

**Community
Pulse** 

**October 2023
Wales**



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.

38
responses

This report is based on **38 responses**, representing just under a quarter of Sported groups in Wales, between **27 September – 9 October 2023**. These groups reach around 2,500 young people in Wales.

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.



Key findings

Cost of Living Crisis continues to bite:

- **Concern about the impact of cost-of-living pressures continues to be very high**, with 89% of respondents either extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group.
- Half of groups have experienced a **reduction in financial support from external funding streams** over the past six months and a similar number have had to **use reserves/faced a reduction in budget surplus**.
- A large majority of groups said their group has **made a change in response to cost-of-living increases; 72% have subsidised equipment and/or kit** for their young people and **half have reduced membership fees and/or provided free memberships**.
- **Groups' top priority over the next six months is securing funding.**
- Groups are expecting **a significant increase in fees for using a facility** (39%) and/or the **use of their reserves/a reduction in budget surplus** (32%) in the next six months.
- **95% are concerned (extremely or fairly) about the rising cost of living's impact on their young people**, with a third saying young people have disengaged or reduced participation in sport.
- Two-thirds of group leaders report that **young people have seen a reduction in disposable income** meaning they are less able to afford subs, travel costs, clothing or kit.
- 55% of group leaders have reported that their **young people have experienced reduced mental wellbeing** as a result of cost-of-living increases.
- Nearly half of group leaders told us they are **only just about coping** in their capacity to support the mental health of their staff and volunteers, with a third saying the same for supporting their young people.

Key findings

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

- On average, groups in Wales who responded to Pulse are engaging around 70 young people, with 79% of these groups supporting young people from historically underserved communities and 50% located in the highest three areas of multiple deprivation (IMD 1-3).
- **Engaging new participants** continues to remain a top priority for groups.
- Three-quarters of groups say they **get inactive young people active** in their communities (79%), 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).
- Group leaders report 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, and a variety of different activities.
- Around half of leaders agree (definitely or tend to) that **they personally can influence decisions affecting their local area** (49%).
- **Confidence in organisational survival is high, with 95% of groups confident (extremely or fairly) in their group's survival over the next six months.** This is higher when compared to the start of the UK's Covid lockdowns in spring 2020, when nearly a quarter of groups were not sure or not confident in surviving for the next six months. Currently, confidence levels are similar to those seen at the start of the cost-of-living crisis in autumn 2021.

But we must support these vital groups:

- 97% of our groups want government to encourage funders to make funding applications easier and more accessible.
- Around half want government support in delivering health initiatives through their group and in making school facilities more available and more affordable.
- Groups would like to see corporates make more funding available, through more simplified processes, and for a wider variety of purposes (for example, sustainability and development funding, or simply for unrestricted purposes).
- Groups have varying relationships with other organisations within the ecosystem. 76% are connected to their National Governing Body for sport. A third of groups don't work with their Sports Council and half have no connection to leisure trusts or voluntary/community sector umbrella organisations. Groups are most likely to get funding from local businesses, and support with securing funding and sustainability from Sported.

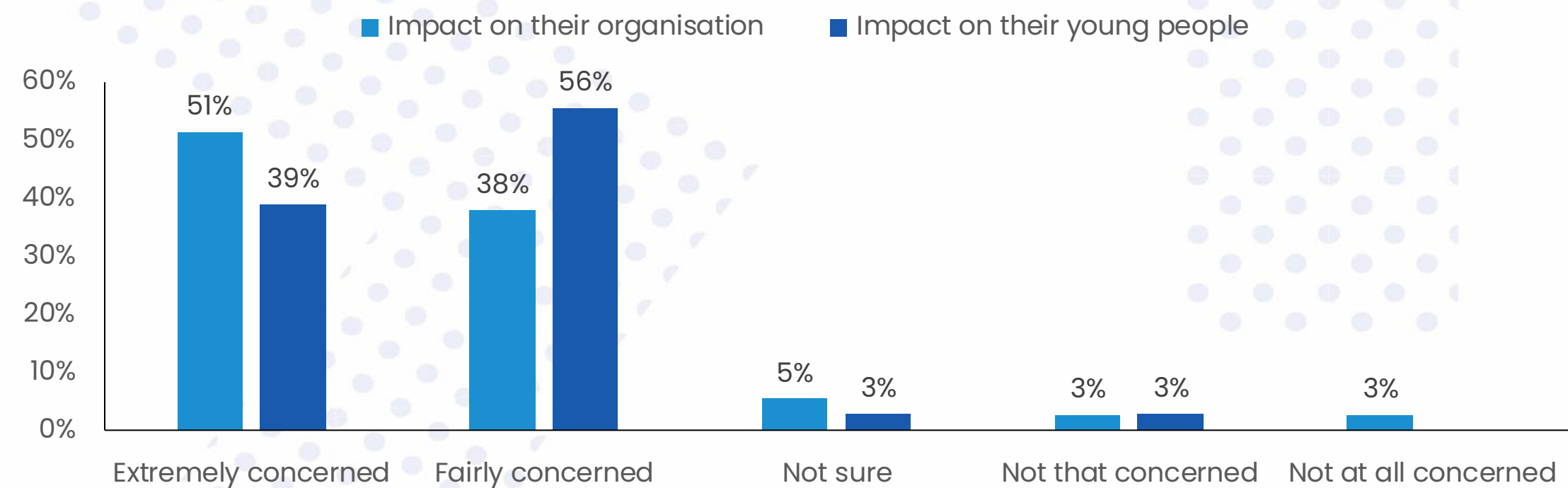
Cost-of-living increases

Impact on groups and their young people

Concern around the impact of cost-of-living increases on groups and their young people remains high. 89% are either extremely or fairly concerned about the impact on their group, with 95% concerned for their young people.

Levels of concerns are similar to six months ago, when 93% of respondents were concerned about the impact on their group and 90% for their young people.

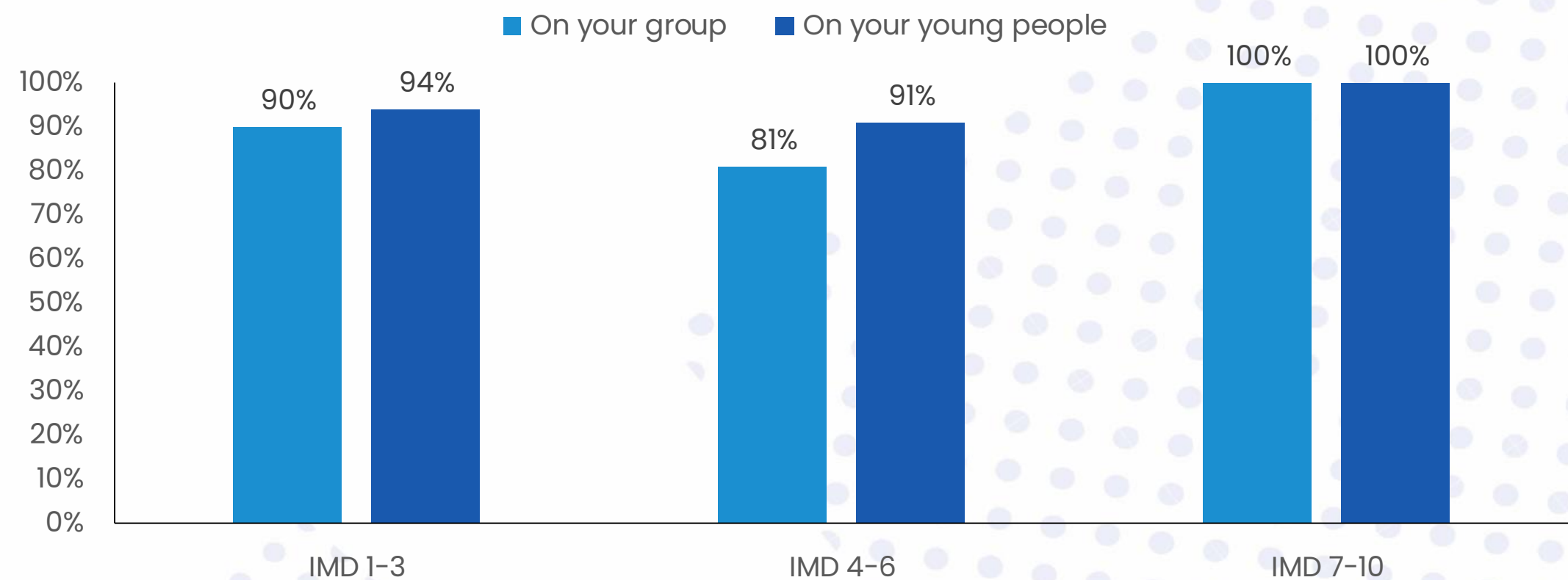
Concern about the impact of cost-of-living increases



Impact on groups and their young people by IMD

High levels of concern about the impact of cost-of-living increases on groups **are found across all indices of multiple deprivation.**

Groups who are extremely/fairly concerned about the impact of cost-of-living increases by IMD (1-10)



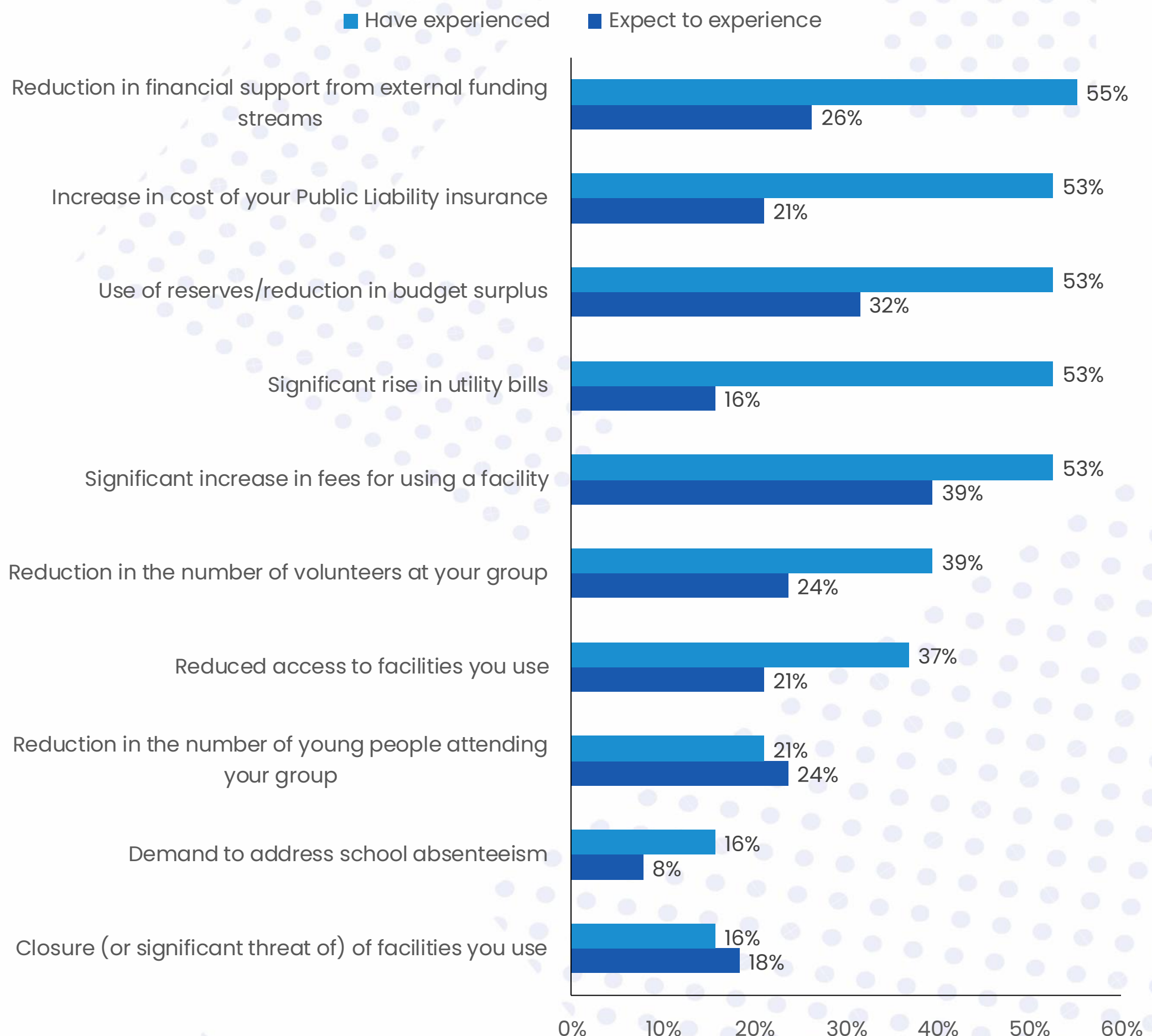
Cost-of-living increases

Impact of cost-of-living increases for groups

The most common experience for groups over the last six months has been a reduction in financial support from external funding streams (55%). Half of groups have seen an increase in the cost of their Public Liability Insurance (53%), used their reserves/had a reduced budget surplus (53%), experienced a significant increase in utility bills (53%), and/or a significant increase in fees for using a facility (53%).

Looking ahead to the next six months, over a third of groups expect to experience a significant increase in fees for using a facility (39%). A third of groups are predicting they'll have to use their reserves/face a reduction in their budget surplus (32%).

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



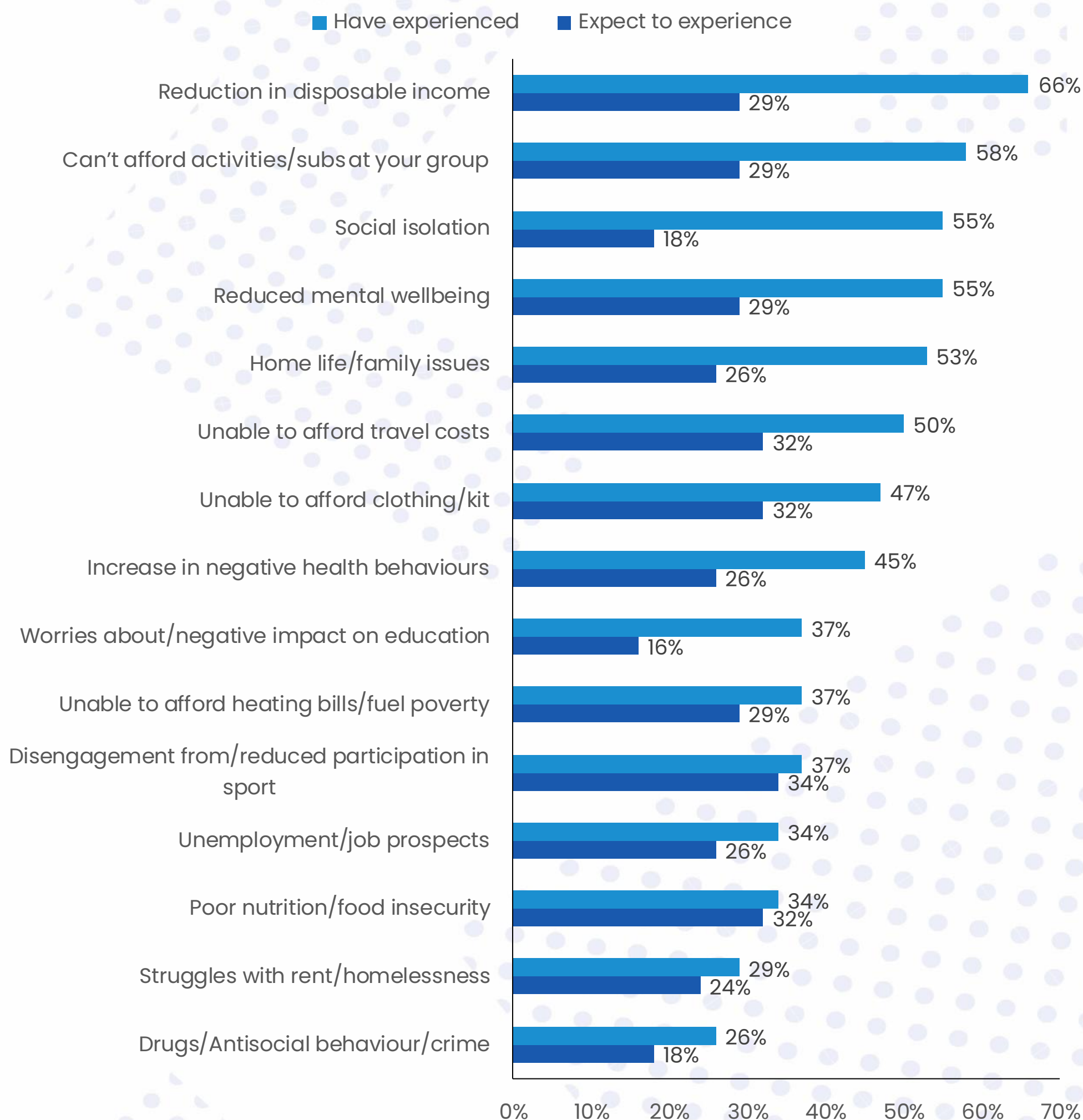
Cost-of-living increases

Impact of cost-of-living increases for young people

Group leaders report that young people are most likely to have experienced a reduction in disposable income over the past six months because of cost-of-living increases (66%). Around half of leaders told us their young people haven't been able to afford activities/subs at their groups (58%), have been socially isolated (55%), and/or faced reduced mental wellbeing (55%) as a result of cost-of-living increases.

Looking ahead to the next six months, a third of leaders told us that young are likely to disengage/reduce their participation in sport (34%).

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



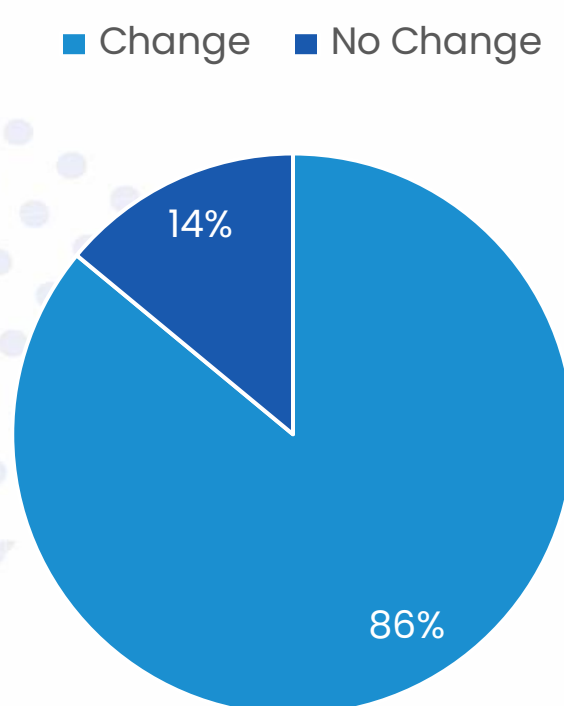
Cost-of-living increases

Groups' responses to the increases

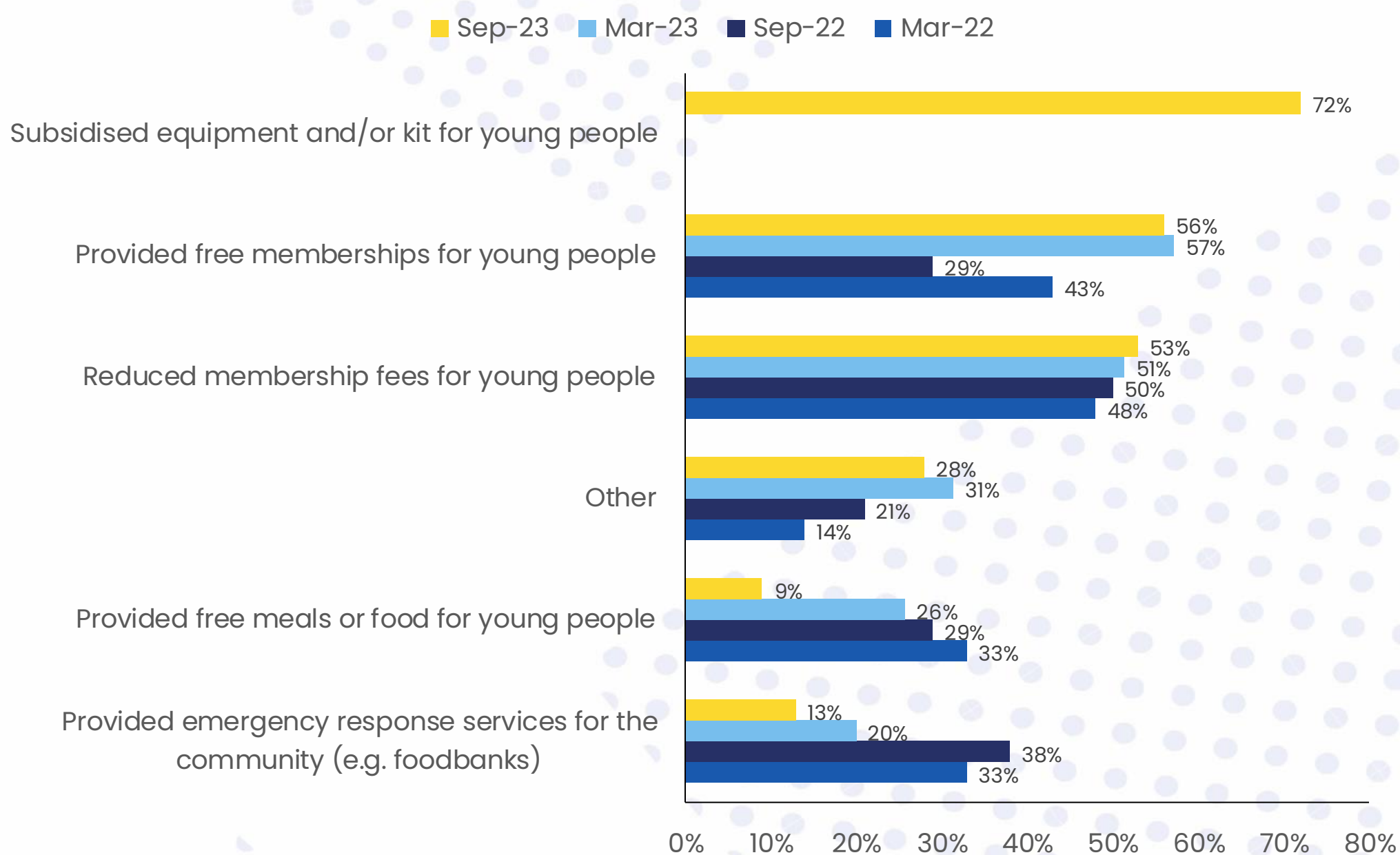
A substantial majority of groups have responded to cost-of-living increases by making a change to their operation (86%). This is an increase from March, when 76% of respondents indicated they'd made a change.

The most common change has been to subsidise equipment/kit for their participants (72%), with more than half providing free memberships or reducing fees for their young people. This illustrates that although groups are under financial pressure, they are removing cost-related barriers from their participants to enable them to still attend.

Proportion of groups making a change in response to cost-of-living increases



Changes made in response to cost-of-living increases



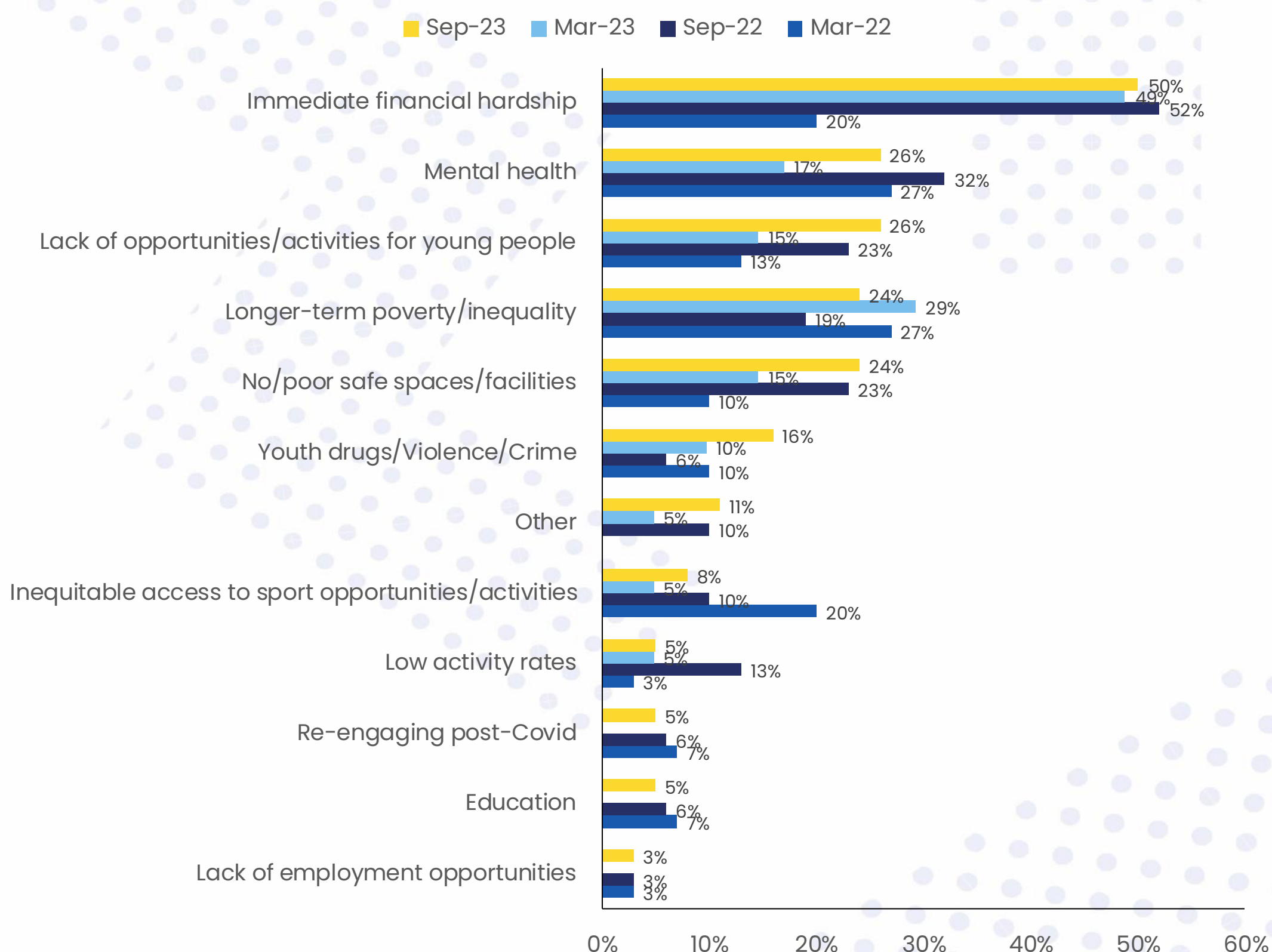
Challenges for young people

Key issues facing young people in their communities

Immediate financial hardship remains the most reported challenge for young people by group leaders. Referring to answers centred on the cost-of-living crisis and current economic hardship, half of respondents (50%) said this was a challenge for their young people. It has been the most cited challenge for young people for the past year now.

Challenges around young people's mental health have grown in the past six months, with this now rating as the second most reported concern. There has also been a rise in the number of leaders noting a lack of opportunities/activities for young people and no or poor safe spaces/facilities.

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



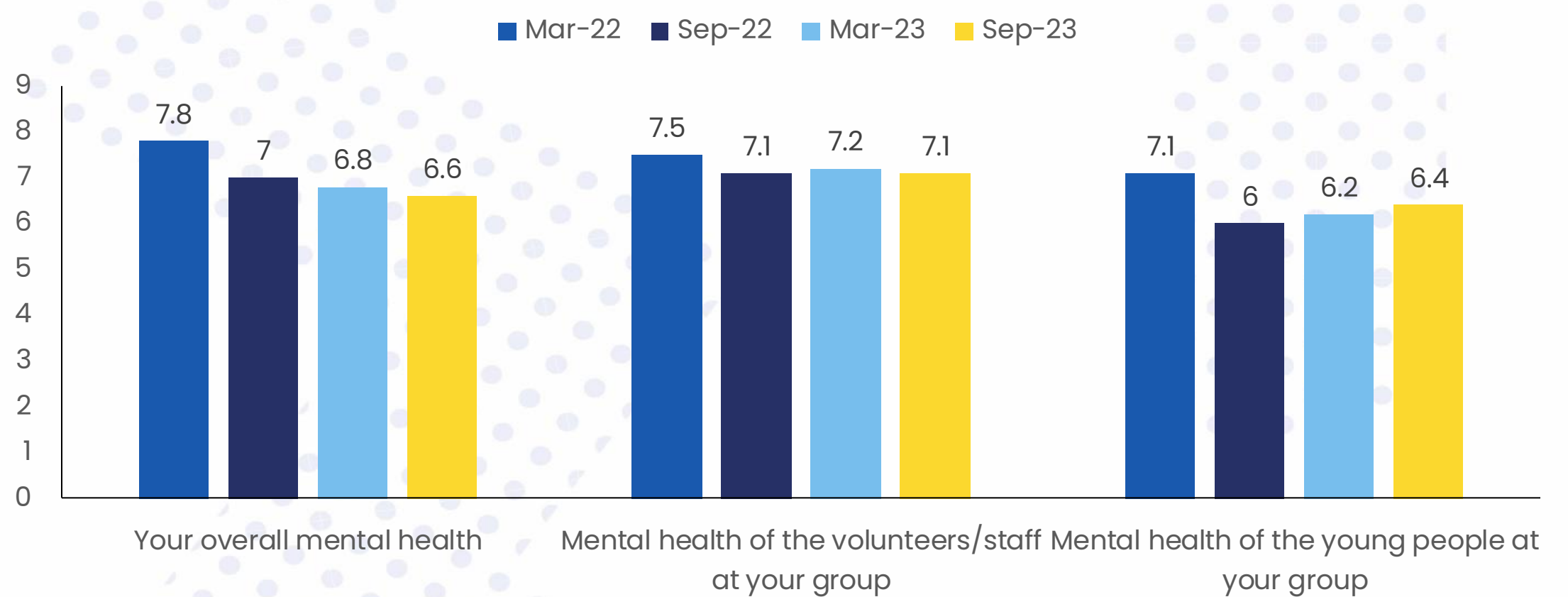
- 'Difficulty accessing positive health activities, financial barriers, bullying and lack of aspirations, and seeing employment opportunities locally.' – survey respondent
- 'Cost-of-living: transport and venue costs affecting attending training and match attendances.' – survey respondent
- 'Family hardship due to the cost-of-living crisis. Lack of money to spend on clubs/activities. Increased sedentary lifestyle. Low levels of physical activity. Low levels of social mixing.' – survey respondent

Mental health

Leaders, staff/volunteers, and young people

Group leaders reported slightly reduced scores for their mental health and that of their volunteers/staff compared to six months ago. They told us their young people’s mental health has improved slightly since March.

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

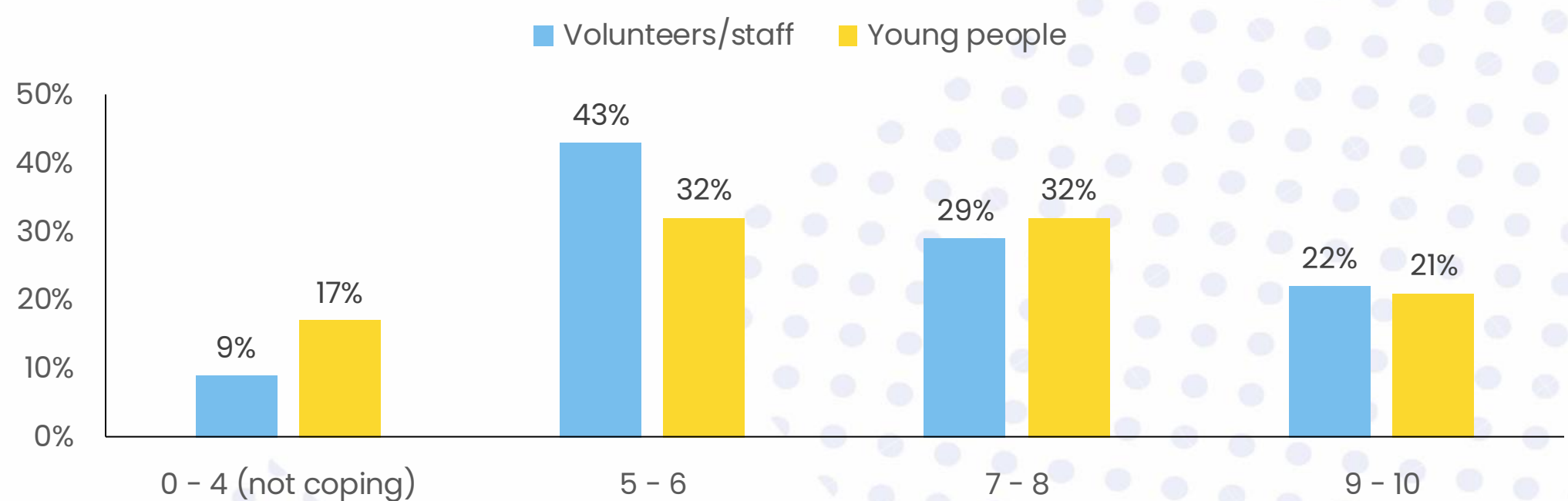


Capacity to support mental health

Half of groups (51%) 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 scored 7 or above for capacity to support their young people’s mental health (53%).

Nearly half are only just about coping (5–6, out of 10) in supporting their staff/volunteers, with a third saying the same for supporting their young people. Nearly one-in-five leaders said they’re currently not coping in terms of capacity in supporting their young people’s wellbeing.

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

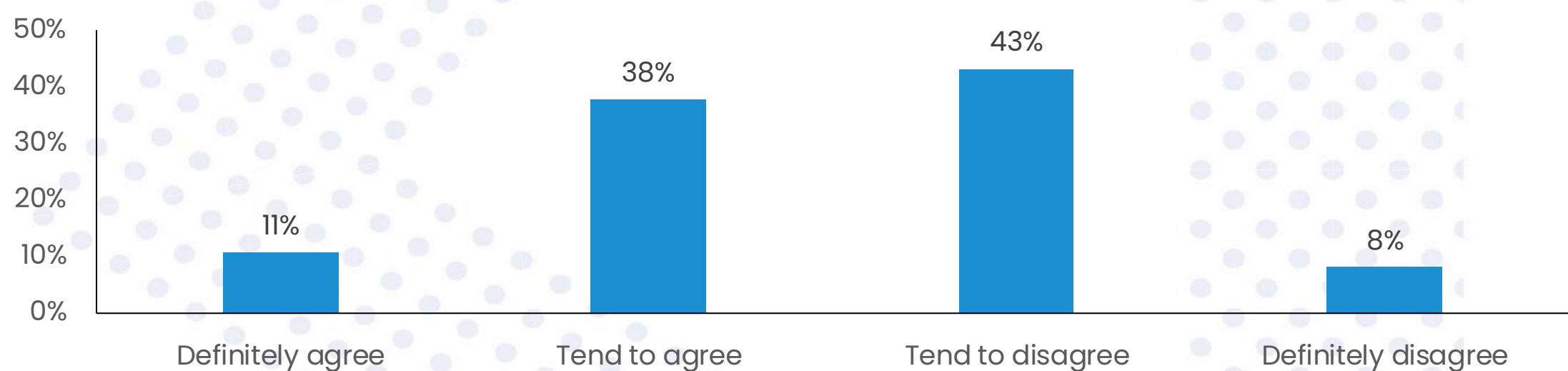


Connecting communities

Influencing the local area

Group leaders' opinion on whether they can personally influence decisions affecting their local area was mixed, with half agreeing and half disagreeing with this statement.

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

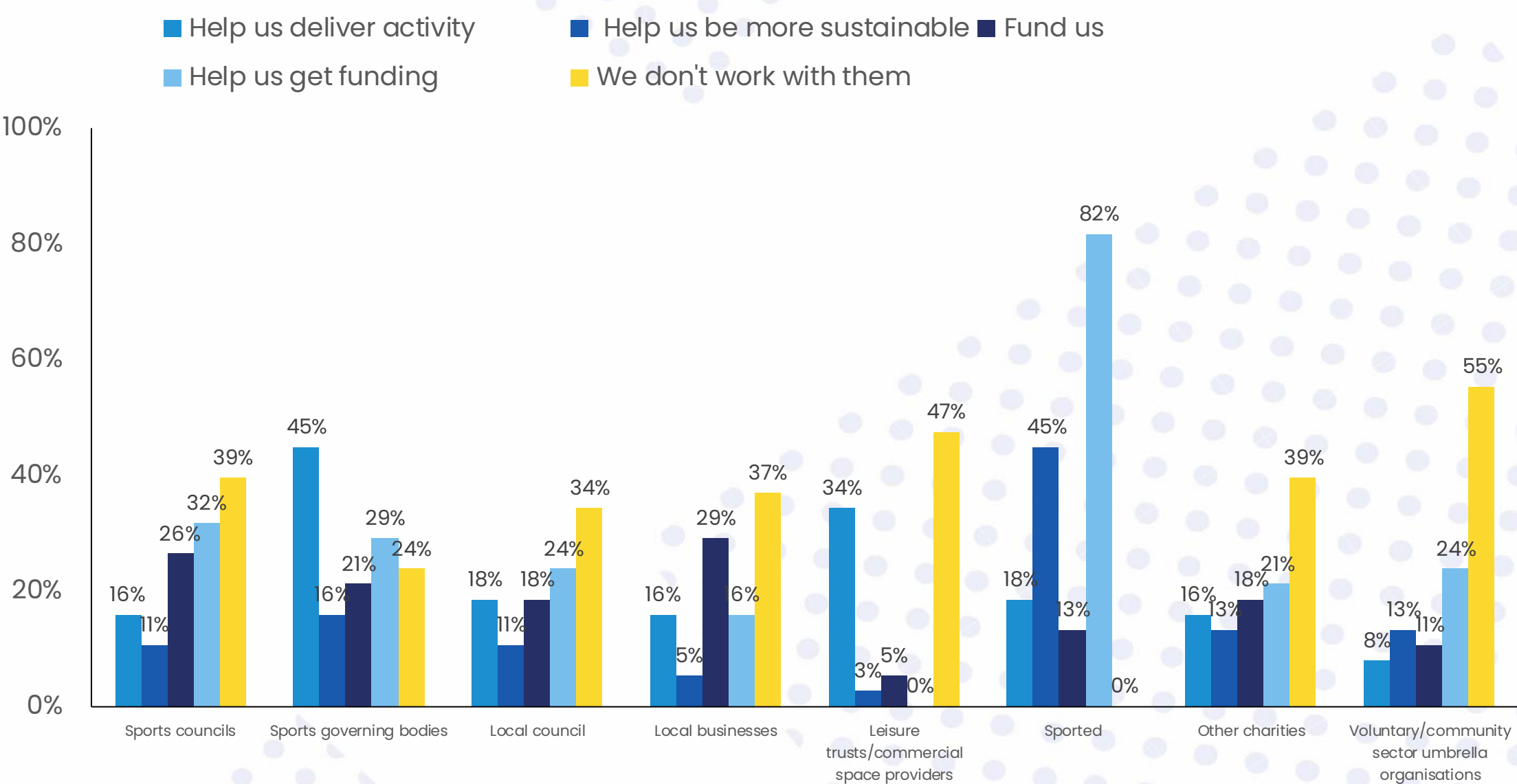


Groups' relationships to other organisations

Our groups have varying relationships with other organisations within the ecosystem. Sports governing bodies are most likely to help groups deliver activities (45%), with Sported supporting nearly half of groups to be more sustainable (45%). Around a third are funded by local businesses (29%) and Sported provides more than three-quarters of groups with support in getting funding (82%). Relationships with other charities are varied, though more than a third don't have a connection to other charities.

Groups emphasised that regular and effective communication are key to successful partnerships with outside organisations. There was also mention of more general collaboration and the need to recognise each other's purpose and efforts

Relationships with other organisations

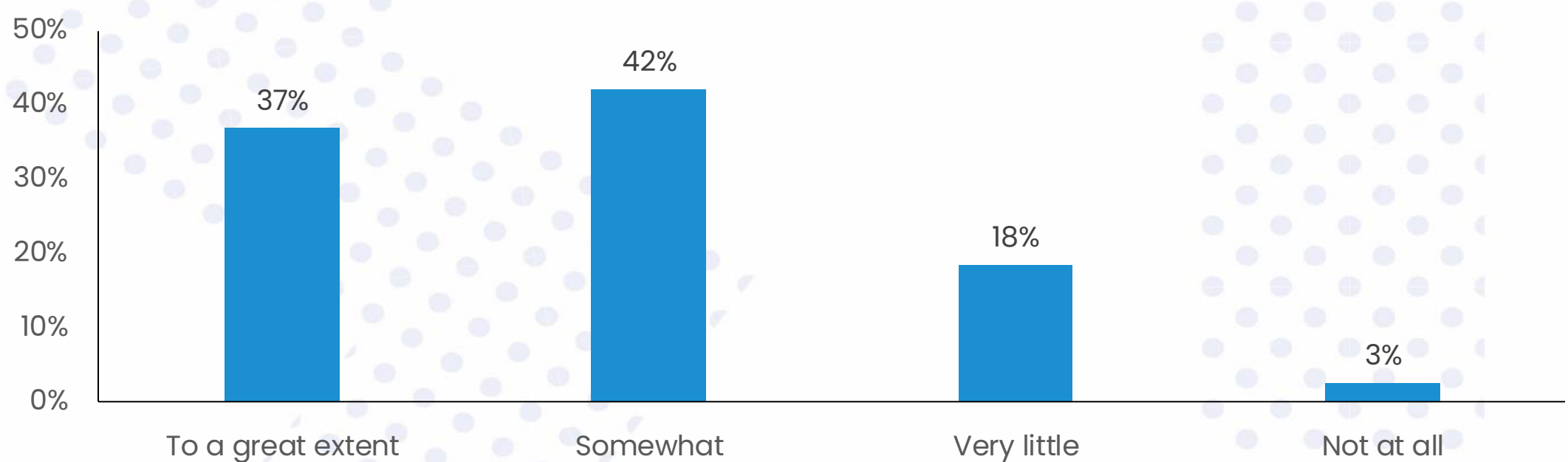


Tackling inequalities

Representation of minoritised groups and the impact on participation

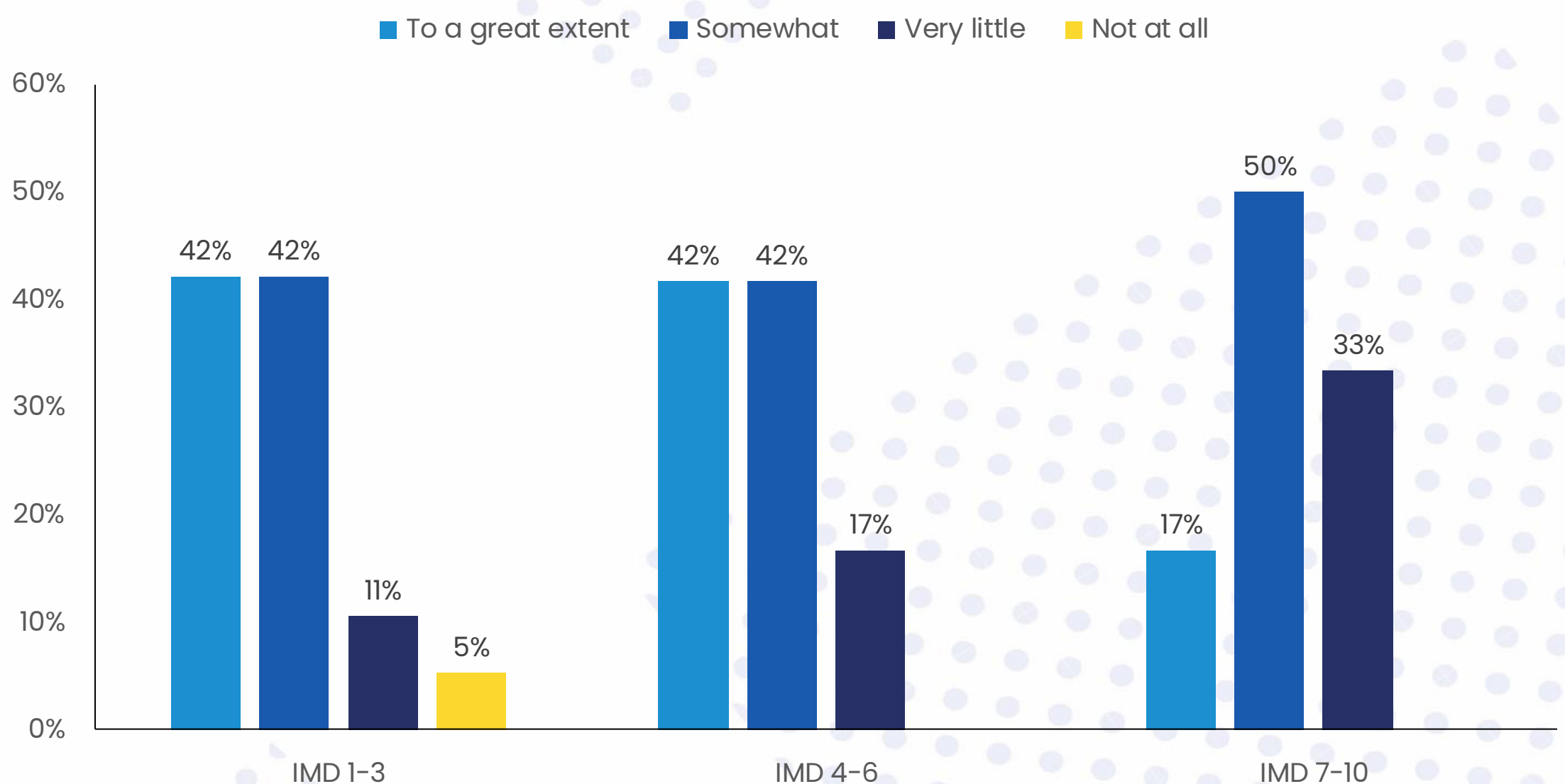
More than three-quarters of group leaders told us that the lack of representation of minoritised groups within sport impacts (to a great extent or somewhat) on young people from their community taking part (79%).

The lack of representation of minoritised groups within sport impacts on young people from leaders' communities taking part



Leaders from groups in areas of higher relative deprivation are more likely to agree that a lack of representation of minoritised groups impacts on young people from their communities taking part in sport and physical activity. 67% agreed (to a great extent or somewhat) when based in areas of lower relative deprivation (Indices of Multiple Deprivation 7-10) compared with 84% who agreed when based in IMD 1-3 and IMD 4-6.

The lack of representation of minoritised groups within sport impacting on young people from leaders' community taking part – breakdown by Indices of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)



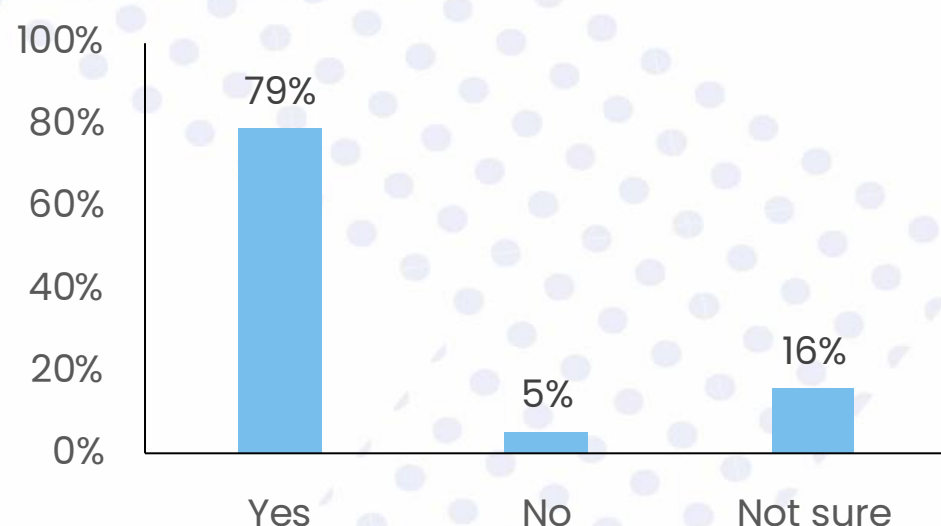
Getting active

Understanding activity levels

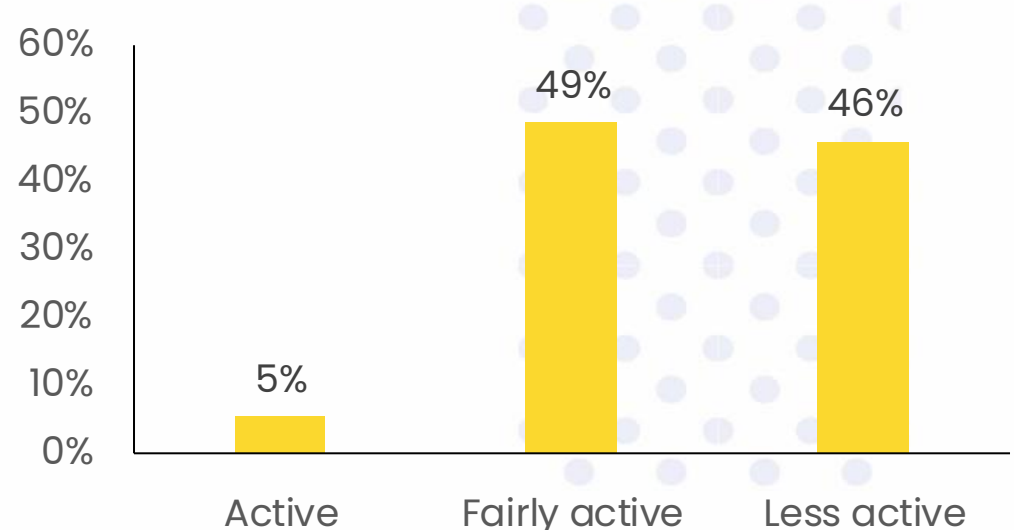
79% of groups told us **they get inactive young people active.**

Half of groups reported young people in their communities are fairly active (an average of 30–59 minutes of physical activity a day), with similar numbers saying young people are less active (less than an average of 30 minutes). 5% said young people in their area are active (an average of 60+ minutes per day).

Do groups get inactive young people active?



How active are young people in groups' communities



What works for getting young people active?

Asked about what works well at their group for getting young people active, leaders identified several key approaches:

- ☐ Affordable activities, either free or at reduced cost, to maximise the opportunities for every young person regardless of their economic situation to take part.
- ☐ Inclusive environments that welcome young people of all backgrounds and abilities.
- ☐ Fun, encouraging, and non-competitive atmospheres, recognising that participation – rather than competition – is key.
- ☐ Engaging young people through lots of different activities where possible: variety and choice helps keep young people interested and lets them take part in the activities they like best.

What are the challenges in getting young people active?

Reporting on the challenges in getting young people active, leaders told us the main issues are:

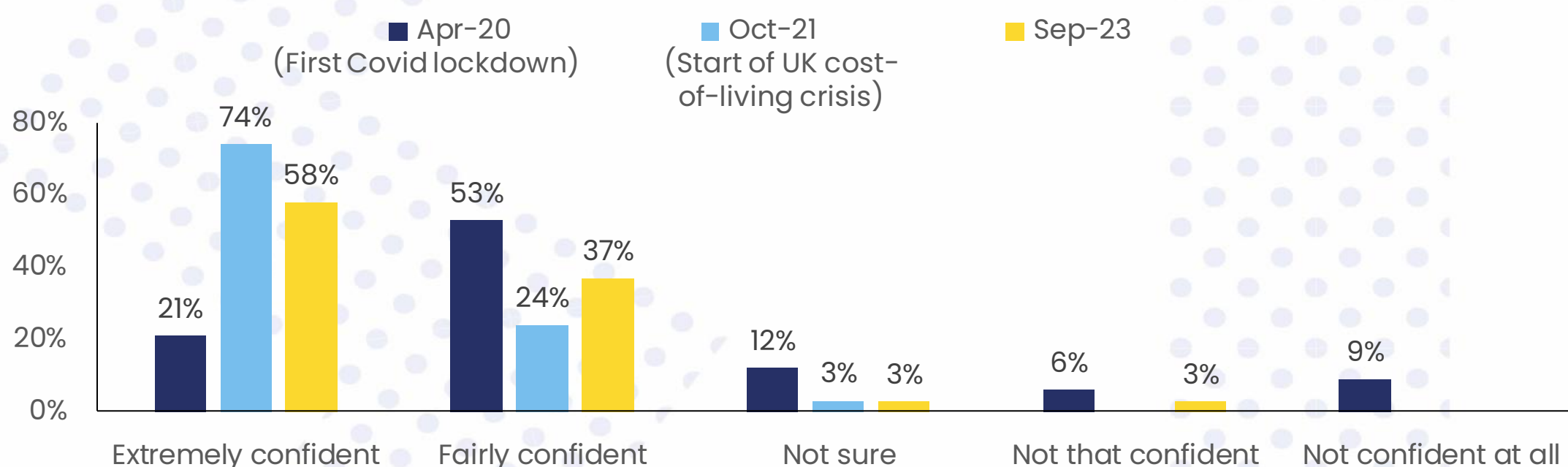
- ☐ A lack of facilities and safe spaces in which to deliver activities.
- ☐ Financial barriers and the cost of taking part for young people.
- ☐ Motivation and the time away from other activities, such as computer games and social media.
- ☐ Mental health challenges, including peer pressure, low self-confidence, and anxiety.

Survival and priorities

Organisational survival

Confidence in organisational survival is high, with 95% of groups confident (extremely or fairly) in their group's survival over the next six months. This is higher when compared to the start of the UK's Covid lockdowns in spring 2020, when nearly a quarter of groups were not sure or not confident in surviving for the next six months. Currently, confidence levels are similar to those seen at the start of the cost-of-living crisis in autumn 2021.

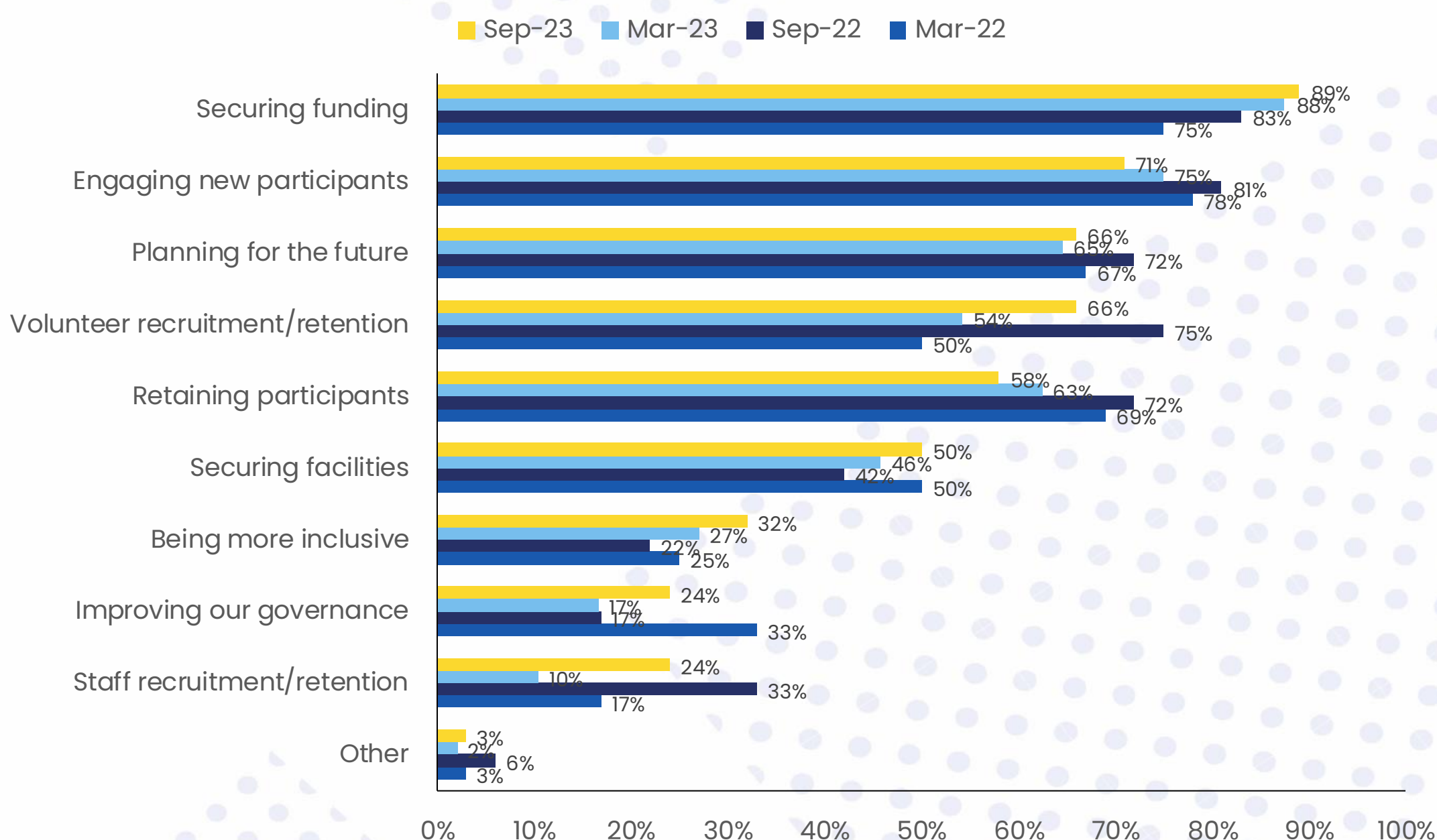
Confidence in organisational survival in the next six months



Top priorities over the next six months

Securing funding remains the most common priority for groups, with 89% of groups identifying this as a key task for the next six months. Engaging new participants and planning for the future continue to be the next most common priorities for groups.

Groups' priorities over the next six months

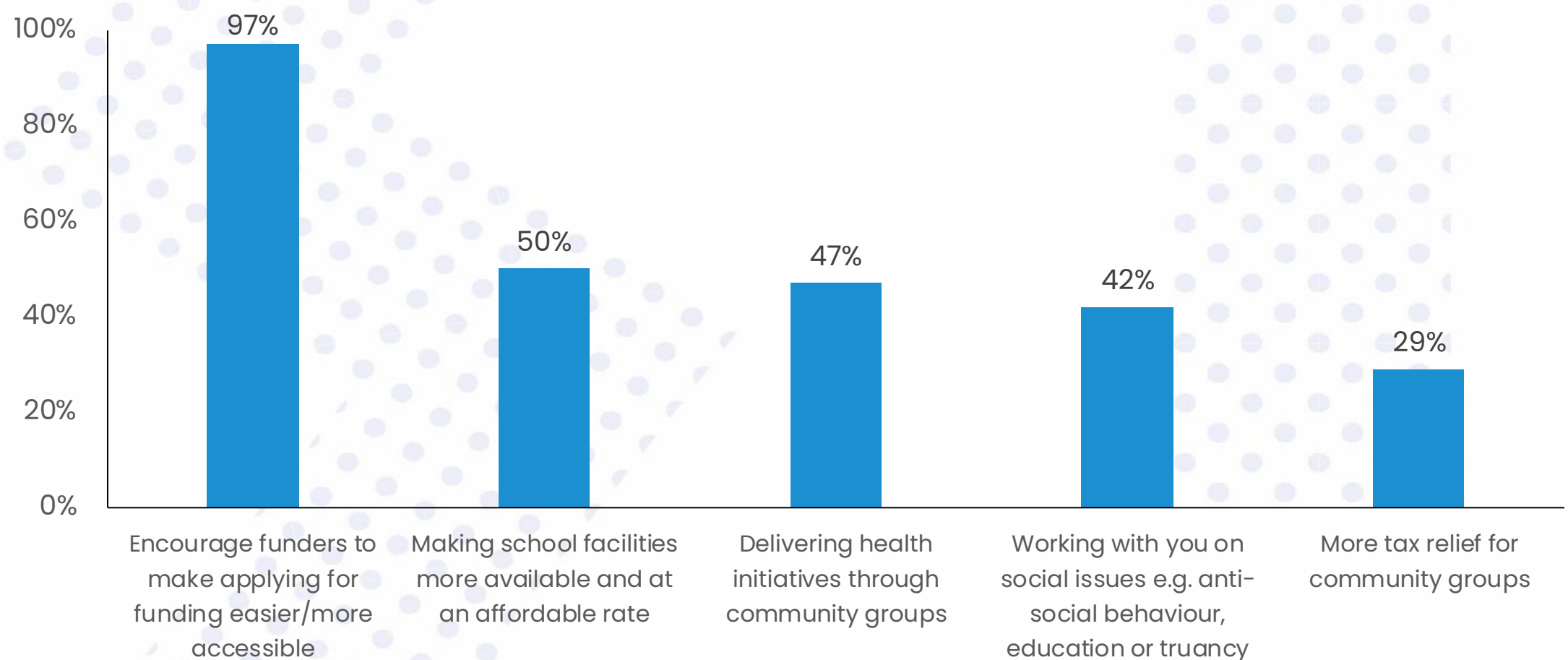


Supporting community groups

What can government do to better support 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 (97%). Half of respondents also said making school facilities more available and more affordable (50%) and government support in delivering health initiatives through community groups (47%) would be helpful.

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

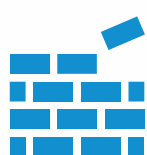


Support from sponsors and companies

What's the one thing groups would like to see sponsors/companies do more of to support grassroots sport?



Increase the amount and availability of funding to help groups access vital financial support.



Diversify funding types to let groups access money for different needs, including for staff costs, day-to-day expenses, and facilities.



Simplify application processes to make it easier and less time-consuming for groups to apply for support.



Go beyond money and help groups through volunteering, coaching, and support in running groups.

Our response

Our Spring 2023 edition of Pulse allowed us to:

- Understand the current needs, issues and jeopardy surrounding community sport to allow us to better define Sported's offer to our members. Last year, we distributed £1.77m in grants thanks to funders including Barclays, Sport England, P&G, CVC and Vodafone.
- Engage every parliamentarian across the UK, as well as key agencies, and advocate on behalf of our groups, highlighting the huge collective impact they make on their communities and on young people in tandem with calls for further support and engagement from all branches of government. This includes illustrating the stark impacts of cost-of-living increases, maintaining the traction gained in our 'Keep the Doors Open' campaign.
- Deepen our connections in the Statutory sector, among devolved government, regional agencies and other charities in order to highlight the effective and revenue-efficient role that community organisations can play in delivering local solutions to local problems through channels of activity which reach audiences who are either hard to reach or simply over-looked.
- To engage the national and regional media to amplify the issues at stake surrounding grassroots sport and young people, spotlighting the research and, significantly, telling the powerful stories of our members and allowing their voice to be heard.
- To open doors for new or extended conversations with corporate partners, illustrating the difference they can make by supporting the sport for development sector and the areas of involvement open to them.

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

