
Report to inform the work of the Volunteering Cost of Living Task Group

Analysis of polling evidence

February 2023



Contents

Summary	3
1. Introduction.....	4
2. The evidence	5
2.1 Volunteer numbers.....	5
2.2 Volunteer recruitment.....	6
2.3 Volunteering challenges.....	6
2.4 Volunteering support.....	9
2.5 Volunteer roles vs. paid employment	10
3. Conclusions	11
3.1 Interpretation of the evidence.....	11
3.2 Key findings.....	12
3.3 Further research.....	14

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We would also like to thank the 122 organisations that participated in the two polls: Volunteer Scotland’s AGM on 23 November 2022 and Impact Funding Partners cluster meeting on 26 January 2023.

Summary

Volunteer challenges – across the two polls the top three main volunteering challenges from the cost of living crisis related to volunteers themselves: ¹

- Ranked 1st - People having less time to volunteer (55% and 59% of VS and IFP respondents respectively)
- Ranked 2nd - The deterioration in volunteers' health and wellbeing (48% and 61% respectively)
- Ranked 3rd - Volunteers' apathy due to 'permacrisis' (33% and 41% respectively).

Volunteers being unable to afford travel costs was ranked 5th (18% and 30% respectively).

Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO) challenges – the main direct volunteering challenges facing VIO respondents were all related to the lack of funding/income (directly or indirectly) and were mostly ranked lower than those challenges facing volunteers:

- Ranked 4th – Lack of funding to support volunteering (31% and 23% of VS and IFP respondents respectively)
- Ranked 6th – Lack of a volunteer coordinator/staff support (25% and 16% respectively)
- Ranked 7th – Constraints relating to the payment of volunteer's expenses (15% and 11% respectively)

Volunteering support

The three most popular categories of volunteering support that Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network, and their partners can deliver are:

- **National campaign** – to highlight the need for, and benefits of, volunteering (73% and 56% of VS and IFP respondents respectively).
- **More funding** – to support volunteer management and support (58% and 69% respectively)
- **Policy influence** – to influence Government policies relevant to the crisis. (49% and 46% respectively)

The other support categories which focused on volunteering practice and research had fewer respondents.

¹ The ranking is based on the number of responses for each challenge category clicked as a 'Main challenge facing their organisation during the cost of living crisis'.

1. Introduction

This short report analyses evidence from two polls on the impact of the cost of living crisis:

- Volunteer Scotland's AGM on 23 November 2022, when over 70 participants responded to a Mentimeter poll. The profile of participants was quite varied and included volunteer involving organisations, umbrella organisations and infrastructure organisations; and
- Impact Funding Partners' (IFP) cluster meeting on 26 January 2023, attended by 48 recipients of funding from the Volunteering Support Fund. The participants were exclusively volunteer involving organisations, with the majority being community based and relatively small.

Volunteer Scotland has analysed the four questions common to the two polling surveys:

- **Volunteer numbers** - During the cost of living crisis (c. last 12 months) has the number of volunteers in your organisation increased, remained static or decreased?
- **Volunteering challenges** - What are the main volunteering challenges faced by your organisation during the cost of living crisis?
- **Volunteering support** - What can Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network, and their partners do to support volunteering during the CoL crisis?
- **Volunteer roles vs paid employment** - Has your organisation been asked to provide or change volunteering roles which replace some or all of the work of paid staff, or change volunteer roles to include tasks undertaken by paid staff?

In addition, a supplementary question was asked in the IFP poll: **Volunteer recruitment** - What has been your experience of volunteer recruitment over the last year?

The characteristics of the respondents from the two polls are discussed to help interpret variations in responses between the two datasets. Finally, where appropriate, the implications of the evidence to the work of the Cost of Living Task Group are highlighted.

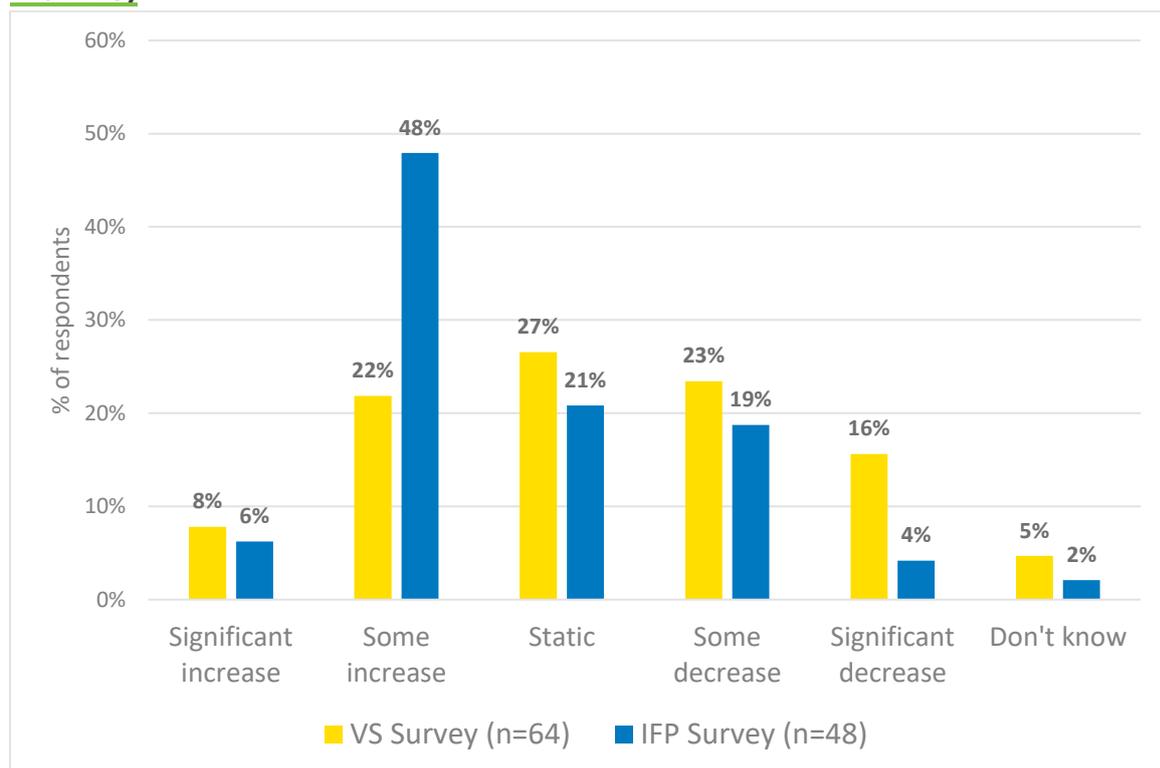
2. The evidence

2.1 Volunteer numbers

Figure 1 presents the change in volunteer numbers for the two polls. The Volunteer Scotland data represents the change over the period November 2021 to November 2022. It's interesting that the yellow bars almost follow a 'normal distribution' curve, albeit that more respondents decreased their volunteer numbers over this period (39%), compared to those that increased volunteer numbers (30%).

However, in contrast, the blue bars of the IFP data for the period January 2022 to January 2023 shows a skewed distribution, with the majority of respondents having increased volunteer numbers (54%), compared to those that decreased volunteer numbers (23%). One possible explanatory factor is that all of the IFP respondents are beneficiaries of the Volunteering Support Fund.²

Figure 1 – Change in volunteer numbers during the cost of living crisis (last 12 months)



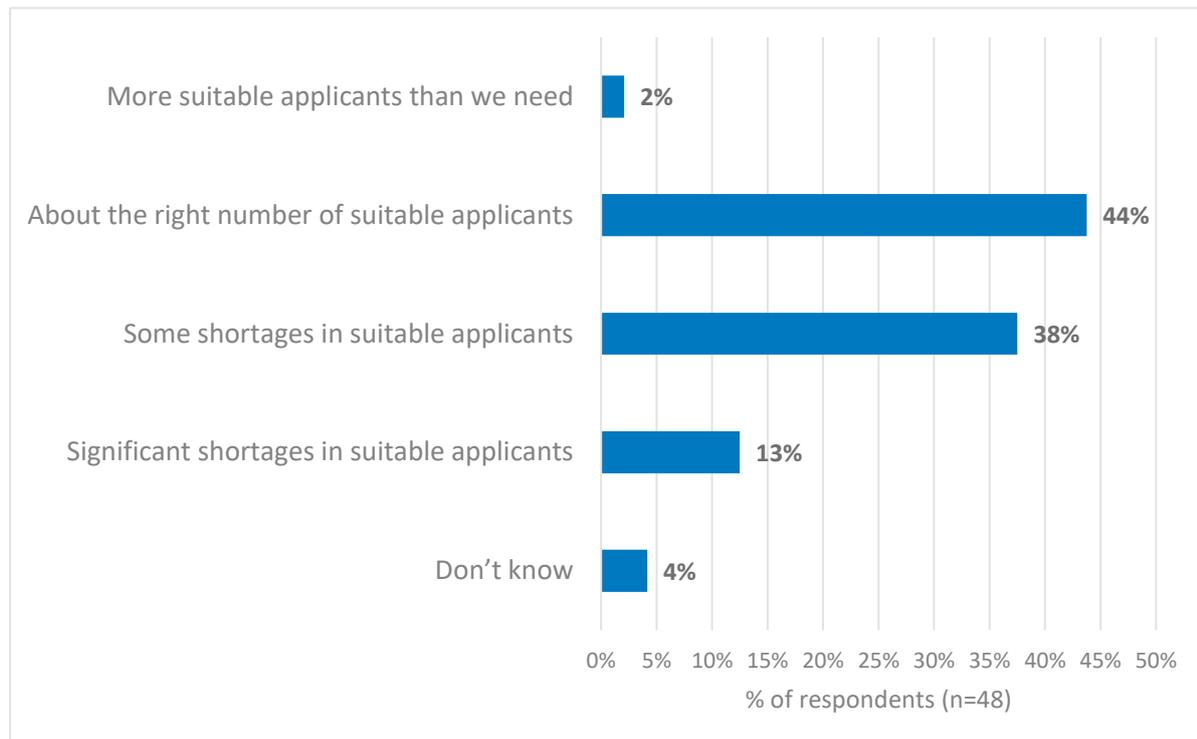
The Fund is worth approximately £1.1m p.a. and supports 113 funded projects. Therefore, it is possible that this funding support has enabled more organisations to increase volunteer numbers in the face of the cost of living crisis compared to non-funded organisations.

² [Volunteering Support Fund](#) – Impact Funding Partners

2.2 Volunteer recruitment

The IFP poll asked participants “What has been your experience of volunteer recruitment over the last year?”.³ Notwithstanding the high proportion of IFP organisations with static or increasing volunteer numbers in Figure 1 (75%), half of the IFP respondents in Figure 2 (51%) experienced ‘some’ or ‘significant’ shortages.

Figure 2 – IFP Survey – Experience of volunteer recruitment over the last year (Jan 2022 – Jan 2023)



This demonstrates a key point: even if your volunteer numbers are increasing, organisations can still be experiencing volunteer shortages to a varying degree of severity.

2.3 Volunteering challenges

The main volunteering challenges facing respondents during the cost of living crisis have been segregated into two categories: the main challenges facing volunteers (Figure 3); and the main challenges facing Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) (Figure 4). This was a closed question in terms of response options, but respondents could tick all that applied. Interestingly, the three most frequently cited challenges all relate to the impacts of the cost of living crisis on volunteers rather than the direct needs of the volunteering organisations themselves.

³ This question was not asked in the Volunteer Scotland poll.

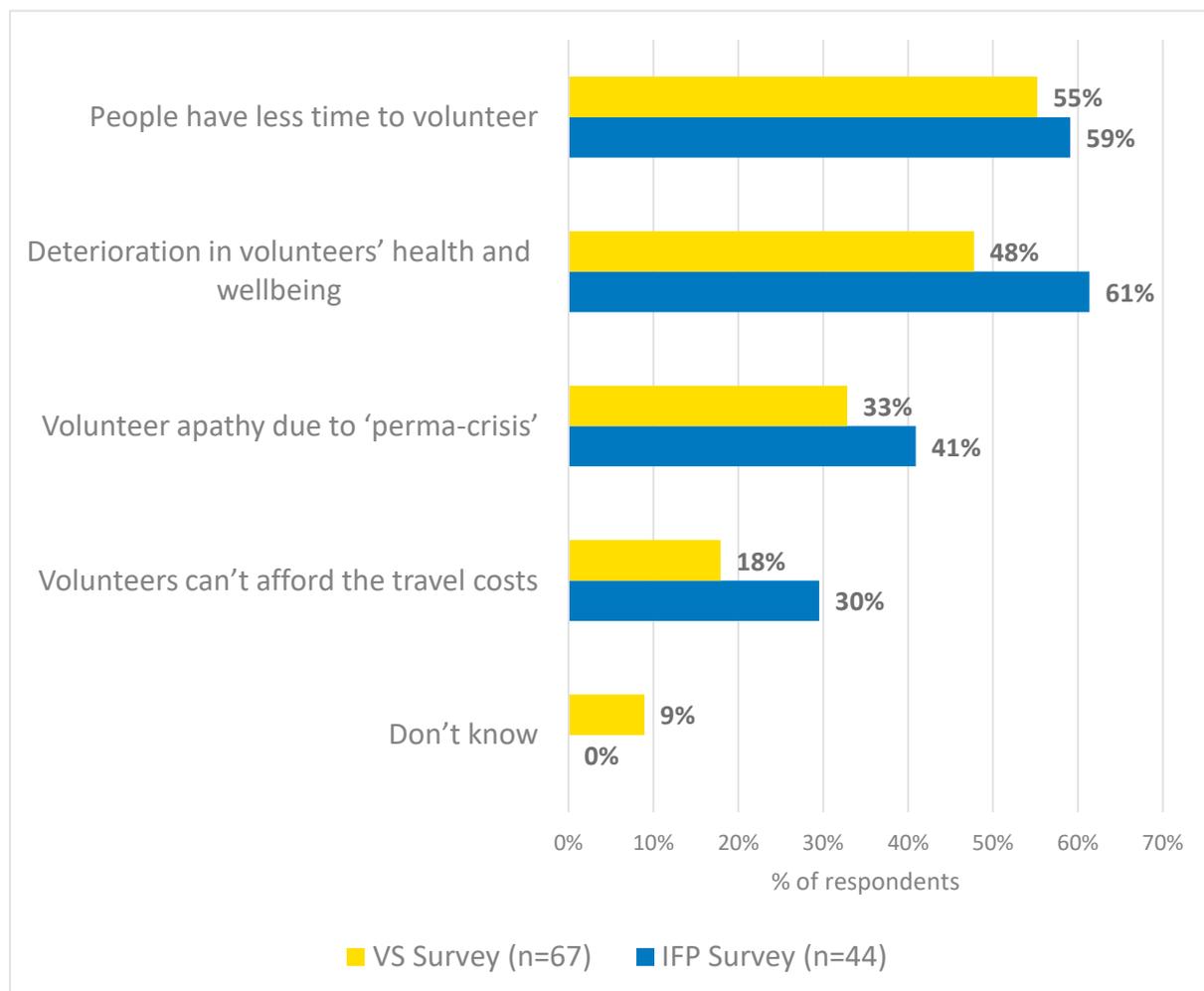
Main challenges facing volunteers

The top three challenges in Figure 3, as measured by the proportion of respondents, all relate to impact on volunteers:

- Ranked 1st – People having less time to volunteer (55% and 59% of VS and IFP respondents respectively)
- Ranked 2nd – The deterioration in volunteers' health and wellbeing (48% and 61% respectively)
- Ranked 3rd – Volunteers' apathy due to 'permacrisis' (33% and 41% respectively).

In addition, volunteers being unable to afford travel costs was ranked 5th in importance (18% and 30% respectively). It's noticeable that for all four challenges facing volunteers a higher proportion of IFP respondents considered them to be 'main challenges' compared to VS respondents. This implies that volunteers supporting smaller community organisations are being disproportionately impacted by the cost of living crisis.

Figure 3 – Main challenges facing volunteers during the cost of living crisis

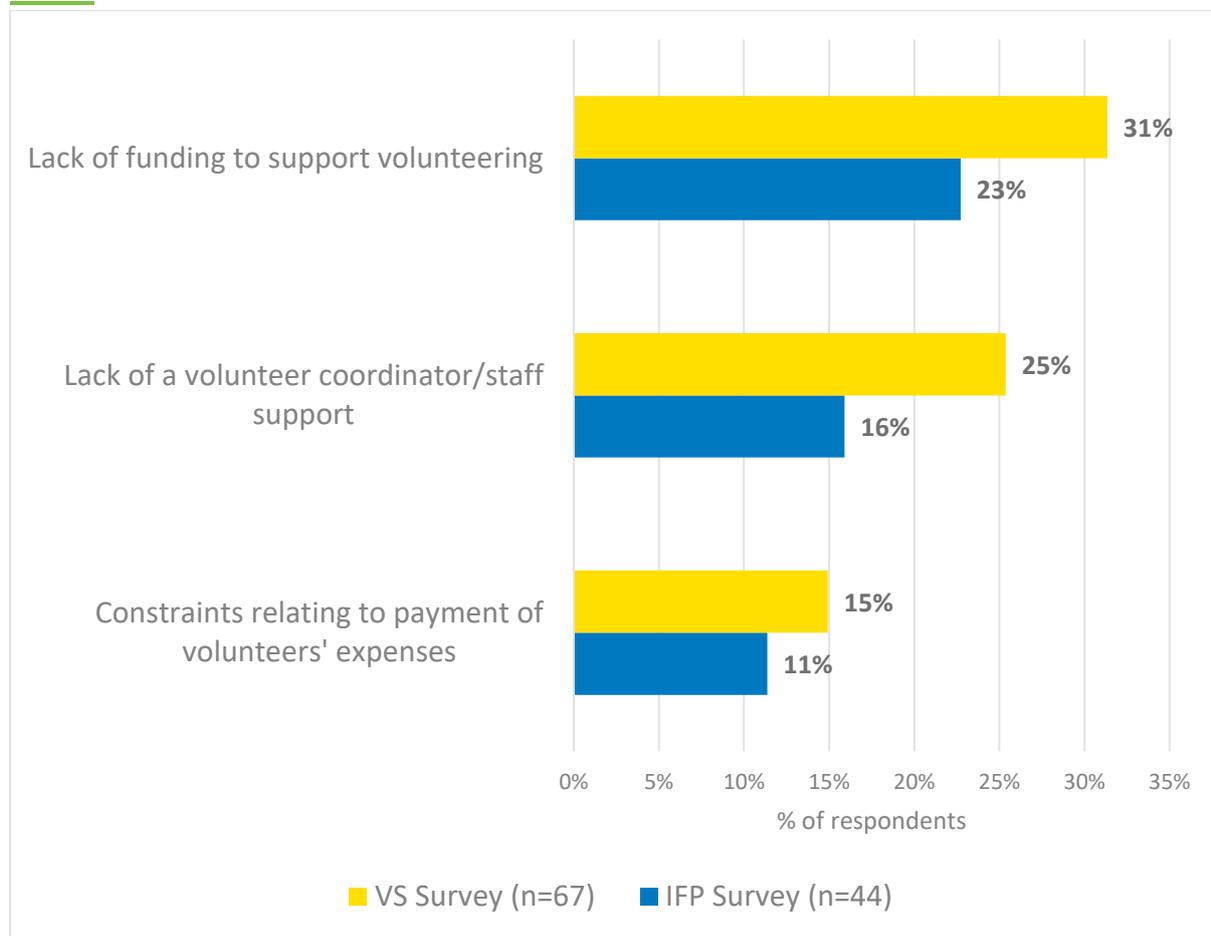


Main challenges facing Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)

The main direct volunteering challenges facing VIOs were all related to the lack of funding/income and were mostly ranked lower than those facing volunteers:

- Ranked 4th – Lack of funding to support volunteering (31% and 23% of VS and IFP respondents respectively)
- Ranked 6th – Lack of a volunteer coordinator/staff support (25% and 16% respectively)
- Ranked 7th – Constraints relating to the payment of volunteer’s expenses (15% and 11% respectively).

Figure 4 – Main volunteering challenges facing VIOs during the cost of living crisis



There are important implications from this evidence. Firstly, the challenges facing volunteers are largely driven by exogenous factors which are difficult for VIOs and infrastructure organisations to influence directly: people’s lack of time, people’s lack of money, volunteers’ poor health and wellbeing and volunteers’ apathy. Also, these challenges are all linked to difficulties in recruitment of volunteers and the problem of volunteer shortages.

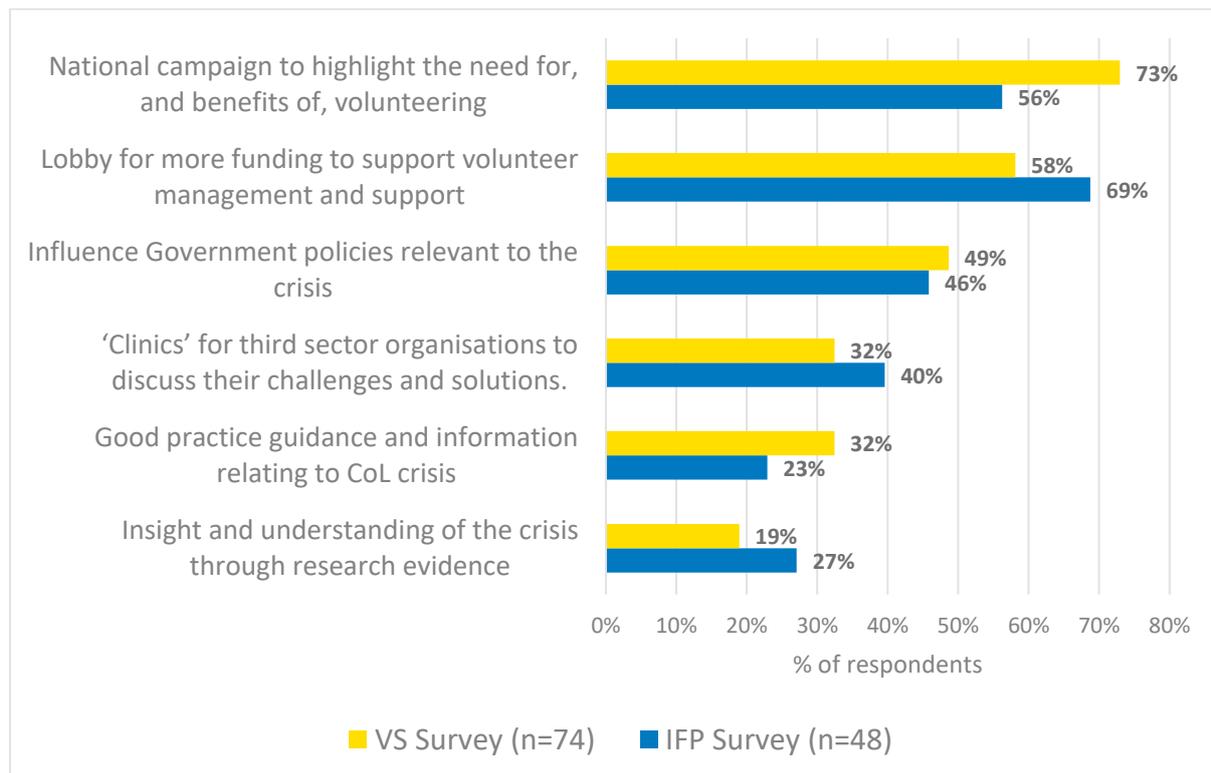
Secondly, the lack of funding and income for VIOs is the most important factor which is undermining their ability to address the cost of living challenges, not the least of which relate to the engagement with, and support of, volunteers.

2.4 Volunteering support

The three most popular categories of volunteering support that Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network, and their partners can deliver are (see Figure 5):

- **National campaign** – to highlight the need for, and benefits of, volunteering (73% of VS and 56% of IFP respondents respectively).
- **More funding** – to support volunteer management and support (58% and 69% respectively)
- **Policy influence** – to influence Government policies relevant to the crisis. (49% and 46% respectively)

Figure 5 – What can Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network and their partners do to support volunteering during the cost of living crisis? (top 3 only)



The other support categories, which focused on volunteering practice and research, had fewer respondents, with less than 41% rating them in the 'top three':

- **Practice clinics** – for third sector organisations to discuss their challenges and solutions.
- **Good practice** – guidance and information relating to the cost of living crisis.

- **Research evidence** – insight and understanding of the crisis.

It is reassuring that all of these support categories are actively being progressed by the Cost of Living Task Group, including:

- Briefing of MPs and MSPs.
- Securing a meeting with Shona Robison, the Cabinet Secretary for Social Justice, Housing and Local Government, at which the opportunity to develop and launch a national campaign will be addressed.
- Establishing a web resource [Managing your volunteer programme in a cost of living crisis](#).
- Producing research evidence specific to the cost of living crisis: [research publications](#)

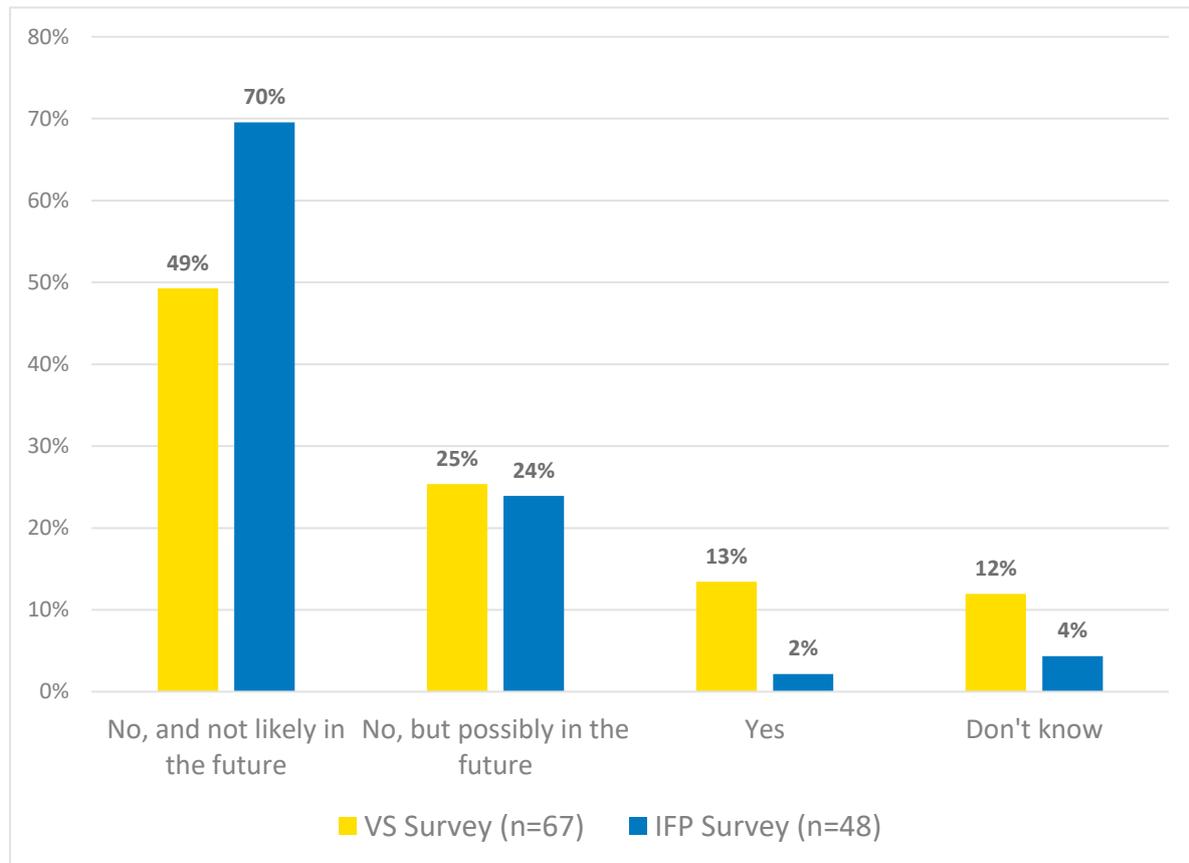
2.5 Volunteer roles vs. paid employment

As the cost of living crisis has evolved and deepened, there has been a growing worry that the funding pressure on public and third sector services may lead to the inappropriate engagement of volunteers. Specifically, there is a concern that volunteer roles may replace some or all of the work of paid staff; or lead organisations to change volunteer roles to include tasks undertaken by paid staff. This would be in direct contravention of the [Volunteer Charter](#).

This question was included in both the Volunteer Scotland and IFP polls. For the smaller community based organisations represented by the recipient of funds through the Volunteering Support Fund, this was not rated to be a current problem: see Figure 6. Only 2% of organisations (one organisation out of 48) had been asked to contravene the Volunteer Charter. However, a further 24% thought that they may possibly be impacted in the future.

In contrast, for the Volunteer Scotland poll, 13% of respondents had been asked to contravene the Charter, with a further 25% considering this to be a possibility in the future. This variation is likely to reflect the different composition of organisations at the Volunteer Scotland event which comprised a number of larger organisations from both the public and third sectors. It could be argued that this cohort may be more open to funding pressures; or perhaps they have greater awareness and recognition of such problems, which could lead to higher acknowledgement of such problems.

Figure 6 – Has your organisation been asked to provide or change volunteering roles which replace some or all of the work of paid staff, or change volunteer roles to include tasks undertaken by paid staff?



Either way, this evidence is valuable in validating concerns about the inappropriate engagement of volunteers during the cost of living crisis, and the need to be vigilant in sharing and supporting the principles underpinning the Volunteer Charter.

3. Conclusions

3.1 Interpretation of the evidence

This report is based on two polls with a relatively modest number of participants – 122 respondents in total. Therefore, care needs to be taken in the interpretation of the data as an indicator of the issues facing volunteering at the aggregate Scottish level.

However, it was reassuring that despite quite different respondent profiles between the Volunteer Scotland and IFP polls, there was considerable congruence in responses for the two questions on volunteering challenges being faced by organisations and the support required. So, whether you’re a small community VIO,

a large charity or an umbrella organisation, there was considerable agreement in the prioritisation of the key problems being faced and how best to address them.

In contrast, for the two questions focused on respondents' own response to the cost of living crisis in terms of the number of volunteers engaged and the displacement of paid staff roles, there was a wide disparity between the results of the two polls. These variances could be explained by the different respondent profiles and the fact that the IFP organisations are all beneficiaries of funding support through the Volunteering Support Fund.

Finally, care must be taken in the interpretation of the two closed questions with pre-determined response options: for the volunteering challenges and volunteering support questions. For both, it is possible that other response options have been excluded which are important to respondents. Hence, the polling evidence may be limited in providing an understanding of the full range of relevant issues and their importance.

3.2 Key findings

Volunteer challenges – across the two polls the 'top three' main volunteering challenges from the cost of living crisis related to volunteers themselves: ⁴

- Ranked 1st - People having less time to volunteer
- Ranked 2nd - The deterioration in volunteers' health and wellbeing
- Ranked 3rd - Volunteers' apathy due to 'permacrisis'.

Volunteers being unable to afford travel costs was also ranked 5th.

VIO challenges – the main direct volunteering challenges facing respondent organisations were all related to the lack of funding/income (directly or indirectly) and were mostly ranked lower than those challenges facing volunteers:

- Ranked 4th – Lack of funding to support volunteering
- Ranked 6th – Lack of a volunteer coordinator/staff support
- Ranked 7th – Constraints relating to the payment of volunteer's expenses

However, it is important to recognise the inter-relationship between these two categories of challenge. For example, funding is critical to enable VIOs to support volunteer recruitment during the cost of living crisis (ref. the challenges relating to lack of volunteer time and volunteer apathy); and to support the health and wellbeing of the volunteers they engage.

⁴ The ranking is based on the number of responses for each challenge category clicked as a 'Main challenge facing their organisation during the cost of living crisis'.

Another interesting finding is the fact that IFP respondents ranked the three funding challenges lower than VS respondents. Again, this may be explained by the fact that all 48 respondents are direct beneficiaries of funding from the Volunteering Support Fund.

Volunteering support

The three most popular categories of volunteering support that Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network, and their partners can deliver are:

- A national campaign to highlight the need for, and benefits of, volunteering.
- More funding to support volunteer management and support.
- To influence Government policies relevant to the crisis.

The other support categories, which focused on volunteering practice and research, had fewer respondents:

- Practice clinics for third sector organisations to discuss their challenges and solutions.
- Good practice guidance and information relating to the cost of living crisis.
- Research evidence to further develop our understanding of the crisis.

Other evidence

As stated in section 3.1, there are quite significant variations between the two polls regarding the questions on volunteer numbers, and volunteer roles which contravene the principles of the Volunteer Charter. It is therefore not possible to reach conclusions on these two issues.

Volunteer shortages – although both polls had more organisations increasing volunteer numbers rather than reducing volunteer numbers over the previous 12 months, this evidence in itself is of limited value in helping us to understand how significant the issue of volunteer shortages has been during the cost of living crisis.

For example, in the case of the IFP survey 75% of respondents had static or increasing volunteer numbers, but 51% also experienced ‘some’ or ‘significant’ volunteer shortages. Therefore, understanding the movement in volunteer numbers is necessary, but not sufficient, in reaching an informed understanding of volunteer shortages. This requires evidence on volunteer recruitment, volunteer retention and the effectiveness of matching volunteer skills to volunteer role profiles. Understanding volunteer shortages is an important evidence gap that needs to be addressed.

Volunteer roles versus paid employment – only one out of 48 IFP respondents confirmed that they had been asked to provide or change volunteering roles which replace some or all of the work of paid staff, or change volunteer roles to include tasks undertaken by paid staff. In contrast, 13% of Volunteer Scotland respondents had been asked to make such changes, which is quite a worrying proportion. However, this may be explained by the profile of organisations at the AGM which were typically larger, often national organisations, and ones which could be more likely to be subjected to such pressures. Further evidence is required to track and understand this issue more fully.

3.3 Further research

There are three areas that warrant further investigation through secondary data and/or primary research:

- Understanding volunteer shortages during the cost of living crisis – see discussion above.
- Tracking the potential issue of volunteer roles displacing paid employment – see discussion above.
- Investigating the potential variation in volunteering impact between organisations which are in receipt of volunteering funding and those that are not. The IFP poll provides tantalisingly evidence of potential positive impacts from financial support provided through the Volunteering Support Fund.



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