

SEC NEWGATE

Global ESG Monitor

What the community expects from corporates on ESG

FRANCE REPORT

2023 RESEARCH FINDINGS

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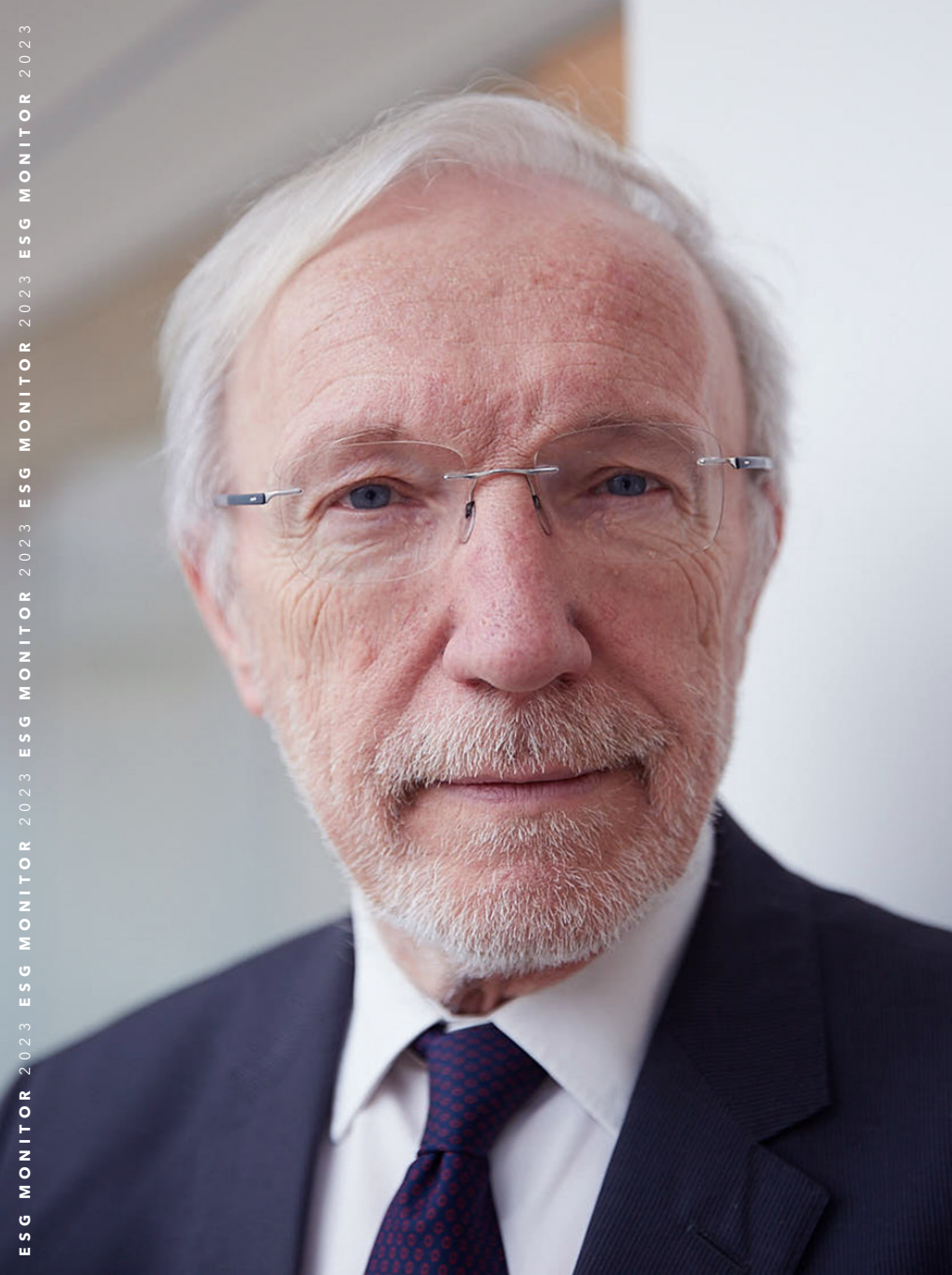
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Part 1.

Foreword





Foreword

Many of our clients seek answers to questions including "Which of our ESG actions should we talk about?", "Are we talking about too many or the right things?" and "How do we make sure our investment in ESG is cutting through?"

As public awareness and interest in ESG issues continues to grow, companies are increasingly concerned that their ESG initiatives are seen as insincere, labeled as 'greenwashing' or attempts to ride the 'wokeness' wave.

The SEC Newgate Global ESG Monitor offers a unique perspective by objectively examining community expectations and identifying what influences the public perspective of corporate ESG authenticity.

ESG initiatives significantly impact a company's reputation. Despite growing societal concerns about the cost of living, the public still expects companies to demonstrate genuine corporate citizenship and authenticity in their ESG efforts.

We often see organizations making decisions on which ESG actions to take, which to communicate and how to go about it, based on gut feelings and intuition, leaving them vulnerable to public scrutiny and unable to authentically communicate their impact.

This research builds on SEC Newgate's growing body of thought leadership work in this space, providing a clear evidence base to help you bridge this gap.

We help clients understand how community expectations are changing, what ESG actions they should be leveraging in their communications based on their reputation, their impacts and community priorities; the risks they need to mitigate; and how to weave this into a compelling and authentic narrative.

Fiorenzo Tagliabue

GROUP CEO, SEC NEWGATE

Part 2.

Background & methodology



Background & methodology

For the third year running, SEC Newgate has conducted research to understand community awareness and perceptions around Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues and actions by corporates in this space.

1,005

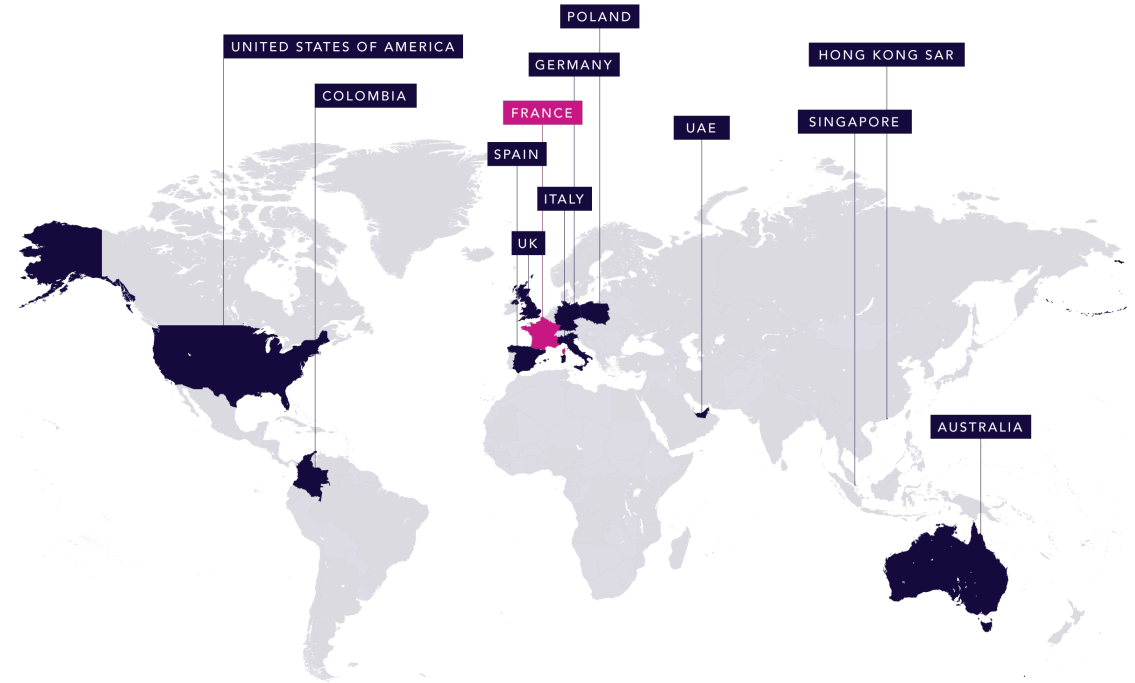
Sample of **n=1,005** from **France**

12,080

Sample of **n=12,080** across **12 countries and territories**.

This research is part of a global study, and this report presents the findings from France. Participants were sourced from global panel provider PureProfile, with questionnaires translated and completed in-language in Colombia, France, Germany, Hong Kong SAR, Italy, Poland, Spain and United Arab Emirates (UAE). Fieldwork was conducted from late July to early August 2023.

Quotas were set by age, gender and location to ensure a nationally representative sample of citizens aged 18+, and the final results were weighted by the actual age and gender proportions within each country or territory. For the 'total' results, each country is given equal weighting.



Other methodological notes to keep in mind

1. Survey questions and sample sizes are shown at the bottom of each page. Unless otherwise specified, questions were asked of all participants.
2. Results may not always total 100% due to rounding or questions allowing multiple-responses.
3. Where possible, results are compared to the 2022 and 2021 survey results for each country as well as the 'global total' i.e. for all 12 countries and territories included in the 2022 and 2021 studies.
4. Down ↓ and up ↑ arrows show where results are statistically significantly lower / higher than the previous year (95% confidence level).

Part 3.

Summary of key insights



Summary of key insights

In 2023, community expectations for organizations' action on ESG in France appear to have reached a tipping point. A primary focus on economic contributions is no longer enough to meet expectations and genuine action to mitigate impacts on people and the planet is a baseline expectation.

- **People are increasingly engaged with ESG issues.** Results show an increase in awareness of ESG (47% aware, up 8% since last year) and awareness of NetZero (22% up significantly from 17% in 2022). We have also seen an increase in interest in ESG issues, with 65% rating their interest at 7 or more out of 10, up 11% since 2022. This is impacting people's decisions in a range of areas - like the type of food they eat, products they buy and who they vote for.
- **The community wants corporates to take action on ESG issues.** In 2023 75% agreed it was important for corporates to take action on ESG issues and 74% agreed that companies should speak out on issues that are important to their employees and customers.
- **We're seeing improvements in performance ratings for large and small companies on ESG overall and on many underlying metrics.** Overall ESG ratings of both large and small companies have increased significantly over the last year, with government and not for profit organizations also seeing slight increases in 2023. The healthcare, education and training, and agriculture industries continue to receive the highest ESG performance ratings.
- **These findings come against a backdrop of ongoing concerns around affordable healthcare, cost of living, and work conditions.** When asked to select the top three issues for their country or territory's future, the main priorities remained delivering high quality, affordable health care (selected by 31% of people in France), addressing cost-of-living pressures (29%) and improving pay and conditions for workers (25%).
- **Community expectations of corporates have changed.** Traditionally many saw corporates' primary role was to make a positive financial contribution to the economy, including providing jobs and paying taxes. It's increasingly clear that

the community do not want this to come at the expense of environmental, social and ethical obligations. Most don't think they should have to pay extra and that this is just part of doing business these days.

- **The community want organizations to think of themselves as one part in a system,** with both positive and negative impacts on the environment and society. There is a strong expectation that they should take action on ESG issues and also speak out on issues that are important to their employees and customers - but not necessarily on broader environmental and social issues.
- **The community believe that good ESG performers are taking a holistic approach and demonstrating action.** They want companies to consider their environmental impacts early and ongoing and to support and enable others. Key to this was seeing genuine efforts to demonstrate good ESG at multiple points i.e. among customers, employees, supply chain, lending decisions etc.
- **Poor ESG performers are called out for their harmful impacts on the environment** (including overuse of plastics), poor workplace culture, prioritizing excessive profit over the wellbeing of customers or the community or who are 'stuck' in a world that is moving on and is slow to transition to sustainability.
- Last year our research revealed 'The Great Disconnect' occurring in communications around ESG issues and this year we found that **the Disconnect is still occurring globally.** There remain several challenges here. Firstly, the community wants companies to communicate their ESG efforts more clearly but are not actively searching for this information; and secondly, trust remains a massive issue in ESG communications.

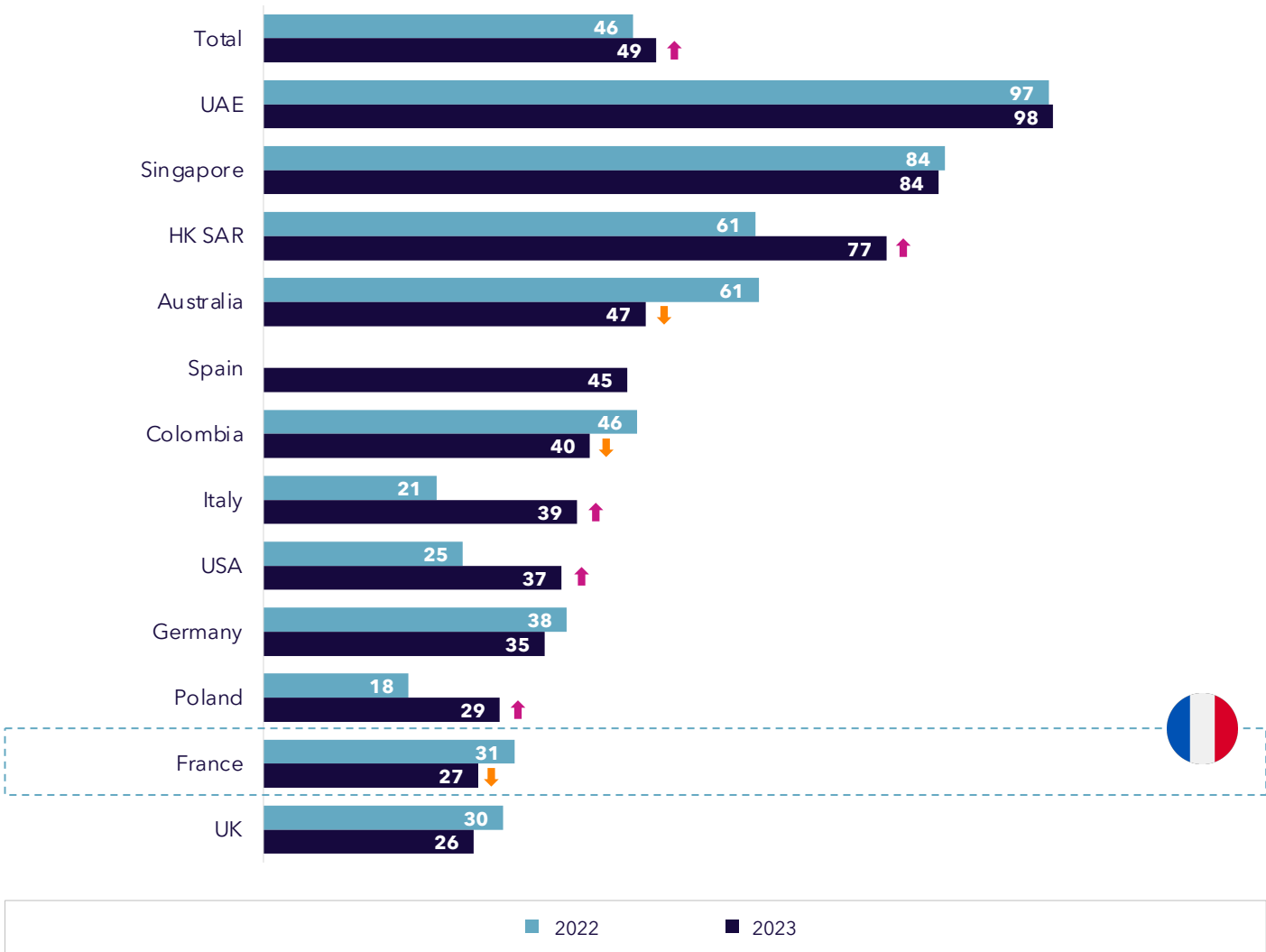
Part 4.

Key findings



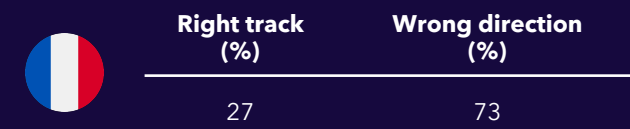
Perceived direction country/territory is heading

(% WHO SAY IT'S ON THE RIGHT TRACK)



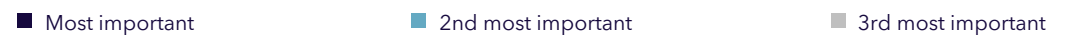
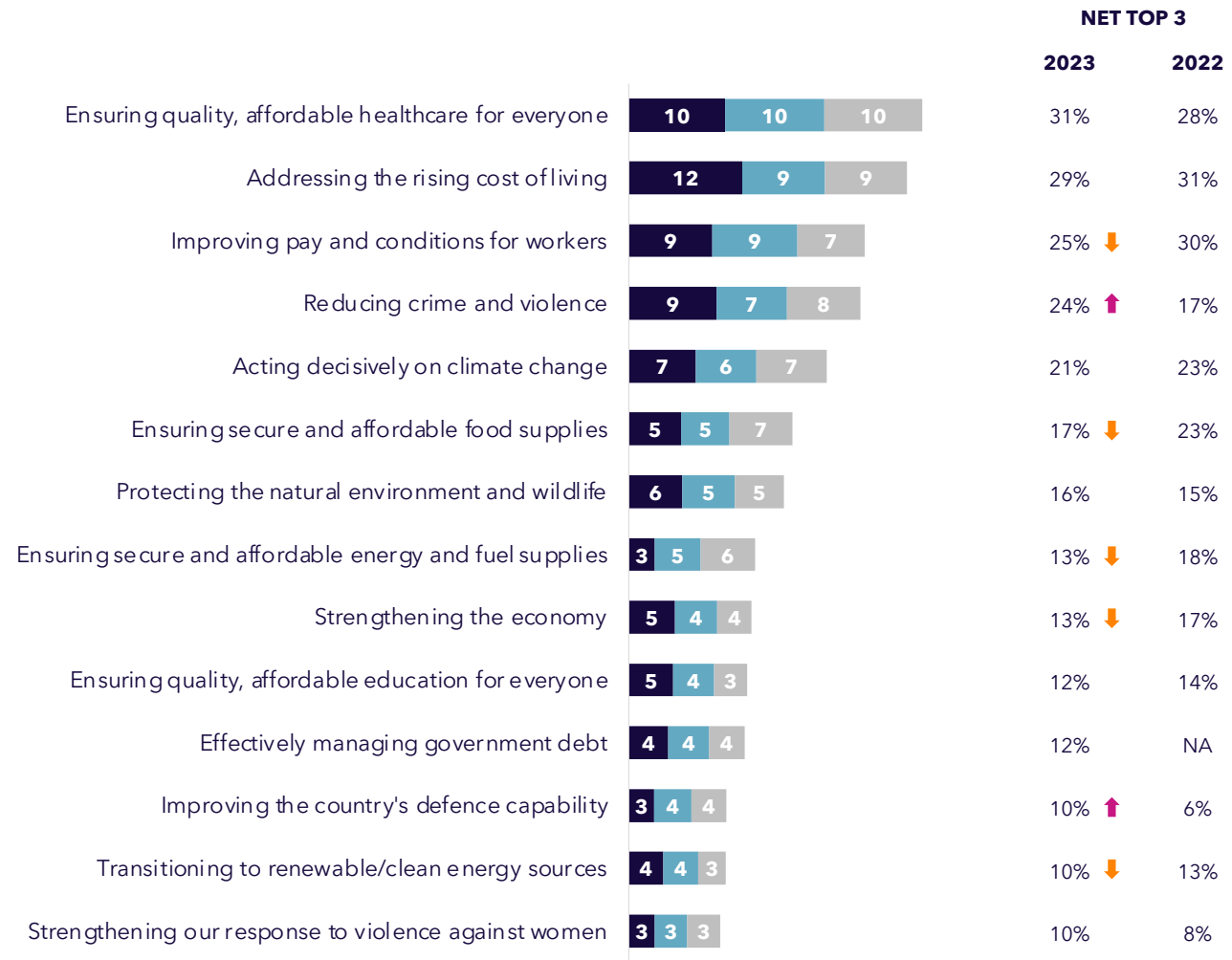
Key finding 1.

There remains a sense of pessimism and concern amongst many in France that their country is headed in the wrong direction.



Q1. Overall, do you think that things in [country or territory] are heading on the right track or in the wrong direction?

Most important issues for France's future (%)

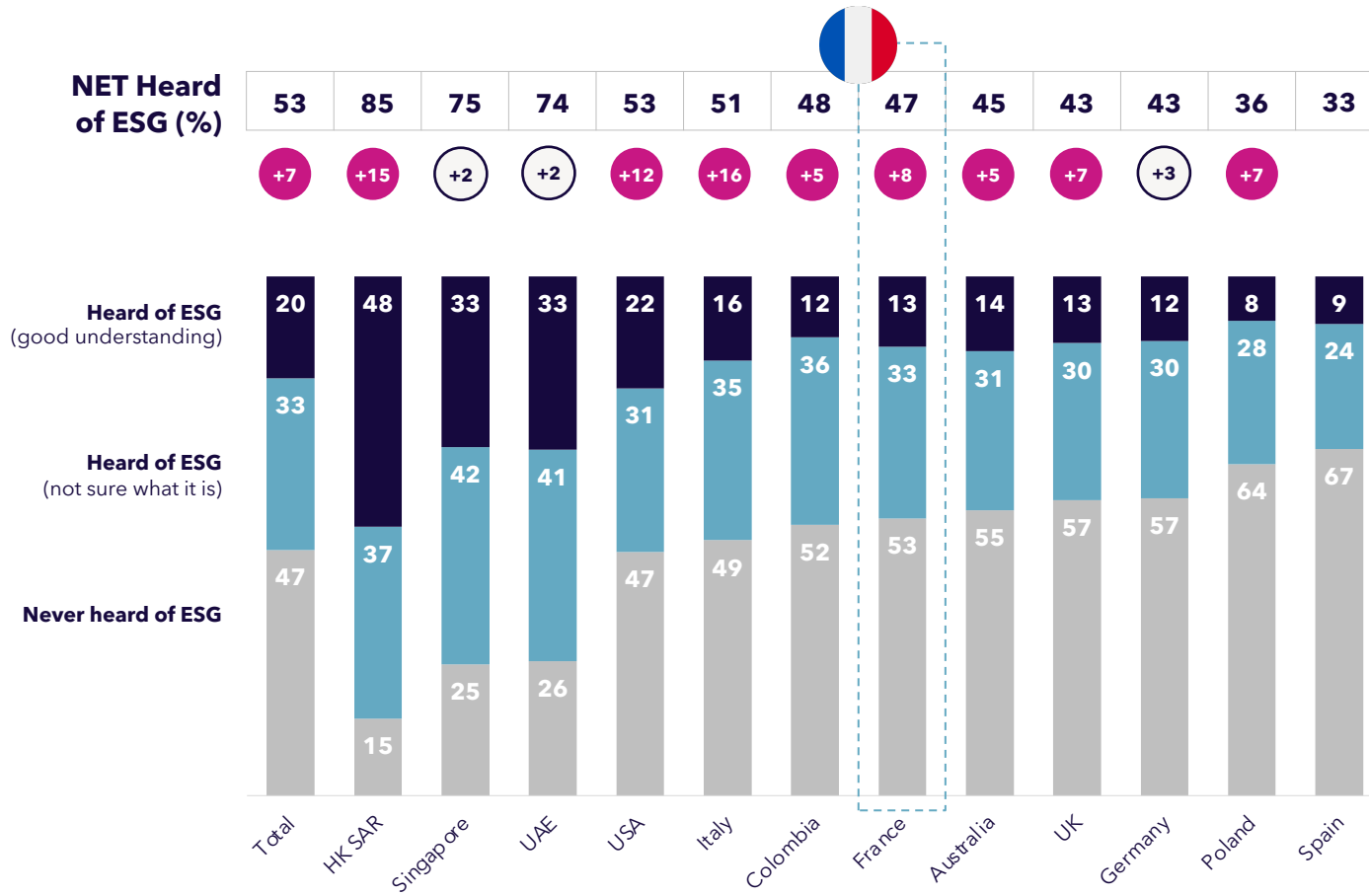


Key finding 2.

Community priorities in France are delivering high quality, affordable healthcare, addressing cost-of-living pressures, and improving working conditions.

Q20. From the following list (of 26 issues), please select the three things you personally feel are most important for France's future. Rank them from 1 to 3 where 1 is the most important thing and 3 is the third most important thing. *Only top 14 issues shown in chart*

Unprompted awareness of ESG by country or territory (%)



Heard of ESG (good understanding)
 Heard of ESG (not sure what it is)
 Never heard of ESG

+15 -15 Significantly higher/lower than 2022 (number in circle = change in percentage points)

+2 No significant change since 2022 (number in circle = change in percentage points)

Key finding 3.

Overall recall of the term ESG has significantly increased, with 47% aware of it, up from 38% last year. While awareness of NetZero is significantly higher this year (22% up from 17% in 2022), this is still the lowest among all countries measured.

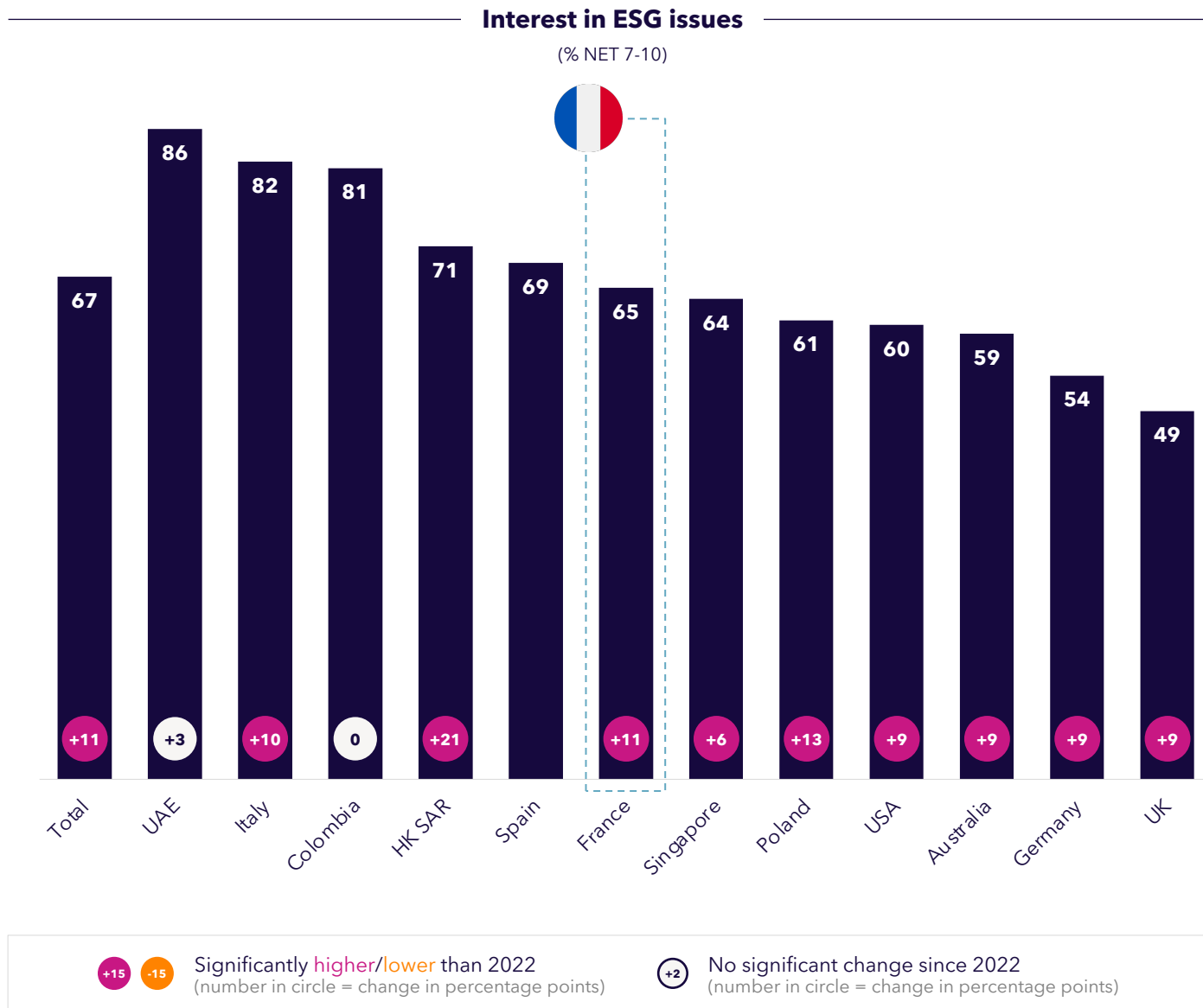
Awareness of Net Zero (total average 54%)

Top 3	Bottom 3
Hong Kong SAR (85%)	France (22%)
United Kingdom (85%)	Germany (25%)
Australia (76%)	Spain (27%)

Q3. Before today, had you heard of the term "ESG" which stands for "Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG)"?

Key finding 4.

And interest in ESG issues has risen even more sharply.



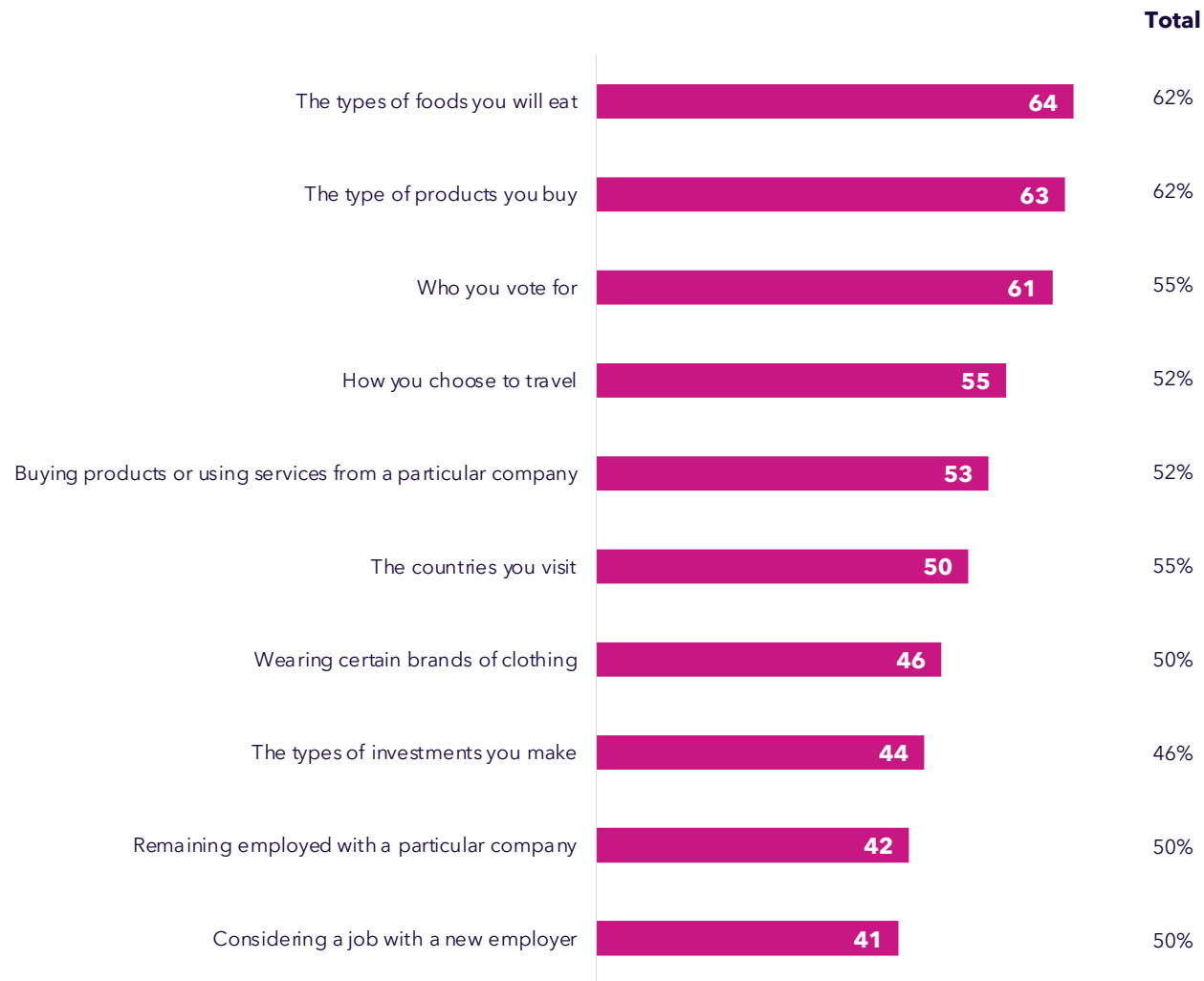
Q4. How interested are you in Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues, if at all?
 * See [page 34](#) for a full definition

Key finding 5.

ESG issues are influencing decisions in a wide range of areas in France - in particular the types of foods they eat, the types of products they buy and who they vote for.

Importance of ESG issues on decision making in France

(% NET 7-10)



Q30. How important are ESG issues to you personally when it comes to making decisions about the following?
 0=not at all important, 10=extremely important

Key finding 6.

Most people still think it's very important for companies to take action on ESG issues.

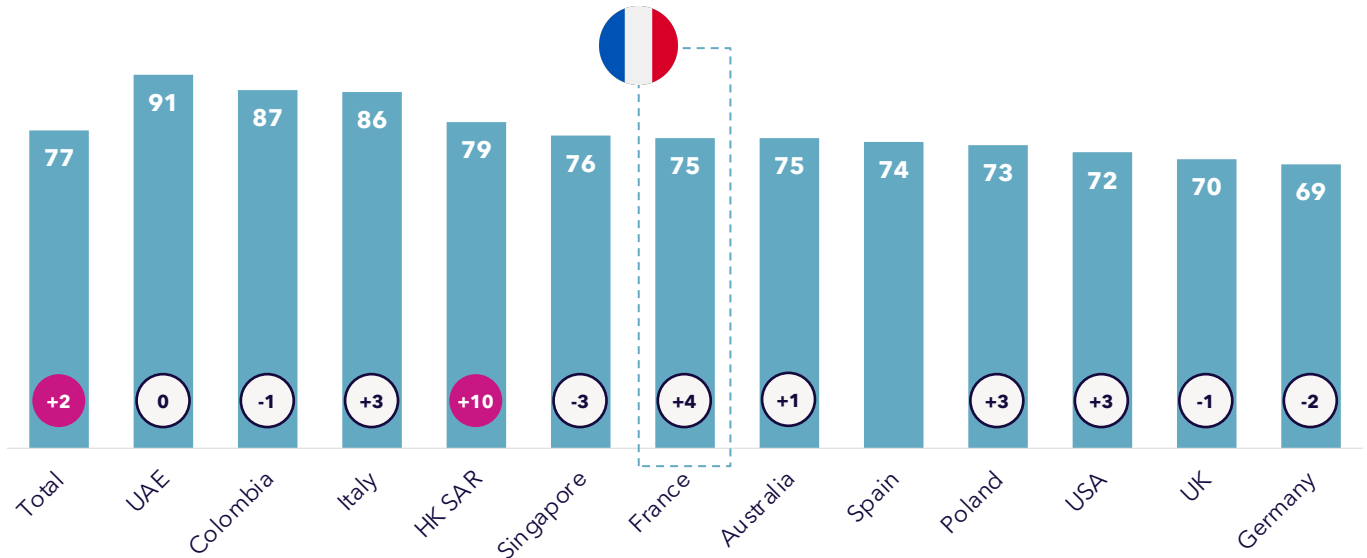
Importance of companies taking action on ESG issues

(% NET 7-10)



75%

in France think it is important for companies to take action on ESG issues
- up by 4% since 2022



+15 -15 Significantly higher/lower than 2022 (number in circle = change in percentage points)

+2 No significant change since 2022 (number in circle = change in percentage points)

Q23. How important do you think it is for companies to take action on environmental, social and governance issues?
0=not at all important, 10=extremely important

Key finding 7.

Most say companies should speak out on issues important to their employees and customers, but they are divided on whether they should speak out on broader issues.

Consumer expectations of companies when it comes to ESG

(% 'STRONGLY' OR 'SOMEWHAT' AGREE)

1.



74% agree

Companies **should speak out on issues that are important** to their employees and customers

(5% disagree, 21% are neutral)

2.



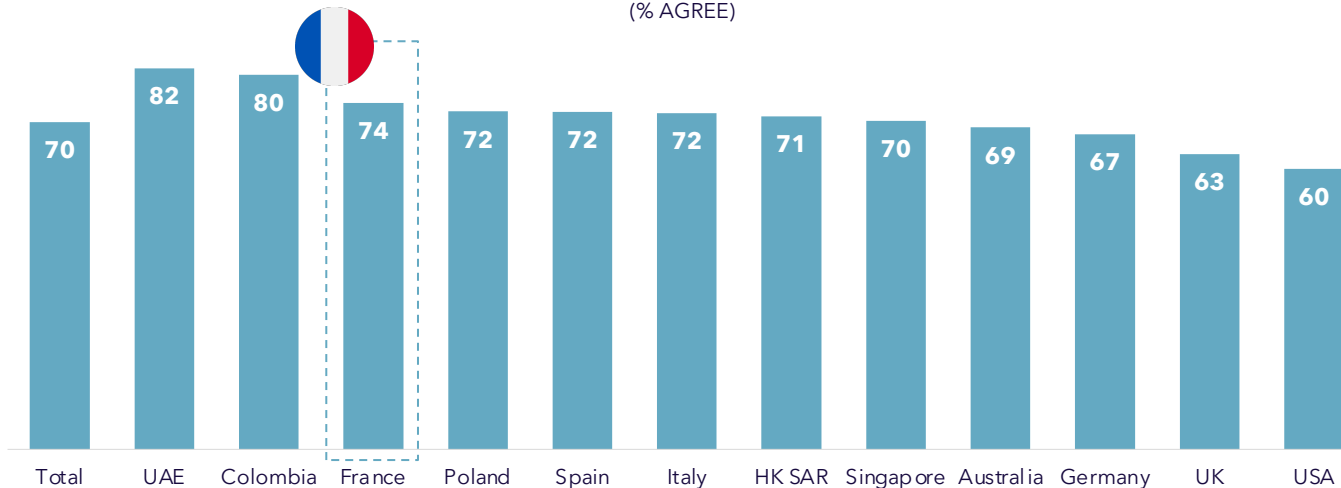
45% agree

Companies **should focus on their core business** rather than trying to have broader influence on social and environmental issues

(24% disagree, 31% are neutral)

Companies should speak out on issues that are important to their employees and customers

(% AGREE)



Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

Key finding 8.

Most people think companies can be profitable while also performing well on ESG. However, only a minority agree they'd be prepared to pay more for products or services from companies with stronger ESG performance.

Consumer expectations of companies when it comes to ESG

(% 'STRONGLY' OR 'SOMEWHAT' AGREE)

3.



66% agree -8

Companies **can be profitable** while also performing well on ESG

(6% disagree, 27% are neutral)

4.



68% agree 0

Companies **should not pass on the cost for better ESG performance** to their customers

(6% disagree, 26% are neutral)

5.



37% agree -3

I'd be **prepared to pay more for products or services** from companies with stronger ESG performance

(27% disagree, 35% are neutral)



Significantly higher/lower than 2022 (number in circle = change in percentage points)



No significant change since 2022 (number in circle = change in percentage points)

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?



So, what do people think good and bad ESG performance looks like?

What is expected from corporates?

The community values corporates operating a profitable business, providing employment and returns to shareholders, but the way they get there is equally important.

The community wants companies to be thinking about their impacts on society and the environment in their decision-making processes. A primary focus on economic contributions is not enough to meet expectations anymore. This reflects a shift towards a more holistic 'systems thinking' lens which recognizes the interconnectedness of all parts of a system.

Key finding 9.

The 'best' ESG performers consider their environmental impacts from the outset, enable others to make a difference and have ESG genuinely embedded in multiple points of their operations.

Survey participants were asked to describe what specific actions companies they see as performing well on ESG are doing.

Qualitative analysis of the verbatim comments reveals there is a consistent theme of 'action'. By far the most frequently mentioned initiatives were things that limit negative environmental impacts.

Other key themes included supporting and enabling others, showing good ESG practices in multiple points of the organisations practices and genuinely trying.

What actions characterise companies who are seen to do a good job on ESG?



Environmental impacts are considered early, and ongoing

Strong performers find ways to minimise their company's impact from the start - from embracing renewable energy sources, to using recyclable packaging materials or natural ingredients in products, and safely disposing of their waste.



Multiple points of evidence

People are increasingly citing multiple points of evidence rather a single, flagship program when making an assessment.

These ranged from treatment of customers and employees, to the manufacturing and sales processes it uses, through to recycling activities and lending decisions.



Multiply impact by enabling others

Philanthropic donations and grassroots community initiatives are the more established ways of demonstrating good ESG performance.

Increasingly people are interested in how companies can have a bigger impact by making it easier for others to take practical action that makes a difference.



Genuinely trying

Demonstrating action behind ESG commitments is being noted - even if not to a gold standard or perfect, people like seeing some action (rather than none).

Being flashy can lead to scepticism.

Key finding 10.

The 'worst' companies are those causing harm to the environment, treating employees or customers poorly, or are slow to act on ESG issues.

Survey participants were asked to describe what specific actions companies they see as performing poorly on ESG are doing.

The environmental lens reigns supreme in the minds of the community when assessing ESG performance, and many can name companies that have mismanaged their environmental impact or are a drain on natural resources.

Poor performers are also called out for a lack of care or concern for their employees and customers, poor workplace culture or prioritising excessive profit over the wellbeing of customers or the community. This is when people see the financial performance of a company prioritised over environmental, social and ethical obligations.

What actions characterise companies who are seen to do a **bad job on ESG?**



Harmful impacts on the environment

Frequent mentions of excessive pollution, contributing to deforestation, exploitation of natural resources and generally lacking environmental responsibility.



Excessive profits, price gouging and promoting overconsumption

Putting their own needs and profits above all else. Charging high fees and prices and making a massive profit during a cost-of-living crisis.

Also promoting over-consumption and producing poor quality products.



Worker exploitation and bad conditions

Unfair treatment of workers, including poor pay, working conditions or hours and job instability. Lack of diversity and inclusion was also mentioned.



Slow transition to sustainability

A lack of commitment to sustainability, including a slow, inadequate or non-existent transition to green energy and reducing their carbon footprint, and/or not offering environmentally-friendly products.



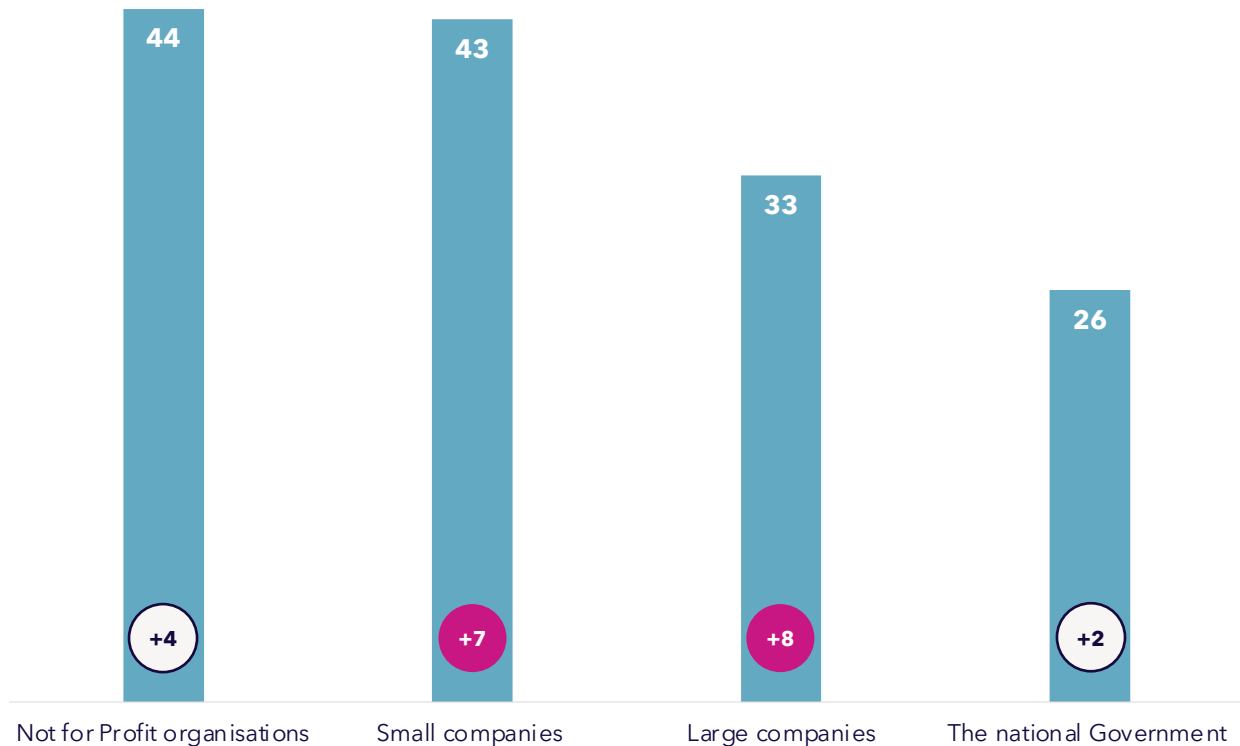
Too much plastic

Companies that manufacture plastic and use excessive or non-recyclable plastic packaging are seen as significant contributors to a broad (and growing) range of environmental issues.

Q29B_2. What is it that they are doing poorly specifically?

Performance of various groups in France when it comes to ESG

(% NET 7-10)



Significantly higher/lower than 2022
(number in circle = change in percentage points)



No significant change since 2022
(number in circle = change in percentage points)

Q6. Overall, how would you rate the performance of the following groups when it comes to acting responsibly on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues? 0=very poor, 10=excellent

Key finding 11.

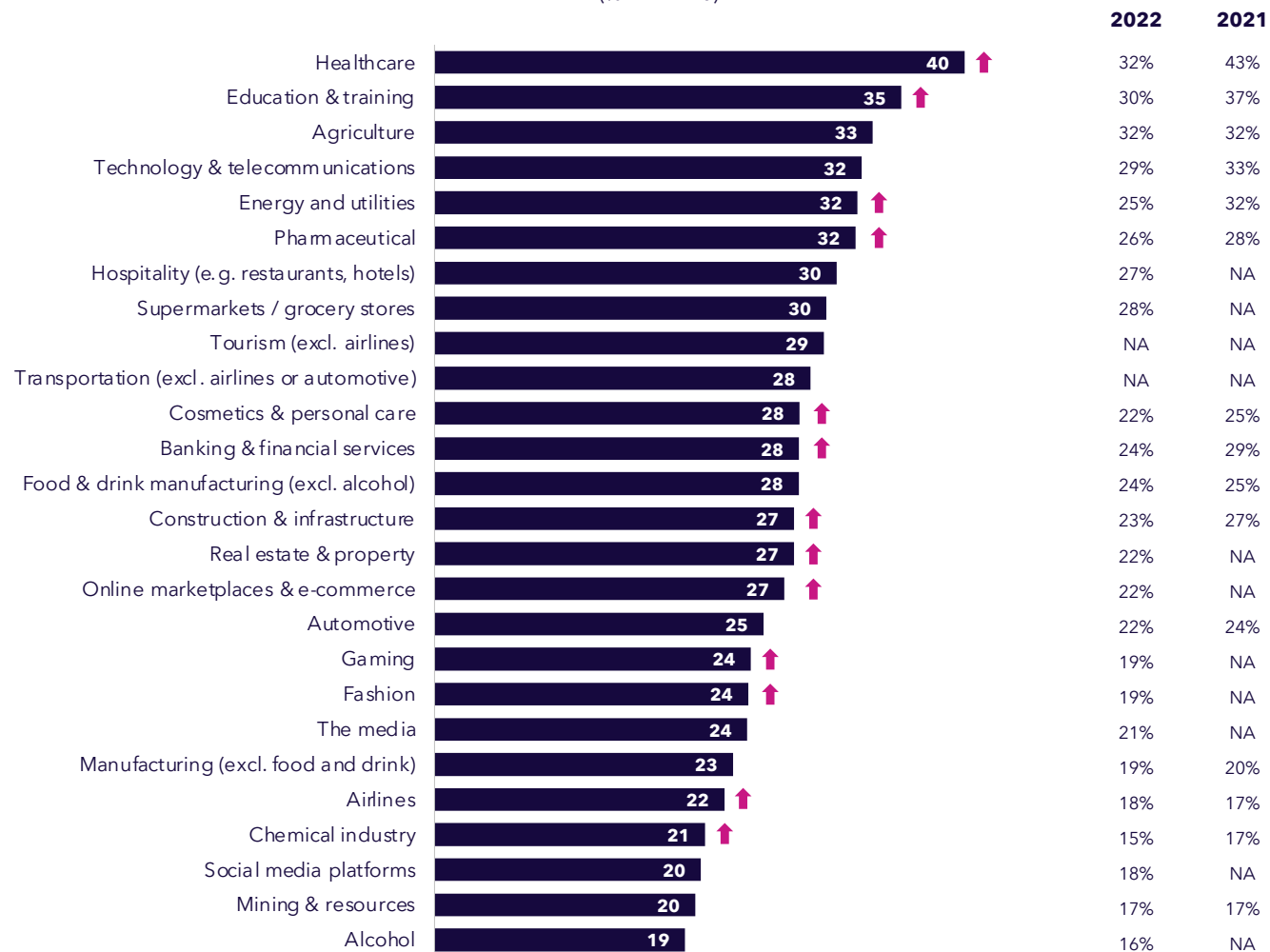
Ratings of the overall performance of companies have increased significantly over the last year, with government and not for profit organisations demonstrating modest increases.

Key finding 12.

There have been notable improvements in ESG performance ratings across many industries this year.

Ratings of industry ESG performance in France

(% NET 7-10)



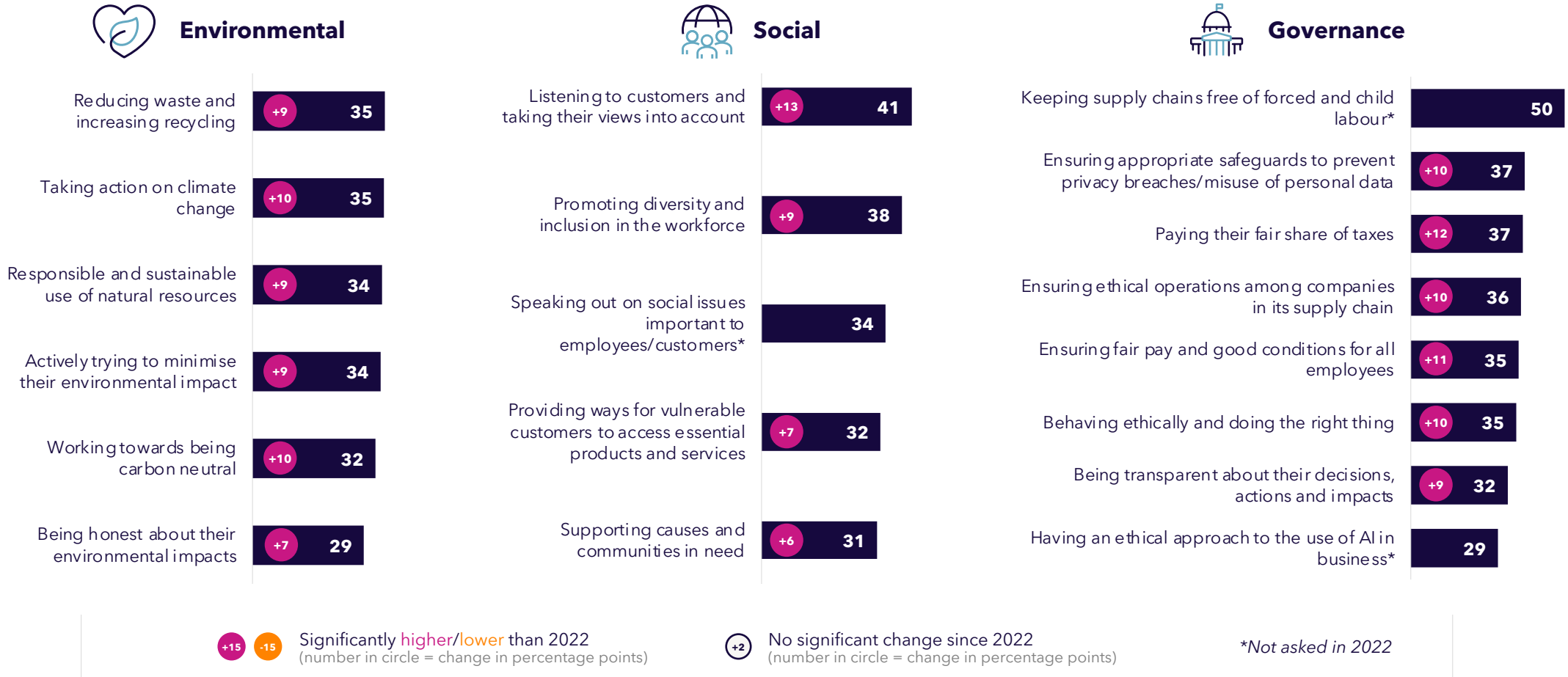
↑↓ Arrows indicate results that were either significantly higher/lower than 2022

Q11. How would you rate the performance of the following industries operating in France when it comes to acting responsibly on Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) issues

Ratings of all granular ESG actions have also increased

Ratings on company performance on various ESG aspects in France

(% NET 7-10)

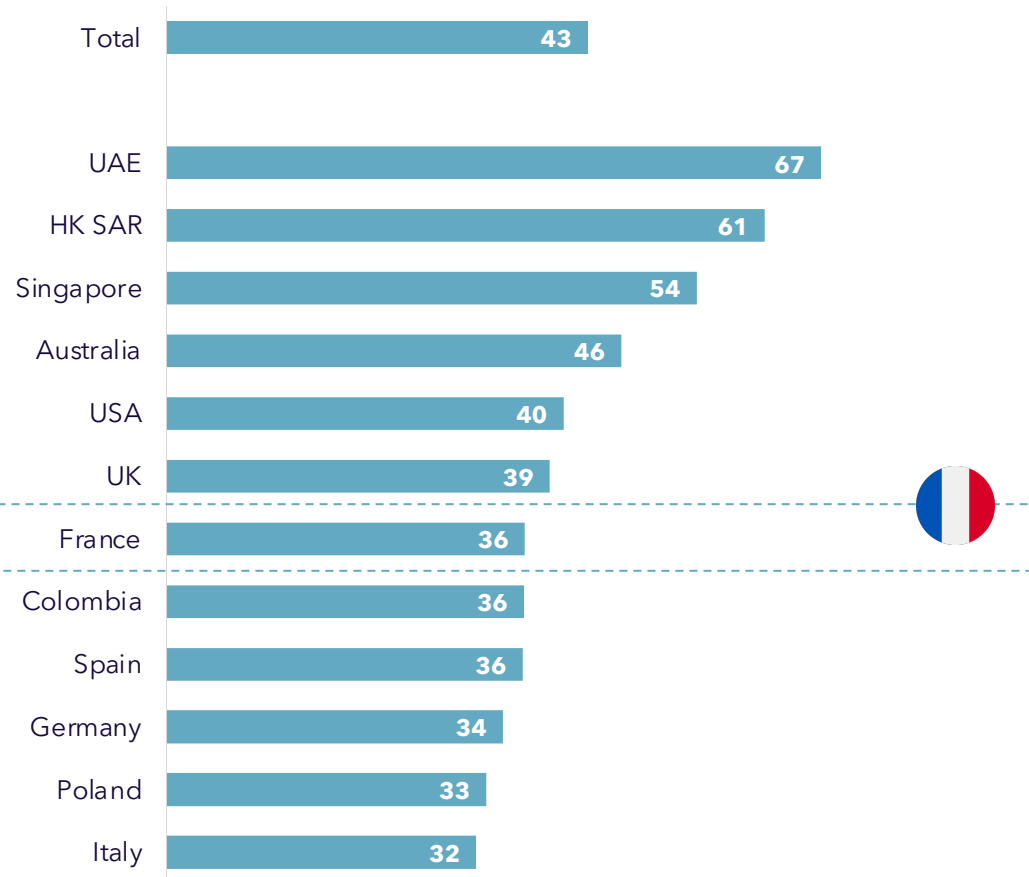


Q13. In general, how would you rate the performance of companies in France on the following things? 0=very poor, 10=excellent

Views on company behaviours in general - NET Agreement

(% 'STRONGLY' OR 'SOMEWHAT' AGREE)

'Companies are generally behaving ethically and doing the right thing'



Key finding 14.

There remains much room for improvement for corporates to demonstrate their ethics and positive influence.



What does the community think about *ESG communications from companies?*

In 2022 In 2022 our research revealed 'The Great Disconnect' occurring in ESG corporate communications. We saw the community wanting companies to communicate their ESG efforts, while being very passive in consuming this information and, more concerningly, not trusting them.

In this year's study we found that the Disconnect is still occurring. Trust remains a massive issue in ESG communications. More than half don't trust what organizations say about their ESG performance and two thirds think that greenwashing is a big problem among companies in their country or territory.

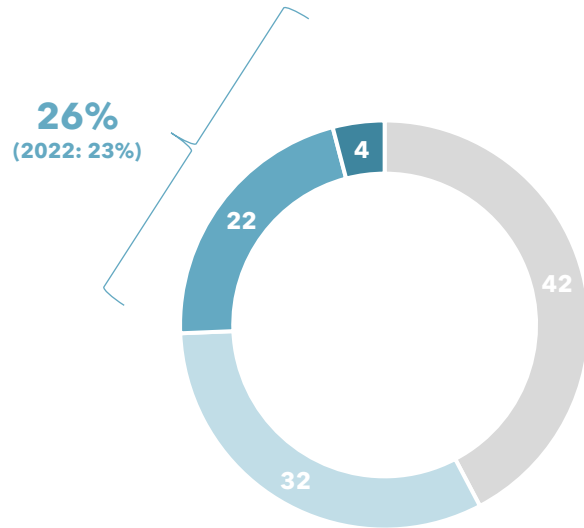
Part 1 of 'The Great Disconnect'
- Communications expectations and frequency of looking for ESG information



70% agree ↓
 (2022: 76%)

Companies **should communicate the results of their ESG efforts** more clearly for consumers and investors

But...



Just 26% are looking for information on companies' ESG activities and performance.



↑↓ Arrows indicate results that were either significantly higher/lower than 2022

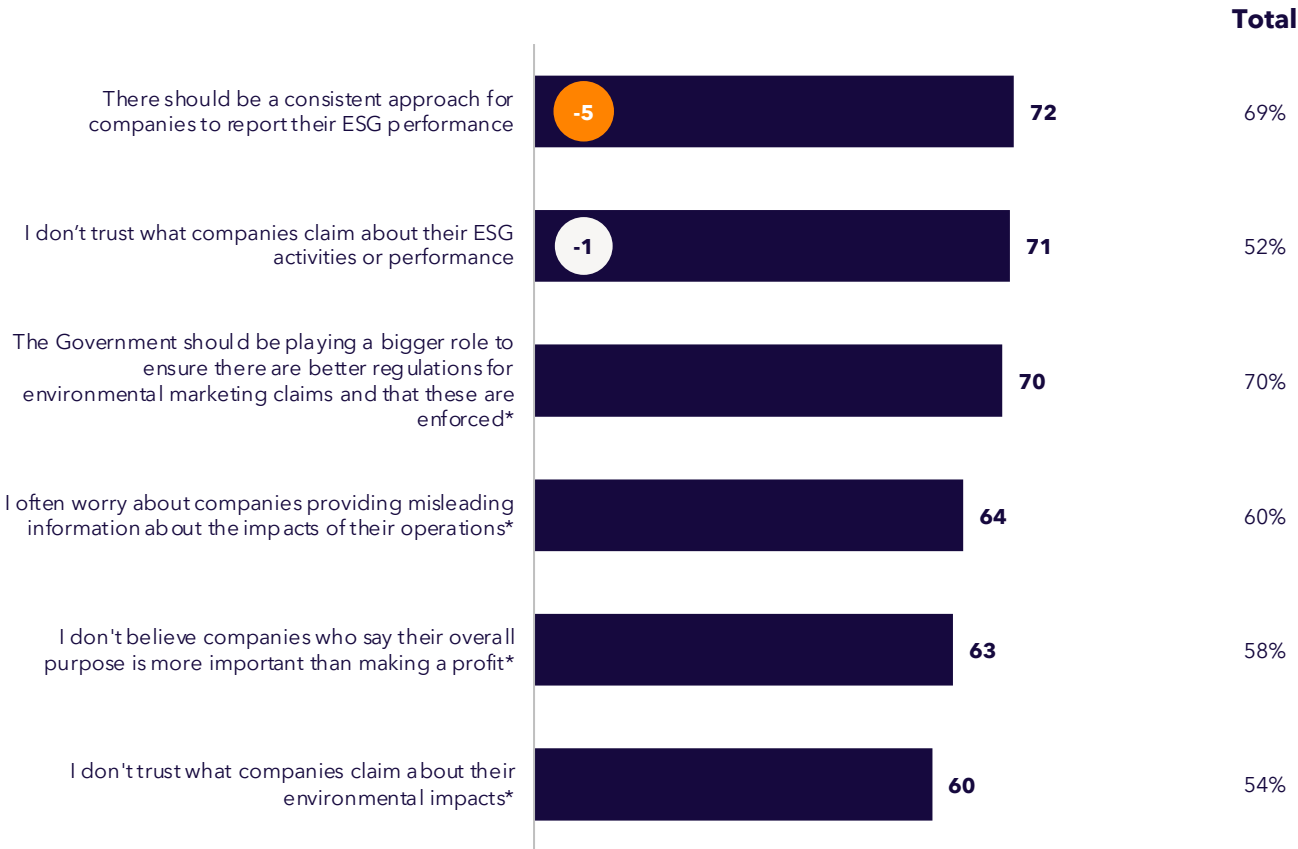
Key finding 15.

People expect companies to take action and be transparent about it. But they're also not an 'actively engaged' audience'

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?
 Q26. How often, if ever, do you look for information or do research on a company's ESG activities or performance?

Part 2 of 'The Great Disconnect'
- Attitudes towards company claims and reporting in France

(% 'STRONGLY' OR 'SOMEWHAT' AGREE; % NET 7-10)



Significantly higher/lower than 2022
 (number in circle = change in percentage points)



No significant change since 2022
 (number in circle = change in percentage points)

Key finding 16.

Distrust in what corporates claim about their ESG activities is deeply embedded and there remains a strong interest in a consistent approach when reporting ESG performance.

Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

*Not asked in 2022

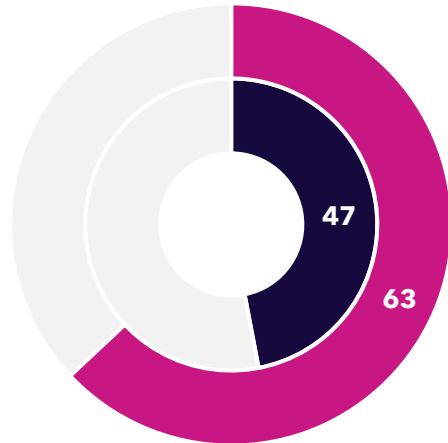
Key finding 17.

Around two in five in France have heard of the term 'greenwashing' and around two thirds think it's a real problem once they see the definition.

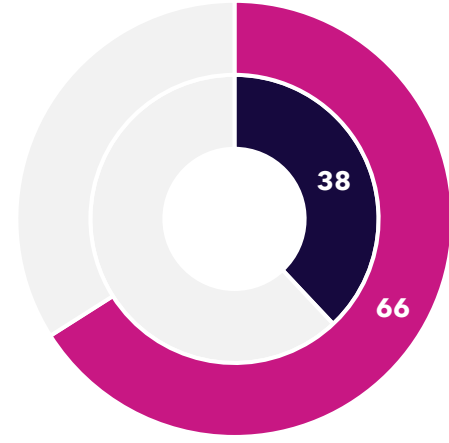
"Greenwashing" is when a company provides misleading or false information to consumers or investors about how environmentally friendly, sustainable or ethical its products and/or operations are.

Awareness of the term 'greenwashing' and perceived scale of the problem (%)

1. Global Total



2. France



■ NET heard of Greenwashing ■ How much of a problem is it? (% NET 7-10)

Q33. And before today, had you heard of the term "Greenwashing?"
 Q34. How much of a problem do you think Greenwashing is among companies in France, if at all?



Our qualitative research shows that *employees are a major audience* for ESG actions

We know that employees are the group paying most attention and that they are quick to identify a disconnect between what is said and what is actually done. We also know that they are a highly trusted source of information on how their employer is doing more broadly.

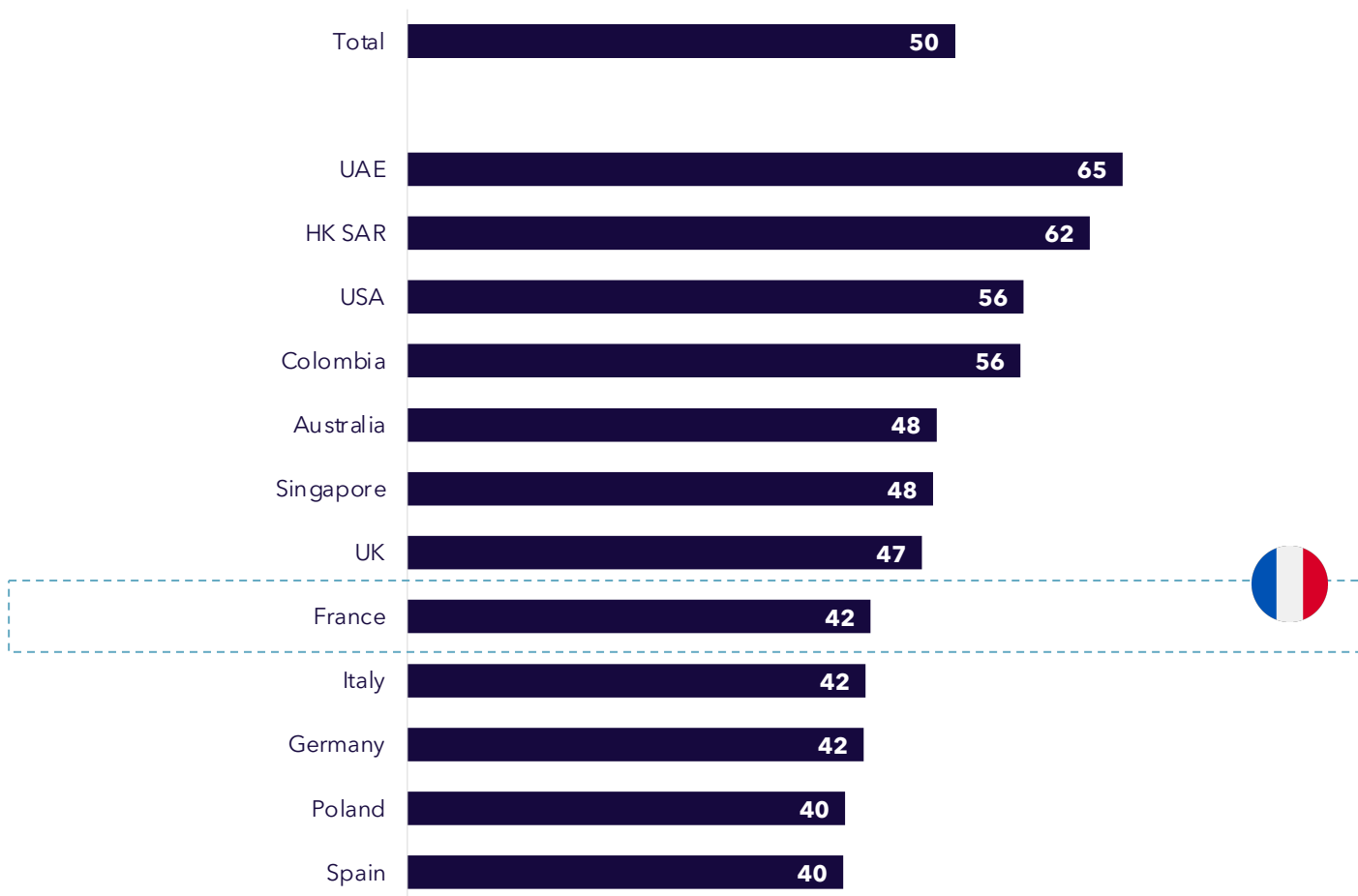
In this study we drilled down into employee sentiment to understand how they think their employer is performing in this area and how important ESG issues are when seeking a new job.

Key finding 18.

Only two in five believe that their employer is genuinely trying to do the right thing when it comes to ESG.

My employer is genuinely trying to do the right thing when it comes to ESG

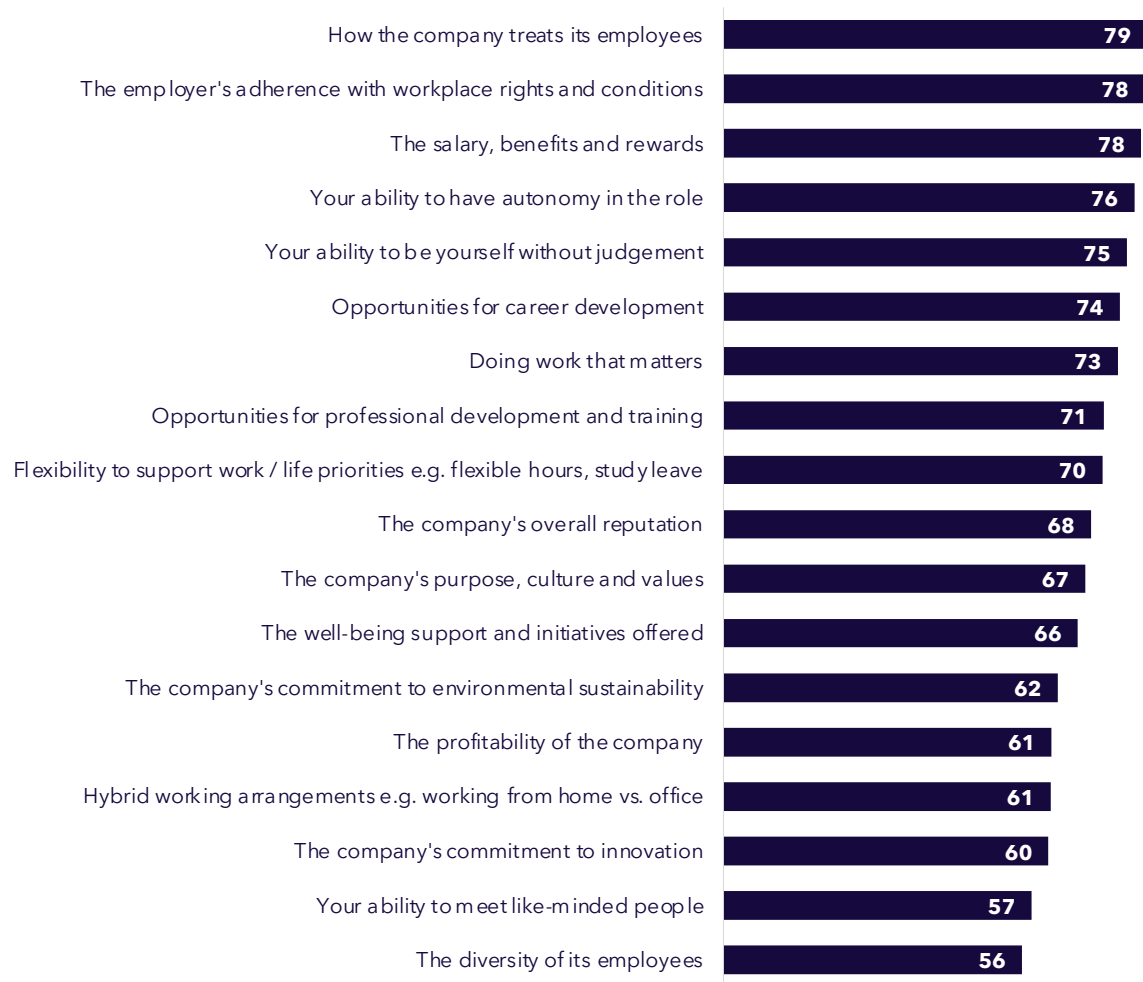
(% 'STRONGLY' OR 'SOMEWHAT' AGREE)



Q15. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements. Base: Those who are employed, Global Total n=7,969; France n=603

Importance of specific ESG factors when choosing a new employer

(% NET 7-10)



Key finding 19.

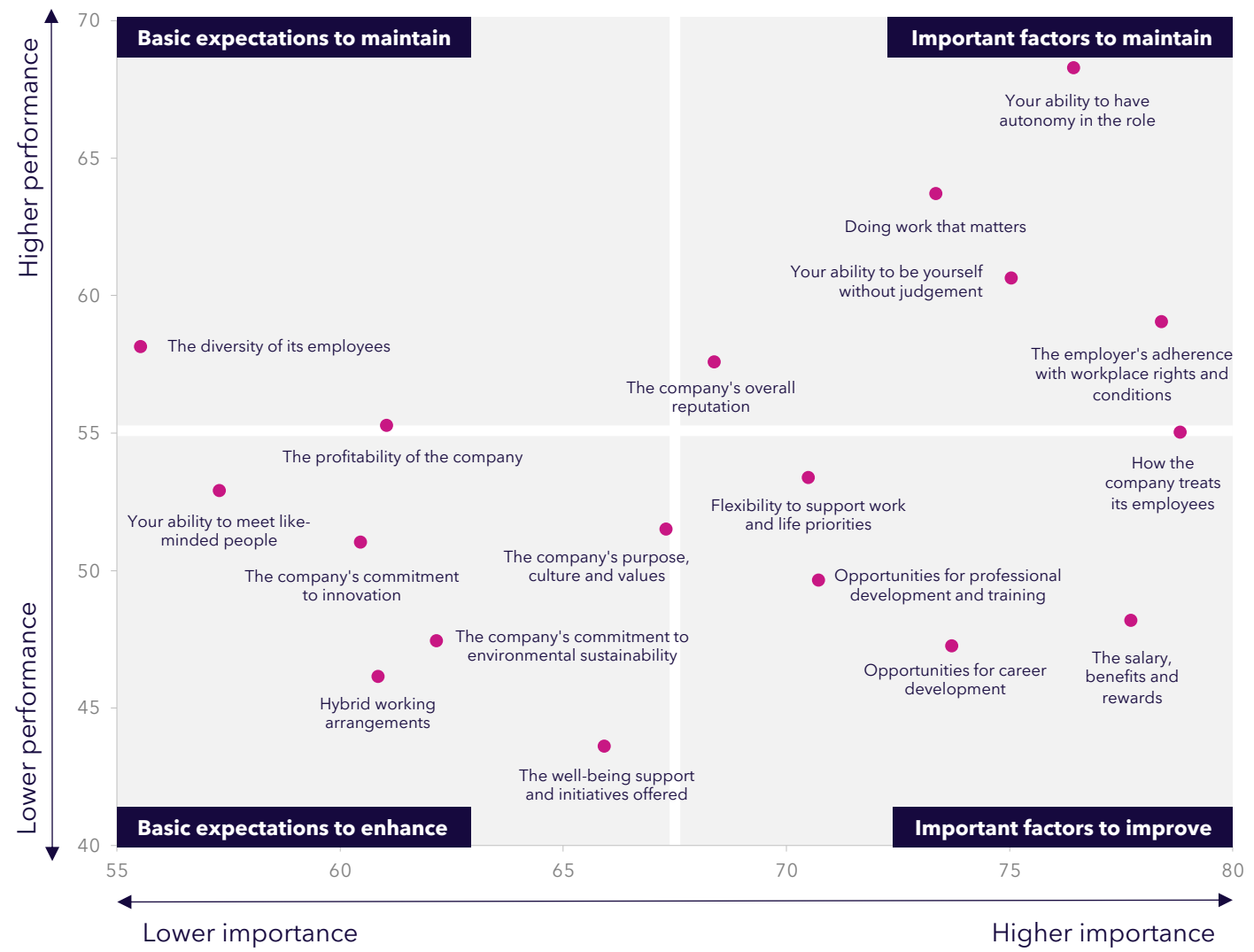
Employees have high expectations of organizations as employers with the main considerations being how the company treats employees, adherence with workplace rights, and the salary, benefits and rewards.

Q31. If you were considering a potential new employer, how important would the following things be for you personally?

Key finding 20.

There are some key gaps between what employees are looking for and how they'd rate their current employer, particularly relating to remuneration, working arrangements and career advancement and professional development.

Performance (% NET 7-10) vs. importance (% NET 7-10)



Q31. If you were considering a potential new employer, how important would the following things be for you personally?
 Base: All participants, n=1,005
 Q32. How would you rate your current employer on those same aspects? Base: Those who are employed, n=603

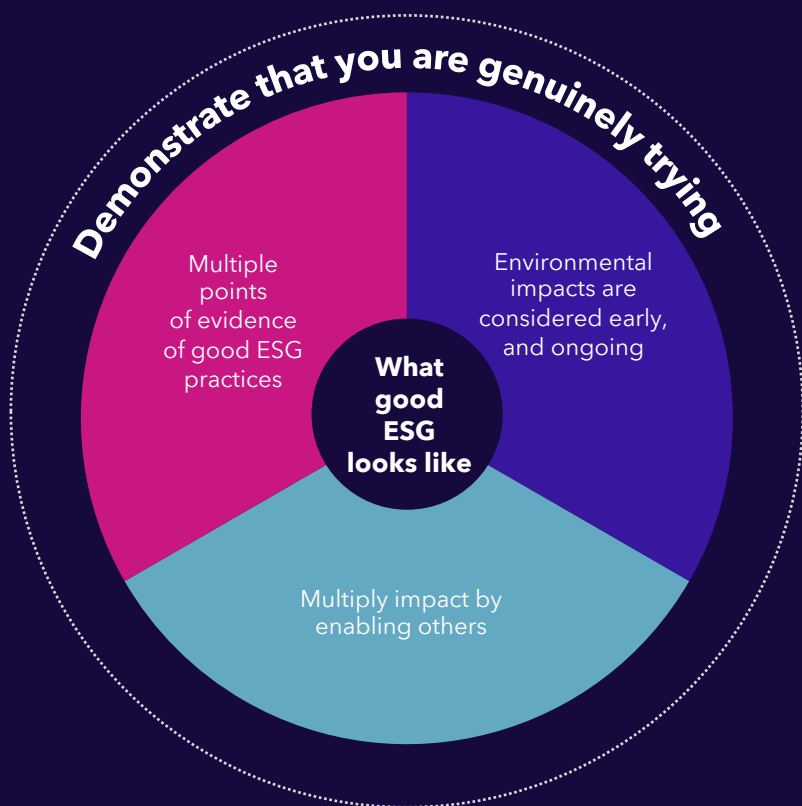
Part 5.

So, what next?



So, what next?

Key Take Outs for Communications



1. Consider and act on all impacts on people and the planet

Expectations have changed and the community now expect organisations to think about their impacts on planet (first and foremost) and people from the outset.

2. Think carefully about which actions you highlight

Start by reflecting on the impacts your organisation has and how this aligns with the values in the communities you operate in. Make sure you have permission to play in that space and assess whether your actions are simply seen as 'what's expected' or whether it's 'going the extra mile'.

3. Tell a story and include specific details to build trust

It's hard to get cut through as people are busy and highly sceptical of greenwashing. People respond to good stories that align to their values and have solid proof points. They want to know your actions are genuine, will actually make a difference, that you're committed, and they want to see the evidence-base.

4. Provide multiple proof points for overall impact

Increasingly people require multiple points of evidence that a company is 'doing the right thing'.

5. Don't go it alone - join forces with others and empower your customers

Consider the multiplier effect. Look at how you can work with staff, partner organisations and government to find solutions to complex problems. People want to be empowered to play their part - if you can make it easy for them.

6. You don't have to be perfect - just try

People anthropomorphise companies and talk about them as if they're people. It's okay to be human. They don't expect you to be perfect from the outset - they just want to see you genuinely trying. Apologise if you don't get it right, course correct and keep trying.

7. Gen Z and Millennials show the way

These generations are strong supporters of ESG initiatives so can be targeted with tailored messaging now. They can also help you future-proof your strategy. Employees in this generation also have specific information needs.

8. Focus on addressing these issues before they become a problem

Bad news sticks. There are some things - like paying correct wages and a fair share of tax, and meeting human rights and modern slavery obligations - that people assume you'll get correct. But they'll punish you severely if you get them wrong.

Appendix

How we defined ESG in this study

The issue of terminology in a study like this is fraught with difficulty and we're aware that the term ESG has particular connotations in different countries.

We investigated the use of different terms in focus groups in 2022 but found similar issues or limitations with other phrases. For example, many felt the term sustainability referred primarily to actions that protect the environment.

On balance, most liked the use of ESG as a framework for companies to use to hold themselves to account on the issues that matter most to the community.

After asking participants whether they had heard of the term ESG, which we said stands for 'Environmental, Social and Governance', they were shown the text below.

As you may already know, the term "ESG" refers to standards, policies and behaviours that organisations have in relation to **Environmental, Social** and **Governance** issues.

Some examples of these issues include:



Environmental

Action on climate change, use of natural resources, waste management, pollution, toxin free environments and the preservation of habitats and living creatures.



Social

Human rights, working conditions, health and safety, social equality, diversity and inclusion, contributing to the local community, speaking out on social or political issues.



Governance

Ethical standards, transparent reporting, responsible policies and procedures, board diversity, data protection and privacy, risk management etc.



Contacts

Sue Vercoe

Managing Director, SEC Newgate Research Australia

sue.vercoe@secnewgate.com.au

Irene Diseris

Senior Director, SEC Newgate Research Australia

irene.diseris@secnewgate.com.au

Hélène Milesi

Confirmed consultant, CLAI SEC Newgate France

helene.milesi@clai2.com

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