

Impact of excessive screen time and social media on young people's mental health

Flash Eurobarometer 579

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A young girl with a pink unicorn headband is looking at a tablet. The image is partially obscured by a green circular graphic on the left side of the page.

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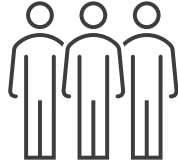
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Methodology



The survey was conducted among a representative sample of the national population aged 13- to 18-year-olds and parents with dependent children in each of the 27 EU Member States. Approximately 1,000 interviews were carried out with 13- to 18-year-olds in each country, except in the smallest Member States, where 500 interviews were conducted. For the parent sample, 500 interviews were conducted in each country, with 250 in the smallest Member States.

In total, **39,047** interviews were completed:

 **26,297** adolescents  **12,750** parents

Results have been statistically weighted so that each Member State contributes to the EU27 aggregate in proportion to its actual share of the total EU population (i.e. countries with smaller populations have a correspondingly smaller weight in the overall EU results).





The sample was structured to reflect the target population by applying quota controls on **gender, age group and region of residence**. Respondents were recruited from an online panel, with quotas set either on interlocking or marginal criteria. Within this framework, invitations were issued randomly among eligible panel members.



The interviews were conducted online (CAWI) from **30 March to 16 April 2026**.

Survey coverage - number of interviews per country

	Adolescents	Parents		Adolescents	Parents
EU  EU27	26297	12750	LV 	1000	500
BE 	1016	500	LT 	1000	500
BG 	1000	500	LU 	500	250
CZ 	1000	500	HU 	1000	500
DK 	1000	500	MT 	595	250
DE 	1121	500	NL 	1029	500
EE 	1000	500	AT 	1040	500
IE 	1041	500	PL 	1000	500
EL 	1000	500	PT 	1000	500
ES 	1052	500	RO 	1042	500
FR 	1043	500	SI 	1033	500
HR 	1000	500	SK 	1000	500
IT 	1051	500	FI 	1000	500
CY 	597	250	SE 	1137	500

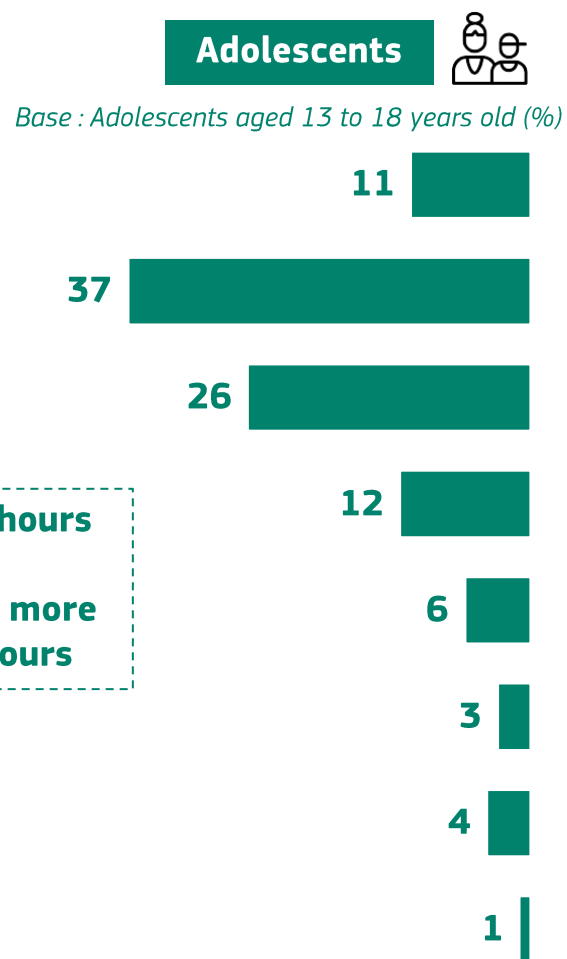


01

How European adolescents use screens and social media: time, mix, and motivations

Adolescents report spending an average of 4.5 hours per day on screens on a school day, more than an hour above what parents estimate (3.4 hours)

Q2a/Q2 How much time do you estimate [you spend] / [your child spends] on screens (smartphone, computer, tablet, TV, gaming console included) in total...?



Mean : 4.5 hours

25% spend more than six hours

“On a typical school day”

Less than 2 hours

2 to less than 4 hours

4 to less than 6 hours

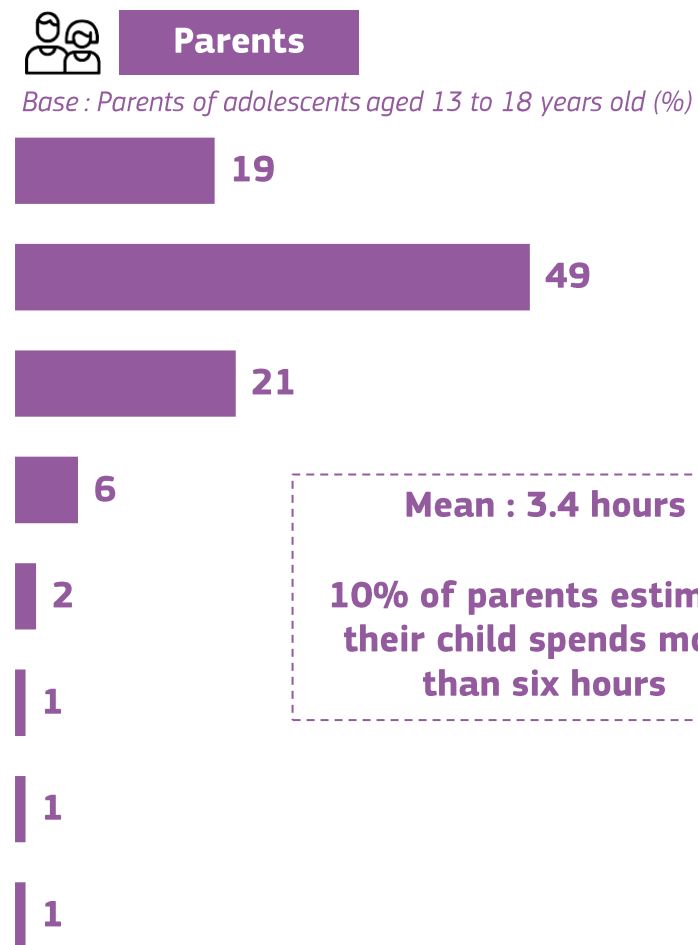
6 to less than 8 hours

8 to less than 10 hours

10 to less than 12 hours

12 and more hours

Don't know



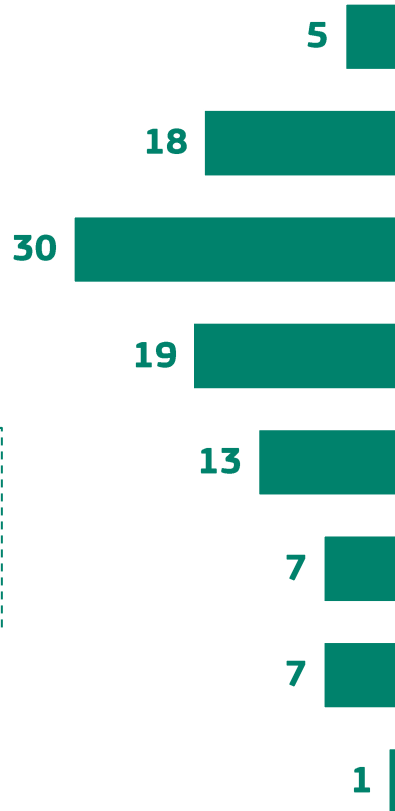
Mean : 3.4 hours

10% of parents estimate their child spends more than six hours

At weekends, adolescents report 6.1 hours of screen time per day, with parents' estimates (5.3 hours) drawing closer to reality

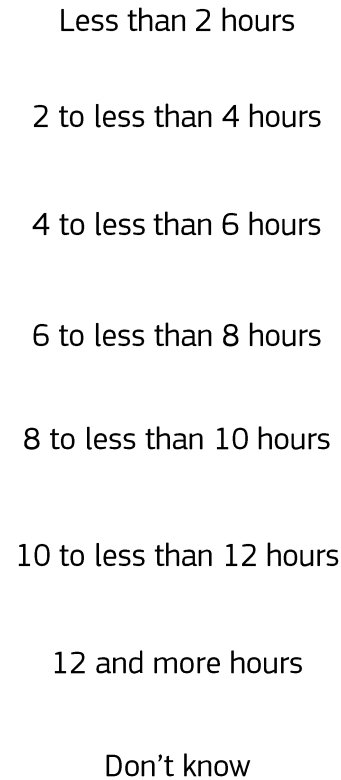
Q2b/Q2 How much time do you estimate [you spend] / [your child spends] on screens (smartphone, computer, tablet, TV, gaming console included) in total...?

Adolescents 
Base: Adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)



Mean : 6.1 hours
46% spend more than six hours

“During the weekend (Saturday or Sunday)”*



Parents 
Base: Parents of adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)

Mean : 5.3 hours
36% of parents estimate their child spends more than six hours

Adolescents who started using social media before age 10 spend 1.8 more hours on screens during weekends than later adopters (7.5h vs 5.7h)

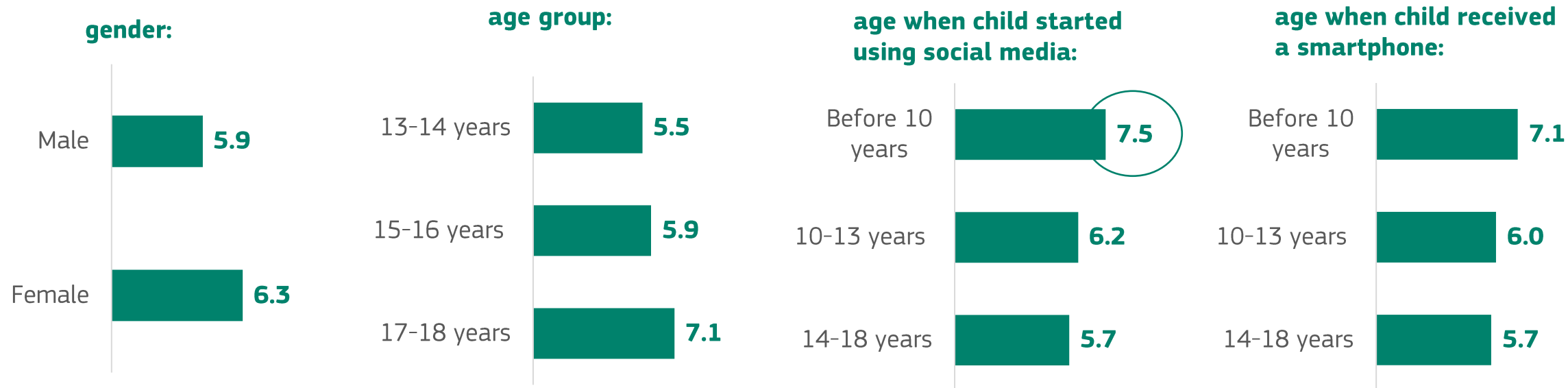
Q2b How much time do you estimate you spend on screens (smartphone, computer, tablet, TV, gaming console included) in total...?



Adolescents

Base: Adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)

Mean hours of screen use per day “During the weekend (Saturday or Sunday)” by...



During the weekend, reported screen time ranges from 4.3 hours in Cyprus to 7.3 hours in Sweden, around an EU27 average of 6.1 hours

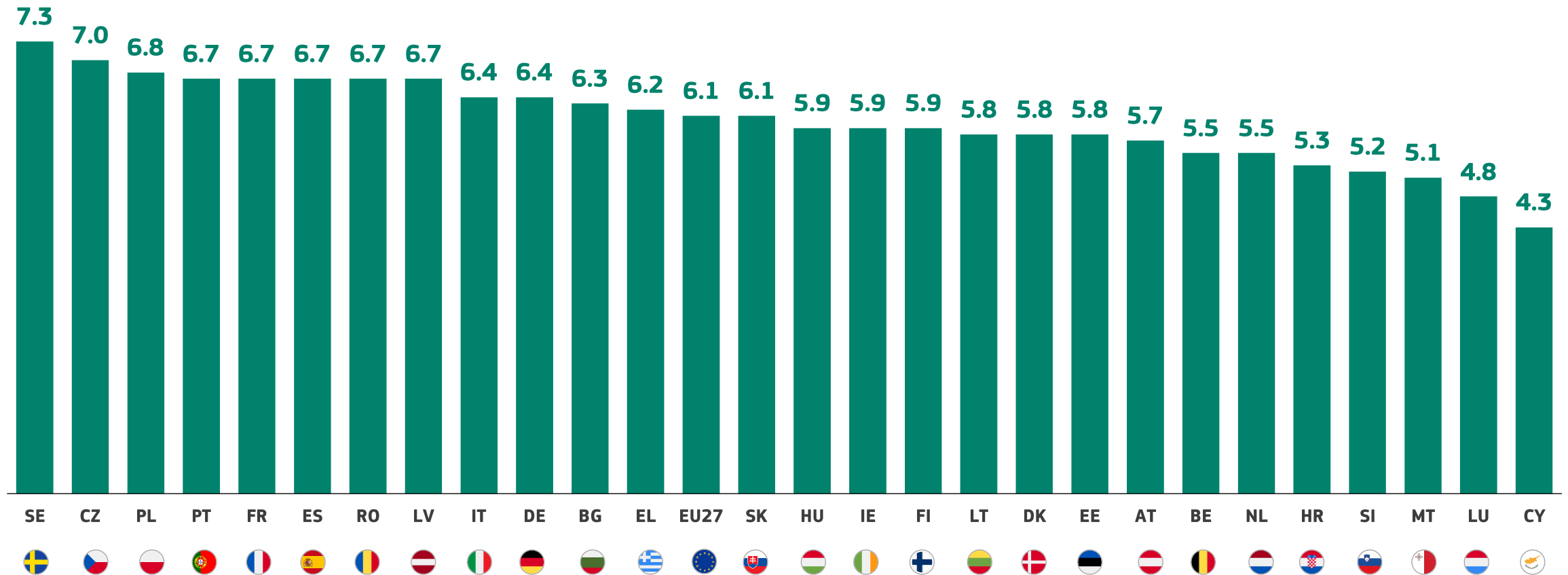
Q2b How much time do you estimate you spend on screens (smartphone, computer, tablet, TV, gaming console included) in total...?



Adolescents

Base: Adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)

Mean hours of screen use per day "During the weekend"



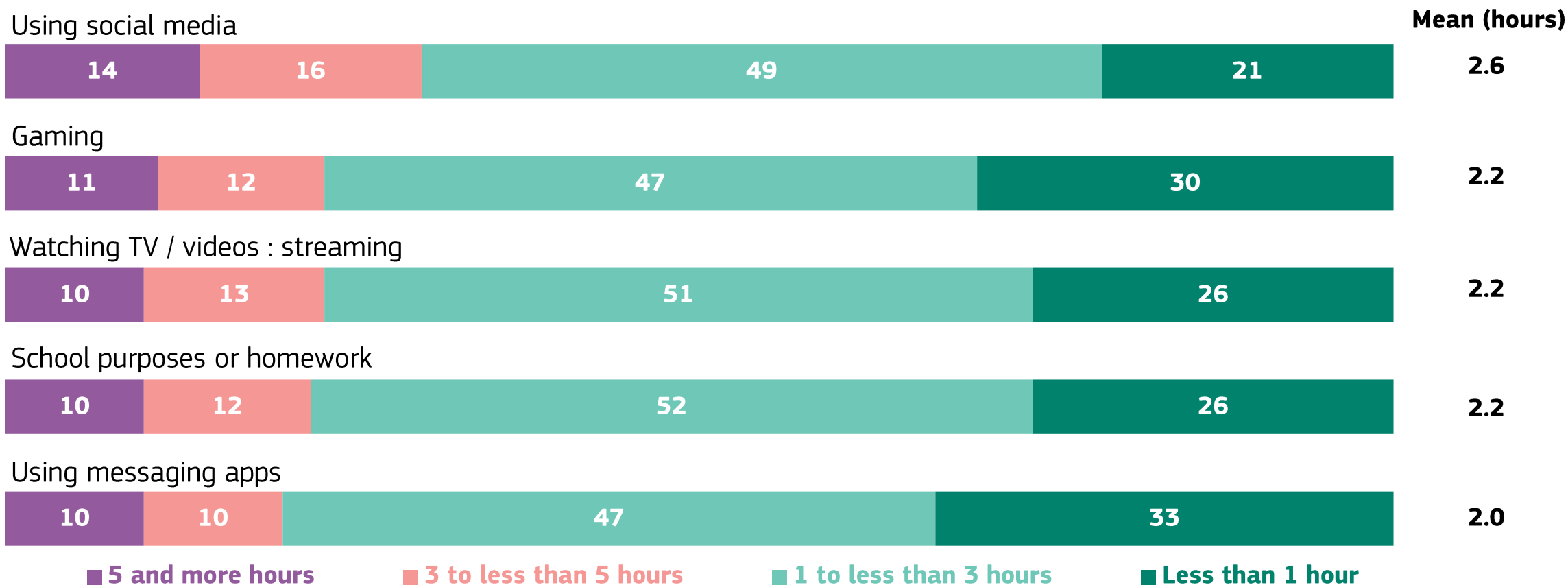
On average, adolescents spend between 2 and 3 hours per day on each type of screen activity, with social media usage slightly higher

Q3 On a typical day (from Monday to Friday), how much time on average do you think you spend on screens, for each of the following?



Adolescents

Base: 25775 Adolescents who use screens on a typical school day (%)



Entertainment (57%) and staying in touch with friends and family (53%) are adolescents' two leading reasons for using social media

Q6 What are the main reasons why you use social media? Firstly? And for which other reasons do you use social media?



Adolescents

Base: 23702 Adolescents who spend time using social media on a typical school day (%)



(* Total exceeds 100%, as respondents were allowed to give two answers.

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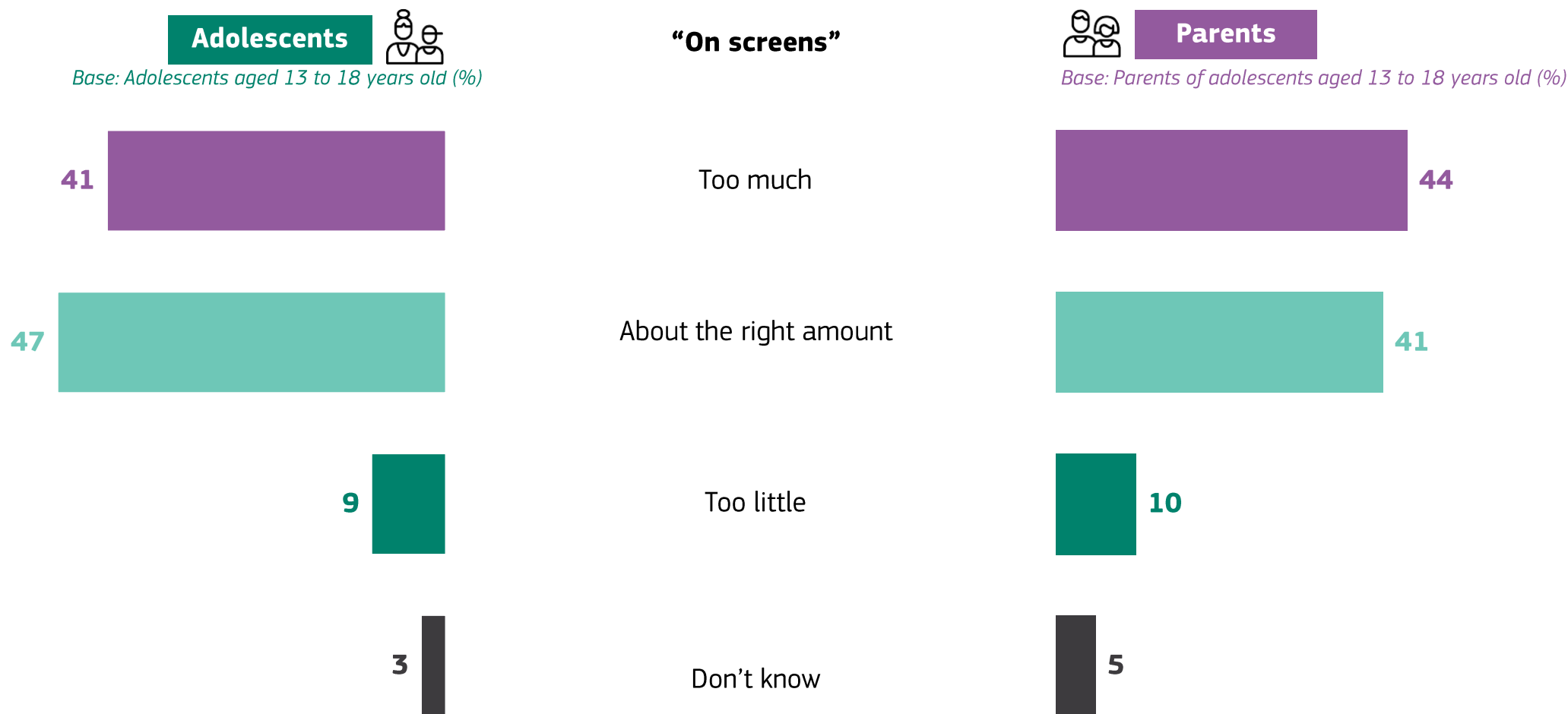


02

Adolescent and parental
views on screens and
social media: a divided and
ambivalent assessment

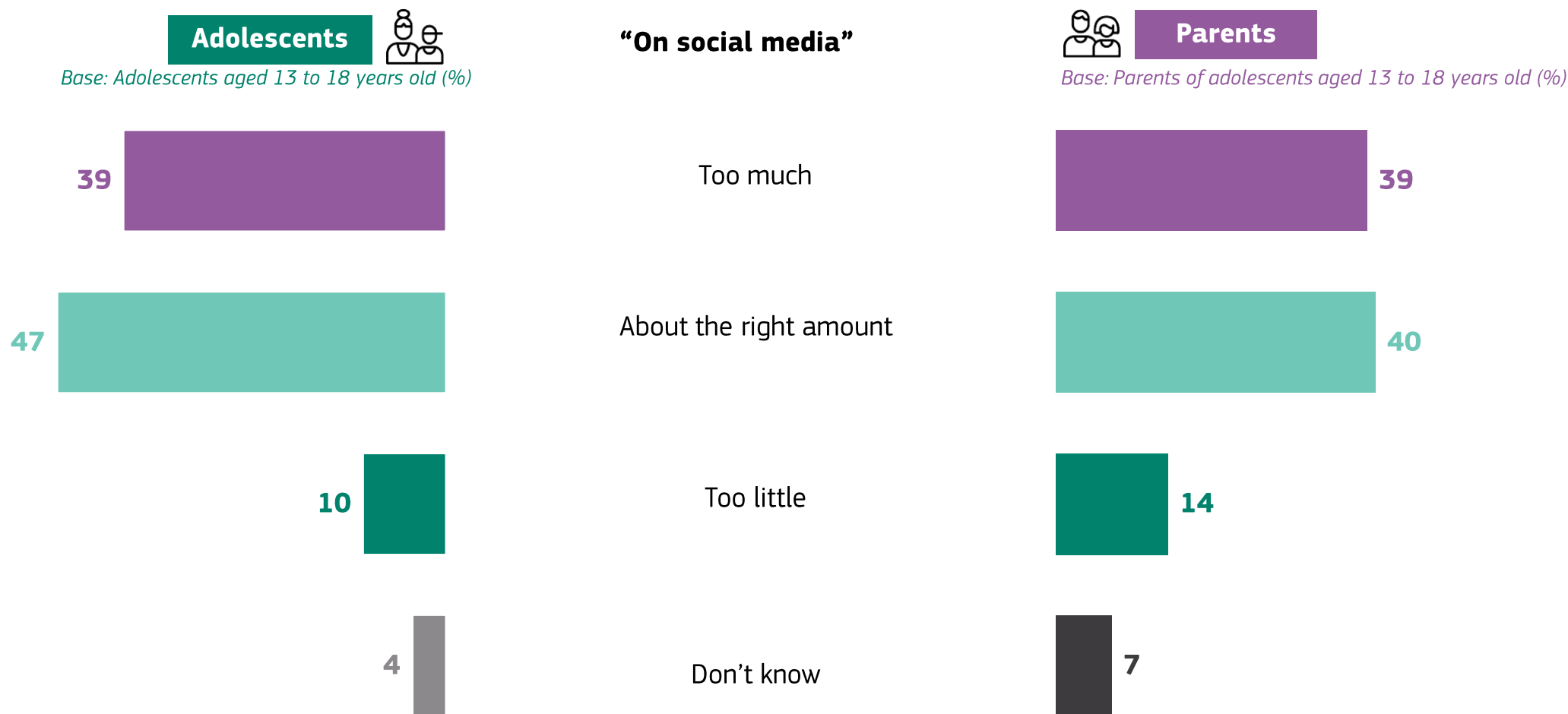
More than 40% of adolescents and parents alike see screen time as excessive. A similar proportion sees it as about right

Q4/Q3 And, overall, would you say the amount of time [you spend] / [your child spends] [on screens/on social media] per day is...?



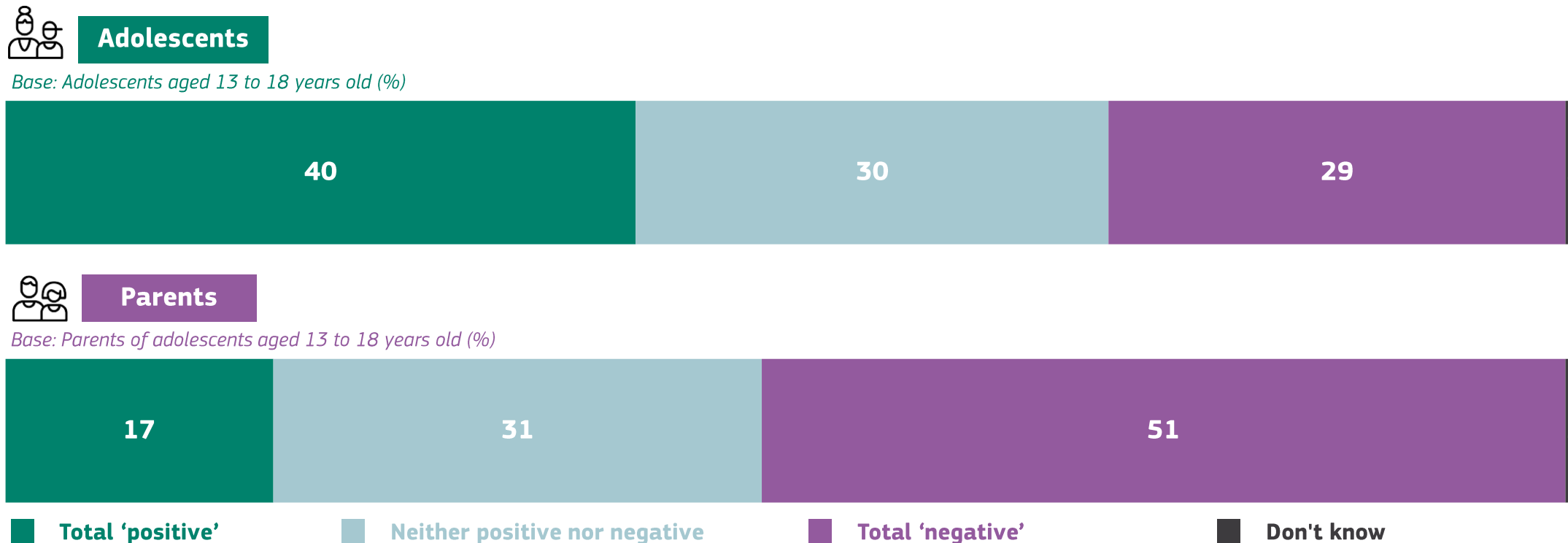
Adolescents and parents are split on social media use: 39% in both groups consider it excessive, but a notable 14% of parents would welcome more

Q4/Q3 And, overall, would you say the amount of time [you spend] / [your child spends] [on screens/on social media] per day is...?



The gap between parents and adolescents is striking: nearly one in three adolescents report that screens have a negative impact on their lives, compared with more than half of parents (51%)

Q5/Q4 Overall, do you think screens have a positive or negative impact on the lives of young people [your age] / [of your child's age]?



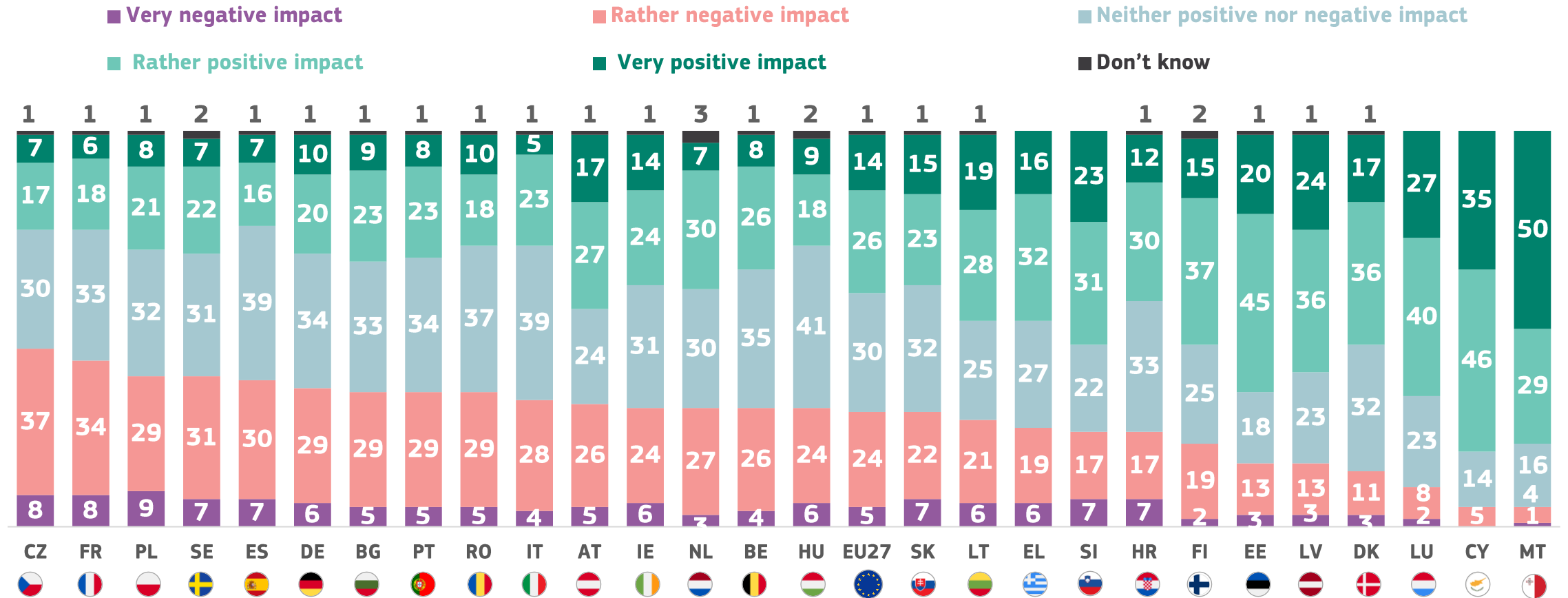
Adolescents' perception of screens varies widely across the EU and tends to be more critical in countries where consumption is highest

Q5 Overall, do you think screens have a positive or negative impact on the lives of young people your age ?



Adolescents

Base: Adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)



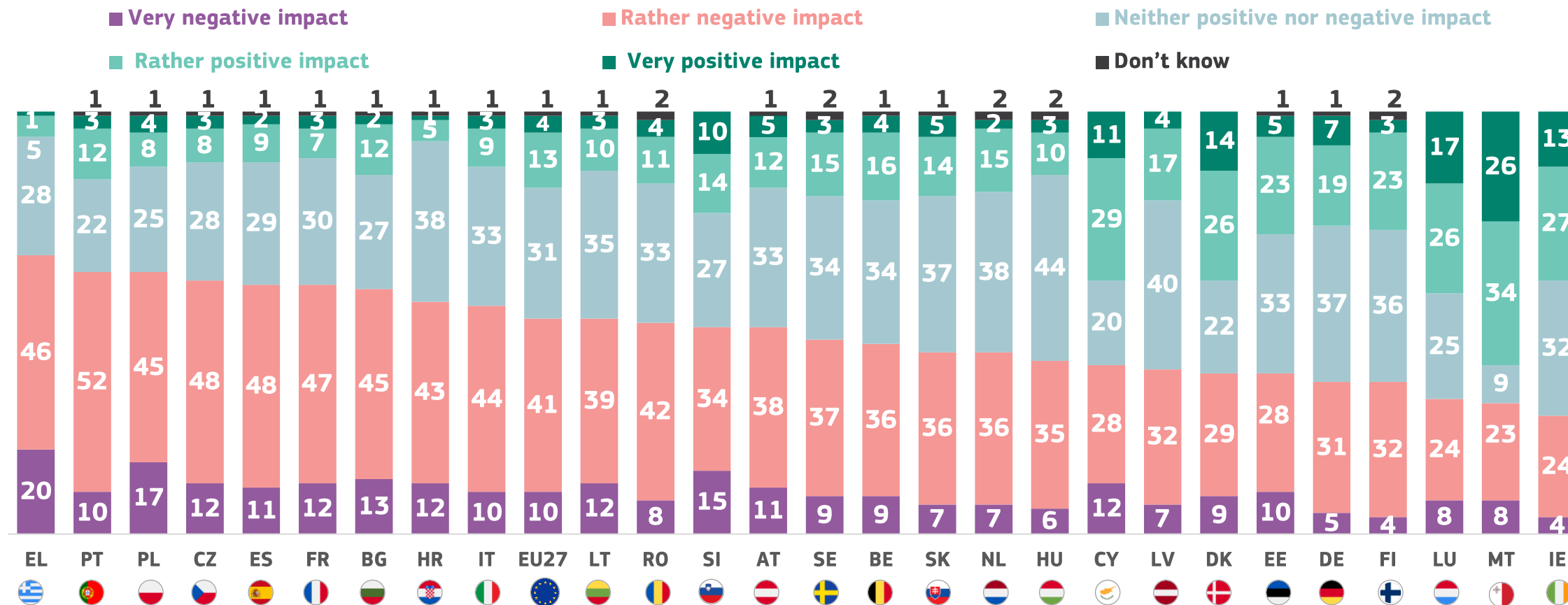
Parents' views are more uniformly negative across the EU, with the most critical assessments found in Greece, Poland and Portugal

Q4 Overall, do you think screens have a positive or negative impact on the lives of young people of your child's age ?



Parents

Base: Parents of adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)



Parents worry more about online dangers than about the effects of screens on sleep and school

Q5 Are you concerned or not concerned about each of the following aspects of your child's screen use?



Parents

Base: Parents of adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)

The risk of your child being exposed to harmful or inappropriate content online



The risk of your child being contacted by strangers online



The impact of screen use on your child's sleep



The impact of screen use on your child's school performance



Very concerned

Fairly concerned

Not very concerned

Not concerned at all

Don't know



03

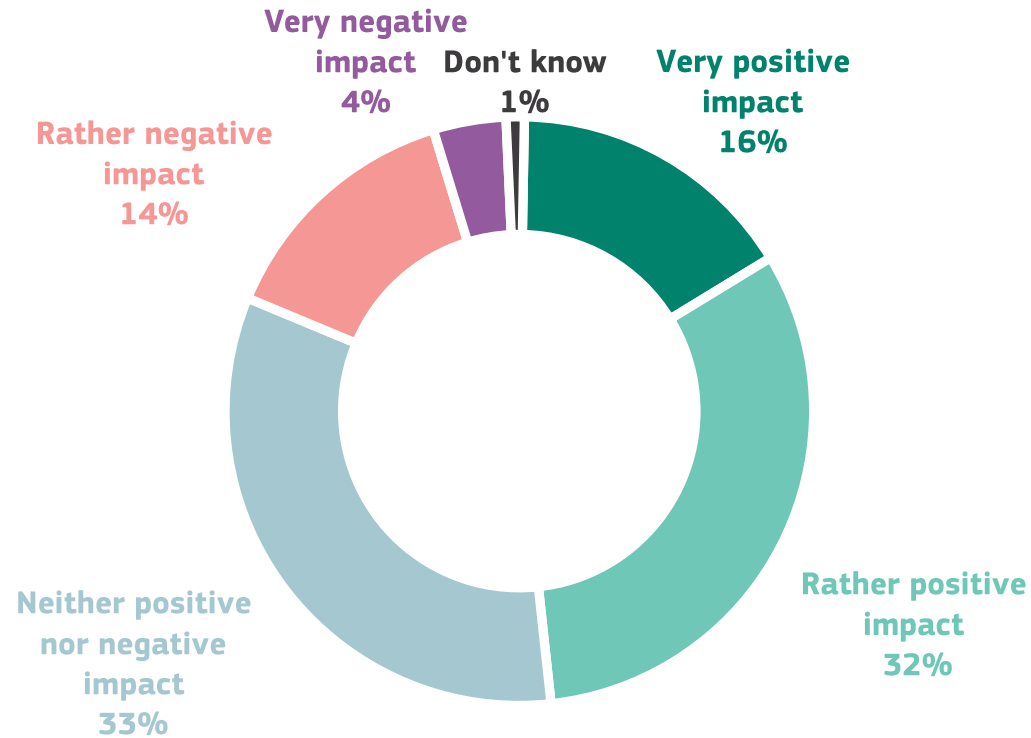
Impact of Screen Use on Well-being

48% of adolescents think that social media is having a positive impact on their lives whereas only 21% of parents feel the same

Q7/Q6 Overall, would you say social media have a positive or negative impact on [your mental wellbeing] / [your child's mental wellbeing] (for example your mood, stress levels or [how you feel about yourself] / [self-esteem])?

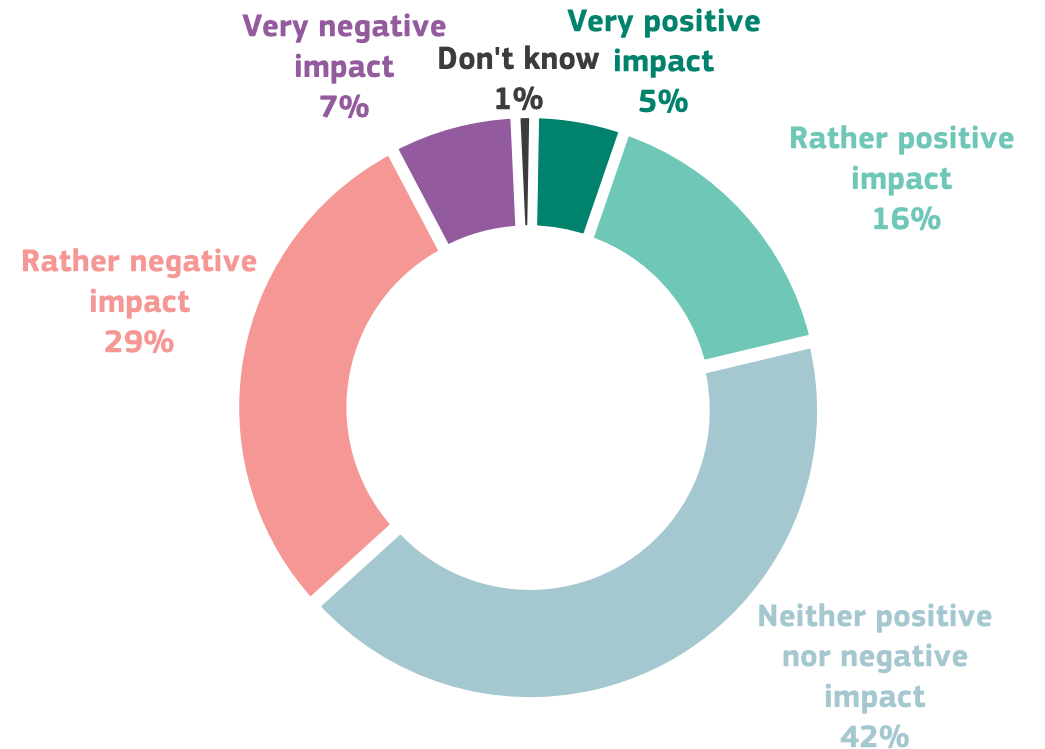
Adolescents

Base: 23702 Adolescents who spend time using social media on a typical school day



Parents

Base: 10827 Parents whose child uses social media (regularly or occasionally)



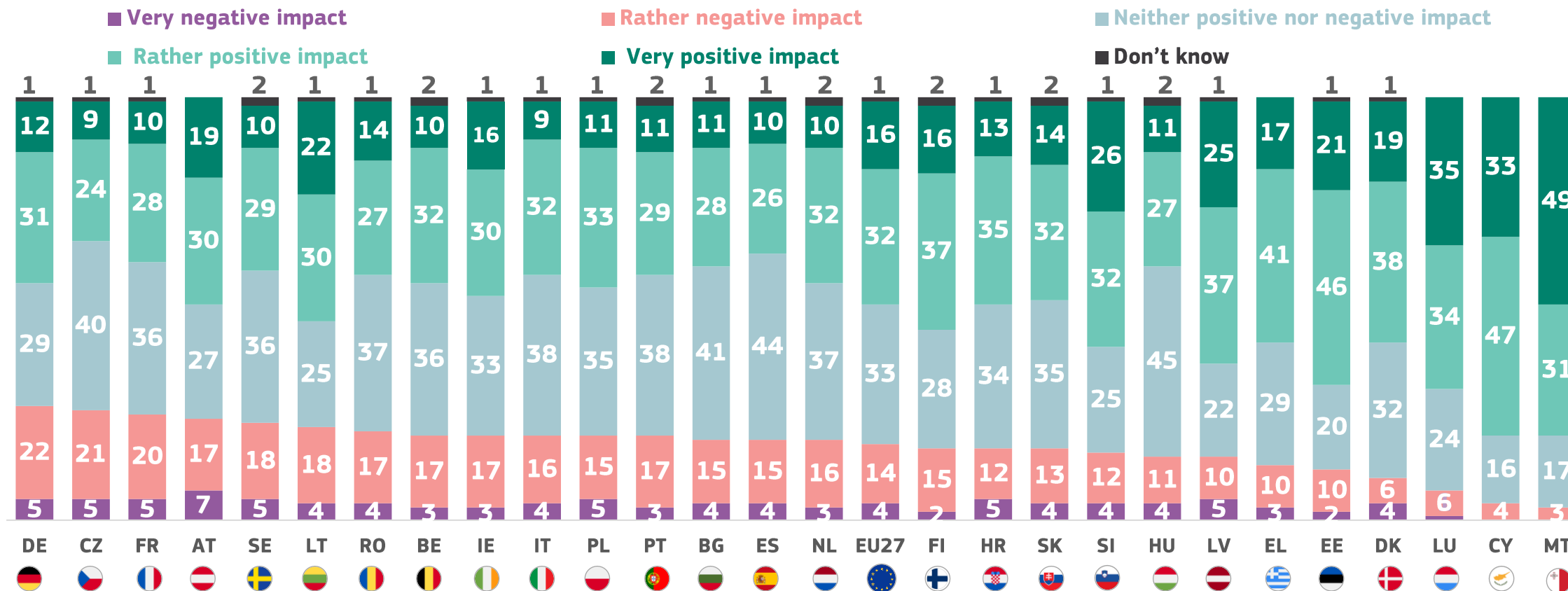
Adolescents' views on social media span a wide spectrum, from 80% positive in Cyprus to barely one in three in Czechia and Spain

Q7 Overall, would you say social media have a positive or negative impact on **your mental wellbeing** (for example your mood, stress levels or how you feel about yourself)?



Adolescents

Base: 23702 Adolescents who spend time using social media on a typical school day (%)



Parents remain broadly sceptical about the impact of social media on their children in nearly every Member State

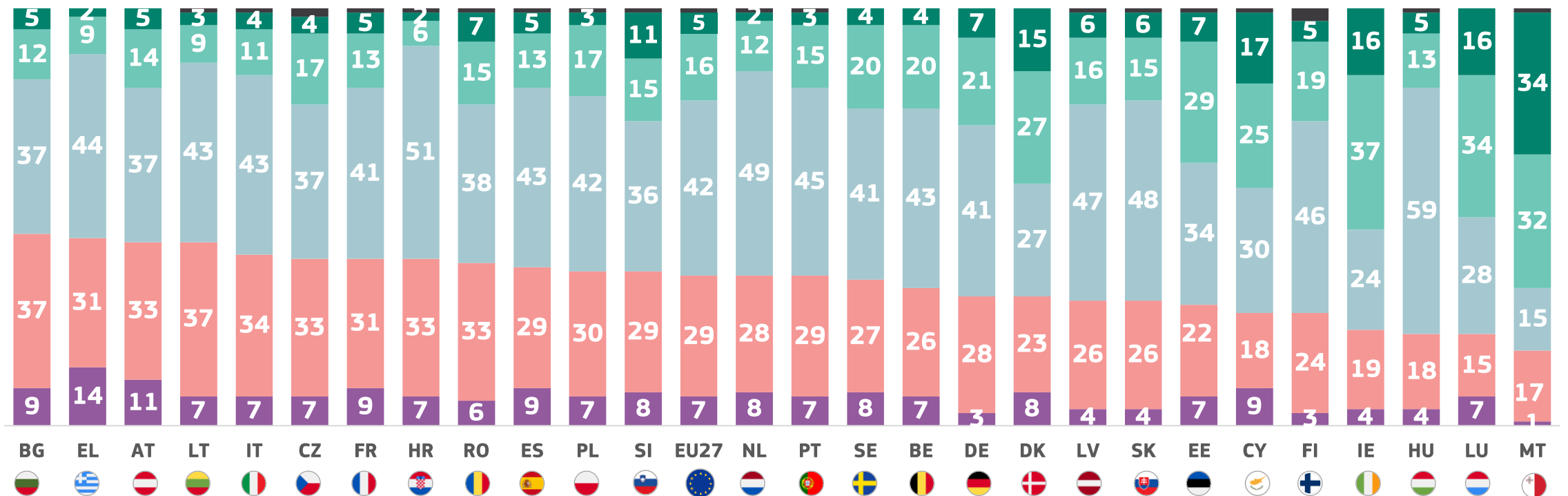
Q6 Overall, would you say social media have a positive or negative impact on **your child's mental wellbeing** (for example your mood, stress levels or how you feel about yourself)?



Parents

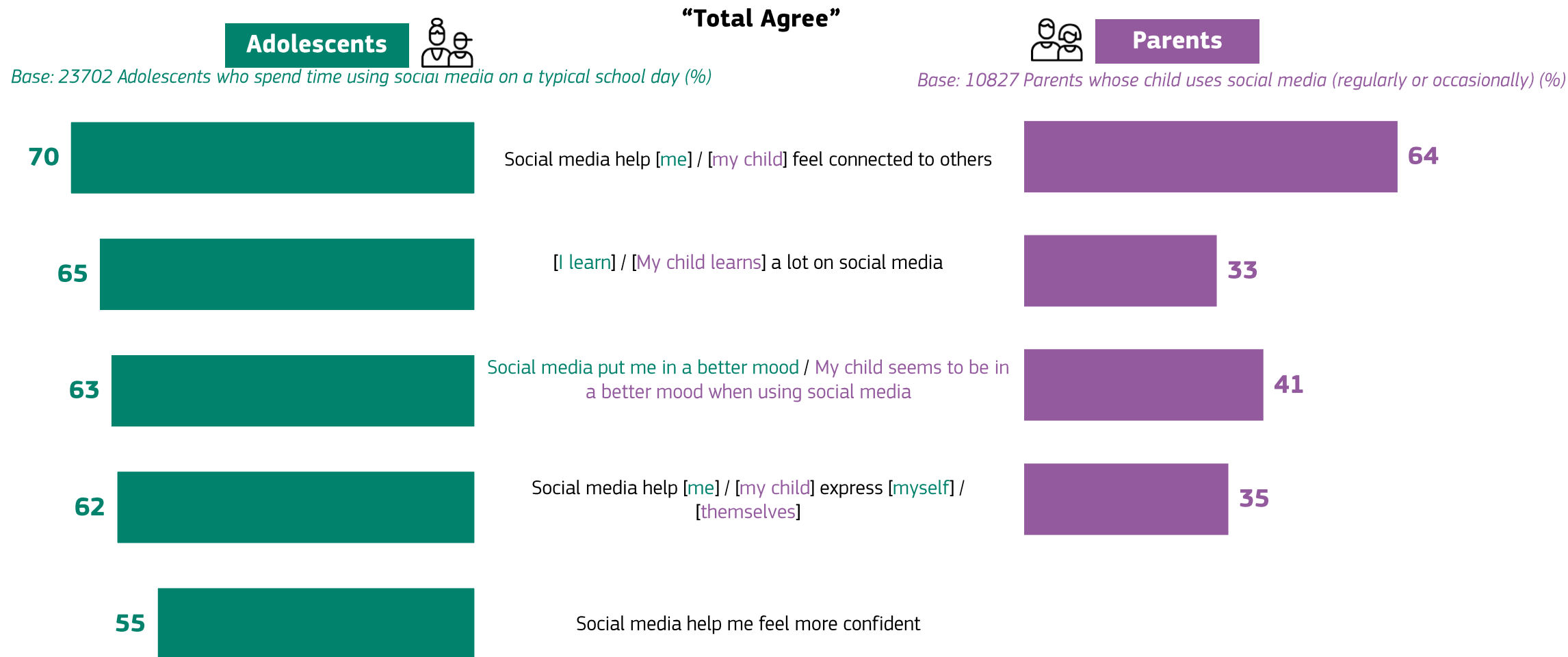
Base: 10827 Parents whose child uses social media (regularly or occasionally) (%)

■ Very negative impact
 ■ Rather negative impact
 ■ Neither positive nor negative impact
■ Rather positive impact
 ■ Very positive impact
 ■ Don't know



Adolescents see broad benefits in social media (55-70% agree); parents agree mainly on social connection (64%) but less on learning, mood, and self-expression

Q8/Q7 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to [your use of social media] / [your child's use of social media] ?



Adolescents see broad benefits in social media: 55–70% agree across connection, learning, mood, self-expression and confidence

Q8 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your use of social media ?



Adolescents

Base: 23702 Adolescents who spend time using social media on a typical school day (%)

Social media help me feel connected to others



I learn a lot on social media



Social media put me in a better mood



Social media help me express myself



Social media help me feel more confident



■ **Totally agree**

■ **Tend to agree**

■ **Tend to disagree**

■ **Totally disagree**

■ **Don't know**

Parents agree mainly on social connection (64%) but are less convinced about learning, mood and self-expression

Q7 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to your child's use of social media?



Parents

Base: 10827 Parents whose child uses social media (regularly or occasionally) (%)

Social media help my child feel connected to others



My child learns a lot on social media



My child seems to be in a better mood when using social media



Social media help my child express themselves



Totally agree

Tend to agree

Tend to disagree

Totally disagree

Don't know

Parents worry more about online dangers than about the effects of screens on sleep and school

Q5 Are you concerned or not concerned about each of the following aspects of your child's screen use?



Parents

Base: Parents of adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)

The risk of your child being exposed to harmful or inappropriate content online



The risk of your child being contacted by strangers online



The impact of screen use on your child's sleep



The impact of screen use on your child's school performance



Very concerned

Fairly concerned

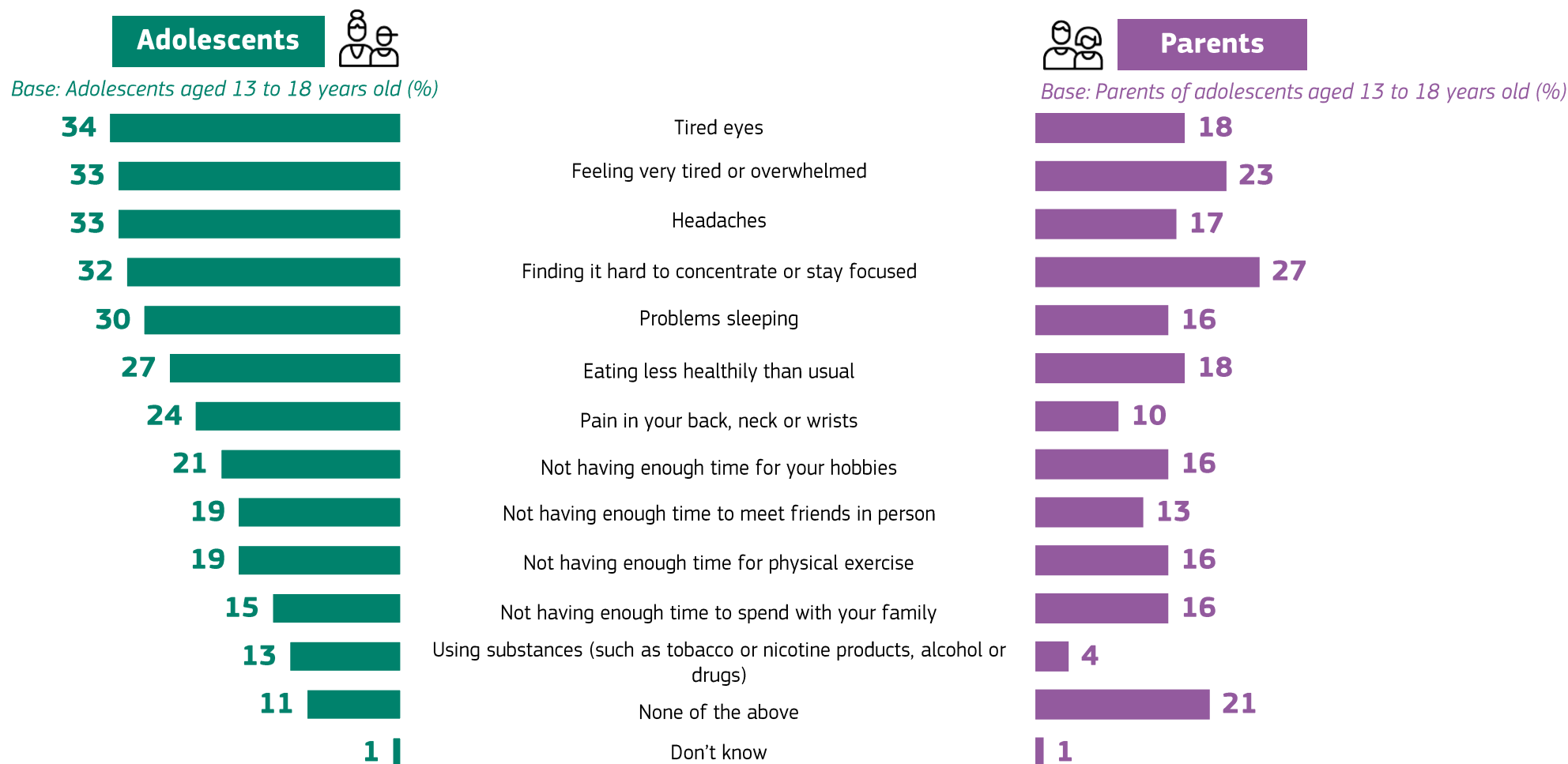
Not very concerned

Not concerned at all

Don't know

A third of adolescents report tired eyes, fatigue, headaches or concentration problems over the past month, symptoms parents systematically underestimate

Q1 Which of the following situations, if any, [have happened to you] / [have you noticed happening to your child] in the past 30 days?



(*) Total exceeds 100%, as respondents were allowed to give multiple answers.

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Fieldwork: 30.03.2026 to 16.04.2026

The more screen time increases, the more adolescents report symptoms

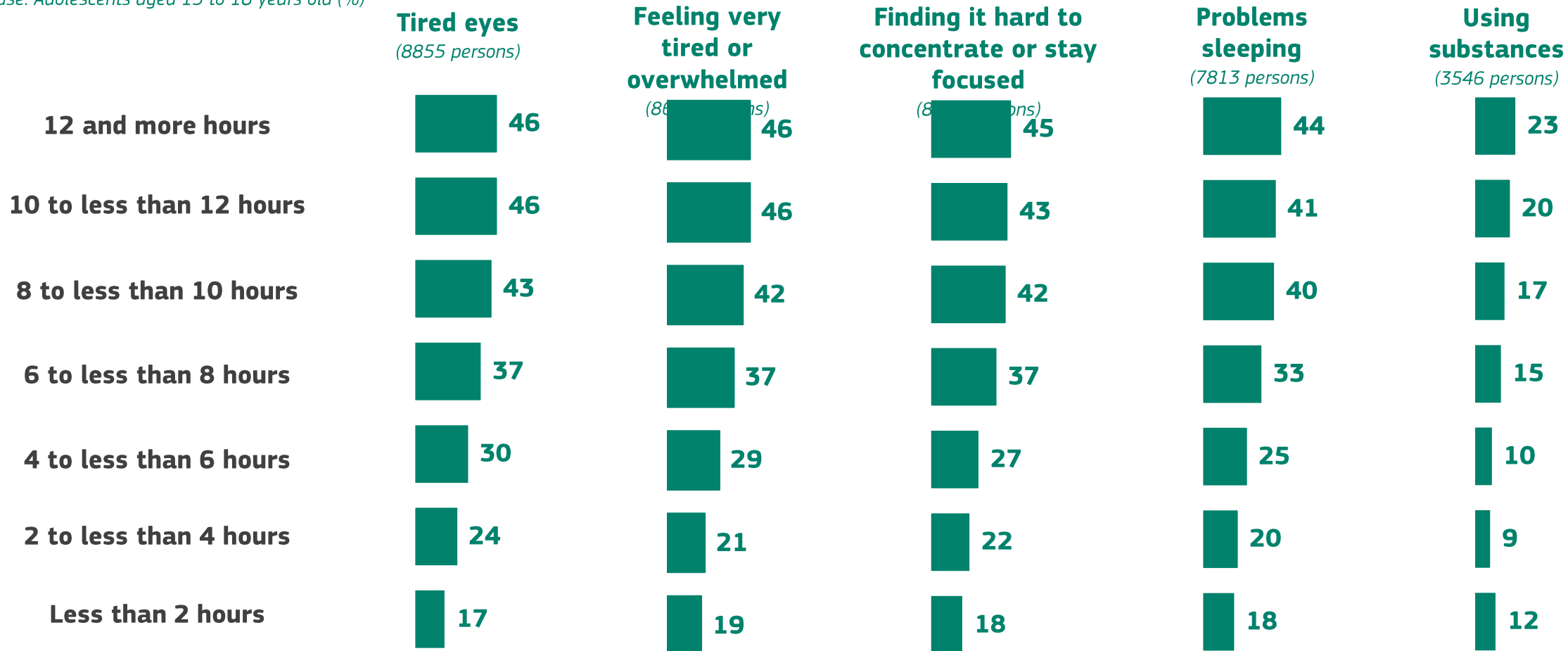
Q1 Which of the following situations, if any, have happened to you in the past 30 days?



Adolescents

Base: Adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old (%)

% reporting symptoms by time spent on screen during the weekend:



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From 22% to 39%: social media drives the steepest dose-response on adolescent sleep, with a milder but noticeable effect from messaging

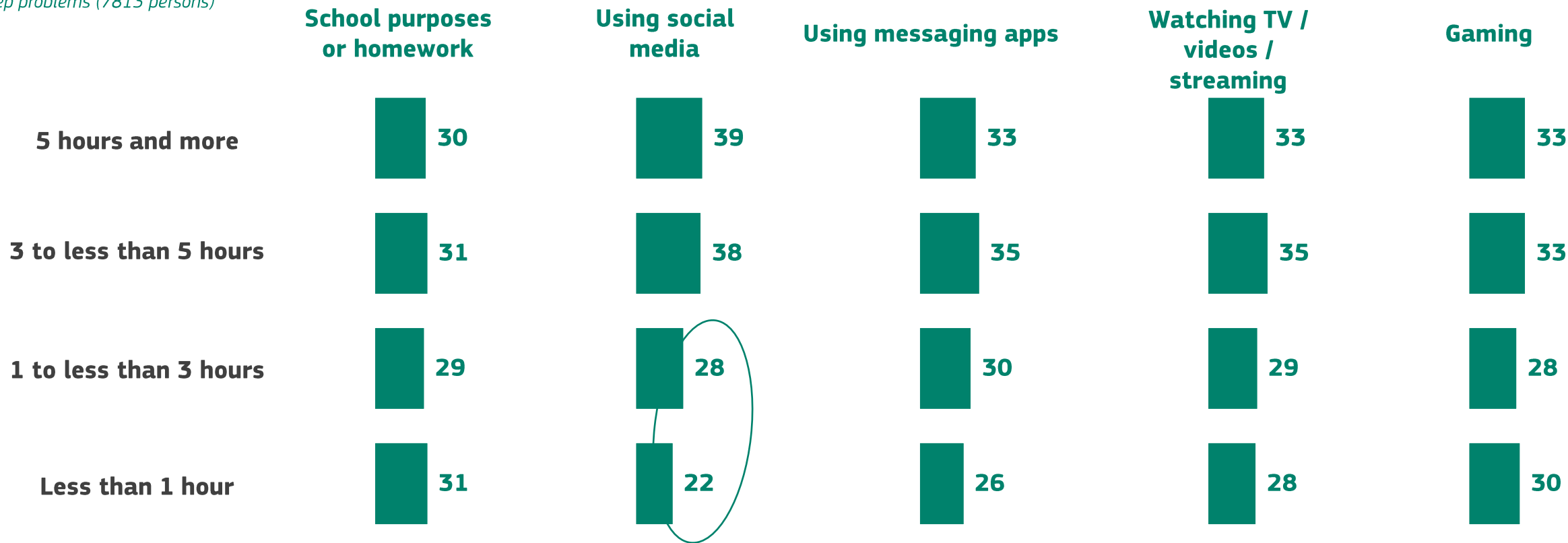
Q1 Which of the following situations, if any, *have happened to you* in the past 30 days?



Adolescents

% reporting sleep problems by daily time spent on each activity

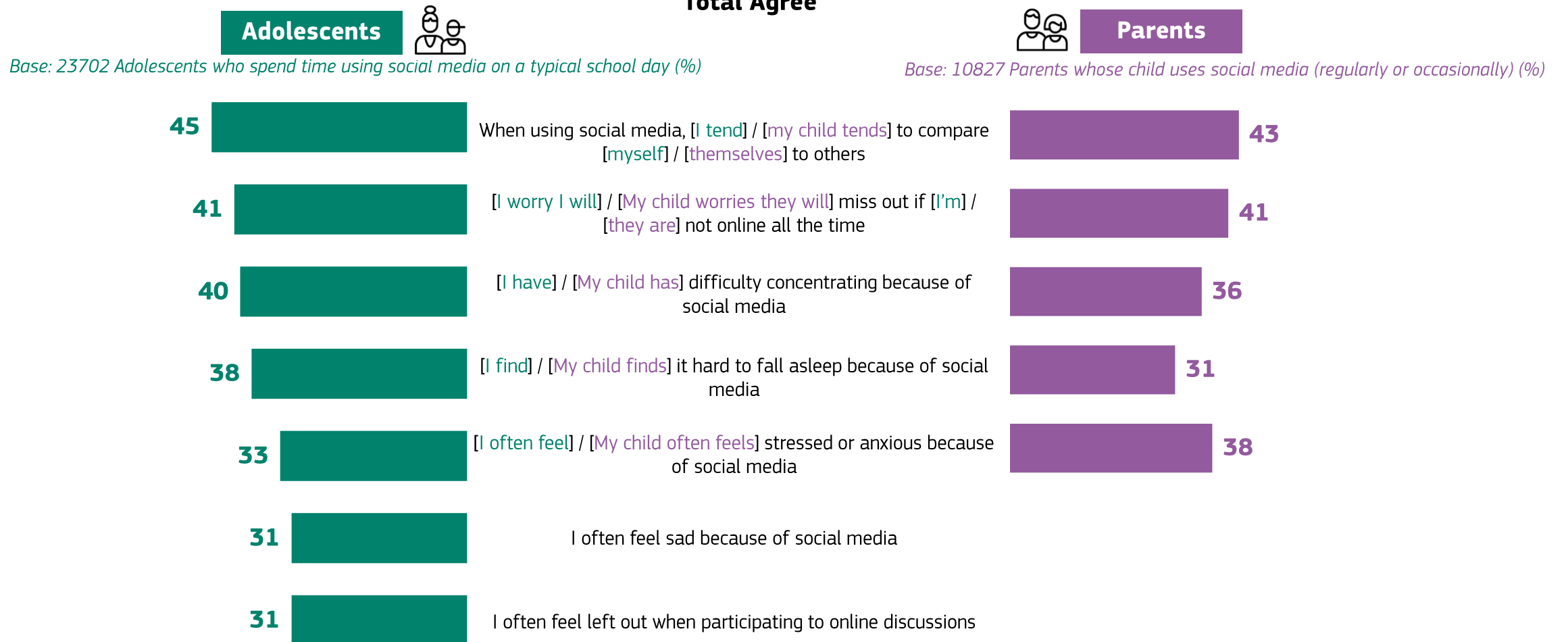
Base: Adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old reporting sleep problems (7813 persons)



Nearly one in three adolescents recognise feeling stressed, sad or socially excluded because of social media

Q9/Q8 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to [your use of social media] / [your child's use of social media] ?

"Total Agree"



Increased social media use is associated with higher negative impacts across multiple aspects of adolescent well-being

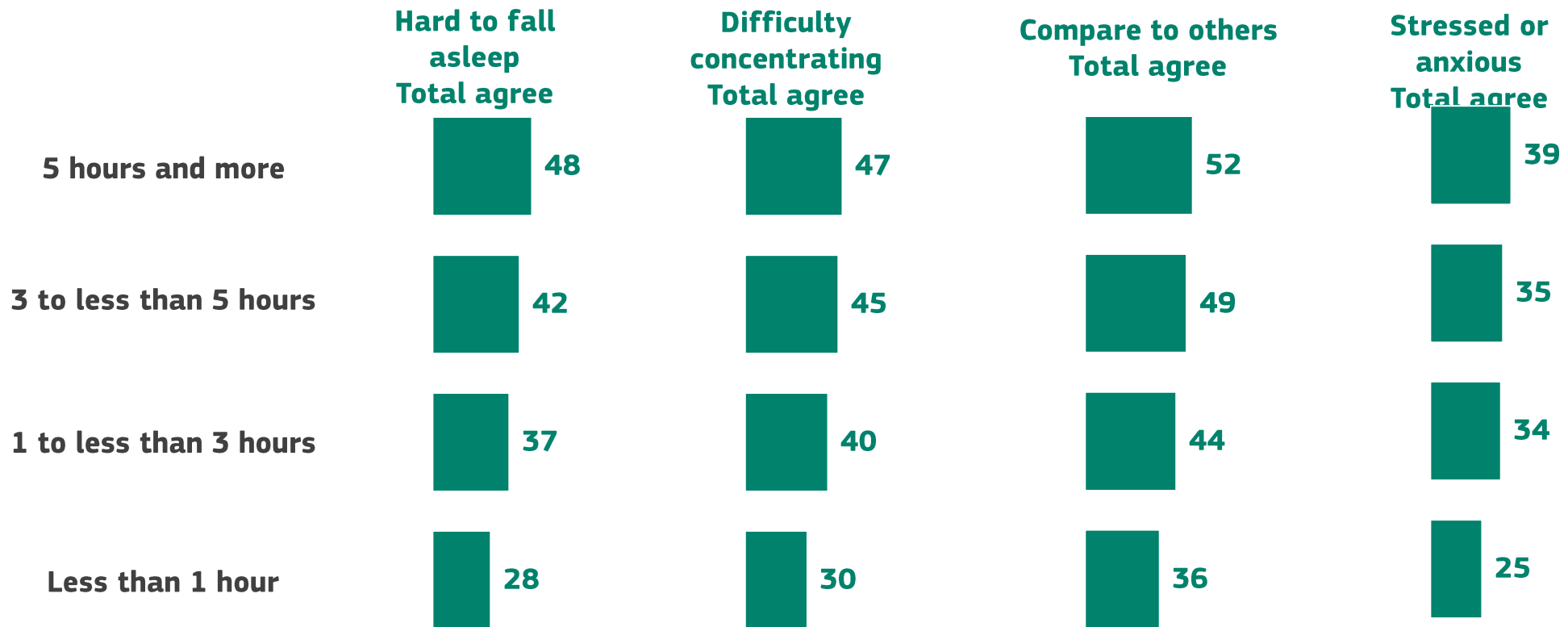
Q9 To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements in relation to [your use of social media] ?



Adolescents

Base: Adolescents who spend time using social media on a typical school day (23702 persons)

% reporting difficulties by daily time spent on social media



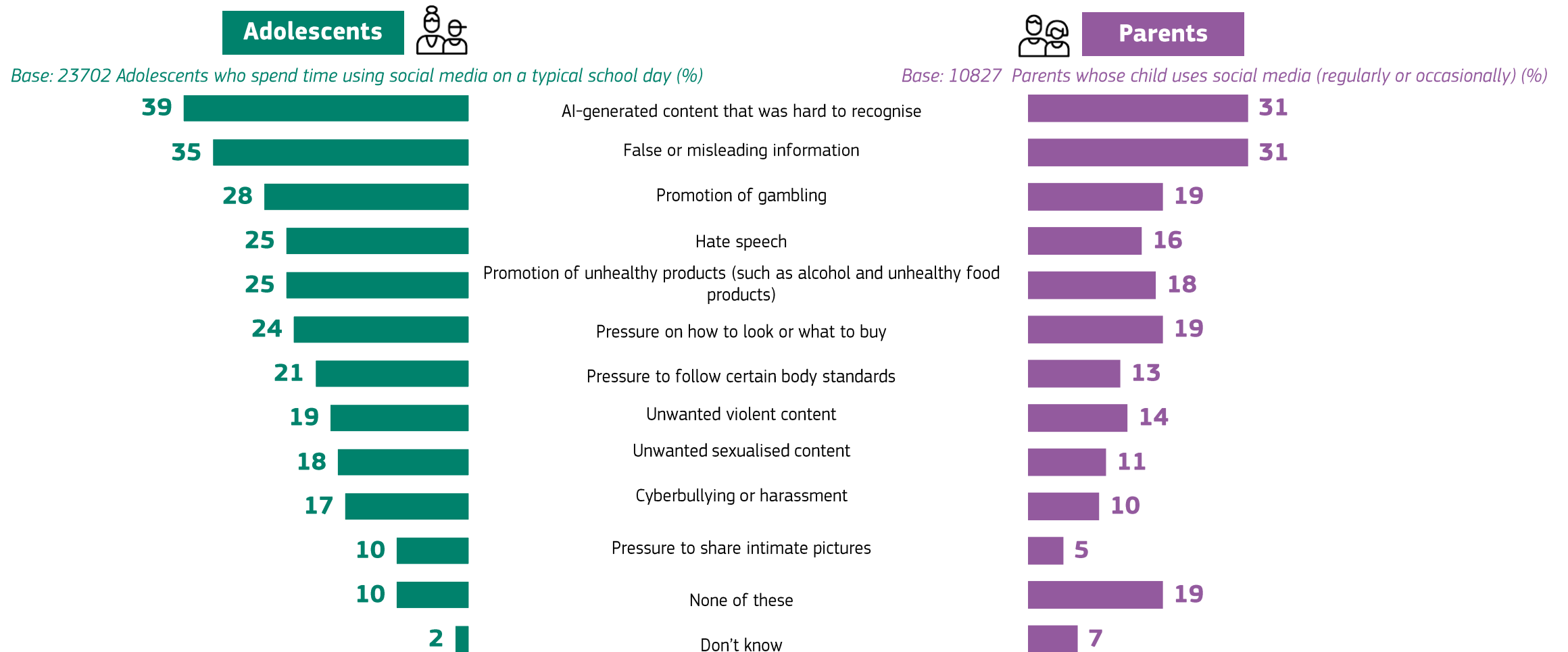


04

Online Risks and Harmful Experiences

Adolescents report negative online experiences ranging from AI-generated content (39%) and disinformation (35%) to cyberbullying (17%) and pressure to share intimate pictures (10%), while parents' figures reflect perceptions of these risks

Q10/Q9c In the past 3 months, [have you] / [has your child] seen or experienced any of the following when using social media?



While exposure to harmful content doubles with increased screen time, exposure to such content is already common at lower levels of screen time

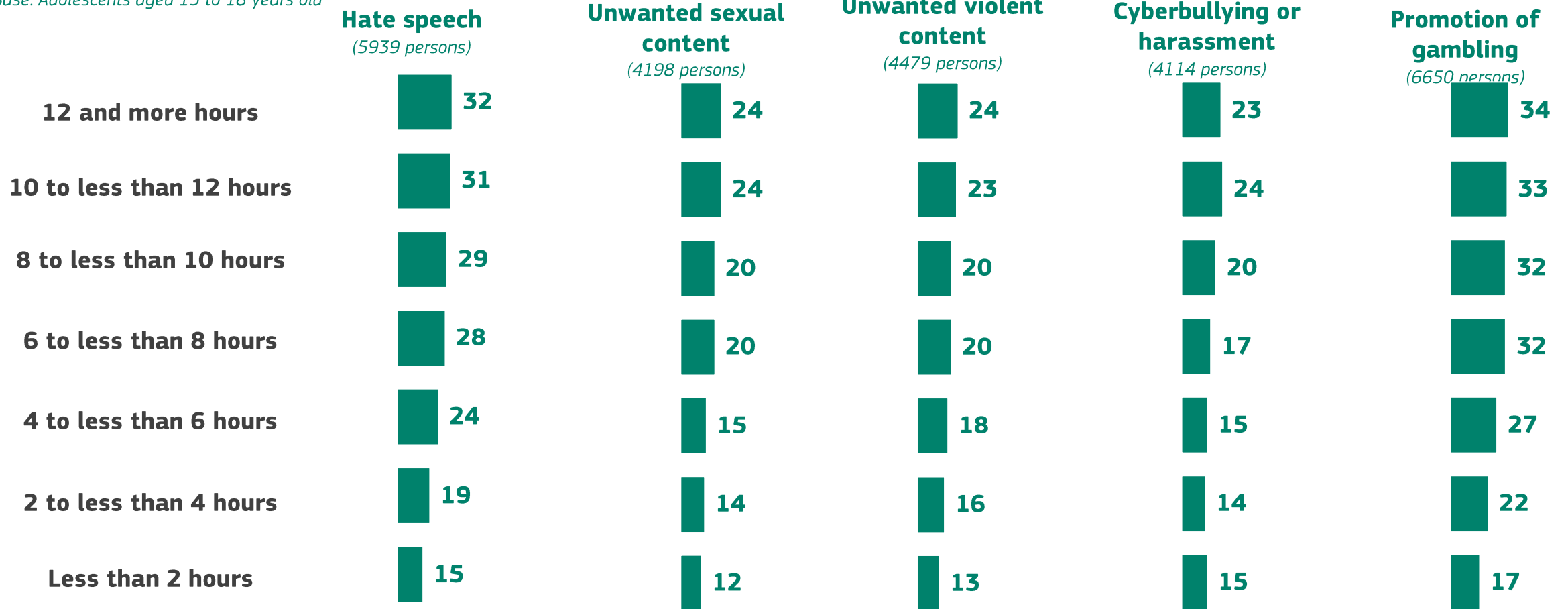
Q10 In the past 3 months, [have you] seen or experienced any of the following when using social media?



Adolescents

% reporting experiencing the following by time spent on screen during the weekend:

Base: Adolescents aged 13 to 18 years old



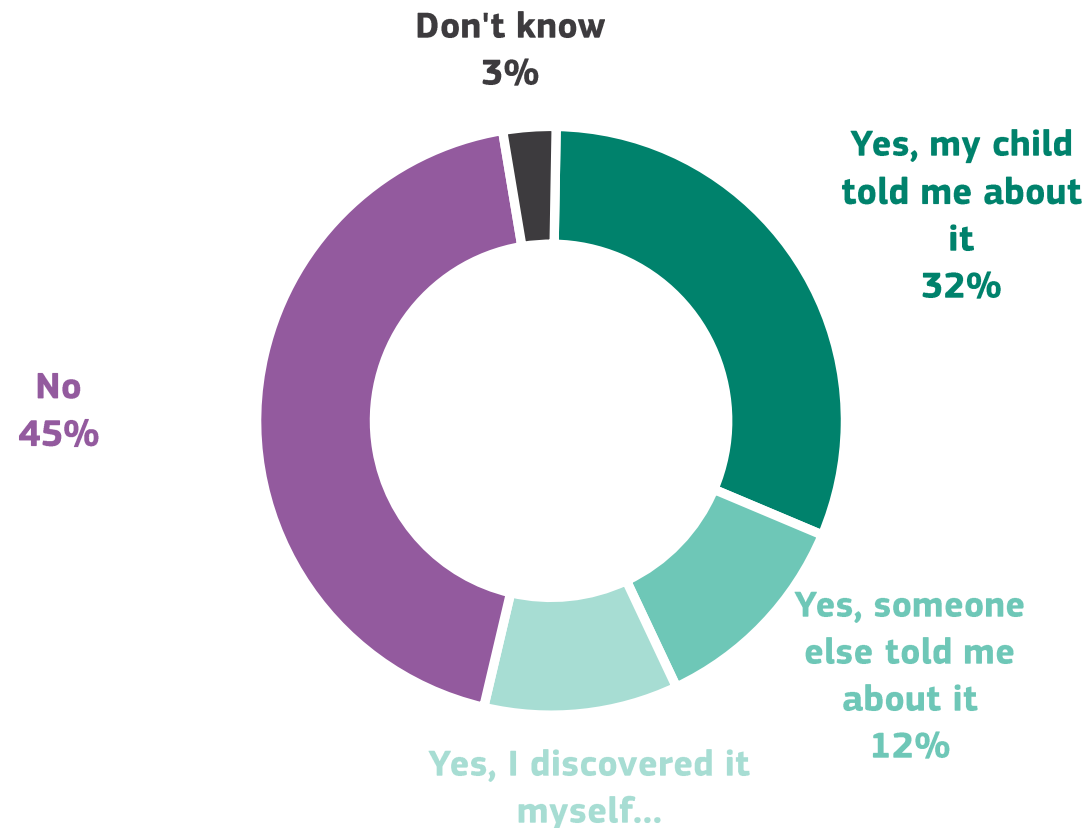
More than half of parents (55%) have become aware of their child having had a negative online experience, most often told directly by the child (32%)

Q9a Has your child ever come to you, or have you ever discovered, that your child had a negative experience online?



Parents

Base : 10827 Parents whose child uses social media (regularly or occasionally)



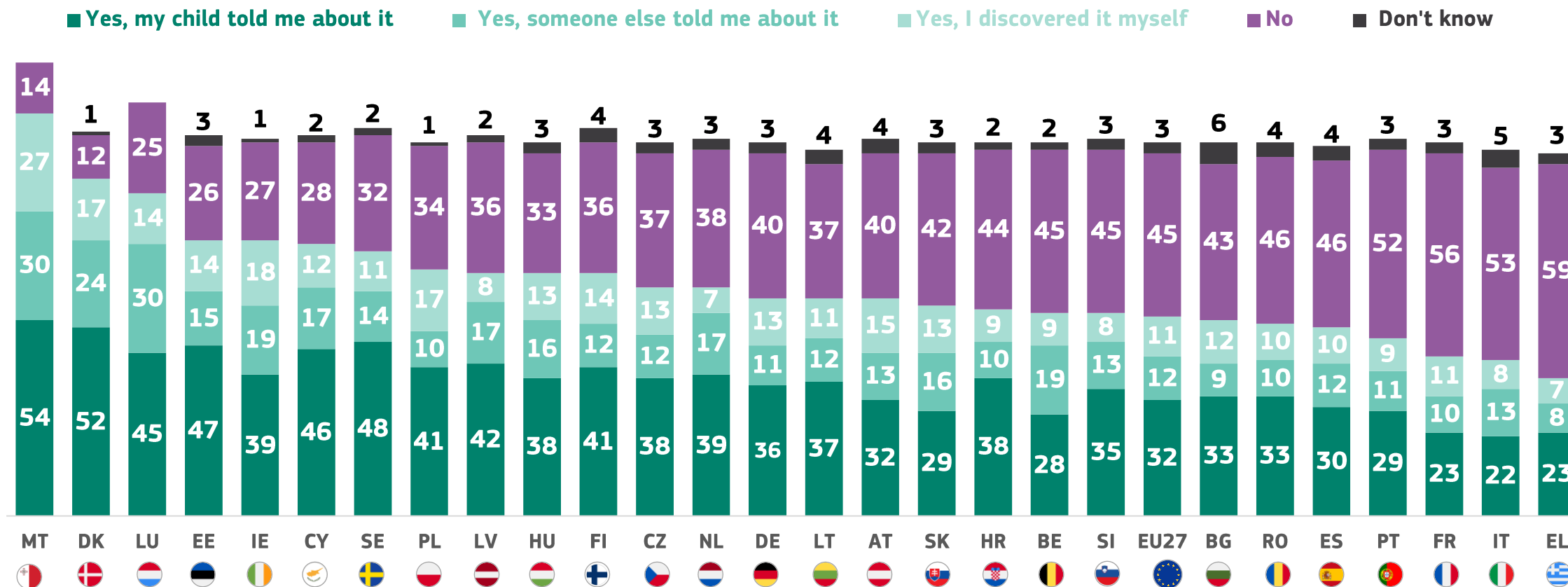
Parental awareness of children's negative online experiences varies widely across Europe, being far more common in Malta and Denmark than in Italy or Greece

Q9a Has your child ever come to you, or have you ever discovered, that your child had a negative experience online?



Parents

Base: 10827 Parents whose child uses social media (regularly or occasionally) (%)



(* Total exceeds 100%, as respondents were allowed to give multiple answers.)

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05

Protection Strategies and
Parental Support

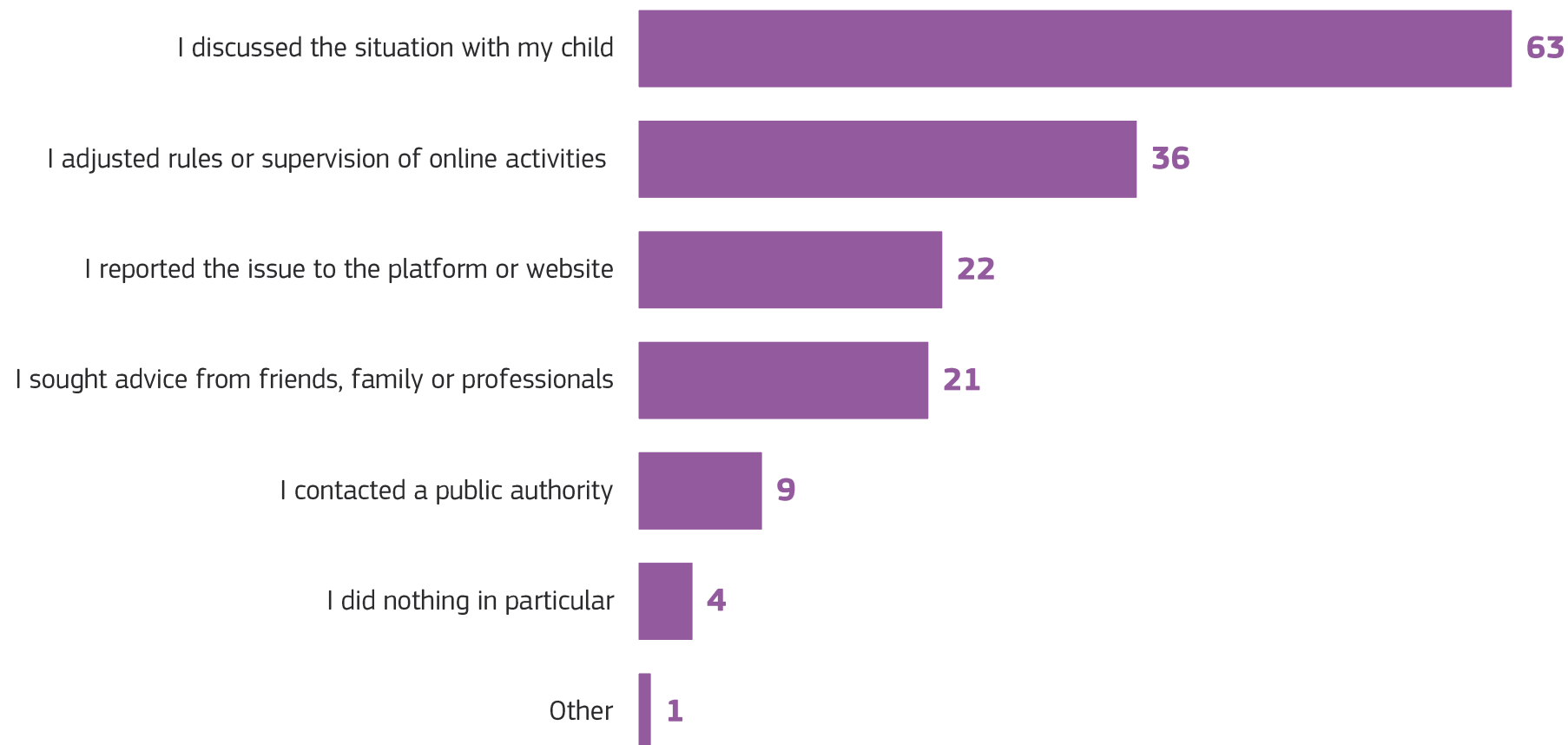
When faced with a negative experience, parents rely first on dialogue (63%) and rule-setting (36%); few turn to platforms or public authorities

Q9b What did you do when you became aware of the fact that your child had a negative experience online?



Parents

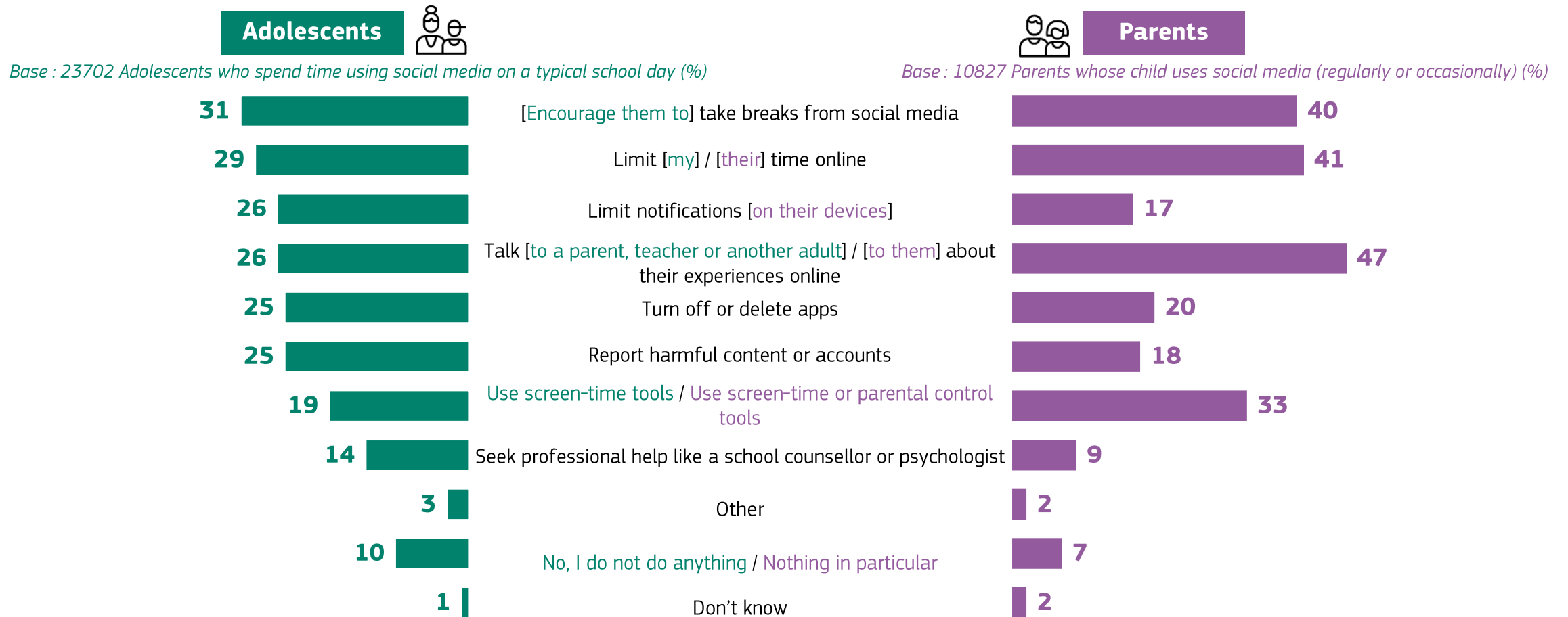
Base : 5665 Parents who are aware that their child has had a negative online experience (%)



(* Total exceeds 100%, as respondents were allowed to give multiple answers.

From dialogue to technical controls, parents take a multi-faceted protective approach but rarely seek professional support

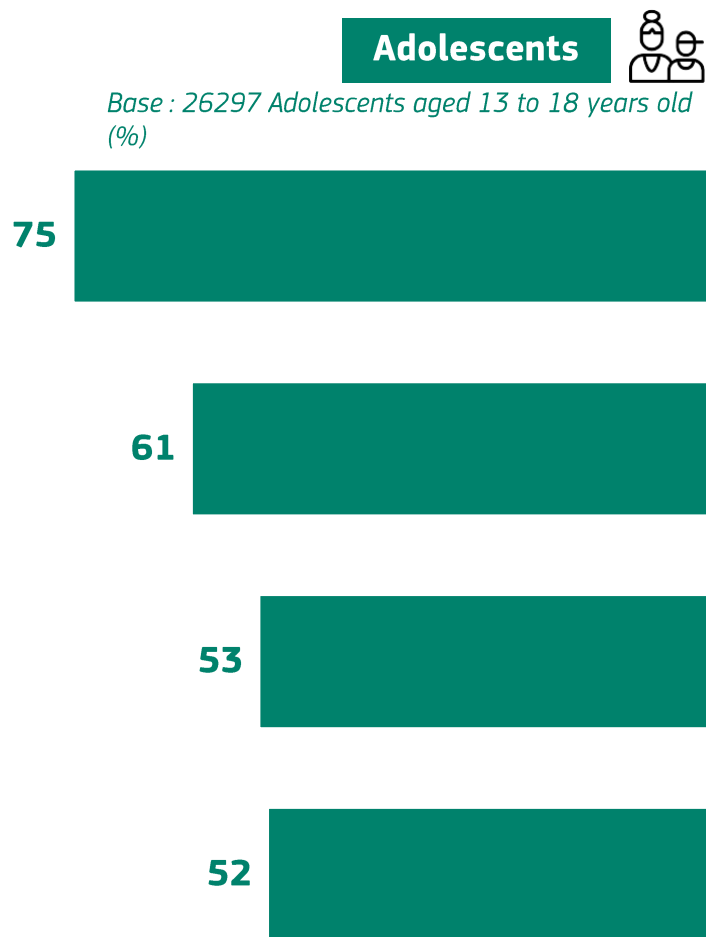
Q11/Q10 Do you do any of the following to protect [your] / [your child's] mental wellbeing when [using] / [they use] social media?



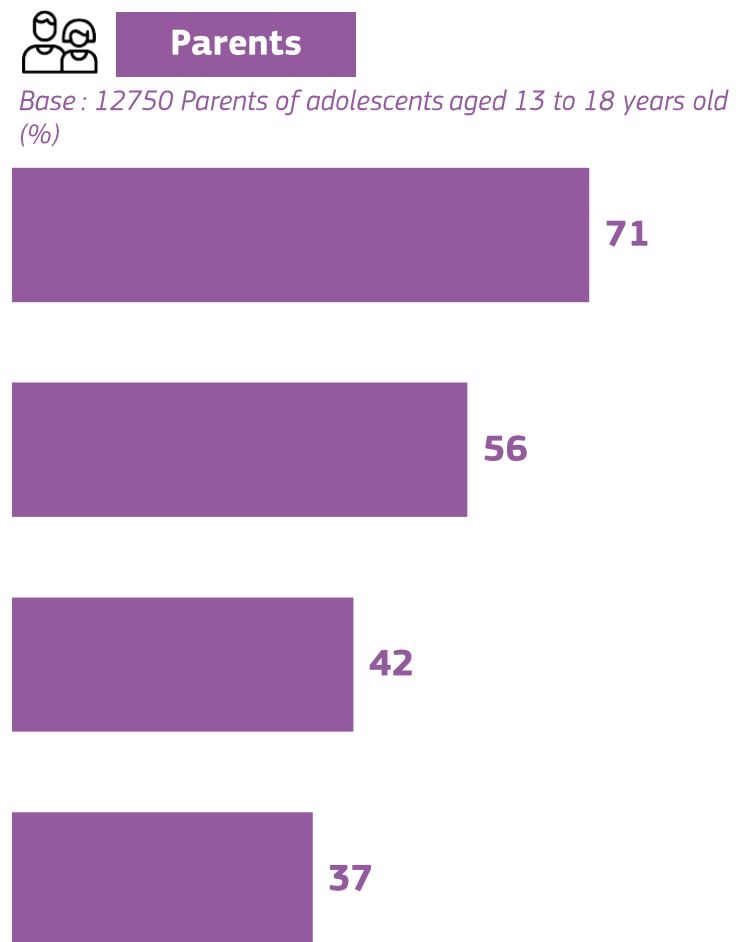
(* Total exceeds 100%, as respondents were allowed to give multiple answers.

While half of the adolescents think that social media platforms are doing enough to protect their mental well-being online, only 37% of parents agree

Q12 Do you think each of the following do enough to protect adolescents' mental well-being online?



"Total Yes"



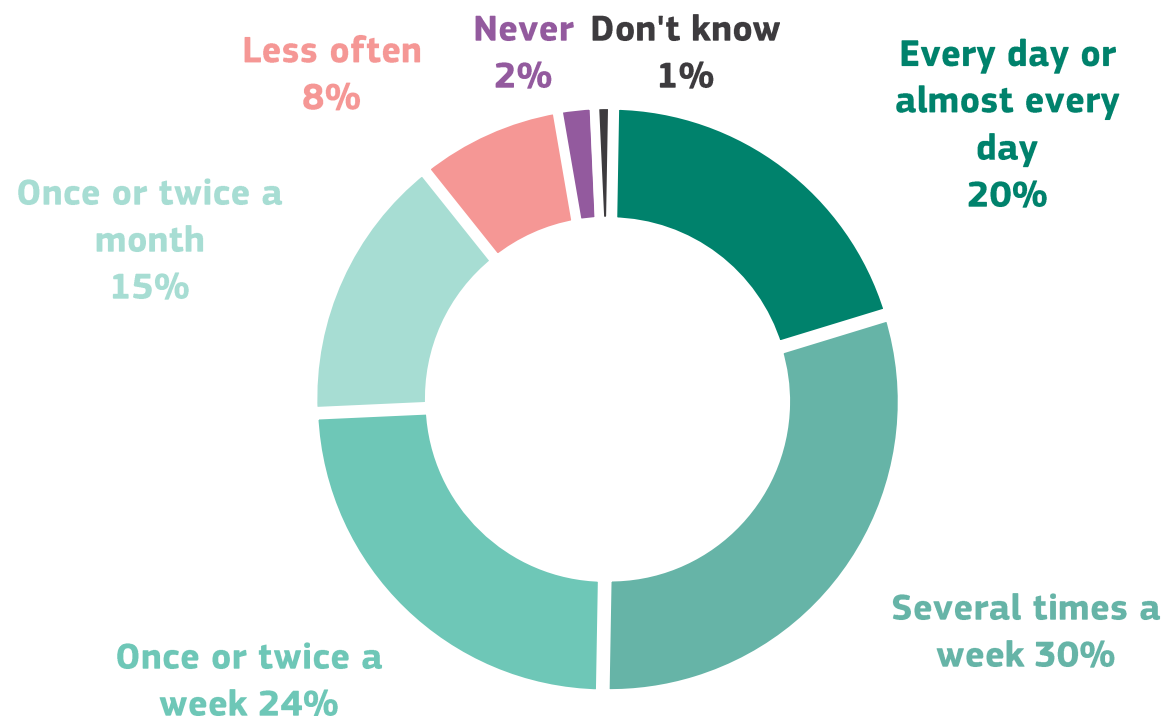
While 50% of parents report frequent dialogue (several times a week or more), 25% talk only monthly or less

Q11 How often do you talk with your child about what they do or experience on social media?



Parents

Base: 10827 Parents whose child uses social media (regularly or occasionally)



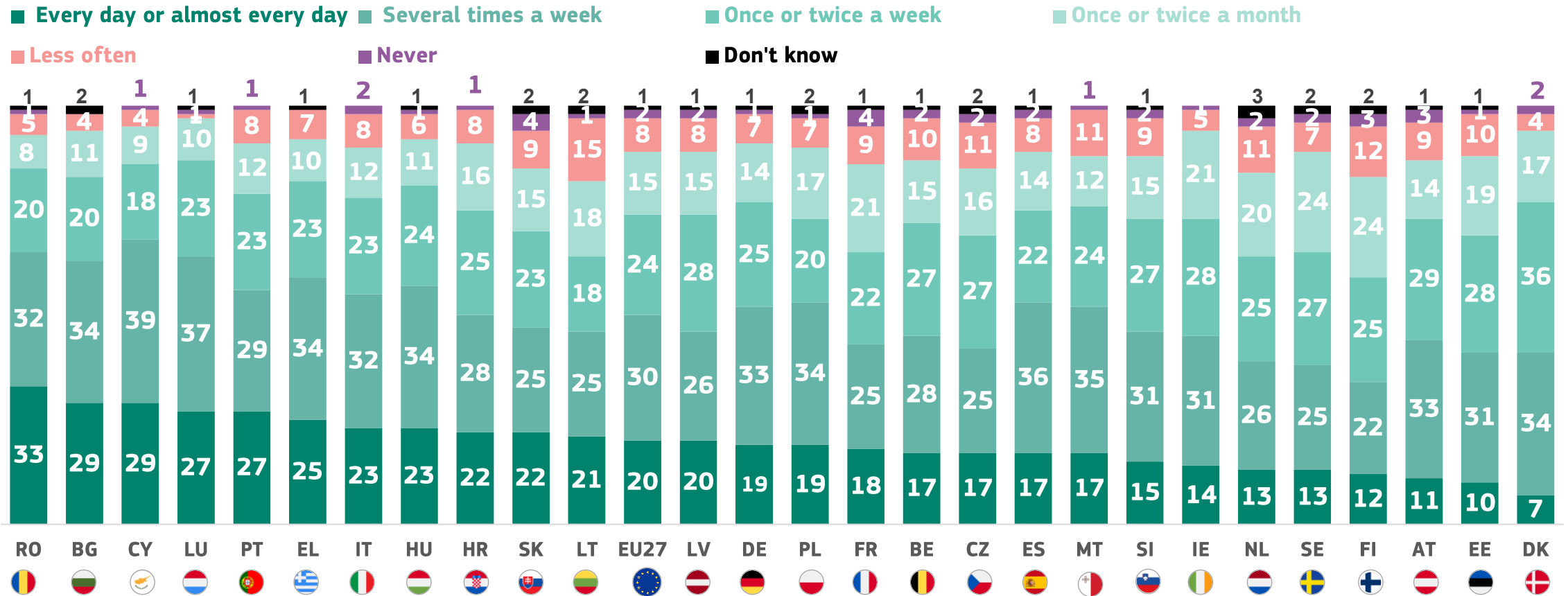
The frequency of parent-child conversations about social media varies widely, being most common in Romania and Bulgaria

Q11 How often do you talk with your child about what they do or experience on social media?



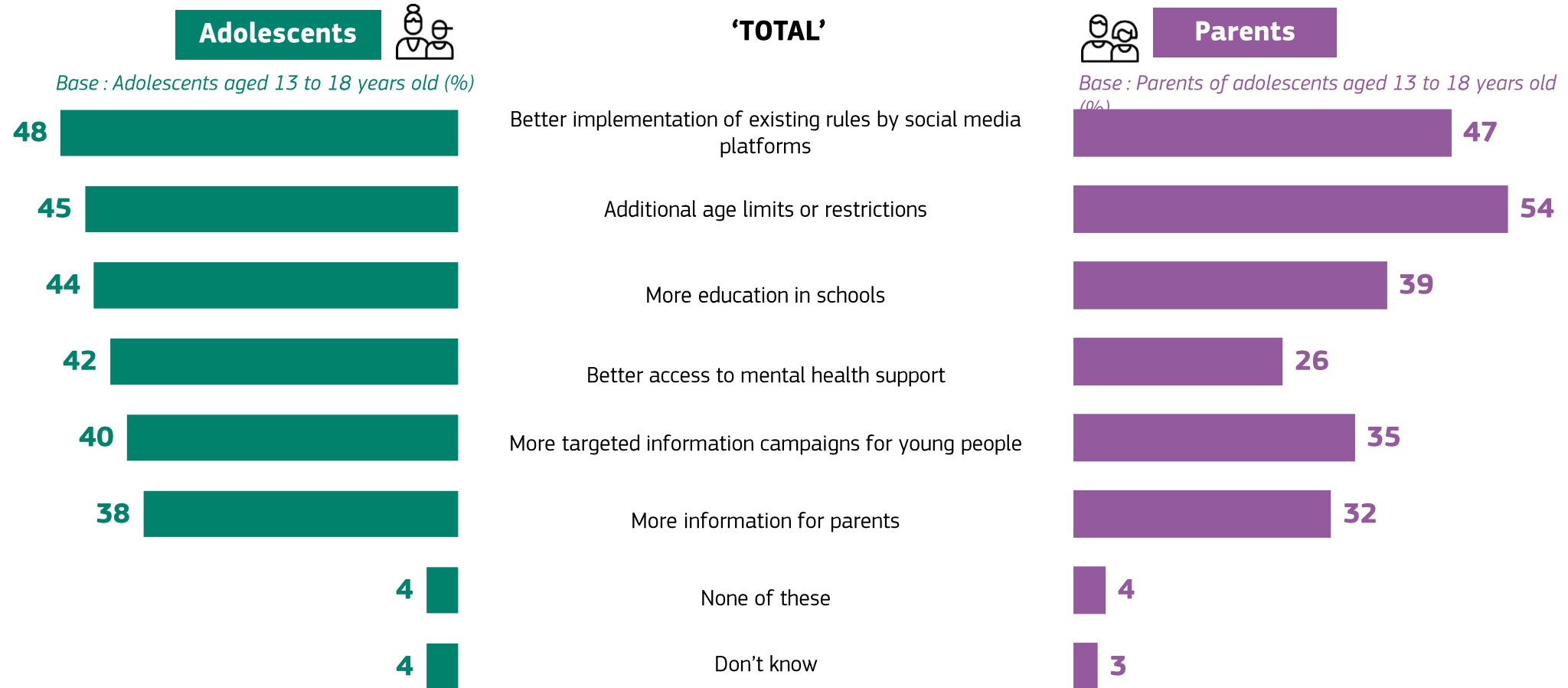
Parents

Base: 10827 Parents whose child uses social media (regularly or occasionally) (%)



Both groups agree on enforcing existing platform rules (47-48%): while parents push for age limits (54%) rather than access to mental health support (26%)

Q13 To improve the mental wellbeing of young people online, which of the following actions you think is most effective? Firstly? And then?



(* Total exceeds 100%, as respondents were allowed to give multiple answers.

Key findings

1. Adolescent screen time is heavy: 4.5h on a school day, 6.1h on a weekend day, with 46% of teens above 6 hours on weekends. Parents underestimate this by close to an hour (3.4h on school days, 5.3h on weekends).
2. Screen time rises sharply with early entry into social media: 7.5h on a weekend day for those who started before age 10, against 5.7h for those who started after age 14. This suggests a strong association between early social media use and heavier exposure, though the comparison with other predictors, such as the age at which the child received a smartphone, should be clarified before presenting it as the strongest factor.
3. Parental concern concentrates on acute external threats (harmful content 72%, online strangers 61%) more than on long-term internal effects (sleep 54%, school performance 51%). the link with screen-use intensity goes the other way: sleep problems rise from 18% (light users) to 44% (heavy users).
4. Adolescents and parents are divided on the impact of social media on the child's mental well-being: 48% of adolescents see a positive effect against 18% who see a negative one, parents stand at 21% positive against 36% negative. A part of adolescents thus already declare a negative impact on themselves, and 42% call for better mental health access.
5. Cross-generational mandate: 47-48% of both populations want stronger enforcement of platform rules; parents push for age limits (54% vs 45% of adolescents), adolescents call for better mental health access (42% vs 26% of parents).

Early entry into social media drives heavier screen time, which in turn is associated with higher levels of mental health symptoms, with social media showing the strongest dose-response relationship among digital activities. Parents partly miss this chain, focusing more on acute external risks than on the long-term internal effects on sleep and concentration. While a majority already view screens negatively, both generations converge on three key levers: better implementation of existing rules by platforms, age limits at entry, and improved access to mental health support



Colophon

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