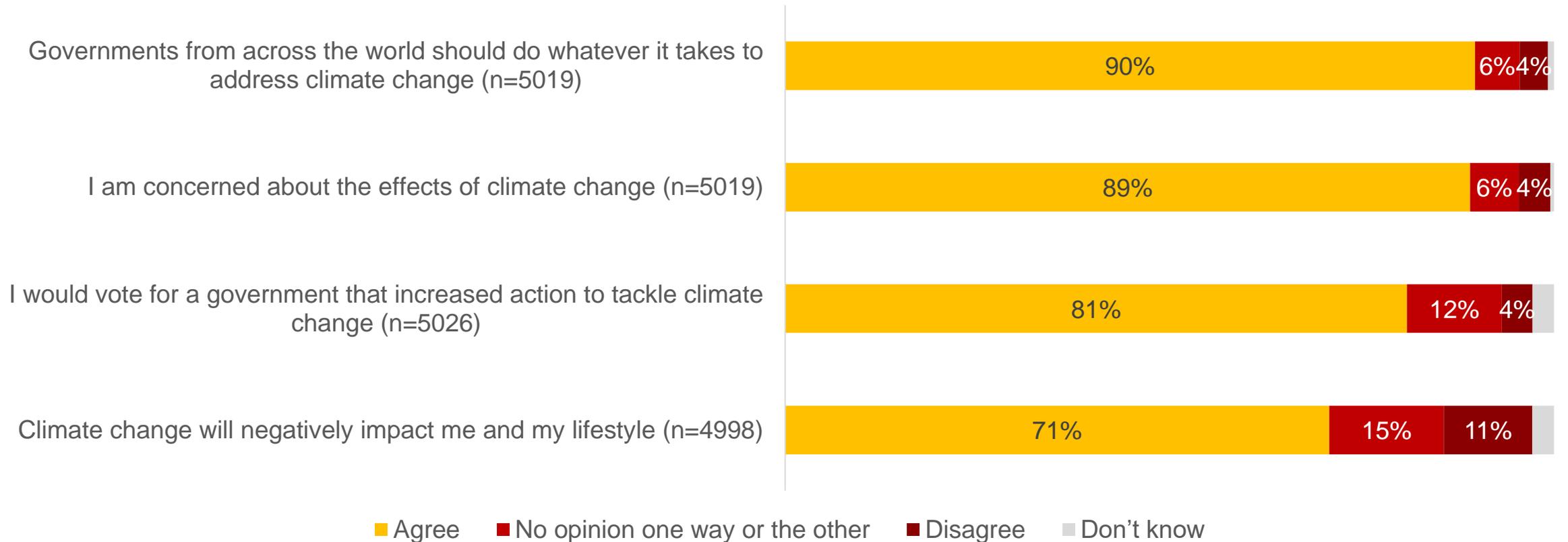
A job with a starting salary of 15% lower than average in a role that does contribute to positive environmental and social change

Whether the job suits their personality, job security and if the job uses skills related to their course are the main factors respondents will take into account when considering their future career or job.



Climate change
and awareness
of the SDGs
(Europe)

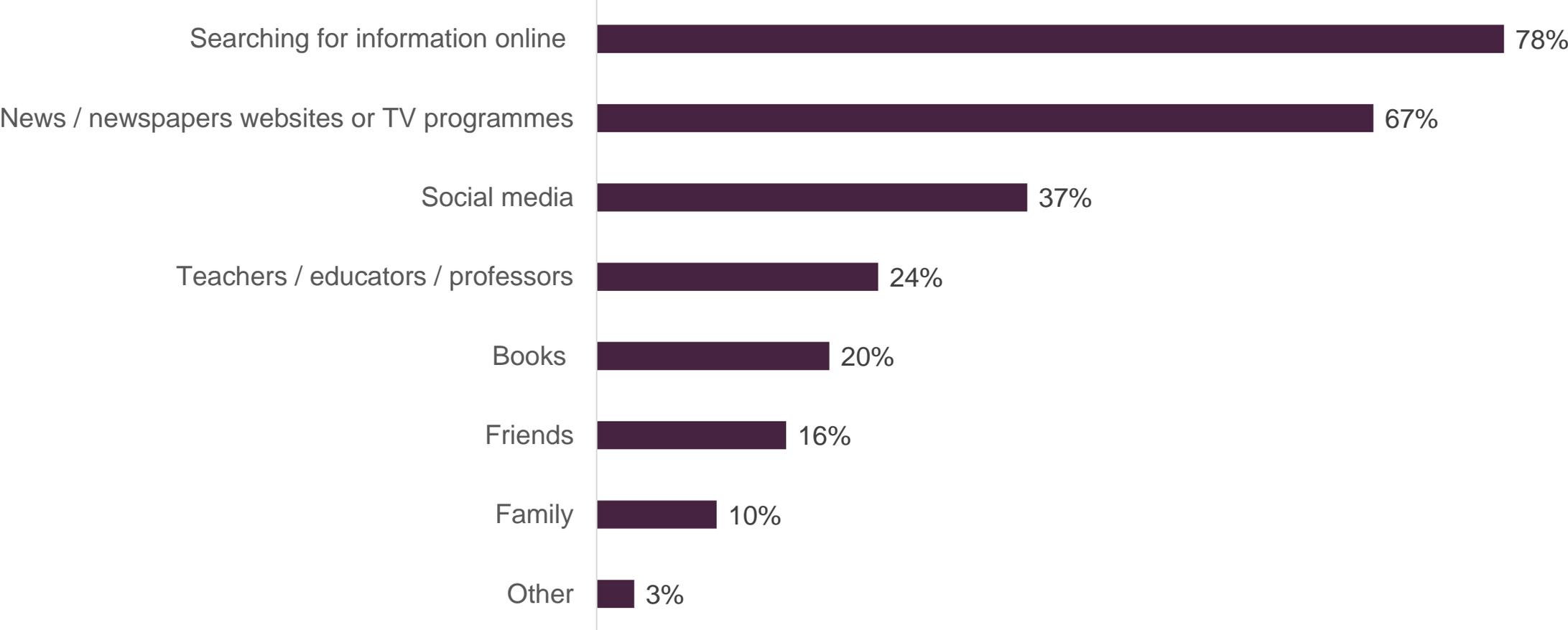
90% say they're concerned about the effects of climate change, and also agree that governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change.



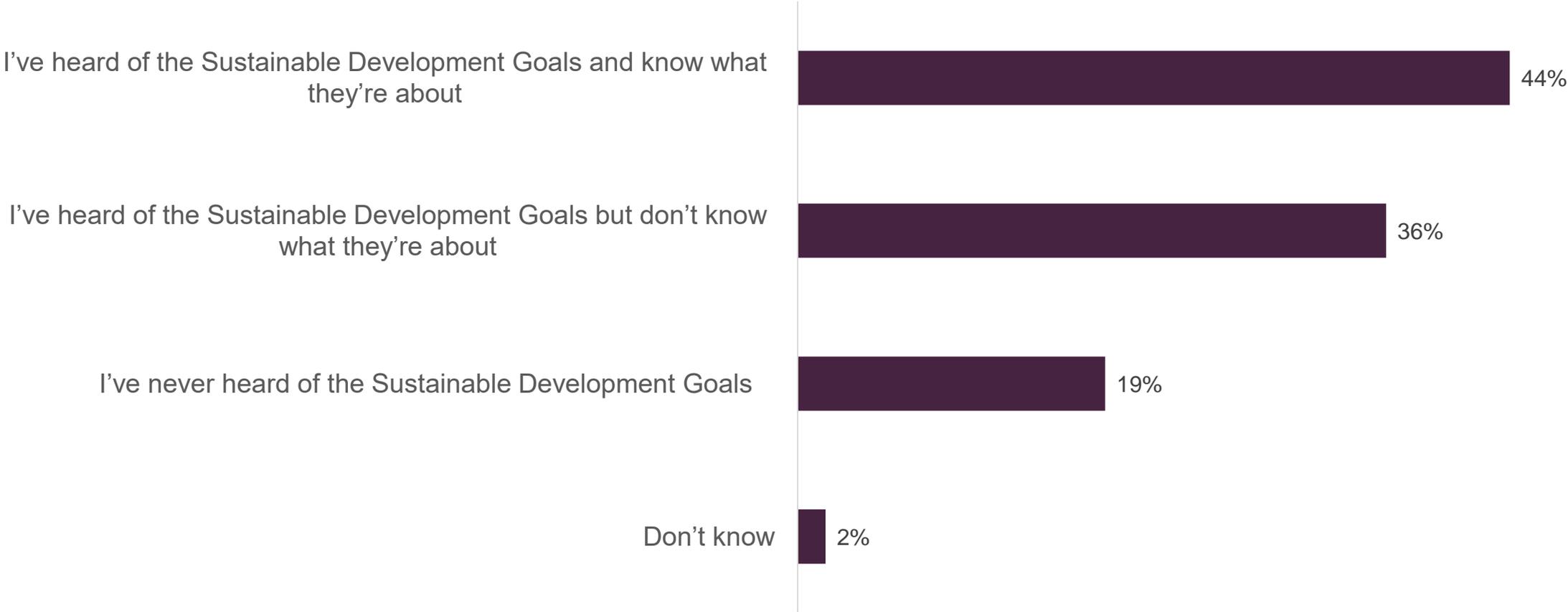
When asked to identify the word that best describes their feelings about climate change and their future, 75% say they're worried.



Three quarters of respondents search online when looking for information about climate change.



Less than half (44%) of respondents say they have heard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and know what they're about.

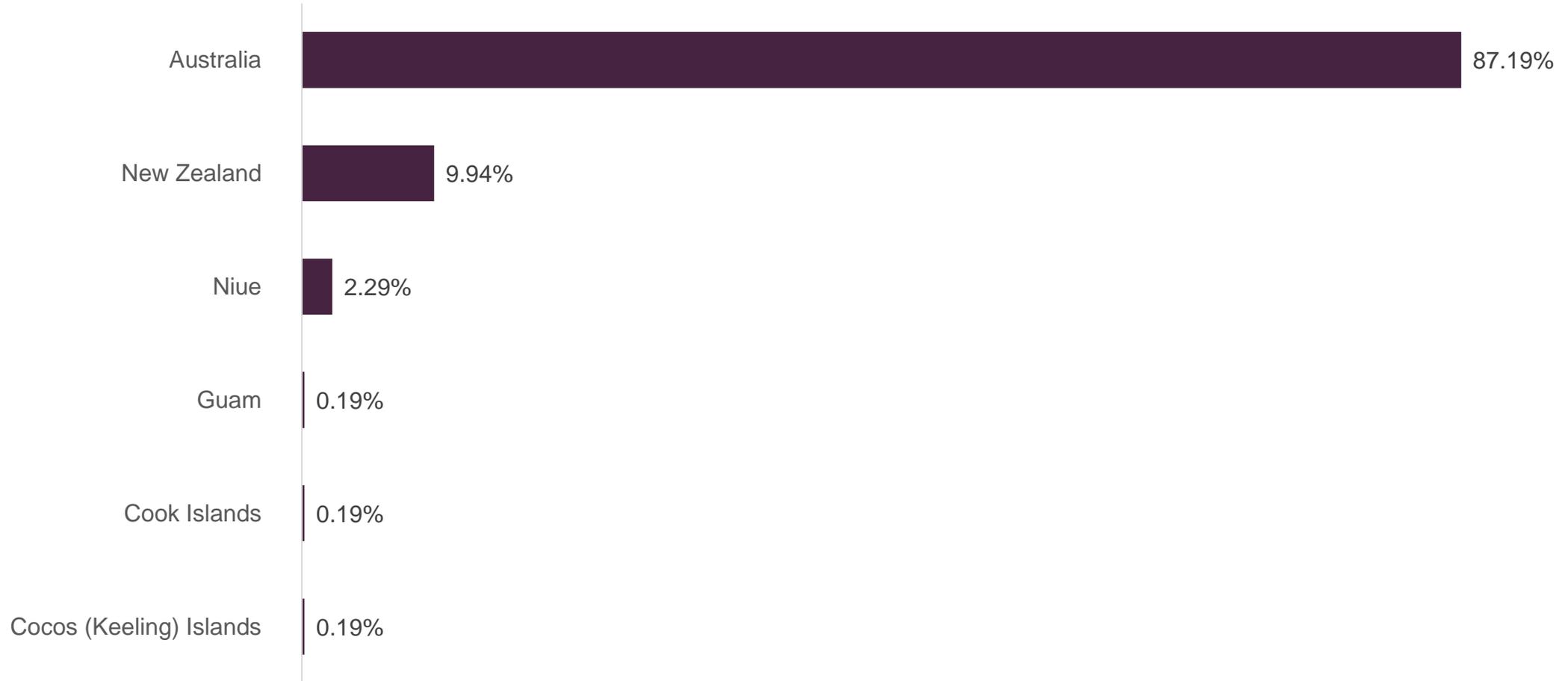


Survey results

Regional breakdown

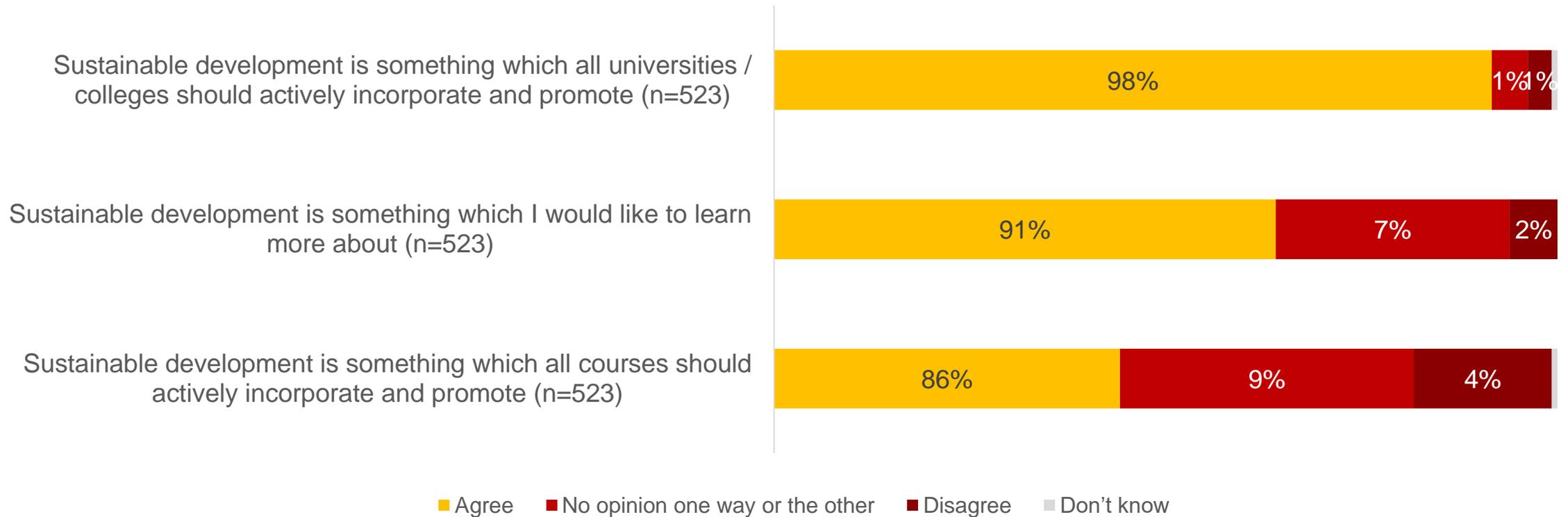
Oceania

523 respondents completed the survey and reported they were studying in the following countries in Europe...

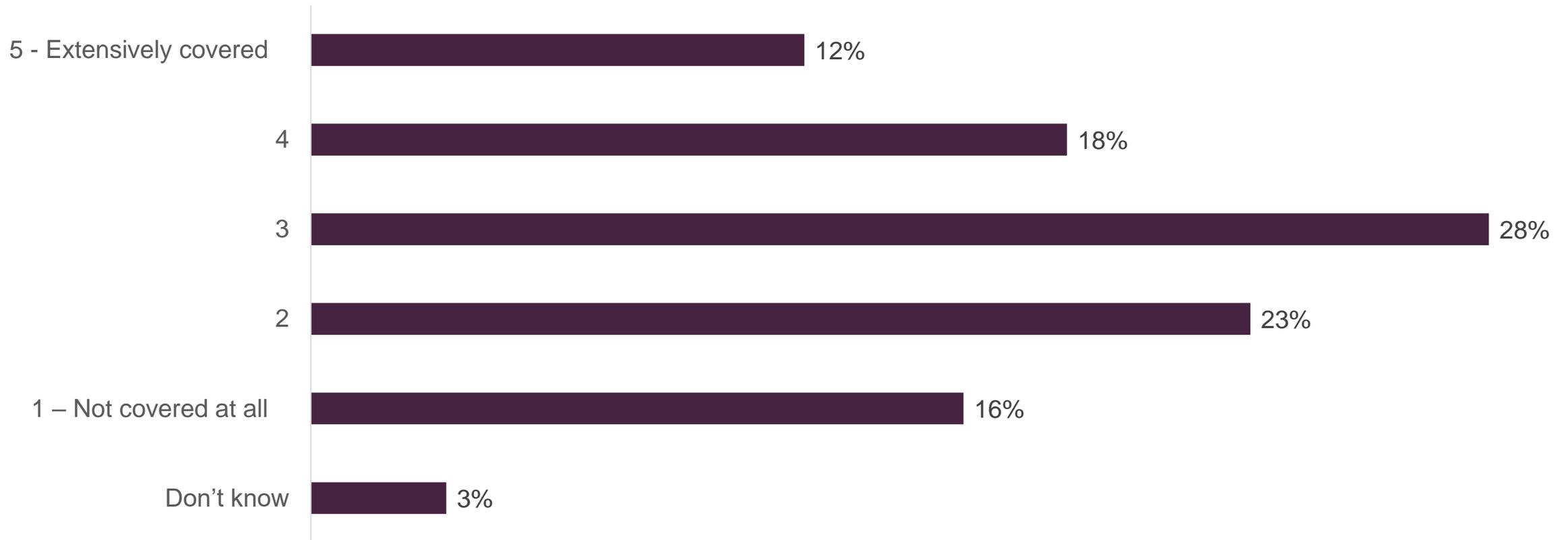


Experiences of
sustainability in
education
(Oceania)

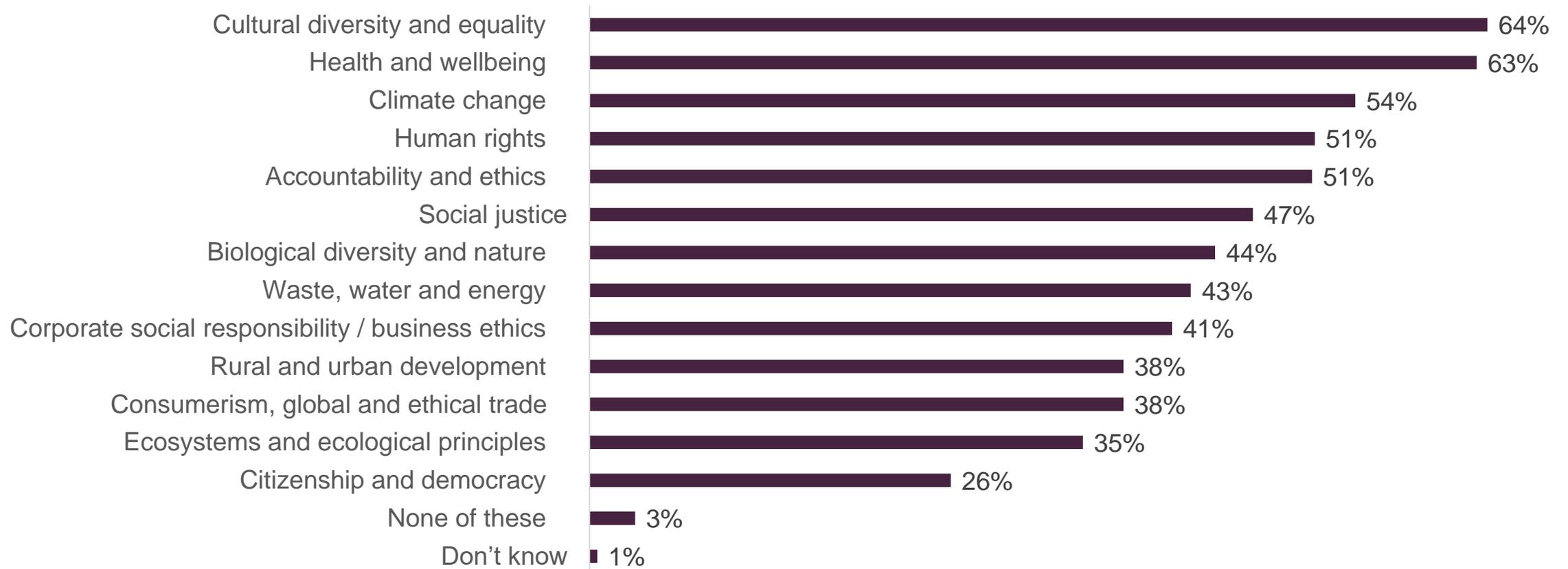
98% agree that sustainable development is something which all universities and colleges should actively incorporate and promote. 91% say the concept is something they want to learn more about, and 86% want to see it covered by all courses.



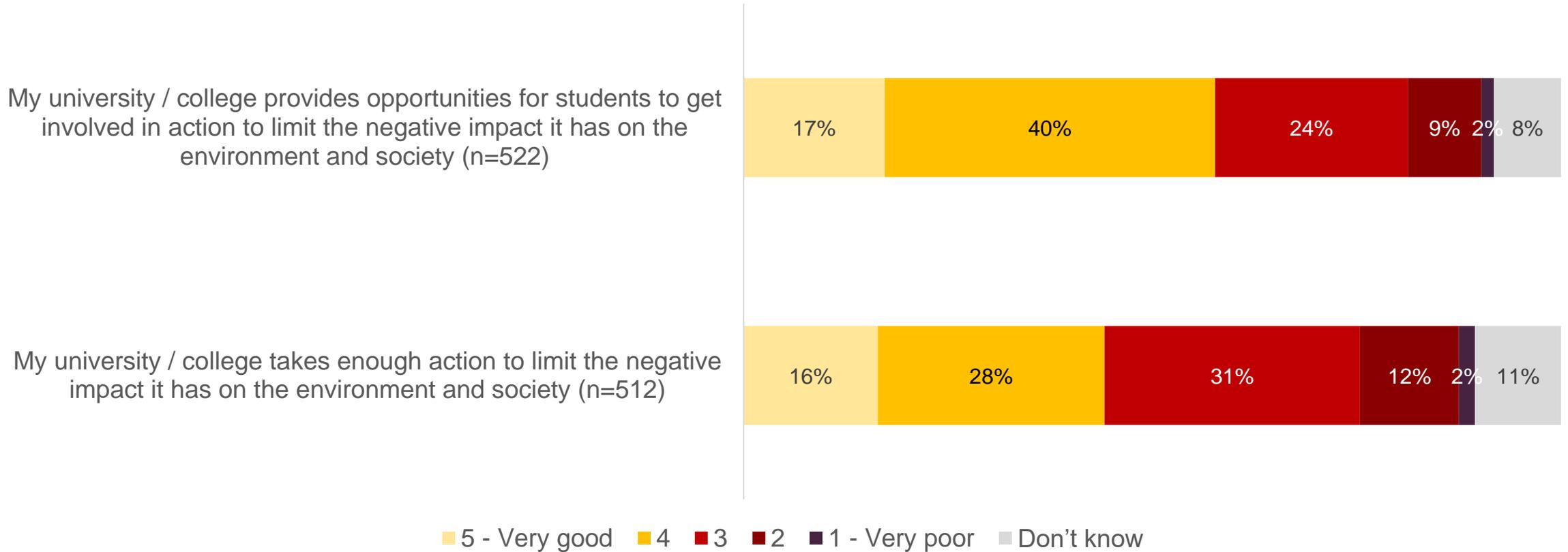
30% of respondents say sustainable development has been covered in depth by their course. 39% report low or no coverage of the concept.

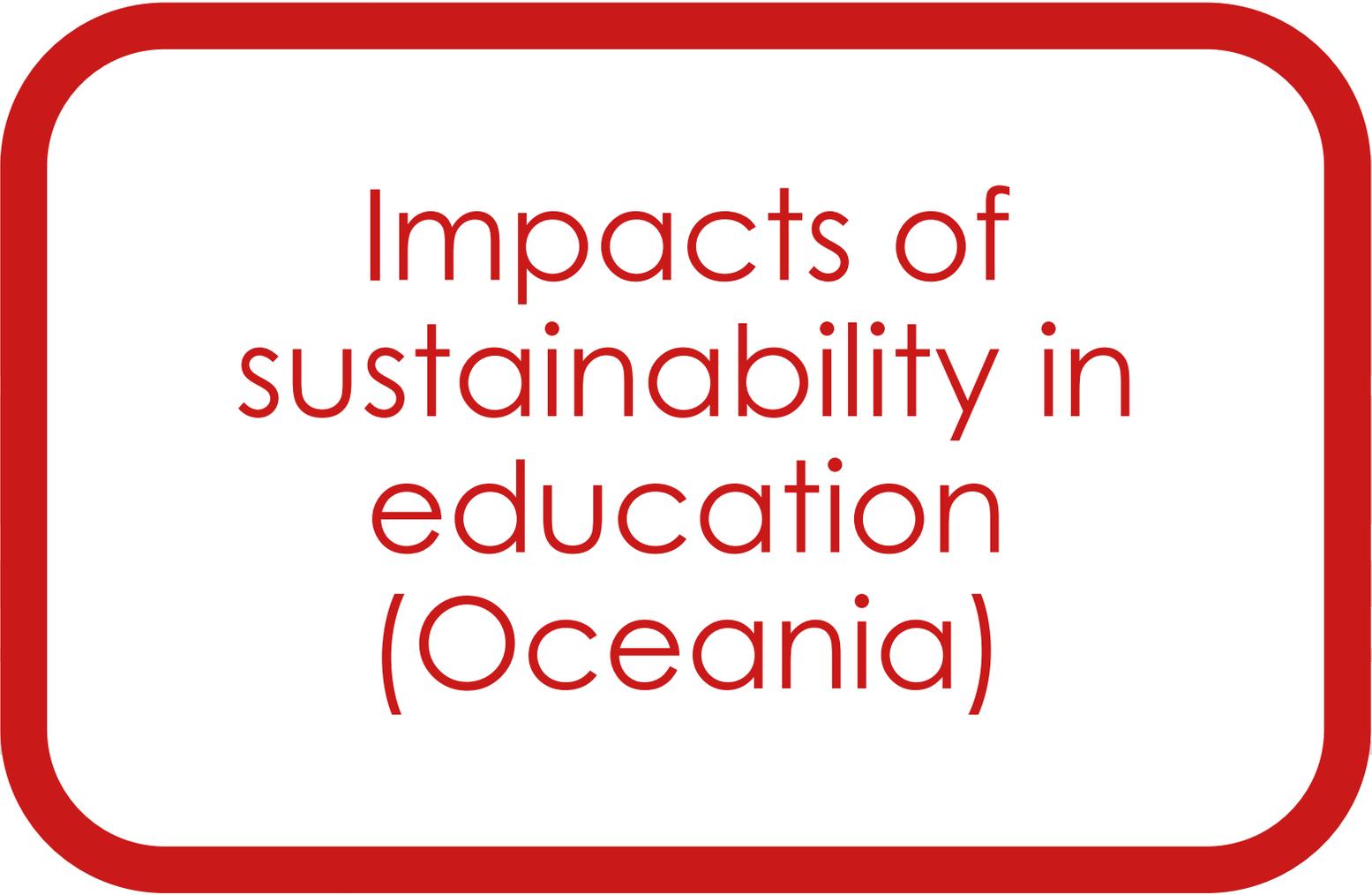


Cultural diversity and equality (64%), health and wellbeing (63%) and climate change (54%) are the issues respondents report most frequently as having been covered by their education so far.



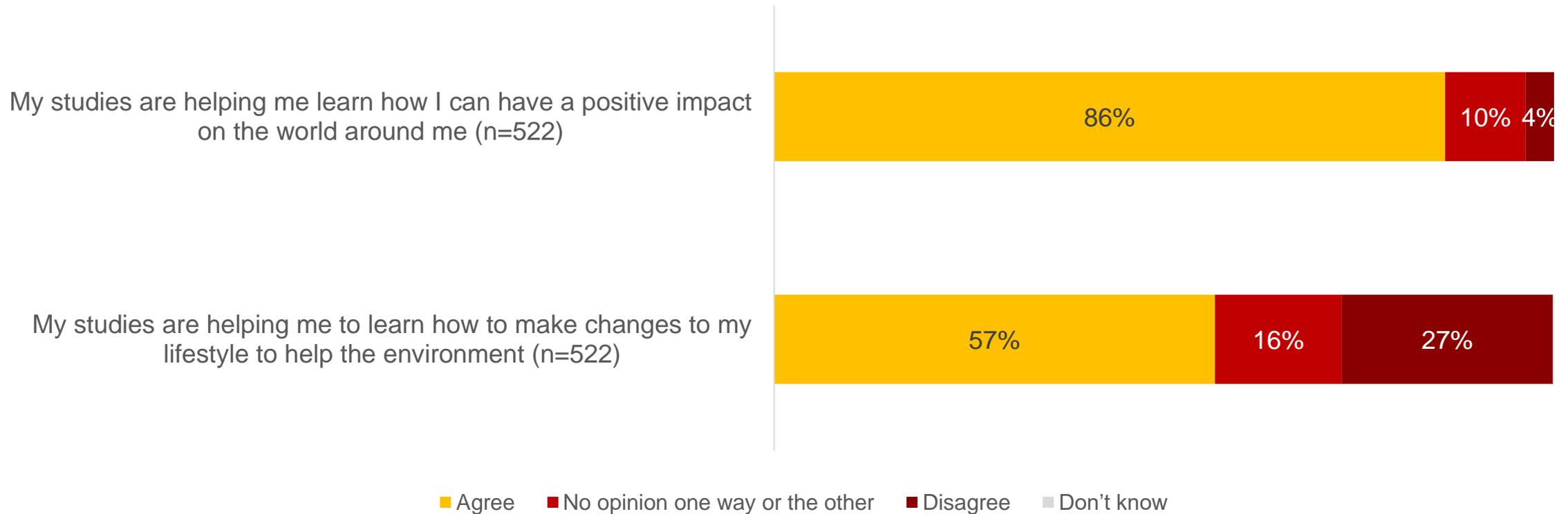
17% say their place of study is very good at providing opportunities for students linked to sustainability, and 16% say it's very good at addressing its own negative impacts.



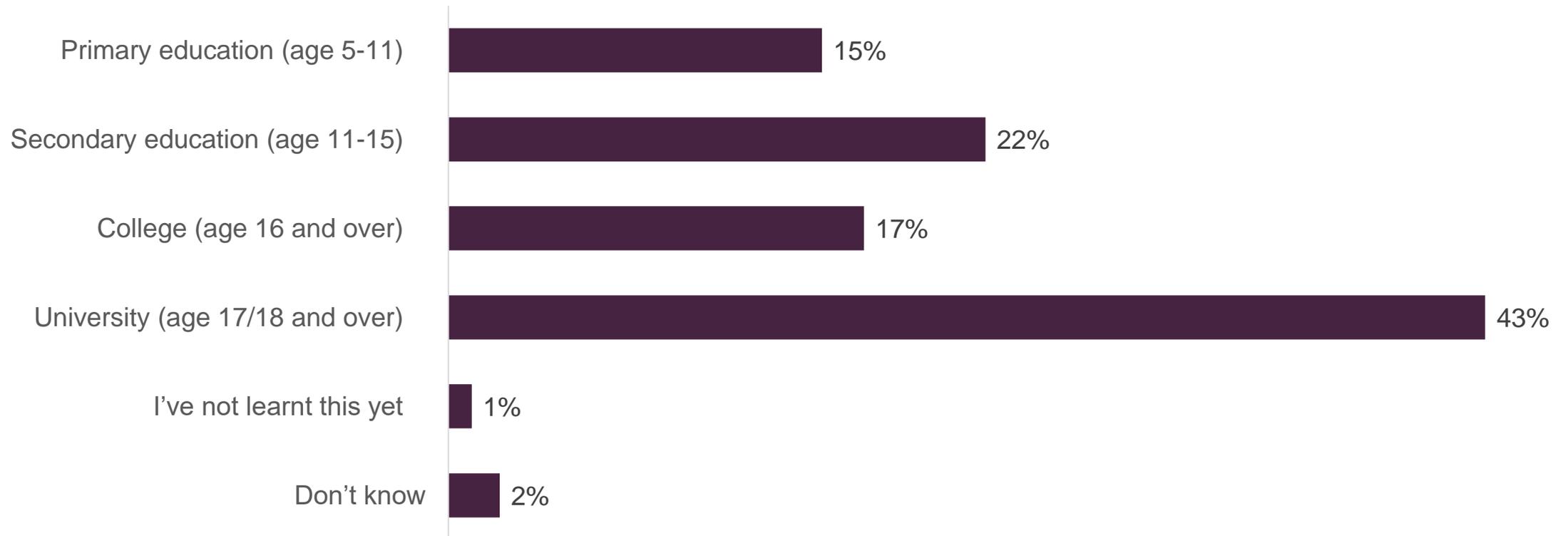


Impacts of
sustainability in
education
(Oceania)

86% agree that their studies are helping them learn how they personally can positively impact the world around them. 57% agree that their studies are helping them learn how to make changes to their lifestyle to help the environment.



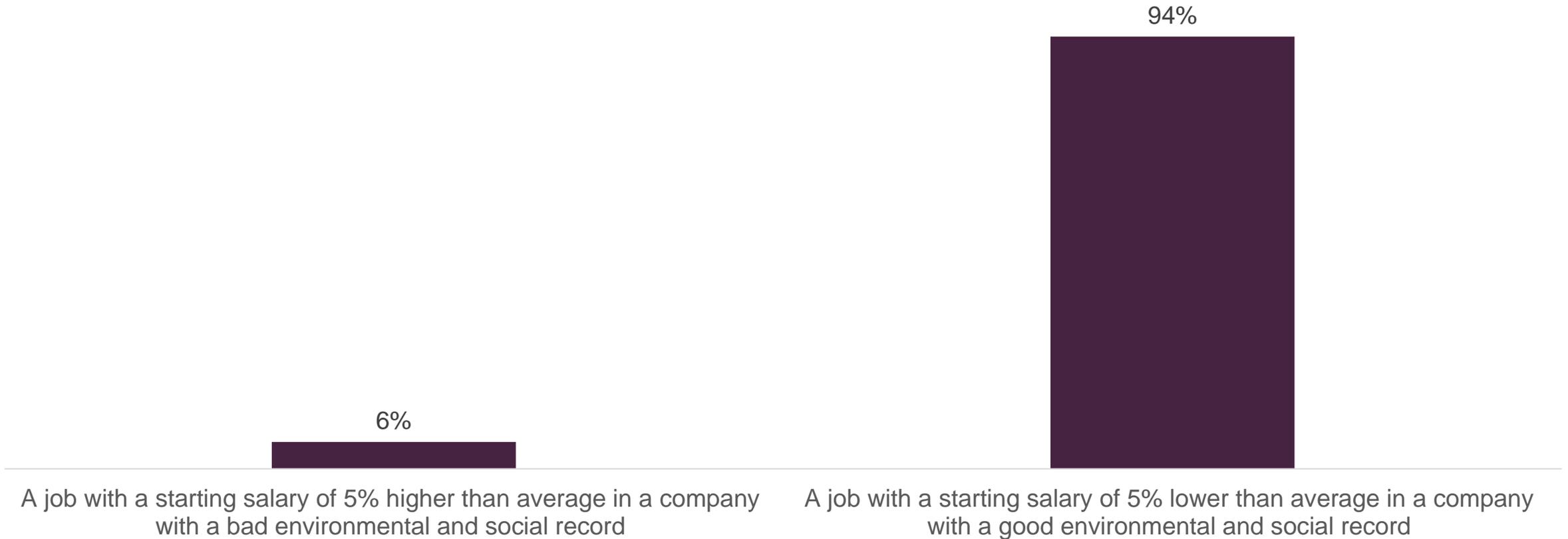
43% of respondents identify their studies at university as being the place where they've studied that has encouraged them to think and act to help the environment and other people the most.





Sustainability
and
employment
(Oceania)

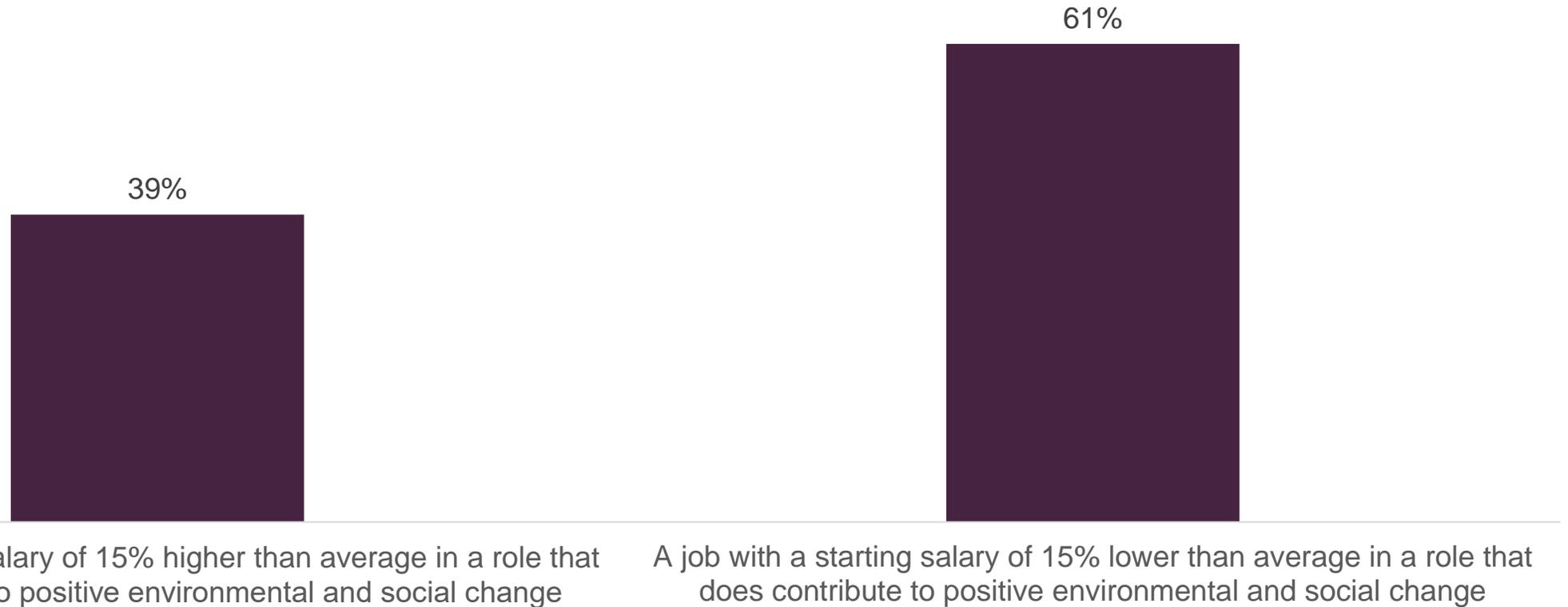
94% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 5% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



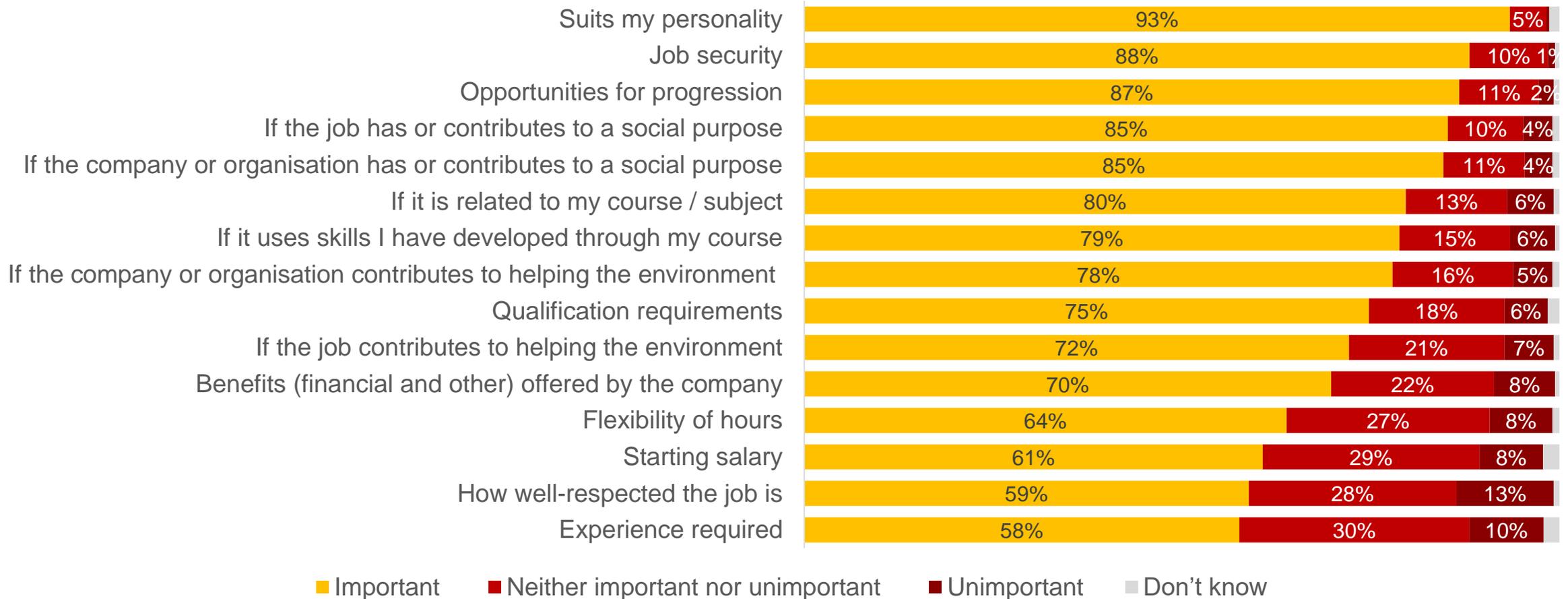
75% of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in a company with a good environmental and social record



Almost two thirds of respondents say they are willing to accept a salary sacrifice of 15% to work in role that contributes to positive environmental and social change.

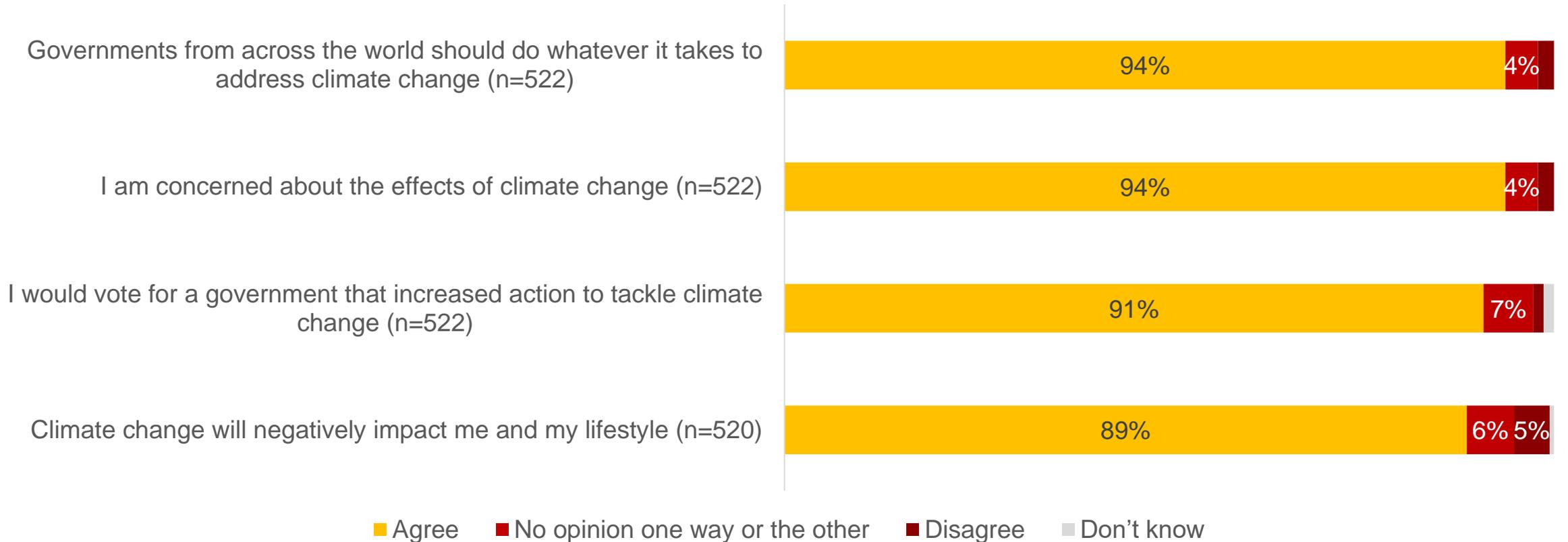


Whether the job suits their personality, job security and opportunities for progression are the main factors respondents will take into account when considering their future career or job.



Climate change
and awareness
of the SDGs
(Oceania)

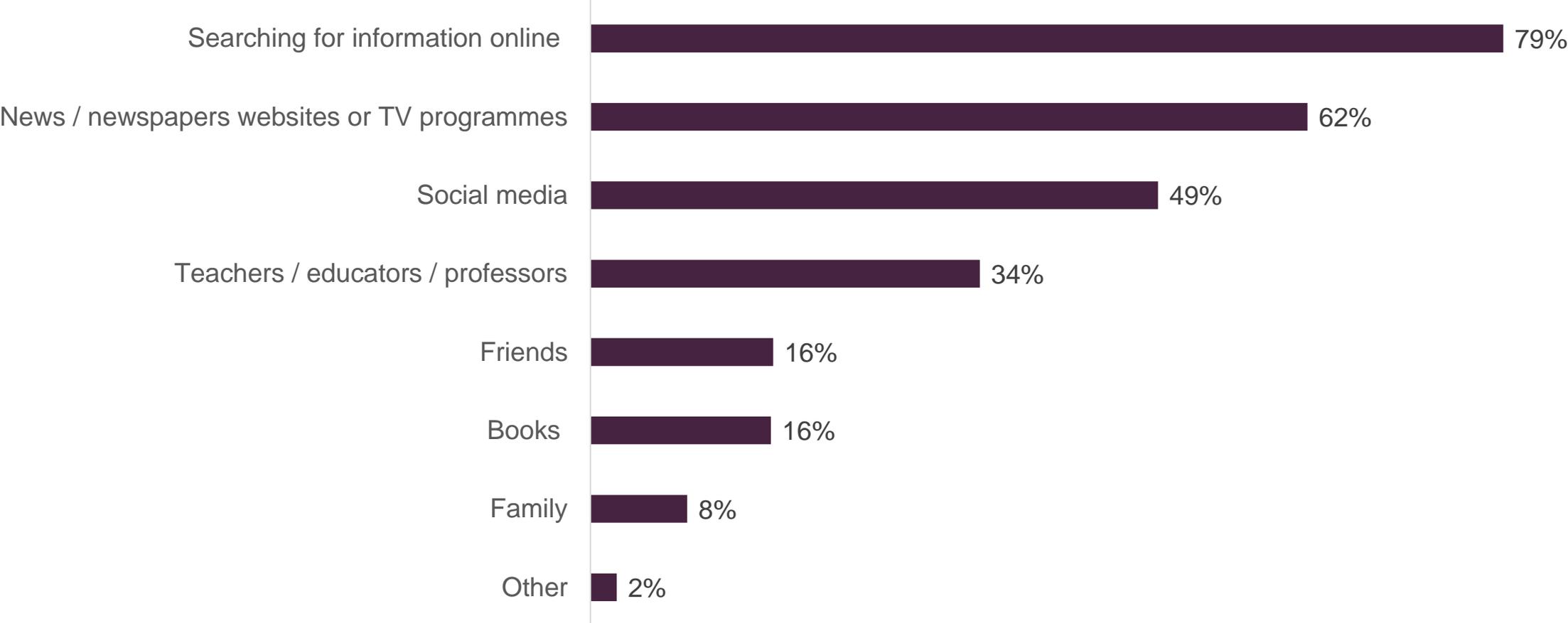
94% say they're concerned about the effects of climate change, and also agree that governments from across the world should do whatever it takes to address climate change.



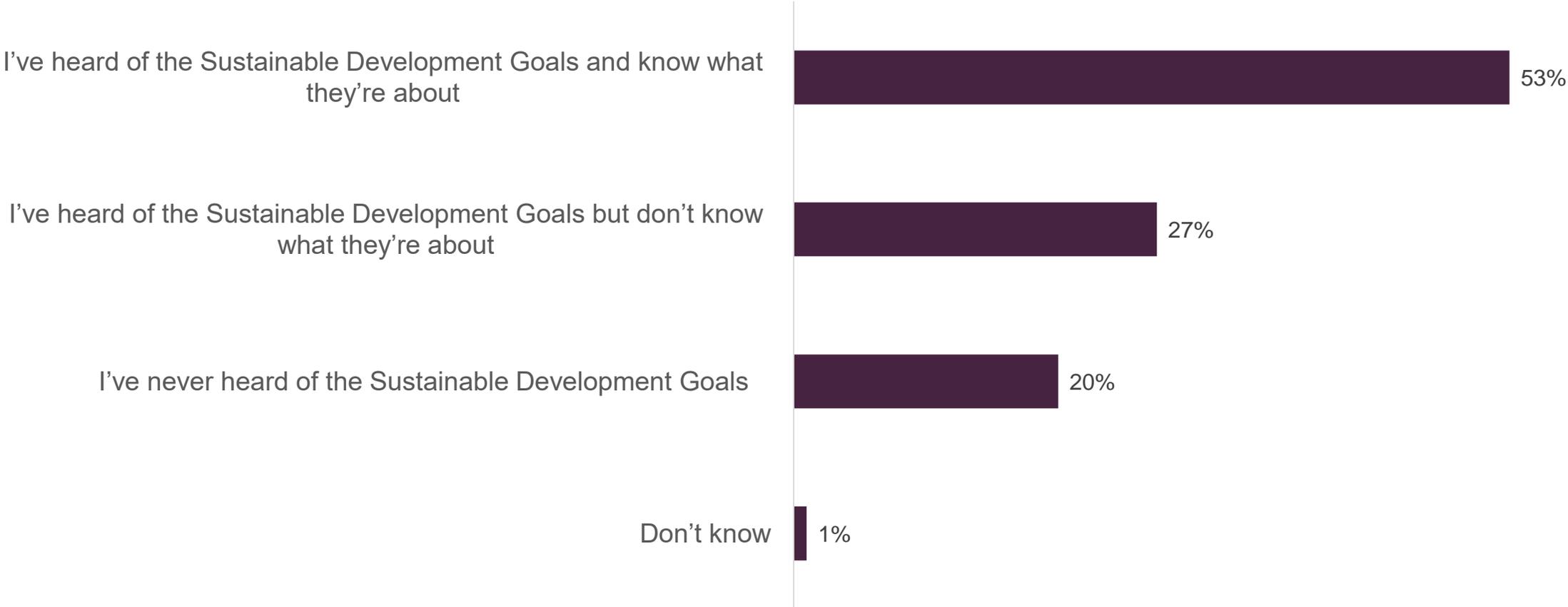
When asked to identify the word that best describes their feelings about climate change and their future, 84% say they're worried.



Over three quarters of respondents search online when looking for information about climate change.



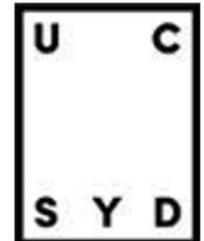
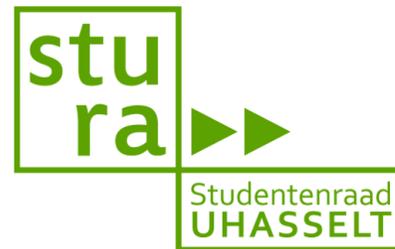
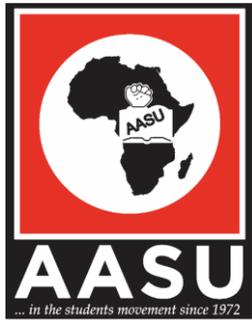
Half (53%) of respondents say they have heard of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and know what they're about.



Acknowledgements

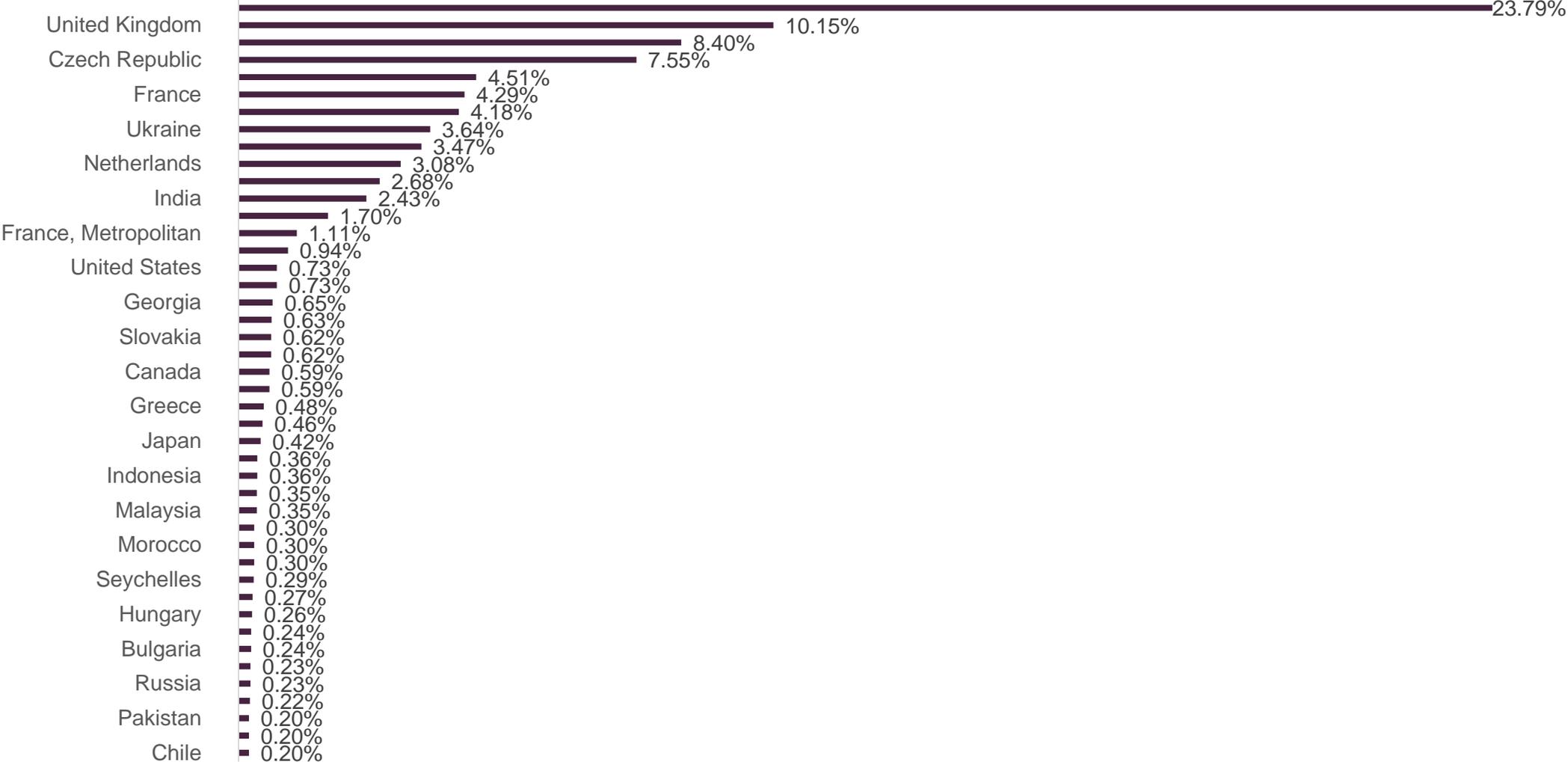
Acknowledgements

Thanks goes to all the students from around the world who contributed to the research by completing the survey and to the following organisations who are amongst those who helped distribute and promote this work:

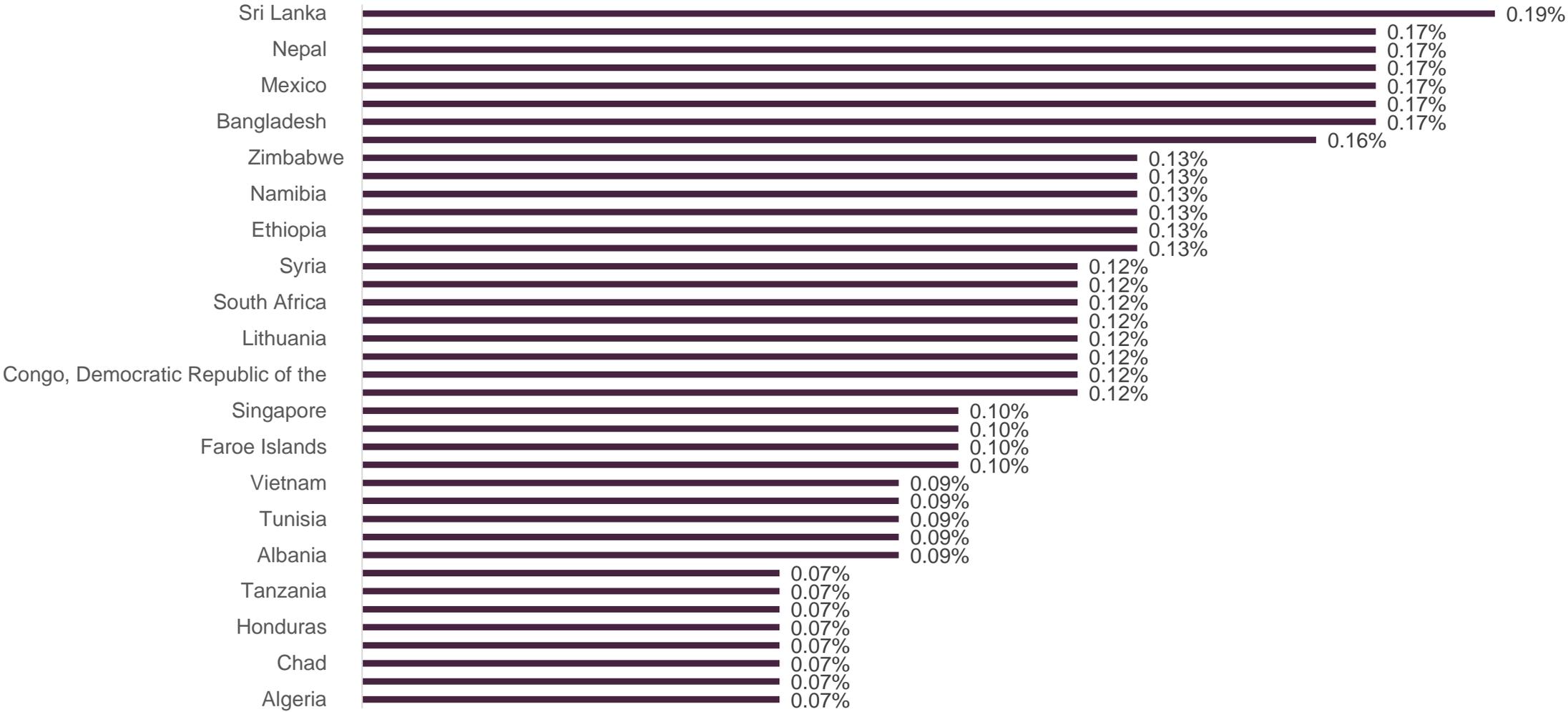


Appendices

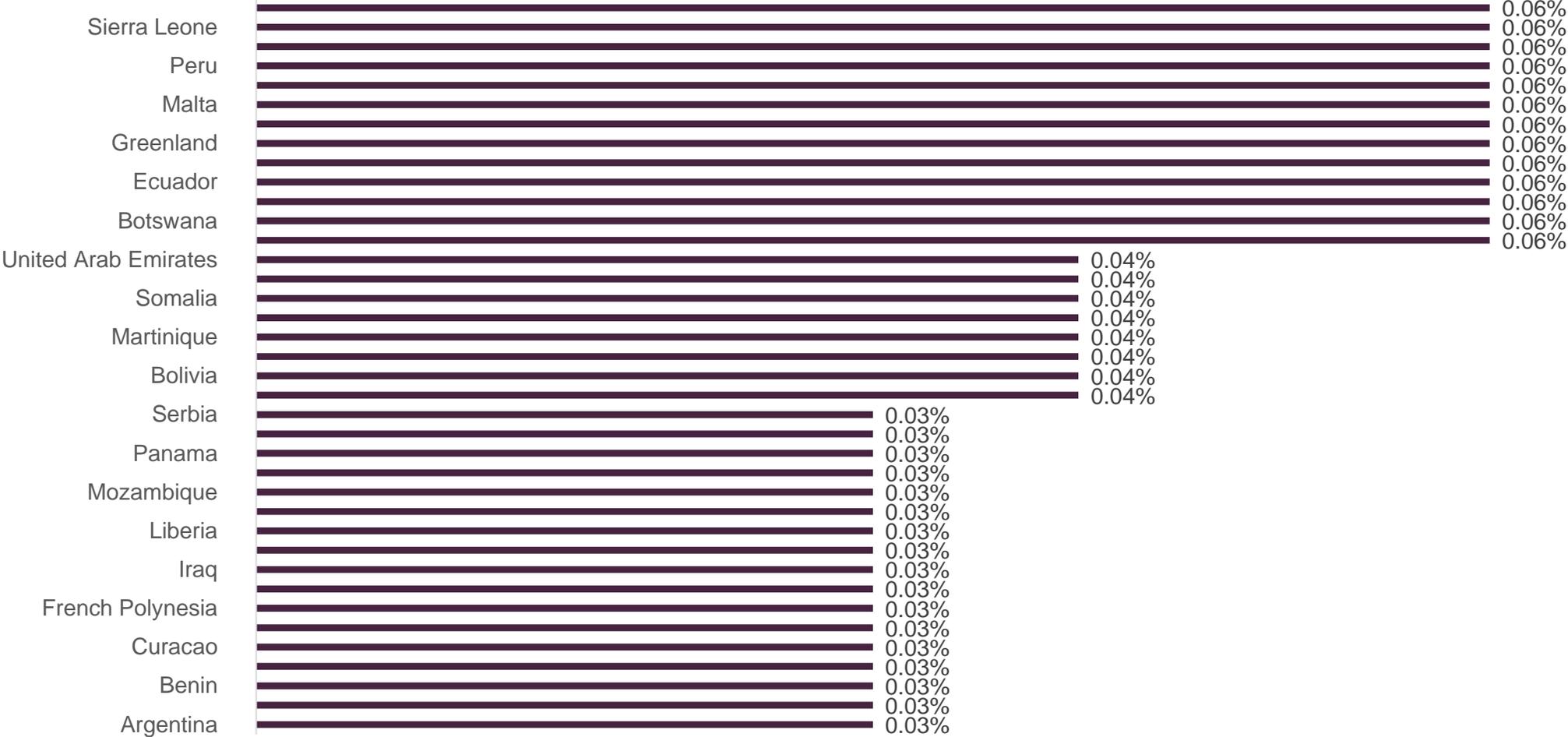
Which country or territory are you from? [Overall respondents]



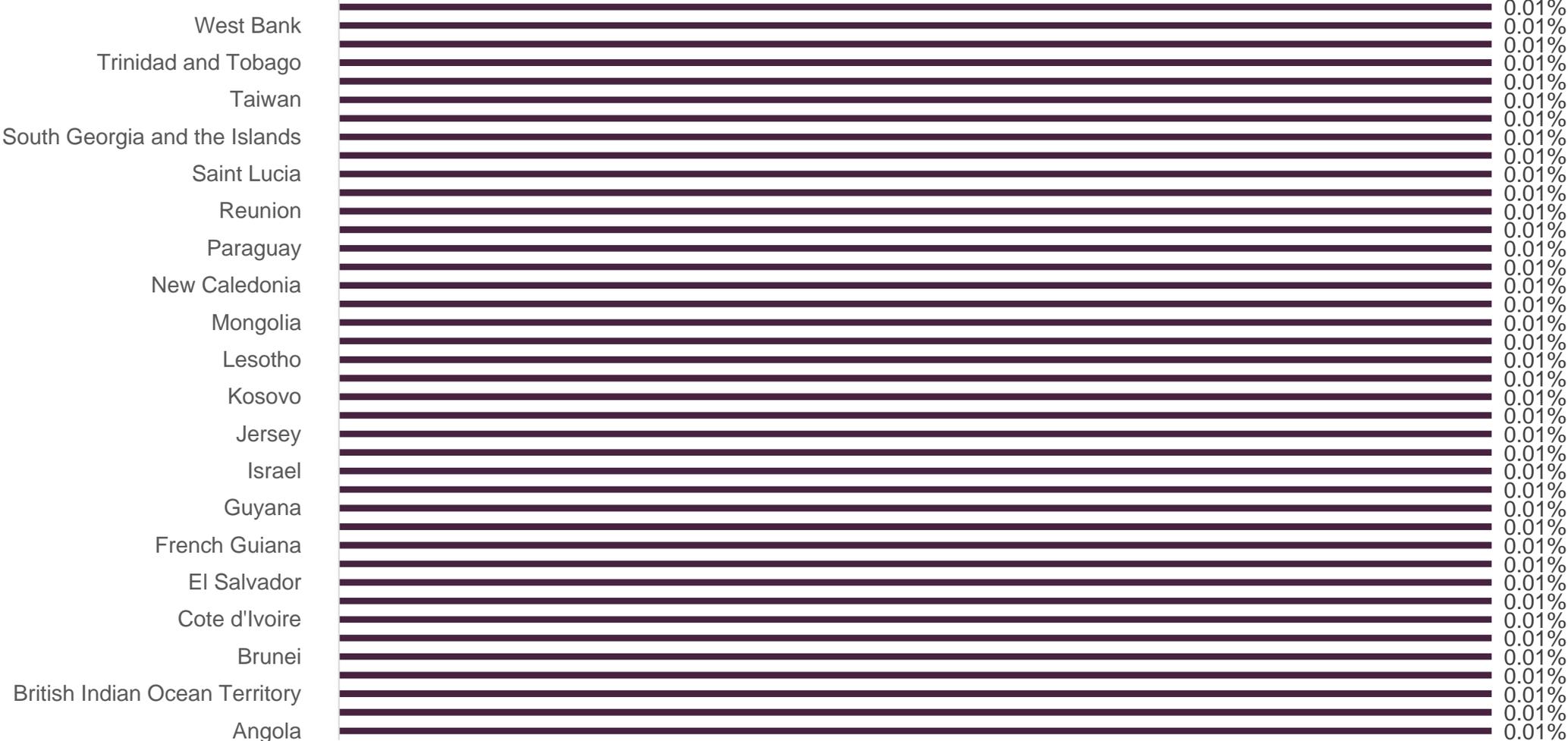
Which country or territory are you from? [Overall respondents]



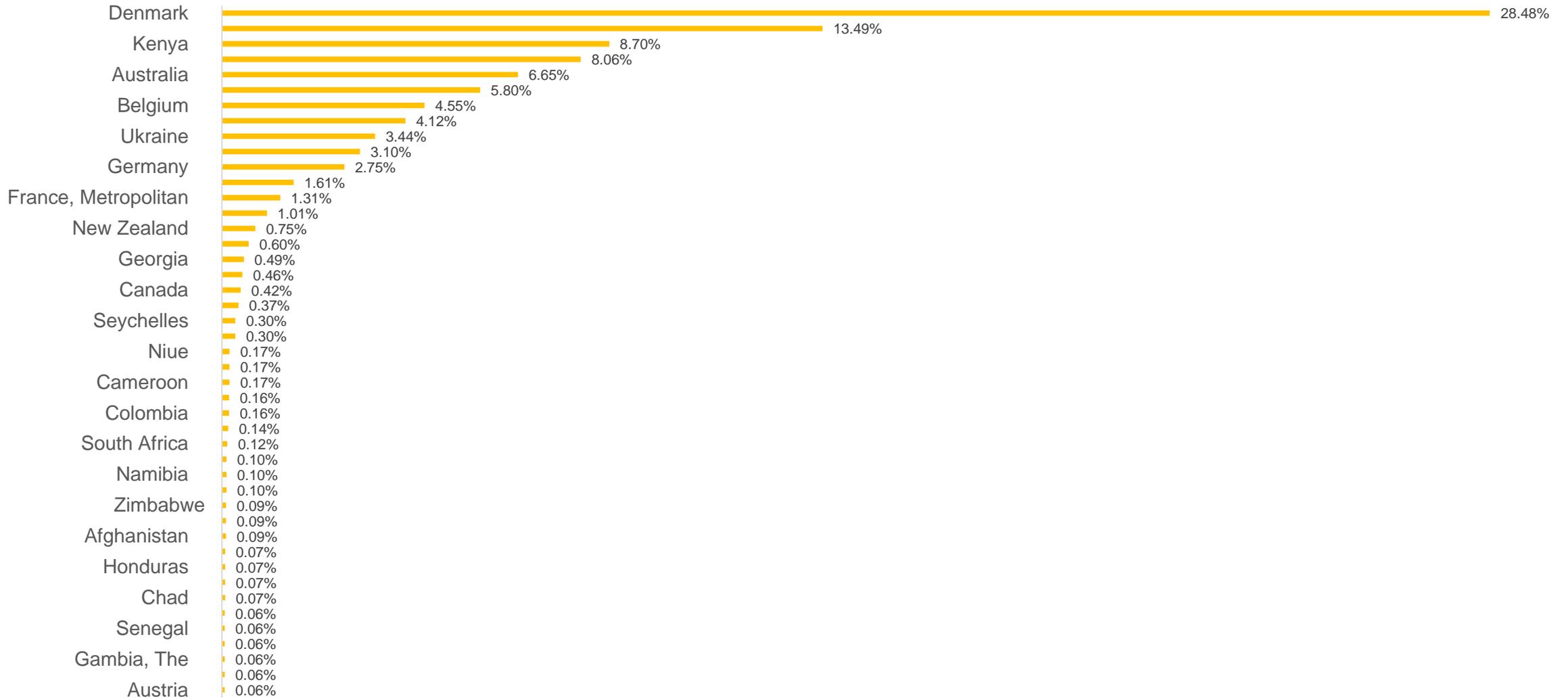
Which country or territory are you from? [Overall respondents]



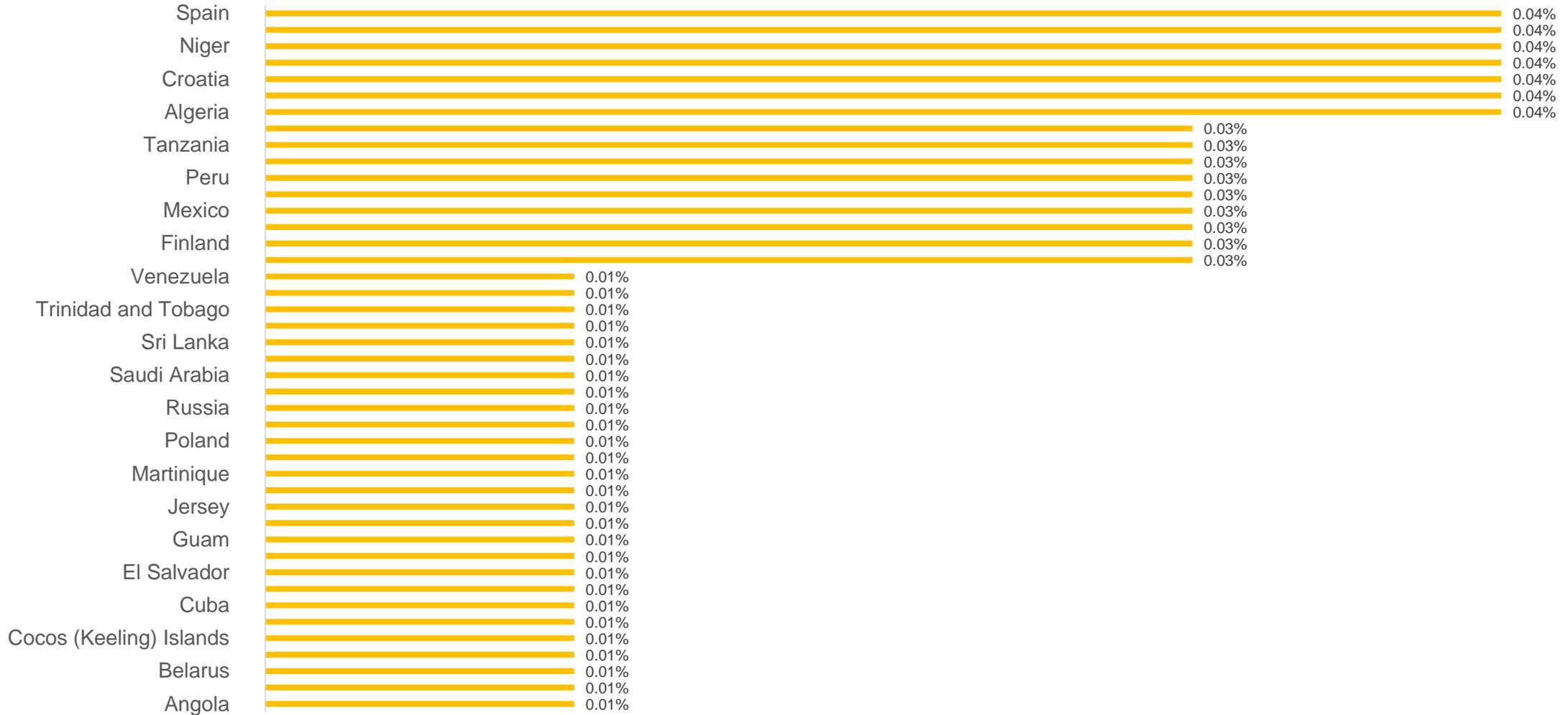
Which country or territory are you from? [Overall respondents]



Which country do you study in? [Overall respondents]



Which country do you study in? [Overall respondents]





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