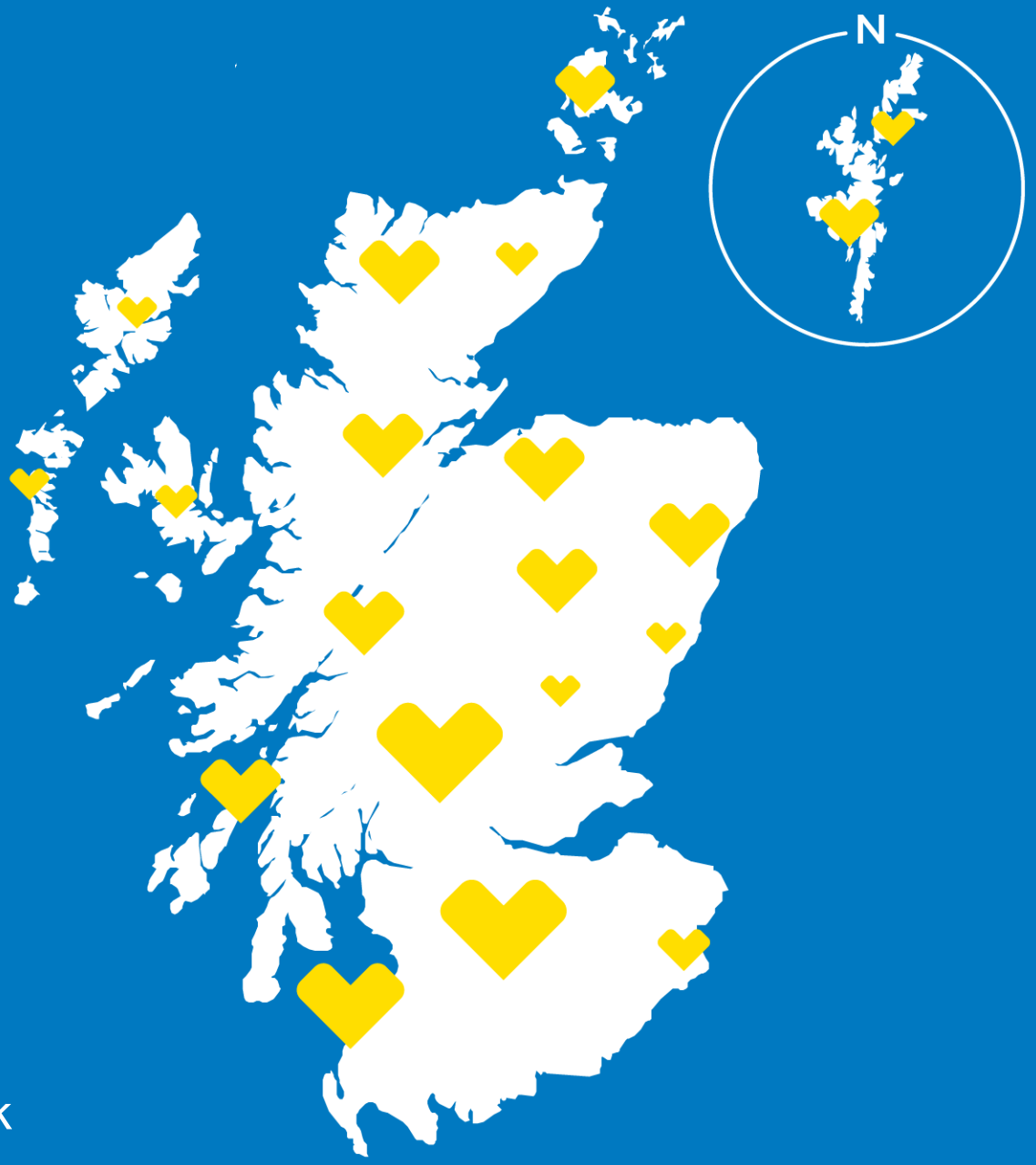
# COVID-19: Mutual aid volunteering in Scotland




**February 2021**

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# Scope…

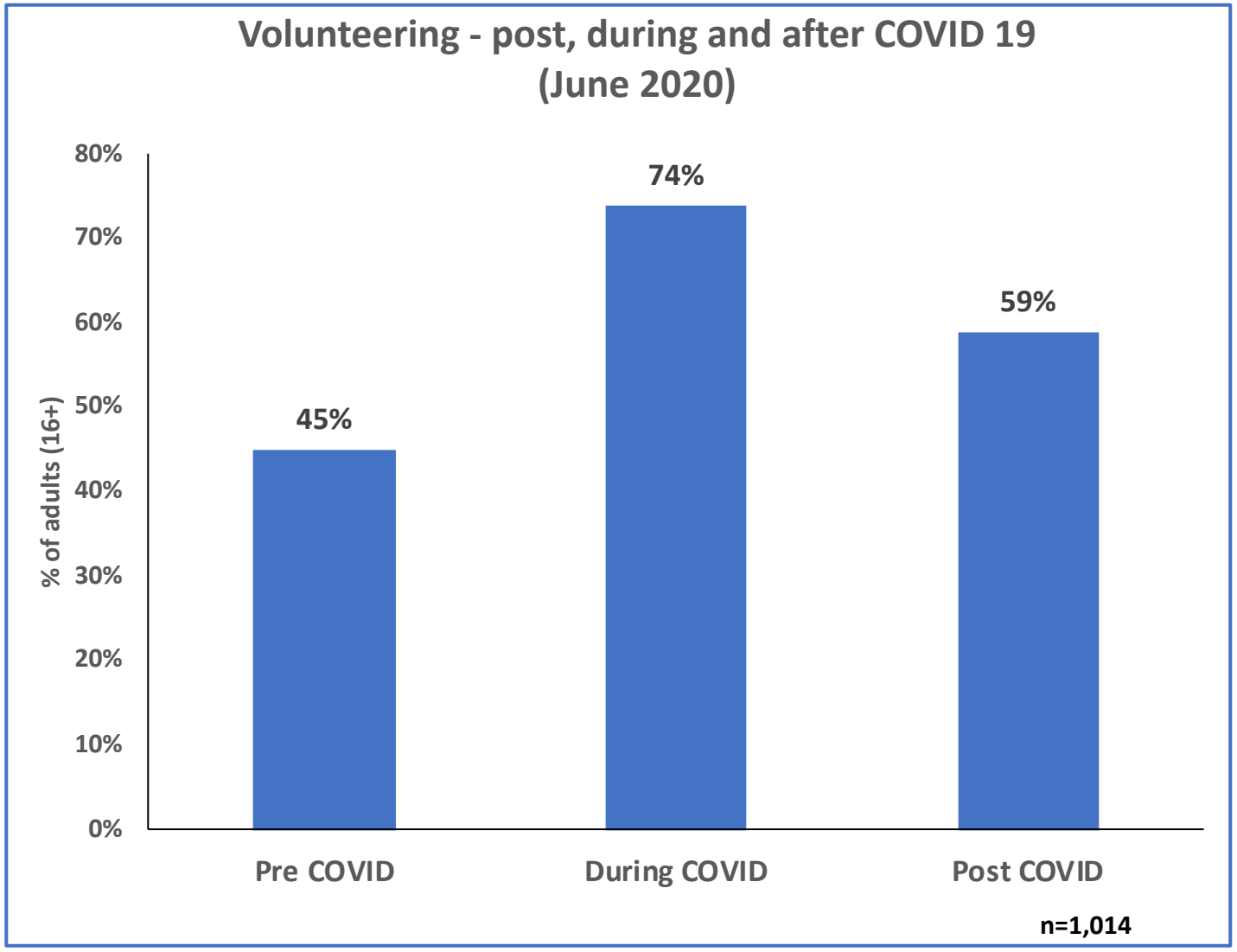
✓ Mutual aid volunteering in Scotland

✓Examples of Mutual Aid groups in Scotland

✓Challenges and opportunities for Mutual Aid

# Mutual Aid volunteering in Scotland

# Trend in total volunteering participation

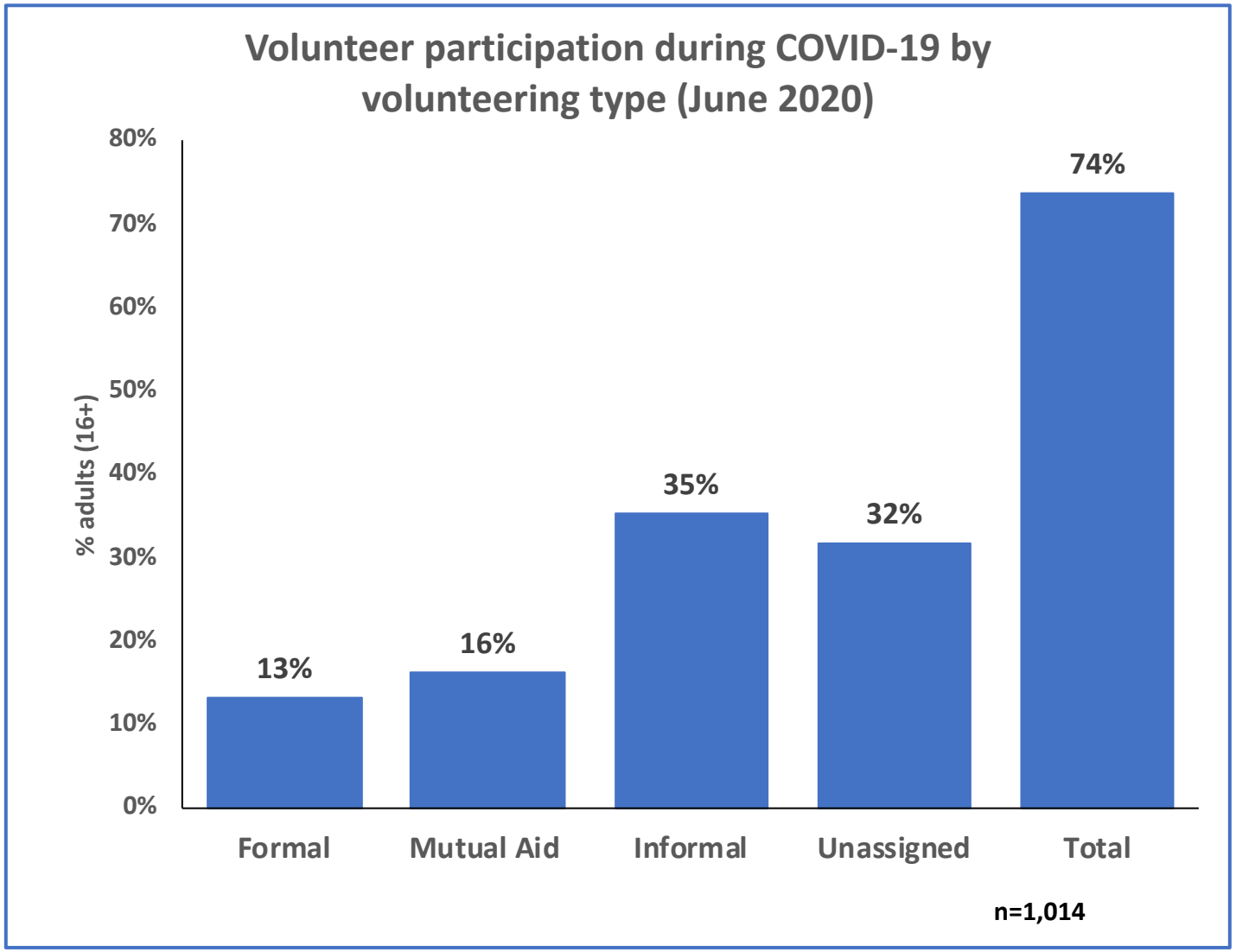



In June 2020:

- Overall volunteer participation increased by 29% (from 45% pre COVID-19 to 74% during COVID-19)
- Post Covid-19 volunteering is expected to increase by 14% from pre-covid level (from 45% pre COVID-19 to 59% during Covid-19).

Source: Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020,

# Volunteer participation during COVID-19 by volunteering types




"Thinking now about the time since the COVID-19 crisis began in March of this year, have you given any voluntary unpaid help:

- Through a charity, formally organised group, club or an organisation like the NHS (**formal volunteering**)
- Through an informal group set up by people in your area to support and help others in your local community (**mutual aid**)
- As an individual to help other people outside your family, or to support your local community (**informal volunteering**)"
- **Unassigned –** 32% of those surveyed did not select one of the three volunteer options above but confirmed undertaking at least one type of volunteering during COVID-19.

Source: Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020,

# Mutual Aid groups in Scotland – Feb 2021

**The total number of mutual aid groups operating in Scotland is hard to measure:**

- In April 2020 over 220 mutual aid groups were estimated to be operating in Scotland – see Scoping Paper
- The current map of mutual aid groups registered with COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK shows around 280 groups operating in Scotland (illustrated in the map).
- This excludes un-registered mutual aid groups; for example, those supporting smaller geographies such as WhatsApp groups for residents in a block of flats or street.
- Therefore the total number of mutual aid groups in Scotland is likely to be significantly greater than 280.

**At least 16% of adults in Scotland (16+) volunteered with a mutual aid group (March to June 2020) the equivalent of 727,000 Scottish adults.**
**This is a minimum estimate given that 32% of respondents are unassigned and a high proportion are likely to have undertaken mutual aid activities.**

Sources: Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020; NRS Mid Year population estimates 2019; COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK; Volunteer Scotland 'Research on Mutual Aid Groups in Scotland' :April 2020

# Some of the types of volunteering undertaken by mutual aid groups in Scotland

Volunteer Scotland

Befriending or keeping in touch with someone who is at risk of being lonely

**Doing food shopping**

**Collecting and delivering prescriptions**

**Providing transport to and from medical appointments**

**Collecting pensions / benefits or arranging bill payments on some ones behalf**

**Providing food support other than shopping**

**IT support – helping people access technology and get online**

**Signposting to formal organisations and other sources of advise and help**

**Telephone befriending services**

**Household tasks such as cleaning and gardening**

**Producing PPE**

Sources: Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020; Volunteer Scotland's 'Mapping of press and social media coverage' (https://www.volunteerscotland.net/for-organisations/research-and-evaluation/publications/covid-19-research/)

# Examples of Mutual Aid groups in Scotland

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**Stirling Pulling Together - Facebook Group**

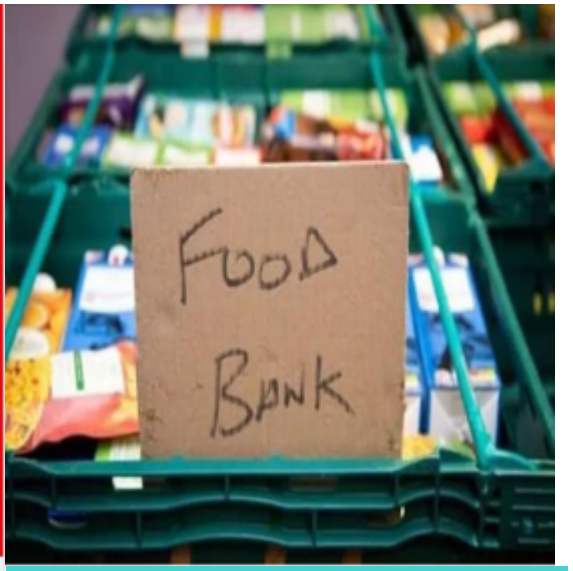
**- 5,300 members -**

**"This group has been set up in the hope that we can come together as a community for those that are most vulnerable during the Covid-19 outbreak.**

**Hopefully, those that are in the position to help will come together and maybe offer support with shopping, picking up prescriptions or just offer a friendly voice at the end of the phone.**

**If you know of someone who is not on Facebook and needs help, a friendly note from one of the members here could be posted through the door?**

**Let's all pull together, help each other whilst staying safe and making sure nobody is left to suffer alone".**



Source: Facebook

# Examples of mutual Aid groups in Scotland

## Edinburgh Coronavirus Support - Facebook Group

**- 9,200 members -**

**"This is a group for connecting and communicating efforts to help those dealing with the direct or indirect effects of the Covid-19 coronavirus. Connecting the people who can't, to those who can."**

## Glasgow Mutual Aid - Facebook Group

**- 3,200 members -**

**"Glasgow Mutual Aid is a group for those in Glasgow wishing to help others by providing food and other services to those in need. We formed in response to the COVID-19 outbreak and are trying our best to safely support those who are self-isolating, quarantined, or otherwise vulnerable."**

Source: Facebook

# Challenges and opportunities for Mutual Aid

# Benefits of and concerns around mutual aid groups in Scotland during COVID-19

## Complemented (contributed extra features to current provision)

- ✓ Delivery services (food, prescriptions).
- ✓ Provision for non-shielding yet still vulnerable individuals.
- ✓ Quick responses (typically two weeks ahead of formal services).

## Enhanced (increased effectiveness of existing provision)

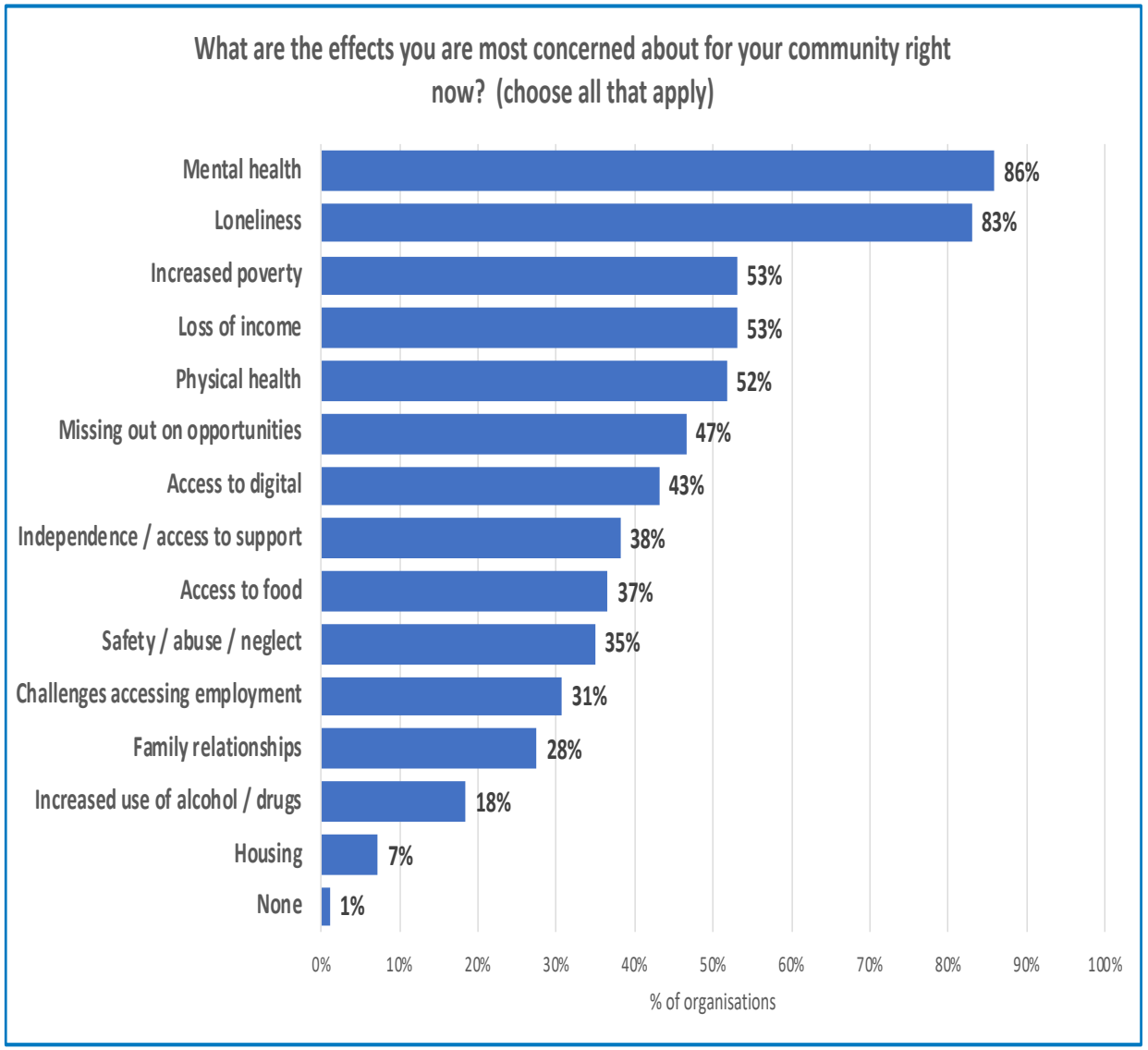
- ✓ Pooling resources/linking existing organisations
- ✓ Sharing of pre-existing information (e.g. local infection rates)
- ✓ Large number of volunteers
- ✓ Local knowledge

## Undermined (lessened effectiveness of existing provision)

- X Lack of long-term security (e.g. those being delivered food by the group)
- X Exposure to risk (e.g. bypassing PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) checks for 'volunteers')

Source: Solidarity in a time of crisis: the role of mutual aid to the COVID-19 pandemic – Chief Scientist Office Scottish Government and Glasgow Caledonian University

# The need for an integrated approach




- Mutual aid and informal volunteering in Scotland have driven the increase in overall volunteer participation during COVID-19.
- Informal volunteers (including Mutual Aid) have provided a disproportionate response in specific areas, such as 'Befriending' and 'Helping with household tasks' etc.
- Formal volunteering provides a greater degree of support to those with more complex needs, such as supporting those facing challenges' or 'supporting people's physical and mental health'.
- The third sector is most concerned about issues in the community which relate to those areas where formal volunteering has the biggest role to play.
- 'Mental Health', 'Loneliness', 'Loss of income' and 'Increased poverty' are key concerns right now and may deteriorate further during the economic downturn and extended periods of lockdown or social distancing.
- Mutual aid, informal and formal volunteers working in partnership can support both the immediate needs of the Scottish population in terms of food provision, etc. and the longer-term health and wellbeing challenges.

**Source**: TSI Scotland Network Survey – June 2020

# Looking to the future: challenges & opportunities

## 1. COVID 19 had led to deteriorating health and wellbeing

- Exacerbation of long-term H&W issues – especially mental health, domestic abuse, etc.
- Constraints on formal volunteering
- Wider role for mutual aid and informal volunteering

## 2. Social isolation and loneliness

- 20% of adults felt lonely in the last week (SHS 2019)
- Adverse impacts from shielding and self-isolation
- Build befriending services and capitalise on community engagement through all forms of volunteering.

## 3. Lessons from mutual aid

- Enhanced use of social media /technology
- Hyper-local knowledge, F2F and very fast response
- Lack of bureaucracy and informal volunteer recruitment, but risk issue

## 4. Societal changes – long term?

- Better connected communities?
- Mutual aid phenomenon?
- Increased collaboration between all forms of volunteering?
- Volunteering – total participation rate projected to increase from 48% to 59%?

**Can these opportunities be exploited to bring about a positive from the impact of COVID-19 ?**

# Sources

- ‘Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in Scotland’ – Link – Volunteer Scotland, July 2020
- Mapping of volunteering related press and social media coverage during COVID-19 – Link – Volunteer Scotland, published monthly
- ‘Impact of COVID-19 on the third sector in Scotland’ – Link – analysis of TSI Scotland Network survey data by Volunteer Scotland, June 2020
- ‘Research on mutual aid groups in Scotland’ Link – Volunteer Scotland, April 2020
- ‘Solidarity in a time of crisis: the role of mutual aid to the COVID-19 pandemic’ Link – Roy, M. et al., Glasgow Caledonian University, Oct 2020
- NRS Mid Year population estimates 2019 – Link – National Records of Scotland