

EUROPEAN COMMUNICATION MONITOR

BRIEF REPORT

ASSESSING AND ADVANCING GENDER EQUALITY

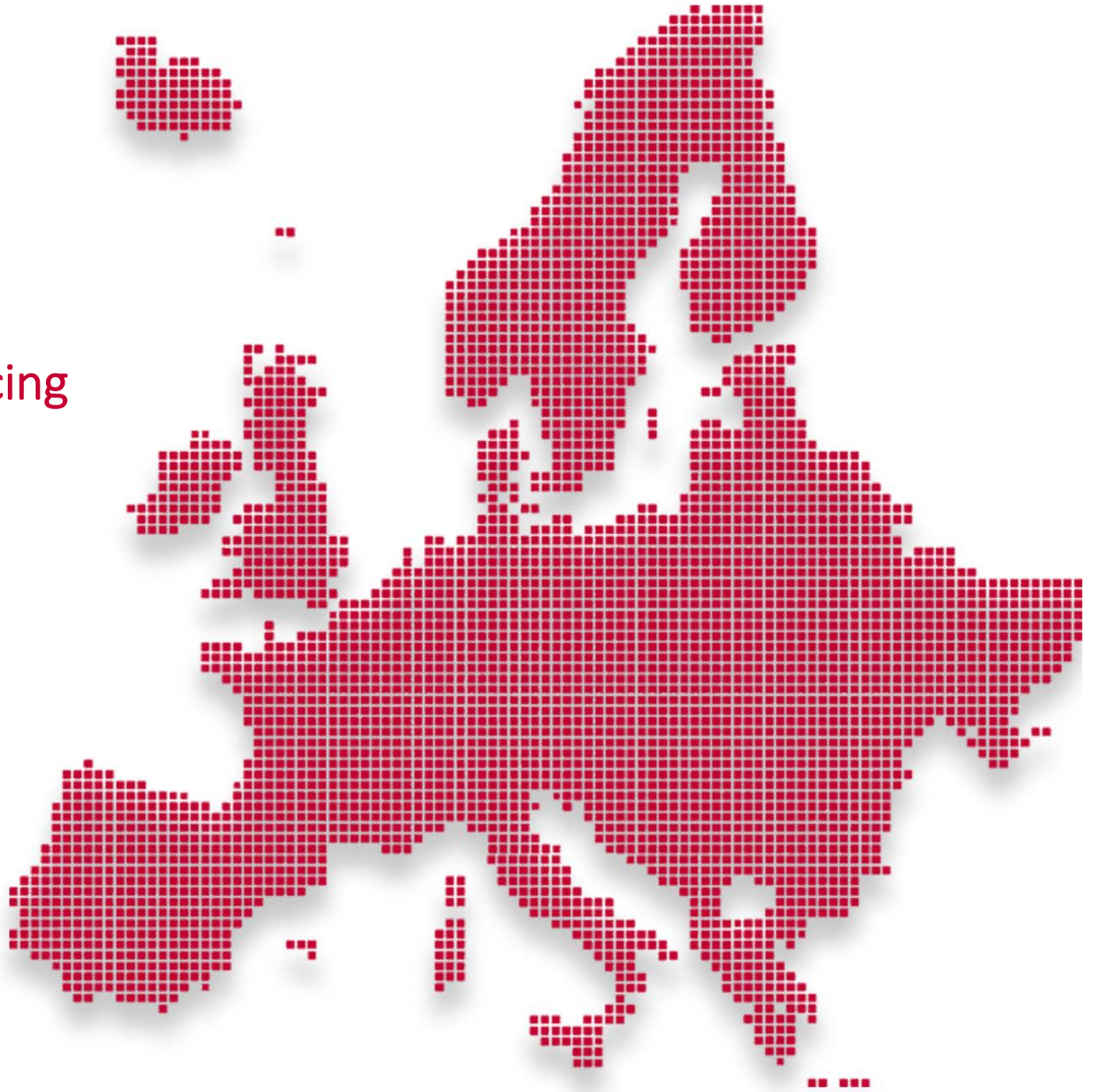
ORGANISED BY:



PARTNERS:



Assessing and advancing
gender equality



Assessing and advancing gender equality

Since the United Nations addressed gender equality as the fifth of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), business in general and the PR and communication industry in particular, have promoted discussion on the issue. Special reports (i.e. CIPR, 2017; GWPR, 2019) along with particular networks to enhance women's leadership have been established and gained traction. Industry reports and the most recent scientific meta-studies (Place & Vardeman-Winter, 2018; Topić et al., 2020) corroborate that gender inequalities and discriminations still persist in the communications field. Annually the European Communication Monitor monitors female practitioners and gender issues in the profession. This year it evaluates how gender equality achievements are perceived. The study also explores the awareness of the *glass ceiling* and its causes and responsibilities at the individual, organisational and profession level.

Gender issues remain a particular concern in an industry where three out of four departments and agencies in Europe employ more women than men, but still only one out of two leaders are women. Over half of practitioners (55.4 per cent) observe an improvement in gender equality in their country, but disagreement arises when it comes to evaluating how much has actually been done to support female practitioners: every second man (50.1 per cent) believes enough has been done, while most women (45.2 per cent) strongly dispute that. The *glass ceiling* refers to unacknowledged barriers that keep female practitioners from rising in the hierarchy (Dowling, 2017). There are still 32 per cent of European communication practitioners that deny the glass ceiling exists at any level. 42.6 per cent acknowledge the problem at the professional level in their country, but only 22.4 per cent concede it is an issue in their own organisation or department.

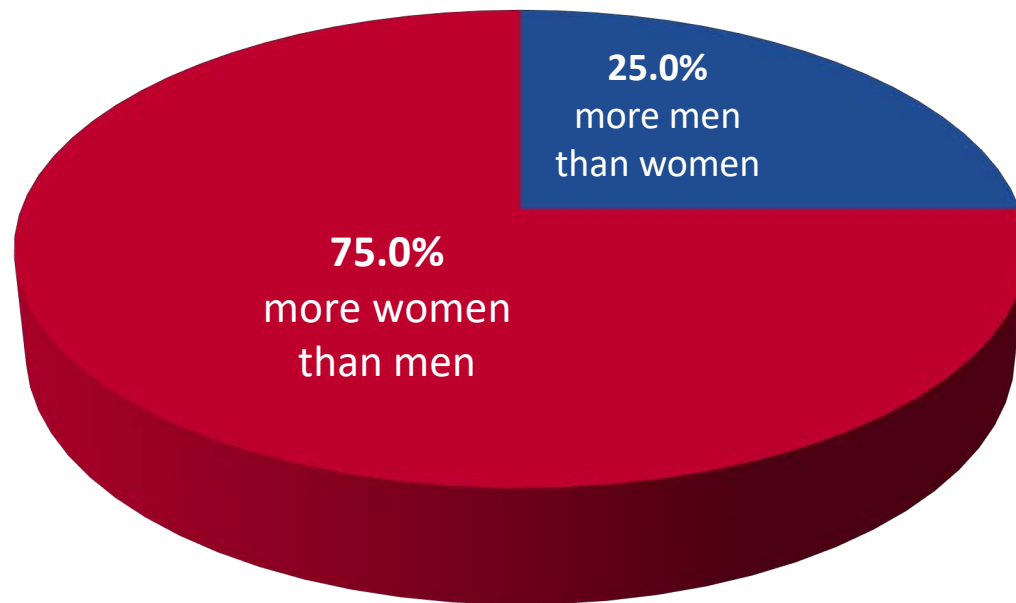
According to previous research, denial occurs in the field (Yeomans, 2019) and is most commonly seen in male practitioners (Zerfass et al., 2014). This study shows that only three out of ten male respondents (29.6 per cent) acknowledge the problem in the profession and only 11.2 per cent accept it is observable in their organisation or department. In contrast every third female practitioner (29.4 per cent) believes they have been personally affected.

When considering factors that perpetuate the glass ceiling, the results corroborate previous research (Catalyst, 2004; GWPR, 2019; Meng & Neill, 2020; Moreno et al., 2020). The majority identify issues at the organisational level: lack of flexibility to take care of family obligations (61.6 per cent) and intransparent promotion policies (57.9 per cent). Barriers at the macro level of the profession are also identified – a lack of networks and programmes for women (39.2 per cent) and too few inspiring female role models (33.9 per cent). Yet, at the individual level a lack of motivation and competences of female practitioners is identified by a small number of respondents (15.4 per cent), less than two out of ten respondents. Because psychological and cognitive differences are not empirically conclusive, gender differences tend to be explained today in educational, social and cultural factors (Mazei et al., 2015; Tench et al., 2017). Responsibilities for overcoming the glass ceiling are also placed at the organisational level for 65.3 per cent of respondents. Nevertheless, CCOs and agency CEOs tend to attribute shared responsibilities to the professional communities and female employees.

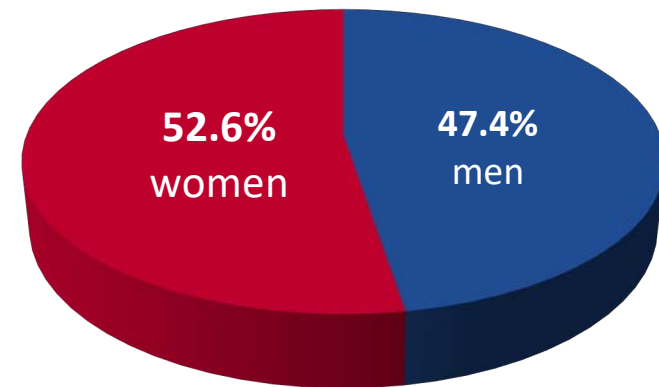
Results of this study reinforce that gender prejudices still exist in the profession in Europe. The main factors for the glass ceiling relate to work-life balance conflicts and interventions are needed firstly from organisations and secondly from professional communities.

Gender issues at work: In 75 percent of communications departments and agencies, women are in the majority, but only every second top communicator is female

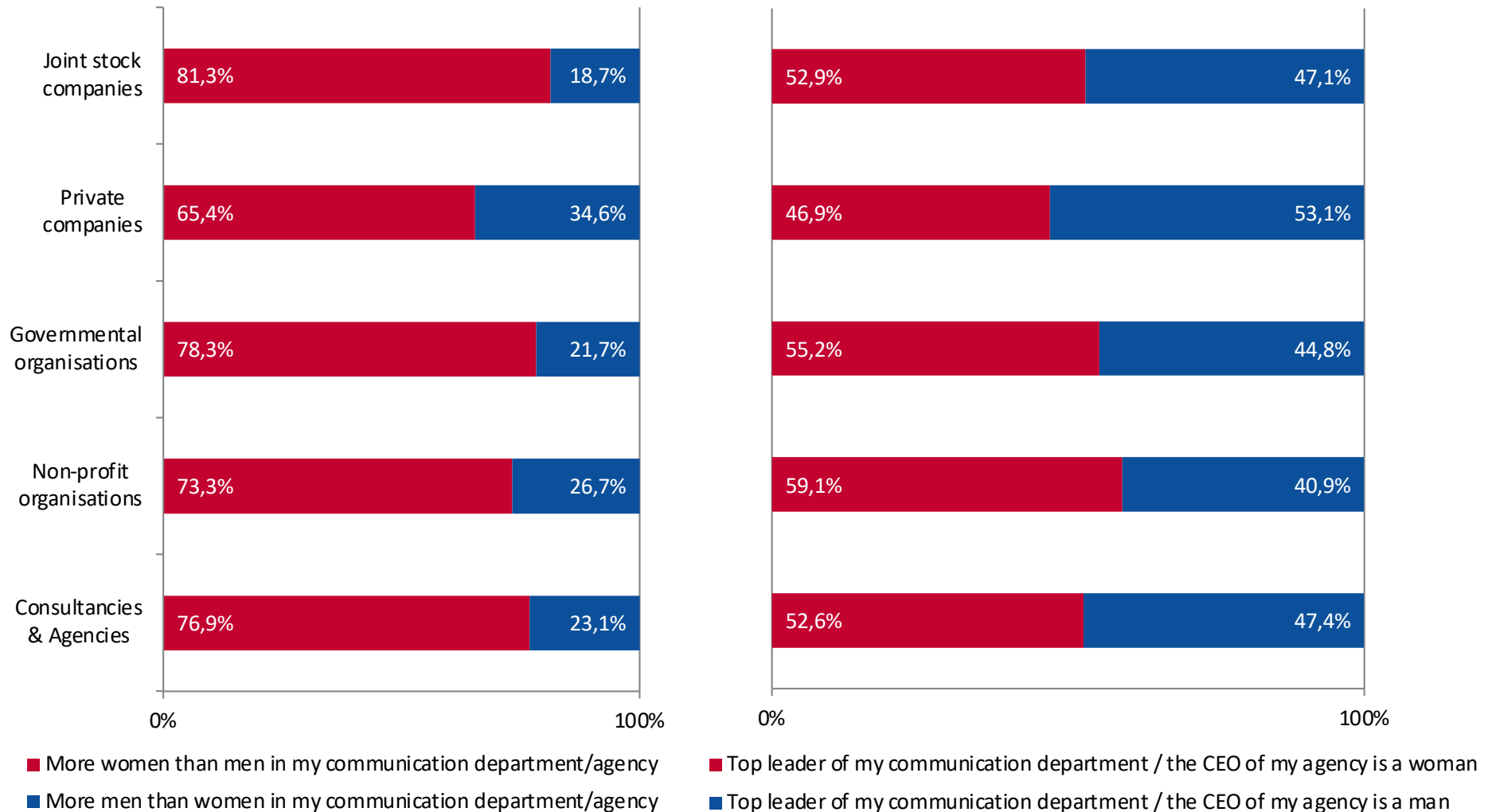
Practitioners working in communication departments and agencies



Top leaders of communication departments and agencies

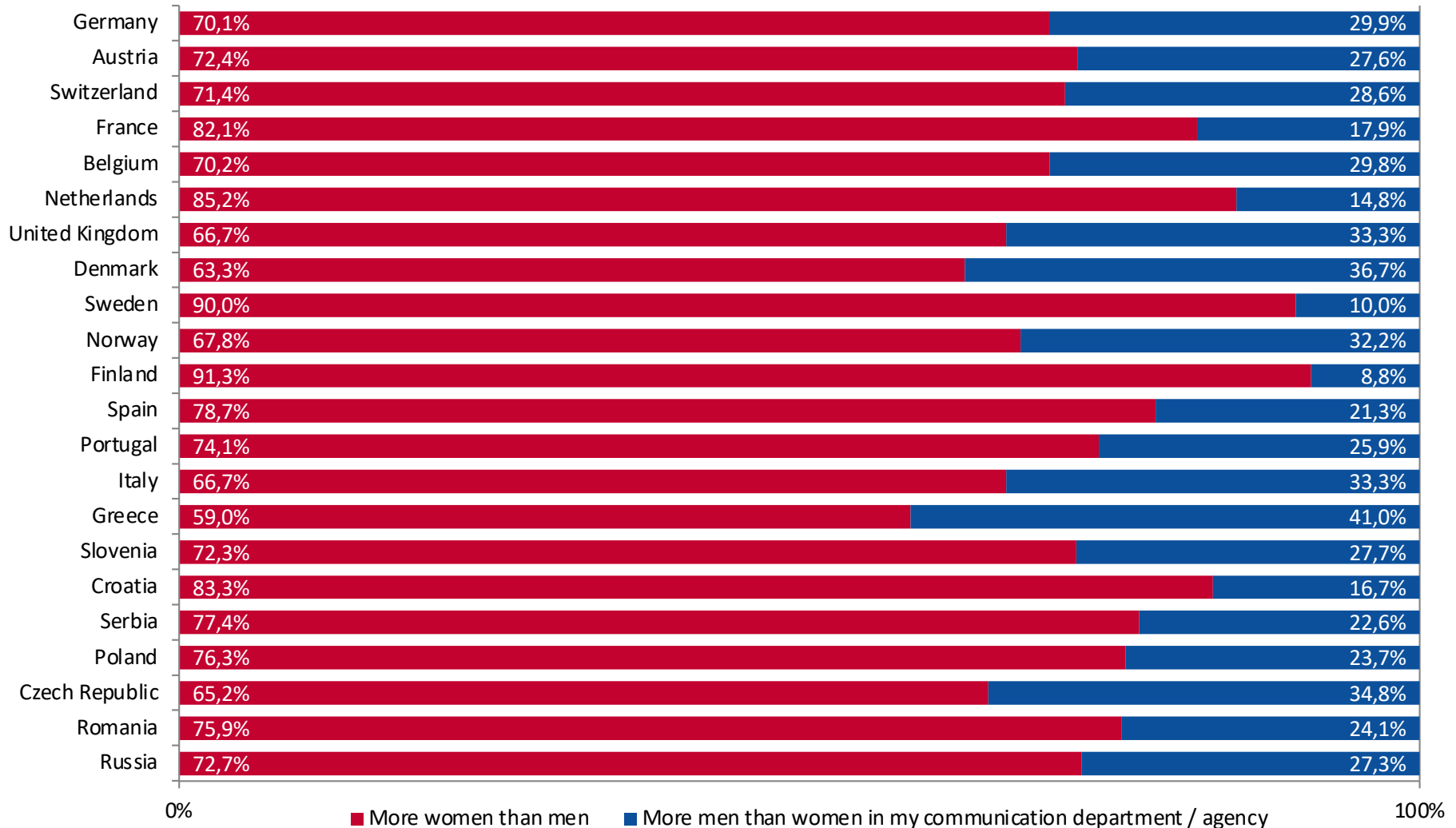


Female communicators are predominant in all types of organisations – female leadership is stronger in non-profits and falling short in private companies



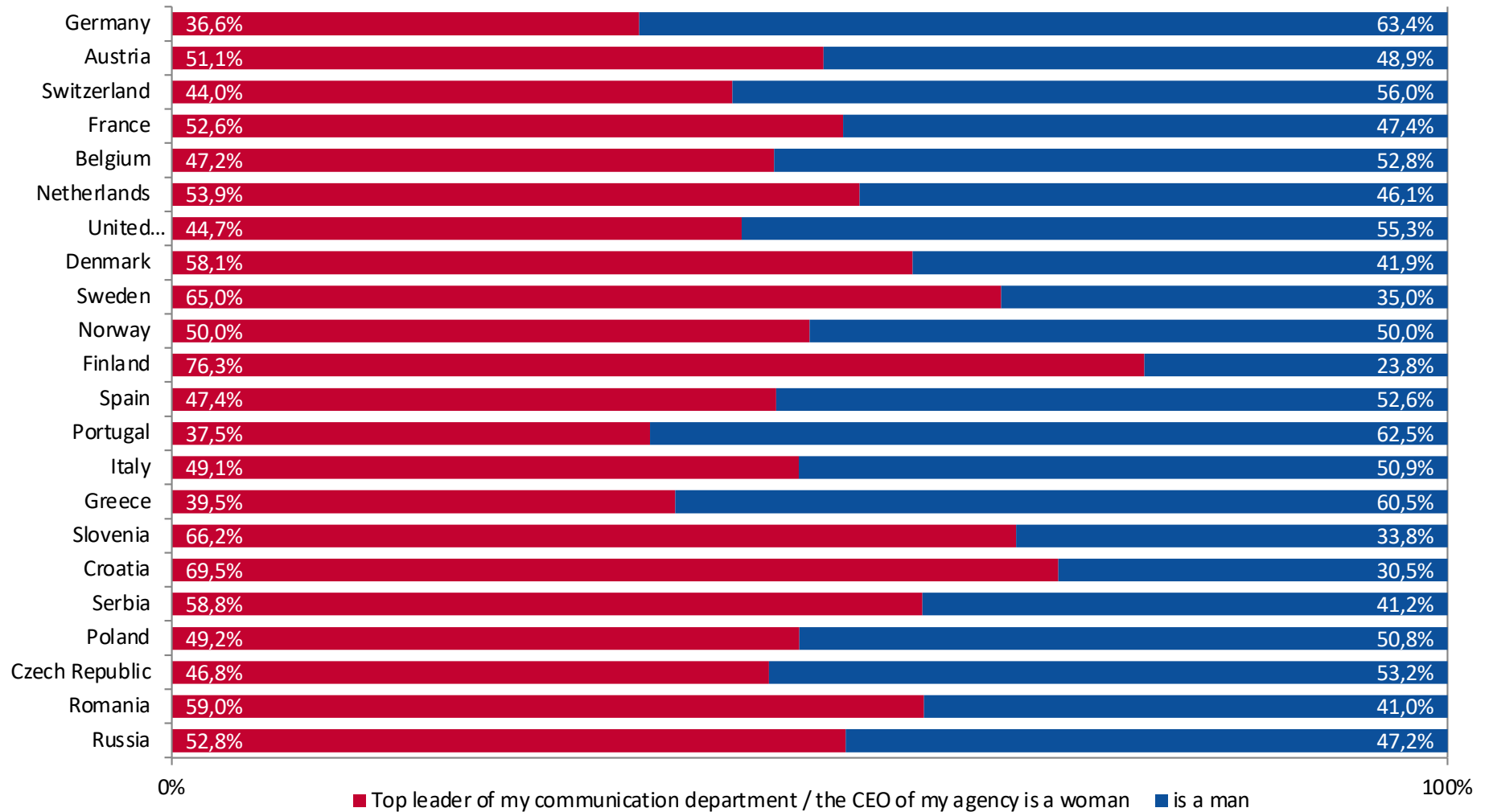
www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n ≥ 2,151 communication professionals. Q 32: How is the situation regarding women in leading communication positions in your organisation? The top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a woman / Overall, there are more women than men in my communication department/agency. Scale: Yes / No / N/A. (Highly) significant differences between various types of organisations (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$ / $p \leq 0.05$).

Nine out of ten communication departments and agencies in Finland and Sweden are dominated by female professionals, compared to only 59 per cent in Greece



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 1,897 communication professionals from 22 countries. Q 32: How is the situation regarding women in leading communication positions in your organisation? The top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a woman / Overall, there are more women than men in my communication department/agency. Scale: Yes / No / N/A. Highly significant differences between countries (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$).

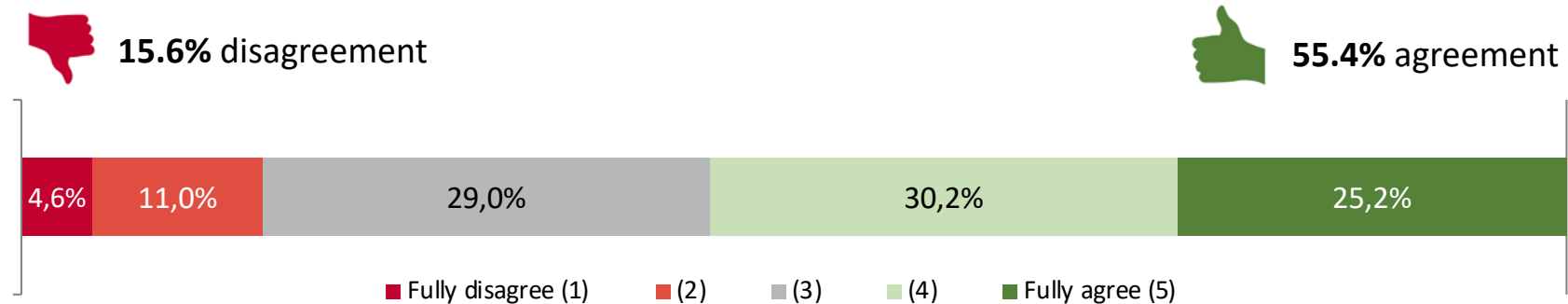
Female leadership in communications is strong in Finland, Sweden, Croatia, and Slovenia, while Germany, Portugal and Greece are lagging behind



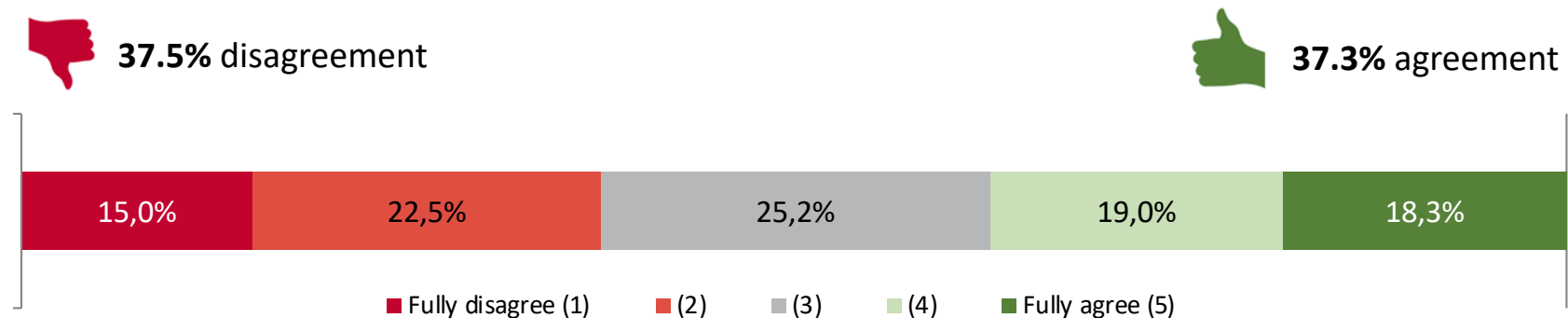
www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 1,925 communication professionals from 22 countries. Q.32: How is the situation regarding women in leading communication positions in your organisation? The top leader of my communication department/the CEO of my agency is a woman / Overall, there are more women than men in my communication department/agency. Scale: Yes / No / N/A. Highly significant differences between countries (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$).

Most communicators in Europe state that gender equality has improved recently, but they disagree whether enough is being done to support women in the field

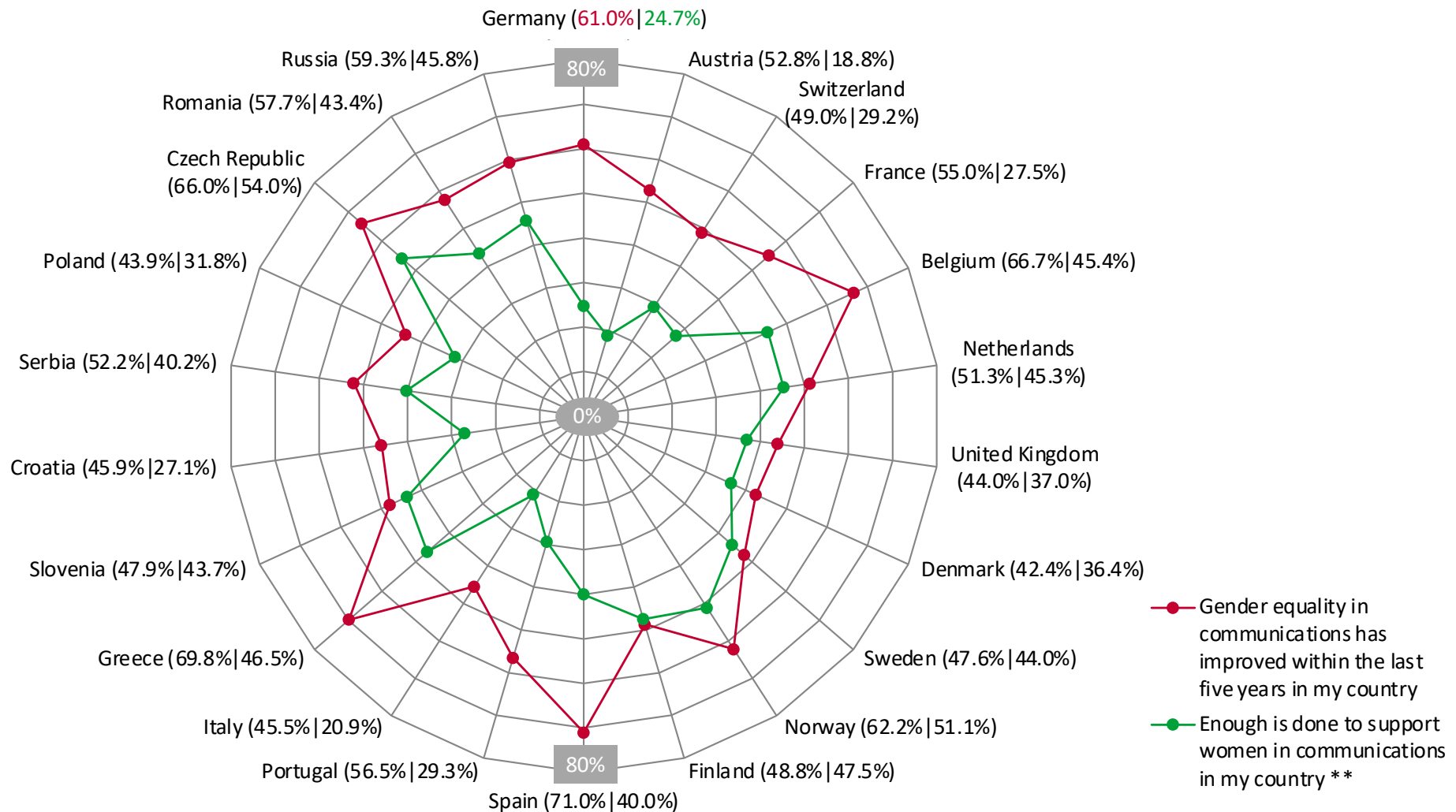
“Gender equality in communications has improved within the last five years in my country.”



“Enough is done to support women in communications in my country.”



Gender equality has improved significantly in Spain, Greece, Belgium, and the Czech Republic; more support is especially asked for in Austria, Italy, and Germany

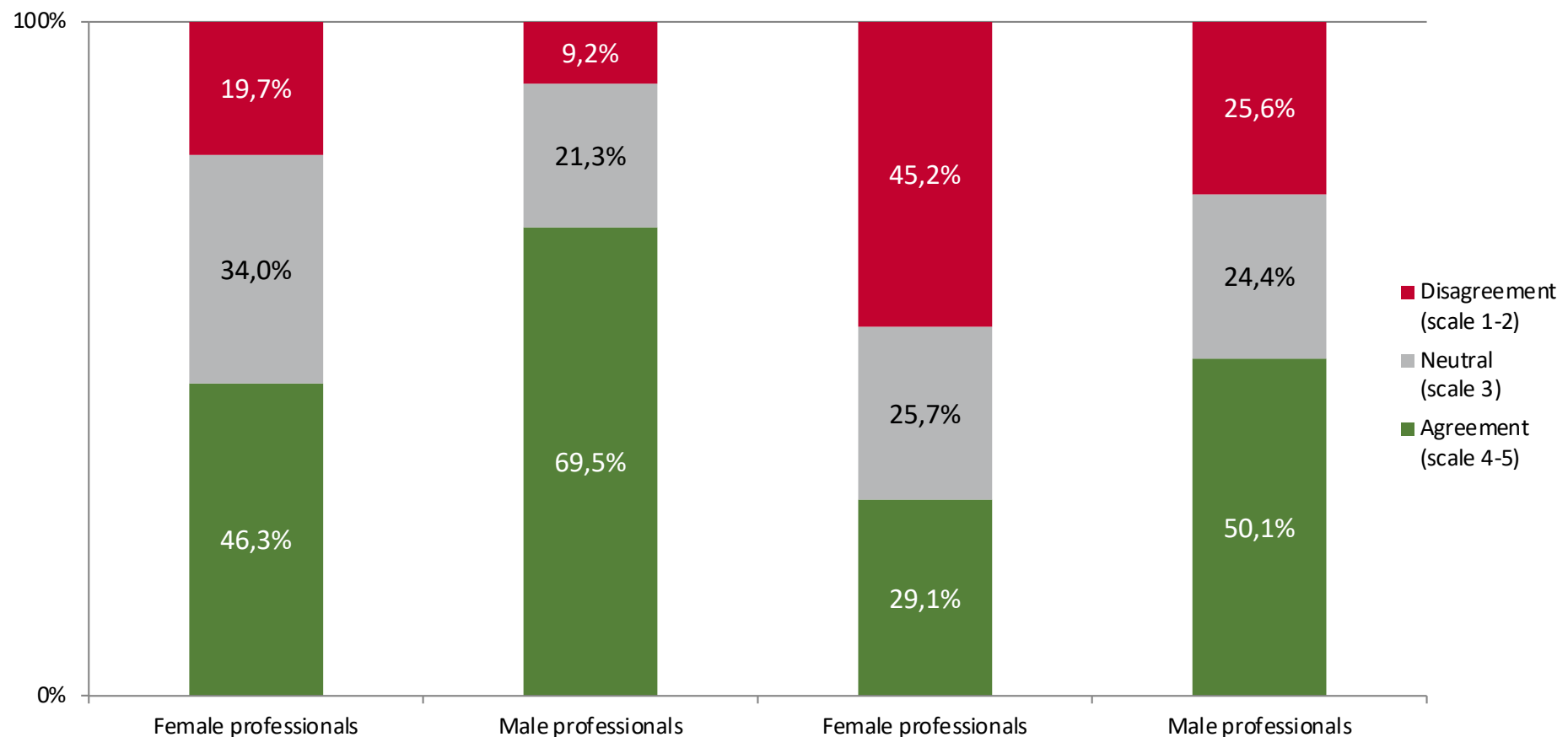


www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 2,048 communication professionals from 22 countries. Q8: Gender issues are heavily discussed at the moment across all professions – especially the equality of women and men. How would you assess the current situation of women in strategic communication and public relations? Scale 1 (Fully disagree) – 5 (Fully agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. ** Highly significant differences (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$).

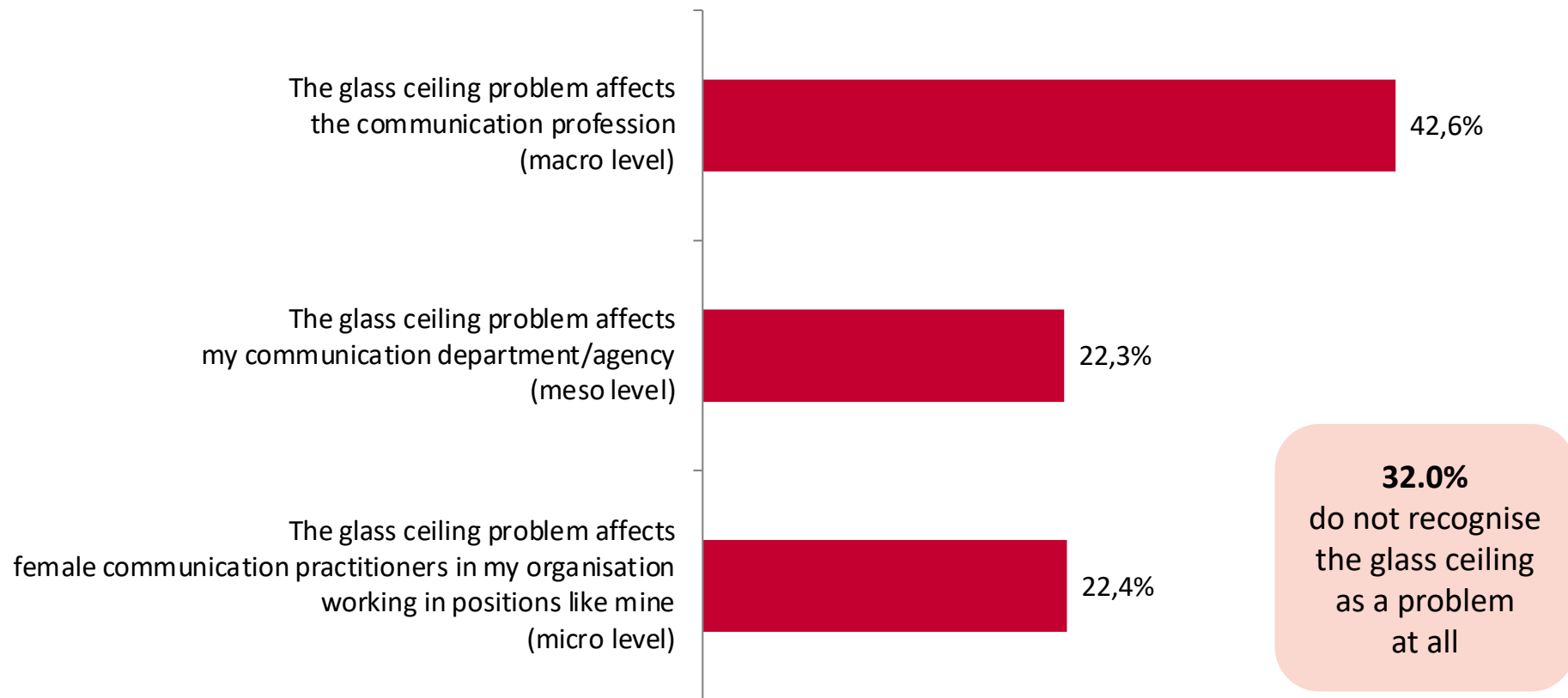
Male respondents assess the current situation of women in the profession more positively than female colleagues; every second believes that there is enough support

*“Gender equality in communications has improved within the last five years in my country.” ***

*“Enough is done to support women in communications in my country.” ***



Four out of ten communication practitioners in Europe believe a glass ceiling problem exists in the profession, but only every fifth reports about it in their own environment

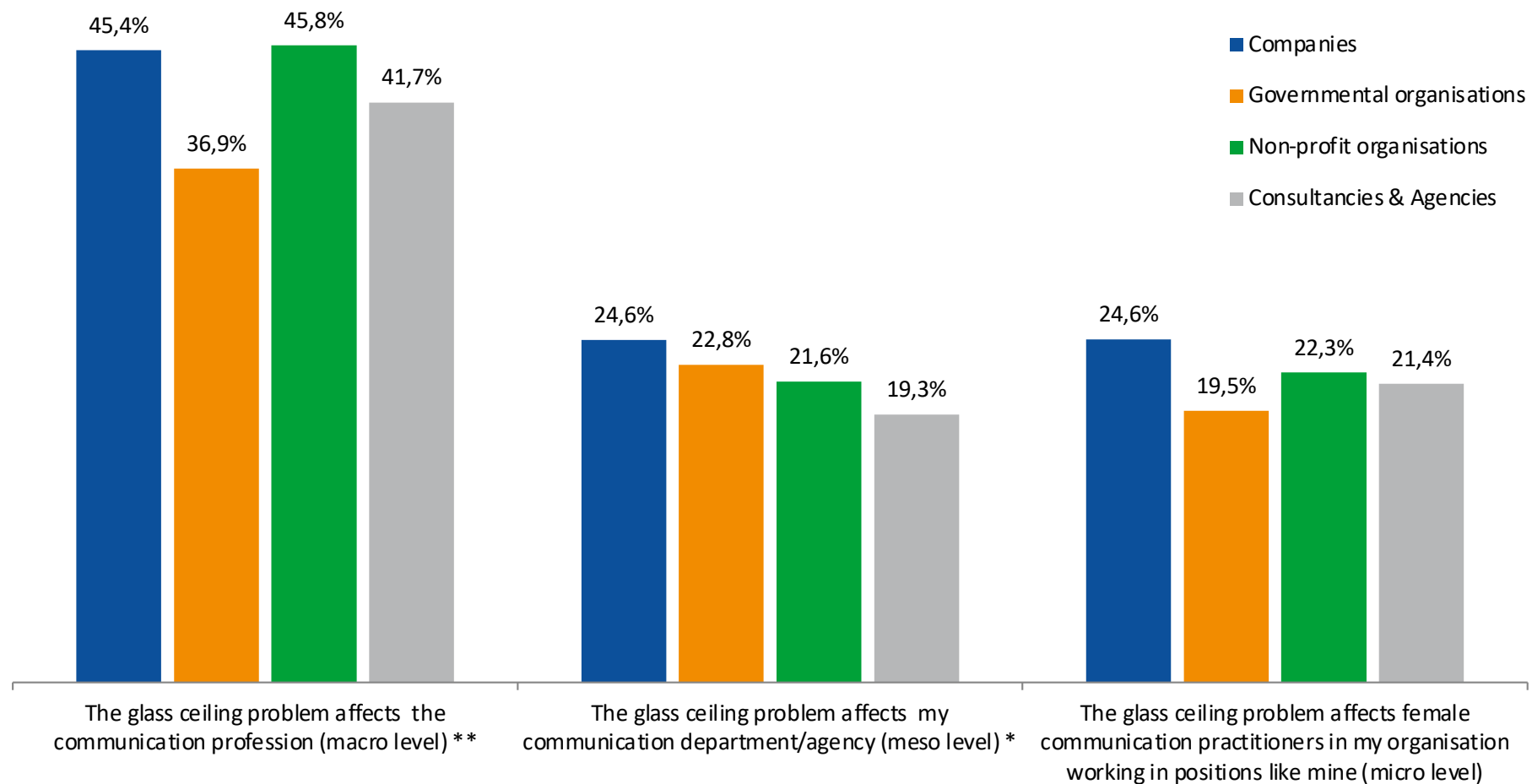


Glass ceiling

= an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy

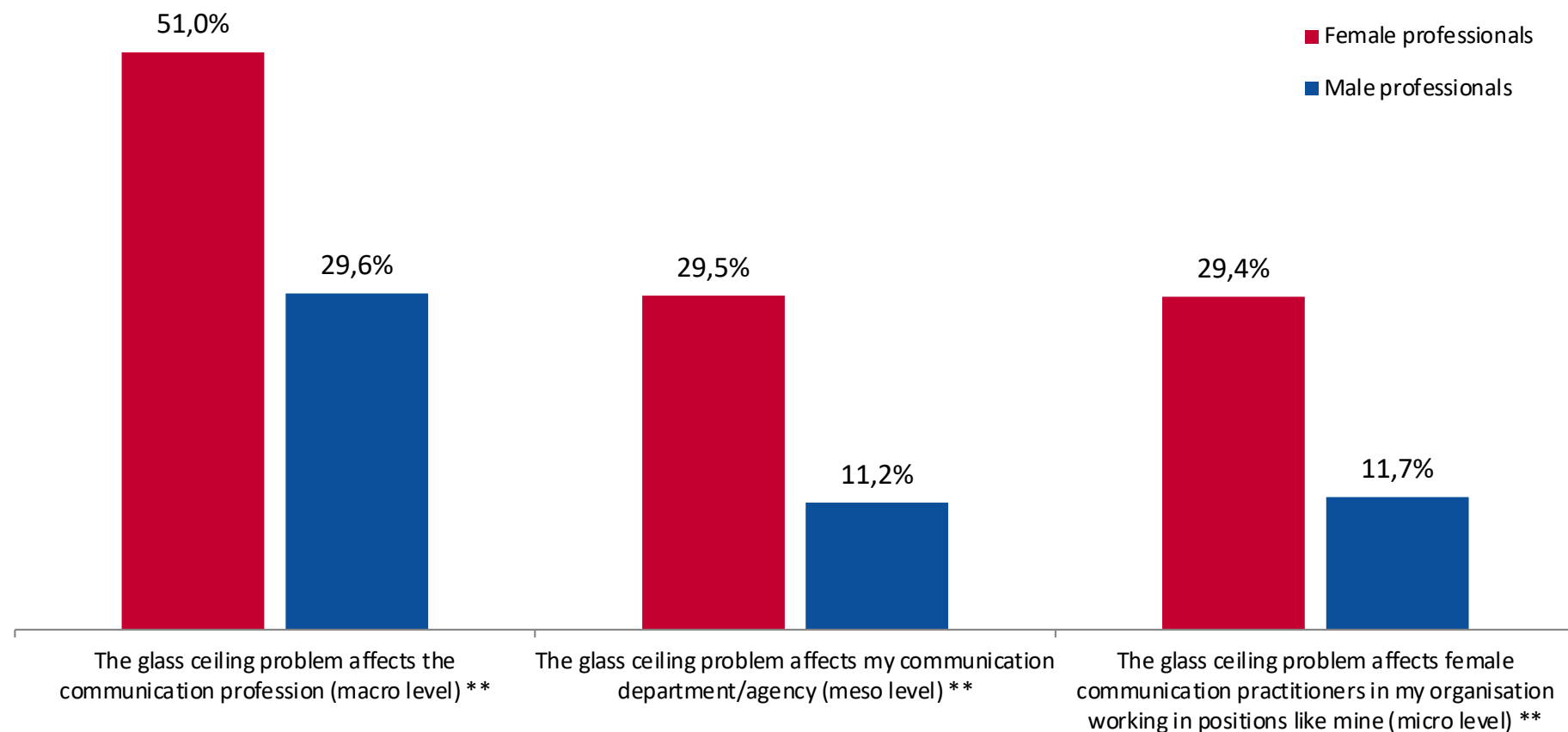
www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 2,204 communication professionals. Q 9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the “glass ceiling” – an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organisation? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. Not recognizing the problem at all = respondents who disagreed with all three items (scale points 1-2).

Significant differences across various types of organisations: The glass ceiling problem is perceived as most relevant in companies



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n ≥ 2,204 communication professionals. Q 9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the “glass ceiling” – an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organisation? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. ** Highly significant differences (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$). * Significant differences (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.05$).

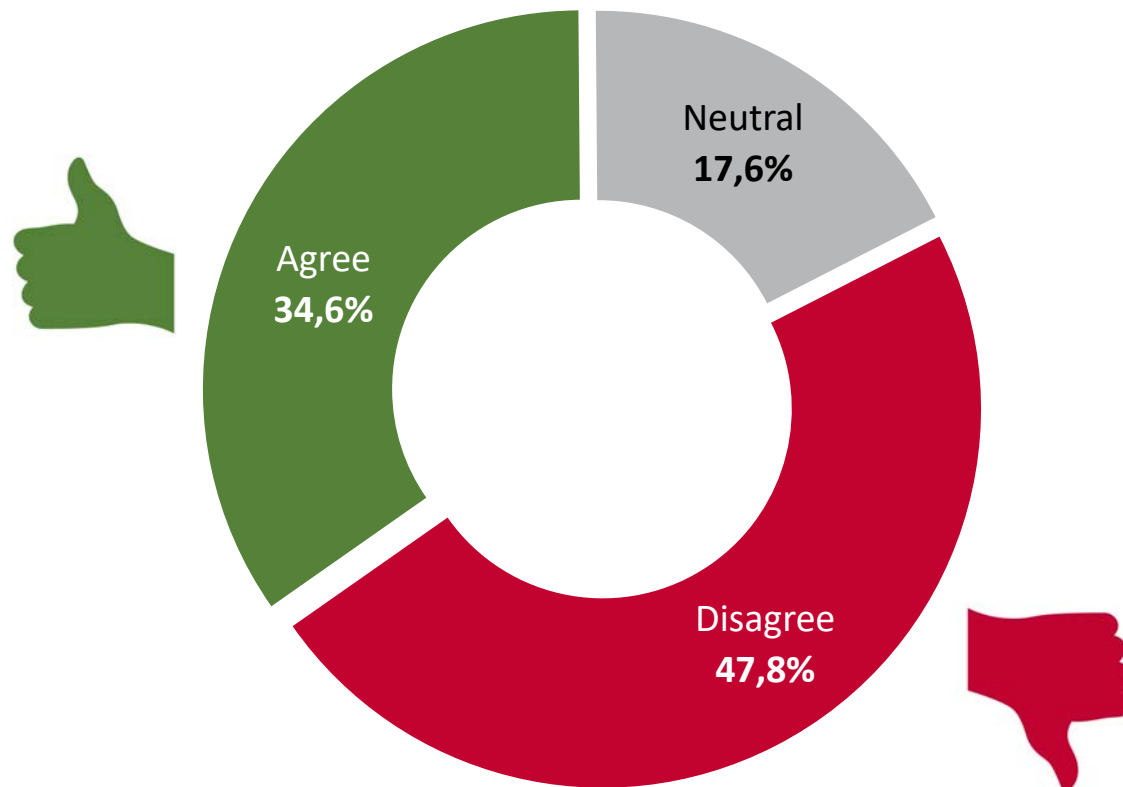
Women working in the communications profession are much more aware of unacknowledged barriers for promotion on the macro, meso, and micro level



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / $n \geq 2,201$ communication professionals. Q9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the “glass ceiling” – an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organisation? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. ** Highly significant differences (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$).

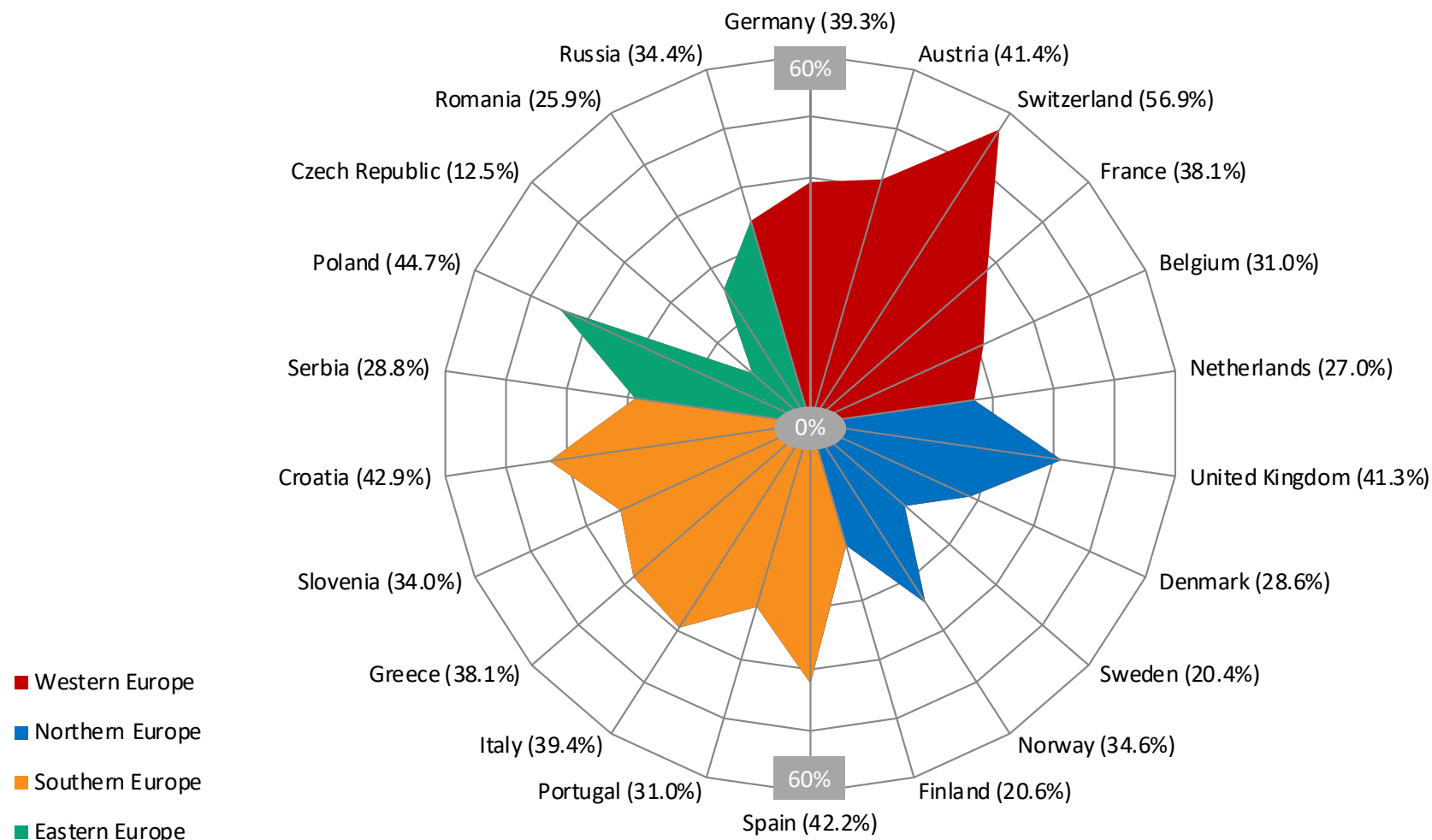
Every third female communication practitioner in Europe states that she is personally affected by an invisible barrier keeping her from rising to another career level

The glass ceiling problem affects me personally



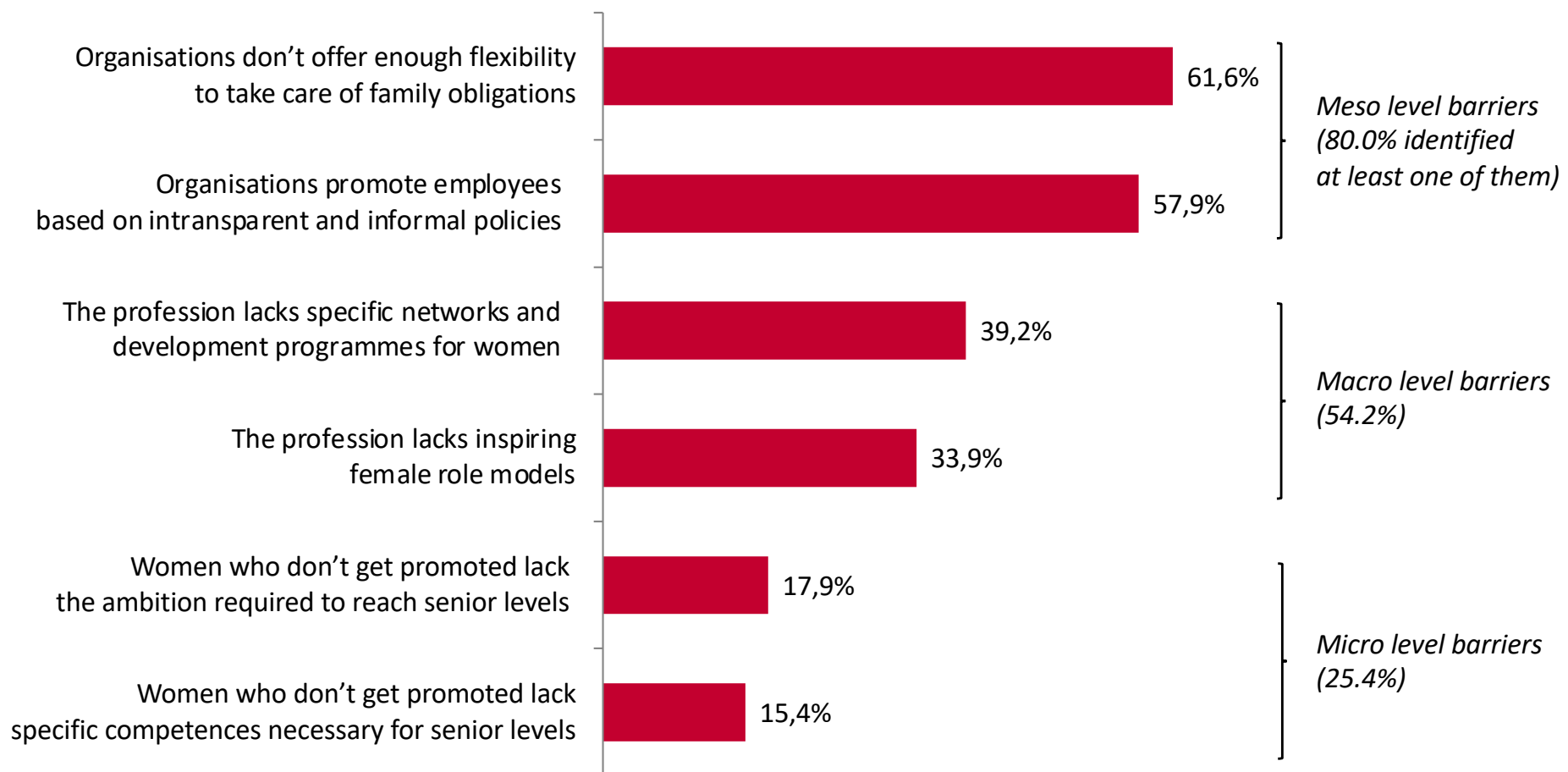
The personal impact of the glass ceiling problem is assessed quite differently across Europe

The glass ceiling problem affects me personally



Factors hindering women from reaching top positions in communications: Organisational barriers are most important

Reasons for the glass ceiling in the communications profession



Assessment of reasons for the glass ceiling problem in Western/Northern Europe

	Women who don't get promoted lack specific competences necessary for senior levels	Women who don't get promoted lack the ambition required to reach senior levels	Organisations promote employees based on intransparent and informal policies	Organisations don't offer enough flexibility to take care of family obligations	The profession lacks specific networks and development programmes for women	The profession lacks inspiring female role models
Germany	13.3%	12.4%	62.9%	63.8%	30.5%	28.6%
Austria	17.7%	32.9%	68.4%	77.2%	50.6%	40.5%
Switzerland	9.1%	18.2%	58.2%	69.1%	45.5%	41.8%
France	8.7%	4.3%	52.2%	43.5%	34.8%	39.1%
Belgium	11.4%	11.4%	54.5%	54.5%	36.4%	31.8%
Netherlands	6.5%	8.7%	69.6%	45.7%	37.0%	30.4%
United Kingdom	7.7%	7.7%	75.0%	63.5%	25.0%	26.9%
Denmark	0.0%	10.0%	50.0%	50.0%	40.0%	60.0%
Sweden	8.3%	4.2%	54.2%	33.3%	25.0%	29.2%
Norway	5.9%	17.6%	67.6%	29.4%	50.0%	20.6%
Finland	10.7%	14.3%	60.7%	42.9%	35.7%	25.0%

www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 962 communication professionals from 22 countries. Q10: What are the factors that hinder women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations in your country? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

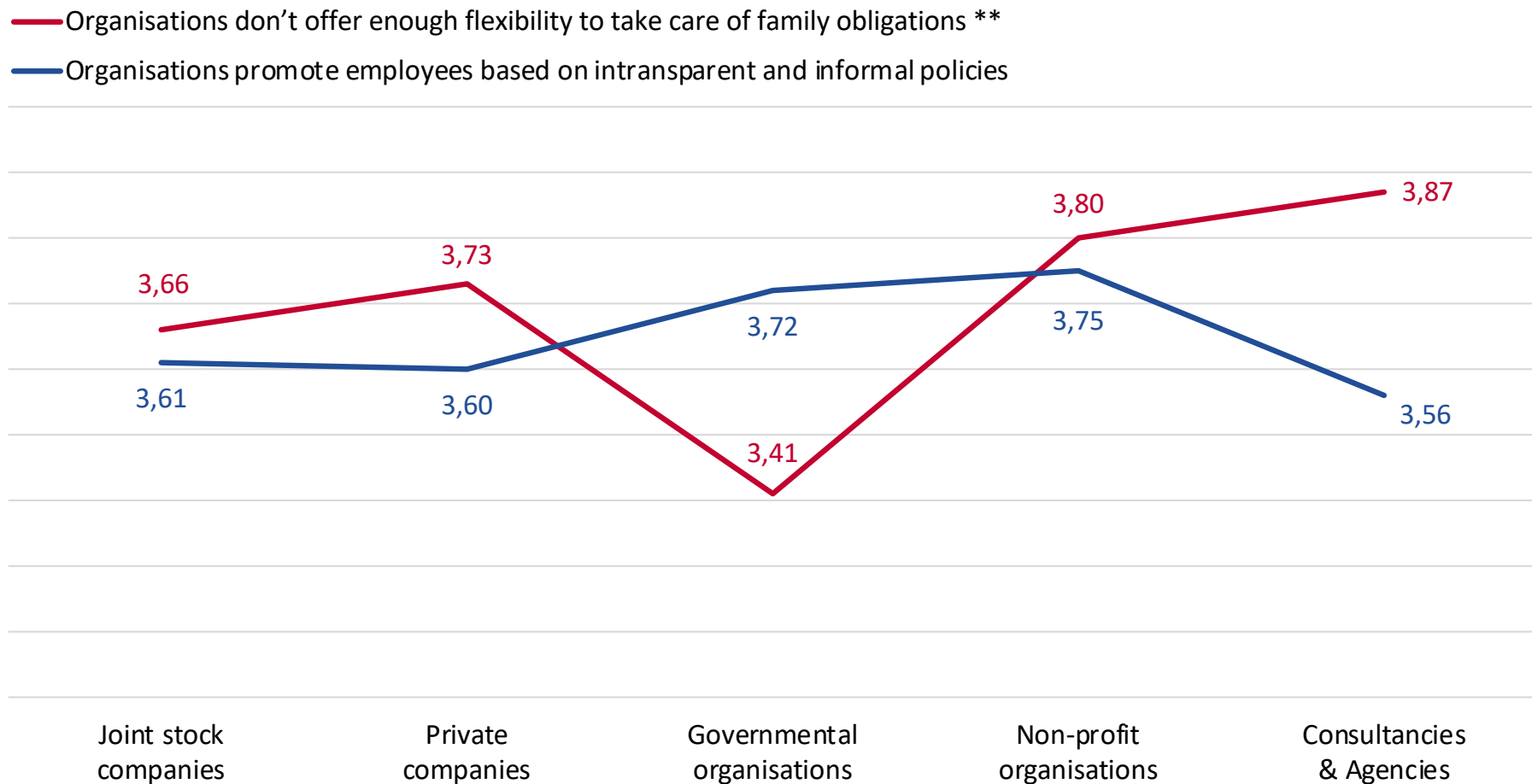
Assessment of reasons for the glass ceiling problem in Southern/Eastern Europe

	Women who don't get promoted lack specific competences necessary for senior levels	Women who don't get promoted lack the ambition required to reach senior levels	Organisations promote employees based on intransparent and informal policies	Organisations don't offer enough flexibility to take care of family obligations	The profession lacks specific networks and development programmes for women	The profession lacks inspiring female role models
Spain	15.8%	26.3%	59.6%	73.7%	43.9%	36.8%
Portugal	11.1%	11.1%	64.4%	60.0%	40.0%	26.7%
Italy	10.1%	17.4%	56.5%	75.4%	50.7%	42.0%
Greece	17.6%	11.8%	52.9%	70.6%	47.1%	29.4%
Slovenia	16.7%	16.7%	41.7%	61.1%	27.8%	30.6%
Croatia	15.9%	9.1%	65.9%	59.1%	38.6%	36.4%
Serbia	22.5%	22.5%	52.5%	75.0%	42.5%	42.5%
Poland	13.3%	10.0%	63.3%	63.3%	26.7%	46.7%
Czech Republic	21.4%	42.9%	50.0%	64.3%	35.7%	42.9%
Romania	29.5%	26.1%	35.2%	59.1%	43.2%	30.7%
Russia	36.4%	40.9%	59.1%	59.1%	36.4%	36.4%

www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 962 communication professionals from 22 countries. Q10: What are the factors that hinder women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations in your country? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5.

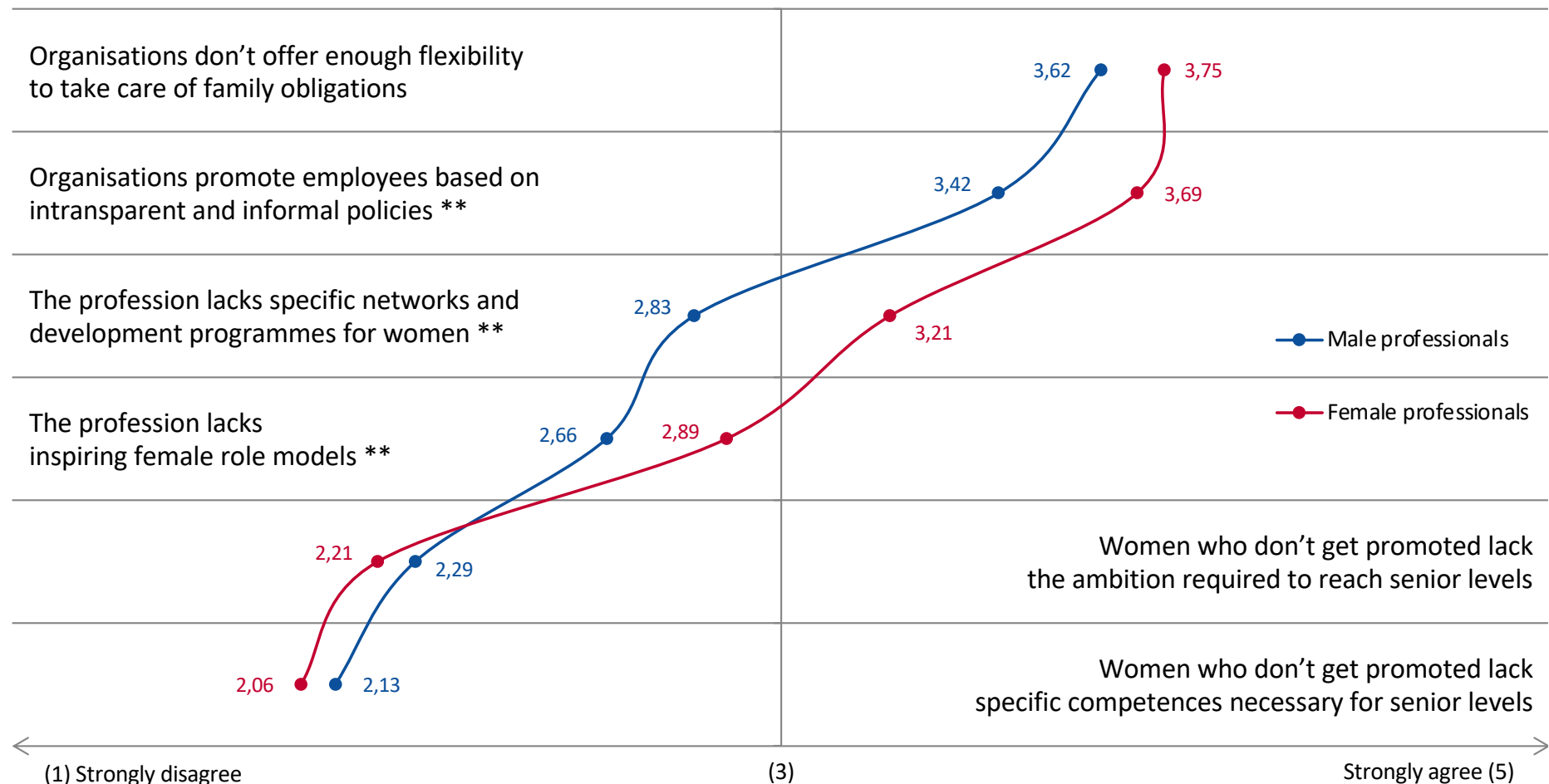
Governmental organisations offer more flexibility than companies and agencies, but they are equally intransparent and informal in their promotion policies

Organisational factors which hinder women from reaching top positions in communications



Female practitioners report stronger barriers on the organisational and professional level, while men blame individual characteristics of women more often

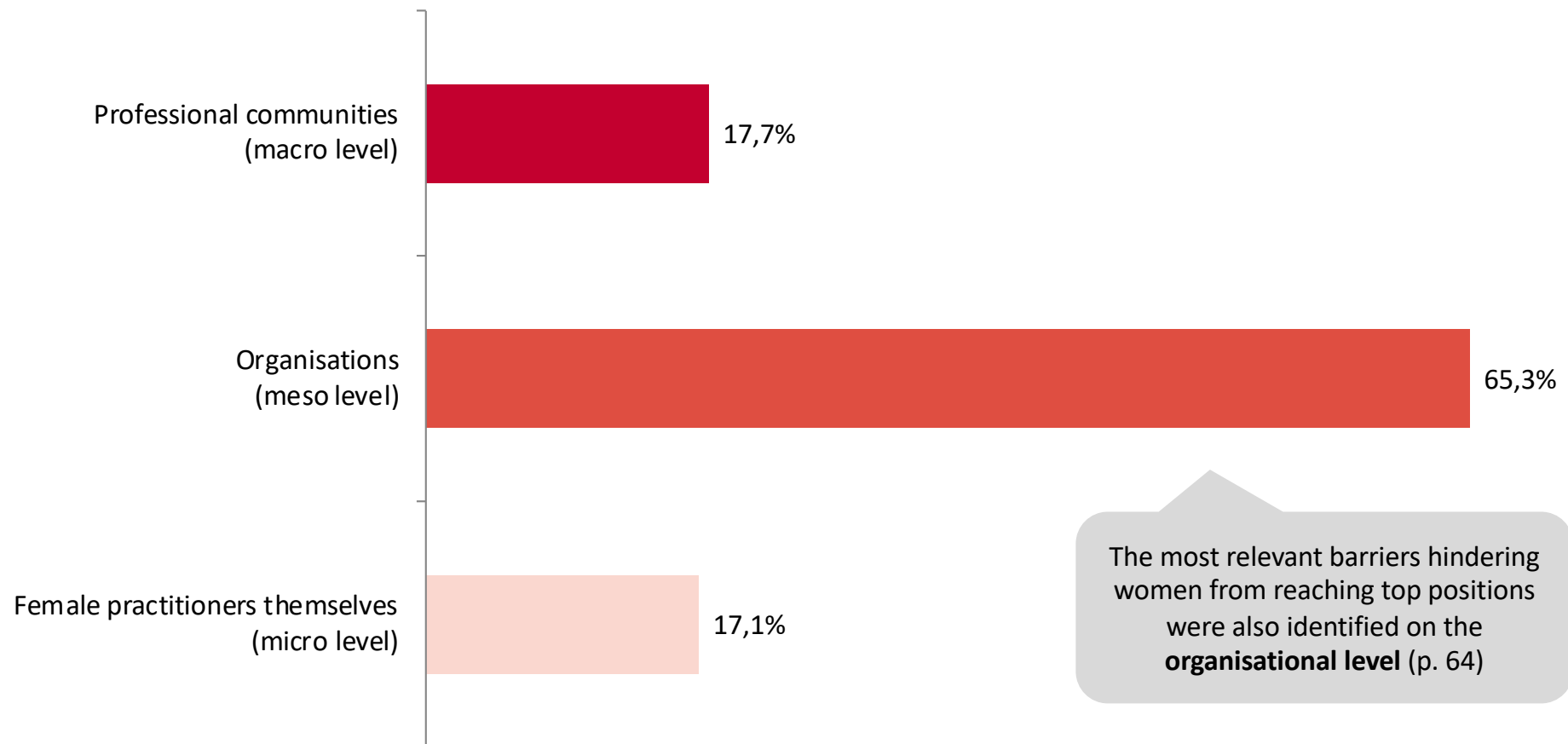
Factors assumed to hinder women from reaching top positions in communications



www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 1,083 communication professionals. Q 10: What are the factors that hinder women from reaching top positions in strategic communication and public relations in your country? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Mean values. ** Highly significant differences (ANOVA, $p \leq 0.01$). * Significant differences (ANOVA, $p \leq 0.05$).

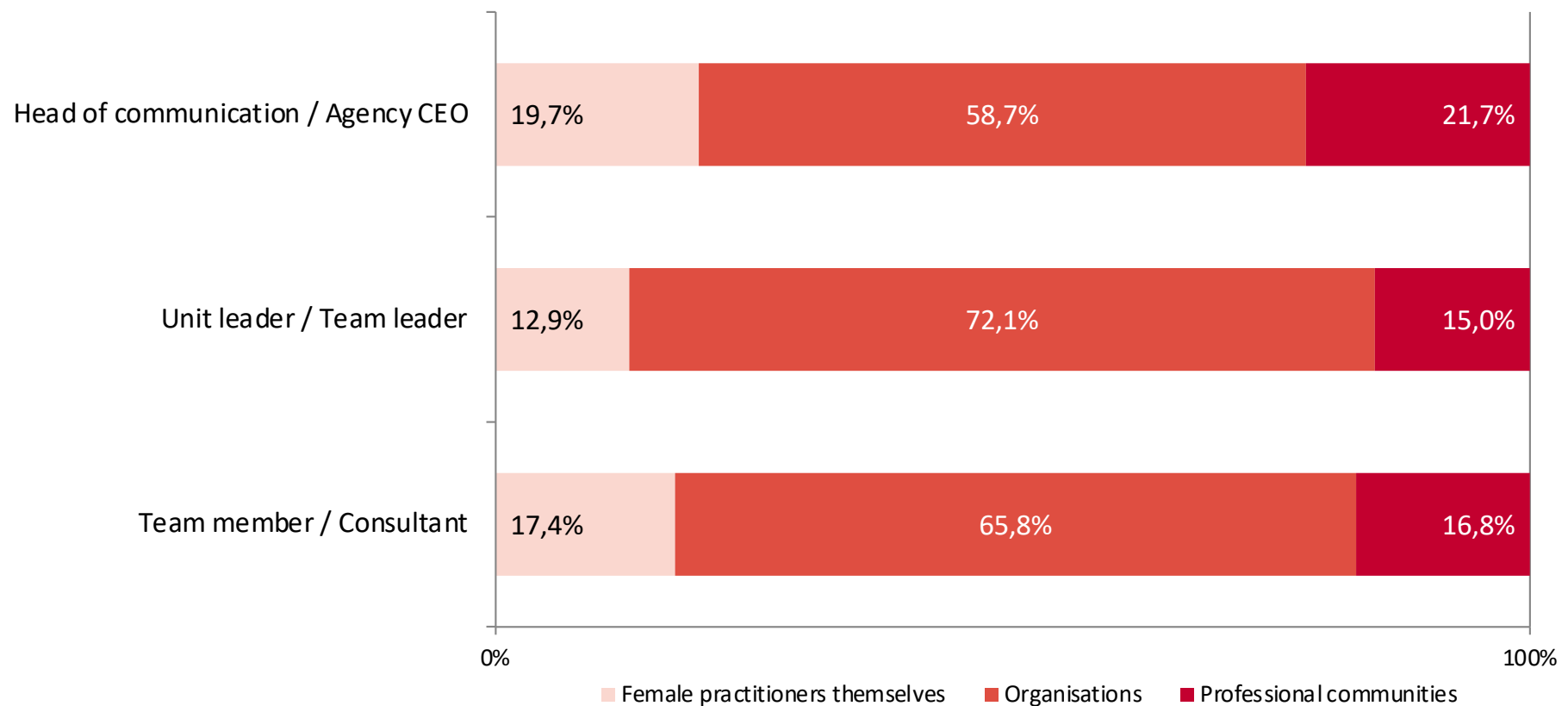
Overcoming the glass ceiling in communications: A clear majority of European practitioners believe that organisations have the greatest influence on the issue

Agents assumed to be most capable to change the current situation of women in communications



Communication leaders stress the self-responsibility of female practitioners and the stewardship of professional associations more often

Agents assumed to be most capable to change the current situation of women in communications



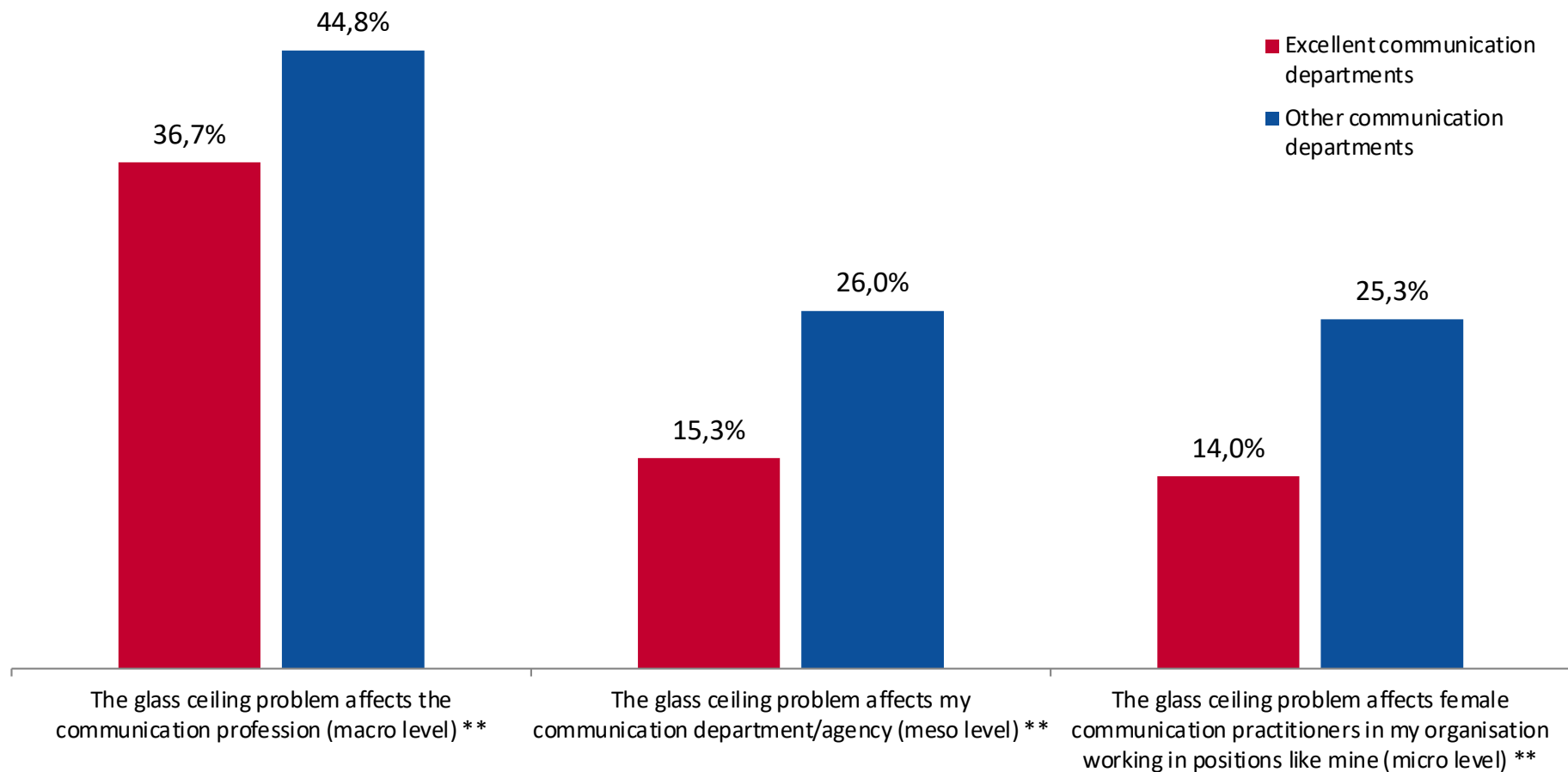
www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 1,049 communication professionals. Q 11: And who do you think is most capable of changing the current situation of women in communications? Female practitioners themselves (e.g. by enhancing their competencies and motivation) / Organisations (e.g. by changing structures and cultures) / Professional communities (e.g. by uniting and supporting female practitioners). Highly significant differences between hierarchical levels (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$).

Perceived capability of different agents to break the glass ceiling in Europe

	Professional communities (macro level)	Organisations (meso level)	Female practitioners themselves (micro level)		Professional communities (macro level)	Organisations (meso level)	Female practitioners themselves (micro level)
Germany	8.4%	72.9%	18.7%	Spain	12.1%	75.9%	12.1%
Austria	7.5%	78.8%	13.8%	Portugal	15.6%	73.3%	11.1%
Switzerland	3.6%	85.7%	10.7%	Italy	22.9%	65.7%	11.4%
France	21.7%	69.6%	8.7%	Greece	16.7%	66.7%	16.7%
Belgium	22.9%	64.6%	12.5%	Slovenia	21.6%	56.8%	21.6%
Netherlands	16.3%	67.3%	16.3%	Croatia	11.4%	61.4%	27.3%
United Kingdom	18.2%	76.4%	5.5%	Serbia	34.1%	43.9%	22.0%
Denmark	30.0%	40.0%	30.0%	Poland	6.3%	62.5%	31.3%
Sweden	4.0%	88.0%	8.0%	Czech Republic	0.0%	57.1%	42.9%
Norway	28.6%	60.0%	11.4%	Romania	26.7%	48.9%	24.4%
Finland	14.3%	82.1%	3.6%	Russia	24.0%	44.0%	32.0%

www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / n = 990 communication professionals from 22 countries. Q11: And who do you think is most capable of changing the current situation of women in communications? Female practitioners themselves (e.g. by enhancing their competencies and motivation) / Organisations (e.g. by changing structures and cultures) / Professional communities (e.g. by uniting and supporting female practitioners).

Communication practitioners working in excellent departments report less problems with gender inequalities

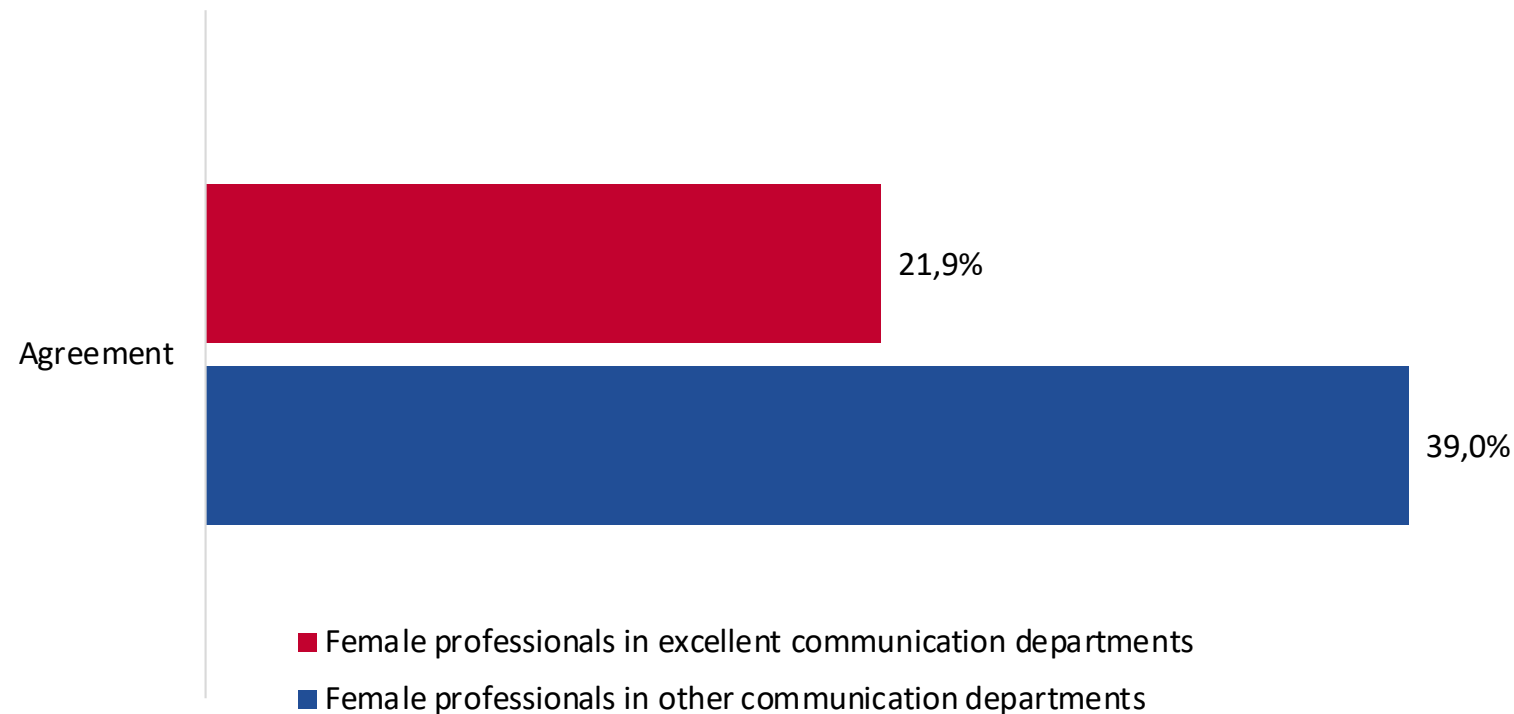


www.communicationmonitor.eu / Zerfass et al. 2020 / $n \geq 1,486$ communication professionals in communication departments across Europe.

Q.9a: In many professions, women are less often found in leading positions. This phenomenon is referred to as the “glass ceiling” – an invisible barrier that keeps female practitioners from rising beyond a certain level in the hierarchy. How do you perceive the situation in the communication profession in your country and in your organisation? Scale 1 (Strongly disagree) – 5 (Strongly agree). Frequency based on scale points 4-5. ** Highly significant differences (chi-square test, $p \leq 0.01$).

Female professionals working in excellent communication departments are less affected by a glass ceiling problem hindering their career plans

The glass ceiling affects me personally



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The mission of EUPRERA is to enhance and promote innovation in the knowledge, research, education and practice of strategic communication. Through its membership of universities and other research associations and bodies, EUPRERA has developed a range of high profile transnational research projects and a worldwide network. More than 200,000 scholars and practitioners can potentially be reached through its extended communication channels and partnership arrangements.

www.euprera.org



European Association of Communication Directors (EACD)

The EACD aims to attract, inspire and engage current and future communication leaders to drive excellence in the profession. It offers a platform to connect, deepen their expertise, share best practice, establish and promote relevant standards. The EACD is a networked community that convenes its members in national chapters and working groups. It engages its members – and others – through a rich online programme and regional debates across Europe.

www.eacd-online.eu



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The Nordic Alliance for Communication & Management is a cross-disciplinary research group focusing on communication as a strategic driver of sustainable organizational performance and success in a changing world. NORA is hosted by BI Norwegian Business School, Oslo.

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Please contact the universities listed here for presentations, insights or additional analyses in key countries.

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Communication Excellence

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