VOICES OF THE CREATOR ECONOMY 2025

Insights from the people powering influencer marketing in Europe

A comparative study across France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK, and the Nordics, exploring professional creator trends, brand collaboration practices and market shifts.

kolsquare

INTRODUCTION

As the European creator economy heats up and more people launch careers as content creators, a dynamic — and sometimes problematic — professional landscape is taking shape.

From emerging income streams, to multi-platform activity, relationships with brands, intellectual property, and the impact of AI, we wanted to hear from the people shaping the European influencer marketing industry what it really means to be a creator in 2025.

What did we learn?

Well, creators report respectful communication with brands and say audiences overwhelmingly respond positively or are accepting of sponsored content.

Shared values and ethical alignment rise to the top as the most important reason for selecting brand partnerships, while clear labelling of sponsored content is important for the vast majority of European creators.

> "People want real content. Authenticity is the name of the game. Also, there's greater awareness of ethics, and morals, nobody wants to support evil companies."

Macro-creator, Facebook, Instagram, X, Spain

Nearly 50% of creators focus on reflecting DEI and sustainability issues in content, and a third nominated increased professionalism and the growth of responsible influence as key opportunities for the industry going forward.

And, in the context of a social media environment that is often called out for its toxicity, it is encouraging to see that a solid majority — 63% — of European creators said they had not been harassed online. With less than a third of respondents (some preferred not to say) having experienced negative online behaviour, the figure is definitely too high, but less than what one might have expected.

Unfortunately, however, old habits die hard. Despite being a new and female-dominated industry, the gender pay gap persists for content creators.

Across Europe, female creators are more likely to manage their business entirely on their own, less likely to be full-time creators, and nearly twice as likely as men — 38% to 23% — to earn less than €500 a month from content creation.

In every income bracket above this benchmark, male creators outnumber women, highlighting a structural imbalance and financial precarity that goes beyond platform preferences or content niches.

> "The instability of it. Income is so variable month by month and it feels like a house of cards that could come down at any moment."

Macro-creator, TikTok, UK

Within this context, creators are hustling to optimise output, frequently working across multiple platforms and massively adopting AI tools. With three-quarters of European content creators regularly using AI for ideation, scripting and text editing, AI is reshaping the way content is made — fast.

But not only.

Many European creators are also relying on AI to optimise content for SEO and analyse performance, signalling the growing professionalism of content creators and a sophisticated understanding of their operating environment.

> "AI is going to change the way people will learn about products and brands and there will be for sure some movement on that field for CCs too."

Nano-creator, Facebook, Italy

In such a rapidly evolving industry, it is not surprising that roughly two-thirds of European creators report being sometimes or often stressed by their job, citing the need to constantly create content, deadline pressures and managing 9-to-5 jobs alongside content creation as key stress drivers.

The results of Voices of the Creator Economy 2025 demonstrate the future of influencer marketing is being built — post by post, story by story — by creators who are not only adapting to the evolving landscape, but leading the way.

Despite the challenges, the European creator economy is maturing into a more conscious, committed, and professional space. As true believers in the power of responsible influence to drive positive impact, Kolsquare is confident the insights presented here will contribute to building an ethical and sustainable future for our industry.

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"The shift towards long-term partnerships is exciting because it signals the industry finally growing up. Creators are demanding real relationships with brands, and audiences are rewarding them for it. The whole industry is thinking long-term now because that's what works."

Grace Andrews @the.socialclimber, 137K LinkedIn, 91K Instagram

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Confirming their growing professionalism and thoughtful approach to content creation, European creators nominate shared values and ethical alignment — ahead of compensation — as the top criteria for selecting brands to work with. 68% nominate transparency around brand collabs, while around a half nominate sustainability/environment, and diversity, equity, and inclusion as important values to reflect in content.

73%

of female respondents manage everything themselves

While 66% of respondents manage everything themselves — from content planning, to editing content or negotiating with brands — that figure rises to 73% amongst women, 20 points higher than for men at 53%.

Despite being a new and female-dominated industry, the survey confirms a clear gender pay gap. Women are far more likely to sit at the bottom of the earnings scale: 38% earn under €500, compared to just 23% of men. At the top end of earnings, meanwhile, 32% of men, compared to just 20% of women, earn more than €3,000 a month.

Content creation is **a full-time job for just**

28%

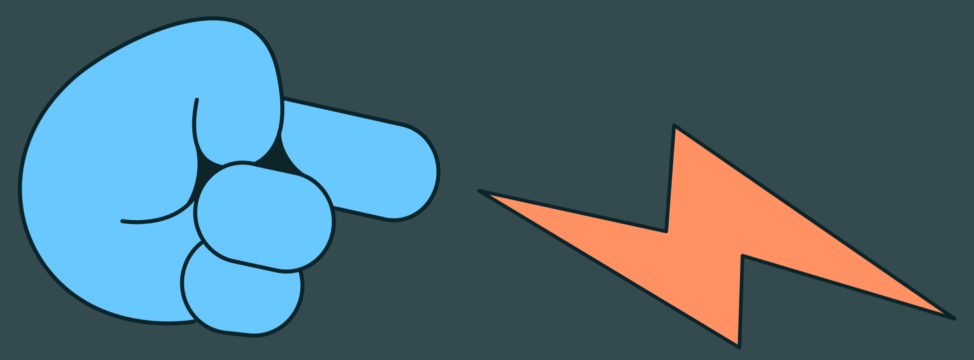
of creators.

Of those working in other jobs, nearly half — 43% — are working in social media or jobs related to content creation.

65% of creators say they are sometimes, often or always stressed by their job, nominating managing content creation alongside full-time work, deadline pressure, and pressure to constantly create content as key stress drivers.

3/10

creators report being the target of online harassment, with trolling and personal insults the most common form of abuse.



At 30% — versus the European average 18% — UK creators are much more likely than their European neighbours to be the targets of racial abuse online.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

Working with an agent is far from the norm. **7/10 creators say brands or agencies contact them directly for collabs**, while nearly half reach out to brands themselves.

57%

of creators say their audience follows them because they feel inspired by their content and lifestyle.

Instagram is king. 53% of creators earn most of their money from Instagram, far outstripping those earning from TikTok (14%) and YouTube (13%).

More than half — 54% — of creators say increased demand for niche and micro creators is the key opportunity for the year ahead, followed by expansion of brand investments (39%) and growth of new platform monetisation tools (36%).

TOP CONCERNS AMONG CREATORS

1. Impact of algorithm changes on their work.
2. Impact of AI
3. Monetisation inconsistency

72%

European creators are prolific users of AI: 72% say they use it on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

67%

are earning from paid collabs and sponsored content

Unsurprisingly, paid collabs and sponsored content is the most common way creators earn money. More than half are working as affiliates or on a commission basis, and around a third are earning from platform monetisation programs, brand ambassadorships or UGC.

Nearly

2/3

creators

say they have been paid late for their work, while nearly

3/4

creators

say they've been on the receiving end of unrealistic demands from brands.

METHODOLOGY

At Kolsquare, we believe it's time the influencer marketing industry stopped talking about creators and started listening to them.

Together with research partner NewtonX, we launched a Europe-wide survey in May and June 2025 to better understand the people shaping the creator economy from the inside out.

We asked creators across all industries and specialisations to share how they work, earn, collaborate, and experience their careers — from platform partnerships and brand deals, to mental well-being, identity, and the future of the industry.

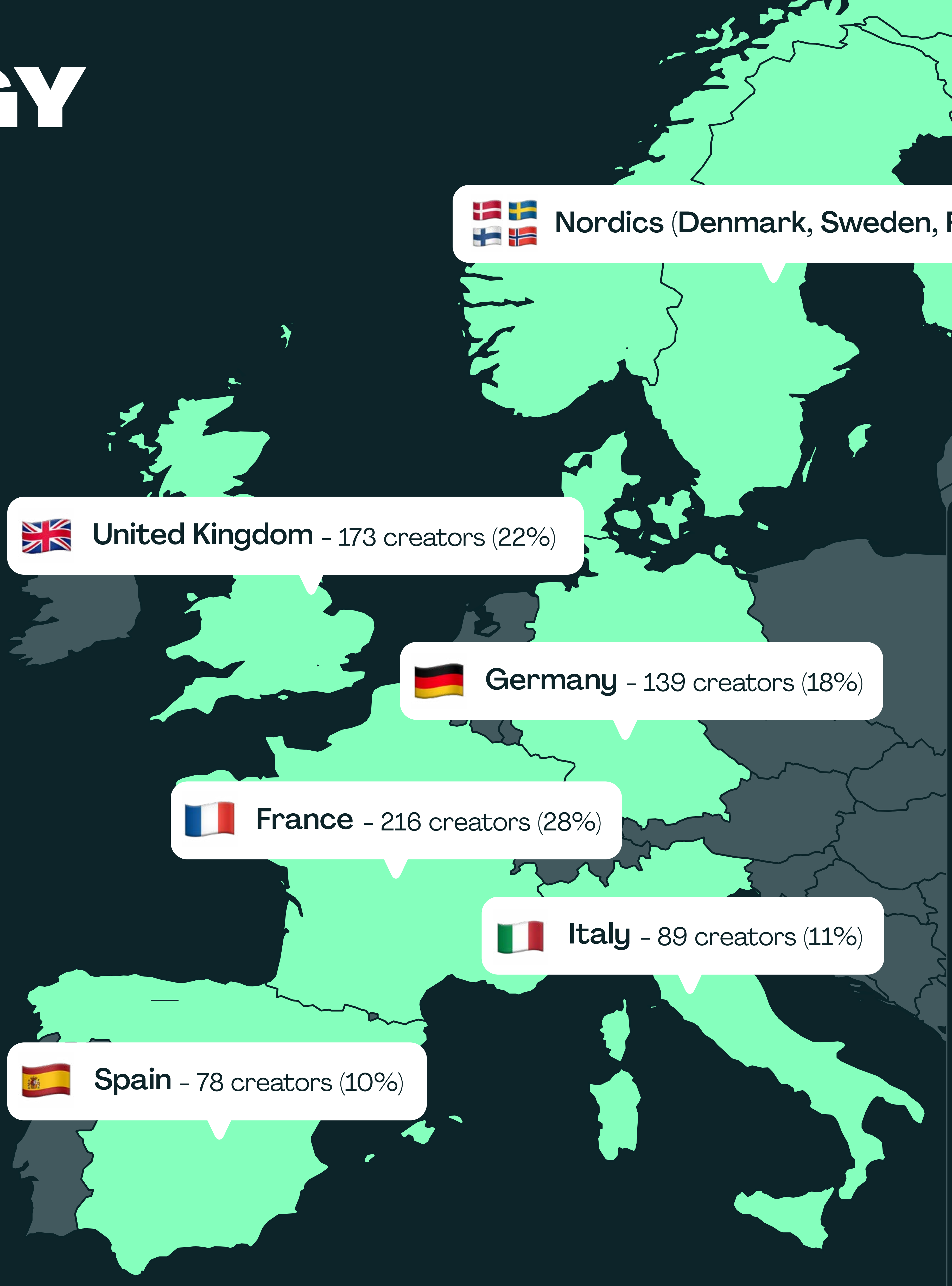
To ensure quality insights, survey participants had to meet three core criteria:

5K+

followers on at least one social media platform (including Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitch, Pinterest, Snapchat, X, Substack, Threads, Bluesky, and Discord)

Located in France, Germany, Spain, Italy, the UK, or the Nordics (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway) for most of their activities

At least one brand collaboration in the past 12 months (paid or gifted)



Who took part?

In total, 783 creators responded to the survey, which was shared via NewtonX's vetted B2B research panels and Kolsquare's extended creator and partner network.

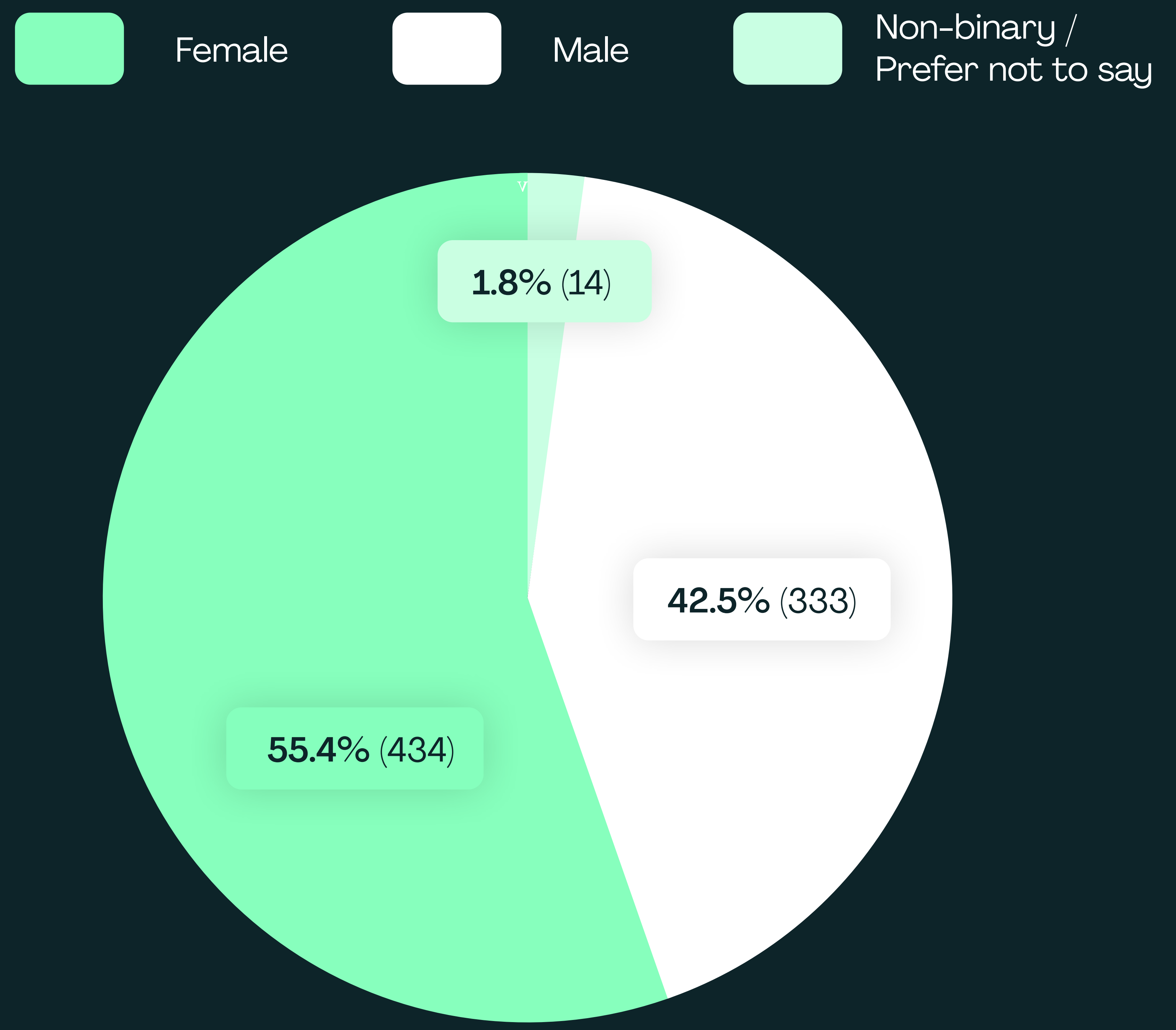
Geographic breakdown: Where are they based?

The survey included creators from six key European markets, offering a comparative view of regional experiences*.

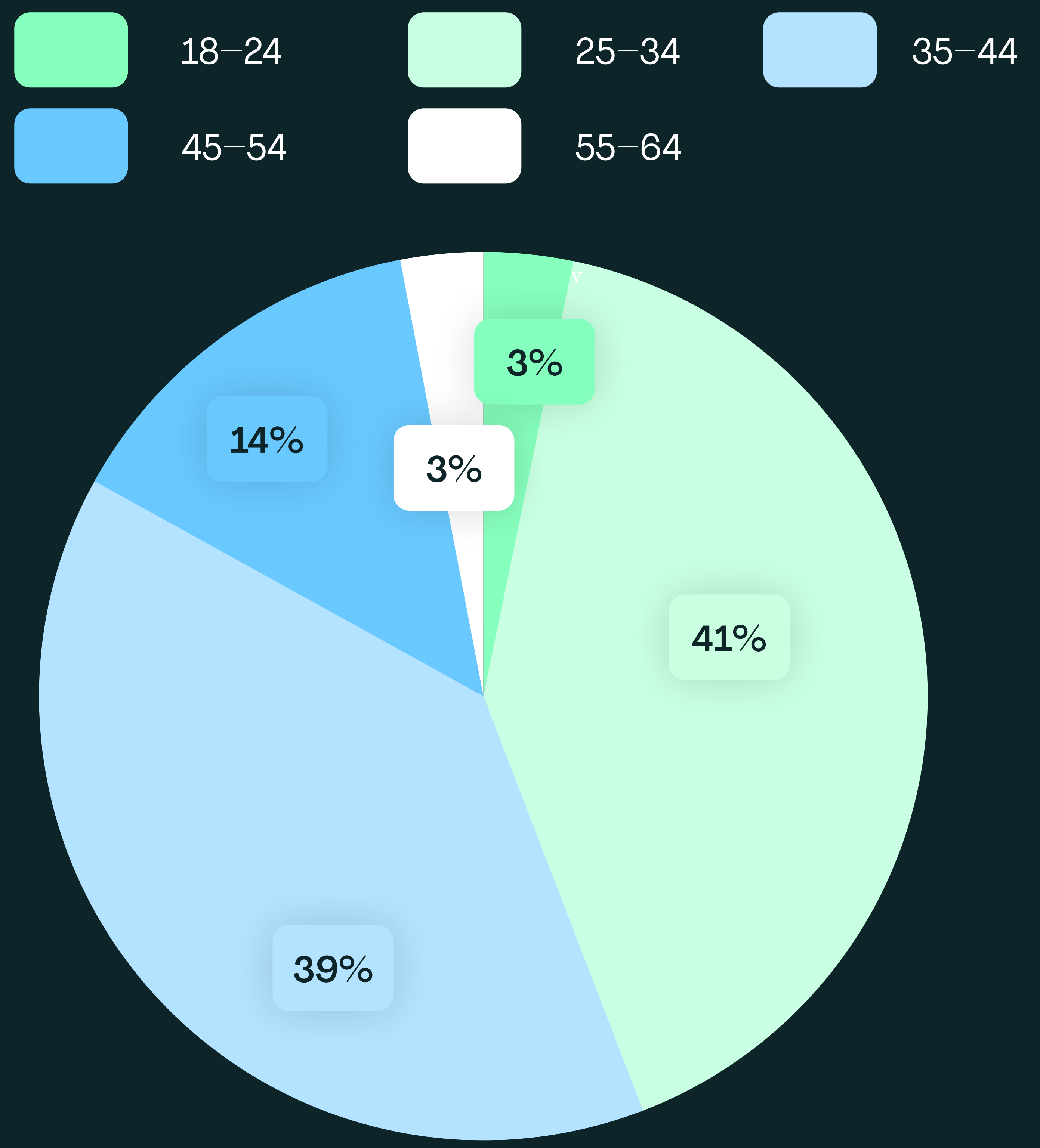
*with some limitations due to a smaller sample size in Spain, Italy and the Nordic countries

METHODOLOGY

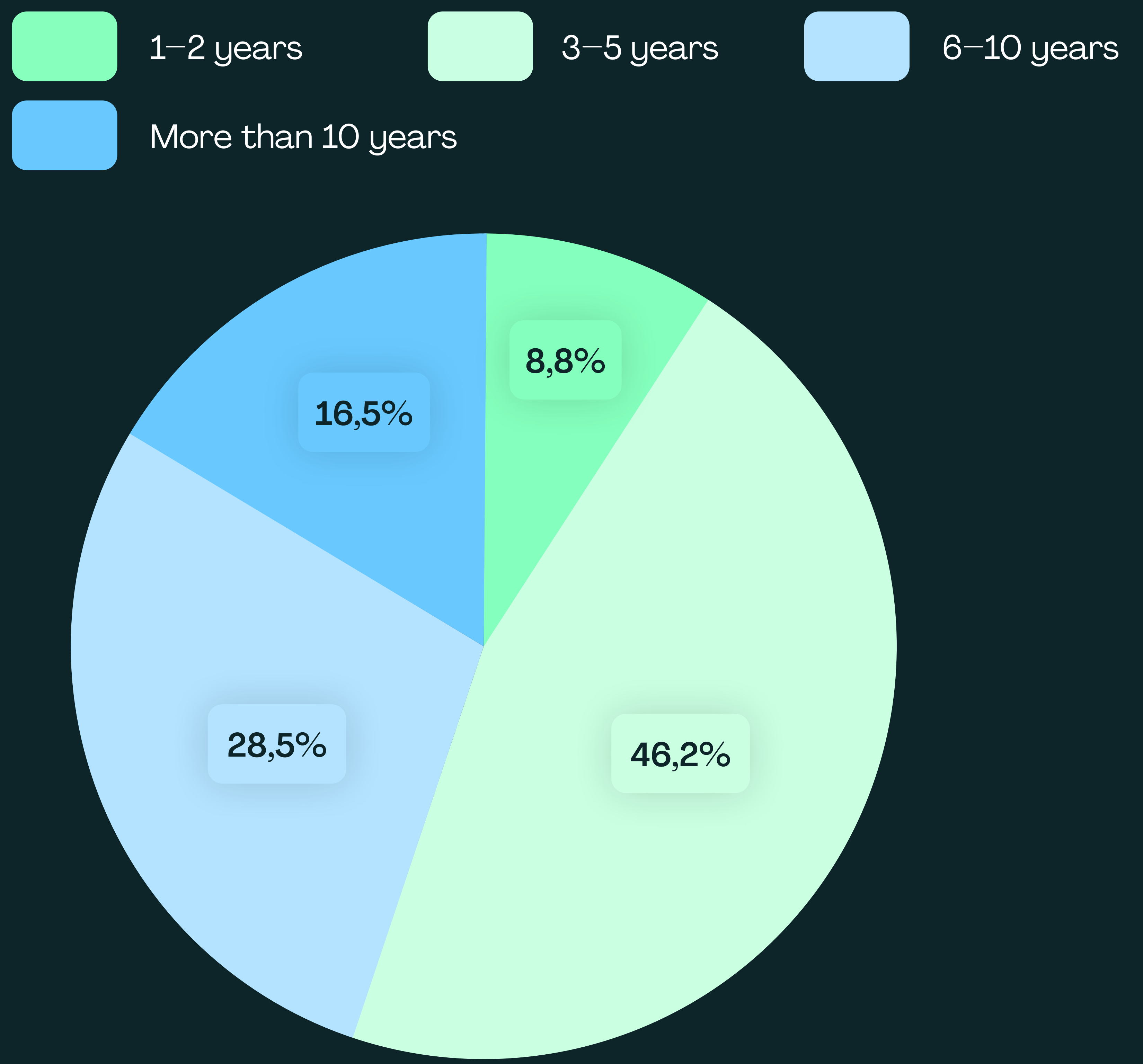
Which gender do respondents identify with?



How old are they?



How long have they been creating for an audience?

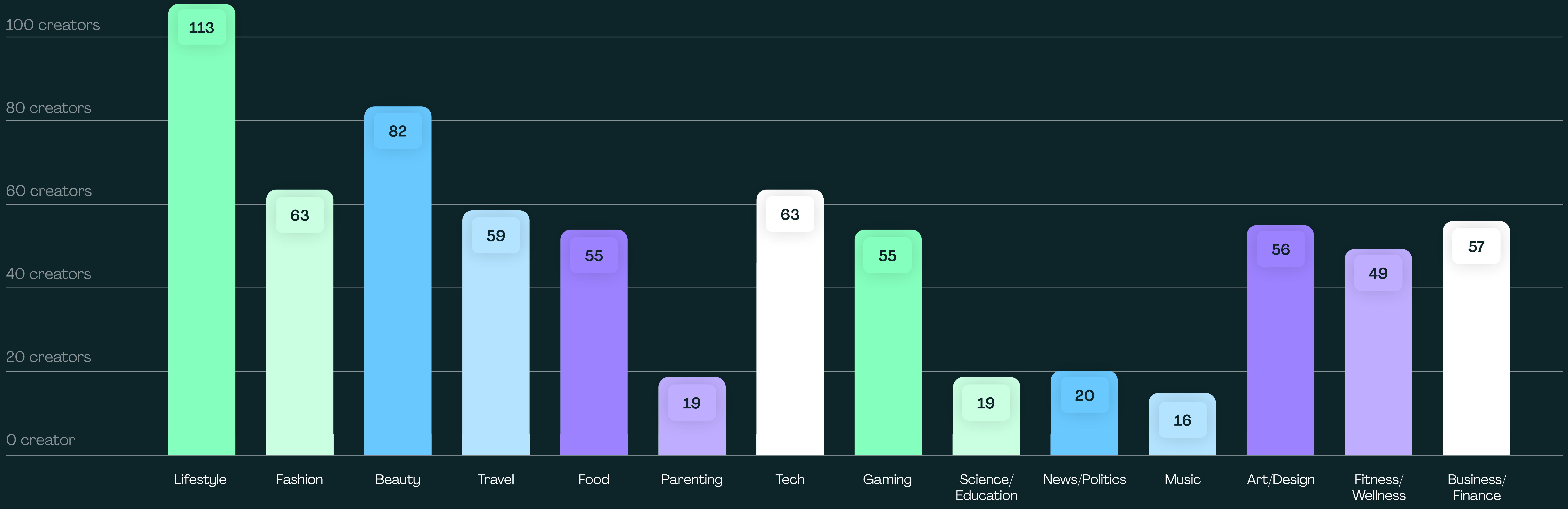


The majority of respondents can be considered 'mature' or even 'legacy' creators, looking back at three years or more of activity as a professional.

METHODOLOGY

**Niches and industries:
What do creators focus on?**

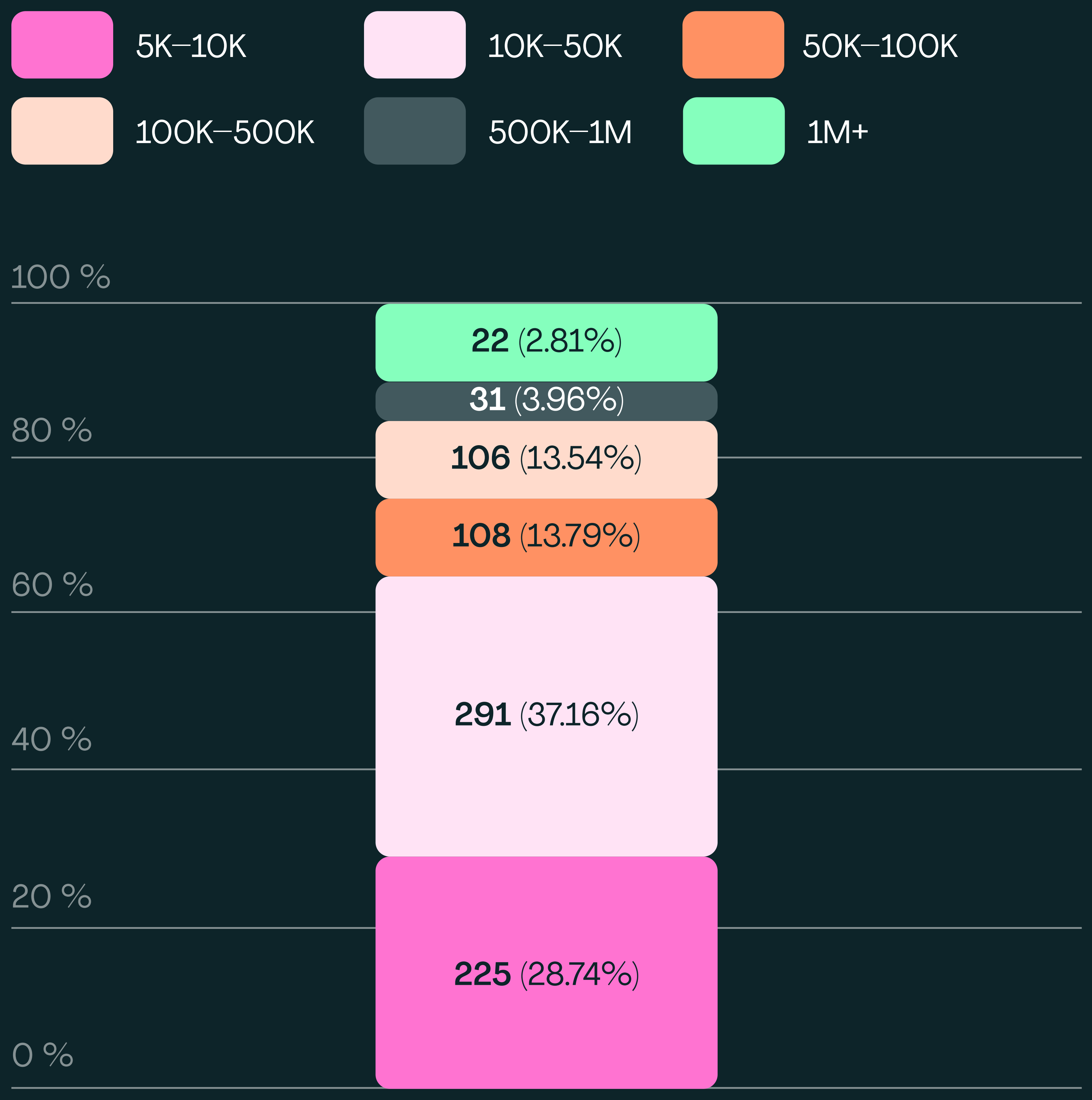
While many creators work across several categories, we grouped them by the primary niche they selected.



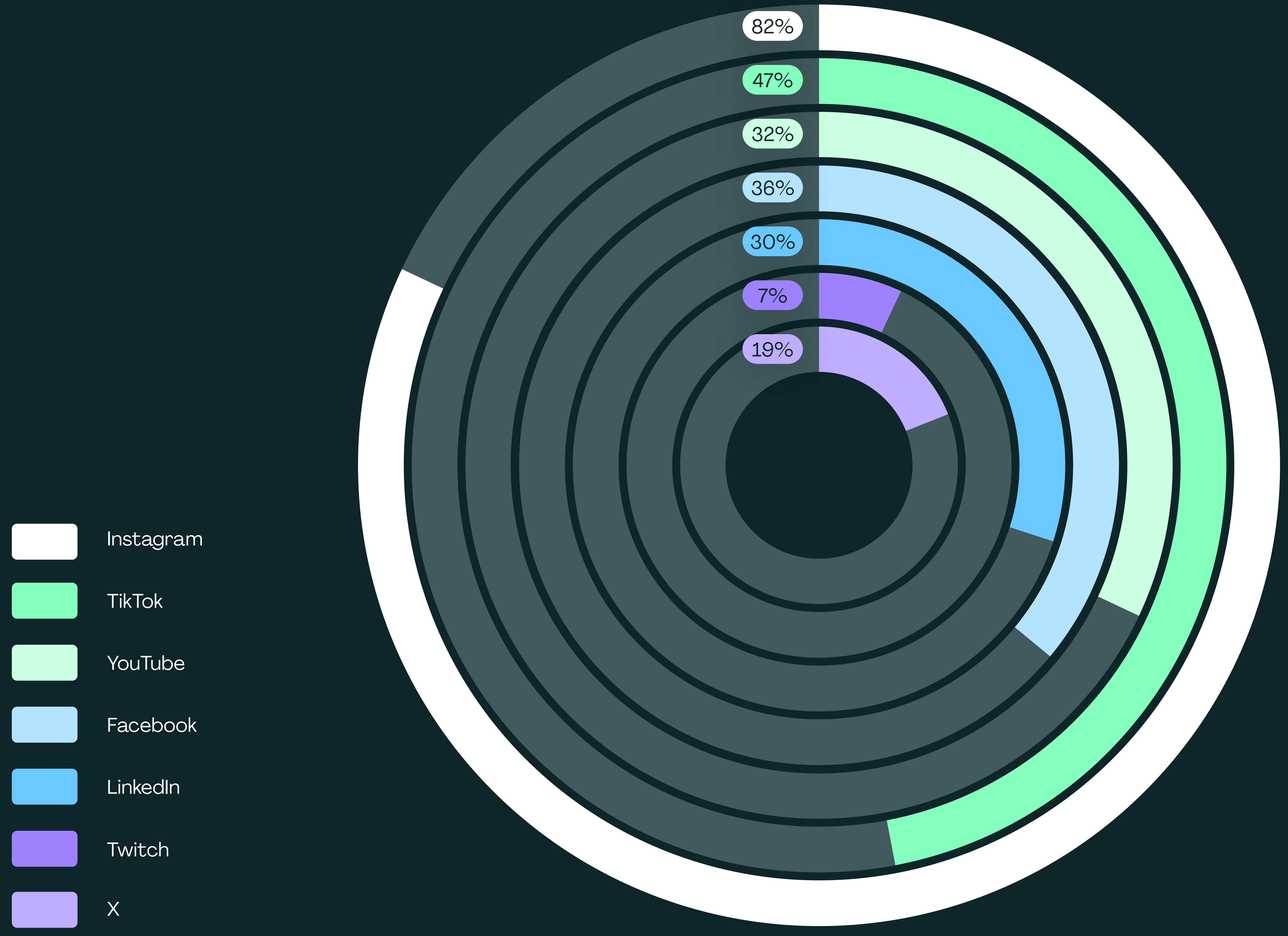
METHODOLOGY

Community size: How big is their audience?

While many creators are active on multiple platforms, we focused on the one where they have the largest following to better understand their primary reach and influence.



SHARE OF CREATORS WITH +5K FOLLOWERS PER PLATFORM



1 MEET EUROPE'S CREATORS

UNITED KINGDOM

THE MULTI-CHANNEL HUSTLERS

Everywhere at once

UK creators operate on multiple platforms and have diverse revenue streams. They lean heavily on affiliate marketing, brand ambassadorships, and subscriptions or donations, while relying less on sponsored content than in other regions.

Instagram on the wane?

UK creators monetise less from Instagram and more from TikTok than other Europeans. They have a strong presence on LinkedIn and X remains important.

Stressed and harassed

UK creators are more likely to be stressed out by content creation and to be the target of negative online behaviour. A whopping 30% of UK creators — compared to the European average 18% — report receiving race-based insults online.

#Influenceforgood

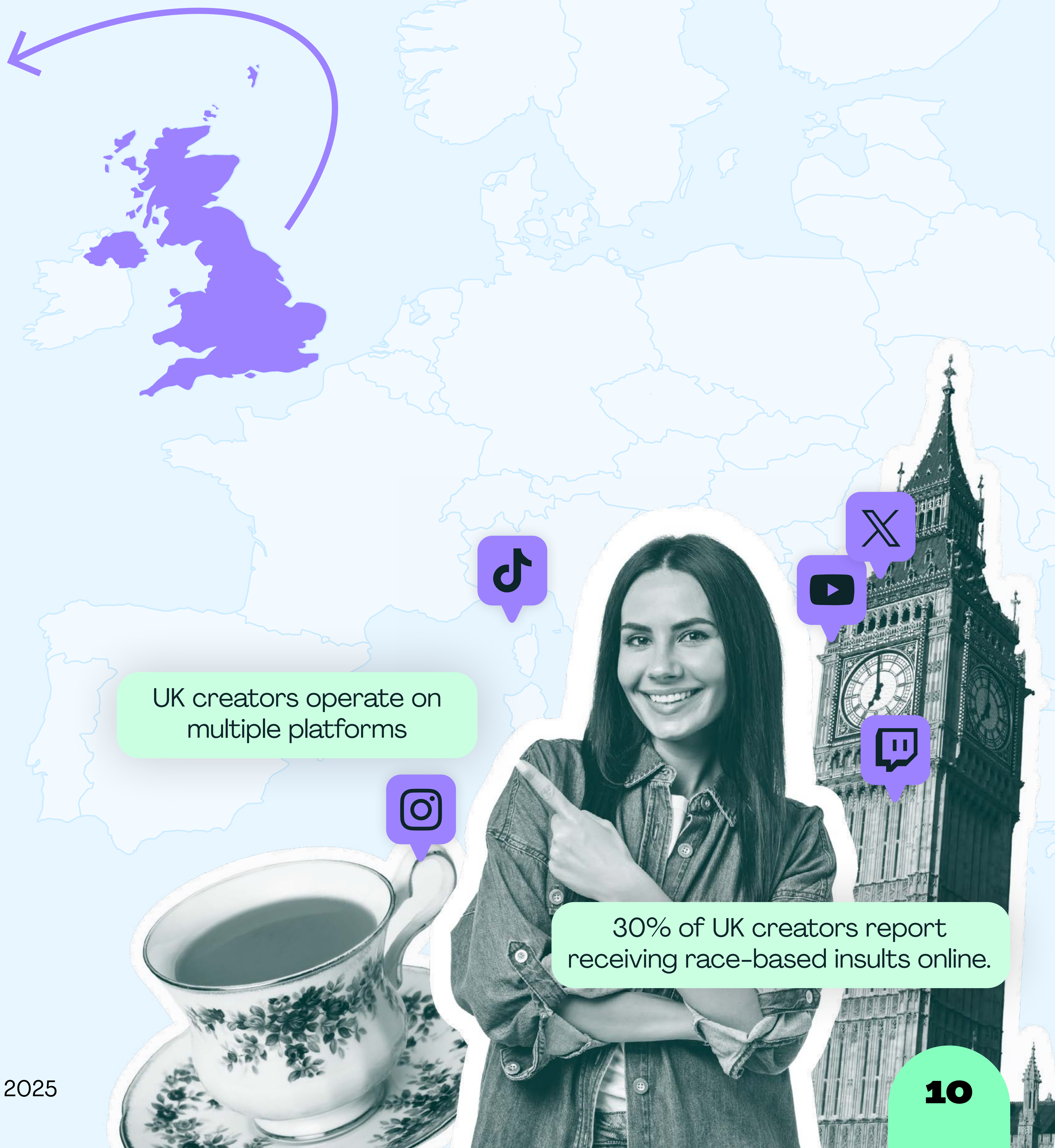
Reflecting diverse and inclusive values, and spotlighting mental health in content creation are top-of-mind for UK content creators.

> "Threads is becoming a thing and I am exploring ways to make use of it and extend my current content (which is image-focused) to there (more text focused). There are more emerging influencers on the new platforms too and will make the competition stronger."

UK micro-creator Instagram

> "The race-based hate UK creators experience is frankly devastating. Platforms have the technology to stop this abuse but they're not doing nearly enough. When brilliant creators from diverse backgrounds are being driven away by harassment, that's a platform failure, not a creator problem."

Grace Andrews @the.socialclimber, 137K LinkedIn, 91K Instagram, UK



1 MEET EUROPE’S CREATORS

FRANCE

INSTAGRAM’S TRUE BELIEVERS

Instagram is my home

At 90%, French creators have the highest representation on Instagram, and more of them are making money from the platform than their European neighbours. They are also the least likely to have accounts on TikTok (42%).

The hard graft

50% of French creators earn less than €1,000/month from content creation, and a whopping 69% — compared to the European average of 51% — have done gifted collabs in the last year.

Tapped into the community

63% of French creators think people follow them because they feel inspired by their content and lifestyle, while 40% say they relate to their lifestyle and experiences.

Ethical professionals

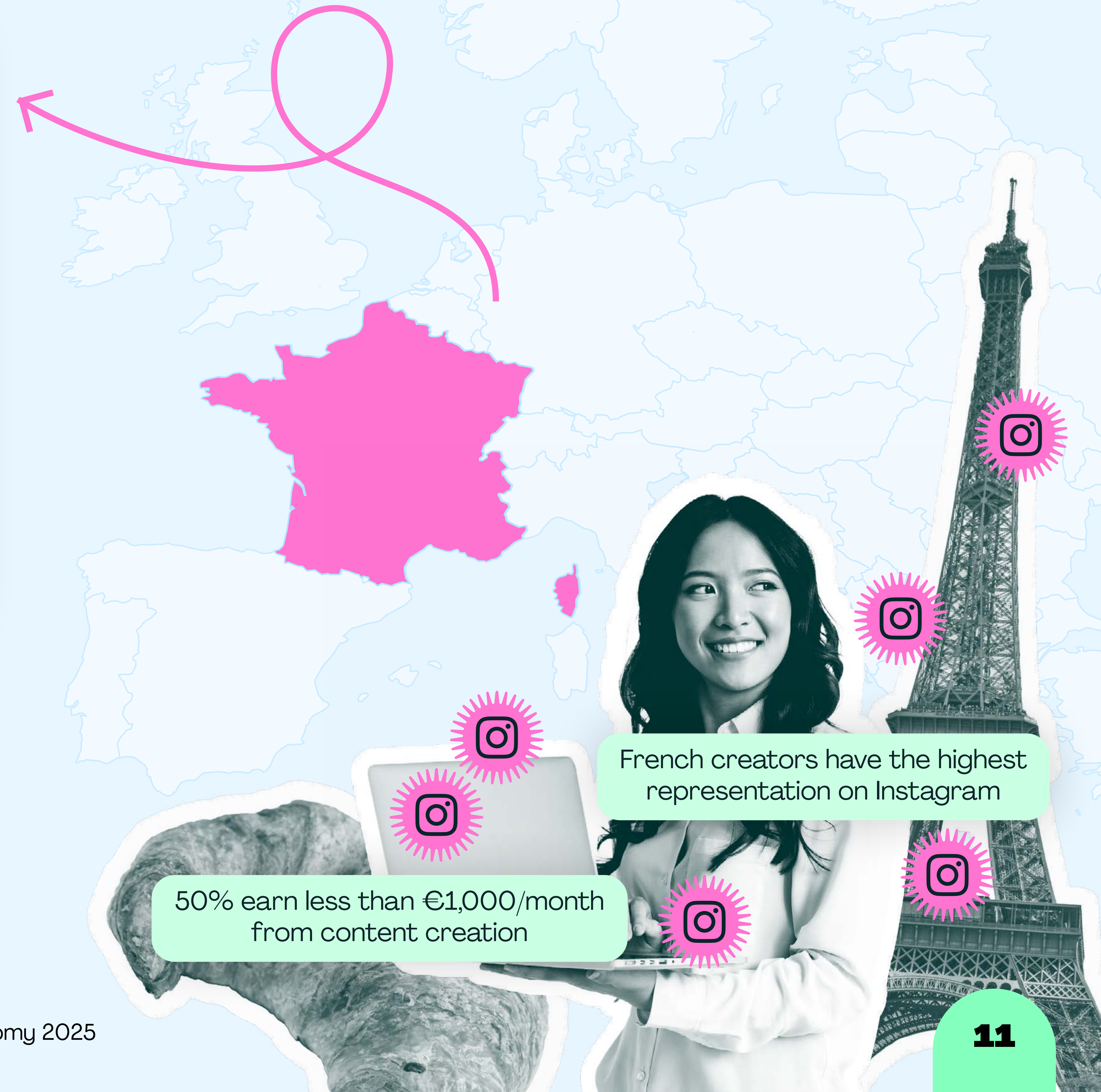
A large majority —76%— of French creators nominate transparency and 46% nominate sustainability/environment as key values to reflect in content. They (39%) also see greater focus on transparency and ethics as a major opportunity.

“In my opinion, moderation isn’t effective enough. It is easy to circumvent certain measures and find shocking/violent/hate-inciting content on some platforms, despite the theoretical ban on such content.”

@aikulive, 133K YouTube, France

“There should be more moderation of content on platforms; people often feel too free to insult and criticise content creators just because they are on social media.”

@croquelalife, 88K Instagram France



GERMANY

MASTERS OF MONETISATION

Raking it in

German content creators earn more overall than their European neighbours. 41% earn €1,000 - €4,999/month — nine points above the European average — while 17% earn +€5,000, four points above average.

Diverse income streams

German content creators report a wide variety of income streams, including above-average earnings from subscriptions, platform monetisation programs, speaking gigs, and services.

Pragmatic approach

When selecting brands to work with, Germans prize compensation and brand reputation equally above other considerations, followed by shared values and creative freedom.

Difficult conditions

With 40% reporting they have been subject to online harassment, German creators track 10 points above the European average on this indicator. 78% of those have been trolled or personally insulted, and 58% have been criticised about their content style.

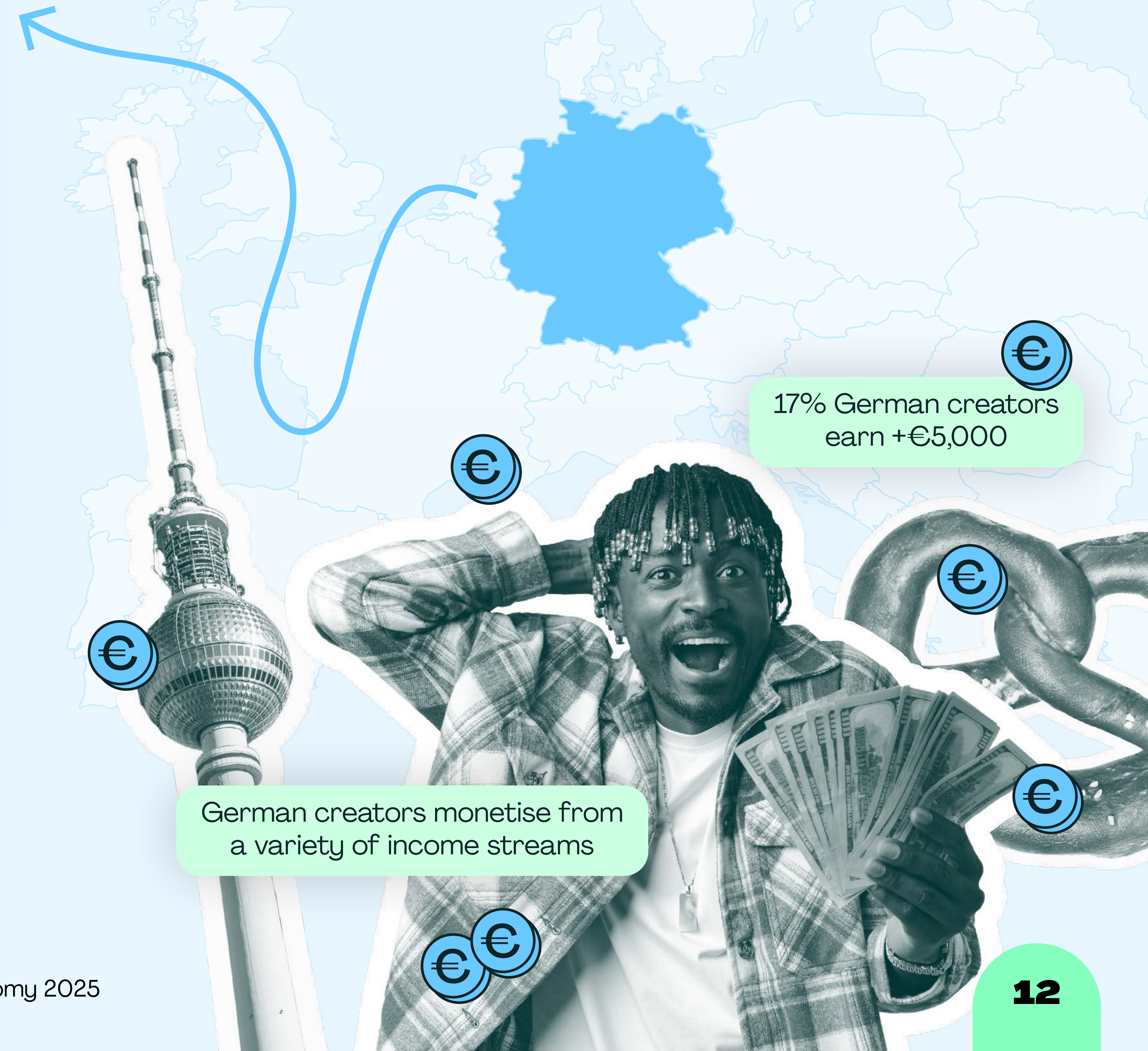
*NB: male respondents are over-represented in this sample, 64% / 34% (2% non-binary, prefer not to say)

"Awareness of responsible influence is growing, and followers are becoming more selective about who they follow. This tends to reduce the total number of followers, but improves quality, i.e. interaction."

Nano-creator, Instagram, Germany

"Clear target group definition and communication for sustainable product loyalty is becoming increasingly important."

Nano-creator, LinkedIn, Germany



1 MEET EUROPE’S CREATORS

SPAIN

THE TECH-SAVVY ASPIRANTS

AI enthusiasts

At 47%, Spanish creators track 17 points above the European average amongst creators who use AI daily for content creation. They are much more likely to use AI for content analytics and widely use it to optimise content for SEO, indicating a professional, tech-savvy approach.

Ready to level up

Spanish creators are by far the most likely to nominate the professionalism of the creator economy as a key opportunity, and like their European counterparts, see big opportunities for niche and micro creators.

Big bucks... Not.

More than half — 53% — of Spanish content creators report earning less than €500/month, and just 12% earn more than €3,000/month, 13 points below the European average.

Strong audience bonds

Two-thirds of Spanish creators say their audience follows them because they are inspired by their content and lifestyle, and only 28% say they have experienced negative online behaviour.

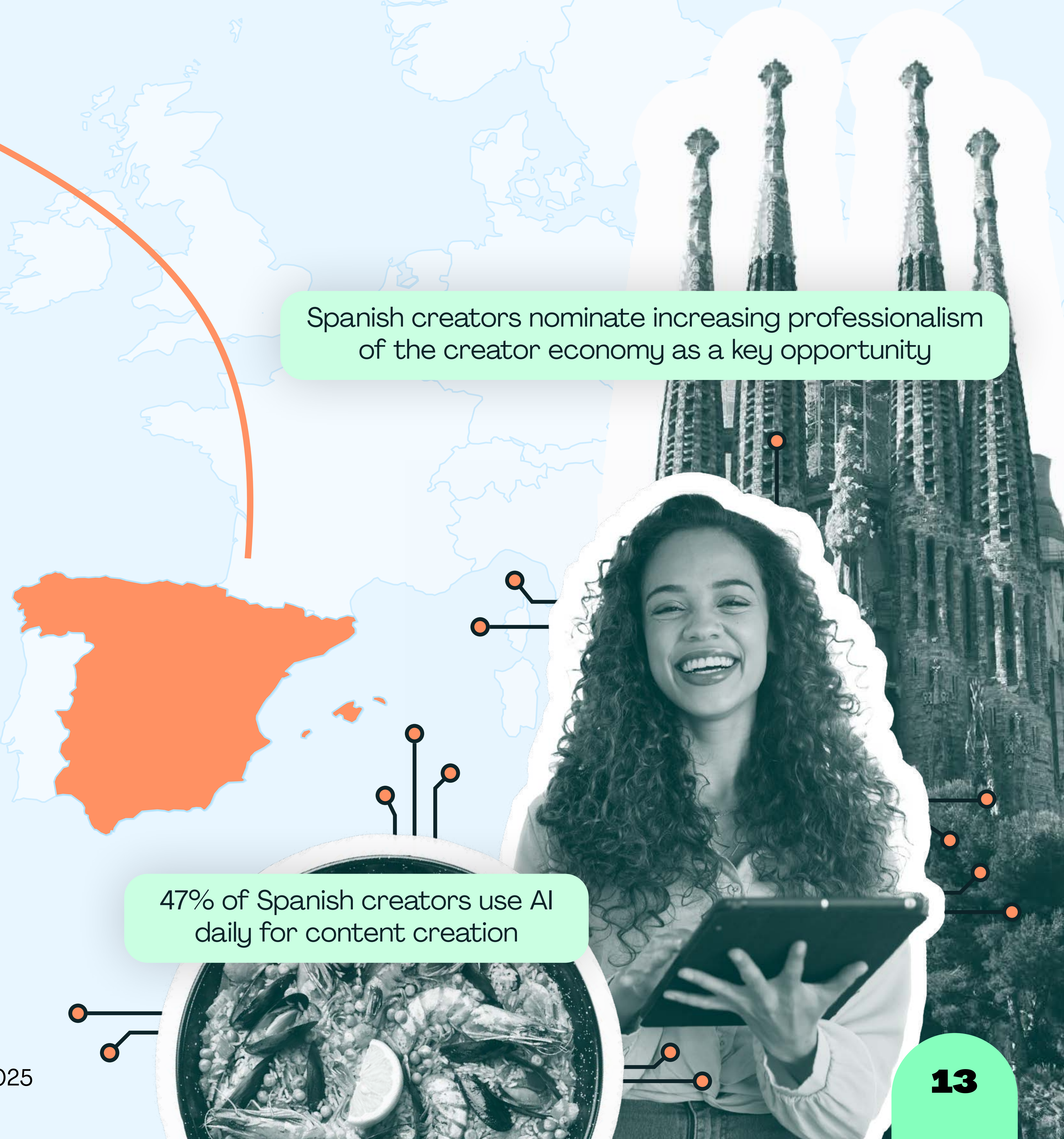
*NB: sample notable for higher female representation 58% / 40%, 2% non-binary/prefer not to say

> “I hope the sector becomes more professional because I have come across many creators who do not know how to collaborate with brands, and also many brands taking advantage of creators.”

Macro-creator, TikTok, YouTube, Instagram, Spain

> “There are still too many non-professionals trying to influence others with their informal style. Late payments, unfair competition, hiring without contracts, etc. [continue to be a problem].”

Nano-creator, YouTube, Twitch, Spain



1 MEET EUROPE'S CREATORS

ITALY

THE ALL-IN ADVOCATES

Full-time and all in

Italy has the highest proportion of full-time creators in Europe (35%) and a huge majority — 81% — who either create full-time, or part-time while working in a content-related job, revealing a deep professional commitment to the industry.

Low pay, wide gap

74% of Italian creators earn less than €5,000/month from content. Women are more than twice as likely as men to earn less than €500/month, and trail men in every earnings bracket except €500-€999/month.

Values driven

Italian creators are most likely (62%) of all European creators to choose brands based on shared values, and least likely (36%) to prioritise compensation. 72% say transparency and 52% say sustainability are important values to reflect in content.

Regulatory frustrations

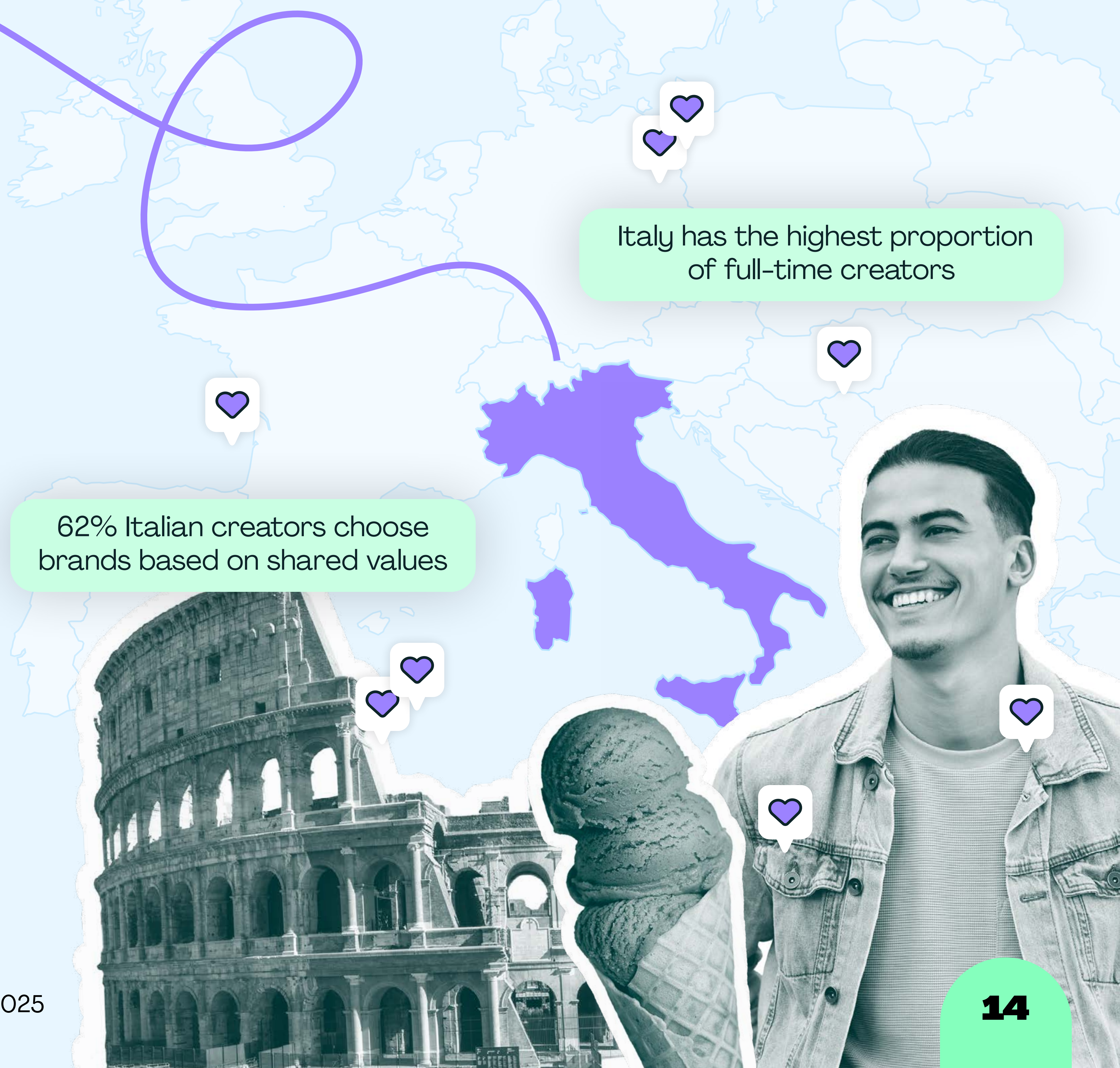
More than half — 54% — of Italian creators say influencer regulations are too complex or limit their creative freedom, reflecting the impact of a regulatory environment in a state of flux. A further 12% say they are not aware of the laws.

"Italian creators really care about who they work with — shared values matter more than money. It reflects a culture of authenticity and trust. There's also a clear push for purpose-driven content that resonates long-term."

@patrizia_waz, 10.7K, Instagram, Italy

"I see a lot of budget shifting towards creators. Nevertheless most requested creators are becoming very expensive, therefore there will be a need for tools to reach and engage with micro and nano influencers."

Nano-creator, Instagram, Italy



1 MEET EUROPE'S CREATORS

NORDICS (Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Norway)

THE LEVEL-HEADED PROFESSIONALS

Full-timers with help

Creators from the Nordic countries track higher than their Southern neighbours for working full-time (31%) and are most likely to source brand collabs through an agent or talent manager.

Values-driven pragmatists

More than half — 53% — of Nordics creators nominate compensation as a key consideration when partnering with brands, while around two-thirds prioritise transparency (65%) and sustainability (63%).

Alt-income earners

Nordics creators are the least likely to earn from paid collabs or gifting, but most likely to earn via brand ambassadorships and platform monetisation programs. They track six points above average for earnings from services. Most — 59% — earn less than €1,000/month from their activity.

Kind and chill

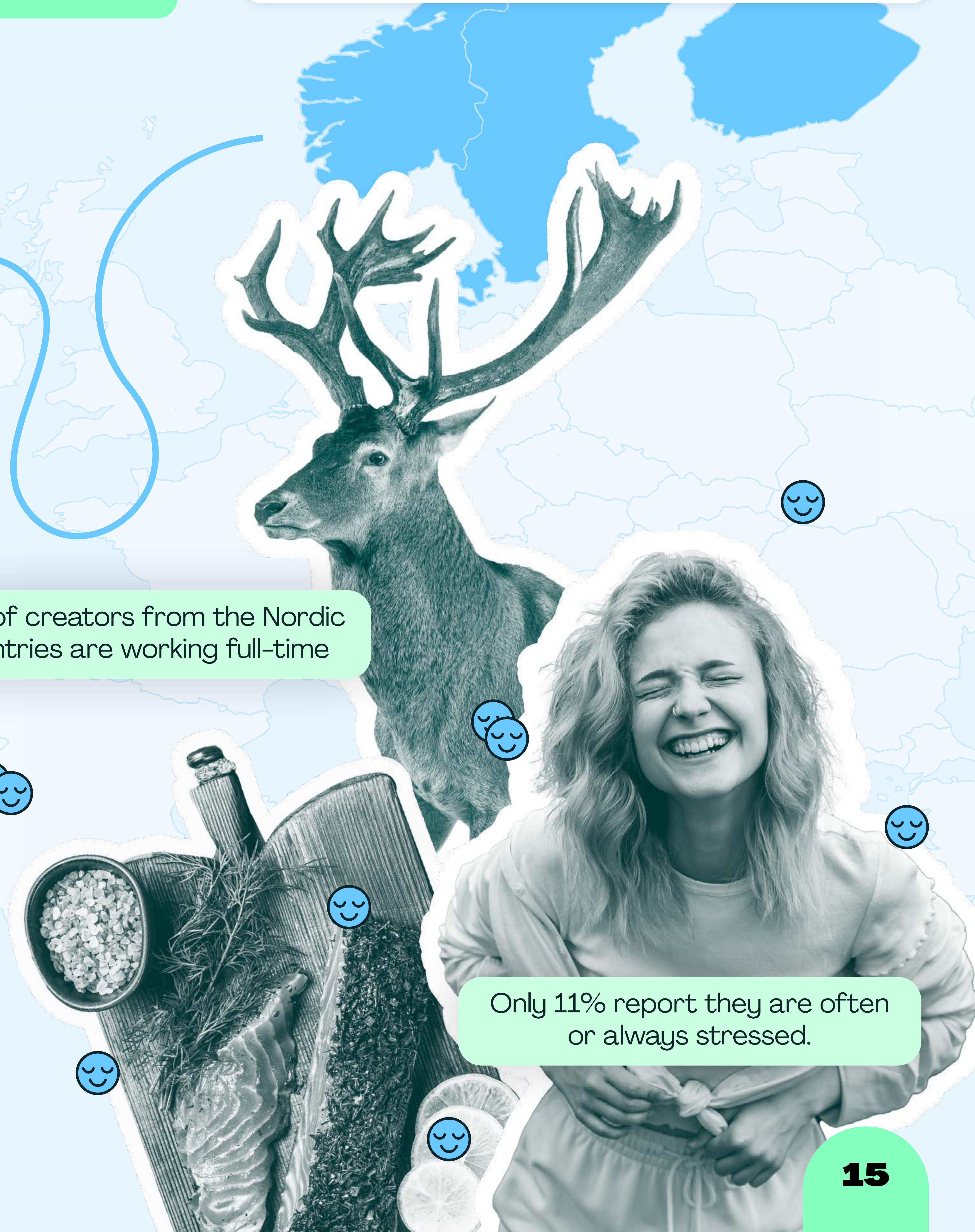
At just 20%, Nordics creators track 10 points below the European average for having experienced online harassment. They are also pretty chill about their work, with just 11% — compared to the European average of 21% — reporting they are often or always stressed.

> "I think [the creator economy] will go from something 'young people' do to something everyone respects and knows about."

Nano-creator, LinkedIn, Sweden

> "I believe that there is a growth in this type of influencers [micro] who cater to a very specific audience, but whose fans are extremely loyal."

Nano-creator, TikTok, LinkedIn, Norway



31% of creators from the Nordic countries are working full-time

Only 11% report they are often or always stressed.

2

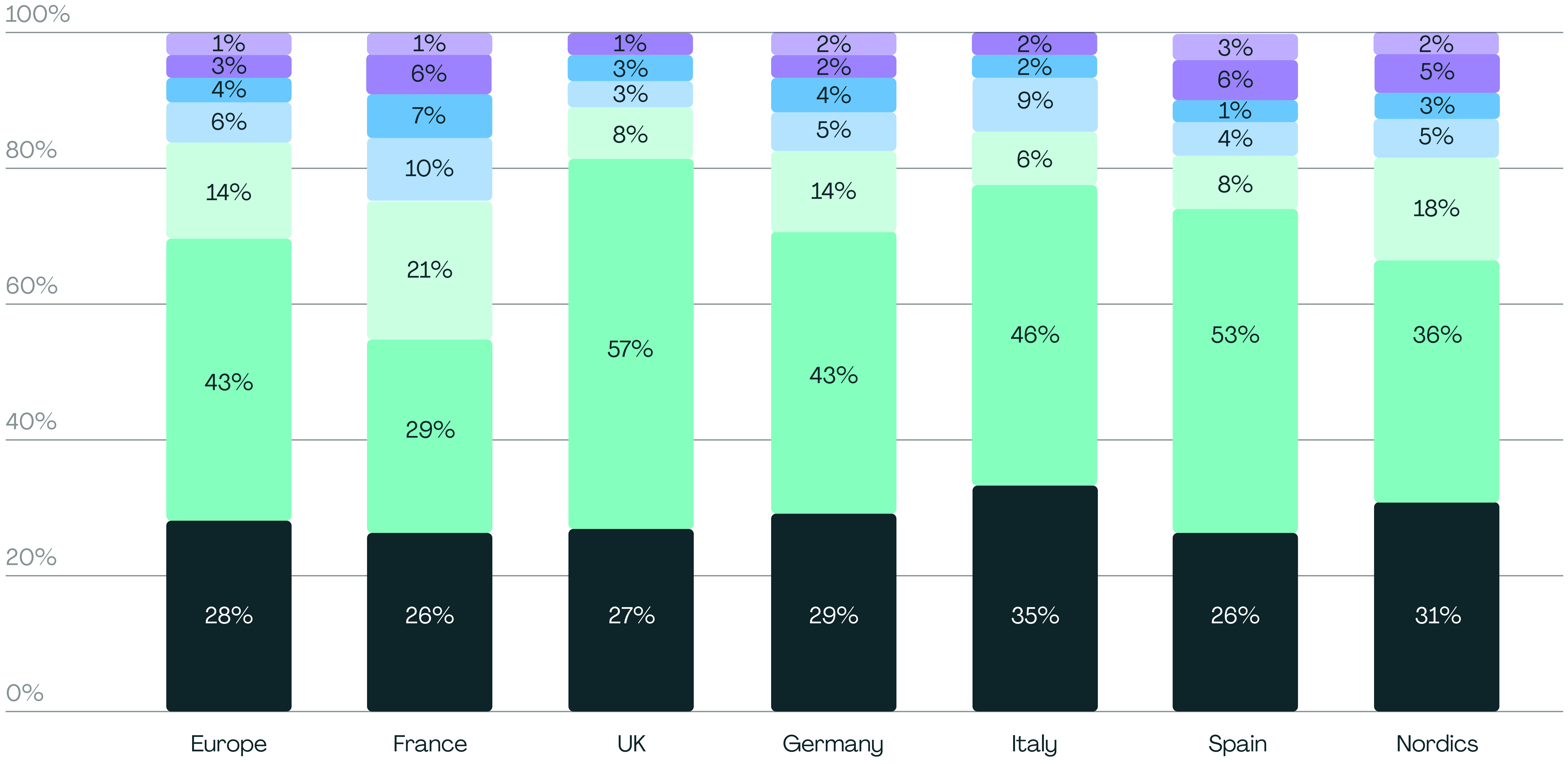
PART-TIME AND FLYING SOLO: HOW DO EUROPE'S CREATORS WORK?

A FULL-TIME JOB FOR SOME. A SIDE HUSTLE FOR MOST.

Only 28% of respondents describe themselves as full-time creators, having no other source of income besides their social media activity.

The majority of creators (43%) juggle content creation alongside content-related jobs in marketing, comms or social media — particularly in the UK and Spain. France stands out for having the highest number of creators working part-time in unrelated fields (21%).

- I create content full-time (it is my main income source)
- I am a part-time creator and work in a content-related job (e.g., social media, marketing, comms, etc.)
- I am a part-time creator and work in a job unrelated to content creation
- I am a part-time creator and freelance in a creative or content-related role
- I am a part-time creator, run my own business (not content-related), and also have a job
- I am a part-time creator and my content creation supports/promotes my small business
- I am a part-time creator and do not have another job



A FULL-TIME JOB FOR SOME. A SIDE HUSTLE FOR MOST.

From a gender perspective, men are slightly more likely than women to be full-time creators (31% vs. 26%), while women dominate every category of part-time work — especially content-related jobs and freelance roles.

- I create content full-time (it is my main income source)
- I am a part-time creator and work in a content-related job (e.g., social media, marketing, comms, etc.)
- I am a part-time creator and work in a job unrelated to content creation
- I am a part-time creator and freelance in a creative or content-related role
- I am a part-time creator, run my own business (not content-related), and also have a job
- I am a part-time creator and my content creation supports/promotes my small business
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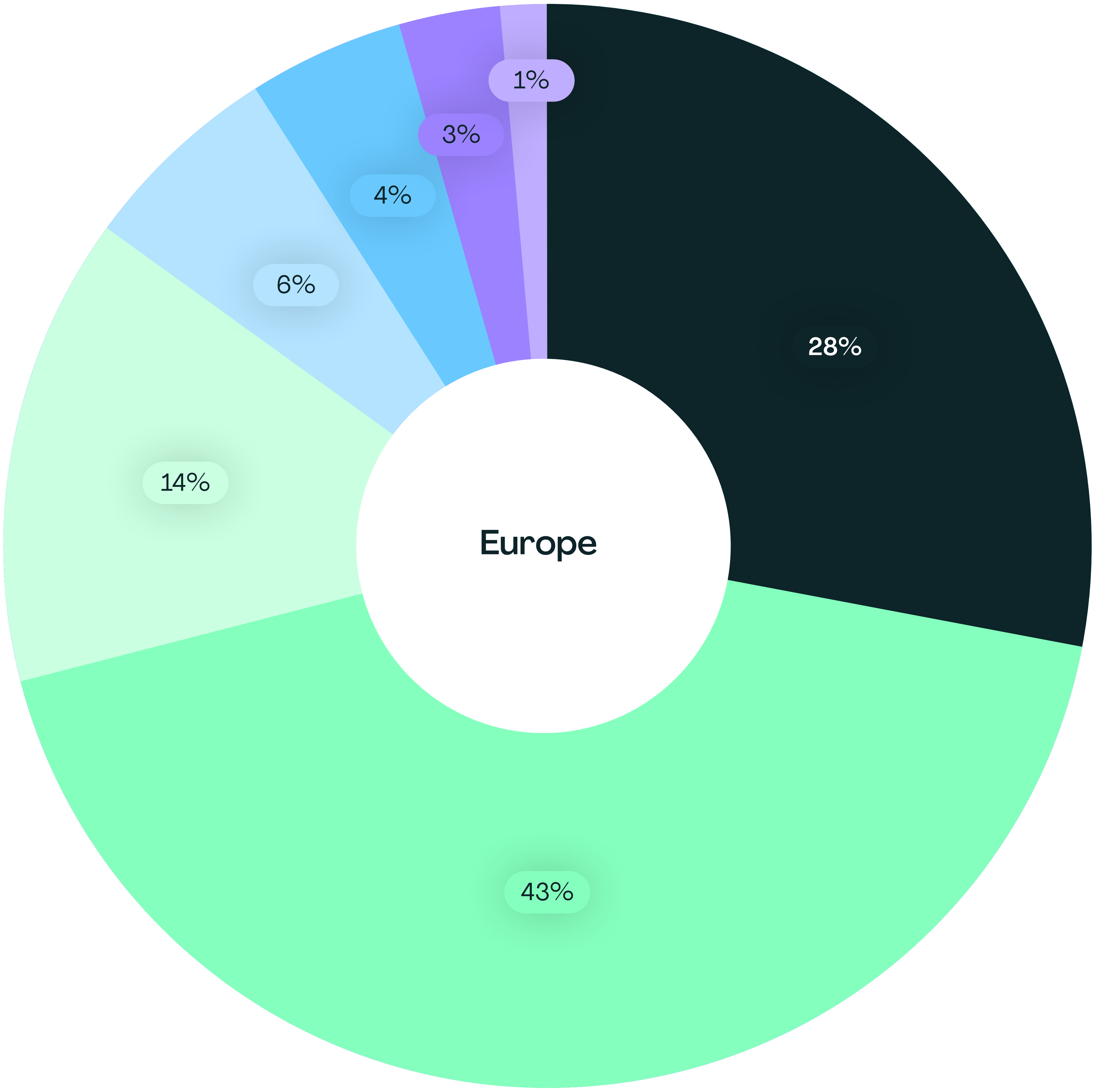
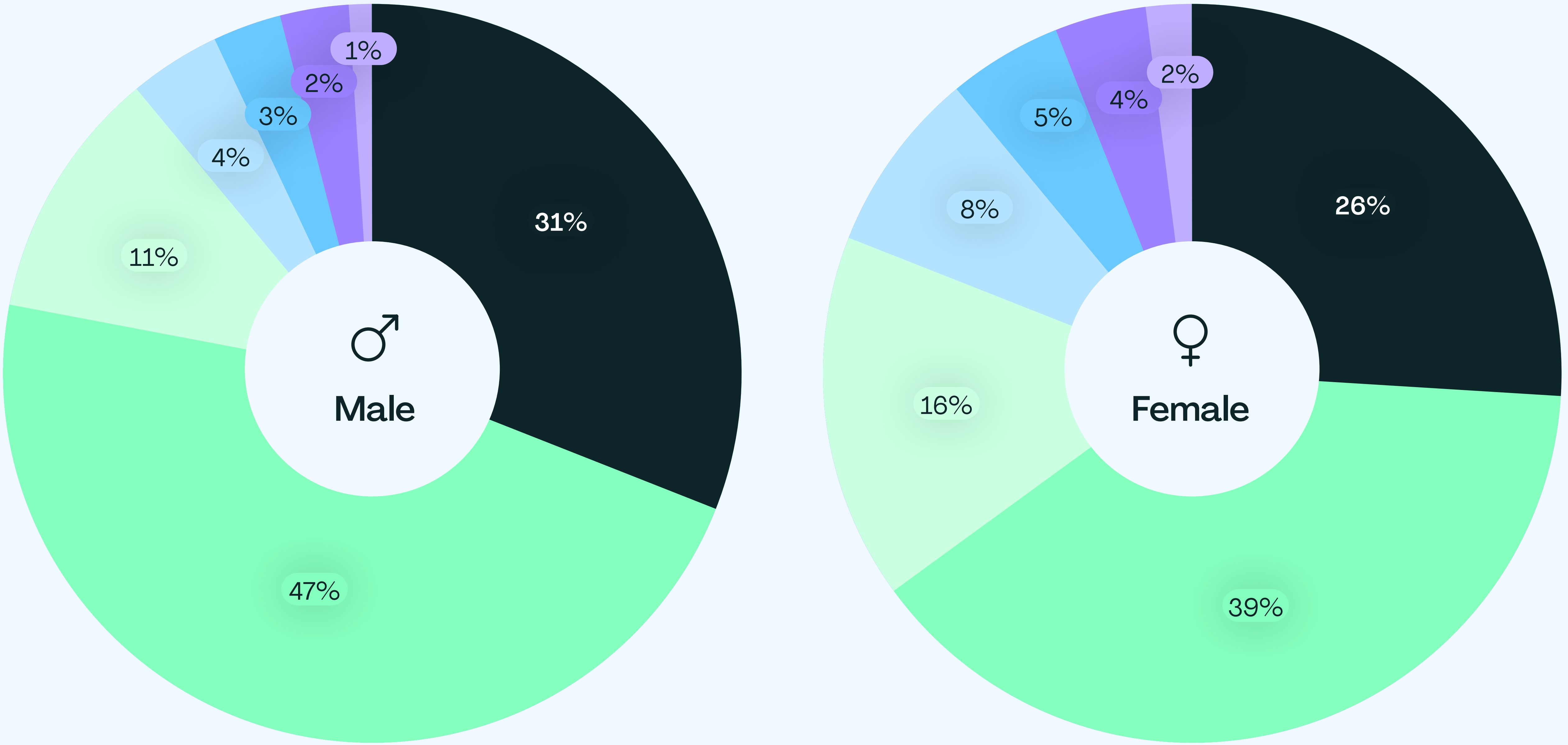
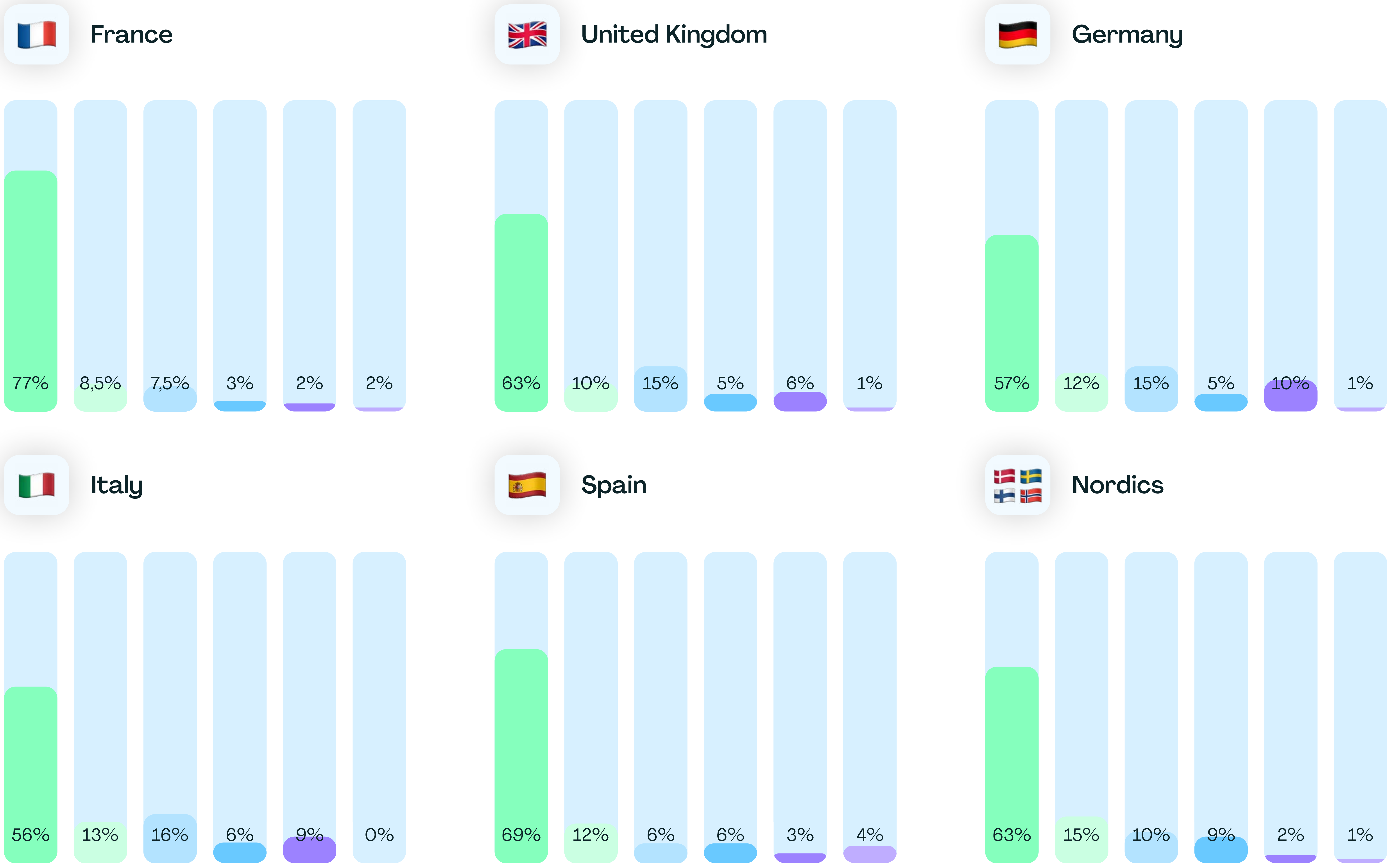




FLYING SOLO: HOW MANY CREATORS HAVE AN AGENT?

66% of respondents manage everything — from content planning to editing, and negotiating with brands — themselves.

Among those who don't work solo, the overall split between working with an agent or occasionally outsourcing work is fairly evenly distributed, though there are notable differences across countries.



I manage everything on my own

I have an agent or agency that helps me manage my workload

I occasionally commission work from freelancers (e.g., editor, photographer)

I occasionally work with other creators

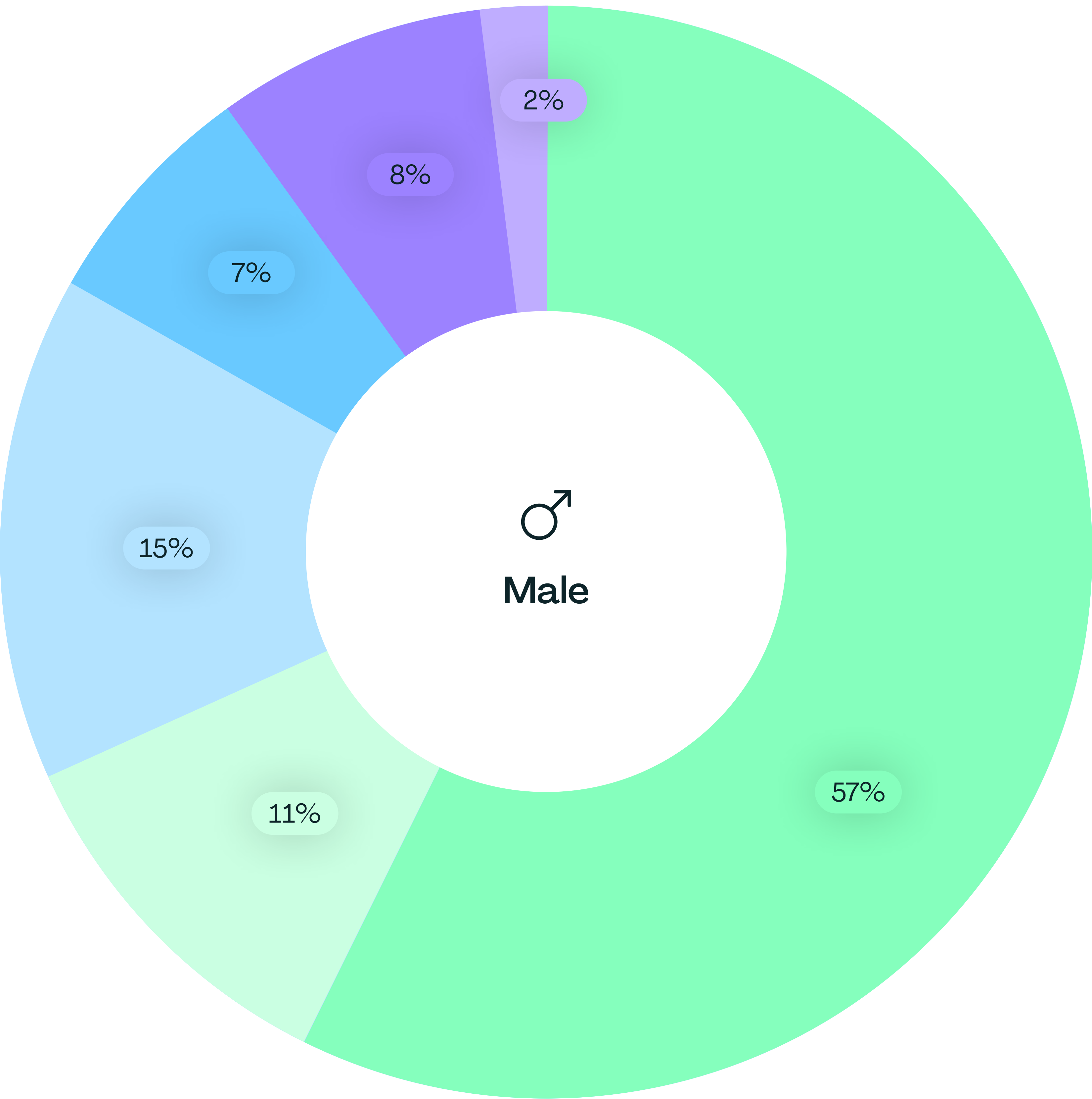
I employ a team of regular contributors (1 or more people, who help with a range of organisational and content related tasks)

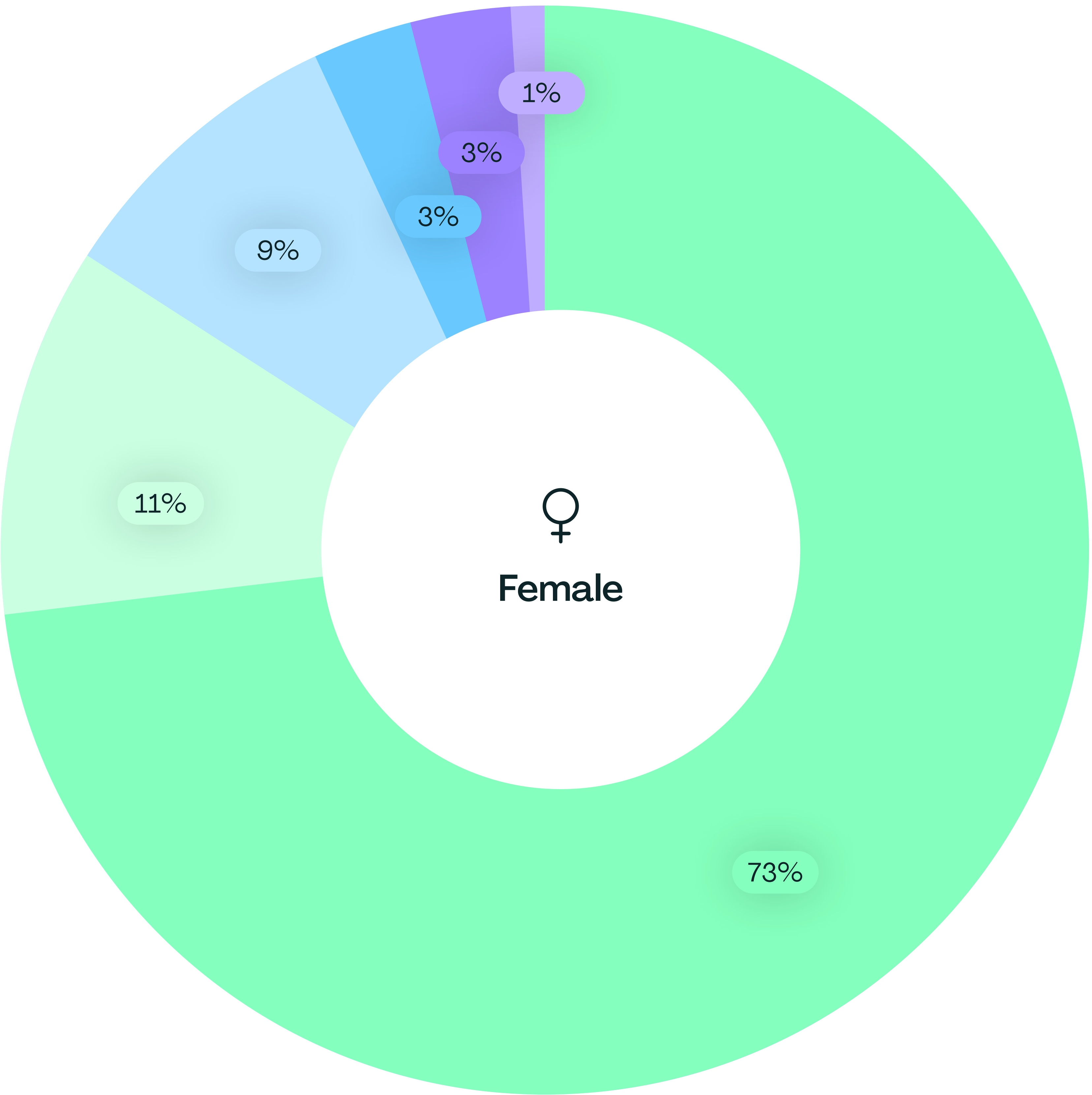
Other

MOST CREATORS STILL FLY SOLO – ESPECIALLY WOMEN

The ‘do it yourself’ approach is particularly common among women, with nearly three-quarters running their activity entirely on their own.

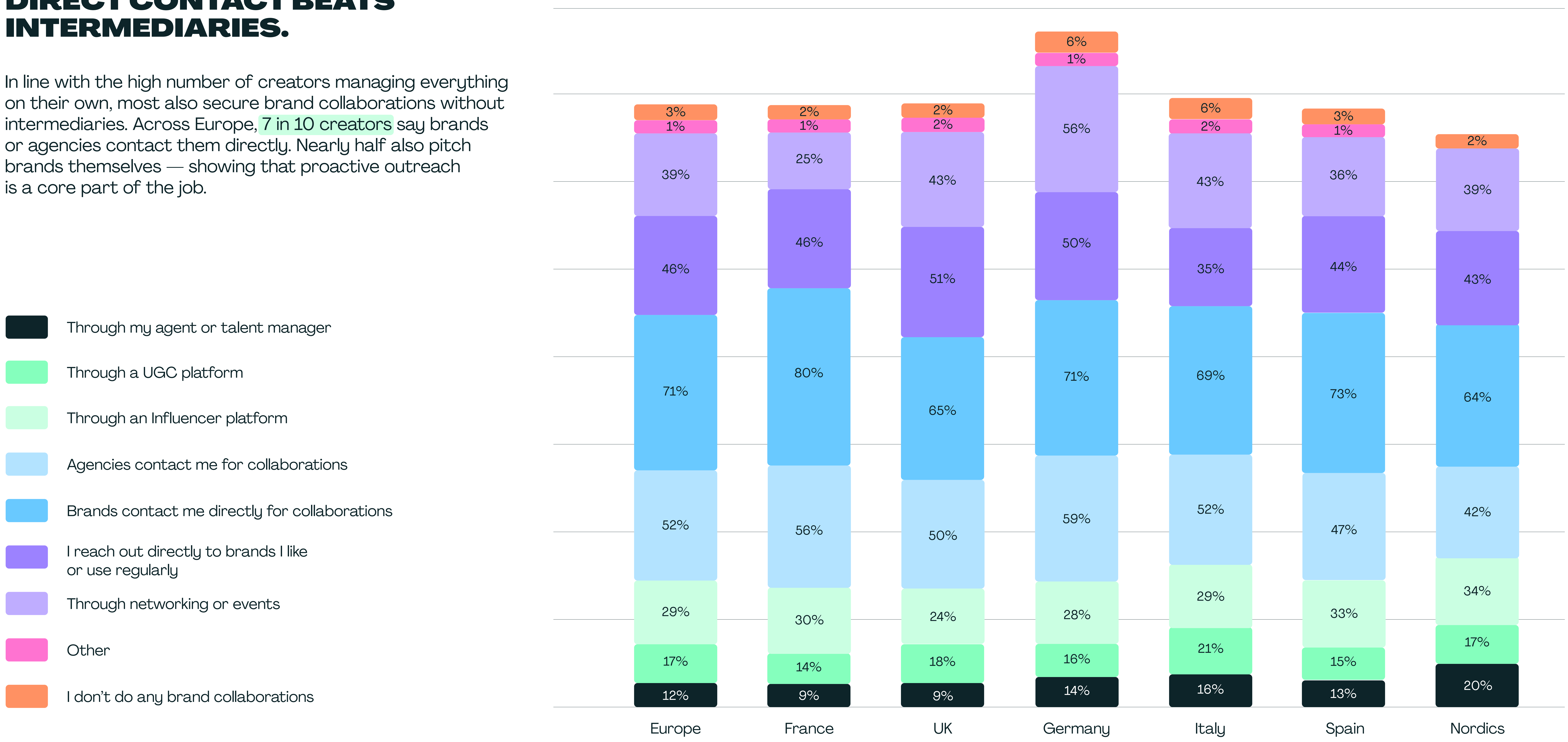
- I manage everything on my own
- I have an agent or agency that helps me manage my workload
- I occasionally commission work from freelancers (e.g., editor, photographer)
- I occasionally work with other creators
- I employ a team of regular contributors (1 or more people, who help with a range of organisational and content related tasks)
- Other





FINDING COLLABORATIONS: DIRECT CONTACT BEATS INTERMEDIARIES.

In line with the high number of creators managing everything on their own, most also secure brand collaborations without intermediaries. Across Europe, 7 in 10 creators say brands or agencies contact them directly. Nearly half also pitch brands themselves — showing that proactive outreach is a core part of the job.



3 NEW INDUSTRY, OLD HABITS: REVENUE STREAMS AND THE GENDER PAY GAP

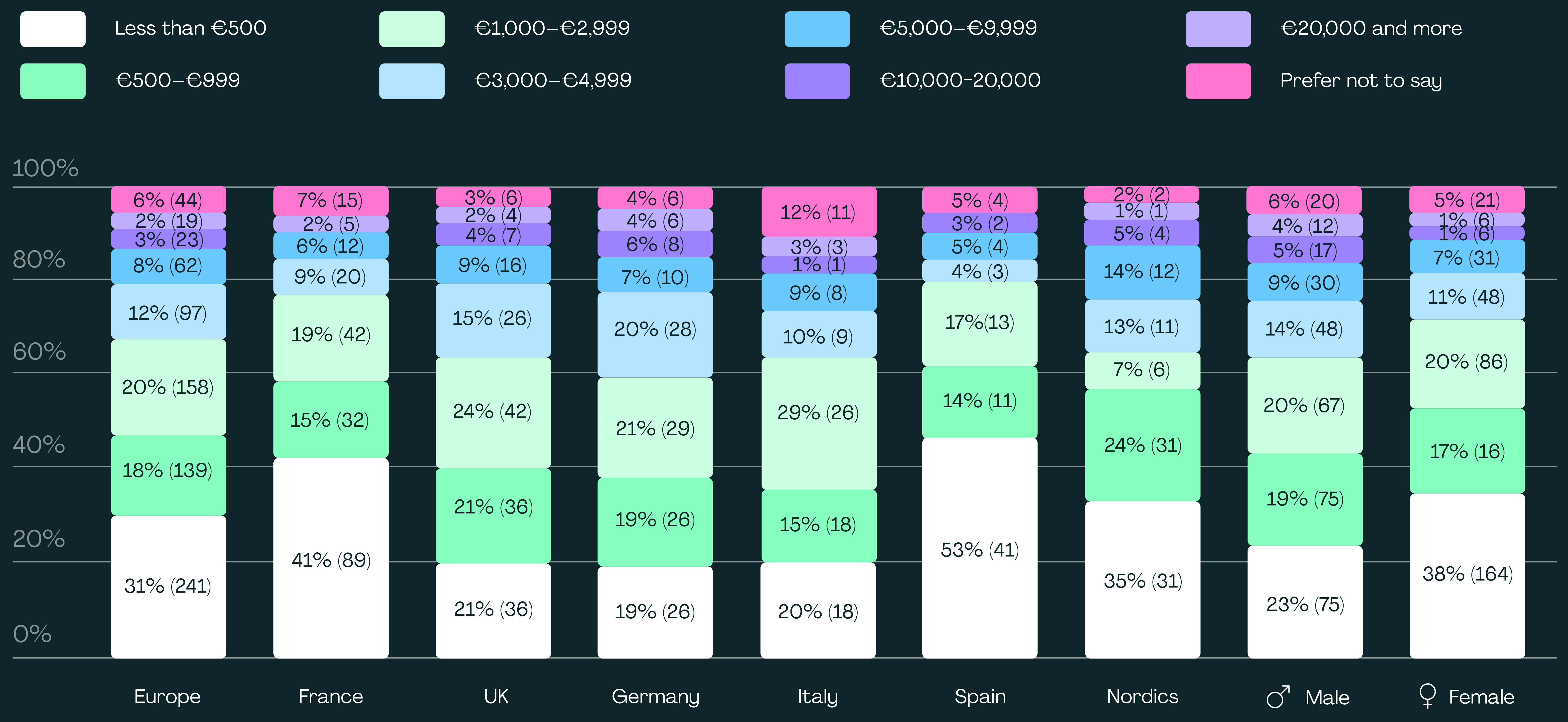
EARNINGS: THE GENDER GAP IS ALIVE AND WELL

Nearly one in three creators in Europe earns less than €500* per month from content — with wide variation by country. But geography isn't the only dividing line.

Women are far more likely to sit at the bottom of the earnings scale: 38% earn under €500, compared to just 23% of men.

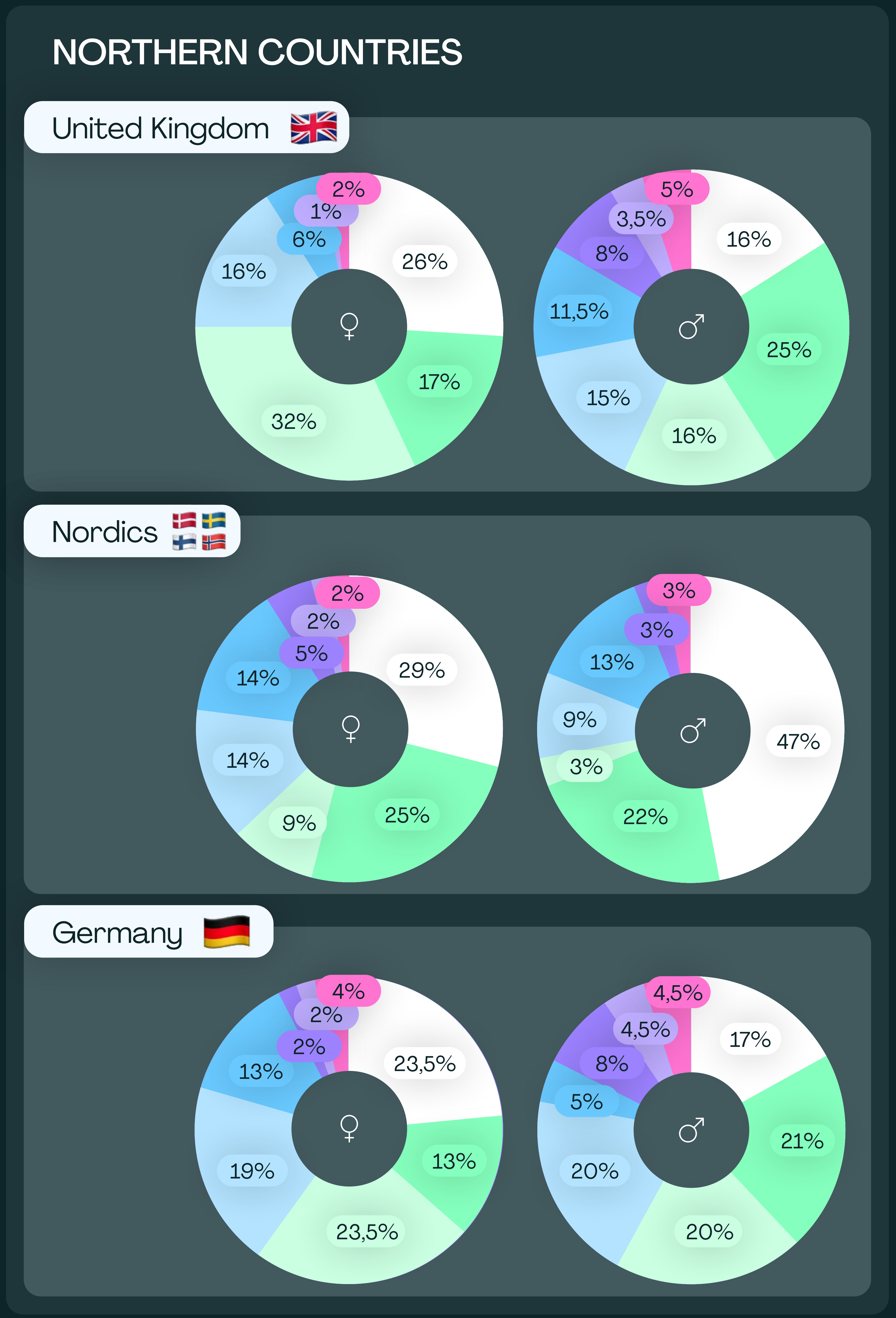
At the top end, the gap is just as stark. While 32% of male creators earn more than €3,000 a month, only 20% of women do. The result is a 12-point difference in access to high-value deals and monetisation — despite equal effort and professionalisation across genders.

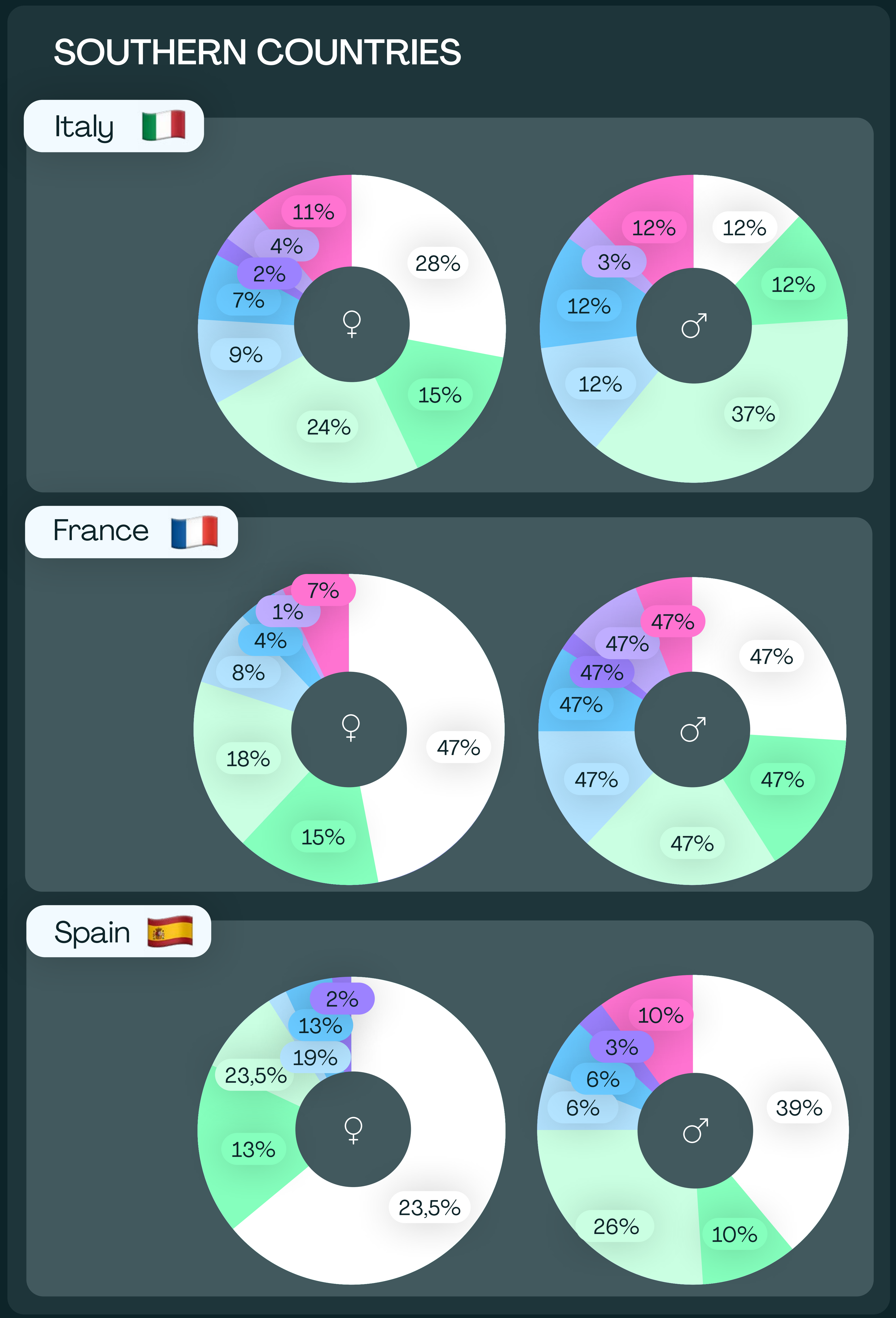
*To provide a comparative overview, GBP, Swedish, Danish, and Norwegian Krona have been converted into their Euro equivalent



FROM NORTH TO SOUTH: HOW GENDER SHAPES EARNING POWER

Across Europe, women creators consistently earn less than men — especially in Southern countries like France, Spain, and Italy. In contrast, the gender income gap appears to narrow in Germany and the Nordics. This could point to greater equity in monetisation and deal flow, especially in Germany where the sample skews higher towards men (64%).



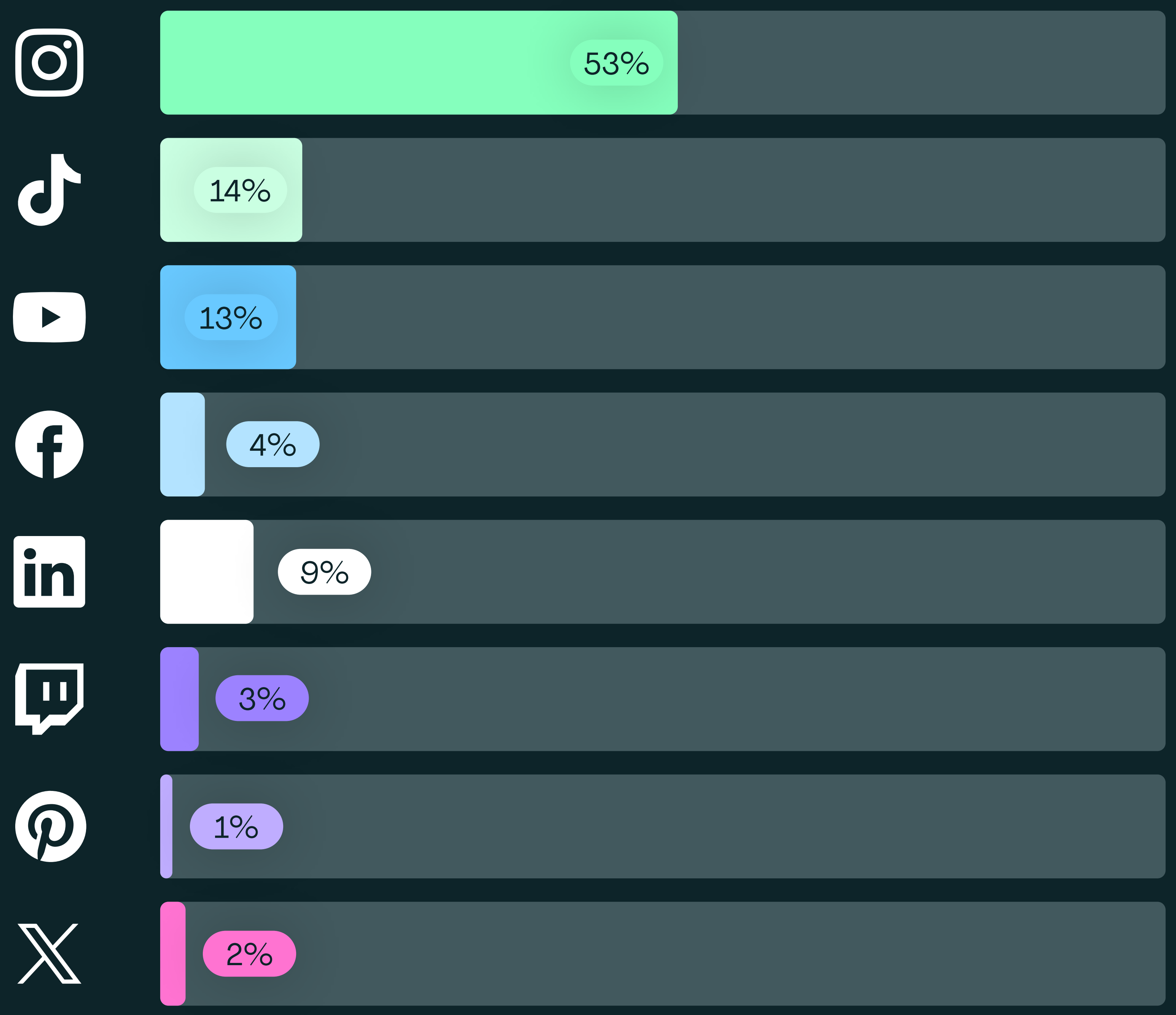


- Less than €500
- €500–€999
- €1,000–€2,999
- €3,000–€4,999
- €5,000–€9,999
- €10,000–€20,000
- €20,000 and more
- Prefer not to say

WHICH PLATFORM BRINGS THE BIGGEST VALUE?

In terms of monetisation, Instagram clearly brings the biggest value for Europe's creators, with over half saying they earn most of their money via this platform.

While findings are consistent across different countries, there's a significant difference between female and male creators, with the latter also earning more money on YouTube, LinkedIn, or even X, than their female peers.



(Total, Europe)

Which platform do you earn the most money on? (By gender)

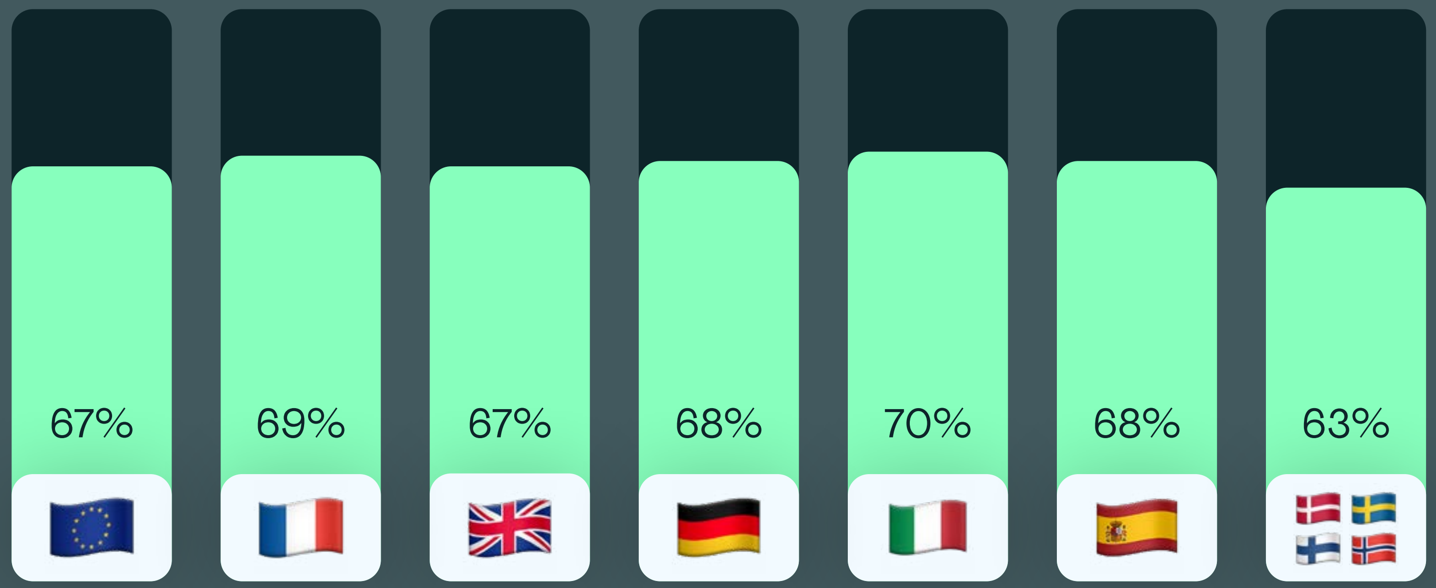
SPONSORED POSTS, SIDE HUSTLES, AND THE RISE OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

Sponsored content still generates the most income for creators across Europe, with around two-thirds reporting at least one paid collaboration in the past year.

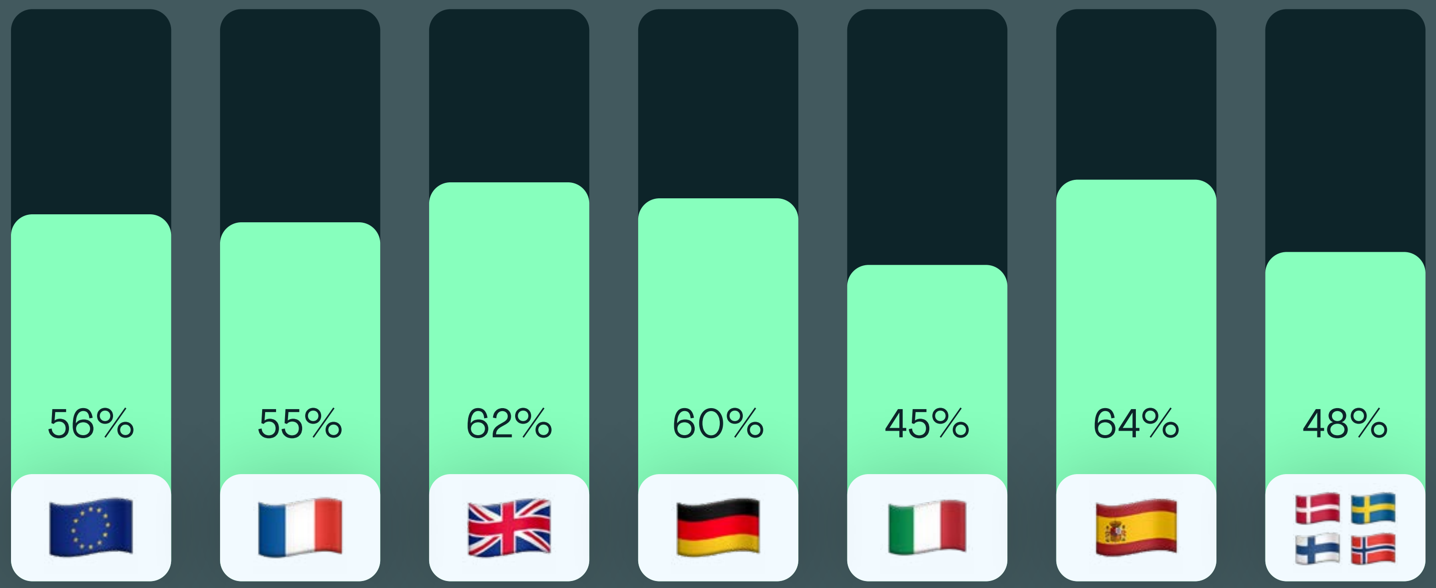
Affiliate income is the second most frequently mentioned revenue stream, followed by subscriptions and platform monetisation, particularly prevalent in Germany.

On the flip side, France's barter culture stands out: 69% of creators have accepted gifting or unpaid collaborations, the highest rate in Europe.

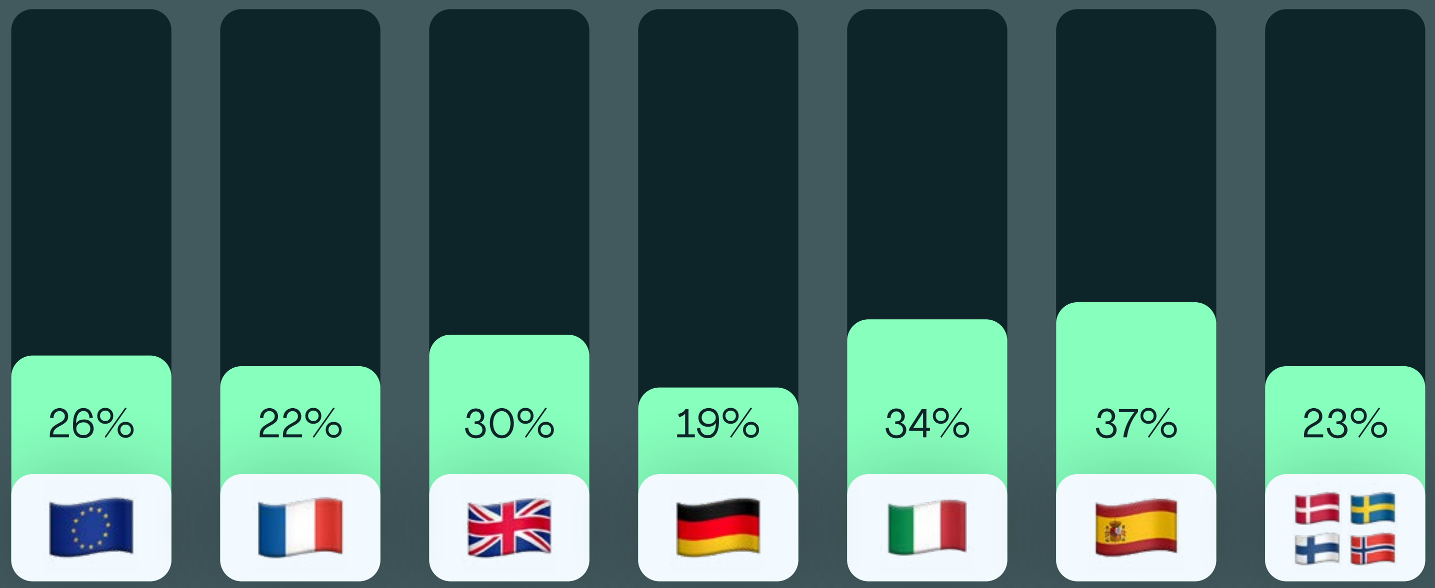
Paid collaborations / sponsored content



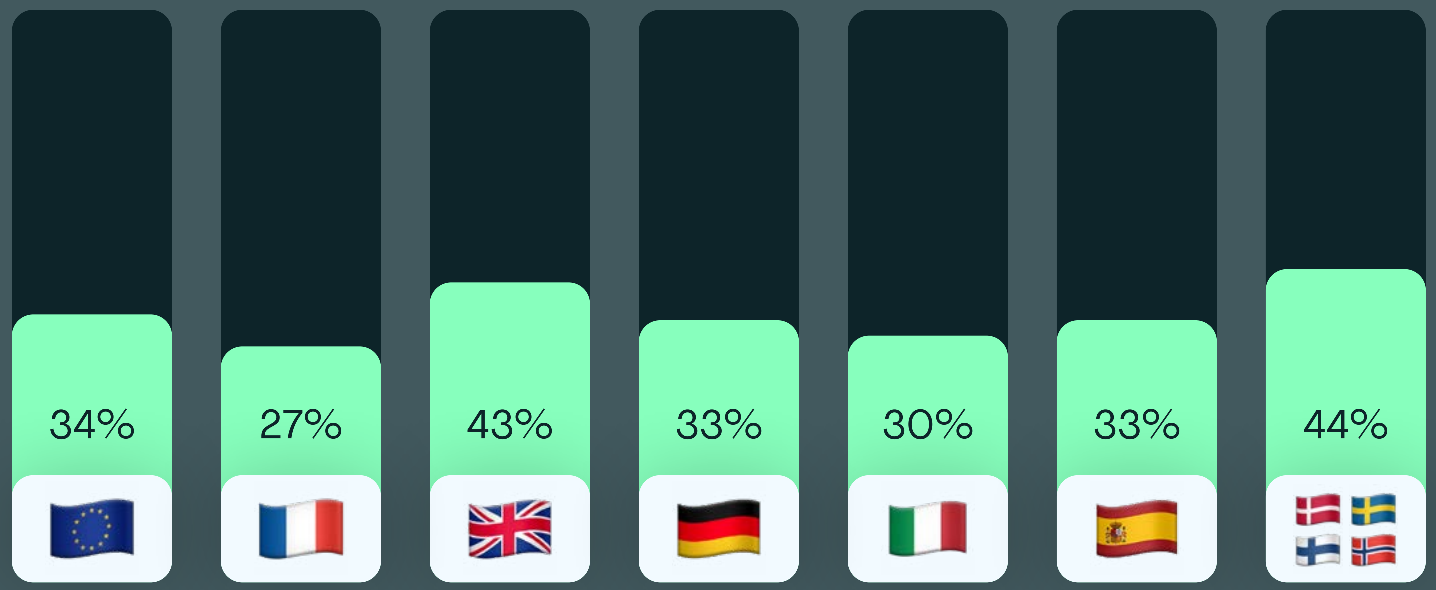
Affiliate marketing or commission



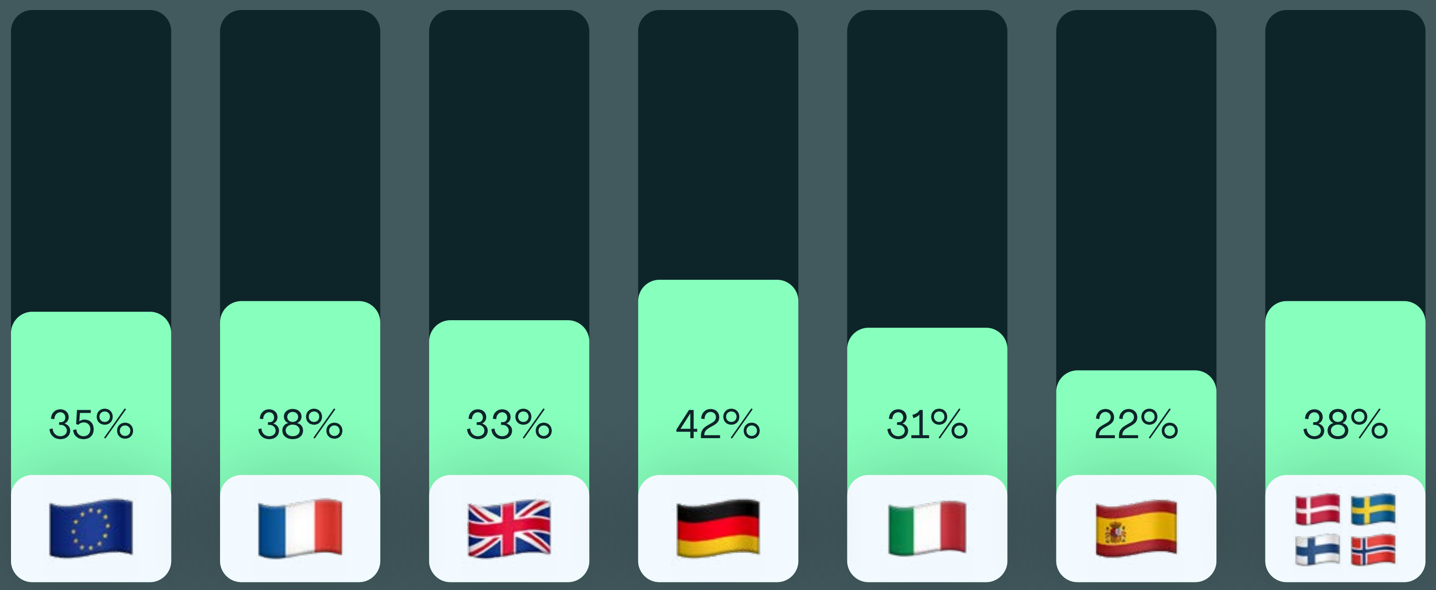
Product co-creation w/brands



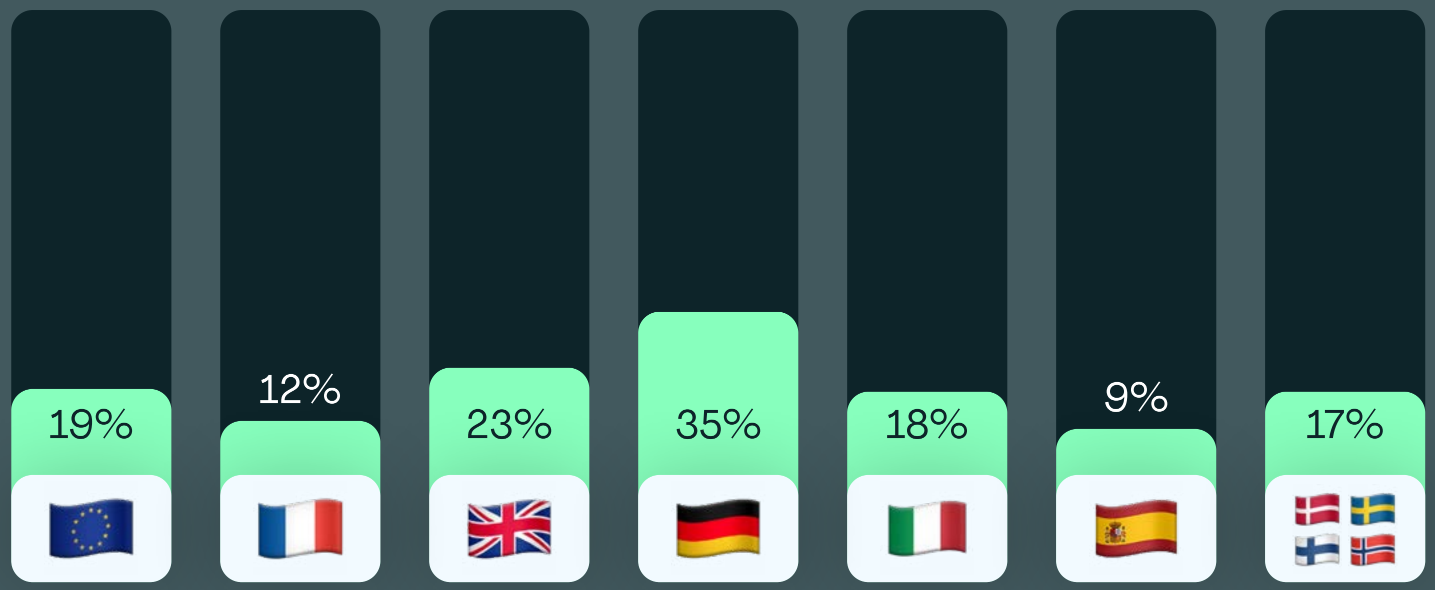
Brand ambassador program



Platform monetisation (e.g., YouTube Partner Program, TikTok Creativity Program



Subscriptions, donations, virtual gifts/tokens (e.g., Patreon, Substack)

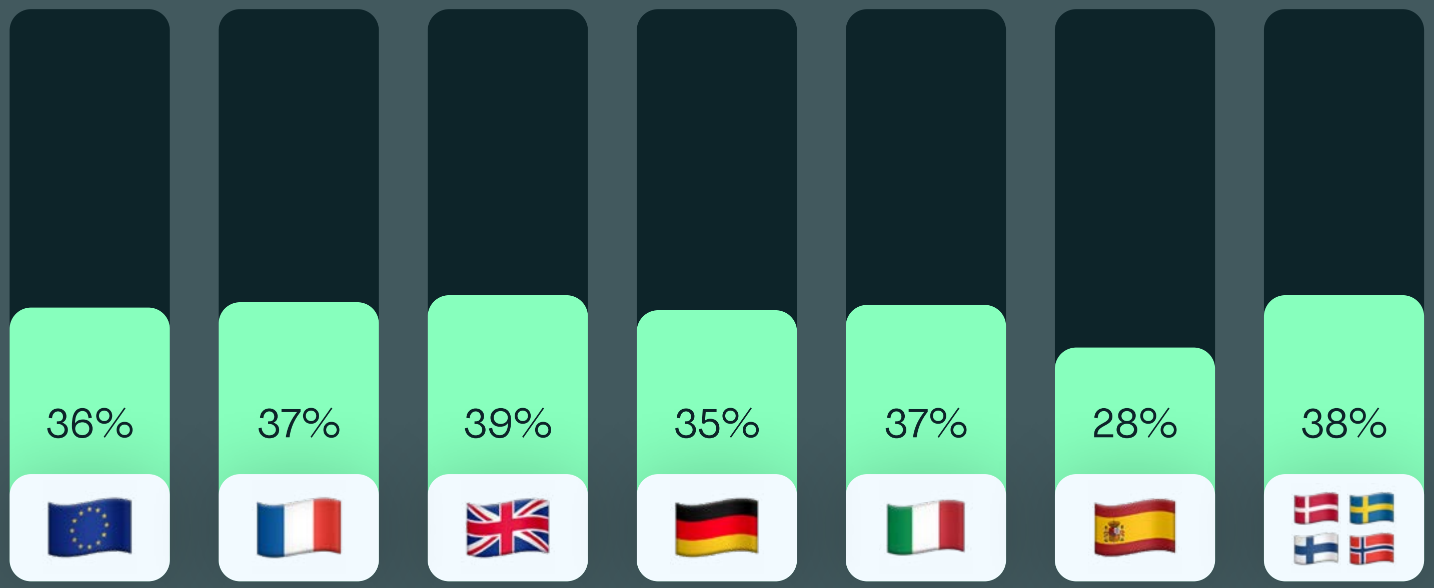


SPONSORED POSTS, SIDE HUSTLES, AND THE RISE OF SUBSCRIPTIONS

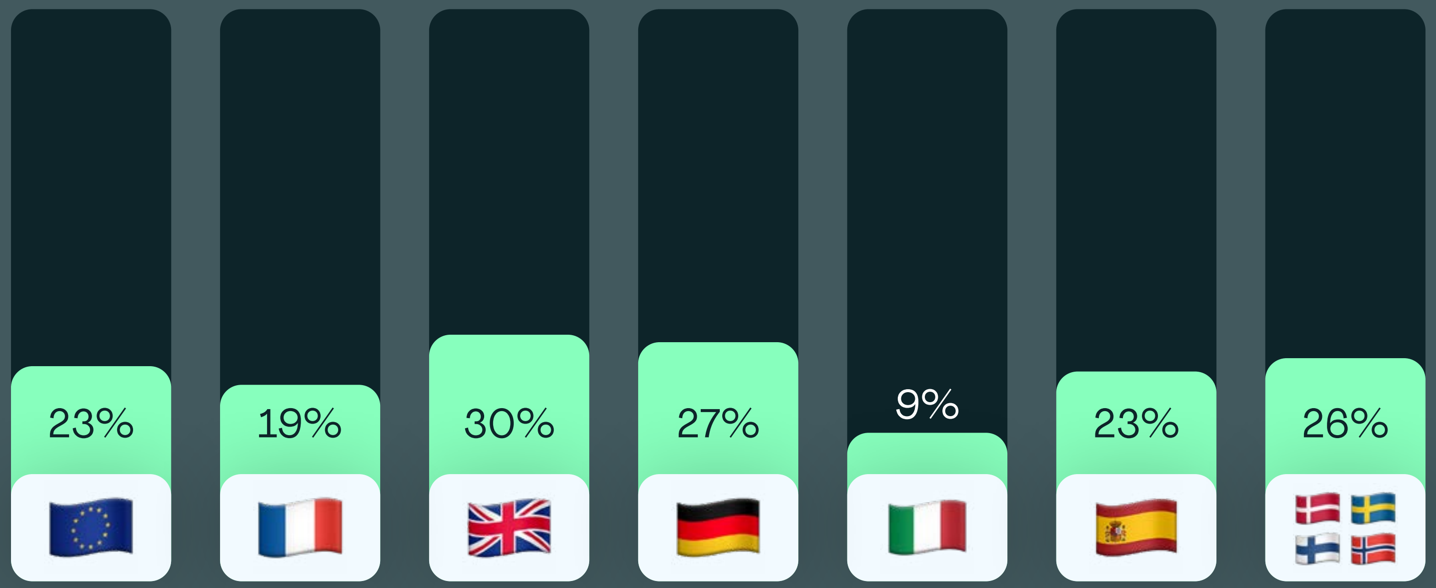
> "Influencers, who now play a key role in acquisition strategies, are being activated for performance during uncertain economic times. While overall media budgets may shrink, affiliate marketing budgets are growing. Three years ago, only 50% of brands wanted to integrate affiliation into influencer programs. Today, 80% of incoming requests are for this type of integration."

Affilae CEO **Alexandre Dos Santos**

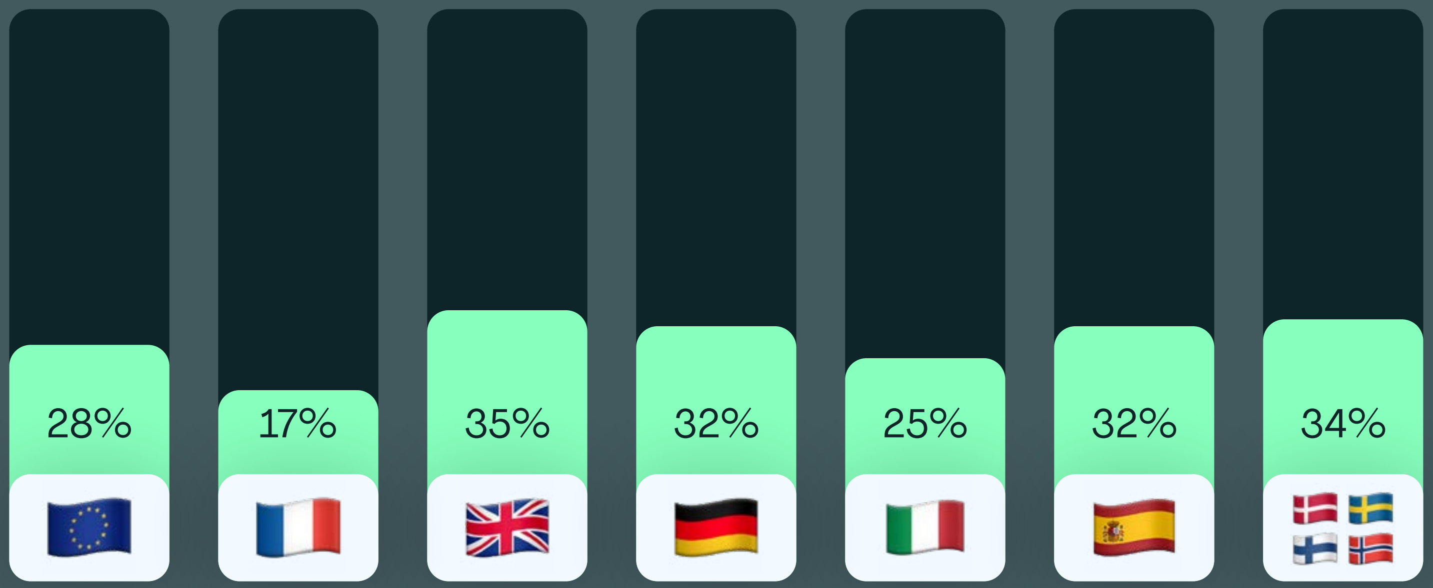
UGC / content creation for brands (not published on your own channel)



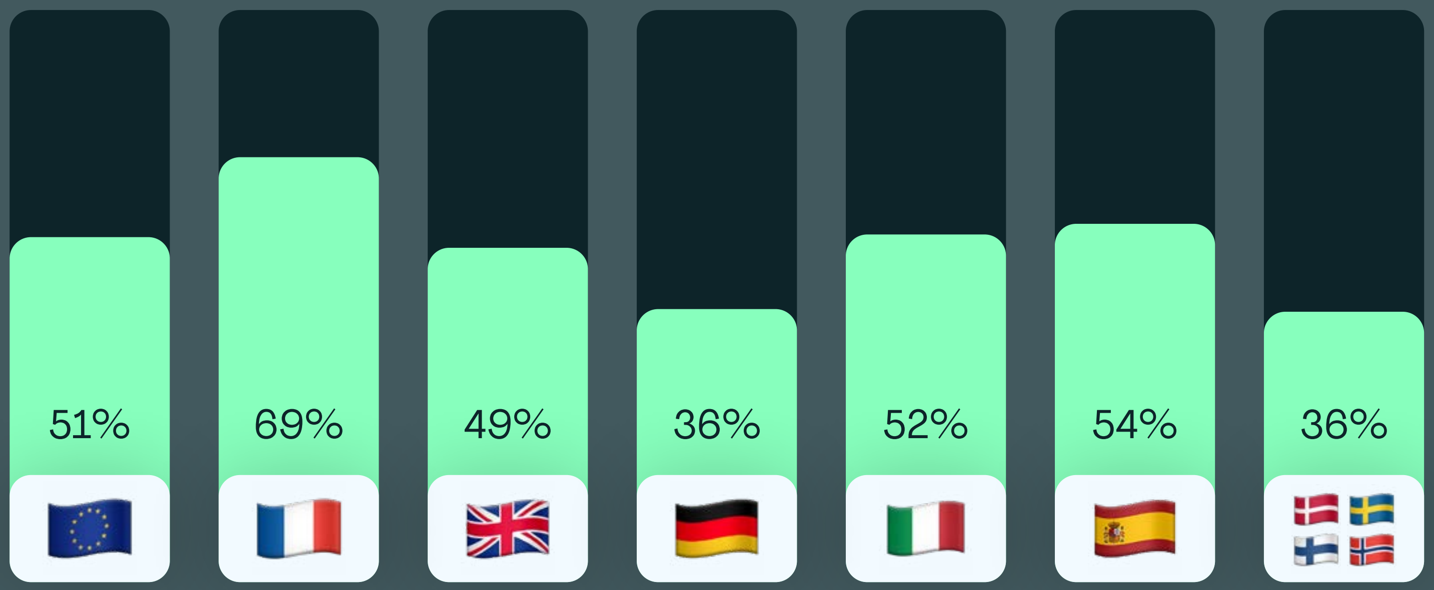
Sale of digital or physical products (e.g., merchandise)



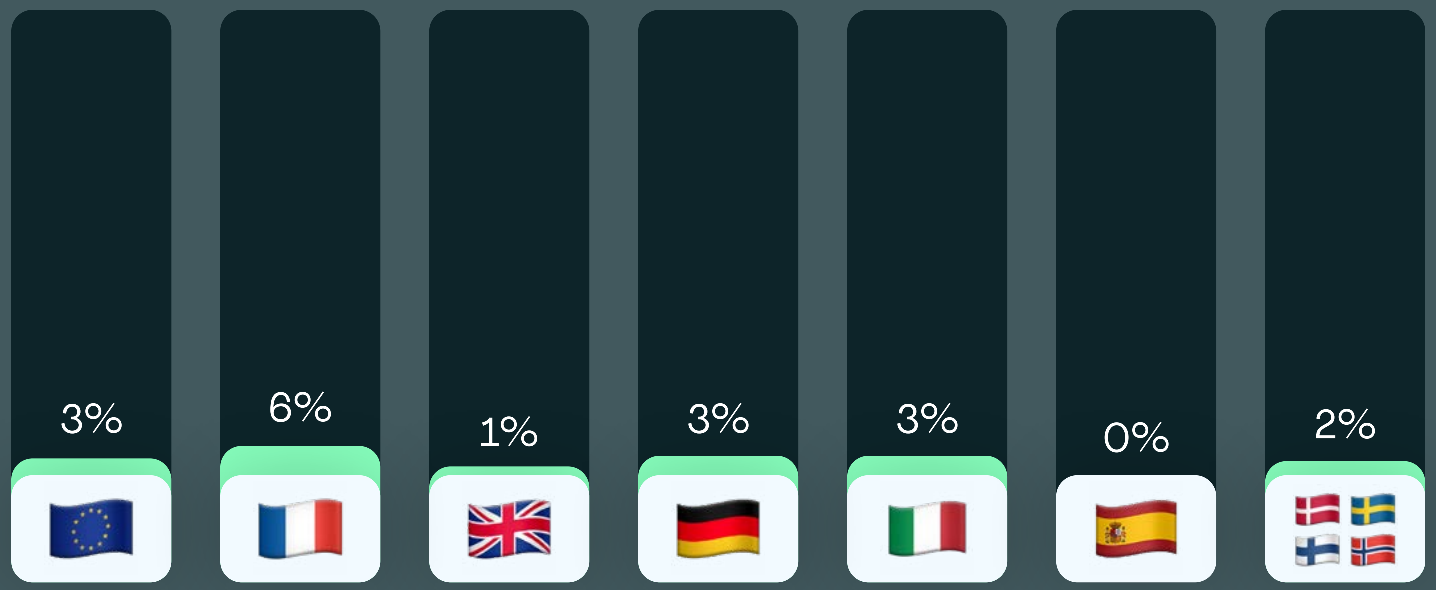
Services (e.g., coaching, consulting, speaking gigs)



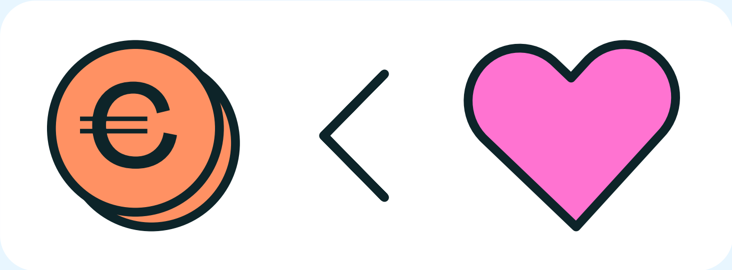
Gifting or bartering



Other



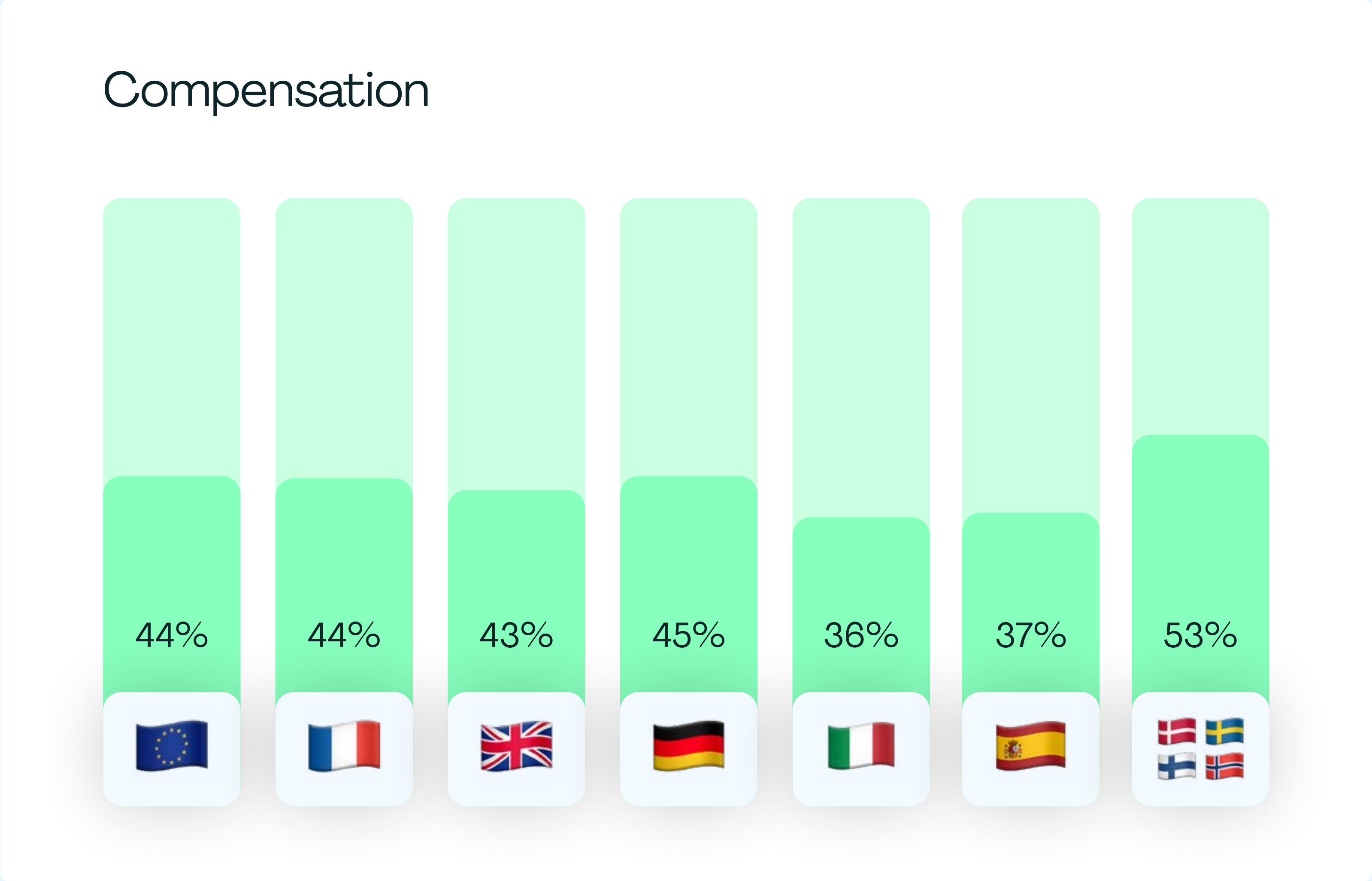
4 VALUES: WHAT MOTIVATES EUROPE'S CONTENT CREATORS ?

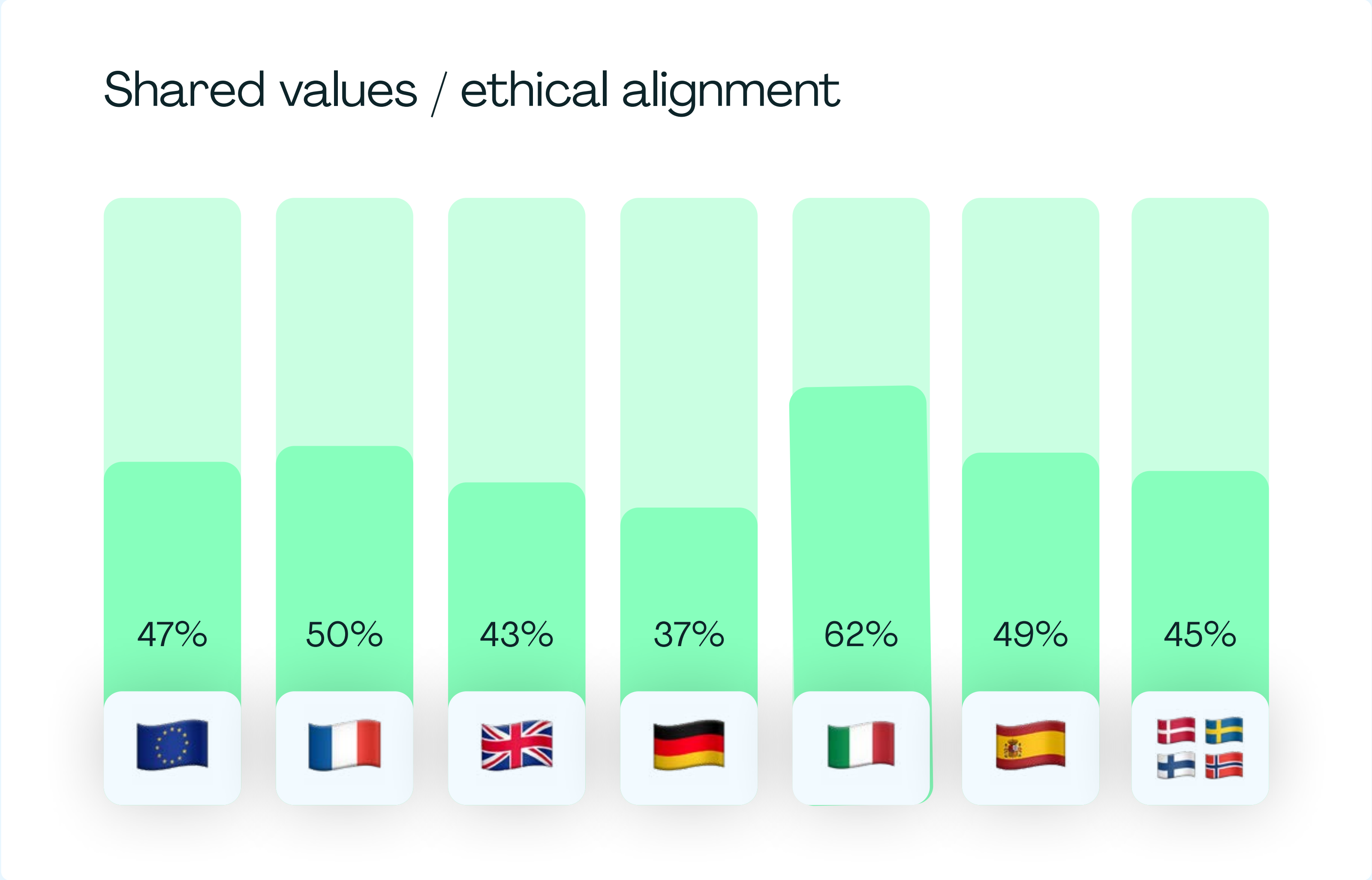


MORE THAN MONEY: WHAT MAKES A BRAND COLLABORATION WORTH IT

When choosing brand partners, creators look well beyond the paycheck.

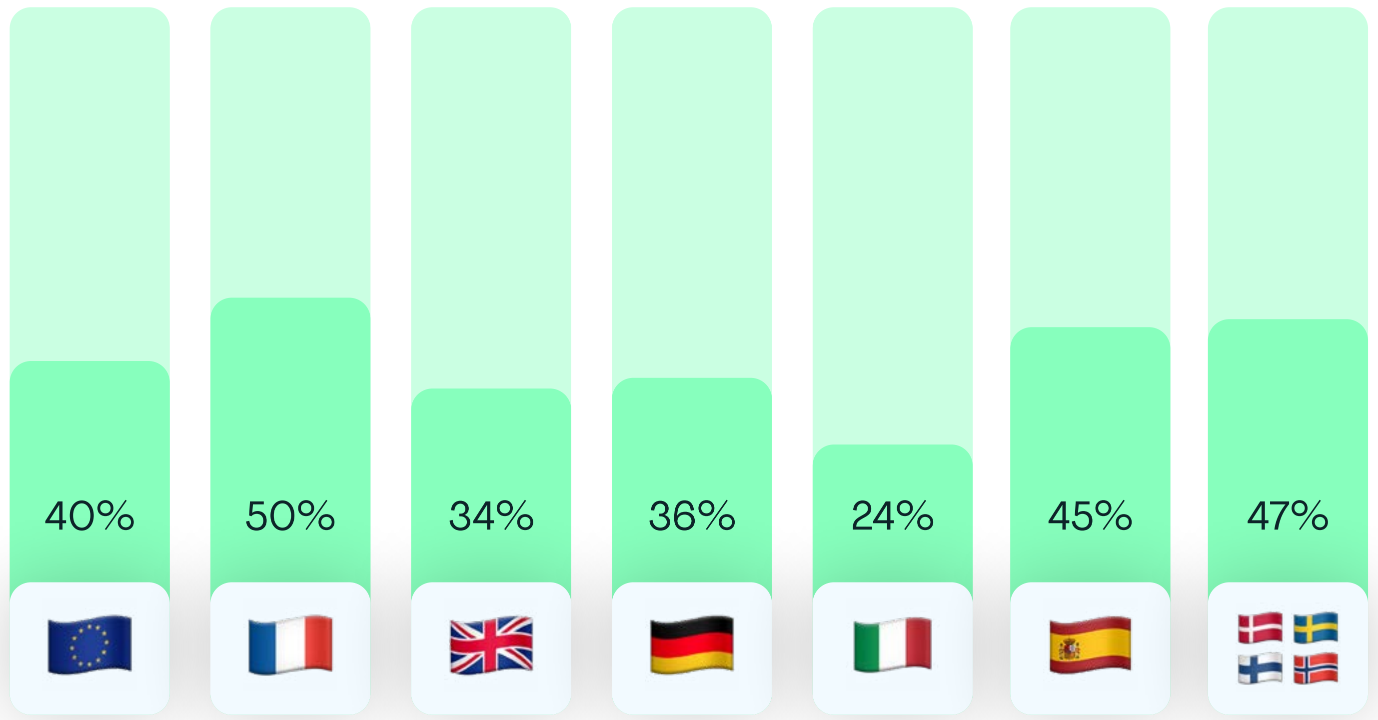
While compensation remains a top-three driver (44%), shared values and ethical alignment rank highest overall (47%) — especially in Italy (62%) and France (50%).



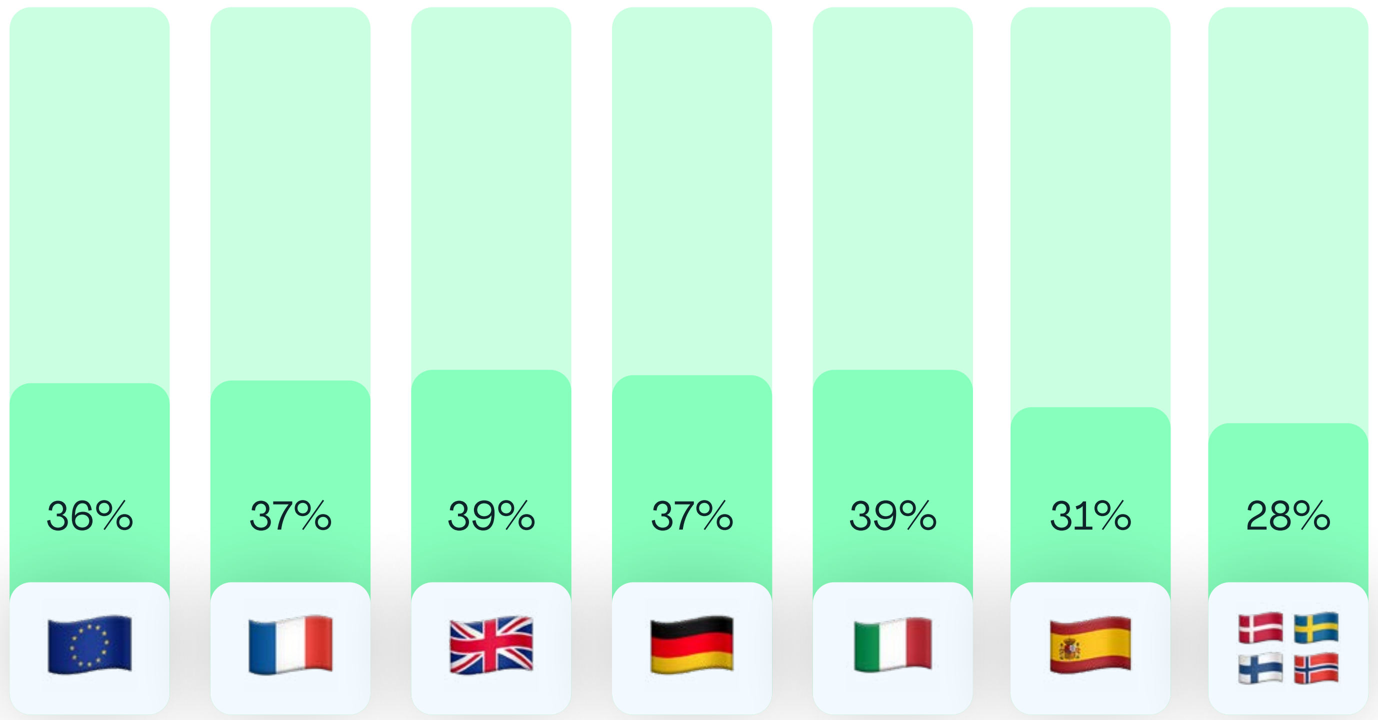


MORE THAN MONEY: WHAT MAKES A BRAND COLLABORATION WORTH IT

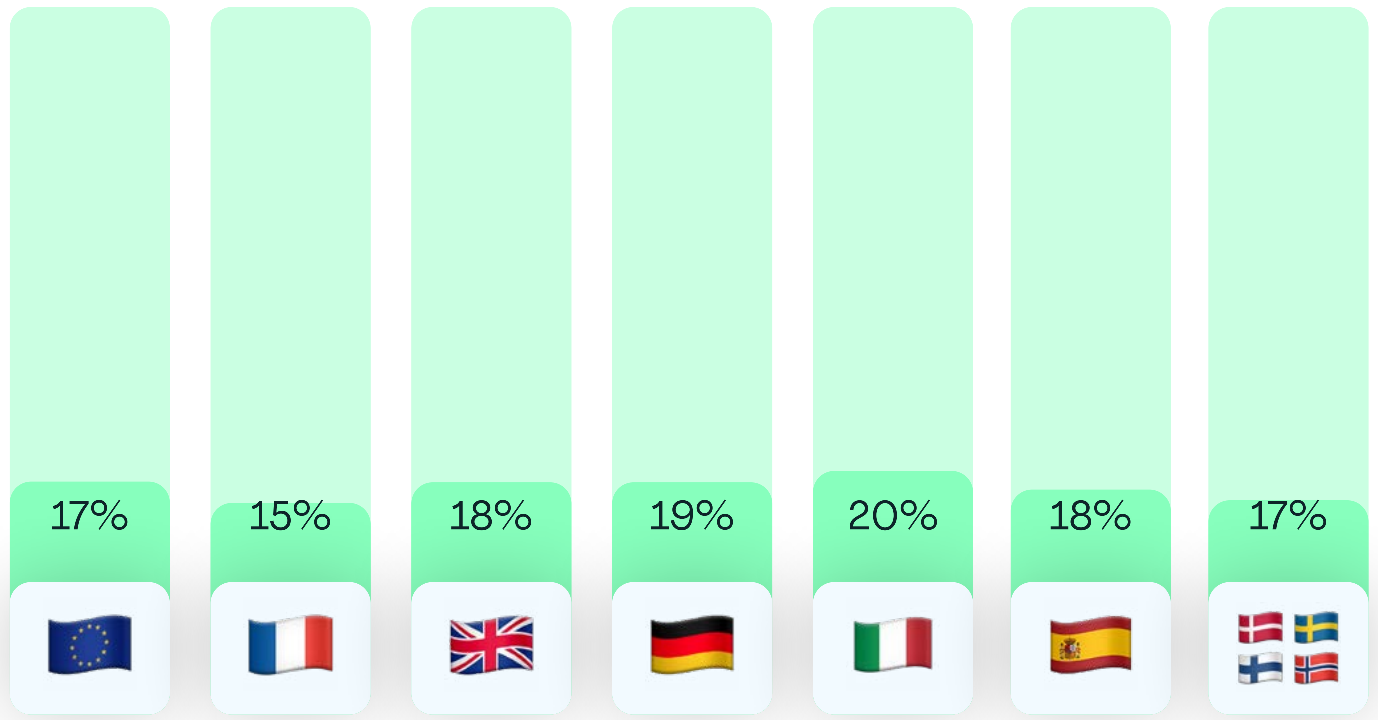
I like and have used the brand's products



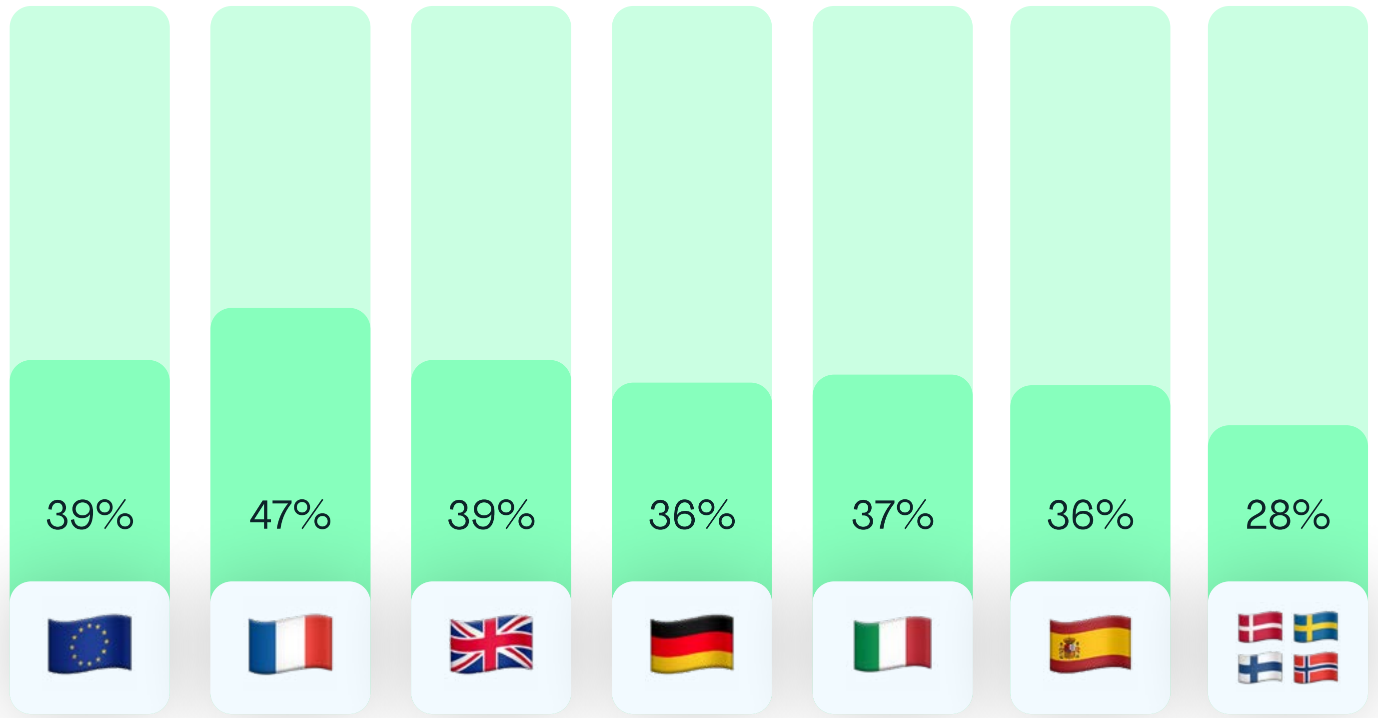
Creative freedom



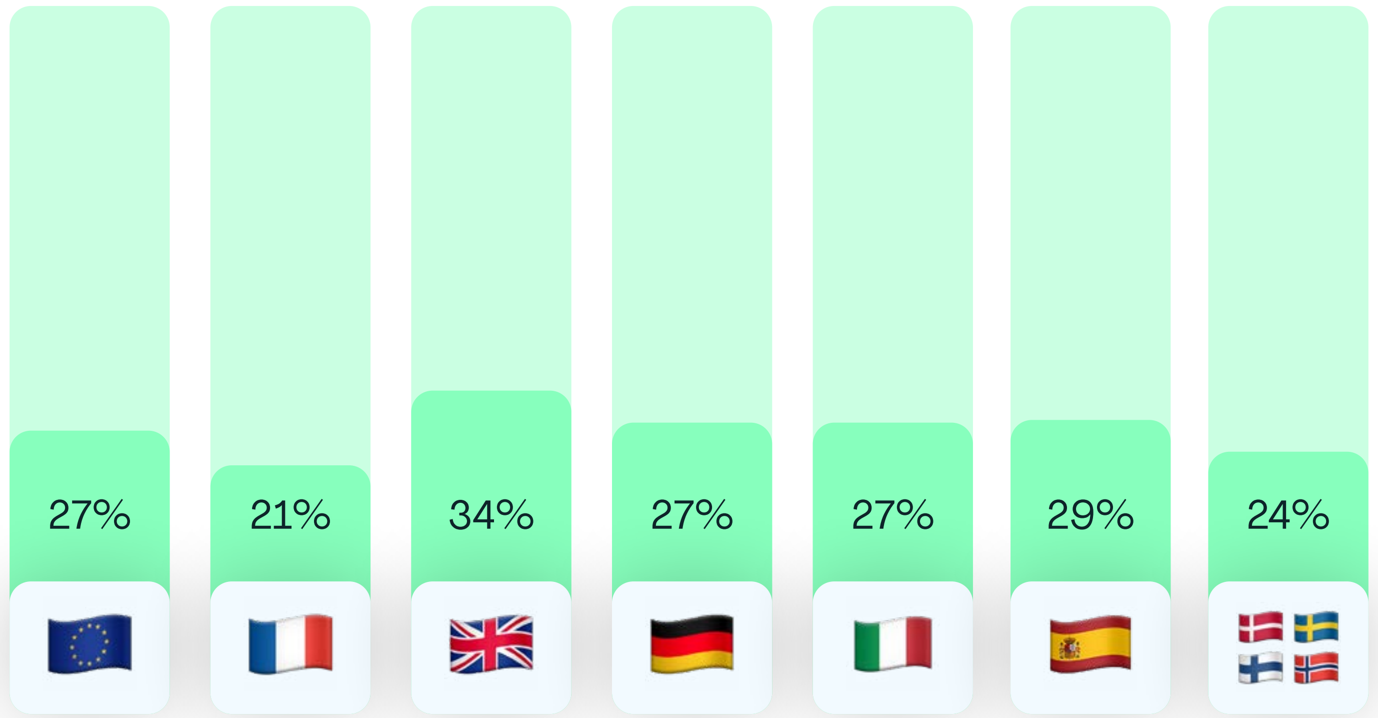
Brief clarity and collaboration



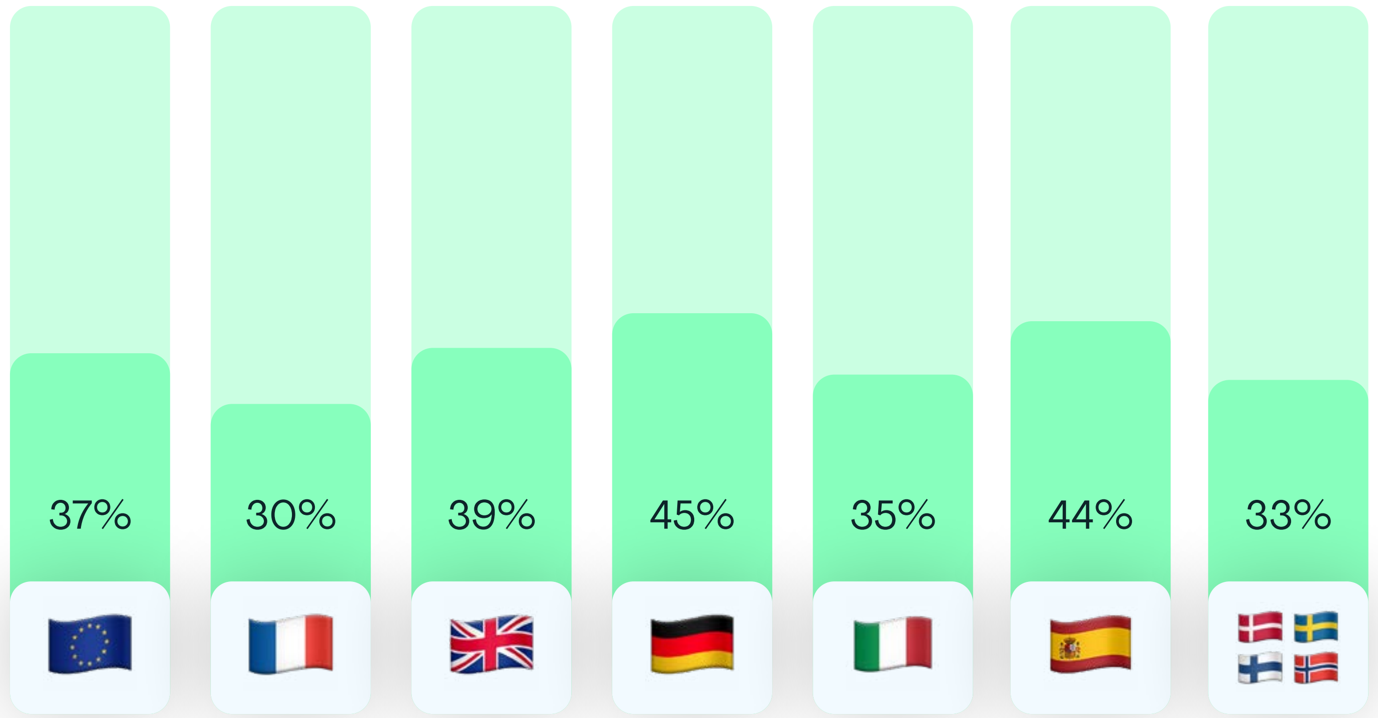
Audience interest



Potential for long-term brand partnership



Brand reputation

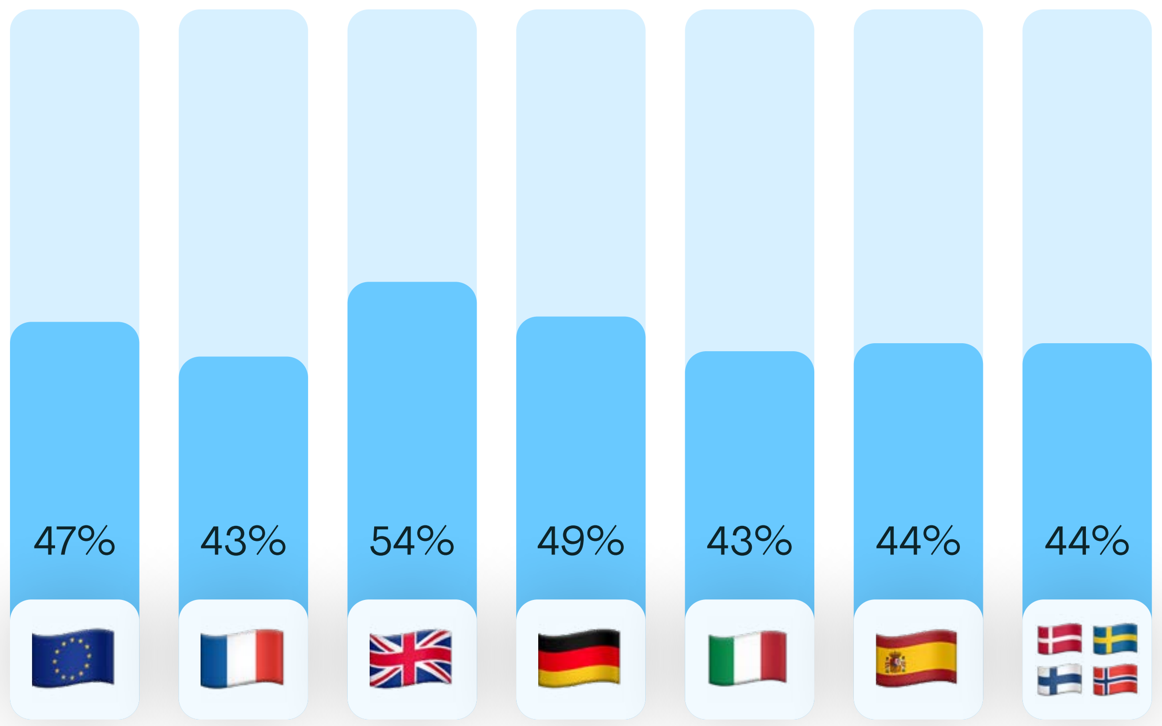


BEYOND THE BRIEF: WHAT CREATORS STAND FOR SHOWS UP IN WHAT THEY POST

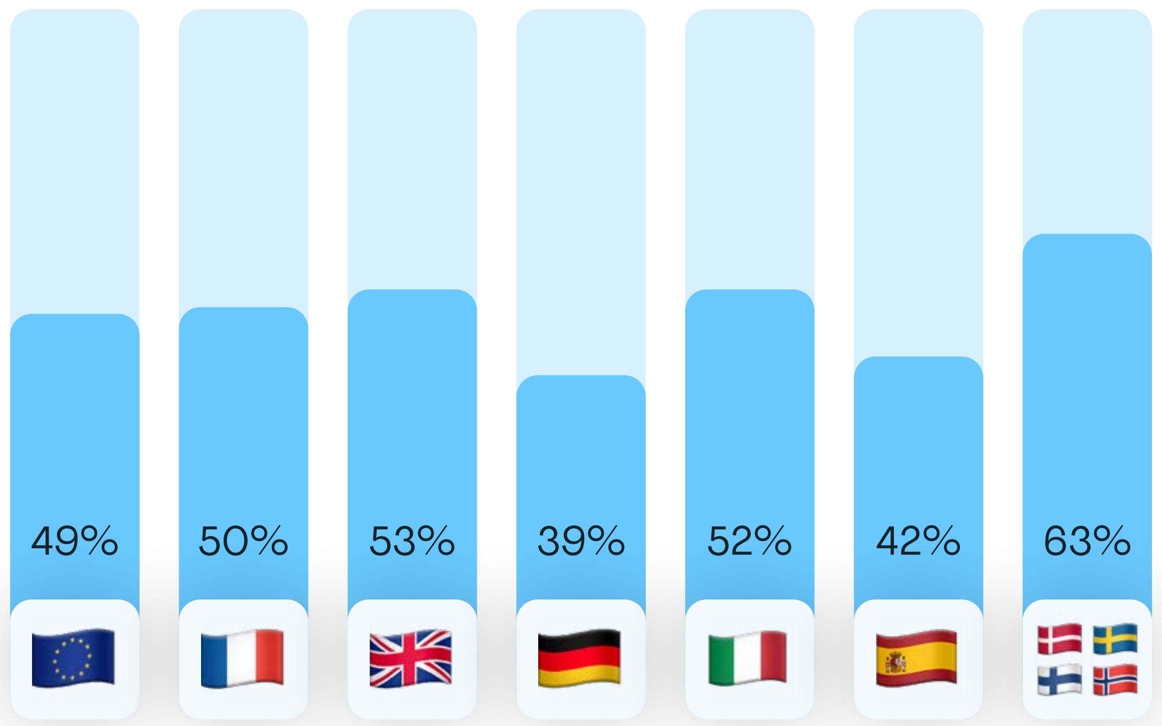
Just as creators choose brand partners based on values, they're also intentional about the messages they send through their content. Transparency around brand partnerships tops the list across all countries, giving a strong signal that creators see disclosure not as a regulation, but as a value.

Nearly half also say they actively promote sustainability (49%) and diversity and inclusion (47%). Mental health awareness is another topic that is gaining ground, especially in the UK.

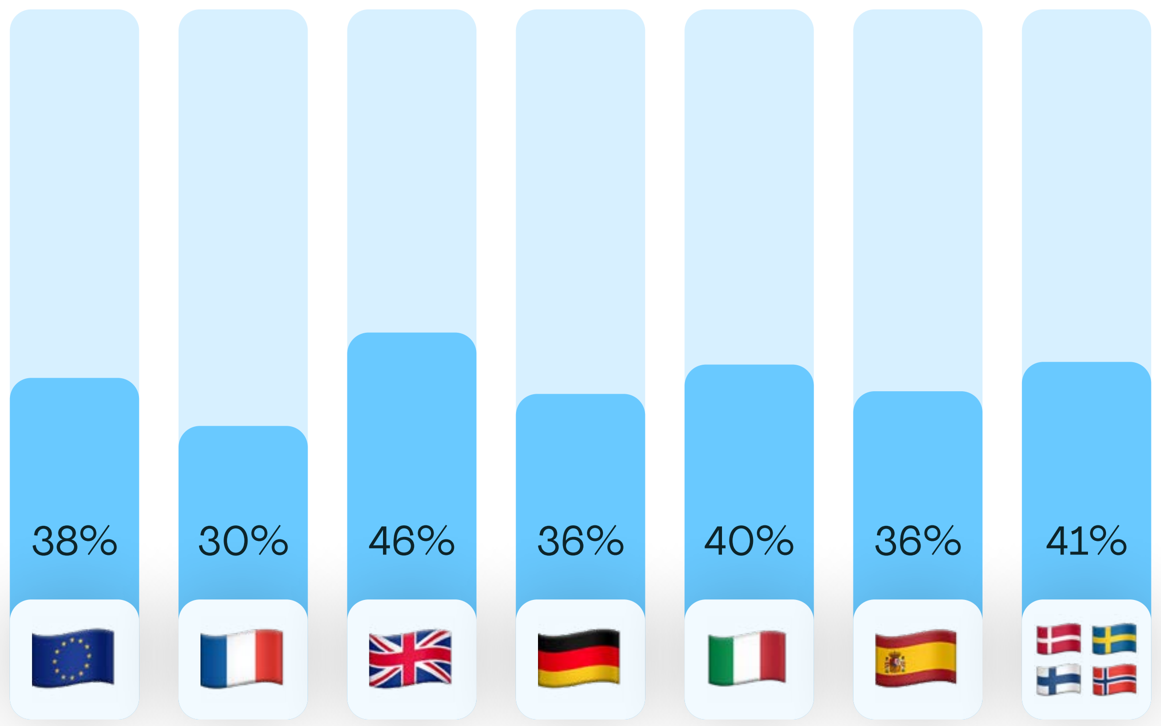
Diversity & inclusion



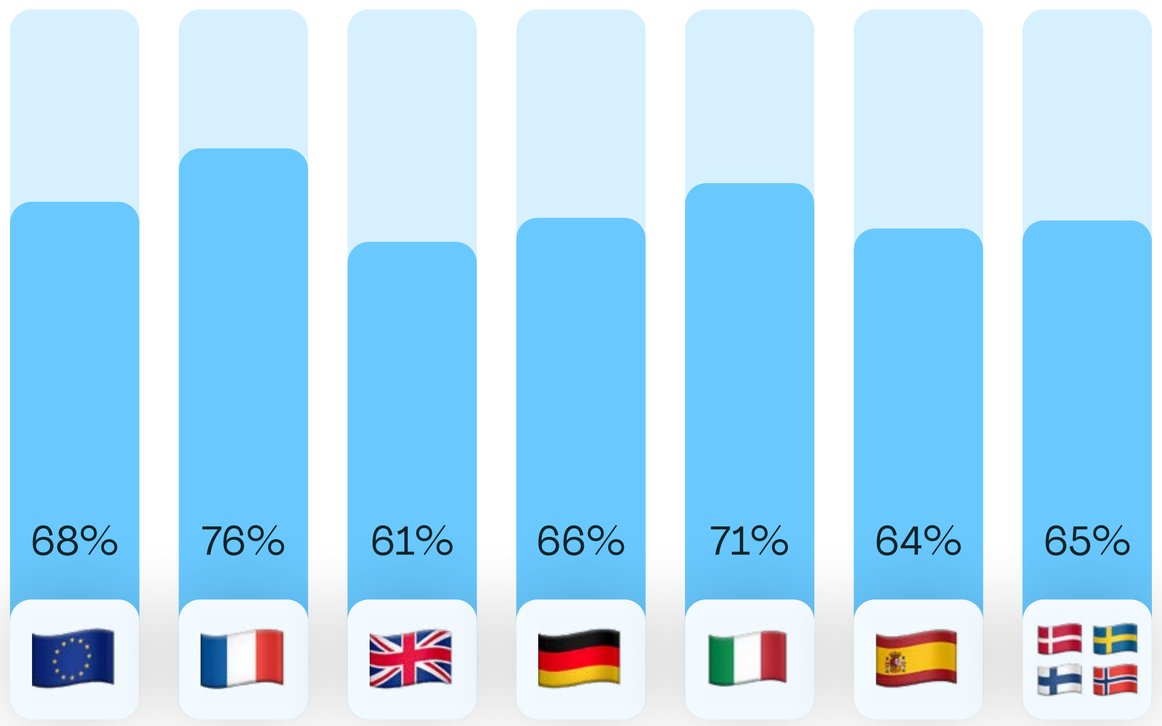
Sustainability / environment



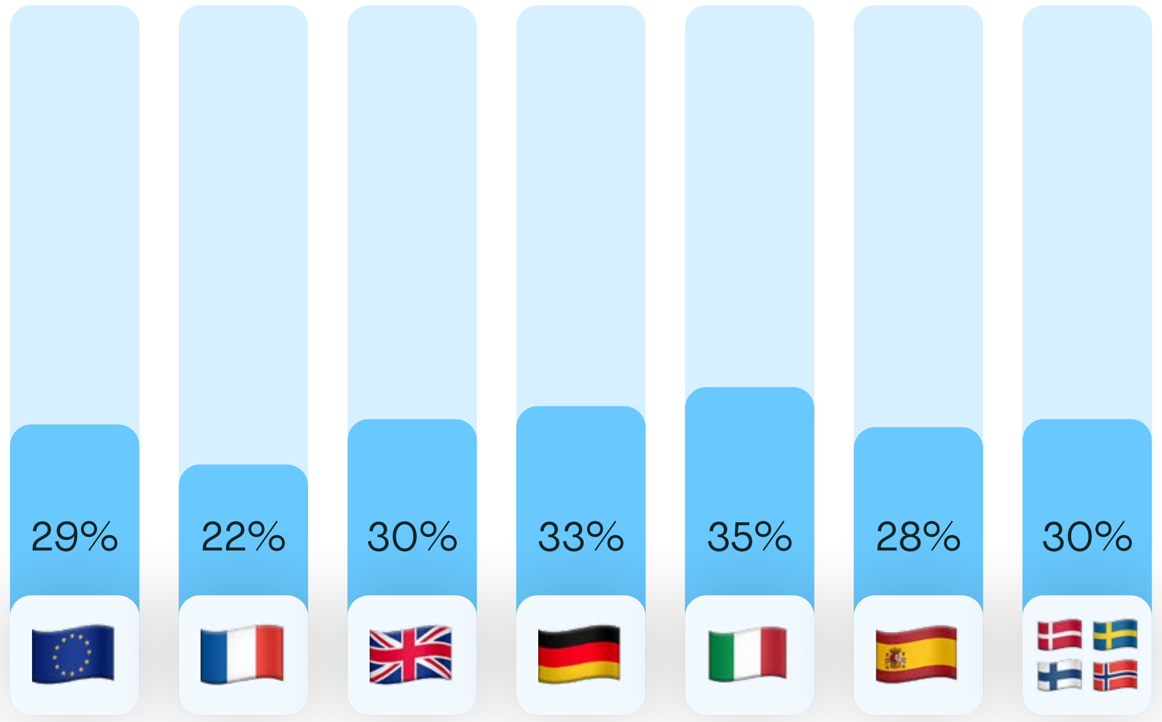
Mental health awareness



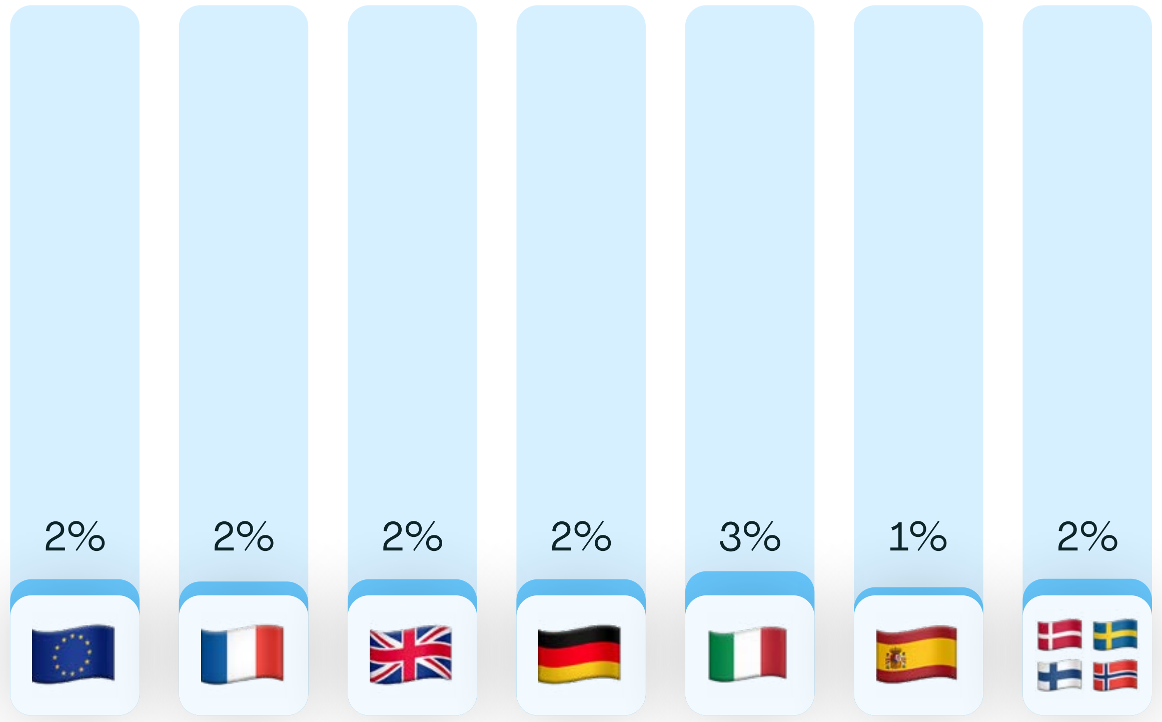
Transparency/clearly labelling brand partnerships



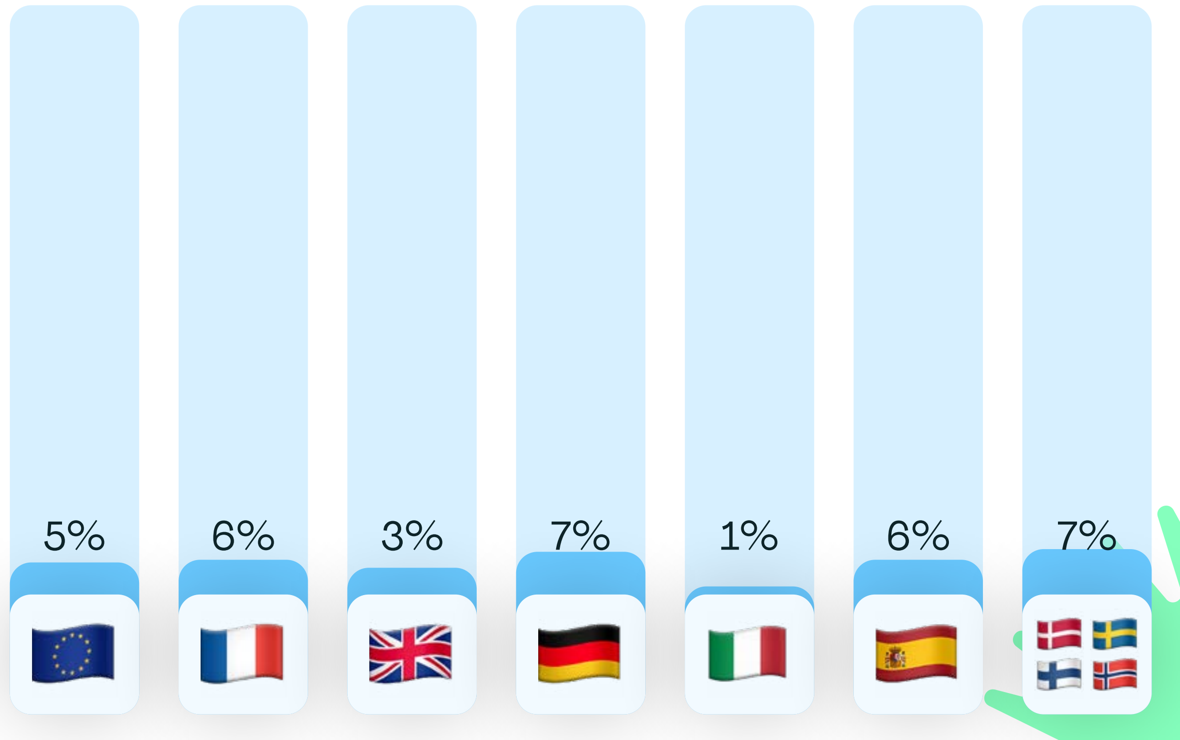
Social or political advocacy



Other

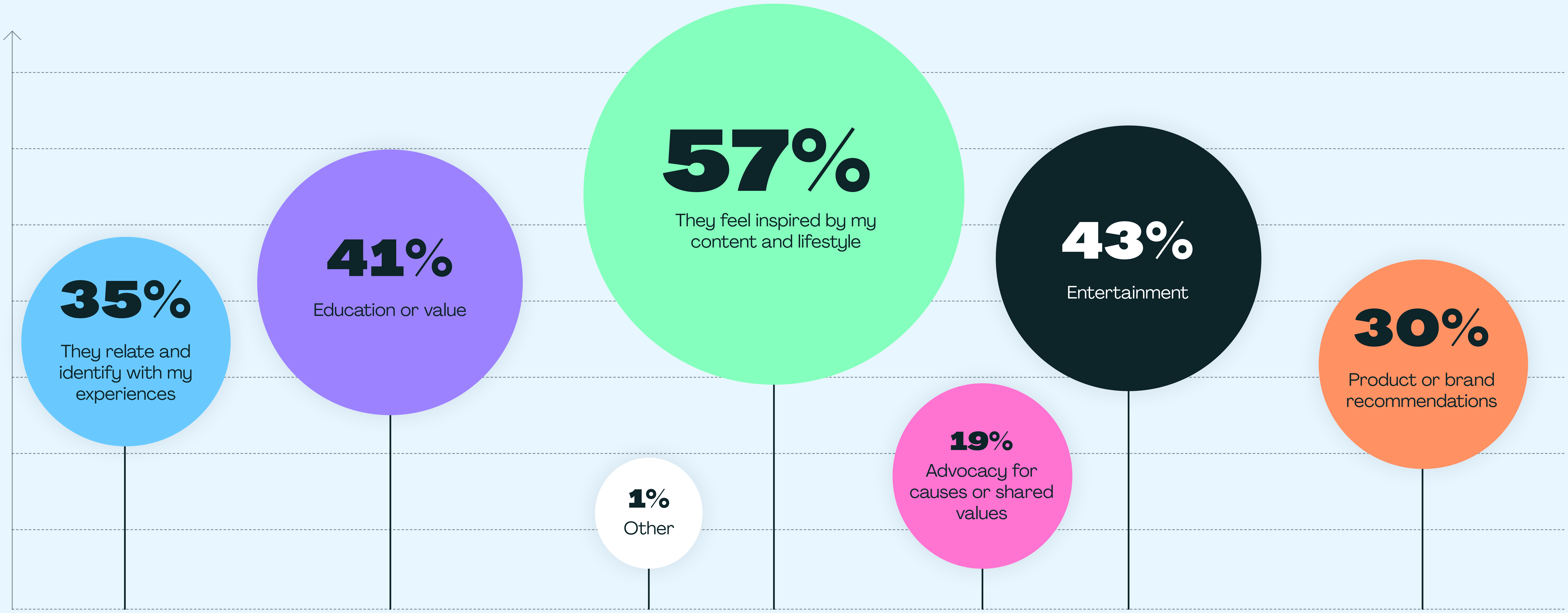


None of the above



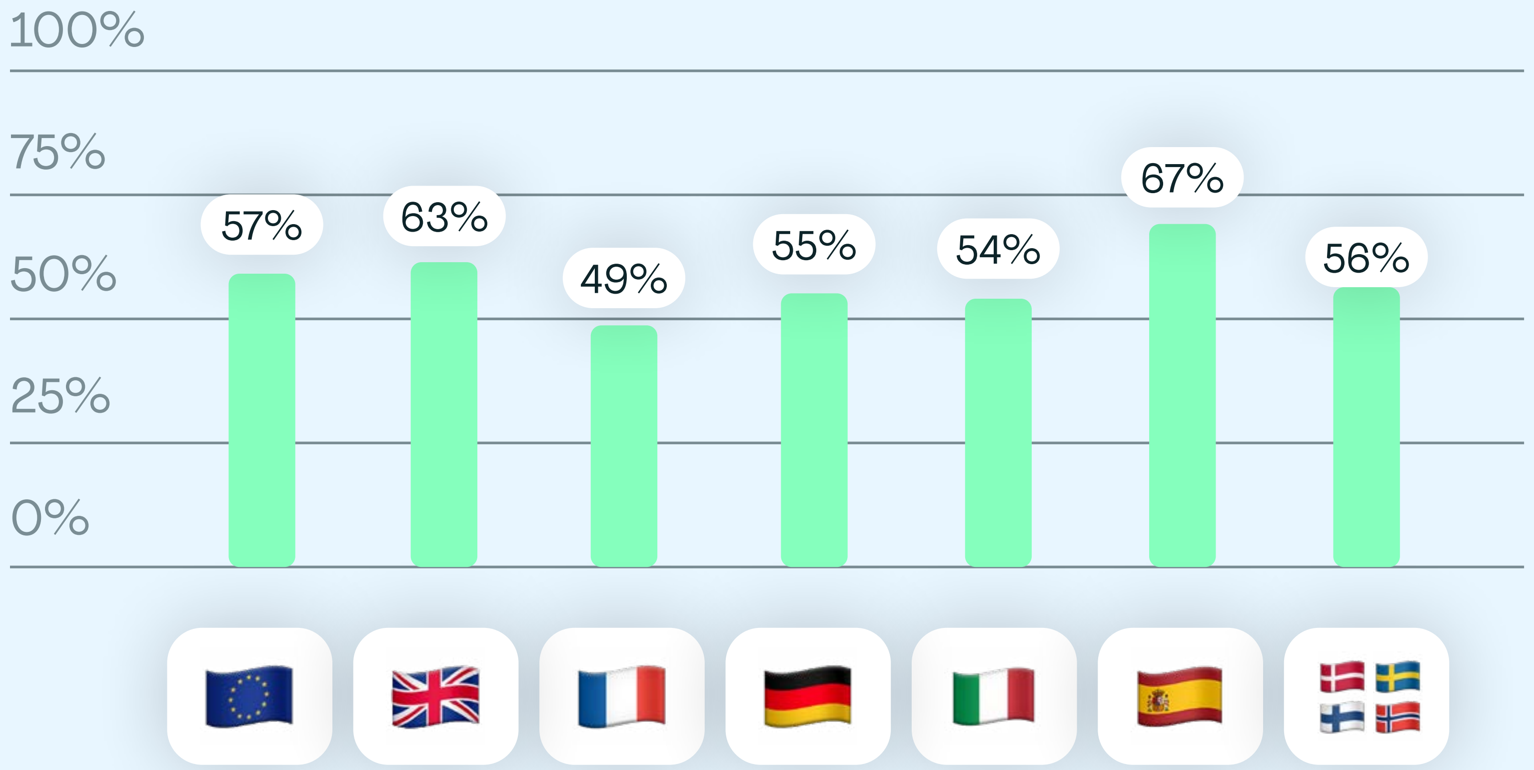
WHY DO FOLLOWERS STICK AROUND?

When we ask why creators believe their audiences engage with them, inspiration is the biggest draw, followed by education and entertainment. Relatability matters a lot too, with one in three creators saying their followers identify with their personal experiences.

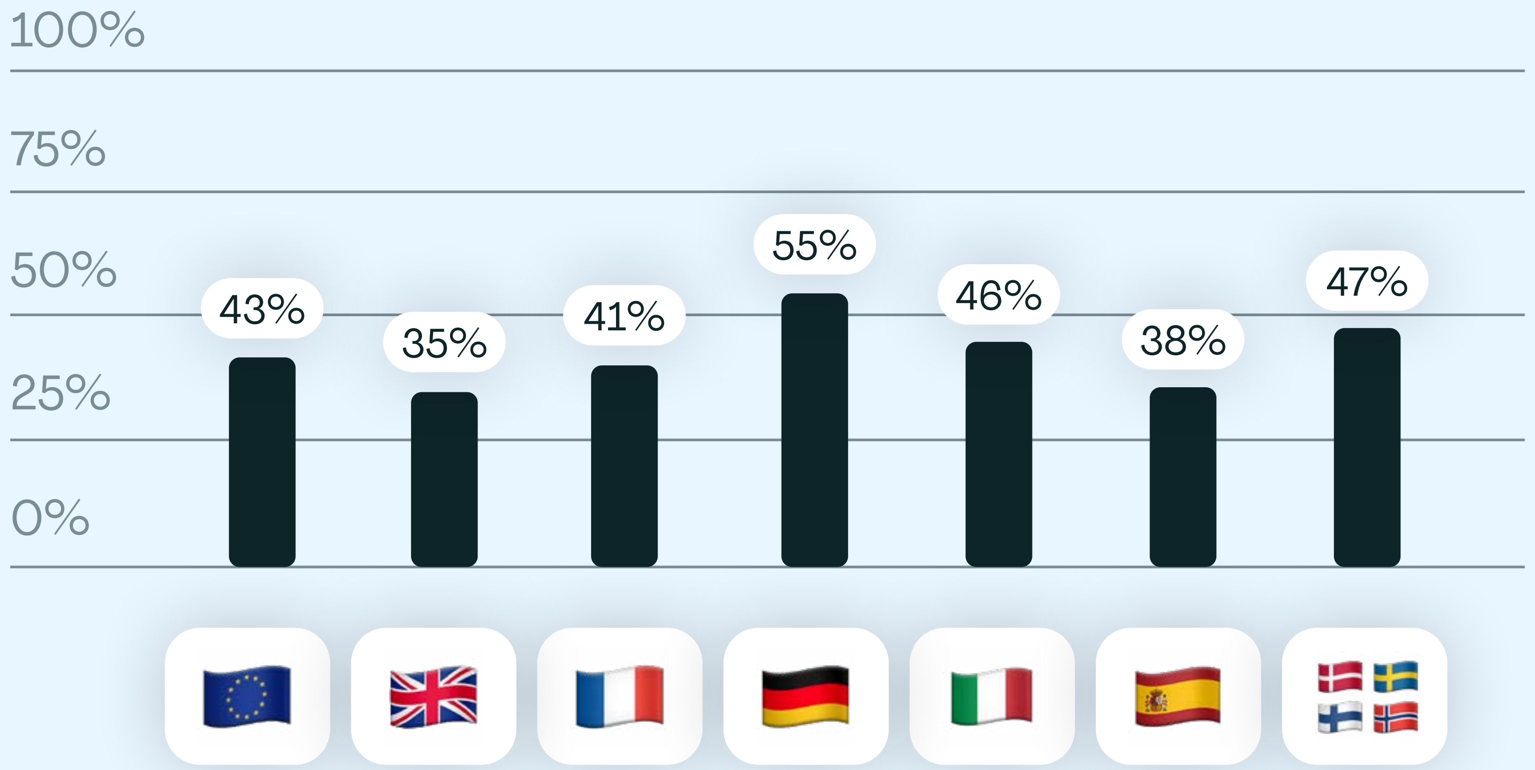


WHY DO FOLLOWERS STICK AROUND?

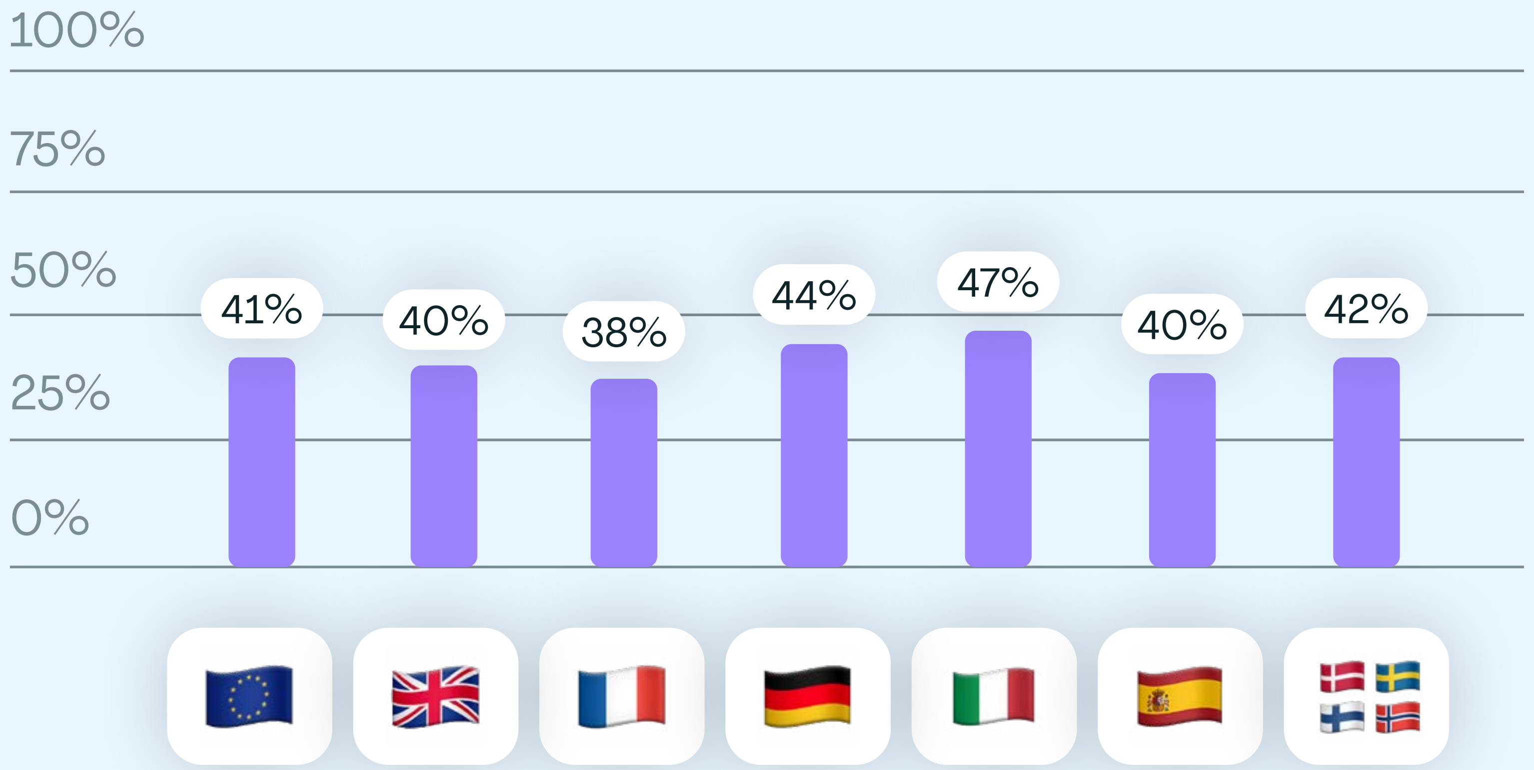
1 They feel inspired by my content and lifestyle



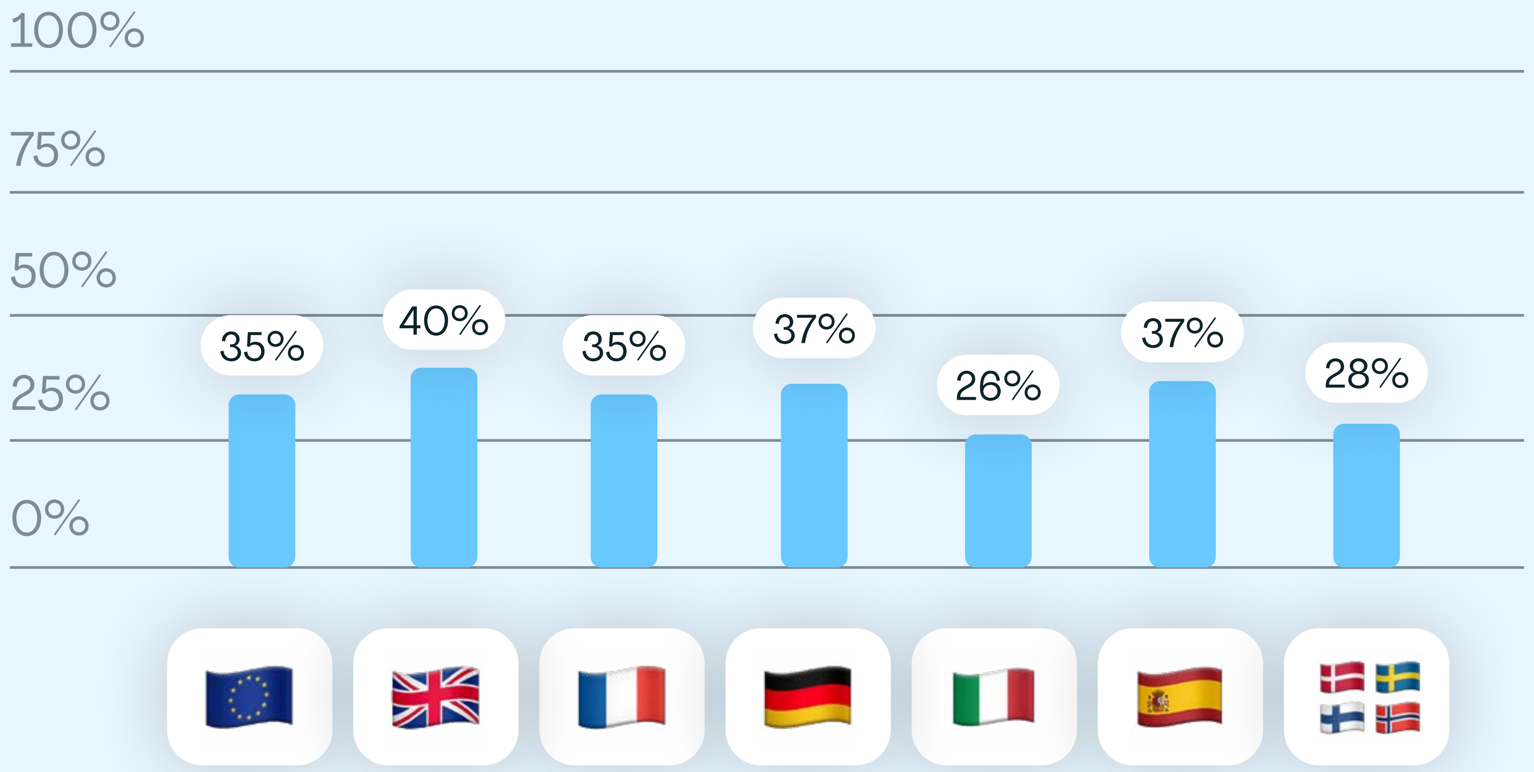
2 Entertainment



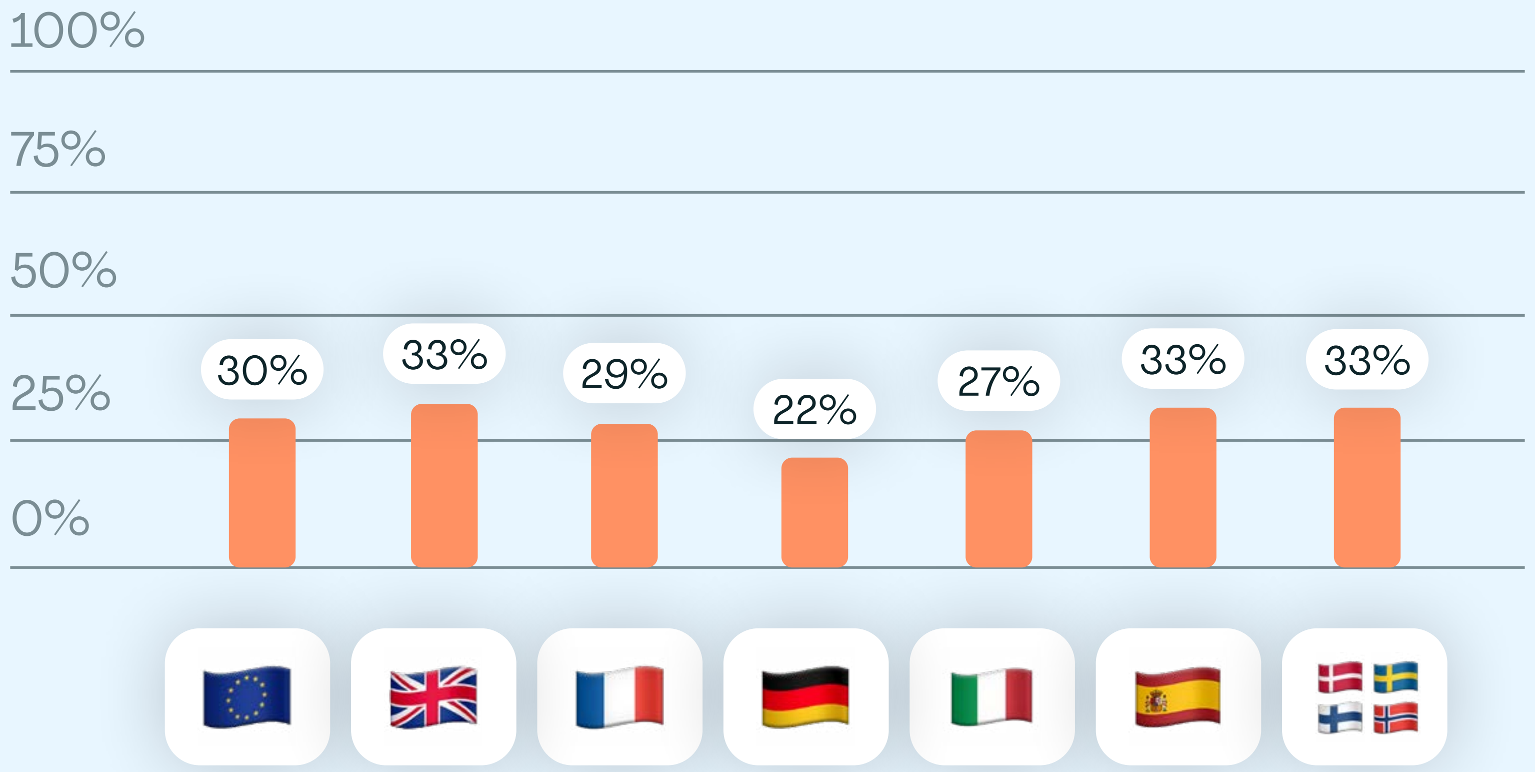
3 Education or value



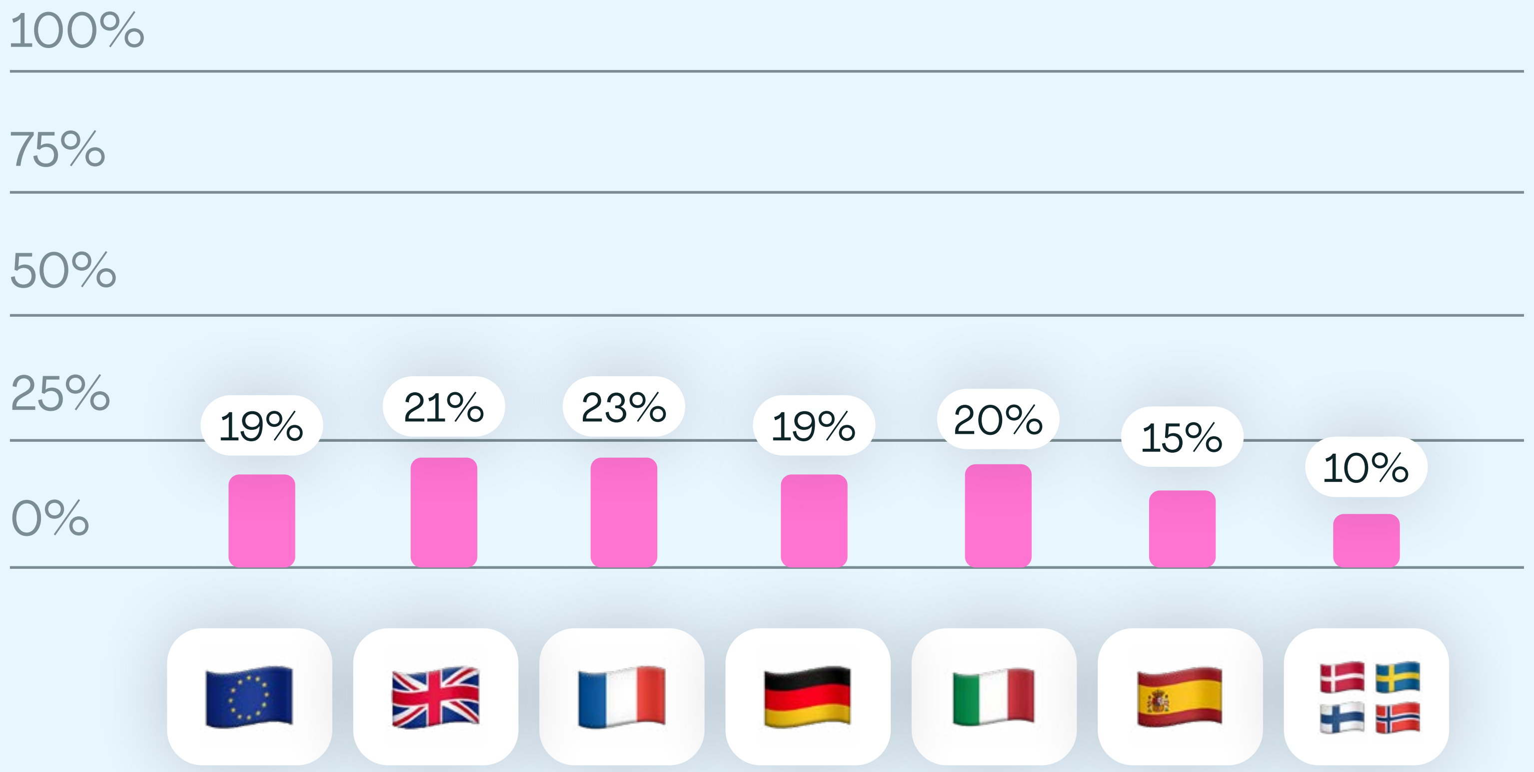
4 They relate and identify with my experiences



5 Product or brand recommendations



6 Advocacy for causes or shared values



5 BURNOUT, HUSTLE AND PREJUDICE: LIFE BEHIND THE CONTENT

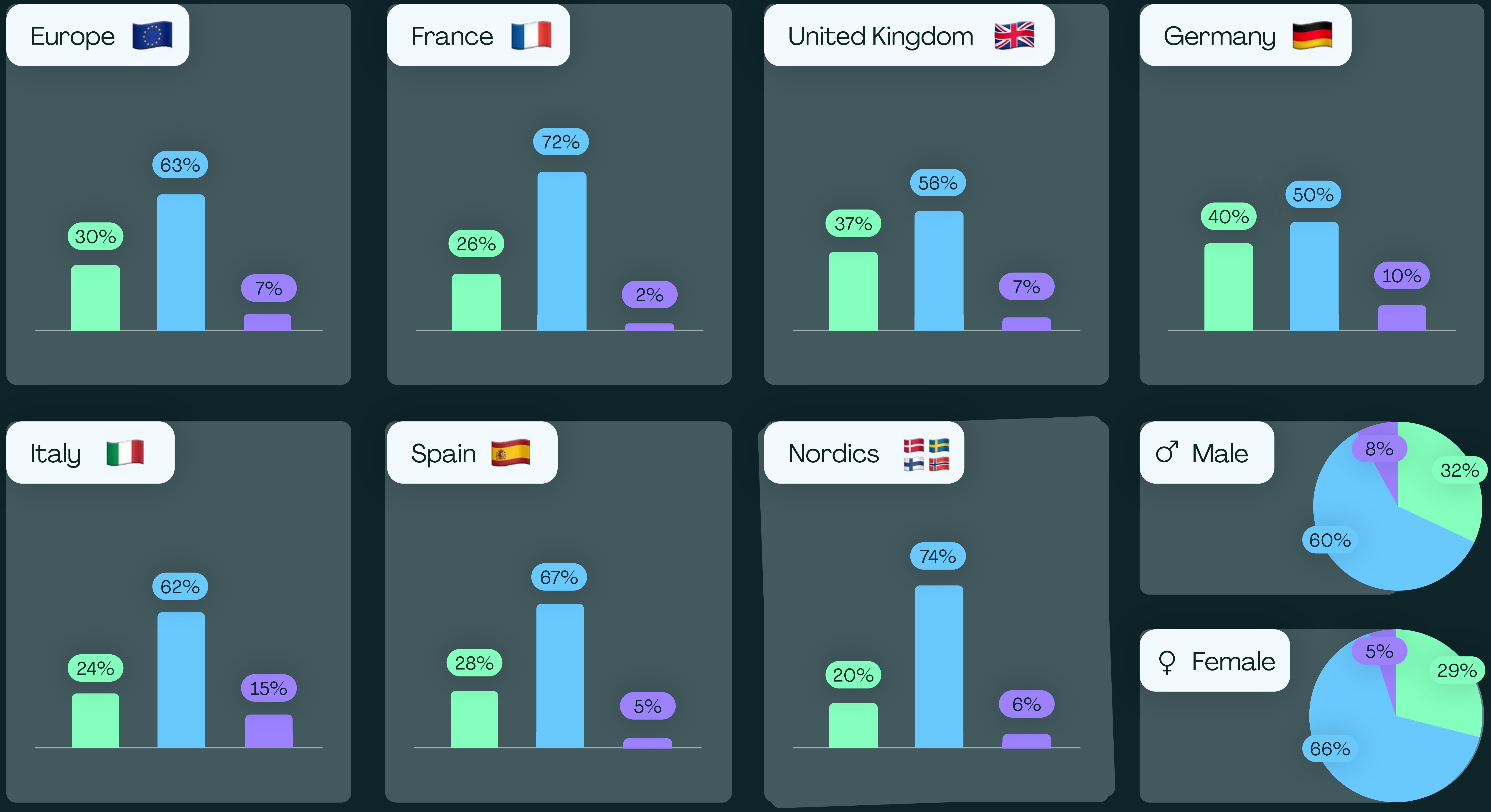
Behind the curated posts and polished videos, many creators face a complex set of pressures — from unrealistic brand expectations to unclear briefs, late payments, and persistent copyright concerns.

ONE IN THREE CREATORS FACE NEGATIVITY

While just under one third say they've been the target of online harassment, the emotional and professional toll of constant performance is real. In an industry based on visibility, systemic issues, mental strain, and inequalities shape many creators' day-to-day reality — bringing food for thought when considering the industry's path forward

Have you ever been the target of online harassment or negative behaviour as a creator?

Yes | No | Prefer not to say



TROLLING COMES FOR EVERYONE — BUT WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF BODY SHAMING AND GENDERED DIGS

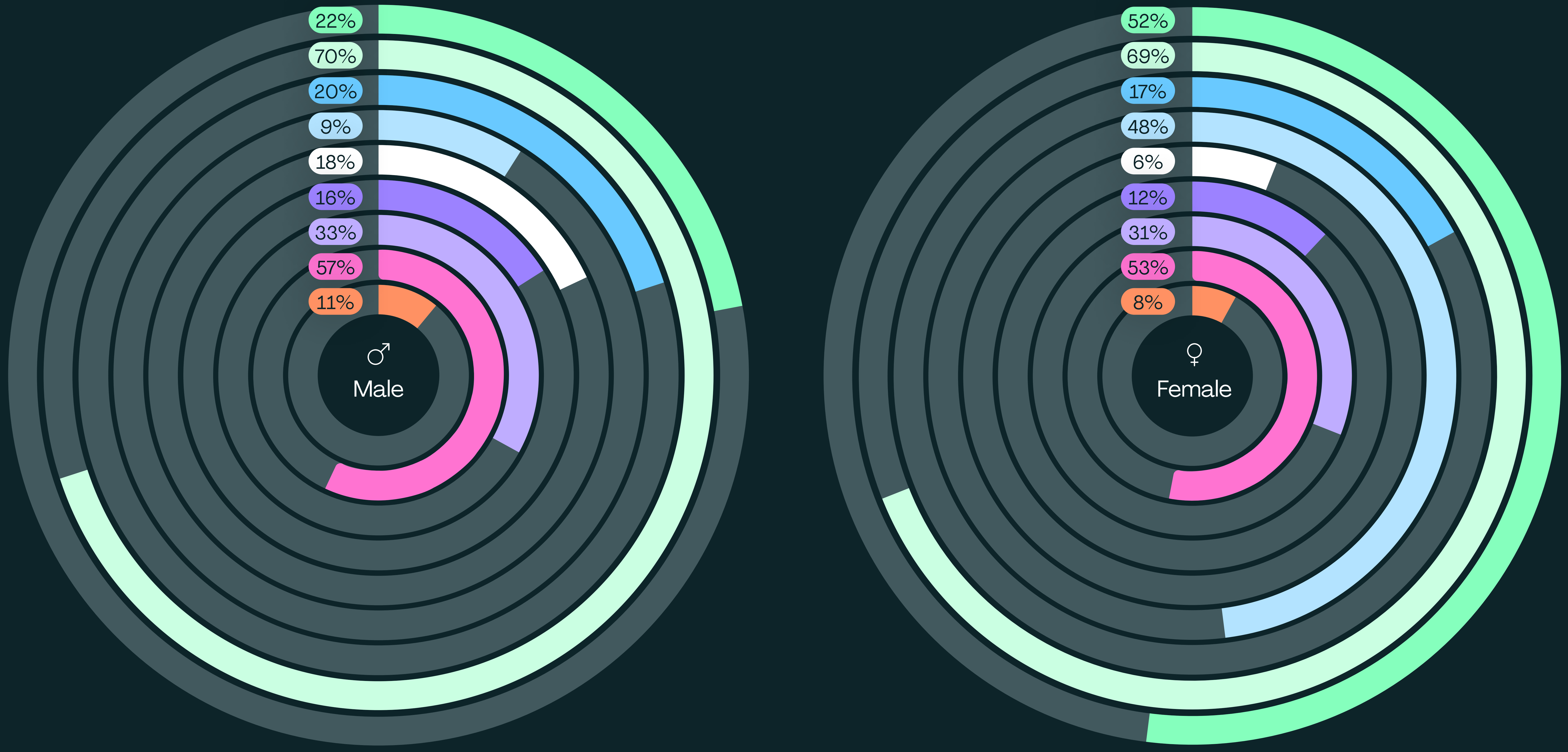
Of those who have experienced negative online behaviour, women are more likely to be subject to sex and gender-based comments (48%), and body shaming (52%).

Men on the other hand are more often the target of homophobic comments (18%). Trolling and personal insults, meanwhile, is a common experience for both men (70%) and women (69%).

- Body shaming
- Trolling or personal insults
- Criticism or hate related to race or ethnicity
- Sexist or gender-based comments
- Homophobic or transphobic remarks
- Criticism or hate based on religion or beliefs
- Criticism on brand choices for collaborations
- Negative comments about your content niche or creative style
- Threats or doxxing (making public your personal details)

> "I started on TikTok and got 30,000 followers pretty quickly... But I don't like the atmosphere there at all. People are more aggressive, I've been insulted. I don't want to put up with that. So I stopped completely."

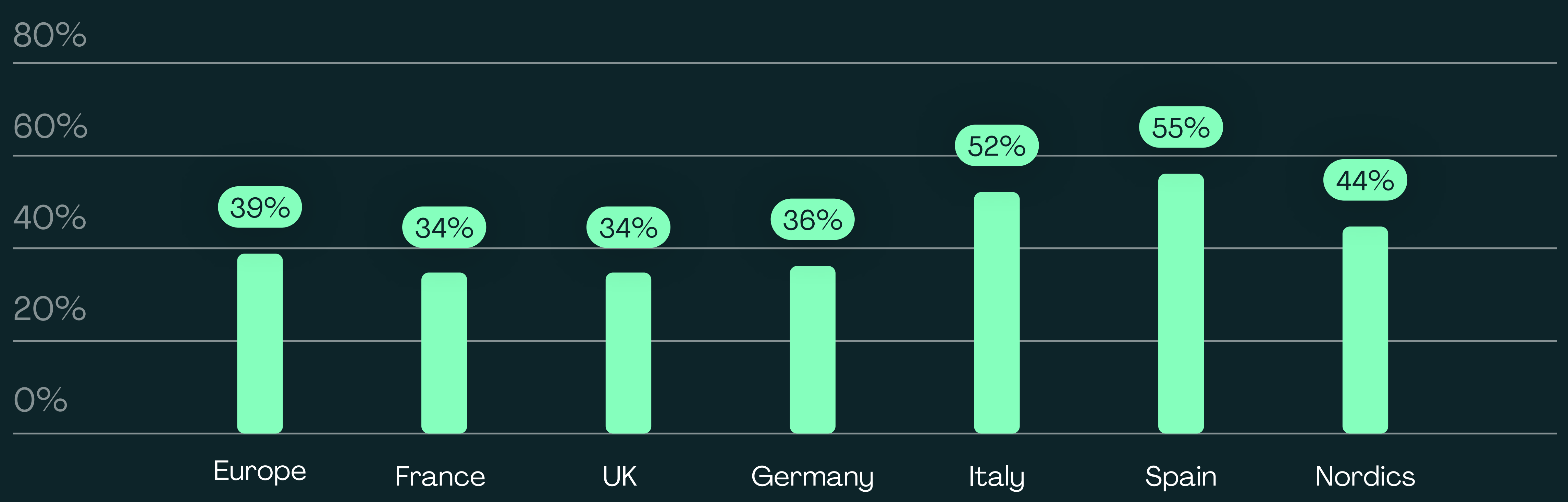
@amanda.saurin, 48.7K Instagram, 183K YouTube



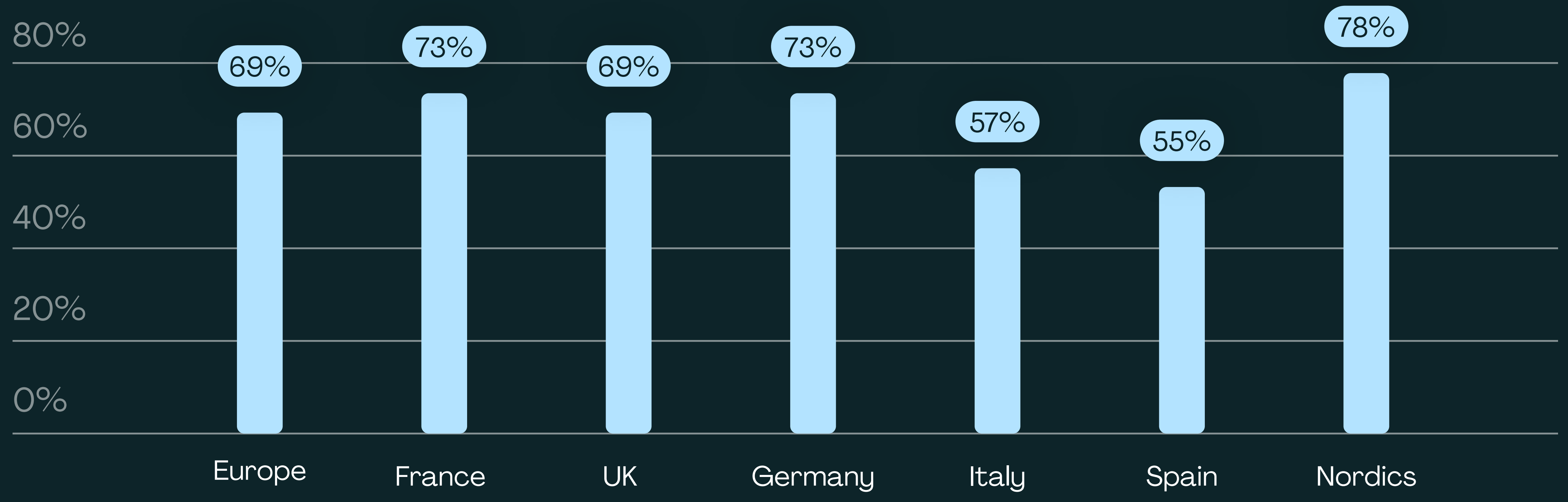
kolsquare

TROLLING COMES FOR EVERYONE — BUT WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF BODY SHAMING AND GENDERED DIGS

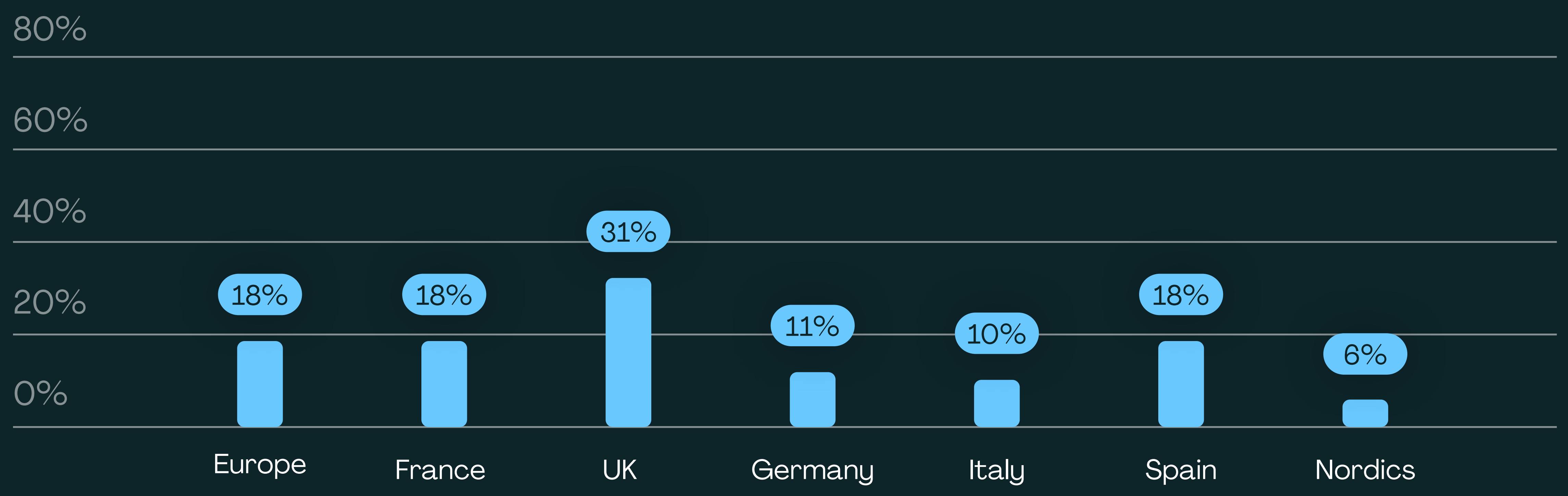
Body shaming



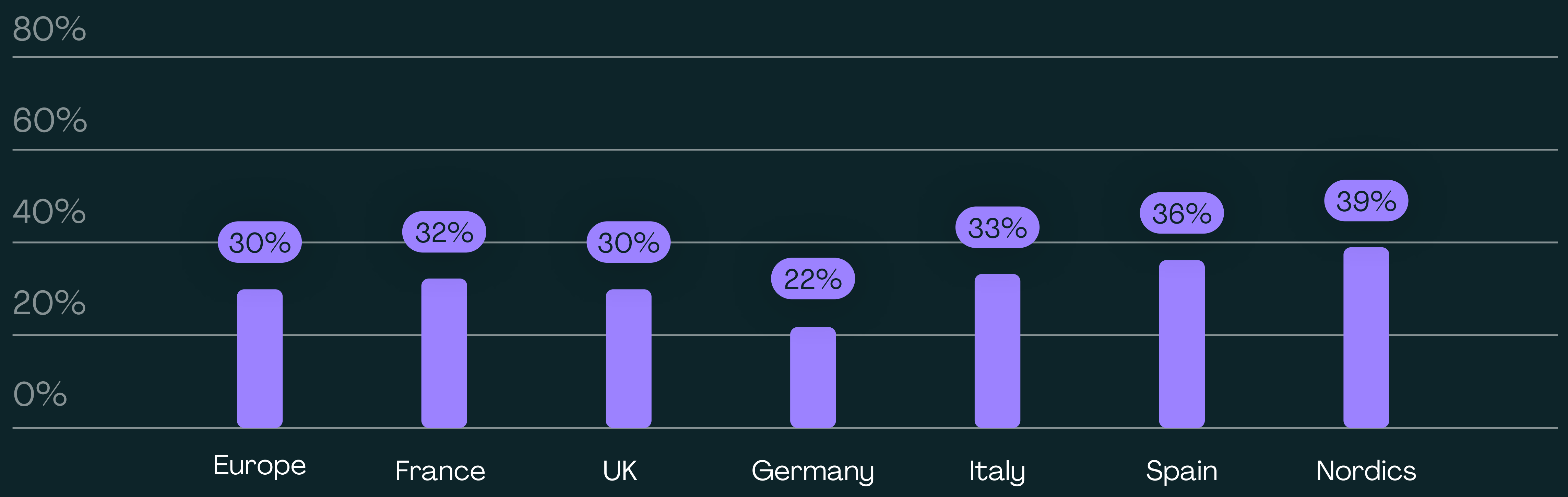
Trolling or personal insults



Criticism or hate related to race or ethnicity

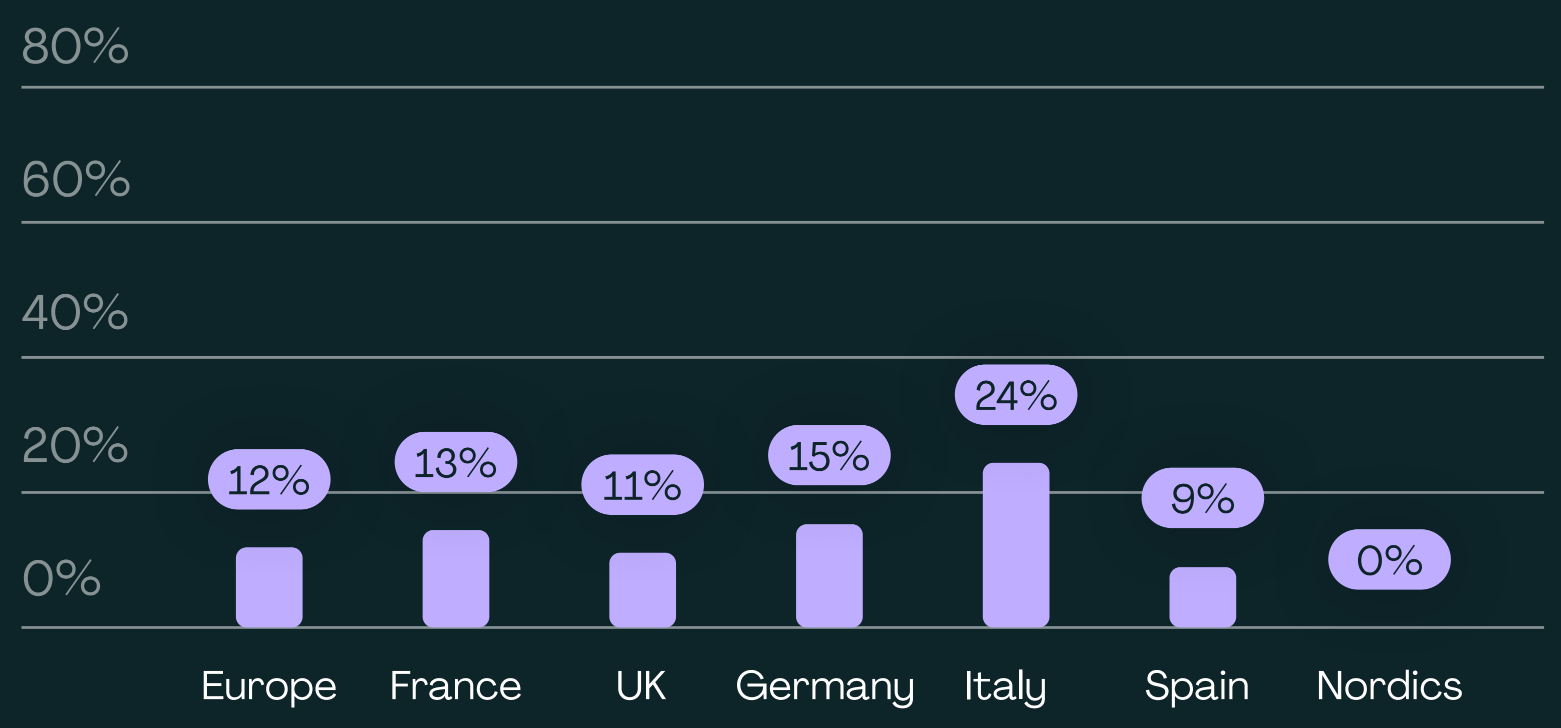


Sexist or gender-based comments

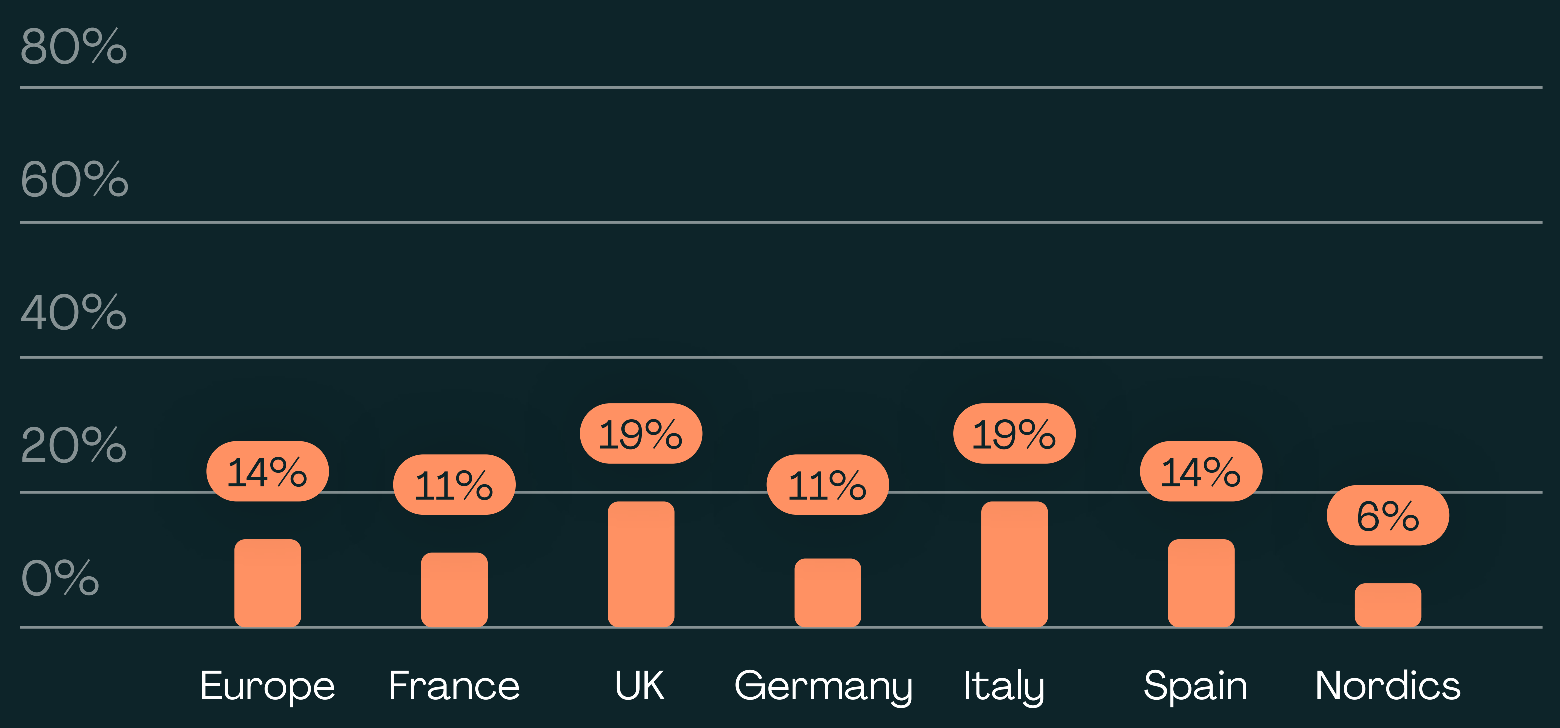


TROLLING COMES FOR EVERYONE — BUT WOMEN BEAR THE BRUNT OF BODY SHAMING AND GENDERED DIGS

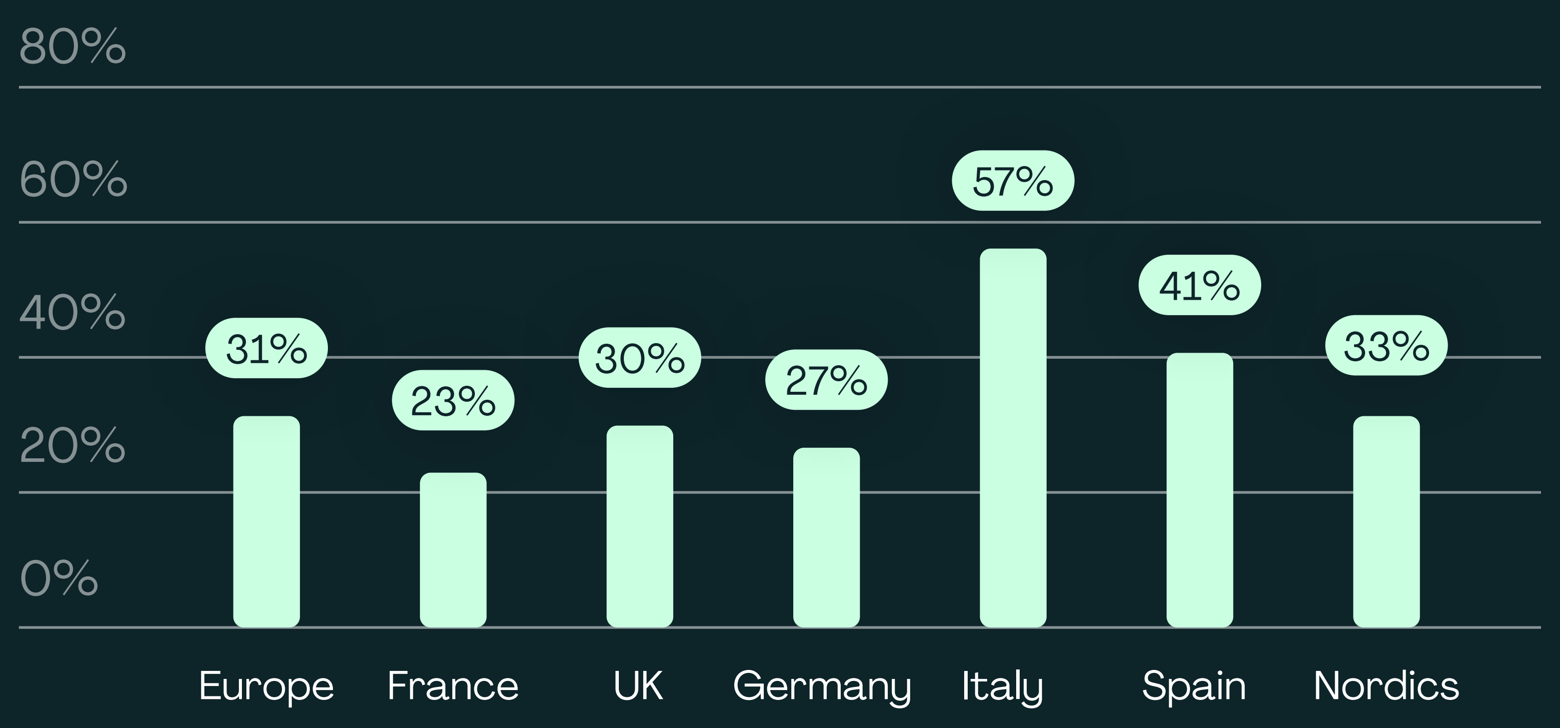
Homophobic or transphobic remarks



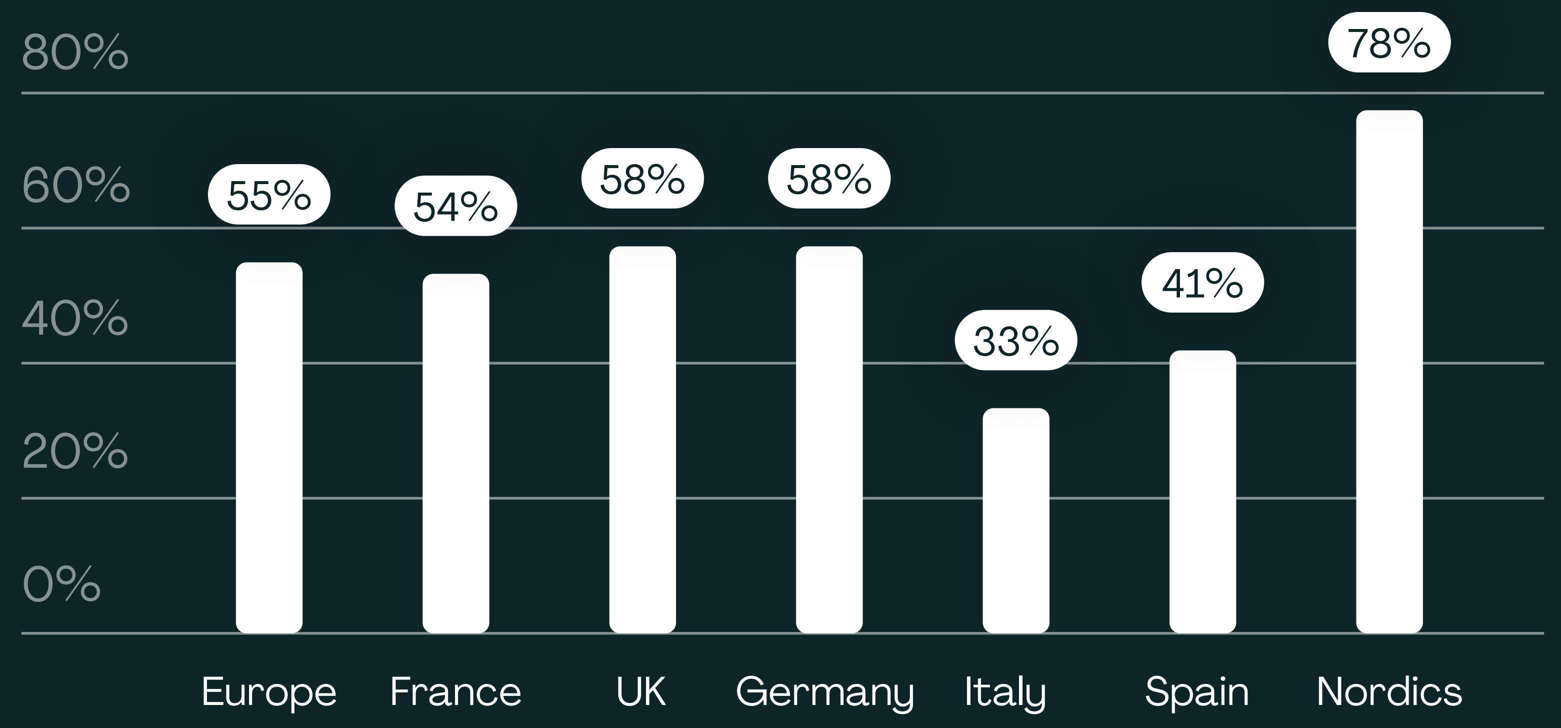
Criticism or hate based on religion or beliefs



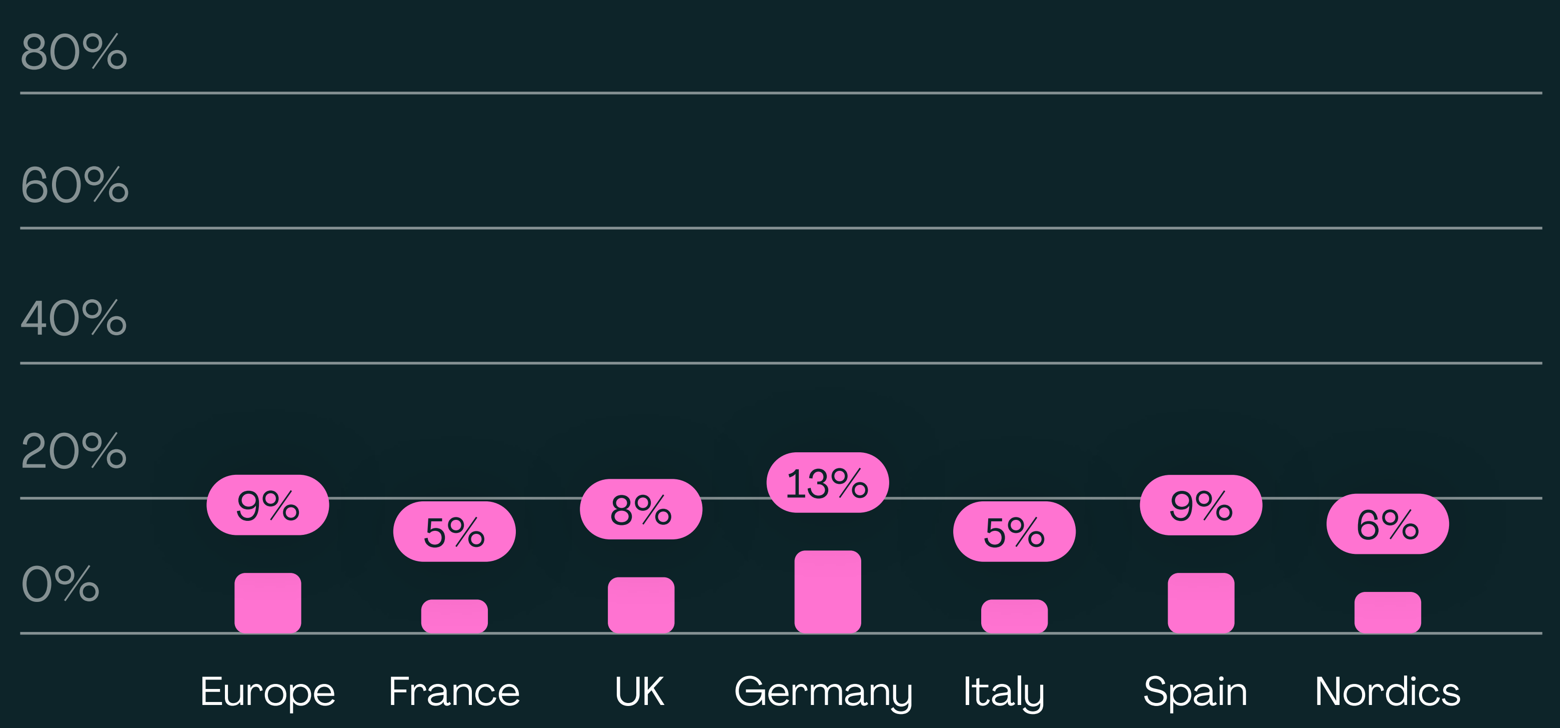
Criticism on brand choices for collaborations



Negative comments about your content niche or creative style



Threats or doxxing (making public your personal details)

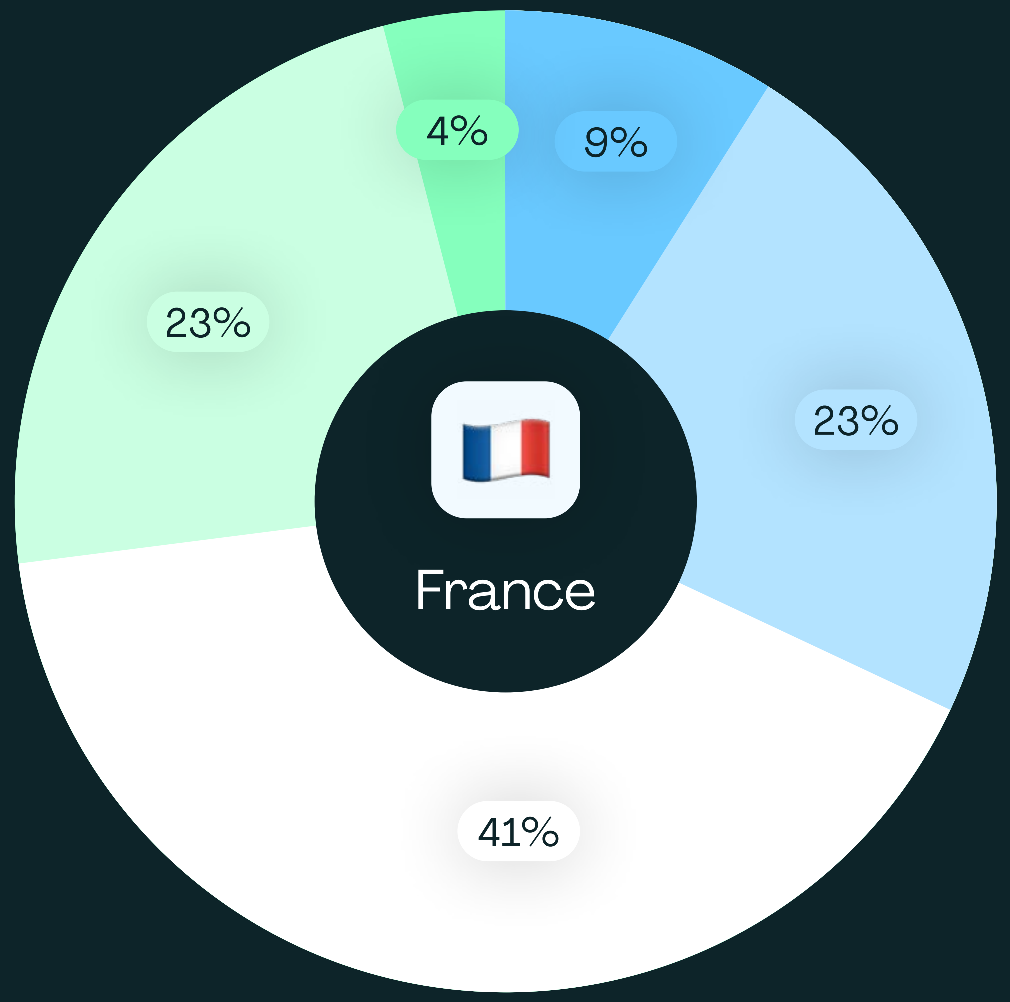


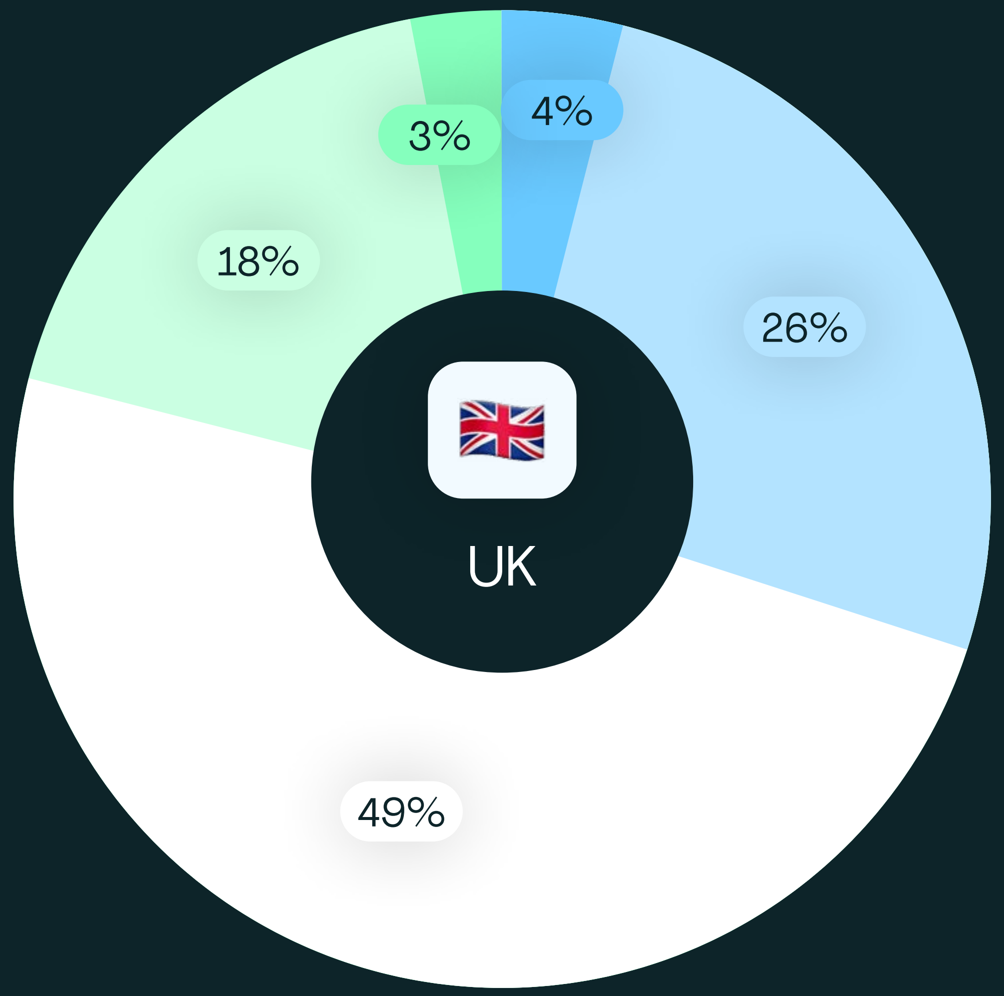
ALWAYS ON: HOW STRESSED ARE CREATORS?

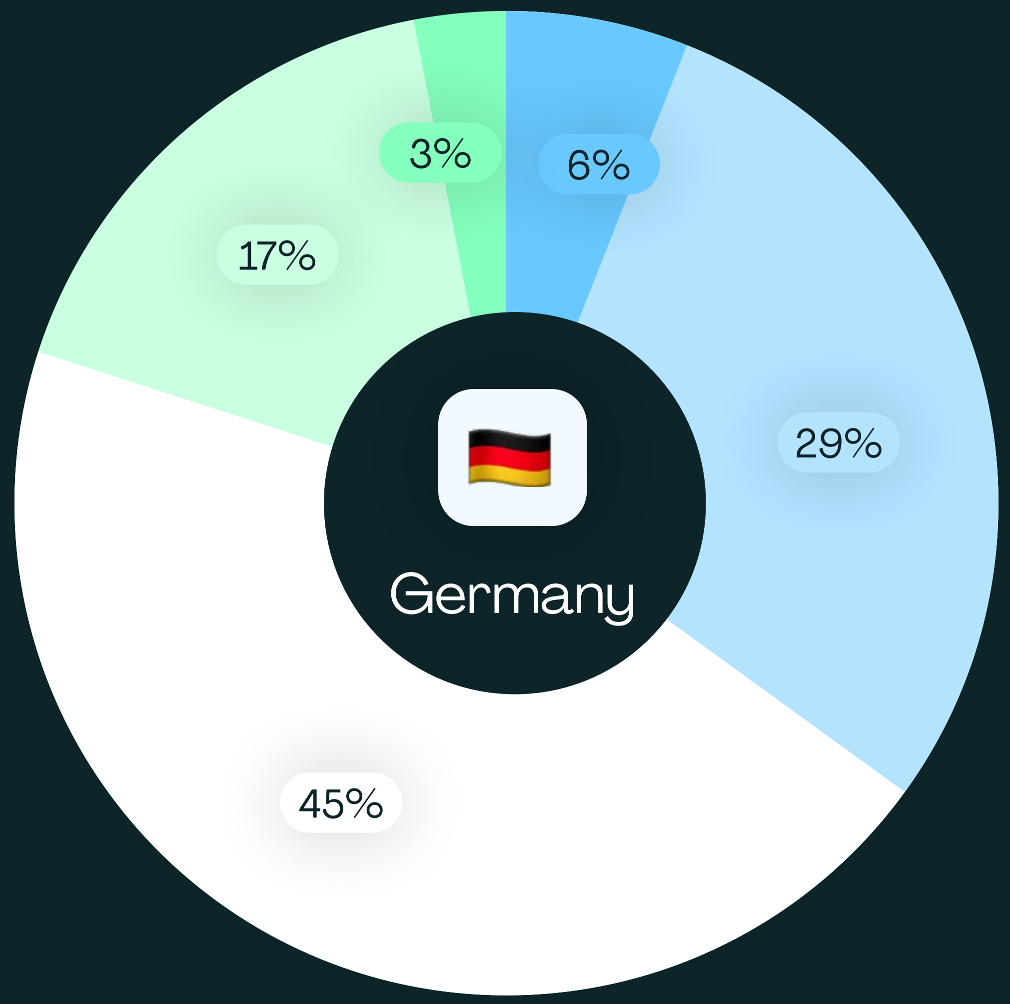
From tight deadlines and creative block, to the need to constantly post or managing the work/life balance, two-thirds of European creators report being sometimes, often or always stressed by their content creation work.

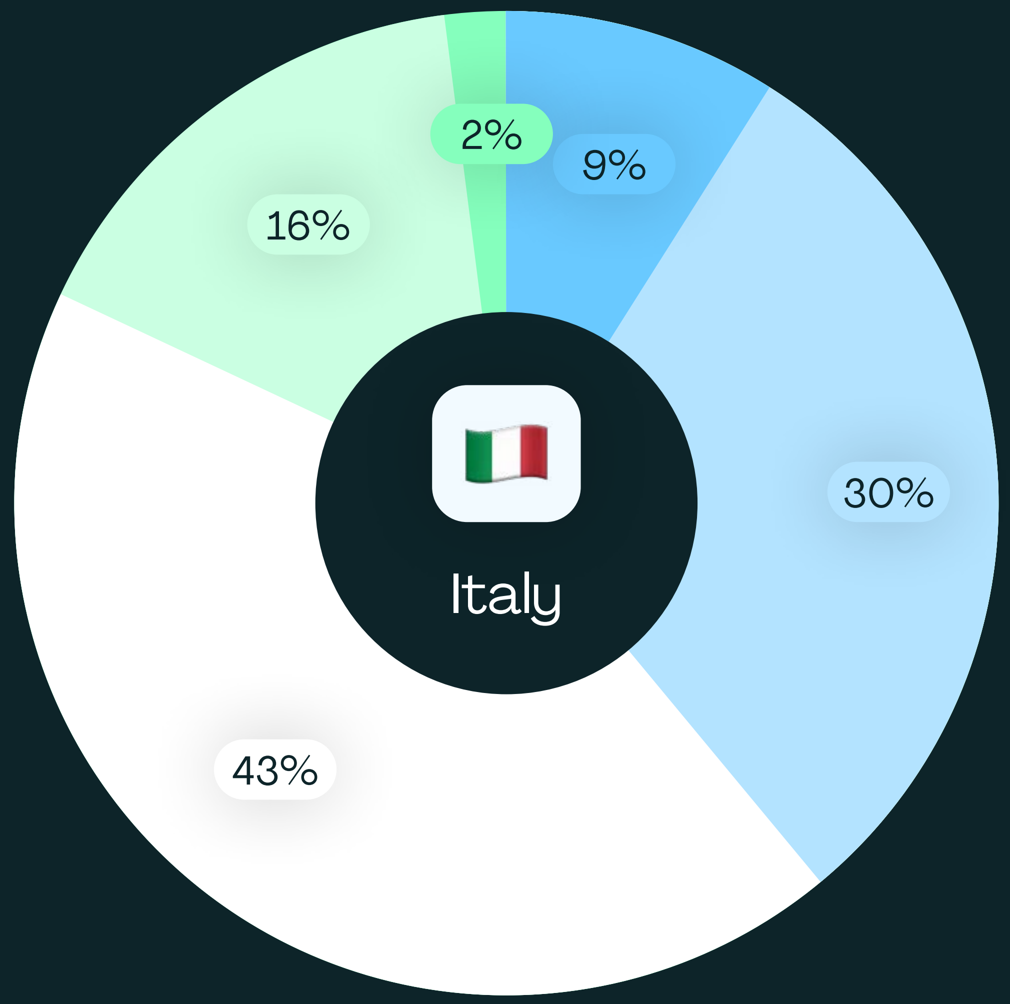
How often do you feel stressed or burned out by your creator activity?

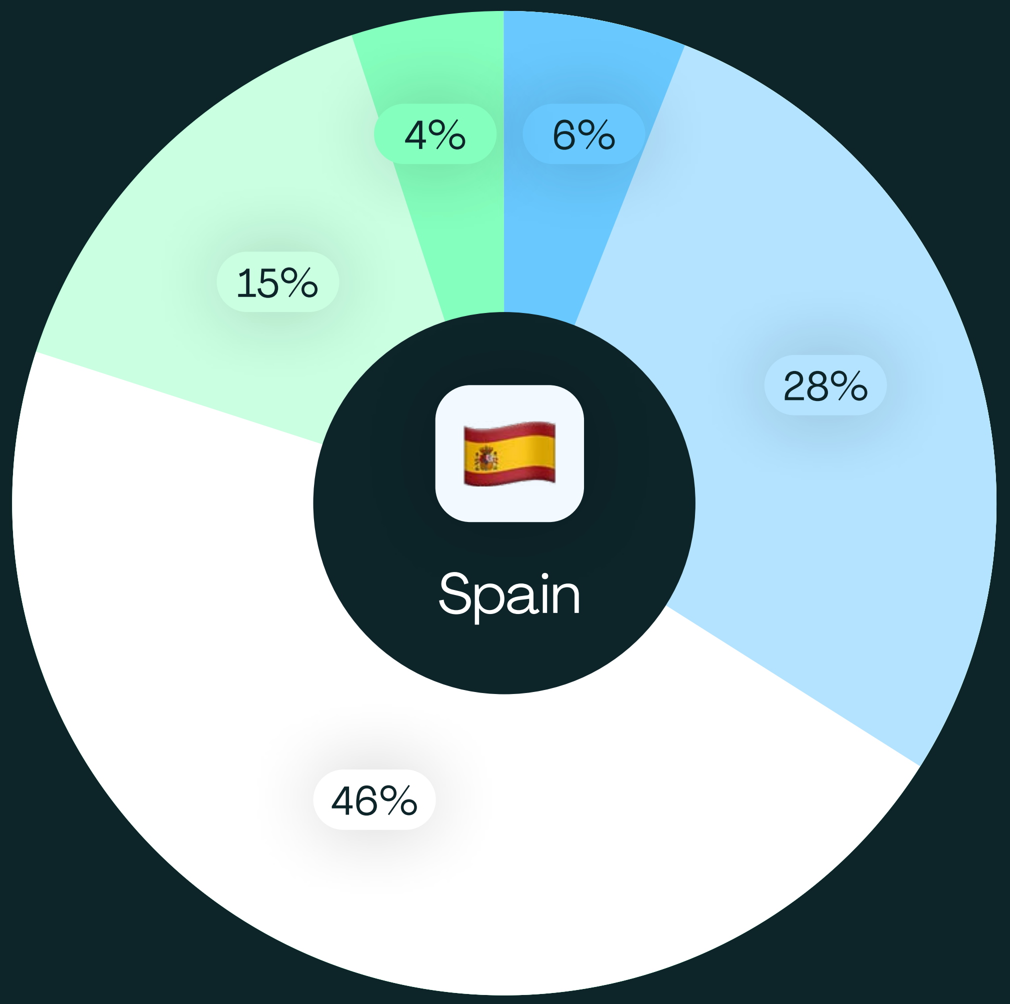
Never
Rarely
Sometimes
Often
All the time

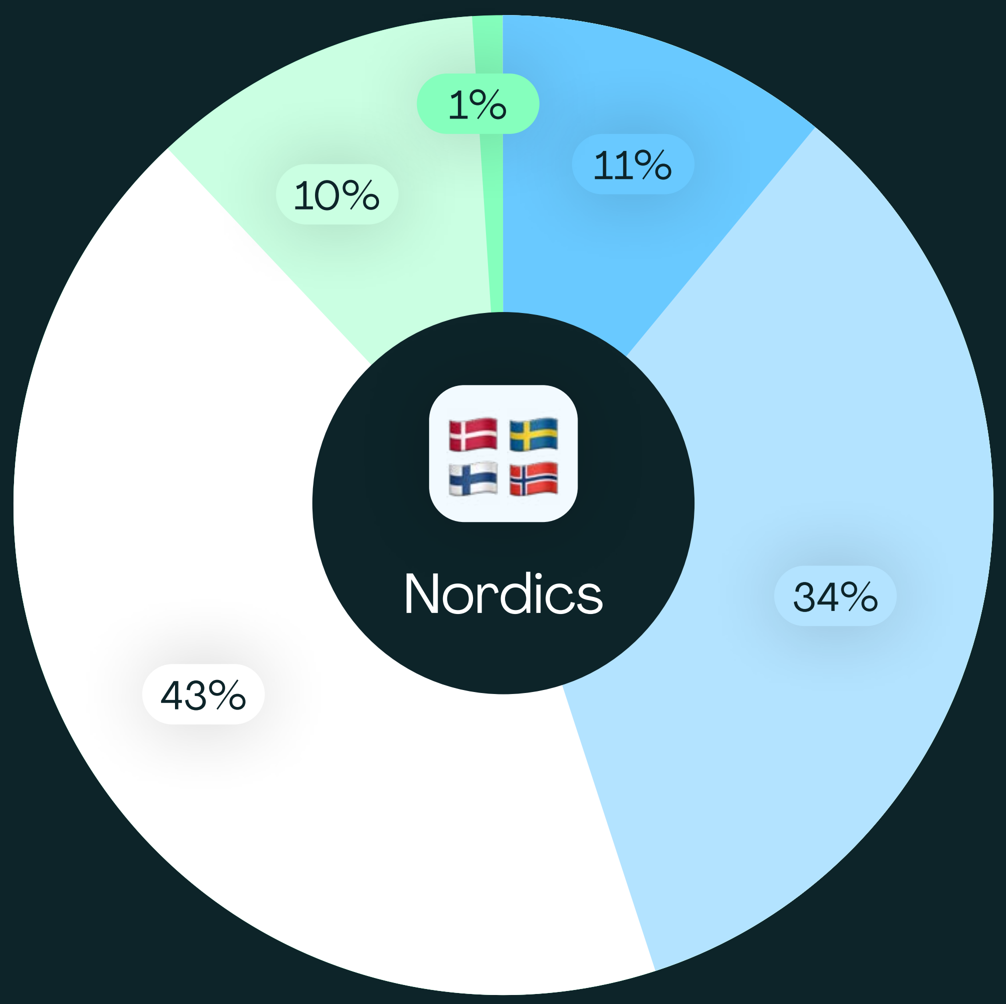










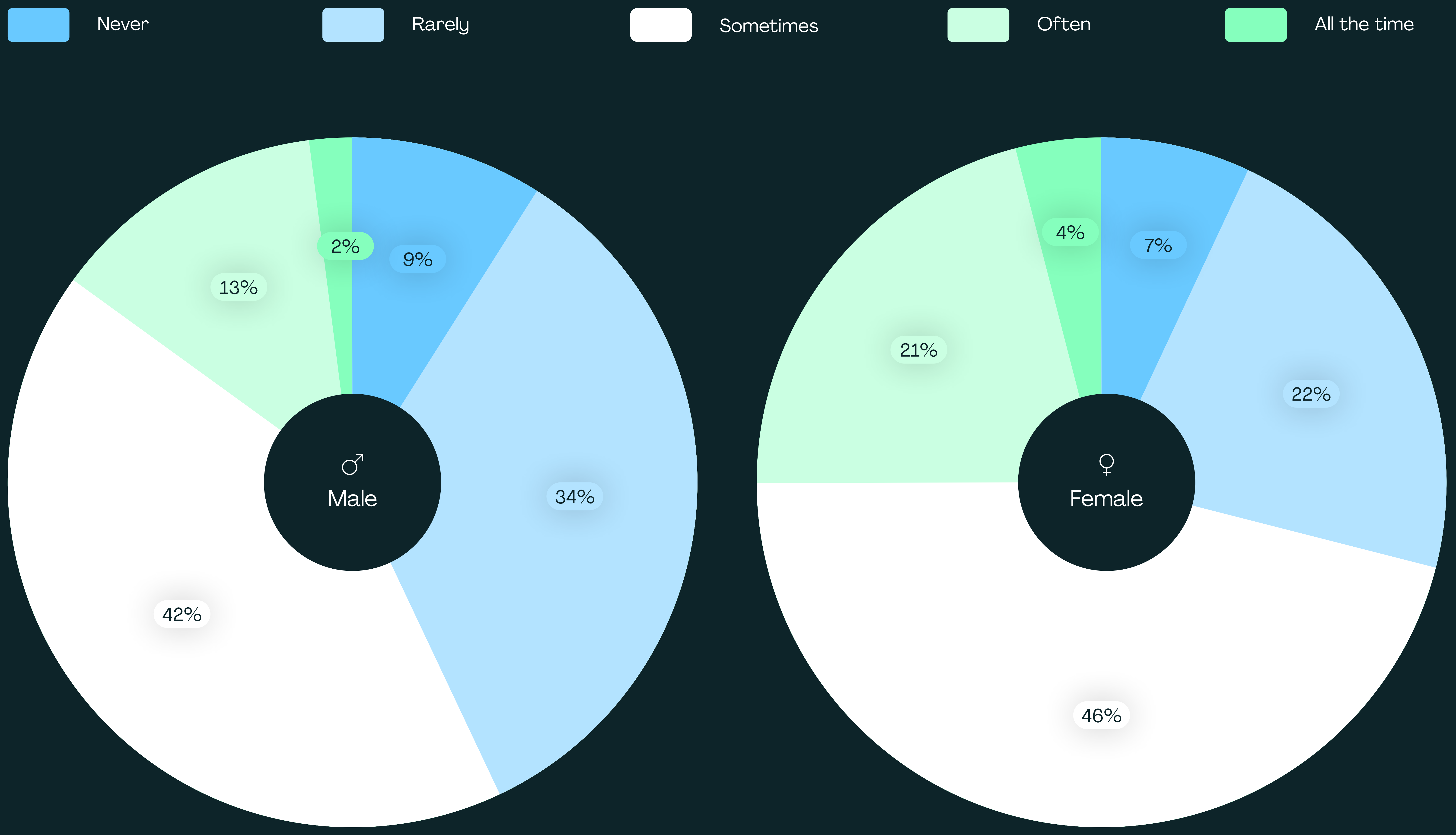


ALWAYS ON: HOW STRESSED ARE CREATORS?

"Mental health is greatly overlooked in content creation. Some creators are unable to cope with the pressure of their work. It's not always easy to stay afloat in an environment as competitive as content creation. Many creators don't dare to talk about it and prefer to keep quiet. However, it's a subject that is becoming more accessible, but not enough for my liking."

@aikulive, 133K, YouTube

How often do you feel stressed or burned out by your creator activity?



WHY ARE THEY STRESSED?

We asked creators what were the top drivers of stress. The responses varied, but managing content creation alongside a full-time job, tight deadlines and pressure to constantly create content came out on top.

Other drivers cited included financial instability, creative block and being overwhelmed by the workload. Following are some of their responses.

"No clear separation between work and leisure time."

"Not good enough. Poor performance. Others's opinions."

"Having to create so many pieces to stay relevant."

"The need to upload to platforms almost daily, whilst doing everything on my own, professionally for +5 years - it can be draining."

"Doomscrolling, comparison."

"Tight deadlines and wanting to do everything perfectly."

"The time limitation of collaborations and the associated existential fears associated with self-employment."

"When creativity slows down, visibility drops and so does confidence. The comments can sometimes be violent, and you're reminded 'you're on the Internet, you chose it."

@noemiepolverini, Instagram, 26K

"Keeping it all organised on top of my 9-5."

"People expect to have a huge amount of working hours for a bad payment."

"Thinking that one day to another things can totally change."

"Short and unrealistic deadlines."

"The constant need to produce content and adapt to changing platforms, which frequently change requirements, guidelines, community regulations."

"Instability, no control over performance, algorithm dependencies."

"Feeling like I have to work non stop and if I stop I would lose my revenue."

"I stopped constantly checking my KPIs because it was stressing me out too much. When I burned out, I stopped posting, and as a result, I lost 8,000 followers..."

@pommandarine, 102K Instagram, 155K TikTok, France

MULTI-PLATFORM PRESSURE

While the results here show that 69% of creators have more than 5,000 followers on two or more social media platforms, fewer than half of the creators who responded to our survey have large followings on three or more platforms.

This indicates a focus by creators on core platforms, and perhaps the difficulty of building strong, relevant followings on new platforms.

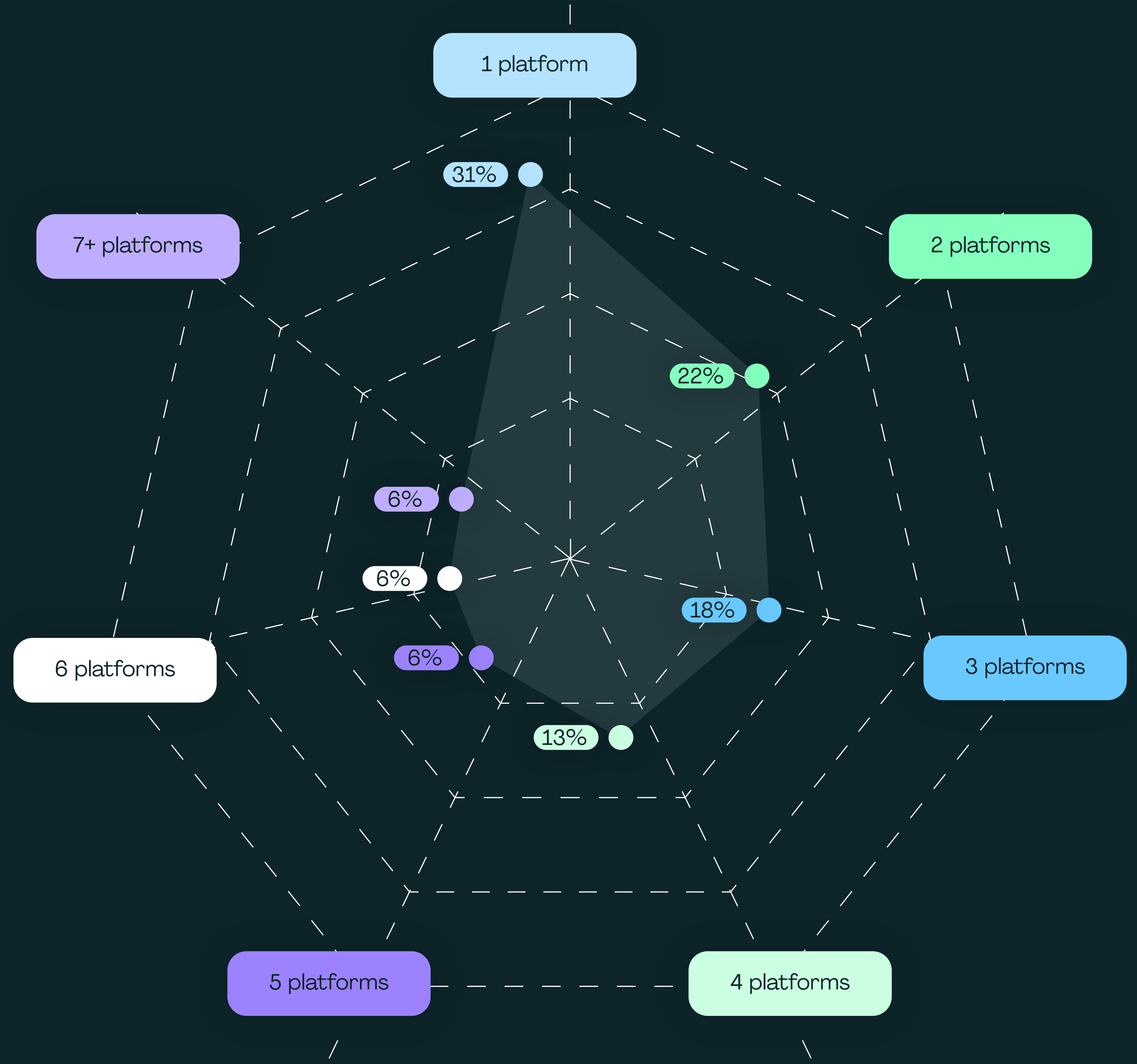
"Today, relying on a single platform is just too risky — algorithms change, reach drops, audiences age and move on, and brand budgets can shift overnight. To build a lasting career, creators need to diversify — either by being active on multiple platforms or by developing something they fully own, like a blog, newsletter or podcast. Not putting all your eggs in one basket is also a way to protect your mental health in an industry that's always changing."

Jonathan Chan, 64K, LinkedIn

"Apart from Snapchat, I think the constraint of this new generation of content is multi-platform. I really believe that this is a must for any creator who wants to evolve accordingly in the media landscape. Everything is moving faster and faster, with increasing saturation; ignoring certain platforms would be like missing the boat. The paradox is that for creative people, being everywhere means being nowhere at the same time. The challenge is to find the right balance, to produce quality content in quantity without burning out."

ali.planner_, 23.8K Instagram, 56K YouTube, 191K TikTok

How many platforms are you active on?



BRAND COLLABORATIONS: THE FRICTION POINTS

When it comes to brand collaborations, four pain points stand out across the board: unrealistic deliverables (71%), micromanagement (66%), unclear briefs (64%), and late payments (62%). While not every creator faces these issues often, they remain persistent friction points in the brand-creator relationship.

On a positive note, relatively few creators have experienced disrespectful communication from brands (63% answered never or rarely) and creators generally feel they are getting appropriate credit for their contributions. Being asked to share data also doesn't come across as a big issue with only 15% saying that this always or often bothers them.

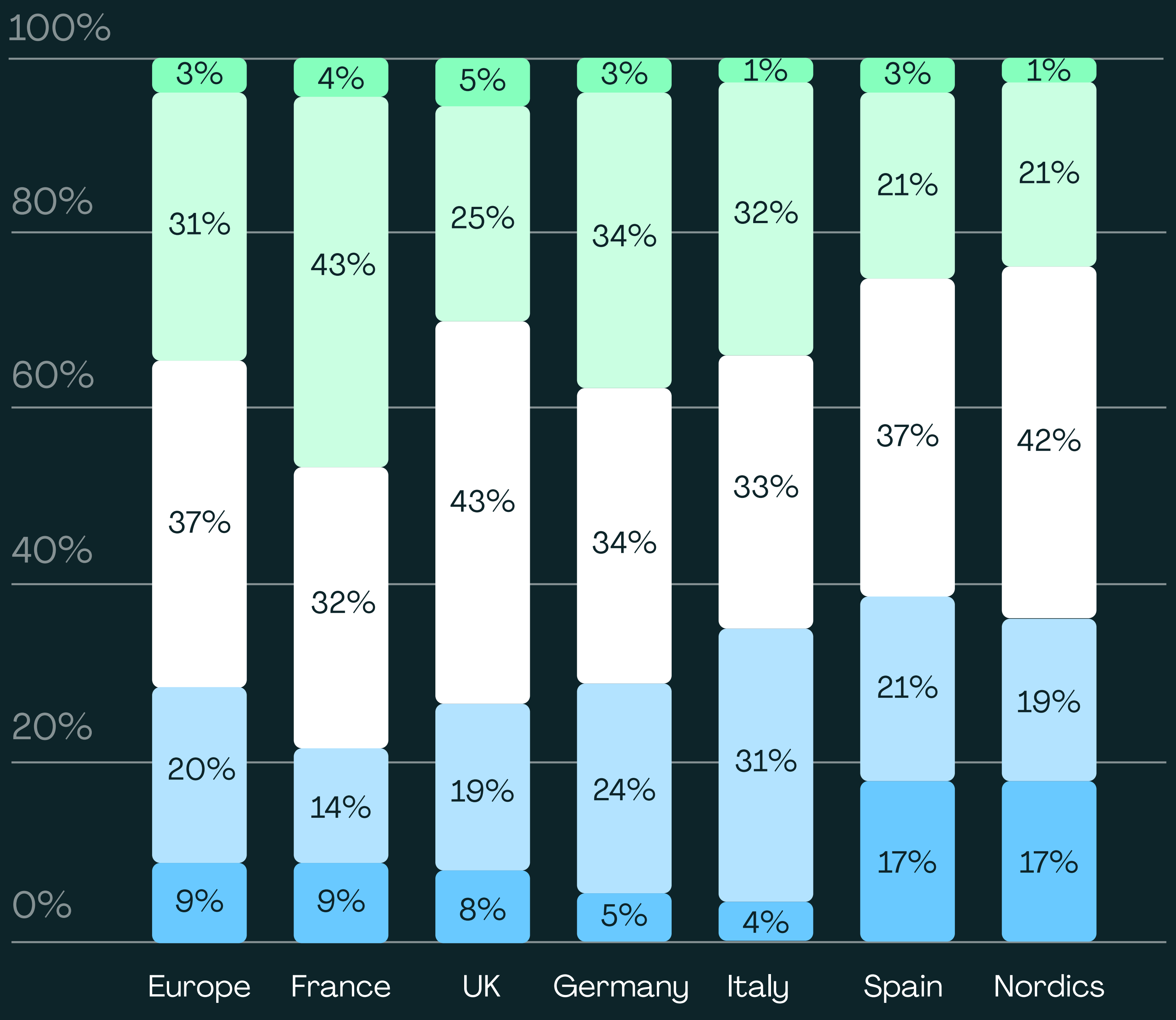
> "There are definitely industry-wide challenges. Delayed payments, unclear feedback, and multiple rounds of edits with no extra fee are common issues. I've learned that being professional, organised and easy to work with usually helps make collaborations run smoothly."

@martacanga, 24.6K, Instagram

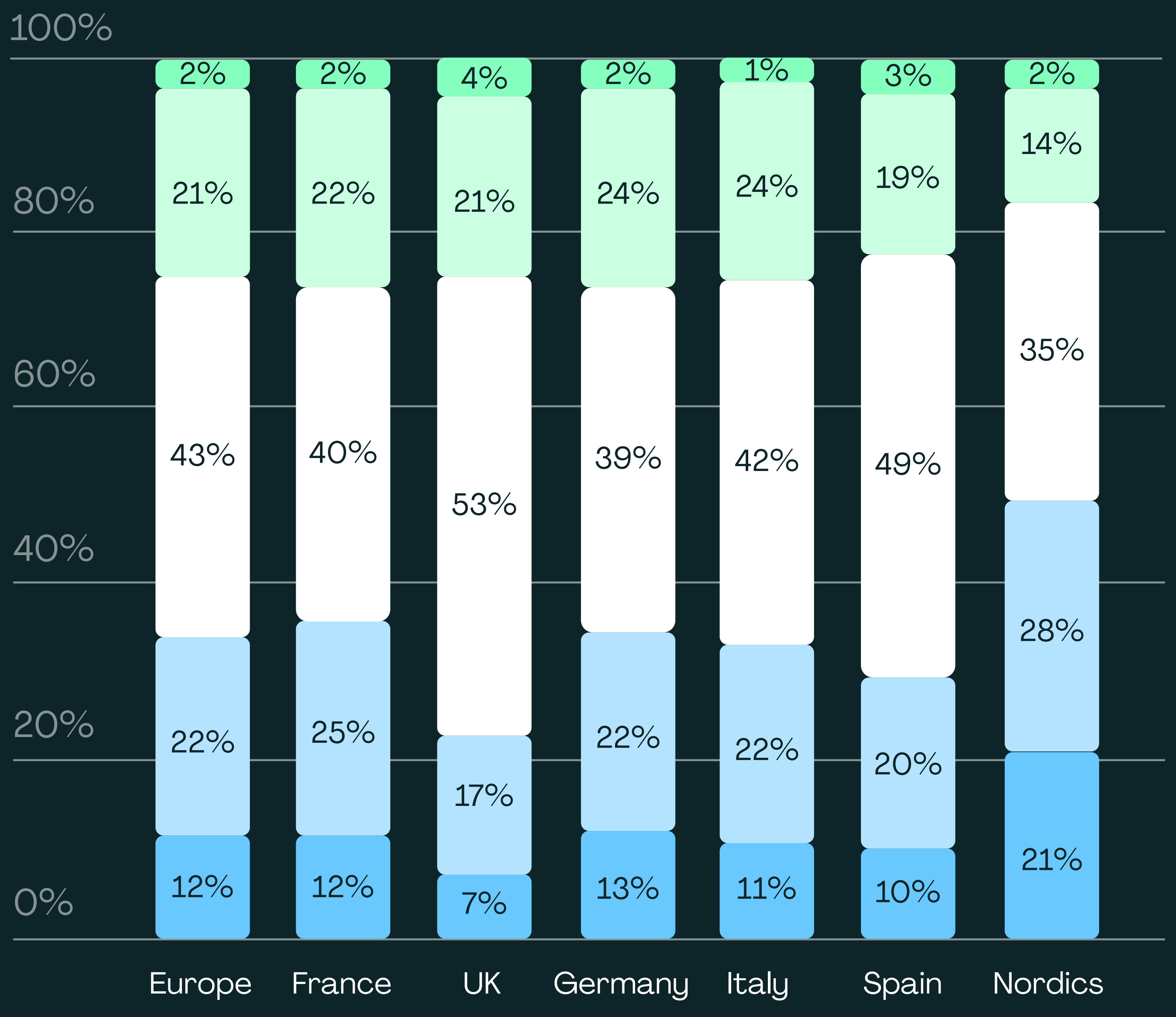
How frequently have you experienced the following issues when working with brands?

Never | Rarely | Sometimes | Often | Always

Being offered unrealistic deliverables for the compensation (gifted or paid)



Experiencing too much creative control or micromanagement from the brand



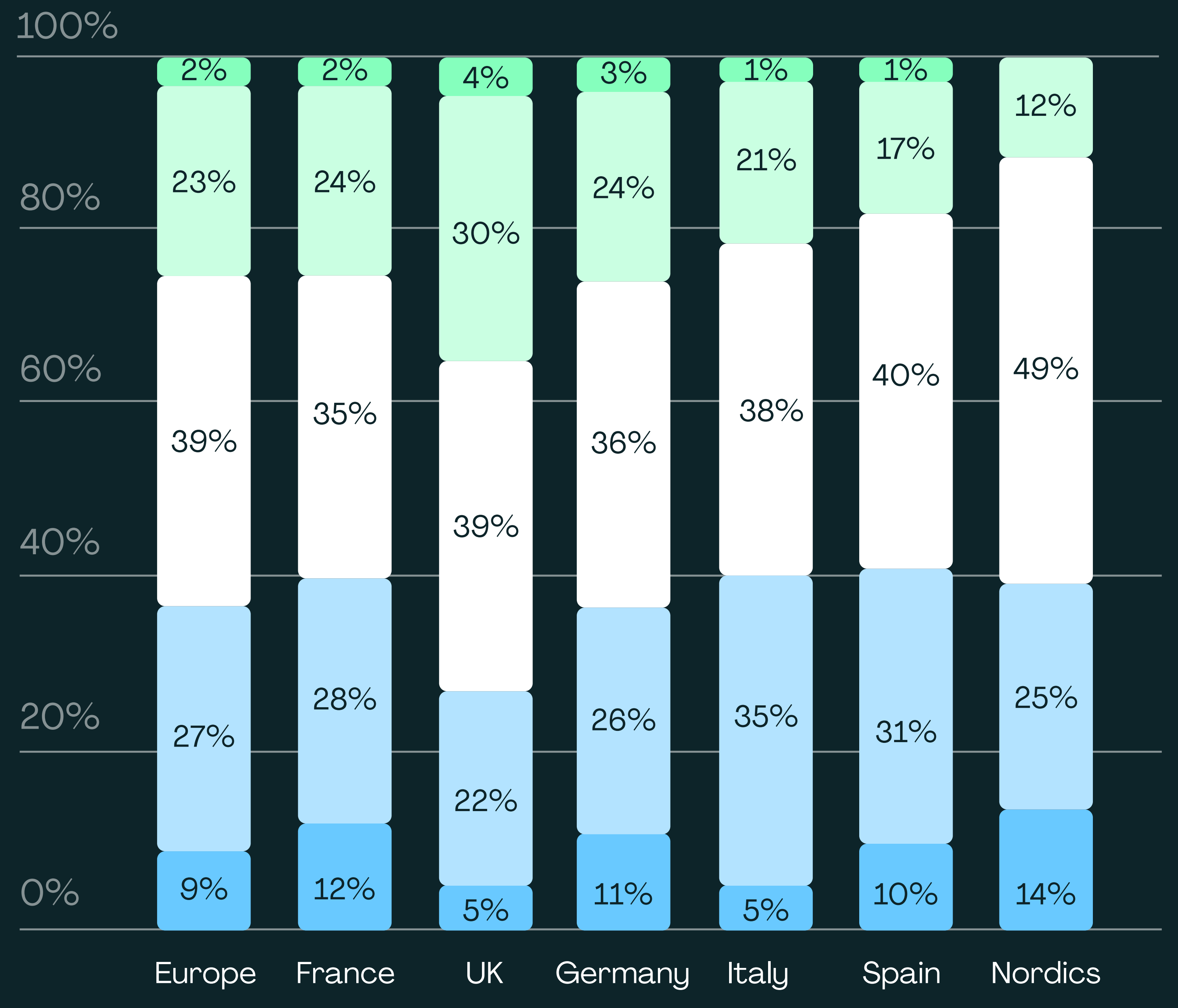
How frequently have you experienced the following issues when working with brands?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Always

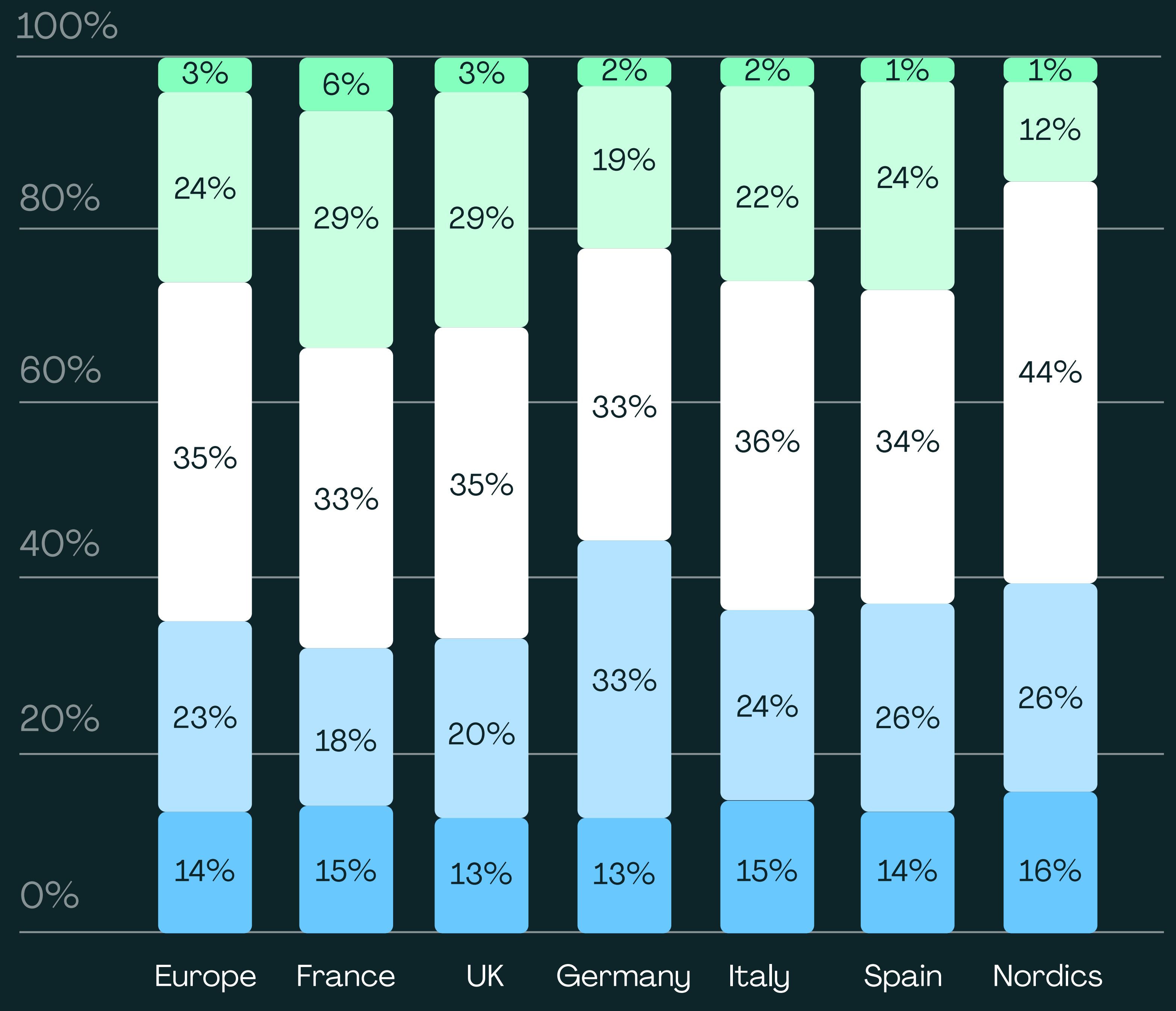
> "The problem with some gifting campaigns is the unrealistic expectations that are set afterwards. Basically, the brand offers to discover a product, without mentioning any specific requirements, and then once the package has been sent, ask: 'Could you make 3 Reels?'. Without proper payment, that's just not acceptable."

@noemiepolverini, 26K, Instagram

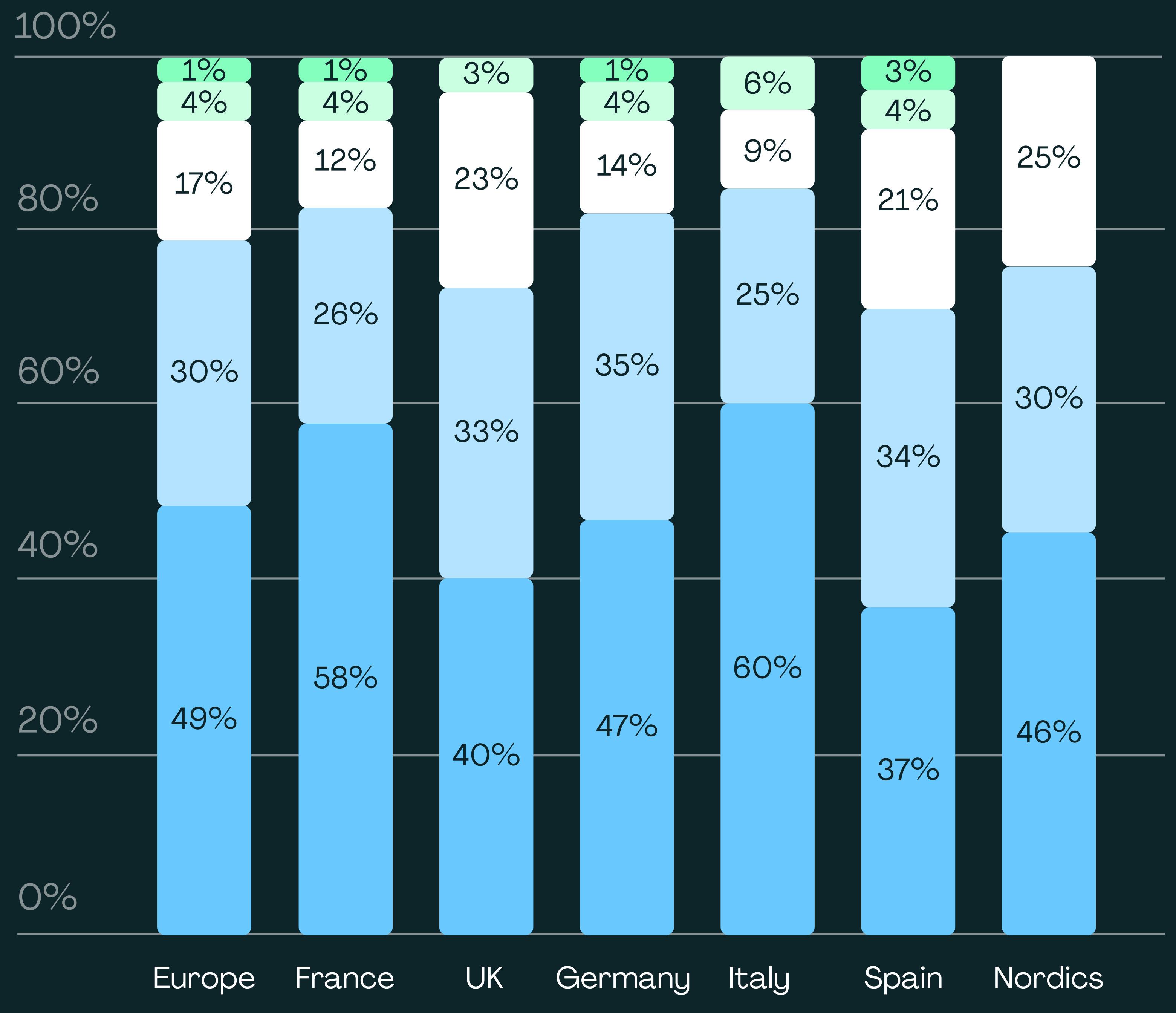
Being given unclear or constantly changing briefs



Receiving late payments



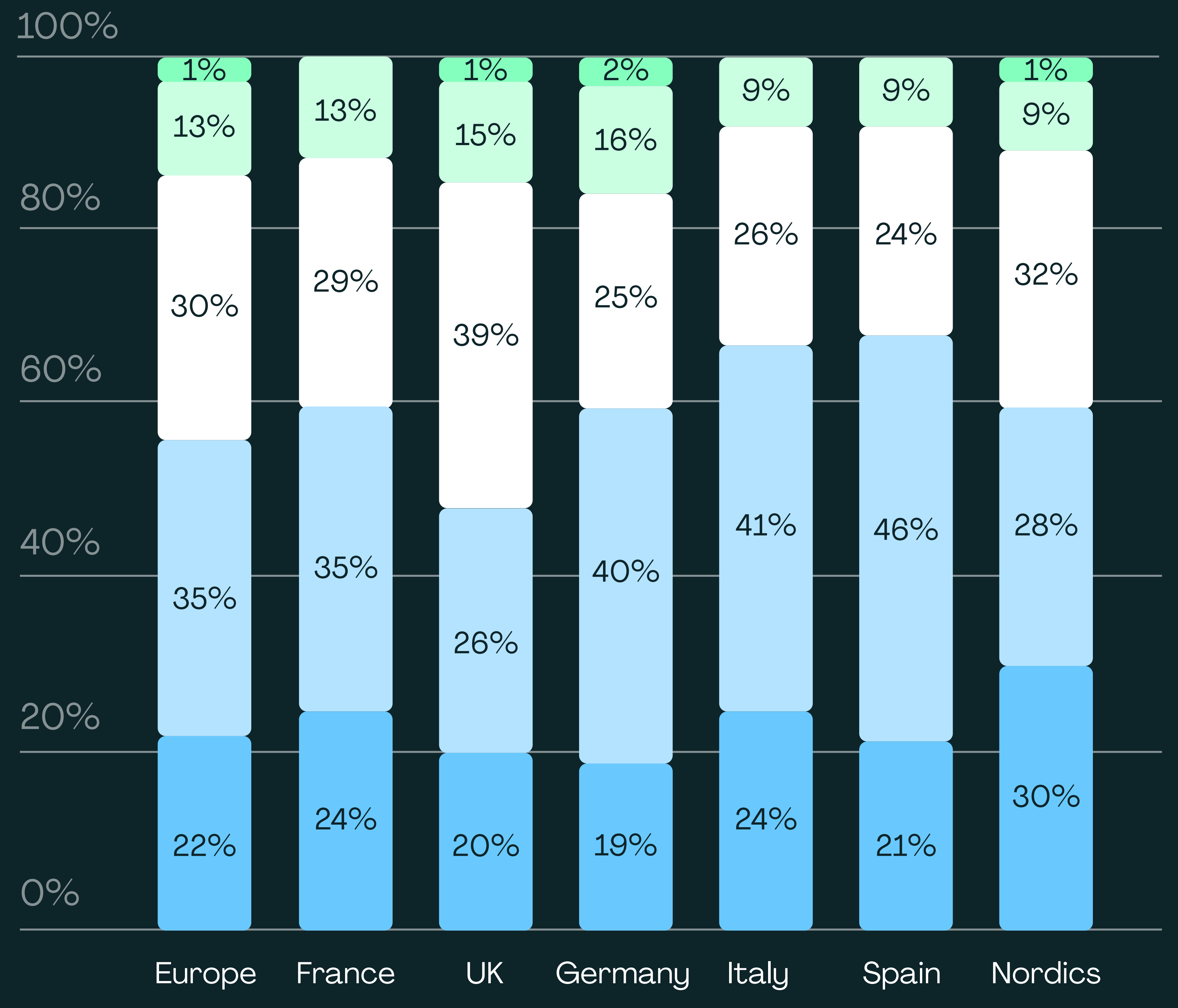
Completing a collaboration but never receiving payment or compensation



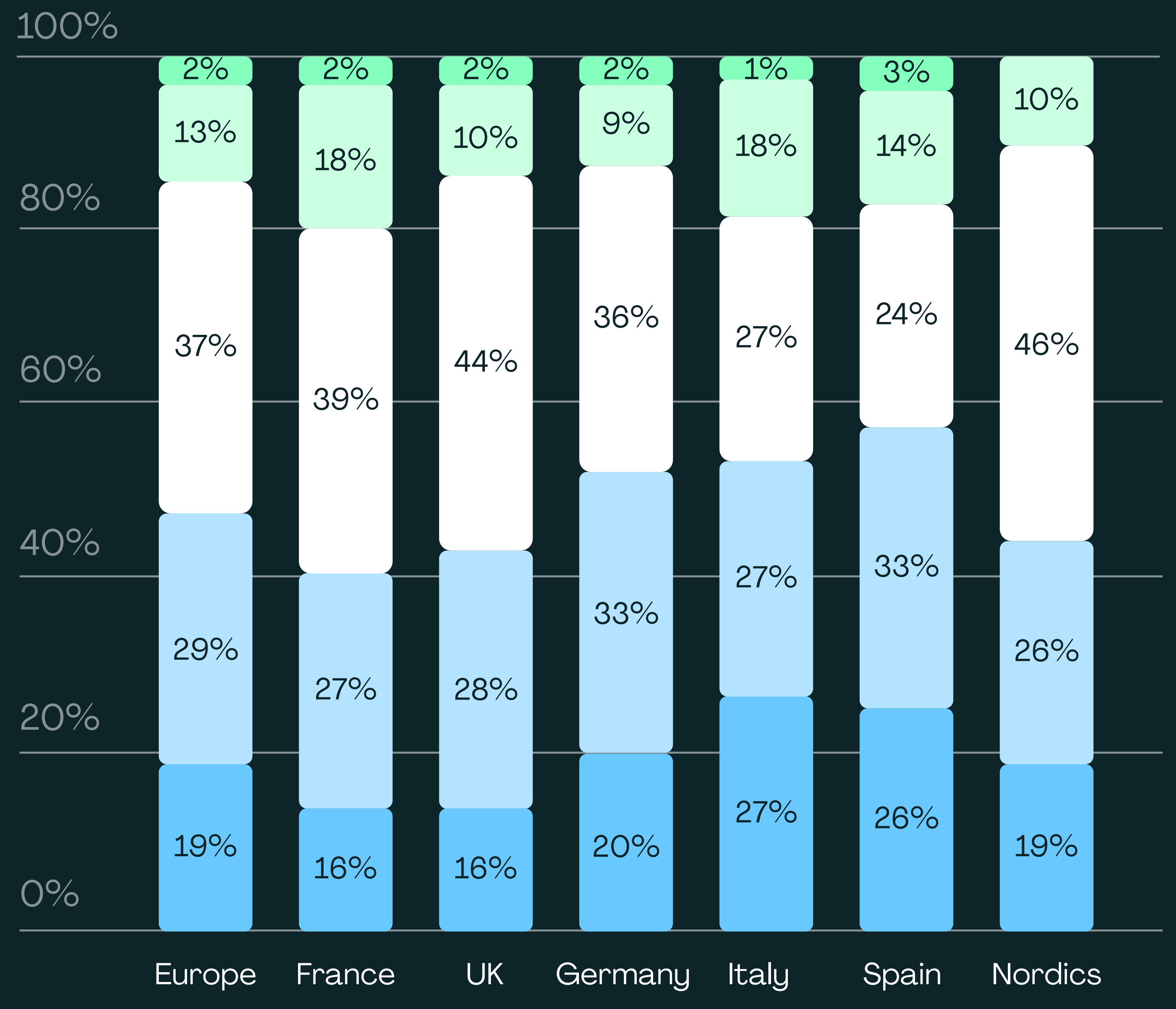
How frequently have you experienced the following issues when working with brands?

Never
Rarely
Sometimes
Often
Always

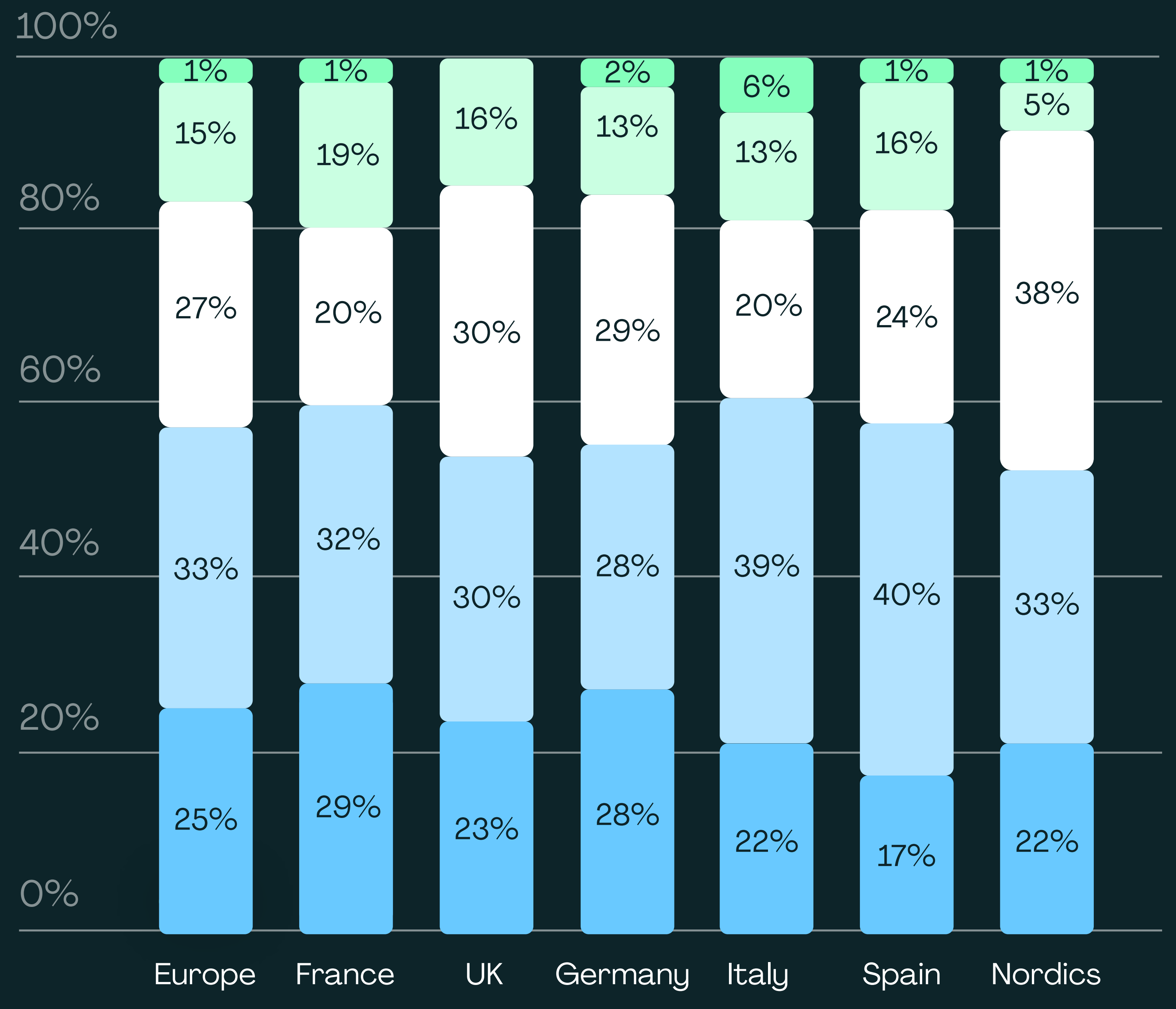
Feeling pressured to accept terms you were uncomfortable with



Lack of recognition or credit for your creative work



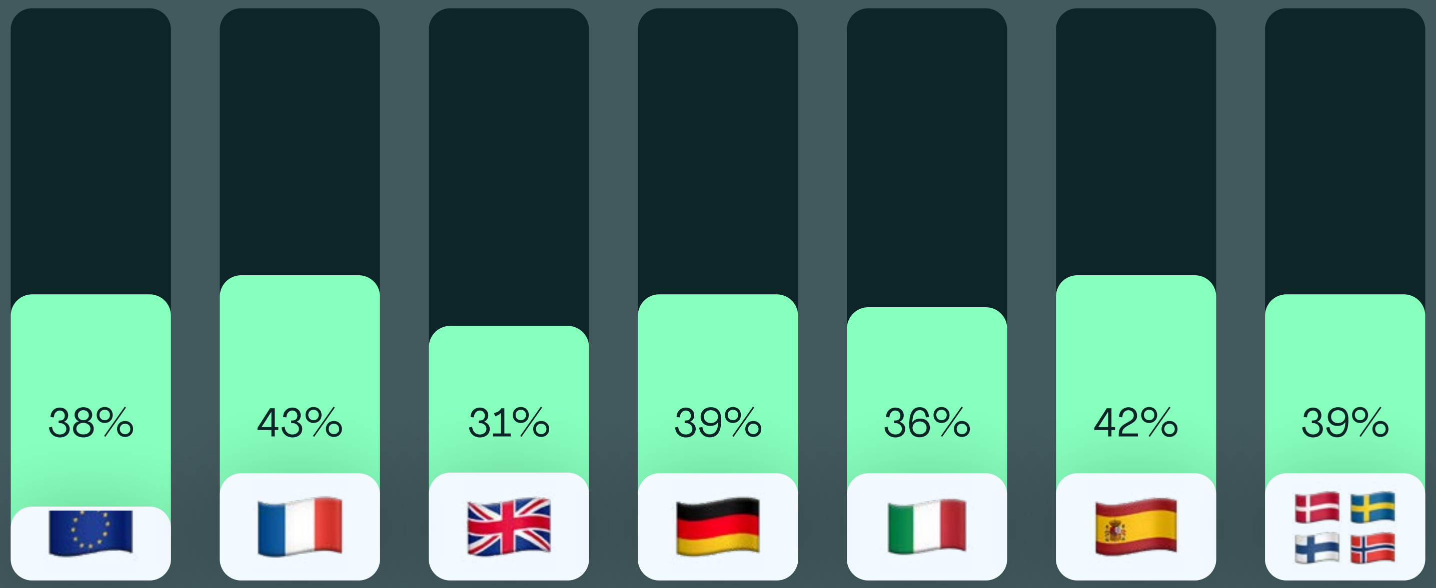
Unreasonable demands to share data



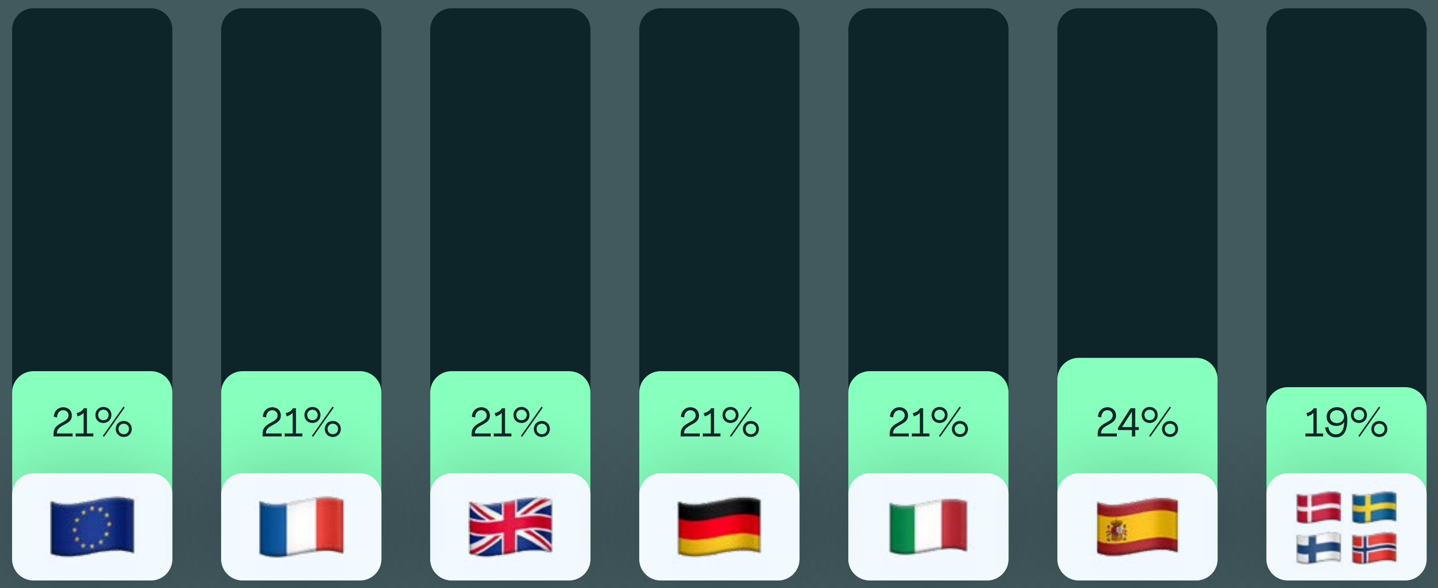
PROTECTING CONTENT IN THE CREATOR ECONOMY

Intellectual property emerges as a major pain point for European creators, with music licensing, unauthorised use of content and personal likeness, and content imitation prevalent — a strong indicator that key areas of the burgeoning creator economy remain underdeveloped.

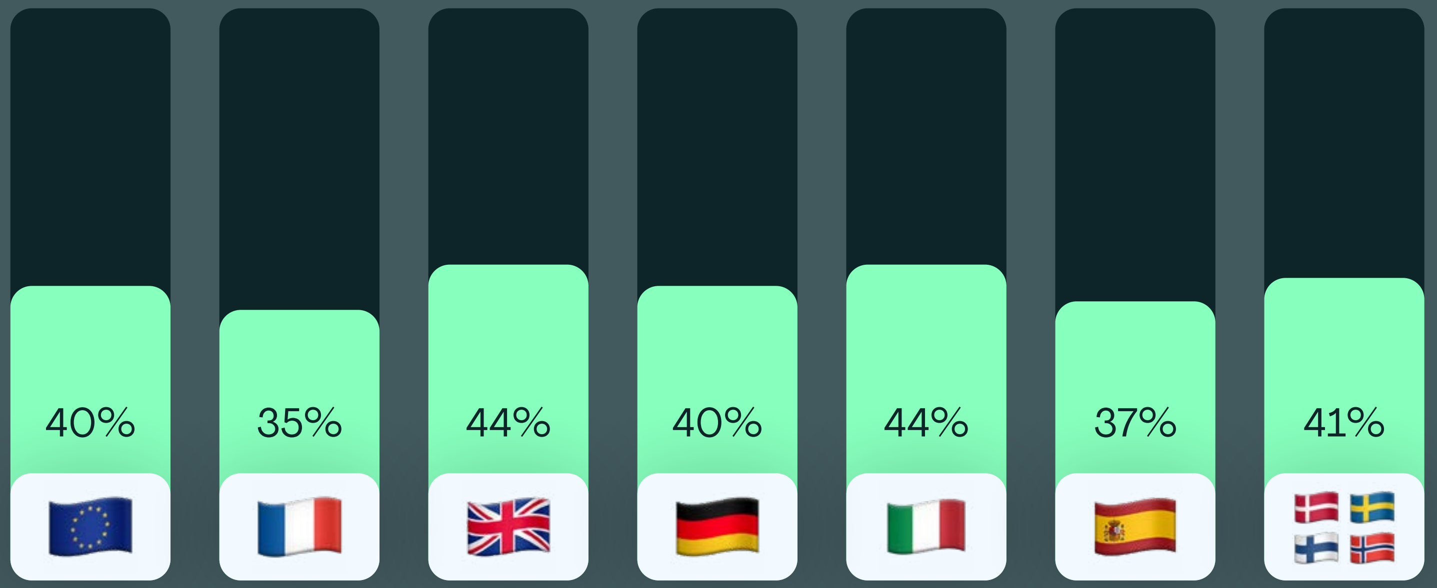
Use of my images/content, voice, or personal likeness without consent



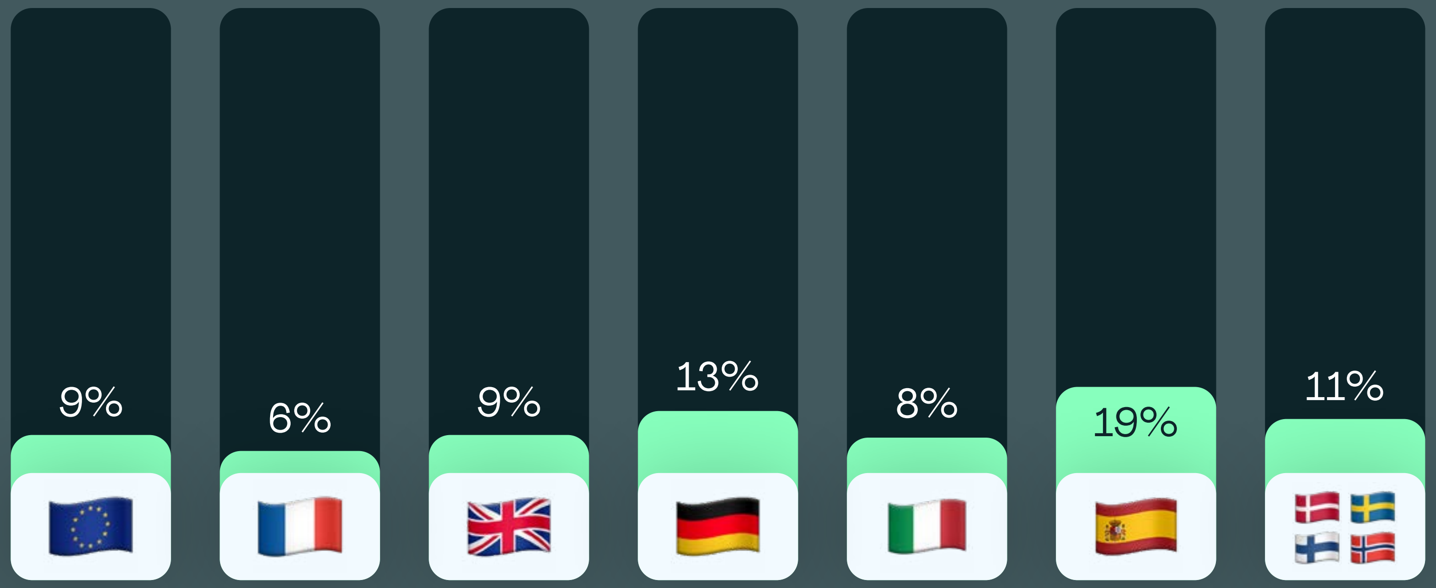
Being asked to promote counterfeit or "dupe" versions of products



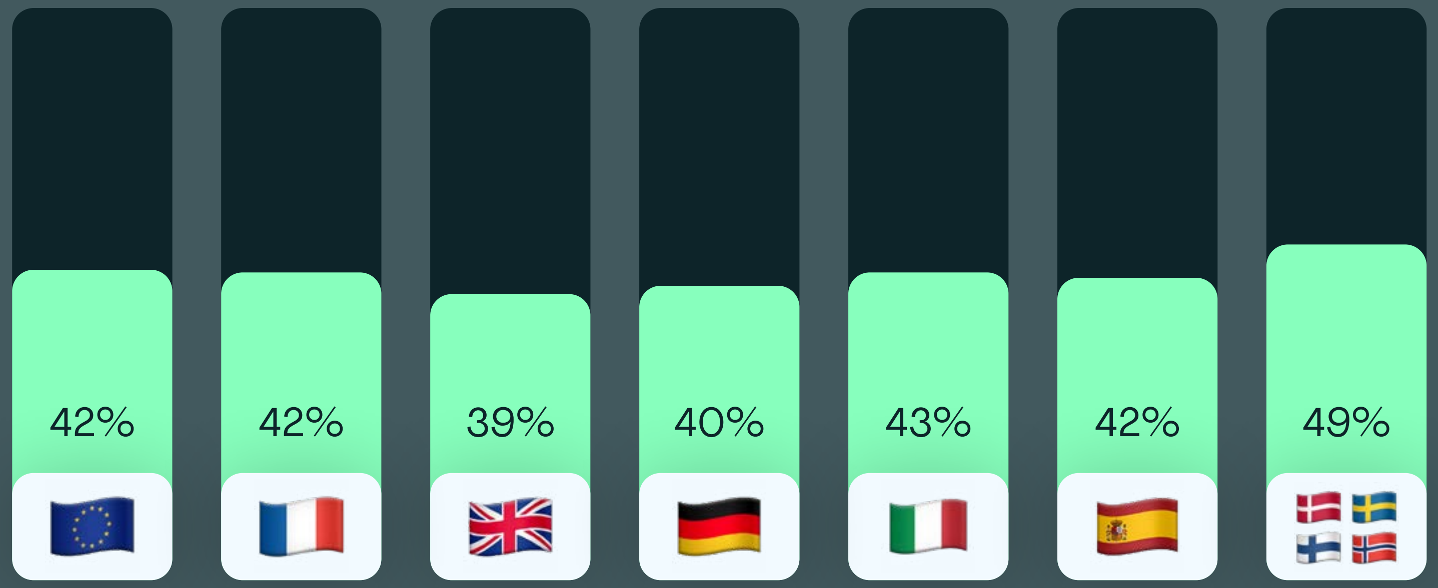
Music licensing issues (e.g., takedowns, muted content, disputes over using or owning rights to music you featured or created)



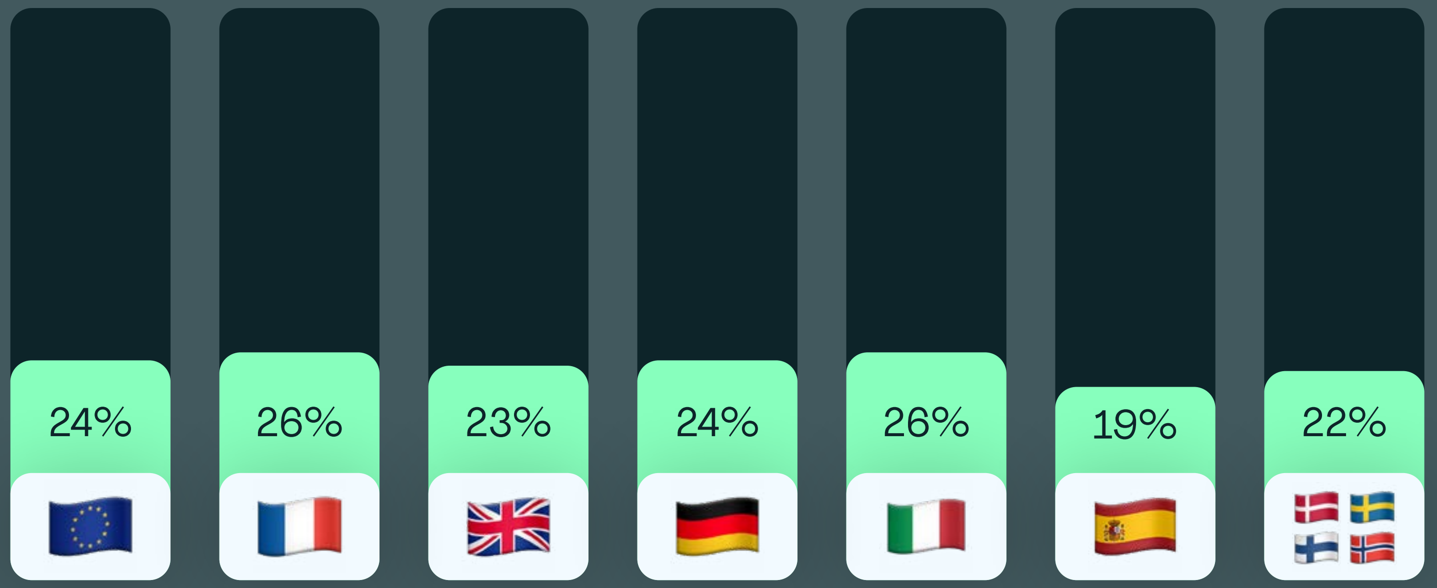
AI-generated content using my voice/images/content/style



Content from other creator(s) that copy my images/content/style



None of the above

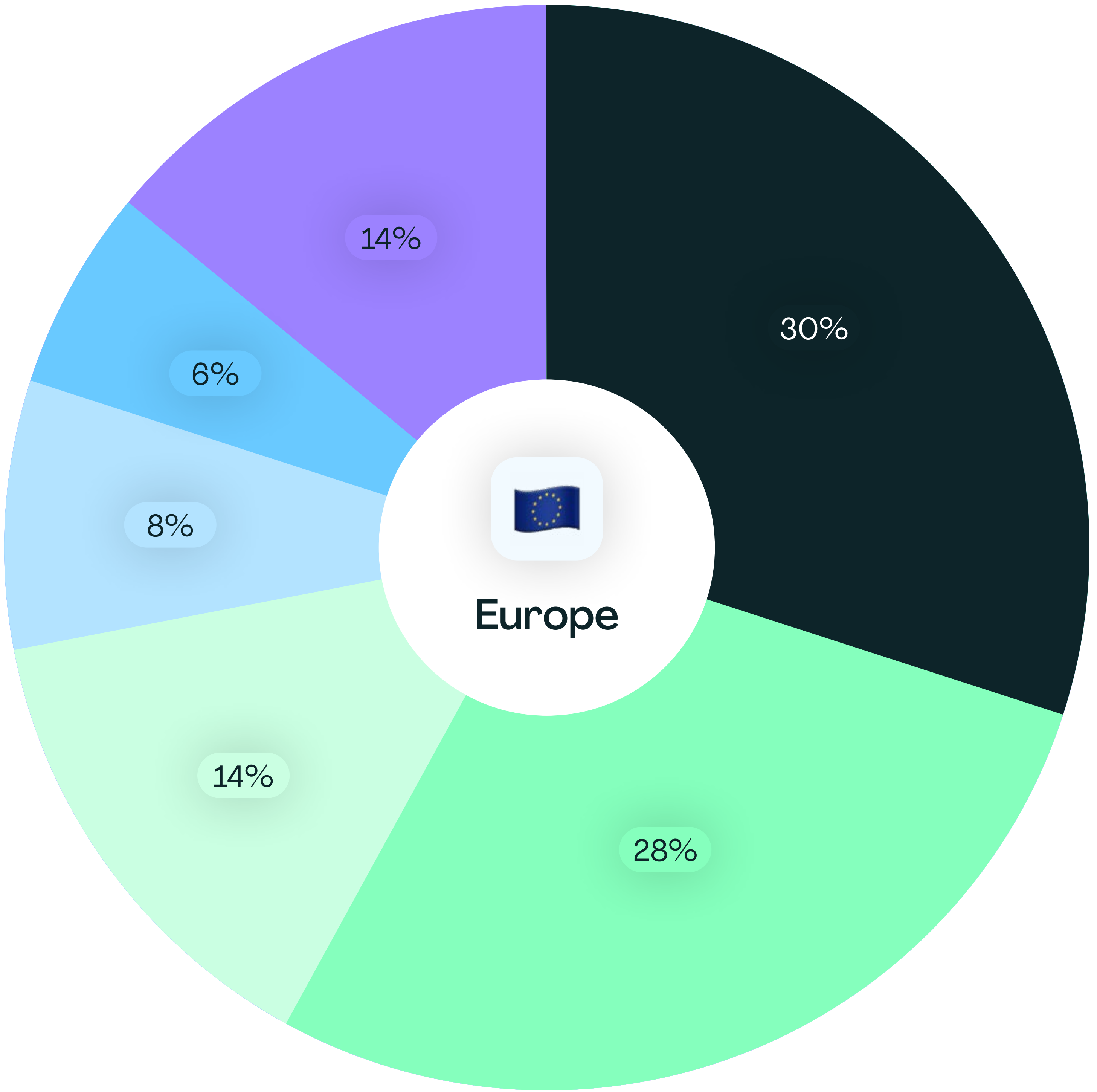


6 NICHE IS THE NEW MAINSTREAM: FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES... AND CHALLENGES

The creator economy isn't standing still — and neither are the people shaping it. From AI tools to regulatory shifts and evolving brand deals, many creators see their profession changing. While optimism is high, there's no shortage of complexity: new technologies, unclear rules, and a growing pressure to stay relevant are all reshaping what it means to create for a living.

80% AND COUNTING: CONTENT CREATORS ARE ENTHUSIASTIC USERS OF AI

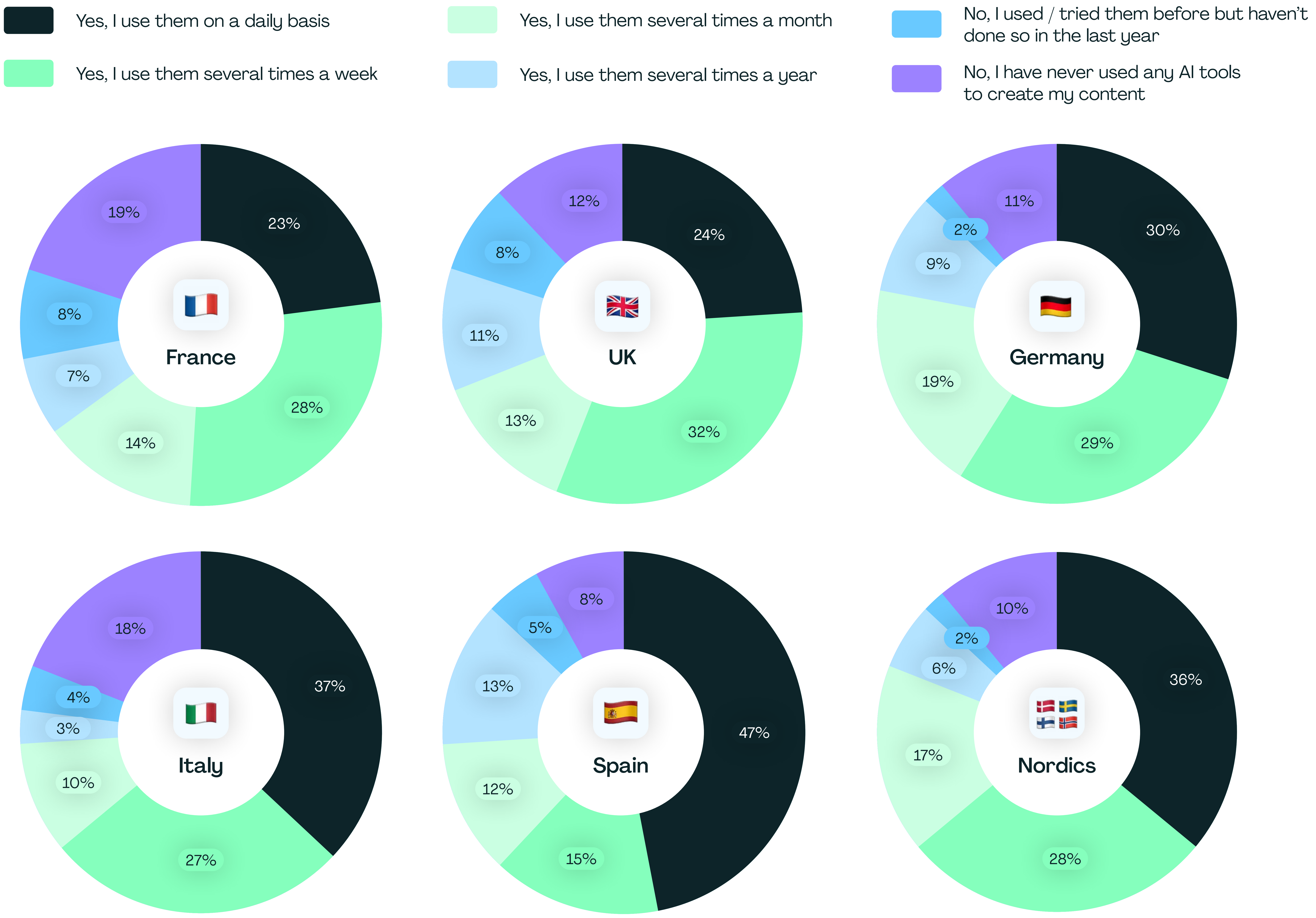
Europe's content creators are prolific users of AI. While most use it for ideation and text editing, many are also using it to analyse content and optimise it for SEO, pointing to a sophisticated understanding of their operating environment.



Do you use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, image generators, editing tools) for your work as a content creator?

- Yes, I use them on a daily basis
- Yes, I use them several times a week
- Yes, I use them several times a month
- Yes, I use them several times a year
- No, I used / tried them before but haven't done so in the last year
- No, I have used any AI tools to create my content

Do you use AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, image generators, editing tools) for your work as a content creator?



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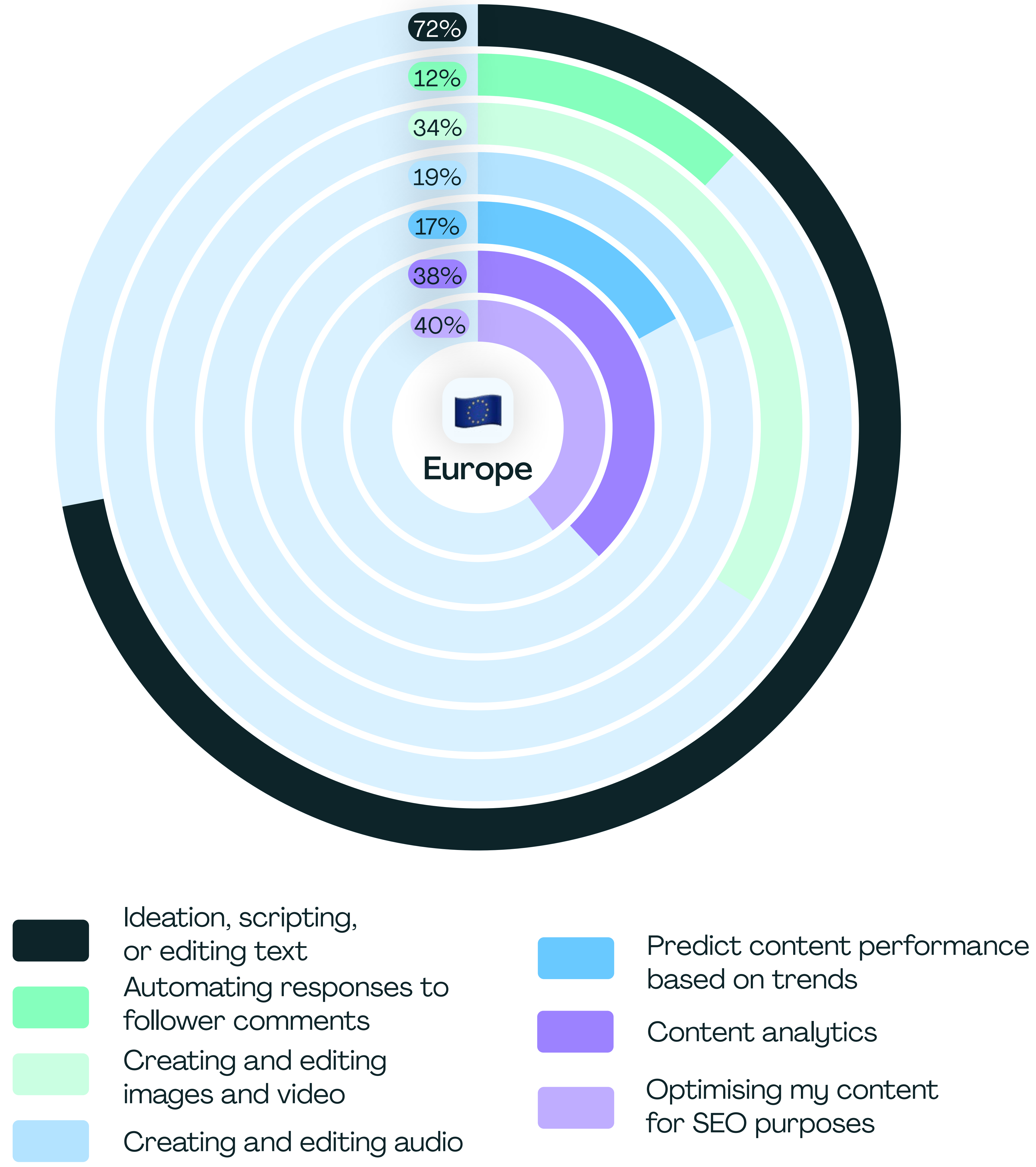
FROM IDEA TO CAPTION: HOW CREATORS USE AI

"AI's a real game changer — Italians are already deep into using it beyond ideation. The challenge is keeping content feeling human while scaling smartly. The opportunity? Better strategy, faster output, stronger insights."

@patrizia_waz, 10.7K, Instagram

"Today, almost everyone is creating AI-powered content... But this is a huge opportunity. The more AI standardises content, the more content with personality rises above the crowd. When you tell your story, no AI or human can copy you."

@caroline.mignaux
145K Instagram, 64K TikTok, 154K LinkedIn



THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK: GUIDELINES OR GUESSWORK?

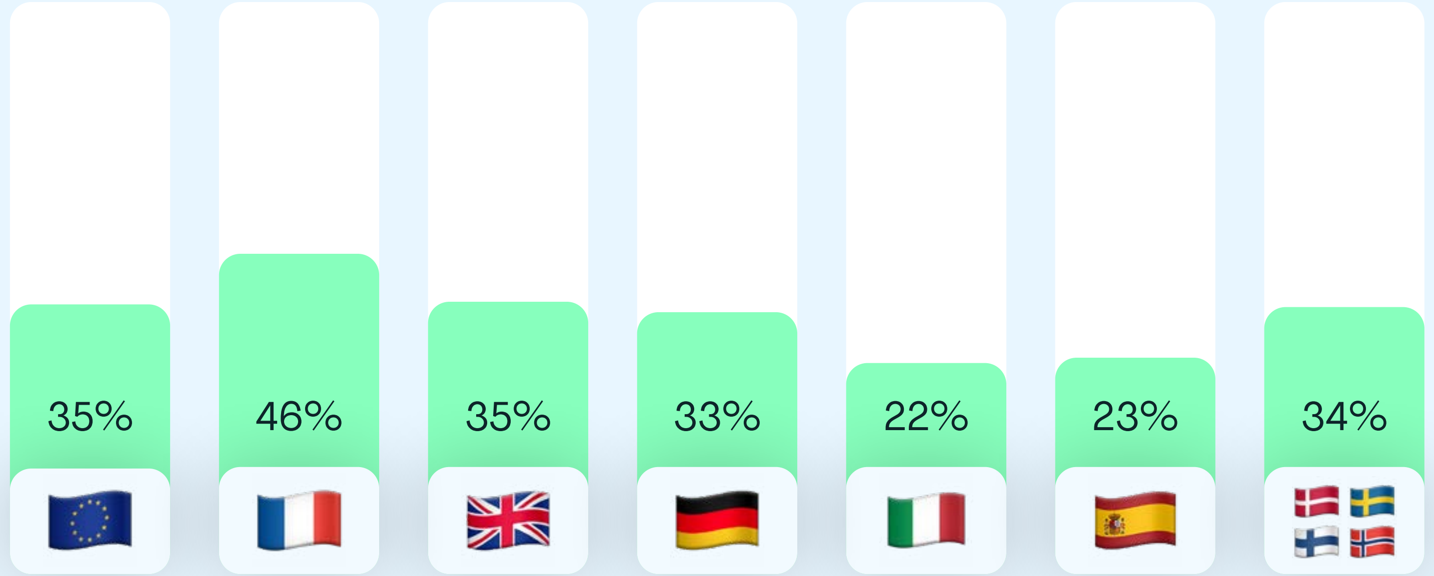
When it comes to influencer regulations, creators are split. Roughly the same number find current rules helpful as those who say they're too complex to follow.

Italy stands out: nearly half of Italian creators (48%) find the rules confusing, while only 22% consider them useful — highlighting a clear need for greater clarity and education around the evolving legal landscape.

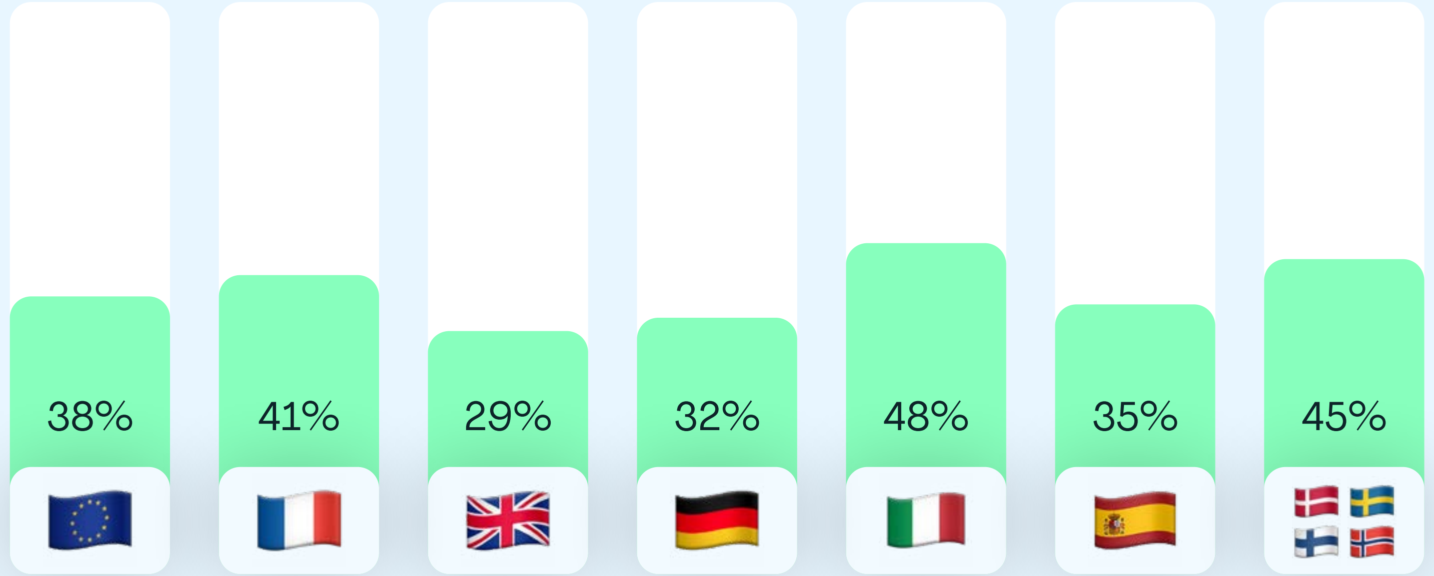
> "The confusion around regulation genuinely frustrates me because creators want to do the right thing, but they're drowning in jargon and complexity."

Grace Andrews @the.socialclimber,
137K LinkedIn, 91K Instagram

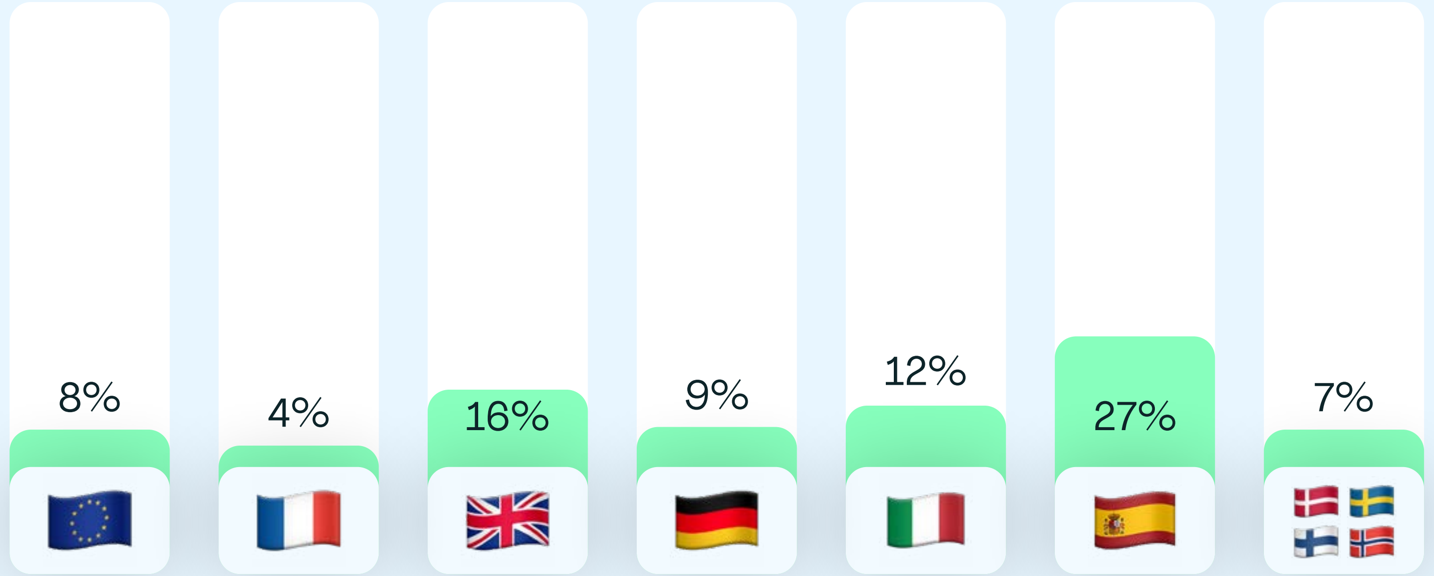
They are helpful and protect creators and audiences



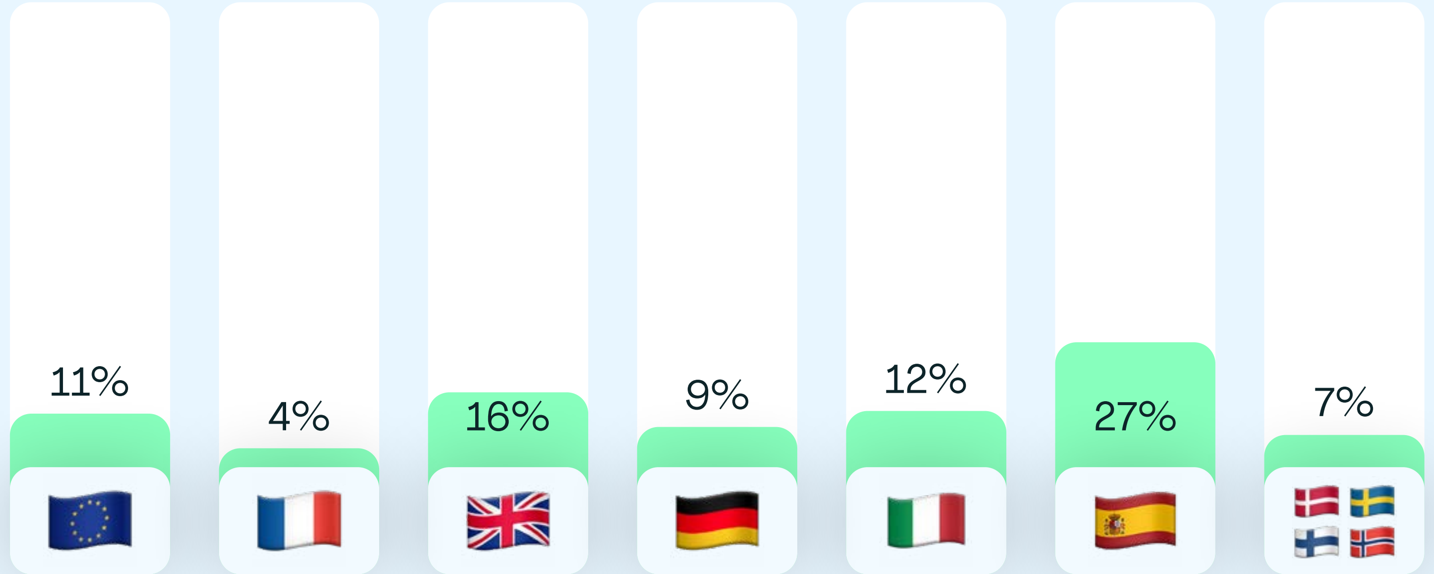
They are too complex or unclear



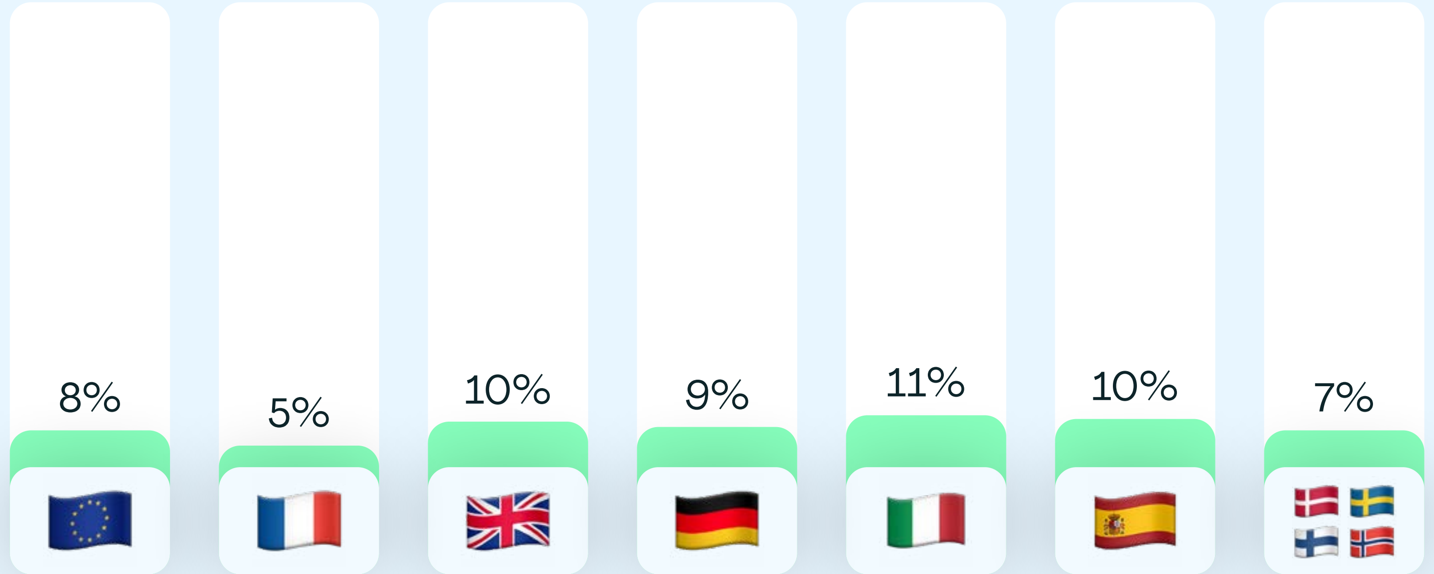
They limit my creative/business freedom



I'm not aware of the laws



No opinion



> "Apart from the rules imposed by the various platforms, there are several laws that regulate content. Recently, new regulations have been introduced concerning posts containing commercial collaborations. These laws vary from country to country. As a content creator with a predominantly French audience, I adhere to French law."

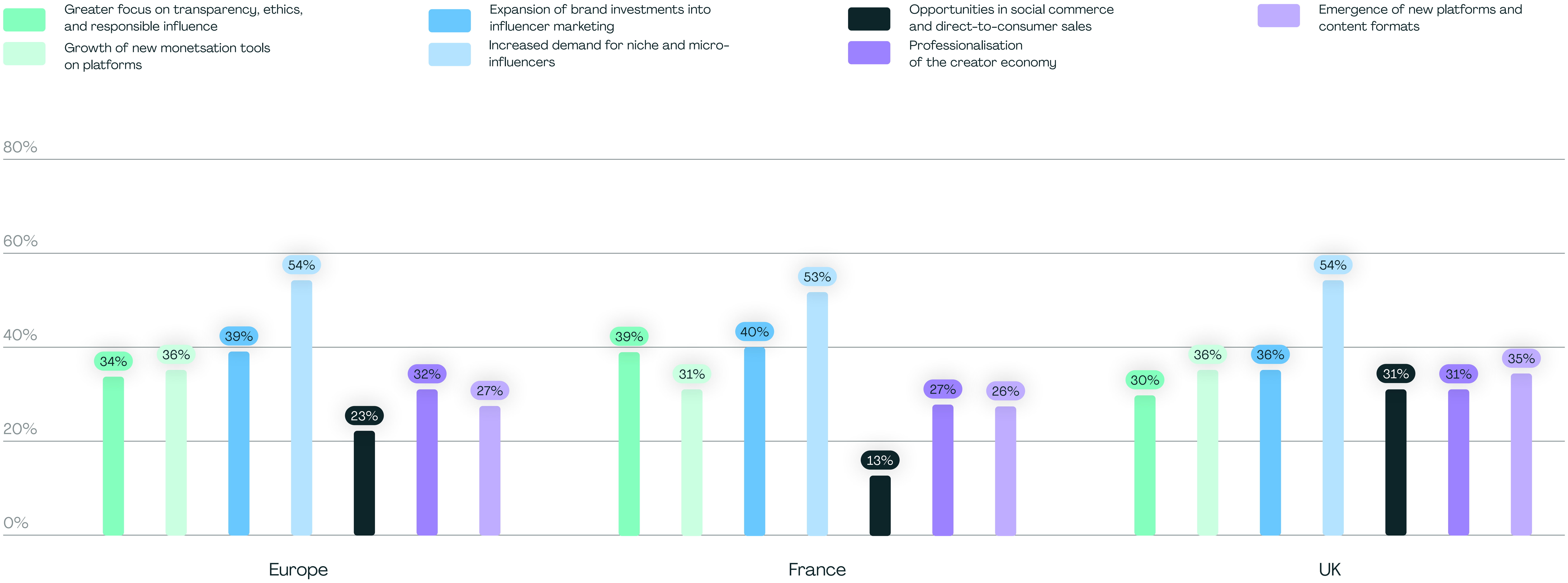
@aikulive, 133K, YouTube

NICHE IS THE NEW MAINSTREAM

Across Europe, creators see the growing demand for niche and micro influencers as the biggest opportunity ahead — a view shared by 54% of respondents. German creators lead this trend, with 68% identifying it as a key opportunity. Increased brand investment is also widely anticipated (39% overall), especially in Italy (47%) and Germany (45%).

> "More brand money is coming in, and creators are ready to catch it. The real challenge? Standing out and staying relevant. Niche isn't the focus here — big vision and smart moves are."

@patrizia_waz, 10.7K, Instagram



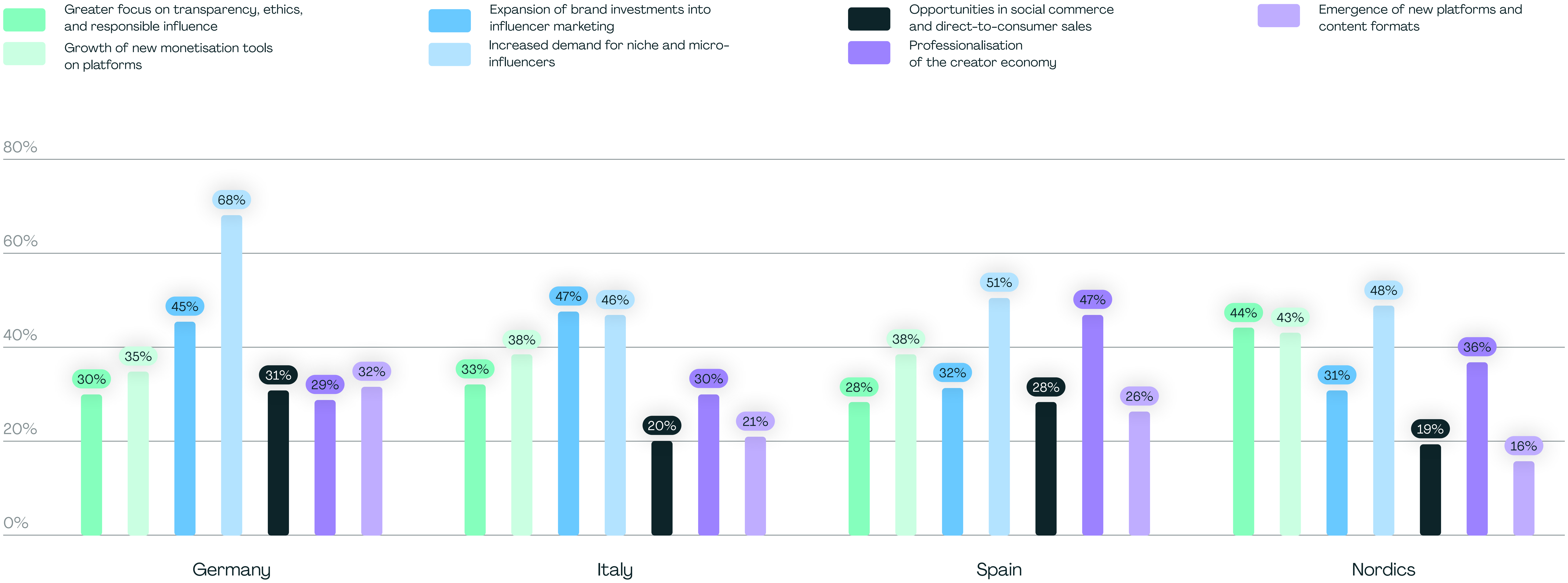
NICHE IS THE NEW MAINSTREAM

> "The launch of TikTok Shop in particular opens up new possibilities for collaboration and more immediate and traceable monetisation."

Nano-creator, Instagram, LinkedIn, Italy

> "Today, the great thing about LinkedIn is that it allows you to get thousands, even millions of views... without spending a single Euro on advertising."

@caroline.mignaux 145K Instagram, 64K TikTok, 154K LinkedIn



CLOUDS ON THE HORIZON? ALGORITHM ANXIETY AND AI UNCERTAINTY

When asked about the biggest challenges ahead, creators across Europe pointed to two clear threats: algorithm changes and the impact of AI.

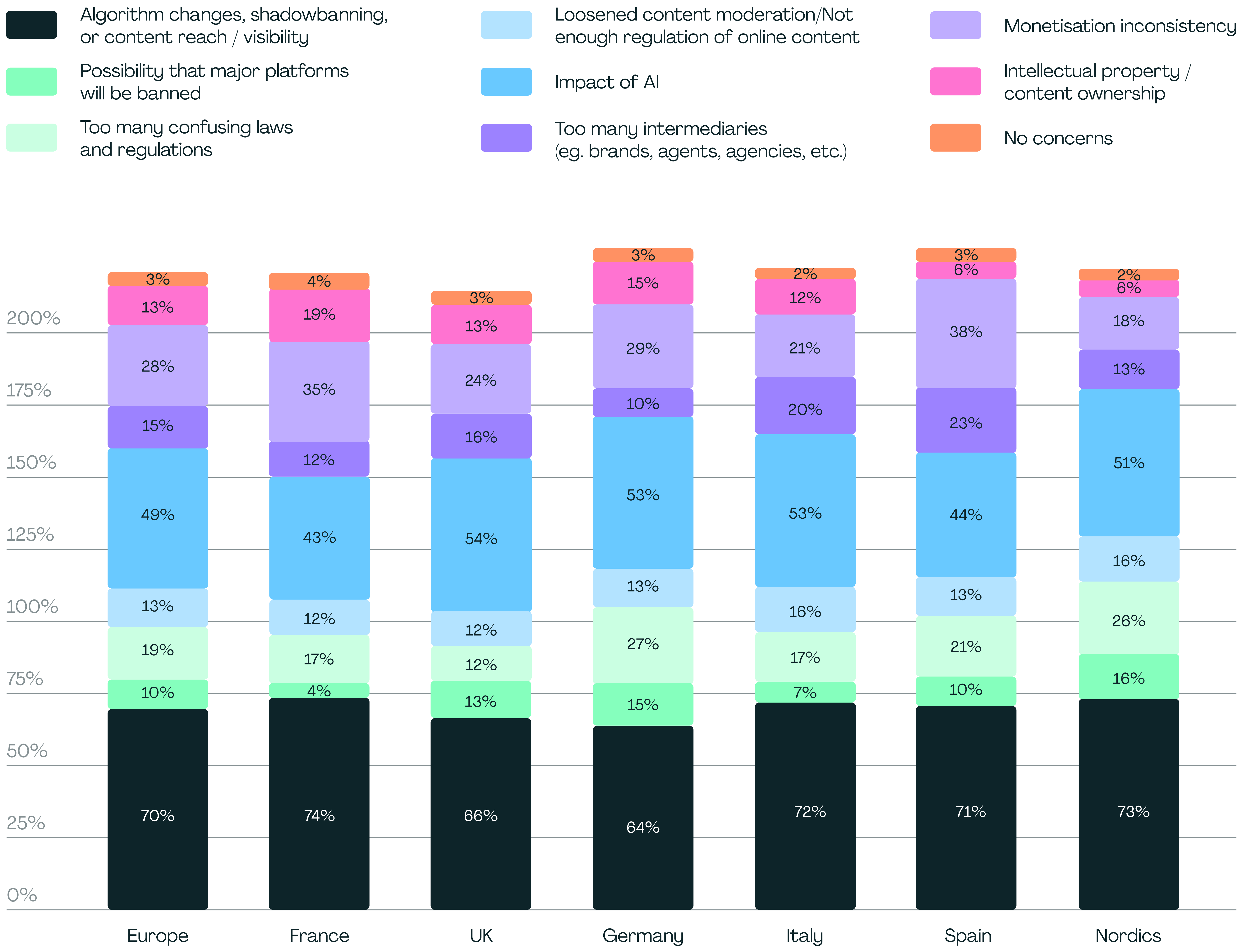
These concerns are consistent across all countries and content types. Meanwhile, French and Spanish creators stand out for their heightened worries around monetisation inconsistency — with 35% and 38% respectively naming it a top issue for the year to come.

> "Are there things I do today that will be replaced? These are questions we ask ourselves. AI can give you fashion advice, but it will never take into account your whole personality, your history, your lifestyle. My role is precisely to bring that human touch. And tomorrow, the challenge for designers will be to help their audience understand this human added value."

@amanda.saurin 49K Instagram, 183K YouTube

> "I feel like I work hard on my content, but the algorithms used by platforms mainly distribute content that is formatted to follow a trend or go viral. Unfortunately, content that attempts to add value is not valued... So it's very frustrating to create content that doesn't reach my subscribers, even though I have a large following."

Macro-creator, YouTube, France



ABOUT KOLSQUARE

Kolsquare is Europe's leading Influencer Marketing platform, a data-driven solution that allows brands to scale their KOL Marketing strategies and implement authentic partnerships with KOLs (Key Opinion Leaders).

Kolsquare's technology enables marketing professionals to easily identify the best Content Creators' profiles by filtering their content and audience, and to build and manage their campaigns from A to Z, including measuring results and benchmarking performance against competitors.

Kolsquare has built a thriving global community of influencer marketing experts, and offers hundreds of customers (Coca-Cola, Netflix, Sony Music, Publicis, Sézane, Sephora, Lush, Hermès...) the latest Big Data, AI and Machine Learning technologies to drive inspiring partnerships, tapping into an exhaustive network of KOLs with more than 5,000 followers in 180 countries on Instagram, TikTok, X , Facebook, YouTube and SnapChat.

As a Certified B Corporation, Kolsquare has been pioneering Responsible Influence by championing transparency, ethical practices, and meaningful collaborations to inspire change.

In October 2024, Kolsquare joined the Team.Blue group, one of the largest private tech companies in Europe, and a leading digital enabler for businesses and entrepreneurs across Europe. Team.Blue brings together over 60 successful brands in web hosting, domains, e-commerce, online compliance, lead generation, application solutions, and social media.

Certified B Corporation

www.kolsquare.com

ABOUT NEWTONX

NewtonX

NewtonX is a leading B2B research company that specialises in delivering precise, high-quality quantitative insights by sourcing verified professionals across 140 industries. Using proprietary AI technology and a custom recruiting engine, NewtonX connects clients with the exact experts they need to answer their most critical business questions.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all our partners and contributors who helped bring this project to life!

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