

# Volunteer Scotland



## Volunteering in 2020

### Findings from the Scottish Household Survey

Volunteer Scotland's Analysis - April 2022



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## Key Findings

Scottish Household Survey data ([SHS 2018](#) and [SHS 2020](#))

### Overall volunteering participation

- The adult total volunteering participation rate in Scotland increased from 48% in 2018 to 64% in 2020, a 16% increase.
- This compares to a total volunteering participation rate during the first lockdown (March – June 2020) of 74%. [Ipsos MORI and Volunteer Scotland](#)

### Formal volunteering participation

- The adult formal volunteering participation rate was 26% in 2020; a figure which has remained constant for the last three years.
- However, there were demographic changes in 2020 including:
  - Age – those aged 16-34 were the only age group to increase their volunteering participation, from 23% in 2018 to 25% in 2020.
  - Gender - For the first time since 2007 formal male volunteering participation rates were higher than female participation rates (26% vs. 25%)
  - Disability – there was a 7% differential in volunteering participation in 2020 between disabled adults (20%) and non-disabled adults (27%).
  - Type – ‘supporting local community or neighbourhood groups’ was the most popular type of formal volunteering, involving 25% of volunteers.
  - Frequency and intensity – SHS data shows that as well as being undertaken less frequently, a higher proportion of formal volunteering is being undertaken with fewer hours. The proportion of ‘low intensity’ volunteers increased from 58% in 2018 to 73% in 2020.

### Informal volunteering participation

- The adult informal volunteering participation rate was 56% in 2020, a 20% increase from the 36% rate in 2018.
- All types of informal volunteering activities increased in 2020, the largest increases being:
  - The 51% increase in ‘Keeping in touch with someone who is at risk of being lonely’, up from 18% in 2018 to 69% in 2020; and
  - The 39% increase in ‘Doing shopping, collecting pensions, collecting benefits or paying bills’, up from 12% in 2018 to 51% in 2020.
- The demographic changes in 2020 included:
  - Age - adults aged 35-59 volunteered informally the most in 2020: up from 38% in 2018 to 61% in 2020.
  - Gender - male informal volunteering participation increased to 53% and female participation to 59%.
  - Disability - for both disabled and non-disabled adults there has been a 21% increase in informal volunteering participation rates during 2020 to 54% and 57% respectively, with only a 3% differential.

## 1. Introduction

In January 2022 the Scottish Government published the ‘Scottish Household Survey 2020 - telephone survey: key findings’.<sup>1</sup> This report presents Volunteer Scotland’s analysis of the accompanying data tables.

The Scottish Household Survey (SHS) is an annual survey which has been carried out since 1999. It collects data on a wide range of topics using face-to-face in-home interviewing. This includes annual questions on formal volunteering, and from 2018 biennial questions on informal volunteering. It is the most authoritative data source on volunteering in Scotland with a sample size in most years in the range of 9,000 – 10,000 adults aged 16 plus.

Due to the restrictions of COVID-19, SHS 2020 was adversely affected with a much reduced sample size and a decision to use a telephone survey in place of face-to-face interviews – see further discussion of the methodological implications in Section 2.

### **SHS volunteering definitions (from SHS 2020 questionnaire)**

Formal volunteering: “Thinking back over the last 12 months have you given up any time to help any groups, clubs or organisations in an unpaid capacity.”

Informal volunteering: “Any unpaid help you as an individual may have given to other people or to improve your local environment, that is apart from any help given through a group, club or organization. Do not include help given to a relative.

## 2. Methodology

Due to COVID-19 all SHS fieldwork was suspended in March 2020. At this point 1,500 face-to-face household interviews had been completed. However, the decision was taken to change the research method to telephone interviews for 2020, and to ensure consistency only the telephone survey results have been published.

2,790 telephone/video interviews were completed for SHS 2020 compared to around 10,500 face-to-face interviews in the 2019 survey. The smaller sample size means that data cannot be broken down in the same ways as previous surveys: for example, there will be no local authority breakdowns provided.

**Due to the change from face-to-face to telephone/video interviews care should be taken in comparing the results to previous years, due to the following factors:**

- The much smaller achieved sample size for the 2020 telephone/video survey compared to face-to-face interviews in previous years.

<sup>1</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2020 Telephone Survey - Key Findings](#) – Scottish Government; January 2022.

- The change in the profile of respondents: for example, homeowners and people with higher level qualifications are over-represented.
- Individuals may answer questions differently over the phone than when asked face-to-face.

It should also be noted that the telephone/video survey took place in two time periods (a small pilot of c. 200 interviews in October 2020; with the majority of interviews in January – March 2021), whereas the face-to-face surveys are undertaken on a rolling basis throughout the year. The [SHS 2020 methodology report](#) provides detailed information on the change in approach, and how it may have impacted the results.<sup>2</sup>

As a consequence of these changes in research mode and other methodological considerations, Volunteer Scotland has sense-checked the SHS 2020 volunteering findings against a range of other data sources – see references in ‘The Road to Recovery’ report.<sup>3</sup> The objective has been to try and identify whether the SHS data reflects genuine changes in volunteering due to the pandemic through triangulation with other key evidence sources.

Please also note that the differences in this report have not been tested for statistical significance. Statistical significance results are those that are not likely to occur randomly or by chance but are instead likely to be attributable to a specific cause. For example, if you sampled other groups of Scottish adults you would arrive at the same result, indicating that the result from the initial sample is not just a chance finding from one sample of the population. Full significance testing will be presented in the full analysis undertaken by Volunteer Scotland when the raw data for the 2020 SHS is available.

### 3. Overall volunteering participation

#### What classifies as volunteering participation?

The term ‘volunteering participation’ used in the SHS data is based on an adult aged 16 plus volunteering at least once in the previous 12 months from the date of interview. This applies to both formal and informal volunteering statistics presented in this report. If an adult volunteers less frequently than yearly, then they are not included in the volunteering statistics.

Before examining the changes in formal and informal volunteering participation in detail between SHS 2018 and SHS 2020 it is important to consider the overall volunteering participation, and whether the 2020 SHS data is in line with other COVID-19 research undertaken.

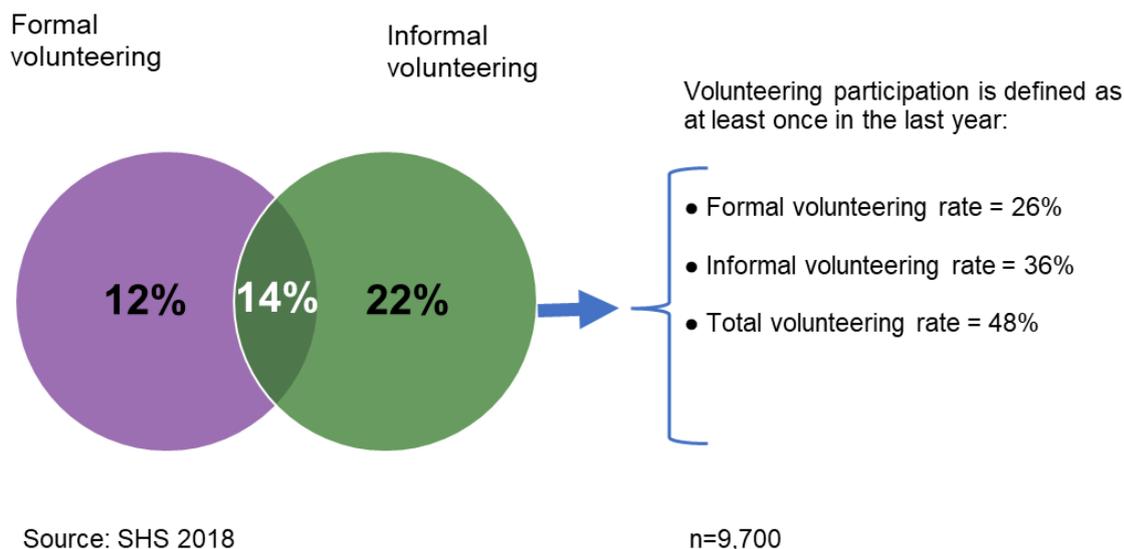
<sup>2</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2020: methodology and impact of change in mode](#) – Scottish Government; January 2022.

<sup>3</sup> [The Road to Recovery - During COVID-19 - The volunteer response](#) (Section 3) – Volunteer Scotland; February 2022.

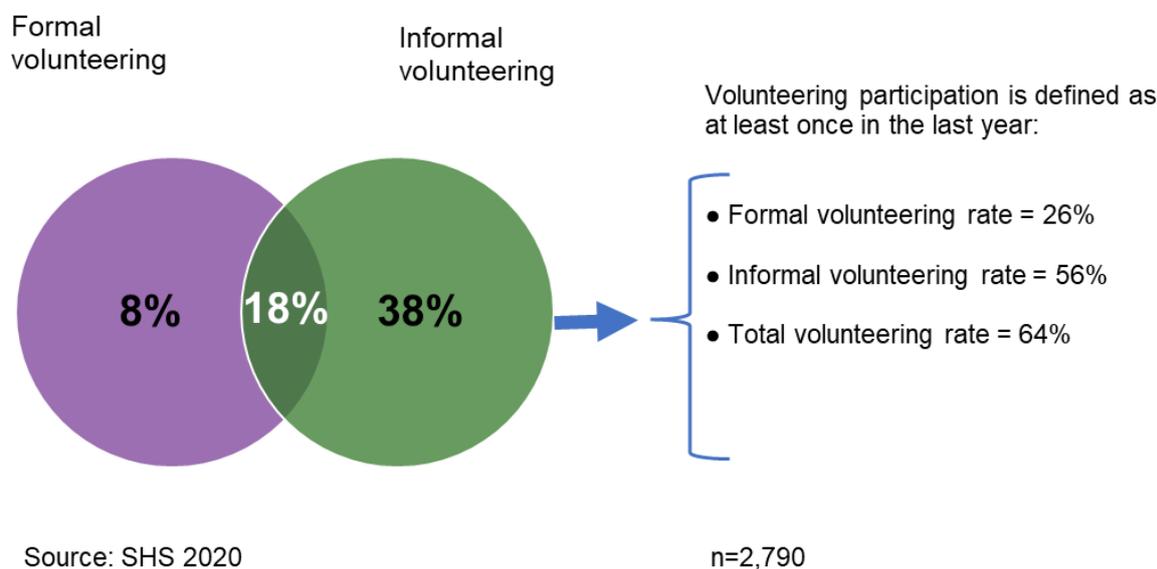
Figures 1 and 2 present SHS 2018 and SHS 2020 data respectively.<sup>4</sup> This shows:

- No change in the formal adult volunteering participation rate of 26%;
- A 20% increase in the informal adult volunteering participation rate from 36% to 56%; and
- A 16% increase in the total adult volunteering participation from 48% to 64% .

**Figure 1 – Scottish adult volunteering participation rate 2018 (16+)**



**Figure 2 – Scottish adult volunteering participation rate 2020 (16+)**



<sup>4</sup> Each Venn diagram shows the percentage undertaking formal volunteering only; the proportion of adults participating in both formal and informal volunteering; and those who undertake informal volunteering only. Therefore, total volunteering participation is the sum of all three.

Triangulating the SHS 2020 data with other research evidence has enabled Volunteer Scotland to provide an interpretation of the SHS findings, which helps to validate the direction of change, although not the extent.

**Total volunteering** – in June 2020 Volunteer Scotland commissioned Ipsos MORI to include questions on adult volunteering participation during the first lockdown as part of their omnibus telephone survey.<sup>5</sup> This gave a total participation rate of 74% which is higher than the SHS 2020 figure of 64%. Factors that should be taken into account in the interpretation of these datasets include:

- The fact that the Ipsos MORI survey was recording volunteering participation over a three month period compared to the SHS over a 12 month period. Other things being equal, this would tend to increase the SHS volunteering participation rate compared to the Ipsos MORI data (but it is actually 10% lower).
- As discussed in ‘The Road to Recovery’ report the first lockdown represented the peak volunteering period in Scotland, which reflects the initial surge in informal and mutual aid volunteering to address the immediate societal needs, before more formalised help and programs were able to be put in place.<sup>6</sup> Volunteering was at the forefront of people’s minds, a lot of adults were on furlough and, other things being equal, this could have resulted in a higher Ipsos MORI volunteering participation rate compared to the SHS survey when the questions were being asked in the period January to March 2021.
- The fact that the Ipsos MORI proactively asked adults in Scotland to identify if they had supported the work of any mutual aid groups, defined as a category of unpaid help: “...*through an informal group set up by people in your area to support and help others in your local community (the key distinguishing feature is that the volunteering is provided through non-constituted groups without legal/charitable status. This category refers specifically to groups on Facebook, WhatsApp, etc. set up to support communities or issues in society).*” The fact that the SHS 2020 does not explore this category of volunteering support may have led to an underestimate of volunteering participation, although again this is only a hypothesis as there is no firm evidence to prove this.

Taking these possible explanatory factors into account the Ipsos MORI data does help to validate the significant increase in the SHS total adult volunteering participation rate from 48% in 2018 to 64% in 2020. One would expect a significant increase in volunteering. However, these are not comparable datasets, so it is not possible to determine which dataset is the more accurate in measuring this increase.

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<sup>5</sup> [Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering participation in Scotland](#) – Volunteer Scotland, July 2020.

<sup>6</sup> [The Road to Recovery: Lessons learned from Scotland's volunteering response to COVID-19](#) – Volunteer Scotland, February 2022.

**Formal volunteering** – the SHS adult volunteering participation rate has remained constant at 26% for the three years 2018 – 2020. However, based on the findings from the Ipsos MORI survey and from other sources discussed in ‘The ‘Road to Recovery’ report, Volunteer Scotland believes that the 2020 figure hides quite significant shifts in the type of formal volunteering being undertaken.<sup>7</sup> Specifically:

- Formal volunteering through volunteer involving organisations (comparable to the type of formal volunteering undertaken pre-pandemic) was significantly reduced during the pandemic due to social distancing, shielding of volunteers, etc. So, one would expect this to reduce the formal volunteering participation rate below the 26% figure.
- In contrast, there was a big upsurge in mutual aid volunteering, especially during the first lockdown – see ‘The Road to Recovery’ report.<sup>8</sup> This is classified as formal volunteering as it is through an organisation or group. This COVID-19 impact will have had the effect of increasing the formal volunteering participation rate, which will have helped to counteract the decline in more traditional formal volunteering.

**Informal volunteering** – the SHS revealed a 20% increase in the adult informal volunteering participation rate, from 36% in 2018 to 56% in 2020. This was validated through the Ipsos MORI survey which identified very high participation rates in activities linked strongly to either informal volunteering or mutual aid, including ‘befriending or keeping in touch with someone who is at risk of being lonely (68% of volunteers); doing food shopping (57%); and helping out with household tasks such as cleaning and gardening (30%).

## 4. Formal volunteering

There has been a discernible decline in formal adult volunteering participation, from a high point of 31% in 2010 to the recent levelling out at 26% for the period 2018 – 2020: see Figure 3.<sup>9</sup> As explained in Section 2, there were quite significant shifts in the types of formal volunteering undertaken during 2020 which have tended to cancel each other out, with the rate remaining constant at 26%. This section now looks at demographic differences in formal volunteering participation rates; the change in volunteering frequency; and the change in volunteering intensity.

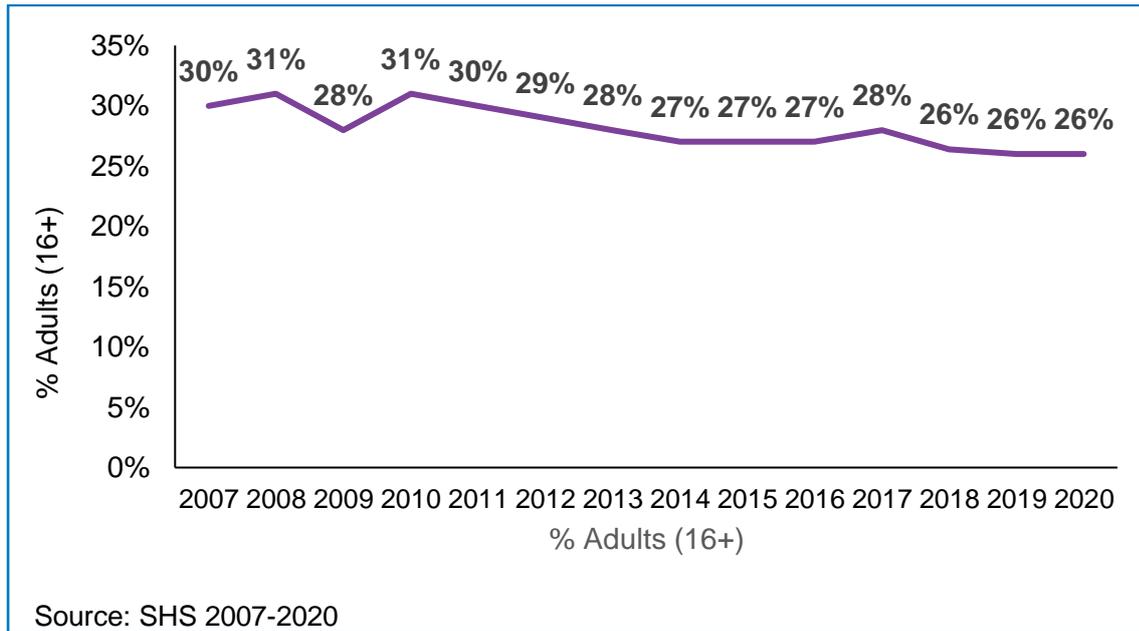
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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

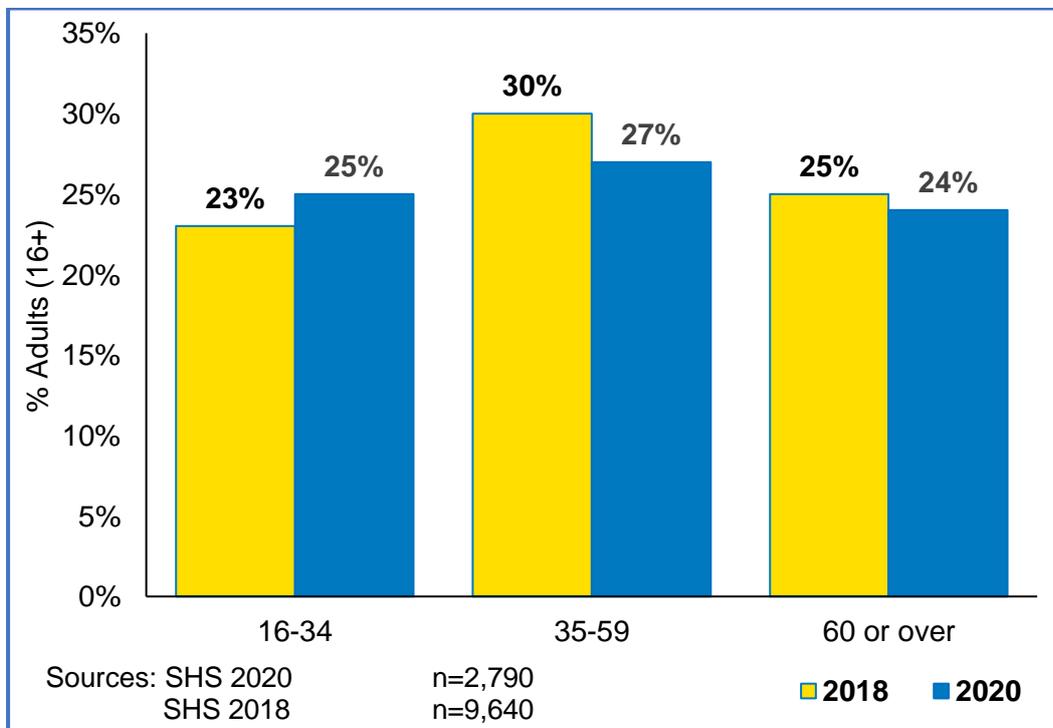
<sup>9</sup> [Volunteering Trends in Scotland: 2007 - 2019](#) – Volunteer Scotland; June 2021

**Figure 3 – Scottish adult (16+) formal volunteering participation rates 2007 – 2020**



**Age** - The SHS 2020 results show that adults aged 16-34 were the only age group to increase their volunteering participation during 2020, from 23% in 2018 to 25% in 2020: see Figure 4. Although not directly comparable (due to the difference in the age bands), the results from the Ipsos MORI survey showed that adults aged 16-24 had the highest participation in both formal volunteering and mutual aid during the first lockdown.<sup>10</sup>

**Figure 4 – Scottish adult (16+) formal volunteering participation rates by Age groups**

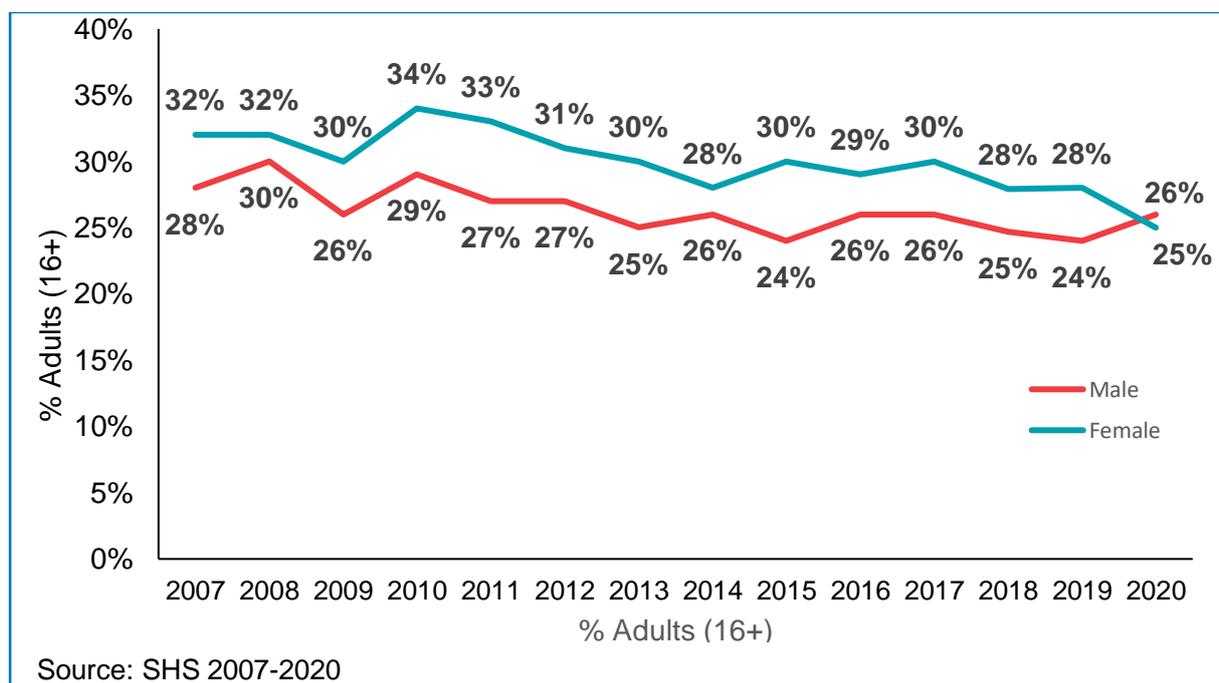


<sup>10</sup> [Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering participation in Scotland](#) – Volunteer Scotland, July 2020.

**Gender** - For the first time since 2007 formal male volunteering participation rates are higher than female participation rates (26% vs. 25%): see Figure 5. One possible explanatory factor has been the significant contraction in volunteering roles during COVID-19 relating to the category ‘children’s education and schools’ (see Figure 8) where female participation has historically been much higher.<sup>11</sup>

Research also suggests that formal female participation rates may have fallen more than males during 2020 due to the additional caring responsibilities undertaken by females, in particular home schooling of children.<sup>12</sup> It will be interesting to see if this narrowing in volunteering participation by gender continues into the future, which would be a significant change in the profile of formal volunteering in Scotland.

**Figure 5 – Scottish adult (16+) formal volunteering participation rates 2007 – 2020 by Gender**



**Disability** – Figure 6 shows that COVID-19 has impacted volunteering participation for both disabled and non-disabled adults equally, but with only a marginal 1% decline in each. The result is that the differential in volunteering participation between disabled and non-disabled adults remains at 7% for both 2018 and 2020.

This evidence is perhaps at variance with what one might expect due to disabled adults having to shield depending on their health condition, and the reduction in support available to support disabled volunteers during COVID-19, in part due to social distancing measures.

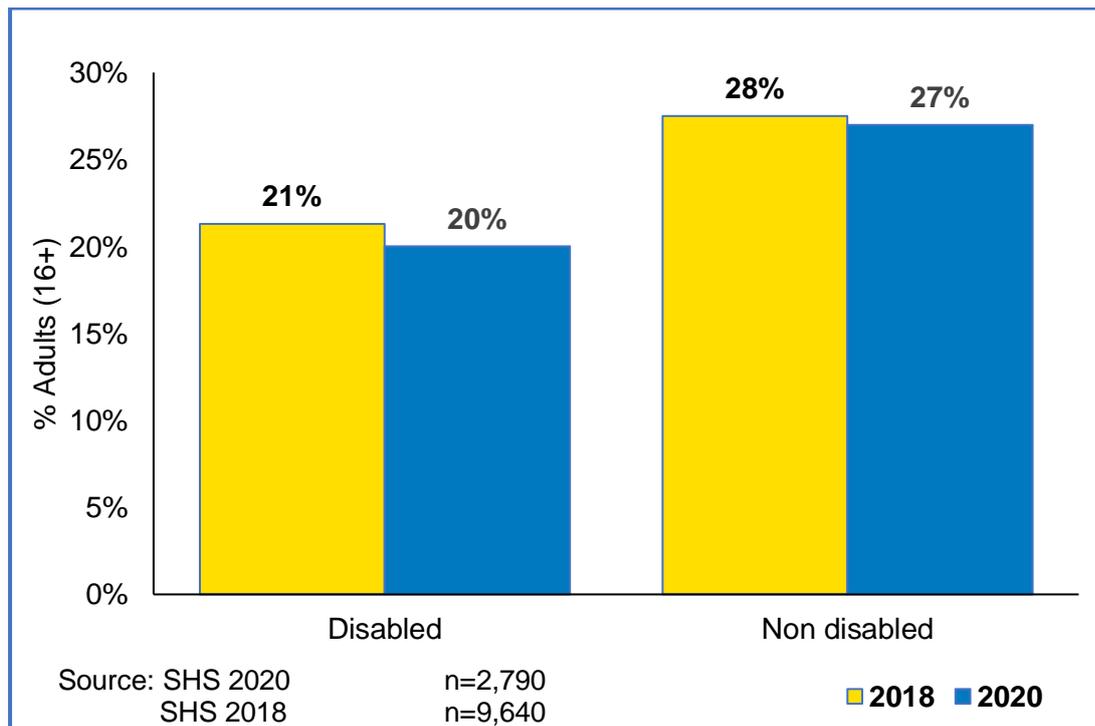
<sup>11</sup> [Scottish Household Survey 2018: Annual Report](#) – See Table 11.7 in ‘Volunteering’ Chapter which shows that male volunteer participation in ‘Children’s education and schools’ was half that of females (13% vs. 26%)

<sup>12</sup> [The Road to Recovery - During COVID-19 - The volunteer response](#) (Section 3) – Volunteer Scotland; February 2022.

Research also indicates that for many volunteer involving organisations COVID-19 has exacerbated the challenges of achieving inclusive volunteering.<sup>13</sup>

There is also the unknown impact of increased use of digital engagement during COVID-19 and whether this has facilitated volunteering by disabled people. Intuitively one would expect positive impacts, but the evidence from ‘The Road to Recovery’ research also shows that for some disabled people it may have created an additional barrier to volunteering.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 6 – Scottish adult (16+) formal volunteering participation rates 2018 & 2020 by Disability**



**Definition of ‘disability’**

The SHS 2020 derives its data on the number of disabled people using two questions:

1. Do you have a physical or mental health condition or illness lasting or expected to last 12 months or more?

If they respond ‘yes’

2. Does your condition or illness reduce your ability to carry out day-to-day activities?

Response options: Yes, a lot; Yes, a little; Not at all

‘Disability’ includes those whose day-to-day activities are reduced either ‘a lot’ or ‘a little’. From previous analysis conducted by Volunteer Scotland on the SHS 2018 data we know that volunteering participation is significantly lower if one only examines people whose day-to-day activities are reduced ‘a lot’. Not only does this group of disabled people volunteer less, but they are also likely to have been more adversely impacted by COVID-19. This will be analysed by Volunteer Scotland once the SHS 2020 dataset is available.

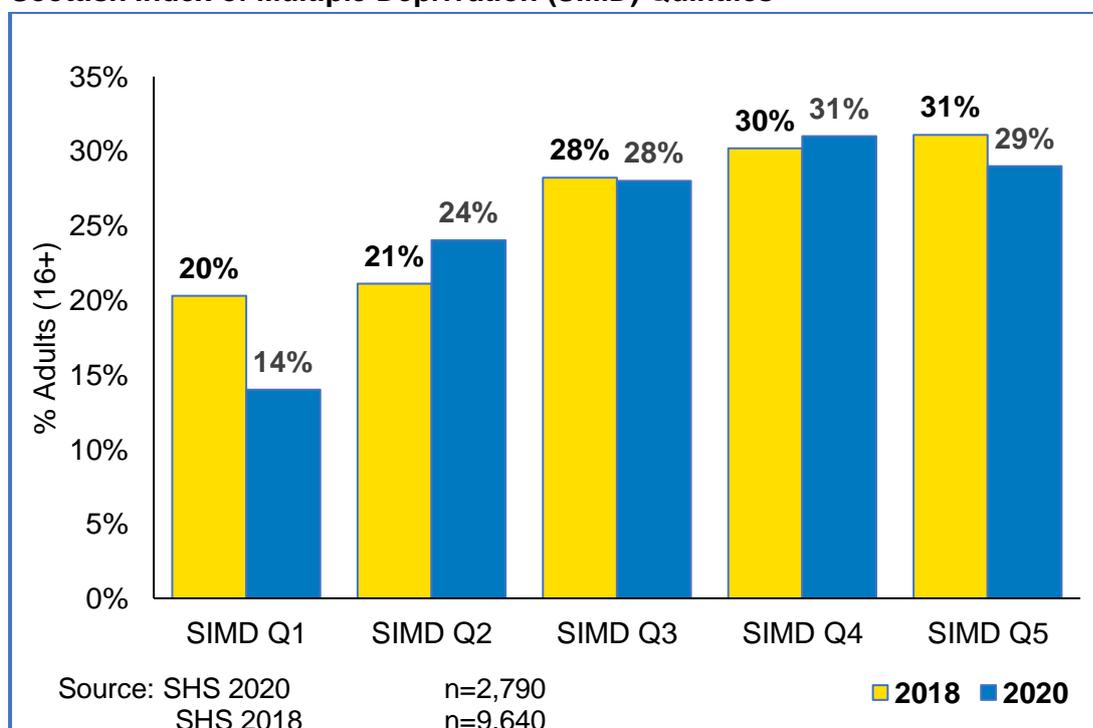
<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> [The Road to Recovery: Lessons learned from Scotland's volunteering response to COVID-19](#) – Volunteer Scotland, February 2022.

**Deprivation** – Figure 7 shows that adult volunteering participation was lowest in quintile 1 (the 20% most deprived areas in Scotland) in both 2018 and 2020. However, there was an appreciable 6% decline in quintile 1 participation, from 20% in 2018 to 14% in 2020. Possible explanatory factors include:

- The poorer health of those living in quintile 1 leading to higher levels of shielding.<sup>15</sup>
- The higher incidence of COVID-19 in areas of deprivation and the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on people's health. For example, the deaths from COVID-19 are particularly concentrated in the most deprived areas of Scotland.<sup>16</sup>
- Possibly there were fewer opportunities to volunteer in the most deprived areas during COVID-19; also less access to affordable childcare?
- Due to changes in SHS 2020, participants living in quintiles 1 and 2 were underrepresented in the sample and that also could have affected the results.

**Figure 7 – Scottish adult (16+) formal volunteering participation rates 2018 & 2020, by Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) Quintiles**

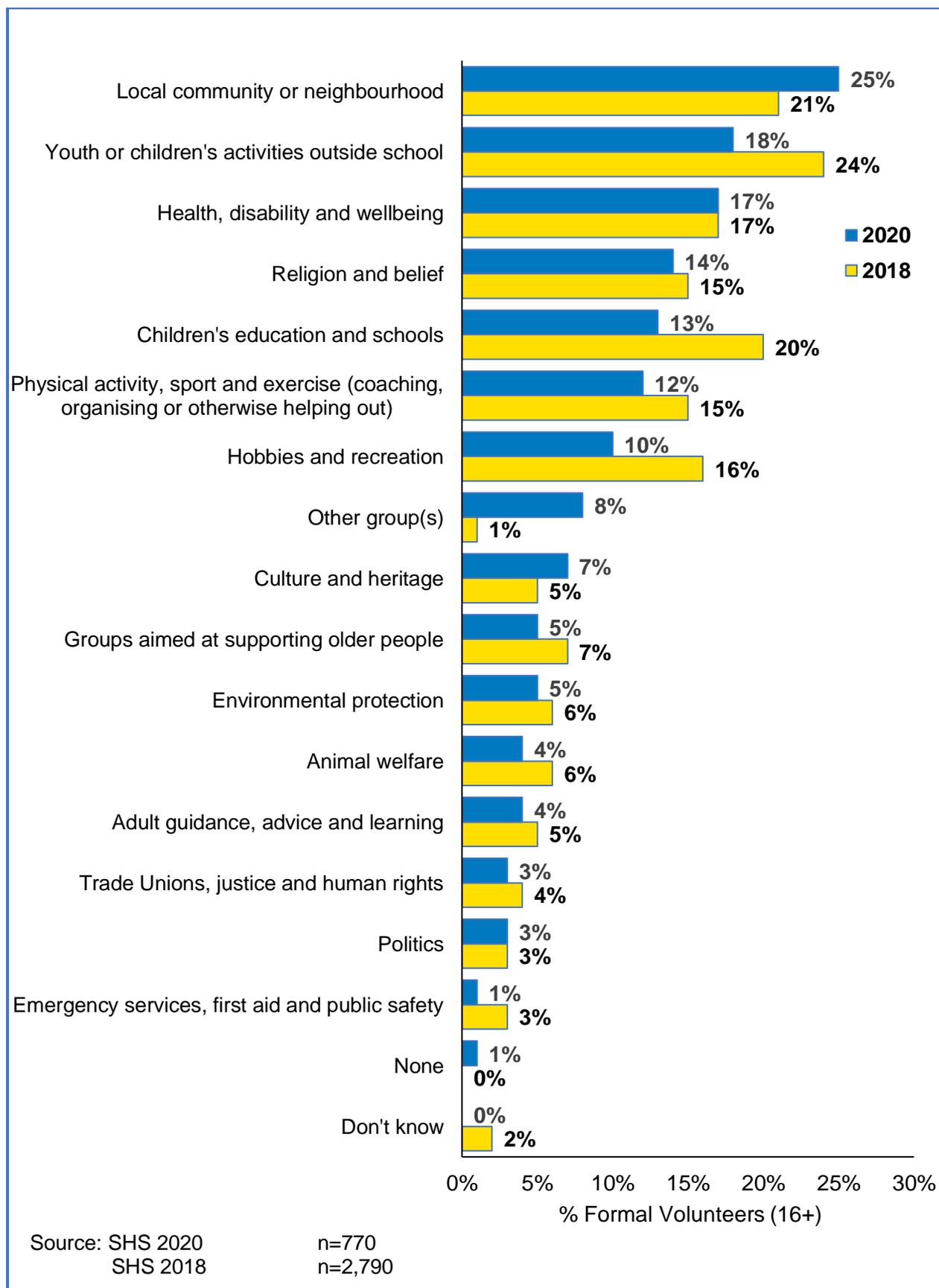


**Types of organisations supported by formal volunteers** - Figure 8 details the types of organisations or groups adults formally volunteered with (in the previous 12 months) in both 2018 and 2020. Adult volunteering participation has declined for most categories of volunteering, with the largest decreases relating to children's education and schools (7%), youth or children's activities outside school (6%), hobbies and recreation (6%). The exceptions were increases in participation for 'other groups' (7%), community (4%), culture and heritage (2%).

<sup>15</sup> [The contribution of volunteering to Scotland's health and wellbeing](#) – Volunteer Scotland; Oct 2019

<sup>16</sup> [COVID-19 and deprivation: Scotland](#) – COVID Recovery Commission

**Figure 8 –Types of organisations or groups adults formally volunteered with in the past 12 months, 2018 & 2020**



The increases and decreases between 2018 and 2020 were to be expected given the differential impacts of COVID-19. For example, schools and recreational facilities were closed for long periods, while community engagement increased hugely through mutual aid and smaller neighbourhood groups; and ‘other groups’ may be reflective of new ways in which to volunteer (mutual aid) and campaigns like sewing scrubs that allowed people to sign up and volunteer online through bespoke groups addressing COVID-19.

Analysis of SHS 2020 data reveals that supporting local community or neighbourhood groups has become the most supported type of organisation across a wide number of demographic groups; adults aged 35+, both genders, disabled and non-disabled adults and SIMD Q2 – Q5. This reinforces other evidence sources that community engagement increased significantly during COVID-19, irrespective of demographics and has been a real positive change from the pandemic. Volunteer Scotland’s report ‘Routemap to Improvement’ has examined the ways in which this increase in community engagement and cohesion can be harnessed post COVID-19.<sup>17</sup>

**Types of formal volunteering activity** - When considering the types of formal volunteering activities undertaken in the past 12 months only ‘generally helping out’ and ‘other activities’ have increased: see Figure 9. This is in line with the Scottish Government’s research which found that a ‘can do’ approach was predominant during COVID-19 with volunteers undertaking any tasks required to support the response to COVID-19, and just getting stuck in to get things done.<sup>18</sup> In 2020 the SHS data also shows that ‘Generally helping out’ was the most undertaken task irrespective of age range and gender, with 58% of volunteers involved in this support category.

The percentage of formal volunteers acting as a ‘committee member or as a trustee’ remained constant at 25%. The role of trustees, particularly in smaller volunteer led organisations, was critically important over the course of the pandemic with many trustees undertaking additional tasks and looking for ways to continue to offer services and keep organisations running; for example, many were key in helping third sector organisations look to and implement digital solutions.<sup>19</sup>

The decrease in other volunteer tasks is unsurprising as many third sector organisations had to either pause or stop pre-COVID 19 projects and activities such as face-to-face fundraising due to social distancing restrictions.

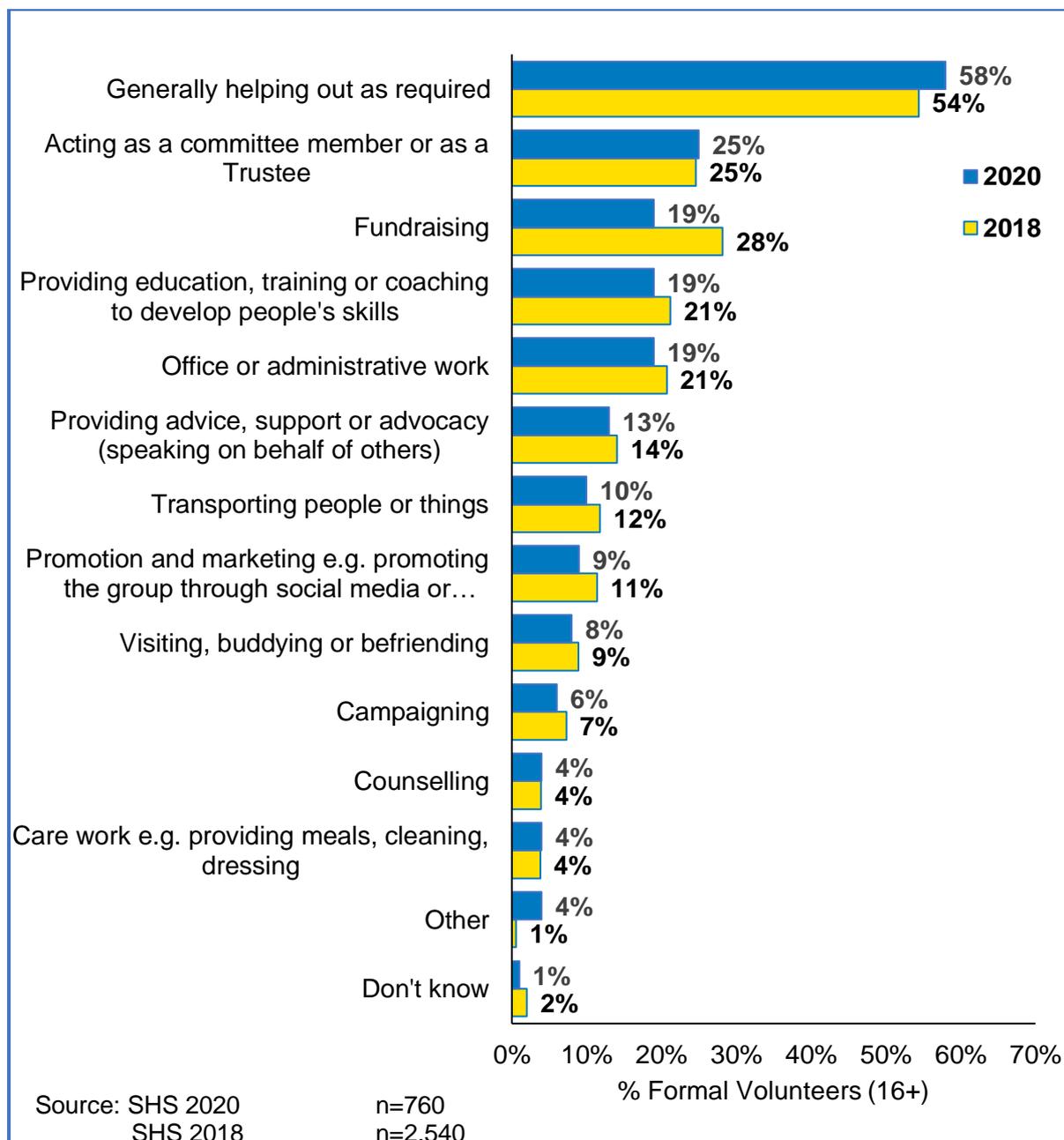
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<sup>17</sup> [Routemap to Improvement](#) – Volunteer Scotland; February 2022

<sup>18</sup> [Scottish Third Sector Perspectives on volunteering in Scotland: Survey Report](#) – Scottish Government; January 2022.

<sup>14</sup> [November 2020 COVID-19 Survey: Volunteers and Trustees Supplementary](#) – OSCR (undated)

**Figure 9 –Types of formal volunteer activities undertaken in the past 12 months - 2018 & 2020**



**Frequency of formal volunteering** - The SHS 2020 data for the frequency of formal volunteering is presented in Figure 10. Unfortunately it’s not possible to compare this data with SHS 2018 due to two important interlinked elements. The first is the change in the wording of the question:

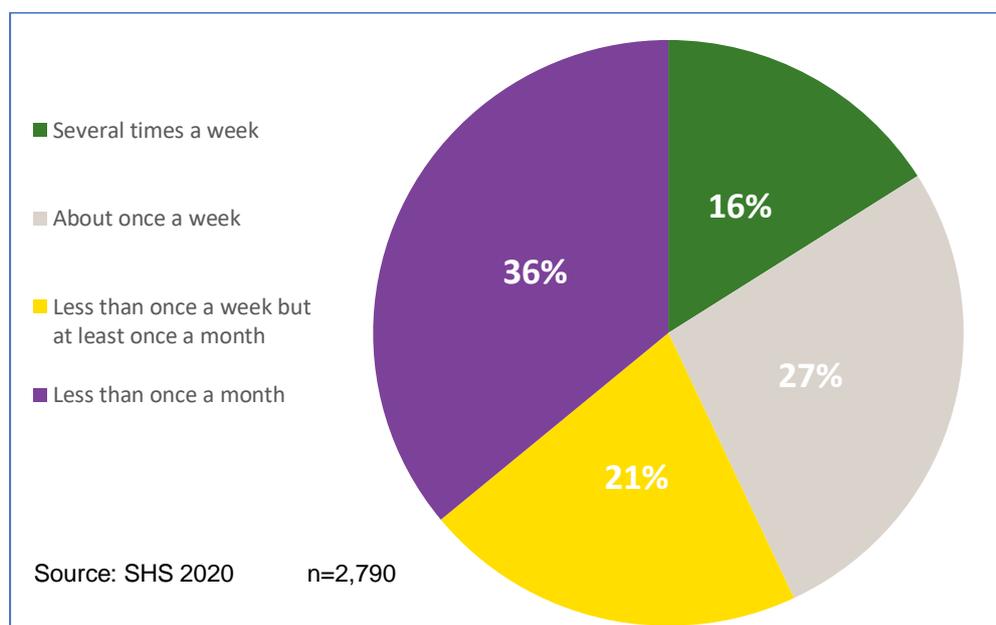
- In 2018 the question asked Scottish adults to consider their volunteering frequency over a 12 month period.
- In contrast, the 2020 survey asks Scottish adults to consider the frequency of volunteering they undertake ‘nowadays’.

The use of ‘nowadays’ removes the ability to consider and analyse the data over the course of COVID-19 in 2020.

Secondly, as the majority of the telephone interviews took place in Jan-March 2021 the frequency does not represent formal volunteering at peak points in the pandemic, for example the periods of lockdown.

It will be interesting to compare the SHS 2020 data with SHS data post-COVID-19 to determine if the frequency of volunteering has changed. The Ipsos MORI research commissioned by Volunteer Scotland during the first lockdown projected an increased time commitment by 31% of adult volunteers, with only 5% projecting a decrease.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 10 – Frequency of Formal Volunteering undertaken 2018 (in the past year) & 2020 (nowadays)**

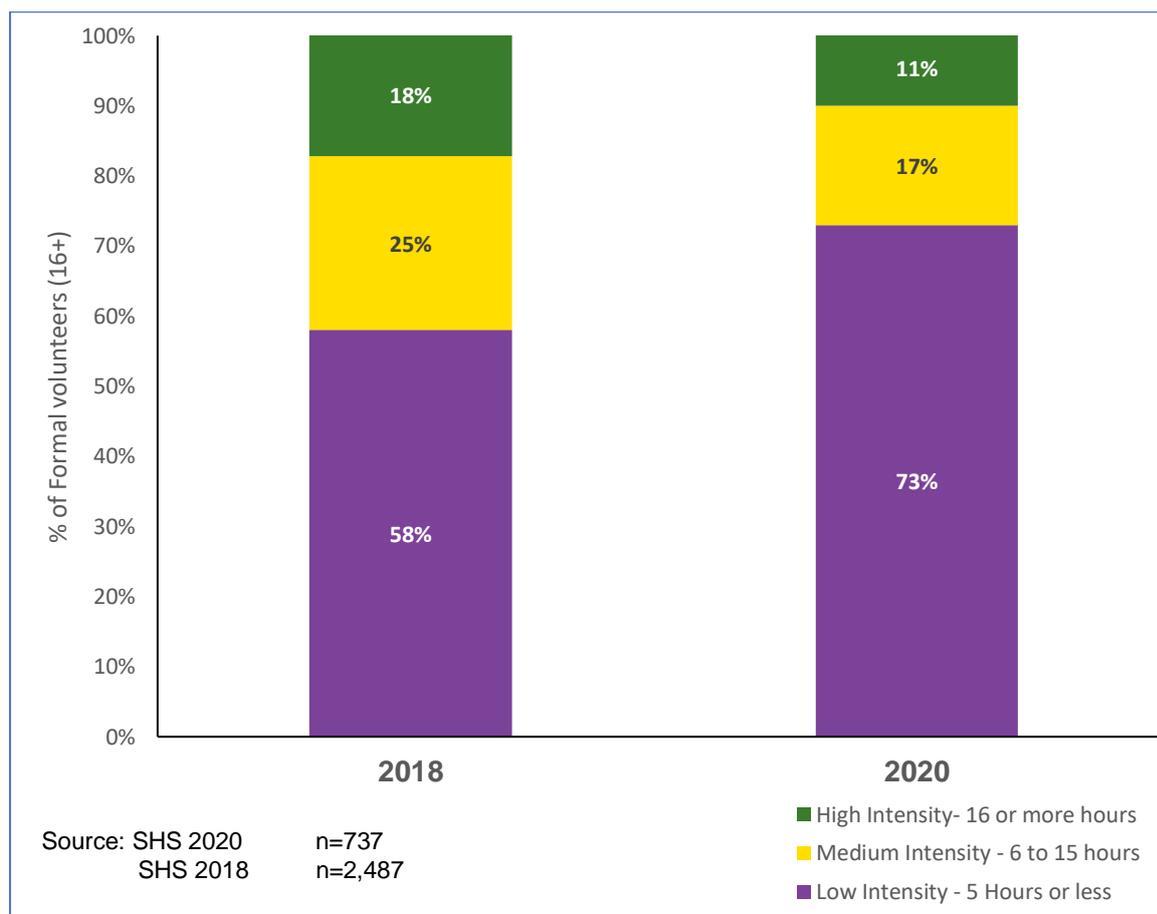


**Intensity of formal volunteering** - Linked to the frequency of formal volunteering is the intensity with which it is undertaken. As in previous years Volunteer Scotland has analysed this in three categories: low intensity volunteering (5 hours or less in past 4 weeks); medium intensity (6-15 hours in the past four weeks); and high intensity (more than 16 hours in the past four weeks). Figure 11 shows a higher proportion of formal volunteering is being undertaken with fewer hours. The proportion of ‘low intensity’ volunteers increased from 58% in 2018 to 73% in 2020. The decrease in intensity of formal volunteering applies to all age groups and genders.

<sup>20</sup> [Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering participation in Scotland](#) – Volunteer Scotland, July 2020.

Because this question relates to the previous four weeks during the period January to March 2021, the intensity of volunteering will not reflect the peak periods of volunteering during COVID-19. As explained in the analysis of the frequency data, the intensity findings may be indicative of a recovery phase where VIOs were able to restart pre COVID-19 programs and activities but not to the same extent as prior to COVID-19, lessening the opportunities for adults to participate, thereby reducing not just the frequency but also the intensity with which they volunteered.

**Figure 11 – Intensity of Formal Volunteering undertaken 2018 & 2020 in the past 4 weeks**



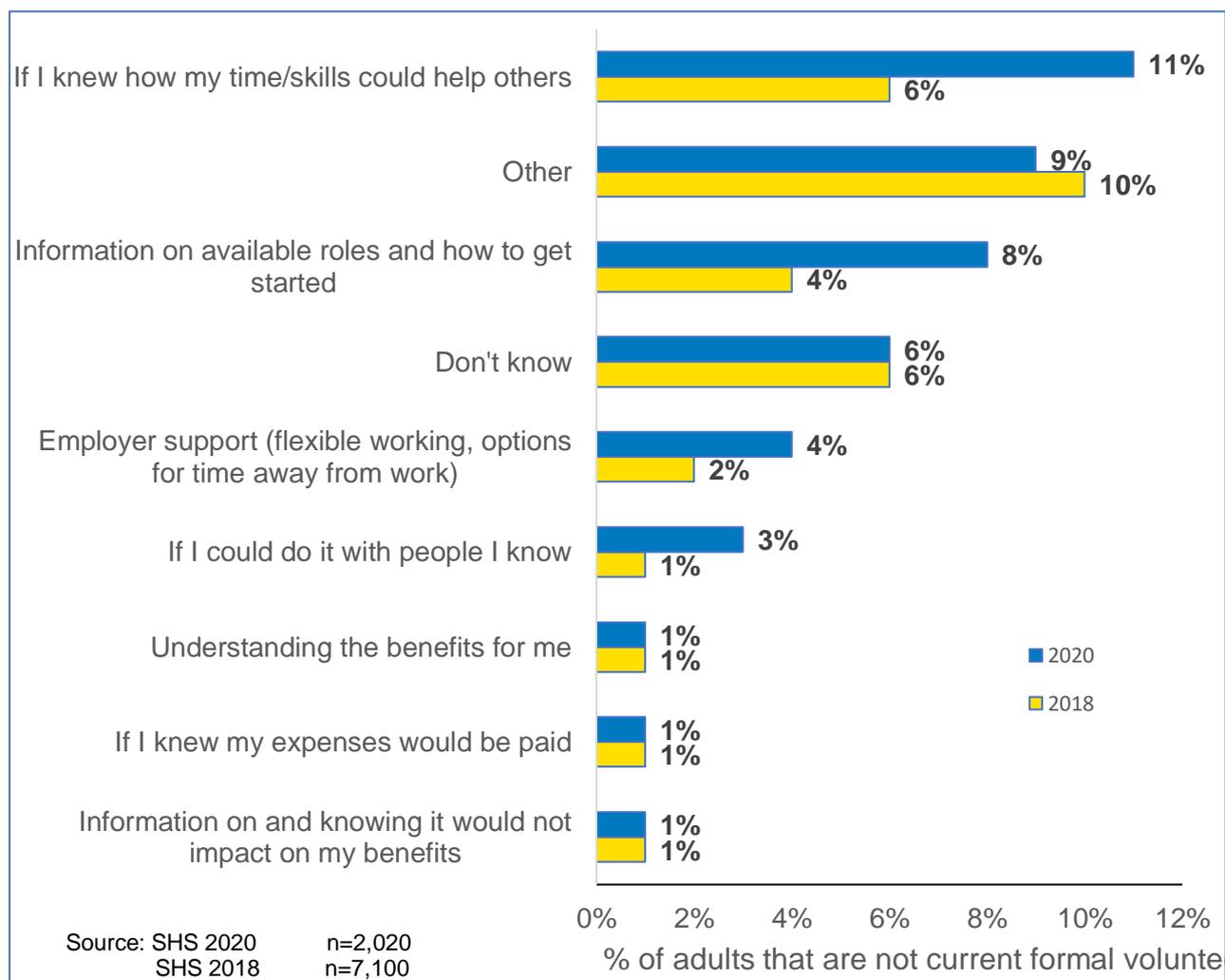
**Factors influencing future volunteering** – In SHS 2020 those who were not volunteers were asked if there was anything that would encourage them to volunteer formally in the future. Sixty-five percent responded ‘nothing’, but 35% indicated that there were factors which may encourage them to volunteer: see Figure 12.

In 2018 the highest response category was ‘other’ at 10% of non-volunteers, but in 2020 the highest response category was ‘If I knew how my time/skills could help others’ at 11% (up from 6% in 2018). This is an interesting change and may suggest that those not currently involved in formal volunteering are giving more thought to how they can help others through volunteering. ‘If I knew how my time/skills could help others’ is the highest response category for adults aged 16-59, both genders, adults with and without disabilities and SIMD Q2-5.

Given the context of COVID-19 and the increase in overall volunteering there is an interesting question as to whether adults who volunteered informally during COVID-19 are looking at ways in which they can volunteer more formally in the future. Once the raw data for the SHS survey is released this is an area that will be investigated further.

There was also an increase in the percentage of adults stating that ‘Information on available roles and how to get started’ (4% increase); ‘Employer support such as flexible working and options for time away from work’ (2% increase); and ‘If I could do it with people I know’ (2% increase). All other categories remained the same or had slight decreases.

**Figure 12 – Reasons why adults (16 +) may formally volunteer in the future**



While undertaking this analysis Volunteer Scotland had a ‘so what’ moment as the percentages for each category are relatively small. So, what does this data really tell us and is it important?

There were over 3.3 million adults who were not volunteering formally in Scotland during 2020:

- Number of adults in Scotland in 2020 - 4,549,217
- Number of formal volunteers = 26% - 1,182,796
- Number of adults not volunteering formally - 3,366,421

If we now examine the most popular factor ‘If I knew how my time/skills could help others’, which applies to 11% of adults then this could result in up to an additional 370,306 adults volunteering formally, which would increase the formal adult volunteering participation rate by 8% from 26% to 34%.

However, the actual percentage increase is likely to be substantially less than this as the question was ‘Reasons why adults **may** volunteer formally in the future’. Also, the volunteering may not be this year, next year or even the year after – only at some point in the future. Notwithstanding these qualifications, even if half of this increase was realised in a future year, the formal volunteering participation rate would increase by 4% to 30% a rate not realised since 2011: see Figure 3. A similar breakdown for all factors influencing formal volunteering participation is presented Table 1.

**Table 1 – Reasons why adults (16 +) may formally volunteer in the future**

Reasons why adults may do formal volunteering in the future	2018	2020	Difference (2020 - 2018)	Potential volunteers	Potential increase in formal participation rate
Information on and knowing it would not impact on my benefits	1%	1%	0%	33,664	1%
If I knew my expenses would be paid	1%	1%	0%	33,664	1%
Understanding the benefits for me	1%	1%	0%	33,664	1%
If I could do it with people I know	1%	3%	2%	100,993	2%
Employer support (flexible working, options for time away from work)	2%	4%	2%	134,657	3%
Don't know	6%	6%	0%	201,985	4%
Information on available roles and how to get started	4%	8%	4%	269,314	6%
Other	10%	9%	-1%	302,978	7%
If I knew how my time/skills could help others	6%	11%	5%	370,306	8%

However, the dynamics of the volunteering pipeline are complex. Table 1 shows that in 2018 there were also potential projected increases in volunteering participation if these factors were addressed. However, formal volunteering participation has remained constant at 26% over the period 2018-2020. Maybe there was an influx of new volunteers, but this positive impact was counterbalanced by the exit of an equivalent number of existing volunteers? Or maybe there has been a complete lack of success in addressing these barriers, which could have been exacerbated by the impact of COVID-19 in 2020? Or perhaps it's a combination of both?

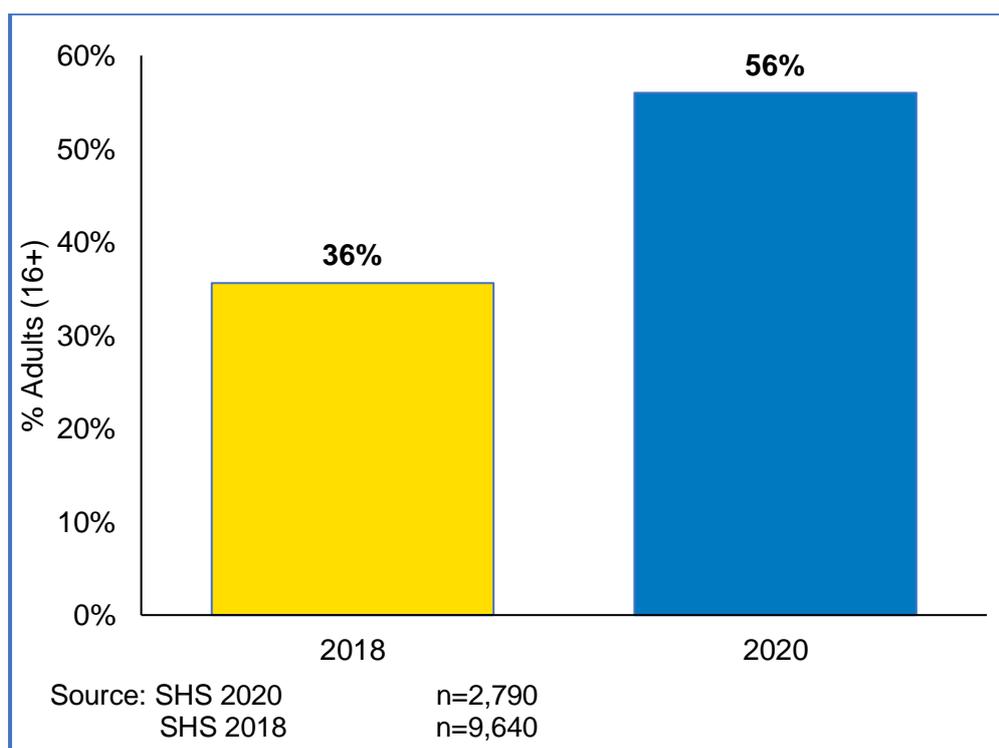
Given its strategic importance and the potential impact on volunteering participation this issue would warrant future research and analysis as the SHS data on its own raises more questions than it answers. However, what we do know is that, in principle, each of these factors are actionable, often without a significant cost. For example, they are related to information on roles, how to get started and details of how adults' skills and experience would help others.

This could present an important opportunity with the potential not just to increase formal volunteering participation rates, but also to leverage the health and wellbeing benefits for the new volunteers, in addition to their contribution to society. COVID-19 has exacerbated societal issues around social isolation, loneliness and mental health, hence by increasing volunteering participation there is an opportunity to help mitigate some of the detrimental impacts of COVID-19 on Scottish society.

## 5. Informal volunteering

**Increase in informal volunteering during COVID-19** - Informal volunteering participation was first introduced as a question in the SHS in 2018. Between 2018 and 2020 the informal participation rate increased by 20%, from 36% to 56%: see Figure 13. This major increase is validated by a wide range of other supporting evidence which demonstrates the impact of COVID-19 – see evidence discussed in ‘The Road to Recovery’ report.<sup>21</sup> Informal volunteers stepped forward to help the most vulnerable in their communities, including those shielding, on a scale never seen previously in Scotland.

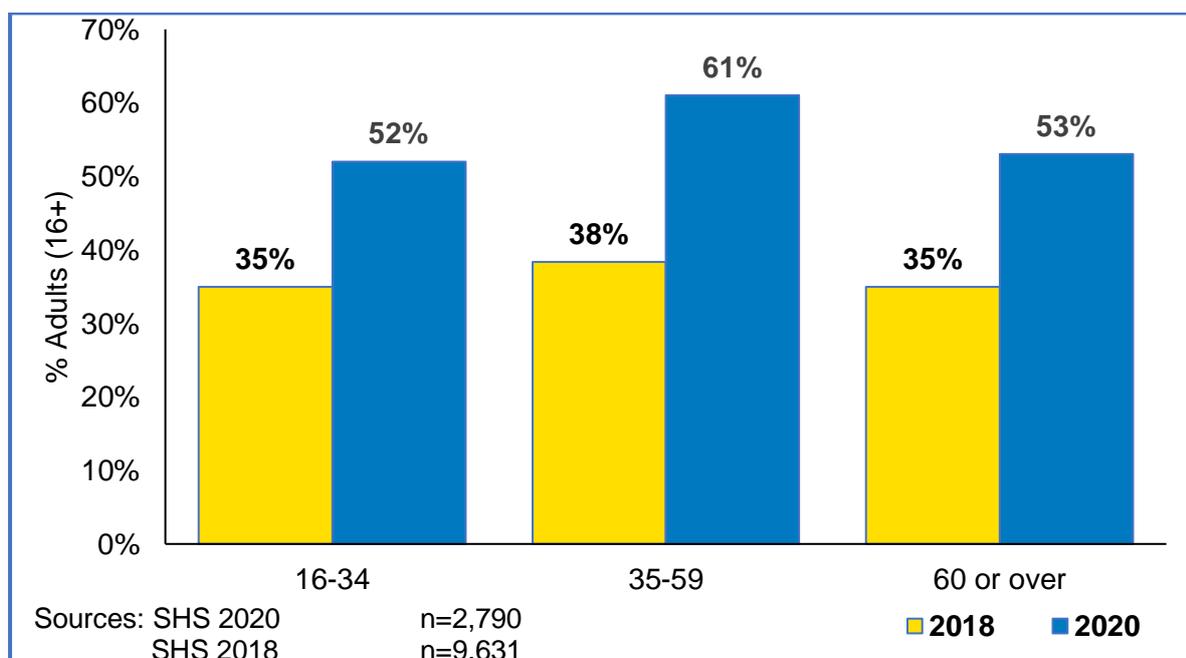
**Figure 13 – Scottish adult (16+) Informal volunteering participation rates 2018 & 2020**



<sup>21</sup> [The Road to Recovery - During COVID-19 - The volunteer response](#) (Section 3) – Volunteer Scotland; February 2022.

**Age** - As in 2018 it was adults aged 35-59 that volunteered informally the most in 2020: see Figure 14. However, the proportion of adults in the mid-life age category increased from 38% in 2018 to 61% in 2020; this 23% increase was larger than the other two age categories. This reflects how actively engaged this age group was during COVID-19, which may be attributable to furloughing among this age group. This increase is discussed in more detail in Section 3 of Volunteer Scotland’s ‘The Road to Recovery’ report.<sup>22</sup>

**Figure 14 – Scottish adult (16+) Informal volunteering participation rates 2018 & 2020 by Age Group**

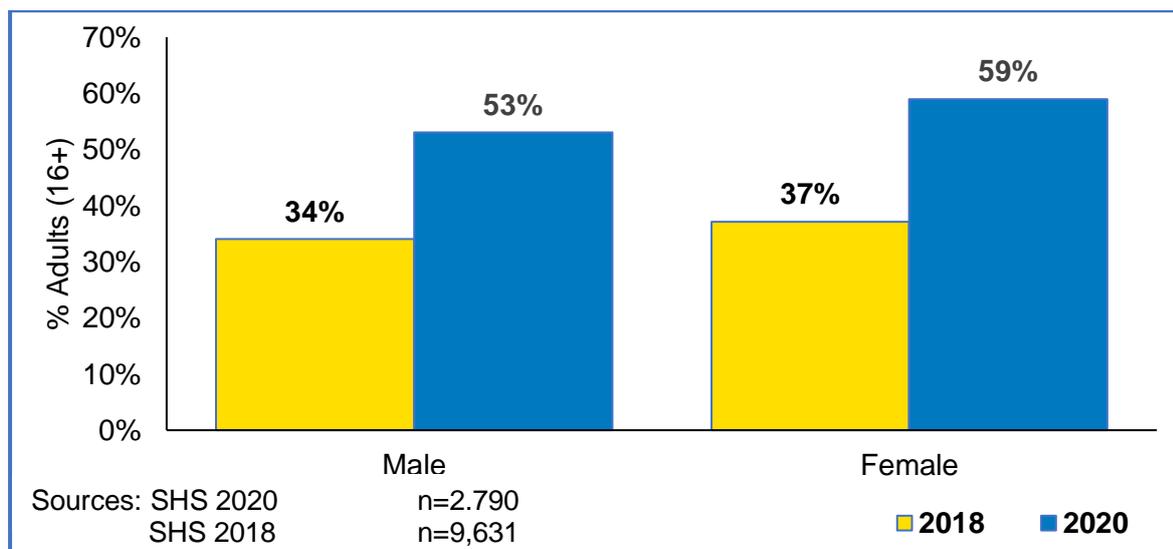


**Gender** – Both males and females significantly increased their informal volunteering participation in 2020: male participation increased to 53% and female participation to 59%: see Figure 15. However, the gender differential in volunteering participation doubled from 3% in 2018 to 6% in 2020.

This could be accounted for by the nature of informal volunteering and the type of roles that females have played in supporting their neighbours and communities in which they live. Compare this to the change in formal volunteering participation in 2020 where male participation exceeded female participation for the first time since 2007. The working hypothesis for this change is the additional caring responsibilities that females may have undertaken during the pandemic, for example home schooling. Also, informal volunteering may have been a more flexible way for females to volunteer around these additional responsibilities during the pandemic.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid

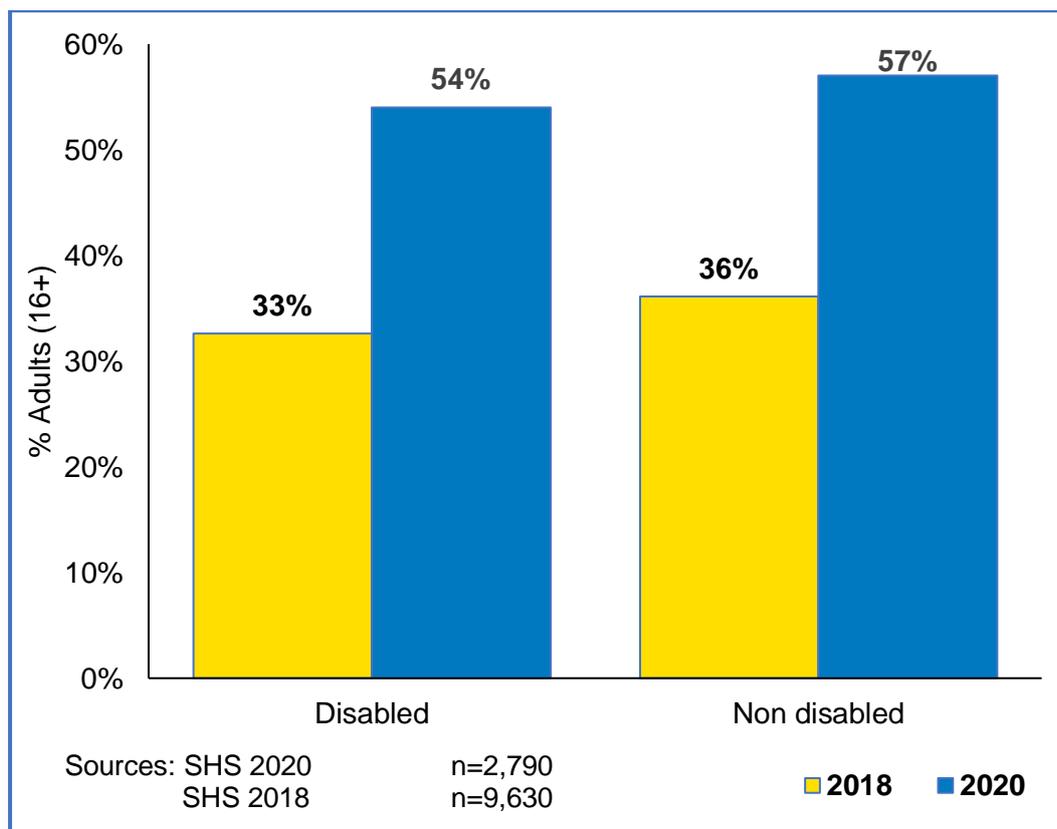
**Figure 15 – Scottish adult (16+) Informal volunteering participation rates 2018 & 2020 by Gender**



**Disability** - For disabled and non-disabled adults there has been a 21% increase in informal volunteering participation rates during 2020: see Figure 16. The fact that 54% of disabled people supported their neighbours, friends or others in their community during COVID-19 is noteworthy. This participation rate is only 3% less than non-disabled adults at 57%.

This begs the question as to why there is greater equality in informal volunteering participation for disabled people compared to formal volunteering (where the differential in participation is 7% - see Figure 6). One explanation could be the greater flexibility of informal volunteering which enables disabled adults to select when they volunteer, how often they volunteer and the tasks they undertake depending on their condition. They also have more flexibility to change their volunteering participation as the conditions relating to their disability varies over time.

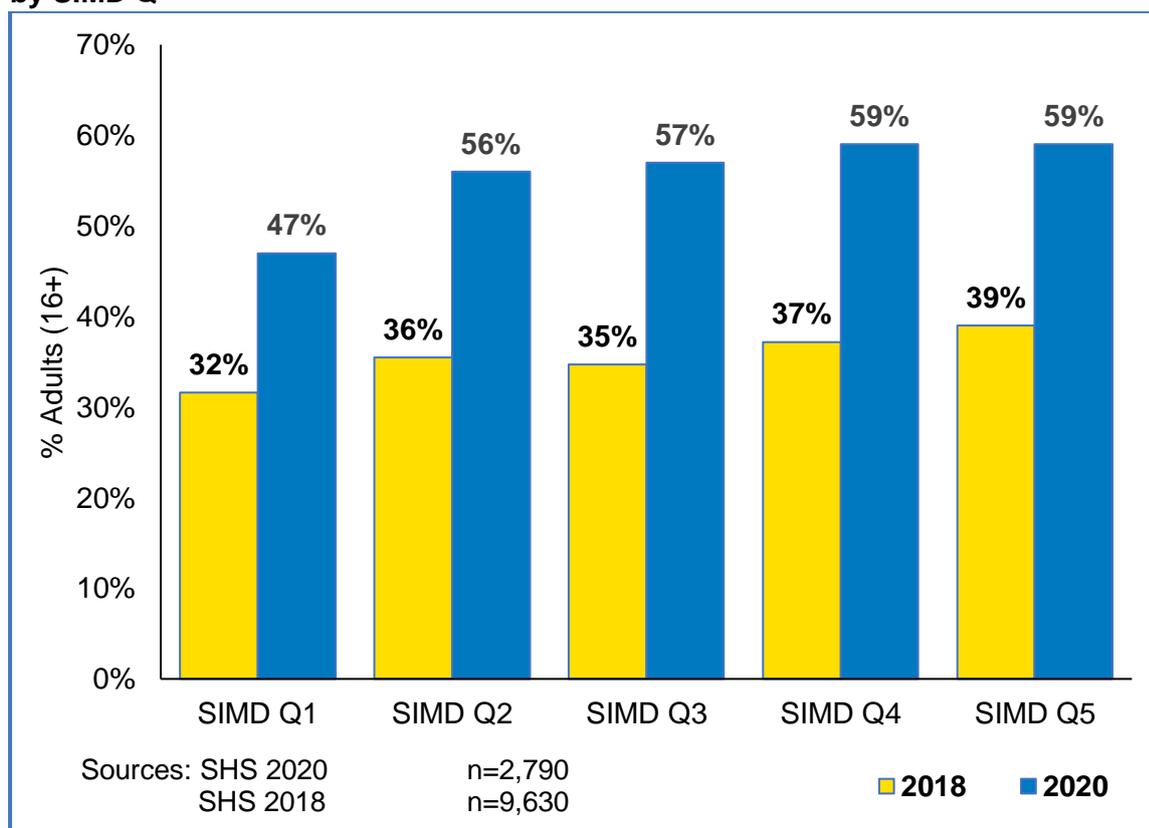
**Figure 16 – Scottish adult (16+) Informal volunteering participation rates 2018 & 2020 by Disability**



**Deprivation** – It was encouraging to see that informal volunteering participation increased significantly across all SIMD quintiles, up to 47% in Q1 and 59% in Q5: see Figure 17. However, the gap in volunteering participation between those living in the most and least deprived areas increased from 7% in 2018 to 12% in 2020. This raises an interesting question as to why the informal participation rate in SIMD Q1 has been disproportionately impacted? This may be due to the disproportionate impacts of COVID-19 itself with deprived communities suffering higher COVID-19 infection rates which would increase those in self-isolation and reduce the pool of available volunteers.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> [Health Inequality and COVID-19 in Scotland](#) – The Scottish Parliament (undated)

**Figure 17 – Scottish adult (16+) Informal volunteering participation rates 2018 & 2020 by SIMD Q**

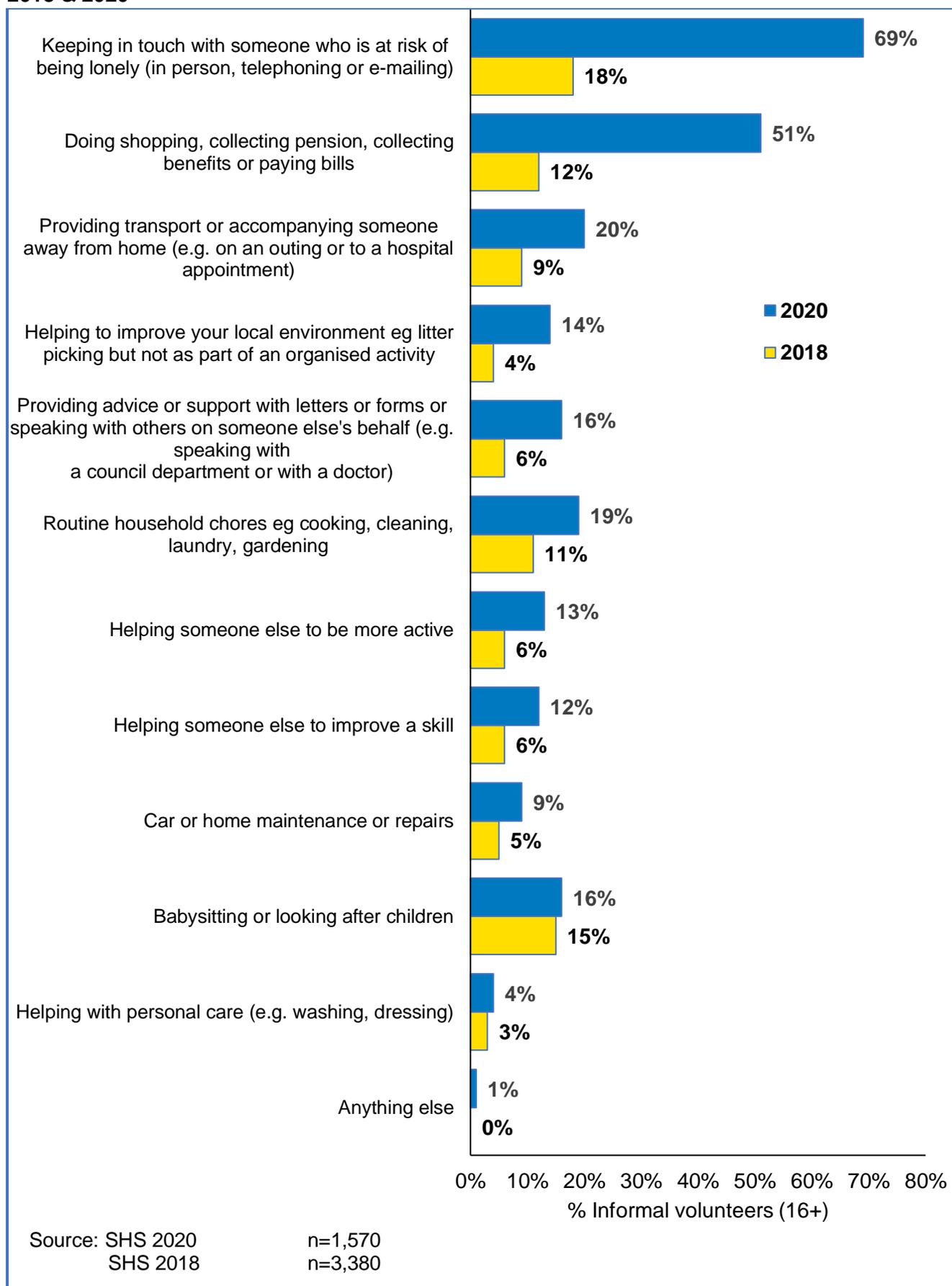


**Types of informal volunteering activity** - Figure 18 shows that all types of informal volunteering activities increased in 2020 which reflects how important the type of support offered by informal volunteering was in addressing society’s needs during COVID-19. However, the stand-out categories of informal support were twofold:

- The 51% increase in ‘Keeping in touch with someone who is at risk of being lonely’, up from 18% in 2018 to 69% in 2020; and
- The 39% increase in ‘Doing shopping, collecting pensions, collecting benefits or paying bills’, up from 12% in 2018 to 51% in 2020.

Both categories are the highest supported informal volunteer activities irrespective of demographic group (age, gender, disability and deprivation).

**Figure 18 – Types of informal volunteer activities undertaken in the past 12 months 2018 & 2020**

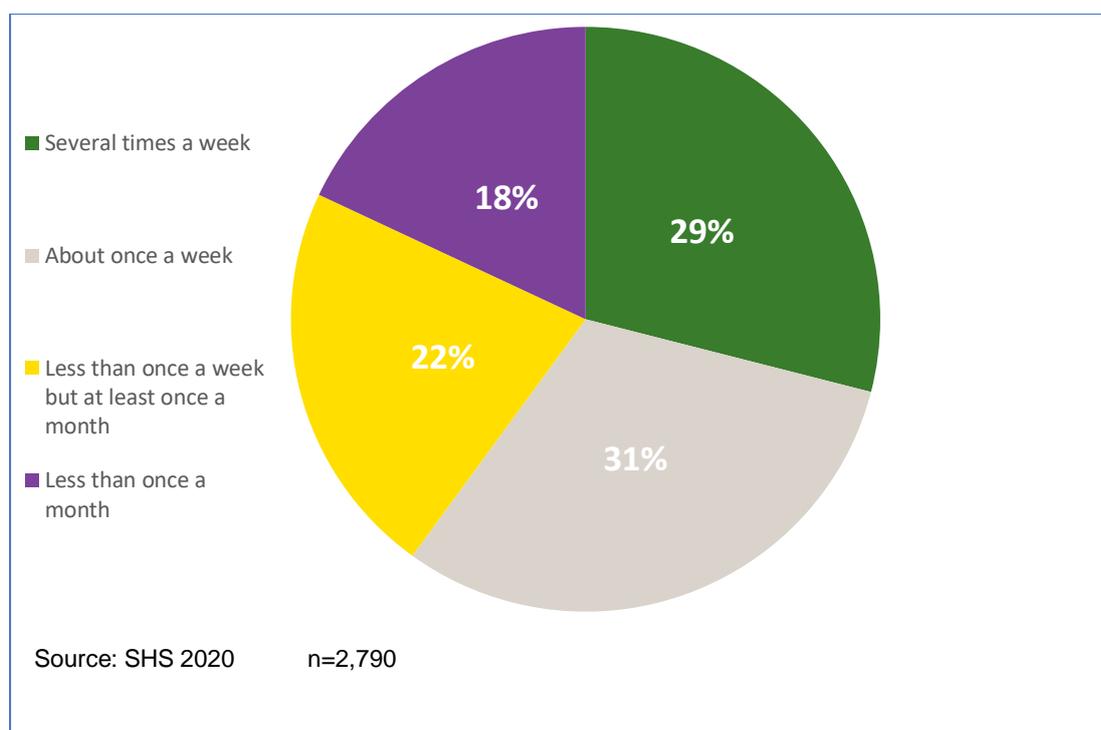


While we would have expected to see informal volunteers step forward in times of crisis in Scotland, for example during storms, this level of engagement in society was much greater than expected, and demonstrates the critical role that informal volunteers played in helping to address society’s needs during COVID-19.

Volunteer Scotland collated an evidence library during COVID-19 of media articles on volunteering in Scotland which gives specific examples of how informal volunteers offered support in a multitude of ways.<sup>24</sup>

**Frequency of informal volunteering** – Given that the wording of the frequency question changed from ‘in the past year’ in 2018 to ‘nowadays’ in 2020 one should not compare the results between the two years. For example, most of the 2020 telephone/video interviews for SHS 2020 were conducted during January to March 2021, so the ‘nowadays’ question may well miss the higher levels of volunteering engagement during the crisis periods in 2020, which the ‘in the past year’ questions would have picked up. Consequently, only the SHS 2020 data is presented in Figure 19.

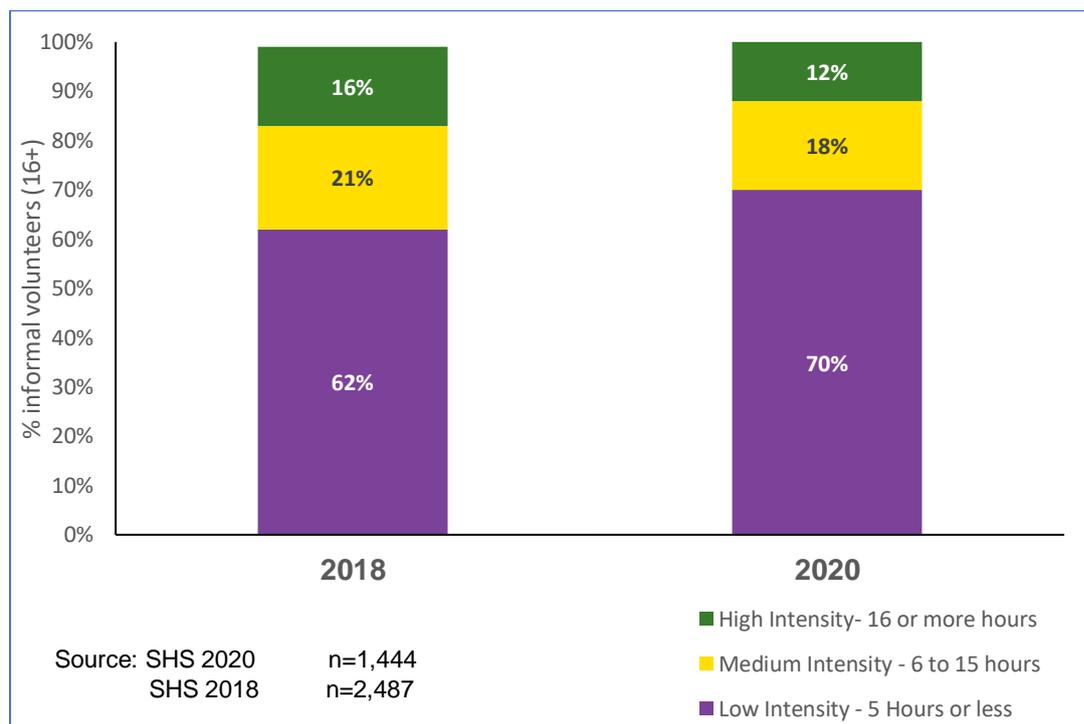
**Figure 19 – Frequency of Informal Volunteering undertaken 2018 (in the past year) & 2020 (nowadays)**



**Intensity of informal volunteering** - the frequency with which informal volunteering takes place (in the past 4 weeks) has decreased: see Figure 20. Low intensity volunteering increased by 8% from 62% in 2018 to 70% in 2020, with high and medium intensity proportions declining by 4% and 3% respectively. While it is difficult to determine the exact reasons for these changes, one hypothesis could be that informal volunteers stepped back and took a break after the height of the pandemic was over. It will be interesting to keep track of this data to confirm if this is a short term or lasting change.

<sup>24</sup> [Evidence library of media articles on volunteering in Scotland during COVID-19](#) – Volunteer Scotland

**Figure 20 – Intensity of Informal Volunteering undertaken 2018 & 2020 in the past 4 weeks**



## 6. Conclusions and what’s next?

While care must be taken in interpreting the SHS 2020 survey, especially in comparing the data to previous years as discussed in Section 2, it is important to note that a number of the changes are in line with other COVID-19 research, especially the large increase in informal volunteering. Also, mutual aid (included in the SHS definition of formal volunteering) followed the same pattern as informal volunteering with a major increase, which counteracted the decline in formal volunteering due to social distancing, shielding, etc. This evidence helps to explain why the formal volunteering participation rate remained constant at 26% in 2020.

Once the raw data from the SHS is published Volunteer Scotland will undertake further analysis, similar to the cross sectional analysis undertaken in 2016 and 2018.<sup>25</sup> This will provide breakdowns of formal and informal volunteering by social indicators such as health, and social isolation and loneliness. This is critically important in helping to understand where demographic groups in society may have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and the extent to which this varies between those who have volunteered and those who have not. This evidence will be used in the supporting the rollout and implementation of the ‘Volunteering for All’ Action Plan due for publication in June 2022.

<sup>25</sup> [Scottish Household Survey: Cross-sectional Analysis 2016, 2018 and 2019](#) – Volunteer Scotland

It is important moving out of the pandemic that we don't lose sight of the lessons learned from COVID-19, for both the third sector and volunteering more widely. The SHS 2020 data has helped to further build this evidence base around volunteering and a key goal is to capture the lessons learned and enhance the contribution of volunteering as we move towards 'steady state'. This could provide a lasting legacy to the immense hard work, dedication, and adaptability that volunteers in Scotland and the wider third sector have shown in support of Scottish society throughout COVID-19. Volunteer Scotland's recently published 'Routemap to Improvement' puts forward suggestions for how this legacy could be realised.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [Routemap to Improvement](#) – Volunteer Scotland; February 2022