

**The**

**2026**

**Story**

**Report**

**The More Books, The Better Wellbeing**

# The quiet power of the story

*Today's world can feel overwhelming, with its constant stream of notifications, screens, and the persistent pressure to be productive. At Storytel Group, we have always believed that stories are more than just entertainment – they are a sanctuary.*

This year, we conducted research to better understand the impact that stories have on our daily lives.

Our findings are clear: whether you are on a busy commute, doing household chores, or taking a quiet moment before sleep, stories offer a powerful way to restore your wellbeing. From finding peace during a long journey to using audiobooks as a screen-free way to spark a child's imagination, the pattern is unmistakable: stories help us pause and recharge.

Most importantly, our research shows that the more we read or listen – regardless format – the better we feel. Regular reading and listening are consistently linked to higher levels of personal wellbeing.

We don't just read to escape our busy lives; we read to enrich our lives. This report confirms the meaningful impact of books in all formats as a daily habit.

**Bodil Eriksson Torp**

CEO Storytel Group





## About The 2026 Story Report

The 2026 Story Report was commissioned by Storytel and conducted by Trackit Insight, a Stockholm-based independent research and insights agency specialising in human-driven consumer data. The survey was designed to explore the relationship between consumption of stories, audiobook habits and wellbeing across five European markets. Data were collected through online panel interviews in April 2026, with a total of 5,077 respondents across Sweden, Norway, Finland, Poland and Bulgaria – approximately 1,000 per market. Respondents were aged 18–79 years and samples were representative of each national population. Panel recruitment and data collection were carried out by Norstat in Sweden, Norway, Finland and Poland, and by JTN Research in Bulgaria.

# Our key findings

## 1. There's a clear connection across markets between book consumption and wellbeing

**Book lovers feel the best:** There is a clear “dose-response” relationship between how much people consume stories and their self-reported wellbeing across all five markets (Sweden, Norway, Finland, Poland and Bulgaria). The more someone reads or listens to books, the higher their wellbeing. In Poland and Bulgaria, books seem to fill an even deeper functional role as wellbeing scores start lower in general, but the effect of listening is proportionally larger and more emotionally significant.

The more  
you read –  
regardless of  
format  
– the better  
you feel

**Listeners say audiobooks improve their wellbeing:** Between 84% and 93% of daily or weekly listeners in the five markets agree that audiobooks contribute to improving their wellbeing. Norway's daily and weekly listeners reported the highest impact, with 93% of audiobook listeners stating that audiobooks are a contributing factor to their wellbeing.

**Non-listeners report the lowest wellbeing:** Especially in Finland and Poland, where daily and weekly listeners report wellbeing scores 19 percentage points higher than non-listeners.

**Audiobooks are making book reading more equal:** In markets like Poland and Bulgaria, physical reading remains more female-dominated, but audiobook listening has achieved something print hasn't: equal adoption across genders.

## 2. Audiobooks transform “dead time”, make daily tasks more enjoyable and help people read more



**Multitasking is the #1 reason for starting with audiobooks:** When audiobook listeners are asked why they started listening to books, between 55% and 68% of users answered “do other things at the same time” – the #1 entry point in every market.

**Relaxing and escaping into another world are top reasons for reading and listening:** Across markets, the top reasons for turning to books are to relax and unwind and to escape into another world. The third most popular reason is to get inspired and learn new things.

**The chore cure:** Across markets, 34–54% of audiobook listeners tune in while doing household chores – making it the #1 or #2 most popular use case. And it shows why: when asked to rate the importance of key wellbeing factors and how stories connect to these, the importance of “make everyday activities more enjoyable” is strongly connected to audiobooks.

**The situations where audiobooks are most used vary by country:** Norwegians are the top commute listeners (57%), Swedes are the top walkers (48%), and Bulgarians are most likely to listen to audiobooks just before going to sleep.

**Audiobooks increase overall book consumption:** 53% to 71% of listeners across all markets report finishing more books since they started using audiobooks.



### 3. Books are an antidote to screen time stress

**The screen-free alternative people are looking for:** 52% to 59% of the total population feels they spend too much time on screens, and 60% to 80% of audiobook listeners in the markets agree that audiobooks are a great tool to reduce screen time.

**A better alternative to screen time:** 63% to 79% of audiobook-listening parents believe audiobooks are a vital alternative for their children to reduce screen time.

**Positive effects on kids:** Parents think their children become calmer (57–76%), more focused (55–77%), and even smarter (65–79%) from listening to audiobooks.



### 4. Book people are considered more attractive

**Physical book readers are perceived as more attractive by 47–66% of respondents across the five markets.** Women find book readers and listeners significantly more attractive than men do, regardless of format. Across the five countries, 20% to 40% of women are more attracted to audiobook listeners, with Bulgarian (40%) and Polish (34%) women topping the list.



## 5. We're all obsessed with crime — and it's actually good for us

**Crime rules:** Crime is the #1 preferred genre in four out of five markets, with Bulgaria as the only exception (preferring Fiction, but Crime landing the #2 spot).

**Crime fans report high wellbeing:** Interestingly, crime listeners consistently across all five markets report high wellbeing scores.

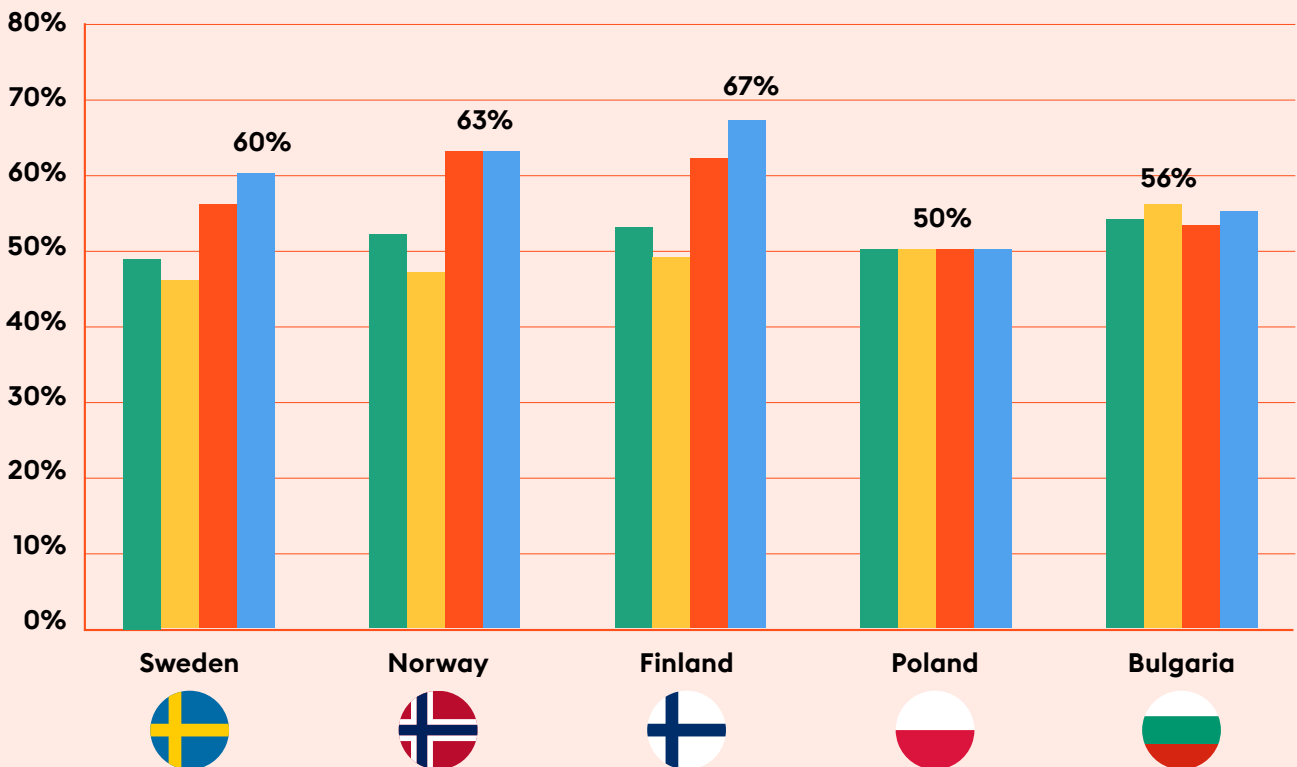
**Unique tastes by market:** Poland is the only market where Fantasy/Sci-Fi is #2, Sweden has a unique interest in Feel-good (#3) and Bulgaria is unique for its high interest in Self-Improvement (#3).

# Audience insights

## Who reads and listens to books?

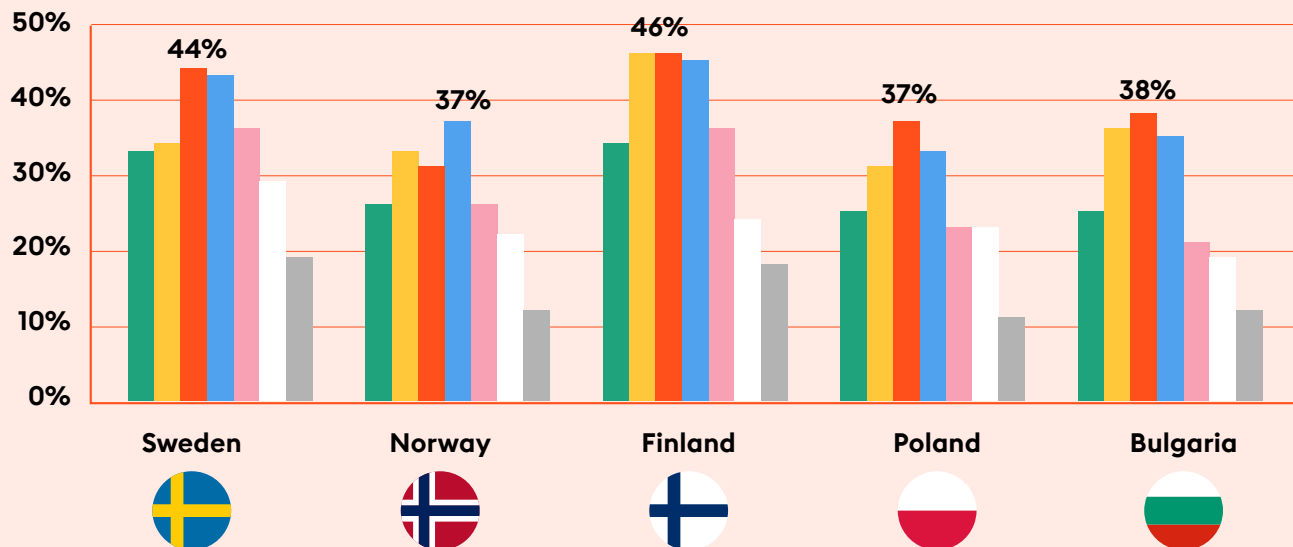
In Scandinavia, women are driving the adoption of the audiobook format. In Poland and Bulgaria, audiobooks have achieved something physical books haven't – equal listening across genders. In these markets, more women read books (+4-7 percentage points) but with audiobooks, men are catching up.

Book reading is fairly spread out across all age groups in the markets, while audiobook listening spikes in the age groups 25–34 and 35–44. Finland stands out with the highest share of 18–24-year-olds enjoying audiobooks.



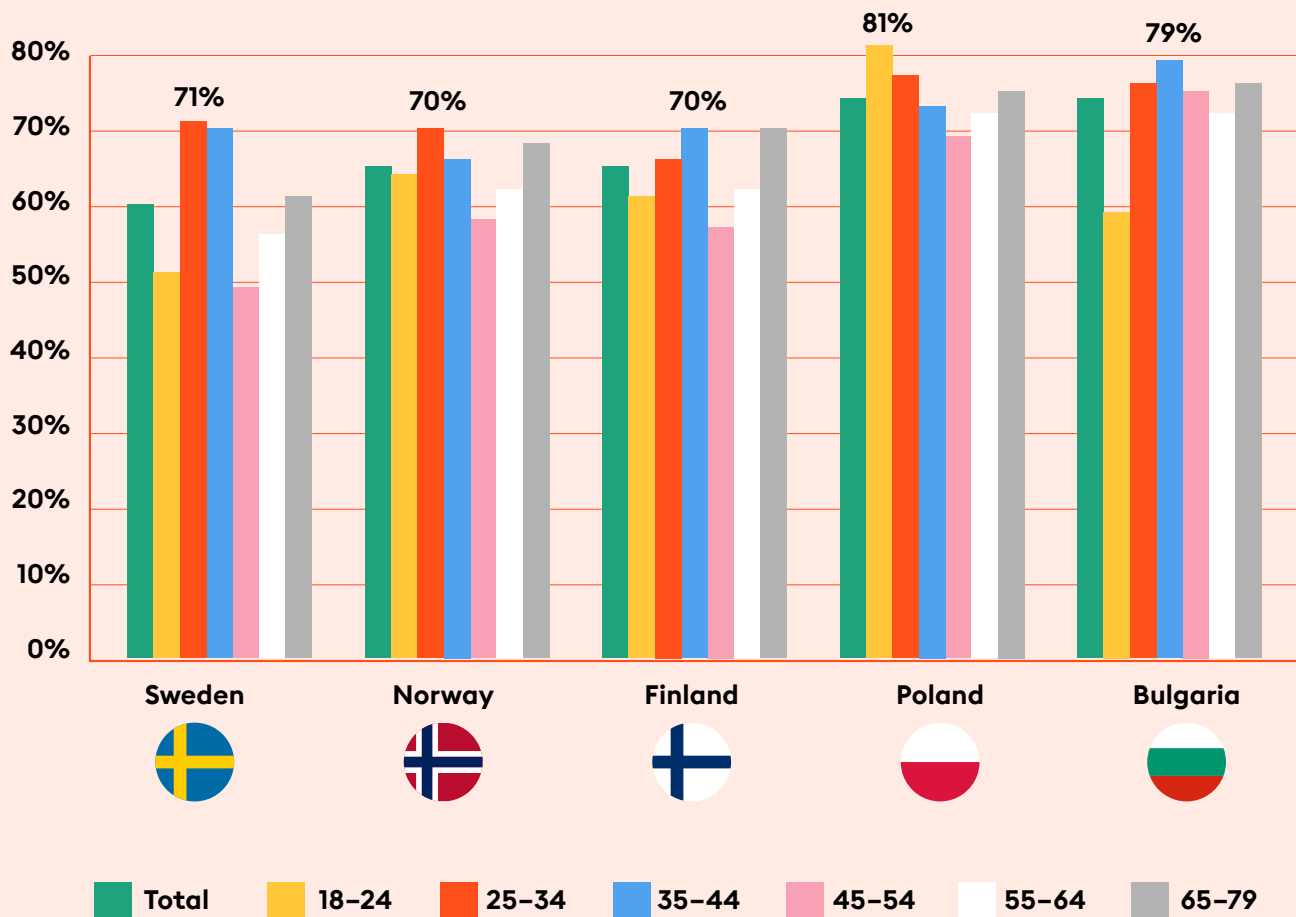
## Share of audiobook listeners per age group

Have listened to a book in the last 6 months



## Share of book readers per age group

Have read a physical book in the last 6 months

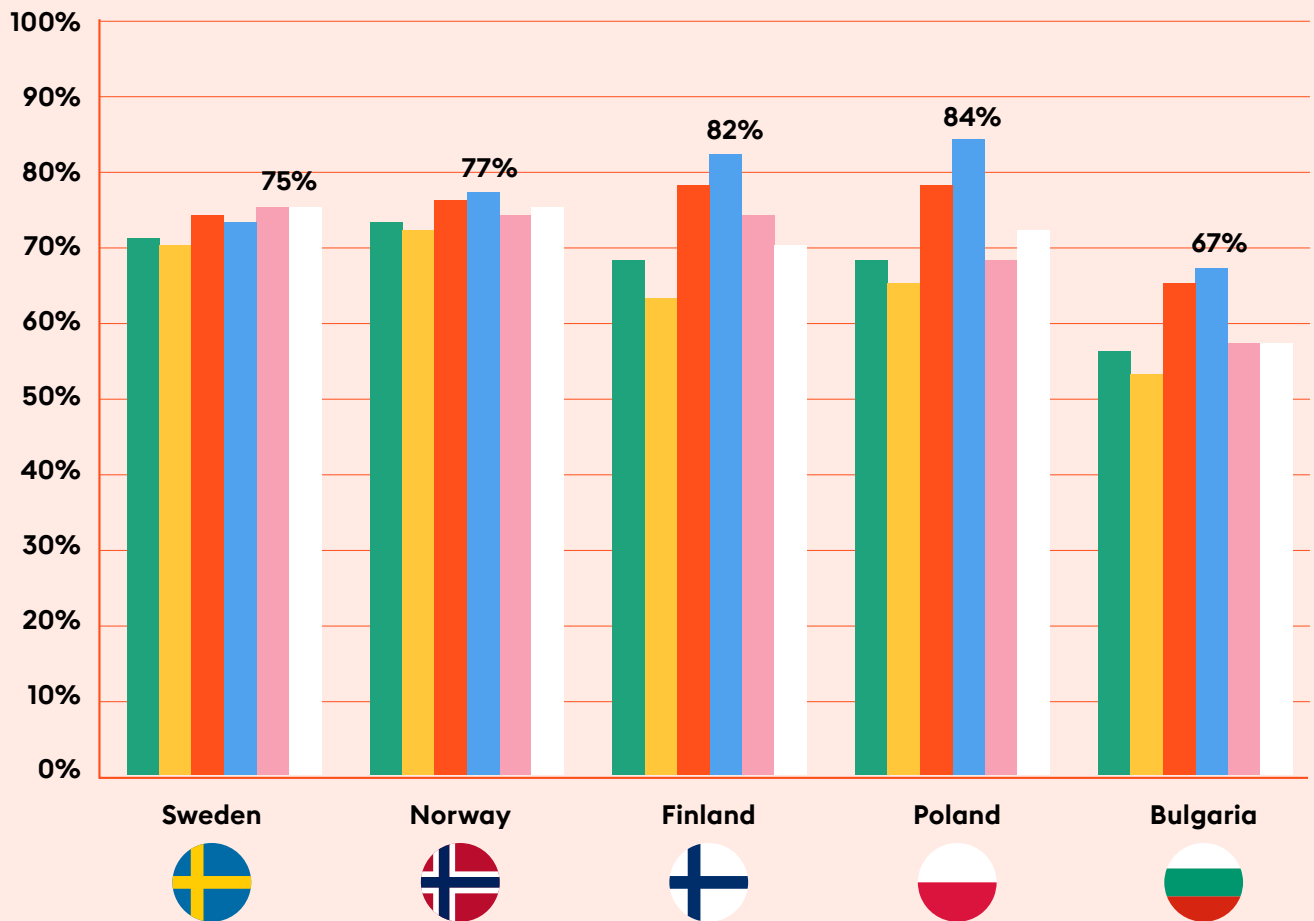




## The people who read and listen to books the most feel the best

**Even in Sweden — the country with the highest baseline wellbeing — the pattern holds:** the people who read and listen report higher general wellbeing than the people who haven't read or listened in the past 6 months. It's consistent across all five countries, all segments. In Finland and Poland, the difference is clearest, as daily to weekly audiobook listeners report 19 percentage points higher general wellbeing than non-listeners.

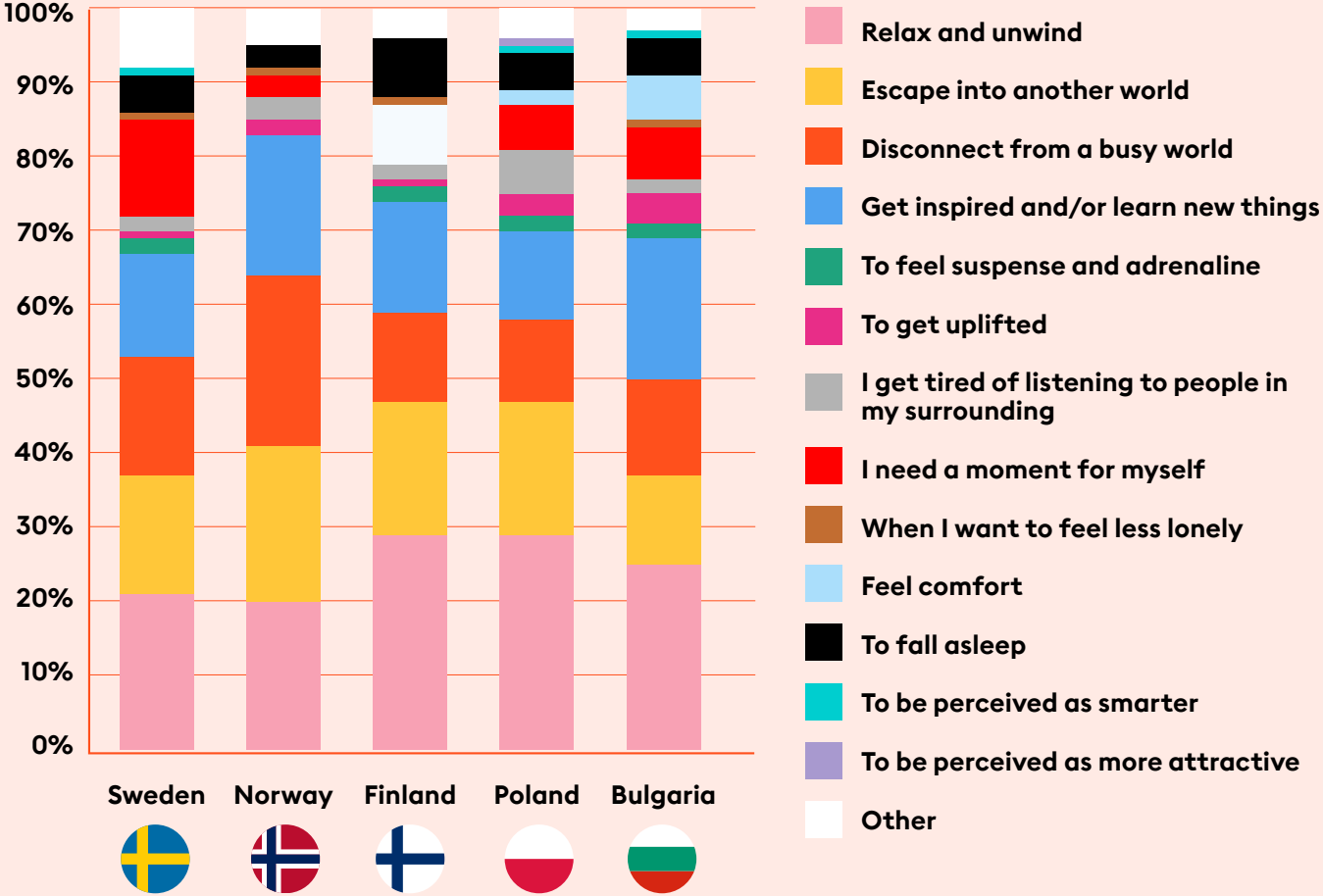
## Self-rated wellbeing (“good” or “very good”)



# The big why: reasons for turning to books



## What is the #1 reason you read or listen to books?



# Audiobook moments

## In what situations do you listen to books? Top 5 per market



Sweden

- While walking, 48%
- While doing household chores, 44%
- While travelling, 40%
- When I'm alone, 36%
- During commuting, 35%



Norway

- While travelling, 57%
- While doing household chores, 54%
- When I'm alone, 46%
- While walking, 44%
- While cooking, 42%



Finland

- While doing household chores, 48%
- While travelling, 43%
- While walking, 42%
- When I'm alone, 38%
- Before falling asleep, 36%



Poland

- While doing household chores, 43%
- While travelling, 33%
- When I'm alone, 32%
- During commuting, 30%
- While walking, 30%



Bulgaria

- When I'm alone, 41%
- While doing household chores, 34%
- Before falling asleep, 33%
- While cooking, 26%
- During commuting, 24%

## Tastes differ by market, but crime is a consistent favorite

Crime, thrillers and fiction are consistently at the top when asked what genres audiobook listeners mostly consume. Poland stands out with a higher interest in fantasy and Sci-Fi, while Swedes tend to prefer feelgood literature more than other markets. Bulgaria is the only one of the five markets where self-development is in the top 3 most popular genres.



### Which genres do you listen to most often? Top 5 per market



Sweden

Crime/Thriller, 47%  
Fiction, 36%  
Feel-good, 28%  
Biography/Memoir, 27%  
True Crime, 24%



Norway

Crime/Thriller, 54%  
Fiction, 39%  
Non-fiction, 28%  
Fantasy/Sci-fi, 25%  
Classics, 18%



Finland

Crime/Thriller, 47%  
Biography/Memoir, 43%  
Fiction, 31%  
True Crime, 26%  
Non-fiction, 24%



Poland

Crime/Thriller, 49%  
Fantasy/Sci-fi, 37%  
Non-fiction, 33%  
Classics, 28%  
Biography/Memoir, 26%



Bulgaria

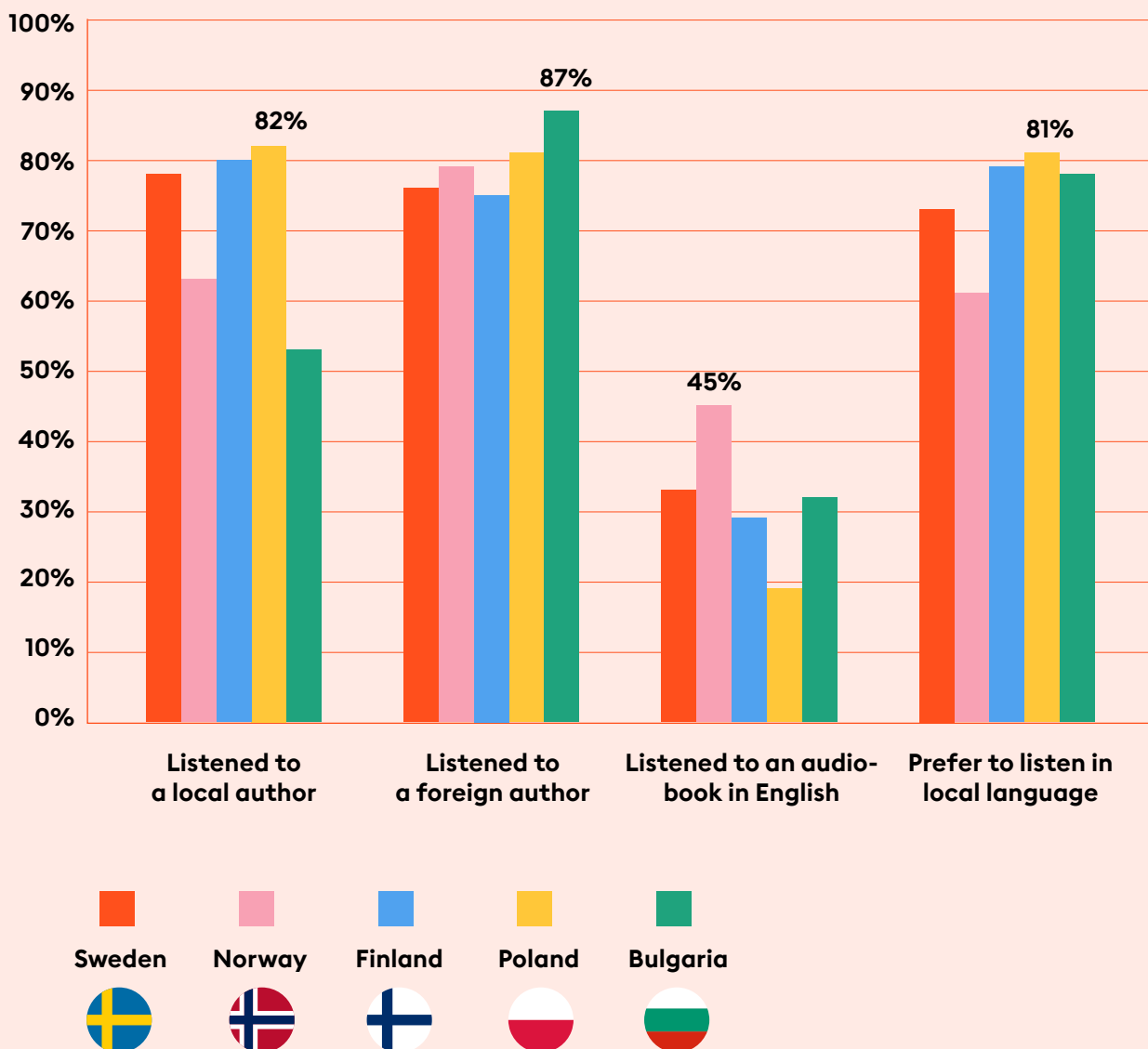
Fiction, 46%  
Crime/Thriller, 37%  
Self-imp./Pers. dev., 30%  
Fantasy/Sci-fi, 29%  
Romance, 25%

## Local voices, global stories

The interest in books from local vs foreign authors is fairly equal in all markets except Norway and Bulgaria where more people state that they have consumed books by foreign authors than local in the last 6 months.

The interest in English audiobooks varies between markets, with Norway having the highest portion of the population who have consumed an English audiobook in the last 6 months with 45%, and Poland the lowest with only 19%.

When asked if they prefer audiobooks in the local language, the difference between markets stands. Norway rates this the least important with 61% preferring audiobooks in the local language, and Poland rating it the most important with 81% of people preferring Polish audiobooks.



# Screen time anxiety is consistent across all five markets

More than half of respondents with children under 18 are concerned by their kids' screen time. Audiobooks have emerged as an antidote, with the strongest conviction in Norway and Finland where 61% of parents agree that audiobooks are a great alternative to screens.

Across all markets, the majority believe their children are calmer, more focused – and even smarter – when listening to audiobooks.

