

# Community Pulse

October 2023  
Executive Summary



  
**SPORTED**

Taking the pulse of  
community sport

# The view from the ground

The Community Pulse is a longitudinal study of Sported members on the sustainability, needs, and ambitions of grassroots groups throughout the UK. It ensures the voices of small community organisations are heard.

It aims to:

- inform others about the issues and opportunities facing community sports groups.
- increase awareness of funding and resources available for such organisations.
- help stakeholders make more-informed decisions in relation to grassroots sport in the UK.
- fill an insight gap on behalf of those who aren't 'traditional' sports clubs or who don't work as commercial or leisure providers.

**621**  
**responses**

This report is based on **621 responses**, representing just under a quarter of Sported groups in the UK, between **27 September – 9 October 2023**. These groups reach around 93,000 young people across the UK.

## Sported and its network

Sported is the UK's largest network of community sports groups, supporting over half a million young people to overcome barriers to reach their full potential. Our role is to empower the local heroes running these groups by providing much needed professional expertise, resources, and operational support, free of charge, to help their group survive and young people thrive.

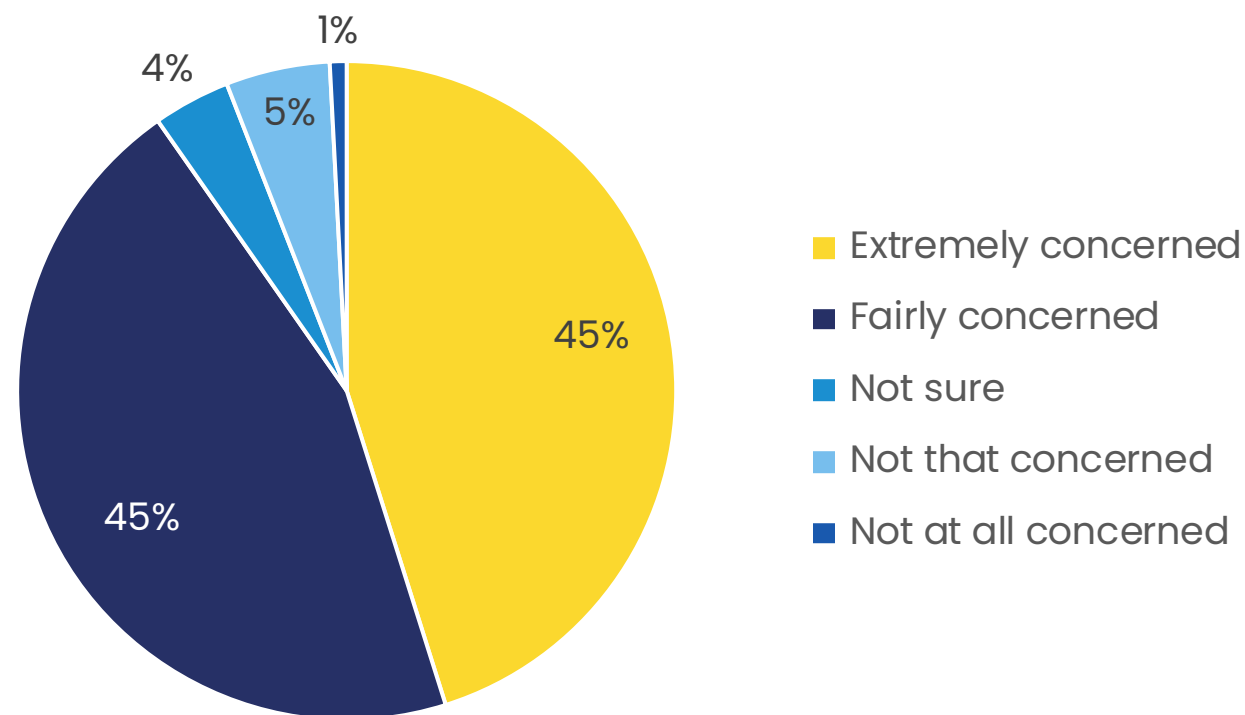
Sported's groups work within complex local contexts, often tackling some of society's biggest challenges. Around 50% are located in areas that sit within the highest three indices of relative deprivation in the UK, two-thirds are volunteer-led, and a third have an annual turnover of less than £10,000.



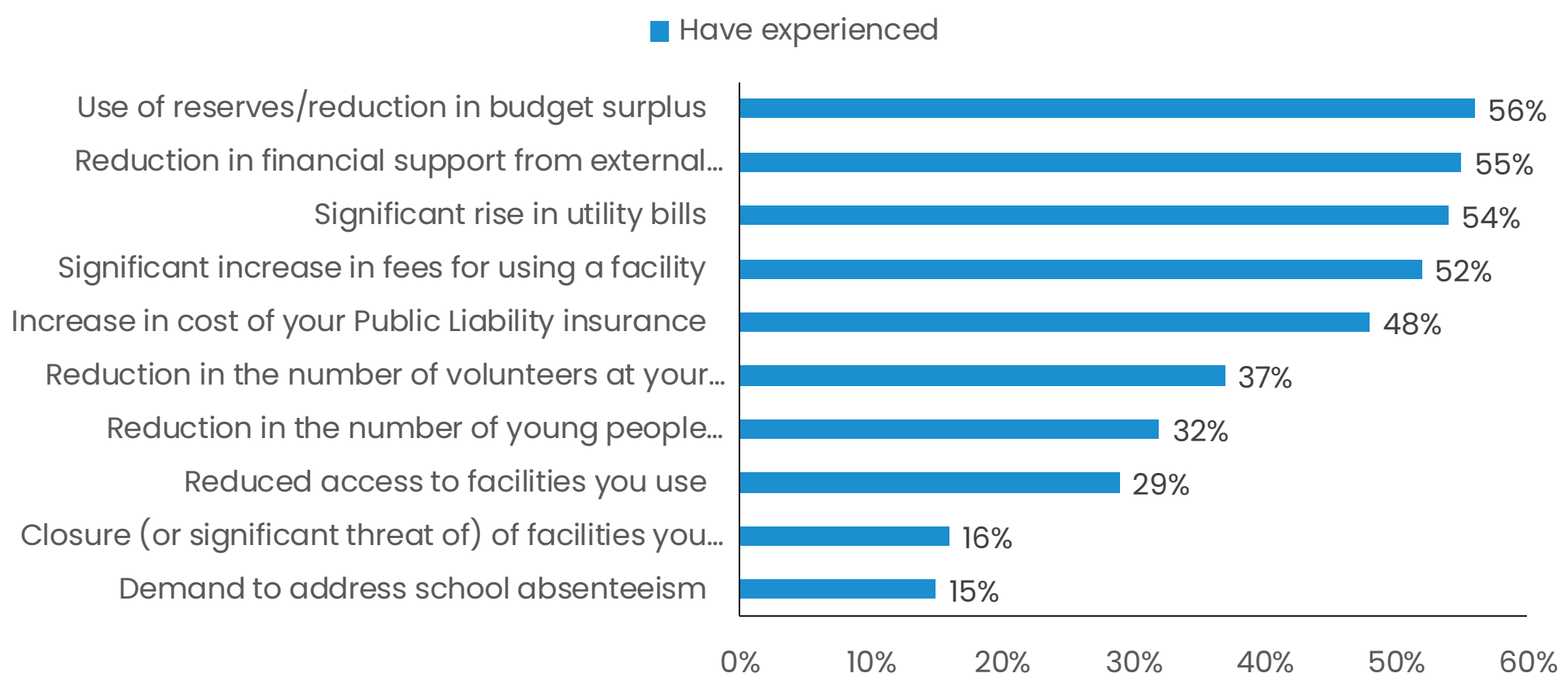
# Cost of Living Crisis continues to bite:

## Impact on community groups

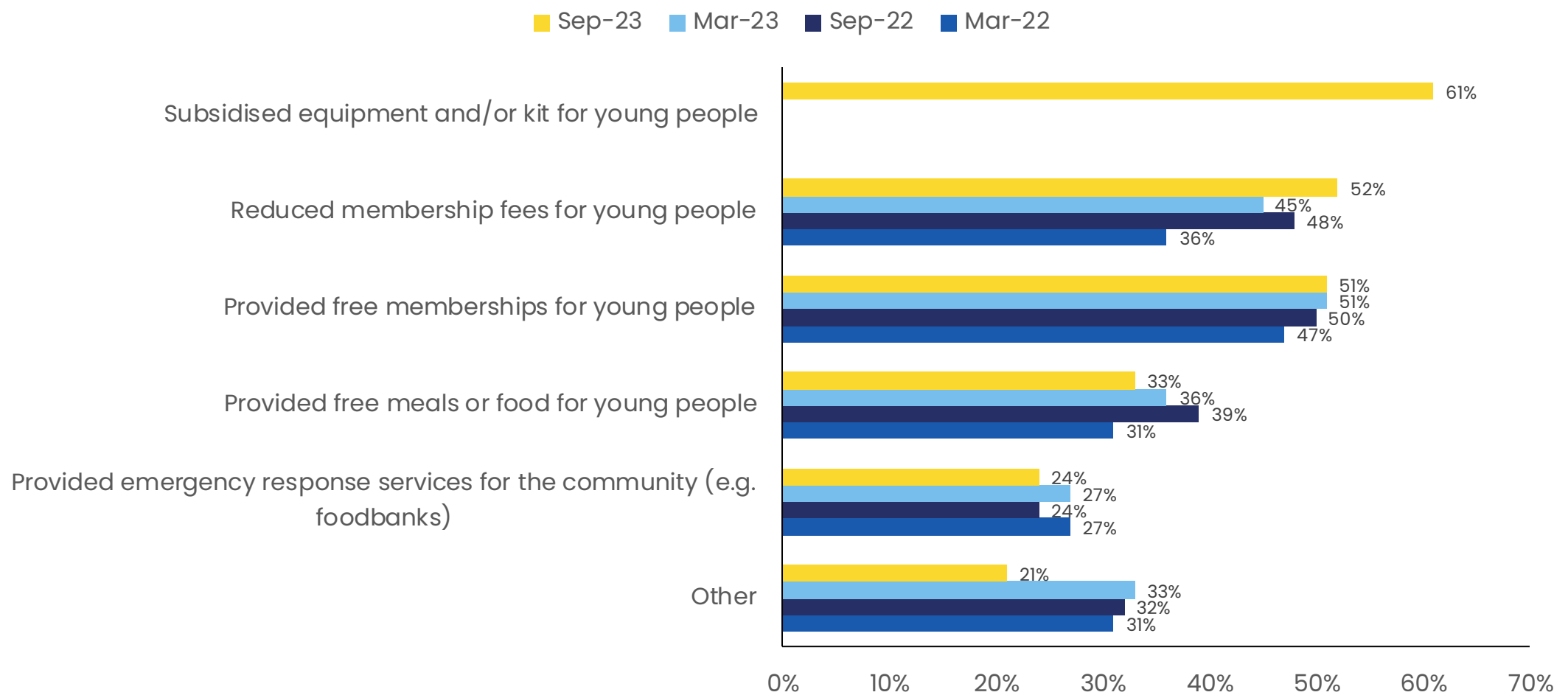
Concern about the impact of cost-of-living pressures continues to be very high, with 90% of respondents either extremely or fairly **concerned about the impact on their group**. This level of concern is similar to six months ago and only slightly less than this time last year.



More than half of groups have had to **use reserves**/faced a reduction in budget surplus over the past six months and the same proportion have **seen a reduction in financial support** from external funding streams.



89% of groups have responded to cost-of-living increases by **making a change** to their operation. This has risen from March, when 79% of groups had made a change. The most common change has been to subsidise equipment/kit for their participants (61%), with around half reducing fees for their young people and/or providing free memberships.



Unsurprisingly, **securing funding** continues to be the most common priority for groups, with 84% identifying this as a key task for the next six months.

Groups are expecting a significant increase in fees for using a facility (37%), a reduction in financial support from external funding streams (33%), the need to use their reserves/reduction in budget surplus (33%), and an increase in the cost of their Public Liability insurance (33%) over the next 6 months.



# Cost of Living Crisis continues to bite

## Impact on young people

91% of group leaders are concerned (extremely or fairly) about the impact of cost of living increases on their young people, with over half witnessing young people disengage or reduce their participation in sport and physical activity in the last 6 months.

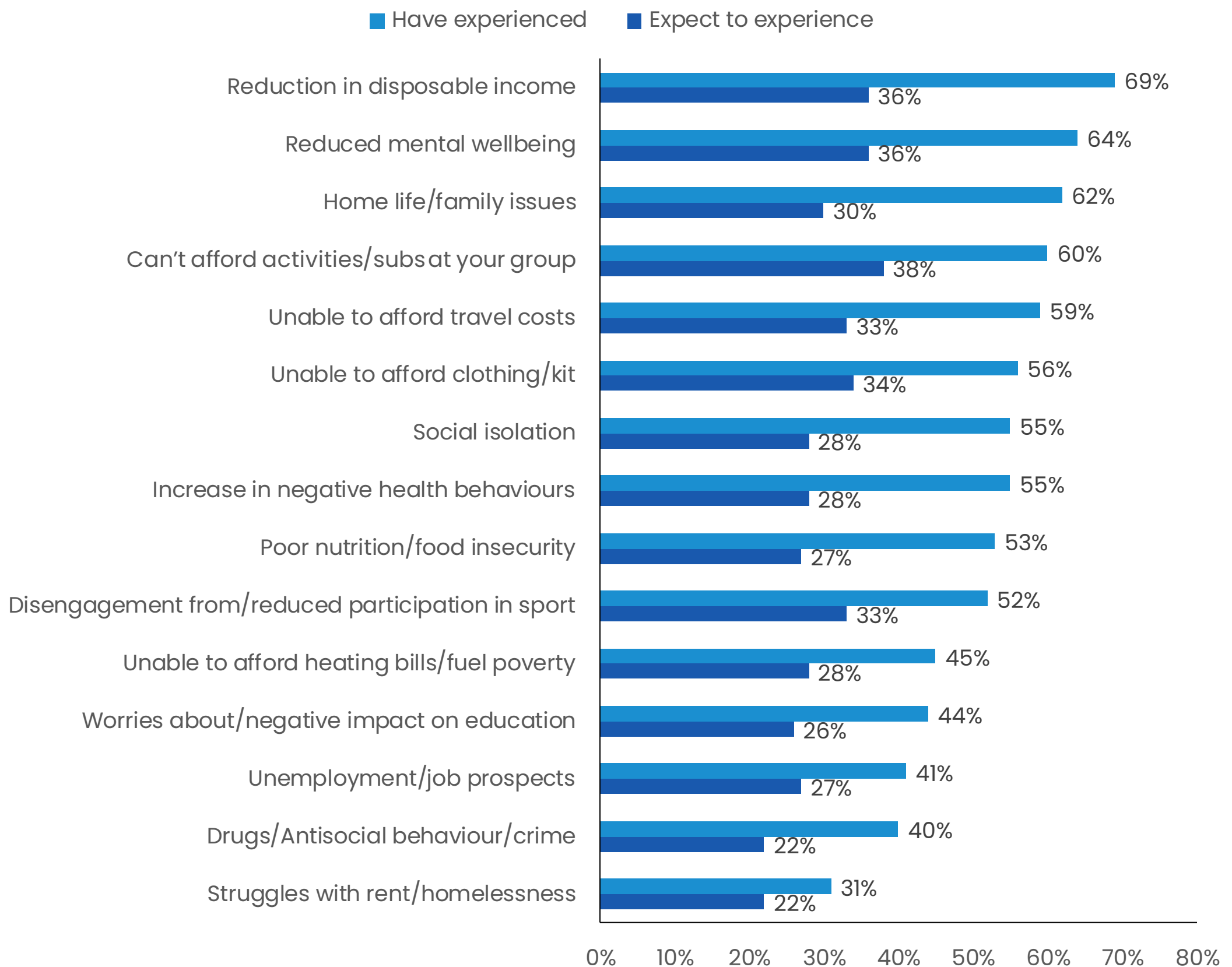
Group leaders report that 69% of young people have seen a reduction in disposable income meaning they are less able to afford subs, travel costs, clothing or kit.

64% of group leaders have reported that their young people have experienced reduced mental wellbeing because of cost-of-living increases. Around a third of respondents told us they are **only just about coping** in their capacity to support the mental health of their young people.

Other issues facing young people include home life/family issues, social isolation, negative health behaviors and food insecurity.

The concern for the impact on young people is felt highest by those groups based in areas of higher relative deprivation (IMD 1-3).

### Issues experienced because of cost-of-living increases (in the last six months/expected in the next six months)



# The strength of community groups

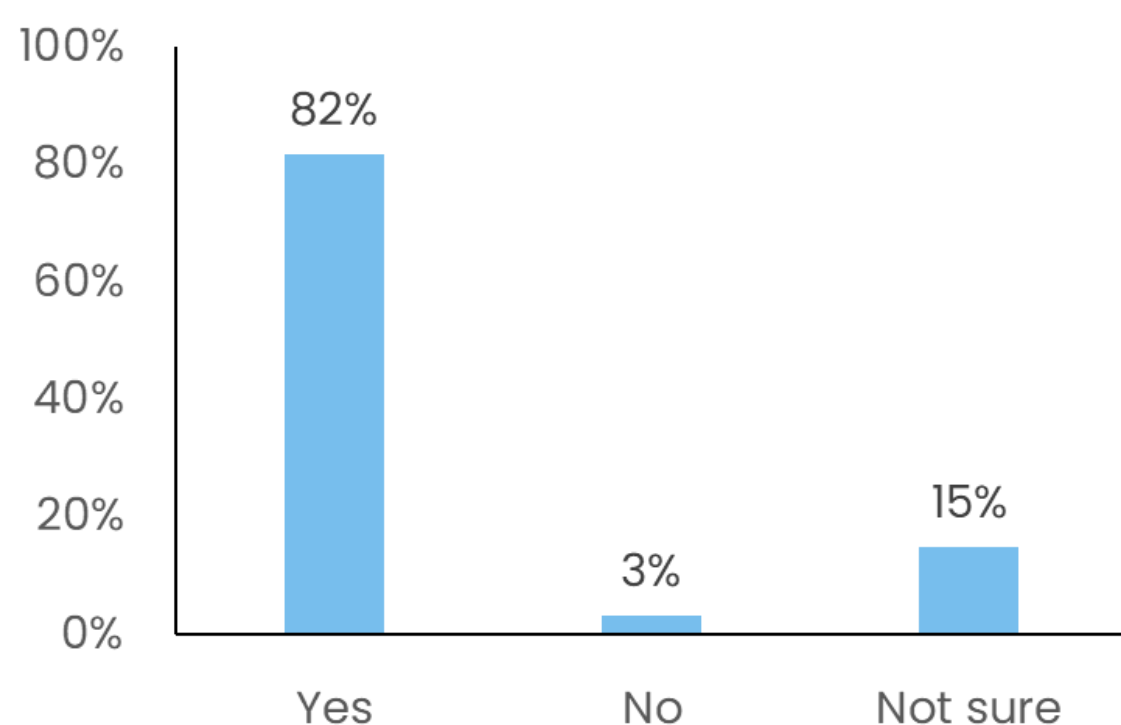
## Despite these challenges, community organisations continue to reach, engage and empower young people

On average, groups who responded to Pulse are engaging around 170 young people. 81% of our groups are supporting young people from historically underserved communities and 51% of groups are located in the highest three areas of multiple deprivation (IMD 1-3).

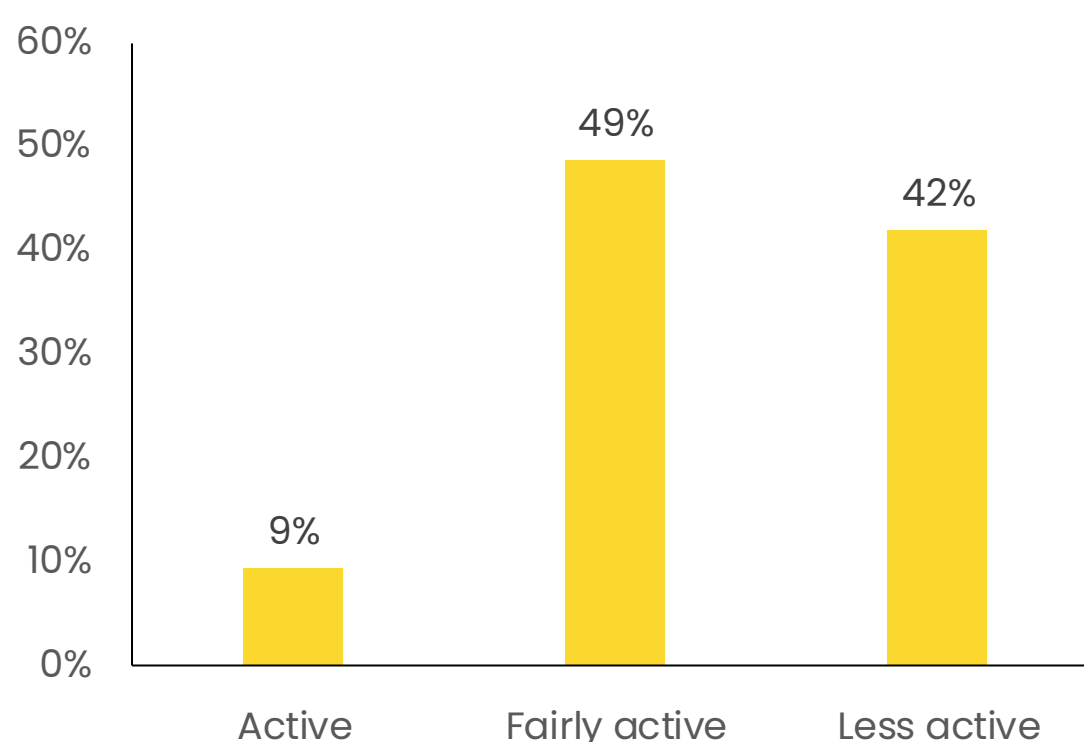
Engaging new participants continues to be a top priority for groups, showing groups' desire to expand their reach.

Over three-quarters of groups say they **get inactive young people active** in their communities (82%) despite activity levels within their communities being relatively low. More than three-quarters of groups (79%) said the lack of representation of minoritised groups within sport impacts on young people from their community taking part (to a great extent or somewhat).

### Do groups get inactive young people active?



### How active are young people in groups' communities

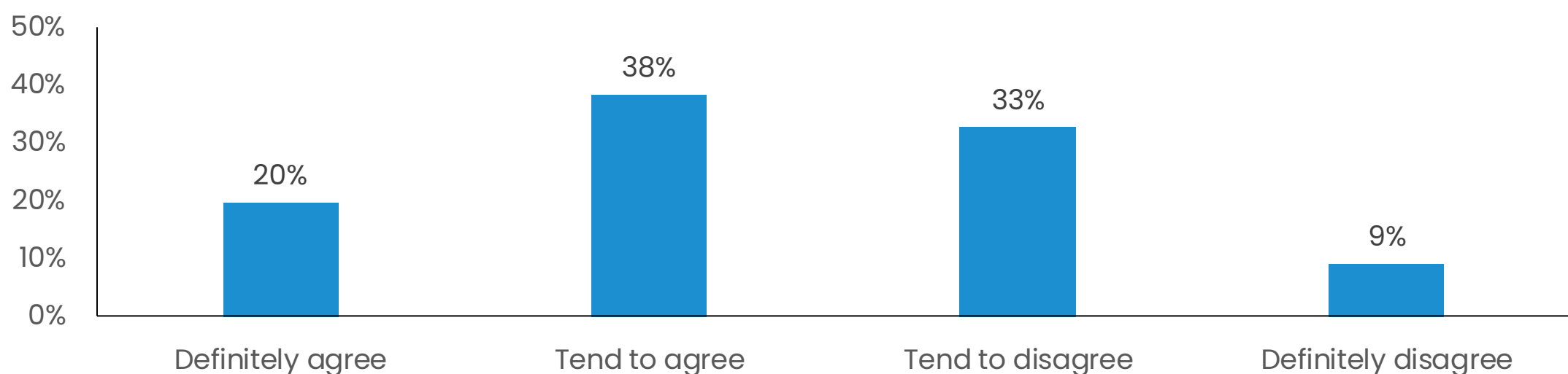


Group leaders reported the **best ways** to get young people active include

- offering affordable activities,
- creating inclusive environments (for young people of all backgrounds and abilities),
- delivering fun non-competitive sessions with lots of encouragement,
- a variety of different activities,
- welcoming peer-to-peer support,
- and trusted coaching staff.

Just over half of group leaders agree (definitely or tend to) that they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area (58%) which implies some of our group leaders feel they have **sense of agency** within their communities.

### Group leaders' belief that they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area

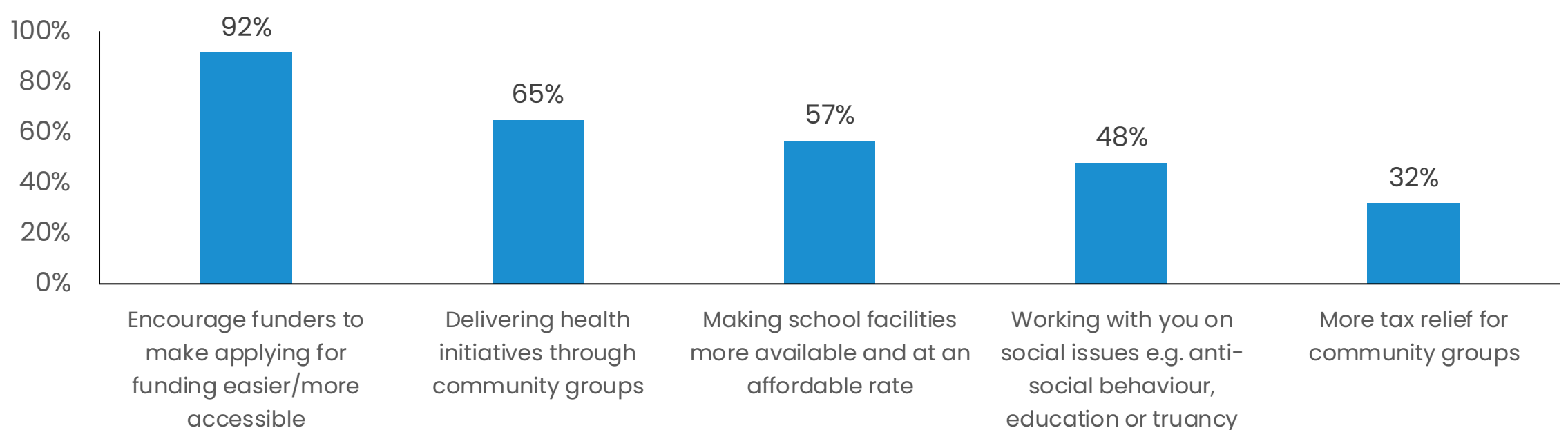


Community groups are continuing to demonstrate their resilience. Confidence in **organisational survival is high**, with 91% of groups confident (extremely or fairly) in their group's survival over the next six months. This has increased since the early stages of the UK's Covid-19 lockdowns in spring 2020, when one in five groups weren't sure about surviving the following six months. Currently, confidence levels are similar to those seen at the start of the cost-of-living crisis in autumn 2021.

# Supporting these vital groups

Almost every group told us that **government**, whether at national or local level, can better support them by encouraging funders to make applying for funding easier/more accessible (92%). More than half of respondents also said government support in delivering health initiatives through community groups (65%) and making school facilities more available and more affordable (57%) would be helpful.

## What more could the government at national or local level do to support groups?

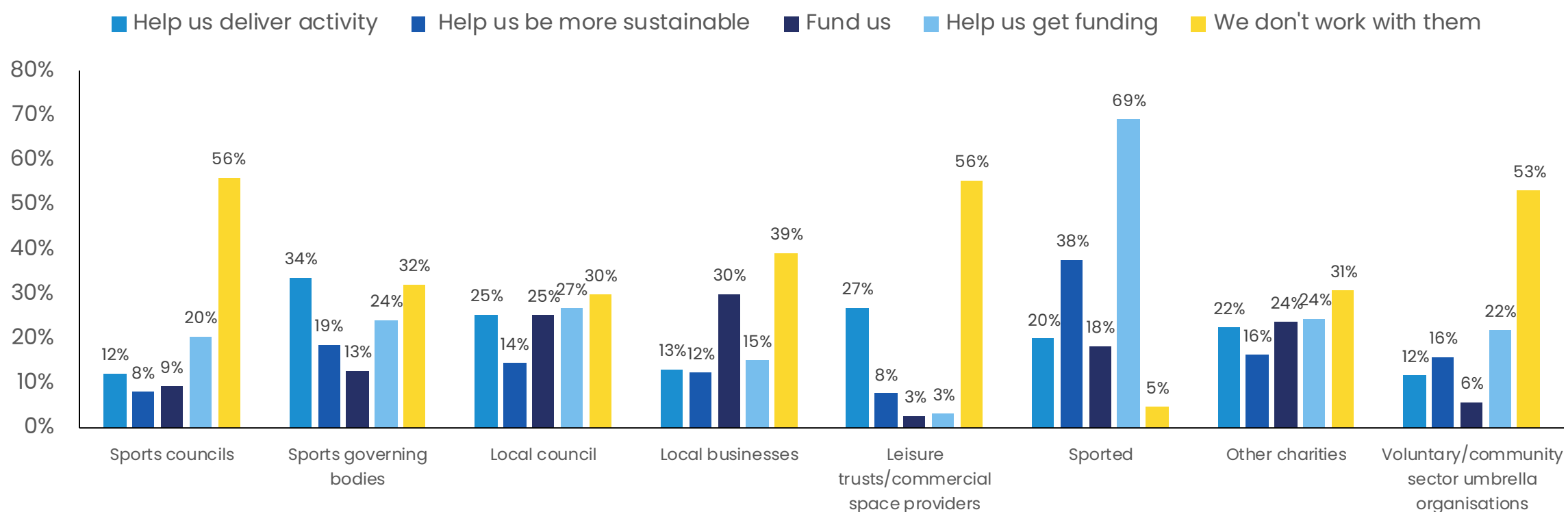


Groups would like to see **corporates** offer funding for different needs (especially facilities/capital/running costs, not just projects), and commit to long-term support, as well as more personalised engagement such as meeting groups in person more often.

Our groups have varying relationships with other organisations within the ecosystem. 68% are connected to their National Governing Body for sport. The majority of groups don't work with their Sports Council, leisure trusts or other voluntary sector umbrella organisations.

Groups are most likely to get funding from local businesses, and support with securing funding and sustainability from Sported.





Group leaders told us that successful relationships with partner organisations are based on regular and effective communication, openness and honesty, an understanding of their needs/situation, shared values/goals, flexibility of approach and simplicity of processes, access to funding, and the willingness of external organisations to listen to smaller groups in their communities.

### Sported's commitment

The findings of our Spring 2023 Pulse informed our discussions with both public sector agencies, and the corporate sector, over how Sported can work with them to channel resources to those most in need – and the return on investment that such engagement can bring. And the insight facilitated our outreach to policy makers so that they make informed decisions on areas that impact on community groups, young people, and grassroots sport and physical activity.





[www.sported.org.uk](http://www.sported.org.uk)

