

Section 6

After Covid-19

The Long-Term Recovery



Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Key findings..... | 3 |
| 6.1 Projected volunteering participation after COVID-19 | 4 |
| 6.2 Priorities for longer term recovery – the VIO response | 9 |
| 6.3 Support required by VIOs – current and longer term | 11 |
| 6.4 Priorities for longer term recovery – infrastructure organisations’ perspective..... | 19 |
| 6.5 Stakeholder support to aid recovery – infrastructure organisations’ perspective | 24 |
| 6.6 Comparison of priorities for recovery – VIOs vs. infrastructure organisations..... | 26 |

Key findings

Projected volunteering participation – during the first lockdown 59% of Scottish adults indicated their intention to volunteer post-pandemic – either formal, informal or mutual aid volunteering.¹ Key projected characteristics include:

- Highest volunteering participation rates are for young adults aged 16-24
- SIMD Quintile 2 has lower participation rates than Quintile 1 (most deprived areas)
- Urban formal volunteering participation is higher than rural
- 30% of adults who intend to volunteer in the future had not volunteered in the 12 months prior to COVID-19
- 9% of adults volunteering pre COVID-19 do not intend to volunteer post COVID.

Shared priorities for recovery – both VIOs and infrastructure organisations identified similar priorities for support relating to long-term recovery²

- **Funding** – the key priority for VIOs is to fund paid volunteer management positions. Infrastructure organisations also highlighted their own funding requirements to support volunteering priorities/programmes more generally – especially TSIs
- **Volunteer recruitment** – the re-engagement of formal volunteers and the recruitment of new volunteers was seen as priority by both VIOs and infrastructure organisations. Trustee recruitment was identified as a priority by OSCR.³
- **Recognition and celebration** – the focus is much more than the recognition and celebration of volunteering by VIOs directly; it's also about improved awareness and a deeper understanding of the contribution of volunteering by the Scottish Government, its agencies, funders and local government, amongst others.
- **Partnership working** – there is a need to build on the improved local partnership working that's emerged during COVID-19, with a focus on improved collaboration, joint working, sharing of resources and intelligence. Also, improving the coordination of volunteering support nationally.
- **VIO practice support** – training to support volunteers in new roles, the uptake of digital technology and new systems
- **Health and wellbeing** – VIOs supporting the health and wellbeing of their volunteers/trustees linked to COVID-compliance and volunteer burnout/fatigue. Infrastructure organisations supporting formal, informal and mutual aid volunteering to help address societal challenges including isolation and loneliness, and health and wellbeing.

Stronger and more resilient communities – infrastructure organisations acknowledged the opportunity to make Scotland's communities more inclusive, and to capitalise, in particular, on the contributions from informal volunteering and mutual aid. Specific programmes of support are planned or underway by the TSIs and partners.² For many VIOs their key focus is likely to remain business continuity and sustainability – now, during the recovery period and possibly beyond. Hence, a much smaller proportion identify with priorities such as inclusive volunteering – for them it is often a case of survival.²

This section examines the evidence relating to Scotland's long-term recovery – both during COVID-19 and post-pandemic. It starts by analysing projected adult volunteering participation rates after COVID-19, drawing upon the Ipsos MORI survey during the first lockdown (the only dataset on projected volunteering post-pandemic in Scotland).¹

The section then presents the views of VIOs and infrastructure organisations on the priorities and support required for Scotland's long-term recovery. This evidence is mainly drawn from the Scottish Government survey and reflects respondents' opinions as of May 2021.² Supplementary evidence from OSCR's survey examining the impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's charities is drawn upon where it provides corroborating evidence, or new insights not included in the Scottish Government survey.³

The section is structured as follows:

- Section 6.1 – Projected adult volunteering participation rates after COVID-19 and analysis of variables such as demographics, and previous experience of volunteering.
- Section 6.2 – Priorities for Scotland's long-term recovery – the VIO perspective during the next phase of the pandemic and recovery (as of April 2021):
- Section 6.3 – Support required by VIOs as of May 2021 and during the COVID-19 recovery phase over the next two years (May 2021 – April 2023)
- Section 6.4 – Priorities for longer term recovery – the infrastructure organisation perspective during the next 12 months (May 2021 – April 2022) and post-pandemic.
- Section 6.5 – Stakeholder support to aid recovery in volunteering post-pandemic - infrastructure organisations' perspective on what is needed from other stakeholders (locally or nationally).
- Section 6.6 – Comparison of priorities between VIOs and infrastructure organisations – the similarities and the differences.

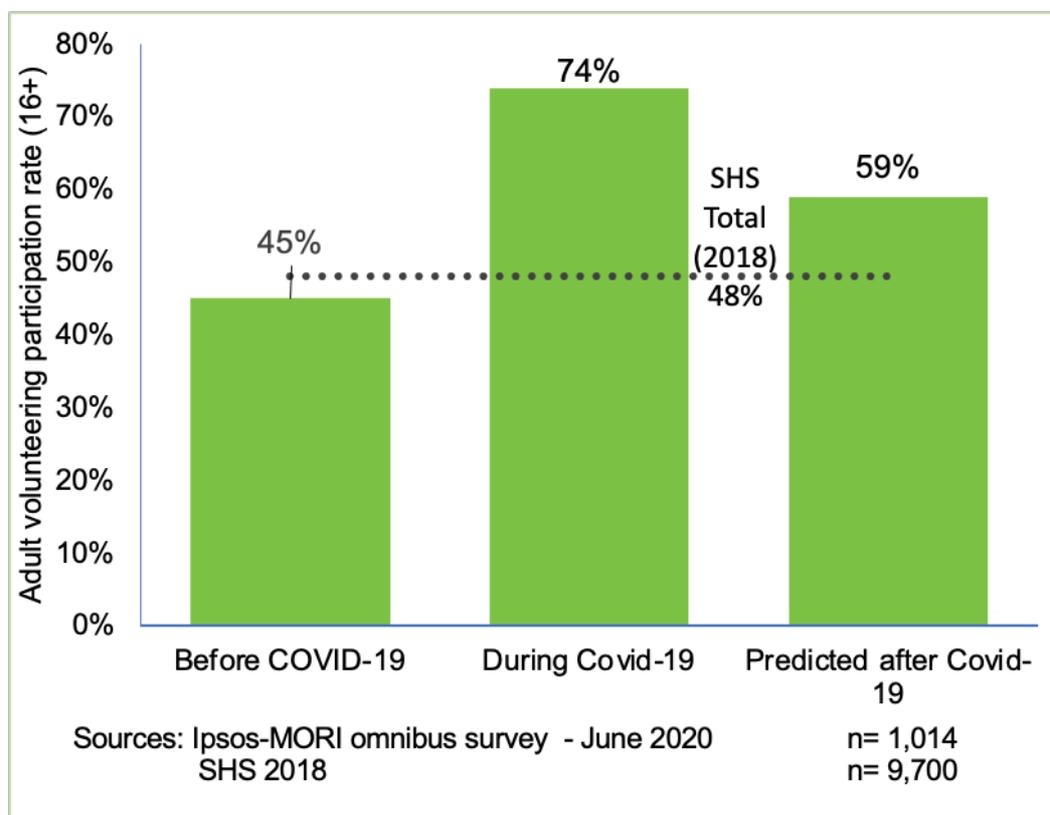
6.1 Projected volunteering participation after COVID-19

Total volunteering projection after COVID-19. As part of the Ipsos MORI survey in June 2020 respondents were asked if they planned to give unpaid help after COVID-19.¹ However, asking people about their future intentions can be a poor indicator of what actually transpires, as there is often the potential for an overly optimistic assessment. When people predict their future behaviour, they tend to place too much weight on their current intentions, which produces an optimistic bias for behaviours associated with currently strong intentions (Society for Judgement and Decision-Making).⁴

This is particularly problematic for the conditions under the first lockdown when many people were on furlough, often had plenty of time on their hands and many were engaging in volunteering for the first time. Therefore, the actual propensity to volunteer when life returns to 'steady state' and they are once again time-poor and responsibility-rich means that such good intentions may not always be realised. This problem is compounded ever further when people are being asked to predict their volunteering intentions not just in a few months' time, but probably years ahead given the long-term nature of COVID-19.

Figure 6.1.1 presents ‘total’ adult projected volunteering participation rates, which reflect adults’ involvement in any type of volunteering: formal, informal or mutual aid. It therefore represents an overall composite volunteering rate. The graph shows that 59% of adults stated their intention to volunteer after COVID-19, a 14% increase from the pre-COVID-19 participation rate of 45%.¹ It is interesting that this predicted rate reflects a significant decline from the participation rate of 74% during COVID-19. However, for the reasons discussed above, it is quite likely that there is still an element of optimism bias which means that the future volunteering participation rate post-COVID will be below the predicted 59% figure, but by how much we do not know.

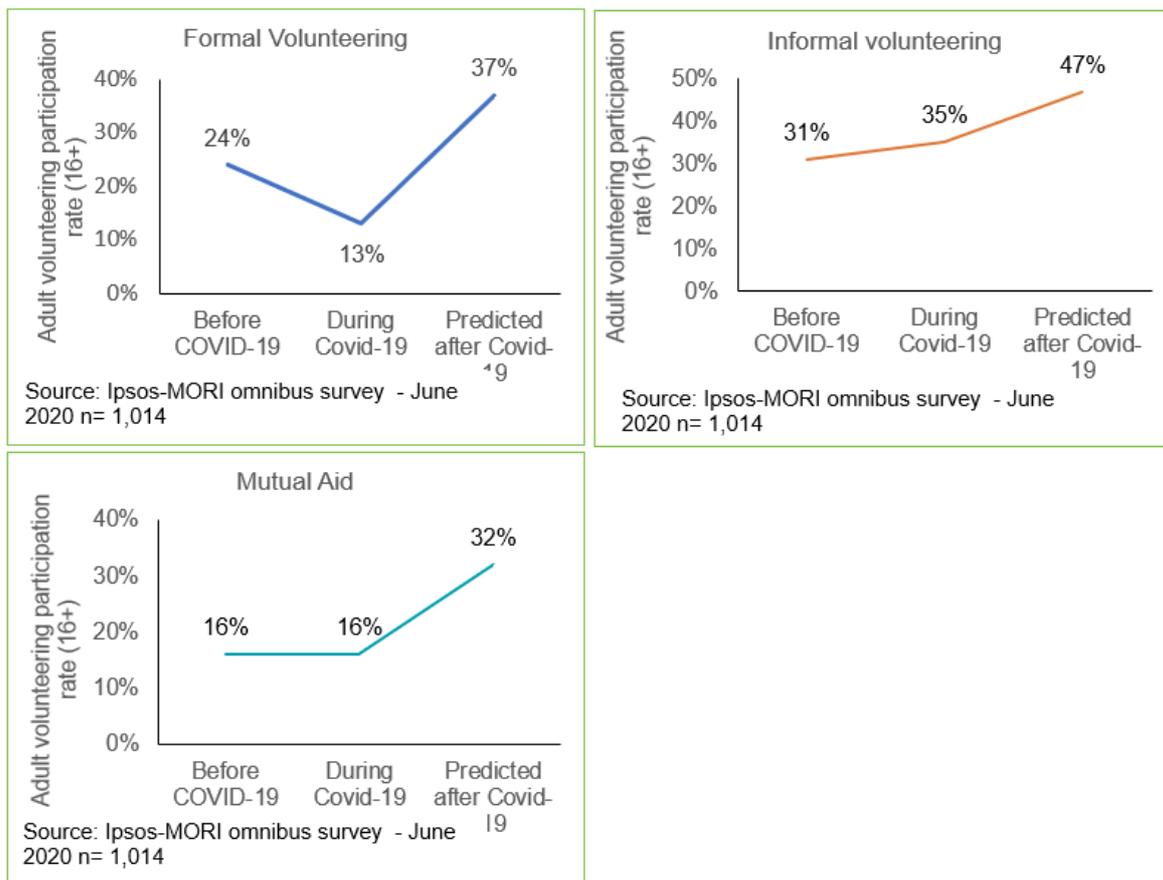
Figure 6.1.1 – Total adult volunteering participation rates: before, during and after COVID-19



Notwithstanding this potential for optimistic predictions, the responses from the Ipsos MORI survey provide some useful insights into the types of volunteering adults are most interested in (formal, informal and mutual aid), and how this interest varies by demographic groups.¹

Volunteering projections for formal, informal, and mutual aid volunteering. Figure 6.1.2 shows that for all three categories of volunteering the projected adult volunteering participation rates post-pandemic are substantially higher than pre-pandemic.¹ (Note: as discussed in [Section 3](#), the volunteering participation rates during COVID-19 are understated due to the 32% of adults who identified as ‘other’ and could not be classified by type of volunteering. It is believed that this under-reporting is particularly significant for mutual aid and informal volunteering.)

Figure 6.1.2 – Adult volunteering participation rates by type of volunteering – before, during and after COVID-19



Volunteering projections by age. Post COVID-19 young adults aged 16-24 projected the highest volunteering participation rate across all three categories of volunteering: see Table 6.1.1.¹ If this was realised, this would be a significant change in the demographic trends in Scottish volunteering, given that the 35-44 age group has consistently had the highest volunteering participation rate in Scotland for a number of years. Even if these 16-24 year-old participation rates are not realised to this extent, the aspiration of young adults in Scotland to participate more extensively in society through volunteering is extremely positive, and it presents an important opportunity which should be capitalised upon.

Table 6.1.1 Projected adult volunteering participation rates post COVID-19, by age and type of volunteering

| Future volunteering by age | Formal | Mutual Aid | Informal | Total |
|----------------------------|--------|------------|----------|-------|
| 16-24 (n=131) | 58% | 44% | 64% | 79% |
| 25-34 (n=174) | 42% | 40% | 52% | 60% |
| 35- 44 (n=153) | 38% | 41% | 48% | 58% |
| 45- 54 (n=182) | 36% | 34% | 55% | 59% |
| 55-64 (n=170) | 43% | 32% | 52% | 59% |
| 65+ (n=205) | 30% | 21% | 36% | 46% |

Source: Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020

Volunteering participation: urban vs. rural. If the predicted Ipsos MORI volunteering rates are realised there would again be a significant change in Scottish volunteering.¹ Overall urban and rural participation rates would be equal, and urban areas would have higher formal participation rates than rural areas; the opposite to pre COVID-19 and a change to the trends for over the last 10 years. Rural areas would continue to have higher informal volunteering and mutual aid participation rates: see Table 6.1.2

Table 6.1.2 Projected adult volunteering participation rates post COVID-19, by rural/urban and type of volunteering

| Future volunteering by urban rural | Formal | Mutual Aid | Informal | Total |
|------------------------------------|--------|------------|----------|-------|
| Rural (n= 202) | 36% | 38% | 54% | 60% |
| Urban (n=687) | 43% | 34% | 50% | 60% |

Source: Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020

Volunteering participation: level of deprivation. For deprivation there is also a change compared to the trends pre COVID-19, where participation rates were lowest in the most deprived areas in Scotland (Q1) and highest in the least deprived areas (Q5).¹ Post COVID-19 the participation rates in all forms of volunteering are predicted to be lowest in SIMD Q2. This raises interesting questions as to whether during COVID-19 more help was needed and provided by volunteers in the most deprived areas (Q1), which may continue post COVID-19 because of the longer-term societal impacts of the pandemic in the most deprived areas.

Furthermore, the trends for Q2 will require careful monitoring post COVID-19 to ensure that those living in Q2 areas continue to have access to volunteering opportunities. The barriers for volunteering participation for those living in Q2 need to be further analysed.

The highest projected participation rate post COVID-19 for formal volunteering continues to be in the least deprived areas of Scotland (Q5). However, the rate for mutual aid volunteering is marginally higher in SIMD Q3 compared to Q5, and informal volunteering is highest in SIMD Q3. These are positive changes, where adults from all areas of deprivation intend to volunteer more post COVID-19, but it also challenges the pre-existing trends of the least deprived continually having the highest participation rates for all types of volunteering.

Table 6.1.3 Projected adult volunteering participation rates post COVID-19, by Deprivation (SIM D Q) and type of volunteering

| Future volunteering by SIMD Q | Formal | Mutual Aid | Informal | Total |
|-------------------------------|--------|------------|----------|-------|
| SIMD Q1 (n=151) | 36% | 31% | 49% | 58% |
| SIMD Q2 (n=142) | 31% | 29% | 41% | 49% |
| SIMD Q3 (n=213) | 43% | 39% | 55% | 61% |
| SIMD Q4 (n=200) | 43% | 34% | 54% | 64% |
| SIMD Q5 (n=184) | 50% | 39% | 53% | 66% |

Source: Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020

Volunteering participation – New / Lapsed Volunteers. Recent analysis of the Ipsos MORI dataset for the period March – June 2020 (not yet published by Volunteer Scotland) found that 30% of adults who intend to volunteer in the future had not volunteered in the 12 months prior to COVID-19.¹

- 29% of Scottish adults intending to volunteer through mutual aid groups post COVID-19 are new / lapsed volunteers.
- 32% of Scottish adults intending to volunteer informally post COVID-19 are new / lapsed volunteers.
- 27% of Scottish adults intending to volunteer formally post COVID-19 are new / lapsed volunteers.

This is an encouraging finding as it demonstrates the potential to engage new and lapsed volunteers as a consequence of volunteers' experience during COVID-19, albeit that the 30% figure is less than the 55% of new and lapsed volunteers during COVID-19.

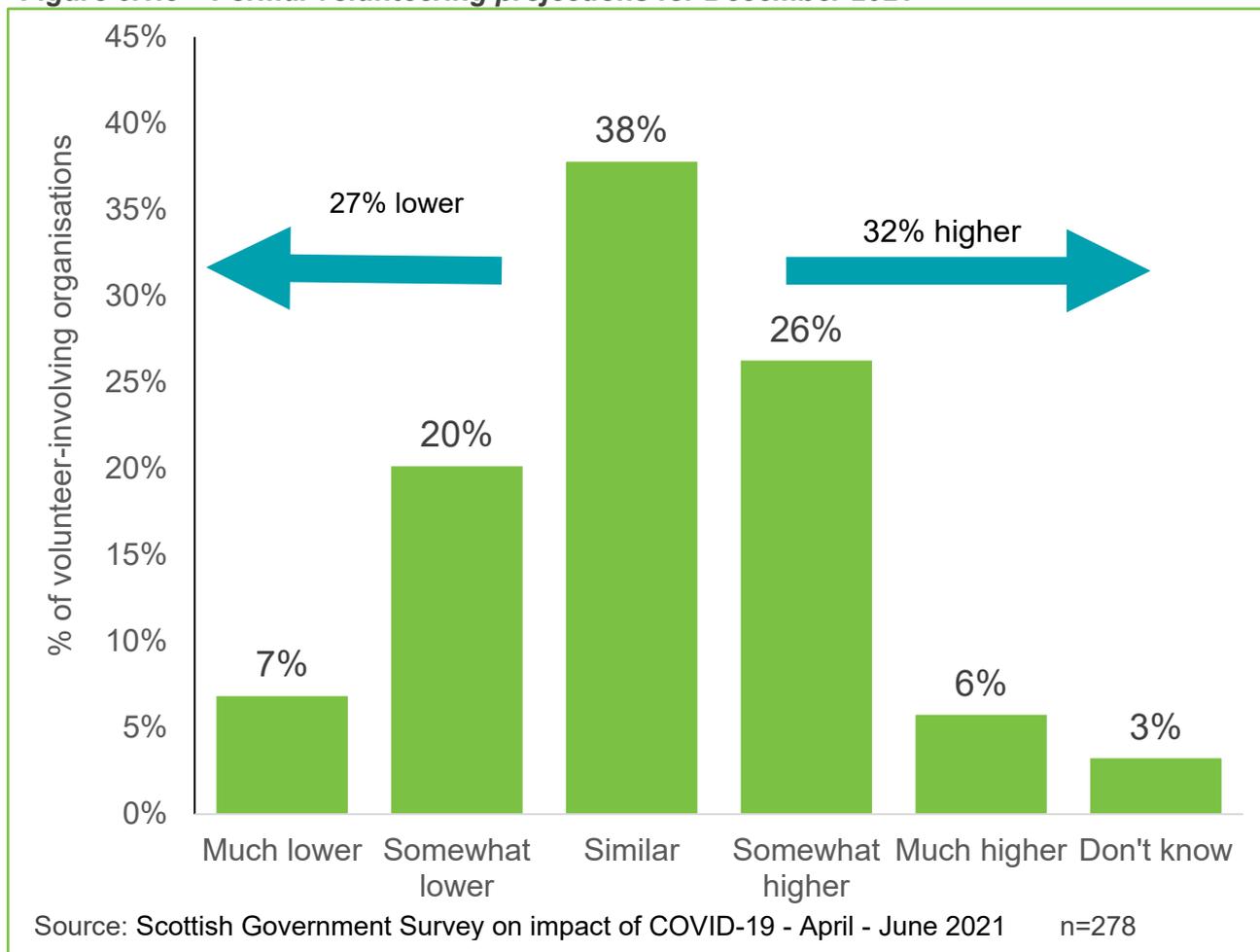
Volunteering participation – Previous volunteers who do not intend to volunteer post COVID-19. New analysis of the Ipsos MORI dataset by Volunteer Scotland also allows analysis of the percentage of adults who had volunteered pre COVID-19 who do not intend to volunteer post COVID-19.¹ For total volunteering 9% of adults volunteering pre COVID-19 do not intend to volunteer post COVID-19.

- 6% of Scottish adults who volunteered through mutual aid groups prior to COVID-19 do not intend to continue to volunteer.
- 8% of Scottish adults who volunteered informally prior to COVID-19 do not intend to continue to volunteer.
- 7% of Scottish adults who volunteered formally prior to COVID-19 do not intend to continue to volunteer.

This raises interesting questions as to why almost 10% of past volunteers do not intend to volunteer post COVID-19. In Scotland there is no baseline data on the percentage of volunteers stopping volunteering each year, making it difficult to interpret the significance of this data. This is an area which requires further research in Scotland.

Formal volunteering projections for December 2021. The Scottish Government survey provides more recent data on projected volunteer numbers.² As illustrated in Figure 6.1.3, a higher proportion of VIOs in Scotland projected they would have more volunteers at the end of 2021, compared to the number they engaged pre-pandemic. In May 2021, 32% of VIOs projected higher volunteer numbers by December 2021, compared to 27% which projected lower volunteer numbers. This represents a complete turnaround from the numbers of volunteers engaged by VIOs in May 2021 – see Figure 4.2.3 in [Section 4](#). At that point the respective figures were 27% of VIOs with higher volunteer numbers and 58% with lower volunteer numbers.

Figure 6.1.3 – Formal volunteering projections for December 2021



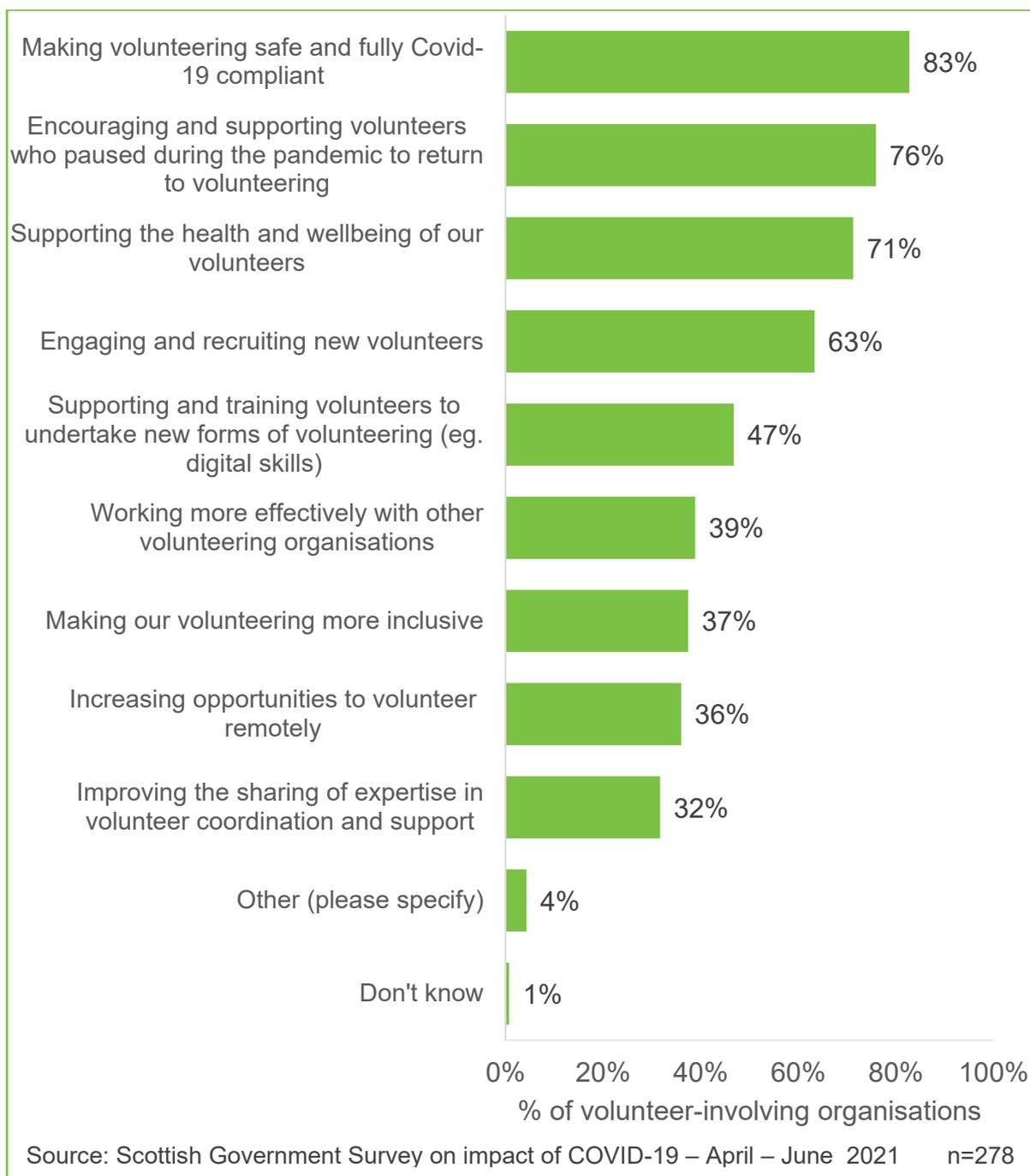
6.2 Priorities for longer term recovery – the VIO response

6.2.1 Scottish Government survey – priorities for support

The Scottish Government survey asked VIOs to identify their organisational priorities for engaging and supporting volunteers during the next phase of the pandemic and recovery (from April 2021 onwards): see Figure 6.2.1.² The evidence shows that the majority of survey respondents were focused on the more immediate concerns of engaging volunteers and protecting their health and wellbeing:

- **Health and wellbeing** – 83% of VIOs were focused on making volunteering safe and fully COVID-19 compliant; and 71% were prioritising support to ensure the health and wellbeing of their volunteers; and
- **Re/engaging volunteers** – 76% of VIOs were focused on encouraging and supporting volunteers who paused during the pandemic to return to volunteering; and 63% were prioritising the engagement and recruitment of new volunteers.

Figure 6.2.1 Organisational priorities for engaging and supporting volunteers during the next phase of the pandemic and recovery (from April 2021 onwards)



Priorities that could be considered to be more medium-to-long term, such as working more effectively with other volunteering organisations (39%); making volunteering more inclusive (37%); increasing opportunities to volunteer remotely (36%); and improving the sharing in expertise in volunteer coordination and support (32%), were of less immediate concern to respondents at this stage of the recovery process.

6.2.2 OSCR survey – priorities for support

OSCR's survey investigating the impact of COVID-19 on Scottish charities in November 2020, highlighted a number of areas of support specific to smaller organisations, many of which have no paid staff at all.³ One key finding that stands out, and which is not overtly addressed in the Scottish Government survey, relates to the needs of trustees. From the 1,583 open responses analysed in the OSCR survey, trustees were identified as a key target for support due to:

- The governance pressures which trustees are having to manage related to funding, business continuity and resourcing issues.
- The negative impacts this is having on their mental health and wellbeing – with problems of trustee fatigue and burnout.
- The older age profile of trustees; for many charities the average age of trustees is over 65. Older age is linked to health-related problems, and during COVID-19 many had to shield and some have had to reduce/withdraw from their trustee responsibilities.
- The need to engage younger trustees with new skills and experiences including digital skills, management skills, etc.

In summary, Scotland's charities need support to help them address the governance and trustee challenges which COVID-19 has triggered, particularly for smaller charities with limited or no staff members. The feedback indicates that this has been a latent problem, which COVID-19 has amplified and made more overt.

These trustee issues relating to older age, fatigue/burnout and skills gaps also read across to volunteer roles more generally, which again are most acute for the smaller charities.

6.3 Support required by VIOs – current and longer term

The Scottish Government survey also asked what support, if any, VIOs needed in order to support volunteering within their organisation at the time of the survey (May 2021), and during the COVID-19 recovery phase over the next two years (as an open text question).² Only 10% of VIOs indicated that that they didn't have any support needs, with 90% identifying a range of support requirements that could assist with volunteering in their organisation: see Table 6.3.1.

Table 6.3.1 Volunteering support required by VIOs: May 2021 – April 2023 (n = 271)

| Categories of volunteering support | No. of respondents | % of respondents |
|--|--------------------|------------------|
| Funding (e.g. for volunteer coordinators) | 130 | 48% |
| Training support for volunteers | 32 | 12% |
| Digital support | 23 | 8% |
| Restrictions – interpretation and compliance | 19 | 7% |
| Recognition and celebration of volunteers | 18 | 7% |
| Recruitment of volunteers | 15 | 6% |
| Partnership working | 14 | 5% |
| Promoting volunteer benefits | 12 | 4% |
| No support required | 30 | 11% |

Note: There were 21 other categories of support with less than 4% of respondents, which are not included in the table. However, none of these categories had more than 8 responses.

Source: Scottish Government Survey on impact of COVID-19 – April - June 2021

Caution: In the interpretation of the quantification of open question responses, as illustrated in Table 6.3.1, the reader must recognise that the evidence only reflects what the respondent chose to include. It is quite likely that they have views on a range of other issues, but there are limits to how much time a respondent will devote to completing an open question. Therefore, one must interpret such quantified analysis of qualitative data with caution as the data is likely to understate, possibly quite significantly, respondents' identification of the highlighted topics as important categories of support. This methodological observation applies to the quantification of other qualitative responses in Section 6 and throughout the whole report.

6.3.1 VIO priorities relating to funding support

Funding support for volunteer management. Funding was the number one support issue identified by VIOs, with nearly half of all respondents (48%) identifying funding as a priority for their immediate and longer-term recovery.² The key driver of this demand for funding is the pressing need to provide additional staff resource for volunteer management and coordination, to build and strengthen the capacity of VIOs during the COVID-19 recovery period.

Funding to support volunteer management and coordination

“Funding commitments are important to afford charities the opportunity to employ a designated staff member to manage volunteers and offer quality of support that volunteers deserve. It can be difficult when this co-ordination role is not available within organisations.”

“Funding for a dedicated volunteer development worker. It is such an important post but very tricky to fundraise for as the beneficiaries are one step removed. We don't need a lot of money...but this pays dividends in generating high quality services to the community...”

“We are limited as to the number of volunteers we can recruit due to staff capacity so support to recruit a Volunteer Coordinator would be beneficial...we have a good infrastructure for volunteering and an active and engaged team so the most positive change would be financial support to recruit staff.”

“Provide funding to allow a designated member of staff to work with volunteers as too often it is everyone's responsibility dealing with volunteers but no-one in the organisation takes overall responsibility. This means that sometimes we get caught up in delivering the project rather than focusing on the volunteer's development and needs.”

“The biggest issue is funding. Volunteers require good, consistent support through the recruitment and training process and ongoing as they volunteer in their role. Particularly when looking at needs of volunteers who might experience barriers to volunteering due to physical/learning disability, mental health problems, caring responsibilities etc. For the number of volunteers we engage with, this requires a full time role. [...] National Government should prioritise this, to ensure that small to medium sized charities and grassroots organisations have the funding to allow an infrastructure of safe and good volunteering practice.”

VIO recommendations to improve the funding model. Respondents also highlighted their concerns over the funding environment, the pressures this exerted on their organisations and the need for improvements in the funding model. These included increasing the availability of more flexible and less restrictive funding; making the funding application process simpler and more transparent; providing funding decisions in a timely manner; and guaranteeing funding streams for longer periods of time. This would all help to secure the future longevity of VIOs and enable them *“to keep offering our much-loved volunteering opportunities to our community in the years to come.”*

VIO feedback on funding issues

“[we need a] a simpler and easier method of securing **longer term funding**”. “There is also an issue of funding streams being heavily restricted and only in place for a short period of time, making it difficult to develop plans beyond 2-3 years.”

“More innovative funding streams would be welcomed that offer flexibility, innovation and creativity.”

“Spending too much time chasing and servicing annual grants takes time away from our core aims. If there were **multi-year funding opportunities** available, it would ease a lot of those problems.

OSCR’s charities’ survey on the impact of COVID-19 provides supplementary evidence from smaller charities in Scotland.³ Issues raised relating to funding included:

- The bureaucratic funding application process, which can be particularly challenging for volunteers to complete. “*The application forms were long and complicated asking for vast amounts of detailed information which they did not necessarily have.*”
- The complexity of the different funding bodies and not knowing who to approach
- The need for support and/or training in how to complete funding applications.

6.3.2. VIO priorities for training and recruitment

Training support. Twelve percent of VIOs identified the need for training support: see Table 6.3.1.² Some respondents thought that statutory partners and infrastructure bodies should do more in terms of providing “*better access to training for volunteers*” because “*supporting and training volunteers is very expensive and support would be welcome*”. This included providing free training; funding for training; and help and expertise in developing training and creating online platforms for training delivery.

Support for volunteer training

“Access to ongoing professional learning opportunities for volunteers.”

“Ensure that funding for accredited training can be accessed through volunteering partnerships with charities and training providers.”

“[We] would benefit from access to training courses that volunteers could attend to increase their skill set. Ideally they would be reasonable priced or free.”

“More training needs to be available to smaller community related groups to be able to achieve good practice, to learn to write good funding bids, to understand the changing PVG landscape, to be able to effectively support volunteer wellbeing and to consider risk management.”

Digital training, health and safety training, volunteer management training and training to upskill volunteers were all mentioned as areas of development that would help to increase the capacity of VIOs and thereby further assist them during the COVID-19 recovery phase.

Recruitment support. Six percent of VIOs identified the need for volunteer recruitment support: see Table 6.3.1.² For a number of respondents, recovery from the pandemic was hinged on being able to attract and recruit new volunteers to their organisation – “*we just always need more volunteers*”. However, VIOs were clear that whilst promoting and growing volunteering was a key concern for them, they also believed that it should be a priority for statutory partners and infrastructure bodies who had a role to play in “*terms of promoting and amplifying the importance of volunteering*”.

Recruitment support from Government & infrastructure organisations

“Normalise volunteering as something we all have responsibility to do, even in a very small way.”

“Greater recognition of [the] value of volunteering to [the] community by Government agencies.”

“We need local and national government to build confidence and encourage people/organisations to restart volunteering projects again across Scotland”.

“The Scottish Government should also consider a campaign to incentivise private and public sector companies to formally recognise volunteering and support employees to undertake voluntary work.”

“Better help in publicising volunteering opportunities at the level of the local Council area. The traditional volunteering umbrella bodies need a lot more resources to be able to advertise and hence to attract volunteers outside their regular sources.”

6.3.3 Priorities relating to digital support

Eight percent of VIOs identified access to digital support as a priority for VIOs during COVID-19 recovery, acknowledging that some level of digital engagement was now considered to be the new ‘norm’ for many VIOs in their future service delivery: see Table 6.3.1.²

VIOs requested help in improving their digital infrastructure and providing staff members and volunteers with IT equipment and accessible digital training, particularly for those who were experiencing digital exclusion such as older age groups and those living in rural areas.

Digital support and inclusion

“...we need expert support for what we're not good at, i.e. IT systems...we need someone who has good IT knowledge & skills to put systems in place for us that are efficient and easy to use. Then more of our time could be focussed on working with those who need support.”

“...we now need to connect the last dots between online local service delivery and the digital have-nots, so that they can be remotely supported with at-home solutions which meet their needs and, crucially, don't make them feel belittled by their lack of understanding of our digital world.”

“Whilst there were grants and programmes available during the pandemic to increase digital inclusion, they generally required a digital champion within the service, which was not possible with such a small staff team. Having access to a local digital champion/champions to work with the organisation would be really welcomed.”

“One big gap within the fellowship is the number of older people who do not have access to modern technology, both through financial limitations and through lack of training. Bringing access to social media to more of the elderly population in particular should be an aim for any government. The need for children to have such access has been recognised and action has been taken, but many of the elderly have been ignored.”

“...Nationally a more stable internet service will be needed to enable this work to continue especially in rural areas.”

OSCR's charities' survey on the impact of COVID-19 in November 2020 provides corroborating qualitative evidence on the importance of the move to digital for the recovery and beyond.³ It shows that not only was the move to digital “*The single greatest impact of the pandemic and restrictions on almost all charities*”, but also that for some charities there was the intention to continue to use online platforms and tools for meetings, delivery of services and wider communication with other organisations beyond the pandemic.

Their research also highlighted the greater digital challenges for smaller organisations with limited or no paid staff. They tended to lack the digital skills, software and IT equipment to facilitate the transition to new online service delivery models.

6.3.4 Enhanced guidance on COVID-19 restrictions and their application

Guidance on COVID-19 restrictions. Seven percent of VIOs mentioned support issues associated with COVID-19 restrictions: see Table 6.3.1.² One important area was the demand for national and local government to provide clearer guidelines on the involvement of volunteers during the COVID-19 recovery phase, and that these guidelines should be kept up-to-date and shared in a timely and accessible manner – see views below. These sentiments were also echoed by OSCR’s November 2020 charities’ survey.³

Enhanced guidance on COVID-19 restrictions during recovery

“Clearer Scottish Government Covid guidance referring specifically to volunteers.”

“We also need to ensure that we are doing everything to keep our volunteers and customers safe - some better guidelines for this would be good.”

“...keep[ing] charity COVID compliant – [there’s] so much red tape. Our small charity covers so many areas...[it’s] difficult to keep up with all the legislation, policy, health and safety changes for each area. Much more support needed from council rather than punitive approach.”

“Continued guidance around COVID-related volunteer health and safety, risk assessment, etc. As we move out of the pandemic, how do we continue to ensure at all times that our "ask" in terms of COVID risk remains appropriate for volunteers and volunteering?”

Ensuring the safety of volunteer returners. In order to generate momentum in the recovery process, respondents highlighted the importance of returning to some level of normality. VIOs were eager to try and resume face-to-face service delivery but were aware that they needed to help alleviate any fears volunteers might have about returning. Therefore, providing “*a safe and welcoming work environment*” that was COVID-19 compliant was a priority for VIOs.

Managing the safe return of volunteers

“We need to be able to get back into our premises. We run our employability service from a community centre which has been closed since last March and is not likely to be reopened before the end of August which is causing us major problems in re-engaging volunteers.”

“Our main issue is to encourage volunteers to feel safe to be "out and about" again - once society has returned to a more "normal" footing we hope to see more of our volunteers returning.”

“A lot of our volunteers have struggled and will need some extra help for themselves to feel safe in the work setting but also need to be aware of guidelines to keep themselves and others safe.”

6.3.5 Improved recognition and celebration of volunteering

Seven percent of VIOs identified support which would help improve the recognition and celebration of volunteering; with a further 4% highlighting support for the linked issue of improved promotion of volunteering benefits: see Table 6.3.1.² The key theme emerging from VIOs’ responses is the requirement for increased recognition of volunteering by the Scottish Government, its agencies and local government. There was also reference to the need for enhanced recognition of volunteering generally through TV, advertising, posters, etc.

However, a few comments also highlighted the important role volunteer recognition plays in supporting more inclusive volunteering and engaging those who are harder to reach.

Linkage between recognition and inclusive volunteering

“Incentives to volunteering such as Access to Work, which is currently only available for people in paid employment.”

“Many of our volunteers have been out of or have never been part of the job market and find accessing employment very difficult and volunteering experience is not fully recognised by employers. There needs to be a national recognition scheme for volunteers particularly those who have lived experience of poverty, addiction, exclusion who are helping through their experience to help others and using their voices to design and deliver services to receive greater recognition.”

“Promote the benefits of volunteering to specific groups - employability and loneliness specifically.”

6.3.6 Improved partnership working

Five percent of VIOs identified ways to support improved collaboration and joint working – locally and nationally: see Table 6.3.1.² A key feature was the goal of sharing data, expertise and resources between partners more effectively:

Improved sharing of resources and expertise

“Work collaboratively, share ideas and spread the information flow. Signpost people to the most appropriate organisation for their needs.”

“Better links between similar agencies to support each other.”

“Better access to training for volunteers is required, with opportunities to link into Council/NHS/HSCP training, strengthening links between services and agencies in line with the integration agenda.”

6.4 Priorities for longer term recovery – infrastructure organisations’ perspective

The Scottish Government survey provides evidence on infrastructure organisations’ assessment of priorities split across two time periods: the next 12 months (May 2021 – April 2022) and also ‘beyond the pandemic’.

6.4.1 Infrastructure organisation support priorities during May 2021 – April 2022

The Scottish Government survey asked infrastructure organisations what they considered to be the most important measures for supporting recovery in volunteering in their area during the next 12 months (May 2021 – April 2022): see Figure 6.4.1.² What stands out from their responses is the consensus over the importance of specific support priorities. The following are all rated as ‘very important’ or ‘important’ by over 80% of infrastructure organisations:

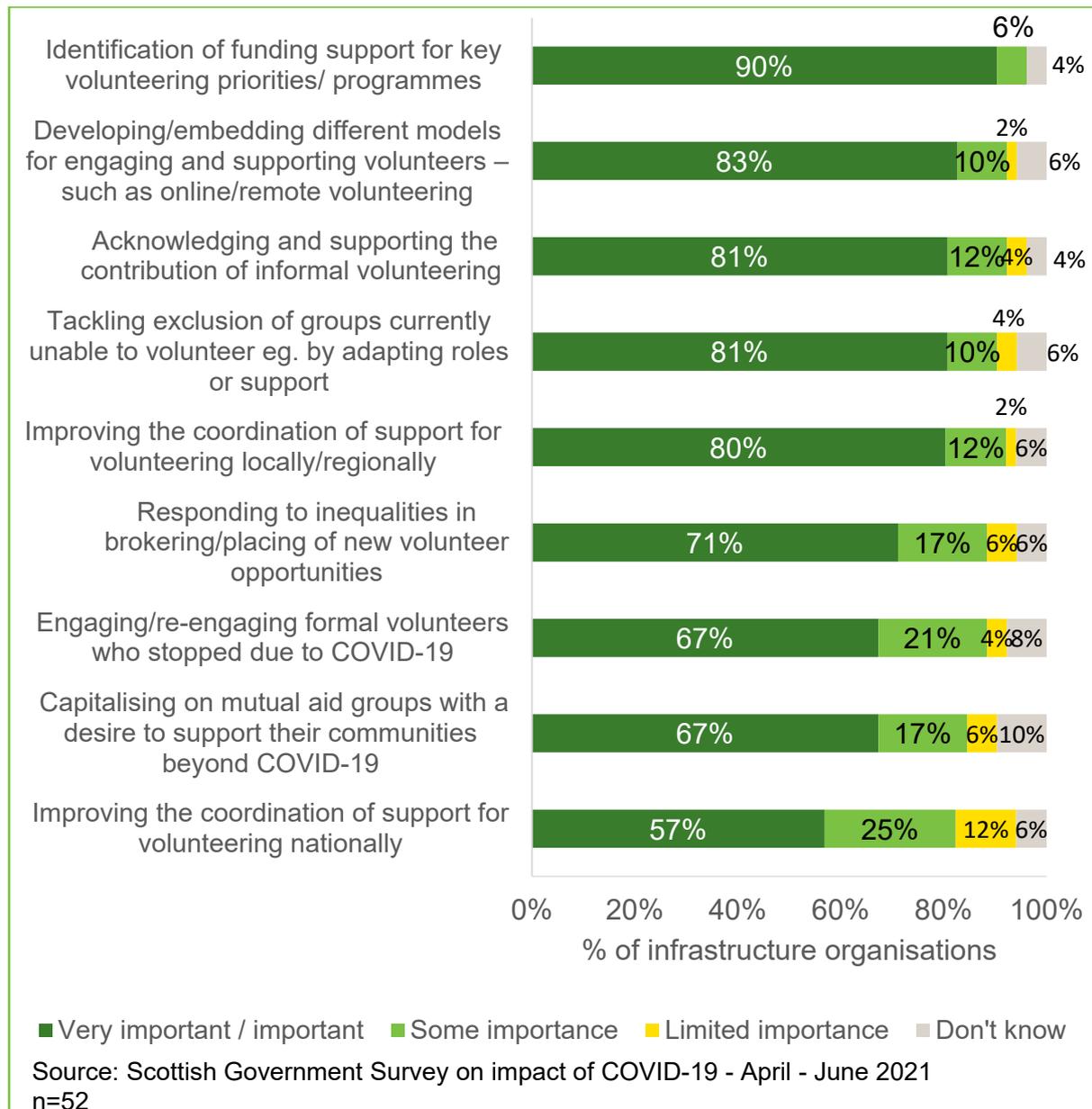
- Identifying funding support for key volunteering priorities/programmes (90%)
- Developing/embedding different models for engaging and supporting volunteers (83%)
- Tackling exclusion of groups currently unable to volunteer (81%)
- Acknowledging and supporting the contribution of informal volunteering (81%)
- Improving the coordination of support for volunteering locally/regionally (80%).

It was also reassuring that the priority categories of ‘funding support’ and ‘engaging and supporting volunteers’ are complementary to VIOs’ priorities (see sections 6.2 and 6.3). However, what was notable was the variance in the importance attached to more inclusive volunteering, with a much higher proportion of infrastructure organisations rating this as a priority compared to VIOs (81% vs. 37% respectively)

Other support factors considered important include:

- Responding to inequalities in brokering/placing of new volunteer opportunities (71%)
- Engaging/re-engaging formal volunteers who stopped due to COVID-19 (67%)
- Capitalising on mutual aid groups with a desire to support their communities beyond COVID-19 (67%)
- Improving the coordination of support nationally (57%)

Figure 6.4.1 Infrastructure organisation support priorities for their area during the next 12 months (May 2021 – April 2022)



6.4.2 Infrastructure organisation plans for recovery beyond the pandemic

In the Scottish Government survey infrastructure organisations shared what their organisations were doing, or were planning to do, to support the recovery in volunteering following the pandemic.² The following key themes were highlighted.

(Re)Engaging volunteers – this relates to the engagement of both new volunteers and re-engagement of existing volunteers. Infrastructure organisations aim to achieve this through more effective promotion of volunteering and volunteer opportunities; improved matching of volunteers to roles; building back the confidence of existing volunteers who disengaged; and the development of new and improved systems/initiatives such as:

- Branding of volunteering linked to the identity of the local area
- Setting up a "Volunteer Passport Scheme" locally to streamline the route to volunteering both for volunteers and VIOs
- Developing a website with new volunteering information or a new volunteering portal.
- Launching a volunteering promotion initiative
- Developing a 'buddy' volunteering system to support those with low self-esteem
- Continuation / development of the 'Community Taskforce Volunteers' initiative for ad hoc tasks
- New approaches to volunteer engagement for those with higher support needs, and those who are isolated.
- Delivery of a 'restart volunteer programme' for VIOs and continued support for mutual aid groups
- Expansion of an informal volunteering opportunities programme.

Support for VIOs – a priority for infrastructure organisations was to “continue to support organisations to adapt to the changing times as we move back to 'normality'”, including providing training and digital services which can be utilised during the recovery period and beyond. Examples include:

- Extending a redeveloped training model: “We have already redeveloped our capacity building services for VIOs including our good practice [...] and have reworked our training to be delivered in a blended way. This is proving very popular.”
- Going back to basics with groups in training for recruitment, management and retention of volunteers.
- Providing peer support and practice development sessions for volunteer managers
- Reviewing and revising development resources as appropriate.
- Using digital platforms to engage with VIOs; and to help facilitate forums to discuss key priorities
- Helping VIOs to refresh their volunteering offer.
- Communicating with voluntary organisations to help them build strategies for recovery; and to secure funding to deliver priorities in a changing landscape.
- Helping VIOs to re-open safely.

Inclusive volunteering – encouraging and supporting inclusive volunteering, including trying to tackle barriers to access that may have been exacerbated by COVID-19, was a further area where infrastructure organisations hoped to aid the recovery of the sector in the wake of the pandemic. Examples include:

- Re-establishment of a programme for people with higher support needs to help them access suitable volunteering.
- Working with minority communities to ensure volunteering is inclusive and that organisations take an active approach to inclusive practices.
- Making volunteering opportunities more welcoming and inclusive for different people; ensuring that barriers to recruitment are not set inadvertently.
- A more joined up approach with other organisations to support and develop inclusive volunteering.
- Development of a Community Growing Project to support those with mental ill-health, linked to volunteering.

Youth volunteering – a number of infrastructure organisations were “*particularly concerned about young people*” and how the pandemic had impacted on their opportunities to volunteer. Rejuvenating youth volunteering was identified as a priority area for some of the infrastructure organisations in the aftermath of the pandemic:

“Volunteering used to be a rite of passage and we worked with schools to ensure that young people had volunteering experience for UCAS [applications] or CVs. Due to schools being so busy this hasn't happened and there is a cohort of young people who have missed out on this due to COVID-19.”

Examples of support underway or planned includes:

- Working with statutory partners and volunteer involving organisations to support young people into volunteering and beyond.
- Reconnecting with local schools to encourage uptake of the Saltire Awards
- Encouraging schools to recognise the digital volunteering undertaken by young people over the course of the pandemic.
- Engaging young people, for example through the Youth Guarantee Scheme, and a youth employability proposal.

Stronger and more resilient communities – the heightened importance of ‘community’ resulting from the pandemic and the need to build more resilient communities was highlighted by infrastructure organisations. Key activities planned to support this include:

- Continuing to support [HelpMyStreet](#) volunteering.
- Provision of additional funding to support community groups in their recovery
- Working with communities to continue to see volunteering as an important way of life.
- Securing external funding to provide a community hub and support staff to ensure that those people who need the assistance get it.
- Continue building the ‘Volunteer (areas X, Y, Z)’ brand which provides a more volunteer focused/community based platform for local people to engage with.
- Needs assessments of local communities to identify how best to support groups/ volunteers and develop more resilient communities.

Strategic planning, action planning and evidence – a clear message from infrastructure organisations was that more effective planning was needed in the wake of COVID-19. They highlighted the need for further national level planning on ‘volunteering strategy’, ‘volunteering action plan’, ‘community resilience plan’ and ‘partnership action plan’. Some also noted the requirement for research evidence and evaluation to determine progress and performance in the rollout of Scotland’s national volunteering and resilience planning approach.

Partnership working – infrastructure organisations highlighted the importance of both continuing and strengthening the partnership working that had taken place during COVID-19, with a number of organisations citing this as key to recovery (see also in [Section 5.3](#)). Examples for taking this forward include:

- Partner/stakeholder engagement in strategy development and action planning
- Partner/stakeholder engagement in COVID-19/resilience meetings on a regular basis.
- Providing networking opportunities for volunteer managers to share and develop good practice.
- Development of close partner/stakeholder relationships to “...ensure that needs are being met for the communities and volunteering is at the heart of this work.”
- Joint working between the local authority and TSI, with the former funding TSI support in certain areas.

Recognition and celebration – a number of infrastructure organisations highlighted their commitment to ‘continue to recognise the great efforts of volunteering’ and ‘...to work with organisations and communities to better show appreciation and support for volunteers’. For infrastructure organisations this recognition and celebration role is usually seen as a shared responsibility with partners, even if they are the leaders in this area.

6.5 Stakeholder support to aid recovery – infrastructure organisations’ perspective

Infrastructure organisations also shared their views on what else was needed from other stakeholders (locally or nationally) to support recovery in volunteering following the pandemic.² Two key themes emerged: funding and coordination/collaboration.

6.5.1 Stakeholder support to aid recovery – funding

Half of all infrastructure organisations (51%) thought funding bodies needed to do more to aid the recovery of volunteering by offering short-term “financial support to volunteer involving organisations who have struggled for income during the pandemic” and to also provide longer-term sustainable funding opportunities to allow the sector to properly recover and grow after the pandemic.

Where funding is required – specific funding suggestions on where funding is needed included:

- Funding support for smaller VIOs whose income has been very significantly affected.
- Investment in TSIs as the ‘local experts’ to help rebuild volunteering (in all its forms) in their communities. Volunteering is local and TSIs are ideally placed to provide the required support.

Influencing the funders – a key priority is improving the awareness and understanding of volunteering by funders, and the resources required to support volunteers and volunteering. The way in which funding is allocated and distributed also needs to be reviewed. Specific suggestions include:

- Security in funding with longer-term, multi-year commitments, which reflects the commitment of Scottish Government to multi-year funding.⁶
- Simplifying application and grant-making processes with reduced bureaucracy
- Speed of funding distribution. COVID-19 has demonstrated what can be achieved during a crisis period versus ‘steady state’:

“I would like to see us use our learning and experience from the pandemic as we move into the recovery phase. Some of this learning is how National and Local Funders were able to put processes in place to distribute funds to those in need in a quick and simple process. Some Funders can take the best part of six months to confirm funding which can be detrimental to an organisation so if we can speed this process up but still ensuring the same level of information and delivery, I think this could be a huge positive.”
(Infrastructure organisation)

The 'Communities and Volunteering Circle' recommendations, which were submitted to the Social Renewal Advisory Board to inform its 'If not now, when?' report, highlighted the crucial role of funding.⁵ The Circle's Recommendation No. 2 mirrors the VIO and stakeholder views from the Scottish Government survey and charities' views from OSCR's survey:

"To transform our approach to voluntary sector and community funding and resourcing and take a whole system approach which is based around people and communities..."

"There was a clear consensus that **long term funding increases the impact on long term outcomes**. The recent experience of repeated, and late, one year national budget cycles have destabilised the funding base for organisations and do not provide the strong foundations needed to drive transformational change."

6.5.2 Stakeholder support to aid recovery – coordination and collaboration

There was a strong feeling amongst a number of infrastructure organisations that stakeholders in the sector needed to work closely together and collaboratively to support the recovery of volunteering.² To achieve this, it was recognised that it will require coordination (and by implication leadership). This evidence was strongly linked to the previous discussion on partnership working (Section 6.4.2). Additional factors to be highlighted include:

- Openness and transparency – holding stakeholders to account, to ensure best value
- The importance of providing the opportunities for TSIs to engage: "Opportunities for TSIs to meet - virtual, or face-to-face when safe to do so, to get together to discuss joint responses and share good practice / work through common issues."

6.6 Comparison of priorities for recovery – VIOs vs. infrastructure organisations

This section concludes with a brief comparative review of the recovery priorities for VIOs and infrastructure organisations. There were clear parallels in their respective priorities for the recovery of volunteering in Scotland: see Table 6.6.1.²

Table 6.6.1 – Comparison of VIOs’ and infrastructure organisations’ priorities for recovery

| Priority | VIOs | Infrastructure organisations |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Funding | 48% of VIOs identified funding support (open question) – mainly to help fund paid volunteer management/ coordination positions. | 90% of infrastructure organisations identified funding support for key volunteering priorities/ programmes. |
| Volunteer recruitment | 76% of VIOs were focused on encouraging and supporting volunteers who paused during the pandemic to return to volunteering; and 63% were prioritising the engagement and recruitment of new volunteers. | 67% of infrastructure organisation believed that engaging/re-engaging formal volunteers who stopped due to COVID-19 was a priority. |
| Recognition and celebration | A priority not just for VIOs, but the Scottish Government, its agencies and local government as well. (open question) | Infrastructure organisations highlighted their commitment to work with organisations and communities to better show appreciation and support for volunteers (open question) |
| Partnership working | VIOs identified ways to support improved collaboration and joint working – locally and nationally (open question). | 80% of infrastructure organisations prioritise the improved coordination of support for volunteering locally/regionally. |
| Training support | Supporting and training volunteers to undertake new forms of volunteering (47%) | Developing/embedding different models for engaging and supporting volunteers (83%) |
| Health and wellbeing | 83% of VIOs were focused on making volunteering safe and fully COVID-19 compliant. 71% were focused on supporting the health and wellbeing of their volunteers i.e. the problems of burnout/fatigue in their volunteer workforce. | Infrastructure organisations recognize the key role of formal, informal and mutual aid volunteering in helping to address, isolation and loneliness, and health and wellbeing challenges. (open question) |

| Priority | VIOs | Infrastructure organisations |
|----------------|--|--|
| Digital | VIOs requested help in improving their digital infrastructure and providing staff members and volunteers with IT equipment and accessible digital training (open question) | 83% of infrastructure organisations prioritised the development/embedding of different models for engaging and supporting volunteers – e.g. online/remote volunteering |

Source: Scottish Government Survey on impact of COVID-19 - April - June 2020

Bringing together the data, a clear picture emerges on the consensus of priorities to support Scotland's recovery. A key priority for both groups was funding, followed by a range of other priorities such as volunteer recruitment, recognition and celebration, etc. listed in Table 6.6.1.

The only category of support where there was an appreciable variation relates to inclusive volunteering. Only 37% of VIOs considered 'Making our volunteering more inclusive' a priority, compared to 81% of infrastructure organisations which thought 'Tackling exclusion of groups currently unable to volunteer' a priority. This variation can be explained by consideration of the wider evidence base, which has highlighted the extreme financial, staffing, volunteering and societal challenges facing VIOs (see [Sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3](#)). The consequence of these challenges is that they are having to focus on resurrecting core business services and, for some, ensuring the very survival of their organisation. So, factors such as inclusive volunteering are subsidiary to achieving business continuity.

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