

Community Pulse

May 2023



SPORTED  **x ring**

Making neighbourhoods stronger and
safer through community sport

Executive Summary

The Community Pulse is a longitudinal study of Sported members on the sustainability, needs, and ambitions of community sports groups throughout the UK.

It aims to:

- inform the sport for development sector 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 community 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.

590
responses

This report is based on **590 responses**, representing **nearly 20% of groups in Sported's UK network**, between **13 – 22 March 2023**. Of these, 51% of responses were from groups in the lowest 30% areas of multiple deprivation.

Sported and its network

Sported is the UK's largest network of community groups supporting 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 the bottom three areas of multiple deprivation, and many are volunteer-led and operating on limited budgets – approximately a third have an annual turnover of less than £10,000.



Executive Summary

Key Findings

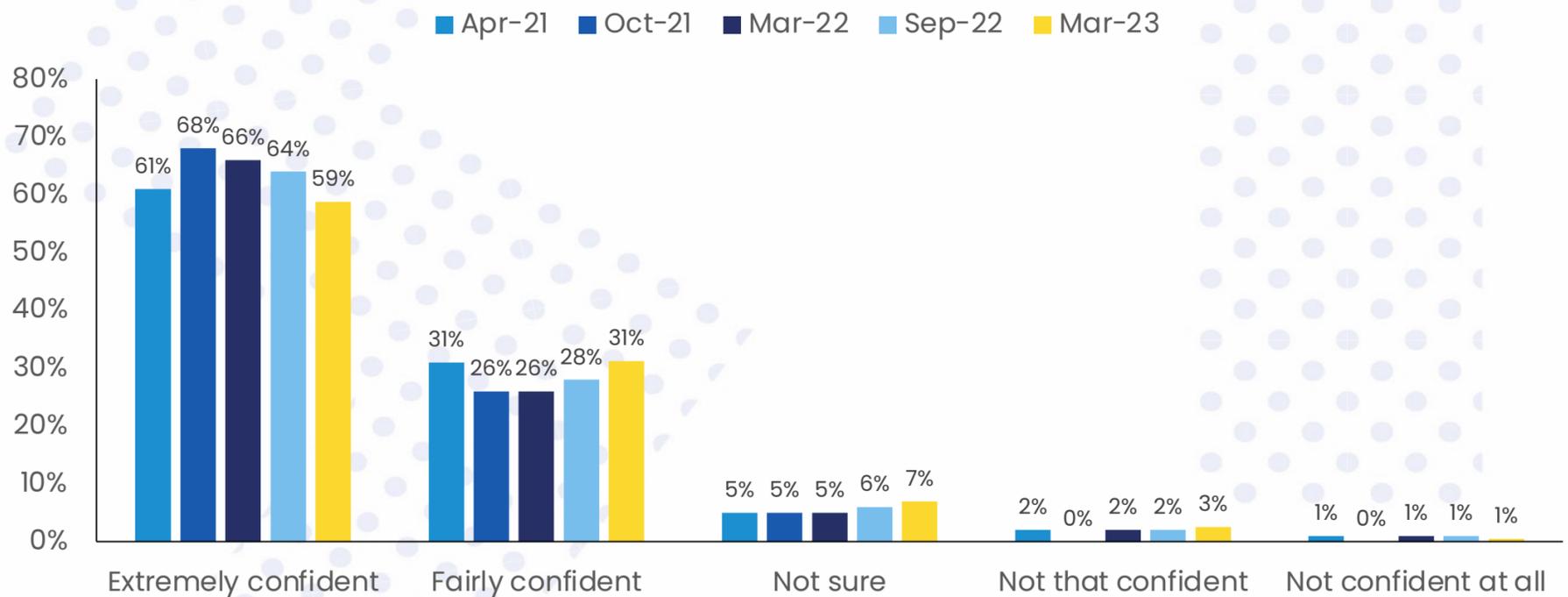
- **Concern about the impact of cost-of-living pressures continues to be very high**, with 94% of respondents concerned about the impact on their group and 92% worried for its effects on their young people.
- The most common concerns around the impact of cost-of-living increases on young people are for **their mental health** (75%) and that they will **disengage from/reduce participation in sport** (73%).
- **Young people's mental health** has continued to decline since March 2022, with around a third of respondents telling us they are **only just about coping in supporting their staff, volunteers, and young peoples' mental health**.
- **Young people not having enough money** is the most common challenge facing communities according to respondents, as it was in our last Pulse in September 2022, with nearly half (49%) telling us this is an issue.
- **Significant rises in utility and energy bills** have been the most common experience of cost-of-living increases in the past six months, while **increases in Public Liability insurance** is the most expected for the next six months.
- More than **three-quarters of respondents (79%)** said their group **has made a change in response to cost-of-living increases** – the most common has been to **provide free memberships**.
- **Securing funding** continues to be the most-reported priority for the next six months, as it has been for each Pulse since March 2022.
- Nearly three-quarters of groups say **they play a significant role (vital or big) in building a stronger sense of community** in their local area (72%).
- **Groups' relationships with other organisations are varied** in terms of support for delivery, funding, and sustainability, but around half don't work with sports councils and voluntary/community sector umbrella organisations.

Survival and priorities

Organisational survival

Confidence in organisational survival is at a level close to that of six months ago, with **90% of groups confident (extremely or fairly) that their organisation will survive in the next six months**. There's been a small but consistent downward trend since October 2021 in groups extremely confident of survival.

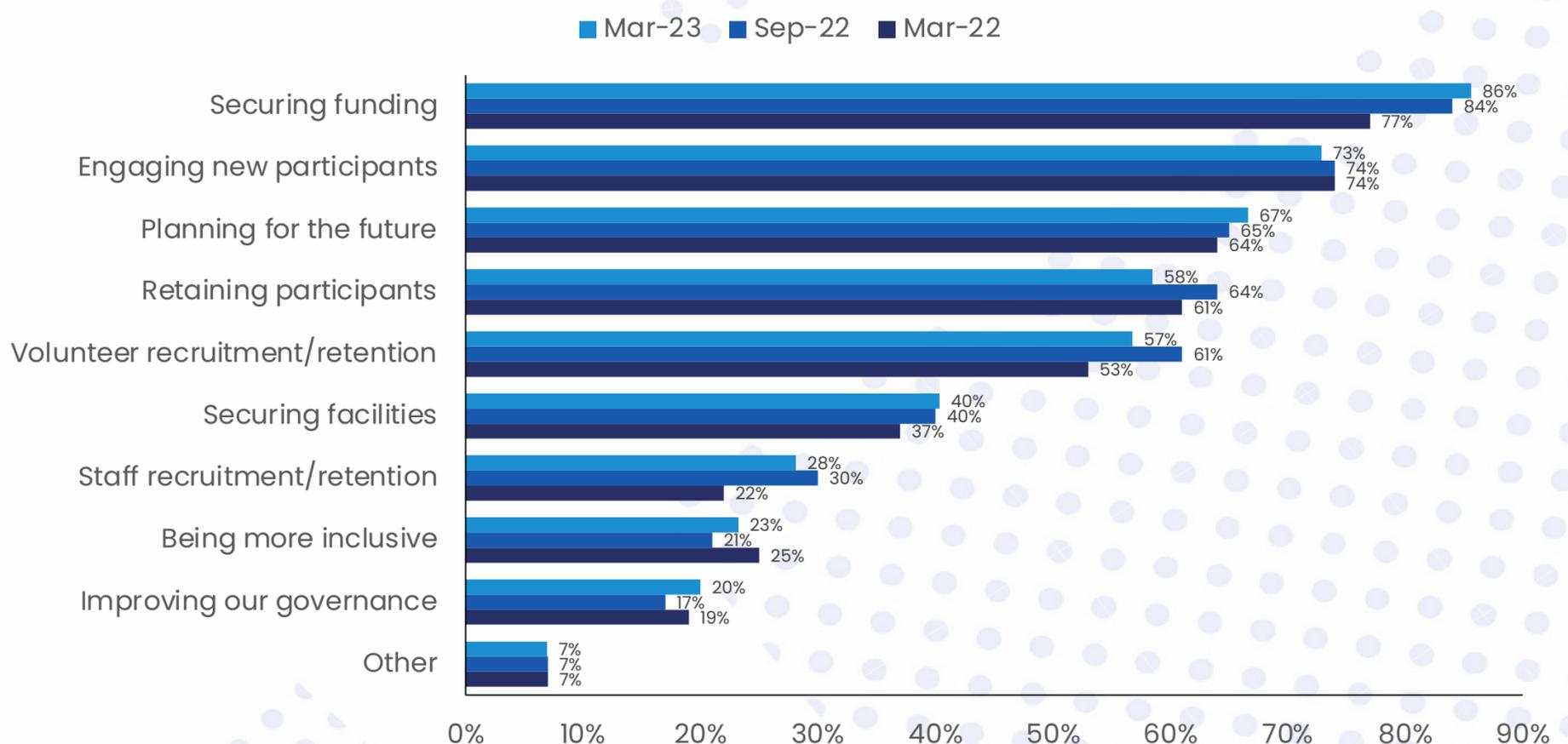
Confidence in organisational survival in the next six months



Top priorities over the next six months

Securing funding remains the most common priority for groups over the next six months, with 86% of groups identifying this as key task. This is a similar proportion to our September 2022 Pulse.

Groups' priorities over the next six months

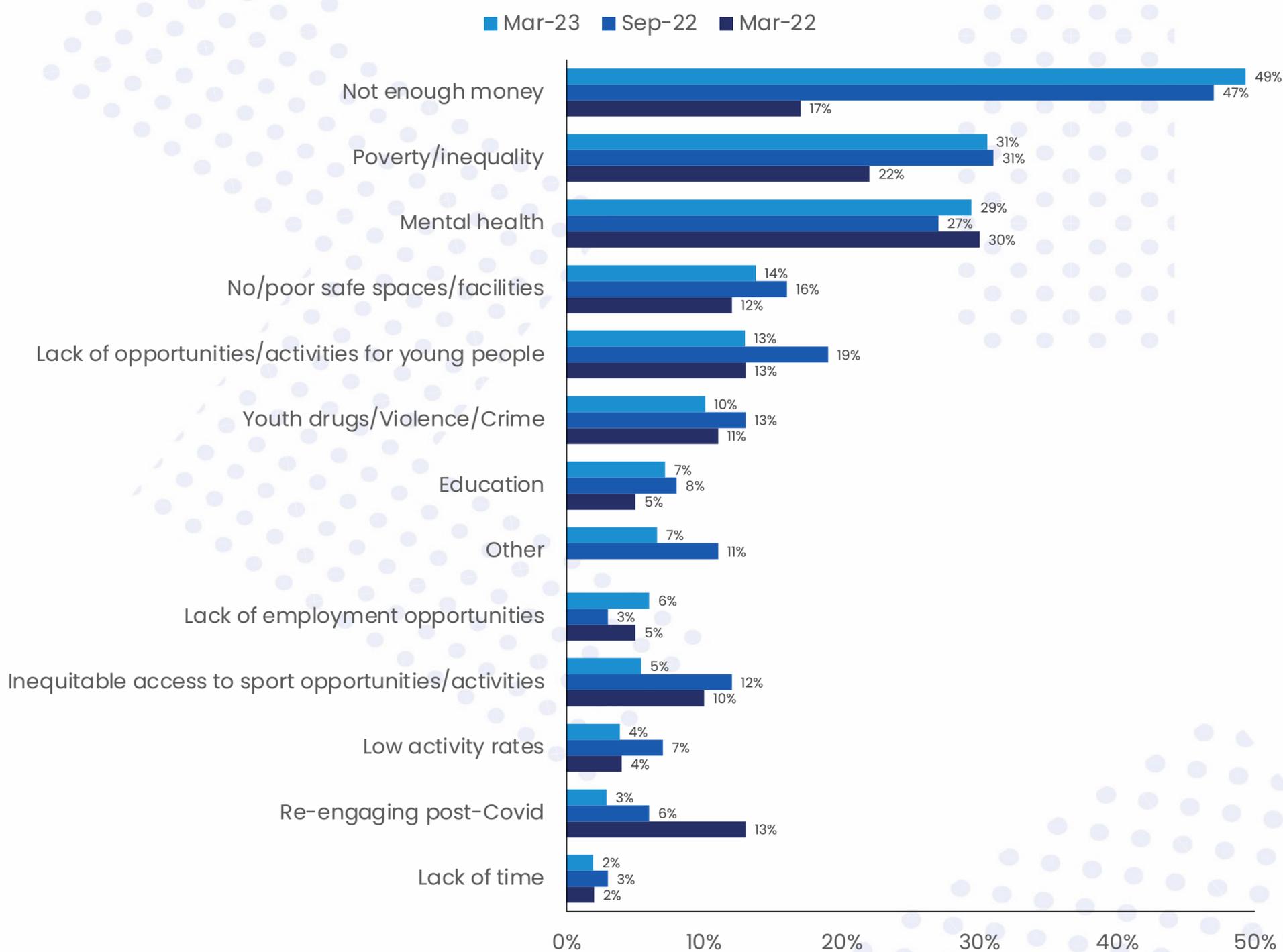


Challenges for young people

Concerns around young people not having enough money remains high. Referring to answers centred on the cost-of-living crisis and immediate economic hardship, nearly half of respondents (49%) said this was a challenge for their young people. This is at a similar level to our September 2022 Pulse, when 47% saw this as an issue.

Concerns around **poverty/inequality** (31%), which cover long-term socio-economic deprivation (including cost-of-living impact), and **mental health** (29%) remain in the top three most commonly cited challenges. These concerns are also at a similar level to our September Pulse.

Key challenges young people are facing in groups' communities at this time



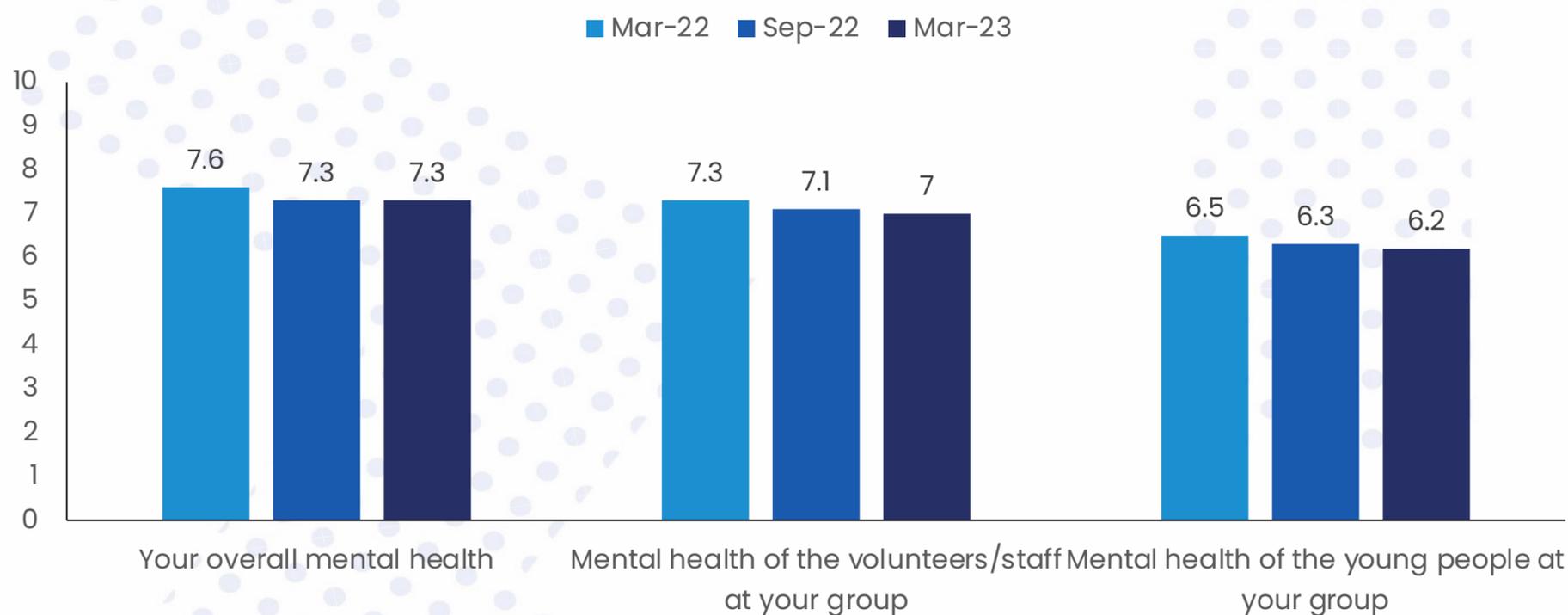
- 'Financial challenges which existed prior to the cost of living crisis but have been exacerbated by how families are struggling and the first thing to go will be children's hobbies.' – survey respondent
- 'Worrying about money has made young people's mental health worse. Young people have lowered their expectations for the future because of the cost-of-living crisis. The disabled youth are facing even more challenges because they feel they are excluded from society as their families face additional financial challenges.' – survey respondent
- 'Young people in our community have been impacted by the rise in the cost of living. From those living at home having to cut heating or switch it off altogether and not being able to run showers or washing machines due to the cost, to needing to access food banks and relying on meals outside the home i.e., school or college.' – survey respondent

Mental health

Leaders, staff/volunteers, and young people

Respondents reported **lower scores for their young people’s mental health** (6.2, out of 10) in comparison to their own (7.3) and their volunteers/staff (7). Scores **for young people’s mental health have gradually declined** over the past year.

Average rating (scale: 0 – 10, where 0 is not at all good, 5 is coping, and 10 is excellent)

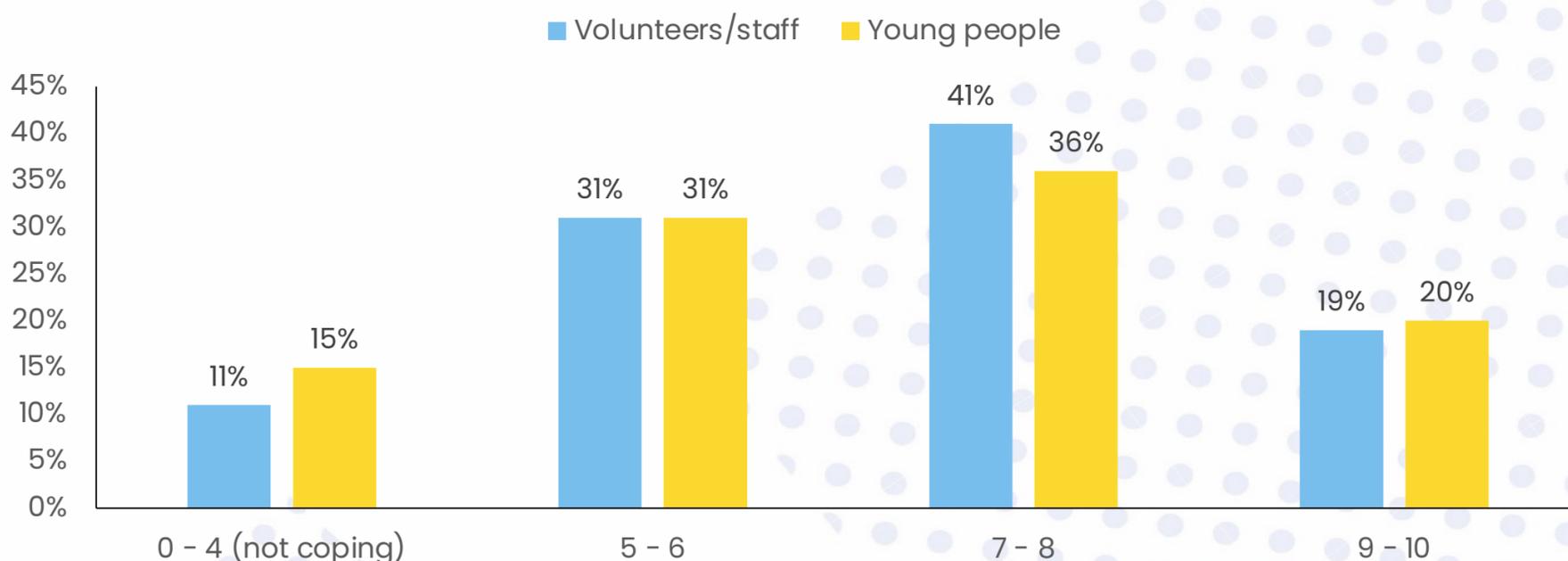


Capacity to support mental health

More than half of groups (60%) reported a score of 7 (out of 10) or above for their capacity to support the mental health of their volunteers/staff. A similar proportion (56%) scored 7 or above for capacity to support their young people’s mental health.

However, around a third are only just about coping (5–6, out of 10) and number of respondents said **they are not coping with supporting mental health** at their group: 11% scored below 5 in supporting their staff/volunteers, with 15% answering below 5 in their capacity to support their young people.

Rating distribution (scale: 0 – 10, where 0 is not at all good, 5 is coping, and 10 is excellent)

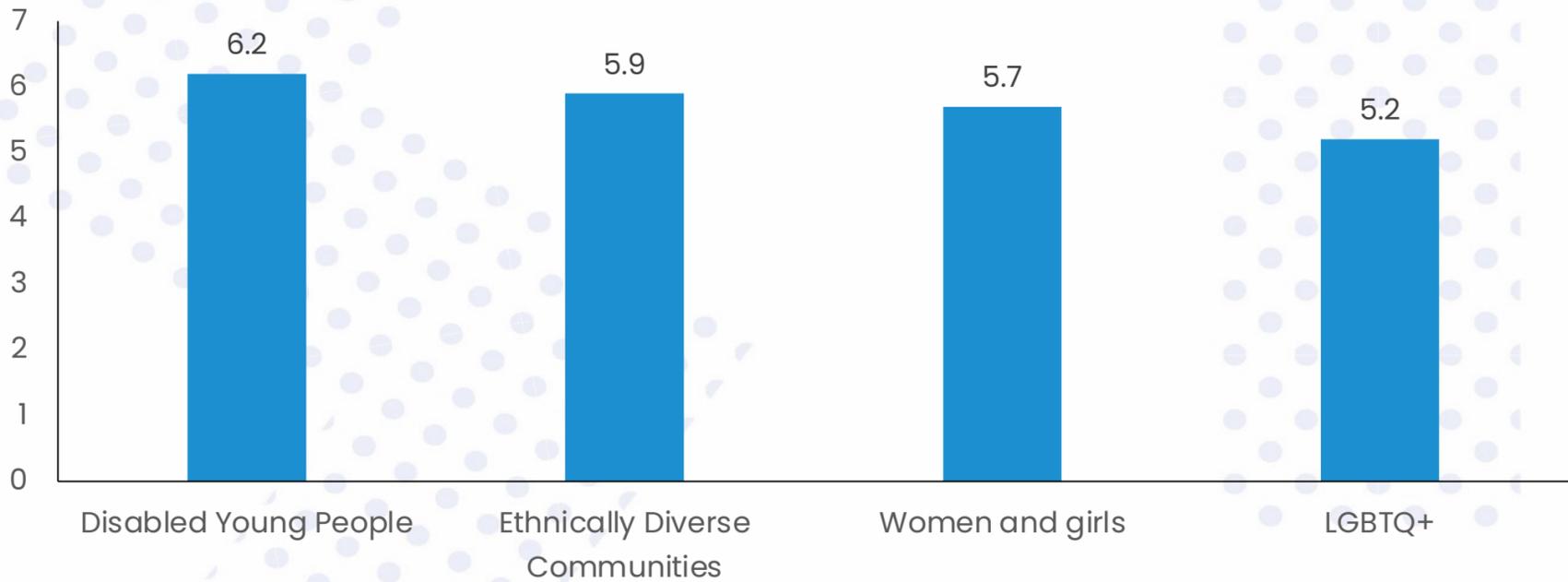


Tackling inequalities

The significance of inequalities experienced in communities

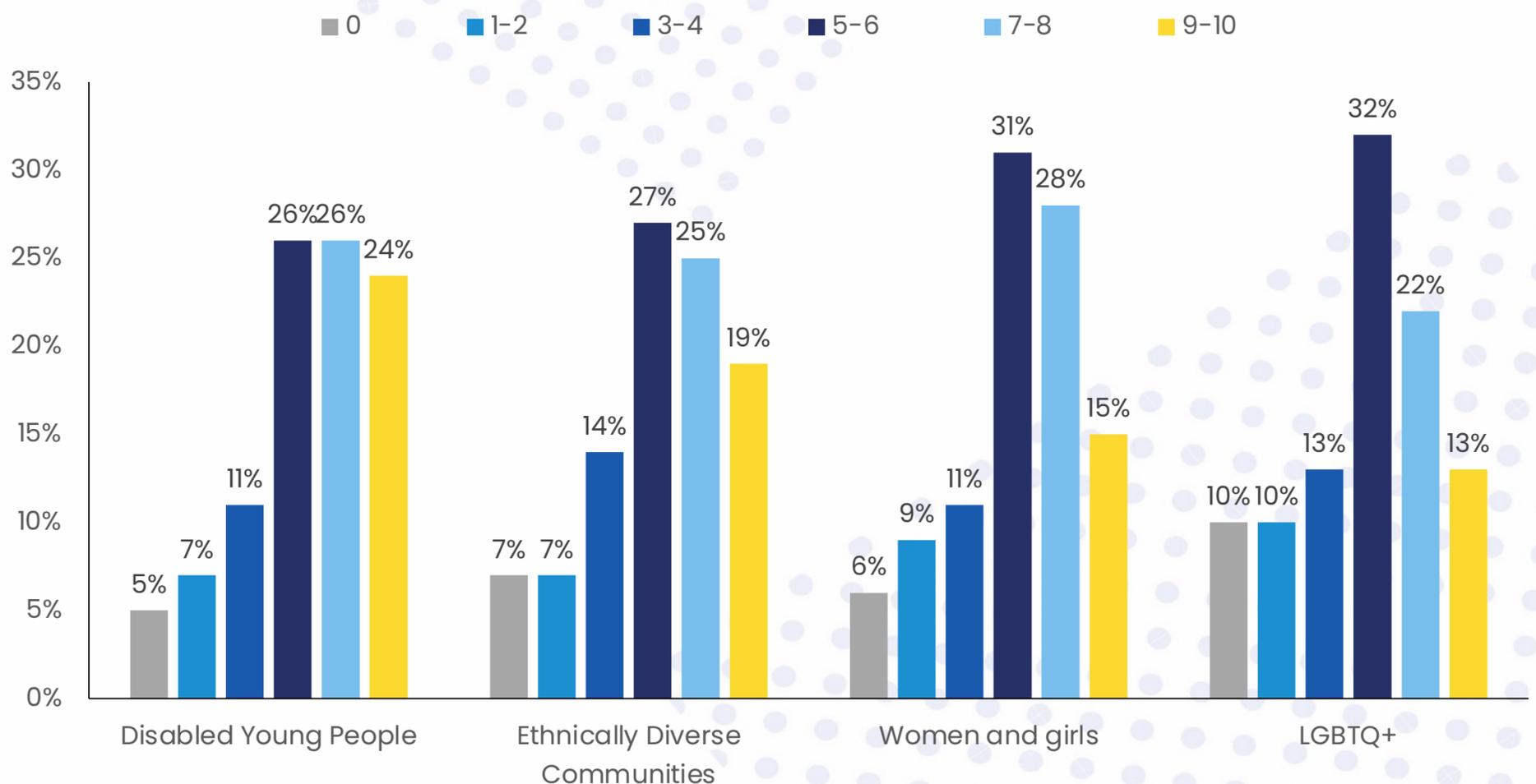
Group leaders identified **inequalities experienced by Disabled Young People** within their communities as most significant, with an average score of 6.2 (out of 10).

Significance of inequalities experienced within groups' communities – average score (out of 10)



For the spread of scores on significance, **more respondents told us the most significant inequality relates to Disabled Young People** than other inequalities – a quarter (24%) scored it as either 9 or 10.

Significance of inequalities within groups' communities – score distribution

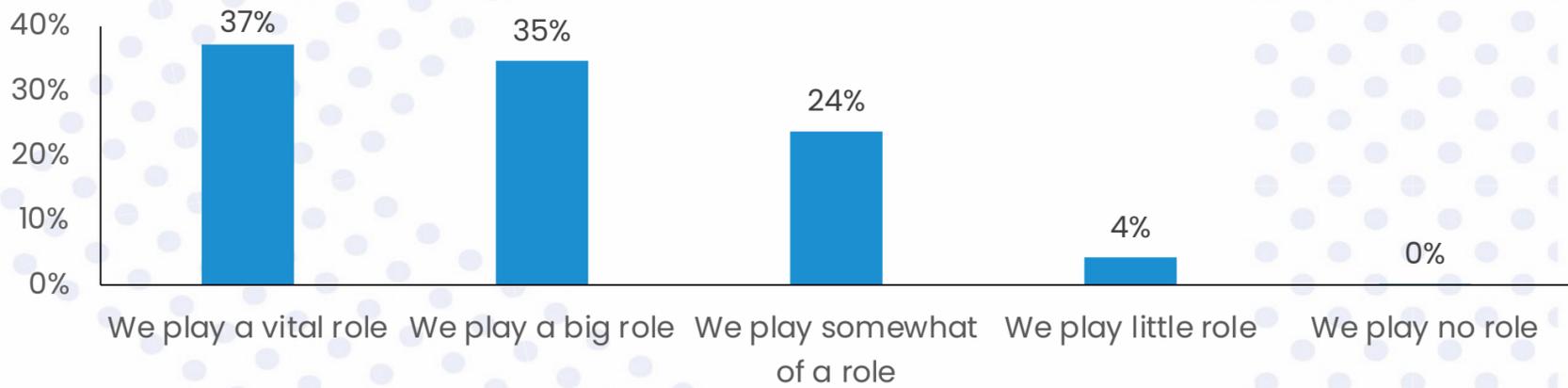


Connecting communities

Building communities

Nearly three-quarters of groups say **they play a significant role (vital or big) in building a stronger sense of community** in their local area (72%).

Building a stronger sense of community in groups' local area



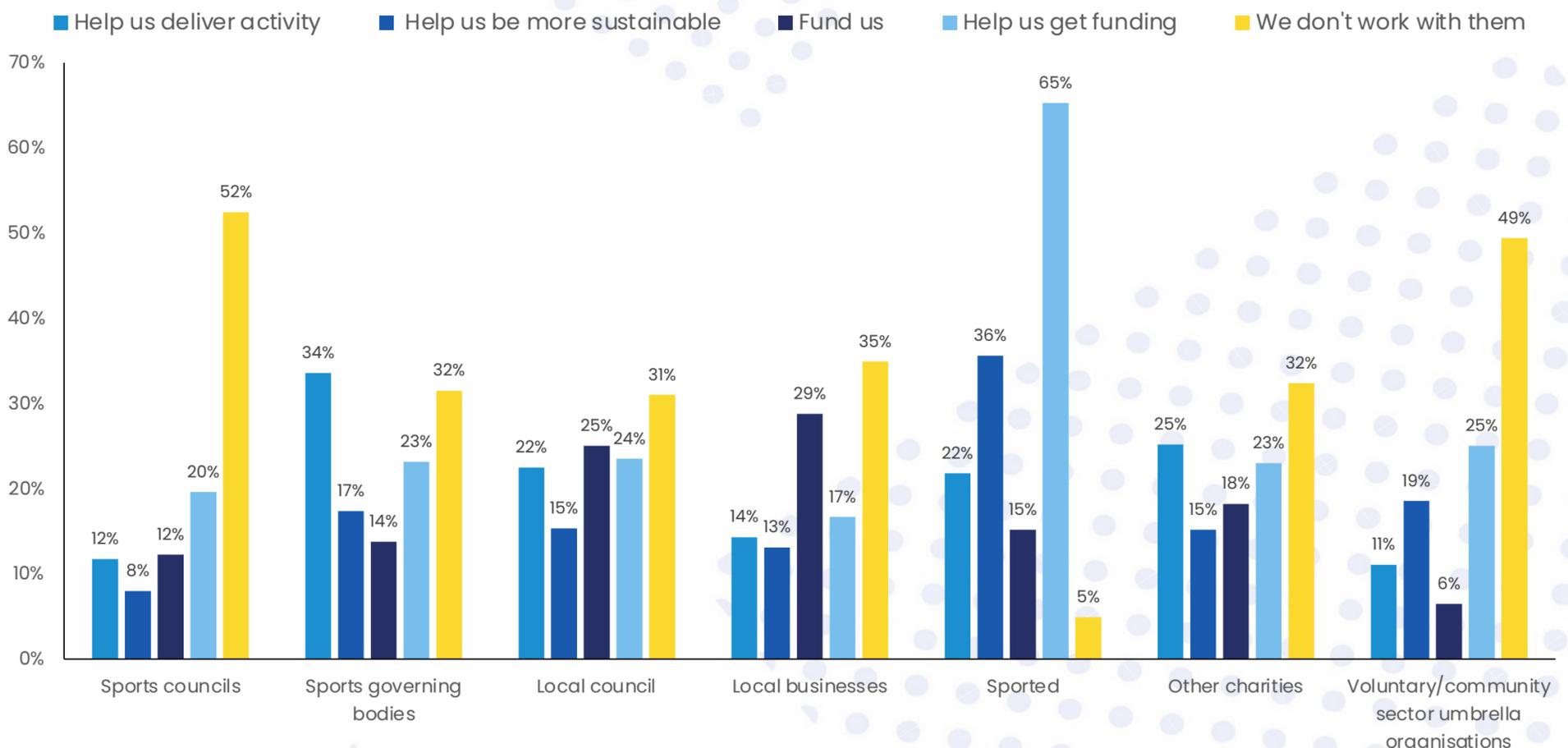
Groups' relationships to other organisations

The majority of groups told us that **they don't work with sports councils** (52%), while sports governing bodies are most likely to support groups **in helping deliver activities** (34%).

Nearly a third of respondents **don't work with local councils** (31%). Two-thirds of respondents reported **Sported helps them get funding** (65%).

Almost half of respondents **don't work with voluntary/community sector umbrella organisations** (49%).

Relationships with other organisations



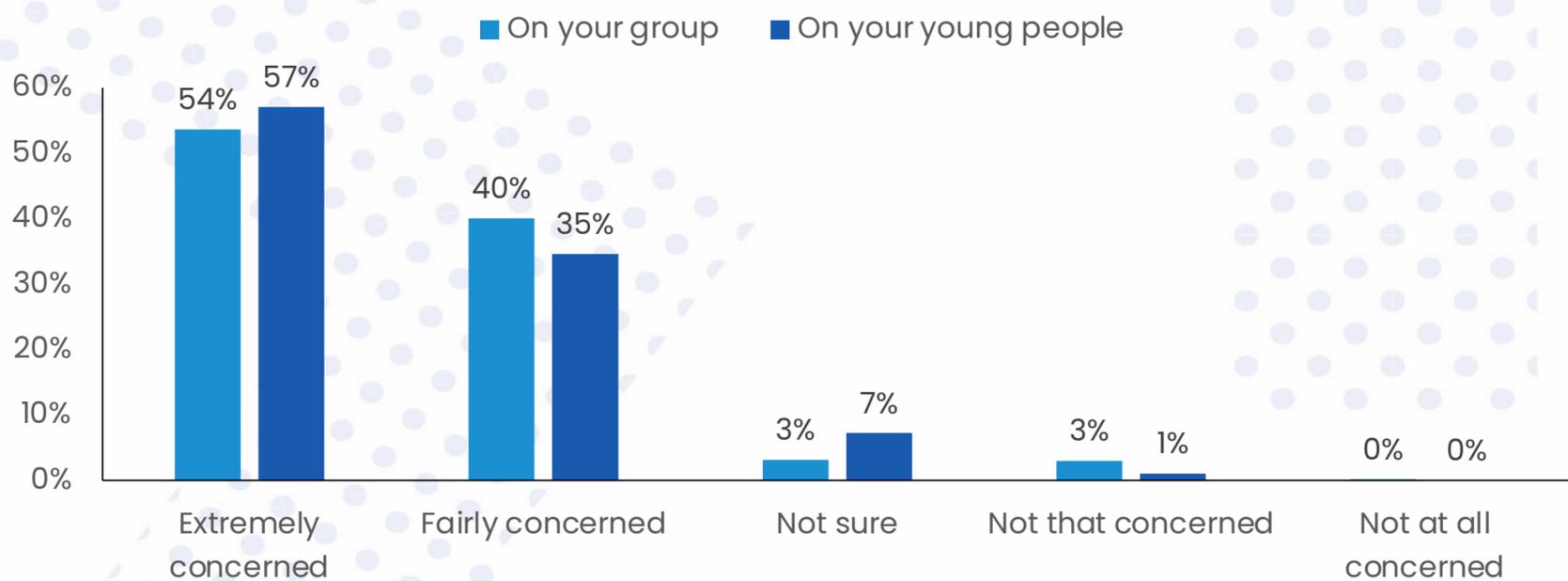
Cost-of-living increases

Impact on groups and their young people

More than 90% of respondents are concerned about the impact of cost-of-living increases on their group and on their young people. 94% are either extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group, with 92% concerned for their young people.

This level of concern is similar to our September 2022 Pulse, where 93% of respondents were concerned about the impact on their group and 94% for their young people.

Concern about the impact of cost-of-living increases

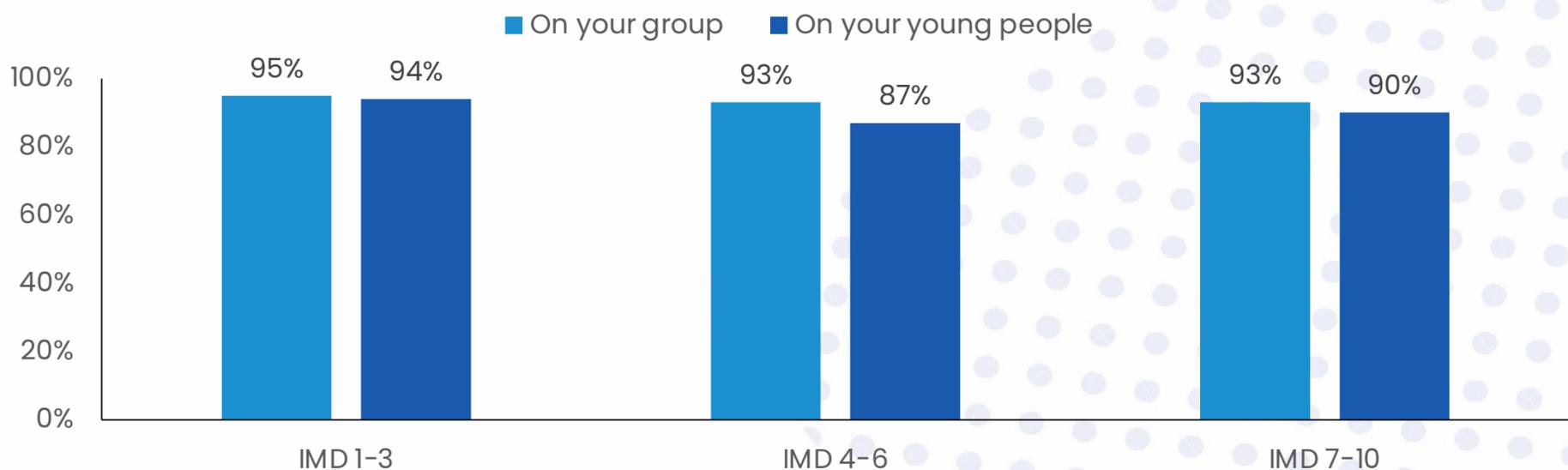


Impact on groups and their young people by IMD

High levels of concern about the impact of cost-of-living increases are found across all indices of multiple deprivation (IMD).

It is highest amongst those groups working in the lowest 30% areas of multiple deprivation.

Groups who are extremely/fairly concerned about the impact of cost-of-living increases by IMD (0-10)

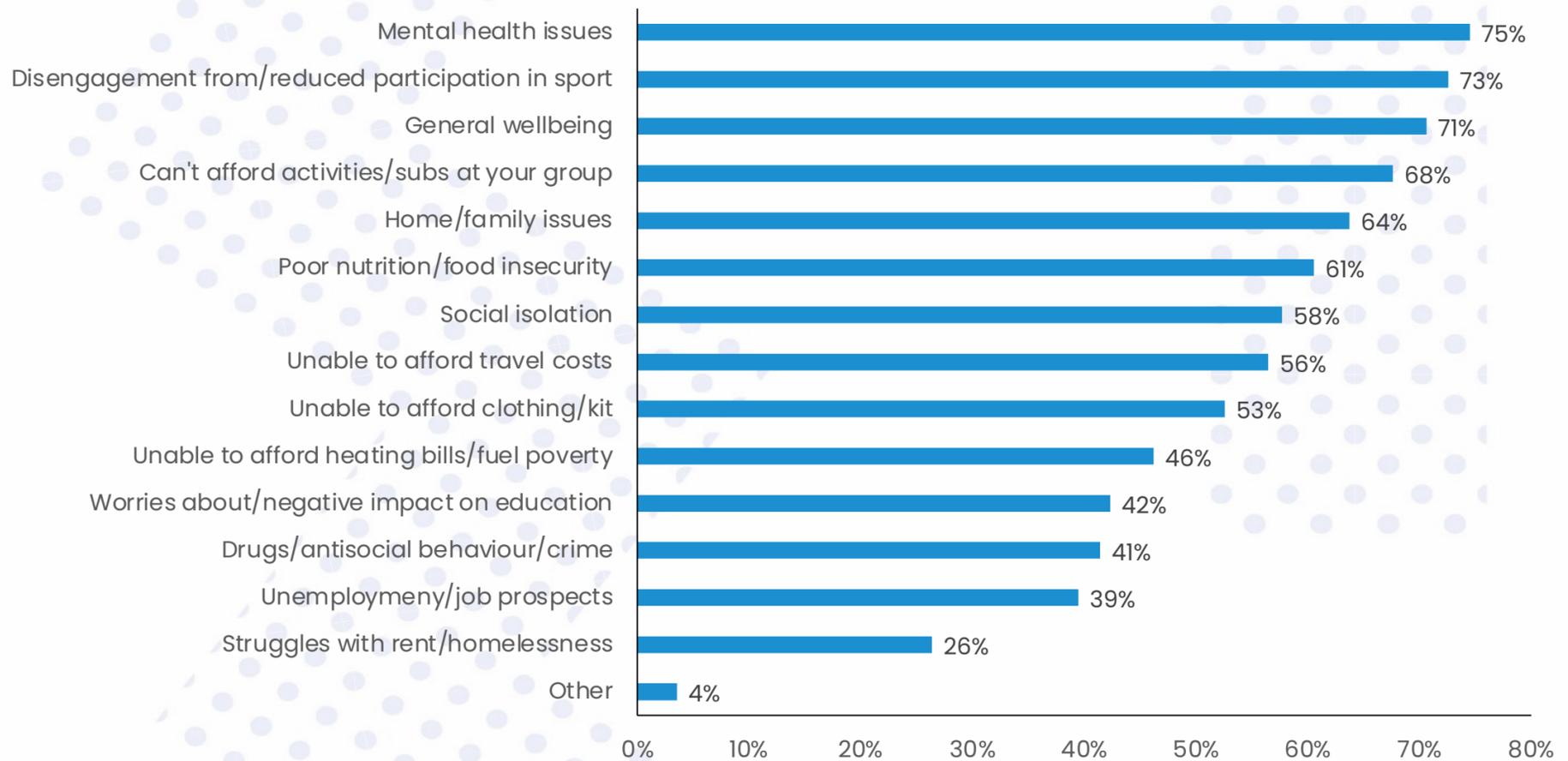


Cost-of-living increases

Impact on young people

Asked to outline concerns about cost-of-living increases on their young people, group leaders identified **mental health** as their most common concern (75%). Around three-quarters (73%) told us they feared young people would **disengage from/reduce participation in sport**.

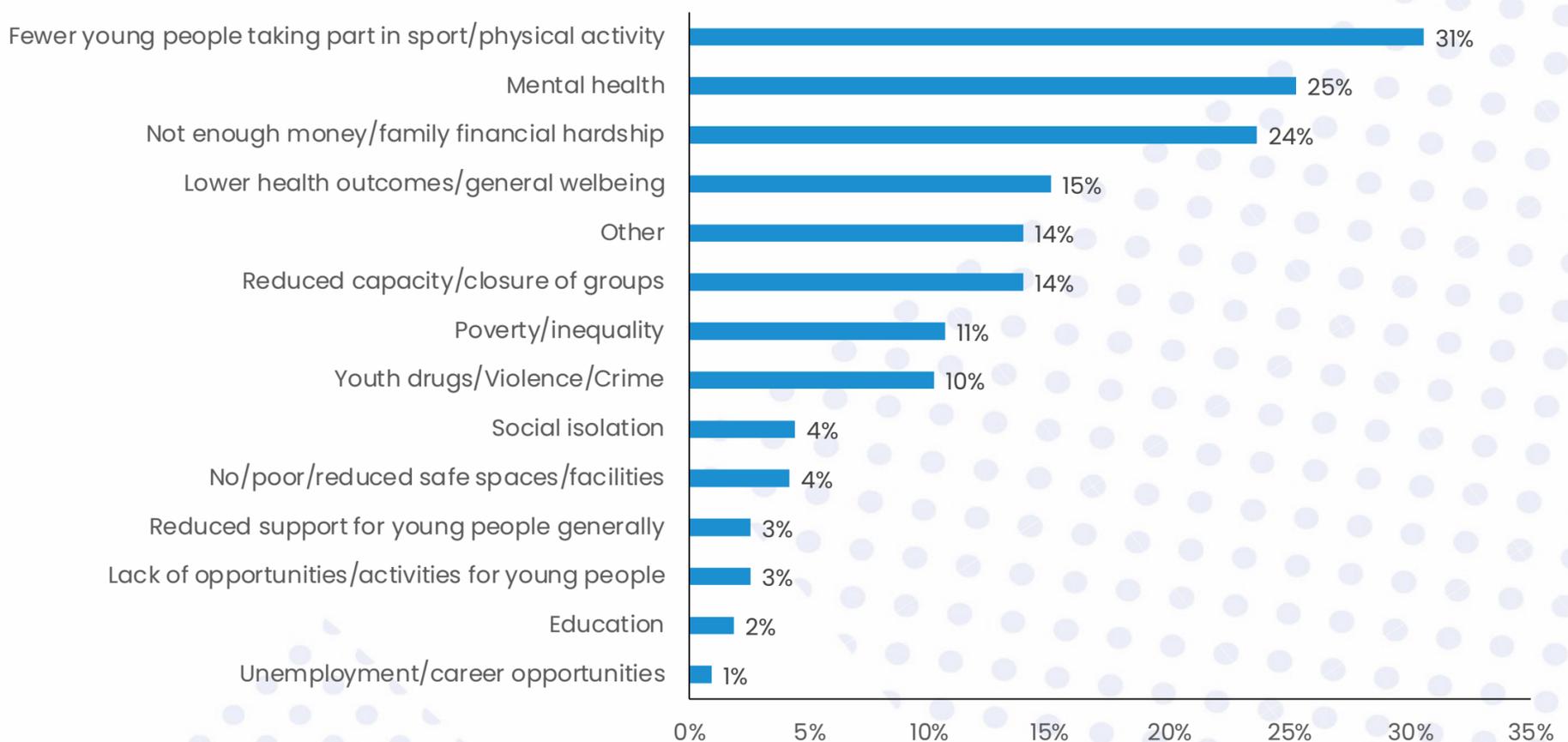
Impact on young people



Impact on communities

Thinking about the longer-term impact of cost-of-living increases on the communities they work in, respondents identified **fewer young people taking part in sport/physical activity** as most likely (31%). A quarter said they believed there would be long-term negative effects on **mental health** (25%).

Impact on communities in the longer-term



Cost-of-living increases

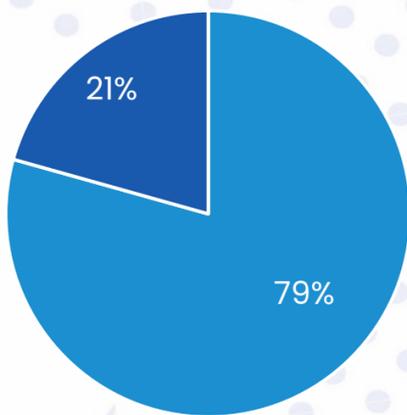
Groups' responses to the increases

Over three quarters (79%) have responded to cost-of-living increases by making a change to their operation. This is a slight increase from our September Pulse, when 72% of respondents indicated they'd made a change.

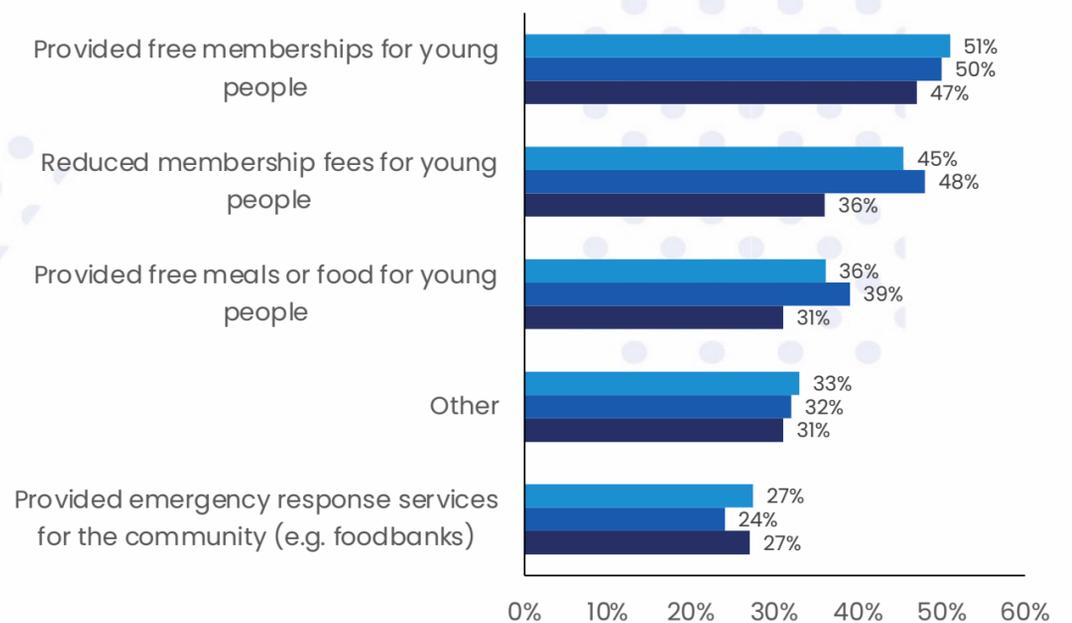
The most frequently made changes have been to **provide free membership for their young people (51%)** and to **reduce fees for their young people (45%)**. These were also the most common responses in September.

Changes made in response to cost-of-living increases

Change No Change



Mar-23 Sep-22 Mar-22

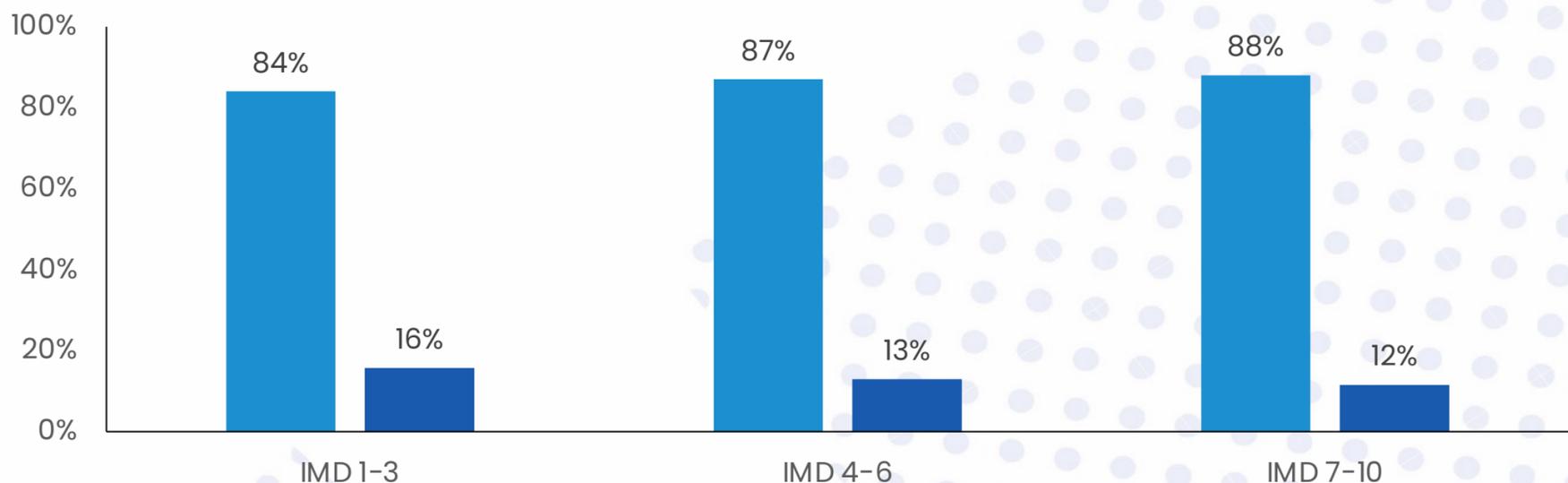


Groups' responses to the increases by IMD

There was a consistent proportion of groups who have made changes in response to cost-of-living increases across IMD ranges.

Changes made by IMD

Change No change



Cost-of-living increases

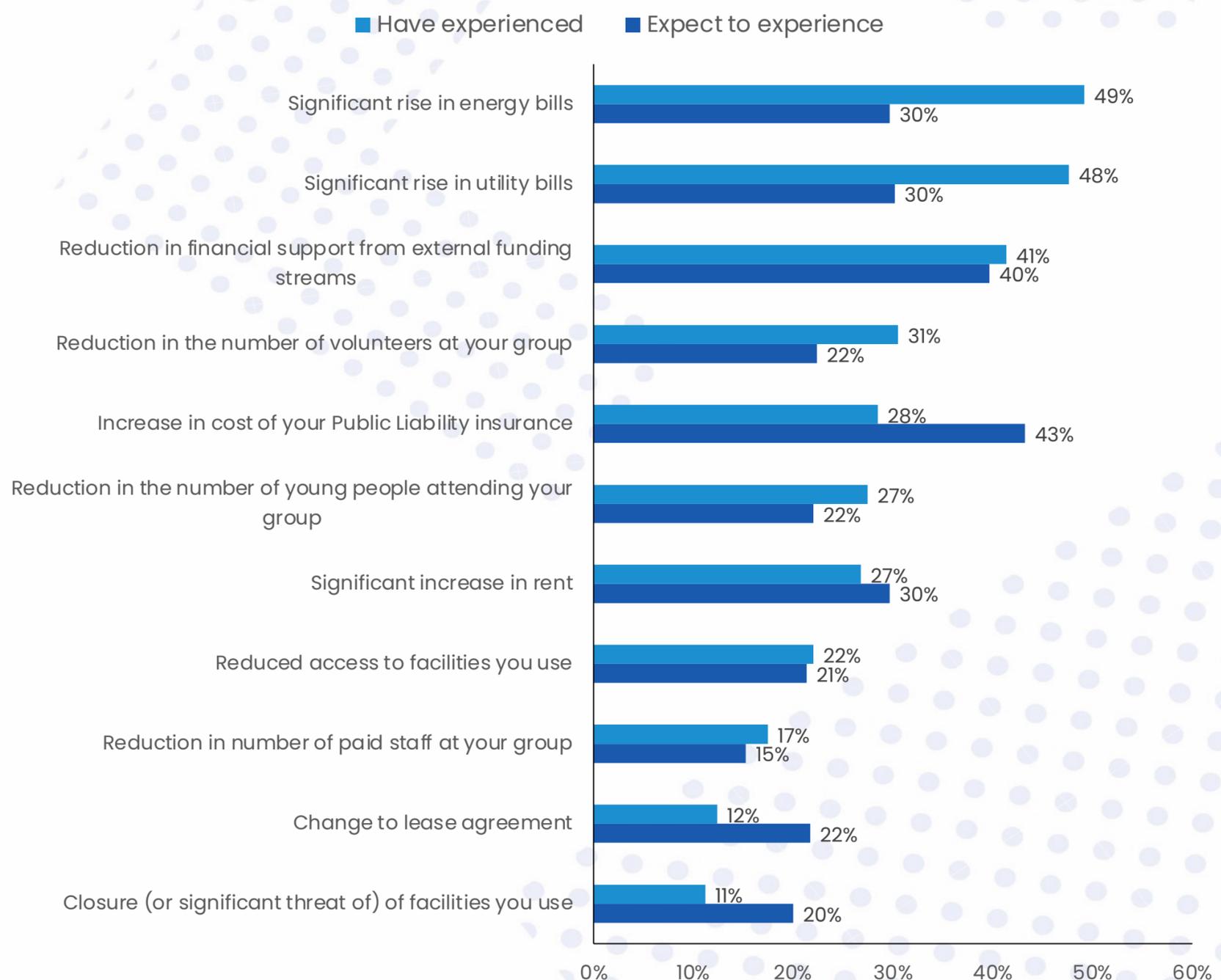
Issues experienced and expected

The most common experiences for groups over the last six months have been **a significant rise in energy bills (49%)**, a **significant rise in utility bills (48%)**, and a **reduction in financial support from external funding streams (41%)**.

The most expected experiences over the next six months are **increases in the cost of Public Liability insurance (43%)**, **reduction in financial support from external funding streams (40%)**, and **significant rises in rent, utility bills, and energy bills (30% each)**.

The expected increase in Public Liability Insurance is significant because groups need this insurance to protect them from personal injury or property damage claims, and it can protect Trustees/committee members from paying any of these claims directly

Issues experienced (in the last 6 months/expected in the next 6 months)



Cost-of-living increases

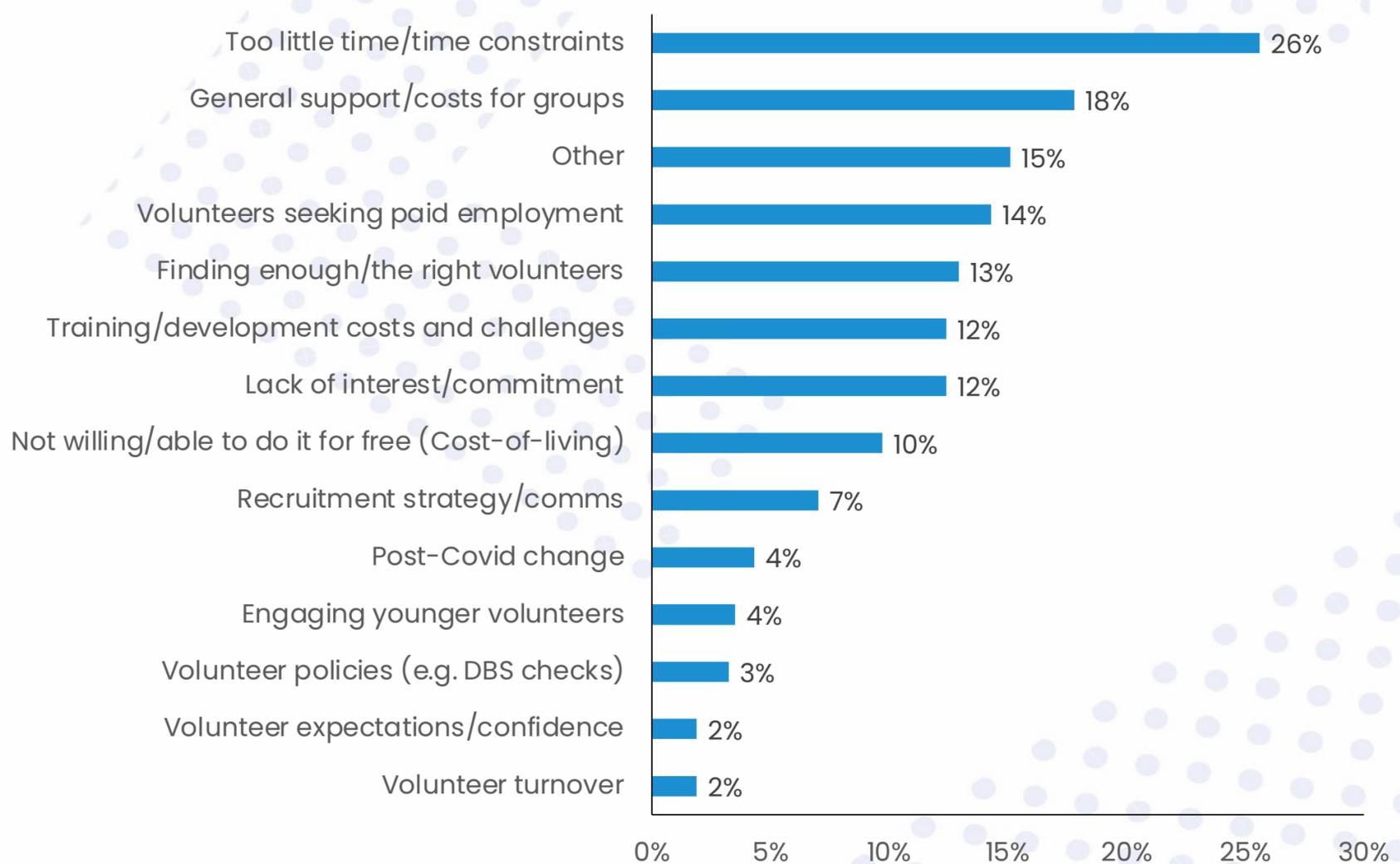
Recruiting/retaining volunteers

The most commonly cited challenges around volunteer recruitment/retention are volunteers **not having enough time** (26%) and **general administrative/financial challenges**, such as travel expenses and supporting/managing volunteers (18%).

Volunteers are also **seeking paid employment elsewhere** (14%), often out of a response to cost-of-living pressures. Groups also struggle **to find enough/the right volunteers**, particularly where they may need existing experience or qualifications (13%).

Respondents also identified costs associated with **training/development** once volunteers join, including the cost of coaching qualifications, as a particular challenge (12%).

Challenges in recruiting/retaining volunteers



Our response

What we're doing in response to Pulse

- Continuing to focus on securing grant income and other direct support for groups most impacted by cost of living increases.
- Exploring further partnerships and funding opportunities relating to mental health of young people.
- Follow up support calls from the Sported field team relating to answers in the Pulse where groups need direct support.
- Additional follow up calls to understand more from members seeking to engage new participants, and those expecting increases in Public Liability Insurance costs.
- Compiled resources, training and toolkits, as well as links to specialist support within our Hub, to help group leaders tackle mental health challenges amongst their staff, volunteers and young people.
- Planning a series of webinars focused around areas of need identified through the Pulse.

Keep the Doors Open

Community sports organisations are critical to the lives of disadvantaged young people. Our reach on the ground tells us the cost-of living-crisis is limiting access to activity and support to young people with the greatest need.

Groups are experiencing significant increases in bills, reduced support from external funders, and a drop in participation levels – they urgently need more funding to mitigate the pinch felt by their participants and their families and to cover the increased running costs. In listening to these organisations, they are asking us to both assist and to use our voice on the issue.

Deploying our research to reach a media and policy audience, Sported has continued to run our Keep The Doors Open campaign to push for change based on the issues raised in the survey. As well as numerous discussions with government and others in the political sphere, the data leveraged coverage in the media through outlets including BBC, ITV, The Guardian and The Sun during the past few months. Our campaign stressed the need for support and action so that these groups survived the winter but also are put on a more sustainable footing in the long term.



You can find out more about our campaign here: [Keep The Doors Open | Sported](#)



www.sported.org.uk

