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SCOTTISH THIRD SECTOR PERSPECTIVES ON VOLUNTEERING DURING COVID-19: SURVEY REPORT



PEOPLE, COMMUNITIES AND PLACES



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Preface and acknowledgements

This research was undertaken in partnership with Volunteer Scotland and the [Mobilising UK Voluntary Action](#) (MVA) research project funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The MVA project aims to build evidence about the volunteering response across the UK during COVID-19. Volunteer Scotland leads the MVA research in Scotland, and the results of this survey will form a core part of the MVA evidence base for Scotland.

This report represents the outputs of a year-long partnership between the Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland. The aims of the survey were: to understand more about the volunteering response in Scotland during the pandemic and what we can learn from this; and to understand the situation, outlook and support needs for volunteering in Scotland in 2022 and beyond.

Core tasks were shared across both organisations. Questionnaire design and survey distribution were shared responsibilities; the majority of the quantitative and qualitative analysis was undertaken by Volunteer Scotland; the Scottish Government was responsible for development of this report. The lead MVA academic team at Northumbria University provided their support to both the Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland throughout the study, including for the mid-project briefing – ‘The Road to Recovery Expo’.

Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland would like to thank all of the organisations that completed this survey. We are very grateful for the detailed responses provided.

Representatives of a number of local authorities, Third Sector Interfaces, and third sector organisations gave invaluable input to the survey questions. In particular we would like to thank Paul Wilson and Sarah Latto who gave detailed input to this project in their role as members of the Advisory Panel for the MVA research.

Scottish Government would like to thank Volunteer Scotland and the Mobilising Voluntary Action team for their support and collaboration in developing this project. Particular thanks are due to the team at Volunteer Scotland who have contributed considerable time to the survey design, analysis and reporting.

The project partners are grateful to all the organisations that make volunteering in Scotland possible. Finally, we would like to thank everyone across Scotland who has volunteered their time to support Scotland’s communities during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Executive summary

1 Introduction

This report presents the results of a survey undertaken by Scottish Government in collaboration with Volunteer Scotland, intended to gather third sector organisational perspectives on volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The survey questions were designed to give insights into the contribution of volunteers and volunteering during the pandemic, to take stock of the current challenges faced by volunteering organisations and to highlight learning and insights emerging around volunteering and its role in this crisis.

1.1 Methodology, coverage, limitations and definitions

The survey included two questionnaires, one aimed at representatives of 'infrastructure organisations' working with the third sector – such as Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), Local Authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships and other umbrella organisations – and one aimed at third sector organisations working directly with volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs).

The survey was live between 30 April and 6 June 2021. We received a total of 346 complete responses to the survey. Of these, 68 were responses to the questionnaire for infrastructure organisations, and 278 were responses to the questionnaire for volunteer-involving organisations.¹

Survey coverage and limitations

The survey results for the volunteer-involving organisations included responses from a wide range of organisation types, sizes and locations. However, the survey sample of volunteer-involving organisations was relatively small, when put in the context of the size of Scotland's third sector as a whole. As such, while we can have reasonable confidence in the overall aggregate findings, we are not able to disaggregate the findings to specific geographies or sectors. In addition, when compared with the whole population of registered charities in Scotland there is some over-representation of larger organisations (by income) and under-representation of smaller ones.

In the infrastructure organisation survey we received responses from 28 TSIs and 11 local authorities. When reading the data from the infrastructure organisation questionnaire, it is important to bear in mind that the majority (54%) were from TSIs.

¹ Fifteen responses to the infrastructure organisation questionnaire were recoded as volunteer-involving organisations, and their responses were considered as part of the overall qualitative analysis. One response from an individual volunteer – not representing an organisation – was also excluded from the infrastructure organisation responses.

Survey definitions

The survey asks questions about both 'formal' and 'informal' volunteering, and about 'mutual aid'. We provided the following definitions to guide respondents:

- **Formal volunteering** refers to volunteering through a charity, formally organised group, club, or public or private sector organisation.
- **Informal volunteering** refers to volunteering as an individual (not through a group) to help other people outside your family, or to support your local community or environment.
- **Mutual aid** refers to volunteering through an informal group, often organised via a social media platform, to support and help others in your local community.

In the context of this report, where possible we have explored these different forms of volunteering separately. However, for many practitioners these distinctions were sometimes unclear or contested, and the attempt to categorise volunteering activities as informal or formal was not always straightforward.

2 Key findings

The outset of the pandemic saw a huge upswell in people wishing to volunteer to help others. Infrastructure organisations and volunteer-involving organisations agreed that this volunteer response was crucial to underpinning the COVID-19 response across Scotland. Overall, 82% of VIOs strongly agreed or agreed that volunteers had been essential to the functioning of their organisation during the pandemic.

2.1 How volunteering changed during the pandemic

In practice, the survey findings indicate that what happened with volunteering during the pandemic varied considerably between volunteering types, between organisations and sectors, and in response to changing COVID-19 restrictions.

Reduced opportunities in pre-pandemic volunteering programmes

Organisations had to stop or reduce many of their programmes involving volunteers at the beginning of the pandemic. This was the combined result of COVID-19 restrictions, of closure of premises, and of many older volunteers and volunteers with underlying health conditions stepping back from in-person volunteering. The pandemic generally caused a reduction in opportunities within pre-existing formal volunteering programmes. Overall, 58% of the VIOs that responded to the survey said that the number of volunteers that they were working with had reduced since March 2020.

The growth of new community-based support groups

As pre-existing volunteering programmes were reducing their operations due to COVID-19, hundreds of new voluntary community support or 'mutual aid' organisations were being formed to respond to the pandemic. These groups were sometimes created by existing organisations, but often by concerned citizens

seeking a way to support the COVID-19 response. The groups typically used social media platforms to support recruitment of volunteers and organisation of their activities. The structures and level of formal constitution of these groups varied hugely, from very informal 'pop-up' groups to groups with a certain level of organisational capacity already in place. The number of such groups across Scotland is unknown, since many were not formally registered or constituted.

Infrastructure organisations noted the speed at which these groups had formed, their ability to respond rapidly to needs, and their reach. However, there were also concerns that these groups did not always have strong procedures in place, including policies and procedures to ensure the safety of the people being helped and the volunteers. Supporting these new organisations to put COVID-safety and safeguarding in place became a major focus for TSIs and other infrastructure organisations.

The importance of informal volunteering

The COVID-19 response was also characterised by widespread informal volunteering, with people supporting others in their neighbourhoods through periods of shielding and self-isolation, or by staying in contact with those at risk of loneliness. Ninety percent of infrastructure organisation respondents agreed that informal volunteering had helped to combat social isolation and loneliness; 87% agreed that informal volunteering had been an essential complement to formal volunteering; and 85% agreed it had strengthened community spirit and identity.

Engaging new volunteers

Infrastructure organisations identified a pattern of large and rapid initial increases in volunteer registrations and activity during the first lockdown, followed by a drop during the second lockdown in early 2021.

Some 73% of infrastructure organisations agreed 'to a large extent' that people started volunteering at the beginning of the pandemic who had not been volunteering before. Many working people and younger people had more time available as a result of unemployment or furlough. The lockdown conditions requiring people to remain in their local areas were also seen to have contributed to an increase in community-based volunteering. Finally, there was a recognition that people were volunteering to support others; to reduce their own experience of isolation and loneliness; and because the situation was so exceptional that many people felt particularly motivated to help.

Infrastructure organisational support for the COVID-19 volunteering response

Infrastructure organisations assumed key roles in supporting the volunteer response in local authority areas, ranging from signing up and assigning volunteers; establishing coordination structures; offering advisory support, guidance and information about all aspects of volunteering to VIOs; and funding advice and distribution.

Faced with a patchwork of different levels of voluntary response across their areas, infrastructure organisations described how they worked with partners to identify

areas where there was less volunteer support emerging at the beginning of the pandemic, and to fill any gaps.

Providing support for new mutual aid/community support organisations became an important role for many infrastructure organisations, particularly TSIs and local authorities. Infrastructure organisations also supported the informal volunteering response, focusing primarily on creating advice and guidance on volunteering safely and good practice.

2.2 Coordination of the volunteering response

Many different institutional partners were involved in the coordination of local volunteering responses during the pandemic. Some respondents indicated that initially the situation was confusing – particularly given the rapid proliferation of new groups and initiatives seeking to help out – and that local coordination took time to get in place.

Infrastructure organisations rated the coordination of the response between themselves and key local partners the highest, with 48% of respondents saying this was excellent, and 31% saying it was good. Infrastructure organisations rated coordination between themselves and national partners less favorably.

Among VIOs, 47% rated coordination of the response as good or excellent, 26% considered that coordination was limited/could be improved, and 6% said there was no coordination of the volunteering response. Where VIOs felt coordination was good, this was usually due to the local TSI, local authority or both putting effective coordination structures in place and engaging well with the third sector.

Overall, many infrastructure organisations and VIOs suggested that coordination within local authority areas improved during the course of the pandemic, and that better coordination structures and working relationships may be an important legacy. Organisations also recognised that their awareness of existing resilience arrangements had increased. Some respondents felt that the nature of resilience arrangements had changed, developing greater focus on social aspects of resilience – including community volunteering – and building closer relationships with the third sector. Respondents felt these were important gains to build on for future responses.

The Scotland Cares campaign

The Scotland Cares campaign was a national volunteering campaign that ran between March-May 2020. The campaign was put in place by the Scottish Government in partnership with NHS Scotland, Volunteer Scotland and the British Red Cross. The intention was to ensure that a large pool of volunteers could be identified to be called upon to support the COVID response at community level as needed. The campaign was a response to the widespread public impetus to volunteer, and the need to be able to channel this 'spontaneous' volunteering effectively without creating additional burden for operational services.²

² [National volunteering plan for coronavirus - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-volunteering-plan-for-coronavirus/pages/12/index.aspx)

Scotland Cares encouraged potential volunteers to sign up with either the British Red Cross or Volunteer Scotland, both organisations with extensive experience of supporting volunteering. Through the campaign there were more than 60,000 sign-ups of potential volunteers with Volunteer Scotland (35,262) and the British Red Cross (25,172).³

Some respondents recognised that the campaign had been successful in raising the profile of volunteering, generating a huge positive response – including from people who were new to volunteering, or with a wide range of skills and experience.

However, the overwhelming opinion among infrastructure organisations was that the volunteering campaign had led to large numbers of people signing up for whom there were not enough volunteering roles available: 48% of infrastructure organisations said that there were significantly more volunteers than it was possible to place. Their view was that the Scotland Cares campaign did not result in high numbers of volunteer placements, primarily because the level of formal volunteering opportunities that existed in local areas at the time was very low. Just 5% of the VIOs responding to the survey indicated that they had received volunteers via the Scotland Cares campaign. Meanwhile, community support and mutual aid groups had already recruited large numbers of participants via social media channels.

2.3 Challenges for volunteering during the pandemic

We asked VIOs to tell us about the challenges they faced in deploying volunteers during the pandemic, and how they have responded to these. The most significant challenges that VIOs faced included:

- Volunteers not being able to volunteer as a result of social distancing measures (87% of VIOs said this was either a ‘major’ challenge or ‘some’ challenge)
- A reduction in the participation of existing volunteers because of the risks of COVID-19 (80% of VIOs).
- 49% of organisations said that adapting their volunteering work to meet COVID-19 requirements was a challenge, along with a lack of information and consistent communication and implementation regarding COVID-19 regulations and what these meant in practice.
- 47% of organisations considered that volunteer wellbeing, fatigue or burn-out was either a ‘major’ or ‘some’ challenge.
- Volunteers having insufficient digital skills or confidence to volunteer remotely was a ‘major’ or ‘some’ challenge to 58% of organisations, with access to suitable equipment also being a challenge.
- 46% of VIOs said that they faced challenges in ensuring that their volunteering deployment was inclusive. Certain groups of volunteers and service users were particularly likely to be excluded as a result of the shift to digital and remote volunteering. Respondents mentioned people with poor

³ [Thanks for pandemic volunteers - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/resources/documents/2020/12/Thanks_for_pandemic_volunteers_-_gov.scot.pdf)

internet access; refugees; people with dementia; some people with disabilities. Organisations working with children and young people struggled to engage these groups effectively through on-line provision.

How volunteer-involving organisations responded to these challenges

Volunteer-involving organisations responded in many different ways to the challenges of deploying volunteers during COVID-19 including:

- Adapting organisational ways of working to implement a COVID-safe volunteering environment: 65% of VIOs said they did this.
- Enabling remote and online forms of volunteering and training: 56% of VIOs moved some or all of their volunteering activity online, while 44% enabled shielding volunteers to undertake volunteering activities from home.
- Pivoting the focus of their work to support the COVID-19 response: 52% of VIOs changed or refocused the types of activities that their volunteers do, when faced with the closure/pausing of their usual programmes.
- 42% said that they responded by providing increased mental health or wellbeing support to their volunteers.

2.4 Current situation and recovery: uncertain times

At the time of this survey (April-June 2021), many VIOs were beginning to restart or increase volunteer work as COVID-19 restrictions were being eased. Many VIOs reported that their numbers of volunteers were recovering: 70% of responding VIOs thought that by the end of 2021 their volunteer numbers would be similar to or higher than they had been pre-pandemic. We do not yet know the effects of the emergence of the Omicron variant on this expected recovery.

Some VIOs were finding that some of their pre-existing volunteers were not able or willing to return. Reasons for this included continued apprehension in relation to volunteer safety/COVID; loss of confidence after having stopped for so long; and for some volunteers, a reassessment of priorities leading to stopping volunteering. Meanwhile, the end of furlough meant that some people who had started volunteering during the pandemic no longer had time for daytime volunteering.

Emerging needs of service users and communities

We asked survey respondents to tell us what they thought were likely to be the most important emerging needs in the communities they work with. VIOs and infrastructure organisations agreed that their primary areas of concern were around mental health and wellbeing (84% of VIOs and 90% of infrastructure organisations respectively) and loneliness and social isolation (73% and 88%). Financial hardship and concerns about unemployment/redundancy were the next most highly cited areas of emerging needs, alongside digital inclusion and access.

Survey respondents were very concerned about the long-term impacts of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing, and on social isolation and loneliness, particularly for older and more vulnerable people who had spent much of the pandemic in relative isolation.

VIO priorities for engaging and supporting volunteers during the pandemic recovery

The main priorities expressed by VIOs for volunteering during the next phase of the pandemic and recovery were:

- making volunteering safe/COVID-19 compliant (83%);
- restarting volunteering and encouraging pre-existing volunteers who have stopped to return (76%); and ensuring volunteer health and wellbeing (71%).
- Engaging new volunteers, and training volunteers to do new types of volunteering such as volunteering remotely were the areas of next highest priority.
- Around 37% of VIOs said that making their volunteering more inclusive was a priority.

What support do VIOs need for recovery in volunteering?

We asked VIOs what they need in order to support recovery in volunteering within their organisation over the next two years.

- **Dedicated funding for volunteer coordination and support:** VIOs said they need sustainable and longer term funding for core costs, and for dedicated posts to support volunteer coordination and management. They highlighted that lack of funding for volunteer coordination roles is limiting their ability to restart volunteering after the pandemic.
- **Support for the costs of dual delivery and hybrid working:** Some VIOs noted that they will need to provide both face-to-face and online/digital services simultaneously over a number of months, and that this dual delivery has additional resource requirements and costs.
- **Digital volunteering and service delivery** was the second most-common area where VIOs said they needed support, recognising that there may be demand for longer-term remote volunteering or service delivery.
- **Support for volunteer training:** Supporting volunteer and staff access to free or low-cost training was a priority for several VIOs.
- **Recognising, accrediting and celebrating the value of volunteering:** VIOs also felt that more should be done to ensure that volunteers themselves are recognised and formally accredited for the skills, experience and training that they develop in their roles as volunteers. Organisations view this as essential for promoting the value of volunteering in order to engage more people.

Infrastructure organisation priorities for supporting recovery in volunteering

We asked infrastructure organisations about priority measures for supporting the recovery of volunteering in their area during the next 12 months.

- 90% of infrastructure organisations said that **short- and long-term funding** support for volunteering was very important or important.

- **Support for volunteer coordination** within local areas was a high priority, with 80% saying this was very important or important.
- **Developing and embedding different models for supporting volunteering** – such as digital and remote forms of volunteering – were considered to be very important or important by 83% of infrastructure organisations.
- Infrastructure organisations highlighted the **need to respond to inequalities and exclusion** in volunteering as significant priorities.
- Infrastructure organisations felt there is an opportunity to harness willingness to volunteer during the pandemic and turn this into **longer-term engagement**: 81% of respondents said it was important or very important to recognise and support **informal volunteering**, and 67% felt that it was important or very important to **support mutual aid groups** where they want to continue.

They also prioritized ongoing **commitment to collaboration and partnership working**, building on what has been achieved in this respect during the pandemic.

2.5 Learning and what has changed

We asked all survey respondents to reflect on learning from the pandemic.

VIO reflections on change and learning as a result of the pandemic

- **The move to remote, online and digital volunteering**: Around one third of the VIOs highlighted this as the most important change and learning that they had experienced during the pandemic. VIOs felt that this had:
 - allowed volunteering to continue in many cases;
 - enabled beneficiaries who were remote or isolating to be reached;
 - enabled organisations to engage a wider pool of volunteers;
 - supported communication and contact.

Whilst organisations acknowledged the challenges that remote and digital working poses in terms of the potential exclusion of some volunteers and some service users, many VIOs recognised the flexibility and benefits that online/remote volunteering had brought, and intended to maintain some degree of online programme, alongside blended approaches and a return to face-to-face volunteering.

- **Recognition of volunteers, and support for volunteer health and wellbeing**: VIOs highlighted an increased focus on recognising and valuing volunteers, and on supporting their health and wellbeing.

If we had to respond to a similar situation in future, there are a number of areas where VIOs think that organisations coordinating policy and responses at national or local level should do things differently:

- **Funding volunteering adequately**: VIOs acknowledged the emergency COVID response funding for third sector organisations (from Scottish Government and other funders) as a lifeline. However, the funding support needs for volunteering remain significant. VIOs stressed that continued

investment in volunteering, and in community/third sector organisations, is an important aspect of ensuring readiness for future emergencies.

- **Maintain a focus on digital inclusion:** VIOs felt that digital inclusion needs further investment and support to ensure that organisations and individuals are sufficiently equipped with digital technology and skills as part of readiness for any future response.
- **Emergency response: provision of clear information and guidance:** in a future emergency, VIOs felt there could be improvements in the provision of timely and clear information, advice and guidance in relation to volunteering.
- **Giving priority to local-level decision-making in emergency response:** VIOs also emphasised the need to recognise the importance of local-level decision making by local organisations within any future emergency response. They felt this could have been achieved through better communication and engagement with local organisations, and by including these groups more effectively in local area decision making.

Infrastructure organisation reflections on change and learning as a result of the pandemic

We asked infrastructure organisations what they had learned, what they would do differently if a similar situation arose in future, and what policy makers and other stakeholders should do differently:

- **Planning and preparedness for future emergency situations:** Several respondents stressed the need for better planning to support the response to any future emergency situation. There was recognition that resilience arrangements have become more inclusive as a result of the pandemic, and that awareness of existing arrangements has increased. Organisations also felt that the internal resilience structures and systems as well as investments in digital working that they have developed during the pandemic make them better prepared for dealing with a future crisis.
- **Better partnership working:** Partnership working – at local levels between key partners, and between national and local levels – was a clear emergent priority. Many organisations said they would seek to approach partnership working differently from the outset of an emergency situation, building more collaboration between key partners.
- **Prioritising local decision making and flexibility of response:** Like the VIOs, infrastructure organisations emphasised the importance of devolving decision making and coordination to local areas, and decentralising funding decisions to enable a more rapid and flexible local response. Some respondents felt that certain aspects of decision making during the pandemic had become more responsive, flexible, or devolved, and wanted to ensure that this could be retained within future emergency responses.
- **Clearer communications and guidance in relation to volunteering:** Some infrastructure organisations stressed the need for clearer communications and guidance in relation to volunteering, and for more proactive engagement with the voluntary sector when developing national or local guidance.

3 Conclusions and next steps

The following key conclusions emerge from the data presented here:

New ways of working represent gains and losses: VIOs made significant changes to their ways of working during the pandemic, adapting to offer remote and on-line opportunities for volunteering and service delivery. Many organisations appreciated the flexibility that remote delivery had brought. Nevertheless, there were some clear losses associated with the shift to online/remote volunteering. These included increased risks of exclusion for some volunteers and service users – because of barriers including lack of access to equipment; disability; health conditions; low confidence. Many VIOs stressed the importance of in-person interaction for the wellbeing of many volunteers and service users. Long-term hybrid and flexible models will require continued investment in digital inclusion as well a recognition that on-line models do not work well for all volunteers, programmes, and service users.

Volunteer wellbeing is a concern: The intensive period that many VIOs have been through since March 2020 has taken its toll on staff and volunteer health and wellbeing. An increased need to focus on supporting volunteer wellbeing and mental health was a clear emerging finding from the study. There were also concerns for those who have had to stop volunteering during the pandemic, and are unable to access the wellbeing benefits that volunteering provides.

Mental health tops emerging needs among service users: VIOs felt the pandemic has had a significant negative impact on mental health, loneliness and social isolation among their service users, and noted the lack of sufficient mental health provision to be able to respond to these emerging needs.

Informal and mutual aid volunteering: future perspectives: An important question now facing volunteering support organisations and policy makers is how to build on the experience of informal and mutual aid volunteering during COVID-19. There are important questions about which organisational structures to invest in for the future, and the extent to which it may be possible to encourage new volunteers to stay involved in volunteering for the longer term.

Coordination and preparedness: building on positive changes: Many respondents noted the increased levels of coordination and partnership working around volunteering within their local areas that had emerged through the pandemic as a positive outcome. They felt that this could be an important legacy to support volunteering and other aspects of local response in the future. Respondents stressed the need to ensure local leadership and coordination of response wherever possible. There was also a sense that volunteering had gained recognition as an essential part of local and national emergency responses. Building volunteering and the third sector more explicitly into existing and future emergency preparedness and resilience arrangements was seen as essential, and organisations felt there were important steps to take now to ensure that volunteer readiness and capacity are better understood, and integrated into wider structures for future emergency situations.

Volunteering needs to be resourced: VIOs and infrastructure organisations repeatedly stressed that providing support and coordination for volunteers, ensuring their wellbeing, and operating hybrid on-line/in person models for volunteering and service delivery are resource-intensive activities. There was clear feedback that more dedicated funding is needed to support volunteering within volunteer-involving organisations and volunteering coordination and support capacity at the level of TSIs or local authorities. This was felt to be essential in order to ensure resilient volunteering capacities for the future.

3.1 Next steps

This report is testimony to the extraordinary and heroic work of organisations and individuals during an unprecedented time. It provides important evidence of the adaptability and effectiveness of volunteering in Scotland. The Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland are reviewing all the findings from the survey. Findings will be shared and discussed within the Volunteering Action Plan working groups, and used to help inform and shape the development of the Scottish Government's volunteering policy, and the new Volunteering Action Plan for Scotland⁴ in particular. The findings will also help inform the wider policy response to the pandemic and lessons learned from it.

⁴ Volunteering organisations and the Scottish Government are working together to co-produce a new Volunteering Action Plan which implements the aims set out in [Volunteering for All](#), Scottish Government's volunteering strategy.

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

Volunteers across Scotland have played an essential role in supporting communities and individuals most affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This volunteer response to the pandemic has included formal volunteers undertaking tasks on behalf of established volunteering organisations, as well as informal volunteering where individuals sought to support and help others in their neighbourhoods and networks.

It is clear that the volunteer response to COVID-19 succeeded in engaging new volunteers – people who were not already engaged in volunteering activities – as well as many existing volunteers. Throughout Scotland, new volunteer-based community support – or ‘mutual aid’ – groups were rapidly created to respond to the pandemic. These groups played a key role in mobilising and targeting local efforts and the willingness of people across Scotland to help others in their communities. A Scottish Government campaign, ‘Scotland Cares’, was set up to help support and manage the public impetus to volunteer in response to COVID-19. This was run in collaboration with the British Red Cross, Volunteer Scotland and NHS Scotland. Through the campaign there were more than 60,000 sign-ups of potential volunteers with Volunteer Scotland (35,262) and the British Red Cross (25,172), indicating enormous public willingness to help.⁵

At the same time, COVID-19 has presented significant challenges for organisations working with volunteers. Existing volunteers in older age categories or with underlying health conditions were particularly affected by the advice that they should shield, in many cases preventing them from undertaking their pre-existing volunteering roles. The general advice to stay at home that was in place during lockdown also had an impact on volunteering rates. Volunteers with support needs or who need specific support in order to volunteer were also negatively affected. The result of all of these changes was that organisations reliant on volunteers lost a significant part of their volunteering capacity. Many organisations adapted their work to be able to engage their volunteers and service users remotely, but this was not always possible. This shift to digital and remote forms of volunteering also posed the risk of excluding some volunteers and service users who were less able to access digital technologies.

As Scotland grapples with the emergence of the Omicron variant – just as many organisations were cautiously emerging from the COVID-19 restrictions – there are many questions about the long-term impacts that the pandemic will have on

⁵ See [National volunteering plan for coronavirus - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/news/national-volunteering-plan-for-coronavirus/), [Number of volunteer sign-ups passes 76,000 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/news/number-of-volunteer-sign-ups-passes-76-000/) and [Thanks for pandemic volunteers - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/news/thanks-for-pandemic-volunteers/) for more information about Scotland Cares. Altogether there were more than 83,000 sign-ups to the campaign. 60,000 of these sign-ups were with the British Red Cross (25,172) and Volunteer Scotland (35,262) from people seeking to volunteer to support Scotland’s public services and local communities. The remainder were NHS returning health and social care workers, including medical, nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students, who were asked through the campaign to consider returning to the workforce to support the NHS response.

volunteering. Will volunteers who paused their volunteering during the lockdown choose to return to their previous volunteer roles? Will new volunteers who signed up to help during the pandemic continue their volunteering engagement beyond COVID-19? Will digital adaptations and new ways of volunteering persist? What support is needed to help organisations adapt to offer safe and inclusive volunteering opportunities in the post-pandemic context?

This report presents the results of a survey undertaken by Scottish Government in collaboration with Volunteer Scotland, intended to gather third sector organisational perspectives on volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The survey was targeted to gather views from volunteer-involving organisations (organisations that work with volunteers directly) and from infrastructure organisations (such as Third Sector Interfaces and local authorities) that have supported volunteering within communities and local areas. Representatives of Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), local authorities, and volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) gave invaluable input into the development of the survey questionnaire.

The survey questions were designed to give insights into the contribution of volunteers and volunteering during the pandemic, and to highlight the learning emerging around volunteering and its role in this crisis. The survey also enables us to take stock of the current challenges faced by volunteering organisations as we move into the next stages of the pandemic and beyond, and to consider what this means for volunteering policy, and support for volunteering in practice.

1.2 Methodology

The survey was created by Scottish Government researchers using Questback, an online survey tool. It included two questionnaires, one aimed at representatives of 'infrastructure organisations' working with the third sector – such as Third Sector Interfaces, local authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships and other umbrella organisations – and one aimed at volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs). Reflecting the different roles of these two sets of organisations, the questionnaire for infrastructure organisations focused more on the overall coordination of the volunteering response within local areas, while the questionnaire for VIOs asked about the experiences of these organisations in implementing and maintaining volunteering programmes through the pandemic and beyond.

The survey was live between 30 April and 6 June 2021. It was promoted as widely as possible to Third Sector Interfaces and local authorities, with a request for these organisations to promote the survey within their third sector networks. The survey was also promoted through Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland networks, as well as by other third sector intermediary organisations such as OSCR and SCVO.

We received a total of 346 complete responses to the survey. Of these, 68 were responses to the questionnaire for infrastructure organisations, and 278 were responses to the questionnaire for volunteer-involving organisations. Fifteen responses to the infrastructure organisation questionnaire were submitted by third

sector organisations which did not fall into the category of TSIs, local authorities, health and social care partnerships or other umbrella organisations. These were not included in the quantitative analysis for the infrastructure organisations, but their responses were considered as part of the overall qualitative analysis. One response from an individual volunteer – not representing an organisation – was also excluded from the infrastructure organisation responses.

The survey results for the VIOs included responses from a wide range of organisation types, sizes and locations, meaning that all estimates have a 95% confidence interval of around +/- 5%. In practice, the exact confidence intervals will vary for each statistic. The sample size was not large enough to support breakdowns of the analysis (for example by organisational type, size and geography), so most data is presented for the respondent population as a whole. For a small number of questions we have considered the role of organisational size and sector, but these findings should be considered as indicative only given the relatively small sample sizes involved. The questions for infrastructure organisations received responses from a third of all local authorities and 28 of Scotland's 32 TSIs, as well as a number of other infrastructure organisations.

Analysis of the quantitative survey questions was undertaken in Excel. Qualitative responses were coded to identify key themes and perspectives for analysis. The range of comments and perspectives provide a rich source of data and insight, and these have been illustrated using quotes as far as possible throughout this report.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and all respondents were provided with a privacy notice before beginning the survey. At all stages of the research, all of the necessary steps were taken to ensure that the survey complied with GDPR guidance and to ensure the anonymity of respondents. All quotes used in this report have been anonymised, with any potentially identifiable data being redacted.

1.3 Definitions

The survey asks questions about both 'formal' and 'informal' volunteering, and about 'mutual aid'. We provided the following definitions to guide respondents.

Formal volunteering refers to volunteering through a charity, formally organised group, club, or public or private sector organisation.

Informal volunteering refers to volunteering as an individual (not through a group) to help other people outside your family, or to support your local community or environment.

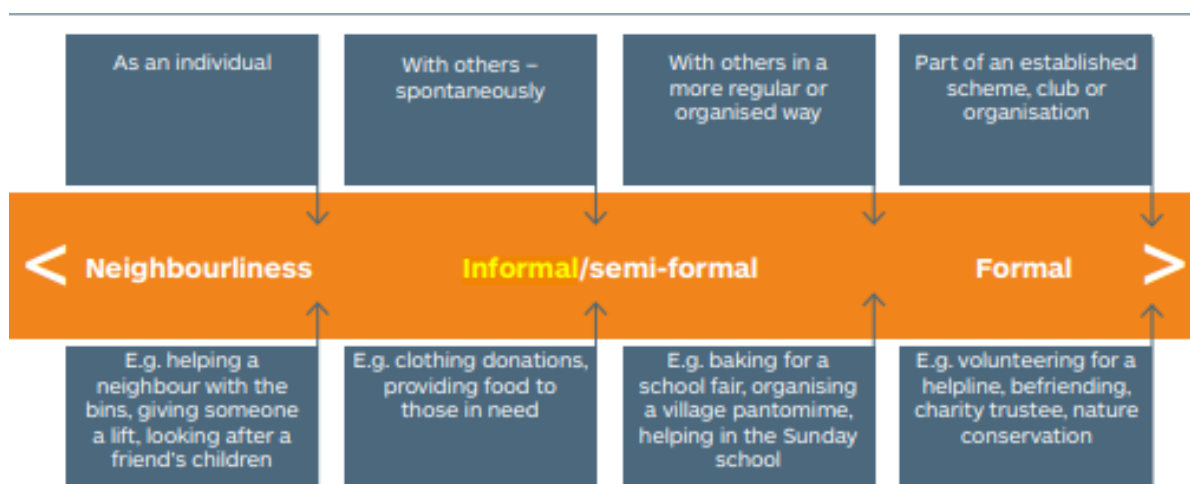
Mutual aid refers to volunteering through an informal group, often organised via a social media platform, to support and help others in your local community.

This definition of 'mutual aid' highlights the limitations in the notion that volunteering can be clearly identified as being either 'formal' or 'informal'. Many mutual aid 'groups' were loosely organised, spontaneously formed groups. Many had no formal status – at least initially – and were highly informal and essentially non-hierarchical

in their way of operating. Others had much more formal operational models or developed these during the course of the pandemic.

In practice, volunteering takes place along a continuum from very informal ‘neighbourliness’ type help – which many people may not even consider to be volunteering – to formal placements within organisations (Figure 1.1). Given the relative informality of many of the ‘mutual aid’ groups – particularly at the beginning of the pandemic – these probably fall towards the middle of the spectrum in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1 The volunteering continuum



Source: Volunteering for All: Our National Framework⁶

In the context of this report, where possible we have therefore explored ‘mutual aid’ volunteering separately from formal and informal volunteering during the pandemic. However, it is clear that for many practitioners these distinctions may be unclear or contested, and that the attempt to categorise volunteering activities as informal or formal has been shown not to be straightforward in this case. Responses to the survey suggest that responding organisations often considered volunteers with mutual aid groups to be ‘informal’ volunteers.

1.4 Limitations of the survey

The survey sample of volunteer-involving organisations is relatively small, when put in the context of the size of Scotland’s third sector as a whole.⁷ As such, while we can have reasonable confidence in the overall aggregate findings, we are not able to reliably disaggregate the findings to specific geographies or sectors, as the sample sizes at the local authority or sectoral levels are very small. Accordingly, we present the data at an aggregate level, and include just a small number of disaggregated insights where we feel these are appropriate.

⁶ The Scottish Government national outcomes framework for volunteering can be downloaded here: [Volunteering for All: national framework](#).

⁷ SCVO estimates that there are some 40,000 voluntary organisations in Scotland, of which 19,884 are charities registered with OSCR: [State of the Sector 2020: Scottish voluntary sector statistics – SCVO](#)

The sample of infrastructure organisations includes very good coverage of TSIs, one of the key organisational groups that we wanted to reach. However, representation of local authorities and other infrastructure organisations such as Health and Social Care Partnerships is more limited. As such, views expressed in the infrastructure organisation part of the survey may reflect TSI views more strongly than the views of these other types of organisation. In addition, the survey received responses from just two infrastructure organisations with national scope.

The coverage of ‘volunteering’ in this survey is mainly reflective of volunteering in third sector organisations, and community-based mutual aid and informal volunteering. It does not include coverage of the NHS campaign which was aimed at encouraging former medical professionals to return to work within the NHS, and which formed part of the Scotland Cares campaign.

1.5 About this report

This report has been written by Scottish Government analysts, with extensive input from Volunteer Scotland. It endeavours to present the survey responses as fully and accurately as possible, and as such it represents the views of the survey respondents, not the official policy positions of Volunteer Scotland or Scottish Government.

Throughout the report, we present results from the perspectives of volunteer-involving organisations and infrastructure organisations separately. The results from the perspectives of these two groups of organisations sometimes differ, for a variety of reasons.

The infrastructure organisations responding to this survey generally provide support to many different organisations and communities across a local area. Their responses reflect an area-based perspective. They were asked to consider what happened across their area in relation to volunteering, and to include reflections on the different forms of volunteering taking place across their area – including formal, informal, and the emerging community-led mutual aid response.

Volunteer-involving organisations responding to the survey were asked to respond from the perspective of their own organisational experiences of engaging and supporting volunteers during the pandemic. As such they represent a formal volunteering perspective, with a small number of respondents representing mutual aid groups. Their responses naturally reflect the purpose and activities of their own organisations, and the needs of their specific service users.

Throughout the report, where the views of infrastructure organisations and VIOs differ, we try to give insights as to why this may be.

We have presented quotations from respondents verbatim, except where we have redacted text to ensure anonymity – for example removing geographical information, names of organisations, or other potentially identifying text.

There are some instances where the data in the text may not match exactly with data summed from the charts. This is due to rounding.

2 Profile of the survey respondents

In this section, we present data about the profile of the two main groups of respondents to the survey: volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) and infrastructure organisations.

We asked survey respondents to tell us about their organisational location, the geographical scope of their operations, the sector they operate within, and their organisational income.

2.1 Geographical spread of survey respondents

2.1.1 Volunteer-involving organisations

Table 2.1 shows that the majority of organisations responding to the survey for volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) defined themselves as ‘operating within a local community or communities’ (38%) or a single local authority (21%). Around 15% were operating nationally across Scotland, 15% across more than one local authority in Scotland, and 7% UK-wide. SCVO estimates that 78% of Scottish voluntary organisations work ‘locally’,⁸ suggesting that this survey sample over-represents the voices of regional and national organisations to some degree.

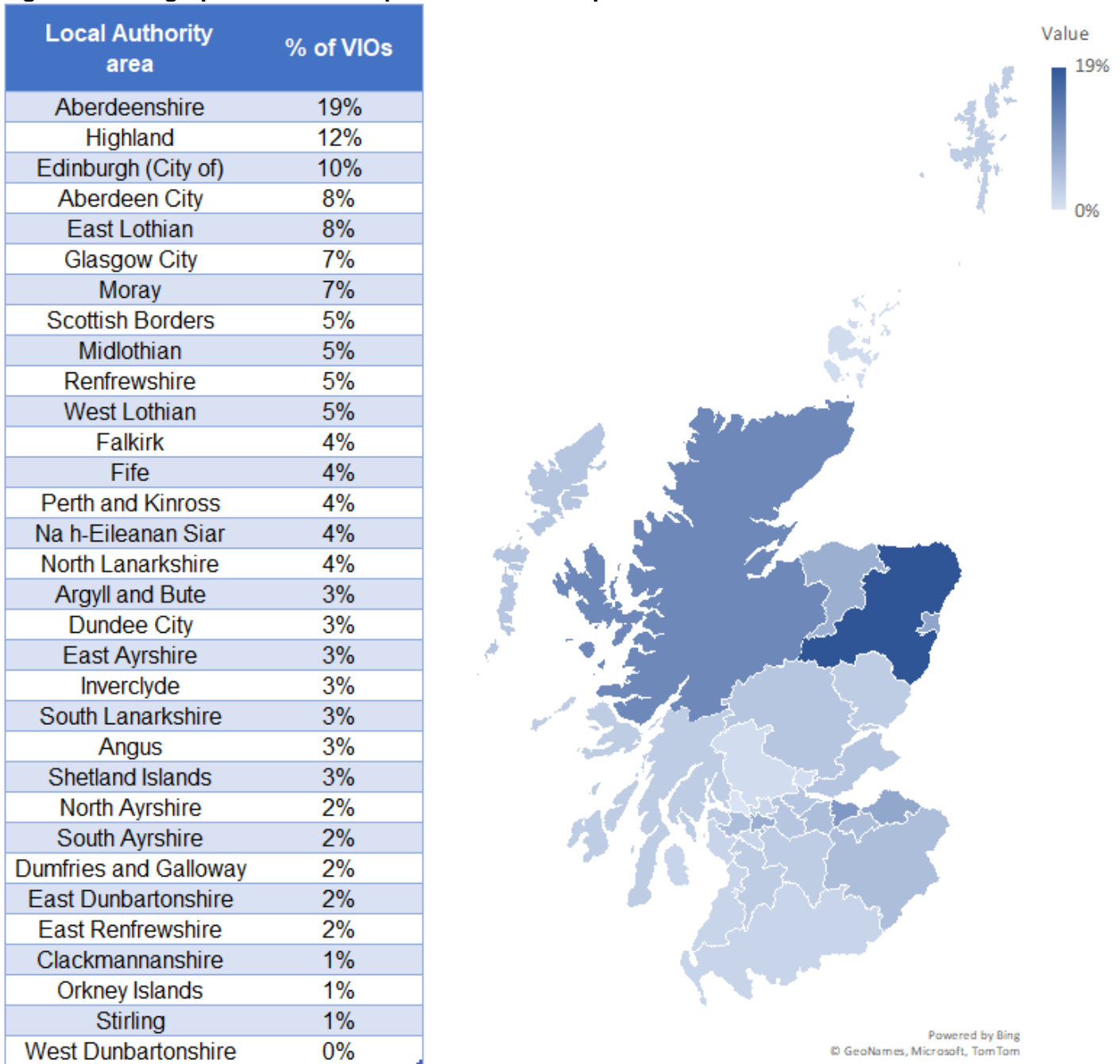
Table 2.1 Geographical reach of volunteer-involving organisation respondents

What is the geographical reach of your organisation?	Number of VIOs	% of VIOs
National, across Scotland	41	15%
UK-wide	20	7%
A local community or small number of local communities	106	38%
Regional (more than one local authority) within Scotland	41	15%
A single local authority	58	21%
International	12	4%
Total	278	

Figure 2.1 shows the geographical areas of operation of the responding VIOs. There was a reasonable spread of responses from organisations operating across Scotland’s local authorities. As would be expected, higher numbers of VIOs said that they worked in more urban areas – where there is higher density of third sector organisations – such as Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen City (7%, 10% and 8% of responding VIOs respectively). VIOs in Aberdeenshire (19%) and Highland (12%) were particularly strongly represented in the sample, perhaps because organisations in those areas were more active in promoting the survey. Overall, there was reasonable coverage of urban and rural areas across Scotland.

⁸ SCVO does not provide a definition for ‘local’ in its [‘State of the Sector’ report](#), but contrasts ‘local’ with ‘national’ and ‘international’.

Figure 2.1 Geographical areas of operation of VIO respondents

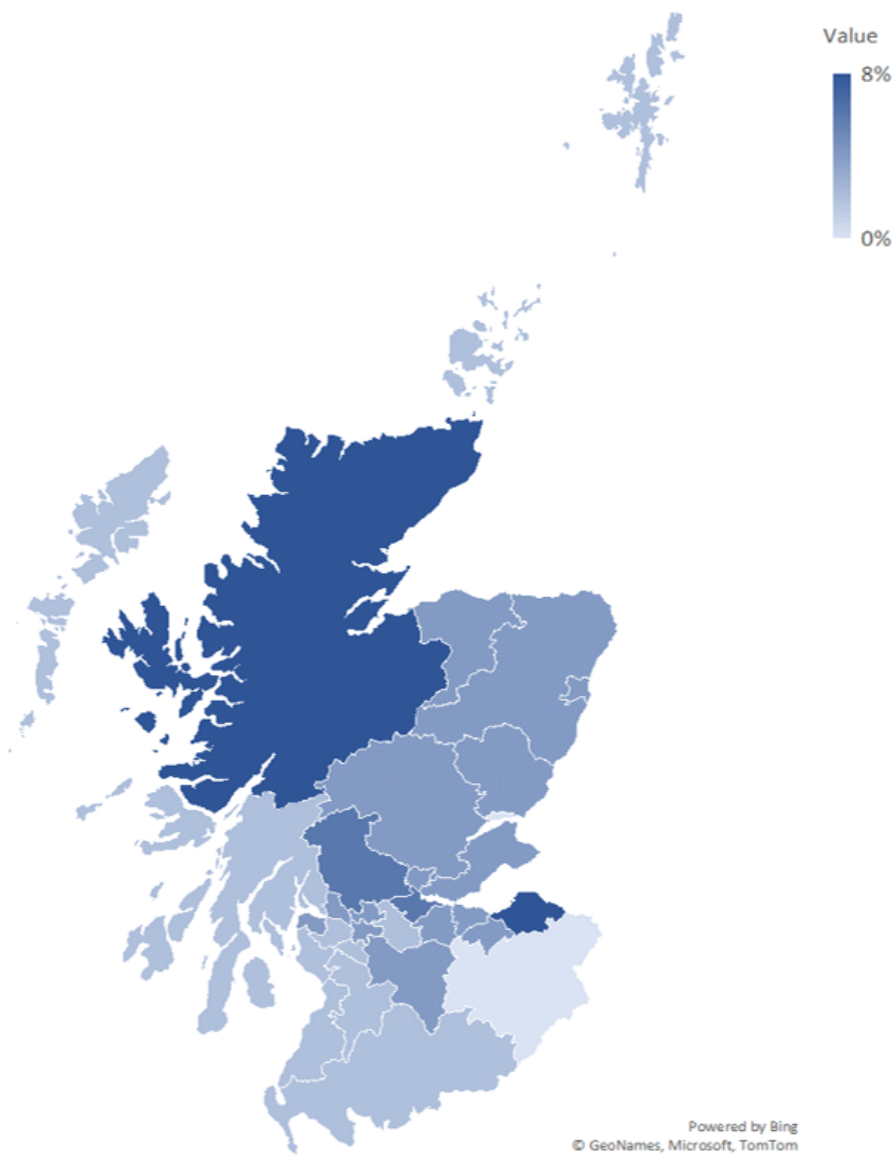


2.1.2 Infrastructure organisations

Among the infrastructure organisations, there was a good response across local authority areas, with at least two infrastructure organisations responding from 20 out of Scotland’s 32 local authority areas, and at least one response from 30 out of 32 local authority areas (Figure 2.2). There were two responses from infrastructure organisations with national scope.

Figure 2.2 Geographical spread of responses (infrastructure organisations)

Local Authority area	% of infrastructure organisations
East Lothian	8%
Highland	8%
Falkirk	6%
Stirling	6%
Aberdeenshire	4%
Aberdeen City	4%
Angus	4%
Clackmannanshire	4%
East Dunbartonshire	4%
Edinburgh (City of)	4%
Fife	4%
Glasgow City	4%
Inverclyde	4%
Midlothian	4%
Moray	4%
Perth and Kinross	4%
South Lanarkshire	4%
West Dunbartonshire	4%
West Lothian	4%
Scotland-wide	4%
Argyll and Bute	2%
Na h-Eileanan Siar	2%
Dumfries and Galloway	2%
East Ayrshire	2%
East Renfrewshire	2%
North Ayrshire	2%
North Lanarkshire	2%
Orkney Islands	2%
Renfrewshire	2%
Shetland Islands	2%
South Ayrshire	2%
Dundee City	0%
Scottish Borders	0%



2.2 Organisational type and sector of respondents

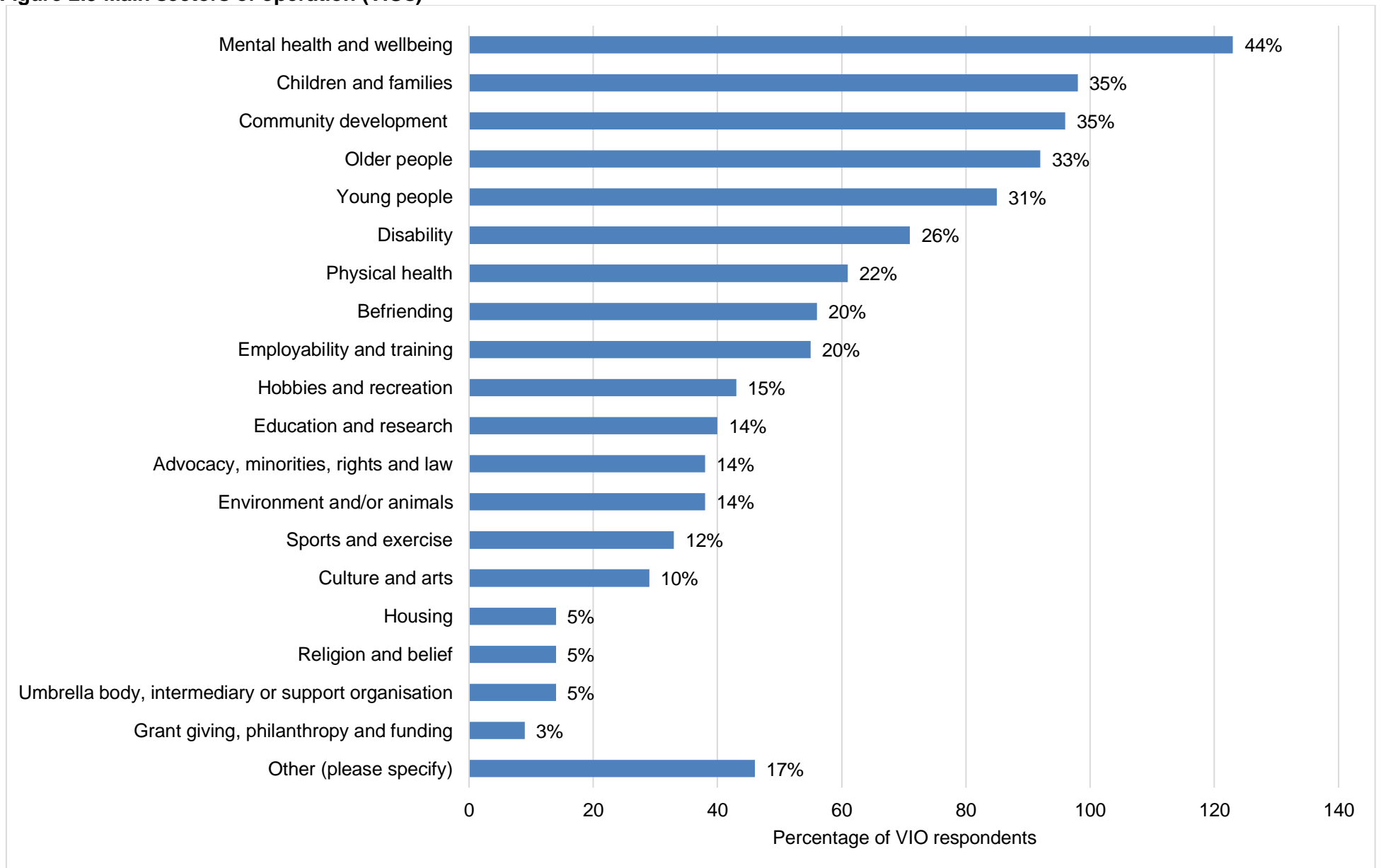
2.2.1 Volunteer-involving organisations

We asked volunteer-involving organisation (VIO) respondents to tell us which sector or sectors they work in (Figure 2.3). VIOs could choose as many sectors as applicable.

As shown in Figure 2.3, overall, all major sectors were represented in the responses. There were a higher number of responses from organisations working in the areas of mental health and wellbeing (44% of responding VIOs); children and families (35%); community development (35%); older people (33%); younger people (31%) and disability (26%). Notably, organisations that responded to the survey were often working in sectors representing particularly high areas of need during the pandemic. Fifteen percent of the respondents chose 'other' to describe their sector. Some sectors included in the 'other' category included food provision, transport, and drug and alcohol responses.

According to recent data from SCVO, around 34% of third sector organisations in Scotland work in the area of social care; 21% in culture and sport; and 13% in community, economic and social development, and these are the top three sectoral areas. Although it is not possible to map the survey data directly to the SCVO categories, we did have a strong response rate from organisations working in each of these three areas.

Figure 2.3 Main sectors of operation (VIOs)



When asked to describe their organisational type, 69% of the VIO respondents said that they were a third sector or voluntary organisation; 15% said that they were a community group or ‘mutual aid’ group; and just 3% said that they were a social enterprise. It is estimated that around 18% of registered Scottish charities are thought to be conducting social enterprise activity,⁹ which suggests that social enterprises are relatively under-represented in this sample.

2.2.2 Infrastructure organisations

As shown in Table 2.2, of the responses from infrastructure organisations, 54% were from third sector interfaces (TSIs), with 28 of Scotland’s 32 TSIs responding to the survey. Twenty-one percent of responses were received from local authorities, 6% from health and social care partnerships, and 20% from other infrastructure organisations. These ‘other’ responses included community councils; local development trusts and partnerships; and network organisations.

Table 2.2 Infrastructure organisation responses: organisational types

Please choose which description best fits your organisation:	Number of respondents	%
Third Sector Interface	28	54%
Local Authority	11	21%
Health and Social Care Partnership	3	6%
Other public sector organisation	5	10%
Other Intermediary (e.g. an umbrella body or a network)	5	10%
Total	52	100%

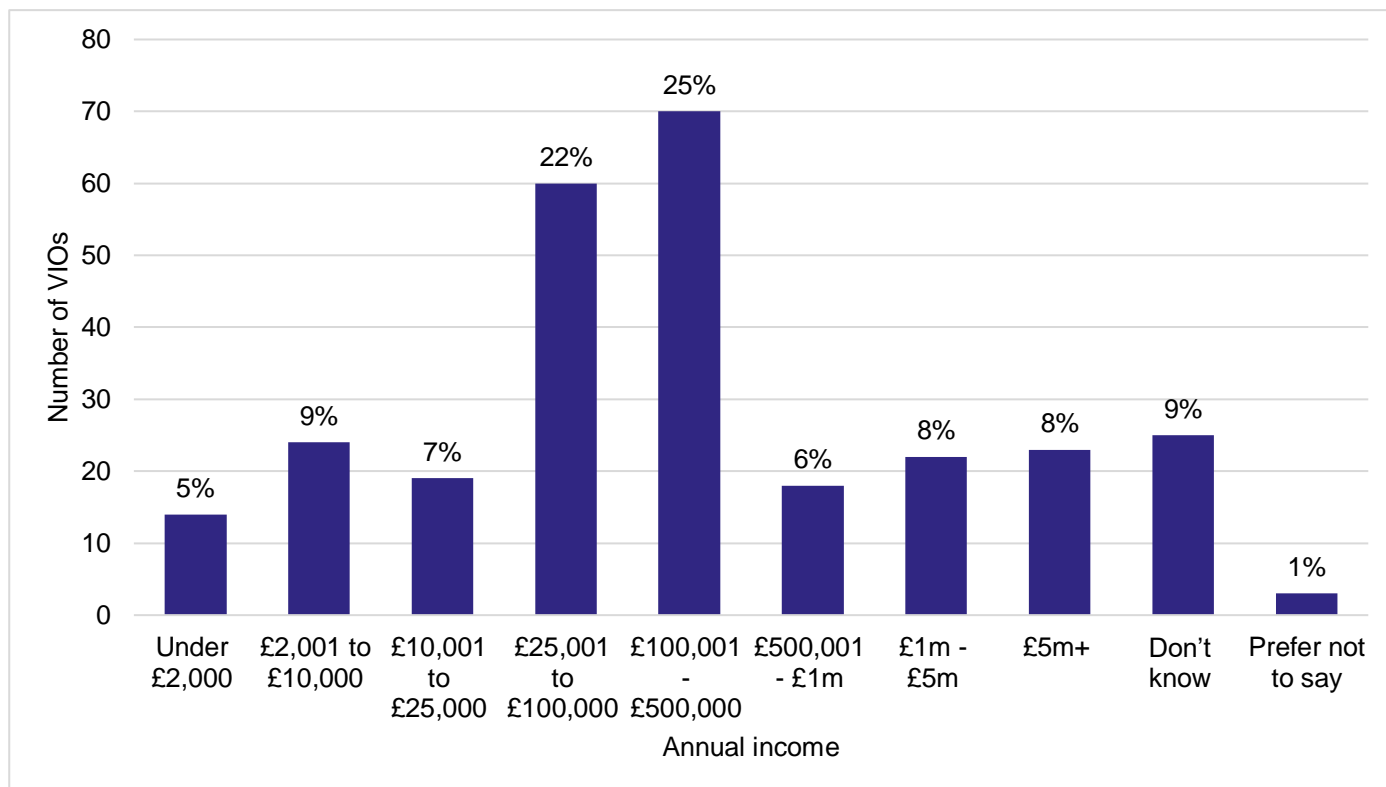
2.3 Organisational size

We asked VIO respondents to tell us their organisational annual income, as a proxy measure of organisational size. Figure 2.4 shows the spread of responses. Forty-seven percent of all responses came from organisations of medium size, with incomes over £25,000 up to £500,000; 14% of responses came from organisations with an income of £10,000 or lower. The most recent data on registered charities in Scotland indicates that 39% of registered charities in Scotland have an income of less than £10,000, which suggests that these smaller organisations were under-represented in the survey sample. Eight percent of responses were from large organisations with an annual income of more than £5 million – these largest organisations account for just 2% of all registered charities in Scotland, indicating

⁹ Whilst there is no legal definition of a social enterprise, there are estimated to be 6025 social enterprises in Scotland, around 72% of which are also registered charities. The Scottish Charity Regulator reported that there were 24,020 registered charities in Scotland in 2021. See the most recent Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) report [An Overview of the Scottish Charity Sector 2021](#), p.17 for more information about the relationship between registered charities and social enterprises.

that larger organisations are over-represented in our survey sample.¹⁰ This is to be expected given that smaller organisations often have few or no paid staff, while larger organisations are more likely to have staff capacity to respond to surveys such as this one.

Figure 2.4 Annual organisational income (VIOs, N=278)



2.4 Survey coverage: conclusions

Overall, although the total number of survey responses is small in comparison to the total population of third sector organisations in Scotland, the VIO response gives strong representation to the three largest sectors according to SCVO (social care; culture and sport; community, economic and social development). The geographical coverage is also reasonable, albeit with some skewing towards certain local authority areas.

When compared with the whole population of registered charities in Scotland there is some over-representation of larger organisations (by income) and national/regional organisations; and under-representation of smaller, and more local organisations.

In the infrastructure organisation survey we had responses from 28 of Scotland's 32 Third Sector Interfaces, such that their voices are strongly represented in the infrastructure organisation findings. The response rate from local authorities was

¹⁰ According to Scotland's Charity Regulator, around half of Scottish registered charities have income of less than £25,000, and two fifths (39%) have income of less than £9,999. See the Scottish Charity Regulator (OSCR) report [An Overview of the Scottish Charity Sector 2021](#), p.14 for more information about charity income in Scotland.

less strong, at 11, or 21% of the 52 responses, or roughly one third of Scotland's local authorities. When reading the data from the infrastructure organisation questionnaire, it is important to bear in mind that the majority (54%) were from third sector interfaces. There were two local authority areas for which no infrastructure organisation response was achieved.

Overall, while there are some gaps, we think that the survey evidence can give us a reasonably robust picture of the situation for volunteering in Scotland during the pandemic and beyond.

3 The volunteer response during the pandemic

3.1 How volunteering changed during the pandemic

The outset of the pandemic saw a huge upswell in people wishing to volunteer to help others. The exceptional and unprecedented nature of the crisis was without doubt a factor in motivating many people to offer to volunteer. This was evident both from the response to the Scotland Cares campaign, which generated over 60,000 volunteer sign-ups, and from the rapid creation of hundreds of community-based 'mutual aid' support groups across Scotland.

The picture of what actually happened with volunteering through the course of the pandemic is complex and dynamic, however, with important changes taking place in response to the changing policy environment and the changing COVID-19 restrictions. As a result, there is no single pattern that describes how volunteering changed during the pandemic. The patterns of volunteering were hugely variable depending on the sectors involved, with many organisations having to reduce pre-existing formal volunteering opportunities, while at the same time informal volunteering and mutual aid-type organisations were expanding.

We asked the survey respondents to tell us about how volunteering changed during the pandemic and about the numbers of people undertaking different types of volunteering – formal, informal and mutual aid – during the different phases of the pandemic. We also asked respondents to reflect on other important changes, such as changes in who was volunteering, whether there were any changes in volunteering in areas of higher deprivation, and what volunteering tasks were important at different stages in the pandemic.

3.1.1 Volunteer-involving organisation views on changes in volunteer numbers

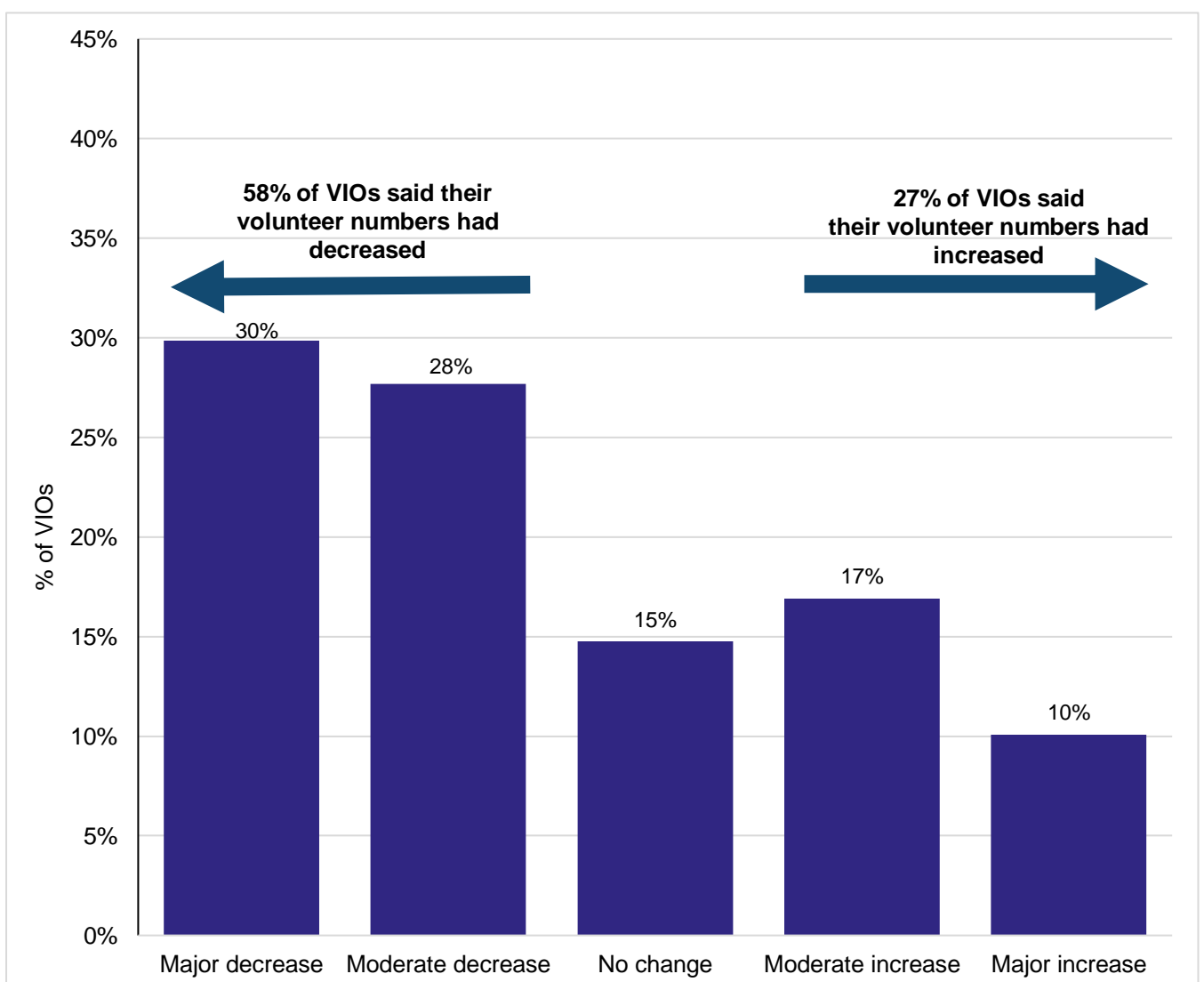
The majority of the volunteer-involving organisations responding to the survey were organisations with volunteer programmes in place prior to the outset of the pandemic. When the first lockdown began, many organisations had to suspend face-to-face work with service users, staff and volunteers. Although volunteering was allowed as an exception to the stay-at-home requirements, volunteers who were older or who had health conditions making them vulnerable to COVID-19 were advised to remain at home, and many withdrew from face-to-face volunteering. The complete cessation of non-essential trading, in-person events and fundraising activities and face-to-face programmes along with the closure of many premises meant that many formal volunteering opportunities that were not directly related to the COVID-19 response simply stopped, at least initially.

'Our retail volunteering operation was paused during the lockdowns due to the retail estate being closed. Some of our volunteers did go to other, more local organisations to volunteer at this time, such as vaccination centres, food banks etc.'

'Most of the events and activities we organise rely on the community building that we manage, and its kitchen. [Community hall] had to be closed in March 2020 and, given current restrictions, we don't expect to be able to reopen or start any meaningful group activities before Autumn 2021.'

'Our monthly children's clubs stopped during lockdown. The leisure centre where we meet was closed. Some volunteers were shielding and did not return when we reopened after lockdown.'

Figure 3.1 How volunteer numbers changed during the pandemic (VIOs, N=278)



In response to the survey question on how their volunteer numbers had changed, at the point when they completed the survey (April-June 2021) 58% of responding volunteer-involving organisations said that their volunteer numbers had decreased since the beginning of the pandemic (March 2020) – with 30% saying that they had experienced a major decrease. A smaller proportion of VIOs (27%) indicated that their volunteer numbers had increased during the pandemic (Figure 3.1).

Enabling factors for organisations that said their volunteer numbers had increased during COVID-19 included:

- Their organisation was able to adapt their work quickly to enable remote delivery of services with volunteer support;
- Their organisation changed the focus of their work to respond directly to needs arising from the pandemic, and needed volunteer support to do this;
- Their organisation was able to provide outdoors volunteering opportunities.

'[We] introduced our Virtual Hospice in April 2020. In-person support that would have been provided to families through a visit to our hospices was transferred to a virtual model. Two volunteer roles were introduced as part of this which meant that volunteers could support families remotely from home.'

'Instead of our volunteers running manufacturing, retail and sales activities - they downed tools and made scrubs, masks and other PPE resources. A small number of volunteers set-up and/or ran foodbanks and food parcel delivery and collection services. We also ran a range of workshops and community support sessions for volunteers to keep people connected, give them meaningful volunteering experiences and continued skills development. Aside from all the COVID resilience work, volunteers also manufactured a small range of products for us to sell online and in the shop (between lockdowns) to ensure some continued trading income as we are a social enterprise and rely to trading income to supplement grant funding.'

'[Our organisation] was formed by local residents who had been taking care of the local environment during the first lockdown and teamed up for group litter picks during summer 2020. COVID has restricted the number of people who can meet up outdoors, so group activities were postponed during the winter lockdown. However, individuals have continued cleaning up their neighbourhood on their own.'

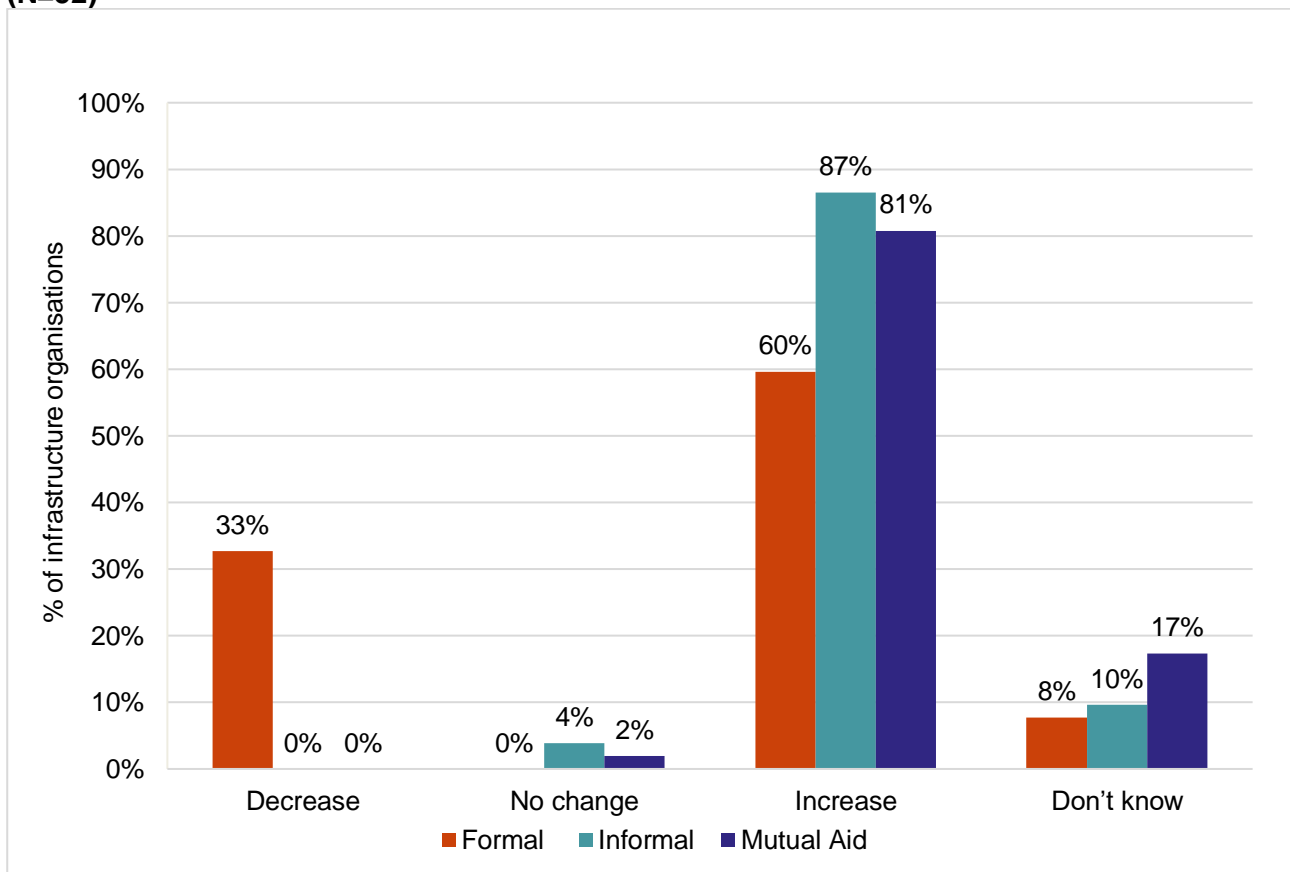
We undertook some additional analysis of this data by sector. Although no very strong patterns emerged according to sector, organisations placing volunteers in sectors that were particularly relevant during the pandemic – such as befriending, mental health and wellbeing, older people and employability – appeared somewhat more likely to have increased their volunteer numbers, and somewhat less likely to have experienced decreases. Organisations working on environmental issues or working with animals were also slightly more likely to have seen increased volunteer numbers – perhaps because many of their volunteers were able to volunteer outdoors where social distancing and safe volunteering would be easier to manage.

3.1.2 Infrastructure organisation views on changes in volunteer numbers

A majority of infrastructure organisations considered that volunteering of all types had increased during the first lockdown (March-June 2020). Infrastructure organisations were more likely to say that the numbers of volunteers undertaking informal and mutual aid volunteering had increased, with 87% of infrastructure organisations saying that there had been an increase in the numbers of informal volunteers and 81% saying that there had been an increase in the number of mutual aid volunteers.

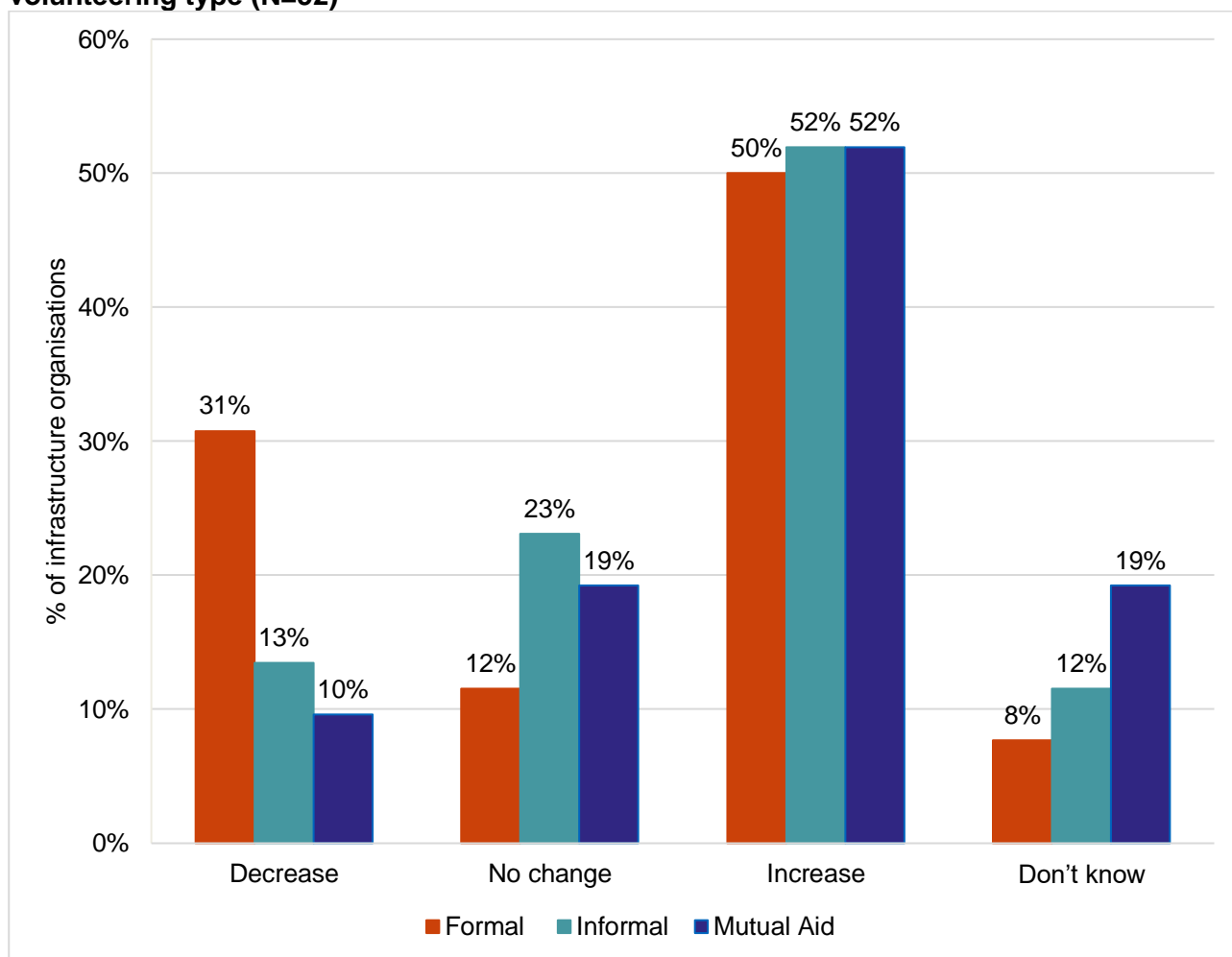
In contrast with the responses of VIOs, 60% of infrastructure organisations considered that there had been an increase in the number of formal volunteers in their areas. Conversely, 33% of infrastructure organisations said that formal volunteering had decreased in their area during the first lockdown period, compared with pre-pandemic levels.

Figure 3.2 Infrastructure organisation views on how volunteer numbers changed during the first lockdown (March-June 2020) compared with before the pandemic, by volunteering type (N=52)



During the second lockdown (December 2020-March 2021), comparison with pre-pandemic volunteering levels still indicated significant increases across all types of volunteering, but to a lesser extent than in the first lockdown, suggesting that the initial surge in volunteering had reduced to some extent. As shown in Figure 3.3, 50% of infrastructure organisations said that there had been an increase in the numbers of formal volunteers during the second lockdown compared with before the pandemic, while the corresponding figures for informal volunteers and mutual aid were 52% and 52%.

Figure 3.3 Infrastructure organisation views on how volunteer numbers changed during the second lockdown (Dec 2020-April 2021) compared with before the pandemic, by volunteering type (N=52)



While a significant proportion of the responding infrastructure organisations considered that formal volunteering increased during the lockdowns, this did not reflect the experience reported by the volunteer-involving organisations that responded to the survey, who overwhelmingly said that their volunteer numbers had decreased.

There are a number of possible reasons for the differences between what volunteer-involving organisations and infrastructure organisations said. The volunteer-involving organisations responding to the survey were established organisations with pre-existing volunteer programmes, many of which could not be continued under the pandemic restrictions. Many of these organisations were not directly engaged in COVID response work, at least initially. In contrast, from their comments it is clear that infrastructure organisations were reflecting the growth in COVID-response volunteering with a subset of community-based organisations in their responses – for example, the growth of volunteering through community councils and resilience groups, where these took a lead in coordinating local COVID-19 responses; or, later on, the growth in volunteering for the COVID-19 vaccination programme. The survey responses also suggest that some infrastructure organisations conflated offers of volunteering and volunteer

registrations – the thousands of people who signed up to be part of volunteering efforts – with the deployment of volunteers, which was much lower in practice.

While the survey questionnaire asked infrastructure organisations to distinguish between ‘formal’, ‘informal’ and ‘mutual aid’ volunteering in their responses, it is clear that these were not always easy distinctions to make in practice, and that respondents had different views of what they considered to be informal and formal volunteering. Some ‘mutual aid’ groups became linked with or absorbed into pre-existing formalised community structures as the pandemic progressed.

Finally, the term ‘volunteering’ was also used by local authorities to denote local authority staff offering to redeploy into pandemic support roles – for example within education hubs and care homes – and within the NHS to denote former health care professionals and students taking on roles in the NHS. This is reflected in some of the survey comments. Since these were paid staff, this is not ‘volunteering’ in the sense of being unpaid work.

3.1.3 Infrastructure organisations’ views on changing patterns of volunteering

In Figure 3.4, infrastructure organisations share their views about ways in which volunteering patterns changed during the pandemic.

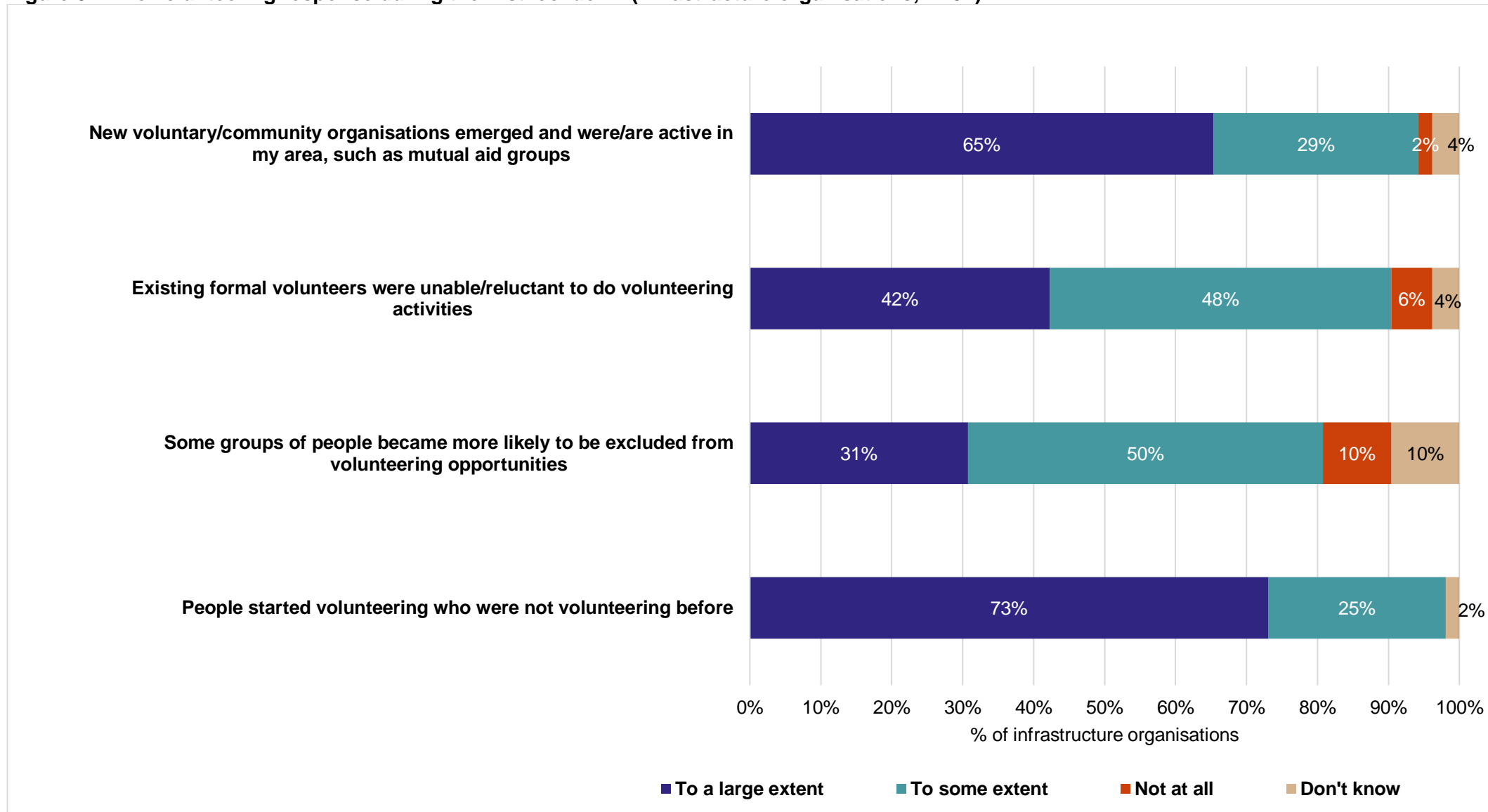
Particularly notable was the emergence of new voluntary or community groups during the first lockdown, with 65% of infrastructure organisations agreeing ‘to a large extent’ that new groups had become active in their areas. The rapid emergence of new community response initiatives and ‘mutual aid’ groups, which provided a platform for people to offer and receive support in their local communities, was a defining feature of the early phase of the pandemic. Infrastructure organisations also described how linkages quickly developed between ‘pop-up’ new mutual-aid type organisations and more established organisations such as community councils or resilience groups.

‘A high number of Facebook and WhatsApp community based groups started up which [the local TSI] organised into local community response groups. This added significantly to the pool of local voluntary [capacity] available. In addition, a very large number of people living in [local authority area] registered to volunteer with the Ready Scotland portal. These were in addition to the community response groups and we have been able to find volunteering opportunities for about three-quarters of them.’

‘We saw an increase in community response, which has meant some ‘pop up’ food banks or response services as well as an increase in the number of volunteers in established community organisations...’

We have seen that in small communities local people have looked after each other – recognising the needs within different households and responding to these needs quickly and without judgement. We think this kind of volunteering will have reduced the need for some crisis support - reducing isolation and keeping vulnerable people safe.’

Figure 3.4 The volunteering response during the first lockdown (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



Seventy-three percent of infrastructure organisations agreed ‘to a large extent’ that people started volunteering at the beginning of the pandemic who had not been volunteering before. Respondents linked this increase in new volunteers to the fact that many working people and younger people had more time available than usual – either because they had lost their employment or because they had been furloughed. The lockdown conditions requiring people to remain in their local areas were also seen to have contributed to the increase in community-based volunteering. Finally, there was a recognition that people were volunteering to support others; to reduce their own experience of isolation and loneliness during the pandemic; and because the situation was so exceptional that many people felt particularly motivated to help in some way.

‘We have seen an increase in people aged between 19-50... volunteering due to the fact they are either on furlough, or are unemployed and looking to offer their help. We have also seen an increase in requests from people who are working but are working from home and with no-where else to go are looking for activities to fill their time.’

‘People who would not have previously considered volunteering were looking for an outlet which reduced isolation and loneliness and viewed volunteering as a means to improve mental health. ...The lockdown led to an increase in the focus of local needs and generated a local response; where people may have volunteered outwith their own neighbourhood the lockdown to a large extent focused their time and attention on the needs of the local community.’

‘We had an unprecedented number of people sign up to help in our local area. We called many of them and it would be fair to say that many had signed up because of the COVID situation/to respond to need rather than because of their own volunteering experience/previous interest in volunteering.’

‘In [local authority area] we have seen a huge rise in individuals looking to formally volunteer as well as many new mutual aid groups forming to deal with the impact of COVID on our local communities. The range of expertise and skills has been unbelievable with many on furlough looking to continue to volunteer when they hopefully return to work. The pandemic has shown the reach volunteers have and the difference they make which has been greatly received in [local authority area].’

Several infrastructure organisations identified a pattern of large and rapid initial increases in volunteer registrations and activity during the first lockdown, followed by a drop off during the second lockdown in early 2021:

‘We experienced a sharp increase in volunteering in the first lockdown as people came forward to volunteer in response to local needs and in response to the Ready Scotland and Red Cross appeals. We also experienced a sharp increase in support required for mutual aid and community organisations to support safer volunteering practices.’

In the second lockdown, we did not experience the same spike in volunteer registrations as the community responses were already established although there was still an increase and offers to volunteer from those who had signed up during the first lockdown – however, many were back to work during the second lockdown which affected availability to volunteer.’

‘As restrictions ease and organisations start to open up again it is clear that many volunteers from early 2020 are no longer available or able to continue volunteering and there is once more a great demand for volunteers.’

Organisations also emphasised the importance of finding ways to keep this new volunteer force engaged for the future:

There has been an incredible community response to the pandemic, supported through formal and informal groups and organisations...Over 1200 people from across [our local authority area] have signed up to volunteer during the crisis. ...Individuals have secured opportunities with a range of third sector partners ... Individuals have been helping with food parcel deliveries to those in need, PPE supplies to carers, medicine pick-ups and support as ward helpers It is hoped that individuals will be able to secure long-term volunteering opportunities post Covid-19. One particularly positive (and unexpected) outcome has been the number of individuals expressing interest in volunteering as trustees.’

At the same time as this growth in new volunteers and new organisations, many existing volunteers had to withdraw from their volunteering activities because of the advice to remain at home or shield. This was particularly the case for pre-existing older volunteers, and volunteers with underlying health conditions or other vulnerabilities. Forty-two percent of infrastructure organisations agreed that pre-existing volunteers were unable or reluctant to volunteer ‘to a large extent’, with a further 48% agreeing ‘to some extent’.

Similarly, 31% of infrastructure organisations expressed concern that some groups had become more likely to be excluded from volunteering during the pandemic, ‘to a large extent’. According to respondents, the groups at higher risk of exclusion from volunteering during the pandemic were older people, people with health conditions, and people requiring support to volunteer – particularly people with learning difficulties, disabilities, or mental health conditions. To a lesser extent, respondents also mentioned people with caring responsibilities as having had to withdraw from volunteering in order to reduce potential risk of COVID-19 exposure to those they care for, as well as parents who were having to remain at home to look after children.

‘We have a large number of older volunteers ...who were unable to volunteer due to COVID advice. ...Older people who volunteered prior to lockdown were deeply affected by this as they were often socially excluded and experienced isolation and loneliness due to the social interaction been removed. We heard the comment ‘if i ever get back’ a lot from this age group while in contact with them, as the lockdown wore on especially during the second lockdown, when it looked uncertain how long lockdown would last.

'Volunteers with additional support needs have been disproportionately disadvantaged in the pandemic. While volunteers with few barriers were able to volunteer in other capacities, mutual aid etc. if their formal volunteering has stopped, for those with support needs this was not possible. Many will have had to shield and other will simply have had support needs that could not be properly addressed in the volunteering available during the pandemic. As we emerge from the second lockdown we are seeing that volunteers with higher support needs are returning much more slowly or their previous roles have disappeared and often organisations are under such pressure that they are unable at this time to take on volunteers with support needs.'

3.2 Volunteer tasks

We asked the survey respondents about the kinds of volunteering tasks for which demand was highest during the pandemic. The results reflect the differing perspectives of infrastructure organisations – with their broad overview of the range of organisations and volunteers that were active in their local areas – and volunteer-involving organisations, which were asked to focus on the questions from the perspective of their own organisation's work.

Infrastructure organisations (Figure 3.5) had a broad overview of the different types of volunteering that were undertaken within their local areas during the pandemic – including formal, informal and mutual aid volunteering. Their responses reflect this broad range of organisations and tasks. They found that during the first lock-down, food-related support tasks were the most frequently needed – 79% of respondents highlighted food support including food banks and delivering food parcels or hot meals, while 75% said that food shopping was a key task. Collecting and delivering prescriptions was the next most high-demand task, as indicated by 71% of respondents. Befriending (63%) and other forms of support for people with physical and mental health problems (40%) were the fourth and fifth highest-demand activities, respectively.

In the second lockdown, according to infrastructure organisations, the needs for volunteer support shifted significantly away from food support, food shopping and deliveries, perhaps reflecting that many people had been able to put other solutions in place to meet their needs by this point. Changes such as the introduction of the extended household policy; supermarkets putting increased capacity for deliveries in place, and increased formal food support availability also probably reduced the need for some of these types of volunteering support. However, the demand for befriending remained high (as indicated by 62% of respondents), and there was an increase in demand for volunteers to support people with mental or physical health problems (50%). Volunteering to support the COVID-19 vaccination programme also emerged as a high-demand task during the second lockdown (29%), after the vaccine roll-out got underway in January 2021.

Figure 3.5 Demand for volunteer tasks during the first and second lockdowns (infrastructure organisations, N=52)

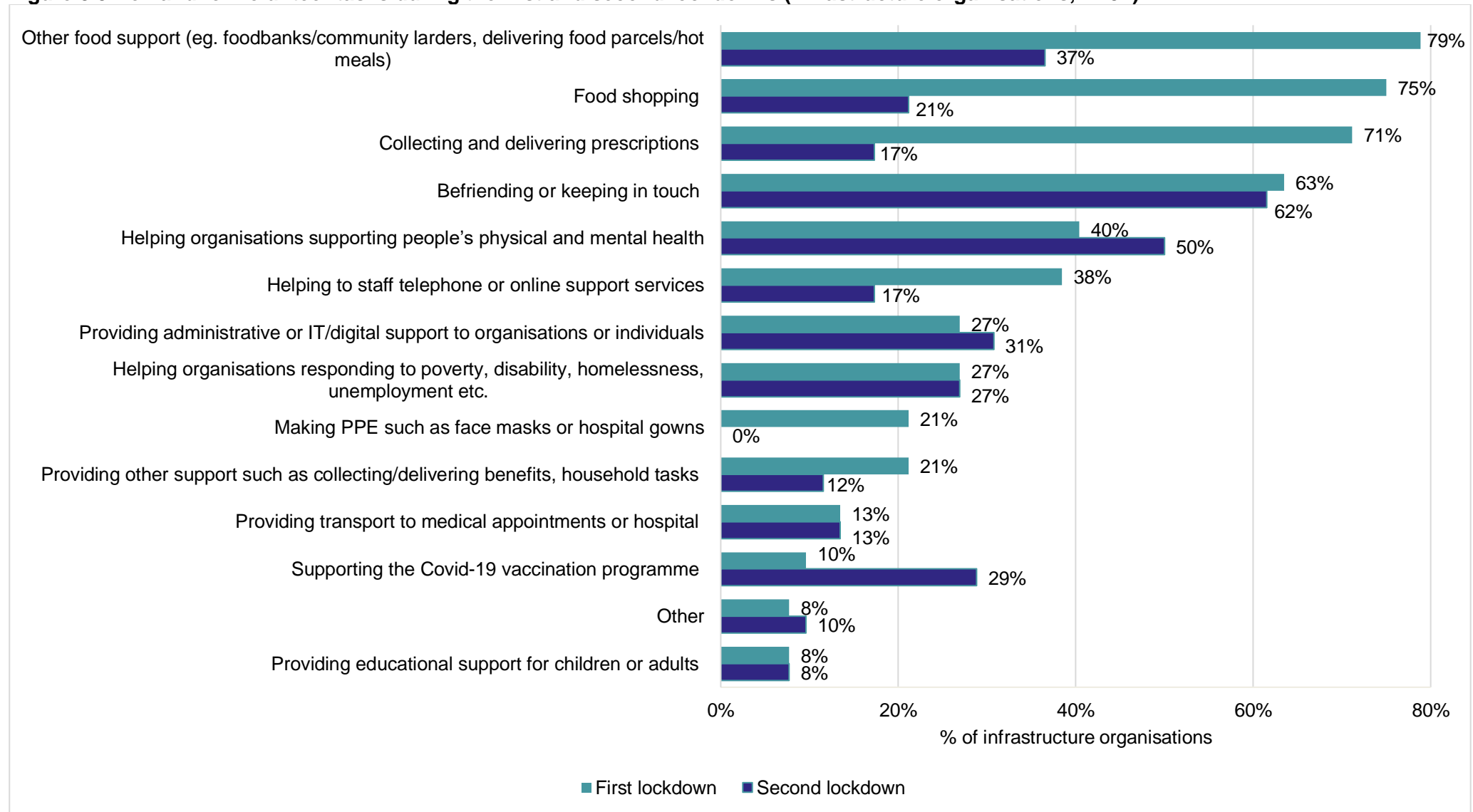
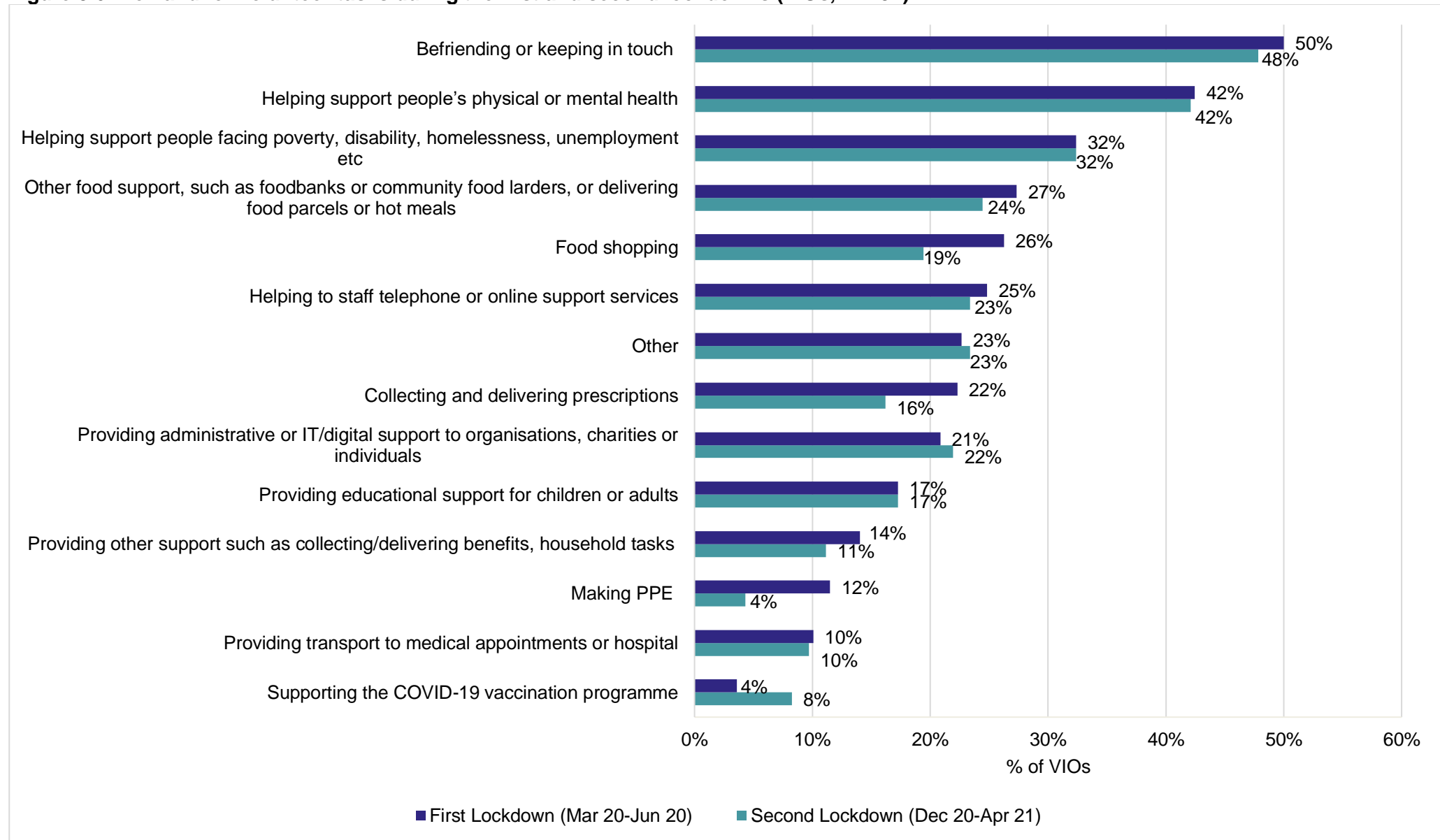


Figure 3.6: Demand for volunteer tasks during the first and second lockdowns (VIOs, N=251)



VIOs were asked what tasks their volunteers had undertaken during the first and second lockdowns (Figure 3.6). Befriending was the most frequently mentioned volunteering task with 50% of VIOs saying that their volunteers did this during the first lockdown, and 48% during the second. Support for people with mental or physical health problems was the next most-frequently mentioned volunteer task, as indicated by 42% of VIOs for both lockdowns.

The tasks that VIOs said their volunteers undertook were quite similar during both lockdowns. Differences were reflected in reductions in food shopping and in making PPE – which were more important during the first than the second lockdown – and in volunteering to support the vaccination programme, which began later in the pandemic.

Differences between what the VIOs and the infrastructure organisations reported about volunteer tasks may reflect the focus of the VIOs that responded to the survey. Many of the responding organisations were involved in mental health and wellbeing, befriending and work with older people, and the work their volunteers undertook during the pandemic reflected these core purposes. In contrast, infrastructure organisations were also reflecting the work of the mutual aid and informal volunteers in their response, much of which was put in place to provide support in local communities with shopping, deliveries, and transport.

This informal emergency support response appeared to have been more needed during the first than the second COVID lockdown, in part because by the time of the second lockdown, institutional partners had been able to build up greater preparedness around food and other essential supplies. Infrastructure organisation respondents described how there was a shift away from the rapid emergence of mutual aid and informal support responses during the first lockdown towards greater institutional preparedness during the second:

‘Communities mobilised very quickly to respond to the COVID outbreak and lockdown and were essential in helping to identify and support vulnerable people, particularly when shops were running out of food. We worked proactively with local anchor organisations to provide support. As lockdown eased and supply chains were re-established, the need for this type of activity reduced significantly. [Local authority] built the resilience and capacity of community food networks and its own food stores in preparation for lockdown 2 and winter with the result that people were provided appropriate support without significant involvement of food groups. There is now an emphasis on the vaccination programme and dealing with the ongoing impact of lockdown and COVID, particularly in relation to mental wellbeing, lost learning and employability.’

'During the first lockdown and early part of the pandemic there was very much an 'emergency response' from individuals, communities and organisations with people just trying to organise themselves to act as quickly as possible to help and protect those in need and vulnerable, and the demand in the first lockdown was around getting basic supplies and supports to people and to preserve life and reduce harm.

As things progressed beyond the initial few weeks there was greater consideration given to joint planning, making best use of volunteer resource and ensuring volunteers themselves were protected and able to work as safely as possible. This meant that by the end of first full lockdown and into second lockdown certain services and activities were better organised across the voluntary and public sector and less 'reactive' and with clearer support processes and procedures in place for individuals and organisations the demand balanced out.

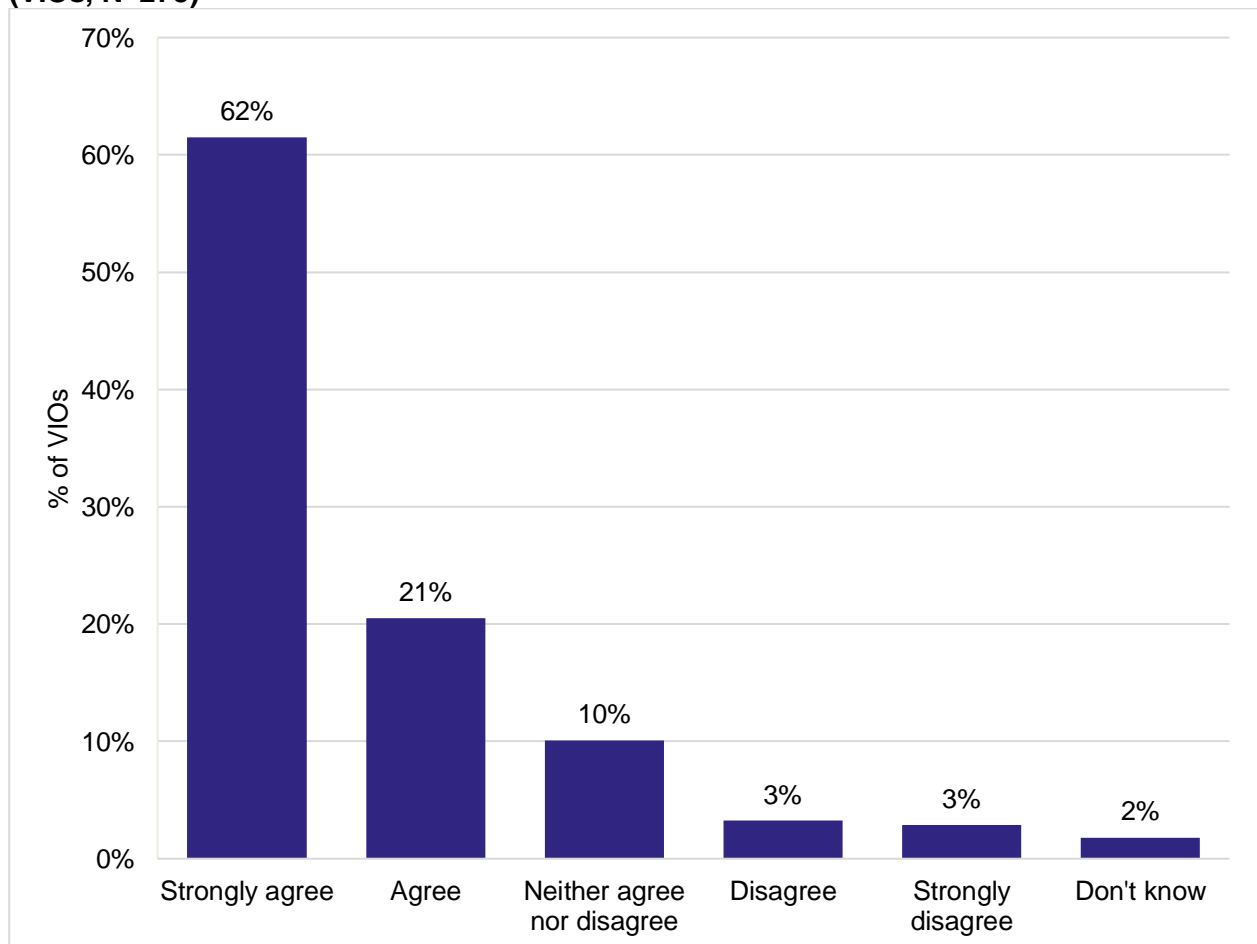
As the impact of the pandemic continued throughout first and second lockdown and as the initial basic needs were largely being met it was apparent that services like mental health and wellbeing and longer term work to support people out of poverty and inequality was required (loss of jobs, confidence, digital inclusion, depression) and volunteering activity increasingly adapted to reflect this need.'

4 Effectiveness of the volunteering response and the role of different types of volunteering

We asked respondents about the extent to which they agreed that volunteers were essential to the functioning of their organisation during COVID-19. Infrastructure organisations and volunteer-involving organisations agreed that the volunteer response was crucial to underpinning the COVID-19 response across Scotland.

Infrastructure organisations tended to focus on the effectiveness of the community response that emerged at the beginning of the crisis, while VIOs focused on the role of formal volunteers in helping to maintain the delivery of their programmes, and on the willingness of their staff and volunteers to undertake steps to adapt their work to ensure that formal volunteering could continue where possible. Overall, 82% of VIOs strongly agreed or agreed that volunteers had been essential to the functioning of their organisation during the pandemic (Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1 Importance of volunteering for the functioning of organisations during COVID-19 (VIOs, N=278)



4.1 The role of different types of volunteering in the COVID-19 response

One of the most striking aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic was the huge upswell in community-level support responses that accompanied the first lockdown in particular. This was characterised by:

- The rapid emergence of many new community support groups, often created or maintained using social media channels like Facebook or WhatsApp. Whilst some of these groups were entirely new, others were linked with pre-existing groups or structures. These groups have been called ‘mutual aid’ groups by some commentators, although this is not necessarily a term that all of these groups would use or recognise. It is not clear how many such groups were created in Scotland, although there have been some attempts to map them.¹¹

These groups tended to operate in relatively informal ways, inviting potential volunteers in local areas to sign up to help via digital platforms. Organisation of these groups was often horizontal rather than hierarchical. As requests arose within the community, these would be advertised to the group, with volunteers self-selecting to respond.

The structures and level of formal constitution of these groups varied hugely, including very informal ‘pop-up’ groups created by concerned groups of individuals, and groups that were set up as part of – or which became linked to – pre-existing community organisations and structures with a certain level of organisational capacity already in place.

- Growth in ‘informal’ volunteering – people making efforts to check in with and support their neighbours, friends, colleagues and so on. There was some degree of crossover/fluidity between this informal neighbourhood volunteering and the community support/mutual aid groups.

At the same time, pre-existing formal volunteering opportunities in many volunteer-involving organisations had reduced in the face of lockdown, as organisations had to suspend their usual activities and programmes. As such, informal volunteering, mutual aid and other dedicated COVID response efforts were a primary route for ‘new’ volunteers to start volunteering, or to volunteer in support of the COVID response specifically.

¹¹ [Mutual Aid](#) is a site dedicated to listing mutual aid groups in the UK. It lists and maps 2067 groups across the UK, with 134 in Scotland. Another site [Covid-19 Mutual Aid UK](#) has mapped over 300 groups in Scotland. Much of this mapping was undertaken at the height of the pandemic, and at the time of writing, it is unclear how many of these groups are still active.

Infrastructure organisations were asked to reflect on these different forms of volunteering, and their relative effectiveness or strengths and weaknesses in terms of their ability to respond to the needs that arose during the pandemic.

4.1.1 Effectiveness of formal and mutual aid volunteering in responding to COVID-19

Figures 4.2a and 4.3a compare the effectiveness of the formal and mutual aid responses across a number of criteria, including speed, safeguarding, coverage of the response in areas of deprivation, and ability to meet people's needs, according to infrastructure organisations.

For all criteria, infrastructure organisations were more likely to rate the formal volunteering response as effective than the mutual aid response, for both the first and the second lockdowns. However, this was in part because infrastructure organisations were much more likely to give 'don't know' responses in relation to the questions about mutual aid organisations, probably because they had not necessarily had direct contact with all of these organisations.

For both types of volunteering, a smaller percentage of respondents rated the responses as effective in the second lockdown compared with the first lockdown. However, this was a result of a much higher level of 'don't know' responses in relation to the second lockdown – not because respondents necessarily thought that the response was less effective. In fact, the percentage of respondents who rated the responses as ineffective (across all criteria) dropped very slightly for the second lockdown.

This increase in 'don't know' responses for the second lockdown was not explained in the comments, although there were some comments to suggest that the overall volunteer response was more routine and 'calmer' during the second lockdown – which perhaps meant that infrastructure organisations were less aware and less able to comment on the detail of that activity.

'Communities appeared to take the second lockdown 'in their stride'; they had the experience of the first period and there was a more organised and calmer approach to the second period of lockdown.'

Figures 4.2b and 4.3b show the same data, this time excluding the 'don't know' responses. When presented in this way, the data show that where respondents felt able to give a rating to the mutual aid and formal volunteering responses they rated them fairly similarly across many of the questions.

For the first lockdown, once 'don't know' responses are excluded, respondents rated the mutual aid response as slightly more effective than the formal volunteering response in terms of its speed, coverage, and ability to meet immediate needs. This is in line with the qualitative comments and other evidence (see Figure 4.4) that the speed of response was extremely rapid from mutual aid organisations – with many forming and becoming active very rapidly at the start of the pandemic.

The main area where respondents clearly rated the mutual aid response less positively than the formal volunteering response was in relation to the ability of mutual aid responses to ensure good standards of care and safeguarding to the people being helped. This was echoed in Figure 4.4 and in comments that suggested that mutual aid organisations did not always have clear safeguarding procedures or training in place to support volunteers from the outset.

Several respondents noted that there was a drop-off in some aspects of COVID-response volunteering during the second lockdown, as more people went back to work, as some people who had received support during the first lockdown had been able to make alternative arrangements for the second; and as formal and statutory providers were better prepared for the second lockdown. Respondents also noted that some mutual aid groups had disbanded by the second lockdown – while others had moved towards becoming constituted as formal organisations or creating formal links with constituted groups. The reduced activity profile of some mutual aid groups during the second lockdown may also have contributed to the very high proportion of 'don't know' responses in relation to mutual aid volunteering during the second lockdown in particular.

'Many of the mutual aid groups started up during the first lockdown do not appear to have started up again during second lockdown: however, some established themselves as constituted organisations in their own right or had established connections and partnerships since first lockdown, volunteering for constituted groups that were better able to work with statutory partners during second lockdown.'

'[Local Authority area] witnessed mutual aid organisations being set up overnight. Initially these groups were very effective but as time passed you could see they ran out of enthusiasm and possible funding.'

'The mutual aid response was stronger during the first lockdown, but still remains a significant response and there is an increased sense of online community with several mutual aid groups supporting traditional organisations or currently looking at formalising and registering as a charity'

Figure 4.2a Infrastructure organisation views on the effectiveness of formal and mutual aid volunteering in the first lockdown (Mar-Jun 2020, N=52)

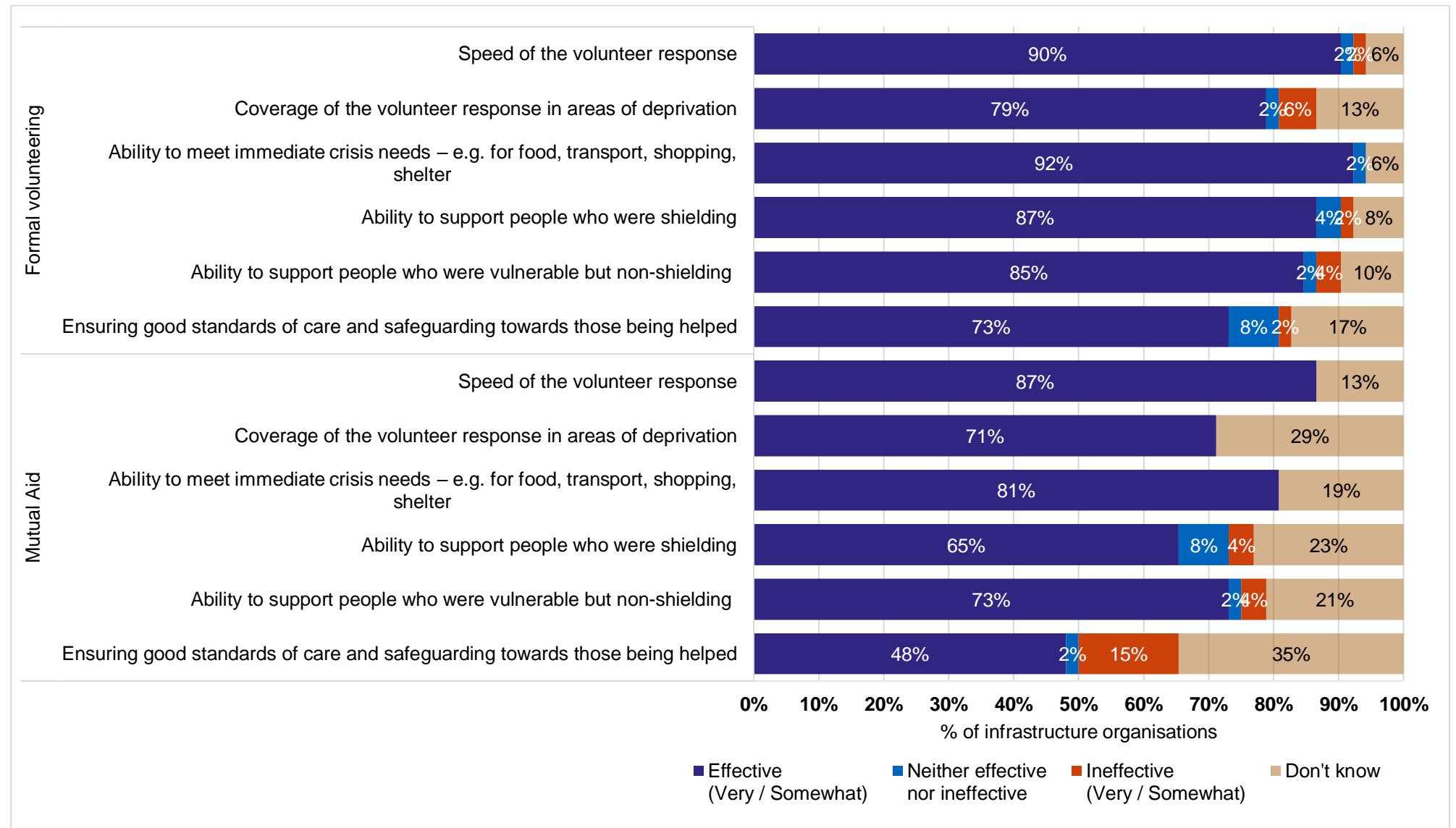


Figure 4.2b Infrastructure organisation views on the effectiveness of formal and mutual aid volunteering in the first lockdown (Mar-Jun 2020), excluding 'don't know' responses

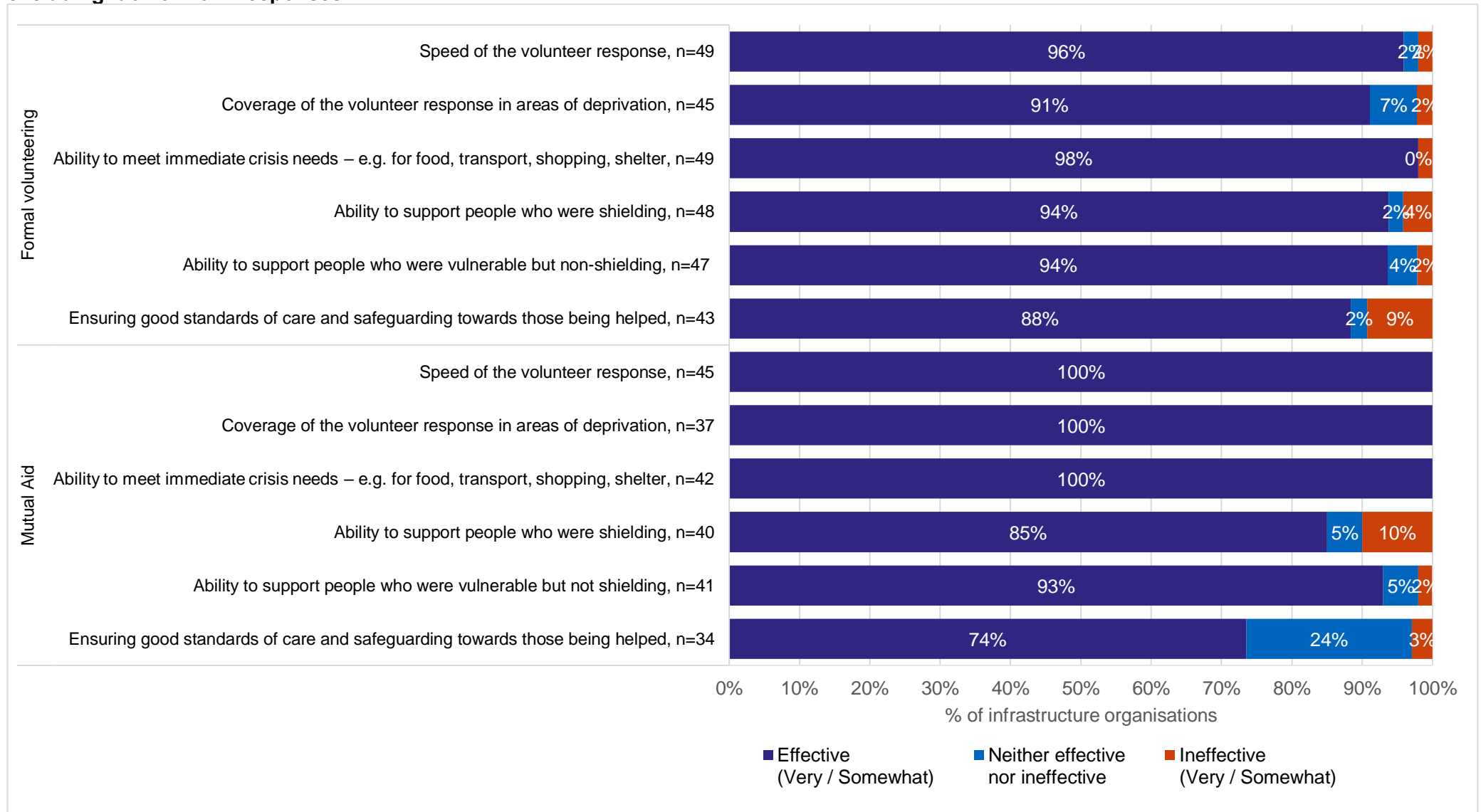


Figure 4.3a Infrastructure organisation views of the effectiveness of formal and mutual aid volunteering during the second lockdown (Dec 2020-Apr 2021, N=52)

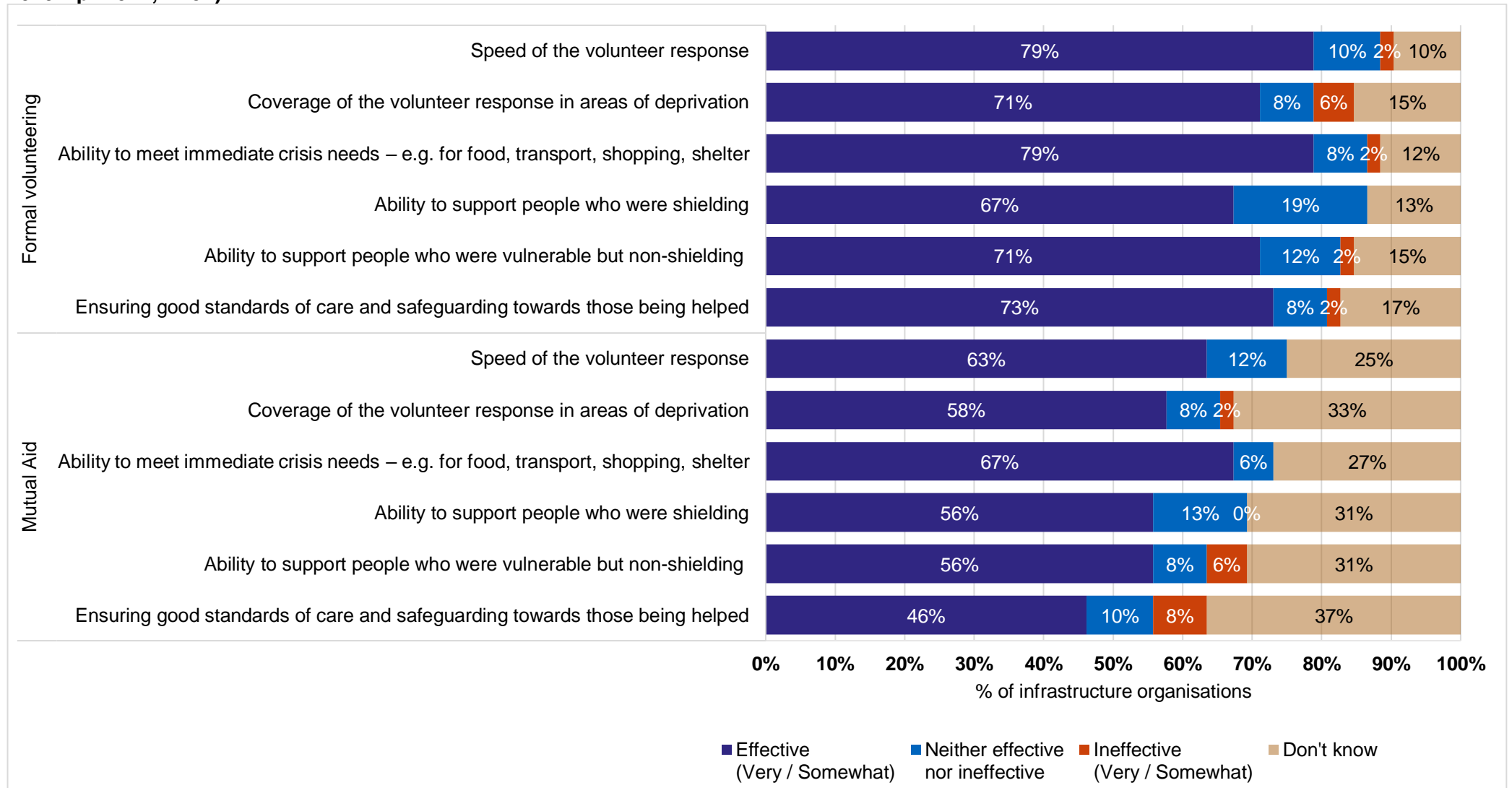


Figure 4.3b Infrastructure organisation views of the effectiveness of formal and mutual aid volunteering during the second lockdown (Dec 2020-Apr 2021), excluding 'don't know' responses

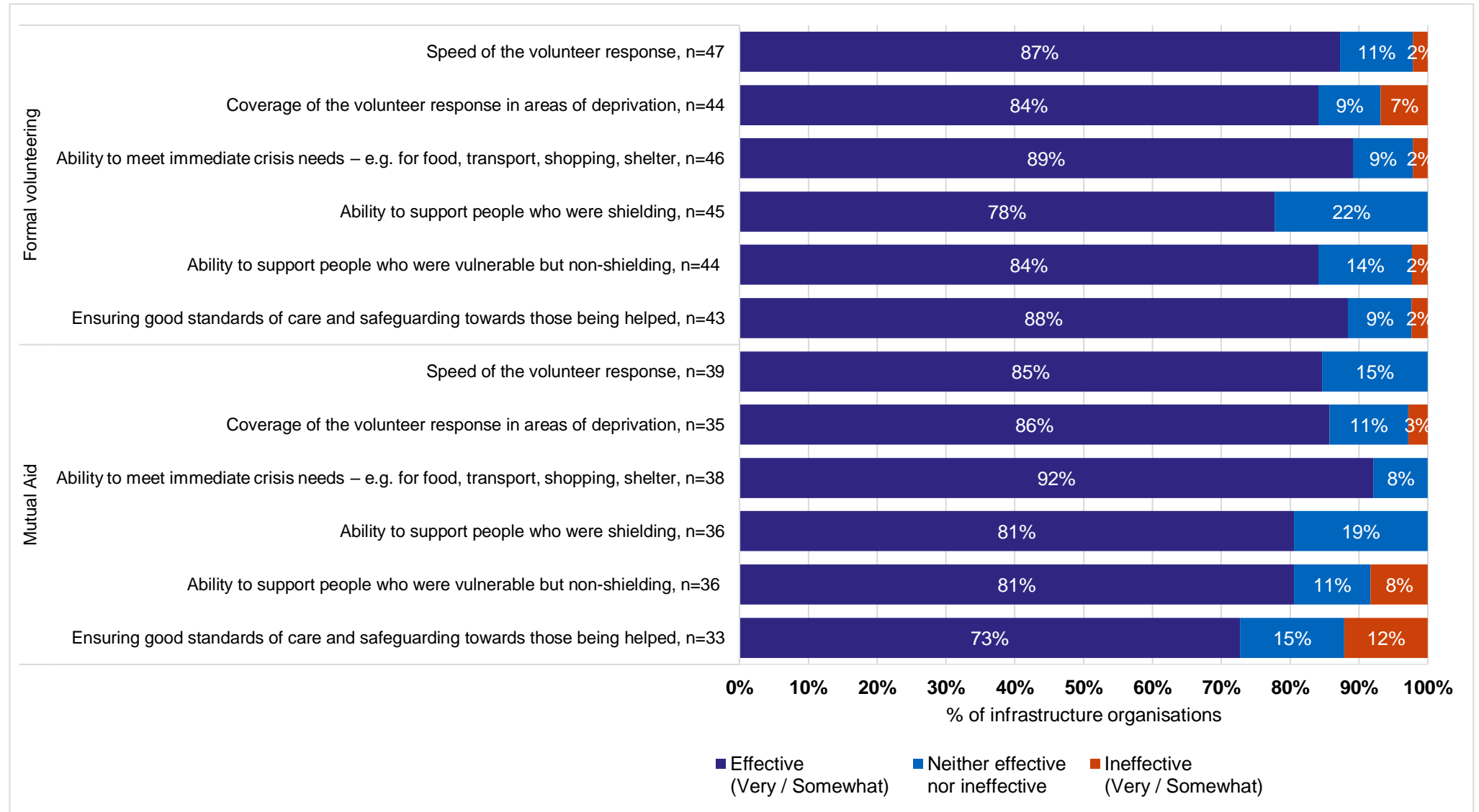


Figure 4.4 gives infrastructure organisation views on a series of questions relating specifically to mutual aid volunteering.

Many respondents stressed that the response was most effective when the different types of formal, informal and mutual aid volunteering worked together – for example, with mutual aid organisations linking with formal support organisations to refer people with needs that they could not themselves respond to. Overall, 85% of infrastructure organisations agreed that mutual aid groups provided an essential complement to the formal volunteering response.

'In the first days of the first lockdown we became aware of a number of new groups emerging; some had fairly good coordination and a planned approach [while] others were more random in their approach with more of a focus on the practical activities rather than on organising themselves. All in all there was a very good response and people did get the help they needed. We became aware of existing groups adapting what they were doing to include COVID-related support and the total number of groups involved was more than 200.'

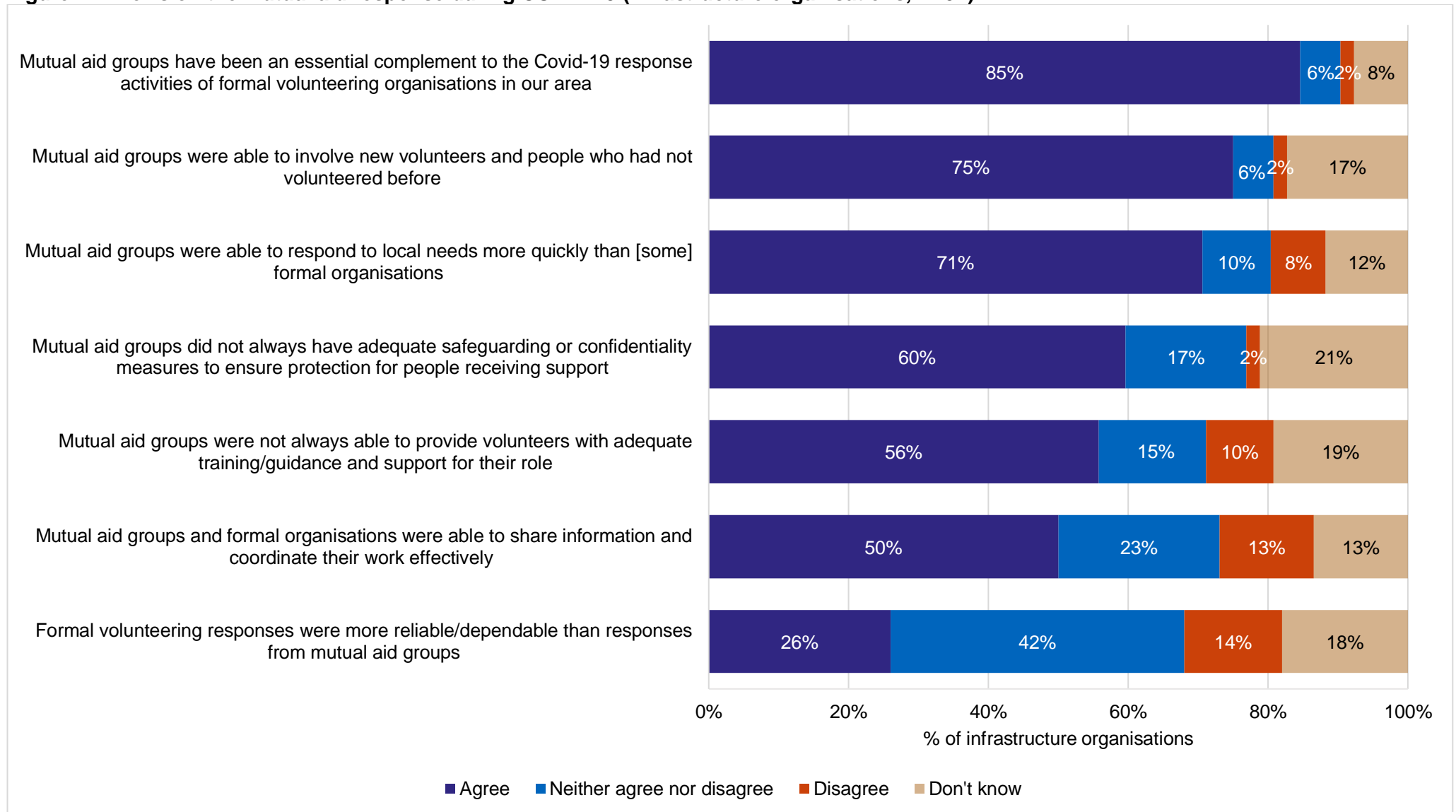
Infrastructure organisations also felt that the mutual aid groups had been able to attract new or different volunteers to those who were already engaged as formal volunteers. Mutual aid volunteers tended to be younger, and not necessarily to have volunteered before. This may reflect the fact that people 70 and over were asked to remain at home and take great care during the pandemic; meanwhile a significant group of working-age people had time to volunteer, due to furlough. The focus on digital platforms for organising these groups, and their relative informality, may also have made them more accessible or appealing to younger ages.

'Local Facebook page set up and run by volunteers. Very effective in sharing information and seeking out volunteers and support during the pandemic. Also shared local 'live-streamed' music etc for entertainment.'

Infrastructure organisations expressed some concerns in relation to the mutual aid response. Sixty percent of the respondents agreed that safeguarding and confidentiality concerns were not always well addressed, particularly in instances where mutual aid groups had been newly formed. The informality of the formation of the groups meant that in some cases at the outset they did not have clear governance arrangements; established policies and practices in relation to safeguarding; and training/guidance in place for volunteers. This was of concern given the vulnerability of some of the people who were being supported by these groups.

'I think they were fantastic at getting people the basics quickly and efficiently although safeguarding for those we spoke to often didn't appear as a focus or sometimes something that had been considered. Although we are not aware of any instances of harm that occurred.'

Figure 4.4 Views on the mutual aid response during COVID-19 (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



'I was horrified at the lack of safeguarding and thought that was put into their volunteering practices. No references, safeguarding etc., we tried to intervene to offer support and raised our concerns with these agencies but no further structure was put in place to protect the people they were helping.'

'Over the last year social media groups have morphed from spaces to ask for assistance to spaces for resource and information sharing, with the direct calls for assistance being signposted to established organisations.'

Some mutual aid groups have been very reluctant to engage with formal structures, not wanting to be seen as a traditional charity and focusing on a very grassroots approach. This has only seen success in a limited number of groups, usually those that were led/administrated by one or two individuals, and bigger groups were more susceptible to drop-off in terms of support and poor management. The biggest issue we have encountered where mutual aid groups are run entirely through Facebook or other social media; there is limited accountability but also a very public platform where grievances can be aired and then escalated.'

Overall, the responses suggest that mutual aid groups were essential to the COVID response, and that some of them intend to continue to operate in some form beyond the pandemic. Infrastructure organisations are focusing on helping them to adapt to define their post-COVID role, and integrating them into local resilience arrangements and other coordination networks.

[Local Authority area] is a small local authority with very diverse communities however local people got together to support their community and these community response teams have become established organisations and are planning for the future and how they can support their own local area as restrictions are eased.'

'The lockdown has increased awareness of issues in some areas e.g. one group reported that they never knew there were so many lonely and isolated people in their communities; some groups have discussed making themselves a permanent fixture in the area.'

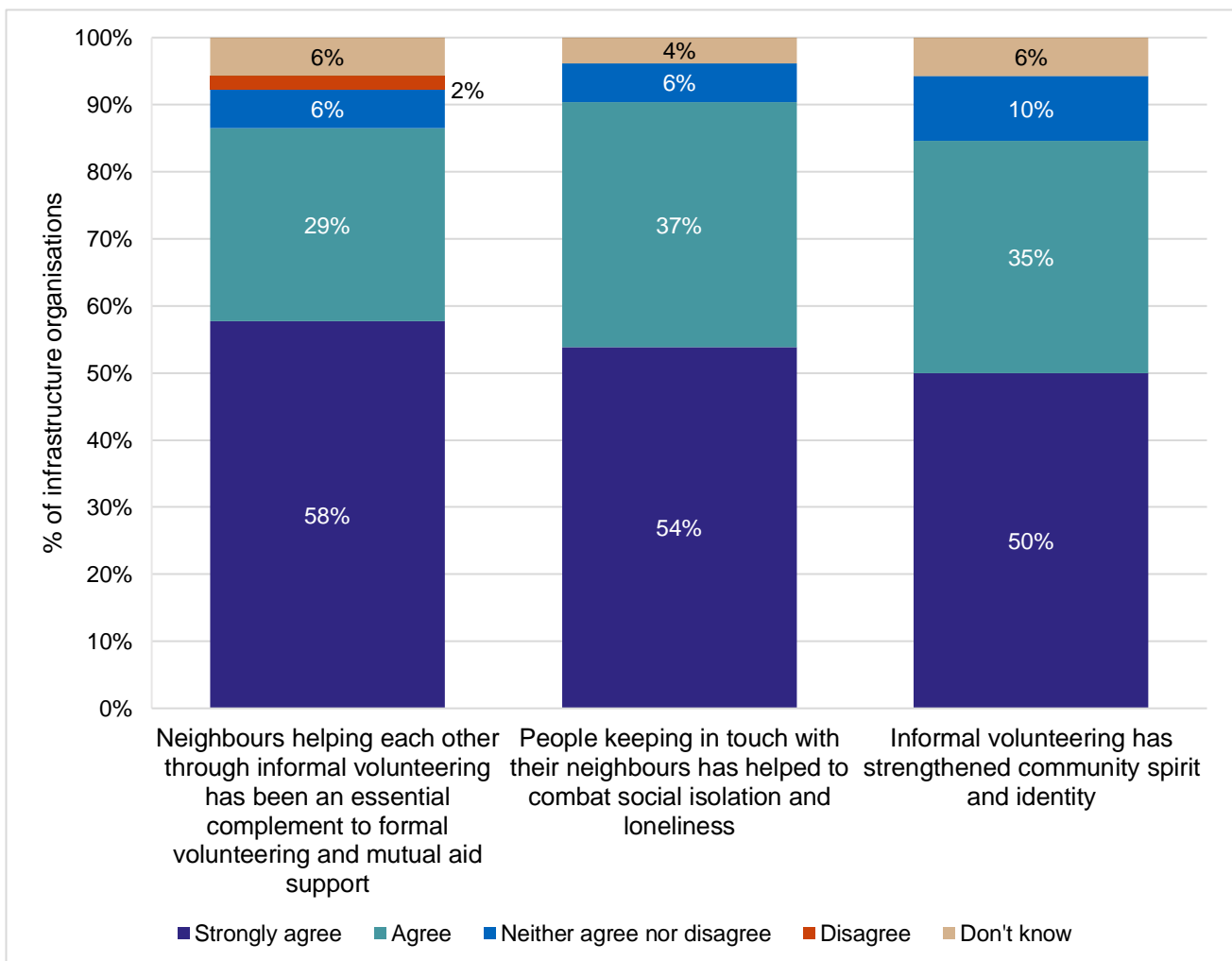
4.2 Informal volunteering

Informal volunteering has been another major component of the community-level response to COVID-19, and one that has seldom been seen and recognised on this scale, at least in recent decades. This is even more difficult to quantify than mutual aid volunteering, because it is defined as individual volunteering not linked to any group or organisation. However, infrastructure organisation responses suggest that informal volunteering took place on a very large scale, and acknowledge the extremely important role that this has played in maintaining a degree of connectedness and community, through months of relative isolation for many people. As with mutual aid, respondents considered that the fact that many people were at home, and/or on furlough schemes, meant that they had more time available to support others in their communities.

As shown in Figure 4.5, 90% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that informal volunteering had helped to combat social isolation and loneliness, while 87% agreed or strongly agreed that informal volunteering had been an essential complement to formal volunteering. Eighty-five percent agreed or strongly agreed that it had strengthened community spirit and identity. According to one infrastructure organisation:

Both formal and informal volunteering approaches were needed, appropriate and very effective in ensuring people received vital help and support

Figure 4.5 Informal volunteering during COVID-19 (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



Some respondents noted how initial contact to provide practical support at the height of the first lockdown had led to longer term support relationships in some cases, as well as raising awareness of issues such as social isolation and loneliness within neighbourhoods.

'People have carried on helping their neighbours with e.g. prescription pick-up months after the initial lockdown. They have developed relationships with these people which would not have been possible prior to the pandemic. These relationships have led to better conversations which have led to new needs being established.'

The lack of data on informal volunteering makes it unclear how inclusive it was, or how broad its coverage was. One respondent struck a note of caution in this respect, suggesting that community-based volunteering responses had not reached all groups and areas equally:

'It is worth noting that in a recent survey done by the Minority Communities Hub, members of ethnic minority communities did not feel any more connected to their neighbours, in fact, it was felt by many that community cohesion was more fractured than ever before.'

4.3 How infrastructure organisations supported different types of volunteering

Infrastructure organisations – and the TSI network in particular – had a lead role in coordinating and supporting the volunteer response in local authority areas, typically undertaking tasks including signing up and assigning volunteers; establishing coordination structures; offering advisory support, guidance and information about all aspects of volunteering to VIOs; and funding advice and distribution (Figure 4.6).

'We quickly became a point of contact for local people to sign up and offer their help, by way of setting up online forms to receive such information very early on in the first lockdown. We then helped to match these volunteers to the available roles and opportunities.'

A daily meeting of lead people within local voluntary organisations, and other partners, quickly became established to allow for ongoing oversight and problem-solving with regard to the volunteer response and other operational challenges.'

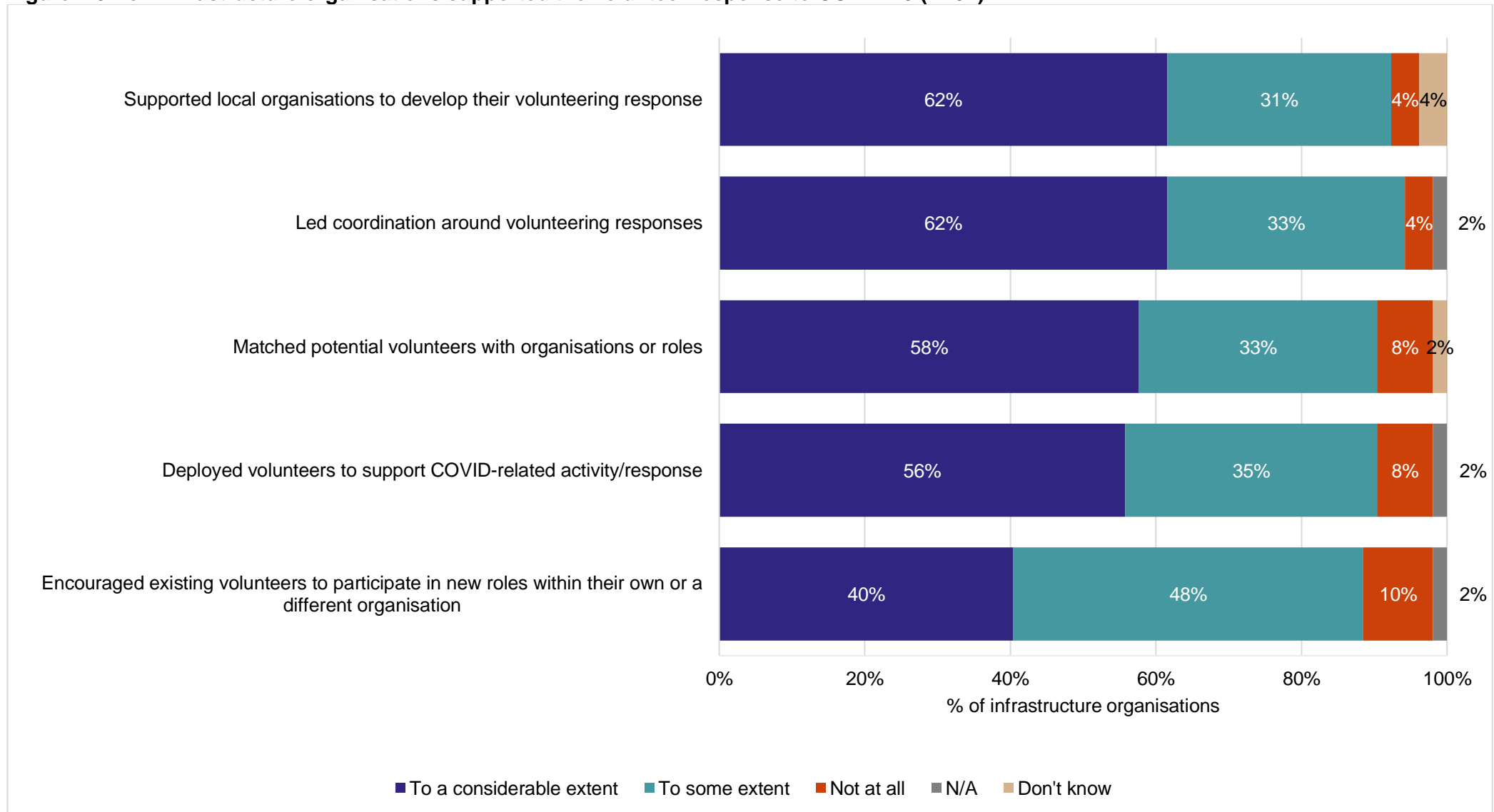
Continued offer of support for VIOs in all aspects of working with volunteers. Our website became a hub of information on all things COVID, including support and funding options, for VIOs and communities.'

We have administered funding on behalf of the Local Authority that included ongoing funding to groups providing food support and other essentials such as utilities and digital connectivity. We have also administered a COVID volunteer expenses fund open to all volunteers helping with the COVID response.'

Faced with a patchwork of different levels of voluntary response across their areas, infrastructure organisations described how they worked with partners to identify areas where there was less volunteer support emerging at the beginning of the pandemic, and to fill any gaps.

'All 42 communities in [Local Authority area] had identifiable arrangements for mutual aid and community support. Where possible these were self-organised by the community using existing structures, however in a small number of communities where there was no clear support structure in place or emerging, [Third Sector Interface] supported neighbouring community organisations to extend their reach, including setting up and managing a team of volunteer community shoppers to respond to requests from vulnerable/shielding residents.'

Figure 4.6 How infrastructure organisations supported the volunteer response to COVID-19 (N=52)



Providing support for new mutual aid/community support organisations became an important role for many infrastructure organisations, particularly TSIs and local authorities (Figure 4.7).

4.3.1 Support for mutual aid groups

At the start of the pandemic, many new community-based ‘mutual aid’ groups were created in order to harness the willingness of the public to get involved in the COVID-19 response. While some of these groups were linked to pre-existing community organisations, others were completely independent, created by concerned members of the public who wanted to do something.

It quickly became clear to infrastructure organisations that while their intentions were good, many of these groups had poor or non-existent organisational capacities; that they did not always have good safeguarding or COVID-safety procedures in place, and that they might benefit from support to help put more formal processes and procedures in place.

‘Some activity led by volunteers – while stemming from a desire to help – saw organisations unintentionally working with little or no protective procedures in place and or in isolation from public sector and other community efforts. This was understandable given the emergency situation and largely volunteers responded quickly and worked with partner agencies as the situation progressed to improve and develop safe and coordinated working practices.’

The support that infrastructure organisations have provided to these groups has been wide-ranging (Figure 4.7), including:

- providing information on how to help mutual aid organisations deliver their services safely during COVID-19 (provided to a ‘considerable’ or ‘some’ extent by 83% of infrastructure organisations)
- providing lists of formal organisations that mutual aid groups could signpost users to (79%)
- providing advice on volunteering good practice, including volunteer management (77%)
- helping mutual aid groups to become compliant with legal requirements (75%)
- advising mutual aid groups on how to register themselves as formal organisations, if they wanted to do so (75%).

Figure 4.7 Support provided for mutual aid groups (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



‘Like many areas in Scotland there was significant numbers of mutual aid groups in [Local Authority area]. Some started as Facebook groups, but moved quickly to become constituted organisations, with the TSI’s help. In our opinion it was important that this development work happened to support the groups to access funding and operate safely. Other groups stayed as Facebook groups, and have since disbanded or morphed into community information sites.’

‘Our team compiled advice and training about safe food handling, shopping and delivering food to vulnerable people.’

‘We have supported mutual aid groups with volunteer management support, COVID volunteering guidance, safer volunteering advice, and volunteer recruitment and support advice and TSI partners have supported with funding and governance.’

4.3.2 Support for informal volunteering

Sixty-nine percent of infrastructure organisation respondents indicated that they had supported informal volunteering in some way. The support that infrastructure organisations provided for informal volunteering focused primarily on creating advice and guidance on volunteering safely and good practice. Many respondents talked about using their websites and social media to promote this. Several mentioned having developed films or postcards targeted at informal volunteers. Infrastructure organisations also made efforts to link informal volunteering efforts with the work of local community/mutual aid groups.

'As part of making our website a hub of information, we created a 'Being a Good Neighbour' guide that we sent to everyone who signed up to offer their help, and was available to all on our website. This provided guidance around safely helping your neighbours, including COVID measures and boundaries.'

4.4 Volunteering coverage across different areas

We asked infrastructure organisations whether they felt that the volunteering response had varied across different geographical areas, or according to levels of deprivation.

4.4.1 The volunteering response in rural and urban areas

The majority of respondents listed rurality as an important determining factor for volunteering in their area. Many highlighted positive responses in rural areas, suggesting that smaller communities, such as villages, had been effective in organising themselves quickly to ensure support within their communities. Respondents suggested that this was partly due to the role of local knowledge and partly to a prior sense of belonging or community, and in some cases pre-existing support structures. Several respondents indicated that emergent voluntary groups in rural areas had been able to use digital platforms for communication and organisation effectively.

Challenges in rural areas arose in relation to the lack of public transport to support volunteering efforts – so that volunteers were generally reliant on their own transport – and ensuring that the response was able to reach people in remote or isolated areas, outside of villages. There were specific challenges for island communities where ferry traffic was reduced significantly due to pandemic regulations, limiting access to shops on the mainland and increasing reliance on a small number of suppliers.

'[Local Authority area] has many more rural areas and local people have to be commended for how they stepped up and organised themselves to look after their own areas. Local area knowledge helped and social media and online communications played a big part in helping to connect people, especially during the more difficult winter weather that hit the area.'

'We saw that in small rural communities people had knowledge about individuals and families and were able to offer the right support to different households quickly and without judgement.'

'New groups and networks emerged in rural communities, and digital platforms were increasingly used to communicate and organise activities. [Rural area] in particular saw an increase in groups operating relatively independently from the council and providing food to local communities.'

Some respondents suggested that community-based volunteering responses emerged more quickly in rural than in urban areas. They considered that the urban volunteering responses in their areas had required greater external support and organisation by formal partners.

'Mutual aid responses were much more prevalent in rural areas where there is a greater sense of community. In the more urban areas responses had to be more centralised or supported – it was more difficult to associate the volunteers with a particular area.'

4.4.2 Volunteering response in areas of higher deprivation

We asked infrastructure organisations to tell us how they thought the numbers of volunteers supporting areas of higher deprivation had changed during the first and second lockdowns, compared with before the pandemic (Figures 4.8 and 4.9). For both lockdowns, the majority of infrastructure organisations felt that the numbers of volunteers supporting areas of higher deprivation had increased compared with before the pandemic. This was particularly true for informal and mutual aid volunteering, with a significant proportion of infrastructure organisations indicating that formal volunteering numbers had reduced in both lockdowns. Overall, the picture of change in volunteering numbers for areas of deprivation appeared to be in line with the national picture.

Figure 4.8 Infrastructure organisation views on how the number of volunteers supporting areas of higher deprivation changed during the first lockdown (March-June 2020) compared with before the pandemic, by volunteering type (N=52)

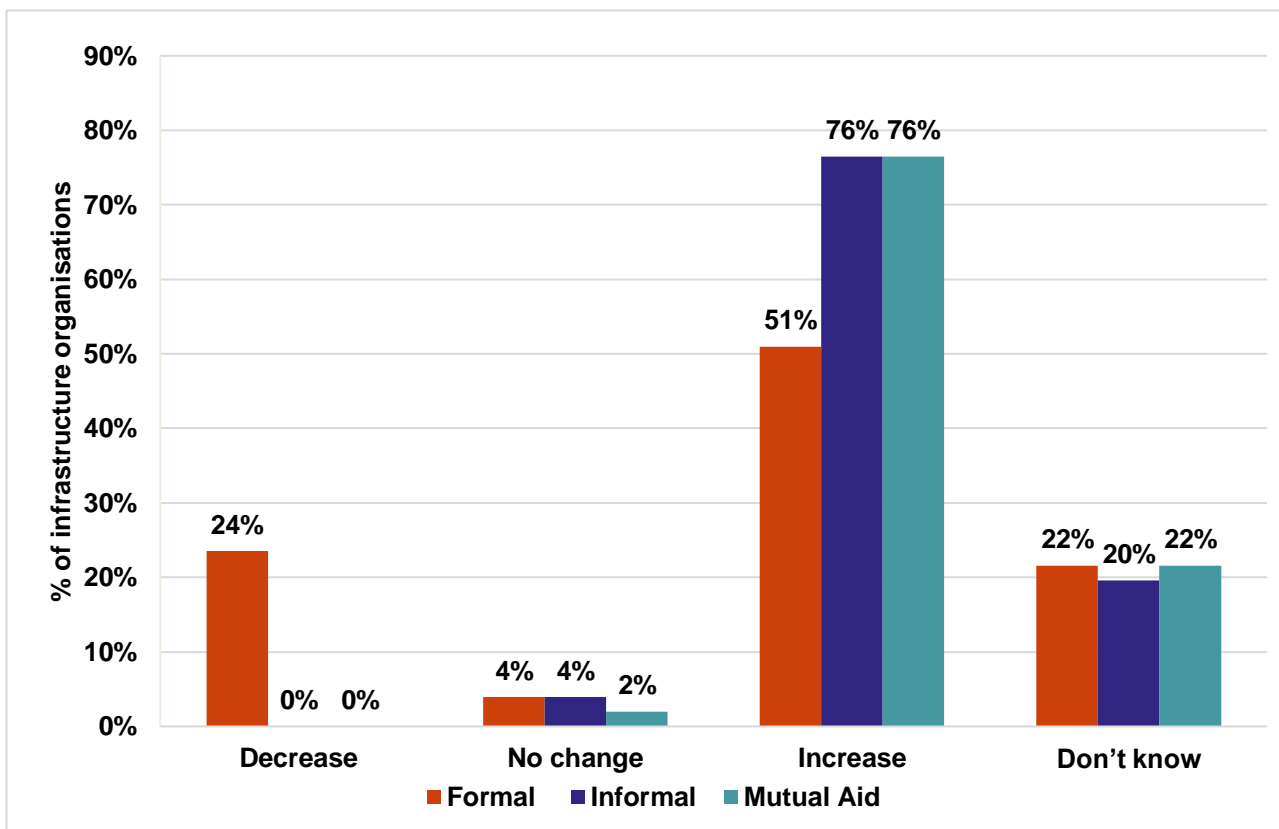
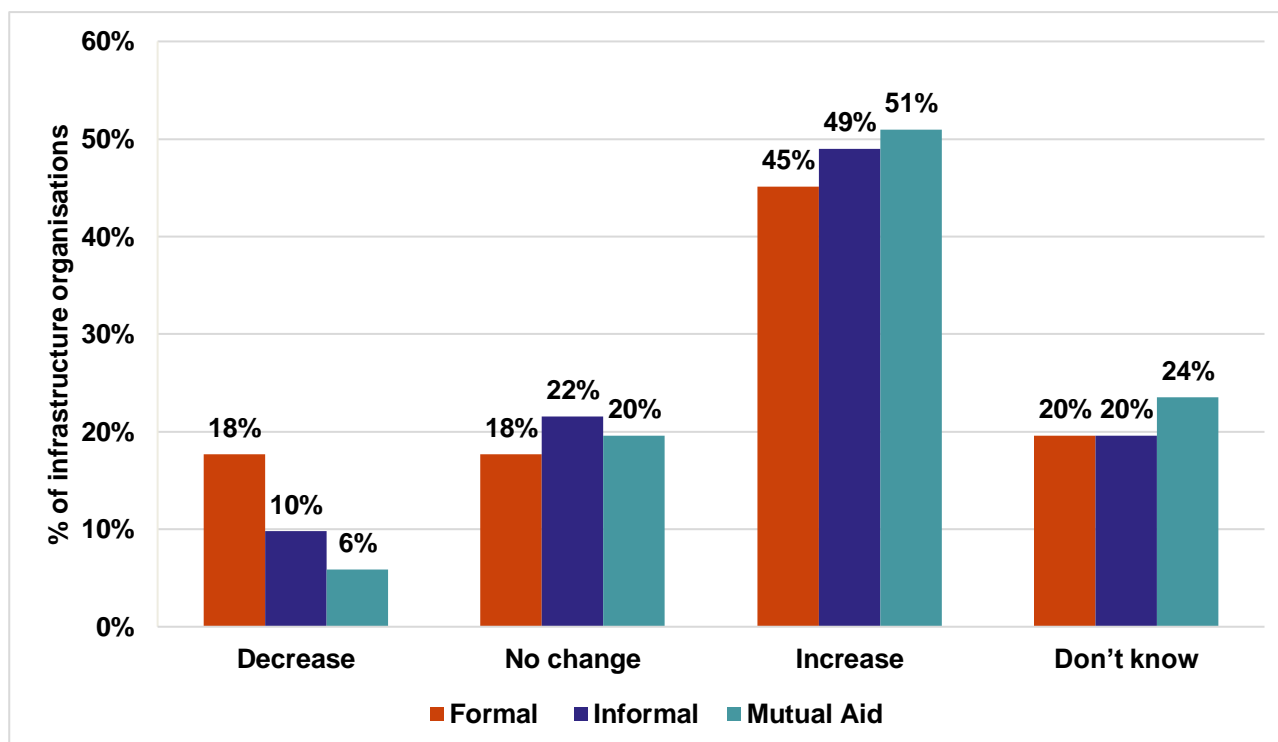


Figure 4.9 Infrastructure organisation views on how the number of volunteers supporting areas of higher deprivation changed during the second lockdown (Dec 2020-April 2021) compared with before the pandemic, by volunteering type (N=52)



Infrastructure organisations gave a range of qualitative perspectives on volunteering in more deprived areas. Some considered that the response had been particularly strong in areas of higher deprivation. Others noted that the response in areas of higher deprivation required more statutory support.

'Each area in [Local Authority area] has its "own way" of "doing" or "supporting" their community/town. More affluent areas were able to quickly pull together databases, organise deliveries etc. and co-ordinate effectively whereas the areas higher on the SIMD index struggled with the digital and co-ordination ... The smaller villages "rallied" really well setting up food supplies/meals etc.'

'If anything, I think those that are often thought of as hard to reach were more willing to engage [as volunteers] during the pandemic. Perhaps because services were local, and led by others in their community that they know/trust.'

'Our areas of "deprivation" provided some of the strongest on the ground responses.'

'I don't think there were any areas [in Local Authority area] where local people weren't mobilised to support their local area whether urban or rural, deprived or affluent. It was a privilege to watch local people come together and to be able to support them in their efforts to care for the vulnerable in their community.'

5 Management and coordination of the volunteering response

We asked survey respondents about their views on how well the volunteering response was managed and coordinated in their local areas as well as nationally, and what could have been improved. We also explored the extent to which infrastructure organisations were aware of resilience arrangements before the pandemic, and whether they had been able to get involved in these during the pandemic. Finally, we asked respondents to share their views on the Scotland Cares campaign, the national volunteer recruitment campaign that was launched at the start of the pandemic.

5.1 Coordination of local volunteering responses

There were many different partners involved in the coordination of local volunteering responses during the pandemic. The number of institutional partners involved, and the fast pace of developments – particularly the groundswell of new community based volunteering efforts that emerged quickly at the beginning of the first lockdown – made coordination a challenging and confusing effort for many organisations.

While in some areas, volunteering coordination was in place from the start of the pandemic, other respondents indicated that initially the situation was quite confusing – particularly given the proliferation of new groups and initiatives seeking to help out – and that the local coordination took time to get in place.

'At the start of the pandemic we organised a keep calm and co-ordinate group to bring together our public sector and local organisations in a collaborative response to the emergency response. This resulted in the creation of... a single telephone number for local people, groups and organisations to call to offer help, ask for help or find out what is happening in [Local Authority area].'

'During the first lockdown and early part of the pandemic there was very much an 'emergency response' from individuals, communities and organisations with people just trying to organise themselves to act as quickly as possible to help and protect those in need and vulnerable and the demand in the first lockdown was around getting basic supplies and supports to people and to preserve life and reduce harm.'

'As things progressed beyond the initial few weeks there was greater consideration given to joint planning, making best use of volunteer resource and ensuring volunteers themselves were protected and able to work as safely as possible. This meant that by the end of first full lockdown and into second lockdown certain services and activities were better organised across the voluntary and public sector and less 'reactive' and with clearer support processes and procedures in place for individuals and organisations the demand balanced out.'

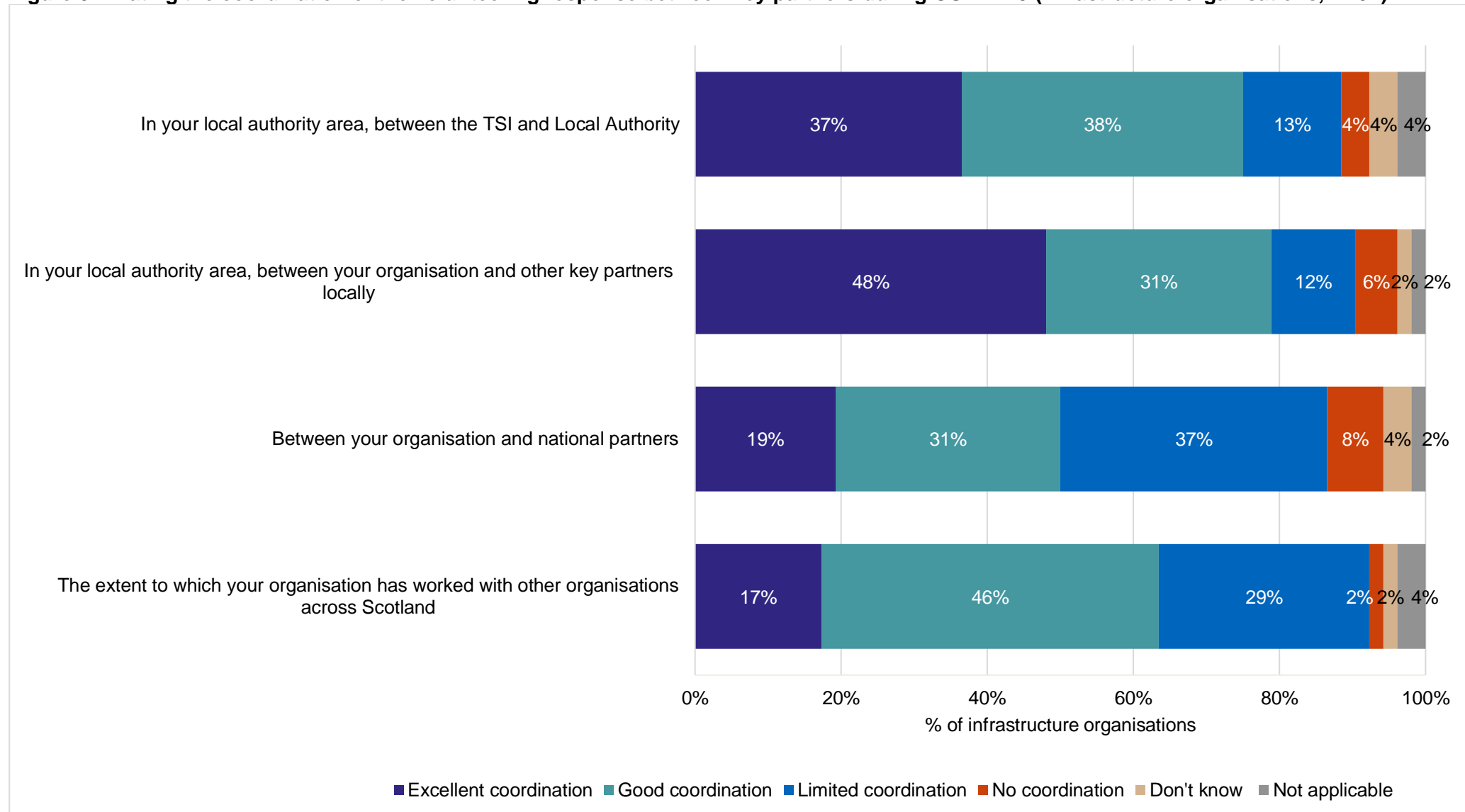
Several respondents felt that the most successful responses were ones that integrated a high level of coordination between different actors. This tended to be easier in places where community support groups had strong links to pre-existing organisations which in turn had established relationships with other key partners in the local area.

5.1.1 How infrastructure organisations rated the coordination of the volunteering response

Coordination of the local volunteering response became an important role for many infrastructure organisations. Ninety-four percent of all infrastructure organisation respondents said that they led coordination of volunteering responses to some or to a large extent (Figure 4.6 above).

Infrastructure organisations were asked to rate the coordination of the volunteering response between key partners. As shown in Figure 5.1, infrastructure organisations rated the coordination of the response between themselves and key local partners the highest, with 48% of respondents saying this was excellent, and 31% saying it was good. Coordination between the local authority and the TSI was also fairly highly rated, with 37% saying this was excellent, and 38% saying it was good. Infrastructure organisations rated coordination between themselves and national partner organisations somewhat less favorably, with 50% of respondents considered the coordination with national partners to be either excellent or good; 37% saying that there had been limited coordination at this level, and 8% saying there had been no coordination. It was clear from the responses that coordination was felt to be most effective – and arguably made the most difference – at the local authority and local levels.

Figure 5.1 Rating the coordination of the volunteering response between key partners during COVID-19 (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



The main predictor of good coordination seemed to be strong or effective pre-existing working relationships between key local partners – particularly the local authority and TSI – which helped to underpin a more inclusive multi-agency approach to the COVID-19 response. Of the 38 infrastructure respondents who gave examples of what had worked well in the coordination response, 27 talked about the multiagency response. Whilst some were able to draw on pre-existing relationships, others felt that positive working relationships and coordination structures developed as a result of the pandemic, and that this was a helpful outcome that would support better planning and coordination through the next stages of recovery.

‘There has been excellent co-operation and co-ordination between the TSI’s Volunteer Centre and the local authority and HSCP to provide an effective, comprehensive and robust volunteer response to help people with mild to moderate needs as well as those requiring high levels of assistance.’

‘What worked especially well was when community response volunteers came across individuals who were not registered with health or social care as ‘vulnerable’, but who were identified as such by the volunteers. The response and co-ordination with health and social care was very good.’

Infrastructure organisations were also asked what aspects of the coordination of the volunteer response could have been improved. Responses to this question focused on two main areas: the coordination between local authorities, TSIs and other third sector organisations; and the coordination of the Scotland Cares campaign between national and local levels. Local authorities were more likely to focus on the coordination between local authority and national level, while TSIs talked more about coordination with other local statutory partners.

Whilst multi-agency working worked well in many places, there were clearly some areas where there was more difficulty, particularly in building strong coordination between the work of the TSI and the local authority.

‘There was little to no coordination of the local volunteer response. It was made pertinently clear by the local authority from the onset that they had no respect for existing relationships, processes and systems which the TSI had already in place due to its role in supporting volunteering in pre-COVID times. Rather than working with us, they further complicated the landscape by adding their own processes.’

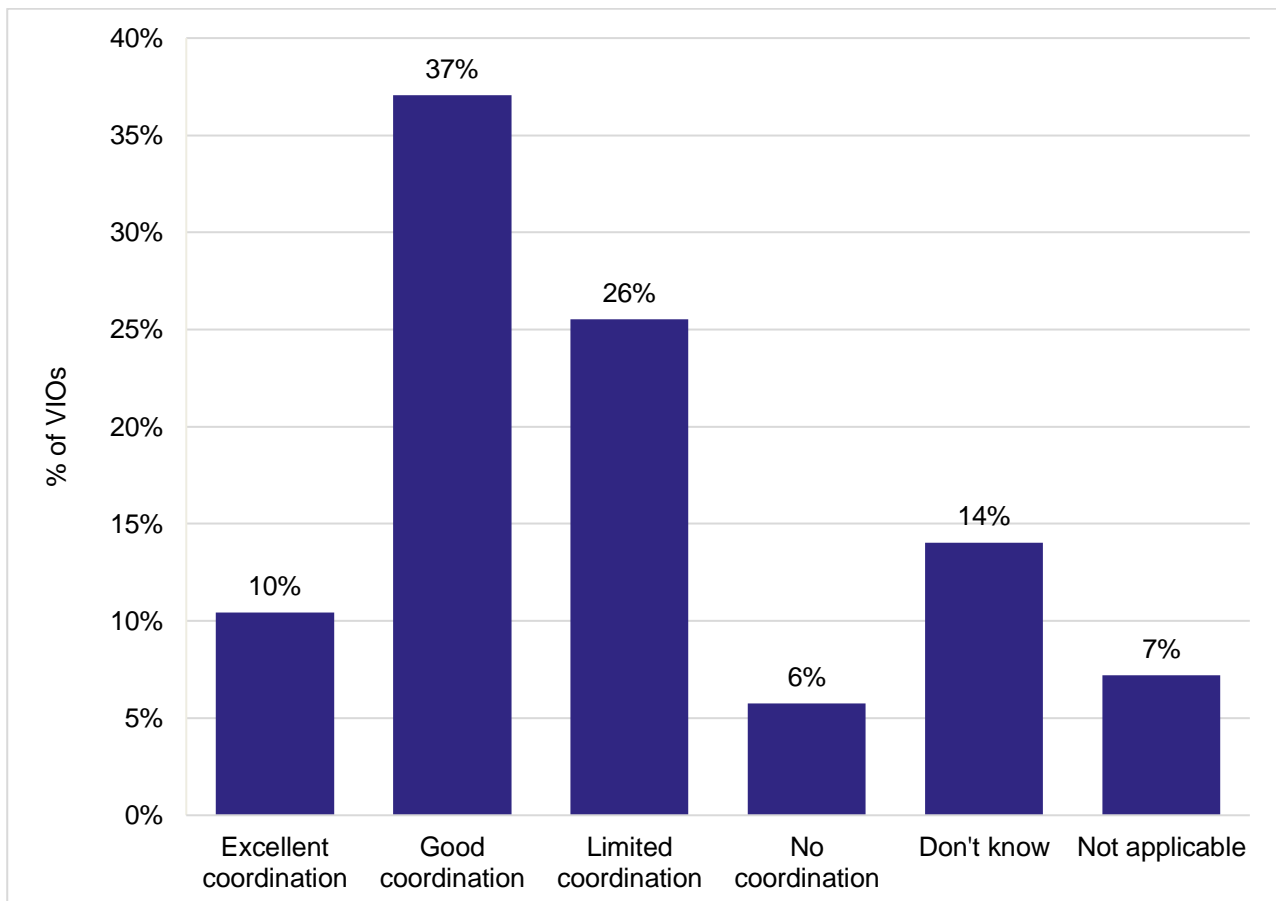
‘Local coordination and recruitment of volunteers could have been more efficient. Initial discussion between [TSI] and local authority were to have a joint response to a local volunteer support phone line and matching of volunteers to local response groups, however, the local authority decided to keep this in-house due to their concerns regarding info sharing. From subsequent feedback, the response could have been improved by increased partnership coordination to ensure consistency in the volunteer response and avoid duplication of work.’

The coordination of the Scotland Cares campaign is covered in more detail in Section 5.3.

5.1.2 How VIOs rated the coordination of the volunteering response

VIOs were also asked to rate the coordination of the volunteering response (Figure 5.2). While 47% rated coordination of the response as good or excellent, 26% felt that coordination was limited/could be improved, with 6% saying there was no coordination of the volunteering response in their view, and 21% saying either that they didn't know, or that the question was not applicable to them.

Figure 5.2 Rating the wider coordination of the volunteering response (VIOs, N=278)



Where VIOs felt coordination worked well, it was usually due to the actions of either the local TSI, local authority or both, in putting effective coordination structures in place and engaging well with local third sector organisations.

'The coordination from the local hub (local authority) in the [area] during lockdown was exemplary, they responded quickly and brought in the local, on-the-ground third sector organisations to help. I believe we worked well together and were therefore able to offer support to the more vulnerable in the community.'

'Food network established to coordinate local response to ensure groups supported each other and avoided duplication. Council established neighborhood hubs and linked with third sector. Supporting Communities Fund ... ensuring quick and easy response for community groups. Successful projects were linked together improving delivery for community.'

Among the VIOs that would have liked more coordination, many cited difficulties in knowing which organisations to contact and felt that there had been limited or no communication or information to support volunteering coordination in their area.

'I think organisations could have been better at "sharing" volunteers, particularly where normal activity had to cease. I also believe that much of the emergency response was provided by community based organisations who didn't have appropriate knowledge of the sector to effectively link up. This has been a key role for TSIs who have often done a fantastic job in coordinating new and existing services. I think the Scotland Cares campaign confused this response, and wasn't joined up with demand/need for volunteers at a community level.'

'It was very difficult to get information about other services, including the local authority. We had nowhere to refer vulnerable people and nowhere to report any problems people were facing. This improved slowly over the course of the first lockdown and by the second lockdown, it was a bit easier. There is no one-stop shop to get info and no one was carrying out online training to help us figure out where people could get help.'

Overall, while many of the responses expressed challenges around coordination, many infrastructure organisations and VIOs suggested that coordination within local authority areas generally improved during the course of the pandemic, and that better coordination structures and working relationships could be an important legacy with the potential to support volunteering and other aspects of local response in the future.

5.2 Awareness and involvement in resilience planning

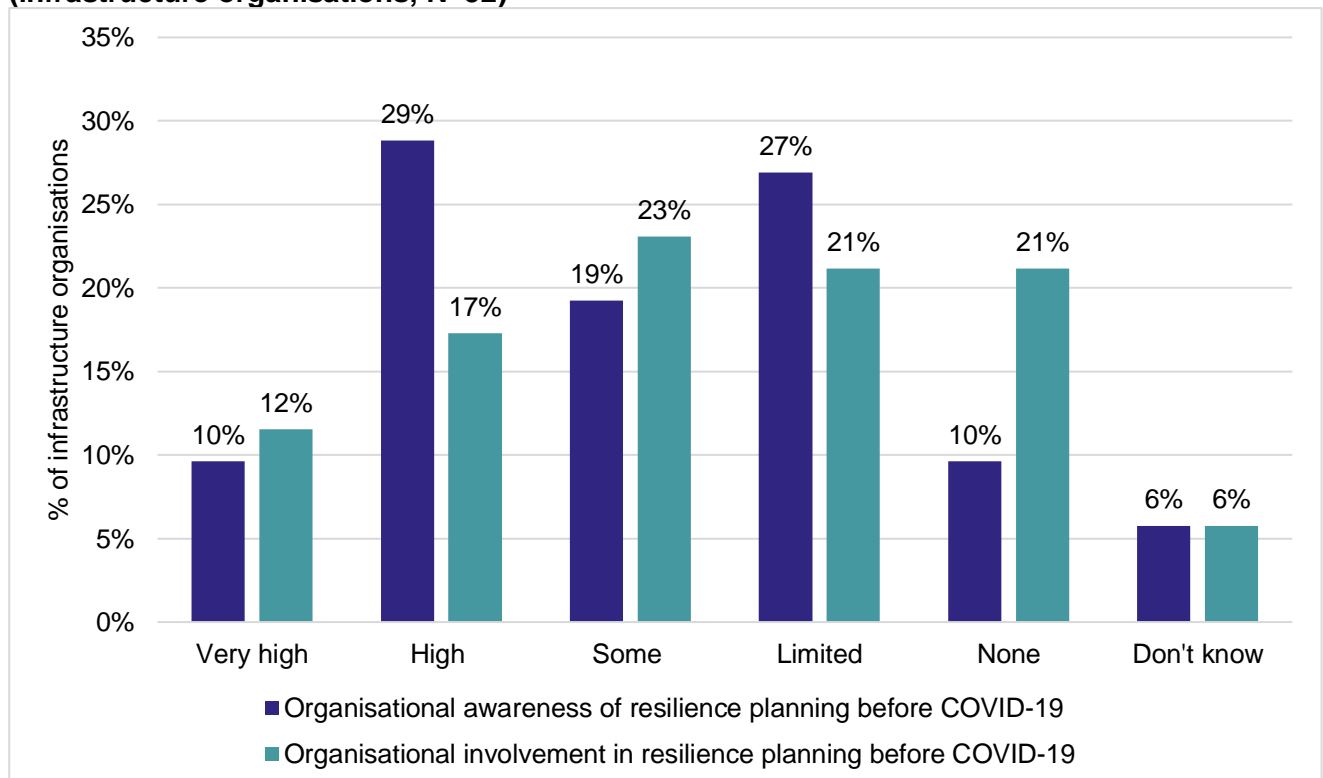
We asked infrastructure organisations about their levels of awareness and involvement in resilience planning prior to the pandemic. As shown in Figure 5.3, the responses suggested there was a lot of variation between infrastructure organisations in terms of how aware or involved they had been in resilience planning prior to the pandemic. As would be expected, local authorities generally rated their awareness and involvement in resilience planning as high: 91% of the local authority respondents said their awareness of resilience planning before COVID-19 was high or very high, while 82% said their involvement in resilience planning prior to COVID-19 was high or very high. In contrast, TSIs varied greatly in their levels of awareness and involvement in resilience planning and partnerships prior to the pandemic – from very high to none. Of the TSI respondents, 25% rated their prior awareness of resilience planning as high, while 14% rated their prior involvement as high or very high. Overall, 58% of respondents rated their awareness of resilience planning as prior to the pandemic as 'very high', 'high', or 'some' (58%). Conversely, 37% rated their level of awareness as 'limited' or 'none' (37%).

While TSIs and the third sector became more integrated in resilience structures in some areas during the pandemic, this continued to be more of a challenge in others.

'We were disappointed not to be involved in our local Resilience Partnership. It would appear there was a different approach across Scotland where some TSI's were heavily involved and others not involved at all.'

'The resilience response felt effective but again could have been improved with more third sector inclusion. Although we eventually were seen as full and effective partners in the Local Response Management Team structure, we were firstly overlooked and in fact turned away from a meeting as it was deemed 'too early' for our involvement.'

Figure 5.3 Awareness of and involvement in resilience planning among before COVID-19 (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



A few respondents considered that the focus of resilience planning arrangements prior to the pandemic had been more on structures, pipelines and 'hardware' aspects of resilience, with less focus on community response and the role it might play in a crisis. Others noted that preparedness arrangements had focused more on potential environmental crises – such as flooding – with the implication that resilience arrangements needed more adaptation to cope with the specific demands of the pandemic.

'The resilience response was effective at coordinating the 'structural' aspects of the pandemic – i.e. planning for hospital beds, vaccines, mortuary back up-procedures. However at the beginning of the pandemic it was insufficiently linked to the community response. Third Sector organisations that typically were involved in the resilience partnerships were not, in most cases, at the forefront of the community response. The community response was coordinated by the LA and TSI. We have since improved communication between the voluntary sector resilience partnership and the TSI.'

'The community resilience response in most areas was very effective but could have been more streamlined/joined up. From the statutory services, it would have been better if they didn't use the plans for flooding, heavy snow etc. as a base to work from. Better communication and again a better understanding and valuing of the third sector input.'

Some respondents also noted that the nature of existing resilience planning arrangements had changed as a result of the pandemic, arguably developing a greater focus on social aspects of resilience, including community volunteering, as well as building closer relationships with the third sector. There was a feeling that this is an important gain that can be built on for future responses, and also that the pandemic has generated useful lessons for resilience arrangements in Scotland.

'We need to distinguish between resilience in the face of emergencies and resilience to chronic stresses and ongoing systemic challenges. The city's resilience strategy had previously looked to address both and had identified the importance of community leadership for both (leaders in both paid and unpaid roles) but I'm not clear that the emergency planning structures had learnt from that nor examined the extent to which they needed to expand their membership to take account of it.'

'During COVID-19 the resilience response was excellent and very effective. There is greater awareness of resilience and more people/organisations are now involved in continuing to actively build community resilience.'

'We have a strong community planning partnership in [Local Authority area] – and the resilience response, such as we've seen during the COVID-19 crisis, saw [Local Council], the Health & Social Care Partnership, local private sector organisations, and the Third Sector network of community groups shape the local response to a national crisis - often providing a 'safe place' for those vulnerable individuals and families most at risk.

'While we believed that the existing work in [Local Authority area] provided a great starting point for meeting the increased needs felt by our communities during the crisis, the resilience response has perhaps actually strengthened the collaborations, and existing partnerships. There is also appears to be a willingness to the idea shaped by the Social Renewal Advisory report to 'Build on new ways of working, based on what has worked well during the pandemic'.'

5.3 The Scotland Cares campaign

The Scotland Cares campaign was a national volunteering campaign that ran between March-May 2020, right at the beginning of the pandemic. The campaign was put in place by the Scottish Government in partnership with NHS Scotland, Volunteer Scotland and the British Red Cross. The intention was to ensure that a large pool of volunteers could be identified to be called upon to support the COVID response at community level as needed, and who could be appropriately supported in a coordinated way. The campaign was a response to the widespread public impetus to volunteer in some way, and the need to be able to channel this

‘spontaneous’ volunteering effectively without creating additional burden for operational services.¹²

The campaign encouraged potential volunteers to sign up with either the British Red Cross or Volunteer Scotland, in order to support the COVID-19 response in Scotland. The campaign also encouraged former health professionals to return to the NHS. By May 2020 the campaign had gathered over 83,000 sign-ups, more than 60,000 of which were with Volunteer Scotland (35,262) or the British Red Cross (25,172).¹³

The British Red Cross made direct contact with the potential volunteers, encouraging them to register as community reserve volunteers and download the ‘GoodSam’ app, an app designed to match volunteer tasks – such as patient transport – with volunteers in the relevant local area.

Volunteer Scotland also made direct contact with all of the potential volunteers signing up on their platform, however the mobilisation of volunteers signing up on the Volunteer Scotland platform was intended to take place via local authority-based volunteering management structures – not via Volunteer Scotland directly. Accordingly, Volunteer Scotland contacted the representatives of TSIs and local authorities in every local authority area, and provided the local authority/TSI volunteering leads with details of the potential volunteers in their local area. It was then up to the local volunteering coordination structure to make further contact with the potential volunteers, encouraging them to register to receive further information about local volunteering opportunities.

Of the 39 local authorities and TSIs responding to this survey, 35 (90%) said they had received data relating to relevant sign-ups to the Scotland Cares campaign. These organisations took various steps to make contact and follow up with the people signing up to the Scotland Cares campaign, including:

- Registering them with their own organisation (63% of the infrastructure organisations did this);
- Informing relevant volunteering organisations in the local area about the availability of potential volunteers (60% did this);
- Matching volunteers to organisations needing volunteers (63% did this);
- Sending regular communications about volunteering in the local area to those people who had signed up and registered (63% did this).

¹² See [National volunteering plan for coronavirus - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-volunteering-plan-for-coronavirus/pages/number-of-volunteer-sign-ups-passes-76-000.aspx), [Number of volunteer sign-ups passes 76,000 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/number-of-volunteer-sign-ups-passes-76-000/pages/number-of-volunteer-sign-ups-passes-76-000.aspx) and [Thanks for pandemic volunteers - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/publications/thanks-for-pandemic-volunteers/pages/thanks-for-pandemic-volunteers.aspx) for more information about Scotland Cares. See also UK Government (2019) established guidelines for the management of spontaneous volunteering in emergencies, ‘[Planning the coordination of spontaneous volunteers in emergencies](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/421113/Planning_the_coordination_of_spontaneous_volunteers_in_emergencies.pdf)’.

¹³ The remainder of the 83,000 sign-ups were NHS returning health and social care workers, including medical, nursing, midwifery and allied health professional students, who were asked through the campaign to consider returning to the workforce to support the NHS response.

5.3.1 Views on the campaign

We asked infrastructure organisation respondents to tell us their views about the Scotland Cares campaign, focusing on what worked well within the campaign, and what could have been improved.

Some respondents recognised that the campaign had been successful in raising the profile of volunteering, generating a huge positive response from large numbers of people, including people who were new to volunteering and groups that would probably not have been reached otherwise. According to one infrastructure organisation:

'The Scotland Cares campaign was excellent and very effective in helping build the tremendous volunteering and community response to COVID-19. It successfully harnessed people's desire to help and the link between the national campaign and local action was great.'

Respondents also acknowledged the success of the campaign in generating interest and sign-ups from people with a wide range of skills and experience.

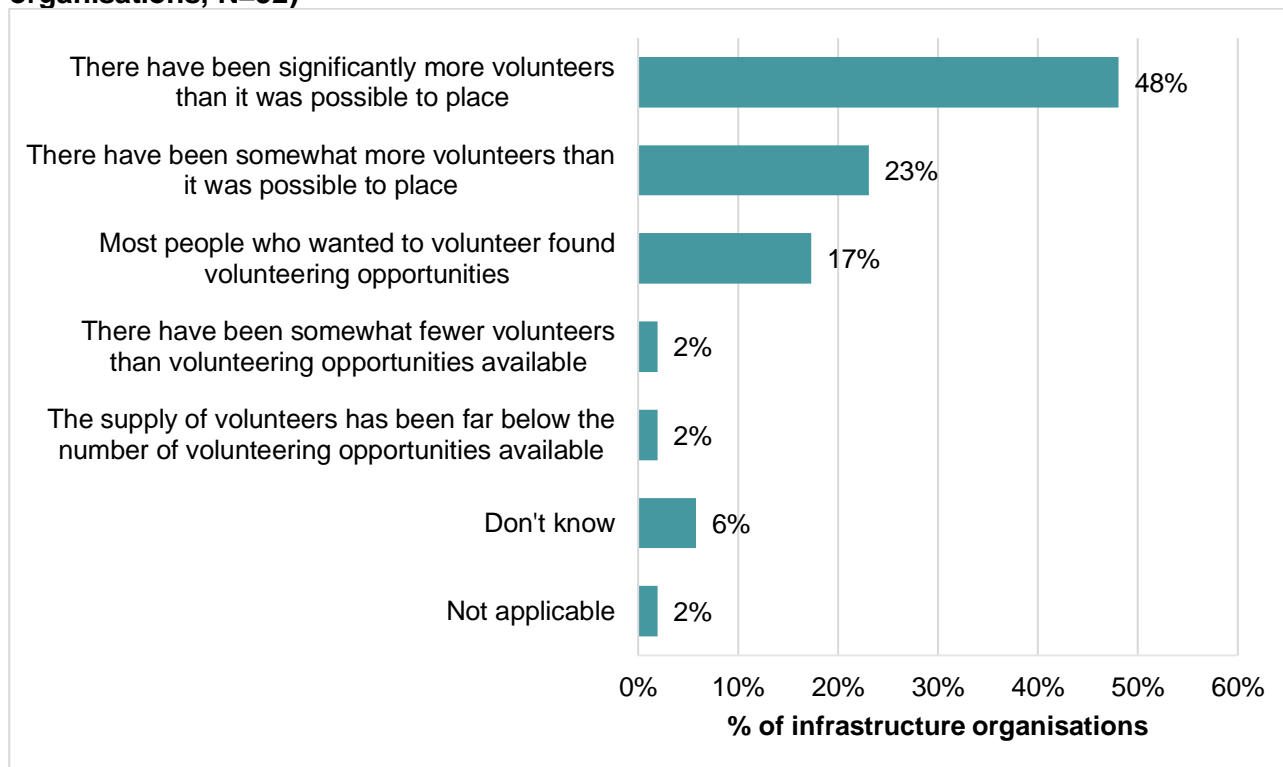
'The range of skills offered by volunteers gave organisations a level of choice not usually available.'

However, the overwhelming opinion among the infrastructure organisations was that the volunteering campaign had led to large numbers of people signing up for whom there were not enough formal volunteering roles available. It was not possible for the infrastructure organisations and their third sector partners to place the majority of the volunteers into roles. As shown in Figure 5.4:

- just 17% of infrastructure organisations agreed that 'most people who wanted to found volunteering opportunities'
- 48% agreed that there were significantly more volunteers than it was possible to place
- 23% said that there were 'somewhat' more volunteers than they could place.

'It energised people to volunteer, which would have been good if we needed them but as it turned out we really only needed a few.'

Figure 5.4 Managing the volunteer supply during the pandemic (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



Once they received the details of sign-ups to the campaign in their local areas, infrastructure organisations (mainly TSIs) typically contacted the people who had signed up to the national campaign to invite them to register with the local volunteering platform, and to share information about local volunteering opportunities. Respondents felt that this double sign-up/registration process was off-putting to people, and created an additional barrier.

‘The promotion and the numbers signing up were fantastic. It felt a bit disjointed with volunteers signing up via a national intermediary to then be passed to the local organisation to deal with. We then had to ask them to register with us which was another exercise and for some could be seen as a barrier. We had to then look at the limited opportunities we had available and try our best to match the skills with the right organisation.’

The influx of willing volunteers combined with a lack of volunteer roles locally was a cause of concern to respondents from infrastructure organisations, who felt that there needed to be better management of expectations around volunteering opportunities – with the result that many potential volunteers were disappointed.

‘I think that what Scotland Cares showed was that there were/are huge numbers of people who are willing to volunteer. There seemed to be a mismatch between people coming forward and being matched up with volunteering opportunities, many people who came forward received very little communication and were left feeling unvalued.’

'I appreciate the good intentions behind the campaign, but it was pretty disastrous for volunteering. There was no coordination with the TSI, so there was no management of the expectations of the number of volunteering opportunities that would be available. We received over a year's worth of volunteers in one go – there was no way we were going to be able to place more than a fraction of them. This resulted in a lot of disappointed volunteers, who couldn't understand why the Government was encouraging them to volunteer, but we were telling them we couldn't place them. This resulted in reputational damage to our organisation, and may mean that people are less likely to volunteer in future. It was very difficult to get our voices heard – we were telling the Government that we couldn't cope with all the volunteers that were coming through, but they kept advertising the campaign.'

Respondents particularly felt that there had been a lack of coordination between the national campaign and the local volunteering coordination leads in the TSIs in particular. In some areas, TSIs had already run volunteer promotional campaigns; in others, mutual aid responses were already well underway. There was a feeling that the Scotland Cares campaign came too late, and did not reflect the level of locally-expressed needs for volunteers.

'It would have been helpful if there had been some consultation with local TSIs who could have advised on the greatly reduced number of opportunities available. A great many volunteers were disappointed at not being offered a role and potentially discouraged their future volunteering.'

'The numbers who registered was positive, however we already had more than sufficient volunteers who registered with our local campaign therefore the end result was duplication and an additional strain on capacity to contact those who had registered on Scotland Cares. The most significant improvement would have been engagement locally prior to any national campaign.'

Respondents also noted that there were difficulties in coordination between the two volunteering sign-up pathways (British Red Cross and Volunteer Scotland). Data management and the additional data-processing workload created by the campaign was also a concern.

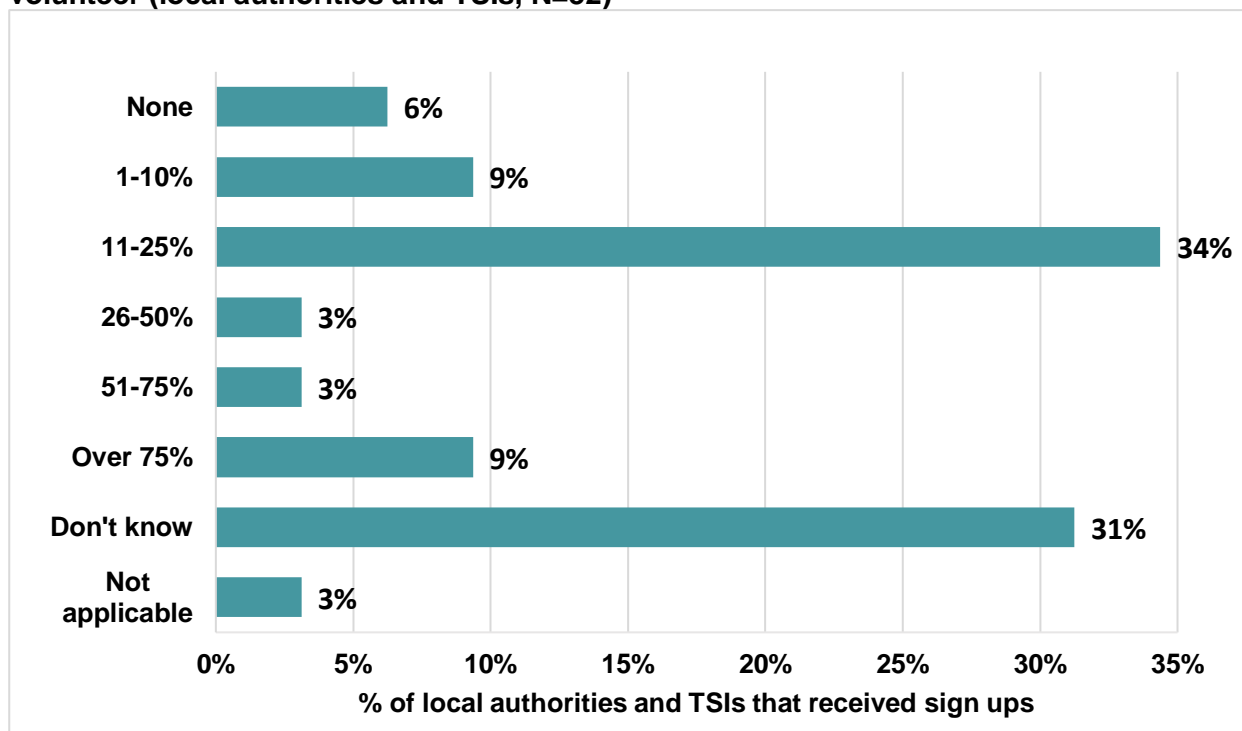
'We were fortunate to have a digital system in place where volunteers could register themselves, upload their own information, and submit their own requirements and any additional information. If we had been reliant on manually sourcing and inputting volunteer information we would have been completely overwhelmed. Options for data management weren't presented to TSIs and it was understood that each TSI should manage the data as best they could, while also adhering to GDPR and their existing procedures.'

5.3.2 Volunteer deployment arising from the campaign

Because the people who signed up via the Volunteer Scotland platform were subsequently linked with local authority-level volunteering coordination structures across Scotland, we do not have a single source of data on the numbers that were subsequently deployed as volunteers. We asked respondents to estimate what proportion of the people who signed-up in their area went on to volunteer with an

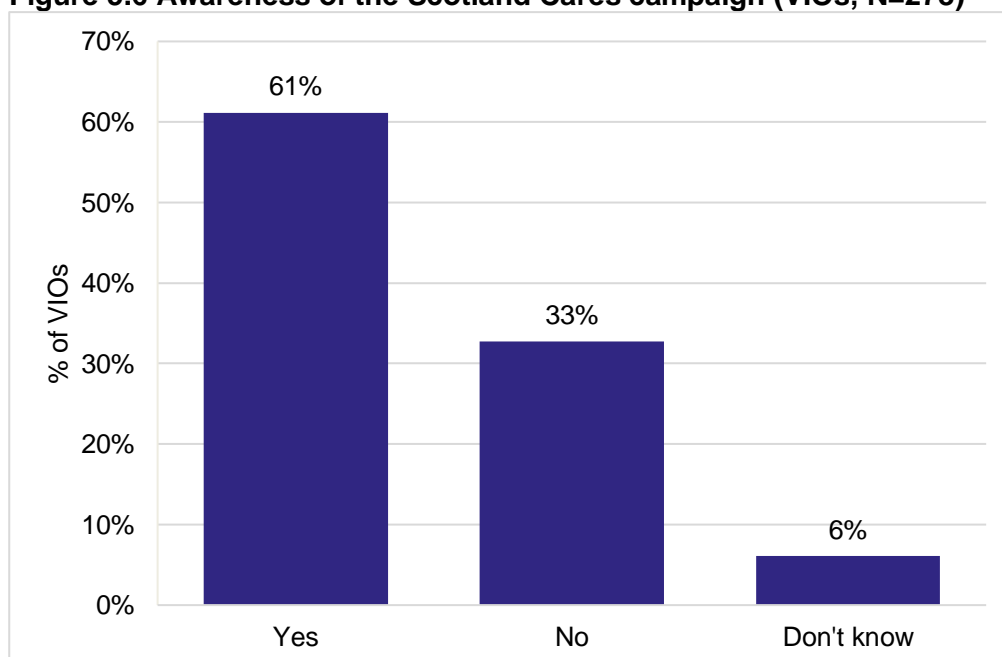
organisation. As shown in Figure 5.5, 50% of infrastructure organisations said that 25% or fewer of the people who signed up went on to volunteer. Thirty-one percent of respondents said they didn't know.

Figure 5.5 Proportion of people signing up to Scotland Cares (VS platform) who went on to volunteer (local authorities and TSIs, N=32)



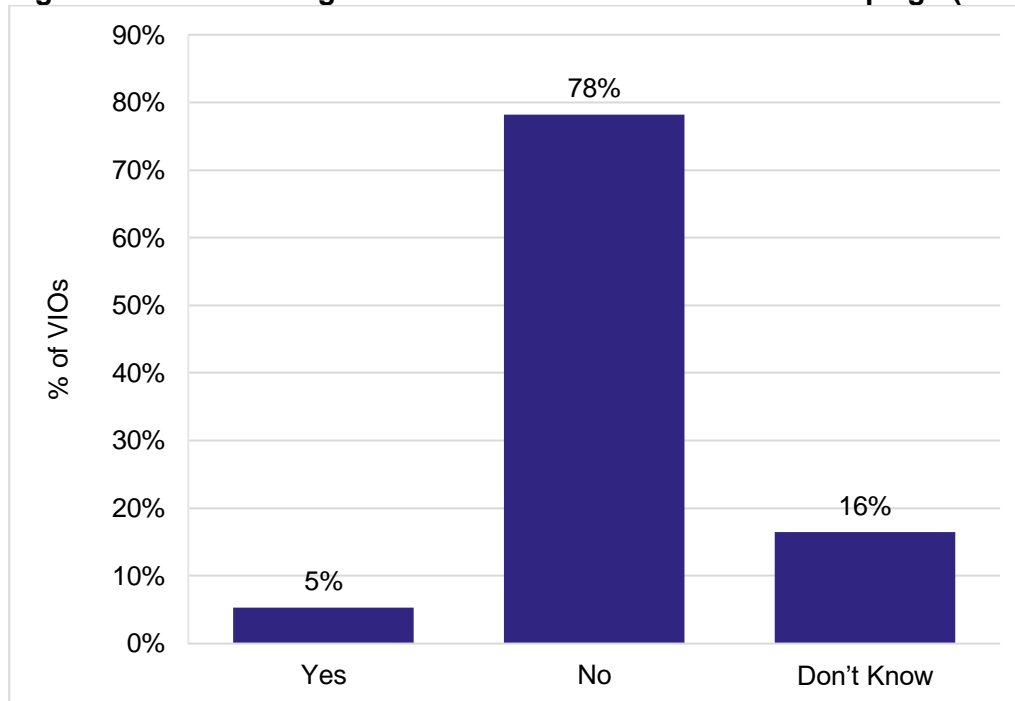
We also asked VIOs about their level of awareness of the Scotland Cares campaign, and whether they received any volunteers as a result of the campaign. Sixty-one percent of the VIO respondents said they were aware of the campaign, while 33% said they were not, suggesting that information about the campaign was only partially successful in reaching VIOs (Figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6 Awareness of the Scotland Cares campaign (VIOs, N=278)



When VIOs that were aware of the campaign were asked whether any volunteers had started volunteering with their organisation as a result of Scotland Cares, 78% answered no, 16% said they did not know, and 5% said that they had received volunteers as a result (Figure 5.7).

Figure 5.7 Volunteering as a result of the Scotland Cares campaign (VIOs, N=170)



Where VIOs indicated that no volunteers had been placed within their organisations as a result of the campaign, they were asked to indicate the reasons for this. Of these organisations, 76% said that they did not need any more volunteers, and 8% said that they had received volunteers from elsewhere.

In summary, from the perspective of TSIs, the Scotland Cares campaign did not result in high numbers of volunteer placements, primarily because the level of formal volunteering opportunities that existed in local areas at the time was very low. Meanwhile, mutual aid groups had already gotten underway, and had successfully recruited large numbers of participants via social media channels.

'The main challenge was that [TSI] had already advertised and placed volunteers when the [Scotland Cares] appeal was launched. In addition the local informal or semi-formal volunteers structures were already well underway – people found their own ways to help.'

From a longer-term perspective, however, the campaign generated a large number of potential volunteers, many of whom have registered with volunteering mailing lists and databases within their local authority area, offering scope for future engagement as more formal volunteering opportunities open up. Efforts to maintain links with this large pool of potential volunteers could also form part of preparedness strategies for future emergency responses (see also Chapter 8 below).

6 Challenges for volunteering during the pandemic – and how organisations have responded

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed many different challenges to organisations working with volunteers, particularly for organisations that had pre-existing formal volunteering programmes in place before the pandemic. We asked volunteer-involving organisations to tell us about the impact of the pandemic on their volunteering programmes and projects; the challenges they have faced in deploying volunteers during the pandemic; and how they have responded to these challenges by adapting the way that they work to enable volunteering to continue.

We also asked infrastructure organisations for their views on the challenges that the pandemic has posed for volunteering, and present their views in the final section of this chapter.

6.1 Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering programmes and projects

We asked VIOs to tell us about the overall impact of the pandemic on their programmes and projects involving volunteers, and whether any of these were reduced in scale, paused or ceased permanently. The results are provided in Figure 6.1 below. Twelve percent of the responding VIOs told us that programmes involving volunteers had ceased permanently. Sixty-one percent said that they had had to pause projects or programmes involving volunteers temporarily, and 31% indicated the projects or programmes involving volunteers had reduced in scale. Just 18% of responding VIOs said that the pandemic had had no impact on their programmes and projects involving volunteers. The data suggest that pre-existing volunteering programmes have been significantly affected by the pandemic with all sectors and sizes of organisations experiencing significant reductions in their ability to run their planned volunteering programmes.

Programmes and activities requiring face-to-face engagement were the main type of projects involving volunteers that had reduced, paused or ceased during COVID-19.

‘Our face-to-face engagement with communities has had to cease and everything has gone online.’

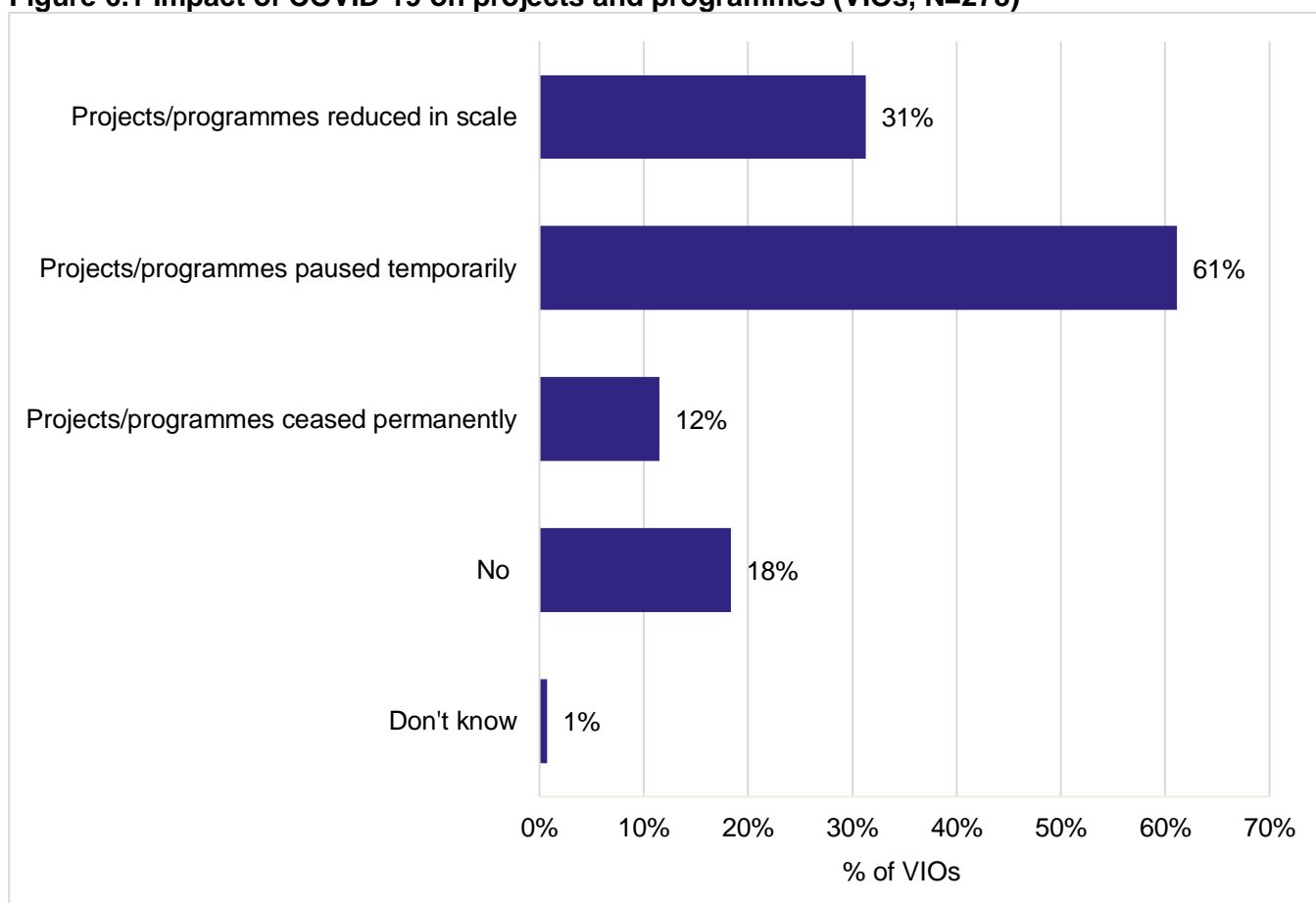
‘During lockdown all our properties had to close meaning that projects were either paused, scaled down or transferred into next year.’

‘Restrictions on public gatherings, meeting indoors and travel within different local authorities have resulted in the suspension of fortnightly sessions and all volunteering opportunities.’

'Programme moved online with home delivery. Uptake was low, so effectively was temporarily suspended. Volunteers not able to engage – lack of technology, lack of technical skills, changed priorities (work and family), loss of interest.'

'Participation groups with young people had to stop completely during most of the lockdowns, which was the majority of our volunteering work. Volunteers were very supportive and understanding, and many stepped forward to help with online participation. However, many young people did not take to online groups and so volunteers weren't required in the same numbers, or often groups were cancelled when there was no interest.'

Figure 6.1 Impact of COVID-19 on projects and programmes (VIOs, N=278)¹⁴



¹⁴ Note: Organisations could select as many options as necessary to describe the overall impact on their projects and programmes, which is why the percentages sum to more than 100%.

One organisation which suspended its programme also noted how their formal volunteers switched to informal and mutual aid volunteering instead.

'As a community hub our doors were closed to the public and many of our volunteers. Prior to COVID-19 they would have been involved in the design and delivery of large-scale community events which were then suspended due to the pandemic. Many volunteers needed to focus on parenting responsibilities. The focus shifted from formal volunteering to mutual aid through a food delivery programme and also informal volunteering in their own street; checking on neighbours, cutting grass, etc.'

6.1.1 Impacts on volunteers

Nearly half of respondents provided some degree of reflection as to how volunteers had been impacted as a result of projects and programmes being reduced, paused or stopped. The vast majority believed that volunteers had been adversely affected; either through there being a lack of opportunities to volunteer, or through personal concerns as to how safe and appropriate it was to volunteer.

'Volunteers were impacted as the demand for their time reduced. Many volunteers are still reluctant to come into face-to-face settings.'

'The stay-at-home restrictions meant that volunteers could not be encouraged to travel other than for essential reasons. Rules around social contacts also meant that it was impossible for volunteers to be supervised or work with other volunteers.'

For most respondents, COVID-19 restrictions had significantly reduced or halted their volunteering activities, providing fewer opportunities for people to volunteer and to form social connections and engage in meaningful activity. Although many VIOs attempted to diversify and provide alternative forms of volunteering, including through digital engagement and delivery, it was not always possible to continue offering volunteering opportunities.

'We have also had to reduce the number of volunteers coming into the food bank on a daily basis to ensure safe social distancing could be enforced. This has been difficult on volunteers but we have actively engaged them in other more social activities such as wellbeing walks and online meetings to maintain contact.'

'From March 2020 when green space volunteering, community development and health and wellbeing activities were paused our volunteers instead delivered emergency food relief initially and later youth work due to a very poor response to both from the local authority. The impact on our volunteers of taking on a whole other range of support services was huge, the resilience work did not feel voluntary, it felt like we were filling a gap to prevent vulnerable households from being overwhelmed.'

'We lost the majority of our volunteers during lockdown, many felt they simply didn't have the digital skills or confidence to deliver remote service. Factors including lack of hardware to bring in digitally confident volunteers was another factor limiting volunteer participation in front line advice. Many volunteers working remotely are using their own hardware (pc/laptop/mobile device) to provide remote services. A great number of volunteers came to the [respondent VIO] to be part of a team, to beat loneliness and to keep active, working from home did not provide them with the familiar interactions they were accustomed to, this meant they didn't feel any personal benefit to their own wellbeing working from home, coupled with handling clients in crisis on a daily basis with no outlet, had a significant impact on their mental health and they decided to give volunteering with us a break. Caring responsibilities saw another portion of volunteers leaving, this including caring for children and family/friends.'

A number of respondents referred to people's '*readiness to volunteer*' and how some volunteers were reluctant to return because of safety concerns regarding COVID-19 or had had to reduce or stop volunteering because of changes in their circumstances brought about by the pandemic (i.e. increased caring responsibilities or other commitments).

'I would imagine that some of our retired volunteers may not wish to return with the added consideration of PPE/guidelines, etc.'

'Some volunteers are on hold either due to increased commitments outside volunteering or because they have chosen not to do remote support.'

'Some of our volunteer counsellors were not able to provide remote counselling due to their home circumstances (e.g. children home schooling, partners working from home, etc.) and not having a private enough space. Others were struggling with personal issues which precluded their volunteering.'

'Many of our volunteers are also older and have experienced...increased isolation and lack of confidence, increased issues with mobility. This has put some off from returning to volunteering. There is also the element of losing the connection with the charity and with the group. As our...volunteers have not met in over a year, it might be difficult to rebuild the team dynamic we had through them meeting regularly.'

'Our social groups, drama groups and music groups have been unable to come into the church to meet because of COVID restrictions. The volunteers who facilitated these are shielding in some instances, in other instances report a reluctance to come out and a detrimental effect on mental health, in some older volunteers – no longer willing to come out ... – "it's too cold", "too much of an effort to get dressed and make my way there", "don't know where a stranger has been - they might give me COVID".'

Some volunteering organisations felt that the lack of opportunity to engage in their usual volunteering activities as a result of volunteering programmes closing or reducing had negatively impacted on the health and wellbeing of some volunteers. A number of VIOs expressed concern that for more vulnerable volunteers, the pandemic had led to an increase in '*loneliness and isolation, loss of purpose and*

poor mental health', and in some instances supporting the wellbeing of volunteers had now become a major focus for the organisations.

'Our volunteers struggled with the fact they couldn't help families who they had a trusted relationship with.'

'Many people choose to volunteer as they themselves are isolated and the personal gain they get from volunteering, so being unable to do so has had a detrimental impact on their wellbeing.'

'We shifted to supporting our volunteers (and participants) as people in a pandemic and worked to alleviate isolation, loneliness [and] wellbeing issues by offering alternative ways to engage with us and each other at home or online.'

'We provided a huge amount of support to our volunteers throughout this time, as they too were grappling with the stress and fear of the pandemic and needed support too. And then in turn the support needed for our staff supporting the volunteers.'

'Reasons for volunteering has shifted in emphasis, from giving something back/supporting others to supporting their own wellbeing. People have felt isolated during lockdowns, and any volunteering opportunities that they engaged in pre-COVID, have been suspended, if they took place indoors. Our own emphasis, as an organisation, has shifted from seeing our volunteers as a support for our delivery of services, to us supporting the wellbeing of our volunteers, who in turn then support the community.'

6.1.2 Impacts on service users

Around a quarter of respondents briefly mentioned how they believed service users had been impacted by their projects/programmes involving volunteers being reduced, paused or ceased during COVID-19. The majority of these respondents believed that service users had been adversely affected; either through not being able to access services due to closures, delays and restrictions; or through increased loneliness and isolation stemming from a lack of social interaction that was once provided by these paused or reduced services.

'The impact of pausing groups has meant some service users have become more isolated and now lack confidence going out.'

'Youth club had to be postponed due to hall closures and social distancing requirements. Young people were tired of online activities and did not want to engage in digital youth club.'

'Our core work is matching volunteers with families. These volunteers provide support through home-visiting. This had to completely stop during both lockdowns although remote support was provided. This had a devastating effect on our families who were already struggling with their physical and mental health.'

Although many organisations had adapted their programmes to be able to deliver on-line or remote support, this was not always meeting the needs of service users. Certain groups of service users found the shift to online provision particularly

challenging: respondents mentioned people with poor internet access; refugees; people with dementia; some people with disabilities. Organisations working with children and young people struggled to engage these groups effectively with on-line provision.

'All of our face-to-face befriending meetings have had to stop which our befriendees and volunteer befrienders have found really hard. We have also had to stop all of our group sessions – these were really valued by everyone involved. We have moved all of our befriending relationships onto telephone befriending/video calls and have offered some shared interest Zoom groups as a temporary measure, but some people have not been able to do this due to hearing problems or lack of access to the internet.'

'Many roles were for our outdoor sports groups, like walking, swimming or the community garden and these had to stop. Others were moved online but many volunteers decided online groups were too much with Zoom fatigue after a while. We used to run several activities and ESOL classes on a drop in basis and our office was a hub with many activities and conversation groups where volunteers and participants could just drop in. We were able to continue doing these online but the number of classes was reduced drastically. The whole nature of drop in services disappeared due to Covid guidelines. We were able to transfer our whole befriending programme to be done remotely. This worked well but only to an extent since all the families and individuals we befriend are newcomers to Edinburgh and the majority are from the refugee community so communicating online when English is not your first language was not easy. Many refugee families also did not have access to internet or computers. Many volunteers preferred the face to face befriending and conversation groups.'

'Reduced number of service users due to struggling with online, lack of equipment and zoom fatigue. It is hard to build trusted adult relationships with young people just using online methods.'

'Participation groups with young people had to stop completely during most of the lockdowns, which was the majority of our volunteering work. Volunteers were very supportive and understanding, and many stepped forward to help with online participation. However, many young people did not take to online groups and so volunteers weren't required in the same numbers, or often groups were cancelled when there was no interest.'

'We moved our befriending to telephone befriending. This has impacted our service users, especially those with dementia.'

In terms of respondents' expectations about whether their projects/programmes involving volunteers would restart, a majority of the respondents who provided text comments indicated that their work had already resumed, or they were expecting it to resume in the near future, subject to COVID-19 rules and regulations. In many cases, this resumption was gradual.

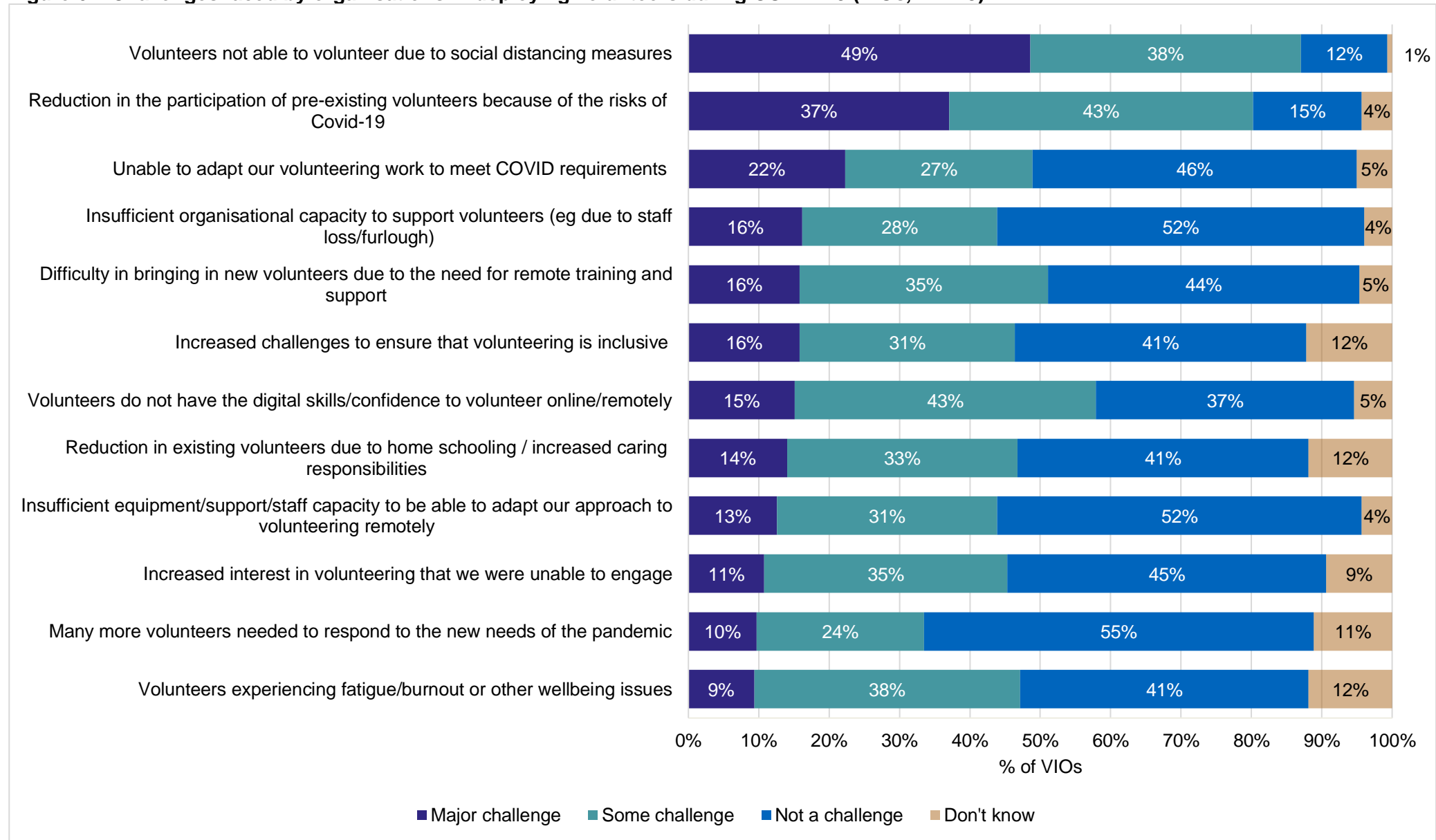
6.2 Challenges faced by organisations deploying volunteers

We asked volunteer-involving organisations to tell us more about the specific challenges that they faced in deploying volunteers during the pandemic. As shown in Figure 6.2, organisations told us that the most significant challenges they faced were due to volunteers not being able to volunteer as a result of social distancing measures (87% of organisations said this was either a ‘major’ challenge or ‘some’ challenge), and a reduction in the participation of existing volunteers because of the risks of COVID-19 (80% of organisations said this was either a ‘major’ challenge or ‘some’ challenge). Around 49% of organisations said that adapting their volunteering work to meet COVID-19 requirements was a challenge to at least some degree.

Volunteers having insufficient digital skills or confidence to volunteer remotely was a ‘major’ or ‘some’ challenge to 58% of organisations. Organisations also found it challenging to bring new volunteers into their organisations during the pandemic, due to the need for remote training and support. Areas of slightly lower concern overall included staff capacity to support volunteers, and the availability of equipment, support and staff capacity to support remote volunteering. Organisations expressed least concern overall about the volunteer supply, with around 33% suggesting that the need for more volunteers to meet the new needs of a pandemic was a challenge, and 55% saying this was not a challenge.

Around 47% of organisations considered that volunteer wellbeing, fatigue or burn-out was either a ‘major’ or ‘some’ challenge. This was also mentioned in several of the open comments, summarized in section 6.2.3 below. A similar proportion of organisations were experiencing challenges to ensure that their volunteering deployment was inclusive.

Figure 6.2 Challenges faced by organisations in deploying volunteers during COVID-19 (VIOs, N=278)



6.2.1 Barriers to volunteering during the pandemic

In the text responses, more than half of VIOs described either not having enough volunteers to help with service delivery due to the 'fallout' of the pandemic and its associated restrictions; or not having enough opportunities for existing and potential new volunteers to engage with the organisation – this was particularly a concern for organisations working in areas requiring high levels of safeguarding vetting for volunteers.

'We had difficulty recruiting new volunteers as we did not have the capacity to adapt our training to online. We want to physically meet new volunteers who will have a role with vulnerable children and young people.'

'Many of our volunteers were older men and women and a significant number of them have decided not to return to their volunteering roles. We have been able to recruit a few new volunteers but we are still not at full capacity. We are planning to run a recruitment campaign over the next few months.'

'We had new volunteers requesting opportunities in the evening and weekends, where we had no opportunities available. We are concerned that increased numbers of people who may have never volunteered before might have been put off as their first exploration into volunteering was met with barriers. Equally, new volunteers that did start with us told us of how difficult it was to find somewhere as organisations often just didn't get back to them. This isn't helpful in trying to create a culture of volunteering in Scotland.'

COVID-19 restrictions and closures had made it difficult to deploy volunteers for more than half of respondents.

'As we deal mostly with the vulnerable elderly our premises have been closed since March 2020 so most of our volunteers are not required.'

'As we organised actual face to face events, the pandemic has meant that we simply were not able to hold them. We have been encouraging, educating, informing and inspiring volunteers online to get active individually.'

'Our main difficulty was that volunteers were advised not to car share and therefore the majority of our volunteer drivers were not happy to volunteer. We provided PPE and advice on precautions to be taken which encouraged some of our volunteers to be deployed for essential journeys.'

'As a museum our volunteering opportunities have always been people facing roles with visitors, schools, care homes, etc. As a result all our activities stopped when we went into lockdown in March 2020 and the building closed. ...Also with staff on furlough no one could manage volunteers and offer online/virtual opportunities. ...We hope to reopen in late May but a new challenge is that many of our volunteers are now volunteering elsewhere or do not want to come back.'

6.2.2 Challenges in following and implementing COVID-19 guidance

Several VIOs also felt there was a lack of information and consistent communication and implementation regarding COVID-19 regulations relating to their activities and what these meant in practice. This tended to make adapting programmes and volunteer activities so that they could continue more difficult:

'One of the biggest challenges was finding rules and guidelines [regarding] COVID that related specifically to community groups and community buildings. Organisations have to be particularly careful about volunteers, but it was very hard to find out information, e.g. our local authority "banned" our gardening group from working around the village socially distanced, yet we could see other groups on [Facebook] working away quite happily and sensibly.'

'Understandably it was difficult to work out what volunteers could and couldn't do initially. Some sector specific guidance had not been worked out yet. We had to spend a lot of time working this out for ourselves. We had to look at various [pieces of] guidance and cross check everything. Volunteer Scotland were amazing in providing support and webinars to work through this and share learning / experience. Local TSIs were also brilliant in setting up support services so we could direct people there to help. SCVO later began sharing how other orgs were doing things differently. Sometimes it was hard to find out who was doing what and building collaboration. It got better though. Third sector organisations are always some of the first sectors to respond to a crisis – we appreciate that this has been acknowledged but I wonder how many third sector orgs/intermediaries were involved in setting some of the guidance and if [it] could work in practice. However, the response has been fantastic in difficult circumstances...'

6.2.3 Volunteer welfare

Organisations talked about the challenges of maintaining volunteer welfare, mental health and wellbeing, and responding to fatigue. The additional challenges of adapting, changing and sometimes intensifying the activities that volunteers undertook also had an impact on volunteer wellbeing in some cases:

'Like many other organisations, we are responding to the general challenges as a result of the pandemic including volunteer fatigue and concerns around safety.'

'We normally support our volunteers in a number of ways that are face to face delivered. We had to adapt quickly, e.g. our 'annual volunteer festival' was on-line last year. However, given that we are a charity that deals with disability, it was noticeable that many of our volunteers and also participants struggled both with isolation and mental health. The lack of ability to get out of the house due to restrictions also exacerbated physical health.'

'As other services have not been running, my volunteers have not been receiving ongoing care, so their health has deteriorated. Also, their mental health has had a big impact to the point one of my volunteers had to be sectioned, so they will not return to us.'

'From March 2020 when green space volunteering, community development and health and wellbeing activities were paused our volunteers instead delivered emergency food relief initially and later youth work. ...The impact on our volunteers of taking on a whole other range of support services was huge, the resilience work did not feel voluntary, it felt like we were filling a gap to prevent vulnerable households from being overwhelmed.'

6.2.4 Digital exclusion

Whilst the option of being able to adapt and move to remote working and digital engagement for volunteers and service users was a lifeline for many organisations, respondents also described how this generated challenges and exclusion within their volunteering programmes. The major challenges related to: lack of devices or data for volunteers (and service users); poor internet connections and broadband – in rural areas in particular; the inability to offer all aspects of training remotely; and the lack of interaction with other staff and volunteers that working remotely entailed. Certain groups of volunteers were particularly likely to be excluded as a result of the shift to digital and remote volunteering.

'Inequality in access to digital devices and data was a major barrier to volunteering in the pandemic for our volunteers.'

'Training has had challenges as some things are much more difficult to teach online, and when you are not working beside someone to ask all the little questions that come to mind it can take longer.'

'Our volunteer training has moved online but there is a significant 'practice' part that involves shadowing that can't move online and is a challenge. ...We do not have a solution to this challenge yet.'

'Challenges for [home] based volunteers has meant we've not been able to fully immerse volunteers into [our] work...i.e. when working remotely they've met our team virtually but haven't met most of the...team and don't get that daily interaction with other...employees and volunteers, being involved in conversations happening in the office, etc. We've created virtual spaces for volunteers to mix and meet other team members but everyone is starting to suffer from zoom fatigue.'

'Having no access to the premises meant that no training of new volunteers could take place and a visually impaired member was unable to produce programmes at home.'

6.3 How organisations responded to the challenges

Organisations responded in many different ways to the challenges of deploying volunteers during COVID-19.

As shown in Figure 6.3, 65% of VIOs responded by reducing their volunteering activities in reflection of the fact that they were not able to deliver their intended programme due to the constraints of lockdown and ensuring COVID-safety for volunteers and service users.

Organisations also implemented rapid and radical changes and adaptations designed to enable volunteering to continue in the light of COVID restrictions. The most frequent change that organisations said they made was adapting their ways of working to implement a COVID-safe volunteering environment, with 65% of responding VIOs saying they did this. Fifty-one percent also said they made adaptations to ensure that volunteering would be COVID-safe for service users.

Many organisations said that they made changes to the modality and types of volunteer activities that their organisation supported, with the primary focus being to enable remote and online forms of volunteering. Fifty-six percent of organisations moved some or all of their volunteering activity online; 52% changed or refocused the types of activities that their volunteers do; and 44% enabled volunteers who were shielding to undertake alternative volunteering activities from home. Providing remote training for existing and new volunteers was another important adaptation.

Forty-two percent of organisations said that they responded to the challenges by providing mental health or wellbeing support to their volunteers.

Notably, some 17% of responding organisations indicated that they successfully advocated for the volunteers to be considered as key workers in order to enable their essential work to continue during the pandemic.

6.3.1 Insights into how volunteer-involving organisations adapted their work

Respondents told us about how they had adapted their ways of working to try and respond to the challenges of deploying volunteers during the pandemic. Their responses reflect the many rapid and radical adaptations adopted across the sector to enable essential work to continue.

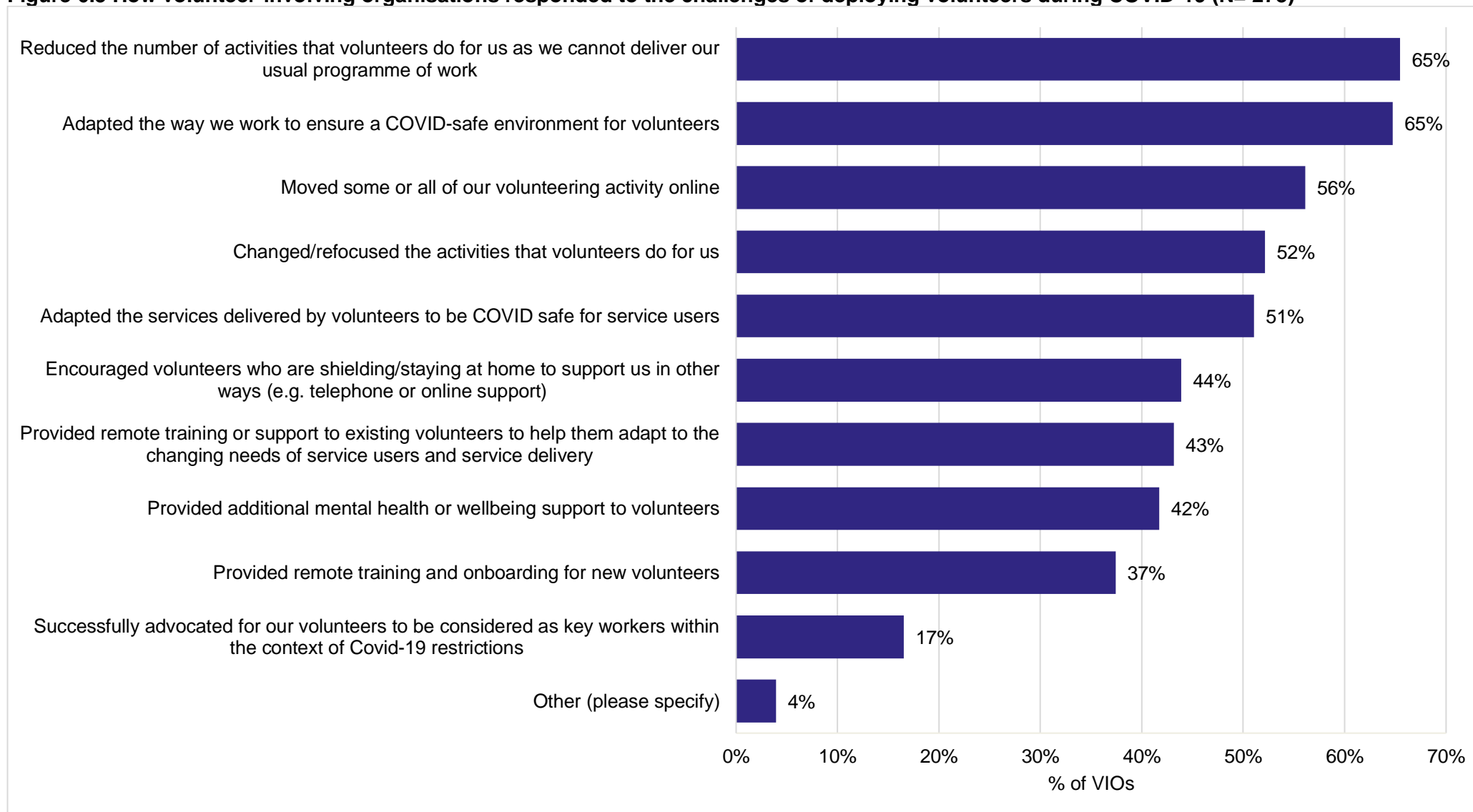
Adapting services in line with COVID-19 restrictions

Many organisations spoke about harnessing the expertise of volunteers to help them work out how to maintain and adapt their services to be in line with COVID restrictions.

'We were lucky to have the expertise in our 100% volunteer group and the connections to work out how to run a service under COVID-19 restrictions.'

'We were fortunate that all our volunteers were adaptable, flexible and able to move online quickly. Also they are used to working in strategic areas and were able to support and test new guidance, new services and digital accessibility.'

Figure 6.3 How volunteer-involving organisations responded to the challenges of deploying volunteers during COVID-19 (N= 278)



'Reacting quickly, this had never been done before, we pulled teams together from across the organisation and took an 'all hands on deck' approach to amend services and volunteer roles. Challenge of managing the expectations and needs of volunteers and service users during an uncertain time. Providing the infrastructure, resources and equipment for new and different ways of working, including IT availability and accessibility for volunteers in some geographical areas. Delivery of online training was new to volunteer managers as well as volunteers.'

'We secured funding for four months to employ one of our volunteers to research all the regulations [and] PPE requirements we would need to safely open our community building kiosk.'

Shifting to digital and remote volunteering

The shift to digital volunteering was a central part of this adaptation for many organisations. This created new opportunities for some organisations to engage volunteers. For others, it was less easy to engage volunteers remotely due to digital exclusion, as discussed above.

'We launched a WhatsApp group for volunteers early on that is active daily and volunteers support one another.'

'All our Board of Trustee meetings were on Zoom, this enabled us to function as an organisation. In terms of keeping in touch with the wider community, Zoom was a useful tool and one that I hope will continue. ...Zoom and Teams opened more doors for us in the Islands and hopefully more meetings will be held this way in the future to enable third sector organisations to have input into national meetings and training.'

'[We have] successfully developed and used new platforms for delivering virtual activities with members in their own homes (virtual online clubs and telephone circles) along with accompanying new training for volunteers. Both have already proved very successful. ...The combination of these, along with face-to-face clubs when they can resume give the project and organisation a whole array of methods to engage with participants in a wider range of settings and locations, as well as more frequent engagement. [We] know that existing members would really appreciate and benefit from more contact and with a blended delivery approach the project could reach people in remote locations and those who can't attend face-to-face clubs. [We] could keep providing activities in bad weather or when members can no longer keep attending a group. ...The virtual world could also provide a safe but convenient setting to encourage isolated people to join a face-to-face club.'

'Incorporating the ability to meet up and connect digitally has opened up collaboration opportunities with new partners both local and further afield. This change of mindset from meeting in our hub space to being able to meet online has allowed us to work with groups normally inaccessible due to distance.'

'Developing online learning, Zooming and Community has really made a difference. Students, graduates, volunteers and staff have all used digital connectivity to help us plan, stay motivated, stay on purpose and create opportunities in the midst of a crisis.'

Changing the focus of their work to support the COVID-19 response

Many organisations decided to adapt by pivoting the focus of their work in order to be able to support the COVID-19 response in some way, despite the closure of their usual programmes.

'Volunteering activity reduced slightly but we diverted volunteering efforts into wider community support/resilience activities. For example:

Setting up two foodbanks and food parcel delivery services in two remote villages – both run by...volunteers and still running now.

A weekly food parcel collection service...for our students, graduates, volunteers and some folk from the wider community. Food poverty is a huge issue for our area and most particularly over recent months with our older folk and families struggling financially, children at home 24/7 and folk being furloughed on reduced wages, not able to access free meals for kids at school and fearful of how they might cope.

...Volunteers and furloughed staff made scrubs for medical centres across the [local authority area], for 8 hospitals across Scotland and for hospitals as far away as Africa.

We've also made and distributed 1000s of face masks for community resilience groups, for frontline workers, for shop keepers, superhero versions for kids in hospital playrooms and then we branched out to manufacturing masks for sale – keeping our volunteers busy at home and providing an income for the women in our business incubator.'

Supporting volunteer wellbeing and mental health

Some organisations described how they were offering greater mental health and wellbeing support to their volunteers, either by adapting their approach to volunteering, or by making additional efforts to maintain contact and check in with volunteers.

'We did instigate shift limits to ensure the wellbeing of volunteers carrying out often distressing work.'

'The major challenge has been mental health and wellbeing for our volunteer team. We offer supported volunteer roles to women who might not be able to sustain volunteering elsewhere, which means staff have offered emotional support via Zoom or phone calls [...]. Our Project Assistant regularly sent cards and letters to volunteers throughout both lockdown periods, particularly to those who were shielding.'

6.4 Infrastructure organisation perspectives on the challenges of deploying volunteers during the pandemic

We also asked infrastructure organisations about the challenges that organisations in their area had faced when deploying volunteers during the pandemic. In general, whilst their views were similar to those of volunteer-involving organisations, infrastructure organisations rated the challenges as more severe than the VIO respondents. As discussed earlier in this report, differences between the responses of the infrastructure organisations and individual VIOs are to be expected. In this case, infrastructure organisations were responding on the basis of their overview of the situation across their local area. In some cases they included their knowledge of the situation for mutual aid organisations, and for small volunteer-led organisations that had effectively been inactive since the start of the pandemic. As such, their perspective includes consideration of the situation for a wider range of organisational types than is represented in the VIO survey, and may therefore give different results.

As shown in Figure 6.4, infrastructure organisations considered the greatest challenges that organisations in their area had faced were:

- volunteers experiencing fatigue, burnout or other wellbeing issues – 87% of respondents thought this was either a ‘major’ or ‘some’ concern. One respondent noted that informal volunteers and those volunteering linked with less formalised community response groups were at risk of encountering difficult situations during volunteering, with little or no support:

‘The health and wellbeing needs of volunteers, particularly informal volunteers or mutual aid groups was not well planned. [Our organisation] came across many cases of volunteers who had dealt with extremely difficult situations – including members of the public disclosing suicidal ideation, mental distress and domestic abuse. We supported all volunteers who got in touch with us and supported them to escalate the issue if necessary. We also sourced funding for a local mental health charity to offer training for volunteers on dealing with difficult situations.’

- the reduction in the participation of pre-existing volunteers as a result of concerns about COVID-19 risks, which 85% of respondents considered to be either a ‘major’ or ‘some’ concern.

Infrastructure organisations also expressed particular concern about the challenges arising from exclusion of some groups of volunteers as a result of the pandemic, with 31% of infrastructure organisations considering this to be of ‘major’ concern.

Infrastructure organisations also highlighted a series of interconnected concerns relating to volunteer skills and confidence to volunteer using digital or remote approaches, combined with concerns relating to organisational capacities and equipment to support digital and remote volunteering.

Figure 6.5 shows the perspectives of infrastructure organisations, when asked about how volunteer-involving organisations have responded to the challenges for

volunteering. Infrastructure organisations highlighted adaptations in delivery to put in place COVID-safe environments for volunteering as the most frequent response, with 71% of infrastructure organisations indicating that many or most/all organisations did this. This was followed by changing and refocusing the types of activities that volunteers undertake – 63% of infrastructure organisations said that many or most/all organisations had done this. Moving volunteering activities online was the next most frequent adaptation cited by infrastructure organisations (58%).

Several infrastructure organisations also considered that organisations were responding by providing training and upskilling to support volunteers to adapt to new requirements and new forms of volunteering; and that organisations were offering mental health and wellbeing support to volunteers.

Figure 6.4 Challenges faced by organisations in deploying volunteers during COVID-19 (infrastructure organisation views, N=52)

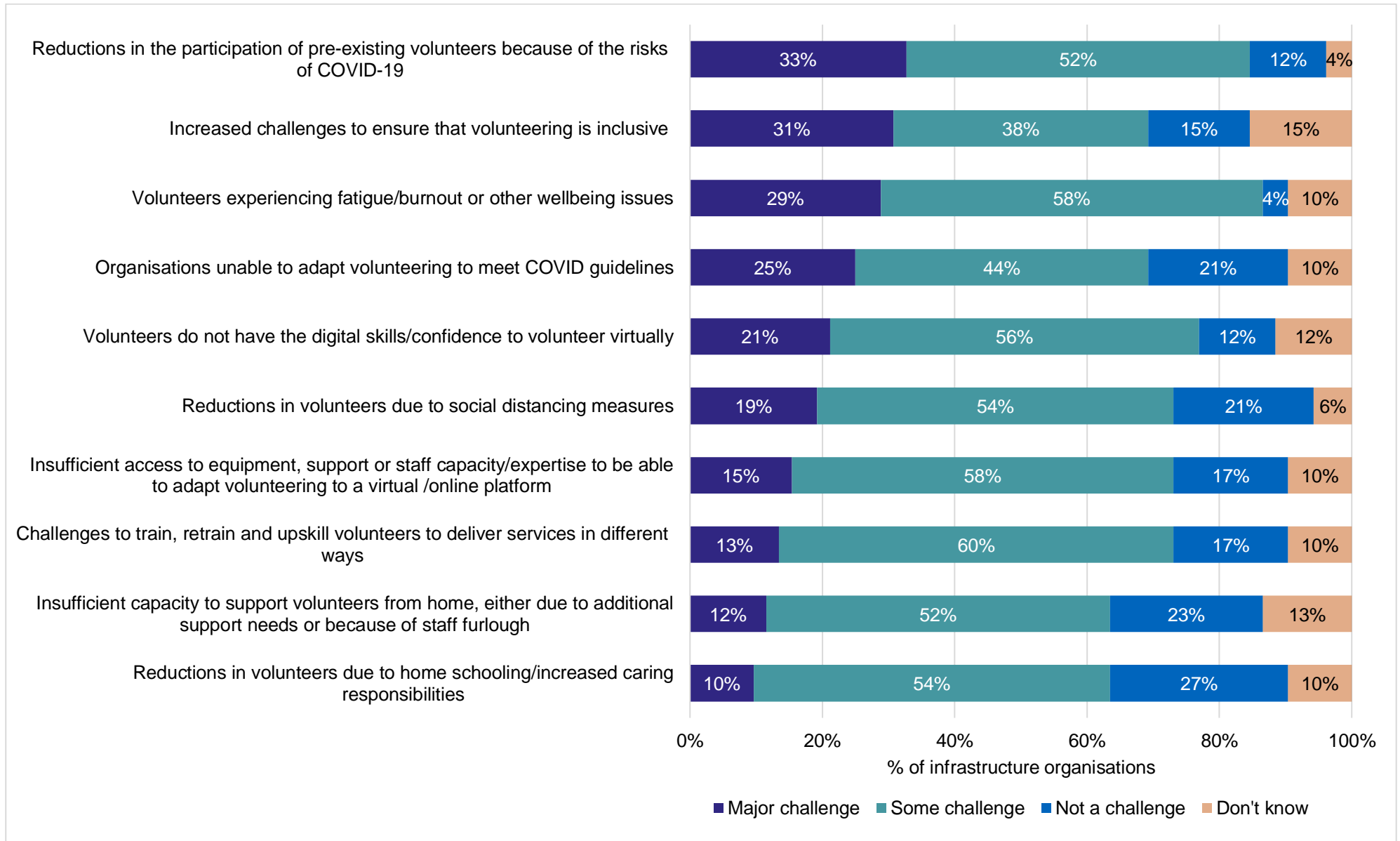
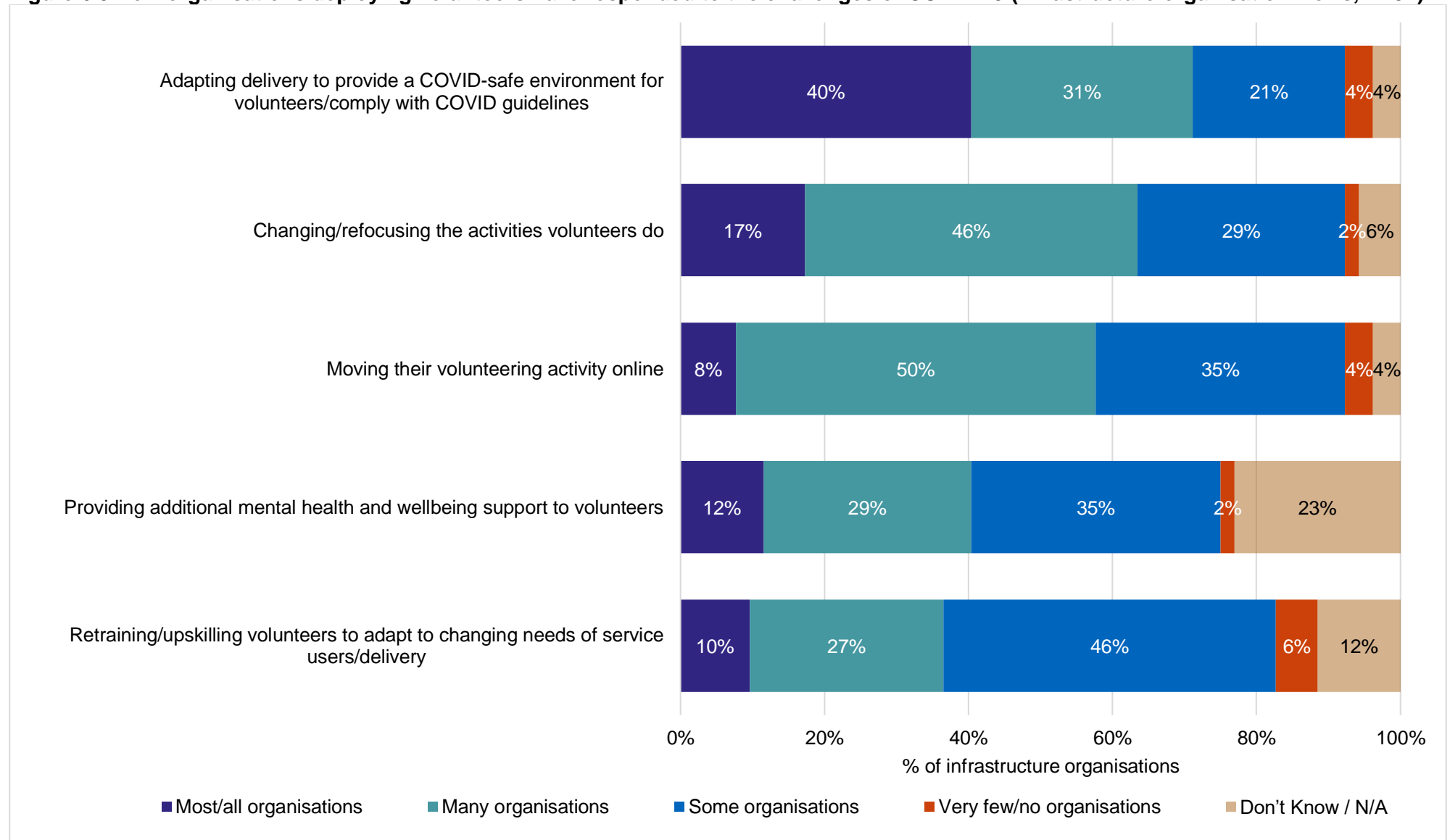


Figure 6.5 How organisations deploying volunteers have responded to the challenges of COVID-19 (infrastructure organisation views, N=52)



7 Current situation and recovery

We asked the survey respondents to tell us their views about the current situation in relation to volunteering at the time of the survey, and to explore their expectations about how this might change during the remainder of 2021 and into the next phase of COVID recovery.

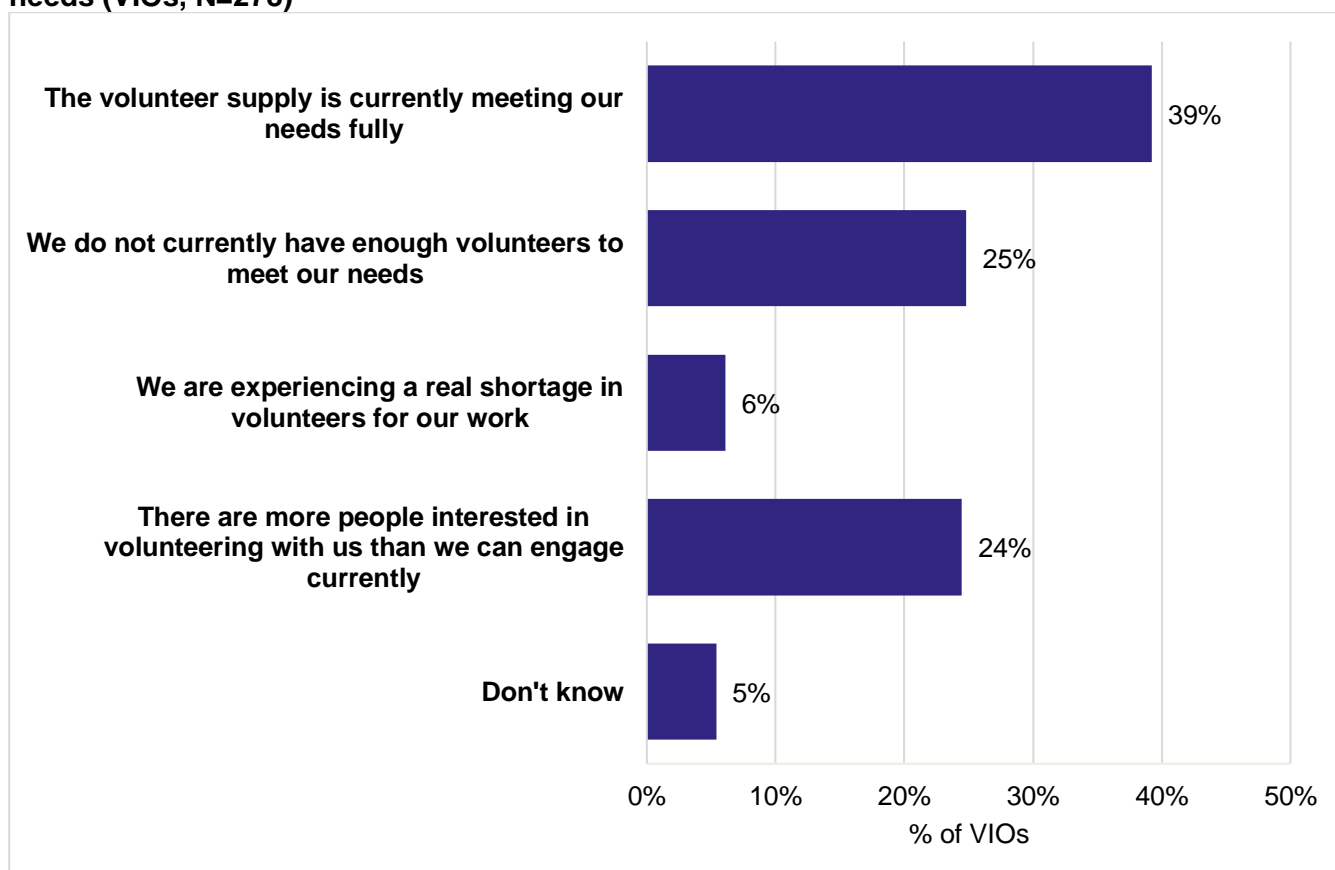
7.1 Perspectives on recovery in volunteering numbers

As shown in Figure 3.1 above, 58% of responding volunteer-involving organisations said that their volunteer numbers had decreased during the pandemic – with 30% saying that they had experienced a major decrease in volunteer numbers. This was primarily a result of two main factors: organisations having to pause their operational programmes because of COVID restrictions or lack of access to premises – with the result that they could no longer offer their usual number of roles for volunteers; and pre-existing volunteers having to withdraw from volunteering – especially those who were older or who had health conditions.

At the time of this survey (April-June 2021), many organisations were beginning to restart or increase volunteer work as COVID restrictions were being eased. It was not yet clear whether and when volunteers who had paused their volunteering due to COVID would choose to return to volunteering. We asked VIOs whether the current volunteer supply was meeting their needs.

7.1.1 VIO views on the current volunteer supply

Figure 7.1 The extent to which the current supply of volunteers is meeting organisational needs (VIOs, N=278)



As Figure 7.1 shows, VIO views on the adequacy of the current volunteer supply varied considerably. Thirty-nine percent of VIOs said that the volunteer supply was meeting their current needs; 31% said that they did not have enough volunteers or were experiencing a real shortage; and 24% said that there were more people interested in volunteering with them than they could currently engage. The text responses also reflected this range of experience, and highlighted a dynamic situation as organisations were gradually restarting programmes and reopening their premises following the end of the second lockdown.

Organisations which were struggling with not having enough volunteers were often those that were in a period of restarting their volunteering programme after a break, and were finding that some of their pre-existing volunteers were not able or willing to return. There was a range of reasons for this, including continued apprehension amongst older volunteers in particular in relation to volunteer safety/COVID; loss of confidence amongst volunteers after having stopped for so long; and for some volunteers, a reassessment of priorities that mean they no longer had time to volunteer for the organisation.

'A number of our retail volunteers have decided not to return to volunteering due to the pandemic. A large number of these volunteers were of an older age and the past year has in a lot of ways diminished their confidence. Some may come back when they see things improving. This has left us with a great need for new volunteers in our 14 shops.'

'We have a lot of volunteers waiting to come back to roles within the hospice but due to some restrictions still in place and the changes in the way we offer services there may not be the same demand for these volunteers. I have been trying to steer some of these volunteers to our retail shops but given our geographical area that is not always possible as many of our shops are too far away from our main base.'

'People are wary of committing because of COVID anxieties. Some of our volunteers have caring responsibilities, so would not put their loved ones at risk. However we have recently advertised for more volunteers and people are beginning to come forward. It depends on the task though. Volunteers are happier about outdoor roles where distancing is easier.'

'There is continuing concern and apprehension about COVID-19 to put off our older volunteers and those with health issues.'

Meanwhile, the ending of furlough meant that some of the newer volunteers who had started volunteering during the pandemic no longer had time for volunteering during the day.

'Many of the volunteers that have come forward as a result of the pandemic are working age who were furloughed, for the community transport we require volunteers that are free during the day'

Some organisations said that they were struggling to find volunteers with specific skills or who are willing to take on particular roles in the organisation, with some roles being easier to attract volunteers to help with than others.

'We have found it difficult to match volunteers to roles. People came forward to volunteer to support with the pandemic with practical roles such as prescriptions, food etc. the levels that we needed the volunteers were always unknown, there were not always enough roles for everyone. We tried to offer other roles such as admin, some tasks that people could do from home but people really wanted to work out in the community. There are still some regular volunteers who would like to come back to their usual role, [but] due to the size of our office, we are unable to offer this at this time. There are a number of volunteers that have run groups for many many years that are not coming back and it is becoming a struggle to recruit to these roles, especially if they are lead roles'

One organisation which deploys volunteers from abroad – and the EU in particular – explained how the dual impacts of the pandemic and Brexit were negatively affecting its ability to run its volunteer programme, with volunteers facing new hurdles in terms of rapidly changing quarantine regulations alongside new visa requirements and costs.

'Bearing in mind that we have always drawn our cohort of young volunteers from overseas and mainly from the EU, we are facing the dual challenge of COVID travel restrictions and quarantine requirements making it difficult for people to actually arrive and the immigration hurdles and costs associated visa and NHS surcharge costs that are now being applied. This has impacted very severely as those who had stayed throughout last year are now beginning to leave. there are applicants for the autumn, but we are looking at a very difficult summer period with a significant shortage.'

Organisations that said they had more volunteers interested than they could engage were often those that had not been able to restart their work fully, or where the volunteering programme requires extensive face-to-face training as part of the onboarding process for new volunteers.

'Due to the limitations on youth engagement, we have many volunteers who aren't needed in their local areas because groupwork isn't happening. We also have a waiting list of people who have registered interest in volunteering, but because face-to-face work isn't happening we can't recruit them into roles until we know more.'

'There are more people enquiring about volunteering with our organisation since the first lockdown. As we are not able to meet as before due to the nature of our work this means that we cannot take on any other volunteers at this time. Working with volunteers who have also additional needs, going back to volunteering means that this needs to be a gentle process and is going to take time.'

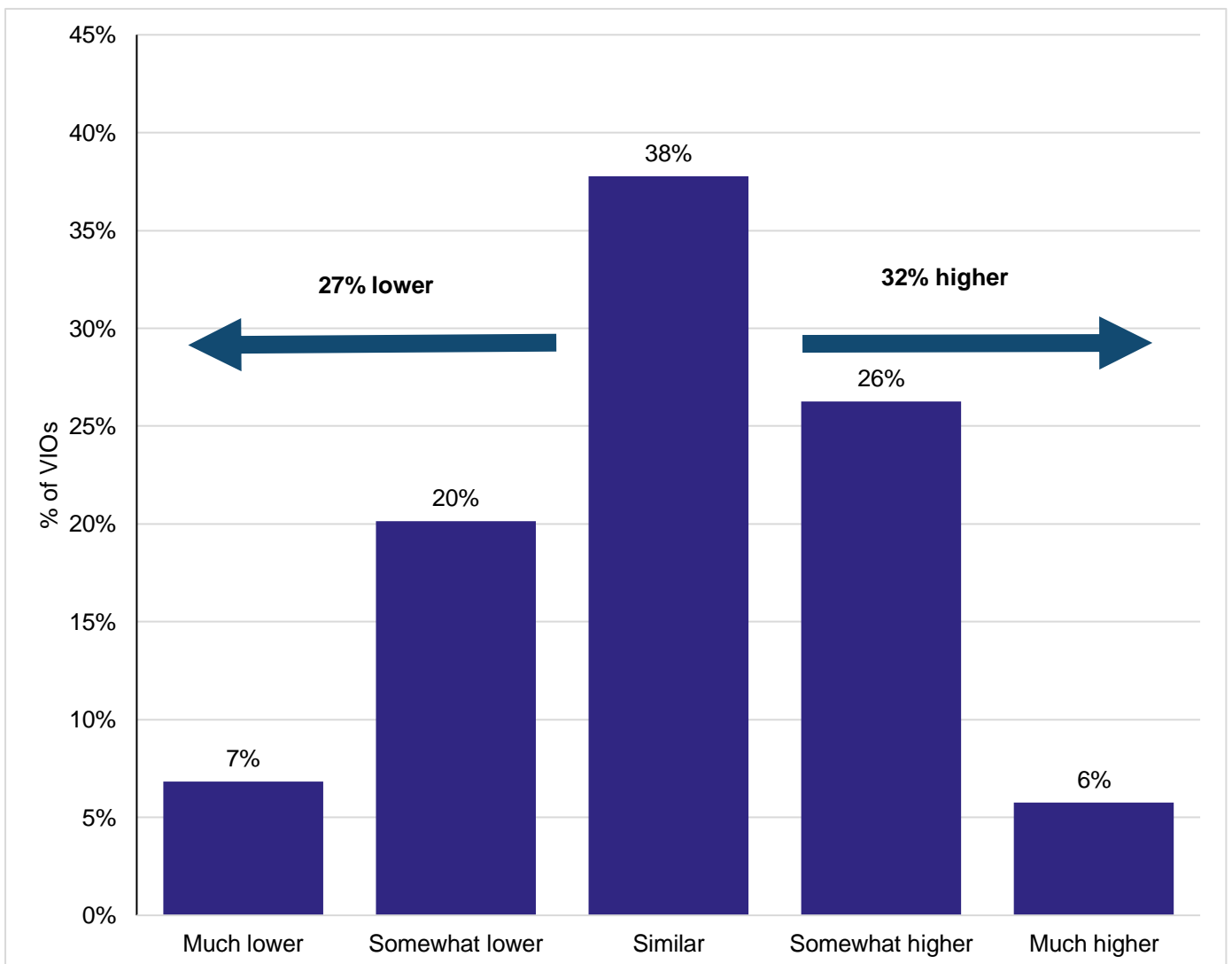
'We didn't advertise during the pandemic but had a steady stream of enquiries, we placed people on the waiting list and now the majority have been onboarded. Volunteers were frustrated as they wanted to help but couldn't be placed immediately which was understandable but the complexity of our services required more intensive training and commitment. We definitely weren't geared up for the practical, responsive volunteer roles as that is not in our service models, as we support some of

the most vulnerable people in society we weren't able to offer this level of immediacy and task based support. ...A more joined up approach with an ability to signpost to other voluntary organisations/mutual aid groups etc. would have been a great way to organise this but it seemed that everyone responded differently and it wasn't as joined up. This has potential scope to look at for the future.'

7.1.2 The outlook for recovery in volunteer numbers

Although many organisations found that their volunteer numbers had dropped during the pandemic, a significant proportion of volunteer-involving organisations reported that their numbers of volunteers were now recovering, their volunteering programmes were restarting, and were optimistic about the outlook for volunteer numbers. Seventy percent of responding VIOs thought that by the end of 2021 their volunteer numbers would be similar to or higher than they had been pre-pandemic, compared with 27% of organisations that thought they would be lower (Figure 7.2).

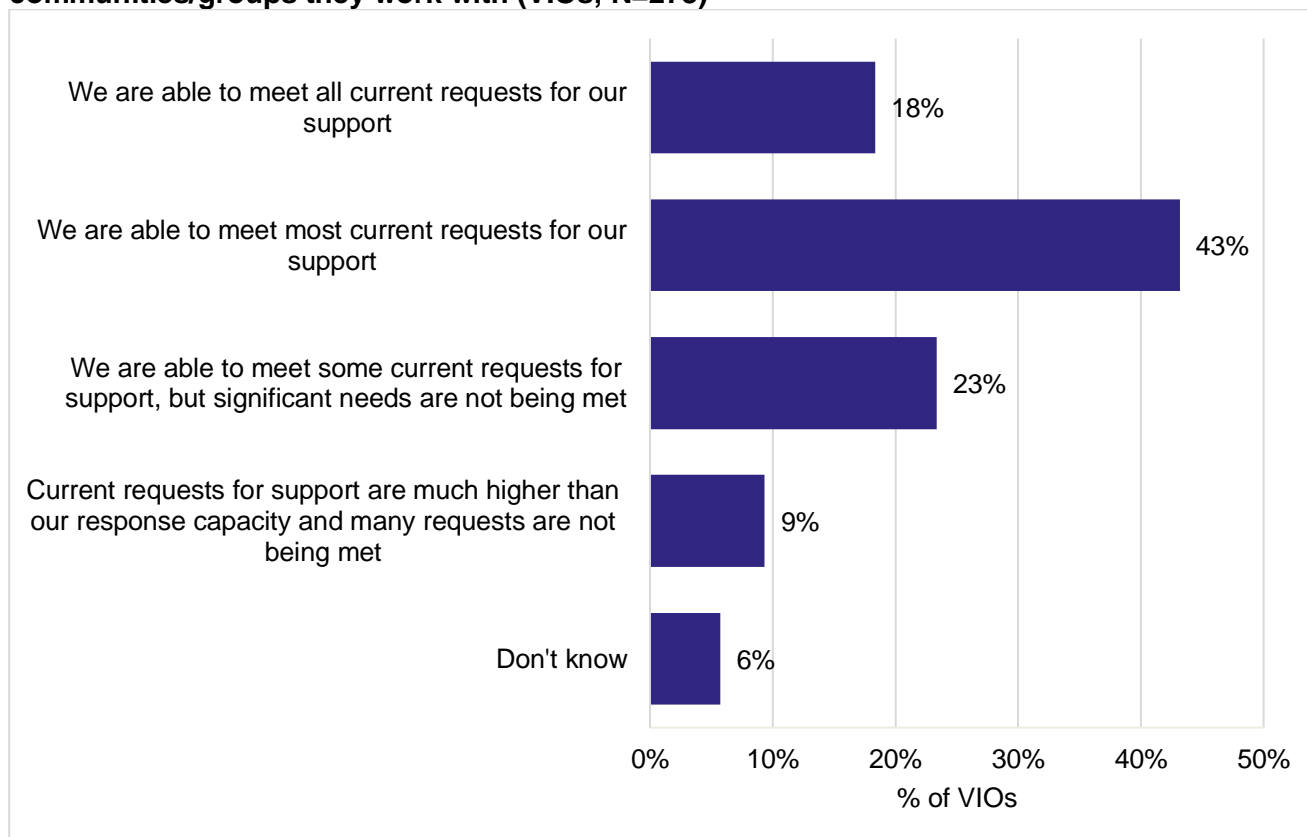
Figure 7.2 Views on recovery in volunteer numbers (VIOs, N=278)



7.2 Meeting the needs of service users and communities

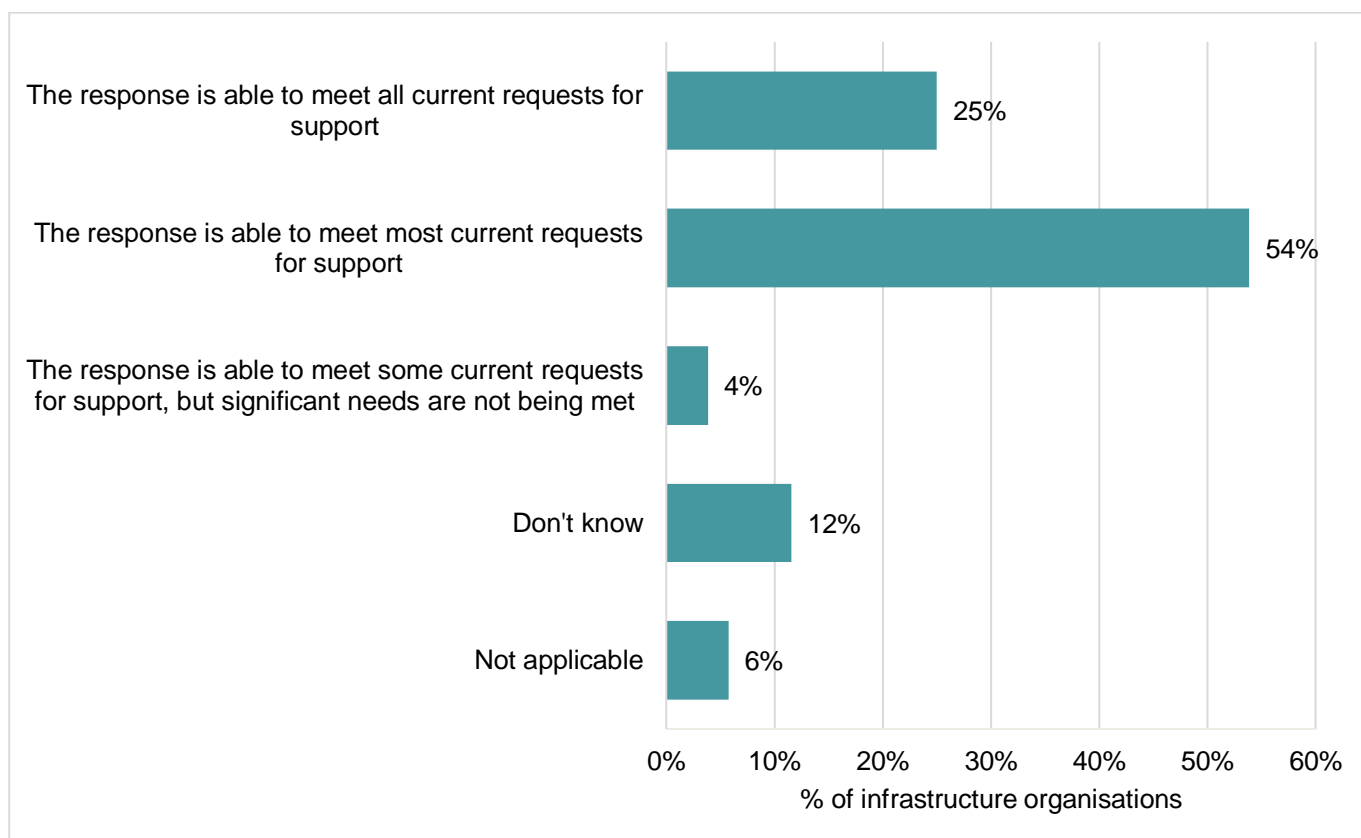
We asked VIO respondents about the extent to which they felt their organisations were able to meet current needs in the groups and communities that they work with. At the time of the survey (April-June 2021), 62% of VIO respondents said that they were able to meet most or all current requests for support, compared with 33% which said that support requests could not all be met, and in some cases far exceeded their capacity to respond (Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3 Extent to which organisations are currently able to meet the needs of the communities/groups they work with (VIOs, N=278)



The views of infrastructure organisations were similar to those of the VIOs, with 25% of infrastructure organisations stating that the current response was meeting all support requests, and 54% saying that most support requests were being met. Infrastructure organisations were less likely than VIOs to consider that the response was unable to meet current levels of request. This may be a result of the fact that volunteer-involving organisations were responding in relation to the capacity of their own organisation to meet the needs of their specific target group(s); many of them delivered face-to-face services which had paused during the pandemic, and had not yet restarted at the point of the survey. Infrastructure organisations were taking into account the wider picture of response capacity across their areas, including informal volunteering and mutual aid/community response groups (Figure 7.4).

Figure 7.4 Views on the extent to which the response by all organisations/factors is meeting current needs within your area/community (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



7.2.1 Lack of resources to meet the needs of service users

Capacity issues were the main problem that VIOs were experiencing in terms of being able to meet the needs of the groups and communities that they wished to serve, with the vast majority of those who responded to this question citing this as a problem. VIOs either did not have sufficient volunteer and staff resources to meet the current demands placed on their services, and/or were not yet able to properly restart their services and activities due to COVID-19 restrictions.

'Referrals to our services are increasing day by day. We are managing but going forward resource and capacity wise we will be unable to meet the level of demand for services. Referrals to our domestic abuse service, perinatal befriending service and others have seen sharp increases, we simply do not have the staff capacity or resources to take on more referrals which is heart breaking as there is huge need. ...We haven't yet seen the impact of the pandemic as we are still living through it but this will continue to be an issue to manage demand for services going forward. As we emerge out of this, we hope that volunteers will still come forward to help, as they will be a crucial part of the COVID recovery. [W]e need to emphasise that the recovery from COVID needs volunteers more than ever.'

'Older and younger people want to volunteer however organisations are still too afraid to start connecting people of different ages. ...It is proving extremely difficult even though we know we desperately need this work to increase.'

'Many 3rd sector community-based organisations were not being offered during lockdown restrictions or their services are now running at a reduced capacity...these have been huge loss for our patients as many of these services offered meaningful opportunities to engage in purposeful and enjoyable activities in the community, bolstering connections with others outwith the hospital environment and aiding recovery.'

7.2.2 Funding for dedicated volunteering support

A lack of funding to help address these capacity issues – for example by ensuring that there are dedicated staff in place to support volunteering – was raised by a number of VIOs:

'Due to funding we can't run enough programmes (particularly in Glasgow) to meet the emerging mental health crisis in young people.'

'We now need funding for a volunteer co-ordinator to meet the need of demand and support for some of our volunteers.'

'As we have failed to secure funds for a dedicated...officer, our responses to cases which are brought to our attention are of an ad hoc nature and woefully inadequate. Without competent capacity, we are not proactive and already stretched staff support only the most vulnerable particularly where children are involved. When urgent referrals are made and we fail to pick them up and offer support as needed, we disappoint people/families at a time when they desperately need our support and reassurance.'

7.2.3 Delivery of face-to-face services

Capacity issues have inevitably led to delays in service delivery, and growth in waiting lists for services. The delivery of face-to-face services has been particularly affected, since these are resource intensive to provide and also much more challenging to deliver in accordance with COVID-19 restrictions. VIOs also noted the growth in demand for mental health support such as counselling.

'Our waiting list for our most in demand service keeps rising but we have lost over half volunteers who deliver it. ...Other services are still in demand even though we have had to pause them entirely and we continue to get enquiries about them. We are still not able to deliver face to face services even though those we support are asking for them.'

'Many of our services supporting clients F2F have had to cease during COVID and have to become virtual which provides some support but significantly less than needed. We are now starting to get back to delivering these services F2F but due to restriction in numbers still and backlog of people waiting it will take some time to get to our normal operating standards.'

7.2.4 Digital engagement doesn't meet everyone's needs

According to almost a fifth of those who responded, digital engagement has not been able to meet the needs of all services users and programmes.

'Due to the fatigue of using online connections experienced by our young people attending school, we have not been able to operate the youth club in the way we would like in order to protect young people's mental health and give recreational opportunities.'

'We usually set up physical information stalls within community centres to speak to women affected by domestic abuse. We have adapted and set up some virtual drop-ins but we are worried in case we are missing women who are unsafe at home to seek support.'

'Our communities have become a little more fractured than they were. 67% don't have the technology that fully enabled them to participate during lockdown and they have become incredibly stressed and distressed in some cases. Most have some phone/old computer many without camera etc. [The] vast majority of adult learners felt they were mostly forgotten about because there was limited resource set up early.'

'Most of our volunteers do not like using Zoom and will refuse to use it. ... We do not have enough staff to support people remotely without volunteers, so remote support hasn't happened. ... Due to most people not having their hearing aids maintained for over a year, a lot of people's aids are no longer working. ... Most of these people are elderly so do not use email or Zoom so they go unsupported, and can't even keep in touch with friends and family via phone. Due to this increased social isolation, cognitive functioning has been in rapid decline (and risk of falls due to poor balance have been on the increase) so we're finding more of our user group in need for additional home help or in need for care home places. These people probably could have had more years living independently had we have been able to continue delivering our service. However, Audiology wouldn't allow it, we couldn't use NHS buildings, community buildings were closed, and we didn't have the staff resources or the financial resources to adapt quickly like other larger organisations have done.'

7.3 Emerging needs

We asked all of the survey respondents to tell us about the emerging needs that they were aware of in the communities with which they work, and to consider what they thought were likely to be the most important emerging needs over the next year. As shown in Figures 7.5 and 7.6 below, both VIOs and infrastructure organisations agreed that their primary areas of concern were around mental health and wellbeing (as indicated by 84% of VIOs and 90% of infrastructure organisations) and loneliness and social isolation (73% and 88%).

Financial hardship and concerns about unemployment/redundancy were the next most highly cited areas of emerging needs (54% and 69%), alongside digital inclusion and access (52% and 77%).

Figure 7.5 Most important emerging needs over the next 12 months (VIOs, N=278)

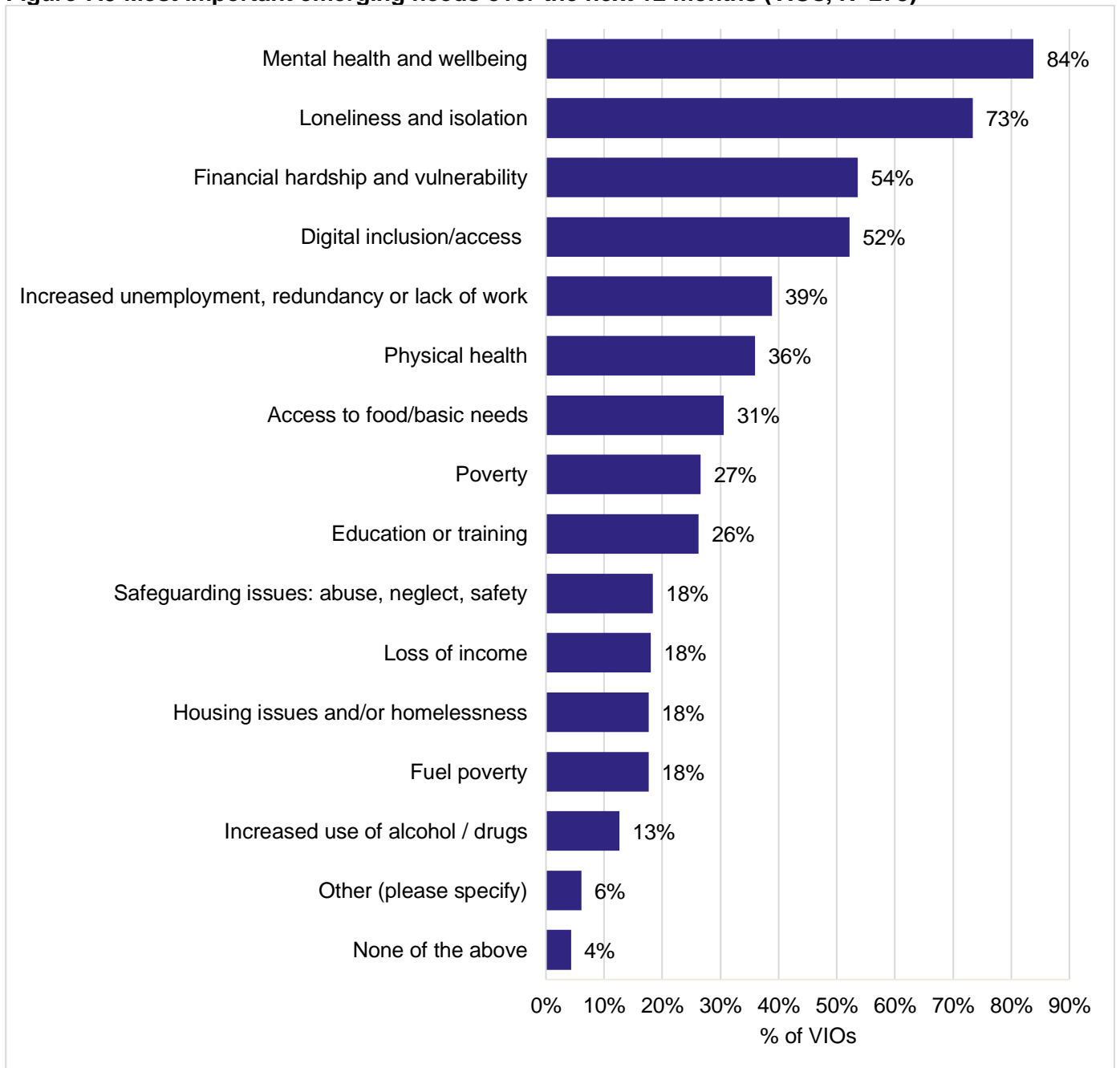
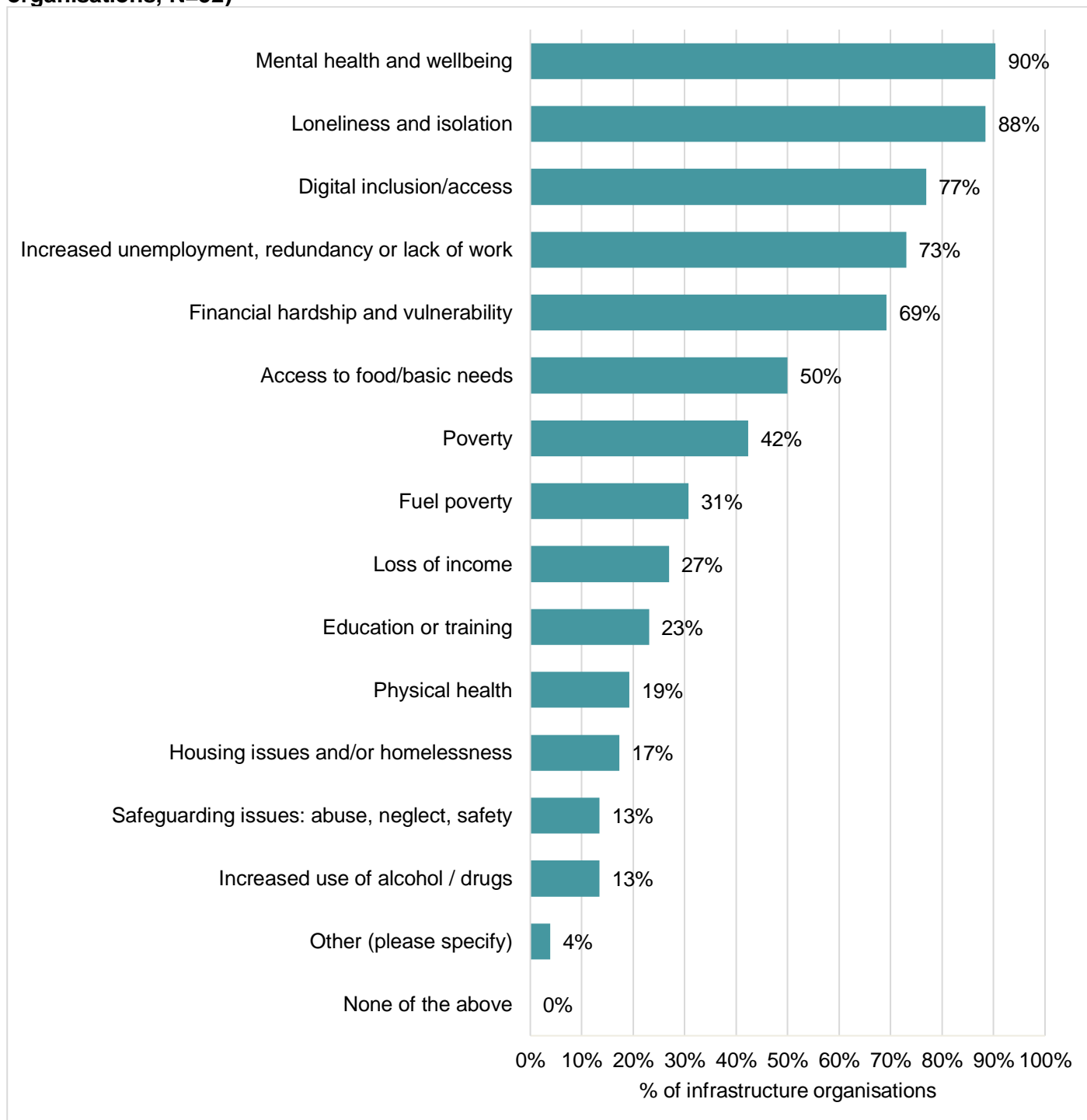


Figure 7.6 Most important emerging needs over the next 12 months (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



Many survey respondents were clearly very concerned about the long-term impacts of the pandemic on mental health and wellbeing, and on social isolation and loneliness, particularly for older and more vulnerable people who have spent much of the past 18 months in relative isolation. As one volunteer-involving organisation working with older people explained:

'Since COVID-19 measures came into place during 2020, older people's issues of loneliness, depression and inactivity increased. Through conversations with existing members, [we] found that people have been worried about being inactive but fearful of knowing what they can do due to COVID-19 rules and typically with both participants and carers feeling increasingly isolated and anxious. Many of the demographic have been through long periods of shielding due to age and health conditions and remained at home for months without seeing other people. Many of the participants are increasingly feeling lonelier and want someone to talk to and engage with them with their interests to take their mind off the outside world.'

VIOs expressed concern that funding and services will not be sufficient to meet these emerging needs.

'Due to funding we can't run enough programmes (particularly in Glasgow) to meet the emerging mental health crisis in young people.'

'We are finding that the previous challenges of health and finances are exacerbated by the pandemic.'

'Isolation and social contact are a problem for our service users so volunteers can provide befriending to help alleviate this. However, staff time to recruit train and support volunteers is lacking.'

'Need for more activities being delivered to reduce isolation, tackle mental health, loss of confidence. Need to help people transition out of lockdown and support them to get back out safely and confidently.'

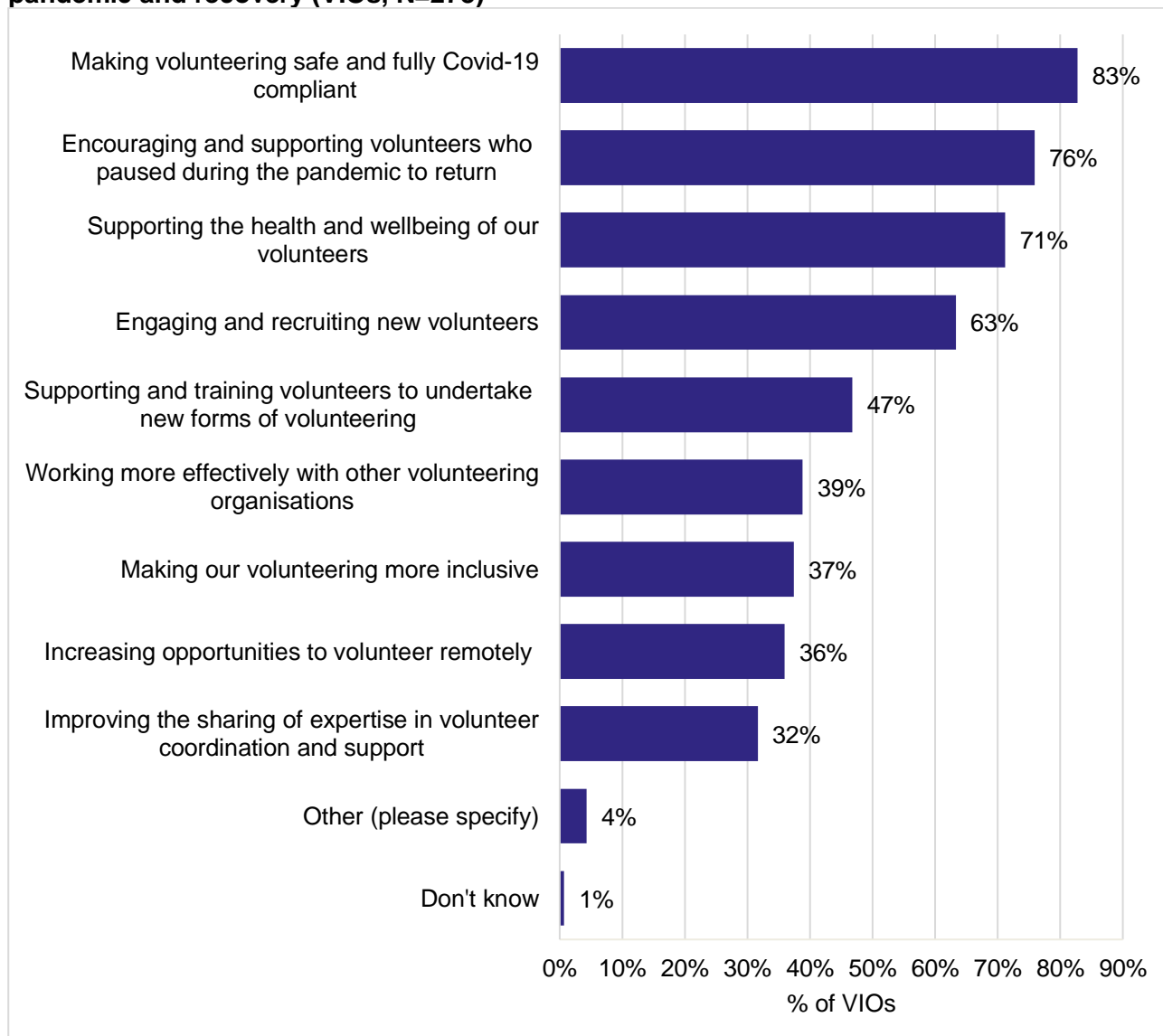
'We work with many people who are older and have health conditions who have been most affected by the lockdown. We are expecting high levels of demand for our services as these people come out of the lockdown.'

7.4 VIO priorities for engaging and supporting volunteers during the pandemic recovery

The main priorities expressed by VIOs for volunteering during the next phase of the pandemic and recovery were focused on responding to changing COVID-restrictions; restarting volunteering and encouraging pre-existing volunteers who have stopped to return; and ensuring volunteer health and wellbeing (Figure 7.7).

Engaging new volunteers, and training volunteers to do new types of volunteering such as volunteering remotely were the areas of next highest priority, but overall greater priority was given to getting pre-existing volunteers back into volunteering, over engaging new volunteers.

Figure 7.7 Priorities for engaging and supporting volunteers during the next phase of the pandemic and recovery (VIOs, N=278)



Some 37% of VIOs said that making their volunteering more inclusive was a priority. The groups that they listed as wanting to reach more effectively included: young people; people with disabilities and health conditions – who organisations identified as having been at higher risk of exclusion from volunteering opportunities during the pandemic; people from BAME communities; and volunteers from deprived or socio-economically disadvantaged areas and backgrounds.

'Within [our] volunteering strategy there are initiatives aimed at increasing diversity and inclusion in our volunteering programme. We are aiming to recruit volunteers from a broader range of socio-economic backgrounds. We're also aiming to work with more volunteers under 25 to make sure our volunteering programme is engaging for this age group. We also want to make sure that [our] volunteers reflect the ethnic make-up of Scotland and reflect the families who use our services. Part of this will involve recruiting volunteers who speak languages used by our service users.'

'We want to reach out to more disadvantaged communities to engage them in volunteering. This will include in-person outreach as well as making our training and volunteering opportunities more inclusive. We also want to start offering paid placements to make us accessible to those who can't afford to volunteer with us but would still benefit from the skills and experience they would gain.'

Some respondents also noted that there may be a need to target groups who have been particularly affected by the pandemic, and who could benefit from the opportunities that volunteering can generate.

'Recruiting across all demographics but specifically targeting 16 to 24 year olds who are unemployed and looking to develop their skills, build their CV and grow in confidence along with the 55+ audience also looking to grow confidence, possibly pivoting their career as a result of redundancy and those feeling socially isolated.'

7.5 The support that VIOs need to deliver volunteering programmes during the COVID recovery

We asked VIOs what support, if any, they need in order to support volunteering within their organisation during the long-term recovery phase over the next two years. We also asked them to tell us what other organisations, such as national or local government, intermediary organisations and others can do to support the recovery in volunteering.

7.5.1 Dedicated funding for volunteer coordination and support

Overwhelmingly, VIOs said they needed sustainable and longer term funding for core costs in general, and in particular funding for dedicated posts to support volunteer coordination and management. A large number of VIOs would like to hire volunteer managers and staff to support volunteers. They highlighted how a lack of funding for volunteer coordination roles in particular is limiting their ability to restart volunteering after the pandemic, as well as a lack of recognition that running volunteer programmes comes with costs attached. Additional funding would also allow some VIOs to expand their services and the associated volunteering opportunities. Some VIOs have been unable to undertake their usual fundraising activities during COVID-19 and require shorter term funding until fundraising operations are fully back in place.

'Like many voluntary groups we need to not rely on volunteer co-ordination, we need core support for admin function, organising, project management, volunteer management, accountancy, governance and all the other functions that a voluntary organisation supporting 200 volunteers and providing community services needs to function, this means support for paid hours not endless offers of training, which further eats into available volunteer time, or support from outside agencies who do not engage with or understand the local community.'

'The biggest support that we need is funding in order to continue the role ... of volunteer coordinator. This is a vital role. ...If we cannot sustain this post,

there will be a significant capacity problem to recruit, support, training volunteers.'

'Recognise that volunteers are not free. Funding is required for resources such as volunteer expenses, equipment, training. Staff time for training and for them to provide supervision and support to volunteers.'

'We need continuation funding for the vital role of Volunteer Co-ordinator. A single person working part-time can support a whole lot of volunteering activity and can encourage people who are new to volunteering and can support those experiencing disadvantages to still volunteer within their community. It is a really essential role and without a Volunteer Co-ordinator we will lose many of our volunteers and our volunteering opportunities.'

It is therefore vital there are funds available for the direct support for volunteering as it is all about building relationships with people and giving them individual support. So many of the volunteers we have worked with over the last few years have gone on to get employment, improved mental wellbeing and felt less isolated. We are a community and this is down to having a dedicated staff member to support volunteers.'

'Supporting and training volunteers is very expensive and support would be welcome.'

7.5.2 Support for the costs of dual delivery and hybrid working

Some VIOs noted that they will need to provide both face-to-face and online/digital services simultaneously over a number of months, and that this dual delivery has additional resource requirements and costs.

'[We need] transition funding to cover the move back from remote to face-to-face delivery: we will be operating both forms of delivery for the next 6 months which will require increased staff time.'

Digital volunteering and service delivery was the second most-commonly mentioned area where VIOs said they needed support, recognising that there may be demand for longer-term remote volunteering or service delivery.

'Digital support to upskill volunteers will be necessary especially if more remote volunteering is to take place. We have introduced a new volunteer role to support our community teams who are delivering sessions through zoom to reach clients in more remote and rural areas. We have set up support sessions for the volunteers on how to use zoom so that they feel more confident in taking part. Nationally a more stable internet service will be needed to enable this work to continue especially in rural areas.'

'Digital skills training to be offered to volunteers who don't feel confident - for training to be more accessible and widely advertised if it exists.'

7.5.3 Support for volunteer training and accreditation

Supporting volunteer and staff access to free or low-cost training was a priority for several VIOs. Training needs were diverse, depending on the specific focus of the organisations. The recognition and accreditation of volunteering was mentioned by a few respondents as an area that needs more development.

'Free volunteer training programmes which are certificated. Our TSI previously provided training, however, what we need is to have more flexible training online.'

Training and information on how to adapt to the changing COVID context and restrictions were also frequently mentioned, with a need for clear guidance on managing volunteering within the changing restrictions.

7.5.4 Recognising and celebrating the value of volunteering

Finally, another area of priority for VIOs is the recognition and celebration of volunteering. Organisations view this as essential for promoting the value and benefits of volunteering in order to engage more people; and a way to ensure that volunteers themselves are recognised and accredited for the skills, experience and training that they develop in their roles as volunteers. In the context of the recovery from the pandemic, organisations feel it is important to recognise the role and contribution of volunteers in rebuilding within communities and services, as well as the support that volunteering can provide for people who need to develop new skills or confidence in order to gain or regain paid work.

'We have worked recently to coordinate volunteering across organisations and would like to explore a volunteer passport to enable different organisations to recognise training and accreditation and enable volunteers to move and support surge.'

'Continued and ongoing recognition of volunteering within our own organisation, measuring the value of volunteering and of volunteer managers. From this, developing additional resource within our own organisation. More and improved ways of recognition for volunteering and volunteer management within the sector, raising the profile of volunteering and volunteer management. Campaigns, and positive and effective media promotion/attention. Government commitment and higher level support.'

'The Scottish Government should also consider a campaign to incentivise private and public sector companies to formally recognise volunteering and support employees to undertake voluntary work.'

'Continued and ongoing recognition of volunteering within our own organisation, measuring the value of volunteering and of volunteer managers. From this, developing additional resource within our own organisation. More and improved ways of recognition for volunteering and volunteer management within the sector, raising the profile of volunteering and volunteer management. Campaigns, and positive and effective media promotion/attention. Government commitment and higher level support.'

From an organisational perspective volunteers need to be supported, encouraged and developed. If they are helping the community then they deserve to get something back for those efforts by receiving training, support and encouragement to have a voice in the community. Capacity within organisations while supported by volunteers to help with projects is also on the other hand stretched by managing volunteers. Especially if we are to manage and support volunteers well and help them develop and feel included. We need funding support for volunteer co-ordinators to support and retain volunteers.'

'Most obviously, we need greater rewards for volunteers. The Saltire Awards are great for younger people but there are no rewards system or similar for those over the age of 25 years. Volunteers need to be supported and encouraged more. Many of our volunteers have been out of or have never been part of the job market and find accessing employment very difficult and volunteering experience is not fully recognised by employers. There needs to be a national recognition scheme for volunteers particularly those who have lived experience of poverty, addiction, exclusion who are helping through their experience to help others and using their voices to design and deliver services to receive greater recognition.'

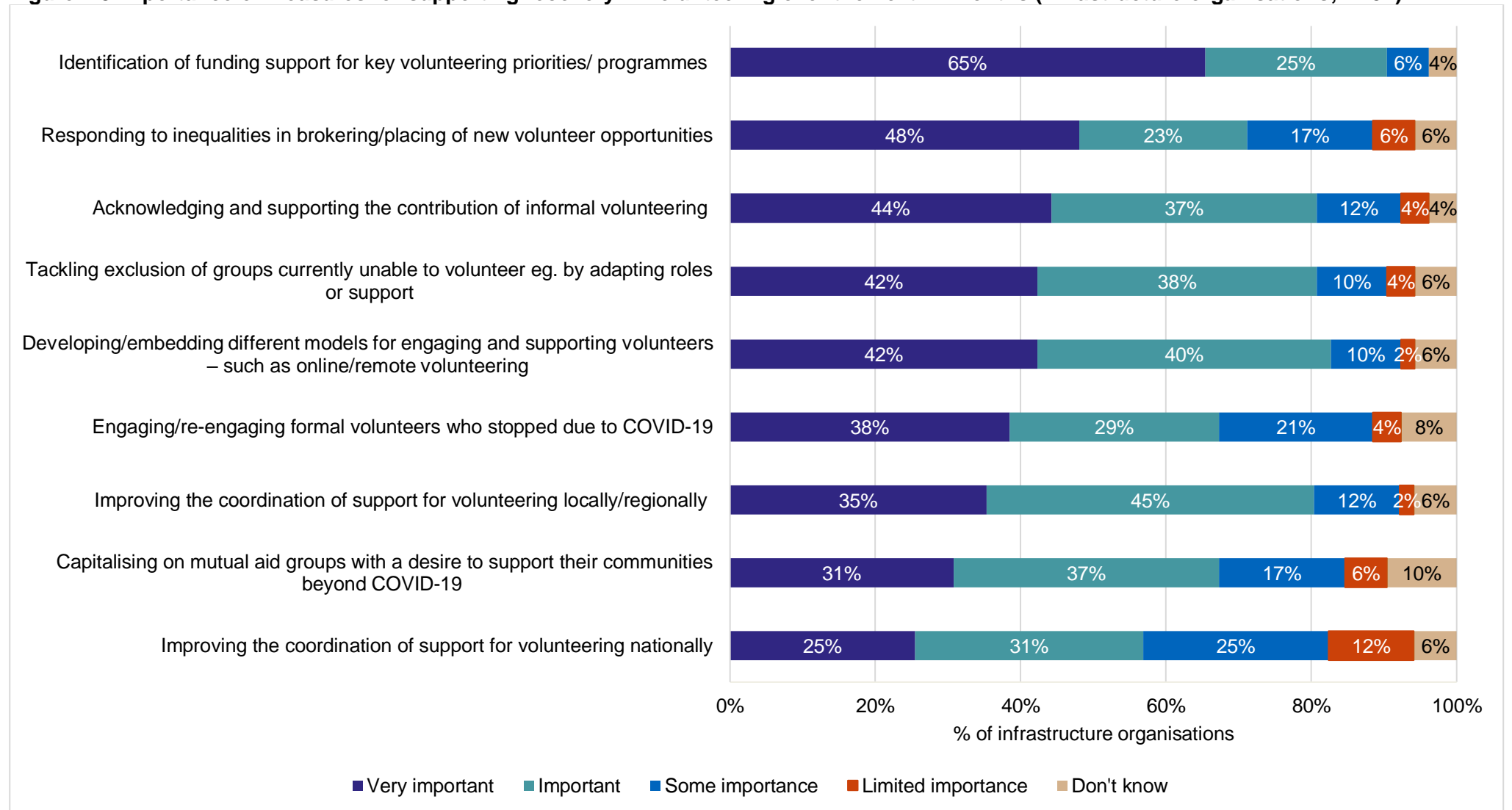
7.6 How infrastructure organisations plan to support recovery in volunteering

We also asked infrastructure organisations about their views on the priority measures for supporting the recovery of volunteering in their area during the next 12 months (ie from mid-2021 to mid-2022). Ninety percent of infrastructure organisations said that funding support for volunteering programmes and priorities was either very important or important to support recovery in volunteering, echoing the views of VIOs themselves who cited funding as the biggest priority. Support for volunteer coordination within local areas was a high priority, with 80% saying this was very important or important. Developing and embedding different models for supporting volunteering – such as digital and remote forms of volunteering – were considered to be very important or important by 83% of infrastructure organisations, acknowledging the potentially important role that diverse forms of volunteering may play over the longer term.

Infrastructure organisations also highlighted the need to respond to inequalities in volunteering, and the need to tackle the exclusion of groups that are currently unable to volunteer as significant priorities. These emerged as higher current priorities for infrastructure organisations than for VIOs – 81% of infrastructure organisations said that tackling exclusion was a priority, compared with 37% of VIOs that said they were currently prioritising making volunteering more inclusive. For VIOs, at the time of the survey (just following the second lockdown) the primary focus was on the significant challenges of getting core programmes running again, reaching service users, restarting volunteering safely, and finding ways to re-engage volunteers who had stopped due to the pandemic.

Infrastructure organisations recognised the role that informal volunteering and mutual aid have provided during the pandemic. As shown in Figure 7.8 below, 81% of respondents said it was important or very important to recognise and support informal volunteering going forward, and 67% felt that it was important or very important to support mutual aid groups where they want to continue to support communities. Respondents recognised that there may be continued opportunities to harness the upswell in willingness to volunteer during the pandemic and turn this into longer-term engagement.

Figure 7.8 Importance of measures for supporting recovery in volunteering over the next 12 months (infrastructure organisations, N=52)



Infrastructure organisations were asked to tell us what their own organisations were doing or planning to do to support the recovery in volunteering. Key themes that emerged included support for volunteering and volunteers; training; partnership working; online services; and recognition.

7.6.1 Area-based promotion of volunteering and volunteering opportunities

Infrastructure organisations recognised the need to support volunteer-involving organisations to enable pre-existing volunteers to return to volunteering, to create more inclusive opportunities for new volunteers, and to support the gains that have been made during the pandemic in attracting new volunteers and developing new ways to volunteer. Whilst acknowledging that much of this work will need to be led by VIOs themselves, infrastructure organisations see opportunities to support this, through their area-based promotion of volunteering and volunteering opportunities; work to promote volunteering with employers and other partners; and streamlining and support for pathways into volunteering.

'We are utilising our new developments on our Salesforce EPI system to broadcast new volunteering opportunities to the bank of volunteers who signed up during COVID-19 as well as any newly registered potential volunteers to keep them engaged and to promote a continued interest in volunteering. We have developed a Community Response protocol based on COVID-19 pandemic to ensure we are ready and able to manage volunteer supply and demand quickly and efficiently.'

'We are supporting organisations to work with their volunteers to try and retain them through increased flexibility of roles moving forward, recognising and supporting volunteer wellbeing is also really important. Being part of other volunteering networks we are keen to drive forward the Volunteering Action Plan and opportunities such as employer supported volunteering to help retain those who were able to volunteer whilst on furlough. Cost of inclusive volunteering also needs recognised as do the many benefits of volunteering.'

'We are working with our minority communities to ensure volunteering is inclusive and that organisations have taken an active approach to inclusive practices. We are reviewing our own practices for volunteer signposting and recruitment to ensure they are not inadvertently setting barriers for individuals to volunteer.'

'We continue to work closely with the [area-based] Volunteer Managers Forum to explore volunteer role development, volunteer support, and volunteer recognition. The forum meets every two months and communications are shared with this forum as and when on training opportunities, volunteer funding, updated best practice etc.'

'We are working with employability partners in [local authority area] to ensure volunteering remains an option for individuals who want to build their experience and skills as part of their volunteering journey.'

'We have newly recommitted to delivering the updated Volunteer Friendly Award in [local authority area], and were part of the steering group for its review. We will be promoting this to volunteer groups across the area to encourage best practice with regards to recruitment, inclusion, support, safeguarding and recognition.'

'We have reconnected with local schools to encourage uptake of the Saltire Awards and to encourage recognition of digital volunteering that was done by young people over the course of the pandemic.'

'Working in partnership with the TSI to maintain the good practice demonstrated and learnt during the pandemic. Investing additional support in the TSI to lead the recovery response in certain areas – including sustainable food provision. Investing in a new volunteer management portal. Continuing to celebrate and encourage volunteers through [local campaign].'

7.6.2 Supporting volunteer wellbeing and resilience

There was recognition that more support for volunteer wellbeing and resilience is needed, in particular for volunteers who are not connected to formal support or supervision. Support can help to ensure the continued engagement of people who want to volunteer over the longer term.

'Support for volunteers is needed and wellbeing sessions will be important for the volunteers who do not receive any formal support or supervision. We need to make that pathway of support clear and TSIs have an important role to play in helping forge a path. ...In most volunteering research, we can see that when asked, most people will say they will continue volunteering or would consider volunteering in the future. However, in order to make this future thought into a reality – volunteers and volunteer co-ordinators need support and this needs to extend to informal groups. TSIs need to be resourced to continue with this growth.'

7.6.3 Providing training and other services for VIOs and volunteers

Providing training to VIOs on issues related to volunteering, and in some cases providing direct support or training to volunteers, was another area of priority. Developing and maintaining online services was also an area where infrastructure organisations intended to provide support.

'Our volunteer management forum for example have gone back to basics with groups in training for recruiting, managing and retaining volunteers - reflecting the changes in practice due to COVID and moving forward.'

'We are also working on setting up a "Volunteer Passport Scheme" locally to streamline the route to volunteering both for volunteers and VIO's.'

'We are looking at buddy volunteering for those who have low self-esteem and although they may wish to volunteer they will require support. We would hope to provide a volunteer coordinator who would support a small group of buddy volunteers who would attend volunteering opportunities with volunteers who require support to start their volunteering journey. We are'

also working with statutory partners and volunteer involving organisations to support young people into volunteering and beyond'

'We have already redeveloped our capacity building services for VIOs including our good practice wiki www.volunteerwiki.org.uk and have reworked our training to be delivered in a blended way. This is proving very popular.'

7.6.4 Building on partnerships forged during the pandemic

Infrastructure organisations recognised that they had made real improvements in partnership working during the pandemic, and wanted to take steps to maintain or build on this.

'We are working closely with local strategic partners to ensure that volunteering is included in local agendas/policies and attending strategic groups to raise the profile and need to support volunteering. Plan to develop new volunteering strategy for the area in the next year, with partners closely involved to ensure shared ownership of volunteering across a range of local agendas/groups. Ongoing dialogue with VIOs to check needs and support required.'

7.6.5 Recognising and celebrating the value of volunteering

As for VIOs, infrastructure organisations also felt that recognition of volunteering is a priority, and that this needs to be integrated into plans for the recovery period.

'Continue to recognise the great efforts of volunteering in our Isles and work with communities to continue to see volunteering as an important way of island life. Continue to support organisations to adapt to the changing times as we move back to 'normality'. continue with representation on multi agency groups to ensure an effective model of volunteering is embedded in our isles.'

7.7 Priorities for other stakeholders in supporting recovery in volunteering

Infrastructure organisations were also asked about what the priorities should be for other local and national stakeholders in supporting recovery in volunteering.

Infrastructure organisations felt strongly that funding should be a priority for other stakeholders. There were calls both for short-term funding to support recovery and adaptation into the recovery phase, and also for longer term sustainable funding to support the work of VIOs delivering volunteering programmes, and to ensure continuation and improvement in the work that TSIs and other volunteer-coordination organisations do to promote, support and coordinate volunteering locally.

'Additional funds are needed to support organisations to increase their capacity to support volunteering. Social distancing measures

and anxieties on return to volunteering will have a negative effect on volunteering, particularly on people with additional support needs.'

'Greater understanding and recognition of (a) TSIs' expertise, opportunities to develop and capacity to offer increased support for volunteering locally and (b) the limitations of current funding (and match funding) for TSI Volunteering Services in the context of so many competing demands on TSIs.'

One respondent felt there was an opportunity to retain and build on the speed and simplicity of funding processes that were in place during the pandemic.

'I would like to see us use our learning and experience from the pandemic as we move into the recovery phase. Some of this learning is how National and Local Funders were able to put processes in place to distribute funds to those in need in a quick and simple process. Some Funders can take the best part of six months to confirm funding which can be detrimental to an organisation so if we can speed this process up but still ensuring the same level of information and delivery, I think this could be a huge positive.'

The second area that infrastructure organisations highlighted as a priority for other stakeholders was ongoing commitment to collaboration and partnership working, building on what has been achieved in this respect during the pandemic.

'A more co-ordinated approach to how we develop and support volunteering would be helpful. Regular discussions with Volunteer Scotland about how local areas are developing volunteering and what gaps in opportunities, or volunteer recruitment we have and how we can work together to address gaps.'

This work has already begun.... Re-vitalization of the Volunteering for All approach, that recognizes the contribution of informal volunteering and participation in local activities would help encourage those not yet ready/interested in formal volunteering to continue to participate.'

8 Learning from the pandemic

Finally, we asked all survey respondents to reflect on learning from the pandemic, and what has changed for their organisation in relation to volunteering. We also asked them what they thought could be done differently or better, if a similar situation ever arose in the future.

8.1 VIO reflections on change and learning from the pandemic

VIOs talked about two main areas of internal change and learning that they had experienced during the pandemic: the shift to remote, online and digital forms of volunteering; and the need to support volunteer wellbeing. When asked what the wider response could learn or do better in the event of a future emergency, they talked about the need for adequate funding for volunteering, clear guidance, and the importance of prioritising local-level decision-making more in any future emergency response.

8.1.1 The move to remote, online and digital volunteering

Around one third of the responding VIOs highlighted the shift to online, remote and digital forms of volunteering as the most important change and learning that they had experienced during the pandemic. VIOs recognised that this shift to remote volunteering has:

- allowed volunteering to continue in many cases;
- enabled beneficiaries who were remote or isolating to be reached;
- enabled organisations to engage a wider geographical pool of volunteers;
- supported communication and contact during a time when this was not possible face to face.

Whilst organisations also acknowledged the challenges that remote and digital working poses in terms of the potential exclusion of some volunteers and some service users, many VIOs felt that they wanted to retain some of the flexibility and benefits that online/remote volunteering can bring, and intended to maintain some degree of online programme, alongside blended approaches and a return to face-to-face volunteering.

It seems clear that the best of remote volunteering can offer real opportunities and that there is currently a real appetite and enthusiasm to build on this and integrate the aspects that work well. For some VIOs, there was a sense that the pandemic has accelerated a move towards digital working that was already in train.

'Remote volunteering opportunities are now normal practice within our organisation. 15% of volunteers surveyed in April/May 2021 will be looking for remote only opportunities. 21% are looking for face to face and 64% are looking for a blend of remote and face to face when restrictions ease. This mirrors our service user survey and appetite for the future.'

'As already highlighted, the online volunteering has allowed us to be more inclusive although that needs to be balanced with digital inclusion as a strategy for funders and Scottish Government going forward. Third Sector COVID Recovery funding allowed us to rapidly respond, purchase equipment for online learning and volunteering and access expert support to help the staff here at [our organisation] learn the digital skills to effectively reach our volunteer team and keep them engaged and on purpose.'

We are aiming to deliver blended learning for our courses and some of our volunteering going forward.

We are piloting outreach work in small fragile and outlying communities where no other services exist. Some of that is having a physical presence in village/church halls for 6-8 weeks delivering upcycling, craft, heritage, design and technology skills as well as delivering online learning and volunteering (blended).'

'Yes - I believe future provision will allow us to encourage and support counselling volunteers who wish to work remotely. This will benefit some clients who cannot travel to access in-person counselling, perhaps because of mobility issues, rural living, or caring responsibilities.'

'The charity is happy to adopt the digital changes forced on us by the pandemic, we had often talked of developing a digital offer to reach remoter areas of [our area], to be more inclusive and to get round the difficulties of expensive and infrequent public transport for young people.'

VIOs recognised that this commitment to greater flexibility and remote volunteering needs to be balanced with the recognition that for many volunteers, the experience of volunteering alongside others is of great importance:

'We are working to develop more flexible volunteering options which – whilst already started pre-pandemic – has now become a priority post-pandemic to ensure service sustainability. ... We have moved our training online and this has also been a real benefit. However, there is no doubt that many, many volunteers have missed the community of their branch as...strict public health adherence has affected both practical interaction...as well as the softer elements of community, such as social events.'

Some respondents talked about the need for systems such as a 'volunteer passport' that would enable flexible redeployment of volunteers, or a process to enable more rapid PVG checks, as part of emergency preparedness measures.

'Have a programme already in place for existing volunteers who have been through appropriate PVG checks and training to be able to support people in their community. Volunteer Passport?'

8.1.2 Recognition of volunteers, and support for volunteer health and wellbeing

The second area that VIOs particularly highlighted as a way in which their organisations have changed in how they work with volunteers was an increased focus on recognising and valuing volunteers, and in supporting their health and wellbeing. VIOs felt that the pandemic has brought real attention to the role and importance of volunteers in Scotland's communities, while the challenges of the pandemic have brought the need to support volunteer wellbeing into sharper focus for many VIOs.

'We have always valued volunteers, their dedication and the support they offer but during COVID and now we appreciate them even more. For example, our food delivery service was absolutely critical for many local vulnerable families. It was literally a lifeline for many and for a time, our volunteers delivering food parcels were the only other humans they spoke to over a given week. Volunteers will continue to help us enhance our services; our effectiveness and the impact we have on our user groups.'

'It has showed us the value of our volunteers even more, and emphasised their strengths and commitment to helping people. Sometimes supporting volunteers remotely is a bit more challenging, as you can't have that incidental 'catch up' in the office, at the kettle or kitchen. We need to be more intentional about being open and available to volunteers.'

If we had to respond to a similar situation in future, there are a number of areas where VIOs think that organisations coordinating policy and responses at national or local level should do things differently.

8.1.3 Funding volunteering adequately

VIOs acknowledged that the emergency COVID response funding for third sector organisations (from Scottish Government and other funders) had been a lifeline. They also appreciated the funding support that has been given for digital inclusion, which emerged as a key concern for many organisations as they moved to supporting service users and engaging volunteers remotely.

Where simpler and quicker emergency funding processes had been put in place, VIOs appreciated this and felt that this could be an important tool for the future.

However, the funding support needs for volunteering remain significant. VIOs stressed the need for continued investment in volunteering, and in community and third sector organisations – and that this is an important aspect of ensuring readiness for future emergencies.

'Provide...significantly more funding for volunteer development and maintenance nationally and locally. We cannot continue to expect the voluntary sector to 'pull the rabbit out of the hat' and find the money required to support and develop volunteers.'

8.1.4 Continue investing in digital inclusion to support future preparedness

Several VIOs identified that digital technologies had played a key role in the response to the pandemic, and that this needs further investment and support to

ensure that organisations and individuals are sufficiently equipped with digital technology and skills as part of readiness for any future response.

'Ensure that we have fit-for-purpose policies in place to maintain a digital communication link with those least likely to adopt this technology without direct help and encouragement. It's often the case that the most vulnerable and most in need of the services provided by local health and service providers, are also the same demographic least able to afford, nor willing to learn how to cope, in the digital age. The pandemic proved we had a strong local network of people willing to help their friends and neighbours when times got tough. The digital network to those in need has to be equally robust.'

'Given the ICT accessibility issues for many people there needs to be a wide development of ICT infrastructure within local authorities so that those who neither have the skills or financial means to access ICT are supported to do so by the local authority. Many services switched to online provision during the pandemic which exacerbated the existing digital divide. For our service users involved in statutory matters, in which the legislation underscores the responsibility of those with statutory responsibility to ensure the participation of the service user, ICT support was more or less non-existent. This led to a reduction in service user rights being upheld and in the ability to participate in decisions being made about them.'

8.1.5 Emergency response: providing clear information and guidance

Another area where many VIOs suggested there could be improvements in a future emergency situation was to provide timely and clear information, advice and guidance in relation to volunteering. While VIOs acknowledge the pace of change of information due to the pandemic some struggled to understand which restrictions applied to volunteers and staff, and many organisations talked about the time it took them to comb through rapidly changing guidance to try to work out what they could and could not do. VIOs would also have liked more rapid information at the start of the pandemic to allow groups to mobilise more quickly.

'I appreciate that guidance produced was very fluid due to the changing situation but, even now, guidance is confusing and vague and very changeable. This can set up expectations and then cause upset, disappointment when things cannot happen. The voluntary sector have been essential during the pandemic and if it were to happen again good, clear guidance for the sector and what can and can't be done is a priority.'

'Policy makers at all levels need to communicate effectively and acknowledge that not everyone is a middle class professional with a tertiary level qualification. The language used for the pandemic was often inappropriate, full of jargon e.g. flattening the curve and far too many acronyms.'

'Make sure that the restrictions around volunteering are clearly outlined in policies. It felt like a real struggle trying to figure out what restrictions applied to volunteers and where there were exemptions.'

'Guidance needs to be quicker, e.g. all volunteers over 70 were paused in March 2020 but guidance about resuming is mixed.'

8.1.6 Giving priority to local-level decision-making in emergency response

VIOs also emphasised the need to recognise the importance of local-level decision making by local organisations within any future emergency response. VIOs felt this could have been achieved through better communication and engagement with local groups and organisations, and for these groups to be included more effectively in local area decision making. Considering policy and campaigns at local levels and adapting these to the needs of local areas was also raised by a number of VIOs.

'Recognise the role of community response to COVID and ongoing support to communities in addressing local needs. Statutory services shut down but local volunteers ensured that local people were supported. Need to resource the third sector properly to ensure they can continue to build local capacity and support volunteers.'

'Focus on smaller scale local responses which have the ability to act quickly and responsively.'

'Better communication on a local level. More flexibility to adapt national policy to work at a local level.'

'Possibly that a one size fits all may not work for the situation and some decisions should be taken at a local level based on the current risks and/or capacity of local organisations.'

'Please, please, please listen to small, one off, grass-roots charities. We know what happens in our communities, we provide valuable work and support to our communities (at low cost).... We deserve an equal seat around the table – alongside public agencies, national charities and statutory services and yet, after decades of saying this, we are still overlooked or not treated as an equal. Make a positive change here and include us fully.'

8.2 Infrastructure organisation reflections on change and learning from the pandemic

We asked infrastructure organisations what they would do differently if a similar situation arose in future, and what policy makers and other stakeholders should do differently. Four main themes emerged: better and more inclusive emergency planning and preparedness; enhanced partnership working; prioritisation of local decision making and flexibility of response; and clearer guidance in relation to volunteering.

8.2.1 Planning and preparedness for future emergency situations

Several respondents stressed the need for there to be better planning in place to support the response to any future emergency situation. Responses perhaps reflected the fact that many infrastructure organisations – TSIs in particular – had not necessarily been actively involved in resilience planning arrangements prior to

the pandemic, and that better planning across all agencies would have helped. There was recognition that resilience planning arrangements have become more inclusive as a result of the pandemic, and that awareness of existing groups and structures has increased, and that this will be beneficial in future.

'Be more prepared - have processes/systems in place and ready to go. Have crisis volunteers already registered who can be deployed quickly and effectively. Support existing resilience groups to be ready to go.'

'We want to put things in place now, resilience planning, registrations and training in communities that will ensure that we are better able to support the identification of individuals, organisations and opportunities to maximise investment if necessary in the future. We are a more active part of the resilience planning process now and that will make a big difference.'

Organisations also felt that the internal resilience structures and systems that they have developed during the pandemic make them better prepared for dealing with a future crisis. They also recognised that the investments many of them have made in digital technology and IT platforms to support their work and wider engagement have been an investment in future preparedness.

'Having developed a methodology for remote recruitment, onboarding and deployment - which we will continue to invest in - we will be very well placed in the event of future similar situation. We are a far more resilient organisation as a result of the past 18 months.'

'I think overall we have responded very well and have been more prepared and agile than perhaps we expected (luckily we had done some IT upgrades and begun more online delivery over the last few years so we had the basics in place we just accelerated the change hugely).'

8.2.2 Better partnership working

Partnership working – both at local levels between key partners, and between national and local levels – was a clear emergent priority, and something that infrastructure organisations felt could be better managed in a future crisis. Many organisations expressed that they would seek to approach partnership working differently from the outset of an emergency situation, building more collaboration between key partners.

'Encourage greater collaboration between local resilience partnerships and the TSI. Encourage greater collaboration between national strategies and the local reality.'

'To work closer with mutual aid organisations right from the start. To encourage them to grow with our support.'

'Having the local volunteer response more streamlined and greater partnership with local authority and NHS initially would have been beneficial but unsure how we could have changed this.'

'Good communication and ensuring that all key stakeholders are around the table to help shape the response. These stakeholders should be identified now and advised they will be called upon to support any future response.'

'Put a requirement in place that NHS, local authority and third sector should work together consistently across the country to meet local needs and put a suggested process in place.'

There was also a view that the Scotland Cares campaign should have been developed on the basis of local needs and coordination with local actors, rather than a top-down national campaign.

'Linking up with the TSIs before launching something as wide reaching as the Scotland Cares campaign would be a key difference. The trust shown with regards to TSIs assisting with funding decisions, utilising the local knowledge we have accumulated, was great and demonstrated exactly why the local TSI model works.'

8.2.3 Prioritising local decision making and flexibility of response

Like the VIOs, infrastructure organisations emphasised the importance of devolving key decision making and coordination to local areas, and decentralising funding decisions in order to enable a more rapid and flexible local response.

'Policy makers need to respond more rapidly to emergencies, they need to have an emergency plan and have good links to communities to do a rapid needs assessment. Not all communities have the same needs so the response needs to be flexible.'

'National stakeholders could engage earlier and more collaboratively with the local response.'

'Ensure that local contacts are involved at the earliest opportunity, when dealing with an emergency that requires for local lockdowns, restricting movement we need key local contacts to be at the table to talk about the local needs and local capacity.'

It would be good to have an overall picture of how involved each TSI was in the planning of support in their area, this will help identify areas where there needs to be some additional links between our National stakeholders and the local contacts.

Having a more local approach to how emergency funding could be distributed to local 3rd and community sector organisations, this will ensure that funding can be targeted to meet local needs and not required to fit into a national picture, allows for demographic differences, inequalities and ensures that emergency support is targeted to those that need it most and not determined by areas of deprivation if this is not the emergency response required.'

'Without the national emergency response funding schemes for community organisations, thousands of vulnerable people would have had no support, through an incredibly scary and unprecedented time. The efforts of the third sector groups managing this funding were outstanding, we hope this would

be a first choice for delivery of funding to support community needs in future.'

'Provide clear guidance and signpost for supports but decentralize more resource to enable local partnerships to develop appropriate local response using existing local knowledge and experience and relationships.'

Some respondents felt that certain aspects of decision making during the pandemic had been more responsive, flexible, or devolved, and wanted to ensure that this could be retained within future emergency responses.

'There was a great degree of flexibility in many of the responses to the pandemic. There has to be greater flexibility built into future resilience planning.'

8.2.4 Clearer communications and guidance in relation to volunteering

Some infrastructure organisations stressed the need for clearer communications and guidance in relation to volunteering in the context of the changing COVID-19 restrictions, and for more proactive engagement with the voluntary sector in relation to the development of national or local level guidance.

'At times there was confusing and conflicting information about COVID, restrictions and volunteering. A vast amount of public service information was distributed across a variety of mediums, which at times felt that key messages were competing with one another for space. In addition our TSI had to translate this information into other languages to ensure this complex information was accessible to speakers of other languages. This was at times challenging as guidance changed quickly.'

'A consistency on guidance on how TSIs/volunteer centres could link in with local hospitals or health centres would also have been good. We're aware that some TSIs were contacted by local HSCPs and health boards to assist with the recruitment of vaccination and/or testing centre volunteers but we were not. That is fine in itself but again the national messaging was at odds and left members of the public confused and frustrated that their offers of volunteering weren't able to be utilised.'

'Ensure there is one trusted source of info that can be shared and promoted specifically for volunteer involving groups – it took our staff considerable time to pull all required info together for groups on a regular basis, which was replicated across other areas in Scotland, e.g. current regulations, how to guides, essential safeguarding checklist, good practice, off the shelf policies as templates.'

'There has never been national guidance on volunteering and the Government routemap. We have all had to reinterpret it locally, and try and work out where volunteering fits in. It would have been good if Volunteering Scotland and the Government had worked together to provide proper guidance on volunteering. Many of the national organisations provided 'guidance' which really just referred people back to the Government guidance. ... There was a lot of reinventing the wheel going on, with us all producing local guidance.'

9 Conclusions and next steps

The survey data have offered many rich insights into the role that volunteering of many different types has played during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is clear that volunteers were an essential part of the response, and that their engagement has helped to support many vulnerable people, particularly those who were shielding and non-shielding at risk, through an isolated and difficult time. It is also clear that many volunteer-involving organisations showed incredible adaptability and resilience, pivoting their work to be able to meet newly emerging needs, and finding ways to adapt their programmes for online and remote delivery wherever possible.

The following are some key emerging themes and conclusions arising from the survey analysis.

9.1 Emerging themes

9.1.1 Restarting work in an uncertain time

For many organisations that had formal volunteering programmes in place prior to the pandemic, it was extremely challenging to sustain these programmes through the pandemic. Many organisations had to stop or pause the delivery of these programmes in the face of COVID-19 guidelines, while many existing volunteers who were older or with health conditions stopped volunteering in order to protect their health.

At the time of this survey (April-June 2021), volunteer-involving organisations were restarting paused programme work, and seeking to re-engage volunteers who had stopped due to COVID. This was an uncertain time, with many organisations unsure as to whether – and when – their pre-existing volunteers would be ready and willing to return, and grappling with ongoing changes in COVID-safety guidance and how to ensure a safe return for staff, volunteers and service users alike. Organisations had not all returned to their traditional premises or restarted work with their usual service user groups. While organisations were generally optimistic about being able to return to full volunteering capacity by the end of 2021, there were concerns that some volunteers had lost confidence and might not feel able to step back into their roles. Ongoing uncertainty about the direction that the pandemic might take and what this might mean for restarting paused work was also of concern. The data collection for this report was undertaken prior to the emergence of the Omicron COVID-19 variant, and it is likely that this may have posed further challenges to this process of restarting face-to-face programmes and volunteering.

9.1.2 Adapted ways of working: gains and losses

VIOs – and infrastructure organisations – made significant changes to their ways of working during the pandemic, adapting their work in order to offer remote and on-line opportunities for volunteering, for training and onboarding of volunteers, and for service delivery. Many organisations appreciated the additional flexibility that remote delivery had brought to their work, particularly in enabling them to engage

with volunteers who were not able to volunteer in person, and in allowing them to tap into volunteer resources from a wider geographical area. Many organisations expected to retain aspects of this into the next phase of the pandemic and beyond.

Nevertheless, there were some clear losses associated with the shift to online/remote volunteering. Lack of access to the necessary technology and equipment has been a challenge – particularly where volunteers or service users were required to use their own equipment and connections. On-line and remote volunteering posed difficulties for some volunteers and service users with certain types of disabilities, or health conditions such as dementia. Some service users – young people in particular – were less keen to engage with online forms of service delivery. Some programmes can not be delivered effectively through online or remote approaches. Many of the VIOs responding felt that the shift to remote forms of delivery had not met the needs of their service users adequately, and expressed an acute need to return to face-to-face services as soon as it would be safe to do so.

Several organisations also stressed that in-person volunteering is important for many volunteers, for whom the social aspects of volunteering and the structure of volunteering outside of the home help to maintain motivation and enthusiasm for volunteering.

It seems likely that hybrid and flexible models that combine the best aspects of remote and in-person volunteering may emerge from the pandemic, but that this will require continued investment in digital inclusion as well a recognition that on-line models do not work well for all volunteers, programmes, and service users.

9.1.3 Volunteer wellbeing: a current concern

The intensive period that many VIOs have been through since March 2020 has taken its toll on staff and volunteer health and wellbeing. Several respondents expressed concern about the wellbeing of volunteers, and an increased need to focus on supporting volunteer wellbeing and mental health was a clear emerging finding from the study. There were also concerns for those who have had to stop volunteering during the pandemic, and who are not currently able to access the wellbeing benefits that volunteering provides.

9.1.4 Recognising volunteers

Relatedly, several respondents felt that there could be better local and national recognition of the contribution that volunteering makes to the work of the third sector and the public sector across Scotland. They considered it to be important to find ways to formalise recognition for volunteers, and that volunteering should be recognised more explicitly across different policy areas for the role it has to play in supporting public services and community development.

9.1.5 Emerging needs: mental health and wellbeing

Survey respondents from both infrastructure organisations and VIOs found that the area of greatest emerging needs among the groups and areas where they work was mental health and wellbeing. It is clear from the responses that VIOs felt the

pandemic has had a significant negative impact on mental health and on feelings of loneliness and social isolation among many communities and target groups. Organisations noted that there is not enough mental health support available to be able to respond to this, and many of them did not have the capacity to take on the level of referrals that they were seeing.

9.1.6 Informal and mutual aid volunteering: future perspectives

The volunteering response during the pandemic was characterised by tremendous engagement from members of the public, including the thousands who signed up to support Scotland Cares; who formed or joined 'mutual aid' groups set up to support communities across Scotland; or who took individual action to check in with and support neighbours or more vulnerable people within their communities. The pandemic has made clear that, when needed, people are more than ready to step in to help others in their communities – and that they don't need to be part of formal volunteering programmes and structures to feel able to do so.

Many of the 'mutual aid' groups and informal volunteering efforts that were so essential during the first COVID lockdown in particular have now reduced or stopped. Some of these groups have formalised or become part of pre-existing community groups or structures.

The initial phase of the pandemic was characterised by some degree of confusion as different groups emerged – many spontaneously – and it was challenging for infrastructure partners to track this upswell of volunteering and work out how best to coordinate and engage with it. In particular, infrastructure organisations took on extensive supporting roles to ensure that new and informal organisations would have the capacity to integrate safeguarding, COVID safe practices, and adequate coordination and support for volunteers.

An important question now facing volunteering support organisations and policy makers is how to build on this experience of informal and mutual aid volunteering – what structures to invest in, and how a similar upswell in volunteering could be more quickly supported and coordinated in the future. It would be helpful for future research to gain a more detailed overview of where mutual aid groups are still independently active, where they have ceased to operate, where they have been integrated into existing community structures, and how they and other stakeholders see their future role.

Similarly, there are important questions about the extent to which it may be possible to build on the willingness of those who signed up with mutual aid organisations, or with Scotland Cares, or who did informal volunteering during the height of the pandemic – and encourage those people to get involved in volunteering for the longer term. Comments from the survey respondents indicated that at the height of the pandemic they had seen an increase in the number of younger people/people of working age who were volunteering – but that there had been a drop off in this once people had started to get back to work and study. It is clear that there is a large pool of people who are willing to volunteer to help in a crisis situation – but perhaps less clear how we can best maintain and engage that enthusiasm over the longer term or in more 'normal' times.

9.1.7 Coordination and preparedness: building on positive changes

Many respondents noted the increased levels of coordination and partnership working around volunteering within their local areas that had emerged through the pandemic as a positive outcome. While many of the responses expressed challenges around coordination, both infrastructure organisations and VIOs suggested that coordination within local authority areas generally improved during the course of the pandemic, and that better coordination structures and working relationships could be an important legacy with the potential to support volunteering and other aspects of local response in the future. There was a hope that more collaborative ways of working and relationships that had developed during the pandemic could be retained for the future.

In particular, respondents stressed the need to ensure local leadership and coordination of response wherever possible. For example, many felt that the national 'Scotland Cares' campaign – while it had successfully engaged a very large number of potential volunteers – would have been better as a locally run campaign which could have been tailored to local needs. In the event, many people signed up to Scotland Cares who could not be deployed into volunteering roles because these had in many cases been paused, or already been filled through other efforts.

Finally, there was a positive sense that volunteering had gained in visibility and recognition as an essential part of local and national emergency planning resilience responses, where it might have been partly overlooked in the past. Building volunteering and the third sector more explicitly into future emergency preparedness and resilience planning was seen as essential, and organisations felt there were important steps to take now in terms of ensuring that volunteer readiness and capacity are better understood, and integrated into wider structures for future emergency situations.

9.1.8 Resourcing volunteering

Several VIOs noted that the COVID-19 emergency funding for third sector organisations had been a lifeline, and that the funding for digital inclusion had helped them to put necessary adaptations in place for volunteers and services users.

However, VIOs and infrastructure organisations repeatedly stressed that providing additional support and coordination for volunteers, ensuring their wellbeing, and operating hybrid on-line/in person models for volunteering and service delivery are resource-intensive activities. There was clear feedback that more dedicated funding is needed to support volunteering within volunteer-involving organisations and volunteering coordination and support capacity at the level of TSIs or local authorities. This was felt to be essential in recognition of the contribution that volunteering has made during the pandemic, and in order to ensure resilient volunteering capacities are better understood and integrated into wider groups and structures for future emergency events

In the words of one infrastructure organisation:

'The voluntary workforce and the workforce of paid staff who support volunteers and/or create the conditions that make volunteering possible experienced a prolonged period of high pressure throughout 2020 from March on, with signs of exhaustion and/or frustration at times evident due to multiple factors, yet demonstrating determination and resilience throughout. It remains important that a balanced approach to self-care and supporting others is not just promoted through messaging but that TSIs and wider third sector are resourced at a local level, and enabled to distribute resources to a range of community groups and organisations who each contribute something unique and valuable, not just 'providing services' but in fact regenerating connection, hope, identity, meaning and empowerment (CHIME), essential for a healthy world moving forward.'

9.2 Next steps

This report is testimony to the extraordinary and heroic work of organisations and individuals during an unprecedented time. It provides important evidence of the adaptability and effectiveness of volunteering in Scotland. The Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland are reviewing all the findings from the survey. As a direct next step, findings will be shared and discussed within the Volunteering Action Plan working groups, and used to help inform and shape the development of the Scottish Government's volunteering policy, and the new Volunteering Action Plan¹⁵ for Scotland in particular. The findings will also help inform the wider policy response to the pandemic and lessons learned from it.

¹⁵ Volunteering organisations and the Scottish Government are working together to co-produce a new Volunteering Action Plan which implements the aims set out in [Volunteering for All](#), Scottish Government's volunteering strategy.



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