

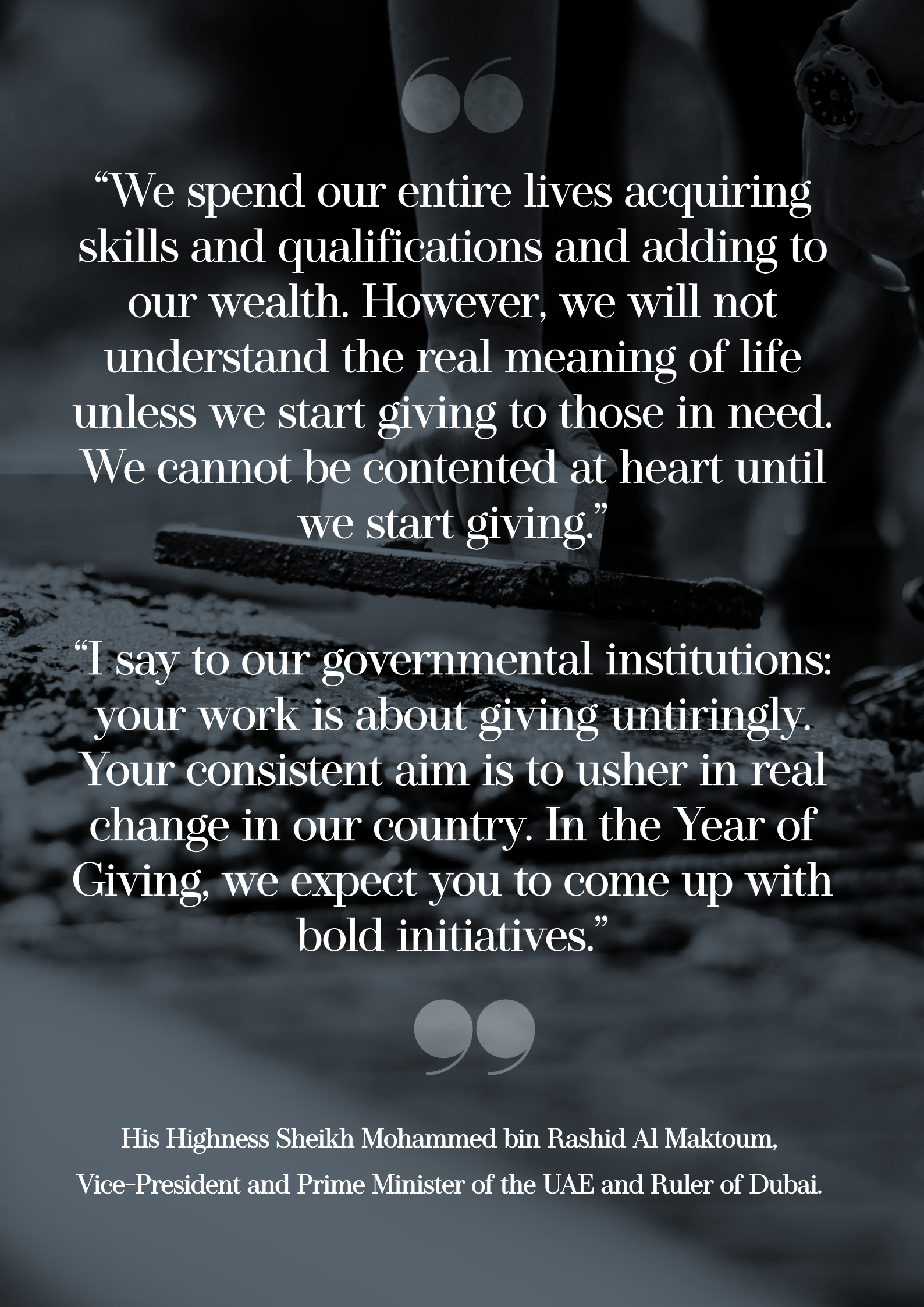
Leading BY Example

**MENA
CSR
SURVEY
REPORT
2020**

DEVELOPED BY
CICERO & BERNAY
PUBLIC RELATIONS
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“We spend our entire lives acquiring skills and qualifications and adding to our wealth. However, we will not understand the real meaning of life unless we start giving to those in need. We cannot be contented at heart until we start giving.”

“I say to our governmental institutions: your work is about giving untiringly. Your consistent aim is to usher in real change in our country. In the Year of Giving, we expect you to come up with bold initiatives.”



His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum,
Vice-President and Prime Minister of the UAE and Ruler of Dubai.

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We are pleased to see the release of such a report that highlights the instrumental role of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and its integration into corporate culture in the UAE. CSR has matured and become more professional and institutionalised in the UAE, driven by the huge diversity of philanthropic activities that seek to make a real impact on communities. As a UAE-based global philanthropic organisation that has to date impacted positively the lives of more than 20 million children and youth across 60 developing countries through the transformative power of education and learning, Dubai Cares offers its supporters and donors a large spectrum of opportunities and programmatic portfolios to meet their CSR needs and goal. We look forward to seeing more effective CSR practices that benefit local and global communities.



H.E. Dr. Tariq Al Gurg

Chief Executive Officer at Dubai Cares and Member of
its Board of Directors



Corporate social responsibility is not just a moral responsibility that we practice and support at C&B; it's a given through which we believe no company could afford to operate without.

A clear and effective CSR strategy is required now more than ever to succeed and maintain the sustainability of that success. Through this report, we sought the insight of C-level executives from across the region to create a benchmarking system, wherein corporates and entities can evaluate their stance and consistently establish better ways to integrate CSR into their mainstream businesses.

As an industry of knowledge and constant evolution, public relations presents a quintessential, experimental grounds for communication that reflects the thoughts and sentiments of all its practitioners. As such, we conducted this survey as part of our responsibility to carry the torch of information and share it with our colleagues within and beyond our industry. We are proud to present these in-depth findings to you and look forward to helping consolidate the emphasis of regional CSR.



Ahmad Itani

Founder and CEO, Cicero & Bernay Public Relations
Chairman, PRCA MENA

Ahmad Itani is the visionary behind the award-winning public relations consultancy Cicero and Bernay (C&B), headquartered in Dubai. While setting new benchmarks for PR in the UAE, Ahmad's impact is felt across the wider communication industry. He is a firm believer in 'letting the facts do the talking', pushing the boundaries of brand communication to new heights and keeping abreast of the rapid evolution of the communication narrative.



The topic of corporate social responsibility is something that is close to YouGov's heart. Our founding idea, to which we have been committed to from the start, is to supply a continuous stream of accurate data and insight into what the world thinks, so that companies, governments and institutions can better serve the people and communities that sustain them.

For this report, we spoke with C-suite executives from Bahrain, Egypt, Jordan, KSA, Kuwait, Lebanon, Oman, and UAE who are part of our online panel, to assess how central corporate social responsibility is to businesses across the region.

Our research indicates that corporate social responsibility is becoming embedded in corporate culture and workforce. Senior decision makers in these markets have a good knowledge and understanding of CSR, especially those in the UAE. It is clear that many of the C-suite leaders believe it shapes the trust in companies, with many saying they personally will not buy a product that is not socially responsible.

This study sheds a light on business leaders' approach to corporate social responsibility across the region so that organisations can better understand where they and their competitors stand on CSR and where they could make the changes.



Stephan Shakespeare

CEO, YouGov

Stephan co-founded YouGov in 2000. One of the pioneers of internet research, he has been the driving force behind YouGov's innovation-led strategy. He was chair of the Data Strategy Board for the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills (2012-2013) and led the Shakespeare Review of Public Sector Information. He is a commissioner for the Social Metrics Commission and an Affiliated Researcher at the Bennett Institute, Cambridge University, where his work is focused on the public dimensions of globalisation and tracking attitudes to public policy.



The CSR Survey Report by Cicero & Bernay is interesting and insightful.

It reinstates the fact that the UAE is poised to play a leading role in guiding others towards a more socially responsible, corporate environment. The survey results also highlight that it is a collective responsibility of all corporates to embed CSR into the core of their operations; profits and successes can never be separated from the obligation and necessity of being responsible towards employees, stakeholders, and the overall ecosystem. The UAE has always had a strong foundation, and our leaders have always encouraged us to believe in the power of giving, which I think has tremendously helped us reach an inspiring point, as affirmed by this survey.

It is said that when one takes the first step, the path appears by itself. Our hopes at Arabia CSR Network were strengthened when our 2007 survey revealed a landscape brimming with organisations undertaking a lot of effort to be responsible and sustainable. This fact has been further reinstated and validated by the findings of Cicero & Bernay's CSR Survey Report, which highlights the leading role the UAE has played over the past decade and a half in forging a sustainable path for others.

The survey further shed light on an important aspect of CSR that is often neglected, which is that it must be incorporated within the very fabric and image of the entity rather than delegated to a solitary department. As a nation that has always believed in the power of giving and following in the footsteps of our visionary and principled leaders, it is incumbent upon business practitioners to translate those ideals into actionable operations.



Habiba Al Mar'ashi

President & CEO, Arabia CSR Network

01 / UNDERSTANDING CSR



History and origin

Corporate Social Responsibility — often mistaken for the budget allocated to charitable donations or team-building activities — is actually a term that has a wider, deeper and more impactful meaning. To understand where the term originated from and how responsibility became a part of corporate life, we need to rewind back 150 years into the 19th century.

Many business owners in the 1800s took up an active and leading role in the development of local communities and society as a whole. They helped build schools and universities as well as made financial contributions (in addition to their taxes) to support museums, sports, and recreational facilities. New York, Mumbai, Manchester, and Sydney were among the cities that were given many of their public assets, such as libraries and concert halls, by business leaders of that time. It was an age when companies recognised the importance of the basic needs of their employees, including housing, education, and healthcare, notwithstanding the salaries they were compensated with. Overall, they took it upon themselves to provide their people with all the essential elements for a decent life.

British, American, and Indian corporate giants, such as Cadbury, Rowntree's, Hershey's, and Tata Group, focused on improving the standards of living of their employees and enhancing the communities in which they were based. Oil and steel corporate magnates, like J.D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, became known for their philanthropic work, having set up exclusive foundations to continue their community-building efforts as a means of social responsibility and good citizenship.

However, interestingly, it wasn't until the mid-1950s that the term corporate social responsibility was formally coined. American economist Howard Bowen, in his publication 'Social Responsibilities of the Businessman,' laid the foundation for the study of CSR in which he analysed and talked about what is expected out of a good business, addressing a company's ethical behaviour towards its stakeholders and adopting practices within the legal and regulatory environment. To this day, and for this reason, Bowen is considered the father of CSR.

02 /

DEFINING CSR



Initially, the concept of a ‘social contract’ between businesses and society was introduced by the Committee for Economic Development in 1971. This contract sought to highlight the notion that companies function and exist due to people’s consent and, hence, raises the obligation to contribute to the needs of society. By the 1980s, CSR continued to evolve as more organisations began incorporating social welfare in their business practices, and the stakeholders followed suit. By the time the 2000s were upon us, CSR had become a necessity more than a trend.

By definition, CSR is a process that seeks to integrate social, environmental, and consumer concerns into business operations, philosophy, and strategy. While working for returns and profits, a responsible enterprise is expected to look at overall employee interests as well as at the wider goal of sustainable benefits of the entire community and the nation it operates in.

In the late 2000s, as global companies took up CSR, the Middle East started recognising the need to contribute to societal development and create a responsible business ecosystem. With a culture that promotes the value of giving, regional companies were fully equipped and set to prove their commitment to acting ethically and with integrity, in and across business relationships.

03

GLOBAL SCENARIO
VERSUS
REGIONAL



Quick to adopt global best practices, the Middle East soon set off on its own progression towards weaving CSR into business operations. The CSR scenario in the region today has evolved and is looking at conceptual changes, in line with global standards and disruptions. The evolution of CSR in the region led to the creation of new measuring tools that replaced existing ones on a global level, including the alignment to ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility that came into play in 2010 as well as the renewed OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises, and the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights that were released in 2011. The UN Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which came into effect in 2015, are mostly used by regional enterprises to benchmark their short and long-term goals while evaluating the fulfilment of the ones set by the UN.

Of all the Middle Eastern countries, the UAE has been a positive and inspiring case study as the pace of adoption, and the commitment to international best practices has been praiseworthy. The collective efforts by government and private players in rating development and societal contributions as equally important responsibilities have worked in favour of creating a positive image of the country in terms of CSR. Leaders and key decision-makers in the UAE took up the duty of implementing and practising CSR and corporate philanthropy to reach and exceed global standards.

Apart from just following regulations effectively and efficiently, and adopting proficient CSR business processes, companies in the UAE and the Middle East now need to look beyond enforcing business ethics and making CSR an essential way of doing business.

04

EXECUTIVE
SUMMARY



The results of this survey reveal that the UAE maintains a leading position in implementing CSR as part of its business strategies. Familiarity with the term is the first means of gauging if a given set of respondents embrace the concept.

Around 66 per cent of UAE C-suite executives said that they've heard of or are familiar with CSR. Almost 43 per cent of the respondents surveyed claimed that they are well-versed with CSR. 60 per cent in the UAE and 41 per cent in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia agreed to this statement. The numbers place the UAE at the top in terms of familiarity with the concept. The survey also found that regionally, there seems to be a growing discontent and disregard towards companies and brands that are not socially responsible. A considerable 55 per cent of all executives surveyed said that they would not buy a product from a brand that is not socially responsible. As per the survey, the average number of people that agree or strongly agree to stop their companies from collaborating with companies that are not socially responsible are at an average of 60 per cent.

Another important takeaway from this survey is that an average of 53 per cent of the respondents named the Emirates as the most active country in CSR in the region; 82 per cent of the respondents were Emirati nationals. This number is a testimony to the fact that the UAE is ahead of other countries in the region in terms of CSR activities and its integration into the business operations.

CSR is not just important for the organisations; it is also a factor that job seekers consider. The survey identified that an organisation's level of social responsibility is an important deciding factor for job seekers. It was marked as an important criterion by 68 per cent of executives in the survey, 70 per cent of those from the UAE, 70 per cent of Saudi respondents, and 64 per cent of Egyptians.

Of the decision-makers in the UAE, 80 per cent of them admitted that the COVID-19 pandemic and related events influenced a positive perception of CSR moving forward. Overall, the majority of respondents agreed to the same.

The survey places the UAE and Saudi Arabia as leaders in adopting CSR as a way of life for their business landscapes.

05

SURVEY METHODOLOGY

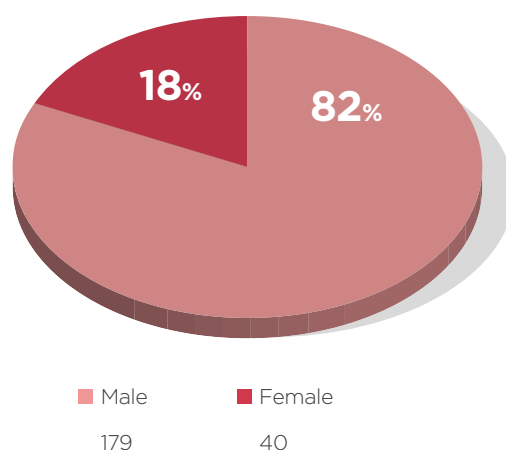
The C&B YouGov CSR survey's research findings are based on the responses of 219 C-suite executives from across the region.

All the data was collected online and is based on the responses of the surveyed leaders from the UAE, KSA, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, Jordan, Lebanon, and Egypt, all of whom were selected using YouGov's panel.

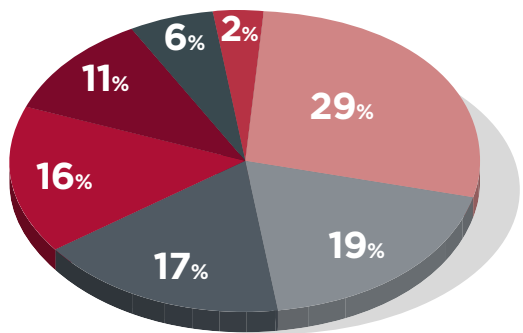
The respondents included decision-makers in key sectors, including aviation, automotive, banking and finance, construction and real estate, healthcare, and transport. A detailed, structured, and quantitative questionnaire was used for this survey, comprising 16 questions, with four specific questions added to the 'CSR in crisis' section having required 8 – 10 minutes of respondents' time. These were administered in both English and Arabic as per respondents' preference.

A natural fallout was maintained for all demographics, and the margin of error was 6.5 per cent based on a 95 per cent confidence interval.

Gender Distribution



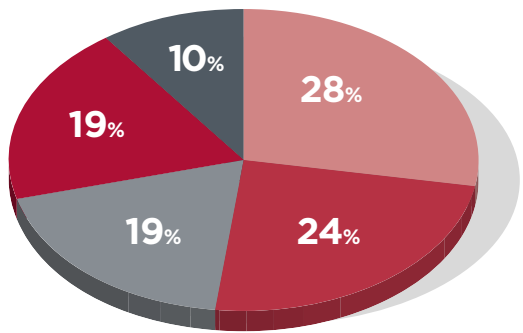
Industry Distribution



Industry

- Construction
- Medical/Health Services
- Automotive
- Banking/Finance
- Aviation
- Transport/Travel
- Other

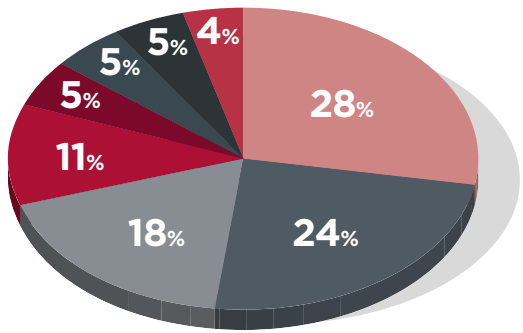
Regional Distribution



Region

- UAE
- GCC (excluding UAE, KSA)
- Egypt
- KSA
- Levant

Country Distribution



Country of Residence

- UAE
- KSA
- Egypt
- Kuwait
- Oman
- Jordan
- Lebanon
- Bahrain

06

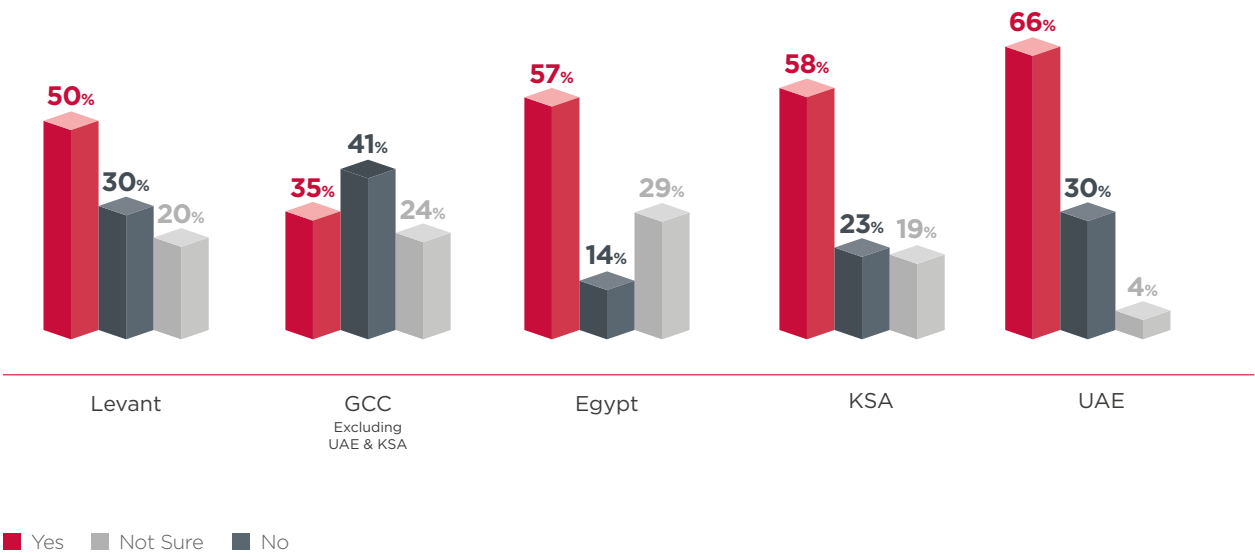
INTERPRETATIONS
& IMPACTS

Q1

Have you heard of the term CSR?

Familiarity with the subject of CSR in the region is high. Culturally, the value of giving is ingrained in most of the populations, and that is apparent in the findings.

A whopping two-thirds of respondents from the UAE claimed to have heard and are familiar with CSR; over 58 per cent of Saudi nationals and 57 per cent Egyptians agree to the same. Looking at the overall sample, responses to this question were mostly positive, with 56 per cent of all respondents having heard of CSR. In the GCC and the Levant, 35 per cent and 50 per cent of executives respectively claimed that they are familiar with the term.



Q2

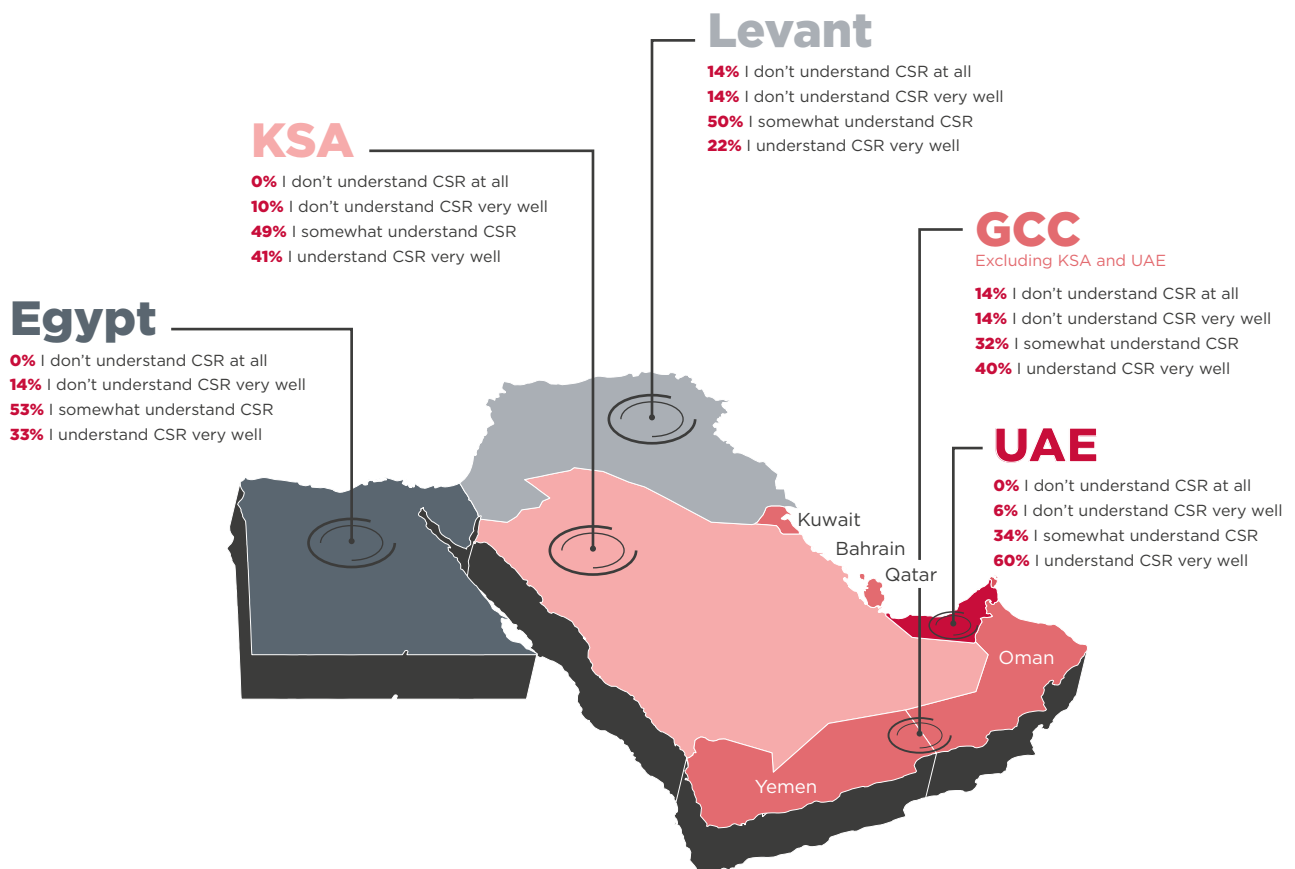
How well do you understand CSR?

When asked how well they know about the scope of CSR, 86 per cent of the respondents said they have a strong grasp of it.

The number is a clear indication of MENA businesses inclined to include CSR in their strategies, notably because the surveyed were decision-making leaders.

The majority of executives from the UAE (94 per cent) stated that they understood or somewhat understood what CSR meant, followed by 90 per cent from Saudi Arabia and 86 per cent from Egypt.

For countries in the GCC and the Levant, a combined 62 per cent of respondents believe that they are well-informed of CSR.



Q3

Do you think the below statements are accurate when describing CSR?

65% of surveyed executives who had heard of CSR said that they would associate it with companies making donations to charities for public welfare.

The same definition was selected by 60 per cent in the UAE and 74 per cent in the KSA.

The figures indicate that charities and public welfare are usual terms associated with CSR. It also implies that businesses working towards public welfare are perceived as fulfilling their CSR obligations.

	Accurate	Inaccurate	Not sure
01. CSR refers to companies making donations to charities for public welfare.	65	23	12
02. CSR involves companies making some sacrifices to do good deeds.	28	58	14
03. CSR means standing by good moral values and ensuring a company doesn't engage in immoral or illegal activities.	31	46	23
04. CSR is done primarily to improve the image of a company by publishing reports or promoting CSR activities to demonstrate the company's achievements to customers.	59	27	14
05. CSR refers to companies getting involved in the discussion of specific social issues, such as human rights or the environment, and implementing measures to address them.	67	21	12
06. CSR means companies taking the necessary steps to meet the domestic or international standards to get CSR certification.	51	34	15
07. CSR is used primarily as a trade barrier by western countries to impair the development of companies from other countries.	72	19	9
08. The primary social responsibility of a company is to make as much profit as possible.	56	25	19

(Unit in %)



UAE

	Accurate	Inaccurate	Not sure
01. CSR is a way for companies to integrate social, environmental and economic concerns in their business, while addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders.	81	17	02
02. The primary social responsibility of a company is to make as much profit as possible.	31	60	09
03. CSR is used primarily as a trade barrier by western countries in order to impair the development of companies from other countries.	36	38	26
04. CSR means companies taking the necessary steps to meet domestic or international standards to get CSR certification.	53	30	17
05. CSR refers to companies getting involved in the discussion of specific social issues, such as human rights or the environment, and implementing measures to address them.	68	19	13
06. CSR is done primarily to improve the image of a company by publishing reports or promoting CSR activities to demonstrate the company's achievements to customers.	43	38	19
07. CSR means standing by good moral values and ensuring a company doesn't engage in immoral or illegal activities.	72	21	07
08. CSR involves companies making some sacrifices in order to do good deeds.	62	21	17
09. CSR refers to companies making donations to charities for public welfare.	60	23	17



KSA

	Accurate	Inaccurate	Not sure
01. CSR is a way for companies to integrate social, environmental and economic concerns in their business, while addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders.	61	27	12
02. The primary social responsibility of a company is to make as much profit as possible.	41	44	15
03. CSR is used primarily as a trade barrier by western countries in order to impair the development of companies from other countries.	37	56	07
04. CSR means companies taking the necessary steps to meet domestic or international standards to get CSR certification.	63	29	08
05. CSR refers to companies getting involved in the discussion of specific social issues, such as human rights or the environment, and implementing measures to address them.	76	22	02
06. CSR is done primarily to improve the image of a company by publishing reports or promoting CSR activities to demonstrate the company's achievements to customers.	44	41	15
07. CSR means standing by good moral values and ensuring a company doesn't engage in immoral or illegal activities.	73	17	10
08. CSR involves companies making some sacrifices in order to do good deeds.	63	25	12
09. CSR refers to companies making donations to charities for public welfare.	68	22	10



EGYPT

	Accurate	Inaccurate	Not sure
01. CSR is a way for companies to integrate social, environmental and economic concerns in their business, while addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders.	56	25	19
02. The primary social responsibility of a company is to make as much profit as possible.	19	67	14
03. CSR is used primarily as a trade barrier by western countries in order to impair the development of companies from other countries	31	44	25
04. CSR means companies taking the necessary steps to meet domestic or international standards to get CSR certification.	56	33	11
05. CSR refers to companies getting involved in the discussion of specific social issues, such as human rights or the environment, and implementing measures to address them.	64	22	14
06. CSR is done primarily to improve the image of a company by publishing reports or promoting CSR activities to demonstrate the company's achievements to customers.	72	17	11
07. CSR means standing by good moral values and ensuring a company doesn't engage in immoral or illegal activities.	75	17	08
08. CSR involves companies making some sacrifices in order to do good deeds.	56	22	22
09. CSR refers to companies making donations to charities for public welfare.	67	22	11



GCC (Excluding UAE & KSA)

	Accurate	Inaccurate	Not sure
01. CSR is a way for companies to integrate social, environmental and economic concerns in their business, while addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders.	50	32	18
02. The primary social responsibility of a company is to make as much profit as possible.	18	68	14
03. CSR is used primarily as a trade barrier by western countries in order to impair the development of companies from other countries.	27	50	23
04. CSR means companies taking the necessary steps to meet domestic or international standards to get CSR certification.	64	14	22
05. CSR refers to companies getting involved in the discussion of specific social issues, such as human rights or the environment, and implementing measures to address them.	55	32	13
06. CSR is done primarily to improve the image of a company by publishing reports or promoting CSR activities to demonstrate the company's achievements to customers.	64	27	09
07. CSR means standing by good moral values and ensuring a company doesn't engage in immoral or illegal activities.	59	23	18
08. CSR involves companies making some sacrifices in order to do good deeds.	41	41	18
09. CSR refers to companies making donations to charities for public welfare.	59	23	18



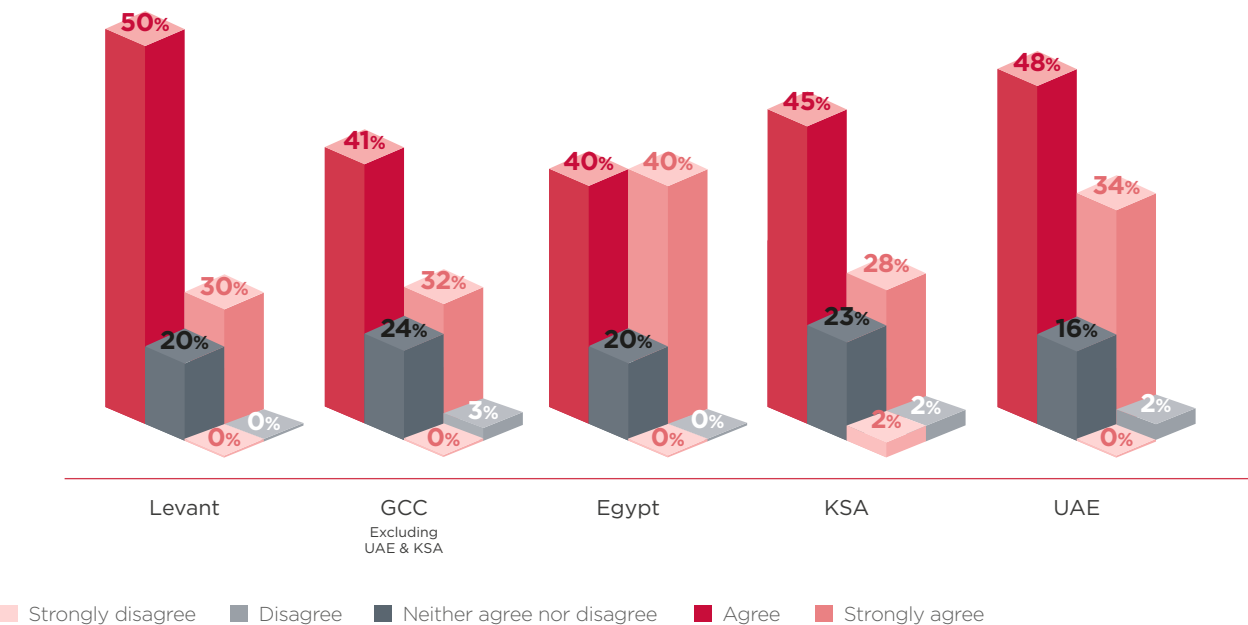
LEVANT

	Accurate	Inaccurate	Not sure
01. CSR is a way for companies to integrate social, environmental and economic concerns in their business, while addressing the expectations of shareholders and stakeholders.	71	21	08
02. The primary social responsibility of a company is to make as much profit as possible.	21	58	21
03. CSR is used primarily as a trade barrier by western countries in order to impair the development of companies from other countries.	07	43	50
04. CSR means companies taking the necessary steps to meet domestic or international standards to get CSR certification.	64	21	15
05. CSR refers to companies getting involved in the discussion of specific social issues, such as human rights or the environment, and implementing measures to address them.	71	08	21
06. CSR is done primarily to improve the image of a company by publishing reports or promoting CSR activities to demonstrate the company's achievements to customers.	36	57	07
07. CSR means standing by good moral values and ensuring a company doesn't engage in immoral or illegal activities.	79	14	07
08. CSR involves companies making some sacrifices in order to do good deeds.	50	29	21
09. CSR refers to companies making donations to charities for public welfare.	79	14	07

Q4

Do you agree with the following statement?

“I have more trust in socially responsible brands compared to those that are not.”



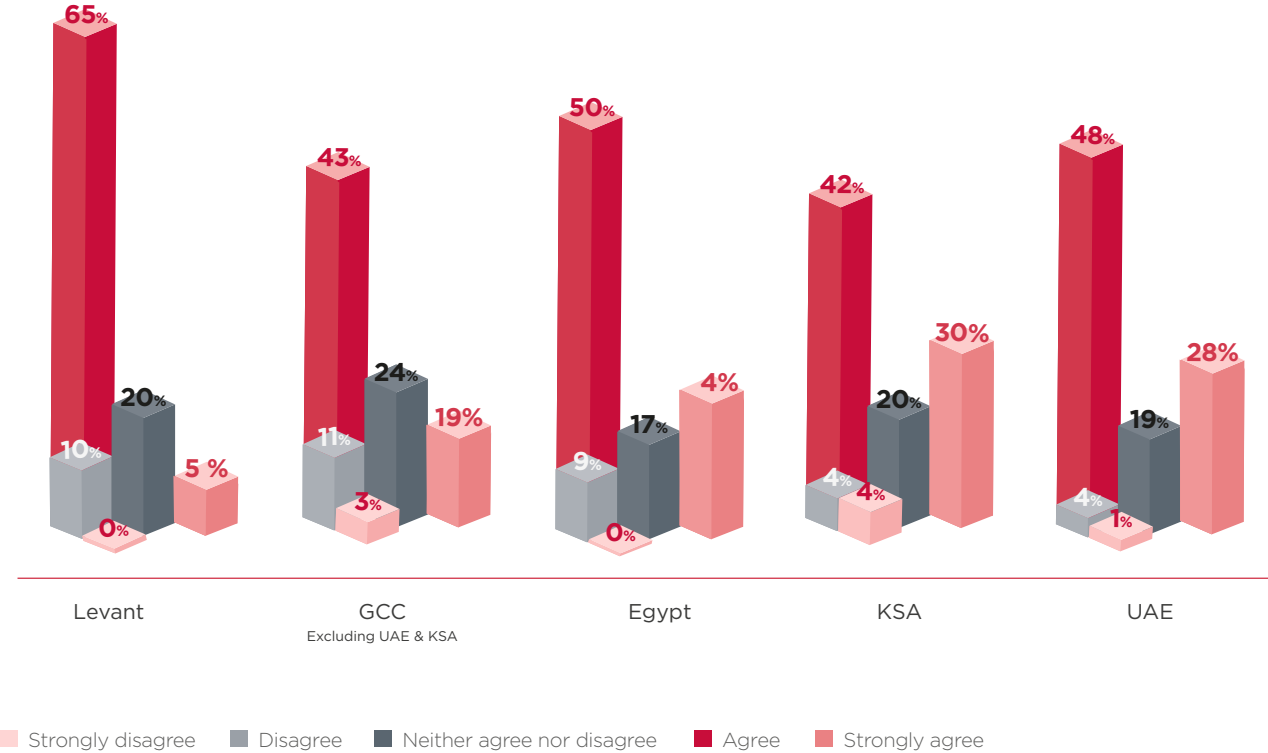
The surveyed executives were asked if, as customers or users, they would trust socially responsible brands more.

82 per cent of the respondents in the UAE said that they trusted (strongly agree or agree) socially responsible brands, whereas 73 per cent in the KSA aligned with the statement.

In Egypt, 80 per cent of respondents also said that they would trust a socially responsible brand over ones that are not.

The percentage is testimony to the fact that for decision makers, both within and outside the business, being socially responsible matters.

“I am willing to pay a premium price for a product/service from a socially responsible company.”

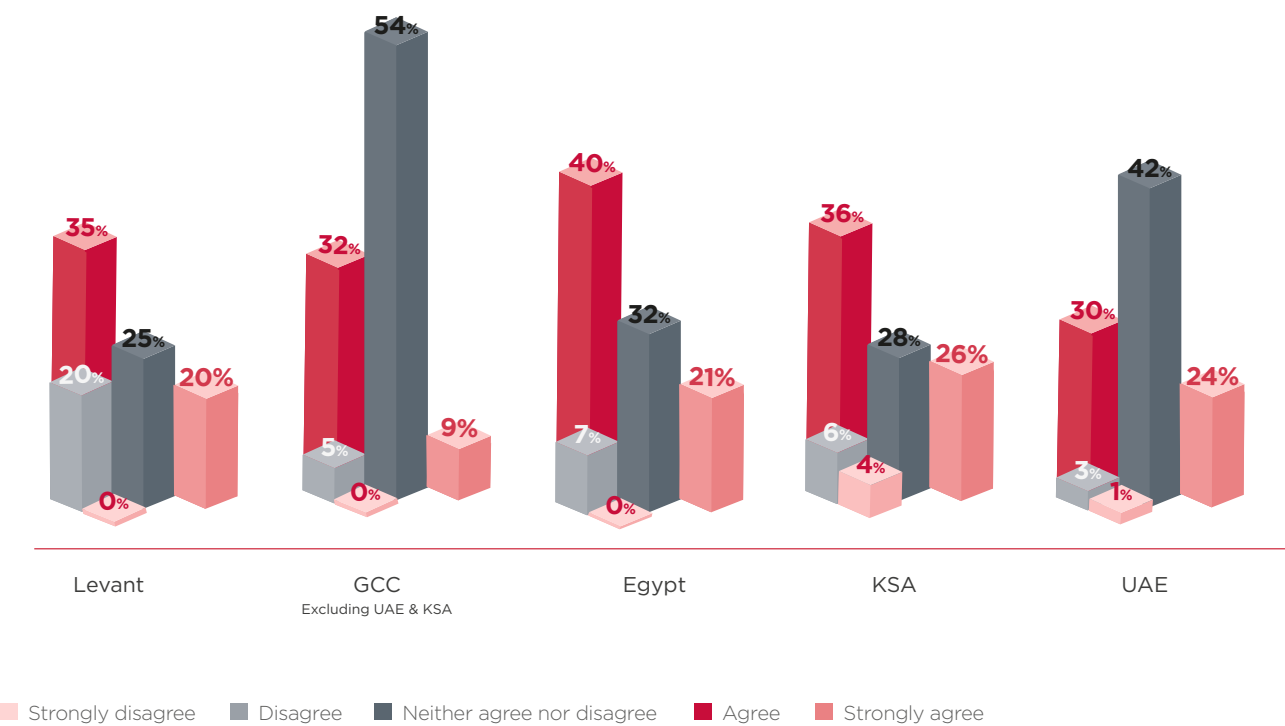


When it comes to evaluating if people will spend extra money to purchase socially responsible products, 72 per cent of respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to paying a premium price for such a product.

In the UAE and the KSA respectively, 76 per cent and 72 per cent of the leaders said they are willing to pay a higher price for an ethical product or service.

The willingness of respondents to shell out extra money for ethical products also highlights the awareness around CSR that prevails in the region.

“I will not buy a product/service from a company that is not socially responsible.”

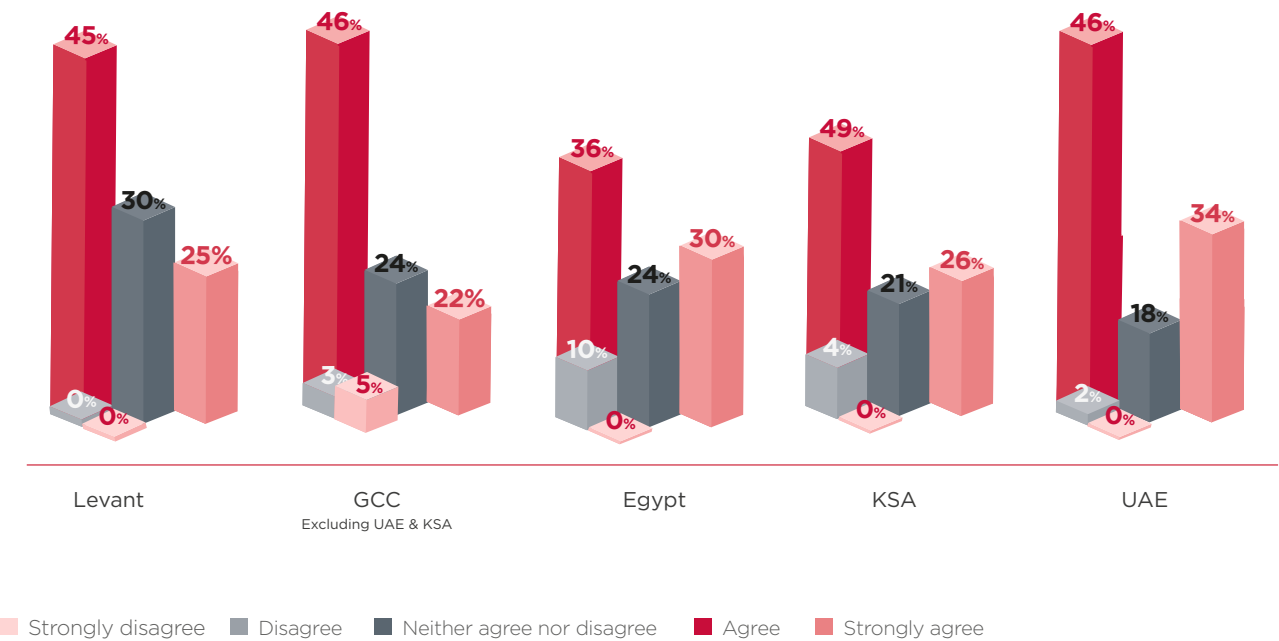


The survey also found that there is a growing discontent and disregard towards companies and brands that are not socially responsible.

A considerable 55 per cent of all executives surveyed said that they would not buy a product from a company that is not socially responsible.

In the GCC, excluding the UAE and the KSA, 54 per cent of respondents said that if given the choice, they would not buy a product/service from a company that is not ethical.

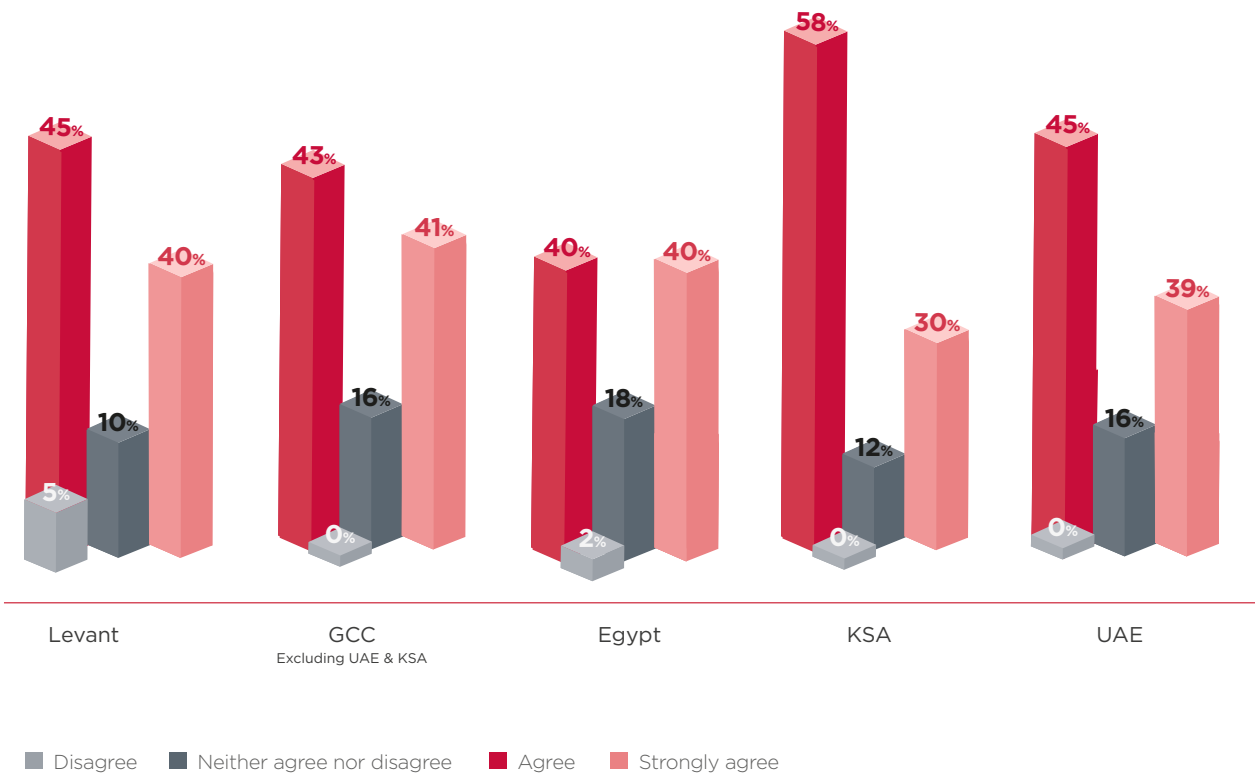
“I will choose a product from a more socially responsible company even when there are cheaper alternatives available from other companies.”



Overall, 35 per cent of respondents can tell that there is a difference between companies that are more socially responsible than others.

Highlighting the level of in-depth awareness of CSR, 45 per cent in the Levant, 46 per cent in the GCC, and 46 per cent in the UAE agree with the statement.

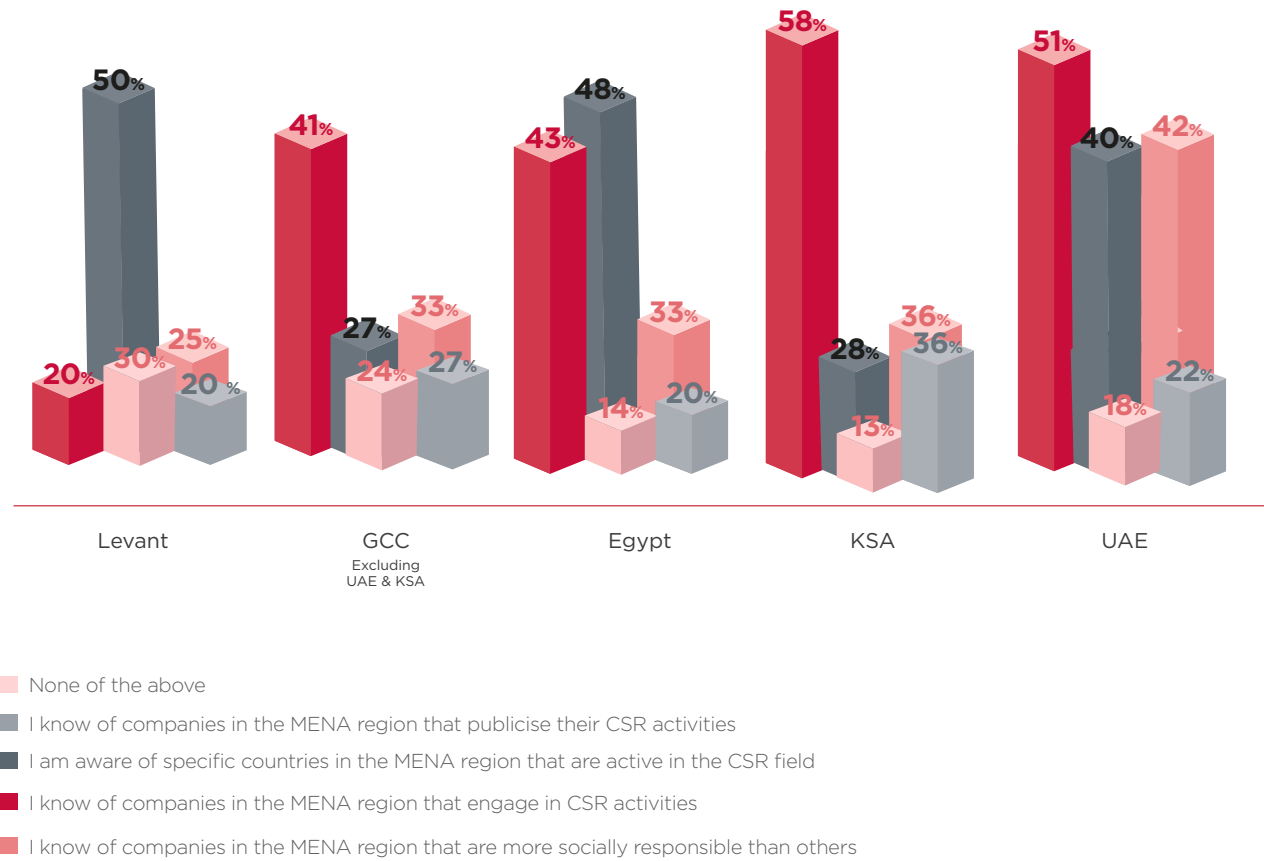
“I will advise friends and family to buy products/services from a socially responsible company.”



Q5

Which of the below statements about CSR in MENA are true for you?

Please select all that apply.

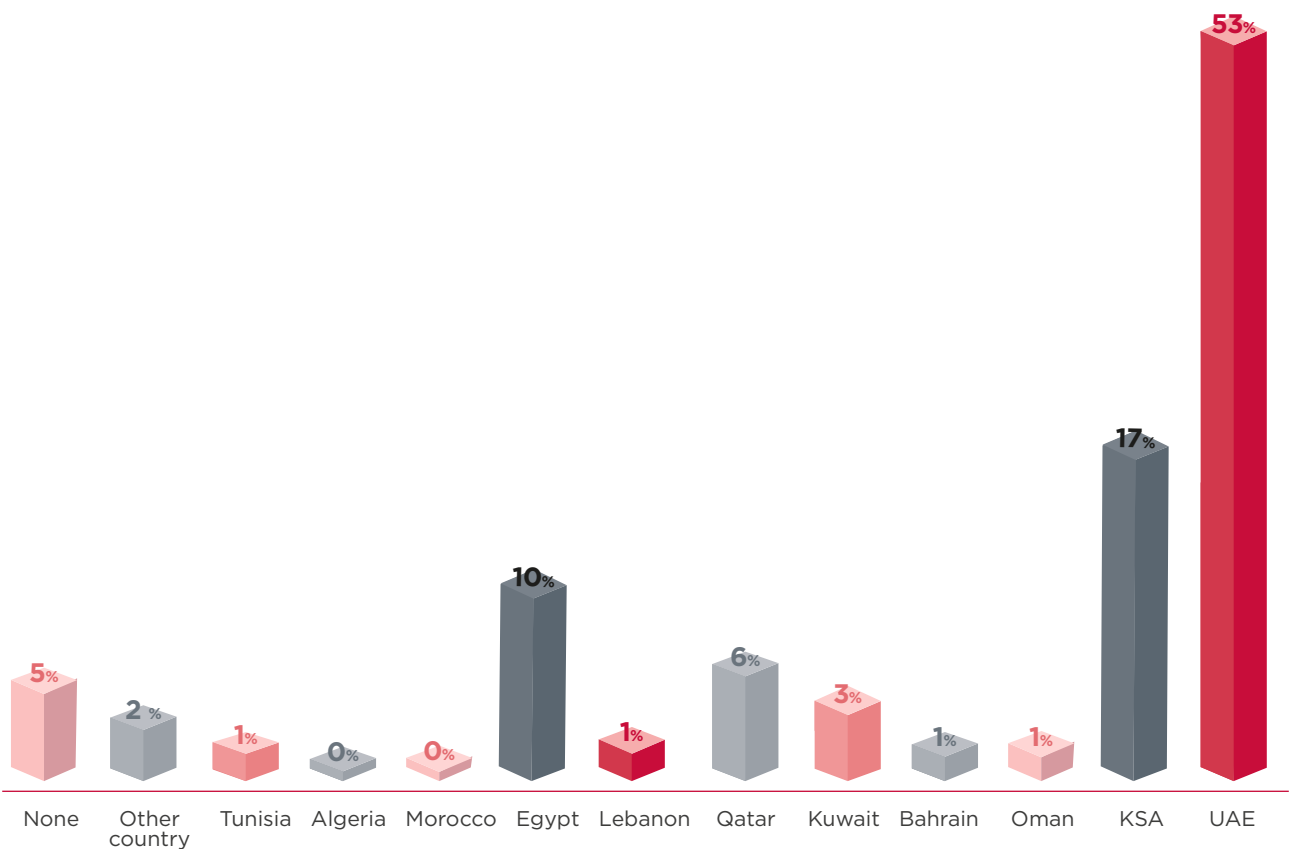


One of the key questions of this survey sought to establish if respondents can differentiate and name countries in the region that are active in CSR; 51 per cent of UAE and 58 per cent of KSA respondents said they could.

Half of the respondents from the Levant also admitted that they know of specific countries in the MENA region that frequently engage in CSR activities.

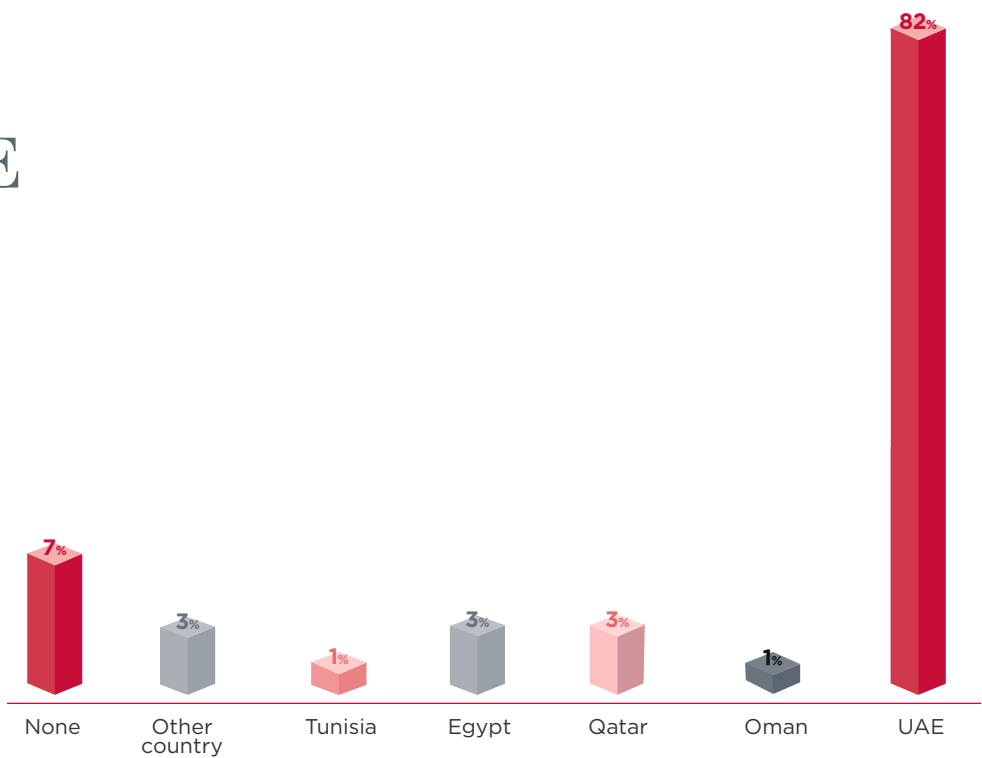
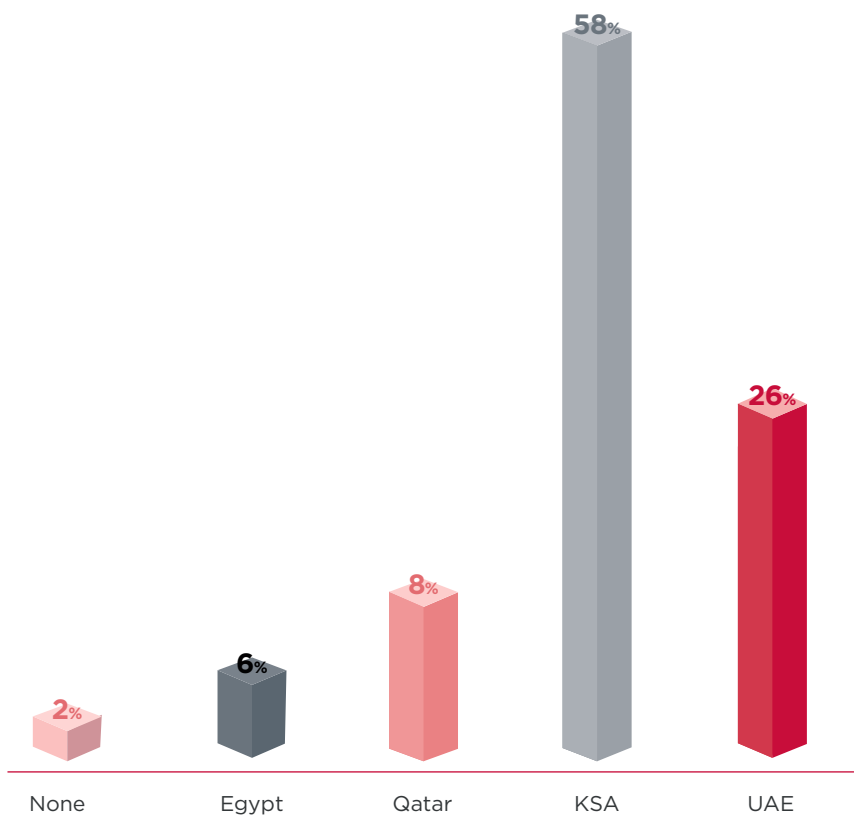
Q6

In your opinion, which one of the below countries is most active in CSR in the MENA region?

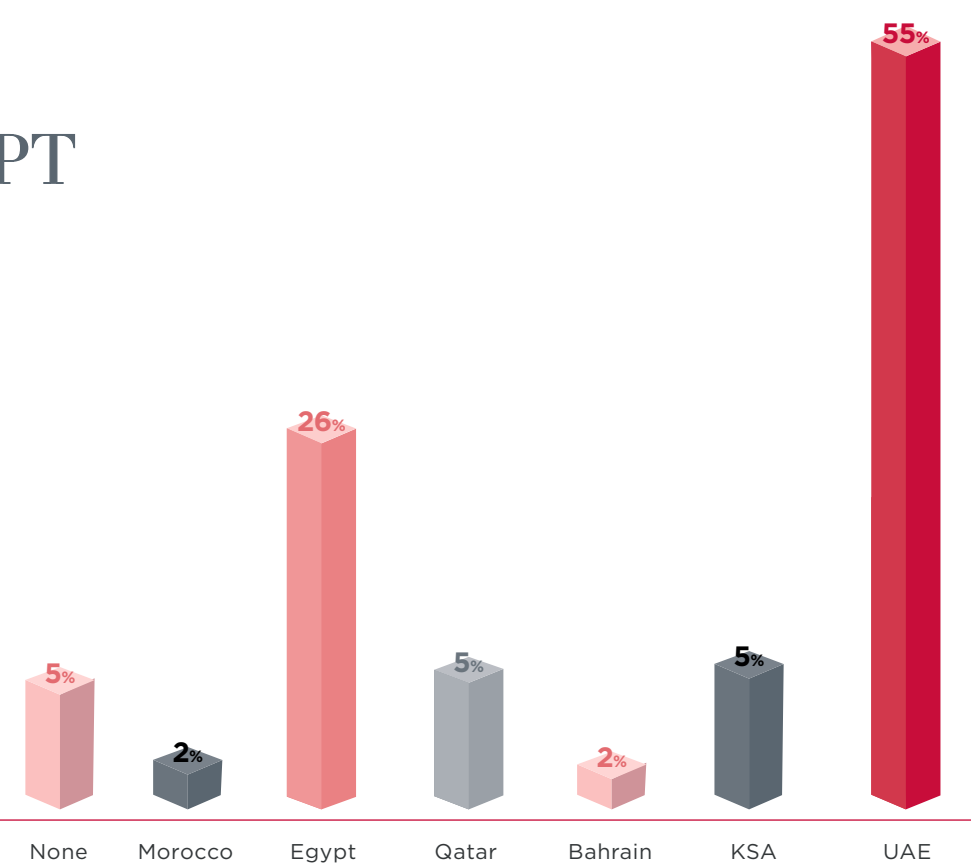


When asked about the countries most active in CSR in the region, 53 per cent of survey respondents voted in favour of the UAE, while 17 per cent said it was the KSA and 10 per cent stated it was Egypt.

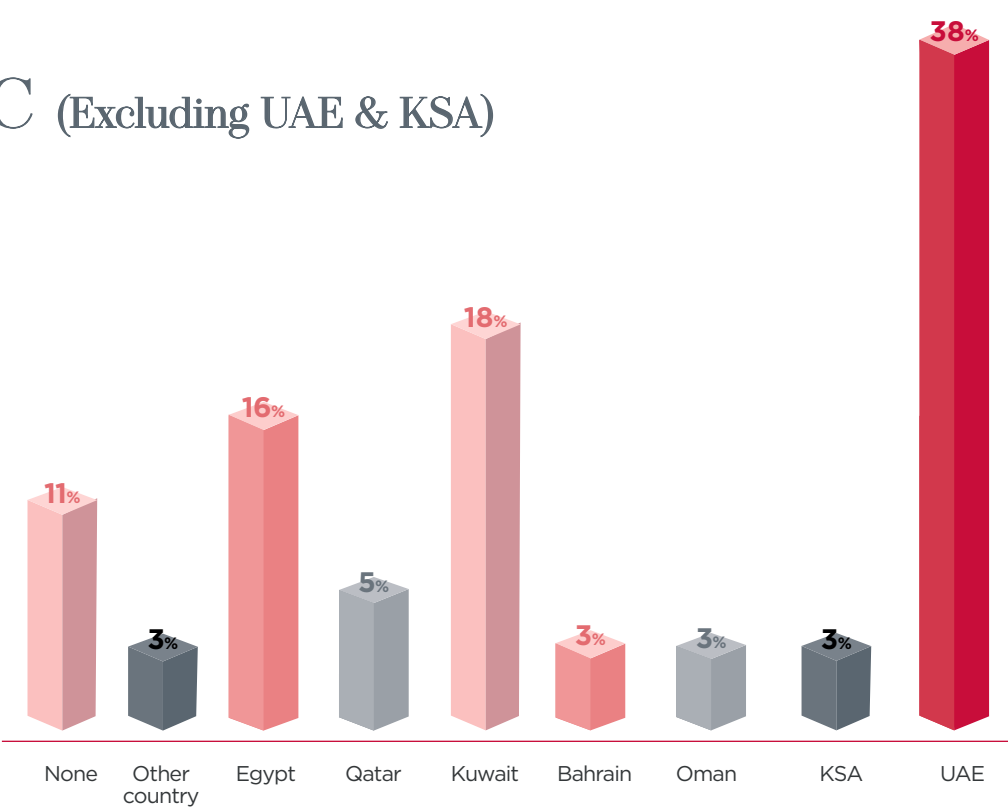
82 per cent of UAE respondents ranked their own country as the most active, compared to 38 per cent in the GCC and 45 per cent in the Levant.

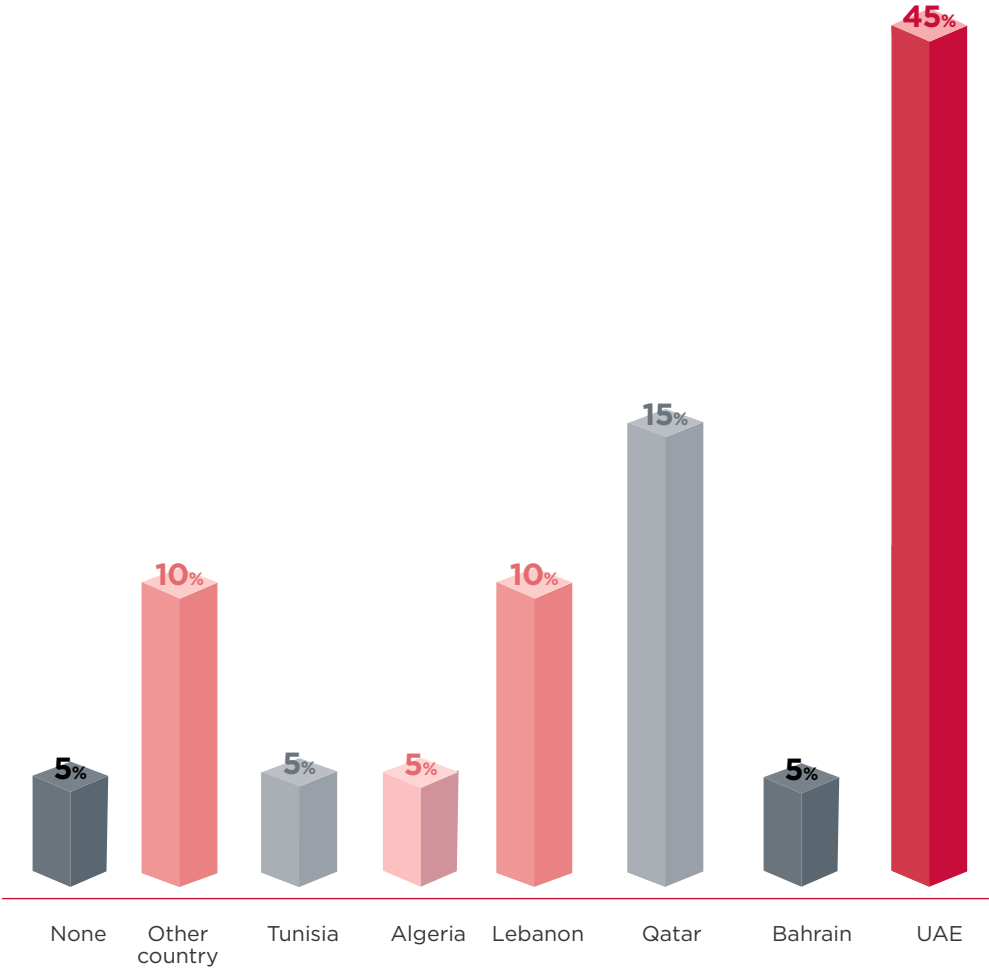


EGYPT



GCC (Excluding UAE & KSA)

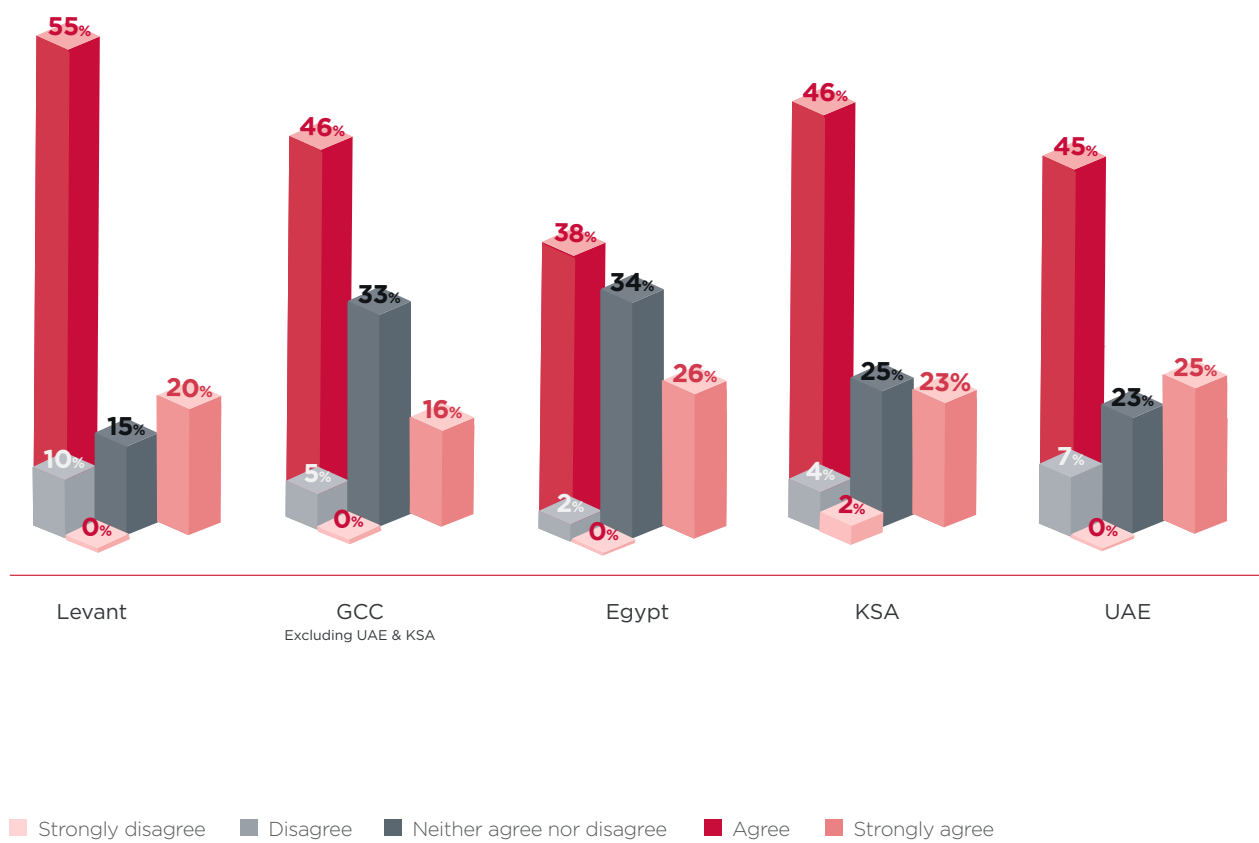




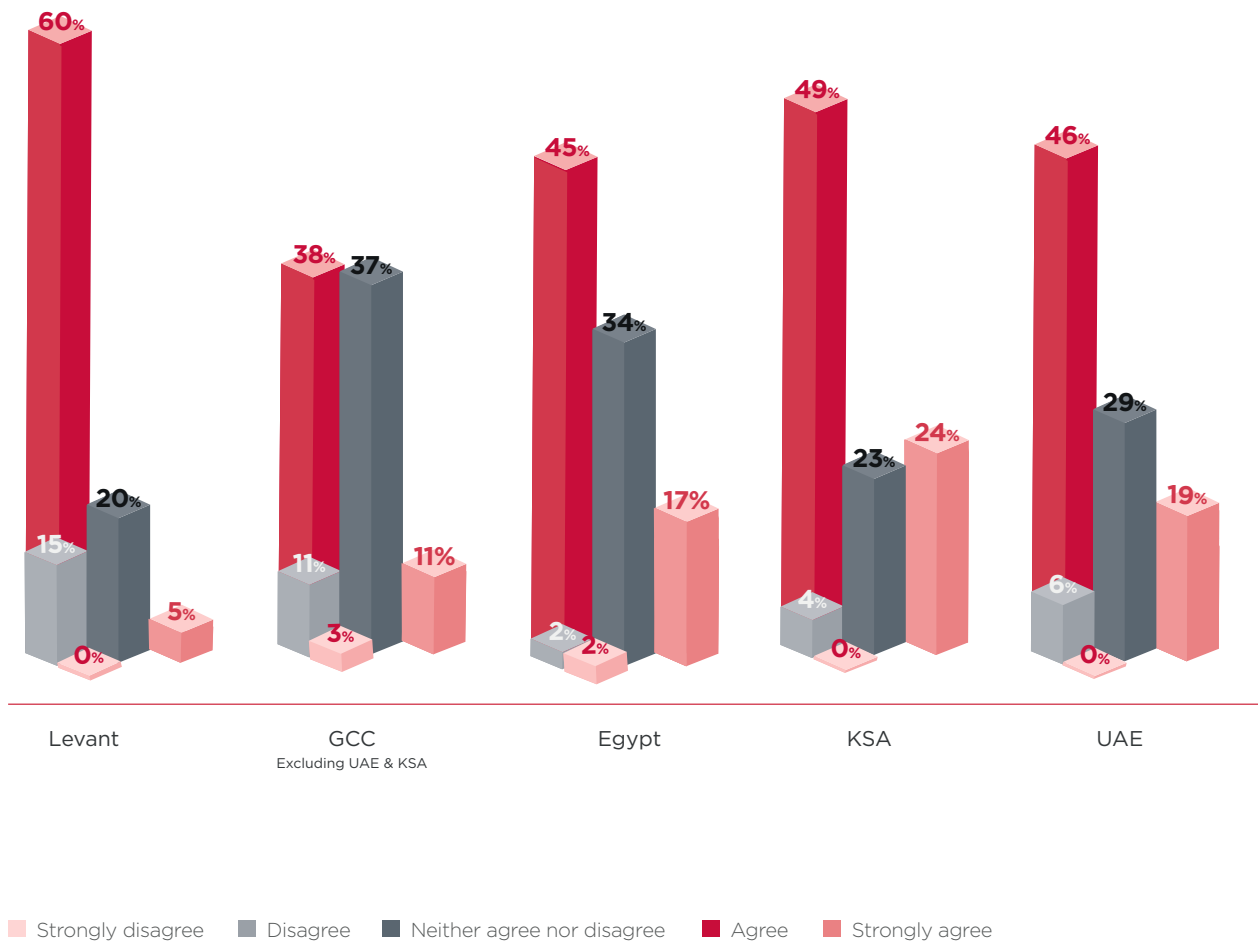
Q7

How much do you agree with the below statements?

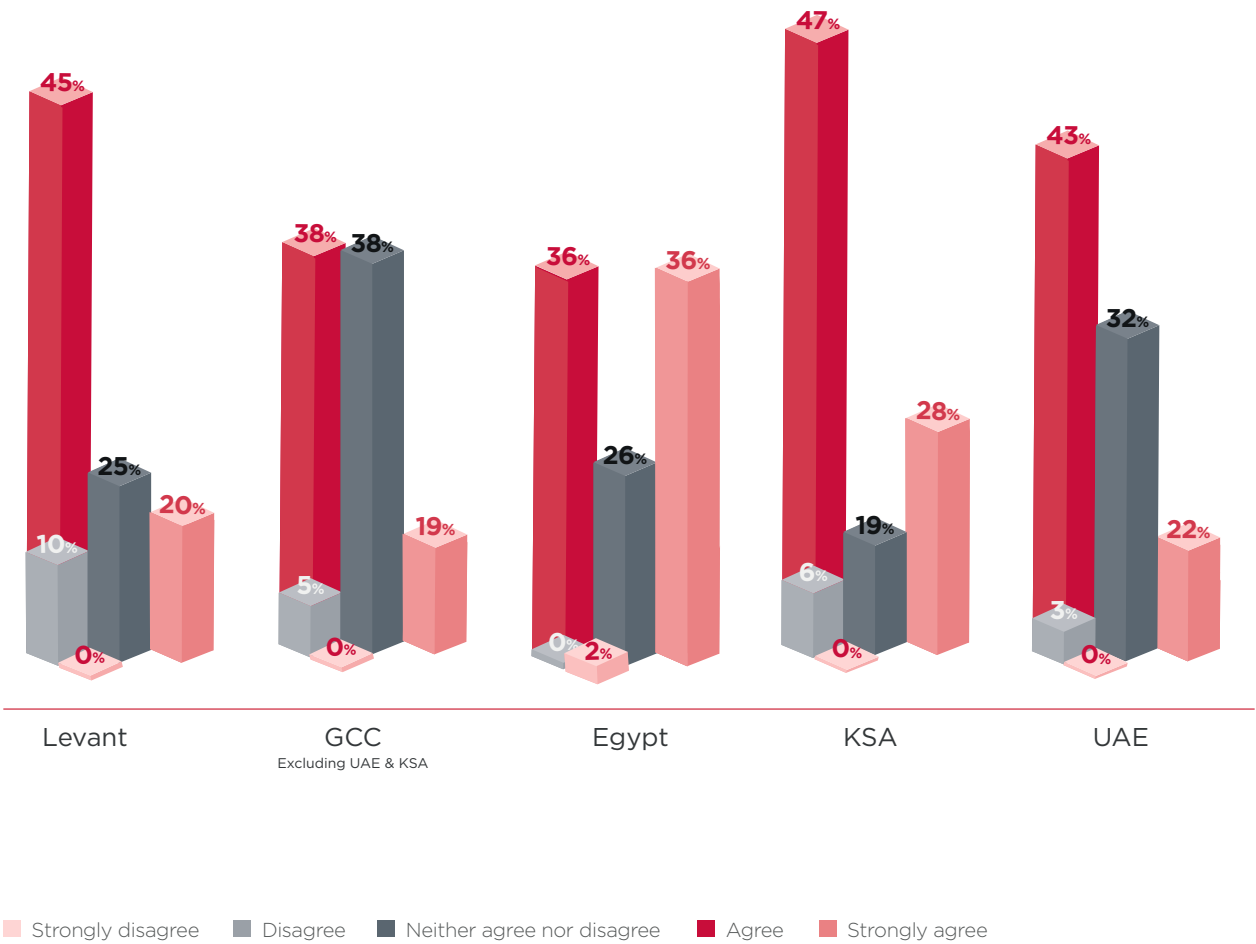
“A company’s CSR activities are an important consideration for job seekers.”



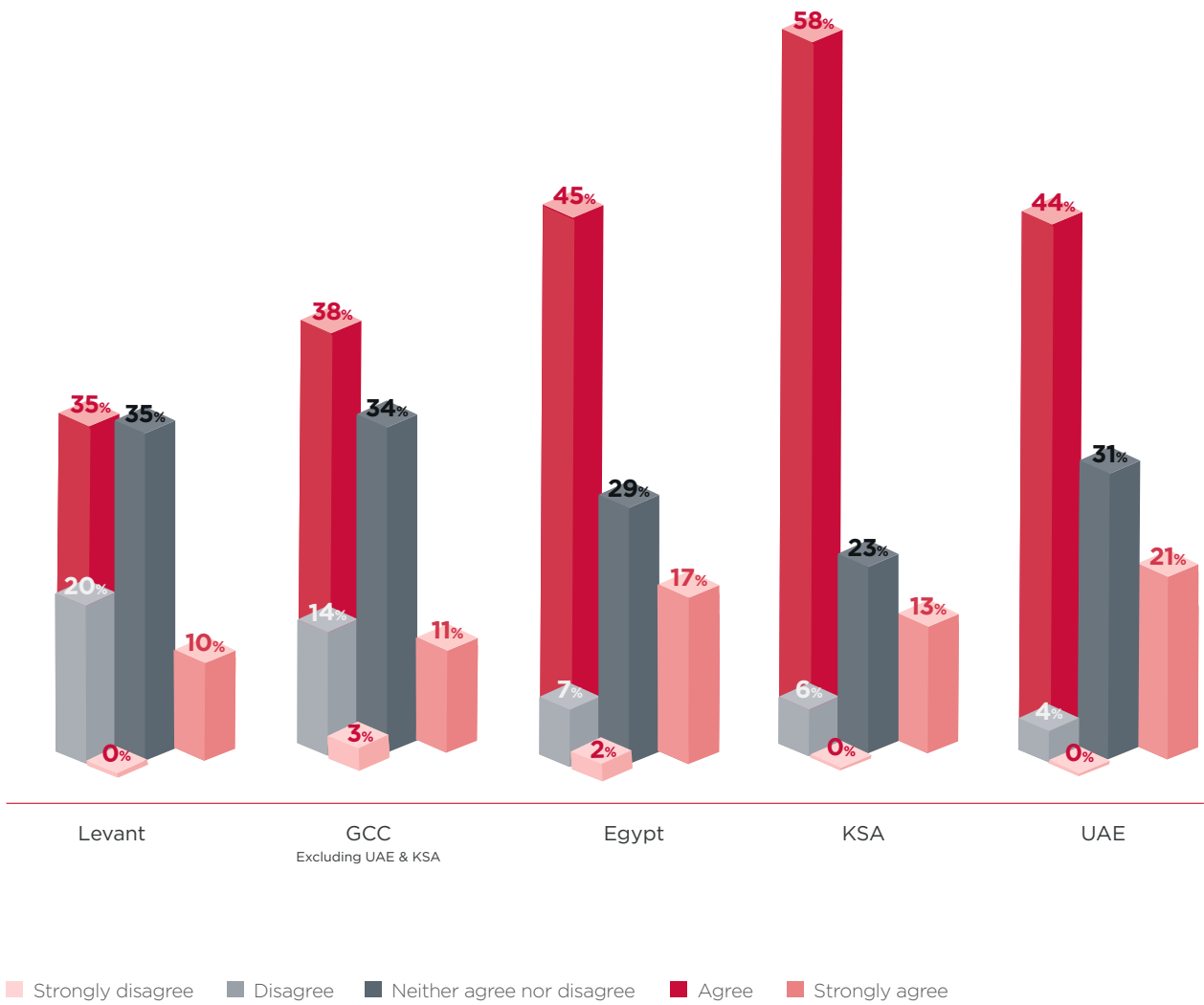
“A socially responsible company is deliberately sought out by job seekers.”



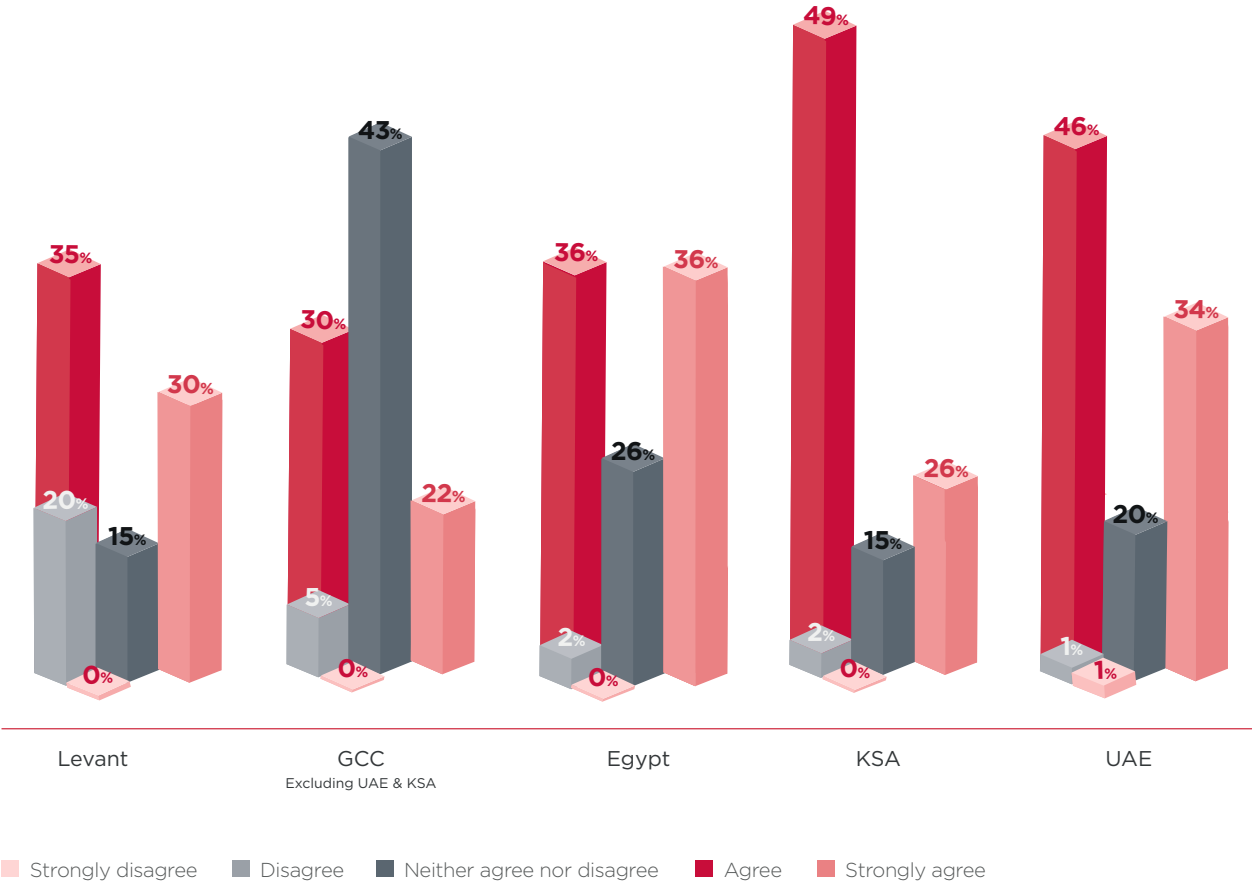
“When presented with two similar job offers, job seekers are likely to choose the more socially responsible company.”



“Employees are more likely to continue working with a socially responsible company, even if they receive other job offers.”



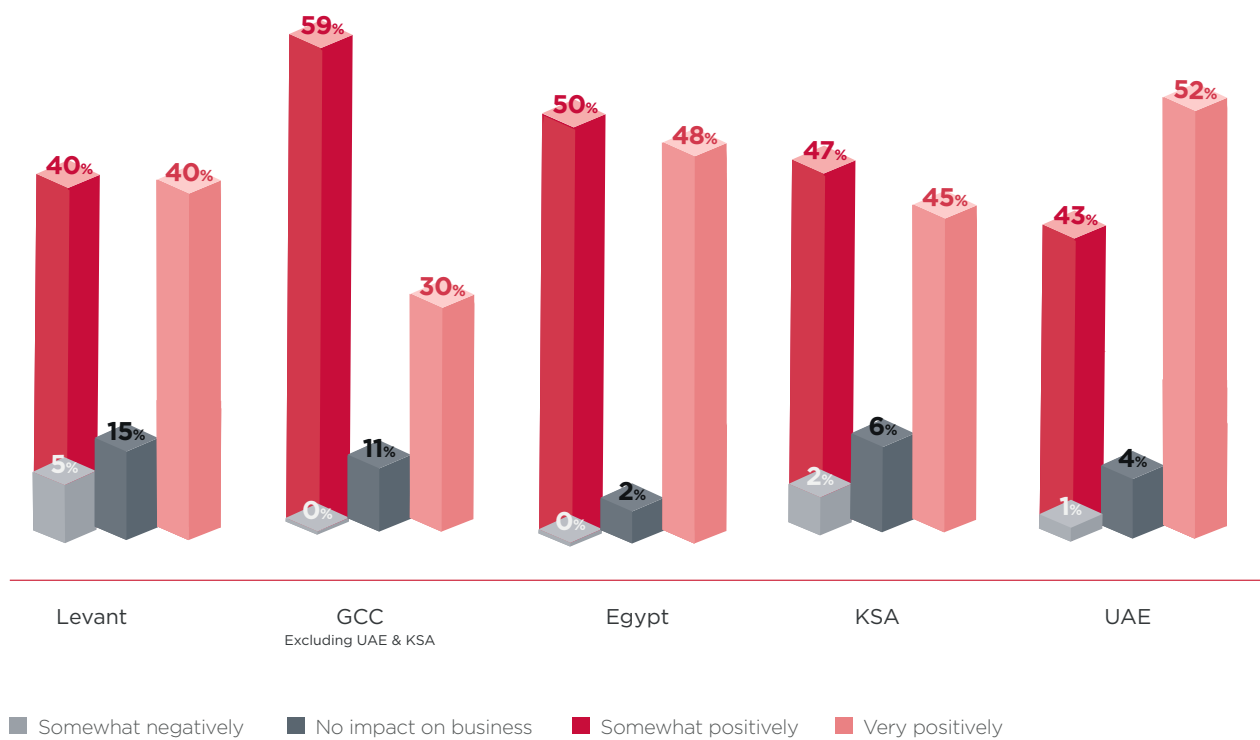
“Employees working in a socially responsible company are more motivated than those working for other companies”



For job seekers, the fact that an organisation is socially responsible or not matters. It was marked as an important criterion by 68 per cent of all the respondents. Both the UAE and the KSA showed the highest average of 70 per cent of executives who agree or strongly agree that CSR activities are important when considering opting for a job or rejecting it, compared to 65 per cent respondents in the Levant. 46 per cent and 49 per cent in the UAE and the KSA, respectively, agree to the statement, and almost half (43 per cent) of respondents from the UAE also said that employees are more likely to continue working with a socially responsible company, even if they receive other job offers.

Q8

How do you think adopting CSR affects a company's business overall?

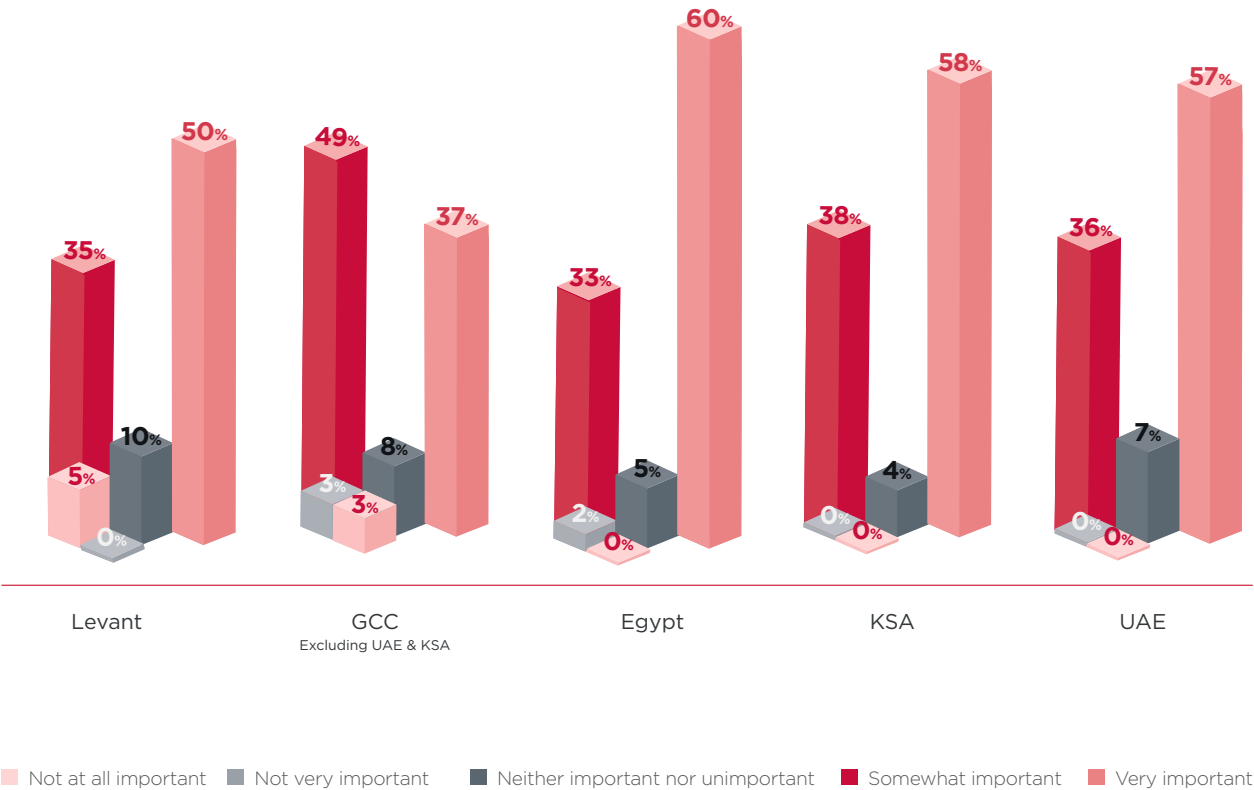


52 per cent of respondents from the UAE agree that CSR would have a positive effect on their company's overall business, with a total of 95 per cent optimistic of the effect.

Similarly, in the KSA, 92 per cent of leaders are upbeat about the impact of CSR. This infers that the overall sentiment around CSR is considerably positive in this region.

Q9

In your opinion, how important is it for a company to adopt CSR into its business practices?



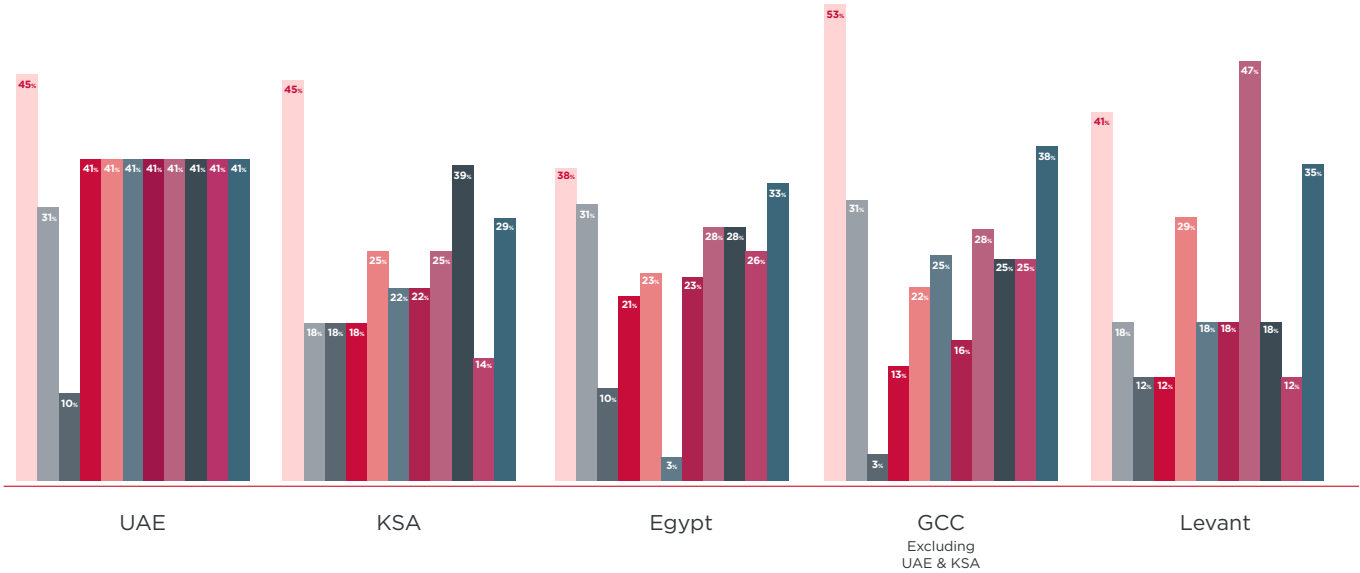
Of those surveyed, 92 per cent think adopting CSR impacts a company’s business. In the UAE and Saudi Arabia, 57 per cent and 58 per cent of surveyed leaders, respectively, admitted that they thought CSR was very important for their business, compared to 60 per cent in Egypt.

This implies the willingness of decision-makers in the region to not just practise CSR, but also integrate it into the very fabric of their respective businesses.

Q10

Why do you think it's important for a company to adopt CSR into its business practices?

Please select up to three top reasons:



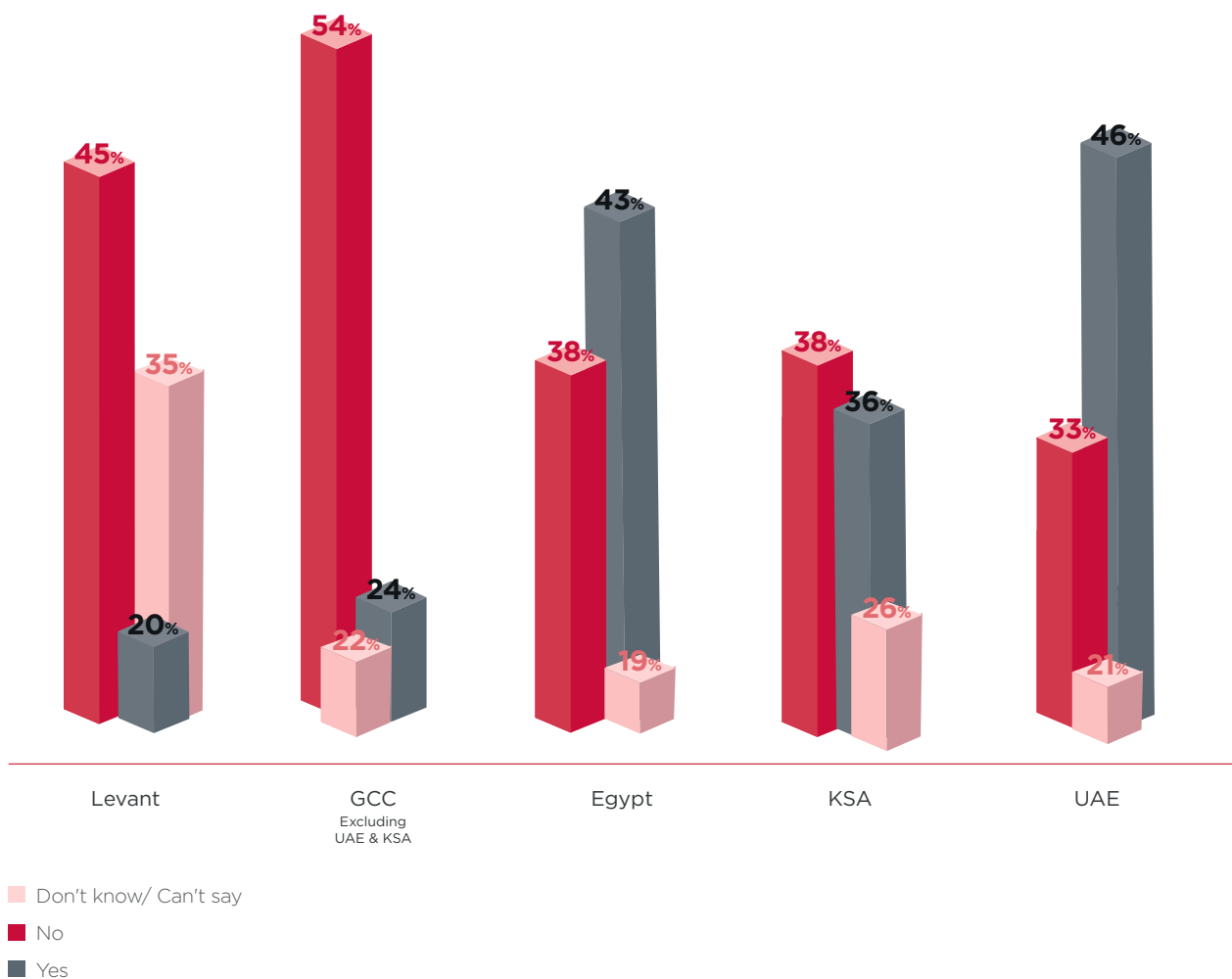
- To improve the reputation of the company/brand
- To differentiate the company/brand from competitors
- To reduce operational costs
- To make it easier to attract and retain employees
- To promote innovation and identify new opportunities
- To get better financial support from investors
- To increase sales and customer loyalty
- To secure the company's future over the long term
- To get free publicity and word-of-mouth without spending on advertising
- To comply with the required domestic or international regulations
- To give back to society

Improving the reputation of a company remained the most selected option for respondents when asked why they thought it was important for businesses to have a CSR plan in place.

It was also found that 48 per cent of surveyed leaders from the UAE consider CSR to be a means of giving back to society.

Q11

Does your company operate a CSR programme?

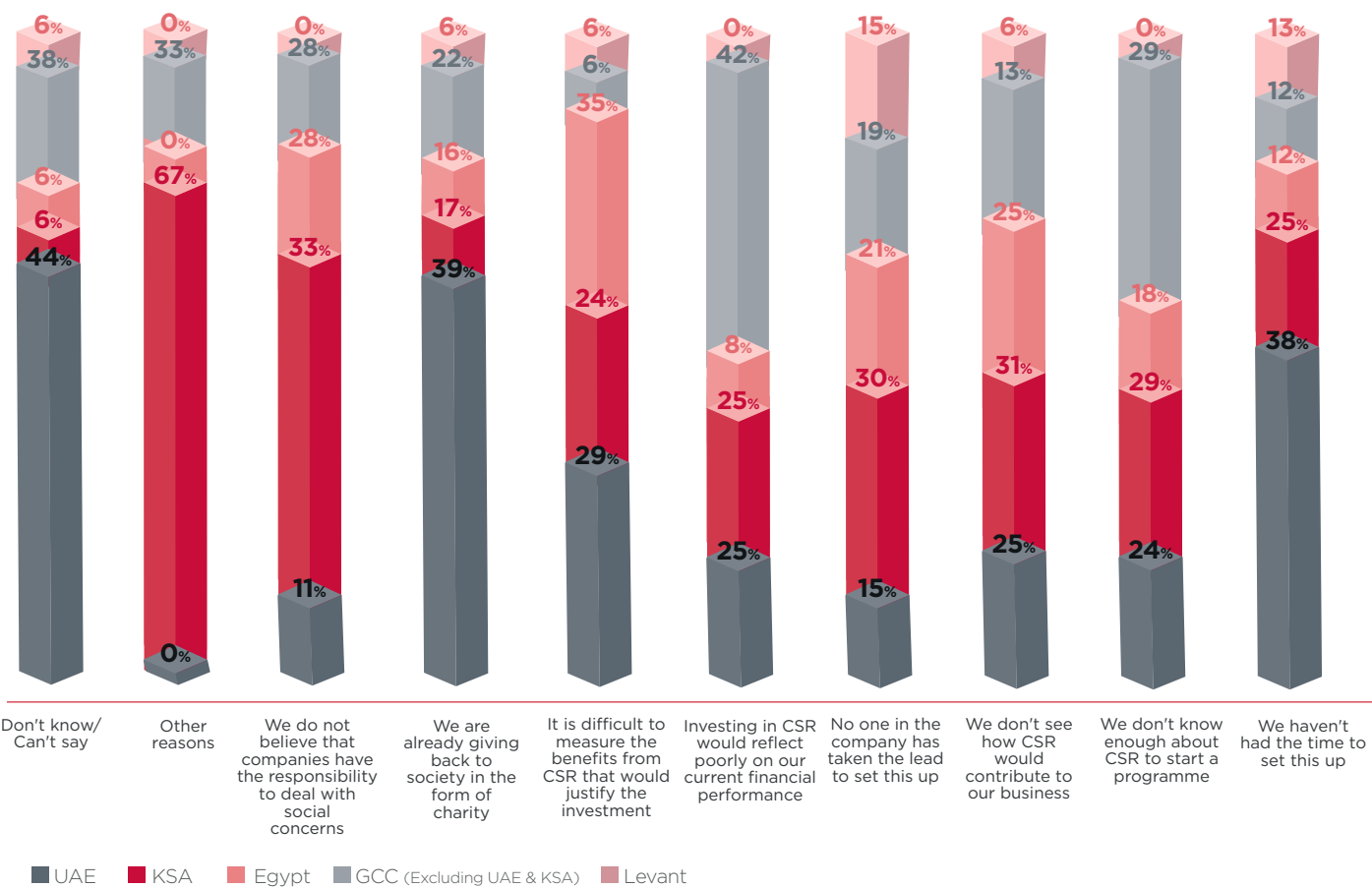


Nearly half (46 per cent) of UAE respondents said their companies operated a CSR programme against 43 per cent from Egypt, 36 per cent from the KSA, and 20 per cent from the Levant. The stats reflect how companies regard having a CSR programme a necessity to be more socially responsible.

Q12

What is the reason for your company not having a CSR programme?

Please select all that apply.



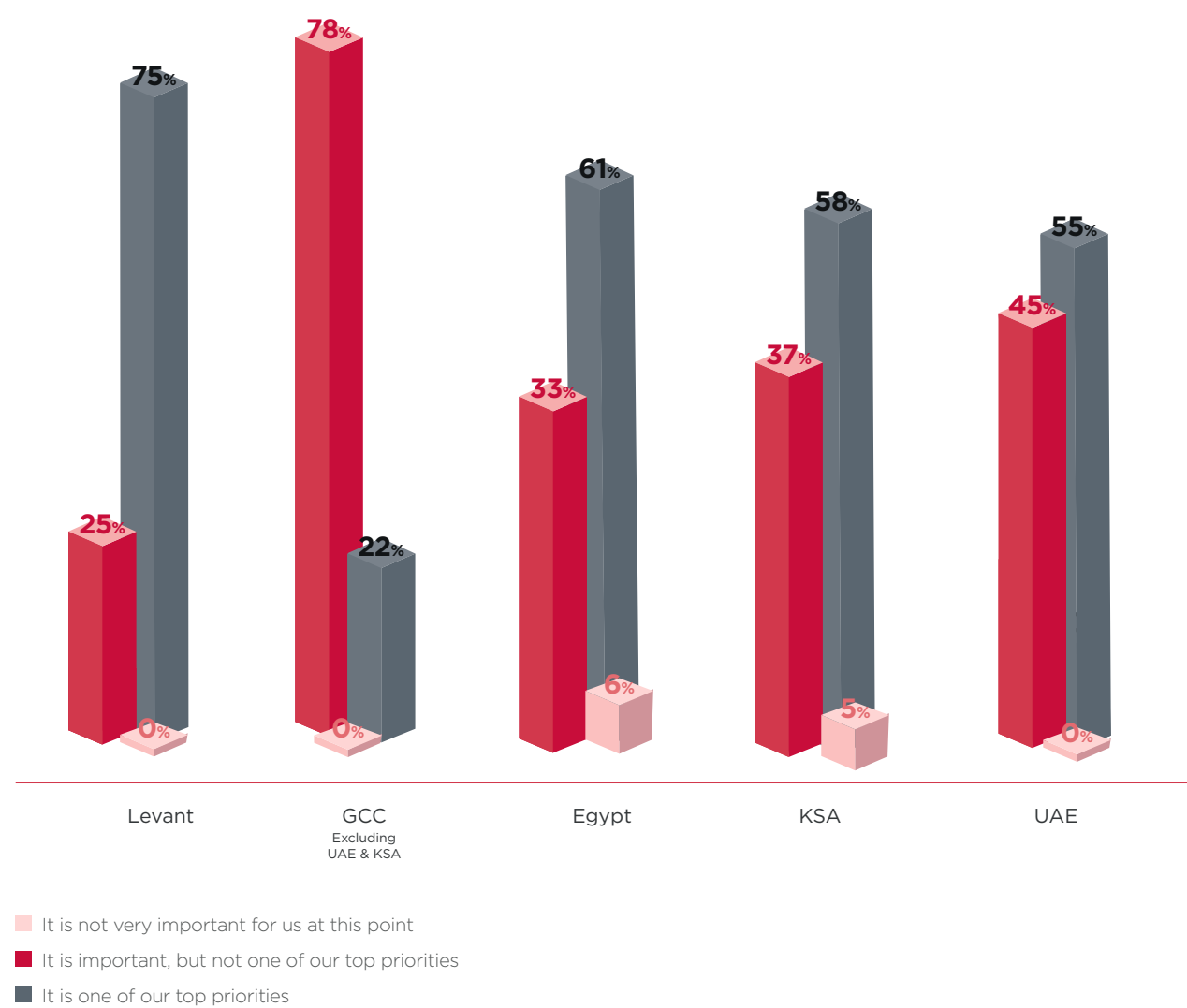
Of the companies without a CSR programme in place, 30 – 31 per cent cited the most probable reason to be ‘No one at the company has taken the lead to set it up.’

However, from the UAE, we do see a mere 11 per cent of participants indicating the reason for not having a CSR programme as ‘We do not believe that companies have the responsibility to deal with social concerns.’

This question brings up some important concerns surrounding CSR, which can be taken into consideration while working on national or regional strategies.

Q13

How much of a priority is CSR for your company?



Of those surveyed, 54 per cent said that CSR was one of their top priorities.

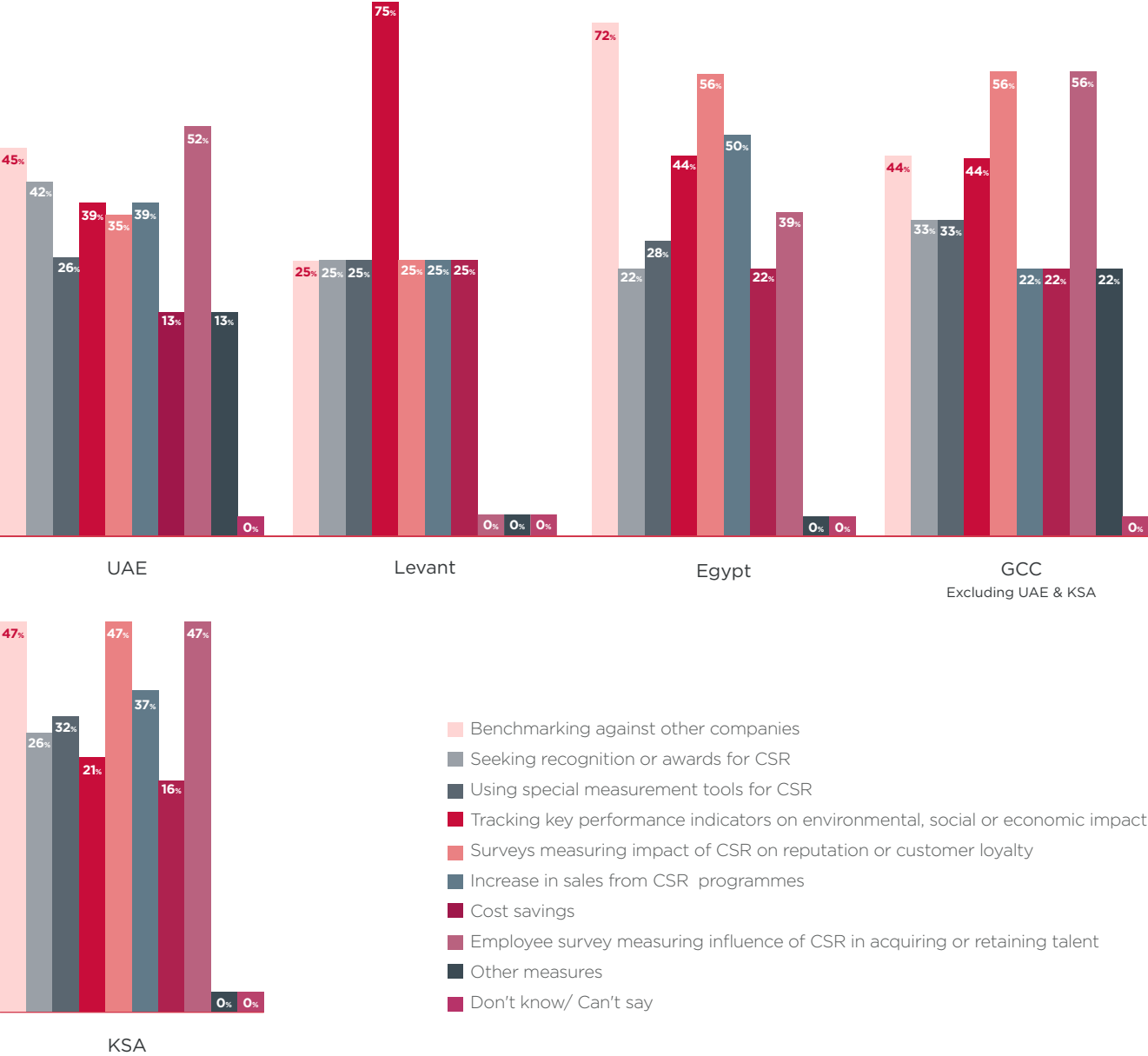
The figure is reflective of the commitment that regional decision-makers have towards adopting and implementing CSR as part of their businesses.

For the UAE, 55 per cent of respondents cite CSR as one of their top priorities, compared to 58 per cent in the KSA and 61 per cent in Egypt.

Q14

How does your company measure the success of its CSR programme?

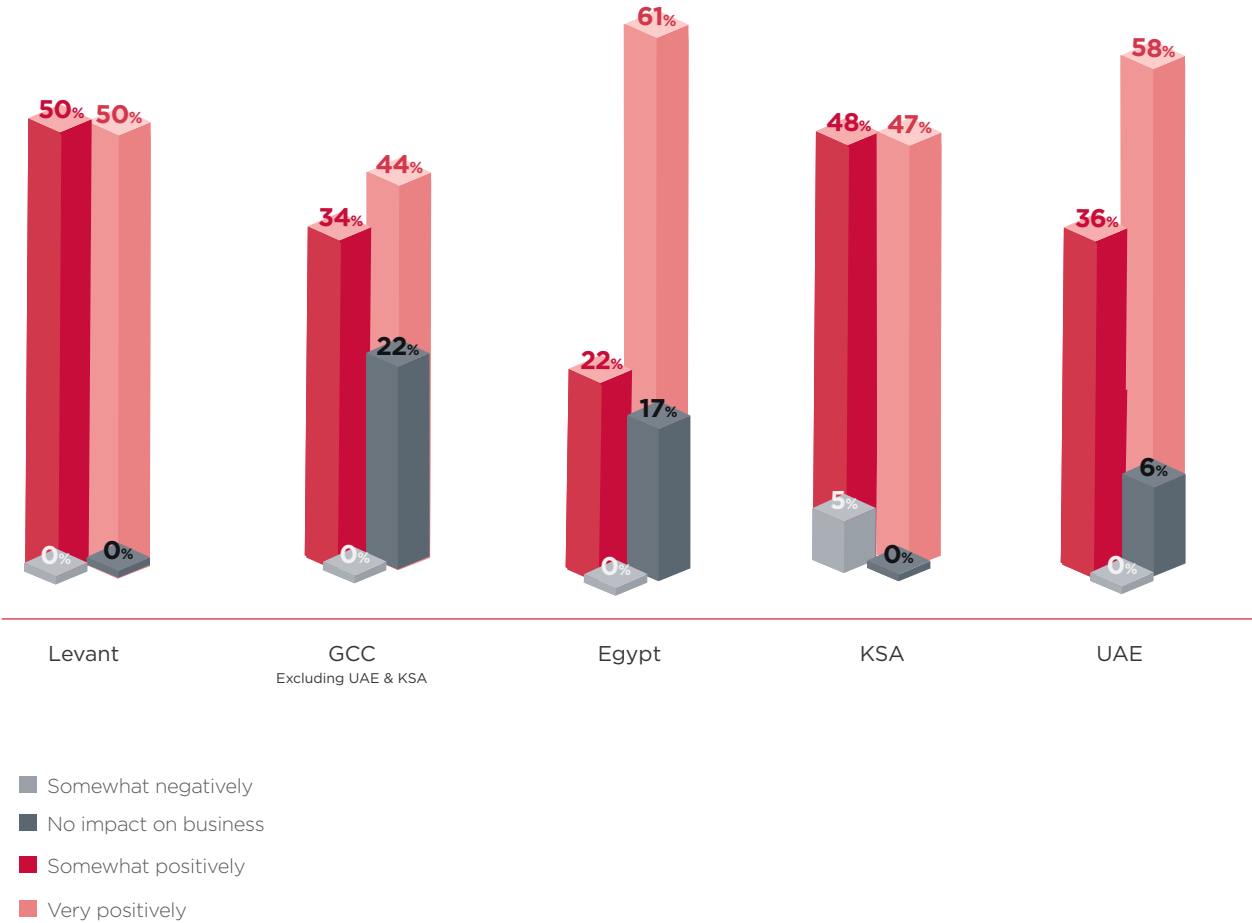
Please select all that apply.



Benchmarking against other companies, the impact of CSR in retaining talent and on reputation were cited as the main ways for assessing the CSR performance of a programme.

Q15

In your opinion, how has your company's CSR programme affected the business overall?

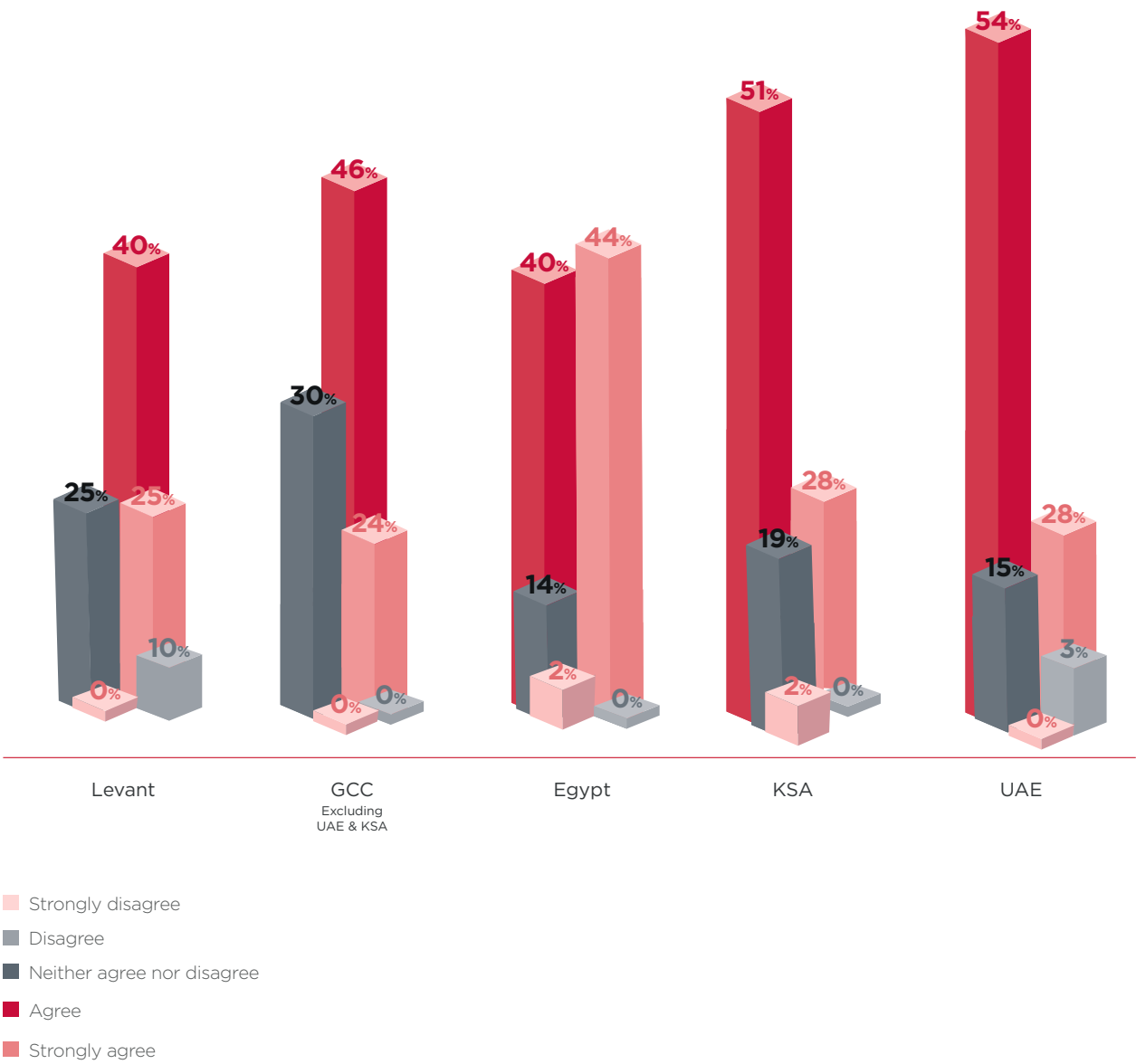


Of those surveyed, 90 per cent said that CSR affects their business positively. The overall sentiment around CSR is therefore optimistic, promising and encouraging in the region.

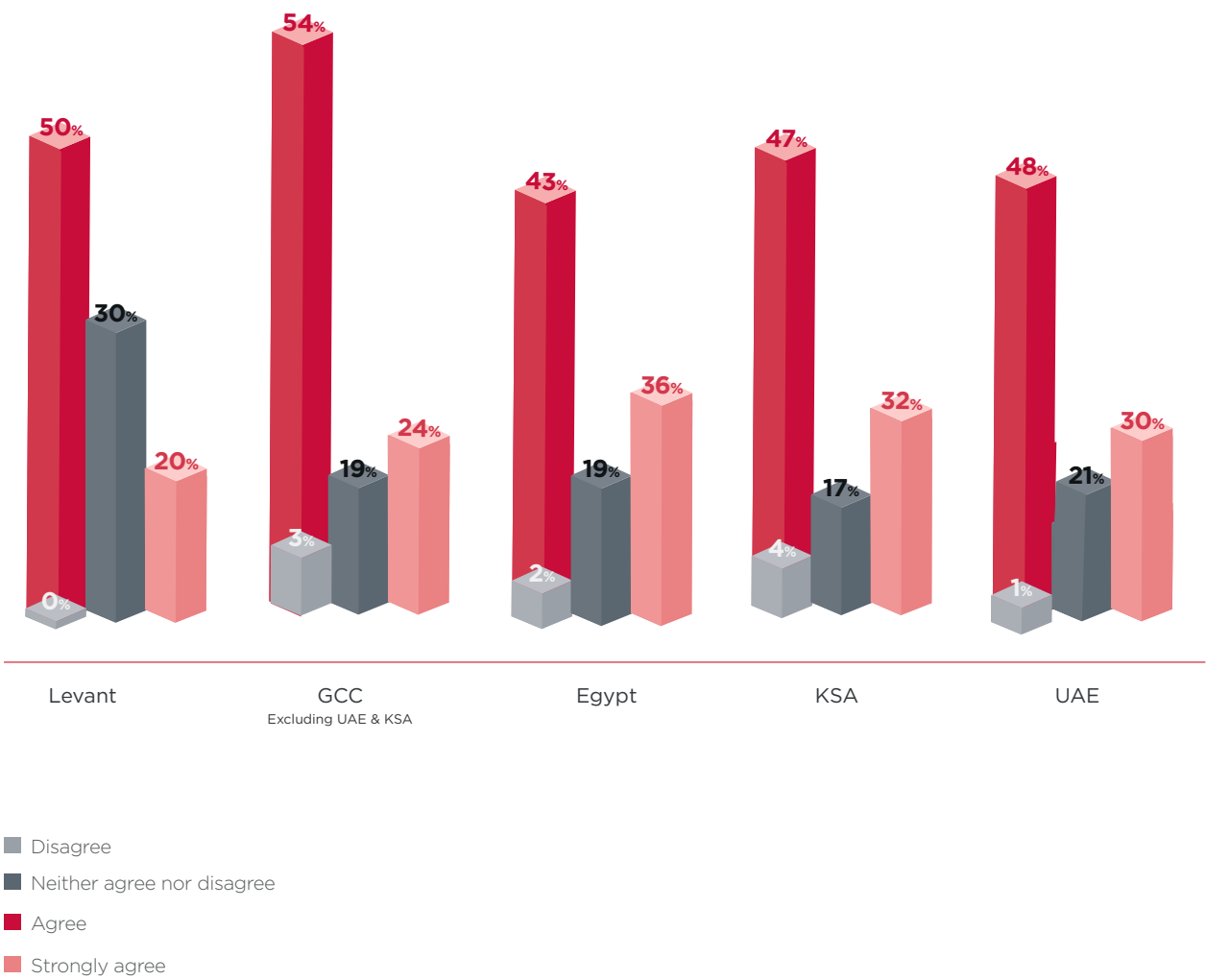
Q16

How much do you agree with the below statements?

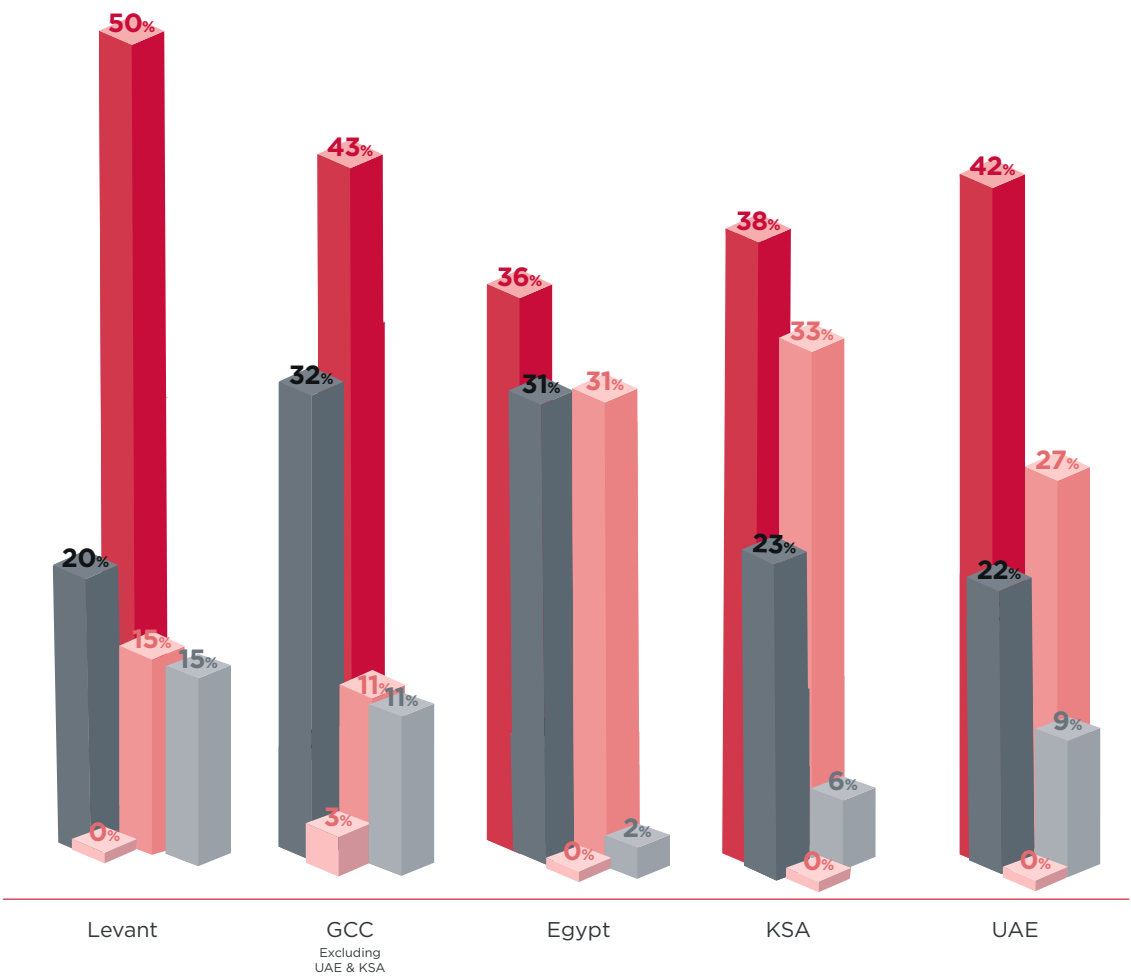
“I prefer for my company to do business with socially responsible companies.”



“I believe that CSR activities improve consumer trust with brands and strengthen attachment.”

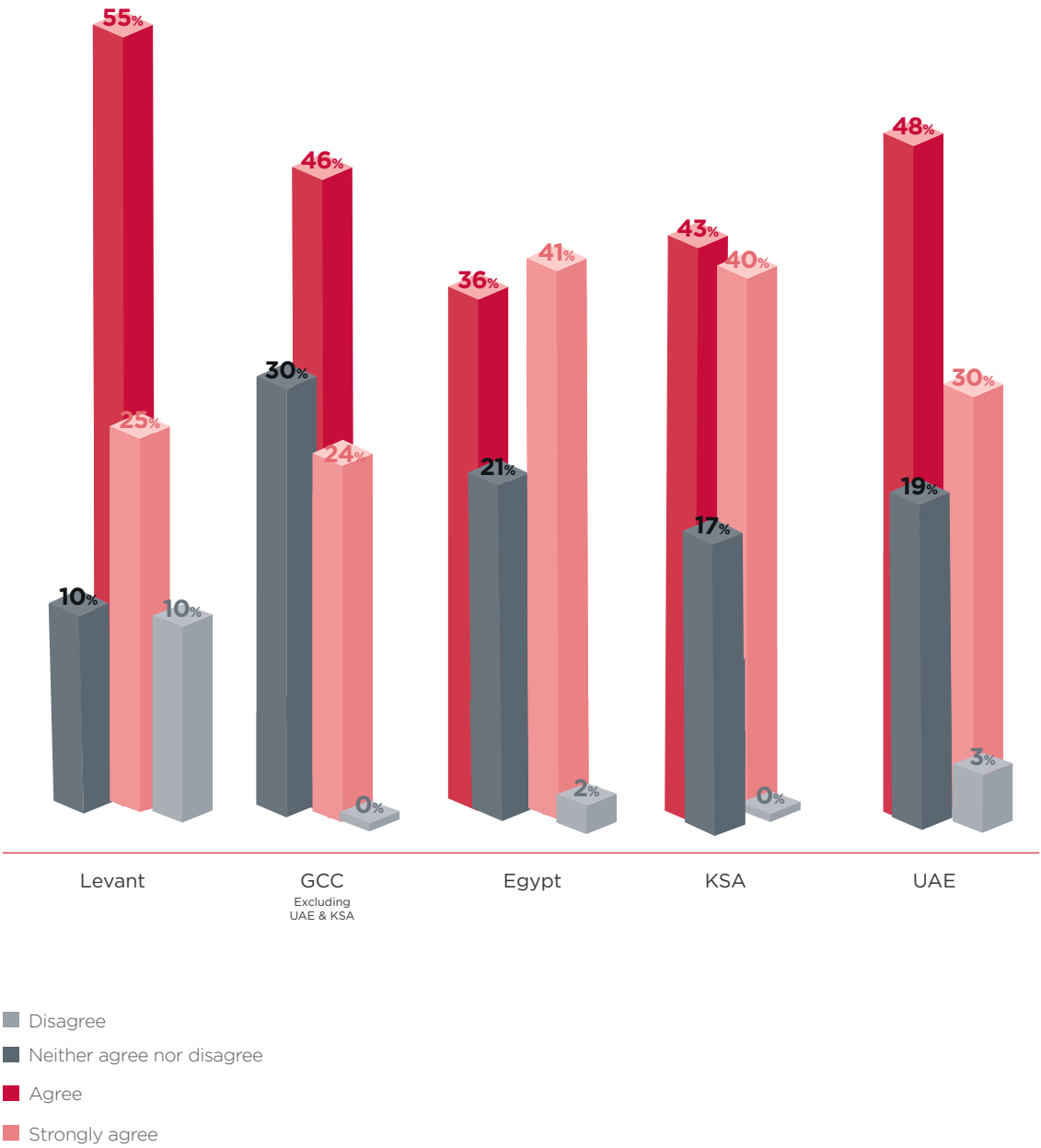


“I believe that social responsibility should be more important for my company than its profits.”

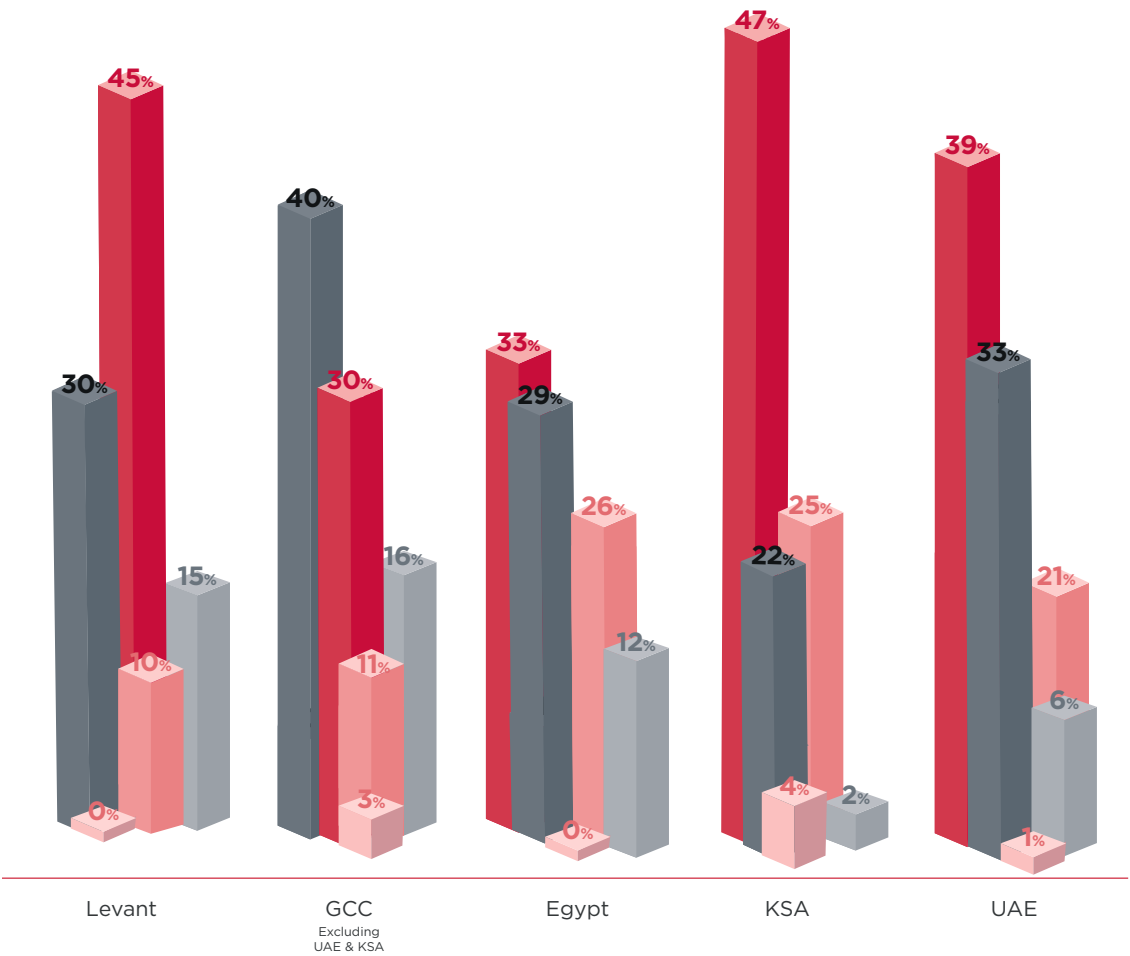


- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

“I am likely to advise my company to conduct business with a socially responsible company.”

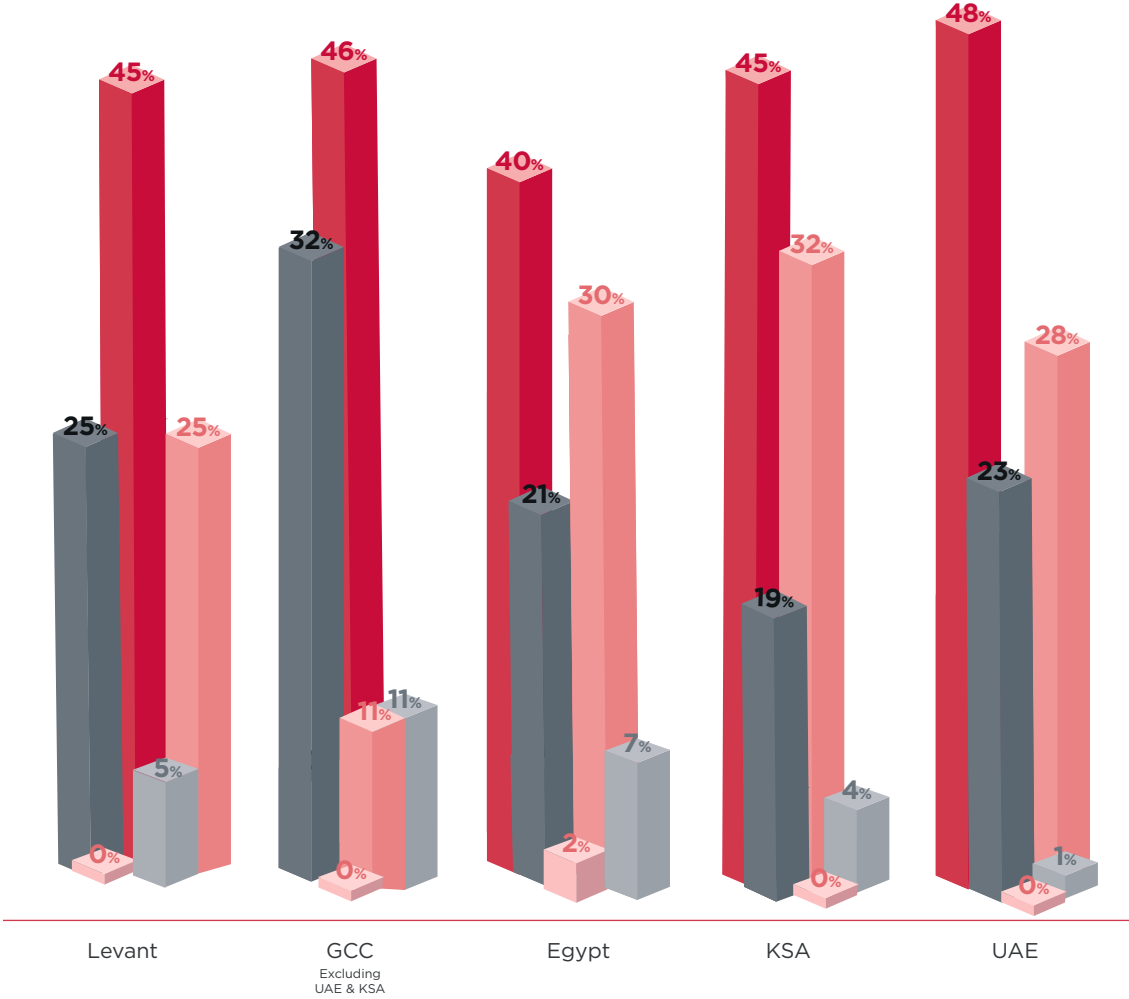


“If given the choice to stop my company’s dealing with a company that is not socially responsible, I will choose to stop.”



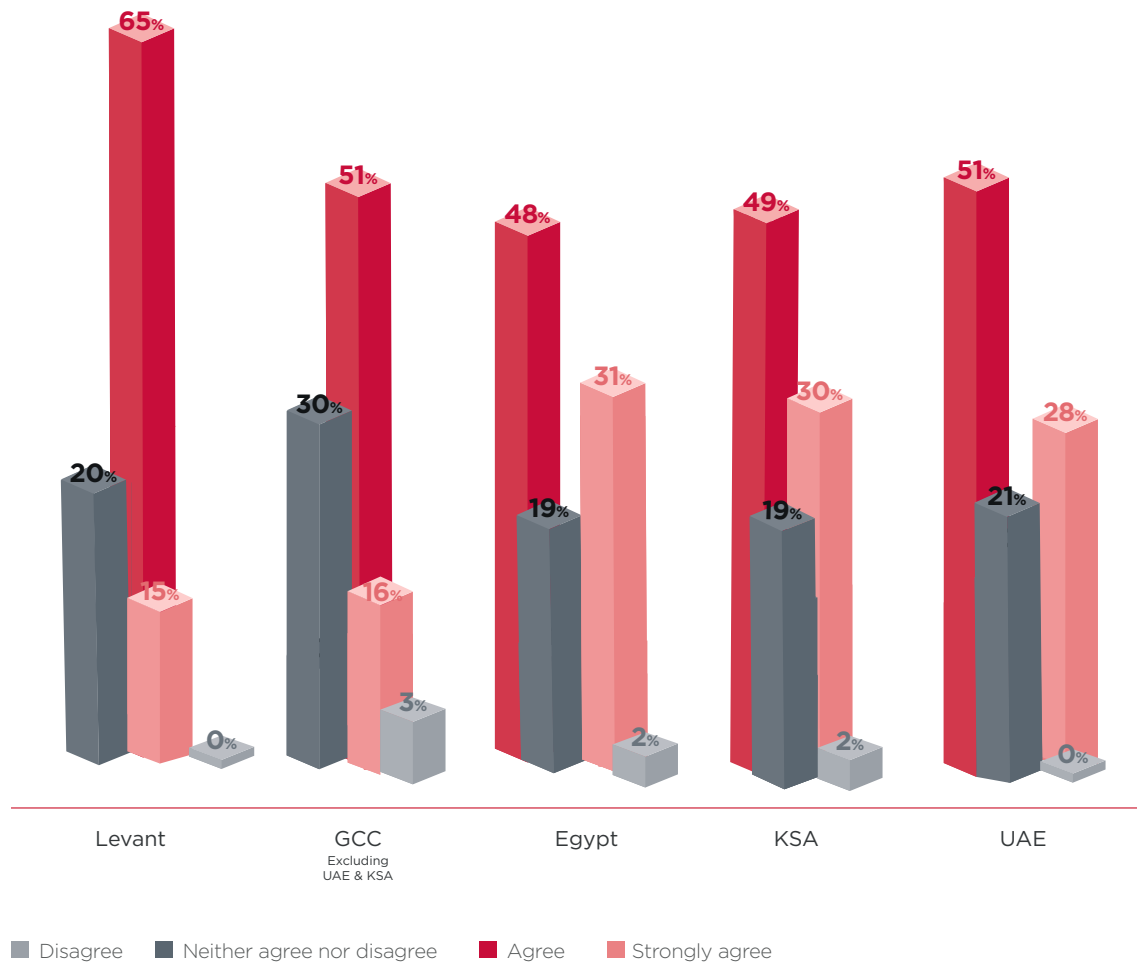
- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

“I will encourage my company to continue business with a socially responsible company, even if it increases the price of its products/services slightly.”



- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Agree
- Strongly agree

“I would recommend conducting business with a company that is socially responsible.”



Overall, this question aimed to assess the consensus of companies willing to work with businesses that are socially responsible. Here, we see the UAE, the KSA, and Egypt as the top three to agree or strongly agree.

As for the ability of CSR activities to build better trust and brand loyalty, there is a healthier average in the MENA region, with 77.63 per cent of respondents either agreeing or strongly agreeing. Strongest in this category were respondents from the KSA at 79.25 per cent.

There is also a small average difference of 5.94 per cent between those who would recommend conducting business with a company that is socially responsible versus those who would encourage this, even if there is a slight increase in a product/service cost.

When observing individual regions, Egypt has a 9.52 per cent and the GCC a 10.81 per cent difference, which is higher than the UAE and the KSA. These sets of figures demonstrate that there is a greater willingness to create more ethically run businesses within the UAE and the KSA.

07

CSR
IN CRISIS



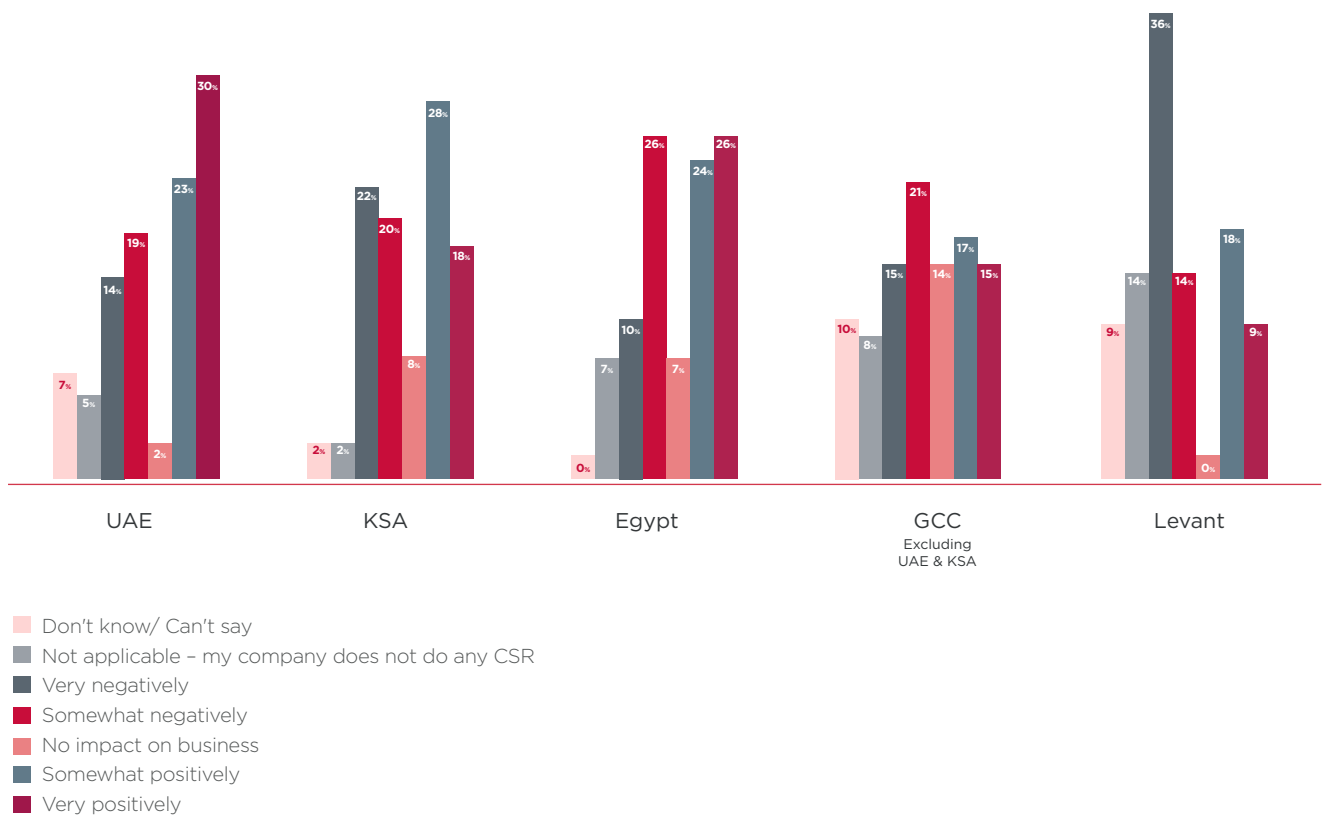
This section is a later but imperative addition to this survey. Just as the planned date for the release of this survey neared, the COVID-19 crisis hit. Global businesses and corporates were badly impacted with what experts are calling the worst financial and economic turmoil since World War II.

At a time when one disease locked down nations and forced organisations to rethink and reshape their business priorities, it created a sense of loss and uncertainty across the world. This is when we decided that the survey needed answers to some more vital questions. We added a set of questions, approached another set of decision-making respondents, and tried to understand how pre, during, and post-COVID-19, the concept of CSR will be affected.

Generally, CSR is an exponentially growing concept fueled by corporations and their understanding of it as a tool to integrate a social perspective within workplace culture. However, during the time of such a crisis, things are bound to change. This section of the survey studies this particular sentiment to gauge if CSR in any way changes for the corporates during these unprecedented times, and if what they preach is also practised.

Q1

How has the pandemic affected your CSR efforts?

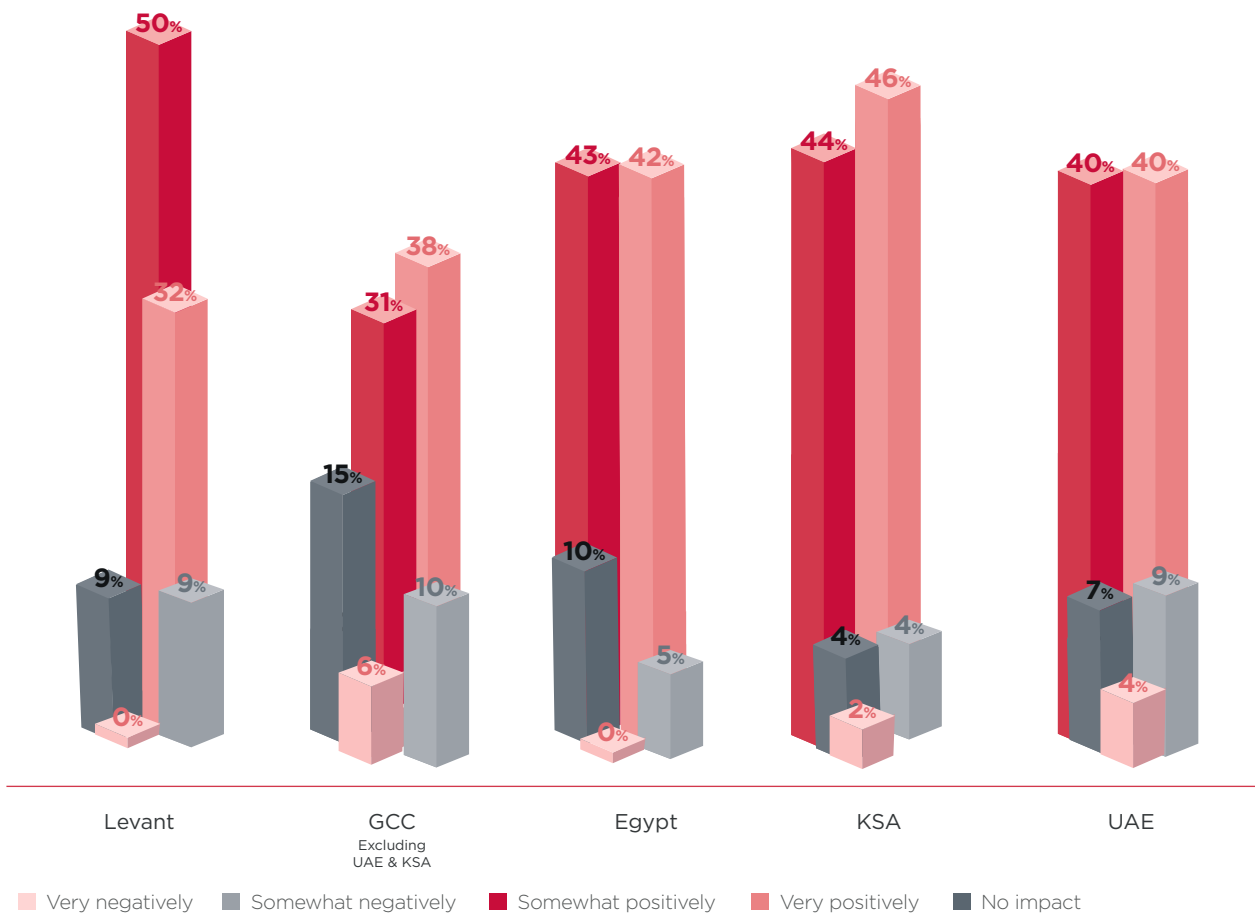


The question, designed to assess if COVID-19 affected budgets or plans of organisations across the MENA region, found that most respondents in the UAE, KSA and Egypt have rather a positive outlook on it.

Around 53 per cent of respondents in the UAE said that they see COVID-19-related changes as having a positive (very positive to somewhat positive) impact on their CSR plans. Sharing similar sentiments, respondents from the KSA and Egypt, at 46 per cent and 50 per cent respectively, agreed that the pandemic has affected their CSR efforts positively.

Q2

How has COVID-19 changed the degree of positive perception of CSR for you?

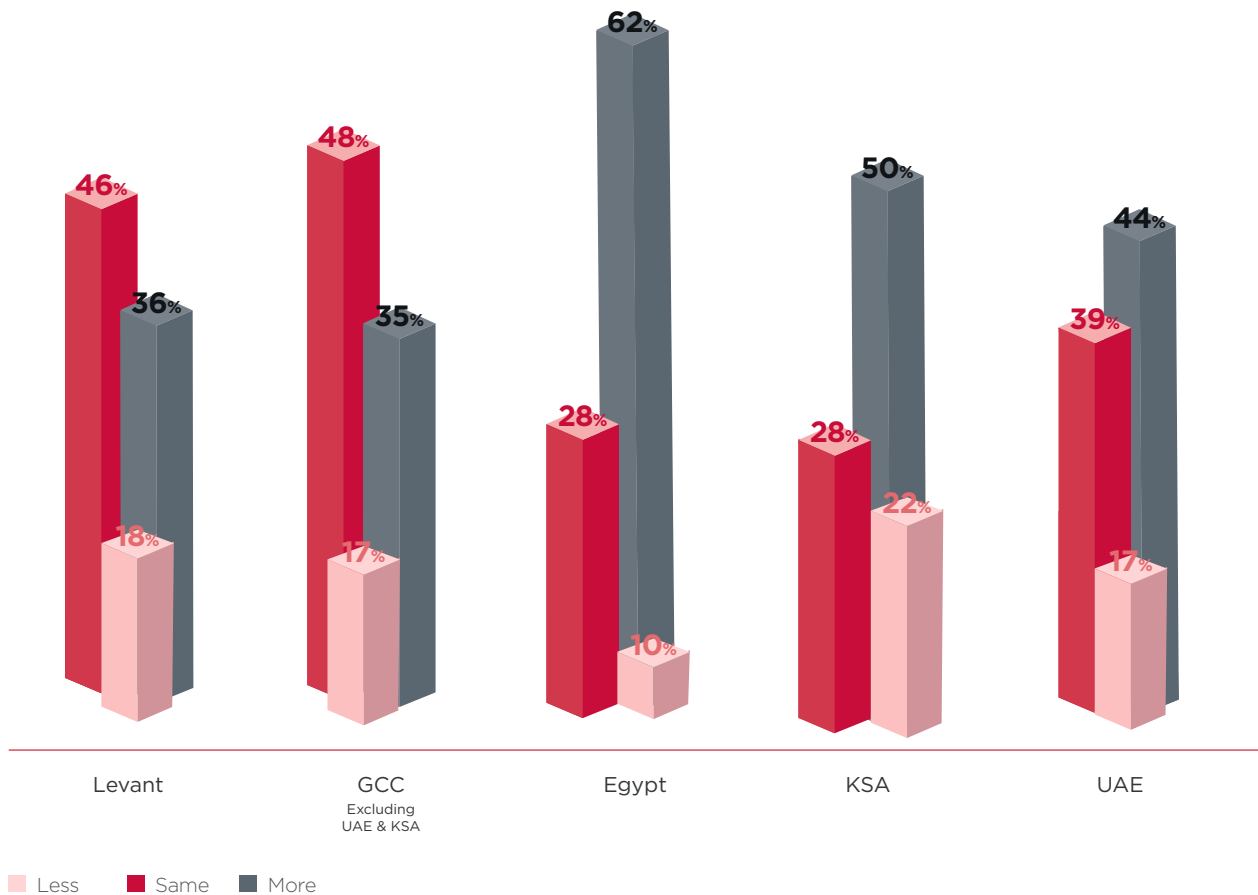


When asked if the pandemic and related events were able to change their perception of CSR, an overwhelming 80 per cent of decision-making respondents in the UAE admitted to it having a positive effect. Overall, the majority of respondents agreed to the same.

The KSA in this question surpassed all other responding countries, stating that the importance of CSR is expected to intensify more after COVID-19, while 85 per cent in Egypt and 69 per cent in the GCC also say that the outbreak would reinstate the idea of having CSR as an essential element for sustained corporate growth.

Q3

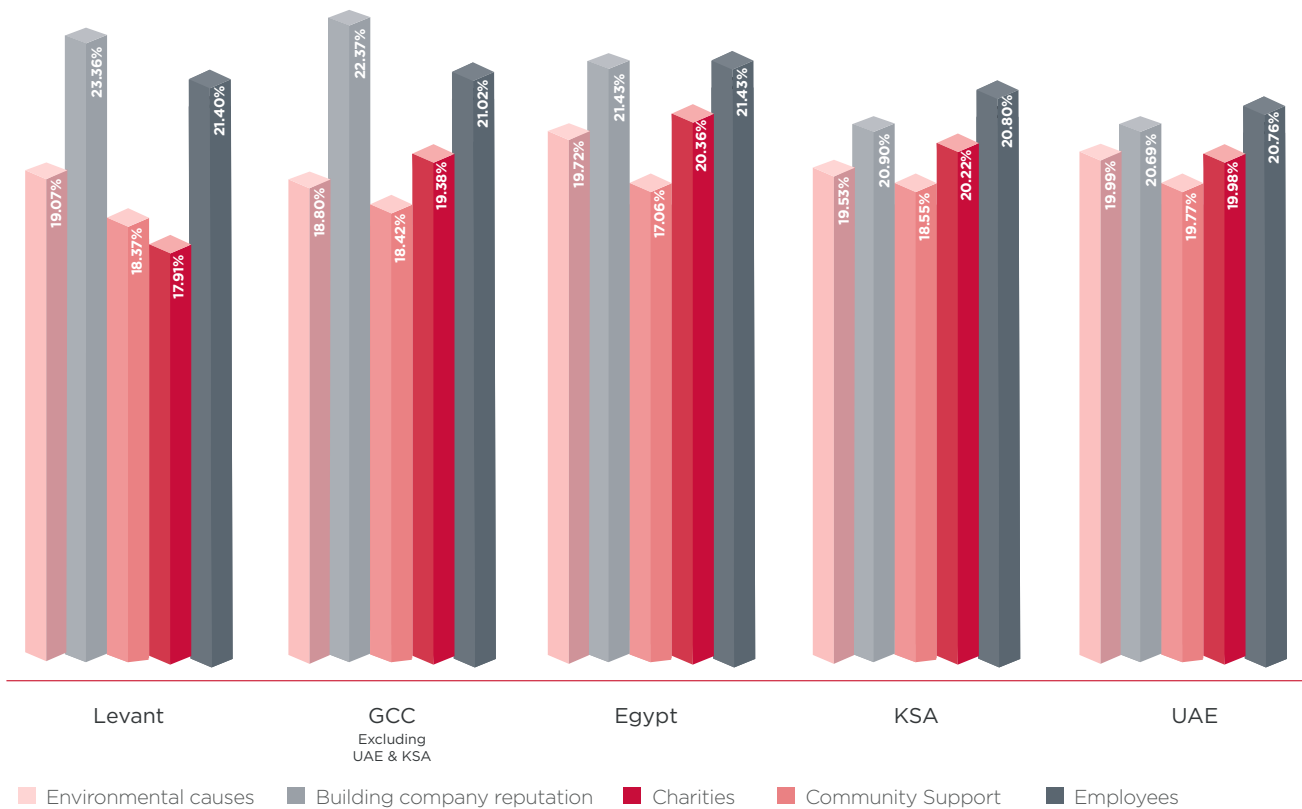
On what scale would your company be engaging in CSR activities as the fallout from the pandemic crisis continues into next year – 2022?



Overall, the responses to this question predicted an important future trend in the post COVID-19 era. Most of the respondents stated that they would either keep the list and cost of CSR activities the same or opt for even more rigorous ones in a couple of years post COVID-19. Of UAE and KSA respondents, a respective 44 and 50 per cent agreed that they would be scaling up their CSR activities. On the other hand, 62 per cent of respondents in Egypt compared to 35 and 36 per cent in the GCC and the Levant respectively said they would be engaging more in CSR activities.

Q4

If your company plans to engage more in CSR in the era of COVID-19 and afterwards, what will your company focus on?



In ascending percentage priority, UAE respondents listed the focus of their CSR activities in the era of COVID-19 as follows:

Charities (19.98%), community support (19.77%), environmental causes (19.99%), building company reputation (20.69%), and employees (20.76%). Overall, across all respondents, the most important CSR focus was building company reputation and developing employees.

08

CSR

THE WAY
FORWARD

The insightful findings of this report point towards both apparent and underlying trends that the region needs to embrace in terms of CSR and its prospects.

Given the importance of CSR and the paradigm shift in its understanding what the COVID-19 pandemic has brought about, we took it upon ourselves to share a conclusive wrap-up of the report, which would also serve as a reference for corporates, government agencies, academic researchers, and industry professionals working in CSR to identify where it stands and what potential it holds.

If there is one clear takeaway from this report it is that the UAE is a regional leader in CSR — its comprehension, implementation, and future-planning — and is well-positioned to drive initiatives as CSR becomes part of businesses' DNA post COVID-19.

After short-term charitable donations, organisations will now have to look both beyond and within to understand what their responsibilities are towards society and their employees — more engagement, more investment, and more personal development plans focused on employees will become evident.

An environment of trust, transparency and confidence is what companies need to create to protect reputation as well as build on employee relationships and strengthen their CSR contributions and ideologies.

The future will see more and more businesses adopting to this shift and making meaningful CSR decisions for the benefit of society and use their brands to be vocal about a socially empowering stance.

Governments across the globe will now be held more accountable for the safety of their citizens, and economic downturns will test authorities' actions, compassion, and support for their people.

Hence, CSR will be listed as a priority on the agenda of public companies and governments. In the Gulf, governments and leaders are highly responsive towards their citizens, unlike in other parts of the world. Therefore, it is even more important for government entities to take CSR seriously and develop impactful campaigns to showcase the human side of their leadership.

In conclusion, the world will see more engagement, more empathy, and a huge CSR drive to get people back on their feet and economies rolling again. In this new voyage, the region, particularly the UAE, is sure to emerge as a guiding light, leading by example, and setting high standards by taking proactive CSR-led steps for quick implementation.

09

ABOUT
RESEARCHERS

Cicero & Bernay Public Relations

Cicero & Bernay Public Relations (C&B) is an award-winning, fully integrated communication agency. It delivers bespoke traditional and new media strategies and campaigns to some of the region's most prominent brands through its expert multilingual team. Established in 2005 and headquartered in Dubai, C&B has a network of offices in 29 countries covering the MENA region as well as the Indian subcontinent, the USA, Russia and Europe, with an innate knowledge of local business in each of these locations. Our ethos is to let the facts do the talking, from making a measurable impact on our clients' businesses through research and insights to developing innovative ideas and result-oriented campaigns that deliver long-term, positive ROI. The foundation of all our work lies in attention to DETAIL – Data, Explore, Target, Assemble, Interpret, and Leverage.

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