



# The Road to Recovery

Lessons learned from Scotland's  
volunteering response to Covid-19



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Mobilising  
UK VOLUNTARY ACTION



Economic  
and Social  
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## **Contents**

<b>Acknowledgements.....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Routemap to improvement.....</b>	<b>5</b>
A. Policy and planning .....	9
A.1 Volunteering policy .....	9
A.2 Resilience policy, planning and implementation.....	9
B. Leadership .....	10
C. Expected responses.....	12
C.1 Funding .....	12
C.2 Partnership and collaboration .....	13
C.3 Information and guidance.....	14
C.4 Training provision.....	15
C.5 Addressing societal needs .....	16
C.6 Scotland Cares.....	17
C.7 Informal volunteering – Individuals’ responses .....	18
D. Unexpected responses.....	19
D.1 Digital uptake .....	19
D.2 Mutual aid response.....	21
D.3 Community engagement .....	22
D.4 Recognition and celebration.....	23
D.5 Challenge of inclusive volunteering.....	24
D.6 ‘Just do it’ .....	25
E. Formal volunteering priorities and support needs .....	26
F. How to turn evidence into action?.....	27
<b>Section 1 - Introduction .....</b>	<b>31</b>
1.1 Research context.....	32
1.2 Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK.....	33
1.3 Definitions .....	33
1.4 Research methodology .....	34
1.5 Scottish Evidence Base .....	36
1.6 Report structure and navigation.....	38
1.7 Next steps .....	40
<b>Section 2- Pre Covid-19 – The Scottish Context.....</b>	<b>42</b>
Key findings .....	43
2.1 Volunteering context .....	44
2.2 Policy context.....	49
2.3 Resilience planning structures and guidance pre-COVID-19 .....	54
2.4 Resilience preparedness of Scotland’s infrastructure organisations .....	58

<b>Section 3 - During Covid-19 – The Volunteer Response.....</b>	<b>62</b>
Key findings .....	63
3.1 Overall Volunteering Response – during the first lockdown (March – June 2020) .....	64
3.2 Types of volunteering response – during first lockdown .....	68
3.3 Mutual Aid .....	71
3.4 Informal volunteering .....	79
<b>Section 4 – During COVID-19 The Volunteer Involving Organisations’ Response .....</b>	<b>83</b>
Key findings .....	84
4.1 Business impacts of COVID-19 on VIOs in Scotland.....	85
4.2 Impacts of COVID-19 on volunteer engagement by VIOs .....	88
4.3 Organisational challenges facing VIOs in the deployment of volunteers .....	94
4.4 VIOs’ responses to the challenges .....	96
4.5 Understanding societal needs during COVID-19 .....	102
4.6 Volunteering tasks undertaken by VIOs to meet societal challenges .....	105
4.7 VIOs’ ability to meet service user needs .....	107
<b>Section 5 – During Covid-19 The Scottish Government and Infrastructure Organisations’ Response .....</b>	<b>111</b>
Key findings .....	112
5.1 Scottish Government’s resilience partnership structure and support.....	114
5.2 Scotland’s voluntary sector resilience response .....	116
5.3 The role of infrastructure organisations during COVID-19.....	119
5.4 Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations .....	123
5.5 The ‘Scotland Cares’ Campaign .....	128
5.6 Scottish Government funding provision .....	139
<b>Section 6 – After Covid-19 - The Long-Term Recovery.....</b>	<b>142</b>
Key findings .....	143
6.1 Projected volunteering participation after COVID-19 .....	144
6.2 Priorities for longer term recovery – the VIO response .....	149
6.3 Support required by VIOs – current and longer term .....	151
6.4 Priorities for longer term recovery – infrastructure organisations’ perspective .....	159
6.5 Stakeholder support to aid recovery – infrastructure organisations’ perspective .....	163
6.6 Comparison of priorities for recovery – VIOs vs. infrastructure organisations .....	165
<b>Section 7 - Lessons learned and next steps .....</b>	<b>168</b>
7.1 How to strengthen Scotland's volunteering response for future crises? .....	169
7.2 How to build upon COVID-19’s volunteering legacy? .....	176
7.3 How to turn evidence into action? .....	181
Appendix 1 – Table of Community Support Funding .....	184
Appendix 2 – List of Abbreviations.....	186

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# Route map to improvement

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## Executive Summary





## **Routemap to Improvement**

The 'Road to Recovery' report explores the actual and projected impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in Scotland during the pandemic and over the longer term. Research evidence was drawn from the period March 2020 – August 2021. It 'forms part of a UK-wide research study involving a wide range of academic and practitioner partners: [Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK](#).<sup>1</sup>

The report highlights how remarkable the community and volunteering response in Scotland has been. Organisations and individuals came together at pace to develop solutions and support those most in need. A new 'can do' attitude brushed aside a lot of the bureaucracy and other barriers to 'make change happen'.

Although inevitably some mistakes were made along the way, the far greater impact was the introduction of new structures, new models of working, new and stronger relationships, new ways of supporting volunteering, and new volunteer roles. This learning represents a golden opportunity for a strong volunteering legacy from COVID-19.

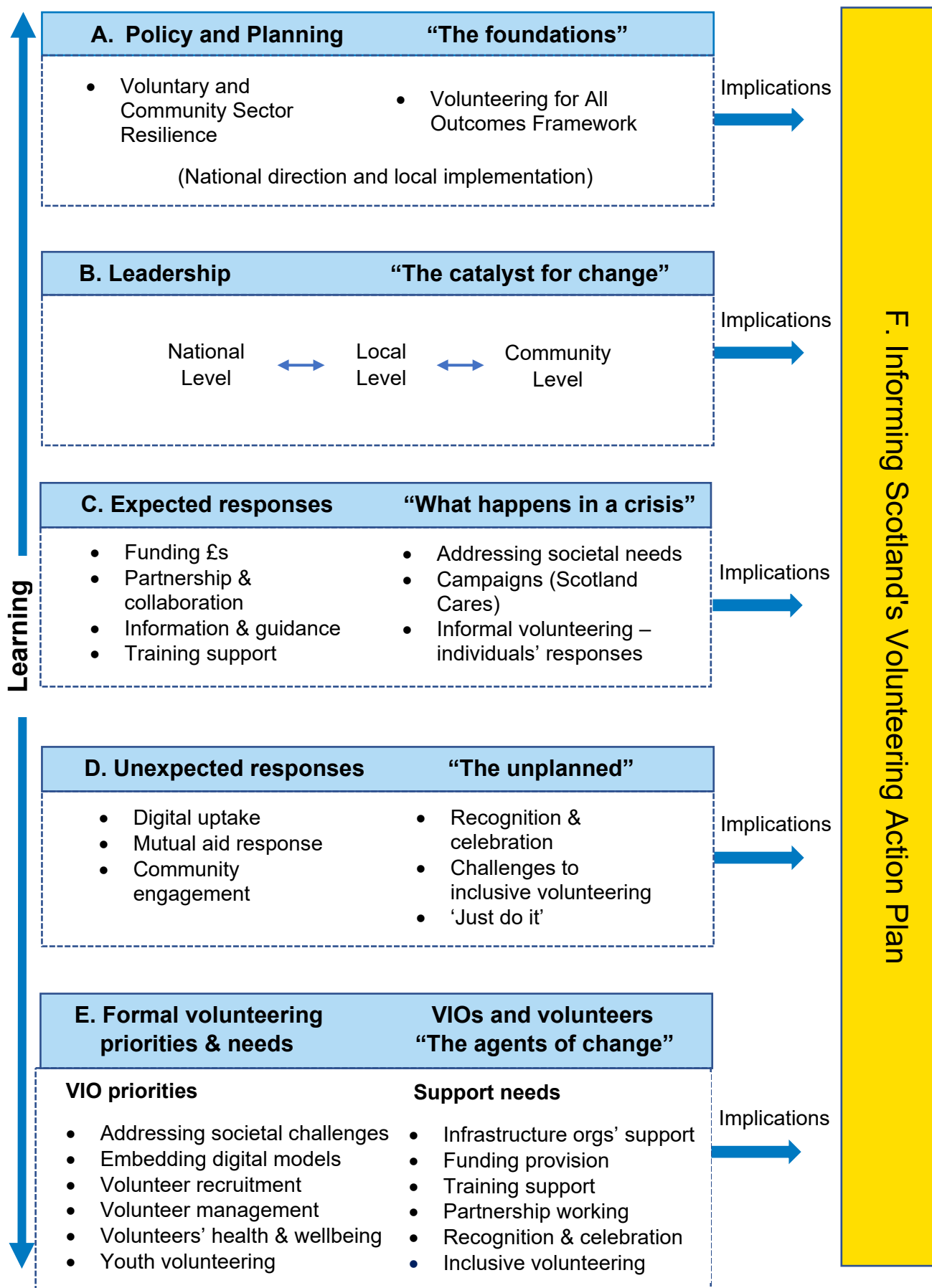
The key goal of this 'Routemap to Improvement' is to ensure that this new way of working is recognised, supported and developed – not just for the ongoing COVID-19 response, but to foster and support volunteering in the long-term, post-pandemic. The 'Routemap' identifies how we can improve through learning which will help us to maximise the contribution of volunteering to society. The danger is that if we don't act now a lot of this good practice and lessons learned may be lost as we revert to the old 'business as usual' model.

## **Scope and structure of the Routemap**

The objective of the 'Routemap' is to summarise the key lessons learned from the 'Road to Recovery' report and to identify how we can improve the support for volunteering during the recovery period and beyond. Its focus is primarily on 'where we need to get to' rather than 'where we have been'. An overarching structure for assessing the evidence is presented in Figure 1. Its goal is to inform the development and implementation of the 'Volunteering Action Plan' for Scotland and help facilitate 'evidence into action'.<sup>2</sup>

There are five overarching elements underpinning Scotland's response to COVID-19 which we need to learn from:

- **Policy and planning** – understanding the contribution of the relevant policies and planning relating to resilience and volunteering that were in place at the outbreak of COVID-19, and how they have evolved since then.
- **Leadership** – an assessment of the effectiveness of Scotland's leadership in supporting the volunteering response at the national level, in the 32 local authority areas, and at the community level.

*Figure 1 - Routemap to Improvement – a Learning Journey*

- **‘Expected responses’** – this is defined as the main categories of response that one can depend on during a major crisis: funding, information, guidance, working together, addressing major needs, etc. These all came to the fore during COVID-19 and if there was another crisis tomorrow, we would have confidence that similar categories of response would occur. However, there have been important lessons learned during COVID-19 which need to be captured to help inform our response to future crises.
- **‘Unexpected responses’** – these are defined as the responses to COVID-19 that people did not see coming and could not realistically have been predicted in advance. They have introduced innovative ways of collaborating, working together and delivering services with the potential for long-term legacy impacts. However, some unexpected responses have also presented challenges which need to be addressed.
- **Formal volunteering priorities and needs** – the evidence has identified specific volunteering priorities for VIOs and their support needs to help them deliver these priorities. Importantly, these priorities and needs are as important for ‘steady state’ beyond COVID-19 as they are in helping to support the ongoing recovery and addressing future crises.

For each topic in Figure 1 there is a brief overview of key lessons learned to identify ‘what’s worked’. This is followed by ‘Implications’ of the evidence (see the shaded text), which discusses possible options to improve performance. The ‘Implications’ are purposely not as prescriptive as ‘recommendations’, because Volunteer Scotland recognises that there are gaps in the evidence collected. The scope of the ‘Mobilising Voluntary Action’ research study under-represented important stakeholder voices such as funders, umbrella organisations and national bodies with expertise relevant to key themes such as community engagement and inclusion.<sup>1</sup>

Therefore, our objective, in partnership with the Scottish Government and the wider sector, is to invite further critical review of the research evidence presented in this report. The ‘volunteering action planning’ process that Scotland is currently engaged in provides an excellent opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders to review the relevance and applicability of the Routemap’s ‘Implications’, which will help inform the specific actions being considered.

For each of the topics discussed there are hyperlinks to the relevant supporting evidence drawn from Sections 2 – 7 of the ‘Road to Recovery’ report.

**Definitions:** to assist the reader in the terminology used such as ‘mutual aid’, ‘informal volunteering’, ‘infrastructure organisations’ and ‘Third Sector Interfaces’ (TSIs), this link provides a full list of definitions.



## A. Policy and planning

### A.1 Volunteering policy ([See section 2.2](#))

Before the outbreak of COVID-19 there was a strong policy direction in Scotland related to volunteering, with a particular focus on its contribution towards the Scottish Government's Performance Framework and specific National Outcomes. This is articulated in 'Volunteering for All: Our National Framework'.<sup>2</sup>

The outcomes and principles embedded in the Framework provided high level guidance on priorities relevant to Scotland's volunteering response to COVID-19, particularly for the role of formal volunteering:

- Tackling poverty and disadvantage
- Achieving a more inclusive society
- Enabling people to contribute to society
- The contribution of volunteering is recognised and appreciated
- Supporting a healthy and active society
- The 'places and spaces' where we volunteer are supported and sustained.

However, no evidence was identified by this study on how useful the framework was in relation to informing the volunteering response and there was no national Volunteering Action Plan in place.

#### **Implications – volunteering action planning**

- The current development of a 'Volunteering Action Plan' for Scotland will assist in addressing the requirement for more detailed volunteering priorities for Scotland relevant to the recovery from COVID-19, addressing future crises and volunteering in the longer term.
- 'The Road to Recovery' report provides supporting evidence relating to each of the five Volunteering Outcomes which will help to inform the Management Team, Working Groups and Governance Group responsible for the development of the Volunteering Action Plan. This includes implications for policy, practice and learning.
- The report also provides clear guidance on how volunteering can enhance its resilience response to future crises, which is relevant to the action planning process.

### A.2 Resilience policy, planning and implementation

(See sections [2.2-2.4](#), [5.1-5.2](#) and [6.4](#))

Before the outbreak of COVID-19 the Scottish Government had a national, regional and local resilience infrastructure in place, including the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership and Voluntary Sector Resilience Groups. It also had a major policy and operational focus to build Scotland's resilience at the community level with guidance in place for responders – 'Building Resilient Communities' – and the Ready Scotland website.<sup>3,4</sup> During the pandemic the resilience infrastructure was further developed through:

- The formation of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Advisory Group
- The ongoing development of the Ready Scotland website
- The creation of the National Voluntary Sector Coordination (NVC) Hub

Good communication, coordination of partners, effective partnership working and shared learning were key to the effective resilience response in Scotland's local authority areas. Although the Scottish Government survey evidence showed that the awareness of, and involvement in, resilience planning pre-pandemic by infrastructure organisations varied significantly across the 32 local authority areas, in general, their level of resilience engagement during the pandemic was very positive except in a small minority of areas.<sup>5</sup>

### **Implications – resilience planning and implementation**

There is a strong platform to **build on the positive progress in resilience planning and operation** during COVID-19:

- Continuing the integration of the voluntary and community sector alongside Category 1 and 2 responders
- Embedding the voluntary and community sector more effectively and consistently in Local Resilience Partnerships (LRPs) and Groups – particularly the TSIs.
- Reviewing the need for resilience planning as an integral element of Scottish Government's funding agreements with TSIs – see the TSI Outcome Framework.<sup>17</sup>
- Providing bespoke support to the small number of local authority areas where resilience planning needs to be significantly strengthened.
- Promoting the sharing of learning between Local Resilience Partnerships and Groups, including innovative ideas and ways of working.
- Being clear that partners' involvement in crisis planning brings with it an obligation to help lead and coordinate the voluntary sector's response for future crises.
- Reviewing the balance between Scotland's emergency crisis response and the need to address longer term societal needs. See C.5
- Learning from the work of the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Communities and Volunteering Circle recommendations.<sup>8</sup>

## **B. Leadership**

(See section sections [5.3](#), [5.4](#) and [7.1](#))

A crisis of the scale and complexity of COVID-19 required decisive and prompt action across areas such as information, guidance, support, services, innovation and funding to facilitate the response by the third sector and volunteering. Effective leadership was critical in helping to make this happen, and the evidence from Scotland demonstrates how much is owed to those who fulfilled this leadership function: nationally, locally and at the community level. This was a combination of those in leadership roles pre-pandemic, embracing and responding to the COVID-19 challenges, whilst for others it was a case of 'stepping up to the plate' and taking on new leadership roles to fill gaps in Scotland's response, especially at the local level.

Examples of leadership include:

- Scottish Government's role in the resilience response, Scotland Cares and funding
- National bodies such as SCVO and Volunteer Scotland in information, research, and engagement with Scotland Cares sign-ups such as through RadioV.<sup>16</sup>
- TSIs, local authorities and partners working together to support the third sector and volunteering locally. The recognition of TSIs' leadership relating to volunteering expertise was critical in this regard.
- Communities and neighbourhoods taking the initiative to develop services and support functions to help people locally; for example, food preparation and delivery.

It is important to embed the good practice underpinning Scotland's leadership response and to learn lessons and to improve leadership for future crises and for the long-term support of volunteering in Scotland.

### **Implications – leadership**

**National leadership** – there is an opportunity for Scottish Government and national partners to review how to further improve national level leadership of volunteering in Scotland. The following issues should be considered:

- The structure and modus operandi of a national volunteering leadership group for volunteering during a crisis. This includes a review of the organisations that should be represented, chairing responsibility and the consensual decision-making model. Specific factors to consider include:
  - The engagement of the TSI Scotland Network representing 32 local authority areas
  - The engagement of representative national organisations such as the Scottish Volunteering Forum
  - The relationship with the Voluntary and Community Sector Advisory Group.
- What functions should a national group be responsible for? In particular, it will be important to differentiate between national responsibilities and those that should be devolved to TSIs and partners at the local and community levels.

**Local leadership** – TSIs' leadership role for volunteering is now much more widely recognised at the local authority level and this needs to be embedded across all areas.

Suggestions to further enhance their leadership role includes:

- Developing Scottish Government and national partners' understanding of the services, skills and expertise of TSIs and partners locally – what they can do, how they can help in a crisis and how they can work together more effectively and optimise their contribution in 'steady state'.
- Scottish Government and national partners' role in facilitating greater autonomy and flexibility at a local level – devolving decision-making and support to TSIs and local partners to utilise their local knowledge to best effect.
- Local authorities, TSIs and partners facilitating community planning and action at the sub-local authority level, giving a more localised approach.

**Community leadership** – TSIs, local authorities and local partners have the opportunity to review their experience from the pandemic in facilitating community-led action, to identify and share good practice. Suggestions included:

- Recognising that communities are best placed to support themselves – they know where the needs lie and where the gaps in provision exist.
- Additional support for smaller, local, community groups and for these groups to be included in local area decision making.
- Ensuring that policies and campaigns are adapted to the needs of local areas.
- TSIs and partners improving their communication and engagement with community leaders and community organisations.

**Clarity in leadership and support roles:**

- Improved clarity in responsibilities between national, local and community organisations – especially leadership roles versus support and facilitation roles.
- Enhanced cascade of responsibilities from national, to local, to community. Understanding needs and priorities for action locally, and the support required by local/community groups and local partners to help deliver this.

## C. Expected responses

### C.1 Funding

(See sections [5.6](#) and [6.3-6.6](#))

There was a strong funding response during COVID-19 by Scottish Government and funding partners:

- Scottish Government committed £350 million to support communities throughout the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>
- The ‘Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund’ was launched to manage donated funding, which distributed £7 million to 1,400 charities by February 2021.<sup>7</sup>
- In 2020-21 Scottish Government allocated an additional £2 million to the TSI Scotland Network to help support TSIs’ response to the pandemic.

The attributes of funding support provided to the third sector in Scotland included:

- Scottish Government working with funding partners with the expertise, networks and resource to support the development and operation of the funds.
- Early provision of funding – the speed of fund development and the issue of funds was a key strength at the height of the crisis.
- Importance of real-time learning – the Scottish Government stressed the importance of learning as funds were developed and rolled out.
- Flexibility and risk taking – the need for funds to have sufficient flexibility and to accept a reasonable level of risk were important
- Centralised funding information – SCVO set up a Funding Hub to coordinate the funding offer to the third sector.

The Scottish Government survey also identified the need to transfer this learning to funding during ‘steady state’ conditions beyond the pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

### Implications - funding

**Influencing funders & listening to funders** – there would be merit in bringing together a representative group of funders to discuss how to improve the awareness and understanding of volunteering by funders; and for the partners in the development of Scotland's Volunteering Action Plan to better understand the constraints and issues facing funders. From the volunteering perspective the evidence indicates that the following should be considered:

- Funding applicants having to 'test' the relevance of volunteering to their project/programme, and the proportion of funds allocated to support volunteering where relevant.
- The funding donor taking into consideration 'investment' factors such as volunteer management and practice – either as a requirement of funding or as an outcome of funding. Linkage to national standards such as Investing in Volunteers and Volunteer Friendly where appropriate.<sup>19, 20</sup>
- As part of the evaluation of funds there should be an assessment of the impact on volunteering. This would help to enhance understanding not only of fund performance but also importantly the fund's contribution to volunteering in Scotland.

The way in which funding is allocated and distributed also needs to be reviewed. Specific issues for consideration include:

- Security in funding with longer-term, multi-year commitments, building on the Scottish Government's commitment to multi-year funding<sup>21</sup>
- 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'.
- Flexibility, innovation and creativity in funding for the sector.

**Funding support** – consideration needs to be given to the funding needs not just of VIOs, but also of infrastructure organisations. There has been an increased recognition of the vital role played by infrastructure organisations during the pandemic, and it is appropriate to review their ongoing funding needs to enable them to support VIOs and volunteers; not just for the recovery but also over the long term (e.g. TSIs and national umbrella bodies).

## C.2 Partnership and collaboration

(See Sections [5.4](#) and [6.3-6.5](#))

The feedback from infrastructure organisations was extremely positive regarding the effectiveness of the coordination of the volunteering response, especially in local authority areas.<sup>5</sup> The key strengths were:

- TSIs being recognised as the centre of knowledge and expertise on volunteering locally, resulting in many TSIs becoming more effectively involved with their local authority and local partners in the management of the crisis.
- Improved communication and problem solving between TSIs. The TSIs acknowledged that the TSI Scotland Network was 'now actually working' as a 'network'.

- National support and collaboration from organisations such as SCVO, Volunteer Scotland and the British Red Cross was also acknowledged, although, in general, national to local collaboration was seen as weaker than local collaboration.

At the local level the Scottish Government survey also highlighted that the strength of local partnership working was not universal, with a minority of local authority areas having problems with communication and partner engagement.<sup>5</sup>

### **Implications – partnership and collaboration**

There is an excellent opportunity to further strengthen partnership working and collaboration that progressed positively during COVID-19. Areas which have been highlighted by the research include:

- **Local partnership working** - strengthening specific local authority areas where progress during COVID-19 has been weaker.
- **TSI and local authority engagement** – building upon the improved collaboration and joint working in relation to volunteering – in structures such as Community Planning Partnerships and Local Resilience Partnerships and Groups.
- **TSI Scotland Network** – building upon the gains made in the effective operation of the Network during COVID-19.
- **National and local collaboration** – reviewing ways to improve the collaboration and communication between Scottish Government, national bodies and the TSIs and local partners. Specific issues identified by the evidence include:
  - Providing increased clarity on the responsibilities of national bodies such as Volunteer Scotland and SCVO, and the TSI Scotland Network. In particular, the importance of identifying mutual responsibilities where close collaboration is essential.
  - How to improve the ‘voice’ of local partners in national planning relating to the third sector and volunteering? For example, local authorities and TSIs.
  - How to share data, expertise and resources more effectively from local to national and vice-versa.

These findings are directly relevant to the work of the ‘Volunteer Action Planning Process’.

## **C.3 Information and guidance**

(See sections [4.3](#), [5.3](#) and [6.3](#))

As expected in a national crisis the scale and complexity of COVID-19 the role of information and guidance was critical. There was widespread evidence of good practice, both nationally and locally:

- **National level** – in addition to the Scottish Government’s role in areas such as information on COVID-19 restrictions, funding programmes and the Ready Scotland website, other examples included SCVO’s centralised funding information; and interpretation of COVID-19 restrictions for VIOs and the public, information which was shared by national organisations such as Scottish Community Development Centre (SCDC), Volunteer Scotland and SCVO.



- **Local level** – TSIs and local partners delivered a suite of information to support VIOs and the wider public on safe volunteering including videos, branded campaigns such as ‘Think Local, Act Local’, and ‘being a good neighbour’ guide. Types of support provided for mutual aid groups included guidance on formalisation of their organisation; governance and legal compliance; volunteer management; COVID-safe delivery of services; lists of formal organisations they can signpost to; and coordination of support geographically.

### **Implications – information and guidance**

Notwithstanding the strong focus on information and guidance during COVID-19, there was feedback from infrastructure organisations and VIOs that Scotland’s information and guidance response could be improved, both nationally and locally:<sup>5</sup>

- **Guidance for involvement of volunteers** – one important area was the demand by VIOs for national and local government to provide clearer guidelines on the involvement of volunteers throughout the whole COVID-19 recovery phase, and that these guidelines should be kept up-to-date and shared in a timely and accessible manner.
- **Recognition and support for informal volunteering** – ensuring that the newfound recognition of informal volunteering in a crisis is retained and that appropriate support is provided. This includes guidance to support individuals in helping their neighbours, friends and colleagues safely – especially local community support focused on crisis needs, and mitigation of social isolation and loneliness.
- **Information and data sharing** – more effective information sharing at all levels: within local authority areas; sharing good practice, lessons learned, etc. between areas; and between national and local levels. The scope to widen access to quality assured information centrally, to minimise duplication locally, should also be considered – not just for crises but also in ‘steady state’. Examples of relevant platforms include Ready Scotland website, Volunteer Scotland’s website and [VolunteerWiki](#) which was initiated locally by Volunteer Edinburgh, but has national relevance and reach.

## **C.4 Training provision**

(See sections [4.4](#), [6.3](#), [6.4](#) and [6.6](#))

The development of new volunteer roles, the introduction of new systems to support volunteers (especially on digital platforms), the onboarding of new volunteers and re-engagement of existing volunteers, and ensuring the health and wellbeing of volunteers during COVID-19, all required significant training support from VIOs. OSCR’s survey of Scottish charities and the Scottish Government survey highlighted the need for this training support and how important it was, not just for frontline volunteers but also trustees.<sup>5, 9</sup>

### **Implications – training provision**

**Training support for VIOs** was identified in the following areas, which has relevance for VIOs beyond COVID-19: <sup>5</sup>

- Funding support to help cover the costs of training by VIOs. This could be delivered via a variety of routes, such as:
  - Funders to make an allowance in their application process for volunteer training expenses when funding volunteer-involving activities.
  - The design of future volunteering funds by Scottish Government and other funders to include a specific focus on training and standards supporting good volunteering practice.
  - The provision of free or subsidised training for smaller VIOs, but chargeable for larger VIOs, as per Volunteer Scotland's pricing model.
- Training support in embedding different models of engaging and supporting volunteers: for example, online/ remote volunteering.
- Creation of online training products to support VIOs in delivery of training.
- Training provision to be complementary to and supportive of the needs of those VIOs pursuing Investing in Volunteers and Volunteer Friendly.<sup>19, 20</sup>

**Infrastructure organisations' role** in the provision of training support locally is critical; combined with learning across geographies. Infrastructure organisations also have a key role in supporting the development and rollout of a national 'quality pipeline' based on quality assured training and national standards of good practice currently being led by Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network and other partners.

## **C.5 Addressing societal needs**

(See sections [4.5](#) and [4.6](#))

A key focus during the first lockdown (March – June 2020) was addressing the crisis needs of PPE production, food shopping, collecting and delivering prescriptions, other food support, and keeping in touch, particularly for those most isolated and at risk. Through a combination of formal volunteering, mutual aid and informal volunteering these needs were addressed very effectively and relatively quickly. In contrast, societal needs relating to mental health, social isolation and loneliness, and poverty (among a long list of needs), were significantly exacerbated by COVID-19. These long-term systemic challenges proved to be an ongoing resilience challenge throughout the pandemic.<sup>5</sup>

What stands out from the evidence is the widespread engagement of Scotland's VIOs in helping to address these long-term societal needs, not just in the first lockdown but throughout the pandemic.

**Implications – addressing societal needs**

- The importance of formal volunteering in addressing these more complex long-term societal challenges should be recognised, compared to the limitations of mutual aid and informal volunteering (with the exception of ‘keeping in touch’ to combat social isolation and loneliness, which mutual aid and informal volunteering are very good at).
- The contribution of VIOs in addressing these challenges needs to be recognised and supported by Government Departments, agencies, and funders in ‘steady state’ – not just in response to the pandemic.
- The scope of resilience planning should be reviewed to consider the appropriate balance between addressing short-term crisis needs and the longer-term resilience of society.
- How to ensure volunteering remains as inclusive as possible during a crisis should be reviewed. Those who derive the greatest health and wellbeing benefits from volunteering are often those most excluded in society. Unfortunately, it was these groups who were often least able to volunteer during the pandemic.

**C.6 Scotland Cares**

(See section [5.5](#))

The Scotland Cares campaign was set up in direct response to COVID-19 and invited people to register their interest to volunteer via the Ready Scotland website. The objective was to provide one place for potential volunteers to sign up, and for this pool of volunteers to be redirected to local organisations, so, if and when they were needed, that need could be expressed and met locally. It was recognised that the demand for volunteers would most likely be variable and spread over time. It should also be recognised that Scottish Government and partners were acting at pace and in conditions of considerable uncertainty in the design and mobilisation of the campaign.

Scotland Cares achieved over 60,000 sign-ups within a month, and this demonstrated the willingness of Scotland’s people to help in tackling the national crisis. It also helped to raise the profile of volunteering. However, evidence from the analysis of the c.35,000 sign-ups via the Volunteer Scotland portal, identified three key problems:

- The demand-supply imbalance due to the relatively small number of formal volunteering opportunities compared to the large number of sign-ups, which meant that most applicants did not get the chance to volunteer. This may also have had negative impacts on applicants’ perceptions of volunteering and the organisations associated with the delivery of the Scotland Cares campaign.
- The heavy workload involved in the administration of the Scotland Cares sign-up and registration process administered by Volunteer Scotland nationally, and the 32 TSIs locally across Scotland, often with the support of their local authority. This workload also hit the TSIs in May-June 2020, when they were already very busy.
- The ‘window of interest’ from volunteer sign-ups was limited, especially after the first lockdown when people came off furlough and started to return to work. Volunteer Scotland’s engagement with the sign-ups identified a significant waning of interest.

### **Implications – from ‘Scotland Cares’**

There are important lessons to be learned from Scotland Cares which can help to inform future initiatives of this nature.<sup>5</sup> There would be merit in Scottish Government and key partners coming together to review the following factors:

- **Consultation pre-launch** – could communication with, and inputs from, the key volunteering organisations in Scotland be improved? This includes Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network and other key partners such as SCVO.
- **Appraisal process** – to review how the campaign was appraised by Scottish Government and what changes, if any, could be made to improve the process.
- **Getting the timing right** – balancing the need to act quickly and decisively versus giving sufficient time for planning the details of such a campaign, giving advance notice to the TSIs, etc.
- **Collaboration post-launch** – the way Scottish Government and third sector partners came together to help develop and deliver the Scotland Cares campaign was seen as a real strength. There may be lessons that could be capitalised on for future campaigns, events and relationships more generally.
- **Managing volunteers’ expectations**: how best to manage volunteers’ expectations when there are significant variables in a campaign of this nature.
- **Don’t forget your existing volunteers** – alongside the management and onboarding of new volunteers from Scotland Cares it was very important to acknowledge the contribution of the ongoing volunteering effort across Scotland.

## **C.7 Informal volunteering – Individuals’ responses**

(See sections [3.2](#), [3.4](#), [5.3](#) and [6.4](#))

When a ‘crisis’ affects communities at the local neighbourhood level people ‘step up to the plate’ and support each other. Acting as an individual to check on your neighbour, help them with their shopping, or provide transport is what we might expect. This is most frequently evidenced in people’s response to adverse weather events, the impact of a terrorist attack or a local disaster. The unique feature of COVID-19 was its severity and that it impacted every single neighbourhood in Scotland; so, it was the scale and duration of the informal volunteering response that was so notable.

The recently published Scottish Household Survey 2020 results highlight how significant this response was.<sup>10</sup> Informal volunteering participation increased from 36% in 2018 to 56% in 2020. Also, informal volunteers focused their efforts supporting the crisis needs which were particularly acute during the first lockdown:

- Keeping in touch with someone who is at risk of being lonely: up from 18% in 2018 to 69% in 2020
- Doing shopping, collection pension, collecting benefits or paying bills: up from 12% to 51%
- Providing transport or accompanying someone away from home: up from 9% to 20%
- Routine household chores: up from 11% to 19%
- Providing advice or support with letters of forms or speaking with others on someone else’s behalf: up from 6% to 16%.

‘Acknowledging and supporting informal volunteering’ was the third most frequently cited priority by infrastructure organisations to support Scotland’s recovery from COVID-19.<sup>5</sup> However, there is less evidence on how informal volunteering should be supported.

### **Implications – Informal volunteering**

Care needs to be taken not to try and ‘formalise the informal’, and so lose the inherent strength of informal volunteering – its informality. Notwithstanding the difficulty in supporting individuals rather than organisations, there are at least three implications from COVID-19 which need to be considered:

- **Recognition of informal volunteering** – there has been a complete sea-change in the recognition of how individuals acting on their own volition can provide an indispensable contribution during a crisis. There is the opportunity to build on this recognition beyond COVID-19 into steady state.
- **Support for informal volunteers during a crisis** – the needs of volunteers are likely to vary from one crisis to another. For informal volunteering during COVID-19 the priority was to inform the public about the risks and how to volunteer safely. The scope to build on the excellent guidance provided by TSIs and partners locally post-pandemic should be reviewed, with the possibility for extending the range of guidance topics relevant to other crises.
- **Stimulating informal volunteering during steady state** – engaged communities where people feel part of their community, where they know their neighbours, and are involved in supporting their community, may result in higher levels of informal volunteering engagement than would be the case in less engaged communities. There is therefore an opportunity to engage with organisations specialising in community engagement to learn from their knowledge and skills, complemented by wider research evidence, to determine whether this could be an indirect route in fostering people’s engagement in informal volunteering.

## **D. Unexpected responses**

### **D.1 Digital uptake**

(See sections [4.3](#), [4.4](#), [6.3](#), [6.4](#), [6.6](#) and [7.2](#) )

COVID-19 has required very significant adaptation of service delivery models by VIOs to try and maintain business continuity and, in many cases, the very survival of their organisation. Top of these adaptations has been the use of phone/digital platforms, with the majority of VIOs surveyed moving some or all of their activities online in Scotland.<sup>5</sup> OSCR’s survey of 2,500 charities stated: “*The single greatest impact of the pandemic and restrictions on almost all charities was going online.*”<sup>9</sup>

The benefits include:

- Improved reach with volunteers and service users:
  - Additional beneficiaries being reached – especially in remote locations
  - Attracting a wider geographical pool of volunteers

- Improved communication and team working with volunteers and staff (especially when working over a large geography)
- The delivery of benefits for both rural and urban areas
- The ability of digital technology to support new and enhanced services
- The cost savings and reduced carbon footprint from digital technology.

However, there is also a need to recognise the limitations of digital technology. The switch to digital was no universal panacea and there were significant challenges for many VIOs, especially for smaller organisations with few or no paid staff:

- Lack of digital skills amongst some volunteers
- The challenges in supporting volunteers digitally
- The exclusion of beneficiary groups such as older adults, disabled people and those excluded due to the cost/lack of equipment
- The basic fact that many services are not suited to online delivery. Face-to-face engagement remains critical for many services.

### **Implications – digital uptake**

**Optimising current digital technology** – the uptake of digital technology and its application in innovative ways through video platforms such as Zoom and Teams, to social media platforms and the ‘good old phone’ have been transformational in the support of volunteers and the delivery of their services.

However, support is required to help embed current digital good practice, whilst mitigating its limitations. Consideration should be given to:

- Identification and sharing of good practice in the use of digital technology, including blended models of volunteer support and service delivery. Accessing existing support from organisations such as SCVO will be important, so as not to ‘reinvent the wheel’.
- Improving VIOs’ digital infrastructure, and provision of IT equipment for staff and volunteers.
- The provision of accessible digital training, particularly for those experiencing digital exclusion such as older age groups and those living in rural areas.

These areas of possible support relate primarily to formal volunteering, but there may also be opportunities relating to the sharing of good practice in the use of social media platforms by mutual aid groups. See further discussion in D.2 below.

**Preparing for future digital applications** – what COVID-19 demonstrated was the need for organisations to be prepared for digital change and having the ability to respond quickly to the application of communication platforms in new settings. This can be existing digital technologies that were ‘discovered’ (e.g. Microsoft Teams) as much as completely new technologies. Crises are excellent drivers of rapid update of existing technologies but for new purposes. Hence, a key challenge for the third sector is its ability to be able to address inequalities in digital access when there is fast-paced change in the technologies being used. Interestingly, there appeared to be fewer barriers in the uptake and the application of Facebook and WhatsApp by mutual aid groups, reflecting the widespread skills-set across society on social media platforms. See D.2



## D.2 Mutual aid response

(See sections [3.2](#), [3.3](#), [5.3](#), [6.4](#) and [7.1](#))

Alongside digital uptake, the mutual aid response ranks as one of the most unexpected, unplanned and transformational aspects of Scotland's resilience response. Exploiting social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp, communities came together spontaneously to provide assistance, which was ideally suited to meeting the initial crisis needs during the first lockdown. Key attributes included: <sup>5 11</sup>

- Speed of response for crisis needs of food, transport, shopping and shelter
- Services were easy to access in an informal way
- Community connectivity, accessibility and hyper-local knowledge
- Ability to support both those shielding, and those vulnerable but not shielding
- Reaching those in need in areas of deprivation
- Large group membership providing ready access to volunteers

TSIs, local authorities and other infrastructure partners thought that mutual aid was a key component of the COVID-19 response, which complemented formal volunteering activities. They also supported mutual aid groups in some of the challenges they faced such as volunteer safety, risk management relating to vulnerable groups and GDPR, and their long-term sustainability.

### **Implications – mutual aid response**

Mutual aid groups are ideally suited to supporting a crisis resilience response, but for many groups their longer-term role in 'steady state' is more uncertain. There is evidence of many groups moving to community support pages on Facebook, becoming dormant or ceasing to operate altogether. However, this should not be viewed as a negative development. Their very strength is their ability to come together and to act quickly in supporting a crisis response.

We need to be careful not to try and formalise what is a very effective informal resilience response. However, there is an opportunity to review how best to support the contribution of mutual aid groups in future crises and, in particular, the merits of becoming an unincorporated association, versus incorporation with legal status.

### **Supporting mutual aid – suggestions include:**

- Reviewing the role of mutual aid groups in Scotland's resilience planning and the resilience response infrastructure, protocols and guidance. Mutual aid to be seen as an integral part of the local resilience response.
- TSIs and partners supporting those mutual aid groups which have the interest and potential to become constituted, through becoming an unincorporated association. There may also be a small number that should become incorporated, especially those interested in expanding their operations and recruiting staff or taking on a premise. The Volunteer Friendly national standard has been offered as a support tool for those that transition to constituted status and wish to take proactive action to improve the volunteer experience. <sup>20</sup>

- Supporting constituted mutual aid groups in aspects such as safeguarding, confidentiality, and volunteer safety, drawing upon good practice in relevant national standards.

There is also an opportunity to reflect on the wider contribution of mutual aid groups in improving community engagement and cohesiveness. COVID-19 has resulted in communities coming together, where people forge new relationships and support each other: see D.3 below. Mutual aid has played an important role in this enhanced community engagement. This includes the contribution from hundreds of very small street level self-help WhatsApp groups focused on helping each other with a mainly social support focus; as opposed to mutual aid groups offering services to help others outside their immediate neighbourhood: see those listed on Mutual Aid UK.<sup>12</sup>

### D.3 Community engagement

(See sections [6.4](#) and [7.2](#) )

The TSI Scotland Network study highlighted COVID-19's positive community level impacts with 'people looking out for each other' and 'people developing new connections and better relationships'.<sup>13</sup> The mutual aid and informal volunteering response was critical in achieving this 'strengthened community spirit and identity'.<sup>5</sup> It brought people together to create stronger and more resilient communities; where people help each other and provide invaluable support and kindness.

Importantly, this contribution was recognised and valued by Scotland's infrastructure organisations whose focus pre-pandemic was largely formal volunteering. However, the challenge going forward is how best to foster and support this new spirit of community engagement.

#### **Implications – community engagement**

Infrastructure organisations put forward specific suggestions to **build stronger and more resilient communities** through volunteering, including: <sup>5</sup>

- Working with communities to continue to see volunteering as an important aspect of community life.
- The provision of community hubs and support staff to ensure that those people who need the assistance get it.
- Continue to build the 'Volunteer Brand' in local communities which provides a volunteer focused/community-based platform for local people to engage with.
- Infrastructure organisations to undertake needs-based assessment of their local communities to determine how best to support groups/ volunteers and develop more resilient communities.
- Provision of additional funding to support community groups in their recovery.

**Inclusive communities** – there is an opportunity to make communities more inclusive, and to capitalise on the contributions from informal volunteering and mutual aid. A key geographic focus should be the most deprived communities in urban Scotland, where adult formal volunteering participation rates are significantly lower.<sup>18</sup> Specific programmes of support are planned or underway by the TSIs and partners and the learning from these interventions should be shared locally, regionally and nationally as appropriate.<sup>5</sup>

**Community leadership** – a need expressed by infrastructure organisations was for more effective empowerment of local community groups to foster community-led action (see section B).

**Further research required** – there is a requirement for further research to understand the contribution of volunteering to community engagement and vice-versa.

## D.4 Recognition and celebration

(See sections [6.3](#), [6.4](#), [6.6](#) and [7.2](#) )

COVID-19 has had a significant impact on VIOs' appreciation and recognition of the contribution of their own volunteers.<sup>5</sup> The pandemic reaffirmed the vital importance that volunteers have within VIOs, within their communities, and within Scotland's response to COVID-19. It is therefore important for all VIOs to fully recognize the contribution of their volunteers and to demonstrate this internally (to volunteers, staff and trustees) and externally to their stakeholders – not just during a crisis but on an ongoing basis.

However, probably an even more important theme emerging from the Scottish Government survey is the requirement for increased recognition of volunteering by a much wider range of organisations, the most important being Scottish Government and its agencies, funders, national partners, umbrella organisations, local government, and employers. There needs to be a much better awareness, understanding and recognition of the role and contribution of volunteering amongst such organisations and more widely in society. Only then will volunteering be reflected effectively in policies at the national, local and organisation levels.<sup>5</sup>

### Implications – recognition and celebration

**Influencing VIOs** – there is an opportunity to build on the increased recognition by VIOs of the importance of volunteers and volunteering. Consideration should be given to how this can best be effected, such as through promotion, events, sharing good practice from COVID-19, and increased uptake of national standards of good practice such as Investing in Volunteers and Volunteer Friendly, etc. <sup>19, 20</sup> There is also a need for increased recognition of the national standards themselves.

**Influencing the 'influencers'** – this includes Scottish Government, national, regional and local organisations, which can influence policy and practice relating to volunteering. This is a complex goal which will require careful consideration as part of Scotland's 'Volunteering Action Planning Process'.

**Inclusive volunteering** – improved understanding and recognition of volunteering and its contribution to volunteers’ health and wellbeing can help to influence more inclusive volunteering policy and practice. Opportunities include:

- VIOs and the ‘influencers’ recognise the benefits of directing policies and practice to help engage those who have the most to gain from volunteering.
- Those with lived experience of isolation and loneliness, mental ill-health, poverty, addiction, homelessness, etc. can use their ‘voice’ in volunteering roles to raise awareness of the impact of the positive health and wellbeing impacts from volunteering
- The scope to introduce programmes to raise awareness and provide support to those excluded from volunteering, such as ‘Access to Work’ for disabled people, which is currently only available for people in employment.

**Infrastructure organisations’ role** – they understand the importance of recognition and celebration and support this locally as a shared responsibility with partners. However, national organisations with a volunteering responsibility, such as Volunteer Scotland and the Scottish Volunteering Forum, also play a key role in supporting volunteering recognition and celebration in partnership with infrastructure organisations.

## D.5 Challenge of inclusive volunteering

(See sections [4.3](#), [4.5](#), [6.3](#), [6.4](#), [6.6](#) and [7.2](#) )

Ensuring volunteering is inclusive and accessible to all is a major challenge for the large majority of VIOs in ‘steady state’ let alone in the midst of a major pandemic. Two key factors have exacerbated the lack of inclusion during COVID-19:

- Those groups in society most excluded and disadvantaged, and who can derive the greatest health and wellbeing benefits, are the people most likely to have been adversely affected by COVID-19, which will have compromised their ability to volunteer; and
- VIOs’ ability to engage those who are excluded has been seriously compromised by COVID-19. Their focus has been on their crisis response and longer-term survival. A minority of VIOs considered ‘Making our volunteering more inclusive’ a priority.<sup>5</sup>

In contrast, infrastructure organisations rated a more inclusive volunteering outcome as one of their top priorities to aid the recovery of the third sector in the wake of the pandemic. This supports the attainment of the Volunteering for All Outcome: “There are diverse, quality and inclusive opportunities for everyone to get involved and stay involved”.<sup>5, 2</sup>

### Implications – inclusive volunteering

**Support for inclusive volunteering** – infrastructure organisations identified a range of support measures to tackle barriers exacerbated by COVID-19:

- Re-establishment of programmes 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, through training and the development of inclusive policies, etc.
- Making volunteering opportunities more welcoming and inclusive for different people; ensuring that barriers to recruitment are not created inadvertently.
- A more joined up approach with other infrastructure organisations and community groups, to support and develop inclusive volunteering.
- Development of new projects, for example a Community Growing Project to support those with mental ill-health through volunteering.<sup>5</sup>

**Digital inclusion** – IT equipment and accessible digital training was identified as a priority by VIOs for staff members and volunteers – particularly for those who were experiencing digital exclusion such as older people, those in poverty and those living in rural areas.<sup>5</sup>

**Recognition and promotion of volunteering** - VIOs highlighted the key role which recognition has in supporting a more inclusive volunteering outcome – see D.4. <sup>5</sup>

**Leveraging mutual aid and informal volunteering engagement** – at a wider level, infrastructure organisations identified the opportunity to make Scotland’s communities more inclusive through more informal volunteering engagement – see D.3. <sup>5</sup>

## D.6 ‘Just do it’

One of the major positive impacts coming out of society’s response to COVID-19 was a transformational ‘can do’ attitude. Innovation, problem solving, less bureaucracy and quick decisions were achieved by organisations and people coming together to deliver funding and practical support ‘on the ground’ and at pace. Examples include:

- The development and delivery of major national funding programmes
- National coordination between Scottish Government and partners
- Local coordination between TSIs, local authorities and local partners
- Delivery of support to VIOs, mutual aid groups and informal volunteers by infrastructure organisations
- The delivery of crisis support by mutual aid groups
- The response of individuals helping their neighbours and the countless gestures of kindness.

So much has been achieved so quickly compared to what typically happens in ‘steady state’. This begs the question as to why the attributes of the ‘just do it’ attitude cannot be retained beyond COVID-19 as a key lasting legacy.

### **Implications – ‘Just do it’**

**Learning from COVID-19** – there is the opportunity to review and learn from the ‘just do it’ model. What made organisations work together so much more effectively? How did funding and support get delivered so much more seamlessly and quickly? Can and should these practices be sustained to the ‘steady state’ beyond COVID-19?

**Combatting the return to the status quo** – once the pressures of COVID-19 are alleviated, it will be all too easy to revert to the ‘old behaviours’. The factors which need careful consideration include:

- Risk averseness – are decision-making processes overly risk averse, with bureaucratic form filling systems resulting in slower decisions, less innovation and possibly poorer decisions overall?
- Cost-effectiveness – did the ‘just do it’ approach result in value-for-money outcomes? Did the funding and support get to those most in need and was it cost-effective? To what extent was funding and support misdirected due to having to operate at pace? See C.1
- Collaborative working – when the pressures of COVID-19 are removed, will organisations revert to models based more on self-interest rather than wider local or national interest?

These are complex issues and not easy to influence in terms of securing positive legacy impacts. It is quite possible that the risk-averse approach in normal times, and the ‘just do it’ approach in crisis are both optimal, which reflects shifts in the risk profile and cost-benefit of action during a crisis. However, there would be merit in an open discussion between the key stakeholder groups involved in the development of Scotland’s Volunteering Action Plan.

## **E. Formal volunteering priorities and support needs**

(See Sections [4.3](#), [4.6](#), [6.3](#), [6.4](#), [6.6](#) and [7.2](#) )

In the Scottish Government survey VIOs identified volunteering priorities and support needs for their long-term recovery.<sup>5</sup> What was striking was how the issues relevant to addressing the crisis were also seen as being pivotally important in supporting their longer-term development beyond the crisis. The other key finding was the symmetry in views expressed between VIOs and infrastructure organisations regarding priorities to support formal volunteering, with the one exception of inclusive volunteering.

### **Implications – formal volunteering priorities and support needs**

#### **VIO priorities**

- *Addressing societal challenges* (see C.5) – a high proportion of VIOs have focused on addressing loneliness, mental ill-health, poverty alleviation, homelessness, etc. and these challenges require long-term volunteering support.
- *Embedding digital models* (see D.1) – capturing the best of digital and mitigating its limitations.
- *Volunteer recruitment* – recovering from the major contraction in formal volunteering through re-engagement of former volunteers and attracting new volunteers.
- *Volunteer management* – additional funding to support volunteer management and coordination was VIOs’ most frequently cited funding need.



- *Volunteers' health & wellbeing* – COVID-19 led to problems of fatigue and burnout for those who remained as volunteers, and also for the health and wellbeing of volunteers isolated due to shielding or whose roles disappeared due to social distancing.
- *Youth volunteering* – the loss of volunteering opportunities for young people, and the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on their health and wellbeing are key drivers underpinning the need for focused support on young people's volunteering.

### VIO Support needs

- *Infrastructure organisations' support* – at the local level TSIs, local authorities and other local partners have a vital role to play in helping VIOs in addressing the priorities listed above. At the national level this responsibility rests with Volunteer Scotland, SCVO and the Scottish Volunteering Forum.
- *Funding provision* (see C.1) – to provide additional staff resource for volunteer management and coordination, and to build and strengthen the capacity of VIOs during the COVID-19 recovery period and beyond.
- *Training support* (see C.4) – digital training, health and safety training, volunteer management training and training to upskill volunteers were all referenced; as was more accessible provision via online platforms.
- *Collaborative working* (see C.2) – the need to improve collaboration and joint-working – locally and nationally – in supporting VIOs.
- *Recognition and celebration* (see D.4) – the role of Scottish Government, partners and infrastructure organisations in helping to recognise and celebrate volunteering and volunteer practice.
- *Inclusive volunteering* (see D.5) – helping to tackle the barriers to access that have been exacerbated by COVID-19 was a priority for infrastructure organisations. Although it was not a current priority for the majority of VIOs, over one-third of those surveyed wanted to make their volunteering opportunities more inclusive.<sup>5</sup>

## F. How to turn evidence into action?

Scotland benefits from having the Third Sector Unit in Scottish Government, which has a specific responsibility for volunteering. It was this Unit which led the development of the 'Volunteering for All: Our National Framework' published in April 2019.<sup>2</sup> It provides a broad strategic framework which is currently being developed into a Volunteering Action Plan for Scotland. Therefore, the timing of the 'Road to Recovery' report is fortuitous as its findings can help to inform the development of the new 10-year Volunteering Action Plan.

### 'Evidence into action'

**Critical assessment and stress-testing of priorities for action.** The lessons learned and 'Implications' outlined in this 'Route to Improvement' summary need to be reviewed, stress-tested and, where appropriate, developed further. This should include consideration of the recommendations from the Social Renewal Advisory Board, the Communities and Volunteering Circle, and the YouthVIP recommendations.<sup>8, 14</sup>

**Knowledge exchange activities.** In addition to Scottish Government and national bodies such as Volunteer Scotland and SCVO, it will be essential to engage key stakeholders in the review process. As a minimum this should include representatives of TSI Scotland Network, local authorities, national sectoral bodies and umbrella organisations, funders and VIOs. The focus should be on:

- Reviewing the 'Implications' in the 'Route to Improvement' to develop agreed priorities for action which are embedded in the Volunteering Action Plan.
- Informing the rollout and implementation of the Volunteering Action Plan.

**Wider dissemination.** It will also be important to share the 'Road to Recovery' findings more widely and Volunteer Scotland will work with the Scottish Government and key partners to support this dissemination process through social media, events and through the engagement of forums such as the Scottish Volunteering Forum and the Cross-Party Group for Volunteering.

**New evidence – an ongoing process.** Finally, there should be an ongoing review of evidence on volunteering participation and community engagement to inform our understanding and learning about the long-term impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's third sector and volunteering. We also need to review the monitoring and evaluation evidence relating to the actions arising from this 'Route to Improvement' summary.

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## Section 1

# Introduction





The 'Road to Recovery' report explores the actual and projected impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in Scotland during the pandemic and over the longer term. Research evidence was drawn from the period March 2020 – May 2021. This Scottish Report forms part of a UK-wide research study involving a wide range of academic and practitioner partners.

To help the reader understand the scope of the 'Road to Recovery' research, its linkage to other research work, the evidence base examined, and how this has been analysed and reported, Section 1 describes the following:

- 1.1 Research context
- 1.2 'Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK' research study
- 1.3 Definitions
- 1.4 Methodology
- 1.5 Scottish evidence base
- 1.6 Report structure and navigation
- 1.7 Next steps.

## **1.1 Research context**

Volunteering in Scotland, as in all nations of the UK, has been significantly impacted by COVID-19. As restrictions and subsequent lockdowns were implemented, the volunteering landscape changed at pace with an increase in neighbourly help and other forms of informal volunteering, and the emergence of hundreds of mutual aid groups. At the same time formal volunteering, through groups, clubs and organisations, saw a significant contraction, with face-to-face volunteering significantly constrained.

The demographic profile of volunteering also changed. Older volunteers and those with underlying health conditions were asked to shield at home. As a result, many pre-existing volunteers became the beneficiaries of voluntary services, with younger adults stepping into new volunteer roles. Rural communities came together to support each other in harder to reach geographies, and many volunteer roles were moved to digital or telephone delivery.

As a consequence of these dynamic shifts in volunteering engagement, and given the importance of volunteering as an integral element of society's multi-layered response to the COVID-19 crisis, Volunteer Scotland re-focused 100% of its research effort in April 2020. Its focus was concentrated on improving public knowledge on the contribution of volunteering and the voluntary sector in helping to address the challenges presented by the pandemic. At pace, we started to build up our COVID-19 evidence base in conjunction with research partners in academia and in the voluntary and charitable sector. Section 1.5 profiles a number of the research outputs developed by Volunteer Scotland with our partners, which have been drawn upon in this research report. Volunteer Scotland's repository for all of its COVID-19 related research can be accessed via this [Link](#).



## 1.2 Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK

The 'Mobilising Voluntary Action Across the UK' project explores and compares voluntary action responses to the pandemic across the UK. Funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (grant no. ES/V015281/1), as part of the UK Research and Innovation's rapid response to COVID-19, the research commenced in late autumn 2020. For the purposes of this report this research is referred to as 'Mobilising Voluntary Action' (MVA).

Volunteer Scotland was responsible for the MVA research in Scotland, which included the production of this 'Road to Recovery' report. It is one of a suite of MVA research outputs which includes country reports for the other home countries; a UK-wide overarching report (pending); a book to be published by Policy Press in the autumn of 2022 sharing the UK-wide evidence; an interpretation of the policy context across the UK jurisdictions; and a quantitative study based on data from two UK volunteer matching services (see <https://www.mvain4.uk/>).

The 'Road to Recovery' research objectives were focused on:

- Understanding the volunteering response to COVID-19 in Scotland with a specific focus on volunteering;
- Comparing this response with the wider UK evidence base;
- Learning lessons to inform the voluntary sector's response to future crises; and
- Identifying and capitalising upon positive legacy outcomes to support recovery and post-recovery in Scotland.

## 1.3 Definitions

### 1.3.1 Classification of volunteering types

The Scottish Household Survey definitions for formal and informal volunteering are used throughout the report:

- Formal volunteering is defined as "*..... Giving up time to help any groups, clubs or organisations in an unpaid capacity*".
- Informal volunteering is defined as "*Any unpaid help individuals have given to other people or to improve your local environment, that is apart from any help given through a group, club or organisation, excluding help given to a relative*".

Mutual aid is considered to be a subset of formal volunteering and was defined by Volunteer Scotland for the Ipsos MORI omnibus survey 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)."

Due to the differences in the formality and legal/charitable status of mutual aid groups, they are analysed separately within this report.

### 1.3.2 Classification of organisational types

- **Infrastructure organisations** are involved in supporting or coordinating volunteering across an area or sector. This term was used in the Scottish Government survey and focused on Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs), local authorities and other relevant partners such as Health and Social Care Partnerships and national umbrella bodies.
- **Volunteer-Involving Organisations (VIOs)** refers to any organisations which engage volunteers in the delivery of their organisation's functions or service delivery. Although the main focus in the MVA research relates to VIOs in the third sector, the term applies equally to organisations in the public and private sectors.
- **Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs)** provide a single point of access for support and advice for the third sector within local areas. There is a TSI in each local authority area in Scotland.
- **TSI Scotland Network** is the network of 32 TSIs across Scotland and is supported to carry out its main functions by the Third Sector Unit of Scottish Government.

### 1.3.3 Time Periods

Analysis within this report is often linked to specific time periods in COVID-19, for example:

- **First Lockdown** – refers to 24<sup>th</sup> of March 2020 to 29<sup>th</sup> May 2020
- **Second Lockdown** – refers to 5<sup>th</sup> January 2021 to 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2021.

However, it is critical to note that between lockdowns there was a spectrum of restrictions being relaxed and then tightened, which also varied by local authority area. So, the boundaries of what actually comprised 'lockdown conditions' needs to be interpreted flexibly. The Scottish Parliament Information centre provides a detailed timeline of restrictions, funding and policy changes over the course of COVID-19.<sup>11</sup>

## 1.4 Research methodology

In line with the wider MVA project the Scottish research adopted a mixed methods approach based on the following research elements:

- Desk research – which mapped relevant secondary data in Scotland – see a description of the primary evidence sources used in this report in section 1.5.
- Policy review – which examined the policy context specific to Scotland.
- Survey – which was undertaken in partnership with the Scottish Government – see further details below.
- Interviews (x4) – which were conducted with senior level representatives in the Scottish Government and Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations (SCVO).

- Mid-project briefing – a Scottish knowledge exchange seminar was held in June 2021 in partnership with the MVA team in the UK and the Scottish Government: '[The Road to Recovery Expo](#)'.

**Scottish Government Survey Report** – a survey of infrastructure organisations and VIOs was undertaken by Scottish Government in partnership with Volunteer Scotland. It was designed to deliver research outputs fully congruent with the research objectives and methodology of the MVA study. Core tasks were shared across both organisations:

- Questionnaire design and survey distribution were shared responsibilities
- The majority of the quantitative and qualitative analysis was undertaken by Volunteer Scotland
- Scottish Government was responsible for development of the survey report and its publication. Entitled 'Scottish Third Sector Perspectives on Volunteering during COVID-19: Survey Report', the Scottish Government report should be viewed as a 'sister publication' to this MVA report.

Volunteer Scotland has drawn extensively upon this deep evidence base throughout its own report. See further details on the scope of the Scottish Government Survey Report in section 1.5.

**Research limitations** – the interpretation of this report's findings must be caveated with the following limitations:

- The research evidence that could have been drawn upon within and outside Scotland was significantly wider than that which has been used. However, a conscious decision was taken to focus on the most robust and relevant data sources to ensure that the research effort was feasible and cost-effective within the deadline for conclusion of the MVA country reports (February 2022).
- The window of time during which the evidence was drawn from (March 2020 – August 2021) means that by the date of this report's publication six months had elapsed. So, for example, subsequent impacts due to Omicron are omitted.
- The research evidence was heavily dependent on surveys of volunteer-involving organisations and infrastructure organisations at discrete time periods – May/June 2020, November 2020 and May 2021. Also, there was only one survey of adults aged 16+ undertaken in June 2020 by Volunteer Scotland and Ipsos MORI.
- However, the Scottish Household Survey 2020 results were published on 31st January 2022, which provided data on adults' volunteering participation for the period October 2019 – January 2021. This was only available at the conclusion of the report, so only headline statistics are reported.
- The MVA research methodology only allowed up to five stakeholder consultations. Hence, a number of important stakeholder perspectives are missing, such as funders, umbrella organisations and national bodies with expertise relevant to key themes such as community engagement and inclusion.

## 1.5 Scottish Evidence Base

The principal evidence sources that Volunteer Scotland has drawn upon for this report are listed below.

### 1.5.1 Pre COVID-19 volunteering evidence – to establish the baseline

To understand volunteering participation in Scotland pre-COVID-19, the ‘gold standard’ for robust evidence is the Scottish Household Survey (SHS).<sup>1</sup> This is an annual survey undertaken by the Scottish Government based on a random sample of the Scottish Adult population aged 16+ (9,700 in 2018). To establish the pre-COVID-19 volunteering baseline the 2018 SHS was used.

### 1.5.2 During COVID-19 volunteering evidence – to understand volunteering and its contribution

In addition to the Scottish Government survey Volunteer Scotland had access to a series of surveys conducted at different points in the pandemic – see details of the principal research evidence below. This allowed for triangulation of evidence between sources; a comparison between specific types of third sector organisations, for example charities compared to the wider third sector; and longitudinal analysis based on evidence in May/June 2020, November 2020 and May 2021. The longitudinal aspect was important because it showed how issues either changed or remained constant during the course of the pandemic. As this evidence has been drawn upon extensively in this report, a brief profile of each survey is described in chronological order.

#### Principal surveys on the impact of COVID-19 on volunteering in Scotland

##### TSI Scotland Network Survey – June 2020.<sup>2</sup>

Online survey conducted during April – May 2020 of 1,189 third sector organisations with representation from all 32 Scottish local authorities, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on the third sector in Scotland. The survey included five categories of organisation: voluntary organisations, community groups, social enterprises, intermediaries, and non-voluntary sector. Volunteer Scotland undertook its own analysis of the data specific to volunteering: [Link](#)

##### Ipsos-MORI Survey – June 2020<sup>3</sup>

Research commissioned by Volunteer Scotland. Telephone survey of 1,014 adults aged 16+ in Scotland, conducted between 22 – 29 June 2020 (the only survey to take an individual rather than organisational perspective). The survey focused on volunteering participation before COVID-19 (March 2019 – Feb 2020), during first lockdown (March – June 2020), and post COVID-19 (once the crisis is over and we are no longer in a pandemic). The survey was modelled on SHS participation questions with the addition of a Mutual Aid category. [Link](#)

##### Impact of COVID-19 on charities in Scotland - May 2020 (OSCR I)<sup>4</sup>

The first online survey undertaken by OSCR, the Scottish charities regulator, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown measures on charities in Scotland'. Survey conducted by 'Breaking Blue' on behalf of OSCR during 5 - 15 May 2020. 4,827 responses from a large number and representative cross-section of registered Scottish charities. Volunteer Scotland undertook its own analysis of the data specific to volunteering: [Link](#). When interpreting the results from both OSCR surveys it is important to note that while responses, particularly qualitative responses, do not explicitly refer to volunteers the majority of Scottish charities are run exclusively by volunteers, meaning that interpretation of results that refer to organisational issues and changes refer implicitly to volunteers and trustees. SCVOs report on Scottish Charities 2021 shows that 68% of charities report that they are run entirely by volunteers.<sup>10</sup>

#### Impact of COVID-19 on charities in Scotland - Nov 2020 (OSCR II) <sup>5</sup>

The second online survey undertaken by OSCR, the Scottish charities regulator, to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of COVID-19 and subsequent lockdown measures on charities in Scotland in November 2020, along with a comparison to the impacts that COVID-19 had on charities in May 2020. The survey was conducted by 'Breaking Blue' on behalf of OSCR during 3 – 15 November 2020. 2,548 responses from a large number and representative cross-section of registered Scottish charities. Volunteer Scotland undertook its own analysis of the data specific to volunteering: [Link](#). OSCR also published a separate report on 'Volunteers and Trustees Supplementary': [Link](#)

#### Scottish Government Survey on impact of COVID-19 – May 2021 <sup>6</sup>

Online survey co-produced by the Scottish Government and Volunteer Scotland. The research was conducted between 30 April – 6 June 2021. The survey was targeted at two audiences: volunteer-involving organisations (278 responses) and infrastructure organisations: Third Sector Interfaces, local authorities, Health and Social Care Partnerships and sectoral bodies (52 responses) to gather insights into the experiences of Scottish third sector organisations and other stakeholders involved in supporting volunteering during the pandemic. There are some instances in this report where the quantitative data differ slightly from the Scottish Government published results. This is due to a methodology difference where Volunteer Scotland excluded 'don't know' and 'not applicable' responses. Volunteer Scotland has used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge and experience to provide insights in the topics being considered. [Link](#)

Other evidence which supplements these surveys includes:

- **Mapping of press and social media coverage: March 2020 – September 2021.** Volunteer Scotland collated a qualitative evidence base of over 800 press and social media articles throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. This diverse evidence base covers all types of volunteering and provides insights into the tasks undertaken, the appeals that were made, recognition of volunteers and emerging societal needs during the course of the pandemic.<sup>7</sup>

- **Working Paper 4: Volunteering in the Pandemic Evidence from Two UK Volunteer Matching Services.** As part of the MVA project, the University of Stirling led a quantitative time series analysis of volunteer application data (Team Kinetic app data for England, Wales, Scotland and BeCollective app data for Northern Ireland). The working paper analyses volunteer and opportunity data from pre-COVID-19 to May 2021, focusing on demographic characteristics of volunteers, how the demographic characteristics changed over time and between nations. This working paper analyses formal volunteering only.<sup>8</sup>
- **Research on mutual aid in Scotland by Glasgow Caledonian University.** 'Solidarity in a time of crisis: The role of mutual aid to the COVID-19 pandemic'.<sup>9</sup>
- **Scottish Third Sector Tracker.** The Wave 1 survey of 585 third sector organisations was conducted during June – August 2021, and gives insights into the state of the sector, key trends, and developments at that time.<sup>12</sup>

## **1.6 Report structure and navigation**

This report for Scotland spans pre-COVID-19 to August 2021 and encompasses a substantial body of evidence. However, it does not include evidence from September 2021 onwards and, in particular, the impact of the Omicron variant and its adverse impact on Scotland's recovery.

The report is structured into seven sections covering three broad time periods – before, during and after COVID-19:

- **Section 1 – Introduction:** MVA context, research methodology, the Scottish evidence base, definitions, report structure and navigation.
- **Section 2 – Pre COVID-19 – The Scottish context:** contextual information on baseline volunteering data; and the policy landscape in Scotland pre COVID-19; and resilience partnership structure and support.
- **Section 3 – During COVID-19 – The Volunteer response:** impact of COVID-19 on volunteer participation in Scotland, mutual aid and informal volunteering.
- **Section 4 – During COVID-19 – The Volunteer Involving Organisations' response:** business impacts of COVID-19 on VIOs; impact on formal volunteering and number of volunteers; organisational challenges facing VIOs in the involvement of volunteers; VIOs' response to these challenges; understanding societal needs during COVID-19; the VIO response in meeting these needs; VIOs' ability to meet societal needs.



- Section 5 – During COVID-19 – Scottish Government and Infrastructure Organisations’ response:** Voluntary and community sector’s integration into Scotland’s resilience partnership structure; voluntary sector resilience response; role of infrastructure organisations; coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations; ‘Scotland Cares’ campaign; support provided by infrastructure organisations.
- Section 6 – Beyond COVID-19 – Long-term recovery:** projected adult volunteering participation rates after COVID-19; VIO priorities for Scotland’s long-term recovery; support that VIOs require; infrastructure organisations’ priorities for longer term recovery; stakeholder support required by infrastructure organisations; comparison of priorities between VIOs and infrastructure organisations.
- Section 7 – Lessons learned and next steps:** suggestions on how to improve Scotland’s voluntary response for future crises; how to build on the positive legacy from COVID-19; and how to turn evidence into action.

Given the wide range of evidence in the report, a ‘Navigation Guide’ has been developed to assist the reader navigate their way to the sections which will be of most interest to them.

Navigation Guide	
Themed areas	Sections
Community resilience and engagement *	<a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">7.2</a>
COVID-safe volunteering – challenges and VIO responses	<a href="#">4.2-4.4</a> , <a href="#">6.2</a> , <a href="#">6.3</a>
Demographic impacts of COVID-19 *	<a href="#">3.1</a> , <a href="#">3.2</a> , <a href="#">4.5</a> , <a href="#">6.1-6.3</a>
Digital communications	<a href="#">4.3</a> , <a href="#">4.4</a> , <a href="#">6.3</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">6.6</a> , <a href="#">7.2</a>
Formal volunteering	<a href="#">3.2</a> , <a href="#">4.2-4.7</a> , <a href="#">5.3</a> , <a href="#">6.2-6.4</a> , <a href="#">7.2</a>
Funding provision	<a href="#">5.6</a> , <a href="#">6.3-6.6</a> , <a href="#">7.1-7.2</a>
Inclusive volunteering *	<a href="#">4.3</a> , <a href="#">4.5</a> , <a href="#">6.3</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">6.6</a> , <a href="#">7.2</a>
Informal volunteering	<a href="#">3.2</a> , <a href="#">3.4</a> , <a href="#">5.3</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">7.1-7.2</a>
Information and guidance	<a href="#">4.3</a> , <a href="#">5.3</a> , <a href="#">6.3</a> , <a href="#">7.1</a>
Infrastructure organisations	<a href="#">5.3</a> , <a href="#">5.4</a> , <a href="#">6.4-6.6</a> , <a href="#">7.1-7.2</a>
Mutual aid	<a href="#">3.2</a> , <a href="#">3.3</a> , <a href="#">5.3</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">7.1</a>
Partnership, collaboration and coordination	<a href="#">5.4</a> , <a href="#">6.3-6.5</a> , <a href="#">7.1-7.2</a>
Policy, strategy, and action planning *	<a href="#">2.2-2.3</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">7.3</a>
Priorities for long-term recovery	<a href="#">6.1-6.6</a>
Recognition and celebration of volunteers/volunteering *	<a href="#">6.3</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">6.6</a> , <a href="#">7.1-7.2</a>
Resilience planning, response and enhancement	<a href="#">2.3</a> , <a href="#">2.4</a> , <a href="#">5.1</a> , <a href="#">5.2</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">7.1</a>
Scotland Cares campaign	<a href="#">5.5</a> , <a href="#">7.1</a>
Societal needs during COVID-19 – health, poverty, etc.	<a href="#">4.5</a> , <a href="#">4.6</a>
Training provision	<a href="#">4.4</a> , <a href="#">6.3</a> , <a href="#">6.4</a> , <a href="#">6.6</a>
VIOs’ business operations – impact of COVID-19	<a href="#">4.1</a>
Volunteering participation rates: before, during & post COVID	<a href="#">2.1</a> , <a href="#">3.1</a> , <a href="#">3.2</a> , <a href="#">3.4</a> , <a href="#">4.2</a> , <a href="#">6.1</a> , <a href="#">7.2</a>
Volunteers’ health and wellbeing	<a href="#">4.3</a> , <a href="#">4.4</a> , <a href="#">6.2</a> , <a href="#">6.3</a> , <a href="#">6.6</a>
<b>Note:</b> * Themed areas relevant to the Outcomes of the ‘Volunteering for All’ Framework	

Also, the contents page is hyperlinked to all of the sections and sub-sections.

## **1.7 Next steps**

This report is entitled 'The Road to Recovery' as its core function is to help support Scotland's volunteering response to the challenges of COVID-19: both during the pandemic, and in the post-recovery period. A summary of the 'lessons learned' is presented in [Section 7](#) and the [Executive Summary](#), entitled 'Routemap to Improvement', presents an overarching analysis of the evidence and the key implications. Volunteer Scotland will be working closely with the Scottish Government and key partners to facilitate our 'evidence into action' philosophy.

Central to this knowledge exchange approach will be the integration of the report's findings into the development and implementation of Scotland's 'Volunteering for All Action Plan'. The navigation guide above has highlighted themed areas that are directly relevant to the five Working Groups: lifelong engagement, policy, recognition and celebration, places and spaces and inclusive volunteering.

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## Section 2

# Pre Covid-19 The Scottish context



## **Key findings**

### **Volunteering Context pre COVID-19**

Based on the 2018 Scottish Household Survey (SHS) total adult volunteering participation rate in Scotland was 48%.<sup>1</sup> The breakdown by type of volunteering was:

- 26% of adults participated in formal volunteering (at least once in the last year)
- 36% of adults participated in informal volunteering (ditto)
- 14% of adults participated in both formal and informal volunteering (ditto).

Adult volunteering participation rates for both formal and informal volunteering were highest in the following demographic groups: those aged 35 – 44; those living in rural areas; and those living in the least deprived areas. These demographic groups with the highest volunteering participation have remained relatively unchanged since 2007.<sup>2</sup>

### **Volunteering policy and strategic direction – pre COVID-19**

The over-arching policy direction in Scotland relating to volunteering is driven by 'Volunteering for All: Our National Framework', which was published by the Scottish Government in April 2019. It identifies five key volunteering outcomes which helps to inform the work of the Scottish Government, partners and VIOs.<sup>3</sup> The outcomes and principles embedded in the Framework are directly relevant to the volunteering response to COVID-19 in Scotland: at the individual, organisation and community level.

### **Resilience planning structures and guidance – pre COVID-19**

The Scottish Government had a national, regional and local resilience infrastructure in place, including the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership and Voluntary Sector Resilience Groups. This spanned national coordination to the regional and local levels. The leadership for this work came from the Scottish Government's Resilience Communities Team in partnership with national, regional and local responders.

### **Building resilient communities – pre COVID-19**

Before the outbreak of COVID-19 the Scottish Government had a major policy and operational focus to build Scotland's resilience at the community level. In May 2019 the Scottish Government published 'Building Resilient Communities' – its good practice guidance for responders (Categories 1 and 2; and responding organisations in the voluntary and community sector).<sup>4</sup>

### **Resilience preparedness of Scotland's infrastructure organisations**

Infrastructure organisations' awareness of, and involvement in, resilience planning pre-pandemic varied significantly:

- 37% rated their level of awareness of resilience planning as 'limited' or 'none'
- 42% rated their level of involvement as 'limited' or 'none'.

Based on feedback from the Scottish Government and SCVO this variation in the involvement in resilience planning was recognised as an issue, and the Resilient Communities Team was at 'The Gathering' in February 2020 to try and address this.

Section 2 describes the Scottish context prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 and is structured as follows:

- Section 2.1 summarises the key characteristics of volunteering in Scotland drawing upon Scottish Household Survey 2018 and Ipsos MORI 2019-20 data.<sup>1, 3</sup> This provides a baseline for both formal and informal volunteering against which to measure the changes in volunteering participation during the pandemic.
- Section 2.2 describes the policy context for both volunteering and resilience.
- Section 2.3 examines the resilience planning structures and guidance prior to the outbreak of the pandemic relevant to the voluntary and community sector
- Section 2.4 reviews the resilience preparedness of the infrastructure organisations relevant to Scotland's voluntary and community sector.

**Note:** The Scottish Government uses 'Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS)' in their resilience work and this term has therefore been used in Section 2. However, for the other sections in the report the term 'third sector' has been used.

## **2.1 Volunteering context**

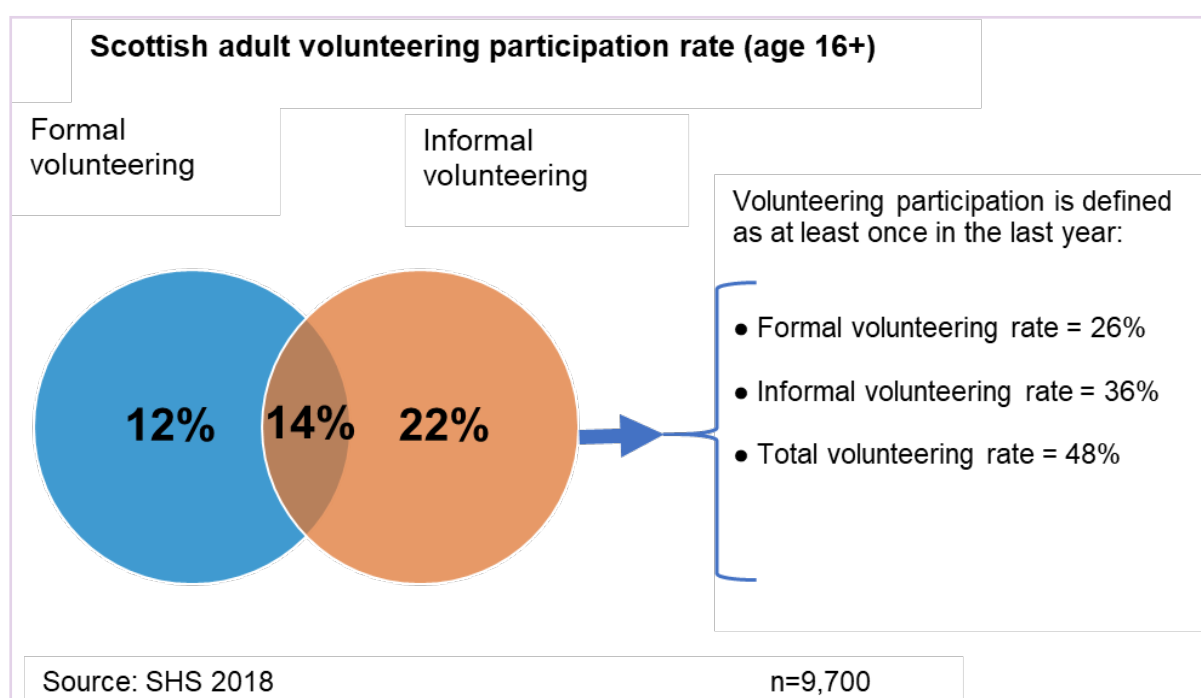
This section provides contextual data on volunteering pre-COVID-19, which will allow for benchmarking of volunteering during COVID-19 and in the future.

### **2.1.1 Volunteering participation**

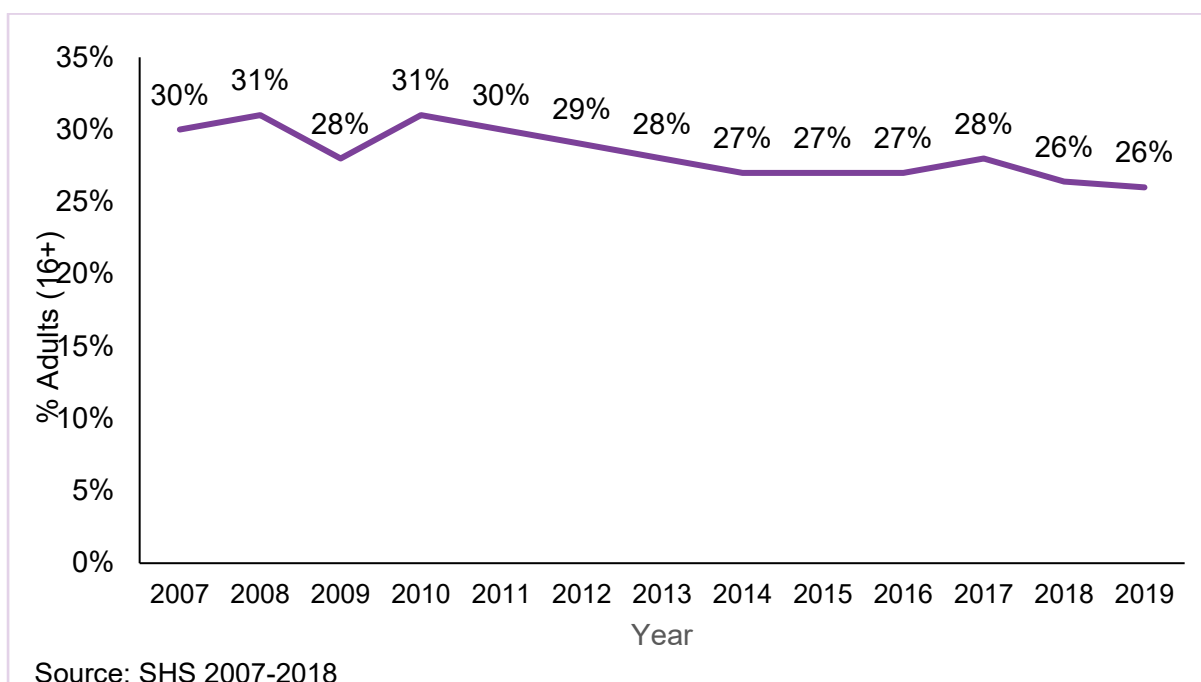
In 2018, 48% of adults (aged 16+) volunteered, either formally or informally at least once in the last year. Figure 2.1.1 shows that the formal volunteering participation rate was 26% compared to the higher informal rate of 36%.<sup>1</sup>

Note: mutual aid is classified as formal volunteering and prior to the outbreak of the pandemic no separate data on this category of volunteering was collected.



**Figure 2.1.1 Total adult volunteer participation in Scotland before COVID-19**

**Volunteering participation trends:** from 2013 formal volunteering had remained relatively unchanged, at a rate of between 26% and 28%: see Figure 2.1.2.<sup>1</sup> A time series analysis of informal volunteering is not possible, as informal volunteering has only been recorded in the SHS since 2018 and is asked every two years.

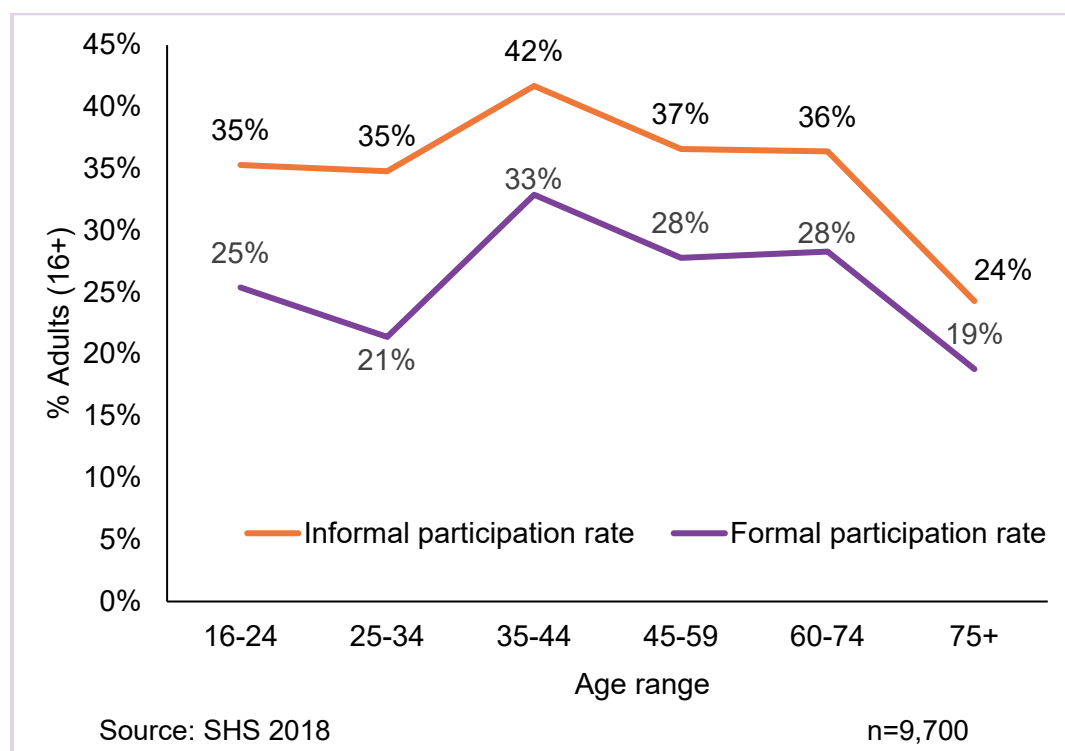
**Figure 2.1.2 Scottish formal volunteer participation rates 2007-19**

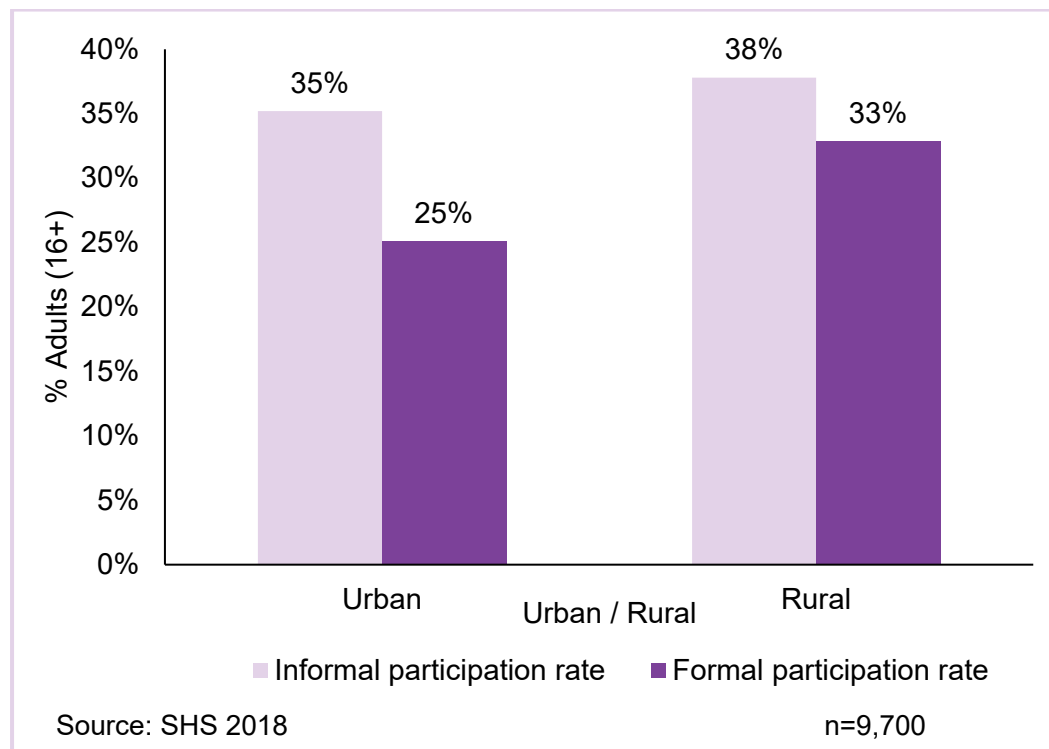
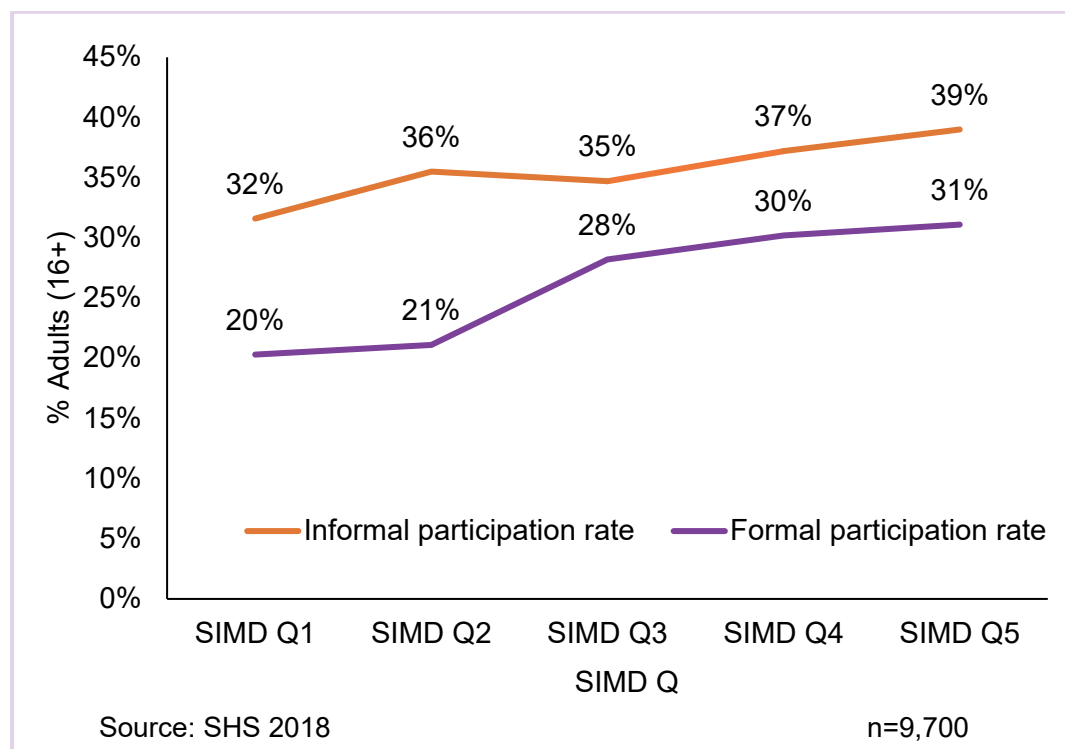
### 2.1.2 Demographic characteristics

The following demographic groups in Scotland have the highest volunteering participation rates in Scotland for both formal and informal volunteering: <sup>2</sup>

- Those aged 35 – 44 (see Figure 2.1.3)
- Those living in rural areas (see Figure 2.1.4)
- Those living in the least deprived areas (see Figure 2.1.5). In Scotland deprivation is measured by the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation Quintiles, with SIMD Q1 being adults living in the 20% most deprived areas and SIMD Q5 being adults living in the 20% least deprived areas.

**Figure 2.1.3 Scottish volunteering participation rates by age – 2018**



**Figure 2.1.4 Scottish participation rates by urban / rural – 2018****Figure 2.1.5 Scottish participation rates by SIMD Q – 2018**

**Trends in volunteering participation by demographic group.** Analysis of formal volunteering time series data for the period 2007 – 2018 shows that each of these demographic groups have consistently had the highest participation rates over time: see Tables 2.1.1 – 2.1.3.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 2.1.1 Scottish formal volunteer participation by age range 2007 – 2018**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
16-24	28%	33%	26%	33%	30%	31%	29%	28%	29%	32%	29%	25%
25-34	29%	25%	24%	27%	30%	26%	24%	25%	24%	27%	23%	21%
35-44	34%	37%	32%	36%	33%	33%	32%	32%	31%	29%	33%	33%
45-59	33%	35%	30%	33%	33%	31%	28%	27%	28%	27%	29%	28%
60-74	31%	30%	31%	33%	30%	30%	29%	26%	28%	28%	30%	28%
75+	17%	19%	18%	18%	18%	19%	20%	21%	19%	18%	20%	19%

Source: SHS 2007 – 2018

**Table 2.1.2 Scottish formal volunteer participation by Urban / Rural 2007 – 2018**

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Urban	29%	30%	26%	30%	28%	28%	27%	27%	26%	26%	28%	25%
Rural	39%	38%	37%	40%	36%	38%	34%	34%	34%	35%	30%	33%

Source: SHS 2007 – 2018

**Table 2.1.3 Scottish formal volunteer participation by SIMD Q 2007 – 2018**

SIMDQ	2007	2008	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
1	18%	20%	18%	18%	18%	18%	18%	19%	20%
2	24%	25%	24%	21%	21%	21%	22%	21%	21%
3	31%	34%	31%	28%	28%	28%	29%	29%	28%
4	37%	39%	36%	35%	32%	32%	32%	32%	30%
5	41%	39%	36%	38%	35%	35%	35%	37%	31%

Source: SHS 2007 – 2018

### 2.1.3 Ipsos MORI baseline

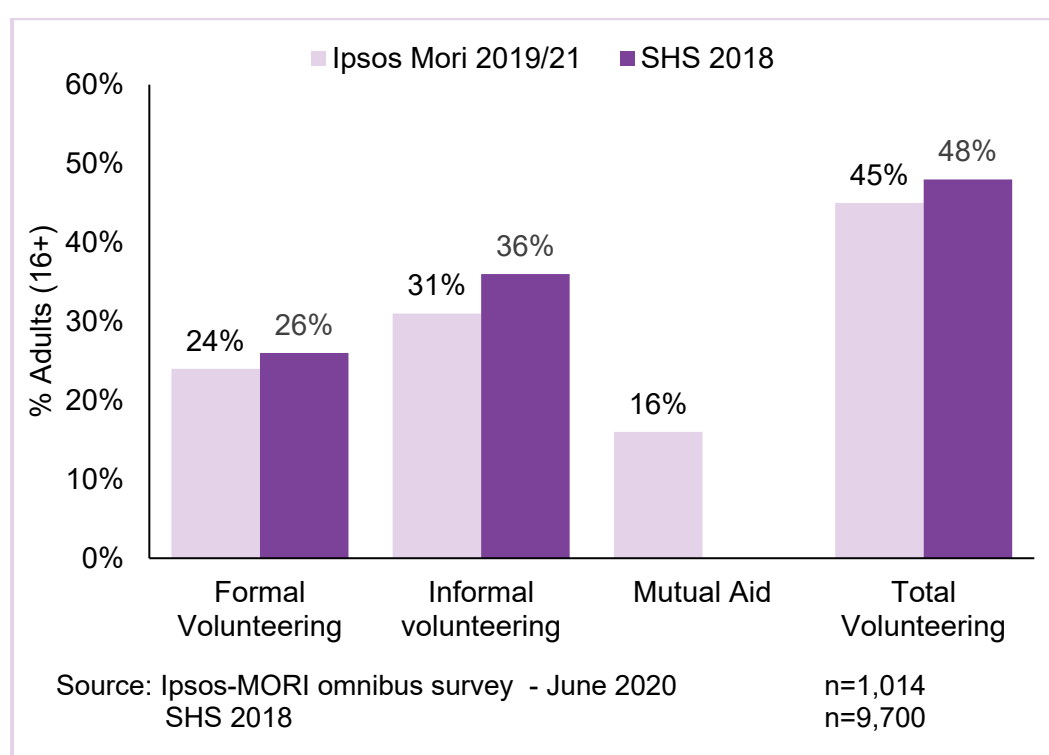
In June 2020 Volunteer Scotland commissioned a bespoke survey with Ipsos MORI to analyse the volunteering response to COVID-19 from the perspective of volunteers, incorporating formal, informal, and mutual aid volunteering.<sup>3</sup> The survey established a baseline by asking respondents if they had volunteered at least once in the past year (the past year relates to the 12 months before the first COVID-19 lockdown – from March 2019 to February 2020).

The survey found comparable volunteering participation rates to the SHS 2018 data, albeit slightly lower rates for both formal and informal volunteering: see Figure 2.1.6. This was reassuring given the different time periods and survey methodology, with the total participation rate in the year immediately pre-COVID being only 3% less than the total participation rate of 48% in 2018. The inclusion of mutual aid as a separate volunteer category in the Ipsos MORI data may cause the formal figure to be below that of the SHS.

This is because mutual aid is often undertaken through a group using social media and this falls into the SHS formal volunteering definition, whereas the Ipsos MORI survey disaggregated the category.

The impact of COVID-19 on formal, informal, and mutual aid volunteering participation rates during the first lockdown, and the demographic groups with the highest participation rates, are discussed in detail in [Section 3](#). The Ipsos MORI volunteering participation rates during first lockdown for the three demographic groups (SIMD Q, Age and Urban/ Rural) are compared to the SHS pre-COVID-19 participation rates due to the availability of the robust SHS time series data.

**Figure 2.1.6 Volunteer participation in Scotland before COVID-19**  
(Ipsos MORI vs. SHS 2018)



## 2.2 Policy context

This section of the report describes the policy context in Scotland pre COVID-19. This is important to understand because the national policy direction, priorities and activities affected the response to the pandemic at the national, regional and local level.

### 2.2.1 National policy direction

The Scottish Government's **National Performance Framework** provides the overarching policy context for Scotland (see Figure 2.2.1). It specifies 11 'Outcomes' which drive all the Government's policy priorities underpinned by a system of 81 'National Indicators' which are used to track Scotland's performance.<sup>4</sup> It also publishes an annual '**Programme for Government**' which identifies key priorities for the forthcoming financial year.<sup>5</sup>

Drawing upon these national policy drivers the Scottish Government published two strategic guidance documents that are relevant to the third sector's response to COVID-19 in Scotland: the first focuses on volunteering and the second on resilience.

### 2.2.2 'Volunteering for All: Our National Framework'

This document was published in April 2019, and it provided new guidance on Scotland's volunteering policy priorities.<sup>6</sup> The development of the 'Outcomes Framework' was led by the Scottish Government but was co-produced with a wide-ranging stakeholder group with expertise and a vested interest in volunteering. Therefore, the volunteering principles and outcomes have widespread endorsement and buy-in across key stakeholders in Scotland. Volunteering can be interpreted as supporting all 11 National Performance Framework Outcomes, either directly or indirectly, but four have been prioritised in the 'Volunteering for All' Outcomes' Framework because of the perceived strength of the contribution from volunteering (see Figure 2.2.2):

- We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe
- We are well educated, skilled and able to contribute to society
- We tackle poverty by sharing opportunities, wealth and power more equally
- We are healthy and active.

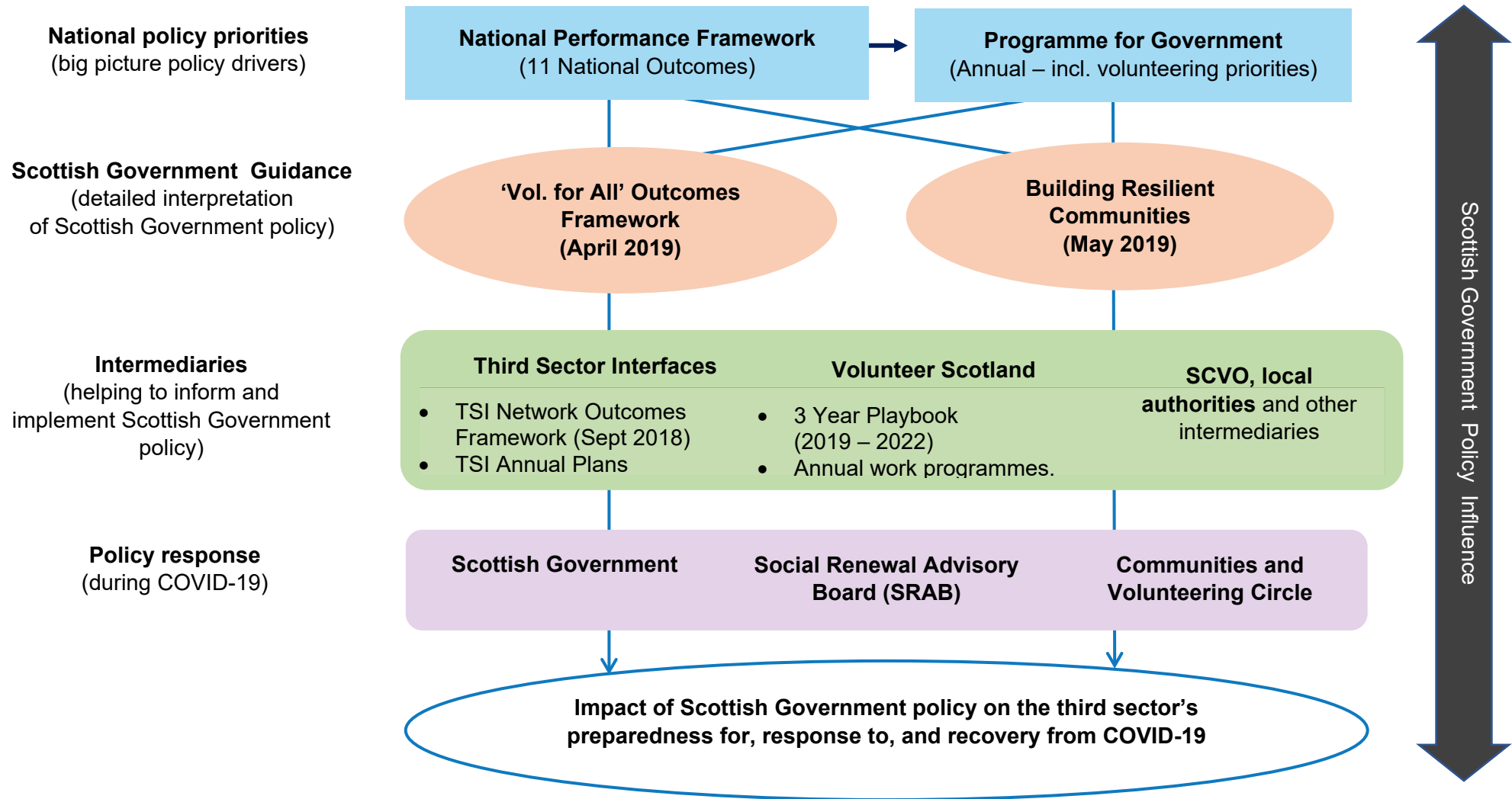
To assist in the roll-out and practical application of the Framework, the Scottish Government is currently leading the development of an Action Plan for volunteering in Scotland, with a scheduled publication date of June 2022. This is being guided by the five Volunteering Outcomes detailed in Figure 2.2, which are focused on inclusive volunteering, places and spaces, lifelong engagement, policy, and recognition and celebration.

**Policy relevance** – it is clear from the focus and content of the policy documentation described above that the Scottish Government recognises the importance of volunteering to society, with a particular focus on its contribution towards the Scottish Government's Performance Framework and specific National Outcomes.

However, within the context of a crisis such as COVID-19 there is no overt resilience or 'emergency-type' policy priorities within this documentation. This is perhaps unsurprising given the lack of a Volunteering Action Plan for Scotland (currently under development at the time of this report) and, also, because this is addressed in the Government's resilience policy documentation and guidance – see further discussion below.



**Figure 2.2.1 - Scottish Government Policy Drivers Relevant to the Third Sector and Volunteering**  
(Leading up to and during COVID-19)



**Figure 2.2.2 - 'Volunteering for All' - Outcome Framework**

However, what is worth highlighting is the relevance of the Principles and Outcomes specified in the VFA Outcomes Framework. A number of policy and volunteering priorities highlighted in the VFA document are particularly relevant, in principle, to the role of volunteering in helping to address the needs arising from the pandemic: see Table 2.2.1.

**Table 2.2.1 ‘Volunteering for All’ themes relevant to volunteering’s contribution to tackling COVID-19**

<b>VFA Outcomes Framework – key themes</b>	<b>Relevance to COVID-19 (in principle)</b>
<b>Tackling poverty and disadvantage</b>	The need to support those poorest in society through food banks, addressing other social and economic challenges, emotional support, etc.
<b>Achieving a more inclusive society</b>	Addressing a crisis which affects everyone and where everyone needs to work together; which is particularly important for those most excluded in society.
<b>Enabling people to contribute to society</b>	Supporting people to volunteer to tackle the emergency and longer-term pandemic priorities.
<b>The contribution of volunteering is recognised and appreciated</b>	That the contribution of volunteers during the pandemic is acknowledged both personally and publicly.
<b>Supporting a healthy and active society</b>	Volunteering’s ability to help address the health and wellbeing challenges of COVID-19, including the health and wellbeing of volunteers themselves.
<b>The ‘places and spaces’ where we volunteer are supported and sustained</b>	The wider contribution of volunteers in supporting the communities they have served.

Furthermore, as part of the development process for a new ‘Volunteering Action Plan’ for Scotland the role of volunteering as an integral part of Scotland’s ‘community resilience’ will be considered, drawing upon the findings of the ‘Social Renewal Advisory Board’ and the ‘Communities and Volunteering Circle’.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.2.3 Building Resilient Communities

A key driver of resilience planning in Scotland is the National Performance Framework Communities’ Outcome: “We live in communities that are inclusive, empowered, resilient and safe”.<sup>4</sup> Community resilience is defined by the Scottish Government as:

“Communities and individuals harnessing resources and expertise to help themselves prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies, in a way that complements the work of the emergency responders.”<sup>1</sup>

It is based on a Culture of preparedness, in which individuals, communities and organisations take responsibility to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. The approach recognises the diversity of individuals in a community and that this diversity affects the way emergencies impact at community, individual and household levels. Hence, different emergencies have the potential to make different people vulnerable in different ways. The importance of understanding this diversity and recognising that vulnerability is dependent on context is discussed in “Preparing Scotland: Care for people affected by emergencies”.<sup>12</sup>

The Civil Contingencies Act 2004 (Contingency Planning) (Scotland) Regulations 2005 provides the foundation for resilience planning in Scotland.<sup>14</sup> This sets out the legal requirement of Category 1 responders (such as the police, emergency services and health boards) and Category 2 responders (such as utilities and transport companies and Scottish Water). It also specifies the requirements of Community Risk Registers.

The practical application of the 2004 Act relating to the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) pre-COVID-19 is articulated in the Scottish Government’s publication ‘Building Resilient Communities (May 2019)’.<sup>1</sup> This provides good practice guidance for responders to maximise the effectiveness of their work with individuals, community groups, private sector businesses and third sector organisations, to help make themselves more resilient. The scope of this guidance is discussed in section 2.3.2.

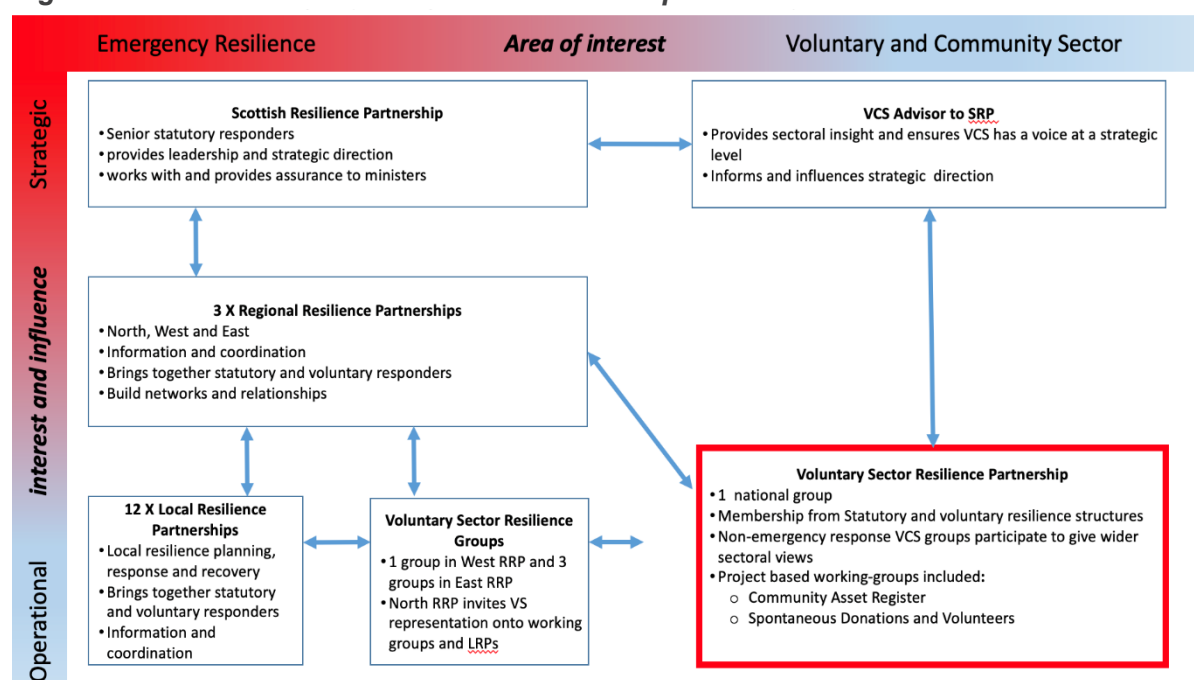
## **2.3 Resilience planning structures and guidance pre-COVID-19**

### **2.3.1 Scottish resilience planning structure**

**Resilience Partnerships** – in Scotland there has been a strong focus on building partnerships between the Category 1 and 2 statutory responders, the third sector, communities and the private sector through resilience structures (see Figure 2.3.1):

- **Scottish Resilience Partnership (x1)** – the core group of senior representatives of statutory responders and key resilience partners including the voluntary sector with a VS representative attending in an advisory role.<sup>9</sup> The group acts as a strategic forum for resilience issues, providing collective assurance to Ministers that statutory responders and key resilience partners are aware of significant resilience priorities, and are addressing these.
- **Regional Resilience Partnerships (x3)** – there are three statutory area-based RRP’s covering Scotland: West of Scotland, East of Scotland and North of Scotland whose remit is to promote co-operation between organisations in preparation for and responding to national emergencies.<sup>10</sup> Each published Community Risk Registers in April 2016, which included consideration of the risk of pandemics.

- **Local Resilience Partnerships (x12)** – Each RRP is supported by a number of non-statutory groups at a more local level, they promote co-operation between organisations in preparation for and responding to national emergencies. Resilience Partnerships can be convened at a local level or across a wider area depending on the nature of the incident and the organisations involved.<sup>11</sup> At the LRP level, local authorities are expected to lead in the engagement with communities, promoting and supporting community emergency planning, promoting resilience education through schools, supporting local training and exercising with community groups. This engagement is informed by and utilises the Social Care and Policy Teams in the local authorities. Their awareness of demographics, location of vulnerable people in the community and other socio-economic characteristics is key. As well as the local authorities, the Third Sector Interfaces (TSIs) have a direct link to the organisations in the third sector supporting the members of their local communities.
- **Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (x1)** - pre-COVID-19 the voluntary sector was primarily represented in national Scottish resilience planning structure through the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP) – see Figure 2.3.1. As this is the principal mechanism for the national integration of the voluntary sector into resilience planning infrastructure, it is discussed in more detail below.
- **Voluntary Sector Resilience Groups** – as detailed in Figure 2.3.1 there are Voluntary Sector Resilience Groups to complement and support the work of the Local Resilience Partnerships. By the outbreak of COVID-19 Voluntary Sector Resilience Groups had been established in the East and West of Scotland bringing together Category One responders, the NHS, Voluntary Sector and Local Authorities. Representatives of these Groups attend VSRP meetings. Work is also underway to establish a similar Voluntary Sector Resilience Group in the North.
- **Community Resilience Groups (300+)** – the strategic and operational guidance provided by the Resilience Partnership structures in Scotland helps to support the work of over 300 less formal local Community Resilience Groups (not shown in Figure 3.2.1).

**Figure 2.3.1 – Resilience structure in Scotland pre-COVID-19**

Source: Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team

The **Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership** has been in existence in different forms for over 10 years and is the national forum for discussion of matters relating to emergency planning and response between the voluntary sector, the Scottish Government, and statutory authorities. Its aim was to be broadly representative of those voluntary organisations involved, or with the potential to be involved, in emergency planning, response and recovery in Scotland.

The role of the VSRP is to identify, discuss and recommend solutions and best practice to common resilience issues involving the Voluntary and Community Sector in Scotland. It works within the wider emergency resilience framework as shown in Figure 2.3.1 and supports the scoping/mapping of what the Scottish voluntary sector can offer and how it can support overall emergency response arrangements.

The VSRP contributes to the Scottish Government's strategic objective of delivering a safer and stronger Scotland by bringing together voluntary organisations and key stakeholders at a national level to identify, develop and maximise the sector's contribution to Scottish emergency preparation, response, and recovery arrangements.

Membership of the VSRP can fluctuate slightly depending on individual organisations' interest in current resilience issues but strives to have a strong spread of organisations and communities represented. The group also plays a key role in developing the Scottish Government's Community Resilience agenda – ensuring work to develop community resilience is coherent, involves the voluntary sector to good effect and makes good use of existing groups, networks and resources, both statutory and voluntary.



### 2.3.2 Voluntary sector resilience guidance and support

The Scottish Government's publication 'Building Resilient Communities' (May 2019) provides good practice guidance for responding organisations to support voluntary and community sector resilience.<sup>7</sup> Its goal is to mainstream community resilience into Scotland's overall resilience preparedness:

"Building community resilience should not be seen as an add-on, but should be carried out as part of responders' day-to-day activities."<sup>7</sup>

The document's target audience is Scotland's emergency managers and resilience professionals working in Category 1 and 2 responder organisations as defined by the Civil Contingencies Act (2004). These include local authorities, the police, fire and rescue service, ambulance service, and health boards. It also targeted at Category 2 Responders and numerous voluntary sector organisations, amongst others, who are a major source of Scotland's resilience expertise and are at the forefront in coping with the consequences of emergencies. It was also hoped that it would be of use to others who have an interest in promoting more resilient communities in fields including, but not limited to, community engagement and community safety.

'Building resilient communities' is complemented by other resources targeted at the communities themselves through the Ready Scotland website.<sup>8</sup> This provides a 'Community Resilience Checklist', a 'Guide to Emergency Planning for Community Groups' and 'Community Group Resources'.

Therefore, a key focus of the Scottish Government's Resilient Communities Team has been the provision of information, guidance and support to help communities become more resilient to civil contingencies and emergencies.

To conclude, before the outbreak of COVID-19 the Scottish Government had a major policy and operational focus to build Scotland's resilience at the community level. This spanned national collaboration to the regional and local levels. The leadership within Scottish Government for this work came from the Scottish Government's Resilience Communities Team in partnership with national, regional and local responders and VCS organisations.

Section 2.4 now examines the extent to which Scotland's volunteering policy and resilience planning preparedness was effective in the third sector's response to the challenges of COVID-19.

## 2.4 Resilience preparedness of Scotland's infrastructure organisations

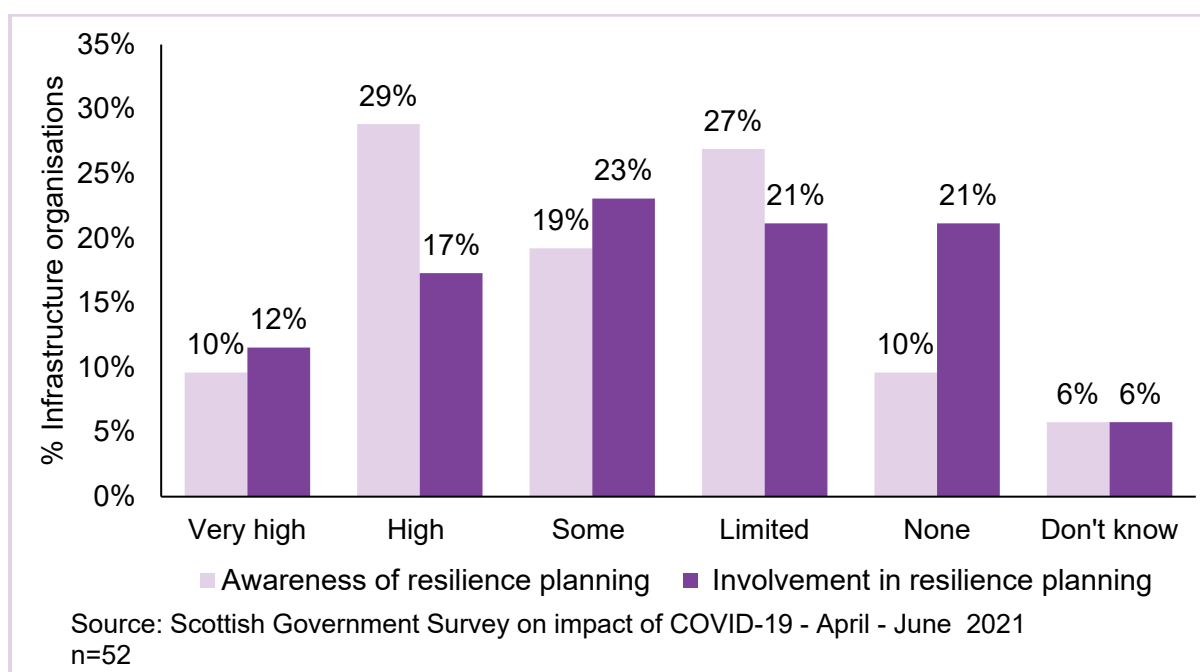
The Scottish Government's survey on the role of volunteering and the third sector response to COVID-19 explored the issue of resilience with a sample of infrastructure organisations from local authorities, Third Sector Interfaces, Health and Social Care Partnerships, and umbrella organisations networking across the sector.<sup>15</sup> A distinguishing feature of 'Infrastructure organisations' is their responsibility for leadership and coordination of support in the voluntary sector's response to COVID-19.

In terms of resilience preparedness, the Scottish Government survey asked infrastructure organisations about their level of awareness of, and involvement in, resilience planning pre-pandemic. 'Resilience planning' could include involvement with Local Resilience Partnerships in planning for the voluntary and community sector's involvement, providing inputs to the Community Risk Register, and planning with local partners in preparation for national, regional or local emergencies.

There was a spread of awareness and involvement by respondents in resilience planning, from 'very high' to 'none': see figure 2.4.1.<sup>15</sup> Key findings include:

- The majority of respondents had an awareness of resilience planning (58% said this was 'very high', 'high', or 'some'); the corresponding figure for involvement being 52%.
- However, over a third of respondents rated their level of awareness as 'limited or none' (37%); the corresponding figure for involvement being 42%.

**Figure 2.4.1 Scottish infrastructure organisations' awareness of, and involvement in, resilience planning pre-pandemic**



However, there was a marked variation in the level of engagement in resilience planning between local authorities and TSIs/other organisations: see Table 2.4.1.

**Table 2.4.1 Scottish infrastructure organisations' awareness of, and involvement in, resilience planning pre-pandemic rated 'high' or 'very high' – by category of organisation**

Resilience planning	Local authorities (n=11)	TSIs (n=28)	Other organisations* (n=13)
Awareness	91%	25%	23%
Involvement	82%	14%	15%

\* Other organisations include Health and Social Care Partnerships (HSCPs), other public sector organisations and umbrella bodies

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

As expected most local authorities rated their level of awareness and involvement to be 'high' or 'very high' (91% and 82% respectively). The comparative figures for TSIs were 25% for awareness and 14% for involvement.

Given the strategic and operational importance of TSIs in community resilience, the large majority which had limited or no awareness/involvement in resilience planning pre-pandemic is a cause for concern.

The Scottish Government recognised that the engagement of the voluntary and community sector in resilience planning was critical, but the level of engagement was variable and this was therefore seen as a priority pre-COVID-19. As discussed in [Section 5.1](#), there was significantly improved engagement by the voluntary and community sector as a direct consequence of COVID-19.

SCVO also provided insightful evidence on why some TSIs may have been reluctant to be involved in resilience partnerships and resilience planning more generally pre COVID-19. Possible explanatory factors include:

- Pre-pandemic resilience planning being seen by some TSIs as the blue light emergency responders: “the four-by-fours that go out when there’s snow or the flood response or fire”. “Also, it (resilience planning) wasn’t really set up for a challenge of this scale.” Therefore, there was a reluctance by some TSIs to be involved in resilience partnerships pre COVID-19 as there was no immediate crises or need to be involved.
- The variation in TSI engagement with resilience planning stem from differences in the perceived threats the different TSIs faced. For example, in rural areas: “I suppose..... there is a lot more blurring of boundaries between the public sector and voluntary sector, and there's generally more emergency response needed because people are cut off in the snow or bad weather. Urban areas, probably less so.”

Interestingly, SCVO indicated that pre-COVID-19 there was “....a lot of chat about how to engage the wider voluntary sector (regarding) resilience work.” “.....the resilience world really wanted other volunteer organisations to know that they would have a role in a crisis.” For example, the Resilient Communities Team from the Scottish Government was at ‘The Gathering’ in February 2020 “to do that very thing...just before the pandemic hit....But, obviously, people are so busy....there is no crisis. ‘Why should we think about crisis response’”.

However, the evidence suggests that responsibility for the lack of engagement by TSIs in resilience planning lies not only with TSIs themselves, but also with the statutory responders and local resilience partnerships and groups. Evidence from [Section 5.2](#) highlights that some TSIs made proactive advances to engage during the pandemic but faced significant barriers.

“Although we eventually were seen as full and effective partners in the Local Response Management Team structure, we were firstly overlooked and in fact turned away from a meeting as it was deemed 'too early' for our involvement.” (TSI) <sup>15</sup>

“We were disappointed not to be involved in our local Resilience Partnership. It would appear there was a different approach across Scotland where some TSIs were heavily involved and others not involved at all.” (TSI) <sup>15</sup>

It is therefore important to learn more about such barriers, to determine whether they have been addressed through the more effective engagement of TSIs during the pandemic, or whether there is further still further work to ensure the effective integration of the whole TSI Scotland Network into local resilience planning and response across Scotland.

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## Section 3

# During Covid-19

## The volunteer response





## Key findings

### Volunteer response during the first lockdown (March – June 2020) <sup>1</sup>

- Total volunteer participation increased from 45% to 74% during the first lockdown.
- Formal volunteer participation fell from 24% to 13%.
- In comparison, informal volunteer participation was 35% and mutual aid was 16% during the first lockdown, but both are believed to be significantly underestimated.
- Volunteers were mainly keeping in touch with people who were isolated, lonely and undertaking tasks in response to the immediate crisis.
- There was an increase in volunteer engagement by younger adults and new or lapsed volunteers during this period.

### Volunteer response following first lockdown (July 2020 – May 2021) <sup>4</sup> (see [Section 4](#) for formal volunteering). The trends in volunteer engagement after the first lockdown:

- Mutual aid volunteering decreased between lockdowns, before increasing during the second lockdown, but not to the same level as the first lockdown.
- Informal volunteering followed a similar trend to mutual aid volunteering, but the reduction in participation was less than mutual aid.

### Assessment of the mutual aid response – mutual aid provided an important contribution, especially its crisis response during lockdowns. <sup>4Z</sup> Key attributes included:

- Speed of response for crisis needs of food, transport, shopping and shelter
- Community connectivity, accessibility and local knowledge
- Ability to support both those shielding, and those vulnerable but not shielding
- Reaching those in need in areas of deprivation
- Large group membership providing ready access to volunteers

A significant proportion of the infrastructure organisations identified two main areas of concern (a high proportion agreed with the following two negative statements): <sup>4Z</sup>

- Mutual aid groups did not have adequate safeguarding or confidentiality measures to ensure protection for people receiving support (60% agreed/strongly agreed).
- Mutual aid groups were not always able to provide volunteers with adequate training, guidance, and support for their role (56% agreed/strongly agreed).

### Assessment of the informal volunteering response – qualitative data showed that informal volunteers were primarily involved in: <sup>6</sup>

- keeping in touch with neighbours who were at risk of being lonely; and
- helping to meet the immediate support needs of those in their local area.

The Scottish Government survey rated the contribution of informal volunteers highly: <sup>4</sup>

- 90% of infrastructure organisations agreed that informal volunteers had an important role in combatting social isolation in their local area during COVID-19
- 87% agreed that neighbours helping each other through informal volunteering had been an essential complement to formal volunteering; and 85% agreed that informal volunteering had strengthened community spirit and identity.

This section examines the volunteer response during COVID-19. The most robust evidence source in Scotland for the volunteer response is the Ipsos MORI survey commissioned by Volunteer Scotland. This survey is specific to the first lockdown and asked a representative sample of 1,014 Scottish adults whether they had given any unpaid help between March and June 2020.<sup>1</sup> The volunteering undertaken is broken down into formal, informal, and mutual aid. For all three types of volunteering the volunteer response during the first lockdown is presented in this section.

After the first lockdown no further surveys of Scottish adults were undertaken. As a consequence, to understand the ‘volunteer voice’ this report has had to rely on indirect evidence on volunteering from surveys and other evidence sources, which reflect the views of VIOs and infrastructure organisations rather than the volunteers themselves.

This section is therefore structured as follows:

- Section 3.1 – the overall volunteer response during the first lockdown: combining the formal, informal and mutual aid volunteering response (March – June 2020)
- Section 3.2 – analysis of the three types of volunteering response during the first lockdown – formal volunteering, mutual aid and informal volunteering – reflecting the variations in volunteering participation across these categories (March – June 2020)
- Section 3.3 – the mutual aid response throughout the pandemic (March 2020 – May 2021)
- Section 3.4 – the informal volunteering response throughout the pandemic (March 2020 – May 2021)

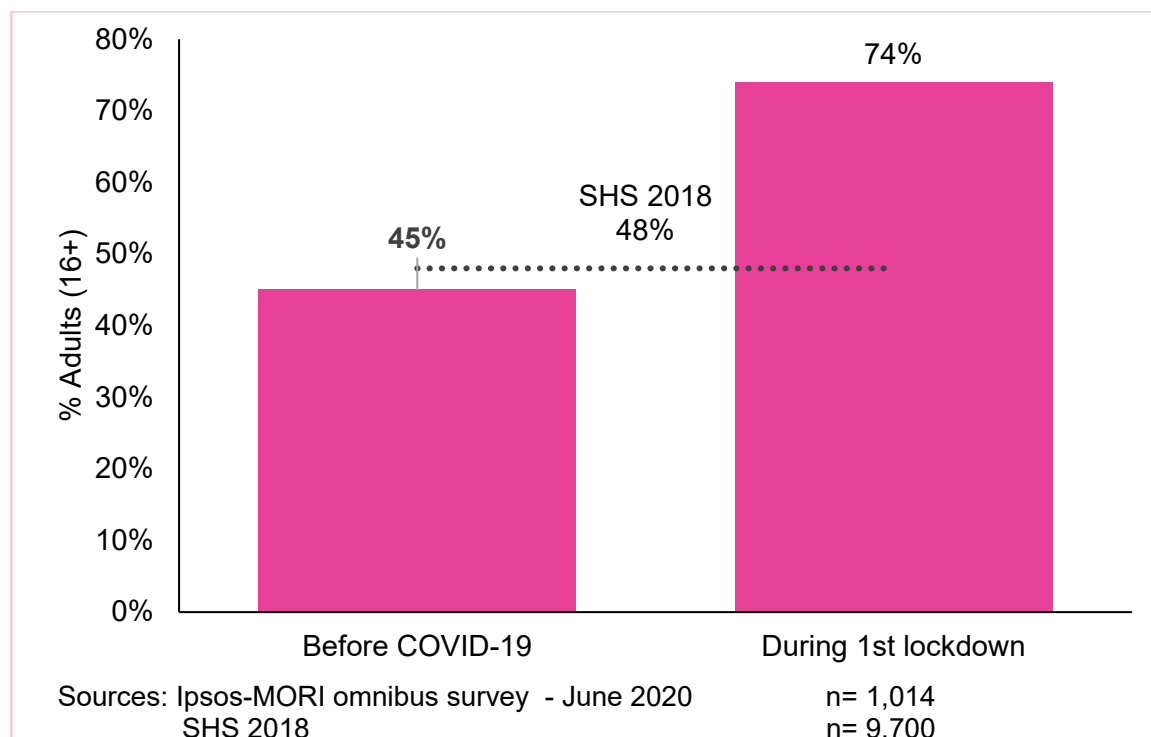
The whole of [Section 4](#) is devoted to the VIO response, the great majority of which focuses on formal volunteering throughout the pandemic (March 2020 – May 2021). Focusing a whole section to the VIO perspective is due to the much more extensive data available from charity and VIO surveys, combined with the importance of formal volunteering before and during the pandemic.

## **3.1 Overall Volunteering Response – during the first lockdown (March – June 2020)**

### **3.1.1 Total volunteering participation during the first lockdown**

The Ipsos MORI survey found that almost three quarters of Scottish adults (74%) had given unpaid voluntary help between March and June 2020, which includes all volunteering categories: formal volunteering, mutual aid and informal volunteering: see Figure 3.1.1.<sup>1</sup> This represents an increase of 29% from the Ipsos MORI baseline of 45%<sup>1</sup> and a 26% increase from the SHS 2018 figure of 48%.<sup>2</sup> This uplift in volunteering participation is all the more remarkable because it reports engagement over a period of three months during the first lockdown, compared to the pre-COVID participation rates which were based on volunteering engagement over a 12-month period. The Scotland Cares campaign during the first lockdown demonstrated the appetite of Scottish adults to volunteer and help others during COVID-19, with 60,000 adults signing up.

**Figure 3.1.1 Total volunteer participation in Scotland before and during the first lockdown (March – June 2020)**



### 3.1.2 Characteristics of volunteers during the first lockdown

Table 3.1.1 shows that during the first lockdown the main demographic change related to the age of volunteers. Younger adults aged 16-24 had the highest total participation rate during the first lockdown<sup>1</sup> compared to those aged 35 – 44 who had the highest rate pre-pandemic.<sup>2</sup> There is a lack of evidence to explain this change, but possible explanatory factors include:

- Younger adults aged 16-24 stepping in to help during a crisis when many older people were having to shield and self-isolate. The Scottish Government report, *Shielding a way forward* show that the number of adults shielding increases from adults aged 16-24 years old up to adults aged 55-64.<sup>9</sup>
- Younger adults aged 16-24 having more time to volunteer due to furlough (for those in work) and as secondary and tertiary education paused before moving online. UK evidence from HM Revenue and Customs on the uptake of employment furlough was highest for those aged 17 – 23 as at 1 July 2020.<sup>13</sup>
- In contrast those aged 35-44 were more likely to have caring responsibilities; for example, home schooling, looking after children, etc., which reduced their capacity to volunteer.

While rural participation rates were still the highest during the pandemic, the difference in participation rates between rural and urban areas was much smaller than pre-COVID-19.

**Table 3.1.1 Demographic groups with the highest total participation rates in Scotland**

Total Volunteering	Age	Deprivation (SIMD Q)	Urban / Rural
Pre COVID-19	35-44	Least Deprived SIMDQ 5	Rural
During first lockdown	16-24	Least Deprived SIMDQ 5	Rural

**Sources:** Ipsos-MORI omnibus survey - June 2020, SHS 2018

New analysis of the Ipsos MORI survey data from March – June 2020 (not yet published by Volunteer Scotland) shows that 55% of adults who volunteered during COVID-19 had not volunteered in the previous 12 months.<sup>1</sup> This high percentage of lapsed /new volunteers not only evidences the willingness of adults to step forward and offer help during the crisis, but it also highlights the potential for this new pool of volunteers to be engaged post-COVID-19. The Scottish Government survey of infrastructure organisations provides further evidence of the increase in new volunteers with 73% agreeing to a large extent that ‘people started volunteering who were not volunteering before’.<sup>4</sup>

Qualitative evidence from the infrastructure organisations in the Scottish Government survey provides several explanations for the increase in new volunteers and changing demographics. The main factors relate to furlough and adults working from home, both of which provided additional time to volunteer. There was also a desire from people to help their local communities, especially as now they were located there full-time (as opposed to travelling to work outside their local communities for large periods of time pre COVID-19).<sup>4</sup>

“Our experience is that local communities have organised COVID-19 response groups, bringing new volunteers with them.”

“We saw more people showing an interest in volunteering from working age populations and those who had no history of volunteering, this was in part due to the number on furlough and partly because of a sense of a need to respond to the emergency. This also assisted with the withdrawal of the older populations who were more likely to shield or stop volunteering due to health/confidence/opportunity issues.”

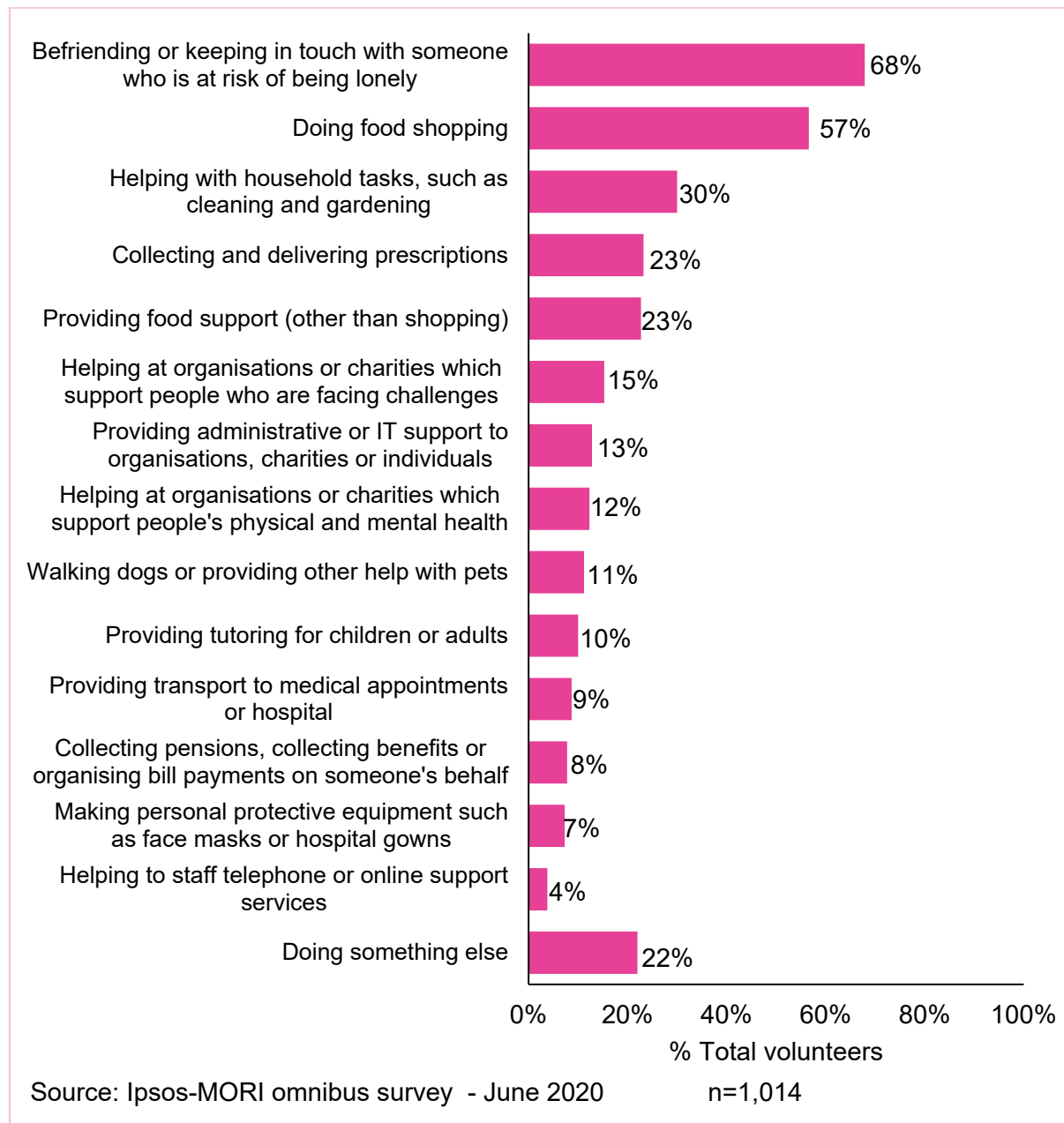
“We placed an early open call for volunteers (in advance of Scotland Cares) and found a number of new volunteers come forward - largely furloughed community members and people normally outwith the area working during the day, able to participate while working from home. We also had a percentage of people estranged from family and friends due to distance seeking ways to keep active.”

‘We saw that in small rural communities’ people had knowledge about individuals and families and were able to offer the right support to different households quickly and without judgement.’

### 3.1.3 Volunteering roles during the first lockdown

Figure 3.1.2 shows the tasks undertaken by volunteers during the first lockdown. Befriending or keeping in touch with someone who is at risk of being lonely was the task most frequently undertaken by volunteers (68%), followed by tasks aimed at meeting immediate needs such as: doing food shopping (57%); helping with household tasks (30%); collecting and delivering prescriptions (23%) and providing food support other than shopping (23%). Figure 3.1.2 shows the breadth of volunteering tasks undertaken by adults in Scotland during the first lockdown.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 3.1.2 Tasks undertaken by Scottish volunteers during the first lockdown**

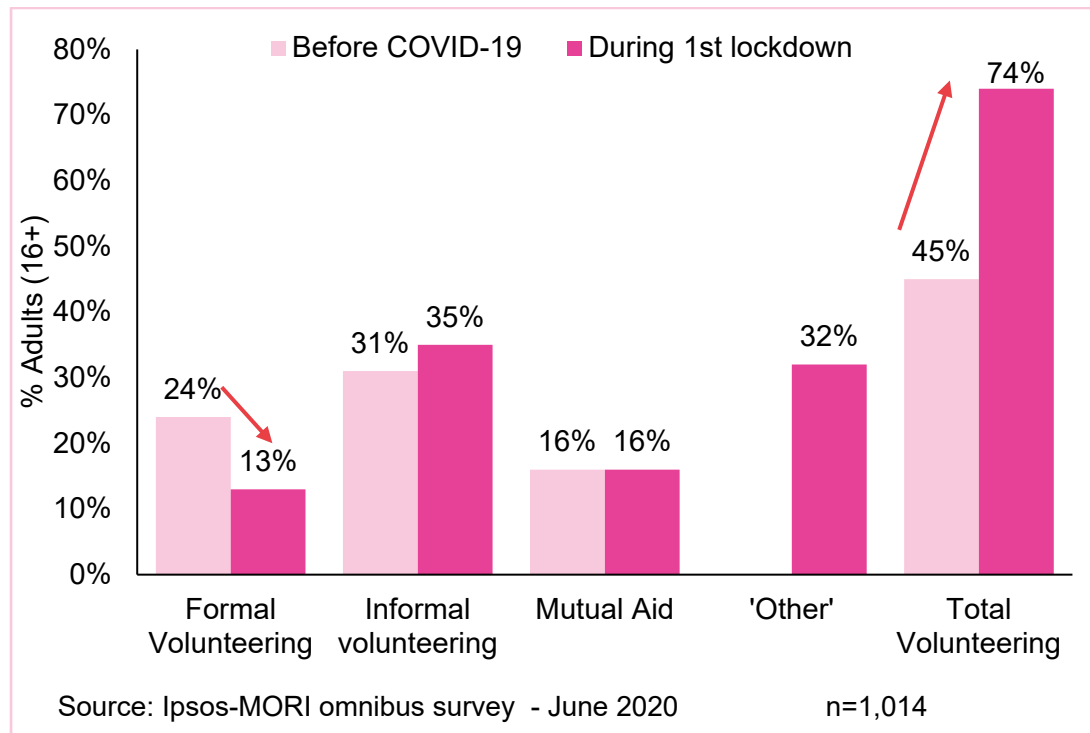


## 3.2 Types of volunteering response – during first lockdown

### 3.2.1 Changes by volunteering type

While overall adult volunteering participation in Scotland increased significantly from 45% to 74% during the first lockdown, the increase was not consistent across all types of volunteering: see Figure 3.2.1.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 3.2.1 Adult volunteering participation rates in Scotland by type of volunteering – before and during first lockdown**



(Note: respondents were able to select any of the three categories of volunteering they had participated in. Hence, the percentages for formal, informal and mutual aid volunteering do not sum to the total volunteering participation rates.)

Formal volunteering was the most adversely impacted, with a decrease in participation from 24% down to 13%.<sup>1</sup> Social distancing, the stay-at-home order, and the closing of charities' premises and retail shops were the main reasons for the decrease in formal volunteering. The initial decline and subsequent changes in formal volunteering participation rates are discussed in more detail in [Section 4](#).



In contrast to the decline in formal volunteering participation, the informal volunteering participation rate increased to 35% from 31% and for mutual aid the figure remained constant at 16%. **However, the reported volunteering participation rates for both informal volunteering and mutual aid are likely to be significantly under-represented during the first lockdown.** This is due to the ‘other volunteering’ category of 32%, which captures those who undertook at least one volunteering activity but didn’t identify as a volunteer. The data shows that these ‘other’ volunteers undertook activities more aligned to mutual aid and informal volunteering, which means that the participation rates for these volunteering types are likely to be understated in Figure 3.2.1.<sup>1</sup>

In comparing the before and during COVID-19 volunteering participation rates in Figure 3.2.1 it is important to note that the Ipsos MORI volunteering participation rates during COVID-19 are over a three month period (March – June 2020), compared to the 2018 Scottish Household Survey participation rates which are measured over a 12 month period. This means that the participation rates for all volunteering types during COVID-19 are likely to be understated.

The ‘other’ volunteering data also gives an interesting insight into volunteering during COVID-19 with almost a third of Scottish adults undertaking tasks to help others but not viewing the help and time they gave as volunteering.<sup>1</sup>

### 3.2.2 Demographic changes during the first lockdown

Table 3.2.1 shows that during the first lockdown the participation rate was highest for younger adults aged 16-24 for all types of volunteering except informal: where the highest participation was amongst those aged 45-54. This contrasts with the pre-pandemic volunteering where for both formal and informal volunteering participation was highest for those aged 35-44 (see comparative SHS statistics in [Figure 2.1.3](#), Section 2).<sup>1</sup>

**Table 3.2.1 Demographic groups with the highest volunteering participation rates by type of volunteering during the first lockdown in Scotland**

Volunteering type	Age	Deprivation (SIMD Q)	Urban / Rural
Formal volunteering	16-24	Least Deprived SIMD Q5	Rural
Mutual Aid	16-24	Least Deprived SIMD Q5	Rural
Informal volunteering	45-54	Least deprived SIMD Q5	Urban
‘Other’ category (the type of volunteering not specified)	16-24	Most deprived SIMD Q1	Rural

Source: Ipsos MORI Survey, June 2020

The higher participation rates of younger adults across formal volunteering and mutual aid groups are a positive change, which may encourage more volunteer participation in the younger age groups going forward and, in some cases, will hopefully support lifelong engagement.

However, the decline in volunteering amongst the older age groups is a trend that will require longer term monitoring and analysis. Those aged over 70 and those at high risk due to underlying health conditions were strongly advised to stay at home as much as possible and significantly reduce unnecessary social contact.<sup>8</sup> Also, as at 1 June 2020, 73% of those shielding in Scotland were aged 55 or over.<sup>9</sup> The combination of these two factors resulted in a major decline in volunteering participation by older people during the first lockdown.

Now that shielding has been lifted and more of the roles that were undertaken by older volunteers, for example working in charity shops, have resumed there remains a question as to whether older adults will return to volunteering to the same levels as pre-pandemic. Research has shown the importance of the health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering to older adults, including a reduction in social isolation and loneliness.<sup>10</sup> Hence, if older adults do not return to volunteering, their health and wellbeing, already exacerbated by COVID-19, may become an even more substantial long-term problem.

For deprivation a similar pattern emerges for volunteering during the first lockdown compared to pre-pandemic, with the highest participation rates being in SIMD Q5 (the 20% least deprived areas in Scotland) for all types of volunteering except the 'other' category (see comparative SHS statistics in [Figure 2.1.5](#), Section 2).<sup>1</sup>

Similar to the pre-pandemic SHS data, all types of volunteering participation during the first lockdown were higher in rural areas compared to urban areas with the exception of informal volunteering. However, there was a decrease in the difference between rural and urban areas during the first lockdown (see comparative SHS statistics in [Figure 2.1.4](#), Section 2).<sup>1</sup>

Analysis from VFA Working Paper 4: "Volunteering in the Pandemic: Evidence from Two UK Volunteer Matching Services" provides additional demographic trend data for formal volunteering that extends beyond the first lockdown.<sup>3</sup> The key demographic findings for Scotland which spans analysis of data from January 2020 to August 2021 include:

- The increased participation of young people in formal volunteering in Scotland, where the average age of volunteers remained low through the autumn and winter of 2020, and into the spring of 2021. This provides supplementary and complementary evidence to the Ipsos MORI data.
- Women are more likely to formally volunteer than men and that this did not fluctuate significantly during the pandemic. (Gender was not included in the Ipsos MORI research)
- Formal volunteering by people with disabilities was proportionally lower in both lockdowns and seemed to recover somewhat between lockdowns. In the final easing phase (March 2021 onwards) registration of disabled volunteers recovered to pre-pandemic levels, but activities undertaken by disabled volunteers did not. (Disability was not included in the Ipsos MORI research)

- Regarding deprivation, the middle 60% (SIMD Quintiles 2-4) were most likely to register to formally volunteer. This finding diverges from the Ipsos Mori finding for Scotland where adults in the least deprived areas had the highest participation rates.

### 3.2.3 Lapsed and new volunteers <sup>1</sup>

Analysis of the Ipsos MORI data has highlighted that a relatively high proportion of volunteers during the first lockdown had not volunteered in the last 12 months. This engagement of either lapsed or new volunteers varied by type of volunteering:<sup>1</sup>

- Formal – 22%
- Mutual aid – 27%
- Informal – 31%
- 'Other' – 62%
- Total – 55%

We don't know the split between 'lapsed' (having volunteered at some point over 12 months ago) and 'new' (having never volunteered), but our assessment is that a significant proportion will have been new volunteers. This is due to two factors:

- The supporting qualitative evidence from the Scottish Government survey (see Section 3.1); and
- The fact that the 'other' category is so high. This cohort comprises individuals who did not self-identify as volunteers in the Ipsos MORI survey, and this may reflect the fact that they had not volunteered before.<sup>1</sup>

At a wider UK level there is also supporting evidence from the 'together' study which revealed that during the first year of the pandemic 12.4 million adults volunteered formally, of which 4.6 million were first time volunteers.<sup>11</sup>

## 3.3 Mutual Aid

### 3.3.1 Number of mutual aid groups during first lockdown

The total number of mutual aid groups operating in Scotland is difficult to measure. Volunteer Scotland's analysis of 'COVID-19 Mutual Aid UK' data revealed that in April 2020 over 220 mutual aid groups based in Scotland had registered with them, operating via a Facebook platform.<sup>5</sup> However, registration was voluntary and not all mutual aid groups will have signed up with them. Therefore, the total number of mutual aid groups operating in Scotland during the first lockdown is likely to have been significantly greater than 220.

Furthermore, it also excludes the large number of social groups based on very small geographies via WhatsApp groups for residents in a block of flats or street. Such groups tend to be focused on helping each other as opposed to providing services to help others. This study has excluded such groups and concentrates on mutual aid groups that have a clear focus on supporting others through one or more services.

The Scottish Government survey of infrastructure organisations provides further evidence of the growth in mutual aid and local community groups during the first lockdown with 65% agreeing 'to a large extent' that 'New voluntary / community organisations emerged and were / are active in my area, such as mutual aid groups'.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.3.2 Crisis response by mutual aid

While it is not possible to give a breakdown of the Ipsos MORI data on the tasks undertaken by volunteers during the first lockdown by the type of volunteering, qualitative data gathered by Volunteer Scotland shows that mutual aid groups were primarily involved in the immediate crisis needs of their local communities.<sup>5</sup> Mutual aid groups were able to act at pace, had hyper local knowledge, knowing both those that needed support and local services that were available. The help from mutual aid groups was also easy to access in an informal way and was specific to the needs of the individual beneficiaries.

A report by Glasgow Caledonian University commissioned by the Chief Scientist Office in Scotland provides further evidence on the tasks undertaken and the characteristics of the mutual aid response to the immediate crisis needs.<sup>7</sup>

#### Glasgow Caledonian University Report – key attributes of Mutual Aid

**Quick delivery services (food, prescriptions):** Mutual aid groups provided these services to individuals from the very beginning of the national lockdown, with formal services only becoming available after 1-2 weeks.

**Provision for those non-shielding, yet still vulnerable individuals:** Those not on shielding lists, yet still vulnerable to the effects of the lockdown, or those who did receive shielding parcels that did not meet their needs, often relied upon the continued support of mutual aid groups. Although this additional support from mutual aid groups was not a positive experience for all, mutual aid group members received feedback that their services more effectively addressed specific and individualised needs of those who needed support.

**Organisational characteristics:** The groups were **approachable** for 'low-level' requests such as requests for small quantities of food, fixing lightbulbs, taking the bins out, and other requests of this nature. They were **flexible** and able to provide bespoke services quickly without any bureaucratic administration. They were also **accessible** to many in the community through social media or other 'everyday' platforms instead of unfamiliar request systems. Finally, many perceived the groups as **private**, providing relative levels of anonymity. Although, there were some concerns that a lack of confidentiality that binds (say) local councillors and formal service providers, but not mutual aid 'volunteers', had the potential to expose the privacy of recipients of mutual aid groups' support. All these characteristics allowed mutual aid groups to assist others with needs that formal service providers potentially could have helped with; but the mutual aid groups often assisted faster and with fewer barriers to access.

**Information signposting:** Mutual aid groups brought together information from a variety of formal and informal sources within and across communities.

**Large group membership:** Mutual aid groups also had access to a relatively large number of members or ‘volunteers’ compared to many constituted organisations, whose capacity-related challenges may have been exacerbated by furloughed staff members.

**Local knowledge:** Mutual aid group volunteers had hyper-local knowledge about buildings in their area, or the collection process of prescriptions at the local pharmacy, for example. They were also in-tune with the needs of community members requesting help from the mutual aid group and were able to adjust service delivery accordingly. In some cases, the mutual aid groups did not have knowledge about existing formal service provision.

**Source:** ‘Solidarity in a time of crisis: The role of mutual aid to the COVID-19 pandemic’ Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health, Glasgow Caledonian University <sup>2</sup>

Due to the lack of further surveys on adult participation rates and the informality of mutual aid groups there is less direct data on how the mutual aid response changed from the first lockdown. Using indirect data and a triangulation of data the working hypothesis is that the easing of the first lockdown restriction from July 2020 reduced the crisis response role of mutual aid and therefore mutual aid volunteering. As highlighted in the Glasgow Caledonian University report, formal volunteering services were often not available until weeks after mutual aid groups were able to offer help. However, once these formal services were in place and the crisis needs during the first lockdown abated, the need for mutual aid support lessened.<sup>2</sup>

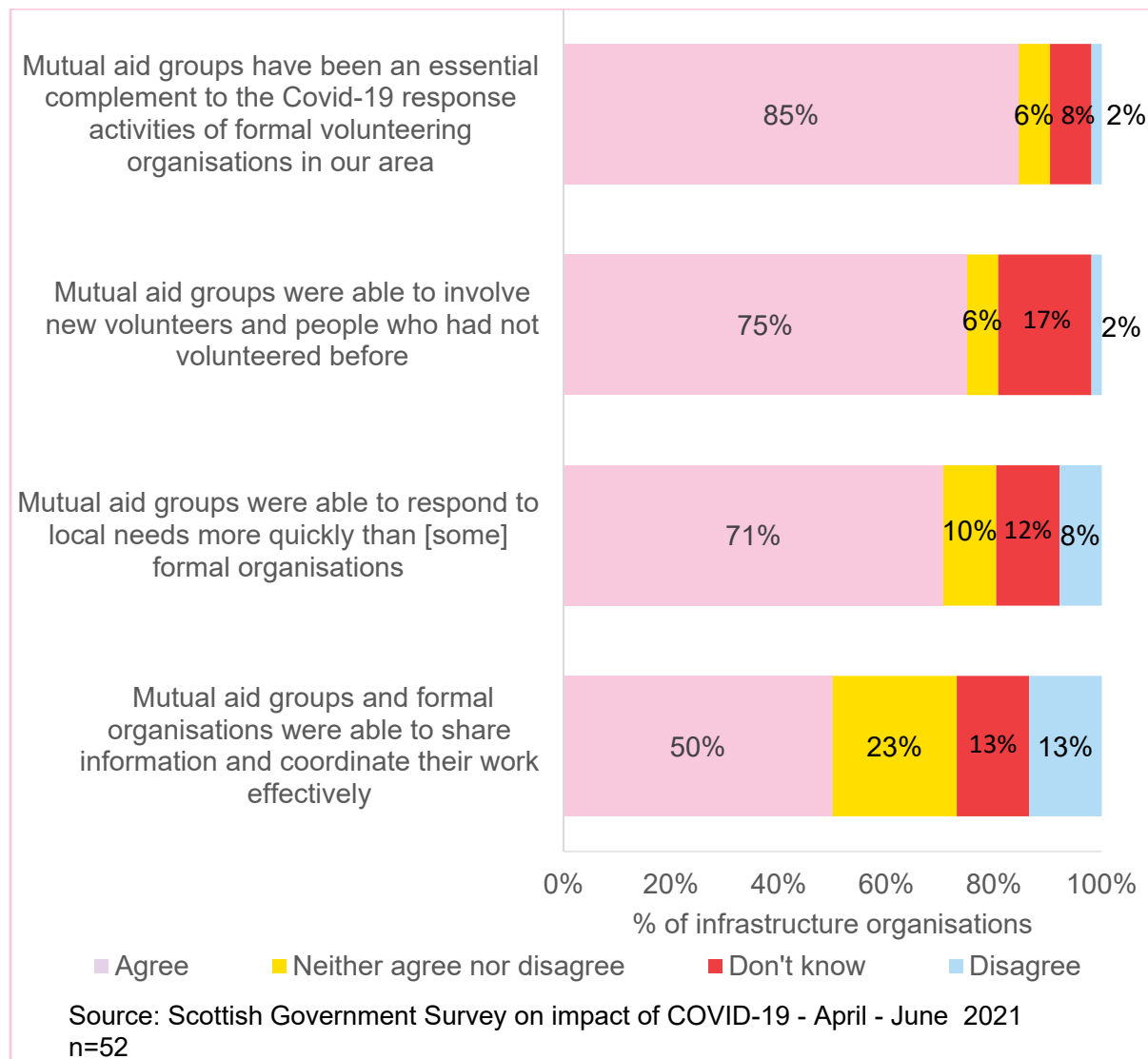
### 3.3.3 Effectiveness of the mutual aid response

The Scottish Government Survey provides important feedback on the mutual aid response throughout the pandemic – both what worked well and also areas for improvement. Figure 3.3.1 shows that TSIs, local authorities and other infrastructure partners thought that mutual aid was a key component of the COVID-19 response, which complemented formal volunteering activities. Eighty-five percent agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. Other attributes were the ability of mutual aid groups to engage new volunteers (75% agreed/strongly agreed), their ability to respond quickly to local needs (71% agreed/strongly agreed) and the sharing of information and coordination between mutual aid groups and formal organisations (50% agreed/strongly agreed).<sup>4</sup>

Regarding areas which did not work so well, a significant proportion of the infrastructure organisations agreed with the following two negative statements.<sup>4</sup>

- Mutual aid groups did not have adequate safeguarding or confidentiality measures to ensure protection for people receiving support (60% agreed/strongly agreed); and
- Mutual aid groups were not always able to provide volunteers with adequate training, guidance, and support for their role (56% agreed/strongly agreed)

**Figure 3.3.1 Mutual aid groups: positive feedback from Scottish infrastructure organisations**



The Glasgow Caledonian University report commissioned by the Chief Scientist Office provides evidence on what didn't work so well with mutual aid groups in Scotland and what could be improved in future crises.<sup>7</sup>



**Glasgow Caledonian University Report – issues identified with mutual aid**

**Sustainability:** Mutual aid groups lacked long-term security that might have left individuals who were vulnerable exposed to similar risks they faced prior to lockdown unless the mutual aid group transitioned them to a formal organisation that was still consistently providing services like food deliveries.

**Risk management:** Each of the mutual aid groups in this study indicated they took risks to 'get things done' including bypassing PVG (Protecting Vulnerable Groups) checks for 'volunteers'. This fear of the risks associated with mutual aid group operations was often cited as a reason why councils and other formal organisations were reluctant to support the work of mutual aid groups directly.

**Health and safety:** Other risks included the transmission of the virus itself as safe delivery protocols and PPE use evolved. The management and distribution of information such as prescription details, names, and addresses also may have posed a risk to individuals and formal organisations. Handling very complex care situations, particularly those related to mental health, were also of concern. Mutual aid groups often had protocols for signposting to organisations with specialist expertise. However, pre-existing formal organisations that were best equipped to deal with many of these challenges were constrained in their ability to help due to COVID-19. This left some mutual aid groups with limited options for response.

**Source:** 'Solidarity in a time of crisis: The role of mutual aid to the COVID-19 pandemic' Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health, Glasgow Caledonian University <sup>7</sup>

Also, the proportion of infrastructure organisations which assessed the mutual aid response as effective ('very' or 'somewhat') declined between the first lockdown (March – June 2020) and second lockdown (December 2020 – April 2021): see the Scottish Government survey data in Table 3.3.1.<sup>4</sup> This may be indicative of the reduced role for mutual aid during the second lockdown.

**Table 3.3.1 Scottish infrastructure organisations' assessment on the effectiveness of the mutual aid response – comparison between the first and second lockdowns**

Infrastructure organisations' assessment	First lockdown Effective (Very / Somewhat)	Second lockdown Effective (Very / Somewhat)
<b>Coverage of the volunteer response in areas of deprivation</b>	71%	58%
<b>Ability to support people who were shielding</b>	65%	56%
<b>Ability to support people who were vulnerable but non-shielding</b>	73%	56%
<b>Ability to meet immediate crisis needs – e.g., for food, transport, shopping, shelter</b>	81%	67%

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

However, this feedback does highlight the important role which mutual aid has played in helping to reach those most in need during the pandemic: those living in areas of deprivation, those shielding, and the vulnerable who did not have to shield. All of these groups in society were likely to have had higher levels of crisis need during the lockdowns than mainstream society.

### 3.3.4 Evolution of mutual aid groups

As described above, the major contribution of mutual aid was in meeting the crisis needs of the pandemic in areas such as food supply, shopping and mitigating social isolation and loneliness. However, once the first wave of the crisis started to abate and the COVID-19 restrictions were relaxed in the summer and autumn of 2020 the demands on mutual aid groups eased.

It was not until the escalation of infections during November and December 2020 and the reintroduction of lockdown in Scotland in January 2021 that once more there was an increased role for mutual aid volunteering, but to a lesser extent, as some of the crisis response needs were lessened during the second lockdown. By the time of the second lockdown more formal services were in place, policy changes such as the extended household had been made, and the capacity of the private sector, for example in food delivery, had increased.

By May 2021 the evidence from a random sample of mutual aid Facebook groups in Scotland revealed a very significant decrease in activity between April 2020 and May 2021: see Table 3.3.2. The data shows that while the average membership size had increased modestly since the first lockdown, the average number of daily posts had decreased very significantly, from an average of 35 per day in April 2020 to only 2 per day in May 2021. The right hand column – ‘total number of posts in May 2021’ – is presented to give a wider context to the very low daily post figures – so zero daily posts does not mean there were no posts over the period of a whole month.

**Table 3.3.2 Changes in Scottish Mutual Aid group activity between April 2020 and May 2021**

Name of mutual aid group	April 2020		May 2021		
	No. of Members	Av. No. of daily Posts	No. of Members	Av. No. of Daily posts	No. of posts in past month
Edinburgh Coronavirus Support	9,230	60	9,200	0	13
Fife COVID-19 Mutual Aid Group	4,300	16	4,600	0	15
Stirling Pulling Together	3700	120	5,300	7	383
Glasgow Mutual Aid	2800	50	3,300	0	22
Community Aid St. Andrews (CASA)	2767	27	3,200	7	136
Scottish Mutual Aid	1,300	4	1,300	0	1
COVID-19 Help and Support in Carnoustie	1,184	8	1,200	0	12
Dundee COVID-19 Mutual Aid Group	900	6	855	1	3
Mutual-Aid Perth	858	20	850	2	36
Average per organisation	3,004	35	3,312	2	

Source: Volunteer Scotland analysis of Facebook data (April 2020 and May 2021)

The infrastructure organisations which took part in the Scottish Government Survey provide further evidence to support the contraction in mutual aid support.<sup>4</sup>

### **Infrastructure organisations' perspective on contraction in mutual aid**

"The first lockdown brought a significant increase in the number of volunteers and volunteering in our local communities; the second lockdown didn't bring about an increase as communities knew what to expect and the infrastructure was still in place to support what was needing done?"

"Many of the mutual aid groups started up during the 1st lockdown do not appear to have started up again during 2nd lockdown: however, some established themselves as constituted organisations in their own right or had established connections and partnerships since 1st lockdown, volunteering for constituted groups that were better able to work with statutory partners during 2nd lockdown."

"The mutual aid groups had either started to formalise towards the second lockdown or had started to reduce operations - there was an issue with getting them to consider taking 'new' volunteers on the basis that they didn't know them and would rather continue on, though this meant the rate of burnout is still an ongoing issue."

Post second lockdown from May 2021 many mutual aid groups remained active and some moved to community support pages on Facebook, for example 'Stirling Pulling Together'.<sup>12</sup> The move to the community support page model was reflective of the changing community needs. During the lockdown periods the page provided a space for community groups and individuals to ask for and offer support, as well as providing information on COVID-19 support available in the local area; for example, the location and operating hours of food banks / community food hubs, along with important updates from the local authority and health boards.

Post lockdown the page continued to provide updates from the local authority and health board, for example of the location of vaccination centres, provided community news and events and offered a space for people new to the area to ask about meet-up groups or other groups within the area. The page also promotes businesses in the community that offered community support during the lockdowns.

The infrastructure organisations also provided support to help mutual aid groups transition into constituted groups which would allow them to offer support to their communities in a more structured way with at least a minimum level of governance, such as through becoming an unincorporated association.<sup>4</sup>

### **Infrastructure organisations' support for mutual aid groups to constitute formally**

"Helping to constitute the groups to become effective local anchor organisations"

“As a result of the support received from the TSI and others the mutual aid groups I have now formed into 3 Community Response Teams covering post code areas. Two are constituted organisations and one is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). They also have their own funding and we have assisted them to become established organisations over the past year”

“Like many areas in Scotland there was significant numbers of mutual aid groups in (our area). Some started as Facebook groups, but moved quickly to become constituted organisations, with the TSI's help. In our opinion it was important that this development work happened to support the groups to access funding and operate safely. Other groups stayed as Facebook groups and have since disbanded or morphed into community information sites.”

A key finding in the report by Glasgow Caledonian University further supports this:

“At the end of 2020 many mutual aid groups were still operating, although very few still resembled their original form. Where groups were successful in their continued solidarity, they found ways to partner and connect with existing formal organisations, while they retained unique community-based ‘assets’ that positioned them to respond to community needs rapidly and effectively.” <sup>1</sup>

### 3.4 Informal volunteering

As discussed in Section 3.2, the Ipsos MORI survey highlighted an increase in informal volunteering during the first lockdown, from 31% pre-COVID-19 to 35% during the first lockdown. However, this is believed to be a significant underestimate due to the ‘other’ volunteers, many of which are understood to have engaged in both informal volunteering and mutual aid.<sup>1</sup>

While it is not possible to break down the Ipsos MORI data on the tasks undertaken by volunteers during the first lockdown by the type of volunteering, qualitative data gathered by Volunteer Scotland during the first lockdown showed that informal volunteers were primarily involved in: <sup>6</sup>

- keeping in touch with neighbours who were at risk of being lonely; and
- helping to meet the immediate support needs of those in their local area and communities.

Like mutual aid groups, much less is known about changes to the informal volunteering response after the first lockdown. The working hypothesis is similar to that of mutual aid whereby the lifting of lockdown in July 2020 reduced informal volunteering; and in response to the increased COVID-19 restrictions during November and December 2020, and the subsequent lockdown in Scotland in January 2021, the level of informal volunteering increased.

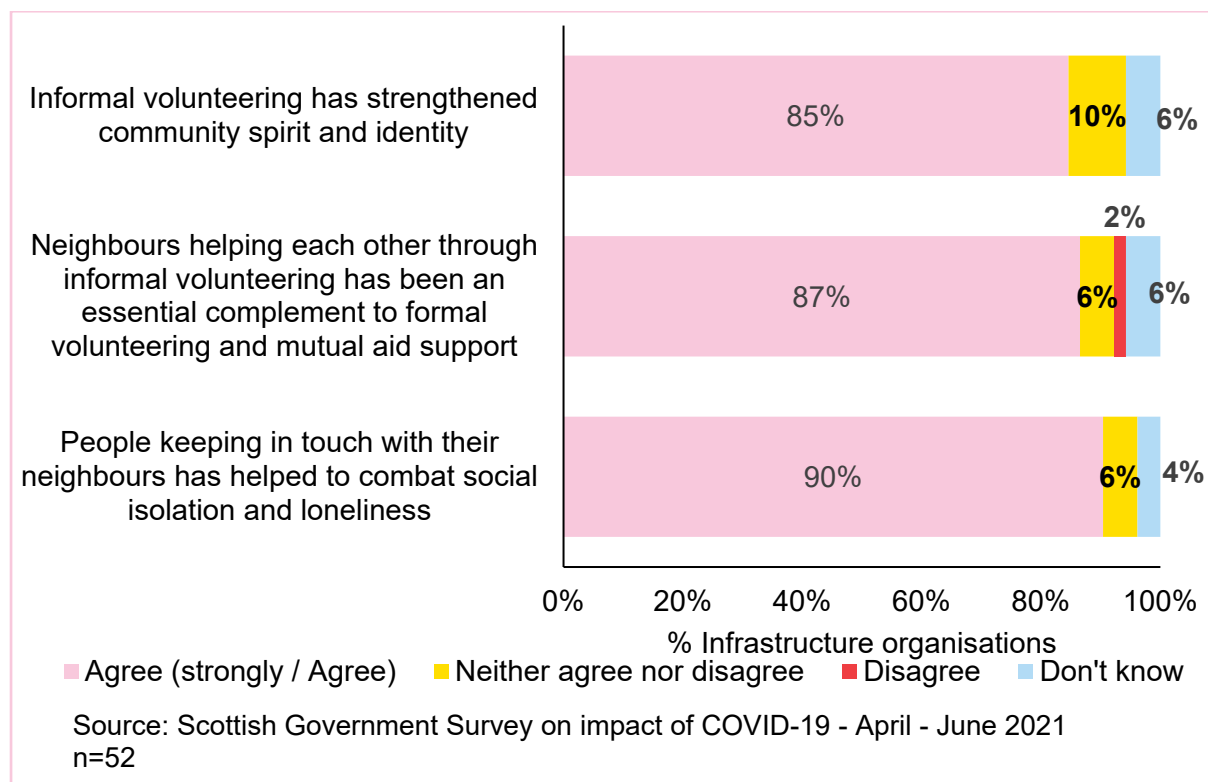
However, the informal response in the second lockdown may not have been reduced by as much as mutual aid due to the ongoing problem of social isolation and loneliness that informal volunteering is so well positioned to address.

The SHS 2018 showed that the task most frequently undertaken by informal volunteers was befriending or keeping in touch with someone at risk of being lonely, involving 18% of informal volunteers. <sup>2</sup> As discussed in [section 4.6](#), while some crisis response needs reduced between the first and second lockdowns, the need for befriending and keeping in touch did not lessen.

The Scottish Government survey provides additional evidence on the contribution of informal volunteering by showing that (see Figure 3.4.1):<sup>4</sup>

- 90% of infrastructure organisations agreed that informal volunteers had an important role in combatting social isolation in their local area during COVID-19
- 87% agreed that neighbours helping each other through informal volunteering had been an essential complement to formal volunteering; and
- 85% agreed that informal volunteering had strengthened community spirit and identity.

**Figure 3.4.1 Scottish Infrastructure organisations' assessment of informal volunteering support during COVID-19**



Infrastructure organisations also provided additional information on the importance of the informal volunteering role, and its evolving contribution over the course of the pandemic.<sup>4</sup>



### Infrastructure organisations' views on informal volunteering

“A vital response to the pandemic, especially in the early days. Without doubt people probably became more involved and aware of their neighbours and their neighbourhood.”

“During the first lockdown informal volunteering increased as majority of communities recognised the needs of their communities and pulled together to support those in need. This continued somewhat during the 2nd lockdown. Another factor for this increase was that many were people who would not normally have the time due to working and people who were on furlough or working from home had more time to offer to help support their communities.”

“People have carried on helping their neighbours with e.g., prescription pick up months after the initial lockdown. They have developed relationships with these people which would not have been possible prior to the pandemic. These relationships have led to better conversation which have led to new needs being established.”

The recently published Scottish Household Survey 2020 provides further corroborating evidence on the levels of informal volunteering participation during COVID-19.<sup>14</sup> The survey was undertaken in October 2020 and January to March 2021 and asks participants about any volunteering activity in the previous 12 months. Therefore, a very high proportion of the data relates to volunteering activity during the pandemic and helps to provide important overall trend data. In particular, it identifies the major increase in informal volunteer participation, which increased from 36% in 2018 to 56% in 2020. The survey also shows that informal volunteers devoted their inputs to supporting those crisis needs which were particularly acute during the first lockdown:

- Keeping in touch with someone who is at risk of being lonely: up from 18% in 2018 to 69% in 2020
- Doing shopping, collection pension, collecting benefits or paying bills: up from 12% to 51%
- Providing transport or accompanying someone away from home: up from 9% to 20%
- Routine household chores: up from 11% to 19%
- Providing advice or support with letters of forms or speaking with others on someone else's behalf: up from 6% to 16%.

**Note:** Scottish Government has posted a notice advising against comparison of SHS 2020 with previous years, due to changes in the research methodology adopted by Ipsos MORI during COVID-19. However, as explained in Volunteer Scotland's news article sharing the headline results, there is a strong case for comparing the informal volunteering results due to the magnitude of the changes, and the corroboration with the June 2020 Ipsos MORI survey results.<sup>15</sup>

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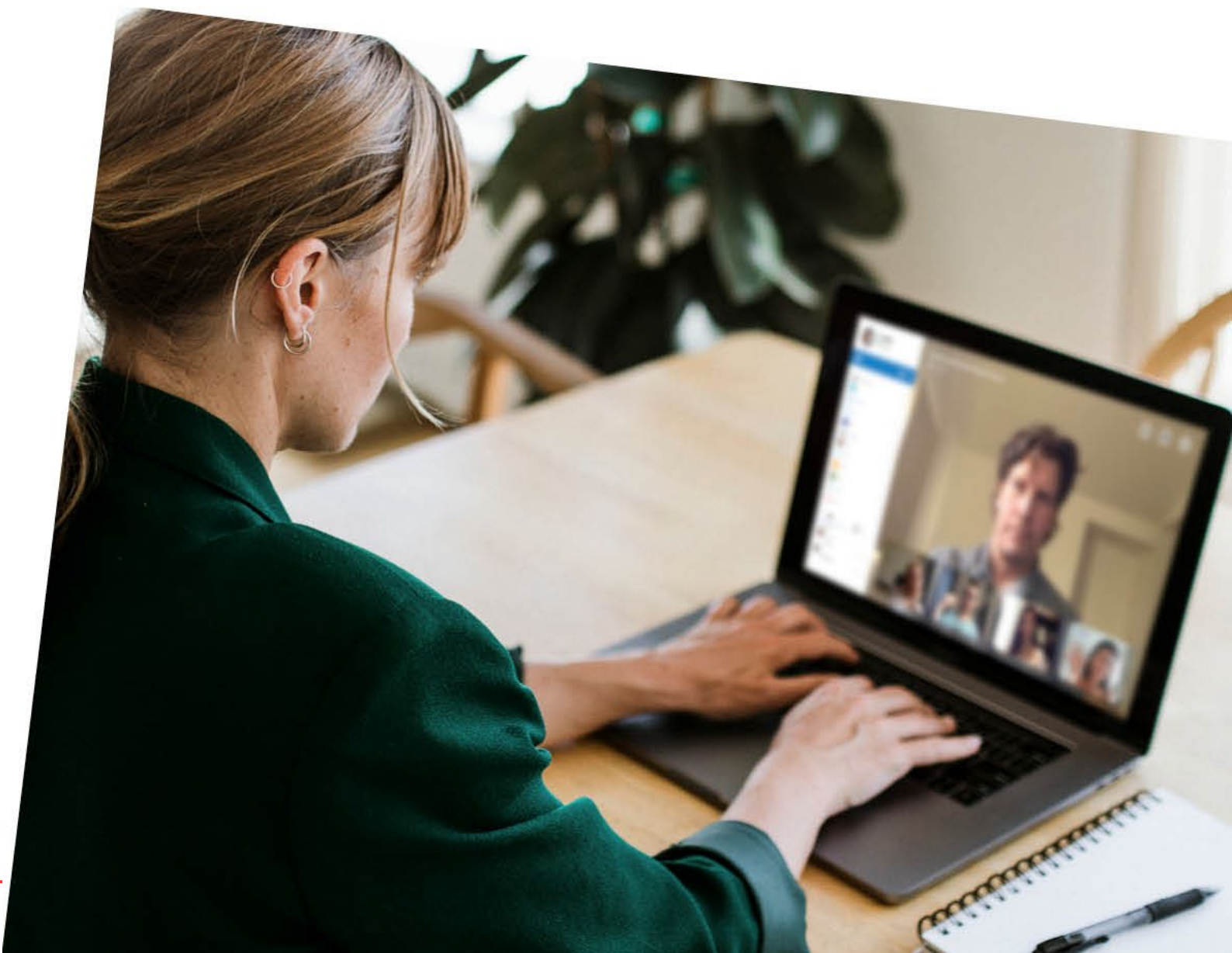
## Section 4

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# During Covid-19

## The Volunteer Involving Organisations' Response

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## **Key findings**

**Business impacts of COVID-19 on VIOs** – projects/programmes for 81% of VIOs were adversely impacted over the period March 2020 – May 2021: either reduced in scale, paused temporarily or ceased permanently.<sup>3</sup> VIOs were also seriously constrained financially with lost income from fundraising, trading and other sources.<sup>1</sup>

**Impacts on volunteer engagement** – these business impacts combined with COVID-19 restrictions such as social distancing and shielding, resulted in a major contraction in the number of formal volunteers during the first lockdown and, to a lesser extent, the second lockdown. Over the period March 2020 – May 2021, 58% of VIOs reported a decrease in their number of volunteers, 27% an increase, and 15% reported no change.<sup>3</sup>

**Other organisational challenges** – VIOs also identified a series of other problems in the involvement of volunteers, the challenges being rated as either 'major' or 'some':<sup>3</sup>

- volunteers' lack of digital skills – 58% of VIOs
- challenge of making volunteering inclusive – 46%
- volunteers' fatigue/burnout and other wellbeing issues – 47%
- reduction in volunteers due to home schooling /caring responsibilities – 47%
- lack of staff support and equipment – 44%

**VIOs' response to these challenges** – in addition to curtailing volunteer services and making them COVID-safe, the most significant change was the adaptation of volunteer services and, specifically, the use of phone/digital platforms, with 56% of VIOs moving some or all of their activities online.<sup>3</sup>

However, the switch to digital was no universal panacea due to the lack of volunteers' digital skills; the exclusion of beneficiary groups such as older adults, disabled people and those excluded due to cost/lack of equipment; and that many services are not suited to online delivery. Face-to-face engagement is critical for many services.

**Understanding and meeting societal needs during COVID-19** - mental health (86% of TSOs) and loneliness (83% of TSOs) were the biggest immediate concerns identified by third sector organisations (TSOs) during the first lockdown.<sup>4</sup> COVID-19 has exacerbated these challenges, which were already major issues pre-pandemic. The second main category of society needs identified by TSOs related to financial hardship, unemployment, and poverty.

**VIOs' ability to meet their beneficiaries' needs** – in May 2021 62% of VIOs were able to meet 'all' or 'most' requests for support. However, a further 23% of VIOs were able to meet some requests for support, but significant needs were not being met; while 9% of VIOs were being faced with requests for support which were much higher than their response capacity, and many requests were not being met.<sup>3</sup>

This section of the report examines the impact of COVID-19 on VIOs and their response. The research evidence covers the 15-month period from the outbreak of the pandemic in March 2020 to May 2021. There is a rich evidence base to draw upon over this period including Volunteer Scotland's early research with Ipsos MORI during the first lockdown, the TSI Scotland Network's survey in June 2020, OSCR's charity surveys in May and November 2020, and the Scottish Government's survey in April – June 2021 – see the references for these evidence sources at the end of the section.

All of these sources focus on formal volunteering with the following caveat: the datasets for the TSI Scotland Network survey and the SG survey of VIOs are likely to have included a small proportion of mutual aid groups in their samples. However, the proportions will be so small that the aggregated data provides a robust interpretation of formal volunteering across Scotland.

The focus of this section is purposely on formal volunteering, excluding mutual aid and informal volunteering: see [Section 3](#) for the analysis of the mutual aid and informal volunteering response.

The section is structured under seven sub-sections:

- Section 4.1 – The business impacts of COVID-19 on VIOs including their business operations, financial impacts and service delivery.
- Section 4.2 – The effect these business impacts have had on formal volunteering and the number of volunteers engaged
- Section 4.3 – The organisational challenges facing VIOs in the involvement of volunteers
- Section 4.4 – VIOs' response to these organisational challenges
- Section 4.5 – Understanding societal needs during COVID-19
- Section 4.6 – Volunteering tasks undertaken by VIOs to meet these needs
- Section 4.7 – VIOs' ability to meet their beneficiaries' needs.

## **4.1 Business impacts of COVID-19 on VIOs in Scotland**

### **4.1.1 Operational impact of COVID-19 on VIOs**

The imposition of the first lockdown on 24 March 2020 resulted in a stay-at-home order, face-to-face services stopping, the furloughing of staff, shielding of vulnerable groups and charity retail operations being paused, all of which severely impacted on VIOs' business operations. OSCR's surveys in May and November 2020 provide hard-hitting evidence on how Scotland's charities were impacted, see Table 4.1.1.<sup>1</sup> Their survey data also provides a good litmus test for how other non-charitable VIOs involving volunteers were likely to have been affected in the third, public and private sectors.



The evidence shows that in the first lockdown over three-quarters of charities had to postpone or cancel planned work, with over a third having to suspend their operations altogether. This evidence is corroborated by the TSI Scotland Network survey which showed that 30% of third sector organisations had stopped 'meaningful delivery' by June 2020<sup>2</sup>

**Table 4.1.1 – Impact of COVID-19 and its restrictions on Scottish charities' operations**

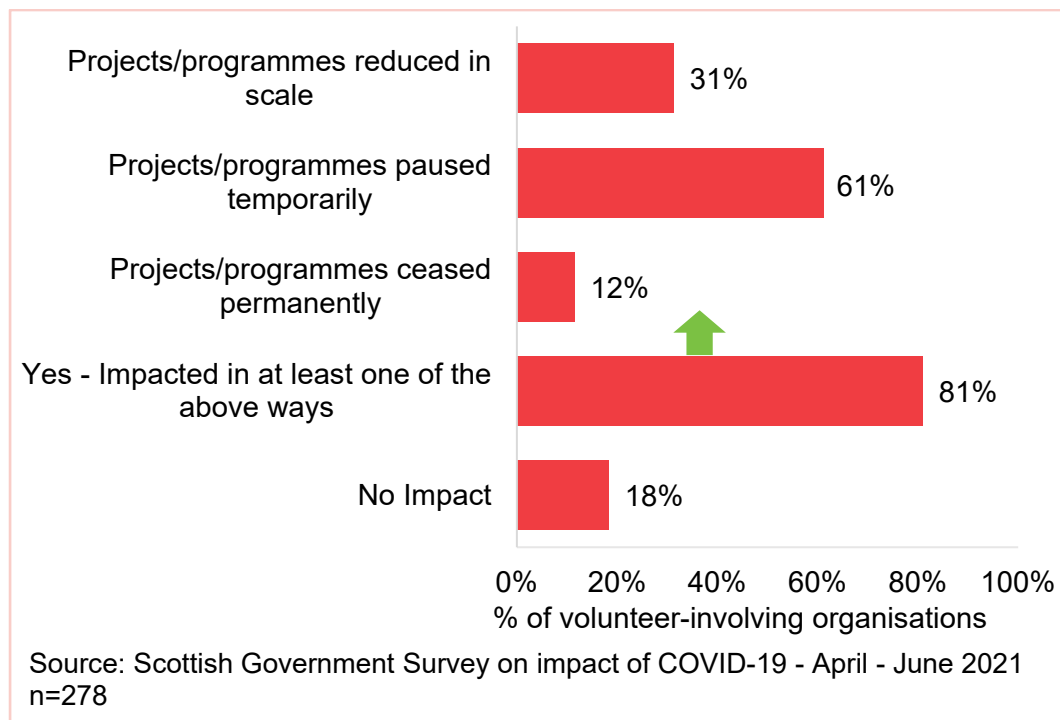
Impacts on business operations	May 2020 (n=4,827)	Nov 2020 (n=2,524)	Change: May to Nov
Planned work / events postponed or cancelled	78%	66%	-14%
Disruption of support or services to beneficiaries	42%	33%	-9%
All charity operations suspended	39%	18%	-21%

Source: OSCR's surveys May & Nov 2020 – Impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's charities

Furthermore, although there was a measurable improvement between May and November 2020, a very significant proportion of charities were still being adversely affected, despite the fact that restrictions at this time were much reduced and Government's support funding was starting to come onstream. The seriousness of COVID-19's impact on business operations was further evidenced by the Scottish Government survey, which showed that for 81% of VIOs their projects/programmes were adversely impacted over the period March 2020 – May 2021: either reduced in scale, paused temporarily or ceased permanently: see Figure 4.1.1.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 4.1.1– Impact of COVID-19 on VIOs projects or programmes in Scotland**

(March 2020 – May 2021)





Research on the Third Sector Interfaces by Evaluation Support Scotland also identified the adverse impacts of COVID-19 on business sustainability. While some TSOs (Third Sector Organisations) kept going and adapted their services, others had to close part or all their services.”<sup>4</sup>

Finally, the Third Sector Tracker (June – August 2021) provided further corroborating evidence on the adverse impact of COVID-19 on business operations, with 73% of third sector organisations' surveyed being unable to fully deliver their planned work and services since March 2020.<sup>9</sup>

#### 4.1.2 Financial impact of COVID-19 on VIOs

Directly linked to the impact of COVID-19 on VIOs' business operations is the impact on their finances. Table 4.1.2 shows that just over a half of charities had lost income from fundraising, but that this had actually deteriorated between May and November 2020, from 51% of charities adversely affected to 56%. There were also adverse financial impacts from lost trading/other income and short-term risks to charity reserves.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 4.1.2 - Impact of COVID-19 on Scottish charities' finances**

Impact on finance	May 2020 (n=4,827)	Nov 2020 (n=2,524)	Change: May to Nov
Lost income from fundraising	51%	56%	5%
Lost income from trading and other sources	42%	38%	-4%
Short-term risk to charity reserves	30%	23%	-7%

Source: OSCR's surveys May & Nov 2020 – Impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's charities

Again, the TSI network survey findings mirror those of OSCR for the third sector as a whole.<sup>2</sup> As at June 2020:

- Two-thirds of organisations thought they were likely to experience a deteriorating financial position (68%)
- For 36% of organisations this would give them challenges
- Only 3% thought they were likely to experience an improving financial position.

Clearly, if VIOs have to curtail their operations or cease them altogether then this is likely to have a significant adverse impact on their finances; but vice-versa, reduced income can compromise VIOs' ability to finance their ongoing business operations – a vicious circle.

Furthermore, these impacts were not considered short-term. In November 2020, 62% of charities considered there to be at least 'some' threat to their financial viability over the next 12 months, with 9% assessing this threat to be 'critical'.<sup>1</sup>

Also, the Third Sector Tracker (1<sup>st</sup> wave June-August 2021) revealed that nearly half of third sector organisations (48%) had experienced a decrease in turnover compared to pre-pandemic levels.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, 32% considered fundraising to be one of the biggest challenges they've faced since March 2020.

Finally, as discussed in [Section 6](#), the Scottish Government survey identified 'funding' as the top priority for VIOs in helping to support volunteering – both at the time of the survey (May 2021) and during the longer-term recovery period over the next two years.<sup>3</sup>

## 4.2 Impacts of COVID-19 on volunteer engagement by VIOs

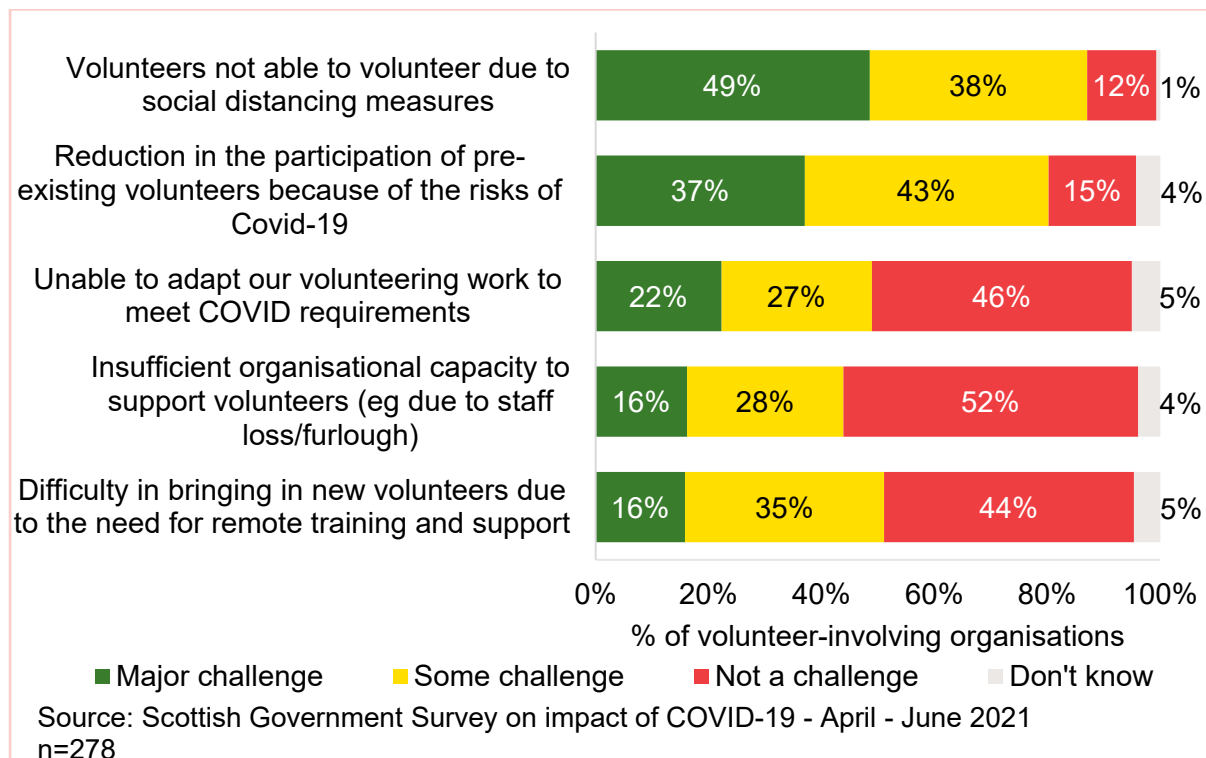
### 4.2.1 Factors impacting volunteer engagement

COVID-19 has had a major impact on the retention, engagement and deployment of volunteers by VIOs. This is attributable to two main factors:

- The adverse impacts of the pandemic on business operations and financial viability, with organisations having to postpone or cancel services and, in some instances, having to cease operations altogether – see discussion in section 4.1.
- There is also the linked factor of COVID-19 restrictions on the deployment of volunteers, including the adverse impacts of social distancing, furloughing of staff (for example, salaried volunteer coordinators) and those who had to shield.

According to the Scottish Government survey in May 2021, the two biggest organisational challenges faced by VIOs in their deployment of volunteers during COVID-19 were social distancing and COVID-19 health risks – see Figure 4.2.1.<sup>3</sup> Eighty-seven percent of VIOs thought that social distancing represented a 'major' or 'some' challenge in their deployment of volunteers; and 80% thought the risks of COVID-19 presented a 'major' or 'some' challenge. Adapting volunteering to meet COVID requirements, lack of organisational capacity and problems of onboarding new volunteers were also challenges.

**Figure 4.2.1 - Impact of COVID-19 on VIOs' deployment of volunteers**



This evidence was corroborated by OSCR's research in May and November 2020, which showed that approximately a third of Scotland's charities either ceased the involvement of volunteers altogether or reduced their involvement of volunteers.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, there was no substantial change between May and November 2020.

**Table 4.2.1 Impact of COVID-19 on Scottish charities involvement of volunteers**

<b>Volunteer utilisation impacts</b>	<b>May 2020 (% of charities)</b>	<b>Nov 2020 (% of charities)</b>
<b>'Volunteers are unable to work'</b>	37%	34%
<b>Charities have 'reduced or ceased use of volunteers.'</b>	32%	32%

**Source:** OSCR's surveys May & Nov 2020 – Impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's charities

Qualitative evidence from the Scottish Government survey illustrates the practical challenges VIOs have faced in the engagement and deployment of volunteers:<sup>3</sup>

### **Practical challenges in the deployment of volunteers**

"We had difficulty recruiting new volunteers as we did not have the capacity to adapt our training to online. We want to physically meet new volunteers who will have a role with vulnerable children and young people."

"Many of our volunteers were older men and women and a significant number of them have decided not to return to their volunteering roles. We have been able to recruit a few new volunteers, but we are still not at full capacity. We are planning to run a recruitment campaign over the next few months."

"We had a huge pool of volunteers that we could not use due to these restrictions and concerns about insurance, and the burden fell heavily on our small staff team to try and help as many families as we could."

"As we organised actual face to face events, the pandemic has meant that we simply were not able to hold them. We have been encouraging, educating, informing, and inspiring volunteers online to get active individually."

"Our main difficulty was that volunteers were advised not to car share and therefore most of our volunteer drivers were not happy to volunteer. We provided PPE and advice on precautions to be taken which encouraged some of our volunteers to be deployed for essential journeys."

#### 4.2.2 Impact of COVID-19 on volunteer numbers

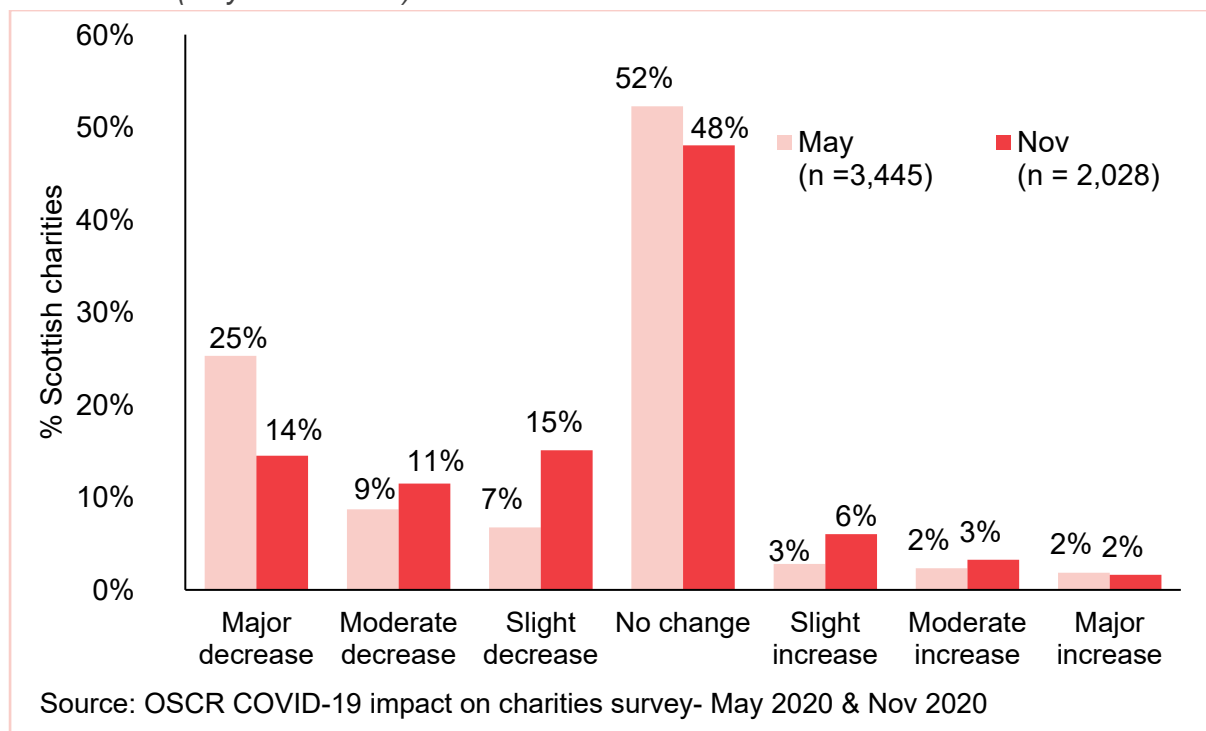
Given the fact that volunteer deployment was so significantly constrained during COVID-19, it is unsurprising that a much higher proportion of VIOs reduced their volunteer numbers compared to those which increased their numbers: see Figure 4.2.2. OSCR's charities' surveys on the impact of COVID-19 show that:

- In May 2020 only 7% of charities had increased volunteer numbers compared to pre-pandemic levels, in contrast to the 41% which had decreased volunteer numbers (a net decrease figure of 34%)
- In Nov 2020 only 11% of charities had increased volunteer numbers compared to the pre-pandemic levels, in contrast to the 40% which had decreased volunteer numbers (a net decrease figure of 29%).<sup>1</sup>

This data shows a modest improvement in the proportion of charities increasing vs. decreasing their volunteer numbers between May and November 2020 of 5%. However, a more detailed analysis of the data in Figure 4.2.2 reveals a more significant improvement than the headline figures suggest:

- The proportion of charities experiencing a 'major decrease' in volunteer numbers reduced from 25% in May 2020 to 14% in Nov 2020, an 11% improvement.
- In contrast those experiencing a 'slight/moderate' decrease in volunteer numbers increased from 16% in May 2020 to 26% in Nov 2020, a 10% deterioration.

**Figure 4.2.2 – Impact of COVID-19 on the number of volunteers engaged by charities in Scotland (May & Nov 2020)**



From this data a working hypothesis is that the easing of lockdown in Scotland led to a gradual increase in formal volunteer numbers engaged in the charity sector during this period.

The Scottish Government survey undertaken in April – June 2021 provides additional evidence to help validate this hypothesis as it examined the extent to which the overall number of volunteers that VIOs worked with changed over the course of the pandemic to May 2021. Their survey asked VIOs to estimate the number of volunteers they engaged with at three points in time: before COVID-19 (April 2019-March 2020); during the first lockdown (Mar-Jun 2020); and at the time of the survey in May 2021. Table 4.2.2 shows the total number of volunteers engaged during these three periods along with the percentage movement in the number of volunteers between these periods.

To contextualise this data, in 2018 1.2 million adults formally volunteered in Scotland.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the 137,236 volunteers engaged by the 267 VIOs pre-COVID-19 accounted for 12% of total formal volunteers in Scotland. This represents a very significant proportion, especially when one considers that the 267 VIOs represent less than 1% of the c. 40,000 voluntary organisations in Scotland's third sector.<sup>8</sup> However, as expected in a survey of this nature there has been a proportionately higher response from larger VIOs, as a consequence of which the 'voice' of the smaller VIOs, the majority of which have no paid staff, will be under-represented.

**Table 4.2.2 Impact of COVID-19 on total volunteer numbers (267 VIO respondents) <sup>3</sup>**

	Before COVID-19 (April 2019-March 2020)	During 1st lockdown (Mar-Jun 2020)	At time of survey (May 2021)	Overall change
<b>Number of volunteers*</b>	137,236	97,199	118,572	
<b>Change in volunteer numbers</b>		-40,037	+ 21,373	-18,664
<b>% Change in volunteer numbers</b>		-29%	+ 22%	-14%
* Note: any VIO that answered don't know in any of the three time periods was excluded from the data in Table 4.2.2 to ensure the analysis of VIO data was consistent over all time periods. This only involved 11 out of the 278 VIO respondents being excluded.				

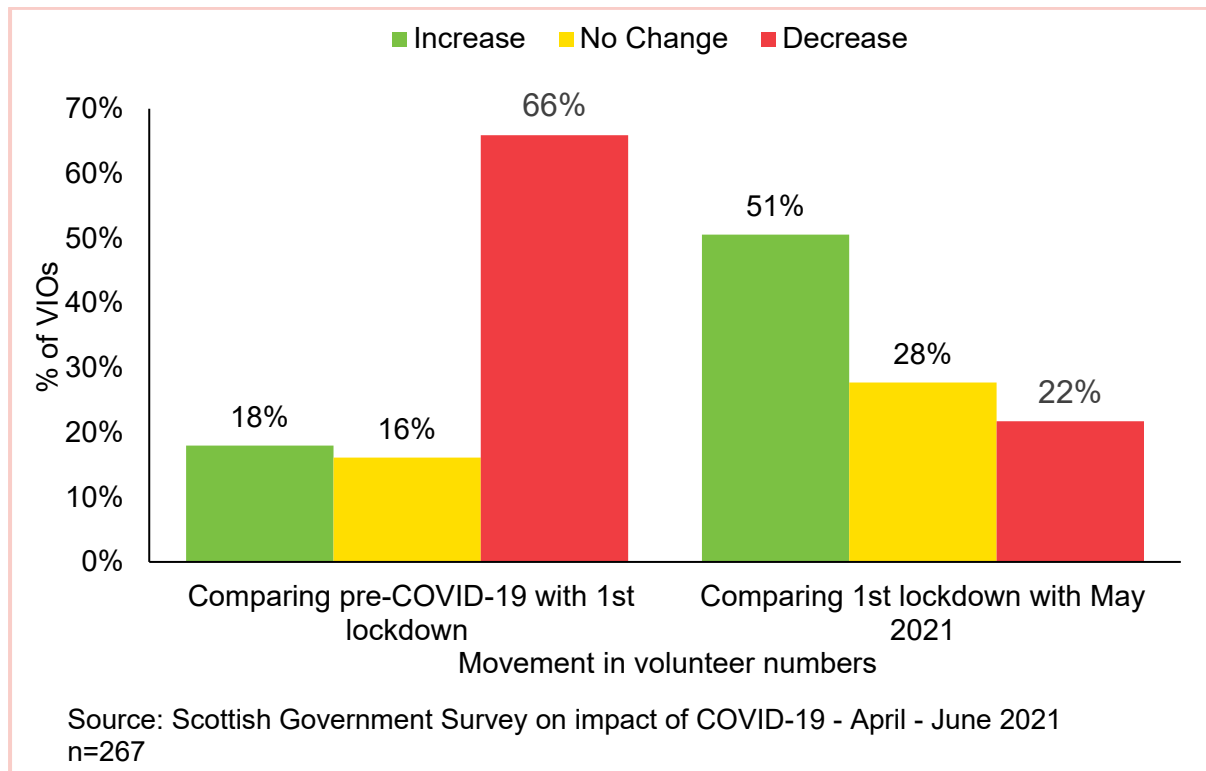
Source: Scottish Government Survey on impact of COVID-19 - May 2021 (n=267)

Table 4.2.2 shows that during the first lockdown formal volunteer numbers decreased by 29% for the sample of VIOs surveyed. However, between the first lockdown and May 2021 formal volunteer numbers started to recover and increased by 22%. However, this was still 14% lower than pre COVID-19 volunteer numbers.

The Scottish Government survey provides further corroborating evidence on the movement in volunteer numbers during the pandemic through its analysis of the proportion of VIOs increasing versus decreasing their volunteer numbers: see Figure 4.2.3.<sup>3</sup> This shows the percentage change in the number of VIOs' increasing vs. decreasing their number of volunteers for two time periods: from before COVID-19 to the first lockdown; and from the first lockdown to May 2021. The key findings are:

- Only 18% of VIOs increased volunteer numbers from before COVID-19 to during the first lockdown, while two thirds (66%) decreased volunteer numbers during the same period.
- Between the first lockdown and May 2021, over half (51%) of VIOs increased volunteer numbers, while only 22% decreased volunteer numbers.

**Figure 4.2.2 Proportion of VIOs increasing vs. decreasing volunteer numbers during COVID-19**



The Scottish Government survey also asked VIOs to provide an overall assessment of the extent of change in overall volunteer numbers from before COVID-19 to May 2021. See Figure 4.2.4.<sup>3</sup> Fifty-eight percent of organisations reported a decrease in the overall number of volunteers they work with, while 27% reported an increase and 15% reported no change.

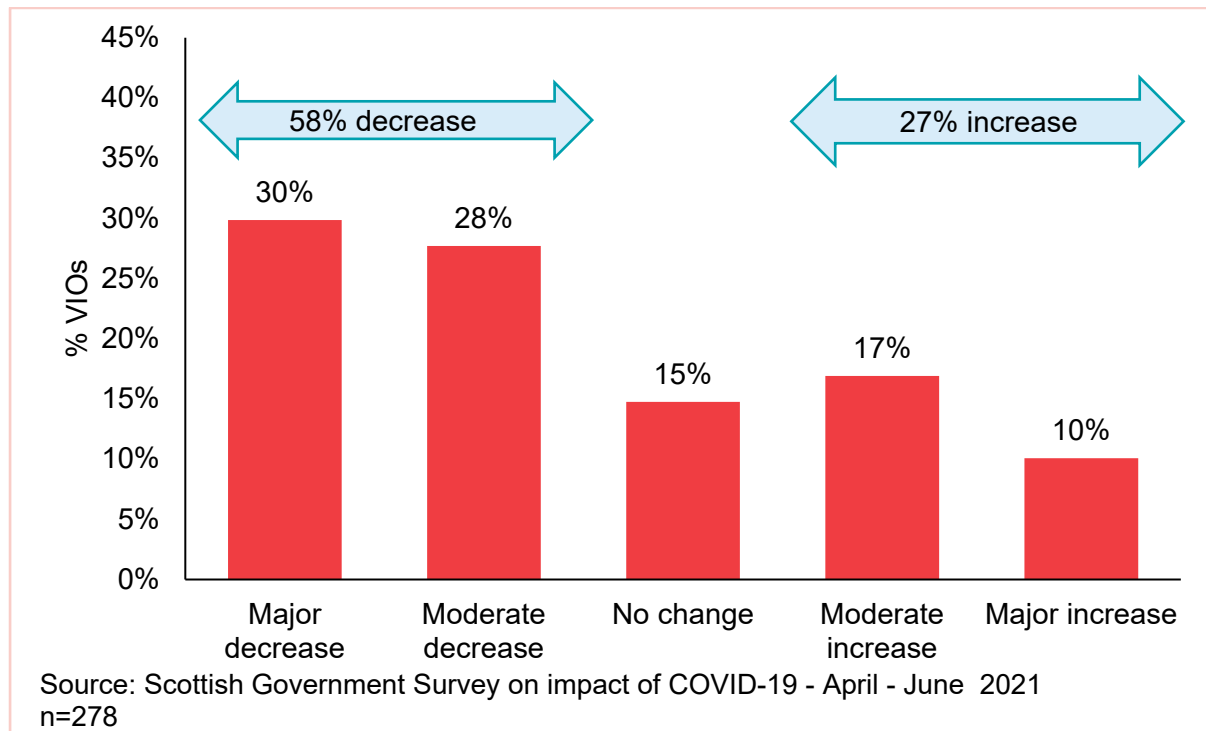
The working hypothesis from the OSCR and Scottish Government data is that the reintroduction of lockdown in Scotland led to a second period of contraction in formal volunteering. By May 2021 there had been a gradual resumption of formal volunteering, but below the pre-pandemic levels. However, it is quite likely that the COVID-19 vaccine programme has accelerated the return to higher levels of volunteering in the period January to May 2021. Additional VIO survey data presented in section 4.4 provides further supporting evidence of these trends.

This evidence on fluctuating volunteering engagement during the pandemic is supported by MVA Working Paper 4: “Volunteering in the Pandemic - Evidence from Two UK Volunteer Matching Services” that found that all four nations had large peaks in formal volunteering registrations immediately following the first and second lockdowns.<sup>5</sup> However, during the first



lockdown most volunteers that registered did not go on to record formal volunteering activity. In contrast, volunteers were more likely to become active, and were active faster, in the second lockdown than the first.

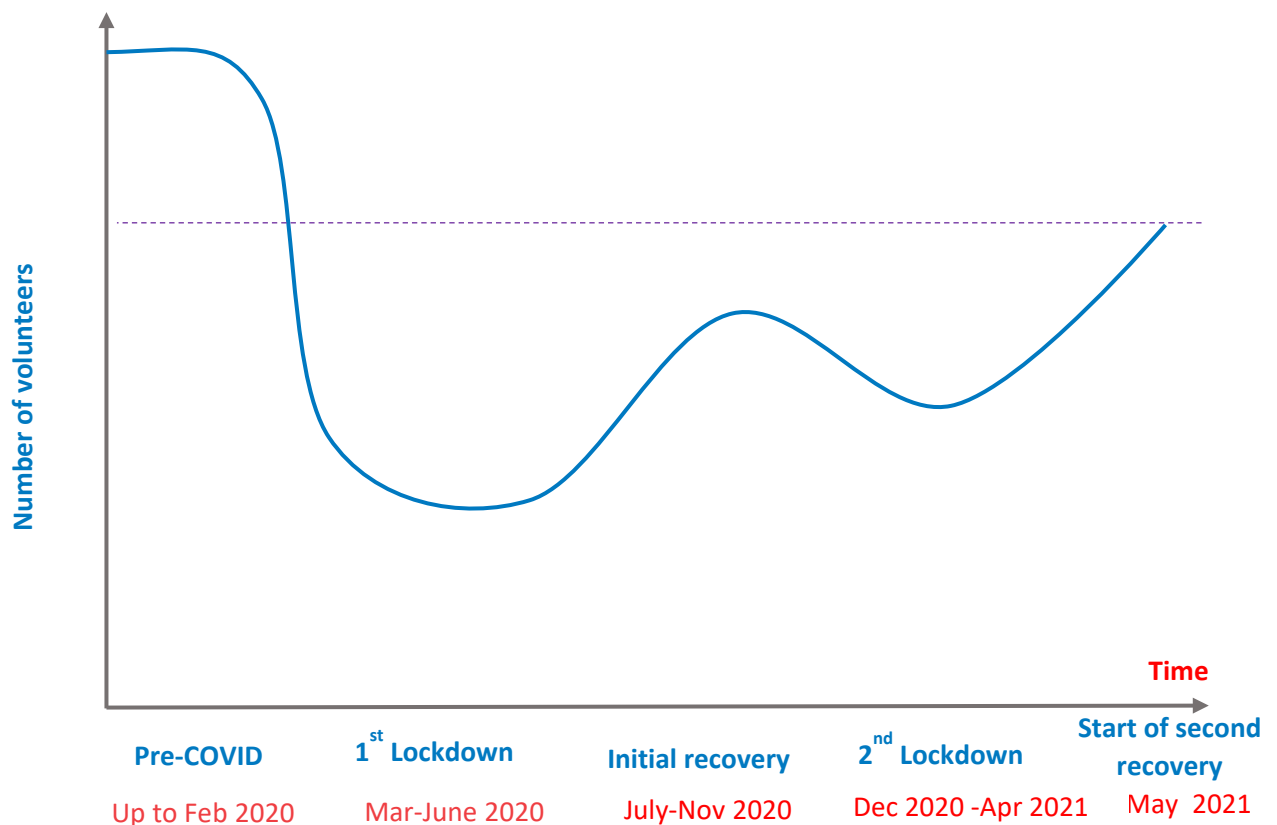
**Figure 4.2.4 Extent of change in overall number of volunteers during COVID-19 (March 2020 - May 2021)**



**In summary,** all of the evidence sources reviewed in section 4.2 support a trend in formal volunteer numbers similar to that shown below in figure 4.2.5:

- Significant decrease in formal volunteer numbers in the first lockdown .
- Gradual increase in volunteer numbers between the first and second lockdowns.
- Decrease in volunteer numbers in the second lockdown, but not as much as the first lockdown.
- Increase in volunteer numbers between the second lockdown and May 2021 but not to pre COVID-19 numbers.

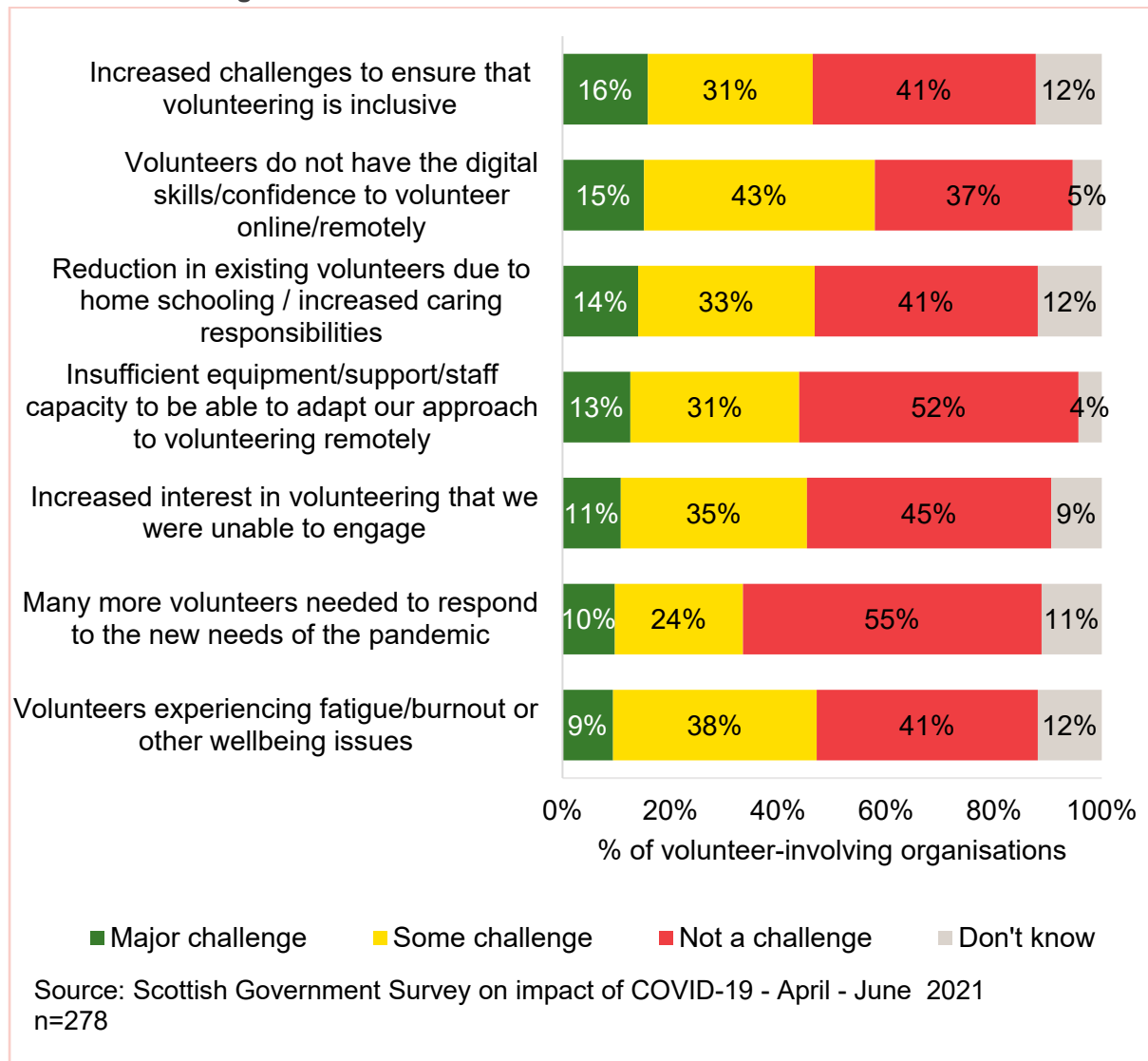
**Figure 4.2.5 Illustrative trend in formal volunteer numbers in Scotland:**  
(March 2020 – May 2021)



### 4.3 Organisational challenges facing VIOs in the deployment of volunteers

The Scottish Government survey in May 2021 identified a range of other factors which presented challenges to VIOs in their deployment of volunteers at that time. This included the problems of inclusivity, digital engagement, additional demands on existing volunteers, lack of staff support/equipment and fatigue/burnout of volunteers: see Figure 4.3.1.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 4.3.1 Other organisational challenges faced by VIOs deploying volunteers in Scotland during COVID-19**



In response to an open question on the challenges they are facing VIOs provided detailed feedback on the following themes.

**Volunteers' health and wellbeing** – ensuring the health and wellbeing of volunteers was a major challenge – especially their mental health. The restrictions resulting from COVID-19 made it difficult to be as effective in the engagement and support of volunteers compared to the level of support provided pre-pandemic. Health and wellbeing issues such as fatigue and burnout were perceived by VIOs as particularly problematic for volunteers; and also for those volunteers engaged in distressing and emotionally challenging roles. The consequence of these factors was that volunteers' morale and motivation was seen to sometimes suffer, with knock-on consequences for volunteer turnover.

**Challenges of digital engagement** – although adapting and moving to remote working and digital engagement was a lifeline for many organisations, key challenges were identified with the shift to digital (see a more detailed discussion on digital uptake and its limitations in section 4.4). These included

- *Digital infrastructure and service provision*: “Inequality in access to digital devices and data was a major barrier to volunteering in the pandemic for our volunteers.” – with reference also to this being more acute in rural areas. Also, the problem of affordability and lack of IT equipment amongst volunteers subject to poverty and disadvantage were also cited.
- *Lack of volunteers’ digital skills* – not all volunteers had the skills and confidence to embrace digital communications in new virtual service delivery models. This was perceived to be more problematic for older aged volunteers and some disabled volunteers.
- *Difficulty in supporting volunteers digitally* – the induction, training and support of volunteers online can be more difficult and can take longer, as the trainer is not working alongside volunteers directly.

**Lack of information and consistent communication** – a further problem that several VIOs encountered whilst trying to deploy volunteers was a lack of information and consistent communication regarding COVID-19 regulations and what these meant in practice. VIOs cited difficulties in the interpretation of regulations to the specific circumstances their organisation or sector faced: “One of the biggest challenges was finding rules and guidelines [regarding] COVID that related specifically to community groups and community buildings”.

## **4.4 VIOs’ responses to the challenges**

### **4.4.1 The types of VIO responses**

A high proportion of Scotland’s charities had to adapt their delivery model to try and mitigate the challenges presented by COVID-19: see Table 4.4.1.<sup>1</sup> The most frequently cited response was the new or increased application of digital technology, with 47% of charities identifying this response in May 2020. The VIO digital response had a major role to play in the delivery of services and engagement with, and support of, volunteers – see the detailed discussion later in this section.

This evidence is supported by the TSI Scotland Network survey findings from June 2020, with 36% of third sector organisations modifying their delivery model (e.g. using digital/ telephone) and 16% of organisations completely changing their delivery model to support their community and service users.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 4.4.1 Adaptation of services by charities in Scotland**

<b>Adaptation of services by charities in Scotland</b>			
<b>May 2020 - % of charities</b>		<b>Nov 2020 - % of charities</b>	
<b>Provided support remotely over the phone or digital</b>	47%	Adapted current services to respond to restrictions	43%
<b>Adapted current services to meet needs</b>	28%	Adapted current services to meet beneficiaries' and/or communities' needs	30%
<b>Changed the support provided to a different type</b>	22%	Changed the support provided to a different type or operating model	20%

**Source:** OSCR's surveys May & Nov 2020 – Impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's charities (Note: the OSCR questions asked in the May and November 2020 surveys varied, so care must be interpreted in comparing time periods. For example, there was no question on the use of phone /digital in November 2020.)

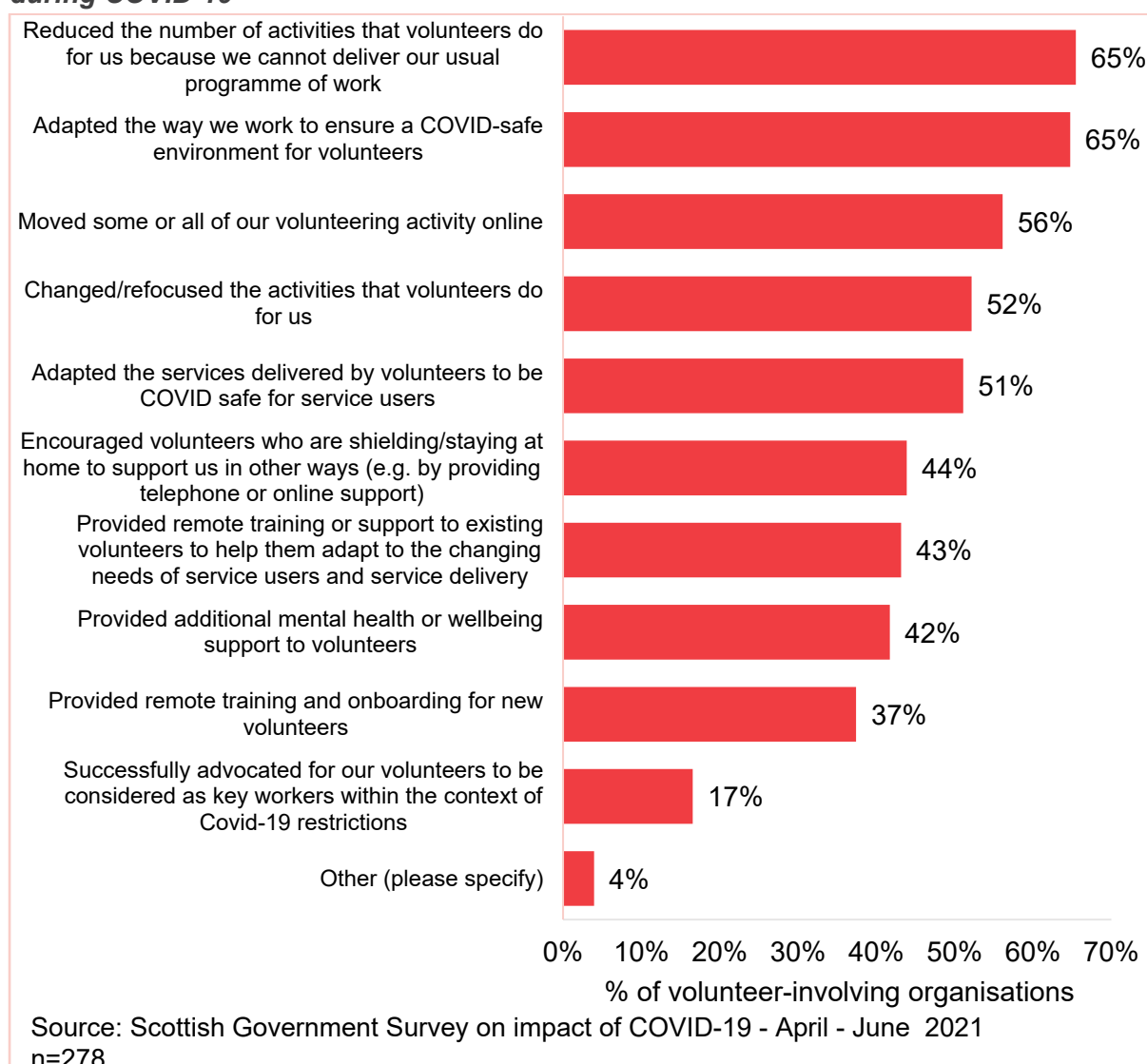
The Scottish Government survey asked a wider range of questions targeted directly at VIOs' response to the challenges of deploying volunteers: see Figure 4.4.1.<sup>3</sup> Over and above the most frequently cited responses of reducing volunteer activities and adaptation of service delivery to ensure COVID-safe compliance, the most frequently cited responses were:

- Moving some or all of volunteering activity online – 56% of VIOs
- Changing or refocusing the activities that volunteers do – 52% of VIOs

VIOs also provided training support to existing volunteers to help them adapt to the new/changed service delivery (43% of VIOs); provided remote training and onboarding support for new volunteers (37% of VIOs); and provided additional mental health and wellbeing support for their volunteers (42% of volunteers).

This evidence illustrates how significant the impact of COVID-19 was on Scotland's VIOs and how wide-ranging and substantive the changes they had to implement were, to try and maintain service delivery. It also highlights how complex the situation was, with changes having to be implemented to meet the needs of both service users and volunteers.

**Figure 4.4.1 VIOs' responses to the challenges of deploying volunteers in Scotland during COVID-19**



The OSCR surveys provide qualitative evidence which illustrates the ways in which VIOs have responded proactively and creatively to the challenges of the pandemic.<sup>6</sup>



### Examples of adaptation by Scotland's charities

"All our members are elderly and many of them were shielded during the lockdown. We have adapted the way we operate to ensure that our members have felt included and less socially isolated. Once it became impossible for our members to meet regularly at the lunch club and social activity sessions because of Covid restrictions we took the club to them instead! We have delivered meals to them all each week, we have delivered shopping for them, developed a newsletter, shared photos, challenges like quizzes, etc. We have visited them each week for a (outside and socially distanced/masked) chat to check on their wellbeing. The Committee has worked hard to help members still feel that their club is there for them even though we cannot meet in person at the moment."

"Our main charity activity is the hire of the town hall for events, but we also run three community clubs each week. At the start of lockdown we ran a very small meals on wheels service. We have now run shopping and prescriptions services, meals on wheels, befriending, gift parcels to those in isolation and food parcels in a 40 mile radius."

"Connectivity and togetherness has been our key purpose. We started a Befrienders scheme phoning people at home and took our other services online. We've populated our Facebook page every day since March to inform, to entertain and to promote health and wellbeing. We took our youngsters' gaming club online. One of our volunteers started 3D production of face shields and we distribute them to third sector and charities for free. We also deliver digital support to other organisations with whom we recently made connections. Looking to January 2021, we are planning to reignite an online version of some of the clubs and classes we provided in real time. We keep in touch with our volunteers via Whereby. Our board meet on Zoom once every two weeks instead of once a month. These have been very challenging times for us all - collectively we can help and support each other - sharing challenges, but also laughing together." (Extract from full response)

#### 4.4.2 The digital response by VIOs

**Widespread uptake of the digital response.** The May 2020 OSCR survey included a specific response category: 'providing support remotely over the phone or digital', which applied to 47% of Scotland's charities (see Table 4.4.1).<sup>1</sup> The November 2020 OSCR survey category of 'adapting current service to respond to restrictions' is more general; however, the survey includes two separate questions on the use of digital services that found:

- Almost half (47%) of charities have improved the use of digital technology among staff and volunteers.
- Over a quarter (28%) of charities have improved the use of digital technology among beneficiaries.

The Third Sector Tracker (1<sup>st</sup> Wave June – August 2021) found that 79% of third sector organisations adapted their operations by providing support remotely.<sup>9</sup>

OSCR's November 2020 analysis of qualitative data for 'Volunteers and Trustees' highlighted that the adaptation of digital service is the single biggest change that COVID-19 has caused in the charity sector.<sup>6</sup> The evidence identified that the digital adaption by many charities fell into two main categories: to ensure the future and survival of charities and as an essential component of supporting the mental health and wellbeing of beneficiaries, staff, trustees, volunteers and the wider public. OSCR's qualitative evidence on the application of digital technology and its limitations is presented below.<sup>6</sup>

**Different ways digital technology has been applied.** The use of digital technology was wide ranging with Zoom, Teams and WhatsApp being most frequently mentioned by Scotland's charities, as well as email, websites, and other social media. The qualitative responses highlight the wide range of ways in which digital technology was utilised.<sup>6</sup>

#### The different applications of digital technology – evidence from OSCR

"Our charity deals with face to face teaching of students and hands on training. We have adapted to on-line courses."

"Our charity provides counselling and support services for individuals who suffer from alcohol and/or drugs addictions. It also provides services to those that are alone and isolated. We have had to move to delivering these services in a different way through telephone engagement and on line digital platforms like zoom and Microsoft teams."

"We are better able to use digital technology, both within the charity and with our partners overseas. Our overseas partners have had to become more resilient and independent as we have been unable to visit them in person."

"We are a church and quickly moved to providing online services and reflections which reached a much wider audience and helped connect with people on their own and those needing additional support."

"Working in the field of complex trauma, we continued to provide services remotely, but increased need for IT equipment resulted in higher support costs, and with equipment off-site we have also incurred higher insurance costs, and the majority of funding does not cover these types of items. We have seen a dramatic increase in risk and had to adapt to provide additional support in order to help. We are struggling to recruit new staff during the pandemic, and demand for our services is increasing."

**Limitations of digital technology** – OSCR's evidence also shows that while charities have had a positive experience in the application of digital technology there are areas of the charity sector where the use of digital has brought challenges, whether through a lack of skills and equipment within the charities themselves, the exclusion of certain beneficiaries (e.g. older adults, those digitally excluded due to the costs or disability), and some services being more difficult and less suited to online delivery. The qualitative responses provide additional insights into these important issues.

### Limitations on the application of digital technology – evidence from OSCR

“While moving to digital delivery has been effective, we are concerned that this often excludes beneficiaries who are unable to use this through age or disability.”

“Although digital technology is great and has enabled us to continue to operate, it's not the same as face to face meeting and you lose something in meeting virtually.”

“Much of our charity's work involves organising events and activities that have traditionally happened in-person. Obviously the COVID restrictions have forced us to try and move much of this work online. Clearly this works better for some types of activities (a seminar on local history, say) than for others (e.g. a guided walk). Also, the move online means that certain sections of the target audience/beneficiaries might end up being excluded due to lack of IT skills/connectivity.”

“We moved from a face-to-face environment to a digital one in one week. We are still delivering our services remotely (language classes for school-age children) because we still don't have access to classrooms. There are trade-offs, however, and we have lost quite a few pupils. Adaption has to be continuous, trying new online learning tools, being creative.”

“As we run an art class for mainly elderly members we have had to close completely. We run a Facebook class free led by our paid tutor but only a few members can join in.”

“Our charity provides a range of learning opportunities for older people, through monthly talks and smaller special interest group meetings. While it has been possible to move some of these to an online format, a number of people are, from personal circumstances, excluded.”

“We are a charity supporting veterans and their families. As face-to-face contact has been stopped we have had to adapt completely to providing support via phone, email and video links, this has largely been successful but we lose the opportunity to ensure that the full needs of the individual beneficiaries are met.”

“Our library has been closed; we cannot do our Study Club. We have been unable to offer our cooking workshops, although we hope to do this soon. Our digital support for families was not successful and there was low take up. People prefer face to face sessions.”

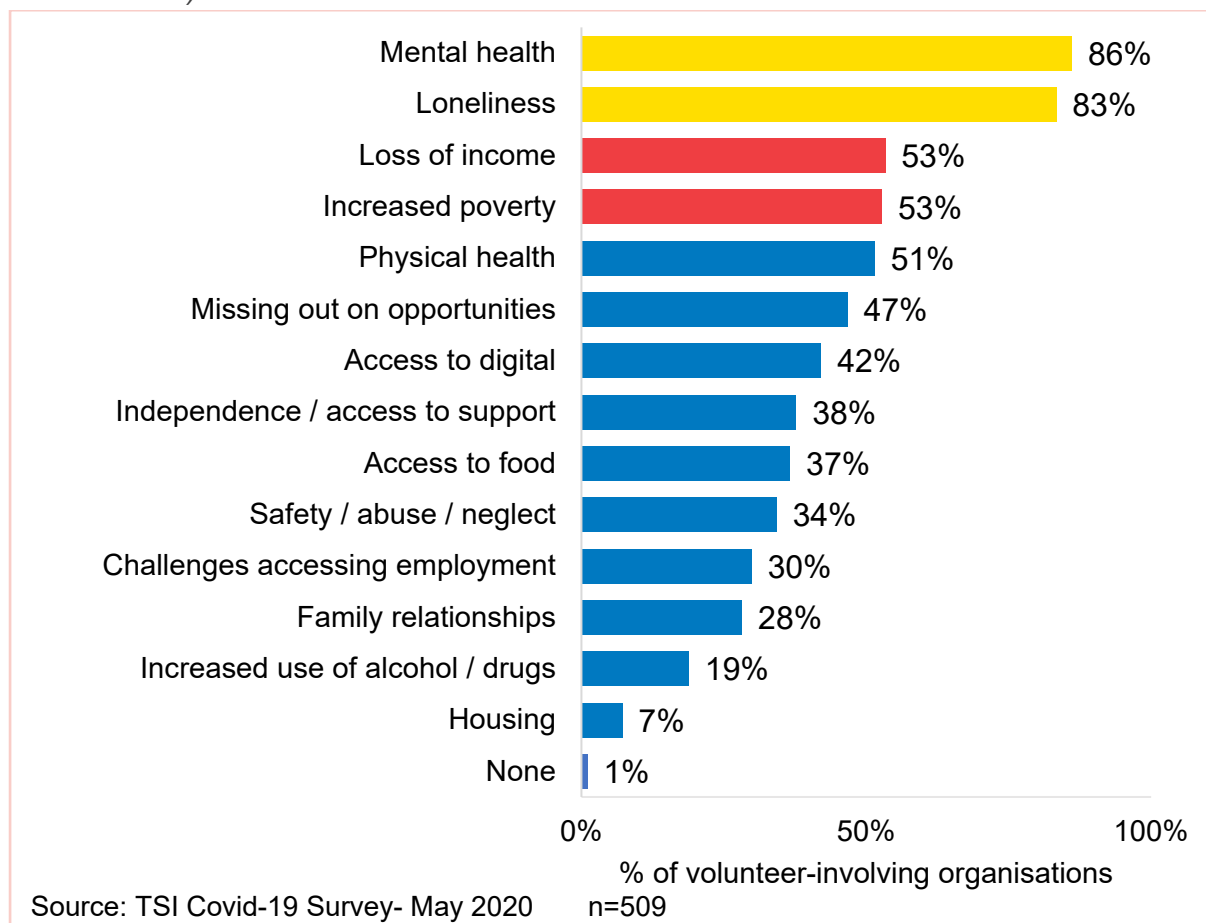
“Needed to adapt to technology to do church services online. Big problem for older folk, and those without the necessary technology.”

## 4.5 Understanding societal needs during COVID-19

This section examines the significant issues facing society during the COVID-19 pandemic, drawing upon evidence from the TSI Network Survey, OSCR Charities survey, and the Scottish Government survey. This facilitates a longitudinal analysis of these issues, identifying those which emerged early in the pandemic and were consistent up to the time of the last survey.

The TSI Scotland Network survey asked third sector organisations what negative effects on their communities they were most concerned about at the time of the TSI survey (June 2020).<sup>2</sup> Mental health (86%) and loneliness (83%) were the biggest immediate concerns during the first lockdown: see Figure 4.5.1. The next most significant negative impacts related to loss of income and increased poverty.

**Figure 4.5.1 Negative effects of COVID-19 on Scotland's communities** (at June 2020, first lockdown)



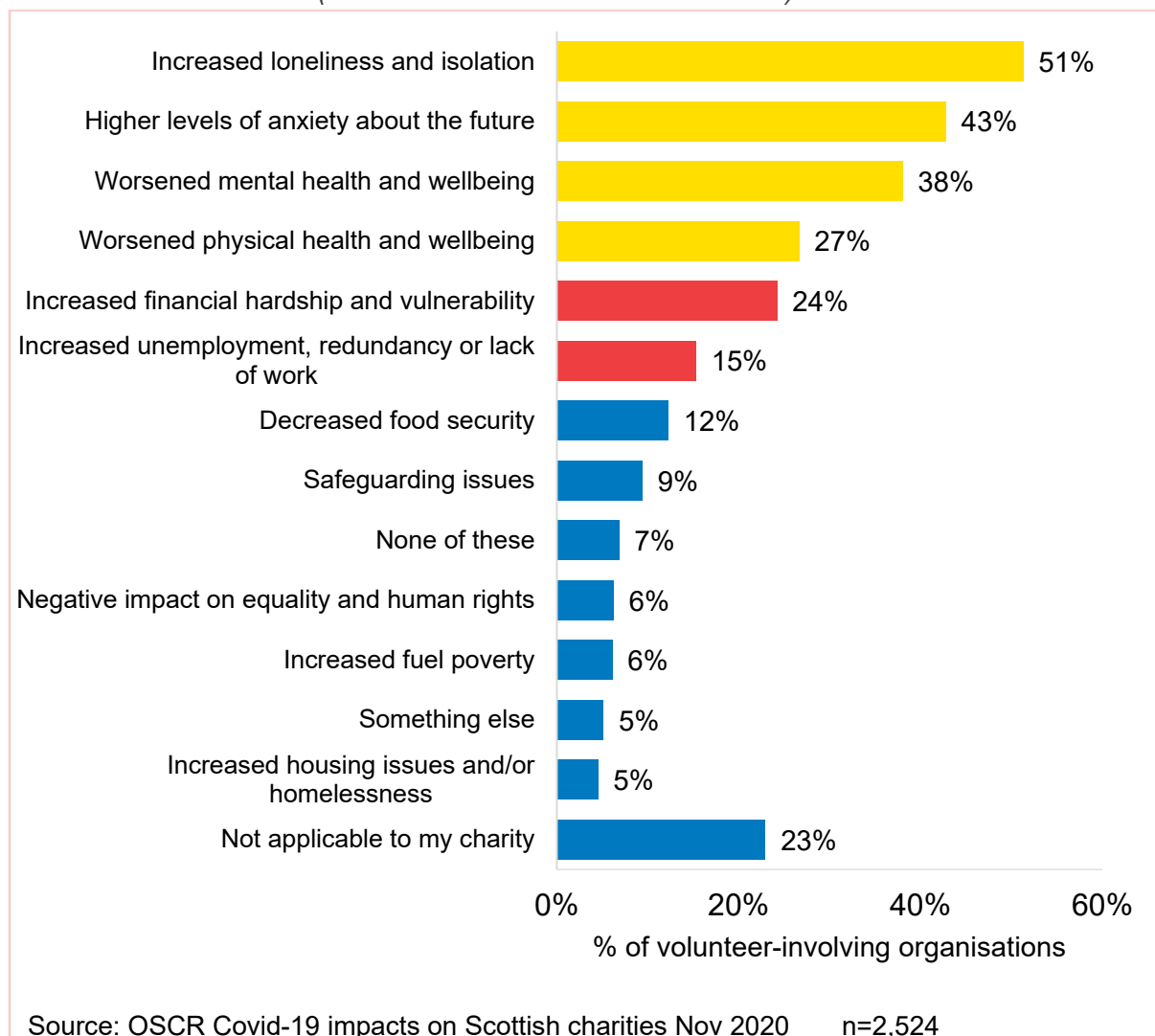
The second OSCR survey included a similar question to the TSI Scotland Network survey on the negative impacts of COVID-19 and restrictions on charities' beneficiaries and services users.<sup>1</sup> As in the TSI survey the main concerns were around social isolation, loneliness, anxiety, and mental health and wellbeing: see Figure 4.5.2. Again, it was financial hardship and loss of employment/income that were the next most prevalent negative impacts.

The Third Sector Tracker (1<sup>st</sup> Wave June – August 2021) reported that the most significant 'emerging societal needs' since March 2020 were: <sup>2</sup>

- Mental health and wellbeing (90% of third sector organisations surveyed)
- Loneliness or isolation (89% of third sector organisations surveyed)
- Financial hardship or vulnerability (74% of third sector organisations surveyed).

These adverse impacts have put additional pressures on the third sector to not only support existing beneficiaries with their pre-pandemic needs, but also in supporting the additional needs of existing and new beneficiaries caused by COVID-19.

**Figure 4.5.2 Negative impacts of COVID-19 on the beneficiaries or service users of Scotland's charities (at Nov 2020 – Local level restrictions)**



The Scottish Government survey also asked VIOs what the emerging societal needs will be over the next 12 months (June 2021 – May 2022).<sup>3</sup> Unsurprisingly, given the long-term nature of these societal challenges, the top two priorities were mental health and wellbeing (84% of VIO respondents) and loneliness and isolation (72% of VIO respondents).

The evidence therefore highlights that these problems have been consistently the highest priorities during the COVID-19 lockdowns and also into the recovery period, and that they are projected to remain the priorities post-recovery.

These conditions represent the next most prevalent needs in society: see Figures 4.5.1 and 4.5.2.<sup>3</sup> The TSI Scotland Network survey also revealed that 53% of third sector organisations during the first lockdown thought that 'loss of income' and 'poverty' were of most concern for their communities.<sup>2</sup> For OSCR's November 2020 survey it was 'increased financial hardship and vulnerability' (24% of charities) and 'increased unemployment, redundancy or lack of work' (15% of charities).<sup>1</sup>

#### 4.5.3 High need groups excluded from volunteering

There was an increased interest in volunteering formally, especially during the first lockdown and furlough period (ref. the c.60,000 Scotland Cares volunteer sign-ups in April/May 2020), combined with a willingness and adaptability of volunteers to undertake different tasks at different points in the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Scottish Government survey highlights several 'high need' groups that due to the nature of the pandemic were perceived by VIOs to be excluded from volunteering, which exacerbate some of the emerging societal needs.<sup>3</sup> These groups included:

- Older people, especially those having to shield, and feeling vulnerable
- Young people in volunteering placements
- People who volunteer as part of an 'employability journey'
- Those with learning disabilities
- Those with communication challenges or sensory impairments
- People without internet access
- Those recently retired without social networks

#### High need groups excluded from volunteering

(perspective of infrastructure organisations)

"People with a learning disability. People who volunteer with a support worker's support. People who volunteer as part of an employability journey. Young people in formal volunteering placements. Older people and people who were shielding."

"I think the COVID-19 pandemic was such an instant event that any person who may require additional support at times felt that they would struggle to keep up with the pace and did not want to contact organisations who were under stress. Also, with some formal volunteering organisations not recruiting volunteers this left some potential volunteers with limited opportunities. It is hard to define exact ages but here in (area X) we tend to place



a lot of young people with learning difficulties into volunteering opportunities and this has been increasingly difficult.”

“Due to Befriending being delivered by distance/telephone this had benefits and draw backs. Some people such as those with limited mobility were able to volunteer when before for face to face this wouldn't have been possible. But others such as those with communication challenges or sensory impairments this may not have been possible. Also due to speed those requiring large amounts of additional support to volunteer often couldn't be accommodated due to capacity issues.”

“Older, vulnerable members of the community were excluded primarily due to Covid restrictions. Those people or communities which did not have digital connectivity - either through poor broadband reception, lack of equipment or skills were also excluded.”

“Individuals who didn't have internet access or were retired and felt vulnerable and recently retired adults who had not established new networks to move into volunteering.”

## **4.6 Volunteering tasks undertaken by VIOs to meet societal challenges**

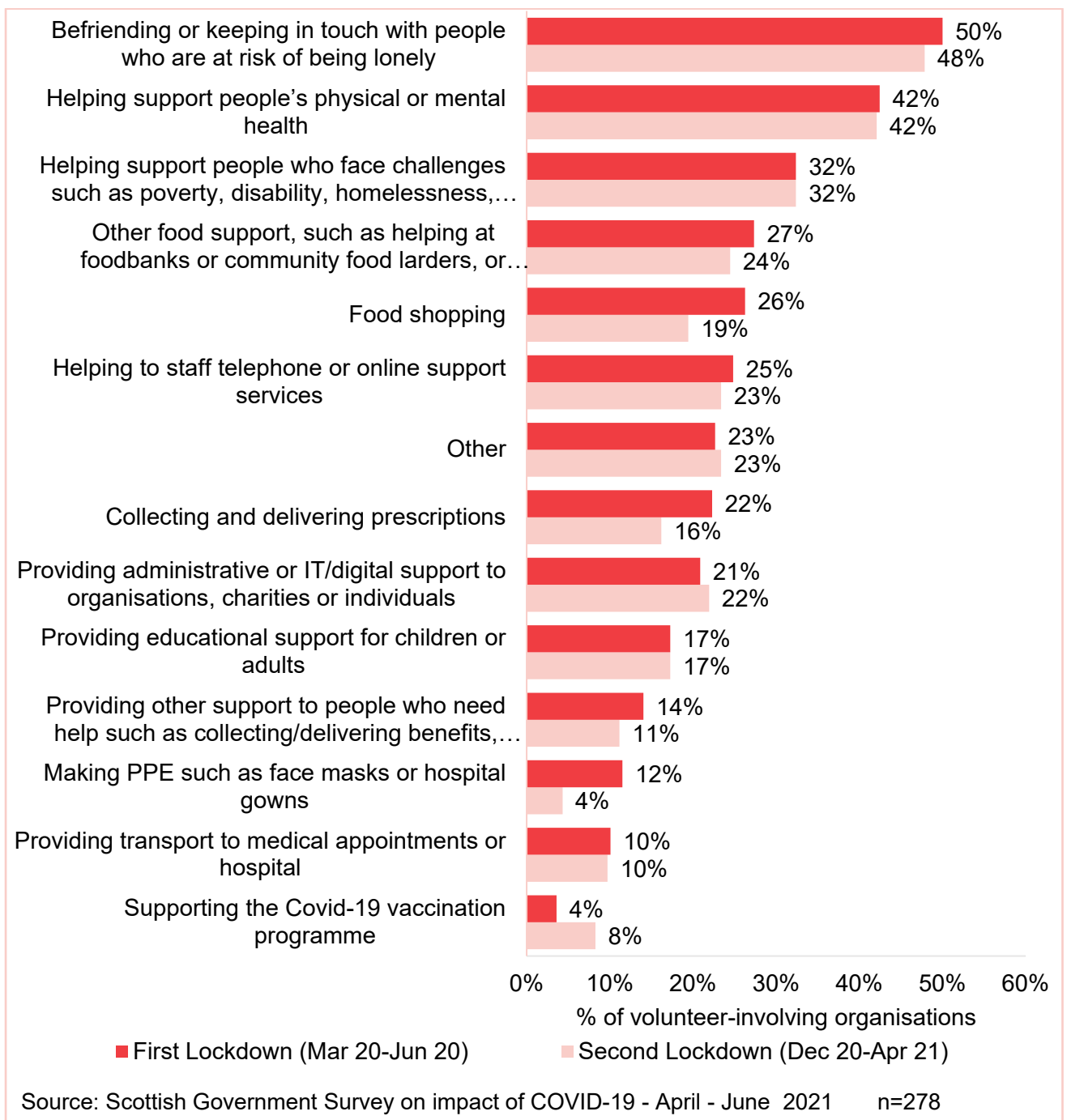
### **4.6.1 The focus of VIO support during COVID-19**

Given the societal needs articulated in section 4.5, Figure 4.6.1 identifies the VIO volunteering support that has been provided in Scotland during COVID-19 to help address these needs.<sup>3</sup>

What stands out from this evidence is the widespread engagement of Scotland's VIOs in helping to address the major and long-term societal needs identified in section 4.5 – not just in the first lockdown, but throughout the pandemic:

- 50% of the VIOs surveyed had deployed volunteers to undertake befriending, or to keep in touch with people who were at risk of being lonely, during the first lockdown. This only decreased to 48% during the second lockdown.
- 42% of VIOs had deployed volunteers to support people's physical or mental health during both the first and second lockdowns.

In contrast, VIOs' engagement in helping to address the immediate needs of food shopping, collecting, and delivering prescriptions, other food support and other general tasks all fell between the first and second lockdowns, as did the making of PPE.

**Figure 4.6.1 VIOs' services delivered by Scottish volunteers during the first and second lockdowns**

**The changing volunteering response during COVID-19.** The Scottish Government survey also provides insightful qualitative feedback on the change in the volunteering response during the pandemic.<sup>3</sup> The example below gives the perspective from an infrastructure organisation, which illustrates how volunteering transitioned from an emergency resilience response to a more structured engagement by VIOs focused on the longer-term societal challenges discussed above.

#### **The changing volunteer response (perspective of an infrastructure organisation)**

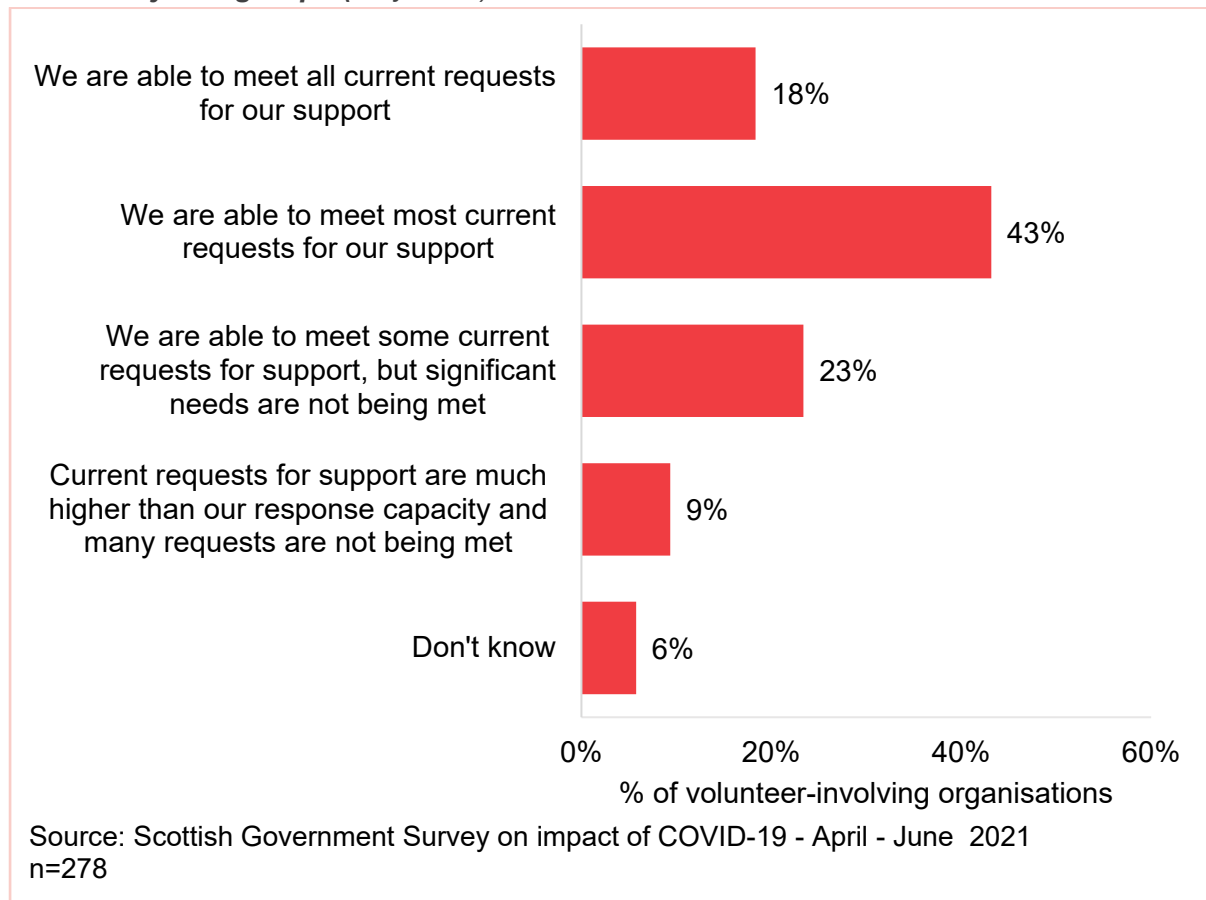
“During the first lockdown and early part of the pandemic there was very much an 'emergency response' from individual communities and organisations with people just trying to organise themselves to act as quickly as possible to help and protect those in need and vulnerable and the demand in the first lockdown was around getting basic supplies and supports to people and to preserve life and reduce harm. As things progressed beyond the initial few weeks there was greater consideration given to joint planning, making best use of volunteer resource, and ensuring volunteers themselves were protected and able to work as safely as possible. This meant that by the end of first full lockdown and into second lockdown certain services and activities were better organised across the voluntary and public sector and less 'reactive' and with clearer support processes and procedures in place for individuals and organisations the demand balanced out. As the impact of the pandemic continued throughout first and second lockdown and as the initial basic needs were largely being met it was apparent that services like mental health and wellbeing and longer-term work to support people out of poverty and inequality was required (loss of jobs, confidence, digital inclusion, depression) and volunteering activity increasingly adapted to reflect this need”

## **4.7 VIOs' ability to meet service user needs**

The Scottish Government survey asked VIOs to assess the extent to which they were able to meet the needs of the communities and groups they served as at May 2021: see Figure 4.7.1. <sup>3</sup> Sixty-two percent of VIOs were able to meet 'all' or 'most' requests for support. However, a significant proportion of VIOs experienced problems in meeting service demand:

- 23% of VIOs were able to meet some requests for support, but significant needs were not being met
- 9% of VIOs were being faced with requests for support which were much higher than their response capacity, and many requests were not being met.

**Figure 4.7.1 Impact of COVID-19 on VIOs' ability to meet the needs of their Scottish community and groups (May 2021)**



**VIOs highlighted capacity issues as the main problem** they were experiencing in trying to meet the needs of the groups and communities that they wished to serve. Capacity issues were linked to the following factors:

- Not having the staff and /or volunteer resources to meet the increased demands placed on their services.

“Demand for our services, already very heavy, has doubled during the COVID lockdown. In Glasgow between December 2020 and end February 2021 we had the same number of referrals as in the whole of 2017.”

- Lack of funding to support increased service demands and the cost of adapting service delivery – for example, to online support.

“Due to funding, we can’t run enough programmes (particularly in Glasgow) to meet the emerging mental health crisis in young people.”

- Not being able to properly restart services and activities due to COVID-19 restrictions – for example, restricted or no face-to-face delivery; combined with the limitations of digitally based delivery which affects many services.

“No face-to-face contact which is difficult for our client group who experience sight loss.”

“Many of our services supporting clients F2F have had to cease during covid and have to become virtual which provides some support but significantly less than needed.”

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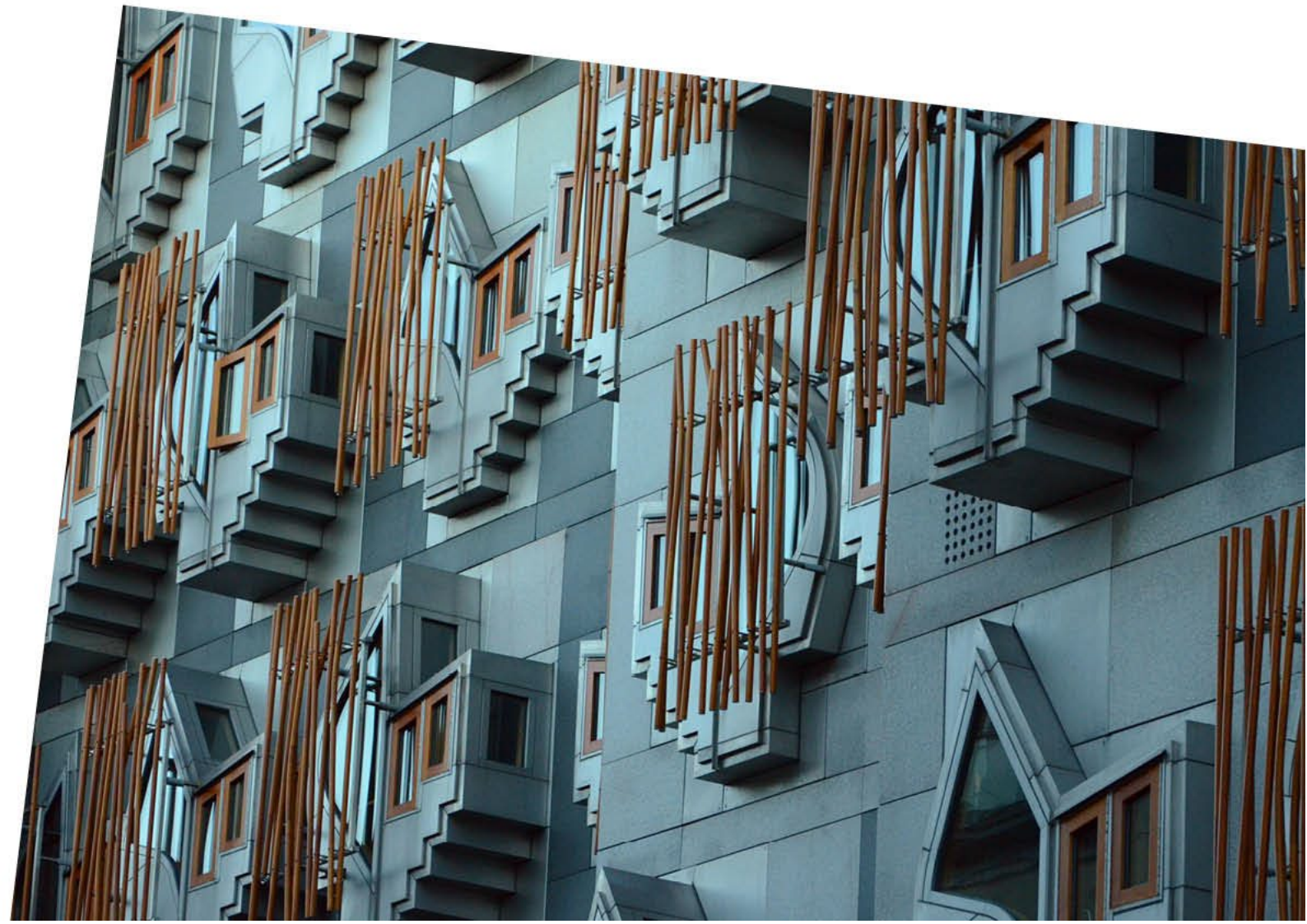
## Section 5

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# During Covid-19

## Scottish Government and Infrastructure Organisations' Response

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## **Key findings**

**Resilience partnership structures and support** – the voluntary sector's involvement in Scottish resilience planning and operational support was enhanced through:

- Expanding membership of the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP)
- Setting up of the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Advisory Group
- In partnership with the National Emergencies Trust, Foundation Scotland launched the 'Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund' to distribute publicly and privately donated funds in Scotland.
- Establishment of the National Volunteering Co-ordination Hub to provide volunteers to support the COVID response programmes, wherever needed across the country.

**Resilience response of VCS** – during the pandemic the effectiveness of the resilience response was rated highly by 64% of infrastructure organisations, which was due to good communication, coordination of partners, effective partnership working and shared learning <sup>1</sup> Suggested enhancements include:

- More effective engagement of the third sector – especially TSIs
- Increased focus on community response, addressing long-term societal challenges
- Resilience structures and plans to encompass community needs
- Recognising and supporting the mutual aid response.

**Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations** – local coordination was rated highly by infrastructure organisations: <sup>1</sup>

- 75% rated coordination as 'excellent' or 'good' between TSIs and local authorities
- The equivalent figure for coordination with other partners locally was 79%.

However, 44% of respondents stated that there has been 'limited' or 'no' coordination between their organisation and national partners. Going forward, it will be important to build on the positive examples of coordination and collaboration triggered by COVID-19, embedding these new relationships across all local authority areas

**Support provided by infrastructure organisations** – support included the registration of volunteer sign-ups; the matching of volunteers to opportunities; provision of guidance and information; funding assistance and advice; and setting up new services, programmes or groups. They also provided support outside formal volunteering:<sup>1</sup>

- 88% of infrastructure organisations supported mutual aid groups
- 69% supported informal volunteering.

**'Scotland Cares' campaign** – this national campaign's success in generating 60,000+ volunteer sign-ups could not be matched with the requirement for formal volunteering roles. Sixty-one percent of VIOs surveyed were aware of the campaign, but only 5% engaged volunteers from it.<sup>1</sup> Evidence from the c. 35,000 volunteers signed up via the Volunteer Scotland portal highlighted an efficient cascade to local authority areas and active engagement by TSIs and local authorities in attempting to register the sign-ups and facilitating their access to volunteering opportunities.

However, given the demand-supply imbalance there was difficulty in managing the expectations of volunteer sign-ups, and the campaign also created substantial administrative work for Volunteer Scotland and the TSI Scotland Network. There are further lessons which should help inform the design and timing of future interventions of this nature.

**Funding** - the Scottish Government provided £350m of funding was invested in communities including significant third sector funds, a proportion of which has supported volunteering, either directly or indirectly.

The previous sections examined Scotland's response during the course of the pandemic from the perspective of the volunteer response (Section 3) and the Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO) response (Section 4). Section 5 now examines the Scottish Government and infrastructure organisations' response. It focuses on three aspects: the resilience response during COVID-19; the role and coordination of infrastructure organisations; and Scottish Government-led support through Scotland Cares and funding provision. It is structured into six sub-sections:

- Section 5.1 – Scottish Government's resilience partnership structure and support
- Section 5.2 – Scotland's voluntary sector resilience response
- Section 5.3 – Role of infrastructure organisations during COVID-19
- Section 5.4 – Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations
- Section 5.5 – 'Scotland Cares' campaign
- Section 5.6 – Scottish Government funding provision

Two main sources of evidence have been drawn upon in Section 5:

- Four interviews with representatives of the Scottish Government and SCVO.
- The Scottish Government's report: 'Scottish Third Sector Perspectives on Volunteering during COVID-19', which analyses the views of both infrastructure organisations and VIOs.<sup>1</sup>

'Infrastructure organisations' can operate at the national, regional or local levels, their key distinguishing feature being their responsibility for leadership and coordination of support in the voluntary sector's response to COVID-19. This includes organisations such as SCVO, Volunteer Scotland, local authorities, Third Sector Interfaces, Health and Social Care Partnerships, and umbrella organisations networking across the sector.

The methodology for the MVA study would have benefited from a wider programme of interviews, including the views of key stakeholder groups such as funders, umbrella organisations and national bodies relevant to areas such as community development. Therefore, this research limitation must be considered in the assessment of the evidence and the conclusions reached in Section 5. The objective is to further enhance the findings and implications arising from this research through its critical review by partners involved in the development of Scotland's Volunteering Action Plan.

In the Scottish Government survey the infrastructure organisations' questionnaire had 52 responses, mainly from TSIs and local authorities: <sup>1</sup>

- 28 TSIs
- 11 Local authorities
- 5 other public sector organisations
- 5 other intermediaries
- 3 Health and Social Care Partnerships

Selected evidence is also drawn from the Scottish Government's VIO survey of which there were 278 respondents. <sup>1</sup>

## **5.1 Scottish Government's resilience partnership structure and support**

### **5.1.1 Utilising the existing resilience partnership infrastructure**

The Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team provided important insights on the role undertaken by the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP) during the COVID-19 response as well as other established Voluntary Sector resilience groups in the Resilience Partnership areas across Scotland (see Figure 5.1.1).

- VSRP met every couple of months throughout the pandemic to discuss and address all the emerging Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) issues and concerns, such as relevant COVID guidance, PPE funding availability, vaccination access, etc.
- It also discussed emerging areas such as VCS involvement in COP 26, and housing Afghanistan refugees in Scotland's communities.

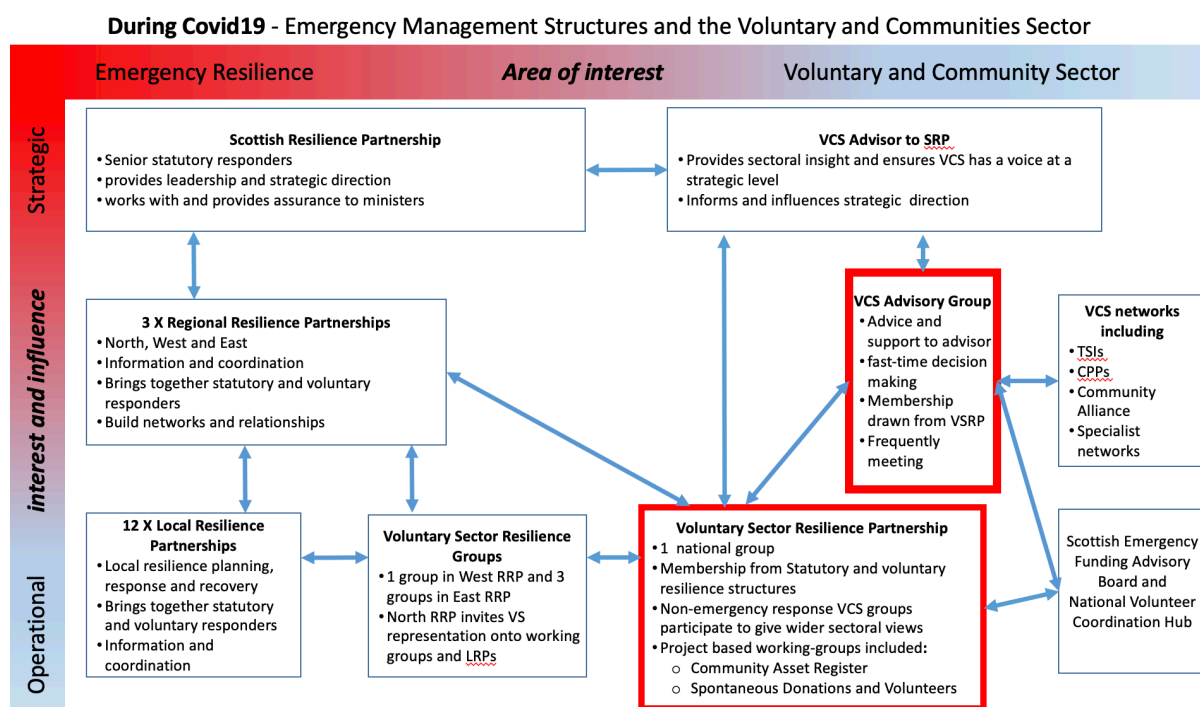
Hence, all the relationships that Scottish Government had through that group were very valuable; the discussion and intelligence shared at VSRP was also both informative and instructive.

### **5.1.2 Development of the resilience partnership infrastructure and support**

During COVID-19 a number of initiatives and changes were undertaken to enhance the voluntary sector's involvement in Scottish resilience planning and their delivery of operational and funding support.

**Expanding membership of the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP)** – prior to COVID-19 the Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team acknowledged that the TSIs and one or two other third sector bodies, such as Volunteer Scotland, were not represented on the VSRP. While work was in progress to expand the membership prior to COVID-19, this had not been fully completed. During the early stages of the pandemic the team worked to ensure that representation on the group was widened.



**Figure 5.1.1 – Resilience structure in Scotland during COVID-19**

Source: Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team

**Setting up the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Advisory Group** – the Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership (VSRP) identified the need for a more agile group to provide quick time advice, insights and act as a sounding board for the VCS advisor to the Scottish Resilience Partnership on issues including emergency resilience gaps, capabilities and priorities. This led to the creation of the VCS Advisory Group: see Figure 5.1.1, which shows how this group fits into the overall Scottish resilience partnership infrastructure.

The VSRP met four times a year during the height of COVID-19 in 2020, whereas the VCS Advisory Group met at least weekly. It provided real-time intelligence on issues relating to what was happening on the ground, such as food supply and PPE. This intelligence helped to identify areas that needed to be addressed and identified the people that have the relevant experience and knowledge in these areas, who could then come together separately to discuss the issues and help develop solutions.

**Donated funding** – prior to COVID-19 the Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team had undertaken a review of the options on how to ensure that spontaneous donated funding to a national or regional event, such as the terrorist attacks at London Bridge and the Manchester Arena in England, were collected and allocated to where they were needed most. The team considered both a bespoke Scottish system to deal with spontaneous funding or working with the National Emergencies Trust, which had experience in dealing with terrorist events in England. While working with the National Emergencies Trust was agreed as the best option by VSRP, the agreements were not finalised at the outbreak of COVID-19. Therefore, interim arrangements had to be put in place quickly to deal with the spontaneous funding received in response to the pandemic.

In partnership with the National Emergencies Trust, Foundation Scotland launched the 'Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund' at the end of March 2020.<sup>3</sup> By February 2021 they had distributed £7 million in grants of up to £5,000 to 1,400 charities and community groups the length and breadth of Scotland.

As part of those arrangements, to support consideration and decision making around appropriate, fair and equitable distribution of donated funds, the Scottish Emergencies Funding Advisory Board (SEFAB) was established, with representatives from a range of organisations; some with funding experience, such as SCDC and the Corra Foundation, and many from the VSRP with relevant experience such as Red Cross, SCVO and Foundation Scotland.

**Further development of the Ready Scotland Website** – the extant Ready Scotland resources at the outbreak of COVID-19, specifically those relevant to the VCS in Scotland described in [section 2.3](#) such as 'Building Resilient Communities', were utilised during COVID-19. However, the website was also used to promote key messages from voluntary sector organisations, and it provided additional resources on key societal challenges, for example mental health resources. There was also active use of the Ready Scotland twitter account.

**Creation of the National Voluntary Sector Coordination (NVC) Hub** – the hub was set up to provide a centralised resource for any areas that needed prompt volunteer support over and above that provided through the existing structures.<sup>4</sup> For example, providing volunteer support for the vaccination and testing programs, wherever sufficient volunteer support was not available, contributing over 50,000 hours. The Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team added messaging to Government press releases providing details of the NVC hub as well as linking into existing resilience partnership structures.

In order to raise awareness, Scottish Government Resilient Communities Team wrote to Health Boards, Local Authorities and Health and Social Care Partnerships providing details of how to access volunteers from the NVC hub. The Team also promoted the hub by adding messaging to Scottish Government press releases and linking into existing resilience partnership structures.

## **5.2 Scotland's voluntary sector resilience response**

### **5.2.1 Resilience response during COVID-19**

Notwithstanding the variable engagement of TSIs in resilience structures and planning arrangements pre COVID-19 (see [section 2.3](#)), when infrastructure organisations were asked to assess the effectiveness of the resilience response in the area where they operate, the feedback was extremely positive. 'Resilience response' refers to the response by resilience partnerships and responders in support of the needs and the voluntary and community sector.



Of the 44 organisations that were able to respond to this open qualitative question (i.e. the respondent had the required knowledge/experience of the resilience response in their area) 28 (64% of respondents) rated the effectiveness of the response as 'very effective', 'effective', 'excellent' or 'good'.

### Positive comments on the resilience response

"The Ready Scotland website was/is very helpful."

"Very effective response, groups mobilised quickly and were supported by council, NHS and TSI"

"The existing Resilience Partnership met regularly with excellent Partner buy-in and representation across the various sectors. This led to a co-ordinated and effective response to the pandemic."

"We have a strong community planning partnership in our area – and the resilience response, such as we've seen during the COVID-19 crisis, saw the Council, the Health & Social Care Partnership, local private sector organisations, and the Third Sector network of community groups shape the local response to a national crisis - often providing a 'safe place' for those vulnerable individuals and families most at risk."

"Very effective. Daily strategic meetings, local needs and guidance informing direction of travel and plans. Effective communication. Feedback from all stakeholders sought at key stages."

"The Resilience response during COVID was very effective. Communication and sharing learning were exceptional."

The features underpinning an effective resilience response were **good communication, coordination of partners, effective partnership working and shared learning**.

In the interpretation of this positive resilience response there are a number of important qualifications:

- Firstly, the extent to which the effectiveness of the resilience response was due to resilience planning and support pre-COVID varied. In some cases it was the local organisations getting together to tackle the crisis outside the Local Resilience Partnerships. In others it was led or supported by the response of mutual aid groups outside formal resilience structures; and there was also an example of a sectoral response to the crisis within the befriending sector.
- Secondly, there is a sense that some organisations were having to 'start from scratch', learn real-time and at pace, the implication being that they were not drawing upon previous resilience planning, group work or training:

“Nothing in place locally to address a pandemic. But response was speedy and efficient.”

- Lastly, it is important to understand how ‘resilience’ success is defined. Interesting observations were made on the effectiveness of the ‘structural’ and immediate crisis response versus the challenges of addressing longer term societal challenges.

The evidence also showed that there is considerable variation across the different local authority/TSI areas in Scotland. Many are exemplars of good practice in terms of joined up partnership working, strong community engagement and very effective resilience responses – whereas for some others there were significant challenges.

### 5.2.2 How to improve the resilience response?

A range of resilience response issues were identified by infrastructure organisations that should be considered by the Scottish Government in its assessment of Scotland’s resilience response to COVID-19, and how its response could be enhanced for the handling of future crises: see Table 5.2.1. The overarching feedback from infrastructure organisations is the need to encompass the third sector and community needs more effectively in Scotland’s resilience response.

Their view was that there was too much of a focus on the statutory Category 1 and 2 responders with the result that the practical emergency needs were well handled, but the complex community and longer-term societal challenges less so. Their feedback also suggests a need for more effective involvement and integration of TSIs, community organisations and mutual aid groups in resilience planning structures and operational delivery at the local level.

**Table 5.2.1 – Infrastructure organisations’ feedback on the resilience response**

Theme	Feedback from infrastructure organisations
<b>More effective engagement of the third sector</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although the resilience response was considered very effective, it could have been improved with more third sector inclusion at the outset. “Although we eventually were seen as full and effective partners in the Local Response Management Team structure, we were firstly overlooked and in fact turned away from a meeting as it was deemed ‘too early’ for our involvement.”</li> <li>• There is also evidence that some TSIs were not involved in the local resilience structures: “We were disappointed not to be involved in our local Resilience Partnership. It would appear there was a different approach across Scotland where some TSIs were heavily involved and others not involved at all.”</li> </ul>

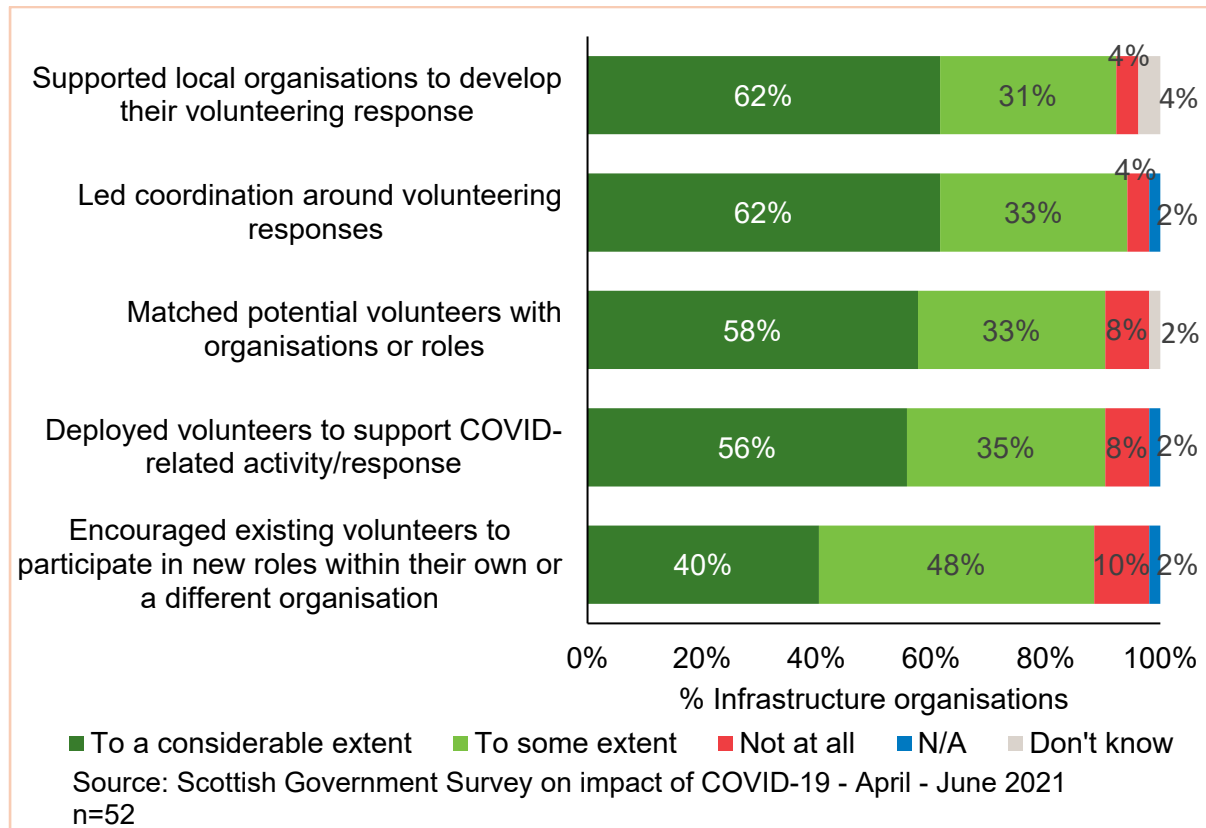
<b>Increased focus on community response and addressing long-term societal challenges</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The resilience response was effective at coordinating the 'structural' aspects of the pandemic - i.e., planning for hospital beds, vaccines, mortuary back-up procedures. However, at the beginning of the pandemic resilience was insufficiently linked to the community response. “We need to distinguish between resilience in the face of emergencies and resilience to chronic stresses and ongoing systemic challenges.”</li> <li>The need for resilience groups to take ownership of volunteering as part of the local resilience response: “Local resilience partnerships contributed volunteers to local groups, but did not lead activity themselves as their primary focus is on environmental issues such as floods and extreme weather.”</li> </ul>
<b>Recognising and supporting mutual aid</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>A key message from infrastructure organisations is the importance of recognising the contribution of mutual aid to Scotland's resilience response, and to learn how to support and embed this approach more effectively for the management of future crises. “In all honesty it was the local community based volunteer group who were quickest to respond. Their ability to be flexible and able to make instant decisions made their response more effective than the statutory agencies. The local groups worked really well together and have continued their partnership beyond the lockdown. The Council was much slower to respond but were able to provide a lot more support once they had got over administrative hurdles.” “The mutual aid groups succeeded where formal structures... could not fully....However, those groups and volunteers need supporting, so resilience -- true resilience has not been embedded in this structure as well as it could have.”</li> </ul>

## 5.3 The role of infrastructure organisations during COVID-19

### 5.3.1 Volunteering coordination and support

The Scottish Government survey asked infrastructure organisations how they have helped support or coordinate the volunteering response in their area, or for the organisations they support.<sup>1</sup> Figure 5.3.1 shows that there was wide-ranging support provided by infrastructure organisations.

**Figure 5.3.1 - How has your organisation helped to support or coordinate the volunteering response to COVID-19 in your area (or for the organisations you support) (within Scotland)?**



Other areas of support were also highlighted by infrastructure organisations:

- **Production and dissemination of new guidance materials and resources –** examples include:
  - Guidance for mutual aid groups
  - Video for 'how to be a good neighbour'
  - Easy read guides on governance and volunteer management
  - Guidance for NHS Boards
  - Information on funding and sustainability
  - Guidance booklets and Q&A session on how to transition to digital /phone based delivery
  - Directory of Services about informal and formal groups providing services.
  - Tailored guidance for community resilience groups including Volunteer Agreement, Induction Checklist, Money Handling, Risk Assessment etc.
  - COVID-19 briefings for the sector

- **Setting up new services, programmes or groups** – examples include:
  - The formation of a Community Taskforce Volunteers Programme that facilitated meaningful engagement with those who had responded to the Scotland Cares Campaign.
  - The organisation of a 'Keep calm and co-ordinate group' which brought together public sector and local organisations in a collaborative response to the emergency. This resulted in the creation of 'The Community Hub', a single telephone number for local people, groups and organizations to call to offer help, ask for help or find out what was happening in their area.
  - The establishment of a volunteer registration on-line portal which allowed volunteers to register, be tasked with activities, have insurance and also proof of identity if challenged on movements during lockdown 1. This portal was used to recruit and deploy volunteers for the mass vaccination programme.
  - The TSI supported the HSCP and Council in the creation of 'Neighbourhood Hubs' to support those areas identified as volunteer 'cold-spots'.
- **Providing funding assistance and advice** – examples include:
  - Distribution of grants
  - Supporting organisations with sourcing funding and making funding applications
  - Distribution of vouchers in partnership with other organisations.

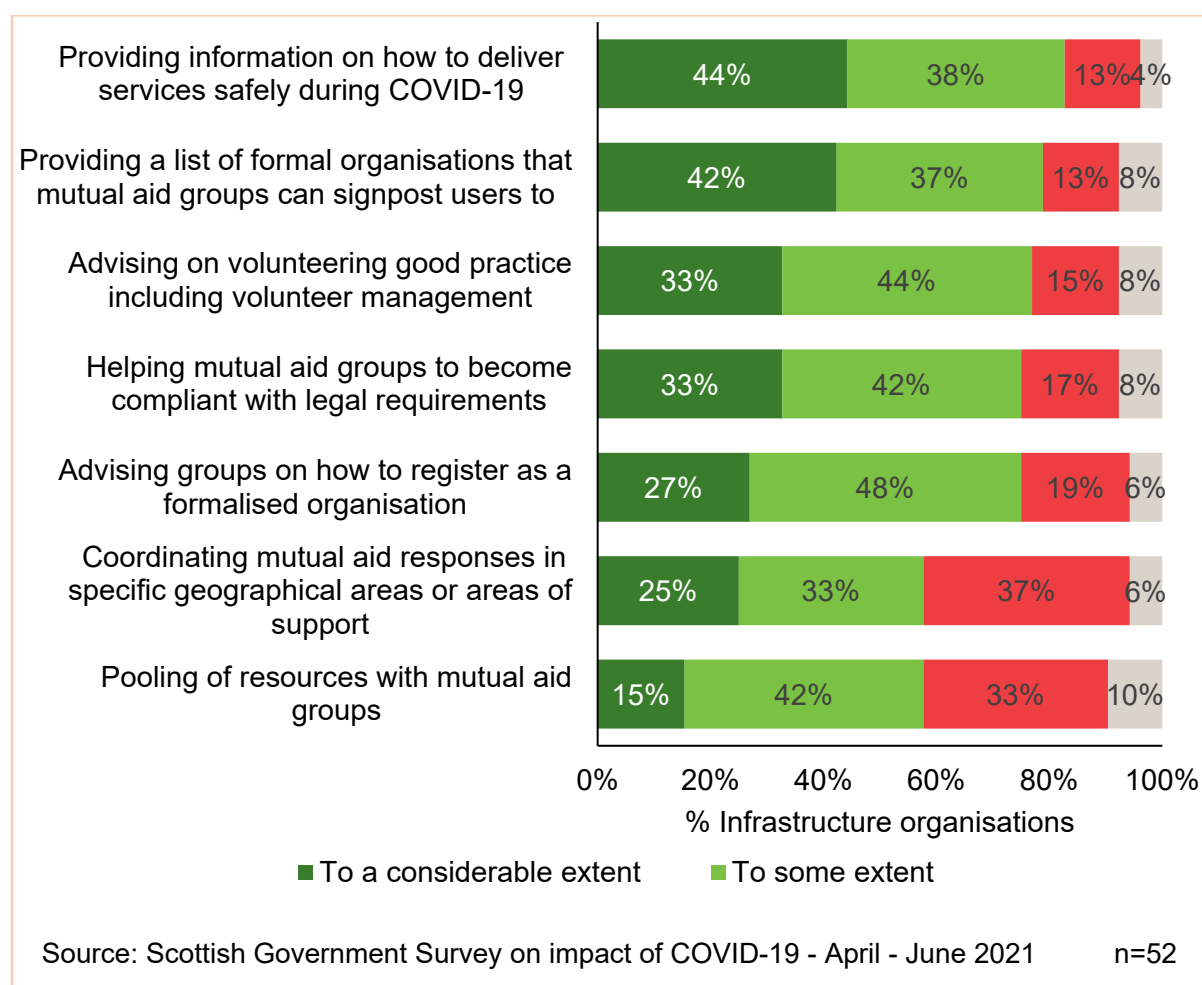
### 5.3.2 Support for mutual aid groups

Eighty-eight percent of infrastructure organisations have supported mutual aid groups in one or more ways. Figure 5.3.2 specifies the information, advice and support provided to these groups: formalisation of their organisation; governance and legal compliance; volunteer management; COVID-safe delivery of services; lists of formal organisations they can signpost to; and coordination of support geographically. Organisations provided examples of the type of support they provided: <sup>1</sup>

"Staff have been working tirelessly to support these new mutual aid groups to get the basic requirements in place including governing document, bank account, funding and volunteering best practice."

"We have used social media to encourage new mutual aid groups to join our network and tried to encourage outside organisations including mutual aid groups to get support from ourselves or (our) TSI, etc."

"We have supported mutual aid groups with volunteer management support, covid volunteering guidance, safer volunteering advice, and volunteer recruitment and support advice, and TSI partners have supported with funding and governance."

**Figure 5.3 2 – Scottish infrastructure organisations' coordination and support of mutual aid groups**

### 5.3.3 Informal volunteering

Just over two-thirds of infrastructure organisations (69%) were involved in supporting informal volunteering.<sup>1</sup> The main forms of support included the provision of advice, support and guidance on how to support neighbours and how to volunteer safely – provided via websites and through social media.

Specific examples include:

- Creating 'Being a Good Neighbour' guide and guidance on how to carry out common tasks (dropping off food, prescriptions, walking dogs etc.) safely
- Providing guidance on confidentiality and health and safety issues
- Linking informal volunteers to mutual aid groups
- Volunteer Edinburgh - 'Think Local, Act Local': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l8zvLqhfeTs>
- Providing a link to the Ready Scotland website regarding helping neighbours
- Providing a helpline for residents looking for support, offering support or looking for help to safely support their neighbours.



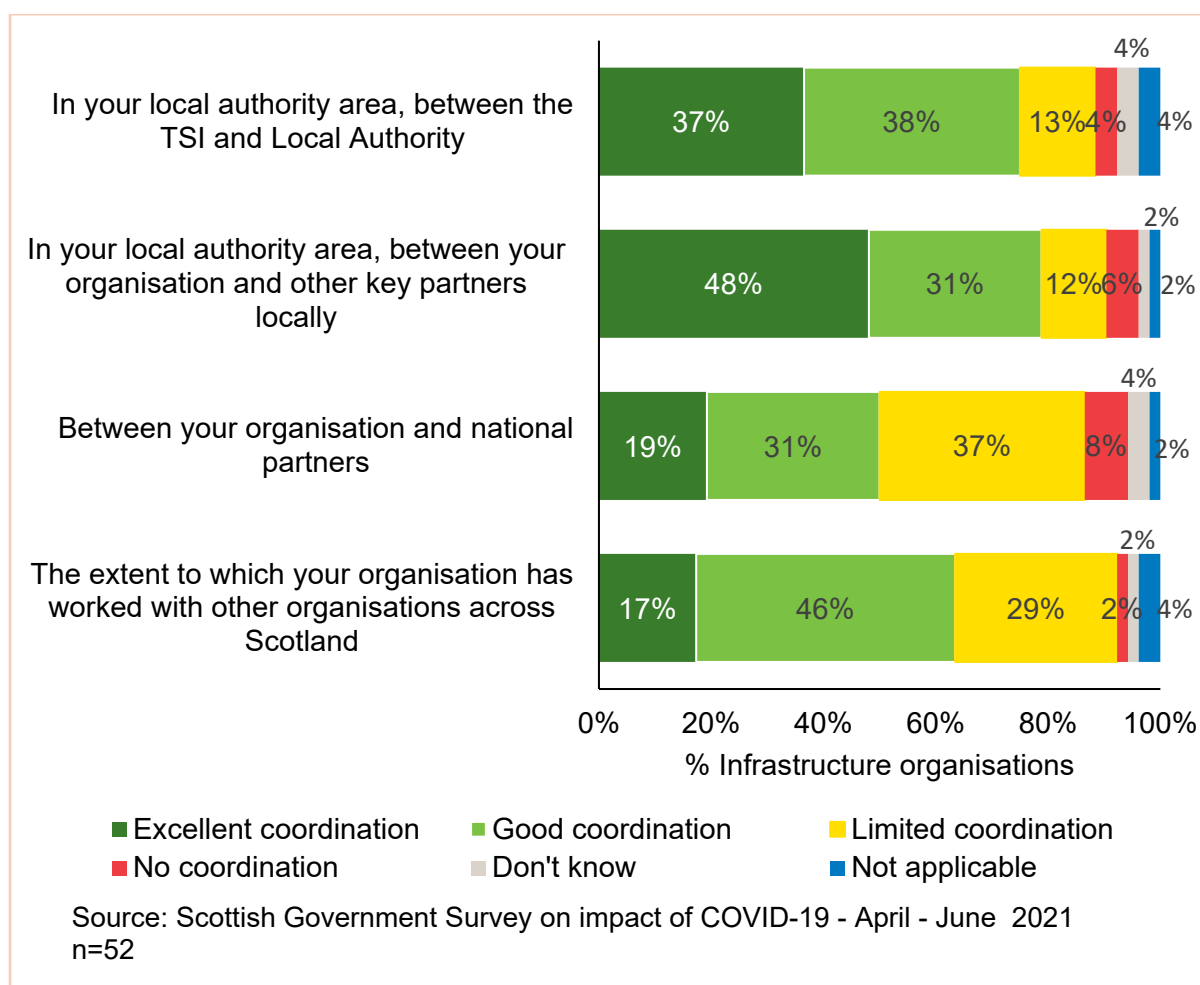
- Distribution of community postcards to encourage people to volunteer/be a good neighbour
- Supporting informal volunteering by working with local organisations, community councils, elected representatives and key community contacts

## 5.4 Coordination and collaboration of infrastructure organisations

The Scottish Government's survey asked infrastructure organisations to rate the coordination of the volunteering response between key partners during COVID-19 – see Figure 5.4.1.<sup>1</sup> The majority of organisations rated the coordination as either 'excellent' or 'good' across the four categories. However, a key finding is that local coordination has been stronger than national-local coordination. The evidence also indicates that there is considerable scope for improvement with regard to the latter:

- 45% of respondents state that there has been 'limited or no' coordination between their organisation and national partners.
- 31% of respondents have had 'limited or no' working with other organisations across Scotland (i.e. outside their local area).

**Figure 5.4.1 Scottish infrastructure organisations' rating of the coordination of the volunteering response between key partners during COVID-19**



VIOs were also asked to rate the wider coordination of the volunteering response between different organisations in the areas or sectors in which their organisation works. <sup>1</sup> Sixty percent rated the coordination as 'excellent' or 'good', with 40% assessing the coordination to be 'limited' or 'none'. (These figures exclude the 'not applicable' and 'don't know' responses which differs from the methodology in the Scottish Government survey. Volunteer Scotland have used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge/experience on coordination between key partners). Like the infrastructure organisations' response, this evidence also indicates that there is considerable scope for improvement in the coordination of the volunteering response.

#### 5.4.1 What worked well in the coordination of the volunteer response?

The feedback from infrastructure organisations was extremely positive regarding the effectiveness of the coordination of the volunteer response, especially at the local level.<sup>1</sup> Respondents provided a rich evidence base about what worked with 'local coordination' and 'national coordination'.

**Local coordination** – the following themes were identified from the evidence:

- **Partner involvement** – there were numerous examples of effective partnership working with the most frequently cited organisations being the TSIs, the local authority and Health and Social Care Partnership, with Community Planning Partnerships and the NHS also being cited.

"The local coordination across (our) TSI, the local authority and the HSCP was excellent throughout the pandemic."

However, the importance of community organisations embedded within local communities was also identified as important:

"Good relationships with key local organisations that strengthened during the response. Existence of key community anchor organisations in many of our communities."

- **Leadership** – local collaboration was based on partners coming together to tackle a shared challenge with effective team working being at the centre. There was virtually no discussion of 'our organisation X was the key leadership body'. However, implicit within the evidence was the key role played by TSIs in collaborative working due to their volunteering knowledge and expertise and this was recognised by other partners:

"All partners worked really well together and recognised the lead role played by our TSI in supporting those in need across the local area".

- **Strengthened partnership working** – a number of examples referenced the positive impact of COVID-19 in strengthening local partnership working during the pandemic, “strengthening a culture of working together across all stakeholders”. As one infrastructure organisation said: “What worked well was simply that all politics were put aside. The focus was on our local area and how we could all support them through the pandemic.”

#### Feedback on improved partnership working

“The pandemic really focuses partnership efforts to what really needed to be done and volunteers were at the heart of this. There is a renewed recognition of the roles and value of volunteers and what worked well was listening to and responding to feedback from volunteers and adapting approaches. One of the positives from Covid was that things had to be done differently showing that there are better ways to work together and learn together across the sectors. The response and recovery efforts really showed Community Planning in action - finding ways to work together across agencies and sectors to respond to and meet the needs of communities and the role of volunteers was highlighted and elevated and hopefully this will continue beyond the pandemic.”

- **Examples of local coordination** – there were numerous examples of ‘new ways of working’ including:
  - Weekly Zoom meetings and increased use of digital platforms more widely
  - Sharing intelligence
  - Creation of ‘locality’ hubs’
  - Setting up of a volunteering working group with key partners
  - Encouraging cross-charity working and resource sharing
  - Taking a person-centred approach to volunteer and client needs
  - Targeting support to high need groups/localities
  - Having a neighbourhood/community level focus – not local authority wide
  - Mobilising to support local COVID-19 outbreaks
  - Having a single point of contact with an overview of the needs of the area.
  - Supporting funding applications so equipment/devices could be obtained to support members.
- **Characteristics of local collaboration and coordination** – the following descriptors were commonly used in describing local coordination and partnership working:
  - Listening
  - Responsive (and fast)
  - Flexible
  - Person-centred
  - Local response
  - Cooperation
  - Coordination

**National coordination** – the evidence points to the different forms of coordination and support at the national level in the response to COVID-19. This highlights the importance of the TSI Scotland Network during the pandemic:

“The TSI Network met regularly on Zoom both nationally and in regional clusters.”

“Working with and support from the TSI network was invaluable during the pandemic. TSIs were able to co-ordinate our responses, share briefings and offer additional support.”

“Communication with other TSIs was excellent as we each learned from each other's experience and what worked best.”

Other examples of national coordination and support:

### **British Red Cross**

“The link to the Red Cross to promote covid related volunteering opportunities to their registered volunteers and vice versa, has worked well since lockdown in continuing to engage with non-traditional volunteers following lockdown in short term and new volunteering opportunities, such as new ‘Meet and Greet’ NHS roles.”

“The creation of the National Volunteering Coordination Hub for the vaccination programme is an excellent example of partnership working. Funded by Scottish Government, operated by British Red Cross and with key stakeholders round the table from the start.”

### **Youth Scotland**

“We attended regular meetings with the Youth Scotland network. This enabled us to share learning and inform Youth Scotland what was needed on the ground - increasing understanding and knowing this was informing National response.”

### **Disclosure Scotland**

“Disclosure Scotland's digital service meant we were able to get people volunteering much more quickly than we could have done under the paper system and this made a huge difference to the volunteer response.”

### **Volunteer Scotland**

“On a national level the support offered by Volunteer Scotland has been strong and we've been able to signpost many volunteer groups to training and resources that helped them quickly develop to ever-changing needs.”

### 5.4.2 What could have been improved in coordinating the volunteer response?

Feedback from the infrastructure organisations on what could have been improved focused on three key themes: Scotland Cares, better communication and partnership working, and local authority and TSI engagement.<sup>1</sup> A lot of the views expressed were 'problems experienced' rather than 'suggested improvements'. However, the former gives clear guidance on lessons learned and what not to do in future emergency responses and, in some areas, what needs to be maintained as good practice post-pandemic.

- **Scotland Cares Campaign** – 16 out of 36 responses focused on the problems created by the national campaign. This has been reported on separately in section 5.5.
- **Communications and partnership working** – notwithstanding the positive feedback on the coordination of the volunteer response locally, which was described earlier in this section, there were a handful of areas that experienced problems with their communication and partnership working. The following examples were cited:
  - A request for better communication between the Council, TSI and the local resilience groups
  - More formal links with community councils and volunteering organisations as 'signed-up members' of the local partnership
  - The lack of community anchor organisation(s) made coordination more difficult. The role of new mutual aid groups helped to fill such gaps.
  - "Better coordination and communication between national and local government and agencies, more decentralization of resource and decision making to enable local agencies to quickly make decisions and develop approaches to meet local needs to allow local volunteers to respond and be supported quickly."

### Local authority and TSI relationship issues

"Less 'ownership' by the local authority and more of a partnership approach."

"Initial discussion between Volunteer Centre and local authority were to have a joint response to a local volunteer support phone line and matching of volunteers to local response groups, however, the local authority decided to keep this in-house due to their concerns regarding info sharing. From subsequent feedback, the response could have been improved by increased partnership coordination to ensure consistency in the volunteer response and avoid duplication of work."

The TSI would have liked to be more involved in the establishment and running of the volunteer hub. "It took far too long for us to be included and receive the data and information that we could have more effectively used."

The creation of the (volunteer response unit) ... unfortunately created an initial disconnect between the informal groups and the TSIs and the support for volunteering.

The problem of public sector colleagues being reassigned into volunteer management/coordination roles during COVID-19, but without the required skills or experience. This highlights the importance of mainstreaming volunteer management training into public sector management training.

- **Local authority and TSI engagement** – for seven local authority areas issues have been highlighted by TSIs relating to the structure and operational response in their area. This relates to a lack of inclusion for TSIs in local structures and systems, and the lack of a partnership philosophy.

The Scottish Government's survey of VIOs also identified problems in local and regional coordination:<sup>1</sup>

- The lack of effective coordination/support from a few of the local authorities was cited.
- Some VIOs had difficulties in knowing which organisations to contact and have received limited or no communication.
- The evidence suggests that the experience of VIOs varies quite markedly across Scotland, with some local authority areas demonstrating more effective coordination and support than others.

## 5.5 The 'Scotland Cares' Campaign

Evidence on the Scotland Cares Campaign has been drawn from the following sources: the views of infrastructure organisations and VIOs from the Scottish Government survey;<sup>1</sup> and interviews with the Scottish Government and SCVO. The analysis has been structured under the following headings:

- Background to Scotland Cares



- Planning the campaign
- Implementation and management
- Impacts of the campaign
- Lessons learned
- Overall assessment

### 5.5.1 Background to the 'Campaign'

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2020 the Scottish Government launched its Scotland Cares Campaign which invited people to register their interest to volunteer via the Ready Scotland website. The objective was to provide one place for potential volunteers to go, to sign up, and to be redirected to local organisations so that if and when they were needed that need could be expressed and met locally.<sup>2</sup> People could sign up via Volunteer Scotland or British Red Cross links and these sign-ups were matched with local needs in a range of organisational settings. The Campaign was paused on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020 because the supply of volunteers outstripped demand. Total volunteer sign-ups were over 60,000 (data sourced from the Scottish Government report):<sup>1</sup>

- 35,262 sign-ups to Volunteer Scotland to support charities and community groups
- 25,172 sign-ups to the British Red Cross to support public services.

Since that date there has been no requirement to re-start the Campaign given the sufficient supply of volunteers locally.

The evidence discussed below is focused on the Volunteer Scotland sign-up channel on the Ready Scotland website, not the British Red Cross channel. The Scottish Government survey questions on Scotland Cares were focused on the role of TSIs and local authorities in handling the sign-ups from Volunteer Scotland channel. Also, there was no interview with the British Red Cross as part of this study.

### 5.5.2 Planning Scotland Cares

**The rationale for a campaign** – based on feedback from interviews with representatives of the Scottish Government the case for a national volunteer campaign was underpinned by the following factors:

- The opportunity to harness people's willingness to help tackle the COVID-19 crisis. It was seen as important to provide a centrally managed sign-up process for all those who wanted to support the COVID-19 response. The goal was to provide a structured route for volunteers, rather than them approaching service providers directly. The model was also seen as a way of managing volunteers' expectations.
- The opportunity to develop a 'bank' of registered volunteers who could be drawn upon flexibly throughout the pandemic as more formal volunteering opportunities opened up. So, the objective was always more than meeting the immediate crisis needs during the first lockdown.

- The strong political pressure on the Scottish Government to take action following the initial 750,000 volunteer sign-ups to the NHS call for a 'Volunteer Army' in England in March 2020. One must be careful not to adopt a revisionist position based on hindsight. There were a lot of unknowns at the time and there were strong pressures on Government to support the voluntary sector's COVID-19 response, and to act promptly:

SCVO also indicated that the Scottish Government was committed to the campaign and to activating it quickly: "It was something that the Government decided was going to happen." "It wasn't really a political option to do nothing."

**Appraising the business case** – it is not known whether the Scottish Government appraised the Scotland Cares proposal and, if so, who was consulted and what aspects it covered. However, it is clear that senior officers had identified the potential problem of an over-supply of volunteers. It always realised that opportunities to volunteer formally would be limited in the short term, especially during the first lockdown. The objective was to build up a reserve of volunteers who could be drawn upon flexibly to help address new needs as the pandemic progressed.

**Consultation with the third sector** – there was limited engagement with Volunteer Scotland and TSIs on the need for the campaign, or to help inform its design. TSI feedback from the Scottish Government survey identified this lack of consultation: <sup>1</sup>

"Asking TSIs if the mass call-out was actually required before releasing such a message. I don't think we would have required it in (our TSI)."

".....more notice of this actually happening would have ensured each TSI was geared up and ready and that we could have circulated our own communications that were relevant to the need in our local areas."

".....I think that lack of communication and involvement of TSIs caused chaos on all levels."

However, Scottish Government and partners needed to respond quickly, and they also were dealing with a situation that no one had ever experienced before. These factors of pace and uncertainty contributed to less consultation than would apply under normal business conditions.

**Designing the sign-up system** – in designing the system there was an initial proposal to set up a completely new portal and registration mechanism, but feedback internally from within Scottish Government and externally from SCVO rejected this approach in favour of using the Ready Scotland website and the cascade of the sign-ups to the TSIs and local authorities.

"And, so ultimately, (the mechanism) did channel, the right people to the right places." (SCVO)

### 5.5.3 Management of the 'Scotland Cares' sign-ups

**Receipt of volunteer sign-ups locally** – from the Scottish Government survey, 90% of TSIs and local authorities confirmed that they had received the sign-up information from Volunteer Scotland, with 10% responding 'no' or 'don't know'.<sup>1</sup> However, from reviewing the qualitative data on Scotland Cares it is likely that the 'no' and 'don't know' response categories result from infrastructure organisations which were not handling the sign-ups for their local area – specifically local authorities. Therefore the 'no' response could just mean that they didn't receive the information, but their partner TSI did. Also, Volunteer Scotland's records show that 100% of volunteer sign-ups were allocated to the 32 local authority areas.

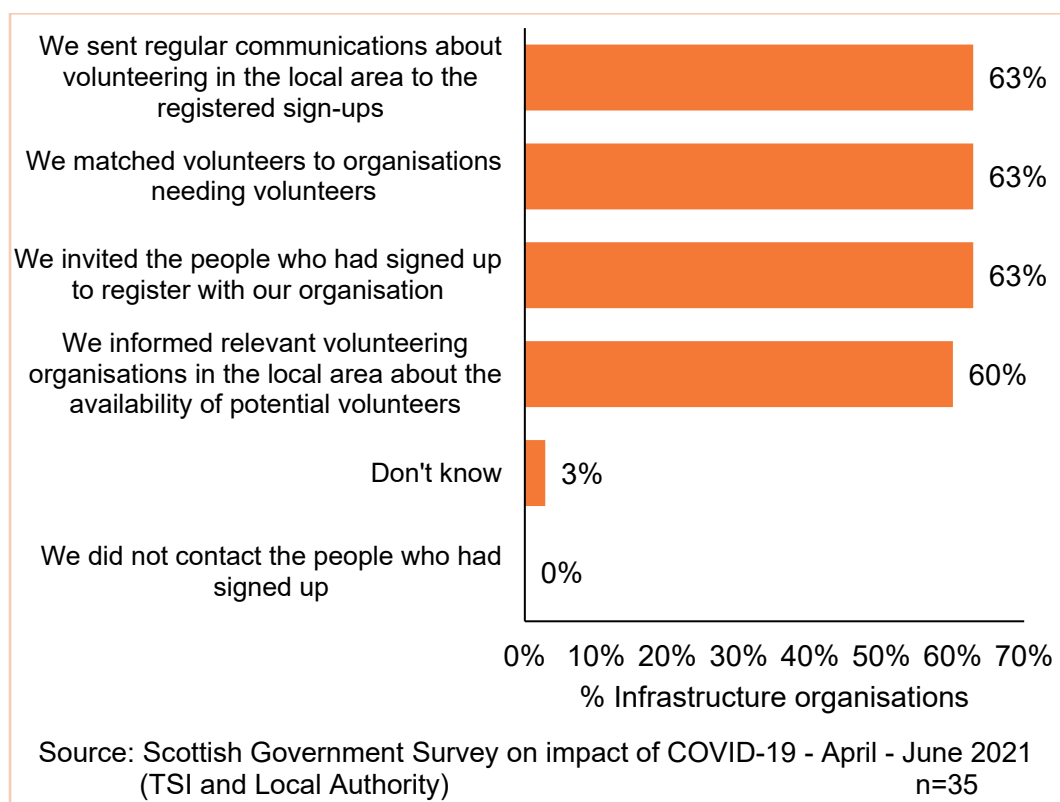
**Feedback on the sign-up distribution process** – Scottish Government believed that a key strength of Scotland Cares was the efficient process for cascading national sign-ups to the local level, with Volunteer Scotland distributing the contact information to relevant contacts in the TSIs and local authorities. Some of the infrastructure organisations were also positive about the sharing of the sign-up information:<sup>1</sup>

"It was useful to receive the spreadsheets from Volunteer Scotland weekly, and with all the details in one place we were able to easily track who we needed to contact and when."

**Management of the sign-ups locally** – the Scottish Government survey revealed that of the 35 infrastructure organisations which confirmed they had received the sign-up data from Volunteer Scotland, all of them contacted the people who had signed up with the possible exception of one 'don't know'.<sup>1</sup> The contact details from the Scotland Cares sign-ups were used in a variety of ways by the infrastructure organisations: see figure 5.5.1.

A number of infrastructure organisations did not know the proportion of sign-ups they registered and the proportion that then went on to volunteer. As a consequence, this data has been excluded in the analysis in Table 5.5.1. (As the 'don't knows' are excluded there is a methodology difference to the Scottish Government survey. Volunteer Scotland has used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge and experience on Scotland Cares). The key findings are:

- A significant proportion of Scotland Cares sign-ups were not registered locally. Forty-six percent of infrastructure organisations registered 50% or less of the sign-ups they received from Scotland Cares. A possible contributory factor for local registration being significantly less than 100% is the two-step process, whereby those who had signed up to Scotland Cares were then being asked to register locally. This may have dissuaded those who were asked to register locally, especially as we know a significant proportion signed up with both the British Red Cross and Volunteer Scotland.
- For the volunteers that were registered locally there was a very low conversion rate to actual volunteer roles. For 76% of infrastructure organisations, 25% or less of their registered sign-ups went on to volunteer. This low proportion is likely to have been significantly influenced by the lack of volunteering opportunities locally – see further discussion below.

**Figure 5.5.1 TSI and Local Authority use of contact details from the Scotland Cares campaign****Table 5.5.1 – Proportion of 'Scotland Cares' volunteer sign-ups registered locally by infrastructure organisations and the proportion that volunteered**

Proportions (that signed up / volunteered)	Registration of sign-ups % of infrastructure organisations (n = 26)	Sign-ups that volunteered % of infrastructure organisations (n = 21)
0%	8%	9%
1 – 25%	19%	67%
26 – 50%	19%	5%
51 – 75%	15%	5%
> 75%	38%	14%

**Note:** The 'not applicable' and 'don't know' responses have been excluded from this analysis, which is a methodology difference to the Scottish Government results. Volunteer Scotland has used this methodology to include only the respondents who had the required knowledge and experience on Scotland Cares.

Source: Scottish Government - Coronavirus (COVID-19) volunteering - third sector perspectives: survey report'; January 2022

### 5.5.4 Impact of Scotland Cares

#### Positive impacts

There were consistent views on the positive aspects of Scotland Cares from infrastructure organisations, the Scottish Government and SCVO, including:

- **Number of sign-ups** – the campaign was seen as a real positive in terms the 60,000 sign-ups as a reflection of the desire from the people of Scotland to help out. It showed the huge appetite to volunteer and participate.
- **Increased volunteering profile** – the campaign raised the awareness of volunteering through mainstream media, which would be difficult to replicate under normal non-crisis conditions.
- **Harnessing the desire to help** – the campaign helped to build and capture the community response.

#### Negative impacts

Notwithstanding these positive impacts there was consensus that the key limitation of Scotland Cares was its inability to deliver volunteering roles for the vast majority of the volunteer sign-ups – an outcome that was mirrored in England. This view was most strongly expressed by the TSIs, which were at the centre of volunteer management and coordination locally. The problem centred on volunteer supply significantly outstripping the demand for volunteers: there were far too many volunteer sign-ups for the number of volunteering opportunities available at that time. Feedback from infrastructure organisations describes the problem and the adverse impacts resulting: <sup>1</sup>

“It energised people to volunteer, which would have been good if we needed them but as it turned out we really only needed a few.”

(the request for help from the public) “.....left many people angry or upset that they were not assigned any tasks, this led to frustration often directed at staff.”

“There seemed to be a mismatch between people coming forward and being matched up with volunteering opportunities, many people who came forward received very little communication and were left feeling unvalued.”

“A great many volunteers were disappointed at not being offered a role and potentially discouraged their future volunteering.”

“We received over a year's worth of volunteers in one go - there was no way we were going to be able to place more than a fraction of them. This resulted in a lot of disappointed volunteers, who couldn't understand why the Government was encouraging them to volunteer, but we were telling them we couldn't place them. This resulted in reputational damage to our organisation, and may mean that people are less likely to volunteer in future.”

SCVO feedback mirrored that of the infrastructure organisations:

“But the weakness was that there wasn't anything for those volunteers to do and it was reputationally risky for everyone. That it was inevitable lots of people would sign up, but not have anything to do in the short term, and that that may have created a sense of frustration.” (SCVO)

The consequence of this demand-supply imbalance was a series of actual and potential negative impacts:

- **The small proportion of volunteer sign-ups that actually volunteered:** evidence from the Scottish Government survey includes: <sup>1</sup>
  - Just 17% of infrastructure organisations agreed that ‘most people who wanted to found volunteering opportunities’; 48% agreed that there were ‘significantly more volunteers than it was possible to place; and 23% said that there were ‘somewhat’ more volunteers than they could place.
  - 76% of infrastructure organisations only managed to convert between 0 – 25% of sign-ups into volunteer roles (see Table 5.5.1 above)
  - Two out of three of the 278 responding VIOs (61%) were aware of the Scotland Cares campaign, but only 5% engaged volunteers through the initiative. The main reason cited for this was that they did not need volunteers.
- **Potential adverse impacts on volunteering:** due to unfulfilled volunteer aspirations which could affect their interest in volunteering in the future.
- **Potential reputational damage:** due to the infrastructure organisations being associated with the failure to deliver volunteer roles for the Scotland Cares sign-ups. The TSIs were particularly exposed to this risk.
- **The management and administrative burden of the Campaign:** Communicating with the sign-ups, registering them and then trying to manage expectations placed a burden on TSIs and partners. Feedback from infrastructure organisations included: <sup>1</sup>

“We did receive a large number of volunteers and contacting them all was a major challenge but we did contact each and every one.”

“...the request for volunteers was too broad and the process of registering was somewhat onerous.”

“.....but it ended up in a lot of people registering nationally as well as locally so created extra work to remove duplications.”



"Options for data management weren't presented to TSIs and it was understood that each TSI should manage the data as best they could, while also adhering to GDPR and their existing procedures."

### 5.5.5 Lessons learned from Scotland Cares

Given the research limitations of the stakeholder consultations relevant to Scotland Cares one must caution against being too prescriptive in drawing up 'lessons learned'. Only four one-to-one stakeholder consultations were conducted with the Scottish Government and SCVO. Hence, the evidence presented is strong in relation to the views of the infrastructure organisations, but more limited regarding Scottish Government, national bodies and funders.

Notwithstanding this evidence gap, it is important to reflect on the views expressed and to put forward what can best be termed 'provisional lessons learned' to help inform future initiatives of this nature.

**Understanding the context** – in assessing Scotland Cares and its performance, Scottish Government stressed the importance of understanding the context and situation during March-May 2020 at the height of the first lockdown. There were major uncertainties over how long the pandemic would last, its unfolding impact, how to balance disease control protocols with support interventions, etc. It is easy to be wise in hindsight, but 'in the moment' the Scottish Government and partners had to make decisions and at pace across a myriad of issues, only one of which was Scotland Cares. Therefore, the business protocols and procedures that would normally be followed in steady state non-crisis times do not necessarily apply when in the midst of an unprecedented global crisis. This 'context' needs to be taken into account when reflecting on the lessons learned below.

**Consultation pre-launch** – as discussed in section 5.5.2 there appears to have been limited consultation with the Government-funded bodies responsible for volunteering in Scotland: Volunteer Scotland and the TSI Scotland Network. Both have specific contributions for a campaign of this nature:

- Volunteer Scotland has a potentially important role in the design and administration of national volunteering programmes.
- TSI Scotland Network has a critical role in assessing volunteering needs at a local level, in advising on the merits of a national campaign, and in informing its design and roll-out.

**Getting the timing right** – as discussed in section 5.5.2 there was a lot of pressure on the Scottish Government to act quickly in the launch of its campaign. However, the feedback from the TSIs and SCVO suggests that giving more time to planning the details of the campaign and giving advance notice to the TSIs would have been beneficial:

TSIs wanted to be sighted in advance on the details of the campaign:

“....far more advance notice regarding when we as TSIs would receive the information, how and what information would be shared,....”<sup>1</sup> (TSI)

SCVO also believed that there would have been significant benefits if Scotland Cares had been delayed giving time to plan the details; in particular being clear about:

“...the specific needs” that it should address. For example, being more realistic about the limited opportunities to volunteer and thinking creatively to: “....find ways to channel what was going to be the inevitable level of interest into a few things that people could have done.... (for example) from home.” (SCVO)

**Collaboration post-launch** – the Scottish Government acknowledged how important collaboration was between the Government and the third sector. The way partners came together to help develop and deliver the Scotland Cares campaign was seen as a real strength - the bridging between Government and the third sector. It was particularly helpful within the context of the COVID-19 challenges: their scale, the lack of information, the risks and uncertainties, and the importance of having to learn real-time as the pandemic unfolded. Scottish Government's trust in third sector representatives was critical in informing and guiding the rollout and management of the Scotland Cares campaign.

**Managing volunteers' expectations:** as already discussed in section 5.5.4 it was recognised that the Scotland Cares campaign was likely to be heavily over-subscribed, so the management of volunteers' expectations was going to be critical. The Ready Scotland website and correspondence from Scottish Government to volunteers all emphasised the stay-at-home message; the fact that there may not be a role in the immediate time frame, but that they may be in the future. This included a number of letters to volunteers and voluntary organisations direct from Aileen Campbell, former Secretary for Communities and Local Government.

“Not all volunteers who have signed up will be needed immediately, but I'd like to stress that volunteers will be critical in our efforts to support and rebuild our communities and many of those who have not yet been called on to help will play a vital role over the weeks and months to come.”  
(Aileen Campbell, former Cabinet Secretary for Communities and Local Government)<sup>2</sup>

SCVO and Volunteer Scotland also tried to manage volunteer expectations through the online sign-up process by making it clear that they may not be used immediately or that there might not be any volunteer opportunities at all for them: “So everything was trying to manage expectations” (SCVO). Also, once signed up, SCVO, Volunteer Scotland, the TSIs and partners tried to find ways to keep the volunteers engaged, and also to maintain their interest in volunteering in the future: for example, the RadioV podcasts delivered by

Volunteer Scotland and the linkage to national volunteering initiatives and support such as mental health training.<sup>6</sup>

However, the evidence shows that there were significant problems in fulfilling volunteers' expectations. For the Scottish Government this was one of the most important lessons learned from the campaign. Despite frequent messaging to the volunteer sign-ups that they might not be needed now, but might be at a future date, this did not seem to get through as effectively as it should have done.

The infrastructure organisations also confirmed the problems they faced in managing the demand for volunteering: <sup>1</sup>

".....we could have done a much better job to ensure the campaign set out more appropriate expectations at the outset: asking people to register in case they were needed at short notice rather than raising everyone's expectations that charities were crying out for people's help there and then."

"An improvement could have been that we "advertised" specific needs when they were identified."

**System design to minimise bureaucracy** – the two-tier system of national sign-ups with Volunteer Scotland and local registration was not efficient for either the TSIs or the volunteer sign-ups. It resulted in duplication and increased workload. There was also duplication and coordination issues with the British Red Cross element of Scotland Cares:

"Most volunteers signed up to both Red Cross and SCVO, were passed by Red Cross to Local Authority and then to us when we already had their details! TSIs were left to sort out the mess and apologise to potential volunteers for their experience." (TSI) <sup>1</sup>

The sharing of volunteering opportunities with the British Red Cross was problematic, especially during the first lockdown:

".....there was some uncertainty over the Red Cross side of things until we organised a meeting with them during second lockdown - we have now established a link that works well, but we missed out on promoting local volunteering opportunities to those who registered to be Red Cross volunteers in the first lockdown." (TSI) <sup>1</sup>

**Don't forget your existing volunteers** – alongside the management and onboarding of new volunteers from Scotland Cares the Scottish Government identified how important it was to acknowledge the contribution of the ongoing volunteering effort across Scotland; all those volunteers who were active before the pandemic but were now supporting society's needs during the pandemic.

### 5.5.6 Overall assessment of Scotland Cares

The Scottish Government's Scotland Cares campaign was developed within a context of strong political pressure for the public sector to take action following the initial 750,000 sign-ups to the NHS call for a 'Volunteer Army' in England in March 2020. There were also major uncertainties over how long the pandemic would last, its unfolding impact, and how to balance disease control protocols with support interventions, etc. This made the planning and delivery of the campaign a challenging exercise. It should also be recognised that the Scotland Cares campaign message included being neighbourly and contributing locally to your community through informal volunteering; not just focused on the formal volunteering sign-up process through the Ready Scotland website.

Scotland Cares achieved over 60,000 sign-ups within a month, and this demonstrated the willingness of Scotland's people to help in tackling the national crisis. It also helped to raise the profile of volunteering.

However, there were three key linked problems resulting from the Scotland Cares campaign:

- The demand-supply imbalance due to the relatively small number of immediately available formal volunteering opportunities compared to the large number of sign-ups, which meant that most applicants did not get the chance to volunteer. This may also have had negative impacts on applicants' perceptions of volunteering and the organisations associated with the Scotland Cares campaign.
- The heavy workload involved in the administration of the Scotland Cares sign-up and registration process administered by Volunteer Scotland nationally, and the 32 TSIs locally across Scotland, often with the support of their local authority. This workload also hit the TSIs in May-June 2020, when they were already incredibly busy.
- The 'window of interest' from volunteer sign-ups was limited, especially after the first lockdown when people came off furlough and started to return to work. Volunteer Scotland's engagement with the sign-ups identified a significant waning of interest.

Based on the evidence reviewed from the different partners consulted it is also quite clear that the potential demand-supply imbalance problem was known in advance of the campaign launch. Therefore, the Scottish Government and partners did their best to try and communicate to the volunteer sign-ups that not everyone would be needed immediately, and it was quite likely their services would be called on in the future.

However, was there sufficient information available during April 2020 when the campaign was being developed, and was it reflected on to make the right call on the launch of Scotland Cares – in that format and at that time? The Scottish Government appears to have been committed to the launch of its campaign, but was it challenged – internally and externally?

As described by SCVO the only way to have impacted the Government's decision or timing of its campaign would have been if:

“...we (infrastructure partners) had been much stronger and saying more volunteers aren't needed just now...but that's a really hard message. And actually, we didn't. Do we have the collective strength to say that? And if we had said that. What would have been the impact on the volunteering infrastructure to say (this) in a time of crisis? Like we don't need volunteers. It was a lose-lose.” (SCVO)

## 5.6 Scottish Government funding provision

Funding support for the third sector was a critical component of the Scottish Government's response to COVID-19 and £350m was invested in communities including significant third sector funds – see mapping tool of community funds: [Community Funding Mapping \(arcgis.com\)](https://arcgis.com).<sup>5</sup> Volunteer Scotland has prepared a summary table of the main funding sources available to third sector organisations: see Appendix 1. This provides links to the full details of the funds and any completed or in progress evaluations. Some of the funds provide breakdowns of the organisations in receipt of funding, by size (using income as a proxy) and geographical coverage.

Not only did this funding help to sustain and support service delivery of third sector organisations, but it also helped to support the key role of volunteers. As evidenced in [sections 6.3-6.6](#), funding is a major issue for both infrastructure organisations and VIOs.

This short sub-section addresses the attributes of the Scottish Government's funding and also identified areas for possible improvement. It draws upon interviews with the Scottish Government and SCVO. The latter organisation has had a key role in supporting the Scottish Government's funding programme, has maintained a comprehensive library of emergency funding resources and has helped to administer some funds.

### 5.6.1 Attributes of funding support

**Effective collaboration with funding partners** – the Scottish Government acknowledged the importance of working with funding partners with the expertise and resource to support the development and operation of the funds. The 'architecture' of the Scottish Government, TSIs and national funders working together was seen as pivotal. This facilitated the prompt and effective distribution of funds from national partners responsible for fund administration to meet the needs of local organisations (small as well as medium/ large) and communities. However, a lot of coordination and management and administrative support is required to achieve this.

**Early provision of funding** – the Scottish Government stated that the speed of fund development and the issue of funds was a key strength at the height of the crisis. The funds were also easily accessible to help organisations keep going and remain viable. This view was supported by SCVO:

“There was lots of money made available very early to support the voluntary sector and volunteering, which was great.” (SCVO)

**Importance of real-time learning** – the Scottish Government stressed the importance of learning as the pandemic unfolded. For example, as time went by the available funding from Scottish Government was significantly more constrained. For the 'Adapt and Thrive' fund in late 2020 /early 2021 there was a stronger evidence-based approach to assess who needs the support and the nature of support that was most appropriate, particularly for trading organisations.

**Flexibility and risk taking** – the need for funds to have sufficient flexibility and to accept a reasonable level of risk were important:

"But I think that it was good to be able to get the money out and doing things and it was flexible.... there was a good level of risk taking and the ability to use the existing infrastructure, trust, people. Open calls for funding....." (SCVO)

**Centralised funding information** – SCVO set up a Funding Hub to coordinate the funding offer to the third sector:

"For us to get that emergency hub up and be constantly kind of interpreting the guidance or communicating the guidance and being the one place where you know information on the funds were all routed through. And, so, it was a bit more coordinated." (SCVO)

**Positive impact of funding** – it was a major factor in helping organisations to survive and face the major financial challenges resulting from COVID-19.

### 5.6.2 Areas for possible improvement

**More time for planning** – while one of the strengths was the fast release of funds, allowing a bit more time to determine what needs each fund was meeting, their specific objectives, and to clearly separate out the funds would have been helpful. Both the Scottish Government and SCVO acknowledged this was an issue. However, given the pressures of a crisis of the scale, complexity and uncertainty of COVID-19 the lack of time for planning may be an unavoidable fact of life.

There is also a separate funding issue highlighted by infrastructure organisations in [Section 6.5](#) relating to the support of core and operational costs of the TSI Scotland Network. However, such funding requests lie outside the boundaries of the funds discussed in this section.



## **References**

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2. Scottish Government news release on the pausing of the Scotland Cares Campaign – 1<sup>st</sup> May 2020: <https://www.gov.scot/news/number-of-volunteer-sign-ups-passes-75-000/>
3. Response, Recovery and Resilience Fund – Foundation Scotland and National Emergencies Trust: <https://www.foundationscotland.org.uk/apply-for-funding/funding-available/rrr-fund>
4. National Voluntary Sector Coordination (NVC) Hub: <https://www.hisengage.scot/media/1960/20210329-nvc-hub-liaison-group-qa-v01.pdf>
5. Scottish Government community funding mapping; Sept 2020: [Community Funding Mapping \(arcgis.com\)](#)
6. RadioV: Bringing Scotland's volunteers together: <https://www.volunteerscotland.net/radio-v/>

Section 6

# After Covid-19

## The Long-Term Recovery



## **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.<sup>1</sup> 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 recovery<sup>2</sup>

- **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.<sup>3</sup>
- **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.

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.<sup>2</sup>

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).<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

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**

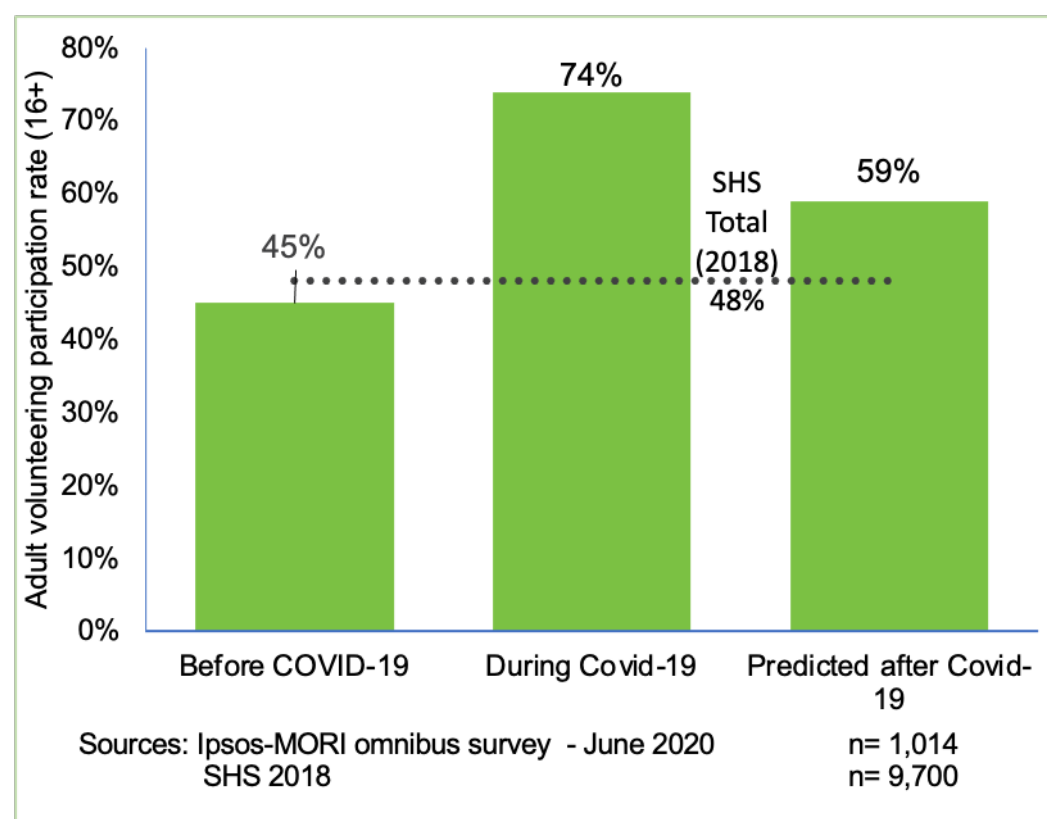
**Total volunteering projection after COVID-19.** As part of the Ipsos MORI survey in June 2020 respondents were asked if they planned to give unpaid help after COVID-19. However, asking people about their future intentions can be a poor indicator of what actually transpires, as there is often the potential 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).<sup>4</sup>

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%.<sup>1</sup> 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.

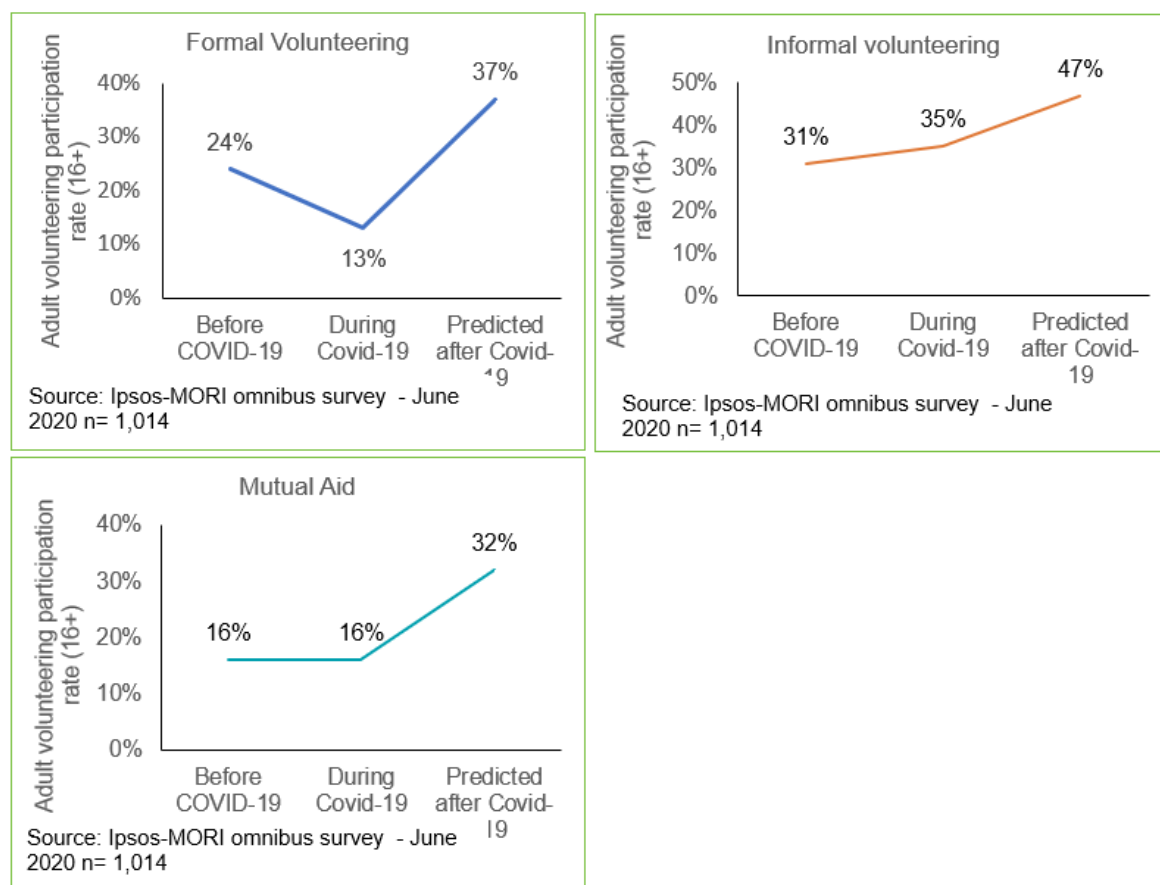
**Figure 6.1.1 – Total adult volunteering participation rates: before, during and after COVID-19**



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.<sup>1</sup>

**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.<sup>1</sup> (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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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).<sup>1</sup> 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 the 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.<sup>1</sup>

- 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.

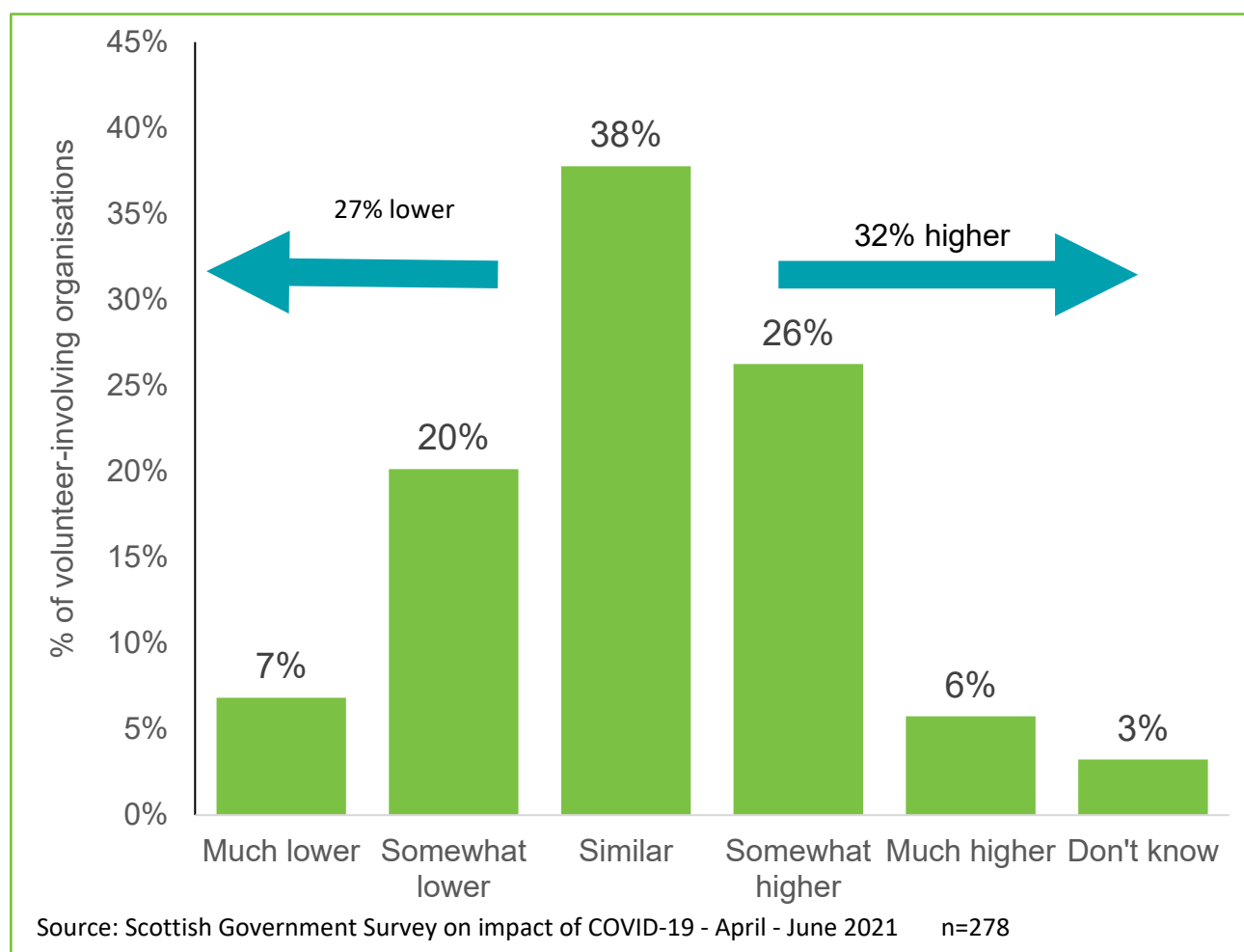
This is an encouraging finding as it demonstrates the potential to engage new and lapsed volunteers as a consequence of volunteers' experience during COVID-19, albeit that the 30% figure is less than the 55% of new and lapsed volunteers during COVID-19.

**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.<sup>1</sup> 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. 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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).<sup>2</sup> 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
<b>Funding</b> (e.g. for volunteer coordinators)	130	48%
<b>Training support for volunteers</b>	32	12%
<b>Digital support</b>	23	8%
<b>Restrictions – interpretation and compliance</b>	19	7%
<b>Recognition and celebration of volunteers</b>	18	7%
<b>Recruitment of volunteers</b>	15	6%
<b>Partnership working</b>	14	5%
<b>Promoting volunteer benefits</b>	12	4%
<b>No support required</b>	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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup>

#### 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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:

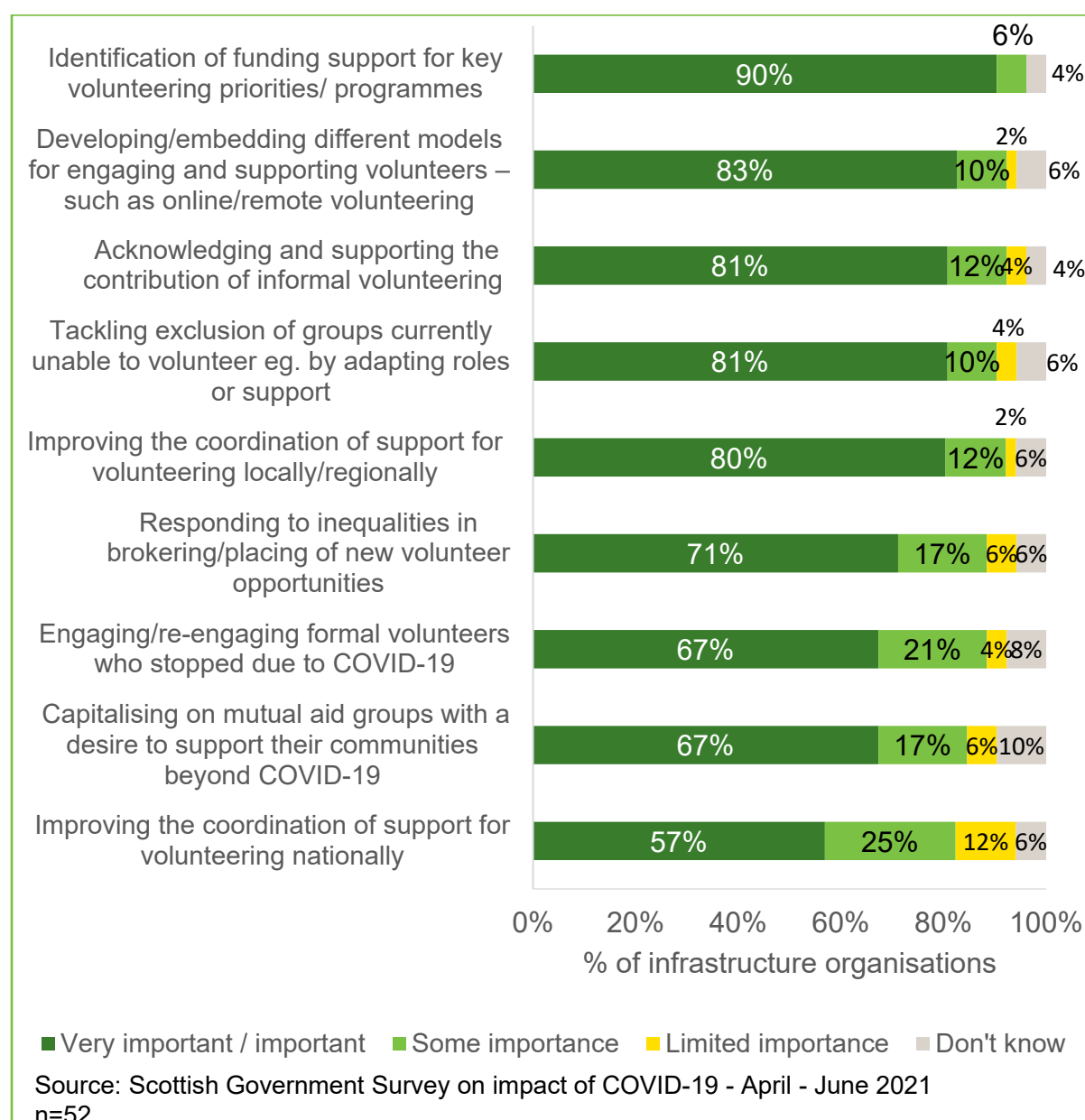
- Identifying funding support for key volunteering priorities/programmes (90%)
- Developing/embedding different models for engaging and supporting volunteers (83%)
- Tackling exclusion of groups currently unable to volunteer (81%)
- Acknowledging and supporting the contribution of informal volunteering (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. 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup>
- 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.<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup>

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

Priority	VIOs	Infrastructure organisations
<b>Funding</b>	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.
<b>Volunteer recruitment</b>	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.
<b>Recognition and celebration</b>	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)
<b>Partnership working</b>	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.
<b>Training support</b>	Supporting and training volunteers to undertake new forms of volunteering (47%)	Developing/embedding different models for engaging and supporting volunteers (83%)

Priority	VIOs	Infrastructure organisations
<b>Health and wellbeing</b>	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)
<b>Digital</b>	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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## Section 7

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# Lessons learned and next steps

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This final section focuses on key lessons learned from Scotland's third sector and the volunteering response to COVID-19 as outlined in Sections 3 – 5. What's worked and can be capitalized upon and what areas could be improved?

It is structured into three sub-sections to answer specific questions:

- 7.1 How to strengthen Scotland's volunteering response for future crises?
- 7.2 How to build on the positive legacy from COVID-19?
- 7.3 How to turn 'evidence into action'?

The analysis in 7.1 and 7.2 is heavily reliant on evidence from the Scottish Government survey dated May 2021 and a word of caution is necessary.<sup>1</sup> Given that Section 7 was written in January 2022, some eight months after the Scottish Government survey, it is quite possible that some of the issues identified may now have been resolved and what are identified as key issues may no longer be priorities. Furthermore, the research methodology under-represented important stakeholder voices such as funders, umbrella organisations and national bodies with expertise relevant to key themes such as community engagement and inclusion.

Therefore, our objective, in partnership with the Scottish Government and the wider sector, is to invite further critical review of the research evidence presented in Section 7, the process for which is outlined in sub-section 7.3.

## **7.1 How to strengthen Scotland's volunteering response for future crises?**

### **7.1.1 Learning from the resilience response of the voluntary sector**

Good communication, coordination of partners, effective partnership working and shared learning were key to the effective resilience response in Scotland's local authority areas. The strong findings from the 'Road to Recovery' report are endorsed by the evidence in 'Shifting the Balance' which provides positive feedback on Scotland's response during the first lockdown:<sup>2</sup>

"Though the depth of implementation and engagement with these frameworks certainly varies in different parts of Scotland, the areas where these structures have had significant focus appear to have found themselves well-positioned to confront a crisis on the scale of the pandemic – and originate new practices in response to it."



However, there are specific lessons to be learned in the following aspects of the resilience response:

- **Long-term resilience** – improving resilience to the longer-term societal challenges exacerbated by a crisis, versus meeting the short-term crisis response. This has implications for the Scottish Government, national and local stakeholders, and VIOs focused on addressing these long-term challenges through formal volunteering.
- **Resilience planning** – the key positives were the policy, strategic and operational commitment from Scottish Government – specifically the preparatory resilience work of the Resilience Division and partners, the suite of guidance documents and the Ready Scotland website. The geographical resilience planning structure was also a strength. Priorities for action are focused on building on the positive trends during COVID-19:
  - Continuing the integration of the voluntary and community sector alongside Category 1 and 2 responders
  - Embedding the voluntary and community sector more effectively in Local Resilience Partnerships (LRPs) and Groups – particularly the TSIs.
  - Supporting those local authority areas where resilience planning needs to be strengthened (there was evidence of variation in engagement in resilience planning across the 32 local authority areas)
  - Promoting the sharing of learning between Local Resilience Partnerships and Groups, including innovative ideas and ways of working.
- **Recognition and support for mutual aid groups** – ensuring that the newfound recognition of mutual aid groups' role in a crisis is retained and that appropriate support is provided:
  - Long-term sustainability – supporting those mutual aid groups that wish to continue their services beyond COVID-19, enabling them to develop creative ways to be sustainable.
  - Risk management – identifying and managing risks such as safeguarding for Protected and Vulnerable Groups; and confidentiality issues relating to GDPR
  - Volunteer safety – ensuring a safe working environment for volunteers.
- **Recognition and support for informal volunteering** – ensuring that the newfound recognition of informal volunteering in a crisis is retained and that appropriate information and guidance is provided to help volunteers remain safe. This includes guidance to support volunteers in helping their neighbours, friends and colleagues – especially local community support focused on crisis needs, and mitigation of social isolation and loneliness.
- **Collaboration and connection** – the more connected communities are in 'steady state' the more resilient they are likely to be when a crisis hits. Partnerships and strong relationships locally are therefore crucial.



“We are pleased with the response to the pandemic, but recognise it was built on partnership with our communities. We need to strengthen this relationship to make us and our communities more resilient to similar situations in the future.” (VIO)<sup>1</sup>

### 7.1.2 Learning from the response of Scottish Government and national level bodies

Scottish Government’s policies and partnership working pre-COVID-19 facilitated the third sector’s response to the pandemic. These strengths included:

- The significant policy and operational focus to build Scotland’s resilience within the third sector;
- The policy direction relating to volunteering which stems from the ‘Volunteering for All: Our National Framework’;<sup>3</sup> and
- The effectiveness of partnership working, and the relationships established between the Scottish Government, the public and third sectors before March 2020.

Furthermore, Scottish Government continued to evolve and enhance its resilience infrastructure and operational support to the third sector during COVID-19. The report ‘Shifting the Balance’ highlighted this contribution:<sup>2</sup>

“Scotland’s government has been working to develop a comprehensive framework to empower communities and civil society organisations to address local issues. The resulting systems have had a significant impact on the way that Scottish localities have been responding to the pandemic.” (Report: ‘Shifting the Balance’)

VIOs were generally very positive regarding the COVID-19 response by Scottish Government and national bodies such as SCVO and Volunteer Scotland.<sup>1</sup> They recognised that these really were ‘unprecedented times’ and that the provision of cross-sector support was complex and that mistakes were made:

“It was unprecedented and while we have all had a moan or two, I don’t think it’s fair to criticise those tasked with making almost impossible decisions.” (Infrastructure organisation)

However, this research has identified important lessons which can be drawn upon in helping Scotland to prepare for future crises, including:

- **National volunteering campaigns** – there are lessons learned from Scotland Cares which can help to inform future initiatives of this nature. There would be merit in Scottish Government and key partners coming together to review the following factors:

- **Consultation pre-launch** – could communication with, and inputs from, the key volunteering organisations in Scotland be improved? This includes Volunteer Scotland, the TSI Scotland Network and other key partners such as SCVO.
  - **Appraisal process** – to review how the campaign was appraised by Scottish Government and what changes, if any, could be effected.
  - **Getting the timing right** – balancing the need to act quickly and decisively versus giving sufficient time for planning the details of such a campaign, giving advance notice to the TSIs, etc.
  - **Collaboration post-launch** – the way Scottish Government and third sector partners came together to help develop and deliver the Scotland Cares campaign was seen as a real strength. There may be lessons that could be capitalised on for future campaigns, events, and relationships more generally.
  - **Managing volunteers' expectations**: how best to manage volunteers' expectations when there are significant variables in a campaign of this nature.
  - **Don't forget your existing volunteers** – alongside the management and onboarding of new volunteers from Scotland Cares it was very important to acknowledge the contribution of the ongoing volunteering effort across Scotland.
- **National leadership** – a key finding from COVID-19 was the positive way in which the Scottish Government and national bodies with responsibility for leadership of volunteering came together to address the challenges of COVID-19. There was a high level of collaboration and at pace, and there is the opportunity to embed this as a lasting legacy, not just for handling future crises, but also building on these strengthened relationships in 'steady state'. However, one aspect that should be reviewed is the structure and modus operandi of a national leadership team for volunteering during a crisis. This includes the organisations to be represented, chairing responsibility and the consensual decision-making model.
  - **Local leadership and coordination** – TSIs' leadership role for volunteering is now much more widely recognised at the local authority level and this needs to be embedded across all areas. Suggestions to further enhance local leadership includes:
    - Developing Scottish Government and national partners' understanding of the services, skills and expertise of TSIs and partners locally – what they can do, how they can help in a crisis and how they can work together more effectively and optimise their contribution in 'steady state'.
    - Scottish Government and national partners' role in facilitating greater autonomy and flexibility at a local level – devolving decision-making and support to TSIs and partners to utilise their local knowledge to best effect. A good example of this was Scottish Government's decision to engage the TSI Scotland Network in partnership with local integrated Health Authorities in the administration and distribution of the £15 million funding from the Communities and Mental Health Wellbeing Fund.<sup>9</sup>

- Local authorities, TSIs and partners facilitating community planning and action at the sub-local authority level, giving a more localised approach.
- **Clarity in leadership and support roles:**
  - Clarity in responsibilities between national, local and community organisations – especially leadership roles versus support roles
  - Enhanced cascade of responsibilities from national, to local, to community. Focus on understanding needs and priorities for action locally, and the support required by local/community groups and local partners to help deliver this.
- **Funding** – lessons learned in the provision of funding support during a crisis include:
  - Recognition of the vital role played by infrastructure organisations during the pandemic and their ongoing funding needs to enable them to support VIOs and volunteers in the recovery and the future (specifically TSIs and national umbrella bodies)
  - More long-term funding and sustained support to enable organisations to plan and develop their work to better support their users and clients. This builds upon Scottish Government's commitment to multi-year funding.<sup>11</sup>
  - Speed of the funding response during a crisis is important – but a balance has to be struck in taking sufficient time 'to get it right'
  - Flexibility, innovation and creativity in funding for the sector, including provision of unrestricted funding – see findings on 'Good Grant Making' from wider UK research.<sup>5</sup> (Note: Scottish Government has provided a proportion of unrestricted funding during COVID-19, and it is important to maintain a balance between restricted and unrestricted funding.)
  - Funding targeted at supporting volunteer management and coordination by VIOs, which was identified as a top priority during COVID-19.
- **Information and guidance** – dissemination of clear and concise information, advice and guidance by Scottish Government and/or national partners to facilitate the mobilisation of volunteers by VIOs and mutual aid groups, and those volunteering informally. The priority in a crisis is to understand the impacts on the community and service users and how VIOs, staff and volunteers need to respond:

"The voluntary sector has been essential during the pandemic and if it were to happen again good, clear guidance for the sector on what can and can't be done is a priority."

- **Partnership approach to plan for future crises** – to complement national and local resilience planning:
  - Continue to build on the integration of the voluntary sector and volunteering response to future crises into national and local resilience planning – encompassing the contribution from formal volunteering, mutual aid and informal volunteering.

- Identify and engage key partners now and build on existing collaborations. Bring partners together to help plan the response for future crises.
- Being clear that partners' involvement in crisis planning brings with it an obligation to help lead and coordinate the voluntary sector's response for future crises.
- Learn from the work of the Social Renewal Advisory Board's Communities and Volunteering Circle recommendations.<sup>4</sup>

### 7.1.3 Learning from the response of infrastructure organisations (within local authority areas)

Infrastructure organisations came together in the face of the crisis in a way that had not happened in 'steady state'. This local collaboration was characterised by partners tackling a shared challenge with effective team working at the centre. A key aspect of this collaboration was the recognition by local partners of TSIs' leadership and expertise in volunteering. However, this response was not uniform across the 32 local authority areas and there are important lessons which can be built upon:

- **Local authority and TSI engagement** – in seven local authority areas there was evidence of a lack of inclusion of TSIs in local structures and systems. Infrastructure organisations pointed to a lack of partnership philosophy and the need for more collaboration and shared ownership.
- **Local partnership working and communication** – 40% of VIOs rated the wider coordination of the volunteering response between different organisations in the areas or sectors in which their organisation worked to be 'limited' or 'none'. Lessons learned included:
  - The need for better communication and collaboration between the Council, TSIs and the local resilience groups in some areas
  - More formal links with community councils and volunteering organisations as 'signed-up members' of the local partnership
  - Recognition and support for local mutual aid groups as an integral part of local collaboration.
- **The role of the TSI Scotland Network** – the evidence highlights the importance of the TSI Scotland Network and its contribution during the pandemic – it was now 'working as a Network' and this needs to be retained and built upon to support the third sector and volunteering in the future:

"Working with and support from the TSI network was invaluable during the pandemic. TSIs were able to co-ordinate our responses, share briefings and offer additional support." (TSI perspective)

- **Community leadership** – TSIs and local partners should recognise the importance of community-led action – with TSIs facilitating rather than leading at the community level:
  - More community and local level communication and engagement
  - Communities are best placed to support themselves – they know where the needs are and where the gaps in provision exist (reference to the role of mutual aid groups and community groups).
  - Additional support for smaller, local and community groups and for these groups to be included in local area decision making.
  - Ensuring that policies and campaigns are adapted to the needs of local areas.
- **Contingency planning to be in place** - infrastructure organisations (26%) recognised the need to have contingency plans, protocols and infrastructure in place that could be initiated in the event of a major incident, such as the COVID-19 pandemic:
  - “We would like to plan and connect with other organisations rather than just reacting to an emergency....”
  - “We want to put things in place now, resilience planning, registrations and training in communities that will ensure that we are better able to support the identification of individuals, organisations and opportunities to maximise investment if necessary in the future. We are a more active part of the resilience planning process now and that will make a big difference.”

#### 7.1.4 Learning from the response of Volunteer Involving Organisations

VIOs identified key areas of learning to take forward in the recovery and in their response to future crises:

- **Contingency planning** – this was on two levels:
  - Planning by infrastructure organisations to support VIOs in their preparedness for future crises – including funding models.
  - Planning by VIOs themselves in terms of potential impacts from future crises – such as maintaining service delivery, premises provision (or alternatives for virtual delivery), the role of digital technology, etc.
- **Recognition and celebration** – increased recognition and celebration of volunteers and volunteering by VIOs (but this applies to other stakeholders as well – see discussion in 7.2.4).
- **Health and wellbeing** of staff and volunteers – this is a key issue for any major future long-term crisis such as COVID-19. Importantly, this includes the health and wellbeing of trustees, which is often neglected.

- **Supporting volunteers** – the importance of supporting volunteers during a crisis. COVID-19 has shown the major challenges volunteers have faced both from the virus itself, the compliance with restrictions and in the execution of their volunteering roles. This necessitates comprehensive support as illustrated by this VIO:

“Offering support, ensuring the wellbeing of volunteers, and keeping volunteers engaged, informed and their motivation to remain was challenging.” <sup>1</sup> (VIO)

## **7.2 How to build upon COVID-19’s volunteering legacy?**

This sub-section examines the potential to embed a longer-term legacy from COVID-19. This includes not just the opportunities that could be capitalised upon, but also the challenges which need to be addressed. These opportunities and challenges are relevant to a post-recovery period of ‘steady state’ conditions, compared to the actions required for facing future crises (the focus of sub-section 7.1). Unsurprisingly, a few of the actions recommended in 7.2 are similar to those listed in 7.1

### **7.2.1 Engaging new volunteers and returners**

COVID-19 highlighted a big change in volunteering engagement in Scotland. Particularly during the first lockdown there was a major upsurge in interest in volunteering and the total adult volunteering participation rate increased from 45% pre-COVID to 74% for the period April - June 2020 (Ipsos MORI survey).<sup>6</sup> The Scottish Household Survey 2020 confirmed this sea-change in volunteering participation with the total adult volunteering participation increasing from 48% in 2018 to 64% in 2020.<sup>10</sup>

However, all of the increase in the SHS participation rate was accounted for by informal volunteering up to 56%, with the formal volunteering participation rate remaining static at 26%. Furthermore, this latter figure is likely to have been ‘inflated’ by those volunteering through mutual aid groups. Therefore, for formal volunteering COVID-19 has presented major challenges in volunteer engagement.

**Volunteer recruitment** – the Scottish Government survey in May 2021 highlighted how important volunteer recruitment is for both VIOs and infrastructure organisations as we go down the road to recovery.<sup>1</sup> An increased supply of formal volunteers will be a key facilitator in the growth and sustainability of the third sector. The opportunity is not just to engage former volunteers, but to capitalize on the interest of those new to volunteering, such as the increased engagement by younger people.

**Inclusive volunteering** – encouraging and supporting inclusive volunteering, including trying to tackle barriers to access that may have been exacerbated by COVID-19, was identified as a priority for the recovery of the third sector by infrastructure organisations.<sup>1</sup> However, VIOs have been seriously challenged by the pandemic and inclusive volunteering was not seen as a priority for the majority during the height of the pandemic.



However, a clear priority for the longer term is a more inclusive volunteering environment in Scotland, which supports the attainment of the Volunteering for All Outcome: “There are diverse, quality and inclusive opportunities for everyone to get involved and stay involved”.<sup>3</sup>

### 7.2.2 Addressing key societal challenges

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of the third sector and volunteering in combatting long-term societal challenges. In particular:

- Mental and physical ill-health
- Social isolation and loneliness
- Poverty and homelessness
- Those suffering abuse, addiction
- Etc., etc.

The third sector’s response has also highlighted how important this contribution is in helping to alleviate these societal challenges. This contribution needs to be recognised and supported by Government Departments, agencies and funders in ‘steady state’ – not just in response to the pandemic.

**Support for volunteering** is essential across the spectrum of volunteering engagement:

- Formal volunteering – the bedrock of support for the more complex needs:
  - 50% of the VIOs surveyed had undertaken befriending or had kept in touch with people who were at risk of being lonely during the first lockdown. This only decreased to 48% during the second lockdown.
  - 42% of VIOs had helped to support people’s physical or mental health during both the first and second lockdowns.<sup>1</sup>
- Mutual aid volunteering – for services linked to ongoing crisis support needs such as food banks/distribution
- Informal volunteering – in supporting those who are isolated and lonely. The ‘keeping in touch’ with friends and neighbours – to support more connected communities.

**Funding and national level support** - the pandemic has highlighted how Scottish Government and key partners can mobilise funding quickly in the face of a national crisis to support the vital role of the voluntary sector and volunteering during a crisis.

However, there is a need to embed this enhanced appreciation of what the voluntary sector can contribute, and the fact that national level support is critical to this – both financial and non-financial (information, guidance, toolkits, collaboration, etc.). This is all the more important given that these societal challenges are long-term and won’t ‘go away’ once COVID-19 is under control.

- VIOs also highlighted their concerns over the funding environment, the pressures this exerted on their organisations and the need for improvements in the funding model: The majority noted that “funding is a constant source of uncertainty”.<sup>1</sup>

- “...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.”

**Influencing funders** - there would be merit in bringing together a representative group of funders to discuss how to improve 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 issues for consideration include:

- Security in funding with longer-term, multi-year commitments
- 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’.
- Flexibility, innovation and creativity in funding for the sector.

Consideration also needs to be given to the funding needs not just of VIOs, but also of infrastructure organisations. There has been an increased recognition of the vital role played by infrastructure organisations during the pandemic, and it is appropriate to review their ongoing funding needs to enable them to support VIOs and volunteers; not just for the recovery but also over the long term. (See also discussion of funding in 7.1.2)

### 7.2.3 Uptake of digital technology

COVID-19 has required very significant adaptation of service delivery models by VIOs to try and maintain business continuity and, in many cases, the very survival of their organisation. Top of these adaptations has been the use of phone/digital platforms, with 56% of VIOs surveyed moving some or all of their activities online in Scotland.<sup>1</sup>

The priority is to capitalize on the digital benefits for volunteer coordination and service delivery going forward. The benefits include:

- Improved reach with volunteers and service users:
  - Additional beneficiaries being reached – especially in remote locations
  - Attracting a wider geographical pool of volunteers
- Improved communication and team working with volunteers and staff (especially when working over a large geography)
- The delivery of benefits for both rural and urban areas
- The ability of digital technology to support new and enhanced services
- The cost savings and reduced carbon footprint from digital technology.

However, there is also a need to recognise the limitations of digital technology. The switch to digital was no universal panacea and there were significant challenges for many VIOs:

- Volunteers’ lack of digital skills
- The exclusion of beneficiary groups such as older adults, disabled people and those excluded due to the cost/lack of equipment

- The basic fact that many services are not suited to online delivery. Face-to-face engagement remains critical for so many services.

## 7.2.4 Recognition and celebration of volunteering

**VIO support** – COVID-19 has had a significant impact on VIOs' appreciation and recognition of the contribution of their own volunteers.<sup>1</sup> The pandemic reaffirmed the vital importance that volunteers have within VIOs, within the communities they serve and within Scotland's response to COVID-19. It is therefore important for all VIOs to fully recognize the contribution of their volunteers and to demonstrate this internally (to volunteers, staff and trustees) and externally to their stakeholders – not just during a crisis but on an ongoing basis.

**Government and national level support** – in the Scottish Government survey VIOs identified the need for increased recognition of volunteering and the value of volunteers, not just by VIOs themselves, but also by the Scottish Government, its agencies, local government and businesses.<sup>1</sup>

### Support from Government & infrastructure organisations

"Greater recognition of [the] value of volunteering to [the] community by Government agencies." (VIO)

"We need local and national government to build confidence and encourage people/organisations to restart volunteering projects again across Scotland". (VIO)

"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." (VIO)

**Linkage to inclusive volunteering** – VIOs also highlighted the disproportionately important role which recognition has in supporting a more inclusive volunteering outcome:<sup>1</sup>

"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."

**Infrastructure organisations' support** – 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'".<sup>1</sup> For infrastructure organisation's this recognition and celebration role is usually seen as a shared responsibility with partners, even if they are the leaders in this area.

### 7.2.5 Collaboration of national and local infrastructure organisations

Infrastructure organisations noted the importance of both continuing and strengthening the partnership working that had taken place during COVID-19 (see further discussion in 7.1.3):<sup>1</sup>

- TSI Scotland Network – building upon the gains made in the effective operationalization of the Network during COVID-19
- TSI and local authority engagement – building upon the improved collaboration and joint working in relation to volunteering – in structures such as Community Planning Partnerships and Local Resilience Partnerships
- Scottish Government and national bodies – to improve the communication channels with the TSIs and local partners – specifically giving a clearer voice to the TSI Scotland Network in national planning matters relating to the third sector and volunteering.
- Strengthening specific local authority areas where progress during COVID-19 has been weaker.

VIOs also identified the importance of sharing data, expertise and resources between partners more effectively – both locally and nationally.<sup>1</sup>

### 7.2.6 Community engagement

**Stronger and more resilient communities** – one of the remarkable features of the pandemic has been people’s willingness to contribute through mutual aid and informal volunteering. The positive community impacts include bringing people together, developing new connections and better relationships, supporting one another and just kindness. What was also interesting was how much this contribution was recognised and valued by the infrastructure organisations in Scotland whose focus pre-pandemic was largely formal volunteering. However, the challenge going forward is how best to foster and support this new spirit of community engagement.

The infrastructure organisations put forward specific suggestions to build stronger and more resilient communities through volunteering, including:<sup>1</sup>

- Working with communities to continue to see volunteering as an important aspect of community life.
- The provision of community hubs and support staff to ensure that those people who need the assistance get it.
- Continue to build the ‘Volunteer Brand’ in local communities which provides a volunteer focused/community-based platform for local people to engage with.
- Infrastructure organisations to undertake needs-based assessment of their local communities to determine how best to support groups/ volunteers and develop more resilient communities.
- Provision of additional funding to support community groups in their recovery.

Infrastructure organisations also acknowledged the opportunity to make Scotland's communities more inclusive, and to capitalise on the contributions from informal volunteering and mutual aid. Specific programmes of support are planned or underway by the TSIs and partners and the learning from these interventions should be shared locally, regionally and nationally as appropriate.<sup>1</sup>

**Youth volunteering** – a number of infrastructure organisations were “*particularly concerned about young people*” and how the pandemic had impacted upon their opportunities to volunteer.<sup>1</sup> Rejuvenating youth volunteering was identified as a priority area for some of the infrastructure organisations in the aftermath of the pandemic:

- Working with statutory partners and VIOs 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 that was done by young people over the course of the pandemic.
- Engaging young people, for example through the Youth Guarantee Scheme, and a youth employability proposal.

### **7.3 How to turn evidence into action?**

Scotland benefits from having the Third Sector Unit in Scottish Government, which has a specific responsibility for volunteering. It was this Unit which led the development of the ‘Volunteering for All: Our National Framework’ published in April 2019. It provides a broad strategic framework which is currently being developed into a Volunteering Action Plan for Scotland. Therefore, the timing of the MVA study is fortuitous as its findings will help inform the development of the new 10-year Volunteering Action Plan (VAP).

To help this process of ‘evidence into action’, the Road to Recovery report concludes with suggested guidance in four areas:

#### **(i) Critical assessment and stress-testing of priorities for action**

The lessons learned and priorities for action outlined in Section 7 need to be reviewed, stress-tested and, where appropriate, developed further. In some areas the recommended course of action is straightforward and unequivocal; but in other areas the priorities over exactly what should be done is much less clear-cut. It must also be remembered that the evidence from the Scottish Government's survey, upon which a lot of the findings in Section 7 are based, is now eight months old. There is also a need to reflect on priorities for action from linked and complementary initiatives such as the valuable recommendations from the Social Renewal Advisory Board and the Communities and Volunteering Circle.<sup>2</sup>

## (ii) Knowledge exchange activities

In addition to Scottish Government and national bodies such as Volunteer Scotland and SCVO, it will be essential to engage key stakeholders in the review process. As a minimum this should include representatives of TSI Scotland Network, local authorities, national sectoral bodies, funders and VIOs. The focus should be on:

- Reviewing and developing the priorities for action
- Informing the process for the implementation of the actions.

The current VAP structure could play a vital role in this regard as its members include representation from all of the stakeholder groups listed above. To assist the five VAP outcome-based Working Groups the Navigation Guide in [Section 1](#) identifies the sections of the report most relevant to their specific outcomes:

- Lifelong engagement
- Policy
- Recognition and celebration
- Places and spaces
- Inclusive volunteering

The Governance Group could also play a key overarching role in the assessment of the evidence and the prioritisation of actions.

## (iii) Wider dissemination

It will also be important to share the 'Road to Recovery' findings more widely and Volunteer Scotland will work with the Scottish Government and key partners to support this dissemination process through social media, events and through the engagement of forums such as the Scottish Volunteering Forum and the Cross-Party Group for Volunteering.

## (iv) New evidence – an ongoing process

Finally, there must be an ongoing review of evidence on volunteering participation and community engagement to inform our understanding and learning about the long-term impact of COVID-19 on Scotland's third sector. The Scottish Third Sector Tracker will play an important role in monitoring the longer term impacts of COVID-19 on the third sector in Scotland.<sup>8</sup> The Tracker is run by an independent research company called DJS Research on behalf of SCVO, the Scottish Government, the William Grant Foundation and the National Lottery Community Fund. The Tracker collects quarterly panel data from Scottish third sector organisations to give current insights into the state of the sector, key trends, and developments. The first wave of the Tracker was completed by 585 third sector organisations based or operating in Scotland. A further five waves of the survey are planned, up to November 2022.



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## **Appendix 1 – Table of Community Support Funding**

Scottish Government COVID-19 funding administered by Third Sector Unit and Social Justice and Regeneration Unit which was directed at third sector and community organisations.

The funds in this table are illustrative of some of the £350m package of Communities Support funding announced on 18 March 2020 more detail of which can be found here: [Supporting communities funding: speech by Communities Secretary 18 March 2020 - gov.scot \(www.gov.scot\)](https://www.gov.scot/news/communities-secretary-18-march-2020/)

Fund	Objective	Launched	Funds awarded	Administered by
Supporting Communities Fund	To underpin the underway in neighbourhoods and communities and that is essential to the nation's resilience.	April 2020	<p>A total of £19.7 million was awarded. This total includes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community Anchor organisation investment</li> <li>• Business Improvement District (BID) Resilience funding and</li> <li>• Towns and BID Resilience and Recovery funding</li> </ul>	Scottish Government
Third Sector Resilience Fund	To support voluntary organisations whose ability to raise income was affected by lockdown. The fund ensured that organisations could pay essential costs such as rent, utilities and staffing costs.	March 2020	The Third Sector Resilience Fund (TSRF) closed for applications on Friday 11th September, having awarded grants totalling £22.65 million to over 1,300 organisations	Firstport

Wellbeing Fund	To provide support to third sector partners and those who require additional capacity to deal with the societal challenges caused by self-isolation or distancing and compounding the vulnerability of those already living in difficult circumstances, for example those experiencing fuel poverty, or those at risk of or experiencing homelessness.	March 2020	In total £37.8m was awarded from the Wellbeing Fund. This includes money distributed via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Two rounds of public bid-in funding</li> <li>• Direct support to TSIs and charities and</li> <li>• The Immediate Priorities fund</li> </ul>	Scottish Government, SCVO, Corra Foundation, Inspiring Scotland, The Hunter Foundation and the TSIs
Community & Third Sector Recovery Programme	To support charities, community groups, social enterprises and voluntary organisations that are supporting people and communities through the shift from lockdown to recovery. The programme has two strands: <b>Adapt &amp; Thrive</b> and <b>Community Recovery Fund</b> . Adapt & Thrive built capacity to help organisations adapt, change, and thrive post COVID-19. The Communities Recovery Fund is grant funding to deliver support and services in communities.	September 2020	<b>Adapt &amp; Thrive</b> closed in July 2021. Awards totalling £30.7m were made to 889 organisations..  The Community Recovery Fund continues to make awards through a targeted approach with over £13.6m awarded to nearly 700 organisations so far.	Scottish Government, SCVO, Corra Foundation, Firstport, Just Enterprise, Community Enterprise and Social Investment Scotland

## **Appendix 2 – List of Abbreviations**

- GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation
- HSCP – Health and Social Care Partnership
- liV – Investing in Volunteers
- LRPs – Local Resilience Partnerships
- MVA – Mobilising Voluntary Action
- NET – National Emergencies Trust
- NVC – National Voluntary Sector Coordination (Hub)
- OSCR – Office of Scottish Charity Regulator
- PPE – Personal Protective Equipment
- PVG – Protecting Vulnerable Groups
- RRP – Regional Resilience Partnerships
- SCDC – Scottish Community Development Centre
- SCIO – Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation
- SCVO – Scottish Council for Voluntary Organisations
- SEFAB – Scottish Emergencies Funding Advisory Board
- SHS – Scottish Household Survey
- SIMD – Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation
- SRAB – Social Renewal Advisory Board
- SRP – Scottish Resilience Partnership
- TSIs – Third Sector Interfaces
- TSOs – Third Sector Organisations
- UCAS – Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
- VAP – Volunteering Action Plan
- VCS – Voluntary and Community Sector
- VCSAG – Voluntary and Community Sector Advisory Group
- VFA – Volunteering For All
- VIOs – Volunteer Involving Organisations
- VIP – Volunteering Innovation Project (ref. youth)
- VSRP – Voluntary Sector Resilience Partnership
- VSRGs – Voluntary Sector Resilience Groups