



INSIGHT HUB

BULLETIN #30

When Systems Fail: The Impact on Migration Services and Communities



SOURCE: Data taken from Hub Survey 30 collected from April-May 2026

DATA DISCLAIMER PLEASE NOTE: The data in this bulletin is based on the responses from organisations who participated in the survey. The sample group is small and therefore the results shown in this report may contain bias and should be used as indicative only. Please contact the Hub team for any validation and verification required.

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INTRODUCTION

This survey provides a snapshot of the current challenges facing migration services across the UK, based on responses from 31 organisations supporting asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. It highlights growing pressures linked to legal insecurity, housing instability, destitution, and increasing risks for both service users and frontline organisations.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[Survey 30](#), which was conducted in April–May 2026, provides an overview of the current state of migration services across the UK, drawing on responses from 31 organisations supporting asylum seekers, refugees, and migrants. The findings highlight growing pressures on both service users and frontline organisations, driven by legal insecurity, housing instability, rising destitution, and increasing systemic risk.

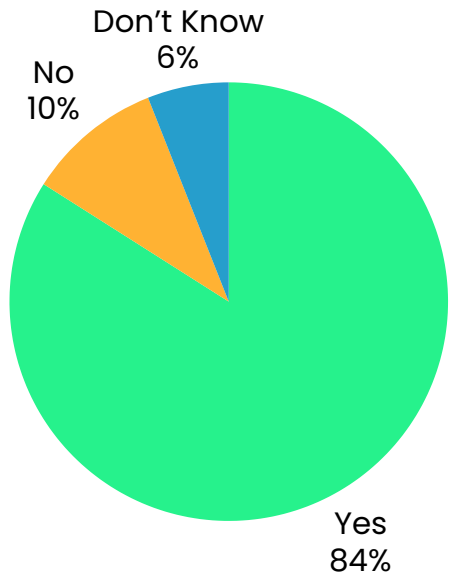
The report identifies significant barriers to accessing legal support, alongside mounting operational challenges that are limiting organisations' capacity to respond effectively. It also highlights the worsening impact of housing shortages and poverty on migrant communities, with many organisations reporting increased demand for crisis support.

Across all sections, respondents describe a climate of uncertainty, fear, and mistrust affecting both staff and service users, compounded by ongoing policy changes and heightened exposure to risk for people with lived experience. The survey underscores the resilience of the sector while pointing to the urgent need for improved resources, coordination, and long-term policy responses.

ORGANISATION PROFILE

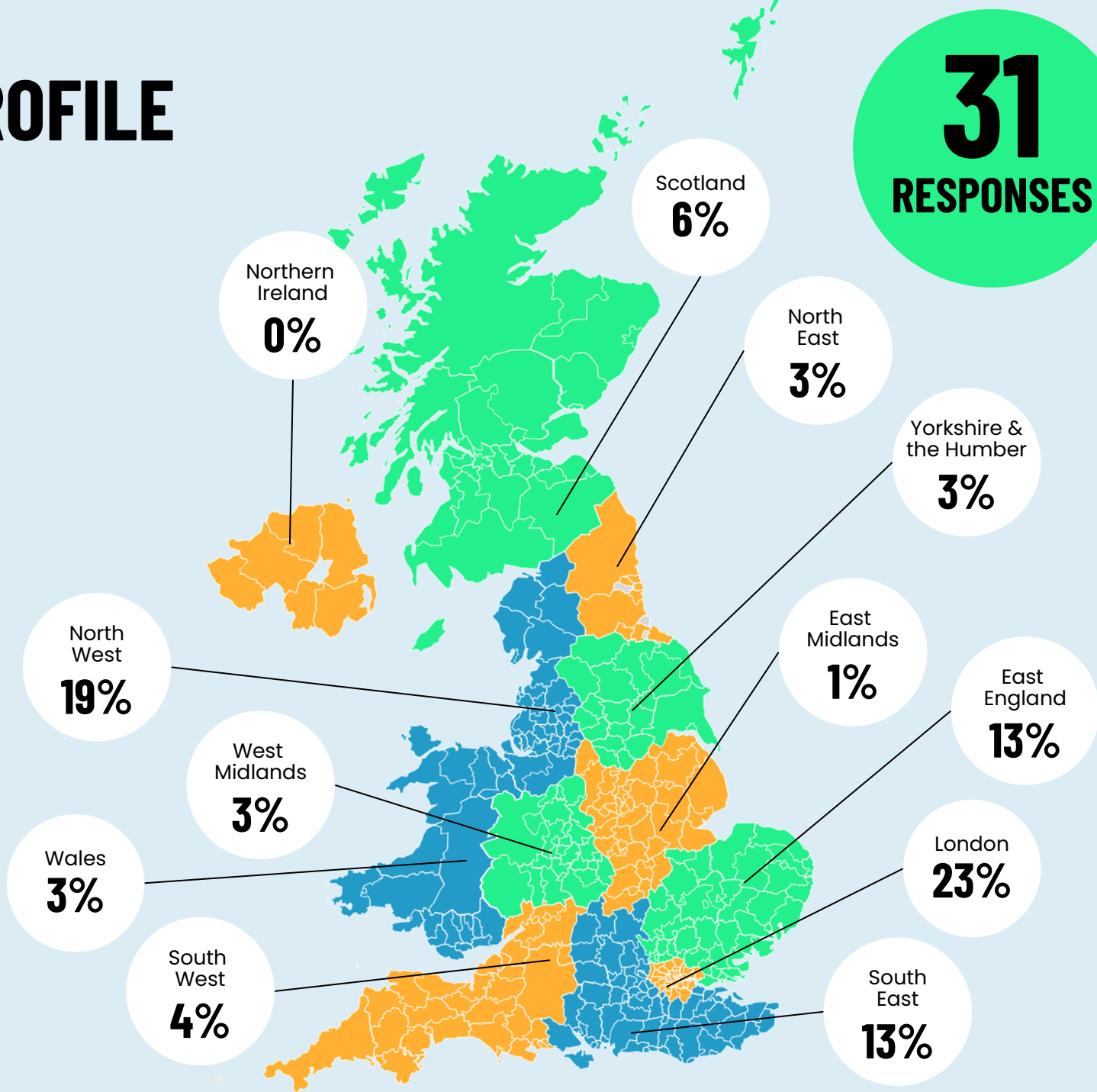
31
RESPONSES

Is your organisation a third/voluntary/non-profit sector?

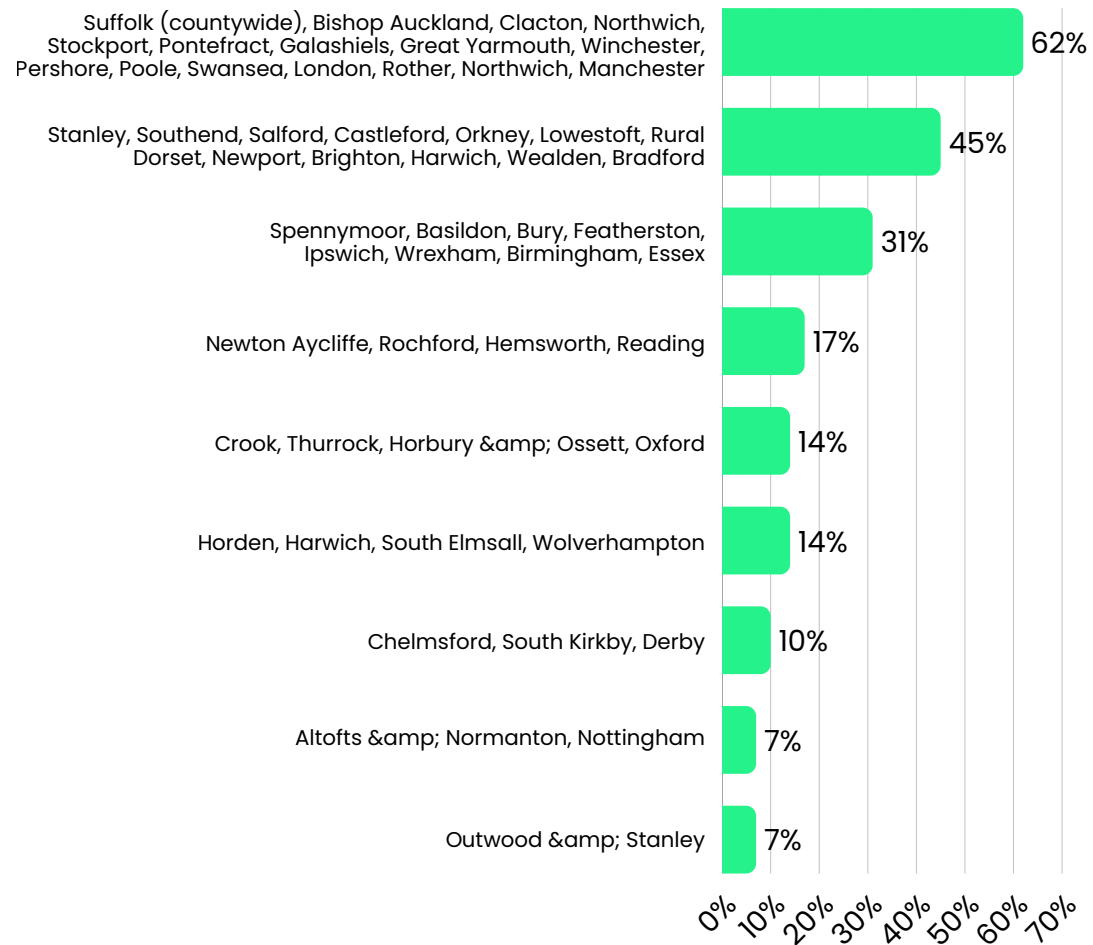


UK-wide
6%

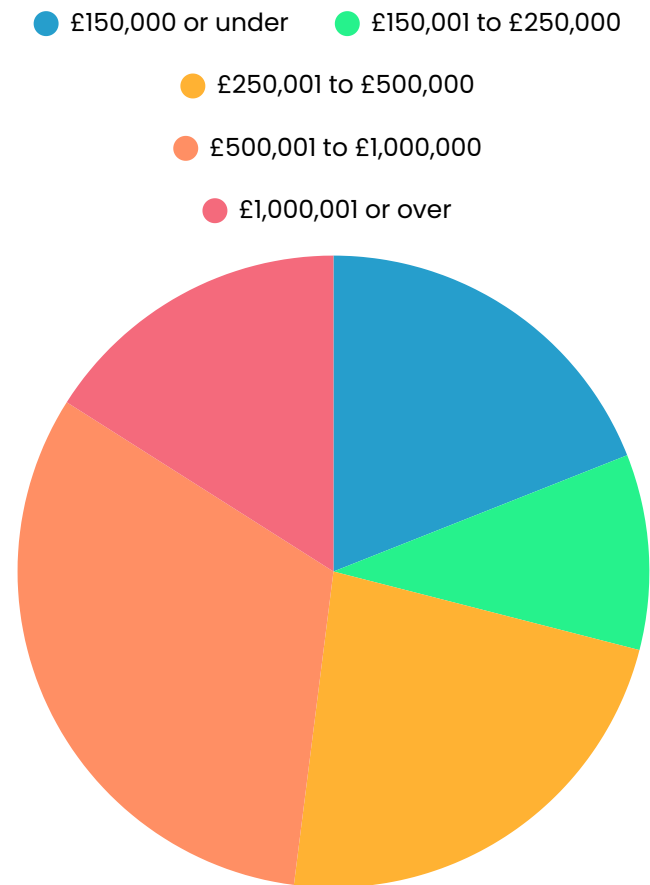
England all regions
3%



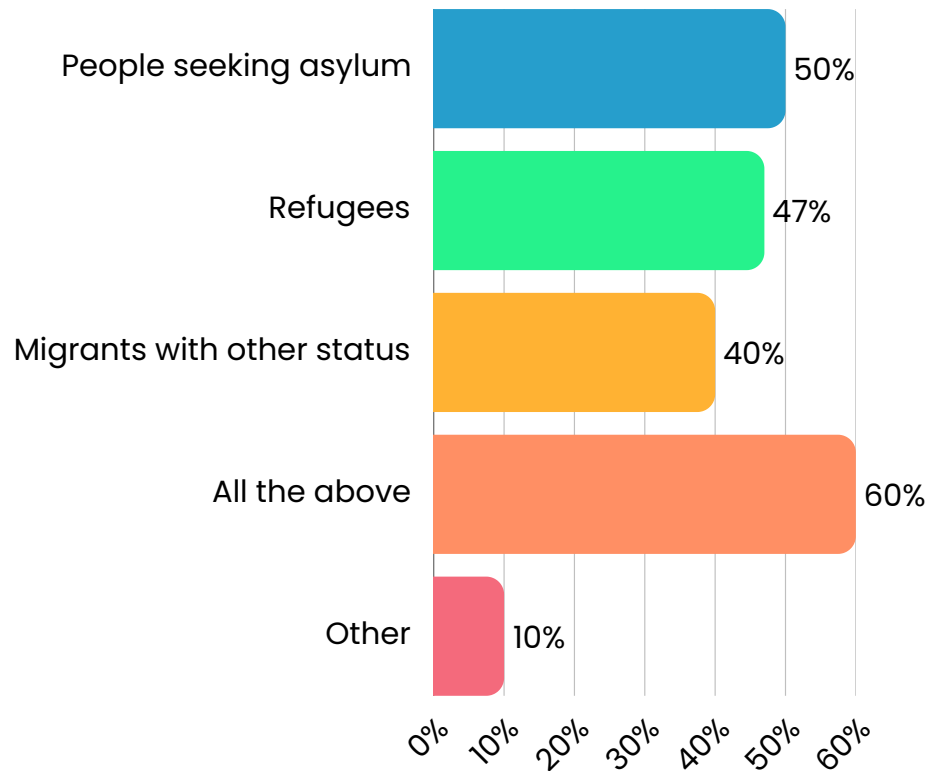
In which city(s) and town(s) is your service based?



What is your organisation's annual turnover?

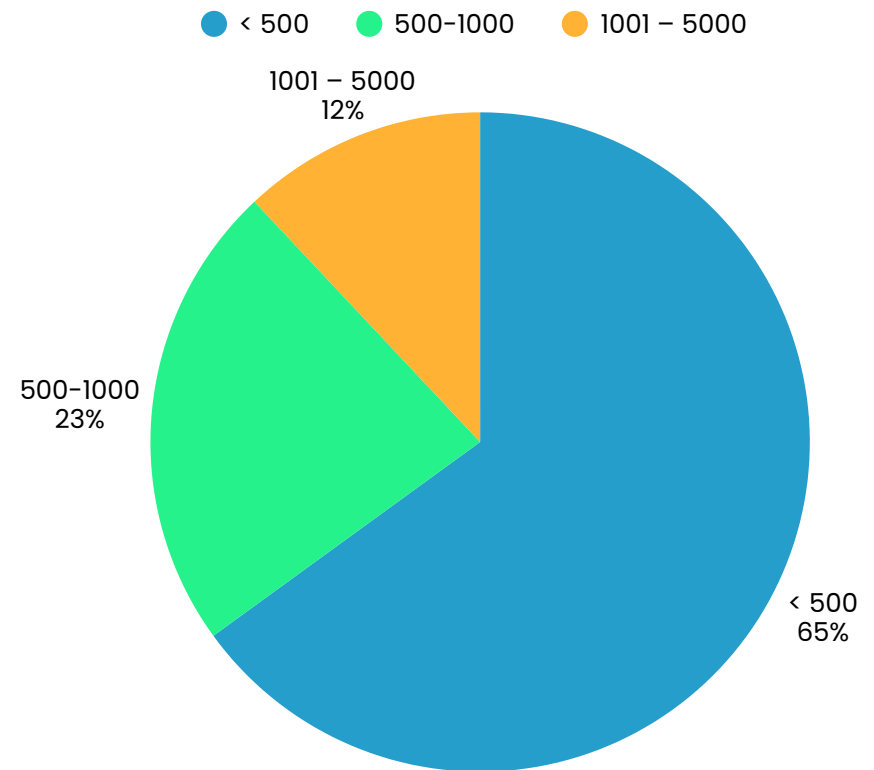


Who is your organisation supporting?

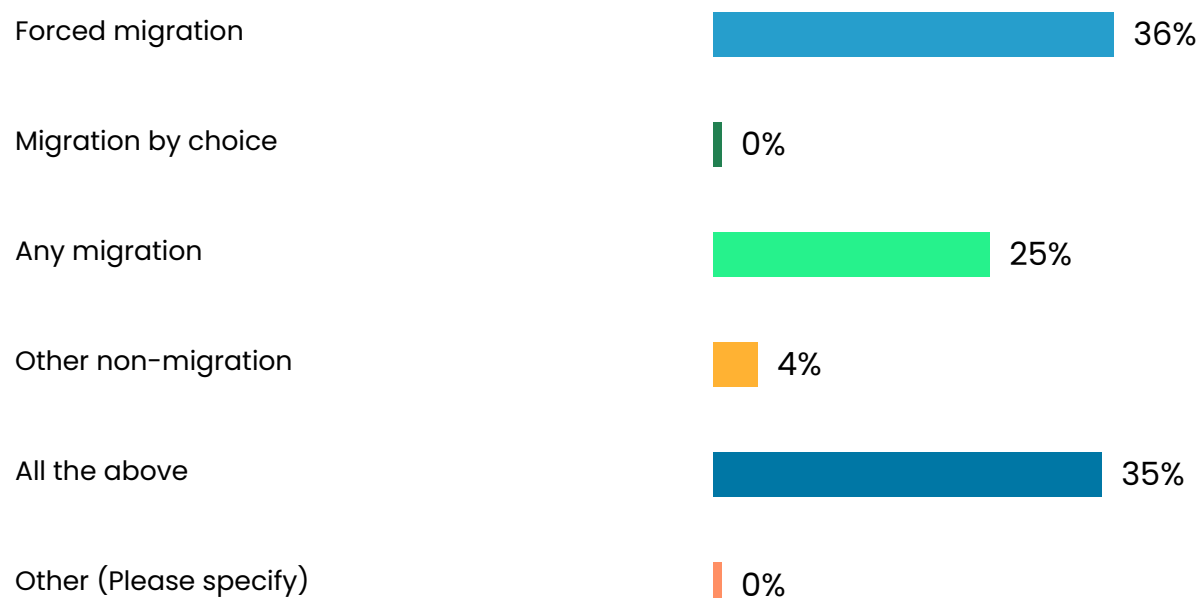


Other: Spouse visa, skilled work visa, student visa, NRM visa, BME People and those with insecure or irregular immigration status

How many people do you currently support each month (including children)?

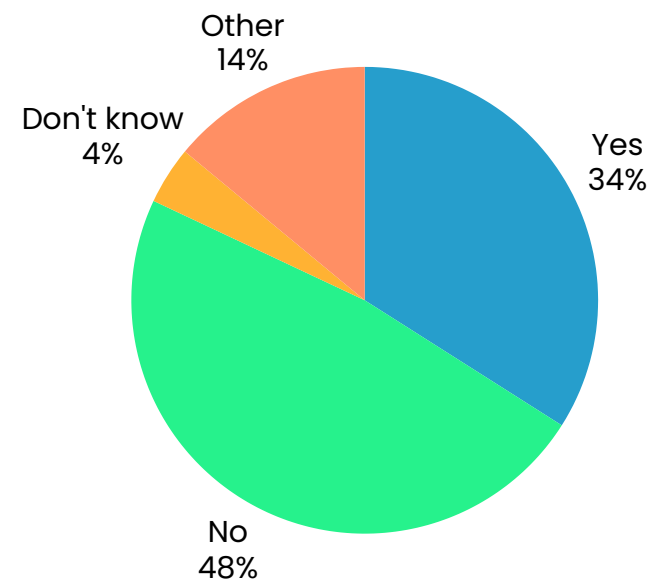


Which type of lived experience does your organisation relate to?

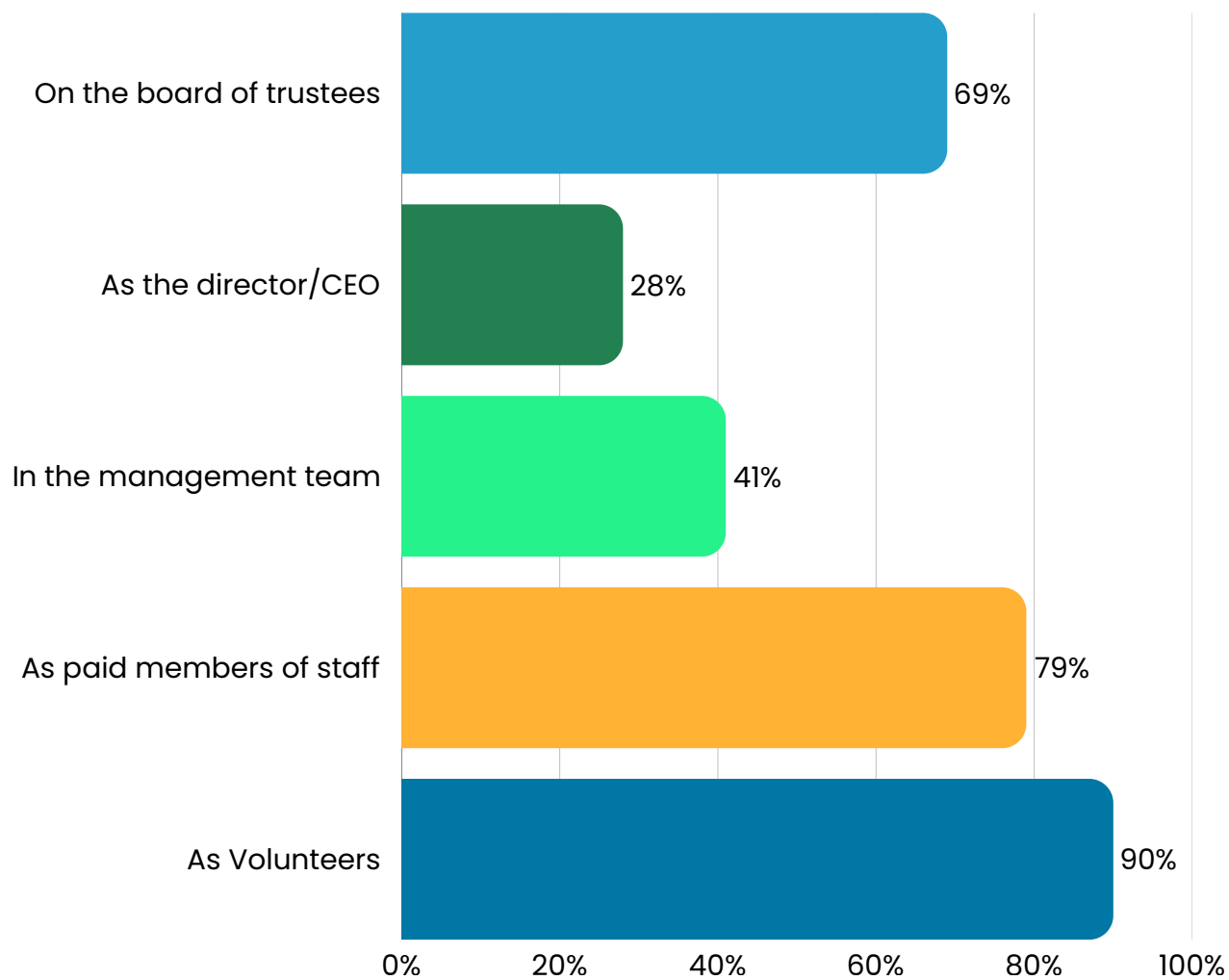


- Forced migration (e.g. asylum, resettlement, refugee family reunion, Ukraine schemes, BNO status holders, etc.)
- Migration by choice (e.g. EU Settlement Scheme, students, workers, etc.)
- Any migration (e.g. both forced and unforced)
- Other non-migration (e.g. domestic violence, modern slavery, disability, mental or physical health issues, etc.)
- All the above
- Other (Please specify)

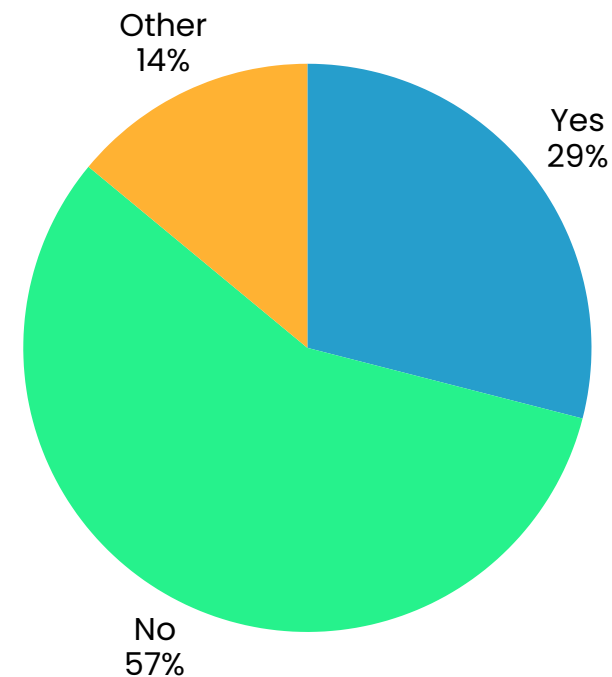
Do you consider your organisation to be led by people with lived experience of migration (forced or unforced)?



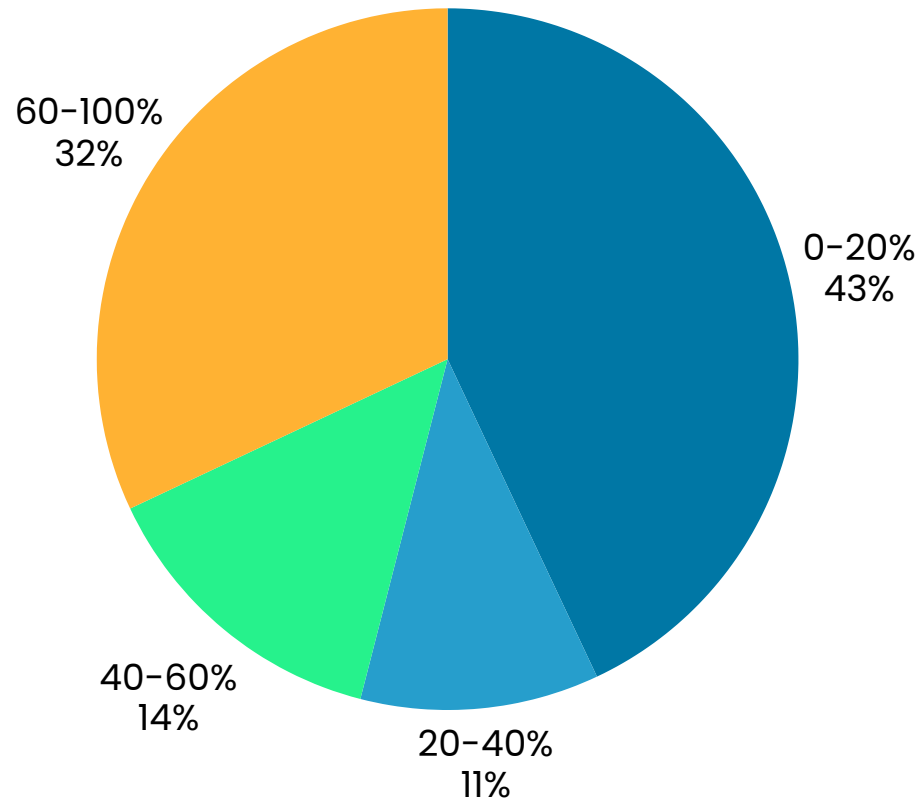
What roles do people with lived experience hold in your organisation?



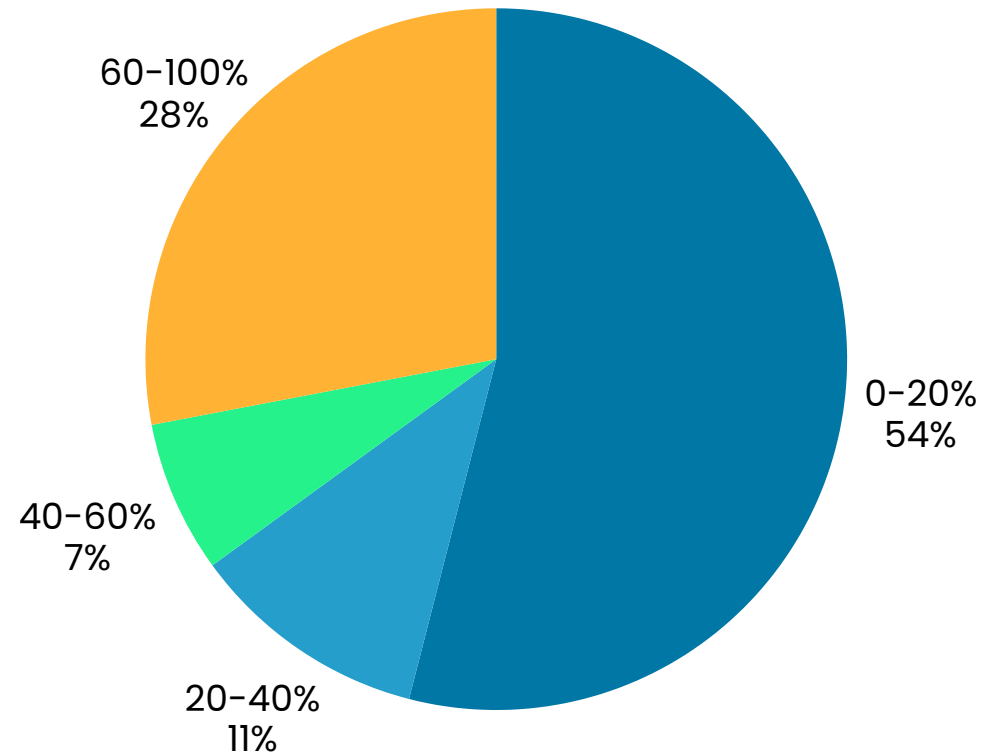
Does your CEO have lived experience?



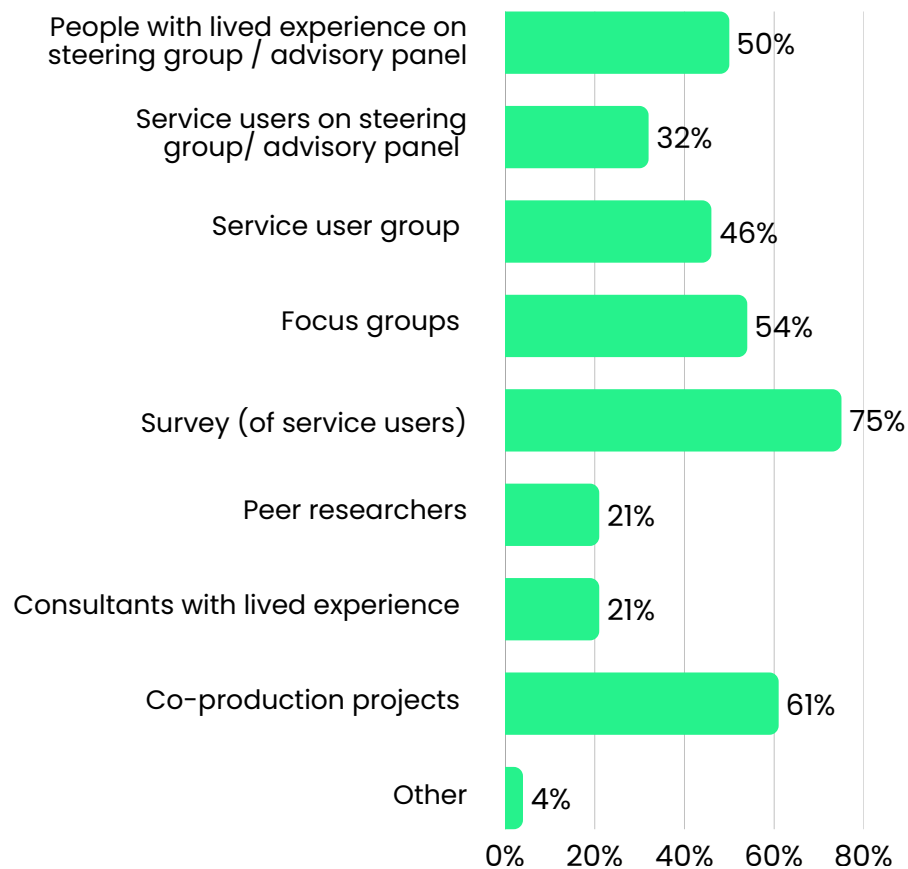
Approximately what percentage of your trustees have lived experience?



Approximately what percentage of your senior managerial team have lived experience?

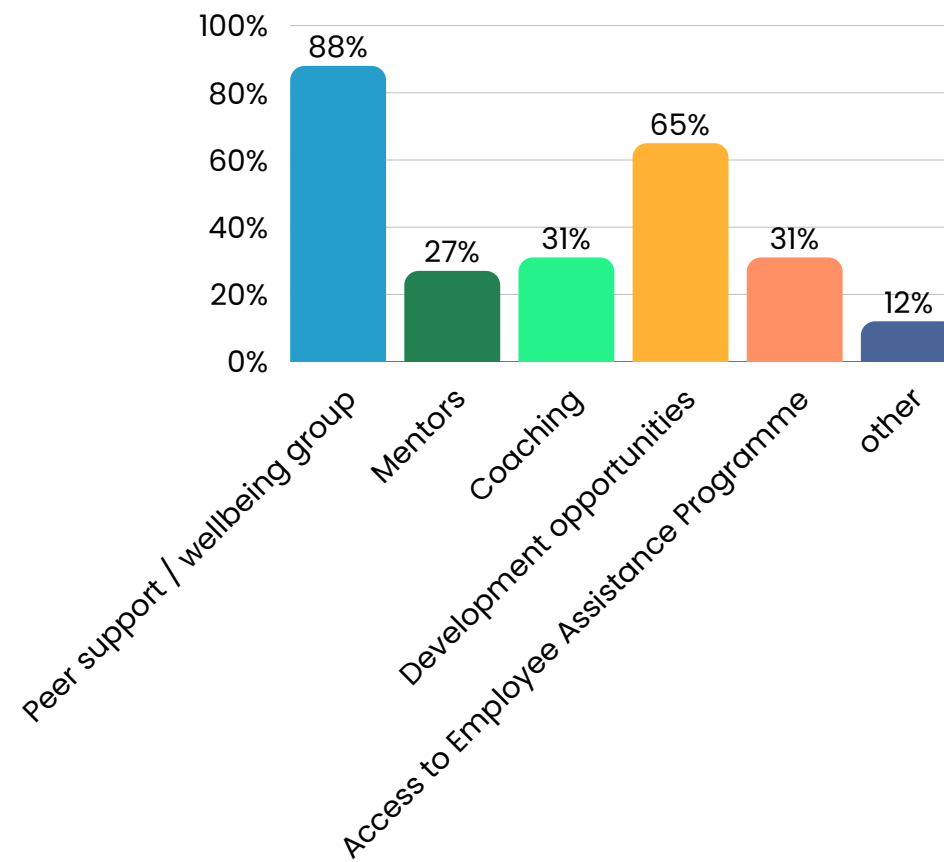


How else do people with lived experience / service users influence decision making in your organisation?



Other: **Volunteers - we are entirely volunteer led.**
We have 1 VLE on our Executive board

How do you support people with lived experience in your organisation?

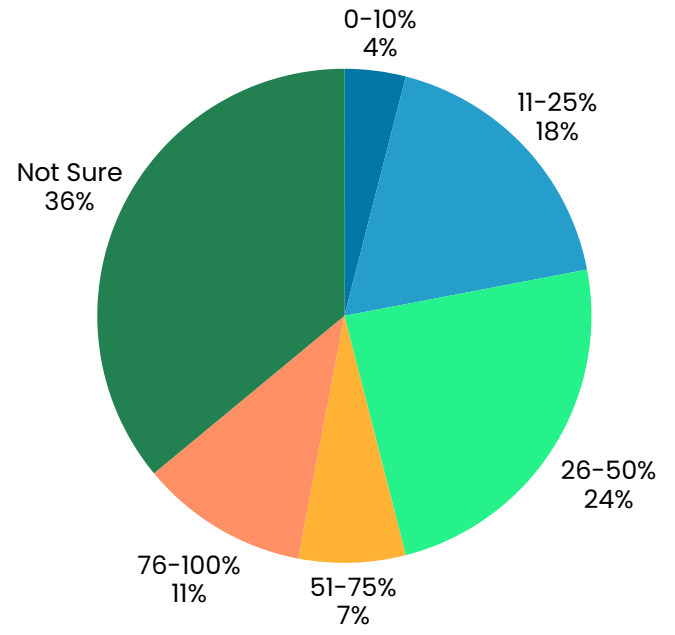


LEGAL INSECURITY AND SYSTEM EFFECTS

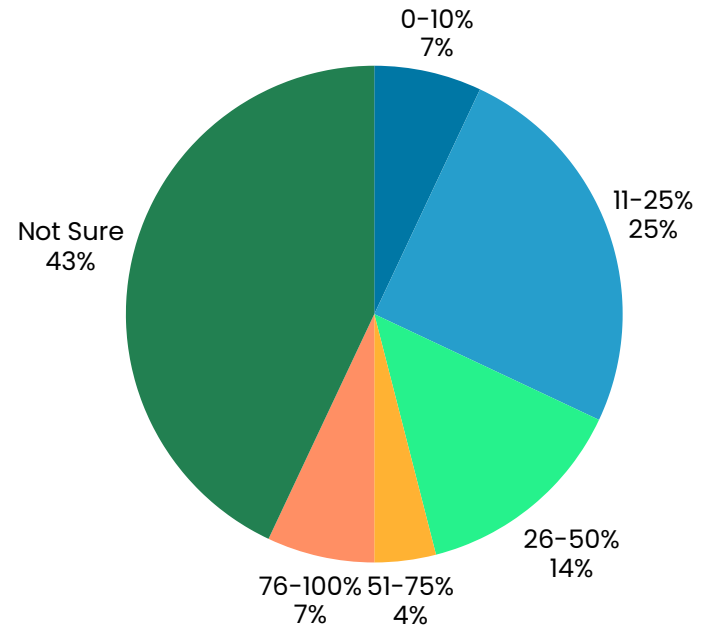


CLIENT REPRESENTATION AND LEGAL AID ACCESS

Approximately, what proportion of your clients remain unrepresented for the entirety of their asylum claim up to the initial Home Office decision?



Approximately, what proportion of your organisation's legal aid referrals result in a successful placement with a legal aid provider?



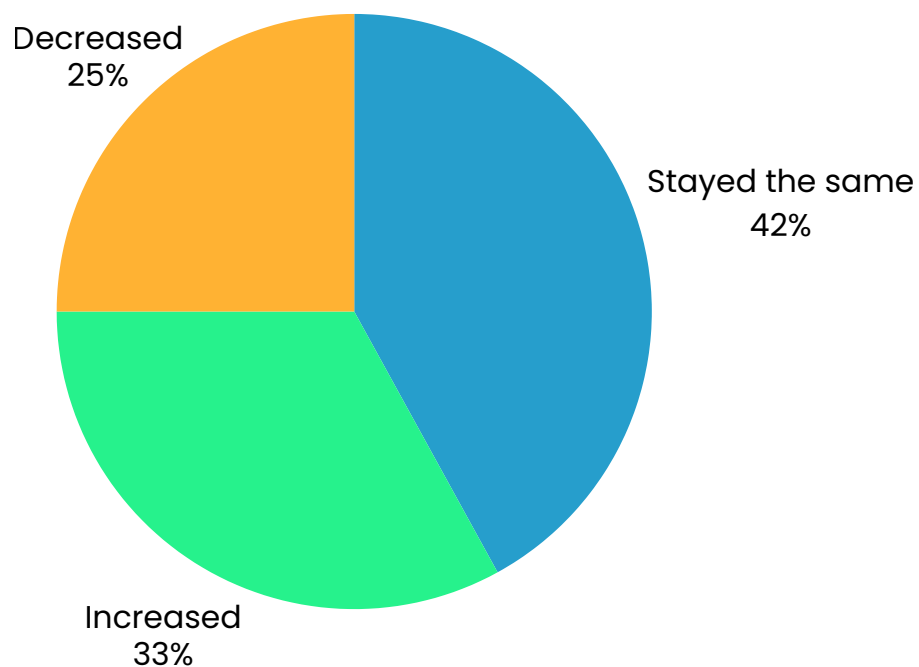
ORGANISATIONAL CAPACITY AND WORKFORCE: STAFFING AND VOLUNTEER CAPACITY



Please indicate your organisation's current capacity for the following

	Average No	Response Rate
Number of paid staff involved in asylum/immigration work	7	100%
Number of volunteers involved in asylum/immigration work	48	100%
Number of volunteers with lived experience	11	92%
Approximate total casework hours per week (staff + volunteers)	132	100%

Over the past 12 months how has your organisation's capacity to deliver asylum or related work changed?



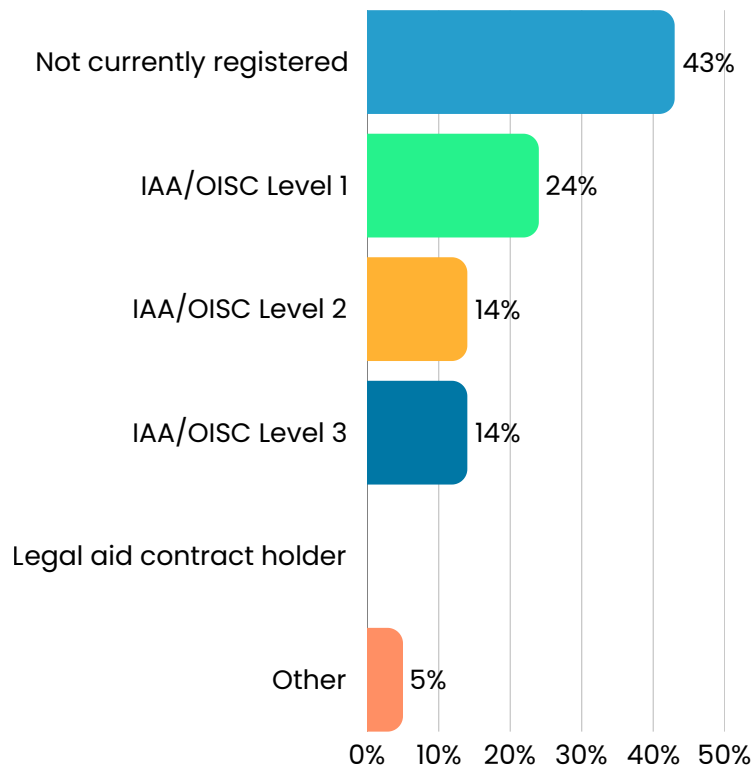
- *"We have grown our immigration team from 2 people to 6 paid staff, working to Level 3 IAA and a solicitor to undertake the most urgent asylum appeals - **often with help of Refugee Action FIAP project!**"*
- *"When I started in 2024 there was no person in charge of the immigration and casework for our client in SEEAWA, **now I am helping nearly 250 people access legal aid and resolve their immigration issues**"*
- *"We seem to upskill people and then they leave - we have increased capacity in the region, just not with us"*

REGISTRATION, ACCREDITATION AND FUTURE PLANS

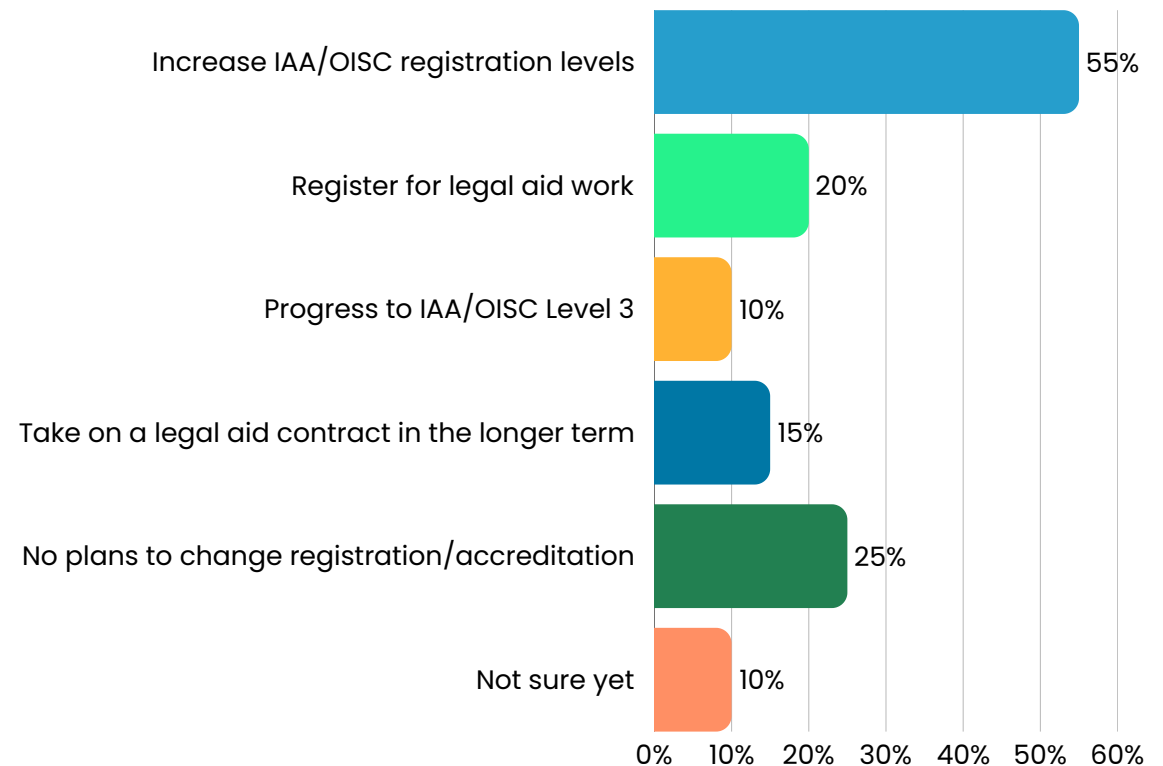
OISC/IAA REGISTRATION STATUS



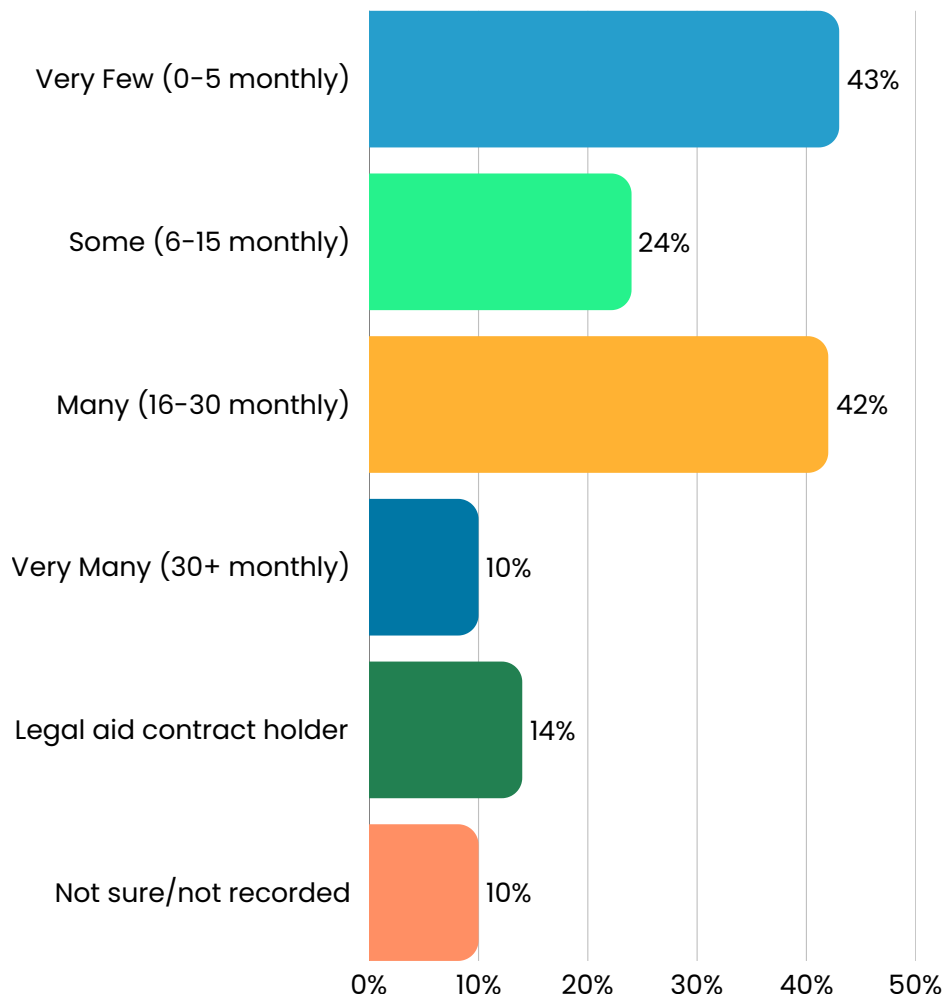
What is your organisation's current registration or accreditation status?



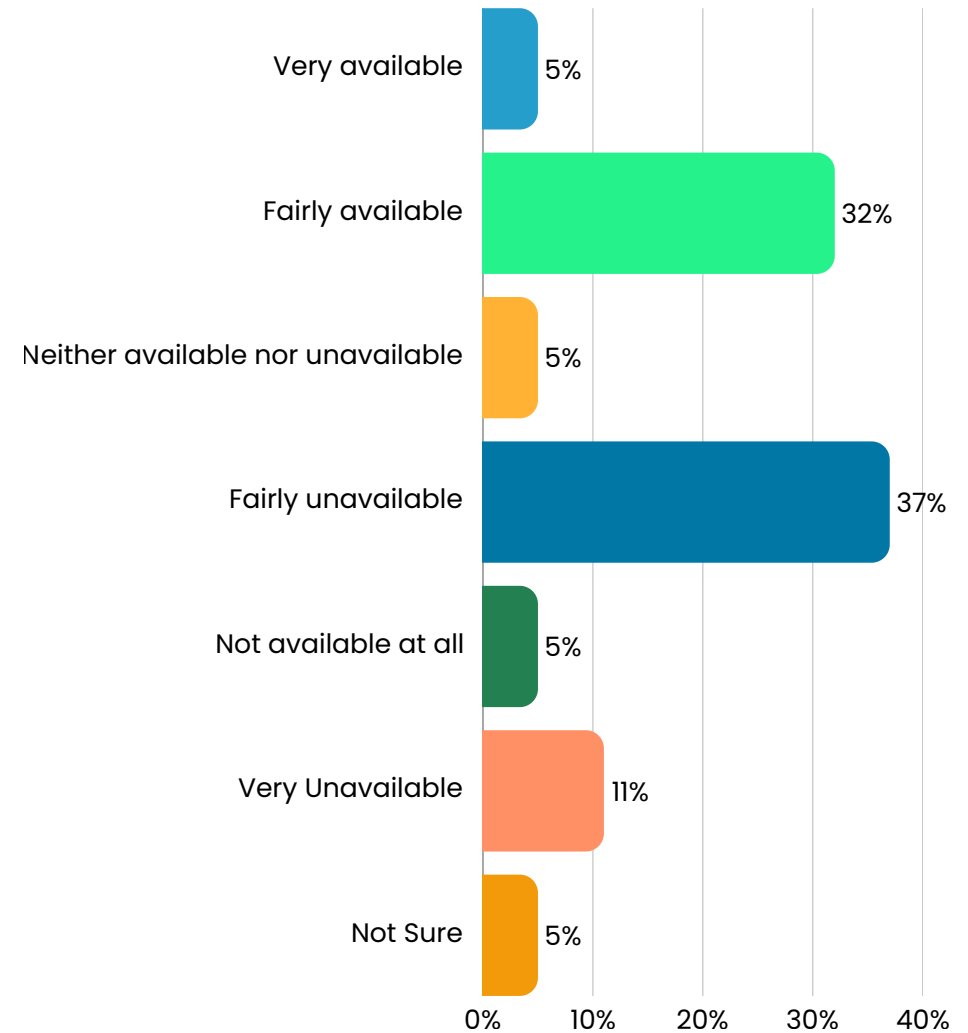
Which of the following are part of your organisation's future plans?



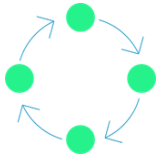
Approximately how many people your organisation supports who need IAA-regulated advice or casework for human rights claims?



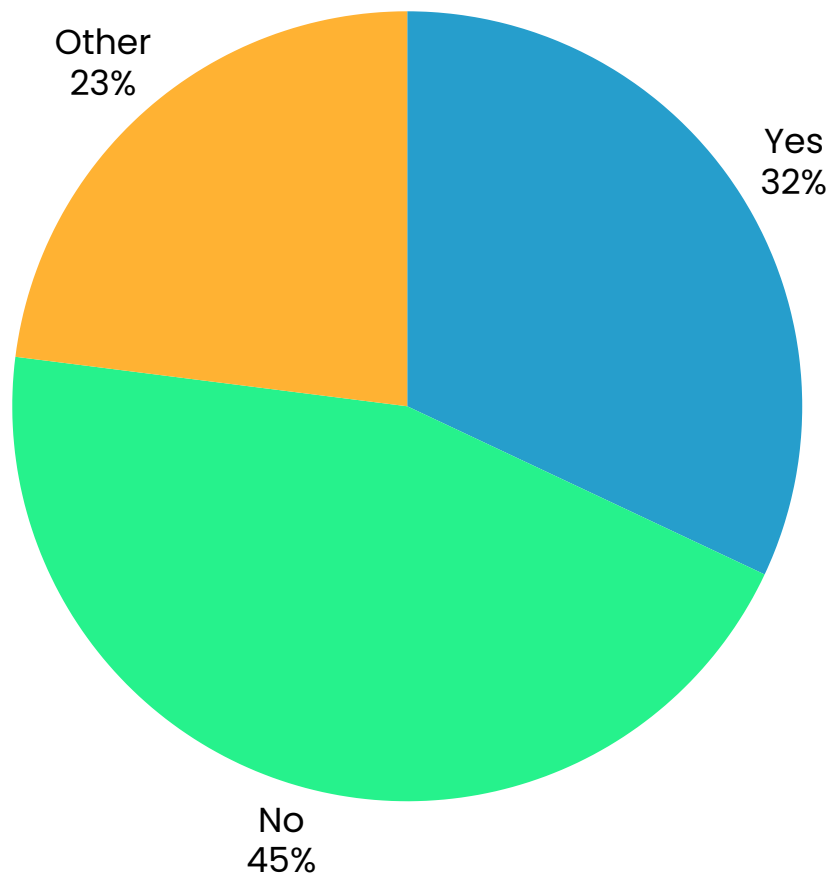
How available is suitable IAA-regulated advice or casework for these clients?



LEGAL AID AS A LONGER-TERM GOAL

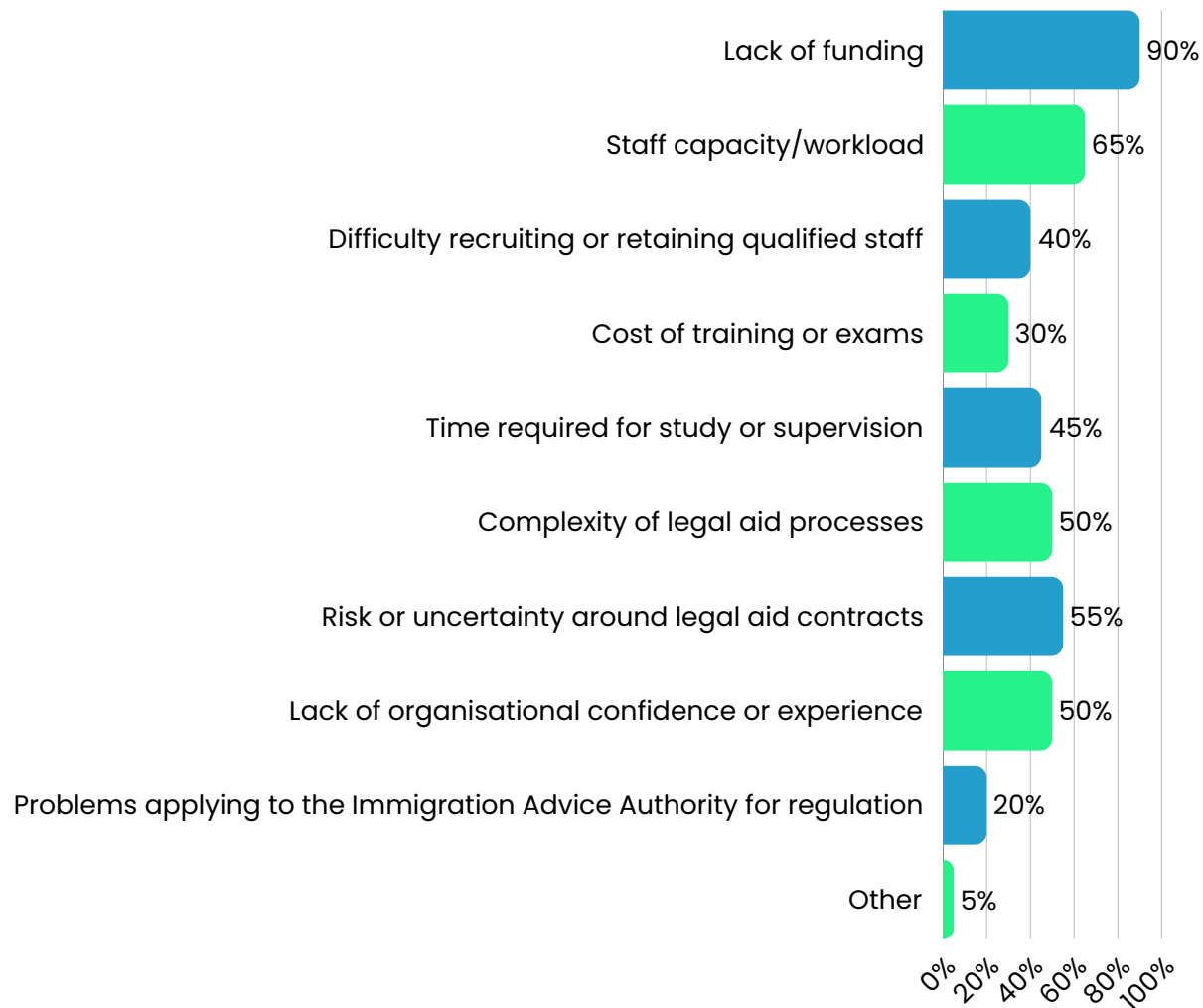


Is taking on a legal aid contract a longer-term goal for your organisation?

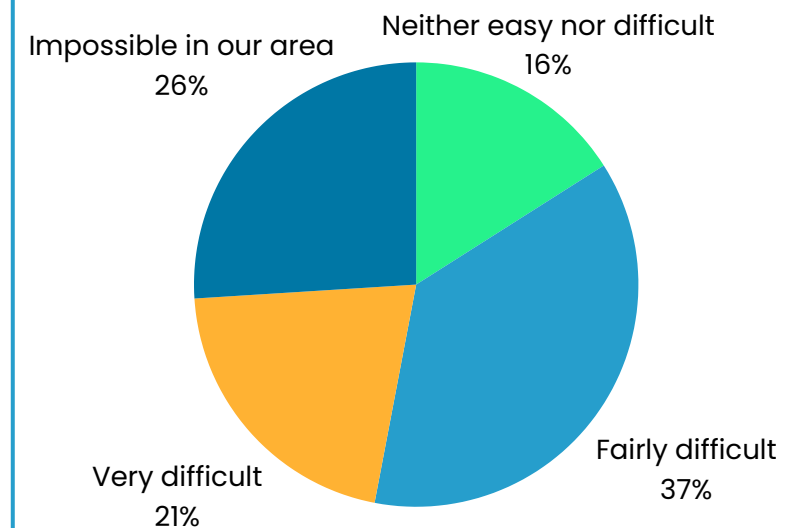


- *“Becoming a registered IAA organisation and identifying a suitable accredited adviser is our top priority”*
- *“The lack of legal aid support for clients who cannot get a solicitor is causing issues for them and for us, as they become destitute or become exploited so they can afford a private solicitor”*
- *“We are struggling to keep afloat with our current level of delivery due to the funding challenges we face. This kind of work would mean a big shift for us and potentially existentially risky”*

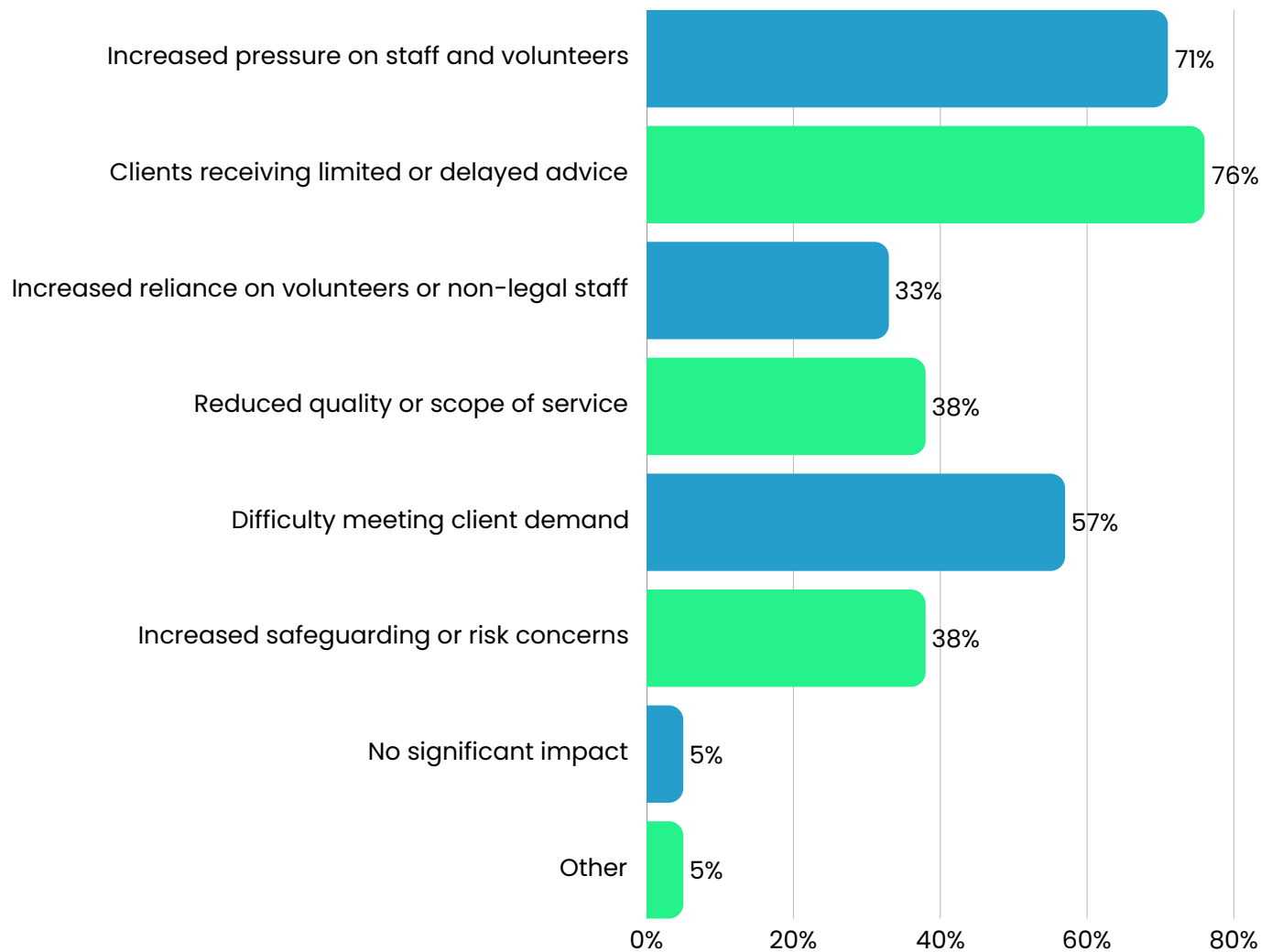
What are the main barriers preventing your organisation from increasing registration, accreditation, or legal aid capacity?



How easy is it for your organisation to find legal aid contractors to refer clients to in your local area?

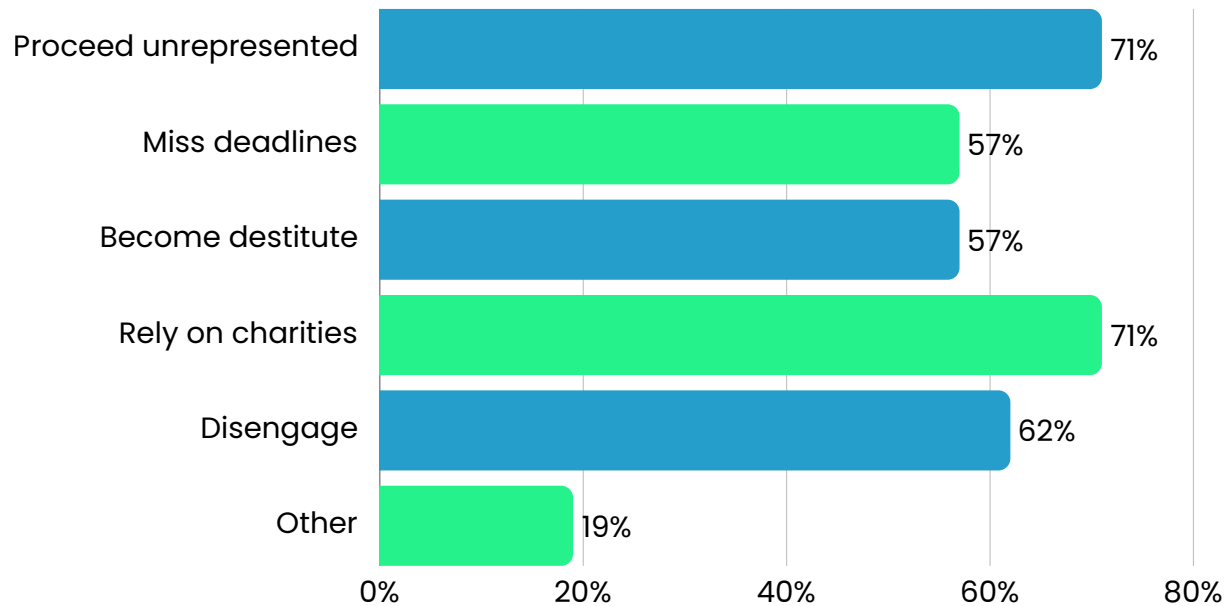


How does difficulty accessing legal aid contractors affect your organisation's service delivery?



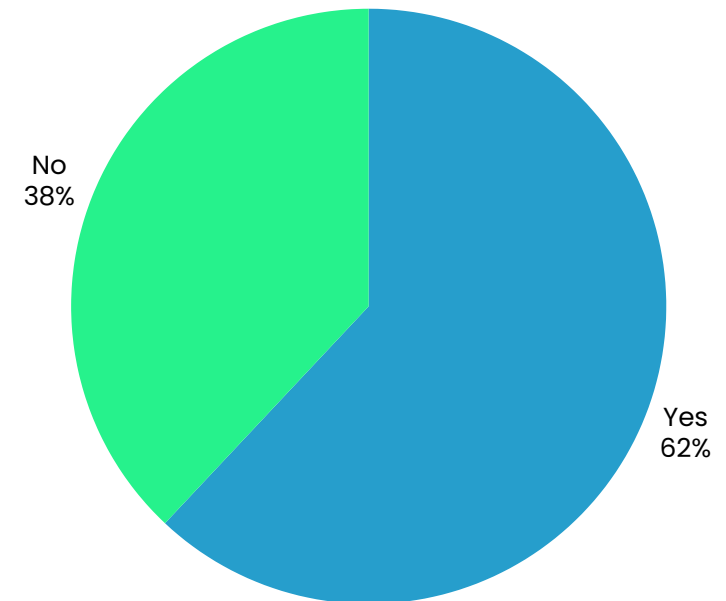
- ***“There is zero immigration representation in Worcestershire. We look outside to any firm that can help. The response has almost dried up”***
- ***“There are no legal aid immigration teams in Essex, so it affects all the nearly 7,000 asylum seekers in our patch”***

When legal representation is unavailable, what most often happens to people?

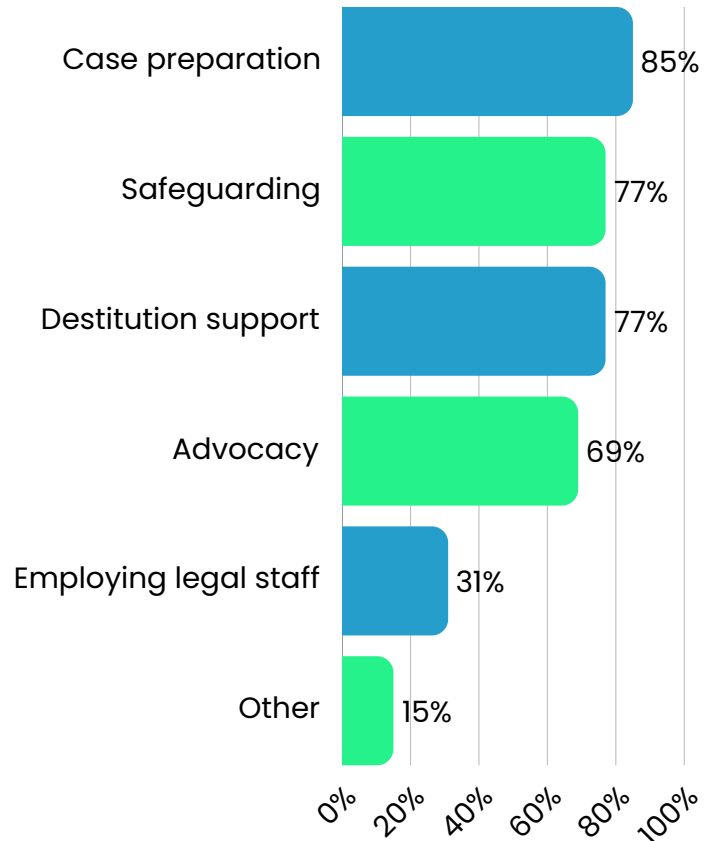


- Take on exploitative 'work' to pay for private representation.
- A mix of the above, no way to tell what users may decide due to their very personal circumstances.
- Receive very poor decisions and must go into the appeal system.

Has your organisation taken on additional responsibilities due to legal aid gaps?



Which additional responsibilities your organisation has taken?



Supporting unrepresented appellants lodging appeals and communicating with the Tribunal.

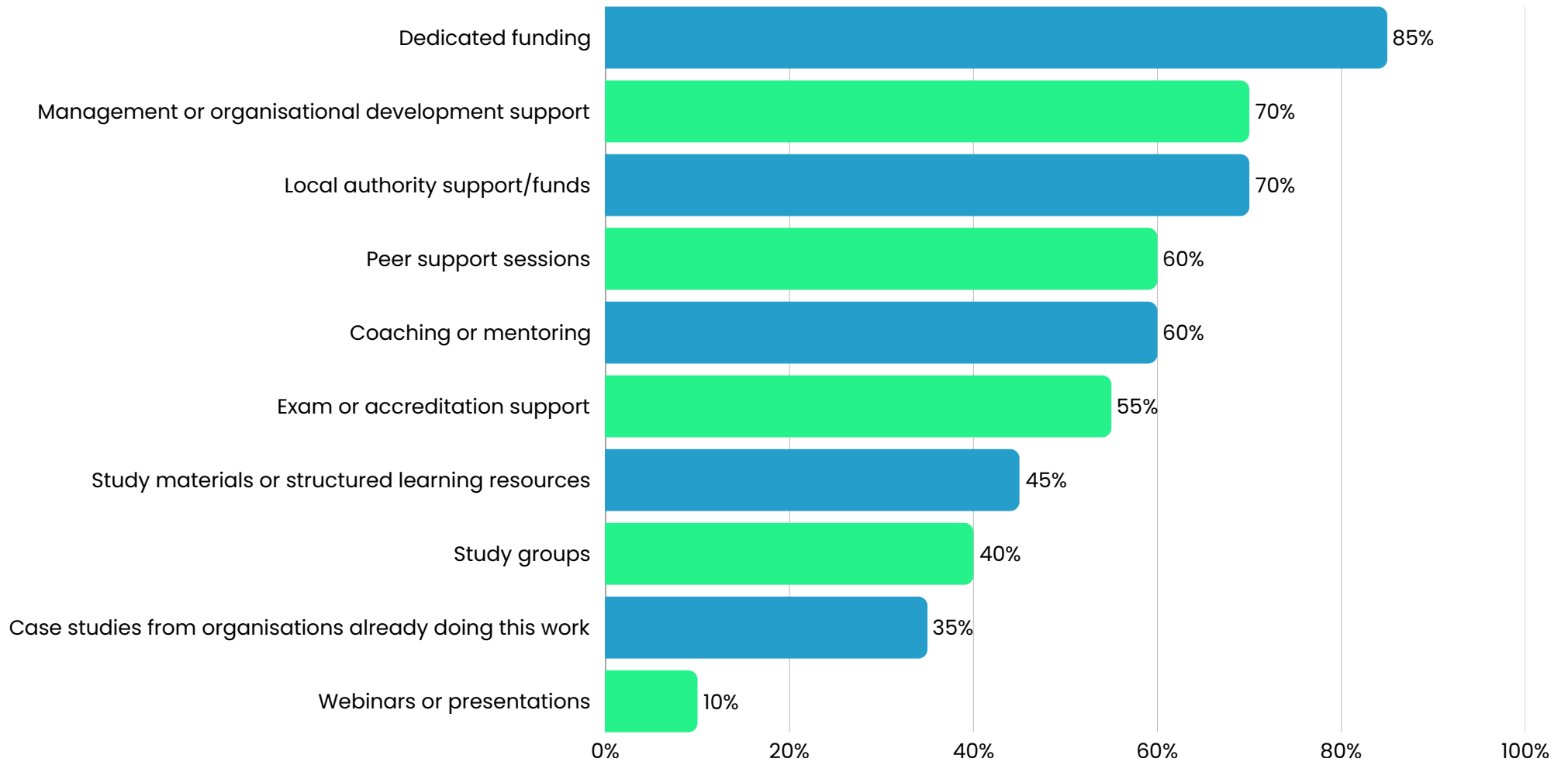
To what extent do you agree with the following statement:

"The voluntary sector is under increasing pressure due to rising demand and limited access to legal representation."

Strongly Agree
100%

"Our charity is becoming the lifeline for desperate situation of the clients"

What types of support would help your organisation to build legal capacity or move towards legal aid work?



In response to these challenges, has your organisation developed any new or innovative approaches to working?

"We're offering IAA immigration training pathway for our general staff - paying for training and exams"

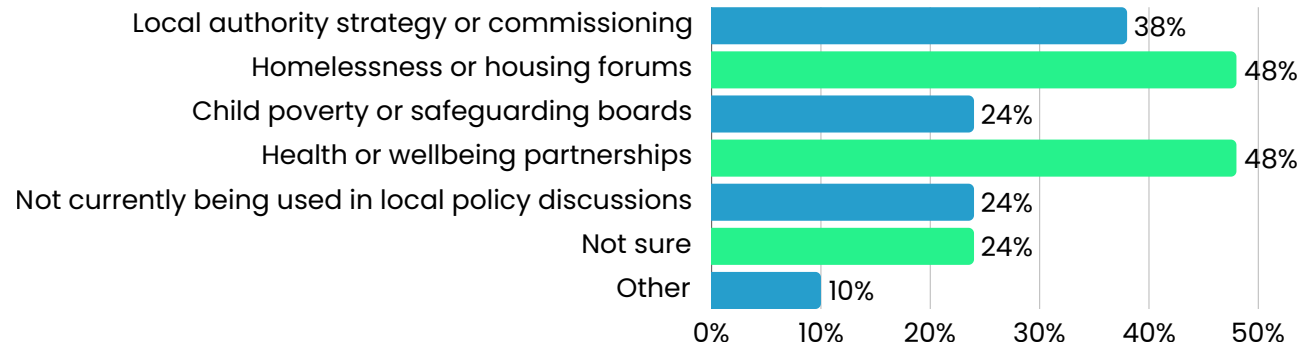
*"Working with other agencies, referring people to **the Right to Remain toolkit**"*

*"We have built a community around people with **common challenges**. We believe that although the legal rep challenges are a key objective to resolve, we don't define people by these needs. **The status quo has led us to create an environment where the people accessing our service can create and define which services they want to see. Over the years this has built up a very strong mutually supportive environment that creates a place for clients to fulfil their potential while we all work together to resolve the legal problems**"*



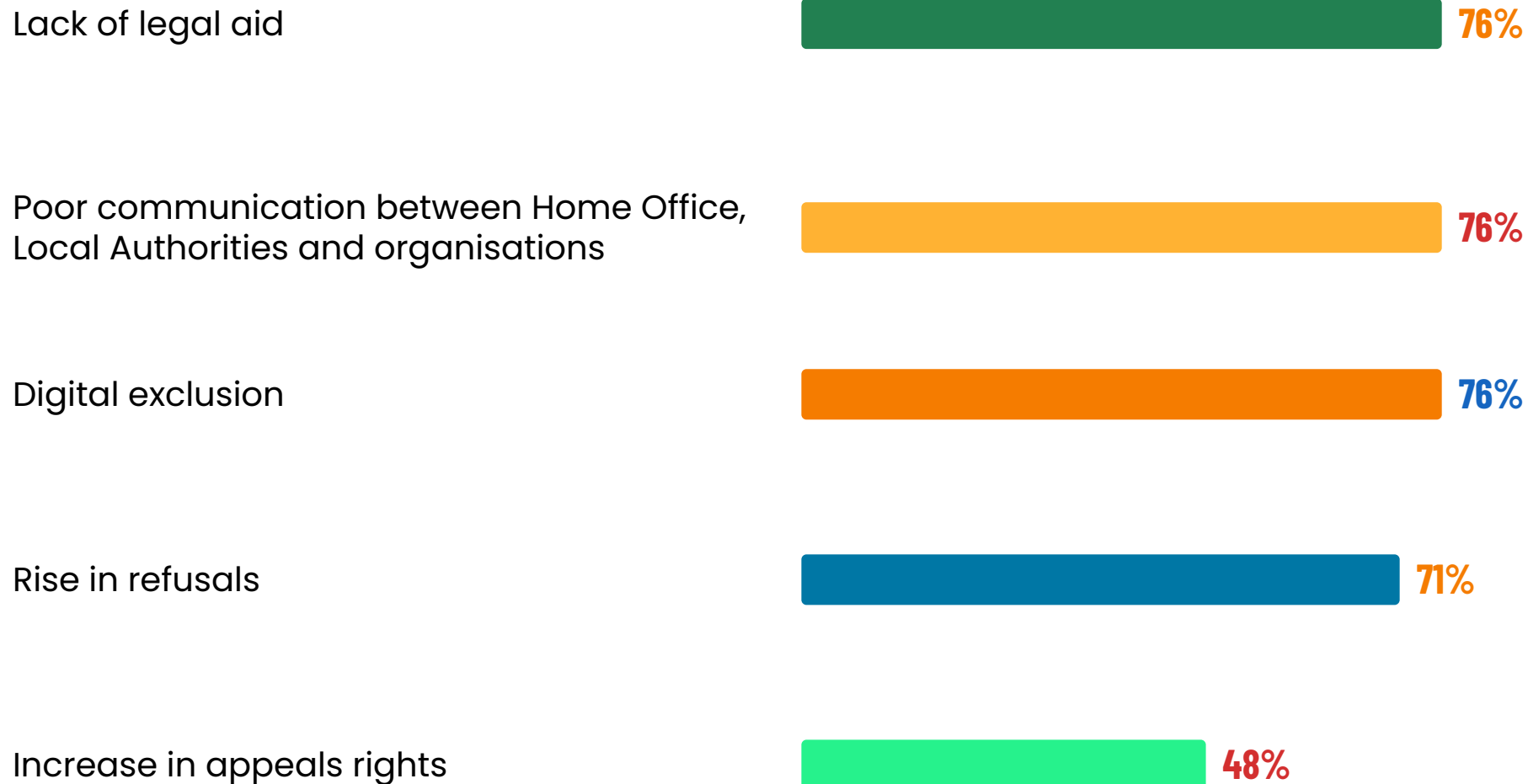
HOUSING AND DESTITUTION

How is information about destitution in your area being shared or used in local discussions or policy processes?

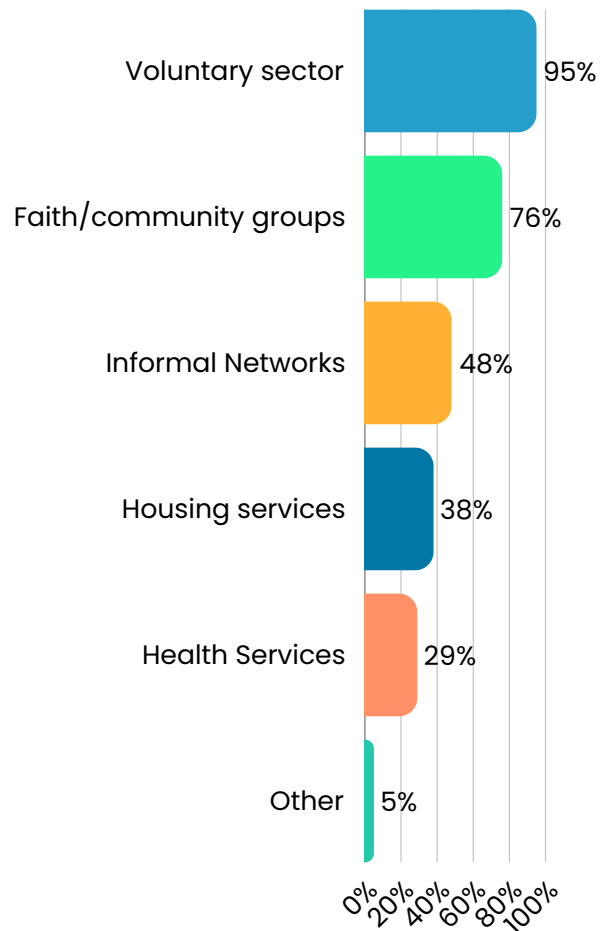


- *“Although this information is used operationally, **it is not sufficiently reflected in strategic planning, commissioning, or local policy discussions**”*
- *“Effective prevention of exploitation requires forward planning and access to safe accommodation for people at risk”*
- *“People affected by modern slavery are at significantly higher risk of exploitation”*

In the last 6-12 months which of these factors is driving destitution in your area?

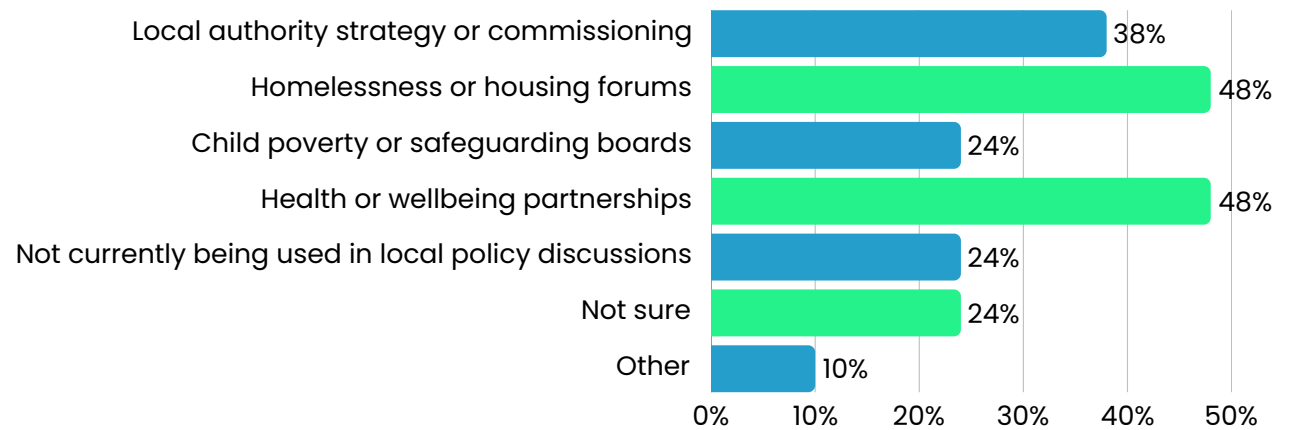


Which services are absorbing the impact of this destitution in your area?



Please Specify: Local Authority

How sustainable is this level of pressure on non-statutory service?



What best describes the impact of destitution on your wider local community?

Increased homelessness



East London, Essex, coastal towns, dispersal areas

Increased health crises



East London, Colchester, Clacton, Harwich, Chester, Northwich, Evesham, Pershore

Community tensions



Clacton, Harwich, parts of East London, Colchester, Chester, Northwich

Strain on services



Cheshire, Essex, Worcestershire, local charities and councils

No wider impact

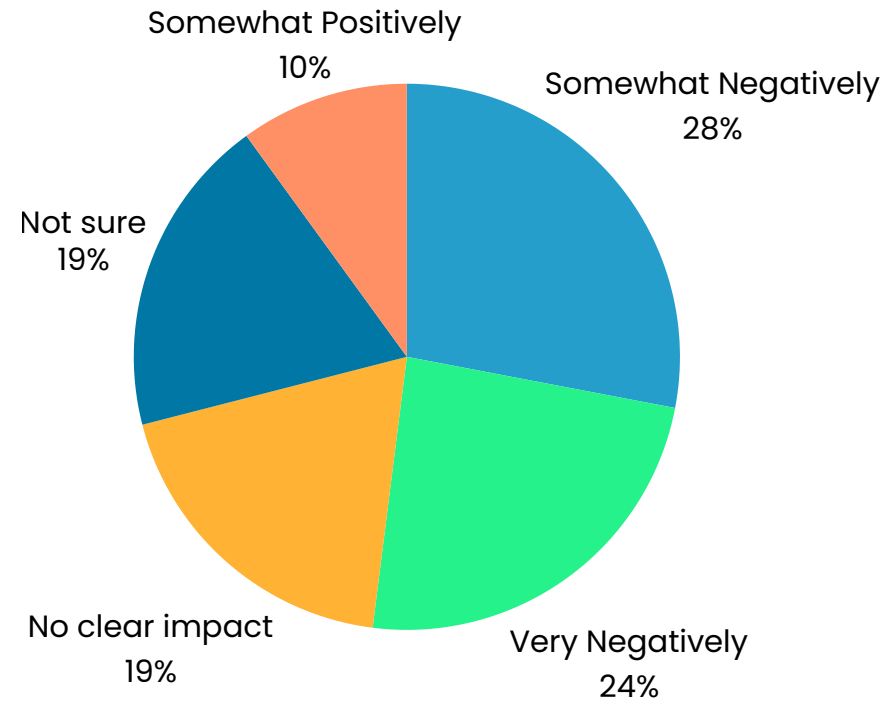


Very few areas reported minimal impact

Rural Disparities Analysis: Key Areas, Issues, and Gaps

Area	Key Issues	Key Gaps	Main Implications
Worcestershire / Evesham / Pershore / surrounding villages	No local immigration representation; reliance on small volunteer groups; funding insecurity; risk of losing local authority support	Legal aid; mental health support; strategic recognition; specialist migration services	Support systems are highly fragile and dependent on volunteers. Capacity Issues
Essex (Colchester, Clacton, Harwich, Chelmsford, Rochford)	No immigration legal aid provision; large asylum population; safeguarding concerns; high exploitation risks	Legal representation; NRPF support; crisis prevention funding; county-level strategic engagement	Large dispersal populations are being supported without matching infrastructure, increasing risks of destitution and exploitation
Cheshire / Northwich / Chester	Hidden deprivation in areas seen as affluent; rapidly increasing demand; limited migration infrastructure	Lack of specialist support and underfunded local charities	Overstretched services, rising community tensions. Affluent regional reputations can mask significant unmet need
Dorset / Bournemouth / Poole / Rural Dorset	Isolation from services; safeguarding concerns; community hostility and protests	Accessible support services; community integration and mental health support	Dispersed accommodation in rural/coastal areas can isolate people from support and increase vulnerability
Durham, (Horden, Stanley, Crook, Spennymoor)	High deprivation; lack of legal aid; housing pressures and political uncertainty	Interpretation support; housing pathways; legal representation and funding stability	Asylum pressures are intersecting with existing deprivation, increasing tensions and overstretching local services
Norfolk / Norwich	Coastal deprivation, seasonal work exploitation, housing pressure, rising hostility and fear	Community cohesion work; safety protections and public engagement infrastructure	Accommodation sites in smaller towns can become highly visible flashpoints for anti-asylum mobilisation

How do current accommodation arrangements (e.g., hotels, large sites, former military sites) affect safeguarding in your area?

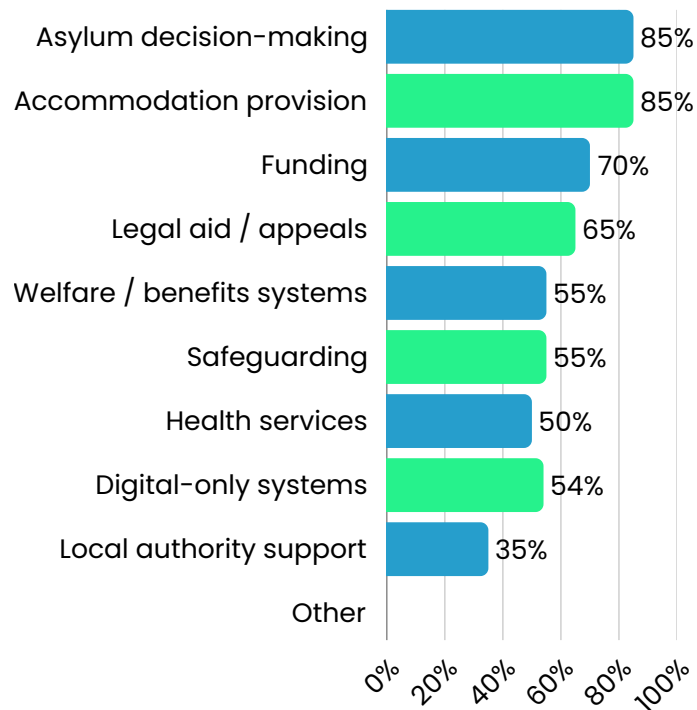


- Weekly protests outside of hotels (Bournemouth, Poole, rural Dorset)
- Brook hotel in Norwich targeted by protesters for nearly a year now, nonstop. heightened community tensions in Norwich affecting everyone from ethnic minority/migrant background

RISK, HARM, AND LIVED EXPERIENCE SYSTEMIC PRESSURES ON ORGANISATIONS AND COMMUNITIES

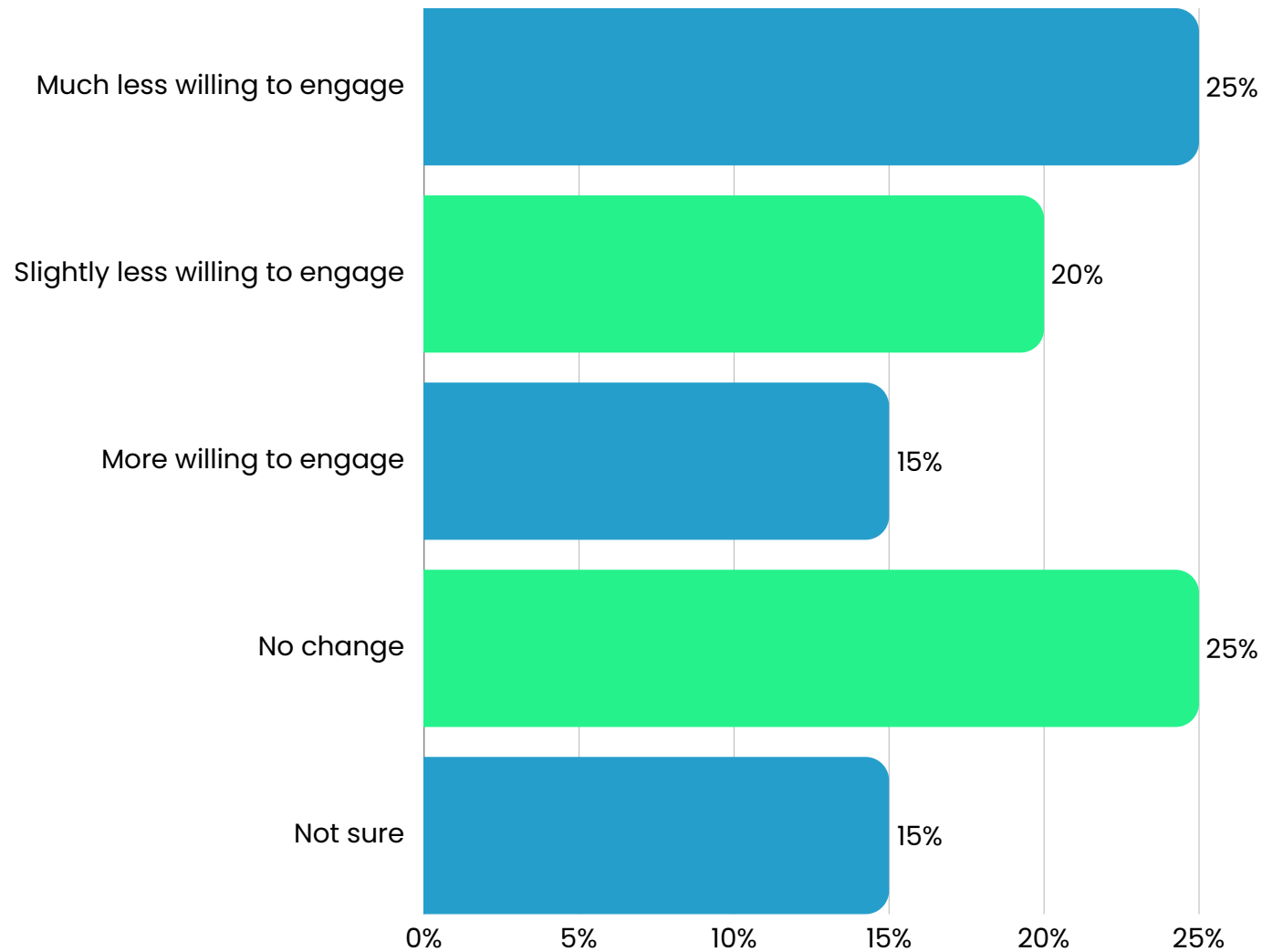


Which parts of the system currently create the greatest knock-on pressures for your organisation or local community?



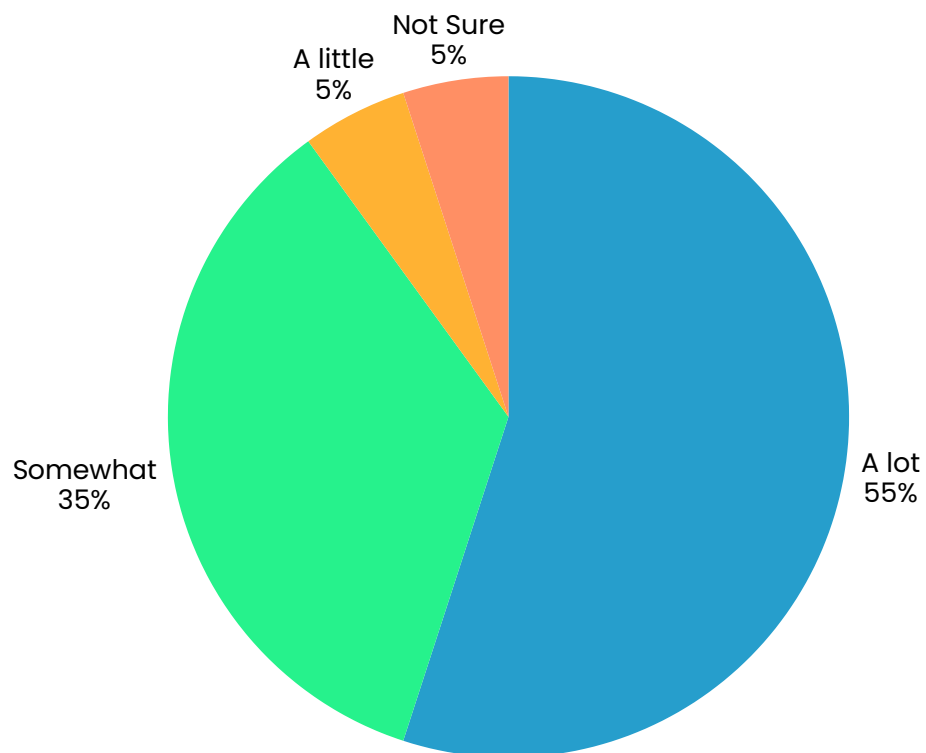
- Housing shortages were a major issue, particularly after leave to remain is granted. In Evesham and Pershore, respondents highlighted a lack of affordable housing and ongoing safeguarding needs, with insufficient trauma-informed support.
- Emergency accommodation for people experiencing domestic abuse was identified as a key gap, with a need for rapid access to safe housing and emergency funding.
- Gatekeeping in mainstream services was widely reported, with some people with insecure immigration status or NRPf incorrectly refused support from local authorities and the NHS.

What changes, if any, have you noticed in service users' willingness to engage with support due to fear, mistrust, or wider system pressures?



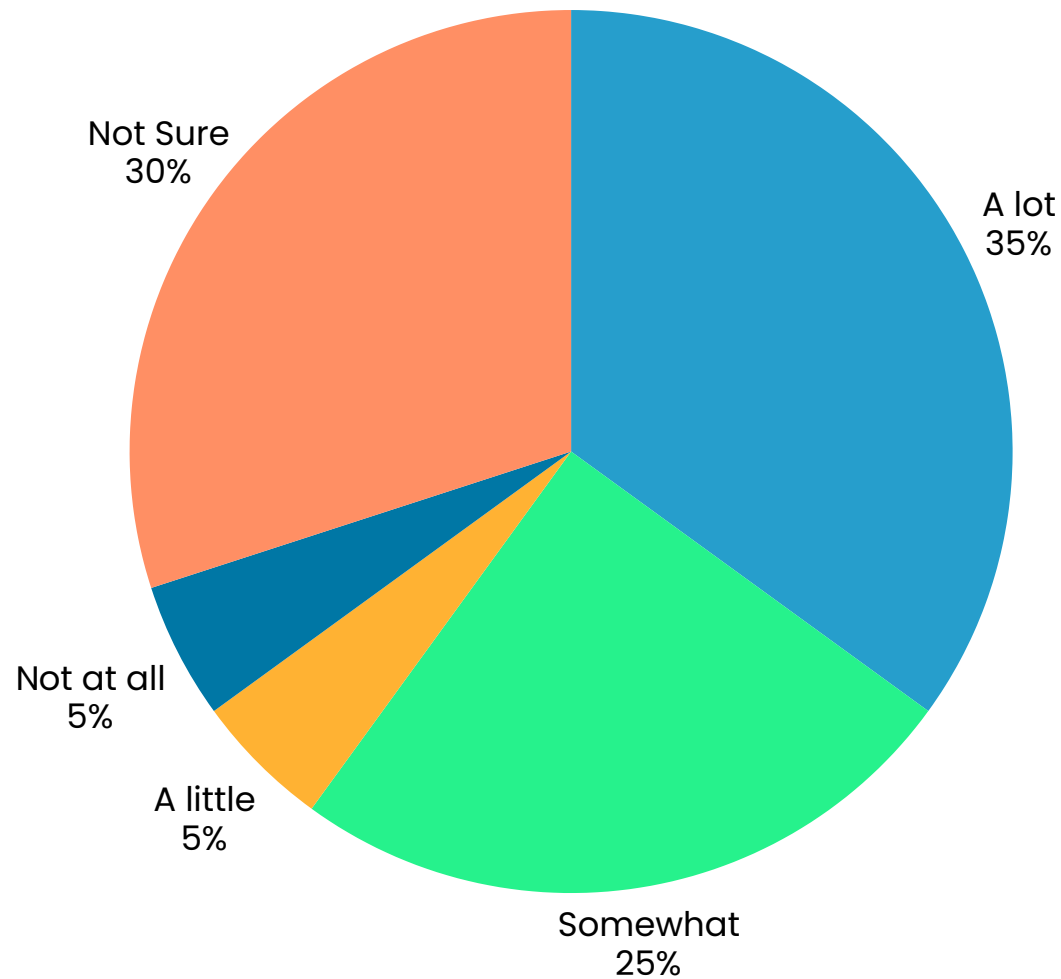
- Changes around new wages for skilled workers, Syrian decision pauses, increased spousal visa costs and thresholds, avoiding benefits all have an impact.
- Clients are very worried about new immigration rules and are desperate not to go onto benefits and also to undertake volunteering.

To what extent do rapid or frequent policy changes affect your organisation's ability to plan or deliver services?



- Some organisations have very little capacity to manage frequent change and the burden falls on 2 or 3 key people who are under a lot of pressure.
- It requires constant training and changes in internal responses and procedures. It also puts more pressure on casework as people come in asking for clarification and / or needing reassurance.

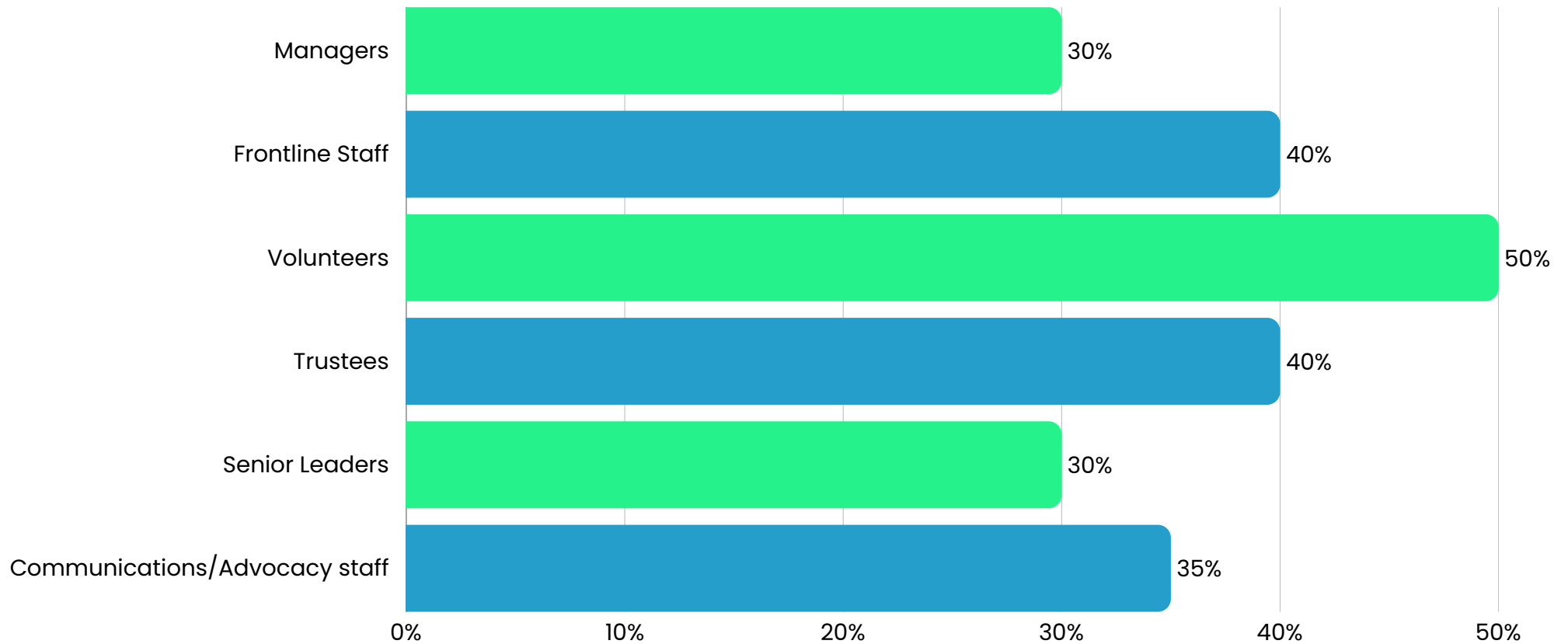
In your opinion, to what extent do funders' application processes contribute to digital exclusion of small community and lived experience led organisations?



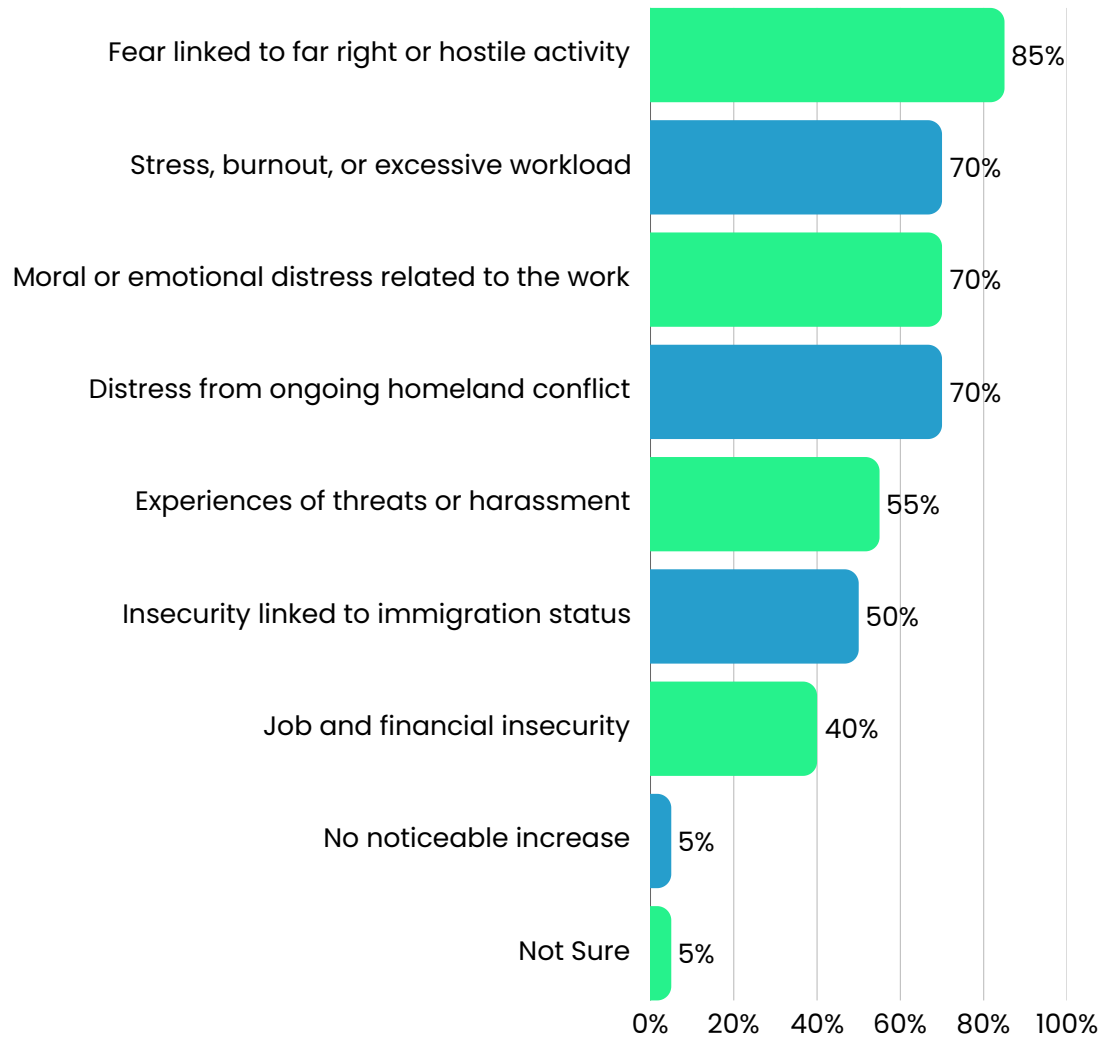
- ***"Tender applications or bids - often use very difficult login processes. Requirements for detailed risk assessments and the like which are not proportional to the work we do"***
- ***"Funding applications are very complicated- I spend lots of time trying to write them and get evidence. The forms are often online and long and complicated and difficult to translate"***

LIVED EXPERIENCE GROUPS AND EXPOSURE TO RISK

For each lived experience group below, please indicate the level of risk or harm they are currently exposed to, given the current migration context:



In the past 6-12 months, which of the following have increased for staff, volunteers, trustees, or directors with lived experience in your organisation?

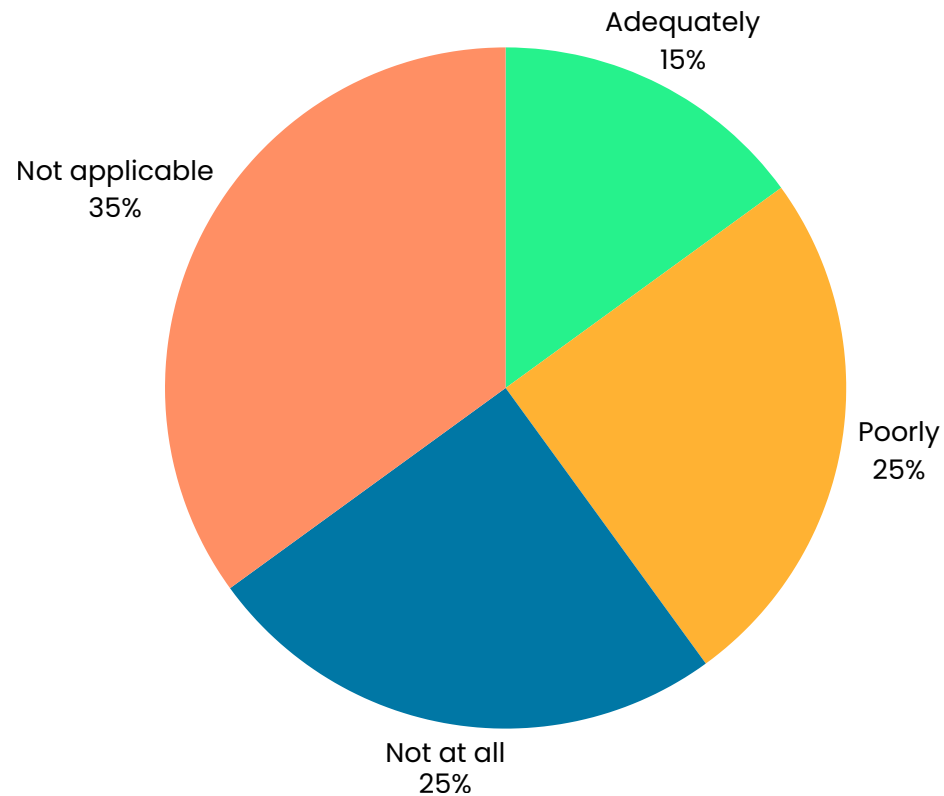


“We have staff from Iran, unable to reach family members, staff who no longer can afford the spousal route and skilled workers who we will no longer be able to support in a year”

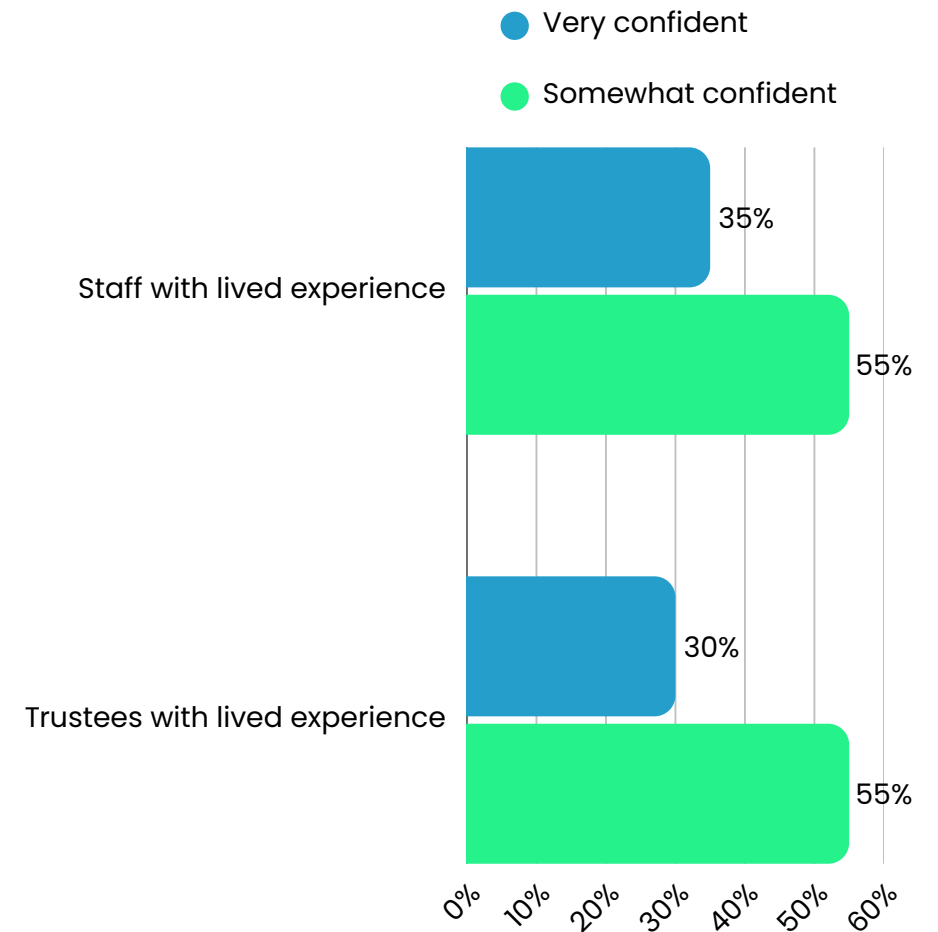
“Funders ask questions about lived experience but do not seem to be curious about what this means in practice to be a small advice organisation whose team has lived experience”

“The sector faces job insecurity due to short-term funding. Staff and volunteers are also experiencing high workloads, complex cases, and increased incidents of harassment and abuse linked to drop-in services”

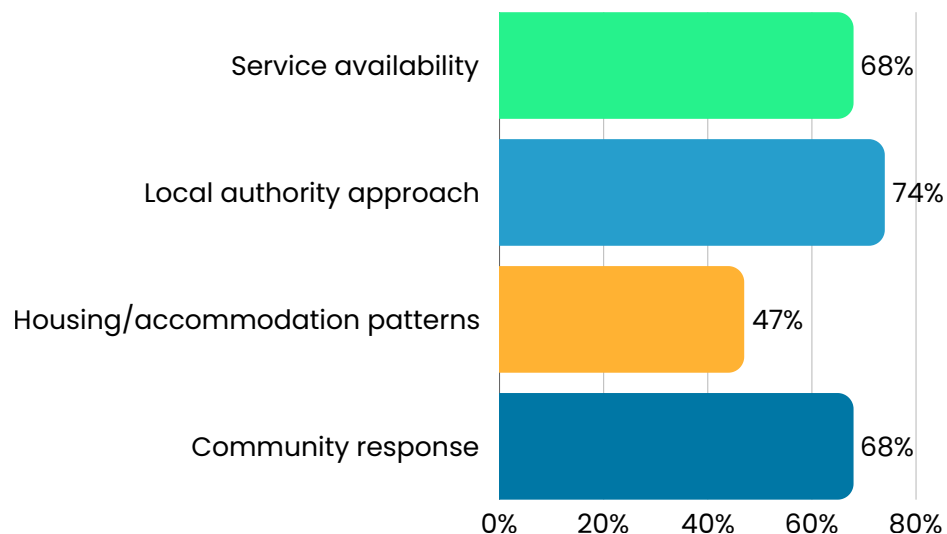
How well are funders resourcing the support needs of lived experience staff?



How confident are you / your organisation in supporting the following?



Thinking about your area, what makes your local context different from others?



● Service availability

Merseyside, Northwest, Evesham, Pershore, Cheshire, Colchester, Clacton, Southend, Rochford, Chelmsford

● Local authority approach

London boroughs, Essex (Colchester, Clacton, Southend, Rochford, Chelmsford), Merseyside, rural Worcestershire, Wigan

● Housing/accommodation patterns

London, East London, Essex coastal towns, Cheshire

● Community response

Bethnal Green, Norwich, Wigan, Cheshire

“In Cheshire, we have significant pockets of deprivation and we have an increasing number of migrants and asylum seekers/refugees... this area doesn't have that experience and organisations have not grown to deal with the issues that the communities have.”

“We are the only voluntary and community sector organisation providing sole support for asylum seekers and refugees in our area. Our local authority is led by a Reform council... future funding remains uncertain amidst rising community tensions.”

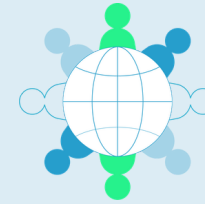
Is there anything else you would like to share about your organisation's current context, pressures, or recent changes over the past 6-12 months that have not been captured in this survey?



"We have implemented a risk assessment with staff to keep everyone safe as hostile narratives escalate around local elections and public events, affecting how we deliver services and community support."



"We're very pessimistic about future funding and expect the organisation to shrink within the next 12-18 months, despite growing demand and efforts to subsidise free services."



"Worcestershire's refugee support relies on six small volunteer-led groups operating through sheer commitment, yet rural support networks are often overlooked in a city-focused sector."

KEY LEARNINGS

1

Lack of local infrastructure and legal support

- Rural and small-town areas often lack specialist services, transport and legal aid.
- National systems assume urban infrastructure exists everywhere, leaving many communities without accessible support.

2

Legal insecurity increases vulnerability and harm

- Immigration uncertainty contributes to homelessness, destitution, unsafe housing and exploitative work.
- People become more vulnerable to trafficking, abuse, debt and social isolation.
- Rising racism and far-right hostility further intensify fear and exclusion.

3

Community organisations are absorbing system failures

- Charities and small organisations are functioning as essential infrastructure, providing crisis response, safeguarding, food and housing support.
- This is happening without proportional funding, staffing or long-term capacity.

4

Frontline staff and volunteers are under growing pressure

- Many workers have lived experience themselves and are simultaneously managing immigration uncertainty, racism and homeland conflict.
- Emotional exhaustion and operational strain are increasing across the sector.

5

Communities are creating adaptive responses

- Partnerships, peer networks and community-led approaches are helping fill gaps in support.
- Co-produced models are creating more trusted and locally responsive solutions despite limited resources.

**REFUGEE
ACTION**