



# 7th ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7)

Students' Forum: 11–15 May 2019 | Rectors' Conference: 12–14 May 2019

Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals:  
Perspectives from Asia and Europe

## ASEM-wide Youth Survey: Views of the ARC7 Applicants on the Relationship Between Higher Education and the Sustainable Development Goals



Co-organised by



National University of Political Studies and Public Administration



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**7<sup>th</sup> ASEF Rectors' Conference & Students' Forum (ARC7) 2019, Bucharest, Romania**  
"Higher Education Taking Action Towards the Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives from Asia and Europe"  
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# **ASEM-wide Youth Survey: Views of the ARC7 Applicants on the Relationship Between Higher Education and the Sustainable Development Goals**

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The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) is the only bi-regional multi-stakeholder dialogue platform for university and student leaders, policy makers, and business representatives to discuss higher education challenges of mutual concern in Asia and Europe.

ARC is recognised as the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM ME). Its results, including policy recommendations and research, feed into the preparation of ASEM MEs, which ARC rectors and student representatives are invited to attend. Moreover, ARC is contributing to the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, and it is one of the initial commitments to the Global Action Programme (GAP) on Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).

ARC takes place on a biennial basis alternating between Asia and Europe. It addresses 3 areas in higher education: 1) quality and inclusive education, 2) university governance and 3) university-business partnerships

Over 296 universities from 51 Asian and European countries have been represented at the ARC conferences since 2008.

### **ABOUT ARC7**

ARC7 offers a creative space for knowledge exchange on implementing a whole-of-institution approach on sustainable development, teaching the next generation of leaders and thinkers to act sustainably and ethically; conducting research that leads to positive change in our world; and engaging communities outside the walls of academia. The conference also explores how university and student leaders from Asia and Europe can work together towards “a future we want”.

ARC7 explores how higher education can take action towards achieving the sustainable development goals on 3 different levels:

- Taking Action at Home – SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance
- Taking Action at Community Level – SDGs as Drivers of University Social Impact
- Taking Action at International Level – SDGs as a Catalyst to Reorient Internationalisation

### **ASEM-WIDE YOUTH SURVEY**

The Open Call for Participation was launched across Asia and Europe for the month of November 2018. About 7000 students, young professionals and entrepreneurs between the ages of 18 and 30 applied to be part of the project.

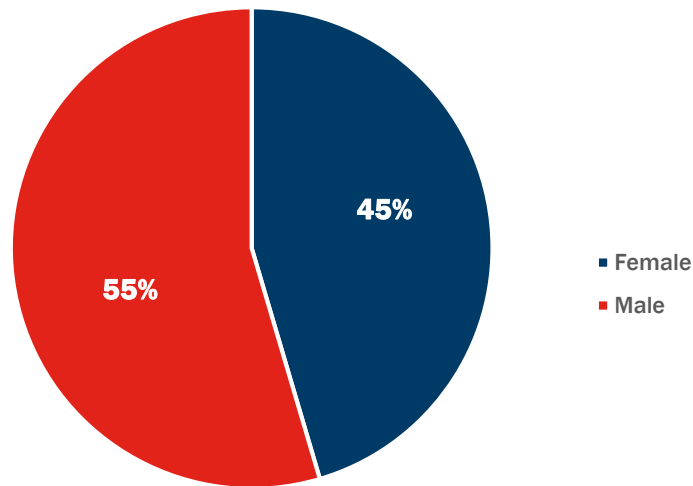
As part of the Open Call, ASEF invited all applicants to join a survey to capture the views of ASEM youths on University Governance and the relationship between higher education and sustainable development goals. The survey results were analysed generally, as well as evaluated by comparing responses from Asia and Europe, male and female applicants.

This document highlights some survey results, in particular within those areas where significant differences in the responses were identified.

*Disclaimer: The survey results are meant to showcase general trends and might not necessarily follow strict empirical methodologies.*

## PROFILE OF SURVEY PARTICIPANTS

### 1. Gender



### 2. Country of Citizenship

Asia	Europe	Total
95.05%	4.95%	100%

Overall, Asian countries in ASEM have a population of almost 4 billion people (representing 88% of ASEM's total population). The European ASEM countries have a population of slightly more than 520 million (representing 12% of ASEM's total population). According to 2016 population census and statistics of ASEM partners, the youth population (age 15-29) is about 24% of ASEM's total population, amounting to an estimate of 1.03 billion. Within the youth population, about 91% of them are from Asia. Countries such as China, India, Kazakhstan and Pakistan are experiencing a youth bulge, where they have the largest youth population in their own history.

Source: Eurostat 2016, ASEANstats 2016, United Nations Statistics Division, Respective Countries' Statistics Department.  
Official projections are used for Bangladesh and India.

### 3. Current Occupation

Undergraduate (BA, BSc, etc.)	Graduate (MA, MSc, MBA etc.)	Doctoral (PhD, etc.)	Diploma (Polytechnic etc.)	Total
62.07%	30.18%	6.00%	1.75%	100%

#### 4. Major Field of Work/Study

Major Field of Work or Study	% of Respondents
Humanities	8.87%
Social Sciences	22.79%
Business Studies and/or Management Science	18.71%
Medical Sciences	6.45%
Engineering and/or Technology	22.78%
Law	5.36%
Natural Sciences	10.31%
Communication and Information Sciences	4.73%
Total	100%

#### 5. Have you heard about the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) before?

No	Yes	Total
50.66%	49.34%	100%

#### 6. Have you heard about the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) before?

No	Yes	Total
38.74%	61.26%	100%

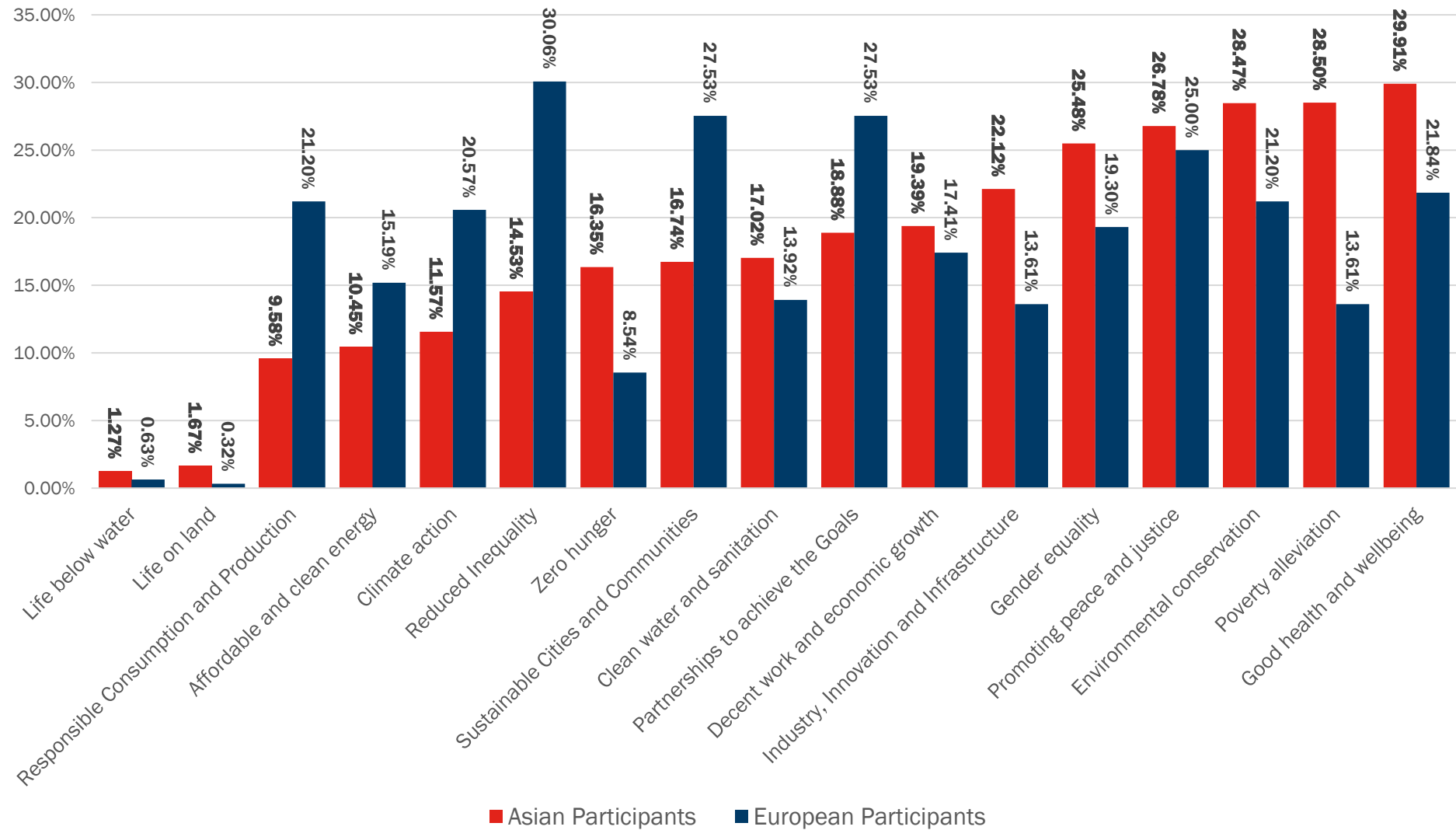
VIEWS ON UNIVERSITY GOVERNANCE

7. Share 3 words that come to your mind when you hear the term ‘sustainable development’

- Asian survey participants
- European survey participants



**8. I believe that Universities should focus on these Sustainable Development Goals, next to SDG4 on quality education:**  
*(Participants can select up to 3 goals which they believe are the most important)*



*(The total percentage does not add up to 100% as participants were given the option to select more than one option.)*



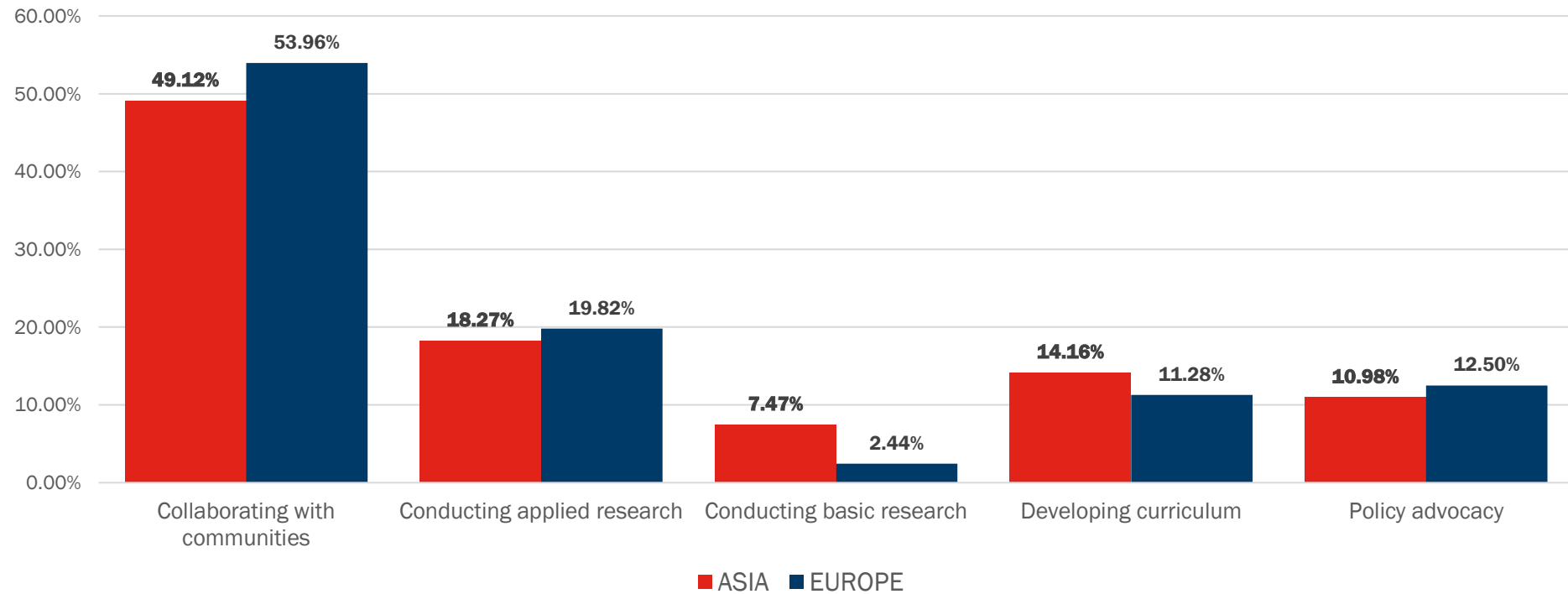
	ASIA	EUROPE
Life below water	1.27%	0.63%
Life on land	1.67%	0.32%
Responsible Consumption and Production	9.58%	21.20%
Affordable and clean energy	10.45%	15.19%
Climate action	11.57%	20.57%
Reduced Inequality	14.53%	<b>30.06%</b>
Zero hunger	16.35%	8.54%
Sustainable Cities and Communities	16.74%	<b>27.53%</b>
Clean water and sanitation	17.02%	13.92%
Partnerships to achieve the Goals	18.88%	<b>27.53%</b>
Decent work and economic growth	19.39%	17.41%
Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	22.12%	13.61%
Gender equality	25.48%	19.30%
Promoting peace and justice	<b>26.78%</b>	25.00%
Environmental conservation	28.47%	21.20%
Poverty alleviation	<b>28.50%</b>	13.61%
Good health and wellbeing	<b>29.91%</b>	21.84%

Generally, the top 3 focus of both Asian and European participants are different; they do not overlap. However, the differences do explain certain underlying issues in the respective continents. Where Asian participants think that one of the top focus should be on *Poverty Alleviation* (28.5%), only 13.61% of European Participants think so. On the other hand, where European participants believe that one of the top focus should be *Reduced Inequality* (30.06%), only 14.53% of Asian participants believe the same. This could perhaps be due more developing countries in Asia, where the priority could be breaking the poverty line rather than resource distribution and narrow inequality. This is also evident from how 16.35% of the Asian Participants picked Zero Hunger as an important focus compared to only 8.54% of European participants.

It is interesting that very few Asian and European participants think that the SDGs *Life Below Water* and *Life on Land* should be the focus of Universities. Both of these SDGs have the least votes.

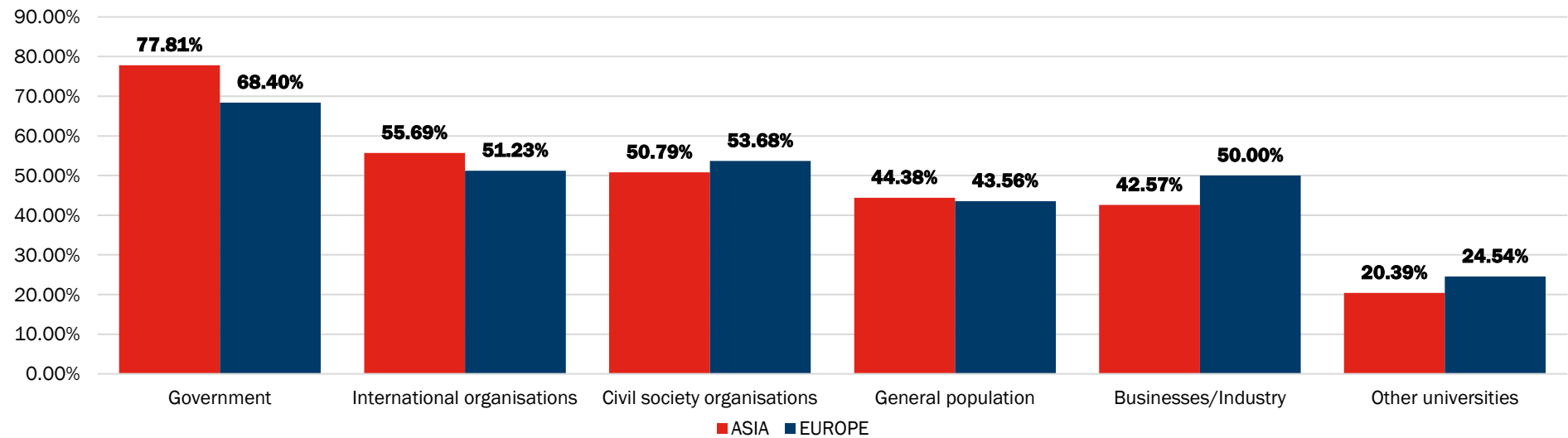


### 9. In my opinion, higher education can do the most to achieve the sustainable development goals by...



	ASIA	EUROPE
Collaborating with communities	49.12%	53.96%
Conducting applied research	18.27%	19.82%
Conducting basic research	7.47%	2.44%
Developing curriculum	14.16%	11.28%
Policy advocacy	10.98%	12.50%

**10. I believe that Universities should work with this/these stakeholder the most in driving sustainable development:**  
*(Participants are allowed to select up to 3 stakeholders)*

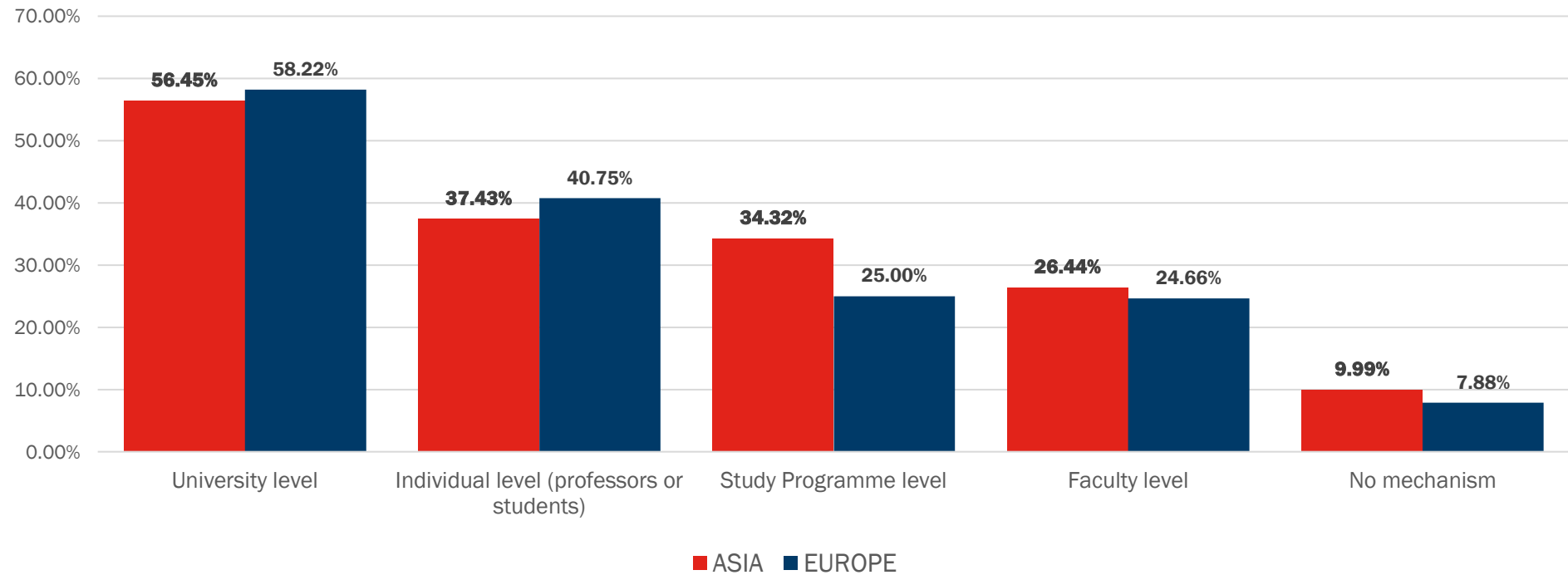


	ASIA	EUROPE
<b>Government</b>	<b>77.81%</b>	<b>68.40%</b>
<b>International organisations</b>	<b>55.69%</b>	<b>51.23%</b>
<b>Civil society organisations</b>	<b>50.79%</b>	<b>53.68%</b>
<b>General population</b>	44.38%	43.56%
<b>Businesses/Industry</b>	42.57%	50.00%
<b>Other universities</b>	20.39%	24.54%

Generally, majority of Asian and European participants think that the Universities should work with the Government the most.

*(The total percentage does not add up to 100% as participants were given the option to select more than one option.)*

**11. Sustainable development efforts at my University are governed at:**  
*(Participants are allowed to select multiple options)*

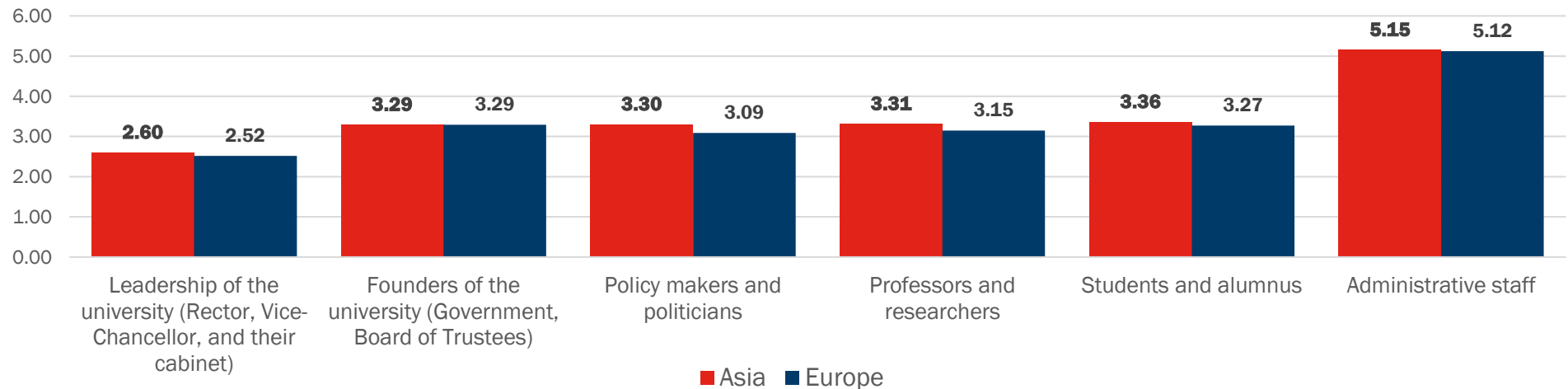


	ASIA	EUROPE
University level	56.45%	58.22%
Individual level (professors or students)	37.43%	40.75%
Study Programme level	34.32%	25.00%
Faculty level	26.44%	24.66%
No mechanism	9.99%	7.88%

## 12. Who should take the responsibility in leading sustainable development efforts in higher education in your opinion?

(Participants ranked the following options on a scale of 1 to 6, with 1 being the most responsible while 6 being the least responsible. The score below is the mean score.)

### Most responsible:

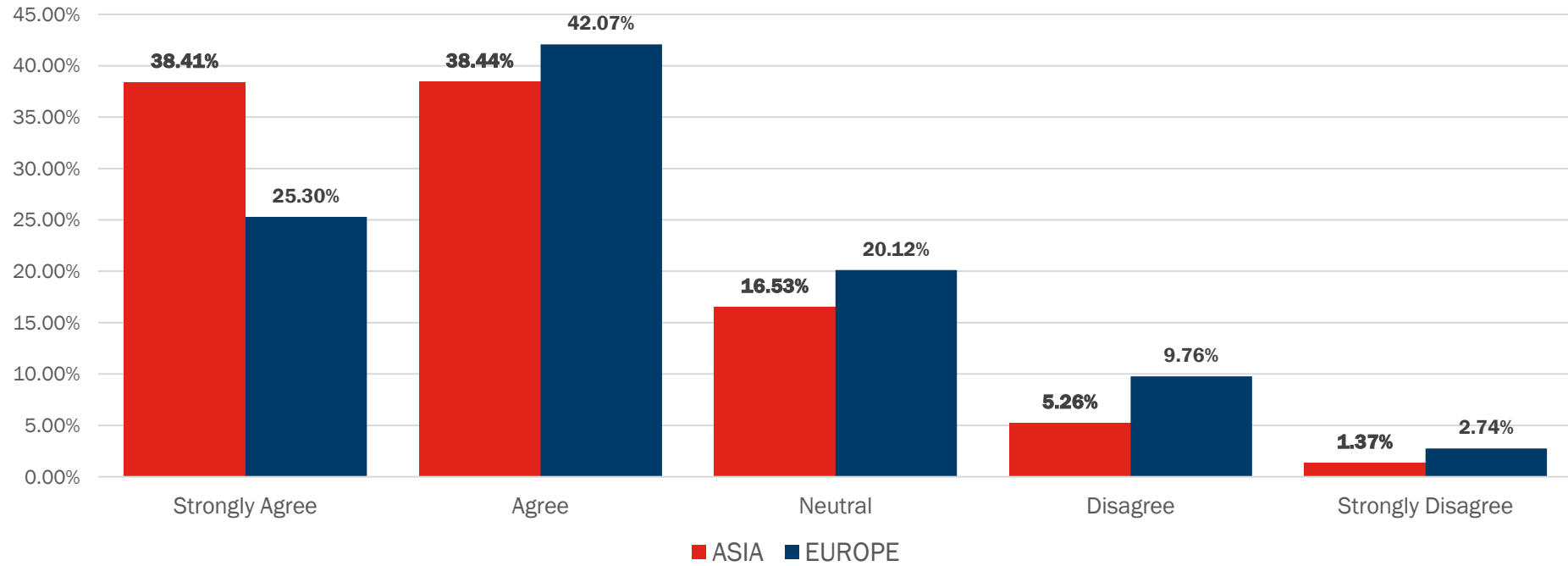


	ASIA	EUROPE
Leadership of the university (Rector, Vice-Chancellor, and their cabinet)	2.60	2.52
Founders of the university (Government, Board of Trustees)	3.29	3.29
Policy makers and politicians	3.30	3.09
Professors and researchers	3.31	3.15
Students and alumnus	3.36	3.27
Administrative staff	5.15	5.12

Both Asian and European participants believe that the *University leaders and Politicians* should drive sustainable development efforts in Higher Education. Meanwhile, they feel that their peers, *Students and Alumnus*, should be less responsible. This could signify that youths should be empowered further to push sustainable development efforts in Higher Education. Almost unanimously, participants expressed that *Administrative staff* should be the least responsible.

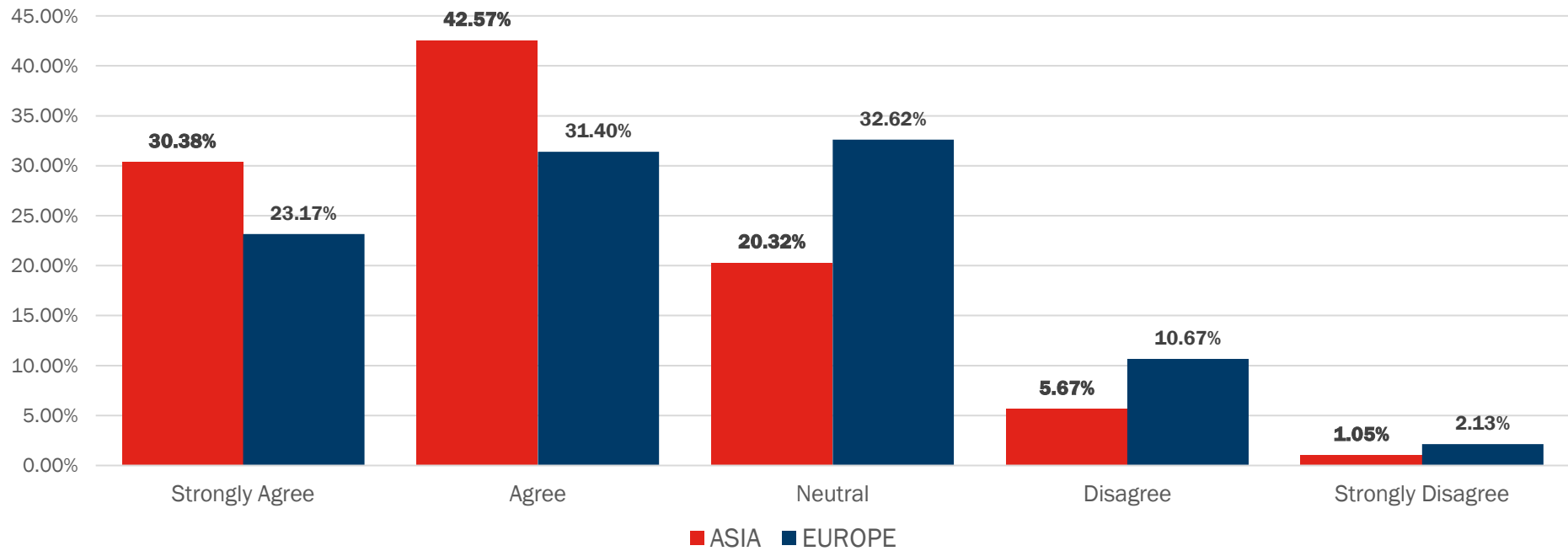
**13. Please assess current efforts to achieve SDGs at your university and at your country. Evaluate the statements below.**

*“My university finds it important to work towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.”*



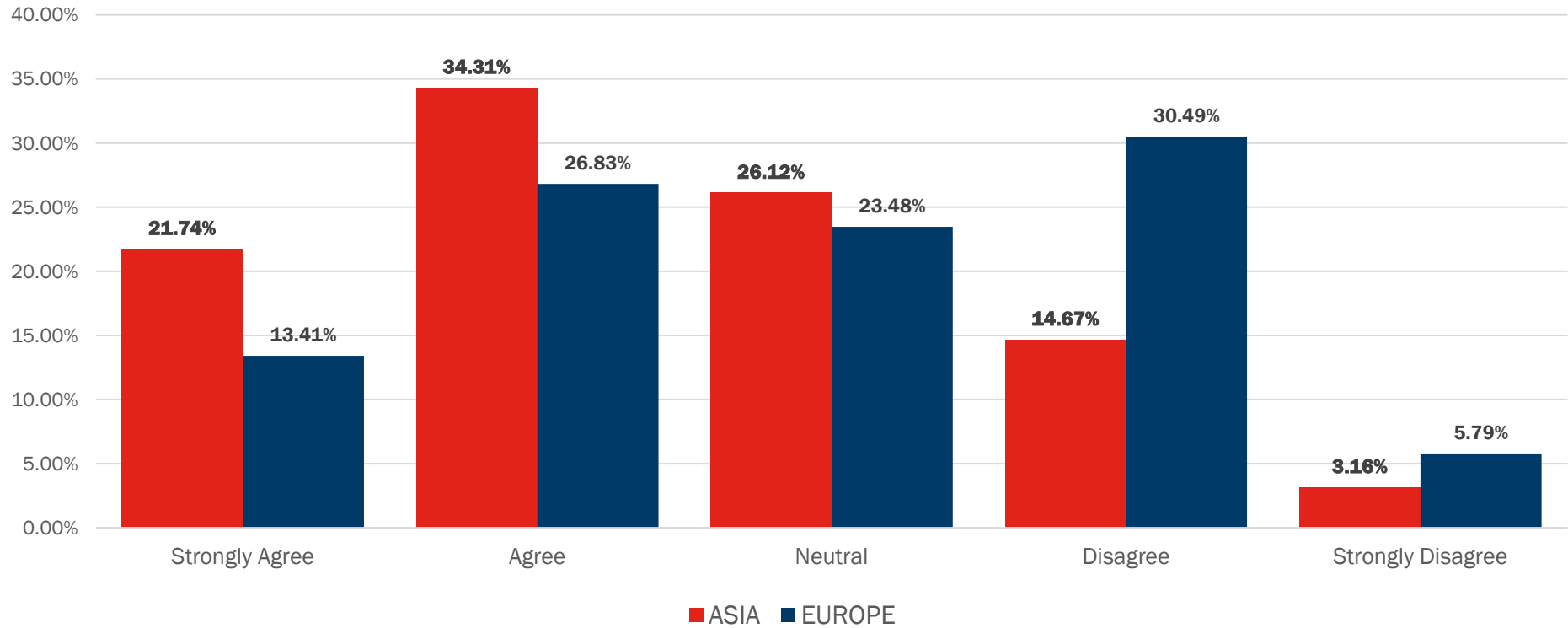
	ASIA	EUROPE
<b>Strongly Agree</b>	38.41%	25.30%
<b>Agree</b>	38.44%	42.07%
<b>Neutral</b>	16.53%	20.12%
<b>Disagree</b>	5.26%	9.76%
<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	1.37%	2.74%

*“By 2030, sustainability will become a horizontal priority at my university in teaching, research and development as well.”*



	ASIA	EUROPE
Strongly Agree	30.38%	23.17%
Agree	42.57%	31.40%
Neutral	20.32%	32.62%
Disagree	5.67%	10.67%
Strongly Disagree	1.05%	2.13%

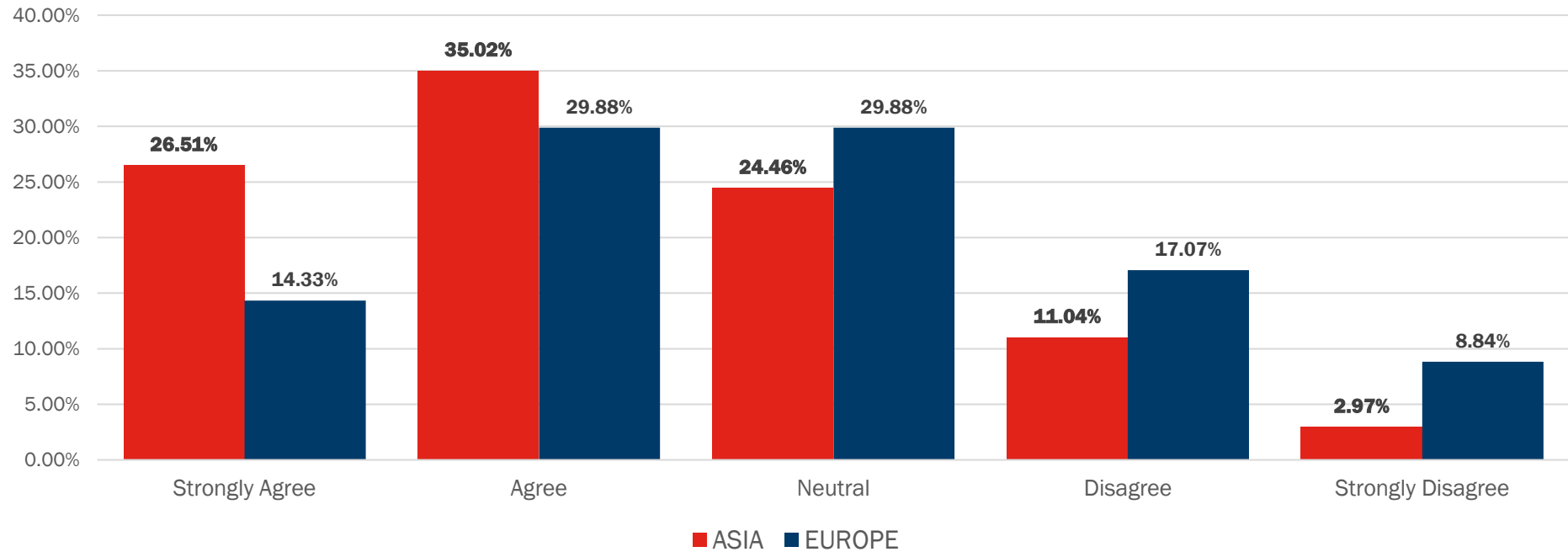
*“The education policy makers in my country give great importance to policies that support the achievement of the SDGs.”*



	ASIA	EUROPE
Strongly Agree	21.74%	13.41%
Agree	34.31%	26.83%
Neutral	26.12%	23.48%
Disagree	14.67%	30.49%
Strongly Disagree	3.16%	5.79%

*“By 2030, my country will achieve SDG4 and ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.”*



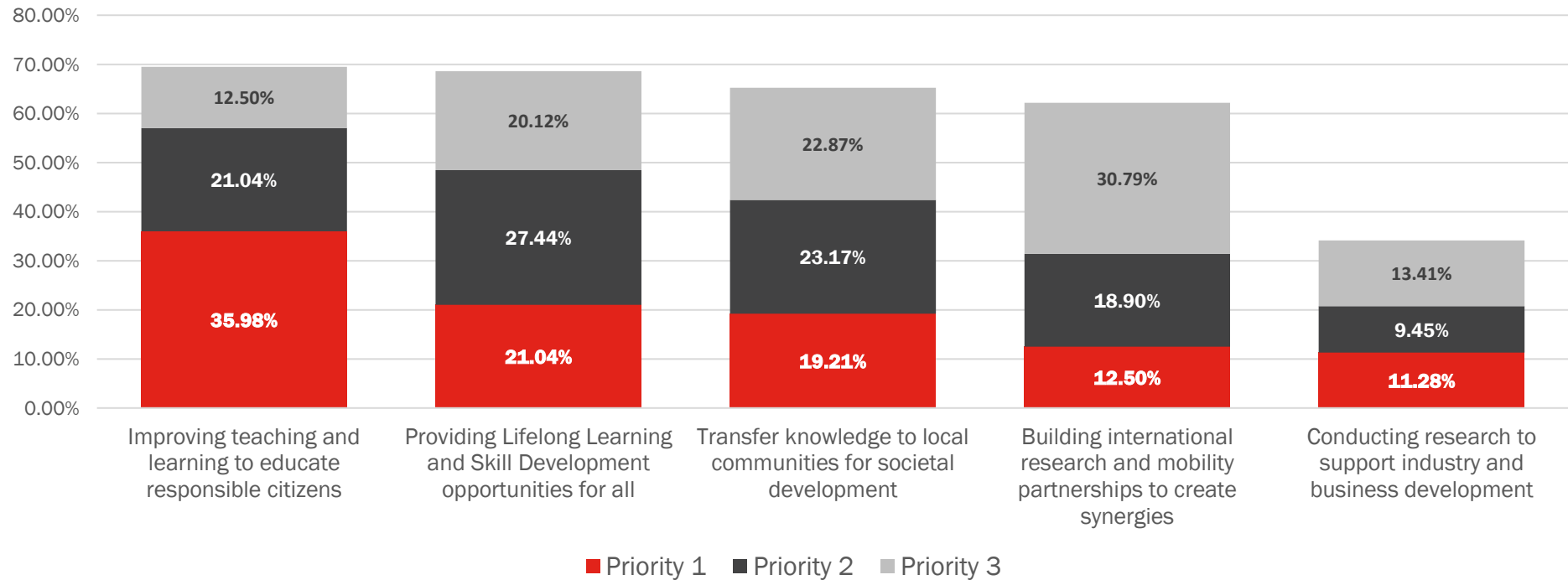


	ASIA	EUROPE
Strongly Agree	26.51%	14.33%
Agree	35.02%	29.88%
Neutral	24.46%	29.88%
Disagree	11.04%	17.07%
Strongly Disagree	2.97%	8.84%

These statements were also analysed based on the Human Development Index of each countries. When examining the top 5 and bottom 5 countries among Asia and Europe, it was found that the less developed countries were also generally positive about the current efforts to achieve the SDGs at their universities and in their countries.

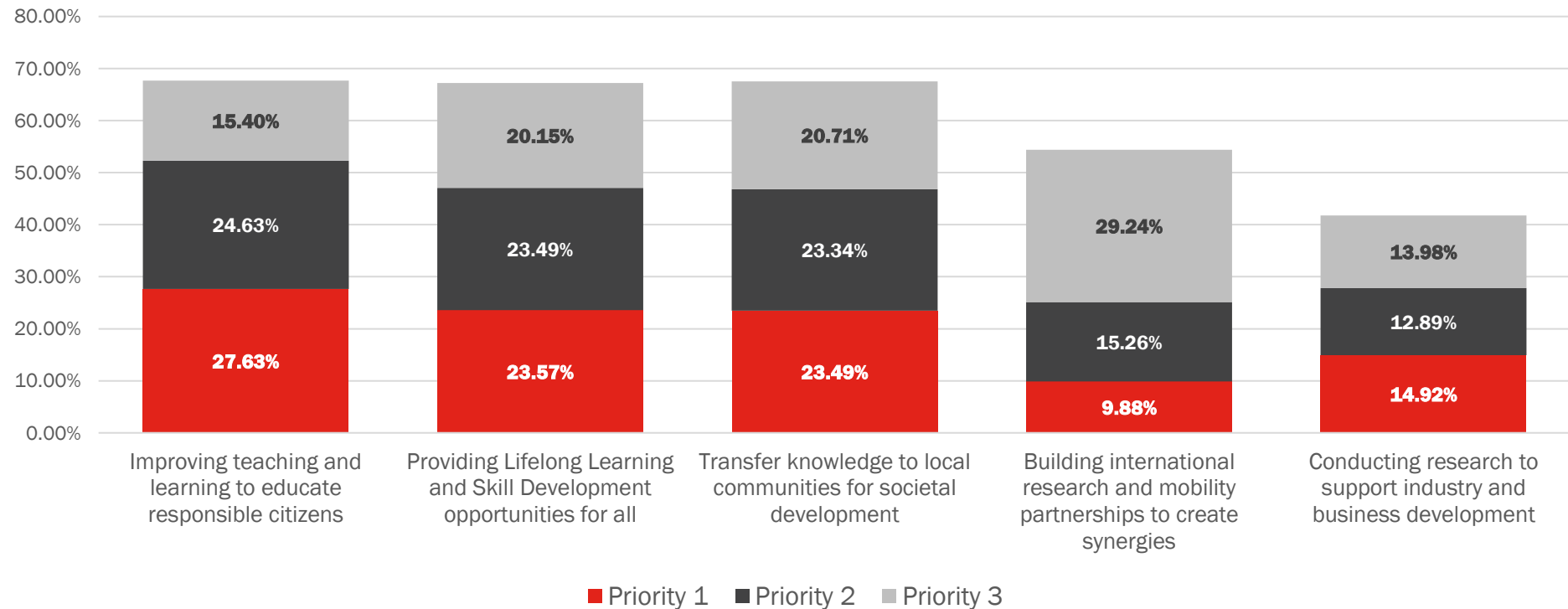
**14. Now imagine that you are the Rector of a university that is currently developing a mid-term strategic plan regarding sustainable development. What strategic priorities would you put on top of your agenda? Please only select your top 3 priorities:**  
*(Participants chose and ranked their top 3 priorities.)*

**Asian survey participants**



	<b>Priority 1</b>	<b>Priority 2</b>	<b>Priority 3</b>
Improving teaching and learning to educate responsible citizens	35.98%	21.04%	12.50%
Providing Lifelong Learning and Skill Development opportunities for all	21.04%	27.44%	20.12%
Transfer knowledge to local communities for societal development	19.21%	23.17%	22.87%
Building international research and mobility partnerships to create synergies	12.50%	18.90%	30.79%
(Conducting research to support industry and business development)	11.28%	9.45%	13.41%

### European survey participants



	<b>Priority 1</b>	<b>Priority 2</b>	<b>Priority 3</b>
Improving teaching and learning to educate responsible citizens	27.63%	24.63%	15.40%
Providing Lifelong Learning and Skill Development opportunities for all	23.57%	23.49%	20.15%
Transfer knowledge to local communities for societal development	23.49%	23.34%	20.71%
Building international research and mobility partnerships to create synergies	9.88%	15.26%	29.24%
Conducting research to support industry and business development	14.92%	12.89%	13.98%

Despite the geographical and socio-economic differences, participants of both Asia and Europe have similar order of priorities on average. It also seems that more European participants prioritised *Improving teaching and learning to educate responsible citizens* much more than Asian participants.

**15. This is your chance to shape the ARC7 agenda. Imagine that you could advise the Education Minister of your country on developing one single policy. What advice would you give your Minister? Your input may be selected to be presented and debated on stage at ARC7.**

The survey participants have provided a diverse range of answers. Generally, there are some recurring themes and topics; insightful and outstanding comments are also highlighted here.

There were also some common trends that unite certain groups of people. By comparing developing and developed countries across Asia and Europe, we can better understand the prevalent issues faced by each group. Among the ASEM countries of Asia and Europe, we examined the inputs from the five countries with the highest human development and the five countries with the lowest human development within Asia and Europe.

Below, we highlight the common recommendations by the different groups.

**The five countries of Asia and Europe with the highest human development would advise their Education Minister on developing policies:**

- » To equip people with relevant skills to advance the sustainable development agenda
  - *Improving Information Technology (IT) infrastructure and incorporating it into Education*
  - *Train more people in vocational skills, which are more relevant to sustainable development*

**The five countries of Asia and Europe with the lowest human development would advise their Education Minister on developing policies:**

- » To improve quality of education
  - *Modernising and digitisation of curriculum*
  - *Updating of pedagogies*
- » To strengthen governmental support for research
  - *Increase research grants and improve infrastructure to enable citizens*
  - *Enhancing mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation*

**All the 20 countries of Asia and Europe would advise their Education Minister on developing policies:**

- » which are more inclusive
  - *Improve accessibility to education, especially of less-privileged groups.*
  - *Give more consideration on the gender equality and mental health when forming policies.*
- » To generating more awareness about sustainable development
  - *Through partnering with other Universities, Businesses and other relevant Stakeholders to advance the SDG agenda*
  - *Foster an environment for knowledge sharing*
  - *Sustainable Development as a mandatory subject for every student from High School to University*

## ORGANISERS OF THE ARC7

### Co-organised By



#### The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

ASEF is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, it is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). ASEF promotes understanding, strengthens relationships and facilitates cooperation among the people, institutions and organisations of Asia and Europe. ASEF enhances dialogue, enables exchanges and encourages collaboration across the thematic areas of culture, education, governance, sustainable development, economy and public health.

The work of ASEF's Education Department (ASEFEdu) focuses on the themes access to quality education and youth employment, and, hence, contributes with its projects to the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially to Goal4: "ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all."

For more information, please visit the [www.ASEF.org](http://www.ASEF.org).



#### The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA)

The National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), established in 1991 as a school of governance, is a landmark in the Romanian academic setting. SNSPA promotes academic excellence in Political Sciences, Sociology, Administrative Studies, International Relations, Diplomacy, European Studies, Communication Sciences, Psychology, Management. SNSPA teachers are experts in their fields; they incorporate current and global perspectives into the curriculum and promote innovative and original thinking.

Currently, the university is home to more than 6,000 students enrolled across 9 departments. Thousands of graduates from their academic programs have successfully entered careers in academia, government, industry and nonprofits. SNSPA is a member of several international university alliances (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, Romanian-U.S. Fulbright Commission, International Association of Universities, European University Association, European Association for Public Administration Accreditation) and collaborates with public institutions and business organizations across a wide range of different fields.

For more information, please visit [www.SNSPA.ro/en](http://www.SNSPA.ro/en).



#### Ministry of National Education (Romania)

The mission of the Ministry of Education is to provide an educational environment to ensure the harmonious development of all its beneficiaries by promoting excellence and ensuring equal access to education.

For more information, please visit <http://edu.ro>

## In Partnership With



### ASEAN University Network (AUN)

<http://www.aunsec.org/>

Founded in November 1995, the ASEAN University Networks' (AUN) main objective is to strengthen the existing network of cooperation among leading universities in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region.



### European University Association (EUA)

<http://www.eua.be/>

The European University Association (EUA) is the representative organisation of universities and national rectors' conferences in 47 European countries. It was formed in 2001 as the result of a merger between the Association of European Universities (CRE) and the Confederation of European Union Rectors' Conferences. EUA supports and takes forward the interests of individual institutions and the higher education sector as a whole.



### International Association of Universities (IAU)

<http://www.iau-aiu.net/>

Created in 1950 under the auspices of UNESCO, the International Association Universities (IAU) brings together more than 650 institutions and organisations worldwide for exchange and action on common concerns in the area of higher education.



### European Students' Union (ESU)

<http://www.esu-online.org/>

The European Students' Union (ESU) is the umbrella organisation of 44 National Unions of Students from 38 countries. The aim of ESU is to represent and promote the educational, social, economic and cultural interests of students at the European level towards all relevant bodies and in particular the European Union, Bologna Follow Up Group, Council of Europe and UNESCO. Through its members, ESU represents over 15 million students in Europe.



### Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

<http://esn.org/>

Established in 1989, Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is the biggest student association in Europe. ESN works for the creation of a more mobile and flexible education environment by supporting and developing the student exchange from different levels and providing an intercultural experience also to those students who cannot access a period abroad ("internationalisation at home").



### Erasmus Mundus Association (EMA)

<https://www.em-a.eu/>

The Erasmus Mundus Students and Alumni Association (EMA) is a not-for-profit organisation representing a community of more than 12,000 members, students and alumni of Erasmus Mundus Master and PhD courses, from over 170 countries. EMA's headquarter is in Brussels, Belgium but the organisation is fully managed by volunteers all around the world.



### National Rectors Council Romania

<http://www.cnr-romania.ro/>

The National Council of Rectors is a consultative body including all the Rectors of the accredited higher education institutions in Romania.

**SUPPORTED BY****European Students' Forum (AEGEE-Europe)**<https://www.aegEE.org>**International Association of Political Science (IAPSS)**<https://www.iapss.org>**ASEM Education Secretariat (AES)**<https://www.aseM-education.org>**Association of Pacific Rim Universities (APRU)**<https://apru.org>**European Youth Press (EYP)**<http://www.youthpress.org>**The European Union (EU)**<https://europa.eu>**Rubik's Brand Ltd.**<https://www.rubikcube.org>**VISUAL CONCEPT**

*The United Nations General Assembly identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that encompass many aspects of contemporary society. The goals serve as globally-recognised standards that call upon stakeholders across all sectors, including education, to implement them by 2030. Achieving the SDGs, however, is a complex interplay that requires both strategic thinking as well as creative and innovative methods. Solving a Rubik's cube - one of the most famous educational toys ever - resembles this multifaceted process: it takes not only analytical skills and imagination but also hands-on action in solving the puzzle to get all the colours, sides and patterns right within the given time. Like the pieces in a Rubik's cube, the SDGs are interconnected and any decision to move towards a certain direction has an impact on the overall pattern and outcome. The 7th ASEF Rector's Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7) is the platform for students, rectors, policy-makers and education ministers to showcase the interdisciplinary role of higher education in this serious game of developing and sustaining our societies. While the optimal solution may not be the easiest nor the quickest, we know we are moving the pieces in the right order by taking turns in drafting policy recommendations and making commitments towards the SDGs at ARC7.*