Orthographic practices in Europe
Results of an EFNIL survey

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Overview

- The questionnaire
- Results
- General tendencies

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The Questionnaire

Main Themes

1. Questions about language, alphabet, complexity of orthography, official rules

2. Questions about the formulation, implementation, and communication of the official rule set

3. Questions about observing the orthographic development and the number of permitted spellings

4. Questions about the acceptance and integration of foreign words

5. Questions about gender inclusive language and its influence on orthography

# Background information

Countries and Languages

- 43 Institutions
- 31 Countries (Spain, Portugal and Ireland not represented)
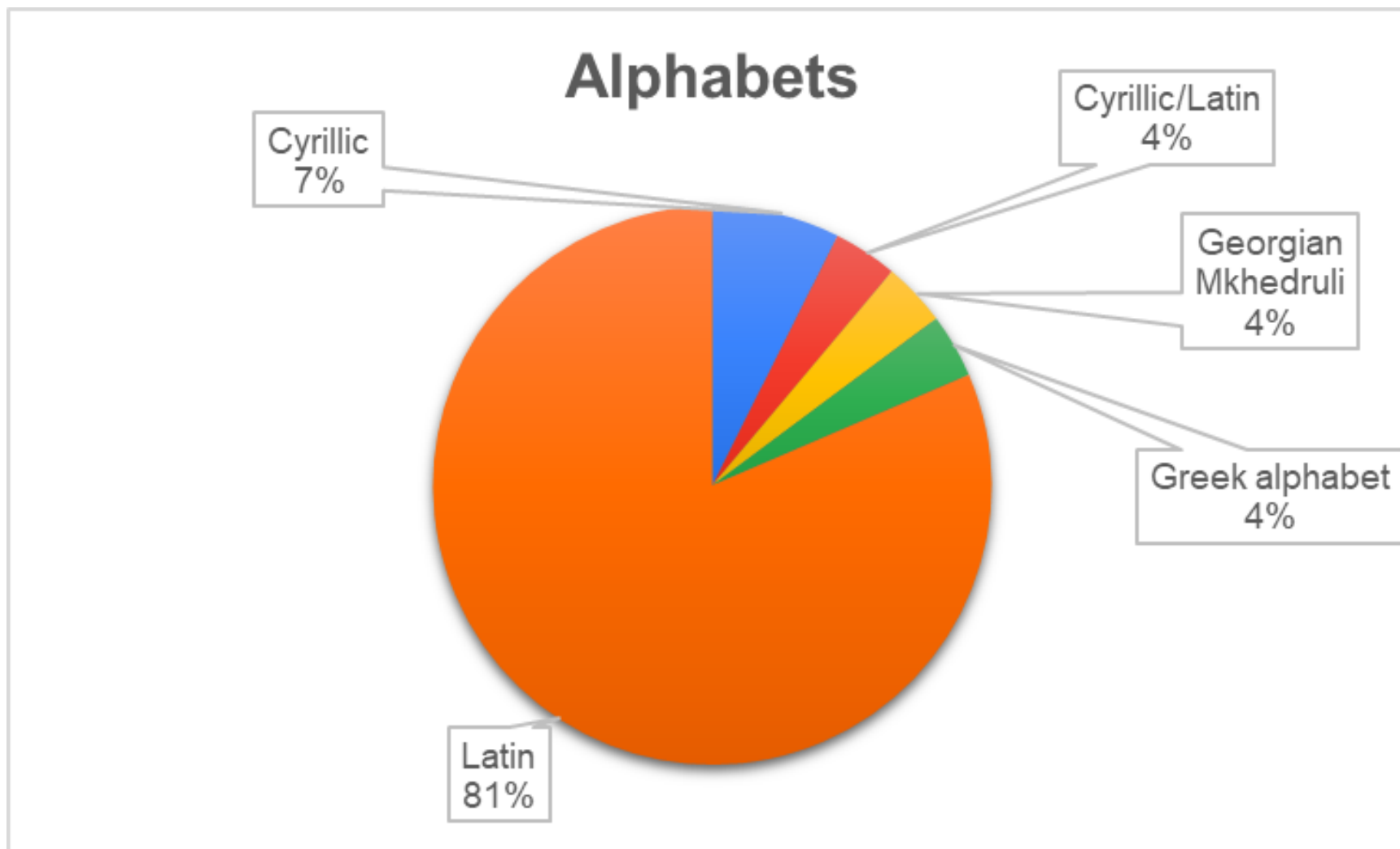- 27 official languages

Problems:
- German in Germany, Austria and in Switzerland
- Swedish and Finnish in Finland
- Flemish, French and German in Belgium
- Italian, French and German in Switzerland
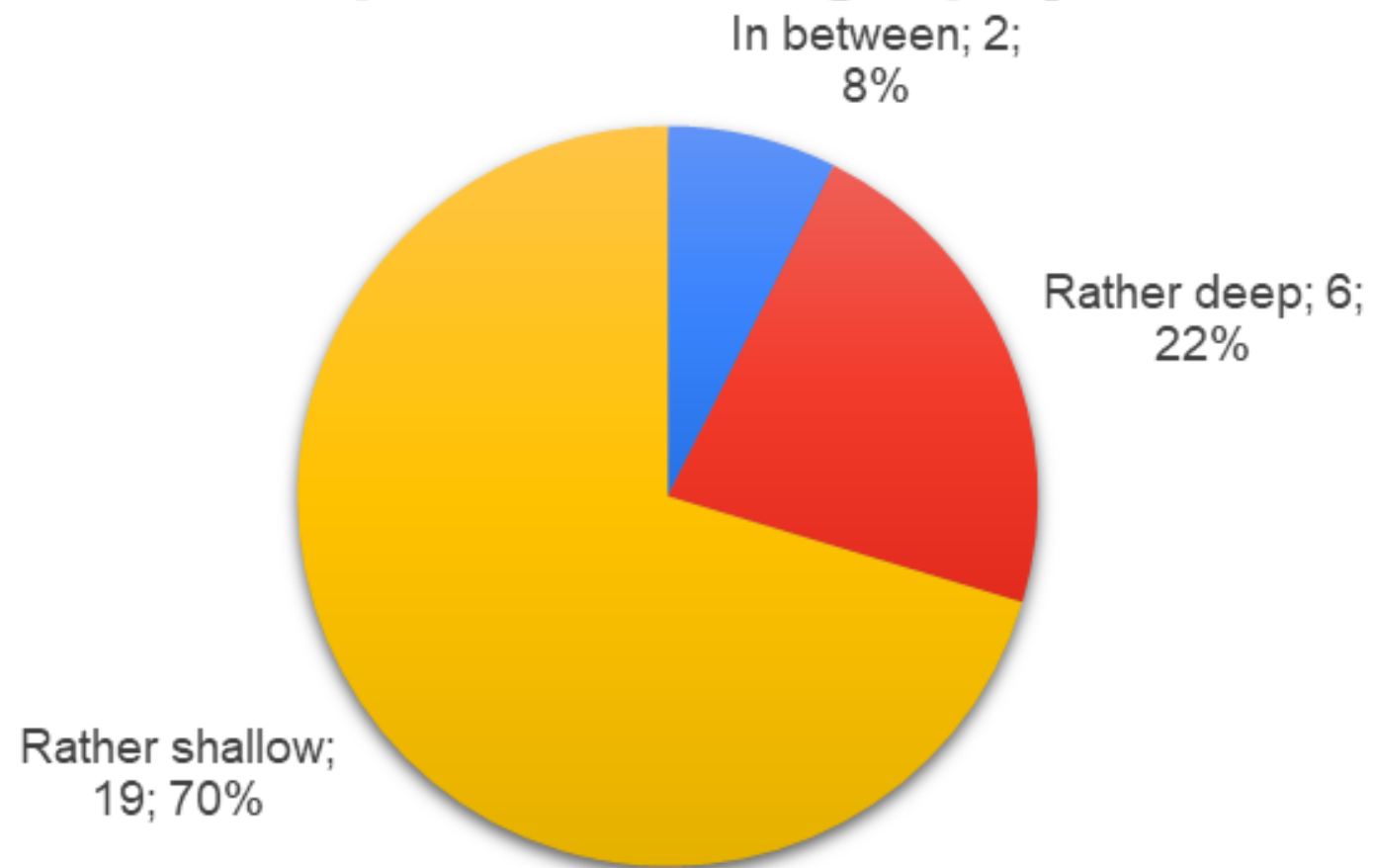- Nynorsk and Bokmål in Norway.

Language Families
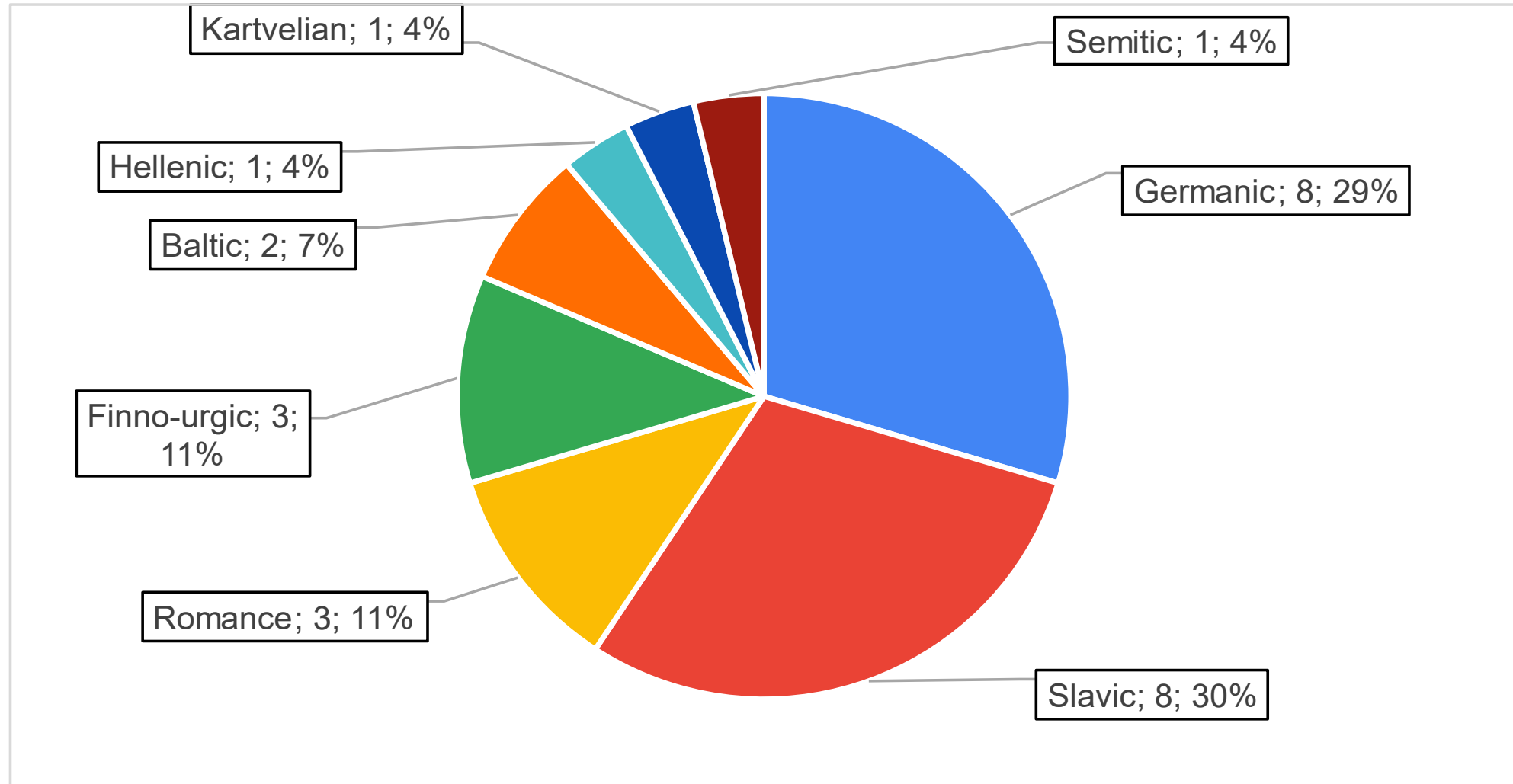
Different Alphabets

Depth of orthography

In between; 2; 8%

Rather deep; 6; 22%

Rather shallow; 19; 70%

Number of Speakers

Language	LZ	IS	MT	ET	LV	SL	LT	GE	SV	NO	FI	BU	DA	CR	SR	SE	CZ	GR	HU	RO	NL	PL	UKR	IT	FR	DE	UK+
Mill. Speakers	0,3	0,4	0,5	1,1	1,3	2	2,3	3,7	5	5,3	5,8	6	6	7	7,3	9,7	11	13	13	24	25	40	41	55	76	130	400

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Gender Markers

- c-n = common/neuter
- m-f = masculine/feminine
- m-f-n = masculine/feminine/neuter
- none = no gender markers on nouns

Gender dist.	Baltic	Germanic	Hellenic	Kartvelian	Romance	Semitic	Slavic	Urgic	Total
c-n		3							3
m-f	2				2	1			5
m-f-n		4	1		1		8		14
none		1		1				3	5
Total	2	8	1	1	3	1	8	3	27

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c-n (3)
- Danish
- Dutch/Flemish
- Swedish

m-f (5)
- French
- Italian
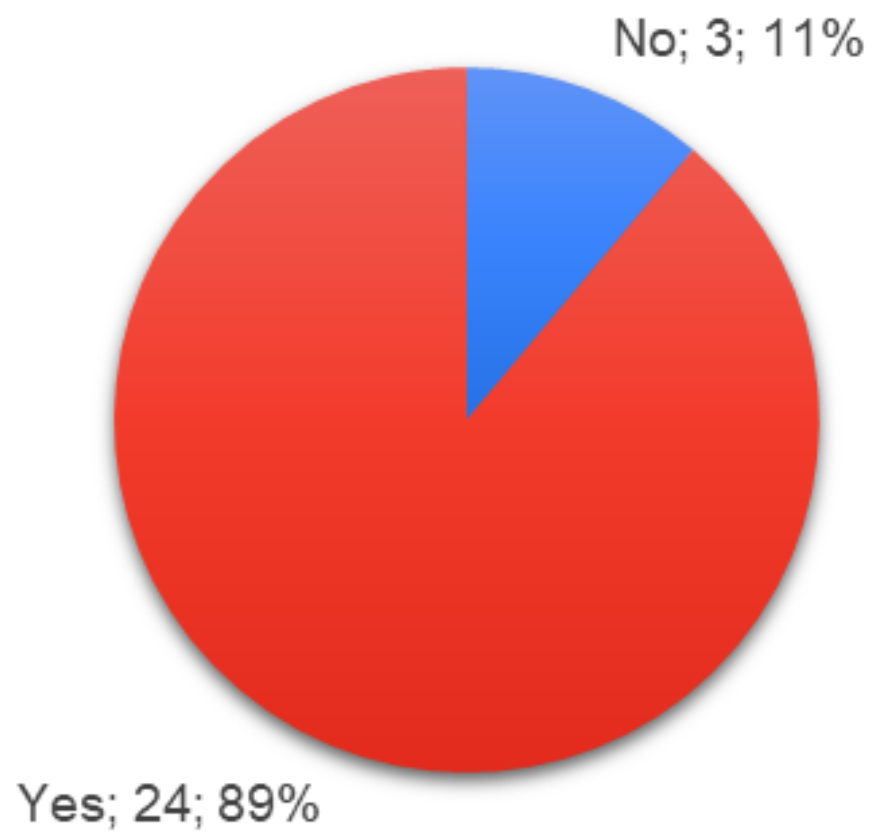- Latvian
- Lithuanian
- Maltese

none (5)
- English
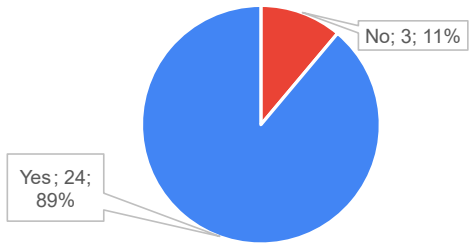- Estonian
- Finnish
- Georgian
- Hungarian

m-f-n (14)
- Bulgarian
- Croatian
- Czech
- German
- Greek
- Icelandic
- Letzeburgisch
- Norwegian
- Polish
- Romanian
- Serbian
- Slovakian
- Slovenian
- Ukrainian

Official Regulations

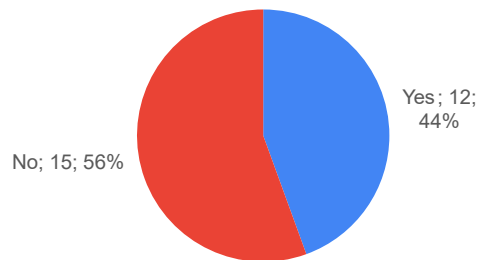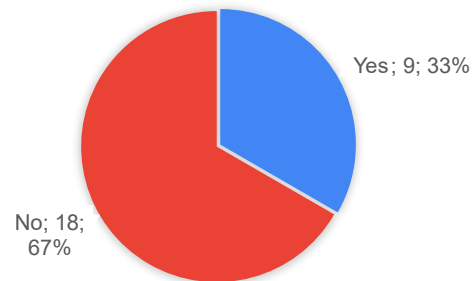# Official regulation for the official languages

No; 3; 11%

Yes; 24; 89%

ORTHOGRAPHY — No; 3; 11%; Yes; 24; 89%

GRAMMAR — No; 12; 44%; Yes; 15; 56%

Vocabulary — No; 15; 56%; Yes; 12; 44%

PRONUNCIATION — Yes; 9; 33%; No; 18; 67%

"Vocabulary is officially regulated, but not in reality (because it would be unrealistic)". ET
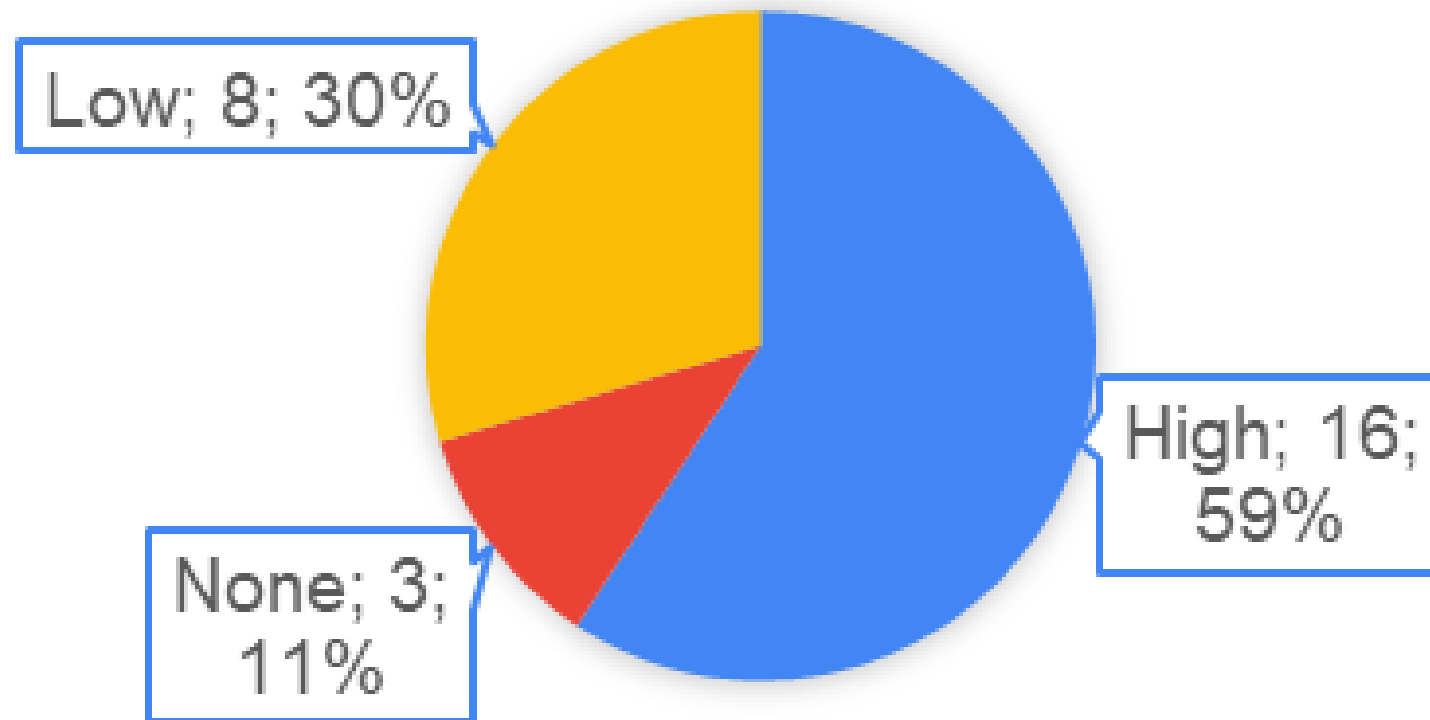
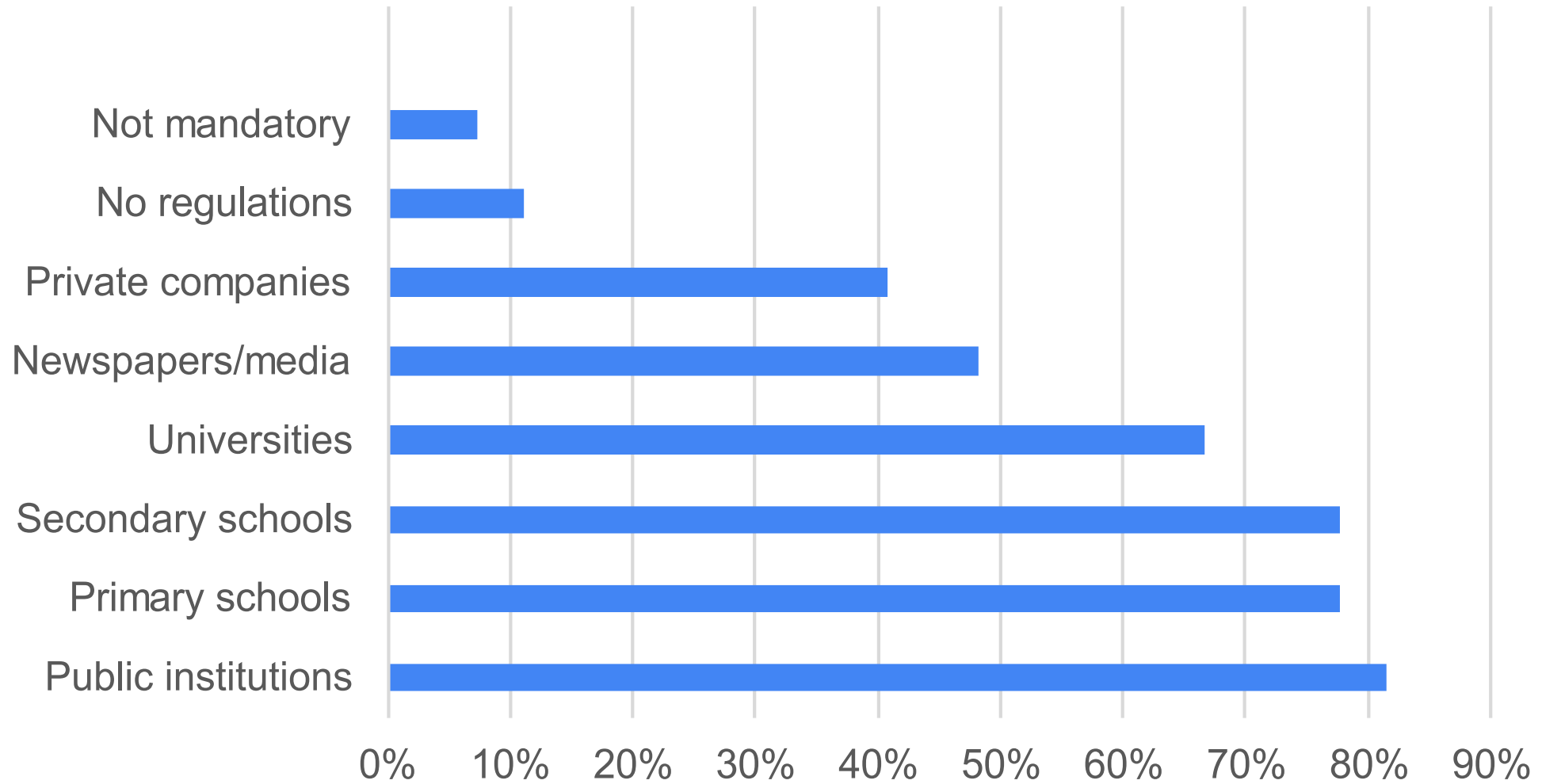# What is officially regulated?

Other:
Proper names (DK and FI)
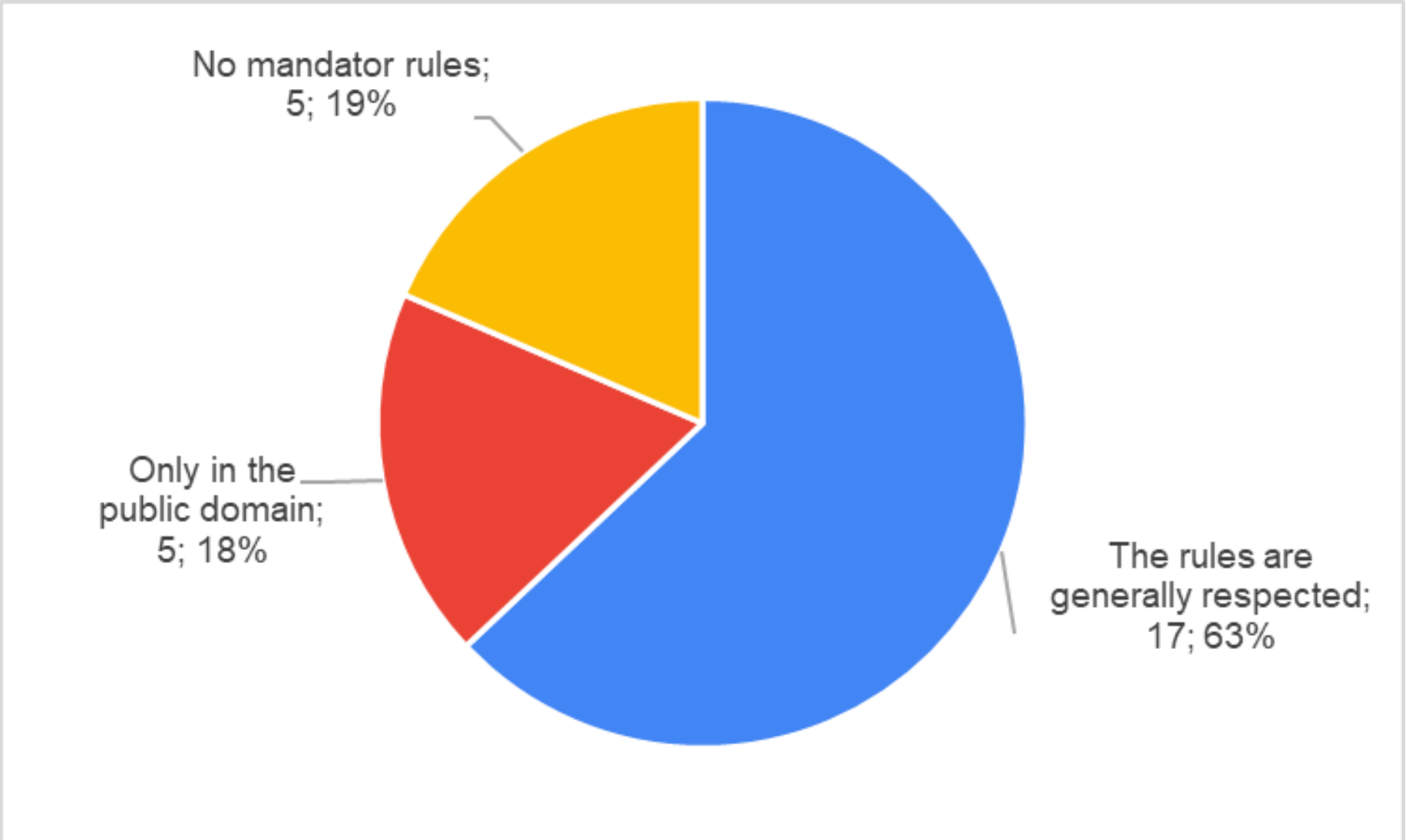Clear language (NO, SV)
Terminology (LT, FR)

How well are the rules respected?

No mandator rules; 5; 19%
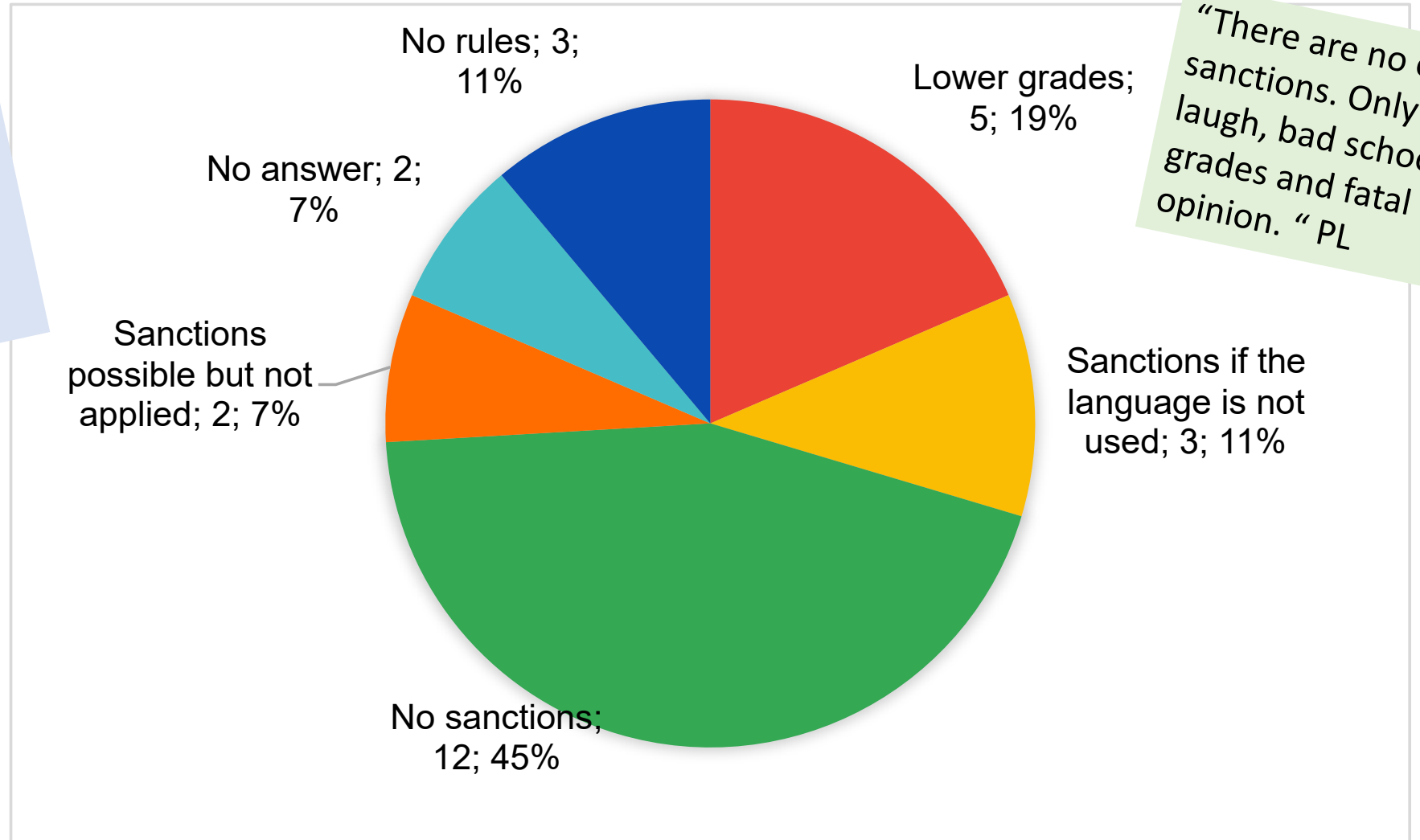
Only in the public domain; 5; 18%

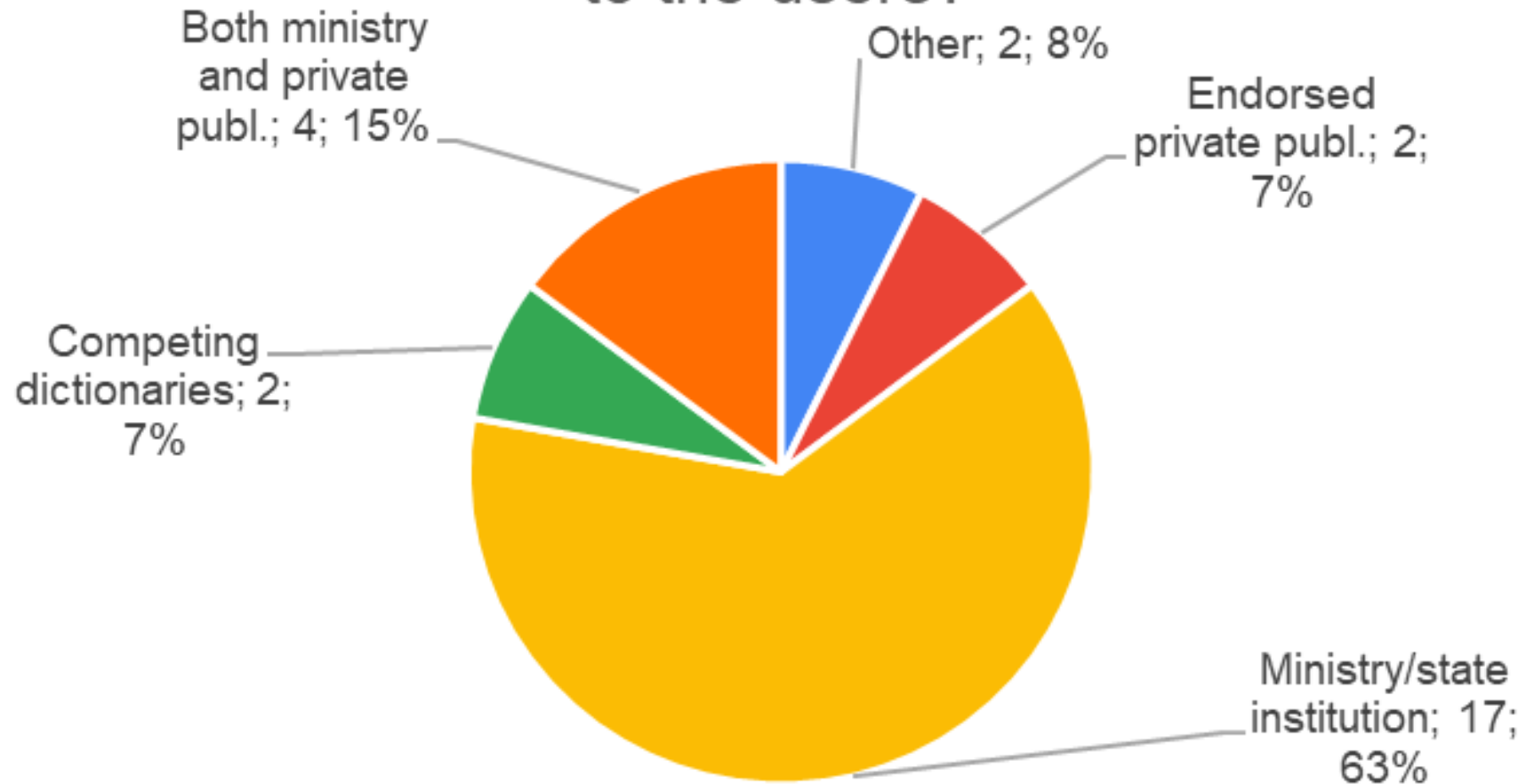The rules are generally respected; 17; 63%

What Sanctions are applied?

"It is possible to impose sanctions for non-compliance with orthographic rules, but sanctions are usually not applied, warnings and consultations from the State Language Inspectorate are sufficient". LT

"The State Language Center has rights to apply fines for violation of the regulations mentioned above. In practice, more consultations than real fines have been applied". LV

"There are no official sanctions. Only the laugh, bad school grades and fatal opinion. " PL

No rules; 3; 11%

Lower grades; 5; 19%

No answer; 2; 7%

Sanctions possible but not applied; 2; 7%

Sanctions if the language is not used; 3; 11%

No sanctions; 12; 45%

How are orthographic rules communicated to the users?

- Both ministry and private publ.; 4; 15%
- Other; 2; 8%
- Endorsed private publ.; 2; 7%
- Competing dictionaries; 2; 7%
- Ministry/state institution; 17; 63%

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Latest orthographic reforms

(Scatter plot: Number of languages vs. Year of the latest reform)
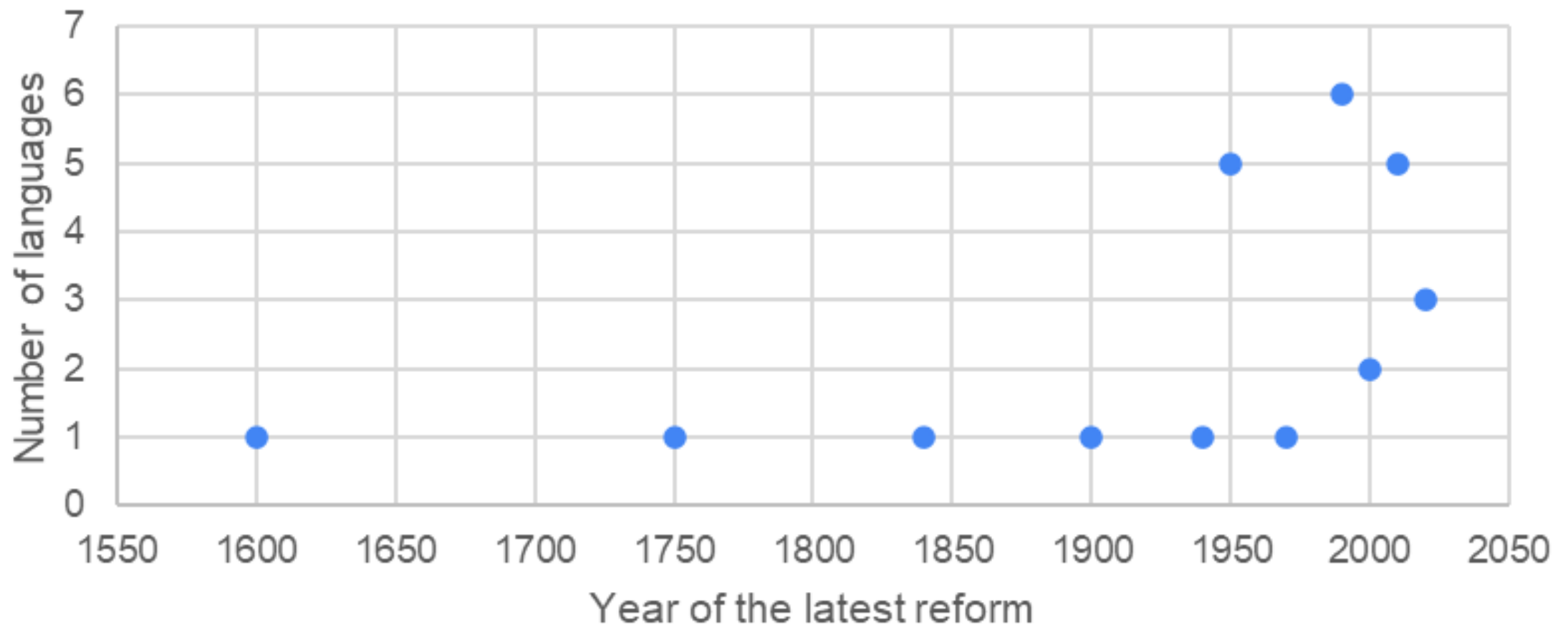
When was the last spelling reform?

1600
  Italian
1750
  English
1840
  Estonian
1900
  Swedish
1940
  Bulgarian
1950
  Finnish
  Hungarian
  Latvian
  Polish
  Slovakian
1970
  Greek

1990
  Czech
  French
  German
  Romanian
  Serbian
  Slovenian
2000
  Dutch/Flemish
  Norwegian
2010
  Croatian
  Danish
  Georgian
  Icelandic
  Maltese
2020
  Letzeburgisch
  Lithuanian
  Ukrainian

Spelling variants

- Other; 1; 4%
- Many alternatives with equal status; 1; 3%
- Only one recommended spelling; 1; 4%
- One recommended spelling, many alternatives; 3; 11%
- One recommended spelling, few alternatives; 21; 78%

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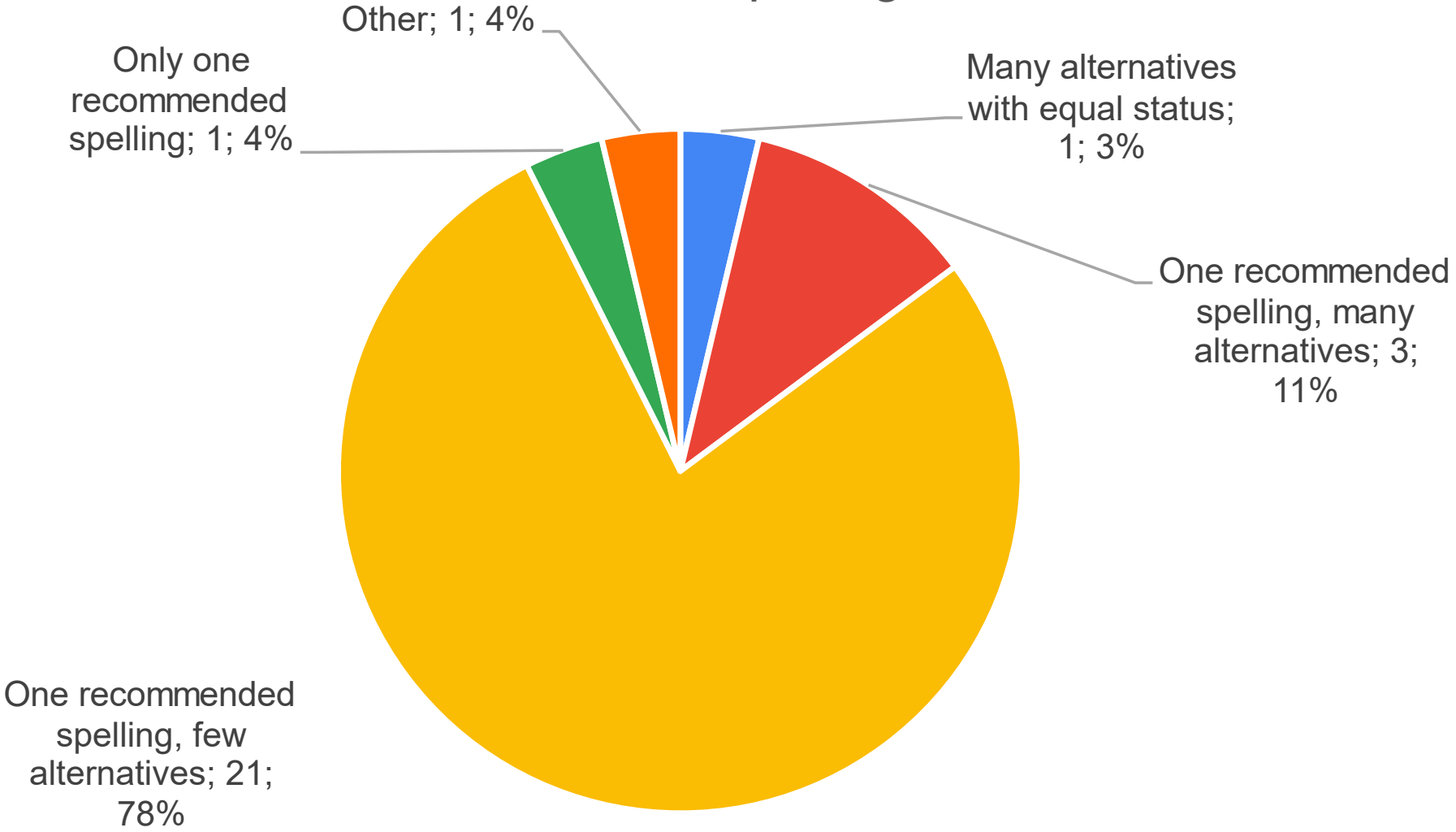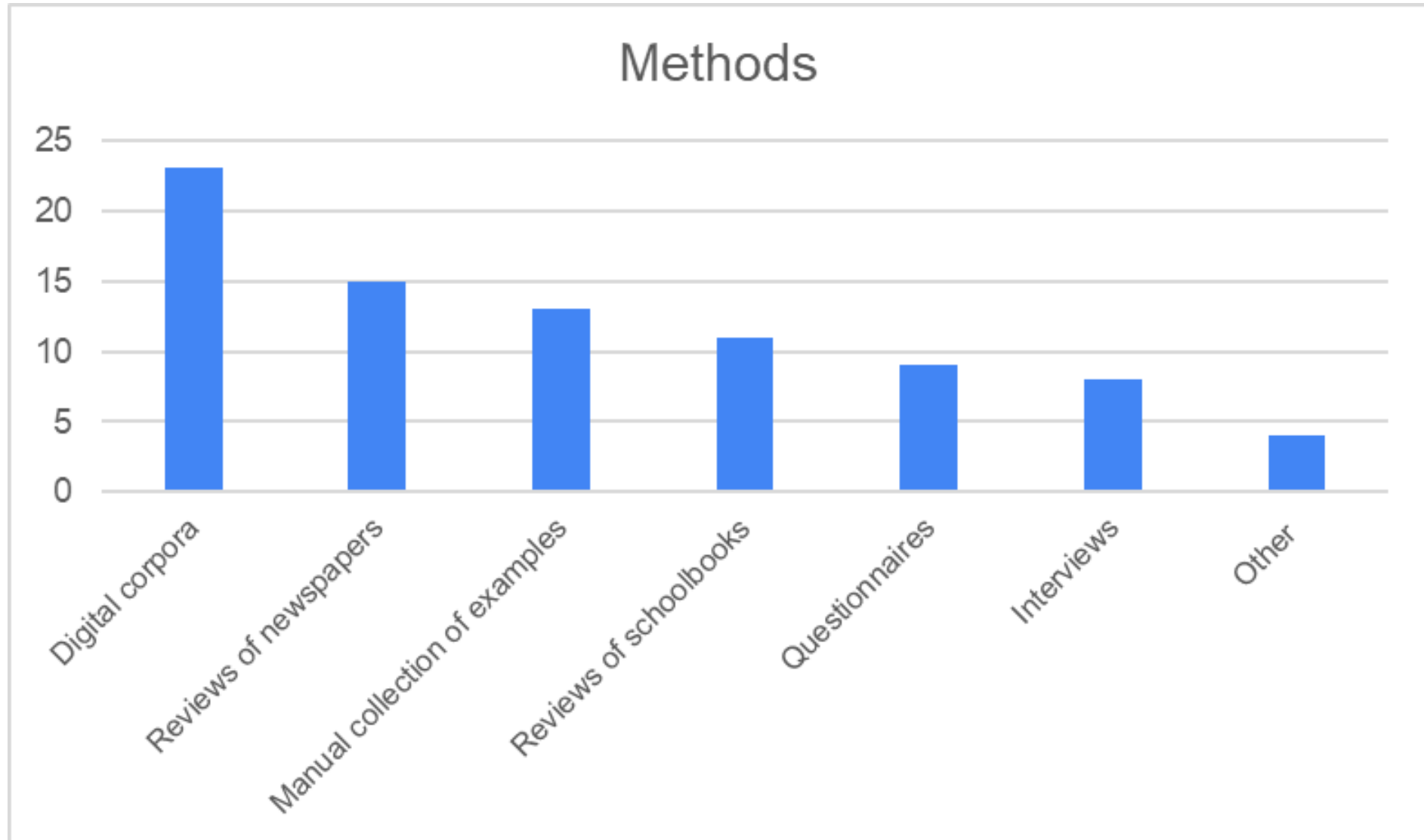
Who is monitoring the development?
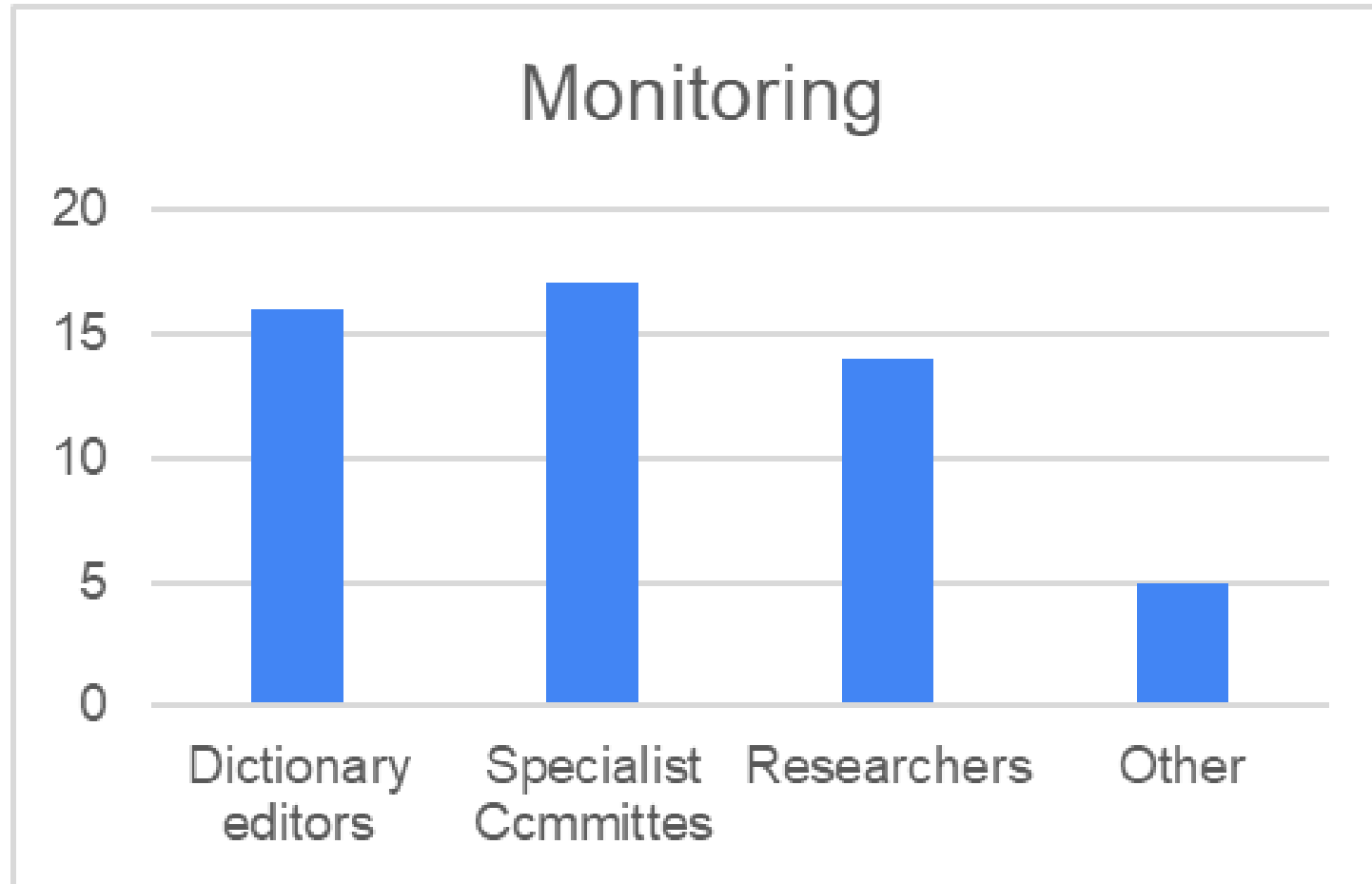
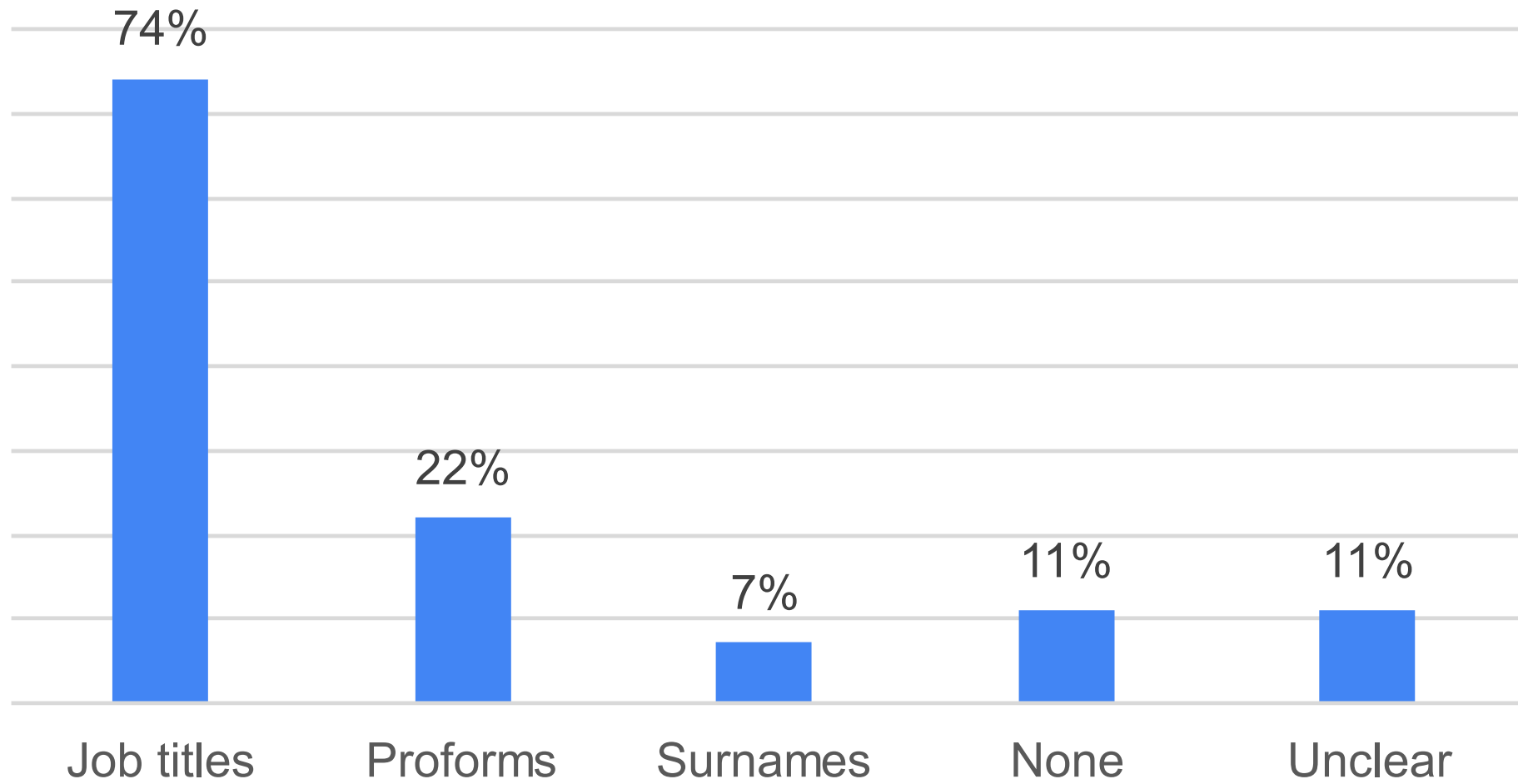# What methods are used?

How does the Gender Debate affect European Orthographies?

What is affected by the gender debate?

Job titles 74%
Proforms 22%
Surnames 7%
None 11%
Unclear 11%

Have gender issues affected orthography?

Yes ; 6; 22%

No; 21; 78%

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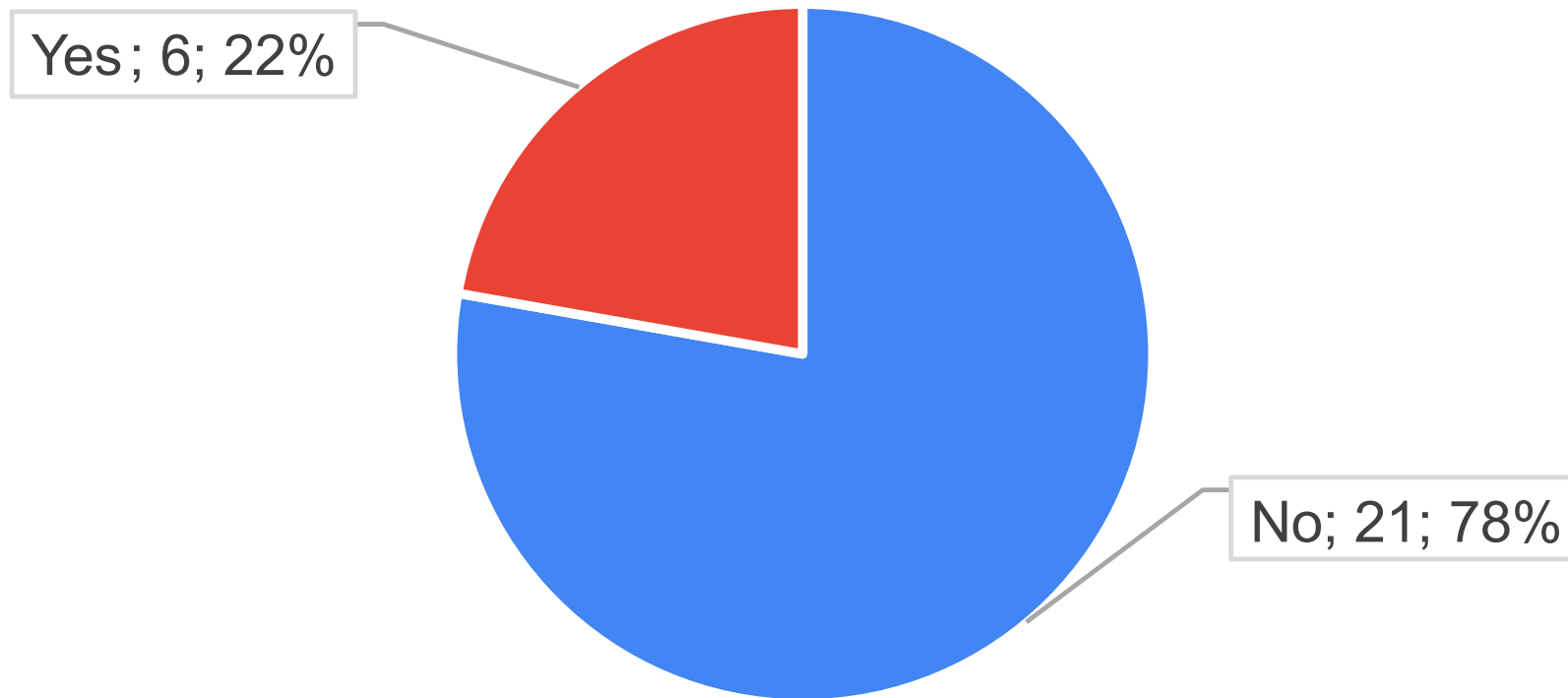
Do you expect changes in the next 10 years?

?; 3; 11%

Few; 1; 4%

No; 7; 26%

Yes.; 16; 59%

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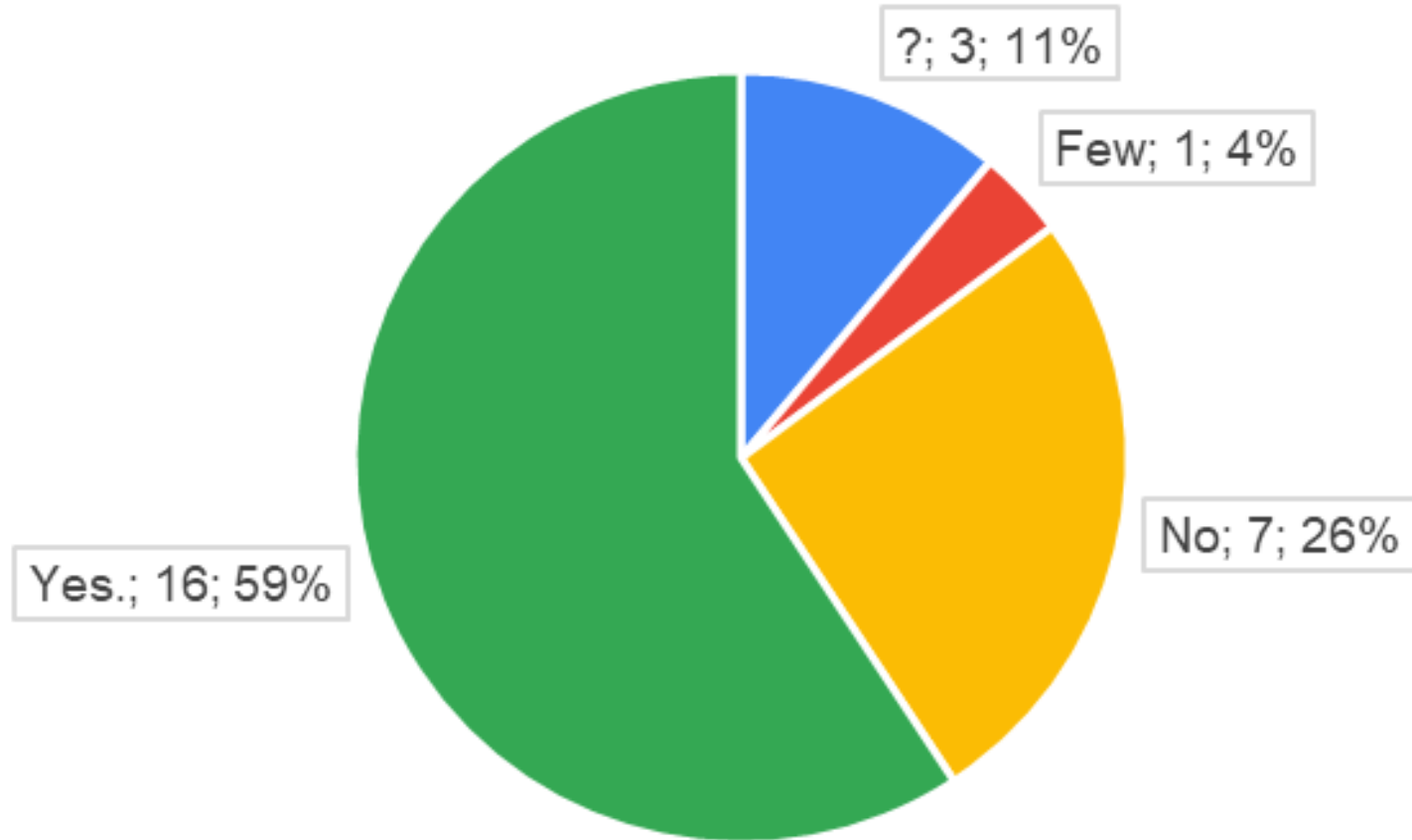
Country	4.1.1. Guidelines on the use of other languages (minority languages, foreign languages, sign language)	4.1.2. Guidelines on the use of gender-neutral language and other gender aspects	4.1.3. Guidelines on cultural diversity and/or sexual preferences	4.1.4. Guidelines on other issues
Austria	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Belgium (Flemish Community)	No	Yes	No	No
Bulgaria	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Denmark	No	No	No	Yes
Estonia	No	No	No	No
Finland (Swedish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Finland (Finnish)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Germany	Yes	Yes	No	No
Grand Duchy of Luxembourg	No	No	No	No
Greece	Yes	Yes	No	No
Hungary	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Iceland	Yes	No	No	No
Ireland (excl. Northern Ireland)	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Italy	Yes	Yes	Unknown	Unknown
Latvia	No	No	No	No
Lithuania	Yes	Unknown	Unknown	Yes
Malta	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown
Netherlands	Yes	Yes	No	No
Norway	Yes	Yes	No	No
Portugal	Yes	No	No	No
Slovak Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Slovenia	No	Yes	No	No
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Switzerland	Yes	Yes	No	No
UK (England)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
UK (Wales)	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
UK (Northern Ireland)	Yes	Yes	No	No
UK (Scotland)	Yes	Yes	No	No

Table 11: Are there other language-specific instructions or guidelines for communication by public authorities in your country?
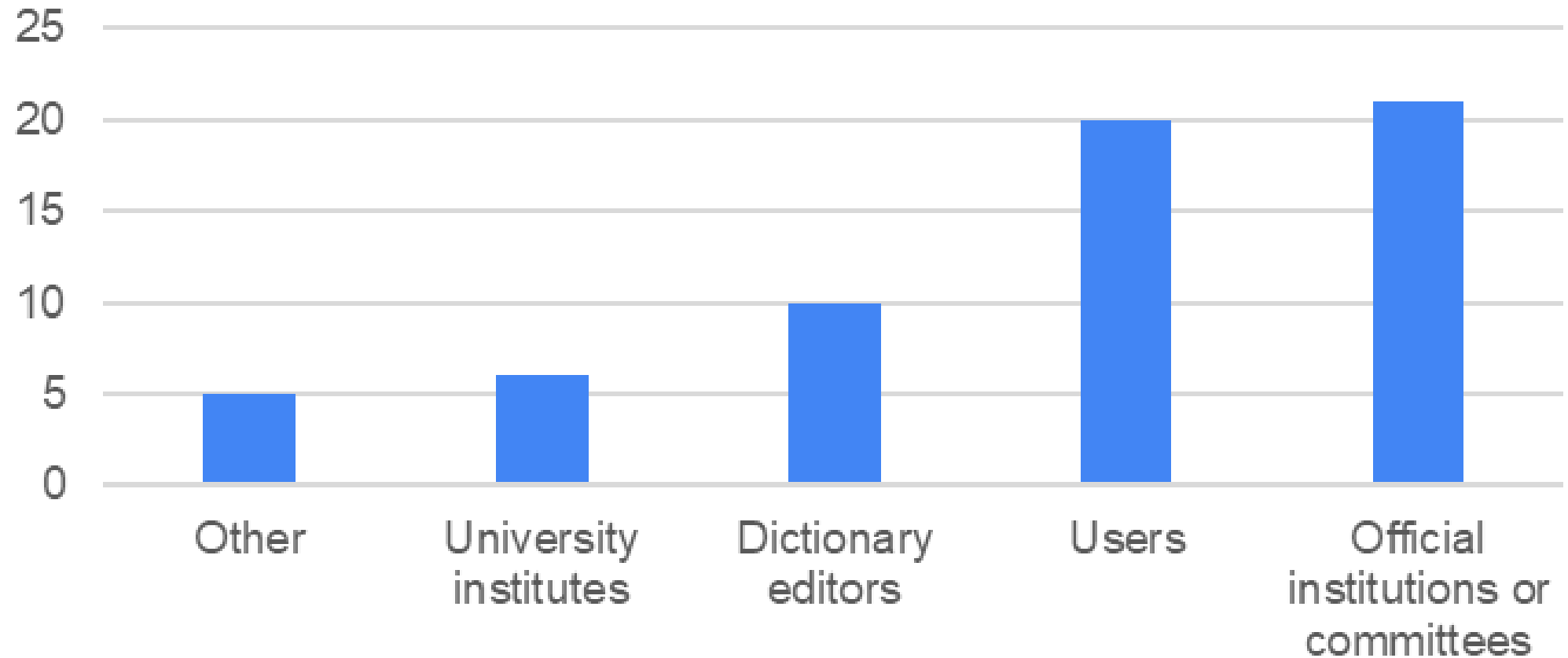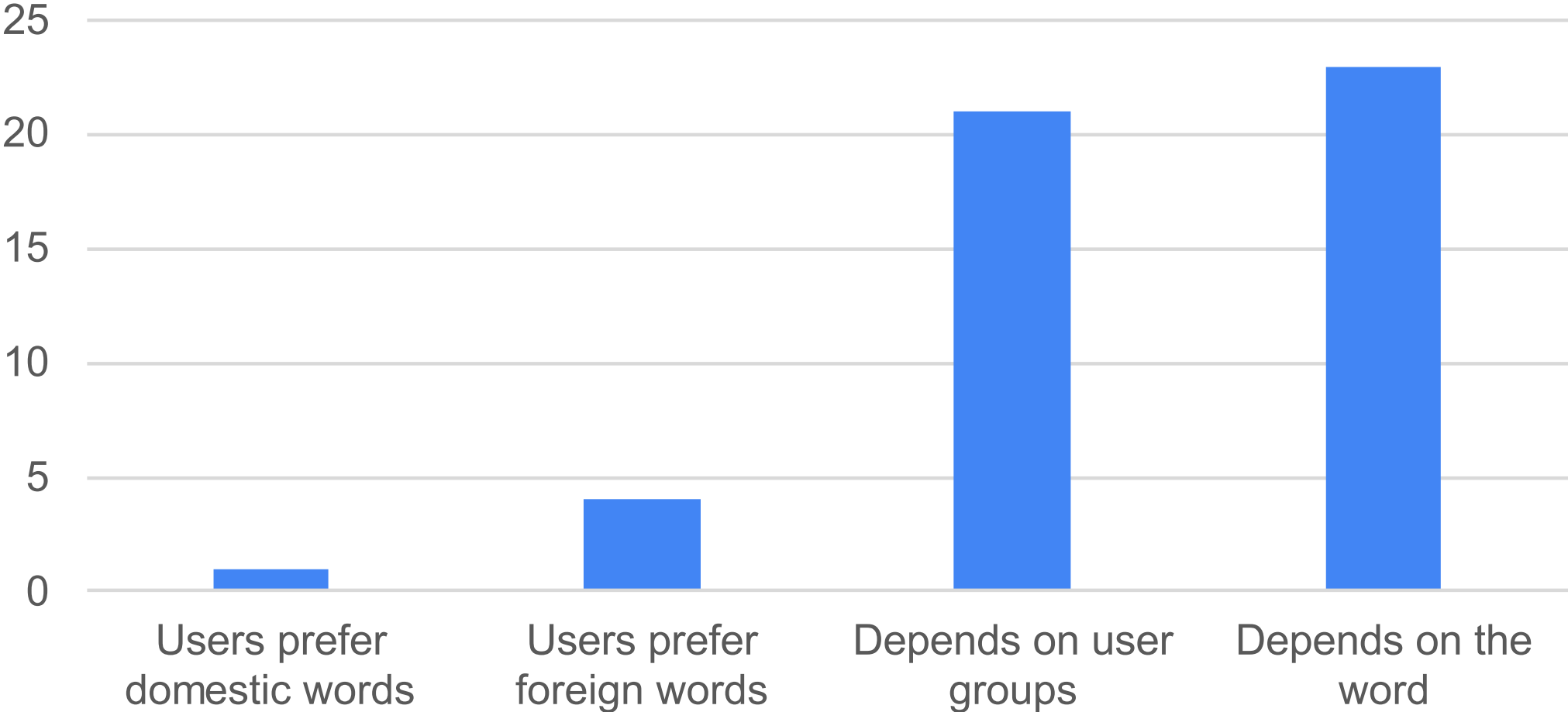
How do countries deal with foreign words?

Are domestic words suggested to replace foreign words?

Often; 8; 30%

Sometimes; 15; 55%

Rarely; 4; 15%
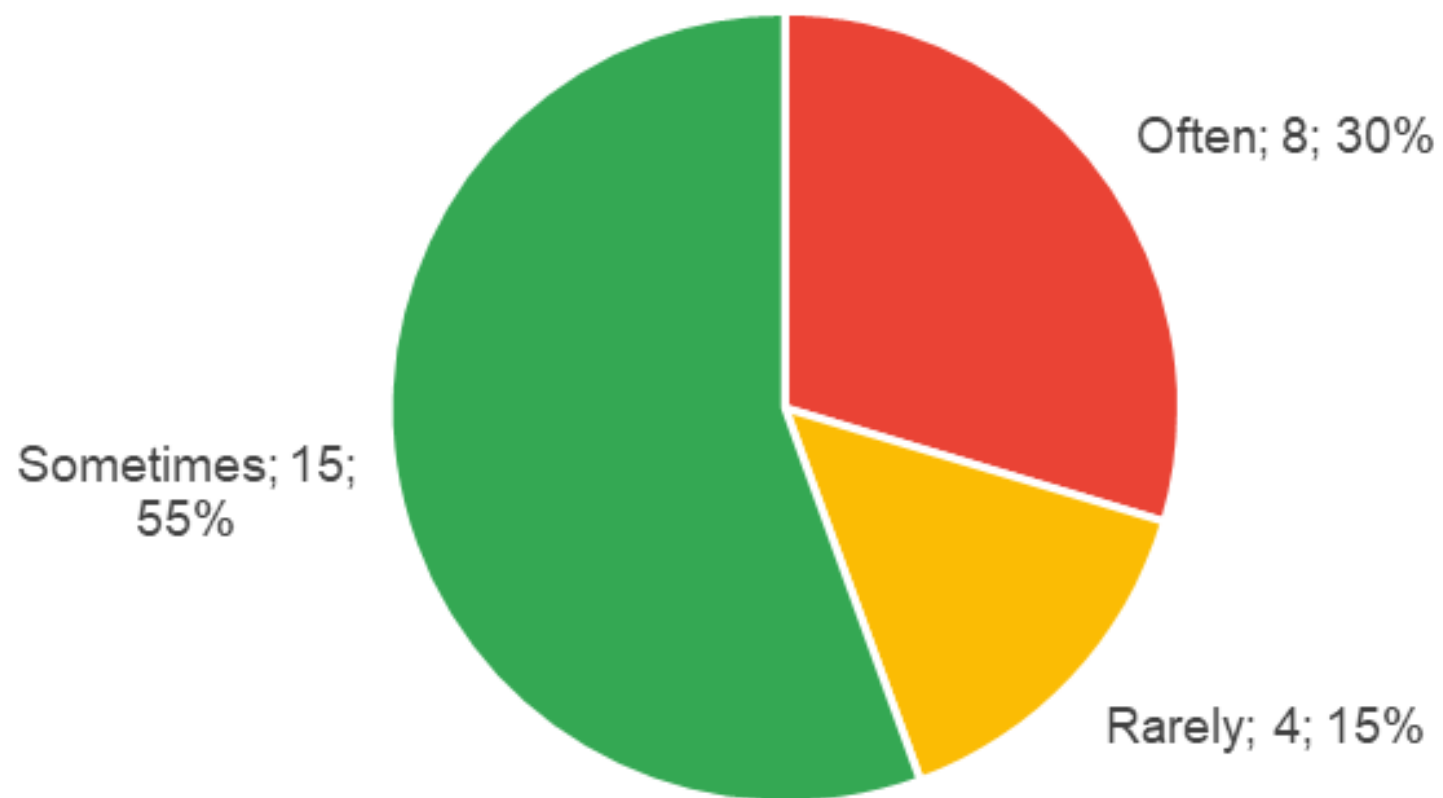
Is there a Correlation between Number of Speakers and the Acceptance of foreign Words?

Language	LZ	IS	MT	ET	LV	SL	LT	GE	SV	NO	FI	BU	DA	CR	SR	SE	CZ	GR	HU	RO	NL	PL	UKR	IT	FR	DE	UK+
Mill. Speakers	0,3	0,4	0,5	1,1	1,3	2	2,3	3,7	5	5,3	5,8	6	6	7	7,3	9,7	11	13	13	24	25	40	41	55	76	130	400
Often		X	X		X	X						X		X				X									
Sometimes				X				X	X	X	X				X	X			X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Rarely	X												X				X										X

Tendencies

Although the languages examined have very different characteristics (language family, gender system, etc.), there are many similarities:

- Regulation of orthography occurs almost everywhere
- Regulation in other areas more than I thought
- Typically, mandatory rules for public institutions and schools
- Few sanctions, if any
- Gender discussion is widespread, but not yet visible everywhere
- Integration of foreign words is generally less common.

" Standardization works best when it credibly answers questions to which there actually is no answer, as if there were one."

Prof. Helge Dyvik, former head of the Norwegian Language Council (Språkrådet) (2003)

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