

Community Pulse, Northern Ireland

Understanding our members'
world – March 2022



Executive Summary

41
responses

The Community Pulse is a longitudinal study of Spoted members on the sustainability, needs, and ambitions of community groups throughout the UK. It aims to inform the sport for development sector about the issues and opportunities facing community sports groups, as well as increasing awareness of funding and resources available for such organisations. It also seeks to help stakeholders make more-informed decisions in relation to grassroots community sport in the UK.

This report provides an analysis of responses from respondents in Northern Ireland. Between **21–28 March 2022, 41 survey responses** were received from groups in Spoted's network in Northern Ireland. **16 responses (39%) were from groups in the lowest 30% areas of multiple deprivation.** This research builds on Community Pulse consultations throughout 2020 and 2021.

Spoted and its network

Spoted 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.

Spoted's groups work within complex local contexts, often tackling some of society's biggest challenges. 47% of our groups are located in the lowest 30% areas of multiple deprivation, and many are volunteer-led and operating on limited budgets – in our UK Pulse survey, 34% reported an annual turnover of less than £10,000.

Key Findings

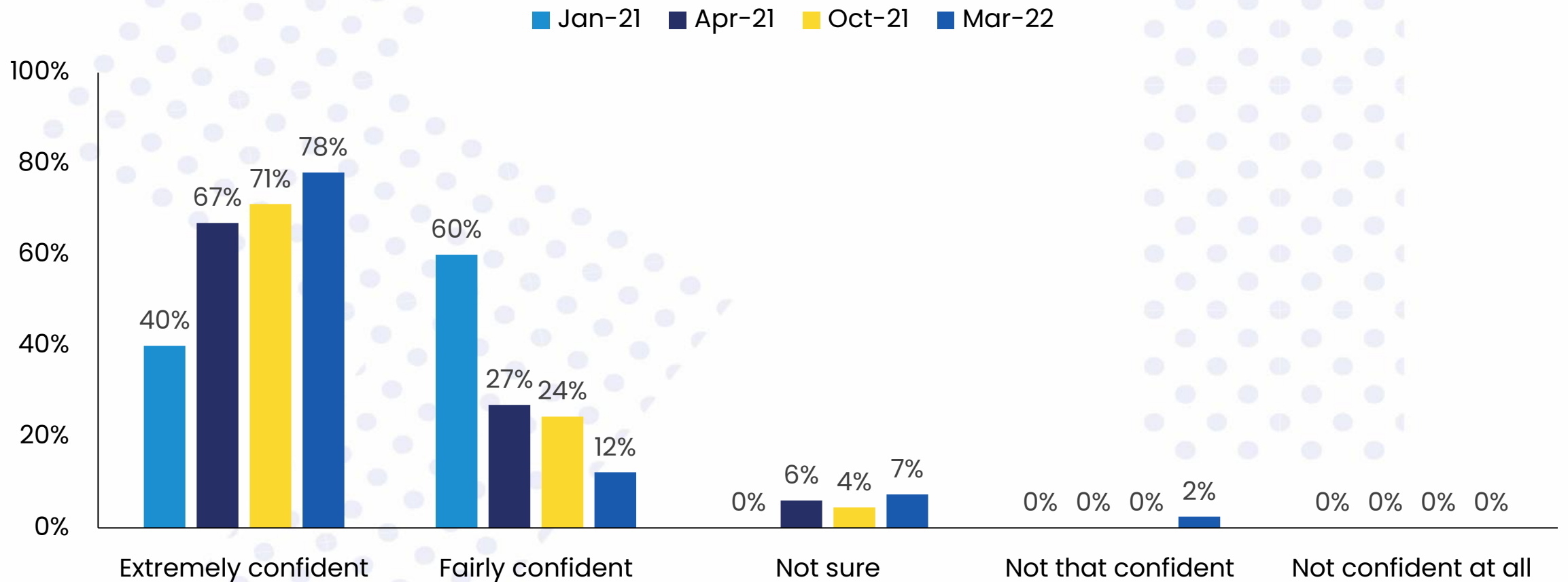
- **Confidence in organisational survival is high and remains at a level close to six months ago** – 90% of groups are extremely or fairly confident in their group's survival, including 78% being extremely confident.
- **Health and wellbeing is the most common sport for development focus for groups in the year ahead** – 63% of groups have designated this as their focus (more than three times the number compared to the next most cited focus of inequality in sports provision).
- **Securing funding and engaging new participants are groups' top priorities for the next six months** – 80% of respondents are seeking to secure funding, with 78% looking to engage new participants.
- **Mental health and poverty/inequality are identified by group leaders as the most significant challenges young people are facing in communities** – 26% of responses from groups designated these as the most significant issues, with a lack of/poor safe spaces and facilities the next most pressing issue (23%).
- **Respondents reported lower scores for their young people's mental health compared to their own and that of their group's volunteers/staff** – an average of 6.7 (out of 10) for young people compared with 7.8 and 7.2 for respondents and volunteers/staff respectively. Respondents rated their own physical health lowest (6.6).
- **A large majority of groups have participation levels below capacity and there are indications that participation has not recovered to pre-Covid 19 levels** – 81% of groups are running below capacity, of which just over half (52%) report levels being reduced from pre-pandemic levels.
- **Groups are most confident in their knowledge of the challenges facing, and their support for, women and girls** – 73% are fairly or extremely confident of their knowledge of these issues and 71% are fairly or extremely confident in supporting women and girls.
- **Groups are least confident in their knowledge of and support for young people with disabilities** – there are also high levels of uncertainty among groups in terms of how to support young people around LGBTQ+ issues, in ethnically diverse communities, and those with disabilities.
- **Concern about the impact of cost of living increases on young people and groups is very high** – 83% of respondents are extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group and 82% on young people.
- **Nearly half of groups (47%) have made a change to their organisation in response to cost of living increases** – the most frequent has been providing emergency response services to their community 44%.
- **Groups are mostly connected to other local community organisations/sport groups** – 100% of respondents reported some form of connection to these types of external organisations.

Survival and turnover

Survival

Confidence in organisational survival has increased slightly from October 2021, with **90% of groups extremely or fairly confident their organisation will survive in the next six months.**

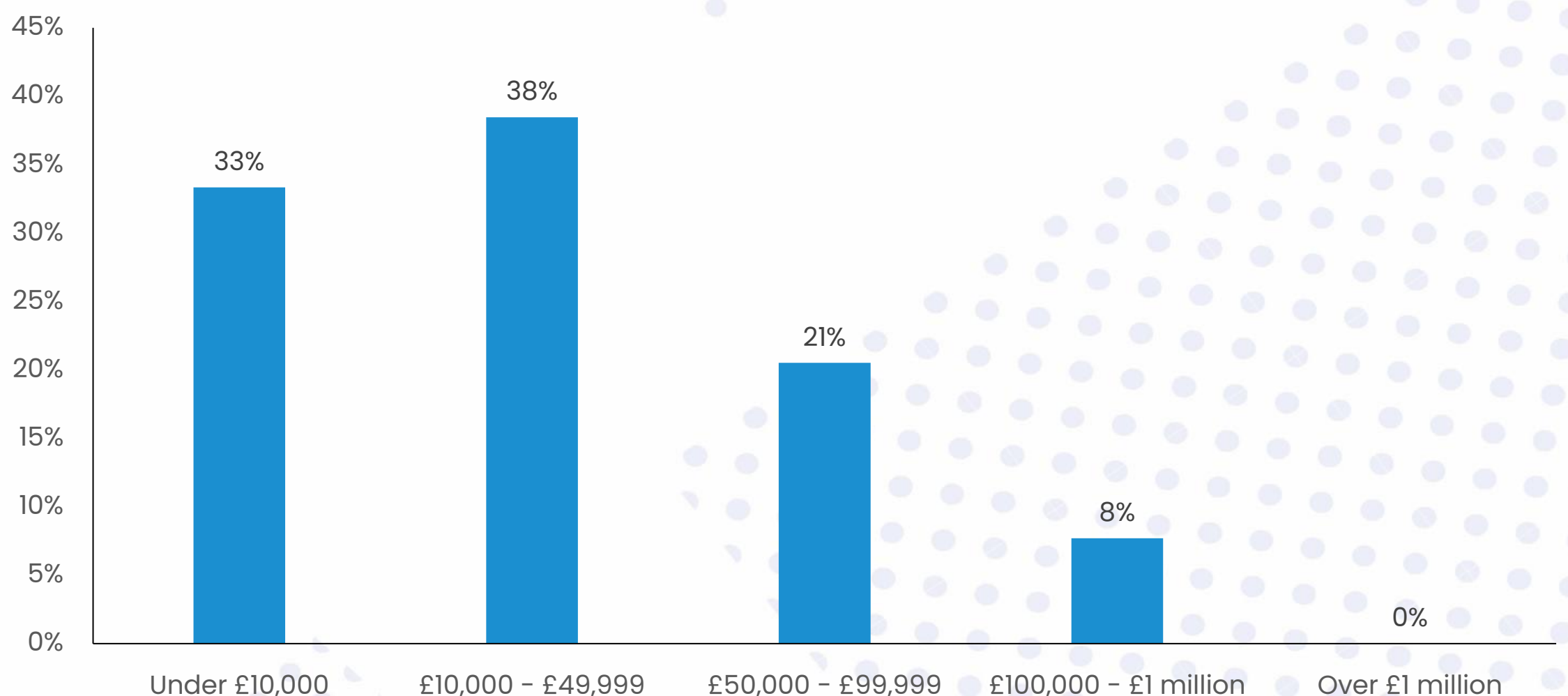
Confidence in organisational survival in the next six months



Turnover

Nearly three-quarters (71%) of groups responding to Pulse operated on an annual turnover of less than **£50,000** for the 2021-2022 financial year. **Most (38%)** have a turnover of between **£10,000 and £49,999.**

Annual turnover for the current financial year (2021-2022)

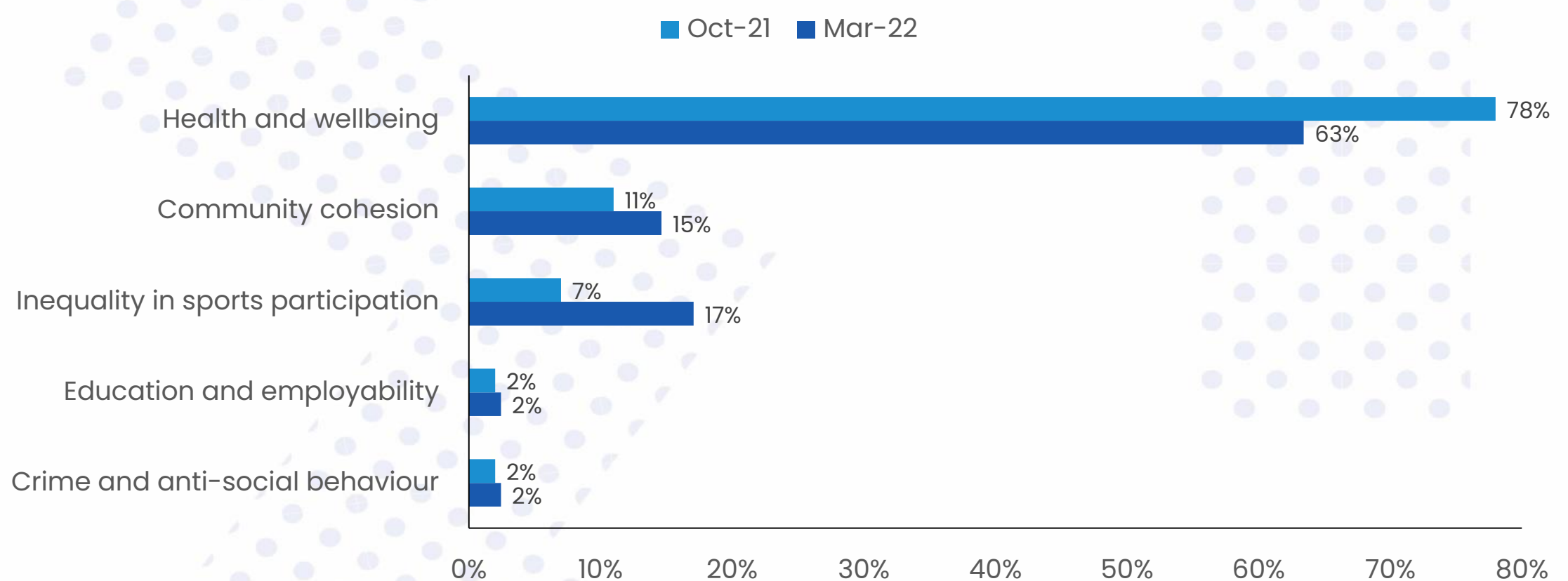


Sport for development focus and organisational priorities

Sport for development focus for the next year

Health and wellbeing (63%) remains the most reported sport for development focus among groups for the year ahead. The next most common primary focus is inequality in sports participation (17%), followed by community cohesion (15%).

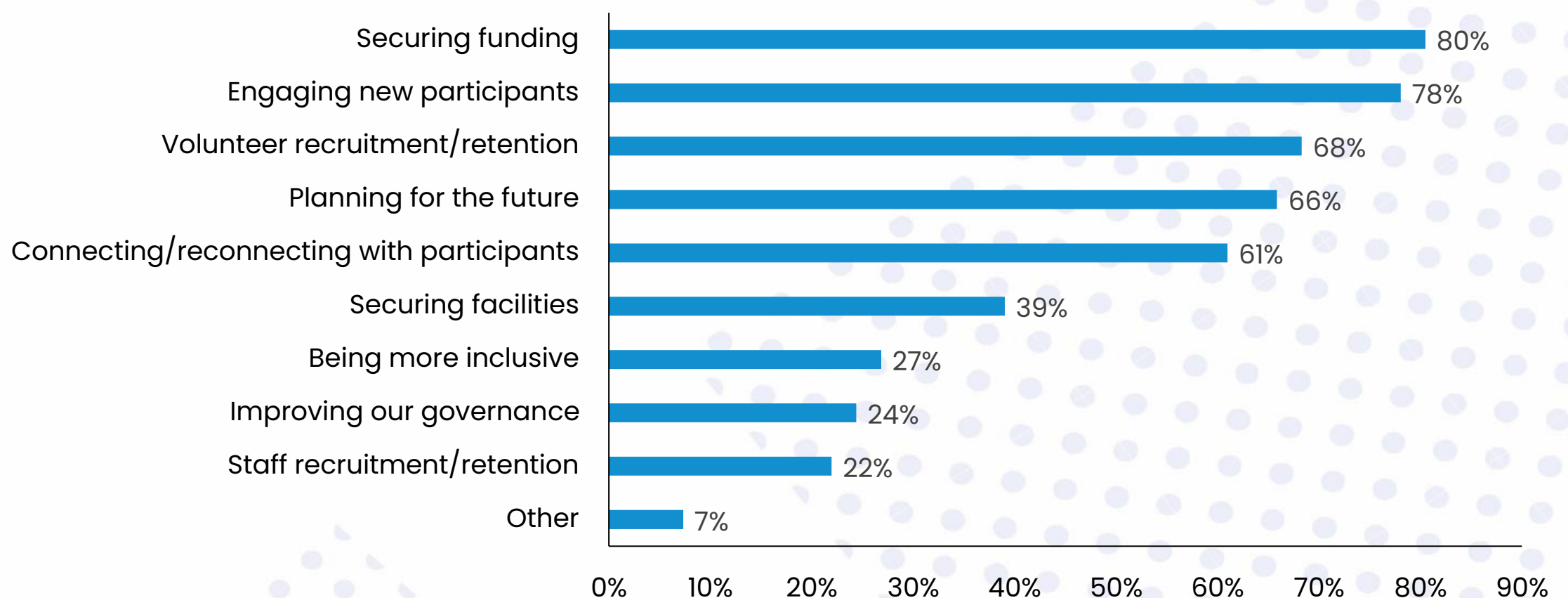
Sport for development primary focus for the next year



Top priorities over the next six months

The most common priority for the next six months for groups is securing funding (80%), followed by engaging new participants (78%). Volunteer recruitment/retention (68%), planning for the future (66%), and connecting/reconnecting with participants (61%) were also priorities for the majority of groups.

Top priorities over the next six months

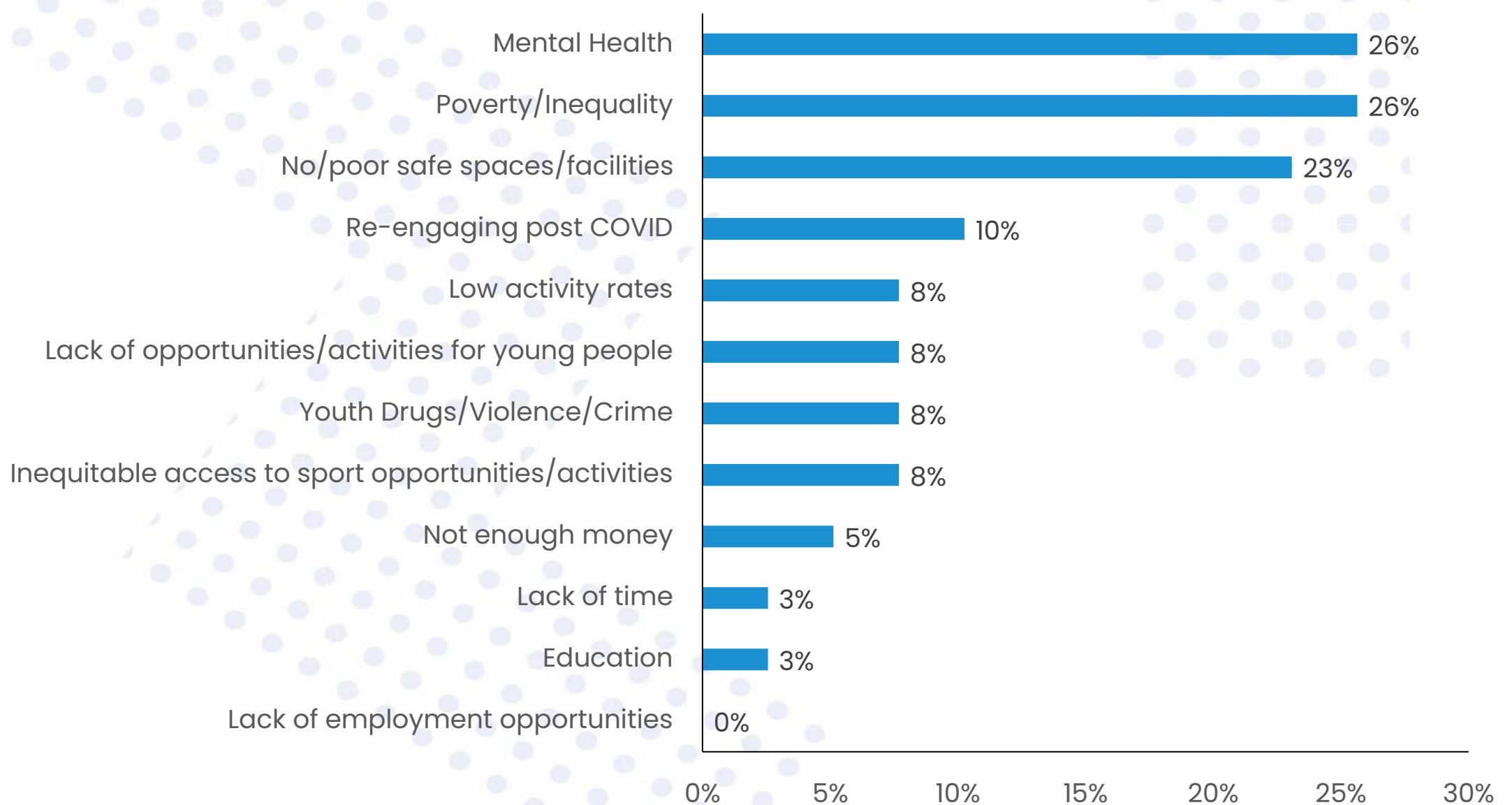


Community challenges

Mental health and poverty/inequality are the most significant challenges that groups report young people are facing in their communities (26% for each). Concern around no/poor safe spaces/facilities was also identified as a key issue (23%).

The focus on mental health mirrors results from our UK-wide analysis in which 27% of respondents identified mental health as the most significant challenge facing young people in their communities.

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



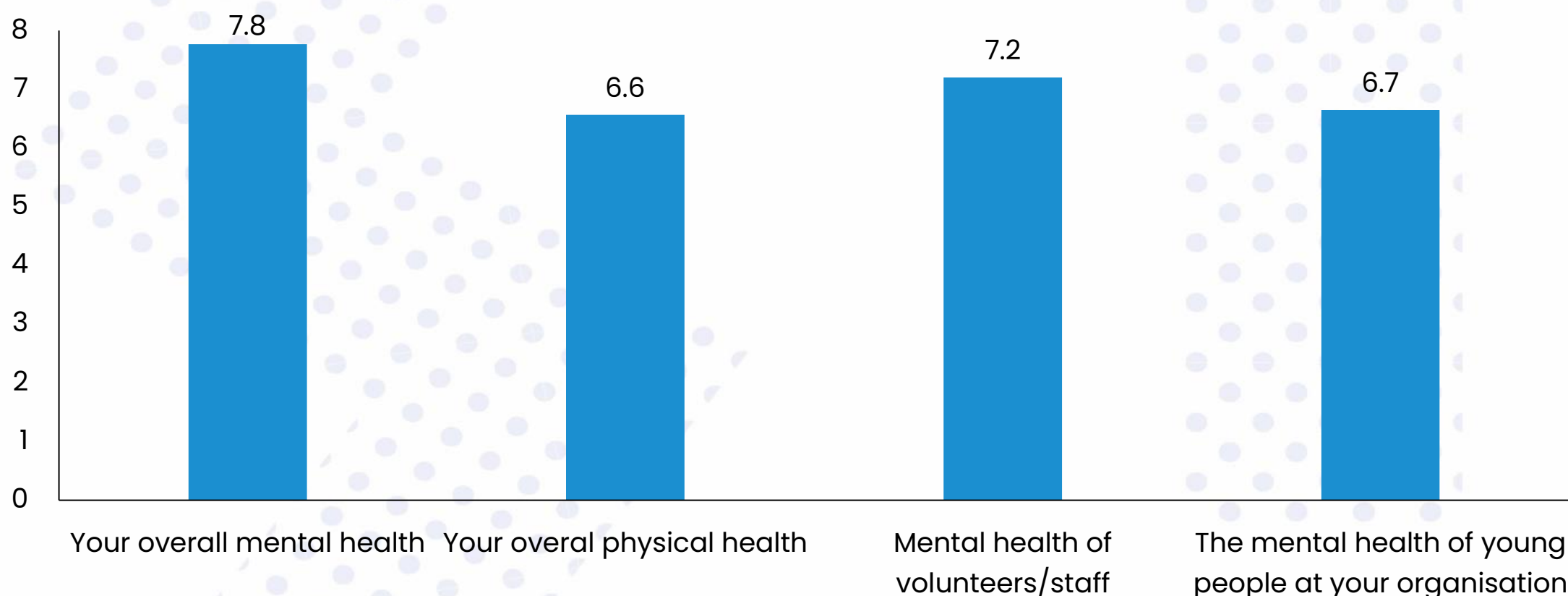
- 'Our users have complex needs and benefit from the service we offer. However, due to their differing abilities there is not enough therapeutic sporting opportunities for them in the local community.' – survey respondent
- 'The Portadown, Craigavon and Lurgan area would be classified as a deprived area, with many of our young people coming from either further a field, or from local low-income households. With football being an expensive game we try to give our members opportunities to reduce fees via fundraising events but not everyone can make these events.' – survey respondent
- 'Young people are still faced with the lack of resources and facilities. Some will also not attend clubs groups in certain areas unfortunately still due to sectarianism.' – survey respondent
- 'Lack of activities other than football/ hurling, and a lack of facilities.' – survey respondent

Health

Physical and mental health

Respondents reported lower scores for their young people's mental health compared to their own and that of their group's volunteers/staff – an average of 6.7 (out of 10) for young people compared with 7.8 and 7.2 for respondents and volunteers/staff respectively. Respondents rated their own physical health lowest (6.6).

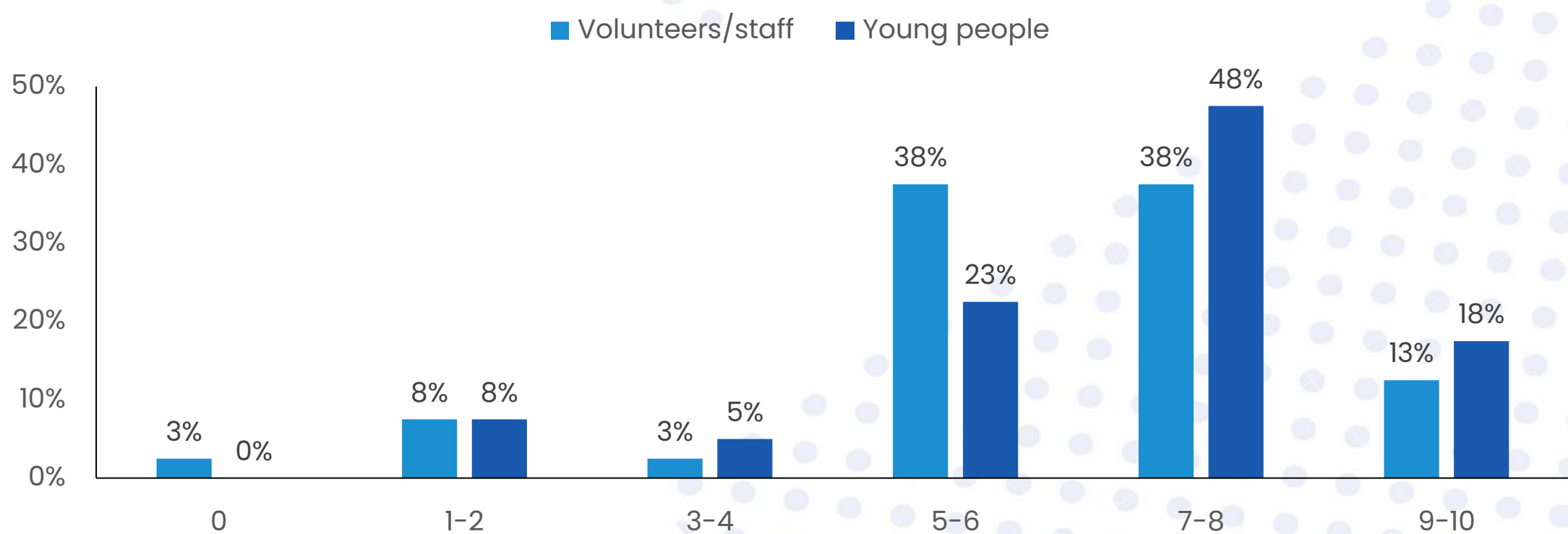
Respondents' rating (scale: of 0 – 10, where 0 is not at all good and 10 is excellent)



Capacity to support mental health

About half of groups (51%) reported a score of 7 or above for their capacity to support the mental health of their volunteers/staff and two-thirds (66%) to support the mental health of their young people.

Respondents' rating (scale: of 0 – 10, where 0 is not at all good and 10 is excellent)



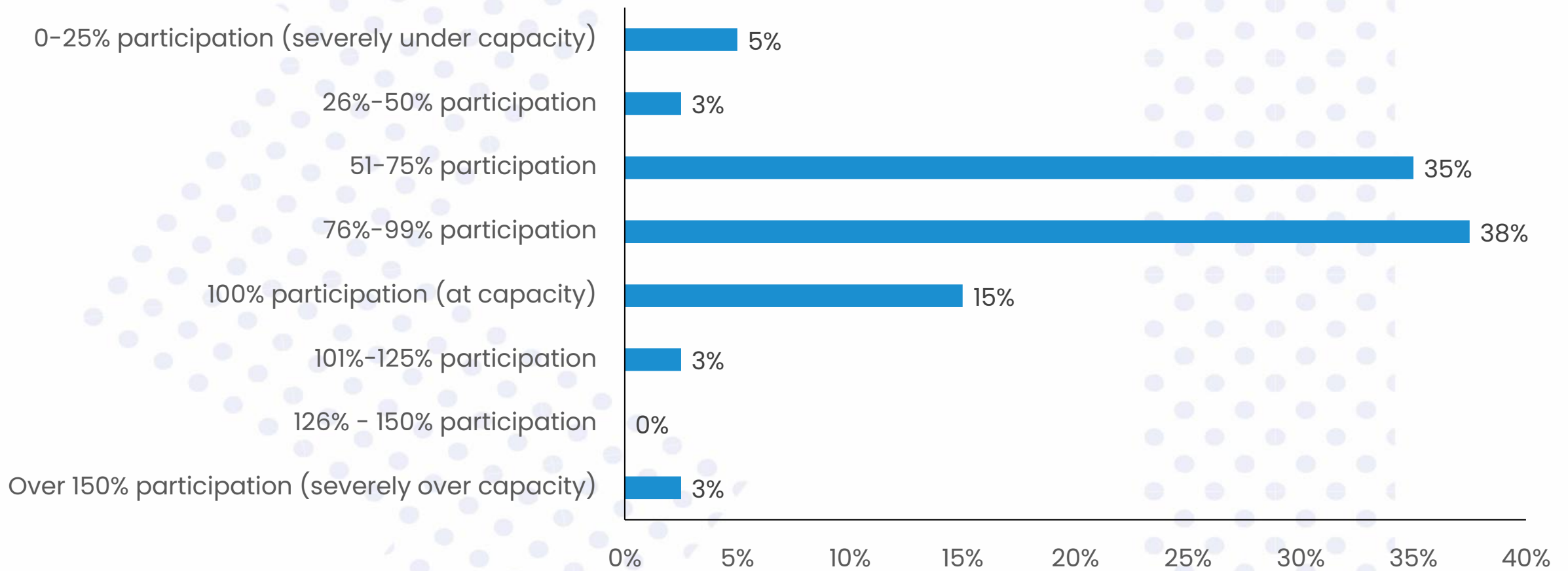
Participation and capacity

Current participation levels

A large majority of groups (81%) have participation levels below capacity, with most (38%) seeing participation levels of 76–99% of their capacity.

Two respondents (6%) reported being oversubscribed, with participation levels above their organisational capacity.

% of groups by current participation rates compared to organisational capacity

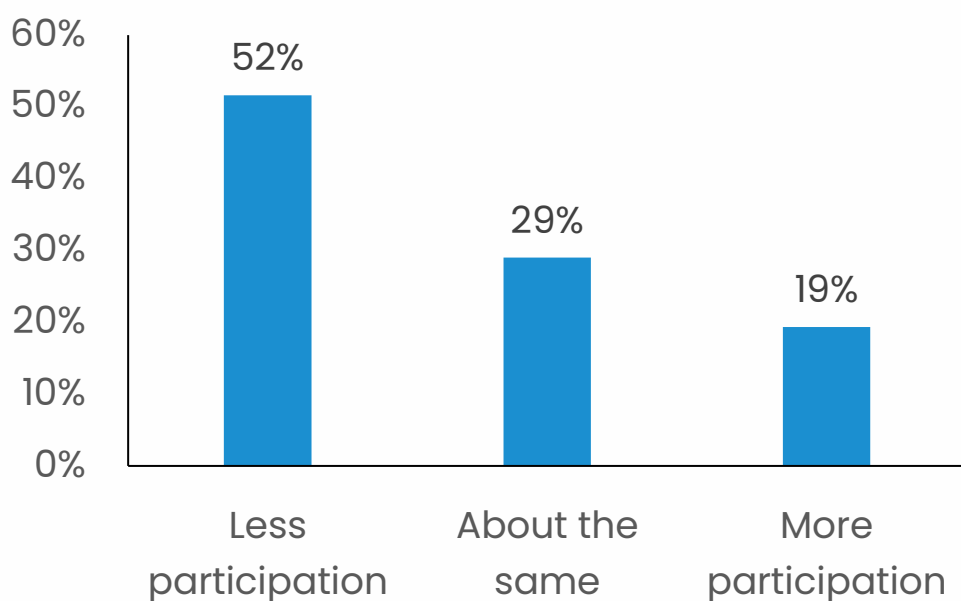


Participation levels compared to pre-Covid

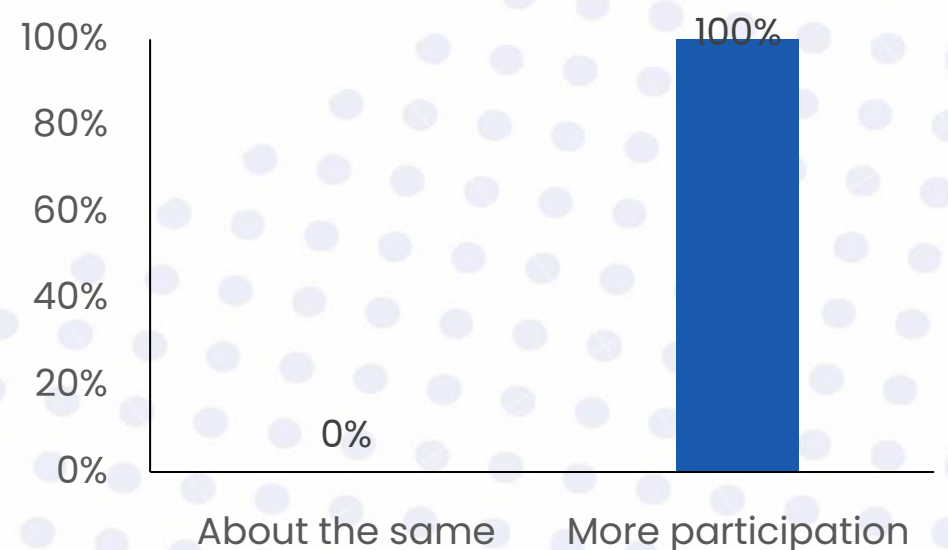
Just over half (52%) of groups that currently have participation levels below capacity report participation is lower than before the pandemic, indicating participation levels are yet to fully recover from before the pandemic.

For the two groups who are currently seeing participation levels above their capacity, **both reported that participation is now higher than before the pandemic.**

Groups with current participation below capacity



Groups with current participation above capacity

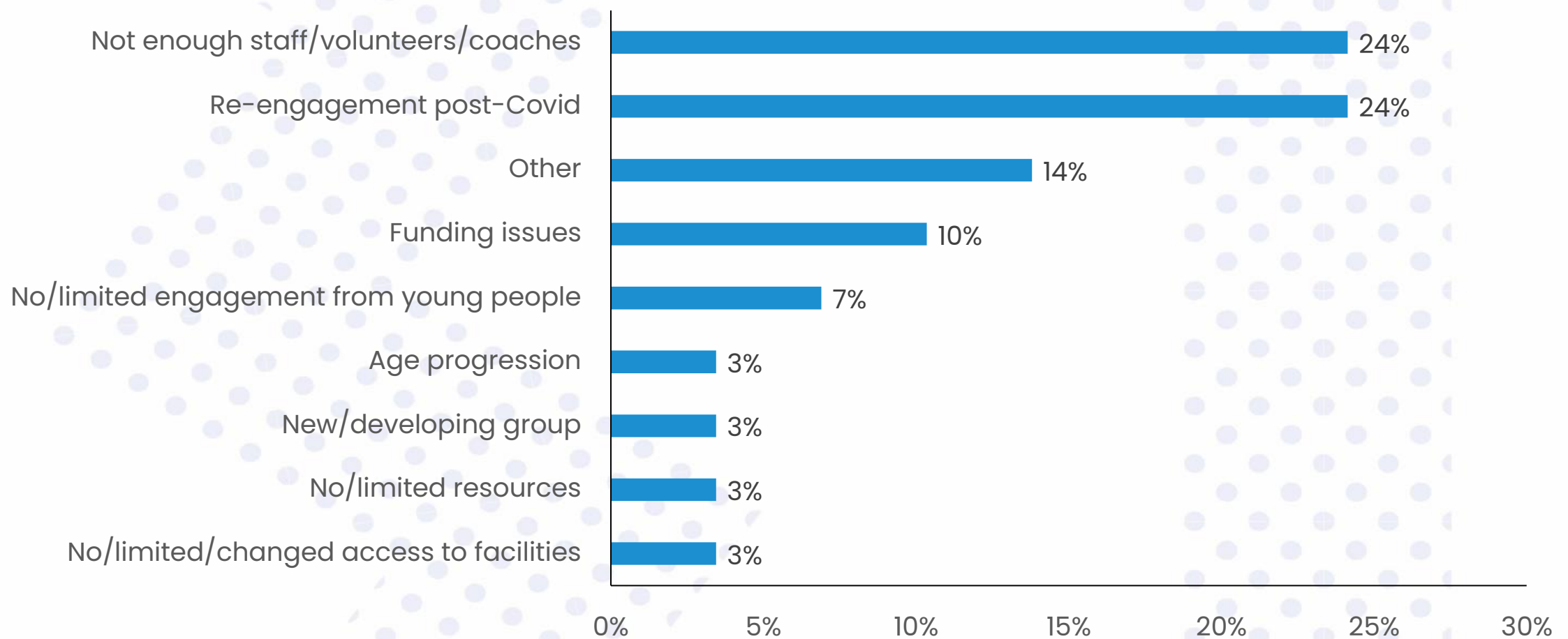


Participation and capacity

Why are participation levels down?

For groups reporting lower levels of participation than before the pandemic, **the two most common causes are not enough staff/volunteers/coaches (24%)** and **difficulties with re-engaging after the pandemic (24%)**. Groups also raised concerns about funding issues and no/limited engagement from young people.

Reasons for participation below pre-Covid levels



- 'There is a shortage of gymnastics coaches in NI. It has to be recognised that gymnastics is one of the most difficult sports to get qualified in, insured in, access in. It is very costly and not an easy sport to get started coaching in.' – survey respondent
- 'Restricted with staff and volunteers and still very much feeling the pinch of Covid in daily life.' – survey respondent
- 'We have limited facility space and also require more coaches.' – survey respondent
- 'Still recovering from the pandemic and lack of sponsorship because of it.' – survey respondent
- 'Covid 19 has prevented full participation.' – survey respondent
- 'Require additional coaching volunteers, so we can add to our current capacity.' – survey respondent

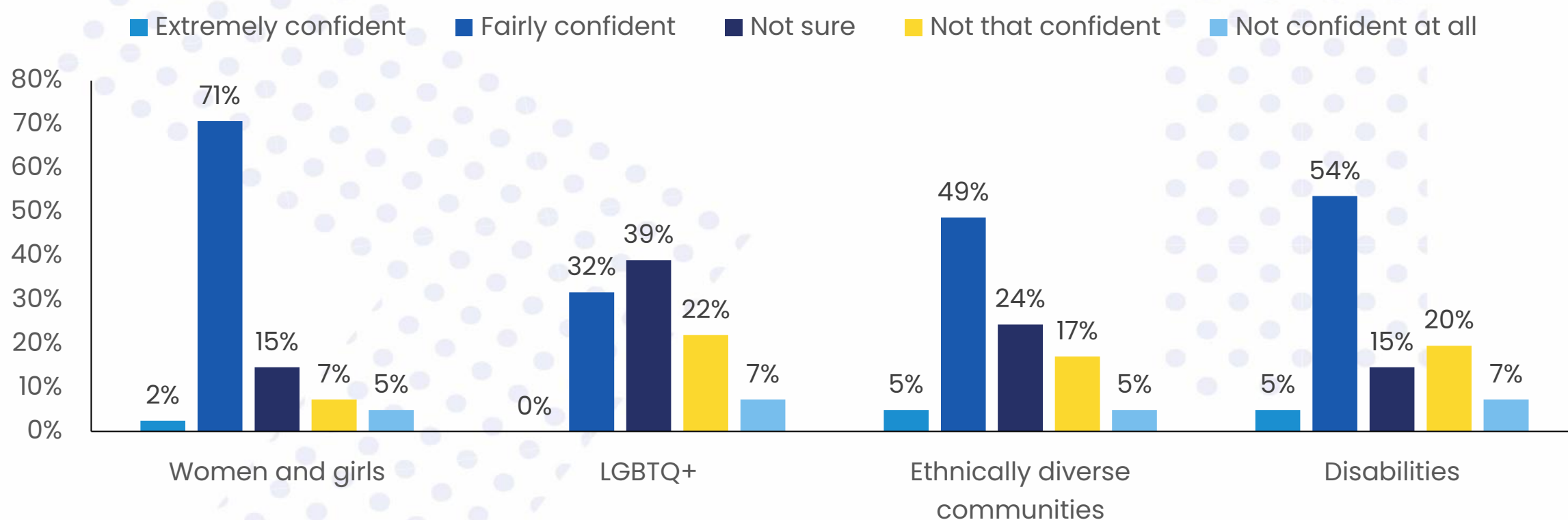
Tackling inequalities

Knowledge of challenges facing young people

When thinking about tackling inequalities, groups are **most confident in their knowledge of the challenges facing women and girls** (73% are extremely or fairly confident in this area).

Confidence is **lowest with regard to knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues**: 29% of groups are not that confident, or not confident at all in their knowledge of the challenges in this area. There is a noticeably higher proportion of groups that are not sure about their knowledge of LGBTQ+ issues (39%).

Group confidence in their knowledge of challenges facing young people

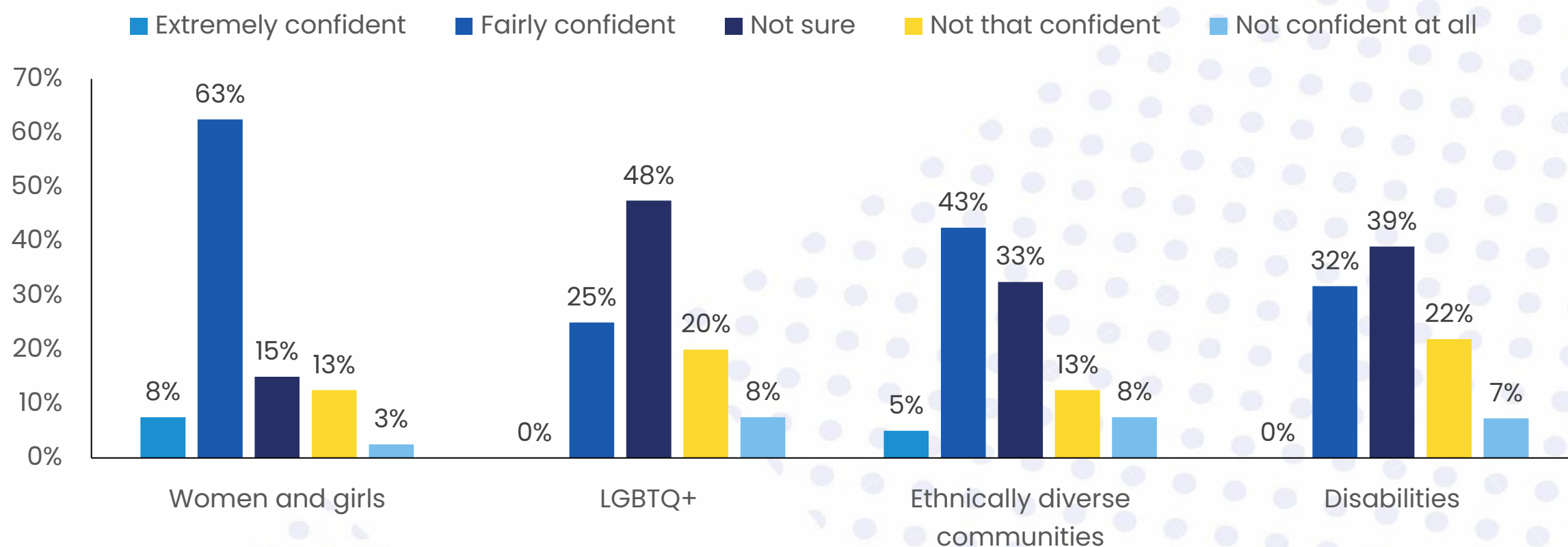


Support for young people in these areas

Groups are **most confident in supporting women and girls**, with 71% being extremely or fairly confident in this area. Groups were **least confident in supporting young people with disabilities** (29% being not that confident or not confident at all).

A lack of certainty in confidence was also evident in supporting young people around LGBTQ+ issues (48%), in ethnically diverse communities (33%), and with disabilities (39%).

Group confidence in how they feel supporting young people

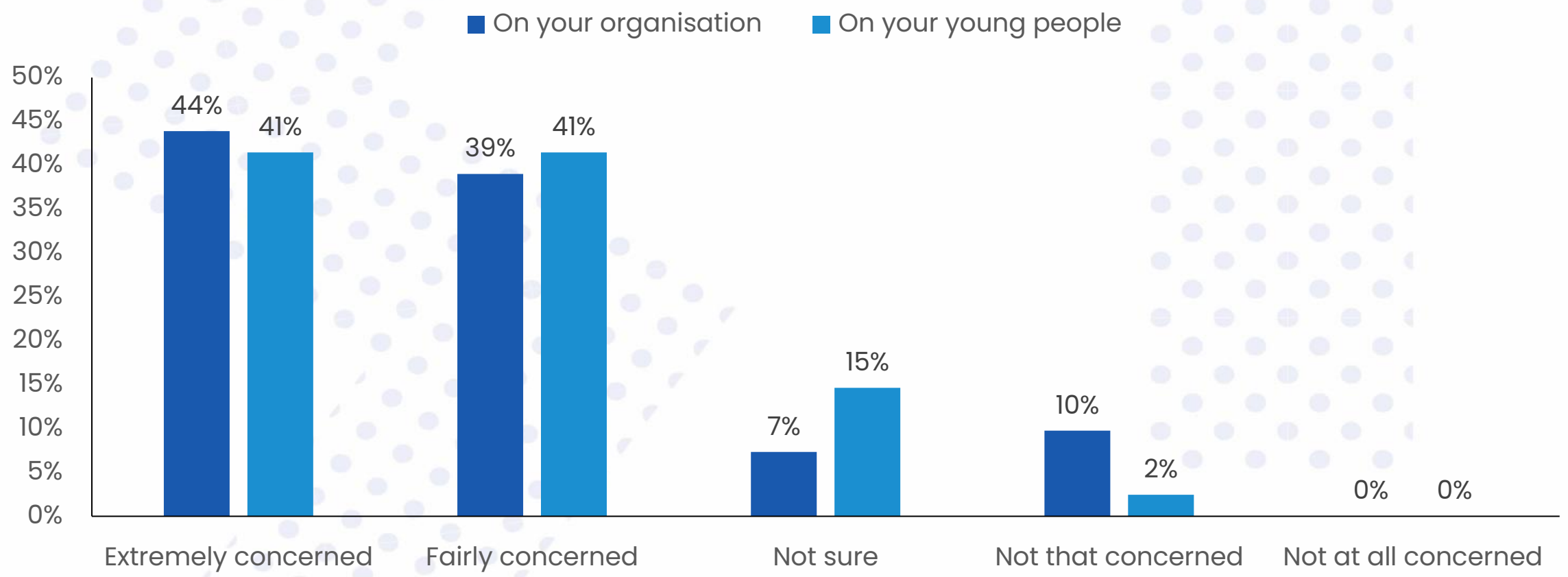


Cost of living increases

Impact on groups and their young people

83% of respondents have concerns (being either extremely or fairly concerned) about the impact of cost of living increases on their organisation, with 82% having concern on this issue for their young people.

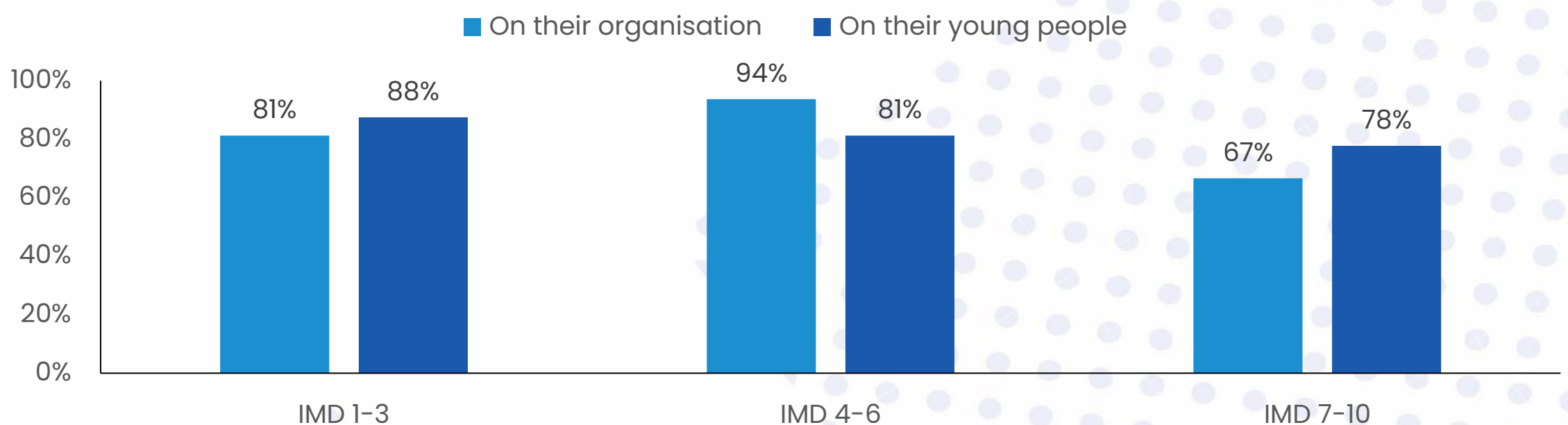
Concern about the impact of cost of living increases



Impact on groups and their young people by IMD

There are **consistently high levels of concern about the impact of cost of living increases on organisations across all areas of multiple deprivation**. Concern around the impact on young people is very high among groups working in the bottom 30% and middle 30% of areas of multiple deprivation. For groups working in the top four deciles of deprivation, concern levels remain high but are reduced.

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

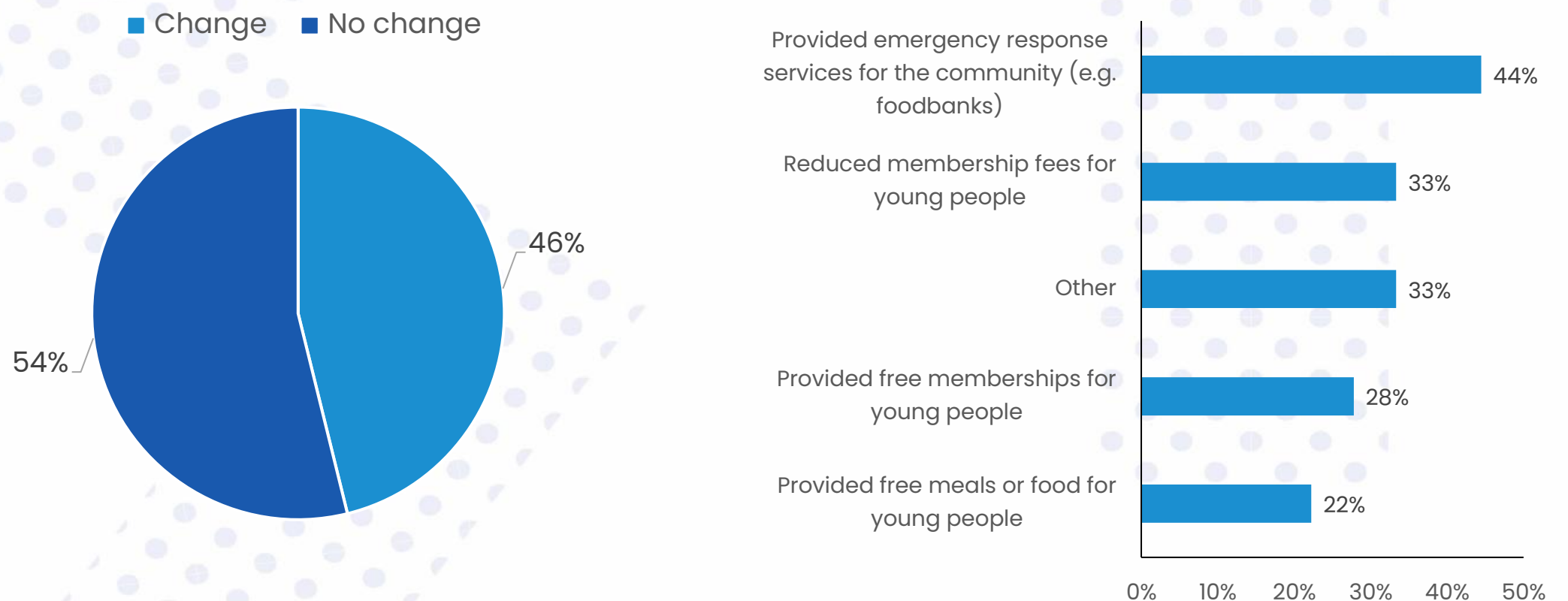


Cost of living increases

Groups' responses to the increases

Nearly half of groups (46%) have made a change to their organisation in response to the cost of living increase. The most frequently made changes have been to **provide emergency response services for the community (44%)**, and to **reduce membership fees for their young people (33%)**.

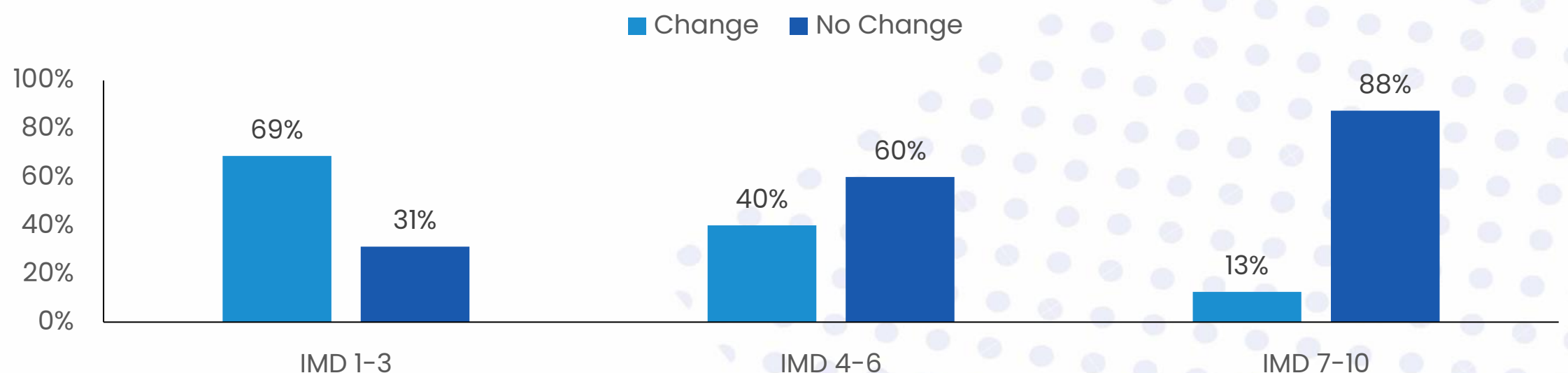
Changes made in response to cost of living increases



Groups' responses to the increases by IMD

Groups were more likely to have made changes in response to cost of living increases if based in areas of higher deprivation. 69% of groups in the lowest three deciles for areas of multiple deprivation have made a change, compared with 40% for the middle three and 13% for the top four deciles.

Changes made in response to cost of living increases (by IMD)

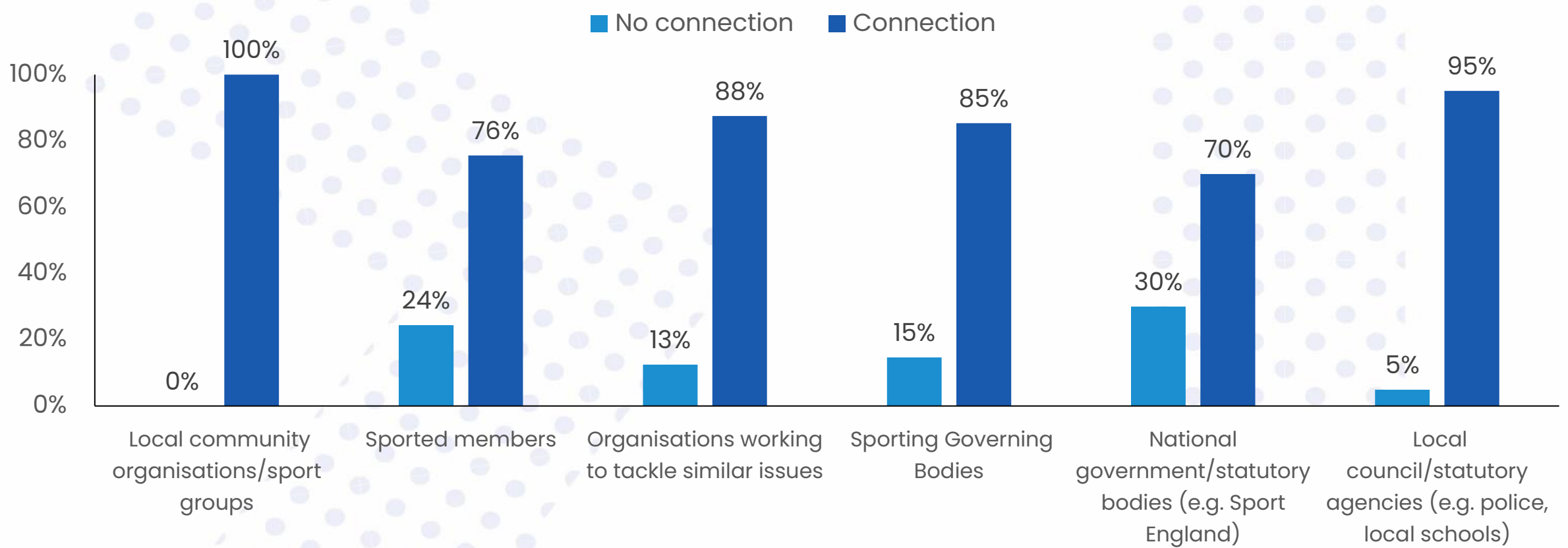


Connected communities

Groups' connections to other organisations

Groups report high degrees of connection with other organisations and agencies, **with the most frequent being local community organisations/sport groups (100%) and local councils/statutory agencies (95%).**

Connection to other organisations



Where groups report a connection to another organisation, **active collaboration occurs most frequently with local community organisations/sport groups (32%).**

Extent of connections to other organisations

