

**Community
Pulse** 

**May 2023
Northern Ireland**



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 **54 responses** between **13 – 22 March 2023** from Sported groups in Northern Ireland. Of these, 38% of responses were from groups in the lowest 30% areas of multiple deprivation.

54
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

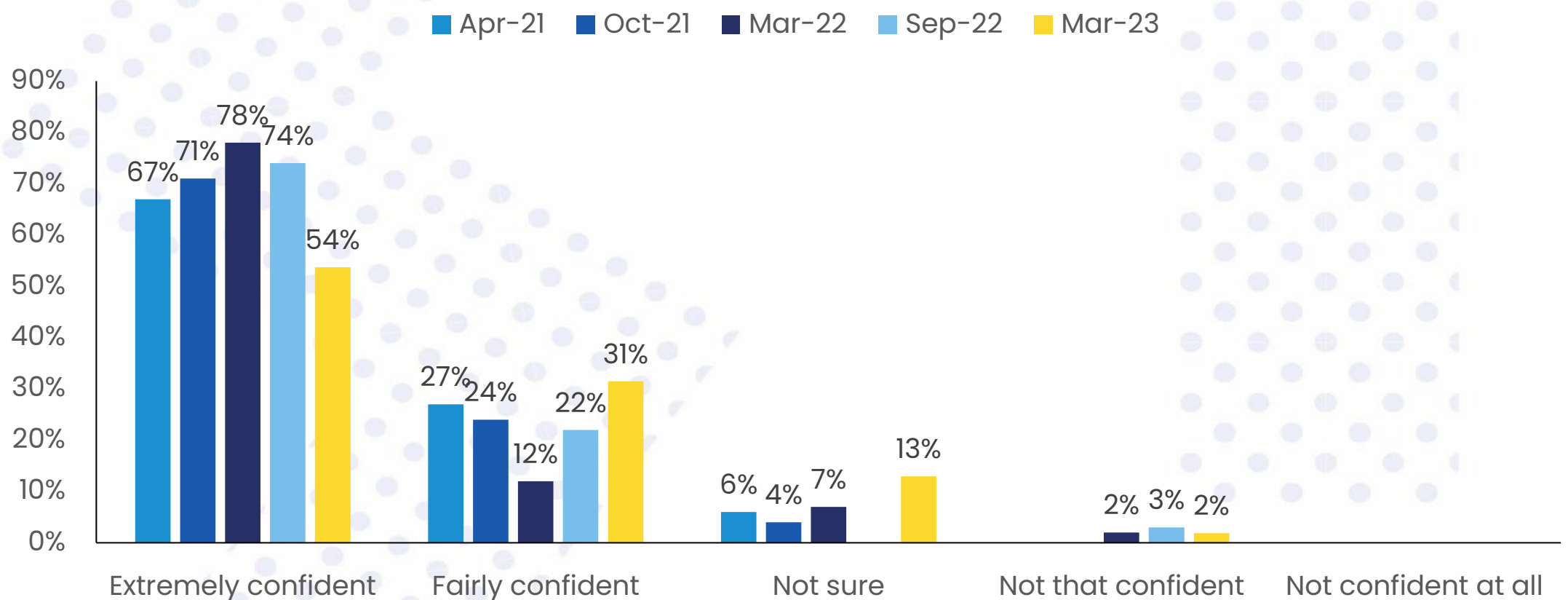
- **Concern about the impact of cost-of-living pressures continues to be very high, with 90% of leaders are either extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group, with 84% concerned for their young people.**
- The most common concerns around the impact of cost-of-living increases are on young people's **disengagement/reduced participation in sport** (82%) and the negative effects on their **mental health** (80%).
- **Young people's mental health** has continued to decline since March 2022, with around a quarter of respondents telling us they are **not 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 over half (56%) 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.
- **Over two-thirds of respondents (69%)** said their group **has made a change in response to cost-of-living increases** – the most common has been to **reduce membership fees.**
- **Securing funding** continues to be the most-reported priority for the next six months, as it has been for each Pulse since March 2022.
- Around two-thirds of groups say **they play a significant role (vital or big) in building a stronger sense of community** in their local area (68%).
- **Groups' relationships with other organisations are varied** in terms of support for delivery, funding, and sustainability, but significant numbers don't work with sports councils, other charities outside Sported, and/or voluntary/community sector umbrella organisations.

Survival and priorities

Organisational survival

Confidence in organisational survival has fallen since September 2022, with 85% of groups now confident (extremely or fairly) in their survival, compared with 96% six months ago. There has been a small but noticeable increase in the proportion who now aren't sure of their group's prospects for the next six months.

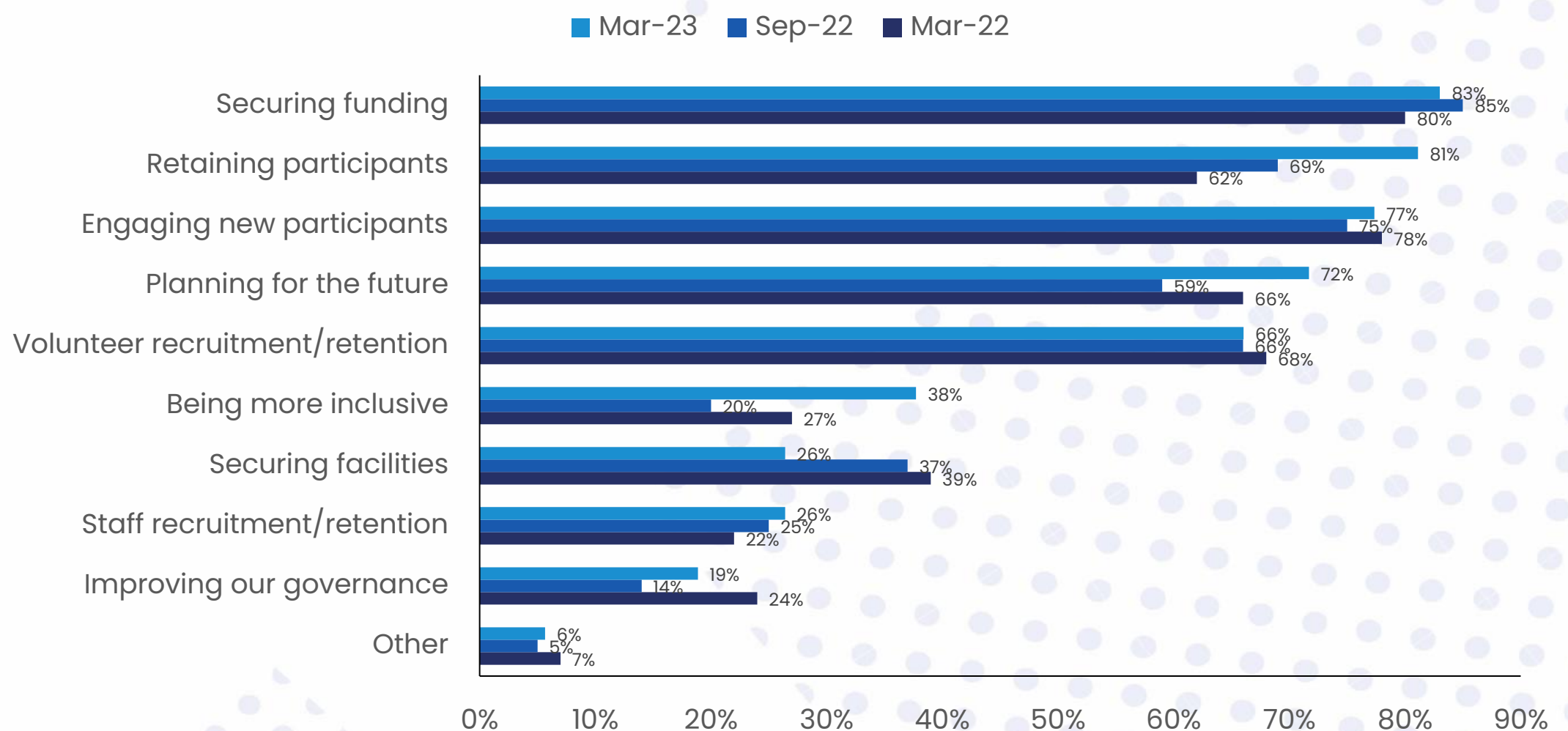
Confidence in organisational survival in the next six months



Top priorities over the next six months

Securing funding remains the most common priority for groups over the next six months, with 83% of groups identifying this as key task. This is a similar proportion to our September 2022 Pulse.

Groups' priorities over the next six months

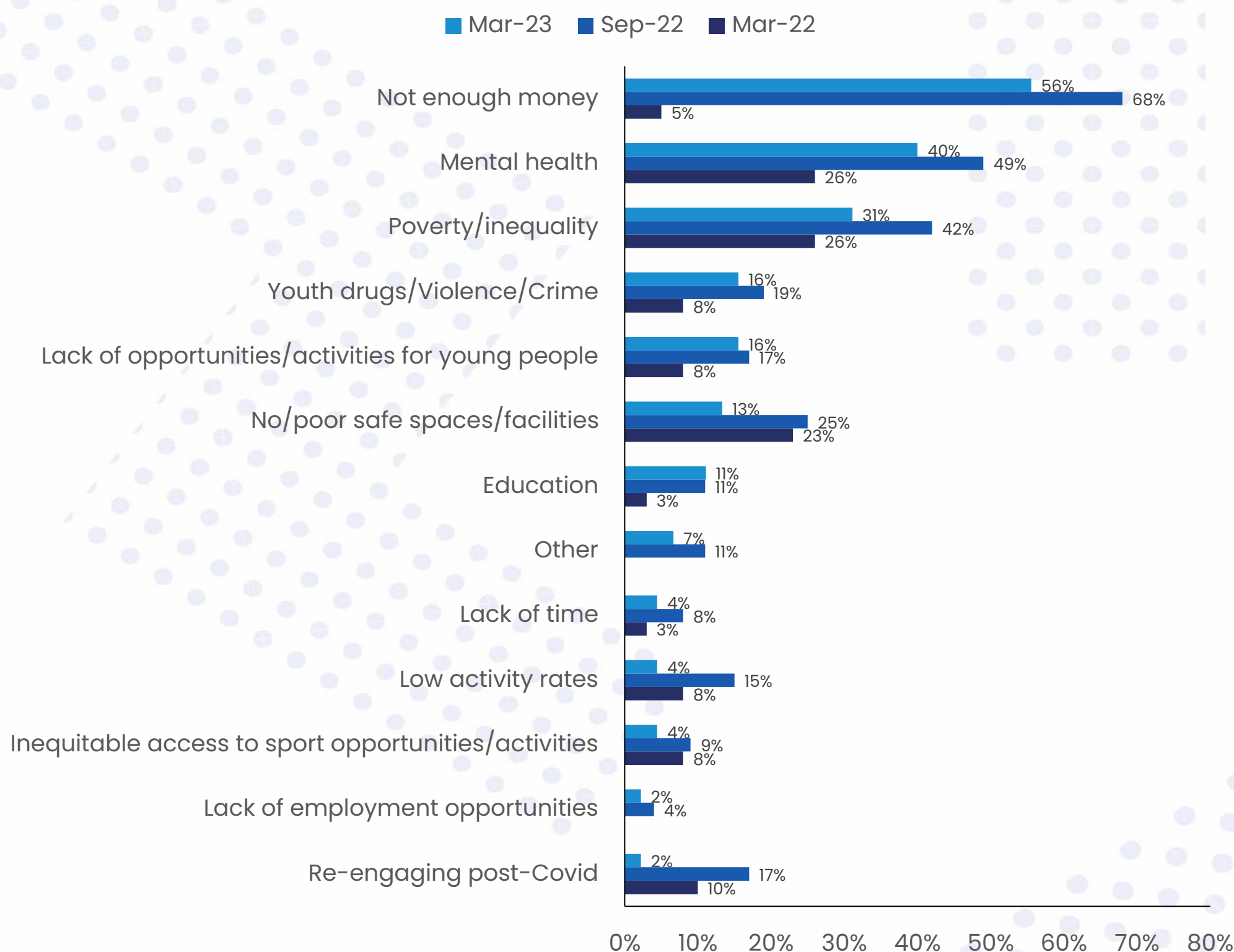


Challenges for young people

Concerns around young people not having enough money remain high. Referring to answers centred on the cost-of-living crisis and immediate economic hardship, over half of respondents (56%) said this was a challenge for their young people. While this has fallen slightly from our September 2022 Pulse, when 68% saw this as an issue, it remains the most common concern among group leaders.

Concerns around **mental health** (40%) and **poverty/inequality** (31%), which covers long-term socio-economic deprivation (including cost-of-living impact), remain the next most commonly cited challenges.

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



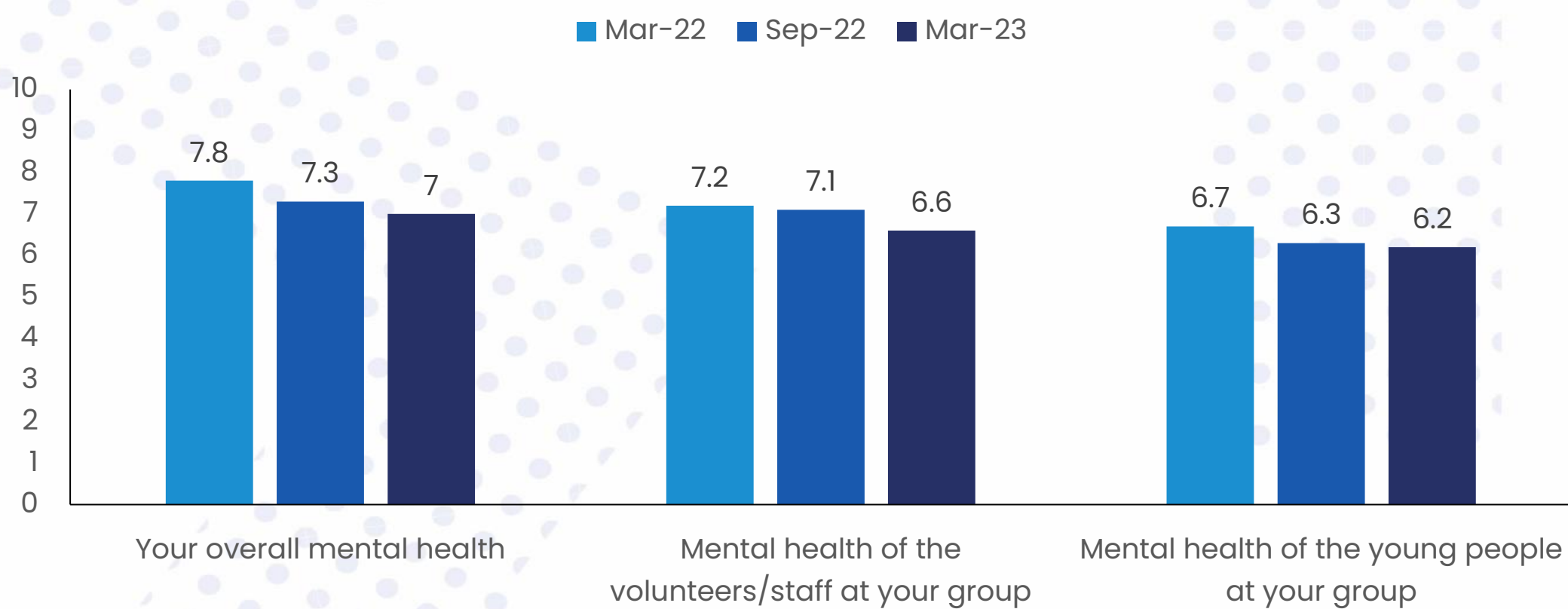
- 'Relevant, worthwhile activities at an acceptable price. They must also be local and inclusive. Being inactive physically and socially leaves young people isolated and liable to unhealthy thoughts and feelings. Talking and engaging with others is essential.' – survey respondent
- 'Cost of living, our members don't have money for training which means we have no money to pay for pitch hire and referee costs. A number of our players are thinking of not playing next year as they are struggling.' – survey respondent
- 'Poor mental health due to lack of confidence in things like school, employment opportunities, etc.' – 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) and their volunteers/staff (6.6). Scores for young people's mental health have steadily declined over the past year.

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

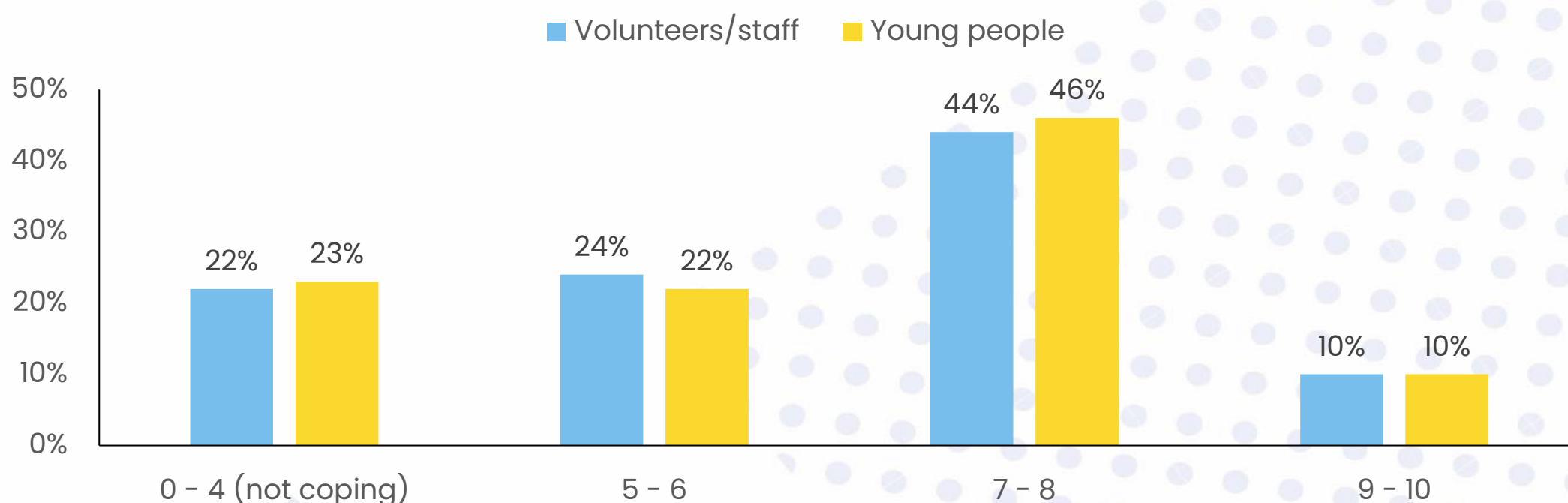


Capacity to support mental health

More than half of groups (54%) 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 quarter are only just about coping (5–6, out of 10) and a similar number of respondents said they are not coping with supporting mental health at their group. 22% scored below 5 in supporting their staff/volunteers, with 23% 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)

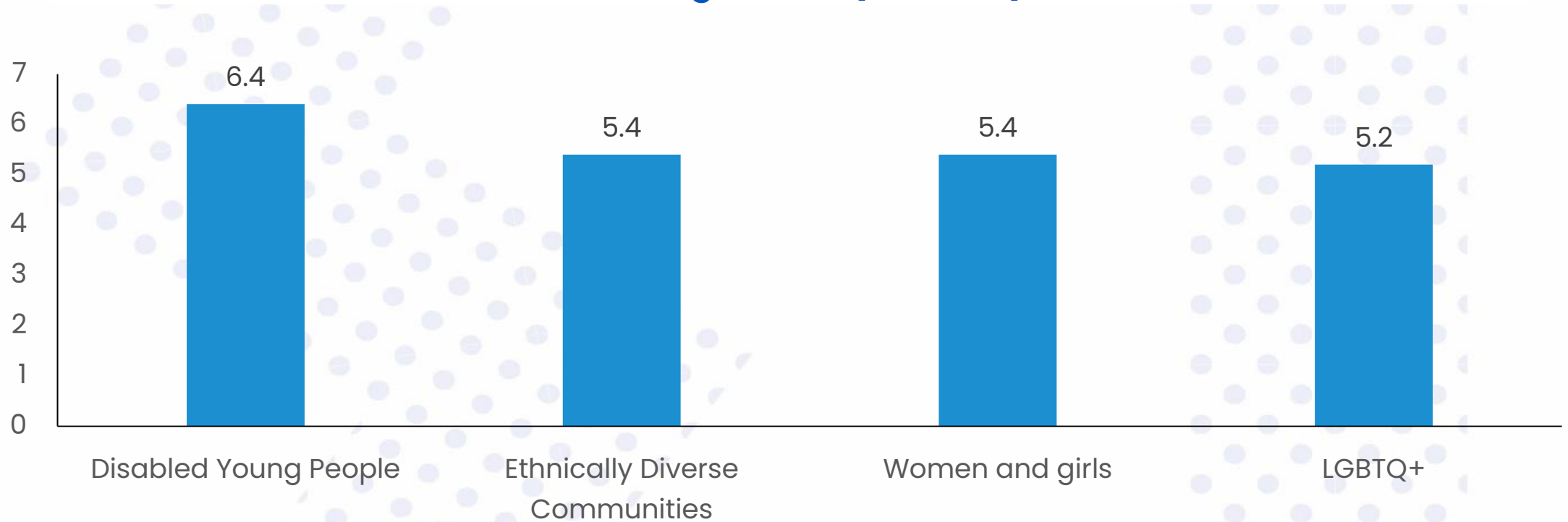


Tackling inequalities

The significance of inequalities experienced in communities

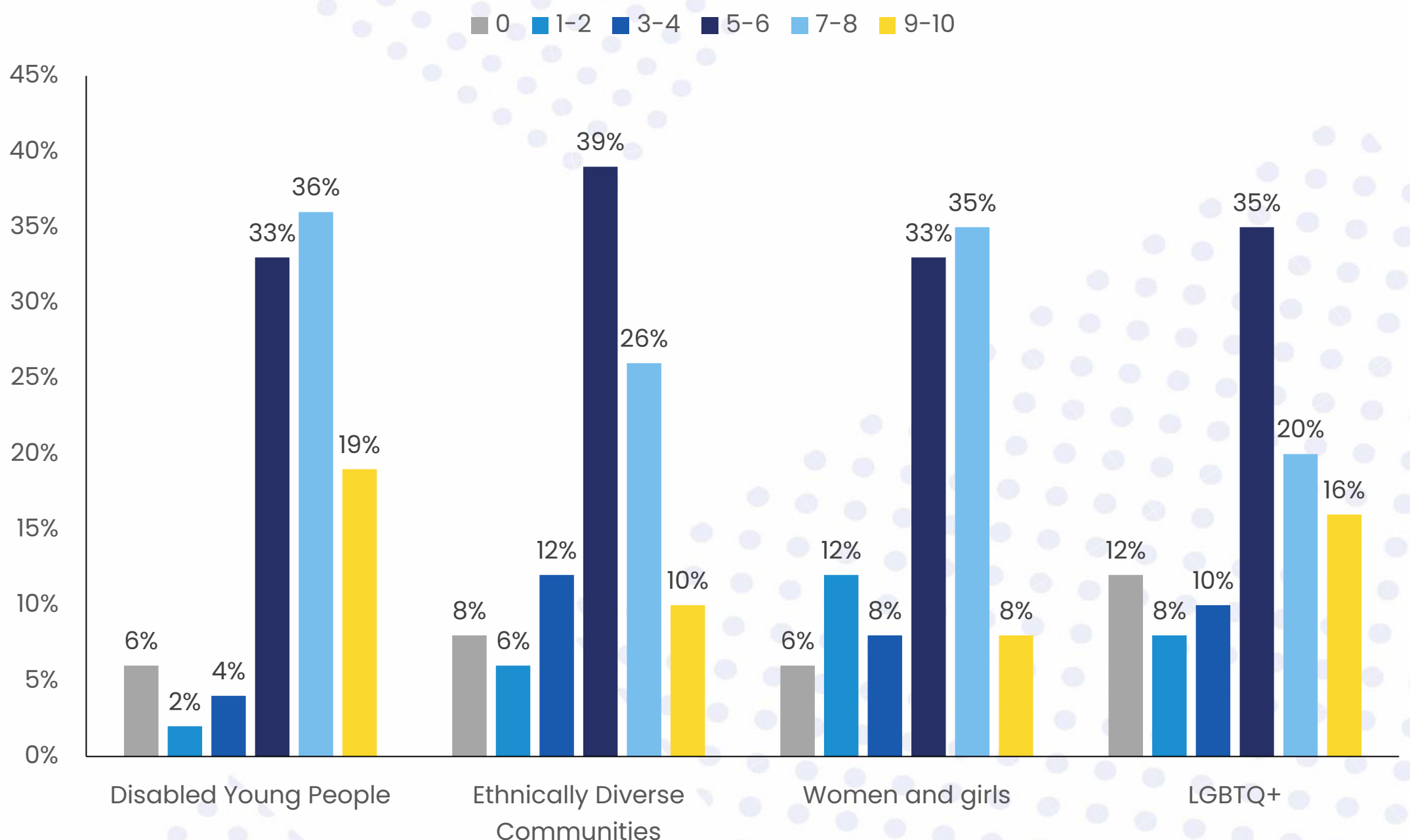
Group leaders identified **inequalities experienced by Disabled Young People** within their communities as most significant, with an average score of 6.4 (out of 10).

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



Looking at the spread of scores on significance, **more respondents told us the most acute inequality relates to Disabled Young People** than other inequalities: 19% scored it as either 9 or 10.

Significance of inequalities within groups' communities – score distribution

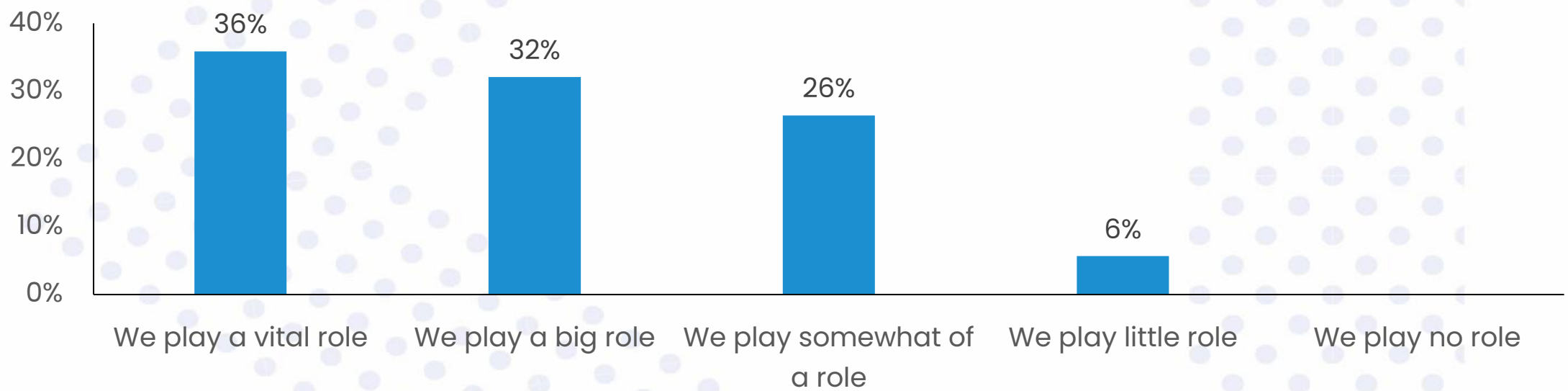


Connecting communities

Building communities

Around two-thirds of groups say **they play a significant role (vital or big) in building a stronger sense of community** in their local area (68%).

Building a stronger sense of community in groups' local area



Groups' relationships to other organisations

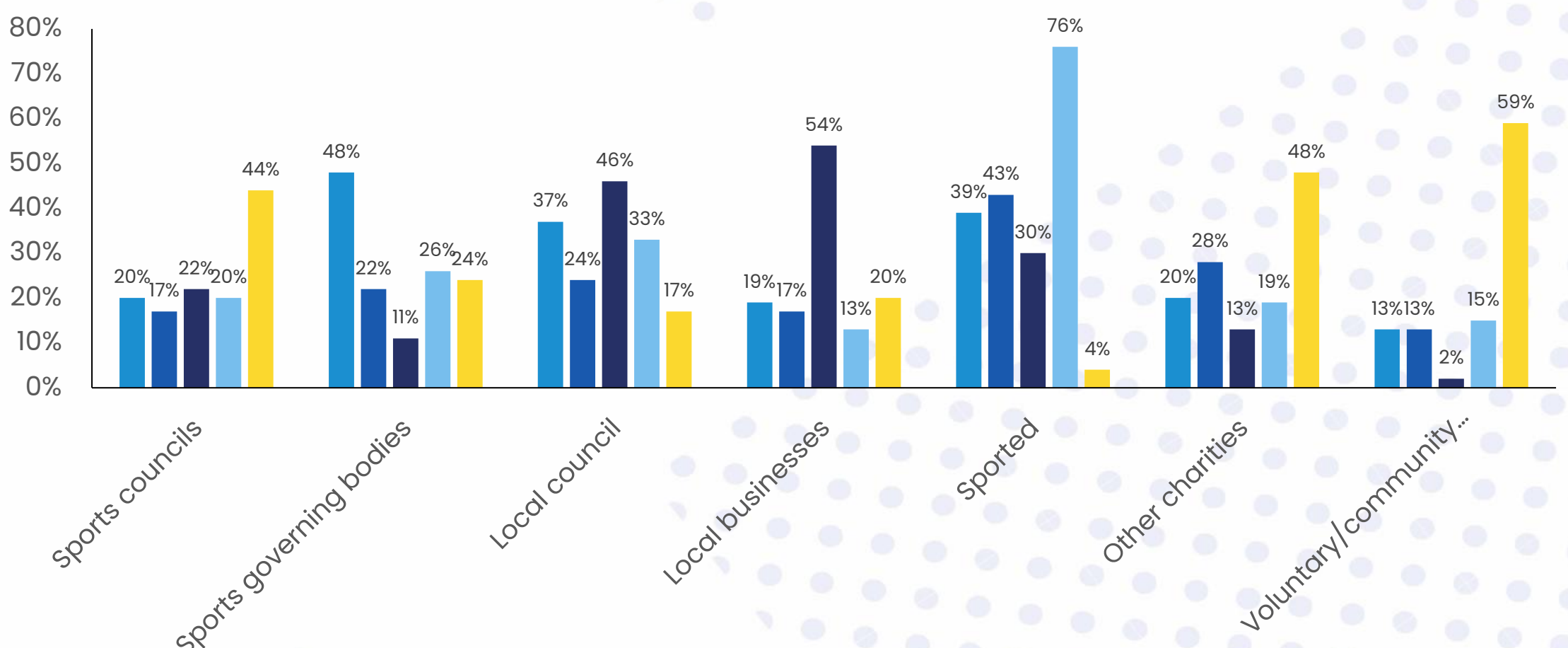
Nearly half of groups told us that **they don't work with sports councils** (44%), while sports governing bodies are most likely to support groups **in helping deliver activities** (48%).

Nearly half of respondents **are funded by their local council** (46%). Three-quarters of respondents reported **Sported helps them get funding** (76%).

Nearly half of groups **don't work with other charities** (48%), and over half of respondents **don't work with voluntary/community sector umbrella organisations** (59%).

Relationships with other organisations

Legend: ■ Help us deliver activity ■ Help us be more sustainable ■ Fund us ■ Help us get funding ■ We don't work with them



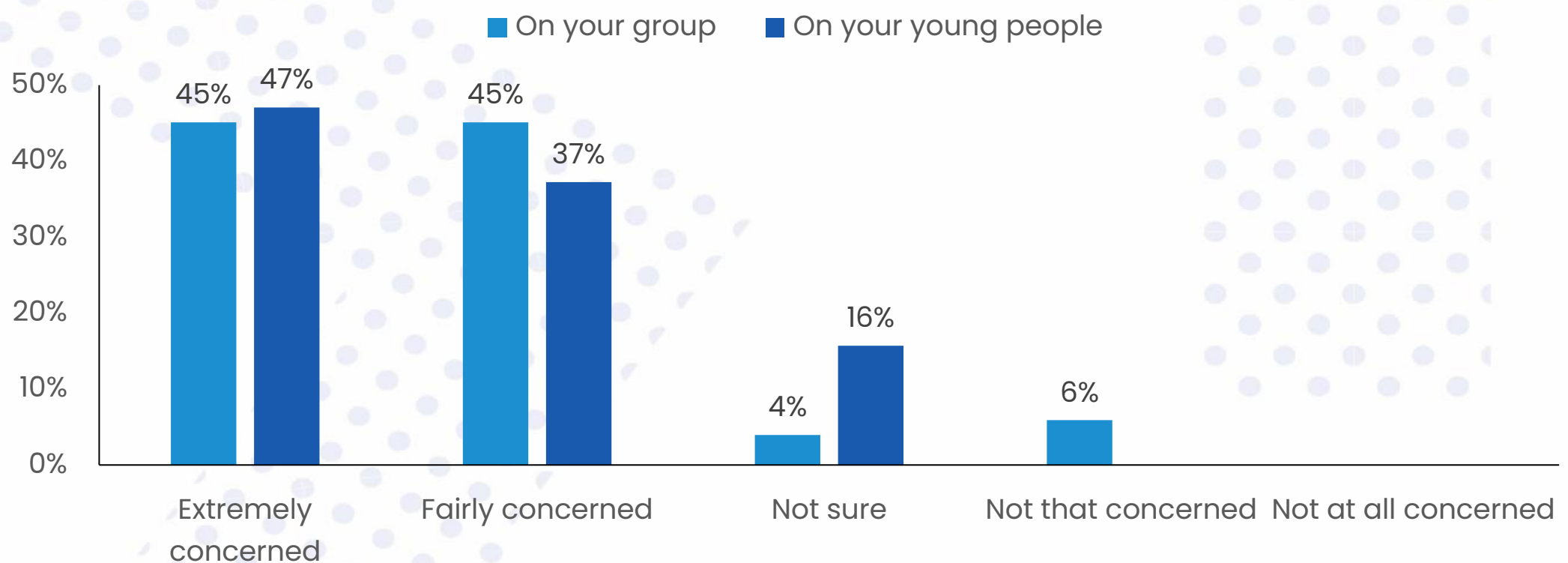
Cost-of-living increases

Impact on groups and their young people

There are high levels of concern about the impact of cost-of-living increases on groups and their young people. 90% of leaders are either extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group, with 84% concerned for their young people.

This level of concern is similar to our September 2022 Pulse, where 86% of respondents were concerned about the impact on their group and 92% for their young people.

Concern about the impact of cost-of-living increases

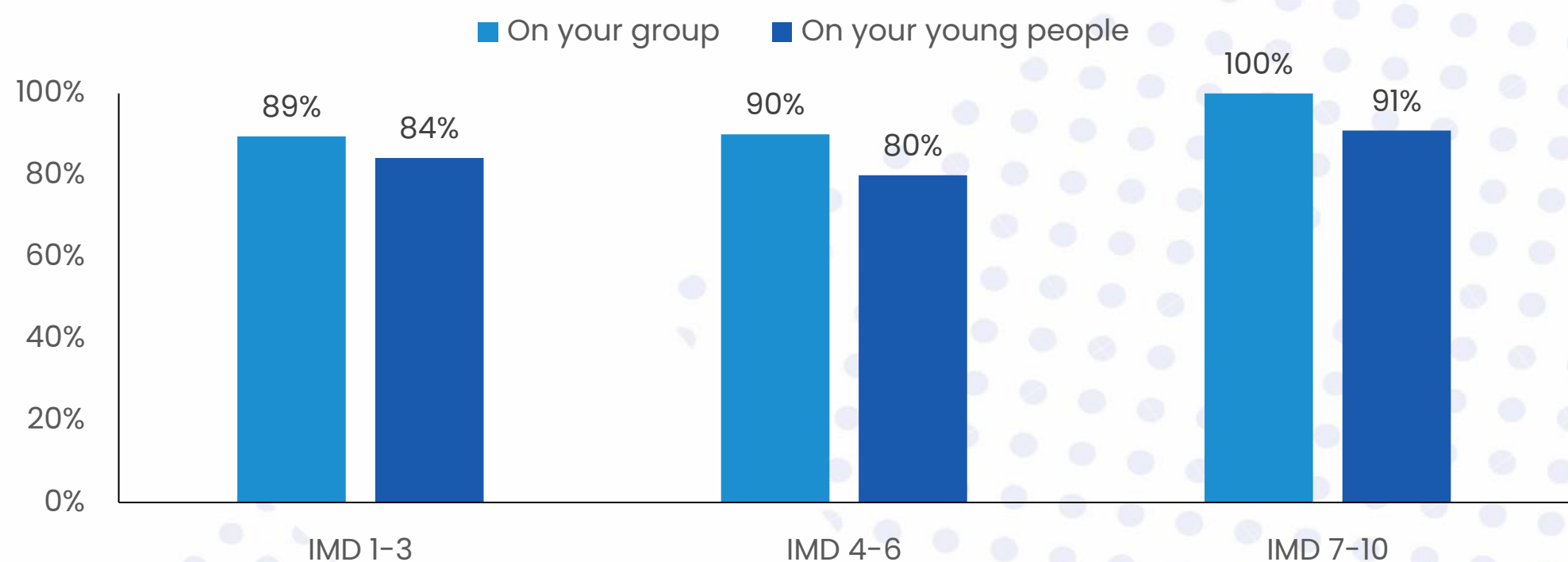


Impact on groups and their young people by IMD

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 highest 40% areas of multiple deprivation.

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

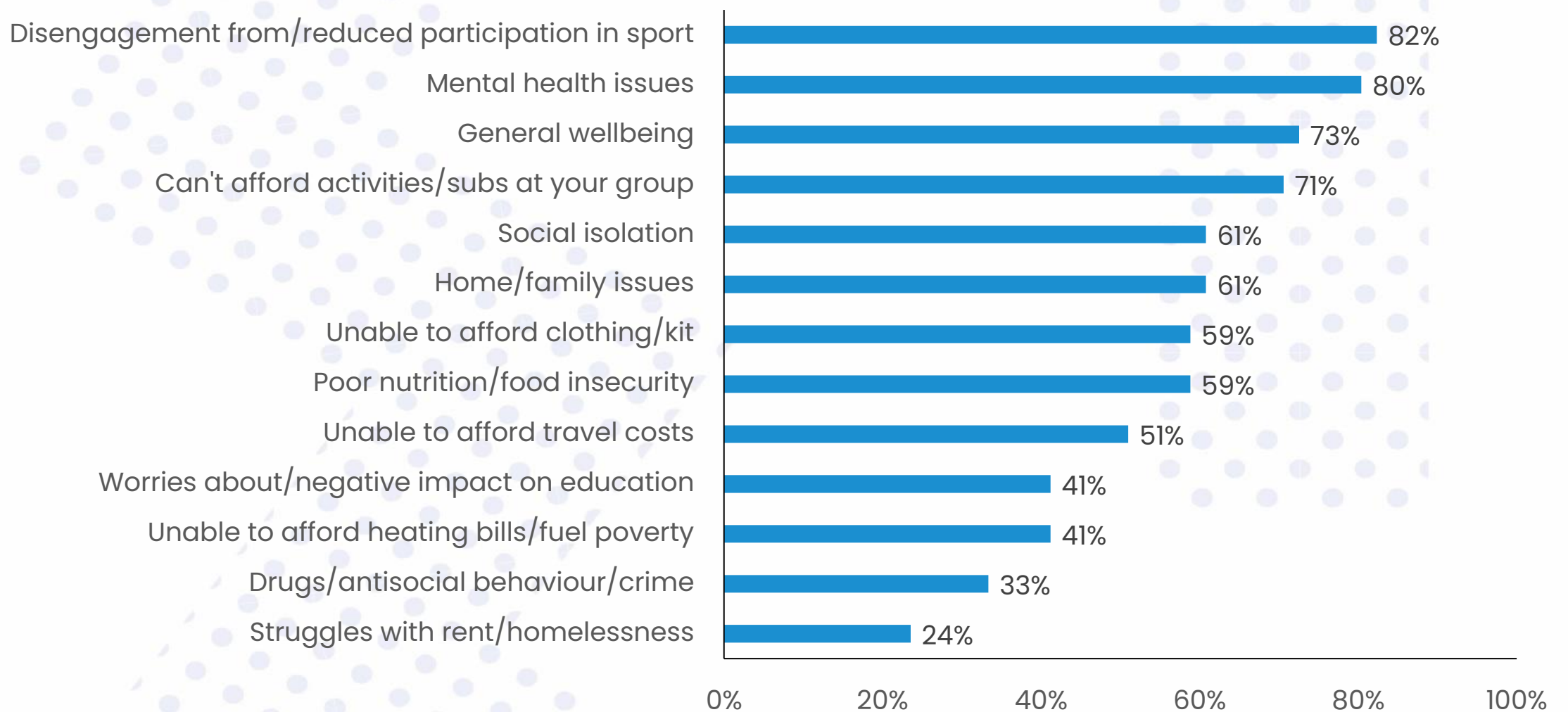


Cost-of-living increases

Impact on young people

Asked to outline concerns about cost-of-living increases on their young people, group leaders identified **disengagement/reduced participation in sport** as their most common concern (82%). Over three-quarters told us they feared for young people's **mental health** (80%).

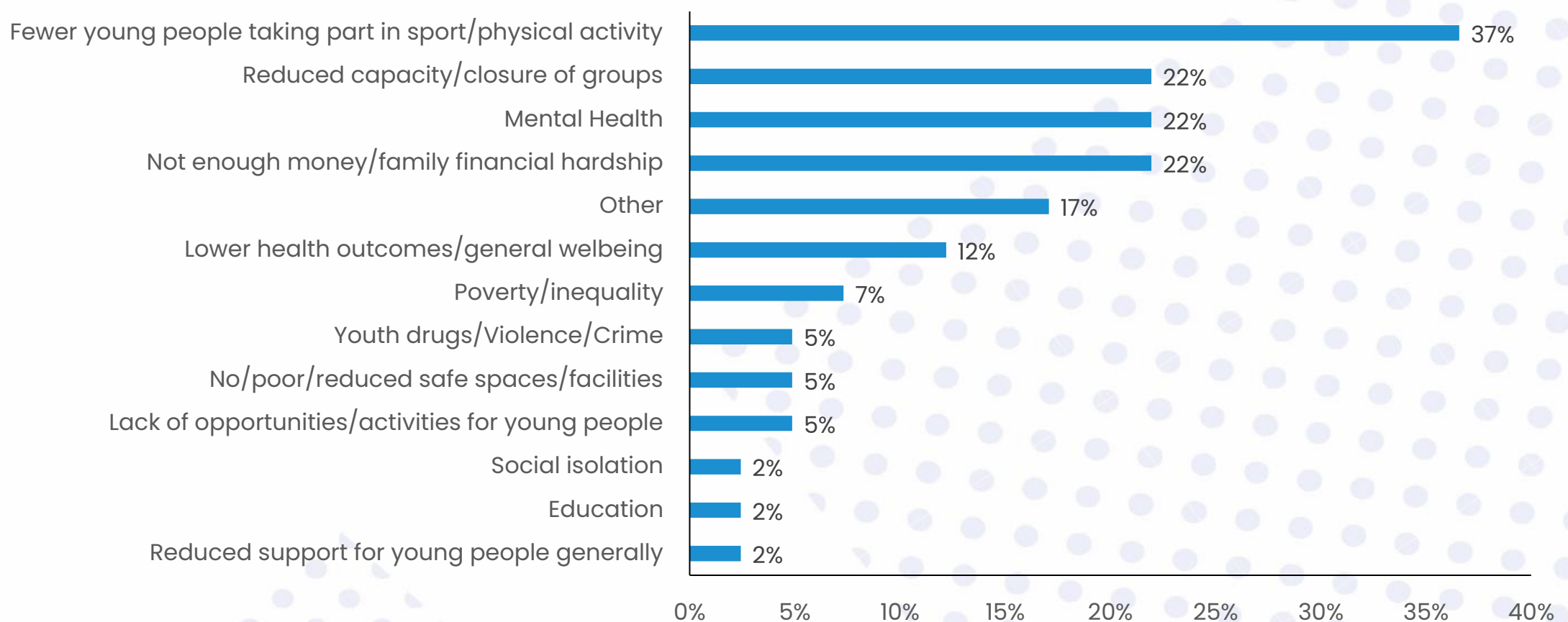
Impact on young people



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 (37%). Nearly a quarter said they believed **groups would have reduced capacity/have to close**, that there would be negative long-term effects for **mental health**, and that families would **not have enough money/face financial hardship** (22% each).

Impact on communities in the longer-term



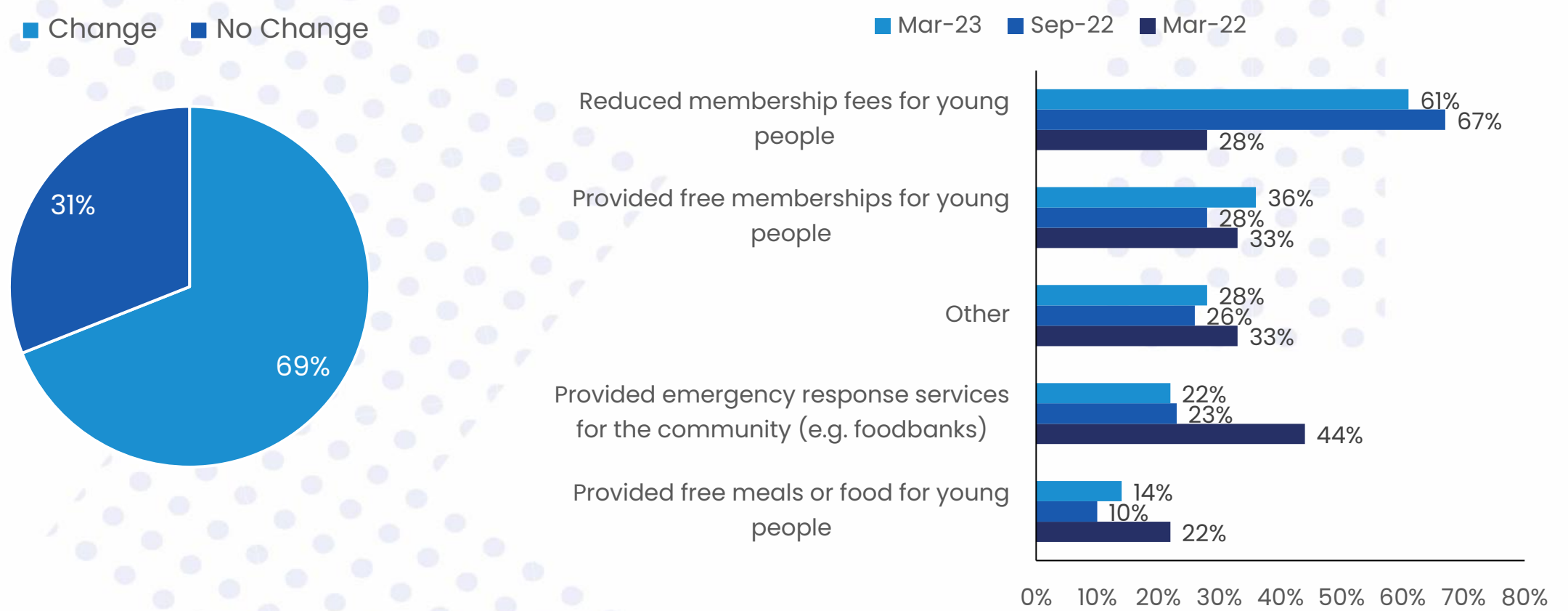
Cost-of-living increases

Groups' responses to the increases

Over two-thirds (69%) have responded to cost-of-living increases by making a change to their operation. This is almost identical to our September Pulse, when 68% of respondents indicated they'd made a change.

The most frequently made change has been to **reduce membership fees for their young people** (61%). Around a third have also **provided free memberships for their young people** (36%). These were also the most common responses in September.

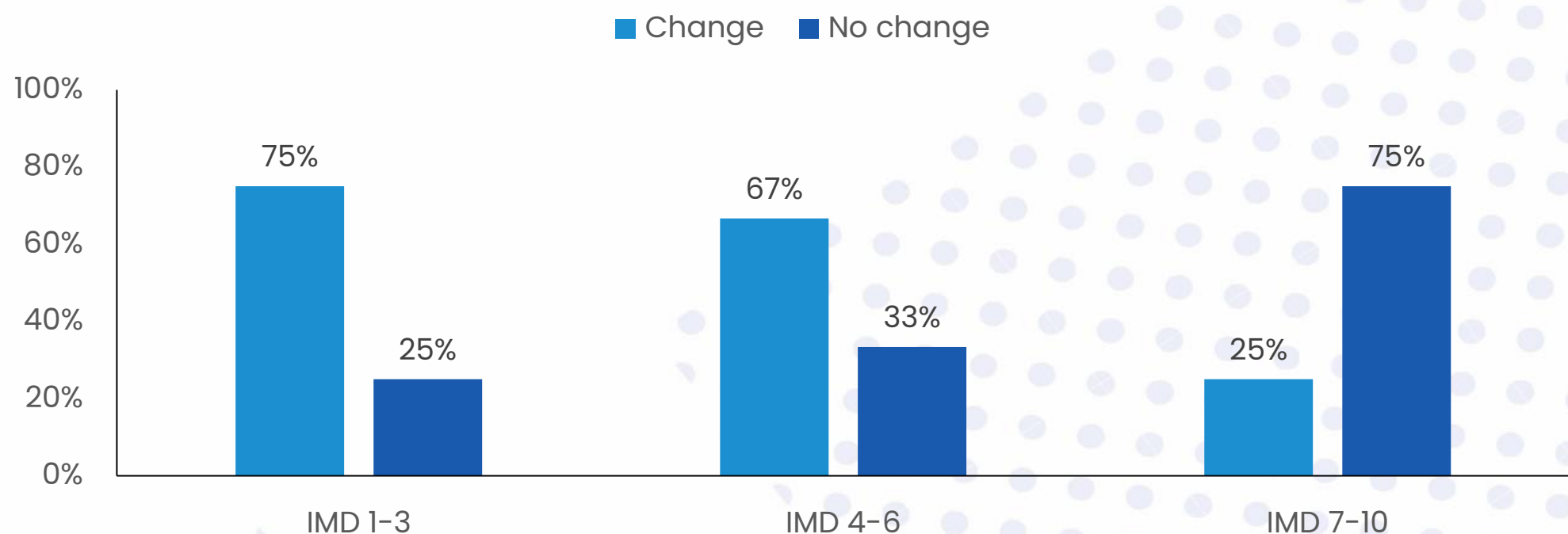
Changes made in response to cost-of-living increases



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 areas of greater relative 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 (57%)**, a **significant rise in utility bills (57%)**, and a **reduction in financial support from external funding streams (41%)**.

More than half of groups expect to experience **increases in the cost of Public Liability insurance (54%)** over the next six months. Nearly half expect a **reduction in financial support from external funding streams (46%)**, and over a third expect the **closure (or significant threat of) of the facilities they use (37%)**.

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

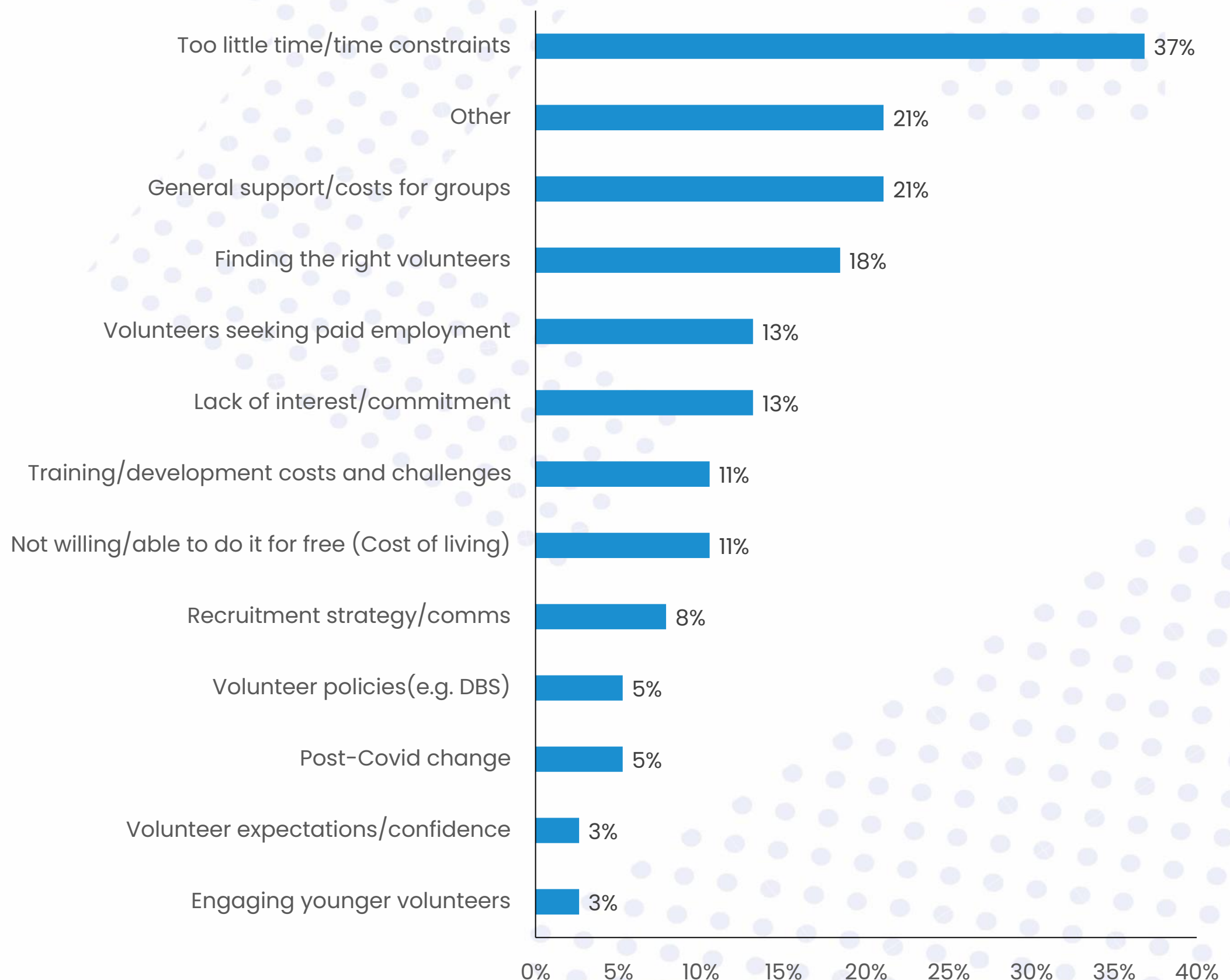
Recruiting/retaining volunteers

The most commonly cited challenges around volunteer recruitment/retention are volunteers **not having enough time** (37%) and **general administrative/financial challenges**, such as travel expenses and supporting/managing volunteers (21%).

Volunteers are also struggling **to find enough/the right volunteers**, particularly where they may need existing experience or qualifications (18%).

Respondents also identified challenges with **volunteers seeking paid employment** (13%) and a **lack of interest/commitment to the roles** (13%).

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

