

**Community  
Pulse** 

**May 2023  
England**



**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.

This report is based on **409 responses** between **13 – 22 March 2023** from Sported groups in England. Of these, 55% of responses were from groups in the lowest 30% areas of multiple deprivation.

**409**  
**responses**

## 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

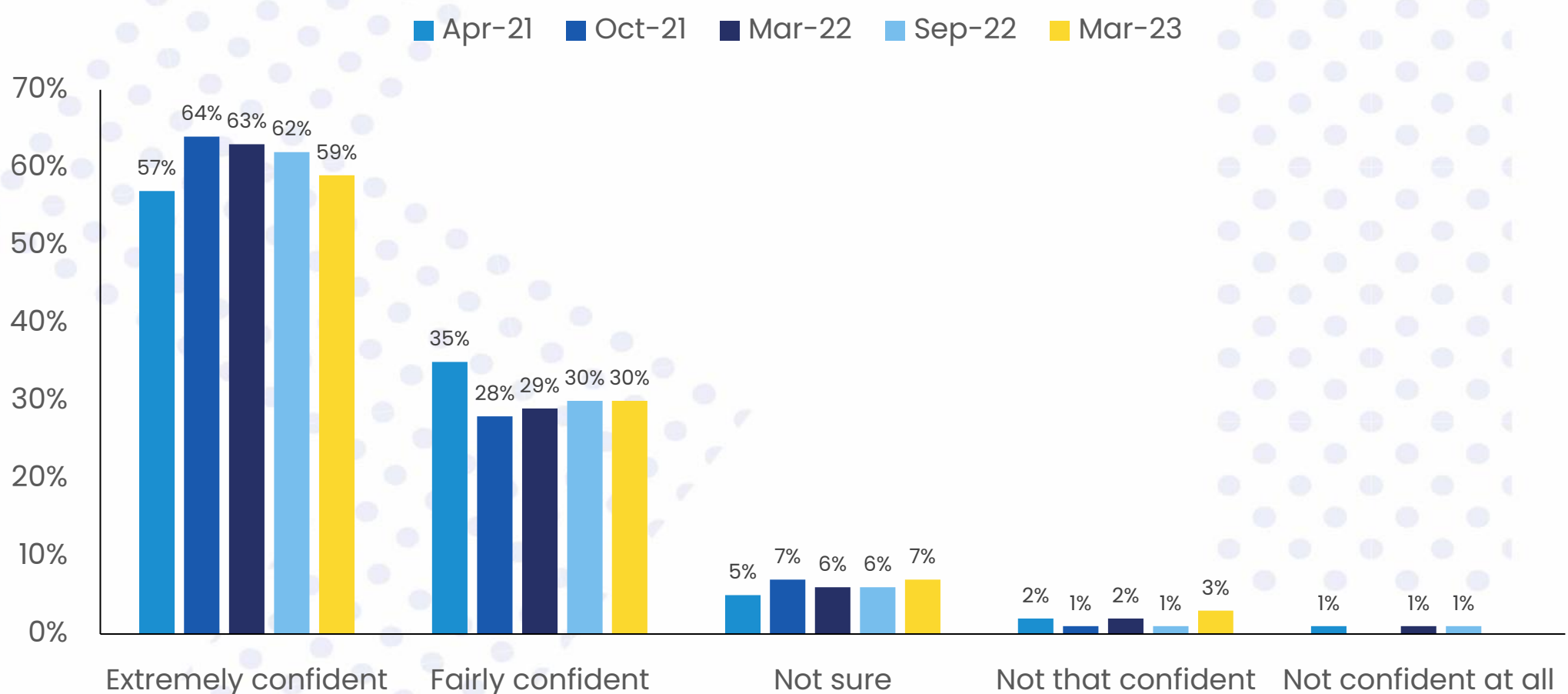
- **Concern about the impact of cost-of-living pressures continues to be very high**, with 94% of respondents either extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group and 93% concerned for their young people.
- The most common concerns around the impact of cost-of-living increases on young people are for their **mental health** (74%) and **general wellbeing** (73%).
- **Young people's mental health continues to be scored by leaders as worse than their own and their staff/volunteers'**, 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 (48%) telling us this is an issue.
- **Significant rises in utility and energy bills** have been the most common experiences 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 (82%)** 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 (71%).
- **Groups' relationships with other organisations are varied** in terms of support for delivery, funding, and sustainability, though many groups don't work with other organisations in their community or across the sector.

# Survival and priorities

## Organisational survival

**Confidence in organisational survival is high, and at a level similar to six months ago.** 89% of groups are confident (extremely or fairly) in their survival, compared with 92% six months ago.

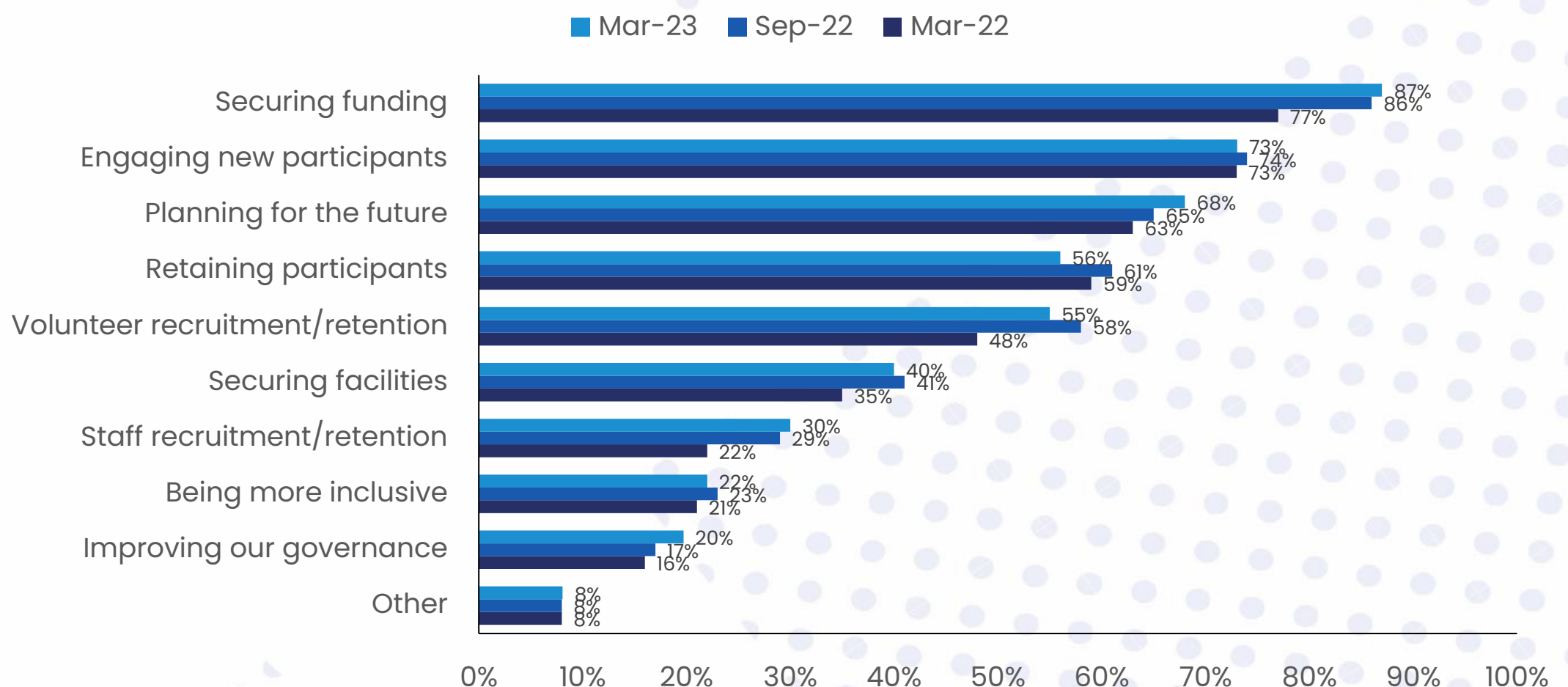
### Confidence in organisational survival in the next six months



## Top priorities over the next six months

**Securing funding remains the most common priority for groups over the next six months, with 87% of groups identifying this as key task.** This is a similar proportion to our September 2022 Pulse. Engaging new participants (73%) and planning for the future (68%) also remain the next most common priorities.

### Groups' priorities over the next six months



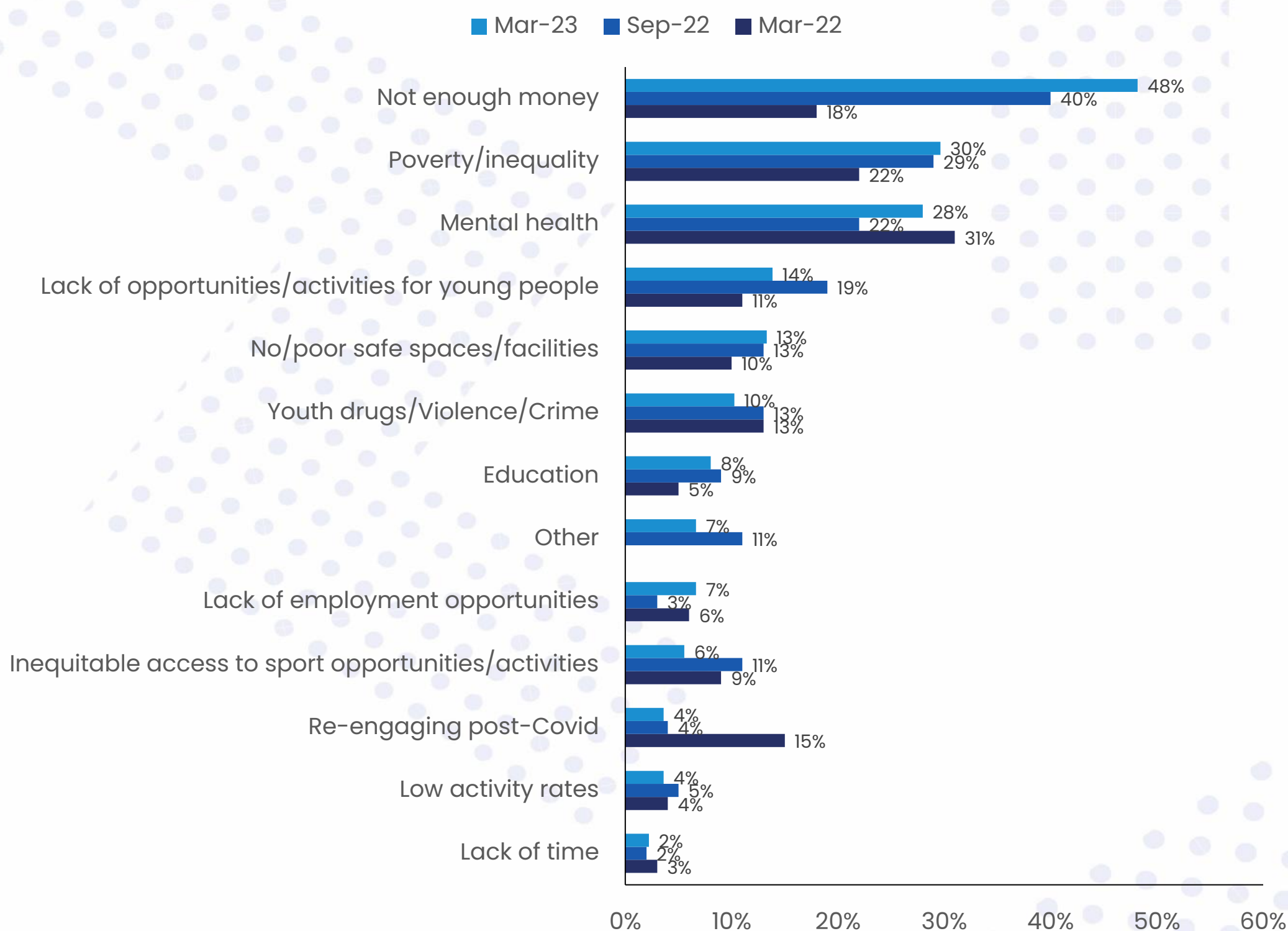


# Challenges for young people

**Concerns around young people not having enough money remain high.** Referring to answers centred on the cost-of-living crisis and immediate economic hardship, nearly half of respondents (48%) said this was a challenge for their young people. This has increased slightly since our September 2022 Pulse, when 40% saw this as an issue.

Concerns around **poverty/inequality** (30%), which covers long-term socio-economic deprivation (including cost-of-living impact), and **mental health** (28%) continue to be the next most commonly cited challenges.

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



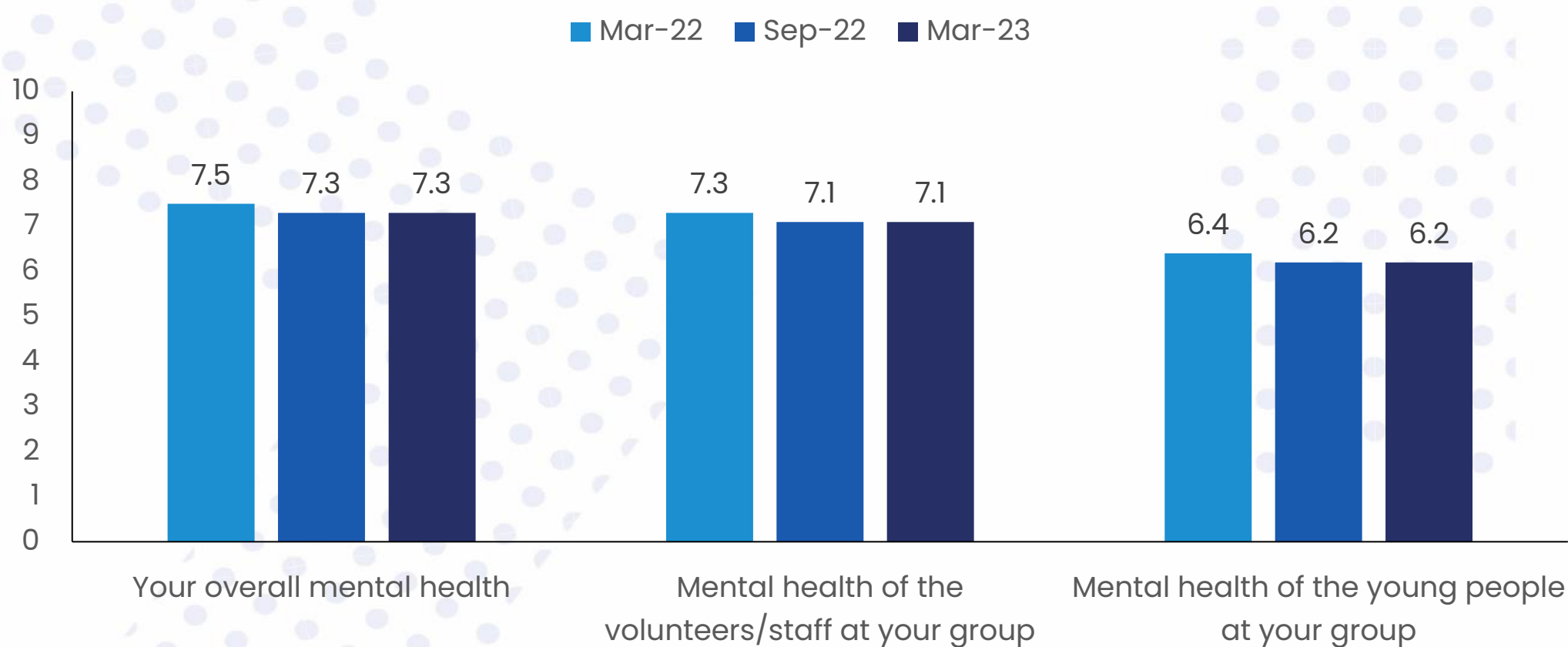
- 'Young people in our community have been impacted by the rise in the cost of living. From those living at home having to cut heating or switch it off altogether and not being able to run showers or washing machines due to the cost, to needing to access food banks and relying on meals outside the home i.e. school or college.' – survey respondent
- 'Education attainment levels, cost of travel to and from school, the feeling of belonging at their schools, access to quality food at home, access to heating at home, more physical activities for teenage girls. – survey respondent
- 'Poverty! Plus limited access to medical services, almost zero access to psychological/mental support (only if suicidal), over-stretched social services providing low levels of support for children in care, increased cost in participating in sports and social activities.' – 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 (7.1).

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

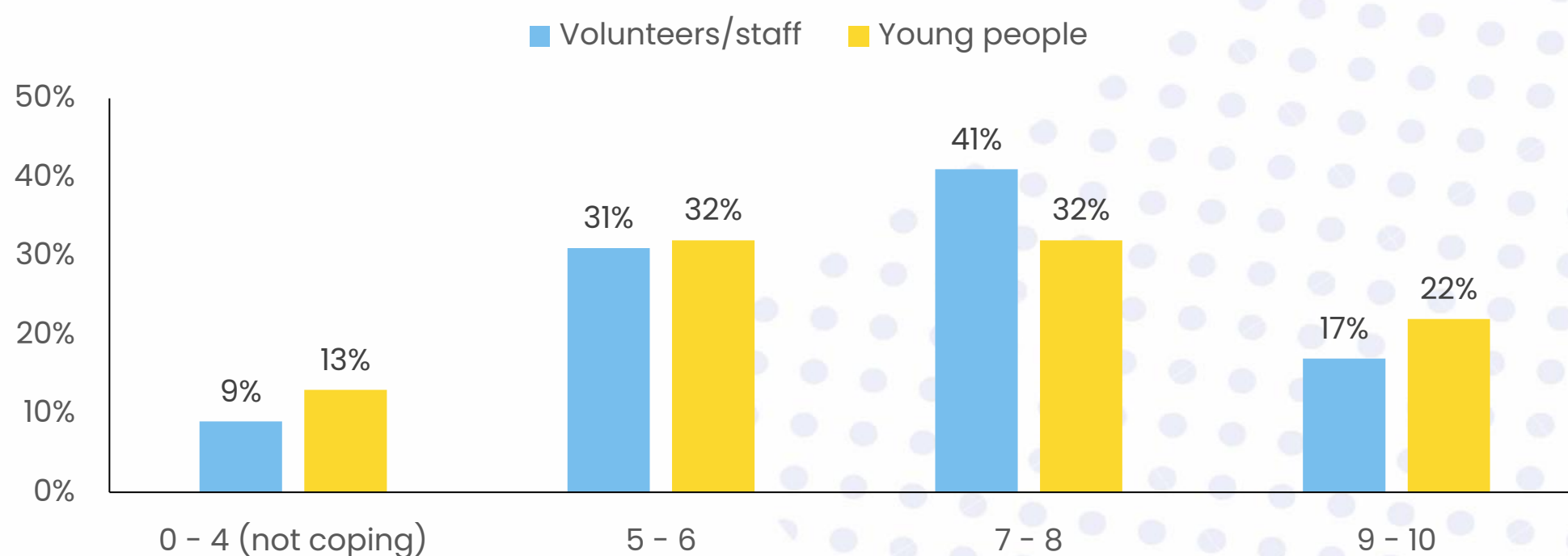


## Capacity to support mental health

**More than half of groups (58%) reported a score of 7 (out of 10) or above for their capacity to support the mental health of their volunteers/staff. Just over half (54%) 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) in supporting their volunteers/staff (31%) and their young people (32%) with their mental wellbeing.

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

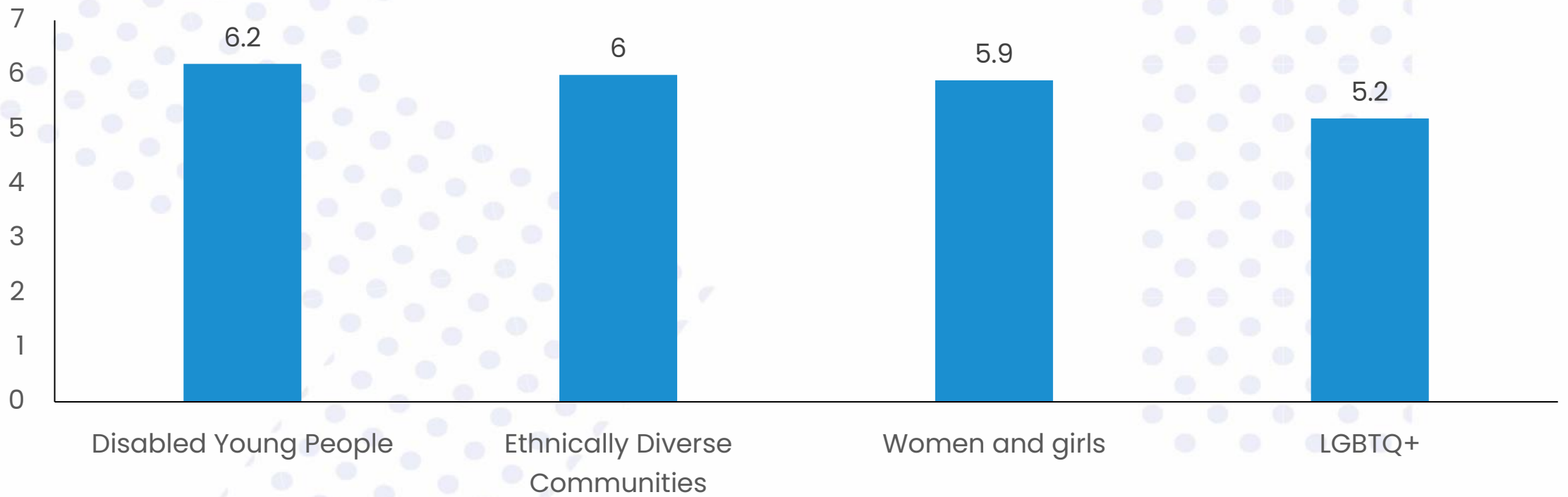


# Tackling inequalities

## The significance of inequalities experienced in communities

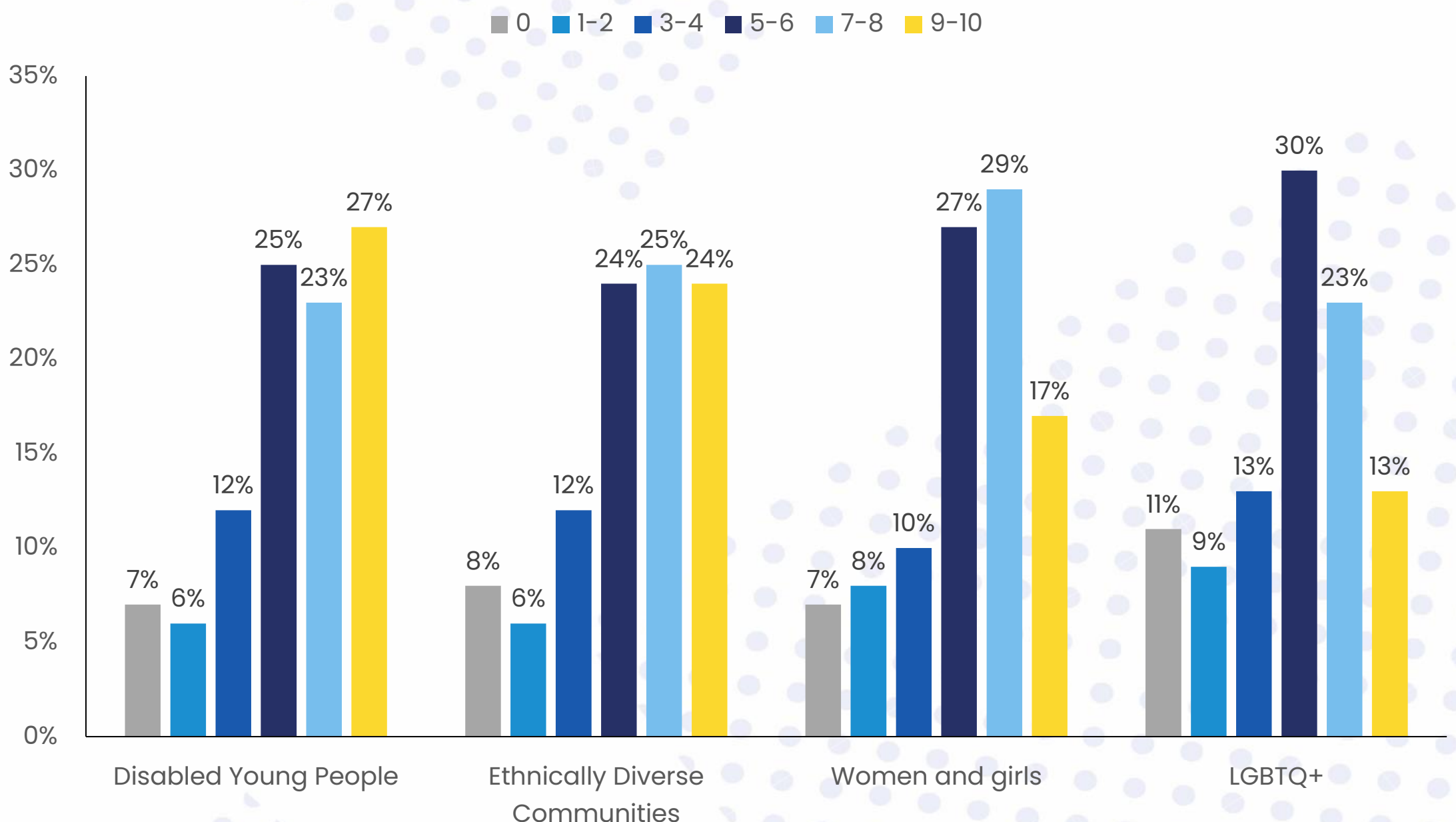
Group leaders identified **inequalities experienced by Disabled Young People** within their communities as most significant, with an average score of 6.2 (out of 10).

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



Leaders told us the most acute inequality (9-10) is experienced by Disabled Young People, but nearly a quarter also said inequality experienced by Ethnically Diverse Communities is at the highest extent of significance.

### Significance of inequalities within groups' communities – score distribution



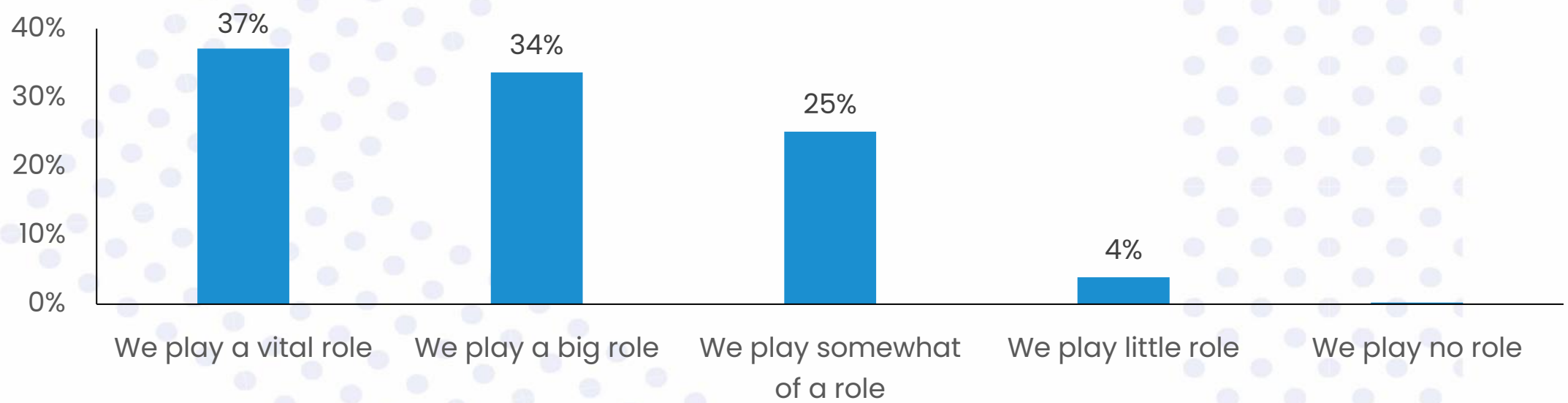


# Connecting communities

## 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 (71%).

### Building a stronger sense of community in groups' local area



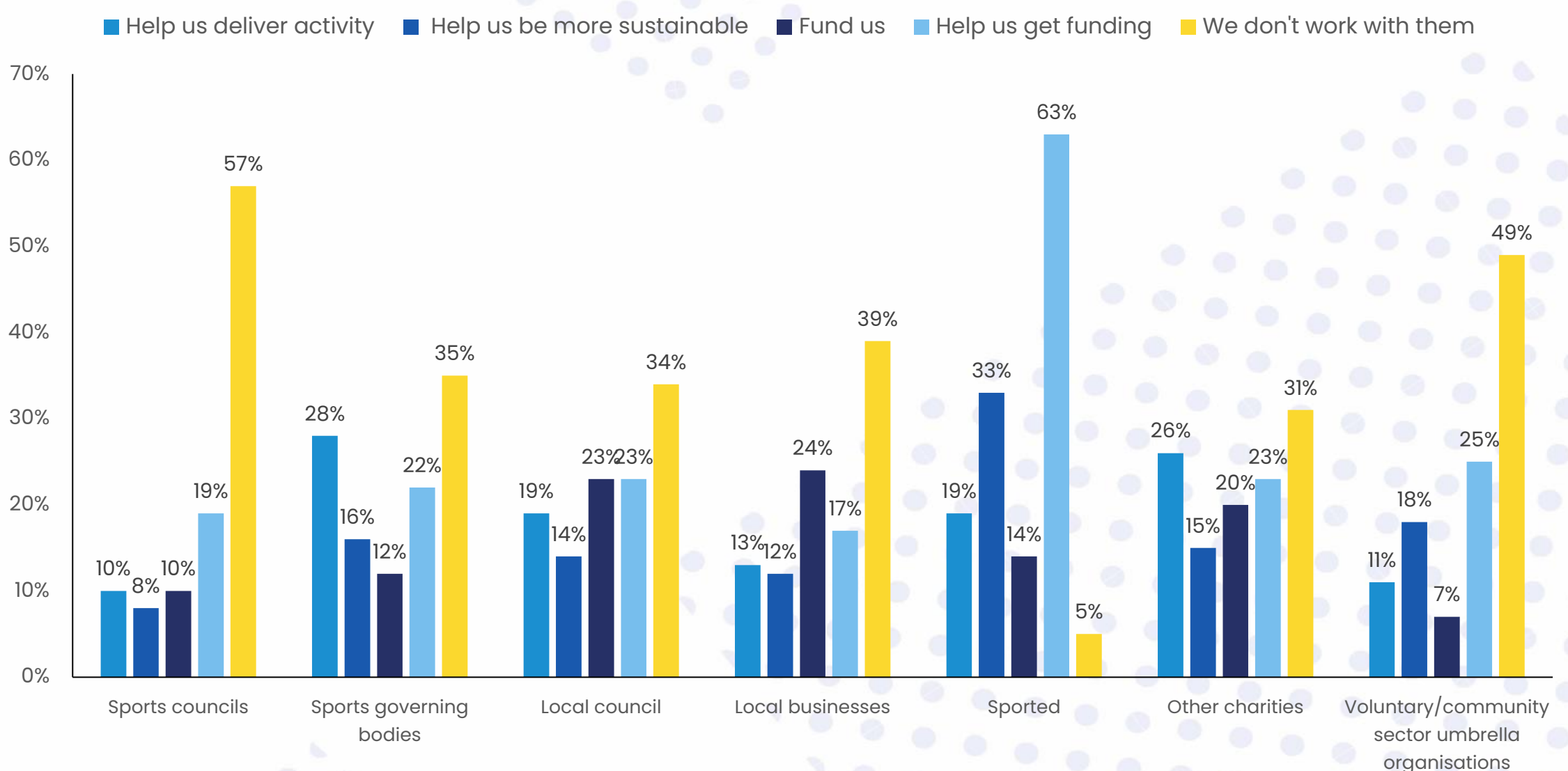
## Groups' relationships to other organisations

More than half of groups told us that **they don't work with sports councils** (57%), while a third **don't work with sports governing bodies** (35%).

A similar proportion **don't work with their local council** (34%) and just over a third **don't work with local businesses** (39%).

Two-thirds of groups told us that **Sported helps them get funding** (63%). Around a third **don't work with other charities** (31%), and nearly half of respondents said they **don't work with voluntary/community sector umbrella organisations** (49%).

### Relationships with other organisations





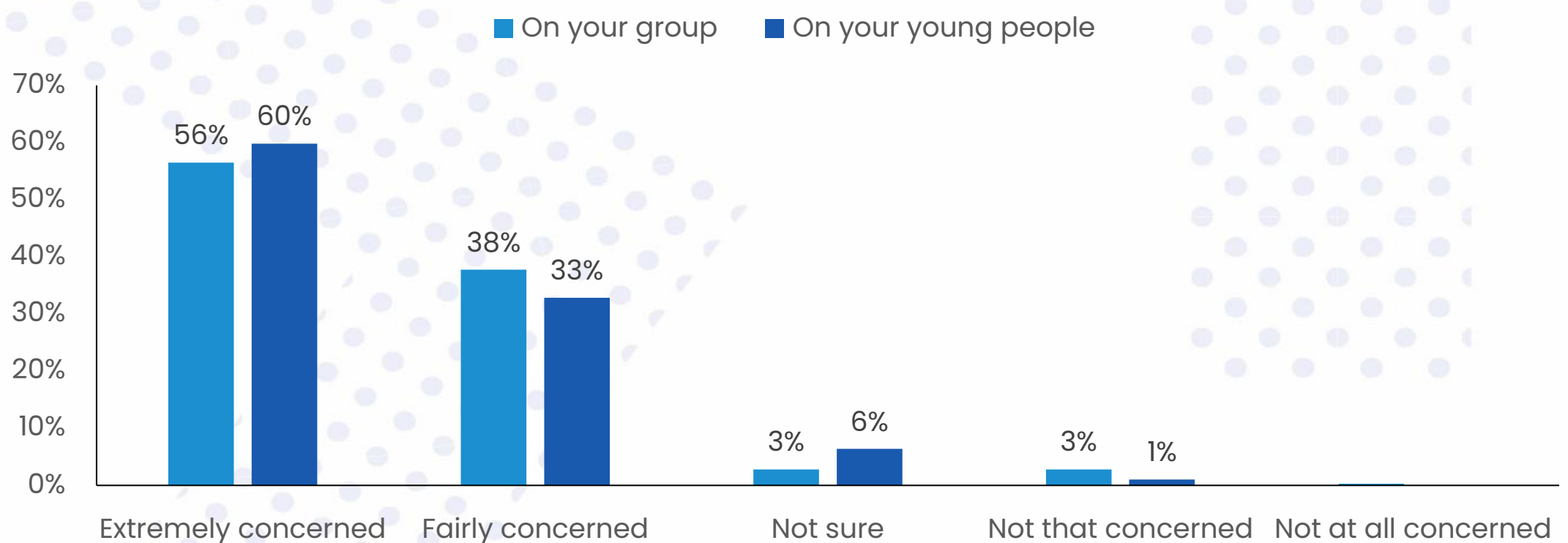
# Cost-of-living increases

## 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 93% 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 on their young people.

### Concern about the impact of cost-of-living increases

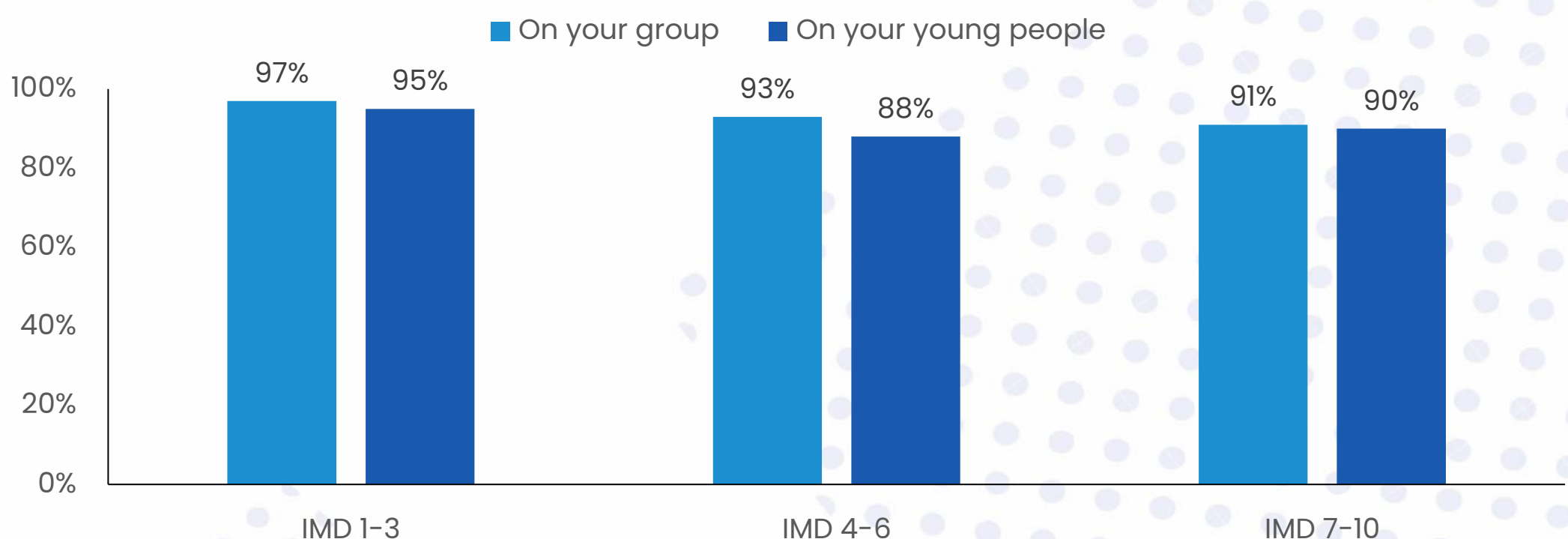


## Impact on groups and their young people by IMD

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)

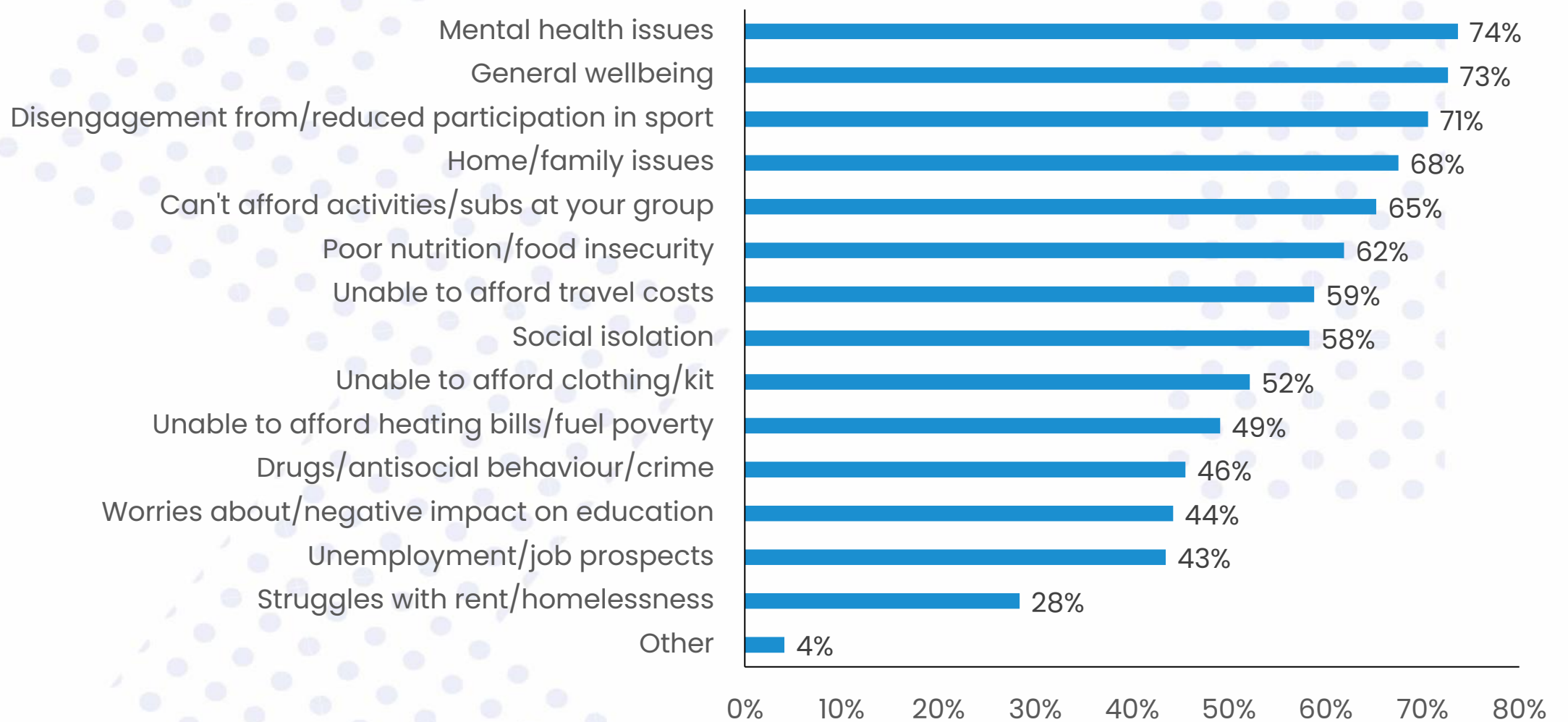


# Cost-of-living increases

## Impact on young people

Asked to outline concerns about cost-of-living increases on their young people, group leaders identified concerns around **mental health** (74%) as the most common impact. The impact on young people's **general wellbeing** (73%) and **disengagement from/reduced participation in sport** (71%) were cited as concerns by nearly three-quarters of respondents.

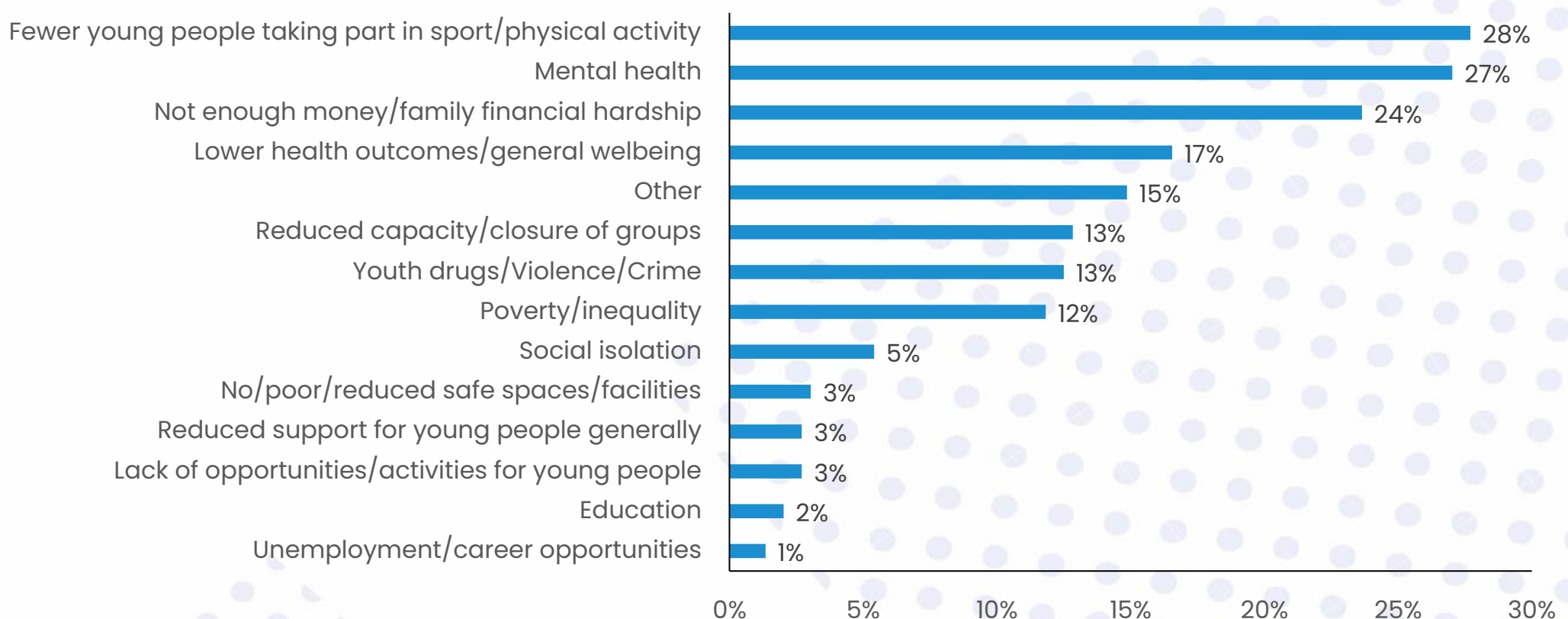
### Impact on young people



## 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 the most likely consequence (28%). A quarter said they believed there would be negative long-term effects for **mental health** (27%), with a similar number fearing for young people **not having enough money/facing family financial hardship** (24%).

### Impact on communities in the longer-term





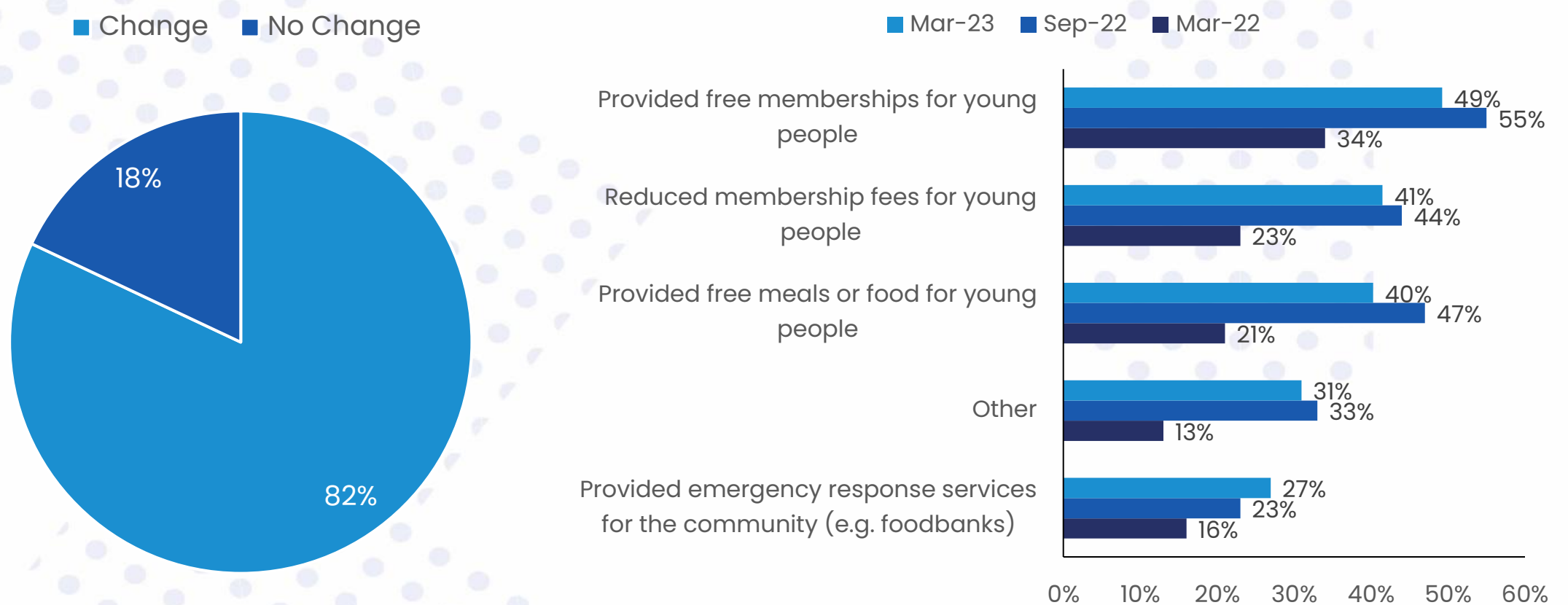
# Cost-of-living increases

## Groups' responses to the increases

More than three-quarters of groups (82%) have responded to cost-of-living increases by making a change to their operation. This is an increase from our September Pulse, when 73% of respondents indicated they'd made a change.

The most frequently made change has been to **provide free memberships for their young people (49%)**. The next most common responses have been to **reduce fees for their young people (41%)** and **provide free meals or food for young people (40%)**.

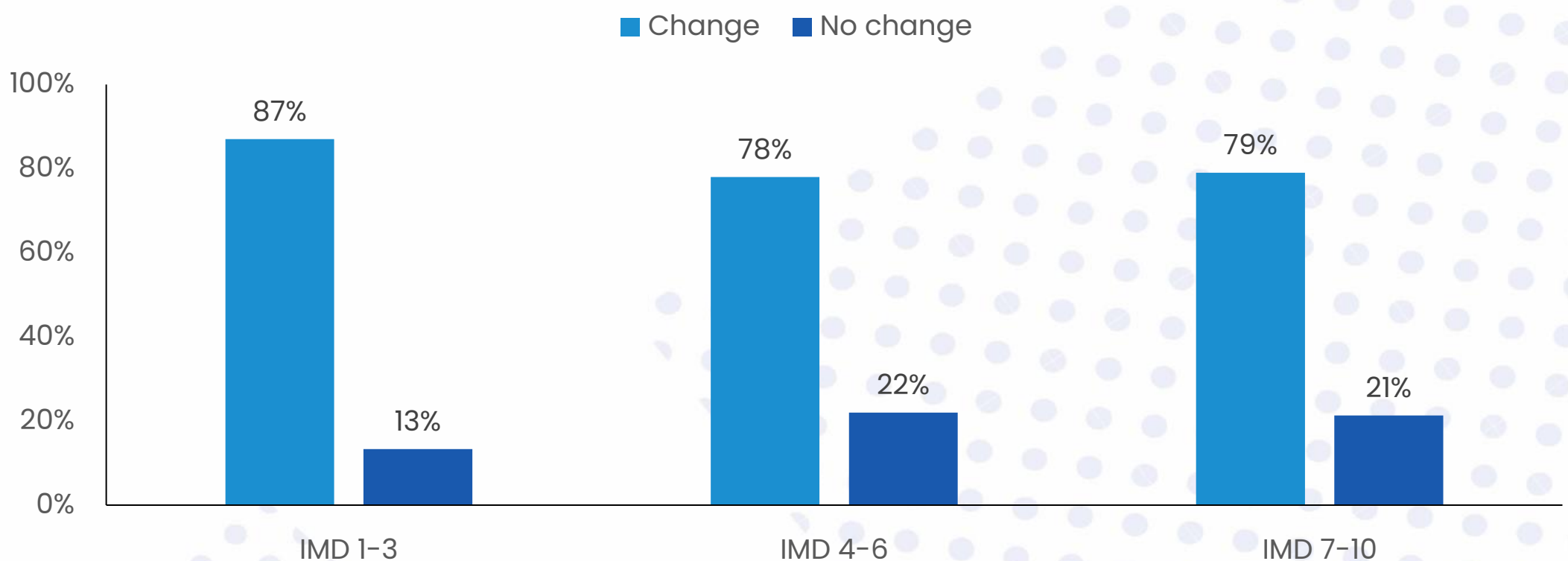
### Changes made in response to cost-of-living increases



## Groups' responses to the increases by IMD

Groups were more likely to have made a change in response to cost-of-living increases when based in the lowest 30% areas of multiple deprivation.

### Changes made by IMD



# Cost-of-living increases

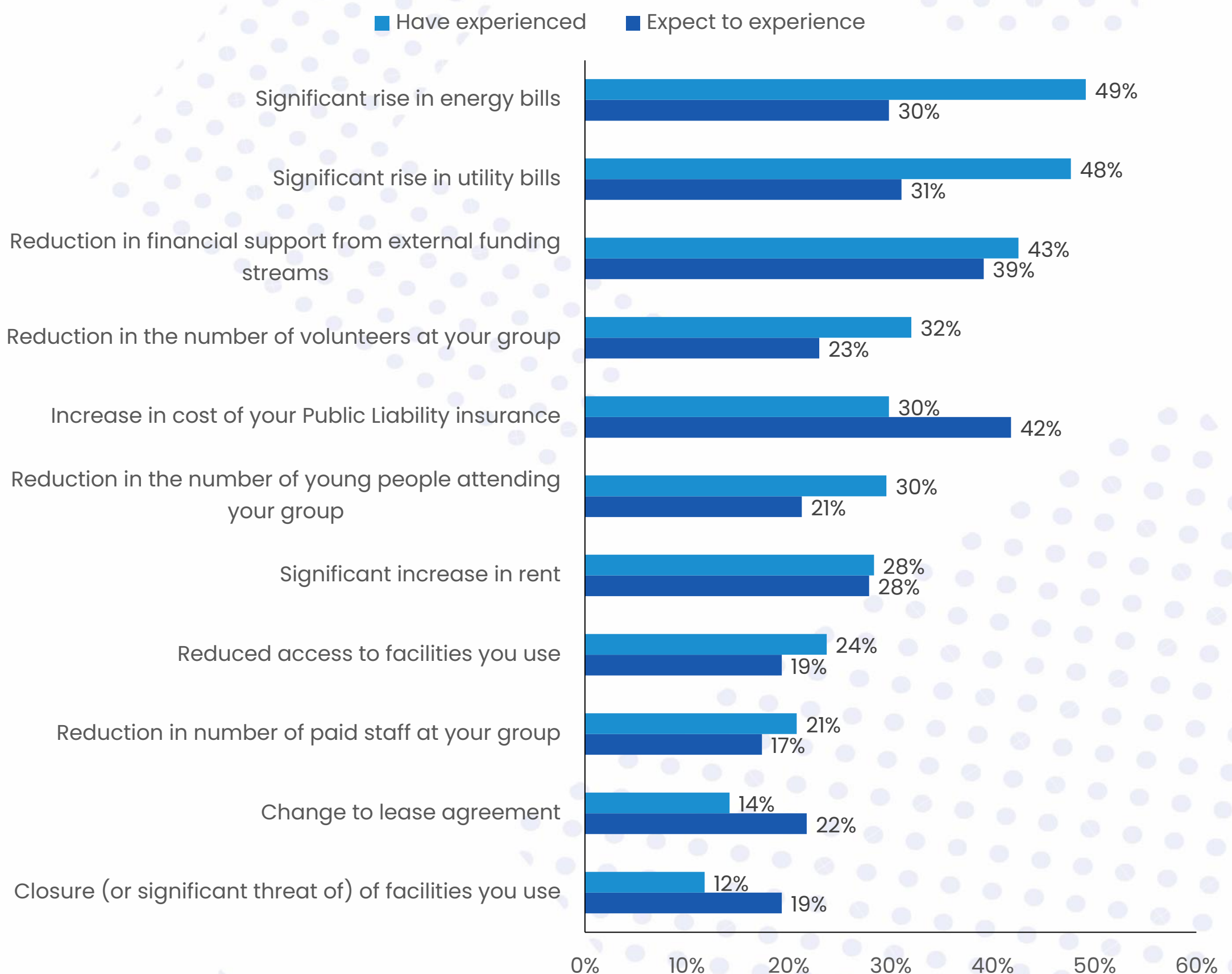
## Issues experienced and expected

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** (43%).

Nearly half of groups expect to experience **increases in the cost of Public Liability insurance** (42%) over the next six months. Similar numbers of groups expect **a reduction in financial support from external funding streams** (39%).

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 six months/expected in the next six months)





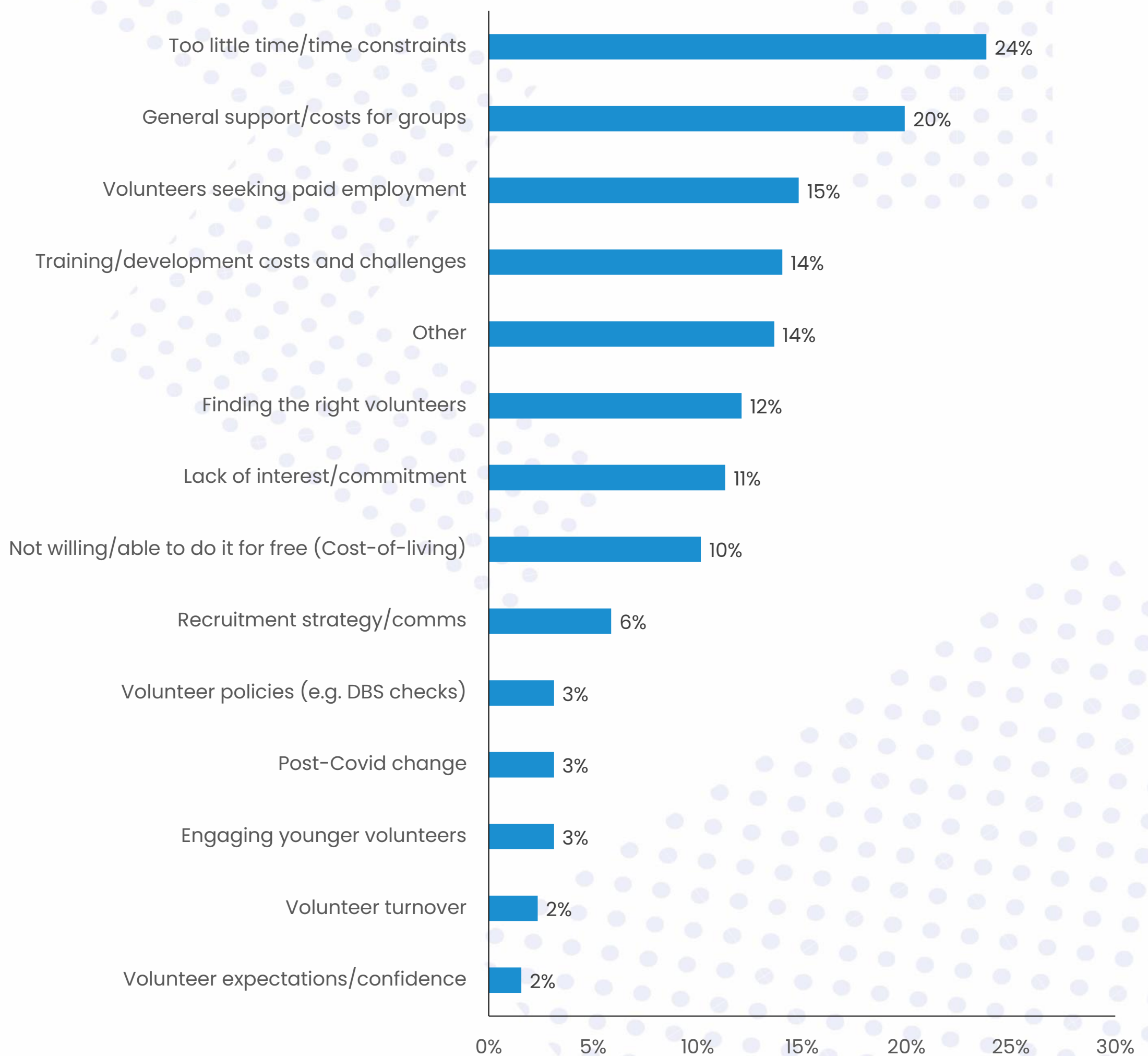
# Cost-of-living increases

## Recruiting/retaining volunteers

The most commonly cited challenges around volunteer recruitment/retention are volunteers **not having enough time** (24%) and **general support/costs for groups** (20%).

Volunteers are also **seeking paid employment** (15%), which presents a challenge for groups. Groups also reported **training/development costs and challenges** (14%) as an issue in recruitment and retention.

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

